

Claudie Hukill

(Formerly “Rain in The Hollows”)

A play in two acts
by Sean O’Leary

Winner–Pittsburgh New Play Festival

Nomination – Humana Festival of New American Plays

Professional Premiere –Tri-State Actors Theater

Unanimous Selection – Barter Theatre’s Appalachian Festival of Plays & Playwrights

Winner – Charleston Stage Company New Play Project

Selection –New Voices Reading Series; Round House Theatre

Finalist –Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre ScriptWorks

Finalist –Southeastern Theatre Conference New Play Project

Finalist –Year End Series New Play Festival; Northern Kentucky University

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Artistic Statement

Conviction and Humility are both virtues. One requires that we set aside doubt and the possibility that we might be wrong. The other requires that we embrace it. So, when faced with life-altering decisions whose outcomes can't be known in advance and whose consequences are far reaching for others as well as ourselves, how are we to choose which of these virtues to follow and which to reject . . . and at what risk? In "*Claudie Hukill*" Conviction and Humility fight it out between themselves.

Synopsis

Every family struggles with its own myths. In "*Claudie Hukill*", Rob, a young Boston journalist, returns to the coal-blackened hollows of his native West Virginia to confront his larger-than-life brother, Claudie, whose heroism during a mine cave-in and countless other legendary feats is accompanied by a maddening disregard for rules, laws, or the consequences of his actions for his impoverished family.

Rob, long familiar with Claudie's erratic behavior, which he views as selfish and irresponsible, dutifully tries to put animosity aside and find his brother, who has gone missing, so his family can be helped. Instead Rob runs headlong into Claudie's wife who believes Claudie is merely ill and their mother who seems to think Claudie is divinely inspired.

The ensuing conflict drives Rob to an emotional breaking point without even having found Claudie. Then comes the final blow when Rob learns that Claudie has died while miraculously saving the tiny community from a flood thus elevating his already legendary brother to martyred sainthood.

Rob, who has led a life of fervent humility in conscious contrast to the unchecked willfulness and self-assuredness of Claudie, is left alone to find reconciliation with the brother of mythical stature who has thwarted and frustrated him without so much as making an appearance and, now, never will.

Characters (In order of appearance.)

Grandma (Clara Hukill) A weathered, blind woman of sixty-two
Kit Hukill Grandma's eleven year-old granddaughter.
Pearl Hukill Kit's mother. Thirty years old
Sam Burton Local newspaper publisher. About sixty.
Tierney Chase Rob's blue-blood Boston wife. Late twenties
Rob Hukill Prodigal son back from Boston. Late twenties

Setting

The living room of the Hukills' threadbare and ramshackle house located in a holler outside of Saunders, Logan County, West Virginia, along the Buffalo Creek. It is February 1972.

Claudie Hukill

The Set

The living room of an aging house -- the very picture of Appalachian poverty. It is neatly kept, but the furniture and carpet are badly worn. The room is large and also functions as a dining area. The furniture consists of a threadbare couch, a coffee table, a rocking chair, one large cushioned chair, an old television with rabbit ears, and a dining room table with four chairs. The walls are adorned with a few small black and white family photographs and a cut out, framed picture of President Kennedy. One wall is devoted to framed newspaper clippings recounting the exploits of the Hukills' two sons, Claudie and Rob. The majority of clippings belong to Claudie.

The front door is located up-stage, just to the right of center. The doorway to the kitchen is up right and a hallway leading to the home's four bedrooms and bath is up left.

Author's Bio

Sean O'Leary is the author of five completed full-length plays, three of which are receiving Equity productions. His most recent, VALU-MART, is the 2007 winner of The University of Alabama at Birmingham's Ruby Lloyd Apsey Award for plays confronting racial and ethnic issues and was a finalist in the National Arts Club's Playwrights First competition. BENEATH SHELTON LAUREL was commissioned by The Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre where it played for 20 consecutive sold-out performances between 2005 and 2006 and won a National Endowment for the Arts "Access to Artistic Excellence" grant for a touring production that is now underway. Sean's earlier play, POUND, about the poet Ezra Pound, received its professional premiere in October 2004 at The Washington Stage Guild in Washington, DC and has gone on to five other productions. CLAUDIE HUKILL received its professional premiere (under the title RAIN IN THE HOLLOWS) three months earlier at Tri-State Actors Theater in New Jersey and has gone on to other productions as well. Between them POUND and CLAUDIE HUKILL have won or been finalists in more than a dozen national playwriting competitions. Sean's first play, WINE TO BLOOD was produced by Oglebay Institute's Towngate Theatre and selected by Brandeis University for its permanent collection of works inspired by the Spanish Civil War. Sean is the 2004 winner of the West Virginia Commission on The Arts Fellowship for Drama and was recently added to The Literary Map of West Virginia. He is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America and the Playwrights Forum of Washington, DC. He lives near Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. For more information, visit www.olearyonstage.com.

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Claudie Hill

Act I, Scene 1

(Early evening. Grandma rocks silently in her rocking chair. Kit, dressed in a slicker and soaking wet, enters carrying a rabbit under one arm. She takes the rabbit into the kitchen and returns with a towel, which she uses to dry him. As she does so Pearl calls from offstage.)

Pearl

Kit, is that you?

Kit

Yes'm.

Pearl

Then help Grandma with her hair. We gotta leave pretty soon.

Kit

Yes'm.

(Kit places the rabbit in Grandma's lap.)

Here. I dried him for you.

Grandma

Well, here's old Pogo all plump and fuzzy.

(Grandma lifts Pogo to eye level and pulls him nearer till they touch noses. She smiles and then holds Pogo to an ear as though listening to a whispered message. She then replies)

Why no. I ain't seen such rain since '36 when we had to get around in row boats.

Kit

Was that the flood?

Grandma

Biggest ever. Water up to the ceiling.

(To Pogo.)

Why, I bet they still tellin' that tale in the rabbit family, ain't they?

Kit

Think it'll happen again?

Grandma

No, things was different then. Back in them days Buffalo Run was wide as a river through here. Folks fishin' from boats. Even had a ferry cuz there weren't a bridge 'tween here and Logan.

Kit

Hold still, Grandma.

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Then the coal company dammed it. Now it ain't but a crick.

Kit

I seen the dam. They got a whole lake up there and you know what? The water's black.

Grandma

Pogo, you tell this child she don't need to be pokin' round up there.

(Grandma holds Pogo up to her ear.)

Kit

Yes'm.

Grandma

(Holds Pogo to her ear.)

What's that?

(Listens some more.)

Pogo says he don't mind the rain cause it's ramp growin' weather. You been feedin' him like I told you?

Kit

He likes ramps a lot more n' carrots.

Grandma

(Again to the rabbit.)

"Course I do" says he.

Kit

Hold still, Grandma.

Grandma

(Still to the rabbit.)

Talkin' to her grandma thataway.

(She moves rabbit around to her ear as if to allow the rabbit to whisper in her ear.)

She's so high and mighty, you better ask her.

Kit

What, Grandma?

Grandma

Pogo says he can't remember what we're gettin' all fixed up for.

Kit

Mr. Newlin's wake down at the Methodists.

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Greenie Newlin. Oh Lord, Greenie Newlin at the Methodists. You know what he used to say?

Kit

What, Grandma?

Grandma

I ain't afraid o' dyin' but o' bein' made a Methodist.

Kit

Is that what they're doin' to Mr. Newlin, makin' him a Methodist?

Grandma

Nah. Greenie slipped 'em, but they'll pertend anyway. Say some words, plant a cross, and declare him a Christian.

Kit

Wasn't he?

Grandma

(Perturbed at being corrected.)

Well, let's just say that callin' Greenie Newlin a Christian does more for their reputation than it does for his. Wouldn't you say, Pogo?

(Grandma lifts Pogo to her face.)

Kit

Hold still, Grandma. Almost done.

Grandma

Did you tell your daddy he should be there?

Kit

Yes'm

Grandma

Well, what'd he say?

Kit

He said you're right.

Grandma

Is that all?

Claudia Hill

Kit

Yes'm

Grandma

(Not really satisfied with the answer, but knows it's the best she'll get.)
And what about you?

Kit

Maybe.

Grandma

You know your Mama'll go scarlet if you ain't.

Kit

Yes'm.

Grandma

Is that all you're gonna say?
(Kit only shrugs. Grandma Listens to Pogo.)
She did what? She shrugged?

Kit

Yes'm.

Grandma

Mama's liable to send you to your room for a month?
(Kit shrugs again. Grandma pauses, then puts Pogo to her ear.)

She did it again? Well, I guess we ain't gonna talk about it then. Just like your daddy.
Don't matter how much trouble. Just gonna do what'cher gonna do.
(Grandma pauses, but Kit doesn't pick up the thread.)

Kit, did I ever tell you how your daddy got in trouble on his first day of school?

Kit

No m'am.

Grandma

Well, there he was in the first grade and L'il Donnie Catlett was in his class. Now I could never figure out whether L'il Donnie couldn't hold it cuz he was the nervous type or whether he was the nervous type cuz he couldn't hold it. In any case, there he was, drummin' his legs, ears turnin' red -- that was his sign -- but Myrtle don't pay him no mind.

Kit

Mrs. McCoy?

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Miss Urine Retention wouldn't let no one go the bathroom til it was time. Well, your daddy seen there weren't no hope for L'il Donnie, so he got up, took'm by the arm, and started walkin'm to the bathroom. Myrtle's yellin' at'em to get back in their seats, but your daddy took L'il Donnie right by her like she weren't even there. And I know, cuz she told me.

(Laughs at the memory.)

Kit

Geez, what'd she do to him?

Grandma

You'd o' thought he robbed a bank they was so worked up. Myrtle and who's that principal?

Kit

Mr. Smith?

Grandma

Old fool prob'ly gets hives thinkin' about your daddy.

Kit

Weren't you mad?

Grandma

Well, I sure acted like I was – and there was plenty o' times I got angry as a hornet at your daddy – but truth be told, that day was a weight off my shoulders. Up til then, I thought it was only me your daddy ignored. Didn't think near so bad o' myself after.

Pearl

(From offstage, the bedroom area.)

Kit, can you take the brownies out o' the oven and put some foil over 'em?

Kit

Already did, Momma.

(Puts finishing touches on Grandma's hair.)

Gotta go.

(Kit picks up the rabbit from Grandma's lap and rushes outside. The screen door slams shut with a bang.)

Pearl

Then get in here and get dressed.

(Pearl enters from left and crosses kitchen.)

Momma, did you see where Kit got off to?

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

Takin' Pogo back to his pen I 'spect.

Pearl

I told her not to bring that Rabbit in here any more.

Grandma

Oh, rest y'self, Pearl, Claudie used to bring in a lot worse.

Pearl

It ain't that, Momma. It's that I told her not to.

Grandma

Oh, go on, Pearl.

(Pearl is already on her way to the front door.)

Pearl

Disappearin' all the time. Bringin' Pogo in when I tell her not to. You know what Mr. Smith said about Kit. . .

Grandma

That she's a bright child, a real bright child.

Pearl

That was just to make us feel better. His point was that Kit can't go on pick'n and choos'n which rules to follow.

Grandma

Oh, the old fool said the same about Claudie.

Pearl

I swear you do it just to provoke me.

Grandma

Pearl?

Pearl

We're talkin' about Kit, Momma, not Claudie.

Grandma

That's right

Pearl

She ain't Claudie.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

No,

(A pause during which Pearl relaxes.)

But, she's so like him. . .

Pearl

(Pearl explodes in exasperation.)

No, Momma, it ain't the same. D'you hear? All this talk o' Kit bein' like her Daddy.

Well, where's it got him? Where's it got us?

Grandma

He's got his ways. . .

Pearl

You and everybody else callin' her a prodigy like her daddy. No wonder she's all puffed up.

(Pearl goes to the front door and almost screams for Kit.)

Kit!

(Pearl begins to sob.)

Grandma

Pearl? Pearl?

Pearl

I'm sorry, Momma. It's just that every time you talk about Kit bein' like Claudie I get scared.

Grandma

Scared? Of what?

Pearl

That Claudie'll never get better and Kit'll be just like him.

Grandma

Well, Claudie's the same as always.

Pearl

Oh, Momma, you know he ain't. He's hardly ever here. I don't know where he goes, for days at a time.

Grandma

Pearl, it ain't ever been otherwise with Claudie.

Pearl

I don't think he's lookin' for work and he ain't been to any o' them counseling sessions.

Claudie Hill

Grandma

Oh, Pearl. . .

Pearl

Momma, he ain't right.

Grandma

Why, when he was a boy he'd do such things as like to drive me crazy. Givin' 'way what little we had, vanishin' in the night to go Lord knows where. . .

Pearl

(Challenging Grandma.)

And what'd you do, Momma?

Grandma

All the things that didn't work. Lecturin', threatnin', pert' near beggin' and there he'd sit, right there in that chair. . .

(She motions to the old chair near the fireplace.)

. . . respectful as can be. And you could see it hurt him to upset me so. 'Course we both knowed it'd happen again.

Pearl

Maybe if you'd punished him . . .

Grandma

Punished? Why that boy spent whole years in his room 'cause I wouldn't let him out and there ain't a floor board in the hen house he can't draw from memory, he scrubbed it so many times. His daddy even tried the belt – and that weren't like Harlan . . .

Pearl

I know, Momma, but . . .

Grandma

We wondered if we was sane – fit to be parents.

Pearl

I know, Momma. But it wasn't your fault. And I know it ain't Claudie's fault neither. He's sick and. . .

Grandma

Sick? 'Ceptin' his back, Claudie's the fittest person ever was.

Pearl

That ain't the kinda sick I mean.

Claudie Hukill

Grandma

Listen, Pearl. We punished him when he broke rules, but every time we looked back at what he done, we seen they was rules that needed to be broke. You know what I finally figured out? We only got rules 'cause we can't always tell right from wrong for ourselves. Well, Claudie just don't have that problem, so he don't worry about 'em.

Pearl

Oh God, Momma, you sound just like them old farts hangin' round the gas station talkin' 'bout "Claudie Hukill, the local legend". How he won us the state championship, how he got us a new school, how he saved everybody from dyin' in the cave-in. An' every crazy thing he does, they say, "Well, that's just Claudie", and it ain't doin' him or us any good.

Grandma

Pearl, I know what you're thinkin', but folks like Claudie and Kit, they got their own 'rithmetic.

Pearl

(Letting frustration and anger creep in.)

Well, it sure ain't the kind used to balance the checkbook and pay the bills. Damn it. Damn it. Damn it!

(Lengthy pause. Grandma sits in stunned silence while Pearl gathers herself.)

I'm sorry, Momma. I know what Claudie means to you and, if there was any way I could even pretend it's all right, I would, but we're about broke and I don't have any idea where he is. He ain't worked since the cave-in. It's been most a year. He won't put in for unemployment and he won't go to counseling. I can't just say it's OK to starve because Claudie's the way he is.

Grandma

Oh Pearl, we ain't starvin'. We got all we need.

Pearl

Momma, you don't buy the groceries or pay the bills no more. The only thing keepin' us above water is food stamps and Robbie.

Grandma

Robbie?

Pearl

It's him been payin' most o' the bills since Christmas.

Grandma

Well, Robbie's family. He's got an obligation.

Pearl

Maybe to you, Momma. But he ain't responsible for Kit and me. We're Claudie's family.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

Oh, Pearl. 'At don't make no difference. Now you lost your folks young, so maybe. . .

Pearl

That ain't got nothin' to do with it.

Grandma

Has Robbie ever complained?

Pearl

'Course not.

Grandma

That's because he understands about Claudie.

Pearl

It's because he's generous and he loves you and me and Kit and he's as worried about Claudie as I am. That's why he's comin'.

Grandma

Robbie?

Pearl

Yes, Momma. Tonight. I'm gonna talk to him about getting help for Claudie.

Grandma

Robbie's comin' home?

Pearl

Aren't you glad? He oughta be here by the time we get back from the funeral home.

Grandma

(Grandma starts to mist up.)

He ain't been here in . . . in . . .

Pearl

I know, Momma, I know, but there's somethin' you gotta promise me . . .

(Pauses a moment, but Grandma is completely distracted by thoughts of Rob.)

When he gets here, I want you to tell him to talk to Claudie.

Grandma

What?

Pearl

You need to tell Robbie to talk to Claudie – to get help.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

Why didn't nobody tell me Robbie was comin'?

Pearl

He just called me at work this mornin'. Now you will talk to him, won't you?

Grandma

Pearl, there ain't no need . . .

Pearl

No, Momma,

(Forcefully, to get Grandma's attention.)

Claudie needs help.

(Pause.)

Please, Momma.

(The sound of an approaching car is heard.)

Oh, Lord, that'll be Mr. Burton and I'm not even ready.

Grandma

I didn't think Robbie was ever comin' back.

Pearl

But he is. Ain't it wonderful? Now you gotta entertain Mr. Burton for a few minutes while I finish getting ready.

Grandma

(The doorbell rings.)

What's Sam Burton wantin' here?

Pearl

He's givin' us a ride to the funeral home, so you be nice to him. Sweet Jesus, where is Kit?

(Pearl goes to let Burton in.)

Hi, Mr. Burton. We're almost ready.

Burton

Evenin' Pearl, Clara.

Pearl

I just need to finish my makeup and get our coats.

(Pearl exits toward bedrooms.)

Burton

Where's Kit?

Claudia Hill

Grandma

(Ignoring Burton's question.)
Sam Burton, Robbie's comin' home tonight.

Burton

If the road isn't washed out. Yeah, he called me this mornin'. His folks at the Boston Globe are talkin' about buyin' the rights to the minin' series. 'At'll be sumthin'.

Grandma

Is that the first you heard?

Burton

Sure is and I'm glad it's him cuz, if it were anybody else, they'd take one look and turn around and go right on back.

He's been gone a spell, hasn't he?

Grandma

More 'an a spell, Sam.

Burton

(Realizing he's hit a sensitive nerve.)
Yes, M'am.
(Changing the subject to a more mundane topic.)
So, where's the next generation?

Grandma

Kit? Don't matter, so long as she's not out there begettin' another one.

Burton

No, m'am.

Grandma

Well, I 'spect I should thank you for givin' us a ride.

Burton

No need. I know it galls you.

Grandma

I hear Robbie ain't the only one interested in your minin' story.

Burton

Well, it hasn't won anything yet. It's just a nomination.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

And have you informed them Pulitzer folks that “the Logan County Lantern” ain’t nuthin’ but one broken down old man makin’ a livin’ off other folks’ gossip?

Burton

Word for word, right on the application.

Grandma

Well, if you win, just remember that even a blind hog finds an acorn once in a while.

Burton

Now would you believe, Clara, ‘at’s just about the kindest thing anybody around here’s said to me lately.

Grandma

That’s cuz they’re scared your hell raisin ‘bout the coal companies is gonna cost ‘em their jobs.

Burton

If it does, they made it plain it’ll cost me my life.

Grandma

Then be glad you didn’t start crusadin’ til you were 60.

Burton

So, you think it’s a fool thing too?

Grandma

No. I think it’s a fool thing that it took you 30 year to get around to it. Mines been killin’ folks a long time.

Burton

And others just end up like Claudie.

Grandma

What’s that mean?

Burton

Well, . . . nothin. . .

Grandma

Sam, what’re folks sayin’ about him?

Burton

Whadya’ mean, Clara?

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

You know darned well what I mean. What about Claudie?

Burton

Oh, I don't know. They give him his space – pretty much like always.

Grandma

Sam, we knowed each other too long to be sparin' feelings.

Burton

Clara, I'm not one to know. Folks won't even speak to me lately.

(Grandma remains silent waiting for more.)

All right. They see he's not around much and, when he is, he doesn't talk to anybody. Course, it's Claudie, so most figure he's got his reasons.

Grandma

You one of 'em?

Burton

Yeah.

Grandma

He talk to you?

Burton

Sometimes.

Grandma

Do you know what he's about?

(Pearl enters in a rush carrying her coat and Grandma's.)

Pearl

All right you old cronies, are you ready to go?

Burton

We're not waitin' for Kit?

Pearl

(Ignoring Burton's question.)

C'mon, Momma, up with you.

(Helps Grandma up from the chair and into her coat.)

Mr. Burton, would you leave a note for Robbie tellin' him we're off at Greenie's wake and we'll be back around 10?

(Burton uses pen and pad on the table to write a note. Pearl pulls a plastic scarf from her pocket and puts it on Grandma.)

Claudia Hill

You'll need this.

Grandma

Horrid thing.

(Burton gets the door and they exit.)

Burton

(Calls out after them.)

Oh, you need it, Clara. This rain's biblical, downright biblical.

(Blackout. End of Scene 1.)

Claudia Hill

Act I, Scene 2

(A half hour later. The lights come up on the empty living room. Pearl, Grandma, and Mr. Burton have gone to the wake. Kit has not returned. We hear a car approaching and the headlights cast a moving beam through the front window as it comes to a stop outside. The doors open. A moment later there's a knock on the front door. After a pause the door is pushed tentatively open and Tierney sticks her head in to see if anyone is there. She is taken aback by the threadbare furnishings and atmosphere of poverty.)

Rob

(Calls from the car where he is getting suitcases from the trunk.)
If no one's home, just hold the door.

Tierney

(Enters apprehensively allowing the screen door to shut behind her. She speaks somewhat to herself.)
Are you sure this is the place?

Rob

(Has arrived at the screen door laden with suitcases.)
You know, it's pouring out here.
(Tierney rushes back to hold the screen door open for Rob who squeezes in. He calls.)
Hello. Ma? Pearl?
(There is no answer. Rob is unmoved and turns to go back to the car.)
I still have to get my briefcase.

Tierney

(Speaks as Rob is on his way out, so she isn't heard.)
Maybe they don't live here anymore.
(Alone again, Tierney sees the note on the table and begins to read as Rob returns with his brief case. He stands soaking wet looking at Tierney who is still reading. After a moment she becomes conscious of his presence and looks up. She realizes he has had to carry all the luggage.)
Well, I didn't want to look a mess for your mother.

Rob

She's blind.

Tierney

Screw you.

Rob

So where are they?

Claudia Hill

Tierney

Your mother and Pearl are at. . .

(Looks down and reads the unfamiliar name as though it might be contagious.)

Greenie Newlin's wake.

Rob

One of the most prominent men in the community.

(Pauses a moment to recollect.)

Spent forty years underground. Not many make it that long.

Tierney

Wasn't he one of the miners your brother saved in the cave-in last year?

Rob

I don't remember.

Tierney

Yeah, I remember his name. They were in the picture together. Your brother carried him out on his back.

(Tierney starts to go through some paper in an overnight bag that came in with her luggage.)

Rob

What're you looking for?

Tierney

I brought the article. . .

Rob

What?

Tierney

Well, I saved it because I thought your Mother would like to see her son's picture in the Globe.

(Rob looks at her and rolls his eyes.)

Well, what about Pearl and Kit?

(Accusingly.)

You wouldn't send it.

Rob

They were here. Remember? They know all about it.

Tierney

What is wrong with you?

Claudie Hukill

Rob

(Rushing from picture to trophy.)

See this? That's Claudie Hukill. Over here? It's Claudie Hukill again. And who might that be? Why, it's that same Claudie Hukill, favorite son of Saunders and friend of the working man. It's a good thing you didn't get it framed, because there wouldn't be any place to hang it. Believe me they know about Claudie Hukill. Everyone in Saunders knows about Claudie Hukill.

Tierney

You're jealous.

Rob

It's not jealousy, it's resentment. There's a difference. My brother has abandoned his family, kept them living like this. . .

(He looks around the house disapprovingly.)

and is generally acting like the village idiot. Do you think they would really appreciate this right now?

Tierney

Yes, I think they would.

(Rob is disgusted.)

Rob

You unpack. I'm going down to the funeral home.

Tierney

(Stunned and vaguely frightened at the prospect of being left in uncomfortably unfamiliar surroundings.)

You're going to leave me?

Rob

Here? Go ahead, say it. Are you going to leave me in . . . THIS? Welcome home, honey.

Tierney

I just thought I might go. . .

Rob

Look, introductions are going to be hard enough and I'd really rather not do it in front of a corpse.

Tierney

I have never seen you like this.

Claudia Hill

Rob

You told your Mother you'd call her when we got here. The way she talks, I'll be back before you're off the phone.

Tierney

But . . .

Rob

We're in the first door on the left. It's my old room. You'll probably find a lot more distasteful things about me.

Tierney

(Replies, but Rob is gone.)

You know, you're being a real shit.

(Tierney drops into an empty chair exasperated. After a few moments she decides she had better get used to it and starts looking around at the very alien environment. She takes note of the threadbare condition of the furniture and carpet and goes on to take stock of the decorative items: assorted family photos, a picture of JFK cut from a Look magazine, and a plastic plaque engraved with the serenity prayer. Having begun to fathom the reality of Appalachian poverty, she glances at her watch and realizes it's nearly her mother's bedtime. She goes to the wall phone next to the kitchen door and calls.)

Hello, Mother, it's me. Just wanted to let you know we made it. . . . Not yet. A family friend died recently and they're at his wake, so we let ourselves in. . . . Oh, well its, ah, very lived in. You know. . . . Yes. I, uh, suppose you would call it a cottage. . . . It's a, um, wooded setting. . . . Yes, very secluded. . . . Well, Rob's brother, his wife and their daughter and Rob's mother Yes, it is sweet they're all together. . . . I know Rob and I would have more room at the house with you, but our apartment is so convenient to work. . . . Oh, Mother. You don't need us. . . . Norris and Sophie have been taking care of the house since before I was born. . . . Mother, look, I really shouldn't run up their long distance bill. . . .

(Kit enters through front door. She is soaked again and starts to remove her wet things at the door when she notices Tierney on the phone. They wave politely while Tierney continues the conversation with her mother.)

I'm sorry, Mother, I didn't hear you. . . . The Vineyard? Yes, I know. You want to open the house early this year. I told you Rob and I would come down to help. . . . Who? Well, I'm not sure, Mother. It's a long way for them to travel Not exactly retired, but they still have. . . . Oh no, Mother, they're not Hilton Head people. . . .

(Tierney finds the conversation increasingly awkward as Kit watches and listens intently as she munches on a brownie.)

It's just that I haven't even met them yet and they don't know We were going to tell them tonight. . . . Well, if Rob thought they were going to be angry, I'm sure he would have told them before we came. . . . No, I don't think an invitation would soften the blow because there's no blow to soften. Mother, you sound like you think Rob should be embarrassed by me. . . . No, Mother, please. Look it's getting late. Why don't we talk about it when I get back? . . . I promise. I'll come out on Saturday and we'll go riding.

Claudia Hill

You tell Norris to have Rodrigo all saddled and I'll be there at 10. . . Night, Mother.
Love you.

(She hangs up smiling sheepishly at Kit who is fully understanding and utterly unperturbed.)

Gee, I bet you can guess who I am.

Kit

Are you married to Uncle Robbie or just going with him?

Tierney.

We got married last week in Bermuda.

Kit

And you didn't tell your momma either?

Tierney

The day before yesterday. Is that awful?

Kit

I think it's swell.

Tierney

You do?

Kit

Now you and Uncle Robbie can sleep in his room and I don't have to move. What's your name?

Tierney

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Tierney Chase and you must be Kit.

(Reaches to Kit to shake hands.)

Kit

Why did you get married in Bermuda?

Tierney

Oh, neither one of us wanted a big formal wedding and, if we had announced it, my mother would have insisted.

Kit

Why not just invite the folks you want?

Tierney

You don't know Mother. Her idea of intimate is keeping the guest list in triple digits. Her secretary contacts the police to arrange traffic control.

Claudia Hill

Kit

How many houses do you have?

Tierney

Well, your Uncle Rob and I have only an apartment, but Mother has three.

Kit

Just for herself?

Tierney

The house in Marblehead, a winter chalet at Mount Sunapee, and the cottage on the Vineyard.

Kit

What's the Vineyard?

Tierney

Martha's Vineyard is an island off the Massachusetts coast.

Kit

In the ocean?

Tierney

Unh hunh.

Kit

Is it strange coming here?

Tierney

Well, it's, ah, different. Did I offend you?

Kit

You mean when your momma wanted us to come to the Vineyard and you didn't want us to?

Tierney

That wasn't very nice, was it?

Kit

It's OK. You were just thinking of us.

Tierney

No, I wasn't. I was thinking of myself and what Mother would think. She doesn't meet many people. . . um, outside her circle.

Claudia Hill

Kit

Neither do we. You want a brownie?

Tierney

Sure. So, how come you were out in the rain instead of at Mr. Newlin's wake with everyone else?

Kit

I was walking with my daddy.

Tierney

In this downpour? Where is he?

Kit

He'll prob'ly be busy for a while. You came because of him too, didn't you?

Tierney

Well, your Uncle Robbie would like to see him and I'd like to meet him. I understand he's famous around here.

Kit

It's good you're here.

Tierney

I hope so.

Kit

We'd better get your things into Uncle Robbie's room.

(Kit picks up the biggest suitcase and hauls it to the bedroom. Tierney follows with the remaining two bags. Kit returns to wrap the brownies.)

Tierney

Here, let me help you.

(Sweeps the crumbs into her hand.)

Kit

I have to go to bed now.

(She gathers the clothes that she had hung at the door to take them into her room.)

Tierney

Already? It's not even a school night.

Claudia Hill

Kit

(Stops as she is walking back to her bedroom.)

Don't worry about saying the wrong thing. We know we're poor.

(Smiles and exits.)

Tierney

(Somewhat dumbstruck at such sage advice from an 11 year-old. Calls after Kit.)

Is everyone around here as kind as you?

(There is no reply. Tierney takes it all in for a moment, sees a book, and settles into a chair to read.)

(BLACKOUT)

Claudia Hukill

Act I, Scene 3

(As the lights come up Tierney has fallen asleep in the chair with the open book laying beside her. A car's headlight beams shine through the front window and there is the sound of car doors opening and closing. The front door is pushed open by Rob who holds it open with one hand while holding an umbrella outside with his right. Grandma and Pearl squeeze by.)

Rob

How long has it been raining like this?

Pearl

Thank God it ain't snow. We'd never get out.

(Stopping Grandma just inside the door.)

Hold on Momma. Let me get your wraps.

(Helps Grandma remove her wet coat and scarf and guides her to the rocking chair.)

Rob

Tierney probably fell asleep.

(Tierney begins to stir.)

Grandma

Well, let her sleep if she needs it, cuz she's only gonna wake up and see us.

Tierney

(Calls attention to herself.)

No, I'm right here.

(Rob goes to meet her and guides her to Grandma.)

Rob

Momma, this is Tierney.

(Grandma's hand is extended and Tierney takes it.)

Tierney

How do you do, Mrs. Hukill?

Grandma

Well, that's better than the "Howdy" I got from that Pickett girl you brought home last time.

Rob

Momma, that was eight years ago.

Grandma

Oh, Robbie, relax. I was jus' goin at ya. I'm sorry, Tierney. It's awful nice of you to come all this way.

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

I feel bad enough that we got married without telling you.

Rob

Tierney, excuse me. This is Pearl, Claudie's wife

Pearl

Nice to meet you, Tierney.

(To Grandma.)

Momma, It looks like Rob done all right for hisself.

Tierney

I'm glad to meet you, Pearl.

Grandma

If it weren't for Pearl to tell me what folks look like, I'd have to do that face-feelin'.

Tierney

Would you like to?

Grandma

Nah, I ain't no good at it. Can't never get by the nose. If I'd been born blind, I'd think folks was just a nose with all the other stuff attached to it.

Pearl

Would you cut it out, Momma?

(To Tierney.)

She just likes to shock folks.

Rob

Momma. Tierney and I wanted to explain to you about the wedding.

(He looks at Tierney as though he expects her to pick up the thread. She is uncomfortably surprised. Pearl comes to her rescue.)

Pearl

Rob, before we start explainin', why don't everyone get comf' terble and I'll get some coffee up?

(She leads Rob and Tierney to the couch then exits for the kitchen to get coffee and the brownies.)

You sit here, cuz I'm just gonna be up and down. Now, did you all get somethin' to eat?

Tierney

I've already had some of your brownies with Kit.

Claudie Hubill

Pearl

(Speaking from the kitchen as though she had known where Kit had been.)
Oh, she got back early. Well, that's nice.

(With less self-assurance.)
Did she go to bed?

Tierney

Mmm hmm. She said she was tired.

Rob

You know, I haven't seen Kit since she was a baby.

Grandma

Well, you'd know her cuz' she's just like her daddy.

Rob

(Nervously.)
Now what do you mean, Momma?

Pearl

(Returning with the coffee.)
She means Kit got herself into a peck of trouble – and it ain't the first time.

Tierney

(Saving the day.)
Well, we had quite a talk and she was just lovely.

Pearl

Excuse me for a moment while I go have a word with her.
(Exits to Kit's bedroom.)

Grandma

Poor Pearl. She tries so hard to be a good momma.

Tierney

From what I can see, she's getting results. Kit really was delightful.

Grandma

Oh, she don't have to worry about Kit no more'n I had to worry about Claudie. Now I s'pose Robbie's told you about Claudie?

Rob

Momma, before we talk about Claudie, I need to explain why we got married without telling you.

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Robbie, you know whatever you do is all right with me, cuz I know you're only thinkin' of the best. Besides, I'd like to get to know Tierney.

(Addressing Tierney.)

I don't know much but what Robbie told us in the car, but so far you sound pretty good.

Tierney

Rob's pretty good too.

Grandma

You always lived in Massachusetts?

Tierney

Uh huh.

Rob

Tierney's ancestors go all the way back to the Mayflower.

Grandma

Did your folks know the Kennedy boys?

Tierney

They weren't really friends, but my parents met them. We used to have a house close to theirs on the Cape.

Grandma

What's the Cape?

Rob

On the ocean south of Boston -- where lots of folks vacation in the summer.

(Pearl returns.)

Grandma

(To Tierney.)

And you live there?

Tierney

Not anymore. Mother bought a new cottage on Martha's Vineyard.

(Sees that Grandma doesn't follow.)

Martha's Vineyard is an island.

Grandma

I'll bet it's somethin' to see.

Claudia Hill

Tierney

Mother asked if you'd like to come visit us there.

(Grandma smiles in surprised embarrassment, which is shared by Pearl.)

Grandma

Well, I don't know. . .

Tierney

We'll open the house in May and you're all welcome.

Pearl

(Mindful of the practicalities.)

We'll have to see.

Rob

(Somewhat doubtfully.)

It'd be a big trip.

Grandma

'Course it would. Tierney, it's lovely of you and your mama to ask. You tell her we'll see what we can do.

Tierney

I will.

(A pause in the conversation.)

Grandma

Well, it's getting' way past my bedtime, so if you'll all excuse me.

(Grandma rises to leave.)

Rob

Momma, before you go, I just want you to know that it's good to be home and I'm sorry about being gone so long.

Grandma

(Too Tierney.)

Now you see what kind of boy you're getting? He worries about hisself just like Pearl worries about Kit. Ain't no call for it, but you can't tell'm otherwise.

Rob

Momma, can we talk tomorrow. . .

Grandma

'Course we can.

Claudia Hill

Rob

Because I need to explain why it's been so long. . .

Grandma

Robbie, it's OK. There ain't nuthin' to explain. Now, y'all have a nice visit and leave some o' them brownies so I can sneak one in the morning.

Tierney

Night. . . Momma.
(Grandma laughs.)

Grandma

Goodnight, Tierney.
(Grandma and Pearl exit to bedroom.)

Tierney

Wow, I like her.
(Rob, still seated, looks forlornly after them prompting Tierney to give him a hug from behind believing that he regrets having stayed away all these years. Instead, he surprises her.)

Rob

I should have never come back.

Tierney

What are you talking about? Don't you see how happy she is?

Rob

It doesn't matter what I do – good or bad. She doesn't care.

Tierney

What?

Rob

That is what she said, you know.

Tierney

You mean the wedding – being gone so long? She told you it was all right.

Rob

No, it's not "all right". What she means is it doesn't matter.

Tierney

Rob, she loves and trusts you.

Claudie Hubill

Rob

There's a difference between love and disinterest.

Tierney

What's going on? Does she owe you something?

(Pause.)

Jesus! I think the only time men apologize is when they think they're owed an apology.

Rob

You don't think I was sincere?

Tierney

In a weasley sort of way.

Rob

(About to explode, but reconsiders.)

No, you're right. She doesn't owe me a damn thing.

Tierney

(Exasperated.)

I don't know what this is all about, but if you're going to start feeling sorry for yourself, at least tell me why.

Rob

For the first time since the wedding, I really feel married.

(Tierney turns and walks away in disgust.)

You know? I used to think she didn't listen because she was so overwhelmed by Claudie that she was afraid of what she might hear. So, I was the good kid – always kept up on his chores, never a problem, and I thought I was doing her a favor. She didn't think we could do any wrong.

Tierney

I wish my mom had thought that.

Rob

Oh, some of the time, yeah. But sometimes you just want a little feedback – you know, some positive reinforcement.

Tierney

Right now you have the vocabulary of a writer and the emotions of a 12-year old. If you wanted attention, you should have rebelled like everybody else.

Rob

Nah, we had Claudie for that.

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

I thought he was supposed to be the perfect one.

Rob

It's not hard to be perfect when, by definition, everything you do is right.

Tierney

You said it was that way for you too.

Rob

Yeah, but I knew better and so do most other folks. But, Claudie? He never doubted a thing in his life. And, because he didn't, most folks didn't doubt him either.

Tierney

What do you mean?

Rob

Did I ever tell you that he committed a felony?

Tierney

What?

Rob

Yeah. He was never charged, but everyone knew he did it.

Tierney

Did what?

Rob

Grand theft. I was twelve, so Claudie would've been fourteen. It was late August and school was about to open. Well, one night Claudie and Denny Haney broke into Lincoln – that was the Negro school then. . . .

Tierney

You had segregated schools?

Rob

Well, we did up until that year. That night Claudie and Denny broke in through a window in the basement where the furnace was. Well, Claudie decided he'd take a part of the furnace as a souvenir. A week later when the building inspector checked the school to make sure it was ready to open, he couldn't certify it because the furnace didn't work. It turned out that replacing that part cost more than a thousand dollars which was probably more money than they spent on Lincoln in five years. So, they had to shell out the money or send the black kids to school with us. And that's how Logan County schools became the first in West Virginia to desegregate.

Claudie Hill

Tierney

Is that why Claudie did it?

Rob

Asking Claudie why he does anything is like asking a rock why it's hard. Besides, he was 14 years old. What'd he care?

Tierney

Well, how did you find out he did it?

Rob

He told me – told anyone who ever asked.

Tierney

So, maybe he did know.

Rob

So what? Does that make it right?

Tierney

It's kind of like an act of civil disobedience.

Rob

(Incredulous.)

It's a crime, a felony.

Tierney

But, if he told people he did it, he was ready to accept the punishment. That makes it an act of civil disobedience.

Rob

Well, maybe if he was smart enough to figure out that what he did would end segregation, he was also smart enough to know that the School Board would never press charges because then everyone would know the real reason they desegregated.

Tierney

(Impressed.)

Now, that's really smart.

Rob

(Rolling his eyes.)

Don't you hear what I'm telling you? This was a fourteen year-old kid who's absolutely certain that he's always right.

Tierney

I wish I could be that way.

Claudie Hubill

Rob

Hitler was that way!

Tierney

Well, did he ever do anything that was really bad?

Rob

Hitler or Claudie?

(Pearl enters having gotten Grandma to bed. Crosses to kitchen.)

Pearl

It's been quite a day for her. Y'all want any more to eat?

Tierney

No thanks.

Pearl

Some coffee?

(Rob, still recovering from his frustration with Tierney, just shakes his head.)

Tierney

Yeah, please.

Rob

Sure.

Pearl

(Re-entering with coffee feels the tension.)

If I'm interrupting something, I've got plenty to do in my room.

Rob

No, no. We were just talking about old times.

Pearl

(Still unsure. In reference to Grandma.)

Well, she's still sassy. Turnin' me into an old fussbudget.

Tierney

She doesn't seem too fazed by things – going blind I mean.

Pearl

Oh no. At first they told her it would be hard and then, when she didn't hardly change, they said she was in denial – although I don't know how you could very well deny bein' blind.

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

No.

Pearl

Well, that was five years ago.

Rob

I had just started at the Globe.

Pearl

And she was so proud of you.

(Tierney flashes an "I told you so" look at Rob.)

She made me promise to tell you to stay in Boston, cuz she didn't want to interfere with your new job.

Rob

Well, that's one way of looking at it. Pearl, where's Claudie?

Pearl

(Nervously.)

Around.

(To Tierney.)

He don't keep to no particular schedule.

Rob

Does he know I'm here?

Pearl

Well. . .

Tierney

(Saving Pearl.)

Yes, he does.

(Rob and Pearl are surprised.)

Kit told me – before – while you were at the wake.

Pearl

(Embarrassed.)

Did she say where he was?

Tierney

No.

Rob

(To Pearl.)

You didn't tell him we were coming?

Claudie Hubill

Pearl

Well, you only called me this morning.

Rob

But we talked about the possibility a week ago.

Tierney

I'm sure Pearl wanted it to be a surprise.

Rob

Yeah, for Momma, but not Claudie.

Pearl

No, no. Truth is I ain't seen him in a week – two weeks if you get right down to it.

Rob

Well, where's he staying? I mean Kit sees him.

Pearl

Robbie, we're talkin' about Claudie.

Rob

(To Tierney.)

You see – as though that's an explanation.

Pearl

Robbie, I know how you feel about Claudie, but we gotta talk. He needs help.

Rob

What?

Pearl

He ain't well.

Rob

You mean his injuries from the cave in?

Pearl

(Not quite knowing how to proceed.)

Well, yeah. . . sorta?

Tierney

He hurt his back and did some nerve damage, right?

Claudie Hubill

Pearl

Yeah, but that's OK – I mean he ain't too put out about that.

Rob

Is there something else?

Pearl

Well, they say these kind of things traumatize you.

Rob

What? Claudie, traumatized?

Pearl

He seems happy enough, but he's acting strange.

Rob

More 'n usual you mean?

Tierney

(Responding to what she perceives to be Rob's insensitivity.)

Rob, he had friends die and he was almost killed himself. People can be traumatized by a lot less.

Rob

(Implicitly acknowledging Tierney's point addresses Pearl.)

So, is he like paranoid or have a tick or something?

Tierney

You're awful.

Pearl

(A "what'd I say?" look on Rob's face causes her to jump in before an argument breaks out.)

No, no. It ain't like that. I mean, you meet him and he seems fine. He'll talk to you – even tell you all about the cave-in.

Rob

Well, in what way is he traumatized?

Pearl

He just ain't around much.

(Pause.)

Rob

That's it?

Claudie Hubill

Pearl

(Feeling as though further explanation is required.)

I mean for days at a time, he's just gone. He misses doctor appointments – especially the ones with the social worker. And I know he ain't lookin' for a job.

Rob

But, he was disabled. Right?

Pearl

He can't do heavy lifting and such, but he's fine for clerkin' and office work and things. And there's some folks'd hire 'im cuz o' what he done and he's so well known and all.

Tierney

But, if he's really traumatized . . .

Pearl

Well, that's what they tell me and I can't see any other explanation. . .

Rob

So, what's his excuse? You see him sometimes. What's he say?

Pearl

He says there's things he's gotta do, but he don't say what.

Tierney

You know, he may not even know himself. . .

Rob

Look, I don't mean to be inconsiderate. I feel terrible about what happened to him and the other miners, but disappearing and neglecting responsibilities isn't exactly unusual behavior for Claudie, now is it?

Tierney

Oh, come on. You're not going to bring up your stupid adolescent rivalry now?

Rob

What do you know? You've never even met the man.

Tierney

And you haven't seen him in eight. . .

Rob

Pearl, explain to her. Tell her about Claudie.

(Gesturing to the clippings on the wall.)

Claudie Hubill

Not the one in the clippings – the private one, the one you want to be able to depend on, the one you want to know won't throw you overboard for mysterious reasons he never sees fit to reveal. . .

Pearl

I know what you mean, Robbie, but this is different.

Rob

(Demanding an answer.)

Oh? And how is it different?

Tierney

Would you back off? Whatever the problem is, it isn't her fault.

Rob

No, and it isn't your fault and it isn't my fault. So, whose fault is it?

Tierney

Why does it have to be anybody's fault? Maybe it just is.

Rob

On the other hand, maybe someone is responsible. Maybe someone can do something about it.

Pearl

Would you stop it!

(Pause. All are stunned by Pearl's sudden outburst, including Pearl.)

Robbie, it ain't the way you're sayin'. Claudie's Claudie and I ain't pretendin' otherwise, but he's also been a good husband and father for all these years -- workin' underground. And you know how hard that is. Now, maybe he don't do things to your likin', but he's all I got and I love him, I'm worried about him and I need your help. I need you to talk to him.

Rob

Me? You think he'll talk to me?

Pearl

Robbie, I've tried. Momma won't, and Claudie won't give anybody else the time of day.

Rob

No, no, no, no. You can't imagine. . . Claudie and I haven't communicated since 1964 and we didn't like each other then.

Tierney

What is your problem? Don't you get over anything? I suppose you're holding a grudge against the kid who tied your shoelaces together in the second grade.

Claudie Hukill

Rob

I – I . . .

Tierney

Pearl isn't asking you to fix him. She isn't even asking you to diagnose the problem. She just wants you to find out what he's doing.

Pearl

That's all. I mean just so I'd know he's OK. Robbie, right now the only person I can ask is Kit and what am I supposed to say to her?

Rob

But, what if he doesn't want any part of me? Or what if I find out there isn't anything wrong – that it's just the same old Claudie doing the same old things he did when we were kids?

You really want to know that? Because there's a woman in there who almost went to the madhouse trying to figure out what Claudie Hukill is all about. And you see how she ended up – deluding herself that he lives on some other plane, that he can't be questioned or understood.

(To Pearl.)

You've heard it, haven't you? And it doesn't do Claudie any favors, does it?

(Pearl can only look down. Rob now addresses Tierney.)

It just encourages him. You see? And you think this is going to be any different?

Tierney

You know what I just realized? You're afraid of him. Afraid that maybe he has good reasons. And then you couldn't blame him for every little misery in your life.

Rob

You don't understand. You. . . you can't. You think this is just some chicken-shit sibling rivalry thing. Well I promise you, if I had never been born, there would still be a Claudie Hukill problem in this world.

Pearl

(Feeling awkward and defeated.)

I, um, I really have to get to bed.

(To Rob.)

Maybe you could just think about it.

Rob

(Embarrassed.)

Uh, yeah . . . sure. I'll . . . uh. . . think about it.

Claudie Hubill

Pearl

Tierney, I'm goin' into Beckley tomorrow to do some shopping. Would you like to come?

Tierney

Yeah, we'll have fun.

Pearl

(To Rob.)

That way you can have some time with Momma.

Rob

Thanks.

Pearl

Night.

(Exits to bedrooms.)

Rob

Night.

Tierney

Night.

(Incredulous that Rob doesn't offer to help.)

You're just going to let her go – like this? Rob, she needs help. She loves him.

Rob

Everybody does. I'm going to bed too.

(Without pause or explanation Rob also retires leaving the surprised Tierney alone in the living room. Bewildered, she ponders for a moment and wanders over to look at Claudie's "wall of fame". After a few moments, Kit enters from the bedroom area, crosses to the coat rack by the door, sees Tierney, and smiles at her.)

Tierney

Did you hear. . .

Kit

It's OK. Momma's been worried about Daddy for a while.

(Kit smiles again and puts on her coat.)

Tierney

What are you doing? It's late.

Claudia Hill

Kit

It's OK.

(Kit gives a reassuring little wave and exits. Tierney starts to make for Pearl's bedroom but stops with a confused, bewildered look on her face.)

(Blackout.)

Claudia Hill

Act I, Scene 4

(The next morning, shortly after breakfast. There are still dishes on the table. Pearl is in the process of removing them to the kitchen. Rob is sitting at the table reading The Logan County Lantern. Grandma is still finishing her coffee and the remains of a Danish. Tierney is sitting on the couch in her coat with her purse open looking through her wallet.)

Tierney

Rob, do you have any cash?

Rob

Yeah, some. But we oughta' use up the travelers' checks.

Pearl

It's all right. I got some.

Tierney

Well, I want some cash just in case. Where's your wallet?

Rob

My jacket, in the bedroom.

(Tierney exits to the bedroom.)

Grandma

(To Rob.)

You two sound like you been married for ages.

Rob

Well, we've lived together . . .

(Realizes he's speaking to his mother.)

We've, uh, shared the financial responsibilities.

(Grandma and Pearl both laugh.)

Grandma

Robbie, if your daddy knew, know what he'd do?

Rob

What?

Grandma

Laugh even harder.

Pearl

(Scoldingly as Tierney re-enters.)

Momma.

Claudia Hill

(To Rob.)

She gets more cantankerous every day. Now, will you two promise not to fight while we're gone?

Tierney

Boy, I must have missed something.

(Pearl has finished clearing the dishes and she and Tierney head to the coat rack and put on their coats.)

Pearl

Now you two behave. I'm takin' Tierney up to Beckley, the big city, to pick up a few things. We'll be back before dinner.

Rob

Before dinner? Sounds like more than a few things.

Tierney

Mind your own business. I told Pearl we might take in a movie.

Grandma

Well, if you do that, bring me back some o' them Junior Mints.

Pearl

Yes'm.

Grandma

And take your umbrella. That rain's comin' down harder 'n ever.

Pearl

We're fine, Momma. You just enjoy your time with Robbie.

Tierney

(To Rob.)

See ya. Bye, Momma.

(Pearl and Tierney head out the door.)

Rob

(Calling after them.)

Remember, that's a rental car.

Tierney

(Sticking her head back in.)

Yeah, we can really have fun.

(Exits.)

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Sounds like you got your hands full with that one. How'd you meet her?

Rob

I was assigned to do a story about a shelter for battered women. . .

Grandma

Hmm?

Rob

You know. For women who are beaten by their husbands or boyfriends and need a place to stay.

Grandma

(Assuming that Tierney was a client.)
And she was there?

Rob

No. No. Not as a client. Tierney and a friend of hers run it. They started it.

Grandma

Well, is there much money in that?

Rob

No. None at all actually. In fact, Tierney generally writes a monthly check to cover the expenses they can't meet from grants and donations.

Grandma

Well, what's she been livin' on?

Rob

Me . . . along with a little help from a large inheritance.

Grandma

Her folks is rich?

Rob

Filthy.

Grandma

Smart, rich, and Pearl says she's pretty.

Rob

See? Everything I'm not. A perfect couple.

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Still runnin' yourself down – with all you accomplished.

Rob

Mom, I'm a staff writer on a newspaper. The guy who picks up our garbage gets paid more than I do.

Grandma

But, you got the luxury o' doin' what you love. Ain't many folks can say that.

Rob

Where I live people expect it.

Grandma

In this world places like where you live is as peculiar as white rhododendrons.

(Rob softly chuckles.)

What you laughin' at? Don't you know everything old blind folks say is wise?

Rob

Momma, I think you just accused people from Boston of being provincial.

Grandma

We all are. Just some folks think their way's better'n everyone else's.

(Grandma rises from the table and works her way to her rocking chair.)

See, I can get along pretty good 'long as you folks don't move the furniture

Rob

No, Ma'm.

Grandma

Well, I hear you're down here to talk to Sam Burton about printin' his coal minin' series in your newspaper.

Rob

Yeah.

Grandma

Does the Boston Globe usually get its news from the likes o' Sam?

Rob

Stop it. My editor thinks that series may be the thing that finally forces passage of mine safety legislation.

Grandma

Why do folks in Boston care about coal mines?

Claudie Hubill

Rob

You remember the Farmington explosion? Three days of network TV coverage while they tried to dig those sixteen miners out. Made it real.

Grandma

What was it before?

Rob

Statistics.

Grandma

So'd you talk'em into runnin' Sam's series?

Rob

Nope, Walter Cronkite did.

Grandma

Who's he?

Rob

(Amused at having forgotten.)

I guess they still haven't gotten the TV cable up the hollow, have they? He's on the CBS network -- like Huntley and Brinkley on NBC.

Grandma

There were some o' them CBS folks here for the cave-in at South Fork, but it was mostly over by the time they got there.

Rob

Well, it still made a splash. The AP photo of Claudie hauling Mr. Newlin out of the mine must have run in two hundred papers. My editor saw the last name and made a joke of askin' me if it was my brother. He just about died when I told him, "yeah".

Grandma

He musta knowed you was from West Virginia.

Rob

Not until then.

(Pause.)

Anyway, he's the one who arranged for Mr. Burton's series to be nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and sent me down here to get the rights to it.

Grandma

Was it hard to talk him into it?

Claudie Hubill

Rob

I didn't say a word, Momma. He got interested in the mining thing after Farmington and South Fork, so I just sent him the copies of the Lantern Pearl sends me. Last Tuesday he called me at home and told me to get on down here. Said he wants me to do an interview with Claudie too.

Grandma

Claudie's been pretty scarce lately.

Rob

That's what Pearl said.

Grandma

Is that all she said?

Rob

No.

Grandma

She's worried about him.

Rob

Seems like she has reason.

Grandma

She says you been sendin' money.

Rob

Yeah, some.

Grandma

So, what are you gonna do?

Rob

Ask him what he's doing, I guess.

Grandma

And what are you gonna do when he won't say?

Rob

I can't make him do anything, Momma.

Grandma

Ain't nobody make Claudie do nothin'.

Claudie Hubill

Rob

But he needs to.

Grandma

What?

Rob

He needs to do something -- like take care of his family.

Grandma

We ain't hurtin'.

Rob

Pearl is.

Grandma

She's just scared for Claudie, but she don't understand. . .

Rob

Momma, it's worse than that. Maybe you just don't remember how it felt back then?

Grandma

When you was kids?

Rob

And Claudie damn near destroyed us. I used to hear you cryin' to Daddy that Claudie'd end up in jail.

Grandma

But, I was wrong. . .

Rob

No, you weren't, Momma. He should have gone to jail.

Grandma

Robbie, you know Claudie never broke no rule that didn't need to be broke.

Rob

Who says, Momma? Who says?

Grandma

Did you ever know him to do one selfish thing?

Rob

I haven't ever known him to do anything but. Look at this place. Look at Pearl working tooth and nail to get by.

Claudie Hukill

Grandma

Hukill's always worked tooth and nail . . .

Rob

That's what I mean, Momma. Claudie could have changed it. He had it all, more genius and charm in one damn finger than I have in my whole being.

Grandma

And don't you think it's been put to good use?

Rob

Oh please, Momma, don't tell me again how he won the state championship and desegregated the schools and faced down the Klan and . . .

Grandma

He did.

Rob

And he also broke laws, knocked up Pearl when she was 16, and kept his family in poverty.

Grandma

Robbie, there ain't a person around that ain't grateful Claudie Hukill stayed in this holler.

Rob

Well, kept him away from the rest of the world where he might have done some real damage.

Grandma

Robbie, I don't know what to say, 'ceptin you're wrong and I hate to think o' you going through life all grizzled up.

Rob

Is that what I am, Momma?

(A sad chuckle.)

Grizzled up?

Grandma

What? You forget how to speak English up 'ere in Boston?

Rob

I probably forgot a lot, but you know I still care about . . .

Grandma

'Course you do. . .

Claudia Hill

Rob

Momma, why do you always do that?

Grandma

What?

Rob

Cut me off . . . shut me up every time I try to say something important to you.

Grandma

(Shocked.)

Robbie!

Rob

Really – like last night about Tierney and me getting married.

Grandma

I weren't shuttin' you up. I was just tellin' you it's OK.

Rob

But maybe it wasn't OK. You don't even know why we did it.

Grandma

I got faith in you . . .

Rob

Maybe I don't have faith in myself.

Grandma

(Genuinely surprised.)

D'you do somethin' wrong?

Rob

That's just it. Sometimes I don't know.

Grandma

Well, Tierney seems like a nice girl . . .

Rob

No, not that. I just mean sometimes I do things and I'm not sure and . . . I'm looking for reassurance I guess.

Grandma

Robbie, you never done nothin' bad in your whole life.

Claudie Hubill

Rob

Not on purpose, but a lot of the time, I'm not sure . . . not a hundred percent.

(Pause. Grandma is confused. Rob puts it in the only terms he thinks she can understand.)

Momma, I'm not like Claudie. I make mistakes, not because I mean to, but because I do and sometimes . . . I just need a little help.

Momma ?

Grandma

Yes, Robbie ?

(The sound of someone walking on to the front porch. Door opens and Kit enters.)

Kit

Hi, Grandma. Hi, Uncle Robbie.

Rob

Hi, Kit. Nice to see you again.

Grandma

(Stands and holds out her elbow to be guided.)

Oh Lord, child. Where you been? Sit down and let's get you dried off 'fore you take ill.

Kit

Yes'm.

(Kit removes her wraps while Grandma exits to kitchen for a towel.)

Daddy says hi. He hopes you and Tierney are havin' a nice time.

Rob

He does? Well . . . I guess you see him a lot?

Kit

Sometimes.

Rob

Do you think I could see him too?

Grandma

(Re-enters with towel.)

Kit, get yourself sit'iated and let me dry you.

Kit

Yes'm.

(Moves to chair and Grandma starts drying her hair.)

Claudia Hill

Rob

Kit, do you think you could ask him for me?
(Kit is in a quandary and hesitates.)

Grandma

‘Course she will. Now be still.
(Kit gives a nervous little smile.)

Rob

Well . . . uh . . . I’ll let you two be. Mr. Burton’s coming over pretty soon to talk about the series and I have to get some things ready. And Momma, we’ll uh . . .

Grandma

Robbie, we got all the time in the world, so you go right ahead and take care of business.
(Rob exits to bedroom. Grandma finishes drying Kit’s head and Kit starts to exit)

Grandma

Where are you going? I ain’t done.

Kit

I can finish in my room.

Grandma

Well, I don’t even have Pogo here for company.

Kit

I’ll get him.
(Starts to front door.)

Grandma

What about you? I ain’t even had my hair done today.
(Moves to rocking chair as though she expects Kit to start on her hair.)

Kit

(Stops and returns to rocking chair and begins to brush Grandma’s hair.)
Yes’m.

Grandma

Well, you gonna tell me?

Kit

What?

Grandma

Why you didn’t say “yes” when Uncle Robbie asked for your help.

Claudie Hubill

Kit

Didn't know if I should.

Grandma

Sounds serious.

(Kit shrugs, but says nothing.)

Now I don't even need Pogo to tell me you shrugged again.

(Still no response.)

Kit, have you ever seen your Daddy doubt hisself?

Kit

No ma'm.

Grandma

I only seen it once when he weren't much older'n you. One day he's walkin' home and a tent preacher give him a ride. They're goin' along and the preacher asked your daddy if he was comin' to the revival they got up for the weekend. Your daddy said, no. And then the preacher asked him if he was a Christian. Well, we been to church and all, but we never quite settled on it, so your daddy said he weren't sure.

He didn't say nuthin' to me 'bout it, but next morning there was three pastors from the Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals at the front door wantin' to talk to grandpa and me. Grandpa was workin', but I invited 'em in and sent your Daddy to his room. Course, he listened to us through the register.

They told me how worried they was 'bout your Daddy, what with his behavior and all. And it made me feel real small. So I promised 'em I'd talk to Grandpa about it and, when they was gone, your daddy come out feelin' real bad. Said he was sorry to bring such trouble on me and allowed as how maybe he really was a Christian since he'd always been partial to them bible stories. Course, he knowed the preachers didn't approve of a lot of the things he done, so he was confabulated.

I just said, "Claudie, would you ever do somethin' if you didn't know it was right?"
"Nope." "And would you do your best to make it up if you ever made a mistake?"
"Yep." Then I said, "Can't nobody ask no more." And that's the last I ever heard of it.

(Pause to allow story to sink in.)

Now, are you doing something you don't think's right?

Kit

(Thinks about it for a moment.)

No, ma'm.

Grandma

Sure you ain't makin' a mistake?

Claudie Hill

Kit

No, m'am.

Grandma

And you don't think you can tell me?

Kit

No, m'am

Grandma

(Shakes her head in resignation.)

Just like your daddy. Now get on with you.

(Kit exits to bedroom. Grandma's face initially registers worry. Then, she relaxes in her chair.)

(Blackout. End Act I.)

Claudia Hill

Act II, Scene 1.

(Rob is alone in the room. He's on the phone with Boyle, his editor.)

Rob

. . . Yeah . . . yeah . . . I'm going to see Burton in a few minutes. He's bringing all the notes. . . . I don't know. Monday, maybe Tuesday. Depends on how long it takes to get ahold of some of the sources Most of 'em are miners. They work shifts. That and some of them'll be a little nervous. . . . No, no. It'll be all right. It's just that it's one thing when Sam Burton's doing the asking and another when it's the Globe. . . . Oh, sure, I'm a local too.

No, I haven't talked with my brother yet

(A car pulls up outside, then we hear a knock on the door.)

Yeah, sure. Look I think Burton's here. . . . Yeah, I'll see if I can't find him right after I'm done with Burton . . . Gotta go. See you.

(Hangs up and goes to door.)

Hello, Mr. Burton.

Burton

By Jesus, look at you -- the correspondent from The Boston Globe.

Rob

Just a staff writer.

Burton

But not for long. Besides, a staff writer on the Boston Globe's a sight higher than publisher of The Lantern any day.

Rob

But not as high as Pulitzer Prize nominee.

Burton

You here by yourself?

Rob

No, Momma and Kit are around somewhere.

Burton

Well, what did you tell that Boyle fella to get him to nominate me?

Rob

Didn't have to tell him anything, Mr. Burton. The series sold itself.

Claudia Hill

Burton

It's been since the mine wars that outsiders took any notice of what goes on here.

Rob

Well, we got the union then. Maybe we'll get us some safety legislation this time.

Burton

You think so?

Rob

Our Washington guy says it's already being drawn up and Boyle told me Senator Kennedy asked for an advance copy of the series because he wants to be out in front of it.

Burton

This Boyle fella seems pretty cocksure I'm gonna let him have the rights.

Rob

He figures he's got the inside track.

Burton

Does that mean you're gonna drive a hard bargain?

Rob

(Opens his briefcase, pulls out some papers, and tosses them on the table before Burton.)

Already did. You're getting the same deal William Porterfield got for last year's series on the Mafia.

Burton

(Amused as he looks through the pages.)

You know you could have had it for nothing.

Rob

Well, I couldn't very well have Boyle think his next Pulitzer Prize winning feature was written by a rube, could I?

Burton

(Reaches into his brief case and removes a binder thick with documents.)

There it is – manuscript indexed with accompanying interview notes.

Rob

Double-spaced. Boyle will love you. You know, Mr. Burton, there's one other thing. Before I take this back, I need to verify the story with a few of your sources.

Claudia Hill

Burton

Robbie, you cut me to the quick. 'Course you do. Why don't you go through that and let me know which sources you need to talk to and we'll start callin' 'em Monday?

Rob

I know it's not necessary. . .

Burton

The hell it ain't. With the way folks is suin' these days you gotta' be covered three ways from Sunday.

Rob

Well, Boyle assumes the Globe'll get sued every time we run an expose. Figures we must have missed the story if we don't.

Burton

Now that is journalism.

Rob

Could you have ever imagined sitting in this house having this conversation?

Burton

Robbie, I knew you were good when I had you reporting on basketball games in high school.

Rob

Used to be such a big deal going to those far-away places like Mt. Hope and Northfork, flashing my press credentials. I used to make a big production of opening that old typewriter in the press box -- this elaborate ceremony with paper and erasers.

Burton

Do you remember your first big expose?

Rob

No, what?

Burton

When Warwood and Ceredo-Kenova showed up for their state semi-final both wearing green uniforms . . .

Rob

And I wrote that it was because Warwood's coach was drunk. . .

Burton

And I spiked it, cuz we both woulda been run out of the state.

Claudia Hill

Rob

Well, one of us was anyway. But, you know what, Mr. Burton? Those are my fondest memories of Buffalo hollow.

Burton

Robbie, how come you been gone so long?

Rob

Don't most folks try to get out of here?

Burton

C'mon, Robbie. You know what I mean.

Rob

I don't know. I guess I kinda like not living in the shadow of a legend.

Burton

I didn't know you were so hot for fame.

Rob

Not fame. Just a little recognition.

Burton

Well, you sure got that in college and then with the Globe. It's a hell of an accomplishment.

Rob

Only in Buffalo hollow, Mr. Burton.
(Rob gets up and starts heading for the kitchen.)

You want a beer?

Burton

Some ice water'd do me.

Rob

(Continuing as he gets drinks.)
You see, what I figured out was Mom. . .

Burton

She's proud as all get out of you. . .

Rob

I know.
(Returns with drinks.)

Claudie Hubill

Really, I do.
(Pause.)

Oh God, it's hard to explain – even to myself.

Burton

Robbie, I've known your folks a long time. I was a good friend of your Daddy's and I think I even know something about what life was like with Claudie.

Rob

Daddy really told you?

Burton

Some. Enough to know it was hard on you all.

Rob

Hard? Mr. Burton, I honestly didn't think we'd survive it. Daddy used to say he didn't put on airs, but even he had some pride and when Claudie had a couple scrapes with the law I really thought he was going to lose it.

Burton

Claudie didn't do anything real serious.

Rob

I'm not a parent yet, but I think I finally figured out that, when you are, everything your kid does is serious. I mean, it just sucked the air right out of the house.

(Pause.)

And then Momma started making excuses for Claudie. I don't know – maybe she was just worn out. But, she started to find good in everything he did and all of a sudden it wasn't Claudie against my parents, but Mom against Dad.

Burton

Where were you in all this?

Rob

Trying to compensate. For everything Claudie'd do wrong, I tried to do something right. But, Claudie's a star you just can't outshine.

(Pause.)

After Daddy died Momma just seemed to float for a while and after that, well, she just started saying that Claudie and I had to find our own way. I was never quite sure what that meant and Claudie – he'd been doing it for so long I don't think it made any difference. Mostly, to me, it meant he won.

Burton

What do you mean?

Claudie Hubill

Rob

I felt kinda like a doctor whose patient just died. Even though you did best you could, you still feel empty. There just didn't seem to be much point in coming back.

Burton

I never detected any friction between you and your mother.

Rob

Nope. Mom found herself a nice painless space and I don't blame her.

Burton

And Claudie?

Rob

What? Do I blame him?

Well, I sure as hell don't think it was involuntary mental illness or whatever it is Pearl's calling it. He was pulling this kind of stuff long before the mine cave-in.

Burton

What do you think he's been doing?

Rob

I don't have the slightest damn idea, but I know Pearl's about ready to crack and he's nowhere to be found.

Burton

Are you gonna talk to him? I think you better. . .

Rob

Mr. Burton, everybody tells me I gotta talk to Claudie – you, Pearl, my wife. . .
(*Pause.*)

Burton

Yeah . . .

Rob

But, what the hell am I supposed to say? Do I yell at him – tell him he's neglecting responsibilities?

(*Burton is mildly amused at the prospect.*)

See?

Burton

Robbie, what about all the things you just told me?

Claudia Hill

Rob

No . . . I mean, don't you think we have enough problems right now, without digging up all that crap from when we were kids?

Burton

Maybe that "crap" from when you were kids is the one reason he might listen to you.

(Rob pauses to consider.)

Ahhh, don't pay any attention to me. What do I know about families – ain't even been married.

Rob

I thought you always told me never to run yourself down.

Burton

See that? The student's become the teacher. Something will come to you.

Rob

Maybe he'll surprise me. Maybe I'll surprise myself.

(Rob looks doubtful. In the distance a fire whistle goes off. Both look up.)

Is that the fire whistle?

Burton

Sure is.

(Kit and Grandma enter from the bedroom.)

You hear that Clara?

Grandma

Sounds like Margaret Haney's clothes dryer's on fire again.

Burton

Probably, but as chief o' the volunteer fire department, I better get down there.

(Starts packing and dressing.)

Rob

Mind if I come along?

Kit

Me too?

Grandma

No, you stay with me young lady. You been doin more'n your share of carousing.

Burton

(To Rob.)

Well then, come on.

Claudie Hukill

(To Grandma.)

Don't worry Clara, I'll get him home safe.

(Burton and Rob exit.)

Grandma

Kit, would you get me over to my rocker?

(Kit takes Grandma's arm and directs her.)

With all these folks comin' and goin' I can't keep track o' where anything is.

(Blackout.)

Claudia Hill

Act II, Scene 2.

(Grandma is rocking softly. A car pulls up and Pearl and Tierney enter in high spirits, carrying department store shopping bags. The joviality is brief as Pearl sees Grandma alone in her rocking chair.)

Pearl

Momma, are you out here all alone? Where's Kit?

Grandma

It's all right. She's in her room.

Tierney

Where's Robbie?

Grandma

Oh, he went out with Sam Burton more'n – what time is it?

Pearl

Six-thirty.

Grandma

More'n five hours ago.

Pearl

Where'd they go?

Grandma

The fire whistle went off and Sam had to go cuz he's the chief and Robbie decided to go along. Did you see anything when you come up through town?

Pearl

It was so late we came over the mountain.

Tierney

Should we go into town?

Pearl

No, if they're on a call, they could be anywhere in the county. I'll call the firehouse.

Somebody usually stays behind to handle the phones. Oughta know somethin'.

(Pearl goes to the phone and dials, then takes advantage of the long cord to take the receiver into the kitchen.)

Grandma

(To Tierney.)

Don't worry, if it was anything bad, we'd a heard by now.

Claudia Hill

Tierney

It's OK. When Rob was a city reporter, he used to do this all the time.

Grandma

How's he like bein' a newspaper man?

Tierney

I don't think he could imagine doing anything else.

Grandma

When he was in high school he used to spend more time at Sam Burton's than he did here.

Tierney

Well, guess what? He does the same thing at the Globe, but I'll break him of it.

Grandma

Ain't none of the men in our family ever been broke of nothin'. Hope I live to see the day.

Tierney

You will.

Grandma

So'd I hear some bags rustlin' 'round?

Tierney

Pearl and I made a real contribution to the local economy today. Got you a new bedspread.

(Tierney fishes in a bag for the bedspread.)

Here, you can feel it.

Grandma

While you're diggin' for that, you think you might be able to come up with them Junior Mints?

(Tierney lays the bedspread across Grandma's lap.)

Tierney

Oh, you'll never guess what. There was Heck's, this new department store having a grand opening, and you know what they had on special. . .

(Puts a large box of Junior Mints in Grandma's hands.)

Grandma

(Delighted.)

At my age this might be a lifetime supply.

(Pearl enters from kitchen.)

Claudia Hill

Pearl

Well, I never. Would you believe we got us a flood?

Grandma

What?

Pearl

That's right. James Lee Blake just told me there's a foot o' water on Front Street. Said Rob and Mr. Burton been helpin' folks move furniture and such.

Tierney

Was anybody hurt?

Pearl

Nah. It ain't but the crick that overflowed.

Grandma

First time that happened since they put up the gob dam.

Tierney

What's a gob dam?

Pearl

The coal companies dump the waste outa' the mines – shale and dust and such – into the crick beds and make dams. The one up the holler's made Buffalo Creek nothin' but a trickle.

Tierney

How big is this dam?

Pearl

I don't know. They don't let nobody up there, but I hear they got three of 'em and one of 'em's supposed to be half the size o' Cheat Lake.

Grandma

Judgin' from what it done to the crick, it may be so.

Pearl

Some folks has been sayin' that with all o' this rain it might bust, cuz it ain't made o' nothin' but dirt.

Grandma

If that happened there wouldn't be no Saunders left and a coupla other towns neither.

Claudia Hill

Tierney

Well I'm sure they inspect.

Pearl

They tell us so. But, I'll betcha that when that water come up today there was some nervous folks.

Grandma

Is it still rainin' out there?

Pearl

Hard as ever.

(To Tierney.)

You know we ain't had but five days without rain since the first of February and even they was overcast.

Grandma

I seen as much sunlight as she has.

Tierney

Did Mr. Blake tell you when Rob's planning to come home. I'm getting hungry. . .

(To Grandma.)

And we got a treat for dinner.

Grandma

Well, it's just Christmas in February.

Pearl

Pretty soon he said. It's dark and nobody wants to turn on the electric while they're workin' in water.

(To Tierney.)

You wanna help me get dinner started?

(A car pulls up in front and we hear two doors opening and closing. In a moment Rob appears at the door followed by Burton. They both shake off their wet things.)

Rob

Sorry, got a little busy. Did you hear about the flood?

Pearl

Yeah, when I called just now lookin' for you boys.

(Rob gives Tierney a peck on the cheek.)

Claudia Hill

Rob

Is it all right if Mr. Burton stays for dinner?

Grandma

He musta heard it was gonna be special.

Burton

Thank you, Clara.

Tierney

Pearl and I did some serious shopping today.

Burton

(To Tierney.)

Excuse me, I don't think we've been introduced.

Rob

Tierney, this is . . .

Tierney

I know. Mr. Burton, I'm Tierney Chase
(Offers her hand to Burton.)

Burton

Well, I thought you two were married.

Grandma

Sam, you bumpkin, don't you know the way it works these days? First, you live together, then you get married, and, if it's workin' after a few years, maybe you take the same name.

(Rob is genuinely embarrassed.)

Burton

(To Tierney.)

Sorry, I guess I'm sorta backwards.

Tierney

It's nice to meet you. Please excuse me, I need to help Pearl with dinner.

(Exits to kitchen. Rob and Burton settle into the sofa.)

Grandma

Well, I hear you two desk jockey's had to put in some manual labor.

Burton

Clara, you wouldn't believe. That dang creek's running like a river and you know why? Somebody went and opened the sluice gates for the big dam.

Claudia Hill

Grandma

I didn't know they had any sluice gates.

Burton

They sure do. They've just been 10 foot under since they expanded the size of the dam. Never expected to have to use them.

Grandma

Was the company afraid the dam would bust?

Burton

That's just it, Clara. The company didn't know anything about it.

Rob

Momma, I have never seen anybody angrier in my life than the superintendent of that mine.

Burton

Somebody told 'im they thought Robbie was a lawyer, cuz of the way he's dressed and all, and that fella got right up in Robbie's face tellin' him that it was an act of vandalism and the company isn't responsible for damages and they don't need any . . . what was it he said?

Rob

Ambulance-chasing shysters.

Burton

Ambulance-chasing shysters around here. Boy, I know I shouldn't be laughin' with the damage and all, but it was a hoot.

Grandma

Well, do they know who did it?

Burton

Clara, they don't even know how they did it. With that gate 10 feet under, they say it musta taken a team of at least three men. And there's not a dang thing the company can do about it now except wait until the pool's drained and then start over.

Grandma

Sam, I'm sure you had a swell time, but ain't you afraid folks is gonna blame you?

Burton

Me?

Claudia Hill

Grandma

Sounds like there's a good bit of property damage and you're the one got everyone stirred up over the mines. Might say you inspired it.

Burton

Well, now. That's an interesting perspective.

(To Rob with a hopeful twinkle in his eye.)

You think they will?

Rob

Momma, what you see here is a proud newspaper man.

Grandma

I don't understand none of you.

(Pearl enters to set the table.)

Pearl

Hey, Mr. Burton.

Burton

How are you, Pearl?

Pearl

Real good. Well, I hope you're all ready to eat, cuz we got a four-course meal for you. Robbie, would you get Kit?

(Rob exits to the bedrooms.)

Tierney

(To Pearl.)

Are we already for the salad?

Pearl

Guess so.

(Tierney exits to kitchen.)

Tonight we're gonna have salad, followed by soup, followed by the main course, and finished off by dessert.

Tierney

(From the kitchen.)

And you have to eat slowly and savor every bite so the roast has time to cook.

Grandma

Folks in this family usually eat like a pack o' wolves . . .

Claudia Hill

Burton

But, we'll try to be on our best behavior.

(Rob enters with the sleepy-eyed Kit.)

Looks like that late night got to you, young lady.

Kit

Hey, Mr. Burton.

Pearl

Kit honey, you help your grandma and come around here to this side of the table.

Kit

Yes'm.

(Goes to Grandma and directs her to the table.)

Pearl

Robbie, you're down there.

(Everyone but Pearl and Tierney get seated.)

Tierney

(From the kitchen.)

Is everyone ready?

Pearl

(Seating herself.)

I think so.

(Tierney enters with a richly laden salad bowl.)

Rob

(To Tierney.)

How come you never do this at home?

Tierney

Because this is a special occasion. You've come home. . .

Pearl

(Teasingly.)

'Bout time.

Tierney

And I've gotten to meet all of you.

Grandma

If you think that's an honor, I ain't gonna try to convince you otherwise.

Claudie Hubill

Burton

Well, I suppose this calls for a toast. . .

Pearl

Mr. Burton, before you do that, I just want to say to y'all that this wouldn't been possible without Tierney and I'm real sorry Claudie ain't here cuz I think he'd like to be – with everyone together like this – and . . .

(Speaking now to Rob and Tierney.)

before you go I promise you we'll be together.

(Pearl is almost in tears.)

Burton

Amen.

Grandma

Pearl, Sam says that flood started cuz' someone opened the sluice gates up at the dam.

Pearl

(In amazement.)

What?

(In the distance, we hear the fire whistle again. All look up and at one another in confusion except Kit who looks dejectedly down at her lap.)

Burton

Criminy! What now? Clara, can I use your phone.

Grandma

You know where it is.

(Burton dials wall phone and takes receiver into kitchen so as not to disturb others.)

Rob

I hope it's not serious, because after today everyone's just about exhausted.

Pearl

Well, at least it ain't the dam, cuz all the water been let outta that.

Tierney

(Picking up the salad bowl to pass it.)

Well come on, y'all. Let's get. . . .

Rob

(Amused.)

What'd you say?

Claudia Hill

Tierney

What?

Rob

You said, “y’all”.

(Looks at others and all except Kit begin to laugh.)

Tierney

I didn’t. . .

(An ashen Burton comes back into the room, but doesn’t sit.)

Burton

Umm, I’m sorry to do this, but I gotta go.

Pearl

What is it?

Burton

Rob, would you . . . uh. . . mind comin’ with me?

Pearl

You need extra men? I can help. . .

Burton

No, it isn’t that.

Grandma

Well, what is it, Sam?

(A bewildered Burton hesitates.)

Rob

Momma, I’m sure . . .

Grandma

Sam!

(The distraught Burton cannot respond.)

Robbie, get my coat.

Rob

If Mr. Burton. . .

Grandma

Get my coat.

(Grandma starts toward the door on her own. Pearl rushes to guide her.)

Claudia Hill

Pearl

Get mine too, please.

Rob

(Gets coats.)

Mr. Burton. . .

Burton

(Doubtfully, but resigned.)

You all better go in Robbie's car and follow me.

Pearl

Tierney, could you stay with Kit?

(Burton exits as Pearl puts on her coat and Robbie helps Grandma with hers.)

Tierney

Sure.

Rob

(Pearl is now guiding Grandma out the door and Rob has started to put on his own coat.)

I'll give you a call.

Tierney

That's OK. We're fine.

(Rob exits. Tierney goes to the door and watches as the cars drive away. Kit wanders over to the couch and sits with her legs drawn up close, her head on her knees. To Kit. Trying to be a little light-hearted.)

Looks like we have dinner all to ourselves.

(No response.)

Well, maybe we should save it for them. What do you think?

Kit

(Looking up, distressed.)

Daddy didn't mean to hurt nobody.

Tierney

What?

Kit

He didn't mean to hurt nobody.

Tierney

What is it you think your daddy did?

Claudia Hill

Kit

(Softly.)
He let the water out of the dam.

Tierney

What?

Kit

He let the water out of the dam.

Tierney

(Going to hug Kit who has begun to cry.)
Why? . . . Well, I don't think anyone got hurt.

Kit

They're gonna be so angry at him.

Tierney

Kit, It's all right. It'll be OK.

Kit

They won't understand. They never understand.

Tierney

What? What is it they won't understand?

Kit

He had to do it. He had to do it. They woulda died.

Tierney

Kit, what are you talking about?

Kit

The dam. It woulda busted.

Tierney

Kit, did you know about this before it happened?

Kit

I couldn't tell cuz they woulda stopped him.

Tierney

But, Kit, the dam was safe. Mr. Burton said the company inspected it.

Claudia Hill

Kit

(Shaking her head.)
It woulda busted. Daddy knew.
(Kit sees Tierney's look of confusion.)
He knew.

Tierney

What did he know?

Kit

No one ever understands.
(Pause. Tierney doesn't know how to respond.)
I don't want to be like this.

Tierney

Like what, dear?

Kit

(A sudden, almost angry outburst.)
Alone! I want folks to understand.

Tierney

What is it that you want folks to understand?

Kit

He knew. And I knew.
(Tierney still doesn't entirely follow, but seeing Kit's distress hugs her close.)

Tierney

It's all right. They'll find your daddy and he'll be able to explain what he knew and it will be all right.

Kit

(Kit looks up realizing that Tierney doesn't understand what has happened to Claudia.)
No they won't. He's gone.
(Pause.)
He's gone. . . . He's dead.

(Blackout. End Scene.)

Claudie Hubill

Act II, Scene 3.

(Late the next morning. Tierney is alone, clearing the remains of breakfast. As Tierney carries some dishes into the kitchen, door is heard opening in the bedroom hallway.)

Grandma

(Heard knocking on Pearl's door. Her voice is unusually insistent.)

Pearl? Pearl.

(We hear the clatter of her cane as she now calls more urgently.)

Pearl, where are you? . . . Kit, where's your momma?

Tierney

(Rushing to Grandma to guide her into the living room.)

Momma, it's Tierney. It's all right.

Grandma

Where's Pearl and Kit? We got things to do. . .

Tierney

They're not here. Pearl. . .

Grandma

Well, I gotta see to my boy.

(Calling out.)

Robbie! . . .

Tierney

He's with Pearl, Momma . . .

Grandma

(Still calling to Rob as she might have when he and Claudie were children.)

We gotta see to Claudie. He got hisself in a scrape . . .

Tierney

(Finally, getting Grandma to her rocking chair.)

Come on and sit down.

Grandma

(Impatiently, angrily to Tierney.)

Get Robbie. He'll know what to do.

Tierney

Robbie's taking care of it, Momma.

Grandma

But, I ain't told him . . .

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

He's with Pearl and they're seeing to Claudie. They're over at the hospital having Claudie moved . . .

Grandma

Where they takin' him?

Tierney

To the funeral home.

Grandma

(Getting her bearings, becoming sober.)

They're takin' Claudie to the funeral home.

Tierney

Uh huh.

Grandma

Which one?

Tierney

Uh . . . I don't know . . . They said they were going to Logan?

Grandma

McCollum's. That's where I took Harley. Robbie remembers. He weren't but 14.

That was a time. Harley died kinda sudden and Claudie was . . . well, wherever Claudie was in them days . . . and I'm out there in front with Harley who was already gone by time I found him. Had his head in my lap. Robbie's in his room readin' like always. It was like me and Harley was in a world by ourselves cuz no one else knew. It was peaceful, like everything was in it's place. And I remember thinkin' I coulda' stayed there for hours until Robbie got hungry and came lookin' for dinner. But I didn't and, to this day, I wonder why.

(Calm. Tierney has been stroking Grandma's head and holds it to her bosom.)

Don't suppose Kit's about?

Tierney

Took off sometime last night.

Grandma

What'd Pearl do?

Tierney

Nothing. I don't think she knows.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

(A hint of a smile.)
Just as well. It'd just be one more thing to upset her.

Tierney

I'm worried about Kit.
(Grandma looks at her quizzically.)
She knew . . . about Claudie . . . even before the fire whistle.

Grandma

Well, 'course she did.

Tierney

I think she feels guilty.

Grandma

For what? Saving everybody in the holler?

Tierney

But, how could she know?

Grandma

She knew.

Tierney

Last night, while you went to see about the fire whistle, she told me . . .

Grandma

Told you what?

Tierney

That Claudie didn't mean to hurt anybody. But, she meant herself too.

Grandma

Well, what they done caused a lot of damage. And I expect she does feel bad about that. Just like Claudie. He felt bad about everything he done. But that don't mean it weren't right. He just weren't smug about it.

Tierney

She's only eleven and I don't think she's quite as sure as Claudie.

Grandma

Like a foal getting' up on her feet first time.

Claudie Hubill

I'd be a whole lot more worried about Kit if she didn't feel bad about the things she done, even when they was right. Ain't nothin' happens in this world, don't cause pain somewheres. But I ain't worried long as the folks responsible know it.

(Tierney isn't convinced, but lets it go.)

Tierney

(Going into the kitchen.)

You haven't had anything to eat. Pearl left some sweetroll.

Grandma

Well, 'spect I better. Otherwise folks'll be getting all worked up.

(Starts to rise as Tierney brings sweetroll to the table, then hurries over to guide Grandma.)

You know, I can find my way there.

Tierney

Sorry.

Grandma

No, I didn't mean it that way. . . . Well, maybe I did, but it weren't your fault.

You know Tierney, bein' blind's most strange, cuz folks figure it makes you nothin' more'n a spectator. And that don't need to be so, but some o' the time I let it. Let 'em guide me to places I can get myself. Let 'em shout at me when I ain't but three foot away cuz they must think bein' blind makes you deaf too. And then sometimes they even talk about you twixt one another like you weren't there. And I let 'em

Tierney

How come?

Grandma

At first, you let 'em cuz it's interesting. Learn a lot about folks. Then, after a while, you begin to figure out things work'emselves out pretty good that way and you think you're getting away with something. And then one day it hits you that maybe you never had that much control over things in the first place.

Now, 'course that don't mean they ain't times you slip back – lose yer head – like when that old blind woman come stumblin' out o' the bedroom this mornin' ravin' 'bout seein' to her boy.

Tierney

Claudie's your child.

Grandma

Robbie thinks I let things go, don't he?

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

(Feeling uncomfortable.)
What do you mean?

Grandma

Tierney, I ain't bein' the blind person lettin' things go right now.
(Pause.)

Tierney

(Understands.)
He . . . worries about you.

Grandma

(Aggressive.)
He don't worry about me. He's madder'n hell at me.

Tierney

Well, I don't think . . .

Grandma

No, don't trample on this cuz it's important.

Tierney

He's not as mad at you as he is at Claudie. He thinks you just reached the point where you couldn't do anything with Claudie and so you gave up and rationalized it.

Grandma

If that means I give up tryin' to fix what weren't broke, 'at's so.

Tierney

Momma, to be honest with you, I don't know what to think of Claudie . . .

Grandma

No one does.

Tierney

. . . but I know Rob feels like he put his heart and soul into helping you, supporting you, doing everything Claudie didn't and. . .

Grandma

Nuff said. He's right, you know. People like Claudie can't exist if folks don't let 'em. And I let'im. If I'd had a mind to, I coulda' crushed Claudie at any time – had him chucked into Pruntytown or somewheres else. Nope, Claudie took me right up to the limit and with half a mind Robbie coulda pushed me over. But he never did.

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

Well, from what Rob says, it doesn't sound like he was as pure as the driven snow.

Grandma

No, Robbie was better. Never got into a scrape – or at least never got into one he couldn't fix hisself.

Tierney

Were Robbie and Claudie close?

Grandma

Them two were everything. Why I remember one day seein' 'em both hangin' from the swingin' rope and thinkin' they was this two-headed, four-legged child like in them Greek stories. When they was little, you just couldn't separate 'em. In fact, one o' the first warnin' signs I learned that Claudie was getting into trouble was when I seed he wasn't with Robbie. And I don't know if it was because Robbie didn't feel right about what Claudie was doin' or if it was because Claudie didn't want Robbie to get in trouble with 'im. But you could be certain that if Claudie was off by hisself, trouble weren't far behind.

Tierney

Rob says they used to fight.

Grandma

Well, I s'pose you could call it that, but truth be told, Robbie weren't much of a challenge for Claudie. 'Course Claudie's almost two years older and . . . well, he always knew how to handle hisself. They was like them goats – no one ever got hurt --just scrapped enough to let t'other know what they thought.

Yep, when they was little they was always together. Then, when Claudie started actin' up they went through their rasslin' phase. And when they was in high school, they didn't have much to say to each other.

Tierney, I know how Robbie feels about Claudie and me. What I don't know is how he feels about hisself.

Tierney

I don't think he knows himself.

Grandma

When'll they be back?

Tierney

They said by lunch.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

Tell me how Pearl's doin'.

Tierney

Hasn't said much. Seems focused on taking care of business – cleaning up the mess.

Grandma

You didn't get to meet Claudie, but if you'd seen 'em together, you'd know how much they loved each other.

Tierney

I know.

(The sound of Rob's car approaching outside. Tierney clears Grandma's dishes. Rob and Pearl enter. Pearl goes straight to Grandma and hugs her. Rob joins Tierney and they look on silently.)

Pearl

I'm sorry I left you, Momma.

Grandma

Someone needed to do the lookin' after. How are you?

Pearl

I don't know. Kinda grateful there's so much to do I guess. That way I don't really think about it.

Grandma

You know, sometimes after I first lost my sight I'd get confused whether I was asleep or awake. Happened this morning and I thought for sure I'd wake up here directly, but I already was.

Pearl

Why didn't he say nothin', Momma?

Grandma

Oh Lord, Honey, ain't know way o' knowin'. Maybe he didn't plan on dyin'.

Pearl

That ain't what they sayin'. They say any man goes under that water'd know what's gonna happen.

Grandma

He had his reasons. . .

Pearl

Did he want to die?

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

Oh, Pearl, not Claudie. He loved you and he loved Kit way too much.

Pearl

Did I let him down?

Grandma

Claudie didn't depend on nobody that much. If he done it on purpose, he knowed we'd be all right.

(Pearl begins to pull away and Tierney helps her to a seat on the couch.)

Tierney

(To Pearl.)

Come on over here.

Rob

(Stepping over to take Grandma's hand.)

They're taking good care of him.

Grandma

Did you take him up to McCollum's?

Rob

They're moving him up there this afternoon.

Grandma

You never got to talk to him, Robbie.

Rob

It's all right, Momma.

Grandma

(To Rob.)

Did he really kill hisself?

Rob

I'm sure he thought the dam would burst and he didn't have any other choice.

Grandma

Would it?

Rob

I don't know. Maybe.

Claudie Hukill

Grandma

I imagine some folks is sayin' he was crazy.

Pearl

He wasn't crazy. He just needed help. And nobody in this damn hollow even cared. All they did was live off him.

Tierney

Pearl, relax.

Pearl

They didn't lose him. They'll be swappin' Claudie Hukill stories for the next hundred years. We're the ones who lost him.

Tierney

That's right and you're going to get through it.

Pearl

This hollow wouldn't have been nothin' without him. Damn 'em all.

(Becomes conscious of the silence after her outburst.)

Where's Kit?

Tierney

She isn't here right now.

Pearl

Where is she?

Grandma

She's all right, Pearl.

Pearl

No. I want to know where she is.

Rob

Tierney?

Tierney

I, uh . . . don't know. She left sometime after we all went to bed last night.

Pearl

Oh God!

(Breaks down sobbing.)

Tierney

Rob, maybe you should go look for her.

Claudie Hubill

Grandma

It won't do no good. We should let the girl be.

Pearl

Momma! She's eleven years old and her daddy just died. We don't know what she's thinking'.

Grandma

Pearl, honey, believe me. She'll be back.

Rob

Why don't I call the sheriff and ask 'em to look out for her? Then, if she's not back by this afternoon, I'll go looking.

(Pearl is unresponsive, her head buried in Tierney's lap. After there's no reaction Rob goes to the kitchen to make the call.)

Tierney

(Stroking Pearl.)

It'll be OK.

(Looking up at Grandma.)

It will be OK, won't it, Momma?

Grandma

Tierney's right, Pearl. You know, at that age Claudie'd tell me he'd never let me be hurt. Then, he'd go out and do things as like to crush me, but I always come through. And I got so that I was almost proud o' myself for weatherin' the storms – even looked forward to 'em like they was some kinda challenge.

There was once when Claudie'd been out o' school for three days, they had me down to the principal's office tellin' me he was surely goin' to hell and how I was pavin' the road. Well, I survived and I told Claudie how I handled it and I musta been a little smug, cuz that was one o' them rare times he walked over and hugged me and said, "Don't you get too high and mighty, cuz you know I wouldn't ever cause you no trouble you can't handle."

I was so let down and raised up all at once, I didn't know what to say.

(Rob returns from the kitchen.)

Rob

They'll be on the lookout.

Claudie Hubill

Tierney

(Motioning to Pearl who is silent in her lap.)

Momma was just telling Pearl and me how, no matter what Claudie did, he was careful not to hurt her more than she could handle.

(Rob is visibly ambivalent.)

Grandma

That don't mean it didn't hurt sometimes and never more'n now.

Rob

(Crosses to Grandma.)

I'm sorry for you, Momma.

Grandma

Robbie, are you also sorry for yourself?

Rob

(Almost but doesn't quite smile at what to him is the mild absurdity.)

Of course, Momma – for me too.

Pearl

Robbie, he did love you.

Rob

(Same patronizing tone.)

Yes, we were brothers . . .

Pearl

No, Robbie. He really loved you. Why, did you know he used to have 'em mail Boston Globe's to us just so's he could see all your stories?

Rob

No, I . . . uh, didn't.

Grandma

Robbie, you was the one thing – the only thing – in this world he'd brag about. You ask Sam.

Rob

Look, I never said anything bad . . .

(Tierney looks doubtfully at him.)

We just weren't close. That's all.

Pearl

I just wish'd I'd told him you were comin'. Maybe he wouldn't . . .

(Starts to dissolve into tears. Rob goes to her.)

Claudia Hill

Rob

Pearl, there wasn't anything you could do for Claudia. There wasn't anything anyone could do for him.

Pearl

Why?

Rob

Because he wouldn't let them. You, me, anyone. I mean, listen to us – going on about how he needed help, about how he never hurt anyone, at least not too much. Well, he was my brother and I loved him, but I'm here to tell you that not only did he not want help, he would have thought you were crazy for thinking he needed it and, as far as hurting people, I'm sorry, Momma, but he did. He hurt me. He hurt Daddy. And he hurt you.

Grandma

Robbie . . .

Rob

No, Momma. Dear God, isn't it time someone said it? Look at it. He's making a mother bury her son. He's left his wife and child in poverty. And he's done it all without so much as a word – no warning, no explanation, no apology – nothing. It's not OK. It never was.

Tierney

Robbie . . .

Rob

This has needed to be said for years. I should have said it before I left. Someone should have said it in . . . 1963.

Pearl

Do you think he wanted it this way?

Rob

You don't have to take my word for it. Look at the situation. Do you think this happened by accident? This is the inevitable outcome of choices he made.

Pearl

You weren't here. You have no idea about the choices he made and whether he was in any condition to make them.

Claudia Hubill

Rob

I know all about the cave-in – the shock, the stress – my wife deals with it every day. But, you know the one problem with that explanation? It happened in 1971. Well, guess what? Claudia was making the same kind of choices in 1961 and 1951 for that matter.

Grandma

Why did you wait until now to say this?

Rob

You . . .

Grandma

Not to me. To Claudia.

Rob

To Claudia? Did Claudia ever explain himself to anyone, Momma? You remember -- that little Steve McQueen half smile that told you you couldn't possibly understand – that you were from some inferior species?

Grandma

You were little kids, Robbie, and I can tell you he had a high opinion of you.

Rob

Well, I guess I just wasn't here to see it and he never bothered to call me.

Grandma

He was your brother.

Rob

And he was your son. Momma, why was he allowed to dominate our house, our family, everything? Do you remember what it was like? He blocked out the sun. He exhausted the oxygen. He drained all the wells. Was there anything left for any of us – of any of us?

Grandma

Yes, there was. I'm real, Robbie. I ain't somethin' you just imagined. I'm right here in front of you and I feel as whole and complete as a human being can be. I don't know what you think it is he stole from me and I'm almost afraid to ask what it is you think he stole from you, but that boy helped me see things, helped me learn about life in a way that makes me appreciate it more and worry about it less. And if the Lord couldn't give me money, he give me blindness so's I don't have to notice I don't have it.

Pearl

Robbie, there's a difference between bein' angry and bein' hateful. And I promise you I been so angry that if thought Claudia wished this on us, I'd load up my shotgun with rock salt and nails. But, I can't hate him. I don't know if it's because he was sick and weren't

Claudie Hubill

responsible or if Momma's right and he just knows what's right and does it regardless of the consequences. It's a damn strange world when you can't tell the difference.

(A car is heard approaching outside. Tierney, grateful for the opportunity to escape, goes to the door and opens it for Burton who is carrying a cardboard box.)

Tierney

Hi, Mr. Burton.

Burton

Mornin', Tierney. Clara. Pearl. I'm sorry to bother you all right now, but the boys found Claudie's clothes in the woods near the dam and I figured you'd want 'em.

(Tierney takes the box and puts in on the coffee table in front of Pearl who begins to open it.)

There's something else in there. They found a note.

Grandma

Claudie left a note?

(Pearl opens the box and removes a piece of paper.)

Burton

No, Clara. It isn't from Claudie. I think . . .

Pearl

Kit wrote it.

Tierney

That's where she went.

Grandma

What's it say?

Pearl

(Reading from the note.)

"I didn't want anyone to get hurt. I didn't want to hurt anyone. The dam was going to bust." And it's signed "Claudie".

Tierney

(To Burton.)

But, you said the dam wasn't going to burst.

Burton

That's what the company said, but a funny thing. They got the state boys over there right now and they're sayin' Claudie was right. That gob wall's so saturated, it's a miracle it held as long as it did. 'Course, I suppose that's why Claudie did it when he did.

Claudie Hubill

Rob

You think he knew?

Burton

I only know the state engineer's telling me that if those sluice gates hadn't been opened, one hundred and thirty two million gallons of blackwater would have crashed through the hollow and probably taken everything in its path.

Pearl

(Goes to Grandma.)

My God.

Burton

There's something else you all ought to know. That series on conditions in the mines you come all the way down here for, Robbie, was mostly reported and written by Claudie. In fact, it was his idea from the beginning.

Tierney

Mr. Burton . . . ?

Burton

Pearl, Clara. I know it's been tough on you and Kit and . . . well, Claudie did too, but he made me keep it secret, cuz there's a lot of angry folks and he was afraid some crazy thug or redneck might come after him and hurt you all by mistake.

Grandma

Sam, what about you?

Burton

Clara, you said it. I ain't but a broke-down old man who makes his livin' off other folks gossip. Well, Claudie knew it too – 'course he was too polite to say so – so, he did me the high honor of letting me pretend to be a great newspaper man for a while and I did him the more dubious honor of letting him pretend to be me. It was all in a great cause and, if anything were to happen to me right now, I'd die as content as I'll ever be.

Rob

Mr. Burton, but the story . . .

Burton

Robbie, I know what you're gonna say, but don't you worry. Claudie didn't mislead anyone when he researched the story. He went up and down this state personally documenting the conditions in the mines. Those that didn't want to be quoted on the record, he made 'em a deal that they wouldn't tell on each other and those that did go on the record . . . well, he just took his chances.

Claudie Hubill

I woulda had to tell you tomorrow when we started callin' all these folks to verify the sources. I just figured we'd keep it twixt you and me like Claudie wanted. No offense, Clara.

Grandma

No, Sam. None taken.

(An emotionally disoriented Rob exits out the front door.)

Tierney

Rob . . .

(Starts to go after him, but Grandma calls out. . .)

Grandma

Tierney, I expect you better leave him be right now.

Pearl

(Shouting almost desperately after Rob, but he is gone.)

Robbie, please find Kit!

(Blackout. End Scene.)

Claudie Hill

Act II, Scene 4.

(The set is blacked out except for a spotlight on a sawed off tree stump placed down left. To indicate that this is outdoors and no longer in the living room Rob enters from the wing.)

Rob

(Looking up, raving to the absent Claudie.)

You son of a bitch. You're just going to go . . . You saved 'em all and now you're going to leave . . . Well, what about me . . . ? I'm an unbeliever, Claudie. You hear me? An unbeliever. They say you're the second coming, but I say you're just a selfish bastard gone delusional.

(Waits as though for Claudie's reply.)

So I'm going to hell. Is that it? . . . You just gonna let it happen . . . ? Well, you can't, Claudie. You hear me? You can't, because, if you do, you failed. You didn't save 'em all and I'm the living proof. And you know what that means? I was right. I was right about you, I was right about Momma, and I was right about me . . .

(Dissolves in tears.)

You know, Claudie. I've always been so scared of being wrong – praying I was right, just some of the time. And there you were, so goddamn certain. How does it feel, Claudie? That's all I ever wanted from you. I wouldn't have asked for any more – just to know how it feels.

(Unbeknownst to Rob, Kit enters and sits silently on the stump watching him.)

Was it really easier to do all the things you've done, to save all those people, to die than it was to talk to me? Would it have been a waste of time? Is that the great irony of you and me, that the one thing I finally understand is that I'm incapable of understanding? But, you know what, you should have at least given me a chance . . . that's all, a chance.

Kit

Uncle Robbie . . .

(Startled and embarrassed, Rob Turns.)

Sorry. What are you doin'?

Rob

Being confused mostly.

(A look of concern crosses Kit's face.)

No. No, it's OK. How are you? We oughta get you home. Your mom's worried about you.

Kit

I'm afraid.

Rob

She's a little ticked off, but I think she's going to be OK.

Kit

That's not what I mean.

Claudia Hill

(Rob frowns confusedly.)

Uncle Robbie, did you ever have to do something', but you knew folks wouldn't understand?

Rob

You mean something bad?

Kit

Hunh unh. Something good. Something you knew was right, but nobody'd believe you?

Rob

Like what?

Kit

Like daddy and the dam. He knew it was goin' to bust, but nobody woulda believed him.

Rob

How did he know?

Kit

I don't know, You just do sometimes – like when the peep toads know when there's gonna be a storm, but nobody knows how. And it don't matter that you're right, cuz nobody believes you . . .

(Becoming distressed.)

Rob

Well, you know, you might want to give your mom a chance once in a while. She might surprise . . .

Kit

Nobody, Uncle Robbie, nobody.

(Hopefully.)

Uncle Robbie, are you like Daddy?

Rob

Not very much.

Kit

(Disappointed.)

Oh.

Rob

Kit, what do you do when you gotta do something and folks don't understand?

Kit

Do it.

Claudia Hill

Rob

Even when you know you're going to get in trouble . . . ?

Kit

That's what Daddy done.

Rob

And you're going to hurt other people?

Kit

(Feeling frightened and guilty.)
I don't want to hurt anybody. . . .

Rob

I know, I know . . .

Kit

But sometimes folks'll get hurt no matter what you do.

Rob

But, what if you're wrong, Kit? What if you make a mistake and people are hurt unnecessarily?

Kit

(Almost hopefully.)
Was Daddy ever wrong?
(Pause. Rob is stumped.)

See, you don't understand

Rob

It's OK, OK. It's just that most people don't think that way.

Kit

(Submissively.)
No, sir.
(Pause.)

Rob

Sounds pretty lonely.

Kit

Daddy told me I'm big enough.

Claudia Hill

Rob

Do you feel big enough?

Kit

No, sir.

Rob

He tell you that just before he released the water?

Kit

Yes sir.

Rob

Were you there?

Kit

He sent me home.

Rob

But, did you know he was going to die?

(Kit begins to cry softly.)

Kit

Yes, sir.

(Rob embraces her.)

Rob

Kit, your daddy was right about the dam. He was also right about folks like me not believing him.

(Kit looks up gratefully.)

If he'd said anything to me I'd have told him the company had a trained engineer inspect that dam and it was fine. And then a few towns would have been destroyed and God knows how many killed.

Kit, the reason people like me had a hard time believing your daddy is that we aren't always right in what we think and figured he couldn't be either. But like Grandma always says, when you look back at all the things your daddy did, it's hard to figure out when he wasn't. I guess we can't always have faith in ourselves, so we don't have much in other folks either.

Kit

(Kit doesn't really follow.)

What do you mean?

Claudia Hill

Rob

I mean you'll probably go on doing what's right, but Kit, you gotta promise me one thing.

Kit

Yes sir?

Rob

Just never stop feeling the pain it causes other people, because otherwise you'll be downright dangerous. Do you understand?

Kit

Yes, sir.

Rob

Now, are you ready to go home?

Kit

Uncle Robbie, are you gonna stay with us?

Rob

No. I've got things of my own to do. But can we talk on the phone?

Kit

Unh hunh.

Rob

Will you call me?

Kit

Yes, sir.

Rob

Do it collect, so it doesn't run up your Momma's bill.

Kit

Yes, sir.

Rob

Any time. Do you understand?

Kit

Unh hunh.

Rob

You know, summer's only a few months away. Maybe you could come up to visit.

Claudia Hill

Kit

(Hopefully.)
On Martha's Vineyard?

Rob

Unh hunh.
(Rob and Kit exit to wing.)
(Blackout. End Scene.)

Claudie Hubill

Act II, Scene 5.

(The living room. Grandma is in her rocking chair and Pearl is on her knees with her head on Grandma's lap. Burton is on the couch as Tierney enters from the kitchen with coffee for Burton.)

Pearl

Momma, you know what Claudie done?

Grandma

Yes, Honey. I do.

Pearl

I wish'd he'd told us.

Grandma

Maybe we weren't ready to hear.

Pearl

But you woulda been.

Grandma

I don't 'spect an old blind woman woulda been much help with what Claudie had to do. That's the thing about Claudie. There didn't seem to be a lot o' sense in the things he done until you thought on it a while.

Burton

Pearl, you know, when Claudie was going all over the state to do that story, he used to talk about how hard it was for you and Kit. There wasn't much he could do about it, but it weighed on him.

Pearl

But, if he'd only told me.

Burton

You remember when Jablonsky was runnin for president of the mine workers and they killed his family? Claudie never forgot that and he wasn't gonna take any chances.

Grandma

So, you think he's up there with Mother Jones tellin' God Almighty 'bout West Virginia?

Burton

I expect so, Clara.

(The front door swings open, held by Rob, and Kit enters.)

Rob

I hope you'll excuse us, but Kit and I had some sortin' out to do.

Claudie Hukill

(Kit walks in sheepishly holding Pogo. Pearl runs to her and they embrace for a few moments.)

Grandma

(Impatient with the ongoing silence as others watch mother and daughter.)
I 'spect this is one o' them Kodak moments.

Kit

(Pearl releases Kit who holds Pogo up to Grandma.)
Grandma, Pogo wants to know if you want to come see the sun?

Grandma

What?

Tierney

(Going to the window and looking out.)
Honest to God.

Kit

Come on!
(Kit hustles Grandma and Pogo outside. Pearl and Rob follow leaving Tierney and Burton.)

Tierney

(Feeling as though a weight has been lifted.)
Mr. Burton, I sure would have liked to meet Claudie Hukill

Burton

You should've Tierney. Everybody should've.

Tierney

So, you think he was the real deal?

Burton

Some'll tell you he was and some'll tell you he wasn't, but I know one thing about Claudie Hukill. That boy never doubted himself one moment in his entire life.

Maybe if you snatched Claudie out of this hollow and plunked him down someplace else, he'd a been just as screwed up as the rest of us. Maybe that's why he never left. Or maybe the world didn't deserve him and we just came up lucky.

(The others return, Kit guiding Grandma to her rocking chair and Pearl approaching Tierney.)

Pearl

Oh Tierney, it's a beautiful sight.

Claudie Hubill

Rob

Momma, did you ever tell Kit about the time the principal came up here looking for Claudie complaining, “That boy of yours thinks he makes the sun shine”?

Grandma

(Settling into rocking chair. Kit puts Pogo in her lap.)

You know, I don't believe I have.

(Curtain.)