

There's Still Snow on Silver Star -- Audition Sides

HIRAM 1

HIRAM (O.S.)

Confound ya, Delilah! Get in there! Git!

ESSIE

(calling out)

No call shouting at her! Not her fault!

HIRAM storms in.

HIRAM

No call? Durn near sunset! If she ain't walk so Dad-blamed slow--

ESSIE

She's a plowhorse, not a thoroughbred.

HIRAM

Should sell her for glue! Lost her spirit after Samson died, bad cess to her!

ESSIE

Stop cursin' poor Delilah!

HIRAM

Shouldn't have even gone! Whole day wasted.

ESSIE

What did the extension office--

HIRAM

Charcoal rot, they called it. Ain't never heard a such a cussed thing!

ESSIE

What did they say to do?

HIRAM

They tol' me--

Hiram's words are stopped by a violent cough. His breath begins to come in wheezes, as if he can't catch a full breath.

ESSIE

Pa?

The coughs come again. Essie moves over to him.

ESSIE (cont'd)

You got your cigarettes?

(Hiram nods, coughing)

Well, fish 'em out!

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Hiram pulls out a metal tin of medicinal cigarettes and a box of matches. With shaking hands, he lights up and takes a long pull. He regards the cigarette.

HIRAM

Like my pipe better.

ESSIE

Not a matter of what you like. Doc Shoemaker come all the way out from Woodland, bring you those.

HIRAM

Yeah, well, they taste funny.

ESSIE

Better'n bronchial spasms.

HIRAM

Huh.

Hiram takes another drag and flicks the spent match to the ground. Essie runs to the discarded match and grinds it out with her shoe.

ESSIE

It's dry as sticks, you durned fool! Honestly!

HIRAM

(croaking)

It was out!

ESSIE

When's the last time it rained?

HIRAM

But it were already out!

ESSIE

Like to burn the place down.

HIRAM

Fine! Let it! What the extension people said anyhow...

ESSIE

What are you on about?

HIRAM

"Gotta burn it all up," they tol' me. "Kill the..." whatever, whatever. Whole field.

ESSIE

Burn the potatoes? That's their answer?

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HIRAM

Every plant, right down t' the ground. Then plow it deep, rake 'n pile whatever's pulled up, and burn it again.

ESSIE

Huh.

HIRAM

Durn right, "Huh." Won't have a spud to sell. Be eatin' shoe leather and memories by Christmas.

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HIRAM 2

HIRAM

Nothin' doin' but put the place up for sale.

ESSIE

(suddenly forceful)

You will do no such thing!

HIRAM

Ain't you been listenin'? We got no harvest!

ESSIE

Well, we aren't licked. Not yet. Mary McCutcheon said she'd hire me for a spell to teach school once her baby comes. She's due in a less than a month, and I'll earn three doll--

HIRAM

No.

ESSIE

What?

HIRAM

No!

ESSIE

What do you mean, "no?"

HIRAM

Ain't right for a man to lean on his daughter to provide!

ESSIE

Of all the pig-headed--

HIRAM

Won't take your money. Won't do it.

ESSIE

I'm *here*, let me help!

HIRAM

Shouldn't *oughta* be here.

ESSIE

Oh, now you don't want me?

HIRAM

I want you to get on with your life, Ess! Find someplace better like your brothers done.

This is clearly a sore point and something she doesn't want to discuss.

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ESSIE

Pish! I have a bird to pluck.

She returns to the washtub and starts plucking again.

HIRAM

I mean it, girl.

ESSIE

I mean it, too. Meat'll go bad in an hour in this heat, I don't get it under cool water soon.

Silence. Essie plucks. Hiram regards her.

HIRAM

Ninety-eight was four years ago, you know.

ESSIE

I'm aware. Countin's a specialty of mine.

HIRAM

I'm only sayin' it's maybe time. Could start lookin' again.

ESSIE

At *who*? Tell me. Who? Aren't but eight or ten families this whole neck of the woods. Not a lot of eligible men to pick from!

HIRAM

Fred Fargher's wife died last winter.

ESSIE

Fred Fargher is near *your* age!

HIRAM

There's Will Eaton.

ESSIE

You mean *Billy*? He was in knickers not but--

HIRAM

Well, he's growed up now and--

ESSIE

Pa, stop it! I'm not going through that again.

Pause.

HIRAM

Don't have to be love, you know.

ESSIE

What doesn't?

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HIRAM

Marriage. Can be just an agreement 'tween two consenting parties.

ESSIE

How romantic.

HIRAM

Romance ain't a gotta be a part of it, is my point. Better to build a life with someone, than alone.

ESSIE

Oh, so I should just march up to Fred Fargher and slap down a contract?

HIRAM

Don't have to be him. You could...put out an advertisement.

ESSIE

What, in the *paper*?

HIRAM

(shrugs)

Could do.

ESSIE

Is my own father seriously suggesting I become a *mail-order bride*?

HIRAM

Works for some, I hear.

ESSIE

I think I better go pull this poor chicken's guts out, lest I start in on *yours*.

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HIRAM 3

SETTING: A dinner table set for three. A pair of taper candles still glow but have melted considerably. Two settings show evidence of finished meals; one is noticeably untouched. ESSIE enters and immediately blows the candles out.

ESSIE
Left you to watch those lights.

HIRAM
Ain't no harm done.

ESSIE
Till the house burns down.

HIRAM
Let it.

ESSIE
You're in a fine mood.

HIRAM
I'll bust his nose.

ESSIE
Line starts behind me.

They stand a moment in silence.

ESSIE (cont'd)
The Irishman wanted to buy, is what galls me. Did all that legwork to learn about the loan. Came up here to make his offer. Makes no sense he wouldn't show now, at least talk about it.

HIRAM
Huh.

Hiram finds a whiskey bottle and pours himself a large drink.

ESSIE
Last thing you need. You had plenty at dinner.

HIRAM
Leave me be.

(he drinks)
Dark as a tomb in here. At least set a lamp.

Hiram takes the oil lamp and tries to light a match, but the drinks are beginning to take their toll.

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ESSIE

Stop! You'll spill it and burn us up!

HIRAM

Cheap penny matches...

ESSIE

Give it here.

She takes the lamp, sets it on the table, and lights it.

HIRAM

Look so much like your Ma, in that dress.

ESSIE

Pretty little thing...stupid to even wear it. Stupid to think selling to Walsh is any better than letting the bank evict us.

HIRAM

Either way, least there's an end to it.

ESSIE

An end? This is our home!

HIRAM

It's a graveyard, Essie! A home for broken things. What do we got here? A field that's poisoned. A house like to fall down if I don't prop it up year after year. Initials carved into a barn post, remindin' me Jack and Asa ain't comin' back. A bed upstairs, too big by half without my Hattie in it...

(Another gulp of whiskey)

And a daughter flutterin' about me like a bird with a broken wing.

ESSIE

You're drunk.

HIRAM

And you hate me.

ESSIE

I don't.

HIRAM

You do. Bitterness and blame just rolls off you. And why not? It's my fault we've lost the farm. Should 'a known not to risk the loan. Or how to stop the rot. I'm the one should 'a listened to Hattie when she said she...she was...

Hiram downs his liquor in a single gulp and slams the glass onto the table. Essie regards him a moment, then pours another shot for him.

ESSIE

Not your fault. Steamships burn, and crops sometimes wither. Mama took sick so sudden no one could have predicted.

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HIRAM

Should'a given her a better life, 'stead'a makin' her claw this place outta wilderness.

ESSIE

She had no regrets, living here.

Hiram shoves the whiskey away.

HIRAM

She did. On her deathbed. Said she was sorry she couldn't make you a wedding dress.

Essie downs the whiskey in the glass herself.
Winces. She's not accustomed to hard spirits.

ESSIE

Go to bed, Pa. We'll figure out what to do in the morning.

Hiram shuffles out, clearly affected by his drinking.

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JAMIE 1

ESSIE steps out on the front porch with a Winchester rifle, barrel held low. She peers into the darkness.

Who's there?

With the ease of familiarity, she levers a round into the chamber. Slowly, a silhouette slips in around the barn.

JAMIE

Don't shoot. It's Jamie.

ESSIE

Not the most compelling reason to hold my fire.

JAMIE

You're upset.

ESSIE

When a woman extends an dinner invitation, Mister Walsh, she doesn't mean sneak in three hours later.

JAMIE

And I do apologize for that.

ESSIE

Get on out of here. Pa's gone to bed, dinner's long since put away, and you've a fair piece to ride in the dark.

JAMIE

I'm just the buyer here. *You're* the salesman. You're the one tryin' to make a pitch.

ESSIE

A...pitch?

JAMIE

Like in baseball. A pitch is...you put forth your reasons why the customer *should* buy a thing, and if you do well enough...home run.

ESSIE

It's late for games, Mister Walsh. You know what I'm...what *we're* offering you, or you wouldn't have come.

JAMIE

Perhaps I want to hear it from your lips. Pitch me your land, Miss Garner. Make me want to buy it.

ESSIE

I don't play baseball.

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JAMIE

If you won't even come to the mound, I'll simply walk off the field.

ESSIE

You're being ridiculous.

JAMIE

And you're losin' a customer. Pitch.

ESSIE

Alright! Sakes alive. Our homestead is a hundred and sixty acres, with forty cleared for farming and another--

JAMIE

If I didn't know what your product *was*, I wouldn't be sitting here.

ESSIE

Ugh! You are the most frustrating--

(with a sigh)

Fine. A fair value for our land is twenty-five dollars an--

JAMIE

What are you doing, woman?

ESSIE

I'm...pitching!

(Jamie scoffs)

You asked me to sell it to you! I'm telling you the price!

JAMIE

Saints in heaven! Cost is the last thing you mention!

ESSIE

Well, how would I...! I'm not a salesman!

JAMIE

I can see that!

Pause.

ESSIE

All right, Mister Walsh: teach me how to pitch.

JAMIE

For starters, you never start with a price. Or talk of value, or even money. None of it. You don't even start by describin' the product.

ESSIE

What, then? I have to say *something*.

JAMIE

First, you have to make the customer feel they can't live without whatever it is you're selling.

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ESSIE

But what if that's not true?

JAMIE

Oh, it's rarely true at the start. You have to *create* the need.

ESSIE

Pish. A person either has a need or they do not. I can't manufacture that.

JAMIE

Oh, but you can! Show them they have a problem, then show them how what you're sellin' solves it. Then, mention a few superlative qualities your product has, but get the customer to describe it in their own words. To tell *you* why the thing is so good.

ESSIE

I see. Then what?

JAMIE

Then, create a sense of urgency, the notion that if they don't act quick, they'll miss out and forever regret it. And only then, at the very end, do you mention the price. And be ready to walk away if they don't jump at it.

ESSIE

But I want them to buy. Why would I walk away?

JAMIE

Why does a woman flutter her eyes then turn her gaze? Have you never flirted, Esther Garner?

ESSIE

I...yes. Naturally. But it has been...a long time, and I fear I was never very skilled at it.

JAMIE

Oh, I doubt that. To be sure, I'm surprised you're not wed.

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JAMIE 2

ESSIE

How do I know there even *is* a company you work for? This whole affair may be a false pretense!

JAMIE

False pretense? Well, you're a fine pot to be callin' the kettle black!

ESSIE

What?

JAMIE

You invite me to a fine dinner, just to get to know a neighbor?

ESSIE

To talk about the land.

JAMIE

And no other reason in the world, is it?

ESSIE

What other reason could there be?

From his pocket, Jamie pulls out a folded piece of newspaper and slams it on the table.

JAMIE

This! Your friend Kit's not the only one gets the paper!

ESSIE

What is that?

JAMIE

Oh, is it my turn to be after readin'? Very well, then!

(reading the page)

"Yacolt woman seeks husband. A fine girl, smart as paint, works from dawn to dusk. Inquire at the Garner homestead--"

Essie snatches the paper away.

ESSIE

What?!

JAMIE

(from memory)

--No reasonable offer refused."

Essie reads the ad incredulously.

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ESSIE

What? I didn't...

JAMIE

(mockingly)

Oh, I didn't! I didn't! You didn't invite me up here to snare me into a marriage?

ESSIE

That wasn't--!

(a realization)

Pa...

The dam bursts. With a scream of fury, Essie bolts for the bedrooms. Jamie catches her around the waist and spins her away.

ESSIE (cont'd)

Let me go! I've got to talk to Pa!

Jamie manages to get the knife out of her grasp.

JAMIE

Pr'aps not with a knife in your hand!

Essie, now disarmed, wrenches herself out of Jamie's grasp.

ESSIE

Offering me at market like a prize mare!

JAMIE

I'm sure he meant well--

ESSIE

"Smart as paint?" That's how he describes his daughter?

JAMIE

No harm done. No one even answered the ad.

That did not make things better.

JAMIE (cont'd)

No! I didn't mean it like that! I meant--

ESSIE

Stop talking, Mister Walsh.

JAMIE

Ah, Essie, I don't mean to shame ya...even if it 'twas your Da's idea. There's nothing wrong in the world with wantin' to wed.

ESSIE

Do *you* want to get married?

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JAMIE

Is that a proposal?

Jamie smiles. Essie realizes what she's said.

ESSIE

I...I only mean...

JAMIE

(reassuringly)

'Twas but a jest. I took your meanin'.

(pause)

To be earnest, I don't often think of marriage one way or t'other. Too busy movin' about, surveyin' the land, buyin' an' sellin'--

ESSIE

--showing up late to dinner.

JAMIE

And showing up late to dinners, aye. Critical part o' the job, don't ya know...

A moment of connection through humor. Then Jamie moves to tend the stove and speaks without looking at Essie.

JAMIE (cont'd)

...but there are nights...when the world's gone still, and the fire's burnt low, and I'm lyin' alone in my bed...that I do wish for a girl beside me.

ESSIE

What is it about marriage that appeals to you?

JAMIE

Have you ever been at a crowded party and seen the look a husband and wife share when they spy each other across the room? Or that moment when he takes her hand to help her climb into a coach an' she glances up at him? When I see that...I want it. I want what they have. It makes me angry...jealous, even...for what I don't yet possess. A husband and wife look at each other in a way they look at no one else. And when their eyes meet...why, it's a secret passes between them.

ESSIE

A secret?

JAMIE

Aye. They share something others'll never know. For all the broadcloth and taffeta and silk hats and parasols, they see each other without all of that. It's like a bit o' witchcraft.

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JAMIE 3

JAMIE

You just asked me to buy it, woman! What do you mean “no?”

ESSIE

You’ve already admitted that price is robbery. So let me add an additional cost to ease your conscience. I want the schoolhouse and the acre around it thrown in.

JAMIE

Very well: I accept.

ESSIE

Then it’s a--

JAMIE

Not so fast. You see, I’m a shrewd negotiator, too. And since we’re bargainin’, there’s somethin’ else I’d ask from your Da.

ESSIE

More? He’s given you our home! What else could he possibly offer you, Jamie?

JAMIE

Yourself, Esther Garner.

ESSIE

Me?

JAMIE

That dream you pitched me, it included a wife to come home to.

ESSIE

So it did.

JAMIE

And you see, between the time I saw you last week and our meetin’ tonight, I saw a certain advertisement in the paper...

ESSIE

You said you brought it as a curiosity!

JAMIE

Aye: curious because it confirmed you were single. I took a fancy to you the moment I saw you.

ESSIE

No. You saw me in the heat of the day when I was up to my elbows in chicken guts! Hardly a Venus rising from the waters.

JAMIE

Lovely still for all that. And look how you clean up.

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ESSIE

Don't say such things. I'm not a schoolgirl in pigtails you need flatter.

JAMIE

How can it be flattery if I mean it?

ESSIE

Pish. I know I'm nothing special.

JAMIE

You think I am? I'm not. *We're* not special, and that's the point, Essie. We die tomorrow, no one notices, no one barely sheds a tear. But you're a person could see me, and I you. Through the ups and downs, the big moments and the quiet ones. To bear witness to a life lived together. Does that not appeal to you, even a trifle?

Essie takes a step back.

ESSIE

What if...if you don't like what you see?

JAMIE

But what if I do? What if I fall madly in love with what I'm lookin' at?

ESSIE

I don't...I hadn't...

She steps back again.

JAMIE

This far, Essie. This far and no further.

ESSIE

What?

JAMIE

Each step I take, you answer with one back. Well, here I plant my feet.

A long moment passes between them. Slowly, Essie returns to Jamie until they stand very close.

ESSIE

Can I ask you something?

JAMIE

No harm in a question.

ESSIE

James Patrick Walsh, will you marry me?

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KIT 1

KIT

(to Jamie)

Very polite of you, Mister Walsh!

They turn away from Jamie.

ESSIE

Polite doesn't mean he's not still evil.

KIT

'Course not...easy on the eyes, though.

Essie regards Jamie thoughtfully.

ESSIE

Huh.

KIT

Essie...what are you schemin'?

ESSIE

What? Nothing!

KIT

You're up to somethin'.

ESSIE

Am not.

KIT

Are. You make that face.

ESSIE

What face?

(Kit demonstrates)

I do not!

KIT

You never see yourself. What are you plottin', Essie?

ESSIE

I don't think I should say.

KIT

I'm your best friend. Have to tell me. It's practically a law.

ESSIE

You won't like it.

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KIT

I ain't budging. I'm as stubborn as you are...

ESSIE

...and twice as mean.

KIT

...and twice as mean.

ESSIE

Look. I think I know a way to keep our place, pay off Pa's loan, *and* get the school back.

KIT

Sakes alive! How?

ESSIE

By remembering my Jane Austen.

KIT

Everything's so clear now. The world is saved.

ESSIE

Do you recall the first line of *Pride and Prejudice*?

KIT

I'm guessin' it ain't "Once upon a time?" Go on, tell me, I know you're dyin' to.

ESSIE

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

(Kit still isn't getting it)

Don't you see? All I have to do is marry Jamie Walsh.

KIT

MARRY HIM? Have you lost all Sense and Sensibility?

ESSIE

It makes perfect sense! If Walsh buys the land, we can pay off the loan. Then when he marries me, the farm stays in the family. We'll have this house to live in so he won't need the school and we'll be able to give it back to Mary. Three birds, one stone.

KIT

You'd wed him just to keep the farm?

ESSIE

Why not? *Men* have married for land and titles since King Arthur!

KIT

But you don't know this Irishman from Adam!

ESSIE

'Course I don't. But he's rich, he's handsome, and he solves all my problems.

KIT

So it's that easy?

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ESSIE

No, it's not *easy*. I have to convince him to marry me! Now are you going to help or not?

KIT

This is a horrible plan, Esther Garner, and it's gonna end awful...so of course I'll help you!
Now come on.

They exit into the house.

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KIT 2

ESSIE

Wish Pa and Jamie were back.

KIT

They'll be here when they get here. Won't see 'em tonight, anyhow.

ESSIE

He said they might.

KIT

It's thirty miles to Vancouver, twice that back. You think Delilah's still got sixty-mile days in her?

ESSIE

Not many.

KIT

So, tomorrow. Meantime, we get a girls' night for weddin' dresses an' whiskey! Now spin. Spin!
(Essie twirls in the dress.)
You sure you don't want my Ma to make a dress for you?

ESSIE

Why? This is beautiful!

KIT

I don't know...no one does sleeves like that no more.

ESSIE

You don't like it?

KIT

Of course I like it! It was *my* dress! It's just...years out of style, is all.

ESSIE

Don't need to be Beau Brummell. It'll just be a private little ceremony.

KIT

Your Ma's is so classic, though. You sure it don't fit?

ESSIE

Not in my tightest corset! She was skinny as a split rail! In yours I at least have some freedom.

KIT

Aaah! May as well up-and-call-me a plump dairymaid! You owe me a shot for that.

ESSIE

Pish.

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KIT

Don't "pish" me! Where's the booze?

Essie gets a whiskey bottle and two glasses.

KIT (cont'd)

(raising a glass)

To weddings.

ESSIE

And to friends who loan bridal dresses at a moment's notice.

KIT

Does look good on you.

They drink. Essie sips while Kit shoots.

ESSIE

How do you gulp it like that? I could never--

KIT

Hold the glass against your lip.

ESSIE

What?

KIT

I'm teaching you. Hold it against your bottom lip. Now breathe. When I say go, you're gonna open your mouth and tip your head back fast. Don't move the glass, just let it pour right in. Then swallow before you have a chance to think. Ready? Go!

Essie shoots the remainder of the whiskey. Her eyes go wide and she coughs a bit. Kit laughs.

ESSIE

Ooo. That burns...

KIT

School is in session.

(pause)

You think you'll ever teach again?

ESSIE

Won't need to, once the land's all settled.

KIT

Ain't a matter of need. What do you *want*? This is your chance to get free of this place!

ESSIE

You think leaving makes me free? Tearing off pieces of me and leaving them behind?

KIT

What pieces? You got no ties to--

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ESSIE

See that stove? I learned how to cook on that very stove. I watched Pa make this table, hiding it under canvas in the barn so he could surprise Momma with it come Christmas. How many summer days did you and me and Asa play in these woods?

KIT

Forest pirates!

ESSIE

Forest pirates...

KIT

And his stick sword with the tin-can hilt...

ESSIE

All of it. This place isn't holding me down. It's who I *am*.

KIT

I just meant...maybe losin' the place could be an opportunity, is all. Maybe it's Fate tellin' you to get back out into the world.

ESSIE

I've been out in the world, and it kicked me in the teeth.

KIT

I know, darlin'.

(She pours another round.)

To Harrison.

ESSIE

Harrison.

They both shoot the whiskey.

KIT

See? You're a natural!

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KIT 3

ESSIE
Kittie, something's wrong.

KIT
It's...Frank. Well, me and Frank. He and I, we ain't...

Kit falls silent.

ESSIE
Aren't what? Getting along?

KIT
In love no more.

ESSIE
Pish. That's the whiskey talkin'.

KIT
It ain't, though...

ESSIE
What happened? You have a fight?

KIT
No, not a bit. Not mad at him, or nothin', or he at me.

ESSIE
Then what?

KIT
Cain't tell ya what. I look at him, I don't feel...not one damn thing. He could be any feller on the street. An' I can see him lookin' back at me the same way.

ESSIE
Does he...treat you bad?

KIT
Never hit me, don't yell much. Always provides for us, and faithful as a hound dog.

ESSIE
You see? He does love you. He's doing the things that love does.

KIT
He's only doing what's he's got to, to honor his weddin' vows. And it's awful.

ESSIE
No one said *any* marriage is a cakewalk. But you both *wanted* to be wed. You just need some time to remember why.

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KIT

I 'member bein' scared to go off on my own. I remember latchin' onto the boy with the soft eyes and broad shoulders who stood to inherit the biggest dairy in the county.

ESSIE

Nothing wrong with that. At least it's security.

KIT

Security's not love. Ain't no more than a business deal.

ESSIE

Well, then we can commiserate our contract marriages together.

KIT

But if marriage is a contract, what happens when I can't hold up my end of the bargain?

ESSIE

What...what do you mean?

KIT

I mean I've kindled two babes for Frank and got no young-uns to show for it.

ESSIE

That's not your fault!

KIT

'S what Frank said too, after the first one come out stilled. "You'll be all right, Kittie, we'll have more..." Then last year...well, you saw the second...

ESSIE

Rosemary was a little angel.

KIT

That Heaven only lent me three days.

ESSIE

I know...

KIT

What you cain't know was the look Frank gave me, like I was broken. You know he didn't even make the coffin? Had to use my best picnic basket to bury her in.

ESSIE

Is that when...things changed?

KIT

I don't know. I was in a bad way after that--well, you 'member. By the time I could lift my head again, Frank and me were...the way we are.

ESSIE

Oh, Katherine, I am so--

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KIT

No...don't want your pity! But neither do I wish a contract marriage on you! Don't want you walkin' in my shoes.

ESSIE

Good, because they really don't go with this dress...

KIT

It were a simile, you nincompoop!

ESSIE

It was a *metaphor*, actually.

KIT

Schoolmarm.

ESSIE

Dunce.

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ENSEMBLE 1

We hear far-off HOOF BEATS. Hiram re-enters and looks into the distance to find the source of the sound.

HIRAM

(calling to the house)

Essie! Someone's coming down the road! We know anyone rides a big blue roan?

(to himself)

Nice gait on her, too.

ESSIE

(seeing the visitor approach)

Who is he?

KIT

Who cares? Look at him...

ESSIE

Pa?

HIRAM

Dunno. Ne'er seen him afore. Fancy for this weather, too.

(calling out)

Just tie her by the rail there, where she can get at the trough!

They wait and watch in silence.

JAMIE strides in. This is a man who could sell water to a fish. Kit smiles. Essie unconsciously smooths her hair.

JAMIE

God save you all and a fine day to you!

KIT

Afternoon.

JAMIE

Might I be addressing Mister W. H. Garner and his lovely...daughters?

HIRAM

Who's askin'?

JAMIE

Well, my father named me James Patrick Walsh, but only my mother calls me that, and then only when I've sinned. To everyone else, I'm simply Jamie.

KIT

An Irishman...

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JAMIE

By blood and brogue only. My parents were from County Cork, but I'm a natural-born American and proud of it.

HIRAM

You ain't here 'cause...the paper? Already?

JAMIE

The...paper?

KIT

You're a newspaperman?

ESSIE

Now what would a reporter want with us? More likely, he's a traveling salesman.

JAMIE

Oh, not traveling anymore, Miss. Aren't I after buyin' a place not two months past? Right here in Yacolt.

HIRAM

In where?

JAMIE

Yacolt...the town...where you live too?

HIRAM

We live in Garner.

ESSIE

(to Hiram)

Can you not make trouble?

JAMIE

The town's named Yacolt. I'm not mistaken.

HIRAM

It's *Garner*. I should know: I'm Hiram Garner. Ran the post office here for eight years 'til the consarned U-S-P-S made me close mine down. Said Joe Eaton opened his Yacolt mail drop a year afore mine, which he most assuredly did not!

JAMIE

And a crying shame if he did! 'Garner' rolls off the tongue mickle more smooth and free than any 'Yacolt!'

HIRAM

Cain't argue with that.

JAMIE

Well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Hiram. And this lovely creature is...?

KIT

Katherine Ann Cole. From Cole's Dairy Farm. But soon I'll prob'ly let you call me Kit.

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JAMIE

I await that day with trembling anticipation, Katherine Ann Cole of Cole's Dairy.

Kit flashes him a dazzling smile.

HIRAM

Now this here is--

ESSIE

Esther Garner. His full-grown daughter who can speak for herself.

JAMIE

Enchanted to meet you, Miss Garner. If it is *Miss* Garner?

KIT

Oh, it certainly is...

ESSIE

What can we do for you, Mister Walsh?

JAMIE

Well, you can start by callin' me Jamie.

ESSIE

I don't think just yet.

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ENSEMBLE 2

Jamie dashes to the house and bursts in the front door.

JAMIE

(shouting)

Esther! There's a fire! A bad one. Jumped the Columbia at Cascade Locks and--

ESSIE

The fire crossed the *Columbia River*?

KIT

We gotta run! Now!

JAMIE

(sharply)

Katherine!

(Kit is startled silent)

We have a little time. Not much, to be sure, but some. But only if we keep our wits about us. Now, can you help Esther pack? Can you do that?

(Kit nods)

All right. I need to see to my horse. She's had a long day, an' it might be a longer night.

Hiram enters, coughing.

JAMIE (cont'd)

Hiram? Praise the saints! You made it. Are you all right there?

HIRAM

Saw Jim McCutcheon...he saw the flames comin', said they were near three hunderd feet high.

JAMIE

Jesus, Mary and Joseph...the end of the bloody world.

HIRAM

Most folks is headin' for the crick, to hunker down an' shelter in the water.

JAMIE

An' why do they s'pose that'll save 'em? This fire is--

HIRAM

(suddenly)

What do you expect us to do, young'un?! Give up an' die? We're tryin' to live through this thing the only way we--

Essie and Kit run out of the house.

ESSIE

Pa? Pa!

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HIRAM

I'm alright, darlin', I'm alright.

KIT

Mister Garner? Did Frank come with you?

HIRAM

I stopped by the dairy, but I missed him. Charlie Landon said Frank and his folks took out on horses, headed south to Camas or some such.

KIT

Without me?

HIRAM

Prob'ly thought there weren't time to fetch you. Lotta folk buried their valuables, ran as best they could. Us too. We're gonna head to--

ESSIE

We're leaving?

HIRAM

'Course we're leavin'! What else?

ESSIE

Staying! Staying in our home, that's what else!

HIRAM

Fire don't give a damn, our home! Feel that breeze? Wind don't blow east to west here, Essie, you know that. That's the fire's doin'. It's comin' right through here, blowin' ash and cinder ahead and settin' everything a-light. It'll be God's own mercy we 'scape with our lives.

ESSIE

No...no...no. We've got a good clear area 'round the house here and--

HIRAM

For God's sake, just do what I say, for once! Get your things to the wagon!

ESSIE

The fire won't come here. It can't.

JAMIE

How d'ye figure? The thing is miles wide and blowin' right toward us!

ESSIE

This is my home! It was going to be our home!

JAMIE

But if we run and live--

ESSIE

I'm tired of running, Harrison!

Pause.

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JAMIE

It's Jamie.

ESSIE

Go if you want to. This place is all I have left, and if the fire wants me...then I'm deciding where to meet it. Right here. On Garner land. I'll see you soon, Pa.

HIRAM

You get in that wagon *now!*

ESSIE

I'm not a child anymore! You can't order me around!

HIRAM

You are gonna be the death of me! Ain't the time for your cont--
(violent coughing)

...contrary--

(more coughs)

...you are as stubborn as your mother!

ESSIE

And twice as mean! And that's from you.

HIRAM

(a burst of energy)

Fine! Then *I'm* stayin'! We'll *all* stay an' burn! If you say "fight," girl, then let's stay an'--

Coughs interrupt him. Essie comes near.

ESSIE

No. I won't be the death of you, Pa. Not today, not ever.

HIRAM

Esther Elizabeth...

ESSIE

Please. Go.

Hiram starts to protest once more, but coughs get the better of him. With effort, he controls his breathing.

HIRAM

Hattie would be so proud of you. God be with you, daughter.

(to Kit)

Come on, girl.

Hiram exits into the barn.

ESSIE

Kit, I need you to take care of him. You drive the wagon: he's in no shape.

KIT

I can do it.

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I know. ESSIE

You're my best friend in all the world. KIT

And I'll see you when all this is over. ESSIE

That a promise? KIT

Promise. ESSIE