

*(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 heared 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.

**Scene Two.**  
**The Kitchen Porch of Skidmore's Ranch House**

*(The kitchen porch of Skidmore's ranch house. There are a few benches on the porch and a large coal stove. At Rise: The music for the dance can still be heard offstage. Immediately after the curtain rises, JUD dances on with LAUREY, then stops and holds her. She pulls away from him.)*

**LAUREY.** Why we stoppin'? Thought you wanted to dance.

**JUD.** Want to talk to you. What made ya slap that whip onto Old Eighty, and nearly make her run away? Whut was yer hurry?

**LAUREY.** 'Fraid we'd be late fer the party.

**JUD.** You didn't want to be with me by yerself – not a minnit more'n ya had to.

**LAUREY.** Why, I don't know whut you're talking about! I'm with you by myself now, ain't I?

**JUD.** You wouldn'ta been, if ya coulda got out of it. Mornin's you stay hid in yer room all the time. Nights you set in the front room, and won't git outa Aunt Eller's sight... Last time I see ya alone it was winter, with the snow six inches deep in drifts when I was sick. Ya brung me that hot soup out to the smoke house and give it to me, and me in bed. I hadn't shaved in two days. You ast me 'f I had any fever and ya put yer hand on my head to see.

**LAUREY.** *(Puzzled and frightened.)* I remember...

**JUD.** Do ya? Bet ya don't remember as much as me. I remember eve'ything ya ever done...every word ya ever said. Cain't think of nuthin' else... See? ...See how it is.

*(He attempts to hold LAUREY. She pushes him away.)*

I ain't good enough, am I? I'm a h'ard hand, got dirt on my hands, pigslop. Ain't fitten to tetch ya. You're

better, so much better. Yeah, we'll see who's better – Miss Laurey. Nen you'll wisht you wasn't so free with yer airs, yer sich a fine lady...

**LAUREY.** (*Suddenly angry and losing her fear.*) Air you making threats to me? Air you standing there tryin' to tell me 'f I don't 'low you to slobber over me like a hog, why, you're gonna do sumpin 'bout it? Why you're nuthin' but a mangy dog and somebody orta shoot you. You think so much about being a h'ard hand. Well, I'll just tell you sumpin that'll rest your brain, Mr. Jud. You ain't a h'ard hand fer me no more. You c'n just pack up yer duds and scoot. Oh, and I even got better idys'n that. You ain't to come on the place again, you hear me? I'll send yer stuff any place you say, but don't you's much's set foot inside the pasture gate or I'll sic the dogs onto you!

**JUD.** (*Standing quite still, absorbed, dark, his voice low.*) Said yer say! Brought it on yerself. (*In a voice harsh with an inner frenzy.*) Cain't he'p it. Cain't never rest. Told ya the way it was. You wouldn't listen –

*(He goes out, passes the corner of the house, and disappears. LAUREY stands a moment, held by his strangeness, then she starts toward the house, changes her mind, and sinks onto a bench, a frightened little girl again. There is a noise offstage. LAUREY turns, startled.)*

**LAUREY.** Who's 'at?

**WILL.** (*Entering.*) It's me, Laurey. Hey, have you seen Ado Annie? She's gone agin.

*(LAUREY shakes her head.)*

**LAUREY.** (*Calling to him as he is on his way out.*) Will! ... Will, could you do sumpin fer me? Go and find Curly and tell him I'm here.

*(CURLY enters.)*

I wanta see Curly awful bad. Got to see him.