

Leaving Egypt

**Playwright
Ron Short**

**Composer
Ron Short**

**Directed by
Dudley Cocke**

**Original Cast
Tommy Bledsoe, Kim Neal Mays, and Ron Short**

**Singers and Musicians
Tommy Bledsoe – Guitar, Vocals
Kim Neal Mays – Vocals
Ron Short – Guitar, Fiddle, Vocals**

**© 1987 Roadside Theater/Appalshop (all rights reserved)
Original Music © 1987 Ron Short**

TIME: Present to Past

PLACE: Remote mountain area of central Appalachia.

SETTING: Isolated cabin of the Hall family, located in the center of a larger family land holding. The cabin sits at the top of a long, gradually rising hill surrounded by a rugged forest, deep and dark. A single lane dirt road leads to the foot of the hill off of a two-lane, hard-top which crosses the mountainous gap between Virginia and Kentucky. In the past, the cabin has been a trading post and inn.

CHARACTERS

Earl Hall (played by Ron Short): In his 60's, strong willed, mystic, poet, head of the family; has always lived on the family land.

Benny Hall (played by Tommy Bledsoe): Troubled young man, wild-eyed, knife at belt, Vietnam veteran, Silver Star medal awardee.

Shirley Hall (played by Kim Neal Mays): In her 20's, innocent with a hard edge, nervous smoker, quick temper.

Earl, Benny, and Shirley enter and greet audience. Earl begins singing, Benny and Shirley join on chorus. Acapella

CITIES OF GOLD

Tell me where do you come from
Tell me where will you go
To the mountains around you
Or the Cities of Gold.

(Chorus)

Cities of Gold, Cities of Gold
Oh so lonely and so cold.
You can lose your very soul
Living in the Cities of Gold.

And the land of a million secrets
And the land that gave us life
Gives up all its treasures
Sadly hides its face and dies.

(Chorus)

But the people said to Pharaoh
You better let our children go
'Cause we're tired of living our lives
Just to build your Cities of Gold.

(Chorus)

EARL *(to audience)*

We could sing all night if we wanted to, but I reckon you've all come here tonight to hear our story. There was a time when 'bout ever' family had themselves a storyteller. I was always the storyteller in our family. Told stories to the young'uns, 'bout Jack and Mutsmeg. It got to where the younguns could tell 'em good as anybody. That's how it's supposed to work. But, things happen in this here world – things change . . .

EARL

Once upon a time they was a feller named Jack.

SHIRLEY

He lived with his mommy. Didn't have no other kin hardly.

BENNY

His daddy was dead, and Jack and his mommy was considered poor people.

EARL

But now actually they may have been poor, but they lived pretty good.

SHIRLEY

Had a garden

EARL

chickens

SHIRLEY

and a pretty good ol' milk cow.

EARL

Jack, he roamed all over the mountains, hunting and fishing.

SHIRLEY

They had a right fair little old cabin.

EARL

Leastways, it didn't snow through the cracks

BENNY

but Jack, he wadn't never satisfied. All the time talkin' 'bout goin' off to seek his fortune.

SHIRLEY

His mommy'd try and talk him out of it

BENNY

but Jack was dead set on lightin' out.

SHIRLEY

His mommy seed they wasn't nothin' to do, so she sewed him up a new set of travelin' clothes, baked him up a batch of journey-cakes, and

BENNY

bright and early one morning Jack lit out.

EARL

He traveled along and

SHIRLEY

traveled along

BENNY

'til he eat up 'bout all of them journey-cakes.

EARL

Then one day he come to this big town

BENNY

settin' on what Jack thought was the biggest river he had ever seed.

SHIRLEY

And when he stuck his hand in to get a drink

BENNY

he spit that water out 'cause it tasted like pure salt.

EARL

Jack had never seed the ocean before.

SHIRLEY

He seed these great big ol' boats anchored off there from town

EARL

and he seed this bunch a people gathered 'round in front of one of 'em.

BENNY

So he wandered over.

EARL

They was this one feller saying,

SHIRLEY

"Boys, we pay good wages for honest labor. Sign up with us and you'll come back a rich man."

BENNY

Now Jack was right in for that.

SHIRLEY

"Not only that, boys,"

EARL

this feller says,

SHIRLEY

"You'll get paid ever' week, come the end of the week, and in gold coin to boot."

EARL

That done it.

BENNY

"Gold! Where do I sign?"

SHIRLEY

They put Jack on this boat with a bunch of other fellers, fed him a good meal

EARL

give him plenty to drink.

BENNY

Next morning when Jack woke up they was chains around his ankles and he was in the belly of this ship

SHIRLEY

sitting beside another feller with a big oar in front of 'em.

EARL

Jack looked and seed the place was full of people just like him

BENNY

chained up to them oars.

SHIRLEY

Then this great big feller with a whip come in and told 'em to "Start paddlin'!"

BENNY

They paddled all day and Jack seed they wadn't no way to break out of them chains, and

SHIRLEY

ever' time they slowed down that feller with that whip set in on 'em.

BENNY

Next day hit was

BENNY & SHIRLEY

the same thing.

EARL

Went on like that for 'bout a week. Then one morning this other feller come in and he went up and down the boat payin' ever'body off in gold coins. When he got to Jack, Jack says,

BENNY

“Well, what am I supposed to do with this?”

SHIRLEY

“What's the matter, ain't you happy to get paid?”

BENNY

“No, I ain't happy to get paid when it don't look like I'm gonna get to enjoy it much.”

SHIRLEY

“Then they sure must be somethin' wrong with you. Any fool'd be happy to have steady work and good pay.”

BENNY

Then they made 'em start up rowing again.

EARL

Hit went on like this and on like this, ever' week gold coins, and Jack started thinkin',

BENNY

“Maybe I am a fool. If these fellers think I ought to be happy, maybe I should.”

EARL

So ol' Jack, he set into singin' and a-rowin'.

SHIRLEY

The more he sung

BENNY & EARL

the harder he rowed

EARL & SHIRLEY

and the harder he rowed

BENNY, EARL & SHIRLEY

the louder he sung.

EARL

Now they hadn't never had nobody do this before, so these fellers didn't know what to make of Jack.

BENNY

Jack worked so hard he worked one partner 'til he dropped

SHIRLEY

then another

BENNY

then another.

EARL

After he wore out 'bout a dozen

BENNY

they let him work by hisself.

EARL

Then they promoted him to the front oar

SHIRLEY

then to the beating of that drum, and

BENNY

oh, wadn't Jack a killer on that drum.

SHIRLEY

Finally, they made him start working out on the deck.

BENNY

After gettin' out of the belly of that ship and workin' out on deck for a while, gettin' to feel the sun and the wind and the rain again, Jack begin to think maybe he didn't like it on the boat after all. Didn't matter if his pockets was full of gold, he decided he was gonna get off first chance he got.

EARL

But it didn't look like that boat was ever gonna go to land

SHIRLEY

so one day, when Jack spied the shoreline way off in the distance

BENNY

he knowed this might be his only chance, so he jumped overboard and set in to swimming.

EARL

But now that gold was so heavy hit was about to pull him under.

BENNY

So he started unloading his pockets

SHIRLEY

then he'd swim a while till he got tired

BENNY

then he'd unload some more gold.

EARL

Pretty soon that gold was all gone and

BENNY

Jack was sure he still wadn't gonna make it. Finally he was plumb wore out, and he started flounderin' around in the water

EARL & SHIRLEY

just before everything went black.

EARL

When Jack come to, he wasn't sure if he was alive

BENNY

or dead.

EARL

But if he was dead, he was kinda worried

BENNY

'cause he was awful warm.

EARL

When he sort of set up and looked at hisself, he could see why.

BENNY

Somebody had done dressed him up top to bottom in a brand new fancy army uniform.

SHIRLEY

When Jack looked around, he seed a whole bunch of other fellers dressed just like him.

EARL

Jack had done landed in this country where one half of the people was fightin' the other half of the people and they hadn't been no new recruits for so long, this one bunch was

EARL & SHIRLEY

awful pleased to get Jack.

BENNY

"Well now thank you, fellers, but I really don't want to join no army."

SHIRLEY

"What ya mean ya don't want to join no army?"

BENNY

"Well look here, I don't even know what your fightin' for."

EARL & SHIRLEY

"We're fightin' for freedom, that's what."

SHIRLEY

"Your for freedom, ain't ya?"

BENNY

"Well 'course, just I'm not sure I want to go to fightin'."

SHIRLEY

"Well now if you ain't willin' to fight for freedom, then I reckon you must be agin' it."

EARL & SHIRLEY

"Shoot him, boys!"

BENNY

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, I reckon I could be talked into it."

EARL

Now Jack didn't want to be in no army. He wanted to get back the gold he'd lost.

BENNY

He decided he'd just play along 'til he could escape.

EARL

But one day, they was ambushed

BENNY

and Jack looked up to see this feller

SHIRLEY

in a different uniform

BENNY

looking down the barrel of a gun pointed right at him,
and Jack just naturally fired back.

EARL

All them years a huntin', Jack was a crack shot and

BENNY

That other feller fell dead.

SHIRLEY

When the fightin' was over, everybody run up pattin' Jack on the back.

EARL

Give him a medal

BENNY

extra rations

SHIRLEY

promoted him

BENNY

raised his pay.

EARL

Now when Jack seed the commotion these soldier fellers was making over him for just killin' one feller, Jack figered,

BENNY

"Why I must be a fool. If soldiering is this easy, maybe this is what I ought to be doin'. Maybe it is."

EARL

So ol' Jack he set in to soldierin' hard. Pretty soon he was the talk of the whole country.

SHIRLEY

The other side got to wishing Jack was on their side, so they set out to capture him.

EARL

Set their whole army to nothin' but doin' that. Directly, they got him.

BENNY

Next thing Jack knowed, he had another uniform, fancier than his old one.

SHIRLEY

Well this made them fellers that Jack was fightin' with before mad. They set out to capture him back.

EARL

Pretty soon them people wadn't doing nothin' but fightin' over Jack.

SHIRLEY

Plumb forgot what it was they's fightin' 'bout before.

EARL

They got to passin' Jack backwards

EARL & SHIRLEY

and forwards.

BENNY

Didn't matter if he was the most important feller in that country, Jack was getting pretty tired of this whole thing.

EARL

Then one day this bunch of fellers come to see him. Told him,

SHIRLEY

"We represent the religious end of things in this country, Jack, and we are pretty worried."

EARL

Hit done looked like that Jack had become so important

SHIRLEY

that people was startin' to look at him like he was a god or somethin'.

EARL

And some of them people was talkin' about starting up the

EARL & SHIRLEY

"Church of Jack."

SHIRLEY

"We can't have just anybody comin' into religion, so why don't you just join up with us, and become head of the whole thing?"

BENNY

"Well now I don't know whether I want to do that or not. I've been awful sinful, and hit don't look like I ought to be no religious leader. Besides, all the preachers I ever knowed was awful poor."

SHIRLEY

"No, this pays pretty good, and look here now, Jack, hit'll stop this killin'. If you want to do good, then this is the way to do it."

BENNY

"Pays pretty good?"

EARL & SHIRLEY

"Oh, yeah!"

BENNY

Jack figered, well, he might give it a try.

SHIRLEY

Besides, he was gettin' awful tired of soldierin'

BENNY

and hit sure didn't look like this was no way to make his fortune.

EARL

Maybe this religion thing was the way to go.

BENNY

After a while, Jack knowed he'd found his callin'. He kinda liked bein' a god! Lived in a fine house, had servants, good food, gold, silver

SHIRLEY

and the war did stop.

BENNY

Jack figured his fortune was made.

EARL

'Til one day these religious fellers come to Jack and told him,

SHIRLEY

"There is trouble. Some of them people is startin' to say that maybe, Jack, you might not be a god. And maybe there ought to be another religion."

BENNY

Jack allowed as how that was alright with him. Seemed like they was enough to go 'round.

EARL & SHIRLEY

"Oh no! You don't understand!"

EARL

"If we let them go their own way

SHIRLEY

the next thing you know somebody else will want to go their own way,
and

EARL

we'll be right back to where we was."

EARL & SHIRLEY

"You don't want that do you?"

BENNY

"Well, what are we going to do?"

SHIRLEY

"Well, we figered we'll just have to hang a few of 'em to make an example. Then I reckon there won't be no more problems."

BENNY

"Well ain't I the fool. If you fellers thinks that's what we ought to do, I guess it's what we ought to do. You know more about this stuff than I do."

SHIRLEY

So they arrested a bunch a people and hung 'em, and things sort of quietened down.

EARL

But then them religious fellers started worryin' that somebody else might start up.

SHIRLEY

So they started in to arresting people and torturing 'em

EARL

so they could tell if anybody was thinking of causin' any trouble.

SHIRLEY

Pretty soon, nobody

EARL & SHIRLEY

trusted nobody.

BENNY

And Jack begin to see, about that time, that them fellers that was supposed to be protectin' him might just, in fact, be his guards. He begin to think that maybe this wadn't the way he wanted to make his fortune, and started to get awful homesick for his cabin in the hills.

EARL

So when this peddler feller come to Jack's house one day and told him,

SHIRLEY

"Jack, I sell these various religious utensils and doo dads, and I'm headed for the mountains. Heard tell, they hain't no religion a'tall up there, and hit looks like prime doo-dad sellin' territory to me."

BENNY

Jack determined right then and there to stuff his pockets full of as much gold as he could pack, hide out in that peddler's wagon, and go home. He was through a-listenin' to other people tell him what to do.

SHIRLEY

When Jack got back home, he found his mommy had passed on

EARL

but the old cabin was in pretty good shape, and

BENNY

Jack set in to make things straight. Wasn't long 'til he had the finest place in the country.

EARL

"Too bad he was a little tetched in his head though"

SHIRLEY

folks would say

EARL

'cause no matter what anybody would talk about

SHIRLEY

Jack would take the contrary side.

EARL

If they said it was hot,

BENNY

"Little too cold to suit me."

SHIRLEY

If they said it was cold,

BENNY

"Mite warm if you ask me."

EARL

If they talked about how good he was doin'

BENNY

Jack would start into a hollerin' and a complainin' 'bout how miserable his life was.

SHIRLEY

But then when they'd start feelin' sorry for him, Jack would say,

BENNY

"Boys, I got it made."

SHIRLEY & EARL

"Contrary old fool's crazy!"

BENNY

"Yes sir, boys, ain't I the fool! Ain't I the fool!"

Benny and Shirley exit into the house. Earl crosses back to where he began the introduction, singing lines from Cities of Gold.

EARL

I like to tell stories and sing. Sorta frees my mind up some way or 'nother. My daddy told stories. His daddy too. My great grandpa was the first white man to settle these parts. . . (*radio blares from house, Bad Moon Rising*) Excuse me just

a minute. Turn that damn thing off! I'm tryin' to talk to people here! . . . I said turn that damn racket off! (*music goes off*)

In the house, that there's Benny and Shirley. Benny's my nephew, Shirley's my granddaughter – 'bout all that's left of us Halls around here. People used to could tell stories and sing songs, but it's got to the point where it seems to me people don't want to do nothin' fer theirselves no more – e ven let somebody do their singin' fer 'em. I was born on the sixth day of January. Now, they say that children born on that day is special. They claim to be able to have powers – see things, cure the sick, talk to the dead. I'm not sayin' I got any powers, but I'll tell you this, there will come a time in ever'body's life when you got to use what you know, whatever you got, to help you out . . . (*Earl sees a car at the foot of the hill*)

(*to audience*) Excuse me just a minute. Looks like we're gettin' more company. (*walks over to look*) Damn, it's that Roy Lee Johnson! (*to the cabin*) It's the sheriff. You all stay out of sight there 'til he's gone. And . . . (*sees Shirley sneaking off*) Hold it right there missy. Don't you go wandering off. Think I don't see how you disappear ever' time that thing shows up? As a matter of fact, you come here. Get out here. You just wait right here while I see what he wants.

(*to audience*) I'll be right back.

(*Earl exits. Shirley watches him, turns to the audience, divides her attention between the foot of the hill and the audience.*)

SHIRLEY

Benny, come out here. . . Benny, come out here! (*to audience*) He ain't been hissself since he come home. Benny's my cousin, second cousin really, but we always been real close. When me and Benny was kids, we heard Grandpa tell them old stories. Course now, other people told stories too . . . some of 'em about the Halls . . . some of 'em not so nice. When I was a kid I'd hear people say, "Now you better not mess with them Halls. You mess with one, you got all of 'em to deal with, and Lord only knows how many of 'em they are." That's the way it was around here, Bunkum for Bunkum and Hall for Hall.

(*Shirley glares at cabin, turns back to the audience*)

Course they ain't many Halls worth nothin' left around here no more. Grandpa says, "We've either been hung, shot, run off, or moved to the city." In his mind they're all 'bout the same thing.

EARL

Benny come out here, I want to talk with you. (*Earl storms into cabin, and we hear racket*)

Boy, what am I gonna do with you? *(Benny and Earl come bursting out of the cabin)* How did you cut your hand?

BENNY

You think a cut bothers me? Hit don't bother me one bit. You want me to show you? I'll do it again. *(puts knife to wrist)*

SHIRLEY

Benny! Stop that!

BENNY

Their's people dyin' ever'day! You think I'm afraid of a little pain?

EARL

Boy, you ain't in Vietnam now. I'm real sorry you didn't get your head blowed off over there, but I reckon you're gonna have to learn to live with it.

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, leave him alone! Benny, put that knife away! Go on, put it away!

(Benny puts knife in sheath. Benny and Earl glare at each other. Earl turns to Shirley and audience)

EARL

You know what he done? Took that knife of his and laid his hand open showin' out fer that little waitress at Nell's Cafe. Impressed the hell out of her, didn't you son! She fainted. Nell's having a fit, and now Roy Lee is here in my face sayin' if he catches you in town again you're goin' to jail or he's gonna go ahead and shoot you and put you out of your misery.

BENNY

I ain't afraid of Roy Lee Johnson!

EARL

I know you ain't, but you oughta be. It ain't just him, son, that whole town is scared of you. He could shoot you for spittin' on the street, and they'd stand there and applaud him.

SHIRLEY

What did Roy Lee want? *(sees paper in Earl's pocket)* What's that?

EARL

What?

SHIRLEY

That paper in your pocket.

EARL

Bunch of bunk, that's what.

SHIRLEY

Well, what does it say?

EARL

You want to know, you read it.

(Shirley looks at paper, Earl and Benny stare at each other)

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, this is an eviction notice. It says here you got 30 days to vacate under the right of "eminent domain."

BENNY

What the hell does that mean?

SHIRLEY

Did the Southeast Electric Power Company offer to buy your land? Says they sent you notice six months ago, and you failed to respond. Did you get a notice?

EARL

I get all kinds of junk in the mail. Don't mean I bother to read it all.

SHIRLEY

But, Grandpa, it says here they're gonna take your land!

(Earl doesn't respond, sits silently. Shirley looks at Benny questioningly.)

BENNY

Maybe you didn't hear her! *(to Shirley)* He don't want to hear you.

EARL

I heard her! And I'd hear the rest of it if you'd be quiet long enough. What else does that paper say?

SHIRLEY

I can't figure it all out, but it looks like the government is gonna let this power company build a dam and something called a pump storage generation plant.

EARL

Now that's a new one. What the hell is that?

SHIRLEY

I think it's where they pump water to the top of a mountain, and then run it back down to make electricity.

EARL

That don't make a hell of a lot 'a sense, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Well, I don't know anymore than you do, but if you'd been decent to Roy Lee maybe he would have set down and explained it to us.

BENNY & EARL

Humph. Hell fire.

SHIRLEY

I don't know why you two always gotta be that way. Roy Lee has gone out of his way to be nice to us.

BENNY

Maybe you've gone out of your way to be nice to him.

SHIRLEY

You watch your mouth, mister! If he didn't come by here ever' now and then, I wouldn't see nobody but you two. Cut off from civilization . . . *(to Earl)* And you! When are you gonna get a phone? Can't talk to nobody, can't find out nothin'. Even the Flintstones had a god damn phone. If you had a phone, you know, I could just . . . I could go in and call Roy Lee and ask him to explain what's happening. But no! Now I've got to go all the way into town . . .

(Earl grabs Shirley's arm)

EARL

You ain't goin' nowhere! And you're not gonna talk to Roy Lee Johnson!

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, Roy Lee ain't as bad as you think. He cares for me, and I need somebody to care for me.

BENNY

Bet he ain't proposed, has he? *(Shirley shoots Benny the bird)*

EARL

Alright that's enough of that. Now Shirley, I know ever'body needs somebody to care for 'em, and I hope someday you find somebody, but I'm here to tell you it ain't Roy Lee Johnson. That boy and his kind have run our people to ground more times than I care to think about. Sometimes I think that boy's 'bout two weeks away from bein' a human bein'.

SHIRLEY

And sometimes, you're just a mean ol' man.

EARL

You want me to tell you what kind of man Roy Lee Johnson is? Not more than ten minutes ago he stood right down there in my face and on my land and told me that if I kicked up a fuss about this thing, he'd be glad to see all of us rot in jail.

SHIRLEY

He didn't mean all of us.

EARL

Oh lord, somehow you figer you're left out of this, huh? That he'll just come up here and take me and Benny?

BENNY

I'll take him to hell with me!

SHIRLEY

How can my seein' Roy Lee hurt us?

(Shirley exits into house)

(Earl plays guitar, Earl & Benny sing)

THE LAW IS RIGHT

You better watch what you do, watch what you say.
Somebody hears you, even when you pray.
And everybody's guilty in somebody's eyes.
Don't matter if it's the truth or if it's a lie.

(Chorus)

'Cause the law is right,
Even when it's wrong.
You may not like it,
But you gotta go along.
It ain't for the weak.
It was meant for the strong.
And the law is right,
Even when it's wrong.

You can run, but you can't hide.
The evil you do still lives inside.
Even if you hide you can't get away,
For everything you do, you're gonna have to pay.

(Chorus)

(Refrain)

You can run, but you can't hide!
You can run, but you can't hide!

Justice is blind, or so they say.
So you better not get in the way.
Money is the hand that moves the pen.
You can play the game, but you can't win.

(Chorus)

EARL *(to Benny)*

Alright now. I'm goin' into town and see old Judge Sutherland. Find out what this is all about, and see how much it's gonna cost us. See if you can stay out of trouble while I'm gone. Just try it, you may like it.

(Benny goes into house. Earl picks up paper that dropped from Shirley's hand during argument. Talks to audience.)

How we come to be here in the first place is in a story I heard a long time ago. See, what it was, they was this king wanted to keep people for slaves. Now you understand, ain't nobody wants to be no slave, so they left out of there. Some say this feller that led 'em out of there had other names. We call him Jack. But anyway, when they got here, this place they first landed, hit was all swampy and muddy. Wadn't no water to drink, nor food. Skeeters as big as hummingbirds. When one of them fellers bit you, you stayed bit. Them people started moaning, complaining, wishing they was back home. Said, "What's a' matter? Wadn't they enough graveyards at home, you had to bring us here to start a new one?"

So Jack, he left 'em at camp and he went out scoutin'. Hit was gettin' up towards evenin' when Jack begin to notice that the animals around him was headin' sorty in one direction, so he started follerin' along. Pretty soon he seed they was all goin' to a watering place where water was bubblin' out of the ground. Jack, he rolled a big rock over that little spring, daubed it up tight, and went on back to camp. Told them people to come on. "Lord, this is a wonderful land we've come to. Why they's water under ever' rock, if'en you know where to find it."

This made 'em sorta mad. "If you're so smart, then let's see you do it."

"Bet you fifty dollars I can," says Jack.

"Hit's a bet!"

So off they went a followin' Jack. They come to that big rock, and Jack told some of the men to roll the rock away and they'd find water. Well, they didn't believe

him, but when they rolled the rock away that water come bustin' out all over the place. Them people drunk their bellies full, filled all their canteens, paid Jack his fifty, and off they went saying as how they believed in him all along. 'Til they run smack dab out of food. No journey cakes left and no flour to bake more with. Them people set into grumblin' again sayin' hit was all Jack's fault. So Jack had to set out scoutin' again. That's the time he found them bread trees . . .

Oh, they had 'em some adventures out there in that wilderness, but some how they always pulled through it. Well now, the weaker ones of 'em died out. And some of the wild ones took to a-runnin' game, and we ain't seed nor heard from 'em since. But the strongest of 'em kept on a climbin' 'til they reached the mountains. High mountains over river valleys, plenty of game in the woods and fish in the streams. Lordy children, "We've come home!" said Jack.

(Earl exits)

(Shirley comes out of the cabin)

SHIRLEY *(to audience)*

I never will forget the day I was sittin' in that bar in Dayton. I looked up, and there he stood. Took me by my arm, told me I was comin' with him, back home. Said we needed each other. When I got here, Benny was already here. When Benny got back from Vietnam, after they throwed him out of the Army, he was just wandering around. Grandpa had gone to California and found him. I never knowed Grandpa had been further than town in his whole life. Felt to me like he wasn't looking when he found me, he just come straight to me. Benny said the same thing. I asked Grandpa how did he know, how did he find us? He just looked at me. Sometimes he's scary as hell. You can't tell what he's thinkin'. Between him and Benny, ain't no wonder I took up with Roy Lee. Asked Grandpa one time, "What do you want from me?"

"Just for you to feel at home," he said.

I don't even know what that means, but I knowed he was after somethin'. Seems like no matter what you do, somebody's always wantin' somethin' from you. They's things I want too, things I don't want, but I can't hardly tell the difference no more.

(Shirley sings, accompanied by off-stage guitar)

I DON'T WANT TO BE NOBODY'S MAMA

I'm sure you think that you know me.

You've seen me somewhere in your life.

I'm a girl in a bar, a picture in a magazine.
I'm somebody's darling loving wife.

I can't hide from the eyes that look through me,
But I won't veil my face and turn away.
I won't run from my life, I may not be right,
But one time I'd just like to say.

(Chorus)

I don't want to be nobody's mama.
I don't want to be nobody's girl.
I just need one thing to believe in,
And someone who needs me in this world.

Sometimes I feel like a river
About to drown in my own fears.
Sometimes I feel like a useless drop of rain
With no way to fall but in my tears.

(Chorus)

(Earl returns from town)

SHIRLEY

What did the judge say? Is he gonna let us stay?

EARL

Shirley, why didn't you tell me there was a federal judge's name on that paper?

SHIRLEY

I didn't know, and what does that mean?

EARL

That means that ever' crooked son of a bitch from Washington, D.C. down to Roy Lee Johnson is in on this, that's what it means. Ain't no wonder Roy Lee's acting like he's got us skinned and hung out on the wall to dry.

BENNY

We'll see who gets skinned!

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, what did the judge say?

EARL

The judge? The judge told me it was for the common good that I give up my land. Then he told me if I'd throw in with him we'd rob the damn power company blind. That's what the judge said. It's plain ever'body in that town has gone crazy and is lookin' to make a killin' off this thing, but right here on this ridge is where they want to do it.

SHIRLEY

Well we got something else, come in the mail today.

BENNY

You said they wadn't no mail.

SHIRLEY

I was waitin' for Grandpa.

EARL

Well, I'm here, what is it? Come on, girl.

(Shirley hands Earl an open letter)

SHIRLEY

It's from the health department saying if we're gonna move our dead, they gotta supervise the removal.

EARL

My God. Don't nobody talk to nobody no more? This world is being run by little pieces of paper.

(Earl begins singing, Benny & Shirley join on Chorus, acapella)

PROMISED LAND

When first we come into this country
Our rifles in our hands,
We thought for sure that we'd been brought

Straight to the Promised Land.
But promises are like the clouds
That float off with the breeze,
And doubts and fears as numerous
As the forest has trees.

(Chorus)

So it's load up the wagon
Throw in the kids
Promise the wife again,
"Don't worry little dear this is the last time,
We're headed for the Promised Land."

But it's work and toil, sweat and tears
For everything you own.
And in a lifetime, maybe two,
You'll build yourself a home.
And the house built on that solid rock
Will forever stand.
But there's nothing in this
World as fleeting
As those things built by man.

(Chorus)

When first we come into this country
Our rifles in our hands,
We thought for sure that we'd been brought
Straight to the Promised Land.

BENNY

Did you hear what she said?

EARL

Yes son, I heard her.

SHIRLEY

What about a lawyer?

EARL

Wadn't a lawyer in town that would even talk to me. Now when them fellers don't want your money you're knee deep in it!

SHIRLEY

Ain't there nobody who'll help us?

EARL

Well yeah, there was a nice little feller down at the bank offered to go ahead now and buy my land, save me all that trouble.

SHIRLEY

Maybe you should just sell it to 'em while you can.

EARL

Shirley, they don't want our land. First thing they're gonna do is cut down all the timber left on the place. Then they're gonna tear it apart to get the coal. Then they're gonna build that generation plant. Then they're gonna flood the whole gorge. Then, there won't be no land no more. My people and this land . . .

BENNY

Don't start no story 'bout "our people." What good is a story about our people gonna do us?

SHIRLEY

It takes money to live in this world. We can buy more land.

EARL

You can't own land with money anymore than you can own stories with money. My people has lived on this land and died on it. I reckon that gives us more right than anybody for being here.

BENNY

How you gonna stop 'em from takin' it?

EARL

We've fought for it before. I reckon we'll do it again. One time back . . .

BENNY

What makes you think you can stop the U.S. government from taking what it wants?

EARL

You, boy!

BENNY

Me! How you figer that?

EARL

You told me yourself them Vietnamese has done it. They run you off, didn't they?

BENNY

You think I'm afraid to die or I wouldn't have got out of Vietnam, don't you?

Well, I never run off. I never give up, and I never quit fightin', but I ain't dyin' for you.

EARL

You're already dead, boy. You just ain't decent enough to lay down in your hole, that's your problem.

BENNY

What the hell are you talkin' about?

EARL

For a man to live, they's got to be things he's willing to die for.

BENNY

Like what?

EARL

Like home, this family, this land.

BENNY

You ain't never had to fight, see people die! Land don't mean nothin'. You can take it one day, give it back the next. You don't understand nothin'.

EARL

Then why don't you explain it to me. Go on, boy, you tell me what it was like over there. Come on!

SHIRLEY

Let him be. *(moves between Earl and Benny)* Just leave him alone!

(Earl exits into house. Shirley tries to comfort Benny. He pulls away.)

BENNY

I don't need you takin' up for me.

SHIRLEY

You're welcome.

BENNY

Women of your kind are all the same.

SHIRLEY

Women of my kind? Just what is a woman of my kind?

BENNY

I know about you in Dayton.

SHIRLEY

You don't know nothin' about me!

BENNY

I know about whores.

SHIRLEY

Well, I don't know nothin' about you "big brave soldier boys" except for "rumors" I've heard, of course. (*motions to Benny's hand*) And you're not doin' too good with women either, are you?

BENNY

(*grabs Shirley*) Shut up!

SHIRLEY

Oh, you like to play rough, uh? Well, that's okay. Women of "my kind" like that.

BENNY

(*Benny pushes Shirley away*) She spit on me, called me names.

SHIRLEY

Who did?

BENNY

When I got home, I got off the plane. They was people waitin' at the gate. I thought they was family, friends of guys gettin' off. This one girl run up to me. She had long red hair down her back. I thought maybe she was just gonna hug my neck or something, but I couldn't hear her for the noise so I leaned towards her, and she spit in my face and throwed red paint on my uniform. They never told us people at home hated us. They never told us . . .

(*Benny sings, Shirley joins on chorus, accompanied by off-stage guitar*)

VIETNAM

I went walking one morning.
The Devil grabbed me by the hand.
Said, "Come on, let me show you around my little place,
I call it Vietnam."

Ain't so much to look at.
Just a quaint little jungle land.

But before I'm through, it'll mean the world to you.
You won't forget Vietnam.

(Chorus)

Vietnam, where the sweetest flowers died on the vine.
Vietnam, it'll steal your heart, steal your mind.

So come all you space age children.
You ain't never gonna understand.
If you want to see real living and dying
Come on over to Vietnam.

Pride is the first thing that leaves you.
Fear is the last thing to run.
And you can't see too well when you're staring into hell
Down the barrel of a gun.

(Chorus)

(Tag)

Momma don't you know me, I'm the boy next door
Can I come home.
Momma don't you know me, I'm the boy next door
Can I come home.

I went walking one morning.
The Devil grabbed me by the hand.
Said, "Come on, let me show you around my little place,
I call it Vietnam."

Ain't so much to look at.
Just a quaint little jungle land.
But before I'm through, it'll mean the world to you.
You won't forget Vietnam.
You won't forget Vietnam.
You won't forget Vietnam.
You won't forget Vietnam.

SHIRLEY

Do you remember when we was kids? Benny, listen to me! Remember the hayloft? And when we was kids we use to make brown sugar and butter biscuits, take 'em and hide out in our secret place in the hayloft. Remember that? We used to lay hid in there, away from ever'body and tell secrets and talk about how

our lives was gonna be. We had some high fallutin' dreams, you and me. I was gonna be a nurse, and you was gonna be . . .

BENNY

I was gonna sing on the Grand Ol' Opry.

SHIRLEY

You do remember! You want to know what happened in Dayton?

BENNY

No.

SHIRLEY

I want you to know.

BENNY

I don't want to know.

SHIRLEY

You ever been in love? Benny, have you ever been in love? Okay. I'm talkin' about love that chills you to the bone. I'm talkin' about love that half the time you're scared to death you're gonna lose it, and the other half you're scared to death it'll be like that forever. Love where you know you'll do anything, I mean anything, that's asked of you.

When I was a kid, I grewed up hearing all them ol' ballads, you know, like (*sings a little of When I Die Bury Me Deep*) you know, where people died for love. I reckon I thought it was all a joke. Nobody died because of love. Not in the 20th Century, for heaven's sake! I mean "Teen Angel" got run over by a train, but that was the sweet sting of death, not mean and cruel. You become an angel and lived forever in people's memories.

When we went to Dayton I was so excited about livin' in a big city, playin' with other kids that wasn't my cousins, gettin' new clothes, goin' to the movies. But I never did fit in. I tried, but I was just too different. Mommy said it wasn't me different it was them, but it didn't seem that way. I got to thinking maybe there was something wrong with me. 'Til I met Frankie. He made me feel special. He was real popular, too. Ever'body liked Frankie. Frankie turned me on to dope. He was always sellin' it. But it wouldn't have mattered to me. He could do no wrong as far as I was concerned.

Daddy didn't like Frankie. Got so Daddy and me was fightin' all the time. Either him or Mom. I quit school, moved in with Frankie. We lived high. When I got pregnant, he started leavin' me home by myself, and he got real mean. We started fightin' all the time. I started drinkin' real bad. That only made things worse. Once I grabbed a knife on him. He beat me up so bad I had to go to the hospital. I lost my baby. He come to the hospital, begged me to come home with him. He acted so hurt and sweet I couldn't turn him down. I never could turn him down.

It was alright for a while. Pretty soon it was worse than before. Finally he come home one night, told me he wanted me out of the house, that the next day he had a new girlfriend movin' in. I stabbed him twice 'fore he got out the door. The cops come, took me to jail. That's where I met Sheerene. She laughed when I told her what I'd done, said, "Good for you!" Told me she was in jail for doin' the "Bed Spring Boogie." I didn't even know what she meant 'til she told me. I figured I didn't need me no more men, but you got to have somebody. I couldn't go home. I was too ashamed. I moved in with Sheerene. All we done was drink and lay up with men. Sheerene said if you had to have men, they ought to pay. That's when Grandpa come and found me.

When we was kids, leavin' for Dayton, Grandpa said something to Dad I ain't never forgot. He told him that in each generation ever' man had to look at himself like he had just left Egypt. That was always one of my favorite stories, and it seemed to me like goin' off to Dayton was like headin' for the promised land . . . but I ended up in the wilderness, believing in nothin' or nobody. Grandpa was saying that no matter where you end up, you have to remember who you are, where you come from, and the people you come out of. No matter what me and you become, there will always be two skinny kids in the hayloft – long as one of us remembers.

BENNY

When I was in Nam, I got this crazy notion one day that I was shrinkin', gettin' smaller and smaller. I'd find myself wanderin' around lookin' for something, but I didn't know what.

SHIRLEY

That wasn't you over there, Benny.

BENNY

Then who the hell was it? Remember that story about the old black man that blowed his arm off buildin' the railroad tunnel through Pine Mountain? Sometimes at night when the wind is just right, you can hear him moanin' and

cryin' inside that tunnel, walkin' up and down lookin' for his arm. That's me!
Lookin' for the parts I've left scattered around.

SHIRLEY

That old man may be doomed to look forever, but you ain't. We can make our
own story.

BENNY

You don't understand. Them giants Earl's always telling about in them stories,
they're real alright. One of 'em is fixin' to swaller us up.

SHIRLEY

Then we'll have to figure out some way to stop it!

BENNY

How we gonna do that?

SHIRLEY

I don't know yet. I still think Roy Lee can help us.

(Earl comes to door)

EARL

What are you two talkin' about out here?

SHIRLEY

Nothin'.

EARL

Well now, I heared you talkin' about somethin'. *(to the audience, but obviously
wanting Benny and Shirley to hear)* I don't know why we spite each other. Don't
start out to, but somehow or 'nother you see right where we end up. Maybe that's
just the way the family is. Speakin' of family, 'while ago I was layin' in there and
I had this dream. Come to me, and what it was, was great Grandpa wanted to see
me. Sent word. Said I was to meet him down by that ol' barn he built out yonder
by the field. I went down there and sure enough, here he come walkin' across the

field toward me, but I still couldn't see his face. He had this ol' hat pulled way down on his eyes. He walked straight up to me, raised his head . . . and it was me.

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, they's a car at the foot of the hill.

EARL

I tell you we're gettin' popular as hell up here. I better go see who it is. (*Earl exits*)

SHIRLEY

Benny, I'm worried 'bout Grandpa. He's acting strange.

BENNY

Earl's always actin' strange.

SHIRLEY

No, now this is different. I never knowed Grandpa to have a problem he couldn't handle. Funny, I never even thought of him as somebody who could die. Somehow I thought of him as always being here, like this land.

BENNY

There ain't nothin' permanent, not people and not land.

SHIRLEY

We ain't air that blows away. Even if he dies I'll remember him.

BENNY

Like I remember Vietnam.

SHIRLEY

If that's what's important to you, I guess so, but it don't seem to me like that's something you'd want to fight to hold on to.

BENNY

That's 'cause you ain't never had to fight.

SHIRLEY

I've fought all my life!

(Earl enters)

EARL

And you're at it again. What are you two into now?

SHIRLEY

Who was it?

EARL

We got us a feller from the power company down there.

BENNY

What does he want?

EARL

He's got a court order sayin' that we got to let him run survey lines. That son of a bitch Roy Lee sent him up here. Told him, "No, them Halls ain't gonna be no trouble fer you."

SHIRLEY

They're pretty sure of themselves, ain't they? Or us.

EARL

Yeah, he give me a hundred dollars – said he wants to stay here.

BENNY

You're gonna let him stay?

EARL

Yes, I'm gonna let him stay. I'm gonna treat this feller like he was long lost family. *(to Benny)* You go down there and help him with his stuff. Put him in the cabin out back. Go on, do like I tell you! *(Benny begins to exit)* And Benny, kill us a couple of them fryers for supper. I'm in the mood for fried chicken. *(to Shirley)* Can you bake biscuits?

SHIRLEY

Yes, I can bake biscuits, but I want to know what you're up to.

EARL

You think you could get Roy Lee up here for breakfast tomorrow mornin' without anybody knowin' about it?

SHIRLEY

Course I can, but what are you talkin' about?

(Benny returns.)

BENNY

Where's the hatchet?

SHIRLEY

Benny, he's talkin' crazy, about invitin' Roy Lee for breakfast.

BENNY

Like hell!

EARL

Stay out of this!

BENNY

What do you think you're doin'?

EARL

I'm doin' what I got to do. You can't always get that snake's head with your first lick, but if you can break his back you can slow him down some.

BENNY

You're crazy man, you're gettin' crazier than me.

EARL

Now comin' from you son, that's a real compliment. But I ain't just settin' here and lettin' 'em take my land. I got no place left to go and neither do the two of you, and I'll do whatever I got to do to hold on. *(to Benny)* If you wanna do something, go kill them chickens like I told you. Use that fancy knife. You might like that, now go on. *(Benny exits)*

(to Shirley) Now you go on and do what I told you to do.

SHIRLEY

You knowed somethin' like this was gonna happen, didn't you? That's why me and Benny are here!

EARL

You're here 'cause you need to be. Now go do what I tell you.

SHIRLEY

I'll do what I want to do.

EARL

Well . . . fine. Why don't you do whatever suits you?

SHIRLEY

I'll go bake some biscuits.

EARL

(to audience) When people first got here it looked like ever'thing was gonna be alright. Started clearin' up land, buildin' houses. But 'fore long they found out they had done moved into the land of giants. Says right there in the Book "They was Giants in the land" in them days. A whole nest of 'em. There was an old man and old woman, a boy and a girl. At first hit like to scared them people to death. Them giants would come into the settlement pokin' their noses into ever'thing. But pretty soon people got used to 'em, didn't hardly pay 'em no mind. Some people started gettin' the giants to do favors for 'em, pull up a tree here, move a rock there. Pretty soon, they was bringin' in game, harvestin' crops, doin' all of the work. People plumb forgot how to work. And instead of spreading out, and livin' like people is supposed to live, them people was movin' in close around where the giants lived. Pretty soon they started fightin' over land where they was all crowded up so. Property begin to vanish, neighbors started blamin' each other,

family started fightin' family, and nobody trusted nobody. Then the children started to disappear. . .

(Earl exits slowly)

INTERMISSION

(Twilight after supper, Earl sits on front porch playing fiddle and singing)

MY LITTLE GARDEN

Had a little garden
Up on a hill.
Grewed sweet corn
For my whiskey still.
Wasn't very long
The crows come along.
Now my little garden
Is almost gone.
My little garden is almost gone.

Two ol' crows
Settin' on a limb.
I took aim
There was one again.
One ol' crow
Settin' on a limb.
He fell off
Now ain't that a sin.
No more crows settin' on the limb.
No more crows settin' on the limb.

This ain't near the end of my song.
When two fell off
Four more flew on.
Here is the moral
And it won't take long.
There'll be crows
As long as they's corn.
There'll be crows as long as they's corn.
There'll be crows as long as they's corn.
There'll be crows as long as they's corn.

EARL

I reckon it's time to finish up this story 'bout Jack. I told you about the children disappearin'. Only one or two a year, so the people blamed it on the wilderness and wild animals, but Jack feared somethin' else. He started watchin' them giants. One day in the spring, when all the giants come to the settlement to help out with the plantin', Jack noticed Mommy Giant wadn't there, so he snuck over to the giants' cave, hid out, and watched. He could see her. She was bakin' and cookin' all kinds of food, and then she loaded it all into a basket and started to leave. Jack followed. She went into the woods 'til she come to another cave. Then, lookin' around to make sure nobody was follerin', she crawled into the cave with the basket. Jack snuck up to the entrance, and he could see this strange red glow comin' out of that cave. And when he snuck up a little closer, they was the awfulest smell in the world a comin' out of that cave. And he could see that that light and smell was comin' from a fiery pit in the center of the cave. The giant started talkin' in a tongue Jack had never heard before:

Ish Bael By Yeth Oman,
Ashtarte Obyea.
Ish Bael By Yeth Oman,
Ashtarte Obyea.

(Shirley and Benny come out of the house)

Then she started throwin' in the food a piece at a time. When she finished, she left, and Jack went on in that cave. They was all kinds of strange drawings on the walls. Jack traced some of 'em with his finger. He could see they was real old. They was black and cracked with age. But when he traced some of the newer ones, and looked at his finger, his own blood run cold 'cause there on his finger was fresh blood. And then what he seed next like to scared him to death, 'cause there around the pit lay the clothes of little children – little boy, little girl, little boy, little girl. Jack run all the way to the settlement, told the people what he'd seen and what he thought it meant, but they wouldn't believe him.

"You're crazy. That's what comes from believing all them stories you tell."

Jack went to his family and told them his story. His own family did not believe him, but finally they agreed to help. Jack's brother, Will, was a blacksmith, and he had the biggest anvil around – it took three men to move it. So Jack and his brothers got the anvil and set it on the edge of the pit, which was beginning to get hotter and hotter and bubble over the sides. And then they left Jack in the cave to wait for the giants. It wasn't long 'til the giants come in with a little boy.

Jack stepped out of his hidin' place. "Ho brothers, I been waitin' for you. I've got a message for you. The great god of the underworld sent me here. Said he wanted to come up. Now if you'll set the boy down, I'll tell you how to bring him up."

“First of all, you've all got to be tied together so you can all pull at once. Next, now this is real important, you've got to be blindfolded – that's right. You won't be able to look at him 'til he takes on a new shape, else you'll go blind. OK!”

So Jack got that big rope, put the old man up front and tied that rope 'round his waist, then the old woman, big bubba, and that big ol' girl. Then he had 'em put on them blindfolds while he snuck over to that big anvil and tied the other end of the rope around it. Then ol' Jack set down, and with both feet he kicked that anvil into that fierce pit pulling ever'one of them giants in after it, while ol' Jack danced around the pit and sung at the top of his lungs, "Hey, ho, diddle um day."

BENNY

Too bad things ain't as simple for you, as they are for ol' Jack.

EARL

Who says they ain't?

BENNY

What are you talkin' about?

EARL

Who says I ain't got ever' thing I need right here on this land to handle any problem I might have.

SHIRLEY

What do you mean, Grandpa?

BENNY

He's talkin' to hear his head rattle. Like them stories of the little people he used to tell us lived around here. When I was a youngun I like to wore my fool self out runnin' all over this mountain lookin' for 'em.

EARL

I never told you I actual seed 'em. I told you stories that held out the promise of what could be.

BENNY

Like that one you just told? I reckon we're supposed to see some moral or 'nother in it?

EARL

Boy, you don't have to hold ever'thing up to the light to see it. There is some things you believe without knowin' 'em, and there is some things you know before you believe.

BENNY

(to Shirley) Did you understand a word of that?

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, we really don't know what you're talking about.

EARL

When my great grandpa come in here . . .

BENNY

Oh God, here he goes again.

EARL

He settled right here. Said he heard a voice – told him this was The Place, and he figered this gap between Virginia and Kentucky would be a good place for business . . .

BENNY

Well, that voice may have knowed land, but it didn't know diddley about business, did it?

EARL

So you know this story, do you?

BENNY

I ought to. You've told it a hundred times.

EARL

That don't mean you listened once.

EARL

Well, go ahead then. Let's hear it. Go on!

(to audience)

BENNY

Well, second winter he was here he's just about ready to call it quits 'til he got in that argument with the peddler. Peddler come in to stay the night, got to drinkin' some of Grandpa's corn. He and the old man got to arguin'.

SHIRLEY

Peddler started bothering Great Grandma, that's what happened.

EARL

Whoop, look here Benny, Shirley knows it too!

BENNY

I know the story, Shirley!

SHIRLEY

I was just trying to help out.

BENNY

Grandpa thumped him once. Peddler fell. Hit his head on the hearth

BENNY & SHIRLEY

and there was one less peddler in the world.

BENNY

(to Shirley) And that's how we got here . . . That's it.

EARL

You finished, are you? I reckon maybe you don't know ever' thing. I reckon they's things 'bout your own family you don't know. And I reckon it's about time you found out.

When Grandpa started scoutin' this gorge, off below the house he found a cave where there's the strangest sight you ever seed. They's a pond about 10 foot across, but now this ain't no ordinary pond. No sir. Two times a day, that pond'll start swirlin' and frothin', turnin' bright red. Looks like the very fires of hell are lit up underneath it, and starts swirling 'round and 'round, faster and faster, and then it's like the whole bottom drops out. Anything in that pond disappears into the bowels of the earth and is never seed again. I think it may be a short-cut to hell. But whatever it is, the "Suck" has been in the Hall family ever since Great Grandpa. Ain't nobody but us knows about it. Great Grandpa throwed that feller in the Suck, kept that peddler's wagon, made it through the winter, and that's how we got started.

SHIRLEY

But that's just a legend. That place don't really exist.

BENNY

Is that what you're gonna do with that surveyor feller?

(Earl doesn't answer, just looks at Benny)

BENNY

Get serious, man. What about Roy Lee?

EARL

That boy's head has got a mite big, but I reckon he'll fit too.

SHIRLEY

I ain't bringin' Roy Lee here.

EARL

You ain't got no choice girl.

BENNY

You're crazy, man. Ain't nobody goin' down no hole 'cause there ain't no hole.

EARL

You done proved you don't know ever'thing, boy. How you think we got by all these years ever' time we've been in trouble?

BENNY

You're tellin' me that this family has gone through life chuckin' people down some hole, and you know where it is? How in the hell do you expect anybody to believe that?

SHIRLEY

(laughs nervously) It's not true, is it?

EARL

You're beginnin' to wonder ain't you, both of you? Roy Lee wonders about it. People 'round here been wonderin' the same thing for a long time. Why you think they've left us alone for so long?

BENNY

But it's not true, is it?

EARL

What the hell difference does it make if they believe it?

BENNY

I know what you're tryin' to do.

EARL

Well it's about damn time. Now you can get in this family or get the hell out, boy. One or the other.

BENNY

He's talking about killin' people like it was some kind of Jack tale!

SHIRLEY

He's just jokin', Benny. He didn't mean it.

BENNY

Shirley, shut up!

EARL

No, you shut up, you shut up! Boy you don't care about nothin' ner nobody. God damn your eyes!

BENNY

(Benny pulls a Judo move, puts a knife to Earl's throat) You want to talk about killin', I'll show you how easy it is. All I have to do is pull this knife across your throat and you're dead. It's that easy. *(throws Earl down and moves away)*

SHIRLEY

Grandpa, we can't start killin' people!

(Earl rises, goes to his chair)

BENNY

You want to hear a story? I'll tell you a story. Up in the mountains there was these people, lived like mountain people here. I laid up on a ridge lookin' down at their village. Women, children, pigs – felt like I was home instead of someplace else. I dropped my pack and my weapon, pulled off all my clothes, and walked buck naked into that village singin' "Sourwood Mountain" loud as I could.

After that village, I knowed they wadn't no way to win that war. Them people was fightin' for their homes. Hell, most of us didn't even know where we was, much less what we was fightin' for. I told the captain that we might as well go home. The only way we was gonna win this war was to kill ever' man, woman, and child in the country 'cause they wouldn't never give up. After that, they started putting me out on point every patrol we made.

We come up on this village one day. I's on point, as usual. Soon as I seed it I knowed it was trouble. It was gettin' up toward the middle of the afternoon – time for us to break off, head back to base camp. You don't want to get caught out near dark. We may 'a owned the day, but Charlie owned the night. I told the lieutenant that we ought to just turn around and leave right then. He told me he was tired of my attitude!

All we could see was this old man and woman sittin' in front of a hooch. Lieutenant said we was goin' in. It was the weirdest thing, this whole village was deserted except for this little ol' man and woman. There was pigs and chickens, dogs running around, and some of the hootches had fires going, but it was empty, except for them two. Soon as we come in they start smiling and bowing. "No Cong. No Cong." We had this Vietnamese interpreter, and I could tell he was spooked. He wanted the hell out of there and quick, but the lieutenant made him ask where ever'body was.

"Working," they said, "Over there," pointin' off to the right.

"How many people live in the hootch?"

"Just them," they said. But I seed at least 20 pounds of cooked rice in a pot settin' there, and I knowed they was feedin' a lot of people. I told the lieutenant we better get the hell out of there, and quick. He told me to check the rest of the hootches and see what we could find. There wadn't nothin', but I knowed where it was – underground. And I damn sure didn't want to take time to find it.

I told the lieutenant, "Let's burn the whole damn thing down, and when she starts smokin' real good, move out and use the smoke for cover."

"We ain't gonna burn down a friendly village," he says.

Finally, he says we're gonna move out. I'm on point, and my gut starts tightening up. I must have wet myself 'cause I can feel something warm running down my leg. Then I see Cleveland, this black guy next to me, his whole head explodes, and I know we're taking fire. I ain't wet myself, "I'm hit, I'm hit." We're taking fire from all sides. They waited 'til we got out in the open and away from the village, and they had us hemmed in like pigs in a pen. There was AK47 fire coming from the village, from the same hootch where the old man and woman was. Ever'time we tried to come together to concentrate our fire, they'd lob a mortar in and we'd have to spread out. We couldn't move and we couldn't return fire.

Somehow the lieutenant got the radio, and I could hear him callin' for choppers. He was screamin' at the top of his lungs, "Get us out of here, get us out of here." But I knowed there was no way for a chopper to get to us. It was hard to tell how many had been hit, but you could hear people screamin' all over the place. I wrapped a bandage around my leg, put my belt around it. Our medic was dead. It was starting to get dark and rain.

I don't know how long we laid there. I heard something, sounded like a chopper. Two of 'em! They came in low, guns wide open. Concentrated fire on the tree line in front of us. We started trying to drag the wounded together, get them up

front toward the chopper. One of the choppers came in while the other was covering. He had just touched down when the whole thing exploded. One big fireball and it was gone. Pieces of metal flying ever'where. Jesus! The other chopper broke off sayin' they wadn't no way, they'd have to have more fire power. The lieutenant went crazy. He grabbed the radio and started beggin' 'em not to leave. By this time it was almost dark and raining hard.

We laid there all night in the mud. We could see the fires in the village, hear people laughing, talking, smell the food. Ever' once in a while they'd drop a mortar round, just so we didn't get too comfortable. All night there was people praying and crying. I started crawling toward our M60. I didn't know what I was gonna do, but I wasn't gonna wait for them to come get me. It was getting' daylight. Still rainin' like hell. I started crawlin' toward the village with that machine gun. Come to this little rise, and I laid up there, stuck in a belt, and started firing. And I kept firing, ever'time I saw something move. I fired until there wadn't nothin' movin'.

By that time, my squad had moved up and opened fire. They emptied their weapons, reloaded, and started firing again. There wadn't no Viet Cong, just villagers. Charlie had pulled out sometime before daylight. They didn't care about them people. They used 'em just like we did. We killed the pigs, the dogs, the people, the chickens, the buffalo – all of 'em, and we set fire to the village. Twenty-eight people and assorted animals. We had eight dead, six wounded, and one chopper gone. They said we won.

Next time we went out on patrol, I didn't wait. I learnt my lesson. I just opened up. It didn't matter if you could see Cong or not. They was there. They was underground or waitin' nearby, and if they wadn't there today, they'd be there tomorrow. It didn't matter about right or wrong.

(Pause. Shirley begins singing, Earl joins on Chorus, Benny tentatively joins last chorus, acapella)

AN OPEN DOOR

In your dreams try to think of me
For I will be dreaming too.
Then no matter where you may be
You'll know someone thinks of you.

(Chorus)

The moon is shining on the mountains.
You've seen it many times before.
Come home to the people who love you,
You'll always find an open door.

Sometimes, the mind may wander.
Sometimes you think you've lost your way.
But if you will listen to your heart,
It will bring you home one day.

(Lights fade to shadow then up when actor, who played Earl begins song and is joined by other two actors, acapella)

I GOT A HOME SOMEWHERE

I got a home somewhere
I'm leaving today.
I got a home somewhere
I'm leaving today.
I got a home somewhere
A heart beat away.

Dark waters rising
I'm leaving today.
Dark waters rising
I'm leaving today.
I got a home somewhere
A heart beat away.

I want to see my father
I'm leaving today.
I want to see my mother
I'm leaving today.
I got a home somewhere
A heart beat away.

I got a home somewhere
I'm leaving today.
I got a home somewhere
I'm leaving today.
I got a home somewhere
A heart beat away.

(Applause)

(Actor who played Earl speaks to the audience as himself)

This story doesn't stop. It just comes to a resting place. Because when the story stops, the world comes to a resting place. This story is not about the past, but

about the future – the world we live in today. We (*the actors*) don't quit, but we're going to rest. If you want to carry the story on, looks like there's enough of you to do it!

END