

Voices of the Land

CANADIAN PLAYS

Series editor: Anne Nothof

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Voices of the Land: The Seed Savers and Other Plays
Katherine Koller

VOICES *of the* LAND

The Seed Savers and Other Plays

Katherine Koller

With an introduction by Anne Nothof



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*To my parents,
who taught me to love the land,
and to all who hear its many voices.*

Let them be left, wildness and wet,
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

— GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS,
“Inversnaid”

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Preface

In each of the four plays in this collection, the land is a central character, with a presence and a voice that interacts with the protagonists. The voice of the land describes the lives of the characters and informs their choices. Natural features of the Canadian prairie environment — the prairie grass in *Cowboy Boots and a Corsage*, the lake in *Abby's Place*, the woods in *The Early Worm Club*, and the wind in *The Seed Savers* — constitute dramatic elements that go beyond setting and backdrop. They are present in the themes and issues, in the conflicts expressed by the characters, and also in the resolutions, effecting transformation through their inherent power.

The action in each play occurs largely or entirely out of doors. This poses the challenge of creating unbounded space within the confines of the theatre through sound, light, stage design, and the suggestive simplicity of a few realistic props. Members of the audience enter an imagined world, bringing with them their own particular relationship to nature. That sensory memory is what I call on when I'm writing, and it's what I need audiences to bring with them when they are participating in the drama. For readers of the plays, that process is even more crucial, because they must connect with their own experiences of the land and imagine new ones: the smell of the prairie grass on the first days of spring, the vocalization of birds in the early morning woods, the silence of the lake at night, interrupted only by the call of the loon, and the sound of the wind in the fields.

The Seed Savers, unlike the other plays, was inspired by an historical event. After reading about the case of *Monsanto v. Schmeiser*, which by 2004 had reached the Supreme Court of Canada, I decided to go to Bruno, Saskatchewan, to meet Percy and Louise Schmeiser. These folks, farmers for fifty years, were being sued by the Monsanto corporation for growing

genetically modified canola in their fields without a license agreement. Monsanto sued on the basis of intellectual property rights: the corporation owns the patent on Roundup Ready Canola, which is resistant to the wide-spectrum herbicide Roundup. This means that farmers can spray this crop to get a weed-free field. The Schmeisers claimed that it was wind, or natural pollination, that had blown the GM canola onto their land. It seemed to me that agriculture was changing — that this case reflected a new way of farming that not everybody welcomed. That's cause for drama, especially when the conflict happens within a family and between neighbours and forces lovers apart. And the wind played a primary role in this drama. I was intrigued by my meeting with the Schmeisers and launched into research about genetics, about the history of canola in Canada, and about corporations like Monsanto. I kept my eye on the legal case, which the Schmeisers ultimately lost in a 5-4 decision, although they were not required to pay damages to the corporation.

Soon my characters began to work with me. This happens most often in the research stage: characters give their names and ask questions that make me look for more material, and then they start challenging each other. I realized, happily, that although I was including certain events that in fact happened to Percy and Louise Schmeiser (the lawsuit, the leather jacket from the company as a reward for information, worldwide speaking engagements), I was not writing a docudrama but a different story about my characters Joe and Mindy, their conflicts, shared desires, and thwarted hopes.

My characters live in my head for a few years, and when they go onto the page, things get increasingly complicated. Now their problems have to fit into a structure and pacing and tempo, and we all go through the process of many drafts, to transform the play to the stage. In the case of the Edmonton premiere of *The Seed Savers*, Michael Clark, artistic director at Workshop West Theatre, showed us the way through. Before the final draft of the play was completed, he and I talked with April Viczko, lighting and set designer, about the nature of the wind as a character. In the end, the wind was evoked by the sheer open space of the stage, surrounded by a single row of chairs placed on a floor painted like the prairie as you see it from the sky. Telephone poles, diminishing in size, were suspended from the ceiling, diagonally across the two-storey headspace, creating perspective and distance. The characters moved through this exposed landscape. Sound designer Paul Morgan Donald created an overlapping aural montage with music

and natural sounds emitted from all four corners of the stage area. For me, the audience surrounding the stage became the energy of the wind in that production. In a later production at the Station Arts Centre in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, also directed by Michael Clark, the set by necessity was more contained, but the wind was still there. The audience brought it in with them, along with the yellow of July canola, and their sensory experiences as people of the prairies.

These plays are also linked by their rootedness in the prairies, particularly in Alberta. Although *The Seed Savers* was inspired by the Schmeiser case in Saskatchewan, it could have taken place in Alberta, which is also painted in canola. *Cowboy Boots and a Corsage* comes from a place in southern Alberta, the Milk River Ridge. I can see it in my mind's eye now: the colours of the shortgrass prairie, the roll of the land toward the river, and the wind, the heat, the magic of that untouched virgin prairie. *The Early Worm Club* is set in a boreal forest near Edmonton. I can smell the trembling aspens and balsam poplars and black spruce, and the spring mushrooms. *Abby's Place* is set at a deep and quiet lake in northern Alberta, frequented by white pelicans, redwing blackbirds, and goldfinches. These plays are about places I know and love, and they all look like Alberta. There's a hopeful timelessness in that, for me. As Abby says in *Abby's Place*, "There will always be the lake," and Mindy says in *The Seed Savers*, "Nature has us all in her hand." The connections made in these plays depend on the land that endures to show us who we are.

— KATHERINE KOLLER

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Katherine Koller's Prairie Synergism *Women on the Land*

Voices of the Land brings into the present a long tradition of Canadian prairie plays by women that enact the synergistic relationship of place and person. The landscape acts upon the protagonist in both antagonistic and supportive ways. It may be the occasion for struggle, but also of redemption. It can be both debilitating and energizing in the heroine's journey toward self-affirmation. As in the prairie plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, Elsie Park Gowan, Sharon Pollock, Joanna McClelland Glass, and Connie Gault, in Katherine Koller's works the Canadian wilderness resists the idealization of the pastoral motif: a withdrawal from society into an isolated, unspoiled natural environment in order to refresh the spirit and stimulate the imagination. Her Western Canadian protagonists learn to embrace the landscape's terrible beauty and power in the process of discovering their own strengths.

This perspective is also evident in W.O. Mitchell's early plays and novels, and particularly in Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow* (1968), where the prairie landscape is present as a defining condition of life — endlessly changing but timeless, adversarial but mind-expanding:

Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a country that in its good moments was more beautiful. Even in drouth or dust storm or blizzard it is the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all of the senses. You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun, but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.

It is a country to breed mystical people, egocentric people, perhaps poetic people. But not humble ones. (8)

Sharon Butala's portrait of the Saskatchewan prairie evokes the synergism of place and person even more graphically. In *The Perfection of the Morning* (1994), she suggests that a woman's inclination is to make connections with the physical landscape and to evoke a spiritual geography: "And what about the end of the day when in the wash of golden light all blemishes fade and disappear and peace descends over the yellow grasses and the luminous sky? Then, too, there is such perfection that all desire for heaven is absorbed in the glowing, fragile plains, the radiant hills" (190).

The prairie landscape in Katherine Koller's plays is closely associated with the lives of women. The four plays in this collection portray women in terms of a rural environment: their lives are conditioned by the land, which provides a touchstone for values, emotions, and self-awareness. Mindy, in *The Seed Savers*, listens to the wind in order to understand her place in the world: "They say the northwest wind makes you wise" (119). Her husband Joe's response is more pragmatic: the wind may bring intimations of rain; but he is also deeply rooted in the soil. As he explains to his granddaughter, Sky:

I live close to life. I grow my own seed. I work near the animals, and the birds. They tell me when a storm is coming, by how they move. The hand of nature pushes me, always, to get the jobs done that need doing. I fix machines, keep the equipment running. For the promise I make to the seed. I'm a part of all this, an old guy like. Suits me right down to the ground. (128)

Joe's young neighbour, Solo, has a more intuitive relationship with the land. As they gaze out on the prairie from the narrow ridge of land that functions as his "dream bed," he tells Sky that "when you can see forever like this, you can see inside yourself" (150).

Returning "home" to the farm from Toronto, Sky imagines the prairie as a garden in the biblical *Song of Songs*, its erotic life awakened by the wind:

Awake, O North wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out.
Awake, O North wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden.
Let my beloved come to his garden,
and eat its choicest fruits. (161)

In Koller's plays, it is not only the women who are in tune with their environment, however. In her epic history of coal mining in southern Alberta, *Coal Valley: The Making of a Miner*, the young boy Chip hears the voice of the land through the words of an old miner: "It pays to listen. You gotta train your ears, 'cause there's no echo here. The walls absorb sound, muffle it. Like a thick blanket. Like a womb. It pays to listen to her. Right that there. Because Mother Nature, well, she's bigger 'n you, son" (433).

Koller's plays construct the land as both nurturing and destructive. It exacts a high price in physically and mentally wrenching toil, which inevitably conditions the lives of those who persevere or fail. As in Sharon Pollock's *Generations* (1980), *The Seed Savers* enacts the convictions of women who opt to stay on the land, despite the hardships, because it embodies for them a larger purpose: their lives are wholly conditioned by their particular place. For Margaret Nurlin, the mother and wife in *Generations*, whose father lost his farm in the Depression, losing oneself in the work of a prairie farm means being part of something bigger than self-sufficiency. In *The Seed Savers* Mindy, who hangs onto her husband "like the prairie holds down the hills" (190) and who has spent fifty years of her life married to a farmer and a farm, carries her convictions into a wider world, in order to preserve her family's integrity and the health of future generations.

As in Ringwood's *A Fine Coloured Easter Egg*, set in the 1950s, where oil exploration threatens the traditional life of a farm family, Koller's plays may also assume environmental implications, particularly in *The Seed Savers*, as market forces pressure farmers to buy genetically modified seed. In *Cowboy Boots and a Corsage*, the female protagonist resists selling her land; it is the last vestige of untilled and unspoiled prairie and, for her, a place of connection.

Women's prairie plays are often focused on social and family history in terms of landscape: events past, present, and future are conditioned by environment. For example, Elsie Park Gowan's *Breeches from Bond Street* (1949) performs the history of a late-nineteenth-century prairie town through the reformation of a remittance man by a rejected mail-order bride. In *Mirage* (1979), Ringwood shows how communities develop through interdependence and reconciliation between individual and environment. The history of three generations of a prairie family is dramatized as a process, beginning with struggle and near defeat. Family dissolution and despair during the Depression are graphically evoked in Joanna McClelland Glass's *Canadian Gothic* (1972). As are many of her later plays, *Canadian Gothic* is based on memories of her childhood in

Saskatchewan, depicting the emotionally debilitating consequences of living in isolation on the prairies and the conflict between a repressive father and his free-spirited wife and daughter. *Play Memory* (1983) returns to a bleak prairie landscape in rural Saskatchewan during the Depression, portraying an authoritarian father's attempts to control his wife and daughter, with tragic consequences.

Kelly Rebar's *Bordertown Cafe* (1989) also considers the generational prairie family dynamic and the struggle of the younger generation to determine where is "home." Set on the Canadian side of the Alberta-Montana border, it dramatizes the family complexities inherited by a seventeen-year-old boy and his divided loyalties to, and frustrations with, his divorced mother and father. The stage directions signal the radical discrepancy between the claustrophobic, limiting environment of the café and the openness and freedom of the prairie: "*The closed, tight space of the cafe is contrasted by a sense of overwhelming prairie sky that surrounds the set*" (11). In the end, the boy opts to stay in Alberta and help his grandfather with the combining, clearly establishing that his home is on the prairie.

The family dynamic in Koller's plays is similarly portrayed in terms of connection to the land. In *The Seed Savers*, Joe and Mindy's only son has fled to the city to escape the torment occasioned by the "demented wind" (162) and has died there, his ashes "scattered in a city ravine" (123). But his daughter, Sky, returns to find her place in the prairie landscape and in the family: "*Sky takes in the colours, the sounds and smells of fall on the farm. She lets the wind play in her hair, her face, lifts her arms and gives in to it. For the first time in a long time, she's home*" (125). In *Cowboy Boots and a Corsage*, the daughter is tempted to leave her widowed mother, Jeannie, for life in the city with her boyfriend but changes her mind when she visits the crumbling ancestral homestead in the moonlight. She compares Jeannie to the "tough grass" (36) of the untilled prairie, when she finally inherits her mother's determination not to sell out her history. The play's focus is on the land as it participates in the identification of a place called "home."

Beyond their social implications, Koller's plays in this collection have a mythic dimension. As in the prairie plays of Saskatchewan writer Connie Gault, *Sky* (1989) and *The Soft Eclipse* (1990), there is a recognition and acceptance of the extremes of light and shadow that characterize prairie life. The isolation of the landscape may offer respite from predation or intrusion, as in *The Early Worm Club*, or it may provide the means by which a reconciliation with place and people

may be achieved. The prairie is place where there is nothing at all, or it may offer the whole wide world — a place to lose or to find oneself. There is no nostalgia, no romanticization, but an acute awareness of the stark contrasts of the prairie landscape, the sudden shifts in light, colour, mood, and season. There is also an awareness of the interconnectedness of place and person, the synergism of landscape and character. In *The Early Worm Club*, although the action is driven by Millie’s determination to get a mate, the resolution is achieved in her sense of belonging to the Alberta parkland, with its full spectrum of birdlife.

This awareness of a mythic connection is often voiced by a “seer” figure in prairie literature and drama — Jake in Mitchell’s *Jake and the Kid*, for example, or the diviner, Dowser Ringgo, in Ringwood’s *Mirage*, who voices an awareness of how the “gods of the land” inform human life. In the Prologue, Dowser invokes an animate and metaphysical landscape:

A prairie vision must inform my song.
Much that I count as beautiful or strong
I learned here, long ago,
Here in this central plain where my world began
Stretching out wide and far
Under the high dome of wheeling stars.

What gods I knew
Rose in plumes of dust at high bright noon
Or flattened themselves on the long shadows
Or morning and evening on the prairie.
Phantoms in drifting snow howled with the blizzard,
Etched mandalas on the window pane
In the stillness of late dawn when it seemed
The world would crack apart with cold.

....

No easy gods, and yet they challenge, crying “hunt us down,
Uncover us from beneath your monuments of wood and stone,
Come, dance and sing with us,
For without us you are homeless.
Hunt us down for without us you are forever homeless.” (490)

Similarly, in Sharon Pollock's *Generations*, the land has mythic dimensions. As Pollock stipulates in her description of the play's setting: "*There should be some sense of the omniscient presence and mythic proportion of THE LAND in the design. . . . During the action of the play, the sun is slowly passing overhead; the earth is turning; this is reflected subtly in the changing patterns of light and shadow*" (610). Like Ringwood, she voices the spirit of place through a prairie seer, Old Eddy, defined by critic Richard Perkyns as "an essential part of the inscrutable landscape" (Introduction to *Generations* 604). As an early pioneer and patriarch of the Nurlin family, Old Eddy has struggled to survive on the prairie and has lost a wife and son, but over time the prairie has become an integral part of his psyche. His passionate attachment to the land is inherited by his grandson, David, who finds it difficult to articulate his feelings to his urbanite girlfriend: "Out there . . . is . . . something — I know it. Out there . . . is a feelin' . . . you don't get other places. Other places it's hidden in all the dinky scenery, but on the *prairies* it's just *there*. A power . . ." (654).

In *Abby's Place* the seer figure is evident in the self-taught philosopher Clyde, overseer of the village dump, who functions as the guardian spirit of the place. But it is Abby, the dying visitor, who becomes most closely attuned to landscape, forming a spiritual bond with the lake, which she believes will always be there, long after she is gone. As she tries to explain to her husband, Rodney: "I promise that if there is any way of reaching you, this is where I'll be. In the morning, when you go out on the dock to greet the lake, you can wave at me, and I'll wave back" (98). The lake is a place of healing for her husband after her death.

Koller's plays move beyond the confines of the page and the stage in an expression of the personal, social, and mythic dynamics of the prairie landscape. In striking new ways, they focus on the land and on those who live in intimate terms with the land. They dramatize the lives of women who have learned to celebrate the terrible beauty of their environment and have formed a mental and emotional synergism with the prairie.

— ANNE NOTHOF

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Voices of the Land



Cowboy Boots and a Corsage, Edmonton Fringe Festival: Joan Hurley as Jeannie; Clare Denman as Roxanne; John Weed as Paul; Barbara Schmid as Angelina. Photo by Ed Kaiser.

COWBOY BOOTS *and a* **CORSAGE**

Cowboy Boots and a Corsage was first produced at the Edmonton Fringe Festival in August 1991 with the following cast and crew:

JEANNIE Joan Hurley
ROXANNE Clare J. Denman
ANGELINA Barbara Schmid
PAUL / WELFARE AGENT / HARRY John Weed
MUSICIAN Blake Winnipeg

DIRECTOR Jonathan Christenson
STAGE MANAGER Sian Williams
DRAMATURGE Patricia Badir
SET Maureen Harvey
COSTUMES Brigitte Blunck de Vicque
CARPENTER Lorne Wensel
SPECIAL EFFECTS Robert Koller

The script was slightly revised for a production at FemFest! by Sarasvati Productions in Winnipeg from 7 to 15 June 2003 with the following cast and crew:

JEANNIE Cairn Moore
ROXANNE Andrea Dziadek
ANGELINA Alison Kolisnyk
PAUL Illya Torres-Garner
WELFARE / REAL ESTATE AGENT Henri Marcoux
HARRY Darryl Miller

DIRECTOR Hope McIntyre
DRAMATURGE Joanna Falck
MUSIC Illya Torres-Garner

Characters

JEANNIE, newly widowed, in her forties

ROXANNE, her daughter, in Grade 12

PAUL, Roxanne's boyfriend, also in Grade 12, plays the guitar music bridges where indicated

WELFARE AGENT, male, who also plays REAL ESTATE AGENT

HARRY, in his forties

ANGELINA, Paul's mother, in her forties

Set

There are three main playing areas: the half-section, where Jeannie goes in her mind; at stage right, a table and two chairs — Jeannie's kitchen; at stage left, an area representing various locales in town, Roxanne's space.

Music

For bridges between scenes, and especially to underscore Jeannie's time on the land, Paul plays acoustic guitar. He also sings the Grad song.

SCENE 1 Jeannie's Kitchen

Music.

Jeannie, in her mind, is at her land, where she retreats often. Angelina is seated at the table, set with two cups, a deck of cards, and a cribbage board. Angelina has a tote bag. Jeannie carries a bottle of amaretto.

JEANNIE (To the cows) What are you looking at? Hey, Lola! Matilda! Trudy! It's just me. Just me. I need you girls more than ever now. I wish I could just stand there and watch, like you! You big smart asses!

Angelina sneezes. Jeannie brings a bottle of amaretto to the table.

JEANNIE Hot tea for your hay fever.

ANGELINA Oh, thanks, Jeannie. It's worse this spring.

JEANNIE Then let's make it blueberry tea.

ANGELINA Oh, no . . . ah, blueberry for me, please.

JEANNIE Okey-dokey. Clear for you, double blue for me.

ANGELINA That stuff costs the earth. Can you really afford it, I mean —

JEANNIE Don't get your tits in a knot. I found this in the closet. I think it was a present. An anniversary present. I thought we should pause to celebrate. Since you're here.

ANGELINA Well, it's a good thing I came by. To keep you company.

JEANNIE And ask me something. You always do. So what's on your mind, Angelina?

ANGELINA I was just wondering if you got your insurance claim yet.

JEANNIE Ha! He never bought insurance in his life.

ANGELINA I thought so.

Jeannie reaches for more amaretto.

JEANNIE Happy Anniversary.

ANGELINA You could probably do without this.

Angelina corks the bottle.

JEANNIE I couldn't.

ANGELINA Well, honestly, Jeannie, here it is only three months after your husband drops dead at Harry's Bar and Billiards and you're soaking up the sauce in your tea!

JEANNIE Oh, dry up, Angelina. Play cards.

ANGELINA My crib. Fifteen two, fifteen four, and eight's a dozen.

JEANNIE Why do we bother playing? We know you're going to finish first. You're always first. First to get asked out, first to get knocked up, first to get married . . .

ANGELINA Not first to get widowed, that's you.

JEANNIE Thank heavens I get to be first at something.

ROXANNE (*off*) I'm home!

ANGELINA If you don't watch out, you're going to be first at something else.

Roxanne enters kitchen.

JEANNIE I know what you're thinking. Technically, that would be a tie.

ANGELINA Over my dead body.

JEANNIE (*Concentrating on her cards*) Hi, honey.

ANGELINA Hello, Roxanne.

ROXANNE Howdy.

JEANNIE How was school?

ROXANNE Got a detention.

ANGELINA Oh!

ROXANNE Smoking in the can.

JEANNIE Smoking in the can.

Jeannie slips away to the land.

JEANNIE Remember we used to do that, Ange? That was before you had hay fever, of course. And it wasn't in the can, it was under the school steps.

ROXANNE Anything to eat around here?

ANGELINA Oh, I brought some of my pound cake for you two. It's fresh baked!

ROXANNE How wholesome.

JEANNIE You had your eye on Charlie even then. Even though he was looking at me.

ANGELINA One of Paul's favourites.

ROXANNE Pound cake?

Roxanne reads Angelina's cards, then takes up Jeannie's.

JEANNIE You knew exactly how you were going to fix things. One, two —

ROXANNE Four, six, eight and his nibs is one more!

ANGELINA Paul loves all kinds of baked goods. Whoever marries him will be in the kitchen all day long.

ROXANNE Ha! The Paul I know likes his sweet stuff any way he can find it.

ANGELINA I wonder, Roxanne, if you've given any thought to a summer job.

ROXANNE I might do some babysitting. I like kids.

ANGELINA Maybe I could find you some work on a farm, so you could see what it's like.

ROXANNE I can see what that's like. All I have to do is look at you.

ANGELINA Your poor mother. With a girl like you.

Music.

Paul enters, guitar in hand. Jeannie moves to kitchen to answer phone.

PAUL Hi, it's me.

JEANNIE Hi, kiddo.

PAUL Roxy home?

JEANNIE Yeah, she's here. Playin' cards.

PAUL Shoot. Is my Ma there, too?

ANGELINA Is that Paul?

JEANNIE Yes, sir.

PAUL Don't let on it's me.

JEANNIE How come?

PAUL She'll think up more stuff for me to do, and I . . . wanted to come by and see Roxy tonight.

ROXANNE Is he coming over?

JEANNIE Only if you keep your shirt on, buster.

ANGELINA Is that Paul?

Jeannie nods at Roxanne.

PAUL Oh, yeah. Ha. That was . . . ha, ha. Okay. See ya.

JEANNIE Later. Bye.

Paul exits.

ROXANNE Gotta go wash the car. Toss the niner, Mom.

Roxanne takes pound cake, exits.

ANGELINA I don't know what I would do if I were you, Jeannie. At her age, Roxy needs things.

JEANNIE As long as she's got gas money, she doesn't complain.

ANGELINA My Paul says your Roxanne is getting wilder every day, racing around in that car.

JEANNIE Yeah? Your Paul ought to know. Caught the two of them the other day . . . starting to strip down from the heat. They had the windows fogged up, but I know where he's got his tattoo!

ANGELINA Well, all I know is, if Roxanne can't find what she needs at home, she'll go looking for it elsewhere.

JEANNIE Like you did.

ANGELINA That was a long time ago.

JEANNIE You think Roxanne would get herself into trouble on purpose?

ANGELINA Like you say, it's been done before. My Paul doesn't need any accident with some girl right now! He's got plans!

JEANNIE Then maybe you should talk to him!

ANGELINA I'm just worried about you, Jeannie. I don't know how you're going to manage, with house and car payments, and all your other expenses.

JEANNIE Are you the one who made the call? Ange?

ANGELINA Nine, ten, eleven . . . I'm out!

Welfare Agent enters, looks around as if inspecting Jeannie's land, carries file folder. Jeannie tries to block him.

JEANNIE What do you want?

AGENT Well, Ma'm, we've checked your file, but there's a problem with support because you own a certain half-section of land.

JEANNIE My mother willed it to me.

AGENT With the half-section, you are ineligible.

JEANNIE But . . .

AGENT There is a way around this problem. Heh, heh. Don't tell anyone I suggested it, but what I usually tell my clients is, sell the pile of rocks 'n weeds, spend the money and reapply!

JEANNIE No way.

AGENT Then, sorry. Can't help you, toodeloo.

Agent exits as Roxanne enters. Jeannie comes back to the kitchen.

ROXANNE Mom?

JEANNIE We're not taking any money from them.

ROXANNE Who?

ANGELINA The welfare, that's who.

JEANNIE Bunch of clowns. Just because I own a few handfuls of prairie grass.

ANGELINA Well, Jeannie, you know I could get Charlie to buy it!

ROXANNE Unload it, Mom.

JEANNIE No!

ANGELINA You've let him graze our cattle on it for years!

JEANNIE I like your cows.

ANGELINA Then at least let Charlie buy it, Jeannie. You could still . . . use it.

JEANNIE I won't sell.

ANGELINA Why not?

ROXANNE We need the money, Mom.

JEANNIE You don't have any land of your own. You wouldn't know what it's like.

Jeannie moves to the land.

ANGELINA I don't suppose I would.

ROXANNE What's the big deal?

ANGELINA I've never really thought about it. I mean, the house is mine, and the farm is Charlie's. It's that simple.

ROXANNE It's pasture.

ANGELINA Well, I better run along. Going up to Lethbridge tomorrow to get my boys outfitted for Paul's graduation.

ROXANNE It's just grass.

ANGELINA By the way, Roxanne, have you made plans for Grad yet?

ROXANNE No. Not really. I don't know.

ANGELINA We're putting on a dinner dance down at the legion hall.

ROXANNE Hey, Mom.

ANGELINA Maybe you don't go in for all that.

ROXANNE I haven't thought about it. Mom?

ANGELINA Then what?

ROXANNE Summer! Parties, swimming, barbeques . . .

ANGELINA And after that?

ROXANNE I don't know! How should I know? I'm just a kid!

Roxanne exits.

ANGELINA I feel sorry for you, Jeannie. Listen, are you sure he didn't put away something in stocks or bonds? You know how men are. They buy stuff, sock it away somewhere and pretty near forget. . . . Jeannie? Oh, Jeannie!

Angelina exits. Music.

JEANNIE There was one bond. I had Elmer down at the bank check on it. He said it was cashed three years ago. He gave me the exact date. Round about spring thaw. Day like today. You would have thought the smell of spring on the prairie would have been enough to lift anyone's spirits. The way I figure it, Harry's Bar and Billiards must have made a bundle that March.

Jeannie exits.

SCENE 2 School Parking Lot

Roxanne and Paul enter, flirting and horsing around. She tries to steal his soccer ball. Paul has his guitar.

ROXANNE Hey, I was wondering about Grad.

PAUL What about it?

ROXANNE It's going to be a big deal this year, eh?

PAUL Gotta be, with Ma running it.

ROXANNE Well . . . are we going or what?

PAUL I am. My Ma's got me doing the Grad song. She's wound up like an eight-day clock. You'd think it was her Grad.

ROXANNE So you're going with your Ma.

PAUL Well . . . it's mostly for people who are passing the year.

ROXANNE Yeah, so?

PAUL Well, you hang out a lot at school.

ROXANNE I mostly go there to smoke.

PAUL Yeah, well, I didn't think you'd be going to Grad.

ROXANNE But you are.

PAUL Getting my Grade 12 means getting four wild years in Calgary.

ROXANNE I'd like to go, too.

PAUL You would?

ROXANNE To Grad.

PAUL Yeah? It could be a really fun time.

ROXANNE Yeah, maybe.

PAUL We'd make a pretty good-looking couple.

ROXANNE You going to wear one of those tuxedos?

PAUL What about you? Have I ever seen you in a dress?

ROXANNE Just that once. At the service for my Dad.

PAUL Yeah, but even then you wore your boots.

ROXANNE Yeah, I did.

PAUL For Grad, you'd have to leave them at home.

ROXANNE Oh, yeah?

PAUL Yeah. Okay. I'll tell you what. You pass, and I'll take you to Grad.

ROXANNE Maybe I will, maybe I won't.

PAUL It's your funeral.

Paul throws the ball at Roxanne. Music. Roxanne picks up her knapsack and crosses to the kitchen.

SCENE 3 Kitchen / Harry's Bar

Roxanne kicks the ball.

JEANNIE Roxy? Where were you?

ROXANNE Out driving.

JEANNIE With Paul?

ROXANNE Yeah.

JEANNIE What's new with him?

ROXANNE Not much. He's been talking about Grad.

JEANNIE Oh.

ROXANNE It's probably a bunch of crap.

JEANNIE I don't know.

ROXANNE Well, you went to yours, didn't you?

JEANNIE No.

ROXANNE Why not?

JEANNIE I was honeymooning.

ROXANNE But you got your Grade 12.

JEANNIE He did. He was finished a year ahead of me.

ROXANNE He did and you didn't.

JEANNIE He wanted to go camping in the foothills as soon as it was warm enough to go with no tent.

ROXANNE No tent?

JEANNIE Slept under the stars every night.

ROXANNE It never rained?

JEANNIE No.

ROXANNE Sounds like Dad all right. Always taking chances.

JEANNIE I took a chance, too. He didn't talk me into quitting. I just did it. I wanted him.

ROXANNE So you don't have your high school.

JEANNIE They're asking for it everywhere: the bank, the Saan store, the lodge, the hospital . . .

ROXANNE But everyone in town knows you.

JEANNIE That's what makes it worse.

ROXANNE So what are you going to do?

JEANNIE I'm going to have to sell —

ROXANNE It's about time.

JEANNIE — the car.

ROXANNE Not the car! Dad bought it for us!

JEANNIE It's not paid for yet. It's costing me.

ROXANNE But I love that car! I mean, it's a car, not an old dusty pickup! And I've been taking really good care of it!

JEANNIE I know.

ROXANNE We need the car.

JEANNIE I don't really see why when we live in a town where everything is in walking distance.

ROXANNE That's why we need it. To go other places.

Harry enters, sets bar.

JEANNIE (*Pause*) There's a sign up at Harry's Bar and Billiards.

ROXANNE I saw it. "Help Wanted."

JEANNIE As if I'd ever want to help Harry.

ROXANNE It wasn't Harry's fault.

JEANNIE You want me to go work in a bar?

ROXANNE I don't know.

JEANNIE The same bar that killed your Dad?

ROXANNE If you have to.

JEANNIE I'm not going anywhere near the place.

ROXANNE Then maybe I should go work for Harry.

JEANNIE Over my dead . . .

ROXANNE Yeah, well you're half-dead at least. How could you go out talking to people with nails like this? You're a mess.

JEANNIE Oh, who cares?

ROXANNE I'll get the kit. I'll be right back.

Roxanne exits. Music. Jeannie gets up, slowly goes to the land.

JEANNIE I've been to Harry's often enough, eh? It got so he and I had a code. He'd phone me and say —

HARRY Hey, Jeannie!

Roxanne enters.

ROXANNE Mom?

HARRY There's someone down here who needs a ride home.

JEANNIE Right off the rigs, spreading money like wildfire. But other times, when there wasn't much to spend, it could be bad —

HARRY Hey, Jeannie!

ROXANNE Where'd you go?

HARRY You want him or should I call the sheriff?

ROXANNE Mom?

Roxanne exits with kit.

JEANNIE And all through everything I kept coming out here, looking for . . . the way it was before. I loved it when he used to say, “Just you and me and the horizon.” Now it’s just me and you girls. Looking down at the grass. I’m just like you. Can’t even hold my head up to look at the sky. Maybe I should just crawl down a hole and pull it in after me.

*Jeannie crumples.
Real Estate Agent enters.*

AGENT Your daughter, pretty little thing, she told me I’d find you here. A friend of a friend said this here bit o’ land could be up for sale. I could list it for ya. I could sell it today. Money in the bank tomorrow. What do you say?

A pause, then Jeannie moos, low, then louder.

JEANNIE Nooo!

Agent exits.

Did you hear what I said, you big, fat cows? Don’t stare at me like that! Wish I could chew it away like you. Oh my girls — Lulu, Millicent, Betsy, Geraldine! I don’t want to lose you. I don’t want to lose this place. What if Harry won’t hire me? What would be worse is that the only job I ever get is working for Harry.

Jeannie moves to the bar.

HARRY I thought you might be calling.

JEANNIE I need a job.

HARRY It’s hard work. You’re on your feet all the time.

JEANNIE I can handle it.

HARRY Any experience?

JEANNIE Cut it out, Harry. Do you want me or not?

HARRY Skirt looks good, anyway.

JEANNIE How much?

HARRY The minimum. But you get your tips. Can't expect a whole lot, though. People are paying big bills. Prices for grain are still down. Machinery's busting left and right. And then there's the damn weather.

JEANNIE As long as it makes them want to drink more, what do you care, eh, Harry?

HARRY Ha! I'm not stopping them.

JEANNIE Just one more thing. It's about Roxanne.

HARRY How is foxy Roxy?

JEANNIE She's talking about graduating this year.

HARRY So what about her?

JEANNIE If she needs me, I want her to be able to call down to the bar, anytime.

HARRY Okay, but I don't want her hanging around here.

Harry ties a money apron on Jeannie, taking his time and looking her right over.

JEANNIE She won't.

HARRY Need that like a hole in the head.

Music. Harry hands Jeannie a broom. They exit.

SCENE 4 The Playground

Roxanne enters, holding hands with Paul.

ROXANNE What a great day! Look at that perfect sky. Makes ya just want to blend in with it.

PAUL Yeah.

ROXANNE Feels good to skip school once in a while, eh?

PAUL Yeah. Spring fever. It gets ya.

ROXANNE Ever think of just taking off with it?

PAUL What do you mean?

ROXANNE Just letting it take over. Packing a bag, jumping in your truck and driving.

PAUL What?

ROXANNE Just you and me, driving fast, and the horizon.

PAUL No!

ROXANNE Aw, come on!

PAUL No way, Roxy. Get real! Just because I'm cutting a class doesn't mean I want to run away.

ROXANNE You're sure?

PAUL Forget it.

ROXANNE I forgot. You know exactly where you're going.

PAUL Yeah. I've thought about it for a long time. I'm doing my degree and then working for my dad. If things go okay, he'll make me a partner in the farm.

ROXANNE Just like your dad.

PAUL All your dad gave you is itchy feet.

Roxanne starts to leave.

Hey, where are you going?

ROXANNE I don't know . . . and right now I like it that way.

PAUL Hey, Rox! Wait. I want you to hear this.

Music.

(Sings)

*Whatever I do, I do
Wherever I go, I go
You gotta know,
it will be with you.*

*If I stay near
or if I go far,
I'm gonna go
with you in my heart.
Whatever I do, I do
Wherever I go, I go
To find the road
I'll take with you.*

Roxanne and Paul exit, together.

SCENE 5 Harry's Bar

Harry is resetting glasses. Jeannie checks a bill, her watch.

HARRY Hey, Jeannie. That table at the back is looking thirsty again.

JEANNIE I just took them a round five minutes ago.

HARRY Charlie's pretty high after his bull won first at the fair today, but his old lady won't let him stay out late. See, Angelina's checking her watch. Go get their order.

JEANNIE I think Charlie's had enough.

HARRY I'm the boss.

JEANNIE Hey, Harry. Charlie's had a good time, and Angelina needs a good lay. Let her take him home in a happy mood.

HARRY They're leaving. You owe me one.

JEANNIE Uh, uh, Harry. You got it wrong. You're the one who's in debt. It's the reason you hired me. How many more widows you trying to make, Harry?

HARRY Can it, Jeannie.

JEANNIE Enough to open a new bar? Maybe call it Harry's Harum?

HARRY All I did was pick him up until there was nothing left. Just like you did.

JEANNIE Excuse me, it's last call. Time to get my tips from those Calgary bigshots.

Jeannie goes to her land and counts money in her pocket.

JEANNIE Nineteen, twenty . . . thirty . . . sixty-five. Holy cats! Not bad for an old girl, eh?

HARRY Not bad at all.

Harry gets ready to leave.

JEANNIE Never thought I'd get anything in a place I lost so much.

HARRY Hey, Jeannie, if you come home with me, it wouldn't take long to get it all back. You deserve it. Everyone does. Even me.

Roxanne enters kitchen with books.

Harry takes off Jeannie's money apron, lets it drop, turns her around to face him.

JEANNIE My mother used to say having your own land is having your own nickel. For me, it's having my own history.

HARRY One day, maybe you'll invite me out there.

JEANNIE Wouldn't that give the old girls something to chew about?

Music. Jeannie goes to kitchen. Harry exits.

SCENE 6 Kitchen

Roxanne is studying at the table.

ROXANNE I was wondering when you'd get home.

JEANNIE What are you doing still up? Was Paul here?

ROXANNE Nope.

JEANNIE Did you get some supper?

ROXANNE Paul invited me to his place.

JEANNIE How's Angelina?

ROXANNE Whenever I'm there, she's rattling around like seed in a two-inch wind.

JEANNIE She likes to fuss. Oh, my feet are so sore they could fall off.

ROXANNE You should get yourself a pair of cowboy boots.

JEANNIE When did you start wearing those again?

ROXANNE Been a while.

JEANNIE Been since he's gone.

ROXANNE You can walk forever without getting sore. He was right about that. Here, try them on.

JEANNIE Okay. Hey, they fit good. You warmed 'em up for me. Nice.

ROXANNE So . . . decent tips tonight?

JEANNIE Pretty decent. Why?

ROXANNE I was wondering about . . . buying a Grad dress.

JEANNIE How much for a Grad dress?

ROXANNE The nice ones are pretty expensive.

JEANNIE Are you going with Paul?

ROXANNE Yeah, I guess.

JEANNIE What about parents? Don't parents get to go?

ROXANNE You want to?

JEANNIE If you're graduating, I'm going, come hell or high water.

ROXANNE Then you'll need a dress, too.

JEANNIE I can't wear the same one?

ROXANNE No.

JEANNIE Not in this town.

Angelina enters bar.

ROXANNE Oh, before I forget, Paul's mom said to remind you about canasta on Thursday afternoon.

JEANNIE Can't. Gotta work.

ROXANNE No time for bat club anymore, eh, Mom?

JEANNIE At Grad, would I have to sit with her?

ROXANNE Well, yeah. You sit with your date's parents.

JEANNIE That settles it, then. We need to go shopping.

Music. Jeannie and Roxanne exit.

SCENE 7 Harry's Bar

Harry enters bar.

ANGELINA Oh, listen, Harry. Could I get a glass of water?

HARRY You bet.

ANGELINA Thank you. Oh!

HARRY What's eating you?

ANGELINA Oh, those women! You give them simple instructions on how to make paper rosettes and they don't follow unless you're holding their hand! I've been running around town all afternoon!

HARRY Here, on the house.

Harry serves her a beer.

ANGELINA In the middle of the day?

HARRY Don't like to see a lady so agitated.

ANGELINA Well, thanks. Umm. Now if I didn't have to face that vixen, Roxanne, tonight.

Jeannie enters.

HARRY Roxy?

ANGELINA She's got my Paul mooning over her like a wet dog. He can't keep his mind on his schoolwork, and exams are just around the corner.

HARRY He's a smart fella.

ANGELINA He used to be, before he took up with her. She has her meals at our house most nights, well, because Paul thinks he has to take care of her, now that Jeannie is always here. . . . I tell you, she's lost track of that girl, but I'll be darned if I'm going to let go of my Paul!

JEANNIE You looking for me?

HARRY Sight for sore eyes.

ANGELINA Oh!

JEANNIE Sorry I'm late.

ANGELINA Jeannie, can I talk to you about the Grad dance?

JEANNIE I should get to work.

ANGELINA I'm just a bit keyed up. They've put me in charge of pretty near everything . . . and there's hardly any time left, so many things to do! What about you? Do you know what you're wearing?

JEANNIE I'm not sure.

ANGELINA Me neither. I can't decide between my peach or my dusty rose! Either way, I don't suppose we'll clash, will we, sitting at the same table?

JEANNIE Don't worry, Ange.

HARRY Time's a-wasting.

ANGELINA The other thing is, on top of everything else, Charlie and I are celebrating our anniversary soon, and I thought, why not buy that patch of pasture as my gift to him? What do you think, Jeannie? I've got my cheque book.

JEANNIE It's the only thing I've got that you don't.

ANGELINA But it would help you out. You wouldn't have to work here.

HARRY She likes it here.

JEANNIE I do.

ANGELINA Oh! Well! I never knew!

JEANNIE And you don't have to be feeding Roxy all the time.

ANGELINA Oh, it's no trouble; when you cook for eight every night, one more doesn't matter. It's just these exams coming up! I'll be glad when that's over. Well, I'll see you on the big night! You're looking good, Jeannie!

*Music. Angelina exits. Jeannie exits to the land.
Harry exits, touching Jeannie as he goes.*

SCENE 8 Kitchen

Roxanne enters.

ROXANNE Mom! Where are you?

Jeannie does not respond.

ROXANNE I wish you wouldn't do this!

Jeannie pushes herself back to the reality of her kitchen, lays out bills, pencil, adds on crib board.

JEANNIE I'm here.

ROXANNE Bills?

JEANNIE One more. It's a biggie.

Jeannie opens envelope.

ROXANNE For what?

JEANNIE Taxes. On my half-section.

ROXANNE But doesn't Paul's dad pay that? He's using it for pasture.

JEANNIE Nope. Whoever owns it, pays it.

ROXANNE So, how much is left?

JEANNIE After the taxes, about a hundred dollars.

ROXANNE Not much.

JEANNIE Probably enough for one dress.

ROXANNE What about tickets, for the dinner dance. And shoes?
And a dress for you?

JEANNIE Maybe I could buy some material and make one.

ROXANNE Sure, Mom. Like the time I was twelve and I needed a
new coat, and you never got past cutting the thing out.
The material is still sitting downstairs somewhere!

JEANNIE This is different. There's a deadline.

ROXANNE Just when are you going to do it? You're out every night
'til late, and just barely out of your housecoat after school
when I get home. And then you're gone to the bar again!

JEANNIE I'm going there to work.

ROXANNE Yeah, to make just enough money to pay taxes on your
stupid half-section.

JEANNIE That land is my friend.

ROXANNE It's more than that! Every time I look for you, you're
never here, and even if you are, you're not!

JEANNIE I haven't been out there since I started work. One of the
reasons for that is I need the car to get there. I haven't
seen the car — or you — for ages!

ROXANNE I've been at Paul's. Studying. Really.

JEANNIE I need to see the sky.

Jeannie starts to move away to the land.

ROXANNE Okay. Wait, Mom. How about this? How about if we, you
and me, how about if we go up to Lethbridge on Sunday,
because you don't have to work, right? They've got this
mall open on Sundays up there, and we can find some
good sales, and get our dresses for Grad?

JEANNIE You go ahead. I'm not much for crowds.

ROXANNE What do you mean? Don't you want to go to Grad?

JEANNIE I'm not spending my land tax money on a petal pink dress to go to Angelina's private party for Paul.

ROXANNE Hey, it's my Grad, too! I'm going to pass! I'm going to graduate!

JEANNIE Here. Take the hundred bucks. Your graduation present.

ROXANNE This is because of a bunch of prairie grass?

JEANNIE It's just that it's mine. It could be yours some day.

ROXANNE Well, I'm going to Grad, even if I have to wear my cowboy boots!

Music. Roxanne stuffs the money in her jeans and pulls her boots off Jeannie. Roxanne exits. Jeannie picks up the cards and lets them fall on the table.

SCENE 9 The Land

Roxanne and Paul enter with their arms around each other.

ROXANNE Just what I thought. Prairie grass and cowpies and flies.

PAUL Never been tilled. My dad says it's the best for cattle. If you look hard, you can see dozens of species of grass. All with their own purpose. Cattle keep it growin'. Land needs the cattle as much as cattle need the land.

ROXANNE Huh.

PAUL You sure aced exams last week. You decide to do something, you really do it.

ROXANNE Yeah, I beat you in Social, didn't I? What about Biology?

PAUL You're the one who should go to university.

ROXANNE I'd have to sell the car.

PAUL Come visit me in Calgary next year?

ROXANNE I've got the summer to decide.

PAUL Ever been to the zoo?

ROXANNE My Dad was going to take me once, but he never did.

PAUL I'd take you to the zoo, and then up to the Husky Tower.

ROXANNE Ha! You're going to be too busy to go to the zoo.

PAUL I won't know anyone. It's going to be lonely.

ROXANNE Not for long.

PAUL Will you write to me?

ROXANNE Never written anybody any letters before.

PAUL Hey, Grad pictures are next week. I want a big one of you to take with me to Calgary.

ROXANNE Really? Okay.

PAUL I can hardly wait for Grad night. There's an after-party out at the lake. Don't bring your bathing suit, though. We're going to go skinny dipping, eh, Roxy?

ROXANNE Huh. You see up there on the hill? That's the old homestead.

PAUL We're going to party all night long.

ROXANNE It's where my great-grandparents lived.

PAUL You know, my Dad asked my Ma to marry him on Grad night. Told me he was so pissed he didn't know what he was saying!

ROXANNE What?

PAUL Who knows, eh, Roxy? Maybe you'll come up to Calgary and decide you want to stay a while. I'd like that.

ROXANNE Yeah?

PAUL Maybe you'll end up with me some day.

ROXANNE You think so.

PAUL Let's go for a ride, hey?

ROXANNE Just a minute, okay?

PAUL I'll start the car.

Music. Paul exits.

ROXANNE Hey Paul! I'm driving!

Roxanne runs off.

SCENE 10 Kitchen / Legion Hall

Jeannie enters kitchen in a housecoat as Angelina, in her Grad outfit, enters the Legion Hall. Jeannie brings a bottle of wine and a glass to the table. She mimes an offer of wine to Angelina, who waves her away with last-minute decoration tizzies.

JEANNIE Hey, Ange. I'm thinking of having some company out at my land one of these nights. In case you see a little campfire out there. Don't worry. It's just a little fire. Nothing I can't handle.

Paul, in his tux, gets checked over by Angelina. Paul makes his way to the kitchen. Angelina watches him go, then exits.

PAUL Anybody home?

JEANNIE Don't you look spiffy!

PAUL I feel like a turkey.

JEANNIE Hey, Roxy!

PAUL Sorry you're not coming to Grad.

JEANNIE You'll have a good time without me.

Roxanne enters carrying boxes.

JEANNIE You moving out?

ROXANNE How come you're home?

JEANNIE I booked the night off, remember? Why aren't you dressed?

ROXANNE I'm taking out the garbage.

PAUL I just came over to give you this. I ordered it a long time ago. Remember I asked what colour your dress was? You didn't know, so I got white. Figured white would match with everything. I didn't really want to go at all when you said you weren't. But it means a lot to my Ma, so what the heck. My Dad and I plan on getting plastered.

ROXANNE Don't.

PAUL Sorry.

JEANNIE Rox, what is all this stuff?

ROXANNE Grades 1 to 11. I can't believe you saved it all.
(*Puts on knapsack*) And this is Grade 12.

JEANNIE Paul, be a honey and load this in the car, will you?

PAUL Sure.

Paul exits with boxes.

JEANNIE I need a few things.

Jeannie puts cards in her housecoat pocket.

ROXANNE What are you doing, Mom?

JEANNIE Matches . . . what else?

ROXANNE Mom, where are you going?

Paul enters.

JEANNIE Kiss Paul goodbye and meet me in the car.

Jeannie exits.

ROXANNE I gotta go.

Roxanne puts on her jacket.

PAUL Wait. Let me pin this on for you. There. Yeah. White definitely goes with denim.

ROXANNE Thanks. See ya.

PAUL For sure! Hey! This one is for Jeannie!

Music. Roxanne takes it, kisses Paul and exits. Paul takes a drink of the wine left on the table and exits.

SCENE 11 The Land

Music. Roxanne and Jeannie enter with their corsages pinned on. It is dusk. They sing with the music.

JEANNIE AND *Oh, give me a home, where the buffalo roam, and the*
ROXANNE *deer and the antelope play.*

JEANNIE Hey, Belle!

ROXANNE Belle?

JEANNIE I don't know. I name them all, over and over again.
Just try to get that old girl's attention! Hey! I said, Belle!

ROXANNE Over here, you big ball of blubber!

JEANNIE Yeah, you! I got company tonight. Yeah, that's right.
Time to go home.

ROXANNE Bye, Belle.

JEANNIE What's first?

Jeannie lights fire.

ROXANNE Grade 12! Good riddance.

Roxanne throws paper in the fire, crunching each sheet into a ball. Pause.

ROXANNE It's pretty quiet out here. Like someone's listening.

JEANNIE Well, it's alive, you know.

ROXANNE What?

JEANNIE The land. Never dies, no matter who walks on it or
when. Just like the big round moon.

ROXANNE Puffed right up for Grad night.

JEANNIE I used to come out here all the time when I was a little girl. My parents used to bring me over for a weekend. They'd call it "going on a holiday." Then it was just me and Granny and Gramps. Those were the best days.

ROXANNE This is where you used to go, isn't it? When Dad would get to you.

JEANNIE Feels good to get out here again. This is my property. Nobody can push me around. Cows are my guests. Good listeners, eh? They just stand there and chew while I'm yelling to kingdom come. Hey, my turn to burn something.

Jeannie flings cards into the fire.

JEANNIE Never played very well anyhow. I need a new hobby. Knitting, maybe.

ROXANNE You, knitting? Ha!

JEANNIE Why not? My Granny taught me, you know? I need to keep my hands busy while I'm on breaks at work.

ROXANNE It's pretty bad, eh?

JEANNIE It's different. Without your Dad. I've kinda got the lay of the land, there, you know?

ROXANNE What about Harry?

JEANNIE Harry is . . . well, he's being patient with me. And the bar is good exercise. Keeps me from going antsy. And it's a social life. Seeing as I'm not playing cards anymore.

ROXANNE Or screaming at cows.

JEANNIE Yeah. I think I'll take up knitting. What about you?

ROXANNE I don't know.

JEANNIE What do you like doing best?

ROXANNE Driving. Driving fast.

JEANNIE Yeah. Like the way they drive ambulances.

ROXANNE Yeah. Like that.

JEANNIE Hope I never wind up in one of those things. I'll be content to lie right here, where I came from, when it's time.

ROXANNE You'd have to learn a lot of first aid stuff for that job. And there's all that special equipment.

JEANNIE You could do it. Look how you busted your ass to pass.

ROXANNE Yeah.

JEANNIE You can go anywhere now.

ROXANNE Yeah, I know.

JEANNIE Sorry about Grad.

ROXANNE I'm glad I didn't buy a dress. Would have just worn it once, anyway.

JEANNIE You really got gypped.

ROXANNE Not really.

JEANNIE What about the coat I never made you?

ROXANNE There's that.

JEANNIE And your Dad down at Harry's all the time.

ROXANNE And you going haywire.

JEANNIE *(Pause)* Why didn't you go?

ROXANNE Why didn't you?

JEANNIE This is better.

ROXANNE Yeah. *(Pause)* Hey, I got you something. It was in Grade 12. Oh, I hope I didn't burn it! Ah! Here it is. For you. From me.

Roxanne pulls out the envelope with her Grad photo. Jeannie holds it close to the fire to see.

JEANNIE This is something to keep, all right. You look so grown up in that gown. And they give you roses to hold.

ROXANNE Fake, Mom.

JEANNIE Well, we got our corsages, and these are real, eh, even though we didn't go to the dinner dance.



Cowboy Boots and a Corsage, FemFest: Andrea Dziadek as Roxanne and Cairn Moore as Jeannie. Photo by Lynn Kohler.

ROXANNE Yeah.

JEANNIE And you got your Grade 12. It's yours forever. Can't get stolen, or burnt down or sold, or beat up. Like Granny used to say, no one can take away what you put in your head.

ROXANNE Just like your land. Tough grass.

JEANNIE Like you.

ROXANNE What about the old homestead up there? It's still standing.

JEANNIE Falling apart. When I was your age, I used to think about coming out here and fixing it up.

ROXANNE With Dad?

JEANNIE Yeah. The night we made you we were out here. I can tell by the moon. It was this time of year, about this time of night.

ROXANNE Right here?

JEANNIE The night before we took off for the hills.

ROXANNE Wow.

JEANNIE That was a landmark for me. Making you.

ROXANNE Here.

JEANNIE I was wearing my cowboy boots.

ROXANNE You've got boots?

JEANNIE I used to. I wonder what happened to them.

ROXANNE They're probably downstairs somewhere. You keep everything.

JEANNIE Could use them at work.

ROXANNE I could get them into shape for you.

JEANNIE I'd like that.

ROXANNE You could probably still fix up the old place.

JEANNIE It's good to have it to think about. But I doubt I'll ever do it.

ROXANNE Yeah. Too busy knitting.

Music. Fade to black.



The Early Worm Club,
Jagged Edge Theatre:
Ian Horobin as Randy,
Christopher Menu
as Jarret and Hansi
Klemm as Millie.
Photo by Ian Jackson.

The **EARLY WORM CLUB**

The Early Worm Club was first produced by Jagged Edge Lunchbox Theatre, in Edmonton, Alberta, from 30 March to 22 April 2000, with the following cast and crew:

MILLIE Hansi Klemm

RANDY Ian Horobin

JARRET Christopher Menu

DIRECTOR Lisa Newman

STAGE MANAGER Amy DeFelice

PRODUCTION Lisa Newman

SET DESIGN Trevor Schmidt

LIGHT DESIGN Roy Jackson

SOUND DESIGN Katherine Koller, Amy DeFelice, and Christopher Menu

Characters

MILLIE, thirties, unattached, recent devotee of bird watching, completely adorned in the paraphernalia of her new “therapy”

RANDY, late twenties, a bachelor, holds a steady job, plays outfielder on the baseball team, a lifelong urbanite

JARRET, thirties, divorced, pitcher on Randy’s recreational baseball team for the last few years, with a wolflike familiarity of the woods. Randy sometimes calls him “Jar,” pronounced “Jer.”

Time

The present. Early summer.

Place

Wooded parkland

Set

A suggestion of trees, with places for being seen and unseen in various levels of the trees, is necessary. Lighting defines the passage from night to dawn to morning.

Music

Vocals, unaccompanied, or minimally accompanied, such as Gregorian chant, scat singing, or spirituals. A separate musical selection can be used as a motif for each of the three characters to introduce their monologues.

SCENE 1 Very early Saturday morning

Music. Jarret and Randy enter. Randy is carrying a heavy knapsack.

RANDY I should be in bed.

JARRET When you're alone, bed ain't gonna work.

RANDY So what is this gonna do?

JARRET Breathe deep.

RANDY All I need is sleep.

JARRET That comes later.

RANDY It's almost day.

JARRET First I've got to clear my head.

RANDY But I need to go to the laundromat.

JARRET Big plans.

RANDY I might meet the girl of my dreams at the laundromat.

JARRET Give it up. They're all flakes.

RANDY I don't think so. What about that girl, Lesley, at the party?

JARRET She was okay.

RANDY See?

JARRET Marry her and she'd turn into a flake.

Randy stops to put sack down, opens it and looks inside.

RANDY What is in here?

JARRET I'll take it. Keep moving. Gotta keep the blood circulating.

RANDY Evaporate the alcohol.

JARRET Next weekend, it's your turn to get plastered.

RANDY I can hardly wait. Lesley would love me. Spewing out of the car, honking the horn.

JARRET So maybe I should be a monk. They have monks who make jam, so why not monks who do drywall? You put your stilts on, no talking, look up and do the ceiling over and over again like Michelangelo. And you never go through married hell.

RANDY Three years of marriage and one divorce and you want to be a monk. You're way ahead of me.

Randy sits, blending into the trees.

JARRET Miles.

Jarret keeps walking, downstage.

JARRET The guy is like plaster dust, eh? Always checking on me, making me eat stuff at the party. I tell him, for me, drinking is, like, a ritual, eh? I don't eat before, during or after. Too hard on the gut, eh? I take my booze in pure form. *(Pause)* Everybody thinks I'm out for chicks, eh? Nope, I'm a monk. There's only one woman for me, and she dumped me on my ass. Probably got ten new guys who want her now. She turns heads. Body like a sculpture. Smart, too. Got her own job. Personnel manager. She wants kids. I can't stand to sit beside 'em.

Jarret moves into the tree. Millie enters, resets her binoculars, hat, book, pen.

MILLIE What I'm looking for is any sign of movement, any hope of life. A tiny alteration in the scenery. If I don't see anything, then I . . . listen. They're up there, hiding in the canopy. *(Pause)* Wouldn't you love to be with them, away from all the dirt of life, gradually covering you up, sinking you deeper into the ground? Up there, the air must be so pure, totally oxygenated from all those leaves? Hey? I'd have a snug little nest. I would fly! Oh, and if you're a bird your genes come with an annual built-in winter vacation! I'd like the camaraderie, the flocking, you know?

Millie gets down, takes off her paraphernalia, lies down as if asleep, then pretends to wake up like Snow White.

Do you remember when Snow White is left in the woods by the kind-hearted huntsman and she's in a clearing, and all the animals of the forest come out? They all want to be her friend? I'd sit out here forever if there was a chance they'd show themselves for me — you know, the birds and all the little creatures?

Millie gets up.

If I don't see or hear a bird for a day or two, I get really anxious. I think the world is coming to an end. To me, every bird is a miracle. I grew up on a farm, and we had this old rooster who crowed like the dickens. Cock-a-doodle-doo! We called him His Lordship. When I was little, I thought it was the voice of God.

Sound of owl hooting.

One lonely screech of the owl: "One for sorrow, two for mirth, three for a wedding, and four for a birth." Huh, sorrow.

Millie resets her gear.

But, when I set off to go in the woods to watch birds, I feel very safe. The time I'm out here is a safety factor. Nobody's up at five for a stroll in the woods, except a fellow birdwatcher or maybe a friendly huntsman.

Jarret hides in the trees, taking out a softball from the bag and throwing it at Randy.

RANDY Hey!

JARRET Just testing your night vision.

RANDY How long do you want to stay here?

JARRET Until we see something.

RANDY What are we looking for?

JARRET Birds.

RANDY Sure.

JARRET Yeah. Listen.

RANDY Listen for what?

JARRET Birds.

RANDY Yeah, right.

JARRET (*Tossing binoculars*) See what you see.

RANDY A couple of guys wandering the woods in the dark.

JARRET What was that?

RANDY What?

JARRET I heard something.

RANDY Something big?

JARRET Maybe.

RANDY Like a bear?

JARRET (*Laughs*) You scared of bears?

RANDY (*Climbing*) What is it?

JARRET A deer. You scared it off.

RANDY I think I'll stay up here.

JARRET You'll scare off all the birds.

RANDY So what.

JARRET I gotta see some birds before we go.

RANDY You saw a deer.

JARRET It's gotta be birds.

RANDY Why?

JARRET Because birds make me feel better!

RANDY (*Coming down*) If you ask me, we're looking for the wrong kind of birds.

Millie is unseen by Randy or Jarret.

MILLIE It's really amazing how many birds you've already seen, like in your past, before you took up the sport? See, here in the index of this book, I outline the little box for each species in green if I remember seeing it before, like if I recognize it from the photograph but I never knew its name? The author of this book says you don't really know a bird until you know its Latin name, but I'm sticking with the, well, vulgar names. I don't know why they say vulgar. I mean, do we say avifauna or do we say birds? Anyway, once I've seen a bird and know its name, I colour the square in red. Look at this page. Five red boxes already.

JARRET There's a redpoll at four o' clock.

Millie checks her book.

RANDY Oh? Okay. That's it, then. We can go, right?

JARRET Wait a minute. There's a finch.

RANDY Hallelujah.

JARRET Little, bright yellow. Over there.

RANDY (*Sees Millie*) Oh.

JARRET And a flicker flying by. I can hear a woodpecker, can you?

RANDY Hi.

MILLIE Shh.

JARRET There's a swallow, and a cowbird, and I think that was a female redwing blackbird.

MILLIE Wow. He's good.

RANDY I guess.

JARRET Osprey way up there, heading toward the water.

MILLIE (*To Jarret*) I hear the male redwing.

JARRET What the . . . ? Who is she?

RANDY I don't know. She's been watching you.

MILLIE Hear it? There. I knew there would be a pair. I'm Millie.

JARRET What are you doing in my space?

MILLIE I'm . . . looking for birds. Just like you.

JARRET Yeah? Well, you can do it over there. We were here first.

MILLIE You can't do that. Birders are friendly folks.

JARRET You're interrupting me.

MILLIE Is he serious or what?

RANDY Jarret? Oh, he's just hungover.

MILLIE Talk about clouding you over before it's even morning yet.

RANDY Yeah. Sorry. He's a pretty crusty guy. He does drywall.

MILLIE Oh.

RANDY I'm Randy. I'm an accountant.

MILLIE Oh, you're probably one of those listers.

RANDY Listers?

MILLIE Yeah. How long is yours?

RANDY I . . . I'm not sure!

JARRET Would you butt out?

MILLIE Sorry. Shhh.

Silence.

JARRET I was on a real roll there.

MILLIE I . . . I . . .

JARRET Don't talk.

Silence.

RANDY Maybe we should go.

JARRET I didn't get my quota. I need to get my quota.

RANDY What's that?

JARRET Ten birds. I only got eight.

MILLIE A quota counter.

JARRET Don't talk.

Silence.

RANDY There's one.

JARRET Where?

RANDY Sitting on that branch at two o'clock.

JARRET What is that?

MILLIE It's a robin.

JARRET A basic robin.

MILLIE Yes.

RANDY Yeah, it does look like a robin!

JARRET That's only nine.

MILLIE One more and I can move.

JARRET Don't talk.

Silence. Rain.

MILLIE (*Unpacking umbrella, rain gear*) I knew it.

JARRET What?

MILLIE It's raining. That little lull in the birdsong? That happens a lot out here just before it starts to sprinkle.

JARRET Do you ever stop?

MILLIE Did you know that was a secret of the monks? They had the stamina of athletes. They'd only sleep a few hours a day, but they kept their energy up by singing almost all their waking hours. The chants gave them the power to function with very little rest.

RANDY Like birds.

MILLIE In the bird kingdom, the male who starts singing nonstop during the early morning feeding hours is considered the strongest, the most virile, for being able to perform without any food.

JARRET Makes sense.

Silence.

RANDY Uh, it's really raining. Maybe I should go get the car.

JARRET Good idea.

RANDY (*To Millie*) Would you like a ride to your car?

MILLIE I took a bus and hiked in.

RANDY Can we drive you back to the city?

MILLIE Thanks, I think I'll stay.

JARRET Go get the car.

RANDY Okay. Uh, just over there?

JARRET It's the only car in the parking lot.

Randy moves downstage.

RANDY Yeah, well, I've never been good with girls. Because I don't have my own, I've sorta made one up in my mind. She talks to me, tells me she'll be around soon, to keep looking out for her . . . stuff like my mother would say, you know?

Pause.

The guys bug me. They see my tattoo, it says "Mandy," and they think I'm just as experienced as they are. I had a dog once called Mandy.

Pause.

My lady. I'm not so scared of the woods and the rain when I tell myself she's waiting for me.

Randy exits.

MILLIE So Randy tells me you're a drywaller.

JARRET Yeah. I make walls. Miles and miles of white, smooth walls. Lotsa dust. Lotsa sweat. Sweat 'n dust walls.

MILLIE I don't like walls.

JARRET Corners. Those are the worst. I hate corners. I'm in these rooms, newly finished walls, and I think, there's no space in here. I'm going to suffocate.

MILLIE Do you think about here?

JARRET Yeah. I go out and party but I always end up here.

MILLIE And let the morning light lift you with it.

JARRET Yeah.

MILLIE I'm surprised I haven't seen you out here before.

JARRET Most days, I've got my ten birds right away and I'm gone.

MILLIE Have you ever heard of the caladrius?

JARRET Sounds Latin or something.

MILLIE I think so.

JARRET I don't like Latin.

MILLIE Neither do I. But anyway, the caladrius was an ancient mythical bird thought to be able to absorb the illness of the man who gazed on it and then fly the sickness to the heavens where it couldn't do any harm.

JARRET Sounds like monk talk.

MILLIE I just wondered if your fixation with seeing birds is a carryover from a very old way of healing.

JARRET I don't know! I might as well be a monk, eh, if you count how long I've been . . . what's that word?

MILLIE Celibate?

JARRET Yeah.

MILLIE That's a Latin word.

JARRET That's for sure.

MILLIE Rain's stopping.

Silence. Millie moves closer.

JARRET Good. I want to see my number ten.

MILLIE Oh.

Silence.

JARRET In my job, you mess up when you talk. You make bumps.
The smoothest walls come from the quietest guys.

MILLIE You must be good at . . . what you do.

JARRET Smooth it over, smooth it over. Yeah, work and
baseball.

MILLIE And birding.

JARRET Not bad.

MILLIE (*Unhappily*) There's a crow.

JARRET I don't count crows.

MILLIE (*Brightening*) Oh? Some people think they are lucky.

JARRET I shoot them and cook them.

MILLIE You eat crows?

JARRET Only on Hallowe'en.

Silence.

MILLIE I'm not fond of cormorants myself. Sea crows. They
remind me of witches, you know, when they lift their
wings to dry them? They look like they're going to
pounce on you.

Jarret poses as a cormorant.

MILLIE Do you want a sandwich?

JARRET *(Lifting the top slice of bread)* No.

MILLIE Oh.

Silence.

MILLIE Randy is taking his time.

JARRET Probably lost.

MILLIE The light's coming.

JARRET He'd need someone holding his hand to get out of these woods.

MILLIE So why didn't you go with him?

JARRET I'm waiting for my ten. Doesn't anybody get that?

Silence.

JARRET Where are they? They should be coming out to feed.

MILLIE How's your head?

JARRET It was about nine-tenths gone, but now it's starting to buzz.

MILLIE Maybe something to eat?

JARRET I told you, NO.

MILLIE I wonder why people say "eat like a bird"? Birds eat a lot. All that energy bringing up their babies and then a major migration right after? They eat like pigs, actually. All the time. And "bird-brained"? I don't know why they say that, because birds must be the smartest creatures in the world to fly halfway around it every year and find their old homes. *(Pause)* Why do you like birds, Jarret?

JARRET I like their singing.

MILLIE The sound bath.

JARRET I guess.

MILLIE The auditorium of the air.

JARRET Best there is.

MILLIE No walls.

JARRET No echo.

MILLIE Sanctuary.

JARRET Escape.

Sound of oriole.

MILLIE What's that?

JARRET An oriole. It's gonna be up high. They hardly ever
come down.

Randy enters. Birdsong stops.

RANDY Hey, did you guys see that orange thing up there?

JARRET Where?

RANDY Well, it's gone now but it was right over your heads.

JARRET Thanks, pal!

RANDY I waited 'til it went, Jar.

JARRET I'm going to look for it.

MILLIE I'll come, too.

JARRET No. You stay put. I need some space.

RANDY I've got the car running on the road. I thought you
guys might be soaked and frozen.

MILLIE You're the one who's soaked and frozen. Hot tea?

RANDY Oh, yeah.

Jarret moves to his own space.

JARRET I can't breathe with that guy around. And then her!
I need quiet, eh?

Pause.

The only sound I can take is these birds. It doesn't poke at my brain, you know? It, like, glues me back together. Smooths me out.

Pause.

That oriole may have screwed me up. And this rain. I don't like orioles. Well, so they sing okay. But they're show-offs, eh? They don't let you see 'em. They just, like, tantalize you. Hear me, but, whoops! Don't see me. And then Randy goes and sees 'em. What does he know?

Jarret exits.

MILLIE How about a sandwich?

RANDY Oh, fantastic. I'm starving. (*Bites*) Um, this is good. Crunchy. Lots of veggies. All veggies.

MILLIE You get hungrier out here.

RANDY Yeah. So. Are you ready to go?

MILLIE I don't think so. The sun's trying to come up, it's going to stop raining. I think I'll stay. Thanks anyway.

RANDY Well, in that case, I'll wait 'til Jarret gets back. If it's okay with you.

MILLIE You don't care about your car out there, running, polluting the lungs of the birds?

RANDY My car? It hardly breathes when it's running. I use clean gas.

MILLIE I used to have a car. I used to be a chain smoker. It went with the job. Advertising.

RANDY So how did you quit?

MILLIE One day the boss gave me the cash to go meet his supplier of, uh, recreational cigarettes. So I left with the money, which is about what he owed me, and never went back.

Then I got on as a mail carrier, but when all you do is look up at the trees, you don't watch the addresses on all your pieces, and you mess up. So then I decided on birdwatching, and I made up the Early Worm Club.

RANDY Who's in it?

MILLIE Just me. I don't advertise. I could, at the Nature Centre where I work now. But I don't. Next Saturday is my anniversary meeting.

Car horn honking.

MILLIE That must be Jarret.

RANDY Why the Early Worm Club?

MILLIE Well, the worms are out before the birds are.

RANDY Surely you don't see yourself as a . . . worm.

MILLIE Oh, yes. We all are, us poor earthlings. The birds are privy to the heavens while we twist in the dirt.

RANDY Um. You're sure you don't want a ride?

MILLIE Uh huh.

RANDY Well, maybe, could I get your phone number so I could call you tonight and make sure you got home all right?

MILLIE I'll be fine. Really.

RANDY I don't feel right about leaving you here like this. But you do this all the time?

MILLIE Every Saturday rain or shine. Never had a problem I couldn't handle.

RANDY Bye, then. Uh. Thanks for the sandwich.

Randy exits. Millie climbs up a tree.

MILLIE Oh, there it is! The rainbow! Oh! Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet! Each colour of the spectrum causes a different physiological response, so you need light from all seven to stay balanced and healthy. So

when you say, “I need some fresh air,” you really mean, “I need some full-spectrum light.” They’ve studied it — you’re more cooperative when you’re outside and you even get fewer cavities!

Pause.

I eat the rainbow, too. I build each meal with something of every colour. Then I’m sure to get all my nutrients. Oh, but not like a blue milkshake or even orange cheese. Chemicals in your food erode your intelligence! I only use natural colours, so I’m visually, psychologically, and physically satisfied.

Pause.

Even with all my colours, though, I think I’m missing something. My body wants . . . a mate. It’s ready and waiting. Trimmed and tuned. Regular, uh, happenings, with a loving partner is all I lack, really.

Randy enters.

RANDY Millie! Millie?

MILLIE Up here!

RANDY (*Quickly climbing*) Is there a bear?

MILLIE No, I just like it up here.

RANDY Oh.

MILLIE What do you want?

RANDY (*Very uncomfortable in tree*) He took my car! He just took off on me. I could see the tail lights spinning around the bend when I got to the road!

MILLIE But it’s your car.

RANDY Right. So I waited. I thought it was just a trick, a little scare tactic.

MILLIE Would he do that?

RANDY Yeah, laughing all the way. I guess I took too long getting there.

MILLIE Because of me.

RANDY Oh, don't say that! My only consolation is that I get to hear you talk some more, if that's all right.

MILLIE I'm planning on doing some serious birdwatching now.

RANDY Can I watch you watch?

MILLIE It's up to you. Are you sure he won't come back?

RANDY We've got a baseball game this afternoon. I guess he figures I'm pretty dispensable.

MILLIE What do you play?

RANDY Outfielder.

MILLIE What about Jarret?

RANDY He's the pitcher.

MILLIE Oh.

RANDY He's probably what you call an attractive guy, right?

MILLIE Oh, I don't know.

RANDY All those muscles, the sure-footedness, the commanding manner.

MILLIE He seems to know his way around the woods.

RANDY He'd eat you up.

MILLIE He wasn't hungry.

RANDY Maybe this time. Next time, who knows?

MILLIE You put up with him.

RANDY Yeah. He needs a friend.

MILLIE Everybody's entitled to a friend.

RANDY What about you?

MILLIE Well, the birds are my friends. And then there's Karla.

RANDY Who's Karla?

MILLIE She's this girl I work with. She does me a big favour every day, in return for Sunday dinner at my place. She's rather large, and I've got this diet I invented . . . anyway, I don't drive any more.

RANDY Air pollution.

MILLIE Yes. So I canoe down the river to work.

RANDY You're kidding.

MILLIE No. It's not far, maybe three kilometres. And Karla, you see, meets me at the docking area, helps me strap the canoe on her car, and takes my bike out of her trunk so I can bike home after work.

RANDY And she helps you launch the canoe in the morning.

MILLIE Uh huh.

RANDY Dedicated.

MILLIE Or something. She's been acting bossy lately, like proposing Sunday night sleepovers and hinting about moving in with me.

RANDY Oh-oh.

MILLIE The thing is, I couldn't canoe May to November without her. Fall is my favourite. The colours are so beautiful they make me stop and cry. *(Pause)* Oh, this feels so reckless, but I wonder if you . . . and Jarret . . . would come to my anniversary meeting next Saturday? The club will be a year old, and maybe it's time to ask some other people to . . .

RANDY I'll come for sure. I'll ask Jarret.

MILLIE I wonder if he found his number ten.

RANDY No doubt. A turkey.

MILLIE You really put yourself down a lot. You should watch that.

RANDY I can't even hold on to my own wheels.

MILLIE That's Jarret exerting his power over you.

RANDY I'd like to punch him.

MILLIE You look like the kind of guy who has a good job, takes care of his own laundry, gets fed by relatives regularly, gets along with his relatives, has a few hobbies, but . . .

RANDY But what?

MILLIE You're not obsessive about anything.

RANDY I have my plans, hopes, I have my dreams.

MILLIE You're probably going to build a house someday, have a family, be normal.

RANDY Yeah, so what's wrong with that?

MILLIE You don't really stand out.

RANDY Okay. I can take this. I'm not remarkable. I need an obsession to make me interesting?

MILLIE Well, yeah.

RANDY I thought women liked steadiness, surety, dependability.

MILLIE It's too predictable.

RANDY I was wrong about you, then.

MILLIE What?

RANDY I think you have a terrific voice. I thought I'd heard you before, in my dreams.

MILLIE Sure.

RANDY My lady. I know I'll find her in a really strange place . . .

MILLIE See? Out of the ordinary. Not like the laundromat or something boring. You're looking for new, strange, obsessive.

RANDY I guess I am.

MILLIE Don't worry. You will find her. You will be happy ever after.

RANDY I hope so, because right now it's guys like Jarret who have all the fun. Jarret goes from girl to girl, never satisfied.

MILLIE He does?

RANDY He doesn't want anything new. He wants his girl to stay the same.

MILLIE Why?

RANDY He can't stand change. Or any sign of aging, maturing. He'd do better with a statue.

MILLIE That would be a waste.

RANDY If I found her, this lady I listen to in my dreams, I'd take her home with me no matter what. She could be deformed and I would still want her. Forever.

MILLIE Randy! That's better.

RANDY You like that.

MILLIE Yeah. That is . . . very attractive.

Jarret enters, mock shooting at Millie and Randy.

JARRET Two of a kind.

MILLIE Oh, Jarret! (*Climbing down*)

RANDY Hey! (*Climbing down*)

JARRET We've got a game in an hour!

RANDY I thought you took off!

JARRET I only went around the block. I hate sitting still when the motor's running.

RANDY Must have been a big block.

JARRET C'mon. You said you had to hit the laundromat.

RANDY I can skip it.

JARRET But you always go to the laundromat.

RANDY Not today!

MILLIE Jarret! What was your ten?

JARRET A couple of grouse in a tree, just waiting to be popped off.

MILLIE This is parkland!

JARRET So what? (*To Randy*) Are you ready?

RANDY When you hand over my keys.

MILLIE Wait! Jarret, I just want to know, how did you get to be such a good birder?

JARRET Robbing nests and hunting.

RANDY Keys?

Jarret passes keys.

MILLIE (*To Jarret*) Good luck at the game!

RANDY Thanks. See you next Saturday.

MILLIE You, too, Jarret.

JARRET Uh, let's go. They can't start without us.

Randy and Jarret exit.

Millie climbs down, finds Jarret's knapsack.

MILLIE Oh. Treasures. Oh. (*Takes Jarret's baseball glove, smells it, loves it, tries it on*) This is nice. Smooth leather. Big hand. Oh, yeah. Keep this. My huntsman. My hunt. (*Puts it in her own pack*) Finders keepers, okay? Normally I wouldn't ever have anything made of leather. I'm very anti-leather, anti-fur, anti-meat. This may be a problem with Jarret. He's obviously a meat-eater, the way he inspected my sprout and tomato sandwich. But I changed and so can he. What going vegetarian did for my PMS will do for his drinking. Jarret's got a good eye, even with the effects of all that alcohol. He'd be stunning after a purifying rainbow diet.

Jarret enters, calling off to Randy, who follows soon after.

JARRET I'll get it! Go back to the car.

MILLIE I bet you need this.

JARRET (*To Randy*) I've got it! Let's go! (*Checks knapsack*)

RANDY Oh, good. Thanks, Millie. We thought you may have taken it home for us or something.

JARRET Wait a sec. The mitt's gone. Where's the mitt?

RANDY It was in there. I saw it.

JARRET It's gone.

MILLIE Well, let's look around. Now, did the knapsack go up the tree with you, Randy?

RANDY No. You had it, Jar. You tossed me the ball, I tossed it back and you stuck it in the bag. Maybe it fell out somewhere.

JARRET Start looking.

MILLIE It's got to be here somewhere.

RANDY Geez, Jar, we've only got a half hour to get there. And we need to pick up some food.

MILLIE (*Opening her knapsack, but hiding glove*) I've got some lunch here if you want to take it with you.

RANDY Well that's . . .

JARRET No way. We'll get burgers. Athlete food.

RANDY Well, I don't see your glove.

MILLIE Hey, guys, how about I stay around and look for it. It's got to be here, somewhere, and then next Saturday I'll meet you, like I was telling Randy, and I'll give it to you then. Okay, Jarret?

JARRET Aw! I need my glove.

RANDY You can borrow someone's.

JARRET I hate that. Ugh.

RANDY We've got to go.

JARRET Okay. Because this is an emergency, here's my phone number. (*Hands card*) If you find it, you call me.

MILLIE Will do. Good luck.

RANDY Bye, Millie.

JARRET This is going to screw the game for me. Geez, and I got my ten. I always play great when I see ten.

Randy and Jarret exit.

MILLIE Oh, yes!

Millie memorizes the phone number and tucks the card into her sock. Music. Dance dream interlude. Millie pretends to use the glove, while Randy and Jarret warm up for the game. Jarret is bare-handed; Randy has a glove. They play while Millie tries, "pig in the middle," unsuccessfully, to intercept the ball. She's just not in the same time or place. Randy misses a ball and Millie runs offstage to find it. Randy and Jarret continue playing as if they haven't lost a ball, using another from Jarret's pocket. They gradually move offstage.

SCENE 2 Next Saturday morning

Millie enters with knapsack and a large picnic basket.

MILLIE I called him six times. Once per day. Different times of the day. I left six messages, all with my phone number repeated twice. I've hardly had a night's sleep the whole week, waiting for him to call back; that was not smart, I know. And apart from going to work, I didn't go out at all. So, by today, I feel quite deprived of rainbow light.

Pause. Millie reveals an egg, which she peels.

I had quite a time deciding what to pack for lunch. I settled on egg. . . . I know what you're thinking about the mayonnaise, but I've got a little cooler in here, runs on a battery? Eggs are also a bird thing, if you

know what I mean. I was trying to keep to a theme. Also, did you know that ancient tribes believed you could enhance your own qualities by eating the part of the bird that corresponded? Well, I picked eggs because, you know, they're for attraction, mating, fertility?

Pause.

Even though he didn't return my calls, I think he'll come. He wants his glove back. I can tell he's superstitious about it. I've slept with it every night. I tucked it in, put my arm around it, and breathed in his aroma. During the day, I stuffed the inside of the glove with a pair of socks, hoping they would absorb the smell, so I'd have something that smells like him to sleep with tonight.

Randy enters, with picnic basket and a baseball bat.

RANDY Millie!

MILLIE Hi!

RANDY I was just on my way to a game.

MILLIE Is Jarret with you?

RANDY No. I told him about it last Saturday, but he had an out-of-town job this week so I haven't talked to him since.

MILLIE Oh.

RANDY I brought a . . . oh, you brought one, too.

MILLIE Well, let's hope Jarret comes so we can eat up all this food later. There's enough for your whole baseball team!

RANDY So how have you been?

MILLIE Fine. You?

RANDY I've been looking forward to coming out here all week.

MILLIE How did the game go?

RANDY Considering I didn't get any sleep the night before, I had a great game. I had three hits and got one guy out.

MILLIE Wow. How did Jarret do?

RANDY He was a mess without his glove. I've never seen him so whacked.

MILLIE Too bad.

RANDY He's got this thing about that glove. His ex gave it to him.

MILLIE Oh.

RANDY So, see anything yet today?

MILLIE Oh, no. I just got here.

RANDY I saw that old orange bird again, caught just a glimpse of it.

MILLIE The oriole? I hope it comes back. Jarret would like to see it, too.

RANDY Jarret is . . . a wolf.

MILLIE Well, I'm not Little Red Riding Hood.

RANDY I didn't mean that you were.

MILLIE I never believed that story, you know. I mean, if a wolf is hungry, he'll eat you, but he's not going to dress up like your grandmother to do it.

RANDY I love how you are so independent. Like with your club. Tell me some more about it.

MILLIE Well. Okay. This is its first anniversary. I started it last year on my birth —

RANDY It's your birthday?

MILLIE Yes. And I thought this one would be really special.

RANDY I get to be the first one to wish you happy birthday.

MILLIE You're probably the only one.

RANDY Well, it's better than nobody, isn't it? After all, you did invite me.

MILLIE I did. And I could count on you to be punctual and thoughtful enough to bring a picnic.

RANDY We can stay out all day. We can have mine for lunch and yours for supper, if you want.

MILLIE What about the game?

RANDY Well, a picnic is portable. We could have it at the park after the game.

MILLIE I'd like to go to the game.

RANDY Then it's a date.

MILLIE Okay.

RANDY I visited the Nature Centre this week. I didn't see you there.

MILLIE Oh?

RANDY I met Karla. She told me it was your day off. I thought Saturday was your day off.

MILLIE I work a four-day week. It's much healthier. I went to the laundromat on my day off.

RANDY Oh?

MILLIE I thought maybe you guys didn't get a chance last Saturday.

RANDY How did you know which laundromat?

MILLIE I picked the one closest to where Jarret lives.

RANDY I do mine at Snow White Laundry.

MILLIE You do?

RANDY Yeah.

MILLIE That's in my neighbourhood!

RANDY Really? I've never seen you there!

MILLIE I've never seen you there. But if you go on Saturdays, we'd miss each other because I'm always out here on Saturdays.

RANDY I think it would be lonely out here all by yourself.

MILLIE Here I feel bound to all of life. When you saw that bird this morning, didn't it give you a lift?

RANDY Well, yes. I wanted to tell you about it.

MILLIE But it's a gift that you saw it. You wouldn't see it in the city.

RANDY But I've seen birds in the city. Lots of them are fed by feeders.

MILLIE Yeah, and lots are killed by flying into buildings in the downtown core. I'm on the board for FLAP, Fatal Light Awareness Program. Twice a week I go downtown before dawn and cover up shocked birds, wait with them until they resuscitate, feed them water and fend off the cats.

RANDY Wow. I like the birds you see in flocks in the middle of winter.

MILLIE On the coldest January day, when you think there can't be a living thing breathing outside, a swirl of cedar waxwings appears to remind you of the power of life.

RANDY Yeah, and I've always liked going out to the lake. I get the same feeling out there.

MILLIE What do you like about the lake?

RANDY The quiet, really. All you get is the sound of the bonfire when the others have gone off to bed.

MILLIE I bet you keep the fire burning, Randy.

RANDY Yeah, I do. Then I like taking off all my clothes and going swimming, when the water feels so warm, and I like looking at the stars.

MILLIE I'd like to go owling sometime, and witness the secrets of the dark.

RANDY If you've spent all your nights in the city, then you've missed the stars. You can't see them like you can out here.

MILLIE Light pollution. I know.

RANDY I have another place I like. You'd like it, too. My mother's garden. I go over most Sundays to help her with the heavy work. When I'm in that place, I swear all my muscles relax. I smell all those fresh smells and I eat this big dinner . . .

MILLIE Are you hungry?

RANDY Yeah, I could eat now.

MILLIE Red wine?

RANDY I brought white.

MILLIE I like both.

RANDY So do I.

Jarret enters.

JARRET Aw, isn't this cozy?

MILLIE We were just starting.

JARRET I'm not staying. I just want my glove.

MILLIE Some wine?

JARRET I want my mitt.

MILLIE Spring water?

JARRET Give me my glove, woman.

MILLIE Are you sure? An egg sandwich?

JARRET I'm so sure.

MILLIE Did you get my messages?

JARRET Oh, yeah. Day and night, all week. What a pain.

MILLIE I just wanted to let you know your glove was safe.

JARRET One night was in the middle of Taffy and me . . .

RANDY Taffy is the ex-wife.

MILLIE Oh.

JARRET Not for long. She's coming around. She's coming to the game today and I'm going to be wonderful. That's why I'm not drinking. And that's why I want the glove. Now!

RANDY You don't have to be rude.

MILLIE It's right here.

JARRET And I know you had it all along. It wasn't lost at all, was it?

MILLIE I just wanted to see you again.

JARRET Well, you've seen me, and I'm not available. Taffy's back in town. This time I'm going to do everything right.

MILLIE I'll be cheering for you.

JARRET What?

RANDY Millie's coming to the game. My date.

JARRET Just don't talk to me. Don't even come near me. Taffy is a very jealous woman.

MILLIE Oh.

JARRET And she is the only woman for me.

RANDY Hope you patch it up with her, Jarret.

JARRET This time for sure. Ugh. What is this smell on my glove?

MILLIE What smell?

JARRET Like bath oil or something.

MILLIE Oh, it may have absorbed the scent of my . . . potpourri.

JARRET Doesn't smell like my mitt anymore!

MILLIE Oh, it does. Leathery and lean.

JARRET How do you know? Have you been sleeping with it or something?

RANDY Jarret, get real.

JARRET Taffy's got a nose for stuff like this. She'll go berserk.

MILLIE She sniffs your things?

JARRET What am I going to do?

RANDY Let's warm it up. Here.

Randy and Jarret play catch.

MILLIE You've got a great arm, Jarret.

JARRET You can't say stuff like that in front of Taffy, I'm warning you.

MILLIE I think I know what you mean. I have this friend, Karla.

RANDY Yeah, she nearly decapitated me when I asked for you at the Nature Centre.

MILLIE Thing is, it makes me like her less.

JARRET Makes me crazy about Taf.

MILLIE Oh. Have you got it good and sweaty yet?

JARRET What?

MILLIE The glove. Let me smell it. Oh, yeah. That's a baseball glove smell.

JARRET When I smell this glove . . . I smell you! You violated my glove! Taffy gave me this glove! She'll go nuts if she finds out. Stay away!

Jarret exits.

RANDY Are you okay?

MILLIE I've felt worse. Like the time I had a date and the next day the man sent me a white rose, and I didn't know what it meant until I never heard from him again. He was European. I guess it meant, "This is dead." Then there was this sweet farm boy who told me after our first date, "Well, honey, it's no good beating a dead horse."

RANDY Some people are just not meant for some people.

MILLIE Jarret must really love her, hey?

RANDY I've never seen him turn down a drink before. Maybe Taffy will be good for him this time.

MILLIE I bet she only eats junk food.

RANDY I wish we could go back to where we were.

MILLIE I'm not very hungry anymore.

RANDY Don't let him wreck our picnic. That's what he wanted to do. Let's not give him the satisfaction.

MILLIE Somehow I don't think he's really gone. I think he's still in the woods.

RANDY He's gone. Now, where was I? I was going to have one of your sandwiches.

MILLIE Randy, did you lock your car?

RANDY No. Why?

MILLIE You don't think he would do anything, I mean, to make sure we don't get to the game?

RANDY I better go check. (*Takes bat*) I'll be right back.

Randy exits.

Millie packs baskets.

MILLIE I've spent a whole week permeating my environment with the thought of him and now it's going to take a whole week to exterminate him. I'm very strict about my environment. When I take something in, like Jarret's glove, I take something out in exchange, to provide equilibrium and prevent clutter. So I got rid of an old bird cage. From my advertising days. When I brought Jarret's glove home, the cage seemed like the symbolic thing to remove. I felt so free, so released!

Pause.

I think I imprinted on him. It wasn't fair, really. I mean to say about someone you don't even know, "This is the man for me." But he was in my territory. What if he comes back? No, he won't. Not if I'm here.

Millie takes her basket and climbs the tree as before.

Randy enters.

RANDY Millie? It's okay! I found him trying to pull the ignition fuse but I scared him off . . . Millie? Millie! Millie.

Randy climbs, more sure-footed than last time.

RANDY Millie. It's all right. I'm here. You're not the only one
in your club anymore.

MILLIE I . . . I just have to purge him out. A good cry, a little
meditation, a day of fasting . . .

RANDY Fast? Not me. I'm having one of your sandwiches. I've
got a game to play later, and a lady watching.

MILLIE I don't know about the game, Randy. I think I'll just
go home.

RANDY No way. It's your birthday. I want you to have some fun.

MILLIE I don't want to see Jarret again. I'd rather not go.

RANDY Okay. We won't go. I'll miss the game.

MILLIE You don't seem like the type to miss anything.

RANDY This is an exceptional circumstance. It's Millie's
birthday.

Sound of orioles singing.

RANDY The orioles!

MILLIE I hear the male. I see the female.

RANDY It's a sign, Millie. It's got to be.

MILLIE There's the male!

RANDY I don't think they wanted to share themselves with
anyone . . .

MILLIE . . . but us!

RANDY Millie, would you come with me to my mother's
tomorrow?

MILLIE Sunday?

RANDY You'd have to cancel Karla.

MILLIE I'd like to cancel Karla.

RANDY Millie, I'll carry your canoe.

Sound of two pellet gun shots.

MILLIE Randy!

RANDY Get down!

Pause. Jarret enters, throws the birds down.

JARRET Throw some dirt on 'em. See if they move.

MILLIE How could you?

JARRET They never come down where you can see them.

MILLIE So now they're flat on the dirt like the rest of us.

JARRET Not me. I'm flyin'.

RANDY You're sick.

MILLIE You said you liked their song, but you don't, really.
You just like knowing what they all are, like targets.

JARRET C'mon. Let's get to the game.

RANDY No.

JARRET Get a move on. Taffy's waiting in my truck.

RANDY Find yourself a new outfielder.

JARRET We're going to win today.

RANDY Not interested.

JARRET What a loser. Look at her!

Millie picks the birds up and cradles them in her skirt.

RANDY *(Shoves bat at Jarret)* You can take your stinking
baseball team! I'm not coming back!

JARRET Some friend.

*Sound of truck horn honking.
Jarret takes the bat and exits.*

MILLIE Why did you let him see you? Show yourself to the wolf
and you're dead. Dead before they had a chance to mate.

RANDY How do you know?

MILLIE His song. He was still wooing her. Once he's got her
approval, he quits singing her praises.

RANDY I'd never do that.

MILLIE I know.

Silence.

Randy picks up one of the birds.

RANDY Would the Nature Centre want them?

MILLIE It costs hundreds of dollars to stuff a hummingbird.

RANDY I'd pay. It would be a legacy from us.

MILLIE I think we should bury them.

RANDY Only we would know where they are.

MILLIE A gift to the earth from the Early Worm Club.

RANDY Like a pledge?

MILLIE You and me.

Sound of owl screeching once, then twice.

Millie smiles at Randy.

Music.

Blackout.



Abby's Place, FemFest:
Kami Desilets as Abby;
Randal Payne as Clyde;
Shawn Kowalke as Rodney.
Photo by Lynn Kohler.

ABBY'S PLACE



Abby's Place, FemFest: Kami Desilets as Abby and Shawn Kowalke as Rodney. Photo by Lynn Kohler.

Abby's Place was first produced by Sarasvati Productions at FemFest! 2006: Breakin' Out, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from 20 to 29 October 2006, with the following cast and crew:

CLYDE Randal Payne
RODNEY Shawn Kowalke
ABBY Kami Desilets

DIRECTOR Keri-lee Smith
STAGE MANAGER Ntara Curry
COSTUME / SETS Abby Myers
SOUND Ryan Morton

Characters

CLYDE, fifties, operates the summer village and town dump. He is a self-taught philosopher.

RODNEY, late thirties, a dentist in Edmonton. He has recently purchased a cottage that needs a lot of fixing as a retreat for himself and hospice for his wife.

ABBY, thirties, married to Rodney for ten years. Abby is used to solitude.

Time

The action follows nearly one year from early spring to early spring, 1990.

Place

Northern Alberta

Set

There is a hole or pit, a lowered area, where an actor can be unseen. The pit is also the lake in some sequences. The upper area, or edge of the pit, is also a deck or dock. An old shack is suggested in the upper playing space. There are areas of elevation from a low level outside the pit to the upper deck or edge. Actual objects of junk are not indicated. Except for the cellphone in scenes with Clyde, telephones are not represented. There are three matching wooden deck chairs.

Music

The soundscape can be performed by Clyde or a musician on or near the stage from found objects (brick, wood, glass, metal, paper, plastic), starting with low-sounding pitches at the beginning and funneling up to a tintinnabulation of beads, bells, and other high-pitched sounds by the end.

SCENE 1 Morning, early spring, at the dump

Music. Clyde blends in with the garbage in the pit, unseen by Rodney, who opens one of the bags he carries, takes out some old dishes and hurls them into the pit. Abby is lying with her back to the audience.

RODNEY I always wanted to do this!

CLYDE Hey!

RODNEY Frisbee!

CLYDE Ow! Cut it out!

RODNEY What? Oh! . . . I didn't see you!

CLYDE I got enough torments without a guy hurling garbage on my head.

RODNEY It was just some old chipped plates! How would I know there was someone down there?

CLYDE Yeah, up there in the land of the living you don't know a lot of things. Like to look before you throw stuff. Like how it feels when the pit gulps you alive. Like being a piece of living garbage.

Abby is on her back, looking up. She is breathing hard. Clyde emerges with bag of cans.

RODNEY Do you . . . work here?

CLYDE Well, I'm not on a picnic. Huh, I can tell by your truck that you live the sunlit life. Mine's over by my shack. I'm waiting for some parts to come in. Like a total replacement.

RODNEY That might take some time.

CLYDE Everything ends up here sooner or later.

RODNEY Hey, someone put a good wood deck chair down there. Look at that.

CLYDE Lookin's free.

RODNEY Under those orange bags by the red carpet?

CLYDE I . . . I don't see colours.

RODNEY Could be still good.

CLYDE I know what's comin'.

RODNEY Could I see it?

CLYDE I don't really feel like going back down there over your Granny's broken china.

RODNEY I could.

CLYDE No, I don't let anybody in the pit. I run a clean, safe dump.

RODNEY My wife would like a chair like that.

Abby rolls over, her back to the audience.

CLYDE What for?

RODNEY I'm fixing up a cottage at the lake.

CLYDE Oh, cottage, eh? You some university type?

RODNEY I'm a dentist.

CLYDE Huh. And they say I work in a sewer. Huh. You must have a complex.

RODNEY What?

CLYDE Everyone must hate your guts.

RODNEY Not really.

CLYDE For what you do to them, eh? And then how you make them pay.

RODNEY The rates are all set by the government —

CLYDE Don't get me started about the government, or I won't get anything done today.

RODNEY What do you do here, anyway?

CLYDE I look for pennies in the wishing well! Hah! See this bag? When I get a hundred cans, that's five bucks right there.

RODNEY So you go through the bags for bottles. I hope you don't pour out the dregs and make a devil's brew!

CLYDE Yeah, well, depends on if I'm drinking that day and what's in the refrigerator! Heh!

RODNEY *(To himself)* Gross.

CLYDE *(Climbing up)* Ya gotta be nuts to fix this. Rear leg's busted.

RODNEY I've got a few tools . . .

CLYDE Dollars to donuts you'll be bringing it back.

Clyde checks Rodney's bags and boxes.

RODNEY Can I give you a few for hauling it out?

CLYDE Well, you're not shopping for free. These old dishes should get me a few bucks, too, eh? Burns me when I see scoffers wrecking stuff for the hell of it.

Music. Clyde takes the bag into his shack. Rodney carries the chair to deck.

SCENE 2 The lake

Rodney speaks on the cellphone to Abby, who is still in the city. Abby sits cross-legged.

RODNEY I've just got to make it livable. I don't want you doing anything when you get here. I've got the sink to fix yet.

ABBY You're enjoying this, aren't you?

RODNEY I love it. But I feel like I've lost so much time.

ABBY I just keep looking ahead.

RODNEY I'm really sure about this.

ABBY I'm holding on to that.

RODNEY This is a healing place.

ABBY For one of us, maybe.

RODNEY For us.

ABBY Us.

RODNEY Hang on, Abby. I'll call you later.

ABBY I know.

Abby is down, hugging the ground.

SCENE 3 The dump, following weekend

Rodney carries lumber through mud and throws it in a pile. Clyde enters.

CLYDE I see you've got a little bit of everything and not much of anything.

RODNEY Yeah, just a bunch of junk from the old garage.

CLYDE Hell of a rain, eh?

RODNEY Yeah. Do you get that a lot up here?

CLYDE All the time. Like a two-assed cow pissing on a flat rock.

RODNEY *(Laughs)* I'll remember not to come out here after it rains. I can hardly move in this mud.

CLYDE Ah, mud, dirt, it's all the same to me. Life is mud. It's what's poking up out of it, sparkling in the sun, that makes a life worth living.

Clyde pulls a push lawnmower out of the pile. Abby, in her own space, slowly rouses and goes through some of the motions of life with the weight of her solitude.

RODNEY *(Pause)* That's a relic you got there.

CLYDE This shoulda been in the scrap metal pile.

RODNEY Does anybody use those old hand-push kind anymore?

CLYDE I got people lining up for these things. Look at that metal plating under there, eh?

RODNEY Yeah.

CLYDE These were made just after the war. Dandy units.

RODNEY My wife would like a lawnmower like that.

CLYDE Your wife again. If your wife likes my stuff so much, why doesn't she come out here and look for herself?

RODNEY She likes quiet.

CLYDE Nothing but quiet here. Just me and my junk.

RODNEY I mean the lawnmower. It doesn't make much noise.

CLYDE Yeah. It barely whispers. I got another one over by my shack, but it's spoken for. I keep all the stuff I can fix quick and sell fast.

RODNEY You don't need that one, then.

CLYDE I don't need it, but I'm going to keep it for parts.

RODNEY Oh.

CLYDE So what are you looking for?

RODNEY Plumbing pipe? You got any?

CLYDE Huh. A guy from up north, he comes in and pretty much fills my truck with his empties. All they do up there is work and drink, eh? Yeah, he just scooped your box of plumbing stuff yesterday.

RODNEY So nothing for plumbing.

CLYDE You running on septic?

RODNEY Yeah.

CLYDE If you want your tank emptied, my brother, he's got a honey wagon. He'll come suck her out. His name is Cal.

RODNEY What's your name?

CLYDE Clyde. Here's my card. I got the hours of the dump listed on there. Cal's number is on the back. If you call him, tell him I set you up. Maybe he'll bring me a hello for that.

RODNEY Uh, they, uh, sucked out the septic before I moved in.

CLYDE Oh. You got an outhouse?

RODNEY Yeah, but it's pretty primitive.

CLYDE If it stinks after you lime it, you'll need to get her sucked out, too. Twice a year.

RODNEY I doubt it'll get that much use, actually.

CLYDE If I just bought a place, I'd get the outhouse done. They just stick the nozzle down the hole and sucks her all out.

RODNEY You and your brother must have a corner on the refuse business.

Abby stops, immobilized, collapses.

CLYDE Yup. So. The wife won't use the biffy, eh?

RODNEY I'd like to get the indoor plumbing ready for her.

CLYDE Most women won't take the outhouse if you give them the choice, eh? Except my daughter, Dusty, now there's one who's more leather 'n lace. She works the rodeos . . . she don't come back here much.

RODNEY So do you . . . live out here?

CLYDE Yeah, I got my trailer, I got my shack. I had a dog once, Flytrap, but he run off. That was after the wife left me, praise the Lord. She couldn't abide with all the junk. I told her what the good book says: It's better to live on a desert island than with a wife like her.

RODNEY It says that?

CLYDE Oh, sure. Hell, I'd rather lie down between a lion and a dragon than listen to my wife. She was just like your leaky pipe, there. Drip, drip, drip.

RODNEY Uh, so are you sure you don't have a spare P-trap?

CLYDE Well . . . I could look in my granddaddy's magic drawer.

RODNEY It's magic?

CLYDE I call it that because it always has what I need. You should start one.

Clyde exits to his shack as Rodney moves away from pit.

SCENE 4 The lake, next weekend

Music. Abby moves to standing, a little desperate. She is still in the area identified as the city. Rodney speaks to her from the lake.

ABBY Rodney?
RODNEY Hi! I thought I'd take a break. Not used to all this fresh air and physical labour.

Abby continues to hold herself. She is listening but cannot reply.

RODNEY Abby? Are you there?
ABBY I'm still here.
RODNEY So what did you do today? I tried calling earlier but you must have been out.
ABBY I had an . . . incident.
RODNEY Oh, no!
ABBY It's because of all the meds they make me take.
RODNEY What happened?
ABBY I just blacked out.
RODNEY Why didn't you call?
ABBY I was unconscious, Rodney. When I woke up, I had to get to the hospital, and once I got there, I was busy, you know, and I didn't want to tell you until I knew what it was.
RODNEY Well, what was it?
ABBY They don't know. Maybe drug allergy.
RODNEY You can't be alone. I've got to get home right away.
ABBY You don't have to. They gave me something to help me sleep.
RODNEY More meds. I just want to hold you.
ABBY I'll be asleep.

RODNEY I won't. I'm coming back tonight.
ABBY No, it's too late to drive.
RODNEY I have to.
ABBY I have to sleep.
RODNEY And I won't sleep until I've got you . . . here.

Beat. Music.

Rodney goes to Abby and leads her to the lake area.

RODNEY Do you remember . . . after our wedding — all the guests and hotel staff, the taxi man, the airport, rental car people, even the awful radio in that car — we got to that cabin we'd rented and it felt like the first time in weeks we were alone. No one could reach us.
ABBY No cellphones then. Bliss.
RODNEY It's going to be like that here. Just us.
ABBY I've been concentrating on just me for a long time now. So have you. Us seems like a lifetime ago.
RODNEY This is for . . . you.
ABBY The lake!

Abby sits in the deck chair.

Clyde sets up two more matching deck chairs with an old umbrella. Rodney gets his work gloves and a large bag of garbage. He puts a bottled beer in one of the gloves. He watches Abby before touching her goodbye. She is concentrating too hard to respond.

SCENE 5 The dump, a week later

Rodney carries the bag to the pit, waits a moment before throwing it in violently. Clyde watches him, lazing on one of his new deck chairs.

CLYDE The wife here?
RODNEY How did you know?
CLYDE That's a pretty good deposit.

RODNEY I just needed to make some noise.

CLYDE You working hard today?

RODNEY Not really.

CLYDE I'm doin' a survey. This kinda heat slows ya down.
(*Swats fly*) Most of us, anyway.

RODNEY I brought you a beer.

CLYDE Ohee. Just what a guy needs on a day like this. Hey, I got a full one I found in a batch of empties. Luck, eh? I put it in my fridge here to cool it off. (*Digging it out of the ground*)
Ya never know what's going to rise up outta the dust o' the earth. That makes one for me and one for you.

RODNEY I shouldn't stay. I . . .

Clyde opens beers, offering Rodney the buried one.

CLYDE Whatsa matter?

RODNEY A few flies today, eh? (*Swats*)

CLYDE Yeah. Ya kill one and the rest come to the funeral.

RODNEY Ha. By the way, here's your P-trap back and here's the one that leaks.

CLYDE Didn't fit eh?

RODNEY I had to buy a new one.

CLYDE Full price?

RODNEY Yeah, but it works.

CLYDE So have a beer. Hey, how do you like my new umbrella?
Just came in, eh? Take a load off.

Rodney reluctantly takes the beer.

RODNEY Nice deck chairs. Same as the one I found.

CLYDE Yup. Sometimes the Lord gives you back double what he takes away.

RODNEY I have my doubts on that.

CLYDE Well, look at these deck chairs and matching umbrella! You took the broken singleton and look what I end up with, eh? Perfect twins and a bonus!

RODNEY Sure.

Rodney finally sits.

CLYDE That's why it doesn't pay to be afraid. No use getting your shorts in a knot, eh Doc? 'Cause the Lord will send you just the package you don't want. Wouldn't be pain, otherwise, would it? 'Cause the thing you're most afraid of is what you're going to get.

RODNEY Everyone is afraid of something.

CLYDE You got that right. Like my little brother, Cliff. He worked the rigs like me, eh? Ah, but Cliffie, he's smarter, eh? So he gets sent out on one of them offshore rigs. Big bucks. It's like their own little island out there in the middle of the ocean. He sends me a letter, telling me about the pool tables, the movies, the computer games. So I sent him one. I says, "So how's the water?" Pulling his leg, eh? Tough big kid like that, but piss-scared of the water. He never wrote me back. You know why?

RODNEY No.

CLYDE Well, the rig, the whole works, she just dumped right over in this big Atlantic storm.

RODNEY I remember that. The *Ocean Ranger*.

CLYDE Yup. They all perished in that freezing water.

RODNEY So even if he did know how to swim, it wouldn't have mattered.

CLYDE Nope, but Lordy he musta been scared.

RODNEY So you think if he wasn't scared, it wouldn't have happened?

CLYDE Maybe not to him. Maybe he took that job to prove he wasn't. If he wasn't scared he just might not have taken it.

RODNEY You think he was afraid to admit it.

CLYDE I know so. Me, I'm a-scared of fire. One of the reasons I took this job. I gotta burn the pit regular. I'm working on my fear. I respect fire, eh, but I know I won't die by it. I'm not afraid of hell, either. I've read all the descriptions of hell in the Bible and guess what? It's just a dump like this. I figure I'm putting in my time now, eh, so I'm counting on going to heaven.

Abby drops her scarf or shawl.

RODNEY I should call my wife.

CLYDE You have my sympathies. You're on a short leash.

RODNEY I just want to see if she's all right.

CLYDE What are you afraid of?

Rodney uses cellphone. Music.

RODNEY Everything okay?

ABBY Fine.

CLYDE Never seen one of them portables before.

RODNEY I'm looking for a screen door, and then I'll be back.

ABBY Rod?

RODNEY Yeah?

ABBY I can hear birds. Where are you?

RODNEY Oh, it's an outdoor hardware store.

CLYDE Hardware from hell.

ABBY Bye.

CLYDE Why didn't you tell her you were at the dump?

RODNEY This is not her kind of place.

CLYDE Maybe you're just making her up. Who ever heard of a wife like that?

RODNEY She likes . . . fresh air.

CLYDE Ah, you city types are too darned sensitive. I'll guarantee there's more pollution in your city streets on any given day than you'll find here at my dump.

RODNEY She wants a screen door, to let the breeze in.

CLYDE You just missed one the day before yesterday.

RODNEY Too bad.

CLYDE I can put you on the waiting list.

RODNEY I'll give you my cell number, in case you get another one.

CLYDE You can give me the number, but it won't do you any good. Screen doors get snapped up pretty quick, and besides, I don't own any kind of phone at all.

RODNEY Well, you gave me your card, so have one of mine.
(Writes) Here's our lot number, 78 on the summer village road.

Music. Rodney exits.

SCENE 6 The lake, a few weeks later

Clyde goes to cabin, bangs on door. Abby is still in the chair. She gathers herself to answer the door.

CLYDE H-E-double toothpicks HELL!

ABBY Hello?

CLYDE Oh, s'cuse me. You must be the wife.

ABBY Abby.

CLYDE Hi, Abby. Ah!

ABBY That looks really painful.

CLYDE Swelled up like a poisoned gopher. I need the Doc.
ABBY You mean Rodney?
CLYDE It's an emergency.
ABBY I can see that. Come in. I'll find him.
CLYDE Come on, Doc, come on. I've been waiting for you all weekend.
ABBY Rodney?

Alarmed that she's not where he left her, Rodney comes up from under the dock.

RODNEY What is it? Clyde?
CLYDE Ah, Doc, you gotta help me.
ABBY How long has it been like this?
CLYDE Three, four days.
RODNEY Uh, we were just packing up.
ABBY No hurry.
RODNEY I can look at it, but I don't have any equipment here.
ABBY Yes, we do. I brought my bag. I was going to throw it in the lake and make a wish or something. I'll get it.

Abby quickly gets the bag.

CLYDE Hell, I just need ya to yank her out. Pair o' pliers will do.
RODNEY All right, okay, let's stay outside . . . in the light.
CLYDE See you got your screen door.
RODNEY I . . . didn't think I'd hear from you.
ABBY Quite swollen.
CLYDE I don't always look this handsome.
ABBY Gloves for you, Rod, and for me.
RODNEY Are you sure?

ABBY My patient.

CLYDE Doc, aren't you doing this?

RODNEY Abby and I used to be partners.

CLYDE Uh, you don't want to get your hands dirty, m'am. My mouth is a history of my life.

ABBY C'mon, Handsome. Open up. Uh-huh. Hm.

RODNEY Oh, nasty.

ABBY Missing a few, huh?

CLYDE (*Mouth open*) Augh. (*Mouth closed*) Bar fight. Over a six-pack of sadness.

RODNEY Anaesthetic.

CLYDE The needle. I knew it. Doc, when do you take over here?

ABBY This will hurt less than it does right now.

CLYDE Go ahead. I'm not afraid.

ABBY Done.

CLYDE Didn't feel a thing. Hey, if you're so good at it, why'd you quit?

ABBY Because I'm sick.

CLYDE You don't look sick.

RODNEY She's feeling better.

ABBY I've been afraid to say it. I wish we didn't have to leave.

CLYDE I was at a garage sale here once.

RODNEY There will always be something to fix here.

ABBY I like that you can say that: "There will always be . . ."

CLYDE You've really cleaned it up.

RODNEY I like to hear you say it.

ABBY There will always be the lake.

CLYDE My mouth feels funny.

ABBY Then we're all set. Forceps.

RODNEY There.

ABBY Ugh. Ugh. Rod, help me.

CLYDE (*Mouth open*) Doc!

Rodney takes over.

RODNEY Just a little more twist, and there you are.

CLYDE Agh. Ugh. Can I keep that?

RODNEY Sure, I'll wrap it up for you.

Abby moves away, strips off gloves.

RODNEY Are you all right?

ABBY Time is falling out of my hands.

Clyde gets out of chair, seats Abby, takes the gloves from her.

CLYDE Sit here. Nice job on the chair, Doc. Heh, it was in pieces when we found it.

ABBY Oh? Where?

CLYDE At the —

RODNEY Where Clyde works.

Rodney shoves cotton gauze in Clyde's mouth.

RODNEY Bite down on this.

CLYDE (*Mouth closed*) The landfill site.

ABBY I thought this chair came with the cabin.

RODNEY Abby doesn't need to know.

CLYDE (*Mouth open*) Why not? Truth is a healer. Falsehood is for fools.

ABBY So there's life at the dump.

CLYDE Sure there is. It's just dying to get out.

ABBY The outdoor hardware?

RODNEY Sometimes it's just easier finding something there than in town. I have to go there anyway to take the garbage.

ABBY And Clyde's there.

CLYDE Yeah, and I tell him what's what.

ABBY I'm glad you came out here, Clyde, or we might never have met.

CLYDE Yeah, well, I better take my rotten tooth here and get back to the pit. Let you folks get back to the city, too bad for you.

Clyde exits.

RODNEY That was beautiful. Seeing you in action again.

ABBY Let's stay. Please. Rod?

RODNEY I'll call. I'll cancel my appointments for another week.

Rodney and Abby touch, tentatively.

SCENE 7 The dump, next weekend, day

Music. Abby goes to the dump, alone. Clyde is working on the lawnmower and continues as they talk.

ABBY Hey, Clyde!

CLYDE There. See. On a day nothing good happens, who'da thought Abby would come to see me? Where's the Doc?

ABBY Rodney's at the cabin. Busy with pieces of something. Just like you.

CLYDE Got piles of stuff like this. Spend a half hour on it and sell it for fifty bucks.

ABBY I see the swelling has gone down.

CLYDE What? Oh! Yeah. Healed up fine.

Abby looks around.

ABBY So this is what it's like.

CLYDE What? Oh, the dump.

ABBY It's full of . . . things.

CLYDE Yup. For me to salvage and fix.

ABBY It's a lot of . . . stuff.

CLYDE Oh, yeah. When the junk gets to me, I burn it. Mind you, it has to really pile up, eh, on account of my aversion to fire. I gotta really smell it bad before I burn, and considering I hardly have the sense of smell any more, I usually rely on complaints from town to know when it's time.

ABBY Oh. (*Sits*) Hey, these chairs match the one I have!

CLYDE Uh-huh?

ABBY Oh! I mean, I just noticed them. I don't mean I want them.

CLYDE I owe you for the tooth.

ABBY I couldn't even finish the job.

CLYDE But you opened the door.

ABBY Maybe you'll open one for me.

Sound to indicate cellphone ringing.

CLYDE Hah! He found you!

ABBY Oh! Hi.

RODNEY Are you on your way?

ABBY Just now.

RODNEY I'll get lunch ready, then.

ABBY Home soon.

RODNEY Okay.

ABBY Bye. (*To Clyde*) He gets lonely.

CLYDE No kids, eh?

ABBY No. We thought we'd wait. And now . . . no chance.

CLYDE The sickness, eh? I been sick before. Used to drink too much. Brought it on myself.

ABBY Then you know how it's always there, like some grief that won't go away.

CLYDE Like living at a dump. You either fight it or you accept it.

ABBY It wants to wad me up inside and suffocate me in the hollow.

CLYDE You can't let it.

ABBY I know. Rodney isn't ready.

CLYDE I never had no care what happened to me. Thing was, no one else did, either. Not my brothers, or my ex-wife, or even my daughter. S'why I did it maybe, to spite them all! But the Lord has given me a good view for all the remaining days of my life of where I've been, and for that I give thanks. I figure I'm stuck here forever, because the minute I move away from the pit, I'll forget what it was like and I'll fall right back in. This here dump is my life insurance policy.

ABBY The lake is mine. And if it can't save me, it will save Rodney.

CLYDE It gives him something to do.

ABBY (*Pause*) I bet he'd like that old lawnmower.

CLYDE I know he would.

ABBY How much?

CLYDE For you —

ABBY I want to buy it. For Rodney's birthday.

CLYDE Okay.

ABBY I couldn't face going into a store, even in town. I —

CLYDE For you, ten bucks. Normally, they're twenty.

ABBY I've got it. Here.

CLYDE He'll like it.

ABBY He doesn't expect anything.

CLYDE He'll laugh, then.

ABBY Yeah.

CLYDE You'd better get back to getting better. I'll deliver this later. I want to shine it up a bit for you. Might even giftwrap it!

ABBY Clyde —

CLYDE Yeah?

ABBY It's good to know you're always here, I mean, in case we need repairs.

CLYDE Oh, I'm a lifer, like I told you. I'm selling this as is, no warranty! But hell, if it's lasted this long it must be worth it, eh?

ABBY Yeah. See you later.

Music. Abby goes to lake area.

SCENE 8 The lake, later

Music. Rodney invites Abby to dance, as if swimming, floating on the water. Clyde brings lawnmower to the deck, where he watches Rodney and Abby. He waits a bit to see if they notice him. He sets up the lawnmower and polishes it.

ABBY I feel like I'm a part of everything here.

RODNEY Just float.

ABBY I want to say it. I have to make the effort now, or you won't be able to find me later.

RODNEY I thought you were toast.

CLYDE What's burning?

RODNEY You got a fire near the ravine.

CLYDE Now why'd they have to go and do that?

RODNEY Who?

CLYDE Mischief makers. They started fooling around with my special stash over there, chucking all my car batteries into the pit. I thought I finally scared them out of here, but I must have fallen and passed out.

RODNEY You think they started it on purpose?

CLYDE Oh, sure. They got something against me. They call me the Junkman.

RODNEY Has this happened before? The fire chief didn't sound too worried.

CLYDE Oh sure. Nothing new. And what's out here, eh? Just me and my junk. Who cares?

RODNEY Well, I do. I came out here to find you, didn't I?

CLYDE Yeah. Here we are again, you and me: an iron kettle and a clay pot tied up in the same bag.

RODNEY What do you mean? Come on, get up.

Rodney folds up the umbrella and uses it to pull Clyde up out of the pit.

CLYDE I mean, when the bag drops, which one of us is gonna end up in pieces?

RODNEY You're going to be okay. You just need a big cup of coffee. And maybe a dip in the lake. Let's go see Abby.

CLYDE Nah. It's the middle of the night.

RODNEY She's the one who saw the smoke all the way to the lake. She'll be waiting up for us.

CLYDE Okay, for Abby. Let's take these deck chairs with us. They didn't get burnt, so they musta been saved for her.

Clyde and Rodney take the chairs to the deck.

SCENE 10 The cabin, a few weeks later

Abby, Clyde, and Rodney sit on the three chairs.

CLYDE Abby don't look like she wants to go home.

ABBY Clyde is a mind reader.

RODNEY Well, I've got to get back to work, right? I've taken off as much time as I could.

CLYDE So why can't Abby stay while hubby goes back and forth?

RODNEY No. I don't want her out here alone.

CLYDE Don't you have neighbours?

RODNEY Nobody stays out all week.

CLYDE I'm here. Me and my mental telepathy.

ABBY I don't get that tumbling feeling here, Rod.

RODNEY I know you're better here but I . . .

CLYDE He's just a-scared of you needing someone and no one's around.

ABBY What about the cellphone? If Clyde kept it, I'd have a lifeline.

CLYDE Me? The magician phone?

RODNEY I don't know if Clyde could. . . .

CLYDE What does this thing run on anyway? Solar?

ABBY It has a battery charger you just plug in.

CLYDE I don't have electric at my trailer.

RODNEY Well, that's it, then.

CLYDE As a rule, I don't like new things, eh? They haven't been held in the hand long enough.

ABBY Oh, that one has.

CLYDE But I suppose I could power it off my cigarette lighter overnight. I wonder if there's enough juice?

ABBY You did that once, Rod. Remember when you stayed over with me at the hospital that time?

RODNEY Yeah, that worked.

CLYDE I got plenty of car batteries. And I got all your numbers here on this card you gave me.

RODNEY But what about at night?

ABBY At night we're asleep and we don't worry about each other and there's nothing anybody can do anyway wherever we are.

Abby takes the shawl from the chair and wraps it around herself.

CLYDE Being close to the water is good for getting better.

ABBY I like to watch the boats. Not the speed boats, but the fishing dinghies, when the lake is calm. The boats are anchored, secure, as if there's solid ground around them, not water. The fishermen stand; their silhouettes are still. They look like they could step out and walk across to me. But sometimes, if I shift my gaze to the sunset or the birds in the air, just for a moment, the boat is gone. Vanished, silent and secret, like a dream.

CLYDE I'll make sure she keeps one foot on the ground, Doc.

RODNEY You're sure.

CLYDE Don't worry, there's nothing in the refrigerator.

RODNEY I was wondering about that. Who's taking care of whom?

ABBY I'll call you tonight, Clyde.

RODNEY *(To Abby)* And I'll call you. Are you sure about this?

ABBY This place is my lifeboat.

Clyde moves back to the dump.

CLYDE (*Presses numbers*) Wish I had someone I could call.

Rodney exits.

SCENE 11 The trailer, weeks later

Music. Clyde is at the dump. Abby sits on the middle chair on the deck. Rodney paces, restless in the city, trying to get Abby's attention.

CLYDE Pork 'n' beans tonight. What did you have?

ABBY He always asks that. He thinks I won't eat if he's not here to cook for me.

CLYDE How many times did he call today?

ABBY Six.

CLYDE Well, that's better than yesterday, anyway.

ABBY I guess.

CLYDE You have to give him time to let go, little by little.

ABBY I don't have time.

CLYDE He'll learn.

ABBY I like talking to you.

CLYDE I'm just doing my job.

ABBY So, how did you sleep last night?

CLYDE Well, not much, eh? Too wound up. It's not like I don't get enough fresh air or nothing, out at the dump all day. Probably not enough exercise. Used to work the rigs. Slept hard then, eh?

ABBY I like to watch the spiders at night. What do you do when you can't sleep?

CLYDE Once upon a time I'd have a drink. But now, I sit up. I read. What I'm doing right now. Full moon, enough light to read by. Only thing is the fool bats out here.

Wish to heaven they'd leave me alone. Got hit by one once, it musta been drunk on fermented berries. Oooh. Didn't like that. Bats are mice with wings, eh? I like 'em on the ground where I can step on 'em, not flicking around my ears.

ABBY The trick with bats is to sit still, like a tree. Keep your shirt tucked in, so nothing's flapping in the wind.

CLYDE I'll try that.

ABBY What are you reading?

CLYDE *The Book of Wisdom.*

ABBY Yeah?

CLYDE Yeah, I read a bit and then I think a bit. I'm studying my life. Trying to figure out why I ended up at the dump. I guess I had no other place to go. But listen to me now, eh? Talking on a cellular with my phone pal Abby every night. I must be doing something right.

ABBY Goodnight, Clyde.

CLYDE 'Night, Abby.

RODNEY Abby? The phone was busy. Are you okay?

Music.

SCENE 12 The lake

Rodney moves to Abby at the lake, waits. Clyde retires into his shack.

ABBY What's the matter?

RODNEY Do you want to go out in the boat today?

ABBY No, I'm happy sitting here.

RODNEY Is there anything else you want to do?

ABBY No, really. I'm fine.

RODNEY A walk, maybe?

ABBY Maybe later, when it cools off.

RODNEY I feel like we should do something together. We don't eat at the same times anymore. Or sleep. You've got your own schedule . . .

ABBY It's blank, Rodney.

RODNEY You're alone so much.

ABBY I can focus better that way.

RODNEY I need to be with you.

ABBY I know you're thinking of me. Watching me.

RODNEY But if I get too close it's like you have trouble breathing.

ABBY It breaks my concentration.

RODNEY I wish I could help you.

ABBY I know.

RODNEY Maybe a walk later when it's cooler, then?

ABBY Maybe.

Rodney goes to fix something under the deck. Clyde finds him, avoids Abby, who is meditative.

RODNEY Clyde!

CLYDE Hey! Let me hold that for you.

Rodney hammers.

RODNEY I want to reinforce this deck. Abby spends so much time on it.

CLYDE Don't want her to fall.

RODNEY *(Nail in mouth)* Uh-uh.

CLYDE You're the one who should worry about falling.

RODNEY As long as I keep my hands busy, I'm okay.

CLYDE Keep nailing, then.

RODNEY Did she see you're here?

CLYDE She doesn't need to know.

RODNEY What's wrong?

CLYDE It's the phone calls.

RODNEY From you?

CLYDE No, from you, Doc.

RODNEY She told you this?

CLYDE When you're in the city you're calling her eight, nine times a day.

RODNEY She hardly ever phones me.

CLYDE You're not giving her a chance. She phones me every night.

RODNEY She does?

CLYDE Yeah, she makes sure I'm reading my Bible.

RODNEY She's looking after you, then.

CLYDE She thinks so.

RODNEY So she would rather talk to you. How's that supposed to make me feel?

CLYDE Hey, Doc. I'm nothing, a big, hollow zero. Maybe that's easier for her, because I don't count for much.

RODNEY Look at her out there. She's so calm. How does she do that?

CLYDE She's breathing with the lake.

Abby sits on edge of deck, feet dangling.

RODNEY So what do I do?

Clyde takes out cellphone.

CLYDE This old thing does the long distance, eh?

RODNEY Yeah.

CLYDE Like this. *(To phone)* Hiya, Doc! Same as always. Uh, how's the weather? *(Peeking out under the deck)* Sun is shining, sort of. The lake is still there. She's still looking at it. *(Prompt to Rodney)* How's the fishing?

RODNEY How's the fishing?

CLYDE Yeah, got a few the other day. Tried out the phone from my boat, which I finally got patched up and painted. Gave her a name, too, for good luck, eh? *The Abigail*. Even checked my Bible for the spelling. Called up Abby from the middle o' the lake. It was like she walked out on the water and sat down on the bow. "Hi Clyde." That clear. She doesn't say much, hell, how could she with me bursting with ways to change the world on the other end of this honker?

RODNEY Okay, okay. I'll check in with you sometimes if I get . . . anxious.

CLYDE Remember, I'm in the salvage business. My whole life, in fact, is a salvage operation.

RODNEY That's what I admire about you. 'Cause I don't know how I'm . . . I don't like this. I don't like leaving her alone so much.

CLYDE I told her that. I gave her a piece of Psalm 28. It goes, "If you are silent to me, I shall be like those who go down to the Pit."

RODNEY I'm going to cancel Fridays at the office for the rest of the summer.

*Rodney takes phone, turns it off, and hands it back to Clyde.
Abby leans back with a sigh of relief.*

SCENE 13 The dump, early fall

Music. Clyde goes up to the dump, on the far edge of the pit nearest to the ravine. Rodney and Abby carry a large green garbage bag to the dump. They stay on the side of the pit opposite to Clyde.

RODNEY Clyde! What a mud pie!

CLYDE Yeah. Good weather if you're a duck.

RODNEY We better stay over here on the high ground.

CLYDE You do that. This mud sucks you up if you let it. It sucks up your soul.

RODNEY Not too busy today, eh?

CLYDE Ah, nobody comes out in this.

ABBY Most people have closed up already.

CLYDE Yeah, summer's over.

ABBY It's almost winter!

CLYDE Yeah, I'm alone out here with my empty pit for the duration. Burned the dump for the last time.

ABBY You mean until spring.

CLYDE Ah, who knows if I'll last that long. Here, catch!

Clyde tosses the phone to Rodney.

RODNEY Whoa! No, Clyde, we want you to keep it.

CLYDE What for?

RODNEY Well, you need it.

ABBY So we can call you and find out when it's spring.

Rodney throws the phone to Clyde.

CLYDE But it must be worth something, eh?

RODNEY It's a gift.

ABBY In case you have any more trouble around here.

CLYDE Could come in handy, all right.

RODNEY If I take it back, I'll use it too much.

CLYDE If I had a phone, I could sign up for search and rescue.

RODNEY You'd be really good at that.

CLYDE Yeah. There's always a few characters who get lost in the bush in the winter. Being colourblind is an advantage with the snow, eh? I see lights and darks better. I can see things that are out of place.

ABBY Like what is sticking up out of the mud.

RODNEY This is for you, too. (*Throws bag over*)

CLYDE Empties?

RODNEY A hundred to a bag. A whole summer's worth.

CLYDE I appreciate that.

RODNEY We should go. So long, Clyde!

ABBY Bye, Clyde.

Abby drops her scarf in the pit, not noticed by Rodney or Clyde.

CLYDE See ya in the spring!

Rodney and Abby exit.

SCENE 14 The dump, late winter

Clyde talks on the cellphone to the fire chief.

CLYDE Hey, Chief! Yeah, well, strike at the shepherd and the sheep will scatter, eh? I just told him you'd be waiting at the bottom of the road. They headed down the ravine on them three-wheeled donor cycles, heh, got that? Donor cycles? Anyway, yeah, I'd like to be paid for my gas. Sure, he can pay me in empties. You're

gonna make him pick cans out of the ditch? Why not? Probably theirs, anyways. Yeah, young once, yeah, long time ago. You know, I wouldn't mind trying out one of those . . . three-wheeled units. You think so, eh? Well, naw, I like to have something around me when I'm driving. Yeah. Don't like being exposed, you know, on the road, but I wouldn't mind bombing around on one in the bush for a day. Sure, ask him. He'll say no, but you can ask. That or get grounded, eh? Well, whatever you say. Sure, Chief. Yeah, excellent. You bet.

Clyde puts the phone in his pocket.

SCENE 15 The dump, spring

Music. The pit is smoking. Rodney enters from the lowest level, picks up some stones, and throws them in the pit with gathering intensity throughout. Clyde enters from shack.

CLYDE Well, I'll be damnified! I hardly seen you through the smoke.

RODNEY Hi.

CLYDE She's burning good, eh?

RODNEY Yeah.

CLYDE I haven't heard from you guys since Christmas. That made my day, getting that call from Abby. Hey, did she come up this weekend?

RODNEY No. She . . .

CLYDE Bit cold yet, eh? Hey! I gotta tell her about this chinook we had in the middle of March, and everybody's got spring fever, uh? I'm in the shack flat on the floor like Humpty Dumpty, eh, but I can hear through my brain haze that my little arsonists are outside. My mind is doing wheelies, and my eyes are like two pee holes in the snow . . . oh, Lordy . . . but I seen them go to my truck and siphon off some gasoline (I got the old putt-putt working this winter, eh?) and then they throw the whole

works on an old car chassis in the metal pile, and they light her up! So I get the phone, and I call my pal the fire chief — I know him real well now 'cause we're on search and rescue together — and I recognize one of those knotheads out there is his kid! — so his ass is in boiling hot water . . .

Rodney sees scarf, reaches for it, falls into the pit.

CLYDE Hey, Doc! Watch out!

RODNEY Damn!

Clyde goes around the pit to Rodney.

CLYDE What are you doing?

RODNEY I slipped!

CLYDE What in the hell —

RODNEY It's Abby's. It's her colour. I don't want it to burn.

Rodney gets the scarf, but burns his hand, and wraps the scarf around it.

CLYDE Come on out of there!

RODNEY I'm trying!

CLYDE You'll burn yourself!

RODNEY I keep sliding!

CLYDE Just put one foot in front of the other!

RODNEY It's not that easy in this slush.

CLYDE No wonder! You don't have any boots on!

Rodney tries to get up again and collapses.

RODNEY Clyde. She's gone.

CLYDE *(Pause)* Gone?

RODNEY She died!

CLYDE *(Pause)* Oh, Doc. *(Pause)* Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

RODNEY I had to come out here.

CLYDE Get on up out of there, now.

Rodney tries to get up.

RODNEY I can't.

CLYDE Don't be a fool.

RODNEY It hurts like hell.

CLYDE You gotta get up.

RODNEY What for?

CLYDE You gotta go back to the lake.

RODNEY Why?

CLYDE 'Cause it helped Abby!

RODNEY The lake sucked me into thinking she was better!

CLYDE She was.

RODNEY But she died.

CLYDE Yeah. *(Pause)* Give me your hand. C'mon, Doc. Doc?

Clyde pulls Rodney out. Abby rises out of the pit behind Rodney and circles her way around it, and around the men, and makes her way to the deck.

RODNEY I didn't know where else to go.

CLYDE It's okay. You got to do your howling someplace.

RODNEY Yeah.

CLYDE It's good you came.

RODNEY She wanted the three of us to sit outside one night as soon as it was warm.

CLYDE Well then, we'll do that. You go make peace with the lake, then I'll come over some night and I'll sit and drink beer with you. And we'll talk about her, so she'll be there, too . . . uh, never mind I'm scared of bats, eh? Abby was going to help me work on that.

RODNEY I'd like to know what she saw out there.

Abby is on the deck, in the middle chair, in her former pose.

ABBY There will always be the lake.

RODNEY She called me the day she went.

ABBY Rodney. Come home. I'll wait.

RODNEY And she did.

CLYDE She sure knew her own way.

RODNEY I'm going to go . . . and open up the cabin . . . and clean up those dump chairs, and we'll sit and talk about her.

Rodney and Clyde go to the deck.

CLYDE No, leave them chairs how they are, spider webs and all. She liked to watch the spiders, she told me. Never met a woman like her.

RODNEY Yeah. Stuff like that. Everything we can remember.

CLYDE I'll bring the beer.

Rodney and Clyde sit, Abby between them, for a moment. Then she dances, into the water, and waves.

RODNEY We'll go fishing.

CLYDE I got a lucky boat.

RODNEY I'll call you.

CLYDE Yup. You do that, buddy.

Music. Fade to black.



The Seed Savers,
Station Arts Centre:
Will Brooks as Solo and
Carmela Sison as Sky.
Photo by Michael Clark.

The **SEED SAVERS**



The Seed Savers, Workshop West Theatre: David MacInnis as Solo and Natasha Napoleao as Sky.
Photo by Russ Hewitt.

The Seed Savers was first produced at Workshop West Theatre, in Edmonton, Alberta, from 29 October to 8 November 2009, with the following cast and crew:

MINDY Maralyn Ryan
JOE John Wright
SKY Natasha Napoleao
SOLO David MacInnis
TYLER Jesse Gervais

DIRECTOR Michael Clark
SET AND LIGHTING DESIGN April Viczko
COSTUME DESIGN Daniela Masellis
MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN Paul Morgan Donald
CHOREOGRAPHY Amber Borotsik
STAGE MANAGER Anna Davidson
PRODUCTION MANAGER Ben Eastep
TECHNICIANS Eric Chamberlin and Erik Martin
PUBLICITY Fat Cat Media Relations

The Seed Savers was revised and produced at Station Arts Centre, in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, from 1 July to 1 August 2010, with the following cast and crew:

MINDY Sharon Bakker
JOE Kent Allen
SKY Carmela Sison
SOLO Will Brooks
TYLER Matt Josdal

DIRECTOR Michael Clark
SET DESIGN Hans Becker
LIGHTING DESIGN Tim Cardinal
COSTUME DESIGN Theresa Germain
MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN Paul Morgan Donald
STAGE MANAGER Diana Domm
TECHNICIAN Craig Langlois

Characters

MINDY, Joe's wife for fifty years, an earthy woman

JOE, late sixties, a farmer, successful, but not a stranger to hard times

SOLO, mid-twenties, farmer, has a few years of agricultural college

SKY, mid-twenties, Mindy and Joe's granddaughter, of mixed race heritage

TYLER, mid-twenties, local boy now but not always, salesman for a multinational chemical and seed company

Time

1998–99

Act 1: Late summer to late fall

Act 2: Late fall to late summer

Place

The prairie, near a small town

Set

The set is bare except for a few props as indicated. The suggestion of a rolling prairie vista, a pond, and an elevated space indicating the dream bed, are required.

THE DREAM BED is a remote and secret place, a high narrow ledge on top of a hill. Dug out and lined with special rocks, it is a place for fasting, dreaming, and vision quests.

THE WIND, the life force, is indicated by sound, music, light, movement, or some combination of design elements.

Sound

Aeolian harp or wind chimes or contemporary naturalistic music

Scenes

Note: Scene titles are for identification only.

PROLOGUE Windsong

Act One

SCENE 1 Work of the Wind

SCENE 2 Truck Tour

SCENE 3 Candlelight Dinner

SCENE 4 Apron of Many Pockets

SCENE 5 Beer Buddies

SCENE 6 The Letter

SCENE 7 Dream Bed

Act Two

SCENE 1 Anniversary

SCENE 2 Winter

SCENE 3 Sales Call

SCENE 4 Planting Trees

SCENE 5 Desert

SCENE 6 Truck Tour Two

SCENE 7 Moving On Up

SCENE 8 Field Check

SCENE 9 First Crop

SCENE 10 Supreme Court

EPILOGUE Song of Songs

Whoever said that farming is the foundation of all the arts is quite correct. When all is well on the farms, all is well elsewhere.

— XENOPHON, *Oeconomicus*, c. 370 BC

PROLOGUE Windsong

Mindy enters. Sound of the birds. It's early sunrise, in the yard. Mindy throws some seeds for the birds. Sound of wind, taunting.

MINDY Oh, you. Plenty for you, too.

Mindy throws some seeds to the wind.

MINDY Take it! Go on! Even though you don't need it. For life.

Joe approaches, but Mindy does not see.

MINDY How do you live without seed?

JOE (*off*) Mindy!

MINDY All you have are songs. Singing, always singing, like a lost bird!

JOE (*off*) Min?

MINDY They say the northwest wind makes you wise.

JOE (*off*) Min!

Sound of wind, travelling.

MINDY Oh! Go on, then. But I'm not giving up on you!

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 Work of the Wind

Joe enters the yard.

JOE You talking to the wind again?
MINDY It tells me things.
JOE It tell you it's gonna rain?
MINDY There's something more, today.
JOE Before it pours, I could use some tea.
MINDY What's going on?
JOE The air is full is all.
MINDY I got no time for tea.

Beat.

JOE I saw the heron by the dugout.
MINDY Oh? Flying or fishing?
JOE Flying. Agitated, like.
MINDY Like you.
JOE Circling.
MINDY He knows.
JOE Hah! King of the sky. He's just a hungry heron. Hungry, like I'm thirsty.
MINDY Some king you are.
JOE Is that what the wind says.
MINDY Joe. Who's coming?
JOE Rain. Probably hail, too.
MINDY If it's the girls and the kids up from Regina, I'll have to get some rolls in the oven.

JOE Not the kids, thank the Lord.

MINDY Who, then?

JOE Not sure.

MINDY Someone who wants to help?

JOE Who in their right mind would show up at harvest time?

MINDY It's someone I know.

JOE If you know so much, why are you asking?

MINDY I'll figure you out yet.

JOE I'm dried right out. I need my tea!

MINDY We see everyone at Christmas and Easter. The only ones who never come are . . . "King of the sky." It's Sky!

JOE She called, is all.

MINDY Sky phoned us?

JOE Yeah.

MINDY When?

JOE You were busy.

MINDY What on earth was I doing?

JOE Boiling water.

MINDY For your tea?

JOE In your big vat.

MINDY I was canning?

JOE You don't like getting startled when you're canning.

MINDY My granddaughter calls from Toronto after all this time and you don't tell me for a whole week?

JOE I didn't want you to bubble over.

MINDY Is Sky all right?

JOE She's okay.

MINDY She's never called before.

JOE We got that one letter, with the map, but after that,
not even a bloody card!

Beat.

MINDY Why did she call?

JOE Just to chitchat.

MINDY Lord love a duck.

JOE You know, shoot the breeze.

MINDY What did she say?

Beat.

JOE She asked about the farm.

MINDY The farm?

JOE Summers here as a kid. She misses it.

MINDY That's a miracle. Her father hated it.

JOE She's got a few bones to pick, too.

MINDY She's got a few bones to pick with you!

JOE There. That's why I kept a lid on it.

MINDY Davey hated us in the end.

JOE She's got questions about him.

MINDY So do I.

JOE Can of worms.

MINDY I could just ring your neck.

JOE Then I won't have to talk.

Beat.

MINDY Did she ask about me?

JOE You were up to your neck in pickles!

MINDY I should have talked to her! If you do this again,
Joe Brandt, you will die alone!

Beat.

JOE She called about her mother.

MINDY What about her.

JOE She's dead.

MINDY Dead!

JOE Got hit by a car. On that, uh, King Street.

MINDY Oh, my Lord.

JOE Killed on impact.

MINDY That's why she called.

JOE Death at harvest.

MINDY You don't keep life-and-death secrets from me!

JOE I'd just started swathing!

MINDY I need to go there.

JOE Not there.

MINDY You can't stop me.

JOE The ravine.

MINDY Her, too?

Beat.

JOE Together at last.

MINDY Our son should have been laid to rest here, not scattered
in a city ravine.

JOE She was the wife.

MINDY She abandoned Davey!

JOE And us.

MINDY Well, she can't keep us away from Sky now.

JOE Sky's got her mother in her. That woman came and went
like the weather. And took Davey and Sky with her.

MINDY It's the worst thing for a girl to lose her mother!

JOE Hope she had the sense to grow up, like her father never did.

MINDY We're going to Toronto.

JOE We can't.

MINDY To comfort our granddaughter.

JOE She won't be there.

Beat.

MINDY Sky is coming?

JOE It's up in the air. Like my cup of tea.

MINDY You asked her.

JOE For a visit, like.

MINDY I don't know whether to hug you or hammer you!

JOE Just don't go making a mountain of bread.

MINDY Oh, for Sky, something more exotic.

JOE Now she's the Queen of Sheba.

MINDY Stollen! Apples and nuts and cinnamon.

JOE Just don't go scaring her off.

MINDY Tomorrow? In a few days?

JOE I left it wide open.

MINDY This is why I listen to the wind.

JOE I can't stop long with the clouds loading up.

MINDY Go! Get it all done before she gets here!

JOE Fifty years and I gotta make my own damned tea.

Joe exits. Sound of rain.

MINDY *(To off)* Joe! Did you tell her about the party?

JOE (*off*) I might have mentioned it.

MINDY Did she say she'll stay? Joe?

JOE (*off*) I wasn't sure of the date.

Mindy exits. Sound of wind.

MINDY (*off*) Joe! October twenty-third! How come you don't know that?

JOE (*off*) I knew that!

MINDY (*off*) Oh, get out of my way. Let me do it!

Rain stops. Music.

Sky enters with two rolling suitcases.

Sky takes in the colours, the sounds and smells of fall on the farm. She lets the wind play in her hair, her face, lifts her arms and gives in to it. For the first time in a long time, she's home.

SKY "Your name is perfume poured out."

*Sound of wind, animated.
Music.*

SCENE 2 Truck Tour

MINDY (*off*) Lunch will be ready soon. Don't be long.

Joe enters.

JOE (*To off*) Just showing Sky the lay of the land.

SKY She's just like I remember her.

JOE Your Grandma wants you all to herself.

SKY Does she still bake three desserts for lunch?

JOE To her, you're the lost sheep.

SKY Lost? (*Pause*) You sent us away.

JOE I didn't mean forever!

SKY He was never coming back.

JOE He needed help.

SKY He never got it.

JOE Did your mother try?

SKY He refused. She gave up.

JOE And you?

SKY I couldn't.

JOE Means the world that you came out here.

SKY Law school trains you to look at a question from all angles.

JOE You had lots of time to think.

SKY You put me in exile!

JOE You weren't exactly in the desert.

SKY Well, no.

Joe pulls out a pouch from his pocket.

JOE I've spent time in the desert. I got this in Egypt.

SKY Is it sand?

JOE No. . . . Wheat.

SKY What's it for?

JOE It's a gift. From a shrivelled up farmer, old as the hills.

SKY I never knew you went to Egypt.

Joe pockets the pouch.

JOE Ages ago. Before we met your mother.

SKY Mom only dreamed of going to Egypt. To commune with the ancestors.

JOE And you?

SKY I can't wait to meet my little cousins.

JOE Mindy's over the moon that you're staying for the party.

SKY Only if I can help out.

JOE She'll be baking buns to feed the whole district.

SKY I mean, with the harvest.

JOE You want to help me?

SKY I'm not afraid of work.

JOE Not driving tractor.

SKY I've learned how to drive.

JOE I don't know. New tractor.

SKY What about the truck?

JOE Hauling grain?

SKY The big red one?

JOE That old geezer takes a strong hand.

SKY I can do it.

JOE Son of a gun.

SKY When do I start?

JOE Gonna need a steady wind to sop up all this moisture.
The north field is a little higher up, could be dried out.

SKY I don't remember all this!

JOE The farm is spread out, like. There, that was peas and
oats. We grow 'em together. The peas climb the oats.

SKY Cool.

JOE There's your wheat, right up to those bluffs.

SKY Wow.

JOE Barley down on that side. Already in the bin.

SKY The farm has really grown.

JOE Everything grows, if it's living.

Beat.

SKY What's that?

JOE That's your canola.

SKY I missed the yellow.

JOE Swathed it before all that rain. Pods gotta cure. Gonna need about five dry days.

SKY The colour of happiness.

Beat.

JOE Wish your dad woulda seen it that way. His sadness was so foreign.

SKY I went to see him a few times. I skipped school and took the subway to that awful men's hostel.

JOE The only one who could light him up was you.

Beat.

JOE Wish I could trade you for that.

SKY You can't. . . . But I owe you! And one day, I'm going to pay you back.

JOE No, I won't allow it.

SKY But it was a lot.

JOE You did all the work.

SKY Why did you put me through law school but not help him?

JOE I knew what to do for you. Just like I know farming.

Beat.

JOE I live close to life. I grow my own seed. I work near the animals, and the birds. They tell me when a storm is coming, by how they move. The hand of nature pushes me, always, to get the jobs done that need doing. I fix machines, keep the equipment running. For the promise I make to the seed. I'm a part of all this, an old guy like me. Suits me right down to the ground.

Joe carries Sky's suitcases off.

SCENE 3 Candlelight Supper

Music. Mindy holds a lit candle in the darkness. Sky lights another from Mindy's.

SKY These are gorgeous. They look brand-new.

MINDY They were a present from your mother.

SKY Oh.

MINDY We haven't had occasion to use them.

SKY Candlelight is centering, don't you think?

MINDY Sure. Huh!

Joe enters.

JOE We got a power failure?

MINDY No. Candlelight, for a change.

JOE Candles!

MINDY Sky wants to set a mood —

JOE Cause a fire!

MINDY Make it romantic like. Huh!

SKY I better check the lentils.

Sky exits, giving Joe her candle.

JOE What's that smell?

MINDY Spices, Joe. Sky brought her own.

JOE I hope this is not vegetarian.

MINDY I made your meat, but Sky won't take it, so don't ask her.

Solo enters.

SOLO You folks okay?

JOE Hey, Solo! Get in here!

SOLO The wind knock out your power?

MINDY We're having candlelight.

SOLO What the hell for?

Sky enters.

MINDY Solo, you remember Sky.

SOLO Hey. Cinnamon.

SKY Solo.

SOLO Heard you were back.

SKY Oh, yeah?

SOLO Took you long enough.

SKY Ten years.

JOE Sky's part of the crew.

SKY Never stayed for harvest before.

SOLO A rare woman does that kind of work.

MINDY Because if we did, the men would expect it all the time.
I, for one, have enough to do.

SOLO Remember when I let you drive the tractor? You knocked
me off!

SKY I pulled you back on.

SOLO Remember the dugout?

SKY Never got you back for that.

SOLO We were just kids.

JOE Anyone giving you a hand?

SOLO No. Not this year.

MINDY Now, that's not right.

JOE What about that friend of yours?

SOLO He's a company man now.

Beat.

SKY Hey. Sorry about your folks.

SOLO Yeah. Sorry about your mom.

SKY I didn't know where else to go.

SOLO Me, too. For weeks after.

SKY So now you do it all by yourself?

SOLO Have to.

JOE He's young!

SOLO I've done it before. I can do it again.

JOE You rest when it rains. Round the clock when it's dry.
Right, Solo?

MINDY That's how farmers get hurt, so rag tired!

SOLO When I finish, I'll be over to help you.

MINDY You count on having supper here, then, 'til we're all
through.

SOLO If it's no trouble.

MINDY Another person, another potato!

Mindy hands her candle to Joe, exits.

SKY I hope you like lentils.

SOLO I grow them.

SKY What kind?

SOLO Red.

SKY Tonight you're getting green.

SOLO Smells like another world. I can hardly wait.

JOE You sure got good-looking canola.

SOLO Hope it counts up just as good.

JOE That all from the seed I gave you?

SOLO No. I bought this year.

JOE Not much weed pressure.

SOLO None.

JOE Can I swap you for some?

SOLO No kidding! I can't.

JOE Why the hell not?

SOLO My contract says I can't save or trade.

SKY Your contract?

SOLO Always something new.

JOE Just because it's new, doesn't mean it's better.

SOLO It's the future.

SKY New seed?

SOLO Yeah. My buddy sells it.

JOE Why buy when mine is free?

SOLO An experiment.

JOE Expensive.

SOLO Something my Dad wanted to try.

JOE You've been busy spraying.

SOLO That's the point.

JOE I don't agree with it.

SOLO I knew you'd say that.

JOE It's the time in, time out —

SKY Consistent application of work that makes a farm grow.

SOLO Yeah, well, you never wanted to trade before.

*Sound of the wind.
Mindy enters.*

MINDY Ready, everyone? Oh, listen to that wind!

JOE A two-bit wind.

SKY Dad used to say that.

JOE When he was little, I'd tell him to go out and see if the
wind could lift a quarter off the ground.

SKY He was afraid of the wind.

Beat.

MINDY Come on, everyone, let's eat.

Mindy starts to exit with Solo and Sky.

MINDY Kind heaven, speed the plough!
And bless the hands that guide it.
God gives the seed.
The bread we need,
our labour must provide it.

Joe blows out the candles.

JOE I'm turning the lights back on.

Joe exits. Music.

SCENE 4 Apron of Many Pockets

Music. Mindy has a stalk of ripe canola pods. Solo waits with her.

SOLO What's keeping them?

MINDY Joe's not moving any faster these days.

SOLO Harvest is no time to be waiting.

MINDY Oh, yes it is. I had to wait 'til after harvest to get married.

Beat.

SOLO How long you think she's here for?
MINDY Our party is five weeks away.
SOLO City girls, you never know.
MINDY I came from the city. Bet you never knew that.
SOLO What city?
MINDY Red Deer, Alberta.
SOLO Wasn't a city then.
MINDY It is now.
SOLO Not like Toronto.
MINDY I'm still pinching myself that she's here.
SOLO Looks like I hurried over for nothing.

Beat.

MINDY Amazing what you get from one single canola plant. About thirty seeds to a pod, at least three hundred pods to a plant, that's nine thousand seeds! And you take one pound of seed, grow it out, and clean it, you get five hundred pounds!

SOLO No one cleans their own anymore.

MINDY I do.

SOLO You can't get all the weed seeds.

MINDY There aren't many to begin with. Not even wild mustard.

SOLO You still got your share of Canada thistle.

MINDY Everyone does. The scourge of the prairie.

SOLO You can spray Canada thistle.

MINDY I let it live on the edge of the fields to feed the birds.

SOLO See, now —

MINDY The birds live here, too.

SOLO You get control —

MINDY I don't control. I take care.

Mindy holds out some seeds for Solo to inspect, then pockets them.

MINDY I hear you've got something new.

SOLO Yeah. I like it a lot.

MINDY What do you like about it?

SOLO No weeds. Higher yield.

MINDY How many times do you spray?

SOLO Twice. It depends.

MINDY That's a lot of fuel!

SOLO I get a clean field.

MINDY Hope you never spray on a windy day.

SOLO No, M'am.

MINDY Keep it on your side, Solo. Because the wind won't abide secrets. Sure as the lines on my face.

SOLO This year's crop was my best so far.

MINDY I think ours is just as good.

SOLO I need to be sure. I can't afford otherwise.

MINDY That's what they teach now? Up at the university?

SOLO Darn right.

MINDY No hoping or praying. Or trusting that the hand of nature is gentle and kind.

SOLO I know better.

MINDY Now, Solo.

SOLO Nature and God and all that? I'm not losing out again. No way.

MINDY But Solo, you're a farmer. You can't make Nature your enemy.

SOLO If I was home that night, that storm would have killed me, too.

MINDY Solo. It was a freak storm. Shows how powerless we are.

SOLO I'm making all the profit I can. That's efficiency. That's growth.

MINDY Solo. Do you want to be alone on this earth?

Beat.

MINDY Remember. You reap what you sow.

SOLO That's how I'm going to get what's mine.

Sound of the wind, whistling.

MINDY You, of all people, should listen to the wind.

SOLO What the hell for?

Beat.

MINDY Now, that's strange.

SOLO Where in the world are they?

MINDY Look here. Joe sprayed over a week ago. But there's canola right up to the pole!

SOLO That's what she looks like, green and growing through the weed kill.

MINDY This is the new seed.

SOLO You got some volunteers!

MINDY This is from you?

SOLO There they are! About time!

Joe and Sky enter.

MINDY From that field, across the road?

SOLO I'm the first guy around here to grow it.

MINDY I gotta tell Joe!

SOLO Hey, Sky!

MINDY Oh, Joe!

JOE What's the matter?

MINDY Look. Here.

JOE Second time I sprayed it.

MINDY What?

JOE Can't get rid of it.

MINDY You didn't tell me!

JOE Nothing you can do.

MINDY Is this in our field, too?

JOE Nothing I can do.

SOLO Isn't it amazing?

SKY Everything else is dead.

SOLO Except my canola!

SKY How?

SOLO They shoot in a new gene, from a bacteria! Keeps it alive!

SKY This is "the future"?

SOLO I'm betting on it.

SKY But it spreads.

JOE Pollen travels like that cloud up there.

MINDY Riding on the wind!

JOE We used to call this rapeseed. It's a weed in itself.

MINDY Now it's a weed you can't spray!

SKY What do we do?

SOLO Bring it in!

JOE We won't harvest the ditch crop this year. We'll bundle it and burn it.

SKY How far up does it go?
JOE Can't see a difference at all.
MINDY Did you hope I wouldn't notice?
SKY Maybe you should test it.
JOE If it's in this field, it's in the wind, and it's everywhere.
MINDY Our pure crop!
SOLO It's just enhanced.
JOE Let's get going.
SKY I'll get the truck.
SOLO I'll get my rig, too.

Joe exits.

MINDY Joe, wait for me!
SKY Are you helping, Grandma?
MINDY I gotta talk to Joe!
SOLO Should I start at this end?
MINDY I don't know what you should do!

Mindy exits.

*Solo and Sky watch Mindy go, then look at each other.
Sky exits. Solo is alone for a beat. Music.*

SCENE 5 Beer Buddies

Tyler offers Solo a beer on a full moonlit night.

SOLO Did you guys ever think of this?
TYLER So Farmer Joe's got our genetics in his crop.
SOLO All I know is he didn't put them there.
TYLER Doesn't matter. I just gotta make a report. And you get this.

Tyler gives Solo a leather jacket.

SOLO What's this for?

TYLER Comes with your phone call.

Solo puts on the jacket. It looks great on him.

SOLO Does it fit okay?

TYLER The company says happy farming.

SOLO I don't want Joe getting any flak.

TYLER Joe? There might even be something in it for him.

SOLO Like what?

TYLER Did he ever give you any of his?

SOLO Joe's the canola king.

TYLER You got any leftover from last year?

SOLO Didn't use it all, because I bought from you.

TYLER I hear it's pretty good against blackleg. Clubroot, too.

SOLO Yup, disease-free. But yours is weed-free.

TYLER Yeah, see? We might be able to do a little tie-in.

SOLO That would be taking what's his.

TYLER He brown-bags it out anyway, right? And our lab docs are wicked at combining stuff. I mean, disease-free, weed-free, all we need now is drought-free.

SOLO Frost-free.

TYLER Storm-free.

SOLO Yeah.

TYLER Sorry.

Sound of coyotes.

TYLER Storm of the century.

Beat.

TYLER I remember after, the moon hung down just like that. Quiet. Except for the flippin' coyotes.

SOLO And me with a hammer, boarding up windows, and you in your work gloves, sweeping up glass. Ha! I didn't even know you had work gloves.

TYLER Your folks let me hang out right through high school, no questions asked.

SOLO We cursed the universe.

TYLER When the sun came up we went fishing. Then got started on the harvest.

SOLO What was left of it. Haven't been fishing since.

TYLER No way! Two years? That's before I got the job.

SOLO Who's got time for it anymore?

TYLER Hey! How about this winter? Up north.

SOLO Nah, I'll be driving all winter. Bills to pay.

TYLER I'll do a promo deal with the company. We'll get a few new suckers, and show them how it's done, eh?

SOLO Don't know if I can take the time off.

TYLER All expenses paid.

SOLO You can do that?

TYLER When you get good yields you get the big fish.

SOLO You're doing okay, then.

TYLER You are. You got a pretty tidy return.

SOLO How do you know?

TYLER I checked.

SOLO How'd you do that?

TYLER A thing I got going with the fellas at the grain exchange.

SOLO That's none of your business.

TYLER Oh, but it is. You're my guy.

SOLO You can't put your nose in my profit margin!

TYLER I'm just making sure. That's all.

SOLO Let me get this right. I'm performing for you?

TYLER In spades, boy.

SOLO Who's the customer here?

TYLER I hand-picked you! Just in time, too.

SOLO You don't get my numbers. That's not part of the deal.

TYLER Hey, buds. You're a company man now.

SOLO Get outta here.

TYLER First, I'm gonna put my feet in Joe's field.

Sound of coyote choir.

Tyler whips out a Ziploc bag and finds his way in the dark to the pole.

SOLO Ha. Hey Ty, hear that? Yip, yip, yip!

TYLER Shut up!

SOLO They're coming to get you!

TYLER Stop it!

SOLO Yippy yap, yap!

TYLER Funny. By the pole, right?

Tyler takes his sample and exits.

Sky enters, with her own Ziploc bag.

SOLO Yip, yippy, yip, yip, yay. Gonna eat you up! Yippy, yip-yip!

SKY Uh, what are you doing?

SOLO Singing to the coyotes.

Sound of the coyotes.

SKY Do they do that a lot?
SOLO Just special nights. Change of the season.
SKY You know about coyotes.
SOLO Oh, yeah.
SKY What about the wind?
SOLO What about the bank.
SKY I heard.
SOLO Joe and Mindy don't have to worry.
SKY They're worried about you.
SOLO I've got to use technology.
SKY But aren't you playing with Nature?
SOLO No. I'm working with it. A new way.
SKY To get out of debt.
SOLO To keep my farm.
SKY And pass it on. To your kids.
SOLO I'm a long way from that.
SKY I know.

Beat.

SOLO Joe and Mindy are all I've got.
SKY Me, too.

Tyler enters and hides his Ziploc bag.

TYLER Hey, Solo! Whoa, hey, hello!
SOLO This is Tyler.
SKY The salesman?

TYLER Yeah.

SKY I'm Sky.

TYLER Haven't seen you in town.

SKY I just got here, a few days ago.

SOLO We've been working.

TYLER Oh?

SOLO Sky is Joe's granddaughter.

TYLER Could've fooled me.

SOLO Ty.

TYLER So you're here looking for your roots.

SKY I guess so.

TYLER Black sheep of the family usually do.

SKY Yeah?

TYLER Takes one to know one.

SKY Well. Good thing we're not plants, or you'd have to spray to tell us apart.

TYLER A girl who gets chemicals!

SOLO Hey —

SKY I also get cross-pollination.

SOLO Let's go, hey Tyler?

TYLER The lady wants to discuss genetic drift! How about a brew?

SKY I'm busy.

TYLER Beer's like, organic.

SKY I've got some digging to do.

TYLER Hey, what have you got against me?

SKY A degree in law.

Sky goes off to take specimens, taking out her own Ziploc bag.

SOLO Time for you to disappear.
TYLER So that's who this is about.
SOLO Hands off.
TYLER I didn't think it was Joe.
SOLO Just leave her alone.
TYLER A lawyer? Get real.
SOLO Now. Before she gets back.
TYLER What's she doing?
SOLO Getting a sample.
TYLER Yeah? Maybe I should get lost.
SOLO Out of bounds.

Sound of the coyotes.

TYLER Jacket looks good!

Tyler exits. Sky enters.

SKY Solo? They're getting closer.
SOLO Yeah. Cheering for us.
SKY Us?
SOLO For getting the harvest in.
SKY Oh.

Sound of coyotes.

SOLO They're just happy to be together.
SKY Yeah?
SOLO Yeah.
SKY I'm not really a wild dog person.

SOLO I'll walk you home.
SKY Home. Huh. It got dark all of a sudden.
SOLO Feel that air? First frost.
SKY Smells almost sweet.
SOLO Smells good to me only when it hits bare fields.
SKY It's a lot colder than I thought.

Music. Solo takes off his jacket, and puts it around Sky's bare arms, and they exit.

SCENE 6 The Letter

Tyler pays a visit to Joe and Mindy. Mindy is in the yard. It's dusk.

TYLER Hi, Mrs. Brandt!
MINDY Is that Trudy's boy? How are you?
TYLER Mighty fine.
MINDY Have you gone out to see your mom lately?
TYLER I visit when I can.
MINDY And how is she?
TYLER 'Bout the same.
MINDY You're all she's got, now.
TYLER Don't I know it.
MINDY Come and have some tea. There's pie.
TYLER No, thank you. You've got company.
MINDY Sky? Oh, she's family.

Joe enters.

JOE Hey, big fella.
MINDY Joe, remember Tyler?

JOE Sure. Solo's friend.

TYLER Yeah. Good to see you. Hey, is Sky home?

MINDY She's out with Solo. I sent them up to the bluffs.
How do you like your tea?

TYLER Sorry, I can't stay.

JOE I heard you're with that chemical outfit.

TYLER I'm actually here on business.

JOE Is this a sales call?

TYLER You've been good to my mother, so I wanted to deliver
this by hand.

Tyler holds out a letter.

MINDY I'll wrap up some pie for you to take to her.

Mindy starts to exit. Joe takes the letter and opens it.

TYLER Now, before you open that I just want to say —

JOE Mindy?

TYLER It doesn't have to go like this.

JOE They're suing me!

MINDY What for?

TYLER I can explain.

JOE Because their canola was in my ditch.

MINDY That's ridiculous!

TYLER It's just a formality, really —

MINDY I should sue them!

TYLER An offer to sign on —

JOE You know I never bought from you.

TYLER But we've got a contract with every farmer growing
our seed.

JOE Everybody knows I use farm-saved seed!

TYLER But our genes are in your crop.

JOE Says who?

TYLER We tested it.

MINDY That's trespassing!

TYLER On the basis of what we found in the ditch —

JOE Now look here, my friend. I don't spray my crop. I use a pre-emergent pellet. You can check that.

TYLER We've got receipts from the input dealer saying you bought spray —

JOE Just for my vegetation agreement. Around the power poles, like everybody else.

MINDY We don't spray willy-nilly!

JOE Makes a bad farmer look better.

TYLER All our growers around here have signed.

MINDY God help us.

TYLER If you come on board, we'll rip that up and call it a day. And I'll throw in some complementary spray. Otherwise, you have to pay the royalty.

JOE Fifteen dollars an acre? That's what Solo pays on top of seed?

MINDY Merciful heaven.

JOE They want their price on a thousand acres. That's fifteen thousand dollars!

TYLER Farmers caught stateside are coughing up a hundred and fifteen dollars an acre. But for family friends . . .

MINDY You sue us, then expect us to buy from you.

TYLER I'm offering you a way out.

JOE I'll do this my way.

MINDY What do you think we're made of?

TYLER Our seed comes clean and pre-treated, on top of the technology.

JOE I won't grow canola anymore. The land can lay waste.

Joe crumples up the letter.

TYLER It's too late for that, Joe.

MINDY What do you mean?

TYLER We believe you saved seed from last year —

MINDY We always do!

TYLER And used it this year. Knowing it was ours.

MINDY How could it be yours?

TYLER Because it tested out at sixty percent. Last year, it was thirty.

MINDY Last year?

TYLER Solo grew it two years —

MINDY Two years!

TYLER In a row. I bet Joe knows that. *(Pause)* Next year, it could be ninety percent. So you understand, you need to be on our contract.

Beat.

MINDY I want you to go, Tyler.

TYLER We'll talk again.

MINDY Now!

TYLER Think about my offer. *(Pause)* Tell Sky, sorry I missed her.

Tyler exits.

MINDY You've known for two years.

JOE I should have talked to Solo.

MINDY You should have talked to me.
JOE So I'm to blame?
MINDY You're getting sued!
JOE Because of Solo.
MINDY Because of you. Not Solo.
JOE Oh, you'll forgive him!
MINDY I have to. So should you.
JOE Not me. Not now.

Joe exits.

MINDY Where are you going?

Sound of the wind, potent.

MINDY What are you going to sing now? Make sure he hears you! Loud and clear! Oh. Joe!

Mindy is alone for a beat, then exits.

SCENE 7 Dream Bed

Solo and Sky make their way to an elevated area, looking over the land, at dusk.

SOLO I only found it a couple of years ago. One of those days I'm wandering out here aching for spring. It's grown over with old brush . . . but these stones, smooth as skin, catch my eye.
SKY What is this place?
SOLO A dream bed. The Blackfoot carried up these stones. They'd lay alone, fasting and thirsting for days.
SKY You can see all around.
SOLO On this side, most of that land is Joe's. Right up to this bluff. There, mixed up with all that bush, into the hills,

that's mine. Joe says, when you can see forever like this, you can see inside yourself.

SKY What do you see?

SOLO I see the land my father cleared, the sections I've opened up, and lots more to be done. Past, present, and future.

SKY I can imagine it in ruffling waves of yellow and green.

SOLO In this light, I see purple and red. Clouds are coming in. Changes colour again.

SKY This is a lighthouse and that is a calm sea.

SOLO You don't want to be up here in a bad wind.

SKY It's quiet now.

SOLO Not for long. Storm's rolling in.

SKY The land looks at rest. Neat and tidy.

SOLO Spent.

SKY Shorn.

SOLO Yeah. Shorn. And a little sad, too.

SKY Why?

SOLO Winter's coming. Creeping in, low and dark like those clouds.

SKY I want to know about winter. My dad couldn't stand it, especially on the farm.

SOLO Most people travel, to get away. Joe and Mindy used to. Joe said, to get an education.

SKY What do you do?

SOLO I have to work. Long hauls, mostly. I want to pick up a few courses, to finish, but so far, no time. . . . I play hockey. I play guitar.

SKY And sing to the coyotes?

SOLO Only ones who listen. Gotta do something or you go crazy. Crazy like a coyote.

SKY Like my dad.
SOLO I didn't mean —
SKY Didn't matter where he was, he never fit in.
SOLO What about you?
SKY My mother was my anchor.
SOLO And now?
SKY I'm adrift.

Beat.

SKY Do you know what happened with my dad?
SOLO Joe never said.
SKY They never spoke again.

Beat.

SKY I thought it was because of me.
SOLO Why?
SKY I look like my mother?
SOLO She was different.
SKY She needed people, lots of people. She loved teaching.
She loved an audience.
SOLO She was beautiful.

Beat.

SKY This is beautiful.

Beat.

SOLO I haven't shown this to anyone.
SKY Really?
SOLO Except Mindy and Joe.

SKY Oh.

SOLO Are they still worried, because of me?

Beat.

SKY They're anxious to get the lab results. To know how much their seed is changed.

SOLO Is there something I should do?

SKY Well, they've been saving for fifty years.

SOLO So, what do I owe them?

SKY I don't know. Fifty years of labour?

SOLO Huh. Anything else?

Beat.

SKY Their party is a few weeks away.

SOLO And then it's winter. At least for me.

SKY If you'll play for me, I've got a song.

SOLO Like, a performance?

SKY Yeah.

SOLO You mean for the whole crowd?

SKY Think of it as a gift.

SOLO I'm a pretty private guitar player.

SKY We could make it private.

SOLO Just them.

SKY And us.

SOLO I only know three chords.

SKY That's all you need.

SOLO I don't know. I think I'll take the fifty years of labour.

SKY I think they'd like this song. It's a bit different.

Beat.

SOLO How does it go?

SKY (*sings*) *Awake, O North Wind, and come thou South!*
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out.
Awake, O North Wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out.
Blow upon my garden.

SOLO What is that?

SKY It's from the *Song of Songs*.

SOLO Never heard of it.

SKY They say it's by King Solomon.

SOLO Oh, no.

SKY Is that where your name comes from?

SOLO Just call me Solo.

SKY My parents used to play it sometimes, at weddings.

SOLO We'd have to rehearse.

SKY Tomorrow?

SOLO Like every day. All day.

SKY I'll bring lunch.

Beat.

Joe enters.

JOE Who the hell do you think you are?

SKY Grandpa!

JOE You! First you tell them that my crop is contaminated.

SOLO Whoa, Joe!

JOE And this is the second year of it!

SKY Two years!

SOLO What's the difference?
JOE Now they're after me to pay!
SKY They're suing you?
SOLO No way.
JOE Intellectual property rights.
SKY On the seed?
SOLO They can do that?
JOE It's their gene in the seed.
SKY They own the patent on the gene.
SOLO I paid the royalty.
JOE On your side of the road.
SKY They can't accuse you without proof!
JOE They got proof! From him!
SOLO Not me!
SKY Tyler!
SOLO For research!
JOE What a sucker!
SOLO I didn't know they would sue!
JOE They want a fee on every acre! Fifteen dollars! Only
 a fool would pay that.
SOLO I want a future.
JOE I thought I taught you. I took up where your dad left off.
SOLO I'm not getting left behind!
JOE That stuff is gonna come and go to the border!
SOLO No way.
JOE Then, sure as shooting, across the bloody road!

Mindy enters.

SKY (To Solo) What about neighbours?

JOE What about friends?

The sound of the wind intensifies to the end of the scene.

SOLO Tell me what I can do here. How can I help you out?

JOE For starters, you can stay the hell away from my granddaughter!

SOLO Joe!

SKY Grandpa!

JOE She's got a boyfriend.

SOLO What?

SKY I don't believe this.

JOE Jeffrey, a big law professor in Toronto.

MINDY What are you doing?

SOLO You said you were alone.

SKY I never said that!

SOLO You didn't tell me about him!

SKY I've got a life!

SOLO In Toronto!

JOE Get outta my sight!

Beat.

SOLO You're on my land!

JOE And you're all over mine.

Solo exits without looking back.

SKY Solo!

MINDY Joe Brandt!

JOE I'm gonna ask Jeffrey to come out for a visit.

SKY So you can embarrass me some more?

JOE I want to talk to Jeffrey.

SKY He's none of your business!

JOE Get his professional opinion.

SKY Who do you think you are?

JOE They picked the wrong guy. I'm going to fight this. I don't care what it costs. All it takes is one farmer to stand up.

MINDY Then you'll stand alone. Without me.

Beat.
Mindy exits.

JOE Min.

JOE Sky.

SKY My dad told me to stay away from you! No wonder he cut himself off!

Sky starts to exit.

JOE Don't go.

SKY I was fourteen years old. We come up from the dugout, and he shoves us in the car in our wet bathing suits. Our stuff thrown in, bags spilling open. The car shoots gravel at Grandma! I see her fall! He screams at you for three hours until Mom gets him to pull over. The rest of the way to Toronto he won't talk. His eyes glaze over, like winter. We can't reach him. He goes every day, wandering, as if he is homeless. And then he was. I lost him. I lost you. I lost Grandma. I lost the farm. Mom had to work three jobs. Then he died. I sent you a map of where his ashes were because you didn't even say goodbye.

JOE We did. After harvest.

SKY You came?

JOE You were away with Jeffrey.

SKY Mom never told me.

JOE Mindy and me, we walked that ravine. We went in together and came out scattered, like.

*The wind intensifies.
Sky starts to exit again.*

JOE Sky? I need you here.

Joe is alone for a beat. Sky returns.

SKY So I can pay you back. *(Pause)* It's going to storm.
We have to find Grandma. Come on. Let's go!

*Joe follows Sky. They exit. Wind roars.
Blackout. Music.
End of Act One.*

ACT TWO

SCENE 1 Anniversary

Mindy is alone. Joe enters, getting ready for the party.

MINDY After we drive Sky to the airport, I'm going to Regina with the girls and the kids.

JOE The morning after our big day?

MINDY Would have gone that night right then and there if it wasn't for Sky.

JOE And the party.

MINDY It's not a party.

Joe puts his pouch in his good jacket pocket.

JOE It's for us.

MINDY It isn't about us anymore.

JOE How many are lucky enough to get to fifty years?

MINDY And put the work of fifty years into a lawsuit!

JOE That's why Sky set up the non-profit group.

MINDY That's your sack of ashes, not mine. And not hers!

JOE It's her present to us, for our anniversary!

MINDY You're asking our guests to donate money!

JOE People want to contribute.

MINDY Who ever heard of raffle tickets at a fiftieth?

JOE They do it, for a cause, in Toronto.

MINDY It's crass!

JOE Sky put a lot of effort into this.

MINDY I've hardly seen her, with you two always at the lawyers'. I should have gone to Regina.



The Seed Savers, Workshop West Theatre: Maralyn Ryan as Mindy; John Wright as Joe. Photo by Russ Hewitt.

SKY Sorry about rehearsal.
SOLO You were busy.
SKY In case I don't see you later tonight —
SOLO You're dancing with me.
SKY Then I won't say goodbye.

Beat.

SOLO Will you come back for the trial?
SKY I owe it to him. I should.
SOLO Bring your skates.
SKY I don't have any.
SOLO You want to know winter, get skates.

Solo warms up on the guitar.

Joe and Mindy come out into the yard.

JOE What's this about?
SKY We've got a song for you.
MINDY This is a surprise.
SOLO It's a gift.
SKY For you. For your fifty years.
MINDY Another present!
SKY Dad used to sing it. With Mom. So it's from him, too.

Sky cues Solo to start. He accompanies her.

SKY (*sings*) *Awake, O North wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out
Awake, O North wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden.
Let my beloved come to his garden,
and eat its choicest fruits.*

JOE You had your baking.
MINDY All for nothing.
JOE You're tired.
MINDY I'm tired of you, Joe Brandt, and I'm not going to your fundraiser!

Beat.

JOE Remember when we almost got tractored out by the bank?
MINDY The year Davey was born.
JOE We recovered because of our own good seed.
MINDY That seed is gone. Gone, like Davey.
JOE Which is why I have to do this.
MINDY Why, Joe. You threw it away. Like Davey. Then Solo. Now Sky.
JOE No!
MINDY I'm next.
JOE If I can't save the seed that grows on my own land, then what?
MINDY You're asking me?
JOE I didn't ask for this. This thing chose me.
MINDY Well, what if I choose, Joe. What then?
JOE You might hold on to the house if you get rid of me.

Beat.

MINDY Is that what you want?
JOE I don't want to do this alone.

Solo, with his guitar, enters the yard with Sky.

SOLO I said I would.
SKY You don't have to, if you don't want to.
SOLO Yeah, I do.

*I come to my garden, my sister, my bride;
I gather my myrrh with my spice,
I eat my honeycomb with my honey,
I drink my wine with my milk.
This is my beloved and this is my friend.
Awake, O North Wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out.
Awake, O North Wind, and come thou South!
Blow upon my garden.*

MINDY Is that your father's song?

SKY No. I never found any of his.

MINDY Neither did I.

SKY I wanted him here.

MINDY You bring him here for me.

Mindy hugs Sky.

MINDY (To Solo) I didn't know you could play?

JOE Who ever heard of wine with milk?

MINDY It's a love song, Joe. You're the wine and I'm the milk.

JOE Oh.

SOLO I should go.

SKY I'll go with you.

MINDY Sky, wait.

SKY Grandma, you better hurry up.

JOE C'mon, Min.

MINDY No.

JOE It's time to go.

MINDY I'm not going.

SKY What's the matter?

JOE She won't budge.

SKY Solo, could you — go open the bar?

SOLO I'll go open the bar.

Solo exits.

SKY Grandma?

MINDY I want to talk about Davey.

JOE Folks are waiting for us.

MINDY I've waited long enough. What did you say to him?

JOE For crying out loud!

SKY The day we left?

JOE Not now!

MINDY Sky is leaving tomorrow. And I'm not going any further with you, Joe Brandt, until I know.

SKY Grandpa.

MINDY Tell us what you did.

JOE I didn't do anything.

MINDY What did you tell him?

JOE I told him to go.

MINDY Because he wouldn't haul for you?

JOE Because he couldn't! Harvest was early that year. Hot and dry. There was a demented wind. Davey was tormented by it. I shouldn't have asked him. I should have known. But I needed another hand. He wouldn't get in the truck. So I leave him standing in the yard, with his hands over his ears. I drive off, but I forget . . . my iced tea. So I circle back, and from the kitchen, I see him, in the yard, carrying all his papers, his drawings, his music, his poems. Then he crawls inside the haystack! And sets it on fire! I'm pulling him out, rolling him on the ground. He won't take my hand. His eyes are blazing at me! That's when I tell him. "Go. Get help in the city.

The sooner the better.” Because I don’t know what to do for him! I’m hosing out the flames and then I hear his car take off.

Beat.

MINDY Oh, Davey.

JOE I didn’t tell you, for his sake.

MINDY You saved him.

JOE I didn’t know we’d never see him again.

MINDY (*To Sky*) Are you okay, dear?

SKY He wouldn’t talk about that day.

MINDY I wouldn’t have believed it.

JOE And now?

MINDY Now I know.

SKY (*To Joe*) You were protecting me.

MINDY And me.

SKY And mom.

JOE I didn’t know any better.

SKY No one did.

Beat.

JOE I want you to be with me, Min. Tonight and tomorrow.
(*Pause*) Are you with me?

MINDY I’ve been with you fifty years. Fifty years tonight. (*Pause*)
We’ll see about tomorrow. Come on. I need help with my zipper.

Mindy and Joe exit.

Music.



The Seed Savers, Workshop West Theatre: Maralyn Ryan as Mindy; David MacInnis as Solo; John Wright as Joe; Natasha Napoleao as Sky. Photo by Russ Hewitt.

SCENE 2 Winter

Music intensifies. A winter wind. Snow falls.

Solo, at the dugout, shovels snow. Solo hears the sound of the coyotes, but he doesn't call back to them.

Sky is in the kitchen. Joe sits. Mindy brings in some dough.

SKY I came back from Toronto for that?

JOE I'm not paying!

SKY After a whole winter of work!

MINDY Times like this, I make bread.

JOE "No matter how it got there," the judge said.

MINDY Nothing else will do.

SKY "No matter how it got there! By seed spillage. Blown in by wind or by germination. From pollen carried by insects, birds, or the wind!"

MINDY Now. You only need four things.

SKY Four things.

MINDY In ancient Egypt, they were female symbols.

JOE Oh, Lord.

MINDY The first thing is grain.

SKY Flour?

MINDY Before you grind it to flour.

SKY We're using flour.

MINDY Water.

SKY Water. That's the next thing they'll want!

JOE Put that judge on bread and water!

MINDY Salt.

SKY Salt of the earth!

MINDY And yeast.

SKY Yeast. I don't get it!

Mindy lets Sky knead the dough.

MINDY Women hold the grain of life within them. Water and salt in the womb. And, like the pregnant belly grows, yeast makes the dough rise.

SKY The ancient world wouldn't understand this ruling. Not patent law against farmers' rights. Not ownership of a life-giving form like a gene.

MINDY Oh, those pharaohs, they thought they were gods. They owned everything, even people. Look at all those slaves who built the pyramids.

SKY Can you own Nature?

JOE Not in my book.

MINDY We've got to have faith.

SKY Faith in the system?

JOE Faith in the seed.

MINDY "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, nothing will be impossible to you."

SKY Patent law is federal.

MINDY Oh, now, we've had enough of that. A whole winter, Sky.

SKY If we apply now, the Supreme Court might hear it this fall.

MINDY We've lost so much already.

JOE It's not about us anymore.

SKY There's really no other way.

MINDY At his age, Joe should be fishing.

JOE I'm not done yet!

Joe leaves the kitchen, goes to Solo, who is still shovelling.

SKY Grandpa's tough. So are you.

MINDY Me? Oh, I just want . . . spring.

Mindy exits.

SOLO I'm taking her skating.

JOE On thin ice.

Beat.

SOLO I don't get why they didn't pay attention to the wind.

JOE Why the hell didn't you?

Beat.

SOLO They said you should have known.

JOE That's between me and the telephone pole.

Beat.

SOLO Woulda thought twice if I knew it would come to this.

JOE You shoulda asked me.

SOLO I don't need to ask your permission!

JOE I wouldn't let you open the bag.

SOLO Joe, I got the right to grow what I want.

JOE You do. And so do I. That's why I'm going to the Supreme Court.

SOLO No way.

JOE They put a lien on my property. I can't borrow or sell or take any profit.

SOLO You just have to pay up!

JOE Not me.

SOLO But Joe. You'll lose your farm.

JOE Not if I win.

SOLO How can you win?

JOE I couldn't look Sky in the face if I didn't fight it. With everything I've got.

SOLO Huh.

Mindy enters, uncovers bread.

MINDY What will you do, Sky, if Joe goes to the Supreme Court?
SKY The first thing is get him a new lawyer.
MINDY That office needs more lawyers.
SKY I mean, a specialist.
MINDY What about Jeffrey?
SKY Not Jeffrey.
MINDY Oh?
SKY Yeah . . . and he found me an articling position.
MINDY When do you start?
SKY Soon. But if there's a hearing . . .
MINDY You'd stay?
SKY I don't know.
MINDY Well, then. That settles it.

*Mindy and Sky leave the bread on the table and exit.
Solo, with his skates, and Joe make their way back to the house.*

SOLO You smell that? Fresh bread.
JOE The woman's baking again.
SOLO You're a lucky man.
JOE Then you go in and tell her I'm going back to court.
SOLO I'm right behind you.

*Sky and Mindy exit with the bread.
Joe exits.*

SCENE 3 Sales Call

Tyler is in his office. Music.

TYLER Hey, dude.

SOLO Hi. Good trip?

TYLER Too bad you couldn't make it.

SOLO How was the fishing?

TYLER I dunno. I got kinda busy.

SOLO With a girl?

TYLER Yeah. Now she wants to move here!

SOLO Huh.

TYLER So how's it going with Sky girl?

SOLO How do you think? She's pretty wound up.

TYLER Who thought Joe would make it to the Supreme Court?

SOLO Sky.

TYLER At least you're making time with her.

SOLO Not if I sign with you.

TYLER What? You don't let a girl get in the way of your contract!

SOLO I've got another chance here.

TYLER Whoa, buddy.

SOLO I gotta make it count.

TYLER You'd chuck it all for her?

SOLO To show her how I feel.

TYLER Not like that!

SOLO How do I make her stay?

Beat.

TYLER You're seeding twenty percent more product this year. That's the plan.

SOLO Yeah, but how can I?

TYLER You wanna be like Joe?

SOLO How do you mean?

TYLER He's risking it all. To prove himself. To her!

SOLO I just want to farm.

Tyler pushes the contract at Solo.

TYLER This is what you do.

SOLO What about Sky?

TYLER Talk to her!

SOLO What do I say?

TYLER That's the fun part.

SOLO Right.

TYLER You'll figure it out.

SOLO What happens when Joe loses?

TYLER Forget Joe.

SOLO I can't do this, man.

TYLER You gotta save your ass, or you have nothing to offer her.

SOLO That's the bottom line. *(Pause)* Give her here.

Solo signs the contract and pushes the contract at Tyler.

TYLER Don't worry. Wait 'til she smells spring on the prairie.

SOLO Spring. Can't get here fast enough.

TYLER Take it slow.

SOLO I gotta get to work. Driving to Calgary.

TYLER Happy farming.

SOLO Hey, I have to give this back.

Solo hands the leather jacket to Tyler.

TYLER Go get her.

Tyler exits. Solo exits.



The Seed Savers, Workshop West Theatre: David MacInnis as Solo and Jesse Gervais as Tyler.
Photo by Russ Hewitt.

SCENE 4 Planting Trees

Sky enters with a wheelbarrow full of bare-branched small saplings.

Sky starts planting the trees.

Solo enters.

SOLO Taking a break from the file boxes?

SKY I thought you'd be seeding.

SOLO I saw your truck.

SKY I'm making a windbreak.

SOLO The wind comes from the northwest.

Solo changes the direction of her row.

SKY I want to protect this field from that one.

Sky changes the row back.

SOLO From mine.

Beat.

SKY I hope I'm not too early. The nursery said as long as there's no more frost.

SOLO You can tell by the smell of the earth.

Solo takes a handful and holds it up to her.

SKY So that's spring.

SOLO Like the scent of a newborn. Won't last. Next time, it's gone.

SKY How do you know about babies?

SOLO Calving.

SKY Calving.

*Sky and Solo keep planting, on either side of the trees.
Mindy and Joe bring a basket.*

MINDY What's she doing?

JOE Can't build a fence high enough.

MINDY She works without rest.

Beat.

JOE Will she stay, Min? Will she stay for the farm?

MINDY I know that a girl who comes from the city to work on
a farm stays on the farm for a man.

JOE So it depends on him?

MINDY He works without reward.

JOE That's up to her.

MINDY No, Joe. It's up to you.

JOE Me?

MINDY To her, you matter like mountains.

Beat.

JOE What about Jeffrey?

MINDY Oh, Jeffrey.

JOE Has he called lately?

MINDY Oh, he's called.

JOE You talked to him?

MINDY When he calls, Sky's always busy!

JOE Getting a little crafty now, aren't ya, Min?

MINDY No use throwing fertilizer on that situation.

Beat.

JOE She belongs here.
MINDY And Solo?
JOE She's the one fencing him out!
MINDY Just don't you stand between them.

Beat.
Joe and Mindy exit.
Solo stops.

SOLO Can we rest a bit?
SKY You can.
SOLO Have you got any water?
SKY For the trees.
SOLO Will you talk to me?

Beat.

SOLO Why won't you see me?
SKY I'm planting.

Beat.

SOLO I'll let it go fallow.
SKY So no canola.
SOLO I'll rotate it further south.
SKY It's already in the garden. It's going to come up here, too.
SOLO Then I'll rogue it.
SKY What?
SOLO Pull it out.
SKY By hand?
SOLO You have to do it here, too. More than once.
SKY Like, forever.

SOLO I will if you will.

Beat.

SKY Why should I throw my life away to pick your weeds?

SOLO You left Jeffrey.

SKY So?

SOLO Why did you come back?

SKY This place.

SOLO Here.

SKY I'm different here.

SOLO I'm here.

SKY This is not about you.

Beat.

SOLO I waited all winter. I even read the *Song of Songs*.

SKY I read files all winter. And now we have to go to Ottawa. But we could lose the farm! I lost this place once. Now I'm losing it again.

SOLO No. Not if you're with me.

SKY Because of you!

SOLO Because of me.

Music.

Solo exits to the dream bed. Sky watches him go, then kicks over a sapling. Joe enters.

JOE In the country, you get to know yourself better. Sometimes, you're all you've got to rely on. But you need your friends, too. Huh. That's why your Grandma talks to the wind!

SKY Wish I could do that.

JOE Wish your father did. Might have saved him.
SKY This wind never lets you go!
JOE Best place for the wind is up on the dream bed.

Joe exits with the wheelbarrow.

SCENE 5 Desert

Sky makes her way up to the dream bed.

SOLO You should go.
SKY I should.
SOLO Then, go.
SKY I can't.
SOLO Why?
SKY Because I have lost my mother, and this is where my
 father came from.
SOLO Then go to Egypt.
SKY Why?
SOLO Where your mother came from.
SKY I can't go to Egypt.

Beat.

SOLO It's about as far away from me as you can get.
SKY That's not what I want.

Beat.

SOLO Then let me take you to Egypt in the winter.
SKY Solo —

SOLO To know where the other part of you comes from.

SKY I need to be here. Stand up to the wind, because Dad couldn't. Know how to be alone, because Mom didn't. Learn about happiness, what they never taught me. Why I love it here. Why I feel I'm home.

SOLO Home.

SKY I want a past, a present, and a future.

Beat.

SOLO I know what you can do.

SKY What?

Beat.

SOLO Work Joe's farm.

SKY Me? How?

SOLO It's the work. Makes you part of all this.

SKY But I'm not a farmer.

SOLO It's in your blood.

SKY There's so much to know!

SOLO You'll figure it out. That's the fun part.

SKY What about articling?

SOLO Spring comes once a year.

Beat.

SKY Teach me?

SOLO Teach me about you?

Beat.

SKY I will if you will.

Beat.

SOLO You could put peas and oats there.
SKY The peas climb the oats.
SOLO There, lentils.
SKY Green or red?
SOLO Red.
SKY Wheat?
SOLO Hard red spring wheat.
SKY Barley?
SOLO Maybe.
SKY I need some yellow.
SOLO Mustard?
SKY Mustard.
SOLO Or if you want . . . I've got something old.
SKY Is it a good yellow?
SOLO It's pure. I saved it . . . for you.

Music. Solo exits. Sky goes to Joe.

SCENE 6 Truck Tour Two

Sky and Joe are in the truck, but this time Sky drives.

SKY You can't just leave it.
JOE Hell I can't.
SKY There's still time.
JOE I'm not working to hand it over to them.
SKY Would you let me?

JOE You?

SKY Only what you think I can handle.

JOE Son of a gun.

SKY It would just be some seed.

JOE Fuel, and fertilizer.

SKY I'm paying. It's from Mom.

Beat.

JOE Not canola.

SKY Well . . .

JOE What, then?

SKY That field, wheat. Red hard spring wheat.

JOE Hard red grows good there.

SKY Hard red. And barley there.

JOE No. Barley likes more moisture than you get there. Flax.

SKY Okay. Flax.

JOE What else?

SKY What about lentils. Red lentils.

JOE Good. And put some mustard in over there. For your yellow. Is that enough for ya?

Beat.

SKY I'll try not to bother you. I can always ask Solo.

JOE Yes, you can.

Beat.

SKY If it fails, then who cares where it goes.

JOE It won't fail.

Beat.

JOE What about the city? Are you done with it, then?

SKY I'm not my dad.

Music. Sky exits.

SCENE 7 Moving On Up

Solo meets Tyler in town, outside the bank.

TYLER Hey, I've been looking all over town for you.

SOLO I've been helping Sky open a new field up by the bluffs.

TYLER Breaking new ground?

SOLO Just trying something.

TYLER So it's going okay.

SOLO Ah, she's going soon.

TYLER She's been going for a long time.

SOLO After the hearing, back to Toronto.

TYLER You gonna visit her?

SOLO I don't know. All I know is farming.

TYLER You'll know what to do. You're a smart farmer.

SOLO I'd go bugs doing anything else.

TYLER Someone's gotta feed the country.

SOLO Feed the world.

TYLER Keep me in business.

SOLO Yeah, I heard!

TYLER Why I love this place.

SOLO Life on the farm.

TYLER Everyone knows before it happens.

SOLO Regional office?

TYLER Winnipeg.

SOLO Good for you.

TYLER Hey, want to get some beer? Show me your little experiment?

SOLO I should get going. She's waiting.

TYLER If you go to Toronto, stop in the 'Peg, eh?

SOLO Maybe.

TYLER And when I'm back for my mom, you and me, we're going fishing.

SOLO Yeah. See ya.

TYLER So long, Solo.

Solo exits.

Mindy and Joe enter with shopping for their trip.

MINDY Look, Joe.

TYLER Hey, folks.

MINDY Tyler.

TYLER So. The Supreme Court of Canada.

MINDY Nature is not for sale.

TYLER You own the land.

MINDY Nature will have her way.

TYLER We're going to win.

MINDY We'll see about that.

JOE We have a right to grow what we want.

TYLER What will make you a profit.

JOE What grows best on our own land, from our best crops. The ancient right of farmers.

TYLER The ancient right of business is pay for what you get.

JOE Yeah. Heard you got transferred.

TYLER Promoted.

JOE Let me guess. Public relations.

TYLER Yeah.

MINDY Well, we're going on TV!

TYLER Oh? I'll have to hear what you say about Sky's secret test plot.

JOE What?

TYLER Watch my smoke, old man.

Tyler exits. Mindy exits.

SCENE 8 Field Check

Joe and Solo go to the dream bed.

JOE This better be good.

SOLO You can see it from up here. There.

JOE I told her no canola!

SOLO This is yours, from before.

JOE But they seized all mine! "Evidence!"

SOLO You always gave me plenty.

Beat.

JOE You can't certify it.

SOLO That's not why we're doing it.

JOE Huh. You won't get rich on romance.

SOLO Romance. Huh.

JOE What do you call it?

SOLO Mending fences?

JOE What if you get sued?

SOLO We pre-tested the seed.

JOE Think these bluffs will protect it, do ya?

SOLO On the north. There's a wide fallow belt on the other sides. It's away from the roads. No canola for acres around.

JOE Huh.

SOLO Looks good, eh?

JOE You put in some sulphur?

SOLO Just like you.

JOE You going to test it after?

SOLO That's the plan.

JOE Best cash crop I ever had.

SOLO It likes the bush soil.

JOE Mindy will like it, anyway.

SOLO Don't tell her yet.

JOE You trying to get me in trouble?

SOLO Let's see how it grows out first.

JOE Looks as good as it ever did.

SOLO At least we'll know we've got it.

JOE Huh. Better than the windbreak idea. But not much.

Joe exits.

SCENE 9 First Crop

Sky, with her suitcases, meets Solo in the yard. He has a bunch of wheat stalks for her. Sound of geese.

SOLO So.

SKY So?

SOLO Ottawa.

SKY Could be a landmark decision.

SOLO I'll look after the farm.

SKY It's goodbye to the farm.

SOLO This is for you.

Solo gives her the wheat.

SKY I'm going to miss harvest . . .

SOLO Should be getting started right away.

SKY . . . the sound of the wheat moving.

SOLO I'll send you photos of the colours.

SKY It's good, isn't it?

SOLO It's excellent. You really get it. The work. The risk.

SKY The time.

SOLO I'll let you know about our canola.

SKY My first crop.

SOLO Stay in touch?

Joe and Mindy enter.

JOE Well, this is it, for us.

MINDY I just hope we have a house to come back to.

JOE There could be a padlock on the door.

MINDY Oh, don't.

JOE A "for sale" sign in the yard.

MINDY Don't say that!

JOE Might have to move to Regina.

MINDY Wouldn't be so bad.

JOE We're two little round seeds, Min.

MINDY As long as we're together.

Joe takes out his pouch.

JOE This might be all that's left, in the end.

Joe tosses it in the air and catches it.

MINDY Let's go. I can't look back. C'mon, Sky.

SKY Wait. I'm an observer on this case. But it's my crop.

JOE If we lose, it goes straight to hell.

SKY It's my promise in that seed.

SOLO Sky, let me do it for you.

SKY It should be me.

SOLO But it's the Supreme Court.

SKY I need to be here.

Beat.

MINDY We have to hang on to the farm, that's all there is to it!

JOE (*To Sky*) You sure?

SKY Yes!

Joe tosses the pouch to Solo.

JOE I want you to keep this.

SOLO With everything I've got.

Joe pats Solo on the back.

MINDY (To Solo) Nature has us all in her hand.

Solo picks up the suitcases to follow Joe, but Joe takes the suitcases.

JOE It's okay. You've got better things to do. Good luck.

SOLO You, too.

Mindy and Joe exit.

SOLO So.

SKY So?

SOLO Harvest.

SKY Yeah.

SOLO Anything else?

SKY Maybe.

SOLO Like what?

SKY Feel like a walk?

SOLO Where?

SKY We haven't gone to the dream bed all summer.

SOLO "O my Dove."

SKY What's that?

SOLO One of the *Songs*.

SKY What's it about?

SOLO It's about you.

SKY Tell me.

SOLO When we get there.

Sky takes Solo's hand.

SCENE 10 Supreme Court

Mindy and Joe are in the Winnipeg airport and look out at a TV monitor. Tyler checks the departures list.

TYLER Gate 21. Delayed.

MINDY Look, Joe! There we are again! Just like the wind!
We're in two places at once.

JOE You look . . . different, Min.

MINDY It's all that makeup.

JOE Look how they did your hair!

MINDY You look good, too, Joe.

JOE (v.o.) We gave up going to school to farm.

MINDY(v.o.) A tough row to hoe, but we did it. So did everyone else.

Tyler spots Mindy and Joe.

TYLER I guess I should congratulate you.

Beat.

MINDY You go right ahead.

TYLER Heard you didn't win, but you don't have to pay.

JOE Not one red cent.

MINDY Our farm is our farm. Our house is our house.

JOE So how's Winnipeg?

TYLER On my way to meetings in Toronto. Gonna call Sky.

MINDY Oh?

TYLER Next weekend, I fly to Chicago.

JOE You just keep moving on up.

TYLER You must be heading home for harvest.

JOE Oh, we're not farming anymore!

MINDY Heavens, no.

JOE Not with the work laid out for us now.

MINDY We're travelling again! Speaking engagements!

JOE This winter, India and Thailand.

MINDY Europe in the spring. All expenses paid!

JOE Now, we gotta protect our wheat.

MINDY Then there's my lawsuit. Did you hear about that?

TYLER Don't think I did.

MINDY I had that rogue canola hand-pulled from my organic garden. And sent the company the bill.

JOE They refused to pay!

MINDY So I'm suing them! For how it spreads!

JOE That's my girl.

TYLER Good luck with that.

JOE Oh, look. I like this part.

MINDY Oh, let's go, Joe.

JOE Bye, son. Watch my smoke.

Mindy, Joe exit.

Tyler watches the monitor.

MINDY (v.o.) The company is responsible. I can't let them get away with that. What would we say to our granddaughter?

JOE (v.o.) She's a lawyer and a farmer. Just brought in her first harvest. Hi, Sky!

MINDY (v.o.) We love you, Sky!

TYLER Where's the bar?

Music.

Tyler exits.

EPILOGUE Song of Songs

Mindy and Joe are on the dream bed.

JOE Would you look at that.
MINDY Is it the blue heron? Come to welcome us?
JOE No, not the heron.
MINDY What, then?
JOE The bull found his way over the fence.

Sound of splashing, off, laughing.

MINDY Cinnamon and salt!
JOE Like a pair of otters. Makes me feel young again,
 healthy as a fish.
MINDY Oh, Joe.
JOE Heat steaming off 'em, splashin' to beat sixty.
MINDY Let's go. Before they see us.
JOE Remember when we used to do that? How 'bout a little
 swim?
MINDY Go on with you.
JOE Come on, Min.
MINDY Hush, Joe!
JOE Last one in is a rotten egg!
MINDY Leave them be!

Beat.

JOE As long as you hold on to me.
MINDY Like the prairie holds down the hills.

Mindy and Joe hold on to each other.

JOE Oh, look! Standing, on the point.
MINDY There he is!
JOE Hungry for his daily fish.
MINDY Holding fast. Blue against the reeds.
JOE Never get tired of that blue.
MINDY Oh, I need it.
JOE Looks like a king. Looking out for us, like.
MINDY We're home, Joe. We're home.

*Joe and Mindy watch the heron from the light of the sunset on the dream bed.
Sky and Solo enter.
Sound of wind.*

SKY “Set me as a seal upon your heart
 as a seal upon your arm
 for love is strong as death”
SOLO “My beloved is mine
SKY and I am his
SOLO Until the day breathes
SKY and the shadows flee.”

*Solo kisses Sky.
Sound of the wind, playful.
The far-off sound of a coyote.
Music. Fade to black.*

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