

CHILDREN OF HOOVERVILLE

A one-act drama by
Hollie Michaels

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www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com
424-703-5315

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ELSIE DAVIS, 13 years old, worked hard most of her life. Takes nothing for granted. Charlotte's sister.

CHARLOTTE DAVIS, 10 years old, scared of the world, likes to have her own way.

DONALD MCGEE, 14 years old, tells it like it is, adventurous. Shirley and Ida's older brother.

SHIRLEY MCGEE, 12 years old, tomboy, adventurous, competitive and optimistic.

IDA MCGEE, 11 years old, motherly and protective.

RUTH COX, 14 years old, a know-it-all, selfish. Patsy's older sister.

PATSY COX, 11 years old, scared of everything, convinced she will die any minute.

VIVIAN MCPHERSON, 14 years old, stubborn in her way. Used to being the leader. Myrtle & Betty's older sister.

MYRTLE MCPHERSON, 12 years old, a follower.

BETTY MCPHERSON, 10 years old, a whiny child with a negative outlook.

FRANCES HANSON, 14 years old, a liar and manipulator. Eddie's older sister.

EDDIE HANSON, 12 years old, mischievous and a follower.

CARL JOHNSON, 15 years old. Always seeking his father's approval.

SETTING

1936 Small Town Oklahoma: Route 66, a town in the San Joaquin Valley, a general store, a Hooverville, a jail cell

SCENE 1

(SONG "The Dust Storm Disaster" [also known as "The Great Dust Storm"] by Woody Guthrie is heard.)

(ELSIE sits, stone faced, covered in dirt. CHARLOTTE sleeps, with her head in Elsie's lap, holding a rock wrapped in rags.)

ELSIE: (*Speaks to the audience:*) I'd spent the whole night before praying that the schoolhouse would just blow away. Didn't really think God be listenin'. If I knew he could hear me, I'd have kept my mouth shut.

(DONALD enters. He doesn't interact with Elsie or Charlotte.)

DONALD: (*Speaks to the audience:*) Mama saw Pa's tractor stalled out in the field. That usually meant a storm was coming in. Sure enough, those clouds came rolling in. Blood red. But Johnny and I had planned to skip that day. He was out in the field waiting for me. I couldn't get to him. Pa would have belted me if he knew. Most other boys weren't even in school no more but Pa had a funny idea that if I stayed, I'd be worth more later.

ELSIE: (*Speaks to the audience:*) I couldn't find him. I couldn't see very far. As I tried to make my way home, I saw old Mrs. Fields hanging on to a fence for dear life. I grabbed her arm to bring her along but she just looked at me like I was a ghost. She wouldn't budge. So I just kept on moving, cursing Johnny for not waiting for me. He usually waited but that was a different kind of a day. School closed just as early as it had begun, once that dust cloud came rolling in.

DONALD: (*Speaks to the audience:*) Looking out that day...the cloud just gobbled the whole world up. Our farm, the Davis's farm, the schoolhouse, the Main Street, cattle, chickens and tractors.

ELSIE: (*Speaks to the audience:*) Johnny.

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DONALD: (*Speaks to the audience:*) Everything.

ELSIE & DONALD: (*Speaks to the audience:*) Gone.

(Sound of the dust storm. Crows scream in the distance.)

SCENE 2

(Elsie and Donald are packing up supplies. SHIRLEY runs on jumping out of her skin. IDA follows holding blankets and clothes.)

SHIRLEY: Isn't this amazing! I can't believe we are going on this adventure! Never seen nothing outside the town. Riding down the whole mother road! All the way to Califor-ni-a! Ain't this something, you guys?

ELSIE: Sure.

SHIRLEY: Why you so down? Come on. Buck up, sunshine!

ELSIE: I'm gonna go see if my Pa needs help. Excuse me.

(Elsie exits.)

SHIRLEY: Why she so gloomy?

IDA: She did just lose her brother. Show some respect.

SHIRLEY: I know. I didn't mean nothing. All anyone ever does here is mope around. Sure life is rough, we got no money, we got no land—well, land worth anything. But we got this here old jalopy and she's gonna take us to the promised land. Ain't she?

DONALD: You talkin' about that ol' jalopy like it's some stallion or something. Nothing but a beat up old car our Pa and Mr. Davis bought from the Andersons. Probably don't even work. Should just forget it all and ride the rails.

SHIRLEY: Nah, she's a ripe ol' beauty, ain't she?

DONALD: Think the dirt has traveled into your brain.

SHIRLEY: Maybe, or maybe I'm the only one seeing things clearly. Well, I won't let you all sour my mood.

DONALD: Come on. I'll help you attach the chicken box.

(Charlotte enters crying with her rock.)

IDA: What's wrong, Char?

CHARLOTTE: Why do we have to go? I don't wanna leave.

SHIRLEY: Don't be silly. Of course you want to leave.

DONALD: Won't be a home here in a day or two anyway.

SHIRLEY: Donald! Don't tell her that.

DONALD: It's the truth. Banks coming to knock down our house and your house. Got no choice but to head out, Charlotte. But don't worry. I'll protect you from any roaming packs of coyote or any wild beast that might be hiding out along the mother road.

CHARLOTTE: No, no, please. Please don't make me go.

IDA: Don't listen to him. He's just trying to scare you.

DONALD: I ain't. Just trying to have a little fun. Listen, when I say I'll protect you, I mean it. I'm giving you my word here. Besides, you'll like California. You get to breathe real clean air.

SHIRLEY: Our Pa's will have so much work when we get there. They won't know what to do with all the money they'll be making. In just one year we will be rollin' in it.

CHARLOTTE: What's that mean?

SHIRLEY: We will have so much money we will be able to live like kings.

CHARLOTTE: And queens?

IDA: *(Pretending they are royalty:)* Your majesty, I see you have forgotten your slippers again.

DONALD: Yes, servant girl. Fetch me my slippers and my golden harp. I wish to hear a song.

SHIRLEY: Servant girl! Oh, servant girl. I am ready to be fed.

(Shirley sits with her mouth wide open. Ida pretends to scoop up dirt.)

IDA: Your meal, my lady.

SHIRLEY: Don't you dare, Ida!

(The two begin to play fight. The clothes and blankets are on the ground. Elsie enters.)

ELSIE: I got to do everything myself? Charlotte, let's go. Pa's waiting. You're gonna sit next to the suitcases in the back—need to see if you can fit. Shirley, your Pa says you got to hold the rope for the mattress.

DONALD: Where you going to be, Ms. Bossy Pants?

ELSIE: Up front, navigating with our Pas.

DONALD: Jus' hold your horses. Why do you get to sit up front? Only the men should be up front. You go sit with your lil' sis. I've got it.

ELSIE: Do you? Cause you've been placed in the back. That's from your Pa.

(Elsie exits. Donald remains.)

SCENE 3

(An empty house in California. PATSY lies on a cardboard box bed. RUTH sits with two suitcases next to her. She glares at Patsy.)

PATSY: Tell Grandpappy I love him. Tell Grandma I'm sorry I didn't become the woman she wanted me to be. When I get to heaven I'll give Mama and Papa a great big hug for you, Ruthy. Don't be too upset when I go.

RUTH: I'll hold back the tears.

PATSY: If we hadn't lost everything, I'd have left something for you. You can have my best dress, if you want. Grandma's got it hidden for a special day. If you can fit into it, it's yours. That is, unless I'm buried in it. In which case, I leave you my best socks instead.

RUTH: Would you hurry up and die already?

PATSY: Rude! Just hope I don't tell Mama and Papa how cruel you were to me on my deathbed when I see them in Heaven. Hear me, Mama? Papa? I'm coming. Please meet me at the gates. I'm... I'm... Oh, I feel it, Ruth. It's happening. Here I go. Here I go... I'm... I'm...

RUTH: Not going to die. Nurses said you were just in need of some rest.

PATSY: Well, maybe not this second, but it's soon. I feel it.

RUTH: Patsy, I hate to scare you, but...I hope for your sake you don't die yet.

PATSY: Really? Why?

RUTH: Because poor people don't go to Heaven.

PATSY: But...I'm not poor.

RUTH: This isn't our house no more. See anything in it?

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PATSY: But...Mama and Papa died after they lost everything. Are they in Hell? Mama and Papa are in... *(Stops herself. Looks around and whispers.)* Hell?

RUTH: No. They aren't. Not cause they are poor, but because they killed themselves. That's why they are in Hell.

(Patsy starts screaming and convulsing.)

PATSY: No! Oh, Mama...Papa...I'll save your souls. I'll save your souls. I'm coming to rescue you. I can feel it now!

RUTH: They aren't the ones in need of rescuing. Anyway...we should probably get going. Grandpa sent us out for eggs an hour ago.

PATSY: I don't want to leave. I want to die in this house.

RUTH: All right. I'll see you.

(Ruth exits. Patsy remains. She makes herself ready to die. After a moment she looks around and realizes that she is alone.)

PATSY: Ruth? Ruth? This isn't funny.

(DOOR SLAM.)

Ah! I don't want to go to H-E-L-L! Ruth, help!

(Patsy exits.)

SCENE 4

(Donald, Elsie, Charlotte, and Shirley are in the jalopy. [The jalopy can be anything, including a cardboard box, a chair, black boxes, crates.] The following is spoken to the audience.)

DONALD: When we first set out on the road, down sweet ol' Route 66, we held our breath. I was in the back keeping everything together, cussing every rock and bump we drove over.

SHIRLEY: I was on the side. Holding the ropes so the mattress didn't fly away. My hands held so tight my fingers were bleeding. Looked like Oklahoma running from my veins.

IDA: I sat with Charlotte, holding her hand and holding back her hair as she let go. Only we hadn't had a stitch to eat, so the only thing she had inside of her to let go of was a mound of dirt.

(Charlotte heaves into a bag.)

ELSIE: I sat with the men up front, helping guide Papa and Mr. McGee. My hands were holding on to the front ropes. Making sure they didn't get loose. I could see Johnny in the mirror and every mile we drove, the image of him got smaller and smaller until he was nothing more than a speck of dirt.

DONALD: We wound along the rocky path, over small springs and through deserts, the hot air smacking me in the face. I should have sat up front with the men. Leading the way. Not stuck back here, riding along the bender.

(They disassemble the jalopy and turn it into a makeshift campsite. They continue to speak to the audience.)

ELSIE: We slept to the side of the road. Washed our clothes in the closest river we could find, if we could find one, that is.

IDA: I made the food. Made sure to use our rations sparingly. Never knew when we'd get any food again.

SHIRLEY: On the second day, our car died out. Both our Pas had to hike to the nearest town. They spent a full week working from job to job in order to get money so they could repair the car. The rest of us just sat and waited.

ELSIE: And waited.

CHARLOTTE: And waited.

DONALD: I wanted to go with them. But Pa said I couldn't leave the girls alone. "The open roads are a dangerous place for women and children". That's why I was there, to protect them. But the truth was he still saw me as boy. Well, I'd show him!

ELSIE: That was the longest week of my life. Just camping along the road with only some coffee beans and a few potatoes to eat.

SHIRLEY: We saw another family drive by. They had three mattresses up on their car. They were the richest people we saw. As we watched them, they stopped and stared at us for a moment, as if trying to see what kind of people we were. Then their Pa came looking after our Ma. We told him none of us had one. He stopped for a moment, thought about it and then asked if we'd watch his three girls anyway, while he went off to get some work. They shared a meal with us in return.

IDA: Thought the road would be full of bad people. But you'd be surprised who'd you meet along the way.

(They settle in to sleep. VIVIAN, BETTY and MYRTLE are all bundled together. Betty keeps thrashing around. Charlotte sleeps next to Ida and Shirley, who are together near Donald. He sits propped against the jalopy. Elsie sits alone. Awake.)

VIVIAN: Betty! You stop that squirming or I'm gonna make you sleep on the road!

MYRTLE: Look who's talking? Your elbow's digging into me.

VIVIAN: Quiet, Myrtle. When Papa comes back I'm gonna tell him about the extra bread you took from the car!

BETTY: Extra bread?

VIVIAN: Think I didn't notice? Give it here.

MYRTLE: Don't know what you are talking about.

DONALD: You got extra food?

VIVIAN: Excuse me, boy, but please keep out of our business.

DONALD: All you girls have done since your Pa left you is squeak louder than a bunch of mice. As the man in charge here, it is my responsibility to make sure we are all fed. No offense, but I can't go on eating coffee beans and potatoes.

VIVIAN: We already shared a meal with you. That was it. Don't be greedy! We are keeping rations too, you know.

DONALD: Just said you had extra. So, if you got the bread, girl, you better show me.

IDA: We could split it.

(Betty grabs the bread and shoves it in her mouth.)

VIVIAN: Betty! Spit that out.

(Betty refuses. Vivian and Myrtle try to open her mouth.)

IDA: Don't hurt her. Great job, Donald.

DONALD: Don't worry. I got this.

(Donald takes a snake he's been holding under his blanket and throws it on the girls. They all jump up screaming. Betty spits out the bread to yell. Donald picks up the bread and the snake.)

A little moist but still good.

BETTY: You lunatic! I could have choked.

DONALD: Could have, but ya didn't.

VIVIAN: I'm telling my Pa! When he gets back he's gonna beat you!

DONALD: If he comes back.

(Vivian, Betty and Myrtle chase Donald. They run off.)

ELSIE: That brother of yours certainly has a way with the ladies.

IDA: Guess you could say that. *(Beat.)* I'm hungry again.

ELSIE: Me too. How you doing, Charlotte? *(No response.)* Charlotte?

(Ida feels Charlotte's head. She is slumped against the jalopy.)

IDA: She's burning up, Elsie. They better get back here soon. Got nothing to give her. Nothing to... Elsie! What are we going to do!

ELSIE: She's just tired is all. Let me see her. Charlotte. Charlotte. Look at me... Come on. Charlotte...please.

(Ida and Elsie exchange a look. During the following, Donald runs back on with the girls. He stops dead in his tracks when he sees Elsie's expression. He runs over to Charlotte. Elsie speaks to the audience:)

We spent the next few hours just hovering over her, willing her to get better. Those three sisters did some sort of dance, saying they used to know Indian folk who knew magic or some such stuff. To me it looked like a bunch of hooey. Felt like forever until finally Donald's Pa came back. Ours didn't. Said he'd ride the rails to meet us in California. Heard about work two towns over. So we had to journey on without Pa.

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(Elsie, Shirley, Ida and Donald rebuild the jalopy. The McPherson sisters stand together watching in silence as they are left behind. The following is spoken to the audience.)

DONALD: When we got to the mountains there was a road that was might steep and twisty. Couldn't get going or make those turns with all our stuff on that rickety old thing, so Pa and I stayed in the front. Charlotte was in the back. Shirley, Elsie and Ida had to take the furniture off and go by foot. What they couldn't carry got left behind. So there went the mattress I had held on so tight to that my fingers bled.

SHIRLEY: After all the swerving was done, we got back into the jalopy and rode the rest of the way down. I'll never forget when we finally got down the mountain and saw the valley. Greener than anything else I had ever seen. We made it to Californ-ia! We all started crying. Even Papa. Donald refused to let us see his tears, but I knew he was feeling like the rest of us. All I wanted to do was bury myself in all that green!

ELSIE: Then we passed a town. It said, no jobs. Mr. McGee didn't flinch. "Just cause people get lazy and come to the first town they see. Don't mean nothing." So we went on. And the next town. "Jobs taken." Mr. McGee still didn't flinch. I wasn't worried yet. But then in the next town...

DONALD: It wasn't the no jobs that got me. It was the "No Okies" and the looks we got as we passed on by. Nothing but cold stares and the Devil's chill running down your back.

IDA: But, we had to stop. We needed to do something for Charlotte. Finally, Papa got a tip. He was off from one farm to another. Seeking anything. But, only had work paying less than a nickel. That was if all of us came. So we did. We did it for Charlotte. But at the end of the day, he only gave us three cents. Said the price went down cause more people came looking for work in the day. But that wasn't the worst of it.

DONALD: That nasty swine! I was rightly mad. So was Pa. So, he said, "We got a sick child. Can't you give us anything? Not even some food?" Then the others heard Pa arguing with the man. They came closer and closer. The farmer got scared. He had a whole field of extra food, but didn't want to give no handouts. Just as a mob was forming, he and his sons set fire to their own field. "Rather watch it burn," he said, "than help you dumb Okies." That was our welcome in to Californ-ia.

SCENE 5

(Ruth and Patsy are in a general store.)

RUTH: What about two chocolates and one licorice stick?

PATSY: Two of each. You don't know how to share. Oh, and the eggs!

RUTH: Oh, you wanted one too?

(Elsie, Ida and Shirley enter, unsure of themselves.)

ELSIE: What are we going to do?

SHIRLEY: Ask nicely?

IDA: Beg? Tell him we can work for 'em, to cover the cost.

SHIRLEY: The sign said "No Okies." I think we should just leave.

ELSIE: It's fine. Just here...

(She spits into her palm and calms Ida's hair.)

Now do me.

IDA: Gross.

ELSIE: Just do it.

(They continue to clean themselves up. Meanwhile, Ruth and Patsy are unaware of anyone but themselves.)

RUTH: Fine. I'll make a deal. You can have two licorices. I'll get a pop and two chocolates.

PATSY: This could be the last candy I ever eat! Don't withhold sweets from a dying girl!

RUTH: If you are dying then you shouldn't have any. So that settles it. More for me.

CARL: You girls ready?

RUTH: Ready for what?

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CARL: To pay.

PATSY: You work here?

CARL: Yup. Everyday after school. My Pa owns it.

RUTH: Gross.

PATSY: Yes, we are ready. Our father has an account.

CARL: Okay. No problem. What's the name?

(Ida smacks Elsie to listen.)

RUTH: Mr. Cox.

CARL: Sure thing.

(Carl goes to the books. Ida and Ruth grab their candy and soda and attempt to leave. Carl looks up alarmed.)

Stop right there! Says your Pa owes us money.

PATSY: But that's impossible.

RUTH: Yeah, he's dead.

CARL: Well, then he don't have an account here no more, does he? In fact, you owe me 10 dollars.

PATSY: Ten dollars? I think I'm going to be sick...

(Patsy faints.)

RUTH: Now look what you did! She's not well. And all over ten dollars that you know we can easily pay. We just didn't bring anything with us. How could we know... Please. My poor sister is so heartbroken. Can't you just let us go? You know we will come right back with the money. Just let me take her home. She needs the sugar.

(While this is happening, Elsie slips a bottle of Laudanum into her bag.)

CARL: I don't know...

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(Ruth sees Elsie for the first time and screams.)

RUTH: Okies! Ewww!

(Carl notices.)

CARL: Hey you! Get out of here.

RUTH: She put something in her bag, I saw it.

(Carl runs to Elsie and grabs her arm.)

CARL: Did you think you could steal from my Pa and me? You Okies are nothing but thieving trash!

RUTH: Well, we will just get out of your way. I'll be right back with the money. Good luck with your Okie problem.

(Ruth shakes Patsy until she's up. They run for it with the candy.)

ELSIE: I'm sorry, please, Sir! It's for my sister. She's very sick.

CARL: Think I'm gonna fall for that old line!

IDA: You just did!

CARL: Don't you go twisting things around. They ain't like you!

IDA: They just stole from you.

CARL: They have an account.

SHIRLEY: In debt.

ELSIE: Bet your Pa is gonna be sore at you when they don't come back with that money.

CARL: He'll be sore at me that some dumb ol' Okies came into the store!

(He takes Elsie's bag and empties it out. Takes out the bottle of Laudanum she stole.)

ELSIE: Please, please, it's for my sister. She really is sick. Please.

CARL: Then it serves her right. One less Okie to worry about.

(Elsie wants to hit Carl but Ida holds her back.)

Now, get! Before I get the police.

IDA: Yes, sorry.

ELSIE: Don't apologize to him! Don't ever apologize to him!

(Ida drags Elsie off.)

SCENE 6

(The Hooverville. A makeshift settlement for homeless migrant workers. Ruth and Patsy run on with their suitcases and a bag of candy.)

RUTH: That was a close one.

PATSY: We've officially been to every store Papa had an account at. I can't live like this.

RUTH: Good thing you are dying.

PATSY: What are we going to do Ruth? We are in a homeless camp!

RUTH: Not for long. I'm writing to Uncle Vanderbilt. He'll help us.

(FRANCES and EDDIE enter.)

FRANCES: Hello.

RUTH: Ew, poor people.

EDDIE: Oh, I'm sorry? Are you looking for the ball in the Palace? 'Cause you might have made a wrong turn.

RUTH: Yes, we did.

FRANCES: Now, Eddie. That ain't no way to treat our new friends.

RUTH: Gross. We aren't your friends.

FRANCES: That's a shame, because friends are hard to come by these days.

PATSY: Tell me about it.

RUTH: Quiet!

FRANCES: I'm Frances. This here is my brother, Eddie. Don't mind him. He's harmless. So, you gals passing through or what?

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RUTH: Yes. Our grandmother just wanted to see what it was like. To be like you drifters.

PATSY: She did? Thought it was because we lost the house, and Papa went into all that debt before he died.

(Ruth silences Patsy.)

RUTH: Poor girl, she's sick. Doesn't know what she's saying.

FRANCES: Well, however long you are here, let my brother and I make you feel welcome. I see you have suitcases. May I bring those somewhere for you? Hate for your sick sister to have to carry anything heavy.

RUTH: Oh, well...we were waiting for our Grandpa. He's just working.

EDDIE: Men don't come back until way after sundown.

FRANCES: Let us help you.

(Frances and Eddie grab the suitcases.)

RUTH: Be gentle. It's lined with real silk.

FRANCES: Of course!

PATSY: Thank you.

FRANCES: What are friends for?

(Frances and Eddie exit quickly.)

RUTH: At least they didn't expect a tip. Hope they don't dirty the handle.

PATSY: They seemed nice.

(Betty, Myrtle and Vivian enter in a huff.)

VIVIAN: Where are they?

MYRTLE: Thieves! Lowlives!

VIVIAN: (*Noticing Patsy and Ruth:*) Where are they? Don't try and hide them!

RUTH: Hide who?

BETTY: Those sneaky devils!

PATSY: Why? What did they do?

MYRTLE: They stole our bread!

BETTY: Right from under our noses. I hate it here! Knew we should have stayed in Oklahoma. First we met that nasty boy on the road, they leave us and now this? I wanna go home!

PATSY: Are you sure they stole it?

BETTY: (*Screaming in Patsy's ear:*) Yes!

PATSY: Ah! I'm deaf. I'm deaf. I can't hear. Oh no. I'll never hear again!

BETTY: I didn't scream that loud.

RUTH: Look what you did to my sister you dumb Okie!

MYRTLE: What did you call her?

RUTH: A dumb Okie!

MYRTLE: You got a lot of nerve! You ain't no better!

RUTH: Oh, but I am. This is only temporary. I don't wear rags and look dirty like you. I have a suitcase full of beautiful dresses, which in fact makes me better than all of you. Let's go, Patsy.

PATSY: What?

RUTH: I said, let's go!

PATSY: I can't hear... What?

RUTH: Let's go.

PATSY: Oh, I don't know.

RUTH: I really hate you sometimes.

(Ruth grabs Patsy's arms to leave.)

VIVIAN: Don't forget your suitcases.

MYRTLE: Oh, that's strange, Vivian. I don't see any suitcases or any fancy dresses.

RUTH: For your information that's because they are being delivered to our tent.

VIVIAN: Delivered?

MYRTLE: By who?

PATSY: Our new friends Eddie and Frances.

(The girls fall apart laughing.)

RUTH: And just what is so funny?

VIVIAN: You fools...

MYRTLE: That's who stole our bread.

BETTY: I almost feel bad for you.

PATSY: What? No...they said they would be our friends.

RUTH: They wouldn't dare steal. We'd get the police here so fast. They don't know who our father is.

PATSY: ...was.

(Silence. The sisters do feel bad.)

VIVIAN: Listen, what would you do with a fancy dress here anyways?

BETTY: Those two will get theirs in the end.

MYRTLE: If you're hard up, we know about this one place that might need an extra hand.

VIVIAN: Hush, Myrtle!

PATSY: Hand for what?

VIVIAN: We shouldn't say. Don't want too many people going and taking our job.

BETTY: Not in the fields either so...

VIVIAN: Betty!

BETTY: Ah, tell em. Probably wouldn't last a day doing real work anyways.

PATSY: I can embroider.

VIVIAN: That's nice. It's a job shoveling manure.

PATSY: I think I'm gonna be sick.

VIVIAN: Told you it wasn't worth telling them. Likely to starve, those two. Too proud to do anything. *(To her sisters:)* Come on. We got a bread thief wearing fancy dresses to catch.

(The sisters exit.)

PATSY: We could of at least found out where the job was, I guess.

RUTH: Why? You'd take one whiff of it and you'd say you lost your sense of smell. "Oh poor little old me. I'm dying. I can't hear. I can't see. I can't smell." Deaf, blind and dumb is all you are.

PATSY: Those could be the last words you ever say to me. Then you'd be really sorry.

RUTH: You ain't gonna die!

PATSY: Mama and Papa did. Grandma and Grandpa will too. They are too old to be living like this. And I am all you have. So you better start being nicer to me!

(Patsy starts to cry. Ruth takes in the scene, she hands Patsy some candy.)

RUTH: Here.

(Patsy looks up at her. Takes the candy. Smiles. Gobbles it up. Elsie enters.)

ELSIE: You! You thieving liars! I could kill you!

(Donald enters and restrains Elsie before she does anything.)

DONALD: Elsie. Elsie. Calm down.

RUTH: Ugh, it's the thieves again!

ELSIE: Me! Me? You stole. I didn't.

RUTH: Yes, because you got caught.

ELSIE: Let me at her. I wanna smack that smile off her face!

DONALD: Would someone please tell me what's going on here?

RUTH: I will. That girl stole from the General Store and I made sure she didn't get away with it.

ELSIE: I need it for my sister. She's sick. She's dying.

PATSY: I'm dying.

DONALD: What store?

ELSIE: What does it matter? We can't help her. It's too late.

(Elsie breaks down.)

DONALD: Please don't cry. I hate it when you are sad.

ELSIE: I'm tired of feeling like this. I just want to be happy again. I don't even remember what that was like.

(Donald holds Elsie.)

DONALD: I know it's tough but I'll help ya anyway I can. Your brother would have wanted me to.

ELSIE: Thank you.

RUTH: Um...is she sane now?

DONALD: Stop it! We've lost everything in the world. Our homes, her brother, my Ma. Now Charlotte is sick...we don't need another nasty person breathing down our neck.

PATSY: I'm sorry... I really am. My sister and I, we... Well...we know how you feel. Ruth...

RUTH: Ugh! Fine. If you want...we can ask our grandma to go see your sister.

PATSY: She used to be a nurse.

ELSIE: Really? That would be wonderful... Thank you.

(Elsie jumps up and hugs Ruth. Ruth screams.)

RUTH: My dress!

PATSY: I'll go find her. Don't move. *(Patsy starts to exit.)*
Come on Ruth.

(Ruth runs off trying to get the smell of poor person off her.)

ELSIE: I hope she can help.

DONALD: I'll get whatever she needs for her.

ELSIE: Thank you. Hey, Donald...can I talk to you?

DONALD: Talking to me right now.

ELSIE: I mean, really talk to you. Normally talk to your sisters but...they ain't here right now and I... Never mind.

DONALD: Go on. Been through enough, right?

ELSIE: Right, well...I... It's about a dream I have. I have the same dream every night. It never changes. First the dark cloud creeps overhead. As it gets closer and closer I see it's a bunch of crows.

DONALD: That's called a murder, dummy.

ELSIE: You gonna listen to my dream or just call me names?

DONALD: Can't I do both?

(Elsie gives Donald a look.)

All right. Go on. You can tell me.

ELSIE: So this murder is heading right toward me.

DONALD: Where are you?

ELSIE: Home... Well what was our home.

DONALD: The farm?

ELSIE: Yea, home. Oklahoma.

DONALD: That there is your first mistake.

ELSIE: What?

DONALD: That ain't your home no more.

ELSIE: It'll always be my home. I'll go back there when this all ends and those clouds roll away.

DONALD: Well good luck. Hope you find it under all that dirt.

ELSIE: You like this place better?

DONALD: No! But you can breathe at night here. Don't have to sleep with no wet rags on our faces. No Vaseline in your nostrils. Don't have to dust every chance you get. Don't have to dig out cattle from the night before. You of all people should...

ELSIE: Should what?

DONALD: Nothing, I just...thought you'd be tired of losing things in the dirt is all.

ELSIE: Things? Didn't know he was a thing to be lost. Glad to know that's how you remember him. A thing?

DONALD: Forget it. Sorry. Not what I... Forget it. Don't know what I'm saying...

ELSIE: I'll say.

(Elsie is about to storm off. She stops. Realizes she has nowhere to storm off too.)

Do you miss him?

DONALD: Who?

ELSIE: Who? Johnny.

DONALD: Every day. He was my best friend. We had some grand plans for our future... Now I guess I got to do it alone.

ELSIE: What were they?

DONALD: You don't want to hear.

ELSIE: Yes I do. Please. I told you about my dream.

DONALD: Did you finish?

ELSIE: No, someone wouldn't let me.

DONALD: So, your crows.

ELSIE: My murder. They came at me. Landed all around the yard. Felt like a shock of electricity when they fell. Suddenly, everything around me was dark. I heard the other black clouds coming. I didn't see nothing but I could taste it in the air. Never forget that taste as long as I live.

DONALD: What? You mean you don't like eating a mouth full of dirt?

ELSIE: *(Sarcastically.)* Oh, of course Donald. I love the taste of land grits. Mmm-mmm, my favorite. Just like Mama used to make for me.

DONALD: I can give you a spoon full of it now, if you're homesick.

ELSIE: You do and I'll rub it in your eyes.

(Donald grabs Elsie and tries to plant her head in the dirt. The two playfully go at it. Suddenly, they exchange looks. They stop. Silence.)

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