

REAPERS

By

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Set: An evocation of a farm, structures like ruins as if a tornado had struck but the members of the household don't know it. They move about the place as if it were intact. There is a road where Joey Beam stands when perusing the sky.

Cast:

Tom O'Brien – 16 year old boy from the State Juvenile Home for Children from broken families.

Joey Beam – 60's – A man with a Greek sea captain's hat, who collects cans and bottles from the ditches.

Mildred Fox – 30's – She has a scar emanating from the side of her mouth which makes her face look as if it were in a perpetual scowl.

Deirdre Fox – 17/18 years old, strikingly beautiful, daughter of Leonard and Mildred.

Leonard Fox – 40's. He has lost his farm to the bank and has to work other farms to pay his debts. He is an alcoholic. He has a limp.

Bruce Fox – 19/21, son of Mildred and Leonard. He loves to startle people.

Hulda Fox – Leonard's mother. She has had a stroke and can't speak or move, but she wakes up.

Time: present. Place: Iowa

Act One

The sound of a huge tornado approaching in the dark. The lights rise on Tom.

TOM

A line of tornados covering the entire southwestern horizon, not clouds, funnels, long, graceful ones like dancers' legs, behind them thick ones like stove pipes. The sky is clear to the north and the tornadoes are moving slowly back and forth sweeping everything up, turning the trees, the crops, the houses, the top soil into splinters and mud. They're all gone, beautiful Deirdre and her devil-brother Bruce, the father's already dead with a baling hook in his head, Mildred, his wife lying on the floor and Hulda raves at broken Jesus and his bloody knuckles and Joey Beam stands grinning like a sea captain in the breeze of catastrophe in the tossing waves of alfalfa. (He starts to run in place, slowly at first and then he picks up speed until at the end of his speech he is running for his life.) And I run, I run to the north away from the storm for I am free! I am free!

Cross-fade to Joey Beam. Joey out on the road looking up at the sky.

JOEY

People from out of state think the Midwest is flat. And it is, some places. But the Midwest isn't flat, not by a long shot. It is rolling, with wide horizons, windswept with sheltering valleys. There are no mountains, there is no sea but the waves of rolling corn and alfalfa sweep out like a sea and lisp like the frothing waves. Up north you got an endless sea of prairie mixed with lakes and marshes and great expanses of wetlands. But that's not what I mean. I mean the sky. The sky is hardly ever flat and it is to the sky that I look. The herds of lazy cumulus rolling in blue butter, gathering as the day grows hot, gathering into giant cauliflowers and the thin, wispy cirrus like snatches of hair fallen from a goddess's comb. In the sky, here in Iowa, there are mountains stretching almost up into space. Billowing mountains that would dwarf the Himalayas. Look up there, those are anvil heads, chopped off by the jet stream, some five miles above the land and the humidity like gun powder ready to explode means there's going to be a storm.

Cross-fade to Mildred and Deirdre in the kitchen looking out at Joey.

MILDRED

Look at him out there, talking to himself, picking up tin cans along the road. Looks so terrible like we shipped some bum off the street.

DEIRDRE

Gotta make money some way.

MILDRED

Can't be very much.

DEIRDRE

He gets a nickel a can.

MILDRED

I don't think he sells them. I never see any conveyance toting any cans away. I'll tell you what I think, I think he stores everything in his living room.

DEIRDRE

Living room? You think he's got a living room?

MILDRED

Stores everything from floor to ceiling. I think it's a kind of sickness. (pointing at the dishes) Set another place. We got a boy. Gonna bring in the hay.

DEIRDRE

From the County Home?

MILDRED

Yeah.

DEIRDRE

Why does daddy always get those boys? Why doesn't he get the boys from around here?

MILDRED

Cuz we don't got enough money to pay those kind of wages.

DEIRDRE

What you mean is that nobody will come out here. Gotta use that slave labor from the County Home.

MILDRED

We're doing them a favor, getting them out into the world, teaching them how to work.

DEIRDRE

God knows they don't know how to do that.

MILDRED

What the hell do you know about it? Did you make your bed? Hell, no! Go get the goddamn food out of the stove, you little slut. "Boys from around here," I'll bet you want 'em. Blow you up like a cow like that Cynthia Cramer in Oxford Mills.

DEIRDRE

(mockingly coquettish)

"I ain't done nothin."

MILDRED

You shut up. Sneaking out on the roof after we've gone to sleep. Don't you think I can't hear your big clod-hoppers clumping around on the roof and those boys out there with their engines running. I don't say nothing because I don't want to wake daddy.

DEIRDRE

Yeah, you sure don't want to do that.

MILDRED

Are you sassing? Tell me, are you sassing?

DEIRDRE

No.

MILDRED

Don't you talk to me that way. "No," what?

DEIRDRE

No, ma'am.

Sound of the truck coming into the farm.

MILDRED

Here they come.

Bruce enters.

MILDRED

Did he get one?

BRUCE

Yeah, only one.

Bruce exits into the bathroom. Tom and Leonard enter.

LEONARD

Got a kid, only one.

Mildred gives Tom the once-over and snorts.

MILDRED

I'll set supper.

Deirdre enters from the dining room. Tom is struck by her beauty. He's never seen anybody like that off the movie screen. He averts his eyes as if seeing her might turn him to stone, but it's hard not to look. Leonard gives him a shove and exits into the dining room. Deirdre looks at him as if he were a weirdo.

MILDRED

(to Tom)

What's wrong with you? Get in there.

At first Tom doesn't know what she means, then he realizes that she means for him to go into the dining room. As he crosses into the dining room he sees an old woman sitting upright at the table in a wheelchair. It looks as if she might be dead. Leonard is standing along the wall. He's waiting for Bruce to get out of the bathroom. Tom stands next to the wall and copies Leonard. He's almost got it perfect when he sees that Leonard's hands are holding each other at rest before him. Tom gives Leonard's hands another look then holds his at rest before him too. They stand there silently. Bruce comes out of the bathroom and sits at the table. Leonard goes into the bathroom. Tom looks at the old woman. He feels Bruce's eyes on him. Tom mistakes the look for an order for him to sit down. He impulsively takes a seat across from Hulda.

BRUCE

You're not supposed to sit until you wash your hands.

Tom immediately gets out of the chair and shoves it in its place and takes his original position against the wall. He forgets to hold his hands together, then remembers. Time passes then Leonard comes out of the bathroom and takes his place at the head of the table. Tom remains standing against the wall. Bruce looks at Tom. Leonard notices that Bruce is looking at Tom so he looks at Tom too. Tom looks at both of them as if pinned in a pair of headlights.

LEONARD

Go on.

Tom snaps out of it and exits into the bathroom. Leonard and Bruce remain stoically sitting at the table. Deirdre enters with a pitcher of iced tea and puts it on the table just as Tom enters from the bathroom. Deirdre glances up at him from the pitcher. Tom starts at

the sight of her eyes on him. He has made absolutely no impression on her. She turns and exits into the kitchen. He follows her with his eyes. When she is gone he is left with Bruce and Leonard. They look at him queerly.

LEONARD

Sit down.

He indicates a place at the far end of the table. Tom sits. He is sitting across from Hulda. He can't help staring at her.

LEONARD

That's Hulda, we stuffed her.

Leonard pours a glass of iced tea and hands the pitcher to Bruce, holding the large thing with one hand. Bruce pours himself a glass. It's a kind of male thing, to hold and pour the iced tea from the pitcher with one hand and not spill a drop on the tablecloth. Bruce pours himself a glass in said manner, then extends the pitcher to Tom without looking at him, holding it with one hand. Tom intuits the test and, bracing himself psychologically, grabs the pitcher with one hand only to find that he is unable to hold it that way. He quickly compensates by grabbing with two hands and barely escapes from having it crash on the table. Leonard and Bruce eye him cautiously. They watch him as he pours himself a glass of iced tea. It is a difficult process and to make matters worse the beautiful Deirdre enters with a platter of bread and a butter dish and Tom is caught mid-pour. She looks at him, noticing that he is using two hands to pour iced tea from the pitcher into his glass and if this wasn't problem enough, her presence has caused him to take his eyes from his task and lay them burning on her face. She smirks, sets the platter of bread down and exits into the kitchen. Miraculously, he avoids spilling the tea on the tablecloth. He sets the pitcher on the table, then does a take at Bruce and Leonard. They look at him deadpan. Tom looks down at his empty plate. Leonard stuffs a slice of bread into his mouth and thinks of something deep. He smacks his lips for awhile, then utters...

LEONARD

Jig-boo pygmies come out of the bush. They're so small the big black guys leave them with their wives who think they're cute. Those little "boys" got big whackers, acting all innocent and all. They take everything, their clothes, their food, they fuck their wives, then they disappear into the jungle. Well, that's what it's like watching black comedians on the TV, white folk take it out of guilt, they never say anything back and just like the pygmies, they take everything out of the house and disappear into the ghetto and white people thank them for it cuz they figure they got it coming. What you think about that, son?

TOM

Me, sir?

LEONARD

Well, yeah, I'm lookin at'cha.

TOM

I don't know, sir.

LEONARD

What you mean, you don't know?

TOM

I...I don't know. I don't know what you're talking about, sir.

LEONARD

I'm talking about black comedians on television.

TOM

I don't watch that much television, sir.

LEONARD

Well, do you think I do?

TOM

I don't know, sir.

LEONARD

Well, I don't, I work the whole goddamn day, but when I do all I see are these black comedy shows making fun of white people, "Cracker this, Cracker that, Redneck this, Redneck that, Ole Whitey here, Old Whitey there." You'd think black people ran the country. What do you think, do black people run the country?

TOM

I don't know, sir.

LEONARD

What the hell do you know?

TOM

Not much, sir.

LEONARD

Yeah, right. Maybe you're just a little sneaky, huh? Are you sneaky?

TOM

I don't think so, sir.

LEONARD

You mean, you don't know?

TOM

I try not to be, sir.

LEONARD

Yeah, but you got to try, huh? Hey, you're not one of those mixed breeds? What do they call that, mulatto?

TOM

I'm Irish, sir.

Leonard laughs.

LEONARD

Well, that's just about the same thing. (Shouts at the kitchen) Hey, when in the hell are we gonna get some goddamn food in here?

MILDRED

(snarling)

It's coming, keep your pants on.

LEONARD

Damn weather. Better hope it don't rain tonight, those bales out in the field, they're gonna be heavy if it rains, hay soaks up that water like a sponge. How heavy you'd say they'd be?

BRUCE

(muttering without looking up)

Hundred pounds.

LEONARD

Least a hundred pounds. Get you soaking wet, worse on a hot humid day after a storm. You work with hay much?

TOM

No sir.

LEONARD

Well, you're gonna tomorrow. We'll work even if it's storming. Won't we, son?

BRUCE

If you say so.

LEONARD
(shouting at the kitchen)
When you gonna get some food in here?

MILDRED
(snarling)
Coming right up.

LEONARD
Boy?

TOM
Yes, sir?

LEONARD
You'll be sleeping in the basement.

TOM
Yes, sir.

LEONARD
I don't want you coming up in the house.

TOM
Yes, sir.

LEONARD
I'm responsible for you, you understand?

TOM
Yes, sir.

LEONARD
Consider yourself in jail just like you are in the juvenile home.

TOM
Yes, sir. (pause) I'm not in jail there, sir.

Leonard gives Tom a hard look.

LEONARD
What'd you say?

TOM
(gulps)
The juvenile home, it's not a jail, sir.

Deirdre enters with a covered dish and sets it on the table. Tom is struck by her beauty. He looks at his plate. Deirdre exits into the kitchen.

LEONARD

You mean you can come and go as you please in that place?

TOM

No, sir.

LEONARD

Well there must be a reason for that. Sounds like you're in jail to me. I got my family here and I ain't gonna expose them unnecessarily to criminal content. You're here to work and do your time.

TOM

I'm not doing time, sir.

LEONARD

Well, in my house you are. When I put you down in that basement I'm gonna lock the door behind you.

TOM

Yes, sir.

LEONARD

And don't ever think of runnin away, not on my time. I'm not so slow on my feet and my boy, Bruce, he's a real speed demon. Ain't that right, Bruce?

BRUCE

If you say so.

LEONARD

Ah, he's just being humble.

TOM

I'm not going to run away, sir.

LEONARD

You got a real bad habit, boy, you know what that is?

TOM

No, sir.

LEONARD

You volunteer too many comments. You speak when you're spoken to.

TOM

Yes, sir.

LEONARD

I didn't ask you a question. Did I? I didn't ask you a question. You answer me when I ask you a question. You understand? Well, answer me.

TOM

Is that a question, sir?

LEONARD

Don't get smart with me. Or are you just dumb? Can't you tell when I ask a question?

TOM

Yes, sir.

LEONARD

So, do you understand me?

TOM

Yes, sir.

LEONARD

We work hard around here. You're gonna work the hardest day you ever worked in your life. You better pray that it don't rain tonight cuz those bales are getting into the barn even if we gotta float 'em on your back. What's your name?

TOM

Tom O'Brien.

LEONARD

I don't need your last name, I don't give a damn about your family, probably a bastard anyway.

TOM

I'm not sir.

LEONARD

What the hell did you say?

TOM

I'm not a bastard, sir.

LEONARD

Jesus Christ, can you believe this kid? Just shut the fuck up, okay?

TOM

Yes, sir.

LEONARD

(shouting)

Deirdre?

Deirdre enters.

DEIRDRE

(irritated)

It's coming, didn't know how many of them we'd have to feed.

LEONARD

Well, get it out here, got a long day tomorrow.

The lights crossfade to a special Mildred moves through the darkness towards it, holding something behind her back while she intones her secret desire to the audience.

MILDRED

All I have to have is a "doesn't matter" situation and I'm gonna kill him, doesn't matter which one. Got a hay hook down there in the barn, down there, where they're gonna be, husband and son. (revealing what she has been hiding, it is a baling hook.) Grab the hook. Sweep up. And bring it down!

Cross fade to Leonard is showing Tom to the basement.

LEONARD

You'll be staying here. It's not bad, cooler than the rest of the house. Toilet's in there so you don't need to use the one upstairs. You'll get just enough time to get up out of bed and fall down into it. This is your place, but you won't be seeing much of it. You'd better go to bed cuz there ain't nothing to do. You're gonna have a long day tomorrow.

TOM

Yes, sir.

Leonard exits. Tom takes off his shirt and pants and neatly folds them. He pulls back the covers, then turns off the light and climbs into bed. There is a snickering. Tom starts.

TOM

Who's there?

Suddenly someone jumps on Tom's bed and straddles him. He turns a flashlight on and shines it in Tom's face. It is Bruce.

BRUCE

"Who's there?" Wow, how original.

Bruce turns the flashlight on his own face so that he looks ghoulish.

BRUCE

Hey boy, how you doing? Cat got your tongue? (Turns the light out so that it is dark again) How do you like my sister? I saw you looking at her. I don't blame you, man, she's a beauty. (Turns the flashlight on and shines it on Tom's face) What's your name?

TOM

(stammering)

I told you my name.

Bruce pushes Tom's face back against the pillow with one hand and shines the light on him with the other.

BRUCE

Don't get smart with me. (He releases Tom) I'm Bruce.

TOM

(stammering)

I'm Tom.

Bruce reaches up and turns the hanging bulb on, clicks the flashlight off and puts out his hand.

BRUCE

Nice to meet cha.

TOM

I can't.

BRUCE

Why not, don't cha like me? (He looks down at Tom and realizes that he's pinned him on the bed. He gets up.) He only got one of ya. Cheap bastard, doesn't want to cough up the food, next he'll be getting Mexicans. Cold day in hell when that happens. How come there ain't more of you?

TOM

They all got picked last week.

BRUCE

How come they didn't pick you? Cuz you're worthless, huh?

TOM

Yeah, probably.

BRUCE

Come on, man, have some balls. Have you ever done farm work before?

TOM

Not much.

BRUCE

City slicker, huh? You must live in Des Moines.

TOM

I came from Des Moines.

BRUCE

What do you mean, "you came from Des Moines?"

TOM

First I was in Lincoln.

BRUCE

Lincoln?

TOM

Nebraska.

BRUCE

Lincoln Nebraska, where the hell is that?

TOM

Just outside of Omaha.

BRUCE

Omaha? I thought you were in Lincoln.

TOM

I was in an orphanage.

BRUCE
What were you doing in Des Moines?

TOM
I was with a Boy Scout leader.

BRUCE
Boy Scout? You were with a Boy Scout?

TOM
No, he was a professional Boy Scout leader.

BRUCE
(looks at him suspiciously)
Are you weird?

TOM
What do you mean?

BRUCE
Are you weird?

TOM
I don't think so, maybe.

BRUCE
Maybe? If you're weird you know you're weird.

TOM
How would I know I'm weird?

BRUCE
Everybody who's weird knows he's weird.

TOM
How?

BRUCE
How? Cuz of the way everybody looks at him. (He makes a face of a guy who is weird and speaks from that face.) I'm weird. Come on, man, aren't you just a little bit weird?

TOM
Well, I guess, maybe I'm a little bit weird.

BRUCE

What kind of weird are you?

TOM

Is there a specific kind of weird?

BRUCE

Of course, that's what weird is all about. What kind of weird do you think I am?

TOM

I don't know...you're kind of...violent.

BRUCE

“Violent?” What kind of sissy word is that?

TOM

“Changeable?”

BRUCE

I'm a “Startler.” I like to surprise people. I'm surprising, don't you think?

TOM

Yeah.

BRUCE

What kind of weirdo are you, with a professional Boy Scout?

TOM

Boy Scout leader.

BRUCE

What the hell is that?

TOM

It was a foster home, he was an administrator in the Boy Scouts of America.

BRUCE

Were you a “real good Boy Scout?”

TOM

Not really.

BRUCE

“Not really?” You're not really anything, are you?

TOM

I don't know.

BRUCE

You don't know what?

TOM

Geez, I don't know, I just want to go to sleep.

BRUCE

You kicking me out?

TOM

I just want to go to sleep.

BRUCE

Don't let me stop you. Here, I'll turn off the light. (He turns off the hanging bulb and sits on the cot.) Is that better? (He waits in silence. There is a little time and then...) Are you asleep?

TOM

I can't do it with you sitting on the bed.

He snaps the light on again.

BRUCE

Why not, man? What kind of "not really" Boy Scout were you?

TOM

Don't you want to go to sleep, it's going to be a long day tomorrow.

BRUCE

Shall we cuddle up together?

TOM

Don't you have your own room?

BRUCE

I like yours better. Just kidding, yours sucks, but hey, it's good in a storm. Yeah, but you see, daddy locked us in, now I got to stay here all night and when daddy finds me in the morning with one of those juvey home boys again, well, he's gonna beat the shit out of both of us and he'll report you to the Juvenile Home and it will get all around the place, that that Boy Scout "Tommy" was workin on that merit badge, what was it, "Animal

BRUCE (CONT.)

Husbandry?" (He slips his hand suggestively into his pants.) They're gonna want to make sure that you're doing it right, right? That you pass all the requirements. (He leans close to Tom and pulls from his pants, a key) Oh, look at that. I guess I'll take a rain check. (He gets up and starts for the door, then stops) Aren't you even curious about how I did it?

TOM

Did what?

BRUCE

Jesus, you're a dumb fuck, how I hid in the room without you and Leonard catching me.

TOM

I haven't really had time to wonder.

BRUCE

Yeah, you see, that's the essence of startle-i-zation, you confound them, they don't know which way is up. Once you been startled by a Startler you never get over it because you don't know when you're gonna get startled again. Where do you think I hid?

TOM

I don't know.

BRUCE

Under the bed, the one you're lying in right now. Isn't that neat?

He reaches up and turns off the bulb. He is in the doorway in silhouette.

BRUCE

Her name is Deirdre.

TOM

Who?

BRUCE

My sister.

Cross fade to Hulda sitting in the wheelchair, Deirdre sitting across from her. She's playing with Hulda's hands.

DEIRDRE

Hulda, granny, let's play with our hands. Mine's a fox, yours is a rabbit. (She takes Hulda's hand and moves it around.) The rabbit runs and runs

DEIRDRE (CONT.)

but the fox is too fast and he's too smart, but the rabbit's got hoppy-legs, he's got thumpers so he can pop the fox in the face before he can eat him. (She takes Hulda's hand and slaps herself in the face with it.) Ouch, ouch, you nasty "wabbit." Like Elmer Fudd, right? You know Elmer Fudd, don't you? And Bugs Bunny, "What's up doc?" Can you hear what I'm saying? (She puts her face right into Hulda's face.) Can you hear what I'm saying, grandma? It doesn't matter cuz you never listened to anybody anyway. You just talked and talked. Couldn't shut up. Now God has shut you up, shut you up good and tight. (She pinches Hulda's arm.) Remember how you did this to me? Used to pinch my arm till it was black and blue. "You shut up, you girl you, you shut up!" When I started crying you'd pinch me harder. Then you'd take me on your lap and cuddle in front of mom. And mom would say, "What's wrong with you, Didi? Don't you like granny?" then you'd say, all crafty, "She just loves her granny too much, don't you darlin?" And you'd look at me with those greedy eyes just loving how scared I was of you. You thought I'd forget because I was so young, but I didn't, did I? Are you scared of me, granny, now? I hope you are, I dearly hope you are. (She pinches her more.) Does that hurt, Hulda? Don't say anything now, now don't you say anything. As if you could say anything.

MILDRED

(from the porch)

Deirdre, are you up there with grandma?

DEIRDRE

Yes, mom, I'm entertaining her.

MILDRED

Leave her alone, it's a waste of time, she's as dumb as a board.

DEIRDRE

I don't know about that. People come out of strokes. You just got to work their minds.

MILDRED

The woman never had a mind. She had a broken record for a brain, "The Lord God's gonna do this and the Lord God's gonna do that and begat and begat." Come down here and look at this.

DEIRDRE

Okay, mom. Should I lay her out on the bed?

MILDRED

What difference does it make?

DEIRDRE

I could do it now.

MILDRED

Naw, I'll help you later.

DEIRDRE

Okay. (She crosses to Hulda and slaps her hard across the face, then, talking sweetly) Mom and me will put you up in the bed in a little while. Look at that, I see it in your eyes, you don't like it in this dark room, laying on your back. Here, I'll push you to the window so you can look out at the pretty lightning.

Deirdre pushes Hulda to the window then enters the front porch.

MILDRED
(looking at the sky)

Look at that.

DEIRDRE

Sheet lightning.

MILDRED

Don't you think the weather is getting strange, it's getting worse and worse.

DEIRDRE

I can't tell, the weather is always grumpy.

MILDRED

It's that global warming.

DEIRDRE

Oh Christ, mother, it's just crappy, it's crappy weather. This is a grumpy part of the country. (beat) Do you think she sees me, grandma Hulda?

MILDRED

She sees everything, sees it clearer than you and me, question is whether she puts it together right.

Bruce enters the porch and heads out to his motorcycle.

MILDRED

You're not going out, you're working tomorrow.

BRUCE

I'm working tomorrow everyday so what's the difference?

MILDRED

You're going out to meet up with Dickey, aren't you?

BRUCE

Maybe I am. So what?

MILDRED

Don't talk to me like that.

Bruce is quickly at Mildred's side and lays his head on her shoulder.

BRUCE

(sweetly)

Mom, you really don't have to worry about me, I'm a good boy.

DEIRDRE

You're an asshole.

Bruce crosses to Deirdre.

BRUCE

Thing about muslins is that they know the right place for women, cover 'em up and make 'em stay at home. You know what would do just as good? (He traces a scar on Deirdre's face with his finger) A scar.

MILDRED

(Shouting)

Don't you talk to her like that, you devil. You ever touch her, I'll kill you!

BRUCE

(sweetly)

Didi.

DEIRDRE

I hate you.

BRUCE

Didi, don't be dreary. I think that boy's got the hots for you. But who hasn't?

DEIRDRE

What boy?

BRUCE

The boy in the basement. Gotta watch her like a hawk, mom.

MILDRED

(to Deirdre)

Don't you do anything with those juvenile delinquents.

DEIRDRE

That little shrimp, what is he, 13?

BRUCE

Oh no, I think he's in full bloom, 16 at least.

DEIRDRE

I didn't notice him.

BRUCE

He noticed you. He was like asking me all these questions about you. You know, she sneaks out at night, but you know that, don't you?

DEIRDRE

You're an asshole.

BRUCE

I love you both to death. See ya later.

DEIRDRE

Not if I see you first.

BRUCE

Oh you won't, I'll always see you first.

He exits.

MILDRED

I don't want you going out tonight.

DEIRDRE

I'm not going out.

MILDRED

You shut up. You stay in and keep your window closed.

Sound of a motorcycle, then diminishing in the distance. Leonard enters.

LEONARD

That son of a bitch, did he take off?

MILDRED

What do you think?

LEONARD

Did you tell him to stay?

MILDRED

Yeah, and he's gonna listen to me?

LEONARD

It looks like it's gonna storm. The hay is gonna be wet, son of a bitch. I don't know about that kid I got. (To Deirdre) You're gonna have to work with us tomorrow, you're gonna have to drive the tractor.

DEIRDRE

Shit, dad.

MILDRED

Cut the "shit".

LEONARD

I'm gonna need your help.

DEIRDRE

I've got stuff to do around the house.

MILDRED

No, you don't. You were planning on goofing off with your little townie friends.

LEONARD

I'm not sure about that kid, I'm gonna have to heave the bales with Bruce.

DEIRDRE

Why did you have to get such a runt?

LEONARD

That's all that was left. I'm gonna go down and work on the baler.

He heads to the barn and exits.

MILDRED

Just lie low tonight and keep your mouth shut. Go to bed.

DEIRDRE

It's early.

MILDRED

Shut up. What don't you get about this situation, dearie?

Blackout. A special rises on Bruce. Sound of crickets.

BRUCE

Dickey Doright breathed it out
 like a soft breath from a dragon,
 breathed it out like he was rolling fire
 around in his mouth lettin a curl of it leak
 over his lips all purple and red,
 and I had to grin. And Dickey says,
 "My daddy's an Arab sailor half filled with nigger blood."
 "So's mine," breathe I, just as happy as he. "In the same fleet."

"Yeah. You want a girl, boy?"

"Yeah, I want a girl," sez I.

"You know the house.

There's a ladder on the side of the shed.

You come up, she'll be ready for you."

The heart of a hunter,
 night creatures,
 my time, my feet
 hovering machines
 flying me over the road,
 sheet lightning making a skeleton of me,
 skull bones and arms swinging like hatchets,
 the smells of the stormy night fresh burned by electricity,
 sounds, sharp and full of omens.

The shed and the ladder and the house gleaming
 the white house and the window open on the second story
 the roof pointing up
 like it was taking messages from other planets
 the white house with the black
 little squares shining with sheet lightning.
 Sez I to myself,
 "Take off your shoes, Brucey
 and walk on your hind legs,"
 slipping across the lawn cut short as a truck driver's butch,

BRUCE (CONT.)

wet between my toes,
me creeping toward that white house.

Soft as a kitten laying its paw on a string
that's been lying too long,
I let that ladder tap the ledge 'neath that window.
Up I go like some old time god
climbing to the sun 'cept it is night,
the room, dark,
a heat growing between my legs,
ice in my belly

and that hunger that makes my hands ache-
bump into a nightstand,
catch a little dancing girl made out of china,
lightning flashing soundless on a bed,
only her tummy rising and falling
'neath her little print night shift,
looking at me with big soft puddles
deep as lakes I could dive in,
a beauty like some strange moth
Dickey had caught for me and brought indoors.
And there he is standing over the bed
like some excellent monster.

The lights fade on him. Tom's basement room.

TOM

I've come to a new place now to work on a farm outside in the country,
they say for three days, putting up the last crop of hay. That boy here
frightens me. His sister is a beauty. Her eyes are so beautiful they make
me want to cry. On the way here in the farmer's truck I heard the cicadas
singing and it made me fall in love with the fall again. Maybe I'll get out
of the Home. Maybe my mom will come and get me and move to Ames
where my uncle Andy is. I remember Council Bluffs and those evergreens
and the river and the sky. That girl, Deirdre, she makes me feel like that.
Everything opens up when I think about her and then it closes down
because she scares the surprise out of me and I keep wanting to look at her
again. There must be nothing in heaven or on earth more beautiful than a
woman. I got to go to sleep tonight because I'm going to bale in the
morning but I'm afraid if I do that boy will come out from under the bed
and grab me. (He checks under the bed) Nope, he's not there.

Fireflies appear. Sheet lightning. Sound of Bruce's motorcycle approaching. It comes to the back of the house. Bruce is returning home in the middle of the night. He approaches the porch from the backyard.

LEONARD

There you are.

Bruce starts. Leonard's been sitting on a chair in the dark.

BRUCE

Holy shit! You got me. I should'a known.

LEONARD

What's that?

BRUCE

That you'd be lurking here in the dark.

LEONARD

My house, my porch, my dark.

Bruce backs down the stairs into the front yard. Leonard is still couched in darkness.

BRUCE

The darkness belongs to everybody, didn't know you had a title to it.

LEONARD

You been out with Dickey?

BRUCE

Sorta.

LEONARD

Sorta?

BRUCE

I only hung out with him part of the time.

LEONARD

Which part?

BRUCE

The last part.

LEONARD

Of course, the last part. You get in trouble?

BRUCE

Nope, they didn't catch us.

LEONARD

Sit down.

BRUCE

Got to go to bed, dad, got work tomorrow.

Leonard stands and his head appears from the darkness. He's drunk.

LEONARD

Sit down.

BRUCE

(meaning Leonard is drunk)

“Workin late,” huh?

Leonard tosses him a can of beer. Bruce catches it, pops the top and drinks but doesn't sit.

LEONARD

Sit down.

BRUCE

I don't want to sit down, dad.

Leonard approaches Bruce. He seems bigger when he's been drinking. Bruce holds his ground.

BRUCE

You gonna do something nasty, daddy?

LEONARD

Fuck you, boy.

BRUCE

Is it “fuck you boy” time? (They stand and look at each other.) We gonna have it out, daddy? I'm a lot younger than you, pop, but then, you're tougher.

Leonard stands swaying a little, watching his son.

LEONARD

You calling me out, son?

BRUCE

What's that mean?

LEONARD

What does that mean?

BRUCE

Goddamned if I know, dad.

LEONARD

You gonna try me out again, want to go to the barn and see who comes out?

BRUCE

I'm confused, daddy, should I go to the barn or should I drink the beer you gave me?

LEONARD

Finish your beer, then let's go to the barn.

BRUCE

Sounds like a plan.

Bruce sits down on the porch facing Leonard. Leonard sits back in his chair and watches Bruce. Bruce takes a swig.

LEONARD

Don't hurry on my account.

BRUCE

I'm not.

Leonard takes a long drink.

LEONARD

It's gonna rain like a son of a bitch. It's gonna rain.

BRUCE

The hay's gonna be wet. Always the big question, to bale wet or wait.

LEONARD

If it's wet it'll leach out ten percent of digestible energy.

BRUCE

Yep, and lose carbohydrates. We could wait a few days and see if they might dry out.

LEONARD

I only got that boy for a few days.

BRUCE

“That boy,” what good is he?

LEONARD

That’s all we got.

BRUCE

You better have Deirdre drive the tractor, gonna need you to bale with me and that piece of peach fuzz.

LEONARD

I already told her.

BRUCE

Bet she loved that. (Takes a drink) Anyway, I don't know if the storm’s gonna hit, saw it from the road. It’s moving north.

LEONARD

You some kind of weatherman?

BRUCE

You taught me everything I know.

LEONARD

Everything?

BRUCE

Every damn thing.

They both take a drink. The sound of thunder. The flashes of lightning get brighter.

LEONARD

What did you do out there?

BRUCE

You want to know, don't you? You want to run with us, me and Dickey, but you can't, cuz you're lame, but you want to run in my skin, like Leroy used to run with you.

LEONARD

What'd you do?

BRUCE

You won't tell nobody will you?

Bruce laughs. Leonard watches him and takes a sip of beer. The can is almost empty.

LEONARD

Linda Luther?

BRUCE

Yeah, maybe.

LEONARD

Wasn't her daddy there?

BRUCE

Nope, he's working the night shift at Wal Mart, stocking shelves.

Leonard finishes his beer and tosses the can at Bruce's feet.

LEONARD

You go first?

BRUCE

Always do.

Bruce downs his beer and carefully puts the can on the ground, then turns and heads toward the barn. Leonard follows him into the barn. A light rises in the barn. Leonard and Bruce cast big shadows as they fight. The fight continues and then silence. The light fades.

Deirdre appears on the roof of the house. She addresses the sky.

DEIRDRE

Peter Pan pick me up. I'm waiting. Tinker Bell, come on down here and show me the way.

Joey Beam appears in the field looking up at the sky. Deirdre sees him.

DEIRDRE

Hey old man, what you doin? You want to do it? (To herself) What would it be like to do it with an old man? His skin all wrinkly and thin like some old tarp on a pile of bones. Could he get it up would be the question. Still I wonder what it would be like. Can't get to Booneville tomorrow, gotta

drive the tractor. Screw you, Leonard. If that twerp kid they got from the Home was worth his salt I wouldn't have to drive that goddamned tractor. Then I could have gone to Coon's Corner and pick up some Pantene, tampons and a bristle brush, talk to Lloyd at the butcher shop. Maybe it won't rain, maybe it will pass through and even that kid could heave the bales and Leonard could drive the tractor. Peter Pan come down to me from the heavens and grant me a wish that it doesn't rain. (To Joey Beam) Hey old man, what you standing out there for, you won't find any cans in the dark. Come on, take that costume off and sweep me away, I know you got a prince under that old sack of skin. You spooky old fart, you're my stationary daddy, you're my yard statue. (To the sky) It's gonna rain, isn't it, Jiminy Cricket, it's gonna goddamn rain.

She begins to sing.

DEIRDRE

When you wish upon a star,
makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires
will come to you

If your heart is in your dreams,
no request is too extreme
When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true.

The lightning bugs fade and the wind begins to blow high in the heavens, making a hollow sound.

Leonard alone under special.

LEONARD

We all saw it. 10 A.M., an unlikely time for a leaping, but if you're a drinker it might just be the butt-end of a binge, a long binge, a very long binge and Clarence, my dad, had been on one for a year now, I mean, not a sober moment and it wasn't because he was having trouble keeping the farm, although he was certainly having that, but it wasn't troubles that made him drink, it was the hair of the dog he was chasing, that hair that was getting shorter by the day, that made him drink, that shot of whisky chaser that swallowed the growing army of goblins that waited for him on the other side of drunk. Hell, a bottle at 4 A.M. after a couple of hours of pass-out could fetch him a fresh patch of skin, a buzz like a virgin boy's first high, but that would only last a few minutes and then he was simply drunk again in the middle of the night with a whole day to go through, and then of course there were the black-outs where any old fucking devil could

LEONARD (CONT.)

put on his skin and take him over. I think that's what jumped him off the window that morning. And I believe that: he didn't jump, he was jumped. It was like something inside of him came up with the bright idea for a circus act, a one time deal to be performed for the entertainment of his children, all 12 of us, cleaning up the farm that Saturday morning. Standing up on the roof crowing like a rooster, Hulda reaching out for him like they do in the silent movies. It'd be funny to anybody who hadn't been living through it. But still and all, I didn't think he'd jump. I mean the jumping was okay and the falling was kind of beautiful, it's the corpse you got left over after the trick is done. I just couldn't get over that dead body on the front lawn. Made me afraid of heights, I can tell you that. And then, of course, him leaving me holding the bag, being the oldest and all, 19 with a mother and 11 kids and a farm just about to go under. It was the end of my days runnin with Leroy.

The lights cross fade to Mildred wheeling Hulda into the kitchen. A box fan sitting on the floor. It is on high.

Joey comes out into his field and looks at the sky. Mildred sees him.

MILDRED

There he is right on time. That old son of a bitch, he used to be beautiful. I remember and I was just a kid. All the girls loved him. Do you remember, Hulda, do you? Do you remember Joey Beam? How good he looked on a tractor or with a horse between his legs? Do you, you old bitch? You had the hots for him, I know, used to watch you fiddle with your fingers on your lap like they were whispering dirty thoughts to each other; you, sitting on the porch behind the railing; you, mooning at the sky while you were washing dishes. I know who you were thinking about. (She puts her face close to Hulda's.) I know who. (She pinches Hulda's cheek.) I know who... (She goes back to her work.)...that old fart out there, not a brain in his head, waiting for something. What the hell is he waiting for?

HULDA

The storm.

Mildred stops in her tracks. She slowly turns and looks at Hulda. Hulda remains immobile as she was before. Mildred approaches her. She scrutinizes her.

MILDRED

Did you say something? Course you didn't say anything. (She turns back to her work, then back to Hulda. Hulda remains the same.) You scary old bitty.

She goes back to her work.

HULDA

There's a fly on your finger.

Mildred is not sure whether she should look at her finger or if she should turn around and look at Hulda. She chooses her finger. Hulda laughs a kind of low smoky laugh.

HULDA

Missed it. There it is, on the wall.

Mildred turns to her, her eyes wide, her mouth agape.

HULDA

Oh, my God, it's flown into your pie-hole.

Mildred's mouth clamps shut of itself.

HULDA

Now you caught it.

Mildred puts her hand to her mouth. Hulda cackles. Mildred slowly withdraws her hand from her face and stares at Hulda.

MILDRED

Hulda?

Hulda cocks an eye at her. Mildred gazes at her in horror.

MILDRED

You've come back.

HULDA

Come back? Ain't gone anywhere.

MILDRED

My god, you've come back!

She approaches Hulda cautiously.

HULDA

Wash your hands!

Mildred isn't sure whether she should ignore Hulda's command considering the momentousness of the situation, so she continues her approach.

HULDA

Wash your hands!

Mildred washes her hands. She turns off the faucet and turns to Hulda.

HULDA

That's not long enough. Long enough is one verse of "Happy Birthday."
Do it!

Mildred, terrified, washes her hands while Hulda mumbles the song with her.

MILDRED

"Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday Dear...(doesn't know what to sing)
Happy birthday to you."

There, now they're clean.

Mildred approaches Hulda.

HULDA

Don't touch me, I hear how you talk about me.

Mildred hesitates.

HULDA

(crafty)

I hear everything. I heard that fly out in the yard. I heard it coming toward the window. I heard it land on your skin.

MILDRED

Hulda, is it really you?

HULDA

You'd better turn that fan off, it draws tornados.

Mildred looks doubtfully at the fan.

HULDA

Do it!

She turns off the fan.

MILDRED

Mother?

HULDA

Mother? Don't you mother me. They're coming back.

There is a silence then the sound of the truck coming back from baling. Mildred turns back to Hulda. Hulda has returned to her original state, slack-jawed, empty-eyed. Mildred crosses to Hulda.

MILDRED

Hulda? Stop that. I know you're pretending. Stop it!

She begins shaking Hulda. Deirdre enters.

DEIRDRE

What's going on?

The rest try to enter but are blocked at the doorway by Deirdre, who stands amazed. The males peer over her shoulder at Mildred who is violently shaking Hulda.

MILDRED

She's been tricking us! She's been hiding all this time! Come on, talk to them! Tell them!

Leonard pushes Deirdre aside.

LEONARD

Take her out of here, Bruce.

BRUCE

Sure pop.

He grabs Mildred and pulls her into the interior of the house off stage.

MILDRED

(as Bruce drags her off stage)

She's alive! She's alive!

Leonard cautiously approaches Hulda. He leans close to her face and ganders at her.

LEONARD

(as if talking to some one far away)

Hello? Hello?

He rises up and cocks his head at her.

LEONARD

Get her to her room.

Deirdre gazes at Hulda in dread.

DEIRDRE

Why me?

LEONARD

(meaning dumb-struck Tom)

What, is he supposed to do it?

Deirdre approaches Hulda with no little trepidation.

LEONARD

Come on, get on with it, she ain't gonna hurt 'cha.

Deirdre pushes Hulda into the interior of the house. Leonard notices Tom's paralyzed stare. He gives him a shove toward the basement door.

LEONARD

What the hell you staring at? Get on downstairs.

The lights cross fade to Joey out in his field.

JOEY

See, the ice sheets reflect the sunlight like mirrors back into space but water absorbs heat, so once it starts getting warm it just gets warmer, then the fingerprints of water appear, fissures snap like thin ice underfoot and glaciers crack and collapse. Iceberg calves nose through the arctic sea following the North Atlantic Gyre: North Equatorial Current, Gulf Stream, North Atlantic Current, and the Canary Current. Who says God does not write upon the water? Pinatubo erupts in the Philippines, shifting the Earth's blue skin and it rains in Africa. Here in Iowa the sky is just as ecumenical. Some clouds are Aztec, some are Thule. Those clouds up there I call them Warrior Clouds. They come out first after the herd clouds have been sucked up into the Billowers. They don't have electricity in them, they just gather up the drifters. The Warriors come out in a line, all gray and heavy. They're cold clouds, they sweep any stragglers and blow them apart until they're like angel hair. That's when a storm is about to brew. I know, I can feel the change and there's a name for that, it's called "The Change." Goes through the bones like ghosts passing through a wall. First comes the Cold Ghost, he's big and upright, he's hard, pass right through you like a blunt knife. There's a lot of him in one bundle, moves through fast, knocks on through. Rude and distant. Then, there's the Warm Ghost, she's wide and

JOEY (CONT.)

soft, but there's a lot of her, so she keeps coming. She's horizontal and goes through the pores, makes you sweat sometimes cuz she sucks the water out of you. She's coarse and nose-y. And then there's the Struggle. That's when they try to get home, Cold Ghost to the ground, Warm Ghost to the sky. That's when the Billowers vanish and the Wall comes in, gray and green like a thick sea.

Hulda's room. Hulda is sitting in her wheelchair, Deirdre is sitting a goodly distance across from her as if in a bizarre painting by Whistler; the pretty girl with her head in a troubled angle, watching beneath her eyebrows and the slack-jawed old woman looking at nothing. They sit there facing each other, unmoving, in silence. Then...

DEIRDRE

Grandma? (silence) Grandma? (silence) Grandma? (double silence) Shit, you didn't say anything. You're still just as dumb as a board. (silence) Aren't you? (silence) Fox and Rabbits, want to play with hands? Naw, you don't get to cuz I don't trust you, you evil old cow, mother of my father, it'd be just like you to do something sneaky. That ole brain's just rotted jelly up there, isn't it? Can't believe you used to be pretty. Is it gonna happen to me that way, get old and ugly with rotten meat in my head? (silence) What did you do to my mama? What'd you do to her? (She scooches herself in her chair a few inches toward Hulda). I ain't afraid of you. Ain't, ain't, ain't. Come on, old lady, talk to me. (She scooches a little closer) You know how much I hate you? Not because of what you did to me, oh yeah, I hate you for that, but I hate you more because you remind me of how old and weak I'm gonna be if I don't die soon. (She scooches a little closer) You asshole, you old asshole. (She puts her face in Hulda's) What you gonna do? What you gonna do?

Suddenly Hulda grabs Deirdre's hair with both hands. Deirdre shrieks and tries to free her hair but Hulda holds on, all the while her face dead, her tongue lolling in her open mouth.

DEIRDRE

Mommy, mommy help me! Mommy, mommy help me! Help me!
Mommy!

Mildred rushes into the room and screams then begins struggling to free Deirdre from Hulda's grip. It's an iron grip and can't be loosened so she begins pounding on Hulda. Deirdre is shrieking all the while. Leonard enters.

MILDRED

Oh, my God! Leonard! Leonard!

LEONARD

Jesus, God, what the hell's going on with you goddamn women? Bruce!
Bruce! Get yer ass up here.

Bruce enters.

BRUCE

Let me try something.

Bruce throws Mildred to the floor. Bruce starts tickling Hulda.

BRUCE

Coochie, coochie coo. Come on, granny.

Suddenly Hulda lets out a wild cackling laugh and releases Deirdre. Deirdre screams and rushes from the room. Bruce stops tickling Hulda but she continues cackling. The sound of crickets begins to emerge and as the lights fade the crickets grow in number and Hulda laughs into the darkness.

ACT TWO

Special on Tom.

TOM

It didn't rain. It was bright and strange and warm.
The wind blew but it had no sense of itself as if
what was blowing was not the wind. The sky was
bright but great clouds lurked on every horizon,
billowing and far away. And she, red bandanna
around her hair, guiding that green tractor,
sleeves rolled, her worn jeans and tennis shoes;
she was the eye of the storm, the earth dragging
space and time like honey around her and me casting
my sight on her with every bale I hoisted onto
the wagon, hay bales brittle with golden spikes
stabbing my wrists till they bled, my hands
swollen and hot in the thick leather gloves,
sweat stinging my eyes, the burning empty
sky and her. The farmer, the boy and me, moving
to the bales that covered the long low slope like
some ancient places that had left ruins everywhere
in neat, even rows. It pulled on me, a sweetness,
like a memory of something that had never happened
to me but which I had remembered, that had always
been there with me and that these people who I had met
only the day before had always been there with me

TOM (CONT.)

in that moment as we snaked along, the farmer with
the bruised face and the limp, the son with the black eye
and the nasty grin and the girl on the green John Deere tractor.

The lights rise on the dining room. Bruce is sitting at the table looking up at Tom. Hulda is at her place in her wheelchair looking as dead as ever. Tom crosses and stands against the wall holding his hands waiting to wash. Leonard enters from the bathroom and takes his seat.

LEONARD

Well, go on.

Tom goes into the bathroom and closes the door behind him. Leonard and Bruce let their eyes rest in each other's proximity. Tom exits the bathroom and at the same moment Deirdre enters with the pitcher. They briefly exchange glances. Deirdre smiles at Tom. Tom is momentarily stunned.

LEONARD

Sit down.

Tom takes his place at the table. Then the iced tea pitcher test begins, Leonard easily pouring the tea from the pitcher with one hand, then Bruce, who, finished, extends it to Tom (whose eyes have barely left the space that Deirdre left behind). Tom turns and finds the pitcher held before him. He looks at it as if it were Excalibur buried in the stone. He grabs the pitcher by the handle with one hand and, shaking, he waggles the iced tea into the glass without spilling a drop, then shifts the pitcher level and places it on the table and expels the breath he has been holding. Bruce and Leonard have watched the entire procedure. Mildred enters with the bread on a plate and warily places it on the table then exits. Leonard grabs a piece of bread and stuffs it into his mouth. Then he gets that look in his eyes, like he's thinking of something deep.

LEONARD

(smacking his lips)

What we got is good leadership. I mean, good, not a lot of fancy-assed speeches, just a down to earth kind of guy. Kick the shit out of the you-know-who's. You know who that is? It's the whoever. Go in and take 'em out. Not any of this worry about civilians. If one of us gets it, a hundred of them get it worse. They blow up a car, we blow up a town. They blow up a building, we blow up a city. That "Arnold," the "Terminator," get a few thousand of him and send 'em down the street, open fire on anything that moves. "Arnolds," that's what we'd call 'em. And those planes without pilots, blast anything that flies, pop a cockroach off a thimble. And way out in space, those satellites with x-rays that can look through walls, can't nothing escape our eyes. No shit. We don't need all these countries taking

LEONARD (CONT.)

up tax dollars. Clean ‘em out, clean ‘em up. Take over the oil wells and put Americans in there to run ‘em. Put Americans to work. Don't ship jobs overseas, ship Americans. (to Tom) What you think, boy?

TOM

It's a good idea, sir.

Bruce laughs.

LEONARD

(to Bruce)

What's your problem?

BRUCE

What's he gonna be, one of those "Arnolds?"

LEONARD

Those "Arnolds" aren't people, they're machines. Besides, that boy did a good day's work.

BRUCE

You mean, he survived. The way those crickets are singing means it's gonna rain. See how he handles wet bales.

LEONARD

That's an old wives' tale.

BRUCE

Bull shit. You count the chirps in 14 seconds, add forty and you get the temperature within one degree.

LEONARD

That's a goddamn good way to spend your time, counting cricket chirps.

BRUCE

I'm just saying chirping crickets mean a weather change.

Deirdre enters with a covered dish.

BRUCE

Isn't that true, Didi?

DEIRDRE

Don't call me Didi.

Again, she glances at Tom then exits.

LEONARD

You did good today, boy. Don't listen to that son of a bitch.

BRUCE

It's gonna storm, it's simply gonna happen, the bales are gonna be heavy, I don't think this kid's gonna be able to lift them.

TOM

I will.

Bruce stops and fixes his eyes on Tom.

BRUCE

What did you say?

TOM

I'm gonna lift them.

BRUCE

You got a snappy mouth, boy.

TOM

I don't mean to be impolite, I'm just gonna lift them.

LEONARD

Shit, listen to that. Sounds like a challenge to me.

Bruce fixes his eyes on Tom but speaks to Leonard.

BRUCE

You think so, pop?

TOM

(in way over his head)

I mean, I'm really gonna try hard, I liked it, I liked being outside in the fields, working...

Deirdre enters and stands near Tom. Tom can feel her presence.

DEIRDRE

Do you want me to work tomorrow?

LEONARD

You volunteering?

DEIRDRE

Yeah.

LEONARD

I think I'm gonna have a stroke. (to Hulda) Excuse me, mama.

BRUCE

Now I wonder why she would wanna do that?

DEIRDRE

Just want to help.

LEONARD

She doesn't want to stay home with grandma.

DEIRDRE

I just want to help.

She exits in a huff and Bruce turns his head to Tom.

BRUCE

Isn't that nice? (to Leonard) Let me take him down, dad.

LEONARD

What do you mean?

BRUCE

Lock him in the basement. What'd you think I meant? "Take him down?"

LEONARD

I don't give a damn what you do, just lock the door, they'll have my ass if he gets away.

BRUCE

He won't get away. Doesn't want to, do you? You like to bale.

TOM
(to Leonard)

Yes, sir.

BRUCE

I'm not a "sir."

TOM

I meant, Leonard.

LEONARD

“Leonard?” We’re not exactly on a first name basis.

TOM

I don't know your last name.

LEONARD

It’s “Fox,” but “sir,” will do.

TOM

Yes, sir.

LEONARD

Just shut up, boy, I don't know what bothers me about you, but you just kind of yip all the time like some gerbil. Don't say, yes sir. Just shut up. Don't even look at me. Look down at your plate. Jesus Christ, look down at your plate! (to Hulda) You know mama, just when I start to like that boy he brings on this goody-goody shit, trying to make me like him. Making sure that he’s real clear with me. You act like a little sugar pill. Take him on down to the basement and bring his food to him.

Leonard tosses Bruce the keys.

BRUCE

Come on, get up.

Bruce pulls Tom up from the chair. Black out.

A special rises and Mildred crosses to it singing while sewing a napkin.

MILDRED

O can ye sew cushions
 And can ye sew sheets?
 And can ye sing ballulow
 When the bairn greets.
 And hee and baw birdie
 And hee and baw lamb
 And hee and baw birdie
 My bonnie wee lamb.

Mildred pricks her finger with the needle. She puts her finger in her mouth and sucks at it and smiles. The special cross fades to the basement as Bruce is shoving Tom onto the cot.

BRUCE

Why do you always fuck up, man?

TOM

I wasn't trying.

BRUCE

Yeah, seems to come natural to you.

TOM

What am I supposed to say?

BRUCE

Don't say anything.

TOM

If I don't say anything I get in trouble too.

BRUCE

Don't make things so complicated. You got to get some attitude.

TOM

But then I'll get in trouble.

BRUCE

That's the wrong attitude. You're too afraid of pain, man. Nothing can hurt that much. Look at this. (He points to his black eye) It didn't hurt that much and you saw what I did to him.

TOM

You did that to him?

BRUCE

Oh yeah. It was fun. We both had fun. We're gonna do it again tonight.

TOM

Why, for God's sake?

BRUCE

Cuz that's what we do during the reaping. Every night during the last crop of hay we fight. Usually takes three days if it doesn't rain. It's a tradition, my dad did it with his dad and his dad did it with his dad before. I've been doing it since I was 13.

TOM

Why?

BRUCE

Why? To see who wins. He's a tough guy, my dad, but I'm gonna beat him.

TOM

Why do you need to beat him?

BRUCE

Because it'll feel good. You know my dad, how he got that limp? Clarence gave it to him, but Leonard beat him.

TOM

Beat him?

BRUCE

Kicked the shit out of him the next year with that game leg. (He sits on Tom's cot) So how do you like my sister?

TOM

What do you mean?

BRUCE

What do I mean? You know what I mean.

TOM

She looked at me.

BRUCE

So?

TOM

Nothing. She just didn't notice me at all before.

BRUCE

And you think she notices you now?

TOM

No, but she looked at me a couple of times.

BRUCE

She's completely out of your league. I mean, men look at her, grown men, men with wives and kids. And the boys, the boys at school, well, you're not one of them.

TOM

I'm not trying anything.

BRUCE

That's the point isn't it? That's why you ain't anything. Oh yeah, I saw her looking at you. It didn't mean anything, she was just pimping you, she knows it makes you crazy and she gets off on it, giving a little shrimp like you the wet eye. Listen, might as well face it, a girl like that is never gonna go for a guy like you. Chicks like to mate with evil guys. They really get hot for them.

TOM

I don't think that's true.

BRUCE

Oh yes, it is, it's like science, you just got to face it. Hey, look at me.

TOM

What do you mean?

BRUCE

Look at me.

Bruce leans close to Tom.

BRUCE

You and me, right now, here alone. Look at me, I'm the same skin as her, I'm her brother. Look at my eyes, they're the same as her eyes. Look at my lips, they're the same as her lips. (Speaking seductively to Tom) Here we are alone together. This is the closest you're ever gonna be to her. (He watches Tom) I can hear your breathing. Can you hear mine?

Tom listens to his breathing even though he doesn't want to.

BRUCE

It's cold, like the breath of a ghost, comes over you, makes you want something you shouldn't want. (Tom looks away) What you looking away for?

Tom looks at him, not wanting to appear afraid to look at him and yet, afraid. Bruce slowly approaches him. He licks his lips, then parts them and gazes into Tom's eyes. Tom is both horrified and transfixed. Bruce seductively touches Tom's face and brings his face to his. Tom can't move. It looks as if Bruce is going to kiss him, then Bruce gives him a shove onto the cot.

BRUCE

What the fuck, are you queer or something? I'm just pimping you, man. See, it's just science. You know I used to choke Deirdre when she was a baby. I didn't hate her or anything, still don't, but man, I just wanted to choke her. It just came into my head. I held back for a real long time but then I did it, couldn't stop doing it. See, I didn't choke her hard, I just cut the air off. But Mildred caught me doing it. Man, she gave me a slapping, but I got her back. I broke a glass in her mouth. That scar there (he touches Tom's face where Mildred's scar is) She was drinking a glass of iced tea, threw an elbow into her face.

Tom dives at Bruce and pushes him on the floor.

TOM

You son of a bitch!

Bruce overpowers Tom and throws him on the bed and climbs on top of him and starts choking him.

BRUCE

You don't know who you're fucking with, asshole. You're starting to turn blue. You stop squirming and I'll let you go.

Tom stops moving. Bruce slowly releases Tom. Tom is gasping for breath.

BRUCE

See, I'm not such a bad guy, I could have beat the crap out of you and no one would have cared. You don't even count, except for one thing. You know what that one thing is? (He pulls Tom to a sitting position and pats him on the cheek) You're gonna be the witness to my coming out.

TOM

Your what?

BRUCE

My coming out, like a debutante. Look at my face, look at it. I want you to remember this face cuz when I come back I want you to tell me how it looks.

TOM

I don't understand.

BRUCE

I'm gonna kill somebody tonight. It hit me sitting at the dinner table. "I'm gonna kill somebody tonight." And there's no way out of it once you

BRUCE (CONT.)

thought of it. It's like the blue monkey trick. I'll give you a million dollars if you don't think of a blue monkey. Can't do it can you? Thinking that way about killing somebody is a real startle-i-zation.

TOM

What are you telling me this for?

BRUCE

Cuz I want to have a witness.

TOM

Does that mean you're gonna kill me?

BRUCE

No, stupid, otherwise I wouldn't have a witness.

TOM

I'm gonna have to watch you kill somebody?

BRUCE

No, I want you to see me before and after I kill someone. You can see me now, the way I am, but when I come back I'll be a murderer. It will be an amazing event for both of us.

TOM

You're crazy.

BRUCE

You're a perfect witness, you got no balls. You're like a piece of toilet paper, so white. After I do it, all I'll have to do is look into your face and see what I've done.

TOM

And then you'll kill me?

BRUCE

Maybe not, man. You just hang tight. You'll be a witness to something special, something that doesn't happen every day.

TOM

Aren't you afraid I'll tell somebody?

BRUCE

No.

TOM

Why?

BRUCE

Because you're too chicken. Anyway, nobody's gonna listen to you, you got no family, you got nobody.

Bruce crosses to the door.

TOM

Are you coming back in the middle of the night?

BRUCE

Maybe, maybe not. That's the startle-i-zation of it. See you later.

Bruce exits.

Cross fade to Mildred and Leonard on the porch arguing. Leonard is cleaning a gear.

LEONARD

We can't be stopping now. We got one more field to hay. That'll pay the rent through the winter. You can take her to the clinic in Booneville. I'm gonna need Deirdre tomorrow.

MILDRED

I don't want to be alone with her.

LEONARD

She's just an old lady.

MILDRED

She was a hateful old lady. Now it's like some stranger started her up again but didn't turn on all the switches.

LEONARD

That's bull shit.

MILDRED

Let's take her to the hospital tonight. There's one in Clayton, not 40 minutes away.

LEONARD

(laughs)

Clayton? That place was closed down two years ago. We'll take her to the clinic in Booneville tomorrow.

MILDRED

I'm not going in there until she's out of the house.

LEONARD

Well, where are we gonna put her?

MILDRED

In the barn.

LEONARD

I'm not going to put my mother in the barn! It looks like it might storm.

MILDRED

It's just as dry in the barn as it is in the house. Leonard, take her down there, just for tonight and then I'll call for someone to pick her up in the morning.

LEONARD

That's gonna cost money.

MILDRED

I'll get Emma to pick her up.

LEONARD

Emma, she's older than Hulda.

MILDRED

Yeah, but she's in her right mind. If you don't do this I'll sleep in the goddamn barn myself.

Mildred gets up and heads toward the barn.

LEONARD

All right, all right, I'll take her to the barn, guess she won't know the difference.

MILDRED

Get some blankets and I'll prepare the place.

LEONARD

Christ Almighty, it isn't enough that I have work all day.

Leonard gets up and heads for the door when Bruce jumps out. Leonard gives a startled cry.

BRUCE

Ho, did I scare you daddy?

LEONARD

You lock that boy up?

BRUCE

Tight as a vault. What you worried about, he ain't gonna run away.
Where's he got to go to?

LEONARD

Where you going?

BRUCE

I'm going to snag some carp with Dickey.

MILDRED

That's a rotten way to get fish, just snagging 'em cuz they're helpless.

BRUCE

Oh and it's nicer to catch 'em in the mouth (traces Mildred's scar with his
finger on his cheek) with a hook and a dough ball?

MILDRED

It's cheating.

BRUCE

I'm outta here.

LEONARD

When you coming back?

BRUCE

Round midnight. You waiting up for me?

LEONARD

Can't ever tell.

BRUCE

Whatever, daddy.

The lights fade.

A special rises on Bruce.

BRUCE

Death-tripping Jesus,
 crying out from the cross,
 "You ain't got a chance,
 You gotta give in to the boss.
 I covered your ass this time
 but fuck if I'll do it again.
 Evil children, born out of sin."
 Cock-sucking brown nose,
 don't listen to him.
 The world's full of magic,
 it comes up inside,
 you got nothing to fear,
 when you got nothing to hide.
 Just think of a blue monkey
 way up in a tree,
 whispering at you,
 "you're free."

Bruce exits. There is the sound of thunder as Leonard wheels Hulda out into the barn. The lights rise on the barn as Leonard enters with Hulda then cross fade to moonlight. There is the sound of crickets. Deirdre steals from the house to Tom's basement room. Deirdre is stands in the doorway. Tom sits up.

DEIRDRE
 (whispering)

Shhhh, come with me.

TOM

Who is it?

DEIRDRE

Shut up. Come with me.

TOM

I'm not supposed to leave.

DEIRDRE

Come on.

They climb up on the roof. They don't talk. Now that they're up there they don't know what to do. He can't look at her, she can't look at him.

DEIRDRE

They treat you like shit. Don't take it personally, they treat everybody that way. Nobody wants to come to this farm, that's probably why you're the only one here.

He still can't look at her.

TOM

I didn't know that.

DEIRDRE

We don't have any livestock, nothing lives here. (She looks up at the stars) Even the stars keep their distance. Nothing new's come into this house all year except you and now that you've been here you won't come back either.

TOM

Yes, I would.

DEIRDRE

Why?

TOM

I liked out there. Out there things were alive.

DEIRDRE

Out there isn't here.

She looks at him.

DEIRDRE

What are you staring at?

Tom murmurs something.

DEIRDRE

What did you say?

TOM
(barely audible)

You're like...very beautiful.

DEIRDRE

I'm like what?

TOM
(softly)

Beautiful.

DEIRDRE

Speak up.

TOM

Beautiful.

She doesn't respond.

DEIRDRE

Why are you in the Home?

TOM

Broken family.

Deirdre bursts out laughing.

DEIRDRE

“Broken family?”

Tom does look at her then, he looks at her because he sees perhaps that she's cruel.

TOM

What's so funny?

DEIRDRE

“Broken family?” I'm from a broken family, you don't have any family at all.

TOM

And that's funny?

DEIRDRE

It's funny like some arm that got rotten, yours got chopped off, you're free of it, me, I'm still walking around with it attached to my body. I'm the one with the broken family.

She stops and looks at him and for the first time he meets her eyes. They remain that way, then...

TOM

Why did you bring me up here?

DEIRDRE

I'm bored.

He looks away. They are silent. Sheet lightning flashes soundlessly on the horizon.

TOM

I have a family. Not a father, I mean, actually I have a father. He's on my birth certificate. He used to get really drunk and beat my mother up. He was in jail a lot and the hospital. A streetcar hit him.

Deirdre laughs.

TOM

You think it's funny?

DEIRDRE

I was thinking, too bad there aren't any streetcars around here. You take yourself so serious, it's kinda funny. What about your mother?

TOM

She's in Des Moines, I think. She forgets where I am.

DEIRDRE

Forgets where you are?

TOM

She's done it a lot. She gets real sorry about it afterwards and she tries to get me back.

He gives a nervous laugh.

DEIRDRE

That's not funny.

TOM

Why isn't that funny?

DEIRDRE

Because she really doesn't care and she won't own up to it; that's the worst kind of cowardice. No wonder you're so damn sincere.

TOM

She does care about me.

DEIRDRE

She doesn't.

TOM
(getting pissed)

How do you know?

DEIRDRE
I'd rather have people hurt me because they hate me than just forget me. I hate her.

TOM
You don't know her.

DEIRDRE
Don't have to.

Tom is silent for a moment then, talking out of nervousness...

TOM
Did you ever see that movie about prehistoric times? There were these ape- men, like Neanderthals, and homos, you know like us, not so hairy and with regular eyebrows, and then there were these orangutan men and they were gentle, didn't kill, just ate weeds and berries. They were the good monkeys. The Neanderthals and us fought and we had this thing about us, we were good at being sneaky and we killed the Neanderthals by tricking them and then there were us and the good monkeys and we killed all but two of them. Then we caught the good monkey's wife and we killed her but he escaped. He was the last one of his kind and he wandered away and disappeared. I think he died of loneliness and then there was only us, the bad monkeys.

DEIRDRE
God, you are weird. So your mom's not at fault because she's a bad monkey?

TOM
Yeah.

They both laugh. A car comes up off stage. The headlights are seen. There is the sound of the motor running.

DEIRDRE
It's Lloyd!

She runs to the other side of the roof and disappears leaving Tom alone. There is the sound of late summer, verging on autumn, crickets, a top 40's station on the car radio, a motor idling, the voices of teenagers, hers joining them; a nostalgic, ominous excitement.

Once in a while the car revs its engine. This goes on. Tom grows uncomfortable, thinking that she's going to leave him out on the roof. The car burns ass on down the road and he's left with the sheet lightning and the crickets. Tom stands and peeks over the edge of the roof where Deirdre has disappeared and sees nothing. Finally, when he's just about to leave she climbs up to the roof.

DEIRDRE

Hey, where are you going?

TOM

I thought you left.

DEIRDRE

Don't you ever go anywhere without me! You know what would happen if Leonard caught you?

They go silent. Deirdre looks at him.

DEIRDRE

I saw you all day looking at me then you kept looking away. I don't know what to make of you. You're soft inside, but you worked hard like you were working for me, like some kind of knight fighting for his lady, except all you had were hay bales. It was pretty funny.

She moves close to him.

DEIRDRE

Look at me. Come on, look at me.

He looks at her and is breathless. She brings her face close to his.

DEIRDRE

I like your face. I like your eyes.

They look into each others eyes, gaze into each others eyes, their eyes tasting their eyes. She brings her lips to his in a soft lingering kiss. Slowly she withdraws her lips. He touches her face delicately with his fingertips.

DEIRDRE

We'd better get you down to the basement.

The lights cross-fade to Mildred, alone sitting at the table opposite Leonard's place. At first she is quite still, then as she speaks she climbs on the table, knocking the glasses from the table.

MILDRED

Them! Hulda belongs in that barn with them. Them. It's all between them. We bare them and are born only to bare them. They protect us so that we can bare them to fight for us so that we can bare them. The she wolves like Hulda, she cuddles them, wipes their little tears, rocks their heads in her big lap, breeds them, keeps them and sends them on their way. She worries about them and waits for them to come home. Now I'm waiting too. God loves the Devil, he's his favorite son and when he had a gentle boy he had him hung from nails til he was dead. (She lies on her back) The Virgin Mary was nothing but a bag to grow meat in. I look up into that sky, I can feel it tighten, that beast that roams the earth, meaner than all of us and I pray for it to cleanse this world of the flesh I put on it.

The sound of Bruce's motorcycle. The lights fade on Mildred. The single light of the motorcycle shines from off stage then turns off. Bruce sneaks on stage. He carefully sees if Leonard is on the porch, and seeing that he isn't, steals into the house. Moments later there is the sound of Tom's door being unlocked. The door opens and Bruce slips into Tom's room. Tom starts. There is the sound of Bruce's labored breathing in the dark. Tom turns on the light. Bruce is standing against the door. His hair is wet, his face dirty, his clothes disheveled. There's a cut on his head. He is terrified. He gestures for Tom to be silent. He creeps oddly to him on tip toes as if he wanted to walk on the air.

BRUCE

I don't want to rouse him.

TOM

Who?

BRUCE

Leonard, he's in the barn.

He looms over Tom, his face gaunt with strain, his eyes fixed with shock.

TOM

Did you kill somebody?

Bruce stares at him, his breathing harsh in his throat as if only his breath could explain what he wanted to say. Finally, he's able to utter something.

BRUCE

I...I...I killed Dickey.

TOM

Dickey?

BRUCE

My friend.

Tom sits up, he pulls back in the bed. Bruce reaches for him, imploring almost sweetly.

BRUCE

It's flooding up there. It's deep and the current is glassy smooth like a long fast snake. We were trying to snag carp. We weren't having any luck so we started horsing around. Dickey waded out to the edge of the deep part. We started lobbing rocks at each other, little ones at first. One hit me in the head. I felt blood. I picked up a big rock and threw it and it hit him and he started bleeding. "I'm gonna get you, Brucy." He started toward me. I grabbed a bunch of rocks and started throwing them at him. "I'm gonna get you, Brucy, I'm gonna get you." He lost his footing and sank. I ran toward him. He came up again but I couldn't reach him, He went down again and then came back up, but this time he was calm like he was already in another place and he looked at me with one eye and then he disappeared.

Leonard approaches from the barn.

LEONARD
(baying the name)

Bruce!

BRUCE
(whispering frantically)
Shut up or I'll kill you. (He crawls under Tom's bed.)

Tom turns off the hanging light bulb. Leonard throws the door open. He stands there balefully silhouetted in the door. He is drunk. He heads for Tom's bed.

LEONARD
I know where you are.

He pulls Bruce out from under the bed.

LEONARD
Get out to the barn!

BRUCE
(pleading)
I can't do it now. I'm feeling sick.

LEONARD

Get your ass to the barn.

Leonard shoves Bruce out the door, then whirls around at Tom.

LEONARD

You keep your mouth shut.

Leonard shoves Bruce toward the barn.

BRUCE

I feel sick. Let's do it tomorrow.

Leonard shoves him toward the barn.

BRUCE

I'll beat you tomorrow, dad, I promise you, I'll beat your ass.

Leonard shoves him into the barn. He turns on the light in the barn. Three shadows loom on the walls; Leonard, Bruce and Hulda in her wheelchair. Shadow play. Leonard hits Bruce in the face. Bruce falls back on the floor.

BRUCE

Dad, I feel sick.

LEONARD

Get your fanny ass up. Get up!

Bruce gets up. They circle around each other. He starts to swing at Leonard and the lights bump out.

Special on Joey.

JOEY

Blood is one river flowing through many bodies. The land trades in blood. All the mine claims, treaties and fences must be earned with blood. You can mine her, strip her, burn and pollute her but you must pay the bill in blood and with interest. The armies of the dead far exceed the living and for all those who live, there are that many who must die. The land has a mind of its own, deeper than ours, but not unlike ours for we come from the earth. The earth speaks with the language of the weather. What people call "chance" is just the limits of their imagination, their inability to follow earth's line of thought. A shrug and cities topple, a whisper and countries are blown away. The earth isn't slow, it's big and when it responds it responds commensurate with its size.

The storm is beginning to build. There is the sound of the wind, hollow and high in the sky. A special rises on Bruce. He has been badly beaten.

BRUCE

Runnin Together
 Movin together
 Thinking alike
 with four arms
 and four legs
 and two heads
 and four eyes
 and four ears
 and two mouths to feed with.

“Runnin Together,”
 you're more than two
 more than three
 you're something else.
 You always have a witness.

Walking twenty miles under the moon,
 laughing and breaking windows,
 killing dogs and shitting in wells.
 Burn it down, and down goes the school house,
 burn it down and down goes ole Ronny's shed,
 burn it down and down go the houses of Danny Turtle and Pietie Rich;
 digging three foot holes in the middle of the highway,
 lying with people while they're sleeping in their beds:
 the farther you go to the edge
 the deeper it gets between you.
 And there can only be two,
 no chicken shit gang,
 just two, if someone rats you out
 you know just who he is:
 that's trust.

Killed a bull once, a big prize one,
 cut chunks out of it and cooked 'em
 on a stick on a fire we set in the middle of a field.
 Look into my eyes. No, look!
 Make snake eyes. (He demonstrates)
 Imagine this: you got someone in the middle here,
 if he turns on you I get him, if he turns on me you get him.
 That's why it's always two, only two.

Leonard, in ominous shadow, appears at the door accompanied with menacing cluster of sound, then the lights rise on him.

LEONARD

(shouting to Bruce)

Come on, boy, let's celebrate! Whisky's on!

The lights rise on the kitchen and the dining room. Deirdre and Mildred are clearing the dishes from supper and bringing them to the kitchen. Leonard is just entering the dining room. Tom is sitting at his usual place. Leonard is holding a quart of whisky. He's frighteningly festive.

LEONARD

Take a seat, son.

Leonard looks at Tom and Bruce as if to give them a formal address. Bruce sits and looks up at Leonard.

BRUCE

I feel like I'm in the Old West.

LEONARD

(calling to kitchen)

Mildred bring in five glasses.

MILDRED

(from the kitchen)

I'm not going to drink any of that goddamned whisky and neither is Deirdre. (She grabs Deirdre and pushes her against the sink and whispers to her secretly) I need you clear. You understand?

DEIRDRE

Yes, I understand.

Leonard approaches the kitchen door, Mildred and Deirdre separate and go about their work.

LEONARD

What are you two whispering about?

MILDRED

I don't think that boy should be drinking, we're responsible for him.

LEONARD

That boy worked circles around Bruce here, my son, the one who counts cricket chirps to see whether it's gonna rain. And did it rain? Crickets said it was gonna rain but did it?

BRUCE

Nearly did, it just pulled back for a storm.

LEONARD

"Nearly did?" Not a drop! Not a drop fell upon that hay. Dry as Egypt. Pick those bales up like they were the Sunday newspaper, 'cept ole Bruce here, dragging his sorry ass behind the wagon while this puppy (meaning Tom) moved around like a fly on a bugger. And Deedra, I didn't call you Didi, that girl drove that tractor on the line, followed the curve of the land like she was tracing something long and pretty. She wasn't going slow neither, her and Tom were workin just like a team, and me too, though I could barely keep up with the pace those two set for themselves. It was a pretty sight, that young beauty up there, my daughter, tough as nails, pretty as an angel.

Mildred enters the dining room with three glasses and slams them on the table.

MILDRED

Angel, my ass.

LEONARD

Yeah, she's too sexy to be an angel.

MILDRED

You shut your mouth, you ugly old fool!

LEONARD

Well, she is sexy, everybody knows that. She gets it from you.

Mildred turns to go to the kitchen when Leonard. Mildred stops in her tracks and then slowly turns to him a nasty smile her face (she thinks about that baling hook in the barn).

MILDRED

Let me just say it now, so that it will be known that I said it: I do not think that drinking this whisky is a good idea and that we will all regret it in the morning.

LEONARD

Very well said, now finish the dishes.

Mildred exits into the kitchen. Leonard ceremonially pours two fingers of whisky into the three glasses, then puts the bottle down and addresses Tom and Bruce.

LEONARD

Boys, I'd like you to stand.

Tom knowing well enough now to discern an order when he hears one and respond, immediately stands. Bruce, however, remains seated.

BRUCE

God, now I know I'm in the Old West.

LEONARD

Shut your pie hole and get on your feet. (He moves toward Bruce. Bruce winces in fear but quickly disguises it and obdurately rises. Leonard puts a glass in Bruce's hand and one into Tom's) The battle is over. The hay is in. Gonna keep the farm from the bank for another winter. Drink up.

He knocks the whisky back, so does Bruce. Then they slam the empty glasses down. So does Tom but without drinking. Leonard pours two fingers of whisky into his and Bruce's glasses. He goes to pour Tom's glass but sees that it hasn't been touched.

LEONARD

(to Tom)

What the hell you doing?

Tom knows he's going to get shit for this.

TOM

I don't like alcohol, sir.

LEONARD

What the hell does that mean?

TOM

I have bad associations with it.

LEONARD

Bad associations?

TOM

It scares me, sir, I've had bad experiences around it.

LEONARD

Goddamn it, every time I start to like you, you pull some prissy little comment out of your little fucking purse. Goddamn it boy, be a man! You drink that goddamn drink or I'll pour it down you!

MILDRED

(from the kitchen)

You can't make that boy drink, that's illegal.

LEONARD

(drawling the word)

L E G A L? What the hell does that mean, l e g a l? (to Tom) Hold yer breath. Come on do it.

TOM

Why do you want me to hold my breath?

LEONARD

Just do it. (Tom hesitates) Do it.

Tom takes a breath-in and Bruce starts to take one in too.

LEONARD

(to Bruce)

Not you, goddamn it. (to Tom) Now take that drink and pour it into your mouth and swallow it and then just when it hits you let it out.

Tom tries but his breath goes out.

TOM

I can't hold my breath and open my mouth.

BRUCE

What a stupid shit.

LEONARD

Shut up! (to Tom, as if introducing a toddler to his first lick of ice cream) Come on, now, you can do it.

BRUCE

May I drink mine?

LEONARD

No, you cannot. (to Tom) Hold your breath, now. (Tom takes a breath and holds it) Good. (Leonard takes the drink from Tom's hand) Hold the air in yer lungs, that's it, now open your mouth. That's it.

Leonard pours the whisky into Tom's mouth and quickly goes behind him and covers Tom's mouth with his hand to hold the whisky in. Tom expels whisky into Leonard's hand.

LEONARD

Goddamn, you little son of bitch, you got that all over my hand.

Leonard wipes his hand on Tom's shirt then pours another drink in Tom's glass.

BRUCE

Shit, my damn whiskey's gonna evaporate.

Leonard hands the glass to Tom.

LEONARD

Then let it evaporate! (Shouting at Tom) Drink it! I said, drink it and don't let a drop of it see the light of day. I mean it!

TOM

Please sir, I just can't. People are always trying to make me drink, but I can't stomach it.

LEONARD

Well, yer gonna stomach it now. Drink it!

TOM

No sir, I won't.

LEONARD

You won't? I'll "won't" you.

Leonard grabs Tom around the neck and forces his mouth toward the glass. Mildred bolts into the dining room and pulls Leonard from Tom.

MILDRED

Stop it! I mean it, Leonard! You can force that shit on our boy but you can't with that one. That one ain't ours, he's property of the state. All he has to do is tell the authorities that you made him drink and see how fast you wind up in jail.

TOM

I'm not property of the state.

In defiance, Tom holds his breath, tosses the whisky back and expels his breath perfectly. There is a beat, then suddenly Tom runs into the bathroom.

LEONARD

Jesus Christ! That is one weird son of a bitch. What can I say (pouring a couple of fingers of whisky into his and Bruce's glasses) some people are made out of different stuff. (to Bruce) Bottom's up, boy.

They toss them back and immediately bring their eyes at each other. Leonard grabs Bruce and brings him to him.

LEONARD

You know I love you. I will always love you. I got to prove you just like Clarence did me and he did me, I'll tell you, did me up one side and down the other.

Bruce grabs Leonard too but with cloaked rage.

BRUCE

I know, dad. You did me pretty good.

They struggle, half in embrace, half in battle. Leonard goes to the bottle and takes a big drink then pushes it to Bruce. Bruce takes a big swig from the bottle and puts it on the table toward Leonard. Leonard looks at Bruce, grins and then takes a big swig and puts it on the table back to Bruce. Bruce grins and takes a bigger drink and puts it on the table back to Leonard. This time Leonard doesn't smile. He eyes Bruce suspiciously. He stands, grabs the bottle and drinks half and slams it on the table. Bruce stands, picks up the bottle, sizes up the contents, then downs them and slams the empty bottle on the table. They both gaze sullenly at each other. They remain that way. Tom enters from the bathroom. Leonard and Bruce, both at the same time and the same speed, slowly turn their heads to Tom and fix their eyes on him as if they didn't know who he was.

LEONARD

(somewhat surprised)

Fuck, I'm drunk. (politely inquiring of his son) Are you?

Bruce, after a moment of introspection, replies objectively.

BRUCE

I am.

LEONARD

(considering the situation)

I better get another bottle.

He heads toward the kitchen. Mildred stands in the way.

MILDRED

No, Leonard.

Leonard throws her aside as if she were a doll, opens a cupboard to get another bottle. It isn't there.

LEONARD

You think you can hide me from my jug? You can't, cuz my jugs like me and they multiply.

He goes onto the porch, pulls a bottle out from under the steps and reenters the house triumphantly. He spreads his arms as if he were the Angel Gabriel herding straggling souls at the Resurrection and drives Mildred and Deirdre into the dining room.

LEONARD

Get on in there, goddamn party poopin Protestants. I want you to sit down and have a drink. It is the only good thing to do considering the (meaning "portentous") promiscuous situation of our collective enterprise: we have succeeded against Nature, we have pulled her golden hair right out of her head, we have reaped the hay from the sun. (He pushes Mildred into a chair grabs her hair and brings her face to his in violent appreciation.) You, my wife and Fraulein have cooked and cleaned and...(he looks to his son for help)...what's another word the rhymes with "k"?

BRUCE

"Constructed."

LEONARD

"Constructed?"

BRUCE

(dictating to his dad)

"The situation..."

LEONARD

"The situation..."

BRUCE

"That has enabled us to do our work."

LEONARD

That's good, son, well spoken.

Deirdre makes for the door, Leonard deftly snags her. He gently caresses her.

LEONARD

No, no, no, my dear daughter Didi, do not humbly run from our midst. (Suddenly bellowing, throws her into her chair.) SIT THE FUCK DOWN! This is important to me. I will have no female remonstrations. (He winks at Bruce) How do you like them apples, son?

BRUCE

That's good, dad, now open the bottle.

LEONARD

In due time, in due time. (To Tom) What are you looking at, boy? I won't make you drink: one: cuz I ain't allowed to, and two: cuz yer a little kitten ball of yarn and you look so scared you might shit yer pants, but I do want you to sit down and join our family, cuz for this night you have earned it.

Tom sits.

LEONARD

Now have we all gathered? (He surveys the room) Someone's missing.

MILDRED

(making for the door)

Oh, no you don't.

LEONARD

Stop her, son.

Bruce grabs her, picks her up and sits her in her chair.

BRUCE

Come on, mom, we won't ever get that bottle open until everybody is here.

LEONARD

Jesus Christ, what kind of a son am I? Where's my mother? She is not where I think she is, is she?

MILDRED

Emma wouldn't take her to the clinic.

LEONARD

Are you saying that my mother is in the barn?

MILDRED

Yes, your dear mother is in the barn, the same one that no one will visit cuz she's such an evil witch, God struck her dead for her evil ways and now the devil has revived her, and even my mother, Emma won't touch her and I'm certainly not gonna do it.

LEONARD

(bawling out)

You're gonna do what I tell you! We're all gonna go down and get her and we're gonna bring her back into this house where she belongs.

MILDRED

I'm not going down there. You can't make me.

LEONARD

Do you want me to make you? Bruce?

BRUCE

(cheerily)

Yes, pop?

LEONARD

You make sure the girls don't get away.

BRUCE

You betcha, daddy.

Leonard turns on Tom.

LEONARD

You, you stay here this is none of your concern. (To his gathered family) I don't want to hear a word out of you until our mother, Hulda, is in her place at the table. Get up now, get up! Bruce, you go ahead and make sure they don't get loose.

DEIRDRE

I'm not gonna do it!

BRUCE

You're damn well gonna do what my daddy says, goddamn, you're gonna do it. You think I'm not gonna catch you? There's no where you can go that I won't catch you. (Tom stands in Deirdre's defence. Bruce puts his face in Tom's) Don't you look at me. You want to try me? You go ahead and try. This is family business. (to Deirdre) Now listen, all we have to do is go down and get grandma and bring her here and then we can party. Now just do it and it will be over with.

DEIRDRE

I don't want to party.

BRUCE

Well, I do.

Bruce grabs Deirdre and pulls her to her feet. He starts after Mildred and Mildred stands. Leonard pulls Deirdre and Mildred to him in a big embrace. Bruce does that same but from the other side. Leonard turns toward the barn, his arms still on Deirdre and Mildred and Bruce backs him up. Thus they move to the barn in procession. For a moment the lights fade, leaving Tom alone at the table and the lights in the barn raise as Leonard pushes Hulda from the Bruce back to the dining room. As Leonard rolls Hulda to a place next to him at the head of the table the lights rise on the dining room. Drunkenly simpering, Leonard gently directs Deirdre and Mildred to their seats.

LEONARD

Sit down.

Leonard and Bruce sit. They sit around the table in silence.

BRUCE

That was fucking crazy, dad.

LEONARD

It was, wasn't it?

Bruce and Leonard crack up. Leonard falls off his chair laughing.

LEONARD

(to Tom)

Laugh you little shit. Don't you think things are funny?

TOM

I don't know, sir.

LEONARD

There we go again. (Bellowing) LAUGH!

Tom tries to laugh which Bruce and Leonard find funny.

LEONARD

(to Deirdre and Mildred)

You laugh too. I'm not kidding!

MILDRED

What's so goddamn funny?

Leonard and Bruce find that funny.

BRUCE

That's really great, mom.

MILDRED

Don't "mom" me, you evil son of a bitch.

Bruce finds that funny.

BRUCE

(laughing)

You called me a "son of a bitch." Well, in that case yer the "bitch?"

Leonard does not find that funny.

LEONARD

Don't you call your mama a bitch! (Bruce turns on Leonard) What are you gonna do to me? What are you gonna do?

BRUCE

I'll kill you.

LEONARD

You gonna kill me? You don't got the stomach.

BRUCE

I killed Dickey Doright!

LEONARD

You killed who?

BRUCE

I killed Dickey Doright!

LEONARD

You didn't kill Dickey Doright.

BRUCE

I did. (to Tom) You tell him, I did, didn't I?

TOM

You told me you did

BRUCE
(screaming)

I killed him! (to Leonard) I killed him, goddamn it!

LEONARD
(to Tom)

Did you see him do it?

TOM

No sir.

BRUCE

I told him beforehand. I told him that I was gonna kill somebody and I did.
(to Tom) Didn't I? Didn't I?

TOM

I don't know.

BRUCE

What do you mean, "you don't know?"

TOM

I don't know if you killed him.

BRUCE

I told you beforehand.

TOM

It sounds more like it was an accident.

BRUCE
(crying in sorrow and rage)

I killed him! I killed him.

Bruce runs to the rifle.

LEONARD

Where you going? You get back here.

Bruce aims it at Leonard.

BRUCE

I'll kill you.

Leonard finds that funny.

LEONARD

That's how you're gonna show me? Well, I'll be really impressed if I'm dead.

Bruce points the rifle at Deirdre.

BRUCE

I'll kill her then. (He swings the rifle at Tom) I'll kill this worthless piece of shit.

Bruce starts to cry.

LEONARD

Put the rifle down. (Bruce lowers the rifle and crumples to the floor) Jesus Christ, what is this, Ninnyland? Everybody sit down, just sit down and we'll have this drink.

Everybody sits and he begins pouring the drinks.

LEONARD

(to Tom)

Did he really kill Dickey?

TOM

He said he did.

LEONARD

How'd he kill him?

TOM

He said he threw a rock and hit him in the head and then he drowned.

LEONARD

You think the rock killed him?

TOM

I don't think so, sir, I think he just slipped in the river and drowned. He said the river was deep and fast up north.

LEONARD

Yeah, it's flooding up there. Got swept away by the current, right?

TOM

That's what I think, sir. They were just goofing off, throwing rocks at each other.

Leonard considers it all.

LEONARD
(to Bruce)

Is Dickey dead?

BRUCE
(barely audible)

Yes, sir.

LEONARD
Well, they probably won't find him for a little while, they'll just think he was washed away in the flood and smacked his head.

MILDRED
Are you saying that there's a boy dead and you had something to do with it?

LEONARD
He said he didn't.

MILDRED
(meaning Tom)
No, that one over there said he didn't. (to Bruce) Did you?

BRUCE
Yes.

LEONARD
It was an accident.

MILDRED
If there's a boy dead out there we got to tell the sheriff about it.

LEONARD
Nobody's gonna tell the sheriff anything.

HULDA
(She starts singing in a sweet wavering vibrato)

Shall we gather at the river
The beautiful, the beautiful river?
Shall we gather at the river?

Leonard is moved. He rises and goes behind Hulda. He puts his hands on her face and looks up.

LEONARD

My god, mother's singing.

She stops mid-verse and eyes each of the males as if just realizing she's in the room with them. She grows suspicious. Her eyes settle on Tom.

HULDA

Who are you?

TOM

I'm Tom O'Brien.

HULDA

Tom O'Brien.

LEONARD

I think she likes you, son.

HULDA
(to Tom)

You, boy, what can you do?

TOM

I can sing a little, ma'am.

HULDA

Sing.

Tom doesn't know what to do.

LEONARD

Get up, boy and sing.

Tom rises and stands in his place at the table. He sings a song from a poem by Rhio Esterline.

TOM (CONT.)
(SINGING)

God painted a picture and called it the world
With mountains valleys and streams

God painted a picture and called it the world
With beauty, laughter and dreams

Splashes of yellow, purple and red

TOM (CONT.)

Tinged with gold and green

A glorious rainbow, a sunset of flame
Flowers and trees serene

God painted a picture and called it the world
With mountains, valleys and streams.

He gave it to man, saying, This is your world

Guard it with love and humility
Keep faith with me and humanity

Keep faith with me...Keep faith with me.

Tom sits. Hulda reaches out for Leonard with her old hands and kisses him on the cheek.

HULDA

Leonard's my lover boy. He's my son. He was the only one to console me in those days when I was cast out of the church, could feel him in my belly movin around. Now that's personal. Clarence and Clyde, they eyed me all the time. I was a pretty girl. Prettier than her. (pointing at Deirdre.) Knew they ran together. People called them The Reapers cuz of all the devilment they done. (She smiles a little smile). One day I went right up to them and started talking. Climbed out on my roof and took night rides in their truck. Never did anything, just drank a few beers. Then one night they climbed through my window. I was fourteen. Never quite understood what Reapers meant till I got a bellyful; reaping babies from young girls' bodies, like fruit off a tree. (pointing at Mildred) Her there, that one, Mildred, she's the same, oh yeah, she don't want to talk about it. Where do you think that boy Bruce came from? Leonard and Leroy.

MILDRED

You shut up!

HULDA

I'll tell you what made Clarence jump. I made Clarence jump. I dug into him with everything I could. I bore him so many children that it ate the farm right out from under him until I drove that demon right off the roof so that there'd be just Leonard and me.

LEONARD

That's wrong.

HULDA

You loved it, you little mama's boy.

She reaches for him. Leonard backs away.

LEONARD

Get away from me, mama.

Leonard stumbles to the floor.

HULDA

(to Leonard)

I know what you done with Clarence, evil cock-suckers. I'd make you jump if I could, but that isn't my call, that's (pointing at Mildred) hers. (Hulda smiles, then quietly...) I'd kill that man if I were you. (she looks at Leonard) I wasn't reaching out that day he jumped, I was urging him.

Mildred picks the rifle up and aims it at Leonard. The rifle in Mildred's hands is another thing, Leonard crawls away genuinely alarmed.

MILDRED

I do want to kill you.

LEONARD

Why'd you want to do that?

MILDRED

Cuz I hate you. (Hulda laughs. Mildred looks at her. To Hulda...) You love this shit, don't you?

A special rises on Joey.

HULDA

You look out the window and see if that old man ain't out in the field.

LEONARD

What old man?

HULDA

That old sailor, Joey Beam.

LEONARD

He ain't ever been to the sea. He's never left this place.

HULDA

He doesn't have to be on the sea.

Leonard gets to his feet.

HULDA

He hears it too.

LEONARD

Hears what?

HULDA

The storm.

They listen to the silence. Suddenly, Leonard, sensing that a storm is about to hit, crosses out into the yard.

LEONARD

We'd better get to it.

Bruce's heart isn't in it, but he has to go, he gets up from his chair.

BRUCE

Okay.

Bruce gets to his feet but he can't face Leonard. He turns to Deirdre and Mildred. Leonard cries out at Bruce.

LEONARD

Last day of baling. Maybe you'll beat me.

BRUCE

Yeah, I'm coming.

Bruce reaches out for his mother. She sees his fear and pain, so does Leonard.

LEONARD

Son? Come on, son, you know what you have to do. Come on.

Deirdre grabs Bruce's hand and tries to keep at the table.

LEONARD

Come on, boy, you can do it.

BRUCE

What if I just shoot you?

LEONARD

What would that prove? You can do it, boy. I did it when I was your age, the last day of reaping, I beat him.

LEONARD

Come on, come on.

Bruce removes his hand from Deirdre's and starts to turn to Leonard. Mildred suddenly bolts between Bruce and Leonard.

MILDRED

Leonard, enough!

BRUCE

This is a man's thing.

MILDRED

Man's thing, is it? I know what the loser does. Is that a man's thing too?

BRUCE

You don't know shit.

LEONARD

Come on boy.

MILDRED

Shall I say what this boy's had to do since he was 13?

BRUCE
(screaming)

Shut up!

LEONARD

Come on, boy!

Bruce throws Mildred to the ground and charges into the barn. Leonard follows and they begin fighting. Hulda wheels herself out onto the front yard.

HULDA

Get up, girl. It's time for come-uppums, either one of them will do.

Mildred starts to get up. Deirdre runs to her and pushes her to the ground.

DEIRDRE

Mama no!

HULDA

Kill them! Kill them, goddamn it!(Mildred hesitates) You can do it girl.
You can do it. Go on. Go on.

Mildred struggles free from Deirdre's grasp and grins.

MILDRED

The baling hook will do.

Mildred creeps into the barn. Deirdre grabs Tom's hand. They climb up on the roof. There is the sound of a distant freight train, you can almost hear the whistle. Joey is looking out in the distance at the source of the sound. Hulda looks at Joey Beam.

HULDA

(pointing at Joey)

Look at him. That's what he's been waiting for all these years. Here it comes.

It is a great tornado but it's far away. Deirdre grabs Tom's hand and pulls him. She leads him up on the roof. The fight continues with furious intensity. As Hulda speaks the sound of the tornado gets louder.

HULDA

You see, the Lord has suffered and even so he strokes us with his loving broken fingers. The Lord is crying in the dark corner of the house. How do I know this? Because I live there too. I live in the dark cellar, I live in rooms full of evil. The broken hands of the Lord have clutched me to him long and hard into the middle of the night set ablaze with his wailing. How he clutched me saying, "Hulda, Hulda, let me hold you. I am scared, Hulda. I'm scared shitless. There is a monster out there, can't you hear it howling? It's after me, Hulda, after the Lord and it's gonna break down this house and get me." And the Lord, who is bleeding, the Lord, who is weeping tears of blood puts his bleeding and bumpy head between his legs and sobs, for his body has been beaten. (Hulda rises from the wheelchair and thrusts her arms heavenward.)When the Lord ascends into heaven he will be covered with scars and he will be beautiful! (In the barn, mildred brings the baling hook down into Leonard's head.) So don't worry now, children, though you may be covered with scars. Though your heart may be small and tight and ugly with terror night upon night hunched down in a dark corner, just remember, you're cringing with the Lord. "Lord, I'm fucking goddamned tired! And Jesus, I'm afraid! I'm afraid, Lord! God, get me out of here. Let me go to sleep even in the land of nightmares." Wait, wait, I hear it coming. Wait, wait. Oh how the windows shudder. Listen, listen to it. Like a cluster of spinning knives. (Hulda gets to her feet.) Go on up there! Go on up there! Go on up there, go on up with the Lord!

Hulda falls back into the wheelchair. Mildred, in shadow, brings the baling hook down into Leonard's head. Leonard crumples to the ground. Mildred pulls the hook out and swings it at Bruce. Bruce grabs it and wrests it from Mildred's hands and begins bringing it down into Mildred. He exits the barn. Bruce is covered in blood. The sound of the tornado grows louder.

BRUCE

Didi, you up there?

Bruce climbs up on the roof. He approaches Tom and Deirdre with the baling hook. He raises the hook as if to strike Tom. Deirdre cries out and puts Tom behind her. Bruce he falls to his knees, drops the baling hook and begins crawling toward Deirdre.

BRUCE

Didi, Didi...

Deirdre looks down at Bruce. Bruce wraps his arms around Deirdre's legs. She kneels down and helps him up. She takes him into her arms. The sound is now a roar, the voices can barely be heard above it. Deirdre cries to Tom to leave while he's got a chance.

DEIRDRE

Go away! Go away!

She kisses Bruce on the lips then holds him. Tom hesitates. The funnel is close. Finally Tom climbs down to the ground. He looks up at Deirdre and Bruce embracing and looking out at the tornado. Tom sees the huge funnel coming and dashes into the darkness. The tornado stops and for a moment becomes muted. A special fades up on Joey Beam.

JOEY

And I saw creatures break into life, eggs cracking with newborn, fawns struggling to their feet, saw them take to the air and deer leap, saw predators kill them and feed them to their young. All about me was birthing, killing, feeding and I felt afraid. What is this thing we witness? Perhaps it should not have been witnessed at all. Then I saw the air itself, a shimmering fluid both thick and fine. I had not been asked here, nor was I an intruder. I was an impossibility made real, the flame of life, so fragile, so fierce.

Joey is smiling as a great shadow begins to sweep in. The sound is thunderous. Cross-fade to a special on Tom. He is running in place as he did in the beginning. He runs and runs as the lights fade.

THE END

