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"Uyotsohi Adanvdo Gadohi"

Broken Heart Land

A full-length play

By Vicki Lynn Mooney

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OHG.9 DLOV SV.9

Broken Heart Land

Cast of Characters In Order of Appearance

Tsimi (Jimmy)	A Cherokee man with a big heart and a pirate smile. 18.
Shepherd Broughton	The ne'er-do-well son of a successful businessman. 26.
Orville	The inventive town pharmacist with a thirst for adventure. 28-35.
Florence	Alma's ambitious young mother, widowed at 31.
Josiah Cuthbert	Florence's Father, behind-the-scenes power broker in T-Town. 55+
Alma	The spunky, beautiful, and unwilling child bride. 12-13

Setting

September, 1903 - October, 1904
Tulsa, Cherokee Nation
Indian Territory

Wado to my mentor, Andrew Hair, for his guidance on Cherokee language translations.

SCENE 1

OPENING: SEPTEMBER, 1903. TULSA, I.T. THE FRONT DOOR TO A VERY NICE VICTORIAN COTTAGE WITH A WIDE WRAP-AROUND PORCH STANDS OPEN. THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR, A CLOSED CASKET DRAPED WITH AN EMBROIDERED CLOTH CAN BE SEEN IN THE PARLOR.

TSIMI WALKS A DRUNKEN SHEPHERD BROUGHTON HOME AND KEEPS HIM ON HIS FEET WITH THE HELP OF ORVILLE, THE TOWN PHARMACIST. SHEPHERD, A DISSIPATED YOUNG MAN OF 26, SLUMPS INTO A CHAIR ON THE PORCH.

THE YOUNG MEN ALL EYE THE REMAINING FAMILY SITTING NEAR THE CASKET FROM THE PORCH WHILE SHEPHERD AND ORVILLE PASS A FLASK BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

TSIMI

Gonna miss old Weli.

SHEPHERD

All his women up for grabs now.

TSIMI

Keep it down, will you Shep? That's a lousy thing to say.

SHEPHERD

I get the baby when she turns thirteen.

ORVILLE

Dang. She's twelve and you're twenty six? You're closer to her mother in age. Why don't you ask her?

SHEPHERD

I don't want to ask anybody. Hell, I don't even want to get married. S'not my idea at all but her grandpa knows my daddy and he put her mamma and my daddy together and they got to talking and it's all set up.

Shepherd burps and staggers to his feet. He goes to the far end of the porch and hurls into the flower bed below.

SHEPHERD (CONTINUED...)

We getting married in November just as soon as she has her birthday. I'm supposed to ask her tonight.

TSIMI

If he's supposed to pop the question tonight, Orville, he's going to need some sobering up. He said he was going to your place to get a Koca-Kola. How did he end up skunked?

ORVILLE

Koca-Kola won't do him no good now. The coca in the original recipe had to be deactivated. They haven't even shipped it for a long time now.

TSIMI

Is it like liquor where just Indians can't have it, or is this new recipe for everybody?

ORVILLE

Everybody.

SHEPHERD

Well, damn. We're not allowed to bring liquor into Indian Territory and now they've taken the best ingredient out of Koca-Kola!

(Nods and closes his eyes.)

ORVILLE

The next thing we know they'll be trying to outlaw cocaine and opium and all that stuff, too.

TSIMI

What did you give him this time?

ORVILLE

Some white lightning I bought off his future grandfather-in-law.

Shep begins to stir a bit.

TSIMI

You okay, Shep?

SHEPHERD

Give me something, will you? I'm not feeling too good.

Orville pulls a bundle out of his vest pocket and begins unwrapping it for Shepherd.

ORVILLE

I've been working on a new tonic powder formula using part of the K25oca-Kola recipe, only instead of putting kola nuts in with the cocaine to bump it with caffeine, I'm mixing in a little of that new stuff, that heroin. My idea is to perk you up, and at the same time, kill all the pain or tiredness you may feel. I think it might really catch on... Try this, Shep; see if it does you any good.

TSIMI

Does he drink it or snort it?

ORVILLE

Be fashionable, Shep. Give her a snort!

Shep snorts the speedball laid out on a paper bundle before him.

SHEPHERD

(The drug hits him.)

Woo! Woo-woo-oo!

ORVILLE

(Giggling and shushing at the same time.)

Goes down good, does it?

SHEPHERD

Huh?

TSIMI

(laughs)

Better than moonshine?

Shepherd mumbles and slumps in his seat.

ORVILLE

If I could cook up something that beats liquor, I'd have my fortune made.

SHEPHERD

I need to go home.

TSIMI

You are home, bud.

SHEPHERD

Oh, right.

ORVILLE

(To Shepherd.)

When the folks who are here to view Weli clear out a little bit, Tsimi will help me haul you up to bed.

(To Tsimi)

I'll ride herd on this old boy if you want to go in and pay your respects.

TSIMI

I won't be long. Don't let him pass out here on the porch.

SHEPHERD

I'm fine!

Tsimi, hat in hand, steps quietly into the parlor. Alma, distraught, sits near Weli's casket. Florence sweeps by Tsimi on her way to the casket. She kneels and turns, signaling for Alma to kneel beside her. They fold their hands and pray quietly. Alma, 12, weeps disconsolately. She was very attached to her father.

Mother offers Alma a hanky and a warning look.

FLORENCE

Dry your tears, darling. Remember who we are; let's not be vulgar.

Alma can't stop crying. Florence rises and moves back a few rows to sit beside Tismi while leaving Alma to deal with her grief alone.

FLORENCE

I saw you walking Shepherd home. I take it he is under the weather this evening?

TSIMI

Yes, ma'am, I fear Mr. Broughton is indisposed.

FLORENCE

You fear nothing, young man, but you lie so prettily that it's no wonder you get away with it. I think it is the smile. Even though we are far from any respectable body of water, from your attitude I would take you for a pirate.

(She checks him out. He smiles politely.)

Inland, of course, we would call you an outlaw.

TSIMI

Weli was a good man. I am sorry for your loss.

FLORENCE

Thank you, Jimmy. I appreciate how well you can hold your liquor. How far did you boys get your nose into what? A jug of whiskey?

TSIMI

I don't drink liquor of any sort, Mrs. Wimsey.

FLORENCE

You telling me you're a lemonade and sarsaparilla sipping Indian? You like black drink?

TSIMI

I like coffee. I take it black.

FLORENCE

Tell me, what is your name in Cherokee?

TSIMI

Tsimi.

FLORENCE

That sounds just like Jimmy to me! What does it mean?

TSIMI

Jimmy.

FLORENCE

(She rises.)

I should go back up front. Poor Alma was so close to her father. If you boys could put Shepherd to bed now... Try to keep him quiet. I'll speak to Alma privately. She was Daddy's girl, you know.

TSIMI

Of course.

Florence goes back into the parlor, pulls Alma to her feet and leads her to a pair of chairs. They sit knee to knee and hold hands while Tsimi and Orville help Shepherd up the stairs to bed.

Mr. Cuthbert joins the ladies and pats Alma's shoulder.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

He's in God's hands now, dear girl. Think of him in that better place where all the streets are paved with gold. Florence, I will take my leave now unless you need me. I have a train to catch.

FLORENCE

Thank you, Father. We shall abide.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I will return from Ft. Smith next week. I am sorry to leave you at such a time, but business is business and I am expected.

FLORENCE

We understand completely, don't we Alma?

ALMA

Don't worry about us, Grandpa.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

(Kisses Alma's cheek)

That's my brave girl. I'll see you soon.

(He nods to Florence.)

Daughter.

They nod at each other.

FLORENCE

You'll be back in time for Emma's wedding?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

That's not until week after next, so yes I will return by then.

He exits.

ALMA

Emma's getting married?

FLORENCE

Yes, to Chester Smith.

ALMA

(Looks around, agitated, and begins to cry again.)

Sister? Emma? I don't see her!

FLORENCE

She went home with the Smiths a little bit ago.

ALMA

But Emma doesn't really know Chester...

FLORENCE

They'll have plenty of time to get to know each other in the next two weeks.

ALMA

But she's been sweet on Reuben Harjo for months.

FLORENCE

Reuben is too dark, honey. Besides, the Harjos plan to choose their allotments on the other side of town. We want Emma close to us, don't we?

ALMA

Chester is white. He won't be getting an allotment.

FLORENCE

But Emma will, and when she does it will be right in line with ours.

ALMA

Em said nothing to me!

FLORENCE

It's a good match. She'll be back by bedtime and you can ask her all about it.

ALMA

Nothing will ever be the same!

FLORENCE

Dry your eyes, love. We must think ahead to the future now.

ALMA

What will we do without Daddy?

FLORENCE

It will be difficult, but we must go on. I don't know what else to do except rent out our rooms. The only way I know how not to lose everything is to find me another husband right quick. I don't have a chance of finding another man as long as you and Emma are around to capture the attention of someone who would truly be better off with a woman of my age.

(She caresses Alma's cheek.)

I'll tell you the truth of marriage; you are bound to be disappointed at some of it, but on the other hand you will have indescribable joy. If you work it right, Shepherd will adore you until the day he dies if you give him a sweet kiss every night. All you have to do is speak softly to him, even when he's wrong, and when you close the door at the end of each day...

ALMA

Kiss Shep? I wouldn't kiss a grown up man!

FLORENCE

Does Shepherd seem grown-up to you, love?

ALMA

Mamma! You always said, "No matter what you do, Alma, don't ever let a man close the door on you!"

FLORENCE

If the man is simply a boarder, yes, but when the man is your husband you will want to close the door.

(Alma pulls back, puzzled.)

I meant, don't let anyone toss you on the bed along with the clean sheets and take advantage when you're in the room alone.

ALMA

Like Mr. Wallace tried that time?

FLORENCE

Mr. Wallace was under the weather with drink. He paid us four extra days for his room over what he owed.

ALMA

I miss daddy.

FLORENCE

Yes. So do I. But, I do wish he had gotten all his tribal affairs cleared up. We can only hope that when the land allotments are distributed, we will all get our rightful share. You're a good girl -- a pretty, sweet girl who deserves your own house and your own family and all the very best things in life. I've talked to Shepherd's father and we think that you and Shepherd would make a good couple. Shep thinks you're better than candy! You'll be all of thirteen in early November. That's a wonderful time for a wedding! My Cluny lace dress? I'll have it remade for you! And, new boots with heels on them. Not children's shoes! Real ladies' shoes for you, little bride!

Alma pulls back from her mother's embrace, not sure this is a deal that favors her.

ALMA

You want me to marry Shep Broughton?

FLORENCE

Will you help your poor mother with this one thing? Please Alma, you must!

FLORENCE (CONTINUED)

(Suddenly bursts into
vociferous tears - Alma
holds her mother tighter.)

Or else, I am lost!

ALMA

Oh Mamma, don't cry! I'll help you. I will, after all, be
thirteen years old in November!

FLORENCE

I hope you don't ever feel as if I've made you do something
wrong or something that you didn't want to do.

ALMA

Of course not, Mamma. I know you wouldn't.

FLORENCE

That's my beautiful girl. Shepherd's father has a good
business and between the elder Mr. Broughton and myself,
and grandfather, too, I we think we can make sure the two
of you don't jump the track. Mr. Broughton will look out
for you by keeping Shepherd in line. Give him a good
grandson and you'll own the old man, too.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS UP ON:

NOVEMBER, 1903... ONE WEEK AFTER ALMA'S BIRTHDAY

Alma dresses for her wedding.
Florence sets the veil, adjusts
the hem, and steps back to admire.

FLORENCE

Pretty as a princess! You don't look a thing like your
father. Except for your eyes, honey, they do give you away
for a mixed-breed. But, to make up for it you did get the
perfect white skin of an angel! You've never looked more
lovely.

ALMA

Who wouldn't look pretty in your Cluny lace wedding dress? I wish Emma was with us. I always took for granted that Emma would be my maid of honor.

FLORENCE

I'll be your matron of honor. Matron of honor and mother of the bride. Having me by your side is not so terrible, is it?

ALMA

No, mamma. I just miss Em. She should be with us today.

FLORENCE

She's feeling better after her fall, but not well enough to attend the wedding. A broken wrist is very painful.

ALMA

She slipped on grease in the kitchen?

FLORENCE

The poor girl simply doesn't have your grace. She's always been kind of an oaf. But she was trying to cook, and that's an improvement.

ALMA

I hope Shep don't care that I can't cook much.

FLORENCE

You're a good little cook! Just serve him with a smile and even if it turns out wrong, he will still forgive you. You remind me of myself when I was your age. I was a bit older when I married your father, fifteen, like Emma. For having two children I'm holding up well, don't you think?

ALMA

You're the most prettiest mommy I could ever hope for!

FLORENCE

Thank you, darling. I know it sounds vain to say so, but if you had two children so close together you would be proud of yourself, too, if you managed to keep your figure. I married young and your daddy was not the man of my choosing yet we managed despite our poor beginning.

FLORENCE (CONTINUED)

The whole reason Father moved to Indian Territory was so all seven of us girls could marry Indian boys and cabbage onto those land allotments. Father never thinks of anything but business. That's why most of us girls married Indians-- so we'd get a hundred and sixty acres to call our own. Fannie and Alice didn't marry Indians like Father wanted, and that will be their loss. I minded my parents and so now each of my girls will get a hundred and sixty acres through their Daddy, and I'll get his allotment so that we can all three put our properties together and have a nice, big family tract.

ALMA

Grandpa said Aunt Fannie and Aunt Alice were slatterns who make their living on their backs.

FLORENCE

He didn't mean they were porters! Heavens, no!

A knock comes at the door.

Who is it?

Josiah Cuthbert peeks in.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Just Grandpa! I'm here to walk my precious sweetheart down the aisle.

ALMA

Grandpa!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

What a vision you are, little one.

Florence bends to give Alma a kiss on the lips.

FLORENCE

The next time I kiss you, you will be a married woman! Oh Father, isn't she beautiful?

(Exits.)

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Prettiest little Cherokee Princess I ever seen!

ALMA

(Laughs)

Oh Grandpa! I think my Daddy would have told me if we were Cherokee royalty!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Nowadays Cherokee Princesses are made, not born. And, you are a princess--you certainly are in my eyes.

Alma is charmed. She gives her grandfather a hug.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT (CONTINUED)

I have a present for you, Alma.

(He sits at the vanity, pulls a letter from his pocket, and smooths it out on the tabletop.)

Your wedding present shall be this house. I paid for every stick and nail that it took to build it. It belongs to you, only to you, and not to your husband. Not your husband, not your mother, not anyone but you. Do you understand?

ALMA

No sir. But, this is mamma's house.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Oh no, never was your mother's house and never could be! If your mamma had been adopted by the tribe, she could have kept it, but the Tribe wouldn't have her. Cherokee women can own property in Indian Territory and you are Cherokee. I am happy to make you a gift of this house.

ALMA

Grandpa! You can't give me mamma's house. I cannot begin to imagine how vexed--

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Your mamma is coming to live with me in the big house after the wedding. I need her help there, darling. Besides, every newlywed begs for privacy.

ALMA

Does mamma know you're doing this?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Don't worry your head. I'll explain it all to her when we get back to my place tonight. She'll be happy for you.

(As Alma signs.)

Did she tell you what all to expect tonight?

ALMA

I know we're to have cake!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Yes, cake! And one more precious hour of innocence.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS UP ON:

EXT. - THE PORCH - EARLY EVENING

Shepherd, Orville, and Tsimi bide their time on the porch while waiting for the wedding to begin.

SHEPHERD

Daddy is of the misguided opinion that me getting married to some little old gal is going to fix me. It won't. I don't want to be fixed. I'm sorry she'll have to suffer, but she said yes to daddy; she never said yes to me because I never asked her. Now, I don't believe I'll get the time before the wedding.

TSIMI

Her mother said yes to your father. She's just a good little girl doing what she's been told to do.

SHEPHERD

She's a shiny little thing, sweet and pure and way too good for me. Daddy knows it. Her mother knows it. She doesn't know it yet, but she'll find out.

ORVILLE

Damn, Shep. Seems like you'd want to try.

SHEPHERD

They think if they load me down with a wife and children that I'm going to come around. I got news for them.

I'm not coming around. I don't want to change. I just want to be a happy drunk.

TSIMI

There are men who would kill to have the kind of chance you're getting, Shep. It ain't going to cost you a damn thing to be good to that girl.

SHEPHERD

Ain't going to cost me if I am or if I ain't.

TSIMI

Oh, you'll do the right thing, alright. On that, you have my word.

Florence comes out onto the porch.

FLORENCE

Are you ready, gentlemen? We are ready to start.

The young men smile slightly and nod to Florence.

She steps back through the parlor door.

Strike up the music!

The strains of "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring" begin to wheeze from the pump organ in the parlor.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS UP ON:

THE PARLOR, AFTER THE WEDDING

All the guests are gone save Florence, Shep, Orville and Tsimi. Alma glows, being the focus of so much attention while Shep hangs back with his buddies, feeling sorry for himself.

SHEPHERD

Believe I'll have me a smoke. Orville?

ORVILLE

Yep.

TSIMI

I'll be right there...

(Turns to Alma and takes her hand.)

Your father was always good to me, Miss Alma. I want you to know that if you need anything, all you have to do is ask. Anything at all. And, I hope you will think of me as a brother.

ALMA

I already do, Tsimi. I always have.

TSIMI

Osdá, wadó! (Ose'-dah, wah-doe'/Good! Thanks!)
I wish you much happiness in your marriage.

ALMA

Wadó, Dinadanvtli. (Wah-doe', deen'-uh-dah-not'-lee/Thank you, brother.)

TSIMI

Donadagohvi, Alma. (doe-nah-dah-go-huh-ee/Farewell-Let us see each other again.)

ALMA

Gowawu, Tsimi. (go-wah'-woo/It is destiny.)

Tsimi exits to join his friends on the porch.

FLORENCE

What did you say to him in that heathen language?

ALMA

I thanked him and we said farewell to each other.

FLORENCE

Well, I wish you would forget all that! You are white, Alma, and you are married to a white man now. I beg you not to speak so in public. You will only set yourself back among civilized people!

ALMA

My father was the most civilized, unselfish person in the world! He was Tsalagi (Jah-lah-gee/Cherokee) and so am I, mother, and so will your grandchildren be if I am so blessed. I beg you to remember that!

FLORENCE

My, aren't we above ourselves?

ALMA

I'm sorry, mamma. I did not mean to sound so forceful.
(Florence remains miffed.)
Grandpa said you would have advice for me on my wedding night. Is there something I should do?

FLORENCE

Play the piano for him, Alma.

ALMA

Oh. I can do that.

FLORENCE

And, slip a towel under your bottom when you go to bed to sop the blood. You don't want to ruin your sheets.

ALMA

Sop the blood?!

FLORENCE

And try not to scream.

ALMA

Scream?! Oh, Mother! You're just mad because I talked Cherokee!

FLORENCE

Alright. It's not that bad; you may bleed a little and it may hurt a little because it will be your first time. You'll get used to it and you may grow to like it. In time.

There is nothing to fear, Alma, being married is all quite natural and it's the only way to get babies.

SHEPHERD

(Enters)

My boys done gone.

FLORENCE

Congratulations on your wedding day, Mr. Broughton.

(smirks)

I've suggested that Alma play for you tonight.

SHEPHERD

I hope she will play!

FLORENCE

We have only a piano at home but when you go to church with us, you'll see how well she plays the organ! No one plays the organ like Alma.

SHEPHERD

I'm quite partial to having my organ played.

ALMA

You have an organ?

SHEPHERD

I do, and a mighty organ it is!

ALMA

I can't wait to see it!

FLORENCE

The marriage contract is sealed. I bid you good night!

ALMA

(Goes to kiss her mother
good night)

Good night, Mamma.

FLORENCE

(Rebuffing her)

You'll get your good night kisses from your husband from now on.

Florence sweeps out into the night.

Shep bends to kiss Alma. She quickly gives him a peck on the cheek and slides onto the piano bench.

ALMA

What would you like to hear?

SHEPHERD

Something soft and tender?

ALMA

As you wish...

She launches into the hymn,
"Tenderly Calling."

SHEPHERD

Maybe something a little peppier...

Alma segues into "Nearer My God to Thee."

SHEPHERD

Maybe something that's not a hymn...

ALMA

You don't like hymns?

SHEPHERD

Is that all you know?

ALMA

Mamma always prefers that I play hymns, but here's one...

She starts playing "Lilly Dale."

SHEPHERD

Not that one, if you please.

ALMA

How about this?

She begins "Listen to the
Mockingbird."

SHEPHERD

That's another dead sweetheart tune.

ALMA

I'm sorry. Perhaps you'd like to play?

SHEPHERD

What I'd like is a kiss. From my wife? On our wedding
night?

ALMA

Perhaps.

SHEPHERD

Ain't no perhaps about it, wife. You gonna kiss me good!

ALMA

Oh! I thought of a good one!

(She pounds the piano with a
rendition of "She'll Be Comin'
'Round the Mountain.)

Join in! Sing it with me! She'll be comin' round the--

(Instead of singing, Shepherd
throws himself at her feet and
begins fumbling with the buttons
on her new shoes. They do not
unbutton easily. Alma kicks at
him.)

What are you doing? My new shoes!

SHEPHERD

They're coming off right now.

ALMA

Stop it! I'm not through playing!

SHEPHERD

Yes, you are!

ALMA

I know lots more songs!

He pulls her off the piano bench
and he wrestles her around on the
floor tearing at her high-button
shoes.

SHEPHERD

Hold still, damnit! Don't fight me!

ALMA

You're going to ruin my new shoes!

SHEPHERD

(He pulls back, panting.)

Stop kicking! Stop now or I'm gonna start kickin' back!

(Alma stops struggling under
the threat.)

How in hell do you get these off?

ALMA

Same way I got them on only backwards.

SHEPHERD

Why are all these little loops and buttons so small?

ALMA

Because they are ladies shoes! I am a lady, if you please!

SHEPHERD

Well, you fight like a mongrel dog!

ALMA

How dare you call me mongrel!

SHEPHERD

You take one more poke at me, little lady, I will cut them
fancy shoes right off your feet!

Alma bursts into tears.

SHEPHERD

Don't cry!

ALMA

I don't know what else to do.

SHEPHERD

All I want is for you to take your damn shoes off, Alma.
I'm just trying do it for you, but my fingers are too big.

ALMA

Do I have to?

SHEPHERD

I'm afraid so.

ALMA

I need my crochet hook.

SHEPHERD

You looking to stab me in the eye with it?

ALMA

I need my hook to undo the buttons. That's how you get
them on; that's how you get them off.

SHEPHERD

Now you're talking.

ALMA

My sewing basket is on the shelf by the wing-back chair.

Shepherd stands, dusts off his
pants and fetches Alma's sewing
basket.

Thank you.

She picks her crochet hook out of
the basket and begins undoing the
first button on a shoe. She
struggles for a moment, tries
again, tries again, and finally
the first of the 21 buttons on her
left shoe is undone.

SHEPHERD

This gonna take all night?

ALMA

Each loop must be opened one at a time.

Shep drops into a chair and twiddles his thumbs impatiently while Alma slowly works to undo each loop.

SHEPHERD

Don't play with me, girl.

ALMA

I'm not playing.

SHEPHERD

Get them damned shoes off or I'll cut them off!

ALMA

I can't go any faster. How come I've got to take my shoes off anyway?

SHEPHERD

So we won't have any trouble getting your bloomers off.

ALMA

I'm not taking my bloomers off!

SHEPHERD

Yes, you will whether the shoes come off or not. And, I ain't waiting any more!

Shep rushes at Alma. They struggle briefly but he overpowers her. Despite her protestations, he flings her over his shoulder and carries her up the stairs.

Alma cries out.

ALMA

No, no! Don't shut the door on me! Please, don't shut the door!

The bedroom door slams shut.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

ALMA'S PARLOR - ONE WEEK LATER

Florence pays her first visit since the wedding. Alma sets a pie on the windowsill to cool.

FLORENCE

I smell cinnamon! Some little angel has been baking!

ALMA

Mamma!

(She flies into her mother's arms.)

Mamma, help me!

FLORENCE

Why, Alma, that's a lovely pie. Doesn't look like you need a lick of my help.

ALMA

Mamma, I hate Shep. I hate him!

FLORENCE

You hate him today; you may love him tomorrow.

ALMA

I will not love him tomorrow or any other time. He is disgusting.

FLORENCE

They're all disgusting.

ALMA

Come back, Mamma. It's not home without you!

FLORENCE

Yes, it is home. This is your home. It was built and furnished at great expense, and I hope you don't abandon it because you are too much a baby to appreciate what has been done for you. I spoiled you for too long, my dear. You don't have one grateful bone in your body.

ALMA

Grateful? Grateful?

FLORENCE

You are not raising seven children in a tent, as my mother did when I was a girl. You are not living in some mud-filled soddy burrowed under the earth like a rat. You have clothes on your back and plenty of food to eat; you have a beautiful big house, you have China dishes, you have five rooms full of fine furniture and you didn't have to wait one day for it, or save for it, or do anything for it except surrender yourself to the marriage bed. If you are that ungrateful, then leave, but you can't come home to me. You're the one with the house. I live with Grandpa now.

ALMA

I hate him.

FLORENCE

And yet, there rests a pie on the windowsill.

ALMA

The pie is for company. He's invited Orville and Tsimi to supper tonight.

FLORENCE

Your first little dinner party! Shall I scribble out a menu for you? I find that having a menu on the table encourages the menfolk to more genteel deportment.

ALMA

Would you? Reading our menu to the boarders was my favorite chore as a child. I was so proud of your pretty handwriting.

FLORENCE

(Taking up paper and pen)

So, what are we having?

ALMA

Pot roast of beef with stewed carrots and onion gravy. Potatoes mashed with milk and butter. Applesauce. Collard greens with ham hock and then, apple pie.

FLORENCE

All my favorite company dishes! Now, aren't you glad you shadowed me in the kitchen from the time you could toddle? Did you make biscuits or yeast bread?

ALMA

Oh! Neither one. I forgot to make bread altogether!

FLORENCE

They won't notice.

ALMA

I should make a quick skillet of corn bread.

FLORENCE

Don't bother. Set your pie out on the sideboard so they all can see it and they won't even notice your mistake. A pie makes every husband happy.

ALMA

I didn't make that pie for Shep.

FLORENCE

You should always keep your husband's pleasure uppermost in your mind.

ALMA

What my husband thinks is pleasure is not at all pleasant to me.

FLORENCE

Do you think another man would be different?

ALMA

I would hope to kiss a pig that they all aren't like Shep.

FLORENCE

Pucker up, Alma; they are all beasts at heart.

ALMA

If they are all beasts, Mother, why did you push me? What was the hurry, pray tell?

FLORENCE

I am thinking of your future. You do not come to this marriage as a beggar, Alma. You have prospects; tribal land will be allotted within the next few years.

ALMA

I need not be married to receive my land allotment.

FLORENCE

Think of this: every time you get yourself a baby, you'll get another land allotment equal to your own! You could double or triple your holdings before the Dawes Rolls permanently close. Have you spoken with your sister?

ALMA

I don't care to face Emma, or anyone, just yet - now that I know what honeymoon means.

FLORENCE

Then I shall tell you the wonderful news. Emma is with child! Let us pray for twins!

ALMA

Oh no, oh please no. Why is it, Mother, that when you are this happy I begin to quake with dread? How many more secret initiations am I doomed to endure for the sake of your ambition?

FLORENCE

Babies, Alma, make babies! That's what we are after!

(teasing)

Don't make me have to choose a new favorite daughter!

A clattering of boot heels on the porch herald Shepherd's arrival as he returns home with Orville and Tsimi.

The Men enter the parlor where the table has been laid for their dinner.

SHEPHERD

Hello!

FLORENCE

Welcome home, Shepherd! Your bride has been a busy girl today. Alma, why don't you get the gentlemen settled while I step into the kitchen and whip up a batch of biscuits. She did very well on everything else, but she forgot to make bread! Good thing I dropped by, eh Alma?

Florence exits to the kitchen.

TSIMI

Osiyo, Alma. (Oh-see-yo') (Greetings)

ALMA

Osiyo, Tsimi.

SHEPHERD

Smells good in here!

(He yells into the kitchen.)

Dinner hasn't smelled this fine since you moved out, Mrs. Wimsey!

(To Alma.)

Good job getting your mamma to do the cooking, Alma.

ALMA

I did the cooking; Mamma's just making the biscuits. Hello, Orville.

ORVILLE

Howdy, Ms. Alma. Shore do smell good.

ALMA

Won't y'all boys take a chair?

The menfolk settle around the table.

SHEPHERD

Are you sure that your mamma made just the biscuits? Are you sure she didn't make the pie too?

ALMA

I made the pie and everything else!

SHEPHERD

But not the biscuits?

ALMA

You are the most aggravating....boy!

SHEPHERD

Man.

ALMA

Jackass!

Florence enters from the kitchen.

ALMA (CONTINUED)

(To Shepherd)

I hate you!

FLORENCE

Alma!

ALMA

You don't have a say on who I love or who I hate. Not anymore, Mother.

FLORENCE

I only thought to mention that I put a pan of biscuits in the oven for you. I will now take my leave.

SHEPHERD

I'll be grateful if this little heifer turns out to be half your bolt, Mrs. Wimsey.

FLORENCE

Where did you get the idea that you could call my daughter a cow? This type of name-calling will not be brooked, young man, or else... Women are not cows!

SHEPHERD

I beg your pardon, Ms. Wimsey! I meant no offense.

FLORENCE

Well, what did you mean then? How is likening a cow to your bride, in any sense, complimentary?

SHEPHERD

I, uh...I was just trying to say that I've always et good at your table.

FLORENCE

Alma is quite a hand in the kitchen, Shepherd. She's been cooking since she was small. Why, she can pinch off a pan of biscuits just as quick, or quicker, than I can and hers are just as good because they are identical to mine. It is reckless of you to tease her about her cooking when she will be preparing your meals for the rest of your life. You may find, my son, that you'll do better with honey rather than vinegar.

Alma runs to her mother and kisses
her cheek.

ALMA

Stay, Mother. Do stay.

FLORENCE

Thank you, no.

(Aside, to Alma.)

Try harder, Alma.

(To All.)

Good evening.

Florence exits. Alma ignores the
men and goes into the kitchen.

ORVILLE

"Son!" Haw haw haw! The old lady's is a looker for her
age but boy-howdy, she is strong. She's already got a ring
in your nose, 'son'!

SHEPHERD

Tsimi likes her, don't you Tsimi?

TSIMI

Sure. I like her fine.

SHEPHERD

She likes you a bit more than fine. All that time you used
to spend at their house -- was that on account of Weli or
on account of her?

TSIMI

On account of Weli.

SHEPHERD

She likes your pirate smile.

TSIMI

I know what she likes about me, but I'm beginning to wonder
what she likes about you.

ORVILLE

That's the dang mystery, alright!

Alma enters from the kitchen.

ALMA

What would you fellows like to drink with your supper?

SHEPHERD

Brandy for me. Hand me the bottle.

ALMA

(Ignoring this instruction)

Must you?

SHEPHERD

You know I must.

TSIMI

Is coffee made?

ALMA

It is.

TSIMI

Then, I'll have coffee.

ORVILLE

Coffee for me, too.

Alma goes back into the kitchen.
Shep crosses to the buffet and
grabs the brandy bottle and a
glass before returning to his
seat.

SHEPHERD

(Pours himself a shot and
downs it)

Sure y'all don't want some?

TSIMI

Lay off, Shep. You get stupid; you ain't going.

SHEPHERD

I need it for courage.

TSIMI

Dutch courage is not courage.

ORVILLE

I believe Dutch courage comes from gin.

TSIMI

(Shoots Orville a withering
look. To Shep)

If you ain't got the guts, Shep, then just stay home.

Alma reappears with coffee for
Tsimi and Orville.

SHEPHERD

I guess I'll have coffee, too.

Alma returns to the kitchen to get
a cup for Shep.

SHEPHERD (CONTINUED)

You ain't cutting me out of this payday.

TSIMI

There will be plenty of time for drinking and celebrating
after we get back.

Alma brings coffee to Shep.

ALMA

(Flushed from her labors in
the kitchen, Alma tries to
get her dinner party off to
a good start.)

I hope you're hungry!

SHEPHERD

Get it on the table, gal! We need to get fed so we can get
gone and get on about our business.

ALMA

What business?

SHEPHERD

Never you mind what business.

ALMA

I was wanting to play a new song for y'all. I been working
on "The Saint Louis Rag."

ORVILLE

That's the new music!

ALMA

I thought we might all of us play games after supper, or do a recitation at least. Maybe pop some corn later...visit....

TSIMI

Aw, you had a nice little program all planned out for us! Sure is thoughtful of you, Ms. Alma. I'm sorry nobody told you that we couldn't stay.

ALMA

All my plans, gone for naught. I was so looking forward to having some good company for a change.

ORVILLE

Next time for sure, Ms. Alma. I'd sure like to hear you play some ragtime.

ALMA

Are you sure y'all have time to eat?

SHEPHERD

Rustle it up, damnit, and we'll eat it. We ain't got all night.

ALMA

I apologize, gentlemen, but I've lost my appetite. Being cursed at does that to me. I'm going to bed.

SHEPHERD

What about supper?

ALMA

I don't care if you eat or not.

She abruptly stalks out of the room and up the stairway.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

EXT. - THE PORCH - NIGHT

With no streetlights, no porch light, and nothing but the moon and stars to light his homecoming, Shep is carried by Orville and Tsimi onto the porch. Orville tries the door.

ORVILLE

Locked.

TSIMI

Knock.

(Orville knocks softly.)

Knock harder.

(Orville knocks harder but there is still no response.)

SHEPHERD

(In agony)

Goddamnit, Alma! Open the door!

Alma appears at the upstairs bedroom window.

ALMA

Are you drunk?

SHEPHERD

Open the goddamn door!

TSIMI

Nobody's drunk, but we've got a little trouble. We need to get him inside. Quick!

SHEPHERD

I'm bleedin' bad.

TSIMI

Shhh. Hold on.

Alma opens the door. Tsimi and Orville drag Shepherd inside and lay him on the parlor rug. Alma closes the door behind them.

ALMA

What happened?

SHEPHERD

I'm shot.

TSIMI

We're going to have to cut his pants off.

ORVILLE

In front of Ms. Alma?

ALMA

Nothing I haven't seen before.

TSIMI

He's going to bleed like a stuck pig when I take off the tourniquet.

ALMA

I'll get a blanket.

Alma rushes upstairs.

ORVILLE

You had to play the fool! You're gonna get us caught. They're gonna know who did it.

Alma returns with a blanket and some towels.

ALMA

Move him off of my rug.

Orville and Tsimi lift Shep onto the blanket, then slide him off the rug and onto the bare floor.

Tsimi works feverishly to cut one leg off Shep's trousers.

TSIMI

Boil some water. Lots. And bring a big wooden spoon.

Alma quickly exits to do as she is told.

TSIMI (CONTINUED)

Orville, go get us some sulfa drugs.

SHEPHERD

And something for the pain! Aargh! Sonofabitch!

ORVILLE

Quit yelling! You're going to bring them all down on us.

Alma returns. Tsimi takes the spoon and uses it to replace tourniquet on Shep's leg.

SHEPHERD

It's too tight!

TSIMI

It's got to be tight. We're going to need another spoon.

Alma goes back to the kitchen to fetch a second wooden spoon.

SHEPHERD

Aarrgh!!!

Alma returns with the second spoon and hands it to Tsimi.

TSIMI

(Inserts the spoon handle into Shep's mouth.)

Bite on this. And, keep quiet!

(To Alma.)

Do you still have your daddy's barbering tools?

ALMA

Why, yes.

TSIMI

Would you get them and bring them to me?

Alma again runs back up the stairs.

TSIMI (CONTINUED)

Orville, clear off the dining room table!

Orville removes the candlesticks from the table.

TSIMI

We'll lift him on the blanket. You grab that end and I'll lift this end.

(To Shep.)

Lie down now. We're going to move you.

Tsimi helps Shep settle back onto the blanket. Orville seizes the blanket corners holding Shep's legs while Tsimi lifts his torso. They place him on the dining room table.

ORVILLE

(To Shep)

You stupid bastard!

TSIMI

Orville, go!

Orville bolts out the door.

Alma returns with her father's kit.

TSIMI

Okay, find me a straight razor and that tooth extractor thing. Looks like pliers on one end...

ALMA

(Pulls out a straight razor and holds up another instrument for Tsimi's inspection.)

Is this it?

TSIMI

That's it. Now, go boil them.

ALMA

Alright.

She takes the tools to the kitchen. Shep rouses and spits out the spoon.

SHEPHERD

Am I going to die?

TSIMI

You may wish you did before it's all over. Lie still.

SHEPHERD

Give me some whiskey. Or brandy. You've got to give me something!

TSIMI

Settle down. Orville will be back with something better than whiskey soon.

SHEPHERD

I want something now.

TSIMI

Well, you can't have nothing now.

Alma returns.

ALMA

I put the tools in the water but it's not up to a boil yet.

(Gasps at Shep's
appearance.)

He's gone white as a sheet.

Shepherd faints.

TSIMI

He's lost blood.

ALMA

Should we try to wake him up?

TSIMI

It's kinder not to. He won't feel it so much passed out.

ALMA

Are you going to tell me what happened?

TSIMI

Hunting accident.

ALMA

What were you hunting this time of night?

TSIMI

Let's just say a wild hog got him.

ALMA

I know wild hogs are dangerous, but I had no idea they were good marksmen.

TSIMI

If anyone asks, just say a wild boar got him.

ALMA

And why will we be lying?

TSIMI

Because we could all three end up swinging at the end of a rope if anyone finds out the truth.

ALMA

And the truth is?

TSIMI

The less you know, the better. Trust me.

ALMA

Will he die?

TSIMI

As long as we get the bullet out, he'll probably make it.

ALMA

Should I check to see if the water is boiling?

TSIMI

Let it boil until Orville gets back with the sulpha drugs.
When he does, I'll do the extraction.

ALMA

That's what you need the tooth-puller for?

TSIMI

Yup.

ALMA

There's sulfa medicine in Daddy's bag.

TSIMI

There is? Well good, but Orville is bringing something to
knock him out, too, or at least kill the pain. I'm pretty
sure old Shep would be hell-to-pay if I tried to work on
him without dulling him down.

ALMA

How did you learn what to do?

TSIMI

Weli taught me. He saved my life.

ALMA

He did? How?

Tsimi opens his shirt and shows
her a puckered scar on his chest.

TSIMI

He fished one out of me. Right here.
(Indicates scar.)

ALMA

I had no idea Daddy did that.

TSIMI

I owe him my life.

ALMA

Daddy was often called away in the middle of the night.
There was a gang of Creek train robbers who would come
knocking on the window and Daddy would grab his bag and go.

He told us that one of them would hold a gun to his head while he was giving the others haircuts. I was so frightened when I was little, but we could never, never tell one single soul. No one. Daddy said that's why his barbershop never got robbed.

TSIMI

Old Weli never got robbed, but it sure wasn't because he gave good haircuts. Would you peek out the window and see if Orville's coming? Seems like he's had time to be there and back twice.

Alma looks out the window, but
Orville is not in view.

ALMA

Don't see him yet. Might he have been arrested?

TSIMI

They'd be looking for three men riding together, one wounded. Most likely they'll wait few days and see who shows up dead. I'm thinking that maybe Orville changed his mind. He just may not come back. Do you see the horses?

ALMA

No horses.

TSIMI

Not good to see saddled horses wandering around loose at sunup after a train robbery.

ALMA

You and Shep and Orville robbed a train?

TSIMI

A hunting accident. Goliga? (Go-lee'-guh/Understand)

ALMA

Vv. Yigoliga. (Uh-huh. Yee-go-lee'-gah/Yes, I understand) But, in this neck of the woods, if the Tribal Police saw Shep's horse wandering around saddled up at daybreak it would not draw any special attention. They've already brought Sadie home twice this week.

TSIMI

They don't usually find her with a bloody saddle, do they?

Alma crosses to the door.

ALMA

I'll whistle up Sadie and shake a pail of oats. She'll come. How do I get yours to come?

Alma goes out on the porch to call Shepherd's mare; Tismi joins her.

TSIMI

You call Sadie and shake your oats, then I'll call mine.

Alma sticks her fingers in her mouth to whistle and suddenly becomes self conscious. He smiles.

TSIMI (CONTINUED)

Atsotasdi. (Eh-joe'-tass-dee) (Whistle, or blowing)

She smiles, whistles up the mare then sprints off the porch toward the barn like a blushing tomboy.

Tismi whistles for his horse and goes inside.

LIGHTS DIM.

FADE UP:

THE DINING ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

Shepherd tosses fitfully on the table. Tismi tends him, blotting his brow with a cool cloth. Alma, filthy from head to toe from wiping down horses and cleaning the blood off Shep's saddle, enters but advances no farther than the kitchen door.

ALMA

I've got blood all over me and I smell like a horse.

TSIMI

We've got to get this bullet out of Shep. We can't wait any longer for Orville.

ALMA

What if he gets difficult?

TSIMI

You'll have to help me. We have to do it. But first, we wash up real good. I'm going to have to take my shirt off to operate. I hope you don't mind, but it's cleaner.

ALMA

I don't mind if that's what you have to do. There's plenty of hot water. I'll get out of these nasty rags and wash up after you.

SHEPHERD

(delirious)

Don't care. She's fixin' to buck! Where..... I said! Give me some. Goddamn shoes!

Tismi comes out of the kitchen bare chested and bathed. Alma has removed her outerwear by the back door and now flits by the kitchen door in her shift. She begins to scrub herself while Tismi washes Shep.

ALMA

Tsimi, don't look. I'm going to run by you in my shift so I can put on a dress.

TSIMI

I'm not looking, but it would be cleaner if you just worked in your shift. No sense bloodying up one of your nice dresses.

ALMA

What would people say?

TSIMI

It's not like we can ever tell this story anyway. Are you washed?

ALMA

Yes, and I tied back my hair.

She enters. Tsimi stands, momentarily completely distracted by her beauty. Alma looks at Tsimi as if he is the first man she's ever seen.

ALMA (CONTINUED)

You don't have any chest hair.

TSIMI

No. My failure.

ALMA

Not at all. You're all smooth; he's like a mangy rat.

TSIMI

Well, I don't care to have this mangy rat's death on my conscience.

ALMA

What shall I do?

TSIMI

Grab a big bottle of whiskey and let's see if he wants some.

ALMA

Oh, he will.

TSIMI

I don't know if you're strong enough to hold down his upper body with your arms. You will probably have to sit on his chest to hold him.

ALMA

If I sit on his chest and pour liquor down his throat he's going to think he's already died and gone to heaven.

Alma opens a door in the buffet and hands Tsimi a bottle of whiskey.

Tsimi kneels by Shep, props him up, and offers him a swig. Shep gulps down the whiskey greedily.

He assembles the tools he will need for the operation and offers the bottle to Shep one last time. Shep gulps.

TSIMI

Gonna need you to cooperate, Shep. Toughen up, now.

Shep screams when Tsimi probes the wound. He struggles to escape.

ALMA

Hold still! He's trying to save your life.

SHEPHERD

Are you my wife?

ALMA

I married you last week. Not sure I'd qualify as a wife.

Shep SCREAMS.

SHEPHERD

It hurts!

TSIMI

We all gonna get strung up if you can't control yourself.
(Takes the whiskey bottle
and props Shep up.)

Drink up, Shep.

SHEPHERD

My leg...

Shep chugs whiskey as fast as he can.

TSIMI

I know. Take it easy.

ALMA

Shall I climb up and sit on him?

SHEPHERD

Stay off of me! I'll bite you!

TSIMI

I think we ought to tie him down. You're not heavy enough to hold him. We need rope.

ALMA

I'll get some from the barn.

She exits through the kitchen.

TSIMI

(To Shep)

You've got to stay still. No more yelling. When it starts hurting bad, bite on the spoon. If you keep hollering I'm going to have to gag you. I don't want to, but I will.

SHEPHERD

More whiskey.

TSIMI

Here you go.

(Hands him the bottle,
Shepherd gulps it down.)

Alma returns with all the rope she could find.

TSIMI

Drink up, Shep.

In his weakened state, the booze hits Shep like a ton of bricks. He sinks back on the table and passes out.

ALMA

That's a blessing. I brought some peggin' string, too.

TSIMI

Good thinking.

Working quickly, he tethers each of Shep's legs to a table leg then winds a reata around his chest and under the table. Shep is completely immobilized.

Bring your Daddy's tools and hand them to me when I ask.

ALMA

(Retrieves the instruments and takes the wooden spoon from Tsimi.)

I hope he doesn't wake up.

TSIMI

If he does, stick the spoon in his mouth and don't let him spit it out, no matter what.

ALMA

I'm ready.

TSIMI

This would have been a whole lot easier if Orville had done what he said he would do.

Tsimi probes the bullet hole with a finger. Shep stirs and mumbles curses under his breath, but remains semi-conscious.

TSIMI (CONTINUED)

Hand me the extractor.

Alma complies. Tsimi inserts it into the wound. Shep starts to tremble. Alma places the spoon in his mouth.

ALMA

Just in case.

Shep struggles against his restraints to no avail. Alma makes sure the stick remains in place. He tries to scream, but only growls instead.

TSIMI

The bullet wants to keep moving around in there....I've got it!

(He pulls the bullet from Shep's thigh.)

Hand me the sulfa powder now. I'll pack it in. You any good with a needle?

ALMA

I make all my own clothes.

TSIMI

Good. You can sew him up. Trade me places.

Alma and Tsimi change sides of the table. He hands her needle and thread.

Don't make the stitches too small; the wound will need to drain.

Alma quickly makes eight basting stitches.

TSIMI

Good job.

Tsimi sprinkles sulfa powder on the exterior wound and bandages Shepherd carefully.

TSIMI

I'll wash him down; go get his nightshirt.

Alma bounds upstairs. Tsimi unties Shep and starts bathing him.

Alma returns.

Tsimi slips Shep into his nightshirt, lifts him off the table, and carries him to the fainting couch in the parlor.

Alma removes the bloody linens and puts them to soak in the to the kitchen.

When she returns the house looks normal again, as if nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened.

ALMA

Guess he won't be wearing trousers for a while.

TSIMI

As long as the wound doesn't fester, he should be wearing pants again in a day or two.

ALMA

And, if it does fester?

TSIMI

He could lose his leg. Or die.

Alma looks upon Shep with very mixed emotions. The longer she looks at him, the more upset she becomes. She bursts out crying. Tsimi tries to comfort her. He takes her in his arms and she sobs onto his shoulder.

TSIMI (CONTINUED)

I know he acted like we were killing him, but as bullet wounds go, it wasn't that bad.

Alma sobs a little louder and tightens her arms around Tsimi's neck.

TSIMI (CONTINUED)

It's in the hands of the Creator now. We did our best.

ALMA

It's not that...not that. It's because, oh dear Lord! I'm going straight to hell for what I'm wishing right now.

They gaze into each other's faces.
Tsimi understands exactly what she
means.

He pulls her close. They kiss.

TSIMI

If hell is where you're going, I'm going with you, girl.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT II

ON THE PORCH - A FEW DAYS LATER

Sheps sits in a rocking chair
under a woolen throw with a cane
at his side. Alma rests, half
sitting on the porch railing and
at the end of her patience.

ALMA

(Covering her ears.)

Stop talking about it! Stop talking about it!

SHEPHERD

They'll hang you, too! They will! You're just as guilty
as the rest of us.

ALMA

If anybody gets caught it will be because you can't hush
your mouth.

SHEPHERD

Judge Parker will hang a woman as quick as a man.

ALMA

I was told 'hunting accident' and all I did was save my
husband's life. I'm thirteen! They're not going to hang
me because I was lied to.

SHEPHERD

They'll hang me; I'm not thirteen! They'll hang Orville and Tsimi, too.

ALMA

Only if you keep running your mouth. If I were you, I'd be thinking up a good story about now. Something along the lines of how you got tusked by a wild boar while you were night hunting. About how your friends brought you home and how I stitched you up. Make it a good one, Shep, for the day somebody notices your cane or your limp and inquires, perhaps, of your injury.

SHEPHERD

Damn, Alma. A body would think you're the twenty-six year old and I'm the one who's thirteen.

ALMA

Yes, as it ever so often and so shamefully seems.

SHEPHERD

(Regarding Alma with
amusement and
appreciation.)

Do you suppose you could ever get to - uh, you know - cotton to me a little better?

ALMA

I don't know, Shep. Don't seem too likely.

SHEPHERD

I was kind of surprised you didn't run home to mother after...

ALMA

I tried; she wouldn't have me. So, no sense in you trying to run me off because this is my house. I own it and I am here to stay. There's nothing to keep you from leaving, though. Why don't you go home to your daddy?

SHEPHERD

He'd send me right back.

(Beat.)

Look Alma, I don't mind being stuck with you near as much as I thought I would. It'd be nice, though, if you could just cotton to me a little better.

ALMA

If it ends up that I can't, will you leave?

SHEPHERD

Death do us part, Alma.

In the distance, Tsimi whistles
for his horse.

ALMA

I think I'll take Sadie out for some exercise before she
kicks down her stall. Nice day for a ride.

SHEPHERD

Guess I'll just sit here by my lonesome.

ALMA

Do you need anything before I go?

SHEPHERD

Brandy?

ALMA

I think not.

Alma leaps down the porch steps
and exits to the barn.

Shepherd decides to see if his
legs will hold him if he goes for
the brandy himself.

HOOFBEATS as Alma takes off,
lickety-split, on the horse.

Shepherd totters, stumbles, and
falls. He lies where he lands,
moaning, and calls out to Alma,
but she is gone.

He struggles to pull himself back
into his chair, working up a sweat
during this exertion. As he
regains his seat, he notices
Josiah Cuthbert grinning at him
from the front porch steps.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Good morning.

SHEPHERD

Morning, Grandpa.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

(Noting Shep's injury.)

What have we here?

SHEPHERD

Wild pig ripped me up. Alma patched me back together.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Wild pig? Is that right?

SHEPHERD

Yep.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

That's funny.

SHEPHERD

Not funny to me.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I meant funny because I was sure you were the one I shot when y'all were trying to rob the train Friday night.

SHEPHERD

I didn't hear about a train robbery.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I'm not surprised. You were probably too busy robbing trains to hear any news at all.

SHEPHERD

Sir?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I thought it was you that I shot at, but I wasn't sure. I didn't know I got you! Har-har!

SHEPHERD

I was out huntin'...

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Save it for the paying customers. To tell you the truth, I'm glad to know you've got the gumption to do -- something -- even if it's wrong. Don't try to deny it, I knew it was you out there in the dark. I recognized your voice.

SHEPHERD

You going to turn me in?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I haven't yet. What makes you think I would now?

SHEPHERD

I'm not admittin' anything, but IF I did it, why wouldn't you? For Alma?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Hell, if I was trying to make Alma happy I'd shoot you again. But, I would try to do a better job of it this time.

SHEPHERD

You're gonna hold this over my head, ain't you?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

(Chuckles heartily.)

You know I will. Over you and your 'associates'. May never come out though, if you play your cards right. May come a day when I might need your help, or discretion, as the case may be.

SHEPHERD

You can count on me, Grandpa.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I'm not your grandpa.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

THE PRAIRIE - DAY

Tismi and Alma walk hand in hand
in the winter sunlight.

They sit together on a fallen log,
happy to be together.

ALMA

The next time the gang goes out to rob a train, I want to go with you.

TSIMI

There is no gang.

ALMA

Yes there is and you're the leader!

TSIMI

(Laughing, he tumbles her
over in the grass.)

How did you get so feisty? You're the craziest girl I've ever met.

ALMA

How old are you, Tsimi?

TSIMI

Eighteen, I think. But, I might be older--started keeping track the summer I learned to count.

ALMA

When is your birthday?

TSIMI

Summer, I guess. Don't know for sure.

ALMA

How can that be?

TSIMI

Mother dead; father dead. Uncle Cooie took care of me for a while but he died, too.

ALMA

Well, who took care of you when your Uncle Cooie died?

TSIMI

Nobody. I been taking care of myself pretty much as long as I can remember.

ALMA

Aw, Tsimi. That's so sad.

TSIMI

I don't like people to feel sorry for me.

ALMA

I won't feel sorry for you. Grandpa says when I receive my allotment I will become a Cherokee princess, so when you get yours, you'll be a prince!

TSIMI

That's a joke, you know, and it started out as a Cherokee joke. We were the first people to laugh at it. There is no such thing as Cherokee royalty, Alma. No such thing as a Cherokee princess. Never really was.

ALMA

Then why do people say there is?

TSIMI

Hundreds of years ago there was a Cherokee princess--two Cherokee princesses--but it didn't stick. Comes from the time when Water Conjuror met with the English; they made him Emperor of the Americas and then told both his daughters that they were princesses now! They came back to camp dragging those big skirts. They had dressed them up like white women and our women were used to moving their arms and legs! They couldn't get around in white women's dresses at all! Somebody says, "What are y'all supposed to be in that getup?" They laughed and said, "We're princesses now!" Everybody laughed. Them, too.

ALMA

Why did they want them to dress like white women?

TSIMI

It was all because they wanted Water Conjuror's mark on paper so they could steal our land.

ALMA

It's not stealing when the deed is signed over, is it?

TISMI

He didn't speak English! He couldn't even read!

ALMA

They cheated.

TSIMI

Count on it. They cheated that day and every day since.

ALMA

You're so strong, Tsimi. You're younger than Shep and you're younger than Orville. You are the youngest member of the whole gang, and you're the boss!

TSIMI

I'm not the boss of anybody but me.

ALMA

Everybody is my boss, or they think they are. My mamma, my sister, Grandpa, now Shep.

TSIMI

No bosses around here. Have at it!

ALMA

Have at what?

TSIMI

Anything you want.

ALMA

Anything?

TSIMI

Nobody here to stop you.

ALMA

You could.

TSIMI

But I won't.

ALMA

You know what I've been thinking about?

TSIMI

What?

ALMA

When we kissed. It's been on my mind since it happened.

TSIMI

You too?

Tsimi turns shy.

ALMA

Ooooh, you're blushing.

(Alma launches forward and kisses
Tsimi.)

Kissing you is better than breathing air.

Tsimi kisses her back
passionately, for a long time.
When he pulls back, she gasps for
breath.

TSIMI

(He laughs.)

Air is good.

ALMA

Air is good. Oh, Tsimi! How do you say, "I love you," in Cherokee.

TSIMI

Gvgeyu. (guh-gay'-you) There isn't a word-for-word translation. Straight across, it means, "I am stingy with you." Like, "I don't want to share," or "I want you to myself." But when you say it to somebody, you also mean "I care for you. I will give my life for you; I willingly surrender my happiness for yours. You will eat even if I do not, you will be safe even if I must put myself in danger, I will protect you with my very breath."

ALMA

Gvgeyu, Tsimi.

TSIMI

Alma, sweet Alma.

ALMA

You're the first boy I've ever kissed.

(Tsimi looks askance.)

Oh, Shep drags his mouth over mine, but I've never kissed him. I've only kissed you and you're the only one I ever want to kiss.

TSIMI

We could just get back on our horses and keep riding.

ALMA

Where would we go?

TSIMI

Some place where nobody knows us. Where nobody knows you're married to another man. That is if we make it out of Indian Territory and nobody tries to bring us back. Folks don't like to see Indian men with white women.

ALMA

I'm just white-looking. In my heart, I am Tsalagi. (Jah-la-gee'/Cherokee)

TSIMI

I believe you are.

ALMA

When white women marry Indian men for money or property, that seems to be tolerable. Mamma married me off to Shep, I think, to try to breed the Cherokee out.

TSIMI

She didn't waste much time once Weli passed away.

ALMA

Daddy wouldn't have stood for it, not for Emma either.

TSIMI

The sun rose and set for Weli in you girls.

ALMA

I'm glad you knew him.

TSIMI

You should be getting back.

ALMA

Go with me. Have supper with us. I can't stand the thought of spending another evening alone with Shep.

TSIMI

Wouldn't look good for us to come riding out of the brush together.

ALMA

You could drop by and check on Shep later. He would be glad to see you.

TSIMI

Not if he knew what we've been doing.

ALMA

Maybe he'd leave me.

TSIMI

Or he could just kill us both.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

INT. - THE PARLOR - THE SAME EVENING

After dinner, Alma daydreams her way through "St. Louis Rag" on the piano. Shep pours himself another glass of brandy when suddenly, Tsimi enters without knocking. Orville slips into the house behind him.

Orville, entranced by the music, dances a cakewalk around Alma as she plays.

SHEPHERD

Tsimi!

TSIMI

Hey, Shep. How you coming along?

SHEPHERD

Still kickin', no thanks to Orville.

(To Orville.)

You cowardly bastard!

Alma finishes her song. Orville
grins at her, not realizing that
Shep is speaking to him.

ORVILLE

That's some fine playing, Ms. Alma. Do you know how to do
the cakewalk?

ALMA

Teach me, Orville! Show me how, show me how!

She stands, ready for a lesson.
Orville turns to Shepherd.

ORVILLE

Happy to! You don't mind, do you Shep?

SHEPHERD

You don't care if I live or die. Why do you care if I
mind?

ORVILLE

Of course I care if you live or die.

SHEPHERD

Then why didn't you come back?

ORVILLE

I had my reasons.

SHEPHERD

Give me one. It better be a good one.

ORVILLE

It's not my fault you set yourself up as a target! I've
got a business on Main Street about three doors down from
the Police. You think I'm going to risk everything I've
worked for on account of you?

SHEPHERD

You should have thought of that before you joined the gang!

TSIMI

There is no gang!

SHEPHERD

You risked gettin' hanged just by going! Next time--

TSIMI

(Tsimi cuts him off.)

There is not going to be a next time.

ORVILLE

Sure as hell not going to be a next time for me!

TSIMI

Nor for any of us.

SHEPHERD

You can't just say -- and that's it!

TSIMI

Already done did. Sorriest excuse for a gang I ever heard tell of. You fellows are useless as train robbers! If you think I'd saddle up with either one of you ever again, you are crazy.

ORVILLE

Suits me fine.

SHEPHERD

(To Orville)

You lily-livered bastard! Piss yellow, through and through.

ORVILLE

It's your own big mouth that got you shot. Mr. Cuthbert wouldn't have known where to shoot if you hadn't been jacking your jaw.

ALMA

Mr. Cuthbert? Did Grandpa shoot you, Shepherd? Why?

SHEPHERD

'Cause I was trying to rob the train!

ALMA

Why didn't you tell me it was Grandpa?

SHEPHERD

I was trying pretty hard not to bleed to death at the time.

TSIMI

Mr. Cuthbert was riding in the car with the safe. We didn't know he'd be in there.

ORVILLE

Him and the two new whores he was bringing back from Ft. Smith.

ALMA

Grandpa and whores?

SHEPHERD

Oh, grow up, Alma. How do you think he got so rich? He's the biggest whore monger in the Territory.

ALMA

What a terrible thing to say!

She looks about for support, but
no one steps forward to refute
Shep.

SHEPHERD

(To the men.)

Am I lyin'?

ORVILLE

Usually.

SHEPHERD

Tsimi knows I ain't lyin'. He's a regular at your grandpa's place.

ALMA

(Crushed.)

You are?

SHEPHERD

All the girls love Tsimi.

ORVILLE

Tsimi and me are both single men. What's your excuse, Shep?

Alma looks from one guilty man to the other then bursts into tears and runs up the stairs. She slams the bedroom door.

TSIMI

What makes you so sure it was Mr. Cuthbert who shot you?

SHEPHERD

When he saw me laid up, he started laughing. He thought he missed.

TSIMI

What did you tell him?

SHEPHERD

I didn't drop no names. He knew it was me and he knows I wasn't alone. I imagine he's got it figured out who was in on the deal by now.

TSIMI

We are dead men.

SHEPHERD

No, but he will hold it over our heads. He may want to use us for some work he's got coming up.

ORVILLE

Like what?

SHEPHERD

Like whatever he says do, we do.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON

THE PARLOR - JUNE, 1904

Alma hums to herself as she waltzes around the parlor like the child she is, intermittently returning to the vase of flowers she is arranging for her expected company.

She glows as only a girl in love
can glow, a behavior that Shep
can't help but notice.

Shep enters from the porch.

SHEPHERD

Is something burning?

ALMA

My cobbler!

She runs into the kitchen.

SHEPHERD

When are they due?

ALMA

(Returns from the kitchen
and sets the cobbler on the
table.)

A little of the juice boiled over in the oven. The cobbler
isn't the least bit burned!

SHEPHERD

You sure love blackberries.

ALMA

I do.

SHEPHERD

You been pickin' blackberries most every day.

ALMA

You've got to get them when they're ripe.

SHEPHERD

You're getting brown like an Indian.

ALMA

I am an Indian.

SHEPHERD

Oh, Christ! You're whiter than I am.

ALMA

It's too hot to wear a bonnet. I like the feel of sun on my skin.

Florence enters from the porch.

FLORENCE

Halloo! I smell home cooking! Hello, Shepherd!

SHEPHERD

Afternoon, Ms. Wimsey.

ALMA

Mamma! Come in!

Florence kisses Alma hello,
regards her with a suspicious eye,
but prudently saves her comment.
Alma indicates a chair.

Shall I make a cup of tea for you?

FLORENCE

I'd love some.

Alma exits to the kitchen.

How's the leg, son?

SHEPHERD

Better. I gave up the cane about six weeks ago and it's wobbly, but it's holding.

FLORENCE

Ah, progress.

Alma reappears.

ALMA

The kettle is on. How is life in your neck of the woods?

FLORENCE

Grandpa keeps me busy. You wouldn't believe the mountains of wash that I do.

ALMA

Have you seen Em?

FLORENCE

Not for months. The last time I dropped in to visit I did not feel entirely welcome. She doesn't seem to need me; hardly even spoke. Do you see her?

ALMA

I rode out there twice but Chester ran me off. I never did get to see her. But that shack! Looks like he's got her living in a chicken coop!

FLORENCE

Father is building a new house for Emma over by Sand Springs.

ALMA

Is he? I'm glad. Chester's little house isn't big enough to hold the two of them, much less a family.

FLORENCE

She will be making me a grandmother soon, and you will be an aunt.

Alma jumps up and fetches her knitting project.

ALMA

I made booties for the baby!

Florence inspects the booties.

FLORENCE

Oh, how sweet! Now, tell me when you going to start knitting for your own baby.

ALMA

All in good time.

FLORENCE

Shepherd, don't you have a say?

SHEPHERD

Not so you'd notice. She takes after you in that respect.

FLORENCE

Well, now that you've recovered from your hog bite and you're still not making babies, what do you do with your time?

ALMA

Aggravates me, most of it.

SHEPHERD

When she's here. She's out in the blackberry canes most every day.

FLORENCE

Alma! You will ruin your complexion! You'll start looking like an old tanned hide.

ALMA

It's just my natural color coming out.

FLORENCE

Ridiculous. Your natural color is white.

SHEPHERD

You know how it looks when a man takes his shirt off and he'll be brown to his elbows, but then there's a line where he's all white again?

FLORENCE

Yes, he will be brown where the sun has hit him, and pale as a fish belly beneath his clothing.

SHEPHERD

Alma doesn't have any of them lines. She's brown as cattail fuzz all over.

FLORENCE

That can't be.

ALMA

Blood will out, mamma. I'm getting more Cherokee every day.

FLORENCE

Oh! Piffle!

SHEPHERD

I believe she is getting more Cherokee than you could ever imagine.

ALMA

Advsiqua. Dila. (Pig! Skunk!)
(Pronunciation: Eh-duh-see-quah/Pig. Dee-lah/skunk)

SHEPHERD

Well, osiyo to you too!

FLORENCE

What has come over you?

ALMA

(Mocking her mother's manner
of speaking.)

I've forgotten your tea. Will you still take it? Or, must you be going?

FLORENCE

Am I still welcome?

ALMA

Are you my mother?

FLORENCE

Of course! What a question.

ALMA

Then, you are still welcome.

Alma exits.

SHEPHERD

She gets that way.

(Beat.)

FLORENCE

How is your father?

SHEPHERD

We don't see each other; when we do, we both head for the ditches. We don't speak.

FLORENCE

Surely that can be mended. Have you thought of an occupation?

SHEPHERD

My favorite occupation is drinking and playing poker.

FLORENCE

Shepherd, you can't raise a family losing at poker.

SHEPHERD

I wish you and daddy had thought about that before y'all hitched me and Alma up. Alma and me, we just don't seem to be able to pull together too good as a team.

FLORENCE

You learn that over the years. Patience, son. You need patience.

Josiah Cuthbert enters.

FLORENCE

Father! Come in.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Howdy do.

Alma returns with a teacup for her mother.

ALMA

Hello, Grandpa. Can I get a cup of tea for you? I've made blackberry cobbler.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Is tea all you have?

ALMA

What would you like?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Milk with my cobbler, if you've got it.

ALMA

I do.

Alma exits.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

(To Shep.)

What you been up to?

SHEPHERD

Nothing that will impress the ladies, I'm afraid.

Alma returns with a glass of milk
for Josiah and dishes up four
plates of cobbler. She seats
herself at the table.

ALMA

(To Josiah)

Mother says you are building a house for Emma.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Why, yes. You and Em are to be my bookends. When the
allotments are awarded, you will be my anchor to the East,
and Emma will be my anchor to the West and you've got all
those cousins in between. We'll control all the land north
of the railroad for thirty miles!

ALMA

But you won't be able to own any of it. Ownership is
restricted to the tribe.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

As long as I can benefit from it, I don't have to own it.
I can simply continue to manage it for the two of you.

SHEPHERD

A strip of prime land running thirty miles alongside the
railroad and you didn't have to lay out a dime!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

It is prime. I chose it very carefully. What a nice
little get-together, Alma. Your cobbler is delicious.

ALMA

Thanks, Grandpa. We invited Mr. Broughton, too, but he
couldn't make it.

FLORENCE

You did? What's the occasion?

ALMA

We need y'all to help us fix something.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

What's that, honey?

ALMA

I don't want to be married to Shep and he's not all that thrilled with me. The whole thing was a mistake from the git.

FLORENCE

But, you stood before God and took the vows, Alma.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

(Quoting)

What God has joined together, let no man put asunder!

ALMA

Well, God didn't put us together, you did. You're not claiming to be the Almighty, are you?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Of all the impertinence!

FLORENCE

Do you agree with this, Shep?

SHEPHERD

We never have got along.

ALMA

Daddy never would have let y'all do what you did.

FLORENCE

Your father wouldn't have lifted a pinky! What did he ever do but cut hair and drink? I raised you girls all by myself with no thanks to William Wimsey, not one bit!

ALMA

Did you know he was a drinker when you married him?

FLORENCE

Your father didn't drink before we married.

SHEPHERD

If I hadn't been a drinker when we were married, I sure would be by now. Like mother, like daughter.

ALMA

Fool!

FLORENCE

(Insulted.)

Take heart, daughter. This one...

(Indicates Shep.)

...will drink himself to death long before his threescore-and- ten.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I'd be surprised if he makes it ten.

ALMA

I don't have ten years to waste; nay, not even one year.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I don't know what you think we can do. Our family doesn't believe in divorce.

ALMA

But you believe in selling liquor to Indians.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

White men and Indian alike.

ALMA

You sell liquor to white men and rotgut to Indians. You believe in making money off of whores. Oh yes, I know about all the 'orphan' girls you rescue and 'nieces' you shelter under your roof. Money is what it all comes down to. Isn't that right, Grandpa?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

That is true, Alma.

ALMA

That's why you auctioned me off as breeding stock, isn't it? The more babies I make, the more land you will control.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Nothing the crowned heads of Europe haven't been doing for centuries. A princess may have her own land, but it remains under the authority of the King.

ALMA

I am not a princess and you are not a king! I will not be a part of your scheme.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I don't know how you'll get around it, my dear. Nature will eventually take it's course.

ALMA

There is nothing natural about this set up.

FLORENCE

A wife should cleave unto her husband....

ALMA

I'll cleave him into pieces before I cleave 'unto' him.

SHEPHERD

Hey!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

The marriage can't be undone. I can't do a thing about it; neither can your mother, and neither can you.

ALMA

I will not spend my life with a man I despise. I want to spend my life with a husband I love and respect, a man who loves and protects me, and loves me. Not with some fool who came tacked onto the back end of a shady business deal!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

But you will, or else you will lose everything.

ALMA

I willingly give up everything. I will get on my horse and ride away.

I will follow my father's traditions, not yours. I shall live as a Cherokee in the Cherokee Nation. All I have to do as a Cherokee woman is leave his belongings outside the door and we will be divorced. My children will belong to me and I will choose a land allotment far, far beyond your reach.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

You will accept the allotment that has been chosen for you.

ALMA

I will not.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

So be it. I have nothing more to say. Now, I'm going to step out on the porch and have a cigar with Shep while you ladies say your good-byes.

Josiah stands and motions to
Shepherd and they exit out onto
the porch together.

FLORENCE

Promise me you won't run away! I will deal with Father.

ALMA

He will eat you alive.

FLORENCE

He always wins. It's true.

ALMA

Say nothing more to him. When he takes you home, simply pack your bags and come back here to stay. I don't want you to do laundry for whores for the rest of your days, mamma. Tomorrow, we will go together and pay a visit to Em. If she is as unhappy in her marriage as I have been, then we'll bring her home and she can live here with us, too.

Shep enters, finds a bottle of
whiskey, and returns to the porch
with it. Florence is overcome
with guilt.

FLORENCE

I'm sorry, sweetheart. You do deserve better. You do. I would not have you live the life I have lived. I was wrong to follow Father's wishes when I talked you into this marriage. Please, dear angel, forgive me. I would not do to you what was done to me, not of my own accord.

ALMA

I do forgive you, Mamma. We'll do our best and we'll make out if we stick together.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS UP ON:

ON THE PORCH

Josiah and Shepherd stand on the porch smoking and drinking.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

What makes you think that you two can't get along?

SHEPHERD

I guess the main clue is that she sleeps with a knife under her pillow.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Do you beat her?

SHEPHERD

Alma could take me three rounds of three.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Another man?

SHEPHERD

Could be. I suspect so.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

You understand, of course, that we can't allow her to run out on us. I have had plans for this property since before she was born. She can stamp her pretty little foot and pitch a hissy-fit, but I will not be thwarted. Do you know the man?

SHEPHERD

I believe I do.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Is he Indian?

SHEPHERD

Yeah.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

That's where she's getting all this Cherokee rot, isn't it?

SHEPHERD

She's pretty good at coming up with ideas on her own.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Are you going to fight for her?

SHEPHERD

She'd spit in my face if I won.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Then, here is where I call in my chit. You and your gang find this fellow and get rid of him. We'll forget all about the train incident. I don't care how you do it, I just want it done. That girl will not leave me high and dry.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

IN THE ALLEY BEHIND ORVILLE'S PHARMACY

It is long after midnight.
Orville and Shep wait for Tsimi to
show. Orville is flighty and
completely unwilling.

ORVILLE

I am not gonna shoot Tsimi.

SHEPHERD

Would you rather hang? Because, that's the choice.

ORVILLE

You don't care about Alma. If they want to be together, why don't you just let them go?

SHEPHERD

If it was up to me, I would.

ORVILLE

You could kill any injun and Alma's grandpa would never know one way or the other, would he? All he wants is a dead body.

SHEPHERD

He's not an easy man to fool. He'd figure us out for sure if Alma runs off with Tsimi.

ORVILLE

He doesn't know I was in on it, does he?

SHEPHERD

Not from me, he don't. I never named any names, but he does have connections.

ORVILLE

I like Tsimi!

SHEPHERD

So do I. How you and me feel about him don't come into it.

ORVILLE

That's cold, damn it. I can't shoot him. I wont do it.

SHEPHERD

Well, you can watch while I do. I've got good reason to shoot him.

ORVILLE

If you loved her, I'd say that you'd have a reason, but you don't.

Tsimi appears at the other end of the alley. He hangs back from the light, and keeps his distance. He has recently wept and he still bears the signs of his grief.

SHEPHERD

Osiyo, Tsimi!

TSIMI

Osiyo. What's going on?

SHEPHERD

Come find out.

TSIMI

Is that Orville you got with you?

ORVILLE

It's me, Tsimi.

SHEPHERD

Where you been?

TSIMI

Up on Chester Smith's spread. You should go home, Shep, there's bad news. Emma is dead. We spent all afternoon hauling her body out of the well up there.

ORVILLE

Oh, no! Seems like I hear about some dead woman being found at the bottom of a well every other week. Did she fall?

TSIMI

She went missing after breakfast. Chester said that she's been melancholy. Said he looked for her but he couldn't find her. When he went to draw water, there she was. On the bottom.

SHEPHERD

She's pregnant.

TSIMI

Baby's dead, too.

ORVILLE

Do you think she was trying to do herself in, Tsimi?

TSIMI

Chester said she did, but I doubt it. Both arms were broke, her face was bashed in. There will be no open casket for pretty little Emma. Bad.

SHEPHERD

Does Alma know?

TSIMI

I stopped by Mr. Cuthbert's to tell him. He's over there now breaking the news. Head home, Shep, Alma's like to be plumb torn up about it.

SHEPHERD

You seem to worry quite a bit over my wife's happiness. A little too much, I'd say.

TSIMI

I'd be tore up if it was my sister. Wouldn't you?

SHEPHERD

Why don't you come into the light where we can see you?

TSIMI

I'm not fit to be seen right now.

ORVILLE

I can give you something to help you feel a little better, Tsimi. Come on in the store. I'll fix you up.

TSIMI

I'm going home and try to forget what I saw.

Tsimi turns to leave. Shep calls out.

SHEPHERD

Alma's pregnant. Did you know?

TSIMI

No. When did she tell you?

SHEPHERD

She didn't tell me. She hasn't had her courses for a few months, though, and that's a pretty sure sign.

TSIMI

(Can't quite keep the smile
out of his voice.)

She's pregnant?

SHEPHERD

It's not mine, but I know whose it is.

Tsimi begins to walk toward him
slowly. Shep pulls his gun out of
his pocket.

TSIMI

It's mine.

SHEPHERD

I know. That's why I've got to kill you.

Orville knocks Shepherd off
balance as he aims to fire at
Tsimi. Tsimi pulls his gun out of
his waistband and returns fire.
Both men fall.

LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP ON:

ON THE PORCH - A SHORT TIME LATER

In the dead of night, Orville
knocks on Alma's front door.
Alma, in her night shift, comes
down the stairs tying on a robe.

ALMA

Who is it?

ORVILLE

It's Orville, Ms. Alma.

Alma opens the door, shocked at
Orville's appearance.

ALMA

Orville! You're bloody!

ORVILLE

I've got Tsimi in the buckboard. He's shot.

ALMA

Tsimi's shot? Bring him in, bring him in!

Florence comes down the stairs and stands behind Alma taking it all in.

FLORENCE

Are you shot, too?

ORVILLE

No ma'am.

(To Alma.)

He was asking for you Ms. Alma, so I brought him here.

ALMA

You did the right thing. Go get him.

Orville bolts off the porch to retrieve Tsimi.

ALMA

(To Florence.)

Mamma, go put the big kettle of water on to boil! And, bring me Daddy's bag of tools. Hurry!

Florence exits to the kitchen.

Alma goes out onto the porch. She sees Orville struggling to carry Tsimi and runs out to help. Every step brings a moan from Tsimi. They go slowly.

ALMA

Put him down.

(She yells for her mother.)

Mamma, bring a blanket!

Florence dashes back with a blanket as Orville and Alma bring Tsimi onto the porch and exits immediately to fulfill Alma's first command.

TSIMI

(Moans, at the edge of consciousness.)

Alma.

ALMA

I'm right here, darling. I'm here. Let me spread the blanket for him, Orville.

Orville and Alma lay Tsimi on the blanket. Alma kneels by his side.

ORVILLE

I'm so sorry, Ms. Alma.

Florence joins them on the porch with Weli's bag of tools.

ALMA

Tsimi! Can you hear me? Hold on, my love. I'm going to get that bullet out.

TSIMI

No, no....

ALMA

Stay with me. You'll be alright. Stay with me!

(To Florence.)

Mamma, get daddy's tooth extractor and his straight razor and boil them up in the water. Thread a needle and boil that, too.

Florence exits back into the house.

ALMA

Tsimi. Tsimi?

(Tsimi passes out. Alma begins to undress him.)

Orville, go get me the scissors! They're in my sewing basket by the wing chair.

Orville exits.

ALMA

Tsimi? Tsimi? Just rest for a minute.

Orville returns with scissors and Alma begins to cut Tsimi out of his shirt. Alma tries to stop the bleeding by pressing on the wound.

Oh my God! How did this happen? Were y'all trying to rob another train?

ORVILLE

No, ma'am. Shep shot Tsimi then Tsimi shot Shep.

Florence returns and stands by ready to help.

FLORENCE

Where's Shep?

ORVILLE

Shep was dead before he hit the ground.

ALMA

Gvgeyu, Tsimi. Gvgeyu, gvgeyu... He's so cold.

(Alma stretches out beside Tsimi's prone body and holds him close.)

I'm here, my darling. Don't leave me, please. I need you, Tsimi. Our child will need you. Can you hear me, Tsimi? We are going to have a baby. Don't go! Don't go!

TSIMI

(He smiles, but his voice is weak.)

Alma. Gvgeyu.

(Tsimi lapses into unconsciousness again.)

ALMA

My love, my love.

FLORENCE

I'll go check on the water. Come, Orville. We'll get you cleaned up a bit.

Florence and Orville go back into the house.

ALMA

I'll keep you warm. I'll be right by your side.

Tsimi suddenly sits bolt upright. He stares at the moon without seeing.

TSIMI

(He points to the horizon.)

Etsi! (Eh'-jee/mother) Edadoda! (Doh'-dah/father)

ALMA

You see your mother and father?

TSIMI

Vv. (Uh-huh/yes)

ALMA

Have they come to fetch you?

TSIMI

(He lies back, smiling.)

Vv. (Uh-huh/yes) Agowadvdi usdi. (Eh-go-wah'-dee oosth-dee/see baby.)

ALMA

They see the baby? Osda. That's good. (ose'-dah/good)

She kisses him tenderly.

TSIMI

(He smiles, lost in a memory of their first kiss.)

Air is good.

ALMA

Gvgeyu, Tsimi. (guh-gay'-you/I love you)

Tsimi begins to seize violently.
Alma covers his body with her own,
trying to keep him still.

(The seizure stops with Tsimi's
last heartbeat.)

Come back, Tsimi.

(She kisses him fiercely, trying
to bring him back to life.)

Air is good!

(Alma softly kisses his lips and
cradles his head in her arms.)

Oh, beloved.

(Florence and Orville return.)

He's gone.

Florence kneels and stokes Alma's
back as she lies sobbing upon the
body of her beloved.

LIGHTS OUT.

FADE UP:

ALMA'S PORCH - OCTOBER, 1904

Alma rocks herself slowly while
she crochets an extra frill on the
sweater she's making for her baby.

With companionable twitters and
giggles preceding them, Florence
and Orville return from their
outing.

FLORENCE

What a glorious day! I have so much pep in my step I feel
like I could walk all the way to Kansas City!

ORVILLE

Don't you dare run off to Kansas City! I don't think could
I make it if I lost my dancing partner.

FLORENCE

You are such a clever man! Fire up the piano for us, Alma!
Play us some ragtime!

ORVILLE

I'm gonna dance your feet down to nubs!
(Florence giggles.)

ALMA

How far did y'all walk?

ORVILLE

Let's see...river and back. About six miles, I reckon.

ALMA

Well, why don't you two sit a spell and let the sweat dry
before you get started on dancing?

FLORENCE

I have not felt this well since I was your age, Alma!
Orville should fix you up one of his special Koca-Kolas.
He makes them the original way--

ORVILLE

Close to the original, I don't have the actual recipe.

FLORENCE

He's put the healthy ingredient back into a health drink!

ORVILLE

All I did was mix a little cocaine back in. They
deactivated it; I just reactivated it.

FLORENCE

You should ask him make one for you, Alma. It truly is
most refreshing!

ALMA

Well, I can certainly see that it agrees with you!

FLORENCE

I'm getting kind of cotton-mouthed. I'm going to go get me
a dip of water. How about you, Orville? Can I bring you
something?

ORVILLE

Water is fine for me.

Florence exits.

ORVILLE

I know us menfolk aren't supposed to notice, but carrying a baby sure seems to agree with you, Ms. Alma. Not all women can say that.

ALMA

I am at peace now, Orville. When Tsimi looks back, this is how I want him to see me.

ORVILLE

I was thinking about you while I was working the other day, about how cool headed you were when I brought Tsimi in. Boiling instruments and cutting off his clothes and all... How did you know to do that?

ALMA

Tsimi. I helped him take the bullet out of Shep. I don't know if I could have done it, but I know I would have tried.

ORVILLE

Where did Tsimi learn it?

ALMA

From my father.

ORVILLE

Guess it runs in the family.

(Florence returns with a
glass of water for
Orville.)

Thank you kindly, Ms. Florence.

(Florence curtsies.)

As I was just getting ready to say to Alma...

(He turns to Alma.) (MORE)

ORVILLE (CONTINUED)

It seems to me that you might be a good one for the doctoring profession. Had you ever thought to study medicine?

ALMA

Never crossed my mind.

ORVILLE

Think on it. You could do a world of good.

FLORENCE

And you wouldn't have to worry about catching another man.

ALMA

I'm not worried about catching another man. I can't think why I'd want one.

ORVILLE

If you was to talk to the tribe, you might be able to find someone who would back you to go to college. Lord knows, there ain't enough doctors to go around. Your people believe in education.

ALMA

I will think about it. Truly, I will. I like the idea of me being a doctor.

FLORENCE

She's smart as a whip, Orville. She took first in her class when she passed the eighth grade!

ORVILLE

No doubt, she's got the stuff alright.

ALMA

I've got to have my baby first, but after that.... Here comes Grandpa. Mamma, did you invite him?

FLORENCE

Heavens, no. I hope nobody else died.

Josiah enters.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Howdy. Mind if I step up on your porch?

ALMA

Hello, Grandpa. Join us.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I've got good news.

(Crickets.)

Anybody care to hear what it is?

FLORENCE

Please share with us, Father.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Owing to recent developments in matters of the heart, Alma, your Aunt Fame has married into the family that will be administrating the distribution of tribal lands, when that occurs. I know you and I had a small misunderstanding over this topic before, but as long as we all pull together - stand united, so to speak - we can all come out in pretty good shape.

ALMA

United in what mission, sir?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

To secure the plots of land here in the Creek Nation that are necessary to my plan. The arrangement will make me rich; I'm not going to try to fool you on my motive. But consider this: you will be my heirs.

ORVILLE

I've met Ms. Fame.

(To Florence.)

Is she your elder sister or your younger sister?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Ah, I thought you looked familiar. I recognize you now.

Orville blushes.

FLORENCE

I take it you met her at my father's house?

ORVILLE

Yes, ma'am. Long, long ago...

FLORENCE

No need to apologize. You've been a single man for all your days, and these type of adventures, although disapproved of, are to be expected of a bachelor.

(To Alma)

Fame is not one of my sisters, nor is she aunt to you, Alma. She's one of Father's ladies. Fame is not her given name. Fame is the name she earned for her unnatural ability to please gentlemen.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

She is willing to help us, so what difference if she is blood kin or not?

ORVILLE

You trust a whore? Haha! That's a good one!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Mind your own business!

ORVILLE

Sir.

Florence takes his arm and gives him a warning look.

ALMA

I always wondered why Emma and I were to be awarded allotments in the Creek nation instead of the Cherokee. It never made sense and always seemed a little underhanded.

FLORENCE

Why, yes. How is it, Father, that we need this intervention from your perversely talented lady friend?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Your allotment needs to be awarded here because you are a minor child who needs a guardian to look out for your interests. I propose to be your guardian.

ALMA

I will not submit to your guardianship. I will receive an allotment for myself, another in trust for my child, one as my sister's heir, and one from my dear father. I have decided to choose my six hundred and forty acres within the nation of my tribe. I was a married woman before I was widowed, and I have never been your ward. My mother and father raised me and provided for me.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Your judgement to make such decisions may be called into question when I reveal your association with the bandit you are entertaining this afternoon.

ORVILLE

Bandit? I am a pharmacist, as everyone in town knows!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Yes, a well-known soda jerk who likes to rob trains on a lark. Just because you and your former friends failed doesn't mean you still can't be hanged for it. I can present two more witnesses who were on that train and they will both swear before God that you were the third robber. On this, you may depend.

ALMA

And, you may depend on this: There are two more witnesses who will testify that he was a dinner guest here on that night.

FLORENCE

That is true. I was here when he came in and he was still here when I left.

ALMA

We had lovely meal that evening. Mother wrote out an official menu to commemorate my first dinner party. After dinner, I did a poetry recitation, Orville taught us the steps to cakewalk, and at the end of the night we all shared a big bowl of popcorn.

FLORENCE

I believe that testimony confirming Orville's alibi coming from two respectable widow-women will trump the testimony of a whore monger and two whores.

ALMA

If you pursue this all your business dealings may be brought to light, Grandpa.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I have given you everything! Your first pony, your graduation dress, this house and everything in it! I walked you down the aisle at your wedding.

ALMA

All so you could steal my heritage. How should I thank you for that?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

You will thank me by following my advice and you will do so without further argument.

ALMA

Emma followed your advice and now she is dead. If you loved her you couldn't have paired her with such a brute. Em never knew love from you, or from any man but our father. I have known love; I am very fortunate that way, but I have never known love from you.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Oh, yes. A thirteen-year-old snot-nose who thinks she is an expert on love. I have given you everything! What did your dark-skinned lover ever give you but the little bastard filling your belly?

FLORENCE

Father, really. You have overstayed your welcome.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Ask your daughter if I am wrong. Brazen little hussy.

FLORENCE

Father, enough!

ALMA

Heed him, Mother. He is the expert on low women.

FLORENCE

For shame, Father. You would make my daughter into something she is not! I won't have it!

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Shut up, you cow!

Orville makes a fist, but Florence takes his hand, staying any thoughts Orville may have of defending her honor.

FLORENCE

Cow. You called me cow. I have not heard you call anyone cow since my mother passed away. You called Mother cow. She would bite her lip and keep working, but we all saw the tears in her eyes. You gave her seven children and naught but a tent to live in. She worked herself to death for you.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

And she never let you forget it, did she? The woman you called mother was not my wife. She did raise seven children in a tent, but she was not my wife.

FLORENCE

Am I not, then, your daughter?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

No man can ever know for sure.

ALMA

Such cruelty from those lips I once so loved to kiss. Such hateful doubts you try to plant in our minds. If she is not your daughter then who is she? Did she start out as an orphan? A niece? Or did you use her as you hoped to use me-- merely a brood mare to further your ambition?

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

You, so proud of your Cherokee blood! Why do you think your sister was Weli's favorite? He knew that Emma was his daughter because she favored him completely. But you, with your fair skin, he couldn't help but doubt. It wouldn't be the first or the last time in this family that the father of a child proved to be someone other than the husband.

FLORENCE

I have white skin! Weli's mother had white skin. Weli loved Alma! He loved both his daughters! How dare you impugn my fidelity or the integrity or my mother? Vile accusations and all evil lies! You've spent too much time among prostitutes; all women are not the same.

ALMA

(Swats at her arm and stands.)

The mosquitos are coming out and I'm going in. I promised to play for you two earlier. You dance so nicely together. Shall we?

(To Josiah.)

You won't be invited in, Grandpa--or whoever you are.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Who knows what end a young lady with your obstinacy may meet?

ALMA

Dark threats from you mean nothing. I've already lost everything. Murder me and I will happily fly at full speed to join Tsimi and Daddy and Emma. I do not fear death. Murdering me will not bring you closer to your goal. You couldn't kill enough people fast enough to keep the truth from coming out.

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

I had such plans for you.

ALMA

I have plans of my own.

Alma turns and enters the house,
turning her back on Josiah.

IN THE PARLOR

ALMA enters the parlor and takes a few steps toward the piano when she suddenly stops. She feels her baby move for the first time.

OUTSIDE ON THE PORCH

JOSIAH CUTHBERT

Talk to her, Florence.

FLORENCE

Godspeed, Mr. Cuthbert.

Florence takes Orville's offered arm. They turn their backs on Josiah.

IN THE PARLOR

Alma tries to coax another kick
from the baby.

ALMA

(To her baby.)

Oh, do that again! Oh, oh precious flutter! Ni, Tsimi!
(nee/look) Daddy says, "osda!" Good baby!

Florence and Orville enter.
Florence is alarmed to see Alma
probing her belly.

FLORENCE

Alma! Are you unwell?

ALMA

I felt the baby move.

Florence rushes to her side and
puts both hands on Alma's bump.
They listen with their hands.

Florence gasps and Alma grins when
they simultaneously feel the next
movement.

FLORENCE

Hello, hello! It's Grandma!

Orville fidgets, not sure he
should be intruding on the moment.

ALMA

Orville, would you like to say hello to little Tsimi?

FLORENCE

Or little Alma.

Orville joins the women. Florence
takes one of his hands and places
it on a likely spot.

ORVILLE

Can't wait to meet you, young fellow! Or miss.

He feels very uncomfortable in this position and steps back after a few seconds.

ALMA

I am in love again! It's so deep, like nothing else I've ever felt in my whole life.

FLORENCE

(Hugs Alma.)

I am so proud of you.

ORVILLE

I'll say, Ms. Alma. If you decide not to take up doctoring you might want to take up lawyering. I don't know where you get your gumption.

ALMA

For gumption, I credit Daddy. He asked me one time if I knew why there is no word to say, "I'm sorry," in Cherokee. Do you know?

ORVILLE

Why isn't there?

ALMA

Because you are always supposed to do the right thing. If you live right and try your best at all times, you never have to apologize for anything.

ORVILLE

Easier said than done, I imagine.

FLORENCE

I did love that about Weli. He was a very honest and kind hearted person.

ALMA

Dear Mother. Thank you for saying that.

FLORENCE

I could have done better by him.

Alma embraces her mother.

ALMA

I promised to play you some ragtime, didn't I? Do you suppose the baby will like music?

FLORENCE

You did. Start playing, you'll see.

Alma crosses to the piano, seats herself and begins to play a new Scott Joplin rag: "The St. Louis Rag."

Alma suddenly laughs out loud and bangs the piano harder.

ALMA

He's doing a jig in there!

FLORENCE

He is?

ALMA

(Laughing)

He's syncopating!

FLORENCE

Oh, joy!

Orville offers his arm.

FLORENCE

Oh yes! Let's dance!

Orville and Florence dance a joyous cakewalk.

LIGHTS DIM.

LIGHTS OUT.

FINAL CURTAIN.