

THE HOMESTEAD AT ROUNDGROVE

A docudrama in three acts by
Marsha Greenshields Grant

The Homestead Act of 1862 provides that any U.S. citizen twenty-one years of age, or the head of a family, and who does not own more than 160 acres elsewhere, can acquire a quarter section (160 acres) of unassigned government land by living on it for five years, improving it, and paying a nominal fee. This legislation has never been repealed.

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

Roundgrove is the name of the township in Kay County, Oklahoma where my paternal grandfather, James B. Greenshields, homesteaded in 1893 following the Cherokee Run. The play is based on his life from 1907 to 1941. All of the events depicted in the storyline of the play actually happened. The characters in the play represent real people and use their real names. James's brother, Albert, kept a daily ledger which provided a detailed account of his activities and those of the family during this time period.

The wartime prosperity and post-WWI agricultural depression which were contributing factors in the turning point of James' life are documented in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Yearbook series available through the U.S. Printing Office.

The towns of Blackwell and Tonkawa are located in north central Oklahoma just east of I-35. Autwine (at the cross-roads) was a small town located half way between Blackwell and Tonkawa. It flourished from 1890 to 1910, then gradually disappeared as the larger towns absorbed the services it provided to the homesteaders. It is described in *Ghost Towns of Oklahoma*, by John W. Morris, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1977, and includes a picture donated by John Greenshields.

Marsha Greenshields Grant, 1993

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I - 1907

- Scene 1: The pecan grove on James Greenshields' homestead, Kay County, Oklahoma, Thanksgiving day.
- Scene 2: The parlor of the homestead, the same day.

ACT II - 1918

- Scene 1: The pecan grove, 11:00 AM, November 11.
- Scene 2: The parlor of the homestead, the day before Thanksgiving.
- Scene 3: The pecan grove, the day after Thanksgiving.
- Scene 4: The parlor of the homestead, later the same day.

ACT III - 1929

- Scene 1: The pecan grove, September.
- Scene 2: The parlor of the homestead, a week before Thanksgiving.
- Scene 3: The pecan grove, later the same day.

EPILOGUE - 1935 to 1941

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JAMES B. GREENSHIELDS, Oklahoma homesteader, ages from 43 to 65 in Acts I-III. (10 years older in Epilogue)

LENA GREENSHIELDS, James' wife, ages from 37 to 59.

ALBERT E. GREENSHIELDS, James' younger brother, age 40 in Act I, age 62 in Act III. (7 years older in Epilogue)

ZADIE GREENSHIELDS, Albert's wife, age 33 in Act I, age 55 in Act III. (10 years older in Epilogue)

BRUCE GREENSHIELDS, oldest son of James and Lena, ages from 20 to 42. (10 years older in the Epilogue)

BRYCE GREENSHIELDS, son of James and Lena, ages from 19 to 41. (11 years older in the Epilogue)

JOHN GREENSHIELDS, son of James and Lena, age 22 in Act II, age 44 in Act III.

ANNA BRYANT, John's girlfriend in Act II, his wife in Act III and the Epilogue.

MRS. BEBEE, a widow, age 55 - 65.

GEORGE HONNOLD, Lena's brother, an attorney, age 55 -65.

VERNA MACPHERSON, Bruce's girlfriend in Act II, his wife in Act III and Epilogue.

PHOTOGRAPHER, adult male, age 25-35.

PAULINE, James' daughter in Act I.....age 15

JOHN, James' son in Act I.....age 13

MYREL, James' son in Act I.....age 11

CLARENCE, Albert's son in Act I.....age 9

ETHEL, Albert's daughter in Act I.....age 7

BEULAH, James' daughter in Act I.....age 5

PROLOGUE - 1941

[Parlor is furnished with a Franklin stove, a rocker, three straight chairs that can be pulled up to the table, an upright piano on the upstage wall, a round pedestal dining table located in the center of the room. An oil lamp sits on a side table located between two chairs SL. Between two chairs on SR is a low bookcase filled with copies of the classics and the family Bible. Downstage of the table are two sitting stools. There are two exits: an open doorway to the kitchen SL and a door, which exits to the outside SR. In the USL corner of the room is a narrow staircase to the second floor of the house. At rise Bruce is looking through old letters and bills found in an old leather suitcase. Bryce enters from the stairs.]

BRYCE: Find anything of interest, Bruce?

BRUCE: Apparently Pa kept every bill, every letter he ever received. Look, Bryce, here's a postcard from Pauline addressed to him in Montana.

BRYCE: He moved around so much I'm surprised it caught up with him. Wonder why he left Albert's ranch.

BRUCE: Hard to say. He never did. Holed up in a rooming house in Butte, selling shoes for a living. . .

BRYCE: You ever write him?

BRUCE: No, I was too busy at the university in Grandville.

BRYCE: Me either. One postcard. . . Do you suppose this is the only time he heard from his family during all those months of exile? How sad.

BRUCE: It was Ma's decision.

BRYCE: He didn't have much choice in the matter. I'd like to think that if she hadn't died so suddenly, they might have reconciled.

BRUCE: I doubt it. Somebody would have offered him a deal, and he would have been up and running again. Here's a bill for seed dated 10 years ago-- still unpaid. Think we should contact them?

BRYCE: I doubt if the company is still in business.

BRUCE: Find anything you want to take with you?

BRYCE: We've got a small apartment. Don't have room for any of the furniture. But Blanche might like one of Ma's quilts. They're all neatly folded in a trunk upstairs.

BRUCE: Better grab it. Once we leave, John and Anna will clean out the place.

BRYCE: Let them. Myrel's not coming back, and Pauline already has what she wants.

BRUCE: Look at this. It's a copy of the Petition to Sell Personal Property from the Kay County Court.

BRYCE: A list of the things that were sold at auction. That was a black day in our lives.

BRUCE: (reading from the list) 6 red milch cows, 3 Jersey heifers, 1 Durhan Bull, 21 yearling white faces, 2 gray horse mules, 40 shoats, 1 thoroughbred Duroc Boar. Then it lists all the farm equipment: cultivators, listers, rakes and weeders. Also the crops: 500 bushels of oats, 300 bushels of corn, 12 tons loose alfalfa hay. The sum total of 30 years. . . back-breaking labor and pennies carefully saved.

BRYCE: Heartbreaking, isn't it? We should have been able to do something.

BRUCE: What? We didn't have the money, all the notes were past due, and everything mortgaged to the hilt.

BRYCE: Then why do I feel so guilty?

BRUCE: What's done is done. We can't go back and do it over again.

BRYCE: What's going to happen to the place now? Should we hold on to it, keep it in the family, or sell it to the highest bidder?

BRUCE: I suppose we ought to poll the siblings. Pauly wants to get everyone together at Thanksgiving.

BRYCE: Thanksgiving was always special for Ma, wasn't it?

BRUCE: Her favorite holiday. When everybody got together... Hate to see it go into a stranger's hands . . . so much of our history was tilled in this soil.

BRYCE: We could lease it for now. Let the next generation decide.

BRUCE: All his hopes and dreams. . .

BRYCE: His Oklahoma empire. . .

CROSSFADE TO PECAN GROVE

ACT I, Scene 1

[Thanksgiving day, 1907. The pecan grove on James' homestead. There is a rustic wooden bench down stage right. Everyone is dressed in their good clothes to have their picture taken.]

JOHN: (offstage) Give it back, Myrel. It's mine! My-rel.... (Myrel runs on stage with John's hat and crouches down behind the bench. John enters, sees Myrel and runs over to him)

JOHN: Give me back my hat, Myrel. My-rel...

MYREL: Gotta catch me first. Come and get it, slow-poke. (sing-song) John is a slow-poke... John is a slow-poke...

JOHN: Darn you, Myrel! Mama's gonna get you for this. My-rel... (Myrel runs upstage and bumps into Lena who has just entered with Zadie, Beulah and Ethel. Lena retrieves the hat)

LENA: That's enough, Myrel! Now, you boys behave. (Myrel tries to scoot by her and Lena grabs him by the shirt collar) You hear me, Myrel?

MYREL: Yes, ma'am.

LENA: That goes for you too, John.

JOHN: Yes, ma'am. (Bruce and Bryce enter, followed by James and Albert, Clarence and Pauly, and the photographer with his camera and tripod.)

ZADIE: Lena, this is such a beautiful day. Did you make special arrangements with the Almighty?

LENA: (laughing) Oh, Zadie, if it was that easy I'd ask for a lot more than a sunny day in November.

ZADIE: Last year we spent Thanksgiving digging out of the snowdrifts.

LENA: Don't remind me. I'm just glad you and Albert and your children could join us this year. We miss being with the home folks back in Kansas, but it's hard for us to get away.

ZADIE: Now that the railroad has put in a spur to Broken Arrow my mother...

JAMES: (to Albert) ...weighed 210 pounds; only got \$15.22 for her. Hardly covered the cost of the old sow's feed.

ALBERT: We only run a dozen hogs, but put up our first silage this year.

JAMES: Lucky you. After a two-month drought we didn't harvest enough corn to feed the crows...

BRYCE: (to Bruce) ...so what did you do?

BRUCE: I told them that unless there was a remedy for sluggish brains, they'd have to repeat the ninth. They said it wasn't fair, and I said, "who cares-- I'm the boss." (Bryce laughs)

LENA: (to Zadie) It was Bruce's idea. They turned that longboat upside down, cut out holes for the windows and a door, and the boys dormitory was added to the house. Only cost us...

BRYCE: (to Bruce)...\$60 for a typewriter? You got to be kiddin'.

BRUCE: Nope. But I'm gonna buy one before next semester. You try writing out 22 tests by hand.

BRYCE: They've got you teaching too many grades.

LENA: (to Zadie) Bruce got the teaching job at Red Rock last spring, and is saving his money for college. Lives in a boarding house I wouldn't put my dog in...

ALBERT: (to James) ...so I spent the better part of a day building a pen for that chicken-eating hog. Anyway, it took my mind off the corn rotting in the fields. Wettest year...

BRYCE: (to Bruce) ...I can ever recall. Ma laid into the kids for wearing out their shoes skating across the buffalo wallows. So, John tried it with his bare feet and nearly got his toes frostbit. (He and Bruce cross to Photographer)

PHOTOGRAPHER: (to James) Mr. Greenshields, most folks like to show off their home in the family portrait, but this is the perfect setting.

JAMES: The township is named for this grove of pecan trees. Roundgrove. It's a natural feature of the landscape. The river's a half-mile to the west, and Duck Creek's to the east. (Albert crosses to sit on the bench and is joined by Pauline and the young boys)

PHOTOGRAPHER: Ideal for picnics. I bet the kids love to play here.

JAMES: It's everybody's favorite spot for our Independence Day festivities. All the homesteaders pitch in . . .

LENA: Homemade ice cream, barbequed ribs. . .

BRUCE: Clam chowder you wouldn't believe, served with those little oyster crackers. . .

BRYCE: And pecan pies, of course.

PHOTOGRAPHER: From your own trees?

BRUCE: Some years it's our biggest money crop. Last year we made over six hundred dollars and everyone got new clothes for school.

LENA: My goodness, Ethel. You're growing up to be as pretty as your Mama.

ZADIE: She's such a shy one, though, always hanging onto my skirts. Clarence, now, gets into one scrape after another.

LENA: John and Myrel are my rascallions. Jim puts them to work, but they run off as soon as he turns his back.

PAULINE: What's that, Uncle Albert?

ALBERT: This is my daily ledger, Pauly.

PAULINE: What's it for?

ALBERT: I like to keep a record. . .

ZADIE: (to Lena) Albert was the recording secretary for the Anti-Horse Thief Society, and when the group folded for lack of horse thieves, he began keeping minutes of his daily chores. Waste of time, if you ask me. . .

MYREL: You writing about the Indians, Uncle Albert?

PAULINE: Sometimes we hear their tom-toms on the reservation in Tonkawa. Pa says they're calling on the Great Spirit to send rain.

JAMES: (to Albert) The Great Spirit was over-busy last spring. We had a bumper crop of winter wheat shocked and ready for the granary when a flash flood washed it all down the river.

ALBERT: Rotten luck. I need to clear more land for crops but it takes time and a strong back. Indian Territory is rough terrain and has a lot more trees than you do on this rich bottom land.

PAULINE: It isn't Indian Territory anymore, Uncle Albert.

ALBERT: That's right, Pauly. We're all a part of the great state of Oklahoma now. November 16, 1907, a new date to put in the history books.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Mr. Greenshields, I was told you made the Run in '93. I'd sure like to hear about it before I leave.

LENA: Please, don't get him started or we'll never get this picture-taking finished.

JAMES: Lena, if the man wants to hear first hand about Uncle Sam's great horse race, I think we should oblige him. You like Pa's story, don't you, Beulah, my love? (He picks her up and hugs her)

CLARENCE: Please tell it, Uncle Jim.

ETHEL: Please, please, Uncle Jim.

ZADIE: Now, don't pester him, Clarence, Ethel.

BRYCE: Here we go again. Wanna go fishing, Bruce?

LENA: (to Bruce & Bryce) Stay put, you two. The short version, Jim, or our dinner will be burnt to a crisp.

JAMES: Well . . . it all started in the spring of '93 when the President issued the proclamation about the last and greatest run for free land in the Oklahoma Territory. At first I wasn't interested. But then an old friend of mine comes for a visit and says to me, "Lets ride down and take a look at the promised land."

MYREL: So you did, huh Pa?

JAMES: That's right, Myrel. We scouted around for a couple of weeks, visited eight or ten Indian tribes, talked with the chiefs, traveled up and down the rivers, and saw some extra good land. It gave me a longing after it, but I didn't think there'd be much use trying. Hundreds of men with faster horses would easily beat me to it.

PHOTOGRAPHER: What changed your mind?

JAMES: All that free land was mighty tempting. . .

JOHN: (Impatiently) Get to the part about the horses, Pa.

JAMES: Right you are, John. I bought two ponies called Fred and Fritz from a Methodist-Episcopal minister. He'd driven them hard for five years, but said they had strong muscles and promised they would get me there. Those M-E ministers are cunningly good financiers.

LENA: Watch it, Jim. Little pitchers have...(pantomimes big ears)

JAMES: (dramatically recreated) Well. . . I got to my station the evening before the big day, got the horses rested up and their limbs rubbed down. Then I got on a beeline straight north of where I wanted to go. We stood in a line, three thousand long and four hundred deep. We were in every shape: some on race horses that cost as much as three thousand dollars; some in carts; some with four horses hitched to the hind wheels of a wagon; some with weapons; some with nothing on but drawers; women dressed in men's clothes and riding astraddle. We waited, hearts thumping, everything quiet.

MYREL: (to Ethel) Now comes the best part.

JAMES: The hour arrived, twelve o'clock noon on September 16th, and the officer fired his gun. I was riding Fritz and leading Fred. Fritz gave me his best for the next four or five miles and the others began to drop behind me one by one. At about twelve miles he began to stagger. I said good-bye to poor Fritz and leaped onto Fred. I was never so sorry for a horse in my entire life. I didn't expect to see him alive again.

ZADIE: Oh, the poor pony.

JOHN: Tell what happened next, Pa.

JAMES: Fred was the fastest horse and in good plight for running. I gave him a few draws of the gad, and we passed the last man at about 16 miles. In no time we struck the north line of my claim. I tied my flag to a Rosin weed and rode a beat around it yelling and waving my hat in the air. Others began to arrive and staked claims all around mine. Then, a thousand or more rode across my claim in the next half hour. Rumor has it that the famous Dalton boys rode by. Folks say they buried a treasure nearby, but Lena said they were going too fast to bury anything. Oh, by the way, my horse, Fritz, was all right, as nimble as he ever was, and Fred, by letting him rest the winter, was all right, too.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Great story Mr. Greenshields. You ought to write it down and have it published.

LENA: It's been done. The DAR printed a whole collection of first-hand stories by the homesteaders on the Cherokee Strip.

PHOTOGRAPHER: This is beautiful country, but how do you stand the hot summers? I hear it can get over a hundred degrees in the shade, and no rain for months.

JAMES: Oh, summers can be cruel, especially for farmers... sand storms that suffocate everything in their path. . . hail the size of baseballs...

BRYCE: (interrupts) Pa, please! Let the man take our picture before we all faint from hunger.

LENA: I tried to warn you. Jim's been making so many speeches lately, his mouth doesn't know from being closed anymore.

PHOTOGRAPHER: (laughing) Okay. If you will all line up, the little ones in front. (Myrel and John start pushing each other)

JAMES: Stop that, you two! Your Ma will tan your hide if you get mussed up before the picture is taken.

ZADIE: How do you manage it, Lena? Your children are so handsome and well dressed.

JAMES: Lena comes from proud people, Zadie. She doesn't want anyone turning up their noses at us cause we're Strip folks.

ETHEL: Mama, I gotta go.

ZADIE: Hold it if you can, sweetheart.

MYREL: I'm hungry.

JOHN: Me too. When do we eat?

LENA: Hush, you two. Don't slouch, Pauly.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Ready? Now don't anybody move. Smile.

(HE SNAPS THE SHUTTER, THEN CROSSFADE TO PARLOR)

ACT I, Scene 2

[Noon the same day. Parlor of the homestead. Lena, Zadie and the three girls enter]

LENA: Pauly, take the girls upstairs and read to them while Zadie and I get the table set for dinner.

PAULINE: Okay, Mama.

ZADIE: Ethel, run along with your cousins.

PAULINE: I'll read from Mr. Anderson's book. You like fairy tales, don't you, Ethel?

ETHEL: Read *The Little Mermaid*. That's my favorite. (they exit upstairs)

ZADIE: (plays a couple of chords on the piano) I so wanted to attend the college in Winfield to study art and music, but there was no money for it.

LENA: Play for the sing-a-long this evening. The boys love a chance to show off. (exits to kitchen) Bruce! Bryce! Come fix the table so we can set it for dinner. (The boys enter and put leaves in the table during the following dialogue. Lena enter with the tablecloth) Bruce, when you're finished, mind the young ones, will you? I don't want them getting hurt or coming in to eat all muddy. (to Zadie) If it's not one thing, it's another. Last month Myrel jumped off the shed roof and ran the tine of a pitchfork right through his leg.

ZADIE: Oh, my God! What did you do?

LENA: Poured turpentine in the wound. It's almost healed with no sign of infection.

BRUCE: You should have heard Mama bawl him out. Don't know who was yelling the loudest, Myrel or Ma. (The boys laugh.)

[Cross fade to Albert and James in the Pecan Grove]

ALBERT: So to make her happy, I got baptized in her church. She's a third generation Latter Day Saint on her mother's side of the house.

JAMES: Is being a Mormon any different from being a Presbyterian?

ALBERT: Not so you'd notice. If we lived by the great salt lake, I could have more than one wife.

JAMES: Then what's stopping you?

ALBERT: Are you kidding? One woman is all I can handle. Besides, Zadio would chop me up for horse fodder if I even considered it.

[Cross fade to parlor]

LENA: (To Bruce & Bryce) It's hardly a laughing matter, you two. Remember that contraption you built, the one the Duncan boy fell off of and broke two of his ribs? Your Pa put an end to your inventions that day. (exits to kitchen)

BRYCE: Ma, that was a roller coaster. (to Zadio) A kid at school told us about one he saw, so Bruce figured out how to make one. Used some old railroad ties for the tracks which we laid up side a haystack, built a cart out of scrap lumber.

..

[Cross fade to pecan grove]

JAMES: . . . got the wheels from an old baby-carriage, then rigged up some pullies to haul it back up to the top again. Every kid in the county had to ride on it.

ALBERT: Clever boy you got there.

JAMES: Now he wants to construct one of those new gasoline-powered tractors. Hear tell they can plow a field in half the time.

ALBERT: Why don't you just buy one?

JAMES: Cost a hundred dollars or more. Can't afford it.

[Cross fade to parlor]

LENA: (enters with tablecloth) When did you see a tractor, Bruce? Nobody around here's got one.

BRUCE: A fella I know saw one at the O.K. City fair last summer. (to Bryce) That's not all he saw. One night he snuck out to a show and saw some chicks dancing without their shirtwaists.

BRYCE: Really? We gotta talk Pa into goin' to that fair next year... to see the tractors, of course.

LENA: That's enough, you two. Out! We have to get this table set for dinner.
(the boys exit)

ZADIE: Life is full of surprises when you're raising a family.

LENA: I could do with less, believe me. Pauline complains that all boys are too "rocky." Says she'd rather be an old maid than have to marry one. (exits to kitchen)

ZADIE: (laughing) She'll change her mind when the young fellows start courting her. Beulah's such a lovely child she'll have to beat them off with clubs when she's of age.

LENA: (enters with dinner plates) From the day she entered this world, never a moment's worry. All the problems that plague a normal child just passed her by. Never been sick a day in her life.

[Cross fade to pecan grove]

ALBERT: Zadie coddles Clarence and Ethel too much. When the diphtheria epidemic hit last winter she wouldn't let them out of her sight.

JAMES: Lena kept our kids home for three weeks after a child at school was diagnosed. Neighbor to the north lost both his wife and son to it.

[Cross fade to parlor]

ZADIE: How tragic. I read that a German doctor has developed a vaccine. Blessed be the day it goes the way of smallpox?

LENA: Knock on wood and pray those Washington bureaucrats keep their hands out of the pie. . .

[Cross fade to pecan grove]

ALBERT: Jim, you're lucky to have all this good bottom land for pasture and crops. I have to quarry rocks on my eighty acres before I can plow, and rent a neighbor's field to pasture my cows.

JAMES: Black gumbo. Brick hard to till when it's dry. Last year was the wettest spring and driest summer on record. But we managed to make a few improvements. New pole barn for the calves. . .

[Cross fade to parlor]

LENA: But we had to borrow money to get us through the winter, then borrow more for the spring planting. Cost only a dollar a day to buy and haul feed, but

by winter's end the cows were starving. It breaks my heart to see Jim work so hard just to keep those poor animals alive. I get so blue and discouraged sometimes. . .

[Cross fade to pecan grove]

JAMES: . . . wondering how it's going to end. Can't seem to get a leg up on Mother Nature or the banks that threaten to reclaim us, body and soul.

ALBERT: You could go back to teaching.

JAMES: Doesn't pay enough to keep a body alive. Forget about feeding a family. It's awfully discouraging, but we'll make it. . .

[Cross fade to parlor]

LENA: Come hell or high water, as they say. Which we've seen too much of lately. But farming's what Jim's got his heart set on, and I'm doing my best to help him make a go of it.

ZADIE: You get back to Winfield very often?

LENA: Not since last spring, though it's only a couple of hours by train now. Haven't been to church in a month of Sundays. Don't have a penny for the collection box. Now I can pray here at home. But I sure miss the weekly gossip.

ZADIE: Lena! You're outrageous! How are your folks?

LENA: Doing just fine. A master carpenter never wants for jobs or money. Mother despairs that my kids are growing up like wild hooligans, so when we go for a visit, she takes them to the opera or readings at the Literary Society. When I was a girl we vacationed in the Rockies, and had a hired girl to help clean and cook. Now, I spend the hot summer months chopping weeds and fighting off swarms of mosquitoes.

ZADIE: I spent all summer helping Albert build the silo. Albert likes to brag that I can ride herd on cattle or till a field as well as any man in the territory.

[James enters holding John by the scruff of his neck]

JAMES: All right, now tell me what this is all about. The truant officer doesn't work on holidays unless it's damn important.

LENA: Watch your language, Jim. What happened?

JAMES: That's what we're going to find out.

LENA: John, have you been skipping school again?

JOHN: No, m'am.

LENA: Then what. . . ?

JAMES: The two Carter boys went missing and later turned up at the tannery in Blackwell trying to sell a couple of animal pelts. . . that turned out to be cat skins.

ZADIE: You mean they skinned somebody's cat?

JAMES: It appears so.

LENA: Oh, my God! Poor Mrs. Bebee.

ZADIE: That was the cat?

LENA: No, that's our neighbor.

JAMES: Lena, do you think....?

LENA: Ask him.

JAMES: John, were those pelts off Mrs. Bebee's cats?

JOHN: Yes, sir.

JAMES: Then before you get the whupping of your life, you'd better explain this real good.

JOHN: You won't like it.

JAMES: You're damn right I won't. Now talk.

JOHN: Jim and Bo Carter was real mad at their Pa about something and figured they'd get even by running away. They told me cause they needed money for train tickets. They didn't say where they was going, but I guess it was a long way off cause they wanted ten dollars.

LENA: Where would you get ten dollars?

JAMES: Lena, that's beside the point right now. Okay John, now explain about the cats.

JOHN: Well, I told them I didn't have ten dollars, but you got that much or more for those moles you trapped and skinned. They said they didn't have time to go looking for no moles, but the Bebee's had lots of cats, and they'd be lots easier to catch.

LENA: Did you help them?

JOHN: No, I couldn't do that to no cats.

JAMES: But you didn't tell anybody about it either, did you?

JOHN: No, sir.

JAMES: Then as far as I'm concerned you're just as guilty as they are. Well, maybe you'll be lucky this time. After you explain all this to the officer, maybe he'll just give you some straight talk and let you go. Okay, let's march back out there and have done with it. (they exit)

ZADIE: They wouldn't arrest a child, would they? On Thanksgiving?

LENA: No, they wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for the cat pelts. Can you believe it? They actually skinned those poor animals. I'll probably be the one who has to tell Mrs. Bebee.

ZADIE: How did you know?

LENA: Mrs. Bebee's has... had four cats. The day before yesterday she was by here looking for two that had disappeared. Since they were toms we figured they were just out prowling. It wouldn't be the first time.
(exits to kitchen)

ZADIE: Poor Mrs. Bebee.

LENA: (offstage) Zadie, what would you say if I told you I was thinking of getting a job?

ZADIE: Six kids don't keep you busy enough?

LENA: (enters with water glasses) I'm just so tired of being dirt poor all the time. I'd like to find something that would bring in a little cash income.

ZADIE: Where on earth would you find the time?

LENA: I don't know. When my mother would talk about some family being dirt poor, I'd picture them like the characters in a Dickens' novel: dirty faces, raggedy clothes, barefoot, and hands out-stretched, mutely pleading for a penny to buy their daily bread. Now I have nightmares where those are the faces of my children. I wake up in a panic, then get on my knees and pray to God to spare us that degradation.

ZADIE: Your so-called poverty doesn't extend to your pantry, I notice. Or did you sacrifice a starving cow just for our visit?

LENA: Misfortune may befall the cash crops, but thank goodness, my vegetable garden keeps this family adequately fed.

ZADIE: And according to Bruce, your pecan crop puts clothes on your back. Count your blessings, Lena. Things are not as bad as they seem.

LENA: If we could barter squash for schoolbooks, and turnips for taxes, we'd have no money worries, right?

ZADIE: Right! I can see it now-- wagonloads of vegetables-- mountains of them, all piled up in the town square. The county assessor stamps your tax bill, "PAID! ...Next?... and what did you bring me today, madam? Oh, no! Not more turnips!"

LENA: Tomatoes and cukes.

ZADIE: "Right on the dollar."

LENA: Sweet potatoes and watermelons?

ZADIE: "That will sweeten the pile."

LENA: Corn and limas.

ZADIE & LENA: (beat) "Succotash."

LENA: Zadie, you're inspired. I'll open a fruit and vegetable market in Autwine.

ZADIE: Where? (James and Albert enter)

LENA: Autwine. That's the little town at the crossroads about a mile south of here. Pauline took good care of Beulah while I cooked for the threshing crew this fall. She's old enough to look after the house and cook for the boys while I...

JAMES: Pauly's becoming a fine cook and Mother's helper, but Lena's got a reputation now. The threshing crew says she's the best cook in the county; won't work unless she fixes the eats, they say.

ZADIE: (to James) Is everything okay out there? John didn't get arrested did he?

JAMES: Nope. The cat caper's been solved, and the nabbers got off with a stern warning to mind their p's and q's. Mrs. Bebee could press charges, but the officer hopes Lena will dissuade her.

LENA: Why me?

JAMES: He's leaving it to you to tell her what happened.

LENA: (to Zadie) I told you! (to James & Albert) Dinner's almost ready, so don't run off. Zadie, come check the corn pudding. My pullets are laying up a storm, so I put in extra eggs. Maybe I should add more cream. See what you think... (they exit)

ALBERT: Those two have had their heads together ever since we got here. How do they find so much to talk about?

JAMES: Their kids and menfolk. Women need to have a little chitchat now and then. Helps clear the cobwebs and sort out our lives.

ALBERT: (laughing) Don't let Zadie hear you say that. So, big bro, what are your plans for next year?

JAMES: Hard to tell. I'm still sitting on the same hundred and sixty the President sold me for a dollar back in '93. Hoped to have a thousand and sixty by now. Farming will be big business some day, and with all my boys doing their part, we could have the biggest and best farm in the state. That's been my dream ever since I made the Run. The quarter section just north of us may be on the market soon. Our neighbor has had some bad luck and is thinking of selling out.

ALBERT: I thought you said this had been a poor crop year, early floods and a late drought? If you're sitting on some extra cash, how about a loan? I'm the brother who's land poor, remember?

JAMES: What I remember is that Pa gave YOU the deed to his place on Silvercreek. That was 300 acres of improved farmland, which you ran downhill till there was nothing left but to sell out and move elsewhere.

ALBERT: It could have been yours, you know. You're the older brother. Now that you're such a big success, I think you might remember how a certain

brother borrowed a wagon and team of horses, loaded it with lumber and supplies, and hauled it all the way from Kansas so you could build your house and barn. And how that same brother talked Pa into loaning you a three hundred dollar gold piece so you could buy a plow and other things you needed. Then after that brother spent his whole summer helping to build your house and barn, you complained that you were going broke trying to feed him.

JAMES: I think that brother has conveniently forgotten more than he remembers. If you recall, I worked the home place for six years and never had a nickel to call my own.

ALBERT: Pa was a tight-fisted Scotch immigrant who pre-empted that homestead and built it from scratch single-handed. He wasn't about to hand it over to anybody, much less his two sons. Had us figured for a couple of losers.

JAMES: We did have ourselves a time of it, didn't we? Riding all over the Kansas countryside looking for teaching jobs and sparking the pretty girls. Not a care in the world.

ALBERT: No one could measure up to Pa's standards. I got the place only after Ma died and Pa was too sick to take care of it anymore. But by then you were married and settled here in Indian Territory. So don't blame me. . .

JOHN: (bursts through the front door with Myrel at his heels and shouts) Ma! Pa! Come quick! The cow has killed Clarence! (Overlapping dialogue as Zadie, Albert, and James exit)

ZADIE: Oh, my Lord!

ALBERT: Where is he?

JOHN: Out by the barn.

JAMES: Where are your brothers? (John points out the door)

LENA: I told Bruce to keep an eye on them. Hasn't there been enough trouble for one day? (to John and Myrel) You two stay right here. Don't move until I get back. (exits)

MYREL: It's all your fault, John. You're the one who taught it to butt.

JOHN: Oh, shut up, Myrel!

MYREL: Well, it was YOUR idea.

JOHN: YOU let it out of the pasture.

MYREL: (crosses to front door) I didn't know that cow could butt so hard.

JOHN: Can you see anything?

MYREL: No, everybody's standing in the way. If Clarence is dead, I bet we don't get Thanksgiving dinner. Darn you, John!

JOHN: If Ma hears you swearing, you'll be in worse trouble 'n me.

MYREL: They're coming back. Now you're going to get it!

JOHN: I wonder if they send kids to prison.

MYREL: They do for murder. (Zadie and Albert enter followed by James, Lena, Bruce and Bryce. Albert carries Clarence who acts dazed.)

JAMES: He's O.K., boys. Just got knocked out for a minute. He's got a bump on his head, but nothing's broken as far as we can tell.

MYREL: Oh, good! Can we eat dinner now?

LENA: Bruce, where were you... never mind, we'll discuss it later. You and Bryce go get the chairs from the kitchen. (They cross to kitchen; Lena confronts John & Myrel) After dinner the Dalton gang here will clean out the barn. That should keep you two out of trouble the rest of the day. (At the foot of the stairs) Girls, come down to dinner. Jim, you're going to have to get rid of that cow before somebody else gets hurt. (exits to kitchen)

JAMES: (with a dour look at the two culprits) That's a shame. She's been a good milker. (exits to kitchen)

ALBERT: (to Myrel and John) Understand you two represented the county in the regional spelling bee last month. How'd it turn out?

MYREL: Not so good. John got eliminated in the first round, and I got disqualified cause my feet weren't flat on the floor.

ZADIE: That must have been disappointing.

JOHN: Then a twister nearly blew the town away.

MYREL: It was real exciting! Two horses hitched to a buggy were lying dead in the street with a two-by-four stuck right through their chests. And the schoolhouse was just a pile of bricks... (Lena enters) We might of got killed.

JOHN: Yeah. People was running around all cut up and bloody.

LENA: That's enough! God, forgive me, but I may strangle you two before the day's over.

ALBERT: Everything smells delicious, Lena. (James enters)

LENA: Be careful, Jim, don't drop that bird. (Places the fruit bowl in the center of the table and a silver candlestick on either side. Bruce and Bryce enter with kitchen chairs; the girls enter from the stairs; everyone helps place the chairs and stools around the table during the following dialogue.)

BRYCE: Are you going to play for a sing-a-long tonight, Aunt Zadie?

ZADIE: I look forward to accompanying your fine voices, gentlemen. Oh, Lena. Your mother's silver candlesticks. How beautiful!

LENA: The fruit bowl was my grandmother's, handed down from the Hallocks to the Honnolds to me. It's over a hundred years old.

JAMES: Lena's ancestors, the Bradfords, sat down to eat with the Indians at the very first Thanksgiving feast. You kids didn't know you were descended from American royalty, did you?

BRYCE: That's never been proved, Pa. (Lena lights the candles)

JAMES: Maybe not. But it makes a good story.

LENA: Jim, if you'll offer the prayer...

JAMES: Oh, Lord, bless this family gathered together today to celebrate the bounty of your good earth for which we are truly thankful.

EVERYONE: Amen.

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 1

[The pecan grove. The morning of November 11, 1918. John and Anna are sitting on the bench facing upstage.]

ANNA: No, John... oh, yes, John... now stop that!

JOHN: What's the matter? Don't you love me, Anna?

ANNA: You know I do.

JOHN: I love you, too. Mmm, your hair smells nice.

ANNA: Rain water.

JOHN: What?

ANNA: Rain water. I keep it shiny and smellin' good cause I wash it in rain water.

JOHN: That's nice. (Starts to fondle her)

ANNA: (Slaps his hand away) Now, stop that, John!

JOHN: But you get me so bothered...

ANNA: I'm not gonna end up with a baby and no husband like some girls I know.

JOHN: You're gonna have a husband. Me!

ANNA: When?

JOHN: As soon as I can talk Pa into givin' us this place.

ANNA: Why would he do that?

JOHN: Cause he's a gullible old fool.

ANNA: Shame on you, John, talkin' about your Pa that way.

JOHN: Well, he is. You'll see.

ANNA: Where are your folks gonna live?

JOHN: Someplace out east of here.

ANNA: I didn't know they were planning to move.

JOHN: Pa's lookin' to buy a ranch over near Uncas.

ANNA: When?

JOHN: Soon, baby, soon...

ANNA: Quit that, and pay attention.

JOHN: What's the matter?

ANNA: You mean your folks are gonna move to a new place and just give us this one?

JOHN: That's right...

ANNA: Wouldn't we have to pay something for it? You spent all your money on that cycle. Then you got in trouble with your pa and he sold it. Honestly, John! Sometimes I wonder if you're ever gonna amount to anything.

JOHN: Don't say that, Anna. You sound just like Ma.

ANNA: Well, my Ma says you lack ambition. Why didn't you finish school? All your brothers did, and then went on to college.

JOHN: Maybe I'm not so smart as my la-di-da brothers. Anyway, they all didn't graduate. Myrel dropped out after his first year and tried to join the Army. But they said he was too short-sighted. Might kill his own men 'stead of the enemy.

ANNA: How come the Army didn't want you?

JOHN: Pa told them I was needed on the farm.

ANNA: Farming's okay with me. My pa was a farmer.

JOHN: Now he's just an old drunk bossin' your Ma and his kids around. When the time's right, I'll talk pa into givin' me this place so we can get married.

ANNA: John, you're always talkin' like you got the cat by the tail, but ever time your Ma or Pa say "jump," you ask "how far."

JOHN: That's not fair, Anna. I can't do anything as long as Ma holds the purse strings. You know that. It's only right Pa give me this place. I do practically all the work around here.

ANNA: I hope it's soon. I'm not gonna wait around forever, you know.

JOHN: Soon... (kissing her) ... real soon. I promise. (James enters and interrupts them)

JAMES: Here you are! Morning, Anna. Bit early in the day to be visiting, don't ya think? Some folks got work to do. John, I told you to round up the hogs before dinner. Mrs. Bebee was by here this morning and fussing because they were rooting in her flower garden.

ANNA: Mr. Greenshields, you gotta fence up those hogs. Nobody lets stock run loose anymore.

(Suddenly there is sound of sirens and church bells in the distance)

JAMES: Good Lord, Almighty! What's all that for?

ANNA: (beat) It's the Armistice! The war's over!

JOHN: How do you know?

ANNA: It's supposed to happen today. Don't you read the newspaper?

JAMES: Thank the Lord. Our soldier boy will be coming home and the whole family will be here for Thanksgiving. (to John) Let's go tell your Ma the good news.

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 2

[Parlor of the homestead, the day before Thanksgiving, 1918. Bruce enters the front door carrying a basket of laundry]

BRUCE: Hey, Ma, I got the sheets and towels off the line before it rains. Where do you want them?

LENA: (Enters from kitchen) Here, I'll take them. You going somewhere?

BRUCE: John and I are running over to Tonkawa. Want us to get anything while we're out?

LENA: No, just don't stay gone too long. I may need your help later. Where's your father?

BRUCE: Out in the barn with Uncle George. Why?

LENA: Remember what I was telling you last night? I'm worried. Talk to him, will you? Find out what he's been up to, and let me know, okay?

BRUCE: Sure, Ma, I will. Promise!

MRS. BEBEE: (Enters with two coffee mugs) Lena, we've been in that kitchen since sunup. Let's have a rest. Hello, Bruce. You taking off somewhere?

BRUCE: Yes, I am, Mrs. Bebee. How's your garden doing?

MRS. BEBEE: Lots better since your Pa penned up his hogs.

BRUCE: I'm happy to hear that, Mrs. Bebee.

LENA: See you later, dear. (Bruce exits)

MRS. BEBEE: Is he still courting that singer from Tonkawa?

LENA: Verna MacPherson. I told him it's time he married her, or quit stringing her along if nothing's to come of it.

MRS. BEBEE: You're not overly fond of her, are you?

LENA: Can you believe she told us not to buy any aspirin tablets cause some druggist said a big batch was poisoned by German spies?

MRS. BEBEE: (laughs) And I thought the war was making me crazy! I dreamt that one of those murdering Huns parachuted right down on my front porch, stood at the foot of my bed with his gun pointed at me, getting ready to shoot, or worse. (shudders)

LENA: You've been a widow so long, maybe you were hoping for... "or worse."

MRS. BEBEE: Lena! Mind your scandalous thoughts. Too bad Albert and Zadie couldn't make it this year.

LENA: They're busy getting ready to move. Albert bought a 300-acre ranch near Butte, Montana, and they plan to leave right after Christmas. Do you think we've got enough food? There'll be thirty people at the table tomorrow. Maybe I should peel more potatoes.

MRS. BEBEE: There's plenty, Lena. Tomorrow I'll bring over another pie and the sweet potato casserole you're so fond of. Any word from Bryce?

LENA: Not yet. It's a long way from San Antonio, but I'm hoping. . . (starts folding the towels and sheets)

MRS. BEBEE: Let me help you with that. Is he doing okay?

LENA: As far as I know. They've been under tight quarantine because of this flu epidemic. If you recall, Bruce got so sick the Army thought he was going to die, and sent him home to do it. Broke his heart that he couldn't go to flying school with his brother.

MRS. BEBEE: Well, it worked out nicely for him in the long run. Now he can go back to school, a graduate student, no less.

LENA: That's where his heart lies, much to Jim's dismay.

BEBEE: I stopped by the cemetery yesterday to tidy up the resting place of my dearly departed, and trimmed back the little rose bush you planted by Beulah's stone. Hope you don't mind. Such a sweet epitaph. It breaks my heart every time I see it.

LENA: Thanks, Bee. I've been so busy getting ready for company I've neglected all my other duties.

MRS. BEBEE: That was the worst diphtheria epidemic I can ever recall. It touched every household in the township. . . So many children taken. (squeezes back tears)

LENA: I'll get us some more coffee. (wiping away a tear, exits to kitchen)

MRS. BEBEE: Lena, are you planning to spend another winter clerking for Sam Duncan? Our doughboys are coming home. . . I think he should save that job for one of them.

LENA: What makes you think any boy will want it? (enters with coffeepot) Autwine is practically a ghost town. Nothing left at the crossroads but the Roundgrove Elementary, the post office, and Duncan's Grocery. The first of the year they're going to close the post office and put us on an R.F.D. route out of Blackwell. Mr. Duncan says he might as well shut down and move, too.

MRS. BEBEE: That poor man. Nothing's gone right for him since he lost his wife and son back in ought-seven. What he needs is a good woman to help him get his life back on track.

LENA: He's joining us for dinner tomorrow. I'll put you two together so you can convince him you're the good woman he needs.

MRS. BEBEE: No thanks, Lena. I've gotten used to living alone. I don't want some man moving in and telling me how to run my farm. You'll just have to find some other widder-woman for poor Mr. Duncan.

LENA: How uncharitable you are, Bee. Don't you get lonesome in that big house all by yourself?

MRS. BEBEE: My charity doesn't include bed and board on a permanent basis. Besides, my daughters send their kids to spend summer vacations with me. It takes me the other nine months to get rested up. So, are you going to look for another job?

LENA: I don't think so. The extra money was nice and helped pay Pauline's college fees, but it was more than I could manage at times. John and Myrel were supposed to help out after school and on Saturdays. But they started running around with the town riff-raff and getting into trouble. Let me tell you, no good comes from raising kids in town.

MRS. BEBEE: Speaking of which, I was in Blackwell last week and saw Jim coming out of Albright's Mortgage company. Are you getting a loan on this place, or planning to buy a new one like Albert and Zadie?

LENA: (Startled) I don't know...

MRS. BEBEE: You don't know? What's going on around here?

LENA: Well, I'm not sure. Jim's been driving around the countryside looking at land up for sale. For a lot of years he's had it in his head to add on to this place. But I don't think it's the smart thing to do right now. I asked George to advise him, but that may have been a mistake (beat) Something's going on. . . Maybe Bruce . . . (she winces in pain)

MRS. BEBEE: What's the matter?

LENA: All of a sudden I've got a splitting headache.

MRS. BEBEE: Want me to get you a cold compress?

LENA: No, I'll just take an aspirin and lie down for awhile.

MRS. BEBEE: Make sure it's not the poisoned kind. (James and George enter)

JAMES: You ladies have fixed enough food to feed the whole U.S. Army.

MRS. BEBEE: Lena's expecting an army tomorrow. Nice to see you again, Mr. Honnold. (She puts on her coat)

GEORGE: You, too, Mrs. Bebee. You'll be joining us, I trust?

MRS. BEBEE: Just as soon as services are over. I hope you'll attend with the family, Mr. Honnold. We have so much to be thankful for this year.

GEORGE: I'll do my best, Mrs. Bebee.

MRS. BEBEE: Don't get up, Lena. I'll let myself out. (exits)

JAMES: Be careful, George. I think Mrs. Bebee is setting her widow's cap for you.

LENA: She's been asked to sing a solo at the service tomorrow. I'd like for all of us to go.

JAMES: I don't advise it, George. If you miss hearing her sing, you'll have something else to be thankful for.

LENA: Don't listen to him, George. The Bebee's were one of our first neighbors, homesteaders like ourselves. She's my dearest friend. I'm sorry I've been too busy to have a proper visit with you, but I'm so glad you came. We don't see you nearly enough. I'm going to lie down for awhile, but after supper I promise you my undivided attention. If you two need anything, you know where to find it. (exits the stairs)

GEORGE: She seems in better spirits these days.

JAMES: We're all in better spirits since the Armistice, George. Now that you've had the grand tour, what do you think? We've made a lot of changes since the last time you were here.

GEORGE: I'm impressed. The war has been a real boon to the nation's farmers. Lena tells me you're finally out of debt, and I hope your prosperity continues. Will all your boys be coming home to stay now?

JAMES: That's been my dream, what I've been working for all these years. With their help I could double or even triple my acreage, and eventually have the biggest farming operation in the state.

GEORGE: Bruce tells me that when he gets his graduate degree he want to teach at a university. And Bryce. . .

JAMES: Says he wants to work for some oil company when he gets out of the Army. But I hope to change his mind.

GEORGE: Well, you can't expect all your sons to follow the same path. What about Myrel and John?

JAMES: Myrel's out in Washington state. Worked for the railroad awhile, and now he's logging. But I think he'll come home if I offer him the right incentive.

GEORGE: More land, a bigger spread. . . perhaps. And John?

JAMES: Spends all his time in Tonkawa courting some girl when he's not running from the law. That boy will be the death of us yet.

GEORGE: What kind of trouble is he in?

JAMES: Just a young man's escapade, but it cost us a good night's sleep and some worrisome hours.

GEORGE: (pulls out his pipe and starts tamping tobacco into it) Lena was most upset when John dropped out of school after the eighth grade. I tried to explain to her that it was unrealistic to expect all her kids to be as responsible as her eldest. Every harvest has its share of blemished fruit.

JAMES: John is not a rotten apple, George.

GEORGE: Let's move this discussion outdoors, shall we? Lena doesn't like tobacco smoke fouling the air in her house.

JAMES: Good idea. It has gotten awfully stuffy in here. (They exit out the front door.)

GEORGE: So, tell me about John's run-in with the law.

JAMES: It's no concern of yours. I've already handled it.

GEORGE: Maybe I can help, use my influence with the courts, if necessary.

JAMES: It's not, but I'll tell you what happened. John wanted to buy a motorcycle a friend of his was selling, but he didn't have enough money. So I co-signed a note at the bank for him using my litter of shoats as collateral. Then a couple of weeks ago one of our neighbors made a very good offer on that litter. He gave John a check for two hundred dollars that John was supposed to take directly to the bank and deposit. But he didn't come home that day, or all that night. The next morning we raced to the bank to put a stop-payment on the check. But it was too late. John had already cashed it.

GEORGE: So, you lost the money, and John broke the law for selling mortgaged stock. What action did you take?

JAMES: My neighbor felt so sorry for me in my predicament, he said he'd forfeit the hogs, and I could pay him back when I had the money.

GEORGE: That was generous of him.

JAMES: As we were driving home an automobile flew past us like all the demons of hell were after it. It was John and one of the Bryant boys. We caught up with them on the outskirts of Tonkawa. John still had all the money in his possession, but he was acting so cocky my neighbor threatened to call the sheriff and have him arrested. So, he gave us the money, and the next day I sold the cycle and paid off the bank.

GEORGE: You were very lucky, Jim. That 'escapade', as you call it, could have had disastrous consequences for John.

JAMES: He just needs to settle down and take on the responsibility of his own place. That's why I'm looking to buy more land. . .

GEORGE: James, I don't think . . .

JAMES: That wind's got a cold bite to it. Let's go back inside. (They return to the parlor) You shake your head like you don't agree.

GEORGE: Land is highly inflated right now. We just signed the peace treaty, and already I have several clients filing for bankruptcy because they over-extended themselves at the height of wartime prosperity.

JAMES: No offense, George, but you lawyers seem to have a gloomy view of the world. I guess it's because you deal with such disreputable people.

GEORGE: Most of my clients are people like yourself, Jim-- farmers and businessmen. . .

JAMES: I know you mean to be helpful, George, but I've been running this farm since I homesteaded it in '93. You have no idea of the hard work it takes. So I doubt you're the best person. . .

GEORGE: I love my sister, and I don't want to see her aggrieved when the tax bill comes due, or have to ask me for a loan to pay the interest on your debts because you've exceeded your credit limit at all the banks in town. It's deplorable that she's had to take a job just to put food on your table.

JAMES: Now wait a minute George! This farm has always provided enough eats to keep us well fed. Just because we've been cash-poor at times doesn't mean you have the right...

GEORGE: When my sister is burdened with hardships she shouldn't have to carry, I certainly do have the right to intervene on her behalf.

JAMES: We're doing just fine now, so your advice is not needed or wanted. Lena's got a lot more spunk than you give her credit for. We've made a good life together. And raised a big family to boot. You've never married or sired any sons. You don't know a damn thing about what goes on in this family.

GEORGE: You seem to forget that Lena and I grew up in a big family. Our parents worked as hard as you. But they were wise enough not to buy what they couldn't pay for, or covet what was beyond their reach.

JAMES: For Lena's sake I'll keep a civil tongue in my head, but take care... a man can be pushed only so far.

GEORGE: Then be forewarned. If you choose to ignore prudent advice and gamble away your present holdings just to satisfy your compulsive need for aggrandizement, or to provide a homestead for a son who's unworthy of your trust, I'll be forced to take legal action. . .

JAMES: You arrogant son of a bitch! You have no right to come into my house and tell me what I can or cannot do. . . (A knock at the door interrupts and

James shouts angrily) Come in! (Bryce enters wearing a WWI Army Air Corps uniform)

BRYCE: Surprise!

JAMES: Bryce! (Gives him a big hug) I'm mighty happy to see you, son. Come quick, Lena. Look who's here.

GEORGE: (Shakes his hand) Welcome home, soldier.

BRYCE: It's good to see you again, Uncle George.

LENA: (Enters from the stairs very emotional) I was praying you'd make it home for Thanksgiving, but I was afraid they wouldn't let you... Oh, Bryce! (Hugs and kisses him) How handsome you look in your uniform. (Hugs and kisses him again)

BRYCE: Where's the rest of the family?

LENA: Bruce and John went over to Tonkawa to see their girls, and Pauline had some work to do at school today. She's a teacher now, you know.

BRYCE: What about Myrel?

LENA: He won't be coming.

BRYCE: I guess he's still chaffing because the Army rejected him. I'm sure he misses being home as much as you miss having him here.

LENA: I hope so. Can I get you something to eat. You've had a long trip and must be starved.

(Bruce and Verna appear outside the house. Verna stops Bruce from entering the house and calls his attention to the sky)

BRYCE: Thanks, Ma, but I had a bite in town. A cup of hot coffee would be nice. It's getting cold out. Looks like it might snow.

LENA: I'll be right back. (She exits to kitchen as Bruce enters front door)

BRUCE: Bryce, old buddy? Welcome home. (They embrace)

BRYCE: Good to see you looking so fit. You were a sickly runt when they sent you home last fall. Didn't expect you survive the winter. Was that you I saw kicking up dust in the tin lizzie?

BRUCE: You bet. Got it cheap cause it didn't run. John and I fixed it up. Want to take a spin?

BRYCE: Not now, I just got here. . .

BRUCE: It won't be as exciting as flying one of your 'crates,' but. . .

VERNA: (Enters in a tizzy) Come quick. Take a look at that sky! It's as black as midnight. I think we're in for it!

BRYCE: Hi, Verna.

VERNA: No time for chitchat! There's a twister headed right for us! Quick! Everybody get to the cave! Well, don't stand there like a bunch of dumb mules! MOVE!

JAMES: Calm down, Verna. It's only rain clouds. Might even be an early snow squall, but nothing to worry about. It's too late in the year for cyclones.

VERNA: Are you sure?

JAMES: I'm sure. Now, sit down and relax. Want some coffee?

VERNA: That would be nice. It feels like winter out there.

JAMES: (at kitchen door) Lena, need a couple more cups.

BRUCE: Verna, you remember my uncle, Mr. Honnold?

VERNA: Sure do. Nice to see you again. (She shakes his hand) Bryce! What a wonderful surprise! (She gives him a big hug)

BRYCE: You always stir things up when you come around, Verna. How's your family? You and your sisters still singing?

VERNA: Everyone's just fine, Bryce. We've been working the Lyceum circuit on weekends, doing shows for the soldiers.

BRYCE: That sounds like fun.

VERNA: Barrels. You should see our costumes-- all red, white, and blue, like the flag. I wear a red taffeta dress with lots of ruffles, a bright blue sash, a white satin headband that matches my petticoat, and strings of glass beads around my neck and arms. They hoot and holler when we come on stage. (Lena enters as

Verna sings a chorus of "Hello, Ma Baby." Bruce, Bryce, and Jim clap and stomp their feet; Lena looks on disapprovingly.)

GEORGE: (Interrupting) I trust our patriotic young men are not so tempted on Sundays?

VERNA: Heavens, no, Mr. Honnold. On Sunday mornings, we sit in the choir loft all nice and proper, and belt out those hymns. (sings) "On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame..."

LENA: Verna, could we wait till after supper for the rest of your performance? Bruce, did John come back with you?

BRUCE: John's staying for supper at the Bryants. Said he'll be back in time to help with the milking. Bryce, do you remember Anna Bryant? John's getting real serious about her. Wouldn't surprise me if they run off and get married one of these days.

LENA: Oh, Lord, I hope not. Surely he's got more sense than tie himself up with one of those Bryants. Not one of them is worth the time of day.

BRYCE: (laughs) Ma, you haven't changed a bit. There's not a girl in the whole state of Oklahoma good enough for one of your boys. It's good to be home again.

MRS. BEBEE: (Entering through the front door) Bryce, I thought that was you I saw walking across the field, so I turned right around and came back. Didn't want to miss your homecoming. (she gives him a big hug) Welcome home.

BRYCE: Thank you, Mrs. Bebee. It's a pleasure to see you again.

MRS. BEBEE: (turns to Verna) And you must be Bruce's girl. Lena's told me all about you. Nice to meet you, Velma.

VERNA: Verna. You remember me, don't you, Mrs. Bebee? Pauly and me used to hang out together when we were little.

MRS. BEBEE: That's nice, dear. Bryce, your Ma and Pa have been hoping and praying you'd get here for Thanksgiving. Are you home to stay now that the war is over? (She hangs up her coat and takes the last cup of coffee. Lena exits to the kitchen to get another cup for herself)

BRYCE: I have to go back the day after tomorrow. My squadron won't be disbanded till after Christmas.

MRS. BEBEE: Then what are your plans? Are you going to join one of those flying circuses?

BRYCE: (laughs at her remark) That's a great idea, Mrs. Bebee, but I don't think so. I've got a job lined up with Shell Oil in Tulsa. They're going to be building refineries all over the world, and I'm going to help build them.

MRS. BEBEE: How exciting. But tell us about this famous Army Air Corps that won the war for us. Isn't it dangerous? I've read about the crashes... (Lena enters)

BRYCE: Yes, there's been some bad ones. But we're philosophical about it. . . a person has only one time to die. There was one tragedy, though, that almost lessened my desire for flying. The pilot's ship went out of control at about 500 feet and took a nosedive straight for the ground. As soon as it hit, it burst into flames. . . .

LENA: Oh my God! You never wrote about that.

BRYCE: I didn't want to scare you, Ma. I've had some near misses, but I've been lucky. Once, I was taking an observer up for a ride and the motor cut out at 200 feet. We drifted over some farmhouses, then I banked the plane with the wing tip only six feet off the ground and plowed into a fence. We escaped without a scratch, but my squadron leader was furious with me for wrecking the plane. It cost the Army twenty-five thousand dollars.

GEORGE: Our aero-squadrons are long on pilots, short on planes.

BRUCE: Bryce has more trouble with the ladies than he does with flying. After he left Ft. Sill for flying school, I picked up his mail to send him till I got sick and they sent me home. All those letters from girls, five or six every day. You still writing to all of them, Bryce?

BRYCE: You bet. Once, when I sent to Montgomery Ward for a pair of leggings, the girl who packed them put her name and address in the box and asked me to write her. So, I did.

VERNA: That reminds me, Bryce, when I was in Blackwell a few weeks ago, one of your prettier school chums stopped me and said that since the Kaiser was running up white flags all over Europe, she hoped you'd be coming home soon. It seems you've been sorely missed at the Literary Society meetings.

BRUCE: Ha! You were getting a reputation even before you put on a uniform.

LENA: Did you get the box I sent you?

BRYCE: Yes, I did. Thanks, Ma. The sweater was real nice, but the tins of fruit and cookies were the best. You wouldn't believe the grub the Army feeds us. Dry spuds and sausage. . .

VERNA: Those soldiers looked pretty darn healthy to me. I won't tell you what they suggested we do after the show. It would shock your pants off.

MRS. BEBEE: (feigning shock, but all eyes and ears) Oh, my!

BRYCE: Mrs. Bebee, a lot of soldiers don't have proper morals, but most of them are decent fellows. One of the Lieutenants was my professor at Oklahoma University. There was a National League pitcher in my unit, and Theda Barra's brother.

MRS. BEBEE: Really? Did she ever come to visit? Wouldn't that be something, Lena? Actually seeing her in the flesh... Oh! I don't mean literally, of course.

BRUCE: I bet that's exactly what you do mean, Mrs. Bebee? (laughs)

LENA: Mind your manners, Bruce. Now that you're here, you might as well stay and eat with us, Bee. You too, Verna. (She starts clearing coffee cups as Bee helps)

VERNA: Mr. G., you really need to clean up the front yard. It's a holy mess! I almost stepped in some horse dung. If you lived in town you'd have your neighbors on you in a minute.

JAMES: Well, now, if we lived in town we wouldn't have need of a horse, would we? I'll get the boys to clean it up after supper. (to George) We'd better get out of here before she finds something else for us to do.

GEORGE: (Confidentially to James as they exit) If Bruce DOES marry her, I wish him lots of luck.

VERNA: Mrs. G. I think it's super Bryce got home for Thanksgiving. Practically your whole family back together again. Mrs. Bebee, did Lena ever tell you how I helped out when Beulah was born?

MRS. BEBEE: I don't think so.

VERNA: Well, there was only Mister and Missus G. and myself here when Beulah decided to enter this world. I was just eleven at the time and scared to death. I'd never seen a birthing before. But Lena told me what to do. I cut and tied the cord while Mr. G. held the baby. Then Lena says to me, "Kiss the new baby,

Verna, and make a wish. It's good luck to be the first person to kiss a new baby." So I did, and wished that one day Bruce would ask me to marry him. You see, I've been in love with him all my life. Now it's come true. We were going to tell you after supper. . .

MRS. BEBEE: Well, congratulations you two. I wish you years of happiness.

VERNA: Thanks, Mrs. Bebee. I know it's going to be heaven!

LENA: (hesitantly) Yes. Congratulations. (to Mrs. Bebee) It's about time. (exits to kitchen with tray of coffee cups.)

MRS. BEBEE: Verna, let's help Lena get the kitchen table set for this crowd of hungry boys. (exits)

VERNA: Don't go anywhere without me, love of my life. (exits)

BRYCE: Where's Uncle Albert and Aunt Zadie and their crew? I was sure they'd be here for Thanksgiving this year.

BRUCE: They're busy getting ready to move. Did Ma write you about the Johnson ranch?

BRYCE: You mean the one Uncle Albert bought in Montana? I know she's not happy about them moving so far away.

BRUCE: The Johnson ranch is a place near Uncas that Pa wants to buy.

BRYCE: You're kidding. Is he still dreaming about building his Oklahoma empire? You'd think he'd be content now that he's finally out of debt. The price of grain is going to fall rapidly now that the war is over. This isn't the time to be investing money. . .

BRUCE: Yes, but his brother is about to commence on a new adventure and Pa feels like he's missing out. You'd think they'd be content when things are going right for a change, but what neither of them has ever learned, is that the pasture really isn't any greener on the other side of the fence.

BRYCE: Pa's still living in the last century, looking for new frontiers to conquer. Like an ancestral chieftain, he wants to rally his clansmen to fight off the invading Moors, then spend his declining years bragging about it. But seriously, does he still think he's going to keep us here by offering us land of our own to farm?

BRUCE: That's been his dream for more years than I can remember.

BRYCE: His dream, maybe, but not mine. I wouldn't survive another summer on this place. Up at six and into the fields by seven to swat horseflies and plow that parched gumbo, row after row after row in the sweltering sun. . . break for dinner at noon, and then back at it again. . . over and over and over till you're ready to drop from the heat and exhaustion. Fall into the sack at eight only to get up at six the next morning and do it all over again. That is not the future I plan to pursue.

BRUCE: Last night, Ma told me he might mortgage the homestead to buy that ranch in Uncas.

BRYCE: That's crazy! He's got to have more sense than that! If the other place fails, he'll lose everything! Maybe Uncle George can make him see reason.

BRUCE: I think that's why Ma invited him.

BRYCE: Well, I'm not going to stick around and bail him out. You're looking at one of Pa's chicks who's flying the coop for good this time. And you'd be one smart bird to follow.

BRUCE: I'll be skirting your tail wind, bro. But John is hoping Pa will make a deal on that ranch and give the homestead to him and Anna?

BRYCE: That boy's altimeter is pointed in the wrong direction. He's as crazy as Pa.

LENA: (At kitchen door) Everything's on the table. Let's eat. There'll be time to talk later.

BRYCE: (For Bruce's ears only) I hope so. I really hope so, before it's too late.

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 3

[The Pecan Grove, the day after Thanksgiving. Bruce and James enter.]

JAMES: I hate to see you taking off so soon, Bruce.

BRUCE: I'll be home for Christmas in three weeks.

JAMES: You and Verna took us all by surprise with your unexpected announcement. But I'm really glad for you, and once your mother gets used to the idea, she will be, too.

BRUCE: I hope so.

JAMES: You planning to get married has me thinking about the future. I've just been offered a good deal on a 600-acre ranch over near Uncas. It's land enough for all my boys to have a fair share. I thought you and Verna might like to build your house there when you're married.

BRUCE: Now Pa, you know...

JAMES: I know you're set against farming right now, but you'd have your own place, and a smart fellow like yourself, with a college degree. . .

BRUCE: That's what I need to talk to you about, Pa. I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I plan to stay in school until I get my doctorate, then find a university teaching position where I can do research. And there's a good chance it will be someplace other than Oklahoma.

JAMES: Still, you'll want to come home some day, and I want to leave this world knowing my children will always have a place to come home to, a place good enough to earn them a living if times get bad.

BRUCE: This is the place I'll always think of as home, Pa. What worries me, and Mama too, is that you'll use this farm as collateral to finance that ranch you're wanting to buy. I know you've been talking with Mr. Albright about his son-in-law's place, and I think they're pressuring you to make too quick a decision. If that ranch is as great as they say it is, let it stand or fall on it's own. The homestead should not be part of the deal. You have Mother worried sick that you'll sacrifice your homestead on a gamble that could leave you both homeless. I wish you'd think of her just once before you go off on some cock-eyed, hair-brained scheme. This place is doing all right for you now, so let things be. You're not a young man who has to prove himself anymore. If any of your boys want to farm, let them find their own land, like you did back in '93.

JAMES: Now wait just a minute...

BRUCE: No, you wait, Pa. I haven't finished yet. I want you to know that I wish Uncle Albert and Aunt Zadie all the luck in the world, but I don't think they're doing a smart thing by selling their farm to buy a ranch they've never laid eyes on, or moving to a state they know nothing about. Farming has its risks even in the best of times, but in spite of the odds and twenty-five years of back-breaking work, you've succeeded with this place. Don't jeopardize it now just because you've suddenly got a case of itchy feet like your brother and want to try something new.

JAMES: What I'm proposing has nothing to do with Albert.

BRUCE: Maybe not, but I think, and Mama does too, that it has everything to do with your sudden notion to pull up stakes and move to a new place. She asked me to find out what you've been up to, so I went to see Mr. Albright this morning. Pa, he's not doing you any favors. He's just helping his son-in-law dispose of some unwanted property and pick up a tidy profit at your expense. He has nothing to lose. If you can't make the mortgage payments on the Johnson Ranch it reverts back to him, and he just puts it on the market again. But he will also own your homestead if you use it as collateral. You'd lose everything you've worked for all of your life. Don't do it, Pa. Please! I have an unlucky feeling about this. (Bruce waits for a response, but James turns away) I'm sorry, Pa. This isn't a good way to say goodbye. But I promised Ma I'd talk to you before I left.

JOHN: (offstage) We gotta go, Bruce, if you're going to catch the 4:40.

JAMES: Wait! You can't leave yet.

BRUCE: Can't, Pa?

JAMES: No! What I mean is, I don't want you to go until we've talked this out.

BRUCE: I've said all I have to say.

JAMES: Good! Then it's my turn. I have a gut-wrenching feeling our future's at stake here, and I don't want you leaving until you hear my side.

BRUCE: Okay Pa, but don't take too long. No train's ever changed it's schedule for my benefit, and I doubt it will now.

JAMES: Bruce, your words have cut me to the quick. Not what you had to say about the Johnson ranch purchase. The right or wrong of it is yet to be told. But knowing that you and your mother have been plotting behind my back hurts me to very the core of my being. Makes me feel like a thief in my own home.

BRUCE: I'm sorry, Pa. I didn't mean...

JAMES: I know what you meant. Your generation thinks it's so smart. You have all the answers, don't you? Well, where I came from the land a man owned was the measure of his success in life. And it was a poor man who had none to leave to his sons. That's what brought your great-grandfather to Canada and your grandfather to Kansas. And that's why it's so important to me to use my homestead to help secure your future.

BRUCE: I can understand that, but I don't...

JAMES: I know you don't want any part of it right now, but when bad times come, and they will, you'll be able to say, "I've got a place to go home to," and those are the most comforting words in the English language. There now, I've had my say. Go meet your train. You're free to do what you want with your life. Allow me the freedom to do the same.

BRUCE: O.K., Pa. (beat) If I can't change your mind, please consider what you do very carefully or YOU may not have a place to come home to.

(Bruce exits as light fades to black)

ACT II, Scene 4

[The parlor, early evening of the same day. The room is in shadows except for the red-gold rays of the setting sun slanting through the window. Lena is alone, sitting in her rocker. There is a moment of silence, then James enters.]

JAMES: It's getting dark. I'll light the lamp and join you. (No answer. He lights the oil lamp and sits across from her.) Everything all right?

LENA: The house seems awfully empty with all the visitors gone.

JAMES: Bruce will be home for Christmas in a few weeks. Bryce too, if he can get leave.

LENA: Where's John?

JAMES: Gone to see Anna, of course.

LENA: I wish Myrel had come. We haven't seen him in over a year. Wonder if he's changed much.

JAMES: I wouldn't be surprised if he comes tooling in here one day real soon. (beat) You look tired. It was a lot of extra work getting ready for Thanksgiving and entertaining visitors. You deserve some "feet up" time.

LENA: I get tired a lot quicker these days. Maybe I'm sickening for something. Lord, I hope it's not the flu. I thought we were finally done with that.

JAMES: You're just missing your big boys. You always get a spell of the blues when they leave after being home. (beat) I wish Albert and Zadie had come. Montana is a long way to go visiting.

LENA: I know. Should I be making plans to move, too?

JAMES: What do you mean?

LENA: You know what I'm talking about.

JAMES: I know that you and Bruce have been talking behind my back. He gave me a real smart lecture before he left, like he was the father and I was the son. I never thought my wife and oldest boy would take sides against me.

LENA: Jim, we're not against you. I just asked him to talk to you, reason with you before you did something we'd all regret.

JAMES: I know how much you depend on him, but it's not Bruce's place to decide what's best for you and me. Lena, we have a chance to buy a ranch east of here, near Uncas. It's over 600 acres set in the horseshoe bend of the Arkansas River. The man who owns it made me a good offer and I think we should take it. His father-in-law, who owns the Albright Mortgage and Trust in Blackwell, said he'd arrange terms to suit us.

LENA: What kind of terms?

JAMES: If I let him put a lien on the homestead, he'll cancel the thousand-dollar note he's holding against us, and we can move there right away. He thinks he can get a high price for this place now that the war's over, and we'll only have to pay him half of what the ranch is worth.

LENA: How much will we owe him?

JAMES: About thirty thousand dollars.

LENA: Thirty thousand dollars! James, that's a fortune! We've never seen that kind of money in all the years we've been married. You must be out of your mind! And what about the thousand you say we still owe him? You never told me about that! I thought we were finally debt free.

JAMES: I borrowed it last year to get the tractor Bruce talked me into buying. Thought I'd get it paid back in a couple of months, but the barn needed painting you said, and a new fence... you're the one that kept harping at me to get this place fixed up.

LENA: I know what I said, but I didn't think you'd put us in debt again to do it. It could have waited until the crops were sold and the money in the bank.

JAMES: Well, it's already done, so there's no use fussing about it.

LENA: You haven't already mortgaged this place and signed a note for the ranch, have you? Without telling me? My God, if you have you'll move over there by yourself. I'm not leaving. This is my home and this is where I'm going to stay.

JAMES: I'm sorry, Lena. I thought you'd be pleased. The house is twice as big as this one. . . plenty of room for all the grandkids when they come to visit. There's a new barn, a silo, acres of good cropland, and plenty of pasture for the stock. The view from the kitchen window is reason enough to buy the place. It looks out over the bend of the river with a beautiful stand of trees on either side.

LENA: I don't need a bigger house, Jim. This is where my children were born, where we watched them grow up. How could you do this without even consulting me?

JAMES: I'm consulting you now, Lena. I want you to have more than what we've got here.

LENA: This is all I ever wanted. I thought you knew that. You're the one who wants more. A lot more! You're afraid your younger brother is going to end up with more than you have, a bigger and better farm, more money to spend, and you can't stand it! So you'll sacrifice everything we have, everything we've worked for all our lives, just so you can prove you're as smart as he is. Well, it's not smart at all. And Albert will find out he's not as smart as he thinks he is, either. There's no guarantee he'll do any better in Montana than he did in Oklahoma. And I doubt you'll do any better with 600 acres than you've done with 160.

JAMES: It's worth a try, don't you think?

LENA: Maybe. Maybe not. But I know I can't stop you from doing what you've got your mind set on. That much I've learned in twenty-five years.

JAMES: Okay. I'll go see Albright tomorrow.

LENA: James, I swear, if you don't make a go of it on the Johnson Ranch. . . Maybe George will be able to salvage something out of the wreck you've made of our lives. (beat) You think on that awhile. I'm going to bed.

BLACKOUT

ACT III, Scene 1

[September, 1929. The pecan grove. James is picking up nuts. He pauses to look at the trees and then sits on the bench. He appears much older and dispirited. Lena enters.]

LENA: There you are. I'm ready to go...

JAMES: ... all the way to Granville, Ohio. Bruce and Verna are looking forward to your visit.

LENA: Not for a visit, Jim. I'm going to be a housemother at the university where he teaches. We've already talked about it, and it's decided.

JAMES: You and Bruce decided. What I want doesn't count anymore, does it? (pause, then Lena looks away) No, I didn't think so. While I was in the hospital, time was heavy on my hands. I thought a lot about this place... about the blackbirds that arrived like clockwork every fall and knocked down the nuts so the boys could gather them up for you... the fourth of July picnics when all our friends and neighbors pitched in... the time when Bruce was just a little fellow playing in the puddles. Remember? He came home crying his heart out because a loud monster had scared him? You laughed and said, "Why, that's just an old bullfrog."

LENA: The train leaves in an hour, Jim.

JAMES: It might be a long while before we see each other again.

LENA: Is there something special you want to talk about?

JAMES: Yes, and no. I was just hoping you'd change your mind, that's all.

LENA: What's done is done. We can't go back and do it over.

JAMES: I guess I should be thanking your brother for saving 80 acres, your half of the old homestead. But it's hard to be thankful to a man who sends his own brother-in-law to the state mental hospital so that all the world knows he's crazy and not competent to handle his own affairs.

LENA: We thought you'd only have to spend a few weeks in a private sanitarium. But the private places cost five dollars a day and we couldn't afford it. Bruce explained it all to you.

JAMES: Maybe he did. I forget now. (angrily) Were you peeking through the keyhole when I was on trial for my freedom? Did you rejoice when the judge said,

"insane?" It was a cruel thing you did to me, Lena. Wasn't the shame of failure enough for you? If I felt worthless before, how do you think I feel now?

LENA: How do you think I felt when all of the bits and pieces of our life together were auctioned off as if they had no importance, no value except so many dollars and cents in a stranger's pocket? The shame of it was so great. . . I just wanted to curl up and die. Never, in my entire life have I felt so helpless, so bereft. Thirty-five years... gone in a day. A cyclone couldn't have wiped the slate any cleaner, and a cyclone, at least, leaves the land so you can rebuild. There's an ache in my soul that won't let me forgive or forget what you did, Jim. I can't make it go away, so it's best that I go. And I think you should too, for a while anyway. A different place, a change of scenery might help us both see things clearer.

JAMES: I suppose I could write Albert... but I'll need to find someone to look after things if I go. Not many of the old neighbors left.

LENA: I talked to John about moving his family here so they can save money to buy their own place.

JAMES: Then the sooner I leave the better. Anna and I couldn't live in the same house without one of us killing the other. (beat) Do you remember when we used to come out here in the cool of a summer's eve, smell the roses and honeysuckle, listen to the crickets and katydids, and watch the moon come up? We'd talk about the incidents of our life together and how we'd have such a happy home in our declining years.

LENA: Jim, if you're through remembering, can we go now?

JAMES: I'm going to miss you, Lena.

LENA: Pauline loaned me money for the train fare. You'll see she gets paid back, won't you? Her teaching salary bought the groceries while you were away.

JAMES: Might have to sell something. Can't get all the way to Montana on my thumb.

LENA: The tomatoes are coming on good. There'll be enough to fetch a price soon. Let's go, Jim. I don't want to miss the train.

(LIGHT FADES TO BLACK AS THEY EXIT)

Act III, Scene 2

[November, 1929. Parlor of the homestead. It is mid-day but cloudy and overcast. Zadie and Mrs. Bebee enter the front door followed by James, Bruce, Bryce, Albert, John, Anna, and George. Mrs. Bebee carries a casserole.]

ZADIE: (Turning on a table lamp and removing her hat and coat) It was a nice service, wasn't it? I never saw so many flowers.

MRS. BEBEE: She was held in high esteem by all her friends and neighbors. There were more than 200 people at the church and over 52 vehicles in the procession to the cemetery.

JAMES: Thank you, Mrs. Bebee, for singing two of Mother's favorites, "Amazing Grace" and "The Old Rugged Cross."

MRS. BEBEE: It was the least I could do. . . I'm going to miss her dreadfully. (starts sobbing) I'd better take this to the kitchen. It's the sweet potato casserole she liked so much. (exits to kitchen)

JAMES: I'm glad you were able to come, George. I know it wasn't easy for you.

GEORGE: I'm sorry, James, for everything. I thought I was doing what was best, what she wanted me to do.

JAMES: Like she said before she left, what's done is done. We can't go back and do it over again. You'll stay awhile, won't you? Get a bite to eat before you leave?

GEORGE: I have to get back to Winfield before dark. I'll call you in a week or two.

JAMES: I'll see you to your car. (they exit)

BRYCE: Uncle George had some nerve coming here.

BRUCE: Don't jump to conclusions, Bryce. You were off in the wilds of Mexico when everything around here was falling apart. If George hadn't intervened. . . . Let's just leave it at that for now.

BRYCE: No, dammit! I won't! You're just as much to blame as Uncle George. When Mama asked for your help to make a couple of interest payments, did you give it to her? No! You were broke, too, you said, even though you were getting a regular salary and could have spared something.

BRUCE: Bryce, this isn't the time. . .

BRYCE: I sent them the better part of a year's wages, housedresses for Ma, overalls and boots...

BRUCE: Your help was a godsend, believe me. And I did give them every cent I could spare. Negotiated loans to buy seed and fodder, spent summer vacations helping Pa put in the crops. . .

BRYCE: Ma wrote me that they were making twice as much on the ranch as they did here on the homestead. But most of what they cleared when the crops were sold went to pay the interest on the mortgage. She said Pa worked such long hours, he was often too tired to eat at night, and neither of them got the rest they needed. She was afraid he was working himself into an early grave. God help me, she never said a word about her own failing health.
(James enters)

BRUCE: No one can fault them for lack of trying.

JAMES: Some of the crop money went to help John and Anna.

BRYCE: Why, for God's sake, when your situation was so tenuous?

JAMES: Your Mama asked me to help them, Bryce. We couldn't stand by and watch our family starve, could we?

BRYCE: You didn't have to beggar yourself to do it.

JOHN: Now, wait a minute, Bryce. You make it sound like it's all my fault.

BRYCE: Well, you took what they gave, didn't you? Never paid back a nickel, from what I hear. You didn't even offer to help Pa put in those crops that were paying your room and board.

JAMES: Son, could we talk about this some other time?

BRYCE: No, I can't Pa. It's making me crazy. You and Mama had reached a time in your lives when you should have taken things easier. . . but the old homestead wasn't grand enough for you anymore. . . not compared to those 300 acres Albert had in Montana. You'd lost your braggin' rights. . .

JAMES: I wanted it for you, Bryce. . .for Bruce, Myrel, and John. . . and for Lena.

BRYCE: No, Pa. You wanted for yourself. And when it all came crashing down..... Uncle George is a successful lawyer. He could have staved off foreclosure if he'd wanted to. But no, he wanted to rub your face in it. Prove he

was right all along. So he convinced Ma that the only way to salvage what was rightly hers, was to have you committed. God, what a family of fools.

ZADIE: Bryce, it's your grief that's striking out in anger. Can't you see that we're all hurting?

BRYCE: (beat) Sorry, Zadie. I guess I need someone to blame. I keep thinking that if I'd been here it would have made a difference, that Ma might still be alive...

ALBERT: Well, I hope Lena was watching from above. She would have been proud of the send-off she was given.

ZADIE: Albert! That's an irreverent thing to say. Show some respect.

JOHN: That's okay Uncle Albert. I was thinking the same thing.

JAMES: Lena was right. We never should have left the home where our children grew up.

ZADIE: (Puts her arms around James) Don't, Jim. Self-recrimination isn't going to bring her back. Your family will help you through this sad time, even Bryce, when he's through flailing his conscience.

ALBERT: Bruce, could you explain what happened? Lena wrote that she'd gotten a job at the college and everything was fine. Then we get your telegram. Did she get sick all of a sudden?

BRUCE: She'd been feeling poorly for about a week and thought it was probably the flu. When she didn't get any better, we were afraid it was pneumonia and called in the doctor. That was on Wednesday. He wasn't overly concerned, and on Thursday she seemed to feel a little better. Then that night there were signs of Hemorrhagic Bright's disease, and she was rushed to the hospital. She passed away at 5:30 Friday morning. It happened so quickly. . . (Verna enters from the stairs)

VERNA: How are you feeling, Mr. G.?

JAMES: Some better, I guess. Where's little Barbara?

VERNA: Sound asleep in the middle of your bed. It was a long drive yesterday, and none of us got much sleep last night.

JAMES: You take extra good care of that little girl, Verna. If anything happened to her I'd really go crazy.

VERNA: Count on it, Mr. G. Where's Pauly?

ZADIE: She and Mrs. Bebee and some ladies from the church are putting together the biggest feast you could ever imagine. There'll be lots of people dropping by this afternoon to pay their respects. I'll be in the kitchen, if you need me. (exits)

JAMES: It'll be Thanksgiving next week. Thanksgiving was always a special time for Lena. She worked extra hard fixing a big holiday feast for her family. Once we had 30 people at the table... (beat) This year all the chairs will be empty. Where's my grandson? John, did you and Anna forget to bring him?

ANNA: He's with my mother. We thought he was too young to sit through the funeral service.

JAMES: Well, go and get him. His grandpa wants to see him.

JOHN: Okay Pa. It seems there's somebody that don't want us around here anyway.

ANNA: We'll be back in a little while. (they exit)

BRUCE: I think he means you, Bryce. You were a little hard on him.

BRYCE: Maybe. Pa, I'm sorry if I caused you any additional pain. . .

JAMES: Forgiven and forgotten, son. We all need some healing time.

ALBERT: Jim, you're not the only member of this family who's fallen victim to hard times. Before we left Montana, Zadie and I just handed our deed over to the bank. . . to save the trouble and embarrassment of a lawsuit. It was going to happen sooner or later. Between the drought and the grasshoppers we haven't had a crop to sell in over five years.

JAMES: Well, that makes us quite a pair, doesn't it? I guess our Pa had us figured right all along.

ALBERT: It's not much consolation, Jim, but our failure was due as much to the times as our own lack of foresight. Wartime prosperity made gamblers of us all. We gambled our ready cash to buy more land, mortgaged our homes to buy new machinery, and then watched our yields get smaller each year on worn out soil. We were gambling with fools gold, and not smart enough to know it.

JAMES: If that profound afterthought is supposed to make me feel better, save the lecture for some other fool. I didn't know we had two professors in the family.

VERNA: What are your plans now, Albert?

ALBERT: Well, we've had all a body can stand of Montana's long, cold winters. So, Zadie and I talked it over with the children, and we decided the Ozarks might be a good place to start over-- nothing grand, mind you-- just a few cows and chickens, maybe some apple trees.

VERNA: I think the Ozarks will be nice for you: good fishing, plenty of cornbread and molasses, and you'll be a thousand miles closer so we can visit each other more often.

ZADIE: (At kitchen door) Food's all ready. Everyone come eat.

JAMES: Lena set the best table in the county. She always said, she had a reputation to keep up. . .

(LIGHTS FADE AS EVERYONE EXITS TO THE KITCHEN.)

ACT III, Scene 3

[Pecan Grove, later the same day. James is sitting on the bench. Zadie enters.]

JAMES: How did you know where to find me?

ZADIE: Lena told me.

JAMES: What?

ZADIE: She told me once that you always escaped to the pecan grove when you wanted to get away from everyone. I'm glad the sun finally came out. It's been so gloomy today.

JAMES: Fittin' for a funeral.

ZADIE: I don't want to intrude. I'll leave if you'd rather be alone.

JAMES: No. I mean, it's okay. I think the whole county came through the house today. Reminds me of the Run when hundreds of people dashed across this place right after I'd staked my flag. Everything was new then and our life together was just beginning. What grand dreams we had...

ZADIE: You did the best you could, Jim.

JAMES: But I wanted so much more. . . I panicked when I saw the boys growing up and away from home. I thought if I had more land. . .

ZADIE: But that wasn't what they wanted, was it? Only John seemed to share your dream, but not the responsibility that went with it.

JAMES: Lena tried to tell me, but I wouldn't listen.

ZADIE: Even so, you and Lena provided your children a secure foothold, enabling them to begin life's race with hope and confidence. That's the best any parent can do.

JAMES: My head knows you're right. Wish I could convince my heart. (beat) You know, this pecan grove used to be my favorite spot in the whole world. When the workday was done, Lena and I would come here, reminisce about the early days, and contemplate the future. After she left I couldn't come near the place. But today I felt drawn, like she was calling me to come sit a spell and have a little chitchat. Now that does sound crazy, doesn't it?

ZADIE: Not at all. If God wanted to build himself a church, I think this is what it would look like. A grove of trees, solid and round like the earth; a canopy of leaves whispering in the wind to remind us of heaven; and the trickle of a brook to soothe away our troubles.

JAMES: Even paradise has its serpents. Nobody comes near this place after a hard rain--hundreds of water moccasins, wrapped around every twig and branch.

ZADIE: (shudders) It scares me just thinking about it. (beat) Have you thought about what you'll do now? Anna said she and John would move back here and help you with the farm, if you want them to.

JAMES: They moved in bag and baggage while I was in Montana. Found out later that John had been tossed out of his own place for not paying the rent. When I tried to give him some straight talk, Anna kicked me out of the house and threw a chair at me. So I told them to get out and not come back. Shouldn't have said that, I guess, but I was awfully mad at the time. Still, Anna's got some nerve.

ZADIE: John and Anna have to work out their own problems. You're not responsible for them anymore.

JAMES: John needs to get away from the Bryant's influence. The oil companies are bringing in new fields all around here. He should try for a job with one of them. I'll talk to him. . .

ZADIE: Maybe Myrel or Bryce will stay until you get back on your feet.

JAMES: Myrel's going back to college right after the holidays; says he wants to be an educator like Bruce and Pauline. Lena would proud to know that. And Bryce is headed for Persia to build the biggest oil refinery in the world. I guess when all is said and done, Lena and I didn't do too badly for a couple of Strip farmers.

ZADIE: Albert and I feel like small potatoes compared to your side of the house.

JAMES: I hope they don't make the same mistakes I did. I hope they see things right before it's too late in life to go back to the correction line.

ZADIE: I'm sure they will, Jim.

JAMES: Maybe they'll write their old Dad once in a while. . . think about where they grew up. . . and come back to visit the home-place now and then. I'll look forward to that.

LIGHT FADES TO BLACK

EPILOGUE

[Two specials are used: one on James who sits in the parlor, the other on the opposite side of the stage into which Bruce, Albert, Verna, Anna, and Zadie step to recite their letters, and then step back into the shadows where they remain in place as family groups for the curtain call.]

BRUCE: Granville, Ohio. July 1935. Dear Dad. Finally heard from the folks at New York City University. Your oldest son, DOCTOR Bruce D. Greenshields will start the fall semester as a full professor making thirty-five hundred dollars a year. A person could retire on that. As ever, Bruce.

ALBERT: Neosho, Missouri. February 1936. Dear Jim. While picking my teeth after breakfast, I thought I'd better write so you'll know we're still alive. We're still fighting to keep the wolf from our door. It's not easy starting over when you're old and grizzled, but I'd rather be on a farm with a few nails and fence staples in my pocket than living next door to relief alley. What do you think of the President's plan to give us all a pension? I could live on easy street with two hundred dollars a month. How about you? Your brother, Albert.

JAMES: June, 1936. Dear Myrel. Congratulations to the new dean at the University of Washington. Just wish you were closer to your old home so we could visit more often. Most of our neighbors have packed up and moved west, farms sold for debts or taxes. Your uncle George drove his fancy new car down from Winfield and visited for one whole hour. Ordinary folks might be hurting, but lawyers seem to be doing okay. Mrs. Bebee is fixing up her house. She put in electric wiring and indoor plumbing, a modern home to last for all time. Just how long SHE will last is the question. Love, Dad.

VERNA: Long Island, New York. April, 1937. Dear Mr. G. Bruce leaves here July 1st for Washington, D.C. He's going to help design an interstate system of roads all across the United States. Won't that be something? But I'm not going with him. I've had it up to my bustle with city life, so I'm going to take Barbara and the baby and move to Texas to be near my mother and sisters. We'll stop for a visit on the way. Can't wait for you to meet little Davie. He looks a lot like you. Love, Verna.

ANNA: Blackwell, Oklahoma. November 1938. Dear Papa Greenshields. Tried to call you, but the operator said your phone was disconnected. Forget to pay your bill again? We want you to come here for Thanksgiving. John will drive down in his new truck to pick you up. If I'd known raising three kids took so much time and money, I'd have stopped with John, Jr. Don't know how you and Lena managed with twice as many. Maybe it's easier on a farm-- less trouble for them to get in to. Anyway, come eat turkey with us. Love, Anna.

ZADIE: Salem, Missouri. September, 1939. Dear Jim. As you can see by the return address we've moved again, just one step ahead of the rent collector. I'm feeling old today. Albert is sick and that makes me blue, but I guess we shouldn't complain. We've had a much longer lease on life than most. In your quiet moments alone have you ever thought about how short this probation on earth is in comparison to eternity? The war news has everybody worried, and Albert says it reminds him of what Bobby Burns wrote: "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." It's been too long since we've had a heart-to-heart. Buy yourself a bus ticket and tell us where to meet you. Love, Zadie

BRYCE: Abadan, Iran. October, 1940. Dear Dad. Job here is finished. Heading back to the States. Next stop, Oklahoma, to spend Thanksgiving with you. I'm writing the rest of the family and asking them to join us for an old time get-together. I miss the fun we all had when the house was bursting its seams with friends and family. See you soon. Love, Bryce.

JAMES: January 1941. Dear Bruce. It was like old times with all the family here for Thanksgiving. It will be something for you to remember when I'm no longer with you. I know you're looking forward to your new job at the University of Michigan. They were real smart people to ask you. I was real lonely and blue when your car rolled out of the yard where so many left after visiting Dad. I walked out to the road just to watch you drive out of sight. I haven't been feeling so good. This winter has been especially cold. The flannel shirts you sent for Christmas helped a lot. I try to eat right to stay well, but not much agrees with me lately. John lost his job at the oil company and is doing carpentry which he seems to like. Sometimes I think he's just waiting for the old man to die so he can take over the homestead. What I decided to do was leave it to all of my children. After I'm gone you can sell it or divide it as you wish. But I hope you'll keep it in the family so future generations will know that when times get bad they'll have a place to come home to. Tell Verna I scrubbed out the kitchen yesterday. Found a dead mouse in the flour bin. Love always from your Dad.

(FADE OUT JAMES' SPECIAL)

BRUCE: WESTERN UNION: JUNE 14, 1941.
TO BRUCE D. GREENSHIELDS, ANN ARBOR MICHIGAN.
DAD DIED ONE THIRTY PM TODAY STOP WIRE IF YOU CAN COME
STOP PAULINE

(FADE OUT SECOND SPECIAL)

[CURTAIN: the cast stands together in family groups as they would for a family portrait: Lena, James, young John, Myrel, Pauly ; Bruce, Verna; John, Anna; Pauline, Bryce; Zadie, Albert, Clarence, Ethel; Mrs. Bebee, the photographer, Uncle George.]