

***MARIANNE LONGTREE***

A Play in Two Acts

by

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## **THE CAST**

Sam Duncan, 39 year-old widower  
Mrs. "Bee" Bebee, age 55 - 65  
Doris MacPherson, age 55 - 65  
Ruby Longtree, Tonkawa Indian woman, age 45-55  
Marianne Longtree, her daughter, age 22  
Tom Breeding, age 25-30  
Buddy, age 25-35  
Jim-boy, age 25-35  
Calvin, age 55-75  
Eli, age 55-75

## **THE TIME AND PLACE**

The action of the play takes place over a three-month period, from late August, 1939 to mid-December, 1939. The single set depicts the interior of a small-town general store, (circa 1925) located at a crossroads between Tonkawa and Blackwell, Oklahoma.

## **SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

### **ACT I**

Scene 1 - late August  
Scene 2 - one week later  
Scene 3 - the following evening

### **ACT II**

Scene 1 - the middle of September  
Scene 2 - the first of December  
Scene 3 - two weeks later

ACT I, Scene 1

[The time is late August, 1939. The place is a small town located at a crossroads between Tonkawa and Blackwell, Oklahoma. The setting is a one-room general store (circa 1925) cluttered with shelves of dry goods, barrels of produce, possibly a Franklin stove, small table with a game of checkers on it, two mismatched wooden kitchen chairs, and a glass fronted checkout counter with jars of penny candy on the shelves. Money may be kept in a drawer or a cash register of the period. There are two exits: one leads to the sidewalk and has both screened and solid working doors; and a curtained doorway to living quarters in the back of the store. At rise there is the distracting loud noise of hammering offstage. Mrs. Bebee enters from the street which causes a small brass bell hung over the door to tinkle.]

BEBEE: (shouting over the noise) Sam? (yells out the door) Will you boys hold it down? A person can't hear herself think with all that racket. (back inside) Sam? (crosses to curtain and pulls it aside) Sam, you've got a customer.

DUNCAN: (entering from back room) Mornin', Miz Bebee. Sorry, I didn't hear you come in.

BEBEE: I guess not with that infernal noise. What, in heaven's name, is going on out there?

DUNCAN: (crossing away from her) It's the CCC boys. They're shoring up the drainage ditch.

BEBEE: (crosses to him & shouts in his face) They're doing what? I can't understand a word you're saying.

DUNCAN: Just a minute. (he steps outside and beats a loud triangle. The hammering stops.)  
Dinnertime, boys!

[The boys speak offstage; the last two speeches fade off as if they are moving away into the distance.]

TOM: Okay, Mr. Duncan.

JIM: Let's hit Kitty's place, whaddya say, Tom?

TOM: Count me out. I'm pinched till payday.

BUDDY: What I'm hankerin' fer is a cold brew. Ya got some stashed in yer truck, Jim-boy?

JIM: Look under the seat, Buddy. Jes' don't broadcast where ya got it.

DUNCAN: (stepping back inside) What I said was that some of the boys from the Civilian Conservation Corps are shoring up the drainage ditch where the county road crosses main street.

BEBEE: How long they been at it?

DUNCAN: 'Bout a week. They'll be outta here in a couple days. Gonna clear land for an armory over near Stillwater.

BEBEE: Good riddance!

DUNCAN: It's a job that needs doing, and it keeps the boys employed.

BEBEE: On the Government dole. What else can you expect with that Democrat in the White House.

DUNCAN: Beats standing in line at a soup kitchen.

BEBEE: That's your opinion. Now, where was I? (extracts a list from her handbag) Oh, yes. (checks a barrel of potatoes) A bit puny, aren't they? Green, too. Where they from?

DUNCAN: Texas. Too early for local spuds.

BEBEE: I know that. Did you get the flannel I ordered?

DUNCAN: Not yet. It's only been a week, Miz Bebee.

BEBEE: Trains still running, aren't they?

DUNCAN: Twice a day. Same as usual. What's your hurry?

BEBEE: None of your business, Sam Duncan. But since you're so blamed nose, I need that flannel to back some quilts I pieced this summer. And I don't have time to run into town every day to check on my order, so give me a call when it comes in. (Tom enters)

DUNCAN: Will do, but since you're here, don't go home empty handed.

BEBEE: Don't aim to.

TOM: Got any apples, Sam?

DUNCAN: Check the barrel, Tom. I'm giving them away for a penny a piece t'day.

TOM: In that case I'll take a couple.

DUNCAN: Got a pot of navy beans on in the back. Help yerself.

TOM: Thanks, I will. (exits thru curtain)

DUNCAN: Decide on whatcha want, Miz Bebee?

BEBEE: (checks her list) Let's see...I need two gallons cider vinegar, five pounds sugar, a jar of pickling spice, half pound of rock salt, and a couple garlic cloves. Rot got to mine, and the cukes are coming on faster than I can nip 'em off the vine. [Doris MacPherson enters and crosses to the shelf of yard goods]

DORIS: Morning, Bee.

BEBEE: Morning, Doris.

DUNCAN: Miz Bebee, how much ya askin' fer yer pickles this year?

BEBEE: Fifty cents a quart.

DUNCAN: Suppose you take 45, an' I'll ask fifty. That way we both come out ahead.

BEBEE: Humph! I'll think about it. How many you want?

DUNCAN: Couple dozen to start. Findin' what ya need, Miz MacPherson?

DORIS: Just trying to choose between the rose brocade and the navy lace.

DUNCAN: Take yer time. I'll be with ya in a minute.

BEBEE: Whatcha planning on making, Doris?

DORIS: Lizbeth needs something pretty for the literary club social.

BEBEE: Why? She got a beau, or hoping to catch one?

DORIS: Neither. She's going to read her prize-winning essay. I guess you heard...

BEBEE: I heard. Hard to miss when her picture, big as life, was plastered 'cross half a page of the Blackwell Daily Courier. You'd think there was nothing else important happening in the country today, 'cept your daughter winnin' first place in the DAR essay contest. Take the brocade. Lizbeth's complexion is too sallow for navy.

DORIS: You got a sour tongue today, Bee. What's the problem? That crib-baby you living with looking elsewhere for satisfaction?

DORIS: Don't be ridiculous.

BEBEE: Oh, thought I caught a touch of envy there. Must have heard you wrong.

DORIS: A widow your age taking up with a man young enough to be her son...it's shameful.

BEBEE: I married him, remember? You were at the ceremony along with every other biddy in the township.

DUNCAN: That'll be two dollars, fifty cents, Miz Bebee. (as she counts out the money Ruby Longtree and Marianne enter.) What kin I do fer ya t'day, Miz Longtree?

DORIS: I'm next, Sam. The squaw can wait her turn.

LONGTREE: I ain't buyin'. Jes' wanna talk.

DUNCAN: Okay. Lemme measure out the yard goods fer Miz MacPherson and we'll talk. How ya doin', Marianne?

MARIANNE: Just fine, Mr. Duncan.

BEBEE: Morning, Ruby...Marianne. Drop by the farm next week and I'll have some pickles and fresh tomatoes for you.

LONGTREE: Thankee, Miz Bebee. I'm mighty fond of yer blue-ribbon pickles. (Bee exits)

DUNCAN: There's jes' three yards left on the bolt. That gonna be enough, Miz MacPherson?

DORIS: (feeling the fabric) Real china silk, huh?

DUNCAN: Yep. A dollar seventy-five a yard.

DORIS: It's a bit more than I planned on spending.

DUNCAN: Real china silk gonna be hard t'come by since the Japs bombed the factories.

DORIS: Then I better take it.

DUNCAN: I'll make it 'n even five, 'less you want some thread t' match.

DORIS: Five dollars is all I have. We're still in a depression, in case you hadn't heard.

DUNCAN: Yes, ma'am, I heard. Only they're callin' it a RE-session now. Gotta look on the bright side. A new diner jes' opened down the road a piece...Kitty's PLace.

DORIS: A cheap road house, attracting all the riff-raff.

DUNCAN: Dunno 'bout that. Kitty makes the lightest flapjacks this side of heaven. Seen yer husband there more n' once. He tol' me he's puttin' on extra men at the grain elevator. Supposed t' be a record crop this year.

DORIS: (counting out her money in change) For some, maybe. Did you know that the Tyrees pulled out yesterday? All their worldly goods piled on the back of a hay wagon. Another farm sold for taxes. Breaks your heart, doesn't it, to see God-fearing Christian people forced off their land when the Government just gives it away to a bunch of shiftless Indians.

DUNCAN: They're on land set aside by treaty, Miz MacPherson.

DORIS: Don't see any of them doing an honest day's work, do you? Still, they manage to get liquored up every Saturday night. Where do you suppose they're gettin' it?

LONGTREE: They make their own hootch...from rotten potatoes.

DORIS: How do you know that?

LONGTREE: I seen 'em. Sell it t' white folks, like your husband.

DORIS: How dare you...to insinuate that Mr. MacPherson, and other good Christian gentlemen would stoop so low...

LONGTREE: Don't believe me? Ask him.

DORIS: (grabs her parcel and storms toward the door) Sam Duncan, if you're going to cater to the likes of her, I'll do my shopping in Blackwell from now on.

DUNCAN: Gonna cost ya more.

DORIS: Then, I'll have to be more prudent, won't I? (exits with her nose in the air)

LONGTREE: Good thing it ain't rainin'... that woman might drown.

MARIANE: Ma, please!

DUNCAN: Whatcha wanna see me about, Miz Longtree?

LONGTREE: What happened t' that young fella ya had workin' fer ya?

DUNCAN: Joined the CCC. Makes three bucks a day, an' gits two meals an' a bed in the bargain. Can't say I blame 'em.

LONGTREE: Then I figure ya got a job 'at needs fillin'', an' Marianne, here, is lookin' t' find one. She'll take whatever ya kin pay her.

DUNCAN: What I need, ladies, is a strong boy t' haul produce off the trucks, and tote stuff from the depot.

LONGTREE: Marianne ain't no weak-kneed town girl.

MARIANNE: I'm used to toting feed sacks, Mr. Duncan.

DUNCAN: I'd like t' help ya out, but soon as the wheat's harvested, the local boys'll be lookin' fer jobs after school. Ya gotta understand, I owe their ma's an' pa's. They keep me in business.

MARIANNE: Sure, Mr. Duncan. We understand. Come on, Ma, we'll try someplace else.

LONGTREE: Stay where ya are, girl. I got sump'in t' say. Mr. Duncan, lessen ya hold ill will fer our kind, there ain't no reason why ya can't give Marianne a try. If she don't work out, ya kin fire her, same as anybody else. At least ya give her a chance. That's all she's askin'.

DUNCAN: Your mama makes it awful hard fer a fella t' say no, don't she, Marianne? Lemme think...have ya tried the diner?

MARIANNE: Kitty's not hiring.

DUNCAN: The grain elevator?

MARIANNE: They have a sign posted, 'Females not welcome.'

DUNCAN: Nuthin' in Tonkawa...

LONGTREE: Ever'place we ask, they say, see Sam Duncan. He jes' lost his boy, and got a job open. Figured you was Marianne's last hope.

DUNCAN: I see. (beat) Well... how's yer arithmetic, Marianne?

MARIANNE: Got all A's. Why? You need some help with the books?

DUNCAN: The Government's got s'many regulations with the income tax law an' this new social security thing... I can't figure it all out, an' if I don't, I might end up in jail.

MARIANNE: I don't think so, Mr. Duncan, unless you intentionally set out to cheat the Government.

DUNCAN: Well, there's been times I thought of it, but I ain't got it in me. More 'n likely, I'd walk ten miles t' return a penny, same as that fella, Lincoln.

MARIANNE: I'd be happy to do your bookkeeping, if you want me to.

DUNCAN: Can't pay ya much, an' won't need ya but a couple days a week... 'cept 'round the holidays when business picks up. Kin always use an extra clerk then.

LONGTREE: She'll do it.



DUNCAN: Let her speak fer herself, Miz Longtree. She might git a better offer in Blackwell.

LONGTREE: Already tried there. They won't have no truck with injuns.

MARIANNE: I'll take the job, Mr. Duncan, and be glad to have it. Thank you.

DUNCAN: When kin ya start?

MARIANNE: Today, if you like.

DUNCAN: Okay. (gives her a stack of account ledgers) Them's all m'account books. Take a peek an' see if you kin make sense of m' scribblin'. I'll be in the back room eatin' m' dinner if ya need me. (exits)

LONGTREE: He's a widder-man, daughter. Lost his family t' the diphtheria back in '25.

MARIANNE: I remember. I was in school with his son.

LONGTREE: The man needs a wife. Ain't too old t' start another family, neither.

MARIANNE: What are you suggesting, Ma?

LONGTREE: Nuthin'. Jes' be nice to 'im. Ya can't ever tell...

MARIANNE: You planning on buying something, or just hanging around? I need to study these ledgers.

LONGTREE: I'm goin'. (crosses to door) Jes' remember what I said...  
(exits as Jim and Buddy enter, roughly pushing her aside)

BUDDY: Watch it, ole woman.

JIM: No'count injuns. Hey, Tom! You in the back? (Tom enters)

TOM: You wasn't gone long. What's up?

BUDDY: Kitty closed early t'day. Had t' eat and run. (looks at the checker board) Wanna a quick game 'fore we git back t' the damn ditch?

TOM: No thanks. (notices Marianne) Howdy, ma'am. You're new.

MARIANNE: No, I grew up here.

TOM: Ain't seen ya around before.

MARIANNE: Mr. Duncan just hired me to do his bookkeeping.

JIM: You're Longtree's bastard half-breed, ain't ya?

BUDDY: (laughing) Ain't they all? (Duncan enters, bowl of beans in hand)

DUNCAN: You boys come in here fer a reason, or jes' t' hassle m'hired girl?

JIM: (leering at Marianne) What I wanna buy, ya ain't sellin', I reckon.

DUNCAN: Then git busy doin' what yer gittin' paid fer.

BUDDY: Hour's not up, yit, ole man. Thought we'd play a game or two. That's what it's here fer, ain't it?

DUNCAN: Only if ya kin keep a civil tongue in yer head an' apologize t' Miss Longtree.

JIM: Apologize fer what? If ya wanna hire half breeds, that's yer business, but we don't got t'be civil to 'em, do we, Buddy? See ya around, ole man. (exits)

BUDDY: That goes ditto fer me. (exits)

DUNCAN: Sorry, Marianne. I wantcha t' know I don't hold with that kind of talk in m'place.

MARIANNE: Thanks, Mr. Duncan. I appreciate it.

TOM: Marianne. That's a pretty name. Pretty name fer a pretty girl.

MARIANNE: Are you mocking me?

TOM: No, ma'am. I wouldn't do that. I sincerely meant what I said.

MARIANNE: (studies him for a moment) I never thought of myself as pretty. Smart... but not pretty.

TOM: Smart, how?

MARIANNE: Book smart. I got all A's in school.

TOM: Did ya now.

MARIANNE: Yes, I did.

TOM: Then, if I was you, I wouldn't waste m' time talkin' t' a fella who jes' got C's, and that's only cause his teacher thought he was cute and didn't cause her any trouble.

MARIANNE: I think you're cute, too.

TOM: Ma'am, that's an awful thing t'say t' a grown man.

MARIANNE: Still keeping out of trouble?

TOM: I surely try. Don't follow that the company I'm forced t'keep has a like attitude, though. I apologize for their words, Miss Longtree. If I could, I'd make 'em take it back.

MARIANNE: That's okay. I'm used to it.

TOM: Don't make it right, though. Back where I come from folks is always pickin' on the Mexicans. Wet-backs, they call 'em, though it never made a lick o'sense t'me. The Rio Grande ain't deep enough to drown a toad, 'cept durin' the rainy season, then ain't nobody kin cross it.

MARIANNE: You're from Texas, then.

TOM: Yes, ma'am. Little town near the border. You from the reservation south of here?

MARIANNE: (nods) My father had a feed and seed store in Tonkawa.

TOM: Had?

MARIANNE: He sold out and went to California with some oil speculators.

TOM: How'd he make out?

MARIANNE: Never heard. Ma thinks he got killed on a rig somewhere.

TOM: Ya mean, you ain't heard nuthin' from 'im since he left?

MARIANNE: That's right.

TOM: How long's it been?

MARIANNE: Six, seven years...

TOM: That's a long time not t' hear from your pa. Ain't there some way ya can find out what happen to 'im?

MARIANNE: Maybe, but Ma never cared to. I think she was surprised that he stuck around as long as he did.

TOM: Is, uh...that sort of thing...customary among Indians?

MARIANNE: No. Just the white men who marry them.

TOM: Oh! Well, if they was married, you're not...what they said...

MARIANNE: It was a common law marriage between a white man and an Indian woman. That makes me a half-breed...and a bastard in the eyes of some people. Listen, Mr...?

TOM: Breeding. Tom Breeding, ma'am.

MARIANNE: Mr. Breeding, you're asking an awful lot of questions. I don't think my personal life is any of your business.

TOM: No, ma'am. Yer right. It ain't none of m' busines.

DUNCAN: Accordin' t' m' time piece, yer hour's up, young man. Ya got yer job, I got mine.

TOM: Sure thing, Sam. But I'll be back. (exits)

DUNCAN: Well, I'll be durned! That fella's smitten, sure as m'name is Samuel P. Duncan.

MARIANNE: What makes you say that?

DUNCAN: He's been stoppin' by here ever' day fer the past week, an' he ain't put more 'n three words together afore t'day.

MARIANNE: Maybe he didn't have sufficient reason until today.

DUNCAN: Ya mean it don't bother ya none that he come on t'ya like a lost puppy?

MARIANNE: No. It was kind of cute.

DUNCAN: (Chuckling to himself) Somebody oughta tell 'im ya said that.

MARIANNE: Why? You better not...I'll just deny it.

DUNCAN: Might save 'im a lot of pain 'n misery.

MARIANNE: What pain and misery?

DUNCAN: Well, I reckon the fella's gonna be workin' with only half-a-mind on his job this afternoon. Mark m' words, Miss Marianne, he's gonna come a-callin', his hands all bandaged n' bloody.

MARIANNE: That's okay, Mr. Duncan. I got an A-plus in first aid.

[Hammering begins again as lights fade to black]

ACT I, Scene 2

[A week later. At rise, Calvin & Eli are sitting at the small table engrossed in a game of checkers. Marianne enters with a box of canned goods and starts putting them on the shelves.]

MARIANNE: Who's winning?

ELI: (studies the board, then makes several jumps triumphantly) Gottcha. Ya owe me two bits, Calvin.

CAL: Put it on m'tab, Eli.

ELI: (marks a crumpled piece of with a pencil stub) That's two thousand, three hun'ed, fifty- two dollars an' twenty-five cents ya owe me. When ya gonna pay up?

CAL: Lemme see that. (grabs the score sheet) Humph! Don't look right t'me. Ya never was any good at ciphering, Eli.

ELI: Marianne, ya wanna check m'arithmetic? This sonofabitch thinks I'm cheatin'.

MARIANNE: (takes the paper) Eli, how do you expect me to read this? It's all smudged, and none of the columns are straight.

CAL: I knowed it! He's been cheatin' me.

MARIANNE: I can't tell from this if he is or not.

CAL: Then we'll jes' have t' start over. This time I'm keepin' score.

ELI: Cal, ya cain't read worth a damn, s' there's no way I'm gonna letcha keep score.

CAL: Get Marianne t' do it.

ELI: Naw, Marianne's got better things t'do, don'cha, Miss?

MARIANNE: I don't mind. How much a game?

CAL: Two bits.

MARIANNE: You got two bits, Cal?

CAL: Nope.

MARIANNE: You, Eli?

ELI: Nope.

MARIANNE: How much do you have?

ELI: (checks his pockets) Couple pennies.

MARIANNE: Then bet your pennies and play for fun when you run out.

CAL: Gal, there ain't no sense playin' 'less ya got a heavy wager on the table.

ELI: Where'd Sam git to this mornin'?

MARIANNE: He's not feeling well, so I'm seeing to his customers today.

CAL: Ain't the flu, is it?

MARIANNE: No, I don't think so. He should be back on his feet by tomorrow.

ELI: Okay. Now, when ya gonna pay up, Calvin?

CAL: Soon as m'oil wells come in.

ELI: What oil wells?

CAL: The ones they're gonna sink in m' north forty.

ELI: The ones who's gonna sink?

CAL: Them speculators. They been diggin' holes all over m'place.

ELI: It don't mean nuthin'. They been diggin' holes all over the county 'n come up dry ever time.

CAL: Them fella's tol' me I got a fer-tile field. Brung in some gee-logical guys from Ponca t' check it out.

ELI: It's fer-tile all right... lots of hog shit.

CAL: Go on...make fun. 'Cause ya won't be laughin' when that black gold starts gushin' out of them wells. I'm gonna high-tail it outta here, move t' France so you'll never git a dime outta me.

ELI: Don't think ya wanna move t' France.

CAL: Why not?

ELI: Cause they're gonna be warin' with the Huns purty soon.

CAL: How ya know that?

ELI: Read it. In the paper.

CAL: Naw, we beat them Huns good in back '18.

ELI: Got a new bunch now. Man called Hitler runnin' things. Done took over most of Europe. Reckon France comes next. Then the Brits...

CAL: S'long's he don't come over here.

ELI: Mebe he will. Whatcha gonna do about it?

CAL: Ain't never gonna happen, s'let's play. Two bits a game.  
(They set up for a new game; Buddy and Jim enter)

JIM: Lookee there, Buddy. The half-breed's runnin' the place now. What happened t' Duncan?

BUDDY: Out huntin' fer his hair piece, most likely. (big laugh)

ELI: Sam's sick t'day. You fellas come in t'buy sump'in or jes' hassle the help.

JIM: Sheet...he sounds jes' like Duncan, don't he? Mus' be one of them contagious diseases. Case ya didn' know, ole man, we used t' work fer Sam back in the good ole days... when injuns stayed put on the reservation where they b'long.

CAL: Heard they struck oil on the Osage reservation. Bunch of rich injuns now.

JIM: Yeah? So why ya gotta work, Missy, if yer s' rich?

MARIANNE: I'm a Tonkawa.

BUDDY: Can'cha tell, Jim-boy?

JIM: Hell, no, they all look alike. 'Cept this one's the purtiest damn squaw I ever seen. Takes after her pa, I reckon.

BUDDY: Damn town's goin' to the dogs. Next it'll be them Jews movin' in an' runnin' everythin'.

CAL: Already got a Jew.

ELI: Crown me, Cal. Who's a Jew?

CAL: The auto mechanic.

ELI: The auto mechanic's a colored man.

CAL: So, he's a jewish colored man.

ELI: What's his name?

CAL: Solomon.

ELI: Solomon ain't no Jew name.

CAL: Is, too.

ELI: Naw, it's a Bible name. Bible's a Christian book.

CAL: He's the best damn mechanic this town's got.

ELI: He's the only mechanic the town's got.

BUDDY: That's what I'm tryin' to tell ya. Them colored Jews is takin' jobs away from the rest of us.

ELI: You a mechanic, Buddy?

BUDDY: Nope.

ELI: You, Jim-boy?

JIM: Nope. Ain't got no money fer mechanic school.

ELI: Then I guess Solomon ain't takin' no job away from y'boys, is he? Crown me agin, Cal.  
(Tom enters)

JIM: It's 'bout time. Thought ya was jes' gettin' a haircut. What took ya s' damn long?

TOM: Had to wait m'turn. How ya doin', Eli?

ELI: Fair to middlin'.

TOM: Cal?

CAL: Same.

TOM: Where's Sam?

ELI: Took sick.

TOM: Want me to fetch the doc?



CAL: Naw. Prob'bly sump'in he et. Ask her.

MARIANNE: I think it's just a summer cold, but go look in on him. He'll enjoy the company.

JIM: Ain't got time fer small-talk, Tom. Cut the jawin' an' git what ya come for. We gotta hit the road...

CAL: Don't make no nevermind t' me if Sam wants t' stay sick awhile. The girl's doin' okay by 'im, an' a sight better lookin', don'cha think, Eli?

ELI: Yep. Yer play, Calvin.

TOM: (to Marianne) That new shipment of Levi's get here yet?

MARIANNE: On the same train as Mrs. Bebee's flannel. If you go by her place, let her know, will you?

TOM: The phone not workin'?

MARIANNE: Storm last night must have brought the line down. I can't even raise the operator. (pulls a wrapped package off the shelf) Here's your order. Two pair, all wrapped and ready to go.

TOM: How much?

MARIANNE: Four dollars and fifty cents.

TOM: (hands her the money) Feels good to have some change in m' pocket again.

MARIANNE: Payday last week, huh?

TOM: Yep. Wish I could stretch it out to last the month.

MARIANNE: (teasing) Then don't be such a spendthrift.

TOM: (looks over at his work buddies who are watching the checker game, then turns back to Marianne and speaks softly) Can't take my best girl dancin' Saturday night with holey jeans, now can I?

MARIANNE: No, I don't expect you can. Might prove to be embarrassing. How's your hand?

TOM: (holds up one bandaged finger) Jes' one bum finger t'day. Will I be seein' ya after work?

MARIANNE: Not tonight. I promised Ma I'd help her scour the kitchen. Tomorrow's okay, if you can ditch your two friends.

TOM: They ain't no friends of mine. We gotta work t'gether, that's all.

BUDDY: (pointing) Ya gotta jump there, Cal.

ELI: (slaps Buddy's hand) Mind yer own business.

CAL: Heard tell the Corps ain't hiring no more. Work's slacking off.

JIM: Ya heard right, ole man. This is our last job fer 'em.

CAL: Whatcha fellas gonna do?

JIM: Roustabout fer one of them oil rigs, I reckon. Trouble is, fer ever' man they put on, a hunnerd git turn away.

ELI: National Guard's recruitin' big time. Reckon that's why they need the armory.

JIM: Where'd ya hear that?

ELI: Don't recall.

JIM: Ya mighta said sump'in.

ELI: Jes' did.

CAL: Yep, we gotta get our dough boys ready fer action, case that Hitler fella comes a-callin'.

BUDDY: Ya think he's gonna come here?

CAL: Naw. But Eli does.

BUDDY: Knowed a fella took off fer Canada awhile back. Gonna join the Royal Air Force n' hep the Brits. (Eli looks at Buddy like he's crazy) That's a fac'. Tol' me so hisself.

ELI: Humph! Ya missed a double jump, Cal.

JIM: (crossing to door) Well, that armory ain't gonna git built 'less we git the field cleared. (crosses to door) Git the lead out, Buddy. Them two ole goats'll still be here a week from Sunday. You, too, Tom. Yer fancy squaw ain't goin' no place, neither. (Tom tenses and turns to Jim with murder in his eyes & his fists clinched. Marianne grabs his arm to stop him)

MARIANNE: Tom, don't...

JIM: (mimics Marianne) 'Tom, don't.' Ya gonna let a squaw tell ya what t'do, Tom-boy?

TOM: Ya gonna shut yer ugly mouth, or do I gotta do it fer ya?

JIM: (egging him on) Whatcha waitin' fer, injun lover? (Buddy hurriedly exits. Tom shoves Jim out the door, then turns back to Marianne.)

TOM: Tell Sam, I'll drop by later. Got some business t'take care of first. (He exits. Marianne starts for the door, but Eli pulls her back.)

ELI: Leave 'im be, Marianne. If they got a score t' settle, ain't no way ya kin stop it.

CAL: Tom's a good boy, but somebody oughta learn them other two some manners. I ain't no goat.

ELI: Y'sure stink like one.

CAL: Ya don't like the way I stink, put a clothespin on yer nose.

ELI: When's the las' time ya took a bath?

CAL: Ya mean, all over?

ELI: 'Course I mean, all over. What other kind is there?

CAL: There's the PTA kind m'wife used t'take.

ELI: What's a PTA?

CAL: Pits, tits, an'...

ELI: I'm talkin' about the Saturday night kind.

CAL: Took one. Las' Saturday night.

ELI: Then take another one. Ya stink like a goat.

CAL: Shut up an' play, will ya?

ELI: That Tom fella a-courtin' ya, Marianne?

MARIANNE: What makes you say that?

ELI: He ain't hangin' 'round Sam's place t' keep Sam company.

MARIANNE: Oh, I don't know. Sam feeds him dinner when he's broke.

ELI: Yep. Sam's a good man. Got a good heart.

CAL: Mebe Sam oughta be the one doin' the courtin'. A widder-man like him, fixed up with this store 'n all would be a good catch, don'cha think, Eli?

ELI: Miz MacPherson's been tryin' to fix 'im up ever since his wife died, an' it ain't done no good. Sam ain't lookin' to git married agin. That's the truth of it.

CAL: Still 'n all, if I was a pretty young thing lookin' fer a husband, I'd set m' sights on Sam. Cain't ever tell. One of these days, he'll topple. I'd bet m'socks on it.

ELI: Nobody gonna take ya up on it, Cal, 'less they're up wind of ya.

MARIANNE: Have you been talking to my mother, Calvin?

CAL: Nope. Why ya ask?

MARIANNE: No reason.

ELI: (jumping his piece across the board) Hoo-wee! Gottcha again Cal. Ya owe me another two bits.

CAL: Damn!

(Blackout)

ACT I, Scene 3

[Evening of the next day. Marianne is perched on a stool behind the counter working on the account ledgers. A dim table lamp lights her work area. Duncan enters thru the curtained door wearing a bathrobe and slippers.]

DUNCAN: Ya still here, Marianne?

MARIANNE: Just bringing the books up to date, Mr. Duncan. How are you feeling?

DUNCAN: Some better, thanks. The chicken soup ya fixed me helped a bunch.

MARIANNE: Good, but I can't take credit for it. Mrs. Bebee brought it when she came to pick up her flannel. She also dropped off two dozen quarts of pickles. How much are you going to charge for them?

DUNCAN: How much she charge me?

MARIANNE: Forty-five cents each. She said that's what you agreed on, so I paid her out of today's cash receipts. I hope that was okay.

DUNCAN: Yeah, but ya took all the fun outta it.

MARIANNE: Out of what?

DUNCAN: Doin' business with Miz Bebee. If I don't pay her right off, she makes it her business t' come int' town ever' day or so an' rib me about it. Then she lays int' Calvin an' Eli fer sittin' around doin' nuthin', which they is most of the time, an' if Miz MacPherson shows up, well... ya know there's gonna be a cat fight. Miz Bebee sure likes t' stir things up, she does.

MARIANNE: (laughing) And you love every minute of it, don't you?

DUNCAN: (poignantly) Ya got a nice laugh, Marianne...(back to business) So, how'd we do t'day?

MARIANNE: Not bad. Enough to cover expenses.

DUNCAN: That include yer pay fer the two extra days?

MARIANNE: No, but I can survive until Saturday.

DUNCAN: Sorry ya had t' come in again. Ain't like me to git sick this time of year.

MARIANNE: Be thankful it's nothing serious. Will you need me tomorrow?

DUNCAN: Dunno...the place feels awful empty when you're not here. Go on home, now. Ya kin do them books some other time.

MARIANNE: I know.

DUNCAN: Ya expectin' somebody?

MARIANNE: I might be.

DUNCAN: Figured as much. Ain't them books keepin' ya here s'late. Whatcha think of Tom?

MARIANNE: He's easy to talk to, although he never says much about himself. Have you known him long?

DUNCAN: Nope. Met 'im the day he showed up with them other two t' work on the ditch. Jim an' Buddy growed up not fur from here. Used t' work fer me, 'til I caught 'em stealin' from m' money drawer. They was nuthin' but trouble then, an' nuthin' but trouble now.

MARIANNE: Has Tom ever told you anything about his family, the town in Texas where he's from...?

DUNCAN: Nope. He ain't talked much t' anybody, 'cept you. Why don'cha ask 'im, straight out. Ya gotta a right t' know them things if he's a-courtin' ya proper.

MARIANNE: Stopping by after work a couple of times hardly means he's courting me.

DUNCAN: Once...no. Twice...he's courtin' ya. Ya like 'im?

MARIANNE: Yes, I do.

DUNCAN: Me, too. (crossing to look at the books) Let's see whatcha got there. Figured out m' scribblin' yet?

MARIANNE: I'm working on it. Sam, you have to keep your costs separate from your profit, like I've done here. See? It's the only way you'll know how much you owe taxes on. Have you got a brighter light I can work by? This one's so dim I'm getting a headache.

DUNCAN: Sorry 'bout that. I ain't out here much after dark, so I never give it a thought. Lemme go see if I gotta brighter light in back. (Exits thru curtain. There is a light tapping on the screen door. Marianne crosses to unlatch it.)

MARIANNE: (very disappointed) Oh, it's you.

LONGTREE: Ain't ya gonna ask me in?

MARIANNE: Come on inside, Ma.

LONGTREE: I take it ya was expectin' somebody else.

MARIANNE: Sort of.

LONGTREE: That mean yes...or no?

MARIANNE: Yes...sort of...maybe.

LONGTREE: If ya ain't sure, it's gotta be that white boy.

MARIANNE: His name is Tom Breeding.

LONGTREE: I knowed his name. You an' him got sump'in goin' on?

MARIANNE: I've only known him a week, Ma.

LONGTREE: A week's plenty long...

MARIANNE: (beat) Long enough for what?

LONGTREE: You ain't dumb, girl. Ya know what I'm talkin' about.

MARIANNE: (belligerently) Listen to me, Ma. Twice, that's two times, he dropped by after work, and we sat out front talking. That's all. Just talk. He said that he might come by again this evening, if he can ditch the fellows he works with. And we have a date to go dancing on Saturday. If that means we got "sump'in goin' on," then yes, I guess we do. Are you satisfied?

LONGTREE: Don't take that tone with me, daughter. I'm jes' lookin' out fer yer welfare.

MARIANNE: No, Ma, you got your nose out of joint because Tom's a white boy, and you don't want me to have any truck with white boys unless they're old enough to be my father and can offer me financial security.

LONGTREE: Nuthin' wrong with that.

MARIANNE: Ma, I just want to get out and have a little fun.

LONGTREE: Little fun kin lead t' big trouble.

MARIANNE: Not if I'm careful. Give me credit for some common sense.

LONGTREE: It ain't *yer* common sense I worry 'bout. It's the fella yer with. He ain't gonna git left with a bun in the oven...

MARIANNE: I don't plan to ever let it go that far.

LONGTREE: Girl, sometimes ya can't hep it. Ya jes' git carried away with the tide.

MARIANNE: Then I'll have to stay out of boats, won't I?

LONGTREE: I ain't makin' jokes, Marianne.

MARIANNE: Is that what happened to you and Pa?

LONGTREE: Ain't none of yer business. Yer pa was a good man, stuck around an' took proper care of us.

MARIANNE: For awhile...

LONGTREE: Fifteen years. That's near a lifetime fer some.

MARIANNE: But if you'd been a white woman, he'd have married you in church, and you'd have a legal right to his pay whether he was living with you or not.

LONGTREE: That stuff don't matter to me.

MARIANNE: Then, why should it matter to me?

LONGTREE: 'Cause ya deserve better, girl. Yer educated, an' down-right purty t' boot. I wantcha t' hold out fer a man who kin give ya more 'n jes babies t' raise. (Duncan enters)

DUNCAN: (changing the light bulb) Evenin', Miz Longtree. Ya here t' fetch Marianne?

LONGTREE: Jes' passin' by. She doin' okay by ya?

DUNCAN: Better 'n okay. Past two days she's took over an' run the place. I been feelin' rocky as a new-born lamb.

LONGTREE: Ain't the flu, is it?

DUNCAN: Nope. Jes' a stomach bug, I reckon. I'm still a bit weak-kneed, so I'm goin' back t' bed. Marianne, did the boy leave a paper t'day?

MARIANNE: Yes, it's around here somewhere. (looks on the shelf over the counter) Here it is. I think this is today's... (She checks the date & sees the headline.) Oh, no...

DUNCAN: (crosses to her & reads over her shoulder.) Lord help us. Ain't no way we kin stay out of it now.

LONGTREE: What's it say? (Marianne holds it up) Jes' tell me. I ain't got m'readin' glasses.



MARIANNE: Big headlines, Ma. It says: HITLER INVADES POLAND.  
FRANCE AND ENGLAND DECLARE WAR ON GERMANY.

LONGTREE: That mean what I think?

MARIANNE: It means that now, all of Europe is at war.

LONGTREE: Agin?

MARIANNE: I'm afraid this one's going to be a lot bloodier than the last one.

LONGTREE: How kin ya know that?

MARIANNE: New technology, Ma. Makes killing a lot easier.

LONGTREE: Naw...

DUNCAN: Miz Longtree, ya don't argue with a girl that got all A's in school.

LONGTREE: Yep. Too damn smart fer her own good.

MARIANNE: Too damn smart to catch a husband is what she means.

DUNCAN: Wouldn't worry none, if I was you, Miz Longtree. Marianne'll do ya proud one day. Mark m' words. Night, ladies. Sleep tight. There's big changes a-comin', an' we ain't gonna rest peaceful agin fer a long while. (exits)

MARIANNE: Good night, Mr. Duncan. See you in the morning.

LONGTREE: He likes ya, Marianne. Sam's the one ya oughta be spendin' yer evenings with.

MARIANNE: Mama...(she hears voices offstage)

BEBEE: Watch it, Doris. You almost stepped in a dog pile.

MARIANNE: (softly) Mama, if you think Sam's such a good catch, why don't you marry him?

DORIS: Think they could clean up the sidewalks once in awhile. This town's a disgrace, Bee. Where did you say you parked?

BEBEE: Around the corner.

DORIS: What's wrong with the lot across from church?

BEBEE: It's all torn up from the storm night before last. You'd have stepped out of the car into ankle deep mud. Now, that really would have pissed you off. (appears in the doorway dressed for

church & holding a Bible. She sees Ruby & Marianne, steps inside. Doris remains standing in the doorway.) Evening Ruby, Marianne. Nice out tonight, don't you think?

MARIANNE: Balmy. Feels like more rain is coming. Wednesday night prayer meeting?

DORIS: A special service in light of today's headlines. I don't suppose you've had a chance to read the newspaper...

MARIANNE: Not all of it, but I did catch the headlines

DORIS: Shocking! Unbelievable! I prayed tonight that I'd have the strength to survive yet another world conflagration in my lifetime. I remember the last one...so devastating...so many young men lost...lives shattered...

BEBEE: Doris, you sat out the last war agonizing about the paucity of your wardrobe. You thought the whole world had conspired to deprive you of the latest fashions.

DORIS: At least I wasn't running around scaring people with wild stories about how the Germans poisoned all the aspirin tablets...

BEBEE: That wasn't me. That was your sister, Anna, remember?

DORIS: Well, I remember you telling me that you dreamed some Hun was going to parachute onto your front porch and ravish you at gunpoint. I wondered, at the time, if that was wishful thinking.

BEBEE: What do you think I was praying for?

DORIS: That's blasphemy, Bee!

BEBEE: Ruby, why don't you and Marianne accompany us to services on Sunday? If Doris and the rest of the world are to survive this calamity, we need all the prayers we can get.

DORIS: Really, Bee, they'd feel out of place...

BEBEE: Doris, why are you standing with one foot in and one out. Come inside and join us. Nothing to be frightened of. Just us girls... Sam feeling any better, Marianne?

MARIANNE: Yes, he does. He appreciated the soup you fixed for him. First food he's kept down in two days.

BEBEE: Good. What were you saying, Doris?

DORIS: I said that I think Mrs. Longtree and her daughter would feel out of place in our church family.

LONGTREE: Look, not feel.

DORIS: Excuse me?

LONGTREE: Ain't gonna know how I feel till I get there. Whatcha mean is we'd *look* out of place. Two injuns among all them white folks...

DORIS: Mrs. Longtree, our congregation is open to anyone who desires to worship with us. I was just trying to spare your feelings, avoid unnecessary embarrassment...

LONGTREE: (sarcastically) Well, that's real thoughtful of ya, Miz MacPherson. But since Miz Bebee's already done the invitin', it'd be real niggardly of us to refuse, don'cha think? Now, I ain't got a proper hat t'wear, but Marianne gits paid Saturday, so I kin go out 'n buy one. That oughtta make me look jes' as uppity as yer white friends.

MARIANNE: Ma, please...

BEBEE: It's all right, Marianne. Your mama has every right to be sarcastic. I've never seen any Indians or colored in the congregation, and if they did come, I expect the good folk of the township would pointedly ostracize them. It was glib of me to make the offer, but it's my nature to do the unconventional thing. Just ask Doris.

DORIS: If you'd only think before you open your mouth, Bee...

BEBEE: Oh, but I did, Doris. I thought, if all the people who grew up in this bountiful country, joined hands and prayed for peace, God might listen this time.

DORIS: I don't know which is more shocking, your socialist leanings, or your irreverant attitude. But a woman who marries a man twenty years her junior hardly can be expected to look at things realistically.

BEBEE: Wrong again, Doris. Women outlive men by as much as twenty years, so I picked my second husband based upon his potential longevity.

DORIS: And if you go first, that boy'll remarry, raise a family of his own, and disinherit your grown children. Is that what you want to see happen?

BEBEE: Ha! The last thing my children said to me before they took off, was that they'd rather die than ever set foot on another cow patty. Anyway, I don't expect to see much from the grave.

DORIS: I'm just trying to help you look at things objectively...

BEBEE: In other words, if the rest of the world doesn't see eye to eye with you, we're either mentally incompetent or blind as a bat.

DORIS: You're overstating things, as usual, Bee.

BEBEE: Tell you what, Doris. If you outlive me, you marry my young, eligible widower and oversee my farm. Just keep in mind that when you hear thunder rolling across those fields, it's God and yours truly having one hell of a belly laugh.

DORIS: There's nothing funny about taking the Lord's name in vain. Bee, your list of transgressions grows longer every day. I fear for your soul.

BEE: Nonsense! There's only one mean-spirited hypocrite standing in this room, and it's time I got you home. See you later, Ruby, Marianne. In spite of the dreadful news, enjoy this lovely evening. (Tom enters) Oh, it's Tom, isn't it?

TOM: Yes, ma'am. Tom Breeding. I'm the fella that stopped by yer place yesterday. Ya git yer quiltin' flannel?

BEBEE: Picked it up this afternoon. Where on earth did you get that shiner?

TOM: Looks worse 'n it feels, ma'am.

MARIANNE: Tom, you didn't...

TOM: Marianne, I couldn't jes' stand by and let Jim an' Buddy mouth them things about ya. I'd 'ave done the same fer any of m'friends.

BEBEE: How very gallant of you, Mr. Breeding. I hope you count *me* among your friends.

TOM: Yes, ma'am. I do.

LONGTREE: Whatcha do t'them other fellas?

TOM: Nuthin'... that won't heal up in a week or two.

BEBEE: (chuckling) Ruby, can I give you a lift home?

LONGTREE: Thankee, but I'll walk.

BEBEE: Then I bid you all good night. Let's go, Doris. These two young people need some private time to discuss the events of the day. (checks Tom's shiner up close) I'll send you a piece of beefsteak for that eye. (pushes Doris out the door and exits behind her)

TOM: (following them outside) Night, Miz Bebee.

BEBEE: (offstage) Night, Tom.

DORIS: (offstage) You're in such an contrary mood tonight, Bee, I may walk home, too.

BEBEE: (offstage, fading away) No you won't. You'd ruin your Parisian leather pumps, and if France falls to the Germans, it'll be years before you can purchase another pair. (Tom enters grinning)

LONGTREE: Ya gonna inner'duce us, Marianne?

MARIANNE: Ma, this is Tom Breeding, the fellow I told you about. Tom, my mother, Ruby Longtree.

TOM: Pleasure t' make yer acquaintance, ma'am.

LONGTREE: Time'll tell, I reckon. Ya comin', daughter?

MARIANNE: In a little while.

LONGTREE: Keep in mind what I told ya. (exits)

MARIANNE: Sorry, Tom. She doesn't mean to be rude. She just doesn't trust you.

TOM: She's concerned fer yer welfare. Can't say I blame 'er.

MARIANNE: Her exact words, almost. Well, Mr. Duncan approves, anyway.

TOM: Do you?

MARIANNE: Do I what?

TOM: Approve...like me a little.

MARIANNE: I like you a lot. You fishing for compliments?

TOM: No. Only I ain't bright like you. Not near as pretty, either. So, I'm havin' a hard time figurin' out why ya want t' spend time with me.

MARIANNE: Because you're cute and stay out of trouble.

TOM: You got a sassy tongue, Miss Longtree, but I like hearin' ya talk. Ya sound like m'teachers back at school.

MARIANNE: I wanted to be a teacher.

TOM: Why ain't cha?

MARIANNE: I went to the Junior College in Tonkawa on a full scholarship, but when I applied for one at A & M, they turned me down.

TOM: 'Cause yer not a full-blooded white girl?

MARIANNE: Because I'm a girl, period. If I had an oil well in my backyard, they'd welcome me with open arms.

TOM: There might be a way...

MARIANNE: Not unless I can talk someone like Mr. Duncan into marrying me, and offering me the financial security Mama thinks I should have.

TOM: Ain't such a bad idea. You and Sam fond of each other?

MARIANNE: (getting mad) Oh, for heaven's sake, Tom! I'm not looking for a rich husband. Especially one old enough to be my father. Yes, I'm very fond of Sam, but I don't have any notion of ever marrying him.

TOM: Glad t' hear ya say that. Hate t' think m' friend, Sam, an' me was rivals fer yer attention.

MARIANNE: What are your intentions, Mr. Breeding? Mama's very anxious to know.

TOM: Tell the truth, I ain't give it much thought. But ya tell yer ma, I never took advantage of a girl I didn't intend t'marry.

MARIANNE: Oh, really! How many past loves are we talking about?

TOM: Another thing I don't do, is kiss n' tell.

MARIANNE: I'm glad... I think. Were these past romances in Texas, or around here someplace?

TOM: I ain't sayin'.

MARIANNE: Well, you'd better start saying something. Sam said I had a right to know all about you, if "ya was a-courtin' me proper." Are you courting me proper, Mr. Breeding?

TOM: Well now...maybe I am. Whatcha wanna know?

MARIANNE: Whatever you want to tell me. I'm not usually so pushy. All the guys I ever dated were from school or the reservation. I've known them all my life. No secrets there.

TOM: I don't aim t' keep any secrets from ya, Marianne. There jest ain't much t' tell. Growed up in Texas, like I said, left school after the eighth grade, same as most folks, and been workin' odd jobs ever since.

MARIANNE: Where did you meet Buddy and Jim-boy? They're hardly your type.

TOM: Jim an' me was roustabouts on the same rig in west Texas. He talked me int' comin' north and applyin' for the Corps. That's when I met Buddy. They was old friends.

MARIANNE: You don't know the half of it. What about your family? Any brothers and sisters?

TOM: Yep. A whole passle of 'em. Still in Texas as fur as I know. Last I heard, a couple of the girls got married--kids, too, I reckon.

MARIANNE: I take it you don't correspond very often.

TOM: No, ma'am. I wouldn't say we're the correspondin' type. I do send a post card to m' folks now n' then, t' let 'em know where I am. Trouble is, I never stay one place long enough fer 'em t' answer. Now, that could change if a certain pretty girl I know, asks me t'stick around. (beat) Well, ya gonna ask?

MARIANNE: No, it's too soon to be making promises.

TOM: I thought ya said ya liked me.

MARIANNE: I do. But I don't want you sticking around for my sake, if there's a better future for you somewhere else. The country's still in a mess, jobs hard to find... I guess you heard the latest war news today.

TOM: Yep. Don't look too good fer them folks over there.

MARIANNE: How is it going to affect your plans?

TOM: Dunno, 'less the President tells me otherwise.

MARIANNE: You mean, you aren't panting to see some action? Every male child who can pass for eighteen will be lined up at the recruiting office tomorrow.

TOM: Yer prob'ly right. Buddy an' Jim can't wait t' git into the fray. They're talkin' 'bout followin' some fella t' Canada n' joining the Royal Air Force. Lotta good it's gonna do 'em. They're too ornery and ignorant to git int' flyin' school.

MARIANNE: But, you're not, are you?

TOM: Think ya'd like me better if I was wearing a uniform?

MARIANNE: I think you'd look very handsome in one. But I don't want you going off and getting maimed or killed in somebody else's war. There'll be time enough for heroics if it comes here.

TOM: Won't have no choice in the matter, if it comes here.

MARIANNE: Just promise me you won't do anything rash.

TOM: Thought ya said it was too soon fer makin' promises.

MARIANNE: I changed my mind. (she kisses him on the cheek) Look in on Sam, will you? And lock up when you leave. (crosses to door) See you Saturday. (exits)

[Tom latches the door behind her, turns off the light, and dances his way to the back room; lights fade to black.]



ACT II, Scene 1

[Two weeks later, the middle of September. Cal is sitting alone at the checker table looking despondent. Marianne enters from the street carrying boxes she picked up at the depot.]

MARIANNE: Thanks for minding the store, Cal. Told you I'd be back in ten minutes. Where's Eli this morning?

CAL: Took sick.

MARIANNE: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Is it serious?

CAL: He's in the hospital.

MARIANNE: In Blackwell or Tonkawa?

CAL: Dunno.

MARIANNE: Well, let me make a couple of calls and I'll find out for you. Do you know what's the matter with him?

CAL: Nobody'll tell me.

MARIANNE: That's terrible. When Sam gets back I'll take you to see him.

CAL: Ya'd do that?

MARIANNE: I'd be happy to, Cal. Eli wouldn't want you to sit here worrying about him. (crossing to the back room) Don't go anywhere. I'll be right back. (exits)

CAL: Got no place t'go. Mebe Eli'll wanna play checkers... if he ain't dead yit. (starts putting checker pieces in his pockets. Jim enters, his arm in a sling)

JIM: Where's Sam?

CAL: Ain't here.

JIM: I kin see that. Who's mindin' the store?.

CAL: I am. Ya wanna buy sump'in?

JIM: Yeah, I wanna buy sump'in. What happened t'the squaw?

CAL: Miss Marianne's callin' hospitals fer me.

JIM: Why? You sick?

CAL: Nope. Eli is.

JIM: What's the matter with 'im?

CAL: Dunno.

JIM: Mebe he's keepin' Buddy company.

CAL: Buddy in the hospital?

JIM: Yeah...got a busted leg.

CAL: How'd it happen?

JIM: Fell off a tractor.

CAL: You fall off, too?

JIM: Naw, I punched a man too hard.

CAL: Humph! Anybody I know?

JIM: M'boss, only he ain't m'boss no more. Got fired.

CAL: Figures.

JIM: Well, ya gonna hep me, or not?

CAL: Hep ya do what?

JIM: Oh, forgit it. (Takes a couple of candy bars and crosses to the door)

CAL: Ain't you fergitten sump'in?

JIM: Like what?

CAL: Like payin' fer them candy bars.

JIM: Whatta you care?

CAL: Gotta pay fer what ya take. Them's the rules.

JIM: An' I reckon y'll tell Sam if I don't.

CAL: Yep.

JIM: (lays some change on the counter & shakes a fist at Cal) I'd put you in the hospital, ya ole goat, 'cept ya ain't worth the trouble. (Marianne enters)

MARIANNE: What's going on out here?

CAL: Ask him.

JIM: Bought a couple candy bars, see? Money's on the table. Better count it. Wouldn't wantcha t'think I was cheatin' ya.

(Tom enters)

MARIANNE: Is that all you want?

JIM: (leans into her and runs his finger down her face, neck and starts to grab her breast) Nope, but it's all I'm gonna get, I reckon. (Tom twists Jim's good arm behind his back) Owwww.... What the hell!

TOM: 'Less ya want both yer arms in a sling, git yerself outta here an' don't come back.

JIM: Ya think yer squaw's purty special, don'cha? Well, I guess ya ain't heared, them injun girls'll make out with anythin' wearin' long pants. Betcha she's made it with ever' young buck on the reservation. (Tom roughly shoves him out the door)

TOM: You okay, Marianne?

MARIANNE: I'm okay...thanks.

TOM: One of these days I'm gonna knock his teeth down his throat. What'd he come in here fer, anyway?

CAL: Tried t' rip off some candy, but I made 'im pay fer it.

MARIANNE: Good for you, Cal. I found out that Eli is at the Tonkawa clinic. He has a case of the mumps. If there are no complications, he can come home in day or two.

TOM: The mumps? At his age? Ya gotta be kiddin'!

CAL: Don't recall I ever got 'em, neither.

TOM: Close as ya been t'Eli, yer bound t' catch 'em now.

CAL: Then I reckon I better git m'self a bed nex' t'his when I go visit 'im. Save ya makin' another trip.

TOM: Ya wanna go now?

CAL: Ya got wheels?

TOM: Yep. Borrowed a fella's truck fer the day. Gotta go t' Ponca t' see a man about a job. I'll drop ya off on the way.

CAL: I got time fer a cupppa coffee?

TOM: Sure. There ain't no rush. (Cal exits to the back)

MARIANNE: Last project for the the Corps, huh?

TOM: Yep. We're breakin' camp t'morrow.

MARIANNE: What kind of job are you looking for?

TOM: Oil field work, I reckon. Word's out, Aramco's hirin' big time.

MARIANNE: Aramco doesn't have any fields around here. They send their people overseas to Persia, Arabia...

TOM: Okay by me. I'd kinda like t'see a bit of the world 'fore I settle down.

MARIANNE: But it's not safe right now. There's a war going on in Europe?

TOM: Them oil fields is in Persia, not Europe.

MARIANNE: I know that. But if the Arabs join forces with the Nazi's, you'll be working in enemy territory.

TOM: Naw...don't make sense fer Aramco t' put their people in danger.

MARIANNE: Wars don't make sense, but that doesn't stop men from killing each other. I know you can find a job closer to home if you give yourself time to look.

TOM: Marianne, I git m' last paycheck tomorrow, an' I ain't partial to starvin'. So I gotta grab on t'whatever I kin, the sooner the better. I figure m'chances at Aramco are better 'n most' cause I got experience workin' the oil fields.

MARIANNE: Then talk to the people at Shell, or Conoco...

TOM: Already did. They ain't hirin'. 'Sides, Aramco's payin' a fortune next t'what I been gittin'. I'd be gone fer a year, maybe two, an' come home a rich man. Makes sense, doncha think?

MARIANNE: No, it scares me to death.

TOM: I ain't gonna die on ya.

MARIANNE: It's not that. What I'm afraid of is that once you get a taste of the big cities and foreign ports, you'll forget all about a half-breed injun girl waiting for you in Okahoma.

TOM: I ain't gonna forgit ya, Marianne. Ya kin bank on it.

MARIANNE: Wish I could believe it.

TOM: Ya figure that's what happened t' your Pa, don'cha?

MARIANNE: If he were dead, word would've gotten back to us somehow. More than likely he's made a new home for himself in California, has a new common-law wife, and I have half-brothers and sisters I'll never meet.

TOM: Well, our kids ain't gonna have that problem.

MARIANNE: What kids? I don't recall you asking me to marry you.

TOM: Well, consider yerself asked, Miss Longtree. (beat) Ain'cha gonna give me 'n answer?

MARIANNE: (startled) I don't have one right now.

TOM: Ya turnin' down m'proposal?

MARIANNE: I can't make that kind of commitment yet. We haven't known each other long enough.

TOM: How long do ya need?

MARIANNE: I don't know...longer than three weeks...

TOM: Ya still like me, don'cha?

MARIANNE: I might even love you, but I'm not ready to settle down and have those kids you're talking about.

TOM: Well, t' be honest, I ain't ready t' be a family man, neither. But if I git that job with Aramco, I wantcha t' know I'm doin' it fer the two of us.

MARIANNE: Sure you are. You're a good man, Tom Breeding. (she kisses him on the cheek) o on now...take Cal to see Eli, and good luck with your interview. Let me know what happens.

TOM: I promise, you'll be the first. Hey Cal, let's git goin'. (Tom gives Marianne's a proper kiss and envelops her in a hug. Cal enters) See ya later. (he and Cal exit. Marianne stands at the door watching him drive away. Ruby walks up to her)

MARIANNE: Hello, Ma.

LONGTREE: That yer fella high tailin' it outta town?

MARIANNE: He's on his way to Ponca...to see about a job.

LONGTREE: What kinda job?

MARIANNE: Roustabout. Oil field work.

LONGTREE: Jes' like yer Pa.

MARIANNE: Except Aramco's not speculating. They already have fields...in Persia.

LONGTREE: Where's that?

MARIANNE: In the mid-east.

LONGTREE: Where?

MARIANNE: The other side of Africa, Ma.

LONGTREE: Don't git uppity. I jes' asked.

MARIANNE: Did you come in here for a reason, or just checking up on me?

LONGTREE: Well, I reckon there's a couple things I might git.

MARIANNE: Like what?

LONGTREE: A new stockpot, fer one.

MARIANNE: What happened to the old one?

LONGTREE: Got a hole burnt in the bottom.

MARIANNE: Okay. Pick out the one you want. Anything else?

LONGTREE: (looking over the merchandize) Kinda like this red calico. How much ya figure I need t' make m'self a dress?

MARIANNE: (agitated) I don't know...three or four yards, I guess. They're mill ends. Already cut to length. Just rummage through and find a piece you think will work.

LONGTREE: What's gottcha in sech a bad mood? You an' Tom git in a fight?

MARIANNE: Don't get your hopes up. He asked me to marry him.

LONGTREE: Whatcha tell 'im?

MARIANNE: I told him I'm not ready to get married yet.

LONGTREE: Smart thinkin'. If he takes off fer Africa, ya ain't likely t'see 'im agin.

MARIANNE: Persia, Ma. Not Africa.

LONGTREE: Whichever. Them young fellas always got the itch t' travel 'round an' see new places. Don't wanna settle down 'til they's older.

MARIANNE: Like Sam?

LONGTREE: Yep. Like Sam.

MARIANNE: You're not going to give up, are you?

LONGTREE: Jes' thinkin' of yer welfare, girl. (takes the yard goods and stockpot to the counter)  
How much?

MARIANNE: You got any money?

LONGTREE: Nope.

MARIANNE: In other words, I deduct it from my paycheck. Okay, Ma. Is that everything?

LONGTREE: Don't forgit what I tol' ya.

MARIANNE: I wish to God I could. (Ruby exits)

(blackout)

ACT II, Scene 2

[The first week of December, two and a half months later. At rise Marianne is putting out Christmas items for sale. Mrs. Bebee enters.]

BEBEE: (singing off key) "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way..."

MARIANNE: Morning, Mrs. Bebee. You're in a cheerful mood.

BEBEE: Crisp, cold days invigorate me. Looks like we might get some snow. Do you like snow, Marianne?

MARIANNE: It's pretty to look at, but it keeps the customers away.

BEBEE: Unless they need a snow shovel or long woolen underwear.

MARIANNE: Goes without saying. What can I do for you today?

BEBEE: Find Sam for me. Is he in the back?

MARIANNE: No, he went to the post office in Blackwell to check the mail and get his tax forms.

BEBEE: So soon? We've got until the Ides of March before those socialist warmongers in Washington get their pound of flesh.

MARIANNE: Sam hopes I can save him a pound or two if I have four months to work on it.

BEBEE: You really understand all those tax forms?

MARIANNE: Most of them. And if I don't, they come with instructions.

BEBEE: In that case, would you do mine? For a nominal fee, of course.

MARIANNE: How nominal?

BEBEE: You can afford to be choosy?

MARIANNE: No, not really. Did you take advantage of the land conservation program this year?

BEBEE: What's that?

MARIANNE: If you let some of your acreage go fallow, the Government will compensate you.

BEBEE: I'll be damned. Never thought I'd come to like the Democrats... but if they're gonna pay me, instead of the other way around... I could learn t' love 'em.



MARIANNE: Pass the word. I'll help anybody who needs it.

BEBEE: Hang out your shingle, and they'll line up at the door. How many days you working for Sam now?

MARIANNE: More than he can afford to pay me.

BEBEE: Which means you aren't paying yourself, doesn't it?

MARIANNE: It isn't that I don't need the money, but I need to keep busy even more.

BEBEE: No word from Tom, I take it.

MARIANNE: Two and a half months, and not even a postcard.

BEBEE: You poor girl. If anything happens, and I'm sure it won't, but if it does, will they notify you or his family in Texas?

MARIANNE: Tom designated Sam as his next of kin.

BEBEE: Making Sam the bearer of bad news if it should come to that, which I'm sure it won't.

MARIANNE: Then I wish you'd quit saying it. Makes my skin crawl, like a bad omen.

BEBEE: How's your ma?

MARIANNE: The same.

BEBEE: She hasn't come by to see me lately. Is she under the weather?

MARIANNE: No, just under my skin.

BEBEE: Still hoping you'll dump Tom in favor of a rich husband, I take it.

MARIANNE: She never lets up.

BEBEE: Well, if I hear of a wealthy oil baron looking to wive, I'll steer him in your direction.

MARIANNE: Steer him to Ma. I've already found my man.

BEBEE: Then why didn't you get him to marry you before he took off for Persia?

MARIANNE: He asked, but I said no.

BEBEE: Are you crazy, girl? A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.

MARIANNE: It's kind of complicated.

BEBEE: How so?

MARIANNE: I didn't think it would be fair to him, and I wasn't sure how I felt. Now, I don't know...was it wise or foolish to let him go so easily?

BEBEE: Nothing's fair about love or war. You take your chances and hope for the best. (Cal and Eli enter) Well, look what the wind's blown in. Two old birds come home to roost. The place hasn't been the same without you two parked by that checkerboard. Have we finally recovered from the mumps?

CAL: You git 'em, too?

BEBEE: I had them in the second or third grade, like every other sensible child. How come you two missed out?

CAL: Jes' lucky, I guess.

ELI: Hell, luck didn't have nuthin' t'do with it. Ya skipped school s'much, ya wasn't there long 'nough to git exposed.

CAL: What's yer excuse? You got 'em first.

BEBEE: You know, don't you, that mumps can make a grown man sterile.

CAL: Reckon it happen t'me?

ELI: Ain't no way yer gonna find out.

CAL: Marianne, if I was forty years younger, 'n not sterile, I'd give yer young fella a run fer his money, I would.

ELI: Forty years ago ya didn' have no money t' run with. Ya still don't. At last count ya owed me three thousand, six hunnerd, ninety-two dollars, and seventy-five cents.

CAL: (setting up the board) Whaddy say we play fer double or nuthin'?

ELI: Naw, ya'd jes' lose agin, and I can't count that high. We'll start from scratch.

BEBEE: Marianne, did Sam say when he'd get back?

MARIANNE: He should be walking in the door any minute now.  
(Doris enters)

BEBEE: Durn!

DORIS: And a good morning to you, too, Bee.

BEBEE: Don't take it personally, Doris. I was expecting Sam.

DORIS: Where is he?

BEBEE: Blackwell. I thought that's where you did your shopping now.

DORIS: Too far to drive if it snows. Didn't want to take the chance. Have you seen the new department store that just opened in Ponca? Very impressive. Even has a tea room.

BEBEE: And expensive as hell.

DORIS: The sales people are so refined.

BEBEE: And so snooty. Stopped by there a few days ago, and the doorman directed me to the employees entrance around in the back.

DORIS: Well, if you must go about in public looking like a cow hand straight from the fields, you have to expect to be treated like one.

BEBEE: Crap!

DORIS: Exactly!

ELI: Ya listenin', Cal?

CAL: I heard.

ELI: When ya git t' be a rich oil man, ya gotta getcha yerself some fancy duds, an' start eatin' in them tea rooms.

CAL: Ain't gonna happen.

ELI: It ain't? What happen to yer fer-tile field?

CAL: They found nuthin' but hog shit.

ELI: Told ya so.

CAL: Easy come, easy go. Yer turn.

BEBEE: (looking at a Xmas candle) Isn't that lovely. What do you think, Doris, should I put it on the dining table or the mantle over the fireplace?

DORIS: (looking at bolts of yard goods) Whatever.

MARIANNE: Mrs. MacPherson, are you looking for something in particular? Maybe I can help you find it.

DORIS: Lizbeth's got several holiday parties on the calendar. Thought I'd make her something pretty in red or green taffeta.

BEBEE: Better make it in red. Lizbeth'll look bilious in green.

CAL: I got a red bow tie. Mebe I'll wear it t'morrow.

ELI: Pay attention, Cal. Ya missed a jump.

DORIS: I kind of like this plaid. It would look nice with a velvet bodice.

BEBEE: Marianne, is Sam gonna put out a string of Christmas lights this year?

MARIANNE: He hasn't said.

DORIS: I think they look garish. Too commercial.

BEBEE: That's the point, Doris. This is a commercial establishment.

DORIS: The new store in Ponca has it's windows decorated with a Victorian motif: carollers, a horse-drawn sleigh, and a mannekin that looks just like Tiny Tim. Very elegant.

ELI: They usin' a real horse?

DORIS: Don't be stupid. Of course not.

ELI: Okay, gimme a fake horse, 'n I'll stand in the window if Sam says it's okay.

CAL: Why ya wanna do sump'in' dumb like that, Eli?

ELI: Beats me. Helps t' bring in customers, I reckon.

MARIANNE: Which one have you decided on, Mrs. MacPherson?

DORIS: Do you mind? I can't make a decision with someone hanging over my shoulder.

MARIANNE: Sorry, I was just trying to help.

DORIS: When I want your help, I'll ask for it.

MARIANNE: Are you always this rude to the hired help, or just to those from the reservation?

DORIS: I assure you, Miss Longtree, I treat everyone equally...

BEBEE: God help us...

DORIS: But if you don't do something about your hostile attitude, no one will patronize this establishment.

MARIANNE: Quit hedging, Mrs. MacPherson. Say what you really mean. If Sam doesn't fire the injun girl, you'll get all your white friends to boycott him.

DORIS: Don't put words in my mouth.

MARIANNE: I don't have to. Your message comes through loud and clear.

BEBEE: Marianne!

DORIS: Well, if you think I'm going to stand here and take any more of your abuse...

BEBEE: Doris!

MARIANNE: That's what you said two months ago, but you keep turning up, like a bad penny.

BEBEE: Stop it you two! I'm ashamed of both of you! (Doris starts for the door, Bee stops her) Wait for me, Doris. This will only take a minute. Marianne, when Sam gets back, ask him what he plans to donate to the children's gift baskets this year. And tell him, he's the people's choice to play Santa again. The kids loved him last year.

MARIANNE: You can tell him yourself. I just heard him come in. (Duncan enters from the back) Did they have the tax forms?

DUNCAN: (hands her a stack of them) Right here. Two of each kind. And all the mail that was in the box. (hands her another stack) Don't bother t'look. I already did, an' there's nuthin' from Tom. Sorry.

MARIANNE: It's not your fault.

DUNCAN: Mornin', ladies. Findin' what ya need?

DORIS: I wouldn't a buy a thing in here if my life depended on it.

DUNCAN: Not even a box of Christmas cards? Marianne, show Mrs. MacPherson the selection we jes' got in?

MARIANNE: (mollified) Over here, Mrs. MacPherson... some nice assortments...

DORIS: I'm not interested. Sam, you keep this place colder than a spring house in February. You really should think about putting in central heating. I'll wait for you outside, Bee, where the temperature is more accommodating. (exits)

MARIANE: I'm sorry, Sam. I'm not doing you any good today, am I? Maybe I should go home...have a fight with Ma...then curl up and sleep for a year...

DUNCAN: It's hard to keep yer mind on things when yer worried about a certain fella on the other side of the world. Why don'cha ya see t' Miz Bebee, an' I'll put a fire under our dinner. Everything'll look better on a full stomach.

MARIANNE: I didn't have any business talking to a customer the way I did. I'll go and apologize...

DUNCAN: T' Mrs. MacPherson? Don't waste yer breath. She'll be back. How else is she gonna keep tabs on us? (exits)

MARIANNE: Sam, wait a minute...

BEBEE: That's okay, dear. You can give him my message later. And don't lose any sleep over Doris. She thrives on verbal abuse. How much is this candle and a box of cards?

MARIANNE: Let's see, that'll be... seventy-five cents.

BEBEE: (gives her a dollar bill and whispers) Give the change to Cal. (Marianne nods) Chin up, Marianne. You'll be hearing from your young man real soon. I'm absolutely sure of it. Toodle-do. (exits singing as Marianne slips the quarter to Cal) "Dashing through the snow, in a one-horse open sleigh, o'er the fields we go, laughing all the way, ha-ha-ha..."

CAL: Miz Bebee's got the spirit, she does.

ELI: Yep. Yer turn, Cal. (Sam enters)

DUNCAN: Anybody hungry?

ELI: You buyin'?

DUNCAN: Got a pot of stew simmerin' on the back burner. Go help yerself.

CAL: Who fixed it?

DUNCAN: Marianne. It's venison. Real good stuff.

CAL: (crossing to the back) Mmmmm....ya comin', Eli?

ELI: Jest a minute... (jumping his piece) Gotcha! (crosses back to Cal) Gimme that two bits, Calvin.

CAL: (hands him the quarter) Easy come, easy go. (they exit; Marianne sits at the table and absentmindedly plays with the checker pieces. Sam crosses to the counter and scans the tax forms Marianne left lying there)

DUNCAN: Go git sumpin t'eat. I'll mind the store.

MARIANNE: I'll get some later.

DUNCAN: Ya sure ya can figure out these tax things?

MARIANNE: Yeah, I'm sure.

DUNCAN: Gotta do an inventory, y'know.

MARIANNE: I know. The last day of the year.

DUNCAN: Won't take long. Business is slower n' a drunk tadpole then.

MARIANNE: Fine.

DUNCAN: Gonna give ya a raise.

MARIANNE: Okay.

DUNCAN: A hundred dollars a week.

MARIANNE: Uh-huh.

DUNCAN: (crossing to her) Marianne, ya haven't heard a word I'm sayin'!

MARIANNE: Yes, I have. You said that we'd do the inventory the last day of the year because business was slow then, and you're going to raise my salary a hundred dollars a week. In a pig's eye you are. You don't even clear a hundred a week.

DUNCAN: Jes' tryin' to git yer attention. Look, girl, ya can't keep mopin' around here like a hound dog off his feed. It's ruinin' the Christmas spirit.

MARIANNE: To hell with the Christmas spirit. Mrs. MacPherson already killed it. Two and a half months, and not a word. If I wasn't so afraid that something had happened to him, I'd be furious. I don't care how busy he is, he still could have found time to mail a post card. I'm more important than his folks... no, that's not fair...but he knows I'm sitting here waiting... at least I think he does...maybe I gave him the wrong impression... maybe he thinks I was leading him on...I don't know...

DUNCAN: Tom's okay, Marianne, or they'd 'ave sent us a wire. Ain't much consolation, but at a time like this ya gotta figure no news is good news.

MARIANNE: It just means that he's still alive. But where, and doing what? Doesn't he realize we're going crazy worrying about him? Men!

DUNCAN: (joshing her) Women!

MARIANNE: Mrs. Bebee...

DUNCAN: What about her?

MARIANNE: She said to tell you that you're the people's choice to play Santa again this year. And she wants to know what you're going to contribute to children's gift baskets. She didn't ask, if, just, what. We take you for granted, don't we?

DUNCAN: If I can't help m' friends and neighbors, I'm the poorer man fer it.

MARIANNE: You and Mrs. Bebee are the only white folks around here who treat the Indians like friends and neighbors.

DUNCAN: Miz Bebee's got her own reasons, but I owe m'life to 'em.

MARIANNE: You never told me that.

DUNCAN: It's a long story.

MARIANNE: Does it have a happy ending?

DUNCAN: Yep. I think so, anyway.

MARIANNE: Then tell me. I could use some good news.

DUNCAN: Well, now...where to begin...

MARIANNE: Try the beginning.

DUNCAN: Don't wanna put ya t'sleep...

MARIANNE: What is it with you guys? Getting you to talk about yourself is like pulling teeth.

DUNCAN: Okay, here goes. (beat) Once upon a time a young fella by the name of Samuel T. Duncan, that's m'father, and a pretty young girl named Elmira Jenkins, that's m'mother...

MARIANNE: I didn't mean the beginning of time. Get to the part about the Indians.



DUNCAN: You wanna hear this story or not?

MARIANNE: Sorry. Go on...

DUNCAN: As I was sayin', these two young people fell in love, got married, an' come to Oklahoma in the Run of '93. They staked their claim an' homesteaded on a quarter section about a mile north of here. Like a lot of them early settlers, they had a real hard time makin' it through the first winter. Pro'bly wouldn't 'ave survived if the Indians hadn't shared their fresh-killed beeves, winter store of sweet p'taters, an' dried fruit with 'em. That kinda set the course o' things t'come. M'folks almost dispaired of ever havin' kids, 'til the turn of the century when I arrived. But Ma took sick with the fever, an' I was such a puny babe, Pa figured we was gonners fer sure. He was jest setting out to fetch a minister, when an Indian squaw shows up an' becomes m'wet nurse till Ma got back on her feet. Guess ya'd have t'say, m'whole family owed their lives t' the Tonkawas. Kin I do less fer 'em now?

MARIANNE: That's so beautiful, I'm going to cry.

DUNCAN: (hesitantly puts his arms around her) Go ahead an' cry yer heart out, girl. Ain't my story that's breakin' it, but it'll do ya good.

MARIANNE: (between sobs) Mama told me you lost your family in a diphtheria epidemic.

DUNCAN: It took m'wife an' son back in '25. M'folks died afore the war.

MARIANNE: (sniffing) Is that when you moved to town and opened the store?

DUNCAN: Yep. Too damn lonely out there on the homeplace with everybody gone. This was a good size town back in the horse and buggy days. Then they closed the post office in '29, an' a year later the schoolhouse got blowed away in a twister. All of a sudden I look around, an' there ain't much left 'cept what ya see now-- mostly boarded up storefronts.

MARIANNE: (pulls away) The economy's getting better. Maybe the town will regenerate.

DUNCAN: Not even the war that's a-comin' is gonna make a lick of difference t' this place. When the railroad pulls the branch line next year, we're history...another Oklahoma ghost town.

MARIANNE: (Sam wipes her face with his hanky and gives it to her to blow her nose) What will you do?

DUNCAN: Lock m' door an' fire m' bookkeeper, I reckon. Rotten shame ain't it, 'cause she was doin' such a good job fer me. (Marianne smiles) Well, would ya look at that. She's got a smile on her face...

MARIANNE: You really should think about relocating, Sam. Mrs. Bebee needs a place to shop where she doesn't have dress up to do it.

DUNCAN: Already thought of it. Trouble is, I like where I'm at, an' I'm gettin' too old to pull m'self outta the rut I'm stuck in.

MARIANNE: Funny you should say that.

DUNCAN: Why? Ya think I'm a spry young fella like yer Tom, or ready t'parcel off t'the old folks home?

MARIANNE: Oh...somewhere in between I guess. You're a sweetheart, you know that? You and Tom...but I've always thought of you like a father, someone who'll take care of me. Maybe I've been wrong.

DUNCAN: Hope not. Them's the nicest words anybody's said t'me since m'wife died. An' that's been s'long ago, I scarcely remember what she looked like. Shameful thing t'admit, ain't it?

MARIANNE: Not really. It's been what... fourteen years? You're not still grieving, are you?

DUNAN: Nope, it don't hurt t'think about 'em anymore.

MARIANNE: Good, because Mama thinks you should get married again and start another family.

DUNCAN: She ain't the only one. Miz MacPherson's been tryin' t' marry me off fer the past thirteen years, an' Eli's got a wager with Cal... Well, I guess m'love life's one big joke t'everybody, huh?

MARIANNE: I'm not laughing.

DUNCAN: Then maybe I oughta give ya sump'in t'laugh about. What would ya say if I asked ya t'accompany me t'the children's Christmas party? There'll be lots of food--Miz Bebee'll see t'that--an' if the fellas bring their guitars an' fiddles, there'll be singin' an' dancin' t' boot.

MARIANNE: I'd love to. Where and when?

DUNCAN: Tonkawa rec hall, a week from Saturday.

MARIANNE: And you'll be wearing a Santa suit. White beard and all?

DUNCAN: If I kin find where I stashed it.

MARIANNE: Why don't I dress up like one of your elves and help hand out the presents?

DUNCAN: Smart thinkin'. If anybody asks, we tell 'em yer part of the entertainment.

MARIANNE: I don't give a damn what people say. Mama will be thrilled.

DUNCAN: How come?

MARIANNE: Well...she's been hoping you'd see the light, and get hitched to her smart-ass, half-breed daughter. But she had you figured for a rich old bastard, so maybe she'll lay off me now.

DUNCAN: (laughs) Wish ya'd said sump'in. I'd of give Tom a run fer his money...'fore he stole yer heart.

MARIANNE: I've got an idea. I won't tell Ma that you're a day away from being broke just yet, and we'll pretend that we're madly in love... give her the best Christmas present she's ever had before I disillusion her. What do you say? Are you game?

DUNCAN: Miss Longtree, I'd be happy t'oblige yer ma. We're gonna have a roarin' good time. I jes' know it.

MARIANNE: Me, too!

DUNCAN: Good. Now we got that settled, git back t'work, girl. 'Til we start havin' this make-believe romance, yer still m' hired help, an' don'cha forgit it.

(blackout)

ACT II, Scene 3

[Sunday morning after the the children's Christmas party. At rise the stage is empty. We hear someone turning the key in the lock on the front door. Marianne enters, finds the metal triangle, and crosses to the curtained doorway where she rings it loudly.]

MARIANNE: Wake up, lazy bones. It snowed last night and I wanna go sledding. (beat) Sam, wake up!

DUNCAN: (mumbling from offstage) Who is it?

MARIANNE: Santa Claus. Who do you think it is?

DUNCAN: Jest a minute. Can't find my pants. (a moment later he stumbles out zipping up the fly on his pants) What time is it?

MARIANNE: Who cares. (she grabs and kisses him) I'm much too happy, and the day is much too glorious to spend it in bed.

DUNCAN: Glad ya feel that way. But ya could of waited a couple more hours t'tell me.

MARIANNE: Right now I could sell my sainted grandmother for a stack of Kitty's pancakes. Aren't you hungry? Get dressed and let's go.

DUNCAN: She open this early?

MARIANNE: Yep! Stopped by to see her on my way here. She said she'd have the coffee brewed by the time we got there.

DUNCAN: Sure hope so. I'm feelin' hung over this mornin'.

MARIANNE: On cranberry punch?

DUNCAN: Somebody must 'ave spiked it.

MARIANNE: Not a chance with Mrs. MacPherson standing guard. You're just not used to partying on Saturday nights.

DUNCAN: Yep, gettin' too old fer them late night shindigs. Need m'beauty sleep.

MARIANNE; You're gorgeous, so finish getting dressed and let's blow this joint. I'm starving.

DUNCAN: You always this bossy on Sunday mornin's? (exits)

MARIANNE: Only with fellows I take a-liking to.

DUNCAN: (offstage) That's gotta include half the township, then.

MARIANNE: Jealous?

DUNCAN: (offstage) I ain't sayin'.

MARIANNE: I might have been the belle of the ball, but I only had eyes for the guy in the santa suit.

DUNCAN: (offstage) Reckon anybody noticed?

MARIANNE: I don't care if they did. I had a wonderful time.

DUNCAN: Me, too.

MARIANNE: You're a hell of a dancer. How come you never told me?

DUNCAN: (offstage) Ya never asked.

MARIANNE: Where did you learn to do the two-step with that sexy dip?

DUNCAN: (offstage) Back in m'salad days. I was quite the man about town, don'cha know?

MARIANNE: I'm discovering a lot things about you I didn't know.

DUNCAN: (enters) Do I look presentable now?

MARIANNE: Handsome as ever. Ready to go?

DUNCAN: Yep...back t'bed. (turns back)

MARIANNE: (grabs his arm) Oh, no, you don't. I'm going to put a sign on your back and parade you around town--hands off, ladies, this one's mine.

DUNCAN: Marianne, yer ma ain't here. Ya kin quit pretendin' now.

MARIANNE: Look at me, Sam. Somewhere on that dance floor last night... make believe turned into the real thing. And don't tell me I imagined it.

DUNCAN: Nope. 'Cept I was afraid t' git m'hopes up... jes' t' see 'em dashed t' smithereens come the light o'day.

MARIANNE: Well, in the cold light of morning you're still the only man for me. What about you? Having second thoughts?

DUNCAN: I never was any good at pretendin', Marianne. I've loved ya since that day yer ma brung her skinny, smart-mouth daughter int' m'store an' told me t' take a chance on 'er.

MARIANNE: How come you never said anything?

DUNCAN: Didn' figure I had much goin' fer me-- too old, too ordinary...

MARIANNE: (teasing) Too old, maybe, but never ordinary.

DUNCAN: Then Tom come along... Ya sure I'm not jest a handy substitute? You been pining fer 'im sump'in awful...

MARIANNE: A passing fancy...waste of time and tears.

DUNCAN: There'll be other young fellas...

MARIANNE: No thanks. Guess I like being stuck here, too.

DUNCAN: This rut ain't big enough fer both of us...

MARIANNE: Then you'll just have to widen it, won't you?

DUNCAN: You're as stubborn as yer ma, ain'tcha?

MARIANNE: Yep!

DUNCAN: Nuthin' I say gonna change yer mind?

MARIANNE: Nope! How does that make you feel?

DUNCAN: Like I was ten years younger, an' got a million in the bank. Do I need yer ma's permission t'court ya proper now?

LONGTREE: (enters from the street all dressed up, wearing a fancy hat and a big smile) You got it, Sam Duncan.

MARIANNE: Ma, what are you doing here?

LONGTREE: Listenin' outside the door ya left open.

MARIANNE: That's not nice. This is a private conversation.

LONGTREE: Then ya shoulda closed the door. I'm leavin', so ya kin go back t' bein' private agin. (Bebie appears in the door)

BEBIE: There you are, Ruby. I turned around and you'd disappeared. Here she is, Doris. Watch

it you don't turn an ankle on that loose board. (enters with Doris behind her) Morning, Marianne, Sam.

DORIS: Sam, if you don't fix the board walk in front of your store, you're going to have a lawsuit on your hands.

DUNCAN: Ladies, it's Sunday. I'm not open on Sundays. S'why is everyone standin' around in here?

BEBEE: Beats me. We were on our way to church. Want to join us?

MARIANNE: You, too, Ma?

LONGTREE: Miz Bebee didn' gimme a choice. Tol' me t' git dressed, or she was takin' me in my red flannels. How ya like m'new hat?

MARIANNE: Makes you look just as uppity as all them white folks.

BEBEE: (pointedly at Doris) And if any of them white folks speak ill of your Ma, they'll know the wrath of God at my hands.

DORIS: I wouldn't have agreed to come with you, Bee, if I'd known you were going to pick up half the township on the way.

BEBEE: Half of what township? I just detoured a couple of miles to get Ruby and Marianne. Only Marianne was up and gone by the time we got there. Or so it appeared...

DUNCAN: Ya sure do like to stir things up, Miz Bebee. Keeps life interestin'!

BEBEE: Not as interesting as what people will be saying about you and Marianne this morning. It's none of my business, but did you two spend the night together?

MARIANNE: (shocked) Of course not...

DUNCAN: Hush girl. Yer right, Miz Bebee. It ain't none of yer business.

DORIS: Sam Duncan! A man of your age and respectabilty...

DUNCAN: A man never gits too old, or too respectable to fall fer a pretty face.

MARIANNE: (playing along) Admit it, Sam. I've ruined your reputation.

DUNCAN: Yep. Gonna have t' make an honest man out of me.

BEBEE: Let me know when you set the date.

MARIANNE: Don't jump to conclusions, Mrs. Bebee. We haven't gotten that far yet.

DORIS: I certainly hope not.

BEBEE: Doris, don't you have to arrange altar flowers or something?

DORIS: I did it last evening.

BEBEE: Then go decant the communion wine, or something.

DORIS: That's not my job.

BEBEE: (glaring at her) Doris...

DORIS: Well...if I'm not welcome here...

BEBEE: You can go spread the word... we'll be along in a few minutes.

DORIS: If you think I'm going to fuel the gossipmongers...

BEBEE: I expect the place will be ablaze by the time we get there.

DORIS: Bee, one of these days you'll go too far...(bumps into Eli as she turns to exit) My, my! Look who's here? Come in, Eli. Join the rest of these sinners in this den of iniquity. Woe be unto ye who have to answer on the day of Judgement. (exits)

ELI: (confused) Huh?...ah, mornin' ladies, Sam. What's she talkin' about?

BEBEE: Your penchant for gambling, Eli. Where's your sidekick? Thought you two were joined at the hip.

ELI: Cal's waitin' outside, ma'am. Got somebody with 'im.

BEBEE: Well, don't stand on ceremony. Invite them in.

ELI: (hesitantly) Sam...?

DUNCAN: Ya heard the lady. I'll put a potta coffee on. Can't take all this company s'early in the day without m'shot of caffeine. (exits)

ELI: (steps outside) Come on in. Everybody's here. (Cal enters, followed by Tom. They all react)

MARIANNE: Tom...

BEBEE: Bless my soul. Where have you been, young man? We'd given you up for dead.



TOM: Howdy, ladies. Marianne...?

MARIANNE: I don't know whether to kiss you or slug you. What are you doing here? You're supposed in Persia.

TOM: Never got there.

MARIANNE: What happened?

TOM: Aramco figured it was too dangerous t'make a crossin', what with the German subs an' all, s'they paid us a month's wage an' let us go.

LONGTREE: Where ya been, boy?

TOM: New York City t'see the World's Fair. Boy, was it sump'in! Ya wouldn't believe what they got there. A radio with pictures, called a television...an' Elsie, the Borden cow gettin' milked on a merry-go-round...funniest thing ya ever seen...

MARIANNE: And that's where you've been all this time? At the World's Fair?

TOM: Nope. Run outta money after couple weeks, so when one of the guys said they was lookin' fer roustabouts down 'round Tampa, we took off fer Florida. Turned out t'be a bust. Nuthin' doin, nobody hirin'.

CAL: Whatcha do then?

TOM: Headed back up the pike...worked the docks in Norfuk till the union boys run us out, then hitched our way north t'Bal-tee-more an' hauled freight 'til we made enough t' buy a bus ticket west.

MARIANNE: And all during all this time, you never thought to drop us a line to let us know how you were, or what you were doing?

TOM: Too busy, or too broke...

BEBEE: That's no excuse. This poor girl was dying a slow death, worried sick that something horrible had happened to you. (Sam enters, stands quietly listening)

TOM: I'm sorry, Marianne. Told ya I wasn't the correspondin' type.

BEBEE: Sorry doesn't cut it, fella.

CAL: Where'd ya go after ya left Bal-tee-more?

TOM: Pittsburgh, Albany, Cleveland, Chicago...

MARIANNE: Making the grand tour, were you, seeing all the sights? How was Chicago? Get out on the lake? See the stockyards, ride the El? Must have been a terrible disappointment after the World's Fair.

TOM: Yeah, it was. Freezin', too. Got hit with a blizzard first week in November. Figured it was time t'head south.

MARIANNE: It doesn't take six weeks to get from Chicago to Oklahoma. You must have made a few stops along the way.

TOM: Had to. I was flat broke. Worked m'way to St. Louie haulin' cattle feed, an' other odd jobs...

MARIANNE: Working odd jobs seems to be your speciality.

TOM: Ain't how I planned it. Jes' turned out that way.

BEBEE: How did you get from St. Louis to here?

TOM: Now, that's an interestin' story. Was thumbing m'way on route 66 when ya'd never guess who stopped t' pick me up.

ELI: Who?

TOM: Buddy an' Jim-boy.

CAL: Do tell!

BEBEE: Must have been fate.

TOM: They was headin' back from Canada an' give me a ride practically t' yer front door, Sam.

SAM: Where are they now?

TOM: Dropped me off at the corner an' headed out to see their folks, I reckon. Hey, y'all act like I've got the plague or sump'in. Ain'tcha gonna welcome me home? (crosses to Sam and extends his hand) Sam? (Sam ignores it)

SAM: How long ya staying?

TOM: Depends on Marianne.

SAM: Then I reckon you two need time t'talk. Why don't everybody move t' m' back room fer a cuppa coffee, an' let the youngsters work things out. (they all file past him to the back)

LONGTREE: Use yer head, girl, not yer heart. (exits)

TOM: What's she mean by that?

MARIANNE: You wouldn't understand. So, tell me.. what depends on Marianne? You weren't thinking of her when you were gallivanting around the country.

TOM: Now, that ain't true. I thought about ya all the time.

MARIANNE: But you were too busy, or too broke to write and tell me.

TOM: I already said I'm sorry. What else kin I say?

MARIANNE: Nothing. So why are you here?

TOM: I told ya I'd come back, Marianne. We made plans, remember?

MARIANNE: Only too well. What now?

TOM: How would ya like t'see California?

MARIANNE: What's in California?

TOM: A job...I hope. Buddy n' Jim-boy tell me it's the land of opportunity. That's where they're headed. Invited me to go along.

MARIANNE: I'd trust those two about as far as I could throw a buffalo.

TOM: Now don't go puttin' em down, Marianne. We had a lotta time t'chew the fat while we was driving down here. They're not the same ornery fellas they was. Fact is, we got a lot in common.

MARIANNE; Then I misjudged you.

TOM: Maybe 'cuz we talk the same. Them easterners made me out t'be a hill billy from the way I talk. I kept tryin' to tell 'em, there ain't no hills worth a hoot 'n a holler in Oklahoma.

MARIANNE: That's not totally accurate, but close enough, I reckon.

TOM: Still mad at me?

MARIANNE: Not mad. Disappointed.

TOM: How come?

MARIANNE: Good Lord, Tom! You leave me with a proposal on your lips, then I don't hear a word from you in over three months. I figure you're either dead, wounded, or just don't give a damn. Sam convinced me that the first two weren't likely, or we'd have heard.

TOM: Yep. I put down Sam as m'next of kin.

MARIANNE: Then you just didn't give a damn.'

TOM: Now, Marianne, that ain't true. . .

MARIANNE: What else was I supposed to think? It wasn't easy, but I learned to live with it. Then, out of the blue, you show up and ask me to go to California with you and those two overblown bigots. (beat) Tom, I fell for you in a big way, and probably would have married you when you got back from Persia. Whether you came back rich or poor was not important. What mattered was that you didn't take the time or care enough to even send me a postcard.

TOM: Is it too late t' make amends?

MARIANNE: By at least twelve hours.

TOM: Ya found another guy, didn'cha?

MARIANNE: Yes, I did.

TOM: Anybody I know.

MARIANNE: You know him well.

TOM: Who?

MARIANNE: I don't kiss and tell, either.

TOM: Then I guess there ain't much point t' me stickin' around, is there?

MARIANNE: Well, you might want to visit with Cal and Eli. They're your biggest fans.

TOM: What about Sam?. He acted kinda funny when I give 'im m'hand to shake.

TOM: You'll have to ask him, yourself.

TOM: Naw...some other time...when there ain't s' many people around. I'll hike down t' Kitty's an' call Buddy t'come pick me up.

MARIANNE: You can use Sam's phone.

TOM: I don't mind walkin'. It's kinda nice out, snow coverin' the fields an' all. An' not near as cold as Chicago.

MARIANNE: If I don't see you before you leave, good luck.

TOM: No chance you'll change yer mind?

MARIANNE: No. But I hope you find what you're looking for.

TOM: Well, ya win some, ya lose some. Name of the game. Give m'regards t' everybody, will ya?.

MARIANNE: I will. (he exits; she watches him go, closes the door after him, and crosses to the curtain) You can come out now. (Sam enters first giving her a cup of coffee; the others file out behind him)

LONGTREE: Well?

MARIANNE: Well, what, Ma?

LONGTREE: Don't play games with me, girl. Whatcha tell him?

MARIANNE: I wished him good luck. He's going to California.

ELI: Ya ain't goin' with him?

MARIANNE: Don't have any reason to.

CAL: What's she talkin' about, Eli?

ELI: Tell ya later. Wanna play? Two bits a game.

BEBEE: It's Sunday, you two old buzzards. You're coming to church with Ruby and me.

CAL: I am?

ELI: Ya heard the lady, Cal. Start makin' tracks.

CAL: But I ain't wearin' m' Sunday-go-t'-meetin' clothes.

ELI: Ya took a bath las' nite, didn'cha?

CAL: Yep.

ELI: Then, you'll do.

BEBEE: Shake a leg, folks. If we get there late we'll have to sit in the front row...and half the congregation will keel over with a stroke. (Cal and Eli follow her out the door)

LONGTREE: Gonna say a prayer of thanksgivin', daughter. Ya finally seen the light.

MARIANNE: (hugs her mother) Jes' lookin' out fer m'welfare, ain'tcha?

LONGTREE: Yep. See ya later, Sam. (exits; Sam finishes his cup of coffee and studies Marianne silently)

MARIANNE: (after a long pause) Well, aren't you going to say anything?

DUNCAN: I got twenty years on ya, gal...

MARIANNE: Seventeen, but who's counting.

DUNCAN: Too old fer the draft...

MARIANNE: That's definitely in your favor.

DUNCAN: Ain't rich, an' ain't likely t'be in business much longer.

MARIANNE: Ma will be disappointed, but she'll come around.

DUNCAN: Course, there's that hunnerd an' sixty acres m'tenant's farmin'...

MARIANNE: Your family homestead?

DUNCAN: Yep.

MARIANNE: I thought you sold it when you moved to town.

DUNCAN: Nope. Didn' wanna live out there by m'self, but didn' wanna sell it, neither. Think ya might cotton t'bein' a farmer's wife?

MARIANNE: I could get used to it. But aren't you rushing things a bit?

DUNCAN: Sump'in fer ya t'think about.

MARIANNE: Yes. . .

DUNCAN: Ain't like you gotta make up yer mind this minute.

MARIANNE: No. . .

DUNCAN: Well?

MARIANNE: Well, what?

DUNCAN: Made up yer mind yet?

MARIANNE: (crosses to him and puts her arms around his neck) I love you, Sam Duncan.

DUNCAN: Luv ya, too, Marianne. Purty name fer a purty girl.

(blackout)