

For Amber Waves
By
Kristen Elise

Cast of Characters

Anora Brooke	22, popular, fearful of commitment
Dustin Knox	24, Anora's ex, stubborn, independent
Mr. Knox	50's, Dustin's ill father
Wally Knox	16, Dustin's hard-headed brother
Clay Knox	19, Dustin's kind brother
Sally Twitchel	17, Anora's sweet-tempered friend
Fred Twitchel	19, Sally's brother
Florence Cobb	17, Anora's exuberant friend
Livie Cobb	9, Florence's sister
Mrs. Brooke	40's, Anora's mother
Nanny	70's, Anora's grandmother
Emerson	60's, Anora's boss
Mrs. Emerson	40's, cool and manipulative
Bertha Moody	23, Emerson's pernicious step-daughter
Deena Doon	20's, employee at Emerson's store
Hank Moeller	20's, Anora's boyfriend
Thacker Ratliff	20's, suitor of Anora
Patrick	20's, suitor of Anora
Debt Collector	
President Roosevelt	(Voice-over only)
Promoter	
Drifter #1	
Drifter #2	
Doctor	
Movie Actor	
Pastor	
Spectator #1	
Spectator #2	
Unemployed Worker #1	
Unemployed Worker #2	
Unemployed Worker #3	
Passerby #1	
Passerby #2	
Passerby #3	
Female Dancer	
Male Dancer	
Dancer	
Emigrants, Drifters, Villagers, Passersby	

Song list

"Rain Follows the Plow"
"The Five Year Dream"
"Free"
"No Place Like Home"
"Go"
"Deceived"
"Dreams of Reality"
"Shadow Stories"
"Fly"
"It's Up to the Women"
"Anora"
"Times Today"
"Black Storm"
"Shadow and Dust"
"Comatose"
"A Lot to Learn"
"Doran City"
"Here's to Better Days"
"Easily So Forgotten"
"The Great American Desert"

ACT I

SCENE 1

DORAN CITY, MIDWEST. AROUND TOWN. APRIL 1934.

Lights are dim. The scene looks deserted. On center stage lies a bench under a street lamp. A windmill stands alone on stage as the OVERTURE begins. As the music escalates, the windmill begins to spin, faster and faster, giving the impression that the wind is growing increasingly unsettled. As the overture nears its end, the windmill quiets down to a slow spin.

SALLY TWITCHEL, FLORENCE COBB,
and LIVIE COBB enter.

SALLY, FLORENCE, & LIVIE
O BEAUTIFUL FOR SPACIOUS SKIES
FOR AMBER WAVES OF GRAIN
FOR PURPLE MOUNTAIN MAJESTIES
ABOVE THE FRUITED PLAIN!
AMERICA! AMERICA!
GOD SHED HIS GRACE ON THEE--

A sudden gust of wind disrupts
their song.

SALLY
Oh, God, you hear that?

LIVIE
What is it?

FLORENCE
Don't know. It don't look good.

The girls fade into the
background as VILLAGERS slowly
enter the stage. The villagers
are draped in shadow, a sea of
unrecognizable faces.

"RAIN FOLLOWS THE PLOW"

VILLAGERS
AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL
WHO MADE UP THE LIES?
WHO GAVE US FALSE HOPE?
AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL
THIS AIN'T PARADISE
WE CAN'T EVEN COPE

WHY AIN'T THE RAIN COMIN' OUR WAY?
HOW COME IT AIN'T FOLLOWED THE PLOW?
WHY DO WE WAIT FOR THE CLOUDS TO BREAK?
IT'S BEEN OVER FOUR YEARS NOW

DUST SWELLS IN AND FILLS OUR DAYS
PREVAILING WINDS KEEP AT NIGHT
TRUTH IS, WE GOT TROUBLES THAT WON'T FADE OVERNIGHT
CHASING THE AMERICAN DREAM

WHY AIN'T THE RAIN COMIN' OUR WAY?
HOW COME IT AIN'T FOLLOWED THE PLOW?
WHY DO WE WAIT FOR THE CLOUDS TO BREAK?
IT'S BEEN OVER FOUR YEARS NOW

ALL OUR WHEAT FIELDS DRAWN TO DUST
CROP AND CATTLE SLOWLY DIE
EVERY HOUSE HAS TURNED TO RUST 'NEATH AN ARID SKY
ELUSIVE AMERICAN DREAM

The Villagers gather around their
radios to listen to one of
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT's fireside
chats:

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT
(V.O.)

I have told you tonight the story of our
steady but sure work in building our common
recovery. In my promises to you both before
and after March 4th, I made two things plain:
First, that I pledged no miracles and, second,
that I would do my best. I thank you for your
patience and your faith. Our troubles will
not be over tomorrow, but we are on our way
and we are headed in the right direction.

VILLAGER #1
(sardonically)
What direction is that?

VILLAGERS
WHY AIN'T THE RAIN COMIN' OUR WAY?
HOW COME IT AIN'T FOLLOWED THE PLOW?
WHY DO WE WAIT FOR THE CLOUDS TO BREAK?
WHAT ARE WE WORKIN' FOR NOW?

As the Villagers exit the stage,
two shadowy figures emerge.
ANORA BROOKE, 22, is a pretty
passionate girl who fears
commitment. A MOVIE ACTOR
accompanies her, dressed in
elegant clothes that clash with
her drab attire.

ANORA
(in an exaggerated fake accent)
My hero!

MOVIE ACTOR
(in an equally exaggerated voice)

Darling!

ANORA
You found me at last! I knew you would.
You've been chasing me on screen for over an
hour.

MOVIE ACTOR
Yes, Anora, I found you at last! And with
only five minutes to spare before the end of
the picture.

ANORA
Well, thank all glorious Providence for that!
We need a good endin'.

MOVIE ACTOR
Sweet love of my life, you speak my heart's
only desire.

ANORA
(Laughing, breaking character)
That's ridiculous! You goof.
(Resuming her movie persona)
Come sweep me off my feet!

She waves to him, then resumes in
a normal voice:

ANORA (CONT'D)
Come, come, sweep! We need a grand finale.

The Movie Actor lifts her off the
ground and spins her around; both
are enjoying the moment. He
lifts her onto the bench, and she
poses dramatically.

MUSIC changes to an upbeat tune--
as to represent the ending of the
film.

The Movie Actor fades into the
background as HANK, 23, emerges.
Simple, plain, and unambitious,
Hank is a representation of the
mundane world that has come to
accept a certain level of status
quo.

HANK
Anora?

The MUSIC STOPS, and Anora
straightens, as though nothing
had occurred.

ANORA

Yes, Hank?

HANK

You, uh... acting out the picture we just saw?

ANORA

Something like that.

(Stepping down from the bench, sighing)

Oh, I think I needed that. A happy escape for an hour or two.

HANK

My leading lady.

Hank leans in for a kiss. Anora quickly diverts it.

ANORA

(Laughing uneasily, with a dramatic gesture)

The end! Not like it's real life, anyway.

She turns away, staring off in the distance. Her expression turns serious.

ANORA (CONT'D)

Do you think... that could be me one day?

HANK

What's that?

ANORA

In the picture we saw. Rags to riches-- with all the flashy clothes and pretty hair...

HANK

Like them movies? Of course not. I mean... why'd you want to be?

ANORA

Gee, thanks! Don't you ever want to know what it's like... somewhere else?

HANK

Nope. I already moved once. That's good enough fer me.

Hank wraps his arms around her. Anora seems to resist. She tries, subtly, to lean away from him, but the distance is considerable enough that the audience understands her intentions.

ANORA

Hank, you're from Tulsa, right?

HANK
Yess'm. Why?

Anora shifts uncomfortably,
trying to increase her distance.

ANORA
Why'd you ever move? It's such a big city
compared to this.

Hank pulls her in closer. She
drops her head.

HANK
Not like I had a say or nothin'. I came with
my folks. When I was a kid... well, Tulsa
wasn't the safest place to be. So we came
here, and here I'll stay.

ANORA
I cannot bear to think I'd die in this
potter's field.

HANK
Aw, it ain't so bad, exceptin' the dust... and
that's everywhere.

ANORA
Not everywhere.

HANK
But you know what Doran City's got that ain't
no other place in the world has?

ANORA
What's that?

HANK
You.

ANORA
Oh, that's... sweet.

HANK
Okay, quit yer playin'.

The WIND HOWLS.

ANORA
(Breaking free from Hank)
You hear that? The wind.

HANK
Same as usual.

ANORA

No, it's like... something's coming.

HANK

Wouldn't worry 'bout it. Times like these you gotta think positive. Like today.

Hank leads Anora to the bench, where they sit. He then looks at her expectantly.

HANK (CONT'D)

You haven't said anythin' all night. Don't you know what today is?

ANORA

Friday?

HANK

(chuckling)

Besides that.

ANORA

The 11th. No, 12th. 13th?

HANK

Stop goofin' around.

ANORA

I... don't know what you're talking about.

HANK

Yes, you do... Six months. Our anniversary.

Anora jolts up from the bench.

ANORA

No. No, see, we started datin' in... October.

HANK

An' it's April.

ANORA

Really, six months? I must be losing it.

HANK

I've ne'er been as happy in my whole life. Fer the first time-- I can't wait to see what's a-comin'. Just think, in another six months... in a year... think where we'll be, Anora.

ANORA

I'd rather not.

MUSIC begins.

ANORA (CONT'D)

Really. I'd rather not.

"THE FIVE YEAR DREAM"

HANK
I CAN JUST SEE IT ALL, FIVE YEARS FROM NOW
YOU AND I NESTLING SIDE BY SIDE
AS NIGHT DRAWS NEAR YOU REST YOUR HEAD
UPON MY SHOULDER IN MY BED
YES, DARLING, WE'RE SINCERELY WED
FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

Anora starts to freak out.

ANORA
WHO'S TO SAY WHAT COMES OUR WAY?
WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING?

HANK
JUST STAY BESIDE ME, YOU WILL SEE
EACH WINTER TURNED TO SPRING

ANORA
(Beat.)
Nope, sorry. Can't see it.

HANK
CAN'T YOU JUST SEE IT ALL, THERE COMES THE DAY
WHEN WE TWO JOIN OUR FAMILIES
SWEETLY PLACE YOUR HAND IN MINE
AND SPEAK THE VOWS AS RICH AS WINE
SEDUCE ME WITH YOUR LOVE DIVINE
ONE LOVELY DAY

ANORA
I NEVER THOUGHT IT OUT, FIVE YEARS FROM NOW
DEAR GOD, WHAT WILL MY LIFE BE?

HANK
ANORA, KEEP YOUR FLAME ALIGHT
HOW WARM THE DAY, HOW FIERCE THE NIGHT

ANORA
THIS CANNOT BE, THIS ISN'T RIGHT

HANK & ANORA
THIS LIFE OF YOU AND ME

MUSIC ends.

HANK
Here, I have somethin' for ya.

He removes a small box from his
pocket, opens it, and hands it to
her.

ANORA
What's that?

HANK

A ring.

ANORA

I know. Why're you showin' it to me?

HANK

I'm givin' it to ya. To let folks know you're my girl.

ANORA

I'm not your girl.

He gives her a kiss.

HANK

You're too cute.

ANORA

I can't breathe.

HANK

You all right, Nori?

ANORA

No. I'm not all right.

Hank tries to kiss her again, but she pushes him away.

HANK

Nori, darlin', what's the matter?

ANORA

Stop it, Hank! Don't call me "darlin'". That's what silly romantics say, not us!

HANK

I say something wrong?

ANORA

Listen, Hank, you're a nice fella and all, but this is a lot for me to-- I mean, six months... Let's just call it off.

HANK

Huh?

ANORA

Friendly partin'. You go your way, I go mine, and we call it an evening. It's late as is, and my ma must be wonderin' where I am.

HANK

What are you sayin'?

ANORA

This... You've been swell. But I'm not your

sweetheart. I can't ever be.

She hands him back the ring.

HANK

What, there somebody else? Patrick? Thacker Ratliff? I seen that boy's eyes on you. Don't you tell me it's Clay'un Knox. You told me you only goes there on account o' Mr. Emerson.

ANORA

Hank, you're not hearin' me.

HANK

Oh, I hears you, just don't understand you. You're distressed. Why don't... why don't we call it a night. Talk about it tomorrow.

ANORA

Wouldn't count on--

HANK

(Interrupting)

Night, Nori.

Hank leaves, upset. Anora looks distraught for a moment, then is distracted by the WIND as it PICKS UP. Anora stretches out her arms to embrace it.

ANORA

Finally, I can breathe!

She breathes in deeply, then coughs.

ANORA (CONT'D)

Spoke too soon, spoke too soon.

VILLAGERS run past stage as if seeking shelter from the impending windstorm.

VILLAGER 1

Everyone, take cover! Some'in's coming.

ANORA

Hey! What're you running away for?

VILLAGER 1

Hurry up!

Anora stands still, as though in a trance... oddly intrigued by the gale. MUSIC BEGINS.

"FREE!"

ANORA
I HEAR THE WIND CALLING
IT WHISPERS TO ME
SOFTLY, EVER SOFTLY
CALLING ME
HOW QUICKLY ALL THINGS FLY AWAY
AND TIME KEEPS PASSING DAY BY DAY
WHILE I WAIT FOR MY TIME TO BE FREE
IN SOLIT'RY

I FEEL ITS CARESSES
THE WARMTH OF THE BREEZE
GENTLY, MEEK AND GENTLY

I FEEL THE DUST FALLING
THE WIND STILL CALLING
THOUGH ASH COVERS ME

AND ALL IT TAKES IS ONE MORE BREEZE
TO BRING YOU BACK HOME TO ME
STILL WAITING THE MOMENT I NEED

ONE DAY THE ZEPHYR
WILL ROAR LIKE A LION
AND OFF I WILL FLY AND BE FREE

'TIL THEN I'LL KEEP DREAMING
SILENTLY TEEMING
WITH A HOPE THAT ONE DAY
THE WIND'LL SEIZE ME

MRS. BROOKE
(O.S.)
Nori? Anora, storm's coming!

ANORA
(Sighing)
Home calling.

She takes a look up at the
windmill, almost longingly.

ANORA (CONT'D)
One day...

Anora exits, and MUSIC changes as
we...

TRANSITION TO:

SCENE 2

EXT. KNOX RESIDENCE - DAY

The music continues as the
audience is presented with a
farmhouse that has extensive
cosmetic damage due to a recent
windstorm.

A DEBT COLLECTOR enters, walking up to the front door and banging on it loudly. The door OPENS, and the Debt Collector lifts his hands in submission. The MUSIC ENDS ABRUPTLY. He is staring at the muzzle of a rifle. The young man holding the rifle, WALLY KNOX, steps out of the house and into view.

A teenager of only 16, Wally is proud and hard-headed, growing up in harsh circumstances. He is loyal to those he loves but quite relentless to people he does not trust.

WALLY

You seem to forget the last conversation we had?

DEBT COLLECTOR

Now, now, you knew I'd be here.

WALLY

I knows a no-good snake when he comes a-slitherin' his way up here.

DEBT COLLECTOR

Ain't my fault; I'm just doing a job for the bank. I'd like to speak to Mr. Knox.

WALLY

In case you ain't noticed, we got other things to take care of. Told you you'd get your money in time.

DEBT COLLECTOR

Now, Wallace--

Wally AIMS to fire at the Debt Collector.

WALLY

I said you'd get your money in time. Now scat.

DEBT COLLECTOR

(Beat)

You'll be seein' me, Wallace.

The Debt Collector exits.

CLAY KNOX, Wally's brother, arrives, carrying a broom and a rag. At 19 years old, Clay is the main breadwinner of the family.

He's amiable and polite, the
spiritual leader of the family.

CLAY
(Looking off stage, where the Debt
Collector exited)
Somebody been by the house?

WALLY
Just a snake.

CLAY
So that debt collector again? What'd you say
to him?

WALLY
I convinced him to give us more time.

Clay takes the rifle away from
Wally.

CLAY
I'm sure you did. C'mon, let's get to work.

Clay hands Wally the broom.
Wally gives him a sardonic smile
as Clay takes the gun back inside
the house. MUSIC BEGINS.

Wally and Clay sing as they clean
up the outside of their home.
Clay uses the rag to wipe the
dirt from the windows and
subsequently puts wet sheets over
them to prevent more dust from
flying in. Clay starts sweeping
dirt off the front porch and
resorts to getting a shovel and
bucket to remove all the dirt.

"NO PLACE LIKE HOME"

CLAY & WALLY
THERE AIN'T NO PLACE LIKE HOME
OH, NOWHERE ELSE I'D RATHER BE
NOT GOING HOLLYWOOD
NOT IN A FOREIGN MOOD
NO BROADWAY LIGHTS I CARE TO SEE

DON'T WANT TO LEAVE MY HOME
DON'T WANT A CHANGE OF SCENERY
DON'T WANT THE OCEAN BLUE
NO TRIPS TO TIMBUKTU
HERE ON THE FIELDS IS WHERE I'LL BE

ON THE VAST GREAT PLAINS OF DORAN CITY
I GOT THE BEST FOR COMPANY
GOT MY FRIENDS TO KEEP ME GROUNDED
AND THE LOVE OF FAMILY

NO BETTER PLACE LIKE HOME
NOT GOIN' NORTH, SOUTH, WEST, OR EAST
OUR FAITH IS TRIED AND TRUE
AND FARMING WE'LL PURSUE
WE'RE GONNA HARVEST FOR THE FEAST

MR. KNOX, their father-- a
relatively young man who's been
stricken with Dust Pneumonia--
carries out another bucket.

MR. KNOX
ON THE VAST GREAT PLAINS OF DORAN CITY
I GOT THE BEST FOR COMPANY
GOT MY FRIENDS TO KEEP ME--

Wally snatches the bucket from
him, bringing an abrupt END to
the SONG.

WALLY
Pa, don't do that, it's no good for you. We
can handle it.

MR. KNOX
As can I, Wally.
(He coughs, then looks around at the
damage, astonished.)
Lord almighty. That was quite the duster. In
all my years of living, I ain't never seen
nothing like this. And that includes the war.

WALLY
Pa, go inside. We'll take care of the
repairs.

CLAY
Oh, leave him be, Wally. He just wanted some
fresh air.

WALLY
Fresh air? That don't exist here. We
breathing dirt.

MR. KNOX
What's the matter, Wally? 'Fraid I'd catch me
some dust pneumonia?

He tries laughing but mostly
coughs instead.

WALLY
Not funny.

MR. KNOX
It is what it is. Can't escape it, whether
I'm inside or out.

WALLY

But being out here ain't doing you no favors.

MR. KNOX

Neither is a sour attitude.

WALLY

(Realizing that he's losing the argument)

Ain't gonna at least put your mask on?

MR. KNOX

Wind storm already passed.

Clay nods to Mr. Knox
encouragingly.

CLAY

Dust hasn't settled yet.

MR. KNOX

Fine.

He reaches into his shirt pocket
and puts it on.

MR. KNOX (CONT'D)

Looks worse than a gas mask.

(Beat.)

I want these days to be happy ones, and ain't
any o' you gonna change that.

DUSTIN KNOX, a young affluent man
around 24 years old, enters. He's
carrying luggage in each hand.
He looks at the others uneasily.
Ambitious, independent, and
friendly, he has come home for
the first time in seven years.

DUSTIN

Neither will I, I hope.

Mr. Knox takes off his mask.

MR. KNOX

Dustin. My dear boy!

Mr. Knox rushes up to his son,
and they hug.

DUSTIN

Hello, Pop.

WALLY

Well, knock me down and steal muh teeth. You
seein' this, Clay?

CLAY

He made it. The fool actually made it.

MR. KNOX

(to Dustin)

I see the Lord done answer some prayers, blessed be. I've been hopin' for this day for a long time. Let me bring in your things. What a surprise!

DUSTIN

No, Pop. I got it.

WALLY

He's right, Pa, take it easy. Come sit back down.

He tries helping his father put the mask back on.

MR. KNOX

Stop talking to me like I'm a cripple, boy. I ain't even confined to a chair.

(to Dustin)

My, how you've grown. Has it really been so long?

DUSTIN

Sorry I've been kept away.

MR. KNOX

You're here now. Is all that matters.

Mr. Knox grabs the luggage.

MR. KNOX (CONT'D)

Wally, you be hospitable, now, y'hear?

WALLY

Don't worry, Pa. I'll treat 'im just as he deserves.

Mr. Knox enters the house.

WALLY (CONT'D)

(to Dustin)

Don't know what you're looking for, but we ain't got it.

DUSTIN

Nice to see you, too.

WALLY

Didn't say you was welcome here.

DUSTIN

(to Clay)

Didn't you tell him I was coming?

CLAY

Well, I weren't so sure you'd come all the way out here...

WALLY

You knew about this, Clay?

CLAY

Yeah, well, sorta. I asked him to come.

WALLY

(to Clay)

Dust getting to you, too? Ain't nobody here thinking straight no more.

(to Dustin)

No need to stay, big brother. We's fine here without you.

DUSTIN

(Looking around, not convinced)

Clearly. What happened?

CLAY

Wind storm knocked all these here parts down.

WALLY

Don't worry, though. We've got it.

Wally leans on a part of the fence, and it collapses.

WALLY (CONT'D)

(Feigning confidence)

Was my next project, anyway. Redo the whole thing. Upkeep.

DUSTIN

Your work always this shoddy?

WALLY

You caught us on a bad day, is all.

CLAY

We've had plenty of those to go around.

DUSTIN

(to Wally)

And let me guess, still making trouble at school?

WALLY

What's it to you?

Clay moves toward the door.

CLAY

I gotta check on Pop. You two, be nice.

Clay exits, entering the house.
Dustin and Wally examine each
other, dubiously.

WALLY
What? We disappointed you?

DUSTIN
Sorry, it's just-- not what I expected.

WALLY
Things tend to change in seven years.

DUSTIN
But... what happened to you all? It's not
just the house. I mean, your clothes--

WALLY
It's called a Depression, birdbrain. And we
weren't the only ones hit. But it looks like
you done made somethin' outta yourself. All
fancy. That your automobile parked out there?

DUSTIN
Yeah.

WALLY
Nifty, Joe College. Hope it don't get swept
up by a storm.

Mr. Knox enters.

MR. KNOX
Boys! Whatcha doing, dawdlin' out here for?
Come inside.

(to Dustin)
How long you in town for?

DUSTIN
I... I'm not sure.

MR. KNOX
You stay as long as you like, Dustin.

Wally groans.

MR. KNOX (CONT'D)
We've got lots to catch up on. No need
standing out here, breathing in this dust.

WALLY
(Upset)
What have I been saying all this time?

MR. KNOX
There's no hope for me. But his lungs ain't
used to it. He's got California air in 'im.

WALLY

Don't say there's no hope.

Wally exits into the house,
frustrated.

DUSTIN

Actually, Pop, there's something I wanted to
talk to you about.

He tries to think of a practical
way to say his next words.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

I've come to help you, Pop.

MR. KNOX

You see what happened to the Steinbeck place?
Terrible, just terrible.

DUSTIN

I know. I know, Pop. That's why I want to
take you with me.

MR. KNOX

What, to California?

(scoffs)

You must be off yer rocker, boy. I was born
in this state, and I'm a gonna die here, too.
No need to be movin' me about.

DUSTIN

Pop, be sensible.

MR. KNOX

I am! Nothin' else to it.

Wally reenters, standing before
the doorway, crossing his arms
over his chest.

DUSTIN

You can't stay here. It's not sensible.

WALLY

'Course it is. Not everyone wants to up and
leave their home place.

DUSTIN

Even when it's falling apart?

WALLY

Good thing it can be fixed.

Wally steps down from the porch.

MR. KNOX

Wally, what'd I say? Go back inside.

WALLY

Just got one more thing to work on.

DUSTIN

You need any help?

Clay reenters.

WALLY

Told ya I'm good. We can manage without your help.

CLAY

Dustin, need your help carrying the plywood.

WALLY

Well. Just him then.

Dustin and Clay exit.

MR. KNOX

This is the first time we all been together in years, and now everyone's runnin' away.

WALLY

Well. It is what it is. Can't help it.

MRS. BROOKE (Anora's mother) and NANNY (Anora's grandmother) enter. Mrs. Brooke is carrying a basket covered with a large cloth. She is a mild-tempered, sweet woman who likes to maintain positive relationships with others.

Nanny, however, prefers to speak the truth even if it's not pleasant. She has a sharp wit that's often muddled from nonsensical phrases.

NANNY

Yoo hoo! Mr. Knox! Care package for you.

WALLY

(dropping the rope)

Morning, Nanny! Mrs. Brooke.

Nanny stops suddenly, observing the house.

NANNY

Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle tied up in chains. That windstorm sure packed a beating on this place.

MRS. BROOKE

Mama!

NANNY
Ain't it the truth though.

Mr. Knox walks up to them.

MR. KNOX
A fine mornin' to y'all!

Nanny jumps.

NANNY
Oh! Bless me, his voice packs a punch.

MRS. BROOKE
(holding out a basket)
We brought you some homemade muffins. Thought
you boys would like some.

WALLY
(walking over)
They your special kind, Nanny?

NANNY
'Course they is, you lug-head. My muffins are
always special.

Wally tries to lift the basket
cover, but Nanny smacks his hand
away.

NANNY (CONT'D)
Not here, child; you'll get dust on it. Take
it inside.

WALLY
Yes, ma'am.

Wally grabs the basket and walks
inside his house.

NANNY
(Looking out in the distance)
Hmm. Something striked me funny like that
queer bone in my arm. Who's that boy a-comin'
this way with Clayton?

MRS. BROOKE
(uneasily)
That's Dustin, Mama.

NANNY
Ain't so! Eyes may not be what they once was,
but I ain't stupid. That boy done cleared up
outta here and is nesting himself on the
coast.

Dustin and Clay enter.

NANNY (CONT'D)
Sweet, dear, merciful heavens and hell below.
(Elbowing Mrs. Brooke)
It's him!

DUSTIN
(Nervously)
Mornin', Mrs. Brooke. Nanny.

NANNY
(to Dustin)
Now why is it you's as red as a tomato grown
on the sun?

MRS. BROOKE
(Ignoring Nanny)
How are you, Dustin?

DUSTIN
It's not me you should be worried about,
ma'am.

He looks at his father.

MR. KNOX
Dust got to my lungs. Not much more to be
done 'bout it.

MRS. BROOKE
I heard Mr. Emerson's getting in a new stock
of Father John's Medicine. Ought to be good
for the cough. I can go ask Nor-- (She stops
herself)-- I'll look into it.

DUSTIN
That's much appreciated, ma'am. But I'm here,
now, so no need to be troubling yourselves.

CLAY
Ahem. Dustin, manners.

MRS. BROOKE
That's all right. We better be going. You
plan to be in town for long, Dustin?

DUSTIN
That's yet to be decided, ma'am.

MRS. BROOKE
Well, good seeing you.

They make their good-byes.

NANNY
(to Dustin)
Good bye, my dear! Lovely to see you all

unexpectedly. Ta ta!

Mr. Knox, Dustin, and Clay enter
the house.

NANNY (CONT'D)
Of all the things to get swept up here!
Didn't think dust could kick up people from
California!

MRS. BROOKE
Ma! He's visiting family.

NANNY
Fine time, too. What we gonna do 'bout Anora?

MRS. BROOKE
Do you think she knows?

NANNY
If I was her, an' I saw Dustin again af'er all
this time, I'd give him a good wallop right
where he deserves and let 'im know just what--

Dustin enters. Nanny jumps.

NANNY (CONT'D)
Dear Lord, child! Don't you go jumpin' in on
people.

DUSTIN
Sorry. Thought you left. I just came to get
something from my car.

NANNY
Oh! Oh, that yours? Quite nice, that is.
(Pause.)
Well, we best be going. Don't wanna be
hangin' about like it's awkward.

Clay enters. Nanny and Mrs.
Brooke exit.

CLAY
I know it's not quite the welcome you
expected; just got a lot of nerves on edge on
account o' that storm. Try not to be too hard
on Wally. He's more sensitive than he lets
on.

DUSTIN
I've gotten a warmer reception from a swarm of
bees.

CLAY
(Chuckling)
C'mon, let me help ya.

Clay motions to move, but Dustin stays firmly put.

DUSTIN
Are they worried about Anora?

CLAY
Who?

DUSTIN
Mrs. Brooke and Nanny.

CLAY
Well, are you?

DUSTIN
Worried about that firecracker? The Nori I once knew... why, if she's the same girl that I-

(Beat.)
The same. You think anybody's the same after all this time?

Clay notices Dustin is reliving the past in his mind. Music BEGINS.

"GO"

DUSTIN (CONT'D)
FUNNY HOW WE EACH LIVE THROUGH IT
THIS LITTLE LIFE WE MUST ALL COME AND KNOW
ARE WE ALL STILL THE SAME
OR DOES EVERYONE CHANGE?
DO WE ALL HAVE A PLACE TO GO?

HOW I NEVER THOUGHT IT MATTERS
SAW THE WHOLE WORLD AS A SURE EBB AND FLOW
THOUGH THE WORLD GOES TO HELL
IT WILL BETTER ITSELF
NO, WE CANNOT ALL LIVE BY "NO"
DON'T WE ALL HAVE A PLACE TO GO?

AND THIS GIRL THAT ONCE I KNEW
WAS OUR LOVE FALSE OR TRUE?
HOW THE SEASONS HAVE CHANGED
AND THE DAYS FLOWN AWAY
TOOK MY MEMORIES, LET THEM FADE
WHO'S THE GIRL THAT GOT AWAY?

IT'S TIME THAT I SEE THINGS CLEARLY
IS SHE A GIRL STILL, OR HAS NORI GROWN?
NO, MY LIFE'S IN C.A.
WHERE I'LL LIVE OUT MY DAYS
I'M NOT MEANT FOR THE STATUS QUO
DON'T WE ALL HAVE A PLACE TO GO?
CAN WE EVER REALLY STAY?

MUSIC ends.

CLAY
Dustin, you there?

DUSTIN
Yeah. Yeah, sorry.

CLAY
Didn't know where your head was at jus' now.
Thinkin' about the past?

DUSTIN
More the future, really.

CLAY
Future will show i'self in time. Come on,
now. We got work to do.

They exit.

TRANSITION TO:

SCENE 3

EXT. AROUND TOWN - DAY

BLUES instrumental music plays in
the background. Florence and
Livie enter, playing a game of
Hopscotch. At Livie's turn, she
struggles to retain her balance.

LIVIE
TOSS IN A SQUARE AND OFF YOU GO
SKIP THAT ONE AS YOU HOP TO AND FRO
JUST ONE FOOT IN EACH LITTLE SQUARE--

She stops suddenly and begins
COUGHING.

FLORENCE
You okay?

LIVIE
(nodding)
Your turn.

Florence plays her round, but
Livie continues coughing.
Florence STOPS suddenly.

FLORENCE
It's getting worse, Livie. I thought you said
you were feeling better.

LIVIE
I am. Promise.

EMERSON, MRS. EMERSON, and BERTHA

enter.

EMERSON

Morning, ladies. Aren't you supposed to be at school?

FLORENCE

No, sir. I mean, yes, but it was canceled cause of the damage the school got.

EMERSON

I see.

Livie coughs again.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

You got a cold there, Livie?

LIVIE

A cough.

EMERSON

Stop by the store to get some tonic.

Florence begins to pull her sister away.

FLORENCE

Thanks, Mr. Emerson, but we got some at home.

Florence and Livie leave.

MRS. EMERSON

Oh, Shawn, I don't see how you can be so cruel. You know those girls can't afford medicine.

EMERSON

I'd give some for free if they need it.

MRS. EMERSON

Free?! Now you're just being cruel to me. And Bertha. How will we eat if you start giving everything away? Have some business sense.

DRIFTER #1, wandering through, is wearing a sign reading, "SEEKING EMPLOYMENT, NOT CHARITY".

DRIFTER #1

'Scuse me, sir. I come from Topeka, lookin' for work. I was wonderin' if you could help a poor fella out.

MRS. EMERSON

There's no work here. You better keep moving.

DRIFTER #1

Pardon, ma'am, but I was asking the gentleman here.

MRS. EMERSON

You know who I am? I'm the mayor's wife. This here's the mayor. And we say there's no work for you.

EMERSON

I'm sorry.

DRIFTER #1

You know where I can find me some work?

MRS. EMERSON

I suggest you keep moving west and out of this town.

DRIFTER #1

(Disgruntled)

Thanks for yer time.

The drifter exits.

MRS. EMERSON

Somebody always wants something!

BERTHA

Goodness, Mama, did you see how dirty he was?

MRS. EMERSON

I could hardly look at the tramp.

(to Emerson)

Come, my dear. I loathe being outdoors for too long.

They exit.

TRANSITION TO:

SCENE 4

INT. EMERSON'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

Anora is behind the counter, working a cash register. PATRICK enters. DEENA, another employee, greets him.

DEENA

Good morning! Welcome to Emerson's General Store. We have a special today on strawberry jam. Would you like to try some?

PATRICK

Not interested.

DEENA
I'm doing well, thanks for askin'.

Fred approaches him.

FRED
Can I help you with something, Patrick?

PATRICK
Actually, I was hoping fer a word with Nori.

Patrick approaches her.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
You look very pretty today, Nori.

ANORA
Gee... thanks.
(Beat.)
Can I help you with something?

PATRICK
You got any plans for Saturday, Nori?

ANORA
Yeah, I'll be helping out at the breadlines.

PATRICK
I mean, something important.

ANORA
Feeding the homeless is important. Goodness knows we've barely got enough for ourselves.

PATRICK
Well, then, how 'bout after that?

Fred approaches them.

FRED
You need help here, Nori?

PATRICK
She's fine.

FRED
I'd like to hear it from her.

ANORA
Fred, I'll call you if we need you. Thanks.

In her corner, Deena makes herself comfortable and starts eating crackers covered in strawberry jam. Fred stands by her.

FRED

You know that's supposed to be for customers,
right?

DEENA
I know! I can't help myself. It's just
staring me in the face, saying, "Take me,
Deena! Eat me!"

THACKER RATLIFF enters, walking
straight past Deena.

DEENA (CONT'D)
(With a mouthful of food)
Weh-cohm oo Eh-er-fum Geh-raw... wah-eh-uh.

Thacker approaches Anora. Fred
takes a bite from the samples,
looking on jealously.

THACKER
Mornin', Nori. Patrick.

PATRICK
Hey, Thacker, you mind? She's helping me out
here.

THACKER
Sorry. How thoughtless.
(Calling out)
Fred? I think Patrick needs some help.

FRED
Seriously?

THACKER
Nori, I want to talk to you.

He pulls Anora aside. Patrick
grudgingly leaves.

ANORA
What is it, Thacker?

THACKER
I'm sorry of what's happened to Hank. It's
got me worried 'bout you.

ANORA
I'm sorry, I can't keep talking to you unless
you're here to buy something. Got work to do.

THACKER
Yeah, actually, you can show me a few things.

Deena and Fred speak from another
corner of the room while Thacker
and Anora silently continue their
conversation.

DEENA

You noticed how all the young boys are flockin' here today?

FRED

I'd say they've a crush on Anora.

DEENA

Is it true, then? She broke Hank's poor heart?

FRED

If I's to venture a guess, yes.

Emerson enters from his office.

EMERSON

How we doing today?

ALL

Fine, Mr. Emerson!

EMERSON

Oh, Fred?

Emerson waves Fred over and takes him aside.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Tell me you got good news for me.

FRED

Sales on feed are particularly high. Not much going on with the preserves.

EMERSON

What? With all the samples out?

FRED

I was hoping the samples would do somethin', but... What're folks gonna do with it? They're eatin' cornbread and beans.

EMERSON

(to Deena)

Are you telling them about the specials, Deena?

Deena wipes the crumbs from her mouth.

DEENA

Got a nice big sign going, too. But they's busy at the counter with Anora.

EMERSON

Nori. Always doing well.

DEENA

Of course she is. Half the town's in love with her.

FRED

Mr. Emerson? If I might offer a suggestion...

They move over to the side.

FRED (CONT'D)

I know you've had me look into ways to curtail expenses. Thing is, it's the missus. She's drawin' a check like an actual employee, but without doin' any work. So others have to make up for the loss of income with greater sales.

EMERSON

I've already had a talk with Mrs. Emerson about that, and... we need to find another way.

FRED

Truth be told, somethin' needs to be done, or you'll be closing up shop soon.

EMERSON

We have to find another way.

Mr. Emerson pulls out an envelope from his jacket.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Fred, run this over to the bank. It ought to hold us over 'til next month.

FRED

Sure thing, Mr. Emerson.

Fred exits.

Mr. Emerson smiles at Anora, who smiles back. He gestures to her to point out the sale booth, and she nods.

ANORA

(to Thacker)

You know, we have a special on strawberry jam today. Would you like to try some?

THACKER

Oh, I don't know. We don't have much use for that no more.

ANORA

You can try it on toast, biscuits, cornbread... keeps the taste of grit out.

THACKER

Really?

ANORA

Yeah, all that dirt taste just sorta... melts away. You wanna try a sample?

THACKER

From you? Absolutely.

ANORA

Deena can help you.

THACKER

Oh.

Anora leads him to Deena.
Thacker tries some jam.

DEENA

Good, inn'it?

THACKER

Sorry, Anora, you said this was on sale?

ANORA

Today's special. I'll ring you up.

She checks him out at the counter.

EMERSON

(to himself)

Best salesperson I ever had.

(to Deena)

Be in my office if you need me.

He exits.

THACKER

Anora, what I been meaning to tell you--

ANORA

Sure it can wait. Have a pleasant day!

Thacker, accepting the hint,
leaves.

DEENA

Nori, you want to take over? Can't seem to persuade them, no matter how hard I try.

ANORA

Oh, Deena, just give 'em a reason to want it. The sale isn't what's gonna entice them. It's the thought of making their lives better.

DEENA

With jam?

ANORA

With jam.

Deena looks at the jar
questionably.

DEENA

I don't know how you do it.

Sally, Florence, and Livie come
rushing in. Livie sees the
samples by Deena and stops,
bringing Florence with her as
Sally approaches Anora.

LIVIE

Can I have some?

DEENA

Please! Have all you like.

SALLY

Anora!

ANORA

Sally, I thought about it, and no, I will not
sing at your little dance event.

SALLY

What? Why not? We need it more than you
know. The promoter said we'd be gettin' paid
and everything.

ANORA

I've already got enough to worry about, what
with work and the breadlines.

Florence approaches Anora. Livie
stays behind with Deena.

SALLY

But it's for a good cause.

ANORA

Wait, don't you girls have school now?

FLORENCE

(Suddenly)

Nori, I cannot believe what happened.

ANORA

What, that I ended things with Hank?

Sally gasps.

FLORENCE

You did what?

ANORA
Oh, you didn't know?

SALLY
No! We came here to tell you something.

ANORA
Deena, you mind taking over the counter for a moment?

Deena takes over the counter.
Anora walks off with her friends.

ANORA (CONT'D)
Quickly. Then off to school.

SALLY
No, that's just it. The Steinbeck house, it's gone!

ANORA
What do you mean, "gone"?

SALLY
It happened during Friday's storm. Just dropped like it were nothing more than sandpaper.

ANORA
Is anyone hurt?

SALLY
No, thank goodness! They weren't home when it happened. But can you imagine? I heard they's talk about leaving soon.

ANORA
What about the farms on Mulberry Street?

SALLY
Oh, everyone else were better off. Some fallen fences and roof damage.

ANORA
(Relieved)
Thank God.

FLORENCE
Oh, forget that, everyone is fine! What happened with Hank?

ANORA
Nothing.

FLORENCE
Hogwash! You broke his heart.

ANORA

Hank will be fine. I never asked for anything special. Was all in his mind.

Anora walks back to the counter.

ANORA (CONT'D)

You'll see, a week from now, Hank will have another girl on his arm.

FLORENCE

Aren't you a least bit sad, though? You gotta be hurtin' somehow.

ANORA

I'm fine. And if that storm meant anything, it's that life's too short to be tied down to someone who's not right.

DEENA

Hear, hear!

"DECEIVED"

ANORA

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM HISTORY?
WE CAN'T STILL BE NAÏVE

DEENA

BEWARE THE INCORRUPTIBLE
HE WILL NOT SPARE YOUR HEAD
FOR THOUGH HE PRIDES HIMSELF WITH LIFE
HE'LL SURELY SEE YOU DEAD

ANORA

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM CHARMING PRINCE
FOR TYRANNY WILL RULE

DEENA

INSTEAD OF FEEDING YOU WITH LOVE
HE'LL FILL YOUR PLATE WITH GRUEL

ANORA & DEENA

HOW COME, HAVE WE, TO THINK THIS WAY?
WHAT MAKES US ALL BELIEVE?
FOR PROVEN NOT THESE THINGS HAVE COME
WE FIND OURSELVES DECEIVED

DEENA

BE WARY OF UNSINKABLE
LEST FIND YOURSELF A LEAK
THOUGH BRANDED WELL OF STEEL AND STONE
ITS STRUCTURE STILL IS WEAK

ANORA

THINK NOT OF THE IMPOSSIBLE
WHAT KNOW YOU OF UNKNOWN?
NO USE TO FIND THE PERFECT TRUTH

WHEN TRUTH IS NOT YOUR OWN

BOTH
AND PERFECT, NOT, IT'S BOUND TO BE
UPON A KEENER EYE
ONCE LOOKED AT WITH EXQUISITE CARE
ITS FAULTS SHOW, BY AND BY

HOW DO WE COME TO THINK THIS WAY?
WHAT ARE WE TO BELIEVE?
ONE DAY WE'LL SEE THAT RIGHT IS WRONG
AND STILL, WE'LL BE DECEIVED

DEENA
HAVE FEAR OF ALL THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU
AND SPARE DELUSIONS, DO!

ANORA
DON'T TELL ME THAT IT MUST BE SO
WHAT'S FALSE NOW COULD COME TRUE

BOTH
SO SAY WE NOW THAT RIGHT IS WRONG
WE'VE COME TO BE BEREAVED
AND THEN THAT DAY WILL COME AGAIN,
BELIEVE WE'LL BE DECEIVED!

FLORENCE
Say, you all screwy? There's nothing wrong
with a fella wantin' to be with a girl.

ANORA
It is when he just wants to be with any girl.
Don't fool yourself thinkin' too well o'
someone.

Anora begins to place items in a
box for delivery.

SALLY
I think there are nice guys out there.

FLORENCE
'Course you think so; you gotta shine on
Clayton.

SALLY
Hush, Florence!

FLORENCE
Spendin' all that time teachin' Wally, and
fallin' for the older brother. So romantic!

SALLY
Don't know what you're talkin' about.
(Whispering)
My brother might hear!

ANORA
(Laughing)
Don't worry; Fred's out right now.

FLORENCE
Then we best leave before he gets back! And
one day, Nori, you'll change your tune.

SALLY
(to Anora)
Just say you'll reconsider.

ANORA
Sally--

SALLY
I wasn't talking about Hank, you know.

FLORENCE
C'mon, Livie!

Livie grabs another sample just
before she, Florence, and Sally
exit. Deena laughs.

ANORA
What's so funny?

DEENA
Just thinkin', there came a time when you
sounded just like them.

Anora drops a can which sounds
with a CLANK. Mr. Emerson
enters.

EMERSON
Everything all right, Anora?

ANORA
Just peachy, Mr. Emerson! Fine and peachy.

Mrs. Emerson enters, in a bad
mood. She sneers at Deena.

EMERSON
(to Mrs. Emerson)
My lovely Elma! Did you want to see me?

MRS. EMERSON
Hello, sugar. What happened to the sign out
front?

EMERSON
Which one?

MRS. EMERSON
The one that went missing since yesterday.

EMERSON

Oh, uh... I think it must be in the back room.

MRS. EMERSON

What's it doing there?

EMERSON

I, uh... Anora, would you mind getting the sign that's in the back room for me?

Anora exits. Mrs. Emerson rounds on Deena.

MRS. EMERSON

And you, what are you giving little girls samples for? It's for paying customers only.

DEENA

But she's just a kid.

MRS. EMERSON

Exactly. You don't see her with money, do you?

Anora returns with the sign and hands it to Mrs. Emerson.

MRS. EMERSON (CONT'D)

That's better.

She hangs it in a prominent location. It reads, "NO MEN WANTED".

EMERSON

Was that all, my dear?

MRS. EMERSON

Not quite. A word?

Emerson and Mrs. Emerson enter his office.

DEENA

Why'd the ol' dragon have to come, anyway?

MRS. EMERSON

(O.S.)

Everyone's out to take advantage of you! They're all so ungrateful.

DEENA

And the dragon speaketh.

Fred enters.

MRS. EMERSON

(O.S., yelling)

She's your adopted daughter!

FRED
(Nervously)
Uh... did I miss something?

DEENA
The return of the dragon.

FRED
Who?

ANORA
The missus. Oh, Fred? Here's a list of the things I packed up for Mr. Knox. And here's the package.

Anora hands Fred a slip of paper and the box she packed.

MRS. EMERSON
(O.S.)
Nobody works! Nobody does anything!

DEENA
Why would anyone want to be married to that?

ANORA
It's a shame. He's a nice guy, unlike others we know.

FRED
(Nervously)
Who said anything about Dustin?

ANORA
(Beat.)
Dustin? Dustin Knox?

FRED
Uh... yeah-- didn't you say something?

ANORA
No. I said "Mr. Knox."

FRED
Uh... well... I could've sworn-- I guess he sort of sprang to mind. I was on my way to the bank and--

ANORA
Did Clay talk to you? I already know he posted a letter to his brother. I warned him against it. Mr. Knox is a fighter, always was, and no need to be worrying someone fifteen hundred miles away.

DEENA

You sayin' you ain't got any bad feelings toward Dustin?

ANORA
Why should I? He's in California; what's passed is past. I wish him the best, my word true.

FRED
(Relieved)
That's good.

ANORA
(Regarding him skeptically)
Why'd you say that?

FRED
Why, er, um...

ANORA
Goodness, has he written back? Don't think I'm so delicate! I knew---

FRED
He's here.

ANORA
(Beat.)
What?

FRED
Dustin's come back. From California.

ANORA
That's... not...

DEENA
(to Fred)
Why don't you go ahead and take those boxes over to Mr. Knox?

ANORA
(Grabbing the items)
No, lemme.

FRED
Oh, it's no problem. I can take it.

ANORA
Fred. Let me go.

DEENA
Nori, you sure you're alright?

ANORA
I'm fine. Good luck with the dragon!

She steps outside.

"DECEIVED (REPRISE)"

ANORA (CONT'D)
HAVE FEAR OF ALL THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU
AND SPARE DELUSIONS, DO...

I'LL SAY THIS NOW, THEY GRIEVE IN VAIN
UPSET? NO, I'M RELIEVED!
MY STRENGTH CAN KEEP ME THROUGH THE DAY
BELIEVE THEY'LL BE DECEIVED!

Anora exits.

TRANSITION TO:

SCENE 5

INT. KNOX RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Clay and Dustin are setting food
on the table. Dustin tries
lifting the cloth off a tray, but
Clay stops him.

CLAY
Don't do that; it keeps the grit out. It's a
trick Sally showed us.

DUSTIN
(Pause.)
Clay, let me ask you something. Be honest.
How can you afford all the expenses?

CLAY
It's not just me working now. Wally's been
workin' on the farm for a little over a month,
since Pa got ill.

DUSTIN
Wally working? He's only sixteen.

CLAY
We gotta make ends meet somehow.

DUSTIN
I thought he was going off to school.

CLAY
Not like he's goin' to college like you did.
But Sally Twitchel's been givin' him tutoring,
so at least it's somethin'.

DUSTIN
Fred's little sister?

CLAY
Yeah. She ain't little no more.

DUSTIN

There something you not telling me, Clay?

Wally enters, holding on to a handful of wheat stalks that are withered.

WALLY

"Amber waves of grain." Who spun that claptrap?

He tosses it away.

DUSTIN

Some crazy who thought this land was paradise.

Mr. Knox enters.

MR. KNOX

Say here, boys. There came a time when this wheat farm here grew nothin' but amber waves, and it really were America the Beautiful. That time'll come again, a time for life.

Dustin and Wally mutter their apologies.

MR. KNOX (CONT'D)

Now shut yer traps and let's enjoy a nice family dinner.

They serve themselves by lifting the cloth just enough to transfer the food onto the plate, and then use another cloth to cover the food on the plate between bites. As they all bite into their foods, their faces express disgust.

DUSTIN

Oh, God, I'm eating dirt.

CLAY

Builds your immune system.

Wally shoves more food into his mouth, struggling to keep it down.

WALLY

Mmm. Like I'm scrubbin' down my throat.

DUSTIN

Would you like some of mine, Wally?

WALLY

No! Don't let me cheat you of your food.

DUSTIN

Hmph. I can't see how you've been living like this.

MR. KNOX

Well, the whole world's been livin' like this. And I'd say we're doin' better than mos' folks 'round here.

DUSTIN

Can't say I agree with you.

MR. KNOX

Worried I'm gonna kick the bucket, are ya?

He's the only one who laughs.

DUSTIN

Why you still living here? Come to California.

WALLY

No thanks, brother.

MR. KNOX

Dustin, few men are lucky to find that place called home. If you do, like'n I did, ain't never gonna leave it.

DUSTIN

You're not making sense, Pop.

MR. KNOX

One day you might see. Soon as you get over your fear.

DUSTIN

What fear?

MR. KNOX

Feelings, boy! Shoot, college gone done some things for your education, but you got another thing to learn 'bout life. You go runnin' around, lookin' for a home, you ain't gonna find it. Not when you as lost as you is.

DUSTIN

I'm not running, I'm... just not coming home.

Anora enters, unseen.

MR. KNOX

Listen, we got each other, right? And we gots our health. Well, mostly.

DUSTIN

Dad, you can't keep living in this dump.

ANORA
It's not a dump.

Dustin turns around and tenses
when he sees her.

DUSTIN
(Uneasily)
Anora.

MR. KNOX
Anora! Pleased to see ya, my dear.

ANORA
Sorry, don't mean to barge in.

DUSTIN
No, please, make yourself at home.

ANORA
I knocked on the door, but no one answered.
I brought some supplies from Mr. Emerson.

MR. KNOX
(Taking them from her)
Wonderful! You're such a sweetheart.

ANORA
Anytime.
(Pause. Then, to Dustin:)
Clayton said he wrote you, but--

DUSTIN
You didn't think I'd come?

ANORA
Didn't know it was an option.

Mr. Knox notices Anora and Dustin
gazing at each other silently.

MR. KNOX
Uh, boys, time we clean up.

Mr. Knox, Wally, and Clay grab
their dishes and take them away.

DUSTIN
It's good to see you, Anora. It's been a few
years.

ANORA
(Clearing her throat)
Guess it has. Four? Five? Who's counting?

DUSTIN
Seven. And I've never seen someone try so
hard to look like they forgot.

ANORA

I did forget, really. You all but slipped my mind.

DUSTIN

You look a little flustered.

ANORA

Not at all! I just... didn't expect to see you.

DUSTIN

Now why is everyone so surprised to see me?

ANORA

Well, you were so eager to leave all those years ago. How long you in town for?

DUSTIN

Not sure. As long as I'm needed.

ANORA

Well, we're perfectly fine here without ya.

DUSTIN

We?

ANORA

Yes. I mean, no! Your brothers, and your father.

DUSTIN

Is that all?

ANORA

Well, the whole town is quite fine. How are things in... well, where you live?

DUSTIN

California? Things are... good.

ANORA

Wonderful.

DUSTIN

You sure you're all right, Anora?

ANORA

Course I am. Why?

DUSTIN

You used to be more lively. Animated. Said whatever was on your mind.

ANORA

Well, times change. So do people.

DUSTIN

I always thought that, too.

ANORA

Right. So whatever's in the past... it's passed. And why'd I bother thinkin' about it? Memory's a good liar. Nothin' but a shadow story.

DUSTIN

Shadow story?

ANORA

Yeah. It's like a hidden story you try to make it out in a book you read. Only you don't really know what the truth is, like tryin' to make out a face from a shadow. Maybe we just see what we wanna see. Am I making sense at all?

DUSTIN

Sounds like you've thought a lot about not thinking.

ANORA

Right. Well, take care of yourself, Dustin.

She begins to walk off.

DUSTIN

You too, puppet.

Anora storms back.

ANORA

Don't call me that. You know I hate that word!

DUSTIN

(Laughing)

Looks like some things never change.

Anora pushes him forcefully.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

(Amused)

Same ol' firecracker. Remember those poems we loved to read? "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both..."

ANORA

Robert Frost.

DUSTIN

"The Road Not Taken."

ANORA

Well, my favorite is "Stopping By"--

DUSTIN

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"? Yeah, I remember. I guess some things haven't changed for us.

(Beat.)

You know, when I left, I thought I was taking that road less traveled. In my head, I was really going a new way.

ANORA

Seems like everyone's going that a-way now.

DUSTIN

For what it's worth, I never meant to hurt you. I just... saw myself as that traveler, and I couldn't drag you along with me; wouldn't be right.

ANORA

You took your road, and I took mine. Some of us have more options than others.

DUSTIN

Doesn't mean we're always better off for it.

MUSIC begins.

"DREAMS OF REALITY"

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

DO YOU EVER THINK 'BOUT THE MOMENTS WE HAD?
THOSE FLEETING MOMENTS OF OUR YOUTH?

ANORA

I TRY NOT TO THINK ON THE MEMORIES PASSED
WHEN I CANNOT FIGURE THE TRUTH

DUSTIN

IT ALL SEEMS A DREAM

ANORA

WELL, THEN, MAYBE IT WAS

DUSTIN

OUR FEELINGS EXTREME

ANORA

NEVER KNOWING THE CAUSE

BOTH

AND YET, WITH THE YEARS FLOWN BY, NOTHING HAS EVER FELT REAL
EXCEPT FOR THE ACHE IN OUR HEARTS
THE PAIN WE TRY TO CONCEAL

DUSTIN

DO YOU EVER WISH THAT YOUR LIFE JUST MADE SENSE?
THAT YOU LEARNED TO BE MORE ASTUTE?

ANORA

HOW I DEARLY WISH THAT THE YEARS MADE ME SMART
THAT I CHOSE THE PROMISING ROUTE

BOTH
AND WE MANAGE, WE COPE, AND WE DEAL WITH OUR PAST
THAT IS PART OF WHO WE BOTH ARE
STILL LOST IN A DAZE AND YET HOPING THAT WE WILL GO FAR

ANORA
IT ALL SEEMS A DREAM

DUSTIN
WELL, THEN, MAYBE IT WAS

ANORA
OUR FEELINGS EXTREME

DUSTIN
NEVER KNOWING THE CAUSE

BOTH
AND YET, WITH THE YEARS FLOWN BY, NOTHING HAS EVER FELT REAL
EXCEPT FOR THE ACHE IN OUR HEARTS
THE PAIN WE TRY TO CONCEAL

AND WE MANAGE, WE COPE, AND WE DEAL WITH OUR PAST
THAT IS PART OF WHO WE BOTH ARE
STILL LOST IN A DAZE AND YET HOPING THAT WE WILL GO FAR
COULD IT BE THAT WE ARE CHASING THE SAME SHINING STAR?

MUSIC ends.

DUSTIN
What's real, Anora?

ANORA
I'm still tryin' to figure that out.

There's a charged moment. They
both move in, as though about to
kiss, when suddenly Anora pulls
away and rushes off. MUSIC
begins as we...

TRANSITION TO:

SAMPLE ENDS HERE.