

Sundown Over Oarmint Gulch

by

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*S*ane directors should probably stop reading right here.

This piece is for a mix of actors, puppets, dancers, masks, video, film, projections, mimes, musicians, and just about anything else that may happen to be available. I'd love to see technologies used that haven't even been imagined yet. But I'd also be especially delighted with the simplest of productions, one that uses only puppetry and other low-tech approaches. Indeed, it can be performed by any size cast in any space on any budget, even entirely without props or special effects, just using mime techniques and speaking aloud those parts of the stage directions that are necessary for the audience to follow the story. The one thing is to find a way to make this whatever-it-is startle into life in front of an audience.

Go way out on a limb, and it will break and you will fall. Go out on a thousand limbs, though, and they will support you.

If you have any questions, you know how to reach me.

S*tartled, Time, a bookkeeper, a meek elderly little rabbit of a man, looks up, blinking, from his massive ledgers. The long-unpainted walls around him are lined with rickety bookshelves filled with huge battered old volumes)*

TIME. What? Why, yes, I'm Time,

In, on, and about

Any old, sands of, spare, and over

Stitch in, by the, quick, and tide and,

Solar, sidereal, mean, and standard.

Me? Yes? An interview? Why, I don't, that is, I'm rather in a, you know I

have so little, that is, I *am* Time, but you know what I –Do? Why, why, I,

I pass mostly. Yes, I pass. Fly? Oh no no. Yes, well I live so much in the

past—or is it the future? I forget. *(getting up)* But, really, now, I have to

(going outside to his waiting buggy)

My horses, Nick and Arrow

You see,

(climbs in)

I have an appointment.

(shakes the reins and drives off into the night)

*

(Powerful, titanic, his footsteps shaking the earth, Pap Rory McGrew, in all the full-bearded glory of his fifty years, strides angrily along the Main Street of Varmint Gulch and up to the Sheriff's Office. He gives a mighty pound on the door.

The entire building collapses.

When the dust finally clears, all that remains of the Sheriff's Office is the sign, the jail in the back, and Sheriff Dirk, with his feet up on his desk and his hat down over his eyes, picking his teeth.)

SHERIFF DIRK *(without bothering to look up)*. That you, McGrew?

PAP. Yep. It's me, Sheriff.

SHERIFF DIRK. What can I do for you?

PAP. I hear Bull Ears Bart is back in town. Aint you gonna do nothin about it?

SHERIFF DIRK. Can't be bothered. Bring him in, and I'll lock him up for you.

(Pap turns and strides down the street as Townsfolk scatter in fear.

Then he stops and

PAP *(bellows)*. Bull Ears!

(Townsfolk are timidly looking out from behind doors and windows)

TOWNSFOLK. It's Pap Rory McGrew! Pap Rory McGrew! Goin after Bull Ears Bart!

PAP (*even louder*). Bull Ears Bart!

I'm a-callin for you!

(Suddenly –

His huge black horse whinnying and rearing, dressed all in black, with an immense handlebar mustache and an enormous black bullwhip in his hand, Bull Ears Bart towers menacingly at the end of the deserted street.)

BART. You askin for me, Pap Rory McGrew?

PAP. Yeah, I'm askin for you, Bull Ears Bart. You shot one of my hands. You stole twenty head of my cattle. You're a lowdown sneakthievin snakeslidin whipwhistlin rodentwrastlin bazoompus and a rangerustler. And now your comeuppance is about to quid its pro quo.

BART. I hear your accusatory charges, Pap Rory McGrew, well, you can charge me all you want, but I aint a-payin. Exceptin this how!

(Bull Ears Bart throws back his arm and lashes out at Pap Rory McGrew with the mighty bullwhip. Suddenly, an expression of surprise, then alarm, crosses Bull Ears Bart's face. He tries to pull back the whip.

Slowly, with immense effort, pulling hand over hand on the whip, Pap Rory McGrew drags Bull Ears Bart from his horse and pulls him step by step

closer and closer. Both men are sweating with the effort. Bart struggles, desperately pulling back on his whip, digging his heels into the dirt, but Pap draws him inexorably nearer until, finally

PAP. Now you're comin with me.

(Pap lifts Bull Ears Bart up by Bart's belt and carries him, dangling like a parcel, toward what remains of Sheriff Dirk's office.)

BART *(whining)*. Now, Pap, now, can't you take a joke? I didn't mean no harm, Pap, really, I was always meanin to give you back those twenty head of

*

(The McGrew ranch. Slim Sim McGrew, a young man of about nineteen years, gets down from his horse, ties it to the railing, and walks to the ranchhouse. In the distance, a poorwill calls, as chickens scatter from Sim's path.)

Inside, Pap Rory McGrew sits enthroned at the head of the long table, an entire roast chicken in one hand, an immense hamshank in the other. He has taken huge bites out of both of them.

Sim comes in. His older brother Boots McGrew, his Sister, and his mother Maw McGrew look up from the table)

PAP. You're late, son.

SIM. Howdy, Maw.

MAW. Howdy, Sim.

SIM. Howdy, Boots.

BOOTS. Howdy, Sim.

MAW. Howdy, Boots.

BOOTS. Howdy, Maw.

SIM. Howdy, Pitiful Jane.

PAP. Lower your tailbone and set to, son

SIM. Paw? I gotta ask you

PAP. Just one shy sniff of your Maw's solanum tuberosum

And roosters crow, ducks queckaqueckquack, and dead cows

MAW. I boiled them myself!

PAP. rise up and dance

Trout leap from the river;

Shake them. Held by fired earth, they

SIM. Paw

PAP. are the thunder of the valley

Massy boulders of the bowl pouring down the mountainside

Them's the vittles makes a strong man mighty, a weak man strong

Brings wisdom to the weary, bloodfierceness to the faint

And colordazzled sight to the blind

Eat your Maw's boiled taters, son.

SIM. Paw . . . I want to marry Tiramie Susie.

(pause)

MAW. Pap, the youngun says he wants to marry Tiramie Susie.

PITIFUL JANE. I wanna have a man.

MAW. Shut up, Pitiful Jane.

SIM. We love each other, Paw, and we

PAP. She's a whore and her mother is a whore

And her children will be whores

And she'll always be a whore and—

SIM. Susie's no whore, Paw, you—

PAP. Before I see you married to that whore

I'll take you up and twist your neck

And tear your arms and stomp you

Into shadowdust!

MAW. Hit him, Pap!

PAP. You rebarbitive little turnip sprout, you

Whining little softeyed milkcalf—

MAW. Give the little scallywag a sockdolager to the proboscis! *(begins
throwing boiled potatos at Sim)*

PITIFUL JANE. I wanna have a man.

SIM. Paw –

MAW. Strike him yea and with the shankbone of a ham! The little bug was brought up on my good boiled taters and he asks to marry such a one as Tiramie Susie!

PAP. Full of your young pride

Ardent in eaglehood

You'll get no way but mine

SIM. Your way, Paw! Your mighty way!

Like skygeese honking south in winter

You know your way

Ten thousand springcrazed buffalo

Thunder down the ravine

And who stands in their path

Is trampled –

PAP. I'll smash you like a robin's egg!

Though seas dry up, mountains fall

Stars change their places in the sky

Though Mangan's Rock be worn to pebblecrush

SIM. Sure! Your every titration is Your Way!

PAP. Never

Not through nights and days of mountainwinds and moonturns

Not though winter pile on winter, summerrain on rain

Crops grow, sliced down, and grow again

Mares foal, and foals' foals foal

Season break on season

You will never marry that little whore!

(Pap overturns the table)

(Sim rushes out)

PAP. Out! Get out! Get out of here! Get out!

PITIFUL JANE. I wanna have a man.

MAW. Shut up, Pitiful Jane.

(Boots gets up and follows after Sim)

*

(The sky is splashed over with stars. Sim is rushing along the empty dirt road, trees shadowed in the night.

Boots catches up with him.)

BOOTS. Hey, kid, you okay?

SIM. I wish I could take his old neck and squeeze

Until the blood spurts from his eyes

BOOTS. Sure, kid.

SIM. It's just—so—

BOOTS. Easy, kid.

Look at them out there. Across the sky. Like somebody kicked over a bucket of stars.

SIM. Boots, I love Tiramie Susie. It's like all my insides are just calling for her. I just don't know how I—

BOOTS. I know, kid.

SIM. Boots—What am I gonna do?

BOOTS. Don't worry, kid. All in good time.

*

(Time is riding along in his little buggy, his whip dangling from his hand, clopping peacefully down a sleepy dirt road)

*

(The Boozy Floozy Bordello: Fine Liquors and Lascivia; Geometry Sam and Turtleeyes Yellowfeather are playing checkers; some of The Girls have gathered around the piano)

SOME GIRLS & CUSTOMERS SING. *The last time I saw my Mother dear
God's blessing on that old grey head
Her final hour was drawing near*

*With weeping my eyes were red
Then she beckoned to draw me near her
As she lay there upon her death bed
“Oh, come here, my son
My darlingest one
For while I still may
I have something to say”
And here’s what my old Mother said:*

*Don’t give gin to your baby
Most babies like bourbon best
If you give baby gin
It will make quite a din
But bourbon will silence the pest
No, don’t give gin to your baby
Though baby may be quite distressed
When your tot goes to bed
Think of what Mother said
Most babies like bourbon best!*

BLUSHING BELINDA. Tiramie Susie! How many times do I have to tell you — keep your ducks out of the bedrooms! A man don’t like it if he’s

pumpin away and suddenly a duck flops down on him!

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I'm sorry, Ma.

MUSTACHIO MIKE (*storms in*). I aint gonna pay!

BLUSHING BELINDA. Why, you know you gotta pay, Mustachio Mike.

Why aint you gonna pay?

MUSTACHIO MIKE. Why, I'll tell you. I was humpin and pumpin and just glorifyin my manhood, doin my tall hard slidin in and out, my rooster rumpus, my stallion shindig, when you know what Forbidden Kitty done?

She laughed at me!

BLUSHING BELINDA. Forbidden Kitty, did you laugh at Mustachio Mike at a sensitive moment?

FORBIDDEN KITTY. Well, yes, I did laugh at him, Miss Blushin Belinda.

BLUSHING BELINDA. Now, why did you laugh at Mustachio Mike?

FORBIDDEN KITTY. Well, I just looked up at Mustachio Mike's face, and he was just a huffin and a puffin, and he looked so plumb serious, I just couldn't help it.

BLUSHING BELINDA. Was you lookin serious, Mustachio Mike?

MUSTACHIO MIKE. Course I was lookin serious. Humpy pumpy is serious business.

DUCK. Quack

TIRAMIE SUSIE (*with her ducks*). I got Max and Priscilla, Ma.

BLUSHING BELINDA. That's good, Tiramie Susie.

(*Sim enters*)

SIM. Miss Blushing Belinda, ma'am, may I speak with Tiramie Susie?

BLUSHING BELINDA. Why, course you can, Sim. You give my regards to your Paw, hear?

TIRAMIE SUSIE (*leaving with Sim*). Thankee, Ma

BLUSHING BELINDA. Okay, Mustachio Mike, tell you what. Next time, I'll give you Earnest Ernestina. She'll never so much as giggle at your Mighty Roger.

MUSTACHIO MIKE. But I like Forbidden Kitty. She has a sense of humor.

BLUSHING BELINDA. Now, Mustachio Mike—

*

(*Geometry Sam and Turtleeyes Yellowfeather, playing checkers*)

GEOMETRY SAM. Mustachio Mike, him bein as contrary and muleheaded as a gallywhumpus, some folks say he once even wrassled a bear. But that's nothin to Pap Rory McGrew. Tell me, Turtleeyes Yellowfeather, did I ever tell you the story of Baby Pap Rory McGrew and the Mountain Lion?

YELLOWFEATHER. Why, no, Geometry Sam, I don't rightly reckon as you have.

GEOMETRY SAM. Well, it's like this –

(Mamma McGrew and Baby Pap Rory McGrew)

MAMMA MCGREW. Are you my cute little adorable little Baby Pap?

BABY PAP. Mamma Mamma!

MAMMA MCGREW. Now, Baby Pap Rory McGrew, you jes lie there quiet as a doodlebug and take you a nap by the fire while I go in for a spell to make some nice baby pap for my Baby Pap.

BABY PAP. Wa

(Mamma McGrew goes)

BABY PAP *(baby snores)*. Whoooosh-shwaa whoooosh-shwaa
whoooosh –

GEOMETRY SAM. When comes stalkin through the woods a huge ferocious Mountain Lion. She was mean and she was hungry.

(Mountain Lion)

MOUNTAIN LION. Grumma grumma wanna yumma grumma . . .

BABY PAP. Shwaaa

MOUNTAIN LION *(hears)*. Gra?

BABY PAP. Whoooosh-shwaa

MOUNTAIN LION. Grumma? [*What's that?*]

BABY PAP. Whoooooosh—

MOUNTAIN LION. Whurra? Whurra?

BABY PAP. Shwaaa whoooooosh—

MOUNTAIN LION. Thurra! Thurra!

(she creeps cautiously closer, then she stops)

Myaarro-ro, oh I see I slurpy see a tender little tasty little myarroooh

slurpy little baby ro rooor

(creeping up on the sleeping Baby Pap) Crrreepa

(closer)

crrreepa

(closer)

crrreepa

GEOMETRY SAM. Can nobody save this helpless little baby?

BABY PAP. Shwaaaa

MOUNTAIN LION (*pounces*). Rrrraa!!!! Grrraara!!! Grrraabba!!!!

BABY PAP (*waking up*). Wha—

MOUNTAIN LION. Grrraara!!!!

BABY PAP (*giggles*).

MOUNTAIN LION. Slurp grup gobble chew chew chew

BABY PAP (*giggles*). Tickles!

MOUNTAIN LION. Grabba! Grubba! Slurpy grob chew –

BABY PAP. Kitty kitty!

MOUNTAIN LION. Grubba!

BABY PAP. Kitty tickles!

MOUNTAIN LION. Grubbrubrub

BABY PAP (*giggling*). Ooh! Ooh!

MOUNTAIN LION. Gra!

Stop graughing you little gra, I'm grying to EAT you grrrr!

BABY PAP. Tickles!

MOUNTAIN LION. Grickles! Grhat sort of grumgru

GEOMETRY SAM. But there was somethin neither of them knew. While the mean hungry Mountain Lion was creepin up on Baby Pap, there was somethin even meaner and hungrier creepin up on her

VOICES (*very soft*). Howoooo

(patter patter patter)

VOICES (*very soft*). Howoooo

(patter patter patter)

VOICES (*very soft*). Howoooo

(small red eyes in the woods)

MOUNTAIN LION (*uneasy*). Grhu?

VOICES. Grrrrrrrrrr

MOUNTAIN LION (*frightened*). Hhhhhhhh hhhhhhhh

Frrr? Frrr?

(pause)

(the Voices launch into a fury of attack)

VOICES. Harrr!!! Harrr!!! Yowrrr!!!

MOUNTAIN LION. Hhhhhhhh!

VOICES. Yow-ya-YA! Yow-ya! Yow—

(Baby Pap sits up)

BABY PAP. Bad doggies!!

(stunned silence)

Nice kitty Pap kitty!

VOICES. Yow! Yow! Yow!!

GEOMETRY SAM. Well, the wolves, they just rush at Baby Pap, clawin and chompin at him. But Baby Pap, before you know it—

VOICES. Ya??

GEOMETRY SAM. —he ties their tails together with a long piece of rope and lights the other end of the rope in the fire like a fuse.

FUSE. Hsssss

VOICES. Yuh? Yow! Rowrow! Rowrowrowrowrow!

GEOMETRY SAM. You never seed a pack of wolves take off so fast
runnin for the river.

(wolf voices fade in distance)

(SPLASH!)

BABY PAP. Bad doggies!

MOUNTAIN LION *(looks at Pap)*. Myurrr *(rubs her head against him)*

BABY PAP. Kitty!

MAMMA MCGREW *(returns)*. Why, Baby Pap, what a nice kitty cat!

Hello, little kitty! And what's her name?

BABY PAP. Jehbuh buh

MAMMA MCGREW. Jezebel! What a nice name for a kitty!

GEOMETRY SAM. And from that day on, she was known as Jezebel.

And for the next eighteen years, Pap and Jezebel was never apart. Until—

But I reckon that's another story.

*

*(Sim and Tiramie Susie, with her ducks Max and Priscilla, on the
bank of Yeller Possum Creek)*

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Did you talk to your Paw, Sim?

(pause; he looks away from her)

I don't want to make trouble for you with your kinfolks, Sim

SIM. Like a wildfire rip

Shooting old trees up in flame

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Sim

SIM. They think I'm just a child!

I'd like to pull him out like a trunk from the ground

Toppled over, his thin roots waving in the air

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Oh, Sim

SIM. Aint nothin *but* trouble twixt me and him, aint never been, aint never will be. When fire tears through the woods, it aint because some hummingbird is making trouble.

I love you, Tiramie Susie

I love you like the snow loves the mountaintop

Like the eagle loves the wind

Like the trout loves the brook

And the rain loves thunder

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I love you too, Sim

I love you so much I just get twisted out with longing for you

SIM. Then marry me!

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I want to be your wife so bad, Sim

I want you like the swift wants south in winter

Like the trees want rain

I want your eyes, your skin

The sunlight on your hair

You are my every river

Rushing, carrying me yours

Forever, always

And it just can't be

SIM. It will be!

TIRAMIE SUSIE. But your Paw, Sim—

SIM. What about him?

TIRAMIE SUSIE. If he won't—

SIM. I'll tear his throat out

(pause)

TIRAMIE SUSIE. You know what your Paw says goes in these parts

(pause)

SIM. I aint givin you up for him. I aint givin you up for no one!

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I want it to be true but

SIM. Come away with me, Tiramie Susie! There's more to the world than
Varmint Gulch!

MAX. Quack

SIM. Let's get out of here, we'll get married in some big city –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. But –

SIM. – some place like Rattlesnake Hole or Dead Man's Bluff, maybe even Gopher Flats! Let's go, late at night when no one knows, we can –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. But – Sneak out on my Ma at night like some rustler? I can't do that

SIM. Then you don't love me!

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Don't say that!

SIM. I do say it! I'd die for you, I'd stick my face in fire, freeze off my fingers, just so I could have you!

(pause)

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Sometimes I think there's no such thing as grownups, that there's nothing but little children, gettin bigger, gettin older and trying to pretend they know what to do. And that grownups are just a story that children make up so as not to be too scared. All right. I will, Sim. I'll run off with you tomorrow night.

PRISCILLA. Quack.

*

(Turtleeyes Yellowfeather and Geometry Sam, playing checkers)

GEOMETRY SAM. Well, now, Turtleeyes Yellowfeather, you ever hear tell bout Hootin Willy?

YELLOWFEATHER. Why, no, Geometry Sam, I don't rightly reckon I have

GEOMETRY SAM. One day, this was back when Pap and his mountain lion Jezebel was still always seen together, there turns up in Varmint Gulch a stranger, tall and thin like he was all twigs and eggshell. He didn't speak, just made a sort of

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

GEOMETRY SAM. sound. And so folks called him

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

GEOMETRY SAM. Hootin Willy. And when he made his

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

GEOMETRY SAM. sound, it was the strangest thing, just

(a tense moment at the gambling table)

POKER PETE. That's a funny deck o cards

SHIFTY MALONE. You sinuatin somethin, mister?

POKER PETE. I aint sinuatin nothin, I'm just remarculatin as to how's six aces is a trifle like tits on a whore's backside

SHIFTY MALONE. Why you son of a bowlegged prairie chicken, you say

that again and I'll

POKER PETE. Yeah, you'll what?

SHIFTY MALONE. I'll—

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

SHIFTY MALONE. I'll—

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

SHIFTY MALONE. give you back all your money. Here's some extra,
too.

(Dan and Mavis Lee)

MAVIS LEE (*angry*). That's it!

DAN. I'm still your husband, don't you talk to me like—

MAVIS LEE. And I'm just fed up to my eyeballs with your stayin out all
night! I'm warnin you. You have just got

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

MAVIS LEE. Just got

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

MAVIS LEE. the cutest little nose.

(at the harness store)

DINKLEHOFFER. Look at this mess!

BLIMSLEY. I'm sorry Mr Dinklehoffer, I don't know how it—

DINKLEHOFFER. Blimsley, this is it! I'm

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

DINKLEHOFFER. I'm—

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

DINKLEHOFFER. givin you a raise in salary. Startin two weeks ago.

BLIMSLEY. Gee, thank you, Mr Dinklehoffer

GEOMETRY SAM. Just one hoot and grown folks would go around
smilin. Little children would stop cryin and run out to play. It sure did
make you feel good. And after a while

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

WHISKEY TIM. I feel good today!

BIG HANK. I feel good!

HAMMERIN JONES. I feel mighty good!

OX HORTON. You feel good too?

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

WHISKEY TIM. In fact, we all feel so good

ALL TOGETHER. *That We Just Can't Stand It!!!!*

WHISKEY TIM. And so we're gonna run Hootin Willy out of town.

BIG HANK. But, Whiskey Tim—

HAMMERIN JONES. What if—

OX HORTON. What if he hoots at us?

HAMMERIN JONES. Cause if he hoots at us

BIG HANK. We'll just feel so good

OX HORTON. We'll just forgit about everythin

HAMMERIN JONES. And let him stay.

WHISKEY TIM. Why, I don't know

GEOMETRY SAM. So they went to Schoolmaster Bigby

SCHOOLMASTER BIGBY. Trivial.

OX HORTON. Huh?

SCHOOLMASTER BIGBY. In order not to hear the hooting, just stuff up your ears with beeswax.

GEOMETRY SAM. And so—

SCHOOLMASTER BIGBY. The Classics Prepare One for Life.

GEOMETRY SAM. --late that night, Pap and Jezebel was up in the mountains trappin at the time, they gathered. And they all stuffed up their ears with beeswax. And then—

WHISKEY TIM. You ready?

BIG HANK. What?

HAMMERIN JONES. How's that?

OX HORTON. D'somebody say somethin?

GEOMETRY SAM. They went out after Hootin Willy

WHISKEY TIM. Howdy, Milkface Perkins. You know where we can find Hootin Willy?

MILKFACE PERKINS. Hootin Willy? Why, I—

WHISKEY TIM. Stow the blab, we can't hear you, just nod yes or no

MILKFACE PERKINS. Why, no, I—

(they go on)

WHISKEY TIM. Howdy, Mr Adolphus Snodgrass sir. You know where we can find Hootin Willy?

MR ADOLPHUS SNODGRASS. Hootin Willy? Why, I—

WHISKEY TIM. Blast the blubber you fat fool, we can't hear you. Just nod yes or no

MR ADOLPHUS SNODGRASS. Well, no, I—

(they go on)

WHISKEY TIM. Howdy, Limpin Brewster. You know where we can find Hootin Willy?

LIMPIN BREWSTER. I sure do—

WHISKEY TIM. We can't hear you. We got wax in our ears.

LIMPIN BREWSTER. How come you got

WHISKEY TIM. Just nod yes or no

LIMPIN BREWSTER (*nods*). I sure do know where to

WHISKEY. Blot the blabber. You like Hootin Willy?

LIMPIN BREWSTER. Why, Hootin Willy he makes everybody feel so good and happy –

WHISKEY TIM. Muffle the malarkey. We're gonna whomp that Hootin herbivore to a whimper and run him out of town. You wanna help us?

LIMPIN BREWSTER. Why I think that's

WHISKEY TIM. Can't hear you

LIMPIN BREWSTER (*nods*). I sure do!

WHISKEY TIM. Then lead us to him!

LIMPIN BREWSTER (*leads the way*). How come you got wax in your ears?

Just follow me. Oh, right, you can't hear. (*gestures and exaggerates words*)

Gotta go pretty deep in the woods. Down this way.

VOICE. Hooo

LIMPIN BREWSTER. Just an owl. Now through here. That's right.

Watch your step. Over this way. Care-Ful . . . And now –

HOOTIN WILLY (*snores*). Hooo

LIMPIN BREWSTER. Under the big oak. There he is. Sleepin like a somewhat overelongated innocent baby.

HOOTIN WILLY. Hooo

(they surround him)

HOOTIN WILLY *(wakes)*. Hoo?

WHISKEY TIM. Get him!

THE FIGHT. *Biff!*

Bam! Thwud! – Whooff!
Kromp! Yow! Jeez! Bim! Whump! Whimff!
Eck – Pombody! Hupf! Ahgg! Bonk! Kabbadabb!
Oof! Fwim!

HOOTIN WILLY. *Hooo –*

Bwum!
Abbawhomp! *Eep!* *Oop!*
Klomp –

HOOTIN WILLY. *Hooo –*

Ubb! Thwap! Dup! Bomp! Ibb!
Oof! Brump! Bliff! Dwuff! Blim! Brompt! Bibba!
Hup! Fwim!

LIMPIN BREWSTER. Hey, why don't we just all be friends and –

BAM!

(knocks Limpin Brewster out cold)

Bomp! Krodd! Yarr!
Dappakob! Kumpa! Thwump!
Krunk! Kurpukka!!!

HOOTIN WILLY *(in the distance)*. *Hoooooo –*

(still more distant) *Hoooooo –*

(vanishing) *Hoooooo*

WHISKEY TIM. Well. We sure took care of him.

BIG HANK. What?

HAMMERIN JONES. How's that?

OX HORTON. D'somebody say somethin'?

GEOMETRY SAM. When Pap came down with Jezebel from the mountains, he was mad as all tarnation. But there warn't nothin to be done. As for Hootin Willie, he just vanished, was never seen nor heard of again.

(pause)

WHISKY TIM. Big Hank. You ever . . . miss Hootin Willie?

BIG HANK. What?

HAMMERIN JONES. How's that?

OX HORTON. D'somebody say somethin'?

*

(night; Tiramie Susie's bedroom)

(a sound)

TIRAMIE SUSIE *(softly)*. That you, Sim?

SIM *(softly)*. It's me, Tiramie Susie.

(climbs quietly from his ladder through window)

You ready?

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Just about. It's — careful Sim, don't wake Max and Priscilla!

SIM. Sorry —

(starts to sit)

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Not there — it's Lafayette! *(cat)* She's —

SIM. Sorry. But . . . Tiramie Susie, that's an awful lot of stuff to try to get down a ladder.

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I'm sorry, Sim, I'm all mixed up inside.

SIM. You just need a few things

TIRAMIE SUSIE. And the ducks

SIM. And the ducks

TIRAMIE SUSIE. And the rabbits and the cat

SIM. And the rabbits and the cat

TIRAMIE SUSIE. And the dog

SIM. And the dog. But aside from the ducks and the rabbits and the cat and the dog, you just need a few things, and then once we're married we can write back to your Ma to send all your stuff after.

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I know, Sim. It's just, it's just I.

SIM. You don't have to worry bout

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I aint never lived no place but here.

SIM. It'll be all right, we just –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Not there, Sim – it's Roderick! (*rabbit*)

SIM. Sorry. But it's gonna be fine, because we love each other and –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Don't step on Wellington (*dog*) –

SIM. Sorry

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Oh, Sim, I'm just scared.

SIM. Aint nothing to be scared about –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. But is it right for us to just –

SIM. We got to, Tiramie Susie! They won't let us be together no other way –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I know, Sim, but –

SIM. I want you mine like my hand is mine

Like my eyes is mine

I want us to be the sun comin up in the morning

Riverflood crashin through the rocks

Eyeflash darktouch

Sweatbreathin

No me, no you

Just us together

Cryin out like eagles –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. *Not there, Sim –*

WELLINGTON (*tail stepped on*). Arwarr! Arwarr!

(Sim steps back, bumps into Lafayette)

LAFAYETTE. Mwaaar!

WELLINGTON. Arwarr!

MAX (*waking up*). Queck!

TIRAMIE SUSIE (*to her animals*). There, quiet there, you –

LAFAYETTE. Mwaaar!

PRISCILLA. Queck!

WELLINGTON. Arwarr arwarr!

BLUSHING BELINDA (*comes through the door*). What's this rumpus?

Don't you know – what in thunderation is – Slim Sim McGrew – what are you doin in my daughter's room? I didn't think you were – you should be ashamed of yourself! Tiramie Susie's a good girl, you can't –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. It's not that, Ma –

BLUSHIN BELINDA. Didn't your Maw and Paw teach you better than to –

SIM. It aint what you think, Miss –

TIRAMIE SUSIE. No, Ma, we was lopin –

BLUSHIN BELINDA. You was what?

SIM. Miss Blushin Belinda, ma'am, me and Tiramie Susie, we didn't mean no disrespect, we was just running off to get married.

BLUSHIN BELINDA. Oh, you poor kids. So your Paw said no.

SIM. That's right ma'am.

TIRAMIE SUSIE. I'm goin, Ma. If we can't go out the window, we'll go out the front door! Sim and me, we got a right to be happy, we—

SIM. We love each other and we—

BLUSHIN BELINDA. There's nothing I can do to stop you. If you have to go, then go. But you can't just think about yourselves. If you two set off in amorous absquatulation, you know what's goin to happen? Sim, first thing your Pa's gonna shut down the Boozy Floozy, you know he will, and me and Forbidden Kitty and Lily of Arabia and Surreptitious Sally— and Faux-pas Fanny and Peaches Melba— and the rest of the girls— is gonna be run outa Varmint Gulch with nary a lace doily to cover our Southern hemispheres. We'll lose everything we built up these twenty year, to start all over in some strange town without a biscuit to our names. You want that to happen to us?

TIRAMIE SUSIE. Sim, I love you, Sim, I love you so much it's makin me spin like a butterfly in a twister. But I can't do this to my Ma, and the girls they been like sisters my whole life to me. I just can't, Sim. I can't marry

you knowin I'll be doin harm to them.

BLUSHIN BELINDA. I'm sorry, you kids. I know you're hurtin like the tender shoots of your young lives have been a-blighted and a-blasted. But it just can't be till your Paw comes around. You gotta wait till it's the right time.

*

(Time is moving through the countryside in his buggy at a brisk purposeful trot.)

*

(Geometry Sam and Turtleeyes Yellowfeather playing checkers)

GEOMETRY SAM. Tell me, Turtleeyes Yellowfeather, I ever tell you how Pap McGrew got himself a scarecrow?

YELLOWFEATHER. Why, no, Geometry Sam, I don't believe you have.

GEOMETRY SAM. Well, it all began with the Sisters Toothsome and Nourishing LaRue.

TOOTH SOME *(to audience)*. Howdy, I'm Toothsome.

NOURISHING. Howdy, I'm . . . Nourishing.

GEOMETRY SAM. Toothsome and Nourishing lived together in a big old house just outside of Varmint Gulch. And one Sunday in Church they saw Handsome Tyrone Purvis the Gamblin Man from Missouri.

YELLOWFEATHER. But, Geometry Sam, was Handsome Tyrone Purvis the Gamblin Man from Missouri a churchgoer?

GEOMETRY SAM. Well, not exactly.

HANDSOME TYRONE. Gentlemen, I offer you a wager that this comin Sunday in our local Church, Minister Finister will lead our congregation in Hymn 163. All amounts will be accepted. Any takers, gentlemen?

LIMPIN BREWSTER. But—nobody ever sings Hymn 163. It is thought to be . . . somewhat peculiar.

(pause)

HANDSOME TYRONE *(stunned)*. This news comes as a shock to me.

When I offered this wager, I believed Hymn 163 to be an ordinary hymn like any other hymn, to be selected as a matter of pure chance. But now I learn from Limpin Brewster that Hymn 163 is never sung. Alas, I have no choice here. I am constrained by the Code of the Gamblin Man, as taught to me by my Gamblin Mama Purvis when I was but a Gamblin Infant dandled on her Gamblin Knee.

GAMBLIN MAMA PURVIS. When a Gamblin Man Makes a Bet, a Gamblin Man Must Stand By It.

HANDSOME TYRONE. So while I will be grateful to anyone who is kind enough to refrain from betting, should there be anyone here so unfeeling

as to take cruel advantage of my innocent error, I have no choice but to accept your ante. Sirs, I am at your mercies. It seems I have inadvertently offered you a sure thing. Under these circumstances, is there any here so heartless as to take me up on my wager?

(pause)

CROWD (*crowding around him*). Ten dollars! Twenty! Fifteen! Thirty five! Fifty!

HANDSOME TYRONE. One at a time, Gentlemen

CROWD. Fifteen! Twenty five! Thirty two! Forty!

GEOMETRY SAM. Now there were some who was content to simply wait for Sunday. But some felt it best not to leave things to chance.

BANKER BENKER. Good day, Minister Finister.

MINISTER FINISTER. Good day, Banker Benker.

BENKER. Minister Finister, I don't believe you know my colleague Banker Binker?

FINISTER. Delighted to meet Banker Binker, Banker Benker.

BENKER. Minister Finister, Banker Binker and I and this delegation here are calling on you today to congratulate you on maintaining morality here in Varmint Gulch by never ever allowing the singing in Church of Hymn 163.

FINISTER. Hymn 163? Why, nobody ever sings Hymn 163. It is thought to be

BINKER. Somewhat peculiar.

FINISTER. Indeed.

BENKER. And we commend you for it.

BINKER. In fact, we commend you for it so much that if you continue to maintain this unblemished record of Hymn 163lessness here in Varmint Gulch through let us say this coming Sunday, all of us here intend to band together in making a very generous contribution to your Church as an expression of our admiration and gratitude.

FINISTER. Why, thank you, Gentlemen, I am touched by your confidence in me.

GEOMETRY SAM. Meanwhile

(Handsome Tyrone Purvis and Miss Lobelia Flutter)

HANDSOME TYRONE. Miss Lobelia, you have from time to time suggested that my soul might benefit from attending Minister Finister's Sunday service. Well, as it happens, this coming Sunday is the tenth anniversary of the passing of my Sweet Angelic Mama, and in her beloved memory I will be present in the congregation.

MISS LOBELIA. I am so pleased to hear that, Mr Purvis.

HANDSOME TYRONE. It was a sacred promise that I made to her on her deathbed.

ANGELIC MAMA. My darlin child, promise me that on the tenth anniversary of my passing, you will go to Church and sing my very favorite hymn in my memory, Hymn 163.

MISS LOBELIA. But—but nobody ever sings Hymn 163. It is thought to be . . . somewhat peculiar.

HANDSOME TYRONE. My Angelic Mama's favorite hymn somewhat peculiar? I am saddened to hear this. But of course—

ANGELIC MAMA. And when you sing my favorite hymn, Hymn 163, I will hear it up in heaven and intercede on behalf of your precious soul.

HANDSOME TYRONE. But of course, you must do what you feel is right. I would not think of asking for any special treatment on behalf of a poor sinner such as I, though my Angelic Mama be weepin up in Heaven.

MISS LOBELIA. Oh, Mr Purvis—

(Miss Lobelia and Minister Finister)

MISS LOBELIA. Oh, Minister Finister, this very Sunday we must include in the service Hymn 163!

MINISTER FINISTER. But, Miss Lobelia—I have just been meeting with Banker Benker and Banker Binker and an entire delegation of our town's

most distinguished citizens including Lawyer Sawyer and Editor Predator and have solemnly promised them that we will never allow Hymn 163 to darken the vocal organisms of our congregation! Indeed, they have assured me that if we continue to banish Hymn 163 from our services, they will make an exceedingly generous financial contribution to our Church!

MISS LOBELIA. Minister Finister – there is a SOUL at stake!

(Minister Finister hesitates)

GEOMETRY SAM. And so came Sunday.

MINISTER FINISTER. Why isn't this remarkable? I don't believe I've ever seen our humble Church so packed on a Sunday. I wonder what has caused this upsurge in religious feeling?

GEOMETRY SAM. And when it came time for the singing of the hymn, you could have heard a frog hiccup.

MINISTER FINISTER. Brethren and sistren, I will now ask Sister Lobelia to lead us in singing

(pause)

Hymn 163.

(UPROAR UPROAR UPROAR)

HYMN 163. *Like a Mouse in the mouth of a Lion*

I lift up my voice to the Lord and squeek

Oh, save me, Protector of Zion

Shield of the small and the meek

Let the Faith of a little grey Rodent

When faced with the fierce Lion's roar

Make my timorous heart, else implodent,

Sprout wings like a Bat to soar!

GEOMETRY SAM. Which is how the sisters Toothsome and Nourishing LaRue saw Handsome Tyrone Purvis the Gamblin Man in Church that Sunday.

TOOTH SOME. Why, what a handsome Gamblin Man that was in Church today.

NOURISHING. I seen him first. He's mine.

TOOTH SOME. What do you mean, you saw him first? We were in Church together.

NOURISHING. But my eyesight is sharper 'en yourn. I keep telling you you need spectacles.

TOOTH SOME. I do not need spectacles.

NOURISHING. If you had spectacles, you might of seen him first. But you didn't, so I seen him first.

TOOTHSOME. I saw him at the same time you did, only more blurrily.

Besides, I spoke to him first.

NOURISHING. Well, you did speak first. But that's because, unlike you, I am ladylike.

TOOTHSOME. Ladylike! Call a man "ladylike" means something. Call a lady ladylike don't mean a hen's tailfeather.

NOURISHING. A Gamblin Man likes a ladylike lady.

TOOTHSOME. I thought you got no use for menfolk.

NOURISHING. I don't. Menfolk are the busiest and the sloppiest and the talkiest and the dirtiest and just about the stupidest of all critters that is.

TOOTHSOME. In that case, I'll take him.

NOURISHING. A Gamblin Man aint menfolk. A Gamblin Man is a Speculation.

TOOTHSOME. And if you take him from me, you'll be speculating on an new dug grave.

NOURISHING. You wouldn't dare!

TOOTHSOME. A lady robbed of her true love by a deceitful sister is capable of desperate actions!

NOURISHING. Even when you was six years old, you had to have everything yourself!

TOOTHSOME. Me! Why you –

NOURISHING. You remember Sally Annie my favorite doll, and you tossed her down the well!

TOOTHSOME. That was because you wouldn't share her!

NOURISHING. I shared her all the time! You just –

TOOTHSOME. You don't want me to be happy!

NOURISHING. Only time you're happy is someone else is unhappy!

TOOTHSOME. Why you stuckup envious little –

NOURISHING. Go on! I bet you're gonna pull my hair!

TOOTHSOME. I'd pull your neck if I – *Wait!*

NOURISHING. If you what? Why I –

TOOTHSOME. No – wait – I'm thinking –

NOURISHING. Thinkin of only yourself as –

TOOTHSOME. What – what if – what if we both marry him?

NOURISHING. Both of us! Why that would be indecent and immoral!

TOOTHSOME. There'd be a mighty big scandal.

NOURISHING (*considers; then*). It's a purty good idea.

TOOTHSOME. We share this house. We share our food. We share the chores. Why not share a handsome Gamblin Man?

NOURISHING. We only just met him this one time in Church. You don't

think, when we notify him he's marryin the two of us, it might seem to him a little sudden?

(pause)

TOOTHSOME. I may have an idea. But no, we'd need 53 identical decks of playing cards. It would be difficult to make such a purchase in Varmint Gulch without attracting a certain amount of attention.

NOURISHING. Why – what about the Ichabod Culpepper and Company Mail Order Catalog? Here, let me – playin cards, playin cards, playin – here it is – item number 428B: “Suitable for large social gatherins. 53 identical decks of playin cards.”

GEOMETRY SAM. So they sent away to Ichabod Culpepper and Company in Chicago for Item 428B. And two weeks later, the shipment had arrived.

HANDSOME TYRONE. Ladies, I was handed a most gracious note from the two of you, asking me to call on you this afternoon.

NOURISHING. Thank you for calling, Mr Purvis.

TOOTHSOME. The reason my sister and I have asked you to call on us is possibly slightly unconventional

NOURISHING. Just a tad

TOOTHSOME. In fact, my sister and I would like to propose

NOURISHING. A wager.

HANDSOME TYRONE. A wager?

TOOTH SOME. It is, I admit, a somewhat unusual wager

NOURISHING. One that no fainthearted fribbler

TOOTH SOME. Or safety-seeking spineless sniffleton

NOURISHING. Could possibly consider

TOOTH SOME. And with such poor odds

NOURISHING. That your chance of winnin

TOOTH SOME. Is practically zero

NOURISHING. Although the prize is

TOOTH SOME. Precious beyond imagining.

HANDSOME TYRONE. Ladies, I am intrigued, as the fish said to the worm.

TOOTH SOME. Here, Mr Purvis, is what we propose

NOURISHING. You see this ordinary deck of playin cards, purchased from Ichabod Culpepper and Company?

TOOTH SOME. Mr Purvis, my sister here will shuffle the deck and ask you to select a card at random.

NOURISHING. Our bet is that that card will not be let's say the Queen of Diamonds.

TOOTH SOME. You will be betting that it is.

NOURISHING. If the card you pick is not the Queen of Diamonds, we win

TOOTH SOME. And you pay us

NOURISHING. One hundred gold dollars.

HANDSOME TYRONE. That is indeed a major wager. But with odds so extremely poor, I wonder what can you offer me as a prize commensurate with the risk?

NOURISHING. Me.

TOOTH SOME. Please. If you win by selecting the Queen of Diamonds, as we are confident you will not, you will get my beloved sister

Nourishing

NOURISHING. That's me

TOOTH SOME. 's hand in marriage.

NOURISHING. Entirely against my will.

HANDSOME TYRONE. May I inspect the cards?

TOOTH SOME. Of course.

(he does)

(pause)

HANDSOME TYRONE. Ladies, I accept your wager.

TOOTHsome. Some coffee, Mr Purvis?

HANDsome TYRONE. Why, thank you

(She distracts him with her cleavage as Nourishing switches decks)

(Nourishing shuffles the cards elaborately)

HANDsome TYRONE. You shuffle very well.

NOURISHING *(as she shuffles)*. Card games were the innocent diversion of our sheltered childhoods.

(She shuffles again)

(She fans out the cards)

NOURISHING. You may choose your card.

(Handsome Tyrone hesitates, reaches for a card)

(pause)

(He turns it over)

NOURISHING. No!

HANDsome TYRONE. The Queen of Diamonds!

NOURISHING. But how--

TOOTHsome. I did not think it possible!

NOURISHING. Sir, you have won against all expectation

TOOTHsome. And we have lost.

NOURISHING. Beloved Sister, I must bid you a fond addieyou,

irrevocably lost as I am by wager to this Gamblin Man.

TOOTH SOME. I fear my heart will break

NOURISHING. Anguish too deep to be spoken

TOOTH SOME. Sir, I am chagrined, abashed, and discomboodled that you are taking my beloved sister Nourishing from me. Painful though it be, and with a heavy heart, there is one recourse left to me. Mr Purvis, I offer you – Double or Nothing.

HANDSOME TYRONE. Double or Nothing?

TOOTH SOME. Yes, a second draw of the cards, this time let us say for the Queen of . . . Hearts. If you draw any other card than that, my dear sister is joyfully returned to the lovin bosom of her happy home.

HANDSOME TYRONE. And if I draw the Queen of Hearts?

TOOTH SOME. Then, sir, alas, both of us

NOURISHING. Both

TOOTH SOME. Must marry you.

NOURISHING. Greatly against our wills.

(pause)

HANDSOME TYRONE. I should not, but – Yes. Double or Nothing.

(Toothsome takes Nourishing's place at the table)

NOURISHING. More coffee, Mr Purvis?

HANDSOME TYRONE. Thank you

(She distracts him with her cleavage as Toothsome switches decks)

(Toothsome shuffles elaborately)

(Shuffles again)

HANDSOME TYRONE. One more time.

(She shuffles one more time)

(Fans out the cards)

TOOTHSOME. Sir, you may choose.

(Slowly, Handsome Tyrone reaches out and selects a card)

TOOTHSOME. You hesitate, sir?

(Slowly, he turns it over)

NOURISHING. No!

TOOTHSOME. It can't be!

NOURISHING. The Queen of Hearts!

TOOTHSOME. Sir, Destiny has decreed against us.

NOURISHING. Fickle Fortune, I fear, has frowned on us

TOOTHSOME. Yet we ask no mercy

NOURISHING. It is against our wills

TOOTHSOME. But we bow before inexorable Fate.

NOURISHING. Mr Purvis, we are

TOOTH SOME. Both

NOURISHING. Yours.

GEOMETRY SAM. So Handsome Tyrone Purvis the Gambler Man from Missouri settled in, in their big house, with the Sisters Toothsome and Nourishing LaRue. Mayhap he had some inklin.

HANDSOME TYRONE. But as my Pragmatic Mama used to say

PRAGMATIC MAMA. My son, a lady who cheats well at cards is a prize beyond all treasure.

HANDSOME TYRONE. Besides, I am in love. And

PRAGMATIC MAMA. There is no power greater than love. Except two loves.

GEOMETRY SAM. Now, one day there rides into Varmint Gulch a Stranger.

BARKEEP. Howdy, Stranger. Newcomers, first drink is on the house.

(Pours a glass for the Stranger) Here. Made by the Widow Tompkins down the road. Calls it whisky. We don't ask questions, but nobody's died of it.

Yet. So, you got a name?

STRANGER. Stone.

BARKEEP. Just Stone?

STRANGER. Tomb. Stone.

BARKEEP. They call me Tinkles. I know. On account I'm barkeep by day and play the pianer here at the Boozy Floozy nights. Tinkles O'Shaughnessy. You planning to stay here long in Varmint Gulch? You can get a nice room over by –

TOMB STONE. I hear the Big Man here in Varmint Gulch is Pap Rory McGrew.

TINKLES. That's right, everybody these parts thinks a heap of –

(Tomb Stone turns and walks out of the Boozy Floozy)

TINKLES. For a while, nothing much seemed to happen. Tomb Stone, he just sat around with the likes of Fiddlin Jake and Limpin Brewster and Sorrowful Mackenzie. Now Fiddlin Jake, he was never the same after Pretty Polly.

FIDDLIN JAKE. Pretty Polly, I love you.

PRETTY POLLY. That's nice. Give me money.

FIDDLIN JAKE. Why I don't have money but what I get playin my fiddle.

PRETTY POLLY. Too bad. Can't do nothing till you give me money.

FIDDLIN JAKE. But I love you!

PRETTY POLLY. That's nice. Give me money.

TINKLES. So one night, Fiddlin Jake hocks his fiddle to stake himself to an all-night poker game here at the Boozy Floozy. And he plays like some

card-playin demon wildcat, and comes morning he's won 562 dollars and 34 cents.

FIDDLIN JAKE. Pretty Polly, I hocked my fiddle and gambled all night and I won 562 dollars and 34 cents, here, all for you.

PRETTY POLLY (*takes the money*). Why, Fiddlin Jake, that's right kind of you. We have to wait till after dark. But you come to my room after ten tonight and I will . . . thank you.

TINKLES. So Fiddlin Jake, he shaves and he bathes and come ten that night, he goes up to Pretty Polly's room where

FIDDLIN JAKE. A letter? (*opens it*) "Dear Fiddlin Jake"

PRETTY POLLY. "I am so grateful that you have made it possible for me to run off with my one true love, Puny O'Toole. Thank you for the money."

TINKLES. Now, as for Puny O'Toole, he was little of heart and little of mind and little in . . . other ways.

PRETTY POLLY. But I love him!

TINKLES. So. Tomb Stone, he set around with Fiddlin Jake and Limpin Brewster and Sorrowful Mackenzie and at first nothing much seemed to happen. Then the whisperin started.

TOWNSFOLK. *Swoosha Swoosha Swoosha*

Wooshawa Swoosha Wooshaw –

SORROWFUL MACKENZIE (*looks up*). Don't mind me, I'm just
whisperin.

TOWNSFOLK. *Swishawisha Woosha DECENCY*

Swoosha MORALITY Swoosha

Wishawa Woosha Swoosha

TERRIBLE *Woosha Swisha*

Wishawa Swoosha SINFUL

Swooshawish Wishawoosh Shishawa

Washawoosh Shooshawa WICKEDNESS

(Mob is forming behind Tomb Stone)

Shoosha Murshawa Moosha

Moormawa Moosha Shoosha

INDECENCY *Mooshawa Woosha*

Mishiwa Shoomaba Boosha

(Torches)

UNDUNCETITUTIONAL

BURN 'EM DOWN!

NO MENAGERIE DRAWER!

BURN 'EM DOWN!

NO DEN OF ANY KITTY!

BURN 'EM DOWN!

BURN 'EM DOWN!

BURN 'EM DOWN!

(Pap is standing in their way)

PAP. You looking for me?

TOMB STONE. You Pap Rory McGrew?

PAP. Yep.

LIMPIN BREWSTER. You been ruinin the good name of Varmint Gulch

FIDDLIN JAKE. Protectin wickedness and immorality from the wrath of
the righteous

LIMPIN BREWSTER. In the shameful shape of the sinful Sisters LaRue.

SORROWFUL MACKENZIE. They don't have the plain decency to kill
each other over a man like proper folk.

LIMPIN BREWSTER. And so we godfearin folk of this town

FIDDLIN JAKE. Will kill them each other for them.

TOMB STONE. Your day is through, McGrew. We're burnin them down.

PAP. And you'd be?

TOMB STONE. They call me Tomb Stone.

PAP. Must be cause you weigh so much.

TOMB STONE. Outta our way

PAP. Ain't quite so many of you now, is there?

TOMB STONE. We—

(He looks around – the mob has vanished)

PAP. They like to know who'll win afore they commit to a side.

TOMB STONE. I'm challengin you McGrew.

PAP. To?

TOMB STONE. Horseshoes at dawn.

PAP. Done.

GEOMETRY SAM. And so next mornin they all gather out by the Old Chinaman's place. Now what nobody knew at the time was Tomb Stone had been the horseshoes champion of seven counties where he was known as Horseshoes Harry.

TOMB STONE. One throw each. Two hundred yards.

PAP. Yep.

GEOMETRY SAM. So Sorrowful Mackenzie set a railroad spike at two hundred yards.

SORROWFUL *(distant)*. All set!

(Tomb Stone does a massive windup and throws his horseshoe)

HORSESHOE. *Wooooosh* – clunk.

SORROWFUL (*distant*). Ringer!

BYSTANDERS. A ringer – at two hundreds yards – why that’s –

TOMB STONE. Match that, McGrew.

(Pap throws his horseshoe)

HORSESHOE. *Woooosh* – clunk.

SORROWFUL (*distant*). Ringer!

TOMB STONE. How –? Okay. Five hundred yards!

PAP. Yep.

(long pause and then)

SORROWFUL (*very distant*). All set!

(Tomb Stone goes through a monumentally convoluted windup and throws)

HORSESHOE. *Woooooosh* – (*pause*) clunk!

SORROWFUL (*very distant*). Ringer!

BYSTANDERS. A ringer – five hundred yards – never heard of – why that’s –

TOMB STONE. Match that, McGrew.

(Pap throws his horseshoe)

HORSESHOE. *Woooooosh* – (*pause*) clunk!

SORROWFUL (*very distant*). Ringer!

TOMB STONE. How did – there’s somethin . . . All right. Think you’re

pretty smart. *(shouts to Sorrowful in the distance)* A mile and a half!

PAP. Yep.

BYSTANDERS. A mile and a half—nobody can—

(very long pause)

SORROWFUL *(very very distant)*. All set!

(Tomb Stone goes through a bogglingly complex windup and throws)

HORSESHOE. Wooooooooooooosh — *(long long pause)* clunk!

SORROWFUL *(very very distant)*. Ringer!

BYSTANDERS. A mile and a half— that's--

TOMB STONE. You might as well just call it quits, McGrew.

(For the first time, Pap does an elaborate windup. Then he throws)

HORSESHOE. Wooooooooooooo — *(and then silence)*

SORROWFUL *(very very distant)*. Don't see nothing!

(pause)

TOMB STONE. Too bad, McGrew. But you made a good—

PAP. Wait.

(pause)

TOMB STONE. What are we waitin for?

PAP. Wait.

GEOMETRY SAM. Finally it's startin to get dark and

TOMB STONE. What is this McGrew? It's getting dark. Nothin to wait for. Just admit—

PAP. Wait.

GEOMETRY SAM. Stars are comin out and the moon. Owls are hootin and coyotes howlin. And folks are startin to feel just a little restless

BYSTANDERS. Now, Pap, don't be a sore loser Pap, it's well nigh midnight, time to just go home and—

PAP. Wait.

TOMB STONE (*to Bystanders*). Feller like that, you're better off without him.

BYSTANDERS. But Pap, you can't expect us to—

PAP. Wait.

GEOMETRY SAM. Finally the sun starts comin up

BYSTANDERS. Pap, we been up all day all night, you just gotta face—

PAP. Wait.

GEOMETRY SAM. And then, then, off in the distance, comes this quiet

IMPOSSIBLY. *wwooooosSSHH*

(they all look up)

GEOMETRY SAM. And there, comin from the West, over the horizon, there comes

BYSTANDERS (*awestruck, looking up, all together*). A flyin horseshoe

(*they watch as it flies high over their heads, and then a long pause*)

HORSESHOE. Clunk.

SORROWFUL (*very very distant*). Ringer!

(*pause*)

PAP. Now, don't you feel too droophearted downsome, you made a right fine—

TOMB STONE. You must take me for a baby baa-lamb

PAP. What—

TOMB STONE. I don't know how you did it, but it was a sniggling diddling lowdown machination of some sort, and you (*pokes him in the chest*) are nothing but a fourflushin flimflam chisling cheat!

PAP. Don't poke me, son

TOMB STONE (*keeps poking Pap*). Can't nobody nohow never toss a horseshoe all round the world and you know it.

PAP. Now you can't win all the—

TOMB STONE. A lot of hogtail and badgerbump! I'll believe it when I see it with my own two peepers! If you can throw that far, show me!

Show me! You cheat!

PAP. You're pushin me too

TOMB STONE. Cheat!

PAP. That's—

TOMB STONE. Chea—

GEOMETRY SAM. And Pap picks him up and swings him around and

Tomb Stone he goes sailin up in the

TOMB STONE. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa —

GEOMETRY SAM. He keeps goin up until he gets up by the planets,

circles once round the moon—

TOMB STONE. Aaaaaaaaa —

GEOMETRY SAM. They say stars winked at him, Saturn tipped his rings,

then one more time round the moon—

TOMB STONE. Aaaaaaaa —

GEOMETRY SAM. And then he starts comin down

TOMB STONE. Oooooooooooooo —

GEOMETRY SAM. Down, down, till

TOMB STONE. Oooo!

(THWUP!)

TOWNFOLKS (*searching*). You see him? Seemed to come down

somewhere about—

ONE FELLER. Wait! Look!

OTHERS. Up there!

TOWN FOLKS. There he is!

FELLER. Caught by his shirt up that big old pine tree!

TOWN FOLKS. Tomb Stone! Hey, Tomb Stone! Come on down!

TOMB STONE. Tomb Stone? Aint no more Tomb Stone. I'm Startouched
Fallinstar.

TOWNSFOLKS. Well, come on down Startouched Fallinstar!

TOMB STONE. Good mornin, Mr Sky!

GEOMETRY SAM. Pap sent food out every day, and folks all pleadin—

TOWNFOLKS. Don't matter who you are! Just come down offa there!

TOMB STONE. This is my place. Here I fell and here I stay.

TOWNFOLKS. Pine tree aint no place for an hombre without pinfeathers!

Come down!

TOMB STONE. My, aint it a happy morning!

GEOMETRY SAM. Pap felt mighty bad, but after a while, long as he was
feeding him, Pap figured

PAP. Poor feller, might as well get some use out of him.

GEOMETRY SAM. So Pap planted a big cornfield all round Startouched.

And that's how Pap McGrew got himself a scarecrow.

TOMB STONE. You crows, all wings a-flappin caw caw caw—think

you're mighty high! Well I, Startouched Fallinstar, I flown higher en you ever done!

*

(Back in Varmint Gulch; Tinkles and Fiddlin Jake watching passers by)

TINKLES. Poor Miss Hannah.

FIDDLIN JAKE. What happened to her?

TINKLES. Oh, it's the usual story. She tried to teach a parrot to speak, but the parrot taught her instead.

MISS HANNAH. Chee crawcrawcraw sssswishshoos

FIDDLIN JAKE. Very sad.

(Maw McGrew and Pitiful Jane)

PITIFUL JANE. What we comin in to town for, Maw?

MAW. We're gettin you some new storebought shoes.

PITIFUL JANE. I need a man.

MAW. Well, you're getting shoes.

PITIFUL JANE. There's one over there.

MAW. Shoes, Pitiful Jane. "Sinful Reilly's General Store", here we are.

(they go in)

Howdy. We're after some new storebought shoes for my daughter here.

CLERK. We got we got some nice shoes up on that high shelf up there, I'll

just I'll climb up and see what we

(he climbs ladder; two Desperados storm in)

DESPERADO. Hands up! Nobody move. I'm Percy the Kid, with my gang Wilfred.

WILFRED. I'm his gang Wilfred.

PERCY. Now you just climb down here and mosey over to the counter and hand me the cashbox.

(pause)

CLERK. I'm I'm sorry but that is I, I just can't do that.

PERCY. What do you mean can't do that?

CLERK. That cash box is my my responsibility. Mr Reilly wouldn't be happy.

PERCY. Now, look. You gotta hand it over.

CLERK. No.

PERCY. What do you mean no? I'm pointing a gun at you.

CLERK. I could I could lose my job.

PERCY. Now listen here! If you don't hand that over, I'll shoot you and you'll be dead. Now you don't want to be dead, do you?

CLERK. I don't know.

PERCY. Bein dead aint no fun at all. Lyin all day with bugs and

centipedes and stuff under ground. You wouldn't like it. So you just go over to the counter and

CLERK. Maybe, maybe I don't I don't care whether I live or die. Maybe nobody loves me.

PERCY. Course somebody loves you.

CLERK. Name one.

PERCY. What about your mother?

(pause)

CLERK. Maybe I'm an orphan.

PERCY. You're an orphan?

CLERK. Maybe.

PERCY. Maybe? Either you is an orphan or you aint an orphan. You can't may be an orphan. Is you or aint you?

CLERK. Maybe.

PERCY. That's just – I'll show you. Wilfred?

WILFRED. Yes, Percy?

PERCY. Is you an orphan Wilfred or aint you an orphan.

(pause)

WILFRED. Maybe.

PERCY. I know your family! You're not an orphan! What do you mean

maybe!

WILFRED. Well, we left Crawdad Squats well nigh three weeks ago.

Can't tell what might have happened.

PERCY. I don't believe this! Is everybody going—

MAW. Pitiful Jane aint an orphan. I know, I'm her Ma.

PERCY. Well, I'm glad to hear someone knows whether or not they're an orphan!

MAW. Course, I aint seen or heard tell of my folks since years back. So I guess I could be an orphan.

PERCY. That don't count!

MAW. What do you mean don't count? I got just as good a right to be an orphan as you do!

PERCY. I'm not an orphan!

MAW. Then why do you keep sayin you're an orphan?

PERCY. I never said I was an orphan! It's he said he's an orphan!

CLERK. Maybe.

PERCY. That's enough! Now you climb down here and hand me that cashbox or

MAW. Wait.

PERCY. What now?

MAW. Gimme a look at that gun.

PERCY. So long as you don't interrupt. So you climb down here and—

MAW. This aint a real gun.

PERCY. And— Is too.

MAW. It's a wooden gun.

PERCY. It's a real wooden gun.

MAW. Well, yes, it's a real wooden gun.

PERCY. Lots of fine things made of wood.

WILFRED. Comes from trees.

MAW. But it aint the sort of real gun shoots out bullets and makes holes in folk.

PERCY. Course not. Them things are dangerous. Someone could get hurt. Now can we just get back to givin me that cashb—Ow!

WILFRED. Ow!

PERCY. What're you doin? Ow!

MAW. Throwin taters at you. And I

WILFRED. Ow—stop that!

MAW. I keep on till you boys surrender.

PERCY. Ow—don't do that—can't have Percy the Kid surrender to a—
ow—female person!

MAW. You can surrender to Sheriff Dirk

PERCY. Who's—

WILFRED. Sheriff Dirk— aint he the one caught Wild Ernest Lefkowitz?

PERCY. Wild Ernest Lefkowitz?

MAW. That's Dirk.

PERCY. Aint no-one more mad-grizzly desperadacious than Wild Ernest Lefkowitz. What do you think Wilfred?

WILFRED. Sheriff Dirk caught any big gangs like me?

MAW. It was Sheriff Dirk brought in the Blue Mittens Gang. All together on the same day.

WILFRED. The Blue Mittens, huh.

PERCY. We don't want to sit in jail. Aint no fun.

MAW. Sheriff Dirk hates lockin folks up since the walls fell down. Says putting a good outlaw behind bars feels somehow disrespectful when the jail aint got walls. He'll just make you promise to stop robbin around Varmint Gulch and he'll put you on the stage back to Crawdad Squats. Cheaper en building the jailhouse back, when it'll just fall down again anyway.

PERCY. Sheriff Dirk'll have to write me a note sayin I'm worse en Wild Ernest Lefkowitz.

MAW. Better en that. Wild Ernest stops in town every few months for a game of pinochle with Sheriff Dirk. He'll write you a note himself if Dirk and I ask him to.

PERCY. A note signed by Wild Ernest Lefkowitz.

WILFRED. He also has to say "Wilfred is a worse gang than the Blue Mittens."

MAW. He'll do that. Wild Ernest likes to encourage young folks.

PERCY. One more thing. You gotta let me hold the cashbox. Just for a second, I'll give it right back.

CLERK. All right. *(climbs down)* Here.

PERCY. There. *(gives back the cashbox)* Now lead me

WILFRED. And his gang Wilfred

PERCY. to Sheriff Dirk.

(Maw leads out Percy and Wilfred)

PITIFUL JANE. You was mighty brave.

CLERK. Was was I?

PITIFUL JANE. Like a bull elk kickin off wolves.

CLERK. I don't I don't know, with all that ruckus and rumpification I just I sort of forgot to be scared.

PITIFUL JANE. Best sort of brave is when you aint tryin to be.

CLERK. Besides it was only a wooden gun.

PITIFUL JANE. You thought it was a real gun, we all thought it was a real gun. That's enough for hissin bobcat brave.

CLERK. You you think so?

PITIFUL JANE. You new out here?

CLERK. I'm I'm nephew to Handsome Tyrone Purvis the Gamblin Man from Missouri. They call they they they they call me Nervous.

PITIFUL JANE. Howdy, Nervous Purvis. I'm Pitiful Jane.

NERVOUS. Howdy.

PITIFUL JANE. You also from Missouri?

NERVOUS. I'm I'm from New Jersey.

PITIFUL JANE. Oh. I always dreamed I'd someday meet a man from New Jersey.

NERVOUS. Weehawken.

PITIFUL JANE (*looks at him*). I was at the Paunch McDermott place the other day, they killed a wild boar, cleaned out the guts and cooked him. You ever seen a boar's . . . thing? It's about this long, but thin like a pencil, and it curls at the end like a pig's tail. I ate the balls. Sliced in little pieces.

(*pause*)

Fried.

(pause)

Taste like chicken.

(pause)

NERVOUS. I don't know I don't know why they call me Nervous.

(pause)

PITIFUL JANE. So. You wanna get married?

NERVOUS. Yes, I, I do, Pitiful Jane.

PITIFUL JANE. I mean to me.

NERVOUS. I, I mean that too.

PITIFUL JANE. Maw's gonna go all lightcrash and thunderdum when—

(Maw returns)

MAW. There. Now, about them shoes—

PITIFUL JANE. Maw, this is Nervous Purvis. Nervous is from New Jersey.

MAW. Howdy. Now fetch down those—

PITIFUL JANE. Nervous is determined to marry me.

MAW. No he aint.

NERVOUS. Yes, Ma'am, I I am.

MAW. Pitiful Jane aint gettin hitched to no one. Now you climb up that—

PITIFUL JANE. Nervous says he won't take no for an answer. Tell her, Nervous.

NERVOUS. That's right, Ma'am, I won't I won't

PITIFUL JANE. Take

NERVOUS. Take no for an answer.

MAW. Don't matter what you take or —

PITIFUL JANE. Aint he wonderlicious?

MAW. Come on, Pitiful Jane. We're goin home.

PITIFUL JANE. I aint —

MAW. Now!

PITIFUL JANE *(as Maw pulls her off)*. Don't worry Nervous. It's comin soon, our time!

*

(Time is rushing still faster ahead in his buggy.)

*

(Geometry Sam and Turtleeyes Yellowfeather playing checkers)

GEOMETRY SAM. Well, now, Turtleeyes Yellowfeather, I ever tell you how that the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle came to be equal to the sum of the squares of the sides?

YELLOWFEATHER. Why, yes, Geometry Sam, I reckon you have.

GEOMETRY SAM. Oh. I did?

YELLOWFEATHER. You did.

GEOMETRY SAM. Oh. Well. I guess it's your turn.

YELLOWFEATHER. This is a story from the old days, before the plague mushroom faces came eating the earth.

WIND. Wai-oooo

THE PEOPLE. It is a time of cold

WIND. Wai-oooo

THE PEOPLE. There are no buffalo.

The dried meat has all been eaten.

The dried corn has all been eaten.

The women are hungry and the children are crying for food

We give the children old moccasins to suck on

Snow has begun to fall

UNCLE CLOUD. My visitor the Owl who lives by the River is come this night to me in a dream. He tells me the buffalo are in the South. We must go south to hunt them.

THE PEOPLE. The children are too weak. They will die on the hunt.

UNCLE CLOUD. We must leave the children behind, and the women to care for them. When we have killed the buffalo we will bring back meat.

We leave in the morning.

(Swift Falcon and Evening Birch)

SWIFT FALCON. Uncle Cloud has spoken. His guide the Owl has told him we must go to the South to find the buffalo. The children will stay behind, and the women to care for them. I must leave you, Evening Birch, in the morning. When we have meat, we will return.

I will think of you, Evening Birch, each moment of the hunt

And of the wanting to be with you

EVENING BIRCH. I will wait for you here when you come back.

YELLOWFEATHER. They left and three days passed.

EVENING BIRCH. The children are beginning to die, Mother. I must go hunting.

MOTHER. There is nothing to hunt, Evening Birch, and you are a woman

EVENING BIRCH. Still I must go

I cannot sit and watch children starve

YELLOWFEATHER. So she went up onto the mountain.

At first she followed the trail, but snow was falling

Soon there was no trail

But she saw

EVENING BIRCH. A bighorn has passed by here

Its tracks still clear in the snow

It must be near

I will follow

(she follows the track)

Up and up it climbs

The raven calls below me

What sort of bighorn is this?

Why is it going here?

The trail twists round and round

Is this a bighorn? Or—

The path grows narrow

But

YELLOWFEATHER. And she looked down

EVENING BIRCH. I am on a thin rock ledge, the width of two hands

Mountain drops below me into emptiness

A hawk flies beneath a crag

Far down more distant than a shout

I see—the fires of my home

Ice is forming on the ledge

I cannot go forward, not turn back

Snow falls

Dark comes

And I hear

Very softly

something

SOMETHING *(begins, very softly, to laugh)*.

YELLOWFEATHER. When the hunters returned

HUNTERS. Where are the children?

Where are the women?

The place is deserted

(they wander off searching)

SWIFT FALCON *(sees her)*. Evening Birch!

(She is sitting on top of her lodge)

Why are you up there?

Where are the others?

EVENING BIRCH. In a dream my mother saw here in this place

Something bad

They have all gone away

You will find them by the river.

SWIFT FALCON. But why are you sitting there?

EVENING BIRCH. I promised you when you returned

I would wait here.

Listen now to what you must do

Go join the others and build a lodge for us

Put up a curtain in the lodge and then come back for me

For four days and four nights I must stay behind the curtain

After that, I will be with you

SWIFT FALCON. I will

EVENING BIRCH. Go now, and do not speak of me to anyone.

YELLOWFEATHER. And so he built the lodge

EVENING BIRCH'S MOTHER. Why are you building this lodge?

SWIFT FALCON. I build it for your daughter

MOTHER. My daughter? Has nobody told you?

SWIFT FALCON. Told me?

MOTHER. While you were away on the hunt

My daughter fell from the Red Mountain

She is dead

SWIFT FALCON. But – but she spoke to me

MOTHER. She?

SWIFT FALCON (*realizes*). No –

YELLOWFEATHER. And he ran, he ran to where he left her

SWIFT FALCON (*running*). No!!

No!!

(gets there, looks, shouts)

EVENING BIRCH!!!

ECHOES. Birch

Birch

SWIFT FALCON. *EVENING BIRCH!!!*

ECHOES. Birch

Birch

(pause)

SWIFT FALCON. She is gone

(Swift Falcon and Uncle Cloud)

SWIFT FALCON. My Uncle, I must find Evening Birch.

UNCLE CLOUD. When the People go to the House of Souls, they are not found again.

SWIFT FALCON. I will journey to the House of Souls.

UNCLE CLOUD. This thing that you wish to do, I do not know if it can be done. But there is one who may help you. You must speak to Grandmother Water.

If you find her, tell her you come from me.

SWIFT FALCON. How do I travel to Grandmother Water?

UNCLE CLOUD. You must go into the forest

And take the path that is not there

That is all I can tell you

SWIFT FALCON. These are the old trees

Tall beyond seeing

Gray yellow green the ancient vines drape round them

Thick moss and fungus slick the trunks

Even the bright insects are still

Grandmother Water, help me!

I seek the path that is not there.

A YOUNG WOMAN. Who are you seeking?

SWIFT FALCON. I search for Grandmother Water

YOUNG WOMAN. Look at me truly

Tell me what you see

SWIFT FALCON. I see a young woman and an old

I see small fish

And insects stepping on the water

Small drops and towering waves

Rain, storm, hurricane

And a still lake in the moonlight

YOUNG WOMAN. I am Grandmother Water

Why do you seek me?

SWIFT FALCON. My heart is crying for Evening Birch

I need her

My Uncle told me I must speak with you

GRANDMOTHER WATER. Yes, I remember your Uncle.

I do not know if what you wish is that which can be done

Evening Birch is in the House of Souls

But there is one who may help you

You must go to Grandfather Smoke

SWIFT FALCON. I will go

GRANDMOTHER WATER. Grandfather Smoke is always thirsty.

Give him this from me (*a leather water bag*)

SWIFT FALCON. I will

YELLOWFEATHER. And so he went until

SWIFT FALCON. A great rock blocks the way

Like a gash swallowing all light

A deep cave wounds the rock. I enter

A dank glow oozes from the lichen

Small feet scurry among bones

A lost bat cries in the dark

What – something brushes against my face

I climb out into light

Where am I?

GRANDFATHER SMOKE (*crawling*). I'm an old man, thirsty thirsty

SWIFT FALCON. Grandmother Water sends you this.

GRANDFATHER SMOKE. Give – quickly!

Glug glub glug glug glub

Glug glug glub

Ahhhhh

Now look at me. What do you see?

SWIFT FALCON. Fire

Things run in terror

A spider crisps in the flame

Moths flutter

Flesh melts chars falls from the bone

GRANDFATHER SMOKE. I am Grandfather Smoke

Why do you call me?

SWIFT FALCON. I must find Evening Birch

GRANDFATHER SMOKE. She is in the House of Souls

Grandfather Hunger sits by the door

If you meet him, give him this *(a small leather bag)*

And he will help you

SWIFT FALCON. I will

GRANDFATHER SMOKE. Now go

YELLOWFEATHER. And so he went

He climbed until

SWIFT FALCON. The way is steep and empty

Parched rock and bitter wind

Ai-eeeeeee! What cuts my feet!?

VOICES. You are walking on the broken pieces of the past

SWIFT FALCON. Ai-eeeeeee!

Evening Birch, I will find you!

YELLOWFEATHER. And then

SWIFT FALCON. A heap of stones and—

(Grandfather Hunger sits by the small heap of stones)

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. I eat the children

I eat the life of the world

Give food or be food

SWIFT FALCON. This is from Grandfather Smoke (*gives him the bag*)

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Grobgrubgrobgrubgribgrubgrobgrubgrog

Aaaaaaaa

Good.

Now ask what you want, I will help you if I can.

I am Grandfather Hunger.

SWIFT FALCON. Is this place yours?

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. I? I only sit by the door

This is the Nest of Dark Vulture

SWIFT FALCON. I must find Evening Birch

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. She is inside.

There is no door

SWIFT FALCON. How do I enter?

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Good. Follow

(they are inside)

SWIFT FALCON. How did you —

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Grandfather Hunger goes everywhere.

Now look up

SWIFT FALCON. But—

(EYES)

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Eyes

SWIFT FALCON. Stretching forever

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Eyes of all who ever died eyes hanging here

You will never find her

SWIFT FALCON. Eyes like stars

Evening Birch, how can I find you in this wilderness of eyes?

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Blue black brown yellow red

All creatures all colors stretching endless

There is no finding

Now leave this place before Dark Vulture—

SWIFT FALCON. Wait—over there—I see them—

Evening Birch—I see you!

(he reaches out, pulls them down)

(Evening Birch stands before him)

EVENING BIRCH. You have come for me

SWIFT FALCON. My heart is caught in yours

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Good—but quickly now—

Dark Vulture will sense you here and

A VOICE. Hhhrrrhhhhrrrrhhhhh—

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. That is Dark Vulture –

DARK VULTURE. Hhrraagghhhh! Hhhe is stealing my hhheyes!

GRANDFATHER HUNGER. Run, now! Run! You ahead, she behind

Do not look back –

If you see Dark Vulture he will have you

Just run, no turning, run

Until you reach your lodge and then you will be safe –

Now, both of you, run!

DARK VULTURE. My hhheyes--my

Hhrrahrrrh!

EVENING BIRCH. Run! Don't look back! I am behind you!

YELLOWFEATHER. They ran

(sound of wings flapping after them)

EVENING BIRCH. Faster!

YELLOWFEATHER. Over rivers, across vast canyons

Plunging through swamps and stone

Stars swirling around then

Through seas and deserts

Mountain crags and stones

(wings)

DARK VULTURE. Hhhrraahhhhhghrrhhh

YELLOWFEATHER. Never looking back

They ran

DARK VULTURE. Hhhrraahrh!

(wings)

SWIFT FALCON. Our lodge—

(suddenly silence)

At last!

Now, Evening Birch, I can look back at you

I turn

YELLOWFEATHER. But she was gone

THE WIND. Wai-ooooo

VOICES. Nightness of nothingness

The Sower and the Scythe

And the Bloody Dancer in the Grass

The March of Generations

The Old toppled by the Young,

Become the Old and topple in their turn

Each plowed under by the next

And I am weary with the death of friends

Sand-coverer of Cities

Desolator of Nations

Destroyer

Devourer

(Sim sits hunched over, his face in his hands)

(Boots comes up behind him, puts his hand on Sim's shoulder)

BOOTS. Come on, kid

(Sim looks up at him)

It's Time

*

(Time is hurtling forward, shaking the reins, urging the galloping horses faster and faster)

*

(The corral at the McGrew place)

(A rooster settles on a post; then, one by one, the inhabitants of Varmint Gulch, past and present, human and animal, people we've met and those we have not, and chickens, horses, ducks, pigs, goats, and cows, gather silently around the corral to watch.)

PAP. Funny. Where in simmerin starfire is everybody? So quiet you could hear a cloud sip water. But—

(startled, sees)

(Jezebel is slowly dragging herself toward Pap; she is very old and her rear legs are paralyzed)

What? Jezebel? That you, girl?

JEZEBEL. Mwarr

PAP *(kneels down)*. I thought you were long gone. Haven't seen you since

(Jezebel licks his hand)

Are you –

(she rests her head on his knee)

You're my little girl. You know that, don't you? You're my little sweetie cat. And I –

(she shudders, twitches)

(she dies)

Old girl. Goodbye, Jezebel, old girl.

(Boots, Sim, and Pitiful Jane walk into the corral)

BOOTS. Paw. We gotta talk.

PAP. Not now

SIM. You got no right, Paw! You got no right! Me and Pitiful Jane –

PITIFUL JANE. I want my Nervous!

SIM. I'm marryin Tiramie Susie! You can't stop me!

PAP. And bitterness surroundin the wind

You—

(he grabs Boots by the collar with one hand, Sim with the other)

You runtwhining—

SIM. You can kill us Paw but you can't stop us!

PAP. You whimperflailing—

SIM. It's our turn now, we—

(Pitiful Jane lifts a huge barrel up over her head)

(CLOCKS)

PAP. Licksniffing pitypouting meekmewling wrigglegripping

Shufflestunted fleahearted pulverpittle, I'll—

(Coming up behind Pap, she slowly starts to bring the barrel down)

CLOCKS. *Swisssh*

CLOCKS. *Ping*

CLOCKS. *Bong*

CLOCKS. *Prrrrrr*

CLOCKS. *Ting*

CLOCKS. *Ditdit*

(the barrel)

(Time, like some half-crazed ancient war god standing at the reins of his

chariot, driving his horses forward, bloody, triumphant, thundering into battle)

CUCKOO CLOCKS. CUCKOO –

CUCKOO CLOCKS. CUCKOO--

CUCKOO CLOCKS. CUCKOO!

(Crashing down on Pap's head, the barrel shatters into a thousand pieces flying through the air)

(Pap staggers and crashes to the ground)

(One by one, the watchers melt away; the rooster is the last to go)

*

(Pap and Maw are sitting on the porch; Pap's head is bandaged and he has a cane; Dan Trimly, the barber, is cutting Pap's beard)

TRIMLY. There, now, Mr Pappy, aint you lookin rootintootinous now with that ugly old beard cleaned up, why folks will point their forefingers at you saying why I never knew Old Pappy was such a spic and dandy lookin old man

(Trimly goes)

PAP. So Boots is takin over

MAW. Always thought he would.

PAP. Maw, I'm goin back up. To the Mountains.

(pause)

MAW. I'm comin with you

PAP. When I go up there, I aint never coming back

MAW. I know that. I'm goin with you.

PAP (*starts to get up*). Let's—

MAW. Not just yet. Any minute Boots'll be fetchin us. He sees we left, they'll be comin after us. No, we go in to the weddin. We sit in the back and while they all got their eyes tied to the hitchin we slip out. By the time anyone notices we vaped off, we'll be well on our way.

PAP. Like dandelions in the wind.

BOOTS (*comes out*). We'll just head up over to the churchhouse now.

Double weddin, best we be on time.

(Pap starts to stand)

*

(Time is riding his buggy off into the sunset)

TIME. Yes. But now I have another appointment.

With? Why . . .

you

(END)