# The Spitfire Grill

## A Musical

Music and Book by
**James Valcq**

Lyrics and Book by
**Fred Alley**

Based on the Film by
**Lee David Zlotoff**

Playwrights Horizons, New York City,
Produced the New York Premiere of *The Spitfire Grill*
Off-Broadway in 2001

*The Spitfire Grill* received its World Premiere production
by George Street Playhouse on November 5, 2000
David Saint, Artistic Director / Michael Stotts, Managing Director

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 2001 by James Valcq and Fred Alley (as an unpublished work)
Copyright © 2002 by James Valcq and the Estate of Fred Alley

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *THE SPITFIRE GRILL* is subject to a Licensing Fee. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur live stage performance rights to *THE SPITFIRE GRILL* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and licensing arrangements and performance licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur Licensing Fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a licensing quotation and a performance license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Licensing Fees are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Licensing Fee of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Stock licensing fees quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: Paradigm LA, 360 Park Ave South, 16th Floor, New York, NY, 10010.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

**RENTAL MATERIALS**

An orchestration consisting of **Piano/Vocal Score, Cello, Violin, Accordian, Guitar/Mandolin and 6 Vocal Chorus books** will be loaned two months prior to the production ONLY on the receipt of the Licensing Fee quoted for all performances, the rental fee and a refundable deposit.

Please contact Samuel French for perusal of the music materials as well as a performance license application.

| |
|---|
| No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired. |
| No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production. |
| Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. |
| No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. |

ISBN 978-0-573-69930-8 Printed in U.S.A. #21469

**IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS**

**All producers of THE SPITFIRE GRILL *must* give credit to the Authors of the Work in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Work, and in all instances in which the title of the Work appears for the purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting a production thereof, including, without limitation, programs, souvenir books and playbills. The names of the Authors must appear on a separate line in which no other matter appears, immediately following the title of the Work, and *must* be in size of type not less than 50% of the size used for the title of the Work.**

**In addition, the producers of the world and New York premieres must receive credit in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the work in size of type not less than 35% of the size used for the authors of the Work.**

**Billing *must* be substantially as follows:**

**(NAME OF PRODUCER)**

**Presents**

# THE SPITFIRE GRILL

**Music & Book by JAMES VALCQ**

**Lyrics & Book by FRED ALLEY**

**Based on the Film by LEE DAVID ZLOTOFF**

**Playwrights Horizons, New York City, Produced the New York Premiere of *The Spitfire Grill* Off-Broadway in 2001**

***The Spitfire Grill* received its World Premiere production by the George Street Playhouse on November 5, 2000 David Saint, Artistic Director / Michael Stotts, Managing Director**

## CHARACTERS

PERCY TALBOTT Early 20's. Pretty, if a bit rough-edged, her face declares the strength of her youth and a sadness beyond her years. Her accent has a southern Appalachian cadence. Strong folk/ country belt to 'D', some head voice required.

HANNAH FERGUSON About 70. A tough-skinned and flinty old bird with a short, no-nonsense manner bordering on the bitter. Mezzo/alto chest range.

SHELBY THORPE Mid-30's. A plain, soft-faced creature with a shy, almost ethereal manner. Shimmering folk soprano with strong high belt to 'D'.

CALEB THORPE Early 40's. Out-of-work foreman of the stone quarry. Frustrated working man clinging to the past. Solid folk/ rock voice with an edge (Top 'G')

SHERIFF JOE SUTTER Mid-late 20's. A young small-town policeman with an appealing intensity and a restless nature. Strong folk tenor to a 'G' (touches an 'A').

EFFY KRAYNECK 50's. Postmistress and busybody, a woman with narrow eyes and a sour tongue. Solid singer in mezzo/alto chest range. (Carries close harmony.)

THE VISITOR Mid-40's. A mysterious figure who never speaks. An actor with powerful eyes and a very strong sense of his body.

## NOTE

All characters (besides Percy) speak in 'standard Mid-western' speech, without 'countrified' intonations.

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### ACT I

| | |
|---|---|
| *A Ring Around the Moon* | Percy |
| *Something's Cooking at the Spitfire Grill* | Company |
| *Out of the Frying Pan* | Percy |
| *When Hope Goes* | Shelby |
| *Ice and Snow* | Caleb, Joe and Effy |
| *The Colors of Paradise* | Percy and Shelby |
| *Digging Stone* | Caleb |
| *This Wide Woods* | Joe and Percy |
| *Forgotten Lullaby* | Hannah |
| *Shoot the Moon* | Hannah and Company |

### ACT TWO

| | |
|---|---|
| *Come Alive Again* | Hannah and Company |
| *Forest for the Trees* | Joe |
| *Wild Bird* | Shelby |
| *Shine* | Percy |
| *Way Back Home* | Hannah |
| *Finale* | Company |

**THE SPITFIRE GRILL**
*is recipient of the*
**2001 RICHARD RODGERS PRODUCTION AWARD**
*Administered by the*
*American Academy of Arts and Letters*

# ACT I

## Scene 1

*SCENE: Montage — Taycheedah Prison / Trailways bus / Town of Gilead / The Spitfire Grill. February.*
*AT RISE: Stage to black. A prison bell harshly rings. There are three sharp metallic clangs and then silence. In the darkness, a VOICE is heard singing a cappella. A soft beam of light slowly illuminates PERCY's face.*

**PERCY.**
OUTSIDE IN THE NIGHT
THERE'S A RING AROUND THE MOON.
THE WIND SINGS IN BARBED WIRE,
I'VE LISTENED TO THE TUNE
WHAT SEEMS LIKE FIFTY YEARS,
OR MAYBE IT WAS FIVE.
IT'S HARD TO COUNT THE DAYS
WHEN YOU'RE BURIED ALIVE.

*(The light expands revealing that PERCY is behind prison bars.)*

OUTSIDE OF THESE WALLS
IS A BIGGER WORLD THAN ME.
I HAD NOWHERE TO HIDE
THE LAST TIME I WAS FREE.
I'VE CIRCLED ON THE MAP
A PLACE TO START AGAIN,
A TOWN CALLED GILEAD,
CLOSE MY EYES AND COUNT TO TEN.

AND IT'S ONE-ONE THOUSAND TWO
THREE-ONE THOUSAND FOUR
FIVE-ONE THOUSAND
SIX-ONE THOUSAND
SEVEN-ONE THOUSAND MORE.
EIGHT-ONE THOUSAND NINE
NINE-ONE THOUSAND TEN.
FIVE YEARS SEEMED LIKE FIFTY
NOW IT'S TIME TO START AGAIN.

*(The prison bars swing open and PERCY steps out.)*

RING AROUND THE MOON,
BIGGER WORLD THAN ME.
READY OR NOT, HERE I GO,
OLLY OLLY OXEN FREE...
OLLY OLLY OXEN FREE.

*(PERCY changes her prisoner's jacket for a plain coat and scarf. Clutching a small suitcase, she crosses downstage.)*

TWO STEPS FOLLOW ONE,
ONE STEP FOLLOWS TWO.
A TICKET IN MY HAND,
A BUS TO SOMEWHERE NEW.
A CIRCLE ON A MAP,
COUNT THE MILES TO GO
ON THE ROAD TO GILEAD
DOWN A HIGHWAY I DON'T KNOW.

IT'S ONE MILE TURNIN' TWO,
THREE MILES TURNS TO FOUR,
FIVE MILES TURNS TO FIFTY
THEN A HUNDRED MILES MORE.
BUS ROLLS TO A STOP,
DRIVER TURNS TO ME,
'THIS IS GILEAD...
WHAT THERE IS IS WHAT YOU SEE.'

A RING AROUND THE MOON,
BIGGER WORLD THAN ME.
READY OR NOT, HERE I COME,
OLLY OLLY OXEN FREE...

*(Lights reveal SHERIFF JOE SUTTER. He flips through documents in a file. PERCY crosses to him. Music continues under.)*

**JOE.** So — Perchance Talbott. Perchance. What kinda name is that?

**PERCY.** Percy'll do. Warden Halverson said he was gonna call.

**JOE.** Yeah, sure, I got a call from the prison. But to be honest, Miss Talbott, if the bus hadn't left, I'da put you back on it.

**PERCY.** Somethin' wrong with this place?

**JOE.** Cripes, look around you. Gilead's a ghost town. There's



nothing here.

**PERCY.** The warden said that —

**JOE.** I really don't care what the warden said, Miss Talbott. He's not the one freezing his ass off at this bus stop, now is he?

**PERCY.** No sir.

**JOE.** So why Gilead? *(PERCY is silent.)* Miss Talbott, it's my job to know why you're here ... okay?

*(PERCY hesitantly reaches into an inside pocket and hands him a carefully folded piece of paper)*

**PERCY.** Well, sir, I ... cut this picture from an old travel book someone donated at the prison.

**JOE.** *(Reads picture caption.)* "Autumn colors along Copper Creek near Gilead, Wisconsin." *(Hands picture back to her.)* You're a little late.

**PERCY.** Creek ain't dried up has it?

**JOE.** It's frozen. And the fall colors are long gone.

**PERCY.** *(Not very sure of herself.)* I hope to be here when they come back.

**JOE.** Yep, well, in the meantime I don't know what the hell I'm gonna do with you. *(Looks around as if for an answer. Tries to sip his coffee.)* Damn ... my coffee's cold. Grab your suitcase.

*(HE leads PERCY along, describing the town to her although we don't hear his words. Instead, we hear PERCY's concerns.)*

**PERCY.**
BEHIND THE WINDOW GLASS
THERE ARE FACES I CAN'T SEE.
I FEEL THEM AS WE PASS,
PEEKIN' OUT TO STARE AT ME
ALONG THE SILENT STREETS
THROUGH A CURTAIN OF NEW SNOW,
IN THE TOWN OF GILEAD...

**JOE.** Good. There's a light on over at the Spitfire.

**PERCY.** The Spitfire?

**JOE.** It's your best chance for a job, and apart from the local jail it's the only guest room in town. Looks like Hannah's burning the midnight oil.

*(Music swells as the Spitfire is revealed. We see HANNAH FERGUSON, a gray-haired old woman of about seventy years*

*with a toughness that belies her age, carrying a lantern and a wrapped-up loaf of bread out back of the Grill. She sets the bread beside a large stump. HANNAH drives an ax into the stump, leaving it there with its long handle poised in the air. For a moment, she gazes out toward the deep wood, then turns to gather a few sticks of fire wood to carry back into the Grill. JOE and PERCY arrive at the front porch of the Spitfire.)*

**JOE.** *(Entering the Grill and heading for the back porch.)* Hannah? Hannah, I saw the light. You still up?

**HANNAH.** No.

**JOE.** I didn't think so. Here, let me help you with that wood.

*(Lights focus on PERCY sitting in the Grill trying to warm her frozen hands, looking at her bleak surroundings and realizing the bus driver may have been right.)*

**PERCY.**
*THIS* IS GILEAD...
WHAT THERE IS IS WHAT YOU SEE.
A RING AROUND THE MOON,
BIGGER WORLD THAN ME —

*(Crossfade back to HANNAH and JOE.)*

**JOE.** You know, Hannah, with your bad hip and that, you could use a waitress this winter.

**HANNAH.** Another body in here won't cure my hip, Joe.

**JOE.** You need some help, Hannah. I mean, this firewood's not gonna walk in by itself. And anyway, you'd be doing me a favor.

**HANNAH.** *(Going into the Grill.)* I don't owe you a favor.

**JOE.** *(Following HANNAH.)* Come on, Hannah. If you wind up in the hospital, who's gonna make my breakfast?

**HANNAH.** *(Looking over to where PERCY sits and shaking her head.)* I took in a stray dog once and I had to replace all my carpets.

**JOE.** I betcha Miss Talbott here is housebroken.

**HANNAH.** Just so you know, I'm not making any promises.

**JOE.** *(Turning to PERCY.)* Miss Talbott . . . *(PERCY crosses in.)* Miss Talbott, this is Hannah Ferguson. *(PERCY and HANNAH take each other in but don't speak. JOE breaks the silence.)* Well, looks like you're all set. Thanks Hannah, now I owe *you* a favor.

**HANNAH.** It's always nice to have the law on your side.

**JOE.** Miss Talbott.



*(JOE exits. HANNAH leads PERCY through the Grill.)*

**HANNAH.** Bathroom's at the end of the hall and there's plenty of hot water but not if you dawdle when you're washing. There's extra blankets in the cedar chest. I give you breakfast at six. Work starts at six-thirty sharp. Anything else you need to know will keep till then.

*(Without so much as a 'goodnight,' HANNAH disappears, leaving PERCY alone, taking in her spartan surroundings.)*

**PERCY.**
A DARK AND NARROW HALL,
AND THROUGH THE DOOR I FIND
THE SAME COLD EMPTY WALLS
I THOUGHT I LEFT BEHIND.

*(The music shimmers as PERCY 'sees' the window.)*

A WINDOW WITHOUT BARS,
LOOKIN' OUT ON SOMETHIN' FREE...
IN THE TOWN OF GILEAD
CLOSE MY EYES AND COUNT TO THREE

*(PERCY reaches her hand out the window into the cold night air.)*

AND THERE'S A RING AROUND THE MOON,
BIGGER WORLD THAN ME,
READY OR NOT, HERE I AM,
OLLY OLLY OXEN
FREE...

*(Fade out.)*

## Scene 2

*SCENE: The Grill, next morning.*
*AT RISE: Lights up on HANNAH barking orders to PERCY.*

**HANNAH.** Percy, there's onions in the cellar that need to come up! And boil some water for oatmeal!

*(A small bell rings on the Spitfire's front door as JOE enters.)*

**PERCY.** Yes, ma'am.
**HANNAH.** And get the Sheriff some coffee. Morning, Joe.
**JOE.** Hannah.
**HANNAH.** Percy, these potatoes won't peel themselves. *(The bell rings as CALEB enters.)* Well, look what the cat dragged in.
**CALEB.** Morning, Aunt Hannah.
**HANNAH.** It is. *(Goes back in the kitchen to PERCY who has plugged a cigarette in her mouth. HANNAH grabs PERCY's arm.)* And I don't want you smoking in my kitchen.
**PERCY.** *(With hair-trigger intensity.)* Don't *grab* at me, old woman!

*(She pulls free.)*

**HANNAH.** *(Sharply.)* You watch yourself or I'll put you out on the street like *that*! *(Snaps her fingers.)*
**PERCY.** *(More riled.)* You tell me what to do and I'll do it, but don't you *never* grab at me!!

**HANNAH.** *(Realizing she may have a wild animal on her hands.)*
SMART-MOUTHED GIRL
FRESH OUTA JAIL,
CAN'T TELL A SKILLET
FROM A GARBAGE PAIL.

KEEP IN YOUR PLACE.
THIS PLACE IS MINE.
MIND YOUR OWN BUS'NESS
AND WE'LL GET ALONG FINE.

TWENTY-ODD YEARS
THE HELP COMES AND GOES.
WHO THE HELL CARES?
WHO THE HELL KNOWS

WHO WIPED OFF THE TABLES
AND STRAIGHTENED THE CHAIRS?
WHO THE HELL KNOWS
AND WHO THE HELL CARES?

*(The bell rings and EFFY enters, takes in PERCY and crosses to HANNAH.)*



**EFFY.** Morning, Hannah.
**HANNAH.** Aren't you the early bird today, Effy?
**EFFY.** Thought you might need something from the store.
**HANNAH.** Well, I don't. And her name is Percy. Happy now?

**EFFY.** *(Conspiratorially; to HANNAH.)*
I HEAR SHE APPEARED ON THE STREET LAST NIGHT
RIGHT AT THE MIDNIGHT BELL.
**HANNAH.**
I THINK YOU READ TOO MANY
OF THE TABLOIDS THAT YOU SELL.
**EFFY.**
I HEAR PEOPLE TALK ALL OVER TOWN;
I THOUGHT THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW.
**HANNAH.**
NICE TO SEE YOU'RE SO CONCERNED,
NOW TAKE A SEAT OR GO!

Imagine, gossip in Gilead.
**EFFY.** I'm not one to repeat gossip.
**HANNAH.** No, Effy, you're always the one who starts it.

**EFFY.**
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL,
SOMETHING'S COOKIN' AT THE SPITFIRE GRILL.

*(EFFY takes a seat. PERCY crosses to her.)*

**PERCY.** What can I bring you?
**EFFY.** Hannah knows what I'm having.
**PERCY.** You gonna want coffee with that?

*(EFFY slides her coffee cup to edge of table. PERCY fills it and turns away.)*

**EFFY.** *(As much to herself as to HANNAH.)*
LITTLE MISS WHITE TRASH HAS NO RIGHT
TO SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT.
BESIDES THIS STINKIN' COFFEE,
I THINK I SMELL A RAT.
AND I'LL SPREAD THE WORD ALL OVER TOWN,
SHE WON'T GET TIPPED ONE DIME.

**HANNAH.**
TO HEAR IT YOUR WAY, EFFY,
YOU'D THINK TIPPING WAS A CRIME.

**ALL.**
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL,
SOMETHING'S COOKIN' AT THE SPITFIRE GRILL!

**EFFY.** *(Turns for the first time to CALEB and JOE at the next table and hisses.)*
I HEAR SHE APPEARED ON THE STREET LAST NIGHT
WITH A MOTORCYCLE GANG!

**JOE.** Percy? Percy, this is Hannah's nephew Caleb Thorpe. He's got that little real estate office just across the street there.

**CALEB.** Only till the quarry's open again, Joe. *(To PERCY.)* I was foreman out there at the quarry.

**PERCY.** Is that right.

**CALEB.** And where do you come from, Percy?

**PERCY.** Dee-troit ...

**CALEB.** Oh yeah? Well, I had some clients from Detroit once, but they didn't sound like you.

**PERCY.** I won't mind comin' from someplace else if that don't suit you.

**CALEB.** *(Manages a smile although he's not amused by her evasion.)* I sorta look after Hannah now, so you'll prob'ly be seeing quite a bit of me.

**PERCY.** *(With order pad poised.)* Well then, if you'll just tell me what you want, Mr. Thorpe ...

**CALEB.** Hannah knows what I'm having.

**PERCY.** That one's been real popular this mornin'.

*(PERCY exits.)*

**CALEB.**
I WISH YOU'D CALLED ME UP
BEFORE YOU BROUGHT HER DOWN.
SHE'S NOT THE KIND OF NEW BLOOD
WE NEED IN THIS TOWN.

WE NEED STRONG-BACKED WORKERS,
WE HAD 'EM WAY BACK WHEN.
WE NEED GOOD-HEARTED WOMEN
WHO STAND BESIDE THEIR MEN



IF GILEAD IS GONNA BE
THE TOWN IT ONCE WAS
AGAIN.

**EFFY and JOE.** *(Overlap with CALEB's last note.)*
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL.

**JOE.**
DON'T ASK ME WHY SHE'S HERE,
I ONLY WISH I KNEW.
GILEAD'S A PLACE FOR LEAVING,
NOT FOR COMING TO.
GILEAD'S A PLACE FOR LEAVING,
NOT FOR COMING TO.

**EFFY.** *(Overlap.)*
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL.
**EFFY, HANNAH and CALEB.**
SOMETHING'S COOKIN' AT THE SPITFIRE GRILL.

*(Music continues as the bell rings and SHELBY enters. She carries a workman's lunch box. She is painfully shy; crossing the room to CALEB is an endless journey for her. As she passes everyone acknowledges her, but she hardly looks up.)*

**HANNAH.** Shelby.

**SHELBY.** Hannah.

**EFFY.** Shelby.

**SHELBY.** Miz Krayneck.

**JOE.** Morning, Shelby.

**SHELBY.** Sheriff. *(She hands the lunch box to CALEB, but remains standing.)* Caleb, you forgot your lunch.

**JOE.** Gonna join us for a cup of coffee, Shelby?

**SHELBY.** Well, I ...

**CALEB.** *(Answering for her as she hesitates.)* Shelby's not much of a coffee drinker, are you Shel?

*(SHELBY shakes her head and turns to go, nearly running into PERCY who enters from the kitchen.)*

**PERCY.** Whoa!

**SHELBY.** Excuse me.

**PERCY.** No, excuse *me*, I'm not sure if I'm comin', goin' or standin' still. *(SHELBY moves past PERCY toward the door.)* Ma'am,

you can sit wherever you like.

*(SHELBY begins to say more, stops herself, and moves to the exit.)*

**EFFY.**
YOU'D THINK THE STRANGER OWNED THE PLACE,
AND IT HASN'T BEEN ONE DAY.
**CALEB.**
I DON'T THINK HANNAH NEEDS THE HELP;
SHE'LL JUST GET IN THE WAY.
**EFFY.**
I HEAR PEOPLE TALK ALL OVER TOWN
THEY SAY SHE HAS TATTOOS.
**HANNAH.**
IT DON'T TAKE MUCH IN GILEAD
TO QUALIFY AS NEWS.

**ALL.**
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL,
SOMETHING'S COOKIN' AT — THE GRILL!

*(The refrain chugs in the background as the action in the Spitfire fades to a low buzz. SHELBY stands outside the Grill, looking in, singing lyrical counterpoint.)*

| **SHELBY.** | **HANNAH and EFFY.** | **JOE and CALEB.** |
|---|---|---|
| WELCOME TO GILEAD, | SAY WHAT YA WANT, | SOMETHING'S COOKIN' |
| I SHOULD HAVE SAID | SAY WHAT YA WILL. | AT THE SPITFIRE GRILL. |
| WELCOME TO GILEAD, | *(Seven times total.)* | *(Seven times total.)* |
| SILENT INSTEAD. | | |
| WELCOME TO GILEAD ... | SOMETHING'S COOKIN' | SAY WHAT YA WANT, |
| WHERE ARE YOU FROM? | AT THE SPITFIRE GRILL. | SAY WHAT YA WILL. |
| WHY HAVE YOU COME? | *(Five times total.)* | *(Five times total.)* |

*(SHELBY's thoughts are cut short by HANNAH calling out as action in the Spitfire dramatically resumes.)*



**HANNAH.**
ORDER UP! ORDER UP!
PERCY, SHAKE A LEG!

*(As PERCY serves the tables, the conversation swirls around her. SHELBY's voice joins in as she looks on from the outside. Musical build-up in counterpoint.)*

**EFFY.**
I HEAR SHE APPEARED ON THE STREET LAST NIGHT
RIGHT AT THE MIDNIGHT BELL.
YOU'D THINK THE STRANGER OWNED THE PLACE,
AND IT HASN'T BEEN ONE DAY.

**CALEB.** *(Overlap.)*
IT'S HARD TO KNOW FOR CERTAIN WHERE
A GIRL LIKE THIS HAS BEEN.
I DON'T THINK HANNAH NEEDS THE HELP.

**HANNAH.** *(Overlap.)*
IT DON'T TAKE MUCH IN GILEAD
TO QUALIFY AS NEWS.

**JOE.** *(Overlap.)*
DON'T ASK ME WHY SHE CAME TO TOWN.

| **SHELBY.** | **HANNAH, EFFY, CALEB and JOE.** |
|---|---|
| I WONDER WHERE SHE'S FROM? | I HEAR PEOPLE TALK ALL OVER TOWN. |

| **HANNAH.** | **EFFY.** | **CALEB.** | **JOE.** |
|---|---|---|---|
| THEY SAY SHE HAS TATTOOS. | I THOUGHT THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW. | WHERE IS THE STRANGER FROM? | THEY WONDER WHERE SHE'S BEEN. |

**SHELBY.**
I WONDER WHY SHE'S COME ...

**HANNAH.**
THERE'S NOT MUCH NEWS IN GILEAD,
THERE'S NOT MUCH NEWS IN GILEAD,
THERE'S NOT MUCH NEWS IN GILEAD —

**CALEB.** *(Overlap.)*
I WISH YOU'D CALLED ME FIRST LAST NIGHT,
I WISH YOU'D CALLED ME FIRST LAST NIGHT,
I WISH YOU'D CALLED ME FIRST —

**EFFY.** *(Overlap.)*
I HEAR SHE APPEARED ON THE STREET LAST NIGHT,
ON THE STREET LAST NIGHT,
ON THE STREET LAST NIGHT —

**JOE.** *(Overlap.)*
DON'T ASK ME WHY SHE CAME TO TOWN,
DON'T ASK ME WHY —

**SHELBY** *(Overlap.)*
I WONDER WHY SHE'S COME?
I WONDER WHY —

*(The above is done in overlapping counterpoint which rises to a cacophony that PERCY can no longer stand. While refilling EFFY's coffee cup, PERCY cuts off the noise by calling out across the diner.)*

**PERCY.** Say Hannah, did I mention that I spent the last five years in prison? *(No one moves.)* And I only got locked up solitary three times. Imagine that.

*(EFFY drops the fork she's holding.)*

**ALL.**
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL.
SOMETHING'S COOKIN' AT THE SPITFIRE GRILL!

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 3

*SCENE: The Grill.*
*AT RISE: PERCY is bussing tables.*

**PERCY.**
BEEN ELEVEN DAYS
SINCE I FIRST WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR.



EV'RY DAY THE SAME
AS THE DAY THAT CAME BEFORE.

COFFEE CUPS AND GOSSIP
EV'RY MORNIN' WHEN I RISE.
COFFEE CUPS AND GOSSIP,
DIRTY PLATES, SUSPICIOUS EYES.

IF THEY COULD SEE WHAT'S IN MY MIND,
I WONDER WHAT THEY'D SAY.
I WISH THAT COPPER CREEK WOULD SWELL
AND WASH THIS TOWN AWAY!

*(PERCY roughly slams a plate into the bus tray. Simultaneously from the kitchen we hear a thud and crash followed by a moan from HANNAH. PERCY runs into the kitchen; the rising lights reveal that HANNAH has taken a nasty fall, dropping an armful of supplies.)*

**PERCY.** Hannah? Hannah!
**HANNAH.** Don't touch me!
**PERCY.** What happened?
**HANNAH.** Don't touch me!
**PERCY.** I heard you, Hannah. But your leg might be broke bad.
**HANNAH.** What would you know about broken bones?
**PERCY.** More than enough. Now you want to fight me old woman, then have at it. But hell or high water we're gonna have to get a doctor to fix that.
**HANNAH.** I don't want you —
**PERCY.** Where's the closest doctor?
**HANNAH.** *(Weakening.)* ... Prairie du Chien... Thirty-five miles.

*(Light shift as PERCY rushes off to call the doctor. Crossfade to EFFY on phone, dialing a number "in time and in tune" with the music.)*

**EFFY.** Listen up, Sarah ...

SHE PUSHED HANNAH DOWN A FLIGHT OF STAIRS,
AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY.
I'LL GET THE DETAILS FROM NEXT DOOR,
AND CALL YOU EITHER WAY.

*(EFFY dials another number "in time and in tune" with the music.)*

**EFFY.** Ruthie, are you sitting down?

OH, I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU HAVEN'T HEARD
IT'S THE TALK OF ALL THE TOWN.
THE BIGGEST NEWS IN GILEAD
SINCE THEY CLOSED THE QUARRY DOWN.

*(EFFY dials another number "in time and in tune" with the music. She speaks.)*

**EFFY.** Hello, Dorothy?

*(Lights crossfade to JOE and CALEB tending to HANNAH, who sits wrapped in a blanket with her leg propped up.)*

**CALEB.** Now do you care to tell me what happened here, Aunt Hannah?

**HANNAH.** I was on my way up the stairs and my hip gave out, that's all.

**CALEB.** Looks like you better close the Grill for awhile and send that girl on her way.

**HANNAH.** The Spitfire hasn't been closed one day 'cept Christmas in forty years. And 'that girl' is the one who got me to the doctor.

**CALEB.** I don't want to be responsible for —

**HANNAH.** Who asked you to be responsible? Until I forget my name or start drooling at the mouth, I'll make my own decisions. Now, I'm not gonna be laid up forever. And till then, well, Percy will have to manage things.

**CALEB.** She just can't take over this place alone. Hell, she's fresh out of prison.

**JOE.** Maybe Shelby could help out —

**CALEB.** I don't want Shelby working.

**JOE.** Just for a little while, maybe.

**HANNAH.** Oh, Shelby'll solve everything, I'm sure.

**JOE.** What do you think, Caleb?

**CALEB.** Well, I suppose Shelby could handle the cash, have Percy stay in the kitchen.

**HANNAH.** The blind leading the blind. Now if you boys don't mind, I'm gonna pee, and I think I can manage that without help from either of you.

*(Lights shift to PERCY reading a recipe.)*

**PERCY.** 7 cups white flour, 3 cups oatmeal, 4 cups brown sugar—packed. 2 cups shortening, 4 cups buttermilk, 5 cups apples—



chopped. Tablespoon of cinnamon, teaspoon of salt, 4 large fresh eggs—beat. Heat oven—350, grease up square pans, coffee cake for 36... Damn!

*(As PERCY attempts to cook, the pots and pans always seem to be one step ahead of her. She vainly attempts to catch up but is clearly overwhelmed.)*

GOT A RECIPE FOR DISASTER:
TURN THE STOVE A LITTLE HIGHER,
THEN JUMP OUT OF THE FRYIN' PAN
RIGHT INTO THE FIRE.

NEVER EVER COOKED A MEAL
THAT DIDN'T START ITS LIFE OUT IN A CAN.
YES, I'M THE QUEEN OF TV DINNERS.
PULL ME OUTA THE FIRE, BACK IN THE FRYIN' PAN...

GOT MY APRON TIED ON BACKWARDS
AND THE OATMEAL'S BOILED TOO LONG.
BATCH O' BREAKFAST BISCUITS BURNIN'
AND THE COFFEE IS TOO STRONG.

THERE'S SO MUCH BUTTER IN THE BATTER
IT WOULD PROB'LY STOP THE HEART OF SUPERMAN.
SERVE UP A SIDE OF INDIGESTION.
SLIDE ME OUTA THE FIRE, BACK IN THE FRYIN' PAN...

*(PERCY rings service bell.)*

ORDER UP, ORDER UP, ORDER UP!

**SHELBY.** *(Entering in waitress apron to pick up plate.)* What's this?

**PERCY.** Eggs over easy, hash browns, and bacon.

**SHELBY.** Oh.

**PERCY.** Why? What's the matter?

**SHELBY.** Which is the bacon?

*(SHELBY exits. PERCY is discouraged.)*

**PERCY.**
GOT THIS LUMPY PANCAKE BATTER,
AND THE EGGS ARE ALL HARD FRIED.

WHAT THE HELL COULD BE THE MATTER?
SMELLS LIKE SOMETHIN' EVIL DIED.

I SWEAR THE CORN BEEF HASH
WOULD MAKE ME TURN INTO A VEGETARIAN.
ADD A TOUCH TOO MUCH TABASCO,
AND I'M OUTA THE FIRE, BACK IN THE FRYIN' PAN...

**SHELBY.** *(Entering.)* Percy, Effy sent her oatmeal back.
**PERCY.** *(Almost afraid to hear the answer.)* Why?
**SHELBY.** It's a little thick. She could get the spoon in but she can't get it back out.

*(SHELBY exits.)*

**PERCY.**
I FORGOT TO FLIP THE BACON,
AND THE SAUSAGE IS STILL RAW,
AND THE COFFEE CAKE I'M MAKIN'
MIGHT JUST BE AGAINST THE LAW.

I HEAR THE SIRENS WAIL.
IT PROB'LY WOULD BE BETTER IF I RAN,
BUT THERE'S ANOTHER DOZEN ORDERS,
GET ME OUTA THE FIRE, BACK IN THE FRYIN' PAN

**PERCY.** *(To SHELBY who enters.)* So... You think I'm losing Hannah's customers?
**SHELBY.** Oh, they'll come back.
**PERCY.** Pretty loyal, huh?
**SHELBY.** There's no where else to eat.

*(SHELBY goes.)*

**PERCY.**
YES, I CAN HEAR THE SIRENS WAIL.
I REALLY SHOULDA QUIT BEFORE I BEGAN.
BUT THERE'S A SINK O' DIRTY DISHES,
GET ME OUTA THE FIRE,
BACK IN THE FRYIN' PAN!
... MAN!

*(On applause PERCY takes off her apron and hangs it on a chair. In a crossfade she goes to HANNAH, who is sitting up, her foot elevated.)*



**PERCY.** I was gonna turn in, Hannah.
**HANNAH.** Percy, who exactly was it that taught you how to cook?
**PERCY.** The devil, judgin' by the *looks*.
**HANNAH.** Shelby knows her way around a kitchen. Get some help.
**PERCY.** I will. Night then.

*(PERCY begins to exit. HANNAH calls to her, very cautiously.)*

**HANNAH.** Percy...? There might be one last thing that — still needs doing.
**PERCY.** What's that?
**HANNAH.** I'd do it myself, but I can't with this leg.
**PERCY.** Yes ma'am...
**HANNAH.** Get a loaf of bread from the kitchen. Wrap it up in a towel, and set it out back by the stump.
**PERCY.** Loaf of bread...?
**HANNAH.** And make sure you leave the ax in the stump there ... so no one steps on it — and gets hurt.

*(HANNAH can see the question in PERCY's face, but PERCY senses it's a question HANNAH does not want to answer.)*

**PERCY.** *(Silently agreeing to leave the matter alone.)* I'll see to it. Not to worry. You want me to turn out your light?
**HANNAH.** No. Just go do what I told you.

*(PERCY goes. Music starts as light fades on HANNAH. PERCY follows the instructions and places the loaf of bread near the stump. She picks up the ax and drives it into the stump, then gives a start as she senses some kind of sudden movement in the shadows.)*

**PERCY.** Somebody there? ... Somebody there??

*(JOE appears out of the darkness.)*

**JOE.** It's me.
**PERCY.** *(Startled.)* What are you doin'?
**JOE.** I didn't mean to —
**PERCY.** What're you *doin'* here? Watchin' me? Lookin' at me in the dark?

**JOE.** I was only —

**PERCY.** If you're thinkin' I'm one of them sex-starved prison gals or somethin', you're damn wrong.

**JOE.** What??

**PERCY.** You just come around for our parole meetin's! Otherwise you got no business around me, you hear?!

*(PERCY goes into the Grill.)*

**JOE.** *(Calling after her.)* I came by to see if Hannah needed more firewood! *(Shakes his head.)* Damn.

*(Crossfade.)*

## Scene 4

*SCENE: The Grill, morning. About a week later.*
*AT RISE: PERCY is doing AM prep. SHELBY and CALEB argue as they enter the Spitfire.*

**CALEB.** But Shel, you knew I was showing the quarry today, and that I needed my blue shirt.

**SHELBY.** *(Embarrassed to be arguing in front of PERCY.)* I didn't have time for a colored load, Caleb. I told you, I'm sorry.

**CALEB.** I'm sorry doesn't get the damn shirt washed, does it?

**SHELBY.** *(Dispirited.)* I'll go home on my break. It'll be in the dryer.

*(PERCY and SHELBY nod a wary 'hello.')*

**CALEB.** *(To PERCY.)* My Aunt said she was gonna write out a list of supplies.

**PERCY.** On the table.

**CALEB.** *(Picks up the list.)* I'll drop these off when I come back for the bank deposit tonight. *(Kisses SHELBY's cheek.)* You girls try not to burn the place down. Who knows, one of these days this old greasy spoon might actually sell.

*(CALEB exits.)*

**SHELBY.** ... Sorry I'm late.

**PERCY.** It's not *my* business.

**SHELBY.** *(Finding empty container.)* Scalloped potatoes finished?



**PERCY.** Nobody said I couldn't eat leftovers.

**SHELBY.** That's not what I —

**PERCY.** I was hungry.

**SHELBY.** You probably haven't had a decent meal since you went to pr— ... I'm sorry.

**PERCY.** I haven't exactly made a secret of where I've been, have I?

**SHELBY.** No, not exactly ...

**PERCY.** *(Very carefully, lowering her defenses a little for the first time with a woman who is still virtually a stranger.)* I shouldn't oughta snap at you. I know you been savin' my bacon in here.

**SHELBY.** I have? *(PERCY nods cautiously.)* Now that things have gotten... sorted out, it's going pretty good, hunh?

**PERCY.** You could say that twice and mean it.

**SHELBY.** Just don't tell Caleb I've been helping out in the kitchen, okay?

**PERCY.** ... Okay. So, is Hannah really tryin' to sell this place?

**SHELBY.** Oh, I don't know, she might just give it away.

**PERCY.** Not really.

**SHELBY.** *(Hesitates)* I think the Spitfire reminds her of better times.

**PERCY.** I don't mean to pry ....

**SHELBY.** Oh, no ... It's not that. It's just ... she never talks about it.

**PERCY.** What?

**SHELBY.** Hannah had a son.

ELI WAS HIS NAME,
TALL AND SWEET AND STRONG,
LOVED BY EVERYONE.

He was like a brother to Caleb. We all looked up to him.

AS LONG AS HE WAS HERE
NOTHING COULD GO WRONG.
GILEAD'S FAVORITE SON...

And then the Vietnam war came.

**PERCY.** He get drafted?

**SHELBY.** No, he enlisted. His dad Jack had been kind of a hero in World War II ... so when it came Eli's turn to serve, he was raring to go. The day of his send-off we all put on our Sunday best.

EIGHT YEARS OLD
WITH A FLAG IN MY HAND,
STEP FOR STEP
WITH THE BIG MARCHING BAND.
THROUGH THE STREETS,
PICKET FENCE, WHITE WASH WHITE,
EVERY HOUSE
PERFECT TRIM, PAINTED BRIGHT.

LIKE ELI, WE WERE BRAVE.
THERE WAS A WORLD TO SAVE.
THE BAND STRUCK UP A SONG,
GILEAD MARCHED ALONG.

I CAN SEE IT STILL,
EVERYONE IN TOWN
WALKING UP THAT HILL,

WAITING FOR THE BUS,
WAVING HIM GOODBYE,
PART OF ALL OF US...

BOWED MY HEAD,
SAID MY PRAYERS EVERY NIGHT.
"ELI PLEASE
SAVE THE WORLD, SET IT RIGHT"

FOLDED HANDS
HOLDING HOPE, LIKE A PRAYER,
FOUR YEARS PASS,
FINGERS PART, NOTHING THERE...

Missing in action. Hannah's never told anyone what the official story was, but after a few years, it was clear Eli wasn't coming back ....

WHEN HOPE GOES, SIDEWALKS CRACK,
WHITEWASH FADES.
MUSIC STOPS, EMPTY STREETS,
NO PARADES.

WHEN HOPE GOES, FENCES SAG,
FLAGPOLES RUST.
PAINT PEELS, BROKEN WHEELS
GATHER DUST.
WHEN HOPE GOES,



HEARTS CLOSE.

EIGHT YEARS OLD,
WITH A FLAG IN MY HAND.
STEP FOR STEP
WITH THE BIG MARCHING BAND.

EVERYONE IN TOWN
WALKING UP THAT HILL,
WAITING FOR THE BUS,
WE ARE WAITING STILL.

*(The song ends.)*

That was years ago... Eli's dad took it real hard. I guess his heart just gave out from it. The day after he died, Hannah put the Grill up for sale.

**PERCY.** My... she must have wanted to get rid of this place real bad.

**SHELBY.** She still does. She's always pestering Caleb to find a buyer. She says she "couldn't unload this grill if it was the booby prize in the Lion's Club raffle"!

**PERCY.** *(With a dry laugh.)* Raffle?!... Well, why doesn't she?

**SHELBY.** Why doesn't she what?

**PERCY.** Raffle it off... People do it all the time — ten dollars for a chance at a TV set or somethin'. To win a whole grill I spose you could ask even more.

**HANNAH.** *(Offstage.)* Percy! Shelby! I don't smell coffee brewing!!

**PERCY.** Well, the fall didn't hurt her nose.

**HANNAH.** I heard that.

*(PERCY and SHELBY look at each other and share their first smile. Crossfade.)*

## Scene 5

*SCENE: Town of Gilead / The Grill. Montage — passage of time.*
*AT RISE: Crossfade reveals CALEB, JOE and EFFY in various limbo areas. THEY are engaged in mid-winter activities. Early March.*

**CALEB.** *(Using ax blade-sharpening tools.)*
WAY-HO!
**JOE.** *(With ice-testing rod.)*
WAY-HO-OH!
**EFFY.** *(Shaking sidewalk salt out of a dispenser.)*
WAY-HO!
GROUNDHOG SAID COLD DAYS AHEAD,
KEEP THE BLANKETS ON THE BED.
**JOE.**
IF I COULD, I'D GROW MY HAIR,
SLEEP ALL WINTER LIKE A BEAR.
**CALEB.**
MY SHADOW FROZE RIGHT WHERE I STOOD.
STOVE IS HUNGRY, CHOP MORE WOOD,
STOVE IS HUNGRY, CHOP — MORE WOOD.

**ALL THREE.**
WAY-HO, ICE AND SNOW
WILL THE WINTER EVER GO?
WILL THE WINTER EVER GO?

*(Lights crossfade to SHELBY leading HANNAH — on crutches — into the Grill.)*

**SHELBY.** Feel good to get out of your room?
**HANNAH.** I could do without those stairs. In fact, I could do without this entire Grill.
**SHELBY.** *(Very tentative.)* Well, Hannah, with the real estate market how it is, you might ...
**HANNAH.** I might *what*?
**SHELBY.** You might want to run a contest to raffle the place off.
**HANNAH.** A contest?!?
**SHELBY.** Oh sure. "Send in a hundred dollars for a chance to win the Spitfire Grill."
**HANNAH.** "Win"?!? What kinda nonsense is that?
**SHELBY.** *(Realizing that the idea sounded quite awful as verbalized.)* Nothing . . .
**HANNAH.** Shelby, that stove's not gonna light itself.

*(Lights crossfade to EFFY, CALEB and JOE engaged in late winter activities. Mid-March.)*

**JOE.** *(Untangling tire chains.)*
WAY-HO!



**EFFY.** *(Shoveling snow.)*
WAY-HO-OH!
**CALEB.** *(Tightening a pipe wrench.)*
WAY-HO!
ICE STORM KNOCKS THE PHONE LINES DOWN,
PIPES ARE BURSTING ALL THROUGH TOWN.
**JOE.**
IF WINTER LASTS ANOTHER DAY,
I'LL PACK A BAG AND MOVE AWAY.
**EFFY.**
WOKE UP TODAY, THE SKY IS GRAY,
THE SNOW IS GRAY, MY SKIN IS GRAY,
GRAY, GRAY, GRAY, GRAY, GRAY, GRAY, GRAY...

*(Lights back to Grill. PERCY sits decanting catsup bottles. HANNAH hovers over her.)*

**HANNAH.** Percy.
**PERCY.** Yes, ma'am.
**HANNAH.** I understand you and Shelby've been talking about some kinda raffle contest thing.
**PERCY.** We were only talkin'.
**HANNAH.** Talk now.
**PERCY.** We just thought you could ask people to send in an essay sayin' why they wanted the Spitfire.
**HANNAH.** An *essay*?
**PERCY.** You might maybe get a thousand or more. Then you'd pick the one you like best and give the Grill to whoever wrote it. *(Shrugs)* That's all.
**HANNAH.** *(Walking away.)* Can't imagine there'd be fifty people who'd want this place, let alone a thousand. *(Over her shoulder to SHELBY who is entering the kitchen.)* Better watch that pot, Shelby! She's pertneer ready to boil over!

*(Lights crossfade back to JOE, CALEB and EFFY.)*

**CALEB, EFFY and JOE.**
WAY-HO, ICE AND SNOW
WILL THE WINTER EVER GO?
WILL THE WINTER EVER GO?

*(Lights crossfade back to Grill. Late March. HANNAH is snapping pea pods. SHELBY stirs a kettle in the kitchen.)*

**HANNAH.** Where's Percy?

**SHELBY.** She went to Dodgeville for supplies.

**HANNAH.** Good. Come here once. *(SHELBY goes to HANNAH.)* Shelby... What do you really think about this contest notion?

**SHELBY.** Maybe you better ask Caleb about it.

**HANNAH.** When I want Caleb's opinion, I'll ask him. Right now, I'm asking *you*.

**SHELBY.** Well, then ... If you're asking me, I'd say why not?

**HANNAH.** That's what I've been thinking, too. Suppose you could see to all the details for me?

**SHELBY.** ... I don't know.

**HANNAH.** *(Impatient.)* Yes or no, Shelby?

**SHELBY.** Yes.

**HANNAH.** Okay then. Now put that stew on slower or the meat'll be tough as leather. Folks'll wonder what you did with the other boot.

*(HANNAH exits. Lights crossfade to reveal JOE, EFFY and CALEB engaged in early spring activities. Early April.)*

**CALEB.** *(With a fishing rod.)*
WAY-HO!
**JOE.** *(Using a hoe.)*
WAY-HO-OH!
**EFFY.** *(With push broom.)*
WAY-HO!
**JOE.**
HAD A DREAM THE OTHER NIGHT,
HEARD THE GEESE IN HOMEWARD FLIGHT.
**CALEB.**
WAY-HO!
**JOE.**
WAY-HO-OH!

**CALEB.**
CREEK IS MELTING, SUN BREAKS THROUGH.
FISH FOR TROUT IN A WEEK OR TWO.
**JOE.**
WAY-HO!
**EFFY.**
WAY-HO-OH!
SWEEP THE PORCH AND SHAKE A RUG.

*(Delighted to see the first real sign of a Wisconsin Spring.)*



LOOK AT THAT, A LADYBUG!

| **CALEB.** | **JOE.** | **EFFY.** |
|---|---|---|
| CREEK IS MELTING, | | |
| WATERS FLOW. | HAD A DREAM | |
| FISH FOR TROUT | THE OTHER NIGHT, | |
| IN A WEEK OR SO. | HEARD THE GEESE | |
| FISH FOR TROUT | IN HOMEWARD FLIGHT, | OH MY GOD, |
| IN A WEEK OR SO! | IN HOMEWARD FLIGHT! | A LADYBUG! |

**ALL THREE.**
WAY-HO, RISE TO SING!
DAYS ARE LONGER, FEELS LIKE SPRING!
DAYS ARE LONGER,
FEELS LIKE SPRING!

**CALEB.**
WAY-HO!
**JOE.**
WAY-HO-OH!
**EFFY.**
WAY-HO!

*(Lights crossfade to PERCY and SHELBY sitting at a table with a notepad.)*

**SHELBY.**
SMALL DINER,
REAL FIXER-UPPER,
TWO STORY HOUSE ATTACHED.
MAIN STREET LOCATION,
GOOD POTENTIAL...

How's that sound? Awful, hunh?

**PERCY.** It's okay, I guess. But if I was gonna gamble a hundred dollars, I'd want it to be someplace, you know... special. Besides, it's not just the Spitfire they'd be gettin', it's Gilead too.

**SHELBY.** There's nothing very special about Gilead.

**PERCY.** We just gotta help folks picture it right.

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED OF A TOWN SO SMALL
THEY ROLL THE SIDEWALK UP?
WHERE THE WAITRESS SPILLS THE GOSSIP
AS SHE FILLS YOUR COFFEE CUP?

WHERE THE POST OFFICE AND BARBERSHOP
ARE IN THE GENERAL STORE,
AND THE ONLY STREET IS MAIN STREET
AND IT RUNS BY YOUR FRONT DOOR?
I don't know...

**SHELBY.** No, I like that. Keep going, what else?

*(As PERCY continues to sing, SHELBY takes notes on her pad.)*

**PERCY.**
DID YOU EVER WANT TO LOSE YOURSELF
AND WANDER WHERE YOU PLEASE?
WELL, YOU CAN WALK A HUNDRED MILES
AND NEVER LEAVE THE TREES.

JUST STEP OUTSIDE YOUR BACK DOOR
WHEN YOU WANT TO RUN AWAY.
THERE'S A CREEK THAT YOU CAN FOLLOW
ON A LAZY SUMMER DAY,

AND WHEN SUMMER TURNS TO AUTUMN
IN THE TOWN WHERE YOU ARE FROM,
THEN THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME...

*(Standing apart from SHELBY, she pulls the travel book clipping from her pocket and gets a bit lost in her reverie.)*

AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME,
THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME TO YOU.
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME,
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME.

**SHELBY.** *(Excited about the ad, she offers.)*
HERE'S A CHANCE TO WIN A LITTLE GRILL
WITH ROOM ENOUGH TO GROW.

**PERCY.** *(Encouraging SHELBY.)*
ROOM TO GROW...

**SHELBY.**
THE CUSTOMERS WHO EAT HERE
ARE PEOPLE THAT YOU KNOW.



**PERCY.**
AND IF YOUR COOKIN'S TERRIBLE
THEY WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN...
**BOTH.**
DID WE MENTION THAT THE SPITFIRE
IS THE ONLY GRILL IN TOWN?

YOU CAN OWN A PIECE OF HEAVEN
WHERE THE HUMMING BIRDS STILL HUM
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME...

**PERCY.** *(Offering SHELBY a look at the travel book clipping.)*
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME

**SHELBY.** *(Intrigued by the photo.)*
COLORS OF PARADISE COME...

**PERCY.**
THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME TO YOU
**SHELBY.**
COME TO YOU...
**PERCY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE...
**BOTH.**
...COME!
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME.

**SHELBY.** *(Becoming more inspired.)*
THE MORNIN' WHEN THE HICKORIES TURN GOLDEN

**PERCY.** *(Sparked by the sudden turn of her friend's phrase, taking notes.)*
WHEN THE HICKORIES TURN GOLD...
**SHELBY.**
AND SUNLIGHT BURNS THE MAPLES RED AS FIRE

**PERCY.**
RED AS FIRE...

**BOTH.**
THE MEADOW GLOWS, THE RIVER BANK IS BLAZIN'
LIKE PARADISE COME DOWN TO LIFT YOU HIGHER!

**PERCY.**
THEN YOU LOOK OUT FROM YOUR FRONT PORCH
TO SEE THE SUN GO DOWN,
ANOTHER NIGHT HAS FALLEN
ON THE STREET OF YOUR HOMETOWN.

AND ALL AT ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND
THAT YOU ARE HERE TO STAY,
WITH ROOTS SO DEEP INTO THE EARTH
THEY'LL NEVER PULL AWAY.

**SHELBY.**
NEVER PULL AWAY!

*(THEIR voices blend in harmony. The two women feed off one another's energy, each seeming to find for the first time a way to express a deep longing for a better life.)*

**BOTH.**
AND WHEN SUMMER TURNS TO AUTUMN
IN THE TOWN WHERE YOU ARE FROM,
THEN THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME...

AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME TO YOU
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME

**PERCY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME . . .
**SHELBY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME
**PERCY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME . . .
**SHELBY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE . . .
**PERCY.**
AND THE . . .
**BOTH.**
COLORS OF PARADISE COME!

*(Crossfade.)*



## Scene Six

*SCENE: The Grill, three weeks later.*
*AT RISE: HANNAH sweeps the floor. From offstage we hear CALEB call.*

**CALEB.** Aunt Hannah? Aunt Hannah!

*(CALEB enters with several out-of-town newspapers in hand.)*

**HANNAH.** No need to shout.
**CALEB.** *(Waving papers.)* What the hell is this about?
**HANNAH.** I don't have my glasses. What does it say?
**CALEB.** *(Reading papers.)* "Win a hometown grill." "Enter the Spitfire raffle." Tell me this is just some kind of joke.
**HANNAH.** Sounds kinda funny, doesn't it?
**CALEB.** Yeah, it's funny alright. I can hear the whole county laugh right now. What the hell were you thinking?
**HANNAH.** To tell you the truth, Shelby and Percy did the thinking.
**CALEB.** Shelby and Percy ...? Well ... that's just great.
**HANNAH.** Spitfire's been on the market ten years, Caleb. I thought it was time to try something new. Or maybe you were hoping I'd leave it to you, when I kick over.
**CALEB.** Why would I want this old grill?
**HANNAH.** Oh, it might just be worth a little something. Lord knows, it would have been worth a hell of a lot more if you'd sold it ten years ago, before they ran the highway through Mineral Point instead of here.
**CALEB.** And I suppose that was my fault? Cripes, it must be my fault the quarry closed, too. Of course, none of that would have happened if Eli was alive.
**HANNAH.** You leave him out of this.
**CALEB.** Why? It's what you're always thinking, you and Shelby, and everybody, if only Eli —
**HANNAH.** Caleb. Maybe that's what *you're* always thinking. Don't even *pretend* to know what I'm thinking.

*(HANNAH goes past him dismissively. CALEB follows her.)*

**CALEB.** Aw, the hell with it. Go ahead, raffle it off. I don't even know why I try.

YOU GROW UP FAST, PAY YOUR DUES,
LEARN TO WALK IN YOUR FATHER'S SHOES.
BUILD A HOME, TAKE A WIFE,
SETTLE IN WITH THE WORKING LIFE.

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
DIGGIN' STONE.
PAY HARD CASH FOR ALL YOU OWN.
A MAN IS MORE THAN BLOOD AND BONE
WHEN HE'S SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
DIGGIN' STONE.

**HANNAH.** The quarry's closed, Caleb. The past is dead.

*(HANNAH exits.)*

**CALEB.**
THEN HARD TIMES COME TO TOWN,
SHAKE YOUR HAND AND-A SHUT YOU DOWN.
SET YOU UP JUST TO WATCH YOU FALL,
KICK YOU HARD AND MAKE YOU CRAWL.

WHERE ARE THE DAYS
WHEN A MAN COULD LIFT HIS HEAD?
PROUD OF THE WAY
HE EARNED HIS DAILY BREAD...

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
DIGGIN' STONE.
PAY HARD CASH FOR ALL YOU OWN.
A MAN IS MORE THAN BLOOD AND BONE
WHEN HE'S SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
DIGGIN' STONE.

*(Half-light rises on kitchen area where SHELBY guides PERCY's hand with a rolling pin. CALEB watches as they share an informal cooking lesson.)*

YOU STAND BACK UP, GET KNOCKED DOWN,
WATCH AS A STRANGER TAKES YOUR TOWN.
SUCK IT IN AND-A SWALLOW LIES.
SOMETHING DEEP IN YOUR BELLY DIES.

*(Half-light on kitchen area fades as PERCY and SHELBY exit.)*



WHAT DOES IT TAKE
FOR A MAN TO FEEL SOME PRIDE?
NOT LIE AWAKE,
WISHIN' FOR A HOLE TO HIDE...

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
DIGGIN' STONE.
PAY HARD CASH FOR ALL YOU OWN.
A MAN IS MORE THAN BLOOD AND BONE
WHEN HE'S SHOULDER TO SHOULDER...

I GREW UP STRONG, PAID MY DUES.
TRIED TO WALK IN ELI'S SHOES.
SHOES DON'T FIT, FOOT'S TOO SMALL.
MAYBE I AIN'T A MAN AT ALL.
MAYBE I AIN'T A MAN
AT ALL.

*(Crossfade.)*

## Scene 7

*SCENE: The Grill. Morning. Early May.*
*AT RISE: SHELBY is busy in the kitchen as PERCY comes down the stairs and discovers her there. PERCY is surprised.*

**PERCY.** Shelby, what are you doin' here?
**SHELBY.** Just getting a start on the baking.
**PERCY.** But it's so early.
**SHELBY.** I think it's better if I'm not home right now.
**PERCY.** Yeah?
**SHELBY.** Caleb found out about the raffle. He's not happy.
**PERCY.** *(With as much hair-trigger anger as sympathy.)* Why should it matter to him?
**SHELBY.** You don't understand. He tries to take care of everything. Hannah, the Grill, —
**PERCY.** Don't go defendin' him, Shelby.
**SHELBY.** I'm not, I only —

*(JOE enters, PERCY's parole file under his arm.)*

**JOE.** Miss Talbott? I need to see — Oh, hi Shelby.

**SHELBY.** *(Assuming there might be trouble since JOE is at the Grill so early.)* Morning, Joe. I spose you got business…

**JOE.** We can take it outside. Miss Talbott? *(PERCY and JOE go out to the back porch.)* You didn't show up for our parole session last night.

**PERCY.** *(Pointing at file.)* Look, why don't you just leave me a list of all your damn questions and I'll answer 'em when I got the time.

**JOE.** Hey. It's my job and I gotta do it.

**PERCY.** Yes, I show up for work every day. Yes, I tell my employer where I go at night. No, I don't have contact with anyone I knew in prison. Yes, I'm gettin' on fine in my job. You can just ask anybody in town and they'll be more'n happy to tell you all about what they think of me.

**JOE.** Okay, okay. *(Closing the file and setting it down.)* Forget about the list. Let's just talk.

**PERCY.** Without that list, there ain't much for us to talk about, is there?

**JOE.** You're right … *(A beat of silence, then.)* We can sit here as long as you want … just staring at my woods.

**PERCY.** …Your woods?

**JOE.** It will be when the old man passes on. Every worthless acre, from Hannah's property all the way to the river.

**PERCY.** Never seen so many trees before.

**JOE.** *(Referring to file.)* Country girl like you?

**PERCY.** Do your papers there say I was "born in the West Virginia mountains"?

**JOE.** Uh-hunh.

**PERCY.** Yeah, well, I don't remember no trees, just coal mines … and how my daddy's fingers was always black from tar, even after he washed 'em, and how he coughed till it killed him. "Father deceased." That's when momma moved us north to the city. Only woods I ever saw was in magazines and picture books. But this is better than any picture. It's beautiful.

**JOE.** It's a damn shame that's *all* it is.

BACK BEFORE I WAS BORN,
A FOREST OF OLD TREES
KEPT WATCH OVER THE TOWN.

BUT THE LUMBER MEN CAME,
SWUNG A BIG AXE,
AND CUT THE FOREST DOWN.



AND WHAT GREW BACK
IS NO DAMN GOOD;
JUST SCRUB TREES
AND BRUSH WOOD…

It's all pretty worthless. Soon as it's mine, I'll sell the whole lot and get the heck outta here.

**PERCY.** You really want to leave?

**JOE.**
WHEN YOU LIVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE
IN THE TOWN OF GILEAD,
EV'RY MORNING YOU WAKE UP
TO ANOTHER WASTED DAY.

WHEN I HAVE ENOUGH CASH,
I'M TAKING A TRAIN
A MILLION MILES AWAY.

I'LL LEAVE BEHIND
THIS ONE DOG TOWN.
THERE'S NOTHING HERE
TO TIE ME DOWN.

OH, A LIFE LIVED IN GILEAD
IS AS WORTHLESS AS THESE TREES…

**PERCY.** I've seen a lotta worthless things. But these trees…?

IF THIS WIDE WOODS WAS MINE,
IF THINGS WAS MAKE BELIEVE,
I'D WALK BENEATH THE BRANCHES,
I'D NEVER WANT TO LEAVE.

IF THIS WIDE WOODS WAS MINE
I'D FIND A STURDY TREE,
I'D SIT MYSELF BESIDE IT
AND DREAMS WOULD COME TO ME.

I'D DREAM MYSELF DEEP ROOTS
TO REACH THE WATER.
I'D DREAM MYSELF LONG LIMBS
TO TOUCH THE BLUE.

IF THIS WIDE WOODS WAS MINE,
IF THIS WIDE WOODS WAS MINE,
IF THIS WIDE, WIDE WOODS WAS MINE

*(Catching herself, PERCY turns to JOE with quiet defiance.)*

THAT'S WHAT I'D DO...

*(An awkward silence; then.)*

Well, I better get inside before Hannah sets the dogs out after me. Parole session over?

**JOE.** I think that'll do for now.

**PERCY.** Alright then ....

*(PERCY goes into the Grill. JOE looks out toward the woods.)*

**JOE.**
WHEN I WAS JUST A BOY,
I'D CLIMB THAT MAPLE TREE.
I'D LOOK OUT ON THE WORLD
AS FAR AS I COULD SEE...

*(PERCY, now in the kitchen, begins to sing again. Though she and JOE are each unaware of the other, their voices blend in harmony.)*

**JOE and PERCY.**
I'D DREAM MYSELF DEEP ROOTS
TO REACH THE WATER.
I'D DREAM MYSELF LONG LIMBS
TO TOUCH THE BLUE. OH...

**PERCY.**
IF THIS WIDE WOODS WAS MINE...
**JOE.**
WHEN THIS WIDE WOODS IS MINE...
**PERCY.**
IF THIS WIDE WOODS WAS MINE...
**JOE and PERCY.**
IF (WHEN) THIS WIDE, WIDE WOODS WAS (IS) MINE...

*(On first musical phrase, PERCY looks toward the porch. On second musical phrase, JOE looks back toward the Grill, then exits in the opposite direction.*
*Crossfade.)*



## Scene 8

*SCENE: The Grill, after closing. Mid-May.*
*AT RISE: SHELBY and PERCY are closing down for the day.*

**PERCY.** Shelby, you know what? I think Hannah spilled that pitcher of ice water in Effy's lap on purpose.

**SHELBY.** Oh, she did not.

**PERCY.** And she was just about to order seconds on my apple brown Betty.

**SHELBY.** Good thing you're learning how to cook, Percy. Way to a man's heart is still through his stomach ... or at least somewhere in that vicinity.

*(A danger bell goes off in PERCY's head. This is not a topic for discussion. She tries to shut it down with a gentle evasion.)*

**PERCY.** And who said I *wanted* a man?

**SHELBY.** You don't think Joe Sutter's been taking particular interest in you lately?

**PERCY.** *(Dismissively.)* He's my parole officer.

**SHELBY.** The Sheriff might be concerned with more than just your parole, Miss Talbott.

**PERCY.** *(SHELBY isn't getting it.)* Yeah, right. That boy's just plain lonely.

**SHELBY.** Whatever you say ... but it doesn't take a fortuneteller to picture you and Joe with a truckload of kids someday.

**PERCY.** *(Turning on SHELBY with a sudden defiance that frightens her friend.)* I ain't no kind of damn mother!

**SHELBY.** Percy, I —

**PERCY.** Do you know what I am?!? *(Then, quieter but no less intense.)* I'm a wild bird, Shelby. Wild bird don't have no nest.

*(There is a short, awkward silence. HANNAH enters.)*

**HANNAH.** Aren't you girls finished yet? *(Mutters.)* Too slow to catch a cold. *(Sound of bell ringing.)* Here comes the town crier. *(EFFY enters, with a letter in hand.)* Grill's not open, Effy.

**EFFY.** I know what time you close. A letter came for you this morning.

**HANNAH.** Did it take longer than usual to steam it open?

**EFFY.** "Hannah Ferguson, care of the Spitfire Grill"... Who do you know from Philadelphia?

**HANNAH.** I'm sure I have no idea. *(She snatches the letter from EFFY and puts it in her pocket. EFFY stares at HANNAH. After a beat.)* I don't think I'll open it just yet. *(Stymied, EFFY huffs out.)* Here Shelby, *you* open it!

*(Excited, SHELBY opens the envelope and presents HANNAH with the enclosed cash.)*

**SHELBY.** One hundred dollars!... *(Music under.)* "Dear Mrs. Ferguson, I saw the article about your contest last night when I couldn't sleep. The reason I couldn't sleep is because my family is falling apart. My husband walked out last year and left me with our high school boy. If I don't do something soon, I'm afraid I may lose my son, too. Maybe if I could take us off to someplace like yours in Gilead, that won't happen ..."

**HANNAH.** *(Dismissively, as she walks away.)* If they're all gonna sound like that, to hell with it. Shelby, you can go home now. We're done here.

**SHELBY.** *(To PERCY.)* Caleb'll be waiting anyway. Night then.

**PERCY.** Night, Shel.

*(SHELBY exits.)*

**HANNAH.** *(Handing PERCY a towel.)* Make sure you wrap that loaf up good. I gotta get off this leg.

**PERCY.** Still pretty tender?

**HANNAH.** Sore enough considering the doctor keeps telling me how good it's healing.

**PERCY.** You think if a wound goes real deep, that the healing can feel just as bad as what caused it?

**HANNAH.** ... Might be. *(Starts toward her room. Music begins.)* Might be.

**PERCY.** *(Reaches out to touch HANNAH's shoulder.)* Hannah...

**HANNAH.** *(Pulls away sharply; then says, not unkindly.)* Goodnight.

*(PERCY takes the bread out to the porch. Light fades on her. HANNAH makes her way up to the bedroom as she sings.)*

OLD FAMILIAR ACHES AND PAINS,
CUTS AND SCRAPES AND SOUVENIRS.
EV'RYBODY HAS A FEW
COLLECTED OVER DAYS AND YEARS.



ALL AT ONCE, A PAIN WILL COME
LIKE SOME FORGOTTEN LULLABY,
THE WHISPER FROM A CHILDHOOD WOUND
WHEN I FIRST LEARNED HOW NOT TO CRY.

TEARS WON'T MAKE IT GO AWAY.
YEARS WILL PASS AND I'LL REMEMBER.

MY LIFE HAS BEEN WHAT IT HAS BEEN.
NO ONE NEEDS TO PITY ME.
AND IF I FALL AND FALL AGAIN
I DON'T WANT ANY SYMPATHY.

FOR GOOD, FOR BAD, FOREVERMORE,
SOMEDAY I'LL LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP,
AND I WILL HAVE JUST ONE REGRET,
A SECRET I WILL ALWAYS KEEP.

AND ON THAT NIGHT THE PAIN WILL COME,
LIKE SOME FORGOTTEN LULLABY
THAT MOTHERS SING TO MISSING SONS
WHEN THEY'VE FORGOTTEN HOW TO CRY.

*(HANNAH lies down and light fades on her.*
*Lights rise on porch area. PERCY sets the bread down and drives the ax into the stump. In the shadows behind PERCY we can just make out the silhouette of a male figure watching her. As PERCY makes her way back toward the door, she catches sight of the figure and stops short with a gasp. In the lantern light, his shadow looms above PERCY. It is the VISITOR. Although frightened, PERCY quickly composes herself and stands her ground.)*

**PERCY.** You gonna do something to me, why don't you just come ahead and do it?! I'm right here, ain't I? *(The VISITOR stands still for a moment, then holds up a small feather and sets it down on the stump. He steps back.)* Okay then. *(She picks up the feather.)* A feather? That's real nice. Thank you. *(The VISITOR stands motionless.)* You scared me, that's all. I didn't see you there. Didja get them loaves of bread I left? I could bring you somethin' different if you want. I know how it is eating the same thing till you can't stand the sight of it no more. Would you like that? *(The VISITOR doesn't answer.)* My name's Percy. You got a name? *(The VISITOR doesn't answer.)* I think I'll call you 'Johnny B,' okay? Johnny B. How would that do?

**HANNAH.** *(Off.)* Percy...

*(The VISITOR tenses, then grabs the bread and leaves. PERCY follows a few steps and calls after him.)*

**PERCY.** Maybe next time we won't be so rushed and we'll have more chance to chat. *(PERCY looks again at the VISITOR's tiny gift.)* A feather.

*(Fade out.)*

## Scene 9

*SCENE: The Grill. Late May through late June.*
*AT RISE: EFFY, clutching a handful of envelopes, marches toward the Grill like a woman on a mission. In the Grill, HANNAH is pouring JOE a cup of coffee. EFFY approaches HANNAH and slaps the envelopes down one at a time.*

**EFFY.**
HARTFORD, HOUSTON, HARRISBURG,
MINNEAP'LIS, MINNESOTA.
PORTLAND, PITTSBURGH, PROVIDENCE,
RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA.
SAY WHAT YA WANT, SAY WHAT YA WILL
ALL OF 'EM "CARE OF THE SPITFIRE GRILL".

*(Speaks as music continues under.)*

Now as postmistress, I've got a legal right to know if the mail service is being used for some irregular purpose. So are you going to tell me what goes on here, Hannah Ferguson? Or do I have to open these letters myself?

**HANNAH.** Not that it's any of your business, Effy. But if you must know, I'm running a contest to give away the Grill.

**EFFY.** What kinda contest?!

**HANNAH.**
FOLKS OUT THERE WILL PAY A PRICE
TO WIN A CHANCE AT PARADISE,
THEY PRAY FOR LUCK AND GIVE THE DICE A GO.

I'D NEED A COLD DAY DEEP IN HELL



BEFORE THIS GRILL WOULD EVER SELL,
SO WHY NOT TRY A HUNDRED BUCKS A THROW?

**JOE.**
IT'S LEGAL, ON THE UP AND UP.
FOLKS DROP THEIR MONEY IN THE CUP
AND WRITE A LITTLE ESSAY ON THE GRILL.

**EFFY.** *(To JOE, for HANNAH's benefit.)*
I BETCHA WHEN THE DEAL GOES DOWN
SHE'LL BE THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF TOWN,
AND GREED IS SUCH A BITTER LITTLE PILL.

**HANNAH.**
COMES A TIME TO SHOOT THE MOON,
TAKE A CHANCE, SAY "WHAT THE HELL."
PAY TO POP THE PRIZE BALLOON,
SPIT INTO THE WISHING WELL.

SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON,
LIFE IS HARD AND GONE TOO SOON.
SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON,

*(Taps her cane on the floor three times.)*

SHOOT THE MOON.

*(Lights shift to CALEB on the phone in limbo light. A week later.)*

**CALEB.** Yeah, hello, is this the *Gennesee Depot Gazette*? I'm trying to track down some news articles about a trial. About five years ago. Yeah, I'll hold.

*(Lights shift to kitchen, the following week. EFFY is now doling out envelopes to HANNAH. PERCY and JOE sort envelopes into small piles as HANNAH passes them along.)*

**EFFY.**
CINCINNATTI
**PERCY and JOE.**
SHOOT THE MOON.
**EFFY.**
BIRMINGHAM AND BUFFALO.
AMARILLO

**PERCY and JOE.**
SHOOT THE MOON.
**EFFY.**
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO.
DENVER, DALLAS
**PERCY and JOE.**
SHOOT THE MOON.
**EFFY.**
PISTOL RIVER, OREGON.
TAMPA, TULSA
**PERCY and JOE.**
SHOOT THE MOON.
**EFFY.**
SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN.

*(Suspiciously eyes envelope and barks.)*

Insufficient postage!

*(EFFY exits.)*

**HANNAH.**
COMES A TIME TO SHOOT THE MOON,
PLACE YOUR DOLLAR ON A DARE.
DROWN IT IN A CHEAP SALOON,
SOON YOU'LL BE TOO DRUNK TOO CARE.

**PERCY, HANNAH and JOE.**
SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON,
LIFE IS HARD AND GONE TOO SOON.
SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON,

*(Three claps; HANNAH taps cane.)*

SHOOT THE MOON.

*(Crossfade to SHELBY heading for Grill with envelopes. A week later.)*

**SHELBY.**
CLEVELAND, CONCORD, CORPUS CHRISTI,
INDIANAP'LIS, INDIANA.
CHATTANOOGA, CHATTAHOOCHIE
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA.



*(SHELBY joins HANNAH and PERCY sorting envelopes.)*

**PERCY, SHELBY and HANNAH**
NASHVILLE, KNOXVILLE, NEW YORK,
ALBANY AND AUSTIN.
MADISON, MEMPHIS, MOBILE,
BALTIMORE AND BOSTON.

*(EFFY clomps into Grill and toots a shrill whistle.)*

**EFFY.** Gangway!!!
**HANNAH.** Oh, what now, Effy?
**EFFY.** *(Shooing HANNAH, PERCY and SHELBY aside and pushing a chair out of the way.)* One side, ladies! Back up! Back up!
**HANNAH.** Don't rearrange my furniture.

*(JOE enters pushing a wheelbarrow filled with overstuffed mailbags on the sides of which are scrawled 'C/O THE SPITFIRE GRILL'.)*

**EFFY.** I hope you're happy now, Hannah Ferguson!

*(JOE hurls one of the mailbags onto the floor in the middle of the room.)*

**SHELBY.** Holy Moses!

*(JOE tosses another mailbag onto the floor.)*

**PERCY.** Holy mackerel!

*(JOE lifts two mailbags out of the wheelbarrow and throws them on the floor.)*

**HANNAH.** Holy shit!

*(With whoops and hollers, they half-playfully drive EFFY out of the Grill. A spontaneous dance of joy around the mailbags then erupts.)*

**ALL.** *(Including EFFY and CALEB offstage.)*
COMES A TIME TO SHOOT THE MOON,
STRIKE IT WHILE THE IRON'S HOT!
IT MAY LAST AN AFTERNOON,
YOU CAN SAY YOU TOOK A SHOT!

SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON!
LIFE IS HARD AND GONE TOO SOON!
SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON!

*(Three claps.)*

SHOOT THE MOON!

SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON!
LIFE IS HARD AND GONE TOO SOON!
SHOOT THE MOON, SHOOT THE MOON!

SHOOT!
SHOOT!
SHOOT!
SHOOT!

*(The letters are tossed into the air. They rain back down, whirling around HANNAH, PERCY, SHELBY and JOE.)*

SHOOT THE MOON!!

**CURTAIN**

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*SCENE: The Grill / Town of Gilead. July through September.*
*AT RISE: PERCY, SHELBY, and HANNAH sit after hours passing around a jug of HANNAH's infamous applejack, getting tipsier by the swig as they read through the essays. Music throughout scene.*

**HANNAH.**
HERE'S TO US AND TO THE GRILL,
AN EMPTY GLASS WILL NEVER SPILL.

**SHELBY and PERCY.**
HERE'S TO US AND TO THE GRILL,
AN EMPTY GLASS WILL NEVER SPILL.

**SHELBY.** *(Reading.)* "Dear Mrs. Ferguson, if your grill goes to me I will do my best to preserve its quaint, rustic charm. In time it could become the cornerstone of a new theme park, Six Flags over Gilead."

*(All three laugh over it.)*

**HANNAH.** I don't know if I'm ready to be a theme park. Pass the jug, Shelby. This applejack's not doing us any good in the bottle.

HERE'S TO YOU AND HERE'S TO ME,
THERE'S DRINK ENOUGH TO DROWN ALL THREE.

**SHELBY and PERCY.**
HERE'S TO YOU AND HERE'S TO ME,
THERE'S DRINK ENOUGH TO DROWN ALL THREE.

**PERCY.** Wait, wait, listen to this one: *(Reads.)* "Dear Mrs. Ferguson, the reason I need your diner is because that's where the aliens told me they will land."

**HANNAH.** Maybe they'll take Effy with 'em! *(Laughter as HANNAH takes the letter from PERCY.)* We're sending that one back tomorrow. In the meantime . . .

HERE'S TO US AND TO THE GRILL,
AND HERE'S TO MONEY IN THE TILL.

**SHELBY, PERCY and HANNAH.**
HERE'S TO US AND TO THE GRILL,
AND HERE'S TO MONEY IN THE TILL.

**SHELBY.** You read one, Hannah.

**HANNAH.** Let's see.... *(Reads.)* "Dear Mrs. Ferguson, I've worked as a cook all my life, but hard as my husband and I have worked, we've never had more than two nickels to rub together. My husband hasn't long to live.

I'M SURE THERE'S LOTS OF FOLKS OUT THERE
DESERVING OF THE SPITFIRE'S CARE,
BUT WHAT A BLESSING IT WOULD BE
IF THIS MAN I LOVE WAS FREE
TO LEAVE THE CITY HAZE,
AND SPEND HIS FINAL DAYS
IN A TOWN LIKE GILEAD..."

**PERCY.** Maybe you should hang on to that one.

**HANNAH.** I guess. But I don't think I wanna pick someone out of pity.

**SHELBY.** Well, what sort of person would you want in here?

**HANNAH.** I don't know ... someone younger than me. Of course, everyone is younger than me. Well, whoever gets it is gonna have their work cut out for 'em, running this place without the two of you.

OH, I'VE SAT AT THIS TABLE
FOR SO MANY YEARS
ALL ALONE AT THE END OF THE DAY.
I'D FORGOT WHAT IT WAS
TO HAVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS
WHO CAN HELP PASS THE HOURS AWAY.

TONIGHT AT THIS TABLE,
I'VE CLOSED FOR THE DAY
AND I'M FAR AS CAN BE FROM ALONE,
AND BE DAMNED IF THE GRILL
AIN'T THE BEST THAT IT'S BEEN.
YOU'RE THE DEAREST OF FRIENDS THAT I'VE KNOWN.



AND THE LIGHT FROM THESE WINDOWS
AIN'T SPARKLED THIS BRIGHT
NOT SINCE I CAN REMEMBER BACK WHEN,
AND MY FRIENDS AND MY FAM'LY ARE WITH ME TONIGHT
AND THIS OLD GRILL HAS COME ALIVE AGAIN!

PEOPLE SAT AT THESE TABLES
FOR TWENTY ODD YEARS
JUST TO PICK AT THEIR FOOD AND COMPLAIN.
NOW THEY WALK IN HERE SMILING
AND CLEAN OFF THEIR PLATES,
AND THE REASON AIN'T HARD TO EXPLAIN:

THE GIRLS AT THE TABLE
BESIDE ME TONIGHT
GIVE THEIR HEARTS TO WHATEVER THEY DO,
AND THE FOLKS 'ROUND THE GRILL
HAVE A NEW APPETITE
FOR THE GOODNESS THAT'S COMING FROM YOU.

AND THE LIGHT FROM THESE WINDOWS
AIN'T SPARKLED THIS BRIGHT
NOT SINCE I CAN REMEMBER BACK WHEN,
AND MY FRIENDS AND MY FAM'LY ARE WITH ME TONIGHT,
AND THIS OLD GRILL HAS COME ALIVE —

**SHELBY and PERCY.**
AND THE LIGHT FROM THESE WINDOWS
AIN'T SPARKLED THIS BRIGHT
**HANNAH, SHELBY and PERCY.**
NOT SINCE I CAN REMEMBER BACK WHEN,
AND MY FRIENDS AND MY FAMILY ARE WITH ME TONIGHT,
AND THIS OLD GRILL HAS COME ALIVE AGAIN!

*(Lights crossfade to tight special on EFFY with menu, placing her order to an unseen HANNAH.)*

**EFFY.**
I'D LIKE THE MORNING SPECIAL PLEASE.
DOES THAT INCLUDE A PRIZE?
I BROUGHT ALONG A HUNDRED BUCKS
AND A PAGE OF PRETTY LIES.

*(HANNAH now appears with a huge stack of essays. She stuffs a handful at EFFY.)*

**HANNAH.**
IF YOU'RE SO WORKED UP
ABOUT THIS CONTEST,
BE MY GUEST,
JUMP RIGHT IN.
GOT READIN' ENOUGH
FOR A MONTH O' SUNDAYS,
AND DON'T PRETEND YOU NEVER LOOK
AT EVERYBODY'S MAIL.
COME BACK TO ME
WITH THE BEST O' THE BATCH,
AND THEN MAYBE,
JUST MAYBE,
I'LL PUT UP WITH YOUR SMARTASS REMARKS!

*(HANNAH disappears; EFFY reads a letter.)*

**EFFY.** "Dear Mrs. Ferguson,

I HAVE LIVED IN THIS BUILDING
FIFTEEN YEARS COME THIS FALL,
AND I STILL DON'T KNOW THE NAMES
OF THE PEOPLE 'CROSS THE HALL."

*(Lights shift to kitchen area where PERCY is stirring a kettle. JOE reads a letter to her.)*

**JOE.**
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON,
IF I DROPPED DEAD TOMORROW,
WOULD MY BOSS EVEN KNOW?
TWENTY YEARS IN THIS CUBICLE,
I'M READY TO GO."

*(CALEB and SHELBY appear in another area. SHELBY is folding laundry.)*

**CALEB.** That raffle contest stuff is keeping you kinda busy, don't you think?

**SHELBY.** I can manage.

**CALEB.** Well, with Hannah back on her feet now, she doesn't need both you and Percy anymore. I think it's time you stopped working at the Grill.

**SHELBY.** But I like working there.



**CALEB.** And I like having you at home. I'll let Hannah know you're quitting.

**SHELBY.** Caleb, you're not my foreman. This isn't the quarry.

**CALEB.** What's that supposed to mean?

**SHELBY.** *(Very tentatively.)* If you need a clean shirt you'll have to put in another load. I'll be late for work...

*(SHELBY exits.)*

**CALEB.** *(Sings quietly.)*
WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A MAN TO FEEL SOME PRIDE?
NOT LIE AWAKE, WISHIN' FOR A HOLE TO HIDE...

*(Crossfade to street area. JOE and EFFY enter from opposite sides, leafing through a few letters while walking. As they pass one another during the 'vocal overlap' section, they share a brief smile before continuing on their separate ways. They read their respective letters in two limbo areas.)*

**JOE and EFFY.** *(Vocal overlap.)*
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON,
DEAR MRS. FERGUSON,
DEAR MRS. FERGUSON,
DEAR MRS. FERGUSON..."

**JOE.**
"FROM THE SOUND OF YOUR PLACE,
WHY WOULD YOU EVER WANT TO LEAVE?
I GUESS YOU GOT YOUR REASONS,
BUT IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE."

**EFFY.** *(Reading a letter which really moves her.)*
"I KNOW YOU CAN'T TURN THE CLOCK BACK,
I KNOW THAT LIFE ISN'T FAIR
BUT THERE'S GOT TO BE SOME HOPE LEFT,
SOMEWHERE."

*(Lights reveal PERCY on back porch, SHELBY at counter, and HANNAH in kitchen, each reading a letter.)*

**HANNAH, SHELBY and PERCY.**
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON..."
**PERCY.**
"I WANT TO SEE MORE THAN CONCRETE AND GLASS."

**SHELBY.**
"I WANT MY HUSBAND AND ME TO HAVE TIME FOR OUR LIVES."
**HANNAH.**
"I WANT MY CHILDREN TO LEARN HOW TO SMILE."
**PERCY, HANNAH and SHELBY.**
"I WANT PART OF ME TO COME ALIVE AGAIN."

*(EFFY and JOE enter the Grill. The Spitfire not only looks different, it feels different. A magical shift has occurred and the sense of budding joy and camaraderie is palpable. EFFY even leaves a tip for PERCY.)*

**JOE, EFFY, PERCY, HANNAH and SHELBY.**
ALL SUMMER, MORE ESSAYS ARRIVE EV'RY DAY,
FIND THEIR WAY TO EACH CORNER OF TOWN.
PEOPLE SIT ON THEIR PORCH SWINGS
'N' READ THEM OUT LOUD
TILL LONG AFTER THE SUN HAS GONE DOWN.

OLD STORE FRONTS ARE PAINTED,
EACH FLOWER BOX FILLS,
THE SIDEWALKS ARE PATCHED AND REPAIRED.
THERE ARE CARS ALONG MAIN STREET
WITH OUT-OF-STATE PL-ATES.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE ANYONE CARED.

AND THE LIGHT FROM THESE WINDOWS
AIN'T SPARKLED THIS BRIGHT
NOT SINCE WE CAN REMEMBER BACK WHEN.
THERE'S A SPIRIT OF HOPE ALONG MAIN STREET TONIGHT.

**HANNAH, SHELBY and PERCY.**
AND THIS OLD GRILL HAS COME ALIVE
**EFFY and JOE.**
AND THIS OLD TOWN HAS COME ALIVE
**ALL FIVE.**
AND GILEAD HAS COME ALIVE
**EFFY and JOE.**
ALIVE...
**ALL.**
AGAIN!

*(Blackout.)*



## Scene 2

*SCENE: Behind the Grill, night. October.*
*AT RISE: The sky is star-filled. HANNAH emerges from the back of the Grill. She looks behind to make sure she is alone. Lantern in hand, she brings a loaf of bread out to the stump. She drives the ax into the stump and gazes out at the woods. She turns back to the Grill. PERCY emerges from inside.*

**PERCY.** There you are, Hannah. *(PERCY looks disappointed when she sees Hannah has already completed the bread ritual.)* Oh... you already took care of things.
**HANNAH.** *(Nods and crosses back to the Grill.)* Yeah.
**PERCY.** Hannah ... them loaves of bread we set out ... are we leavin' 'em for —
**HANNAH.** These October nights get nippy. Keep yourself warm.

*(PERCY watches HANNAH enter the Grill. Then PERCY crosses out to the stump. She stops, reaches in her pocket, and removes a well-worn photo. She reads.)*

**PERCY.** "Autumn colors along Copper Creek, near Gilead, Wisconsin."

*(PERCY tucks the photo alongside the bread. As she turns back to the Grill, JOE emerges from inside, startling her.)*

**JOE.** Percy —
**PERCY.** Joe Sutter, you need to wear a bell around your neck.
**JOE.** Then you'd know I was coming and you might run away.
**PERCY.** I might.
**JOE.** And that'd be a shame, cuz you'd never find out about this.

*(HE holds out a piece of rolled-up paper tied with a piece of ribbon.)*

**PERCY.** What is it?
**JOE.** Ten acres.
**PERCY.** Looks like a piece o' paper to me.
**JOE.** My old man sat me down last night. He's so afraid I'll hop that train outta town that he cut me in on a little of the family land.
**PERCY.** Just what you always wanted.
**JOE.** He let me choose whatever parcel I liked. So I picked ten acres right along Copper Creek, close enough from here you could

throw a stone and hit it.

**PERCY.** Your worthless woods...

**JOE.** A corner of it, anyway.

**PERCY.** So you gonna sell it and move on like you said?

**JOE.**
I'D LIKE TO THINK THE OLD MAN DIDN'T RAISE A FOOL,
BUT SITTING IN THE WOODS OUT THERE TODAY,
I COULDN'T THINK WHY ANYONE WITH HALF A BRAIN
WOULD EVER PACK HIS BAGS AND MOVE AWAY.

I'M JUST A FOOL WHO COULDN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR
THE TREES,
THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY YOU CAME ALONG.
AND NOW THAT OUTBOUND TRAIN HAS ONE LESS
PASSENGER.
IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS THAT I BELONG.

You know, there's a clearing where a fella could put up a little house, with trees all around it. Maybe tomorrow I could give you the nickel tour.

**PERCY.** Maybe.

**JOE.** I was hoping you could help me decide where to put the front porch.

**PERCY.** Front of the house might be good.

**JOE.** That's why I need your help.

THERE'S THINGS THEY NEVER TEACH YOU IN A COUNTRY
SCHOOL.
THERE'S THINGS YOU GOTTA FIND OUT FOR YOUR OWN.
I MAY BE SLOW, BUT EVEN SO I FINALLY KNOW
THAT I DON'T WANT TO LIVE MY LIFE ALONE.

I'M JUST A FOOL WHO COULDN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR
THE TREES,
THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY YOU CAME ALONG.
AND NOW THAT OUTBOUND TRAIN HAS ONE LESS
PASSENGER.
IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS THAT WE BELONG.

OH, I'M JUST A FOOL WHO COULDN'T SEE THE FOREST
FOR THE TREES,
THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY YOU CAME ALONG.
AND NOW THAT OUTBOUND TRAIN HAS ONE LESS



PASSENGER.
IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS THAT WE BELONG.
IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS
THAT WE —

**PERCY.** *(Cutting him off.)* Joe! Joe, you don't wanna be marryin' me.

**JOE.** Why not? I'm already used to your cooking.

**PERCY.** You gonna want children?

**JOE.** Hell, yeah. As many as you're up for.

**PERCY.** I can't have children no more...

**JOE.** Well, then we won't, or...

*(His words trail off.)*

**PERCY.** Joe, don't. Please...

**JOE.** Will you at least think about it?

**SHELBY.** *(As she comes out onto the porch.)* Percy, do you know where Hannah put the — Oh, I'm sorry...

**JOE.** That's okay. I guess we were just about finished here anyway. Ain't that right? *(No response from PERCY.)* Night, then.

*(JOE exits through the Grill)*

**SHELBY.** Percy, are you okay out here?

**PERCY.** He wants me to marry him.

**SHELBY.** Percy...

**PERCY.** I said no. That man deserves better than me.

**SHELBY.** I'm not so sure there is better than you.

**PERCY.** Shelby. You don't know me.

**SHELBY.** I know that you're my friend.

**PERCY.** Yeah, well do you know why I got locked up for five years? *(Looks right at SHELBY.)* I killed somebody.

**SHELBY.** Who?

**PERCY.** My stepfather. Mason Talbott. I was sixteen when he got me pregnant.

**SHELBY.** Percy ....

**PERCY.** My momma just slapped me and told me to shut up about it. But you know what? I found myself lovin' that little life inside me. Feelin' it grow. I got to callin' it Johnny B. After that song, Johnny B. Goode. And I swore to God that I was gonna protect that baby no matter what. But Mason, he got drunk and took to me with his fists so bad that ... my baby — And all I could think was how I hadn't kept my promise. Mason musta been afraid of the police or

somethin' 'cuz he pulled me outa the hospital and dumped me in the back of his car. We ended up in this motel somewhere. Mason had a bottle and he was into it real good. He was sayin' how it was right that my baby died. I didn't say nothin'. But later on, when he was layin' there on the bed all passed out, I took out his straight razor.

*(Spent, PERCY sits in the porch rocking chair, motionless and almost numb.)*

**SHELBY.** Percy... Oh, Percy-girl...

*(SHELBY kneels. Gently and peacefully, she comforts her silent friend with calm, quiet confidence.)*

SING A LONELY CHILD SONG,
POCKET FULL OF RYE,
TO THE ONLY WILD BIRD
'NEATH THE NORTHERN SKY.
FOLD YOUR TIRED WINGS AWHILE,
YOU WILL WAKE TO FLY...
WILD BIRD.

DREAM A DREAM OF LIFTING UP
FROM THIS HOLLOW TREE.
FLY A CIRCLE 'ROUND THE SUN,
HIGH ABOVE THE SEA.
WHEN YOU REACH THE FARTHER SHORE,
THEN YOU WILL BE FREE...
WILD BIRD.

LOOKING BELOW YOU,
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
LONE WILD BIRD,
IS IT ME?

*(SHELBY puts her arm around PERCY's shoulder.)*

WILD BIRD, OH WILD BIRD
TELL ME WHAT TO DO.
IF I WERE A WILD BIRD
COULD I FLY WITH YOU?
AND TURN A RING AROUND THE MOON,
REST HERE WHEN WE'RE THROUGH...
WILD BIRD...



*(PERCY has fallen asleep. SHELBY kisses the top of her head as the lights...*
*Fade out.)*

## Scene 3

*SCENE: The Grill, a while later that night.*
*AT RISE: CALEB sits in darkness at a table, clutching a handful of papers. He drinks from a bottle. SHELBY comes in from the back porch, unaware that CALEB is in the Grill. CALEB sets his bottle down on the table.*

**SHELBY.** Caleb. You should be in bed.

**CALEB.** You're right. It's two-thirty in the morning. I *should* be in bed. But somehow I just couldn't sleep. Must've been something I read.

**SHELBY.** What are you talking about?

**CALEB.** I had the paper over in Gennesee Depot send me some clippings about Percy Talbott's trial. You might want to read them.

**SHELBY.** I don't care what they say.

**CALEB.** You should. Did you know that sweet little friend of yours slashed her stepfather? Take a guess how many times.

**SHELBY.** Don't do this.

**CALEB.** Two or three maybe?

**SHELBY.** I'm going home.

**CALEB.** How about twenty or thirty? Read 'em. *(CALEB thrusts the papers at SHELBY.)* That girl's a cold-blooded killer.

**SHELBY.** That girl is the first *hope* we've had since Eli was here.

**CALEB.** You watch your words, Shelby!

**SHELBY.** I'm tired of watching my words! You're jealous, Caleb, because Percy is doing something for me and for this town that you could never do!

*(CALEB pulls back his hand to strike SHELBY, but something in her face stops him. He lowers his hand.)*

**CALEB.** Shel...

**SHELBY.** I think you should find someplace else to stay for awhile.

*(SHELBY exits.*
*Crossfade.)*

## Scene 4

*SCENE: The Grill / The woods, just before dawn, next morning.*
*AT RISE: As the last few stars lose their light, PERCY remains sleeping on the porch rocker.*
*THE VISITOR steals in. Carefully, he leaves on PERCY's lap a primitive-looking model of a bird made from twigs and leaves. Reaching down for the loaf of bread at the stump, THE VISITOR finds the magazine picture PERCY has left for him. At the same moment, PERCY stirs and awakens to find THE VISITOR's bird.*

**PERCY.** 'Johnny B,' that you? ... *Eli*? *(The VISITOR slowly stands straight up, facing away from PERCY.)* Eli ... you made this, didn't you? *(As he starts to go, she decides to follow, leaving the bird on the stump.)* Eli, where you goin'? Eli?? *(PERCY follows. HANNAH enters to shake out a rug. She notices the little bird and picks it up as the lights crossfade. Special lighting effects — PERCY is dimly seen following ELI down a dark wooded path. The wooded path ends. PERCY stands facing a horizon on the brink of daylight. The first ray of sunrise lights her face.)* Oh, Eli ... Eli, it's beautiful. *(ELI remains behind PERCY. Intensely aware of his presence, but knowing she dare not turn to look at him, her eyes remain transfixed before her. She sings.)*

MORNIN' LIGHT, MORNIN' LIGHT...
PARADISE CAME DOWN LAST NIGHT...
ALL ITS COLORS BURNIN' BRIGHT...
BURNIN' BRIGHT...

*(As PERCY sings, a spectacular sunrise illuminates a new day. As moved by ELI's having revealed this sight to her as she is by the glorious sight itself, PERCY at last begins to release the pain trapped inside her. )*

THERE'S DARKNESS IN ME
AS DEEP AS THIS VALLEY,
AND THINGS THAT I DONE
I CAN NEVER REPAY.

THE DAYS I REGRET
ARE TOO MANY FOR COUNTIN'.
THERE'S SINS RIVER WATER
WILL NOT WASH AWAY.



BUT IF YOU CAN TURN THIS WHOLE VALLEY TO GOLDEN,
AND BURN TILL THE COLORS OF PARADISE SHINE,
THEN MAYBE YOUR BRIGHT MORNIN' LIGHT CAN DISCOVER
A DIAMOND OF HOPE IN THIS DARK HEART OF MINE.

MORNIN' LIGHT,
SHINE ON ME,
SHINE...
FIND A DIAMOND OF HOPE
IN THIS DARK HEART OF MINE.

I AIN'T ASKED FOR MUCH
IN THIS LIFE I BEEN LIVIN'.
I LEARNED EARLY ON
THAT I'M HERE ALL ALONE.

NO MATTER HOW CLOSE
I STAND TO THE FIRE,
IT STILL MAKES ME SHIVER
AND CHILL TO THE BONE.

BUT IF YOU CAN TURN THIS WHOLE VALLEY TO GOLDEN,
AND BURN TILL THE COLORS OF PARADISE SHINE,
THEN MAYBE YOUR BRIGHT MORNIN' LIGHT CAN UNCOVER
AN EMBER OF HEAT IN THIS COLD HEART OF MINE.

MORNIN' LIGHT,
SHINE ON ME,
SHINE.
FIND AN EMBER OF HEAT
IN THIS COLD HEART OF MINE.

MORNIN' LIGHT,
SHINE ON ME,
SHINE.
MORNIN' LIGHT,
SHINE ON ME,
SHINE.

*(As the light grows brighter, PERCY's cry becomes exultant. No longer a plea, it has transformed into an ecstatic affirmation.)*

SHINE ON ME.
SHINE ON ME.
SHINE!

SHINE ON ME.
SHINE ON ME.
SHINE!

SHINE!
SHINE!!
SHINE!!!

*(Radiant and triumphant, PERCY glows. Overflowing with a deeply satisfying joy she's never allowed herself to feel before, she realizes she is good! She is worthy! PERCY basks in the glory of her discovery as the sunrise peaks and subsides. The music grows softer but conveys an edge of tension. ELI slowly comes forward, next to PERCY, and kneels. PERCY smiles, takes a deep breath, and sings with quiet self-assurance and deep contentment.)*

THERE'S A FLICKER OF LIGHT,
THERE'S AN EMBER OF HEAT,
THERE'S A DIAMOND OF HOPE
IN THIS *GOOD* HEART OF MINE.

*(PERCY places her hand on ELI's shoulder. PERCY and ELI both gaze forward, joined in a moment of blissful communion. Fade out.)*

## Scene 5

*SCENE: Outside the Grill, later that morning.*
*AT RISE: EFFY hails JOE and hands him mail.*

**EFFY.** You were forty-five minutes late picking up your mail. I was going to have the Sheriff send out a search party. But since you're the Sheriff, I didn't know who to call.

**JOE.** Thanks Effy, I appreciate your worry.

**EFFY.** You look like you've been spit at and hit.

**JOE.** Long night.

**EFFY.** She turned you down?

**JOE.** Effy, it's not really your damn business.

**EFFY.** Well, you bought a piece of ribbon yesterday, I figured it was for a package. Fifteen cents of ribbon won't wrap around much. Small package. Figured it was a ring.



**JOE.** It wasn't.

**EFFY.** Really, hmm. Now you got me curious.

**JOE.** Effy, you were born curious.

**EFFY.** Better than being born with six toes and a cowlick.

**JOE.** I suppose.

**EFFY.** Well, just remember what my mother always said.

**JOE.** What's that?

**EFFY.** "If you've got the thread, you'll find the needle."

**JOE.** What's that supposed to mean?

**EFFY.** I'm not really sure but she always said it.

**JOE.** Thanks, Effy, you've been a real help.

**EFFY.** Anytime, Joe, anytime.

*(Crossfade.)*

## Scene 6

*SCENE: The Grill, later that day.*
*AT RISE: HANNAH and SHELBY are setting tables. CALEB enters. He and SHELBY meet eyes for a moment but SHELBY continues to work. HANNAH breaks the silence.*

**HANNAH.** Afternoon, Caleb.

**CALEB.** Aunt Hannah.

**HANNAH.** Missed you this morning.

**CALEB.** I wasn't hungry. Where's the rest of your staff?

**HANNAH.** Good question. Haven't seen Percy all day. Want some coffee?

**CALEB.** Yeah. Maybe a sandwich, too.

**HANNAH.** Comin' up.

*(Still glowing, PERCY appears outside the front of the Grill, leading ELI.)*

**PERCY.** Come along, now. *(She enters the Grill.)* Not to worry, come on in.

*(SHELBY looks up to see ELI just outside the doorway. She drops the plate she is holding. It shatters.)*

**HANNAH.** That's one less to wash, Shelby. *(Turning from Caleb, she sees ELI.)* Oh, my Lord.

*(ELI hesitates.)*

**SHELBY.** *(After a brief silence, in a whisper of shocked recognition.)* … Eli?

**CALEB.** *(In disbelief.)* *Eli*?! What the hell — ?

*(CALEB steps forward for a closer look. ELI mistakes it for a sign of aggression and flees.)*

**HANNAH.** *(Rushing out to the porch.)* Wait! Wait, don't go! Don't go!! *(But he's gone. HANNAH lashes out at PERCY.)* What do you think you're doing?!

**PERCY.** Hannah, it wasn't like I —

**HANNAH.** You wrecked the only hope I had, damn you!

**PERCY.** I was only tryin' to —

**HANNAH.** Shut your mouth, you worthless piece of trash!!

**SHELBY.** Hannah, no!!

*(PERCY, standing her ground, looks right at HANNAH.)*

**CALEB.** Eli's alive?

**HANNAH.** …He went off to be a hero, like his father. But Eli was no hero. He was a deserter.

**CALEB.** What?!?

**HANNAH.** Not missing in action, just missing. He showed up here at the Grill one night when Jack and I were closing up. Jack threw him out. I didn't do a thing to stop him.

**SHELBY.** Hannah …!

**HANNAH.** *(Continuing; defensively.)* A deserter. The shame of it killed my Jack. *(With the ironical perspective of hindsight.)* … The shame … Then one night, years after Jack died, I went out to stack the wood delivery, and it was already done, same way Jack taught Eli to do it. It was winter. Cold. So I left a blanket and he took it.

**SHELBY.** Hannah … what have you done?

**CALEB.** My whole life I've been trying to live up to something that never was in the first place. I stayed here, and tried to bring something back to this town. I just wish to God you would have told us the truth. There's so much I think might've happened different.

**HANNAH.** Caleb, I …

*(HANNAH has no words.)*

**CALEB.** Here's to the Spitfire.



*(He sets his coffee cup down sharply on the table. SHELBY begins to pick up the pieces of broken plate. CALEB crosses toward SHELBY. He kneels and helps her. SHELBY and CALEB look at one another. CALEB hands SHELBY the pieces he's collected and goes out the front door. SHELBY discards the broken pieces and leaves the Grill, going the opposite direction as CALEB. HANNAH, unyielding as ever, sits stone-faced. She tersely calls to PERCY.)*

**HANNAH.** Percy.

**PERCY.** Yes, Hannah.

**HANNAH.** I never should have called you that.

**PERCY.** No matter.

**HANNAH.** It does matter.

**PERCY.** I had a lot worse.

**HANNAH.** I know. And for that, I'm sorry.

**PERCY.** I'm sorry too, Hannah. *(Draws a bit closer to HANNAH, testing the waters.)* Don't you be worryin' about Caleb and Shelby. They'll come around.

**HANNAH.** *(Responding with a bitterness that PERCY doesn't expect.)* What about Eli? Eli may never come back now, after what you just put him through.

**PERCY** *(Realizing that HANNAH's anger at her has not abated.)* After what I — ? *(Provoked by her own frustration, PERCY lets HANNAH have it.)* You know — loaves of bread are all well and good, Hannah, but he don't need bread. He needs you.

**HANNAH.** It's too late.

**PERCY.** *(Challengingly.)* He needs to know that you forgave him. *If* you have.

**HANNAH.** You don't know what you're talking about, girl.

**PERCY.** *(Pushed to the limit, she says without thinking.)* I know what it is to lose a child, Hannah! *(HANNAH, still stone-faced, turns and looks at PERCY for the first time.)* I do. And mine can never come back. But your boy is out there.

*(PERCY exits. HANNAH sits in silence as a slow shift of lights takes us from day to night. HANNAH rises and gets out a loaf of bread and a towel. Just as she is about to wrap up the bread, she resolutely changes her mind and puts the items back under the counter. She crosses to the front door, looks out for a moment, and switches on the porch lights. Music starts. HANNAH procures a lantern and makes her way toward the back porch. She looks outside.)*

HANNAH.
IT IS LATE IN THE DAY,
IT IS LATE IN THE DAY.
WOULD YOU PLEASE FIND YOUR WAY BACK HOME?

THERE'S A LAMP IN THE NIGHT,
THERE'S A LAMP IN THE NIGHT.
YOU CAN FOLLOW ITS LIGHT BACK HOME.

*(HANNAH moves through the Grill, still carrying the lantern.)*

I WILL WAIT FOR YOU HERE UNTIL MORNING,
AND ON TO THE END OF THE DAY.
I WILL WAIT FOR YOU HERE UNTIL MORNING.
I PROMISE I WON'T TURN AWAY.

*(She puts the lantern down on a table.)*

HEAR AN OLD WOMAN PRAY,
HEAR AN OLD WOMAN PRAY,
WOULD YOU PLEASE FIND YOUR WAY BACK HOME.

IT IS LATE IN THE DAY,
IT IS LATE IN THE DAY.
WOULD YOU PLEASE FIND YOUR WAY BACK HOME...?

*(HANNAH sits at the table. A few stars have appeared in the sky. It is indeed late in the day. ELI appears in the shadows outside the Grill and watches as HANNAH sings again, softly.)*

IT IS LATE IN THE DAY,
IT IS LATE IN THE DAY...
WOULD YOU PLEASE FIND YOUR WAY BACK HOME...

*(ELI comes out of the shadows and enters the Grill. He sits at the table with HANNAH. HANNAH extends her hand to him as the lights...*
*Fade out.)*

## Scene 7

*SCENE: The street / The Grill, several days later.*
*AT RISE: JOE and EFFY are outside the Grill looking at essays.*



**EFFY.** *(Holding up two essays.)* I'm not sure if either of these will win the blue ribbon but they're the best of what I read. I made a few spelling corrections.

**JOE.** I'm sure you did, Effy.

**EFFY.** This is the one I like the most. *(Reads.)* "Dear Mrs. Ferguson,

I'VE GROWN TIRED OF THE CITY,
IT'S NO LIFE FOR ME THERE.
I LONG FOR A BETTER PLACE
WITH NEIGHBORS WHO CARE."

**JOE.** *(Reading his favorite.)*
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON,
I THOUGHT I WAS DESTINED
JUST TO WANDER AND ROAM,
BUT IN SOMEPLACE LIKE GILEAD,
I'D KNOW I WAS HOME."

**EFFY.** *(Genuinely moved.)* Oh, that's nice, too...

*(PERCY and SHELBY enter, heading for the porch. ALL exchange a brief greeting.)*

**JOE.** Morning.

**EFFY.** You're back working at the Grill again, Shelby?

**SHELBY.** Since yesterday. I just needed a little time.

**EFFY.** *(Kindly.)* How's Caleb?

**SHELBY.** He'll need a little more time. But he'll be alright. We both will.

**EFFY.** *(Offering her hand to SHELBY.)* I hope so.

**SHELBY.** *(Taking EFFY's hand.)* Thanks, Effy.

**JOE.** Well, looks like today's the big day.

**EFFY.** *(Waving the essays.)* Here's our picks.

**PERCY.** I'll give 'em to Hannah.

**EFFY.** *(Reluctant to part with the letters.)* But she told us to bring in our favorites today.

**PERCY.** That's right. But now she wants to talk to just us girls.

**EFFY.** *(Excited.)* Just us *girls*?

**SHELBY.** *(Indicating herself and PERCY.)* Just *us* girls.

**EFFY.** Oh.

**PERCY.** We'll tell you all about it just as soon as we know.

**EFFY.** *(Laughing good-naturedly.)* I know you will ... 'girls'. C'mon Joe, help this little old lady cross the street.

**SHELBY.** *(Going into the Grill.)* 'Bye now.
**EFFY.** *(Exiting.)* Okay then.

*(SHELBY makes an encouraging gesture to PERCY before leaving.)*

**PERCY.** *(Pausing on the porch.)* Say Joe... I keep thinkin' 'bout the other night. I just wanna tell ya that ...

*(She hesitates.)*

**JOE.** You don't have to tell me. I uh ... I know a little something about wild birds.
**PERCY.** Yeah? *(JOE nods.)* Well, I don't know nothin' about front porches, but I got some ideas for that house o' yours.
**JOE.** Yeah?
**PERCY.** Maybe you wanna stop by a little later.
**JOE.** Alright, Miss Talbott.
**PERCY.** Percy'll do. *(She shares a smile with JOE. JOE exits. PERCY enters the Grill and calls out.)* Hannah! Hannah?
**SHELBY.** She's not here yet.
**PERCY.** I can't wait. Shelby ... read me your favorite.
**SHELBY.** Okay. "Dear Mrs. Ferguson,

THERE'S JUST ME AND MY WIFE,
I'M A HARD WORKING MAN.
WE'D LIKE TO RAISE A FAM'LY,
IT SOUNDS LIKE IN GILEAD, WE CAN.

**PERCY.** *(Reading.)*
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON,
THERE'S SOMETHIN' THAT I'VE NEVER SEEN:
A GIANT STRETCH OF EVERGREEN,
A GOLDEN VALLEY SHININ' DOWN BELOW,
AND ME JUST STANDIN' ON THE HILL.
I DREAM I'LL FIND IT AT THE GRILL,
BUT IF I'M DREAMIN' I DON'T WANT TO KNOW..."

**SHELBY.**
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON..."
**PERCY.**
"DEAR MRS. FERGUSON..."

*(HANNAH enters.)*



**PERCY.** Hannah! We got all our finalists here! 'Cept for yours.
**SHELBY.** Should we read them out loud to you, Hannah?
**PERCY.** Or maybe we could just put 'em all in a big cookin' pot and pick one out.
**HANNAH.** None of that will be necessary.
**PERCY.** Why?
**HANNAH.** I'm sending all the money back.
**PERCY.** What?
**SHELBY.** *(Overlap.)* Sending it back?
**PERCY.** Why? You gonna keep the Spitfire?
**HANNAH.** Heck no. I'll be too *busy* to run a Grill while I'm taking care of my son.
**SHELBY.** Then why are you calling off the raffle?
**PERCY.** You couldn't pick an essay?
**HANNAH.** Oh, I picked a winner. The problem is, I picked an essay that doesn't qualify for the contest.
**PERCY.** What're you goin' on about?

**HANNAH.** *(Opens up a folded newspaper and reads/sings.)*
WHEN YOU LOOK OUT FROM YOUR FRONT PORCH
TO SEE THE SUN GO DOWN,
ANOTHER NIGHT HAS FALLEN
ON THE STREET OF YOUR HOMETOWN.

**SHELBY.** That's our ad!
**HANNAH.** Those were the best words written about the Grill. And I'll be dipped if I'm gonna give the Spitfire to the second best. *(Setting an old set of keys on the table.)* Here's the keys. I've never used 'em, not even sure if they work. But they're yours.
**PERCY.** Ours?!
**HANNAH.** Yours. This old Grill may not be much, but it's home. That's the least I can give back to my girls.

**PERCY.**
AND ALL AT ONCE YOU UNDERSTAND
THAT YOU ARE HERE TO STAY.

**SHELBY.**
YOU ARE HERE TO STAY.

**SHELBY & PERCY.**
WITH ROOTS SO DEEP INTO THE EARTH,
THEY'LL NEVER PULL AWAY!

**SHELBY & HANNAH.**
NEVER PULL AWAY!

**SHELBY, PERCY and HANNAH.**
AND WHEN SUMMER TURNS TO AUTUMN
IN THE TOWN WHERE YOU ARE FROM,
THEN THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME.

AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME!
THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME TO YOU!
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME!

**PERCY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE COME!
**SHELBY.**
AND THE COLORS OF PARADISE —
**PERCY and HANNAH.**
AND THE —
**SHELBY, PERCY and HANNAH.**
COLORS OF PARADISE
COME!

**CURTAIN**



## PROPS

In the original production, nearly all of the utensils and other such props were made of wood or metal. Plastic items were avoided. The impression should be that the characters have owned these things for many years. No prop food or liquid was ever used in the Grill scenes. The contents of the plates were left to the audience's imagination.

### ACT I – Preset

Small suitcase
Percy's coat
Bus ticket in coat pocket
Travel brochure clipping of 'Autumn Colors' in coat pocket
Percy's scarf

ON PORCH:
Rocking chair
Wood box with logs
Ax (next to stump)

ON GRILL COUNTER:
Cash register
Spindle for used receipts
Order pad and pen
Percy's recipe card (for 'Frying Pan' number)

UNDER GRILL COUNTER:
3 loaves of bread
2 towels
Bus tray
Spray bottle and wipe rag
Ledger book with pencil attached on string
2 catsup bottles

IN GRILL:
Small 'daily special' chalkboard and chalk
Broom
Coffee cups and saucers on tables
Silverware on tables
Paper napkin holders on tables

IN KITCHEN:
Crate for discarding used props
Apron for Percy
Various pots and pans
Various cooking utensils
Various mixing bowls
Various food containers
Tabasco

Salt and pepper shakers
Box of oatmeal
Coffee pot
Rolling pin
Sheet of wax paper
Towel
Desk bell (pitched on 'B')
Trick bowl with stand-up spoon (for 'Frying Pan' number – Effy's oatmeal)

**Personal Props**

ACT I Scene 1
**JOE**
Cardboard coffee cup
File folder
**HANNAH**
Lantern

ACT I Scene 2
**JOE**
Tabloid-sized local newspaper
**EFFY**
Purse
**SHELBY**
Workman's lunch box
**PERCY**
Pack of cigarettes
Sack of onions

ACT I Scene 3
**EFFY**
Princess phone receiver (no cord)
**JOE**
Blanket for Hannah

ACT I Scene 4
**PERCY**
List of supplies (Percy leaves it on table before lights come up)

ACT I Scene 5
**CALEB**
*(First entrance)* Blade sharpening tools
*(Second entrance)* Pipe wrench (makes ratchet sound)
*(Last entrance)* Fishing rod



**JOE**
*(First entrance)* Ice testing rod
*(Second entrance)* Tire chains
*(Last entrance)* Hoe
**EFFY**
*(First entrance)* Road salt dispenser
*(Second entrance)* Snow shovel
*(Last entrance)* Push broom
**HANNAH**
Crutches
**PERCY**
Cane for Hannah

ACT I Scene 6
**CALEB**
3 full-size out-of-town newspapers (*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Wisconsin State Journal, Dubuque Telegraph Herald*)

ACT I Scene 7
**JOE**
File folder *(Same as ACT I – Scene 1)*

ACT I Scene 8
**EFFY**
Envelope with letter and $100 bill
**VISITOR**
Feather

ACT I Scene 9
**EFFY**
*(First entrance)* Eight envelopes — Hartford, etc.
*(Second entrance)* Eleven envelopes — Cincinnati, etc.
Toot-whistle hung around neck
**CALEB**
Telephone receiver (no cord)
**SHELBY**
Seventeen envelopes — Cleveland, etc.
**JOE**
Wheelbarrow with four mailbags (each stuffed with envelopes)

## PROPS

### ACT II – Preset

Clear all envelopes
Strike chalkboard
Add center table and 3 chairs

IN GRILL:
30-40 letters on center table (in 3 piles)
3 tin mugs on center table
Booze jug on floor near Shelby's chair

ON GRILL COUNTER:
Cash register

UNDER GRILL COUNTER:
Two monogrammed aprons wrapped in plain brown paper
Huge stack of opened letters (stuck together—top letter removable)
2 loaves of bread
2 towels
Menus
Candy dish
Silverware wrapped in cloth napkins (3 sets)
3 matching tablecloths
3 flowers in small vases
Lantern

IN KITCHEN:
Discard crate
Pots and pans
Cooking utensils
Spice rack with spice jars
Coffee pot

### Personal Props

ACT II Scene 1

**EFFY**

| | |
|---|---|
| *(First entrance)* | Purse |
| *(Second entrance.)* | A few letters |
| *(Third entrance)* | Purse and a few letters |

**JOE**

| | |
|---|---|
| *(First entrance)* | Letter |
| *(Second entrance.)* | A few letters |
| *(Third entrance)* | A few letters |



ACT II Scene 2

**JOE**
Rolled-up deed of land (tied with a ribbon)

**SHELBY**
Blanket

ACT II Scene 3

**CALEB**
Small whiskey bottle
5 photocopied pages of newspaper clippings

ACT II Scene 4

**VISITOR**
Small model of a bird made from twigs and leaves

**HANNAH**
Small throw rug

ACT II Scene 5

**EFFY**
Several pieces of mail for Joe

ACT II Scene 6

**SHELBY**
Breakable plate

ACT II Scene 7

**EFFY**
Two letters

**JOE**
Letter

**SHELBY**
Letter

**PERCY**
Letter

**HANNAH**
Full-sized out-of-town newspaper
Set of keys on an old ring (in pocket)

## COSTUMES

Simple, everyday clothing that looks completely natural to each character (and actor) is the goal. The clothes in the show should never seem 'designed.' Also avoid any "Sunday-go-to-meeting" flavor (especially in the women's hair and make-up). We see these people in casual work-day situations and they should be clothed and (non-) styled accordingly. Aim for a timeless rurality. It's great if each character has at least one piece of clothing that seems to have been in the family for many years.

The original production used one or two basic outfits per character, with various pieces and accessories that helped to tell time in the play. Until the last chorus of "Ice and Snow," it's a cold Wisconsin winter. Percy, Shelby, Effy, Joe and Caleb will need winter coats, scarves, gloves, etc. Sweaters and long sleeves are appropriate indoor-wear until this point. "Colors of Paradise" to "Come Alive Again" move through spring and summer. Sweaters are gone; shirt sleeves are short or rolled-up; overshirts may be removed. Act II, Scene 2 to the end of the play takes place in October. Jackets and sweaters should be worn.

PERCY has a tomboy look. For Act I, a long-sleeved t-shirt and pale coveralls, with a plaid flannel overshirt. She'll need a prisoner's overshirt that removes easily for the opening scene. For Act II, perhaps a bit nicer shirt or blouse and casual slacks.

SHELBY is a 'traditional' woman and it's good to illustrate this by dressing her in a simple jumper-type casual dress with various blouses and sweaters. High laced boots will help give her a timeless look.

HANNAH wears casual slacks or jeans and perhaps a shirt that might have belonged to her late husband. She can have some warm, lived-in sweaters for the winter and autumn scenes.

EFFY wears comfortable slacks and very sensible shoes. She'll need winter boots for the scenes in "Ice and Snow" when she's salting the road and shoveling snow.

JOE wears a standard sheriff's uniform for most of the play. He should have both long and short sleeved uniform shirts. For Act II, Scene 2, he wears a plain oxford shirt, windbreaker, and chinos.

CALEB clings to the past and dresses more like the quarry foreman he once was than the real estate salesman he now is. Work boots, jeans, t-shirt, and a plain overshirt.

ELI wears tattered, distressed dark khakis. He may have a bandana tied around his head. Avoid a fanciful interpretation of this character and go for a literal and natural homeless look.



## SET

*The Spitfire Grill* was conceived to play on a single unit set with various levels and platforms suggesting different locations. Michael Anania's set for the New York production was constructed entirely of rough-hewn wood planks with a monochromatic natural color. Employing a 'less-is-more' sensibility, the details were sylized to include only the most basic elements essential for establishing a sense of place. The main playing areas were:

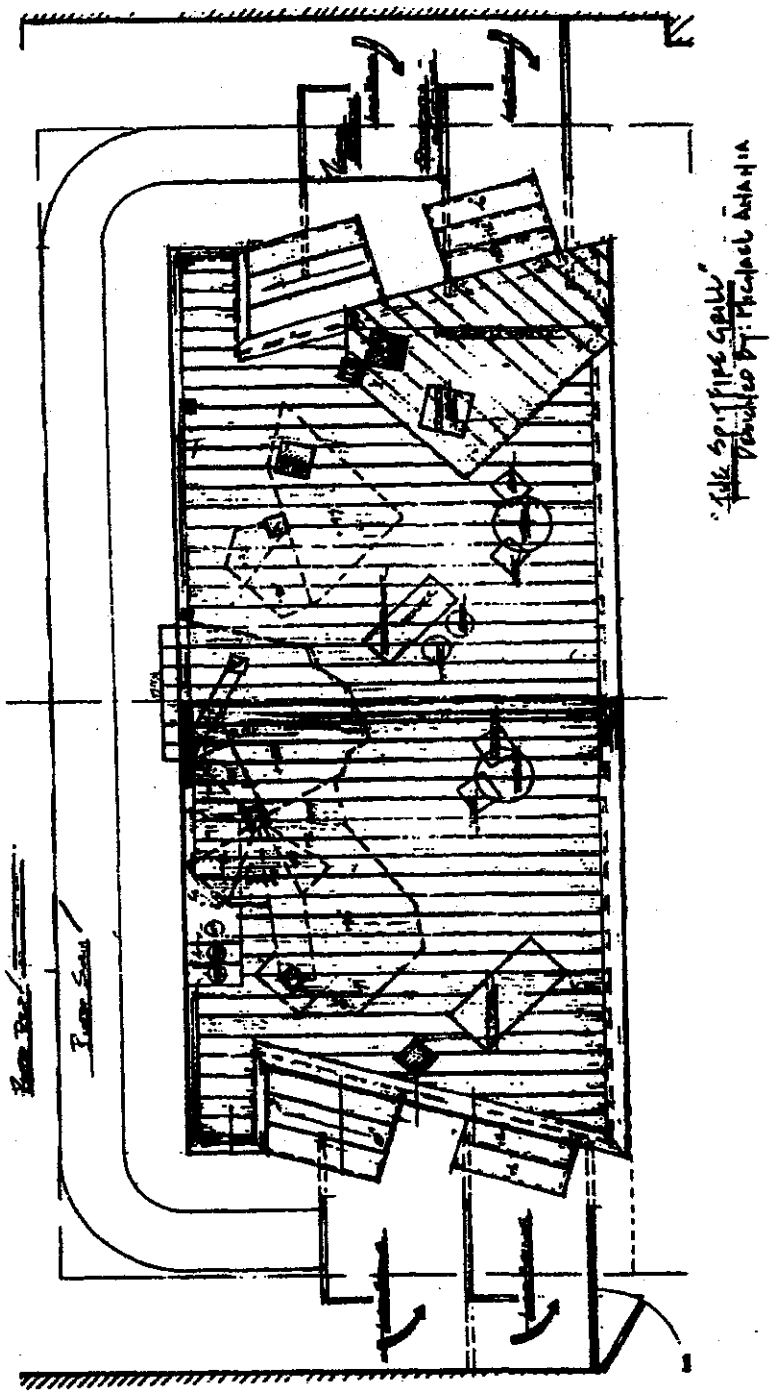
THE GRILL (Center)
2 tables for Act I, 3 tables for Act 2
Check-out counter

THE BACK PORCH (Left)
Stump
Rocking Chair

THE KITCHEN (Right)
Suggested only by an all-purpose wooden counter which represented a stove and food-preparation surface.

There were also two "LIMBO" areas; a smaller one up left center which was completely non-specific, and a larger one up right which was used as Hannah's room for most of Act I and for the 'street' scenes in Act II.

The high elevated platform up center was used only three times: the opening of the show, "Shine", and the "Finale" (during which the three women ascended to the top for the last chorus).



OTHER TITLES AVAILABLE FROM SAMUEL FRENCH

**ANGRY HOUSEWIVES**
A.M. Collins and Chad Henry

*Musical / 4m, 4f / Various sets*
Bored with their everyday lives and kept in insignificance by their boyfriends/husbands, these are four angry women. They try a number of outlets, but nothing suits until one of them strikes a chord on her guitar and suggests that they form a punk rock group to enter the upcoming talent show at the neighborhood punk club. Their group "The Angry Housewives," enter and win. This genial satire of contemporary feminism ran for ages in Seattle and has had numerous successful productions across the country.

"The show is insistently outrageous, frequently funny, occasionally witty and altogether irresistible."
– *Seattle Times*

SAMUELFRENCH.COM