

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

by

Tony Breeze

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Background

The Dust Bowl was an ecological and human disaster that took place in the southern plains of the United States in the late nineteen twenties and early thirties. It was caused by misuse of land and years of sustained drought. Before farmers came the region was covered by dry grasses that held the soil in place, in spite of the long recurrent droughts and occasional torrential rains characteristic of the period. However, in the thirty years after World War I, a large number of homesteaders settled in the region, planting wheat and crops and raising cattle. Both these land uses left the soil exposed to the danger of erosion by the winds that constantly swept over the area.

The American economy had been enjoying a boom through the "Roaring 20's". The introduction of consumer goods, such as fridges, typewriters, radios and cars, not only created more jobs but helped the economy rise even more. The ability to buy "on credit" meant that consumer goods were now affordable to the average American. Not everyone, though, enjoyed prosperity and affluence. There was an ever-widening gap between rich and poor, forty-two per cent all Americans were living below the poverty line and new immigrants and farmers in the southeast never enjoyed the boom. Depression and hardship, when it set in, was nothing new to them.

The grain farmers of the southeast had been suffering for years. The introduction of machines to farming and U.S. protectionist policies led to huge overproduction, loss of foreign markets and unemployment. Farmers found themselves unable to earn a living as the increase in production led to a fall in demand. Worst hit were the "sharecroppers" or "sodbusters" who often ended up with barely enough to live on.

As a result of the immigrant surge after World War I, nativist appeals intensified. A reorganized Ku Klux Klan emerged calling for "100-percent Americanism." Unlike the Klan of Reconstruction, the new Klan restricted its membership to native-born white Protestants, and campaigned against Catholics, Jews and immigrants as well as African Americans. By redefining its enemies, the Klan broadened its appeal to parts of the North and Midwest, and for a time, its membership swelled.

The inflated economy of the "Roaring Twenties" led to inflated share prices. People were buying shares 'on the margin,' whereby they paid ten per cent of the market value and borrowed the rest from banks and speculators. This caused the market to remain abnormally high and over-priced but people, especially the middle classes, the banks and speculators, continued to invest heavily in the stock market. Unfortunately there were too many small banks that had insufficient funds to cope with the sudden rush of withdrawals when the demand came. The banks were unable to return the money as they too had invested it in the stock market and in building projects. In the autumn of 1929 people lost faith in the system and so many tried to sell their shares that the Wall Street market crashed leading to years of Depression.

CHARACTERS

- Joe Macdonald (Pa) Sodbuster farmer living in poverty with his family on a small, broken-down, rented farm in the American Dustbowl, 1929. His face is grimy, his overalls tattered and farming appears to have just about beaten him.
- Mattie Macdonald (Ma) His wife; more educated than Joe; a devout believer and bible-reader, who wears equally tattered clothes and has borne him three children, struggled with him through thick and thin and always tried to keep up his flagging spirits.
- Grandma The elderly matriarch of the family who believes her daughter could have married better and doesn't mind telling people so.
- Becky Macdonald Their twelve year-old daughter
- Billy Macdonald Their mischievous ten year-old son
- Peewee Macdonald Their youngest and smallest son.
- Cornelius T. Spenk Local businessman & owner of several properties, including Macdonald's farm and the local hotel; father of Billy's playmate, Jeremiah; a sour-faced individual who isn't happy unless he's making money and controlling people. Visually differentiated from his twin brother by cowboy hat and cigar.
- Franklyn K. Spenk. Twin brother of the above who is the local doctor and surprisingly more caring and better-natured than his brother (may be played by the same actor as Cornelius Spenk).
- Jeremiah Spenk Spoilt son of wealthy hotelier who is always made to wear the best and will one day turn out to be just like his dad.
- Hobo Young, black, itinerant worker

ACT 1 – SCENE 1

(While the audience is arriving we hear background music from the nineteen-twenties. When everyone is settled, the music fades and the stage lights come up on a run-down rented farmstead in Oklahoma. It is the arid summer of 1929 and we can hear, and maybe even see, a sandstorm in progress. The front door and windows of the farm are covered with old sacking and sheets to try and keep out the dust and we can see a barn with a large single door. Along the front of the farm is a porch on which stand several rickety chairs, an old kitchen table, a small barrel and a rocking chair. Attached to the barn is a lean-to wood store. At one side of the stage we can see half the trunk of a very large tree, the lowest branch of which grows out above the acting area. The silhouette of the rest of the tree can be clearly seen against the backdrop.)

Joe Macdonald staggers in with a handkerchief over his mouth, struggling to carry a heavy sack of corn on his shoulder. It is so heavy that he has to put it down halfway and drag it to the barn door but when he pulls on the door it keeps blowing shut on him. He leaves the sack there and goes back for a second one, this time being so tired that he drags it slowly over to the door. After struggling again with the door and the heavy sacks he calls over the wind noise to his wife inside for help)

Pa Mattie!

(No response)

Can you give me a hand out here?

(Mattie comes out rubbing the flour from her hands and covers her mouth with her apron. Joe points to the problem door and signs for her to hold it open for him. She does so while he drags the sacks inside. They then close the door and both return to the house)

(After they've gone in another figure appears from the other side. It is a young black hobo dressed in a battered hat and long coat, looking for some shelter from the storm. He looks around, peers into the barn then creeps into the lean-to wood store. After a while the wind noise subsides and a boy's head appears at the front door of the house)

Billy Can we go out and play now, Ma?

Ma (From inside) There's a sandstorm blowing out there

Billy It aint now, Ma - it's stopped ...

Ma Are you sure?

Billy Come and see.

 (She looks out)

Ma (Reaching for a broom) Darned dust everywhere again.

Billy Can we, Ma? Please?

Ma I suppose so but don't go getting Jeremiah dirty – his Pa's coming for him soon

Billy I won't. (Shouting back into the house) Jeremiah! Get your butt out here!

Ma Language, Billy!

Billy Sorry.

 (Jeremiah appears, nicely dressed and white-collared)

Jeremiah What d'you want?

Billy 'You playing ball?

Jeremiah I'm playing cards with Peewee

Billy Aw come on

Jeremiah I can't – I've got to go to the party and Pa'll be mad if I get messed up again.

Billy You won't get messed up

Jeremiah You always say that but I always do.

Billy I promise you won't.

Jeremiah OK, but only if I can be the Babe

Billy You were the Babe last time

Jeremiah (Turning as if to go in) I guess it's back to the cards then

Billy (Reluctantly) OK – OK – you can be the Babe

 (Jeremiah punches the air in triumph and Billy goes into the house for the baseball, bat and glove. He emerges with a homemade bat. The ball may be imaginary. He is followed by the diminutive Peewee)

Peewee Can I play?

Billy No

Peewee Why not?

Billy 'Cause you're too little

Peewee I aint

Billy You are. You can't run, you can't jump, you can't throw and you can't catch

Peewee So?

Billy So you got to be able to do all those things to play baseball

(Peewee knows that if he begins to wail, Billy will get into trouble, so he begins wailing)

Billy Don't start that again.

(Peewee increases the volume)

Ma (Appearing at the door) Now what?

Peewee (Mumbling incoherently through crocodile tears) They won't let me play with them

Ma (To Billy) You let him play with you, do you hear.

Billy Aw mom!

Ma Either he plays or you don't

Billy (Resignedly) O.K.

(Peewee magically stops his wailing)

Jeremiah Where's he playing?

Billy He can be catcher

Jeremiah You just said he couldn't catch and he'd need some protection to be catcher

Billy Then I'll find him some

(He runs into the house and comes out with a metal sieve for a helmet, a washboard with string on for chest armour and some huge working gloves)

Billy Come here Peewee

(He puts the gear on him)

Put this on ... There! Now you look like a real catcher

(Peewee staggers around trying to keep the “helmet” straight, not knowing which way is where)

(Placing him in position) Now just you stand there and try and catch the ball when it comes. OK?

Jeremiah Hang on - I aint ready yet

(He does some big warming up swings with the bat)

OK – now I’m ready

(Billy winds himself up and throws. Jeremiah misses it)

Billy Strike One!

Jeremiah That wasn’t good

Billy It was so ... (To Peewee who is looking for the ball) Come on, Peewee, you’re supposed to catch it

(Peewee throws it back to Billy)

Billy “And it’s Sam Rice winding up to pitch his second to the Babe...”

Jeremiah “But the Babe is ready this time ...”

(Billy pitches his second and Jeremiah again swings and misses)

Billy Strike Two!

Jeremiah No way! That wasn’t good!

Billy It was too

Jeremiah (Turning to Peewee for help) Was that good Peewee?

Peewee (Shrugging his shoulders) I dunno

(Jeremiah is frustrated. Billy gets the ball back for his third pitch)

Billy You ready Peewee? This time he's got to run if he misses it

(Billy winds himself up for his third pitch. He throws and Jeremiah misses again, there is a moments panic then Jeremiah begins to run round the diamond and Peewee looks for the ball while Billy goes to home base shouting at him frantically)

Billy The ball, Peewee – get the ball – come on – over here!

(Peewee eventually picks it up and starts to run after Jeremiah but he throws it at him and misses, sending it flying into the woodshed. Jeremiah slides back to home base and realises he's got himself messy again)

Billy Now look what you've done, you've gone and lost it

Peewee Sorry

Jeremiah (Brushing himself down) And I'm all messed up again

Billy It'll clean off – fetch the ball, Peewee

Peewee You fetch it

Billy It was you who lost it

Peewee I aint going in there, there might be spiders

Billy So?

Peewee So I don't like spiders

Billy (Storming across to the lean-to) Honestly, you're nothing but a big baby

(He goes into the woodshed then backs out unable to speak and pointing inside)

Jeremiah What is it? Is it a spider?

Billy There's – there's ...

Peewee Told you there was.

Billy (Running towards the house) There's somebody in there!

(Billy runs towards the house and the other two run with him. Billy shouts through the open door)

Billy Pa! Come quick! There's somebody in the woodshed!

(Pa comes running out carrying his gun with Ma and Grandma close behind. He carefully approaches the shed with gun at the ready)

Pa OK mister – come on out

(No movement)

I'm warning you – if you don't come out now I'm gonna let you have it

(There is a movement and the black hobo emerges, trembling, with his hands in the air)

That's it – nice and slow

Billy Are you gonna shoot him, Pa?

(The hobo looks between Billy and Pa, terrified)

Pa That depends ... OK mister, d'you mind telling me what you're doing on my property?

(No reply)

I asked you a question

(The hobo shakes his head and makes a mumbling noise)

What's up - cat got your tongue?

(The hobo mumbles and tries to point to his own mouth but Joe moves the gun to make him keep his hands up)

Keep those hands where I can see them – I'm waiting an answer

Ma I think he's trying to tell us something, Joe

Gran Be careful

(She approaches the hobo who points to his mouth)

Pa What's he saying?

Ma Oh my God! He isn't saying anything - he hasn't got a tongue

Pa What?

Ma See for yourself

(Pa tentatively approaches and the hobo obliges by pointing to his open mouth again)

Pa Well I ... no wonder he wouldn't answer me ... OK, mister you can put your hands down now

Gran Lord preserve us! Whatever next!

Billy Can I look?

Pa You stay where you are

Ma I think he was just sheltering from the wind, Joe

Pa Well the wind's stopped now so he can be on his way.
(To hobo) I'm very sorry for you, son, but you'd better be on your way now.

(The hobo begins to leave but is stopped by Ma)

Ma Hold on. You can't just send him off like that, it isn't Christian

Pa Why not?

Ma It isn't right, him being the way he is. He looks like he hasn't eaten for a week. (To Hobo) Are you hungry mister?

(The hobo nods earnestly)

Pa What?

Ma He can have some of our stew, there's more than enough to go round

Pa He's a hobo, Mattie, a vagrant - there are hundreds like him down at the rail yard. I'm very sorry for him and all that, but right is right.

Ma Remember what the Good Book says, "Come unto me all ye who are hungry"

Gran Are you sure about this?

Ma Sure, I'm sure

Billy (Surprised) Is he staying for dinner?

Pa (Looking at his wife) It looks that way, Billy - when your Ma gets an idea into her head there's no sense in arguing

Ma (To the hobo) What's your name, son?

(The hobo nods and signals for writing implements)

Ma He wants something to write on – go get him a paper and pencil, Billy

(Billy runs inside)

Gran What were you doing in the shed, boy?

Pa You nearly got yourself shot back there. There's lots of folks round here who'd shoot first and ask questions later.

(Billy is back and gives a notebook and pencil to the hobo who slowly writes his name and shows them)

Pa I can't read it. What's it say? Ab ? Absa?

Ma Absalom – it's from the bible, one of King David's sons, it means "Bringer of Peace"

Pa I can't call anybody a mouthful like that – how about "Abe"? Is that OK with you?

(The hobo nods and smiles)

"Abe" it is then. Can you tell us anything else?

(Abe shakes his head)

Pa You can't? (Abe shakes again) Why not?

(Abe signals with a shrug of his shoulders that that is all he can write)

Pa I don't think he's very good at writing (To Abe) Is that it?

(Abe nods)

I know what you mean, I aint too good myself.

Ma We were just about to have dinner, Abe. There isn't much but what we have, we're willing to share.

Gran He aint sitting at the table with us?

Ma Why not?

Gran It aint right, him being ... (she was going to say "black" but thought better of it)

Pa (Compromising) He can sit on the barrel ... (To Ma) What do you think's gonna happen when he tells all his friends at the rail yard that there's free food going?

Gran They'll all be down here looking for a handout, sure as eggs is eggs

Ma I don't see why ...

(Sound of a Model T Ford approaching down the track)

(She hears the car coming) Your Pa's here for you, Jeremiah

Jeremiah (Brushing dust off his trousers) Don't tell him I've been playing ball

(Sound of the car stopping and car door closing as Cornelius Spenk gets out)

Cornelius (To others) Evening – (To Jeremiah) You ready Jeremiah?

Jeremiah Yes, Pa

Cornelius Look at you, all messed up again – you'll be in trouble when your Ma sees the state you're in.

Jeremiah I just fell over, Pa

Cornelius What did I tell you about getting messed up?

(Jeremiah hangs his head)

Get in the car

(Jeremiah begins to go)

Billy You coming again next week?

Cornelius He can't – he's got a doctor's appointment

Billy Are you sick?

Cornelius No, he aint sick

Jeremiah I've just got to have a mole taken off my neck

Cornelius It aint life-threatening but it aint very pretty. He'll be out of action for a couple of weeks. We'll let you know when he's well enough to play again.

Billy O.K. See you

Jeremiah See you

Cornelius (To Joe) Can I have a word with you in private?

Pa Sure

 (Cornelius takes him to one side)

Cornelius You know what I'm going to say, don't you?

Pa If it's about the rent, Mr Spenk, I'm doing my best but things aint been going too well just lately

Cornelius How long am I supposed to let you live here rent-free?

Pa Things'll pick up when we get some rain. You know what it's been like – you no sooner get the crop in the ground than its taken down by the wind or sandstorms or grasshoppers – if it aint one thing, its another

Cornelius I'm a patient man, Macdonald, but my patience won't last forever – you get my drift?

Pa Yes, sir

Cornelius (Pointing to the hobo) What's he doing here?

Pa Just some hobo that Mattie took in – he's just having some vittals with us then he'll be on his way

Cornelius He aint a paying guest?

Pa No sir

Cornelius Because there's a clause in your contract that says "No paying guests" - not without my say-so

Pa I'll get rid of him soon as I can

Cornelius You see that you do

 (They re-join the others)

 I'll be seeing you folks

Ma Bye Mr Spenk

 (He exits and we hear car door and engine as it drives away)

Ma (To Pa) What was he saying?

Pa Just the usual

Ma He should know we wouldn't be in arrears unless we were forced to be and he's got more money than he knows what to do with.

Pa Those folks are the worst, Mattie, fingers in every pie – they don't give nothing away - that's how they get where they are.

Ma You know how much he charges folks to stay in that hotel of his?

Pa Yeah, I know

Ma Where they get it from I don't know

Pa Not from farming, that's for sure

Billy Can we start now, Ma?

Ma Have you washed your hands?

Billy (Showing her) I washed them this morning

Ma Both of you go and rub them on the flannel

 (They go, grumbling, into the house)

 (Sound of car horn in the distance)

Gran Now what's he hooting at?

Ma It's Becky

Gran Darned motorcars – they'll never catch on

Pa I think they just might Gran

Gran Dashing about the place - If God'd wanted us to go that fast we'd all have been born with wheels!

 (Enter Becky on her old-fashioned bike)

Becky That stupid man almost hit me again.

Gran He ought to have more sense

Ma You're late, we were just about to start

Pa Where've you been, girl?

Becky Just into town

Ma She just needed some ribbon, Joe, for the speaking contest. You don't want your daughter going out looking like a scarecrow

Pa Course not

Gran Have you thought yet what you're going to talk about?

Becky No, I aint got any idea

Ma (Correcting her) "I haven't got any idea"

Gran I wasn't asking you

Ma No, Gran, I was just correcting her, trying to get her to speak properly

Gran It don't matter how she speaks, its what she's speaking about that's important, whether she believes in what she's saying.

Becky Well there aint – (looks at Ma) - there isn't anything really important that I want to say at the moment.

Ma You'll think of something

 (The boys come back and show their hands to Ma who inspects them on both sides)

Ma They'll do

Pa O.K., lets say Grace ... (They all bow their heads) "As we fare so may others fare"

All Amen

 (Ma begins to share out the stew)

Pa So what's the news from town?

Becky They've put the price of hair ribbon up by three cents

Pa I don't call that news

Becky There's talk about a new picture coming to the Adelphi soon called "The Jazz Singer"

Gran The what?

Becky "The Jazz Singer" – and you'll never guess what – it's a talkie

Pa A what?

Becky A talkie – they say you can hear actually them talking

Gran Hear who talking?

Becky The people on the screen

Gran You're putting me on

Becky I aint – I mean I'm not Gran – I was told by Katie Durham and her Pa's the projectionist so he ought to know

Gran Talking pictures! Whatever next.

Billy Can we go and see it Ma?

Ma I don't know about that

Peewee Don't you mean "hear" it?

Pa (Impatiently) Whatever he means, it takes money and money is the one thing that we don't have much of at the moment so lets have less talk about movies and talkies and more concentrating on what we should be doing

Becky What's that Pa?

Pa Working of course. I never heard of nobody getting rich by going to the movies.

Billy I'm going to be rich one day

Becky Oh yeah?

Billy Yeah

Becky And how are you gonna do that?

Billy I'm gonna be a baseball player like Babe Ruth. He gets \$5,000 a year

Gran No?

Billy It's true - last year he hit sixty homers.

Ma Where'd you learn all this, Billy?

Billy I read it in the Tip-Top that Jeremiah loaned me

Ma (To Abe) Come on Abe, there's plenty more where that came from.

(Pa gives her a look as she serves more stew to Abe. There is a pause while they all eat in silence)

Billy (To Pa) Are we poor, Pa?

(Everyone stops eating and looks at Pa for his reply)

Pa (Almost choking on his food) What?

(They're all waiting)

What kind of a question is that?

Billy Well Jeremiah keeps going on about all the things he's got that we aint.

Pa (Not sure what to say) Well we aint rich, that's for sure ... but we got our health which is more than some folks have and you know yourself farming aint been the best of occupations in the last few years what with prices being as bad as they are.

Billy I suppose so ... I just wondered if we could afford a car

Pa What do we want with a car when we got the truck?

Billy A truck aint the same as a nice, new, shiny, black car

Pa What do you think my name is, Billy? Calvin Coolidge?

Ma You've got to stop wanting all the things that other people have – that's called "coveting" and it's a sin – "Do not covet thy neighbours ass or his ox" it says in the bible

Becky (Adding helpfully) "Or his wife"

Ma Yes, well, lets just change the subject, shall we

Becky (Casts a sideways glance at Billy then says) Pa?

Billy (To his sister) Don't you dare

Pa Yes?

Billy (Worried) Don't listen to her Pa, it aint true what she's gonna tell you

Pa What aint true? Let your sister speak.

Becky (Constantly casting glances at Billy as she speaks) He's been peeking at me again

Billy I have not!

Becky He has. He waits till I'm getting undressed then he peeks at me through the hole in the divider. He thinks that I don't see him but I do

Pa Is this true Billy?

(Billy looks around at everyone and feels so ashamed that he runs into the house. His Gran goes after him)

Becky Ask Peewee, he'll tell you

Pa Peewee?

Peewee I promised Billy I wouldn't tell

Ma You tell your Pa what's been going on, Peewee

Peewee (Nervous) Billy said Becky was growing boobies and I said she couldn't be 'cause only grown-up ladies have boobies.

Ma (Feeling awkward) Yes, well if you've ... er ... finished your meal, Peewee, I think you can get yourself ready for bed now.

Peewee But it aint time for bed yet.

Pa Bed!

(He knows that if Pa speaks, he means business, so he reluctantly gets down and goes into the house)

Ma It looks like there's another storm brewing ... do you think perhaps Abe should stay with us for a while?

Pa What?

Ma He could bed down in the barn, he wouldn't be in the way

Pa I just told Spenk he wasn't a paying guest and that he was leaving soon

Ma It wouldn't matter – he could lend a hand – you're always saying how you wished you had grown-up sons to help you.

Pa I don't believe what I'm hearing

Ma That's settled then. (To Becky) Becky take Abe to the barn and find him somewhere to sleep ... (To Abe) Would you like that, Abe?

(He nods enthusiastically)

Becky Come on.

(They get up to go to the barn but as he gets up Abe drops a small book, which Becky sees)

Becky You dropped your book (she picks it up) Hey, it's a bible!

(She gives it back to him)

Ma There you are – he's a bible reader - never judge a book by looking at the cover ... (To Abe) Are you a reader of the Good Book, Abe?

(He nods shyly)

Me too – I think we're going to get along real fine

(Becky leads Abe into the barn)

Pa I don't know what gets into you – first you're feeding him and now you're giving him free accommodation

Ma Just hush yourself.

Pa We have trouble filling the mouths we got.

Ma Well, one more isn't going to make any difference

Pa I suppose at least he's got one thing in his favour, he aint going to be noisy.

(Ma collects the plates)

Ma Joe?

Pa Now what?

Ma I think it's time Becky had her own room, it isn't right her being in with the boys at her age.

Pa I know it aint right but what can I do about it?

Ma She could go in with Gran

Pa There aint the space.

Ma Or Gran could move in with us

Pa I aint having that old –

Ma Joe!

Pa I aint having her moving in with us.

Ma Then there's only one other thing left

Pa And what's that?

Ma You'll just have to build another room for her out the back.

Pa Can you see Spenk letting me do a thing like that? He'd have me drawing up plans and checking all the whys and wherefores every minute of the day. Becky'd be full-grown before it was half finished.

(Pause)

Ma He doesn't have to know about it.

Pa I beg your pardon?

Ma Not till it's finished – you could put it all together, then tell him afterwards.

Pa You're crazy – you know the way he chases folks, he aint happy less he's poking his nose into one thing or the other.

Ma You heard what he said about Jeremiah – he's going to be out of action for a few weeks - so it's likely that we won't be seeing him for a while

Pa I don't know about this, Mattie

Ma What's to know? You just put another room up at the back of the house and when he eventually cottons on you say that you were going to ask him but that it just slipped your mind. You don't think he's going to make you take it down once it's up?

Pa He might - and he might just get mad and kick us out

Ma If he does, he does. We wouldn't be losing so much anyway, the place is falling down round our ears. (She Pauses) We could always move back to Talus

Pa (With hidden meaning) I aint going back there

Ma Or Dearborn.

Pa Dearborn?

Ma Yes. There's lots of folk going for work up there at the Ford place. Mabel Warner got a letter the other day from her sister and her man. She says they're paying him five dollars a day.

Pa I heard. I also heard what you got to do to get that five dollars – a “production line” they call it – men putting nuts onto stub axles one after the other – the same nut onto the same axle time after time, while the cars keep on a-coming at you and if you don’t keep up with the line you’re out of there – you don’t even get time to go for a pee - they’re watching you every minute of the day.

Ma It’s more than we’re making here

Pa I don’t care, I aint selling my soul for no company job in Michigan – five dollars or no five dollars

Ma Please yourself.

(Becky comes back and starts gathering up the rest of the dishes from the table)

Ma (To Becky) Did you find him somewhere warm?

Becky Yeah, he’s fine – snugger than a bug in a rug ... I wonder what happened to his tongue

Pa He was probably just born without one – that’s nature’s way sometimes.

Ma I heard about a woman in Idaho who was born like that.

Pa And I know lots of folks round here who should’ve been born without one!

Ma Joe!

Becky I think I’m going to have an early night, Ma, I’m feeling really pooped.

Ma That’s OK, love, it’s probably all the bike riding you’ve been doing. You aren’t sickening for anything?

Becky No, I’ll be all right.

Ma Goodnight then

Becky Goodnight ... night Pa

Pa Night Becky

(She exits)

What’s up with her?

Ma She's just worrying herself about the speaking contest

Pa She aint got any need to – she's one of the best speakers there is round here.

Ma Its because she can't make up her mind over what to talk about

Pa Well don't look at me, I've got no idea on that score – what do they usually talk about?

Ma It's supposed to be something with a message, something folks can ponder on.

Pa I thought they just talked about cookery or women's things

Ma Some do, but she wants something better than that if she's going to win this year – there's a lot of competition

Pa You're the one with the education – can't you help her out?

Ma I've tried, I've given her lots of suggestions but there wasn't anything that took her fancy

(Becky re-appears)

Becky Pa – he's still doing it.

Pa What?

Becky Peeking.

(Ma and Pa exchange a look)

Pa (To Becky) You tell him that I'm coming in there to see him shortly and him and me's gonna have a little heart-to-heart

(Becky goes back in)

(Pause while Pa thinks)

Ma You still say we don't need another room?

Pa I suppose I could call in a favour from Ged at the wood yard - he owes me for that drilling job I helped him with - but don't go blaming me if things go pear-shaped.

Ma Joe, I married you 'cause I thought you had some get-up-and-go. Where's it all gone.

Pa I guess it got-up-and-went ... I'm just trying to get by here, trying to have a quiet life.

Ma You got to make a stand some time

Pa 'You reckon?

Ma I do.

(The lights down for evening then we hear the sounds of Pa's angry voice, "You do not peek through this blanket! 'You hear me?'" etc and whacking noises followed by "ouches!" from Billy as he receives his punishment, then a series of "Night Ma, Night Pa" from the children to the parents and their replies followed by Pa's voice finally saying sternly to Billy, "And no more peeking!"

(More music from the twenties)

(SCENE 2 - The next morning - Stage lights up brightly for morning, birdsong, etc. Ma comes out with a basket and a bowl to begin shelling peas and Gran follows her)

Gran Morning

Ma Morning

Gran Any thing I can do for you?

Ma You can give me a hand shelling the last of these peas if you like

Gran (Sitting down) Pass some over then

(Ma does so and they begin)

Gran Where's Joe?

Ma He's gone down to the wood yard to try and get some timber

Gran What's he wanting timber for?

Ma We've decided it's time that Becky had her own room

Gran And about time too

Ma But she doesn't know yet, it's a secret

Gran Why - ?

(Becky appears)

Ma Morning Becky – sleep well?

Becky Yes thanks ... d’you want me to give you a hand?

Ma We’ve almost finished

Gran I’ll tell you what you can do, you can do me some reading out of the paper

Becky (To her mum) Do I have to?

Ma Do as your Gran says

Becky (reluctantly) O.K.

(She goes in and comes back with a newspaper)

Becky Why didn’t you ever learn to read, Gran?

Gran (Knowingly) I never needed to – I always had somebody like you to do it for me.

Becky (Opening the Paper) What would you like to know?

Gran Just find me the juicy bits - the births, deaths and marriages

(Becky reads)

Becky “Bud Cavett died at Britton, seventy-two years old,” ... it says he used to be a stagecoach driver between Oklahoma and Tecumseh

Gran I think I knew him

Ma You always say that

Becky “Fifteen people were injured at El Reno when a bus crashed into a bridge”

Gran I told you them motors wasn’t any good – nothing but crashes and accidents – you’ll never get me in one of them!

Becky Here’s a good bit, “Two unidentified bandits robbed the Canadian Valley Bank getting away with \$2,500 in loot. The cashier, Mr Hampton and the book-keeper, Mr Cochran, were kidnapped by the robbers, taken to a deep wood and later released uninjured”... It says “They had an armed detective watching in the bank when it was robbed”

Gran And what did he do about it?

Becky It doesn't say

Gran Then he aint much of a detective – needs his marching orders if you ask me

Ma You don't know the circumstances, Gran

Gran You wouldn't be so kindly if it was your money they was taking

Becky “George Henshaw Junior, formerly of Oklahoma City, has sold his vast Texas oil holdings for three million dollars, chartered an aeroplane and a jazz band and flown to Reno with Miss Caledonia Clay Pullian to be married”

Gran Well, we can all guess what kind of gal Miss Caledonia Clay Pullian is, can't we!

Becky Just listen to this, “ Margurette Griffin aged thirteen of Oklahoma City was awarded a prize for not missing a day of schooling for nine years and was only ever three times late”

Ma What's wrong with that?

Becky Who're they trying to kid.

Ma She sounds a very reliable kind of girl – more reliable than some I know (she looks accusingly at Becky)

Becky I can't help getting sick – you don't want me to go spreading things round all the others?

Ma You have an answer for everything. (Getting up to go in) It's time I was getting lunch sorted

 (Billy appears at the door feeling down in the dumps)

Gran I'll give you a hand (As she goes in) Morning Billy

Billy (Grumpily) Morning

 (He exchanges a look with Becky)

Billy (Sadly) I'm going out to play, Ma

Ma Don't go too far – your Pa will be back soon with the timber

Billy I won't

 (All three females go in)

Peewee (Following) Can I come?

Billy No

Peewee Why not?

Billy ‘Cause you told on me – you’re a snitch

Peewee I aint ... did you get paddled?

Billy What do you think?

Peewee Did it hurt?

Billy (Falsely) No

Peewee Then why’d you come to bed bawling?

Billy I wasn’t – I just had something in my eye – now leave me alone, I got some serious thinking to do

(Billy moves across the stage and every time he moves, Peewee moves after him and stops to hide when Billy looks round)

Billy I know you’re following me, I can hear you

Peewee (From his hiding place) I aint

Billy Yes you are

Peewee (Coming out) What are thinking about?

Billy Not telling you.

Peewee Go on

Billy You’d only snitch again

Peewee I wouldn’t ... are you mad ‘cause you got paddled?

Billy No ... You might not be able to snitch on me soon

Peewee Why not?

Billy ‘Cause one of us might not be around here for too long

Peewee Are you going somewhere?

Billy That’d be telling

Peewee Where are you going?

Billy Somewhere where you don't get paddled

Peewee You mean California, don't you? Tell me about California again, Billy

Billy I don't see why I should

Peewee Please, Billy – I'll let you borrow my special marble.

 (They sit down)

Billy O.K. So what do you want to know?

Peewee Everything, tell me all about it

Billy Well ... Some folks say that it's the best place in the whole wide world, the kind of place where you can walk along the street at any time of the day or night and just reach up and pick whatever kind of fruit that you want right off of the trees

Peewee No?

Billy Its true ... and the sun shines there almost every day

Peewee No?

Billy Except at night of course, then the rain comes - but when it does, it only rains at night-time when everybody's asleep ... and there's no sandstorms, no hurricanes, no grasshoppers and everybody's got a nice car to ride in.

Peewee You're kidding?

Billy That's what I heard

Peewee Do you still have to go to school?

Billy I think so – I aint sure about that – but it can't be half as bad as it is here

Peewee Tell me about the sea again.

Billy Well, there's these real pretty beaches all round the coast with sand and rock pools and you can walk right down to the sea - its just lying there all shining and sparkling in the sun and if you want to you can run and jump and play in it as much as you want

Peewee Will the water be cold?

Billy I don't know – I suppose not

Peewee I'm going to go swimming every day

Billy When? When will you go swimming?

Peewee When we go there

Billy Who says we're going?

Peewee Lots of other folks are, so we might one day
(Ma shouts from the house)

Ma Billy!

Billy Coming Ma ... now what does she want.
(As he goes into the house Peewee looks at the big tree)

Peewee It can't be that far away ... you could probably see it if you was high enough up
(He goes to the tree side of the stage where unknown to us he is clipped into a safety harness and we then see him begin to climb the back of the tree as Billy comes out)

Billy Hey! What are you doing?

Peewee I'm going to look for California – you can probably see it from up there

Billy Don't be stupid, Peewee – come on down.

Peewee It can't be that far

Billy You'll hurt yourself – get down now – please!

Peewee I'm O.K. - I'll tell you if I can see it
(Billy is getting scared and runs back to shout into the house)

Billy Ma!
(She comes out with Gran and Becky and they stand together hardly daring to look at Peewee who is getting higher and higher)

Ma Peewee! Come on down this minute!

Peewee I'm OK, Ma – I'm just going to look to see if I can see California

Ma Its too far away, silly – you won't be able to see anything from up there – please come down

(They see his foot slip and all wince with fear)

Gran Come on down, boy

Becky You'll fall

Peewee I wont, I'm a good climber – aren't I Billy? Billy will tell you what a good climber I am

Ma (To Billy) Can't you do something?

(Sound of a truck approaching down the drive, doors slamming and Abe and Pa come running on)

Pa (Looking at there frightened faces) What is it? What's going on?

(Ma points upwards)

Pa Oh my God!

(While everyone is wondering what to do, Abe begins to go up the tree after Peewee)

Pa Just stay where you are Peewee, Abe's coming for you

Peewee I don't want to get down, I'm looking for California

(Abe gets nearer)

Ma That's it, careful Abe – you got him

(Abe helps Peewee back down to ground level where unknown to the audience the safety harness is unfastened behind the scene)

Ma (Going to hold him but cross) You silly, silly boy – you had us all very worried

Peewee I was OK

Pa You don't climb trees – understand?

Peewee But you might be able to see -

Pa And stop all this talk about California, I don't want to hear any more of it

Peewee But - ?

Pa No more! (Slapping Abe on the back) Thanks Abe, that's one that I owe you

Ma (Looking off towards the truck) That's a fine stack of wood you got there, Joe

Pa It took us a while to load it – all we need now are some willing hands to help us unload.

Becky (Sullenly) I aint unloading no truck

Pa Is that so?

Becky It's boring

Pa (Winking to Ma) Then I guess we'll just have to leave it where it is.

Ma (Knowingly) You will

Becky (Sensing there's something going on between them) Why? What were you going to do with it?

Pa It was just to make a room for you at the back of the house but if you don't want to help us then it don't matter

Becky My own room? You're teasing me?

Ma He isn't

Becky Oh Pa, of course I'll help you! Come on Billy, Peewee, let's get this stuff off the truck

Gran You soon changed your tune

Becky Come on, let's get it unloaded ... my own room! ... I can hardly wait ... it's so exciting ... I'll have to decide what colours to have and everything – and curtains, I'll have to make some curtains (she continues in this vein)

(Ad libbing, they all start to carry on pieces of timber – Becky and Billy come on with a piece, holding it high and at the end comes Peewee with his hand in the air just touching it and thinking he's helping to carry it)

Billy Where are we putting it, Pa?

Pa Round the back, out of the way

(They take it behind the house)

Gran D'you want me to lend a hand?

Ma No thanks, Gran, we got enough here - thanks for offering

Gran I'll make myself useful and put some coffee on (she goes in)

(They all continue to unload the truck – ad libbing as they go)

Becky Do you think blue would be OK for the curtains?

(Billy and Becky come on arguing over one piece)

Billy Hey! I was carrying that piece

Becky No you weren't – go find your own

Billy Pa, tell her to stop taking my pieces

Pa It don't matter who carries what piece, as long as it gets carried

Ma (To Peewee) I need somebody big and strong to help me, Peewee

Peewee (Strutting) Then I'm your man!

Pa You sure you can manage all that, Abe?

(Abe nods and grunts)

(Becky is carrying a piece when she hears a noise and stops to look – we hear the sound of Spenk's Model T coming down the track)

Becky Oh – oh, I smell trouble

Ma Who is it? (She realises) Oh no!

Pa (Following their gaze) Let me handle this – don't anybody speak unless you have to.

(Sound of a car stopping, car door slamming as Spenk approaches)

Cornelius Well, well ... So what do we have here?

Pa Just moving a little timber, Mr Spenk

Cornelius So I see

(He walks round the back of the house and then looks back at the truck)

That's a pretty big pile you're bringing in there ... there's all kinds of things you could do with a stack like that ... fence-mending perhaps... or firewood ... or even construction?

(Pa looks nervous)

There wouldn't be anything that you'd forgotten to tell me, Macdonald?

Pa How'd you mean?

Cornelius Something a tenant should perhaps be asking of his landlord?

Pa I don't follow

Cornelius It aint just you that the guy at the wood yard owes favours to – only my favours are bigger than the one he owes you.

Pa (Realising the game is up) I was gonna tell you Mr Spenk.

Cornelius Tell? Tell? Don't you mean "Ask"? You aint in any position to be "telling" me anything.

Pa I meant "ask."

Cornelius So why don't you just go ahead and ask me.

Pa What? Now?

Cornelius Aint no time like the present.

Pa (Looking around nervously) Well, we – I mean "T" - was going to ask you if it was OK for us to put an extra room on the back of the building ... (he begins to rabbit-on nervously) because Becky's in need of somewhere of her own, now that she's getting more growed up and what with the two boys being in the same room as her I thought that –

Cornelius NO!

Pa You mean - ?

Cornelius I mean it aint OK ... Are you hearing me? When I heard that you was planning to do some building work without even paying me the courtesy of asking – me, who's the actual owner of the property – I just couldn't believe what I was hearing ... not only do you owe me several months in back-rent, you take in lodgers without having the courtesy to ask me and now you have the impudence to be making plans to make alterations to the building without even bothering to consult me –

Pa I was going to ask you, Mr Spenk

Cornelius After the event no doubt

Ma Can I just have a word - ?

Cornelius No you can't – you'll speak when you're spoken to – (pointing to Pa)
This here's the man who signed the tenancy agreement and it's him
that I'm talking to

Pa (Worried) What're you going to do?

Cornelius Do? I don't rightly know at the moment. I just wanted to see if my
information was correct ... and now that I see it is, I don't rightly know
what I should be doing.

Pa It won't happen again.

Cornelius You're darned right it won't ... I'm too all-fired up at the moment to
be able to think straight, what with my boy and everything ... I know
what I should do but I'm going to take myself off now and try and calm
down a little ... but there's one thing you've got to understand – you
don't put a nail in a piece of timber here without asking me first – is
that clear?

Pa Very clear, Mr Spenk.

(Spenk stomps off, slamming the car door and we hear him driving off)

Ma I could really get to dislike that man.

Gran I know just what you mean.

Becky Does that mean I can't have my own room now, Pa?

Pa (Demoralized) What do you think?

Ma I wouldn't care if it made any difference to him, he's only doing it out
of cussedness.

Billy What are we gonna do with all the wood, Pa?

Pa Well one thing's for certain – I sure as hell aint taking it back!

(Lights down – more music from the twenties)

(SCENE 3 – Later the same day - Pa and Abe are just finishing the unloading on their own. Pa drops his last pieces round the back and is walking back to the truck while Abe is carrying the last load towards the back of the house)

Pa Is that the last, Abe?

(Abe grunts and shows one finger)

One more load?

(Abe nods)

Pa I'll leave it with you. (Sitting on the porch and wiping his brow)
That's just about done me in ... I don't know what we're gonna do with it all but I expect we'll find a use

Ma (Appearing at the door) How's about a wooden box for good old Mr Spenk?

Pa (Laughing) He'd probably be sitting up in that telling us we should've had his permission before we built it!

(They both chuckle)

Ma What do you think he'll do?

Pa I don't know but it's too late to worry about it now – what's done is done. You was the one who wanted to build it first and ask permission after.

Ma Yes but you agreed with me

Pa I don't recall I had any choice in the matter.

Ma Of course you did – you're the man of the house

Pa Yeah, and you got a way of getting me to do things I don't want to do.

Ma Are you saying that I nag you?

Pa It's more cute than that – you have the ideas and then you have a way of turning things round so you make me think its me that's had them in the first place.

Ma (Coquettishly) Now would I do such a thing?

Pa You're darned right you would

(She smiles and he smiles back)

Ma I'll tell you what, we'll have a word with his brother. He's coming by this afternoon to give Gran her check-up.

Pa I still don't get it you know.

Ma What?

Pa How two fellahs can look so alike and turn out to be so different.

Ma It's because they're twins, Joe, what do you expect?

Pa Yeah but the one's a doctor and a real nice guy and the other's the nastiest money-grabbing varmint you could wish to meet

Ma Well you aint made the same as your own brother

Pa No, but it's hard to believe they've even got the same mother ... If he's coming by to see to your Ma can you ask him if there's anything he can give her to quieten her down a mite

Ma (Shocked) I beg your pardon?

Pa You know what I mean – some days she's more ornery than a rattlesnake with a sore head and it's generally me that's in the firing line.

Ma That's my mother you're talking about

Pa I know, but she don't have to go bad-mouthing me off to everybody that she meets.

Ma She just speaks her mind

Pa And her mind is generally that I aint good enough for the likes of you.

Ma Well maybe she's right

Pa Oh yeah? Then how come you stayed around for so long?

Ma Somebody's got to keep you on the straight and narrow.

Pa You surely do that, all right

(Pause)

Ma I've asked Becky to make us some more coffee.

Pa Thanks

Ma (Seeing Abe carrying the last load) Abe looks like he's earning his keep

Pa I don't know what I'd've done with out him. He's as strong as an ox.

Ma Then why don't you let him stay?

Pa What? You mean take him on permanent?

Ma Why not?

Pa You know why not – 'cause we aint got the money to pay him, that's why.

Ma I don't think he'd mind, as long as he got his keep.

Pa You're forgetting one thing - Spenk said we couldn't take in any guests.

Ma But he wouldn't be a paying guest, would he?

Pa I suppose not.

Ma Well there you are then.

Pa There you go – doing it again

Ma Doing what?

Pa Doing my thinking for me – if I want to ask him to stay, I'll ask him - when I'm good and ready

Ma Please yourself

(Becky arrives with the coffee)

Pa That's just what I need

Becky Be careful Pa, it's still hot

Pa She's a good girl you know ... one day she's gonna make somebody a great wife.

Becky Like mom, you mean?

Pa I aint answering that in case I incriminate myself.

(Abe arrives)

Pa Come and take the weight off your feet, Abe

Ma ‘You want a coffee?

(He nods)

Pa Help yourself

(He does so)

Pa I reckon that’s a job well done.

(Abe nods and grunts)

Pa The one thing about timber – you can always find a use for it – though
I can’t say what for right now.

Ma (To Abe) We were just talking about you, Abe

(Abe looks worried)

Don’t look so worried – it’s nothing you’ve done ... (Glancing at Pa) I
think there’s something that Joe wants to ask you

(Joe gives her a look for setting him up)

Pa Is there? Oh yes – well we was – I mean “I” was wondering, Abe, if
you’d like to stay round for a while and help us out? On a temporary
basis?

(He nods keenly)

There’s only one problem – we don’t have the money to pay you
proper wages ...

(Abe signals he doesn’t mind)

But you’d have a roof over your head and food in your belly

Ma Joe says you’ve been working real hard – what do you say?

(Abe thinks and then gets out his bible and flicks through it then shows
it to them)

What? What are you showing me?

(She reads) “ A good name is better than precious ointment” - it is,
Abe, and you surely have that with us.

(Abe writes something on his paper and shows Ma)

What's that? Spenk? Don't you worry about him. If he sticks his nose in, I'll just get Joe to tell him you're still a guest.

(Abe nods knowingly but Joe doesn't look so sure at the thought of facing up to Spenk)

Pa (To Becky) If Abe's going to be staying around a while, perhaps you ought to show him where everything is.

Becky O.K. (To Abe) It won't take long, you can finish that later

(He nods, grunts and puts down his coffee)

Let's go then

(They go off)

(Gran emerges)

Gran (Unhappy) Is he still here?

Ma Yes and he's going to be here a might longer. We've just asked him to help us out awhile

Gran You've done what? On your own heads be it.

Pa What've you got against him?

Gran You know what I got against him.

Ma Times are changing now, Ma

Gran Yeah, well I aint.

(Sound of a Model T coming down the track)

Pa We got some company

Ma It's the Doc

Pa He's come to give you your check-up, Gran

Gran I don't need no check-up. I'll be here long after he's gone.

Ma Just behave yourself and do what the doctor says.

(Sound of Model T stopping & door opening and closing)

Franklyn Howdee folks! I hope I find you all well and hearty

Gran Damned stupid thing for a doctor to say! If we was all well and hearty we wouldn't be needing no doctors and you'd be out of a job – which you should be, for all the good that you do

Ma That's no way to talk to the doctor, Gran

Gran If he didn't want to hear the truth, he shouldn't have come

Franklyn That's OK, Mrs Macdonald, I don't pay your Ma no heed

Gran And that's good too because I don't pay you none neither.

Ma He's come all this way to see you, Ma, just try and keep a civil tongue in your head.

Gran Did I ask him to come to see me?

Ma No but -

Gran So give me one good reason why I should be civil.

Pa I think maybe you should just take Gran inside and give he the once over

Gran You talk like I was one of your animals. What if I don't want the once over?

Ma Just do as he says, Ma, for once in your life and let the doctor examine you

Gran (Testily to the doc) Have you warmed your hands?

Doc They're as warm as they're ever gonna be

Gran O.K. but I want you to understand I'm doing this under protest

Ma Yes Ma

 (The doc and Gran go in)

Pa I see now who it is you take after.

Ma She doesn't mean any harm, it's just her way.

Pa If I get like that just take me out in the yard and put me out of my misery

Ma Will that be today or tomorrow?

Pa (Getting up to go) I've got some business to attend to, I'll be seeing you later

Ma Where're you going?

Pa I got to go over to Butler's place - I need to do the top field but I got some trouble with the tractor so I thought I'd see if he'll let me borrow his for a while.

Ma You think he'll lend it 'you.

Pa I don't see why not. He's loaned me things before and me him.

Ma O.K., then. See you later

(Pa exits and she goes into the house.)

(The stage lights go down briefly and come back up to indicate a Passage of time)

(Becky and Abe return from their tour)

Becky And that's about all there is. It aint much but it's home.

(Abe nods and grunts a "thank you")

Speaking of which, where's your home, Abe? Where're you from?

(Abe turns away and doesn't answer)

(She reaches for a pocket) I got a paper and pencil if you want to write it down

(Abe turns away)

What's up? ... Why're you looking at me like that? Everybody's got a home. No reason why you should be any different.

(He doesn't want to know)

There's nothing to be ashamed of, we all have to come from somewhere

(He still isn't interested)

Are your parents still alive?

(Abe is showing signs of stress at some memory)

What's wrong? Are you O.K.? ... I'm sorry if I've upset you but I was just wondering ... I won't mention it again

(Abe goes off into the barn)

(The situation is relieved by the doctor and Ma coming out of the house after the examination)

Ma Well what's the prognosis, doc?

Franklyn She's got the heart of a woman half her age and a tongue to match

Ma I'm sorry about that. I've given up trying to control her

(Sound of Joe's truck coming back down the track and stopping)

Franklyn (Seeing truck coming) You can pass the good news on to your husband. (With a twinkling smile) Tell him she's got many good years left in her yet

Ma (Sarcastically) I'm sure he'll be pleased to hear it

Franklyn Well unless there's anything else, I'd better be off

(Enter Joe)

Ma The doc says that Ma's just fine

Pa (Downbeat) Great.

Ma (Giving him a meaningful look) Was there anything else that you wanted to ask him?

Pa Was there? Oh yeah, there was the one thing, doc. We had a run-in with your brother a while back. We was going to put a room up at the back of the house for young Becky but we sort of forgot to ask him.

Franklyn He wouldn't like that

Pa He didn't – he got pretty mad with us. We was a bit concerned about what he might do about it and wondered if you could perhaps put in a good word for us – we didn't mean no harm.

Franklyn I'll do what I can but he's not an easy man when it comes to persuading. He's got something inside that needs for him to be in control all the time. When we were kids he was just the same - he was the one who always had to be top dog and it's the same now with his own kid – Jeremiah's been brought up real strict – he wouldn't allow him to play with his toys around the house like other kids – he had to keep them all in one corner – that's the kind of fella he is.

Ma If you could just do what you can.

Franklyn I'll do my best – be seeing you folks!

Both Bye

 (They wave him off)

Pa So your Ma's fit and well?

Ma It seems so

Pa Well I suppose you can't win 'em all

Ma Joe!

Pa (To Becky) And how's my favourite girl?

Becky (Unconvincing) O.K.

Pa What's up with you?

Becky I showed Abe round the farm like you told me, then when we got back I started to ask him where he'd come from and about his family and he went all funny on me.

Ma How do you mean "funny"? I thought he couldn't talk.

Becky He didn't need to talk for me to know there was something bothering him. There's something not right there. I offered him a paper and pencil but he wasn't interested.

Pa Maybe he's like me and has trouble with his writing or maybe you're just imagining it

Becky I'm not – he just shut down on me.

Pa Some folks don't like talking about their family

Ma Whatever it is, it's none of our business. If he wants to tell you anything he'll do it when he's good and ready. You're forgetting that we're total strangers to him.

Becky I suppose so.

 (Becky goes in)

Ma Did you sort out your business?

Pa As a matter of fact I didn't. Will you listen to this - Butler said that the last time I borrowed his tractor and took it back it started going wrong on him so he's decided he won't lend it me no more.

Ma No?

Pa That's what he says but it was working fine when I returned it.

Ma Are you sure?

Pa Sure I'm sure.

Ma That isn't very neighbourly

Pa Precisely my thoughts.

Ma What'll you do?

Pa I don't know. I still got that old horse plough out the back – I thought I might put you in the harness.

Ma That isn't funny

Pa No, it aint but if I didn't laugh, I'd cry ...

(Pause as Pa feels the weight of the problems building up on him)

Did you ever get the feeling, Mattie, that somebody up there is trying to tell you something?

Ma Can't you fix the tractor?

Pa I could if I knew what was wrong with it

(He can keep it in no longer and begins to break down, putting his hand up to cover his eyes and turning away)

Ma (She goes to put her arms round him) Hey, hey, there's no need for that

Pa (Sniffling) I'm sorry but it just feels sometimes like I'm banging my head against a brick wall – first one thing goes wrong and then another, the bills keep on coming in, Spenk wants his money and I don't know where in God's name it's going to end ... I've tried, Mattie, I really have tried.

Ma (Comforting him) Yes, of course you've tried.

Pa It aint that I'm bad at farming, it's just the way things keep going, things I can't control

Ma You're not the only one, love

Pa I know I aint but that don't make it feel any better – I just wanted a good life for the kids – what kind of a life are we giving them here?

Ma They've got love, Joe, that's the main thing – they got us - it doesn't matter about all the other things as long you've got love.

Pa You can't eat love, you can't spend it down at the grocery store.

Ma Something'll turn up

Pa You always say that that but it never does, things just keep going from bad to worse.

Ma You got to believe, Joe, you got to hold onto your faith

Pa (Hesitant) There are times Mattie ...

Ma What times?

Pa Times when I get so low that I start thinking that there's only one way out.

Ma (Realising what he's saying and getting cross with him) Joe Macdonald! Don't you ever let me hear you talking like that!

Pa I'm sorry but I don't have the belief that you got, Mattie – I just don't have your strength ... hold me, love (she does so) – hold me tight – let me feel the strength that you got.

(She hugs him as the stage lights go down – sad music from the twenties)

(SCENE 4 – The next day - Ma has decided to assemble the rest of the family while Pa and Abe are away fixing the tractor. Gran sits on her rocker doing her knitting)

Ma (To Gran) Have you seen Joe?

Gran I think him and the black fellah went up the field to try and sort out the tractor. He didn't look very happy though. Has he got something on his mind?

Ma You might say.

Gran Money problems?

Ma Amongst other things – and don't you dare say, "I told you so." That's not the kind of encouragement that we need right now.

Gran You wouldn't listen to me back then.

Ma No, and I don't intend to start now.

Gran If you'd married Stanley Macshane, like I told you, you'd've been a wealthy woman by now.

Ma Well I didn't, so there's an end to it. And you don't measure happiness solely by the amount of money that you have.

Gran No, but it sure helps

Ma I'm going to look for Billy and Peewee. If Becky shows up, tell her to stay here.

Gran O.K.

(Ma goes off to look for the boys)

(Pause while Gran knits)

(Becky appears at the door with some dress material in her hand)

Becky Have you seen Ma, Gran?

Gran She's just gone to look for the boys – she said for you to stay here for some reason.

Becky Aw! I've got to get this dress finished and the stupid sewing machine keeps playing up on me.

Gran You got to know how to use it – go easy on the treadle and talk to it nicely

Becky Don't be silly – what good is talking to a machine?

Gran It don't go wrong for me.

Becky That's because it's almost as old as you and you know how to use it.

Gran If you must know, it's older – and it was second hand when I got it

Becky (Going in) Tell Ma I'll be in the parlour with the stupid machine if she wants me

(Gran knits)

(Enter Billy and Peewee who is holding his knee)

Billy Hi Gran. Where's mom?

Gran She's just gone looking for the two of you. (To Peewee) What've you done to your leg?

Billy He's scraped it

Peewee (Moaning) It hurts

Gran I can see it hurts. I asked you what you'd done to it.

Billy He was climbing trees again and scuffed his knee.

Gran Is it bleeding?

Peewee It feels like it

Gran Let me see – come over here

(She examines it)

It aint nothing but a scratch. Go and rub it with the dishcloth

(They go in)

Kids!

(Ma returns)

Gran You've just missed them – they're all inside – Becky's wrestling with the sewing machine and Billy's gone to tend to Peewee

Ma What's he done?

Gran Scraped his knee but he's moaning like it was broken in three places.

(Ma goes in)

Gran (Reminiscing to herself) It don't seem long since that it was you who was scuffing knees and me doing the nursing.

(She knits a little more)

(Ma begins to usher the three protesting children out onto the porch)

Becky But I haven't finished –

Ma You can finish it later

Peewee I need to lie down

Ma You can lie down when you've heard what I've got to say to you

Gran Are we having a meeting?

Ma You might say

Billy A family meeting?

Ma Yes

Becky What about Pa?

Ma That's what the meeting's about ... now sit down all of you and just listen ... your Pa's not been feeling too well lately, what with all the problems he's got and things going wrong for him –

Billy Like the tractor.

Ma Yes, like the tractor ... and it's my opinion that he's in need of some kind of a pick-me-up

Becky You mean some medicine?

Ma No, I don't mean medicine, I mean a different sort of pick-me-up – he's in need of something to lift his spirits.

Peewee I could tell him one of my jokes

Ma That's kind of you but not quite what I had in mind, Peewee

Peewee It's a real funny one.

Billy Don't bother.

Gran What did you have in mind?

Ma I don't know, I thought that you (indicates all of them) might come up with some ideas.

Billy I could try and be good for a while

Becky You'd find that very difficult

Billy I could lend him my special marble

Ma I'm sure he'd appreciate that, Peewee, but there must be something else, something different we could do

Gran How long is it till his birthday?

Ma Not till October 29th – why?

Gran I know what you could do but you'd have to find some money from somewhere

Becky What's that, Gran?

Gran You could take him to that new-fangled picture show that's on in town.

Becky The talkie! Yes! That's great idea.

Billy Yeah!

Peewee Yeah!

Becky Can we Ma?

Ma I don't know about that... I don't know if we could raise the money for that.

Billy I've got some you could have ... just a minute
(He rushes inside)

Peewee And I've got some in my moneybox
(He too goes in)

Becky I'll go and see what I can find.
(Becky goes in)

Ma Now look what you've started

Gran Well, you did ask for ideas.

Ma Will you be coming with us?

Gran No way. There's no way you're getting me into that truck – but I reckon I might be able to find a few dollars stashed away that you don't know about.

Billy (Running back, gives her some coins) There you go!

Peewee (Coming back with his offering) That's all I got – I thought I had more

Becky I guess you can have this too (Offers money)

Ma But Becky-?

Becky I was saving it to buy new shoes for the speaking contest but I guess I can make do with the old ones.

Ma (To all of them) You are good.

Billy And I'll try and be on my best behaviour but I can't promise.

Becky How're you going to get Pa to go? You know he don't like spending money on pictures – even fancy talking ones

Ma You leave that to me ... and no blabbing about this, do you hear? – this is our secret.

(The lights go down for a scene change but a spot stays on Gran doing her knitting. While the rest are putting on jackets and combing hair for the visit to the picture house, she reminisces to herself)

Gran “Can't fix the tractor” indeed ... I've never heard the like ... when me and Grandpa started in farming all those years back, there wasn't any tractors ... you didn't have any of this trouble with a team of horses ... a horse was pleased to see you in the morning and it learned all the routines of the place ... I never heard of a tractor being pleased to see you ... a horse starts on time in all weathers and keeps going all day without the need for spare parts or gasoline, all it needs is a bit of feed and some water ... and you can use the muck that it produces on the land ... you can control them a lot easier than you can tractors... Grandpa was one of the best horse-ploughers in the state in his day ... won no end of prizes ... he could start a furrow with Major and Trooper and that furrow would stretch into the distance as straight as a die ... I don't know how he did it but he did ... these machines they have today are the cause of all the problems ... dust blowing around everywhere ... it didn't happen in my day ... where's it all going to end? That's what I want to know ...

(**Scene 5 – The same - Later that day-** Lights up again. Pa comes on to sit at the table with Gran. He has on a collar, tie and jacket and is wriggling about, feeling very uncomfortable. Abe sits nearby on the edge of the porch reading his bible)

Gran (To Pa) What the deuce is wrong with you? You're wriggling about like you had ants in your pants.

Pa There aint nothing wrong with me, it's this darned shirt and tie – I aint used to wearing them – it feels like it's cutting me in half.

Gran What's the big occasion?

Pa Mattie says we're going to some church social but I don't recall nobody saying nothing to me about any social.

Gran That's because you don't listen to people

Pa I do but I don't listen to gossip ... How come you aint joining us?

Gran 'Cause I aint travelling in no motor vehicle – they're the devil's work.

Pa They're fine when they're working – it's when they go wrong that's the problem.

Gran Didn't you manage to fix the tractor?

Pa No, me and Abe have taken off every bit we can take off but we still can't get it to work.

Gran If Grandpa had been around he'd have fixed it

Pa Yeah, well he aint

(The children all troop out one after the other grinning at each other and trying hard to keep their secret)

Gran Will you look at this lot – butter wouldn't melt in their mouths

Billy 'You ready Pa?

Pa Sure, I'm ready ... what're you all grinning for?

Becky Nothing. We aren't used to seeing you all dolled up

Pa How long have you known about this church social?

Becky Ages ago – you must be losing your memory (she smiles at the others)

Pa You could be right

(Ma appears)

Ma O.K. Is everybody ship-shape?

Peewee I'm Peewee shaped!

Ma Then lets hit the road – (To Abe) You as well Abe (He is surprised) Yes – come on ... (To Gran) You sure you don't want to come?

Gran I'll be OK – you can tell me all about it when you get back (she grins and winks at Ma)

Ma It's a deal

(They all go off)

Gran (Disdainfully to herself) "Talking pictures" indeed ... never heard the like ... What are they gonna do with the piano player? That's what I want to know.

(Sound of truck doors opening and closing, engine starting up and driving away as Gran waves goodbye to them)

(This is a moment where a large theatre group might be able to back-project part of the film of Al Jolson in "The Jazz Singer" but it's not essential ... we hear music from Jolson)

(The lights come up again to find Gran asleep in her rocking chair. Sound of Pa's truck approaching, doors banging and the kids bursting onto the stage full of energy. They run to wake up Gran and tell her what they've seen, as Ma, Pa and Abe following on behind)

Billy Wake up, Gran

Peewee Are you awake?

Gran Eh? What? I must have dozed off

Becky You should have come with us, Gran, you really should have, it was tremendous

Peewee Better than tremendous

Billy Super-doooper-tremendous!

Pa (To Gran) "Church social" indeed – you knew all about this from the start, didn't you?

Gran And what if I did?

Pa And I bought it - hook, line and sinker

Gran Did you enjoy yourself though, that's the main thing?

Pa Course I did but that's not the point – you told me a lie.

Gran Only a little white one.

Ma Take no notice, Gran, he enjoyed every minute of it.

(The children begin to blurt out the story in their excitement)

Becky You've got to go and see it Gran, you can really hear them talking -

Billy - On the screen

Peewee - Like you was right there with them

Becky - There's this boy who's a good singer

Billy - A Jewish boy

Becky - And his Pa wants him to be a singer in church, like him

Billy - But the boy don't want to

Ma (Correcting him) "Doesn't want to"

Billy - Doesn't want to – and then a man tells the Pa that he's seen his son singing in a saloon

Peewee What's a saloon?

Billy A bar, stupid

Ma Don't call your brother "stupid"

Becky And his Pa gets so mad that he gives the boy a whipping so he won't do it again

Peewee (To Pa) Just like you do to Billy

Pa Only when he deserves it

Becky But the boy doesn't like getting whipped so he runs away

Gran And is that the end?

Billy No, there's lots more yet

Gran I was fearing that

Ma I think you've told Gran enough of the story for now – if you tell her any more it won't be worth her while going.

Pa (To Abe) Did you enjoy it, Abe?

 (Abe nods enthusiastically and grunts)

Pa (Whose spirits have now lifted) I reckon if we're into celebrating, we might as well make a night of it

(He goes towards the house)

Ma Where're you going?

Pa Won't be a sec - me and Abe's going to drink the to the health of
Mister Volstead

Gran (To Ma) Who's Mr Volstead?

Ma The guy who brought in prohibition

Gran You know, I wondered what that smell was out the back.

Becky Why don't we try and show Gran what the movie was like?

Billy Yeah, that's a great idea

Becky (She begins to move the table and chairs) Help me to move these ...
(Becky moves the table and takes a chair down in front of the porch)
You have to sit down here Gran. This is for the audience.

Gran (Moving as she's been told) No rest for the wicked

Peewee We need some light

Billy I'll get a lamp

(Pa comes out with a flagon and some glasses)

Pa What's going on here?

Ma They're putting on a show for us.

Pa We don't have to pay again?

Ma Just sit down and enjoy it

(Pa pours drinks for Abe and himself – the women signal that they
don't want any)

Pa There we go ... here's to Mr Volstead! Here's hoping he's enjoying
himself as much as we are!

(He drinks)

Hey, does anybody want to hear a joke? I got this from a guy in the
picture house ... there's this fellah driving along the road one day after
a sandstorm and he sees this ten gallon hat by the side of the road
resting on the top of a drift... he stops and lifts up the hat and gets the
shock of his life 'cause underneath it there's a head ... so he says to the

head, “Can I give you a lift into town, my friend?” and the head says, “No, thanks, mister - I’m sitting on my horse!”

(They all groan)

Pa And if anybody asks, Abe, you’ve been drinking sarsaparilla

(Abe laughs and nods)

This show sure is taking some preparation.

(Billy comes out with two lamps or torches)

Becky Who’s going to be the boy who sings?

Peewee I will

Billy No, I’ll do it

Peewee You always get the best bits

Ma (Trying to be tactful) Billy, why don’t you let Peewee be the boy this time - you can hold the light – then you do it next time

Billy (resignedly) O.K.

Becky Which bit are you going to do?

Peewee The bit where he starts talking

Billy You sure you can remember it?

Peewee ‘Course I can

Becky (Clears her throat) O.K. Ladies and Gentlemen, we now present for your entertainment Mr. Al Jolson in the first ever talking picture - “The Jazz Singer!”

(Applause from the ‘audience’)

Peewee (Imitating the Jolson scene in the nightclub)
“Wait a minute! Wait a minute! You aint heard nothing yet.
Wait a minute, I tell ya, you aint heard nothin’! Do you want to hear
“Toot, toot, tootsie?”
(The ‘audience’ all answer “Yeah!”)

All right, hold on, hold on.

(Pretends to talk to band conductor)

Lou, listen. play “Toot, toot, tootsie!”

Three choruses you understand. In the third chorus I whistle.

Now give it to 'em hard and heavy. Go right ahead!

(Begins singing)

Toot-toot-tootsie goodbye,
Toot-toot-tootsie don't cry,
That choo-choo train that takes me away from you,
No words can say how sad it makes me,
Kiss me tootsie and then,
Do it over again,
Watch for the mail,
I'll never fail,
If you don't get a letter then you'll know I'm in jail -
Oh, oh, oh -

(While he's singing car headlights lights appear from the side and the sound of engine noise as a car comes hurriedly down the track)

Becky Somebody's coming!

Pa Get rid of the booze!

(Pa quickly takes the evidence into the house)

(Sound of car stopping, car door opening and closing. Enter Cornelius T. Spenk)

Cornelius (Curtly) Good evening folks. I'm sorry to disturb your little get-together but I got some urgent business with Mr Macdonald.

Ma Won't it wait till morning?

Cornelius I'm afraid not ... (To Pa) I need to speak to you in private.

(They go to the side of the stage)

I don't usually come calling at this hour of the night but I've just been told by a friend of mine that you've been seen out in town doing a lot of celebrating

Pa We've been to the movies, if that's what you mean

Cornelius That's exactly what I mean

Pa There aint no law against that. Are you saying that I need your permission now to go to the movies?

Cornelius No, I aint saying that - it's a free country - but it aint quite as straight forward as that, is it? First you're way behind with the rent, then you was going to build a room on the property without asking my

permission and you told me how tight things were for you - I listened to all that, I didn't like what I heard, but I listened – and now people are telling me Joe Macdonald's been seen out in town with his whole family spending money like it's going out of fashion ... just what do you expect me to think?

Pa I didn't know we was going to the movies

Cornelius (Disbelieving) You didn't know? You're asking me to believe that?

Pa As God's my witness. They sprung it on me as a surprise

Cornelius I've had enough of your woolly methods, Macdonald. I reckon that if you got the money to pay for movies, you got the money to pay your rent

Pa It wasn't me that paid, the family scraped it all together

Cornelius So you're saying that you still aint got the money?

Pa No, sir

(Long awkward Pause while Cornelius thinks)

Cornelius I'll tell you what I'm going to do ... I'd just about made up my mind and was thinking of serving you with a notice to quit –

Pa No ?

Cornelius Just hang fire ... I got me another idea

Pa What's that?

Cornelius You can work it off

Pa (Disbelieving) What?

Cornelius The money that you owe me

Pa Doing what?

Cornelius I need some work doing down at the hotel. I got a man off sick and there's a place that needs filling

Pa I don't know about that ...

Cornelius Macdonald, I aint bargaining with you, I'm telling – either you come and work off some of the money that you owe or else you're out of here – which is it to be?

Pa Put that way, I guess I got no choice

Cornelius You got a choice all right

Pa O.K. ... What kind of work did you have in mind?

(Cornelius takes Pa off stage so that we don't hear the end of their discussion)

Becky It looks like Pa's in trouble again

Ma I guess so. Somebody must have seen us going to the movies.

Gran There aint nothing wrong with that

Ma There is if you owe money for the rent

Peewee But it was our money that we used.

Ma Spenk doesn't know that

Billy (Making as if to move) Do you want me to go tell him?

Ma No Billy, Pa can handle it. I think the best thing for us to do would be to just call it a night

All O.K.

(They begin straightening the chairs, etc, then making their way towards the house)

Becky (As she goes in) It was a great movie, Ma. The best time I've had in ages

Billy (He too goes after her) Yeah, just great. Thanks Ma

Peewee (Sings towards her as he goes in) "Mammy, how I love you, how I love you, my dear old Mammy"

Ma Get on with you (Peewee has almost gone when she calls to him)
Peewee - love you too – night, night

(Abe signals he's going to the barn)

Goodnight, Abe. Thanks for all that you've done.

Gran (As she and Ma go in) You don't think they're going to sleep after all that excitement.

Ma Probably not but I don't mind – they haven't had too many happy times lately - one night won't harm them.

(Sounds of children singing in the background “Mammy”)

(Stage lights down)

(Scene 6 - The next day – the farm cockerel crows in the distance for morning as the lights rise)

(Enter Ma with breakfast plates for the table. Pa follows her out fastening his tie)

Ma What time is he coming for you?

Pa I got a few more minutes

Ma Do you have time for breakfast?

Pa Sure

(She puts a bowl down in front of him and goes in for a Pan of porridge oats)

(Abe appears from the barn)

Pa Morning Abe

(He grunts a reply)

Ma Are you joining us for breakfast?

(He does so)

(Becky comes out brushing her hair followed by Billy who's rubbing his tangled mop)

Becky Morning

Pa Morning Becky

Billy Morning, Pa

Ma Morning Billy. How are you?

Billy Peewee kept us awake all night singing silly songs.

Becky (Grumpily) And he remembered every word

(Ma comes back with the Pan and ladle and begins serving out porridge)

Billy (To Pa) Why are you wearing a tie again?

Pa Mr Spenk's asked me to help him out for a while down at the hotel. He's coming to collect me shortly.

Billy Is Abe going with you?

Pa No, I want him to work on fixing the tractor. Is that O.K. with you Abe?

(Abe nods and grunts)

Billy I didn't take you for a hotel sort of person

Pa I aint, but when somebody asks you to do them a favour, Billy, you've got to help them out.

(Ma and Pa exchange a knowing look)

Billy What've you got to do? Is it something important?

Pa (Wanting to keep his self-esteem) You don't think I'd do just any old job? 'Course it's important. The place wouldn't operate without me.

(Billy relaxes, his image of his Pa reassured)

(Sound of a car approaching)

Ma This'll be Mr Spenk now

(Pa gathers his jacket and cap)

(Car stopping and sound of door opening and closing)

Pa I'll see you kids tonight.

(Kisses wife and exits with a wave)

Ma You have a visitor, Billy

(Enter Jeremiah with a dressing on his neck from the minor operation he's had)

Jeremiah Morning

All Morning Jeremiah

Ma How are you feeling after your operation?

Jeremiah It still hurts a bit

Billy Can I take a look?

Ma (Quickly) No, Billy, you can't move the dressing.

Billy Aw!

Peewee Did they put you to sleep or were you awake?

Jeremiah I was sort of awake

Peewee (Amazed) While they cut you?

Jeremiah Sure. They gave me some gas. It didn't hurt too much.

Billy Was there blood everywhere?

Ma (To Billy) I don't think we need to know that, Billy

Becky If it's all right with you, I'm going into town this morning, mom, to take another look in the library.

Ma O.K., love, as long as you're not too late back.

Becky I won't be. See you later

Ma Yes. See you.

 (Becky gets up and heads to the side of the house for her bike)

 (Abe signals that he too has finished, thanks her and gets up to go to fix the tractor)

Ma You finished as well, Abe? All right, we'll see you later. Best of luck with the tractor.

 (He waves to them all and makes his exit towards the fields at the back of the house)

Ma And what are you three going to get up to?

Billy I don't know yet

Ma Whatever it is, just be careful with that dressing – we don't want any accidents ... I've got to go and see to Gran. Is there anything else you want? Have you eaten Jeremiah?

Jeremiah Yes thanks, Mrs Macdonald.

Ma Don't go getting into any mischief ... Billy?

Billy (Resignedly) Yes Ma

Ma Peewee?

Peewee (Resignedly) Yes, Ma

(She goes in)

(As soon as she's gone Jeremiah is bursting to show his friends his war wound)

Jeremiah Do you want to take a look?

Both Yeah!

Jeremiah Just a minute (he fiddles with the dressing and draws it back for them to look)

Billy Yeuk! That's disgusting.

Peewee Horrendous! I think I'm gonna be sick.

Billy And you were awake the whole while they did it?

Jeremiah Sort of.

Billy How come you got it done so quick?

Jeremiah Pa paid for me to go private.

Peewee (To Billy) What does that mean?

Billy You can pay the doctors and jump the queue so you don't have to wait.

Jeremiah So what are we going to do?

Billy Ma said we couldn't do nothing because of your operation.

Jeremiah It doesn't mean we can't do anything, there must be something we can do

Peewee I know – let's play hide and seek

Jeremiah Yeah, that'd be O.K.

Billy Who's going to be "on"?

Peewee It can't be me, 'cause I was on last time.

Jeremiah And it can't be me 'cause I've had an operation.

Billy I guess it's got to be me then.

Jeremiah How many are you gonna count to?

Billy Fifty – and no cheating.

(He goes to the table, which is to act as the base. While Billy puts his head down, the other two go to look for a place to hide. Jeremiah goes off to the side and Peewee looks around for a while, then decides to climb the tree again)

Peewee I know somewhere where they'll never find me.

(He goes behind the scenery and, unknown to the audience, gets clipped onto a safety harness. The audience sees him climbing the tree)

Billy (Continues counting with his eyes covered) Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty! Coming, ready or not!

(He begins to look around for the "hidiers" and after searching he eventually he sees Jeremiah and runs back to base)

Billy Got you!

Jeremiah All you've got to do now is find Peewee.

(Billy begins to look around for him while the audience can see Peewee hiding on the branch high above the stage)

Billy It's only a matter of time Peewee ... (he goes away from the tree to look for him) I'm bound to find you eventually ... You got to be here somewhere....

(As Billy moves further away from the tree Peewee sees his chance to come down but he moves too quickly – we see him run along the branch disappearing behind the scenery and then there is a scream and we hear the sickening thud of what sounds like a body landing [done with a weighted mannequin looking the same and wearing the same clothing by the stage hands from above])

Billy Peewee!(He runs over, as does Jeremiah and kneels over the "body")

Jeremiah Oh my God!

(Ma appears at the door)

Ma What's all the – (she sees Billy bent over the body and immediately rushes over)

Peewee!

(She quickly assesses the seriousness of the situation)

Billy – go get your Pa – tell him we need the doctor here right now!
(Billy dashes off)

(Scene 7 – Outside the local hotel - The lights go down on stage or the front of house curtains close and at the side we then see well-to-do people in thirty's clothing [may be cast, stagehands or extras] coming and going through the front door of a hotel. The doorman, who is in full uniform, has his back to the audience and keeps opening and closing the door for them and touching his cap in deference. We then hear Billy's voice from the back of the auditorium shouting "Pa! Pa!" He appears at the back of the hall and runs through the audience up to the stage to begin questioning the well-to-do people, looking for his Pa)

Billy 'Scuse me – have you seen my Pa? Joe Macdonald? I got to find him ... Pewee's been hurt!

(They shake their heads wondering what this scruffy urchin is doing in their world and they carry on. He ad libs and does this to several people then eventually gets to the doorman who still has his back to us)

Billy (Tapping the doorman on the arm) Excuse me, mister!

(The doorman turns round and we then see that it's actually Joe in full uniform and cap.)

Billy (Unsure) Pa?

(Pa takes off his cap and the two stand briefly opposite each other, both very surprised – after a few seconds, when the audience have had time to take in the picture of the son finding his father doing the subservient role of doorman, there is a total blackout for the end of the first act)

(Music from "The Jazz Singer" for the interval as the houselights rise)