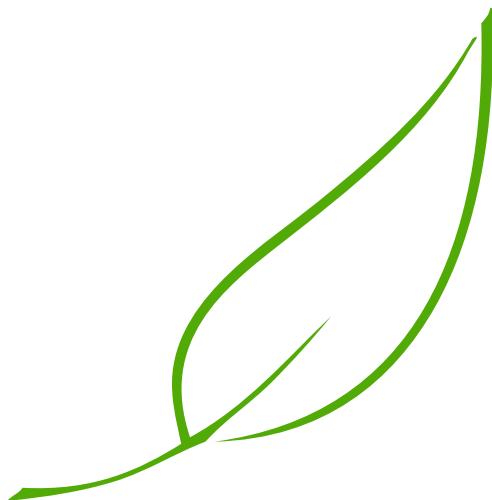


HOW THE WEST WAS WED

By Kelly Meadows



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SYNOPSIS: This play harkens back to the good ol' days...when mail order brides actually came by mail! There's a coupe weddin's goin on in Betsey's Corner, Montana. Ellen Berensen, the richest girl in town, is getting herself hitched up to wrong-side-of-the-tracks Craig Belanger, and *both* families are firmly against it! James, a young man whose Paw runs the general store, just sent off for a bride through one of them mail order houses out of Boston. Poor girl sat on a shelf all those months, and when they open up the box, turns out they sent the wrong item. Will anyone ever make it down the isle?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(12 females, 7-8 males, 0-5 extras)

PAW (m).....	The proprietor of the general store. <i>(113 lines)</i>
MAY (f)	His wife. <i>(95 lines)</i>
JAMES (m)	Their son. <i>(57 lines)</i>
ELLEN (f).....	A young woman about to be married. <i>(138 lines)</i>
GINGER (f)	An excitable bridesmaid. <i>(52 lines)</i>
SAFFRON (f).....	Another bridesmaid. <i>(42 lines)</i>
CINNAMON (f).....	Another bridesmaid. <i>(22 lines)</i>
GAIL (f).....	James' mail-order bride. <i>(48 lines)</i>
POSTMAN (m).....	<i>(10 lines)</i>
MOM (m).....	Ellen's Mother. <i>(50 lines)</i>
GRANDMA (f).....	Ellen's Grandmother. <i>(60 lines)</i>
GREAT GRANDMOTHER (f)	Ellen's Great Grandmother. <i>(90 lines)</i>
GREAT-GREAT GRANDMOTHER (f).....	Ellen's Great-Great Grandmother. <i>(17 lines)</i>
CLARA (f).....	A mail-order bridesmaid. <i>(22 lines)</i>

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MARA (f).....	Packed in the same box. (13 lines)
PREACHER (f).....	(30 lines)
CRAIG (m)	Ellen's fiancé. (75 lines)
FATHER (m)	Craig's Father. Not such a shining light from that same family. (27 lines)
BRACK (m)	His smile might be blinding, if only he had teeth. (47 lines)
SULTAN (m)	This role can double the postman. (11 lines)

SET DESCRIPTION

General Store - a long counter with a cash register on it near the back of the stage.. behind it, either shelves with "goods" on it, such as jars and boxes, or something can be painted. Around the stage can be things like pickle barrels, a few chairs to sit on. On the counter can be jars of candy and the like. The sides of the stage can also have shelves with "goods" or be painted to look like it. PAW should have an exit behind the counter, and be able to keep things under the counter as well, if possible. The scenes after the wedding can take place at the store, but if the store needs to be broken down to make room for the wedding scene, then they can just take place in front of the curtain, or in a smaller version of the store.

Restaurant - if a curtain can hide the back part of the stage, then the general store won't have to be moved. The restaurant can have a few tables and chairs. Checked tablecloths, or some other country design, will give it some flair, and some old timey chairs as well. Fun signs offering specials (steak and potatoes) can be around the stage. Since this is in the middle of act one, players can bring on chairs and tables, and the setup should be kept simple to minimize scene change time. Perhaps a Western tune can be played in between scenes.

Wedding - the author envisions an outdoor wedding rather than in a church, which will simplify setup. Some chairs can be placed behind the "aisle" for the spectators, and of course flowers and other wedding paraphernalia can also decorate the set. Weddings are not set up for the stage, so it's important

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to make sure that all characters can be seen by the audience, even if it means setting it up a bit different than a conventional wedding. If a full scale altar isn't possible, a podium or lectern of sorts, for the Preacher, will make a good substitute.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This is not so much a story about a wedding in particular as it is a glimpse into some eccentric people who live in a particular town. This provides an opportunity to create several memorable characters over and above the "stock western" characters people are familiar with. Each character has some personality traits that can stand out and blend with each other for a fast-paced, fun show. For instance, Paw is sort of cantankerous; James is naïve; Ginger is excitable.

Still, the threads of the story revolve around various couplings that may or may not take place. Making sure these are all well delineated will add to the success of the show. Ellen's marriage to Craig, and their families' opposition, is the major storyline. James' mail order bride is secondary, coupling Gail and Brack.

Also this play presents a lot of opportunities for costuming, what with the marriage clothing as well as some old western attire. Characters should wear what they feel is appropriate, but it doesn't necessarily have to be tasteful. Period costumes would be a nice touch, either way costumes should look "old time." Women shouldn't wear pants, for instance. Time wise, this play is more or less set in the early part of the century, or at least at a time where this was a remote outpost that was hard to get to, and hard to get out of.

Also, be aware that some parts of this tale aren't necessarily realistic, and find the humor in them: i.e. a mail order bride coming through the mail, or Great Great Grandma coming back from the grave to oppose the wedding, or the appearance of the Sultan near the end of the play.

The set can also allow for some creativity; the general store and the restaurant both can have fun signs all over, regarding merchandise, specials, hours, etc., all with an old, western flair.

PROPS

- ☐ Biscuits
- ☐ MAY opens the play with a needle, thread, and some orange material
- ☐ PAW gives out several bottles of pills, which are essentially full of lemon drops
- ☐ A catalogue for JAMES that gets passed around
- ☐ Sack of flour for GAIL
- ☐ Large bags of plaster, that are theoretically very heavy and dusty
- ☐ PREACHER has papers he hands to GAIL
- ☐ Menus for Act One, Scene Three
- ☐ Bubble Wrap/Packing Materials

ACT 1, SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The play takes place in the small town of Betsy's Corner, Montana. While it's not set at any time in particular, it's intended to give the impression of the early 20th Century, say 1915-1920. Scenes one and two are set in PAW and MAY's general store, so the set should strive for that old time traditional look. There's a long counter with a cash register on one end, behind it are shelves of goods for sale; other displays can be placed around in front or on the side of the stage. One entrance needs to be the front door, another, on the other side of the stage, the way upstairs. If possible there should be an exit behind the counter where PAW can go off and bring in his commodities.*

MAY: *(A middle aged woman who's spent a majority of her time out west. As the play opens, she's in a big rocking chair near the exit leading upstairs, got a needle and thread, sewing some material for a bridesmaid's dress.)* It's beginning to look a lot like spring out there again.

PAW: *(He's behind the counter organizing some goods. Crusty, chauvinistic, jack of all trades, he runs a lot of the town simply by running the store.)* This is Montana. We don't have spring in Montana.

MAY: *(Reminiscing.)* We did once, Paw. Twenty years ago. But when it warms up, it's weddin' season.

PAW: *(Usually more impressed with his humor than anyone else is.)* That's a sad time of year for a young feller.

MAY: We've had four this week already. I'm working my fingers to the bone making bridesmaids' dresses. They're so impatient.

PAW: Don't rush it - maybe you can put off some man's ball and chain for a few weeks.

Enter GINGER, SAFFRON, and CINNAMON, three bridesmaids, young women aged around 18-25.

GINGER: *(Enters, all too happy, and all too hyper; she tends to repeat herself a lot when she gets really excited; she runs up to MAY to examine her work.)* May, is it is it done yet?

MAY: Hold your horses, Ginger, I've only got so many thimbles.

SAFFRON: Where is it? I want to try it on!

CINNAMON: Me too.

MAY: (*Holds up a needle and thread.*) Here's what's done on it, Saffron. And I don't think you want to try it on in front of that letch of a husband I married.

GINGER: (*She's a bit of a spoiled brat.*) I told you, I wanted it wanted it today! The weddin's coming up and I need to be prepared.

MAY: You don't need to be prepared, Ginger. It's the fifth dress I made for you this month. Do you have this many girlfriends or are you just doin' the weddings for the meat loaf?

GINGER: I know. But I can't keep keep keep wearing the same dress over and over. Color scheme, you know. Gotta fit in.

MAY: (*Shaking her head.*) Ugly orange. Ellen wants you all to look like pumpkins so she can stand out like Cinderella's horse.

CINNAMON: (*Explaining urgently.*) My name's Cinnamon. I can't wear orange. (*Twirling around, showing herself off.*) I need to wear autumn brown.

GINGER: You can't you can't *you can't* wear brown. You have to wear orange. And be ugly ugly ulgy like us.

CINNAMON: I could never be that ugly. I tried once for Halloween an' everyone said "you still ain't near as scary scary scary as Ginger on a good hair day."

MAY: Y'all's dresses cost a fortune. Ellen's family comes from money. It's all silk, imported from China. (*More to herself, slowly.*) Ugly... orange...silk. (*To the girls.*) Now if you want this finished, stop bugging me and git back home.

GINGER: (*They start to leave, dejected, and GINGER remembers something.*) Oh, can I get a sack of flour?

MAY: (*Trying to get back to work.*) I dunno. You'll have to ask Paw over there.

GINGER: Paw, can I get...

PAW: I ain't your paw.

GINGER: Good for me. But what should I call you?

PAW: I don't remember thanks to everyone callin' me Paw these last twenty years. Look. We have one sack of flour left 'til next month when the riverboat delivery comes back up this way. You can have it, but I can't let it go for cheap.

GINGER: Well, all right. Mama wants to bake bake a pie.

PAW: Bake bake a pie, huh? All right. I'll bring it up for ya. *(He exits briefly.)*

SAFFRON: Calm down, Ginger. Just say it once.

GINGER: *(Takes a deep breath.)* I just get so excited about weddings. I can't help it. Now I want that pie.

MAY: Not if you're going to fit into that dress.

GINGER: Well, make it a size bigger. I'm not gonna forsake a pie... *(Proud.)* Not even for a weddin'.

PAW: *(Enters with a huge and heavy sack, and plops it on the desk, dust goes flying everywhere.)* Here ya go. Pie for everyone.

GINGER: *(Amazed.)* How big a pie do you think she's makin'?

PAW: It's the last sack we have. Take it or leave it. Actually, take it. It's too durned heavy for me to carry it back.

MAY: That's no way to treat a customer, Paw.

PAW: She ain't a customer... she's like a skeeter you can't swat off your backside. And I ain't *your* paw, neither.

CINNAMON: Well why does everyone call you Paw if you ain't anybody's paw?

PAW: I'm *somebody's* paw. Just can't always remember whose. Now that'll be five buck.

GINGER: Five bucks?

PAW: Take it or leave it.

GINGER: Oh, all right. But that's money I'm savin' for dancin' lessons.

CINNAMON: You'd do better to spend it on a pie.

GINGER: I'm gonna give *you* a piece where you can't chew it. *(GINGER plops down some money on the counter. GINGER and SAFFRON struggle to pick up the sack and try haul it out.)* See ya later, Paw.

SAFFRON: Drat, this is heavy. What kinda flour is this, Paw?

PAW: *(Gruff.)* I told you I ain't your-

SAFFRON: You're an aggravatin' miserly old toodle. I suspect you just might be. Come on Cinammon, give us a hand.

She does, begrudgingly. Exit SAFFRON, GINGER and CINAMMON, struggling with the bag.

MAY: *(Thinking it over.)* Ginger, Saffron, and Cinnamon. Spicy bunch. Now where'd you get that big ol' sack of flour?

PAW: *(He's done this before.)* We're out. It's plaster.

Enter JAMES, a young man, anxious and excited. JAMES is genuine, a bit innocent, "what you see is what you get" and wears his heart on his sleeve.

JAMES: Hey, did the postman come by with a package? I'm waitin' on somethin' real special .

PAW: He hasn't come by yet.

JAMES: *(Runs up to the counter.)* When do you think he'll be here, Paw?

PAW: I told you, my name ain't....

MAY: That's our son, Ambrose.

PAW: *(Looks at MAY like she's crazy.)* Ambrose?

MAY: That's *your* name! *(Cranky.)* Wasn't my idea.

PAW: Are you sure? I ain't been called that in years.

MAY: When we got married you told me never to call you Ambrose. You told me to call you Paw. So I call you Paw. I don't know *why* everyone else calls you that – *(To annoy him.)* Ambrose.

PAW: Where'd *he* come from?

MAY: *(Irritated.)* About twenty-two years ago. One of those *kids* you have runnin' around somewhere.

PAW: *(Frustrated.)* Well, who can remember? I've been workin' some long hours. It's the only general store in town, you know.

JAMES: *(Innocent and enthusiastic.)* Will ya let me know if a package comes? My wife is supposed to be showing up any day.

MAY: In the mail? We got enough wives around here as it is.

JAMES: Yep! Lookie here! *(Brings out a catalog. If possible, someone can design a cover for it that says "Brides by Mail" or something similar.)* See? Supposed to be here any day.

MAY: *(Appalled and astounded.)* Through a magazine!

JAMES: I can't get any of the girls around here interested in me. They're all too busy being bridesmaids. Like that Ginger girl, she likes it so much she don't wanna ever get married. She says you get the fun of the weddin' without the ball and chain of a husband. *(Thinks... shows off the catalog.)* Look at her, Mama. She cooks, she sews, she keeps a good house, and she comes from a good family. They're just getting rid of her over some Civil War disagreement.

MAY: The Civil War was years ago.

JAMES: Her mama holds a grudge. Wasn't even a north-south thing. It was some kinda east-west thing. But hey, it says pie crust is her specialty. *(Runs over to PAW.)* Speaking of pie crust; can I get me a sack of flour? I want her to bake me one up the minute she gets here! *(Remembers.)* The last pie I had tasted like plaster.

PAW: *(Back on his same speech.)* I only got one sack of flour left 'til the riverboat gets up here at the end of the month. I can't let it go for cheap.

JAMES: You mean you'd charge your own son?

PAW: I'd charge my own wife but she'd sew my pants too tight. *(Exits.)* A young man needs to learn some fie-nancial responsibility. *(Enters with another big sack; he plops it down and dust goes flying.)* Here.

JAMES: That's gonna be one big pie!

MAY: Crunchy, too.

JAMES: I don't know where I'm gonna find the chocolate creme to fill it up.

PAW: Five dollars. Take it or leave it. *(Gets out another big bag from under his counter, lands it on the counter with a thud)* Chocolate creme. Add water, stir, let it sit for a few days. I'll throw it in free for bein' my kid.

JAMES: I don't have five dollars. *(Shows the catalog to PAW.)* I spent it on the mail order bride.

PAW: Good thinkin'. Ain't no woman worth more'n five bucks nowhow.

JAMES: *(Takes out a wad of money.)* My girl's twenty nine ninety nine. Plus postage. Here. I got four fifty three. *You* take it or leave it.

PAW: Oh, all right. But you owe me 47 cents or I'm not comin' to the wedding.

MAY: He didn't even come to his own. We was married by subpoena.

JAMES: (*As he lugs out the sack.*) Y'all let me know when my package arrives.

MAY: Where'd you get all that plaster?

PAW: Oh, we're out of plaster. That's cee-ment. Should make for one flaky crust. (*Enter ELLEN, MOM, and GRANDMA, with GREAT GRANDMA coming up behind.*) Oh look, it's rich Miss Ellen Berenson and a whole pack of geese.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*To the others as they approach the counter.*) Ellen, tell that old gentleman... (*MAY laughs; PAW takes offense.*) that I need a sack of flour. I can't set up anywhere without a sack of flour.

ELLEN: You can't get flour here! They're always out of it.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Then we'll have to go somewhere else. Back where I come from you weren't officially livin' in a place till you made a pie. Spent 20 years in California and never settled in.

ELLEN: It's the only store in town. It's the grocery, the barber shop, the post office, the dentist, the dressmaker, the morgue, and the bakery.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: It can't be much of a bakery if they're out of flour.

MAY: We're out of dead people, but we're still the morgue.

PAW: (*Here he goes again.*) Sure, we have flour. I got one bag of it 'til the boat comes in up the river. But it's gonna cost ya.

GRANDMA: (*Not taking any guff.*) We just came in on the boat up the river. There wasn't a speck of flour on it.

MOM: (*She's looking at various objects in the store and trying to slip them into her purse.*) Lotta cement and plaster though. Just about sank during that rainstorm.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I want to make a pie. Pie makes me comfortable in my new surroundings. What is this place anyway?

MOM: It's called Betsy's Corners, Montana.

MAY: (*Correcting her.*) That's Betsy's Corner. This is the only corner there is.

GRANDMA: Who's Betsy?

MAY: Don't rightly know.

PAW: (*Fondly remembering.*) Oh, Betsy. I'll tell you who Betsy is!

MAY: (*Goes over to PAW and cuffs him.*) You'll do no such thing. (*To the women, trying to keep PAW quiet.*) She was just a girl who lived here, that's all.

PAW: (*With a smile, to MAY's dismay.*) She had a little saloon back yonder, if you know what I mean.

GRANDMA: (*Still very conservative.*) Not really.

PAW: You know. A parlor.

GRANDMA: A what?

PAW: A house...!

MAY: Oh drat it anyway, it was a gamblin' casino. Besty's Corner started out as a lawless town of shacks, gambling, loose women, and cattle rustlers. Now it's a civilized town with churches, schools, and a ballet academy.

PAW: It stinks.

ELLEN: That's why Mama brought me here. I'm on a ballet scholarship!

GRANDMA: You can't gamble on ballet. I'd rather have horse racing.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Who needs all that ballet! After I finish a pie I lose my balance. (*Starts to fall over.*)

MOM: (*Picks her up.*) You both promised to behave yourselves if I brought you up here.

ELLEN: May, this is my grandma, and my great grandma. And my mom, but you know her.

PAW: Well you tell your great grandma that we're outta flour. (*Muttering to himself.*) The one day we're outa flour everyone wants to bake a pie. (*He starts to get belligerent.*) No one offers me any pie, so I don't see what the heck difference it makes to me if I have any flour or not. (*MAY calms him down.*)

MOM: I don't know what was in that last sack of flour you sold me, but I broke a tooth tryin' to get it down.

PAW: That's ok, I'm the dentist. Here, (*Hands MOM a bottle from behind the counter.*) take these, it's good for your teeth.

MOM: Felt like there was a rock in my stomach for three days.

PAW: That's ok, I'm the doctor too. And the geologist. Here take these, (*Hands her another bottle.*) it's good for your digestion.

MOM: It's the same thing!

PAW: (*Logically.*) It's all goin' the same place.

ELLEN: May... Grandma and Great Grandma came upriver from Nebraska to help celebrate my weddin'! Great Grandma didn't wanna go, but we told her there was a shuffleboard tournament goin' on.

GRANDMA: (*Not pleased.*) Upriver from Nebraska. There's nothing but lowlife upriver from Nebraska.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: When I was your age, they didn't have upriver from Nebraska. I kept asking my pappy, what's upriver from Nebraska? And he said, "nothin' girl, now hush up about upriver from Nebraska. Nothing up there but grizzly bears like the one that ate your cousin Zebediah." But I couldn't stop thinking about it. So one day I just got in a canoe and went upriver from Nebraska, all on my lonesome. I went up, and up, and up...

ELLEN: What did you find? We're not *that* far up.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: ...and up, and up, and up, and...

ELLEN: Great grandma!

GRANDMA: She's been telling that story for 40 years. I wish she *would* go upriver.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Before I knew it, I was smack in the middle of the Arctic Ocean. Came down on the other side into Siberia. Took my pappy 20 years to find me.

GRANDMA: (*Trying to steer her out of this conversation; if there's another chair on stage, GRANDMA can try to sit GREAT down in it.*) Okay Mom, I think it's time to-

ELLEN: No! I want you to meet Craig.

GRANDMA: Who's Craig?

ELLEN: Craig Belanger! (*Dreamy.*) The man I'm going to marry. The reason you're here. The (*Dreamier.*) reason *I'm* here!

GRANDMA: I hope he's a nice boy.

ELLEN: He's a wonderful boy. I met him in ballet class! He's got the sexiest *pas de deux*!

MOM: (*Denying all of it.*) His whole family's trashy. I tried talking her out of it.

ELLEN: Mama!

MOM: Not the wedding, the *pas de deux*. But I'm getting to the wedding. I just wanted to have mom and grandma with me to gang up on you.

GRANDMA: Trashy! We come from old money, Ellen. (*As MOM slips something in her purse.*) We don't have room for trash in our lineage.

ELLEN: Craig's a fine young man. You can't blame him for his father.

GRANDMA: So he's gonna meet you at the general store? That's trashy already.

ELLEN: Oh, it's the hangout. (*Showing off the store.*) It's the malt shop. The church. The Jewish deli. The library. It's sort of all-purpose.

MAY: (*Still sewing, but looking up from it.*) You'd think with all that goin' on here, business would pick up a bit.

ELLEN: Ol' Paw there can't tell a sack of flour from a sack of plaster.

PAW: I ain't your Paw.

ELLEN: You might as well be. I have to come to you for everything. You're the doctor, barber, dentist, baker, chiropractor, pooper scooper, coroner, and recorder of deeds. But folks who want flour around here have to go to the next town upriver. (*offsTage, a sound of an uncooperative horse.*)

CRAIG: (*Heard offstage.*) Stop it, whoa! Slow down! Slowwww down. (*A big crash is heard.*) Ouch. I said slow down. Ow! (*Enters, rather disheveled.*) Uh... you're going to need a new window. (*Horse sound effect, as if it's laughing.*)

ELLEN: (*Excited, runs to CRAIG and presents him.*) That's him, Grandma!

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Looking outside.*) That's a horse!

ELLEN: No, here!

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Gets up and looks close, as if she can't see well.*) That's a horse! A palomino!

GRANDMA: (*Looking him over as well, rushing to judgment.*) He's trash!

ELLEN: No he isn't!

CRAIG: (*Admitting it, a bit.*) My pappy's kinda trashy, but I turned out culture-fied.

ELLEN: But they're high class trashy. They just don't have our kind of money.

CRAIG: (*Offering his hand.*) I'm Craig Belanger. Nice to meet all you fine young ladies.

MOM, GRANDMA, and GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Trash! (*All three turn their backs to him.*)

CRAIG: (*Going around the other side of them, and they turn around again in unison.*) Uh, nice to meet all you fine young ladies?

GRANDMA: (*Snooty.*) We're not speaking to you.

CRAIG: (*He tries it one more time, and they still turn around.*) Why not?

GRANDMA: We can hardly tell you if we're not speaking to you. (*Catches herself.*) I shouldn't have even said that much.

MOM: Shh! Stop speaking to him, if you're not speaking to him. He'll think you're speaking to him.

CRAIG: (*Still trying to face them.*) But-

GRANDMA: What did I tell you, young man?

CRAIG: Nothing really. You're not speaking to me.

ELLEN: Stop it! This is my fiancé! My intended.

GRANDMA: And just what do you intend to do with him?

ELLEN: Well... you know!

GRANDMA: (*Slaps CRAIG.*) You'll do no such thing.

CRAIG: I thought you weren't speaking to me.

GRANDMA: That doesn't mean I can't slap you.

GRANDMA, MOM, and GREAT GRANDMA look him over.

CRAIG: I'm not trashy. My father, now *he's* trashy. And my cousin, Brack? He's just a redneck who plays bluegrass.

GRANDMA: (*Scandalized.*) Bluegrass???

MOM: In our family! (*Mortified.*) ELLEN!

GREAT GRANDMA faints into a chair, GRANDMA gets out some smelling salts to revive her.

MOM: Why didn't you tell me? Next thing you know it's going to be ragtime!

PAW: Before this place turned 'spectable, they played ragtime on every corner in town.

MAY: (*Slaps him.*) There was only one corner.

PAW: But it was this one!

MAY: I took all the scrolls out of the player piano and sold them upriver.

MOM: Ellen, Grandma, Great Grandma, and I used to play in a string quartet. (*Points.*) Violin one, violin two, viola, and cello. Ever since me and Ellen moved to Betsy's Corner we've had to do it by mail.

CRAIG: How do you play by mail?

MOM: We pass notes.

GRANDMA: (*Staunch.*) We won't have bluegrass in our family.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Finally herself again.*) Don't mention that horrible music! When I grew up in Southern Tennessee-

ELLEN: I thought you grew up in Western Nebraska.

MOM: She just said she grew up in Northern Siberia.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I grew up wherever I feel like it. Now, when I grew up in Southern Alabama-

MOM: Tennessee...

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: We moved a lot. And you know why? It was to get away from those dagnabbed bluegrass bands! Everywhere you'd go in Tennessee you'd find a bluegrass band and a saloon. It was sinnin' on every corner. My daddy didn't wanna leave and Mama dragged him out by his ponytail.

CRAIG: I just want you to know that I love Ellen very much and-

MOM: Love?

MAY: In Montana? Out west you don't need love. You need backbone. You need perspiration. You need a man who will put a good roof over your head.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Barrels her way up to the counter.*) I just need a sack of flour. (*To ELLEN.*) I can't believe we just sailed all the way upriver to watch you marry that hooligan! I'm going home.

PAW: You can't. There's not a boat going down river for another month. (*Hands her a bottle.*) Here, take one of these. You'll calm down.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*On a roll, beating the countertop.*) I don't want to calm down! Do you have anything to make me more cantankerous? (*He hands her something.*) It's the same thing!

PAW: May, there, she puts 'em in her pie. No one's been sick in months.

MAY: What are we going to do about that flour? This town can't survive without pie and bread.

PAW: I'm just about out of plaster, too.

GRANDMA: There were fifteen bags of it on the boat. Until it rained.
Now it's all hardened up like a pie crust.

ELLEN: Look. Craig is the man I'm going to marry, and I demand you treat him with respect.

GRANDMA: Ok... (*Looks at CRAIG and starts to laugh.*) Respect!
(*To ELLEN, harsh, bringing GREAT into it.*) We're cutting you off!

ELLEN: Of what?

GRANDMA: The family inheritance! You won't get a penny! A dime!
A nickel!

ELLEN: What about a quarter?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Or a quarter! Either you call off the
wedding or-

ELLEN: I don't need the money.

GRANDMA: (*Everyone looks at ELLEN shocked, GRANDMA
continues after a stunned silence.*) You don't need the money?

ELLEN: (*Can't see what the big deal is.*) No.

GRANDMA: (*Picking up steam again.*) Pardon me missy, but... you
need the money. (*To MOM, who's shoplifting something again.*)
How could she not need the money? (*Sees MOM steal
something.*) Get me one, too.

ELLEN: I have a job as a school teacher. And I work at the gambling
house on weekends. Sometimes I get so confused I teach the
cowboys to read and the kids to play blackjack. I'd rather have
Craig than your lousy two million dollars.

CRAIG: (*In shock.*) Two million dollars?

ELLEN: (*As if it doesn't matter.*) Two million dollars. They think they
can buy me for a lousy two million

CRAIG: (*He wants it!.*) For two million dollars, we'll call it off. (*Starts
to approach GRANDMA, but ELLEN pulls him back.*)

ELLEN: CRAIG!

CRAIG: (*To ELLEN.*) Hey, it's ok. Maybe she'll catch typhoid or
something. You get the money, *then* we get married. I can wait.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Turns CRAIG around.*) Listen here, young man. I've lived through the Russian Revolution, the Mexican Revolution, the Crimean War, the French and Indian Wars, and the sack of Troy. Which, by the way, I'd trade for a sack of flour. (*Continuing.*) I've suffered cholera, diphtheria, whooping cough, polio, and influenza from Thailand, China, Hong Kong, Laos, Cambodia, and (*Scandalized, as is everyone else.*) San Francisco! (*Close up to CRAIG.*) I'm here for the duration, honey.

ELLEN: Craig! I can't believe you're putting money ahead of our love!

CRAIG: Well I'd sure love two million dollars! You could quit your job at the casino, and I could quit my job at the-

MOM: At the what? You don't even have a job.

CRAIG: (*Proud.*) Well, if I did, I'd quit it.

GRANDMA: This is ridiculous. Come on, Mom. We're going back down river to Nebraska where it's civilized.

PAW: I already told ya, there's no boat for another four weeks. You might as well settle in and make a pie.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: All right. Where's the grocery?

PAW: Where do you think? But I'm running low. I'll have to charge ya extra.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Because you can't keep anything in stock? I don't think so.

PAW: What do you mean?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: You can't just raise your price if it's the last one, buster. You're punishing your customers for your inability to properly stock products.

PAW: I always do that. Here, take one of these, you'll calm down. (*She takes one.*)

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Not giving it a chance.*) I don't feel calm.

PAW: (*Takes it back.*) Oops, that's a laxative. Here, try this.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*She takes one.*) Last one my patoot! I've been around a long time. I know every trick in the book. (*About the pills.*) These are tasty! Do you have any more?

PAW: Down to my last bottle.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Snatches them.*) Give me those!

Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE: *Still in the general store. PAW is working behind the counter. ELLEN and her family are over in a corner discussing things, heatedly. CRAIG is off by himself, watching ELLEN and her family.*

POSTMAN: *(Enters pushing a large box, out of breath. GAIL is inside.)* Package! *(He's trying to push it in, with difficulty.)* It's a beaut.

MAY: *(Comes in.)* What's in it? Another "sack of flour?"

POSTMAN: *(Mysterious.)* I think it's human cargo. Kept screaming at me "this side up!" Apparently she's been turned on end since Omaha. Come on, Paw, lend a hand. *(PAW helps him push it inside.)*

ELLEN: *(Excited, but a bit selfish.)* Is that for me? I'm expecting some weddin' presents, you know. From down river.

POSTMAN: Oh yeah, some stuff came in, but I kept it for my wife. *(ELLEN start to fume and runs at the POSTMAN, who backs her off.)* Kidding! *(ELLEN returns to her family, POSTMAN whispers to PAW.)* No I ain't.. *(POSTMAN exits.)*

MAY: *(Examining the box.)* Looks like it's for my son.

JAMES: *(Enters excitedly.)* Is that my wife?

ELLEN: *(Runs to the package.)* Is it that china I ordered from China?.

MOM: *(Shaming her.)* From China! No one orders china from China.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I got a flu from China. But *china* from China! China comes from Japan.

JAMES: *(Excited.)* I bet it's my wife! *(Shows his magazine to everyone.)* See? I got me a woman! Paw, git on over here and help me start my family! *(PAW comes and they push the box in closer to center stage, JAMES just stands there and admires it.)* There she is! Isn't she pretty?

MAY: *(Kicks it.)* It looks kinda beat up.

JAMES: Stop that, Mama, that's my wife you're talking about.

MAY: I mean the box, you idiot! How's she gonna make it through all this?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Joins in.*) This is nothing! When I was younger we had to smuggle ourselves out of Russia during the Russo-Japanese War. They put me in a box and carried me on camel-back through Afghanistan and Persia until they finally put me on a boat to San Francisco where I caught that durned flu. (*Kicks it.*)

GAIL: (*From within.*) Ow!

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: She'll be fine.

JAMES: I had it sent parcel post. Overnight cost a fortune at her weight.

CRAIG: You ordered your bride by mail? And I thought *my* family was trashy.

GRANDMA: That's because your family *is* trashy!

CRAIG: No. (*Kicks the box.*)

GAIL: (*From inside.*) Ow!

CRAIG: *This* is trashy.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Where I come from, *everyone's* trashy unless they're worth about two million dollars.

MOM: Well where exactly *do* you come from?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: It was a very exclusive area in Virginia. It was so exclusive, we were the only ones who lived there.

MOM: Why did you come out west?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Didn't like the neighborhood. Wasn't safe.

MAY: Well, come on boy, are you gonna open it up?

JAMES: I guess so. Anyone have a knife?

ELLEN: Ouch! Better just tear it.

JAMES opens the package as they all crowd around it, they pull off bubble wrap, newspaper, and other packing materials, and finally GAIL, a young woman, pops out, kind of frazzled. She takes a deep breath.

GAIL: Whew! That was a long ride. First off, who kicked me?

GRANDMA: (*Points to CRAIG.*) Trashy boy over there.

GAIL: (*Kicks him, he yelps in pain.*) Now, who's James?

JAMES: Uh, that would be me. Who are you?

GAIL: I'm Gail. Gail Cheevers. You sent for me. (*Throws her arms around him.*) I'm your new bride! (*To MAY, high energy.*) Are you the dressmaker? You look like a dressmaker. We'd better get to plannin'.

MAY: (*Sees JAMES isn't happy.*) Honey, what's wrong?

JAMES: (*Looking from GAIL to his catalog.*) That's not what I ordered.

PAW: Hey, if you don't want her I'll take her. My old lady's gettin' kinda cranky lately.

MAY: It ain't cranky. It's reality.

PAW: (*Brings out a bottle, hands it to JAMES.*) Here. Give her some of these. It's love potion.

MAY: Why don't you try some, Paw?

PAW: (*To MAY, thinkin HE's funnier than she is.*) Because if it works, that means me and you start makin' out again. Anyway it's all just lemon flavored yogurt drops.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I thought I got your last one.

PAW: I found some more under a sack of flour. (*Everyone turns around expectantly.*) My last sack of flour.

JAMES: Naw, she ain't right.. (*Shows the catalog to his parents.*) This is what I ordered. (*Points to GAIL, disappointed.*) Not that!

MAY: (*Offended at first, then agrees.*) You're right. That's not it.

PAW: (*Looks at the catalog as well.*) You got cheated.

ELLEN: (*Offended.*) I can't believe the way you treat women like groceries- (*JAMES shoves the catalog in her face.*) Oh! You're right. Send it back.

MAY: Did you buy her off them clearance pages? They just pick any ol' thing off the rack and shove it in a mailer.

GAIL: Wait a minute. (*Looking through the catalog, flipping a few pages back and forth.*) Oh! No wonder!

JAMES: No wonder *what*? What happened to you between this (*Points to the magazine.*) and that? (*Points to her face.*)

GAIL: That's my cousin Jenny. She got married three years ago. They should have taken her out of stock. (*Proud.*) Someone special ordered her from Seattle. She did real well for herself.

JAMES: (*Confused, a bit.*) She's the one I want! Can't I just put her on backorder?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I was a mail order bride once. Spent 10 years in Algiers serving The Sultan in a harem. I was wife number 279. I escaped just before he got to me. (*Reminiscing.*) I bet he's still in love with me.

GRANDMA: (*Insistent, trying to calm GREAT down.*) We grew up on a farm in Iowa.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Abrasive.*) We never lived in Iowa. (*Pointing to GRANDMA.*) She's going senile.

GRANDMA: We were in Iowa. I don't know where *you* were. Look. I'm tired and I need to rest. That boat upriver was stressful. We used bags of plaster for pillows.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Not to mention... (*Mimes rowing a boat.*) Row! Row! Row!

GRANDMA: That's what you get for buying a cheap ticket.

GAIL: I brought this along. They said I might need it.

Brings a sack of flour out of the box. JAMES grabs it, GREAT GRANDMA tries to get it from him.

JAMES: (*Holding it over his head.*) You keep off it, you old lady!

GRANDMA and MOM pull GREAT GRANDMA away and force her to take a lemon drop pill.

GAIL: You can't keep it unless you marry me. It's sort of an incentive. And if I go back you have to pay a 20% restocking fee.

JAMES: I hope you brought some baking powder too. It's hard to get commodities up here. 'Cept Paw's never low on whiskey.

GRANDMA: Where's the nearest hotel? I need a nap after all this.

PAW: It's right upstairs. Room next to ours.

MAY: Get some earplugs. Paw snores.

GRANDMA: I grind my teeth.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I sing opera.

PAW: In your sleep?

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: Yep. If this is Friday, it's *La Traviata!* (To CRAIG.) Young man, we have enough money that we can put a stop to this wedding. In my day I was known as The Wedding Stopper. If it wasn't for me that sultan would have had 400 wives. (Goes up to GAIL.) You should set your sights a bit lower.

MAY: (Coming between GREAT and GAIL.) I better see you to your room.

Exit MOM, GRANDMA, and GREAT GRANDMA, and with MAY leading them.

CRAIG: (Shouting upstairs.) Ellen's the girl for me. I won't be bullied out of it. (He takes the catalog and starts looking through it.) But, (His eyes open wide.) Plan B, just in case.

ELLEN takes that and tosses it away.

PAW: (Looking over GAIL.) So what are you gonna do with her? You gotta either marry her or send her back. And that box is all ripped up.

JAMES: I can't send her back. I can't afford the shipping.

GAIL: Well you better make up your mind. I don't want to be left out of the next edition.

PAW: (In her defense.) She's got a sack of flour.

GAIL: (Explaining.) It's sort of a gift with purchase.

JAMES: Well can I just keep the flour? No obligation?

GAIL: (Taking the flour back.) The flour stays with me. Oh, and there's a preacher comin' in the mail in a few days.

JAMES: A preacher?

GAIL: Yep. They need proof of the wedding. Now let's just get to know each other. (Holds up the flour.) I wanna see which of the two of you is smarter, you or the sack of flour. (They talk together in a corner, quietly.)

MAY: (Enters.) Well, that herd o' cattle is settled in. (Sees CRAIG sulking in a chair, and goes to him.) What are you so sulky about, Craig? Those old ladies' crabbiness is contagious, ain't it?

CRAIG: I feel like the sick horse at the Kentucky Derby.

MAY: *(Takes CRAIG aside.)* Craig, if you go and get yourself hitched up with Ellen, you're gonna have Mama, Grandma, and Great Grandma on your back for the rest of your life. And there ain't no man strong enough to stand when four generations of females are squattin' on your spine. You're gonna need a quadruple wedding, and I don't have time to sew for all those bridesmaids. *(Sound of a horse outside, and a loud crash. Everyone is startled.)*

PAW: *(Looking towards the door.)* Oh, here comes trouble. Craig's trashy pappy and cousin Brack.

Enter CRAIG's FATHER and BRACK, very cowboy-ish, dirty, with torn clothes and rough demeanor.

FATHER: *(Barging in, to CRAIG, pulling him up out of the chair without any salutation.)* Listen boy! I'm gonna tell you just one more time! Unless it don't take, then I'm gonna tell you just one more time *again*. I don't want you marrying that girl! *(Sees the rest of them.)* Oh, howdy by the way. I aint got time for pleasantries, and I'm no good at 'em anyway.

CRAIG: Dad!

BRACK: Yeah. We won't have you marrying money.

CRAIG: Brack?

FATHER: *(Annoyed with all this.)* She's respectable. She's elegant. I don't want that in my family. Sets a bad example.

BRACK: Wait a minute! Hold off on that Ellen stuff for a minute. *(Looks up and down GAIL and approaches her dangerously.)* What have we here?

GAIL: *(As if she's helpless.)* Stop it! *(pushes him off.)* JAMES! Get him away from me.

JAMES steps in, BRACK holds him off with one arm.

BRACK: Lookie here! Lookie lookie lookie... *(He reaches out for GAIL and she pulls away, afraid.)* Is that a sack of flour? We don't get that 'round these here parts! *(Roughly grabbing the flour.)* I'm gonna take this an' have Sissy bake us a pie!

JAMES: *(Angry, as if they're gonna have a gunfight.)* That's my sack of flour. Besides, if you take the sack, Brack, you have to marry the girl.

BRACK: I ain't the marryin' kind. So I'll let you off this time. *(Hands JAMES the flour, and GAIL swipes it from him.)* Well I *would* be the marryin' kind, but I can't find any of marryin' kind who wants to marry me.

JAMES: Then you're back to plaster pie crust. Now if you'll excuse us, we're trying to get to know each other before the wedding.

They talk quietly, out of the way.

BRACK: I ain't got 'nuff teeth left ta chew it with. I eat applesauce, if it ain't too crunchy. *(Back to CRAIG.)* Now look, Craig, your paw and I come to tell ya one more time, you gotta change your mind. *(He takes the catalog off the floor.)* See? Here's a nice one. Here's another one. Says she's sober up to twice a week and she comes with a butter churn. *(Looks a bit longer.)* Hey, maybe I should buy me a bride. *(To FATHER and PAW.)* Any of y'all got \$14.99 I can snag off ya?

FATHER: Give me that! *(Snatches the catalog away and slams it on the counter. CRAIG tries to speak, but FATHER stops him.)* Do you know what'll happen if you marry Ellen?

CRAIG: *(Hopeful.)* You'll stop speaking to me?

FATHER: Your maw will become plumb impossible. She's going to want the same thing. The fine china, the bed spread, the indoor plumbin'. Next thing you know she'll be too good for me. Now you go tell Ellen it's off and find yourself a trashy girl like I did.

PAW: We don't have trashy girls here in Betsy's Corner.

FATHER: I found me one and so can he. Course, mine wasn't from Betsy's Corner. Found her upriver in Clara's Closet.

PAW: Who's Clara?

FATHER: Betsy's mama. Had a place up yonder way there. If you wanted to get married, you just knocked on the door and said "Howdy, Clara, I'm a poor stranger in need of some female companionship." She had fourteen daughters, so the first one that came downstairs, that's the one you got! Once word got out, men came from all over Montana looking for a bride. Clara ran out faster than you can say Jack Robinson.

CRAIG: Why would anyone say Jack Robinson? Especially fast?

FATHER: It's a saying, you idiot. Not one actually says it.

CRAIG: How can it be a saying if no one says it?

BRACK: Oh, you and your bein' smart. *(Goes to MAY with the catalog.)* Here. Help find me a wife. *(MAY looks at him and starts laughing.)* That's not funny. I deserve love, respect, and romance.

MAY: *(Laughing.)* No you don't!

BRACK sulks away with the catalog, paging through it. GINGER, SAFFRON, and CINNAMON enter.

GINGER: *(Too excited.)* We were looking looking looking for Ellen. I heard her family just arrived.

SAFFRON: Calm down. I hate it when you talk in threes.

MAY: Ellen just went upstairs to the hotel.

GINGER: I didn't know there was a hotel here.

MAY: *(It's obvious.)* It's upstairs next to city hall and the county jail. *(Hollering from upstairs, with a lot of clanging.)* Get us out of here! *(Shrugs it off.)* Oops.... Must've put 'em in the wrong room.

CINNAMON: *(Goes up to CRAIG, not very nice.)* Who are you?

CRAIG: I'm Ellen's fiancé.

CINNAMON: Well I'm the new bridesmaid, and I don't approve.

FATHER: He *thinks* he's Ellen's fiancé. *(To CINNAMON.)* You look trashy. He oughta marry you. *(CINNAMON is offended and tries to look elegant.)* Now you're just trashy tryin' to look elegant.

CINNAMON turns her back to him.

GINGER: Ellen kept it a secret and now I know why. You're part part part of that trashy Belanger family.

CRAIG: Who are you?

GINGER: I'm Ginger. I'm a bridesmaid. So get used to it.

CRAIG: Get used to what?

GINGER: (*Indicating SAFFRON and CINNAMON.*) We're more important than you are. I'm having a dress hand made. You're just wearing some catalog tux.

JAMES: (*Laughing.*) Heck, I'm having a tux hand made and getting a catalog wife. (*Introducing her.*) This's Gail. If we get married, y'all can bridesmaid for us as well.

FATHER: See? (*Moving all the bridesmaids around.*) Is that the kinda stuff you want to marry into?

CRAIG: I'm not marrying them! I'm marrying Ellen.

GINGER: Ellen and I are best friends. (*Snooty.*) So you'll be marrying us both. And I don't want you for a husband.

SAFFRON: (*Goes up to BRACK, interested.*) Who are you?

BRACK: (*Never had a girl interested in him.*) Who am I?

SAFFRON: I said, who are you? You're cute!

BRACK: (*Not sure what to say.*) Me? Cute? (*FATHER laughs uproariously.*) Stop it!

FATHER: Sorry. (*Stops for a minute, then starts to laugh again.*)

BRACK: Will you stop being trashy for just one cotton pickin' gol' darned minute? I got a purdy girl interested in me. Don't mind Mr. Belanger over there. He ain't got no manners. (*Too proud.*) And I learned everything I know from him.

SAFFRON: Manners are for the rich. I want a cowboy.

BRACK: Well, I can't do much. I can't ride a horse, I can't rope a cow, and I can't even grow a petunia what without it dying in July.

SAFFRON: (*Flirty.*) Well then what *do* you do?

BRACK: (*Trying to flirt back, but no good at it.*) Nothing really. I used to chew tobacco 'til I busted my teeth on a chocolate cream pie. Now I just eat fried mush and applesauce mosta the time. That tobacco rots out your teeth, but round here a pie crust saves ya the trouble.

SAFFRON: Cream pie? My specialty.

GINGER: (*Pulling SAFFRON away.*) Now Saffron, I won't have you dating and getting married right before Ellen's wedding. She's the center of attention, and you know she doesn't want you to ruin that by having your own personal life.

SAFFRON: But... I met a nice gentleman. And that's hard here in Betsy's Corner.

GINGER: (*Getting excited.*) This wedding's about about about Ellen. She don't want nothin' to take the attention from her.

JAMES: Hey, this seems like quite a piece of wedding y'all got goin' on. Can we latch ours onto it?

GINGER: Heavens no! What are you going to bring bring bring down the aisle? That sack of flour?

JAMES: If you let us marry with ya, I'll let you use it for the weddin' cake. Otherwise you get one out of cee-ment. If it's a three tiered cake, you can use it for your front steps.

GAIL: So you *are* going to marry me then?

JAMES: I can't afford to send ya back, and (*Goofy.*) you *did* come with a sack o' flour. I just hope you like bluegrass. Round here that's all we play. (*GAIL starts to panic.*) I got me a banjo, and me and my buddies, we just spend all our time outside a-pickin' and a-grinnin'.

GAIL: (*Sweetly.*) My daddy played bluegrass the whole time I was growin' up. (*Not so sweetly.*) That's why I wanted to be a mail order bride.

JAMES: We only play outside in the summer. It gets mighty cold up here in Montana durin' the winter. Then we play inside. (*Romantic, to GAIL's chagrin.*) All night long.

GAIL: (*Jumps back into the box she came from.*) Get me out of here!

JAMES: Hey! How's about if we get you a guitar and teach you to strum?

GAIL: (*Peeps out of the box, angry.*) I don't strum. (*Goes back in.*)

SAFFRON: (*To BRACK.*) So, are you busy tonight?

BRACK: Nah. I got some chickens to pluck, that's about it. Oh, and there's some hawks I gots to castrate. After that, I'm kinda free. You can help me if you want with the pluckin' and the castratin'.

GINGER: (*Almost threatening, getting between them.*) Stop that, Saffron! You can't have a date until Ellen gets married.

SAFFRON: And let him get away?

GINGER: I don't think he's going anywhere. (*Short pause, as she looks him over.*) Ever.

MAY: Wished he'd go to a dentist. Then again, what could they do now?

BRACK: (To SAFFRON.) Ma'am? I can call ya ma'am, can't I ma'am?

SAFFRON: Can you call me ma'am about seven o'clock tonight?

BRACK: On the double!

SAFFRON: I'll see you then at the restaurant. Come on, Cinnamon, if Ginger won't, you gotta help me spruce up. And if I don't like him, then you can have him.

CINNAMON: Well I hope you like him. (Exit SAFFRON and CINNAMON.)

GINGER: (Following them out.) I'm tellin' tellin' tellin' Ellen! (Exit.)

BRACK: Hey... uh... Ms. May? I never had a real date before. What should I do?

MAY: (Looks him over, and tries to straighten him up. As she does, dust goes flying.) Brush your... tooth. Get some new clothes. Shave. Cut your hair. Buy her some chocolate. Clean your fingernails. Get some new shoes. Learn to read. Use some manners. Don't be trashy. And above all, be yourself.

PAW: And you can do that all right here. We're the dentist, the tailor, the barber, the chocolatier, the manicurist, the cobbler, and the one room school.

BRACK: All by seven o'clock?

MAY: All by seven...seven-thirty at the latest. We better get started! (She pulls him off stage. GAIL peeps out of the box.)

PAW: Sack of flour, huh. (He laughs an evil little laugh.) Can't wait 'til you're my daughter-in-law.

GAIL sinks back down, lights go down, and suddenly a metallic clanking starts up.

MOM: (From upstairs.) I said, let us out of here!!!!

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT START: At a restaurant, set up like an old time Western diner. A sign such as PAW and MAY's *Eatin' Place*, or *Good Eatin'*, can be up somewhere on a wall or door. There are a few tables, perhaps with checked table cloths. The same sound effect of a horse and breaking

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glass is heard from backstage. CRAIG and ELLEN enter and take seats. They pick up some menus that are already on the tables, and look it over. If possible, there can be a "pass through window" to the kitchen, where MAY sticks her head out on occasion, if not, she can simply enter and exit from the side.

CRAIG: (*Looking at the menu.*) I don't know what I'm gonna do about Paw and Brack.

ELLEN: (*Looking as well, as they do this scene, they look over the top and around the side of the menus, trying to see each other.*) I don't know what I'm gonna do about Mom, Grandma, and Great Grandma.

CRAIG: Well, I'm not worried about the two million dollars. I just want to be with you. (*Offers a suggestion.*) Maybe we should elope upriver.

ELLEN: I've never been upriver. I don't want to wind up in Siberia like Great Grandma.

CRAIG: I was just thinking the next town up.

ELLEN: These towns are so small, you miss one or two and you're in Siberia.

CRAIG: Can we elope down river?

ELLEN: My whole family lives down river. (*Sweetly.*) Craig, it's not about eloping.

CRAIG: (*Romantic, holding her hand across the table.*) It's about us being together, no matter what.

ELLEN: (*After a short pause, she takes her hand away, gets up and gets animated.*) No, it's about me having a really big wedding. Bridesmaids, cakes, flowers, and full orchestra with brass, woodwinds, strings, chimes, and timpani.

CRAIG: An orchestra?

ELLEN: (*Bangs on the table for emphasis, still grand.*) I wanted to bring in the Boston Symphony and have them serenade us from a riverboat.

CRAIG: What about a bluegrass band?

ELLEN: My family would faint. And you can't play bluegrass in the symphony. (*Very hick.*) "Hey buddy, pass me that bassoon, I feel a song comin' on." Nope. Won't work.

CRAIG: I think an orchestra would just about give Brack a coronary. You can get away calling a violin a fiddle, and you can call a string bass a bass fiddle, but but once you get to the the violas you're pretty much sunk. (*Tries to make her understand his point of view.*) Look Ellen, I can't help the family I come from. I know they're trashy, uneducated, and largely toothless, but that doesn't mean I don't love you. It just means we never get to have any corn on the cob.

ELLEN: (*Romantic.*) And I know my family is snooty, class conscious, and rich as can be. That doesn't mean I don't love you. (*More self-centered.*) But I still want the big wedding.

CRAIG: Are you sure? What's more important, the big wedding, or our love?

ELLEN: Hey, I can love you for the rest of my life. But I'll only get one crack at the big wedding. (*Kind of cranky.*) You don't even have to be there.

CRAIG: What?

ELLEN: Oh come on. What does the groom have to do with a wedding?

MAY: Y'all gonna order anything or just yak about the weddin'?

CRAIG: (*Can't believe it.*) You again?

MAY: Yep. We just took over the restaurant.

CRAIG: Is there anything you *don't* do?

MAY: Yeah, there's some things you never get around to.

ELLEN: What's that?

MAY: We work all day at the general store and all night at the restaurant. You figure it out! Now what do you want?

CRAIG: I just want a soda and a-

MAY: We're out.

CRAIG: But-

MAY: We're out. We got steak and potatoes and lemon yogurt. (*Calling back, taking their menus and laying them back on the table.*) Two steak and potatoes, Paw! And lemon yogurt for desert.

CRAIG: What kind of restaurant is this?

MAY: It's a steak, potato, and lemon yogurt kinda diner. It's also the only one in town. So you better be careful. If y'all's families find you here you're in a peck of trouble. (*Sweetly, as if they had a choice.*) Now you let me know what y'all decide on. (*Exit.*)

Enter BRACK and SAFFRON. HE doesn't look much different!

BRACK: So what do you think? *(Pats himself, and again, dust goes flying.)* I got myself all cleaned up for you.

SAFFRON: Oh, you didn't have to. I like you just the way you are.

BRACK: What way is that?

SAFFRON: Smelly and illiterate. *(Rationalizes.)* I have odd taste in men. *(They sit down, and take menus.)*

BRACK: *(He stares blankly at menu, turning it to different sides.)* I can't really read it. I'm just doin' it for show.

SAFFRON: If Ginger or Ellen sees us we're in a peck of trouble. These brides act like it's all about them.

ELLEN: *(Turns around, admonishes her.)* Saffron!

SAFFRON: Oops. Too spicy for me. *(Tries to hide behind her menu, but ELLEN approaches her and pulls it away.)*

BRACK: This ain't a peck o' trouble. It's a bushell!

ELLEN: *(Scandalized.)* Are you on a date?

SAFFRON: I don't know. It depends if he pays or not.

BRACK: I dunno if I *can* pay. Us trashy folks don't have jobs, you know. We barter. *(A bit embarrassed.)* Well, sometimes we just steal.

ELLEN: My mother steals and *she's* not trashy! *(To SAFFRON, at the height of self-importance.)* You know you're not allowed to date anyone until my wedding. Everyone and everything thing has to focus on me!

SAFFRON: *(A bit too over the top.)* I can't hold out anymore. I can't deny myself love and companionship and the touch of a man, just because of your wedding!

ELLEN: Look at him, he's trashy!

SAFFRON: You're marrying his cousin! *(A bright idea!)* We'll be family! I'll have access to your grandma's money.

ELLEN: You'll have none of Grandma's money, because you're breaking off this date right this minute!

SAFFRON: I am not, and if you don't let up, I'm gonna get married out of spite!

ELLEN: Saffron, you git yourself on home! No, don't, that'll leave me with Brack. Well you can stay here but you can't talk to him. Just eat. (*Puts menus in front of their faces so they can't see each other.*) Nothing that's on the menu is in the kitchen.

She goes back to sit with CRAIG.

BRACK: (*Puts his menu down, and goes to CRAIG, pulls his menu down.*) Craig! What am I gonna tell your pappy?

CRAIG: You tell my pappy I don't care what he thinks.

MAY: (*Enters.*) What you all gonna have?

SAFFRON: You got steak and potatoes?

MAY: I'll check. (*As if she doesn't know.*) Paw? We got any steak and potatoes?

PAW: (*Enters, talks from the edge of the stage.*) I got one left. One steak, and one potato. You can have it, but it's gonna cost ya.

MAY: Stop it, Ambrose. You got three sides of beef rotting in the ice box. Now get off your lazy duff and start cookin'.

BRACK: I cain't chew steak and potatoes. Unless it's Gerber.

MAY: (*Indicating SAFFRON.*) One order of steak and potatoes, and (*Indicates BRACK and steers him back to his chair.*) a big order of lemon yogurt! Strained! (*Sees GAIL and JAMES, entering and choosing a table.*) Lookie here, it's turning into lovers lane.

GAIL: (*Sits at yet one more table, pouting.*) Look, I don't want to marry you, and that's final.

JAMES: Over the bluegrass? It's just hard to play Rachmaninoff on a cigar box. You can't get a Beethoven string quartet goin' with some rubber bands and a pop bottle.

GAIL: Yes, bluegrass. And you didn't even *want* me. You made me feel like merchandise.

JAMES: You *are* merchandise. Didn't even get a owner's manual.

GAIL: (*Hands him a booklet.*) Here.

JAMES: I think I know how to deal with a woman.

GAIL: You need to read every word.

JAMES: (*Hands it back.*) It's in Japanese.

GAIL: (*Whining.*) I wanna go back to Boston!

JAMES: It's not my fault they couldn't read my order form. Chances are I paid too much for ya anyway. Jenny was full price, and you're out of the "picked over and nobody wants it" bin. (*Trying to calm her down.*) Now let's get the steak and potatoes. Best thing on the menu.

Everyone starts checking their menus again. Enter MOM, GRANDMA, GREAT GRANDMA, on a mission. Everyone has menus in front of their face, and they start pulling them away and tossing them down.

GRANDMA: Where is that upstart filly?

MOM: She's over there. They're trying to hide.

ELLEN: (*Annoyed.*) We're in the only restaurant in town at dinner time. We're hardly trying to hide. (*Defiant.*) Instead, we're going to fan the flame! Flaunt the flare! We want the whole world to know.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: That you're marrying trash?

MOM: These are cute! (*Starts to take salt and pepper shakers off the tables and put them in her purse.*)

ELLEN: Mama, stop that!

GRANDMA: Oh, let her. That's how we made the family fortune! Kleptomania.

ELLEN: You said it was in cattle.

GRANDMA: We *used* to rustle cattle, but you can't really fit a full sized heifer into your purse. We steal and then we sell it at garage sales. In Western Nebraska, there's only one garage, and it's ours. Stole that, too.

CRAIG: Sounds like *you're* trashy.

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: (*Starts into another story.*) When I was a girl, I did 15 years for stealing a loaf of bread in Paris.

MOM: (*Through clenched teeth, SHE's had enough of this!.*) You did not steal a loaf of bread in Paris!

GREAT GRANDMOTHER: I did too. Back in 1792. Took my head out just before the guillotine dropped. And be glad too, or none of you would be here.

GINGER: (*Enters, at the doorway, with CINNAMON.*) Just in time! (*Aghast!*) SAFFRON! What are you doing doing with (*Gasps for breath.*) him!?!?



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