

DORNEY YC

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HOOP JUMPER

**By Vicki Lynn Mooney
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DƏPΛPƏY YC
HOOP JUMPER

Cast of Characters In Order of Appearance

- W. W. Hastings/Chuskey Hogtoter - Dual role as Cherokee tribal Official and I.T. Outlaw. Cherokee. About 35+
- Commissioner Needles/Cal Cummings - Dual Role as Federal Dawes Rolls interrogator and I.T. Outlaw. 40+
- Weli (William Wimsey) - A Cherokee barber. 43.
- Florence Cuthbert Wimsey - Weli's white wife. 29.
- Josiah Cuthbert - Florence's father, White, 52.
- Aunt Jane - Weli's sister/mother Creek-Cherokee. 54.

Setting

November 8, 1900
 Claremore and Tulsa, Cherokee Nation
 Indian Territory

ACT I

SCENE 1

CLAREMORE, INDIAN TERRITORY, NOVEMBER 8, 1900, THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR TO THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES AND A CHEROKEE TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVE MEET TO INTERVIEW WILLIAM WIMSEY AND DETERMINE HIS ELIGIBILITY FOR TRIBAL LAND ALLOTMENTS.

MR. HASTINGS

In the matter of the application of William Wimsey for the enrolment of himself and children as Cherokees by blood and his wife as a Cherokee by intermarriage; being sworn and examined by Commissioner Needles.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

What is your name?

WELI

William Wimsey.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

How old are you?

WELI

I was born in 1858, I think.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

How many years old are you?

WELI

That would make me 43.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

What is your post office?

WELI

Tulsa.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

What district do you live in?

WELI

I live in this district.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Are you a recognized citizen of the Cherokee Nation?

WELI

I can't decide that, I don't know. I have lived here all my life.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Your name on any of the rolls of the Cherokee Nation?

WELI

Yes sir, I guess so. I have drawed all the moneys that have been paid out; I don't think it is on the 1880 roll, I wasn't in the country.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Where were you?

WELI

I was going to school in the Creek Nation.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Who do you want to enroll?

WELI

I want to enroll myself, my wife, and two daughters.

MR. HASTINGS

I see you are here on the 1886 roll. What is the name of your wife?

WELI

Florence.

MR. HASTINGS

Is she a citizen by blood?

WELI

She is a white woman.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Have you got a certificate of marriage to her?

WELI

Yes, sir.

(Hands over his documentation.)

MR. HASTINGS

(To the Commissioner.)

A certificate of marriage certified that he was married to one Florence Cuthbert on the 9th day of April, 1887.

(To Weli)

What are the names of your children now?

WELI

I have them right on this, and their ages.

(Hands document to Mr.

Hastings.)

MR. HASTINGS

Emma born in 1888 and Alma, 9 years old.

WELI

Yes sir.

MR. HASTINGS

(Checks another document)

He appears on the 1894 roll along with Emma and Alma.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Are these children alive and living with you?

WELI

Yes sir.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Is Florence your first wife?

WELI

Yes sir.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

You her first husband?

WELI

Yes, I guess so. She was very young when we were married.

MR. HASTINGS

Is she living with you now?

WELI

Yes sir.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Why isn't your name on the roll of 1880?

WELI

I tell you I was going to school in the Creek Nation with my sister. She was the only one capable of taking care of me.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Where was your father?

WELI

He was dead.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

You are not the son of Robert Wimsey?

WELI

No sir, he was my half-brother.

MR. HASTINGS

Did you have the same father?

WELI

I guess so; William Wimsey was recognized as our father.

MR. HASTINGS

Who was your mother?

WELI

She was a white woman from Tennessee. She died when I was a baby. I never heard her name mentioned. My sister hated her and my sister raised me.

(beat)

I never had any trouble drawing money before. I drew my father's money and my Uncle George's money.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Have you always been recognized by the Cherokee Nation as a citizen?

WELI

Why of course, I reckon. I don't know why anyone might have doubted me, but I always have drawn my money and then I just went on. Of course I wouldn't question anything about it.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Your name is not on the roll of 1880.

WELI

Of course I am not on the 1880 roll. I know exactly the reason and you do too, since I have told you! I was born in the Cherokee Nation and married in the Cherokee Nation and lived in the Cherokee Nation!

MR. HASTINGS

Where were you born?

WELI

Over on the Grand River in the Cherokee Nation.

MR. HASTINGS

Your father was a recognized citizen?

WELI

He was an old settler Cherokee; he came here in 1826.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

He died before 1880?

WELI

He died in the South during the war, in 1865.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Had he lived here and been a citizen up here?

WELI

He died during the war.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

You said he died in the South?

WELI

He died during the war; he was with the rebels. My father has been dead for 36 years.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

When did your mother die?

WELI

My mother has been dead ever since the day I was born.

MR. HASTINGS

Who have you been living with since?

WELI

My sister brought me up and put me through school. I have been living with myself pretty near twelve years.

MR. HASTINGS

Where were you married?

WELI

Right north of Tulsa in the Cherokee Nation.

MR. HASTINGS

When?

WELI

In 1887.

MR. HASTINGS

Been living in the Cherokee Nation ever since?

WELI

Yes sir. I am on the same place now.

MR. HASTINGS

You drew this Old Settler money?

WELI

Yes sir. My father's and my step-father's, George Wimsey.

MR. HASTINGS

Did you draw in 1894?

WELI

Yes sir. Drew the Strip money.

MR. HASTINGS

Did you draw in 1891?

WELI

I drew in every payment that has been paid out in the Cherokee Nation that I know anything about. If I am not a citizen, I don't want it at all.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Do you know if your citizenship has ever been questioned?

WELI

I don't know whether it has or not.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Ever heard of it?

WELI

Well, I know when I went to get on the 1896 roll it caused me to go to Tahlequah.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

What did they tell you in Tahlequah?

WELI

I don't know.

MR. HASTINGS

Did you go before the Revising Committee?

WELI

Yes sir.

MR. HASTINGS

And they put you on the roll of 1896?

WELI

Yes sir. They put my name on; you found the names there.

MR. HASTINGS

I certainly did.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Mr. Wimsey, I will ask you to step outside for a moment while we discuss your application.

WELI

Did I say something wrong?

MR. HASTINGS

No, you did not. This won't take long. If you please.

Weli gets up from his chair leaving the two gentlemen to debate his future.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

He seems wrong to me. Something about him.

MR. HASTINGS

What?

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Notes in the old files say he's five-eighths, yet he is applying as a quarter-blood.

MR. HASTINGS

By now, Commissioner, everyone knows that anyone who claims more than a half will likely be appointed a guardian who will surely rob them blind. His people, the Old Settlers who came here in 1826, were mostly full-bloods. He could not possibly be five-eighths if his mother was a white woman.

Maybe he's just being honest.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

But, he seemed scared. What's he scared of?

MR. HASTINGS

I imagine that would be you, Commissioner, and the fearsome power of United States Government. He's afraid that you are going to try to cheat him out of his inheritance. He has all the proper documentation.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

He left the Nation; that disqualifies him.

MR. HASTINGS

He didn't leave Indian Territory, which is the point of that law, I believe. This man went to trade school in the Muskogee Nation which is on the border of the Cherokee Nation, a boundary drawn by politicians, and all contained within Indian Territory. We encourage our children to go to school. That brief absence will not hold as a disqualification.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

He didn't like my questions.

MR. HASTINGS

He answered your questions politely; I think he was insulted by your tone...as I would have been.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Does that mean you're going to accept everyone who comes through here, no matter what I say?

MR. HASTINGS

Do you have any idea how many Cherokee are not coming in here to sign up because of what you say? You are doing a fine job; nobody wants to talk to you! People are being jailed for not signing up. People have been hanged for telling others not to sign up! The richest, whitest ones don't come because they don't need land allotments; they've got plenty. The poorest Cherokees, mostly full bloods who would benefit the most, don't come here because they don't have paperwork or speak English and they don't want you to know who or where they are. Cherokees like Mr. Wimsey, those who have a white wife or husband, show up in droves because the white spouse is on their tail night and day to come down here and grab up that land allotment.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Oh, you know that is going on and you'll still let them in? That's acceptable to you?

MR. HASTINGS

His proof of Cherokee blood is acceptable to the tribe. His children are also of Cherokee blood and acceptable to the tribe.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

If my opinion doesn't matter, then why am I here?

MR. HASTINGS

You'll have to ask Washington, Commissioner Needles. We didn't ask you to be here. We don't need you here, but for some reason they think they do. This is not federal land to be distributed. This is tribal land that is reserved for tribal people only, and only the tribe may decide who belongs to us and who does not.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

But, we will be paying for every single person accepted onto the rolls and all their descendents -- in perpetuity! We can't let you just run up the numbers!

MR. HASTINGS

We will not allow the United States Government to run our numbers down any more than you already have. Telegraph the President if you must, Commissioner, but the tribe is the final arbiter of who is or is not Cherokee. Mr. Wimsey meets the criteria.

Mr. Hastings takes Weli's application and signs it, then pushes it toward the Commissioner to sign.

COMMISSIONER NEEDLES

Under protest.

(He signs.)

MR. HASTINGS

Noted.

Mr. Hastings goes to the door and motions Weli back into the room.

Weli enters but remains standing.

MR. HASTINGS (CONT'D)

(Seating himself and indicating the Commissioner.)

We are in agreement that William Wimsey and both his children as enumerated in the testimony will be duly listed for enrollment as Cherokee citizens by blood and his wife, Florence, as a Cherokee citizen by intermarriage.

Mr. Hastings stands to shake Weli's hand.

Good luck, Mr. Wimsey. Donadagohvi, Weli. (doh-nah-go-huh'-ee, welly) (Let's see each other again, William)

WELI

Wado, Mr. Hastings. Donadagohvi. (Thanks: wah-doe') (I hope to see you again: doh-nah-go-huh'-ee)

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 2

November 8, 1900 - A cloudless, glorious Fall afternoon in Tulsa, Indian Territory. Florence sits on her front porch stitching a sash back onto her youngest daughter's pinafore when her father arrives for a visit.

FLO

Father, hello!

JOSIAH

Telegram from mother!

FLO

Oh, do read it to me!

JOSIAH

Girls having wonderful time in St. Louis. Cotillion tomorrow, Emma in blue, Alma in pink. Respectfully, Mrs. Cuthbert.

FLO

So funny. She signs herself Mrs. Cuthbert to you.

JOSIAH

That's my pet name for her. Does your husband not have a pet name for you?

FLO

None that I particularly enjoy.

JOSIAH

(Shivers)

Are your fingers not cold?

FLO

The light is much better out here on the porch. Sit beside me out of the wind.

(She takes the basket of mending off the rustic bench where she sits and motions for her father to join her. He takes a seat.)

JOSIAH

Much better. Now, if only there were a dram of whiskey to warm my chilly bones.

FLO

I can make you some tea if you like.

JOSIAH

I'm sure Weli wouldn't begrudge me a drink.

FLO

You know well that Weli doesn't drink. We don't keep whiskey by.

JOSIAH

Not even for medicinal purposes?

FLO

The tribes promote temperance. Weli says it is because they have lost so much because of drink and therefore Weli will not drink. I believe he has made a pledge to the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance.

JOSIAH

Well, if he's not out carousing where is he? The sign on the barber shop said Closed this morning.

FLO

William went to Claremore yesterday! It's only taken two solid years of encouragement, but he finally took our application all the way to Claremore to get us on the Dawes Rolls.

JOSIAH

Encouragement!

(Laughs)

I like that!

FLO

I do hope he will stand up for himself. He is so retiring; he's not the kind of husband who likes to take charge.

JOSIAH

Do you not enjoy having a husband who always dances to your tune?

FLO

It isn't as if he does what I say, but he begs my decision on everything.

JOSIAH

That is the Cherokee way. The man sits in the bow of the canoe and paddles; the lady sits to the aft and steers.

FLO

Well, I am not Cherokee. That is not my way. I wish he had more gumption.

JOSIAH

Providing Weli does stand up for himself today, think how rich you would be if you added on another child or two. The Rolls will remain open for several more years.

FLO

I am content to have my girls nearly grown.

JOSIAH

Simply consider...

(beat)

I met the young man Emma will marry today.

FLO

Oh, father. Emma won't turn twelve until next August!

JOSIAH

She's filling out to become quite womanly.

FLO

What a thing for you to notice, Grandpa! Emma is a child.

JOSIAH

Of course she is now, but in two or three years, she'll be ready. This fellow comes with his father's cartage business attached.

FLO

Emma still plays with dolls; she has never so much as batted an eyelash at a boy, much less had a beau!

JOSIAH

It is never too early to think of the future, Florence!

FLO

That will be easier once we know our disposition on the rolls.

JOSIAH

That's my girl. What to do with all that land, eh?

FLO

That is what you are thinking, Father; not I.

JOSIAH

I pray you turn your gentle thoughts in that direction, my dear, to the happy benefit of all. It pays to plan ahead.

FLO

(Nervous tic)

How many years did we live in the wilderness? Seven little girls and you and mother camping in a tent because white people weren't supposed to be in Indian Territory...

JOSIAH

Those were the days! That's when I built my ice house, which is still making money. Ice is treasure in the summer heat.

FLO

And, when you told us we were moving to town and that eight mouths were too many to feed and that I, being the eldest, would be married to a man I didn't know and that the baby, little Amandy, would be going with that Indian woman all within the fortnight... Remember how we cried?

JOSIAH

And now that Indian woman is your mother-in-law, and of all my girls, you and Amanda have done the best.

FLO

But, was that the plan?

JOSIAH

Darling, it was a necessity. Now, come for a kiss.

(She kisses his cheek.)

I have a surprise for you. Since the girls are both getting new party frocks, their pretty mother should get a new party frock. I have a French seamstress coming to my house to take your measurements and bringing bolts and bolts of silk for you to choose from. I'll be back to fetch you when she arrives.

(Josiah stands then bends to
kiss Florence on the

forehead.)

I pray Weli brings good news.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE 3

Weli returns from his Dawes Commission interview. Flo leaps up to greet him; she has been waiting all day for the news.

FLO

How did it go?

WELI

Me and the girls are in by blood. You are in by intermarriage.

FLO

Members of the tribe?

WELI

Our application is approved!

FLO

Does that mean I'll get my own acreage?

WELI

I don't know, honey; I guess you will. I married you in, but it's still up to the tribe to adopt you.

FLO

But if we are approved by the Government, surely my adoption by the tribe is just a formality.

WELI

I didn't know that.

FLO

How exciting to think I will have land of my own!

WELI

Well, I hope you choose your plot next to mine.

FLO

Will you draw land allotments for your father and for your uncle like you did on the money payments?

WELI

That's all changed now; them days are gone. I have a feeling that we're gonna get this one thing and never get nothing else forevermore. IF the land allotment even comes through.

FLO

Of course it will come true! That's the treaty!

WELI

If you can show me one treaty that ever worked out so they did what they were supposed to do, then I will believe everything will come out all hunky-dory.

FLO

Why must you provoke me so? I wanted to be here to greet you! I couldn't wait to hear the good news!

WELI

Of course, it's good news! What am I thinking? Are you happy, sweetheart? Are you?

FLO

I am proud of you, William. Yes, I am happy.

WELI

I can't wait to tell the girls! They can come back from St. Louie now, right? I signed up. That was the deal, init?

FLO

Now that we know what our status will be you and I need to plan very carefully. We don't need the girls in the way.

WELI

When are our girls ever in the way? I signed up more for them than I did for myself!

FLO

For yourself and the girls. I see! Being white makes me last in line.

WELI

I probably would have walked out of that hearing if it wasn't for you and the girls. You don't know what I went through yesterday.

FLO

Was it anything like childbirth, William? Because that's what I went through for you - twice!

WELI

Who do you think I went down there for? That's what you said you wanted. I did it, but you're still not happy. Of course, I did it for you!

FLO

Sometimes you are impossible!

WELI

What's impossible about me? All I ever wanted was a family. Maybe I don't know how to make one because I never had one but that's what I wanted and you gave that to me. I will always love you. I love my girls beyond love. Is there anything at all that I can do to make you happy, Flo?

FLO

You did make me happy today, William. Please don't fret. Here, come for a kiss.

(Weli moves close and they kiss.
Afterwards she leans into him and lets
him hold her, he would kiss her again
but she softly, politely pulls away.)

The strangest thing, Weli. What would you say if I told you that I'm starting to crave another baby?

WELI

(Excited)

Aw, Flo! That's a craving I'll be happy to fill!

FLO

I'm not sure yet, so...

WELI

(He shyly takes her hand and

kisses her fingers)

I can't stop smiling. Gvgeyu, Florence. (I love you: guhgay'-you)

FLO

Oh, Weli. Don't start now. I need to get ready for my fitting. I have meat and bread and beans for you.

WELI

I am hungry.

(Florence exits into the house
as Weli lounges on the porch
watching the shadows of sunset
lengthen as Cal Cummings
approaches unnoticed.)

CAL

Only one dang barbershop in town and it's been closed all
day!

WELI

Who is that?

CAL

Cal Cummings, Weli! Osiyo!

WELI

Osiyo, Cal! I thought you was in jail!

CAL

Done my time. I'm back. I'm toothless now, but I'm back!

WELI

You in trouble?

CAL

Not yet.

WELI

In that case, it's good to see you.

(They shake hands.)

CAL

My, my. I never took you for one who'd tack gingerbread on
his roof.

WELI

Been married twelve years, now. Got two of the prettiest
little girls you ever seen. Girls like gingerbread, it seems.

CAL

Why, you're damn near civilized!

WELI

What brings you to these parts, Cal?

CAL

Just wanted to see if any other old train robbers was still alive.

WELI

I heard about Bob Younger. He died in Stillwater Prison a few years back. That's where Cole and Jim are still serving life. Nope, the Youngers is gone. Cook gang, too. The James boys, old Buck gang -- all out of business.

CAL

Only one I run into was Hogtoter. He was just a kid when I got locked up.

WELI

Don't have to rob a train to get locked up these days.

CAL

Dawes resisters?

WELI

Yep, resisters getting locked up, beat up, killed.

CAL

Hold outs? Nighthawks?

WELI

Nighthawks and Snakes, they goin' after some who signs up. Me, I couldn't see no way around it. If the government wants us to sign up now, it don't matter what any treaty says.

CAL

Listen, Weli - is there any chance you could spare me a swaller of whiskey? Need something to cut the road dust.

WELI

I ain't had a drink for fifteen years and I'm a better man for it. If it's whiskey you're wantin', you better get on down the road, Cal.

CAL

Man, you've changed.

WELI

I have a family now.

CAL

How's that sister of yours? How's Jane?

WELI

She's still kickin'.

CAL

How many kids is she up to?

WELI

Got seven of her own and eight adopted. And me! She's my half-sister but she raised me ever since our Doda and our Uncle George got roped into the War. Janey's the only mama I ever had.

CAL

I always enjoyed Janey. That gal had a mouth on her!

WELI

She's not changed a bit.

CAL

Didn't she even adopt a white baby once?

WELI

Yup, that would be Amanda. She's my wife's baby sister.

CAL

Just what does she need so many kids for?

WELI

Never been about what she needs, Cal. Janey seen some terrible things during the war. She sees any child lost or in need, she can't help but pick it up. She's just good hearted is all.

CAL

Nothing to do with them Cherokee land allotments?

WELI

Janey's more Creek than Cherokee. Her mama was Creek, mine was white. I believe she put in her application as Creek.

CAL

That makes sense; Creeks get more acreage.

WELI

That's not why she does it!

CAL

(Laughs)

Just how well do you know Janey?

WELI

You realize you are talking about my sister, don't you? Jane is well known to everyone in this town for her good deeds and especially her charity towards children. She has fed and clothed and educated sixteen children who had no one in the world save her. She's given loving care to many more. Raising kids is a lot harder than raising crops.

CAL

I'd gouge out my eyes before I'd insult Janey, Weli. It's just that with so many folks trying to cash in on the Dawes Rolls and not that many of them much Indian at all...I was just going to say that she must have had some remarkable kind of foresight because the way I figure, fifteen kids would add up to more than two thousand acres.

WELI

That's not why she did it. Janey won't get the land allotments; those will go to each of her children whether they are adopted or of her own flesh and blood. She has always tried to help as many as she can to get a good start in life. Or, are you just too damned mean to get that?

CAL

I agree, Weli, I agree. Everything Jane gets, you know she earned it. Not even up for speculation.

WELI

I hope I set you straight.

Offstage: The sound of a horse and buggy approaching.

JOSIAH

(From Offstage.)

Whoa!

WELI

(To Cal.)
My father-in-law.

JOSIAH

(Enters)
Hey, Weli!

WELI

Mr. Cuthbert.

JOSIAH

How'd you do at the Dawes hearing?

WELI

We're all in.

JOSIAH

Florence as well?

WELI

Yes sir, as intermarried white.

(Florence enters)

FLO

Your beef and beans are heated up. Shall I... Father?

JOSIAH

It's time, Florence. Your seamstress awaits you!

FLO

(Hastily strips off her apron)
Father's having a new dress custom made for me!

WELI

I'll go with you.

FLO

You don't need to come, William.

WELI

I can go with you. Cal has got things to do, I imagine. Is that about it, Cal?

CAL

I need to hang around. I told Hogtoter that I'd be at your place.

WELI

(To Flo)

Reckon I better stay here. I'll come as soon as I can.

JOSIAH

What you got going with Hogtoter?

WELI

Nothing!

FLO

Father!

(Heads for the buggy)

Shall we?

JOSIAH

Stay out of trouble.

WELI

I aim to.

Josiah and Florence exit.

CAL

So, Joe Cuthbert is your father-in-law? Well, if Joe's still around I know for sure where I can get a drink.

WELI

I just got in from Claremore and I ain't et since morning. I'm gonna get me a plate of beef and beans. You hungry?

CAL

If you got it to spare, I sure wouldn't say no.

Weli exits into the house. Cal creeps around to see what he can see through the windows. He rushes back to take a seat on the porch just as Weli enters with two plates of food.

WELI

Here's yours.

CAL

Mmmmm. Corn bread, too!

WELI

My wife is a very fine cook.

CAL

Remember when we was on the run from the law? We'd get up in the back woods and folks would invite you and Hogtoter up on the porch and I had to eat in the yard.

WELI

You ate the same as us.

CAL

Yeah, but they treated y'all like you was something special and I had to eat in the yard.

WELI

There ain't nothing special about a white man who robs white men, Cal.

CAL

I guess not.

WELI

A lot of our folks figured if we was the ones robbing them back, it was only fair. Cash was hard to come by.

CAL

Well, I appreciate you inviting me up on the porch. Indian Territory always was and still is the safest place for a man on the run.

Chuskey Hogtoter suddenly, silently appears coming around from the backyard.

CHUSKEY

Osiyo, dinadanvtli! (See-yo', deen'-ah-dah-not'-lee: Greetings, brother!)

WELI

Osiyo, Hogtoter! You hungry? (See-yo': Greetings)

CHUSKEY

My warrior blood is up tonight. Get off that porch! Let's rattle!

WELI

I'm going to finish my plate.

CHUSKEY

You'll wrestle me?

WELI

Let me eat my beans!

CHUSKEY

Ah, Weli. I rode through our old stomping grounds down on the Verdigris where we had our camp.

WELI

We caught some fish down there!

CHUSKEY

Catch a big old mess and then go swimming. Chippin' flint arrowheads, hunting rabbits...

WELI

We weren't no good at arrowheads so we tried to make blowguns.

CHUSKEY

We was worse at that than chipping arrowheads. But wrestling in the mud; that was the best!

WELI

Nice and soft. Mud's the best place to rassle.

CHUSKEY

You was the only boy who could take me. Bet you can't do it now.

Weli puts down his plate, steps off the porch, and strikes a comical, halfhearted wrestling pose. With increasing intensity he begins to circle Chuskey until Chuskey is psyched out enough to ever-so-slightly give ground. Weli also pulls back and belches loudly.

WELI

Dang it, Chuskey! Now I got me a belly full of beans and I don't think you want to be squeezing me.

They laugh.

CAL

The first time I seen you boys you was sitting bare-buttet in the mud trying to blow fart bubbles!

CHUSKEY

You scared hell out of us!

WELI

I didn't fart for two years after that!

CHUSKEY

More like two minutes.

CAL

I had a pretty good deal going there for about a week.

CHUSKEY

We thought we was big didn't we, Weli? Hiding out a outlaw. A lot of things went missing that week.

WELI

Janey got suspicious and rode out to run you off.

CAL

Said if I was a self-respectin' outlaw I'd be robbing people myself and not getting young boys to do it for me and if I was the desperado I was making myself out to be, there would be some kind of laws after me, which they wasn't.

Weli stacks the dirty dishes on the porch.

WELI

You sure you don't want some beans?

CHUSKEY

Food is far from my mind.

CAL

You know who is never far from my mind? Janey.

(Weli and Chuskey roll eyes.)

I never let on, but Janey always was and always will be the love of my life.

WELI

Probably best that you never let on...

CAL

There was a time when Janey and me made tracks all over Indian Territory.

CHUSKEY

You mean the time you kidnapped her?

CAL

She forgave me that.

WELI

She stabbed you!

CAL

And, I forgave her...

CHUSKEY

Wonder who is getting robbed tonight?

CAL

Whoever has got the money, I reckon.

CHUSKEY

(laughs)

Same as always! Want to go, Weli?

WELI

You know I changed my ways.

CHUSKEY

Vv. (Yes: Uh-huh) Right around the time Fat Bloke shot that little kid, wasn't it?

WELI

Why you want to talk about that! Of all the stupidest ideas in the first place. Them poor folks in Red Bird never had no money!

CHUSKEY

Them black skin Indians, they got money but only thing is they ain't got a bank. You kind of have to go door to door.

WELI

If you want to talk about old times, I don't know why you have to talk about the worst time that ever was! I don't know why you fellows decided to look me up, but I know you're after something. If you're here to rob, the only thing we have of value are the silver candlesticks I saw you..

(To Cal)

...making eyes at through the window. If you are here to take those I beg you go ahead and kill me now because when my wife gets back and sees them gone, she will surely kill me later.

CHUSKEY

Why you so afraid of your woman? I'm gonna have to start calling you Hoop Jumper.

CAL

Hoop Jumper!

WELI

What do you want?

CHUSKEY

Easy, Weli. I heard you were in Claremore yesterday.

WELI

Who said? Who saw me?

CHUSKEY

Lots of folks seen you.

WELI

Anybody planning to do anything about it?

CHUSKEY

You mean come after you for signing up? Nobody is coming to kill you for signing up. There is strong feeling, but the government is gonna get what they want anyway, init?

WELI

What are they saying?

CHUSKEY

You got a white wife, Weli, ain't no mystery why you done it. But, some are wondering if you put your son on the rolls.

WELI

I don't have a son.

CHUSKEY

The hell you don't!

(He and Cal laugh)

CAL

I seen him three days ago -- spittin' image!

CHUSKEY

A lot darker in skin color but he's your son. His name is Billy. He comes from Red Bird.

WELI

Don't talk about Red Bird! I do not now nor will I ever want to talk about Red Bird!

CAL

Fat Bloke wasn't aiming for the baby.

WELI

Couldn't nobody in the world save that child.

CHUSKEY

That was pretty easy to see, but young Dr. Weli had to stay on and try anyway when he should have rode out with the rest of us. You couldn't fix the baby so you went to doctoring that baby's mamma -- giving her whiskey to calm her down then you take whiskey cause you need calming down, too. You and her went on a big ol' toot. All laid up in drunken splendor, trying to bury all that pain. No one could find ya'll for couple of days; then, when ya'll showed up at the funeral that gal was so drunk she couldn't stand up. And, you was the one crying the loudest! Remember any of that, Weli?

WELI

Pieces. I do now.

CHUSKEY

She says you are the angel who gave her a child for the one that was taken away.

WELI

I never knew.

CHUSKEY

She don't want nothing for herself. She's hoping you will do right by the boy. Name's Billy Vann. Her people were owned by Rich Joe. She wants you to get him on the rolls.

WELI

I had to show my marriage certificate to get my girls in. I swore to them that Flo was my first and only wife. I'd be afraid to go back; it might scotch the whole deal for all of us.

CHUSKEY

He'll go on the Freedman Rolls if you don't. She wanted you to know. Ready to ride, Cal?

CAL

Yup. Thanks for the grub, Weli.

CHUSKEY

Donadagohvi, Hoop Jumper.

WELI

Tla. Tla. Tla. (No. No. No.)

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 4

Aunt Jane sits on the stump in Weli's yard with a towel around her shoulders while Weli searches her scalp with a fine tooth comb for any remaining head lice that may have survived his treatment.

WELI

Looks clean, Janey. I think we got them all.

AUNT JANE

What did you use on me?

WELI

I mixed up a recipe of Persian Rose Insect Powder.

AUNT JANE

What's in it?

WELI

Got hog lard, mutton suet and 12 grains of mercury all mixed up into an ointment with the Persian rose insect powder. I think the rose powder is so it won't stink so bad. Rub it on, wash it off, and looky here-no more critters in your locks!

AUNT JANE

Wado, Weli!

WELI

See Janey, you didn't send me to barber school for nothing!

AUNT JANE

You're a good boy, Weli. You have always been a very good boy.

WELI

There were times...

AUNT JANE

Everybody has their times; you come through yours just fine. Did they like you in Claremore?

WELI

They kept asking me questions I didn't know.

AUNT JANE

What did they want to know that you couldn't tell them?

WELI

I couldn't tell them much about Doda except he died in the War. Worst part was when I didn't know my own mamma's name. She did have a name, didn't she?

AUNT JANE

She called herself Delilah. Our daddy was very lonely when my mother died and your mother was very beautiful. I can see her in Alma.

WELI

Who were her people?

AUNT JANE

I am sure she lied to us, Weli; we didn't know who she was.

WELI

Well, who did she say she was?

AUNT JANE

Said she was a Collins. Uncle George didn't believe her either. Said there ain't no snow-white Collinses in Indian Territory. Said if she was a Collins she'd have to be part Cherokee or part slave to be here, 'cause if she was really was a all-white Collins she'd have better places to be.

WELI

What did you think she was?

AUNT JANE

Weli, I don't know. I was eleven when you were born. She was my step-mother and she beat me with a belt every night before bedtime and I wouldn't have given you a nickel for her.

WELI

Is that why you never whipped me?

AUNT JANE

Tla! Our people don't beat little children!

WELI

Flo don't believe I never had a whipping.

AUNT JANE

Flo spoilt, Weli, rotten as ground apples. You never got beat. Anybody who wanted to whip you would have had to whip me first.

(She stands in preparation to
leave.)

WELI

Before you go, I want to give you this string to tie around your waist to keep the cooties off. I soaked it in the insect salve. Not next to your skin, over your clothes.

Aunt Jane ties the string around her waist. Flo enters, happy and excited from her recent dressmaking adventure. She is slightly taken aback by Jane's presence.

FLO

Well, well. To what do we owe this honor?

AUNT JANE

Florence.

FLO

Aunt Jane.

WELI

I got rid of some head lice for her.

(Flo takes a step back from
Aunt Jane)

FLO

Did you go in the house?

AUNT JANE

Wasn't in there long; just took a little nap in your bed
while I was waiting for Weli.

Florence "clutches her pearls."

WELI

No, you did not! She's pulling your leg! We been in the
yard the whole time, sweetheart.

(Jane laughs)

Stop trying to get me in trouble!

(To Florence)

Tell Janey about your new dress, why don't you.

AUNT JANE

Another new dress?

FLO

My last new dress was three years ago and I've already worn
it mostly to rags. Thank goodness for father! He
understands what a woman needs to be happy.

(Aunt Jane smirks)

I will have it to wear by Christmas!

WELI

I can't wait to see you in it. What color did you pick?

FLO

Violet silk. It is so lovely!

WELI

Look pretty with your eyes.

FLO

It is a flattering shade.

WELI

I'm sure that you flatter it more than it flatters you. I couldn't wish for a prettier gal than my Flo.

(Florence smiles at the compliment.
Weli is elated.)

AUNT JANE

Did I pick good for you, Weli?

WELI

You sure did, Janey. Flo here is thinking that we might have another baby!

AUNT JANE

(To Florence)

Are you?

FLO

No, just thinking about it.

AUNT JANE

He-he! Look at that smile on Weli's face! You ain't gonna get with child by just thinking about it! Most women get them by not thinking at all!

FLO

Must we be vulgar?

AUNT JANE

Don't be mad at Weli. I was just funning you, Florence.

FLO

I will never understand your sense of humor.

AUNT JANE

I will never understand why you don't have one.

WELI

Ladies!

AUNT JANE

I hope you have a boy this time. It's time Weli had a son.

WELI

Boy or girl, Janey; I'll take what comes and be glad to have it. What do you want, honey-sweet?

FLO

Nothing has been decided.

AUNT JANE

We'll take a boy, Flo! We gonna call that little feller Billy, ain't we Weli? Ain't that what white folks call short for William?

FLO

White folks! If you're mixed blood, that makes you white folks, too, doesn't it?

AUNT JANE

Not to white folks.

WELI

Don't try to start something, Janey. Reckon me and Flo are gonna have to ease into this.

FLO

There is much to consider. Babies are a lot of trouble.

AUNT JANE

You think raising babies in this house is a lot of trouble? Ha! During the War when the Rebs and the Yankees were tearing up Indian Territory, we had to make a break for the Red River to get out of the way. Talk about trouble, talk about misery...how much trouble do you suppose...

(Indicates Weli)

...this one was when I had to walk all the way from Tulsey to Texas carrying a three-year-old on my hip and a iron kettle on my back? I weren't but fourteen at the time. Now, that were quite a bit of trouble!

(To Weli)

We hid out among the canes at the water's edge, dodging them Yankees one day and hiding from the Rebels the next and my little brother here didn't want to hold my hand! Do you remember that?

WELI

Tla. (No.)

AUNT JANE

I told him, when you're big enough to outrun me, that's when I let go your hand. There were so many lost children in those days. War piles up a lot of orphans. Weli was an orphan, too, but I wasn't about to let him get lost. How old are you now, Florence?

FLO

Twenty-eight.

AUNT JANE

You had Emma at sixteen and Alma at nineteen; most women your age have at least twice as many by now.

FLO

Once you know what causes something, there is a clear course to prevention.

AUNT JANE

Ha-ha! That will catch up to you! There is only one way to make sure, for sure.

FLO

Yes. That is the method we employ.

Aunt Jane is filled with pity for her brother. There is an uncomfortable moment of silence.

WELI

We might have to build on another story to this house. We'll need the room if we have another baby. What do you think, Flo?

FLO

I'm thinking it wouldn't hurt to build on anyway. The girls are getting bigger.

AUNT JANE

The girls will soon be gone. We already got a boy picked out for Emma.

FLO

Whom do you mean by we?

AUNT JANE

Me and your daddy. We agree on the boy. He's a catch. Only time will tell if he's a keeper.

FLO

Oh, no you don't! I vow that Emma will have chances in life that I never had. It is my fondest wish that you and daddy will let her marry a man she truly loves and not be forced to....

AUNT JANE

Uyoiyadadvnehi! Tohitsv, Weli? (Cruel: Ooh-yoh-ee-dah-duh-nay-hee: Toe-hee-juh, Weli: How do you feel, Weli?)

WELI

Atsisonvnh. (Eh-jee-so-nuh-nuh-hee: Wounded. "I am hurt.")

AUNT JANE

Vv. (Uh-huh: Yes.) Ayo! (Ow!)

FLO

Jabber, jabber. How rude!

AUNT JANE

Here Florence, I'll translate for you: I told him I was going to cut your damn throat, and he said, "Go ahead!"

WELI

That's not what we said!

Aunt Jane turns on Florence.

AUNT JANE

I won't lie; that's not what I said. But, it is what I was thinking! Tsaduliha! (Jah-dooley'-hah: You want it!)

WELI

Janey, please!

Florence turns and flies toward her front door in a rage. Aunt Jane snatches the towel off her shoulders, catches up with Flo and flings it over Flo's head.

AUNT JANE

Here you go, Flo! I make you a gift of my cooties!

Aunt Jane exits laughing as Flo fights with the presumably lice-ridden towel.

FLO

I hate her! Oh, Weli! She's given me lice! I can't even go inside my own house now! I hate her!

WELI

Calm down, Flo. I'll take care of it. Sit.

He motions at the stump. Flo takes a seat feeling vaguely itchy. Weli starts to part her hair and section it off.

FLO

Get them off! Get them off of me!

WELI

I've got the ointment all made up. I think you probably don't need it, but just to be sure... Hold still.

FLO

I can feel them crawling all over.

WELI

The towel was clean, darlin'. I'm not finding any sign of critters.

(He begins massaging her head, neck, and shoulders.

She begins to relax.)

Don't think about anything, just let me help you here.

FLO

She upsets me so.

WELI

Well, we're not gonna think about her now. We're going to think about your pretty new dress, we're going to think about our sweet little girls, and we're gonna think about what to do with all that property when we get our land allotments.

FLO

Why, yes. That is what we shall think about.

WELI

That's right. And, I want you to know that I agree with you about Emma. She should have the right to choose who she will love and marry.

FLO

It means so much that we are together on this, dear Weli. We must not let her be railroaded!

WELI

We don't want our Emma railroaded; we simply won't have it. Now, open up your collar so I can rub you a little deeper.

FLO

(Flo unbuttons the top three buttons on her dress.)

Thank you, Weli.

(He bends to kiss the part in her hair.)

WELI

Guess you was feeling railroaded, too.

FLO

I shouldn't have said, Weli. She provokes me!

WELI

Wouldn't have come out that way if there wasn't some truth to it, I reckon.

FLO

Will you forgive me?

WELI

Of course, I will.

(He resumes searching her scalp
by sections while looking for
head lice)

I didn't know you had hard feelings about the way Janey and
your daddy put us together. Do you have hard feelings against
me?

FLO

Can you forget as well as forgive, my husband? Aunt Jane
makes me say things I shouldn't.

WELI

(Puts down his comb, picks up a
package and opens it.)

Your head is clean so I'm not going to use the ointment, but
I am going to dust you with a powder that kills insects.
Smells good; you'll like it.

He sprinkles a tiny bit of Persian Rose
Insect powder into her hair.

FLO

That does smell quite pleasant.

WELI

There, we'll let it work for a minute or two and then I'll
brush it out.

(He goes back to work massaging
her shoulders and back.)

But, when you said you were forced... I don't recall ever
making you do anything thing you were dead against.

FLO

Father is the one who used force; just like your sister
pushed me in your face. It wasn't my idea and it wasn't your
idea.

WELI

Well, maybe the difference is that if I'd seen you before
Janey did, I'm sure I would have got the idea on my own.

FLO

You are so kind; you shame me.

WELI

When we met, you had this shy, sweet smile and after we'd talked a bit and it was time for me to part, I will never forget the way you tilted your beautiful face and let me kiss your cheek goodbye.

FLO

Oh, father made me practice that part. He said it would be pleasing to you.

WELI

It was very pleasing to me. I was so happy; I thought you liked me.

FLO

I did like you, Weli, and I was willing, but I'd just turned fifteen and I had no idea of what I was getting into.

WELI

I was thirty-one and I didn't know what I was getting into either.

FLO

Now, here we are twelve years married with a family and a bright future ahead.

(Weli picks up a hairbrush and begins brushing the insect powder out of Florence's hair.)

That does smell nice. Thank you, Weli, I do feel better.

WELI

Good. I'll loosen your gown in back and you take your arms out of the sleeves so I can inspect under your arms.

Florence shrugs out of her bodice and holds it up to cover her breasts while Weli inspects one arm and then the other for lice. He rubs a little powder into each armpit.

FLO

Oh, tickle!

WELI

Sorry, sweetheart. We had good sun today so I bet the water in the tank will be nice and warm. When we are through we'll go around back and have a nice shampoo and shower before we go into the house. Sound good?

FLO

We'll wash all our cares away.

WELI

That's the idea, but there is one more lovely part of you that still wants inspection. Kick your bloomers off and let me check your downstairs area for unwanted visitors.

FLO

In the yard?

WELI

I know you don't want lice anywhere near the house. So, turn around, take off your bloomers and lift your skirts for me so I can see what I'm doing.

FLO

You said the towel was clean!

WELI

It is clean.

FLO

What if someone happens by?

WELI

If someone should happen by, just drop your skirts, Flo. I'll cover you.

Flo stands and shimmies out of her undies then resumes her seat on the stump, only this time she faces Weli. Flo slowly raises her skirt.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE 5 - LATER...

Crickets fiddle in the background as Hogtoter sneaks through the yard and stops outside the open window of Weli's bedroom.

CHUSKEY

Weli...Weli.

WELI

Gadousdi? (Gah-doe-oose'-dee: What do you want?)

CHUSKEY

Come, a boy is wounded!

WELI

My boy?

CHUSKEY

Tla! Come now!

WELI

I'll get my bag.

Florence creeps out the front door with a shotgun at the ready. She peeks around the corner, steps out, and gets the drop on Chuskey. Chuskey raises his hands. In the meantime, Cal slips up behind Flo. He cocks his pistol. Flo freezes at the sound.

CAL

I'll take that, ma'am.

(Cal disarms Flo.)

Weli comes out of the house with his bag.

WELI

Flo!

Weli bumps Cal and wrestles Florence's shotgun out of Cal's hands.

CAL

Damn, Weli!

WELI

You touch my woman again, I'll slash your throat so deep you'll have to be buried in two different boxes.

CAL

She had the drop on Chuskey, Weli. I wasn't trying to touch your woman.

FLO

Who are these men? How do they know you, Weli?

WELI

Flo, go inside. I'll be back as soon as I can.

FLO

Where are you going?

Weli escorts Flo back to the front door.

WELI

Lock yourself in and wait for me.

He hands her the shotgun, gently pushes her inside, and closes the door.

The men exit apace. The light in the parlor flickers on. Through the window, Flo's silhouette is seen as she sits looking out with a shotgun at the ready.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS OUT.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 6

Spotlight vignette. The next morning. Weli and Josiah sit side by side on a wagon seat as Josiah drives him home from jail.

WELI

I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Cuthbert.

JOSIAH

Don't worry, Weli. I've got that all figured out.

WELI

I'll pay you back every penny of bail.

JOSIAH

I didn't bail you out. I bought you out of a great big mess and it cost considerably more than bail. As far as the police are concerned, you were mistaken as a Dawes resister.

WELI

But I'm signed up.

JOSIAH

(beat)

This is the story: A gang of mixed-bloods on a tear got all liquored up and decided they needed some haircuts. So, on a lark they kidnapped the barber and held a gun to his head while all the others got trimmed.

WELI

That's the dumbest story I ever heard!

JOSIAH

Don't blame me. Aunt Jane made it up; said, "Why else would anyone kidnap a barber?"

WELI

That's not what happened.

JOSIAH

That is exactly what happened. That is the story you will tell Flo. That is the story you will tell the girls, and if it ever comes up outside the family, that is the only story you will tell.

WELI

Flo knows it ain't true.

JOSIAH

She will go along.

WELI

The police believe that story?

JOSIAH

They didn't let you out because you are innocent.

WELI

But I am innocent!

JOSIAH

You patched up a bullet wound for an outlaw and the cops caught up with you. Are you innocent of that?

WELI

I had to help him. He would have died.

JOSIAH

Since when does barber school qualify you for surgery?

WELI

I'm qualified to pull teeth. Digging out a bullet ain't that much different.

JOSIAH

You've done this before.

WELI

I won't say yea or nay.

JOSIAH

(Chuckles.)

"Why else would anyone kidnap a barber?" I see; we don't want to even think about other implications. Hah, Janey!

WELI

If somebody asked you if you sell liquor to Indins would you answer yea or nay?

JOSIAH

I'm not the one who's fresh out of jail, Weli. Whether your answer is yea or nay, you won't be patching up any more outlaws.

(Pulls a jug of whiskey from

behind the buggy seat.)

The police are going to be checking on you pretty regular from now on. When they drop by you will offer them a drink of whiskey for their trouble. It's the least you can do for the fellows who are keeping outlaws away.

WELI

No liquor in my house!

JOSIAH

Don't be a hypocrite. I know you used to be a lush; besides, it's part of the deal.

WELI

I never made any such deal!

JOSIAH

(Thrusting the jug into Weli's hands)

Are you trying to ruin your life?

WELI

No sir.

JOSIAH

Then do as I say. The tribe won't be handing out land allotments to jailbirds. Did you think of that? You put yourself out to be an upstanding citizen of the Cherokee Nation. You better act like one if you want to get your due.

WELI

I hope you will explain to Flo because I know I won't be able to keep the lies straight.

JOSIAH

You tell Florence whatever you have to tell her. Tell her to forget what she saw and remind her what is at stake. You were never in jail; you were merely at the jailhouse due to misunderstanding. Kidnapped for haircuts. Nothing more will come of it.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 7

Later...Florence storms toward the front door of the house with Weli in hot pursuit.

FLO

Of all the preposterous lies I've ever heard...

WELI

Flo!

FLO

...that one takes the cake! Did your sister make up that ridiculous story?

WELI

Now, Flo...

FLO

(Florence steps inside the front door and slams it in Weli's face)

My name is Florence!

WELI

Yes, I know--but you're my Flo. My only love, my pretty, my sweet...

FLO

I'm not listening! Go away!

WELI

I will go away, but I'll be back. Maybe I'll just jump on a train and get on board to St. Louis right now! I'll fetch our girls back and we can be a family again!

FLO

This is not a fit home for children!

WELI

Well, I miss them and if this is not a fit home I'll take them to my sister!

Florence flies out onto the porch in a screaming fury.

FLO

You will not put my children in the hands of that woman!

WELI

That woman is my sister! The girls love their Aunt Jane!

FLO

She lets them do as they will, and that is no way to bring up children. Naturally, they love her; they can get away with anything when they are with Aunt Jane.

WELI

You lead children, you don't push them.

FLO

Don't tell me you never did anything wrong!

WELI

I was wrong plenty of times. That's how I learned. You do something wrong and then you find out how to do it right. Don't seem like anything to break a child's flesh over.

FLO

I tan them; I don't make them bleed.

WELI

I kind of wish you wouldn't do it at all, sweetheart.

FLO

Don't call me sweetheart! You rode out with outlaws last night. You knew them and they knew you. Where were you? Don't lie.

WELI

You know it is not my nature to lie.

FLO

Yes, I know you don't. That's probably why you are so bad at it. Why are you lying now? To me!

WELI

Because that's the only story I can tell -- that we can tell. Your daddy said if we stick to that story nothing more will come of it.

FLO

How did Father get involved?!

WELI

He came down to the jailhouse and...

FLO

You were in jail?!

WELI

No, no. Listen now, I was at the jailhouse due to misunderstanding. He came by and vouched for me and then he drove me home.

FLO

You're not in trouble with the law?

WELI

No. I did what I had to do; I didn't do anything wrong. Bunch of drunk Indins, honey, what they think is funny doesn't always translate, you know. Funny for them to see a barber sweating over a haircut because one of them has a gun to his head. Not so funny for the barber.

FLO

Were you able give them decent haircuts?

WELI

Never clipped a hair I was so nervous. I just kind of went through the motions. The police bust in and I got swept up with the rest of them.

FLO

Who called the law?

WELI

They'd pulled a job earlier in the day and the cops just tracked them down, I guess.

FLO

But once you explained...

WELI

Mr. Cuthbert did the explaining. Now it's all chalked up to misunderstanding. That's the story.

FLO
That is not all there is to it.

WELI
I need you with me on this Flo. We don't want to jeopardize our Dawes application.

FLO
Oh, William! How could you?

WELI
Will never happen again, my love. I give you my word.

FLO
Father said no more will come of it?

WELI
He did.

FLO
If Father said it, then that is what I shall believe.

WELI
Forgive me?

FLO
Not yet.

WELI
It will blow over; it might take a little time.

FLO
However much time it takes, Weli. After it blows over, IF it blows over, we can start thinking about another baby again.

She turns and goes into the house as the lights go down on Weli.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 8

Spotlight vignette. Josiah drives his buggy while Aunt Jane hitches a ride.

AUNT JANE
I took 'em two peach pies and half-pint of rum and they sure was glad to have it!

JOSIAH

That's a nice, grandmotherly way to soften up the jail guards.

AUNT JANE

All them boys knows Aunt Jane, the laws and outlaws alike. Just made a little party of it; nobody gonna give Weli away.

JOSIAH

Did you get the message across in Creek or Cherokee?

AUNT JANE

I couldn't just tell them what to say. If it were white men I could have, but the tribal police, no. I kind of danced the whole story out in front of the jail cells. Both sides was laughing and joking and chippin' in smart remarks, all the while gobbling pie.

(Pantomimes a nervous barber shaking too hard to cut hair)

Now everybody knows what to say.

JOSIAH

Honor among thieves?

AUNT JANE

Might as well say honor among white men. It's not the same with us.

JOSIAH

You don't care who you insult, do you?

AUNT JANE

When I get respect, I weigh it out right back. Disrespect my people, I disrespect you. When is that fat wife of yours bringing Weli's girls home?

JOSIAH

She'll return a week before Christmas, after the girls finish their school term there.

AUNT JANE

Well, that's too bad. She's gonna miss Mandy altogether.

JOSIAH

Amanda won't be here for Christmas?

AUNT JANE

Nope, she'll be long gone. She's marrying a preacher and they're heading out for California before Christmas.

JOSIAH

This is the first I'm hearing of it.

AUNT JANE

Just happened. His name's Samuel Hardin. She met him at Seminary, looks totally white, only got about two drops of Cherokee in him.

JOSIAH

Will he get a land allotment?

AUNT JANE

He didn't apply. He's been assigned to a church and they plan to make a life in California.

JOSIAH

That kind of balls up the works for you and me, doesn't it?

AUNT JANE

Mandy's allotment shores up right next to mine. She'll be in California, but she will always have a place of her own if she wants to come home.

JOSIAH

If her husband doesn't file, then that will make you and me lopsided. You'll have an allotment on the south side of the railroad in the Creek Nation, but I will get no corresponding allotment on the north side of the tracks.

AUNT JANE

(Laughing)

Is that what you want me to tell him? How do you think your greed for land is going to be taken by Mandy's preacher man?

JOSIAH

From you? You own twice the acreage I do.

AUNT JANE

You don't own any acreage and neither do I. It's not about selling land for us; we're about holding onto our ways.

JOSIAH

You're getting soft in your old age. I figured that you would have a boy picked out for Amanda by the time she was five.

AUNT JANE

I did have, but then I lost my taste for match-making, Joe. My poor Weli is miserable with your Flo.

JOSIAH

He seems pretty happy to me.

AUNT JANE

There's only two ways a woman can make a man truly happy. One of them is cooking, and she's doing fine at that. That other thing, she ain't doing at all. And she's just mean enough to be a little proud of hurting him that way... If you want more allotments on the Cherokee side of the tracks, Joe, get on Florence's tail. Let me out here.

JOSIAH

Whoa.

Aunt Jane steps out of the buggy.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 9

Florence is hanging laundry in the yard when Josiah arrives. Florence runs to meet him near the stump. Furious, Josiah throws a crumpled up note in her face.

JOSIAH

This note? Not one chance.

FLO

As far as St. Louis, Father? I will gather my girls and just keep going.

JOSIAH

You propose that I finance this runaway scheme?

FLO

I cannot bear this life any more, Father; I must escape!

JOSIAH

If you are determined to throw away every advantage in life that I have given to you then you'll have to earn your own way. You will soon learn that for a lady, those options are few.

FLO

Amanda gets her own land allotment! Amanda gets to marry a white man! A Christian preacher, Father! Amanda gets a preacher and she gets to live in California and here I am stuck with an Indian barber in Indian Territory!

JOSIAH

Why are you so discontented with your barber? Has he beat you?

FLO

Heavens, no; I wouldn't allow it.

JOSIAH

You realize that most men do beat their wives; and I'll wager that not a one of them does it with his wife's allowance.

FLO

Weli's not like that. I've never seen him squash a bug.

JOSIAH

A gentle man, faithful and true, who provides for your needs and seeks your counsel in all things... What a contemptible brute!

FLO

I live in misery and you make light of it!

JOSIAH

You won't know misery until your man grows weary of your coldness and tosses you out on your arse.

FLO

My coldness? Hello, Pot!

JOSIAH

If you could reconcile yourself to having more children any worry you may have about your future support will disappear.

FLO

I have no worries about my future support. My husband supports me and will continue to do so.

JOSIAH

He may grow tired of your tedious avoidances. He may very well seek comfort and joy elsewhere and move on to a less disappointing situation.

FLO

I would divorce him.

JOSIAH

Again, how would you make your own way?

FLO

There are more and more white men in the Territory. I'm sure I can find one who will have me.

JOSIAH

If I may point out, your plan lacks foresight. Do you think a new man would accept your mixed-blood children?

FLO

I wouldn't accept a man who didn't accept my girls! Besides, they look mostly white.

JOSIAH

They look white but they are Cherokee. Emma and Alma are blooded Cherokee enumerated on the Dawes Rolls now. That makes it official. Your girls are Indian, and they will stay in Indian Territory until the day they die.

FLO

If I decide to go to California or back East, or somewhere, I would take the girls with me.

JOSIAH

That is what you are forgetting, Florence. You can't take Indians out of Indian Territory. The girls are Cherokee; it's on the record.

(MORE)

JOSIAH (CONT'D)

You can go any time, but you can't take the girls with you. The tribe won't allow it and over that, the Federal Government won't allow it either.

FLO

I am trapped. Sweet Jesus, father! What have you done?

JOSIAH

Me? Aren't you the one who needled and goaded your husband for two solid years before he signed the girls up? You wanted them to be tribal members! What did you think it would mean for your children to be counted as Indians?

FLO

I thought only of the land allotments.

JOSIAH

Of course, and I beg you return your attention to that goal. Perhaps a walk in the meadow will help clear your head. Help clear both our heads. Shall we?

Josiah offers Florence his arm and they exit behind the house on their walk.

Weli enters through the front gate with his bag and heads to the house.

WELI

Flo? Flo?

He scans the yard and listens. When he gets no feedback he enters the house and returns a moment later with a cookie in his hand. He walks toward the back of the house where the laundry is hung, peeks around the corner. He turns back toward the stump when he spots the crumpled note in the grass. He picks the note up and takes a bite of cookie before seating himself on the stump. He opens the note and reads, becoming less and less interested in the cookie. By the time he reaches the end of the note, he is completely deflated.

When Florence and Josiah return from their stroll, they see Weli sitting on the stump with a crumbling cookie in his hand.

FLO
Weli, you're home from work! Father's here.

JOSIAH
Weli.

Weli manages only a nod to Josiah. He cannot stand to look at Florence.

FLO
I baked cookies for you! I see you found them!

(Weli nods but keeps his eyes
on the cookie)
What's the matter? Was it alright?

WELI
First taste was sweet, but the next bite was bitter.

(Offers the cookie to Flo)
It all tastes bitter to me now; you eat it.

JOSIAH
I'll be going, daughter. Time to get this good man fed.

FLO
I so enjoyed our chat today.

(She hugs Josiah goodbye)
Thank you for listening, Father.

JOSIAH
Bon chance and good evening.

(Josiah exits.)

FLO
Are you hungry, darling?

WELI
No, not hungry.

FLO
Are you unwell?

WELI
I am feeling pretty low.

FLO

You rest here and I'll see if I can find a little something to make you feel better... Alright?

WELI

Vv. (Yes: uh-huh)

Florence pats his shoulder and kisses his cheek before she flits into the house. Weli buries his face in his hands, then knuckles away the tears in his eyes. He takes out his handkerchief and blows his nose.

He goes into the yard and paces trying to calm his agitation. He makes a break toward the road, but stops at the gate and turns around. The sight of his little gingerbread house brings him to discomposure.

He wipes his face, blows his nose again, and is trying to decide if he should run when Florence emerges onto the front porch in her nightgown. She has taken down her hair and is carrying a small tray of refreshments.

FLO

Weli? Where did you go?

(She puts the tray down and walks into the yard. She is beautiful under the rising moon. She spots him standing at the gate and starts in his direction.)

What are you doing out here? Are you going somewhere?

WELI

Would you care if I did?

FLO

What's got into you?

(She runs across the yard and embraces him. She lays her head on his chest.)

Your heart is still beating....

WELI

I don't know how.

FLO

What's wrong?

WELI

I hurt all over.

FLO

(Takes him by the hand and
leads him to the stump)

I brought out the lavender oil to relax you. You've been standing all day so sit, and I will rub a bit on your temples.

(Weli sits while Flo retrieves the oil.)

Let me kiss them first.

(She kisses Weli on both sides of his face and begins to massage his head.)

My kisses usually cure you in a hurry.

WELI

(Blows his nose.)

Not working for me today.

FLO

I'm so sorry. I want you to feel better. Let me try again.

(She showers his face with kisses, then seats herself on his lap and holds him close.)

You are precious to me. More precious than gold.

WELI

Am I?

FLO

(She kisses him deeply)

Oh, yes.

WELI

I wasn't so sure after we spoke this morning.

FLO

Oh! Was I cruel, my pet? I'm sorry.

(She snuggles to him a little
tighter and runs her hand
under his shirt)

I talk without thinking.

WELI

And yet everything gets said. I'm not sure we ought to have another baby. Probably better if we don't.

FLO

What if I tell you that I've changed my mind again? I do want to have another child! The girls would love a baby brother; and wouldn't you love to have a little boy to raise and run after you?

WELI

I'm satisfied with the children we have; a man could not wish for more loving daughters.

FLO

(She places Weli's hand on her
waist and clings a little
tighter.)

My thinking has been all wrong, Weli. I have been selfish thinking only of myself when there is no reason I shouldn't be giving you all the sons and daughters you ever wanted. If I lay a son into your arms next year, and perhaps another son in the year after that... will that help make amends?

WELI

Childbirth never was your long suit, Flo. I recall that you have found it most disagreeable in the past.

FLO

I would endure it again gladly to give you a son.

(She frames her breasts with
her hands.)

Do you not feel the pull of the moon tonight?

(MORE)

FLO (CONT'D)
(She would unbutton his
trousers but he takes a gentle
evasive action.)

WELI
I'm getting old, a lot older than you. I may not live to see
a baby grown.

FLO
My kindest husband, who has always granted any favor I asked
-may you live to hold our grandchildren and great-
grandchildren on your knee. You are not too old to grant the
wish I want more than anything else in the world: babies,
babies until they line the walls and stack up ceiling high!
Shall we, Mr. Wimsey?

WELI
Despite the moon and despite the way your beauty shows it up
tonight, I have no heart for sporting.

FLO
You must be ill! You've never denied my pleasure before.
Now, my heart is hurt!

WELI
Shall I heal you with kisses the way that you heal me?

FLO
You are angry with me.

WELI
I was. I am angry with myself now.

FLO
Why so?

WELI
I am a fool, always have been a fool, and I need some time to
think. Just go to bed, Flo.

FLO
You'll join me later?

WELI

I'll try not to wake you. Good night.

LIGHTS OUT:

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 9

Spotlight vignette. Aunt Jane and Cal
in a corner of Aunt Jane's kitchen.
Small table, two chairs, a door.

CAL

Janey! Remember me? Cal Cummings--we go way back.

AUNT JANE

Step in.

(Cal enters and Jane locks the
door)

You can't stay. How did you get out?

CAL

When Providence swings your jail door open, you know Jesus
has other plans. I just walked out.

AUNT JANE

Past the guards?

CAL

The officers had repaired to Dreamland.

AUNT JANE

Then you better make time.

CAL

If I could maybe get a swaller of something for my rheumatiz
or just lay low... I'm gettin' too old to out-scat the law.

AUNT JANE

Seems like "Can I get away with this?" should cross your mind
at some time before you do the deed.

(Pours a drink)

I can help you with a tot of medicine, but then you get gone.

CAL

There used to be a time you and me made tracks all over Indian Territory.

AUNT JANE

That time is long gone.

CAL

I asked Weli about you.

AUNT JANE

Leave Weli alone. He ain't been in trouble for years and years until you all came along.

CAL

We wasn't trying to get Weli in trouble, Janey.

AUNT JANE

Well no, but that's just what old outlaws do. They get theirselves into trouble and they drag everybody else into it.

CAL

Weli wasn't supposed to be part of it. We only came back to get him when that kid got shot. The kid wouldn't have made it without Weli.

AUNT JANE

Y'all shouldn't have tried to rope him into your job in the first place!

CAL

We wasn't trying to rope him in. Chuskey had a message to tell him about a kid by the name of Billy Vann.

AUNT JANE

Vann? Cherokee Vann or Freedman Vann?

CAL

Weli didn't tell you?

AUNT JANE

You tell me.

CAL

He's Weli's boy; Weli's son. He's from Red Bird.

AUNT JANE

Weli never had a son.

CAL

If you seen him, Janey, no question. I swear. Yesterday was the first Weli heard of it. We only went to Weli's so Chuskey could tell him about the boy.

AUNT JANE

A throwback from his drinking days. Weli was very sick when he came home from Red Bird.

CAL

About fifteen years ago. That was the next-to-the-last job I pulled before I was sent to prison, right around that time.

AUNT JANE

(Sighing to herself)

Oh, dear Weli...

CAL

The sight of you sure takes me back. Remember when us boys would come in after a job and you'd whomp up the best damn breakfasts I ever laid tooth to. You'd make us taters and eggs and side meat and bacon and big ol' cat-head biscuits! Girl! Then, when you was ready to run us off, you'd clear the table and line up all the kids' piggy banks. And, we'd go down the line topping them every one off in silver coin! You made my train robbing career the best time of my life!

AUNT JANE

Well, if anybody ever asks, tell them you held a gun to my head while I did it.

CAL

(Breaks up laughing)

Does seem to run in your family! Cook or I'll shoot! Clip my nose hair or I shoot! Hahaha.

AUNT JANE

Here's the deal, Cal: I'm not gonna cook for you or go old times a-wandering. I don't know how deep you put my boys down at the jail in dreamland, but when they wake up, they'll be after you and they ain't gonna find you here.

(She opens the door and gestures for Cal to go through it.)

CAL
Can I borrow a horse?

AUNT JANE
Keep walking.

CAL
Gonna make me steal one?

AUNT JANE
Out.

(Aunt Jane gently pushes him
out the door and bars it.)

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 10

The moon hangs low in the West and the
first glimmering hints of dawn find
Weli still unable to sleep.

He sits on his front porch steps
debating with the unopened whiskey jug
Josiah gave him.

WELI
My old companion, by my side in the dark hours once more.
I've been thinking of you lately -- hard not to think of you
when I feel this lonely. You never told me I was ugly and
stupid. If you ever found me revolting or more animal than
man, well, wado for keeping it to yourself. I wish I wasn't
so glad to see you now because I know you're not my friend.
You never were my friend...

(Weli hauls himself up and walks out
into the yard facing the incipient
sunrise.)

Wado, Unelanvhi I made it through one more night. Wado.
(wah-doe' Ooh'-nay-lah-nuh'-hee: Thank you, Creator.)

Weli seems to gain strength from this
realization. He walks back to the porch
and returns the whiskey jug to it's
spot beneath the front porch steps. He
tries the front door and it opens
easily; then he gently pulls it closed.

He decides instead to curl up on the board that is used for porch seating. It's too short and narrow for him, but he tries.

He closes his eyes for a moment, but bolts upright and wide awake at the sound of running footsteps over his lawn. He stands to guard the unlocked door when he hears...

CHUSKEY

Weli! Weli!

Weli peeks around the corner to see Chuskey standing outside his bedroom window.

WELI

(Steps off the porch where
Chuskey can see him.)

Chuskey, here I am.

Chuskey hustles to Weli. They shelter on the porch

CHUSKEY

Weli, I need a horse.

WELI

You broke out.

CHUSKEY

I need a horse and I need some money.

WELI

You can take a horse, but I only got about two bits on me.

(Weli hands him a pocket of change. They step off the porch into the yard. Weli gestures toward the barn.)

CHUSKEY

Then I'll take them candlesticks, too, Hoop Jumper. Unless you'd rather watch me hang.

WELI

Hang? They'll shoot you on sight. Take the sorrel in the barn and get out of here! You've already brung enough trouble down on my head!

Florence stealthily balances a long barrel pistol on the bedroom widow sill. The gun is too heavy for her. She hears Weli and Chuskey talking but she cannot see them.

They are oblivious to her.

CHUSKEY

Dinadanvtli, asdeliha. (Brother, help me: deen-ah-dah-nut' lee; ahs-deli'-hah)

WELI

I am helping you, brother! Get on the damn horse and ride!

CHUSKEY

Let me make you a deal.

WELI

Every minute you tarry, the closer they come.

CHUSKEY

Give me those goddamn candlesticks, Weli, or your prissy wife finds out you got a Freedman son.

WELI

(Snorts)

What's one more thing?

He notices Florence out of the corner of his eye. She is raising the big pistol to shoot at Chuskey. The pistol is too heavy for her to control and she is not at all in charge of either the gun or her balance. Chuskey notices her and leaps onto the porch just as she raises the pistol to shoot. The gun misfires. Chuskey bursts into the house looking for the candlesticks. Meanwhile, Florence fumbles with the gun in an alarmingly unsafe manner.

FLO

What is the matter with this?!

WELI

Put it down, Flo!

Weli runs to her and grabs the pistol, he wrestles it upward but Flo won't let it go. They grapple for the pistol when Chuskey climbs out the bedroom window with Flo's candlesticks, grabs the gun out of both their hands and in the process bashes Flo in the nose with an elbow. Weli tends to Flo as Chuskey scrams out the back. Flo's nose is bloodied and she is nearly hysterical.

FLO

I'm bleeding!

WELI

(He wipes blood from her face with his handkerchief. He gently probes her face with his fingertips.)

You don't know how to fire a pistol! Nose ain't broke.

(She stands up, dazed. Weli supports her as he walks her to a seat on the stump.)

You're alright. I'll help you.

CHUSKEY

(Offstage)

Git! Haw! Git!

Hoofbeats are heard in the background.

FLO

There he goes, Weli! There he goes with my candlesticks!
He's got my candlesticks! Get him!

WELI

Want me to get shot?

FLO

Weli! He's getting away!

WELI

And he's got my gun.

FLO

(Staggers over to the parlor
window.)

He took my candlesticks!

WELI

Don't worry about that now.

FLO

Aren't you going to go after him?

WELI

Settle down, Flo. I'm not putting myself between him and the posse. That's a good way for me to get shot.

FLO

Well by God, I'm not afraid to go after him! I'll kill him myself!

WELI

You won't be killing anybody. What are you going to do, drop a gun and hope it hits who you want to hit? You could have killed me!

FLO

Why did he come here anyway?

WELI

I don't know. He's trying to get away.

FLO

Because he's an Indin and you're an Indin!

WELI

There's a big difference between being Cherokee and being listed as a Cherokee on your precious Dawes rolls.

FLO

I heard you out here globbidy-globbidy talking Indin to each other. What did you tell him? "Go ahead, take my wife's candlesticks!"

WELI

If you heard us talk, you know that's not true.

FLO

You don't love me! You let your Indin outlaw friend carry off my fortune! My fortune! Those candlesticks belong to me, and only me. I would kill anyone who even looked crosswise at them and you just let him go!

WELI

Alright, Florence. I'll admit it: You're a better man than I am. The shotgun is right inside the door. Go get him!

FLO

Absurd.

WELI

I'll help you in if you want to lie down. I'll chip some ice for your face.

Weli slips an arm around Flo and helps her into the house.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 11

Seven days later, Aunt Jane comes to visit carrying a carpet bag.

When she arrives, Josiah and Florence are preparing to go for a buggy ride together and Weli is bidding them goodbye.

WELI

'Siyo, Janey! (Slang hello: see-yoh')

AUNT JANE

'Siyoy, Weli, tohitsu? (Hi, William, how are you?: See-yoh',
welly, toe-hee'-juh?)

WELI

Ostda. (Fine: Ose'-dah)

JOSIAH

Are you coming or going, Jane, with your carpet bag?

AUNT JANE

I'm back. Ain't going nowhere.

JOSIAH

Florence needs a little airing out so we are going for a ride.

(He offers his elbow to
Florence and they start out
the gate together.)

AUNT JANE

Nice evening for it.

FLO

I'm sure you'll be gone by the time we return.

Aunt Jane bites her tongue and waves
goodbye to Florence and Josiah.

AUNT JANE

Funny how she keeps giving me hints when she knows damn well
I'll do the opposite.

WELI

She stays locked up in her own skin pretty much all of the
time. She always remembers what she said to you, but she can
never remember what you said back.

AUNT JANE

She doesn't listen.

WELI

Where you been?

AUNT JANE

Red Bird.

WELI

What's in Red Bird?

AUNT JANE

You know what's in Red Bird, Weli.

WELI

Did you see him?

AUNT JANE

I did. Everything I was told about him is true.

WELI

Then...

AUNT JANE

He's yours, just darker. That's the only difference. But he's tall as you are now; might grow taller.

WELI

That obvious?

AUNT JANE

Vv. (Yes: uh-huh) I told him to steer clear of Tulsa and he said he would. Since you didn't mention him to me, I figured you didn't want folks to know.

WELI

I don't know, reckon it's just a matter of time. I ain't ashamed of nothing except I've known about him for a week already and I've not done a thing for him yet.

AUNT JANE

Think Flo will take off when she finds out?

WELI

I don't know.

AUNT JANE

Would you miss her if she did?

WELI

I'd miss the girls. When they're not here, when it's just me and Flo, life is not the same. I love my girls and my girls love me, but I've got this big hole in my heart right where it feels like Flo used to be, or ought to be.

AUNT JANE

What did she do to you, Weli? She did something!

WELI

Nothing, Janey, nothing. She is as she is.

AUNT JANE

Don't you worry about your boy. I had supper with him and his mamma. They wanted to know all about you. I told him you had your own barber shop and his eyes kinda lit up. We fixed it up so he can go to school and learn a trade. He thinks he'd like to be a barber.

WELI

Janey, Janey. Wado, ula. (Thank you, sister: wah-doe', ooh'-la)

AUNT JANE

(She hugs him)

I would adopt him if I could, but it's too late. I figured setting him up in a trade was about the best we could do. His mamma is a real good cook, though. If Florence ever decides to walk, remember you've got another woman who thinks the world of you.

WELI

I don't know why.

AUNT JANE

Well, I do. Don't go by what Flo says, Weli, you're a good man and Florence lacks appreciation. Stop letting her tear you down.

WELI

I am tired of it. But, I don't want her to take my little girls away.

AUNT JANE

Tla! (No!) She ain't walking 'cause her daddy won't let her, but that don't mean you have to live with her if she won't treat you right. She's the reason they're calling you Hoop Jumper. Me, I don't think it's funny.

(She opens her carpet bag and pulls out Flo's candlesticks)

Oh, and this... So, if you want her back, I reckon these will bring her on in.

WELI

Candlesticks will do it.

AUNT JANE

It cost me, but that's what money is for, ain't it? I found one of them on the table at Miz Vann's, which is all to Chuskey's favor in my book. He split his take with your son, so he was trying to do good. I traded both of them for cash, and well worth if it brings peace to your house.

WELI

The money, I will...

AUNT JANE

My money is your money.

(Waving off his concern)

I leave it to you to see that Flo gets them, and what you tell her when you give them back. She'll get what she wants, so make her give you what you want. Goliga? (Understand: golee'-guh?)

WELI

Vv. (Yes: uh-huh) All I ever tried to do was the right thing. Now, I don't even know what that means! I don't know what she'll do if she finds out about the boy.

AUNT JANE

Get ready for it, Weli. She will find out about the boy. She'll be the last to know because nobody likes her, but she will find out.

WELI

You're the best sister a man could ever have. The best mamma, too.

AUNT JANE

I should be going, but I'll wait for Flo. I don't want her to think she can tell me what to do.

WELI

Sure, Janey, hang around.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SPOTLIGHT VIGNETTE - IN JOSIAH'S BUGGY

Josiah and Florence chat.

JOSIAH

You realize that it is your own selfishness that is preventing you from being rich beyond rich, don't you?

FLO

Rich beyond rich? In this territory that means owning two shoes!

JOSIAH

You may never live on 5th Avenue, but you could still have a crystal chandelier. You could still have a marble entryway with a huge mirror at the end of the hall, an enormous rosewood table to hold your silver candlesticks...all the princess-y things you've dreamt of since you were a little girl. Your feet need never touch the floor but they land on fine Persian carpets. What difference if the carpet is here or Windsor Palace?

FLO

So you say. I've heard a great many dreams spun, but I doubt all the money in Indian Territory could buy one crystal chandelier.

JOSIAH

The purpose of the land distribution is not necessarily to establish farms and ranches, my dear. Industry, beginning with the railroad, needs to be able to buy land without having to go through a bunch of tribal rigamarole. Industry must be encouraged to invest here for progress and prosperity.

FLO

It's all tribal land. No one can sell it.

JOSIAH

No one can sell it now, but that will change in the near future. If you choose your allotment in town and homestead it for a few years, then you can sell it off acre by acre to whoever can come up with the asking price. I'm betting on Tulsa to grow. It's not about having the land to live on, it's about having property to sell. Say you and Weli together received lands totaling two hundred and eighty acres...how many acres out of two-eighty would you and Weli need for your homestead?

FLO

No more than we live on now.

JOSIAH

You can't let your lack of feelings for him muddy your aims. The rolls will remain open until 1905, possibly longer. In five years you could easily bear three more children, which would add another four hundred twenty acres. If you manage to have twins, or if the deadline is extended as I anticipate it will be, you'd have time to add yet another baby. That would easily put you over a thousand acres.

FLO

And since the land is free, every penny is profit!

JOSIAH

My girl!

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

SCENE 12

Weli gathers two empty coffee cups and puts them on the porch as Aunt Jane replaces the candlesticks in the carpet bag and pulls a leaf of sheet music.

AUNT JANE

I sent off for some sheet music, Weli. I like this song for Mandy's wedding.

(She sings.)

"Many years ago today, Wedding bells were ringing gay,
Seems as if they sang a song of love to me..."

Aunt Jane is interrupted by applause coming from Josiah, who is standing with Florence by the gate.

JOSIAH

Never heard you sing before, Jane. That's a mighty sweet song.

AUNT JANE

It's a new one called "Mandy Lee". I sent away for it. I thought it would be nice for Mandy's wedding.

FLO

A big church wedding, I suppose.

AUNT JANE

Hah! Except there ain't no big church! We'll have it at the Creek Meeting Hall so everybody can come.

FLO

Heathen ceremony, is it?

AUNT JANE

I believe the groom's father, Dr. Hardin, is Methodist. I don't think Methodist is too heathen, is it? He's coming from Illinois for the vows and he's bringing the missus. It will be a different kind of ceremony, though, not the same old empty promises.

(Beat)

I was counting on Alma to play piano at the wedding.

FLO

She won't be back in time.

AUNT JANE

Tell them to come home earlier so they won't miss it!

WELI

We'll send a telegram in the morning and tell Mrs. Cuthbert it's time to bring them home!

FLO

We will not. They learn more in five minutes in St. Louis than they learn in five years in Indian Territory.

WELI

The girls will want to see their Aunt Mandy married, Flo. She's leaving for California right after. If you don't call them home they may never see her again.

FLO

Amanda should have taken that into account before she set her wedding date.

AUNT JANE

Is that right?

FLO

Yes, if she wanted to include my girls.

AUNT JANE

Vv. Gitlidv. (Yes, it's a dog: Uh-huh, geet'lee-duh)

JOSIAH

Florence doesn't speak Cherokee, Jane.

FLO

It's rude to speak a foreign language that others don't understand!

AUNT JANE

To us, English is the foreign language. And it's rude to correct your elders, Florence.

FLO

I'm sure you are the expert on rudeness.

AUNT JANE

By far, the honor belongs to you.

FLO

And you wonder why I don't rush to bring my children back.

AUNT JANE

You want your land allotment don't you?

FLO

Of course I do!

AUNT JANE

And, you know it's up to the tribe to adopt you.

FLO

You're not going to pull any strings to keep me out?

AUNT JANE

Not up to me, Flo. If they call you in to talk to you...

FLO

Would they do that?

AUNT JANE

I don't know, but if they do and you can't greet them in Cherokee, and if all they've heard about you is that you're trying to choke all the Cherokee out of your children, and the only, only reason you want to be a Cherokee is so you can get a land allotment--if it was up to me, I'd say "hell, no."

FLO

You've given my sister everything and you have nothing but hatred for me!

AUNT JANE

I don't hate you; I hate the way you treat my brother.

FLO

(To Weli)

So, you've been complaining against me. To her!

AUNT JANE

Stop blaming Weli! I see how his heart hurts; I see how low you've bent him. He's not complaining against you, I am! Every time you're mad at me, you blame Weli. Every time Emma misses a spelling word, you blame Weli. When Alma hits a sour note on the piano, you blame Weli!

FLO

Oh yes, Weli tries so hard! I beg him on my knees for another child and he sends me to bed chastened and alone!

JOSIAH

(Pats her shoulder)

My dear, now-now. Don't take it so to heart.

(To Aunt Jane)

This was the topic of our ride. She's quite torn up, as you can see.

AUNT JANE

She always cries when she's angry.

JOSIAH

She cries too often.

(To Weli)

She has complained to me that you lack gumption and if you lack the will to accommodate her passion then I can see why she feels so. What happens to a stallion when he won't mount the mares?

AUNT JANE

(To Weli)

Howahis? (Is that true?: How-wah-hees)

WELI

Vv, sagwu yuwokta. (Yes, one time: Uh-huh, sag'-woo you-woktah)

AUNT JANE

He turned you down once.

WELI

Only once in our lifetime, Flo.

AUNT JANE

He refused you only once, yet you have not caught a child in the last nine years. Who begs? Who is chastened? Who sleeps alone when he could have the love and comfort of another?

FLO

Love and comfort of what other?

AUNT JANE

Of the Cherokee woman he had before he had you.

WELI

Janey...

AUNT JANE

Did you not say that you are not ashamed? Did we not agree that the past would come to light?

(To Florence)

That woman would welcome him richly to this day.

FLO

Well, I won't welcome him richly or any other way! If she wants him, which I doubt, she can have him yesterday!

WELI

I have been faithful to you from the first day we met.

FLO

Faithful but not truthful or I would have heard have heard of this such woman before.

WELI

I had not seen her for years by the time I met you.

Florence turns on her heel and storms toward the house.

AUNT JANE

Well, alright then. I'll help Weli get his papers changed and there goes your hope of a land allotment.

(Flo bites back a spate of
furious invective as she
whirls around to face Jane.)

See, all a body has to say to you is 'allotment' and you come around right sharp.

JOSIAH

Florence, show respect.

AUNT JANE

Mandy is your blood sister, Florence. Would you have your own daughters treat each other so cold?

WELI

The girls will be back in time for the wedding. I will bring them back myself.

FLO

Over my dead body!

AUNT JANE

You call down a death curse upon yourself? Oh Creator, lead me not into temptation...

JOSIAH

I'll be going... No need for you to go for the girls, Weli. I will telegraph Mrs. Cuthbert myself and tell her to return with them at once.

FLO

Father!

JOSIAH

I remind you, daughter, that The Bible says a wife must submit to her husband or else be 'put away.' Submit more, and you will surely cry less. May I offer you a ride, Jane?

AUNT JANE

Thankee, Joe.

Josiah and Jane make a quick exit.

FLO

Hallelujah!

AUNT JANE

(From offstage)

Allotment.

FLO

Oh, that despicable hag! Don't you dare take up for her!

WELI

I'm not going to fight you.

FLO

Oh my God, she left her bag! Catch up with her, Weli! She's trying to make an excuse to come back.

WELI

She meant to leave the bag.

FLO

Probably so's she can come back to force me to talk Cherokee or taunt me with some imaginary other woman. Why can you not stand up for me? Why can't you be on my side?

WELI

I'm always on your side. Usually, I'm on your bad side, but I'm always on your side.

FLO

Then, prove it for once! She's too rough and too vulgar to spend time with the girls.

WELI

Jane will come for another visit, and when she does you will welcome her with open arms and you will attend her with dignity.

FLO

She has a way of thinking and speaking that is simply too crude for my taste.

WELI

She is my mother, she is my sister; I know you don't like her, but you'll just have to fake it. I am your husband and you will submit to me on this.

FLO

I will submit. I just don't understand why she has to act so Indin all the time.

WELI

She's not acting. If she's too Indin I guess I am too.

FLO

You're not as bad as she is.

WELI

Not as bad?

FLO

Well, she's more Indin, I guess. She's more than a half-breed and you're just a quarter blood. That's probably why.

WELI

Am I too Cherokee for you or am I not enough? I'm not white enough for whites and I ain't never gonna be any whiter than I already am, Florence. I'm glad the tribe don't care what percentage I am; they accepted me! They accepted my children. My daughters will never have to wonder or doubt who they are. We do not deny our blood.

FLO

Noble savages to the end.

WELI

We're still here, so we made it to the end. Indian Territory is where we start over.

FLO

How shall we start over, Weli? Shall we make amends in bed?

WELI

You don't want me in bed.

FLO

But your other woman does?

WELI

I have not seen her for more than fifteen years.

FLO

Then, how would Aunt Jane know that this woman cares for you still?

WELI

I have two things to tell you, Flo. One of them should make you very, very happy. The other -- I don't know how you'll take it. I have a son.

FLO

With that woman?

WELI

Yes.

FLO

Is that supposed to be the happy news?

WELI

It is for me, but I don't expect you to feel the same way. I didn't even know about him until just the other day. He's a big boy, nearly grown.

FLO

If Aunt Jane made the discovery there is no telling who the little bastard really is. A whore's son, perhaps?

WELI

Janey heard about him and she checked it out. He's mine.

FLO

But, you were never married to his mother, so he's illegitimate. Right?

WELI

Don't say illegitimate and don't call him bastard; people can't help the way they come into the world.

FLO

Did you leave his mother standing at the altar?

WELI

I can't recall that much about her. That was back in my drinking days. I don't recall much of anything.

FLO

I did not know that you used to drink.

WELI

Well, I did drink and I was real bad at it, which is why I haven't had a drink for years.

FLO

Being illegitimate cancels any claim your son might...

WELI

There is no such thing as an illegitimate human being! He is my flesh; that is his "legitimate" claim. We do not deny our blood.

FLO

What about your white blood? What are we to do?

WELI

Could you find it in your heart to mother him, Flo? For just a few years to put a little polish on him?

FLO

You've taken leave of your senses.

WELI

What sense then, in going on together?

FLO

I don't have a choice, do I? I don't. I know father would turn me out, the same way he turned me out when I was fifteen. I only know how to be a wife. I have never known another man but you; I have cooked and cleaned and washed your dirty drawers for twelve long years. I have nursed you, and I have borne you children. We must go on together, Weli, I beg you not to put me aside. I will be good! Upon my oath, I promise to submit to you and that I will bear you as many children as you wish.

WELI

My wish was for you to be happy. My wish was that you would return my love some day. I never wanted you to be false. Your father is the one who wants many children, not me.

FLO

We've never had a problem getting along.

WELI

You liked me pretty well when I drewed the Strip money.

FLO

We have had some good times together.

WELI

All gone.

FLO

Not gone! We'll have more good times. Think of when the girls come home!

WELI

I'm tired, Flo. It's not worth it.

FLO

We can stop fighting. We can bring the girls home. We can do whatever you want.

(She crosses to stand before him.)

Will you embrace me?

(He puts his arms around her.)

I remember good times, Weli. Recall how you roared with pleasure the very first time you took me?

(She loosens her bodice and pulls her gown down to expose her shoulders.)

I didn't let on, but I relished that roar. I can make you that happy again.

(Weli buries his face in her neck. Florence fumbles with his trouser buttons)

Let me make you happy.

WELI

(Weli pulls away)

First, I'm going to make you happy.

(He opens Aunt Jane's carpetbag and pulls out Florence's candlesticks.)

FLO

My candlesticks! My candlesticks! I thought I would never see them again! Oh, Weli! How? Do I want to know?

WELI

You have Jane to thank. Remember that.

Flo polishes a candlestick with the hem of her dress.

FLO

I'll make her a prune cake. Aunt Jane loves my prune cake!

WELI

Look at me, Flo. Are you happy now?

FLO

Overflowing, my dear.

WELI

Yes, I see the way your eyes light up. I have yearned to see your eyes sparkle again the way they did in '88 and in '91, and in '94 when I drew the Strip money, and '96 when we drew again. You sparkle for silver and you sparkle hard for cash but you have never lit up like that for me.

FLO

Please don't leave us. The girls will never forgive me if you do.

WELI

If I thought you loved me I would try, but you don't love me.

FLO

Have I given you that impression?

WELI

You've given everyone that impression. That's why they've been calling me Hoop Jumper around town. You treat me like some little circus dog.

FLO

I'll change, Weli! If that is the impression, I'll erase it. No one will ever think that again.

WELI

I will.

FLO

Give me a chance! Just one more chance! Weli, don't give up on me. You know I can please you. Let me take away the hurt.

She falls on her knees before him.

He steps back to keep his fly out of reach of her desperate hands.

WELI

Do you love me?

She edges closer on her knees.

FLO

I do.

WELI

What is it that you love about me?

FLO

Lots of things, Weli!

WELI

Name one thing.

(Flo is afraid to speak. He turns away.)

That's what I thought.

FLO

(She rises and pursues him)

One kiss before you leave me. Please don't put me away.

Weli does not struggle against the kiss that Florence puts her body and soul into. His body begins to respond and she turns up the heat by trying out a new kind of kiss.

She slips him some tongue. Weli pulls back.

WELI

Tongue. Did your father make you practice that while y'all were on your ride?

(She slaps his face.)

Weli snaps. He grabs Florence's shoulders. She wilts instead of fighting back.)

You want me to cover you like a stallion covers a mare?

FLO

Yes, Weli.

(Weli drags her toward the front door as if she were a toy. He won't let her cooperate, and she begins to get frightened.)

WELI

You want me to get you with child?

FLO

I do.

WELI

Another child for another allotment?

FLO

Weli...

WELI

The truth.

FLO

Yes. No need to torture me with it.

WELI

(Weli sweeps Flo off her feet.)

Alright then, let's go make your daddy happy.

He carries her inside the house and shuts the door. Muffled cries, ripping fabric, groans. A few moments later, Weli comes out onto the porch buttoning his fly.

He retrieves the candlesticks and takes them to the front door.

The door is locked. He knocks.

WELI (CONT'D)

Your candlesticks!

Flo opens the door and takes the candlesticks.

FLO

I hate you.

She slams the door in his face.

WELI

Howa. Osda. (Truth: how-wah'. Good: ose'dah)

Weli seats himself on the porch and pulls the whiskey jug out from under the steps. He uncorks the jug, takes a long swig. He coughs a little, blows his nose, and hits the bottle again.

LIGHTS DIM.

BLACKOUT.

THE END