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Weldings (Original writing)

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1993

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WELDINGS

by

Mark Steven Jensen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

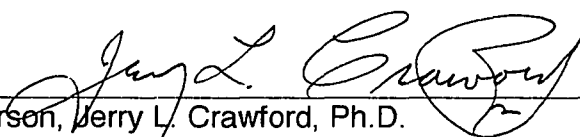
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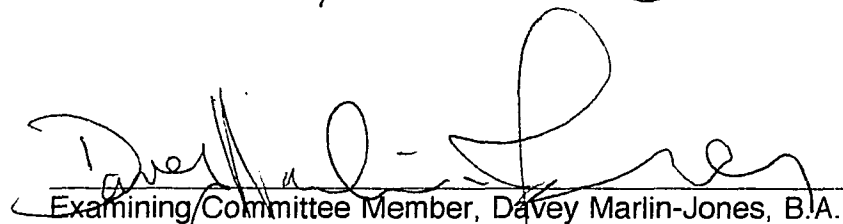
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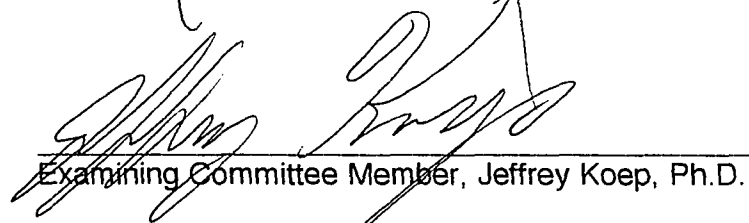
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
March 1993

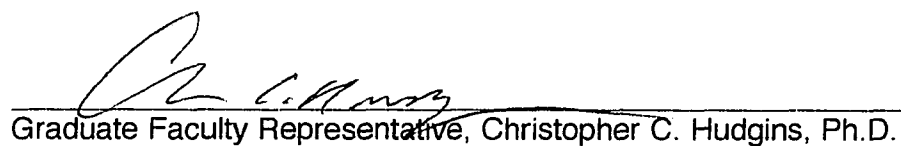
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The Thesis of Mark Steven Jensen for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting is approved.


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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
March 1993

ABSTRACT

WELDINGS is a full length play in two acts, taking place in rural Minnesota. The story centers around blacksmith Ernest Johnson and his relationships with dead wife Gretchen and living middle aged daughter Jenna. Ernest must decide whether or not he should break from his past farm life with Gretchen and move into a town apartment. Other characters enter the shop with their own problems. The clashes observed and experienced through these other characters lead Ernest, Gretchen, and Jenna to solve their conflict. Ernest takes the apartment, and Gretchen finally agrees he should make the move. Instinctively Ernest feels he is making a hard but very healthy choice. The time of year is early summer, just after three days of good ground drying weather. Real time is used during the play. The duration of the action runs from nine twenty-five to eleven forty-five one Saturday morning.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

[in order of appearance]

GRETCHEN JOHNSON-- A housewife and gardener, late sixties, now dead. The former wife of ERNEST JOHNSON.

ERNEST JOHNSON-- A blacksmith and part-time farmer, mid seventies. Former husband of GRETCHEN JOHNSON.

JENNA JOHNSON-- A paralegal at a small law firm in Fergus Falls, late thirties, early forties, the daughter of ERNEST and GRETCHEN JOHNSON.

RANDY STEVENSON-- A farmer who owns a farm close to Arton. Late thirties, early forties, the father of KIM STEVENSON.

MABEL ZIMMERMAN-- A retired farm wife, still living on the farm, late sixties, wife of CLARENCE ZIMMERMAN.

CLARENCE ZIMMERMAN-- A retired farmer, still living on the farm, late sixties early seventies, husband of MABEL ZIMMERMAN.

TOM ZIMMERMAN-- MABEL and CLARENCE's grandson from Maple Grove, ten to twelve years old.

ETHEL WHITE-- A spinster who lives in the new apartments by the football field, late sixties, early seventies.

KIM STEVENSON-- The son of RANDY STEVENSON, working on the Stevenson farm, sixteen to seventeen years old.

OWEN HAGERSTROM-- A hired hand on the Stevenson farm, former auto mechanic, late twenties to early thirties.

TIME and PLACE

Arton, Minnesota, population five hundred and twenty-three. The town is located about thirty-five miles south of Fergus Falls on highway fifty-five. The duration of the play runs from nine twenty five to eleven forty-five a.m. on a Saturday in early summer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who used their fine talents to help fashion this play: Dr. Jerry L. Crawford and Davey Marlin-Jones, whose encouragement, direction, and criticism made this three page experiment into a full evening. Dr. Jeffrey Koep, his common sense and artistic direction guided this play through its first full length production. Joe Aldridge, whose excellent light and set design visualized the play. Dr. Bob Dryden and the theatre department of Brainerd Community College, where the full length script was first staged. The playwriting colony of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who evaluated the initial readings. Very special thanks to Red Shuttleworth, who pushed me and my writing on track. And finally thanks to my wife Jill, who continues to support my work in so many numerous ways.

ACT ONE

[JOHNSON METAL SHOP. The shop is an old wooden shed which ERNEST has full of equipment. He has among other things, a drill press, a feed arc welder, a large grinder, and a gas welder. One corner of the shop has spare parts scavenged from old farm implements. He has a bolt bin from which hangs out bags and small boxes of bolts, washers, and nuts. A blackened workbench is dented, chipped, and scorched from years of use. An impressive tool collection hangs over the workbench. A rotary dial phone hangs from the wall. Four lawn chairs are up front for patrons to sit on. The shed doors are open, ready for customers. The customers will enter from various sides of the stage, depending upon which side of the shop they drive up. Outside the shed doors is a worn out four bottom plow.]

[GRETCHEN stands, very still. She is dressed in coveralls, a worn out feed store cap, and a pair of worn gloves. She is holding a ice cream pail full of old potatoes with sprouting eyes on them.]

[A pick-up slows down and stops. ERNEST enters, carrying a dented stainless steel thermos. He has a big bandage over one arm. He notices GRETCHEN, then goes and deposits the thermos on a work bench.]

ERNEST

I told Jenna I'd go today.

GRETCHEN

Jenna's taking you there? To sign it?

[ERNEST nods.]

GRETCHEN(CONT.)

Then tell her you're too busy. Look at all the work you gotta do. Avoid her, Ernest. Moving into those government apartments means you're just getting closer to the end. And it ain't your time, just like it wasn't right for me to go on from here either. I mean, you won't seriously move into those apartments? Will you?

ERNEST

I'd move off the farm in the fall, after this growing season is done.

GRETCHEN

Leave permanently?

ERNEST

You're gone, gone and dead. You can't rise out of that cemetery. Much as I want you to.

GRETCHEN

So that's it? You'll desert our place?

ERNEST

I'll move back out there again next spring. I'll just live out the winter in town.

GRETCHEN

Once you move to town you won't ever go back out to the place. Do you think you could stand it in there? Those four cramped walls, one door in and out. They are all so antiseptic.

ERNEST

Don't make this difficult.

GRETCHEN

They are antiseptic, Ernest! Think about it for your own good. You're gonna die in that place. Work like you have all these years and then spend your final days in low income housing? What is that?

[Pause.]

ERNEST

It would get stuffy.

GRETCHEN

Stuffy? You don't know what that is. My coffin is stuffy. No, I see what's happening. People are just down sizing your needs Ernie, so when it comes time to put you in a cramped casket you won't protest much.

ERNEST

I'll tell Jenna to forget it.

GRETCHEN

That ain't nothing to live in.

ERNEST

I just said I won't go. Besides, I ain't got the time this morning. They'll be a lot of jobs comin' in. So don't bother me as much.

GRETCHEN

You're out here mighty early for a Saturday.

ERNEST

So are you, Gretchen.

[ERNEST walks around the room,
trying to remember what was going
to do.]

GRETCHEN

What's with you today? Huh? Lit outta the house awful fast. You trying to keep away from me?

[Pause.]

ERNEST

Why do you say things like that? Of course not.

GRETCHEN

I know it's gotten strange. But we can cope, y'know. Taking a little getting used to but. A person dead gets scattered in three places. You'll know what I mean someday by that. My body's laying out there in that graveyard. My soul is up where it's supposed to be. But a big, big part of me is still happy to be with you. You need that part of me.

ERNEST

Wish I could... touch you.

GRETCHEN

In some ways you can.

ERNEST

Most ways, I can't. Not the ways I would want to. Oh, quit this daydreaming.

ERNEST(CONT.)

I gotta get to work.

[ERNEST picks up some scattered tools.]

GRETCHEN

Our house still looks nice.

ERNEST

You approve?

GRETCHEN

Can't knock your house cleaning too bad. Bathroom is maybe getting a little grungy. But the farm still looks good.

ERNEST

I couldn't keep up your garden.

GRETCHEN

Wouldn't expect you to. Just keep up our house. Then you'll do fine. You'll do very fine.

ERNEST

If someone saw me staring into space like this, they'd really think I'd gone louie. Talking to you I... I can't even remember what I was supposed to do this morning. I came out here early, now why was that?

GRETCHEN

Nice of you, loving me so much after I died. Means I still got business in town.

ERNEST

That's right. Gotta finish sharpening those plow blades and then mount them on Stevenson's plow. Ran outta time to finish them last night. I told him ten o'clock. What time is it? Twenty five after nine. He'll be planning to plow today, nice as it is.

GRETCHEN

Keeps us alive, being on our place.

ERNEST

Quiet! You're makin' me confused!

GRETCHEN

I can't be doing that, goodness me! I'll be a little quieter. But I won't leave. You don't got to worry about that. I'll be around these dirty walls, whispering.

ERNEST

Want some music? I'm gonna get some on. Can't work without good music.

GRETCHEN

Do you still, Ernest? Still, y'know, like you used to. That hasn't changed has it?

ERNEST

Gretchen. You're what's missing.

[ERNEST turns on the radio. Polka music is heard, turned down low.]

GRETCHEN

I'll set up here then.

ERNEST

Do what ya want.

GRETCHEN

I better get my potatoes ready for gardening. Should I plant two rows or three?

ERNEST

More potatoes around, the better.

[ERNEST turns up the polka music. It is quite loud, as ERNEST likes to hear it over his tools while he's working.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

[Humming.]

Ah, ho dee dee da dee....

[He grabs a vise grip, goes to a pile of four plow blades, picks a blade up, and turns on his grinder. Sparks fly as he sharpens the blade.]

GRETCHEN

Well. I better get busy!

[GRETCHEN takes out a knife and begins selecting the potatoes she will plant. She cuts the potatoes in halves and quarters, being careful to leave an eye on each section.]

[Over the noise, a car is heard pulling up. JENNA enters, dressed in the latest spring fashion she purchased at Herbeger's. She carries a purse.]

JENNA

Dad! Dad!

[ERNEST doesn't see her. JENNA walks in front of him.]

JENNA

Hey, Dad!

ERNEST

Huh! Jenna?

[ERNEST reaches for another plow blade.]

JENNA

C'MON, YOU SAID YOU'D GO TODAY!

ERNEST

Hm?

JENNA

We talked on the phone. YOU SAID YOU'D MAKE TIME!

[ERNEST shuts off the grinder.]

GRETCHEN

She's gotten real professional looking.

ERNEST

Hm?

JENNA

YOU SAID YOU'D--

[She notices the polka music.]

Here.

[JENNA shuts off the radio.]

GRETCHEN

Getting almost too professional.

ERNEST

Don't get your clothes dirty. Brush anything you're liable to get grease on

ERNEST(CONT.)

those sleeves.

JENNA

Hello to you too.

ERNEST

Yeah. Been awhile since you've been to the shop.

JENNA

Hasn't been that long, has it? Well, the firm's been keeping me busy researching cases. Y'know. Lawyer's employing each other. Heard any good lawyer jokes lately?

[Pause.]

You'd make time if I came on Saturday. So, I'm here. Let's go.

ERNEST

Never said that.

JENNA

Yes, you did.

ERNEST

I did?

JENNA

Yes.

GRETCHEN

Been bugging him all morning.

JENNA

Talked to you last Wednesday on the phone. You do remember that don't you?

ERNEST

Well... can't now. Got these blades to finish for the Stevenson's. He'll be wanting to plow today, nice as it is, so... I gotta get these sharp.

JENNA

The rental office closes at noon. It'll take a little time. You sign the rental agreement, put down a deposit, and you're set to move in. Just think Dad, next winter no more snow blowing. Someone else does it for you.

ERNEST

Don't you have work?

JENNA

It's Saturday.

ERNEST

Too many Saturdays.

[He picks up a blade he sharpened.]

Ouch, this is hot.

[ERNEST sticks the blade in a five gallon bucket of water.]

JENNA

You know it's a real great condominium. You saw it. And close by the shop. Next to the school. You won't miss a single football game, you can just walk out across the grass. Did you hear me? Dad?

GRETCHEN

Keep ignoring her and she'll think you've gone deaf.

JENNA

Did you hear me?

ERNEST

I know now, I heard ya! Things got busy here. Weather turned warm this week. I got farmers coming in from all over.

[ERNEST walks over to the grinder.]

JENNA

Where are these farmers?

ERNEST

Expect to be busy now. Should be nice till Tuesday.

JENNA

I'm asking for an hour. One hour, that's it. We'll look over the place and pay the deposit. Dad, don't start that up now! Dad! YOU CAN'T SPEND AN HOUR WITH ME? NOT EVEN ONE?

ERNEST

Don't talk so loud.

JENNA

Well!

ERNEST

All that shouting's nonsense. When you called last week there hadn't been three days of warm weather. What's gonna happen to my business if they come by and I'm closed?

JENNA

Leave a note.

ERNEST

By the time I'm done gallivanting they'll be halfway to that new outfit in Fergus Falls.

JENNA

We've talked about this.

ERNEST

Looks like we'll just talk some more.

JENNA

Oh fine. If that's the way it is. Get all your work done. I'll call during the week.

GRETCHEN

This can't go on. You got to stop it.

ERNEST

She's leaving.

GRETCHEN

And that's no good. We can't treat our daughter that rough.

ERNEST

Well....

[To JENNA.]

Hold on, don't leave like that. Goodness sakes! You want coffee?

JENNA

No thanks.

ERNEST

Can't make it as good as your mother. I've been trying though. And I don't like that coffee maker you gave me for Christmas. That's too computerized. Just isn't the same when it ain't from a pot on the stove. Something about that. I've been doing some experimenting.

[ERNEST holds up his thermos.]

JENNA

I'm fine, you don't have to.

ERNEST

C'mon. Can't make your trip a complete waste of time.

[ERNEST pours out a cup of coffee.]

JENNA

Dad, I said I didn't.

ERNEST

I hear ya, I hear ya. Try it, anyway.

JENNA

[JENNA looks down at her cup.]

We could come back, pick up donuts.

ERNEST

Don't need to drive outta here mad.

[JENNA drinks.]

JENNA

It's... good. Real good.

ERNEST

If I can make good coffee, must mean the rest of me is doing okay.

JENNA

This is an apartment. Not the home.

ERNEST

It's three miles closer to the home then I ever care to be. Enjoy the coffee. Good pot, huh?

JENNA

Perfect.

ERNEST

Was hoping you'd be impressed. Take some more when you're done with that.

JENNA

You bet.

[ERNEST goes back to the plow blades. JENNA dumps the coffee in a nearby wastebasket. A pick-up drives up.]

GRETCHEN

How far are you on that plow? Randy Stevenson's here.

ERNEST

Randy's already coming in? My gosh! Haven't even finished sharpening the blades!

JENNA

Randy?

GRETCHEN

You told him ten, didn't you?

ERNEST

I'm pretty sure I said ten.

[Sound of a pick-up starter grinding.]

RANDY

[Off stage.]

DAMMIT!

[The pick-up door squeaks open and then slams. Enter RANDY STEVENSON, a middle-aged farmer. He carries four more plow blades, which he drops on a work table.]

ERNEST

Catching the rooster, Mr. Stevenson?

RANDY

Ha! No, barely even moving, and it's almost mid morning. Had a rough night, slept through my alarm. Now the goddamn pick-up's on the fritz.

[He goes towards the bathroom, unzipping his fly.]

Don't think that wore out piece of shit's gonna ever work decent! My gosh, Jenna!

[RANDY zips up his fly.]

JENNA

Randy, nice to see you again.

RANDY

Been a while since I've seen you around here.

[RANDY shakes JENNA's hand.]

JENNA

Oh, not really.

RANDY

When was it? I think, yeah, the centennial dance?

JENNA

Was it then?

Wasn't it? RANDY

JENNA
Well, yes I suppose it was. How's Sue these days?

RANDY
She's fine, fine.

JENNA
Good.

RANDY
Yup.

[Pause.]

ERNEST
Brought in some more blades I see.

RANDY
What? Oh yeah, found some spares in my parts box. Would it be too much trouble to dust the rust off of these?

JENNA
Dad, I--

ERNEST
No, no, don't think it'll be much of a problem at all.

RANDY
Great. You got my plow done?

GRETCHEN
You said ten. It ain't ten. Tell him that.

ERNEST
Almost.

GRETCHEN
Ernest! Don't back down from him.

RANDY
Oh. You're not done yet.

ERNEST
It's my first job this morning. Thought I'd get 'em attached last night. But, I got more work in yesterday than I figured. Weather turned warm so fast.

RANDY

Well, I gotta get Kim in here and change that pick-up solenoid. So I can give ya another hour or so.

[JENNA almost says something, but doesn't.]

GRETCHEN

Ya weren't expecting him till ten!

ERNEST

If I can't get them done by then I better retire.

RANDY

You won't do that.

ERNEST

I've been thinking about it.

RANDY

Can I use your phone? I gotta get Kim out with that part.

ERNEST

I ain't using it.

RANDY

Good seeing you again, Jenna. Excuse me, but before I use the phone I gotta use the, the um... the facilities. But then I'll use the phone.

JENNA

You asking my permission or what?

RANDY

Right.

[RANDY exits into the bathroom.]

JENNA

He still gets embarrassed about saying "toilet" in front of me.

[ERNEST hits his hand.]

GRETCHEN

Don't get so flustered! Take it easy Ernie or you'll get hurt.

ERNEST

You're starting to nag. Nag at me and I won't listen.

GRETCHEN

That was a mean thing to say.

ERNEST

Truth hurts.

GRETCHEN

You're joking again.

ERNEST

Yeah. I am. It's because I got work. Should keep her off my back.

[To JENNA.]

Ya want more coffee?

JENNA

No, I'm still working on it.

GRETCHEN

See Ernie. She's impressed.

[A car door slams.]

MABEL

[Off stage.]

YOU BOYS BE CAREFUL! WATCH YOUR BACK CLARENCE!

CLARENCE

[From offstage.]

YES, YES!

[MABEL enters from the street, dressed in grimy jeans and a worn out "World's Greatest Grandma" T-shirt. MABEL is also holding a broken rake, an ice cream pail full of old bolts, and rolled up pair of work pants.]

GRETCHEN

Oh boy, here she is.

MABEL

HURT YOUR BACK YOU'LL BE IN A FINE MESS! CLARENCE! WAIT NOW TILL TOM CAN HELP YOU!

CLARENCE

[From offstage.]

I AM! Okay, lift Tom!

[Sound of a heavy object dropping to the ground.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

[From offstage.]

YOU DROPPED IT!

TOM

[From offstage.]

I didn't have a good grip on it!

CLARENCE(CONT.)

[From offstage.]

Well, nothing to do about it! Hold that handle together, I'll push it.

MABEL

You be careful now! Push too hard he'll pinch his fingers!

CLARENCE

That's it.

[Enter CLARENCE and TOM pushing a worn out lawn mower. TOM is wearing a pair of swimming trunks and a cartoon T-shirt. TOM holds a broken bracket on the lawn mower handle.]

MABEL

You go slow. Go slow!

CLARENCE

Yes, yes. I'm pushing slow.

MABEL

Metal's sharp there, Tom.

TOM

I'm okay.

ERNEST

Well, then, the Zimmermans are out busting machinery already?

MABEL

Naw, spring cleaning. Just some things we've been putting off-- Tom, look out!

TOM

Grandpa stop.

Huh? CLARENCE

We gotta lift it on the table. TOM

Oh, okay, okay. CLARENCE

[CLARENCE bends down to lift it up.]

You don't do that now with your back! MABEL

How we getting it up there then? CLARENCE

Here, here, I'll help you. ERNEST

Dad. JENNA

[ERNEST gets down next to TOM.]

Look at how he's... he's lifting bad! MABEL

Tom, lift it right. CLARENCE

How am I supposed to lift it? TOM

With your legs. CLARENCE

I'm doing that! TOM

Pay attention now. We'll lift it on three. Ready. One, two, three! ERNEST

[ERNEST and TOM lift the lawn mower onto the table. ERNEST clears some junk off the table. The toilet flushes. Enter RANDY. He dials the phone.]

RANDY

Kim? Would you answer the phone!

ERNEST

So... you're out helping Grandma and Grandpa?

TOM

Yup.

MABEL

This is Tom, our youngest grandson from the Cities. This is Ernie, Tom.

TOM

Maple Grove.

MABEL

What?

TOM

I'm from Maple Grove.

MABEL

Tom's folks are away for the weekend, so he's spending it with us. Aren't you?

CLARENCE

Mowing lawn with Grandpa and Grandma!

TOM

[TOM walks away.]

Yeah.

MABEL

He wants to go four wheeling on Clarence's new toy.

CLARENCE

He sure likes my four wheeler.

ERNEST

I suppose.

MABEL

I don't know why we got that thing.

TOM

It's fun.

CLARENCE

It sure is. And it makes checking the pocket gopher traps a lot easier.

RANDY

Kim, what were you, still sleeping? Half the day will pass before we get into the field. You were outside? Oh. What? The belt broke on the feed mill!

MABEL

Grandpa will let you drive the four wheeler after we're done. Say, you better put on these pants before we go into the store.

TOM

My shorts are fine.

MABEL

You sure you don't want these pants on when we're shopping? Them freezers make that place pretty cold. Go change in the toilet.

TOM

I'm fine!

RANDY

Yeah, the solenoid went out. I couldn't take Mom's car. She had it.

JENNA

Dad, where do you put your coffee cups?

ERNEST

Hm? Oh, you better have some more.

JENNA

One's my limit.

MABEL

Lucky I had these spare britches in the trunk.

CLARENCE

Mabel we're taking up Ernie's time.

MABEL

What if he gets a cold?

CLARENCE

I'm sure the boy will live. Now save the production and lets get to the store.

[Enter ETHEL, walking with a cane.
She carries a purse over one arm.]

RANDY

We gotta get the plow home! Bring the spare solenoid, we'll fix the pick-up in the street. Have Owen go with ya to the shop, show ya the tools. Yeah! He usta worked at that Belgrade Auto Repair before I hired him. Right? So

RANDY(CONT.)

bring Owen with, he'll show ya what to do.

ERNEST

Handle's broke right off.

MABEL

Ernie, we'll be at the store, then we'll pick up the mower on the way back. Oh, can you stick a metal pipe in this rake for a handle? Probably havta weld it on. And here, we brought this. Cleaned out the garage and found this pail of crummy bolts for your scrap pile.

CLARENCE

Those are good bolts.

MABEL

They're scrap and that's the last we're talking about it! Thanks now, we'll see you in a bit. Alright boys, let's quit bothering Ernie. We gotta get our things and go. Way that grass is growin' it'll be a foot tall by the time we get home.

[She heads for the street.]

Ethel? When in the world did you sneak up?

[ETHEL plops down on one of the lawn chairs.]

ETHEL

Oh I'm just resting on the way to the store.

[ETHEL chuckles nervously. She does this out of habit.]

GRETCHEN

I'll bet. The last thing on her mind is resting.

ERNEST

Hey Ethel!

ETHEL

Good morning, Ernie.

GRETCHEN

Good morning, Ernie.

JENNA

Ethel, hello, good to see you again.

ETHEL

Look at the stranger. Brand new in town. And all gussied up too!

JENNA

For today. How are you, Ethel?

ETHEL

Oh can't complain, pretty good. Legs bother some. Little arthritis trouble. Pretty used to it by now though.

[Chuckles.]

How are you?

JENNA

There, I guess. Way it always is.

RANDY

Good, see you in a few minutes.

[He hangs up and gathers his thoughts.]

MABEL

You want a ride, Ethel? Clarence and I are going to the store.

ETHEL

I'm not in that big of a hurry.

MABEL

It'll save you some time.

ETHEL

Probably.

CLARENCE

Weld a slab on and that should do the trick.

ERNEST

It's awfully t'in.

CLARENCE

Yeah, I know. Damn Japanese made probably. You can fix it, can't you?

TOM

You can't fix it?

ERNEST

I'm sure I can.

MABEL

Come on Clarence! You were the one in such a hurry!

CLARENCE

Hold on Mabel. We're figuring out what to do.

RANDY

Amazing how your Dad keeps going like that.

JENNA

He over does it sometimes. Hope it isn't getting too hard for him.

RANDY

Oh, Ernie's pretty tough. It's great how he keeps on. Yeah, well, gotta tear that pick-up apart. Good to see ya.

JENNA

Yes, it is.

[Pause.]

RANDY

Yeah.

[RANDY exits.]

ERNEST

If I build it up here, maybe I can weld it. It's gonna be pretty hard though.

MABEL

It can wait Clarence. This kind've work is a little too delicate for Ernie's shop. We can order the part in Fergus on Monday.

CLARENCE

Order it?

MABEL

When we meet Tom's folks at McDonald's, we can just go down to the lawn boy dealer.

CLARENCE

We're meeting Tom's folks?

MABEL

Oh, no we're... no, it's what we said before.

TOM

What?

MABEL

Are you ready now, Clarence?

TOM

What did you say? Mom and Dad are doing what?

MABEL

Tom, you help Ethel get to the car.

[To ETHEL.]

You better buy enough groceries for the week, Ethel, being you got fast transportation.

ETHEL

All I need is some sugar. Gotta frost my brownies for tomorrow's bake sale.

MABEL

Covenant Church's having a bake sale?

ETHEL

Oh yes. They're expecting three pans this year from everybody. Usually they only ask for two, but there aren't enough ladies who got the time. So this year, we make three.

MABEL

Didn't even hear about it.

[ETHEL starts to get up, but it is difficult.]

MABEL(CONT.)

Clarence!

CLARENCE

What now?

MABEL

We better go!

[To ETHEL.]

Need some help there?

ETHEL

No, no. Just takes a little revving up....

[ETHEL finally gives herself a big enough push to get up.]

There.

[Chuckles.]

TOM

Can we get to the store?

CLARENCE

Yes, yes. Here's the keys. Start up the car would ya?

[CLARENCE hands TOM the car keys.]

TOM

Alright!

[TOM runs off.]

CLARENCE

Just turn the key and touch the gas! Touch the gas!

MABEL

You shouldn't let him start it.

CLARENCE

Ah! What can he do to the car?

[TOM revs the car too hard.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

TOM! THAT'S TOO MUCH!

[TOM lays on the gas some more.]

MABEL

HE'LL BLOW IT UP!

CLARENCE

I SAID TOUCH THE GAS!

[MABEL and CLARENCE exit.
ETHEL follows behind and exits.]

[Silence.]

GRETCHEN

Sure a lot to do around here this morning. Same as always. Place just keeps on. Even Mabel's as feisty as ever. And I was afraid that I was the only person that got along with her. But you're all managing. That's good to see.

ERNEST

[To JENNA.]

Told you I'd be busy. Thaw happens, the plants start growin'. People need my help on all their broken machines to get crops in, cut the weeds down. I'm sure glad you stayed though, you notice now that I wasn't trying to avoid ya.

JENNA

I swear I'll find you here dead.

ERNEST

Maybe so. Excuse me.

JENNA

They're all expecting you to finish everything in a half an hour. What are you going to say when they're all back here again? Dad, you've got to get more realistic with what you can do.

ERNEST

I can do it fine. Just need to put a sleeve in this mower. Take me five minutes.

JENNA

So we'll do the same old thing. You get too busy and I get too impatient.

ERNEST

We should've done it earlier.

JENNA

You didn't decide until now! I've put this off for too long. Things have got to get easier for you. And I know you'll just say back to me, things are nice the way they are. But you work and work. It's time you give up some things. Can't you make life at least a little simpler?

[ERNEST tries to take the handle off the mower. He bangs his bad hand.]

JENNA(CONT.)

Dad, here, why do you need that handle off?

ERNEST

CAN'T WELD THAT! The gas will explode inside! It's got a tank there. One spark and the whole shop will blow.

[Silence.]

JENNA

You gonna tell me how you got that bandage? You weren't wearing that two weeks ago.

[ERNEST gets the handle off.]

GRETCHEN

She's making herself a pest. Get her outta here.

ERNEST

It's nothing.

JENNA

It never is. Your problem is Dad, you've worked so hard all the time you don't know any better. Some people enjoy a little less hassle. Dad, if we don't go today some else will get the apartment. No, I'm staying here this morning and I'll help you finish this stuff, then we'll go look at that condo. There should be time.

GRETCHEN

We'll never get her off this subject will we? Get her outta here, she can go back to Fergus.

ERNEST

[To GRETCHEN.]

It would be nice to have her around. For both of us.

GRETCHEN

But--

ERNEST

Cut your potatoes.

[To JENNA.]

If you think you can. I could use a little assistance. But I don't know how much help you'll be.

[ERNEST laughs to himself.]

JENNA

Hey, I used to watch you, y'know. I did this. You paid me an allowance, and I'd straighten up in here.

ERNEST

You did?

JENNA

Yes.

ERNEST

Seems like a long time ago.

JENNA

It hasn't been that long. This is easy. I just flip it on and grind on them until they get sharp. That right?

ERNEST

You wanna help why don't you put stuff like this away. I've been meaning to but I get doing other things.

[ERNEST hands JENNA the pail of CLARENCE's bolts.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

Whole pail of that's worth 'bout forty cents in bulk scrap. Forty cents. Isn't that something?

JENNA

I will not clean your shop. We'll finish these jobs and then we'll go. Your extra coverall's in the bathroom, isn't it?

ERNEST

If you wanna stay, you'll just havta wait.

JENNA

I'll sharpen these plow blades. You fix Clarence's mower. We should be done in a half hour. Dad, this is not a big problem. I can do this.

[JENNA exits into the bathroom.]

ERNEST

She's hell bent I go. Stubborn as all get out. Must be that Swede in her.

[ERNEST fishes in some spare junk to find a sleeve for the mower.]

GRETCHEN

The way you talk. It has nothing to do with her being half Swedish. If you don't like Swedes you shouldn't have married one.

ERNEST

I just said she was stubborn.

GRETCHEN

Which she gets from you.

ERNEST

I don't want to start this discussion. It leads nowhere.

GRETCHEN

Then Ernest, don't open this discussion. Believe me, Grandpa Bjorn had plenty to say about me marrying a Norwegian. "Tainting the blood," he said. I sometimes think he was right.

ERNEST

Well, it's too late now, ain't it? Not even Grandpa Bjorn could talk sense into you.

[Pause.]

GRETCHEN

I've been gone a year, but you need me to intervene between you two. Still. How many times I've done that. Like when you wouldn't let her ride bike down to the lake.

ERNEST

Don't bring up this.

GRETCHEN

They all wanted her to go swimming but you wouldn't have it. Had to get her chores finished. And there was me, so pleased she was being asked. I offered to do the chores for her, but oh no, she had to finish her work first. Tried cooling both your tempers. Now I can't cool either of you. It's hard to believe I could get even more cut off from you both. But, look. I am.

ERNEST

Ya took Jenna's side in that one.

GRETCHEN

Sure did. I was right too.

ERNEST

Child had to learn to finish what she started. Work first than play.

GRETCHEN

So it equals out. This time I'm taking your side. See? I am on your side, ain't I?

ERNEST

Oh yes. That's for sure, that's for real sure.

[JENNA enters wearing a coverall.
She grabs a plow blade and goes
for the grinder.]

ERNEST

You gotta wear a visor.

JENNA

A what? This? I can wear this.

ERNEST

Mess up your hair.

JENNA

That's quite enough, I think. Don't you?

ERNEST

Okay, I ain't one to turn down free help, that's for sure.

JENNA
[Quietly.]

That's right, you aren't.

GRETCHEN
Slow her down, or you'll havta go.

ERNEST
That grinder wheel's getting dull there, so you're gonna havta change it.
Can't sharpen the blades with that.

JENNA
You were using it.

ERNEST
Well, it's dull.

JENNA
It was fine for you.

ERNEST
Take you forever.

JENNA
Why didn't you change it before?

ERNEST
I um, I was going to do it this morning. I was about to change it when you drove up. One of those things I forgot to do... yesterday. I did I ah.... You'll need a three-quarters straight wrench and I got the new grinder wheel on top of that pile.

JENNA
Can't I just use this?

ERNEST
Go quicker with a new wheel.

JENNA
I suppose.

ERNEST
I'll change it if you don't want to.

JENNA
No, no.

[JENNA gets a wrench.]

GRETCHEN

[To ERNEST.]

You didn't havta turn it into a fight!

ERNEST

What? I'm stalling so I won't havta go. You got anything more to say about it?

GRETCHEN

It's a good thing I'm home as much as I am, otherwise you two would be really getting into it.

ERNEST

I'm wasting time for you!

[ERNEST hits his bad hand.]

Ouch!

JENNA

You alright?

ERNEST

Yeah, it's nothing.

JENNA

You could tell me how you did that.

[JENNA starts replacing the grinder wheel.]

And I know you had a lot of stitches.

ERNEST

Just cut my arm, some metal fell off my rack. Little bump, that's all.

JENNA

Tell me another one. "That's all" was nineteen stitches.

[Pause.]

ERNEST

What do you know about it?

JENNA

I know how many it was.

ERNEST

It was eleven.

JENNA

No it was nineteen.

How do you know that? ERNEST

The nurse at the clinic called me. JENNA

What for? ERNEST

I have her... I have her call me. If something happens. JENNA

You have her call you? ERNEST

Yes I do. JENNA

Why? Why? ERNEST

JENNA
Because if something bad happened, I'd know about it right away. It's a common practice Dad, notifying next of kin. You'd never would've told me about it. This way I find out. I haven't been doing it that long. It's something I started after Mom's accident.

I'm fine. ERNEST

Well I get worried. JENNA

I'm fine! ERNEST

I still get worried. JENNA

[Pause.]

Change that if you're gonna. ERNEST

You asked. JENNA

[JENNA gets the grinder wheel loose.]

GRETCHEN

It gets rough around here, all that yelling.

ERNEST

When she gets outta line, I've gotta lay it clear.

GRETCHEN

A nine year old should be able to ride a little bike!

ERNEST

Did I say she couldn't bike ride? I didn't say that, did I? No. I said when she finishes what she starts. I will drive her all around the country myself if I have to. So she'll catch up with those friends. I'm not against her enjoying herself, she just needs to learn to finish jobs. That's all.

GRETCHEN

Okay. If that's how you feel about it.

ERNEST

Well it's how I feel about it!

GRETCHEN

That's all fine.

[Pause.]

ERNEST

Do you think I should let her?

JENNA

Let her what?

ERNEST

Hm?

JENNA

You said "should I let her", or something like that.

ERNEST

Oh, I ah y'know, I got a Whoopee John tune in my head.

[Tries to sing.]

Should I let her dance with me? Or should we just go and ski? Well it's something like that.

JENNA

You want your music on? You can you know.

ERNEST

No. You don't like it.

JENNA

I can tolerate it for a little while.

ERNEST

Can you? Then it's coming on.

[He turns on the radio. Polka music.]

I'm not sure which station's playing Elvis these days. You still listen to that Elvis music?

JENNA

What about it?

ERNEST

We could change the station.

JENNA

Your music's fine.

[ERNEST starts to turn up the sound.]

JENNA(CONT.)

For now.

[ERNEST leaves the sound alone. They work. ERNEST's metal sleeve for the lawn mower handle fits. He starts to gather his welding equipment. He inhales some phlegm, and clears his throat to spit it out. JENNA gets the old wheel off. He spits into a waste bucket. She notices.]

JENNA

Do you have to hack that crap when I'm here?

ERNEST

Huh?

JENNA

Men. Hopeless. Where do I put this?

ERNEST

You got it off?

JENNA

It came pretty easy.

ERNEST

You're handy with that wrench.

JENNA

It's something you taught me I've put to good use. I've even done a few flat tires since then. Usually I end up putting on the spare. Where does it go?

ERNEST

Throw it. It's junk.

[JENNA tosses it in the same barrel
ERNEST spit it.]

JENNA

I trust that's what it's for?

ERNEST

I'm gonna be welding. So don't look behind the screen, or you'll get eye flash. Look at it, you'll burn out your eyes. Some people even gone blind from it.

JENNA

I know Dad.

ERNEST

Just reminding ya. Too bad you fix your own flats.

JENNA

Yeah, well. I gotta do my own thing.

ERNEST

Suppose so. Well, shield your eyes.

[ERNEST puts on his welding
helmet and goes behind his welding
screen. JENNA starts to put on the
new grinder wheel. RANDY enters,
much greasier than before.]

RANDY

Ernie, you about done with my blades?

[JENNA's wrench slips off the bolt
she is trying to tighten.]

JENNA

Ow! What Randy?

RANDY

Oh, you're here. Ah. You got my plow blades? I could, ah, mount them on the plow while I'm waitin'. I got that pick-up pretty well ripped apart. I guess. So I just thought I could save us all some time. You want some help there?

JENNA

I'm sorry I'm slow. Little rusty at this. As soon as this wheel's on I'll finish sharpening them.

RANDY

I could help with that.

[ERNEST starts welding. Sounds of welding and flickering lights come from behind the screen.]

JENNA

Sure.

RANDY

Here, you hold that end, I'll tighten it.

[RANDY picks up the wrench.
JENNA holds the fly wheel. RANDY starts to twist on the bolt.]

JENNA

No, no, you hold this.

RANDY

You sure.

JENNA

I'll tighten it.

RANDY

You sure?

JENNA

I'll tighten it! I'd rather tighten it.

RANDY

Okay. We'll do what you want.

[Notices the radio.]

Can I shut that off? I mean it sure ain't like Elvis, is it?

JENNA

Nope.

RANDY

Don't know how old people listen to that stuff.

[RANDY shuts off the radio. RANDY and JENNA switch places. JENNA starts tightening the bolt.]

JENNA

It won't take me long.

RANDY

Don't get excited. I just gotta keep busy till Kim comes with that solenoid. When it gets warm the heat makes me a little fidgety.

[Pause.]

How is life treating you in Fergus Falls, then? That's getting to be a regular metro town.

JENNA

It goes.

RANDY

More building going on there every day. I heard they're putting in a new Burger King on the Interstate.

JENNA

Did you?

RANDY

That's what I heard.

JENNA

Word gets around. Yes, it's going on the second exit.

RANDY

Think they'd build too many of those.

JENNA

You'd think so.

[Pause.]

RANDY

You still a secretary at that law office?

JENNA

Sure am.

[Pause.]

I see you're still on your Dad's farm.

RANDY

Completely took it over last year.

JENNA

Pretty farm. Always liked your place.

RANDY

Yeah, remember that you did. I mean that you and I... and it's so convenient. That short driveway is nice. Isn't very far to drive down. In fact, it's very short. It's one of the shortest driveways I've seen. Not many ruts on it either. Hop in the car and boom, you're right on the highway.

JENNA

I sure hated our long driveway. It was too far in the winter chasing after the bus.

RANDY

Well now, that indrive made for a nice healthy jog.

JENNA

What?

RANDY

How far was it anyway?

JENNA

You remember my jogging?

RANDY

Sure.

JENNA

I see.

RANDY

How long was it again. We clocked the length that time on the odometer, but I can't think of how far it was.

[Pause.]

JENNA

It's a half mile with all the curves. I used to get down there and back in about.... How is Sue, anyway?

RANDY

She's fine.

JENNA

Uh-huh. That's good.

RANDY

Sue's doing great. Works with that accountant in Alex. She does pretty well there.

JENNA

Good.

RANDY

Yeah. It's a good job.

JENNA

That's good.

RANDY

Oh yeah. Helps out a lot, her working. She likes it too. Likes it alot. So we can't complain. Not a bit, not one bit.

JENNA

Glad it's going alright for you.

RANDY

Nope. Can't complain.

JENNA

Dad? Is this on?

ERNEST

What?

JENNA

Is this tight enough?

[ERNEST enters from the screen.]

ERNEST

Well, let's see here. Hey Randy.

[ERNEST spins around the grinding wheel.]

Seems okay.

JENNA

Randy's waiting for his parts.

RANDY

Just until Kim comes. I'll mount them while I'm waitin'.

ERNEST

You will? No, you let me do that. That's what I'm here for.

RANDY

It's really no problem.

ERNEST

Well. Here's a couple I got finished. You sure? Jenna, you better sharpen the rest of those. What's taking you so long?

JENNA

You said I should change this wheel. I would've started them if you hadn't told me to do this.

ERNEST

Should've done this instead.

RANDY

Can I grab some tools?

ERNEST

Sure. I'll be out there in a minute.

GRETCHEN

Get after her anymore and I'll.... Just don't get after her.

ERNEST

You had me stall with that grinder. And that was a waste of a good wheel.

GRETCHEN

Two more hours and the office closes. Easy. You can do that.

ERNEST

When stalling starts to involve other people, I don't know. I won't do that again. Ask me to and I won't. People rely on me too much.

GRETCHEN

I won't ask. Sorry. Just looking out for the both of us.

ERNEST

People expect a lot more from me. Shouldn't have let Jenna work on the blades.

[A car stops. Enter KIM, followed by OWEN. KIM is seventeen, dressed in work clothes. A pair of gloves are tucked into his back pockets. OWEN is a strong looking man, late twenties early thirties, already tanned from being in the spring sun. He wears a plaid long sleeve shirt, and patched up blue jeans. They

wear dirty baseball caps they've gotten from feed companies.]

KIM

Dad, dad! Is my dad in here?

JENNA

Your dad?

RANDY

Kim, good you're...here. Dammit! Why are you both with? Huh? What is this?

KIM

Didn't you want Owen with?

RANDY

NO!

KIM

I thought you wanted him here!

OWEN

Oh jeeze.

RANDY

When did I say that?

KIM

On the phone.

[JENNA, tries to ignore the argument, remounting the guard on the grinder.]

RANDY

I didn't say that!

KIM

Damn it, Dad!

RANDY

Don't swear now!

KIM

Well!

OWEN

Kim said you wanted me out here.

KIM

YEAH! You said you wanted Owen to help!

RANDY

OH GOOD NIGHT!

KIM

With the belt broke he couldn't grind feed anyway! You gotta go to Fergus to get that belt.

RANDY

We havta plow, Kim. We sure can't plow the corn ground if we're all standing around in town!

OWEN

Kim thought you wanted me with because of the solenoid.

RANDY

I know how to change a solenoid! Hell!

KIM

We can't go out in the field if the steers ain't fed!

RANDY

Christ. Ain't even done with chores yet. How much feed do the steers have?

KIM

I don't know.

RANDY

Huh?

KIM

I don't know!

RANDY

WELL MY GOSH!

OWEN

There's about six inches left in the windbreak feeders.

RANDY

Not even half a day then. Okay. Let's not get so excited, we just gotta think a minute. Do you know the size of the belt?

KIM

On the feed mill?

RANDY

Yes!

KIM

Ah-- Owen?

OWEN

I'm trying to remember the number. We don't have it, I'm pretty sure.

RANDY

Well, alright, alright. Here's what we'll do. You two stay and fix the pick-up. Wait until the plow's done so's you can take it home with ya. I'll get the size of the belt, make a few phone calls around and see if some of these dealers got one. If I'm not back before noon, you two pick rocks.

KIM

Which field?

RANDY

Finish the corn ground, that's the only field we got plowed! Right? Then maybe you can plant tomorrow, Kim. After Church or something.

KIM

Yeah.

RANDY

We know what we're doing?

OWEN

You're grinding the feed?

RANDY

If I get it fixed. Then I'm plowing.

OWEN

Okay.

RANDY

Owen?

OWEN

Got something else?

RANDY

You and Kim finish that corn ground like we talked about this morning. Huh?

OWEN

Yeah, I know, I know.

KIM

[Under his breath.]

Damn it.

RANDY

Kim, you know what we're doing?

KIM

Yeah! I heard. I s'pose I better get the tools.

RANDY

Okay!

[KIM exits.]

RANDY(CONT.)

That kid sure is pushing the limit today. Especially after last night.

OWEN

He'll be fine.

RANDY

Yeah. Fine. Hope so. Wait'll you have kids someday Owen. They'll push your patience so far, you'll be surprised you got that much tolerance. Coming home with an escort from the cops. Good night!

OWEN

Well, what ya gonna do?

RANDY

Huh. You got me there.

OWEN

We'll see ya.

[OWEN looks outside.]

KIM, WHAT'S GOING ON? WHERE'D YA GO?

KIM

[From offstage.]

I'M GETTING THE TOOLS OUTTA THE BACK!

OWEN

Jeeze, don't bite my head off.

[To RANDY.]

Today better get a hell of a lot better.

RANDY

Yeah.

[OWEN exits.]

RANDY(CONT.)

Damn that kid.

[To JENNA.]

How long those blades gonna be?

JENNA

It's set up! It won't take long at all.

RANDY

No, it's...okay. Ah, I can't stand around in town. I, ah, I should keep moving. They'll take the plow. Put it on my bill.

JENNA

Okay. You alright?

RANDY

Sure. It's nothing. Too bad you heard all that. It's no big deal really. I'll...I'll see you.

[RANDY exits. JENNA watches him go. ERNEST enters with the welded lawnmower handle.]

JENNA

I can't believe that's Randy's son.

ERNEST

Who, Kim?

JENNA

Yeah, he's almost full grown.

ERNEST

Mm-hm. He sure grew up fast.

JENNA

Makes me feel old. Never thought I'd see us kids having kids as old as that. Happened so fast. I'm really getting old.

ERNEST

Yup, you're practically drawing social security. When's the firm gonna throw you that retirement party?

JENNA

It's not that funny. Last time I saw Kim he was a little boy chasing after Randy. Now he's mouthing off to him.

ERNEST

Kid's do that when they grow up.

GRETCHEN

I thought Randy and Jenna'd stay together.

ERNEST

[To GRETCHEN.]

Well, he got that Susan girl pregnant. I guess he's alright with it. I'm not so sure how Jenna's handling it.

GRETCHEN

Randy's getting married in three weeks. I wonder how long it'll last. Marrying because you have to. These kids are as wild as the cars they drive.

ERNEST

Sometimes it works.

[To JENNA.]

You been seeing anybody?

JENNA

Once in a while.

ERNEST

How about that lawyer in Fergus. You still seeing him?

JENNA

Not really. Oh, we go out once in a while but he's got too many problems I don't want to deal with. The last time he was over I even tried to talk about.... It's not as constant as it was.

GRETCHEN

I guess she'll be with someone eventually.

JENNA

I don't know, been on my own so long now I'm used to it.

ERNEST

If there ain't anybody out there worth your time, drop 'em.

JENNA

There hasn't been lately.

ERNEST

Yeah.

JENNA

Not lately.

GRETCHEN

She's still so alone. Who does she really have?

ERNEST

I guess. Me.

GRETCHEN

And me. She's still got me.

ERNEST

She's got both of us then. She's got both of us.

[A car drives up. TOM enters and sits down, disgusted.]

MABEL

[From offstage.]

DOGGONE IT CLARENCE! I TOLD YOU! DIDN'T I TELL YOU?

CLARENCE

[From offstage.]

YES, YES, YES!

[CLARENCE and MABEL enter. MABEL is helping CLARENCE walk.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

Now if I lay down on the floor here, I'll be fine. Just need to stretch it out.

MABEL

You can't lift all those groceries.

CLARENCE

I can lift them fine. It's the bending down part that's trouble.

[ETHEL enters from behind them. She is carrying a plastic grocery bag with a bag of sugar in it.]

ERNEST

What's wrong?

CLARENCE

Set down too much weight at once, I guess.

JENNA

We need an ambulance?

CLARENCE

No, no! Happens all the time. Just lay me flat. That's all I need.

MABEL

This again.

JENNA

On the floor?

CLARENCE

Yes, yes. Chiropractor said that would be best.

MABEL

We should put you on the grass.

CLARENCE

Help me down, Mabel. The concrete's better.

MABEL

I don't know if that's so good.

CLARENCE

Chiropractor said it was!

JENNA

At least let me sweep up the floor. Dad?

ERNEST

Hm?

JENNA

He can't lay down in all that dirt. Where's your broom?

ERNEST

Where did that darn thing go?

CLARENCE

I'll just lay down.

MABEL

Let her get the broom!

CLARENCE

Well, hurry up. Can't be crippled up like this too much!

JENNA

I can't find it!

Lay me down! CLARENCE

It's not in the bathroom. JENNA

I CAN'T STAND THIS! CLARENCE

We better lay him down. ERNEST

Alright. MABEL

Here, I got this side. ERNEST

Let me find the broom! JENNA

Be quiet now! ERNEST

Okay, okay. Just take it easy. Nice and.... Nice and slow. CLARENCE

[ERNEST and MABEL lower CLARENCE to the floor.]

Oo! Ah! CLARENCE(CONT.)

This is good. This is real good. [CLARENCE stretches flat out.]

You feeling better? MABEL

Oh yeah. CLARENCE
[Enjoying the decreased pressure on his spine.]

What else can we do? MABEL

Don't mind me, I just need to breathe. CLARENCE

MABEL

I don't think much of this.

ERNEST

His back needs a break. This will be the best for now, anyway. We can call the ambulance if ya think he needs it.

MABEL

It's so terrible.

JENNA

I found the broom!

ETHEL

He's gotta relax his muscles. That's the only way it'll stop. I don't suppose you got a hot water bottle he could use?

ERNEST

Nope. Not here.

ETHEL

Something hot usually loosens up things. You got something hot he could maybe drink?

ERNEST

Sure do. I got coffee.

MABEL

That's a good idea. Get him some coffee.

ETHEL

It's not the best but it's better than nothing. Where is it?

JENNA

I don't think you want any.

ERNEST

Why?

JENNA

Ethel ah... no. Dad, just forget about it.

ERNEST

You said it was good.

JENNA

It was good, it just wasn't great.

ETHEL

I'm sure it's good enough for now. Where is it?

ERNEST

It's... it's in this thermos over here. You said you liked it.

JENNA

Well, ah... it was weak.

ERNEST

Ethel maybe you should try some first. Jenna here doesn't think it's good enough for public consumption.

[ETHEL pours the coffee. She takes a drink, makes a face.]

ETHEL

No it's not.

ERNEST

What's wrong with it? I did it myself.

ETHEL

I can tell.

[Chuckles.]

Did you follow the directions on the can?

ERNEST

Yes, I followed the directions on the can! Well, I put in a little less then they say, 'cause they just want you to buy more.

ETHEL

I'm glad to see you're trying.

ERNEST

You're just being particular. It's fine.

JENNA

It's water, Dad. Brown water.

ETHEL

Well, not quite, but... it isn't much.

JENNA

Mix in what they say.

ETHEL

[Chuckles.]

Sorry Ernie, but it's the truth.

ERNEST

I guess I just must have just gotten used to it.

ETHEL

I'll show you how sometime. If you want me too.
[Chuckles.]

ERNEST

Hm.

GRETCHEN

Tell her no.

ETHEL

Yeah well. You could visit sometime, I'd show you then. In fact, why don't you come by more often. I mean, I know you're busy and everything. But if you'd come by once in a while maybe I wouldn't havta throw out most of my bars. I make too much and I can't eat it all. It's silly, it's very silly. But you know me, I can't get out of the habit.

[Chuckles.]

If you want that lesson.

GRETCHEN

Tramp.

ERNEST

It's that bad, huh? Didn't realize that.

GRETCHEN

You've told her no before.

ERNEST

I could use a little tutoring.

GRETCHEN

Ernest!

ERNEST

[To GRETCHEN.]

I can visit her. Goodness me!

GRETCHEN

There are many kinds of visiting. What kind do you intend to do?

ERNEST

[To ETHEL.]

I probably won't be able to very soon. Y'know. Summer coming on. The shop is starting to take more of my time. But I'll be sure to get over there.

ERNEST(CONT.)

Sure enough.

ETHEL

Okay.... That's real fine. I'm sure you got lots to do out here. I can't get in the way. That's for sure! But let me know, I'm sure I'll be home.

[Chuckles.]

Ernie doesn't have enough coffee. He drank it all up.

[ETHEL winks at ERNEST.]

ERNEST

Yeah. Thought I had more then I had.

MABEL

Oh.

[To CLARENCE.]

How is it now?

[CLARENCE tries to get up.]

CLARENCE

Nope.

MABEL

Looks like we'll be awhile, Ethel. Might as well sit down.

GRETCHEN

I thought you had given up on him long ago Ethel. After the first few years I didn't even think about you and him. But now I'm gone. Here's your big opportunity. Ethel, don't waste the time you got left. Ernie and you was over a long time ago. I don't mind you coming by, but Ethel, take it easy. He hardly recalls when you two were together. And I can tell you he don't remember because I've been living with him a long while.

ETHEL

I'm in the way here, I'm just gonna head back. Gotta get the frosting put on my brownies! They're expecting them down at the church tomorrow. So. Bye now. Come by the bake sale.

JENNA

You're gonna walk?

ETHEL

Need the exercise. I got two good legs. Well, one and a half.

GRETCHEN

She can walk!

JENNA

I could take you home.

ETHEL

You would? That would be nice, yes.

JENNA

I think I remember where your house is.

ETHEL

No you don't. 'Cause I don't live there anymore.

[Chuckles.]

I got an apartment down by the football field.

JENNA

You do?

ETHEL

Just down the street. You know those new apartments?

JENNA

Oh yes. I know them.

ETHEL

Whole lot easier to clean than that big ol' house of mine.

[ERNEST starts to fit the handle
back on the lawnmower.]

JENNA

I've been trying to get him to see those apartments.

ETHEL

Oh.

JENNA

It's been hard to do.

ETHEL

I can imagine.

[Chuckles.]

You want him in town?

JENNA

No I, I want what he wants. I worry about him being alone. I can't get out here much. Gotta believe he's lonely out there. There's no one he can talk to.

ETHEL

Except the walls.

JENNA

And I know how much fun that is.

GRETCHEN

Try it once in a while. You might be surprised.

ETHEL

I sure miss Gretchen. Have to imagine it'd be pretty difficult. Terrible accident, that was. Terrible. Tractor tipping over like that.

JENNA

Going home every night must remind him. How couldn't it?

ETHEL

The things that happen.

JENNA

I just wonder what would be better.

ETHEL

Hard to know.

JENNA

It won't take me long. I'll finish what I'm working on, then I'll take you home. Okay?

ETHEL

Fine, fine. Don't get your hopes up too high with him. He's hard to convince once he gets set on something.

[Loud so ERNEST can hear.]

His faults are easy to ignore on account of his good looks.

[To JENNA.]

He's too busy to hear me.

[Chuckles.]

JENNA

He doesn't listen to me either. Especially when I'm talking to him.

ERNEST

[ERNEST snaps the handle on the mower.]

There!

ETHEL

You just say when you wanna go, Jenna. Just say when.

[Chuckles.]

[MABEL notices ETHEL going for the chair.]

MABEL

We're holding Ethel up. Maybe I should take her back.

CLARENCE

Alright now. It's feeling better.

MABEL

It does?

CLARENCE

It's time to do my exercises.

MABEL

Exercises! Oh no you ain't!

CLARENCE

Yes, yes. Doctor said if I move my arms just so, y'know, back and forth I'll be able to pop it back.

MABEL

DON'T GO POPPING YOUR DISC!

CLARENCE

I GOTTA DO IT SOMETIME!

MABEL

UFF-DA!

[CLARENCE starts moving his arms up and down, painfully.]

MABEL

Gotta be in such a hurry! CLARENCE! WAIT NOW!

CLARENCE

NO!

[TOM runs over.]

MABEL

Don't do this. Clarence you aren't ready for this yet.

CLARENCE

Phew, that's hard.

MABEL
You quitting?

CLARENCE
I'll try again in a few minutes.

MABEL
You think so!

CLARENCE
Yes Mabel, I think so.

TOM
How are we....

MABEL
Hm?

TOM
How are we mowing lawn when he's like this? Wouldn't it be bad?

MABEL
We'll see how he feels. You and I could do it too.

TOM
[Disgusted.]
Yeah.

MABEL
You'll get on that Yamaha. Just first help us that little bit. Right?
[Pause.]

TOM
What time are Mom and Dad coming on Monday?

CLARENCE
There, I think those muscles are more relaxed. Feels like it was just a spasm.

TOM
Huh?

CLARENCE
It's going away. Didn't hurt it as bad as I thought. Was a close call though.

MABEL
Clarence, do you know what time they're coming?

Who? CLARENCE

Them! MABEL

Oh. Yes. CLARENCE

It's nothing for you to worry about. MABEL

Help me sit up, Mabel. CLARENCE

You aren't ready for that. MABEL

I am too! CLARENCE

No you're not. MABEL

I'll get off the floor and sit. The floor's uncomfortable. CLARENCE

[MABEL helps CLARENCE sit up.]

If you'd make up your mind for five minutes. I don't know if any of this is helping! MABEL

I know why I got sent up here this weekend. TOM

Yes, yes. CLARENCE

They're on vacation. MABEL
[To TOM.]

How's that? [To CLARENCE.]

Pretty sure it was a spasm. CLARENCE

TOM

No they're not! They won't be together, 'cause they're splitting up! You don't have to be so stupid about it!

CLARENCE

Hold on, Tom.

[Pause.]

All we know is it's temporary.

MABEL

Don't talk to Tom about that!

CLARENCE

Sure ain't lying to him.

MABEL

It's not for him to know!

CLARENCE

He certainly needs to sometime!

MABEL

He's too young to worry about stuff like that!

TOM

Oh c'mon! Dad's gotta... he's gotta girlfriend. I saw her at Dad's office--

MABEL

ALRIGHT TOM!

TOM

I saw them! So just tell me what's goin' on so I won't have to guess! Where am I going to be! I gotta know!

MABEL

THAT'S ENOUGH!

CLARENCE

Mabel, stop it!

MABEL

My son wouldn't do that. You can't keep saying that he did. Both of you. All of you! Not here or anywhere! I don't know what you saw Tom, but it sure wasn't what you imagine it could've been. That's pure trash! JUST BE QUIET!

TOM

It's what happened!

MABEL
No it didn't!

TOM
Yes!

MABEL
I am not hearing this. It's not right. Not at all.

CLARENCE
Mabel--

MABEL
I've gotta bring Ethel home. We're slowing her way up. Ethel!

ETHEL
Hm?

MABEL
Your bars need frosting. Let's go.

ETHEL
I suppose if you're ready.

JENNA
I'll take her home Mabel, while you're waiting for Clarence.

MABEL
Clarence will wait here for me! With him! Ethel, let's go!

ETHEL
Alright.

JENNA
I could take her.

MABEL
IT'S NOT A PROBLEM! Give me the keys, Clarence.

CLARENCE
Mabel, you don't have to, stay here now!

MABEL
The keys. Clarence please. This is tearing me to pieces and don't need people around here seeing me.... Clarence. The keys.

[CLARENCE hands MABEL the keys. She exits.]

CLARENCE

[To TOM.]

That had to come out, didn't it?

[TOM sits down on the floor.]

TOM

I just wanted to know.

[ETHEL is almost out the door.]

ERNEST

I didn't think Mabel could get any madder.

JENNA

Ethel?

GRETCHEN

Let her go.

ETHEL

That's okay.

JENNA

You sure?

GRETCHEN

Oh yes.

ETHEL

I've gotta get started on my bars. I can't get out of the habit. Well. We'll see you Ernie.

ERNEST

[To ETHEL.]

Later.

[To CLARENCE.]

What's up with Mabel?

[ETHEL exits.]

CLARENCE

She'll be back. A little upset.

ERNEST

At you?

CLARENCE

It's something. Um, Tom, get me a chair would you?

[TOM grabs one of ERNEST's chairs.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

The boy's got a little trouble, that's all. She'll be back.

ERNEST

Hm.

[TOM drags over a chair.]

CLARENCE

How much longer on that mower?

[CLARENCE starts to get up high enough to get on the chair.
ERNEST tries to help.]

Nope, nope I've got it. How long on that?

ERNEST

Ah, not much. I've gotta snap in the keys, and then the mowers all done. I'll get a handle put in that rake in a second.

CLARENCE

When she comes back she'll want to go regardless.

ERNEST

Yeah. I suppose.

CLARENCE

Tom?

TOM

Yeah?

CLARENCE

Do whatever you want. I'm sure you got a lot on your mind. You could go outside and play, or if you want, you can stay in here with me. You and I got a little time to kill.

TOM

I think I'd rather go outside.

CLARENCE

Let me know if grandma comes back.

TOM

Okay.

[TOM exits.]

Dad. JENNA

Hm? ERNEST

Will he be alright? JENNA

ERNEST
You know the Zimmermans. Good times don't last very long for them. Those folks can't seem to stay outta hard luck. Kind've put situations in perspective. Better to worry about what is happening, instead a what might happen. Don't ya think?

[Pause.]

I'll finish work on the blades. JENNA

You do that. ERNEST

JENNA
It's yours to decide Dad. But you said you'd sign, and I came out here like you asked. You wanted me to make sure everything was legal. Remember Dad? I wouldn't come out here for any other reason.

[Enter KIM.]

Mr. Johnson? KIM

Hm? ERNEST

Can we borrow a screwdriver? KIM

ERNEST
Sure. There should be a bunch over there.

Thanks. KIM

ERNEST
Kim and Owen will be finished pretty soon. They don't have all day.

JENNA

Neither do I.

ERNEST

No.

[KIM picks up four small
screwdrivers as he walks out.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

How many of those blades you got done?

JENNA

I haven't started.

ERNEST

We won't even get outta the shop by dusk at this rate!

JENNA

That would suit you just fine.

ERNEST

Now it would not. I'll start putting them on the Stevenson's plow. You take the sharpened ones out there when you get them finished. Be sure you wear a visor. Don't rush, much as I know you want to. Sharpen them decent. We better get on it.

JENNA

I never worried about either of you. Until Mom went. If you, if you do that too, I won't be able to take it.

ERNEST

Shoving me inside four walls won't keep me alive.

JENNA

When you hurt your arm this week, I saw how stupid this was getting. I don't know you. You were a man that fed me and went off to work. Who are you when you're not here? Y'know, you and I haven't stopped long enough to hardly look at each other! What have we done together? I can't believe I'm saying this. Well I have. I certainly didn't intend to.

[Pause.]

ERNEST

Hm.

JENNA

Dad?

[Pause.]

JENNA(CONT.)

Dad, are you gonna ignore me? Still?

ERNEST

I don't know what to say when people talk like that.

JENNA

Huh? I'm not some acquaintance! I'm your daughter.

ERNEST

I'm not used to it! What am I supposed to tell you? Why are you staying here? I got customers waiting on me.

JENNA

Customers!

ERNEST

Yes.

JENNA

You got an old plow and two pieces of garden equipment! I'd hardly call that a spring rush!

ERNEST

Well... it is! It's about as big as it gets.

[ERNEST notices CLARENCE.
CLARENCE pretends he's not
listening. He grabs a couple
wrenches and the sharpened plow
blades.]

They'll be wanting the plow soon. Gotta get the crop in, while this weather holds. If it rains they're out of luck. So if you're staying, sharpen those and bring them out. I'll be mounting them on the shanks. Are you going to sharpen them?

JENNA

Is this visor good enough?

ERNEST

Yeah.

JENNA

I'm staying dad. Right here.

ERNEST

[To GRETCHEN.]

What in the world can I do? When she's acting like that.

GRETCHEN

Let it pass Ernie. Dwell on it and you and her will just makes yourselves sick. Now get out there.

[ERNEST goes outside the shop and sits by the plow. He starts working on it. GRETCHEN follows him. JENNA gets a vise grip and prepares to work on the blades.]

CLARENCE

I've tried, y'know. Like you.

JENNA

Tried what Clarence?

CLARENCE

Making conversation with my son. Like you kinda wanna do with your dad. Don't get very far. I don't even know what my boy does. Try understanding but... I don't. Him and computers. To me they look like typewriters on television. But every day that's his whole life. I guess it's air conditioned and heated, so it's got some advantages. All them buildings down at the Cities. More of 'em all the time. Ernie and I, y'know, we don't fit into that. You do, and my boy does. But we gotta be outside. Even if it ain't full time farming anymore. Well, that's what time does to ya. Least the light bulb shining my head is the sun.

JENNA

I'm glad you know what you like, Clarence.

CLARENCE

Hey, this is your business. I'm just guessing that's what's on his mind. Well, it's on my mind anyway, who knows what's on his. Shouldn't even say anything. Got that pail of bolts Mabel brought in?

JENNA

What?

CLARENCE

That pail of bolts.

JENNA

These?

CLARENCE

I didn't get a chance to go through the pail and some of them might be good. Never know when you can use a bolt, and if they're all in the junk pile you'll end up buying those new expensive Mexican ones.

[JENNA gives CLARENCE the pail.
She leans up again the entrance to
the shop, looking out at ERNEST.]

JENNA

Just haven't noticed before what's been happening to him. And me.

ERNEST

Darn it! The seats all rounded. They ain't getting tight.

GRETCHEN

The best thing is, you've had the talk.

[ERNEST hits his bad arm.]

ERNEST

This arm is a bugger!

[JENNA can't stand seeing ERNEST
hurt himself. She goes back to the
grinder.]

GRETCHEN

Maybe she'll come by the shop now, once in a while. See what you're doing. Wouldn't that be fine?

ERNEST

It seems too small for both of us. Somehow.

GRETCHEN

What can be different? It's over fifty years. That's the way it's been. We made a great house Ernest. A strong house and a great little farm and this shop business. Change from that and you'll cut off our ground.

ERNEST

But you don't havta live there anymore.

GRETCHEN

Ernie. I'm still the broom in the closet. The dish rack under the sink. My side of the bed is still mine and I'm that jar of dill pickles you will never open. The house is filled with me. Jenna moved out and she moved far away. If she just now is realizing how important you are, then good. I could never quite get her to understand that. You're a great man Ernie. Keep yourself that way.

ERNEST

But maybe I could still do better.

GRETCHEN

Of course you can. Of course. Tackle the trouble you can change. And what can you change today? Hm? Get to work Ernest. Please? The Stevensons want their plow.

ERNEST

Yeah. This plow. I sure am tired.

CLARENCE

[To himself.]

Such trouble.

[JENNA starts up the grinder and the sparks fly.]

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

[A few minutes later. JENNA finishes grinding on the plow blades, shuts off the grinder, and starts dunking the blades in the water bucket. Enter ERNEST, tired.]

ERNEST

I gotta sit down! Don't believe how hard it's going.

GRETCHEN

Can't you finish the plow Ernest?

[He sits.]

ERNEST

I'm so hot.

JENNA

Dad?

ERNEST

Just resting a little bit. Then I'll get back out there. Hard work tightening those bolts. Some the seatings are worn and the bolts start spinning around. Can't tighten on the burrs when the bolts spin.

CLARENCE

Here's a good bolt.

ERNEST

It's got nothing to do with the bolt! It's the seat that's wore!

CLARENCE

Oh! Thought you said you needed a new bolt.

ERNEST

No, I didn't. I know my business, Clarence.

CLARENCE

Thought you wanted a bolt.

ERNEST

Well, at least you're trying to be useful. Which is more than I can say of myself. Jenna, don't start on me! I'll go back out there in a bit. Just had to get in the shade. Whew! Heating up, could be a dry summer.

JENNA

That bandage is filthy. We better change it.

ERNEST

It's fine! Just got a little hard to do. I'll be out there in a second.

GRETCHEN

There's something wrong with you.

ERNEST

I need to rest.

JENNA

Dad, you need to change that bandage.

GRETCHEN

What is it?

ERNEST

Nothing's wrong! It got a little hard to do, I'll get out there. I just need a drink. Even if it is bad coffee it's good enough for me.

CLARENCE

Sit down Ernie.

GRETCHEN

If something's bothering you, just tell me.

ERNEST

Nothing is bothering me!

JENNA

Dad, I'll get your coffee.

ERNEST

Just need something to drink, then I'll sit!

GRETCHEN

This ain't right when you get this way.

ERNEST

And what would that way be?

GRETCHEN

We're not talking until you're civil.

ERNEST

My hands kept slipping! I tried pushing on square with the hammer, then I tightened it with my vise grip. But my hands couldn't hang on to it. Wouldn't come on or off!

JENNA

Dad, I was only talking about your bandage. Your hearing okay?

ERNEST

Hm?

JENNA

Your bandage. It's dirty. We should change it.

ERNEST

Was I saying things out loud?

JENNA

It's too bad it's hard to do. Maybe Kim and Owen can fix it.

ERNEST

No, I'll get it. You said you wanted to change this wrap.

JENNA

Do you have any new ones we could put on?

ERNEST

Ah, yeah. There's some ace bandages in the bathroom.

[To GRETCHEN.]

My hands haven't slipped like that before.

[JENNA exits into the bathroom.]

GRETCHEN

It's because you're hurt.

ERNEST

Maybe so.

[Drinks coffee.]

It really is bad. Thought they were joking but it's so weak. Ish. Oh, I gotta sit down and clear my head. That's all. I'll get things together.

GRETCHEN

That's all right Ernest. You'll get out there again in a little bit.

ERNEST

Just be quiet.

GRETCHEN

Don't be so impossible!

ERNEST

Plant your potatoes!

GRETCHEN

I've planted my last potatoes! Shape up, Ernest!

ERNEST

Can't I be frustrated without being given the fifth degree!

CLARENCE

Mabel would've thrown out this whole pail.

ERNEST

Huh?

CLARENCE

Look at how many good ones there are. Mabel would've thrown away the whole works. Gotta look out Ernest. Good stuff's goin' for junk.

ERNEST

Yup. Junk. That's about the value of the stuff I got in here.

CLARENCE

You about done on that mower?

ERNEST

Oh. Yeah. I am done. Just give me a second, and we'll get it off the table.

CLARENCE

Rest up first.

ERNEST

I don't need all this mothering! Let's get it on the floor.

CLARENCE

You sure?

ERNEST

Yes, I can't sit still.

CLARENCE

Alright. I'll get Tom in here to help us.

JENNA

Dad, here's a better wrap. Let me take off this old one.

CLARENCE

Tom, where are you?

[ERNEST unwraps his dirty
bandage.]

ERNEST

I'll do it.

JENNA

Take it easy Dad.

ERNEST

Oo. It stings when it's out in the air.

CLARENCE

Tom! YOU PUT DOWN THAT OIL RAG! ISH-TA WHATTA MESS! Tom! Get in here.

JENNA

Got it?

ERNEST

Oh yes.

JENNA

Wasn't so bad was it? I've probably saved on that infection getting worse.

ERNEST

I told ya thanks. Do you need to preach at my evils too?

JENNA

I've got the rest of those blades done.

ERNEST

Good. Didn't take you very long.

JENNA

I'm sure you would've done it faster.

CLARENCE

Yes, just put that rag on the ground. Let's get the mower out to the curb!

JENNA

Look. I'll get Kim and Owen to help you out.

ERNEST

I can twist those on. Really. I just gotta get better tools.

JENNA

If the three of you do it, it will go faster.

ERNEST

Don't say anything Gretchen. Randy's farm work is more important.

GRETCHEN

It's not more important than you. But get it done. Get it out of your hair.

ERNEST

[To JENNA.]

Let me tell them, okay? You can start putting them on, if you like. Just put the bolts through and twist the burr on the threads. I'll finish mounting them when I'm done resting. Once they're done with that pick-up, they can come over and help. Tell them that.

JENNA

I can have them finish the plow right now.

ERNEST

No. I'll do it. Let me.

[TOM enters, very dirty.]

CLARENCE

Grandma is gonna have some words with you.

TOM

I was just whipping it around and it sprayed all over the place.

CLARENCE

Let's get the mower outside. Then we'll be ready when Grandma comes back. We'll take that mower, Ernie.

ERNEST

Ah Jenna, before you go out there would you help me set this down? Clarence wants it.

JENNA

Sure.

ERNEST

Let's get it on the floor.

[JENNA and ERNEST take the mower and set it down on the concrete.]

ERNEST

Good deal.

JENNA

I'll start putting these on then.

ERNEST

Sure. Go ahead. I'll join ya.

[JENNA goes out and starts working on the plow. ERNEST pushes up and down on the mower handle.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

Think it'll do ya.

CLARENCE

...Yeah--

ERNEST

I burnt a few holes in it. But, my welder doesn't arc down that cool. I was able to get a pretty good weld on it, though. Should hold.

CLARENCE

Should.

ERNEST

I guess I just put you and Grandpa back to work.

TOM

Guess so.

CLARENCE

It won't take long Tom. Then I'll take you four wheeling. You'll have a lot more fun on the Yamaha after we've finished mowing.

TOM

I'd be fine without mowing.

CLARENCE

You know something?

TOM

Huh?

CLARENCE

I would too.

[CLARENCE winks at him.]

But we gotta do this together, along with Grandma, don't we? Then we'll "hit the waves". That's what you call it, right?

[To ERNEST.]

I think that's what they call it.

TOM

Is my Mom coming on Monday? Or my Dad?

[Pause.]

CLARENCE

She is... I think.

TOM

She is?

CLARENCE

Yes, yes, ah, push the mower out on the sidewalk. Grandma's coming with the car soon.

TOM

Where am I going to be then? At our house, or is she moving out? And where is dad going?

CLARENCE

Get the mower out there now.

TOM

Can you at least tell me that?

CLARENCE

They didn't say when... sometime Monday.

TOM

Everything's all so fuzzy, why can't you tell me?

CLARENCE

BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW! Push that thing in the street now.

TOM

Sure.

[TOM starts pushing the mower outside. CLARENCE watches the mower go out.]

CLARENCE

Boy, that looks good.

ERNEST

It could be better. Maybe you'll want to order a new handle from the dealer.

CLARENCE

How much I owe you?

ERNEST

I haven't got that pipe on the rake. And you gave me those bolts.

CLARENCE

Fix the rake and I'll give you the bolts. We'll call that even. Now how much do I owe ya?

ERNEST

I could put it on your account.

CLARENCE

Nope. I'll pay it now.

ERNEST

It'll be... six fifty.

CLARENCE

Six fifty.

[CLARENCE pulls out his billfold.]

Got change for a dollar?

ERNEST

Think so.

[TOM gets out of earshot.]

CLARENCE

Mabel and I aren't usually so tough on him, it's, well, we've got some trouble.

[CLARENCE counts out the change and puts his billfold away.]

ERNEST

We've all got pretty rough edges this morning.

CLARENCE

Yup. We got some trouble.

[Pause.]

Ben and Karla are separating. Don't let Mabel know I told you, she doesn't want people to know about it. But this trip they're on. Just an excuse. That's

CLARENCE(CONT.)

all. Oh, they're just growing apart they claim and.... Well what's that kid gonna do next week? Huh? Split up between two homes like that. I don't understand it.

ERNEST

They all gonna be in the same house?

CLARENCE

No they couldn't do that. He's getting an apartment . He wanted Tom out of the house so he wouldn't watch him move out. Don't understand it. I shouldn't let it get me so upset, I guess. Nothing I can help. But don't tell Mabel I told you, she wasn't gonna say anything....

ERNEST

I won't, I won't.

CLARENCE

Might be seeing alot of him this next few months.

[To TOM.]

YEAH, JUST KEEP IT BY THE CURB UNTIL GRANDMA COMES!

[To ERNEST.]

Doesn't seem to matter how old your kids are, they can still give ya trouble.

ERNEST

Yeah.

CLARENCE

Yeah. Lucky when they don't.

[To TOM.]

JUST WAIT OUT THERE! I'LL BE OUT IN A MINUTE!

ERNEST

But, I suppose if they're not meant to be together they're not meant to be together.

CLARENCE

No. Suppose not. Sure is amazing though. Before people get married, all they do is dance. Think you're gonna dance everyday. And everyday's gonna be as fun as, as fun as that first dance you had. Never quite works that way. Most of the time there ain't a decent rhythm to dance to.

ERNEST

Nope, you're right. But those first dances sure can be a lot of fun.

CLARENCE

Yup.

ERNEST

Meeting other folks from other towns.

CLARENCE

Doesn't last long though.

ERNEST

Nope, that's for sure.

[Pause.]

Albany still plays polka.

CLARENCE

That's right, they do! Forget to turn that on, should remember to do that.

[CLARENCE laughs.]

Polka music. The way we used to dance at that pavilion. Huh! You and Gretchen, me and Mabel. And you and Ethel, I remember that, both you and Ethel used to chase around.

ERNEST

We didn't chase around that much.

CLARENCE

You and Ethel were a pretty big couple there.

ERNEST

Yes, well, hardly remember doing that now.

CLARENCE

But you still did it. Gretchen used to get so mad at you.

ERNEST

Yeah. I was quite the tomcat.

CLARENCE

You sure were.

[ERNEST and CLARENCE laugh.
ERNEST continues laughing until
he makes eye contact with
GRETCHEN.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

I don't know how you do it, Ernie. Out there by yourself. Couldn't stand it, there'd be too many things to remind me of Mabel. The house would be... empty.

ERNEST

Gets hard.

CLARENCE

Can imagine.

GRETCHEN

You're spending so much time in the shop lately. Am I really that hard to have around?

CLARENCE

I wonder about you Ernie. How you've been able to manage.

ERNEST

Ah! I'm fine.

CLARENCE

I'm sure you are, I'm sure you are. Amazing what's changed though. That accident, changed everything.

ERNEST

Yes, I know. Lotsa changes.

CLARENCE

Yeah.

ERNEST

[Pause.]

Came home, there it was, her plow all twisted, our tractor upside down. Found her under it, laying in the dirt.

[ERNEST and GRETCHEN stare.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

Just laying under it, all quiet.

CLARENCE

You're a stronger guy than me, I sure couldn't do it. Sure couldn't.

ERNEST

Yeah, well. What can ya do? We just dance till the music stops.

[Pause.]

This pipe should work. What do you think?

GRETCHEN

I can see you changing Ernest.

CLARENCE

That looks fine.

ERNEST

I'll tack it on then.

GRETCHEN

Where do you stand? Am I more than a memory or less?

ERNEST

I'm gonna be welding again, so don't look this way.

CLARENCE

Right.

GRETCHEN

Tell me Ernie.

ERNEST

I'm not sure.

[ERNEST goes behind welding screen.]

CLARENCE

TOM, DON'T GET MORE DIRTY. GOOD GOSH! SIT IN HERE THEN!

[Enter TOM. He sits down.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

We'll go through this pail of bolts. You just settle down, you're getting too rambunctious.

[Pause.]

I'd tell ya more if I knew more. Trust me on that.

TOM

Okay.

[ERNEST starts welding. Enter OWEN, now a little greasier from fixing on the pick-up.]

OWEN

Try and start the pick-up, would you? We'll see if it works!

KIM

[Offstage.]

Alright.

OWEN

Now when you press in the clutch, just give it a little gas.

KIM

[Offstage.]

WHAT'S THE GAS GOT TO DO WITH IT?

OWEN
YA CAN'T LET IT FLOOD!

KIM
[Offstage.]
Yeah.

OWEN
Go ahead!
Keep trying.

[The pick-up almost starts, but
doesn't.]

OWEN(CONT.)
I think it'll go! Keep crankin' it. Not so much gas. HEY, NOT SO MUCH
GAS. HELL! WAIT, WAIT, WAIT! YOU'RE FLOODING IT!

KIM
[Offstage.]
What?

OWEN
It's flooding! I smell gas everywhere!

KIM
[Offstage.]
IT IS NOT!

[Sound of the pick-up grinding
again.]

OWEN
Damn it! STOP IT! Hey, STOP IT! **WOULD YOU STOP!**

[The pick-up stops.]

KIM
[Offstage.]
You think it's flooded?

OWEN
I don't see ya breaking any speed records!

KIM
[Offstage.]
Well. What are we gonna do?

OWEN

Let her sit and clear out. Bring the thermos, we'll have a drink.

[OWEN eases down on the floor and takes out a pack of cigarettes. KIM enters carrying the thermoses.]

KIM

You sure we can't start it again?

OWEN

Cripes, what's the problem?

KIM

I just wanna get back home. I hate this place.

OWEN

For what? Rock picking? The rock will be there.

KIM

I know, I just...

OWEN

What?

KIM

I just don't want Dad thinking we're too slow. You know how mad he is already.

OWEN

And who got him mad? Hm? I don't believe it was me. Although I could be mistaken.

[No response from KIM.]

OWEN(CONT.)

Here, wanna drag?

KIM

I don't feel like it right now.

OWEN

You don't smoke.

KIM

Yeah, I smoke. I just don't feel like it today.

OWEN

Hell.

KIM

I smoke!

OWEN

I bet. Ain't as bad as that diesel smoke you inhale up on that tractor everyday. As bad, they tell me. You'll get cancer from that before you're sixty. Besides, one little cigarette ain't gonna hurt you nothing. Might even calm you down a bit. You've been wound up all day.

KIM

I HAVEN'T BEEN EITHER!

OWEN

Oh not a bit. I can tell.

KIM

Alright.

[KIM takes the cigarette. He inhales and coughs.]

OWEN

You smoke, huh?

KIM

I smoke!

[KIM keeps coughing.]

KIM(CONT.)

Here. It's good. What brand is it?

[KIM hands back OWEN's cigarette.]

OWEN

Generic.

KIM

Oh. They sure use some good tobacco.

OWEN

Ain't bad shit. Ain't bad at all. Not for the price you pay.

KIM

I'm sure.

OWEN

Don't got Camels beat though.

KIM

Oh no way.

[KIM takes a swig from the thermos.
Enter JENNA.]

JENNA

Here's where you two went. I thought you were still around the pick-up. My dad talked to you?

KIM

No.

JENNA

His arm's gotten pretty sore so he can't get your parts put on the plow. Could you fellas finish up? The blades are all out there, they just need to be tightened.

OWEN

Yeah, we'll do it.

JENNA

Thanks. He was going to tell you, but y'know, I think he hates admitting it. He'd normally be able to do it, but his arm today and everything.

OWEN

It's no problem. Kim, you got those tools?

KIM

Oh yeah. Where do I put these? We borrowed them a bit ago.

JENNA

I'm not sure where he puts that size screwdriver. Over there should work.

KIM

That bench?

JENNA

He'll see them, anyway.

OWEN

Thanks for letting us use 'em.

JENNA

No problem, no problem at all.

[KIM puts the tools on the bench.
JENNA follows him.]

JENNA(CONT.)

I'm sure people tell you that all the time but, you really, really remind me of your Dad. We ah, we went to high school together. You seem alot like him.

KIM

Yeah, I suppose.

JENNA

You got that Stevenson build.

KIM

I do look like him sorta. What people say. But I just look like him.

JENNA

When he was your age, you could've been twins. The spitting image. It's just strange seeing one of my classmate's kids so tall. Time flies, y'know. I mean you look great. You were pretty short last I saw you. But you've just shot up!

KIM

Thanks.

JENNA

Well. I'll tell him you're almost ready to start on that plow.

KIM

Sure. We'll get on it.

[KIM goes back to OWEN. JENNA starts to straighten up the shop.]

KIM(CONT.)

I really, really hate this place. Why does dad have to come here? I mean what is the draw? We do more and more of the work when we're here. All that's here is a good tool bin. Y'know, I like Ernest Johnson and everything, it's nothing like that. But he's getting so feeble. If we'd go to that new outfit in Fergus we'd get a lot of these jobs done in half the time. Maybe it's a little further away, but it'd be better than putting up with this.

OWEN

Now you sound like your old man.

KIM

I do not.

OWEN

You sound like a practical farmer to me.

KIM

Get off it. You heard what she was saying to me, didn't you?

OWEN

I think she's right.

KIM

I am not like my dad, thank you very much.

OWEN

You want to save time. That sounds like your dad to me.

KIM

Maybe we should start the pick-up so we get the plow together.

OWEN

I'm just ribbin' ya. You know that. Sit. Right now we don't got a boss around. Enjoy it. You can do a better job if you ain't always trying to catch your breath.

KIM

Yeah, I suppose. But I am not like my dad.

OWEN

No, you're not. Your dad wouldn't be out driving like you last night, that's for sure.

KIM

No he wouldn't.

OWEN

Folks get pretty mad at you last night?

KIM

Hell yes!

OWEN

What'd they do?

KIM

Got grounded for a whole month.

OWEN

[Whistles.]

A month! Was up when that state trooper brought you in the yard.

KIM

Was everybody up then? Jeeze!

OWEN

Bet your old man turned all red.

KIM

Huh, you could see the steam. You could see it, man!

OWEN

I bet.

KIM

Never seen him so pissed.

OWEN

Been there before.

KIM

His jaw gets clenched up, and then he paces, like this, y'know.

[KIM imitates RANDY's movements.
OWEN laughs.]

KIM(CONT.)

Thought he was gonna pop!

OWEN

Yeah well, we've all been there. Got have run ins with your folks once in a while. So you gonna lose your license?

[No response.]

Hey, ya lose your license?

KIM

Hell yes. I have a court appearance in two weeks. Reckless driving.

OWEN

Boy that's rough. Real rough. Trick is, not to get caught. We all do wild driving. Hell, I used to. Had my Nova going 110 on highway fifty-five on that flat stretch by Belgrade. Christ, used to make that run all the time. But be smart about it, do donies¹ where there ain't no cops.

KIM

Yeah. This cop isn't normally there. I'm the first one to get caught on that road for something like three years.

OWEN

How fast did you get her?

¹ To spin a car in a quick circle on the road. Short for "donuts".

KIM

Oh damn, I buried the speedometer. She was howling she was so wide open.

OWEN

I bet.

KIM

Buried it! We were driving, kicking up rocks and shit!

OWEN

You see what the cop come out of?

KIM

Naw. All I saw was spinning cherries.

OWEN

Damn that's rough. But that's the breaks. Yup, always said it was lucky I never got caught. I don't know why I never did but, I didn't.

KIM

You still do it?

OWEN

What?

KIM

Y'know. Cruise.

OWEN

Nope. Mainly did when I first got my license.

KIM

Why'd ya quit?

OWEN

After a while things slow down. Get a little more serious.

KIM

I'm not slowing down.

OWEN

You will, we all do. Someday you'll be just like I am, working somewhere and paying bills.

KIM

Uh-huh.

OWEN

It happens.

KIM

Yeah, it happens.

OWEN

Sure does. All your energy goes into impressing bosses. The car just starts taking you there and back.

[ERNEST pounds his slag hammer
behind the screen.]

KIM

When you did all that cruising, did everyone boss you then? Like now?

OWEN

Huh?

KIM

You know what I mean.

OWEN

No. I don't think I do.

KIM

Right.

OWEN

What are you talking about now?

KIM

Ya ain't doing it, are ya?

OWEN

Doing what?

KIM

What Dad said.

OWEN

Pick rocks? Damn right we're gonna. Soon as we start that pick-up.

KIM

You're so full of.... Damn it. I heard you and Dad talking about me this morning. Right before he came to town. You two thought I was greasing the rock picker, but I wasn't.

OWEN

I don't know what you could've heard.

KIM

You ain't doing that, are you? When we're picking rocks.

OWEN

Good god almighty.

KIM

Dad told you to drive today.

OWEN

Yeah he did. And that's all that got said.

KIM

What about the part where he told you to take the wildness out of Kim.

[Imitates RANDY.]

Start sweatin' that criminal out of him. Make him run behind that picker, make him run so fast he almost keels over.

OWEN

Ya heard wrong. Forget it.

KIM

Tell me if you'd do it!

[Pause.]

OWEN

Ya know what's good for ya right now? Just relaxing. Get all wound up ya don't think well. Let's try that pick-up.

KIM

I bet you never topped eighty.

OWEN

Plenty of times.

KIM

You're a liar. Like everyone else, you lie.

OWEN

There's nothing that I've lied about. Take it easy.

KIM

Like everybody else. A lying asshole!

[OWEN grabs KIM and they fight.]

OWEN
HOW YOU KNOW I WOULD HAVE DONE THAT? HUH? HUH?

[CLARENCE, TOM, JENNA, and
ERNEST run over.]

CLARENCE
Boys, you stop that!

ERNEST
Say now!

KIM
GET OFF OF ME!

OWEN
HUH?

KIM
GET OFF OF ME!

OWEN
RIGHT?

KIM
I SAID GET OFF!

[OWEN backs off.]

TOM
Cool, a real fight!

KIM
Pushing me on the floor? Damn it, what is that? Huh? WHAT IS THAT?

OWEN
You don't havta get so huffy. YOU JUST STAY IN HERE AND COOL OFF!

ERNEST
That's right, just break apart and calm down.

OWEN
Sounds like a real good idea.

[OWEN starts to walk out. KIM
follows.]

OWEN(CONT.)
You just stay in here! Okay?

KIM

What are you gonna do?

OWEN

Start the pick-up, since you can't seem to handle it.

KIM

What are you, Dad's little yes man! What boss Randy says goes, doesn't it? Right Owen?

ERNEST

That's about enough.

OWEN

It goes for you too. Maybe you don't admit to it. But you're a yes boy just as much, maybe even more, than I am. Hell, at least I got part of the day that don't belong to him. Your problem is that deep down, you're trying to please dear old Randy. Prove to him what a man you are. You never will. You'll always be his little boy. But you don't gotta prove that to me. I know you are. So don't rub me wrong. Stay in here and cool off.

[OWEN exits.]

KIM

Owen? Hey....

JENNA

What'd your Dad do?

KIM

Hm?

JENNA

What'd your Dad do? You're so mad at him, what is it?

KIM

Leave me alone, okay? Jeeze, it's, it's nothing.

ERNEST

Jenna, they've stopped. Let 'em take it home. Leave him alone.

JENNA

I don't want any more trouble.

[KIM looks out at the pick-up. OWEN starts it right up. KIM stares out at the sound.]

KIM

He can even start the pick-up.

[Realizing that everybody's staring at him, he goes into the bathroom, and slams the door.]

GRETCHEN

That's one thing I've never been in the middle of. Fighting.

ERNEST

Never?

GRETCHEN

Well not that kind of fighting. Don't tease now.

ERNEST

[To CLARENCE.]

They'll be some words later.

CLARENCE

Sure will.

JENNA

Aren't they gonna work on the plow?

GRETCHEN

No they're not.

ERNEST

Doesn't look like it.

JENNA

Oh, what a morning!

ERNEST

Yup. That's the way it goes. How's this rake?

CLARENCE

Try it out, Tom.

[TOM rakes with it.]

CLARENCE(CONT.)

It looks like you've solved another problem.

GRETCHEN

See Ernest, nothing is leaving you all at once.

ERNEST

But it is leaving. Admit that it is leaving.

GRETCHEN

Parts of who we were remain. It's why you gotta be thankful for what you've got.

ERNEST

And what about the things I haven't got? Every season for many years now I've gotten less and less business. Fixing lawn equipment? I would've turned these jobs away years ago, now I'm happy to see Mabel bring in that little crap. Ain't much left here. It's gettin' depressing. Gretchen, this place won't be here next year. I'm closing shop.

GRETCHEN

Are you now? See? It starts with that apartment. Now you're even talking about closing the shop. You matter. Especially to me.

ERNEST

Yes, to someone that's dead! If I were just to walk away, Kim and Owen would just hitch up the plow, and drive it down to Fergus. They'd probably even fix it better in Fergus. I can't keep up any more. Everything's moving too fast. Nope, this is gonna be my last summer. The last one.

[Enter OWEN.]

OWEN

Kim?

ERNEST

Owen, my arm isn't doing too good. Can you work on Stevenson's plow?

OWEN

That's what I was just starting to do. I was getting Kim to help me.

ERNEST

Did I tell you already?

OWEN

No, ah, your daughter did. Kim? We need to get started on that plow. Where is he?

JENNA

In the bathroom.

OWEN

The bathroom?

JENNA

That's where he ran in after you guys had your fight.

OWEN

Well, we gotta get to work. What are we gonna do now?

ERNEST

I was going to explain it to them.

JENNA

Dad, I thought you had. It's not a problem.

ERNEST

Yes it is.

JENNA

Take it easy.

ERNEST

I can't.

[Whispering.]

It makes me.... It makes me look like an old man. Please don't meddle around. I don't want to look as old as I feel.

JENNA

Dad it was a little thing.

ERNEST

No, nothing is little. Nothing is little!

[A car drives up.]

JENNA

It's Randy.

OWEN

Oh, jeeze, we're in for it now.

[Enter RANDY.]

RANDY

Owen?

OWEN

Yeah?

RANDY

The pick-ups running, why aren't you guys?

OWEN

Kim's in the bathroom, upset.

RANDY

Upset? About what? Should be over being upset by now.

OWEN

He heard us talking or something.

RANDY

Well, I havta go to the feed mill company in Brooten for the part. So I just stopped in to see how things were coming.

OWEN

We ain't going until you deal with him! I'm sick of it. You put me in between you two this morning and I tell you, it don't work that way. I'm your hired man for Christ's sake! I shouldn't even be part of it. What do I know about kids?

RANDY

Alright, alright.

CLARENCE

[To ERNEST.]

I'm gonna wait outside with Tom.

ERNEST

Are ya?

[RANDY walks to the bathroom door.
He knocks.]

RANDY

Kim! Kim!

CLARENCE

Uh-huh.

[CLARENCE exits.]

RANDY

Come outta there. Right now. Come on!

ERNEST

I'll see what I can do on that plow.

[ERNEST exits. TOM follows them.
They work on the plow outside.
CLARENCE stares out at the road,

waiting for MABEL. KIM walks out
of the bathroom.]

KIM

What? I was just going to the bathroom.

RANDY

Yeah, I know you were but....

KIM

Why you here anyway?

RANDY

Ah-- I havta go to Brooten to get the part so, I was on my way and I just
thought I'd stop in, see how you guys are coming.

[Pause.]

Owen told me you've been pretty feisty.

KIM

It's going.

RANDY

What is?

KIM

The pickup.

RANDY

I'm glad you got it going.

KIM

The plow isn't done yet. So I suppose you'll take the pick-up to Brooten, pick
the plow up later. We'll take my car back. Right?

[Pause.]

RANDY

No. No you guys might need it. I'll take your car, no need to drag the pick-
up around. You might need it to haul stuff.

OWEN

We gotta have the pick-up, Kim. You wanna drive your car in the field?

RANDY

You won't need your car for awhile, anyway, after that business. Right?

[No response from KIM.]

RANDY(CONT.)

Right?

OWEN

[Under his breath.]

Here we go.

KIM

I feel bad enough, okay?

RANDY

Huh!

KIM

I do!

RANDY

Do you? Why'd you go and drive your car like that?

KIM

No one was around.

RANDY

You could've hurt somebody, yourself.... You've lost your license. I mean, I don't know what you did, but he took your license right there on the spot.

KIM

I know, Dad. I was there.

RANDY

Now you're getting smart.

KIM

No.

RANDY

Yes, you are!

KIM

Well I kinda havta be!

RANDY

Kim, you can't do stuff like this.

KIM

Do stuff like what?

RANDY

I don't know what to do Kim. I mean....

[Silence.]

OWEN

Ernie needs help with the plow. I'm gonna go out there.

RANDY

Go ahead.

KIM

That's right Owen. Walk away. After you agreed with him!

RANDY

KIM! Settle down, you don't need to take after Owen.

KIM

Why not? You're both in it together.

RANDY

What does he got to do with this? Gosh sakes, he's our hired man, Kim. Leave him out of it. Go ahead, Owen, finish the plow.

OWEN

Kim. I only said I would drive tractor to get him off my back.

[OWEN exits.]

RANDY

So.... You heard me this morning? I was just letting off steam, it's got nothing to do with Owen. Oh, come on Kim, you can't blame me for flipping my lid. How was I supposed to react? Is that what all this is?

KIM

No, I guess it's not.

RANDY

What's your trouble? Whatever it is, it had better stop soon.

KIM

It's my problem okay? Not yours. Mine!

RANDY

It's mine as well.

KIM

I need to fix the plow.

RANDY

You're not going anywhere until you explain your attitude.

KIM

What? We just gonna stand around and look at each other.

RANDY

Looks like it until you shape up. Now what is it?

KIM

Say it here?

RANDY

Yeah. Tell me!

[Pause.]

KIM

Forget it. It's not very simple.

RANDY

Try me.

KIM

I would tell you if I knew how I should say it! But I can't, y'know. It doesn't come out in words. I gotta get to work on that plow.

RANDY

Kim... Walking away won't solve nothing. Damn it!

[KIM joins the rest working on the plow. RANDY notices JENNA, who has been pretending to be busy by picking up things here and there.]

JENNA

Here are those extra blades you brought in. Didn't take me long once I get a system going.

RANDY

I'm sure you heard all of that.

[Pause.]

JENNA

I should've left but I... couldn't.

RANDY

Wish you would've. It's a, ha, it's been a rough morning. I don't mean to bring our baggage in here.

JENNA

Like I said. I couldn't.

RANDY

I suppose I'd better round him up again.

JENNA

I thought after years went by, y'know, I could look back at us and laugh. But when you came in here this morning I knew we still weren't done. I could tell. Way you were looking at me. You didn't come back to check on them.

RANDY

Ah... mainly that was the reason.

JENNA

Is this what playing the parent means these days?

RANDY

[Laughs.]

Gets worse every year.

JENNA

Why I never wanted kids.

RANDY

Is it? Or have you been thinking Kim should've been our kid?

[Pause.]

JENNA

You gave him the name we used to talk about. What we would name our... first.

RANDY

Always liked it. Seemed kind've a modern name at the time. Well, the name seemed like even more then, I gotta admit.

JENNA

How is Sue handling all of that?

RANDY

She isn't. Kids. I suppose though, we've given our parents plenty of the same headaches, so I guess we gotta take a turn.

[He laughs.]

JENNA

Looks like something I'm gonna miss out on.

RANDY

Yeah, you got it lucky alright. Lucky you didn't end up with me.

JENNA

I don't know if it's been so lucky.

RANDY

Living with Sue has not been a joy. If that's what you're hinting at.

JENNA

Sue? I don't care about Sue.

RANDY

Makes me sick. Been over this in my head so many times. You got me all scared, talking about marriage. Sue was there and she was a lot of fun. You wanted a ring. And before I could blink I had Susan, a ring, and a kid. Oh what a mess.

JENNA

I didn't want a ring. I wanted you.

RANDY

You had more in mind than I did. Admit it. It scared the pants off me. I didn't mean that.

JENNA

You can't lay the blame all on me, much as you want to. You got your wings clipped, Randy. So did I. But it was a good thing, I would've been stuck on your farm. But because we broke up I was able to leave all of this. I got a job, a real job that I can leave at night. You gave me all of that Randy. Thanks.

RANDY

You're not being serious. C'mon.

JENNA

You even named him Kim. That just made it worse, 'cause it told me you still wanted me around. And every time I go out with some man, I think the same thing is going to happen to me all over again. Men have a incredible way of getting scared. Well I can't help that. That's the way it is, that's my luck. And now with you trying to feel things out between us today. It is too damn much!

RANDY

I haven't been doing that. Why? Does it seem like it?

JENNA

I couldn't ever jog down your driveway. It's too short.

RANDY

I'm sorry if it seemed that way. I mean that hasn't been my intention. It's...ah, sorry.

[Pause.]

JENNA

I'm not sorry.

RANDY

No?

JENNA

How could I be?

[Pause.]

RANDY

You ever think about....

JENNA

What?

RANDY

Just every so often I look at him and I wonder. What he'd a been like if half of him, had been you? You sometimes ever wonder? Now I'm getting way out of hand. It's just the way he's been lately.... You think about things like that?

[Pause.]

Well, it's too late now.

JENNA

Yes. I do.

[Pause.]

RANDY

I better go out. Kim needs to be talked to.

JENNA

Right, right.

RANDY

Yeah.

JENNA

[Mocking.]

Take care of that unruly kid!

RANDY

Hm! Right.

[RANDY rolls his eyes, they both laugh.]

RANDY(CONT.)

Okay.

JENNA

Okay.

RANDY

I hope it won't be another year and half before I see you again.

[JENNA laughs.]

RANDY(CONT.)

It's been good visiting with you.

JENNA

It has.

[Pause.]

RANDY

Okay! Okay.

JENNA

Okay.

[RANDY exits, carrying his extra blades. RANDY takes over from ERNEST. ERNEST comes back inside.]

ERNEST

You give those extra blades to Randy?

[JENNA doesn't hear.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

You give those extra blades to Randy?

JENNA

Huh? Yeah, yeah I did.

ERNEST

All three of them are working on the plow. They definitely don't need an old cow like me gettin' in the way.

JENNA

You better put the bill on his account.

ERNEST

Oh yes. Can't forget to charge can I? Nope, ya can't work for free.

[ERNEST goes over to a drawer and pulls out a greasy account book. He grabs a pencil he has tied next to the phone and starts to write the bill down.]

JENNA

Everything's done.

ERNEST

Yeah....

GRETCHEN

There still is time. You could go to the rental office and reserve that swanky condo.

ERNEST

[To GRETCHEN.]

I wouldn't move in today.

GRETCHEN

You're shutting down. So you might as well.

ERNEST

Ya giving up on me?

GRETCHEN

Aren't you on me?

ERNEST

No.

JENNA

I suppose we could go couldn't we?

ERNEST

[To JENNA.]

I suppose.

JENNA

I've enjoyed working the morning with you. I'll come by some Saturdays. It's kind've good getting away from Fergus. Getting a little too busy there. Almost twenty thousand people. I don't know how all those people can get

JENNA(CONT.)

so crammed together. I suppose I better get back. I'm gonna take off this coverall.

ERNEST

You don't wanna go?

JENNA

Not if you don't. I'd rather you kept up the farm. It keeps some things alive I've been ignoring.

GRETCHEN

You're going to tell her yes, aren't you?

ERNEST

There's no avoiding what is. You've said as much yourself. Jenna?

JENNA

Hm?

ERNEST

I don't want to get your seat dirty. So if you got newspaper in the car, I'll go. Might be a cold winter next fall.

JENNA

Sure?

ERNEST

Mm--hm.

JENNA

Okay. I'll get ready.

ERNEST

[To GRETCHEN.]

Don't start on me.

GRETCHEN

What?

ERNEST

If I don't get it from her I get it from you.

GRETCHEN

You're giving up. Am I supposed to be happy about that?

ERNEST

Oh, come on. I already said I'd go. I can't take that back.

GRETCHEN

Ernest, you're living, I'm not. I forget that sometimes. Just don't close the shop. Because if you do, we'll be all through with our business. There'll be nothing left.

ERNEST

Is it easier out there? Y'know, after?

GRETCHEN

You're talking to the part of me that doesn't know. Just do whatever it is you havta do. And I hope you're doing it because you want more, not less.

[Pause.]

ERNEST

I won't close the shop.

GRETCHEN

Thank you, Ernest. We don't want the air in here to get stuffy.

[MABEL's car drives up.]

ERNEST

It won't for a while. Somebody here?

CLARENCE

You're back.

MABEL

[Offstage.]

ERNIE! ERNIE! IS HE IN THERE CLARENCE?

CLARENCE

What?

MABEL

[Offstage.]

IS HE IN THERE?

CLARENCE

I think so.

[CLARENCE enters the shop.]

Yeah, he's here. Why? Aren't we going home?

MABEL

[Offstage.]

Not yet!

Oh. CLARENCE

[Enter MABEL, carrying a pan of brownies and a knife.]

MABEL
Ethel's brought some bars here for you.

ERNEST
Me?

MABEL
Well not just you. You and anybody else that wants some. Clarence, help Ethel inside.

CLARENCE
I'm going, I'm going. Where is she?

ETHEL
[From offstage.]
I'm fine.

[Enter ETHEL, walking with her cane.]

ERNEST
Ethel, you didn't have to do this.

ETHEL
No I didn't.
[Chuckles.]
But two pans is all the Church's getting from me. That's the way it should be. Two pans from each cook. Any more than that's too much.
[Soft. To ERNEST.]
Besides, it was the only way I could get Mabel to leave.

MABEL
Where can I set them?

ERNEST
I don't know if there's a place decent enough.

[Enter TOM.]

ETHEL
Put it on that table.

ERNEST

It's all dirty.

MABEL

I'll clean it off. Clarence, come here and hold this.

[CLARENCE walks over.]

MABEL(CONT.)

Oh, you better not, with your back.

CLARENCE

Give it here, I'll hold it!

MABEL

No, you're still sore.

CLARENCE

I'll hold it!

MABEL

You gotta be careful.

TOM

I'll hold it.

MABEL

Alright. There you are. Tom! My gosh what in the world did you get into? You're just filthy! Can't leave you two alone without one of you ruining something! Those clothes are going in the washing machine as soon as you're in the house!

TOM

It was an accident.

MABEL

You shoulda put on those britches when ya had the chance! Well, nothing to do about it now. C'mon then, set the bars down!

[MABEL finishes clearing off the table. TOM sets the pan of bars down. MABEL starts cutting up the bars.]

CLARENCE

How ya doin' Mabel?

MABEL

Were ya worried?

CLARENCE

No, not really. Concerned. Tom knows all that we know.

MABEL

He does? I should've been here when you told him. But there's some things I just can't take. Oh, I feel so foolish.

CLARENCE

Don't be now.

MABEL

I got too carried away. Tom, I'm not mad at you.

TOM

I know. I would've left too, but I didn't have the car.

MABEL

Sure got hot today, didn't it? Mowing lawn's going to be quite the job.

CLARENCE

It'll be rough alright. But I'm sure the three of us are up to it.

MABEL

You're sure about that now, are you? Hot as it is out.

TOM

We aren't mowing?

MABEL

I think it would be better if we waited until this evening.

CLARENCE

The lawn's gotta get cut.

MABEL

We've things to discuss Clarence. And while he's out driving the four wheeler would be the best time to do it.

CLARENCE

I didn't think you wanted to discuss it.

MABEL

Well I do. But let's not talk about it here. Ethel, Ernest! I've got some cut up. Have some now.

CLARENCE

You better too.

[CLARENCE gives MABEL a peck.]

MABEL

Clarence now. Not in front of people!

[Everyone but MABEL takes a bar.]

ETHEL

They're a little sticky. Frosting's fresh.

[MABEL walks towards the entrance of the shop.]

MABEL

COME ON IN BOYS. THERE'S BROWNIES IN HERE IF YOU WANT SOME!

RANDY

What?

MABEL

THERE'S BROWNIES! FRESH ONES!

RANDY

I don't know if we got the time.

OWEN

I know I do.

[RANDY and OWEN enter the shop.]

RANDY

They smell good.

[RANDY loads up several bars.]

I suppose we shouldn't...YOU WANT ONE KIM?

[Enter KIM.]

KIM

What kind are they?

RANDY

Brownies.

OWEN

[His mouth full.]

Dere really good.

[RANDY goes over and picks up several bars. He hands a few to KIM.]

Here. Don't fuss either. RANDY

[Enter JENNA, back in her original clothes.]

What are we doing? JENNA

Take one. ETHEL

When did you do all these? JENNA

Just finished. Watch out, they're still a little warm. ETHEL

[JENNA takes a bar.]

They're so good. JENNA

It's a simple recipe. Don't want my bars to get too high fillootin'.
[Chuckles.] ETHEL

We should have some music. ERNEST

Sure Dad. Put some on. JENNA

[ERNEST turns on his radio, and the polka music blares out.]

Oh, listen to that! This was a good song. ETHEL

Still is good. ERNEST

Sure. ETHEL
[Chuckles.]

You'll at least dance with me once in a while? GRETCHEN

ERNEST

I'll always dance with you. That isn't gonna change. Clarence, Mabel, you remember the steps to this?

[CLARENCE grabs MABEL.]

CLARENCE

I sure do.

MABEL

Clarence, uff, you are a sly one.

CLARENCE

Try my best.

ERNEST

Dance with me Gretchen. Dance with me.

[ERNEST and GRETCHEN, MABEL and CLARENCE dance. JENNA grabs RANDY.]

JENNA

Come on.

RANDY

Dance? To this?

JENNA

Why not?

RANDY

Yeah, you're right, why not. Okay. Hold this Kim. And don't eat it.

KIM

You're going to dance to this dad?

TOM

I'm in nerd land.

KIM

No doubt.

GRETCHEN

You still got your steps Ernie!

ERNEST

Yup. I got polka feet!

[Sees ETHEL.]

ERNEST(CONT.)

She's still a wall flower, isn't she?

[Pause.]

GRETCHEN

Dance with her.

ERNEST

Now you know I would like to, but I can't.

GRETCHEN

To everyone else in this shop you look like you're standing still. I can't let people think Ernest Johnson is content watching. Ask her. Go on. I'm sure she'll say no. But it wouldn't be right unless you asked.

ERNEST

Ethel. You still remember how, don't you?

ETHEL

Me? No, I don't think so. My legs.

ERNEST

Come on now. I'll go slow.

ETHEL

Really?

ERNEST

We can dance for a little while.

ETHEL

You'll havta hang on tight. I fall down pretty easy.

ERNEST

I'll be able to keep us moving. But we gotta get started first.

[ETHEL and ERNEST dance.]

ERNEST

I'm going to live at your apartment next fall.

ETHEL

Are you? That's wonderful.

[Chuckles.]

ERNEST

Yeah. I'm going down to sign.

ETHEL

That's great. Well, when you move in, just knock on my door. There's that vacant place down the hall. I suppose that's the unit you're moving into.

ERNEST

Probably so.

ETHEL

Isn't that something!

GRETCHEN

There are many kinds of visiting.

[GRETCHEN watches. The dancers dance. The song ends and a commercial comes on.]

JENNA

That was a lotta fun. Thanks.

RANDY

You bet. I needed that.

JENNA

Your bars created quite a party.

ETHEL

Huh? Oh, yes, they did, they did. Usually people are too busy.

ERNEST

More commercials all the time. Gets irritating.

[He shuts off the radio.]

ETHEL

Have another bar?

ERNEST

Mm-hm.

[ERNEST takes one]

GRETCHEN

Been a while since there's been a moment like this. These little moments. Take care of them, Ernie. They go by too fast.

[Pause.]

RANDY
Well, I suppose.

OWEN
Yeah.

RANDY
You ready Kim?

KIM
Dad I-- yes. I'll be waiting out there.

RANDY
I'm done with it if you are.

[KIM walks out.]

OWEN
Today is gonna be mighty pleasant.

RANDY
Day's almost half shot as it is. If he gets too hard to work with, just, just tell him to go home. Tell him I said he could go home.

OWEN
Alright. We'll see what happens.
[To KIM outside.]
KIM! LET'S GET SOME GAS IN THE TRUCK BEFORE WE HOOK ONTO THE PLOW! YEAH, IT NEEDS GAS!

[OWEN exits.]

RANDY
Thanks, Ethel, for the bars.

ETHEL
Sure.

RANDY
[To ERNEST.]
I'll see you later, Ernest. You'll be in Monday?

ERNEST
Nine o'clock.

RANDY
I'm sure something will break by then.

[RANDY waves and exits. JENNA waves.]

You had enough? ETHEL

Plenty. ERNEST

I'll clean up. ETHEL

[ETHEL covers her brownie pan.]

You need some help? MABEL

No, no. ETHEL

I'll get the boys loaded up, come out when your ready. MABEL

Ah, Mabel? That's okay. We can take Ethel home. JENNA

Hm? MABEL

Dad and I are going over there anyway. So it's no problem. JENNA

If that's alright by you Ethel? MABEL

Oh that's alright by me! ETHEL

[Chuckles.]

Just so you get back. See you all later. HEY CLARENCE, LET'S GET ON THE ROAD! MABEL
ETHEL'S GOTTA RIDE!

Give me the keys! TOM

Grandma's got them. CLARENCE

MABEL

Tom, don't you rev the car that much.

CLARENCE

That's right. If you're going to start it, start it decent.

TOM

I will.

[MABEL hands over the keys. TOM runs off.]

CLARENCE

Oh, no! We still got to put that mower in the trunk.

MABEL

That's right! TOM! WAIT!

[TOM revs the car too much.]

CLARENCE

GOODNESS SAKES!

MABEL

What did I tell you? Huh? We don't need to always give him the keys!

CLARENCE

Yes, yes, I know. But he should learn how to start it decent.

[MABEL and CLARENCE exit.]

ETHEL

I got everything here. I'll go out to your car.

JENNA

Alright. We'll be there in a minute.

ETHEL

Okay.

[ETHEL starts out. ERNEST stares after her. KIM starts up the STEVENSON pick-up. RANDY starts KIM's car. CLARENCE, TOM and MABEL drive off. KIM and OWEN drive off. RANDY drives off.]

[Silence.]

ERNEST

They're all gone for today.

[JENNA looks at her watch.]

JENNA

And just in time. We got fifteen minutes.

ERNEST

I suppose I should put up a note in case somebody shows up. This won't take long, will it?

JENNA

I'm sure you'll be back by one thirty.

[ERNEST starts writing a note.]

GRETCHEN

More and more of us is gonna disappear from the country.

ERNEST

It's just for the winter.

[Pause.]

GRETCHEN

No. With each day more of me goes.

ERNEST

Don't take it like that!

GRETCHEN

Part of me already understands why this happens. The rest of me is learning to accept it. Go Ernie. Go.

JENNA

I'm starting the car. Ethel and I'll wait out there for you.

ERNEST

I'll be coming.

[JENNA's about to go out. She stops and looks at him.]

JENNA

Dad?

ERNEST

Hm?

JENNA

You might like it. I hope.

ERNEST

Mm.

[JENNA exits. ERNEST finishes the note. He pulls out a roll of electrician's tape and rips off a piece. He walks over to the door. GRETCHEN follows him out and stands by the plow. A car starts outside.]

[ERNEST sticks on the note. It says in big words, "BE BACK AT ONE-THIRTY". ERNEST exits.]

[JENNA, ERNEST, and ETHEL drive away. GRETCHEN watches them leave.]

END OF PLAY