

(JUD breaks down, weeps, and sits at the table, burying his head in his arms.)

CURLY. Yes, sir. That's the way it ud be. Shore be an interstin' funril. Wouldn't like to miss it.

JUD. *(His eyes narrowing.)* Wouldn't like to miss it, eh? Well, mebbe you will.

(He resumes polishing the gun.)

Mebbe you'll go first.

CURLY. *(Sitting down.)* Mebbe... Le's see now, whur did you work at before you come here? Up by Quapaw, wasn't it?

JUD. Yeah, and before that over by Tulsa. Lousy they was to me. Both of 'em. Always makin' out they was better. Treatin' me like dirt.

CURLY. And whut'd you do - git even?

JUD. Who said anythin' about gittin' even?

CURLY. No one, that I recollect. It jist come into my head.

JUD. If it ever come to gittin' even with anybody, I'd know how to do it.

CURLY. *(Looking down at gun and pointing.)* That?

JUD. Nanh! They's safer ways then that, if you use yer brains... 'Member that far on the Bartlett farm over by Sweetwater?

CURLY. Shore do. 'Bout five years ago. Turrble accident. Burned up the father, and mother and daughter.

JUD. That warn't no accident. A feller told me – the h'ard hand was stuck on the Bartlett girl, and he found her in the hayloft with another feller.

CURLY. And it was him that burned the place?

JUD. (*Nodding.*) It tuck him weeks to git all the kerosene – buying it at different times – feller who told me made out it happened in Missouri, but I knowed all the time it was the Bartlett farm. Whut a liar he was!

CURLY. A kind of a murderer, too. Wasn't he?

(He rises, goes over to the door, and opens it.)

Git a little air in here.

JUD. You ain't told me yet whut business you had here. We got no cattle to sell ner no cow ponies. The oat crop is done spoke fer.

CURLY. You shore relieved my mind consid'able.

JUD. (*Tensely.*) They's on'y one other thing on this farm you could want – and it better not be that!

CURLY. (*Closing the door deliberately and turning slowly to face JUD.*) But that's jist whut it is.

JUD. Better not be! You keep away from her, you hear?

CURLY. (*Coolly.*) You know somebody orta tell Laurey whut kind of a man you air. And fer that matter, somebody orta tell *you* onct about yerself.

JUD. You better git outa here, Curly.

CURLY. A feller wouldn't feel very safe in here with you... 'f he didn't know you.

(Acidly.) But I know you, Jud.

(He looks JUD straight in the eye. As he continues, he crosses upstage behind JUD, slowly closing in on him.)

CURLY. In this country, they's two things you c'n do if you're a man. Live out of doors is one. Live in a hole is the other. I've set by my horse in the bresh som'eres and heard a rattlesnake many a time. Rattle, rattle, rattle! – he'd go, skeered to death. Somebody comin' close to his hole! Somebody gonna step on him! Git his old fangs ready, full of pizen! Curl up and wait! – Long's you live in a hole, you're skeered, you got to have perfection. You c'n have muscles, oh, like arn – and still be as weak as a empty bladder – less'n you got things to barb yer hide with.

(Suddenly, harshly, directly to JUD.) How'd you git to be the way you air, anyway – settin' here in this filthy hole – and thinkin' the way you're thinkin'? Why don't you do sumpin healthy onct in a while, 'stid of stayin' shet up here – a-crawlin' and festerin'!

(JUD's polishing of his gun has turned into a kind of desperate frenzy. In a reflex action, he raises his arm and the gun goes off.)

JUD. Anh!

(Luckily the gun is pointed toward the ceiling.)

CURLY. *(Reacting to the shot, he draws his own gun.)* You orta feel better now. Hard on the roof, though. I wisht you'd let me show you sumpin.

(JUD doesn't move, but stands staring into CURLY's eyes.)

They's a knot-hole over there about as big as a dime. See it a-winkin'? I jist want to see if I c'n hit it.

(Unhurriedly, with cat-like tension, he turns and fires high up at the wall.)

Bullet right through the knot-hole, 'thout tetchin', slick as a whistle, didn't I? I knowed I could do it. You saw it, too, didn't you?

(Ad-lib offstage.)

Somebody's a-comin', I 'spect.

CURLY. Then why'n't you turn around and look, you crazy womern?

LAUREY. *(With great relief.)* Curly!

WILL. Well, you found yours. I gotta go hunt fer mine.

(He exits.)

CURLY. Now whut on earth is ailin' the belle of Claremore?
By gum, if you ain't cryin'!

LAUREY. *(Leaning against him.)* Curly - I'm afraid, 'fraid of my life!

CURLY. *(In a flurry of surprise and delight.)* Jumpin' toadstools!

(He puts his arms around LAUREY, muttering under his breath.)

Great Lord!

LAUREY. Don't you leave me -

CURLY. Great Godamighty!

LAUREY. Don't mind me a-cryin', I cain't he'p it...

CURLY. Cry yer eyes out!

LAUREY. Oh, I don't know whut to do!

CURLY. Here. I'll show you.

(He lifts LAUREY's face and kisses her gently. The kiss leaves her breathless. She steps back in a state of wonder. Then suddenly she grabs him around the neck and kisses him enthusiastically. He responds, but overcome with a sense of responsibility, he pulls her hands from around his neck and steps back.)

My goodness!

(He shakes his head as if coming out of a daze and gives a low whistle.)

Whew! 'Bout all a man c'n stand in public!

(LAUREY lunges for him again.)

Go 'way from me, you!

LAUREY You don't like me Curly -

CURLY. Like you? My God! Git away from me, I tell you, plumb away from me!

(He backs away and sits on the stove.)

LAUREY. Curly! You're settin' on the stove!

CURLY. *(Leaping up.)* Godamighty!

(He turns around, puts his hand down gingerly on the lid.)

Aw! 'S cold's a hunk of ice!

LAUREY. Wish't ud burnt a hole in yer pants.

CURLY. *(Grinning at her, understandingly.)* Oh, ya do, do ya?

LAUREY. *(Turning away to hide her smile.)* You heard me.

CURLY. Laurey, now looky here, you stand over there right whur you air, and I'll set over here – and you tell me whut you wanted with me.

LAUREY. *(Grave again.)* Well – Jud was here.

(She shudders.)

He skeered me...he's crazy. I never saw nobody like him. He talked wild and he threatened me. So I – I f'ard him! I wish't I hadn'ta! They ain't no tellin' whut he'll do now!

CURLY. You f'ard him! Well then! That's all they is to it! Tomorrow, I'll get you a new h'ard hand. I'll stay on the place myself tonight, 'f you're nervous about that hound-dog. Now quit yer worryin' about it, er I'll spank ya.

(His manner changes. He becomes shy. He turns away, unable to meet LAUREY's eyes as he asks the question.)

Hey, while I think of it – how – how 'bout marryin' me?

(LAUREY, confused, turns away, too. They are back to back.)

LAUREY. Gracious, whut'd I wanta marry you fer?

CURLY. Well, couldn't you meybbe think of some reason

LAUREY. (*Crosses left.*) I cain't think of nuthin' right now, hardly.

CURLY. (*Following her.*) Laurey, please, ma'am - marry me. I - don't know whut I'm gonna do if you - if you don't.

LAUREY. (*Touched.*) Curly - why, I'll marry you - 'f you want me to...

(*They kiss.*)

CURLY. I'll be the happiest man alive soon as we're married. Oh, I got to learn to be a farmer, I see that! Quit a-thinkin' about throwin' a rope, and start in to git my hands blistered a new way! Oh, things is changin' right and left! Buy up mowin' machines, cut down the prairies! Shoe yer horses, drag them plows under the sod! They're gonna make a state outa this territory, they gonna put it in the Union! Country's a-changin', got to change with it! Bring up a pair of boys, new stock, to keep up 'th the way way things is goin' in this here crazy country! Now I got you to he'p me - I'll 'mount to sumpin yit! Oh, I 'member the first time I ever seen you. It was at the fair. You was a-ridin' that gray filly of Blue Starr's, and I says to someone - "Who's that skinny little thing with a bang hanging down on her forehead?"

LAUREY. Yeow, I 'member. You was riding broncs that day.

CURLY. That's right.

LAUREY. And one of 'em th'owed you.

CURLY. That's - did not th'ow me!

LAUREY. Guess you jumped off, then.

CURLY. Shore I jumped off.

LAUREY. Yeow, you shore did.

(**CURLY** *kisses her.*)

**[MUSIC NO. 24 "PEOPLE WILL SAY WE'RE
IN LOVE (REPRISE)"]**

CURLY. (*Speaking over music.*) Hey! 'F there's anybody out around this yard 'at c'n hear my voice, I'd like fer you to know that Laurey Williams is my girl.