# The Tall Girls

a play about
playing basketball

Meg Miroshnik

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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***THE TALL GIRLS*** was first produced by the Alliance Theatre (Susan V. Booth, Artistic Director) in Atlanta, Georgia. The opening date was March 12, 2014. The performance was directed by Susan V. Booth, with sets by Chien-Yu Peng, costumes by Lex Liang, lighting by Pete Shinn, and sound by Clay Benning. The Production Stage Manager was Lark Hackshaw. The cast was as follows:

**JEAN** . . . . . Emily Kitchens
**ALMEDA** . . . . . Kally Duling
**INEZ** . . . . . Lauren Boyd
**LURLENE** . . . . . Veronika Duerr
**PUPPY** . . . . . Hayley Platt
**HAUNT JOHNNY** . . . . . Travis Smith

***THE TALL GIRLS*** was developed during a residency at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference in 2012 (Wendy C. Goldberg, Artistic Director; Preston Whiteway, Executive Director). The workshop was directed by Hayley Finn. The play was subsequently developed at La Jolla Playhouse as a part of their inaugural DNA Series in 2013. The workshop was directed by Juliette Carrillo.

## CHARACTERS

**JEAN –** 15 ½, *the strong forward.*

Cool-headed and decisive. A natural strategist. New to the sport.

**ALMEDA –** 14, *the shooting guard.*

Scrappy, muscular, and temperamental; most likely to intentionally foul.

**INEZ –** 17, *the small forward.*

Very little natural athletic skill, but a nurturing presence.

**LURLENE –** 16, *the center.*

Tall and lazy. Unlikely to practice or rebound. A boy-crazy liar.

**PUPPY –** 18, *the point guard.*

Small – very, very small. A little lady in the making, but a fast, nimble ball handler.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**

Handsome and much, much older.

## SETTING

Poor Prairie, a dusty town in an unnamed Midwestern state

## TIME

A mythical moment in the 1930s

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

***On height:***

The hierarchy of height in this play is as follows: Lurlene is the tallest; Jean is also remarkably tall; Almeda and Inez are of average height; and Puppy is very, very short. It will almost always be impossible to cast the play thus. I would therefore invite you to think of tallness as a state of mind, a way of being in the world.

***On basketball:***

The basketball games and scrimmages in this play will never proceed in the same way twice. That's the point. Embrace the liveness and unpredictability of a bouncing ball onstage.

I would recommend approaching the staging of these moments not as a choreographer, but a coach: Teach the cast a few plays to run as needed. That way, when a shot is missed, the performers can regroup by getting the ball back out to the point guard to call a new play. The stage directions in these sections indicate the arc of the story I am trying to tell through the game or scrimmage; the action described needn't be viewed as entirely prescriptive as long as that story is told.

The drills at the top of Scene 8 should highlight the skill and cohesion of the team. A few drills are suggested in the text, but these may be substituted with others if desired. Think of drills that will keep as many performers as possible in motion simultaneously.

The way each character plays basketball should be an expression of his or her true self.

***On language:***

The characters speak a musical, invented language meant to evoke a moment in history without attempting to represent it exactly.

*For my grandfather and his mysterious,*
*short-lived career as a basketball coach*



Douglas Sommerville and the undefeated 1934
Glyndon High School team (Glyndon, Minnesota)

## One

*(In darkness, the sound of:)*

*(A basketball dribbled on hard-packed dirt. Far away, initially, and then increasingly close. Slow, initially, and then with increasing speed.)*

*(Another ball joins in. And then another.)*

*(A ball hits a wooden backboard and rolls around a metal rim and back onto the dirt.)*

*(Another ball follows. And then another – all the while dribbling continues to create a thunderstorm of basketball.)*

*(A whistle flutters, futile, under the pounding of basketballs on wood and dirt and metal.)*

*(The sounds of a crowd cheering on a game enter, faintly. They intermingle with the sounds of a crowd in a train station.)*

*(The sound crescendos until it is overtaken by the whistle of a train and then a rush of train traveling closer and closer yet.)*

*(The swoosh of a train coming to a stop and a final whistle.)*

*(Silence.)*

*(As the lights come up, the faint sound of a single basketball dribbled on a dirt-packed court a mile away returns.)*

(**JEAN**, *a 15 ½ year-old girl, peers out toward the sound. She is tall and skinny, but dressed in the well-worn traveling suit of a much meatier woman. She wears a hat and gloves and there is a small trunk behind her.)*

*(Her skin, along with every other surface on the stage, is covered in a layer of red dust, which is stirred up occasionally by a breeze blowing through.)*

*(She takes off her hat and stands on tiptoe, straining to see the sounds.)*

*(She taps along to the rhythm of the beating basketball heart.)*

**JEAN**. Twenty-six beats for a half-minute.

Is fifty-two beats for a minute.

Is...three-thousand one hundred twenty beats for an hour.

*(She stops tapping.)*

Feels like.

More than my heart will hold out.

Here.

The place where I will never be found.

Here.

This…*grave town.*

*(As she speaks,* **HAUNT JOHNNY** *enters from a distance. He wears a hat pulled over his eyes and a dark suit. He carries a scratched-up suitcase and a round burlap bundle. He is a handsome man of indeterminate age, but is certainly many years older than 15 ½.)*

*(He stops when he sees* **JEAN** *on tiptoe, still some distance away. He watches her.)*

Poor Prairie, what a grave town.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. *(softly)* I saw you.

*(***JEAN** *turns sharply and sees* **HAUNT JOHNNY**. *She pulls on her hat and sits down next to her trunk. She is suddenly conscious of the dust on her face and begins frantically wiping at it.)*

On the train.

I saw you.

*(***JEAN** *looks down.)*

Only you were seated.

*(He looks at her legs.)*

So, I didn't see how nice and tall you are.
Seated.

*(***JEAN** *pulls her skirt over her legs and swings them behind the trunk.)*

Train came in more'n an hour ago.
What're you doing still hanging on?

*(***JEAN** *looks up.)*

**JEAN**. I might ask you the same.

*(He steps closer.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. You might.

*(A beat.)*

You asking?

*(***JEAN** *shrugs.)*

They got a telephone round there I been using.
And you?

**JEAN**. I don't think I ought to say.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Where you come from?
I saw you around Correctionville, but you looked to have been on for some time before.
What's bringing you up here to Poor Prairie?

**JEAN**. I don't think I'd like to say.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Small town –
I'll find you out sooner, not later.

*(A beat.)*

Whose suit you sporting?

**JEAN**. Mine now.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Woman who wore it out was a lot more woman than you.
Not as nice and tall, though.
Not many women are.

*(***JEAN** *slumps.)*

You ever heard of Babe Dublin?
Babe's Ballers?

**JEAN**. Sure.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. She's an old friend of mine.
Haven't let myself think on her in some time.
But I must say, you are bending my mind that way again.

**JEAN**. Don't believe it.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. It's true.
You've got her legs, the way the backs bulge out, squareish.

*(***JEAN** *puts her hands to the back of her calves, horrified.)*

**JEAN**. I meant: I don't believe you're friends with her.
Or, I don't believe she'd be friends with *you*.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. I lent a hand in the founding of the Ballers.
See, Poor Prairie's her hometown, too.
Her people used to live…

*(***HAUNT JOHNNY** *points out at the horizon.)*

There.

**JEAN**. There?

*(He looks at her.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. To your left.

**JEAN**. There.
Bet she never comes back.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. There?
No.

**JEAN**. Smart. Leave here and never look back.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Fresh arrived and directly spitting to leave.

**JEAN**. Would that I could.
But this is my grave town.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. *(laughing)* You sound like you come up here to get married.

**JEAN**. Something like.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. What's *something like* marriage?

**JEAN**. You look the sort to know.

*(***HAUNT JOHNNY** *crouches down to look under her hat at her face. He leans in.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Just a kid and already so grim.
Not like me.
*I* got a last best option.

*(***JEAN** *snaps.)*

**JEAN**. What are you doing up here?
No men in Poor Prairie.
Said the conductor.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Dusty land these days.
Drove the fathers Downstate.
But! I am fresh off an education.

**JEAN**. You are too old to be newly schooled.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. I took the long way.

**JEAN**. A long way that ends *here?*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Hometown.
I expect to find work here in a way I've got no right to expect from any other place.
But more than that there's –
You'll keep this close?

**JEAN**. Or else?

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. You'll have betrayed me.
I never spoke this aloud before.

*(***JEAN** *looks at him for a beat.)*

**JEAN**. Okay.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. I also come back for…

There's the sunsets.

**JEAN**. The sun sets everywhere.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Not like it do on that field over.

Right there, next to the school.

**JEAN**. There?

*(***HAUNT JOHNNY** *looks at her.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. To your left.

Stand out in that field after the school day in winter – not a tree in sight to break the view – and watch the world set fire for fifteen blazing minutes.

You'll *smell* it in Poor Prairie.

**JEAN**. The sun?

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Now you see why I've never told a soul.

*(***JEAN** *studies him.)*

**JEAN**. What does the sun smell like?

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Like whiskey flavor pipe smoke and cloves and orange peel and snow.

The sunset smells like heat and ice in Poor Prairie and I haven't been able to smell it anywhere else.

*(He takes another step closer.)*

This town'll work on you that way.

*(He sits down next to her.)*

You'll be tied into Poor Prairie before you can say "help".

*(They sit for a moment, eyes locked.* **JEAN** *breaks away.)*

**JEAN**. What's that one with the pounding coming from out behind?

Twenty-six beats for a half minute.

Looks like a barn.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. There?

That's a barn.

**JEAN**. Oh.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. That's a mile away.

**JEAN**. Never would guess.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. It's the flatness.

*(He scoots next to her.)*

And that one there –

**JEAN**. There?

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. There

*(He reaches out slowly, as if petting a strange dog, and takes her gloved hand.)*

*(She blinks wildly, but does not look at him as he moves her hand to the left.)*

There, to the left.

Is the farm where I grew up.

**JEAN**. I see.

*(Slowly,* **HAUNT JOHNNY** *peels off her glove.* **JEAN** *does not look at him.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. What's your name?

*(***HAUNT JOHNNY** *inspects her hand, holding it out, stroking her fingers, pulling her thumb and pinky apart.)*

*(***JEAN** *closes her eyes.)*

**JEAN**. Uh.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Or you don't like to say.

**JEAN**. Jean.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Jean, you have hard hands.

*(***JEAN** *opens her eyes.)*

**JEAN**. They didn't used to be.

*(He looks closer.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Hands get harder with the times.

*(He measures his own outspread hand against hers.)*

**JEAN**. What's your name?

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Johnny.
But they call me Haunt Johnny ever since I was small over there.

**JEAN**. Haunt Johnny?

*(He nods.)*

Because you are like to be a ghost.
I will blink.
And you will never have been here.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. But still you would not tell a soul about the sun smell?
Even if I were to be a ghost?

*(***JEAN** *shakes her head.)*

Good girl.

*(She looks down at his bundle.)*

**JEAN**. It's an odd shape bundle.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. I need something particular to keep my soul in.

**JEAN**. Can I see?

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. No.
Better you touch.

*(***HAUNT JOHNNY** *removes her other glove.)*

*(He picks up the bundle, balances it between his knees, and leads her hands down inside the burlap.)*

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. You got the feel for it?

**JEAN**. Is it a –

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. It is.
You play?

*(She shakes her head.)*

Never?

**JEAN**. They dropped the team in Brighton when I was nine.

**HAUNT JOHNNY**. Shame.
Being as nice and tall as you are.

*(Suddenly, the sound of a sputtering car engine.)*

*(***JEAN** *springs up, jumps away from* **HAUNT JOHNNY***, and attempts to put her gloves back on.)*

**JEAN**. God help me.

*(In one smooth motion,* **HAUNT JOHNNY** *sweeps up his bundle and suitcase and is gone.)*

*(When* **JEAN** *finishes putting on her gloves, she looks up to where he had been.)*

*(As she is looking at this spot,* **ALMEDA** *enters, running, from the opposite direction. She is a muscular 14 year-old and, though not small, is not as tall as* **JEAN**. **ALMEDA** *is barefoot, wears overalls, and is covered in dust and sweat; her hair is tangled and she chews bubblegum.)*

**ALMEDA**. Cousin Jean?

**JEAN**. Oh, you must be –

*(***JEAN** *offers her hand.* **ALMEDA** *circles her like an animal instead.)*

Almeda.

**ALMEDA**. Listen to you: Almeda.

Al's trouble enough.

You're looking the lady.

And they told me you were fifteen.

**JEAN**. And a half.

Sixteen in five months.

**ALMEDA**. Well, fifteen *and a half* sure don't look like you around here.

**JEAN**. The train's been in for more than an hour, I thought Uncle Malcolm –

**ALMEDA**. Left word for me, come to find out.

But I been out, so.

**JEAN**. Well, I have been waiting.

It was not a short trip.

**ALMEDA**. Do you look like this always?

*(***JEAN** *straightens the suit.)*

**JEAN**. It's a *traveling* suit.

Only when I travel.

*(***ALMEDA** *kicks the trunk.)*

**ALMEDA**. You got things don't look like that?

**JEAN**. Everything else.
It's my mother's suit.
Remember her by.

**ALMEDA**. So now you'll be after my ma's things, I s'pose.

**JEAN**. That's quite the hello.

**ALMEDA**. Aw, save the speech.
She ain't had nothing nice since I was still in swaddlers.

**JEAN**. That's some time ago now.
You must be –

**ALMEDA**. Fourteen.

*(A beat.)*

**JEAN**. Didn't know we were so close.

**ALMEDA**. Well, don't forget it now.
And don't forget this:
I don't need no mother.

**JEAN**. Is that so?

**ALMEDA**. Before my ma passed, she told me:
"Al, remember me for always."
And that's the last time anybody told me what to do and I sure ain't sorry for that fact.

**JEAN**. Oh, no?

**ALMEDA**. All my ma ever did is hold me back.
I been needing to run wild *for years.*
Haven't washed my hair since the burial.

**JEAN**. That recently?

**ALMEDA**. *(intended to provoke)* Mothers are unneedful, no-fun, miserable bitches.

*(A beat.)*

You ain't gonna dispute.

**JEAN**. Certainly not.
Do you think I *asked* my mother to send me away?

**ALMEDA**. So, we agree that neither of us wants you here.

**JEAN**. Sure.

**ALMEDA**. Okay, then. We're set.

**JEAN**. If you mind me, we'll be fine.

**ALMEDA**. What's that mean?

**JEAN**. Meaning, *Almeda:*

I am not your mother and I did not give you life, but you will mind me – or I'll make you wish yourself dead.

**ALMEDA**. You don't say.

**JEAN**. I just did.

Now get my trunk.

It was not a short trip.

And I have been waiting.

And I would like to be in bed by dark.

**ALMEDA**. Uh-huh.

**JEAN**. Yes?

**ALMEDA**. Yes.

*(***ALMEDA** *moves to the trunk and begins to wheel it off.)*

*(***JEAN** *picks up her suitcase, smug.)*

*(***ALMEDA** *stops, looks at* **JEAN***, calculatedly.)*

Oh, I'll just need to make a short stop on the way.

**JEAN**. In bed by dark.

*(***JEAN** *exits with her suitcase.* **ALMEDA** *watches her go. The sound of a rhythmic pounding of hard-packed dirt begins…)*

**ALMEDA**. Uh-huh.

*(Lights shift.)*

## Two

*(In darkness, a rhythmic pounding against hard-packed dirt.)*

*(A lantern up on* **INEZ***, a womanly 17 year-old of average height [like* **ALMEDA***, she is shorter than* **JEAN***]. She wears a loose-fitting light-colored dress and dark shoes; she pounds the hard ground with a shovel.)*

*(She pauses for a moment to wipe her sweaty, dusty forehead.)*

**ALMEDA**. Inez!

*(A beat. Muffled coughing offstage.)*

**INEZ**. *(a hiss) Over here.*

*(***ALMEDA** *enters.* **INEZ** *scoops up some broken-up earth with the shovel.)*

**ALMEDA**. Inez, I come special!

*(***ALMEDA** *pats the pocket of her overall bib as* **INEZ** *removes a jug from the ground.)*

**INEZ**. C'mon.

*(***ALMEDA** *runs to* **INEZ** *who playfights with her a little.)*

You loud mouth –

Hazel Shoots'll hear you all the way to Humboldt.

**ALMEDA**. Hazel the Has-Been and her shriveled-up old basketball.

**INEZ**. It was big of her to leave it behind for us, Al.

*(muffled coughing offstage)*

**ALMEDA**. You got your brothers and sisters to bed?

**INEZ**. And dug us up some swill.

We got the run of the plains tonight, girly.

**JEAN**. *(offstage)* Almeda!

**ALMEDA**. Urgh, I told her to stay put!

*Jean!*

**INEZ**. Who's the lady?

*(***JEAN** *enters, tottering in her heels.)*

**JEAN**. I need water.

**ALMEDA**. You'll see in day, it's just the suit.

**JEAN**. *(coughing)* Road was all dust.

**ALMEDA**. Inez is seventeen.

*(***INEZ** *hands* **JEAN** *the jug.)*

**JEAN**. Thank you!

*(***JEAN** *takes a huge gulp of the jug.)*

**ALMEDA**. And 5, 4, 3 –

*(***JEAN** *spits out a mouthful of liquid.)*

**INEZ**. She's quicker'n you counted on.

*(***JEAN** *makes retching sounds.)*

**JEAN**. Not water.

**INEZ**. Corn whiskey.

**JEAN**. *(low)* You will repent this.

**INEZ**. Nice and tall.
Where she come from?

**ALMEDA**. Back East.

**INEZ**. Why's she here?

*(***ALMEDA** *hands* **INEZ** *the jug.)*

**ALMEDA**. Meant to hold me and the farm down.

**INEZ**. Doesn't sum up.
Why would your Pa take on another mouth now?
I don't think this is about you.

*(***JEAN** *steps away.* **INEZ** *watches her.)*

There's more to this story than we know.

**ALMEDA**. I've come to be too much to handle, I heard Puppy Dibbit's mother say.

**INEZ**. Mrs. Dibbit's got a mind to make a name for herself. She went Downstate last week.

**ALMEDA**. The capitol?

**INEZ**. For a committee.

**ALMEDA**. What's the committee?

**INEZ**. On play.

**ALMEDA**. Play?
What's that mean?

**JEAN**. I know what that means.

*(***ALMEDA** *turns.)*

**ALMEDA**. You been here two hours and *you know what that means?*

**JEAN**. Take me to the house and I'll tell.

*(***ALMEDA** *moves as if to grab* **JEAN***'s hair.)*

**ALMEDA**. That's it, I'mma lock you in your luggage.

**INEZ**. You couldn't.
She wouldn't fit.

**ALMEDA**. Then I got rope in the car.

**INEZ**. Ooooh, that's good.

**ALMEDA**. She thinks she'll boss me down?
Then I'll tie up her mouth for a while.

*(***ALMEDA** *exits.)*

**JEAN**. I won't live like this.

**INEZ**. She's an acquired taste.
Like corn whiskey.

*(***INEZ** *holds up the jug, playfully.)*

**JEAN**. Just point me in the right direction.

**INEZ**. Why don't you tell me about this committee on play?

*(***JEAN** *lunges for the shovel, swinging the jug at* **INEZ**.*)*

**JEAN**. I'll take the lantern and I'll find another driver.

*(***INEZ** *reaches out for her.)*

**INEZ**. You'll be sorry if you run off, Jean.
You don't want to get into the cars that'll come for you.

**JEAN**. *(yelling)* Help!

*(***INEZ** *lunges for her and covers her mouth, removing the shovel and jug from* **JEAN***'s hands.)*

**INEZ**. Don't do this now.

*(***JEAN** *screams, muffled.)*

We can have the run of the plains, long as we keep it quiet.

*(***JEAN** *screams again, muffled.)*

At least wait to make a run for it til you'll have a real chance of getting away.

*(***JEAN** *quiets.)*

You understand?

*(***JEAN** *nods.* **INEZ** *eases her down to the ground and holds the back of* **JEAN***'s head, lifting the jug up to* **JEAN***'s lips.)*

*(***JEAN** *shakes her head.)*

You'll feel better.

*(***INEZ** *tips her head back, gently, and* **JEAN** *takes a drink.* **JEAN** *slumps down as* **INEZ** *sits next to her.)*

*(A beat.)*

You see?

**JEAN**. The committee on play is the former First Lady's pet project.

*(***INEZ** *looks at her.)*

**INEZ**. Mrs. Hoover?

**JEAN**. She started speaking on it Back East years ago. This place is such a grave town.

**INEZ**. So, what's it mean: Play?

**JEAN**. Kind of thing that ends up in physicians warning about overexertion and impediments to childbearing.

**INEZ**. Sport?

**JEAN**. *Girls'* sport.

**INEZ**. Impediments to childbearing!
That'd be a blessing.
My ma played point and she's still got six plus me.

**JEAN**. It's inappropriate, they say.

**INEZ**. Y'know, I'd never even heard that word before Mrs. Dibbit chaperoned me and Puppy and Hazel Shoots to the tournament Downstate three years back. Directly after, she had a mile-long list of what Puppy wasn't supposed to do.

**JEAN**. You *played?* In a tournament?

**INEZ**. Did my best.
But Hazel was the star.
When she graduated that year, we lost steam.
What about you?

**JEAN**. Me?

*(***ALMEDA** *enters, carrying a coil of rope. She stops, seeing* **INEZ** *and* **JEAN** *sitting together.)*

**INEZ**. You play?
You got the height for it.

**ALMEDA**. WHAT are you doing, chumming with her?

**INEZ**. Al, Jean's sorry she made a fuss.
Why don't you take her home and let her get some sleep?

**ALMEDA**. It's not *her* home.
She ain't even blood to my pa.
My dead mother's sister's daughter.

**INEZ**. And here I thought I'd already put all the babies to bed.

**ALMEDA**. Inez, I come here special.
With a new dollar.

**INEZ**. Lemme see.

**ALMEDA**. You come close.
Away from her.

*(***INEZ** *stands and walks over to* **ALMEDA** *who takes two steps away.* **INEZ** *closes the gap.* **ALMEDA** *fishes a dollar coin from out of the front of her overalls.)*

**INEZ**. Would you look at that.

**JEAN**. Where'd you get a dollar?

**INEZ**. Al, it's beautiful.

**ALMEDA**. Can we sum it up?

**INEZ**. Of course.

*(***ALMEDA** *kisses* **INEZ** *on the cheek as she gives her the coin.)*

*(***INEZ** *picks up the shovel and runs over to the hole. She scoops out a little more dirt and removes a filthy-looking doll. She pulls up the doll's dress and reaches inside her belly to pull out a jar.* **INEZ** *unscrews the jar and pours out coins into her hand. She counts them back into the jar.)*

*(She pulls out a tightly rolled-up scrap of brown paper and a small pencil. She writes on the paper.)*

**INEZ**. Two dollars and six cents.

**ALMEDA**. A new bladder costs – ?

**INEZ**. Three dollars and fifteen cents, plus sixteen cents postage and special delivery fee.
Sum that up –

*(***INEZ** *scratches for a second.)*

**JEAN**. You need another dollar and a quarter.

*(***INEZ** *looks up at* **ALMEDA**.*)*

**INEZ**. Quicker'n I can count.

**JEAN**. What're you buying a bladder for?

**ALMEDA**. Doesn't concern you.

**INEZ**. Factor in shipping time...

**ALMEDA**. Harvest's over.

**INEZ**. I know that.

**ALMEDA**. Means school's starting back for the winter in four days.
First game's in twelve.

**INEZ**. I *know* that.

**JEAN**. A bladder –

**ALMEDA**. Inez, I gotta go Downstate this year.

**JEAN**. – for a basketball?

**ALMEDA**. Yes, of course.

*Of course* we're talking about a basketball.

**JEAN**. I'm only asking because…

**ALMEDA**. Hazel Shoots didn't get Downstate until her senior year.

On account of she could only practice at practice times.

Cuz you were all sharing that one no-good, hobble-bounce ball.

**INEZ**. I remember, Al.

**ALMEDA**. I *need* my own basketball now.

I gotta be able to practice day and night to have a real shot.

**INEZ**. I'll help any way I can.

**JEAN**. The man I met at the depot had one.

From the feel of it, brand new.

*(***ALMEDA** *and* **INEZ** *look at her.)*

*(A long beat.)*

**ALMEDA**. From the *feel* of it?

What do you know about the *feel* of a basketball?

**JEAN**. Nothing. Just that –

The leather felt like…pebbled.

Like when I used to have new shoes in the fall.

**INEZ**. Hazel's ball's been fish-slippery for years.

*(A beat.)*

What were the laces like?

**JEAN**. I don't know

Raised?

**ALMEDA**. How high?

*(***JEAN** *shows with her thumb and forefinger.* **INEZ** *raises the lantern ever so slightly to look.)*

**ALMEDA**. I don't believe it.

She's dressing up the truth worse than Lurlene Lonestead.

**INEZ**. Lurlene's lies are as long as her legs.

Al, I don't think that's what this is.

**ALMEDA**. Then what's she doing talking to strange men at the depot, huh?

**INEZ**. And getting a feel of their luggage?

*(***INEZ** *looks at* **JEAN**.*)*

More to this story than we know.

Question is: who's the man with a brand-new basketball?

*(***INEZ** *and* **ALMEDA** *look back at* **JEAN**.*)*

**JEAN**. Take me home and I'll tell.

**ALMEDA**. Not *your* home!

**INEZ**. You want that basketball, Al? Take her home.

*(The sound of apples dropping into a bucket begins…)*

**ALMEDA**. Uh-huh.

*(Lights shift.)*

*(In the transition,* **JEAN** *grabs* **ALMEDA** *and holds her down to brush her hair, roughly.)*

## Three

*(Lights up on* **LURLENE***, 16, standing onstage with a cigarette and a photograph. She wears a floral dress and flat shoes and is taller than even* **JEAN***. A shriveled-up old graying basketball lies next to her.)*

*(As she talks, she plays around with the unlit cigarette, mimicking glamour poses.)*

**LURLENE.** She finally gave it to me, Puppy. After three solid years of humbling myself to my knees, donchaknow, Inez finally put it into my hands. And I been looking at Hazel Shoots' Downstate Tournament Royalty photograph like my eyes were gumstuck to it ever since. For the last six days, I have been painting my nails, bathing, and relieving myself with this image, that's how devoted I've been to Hazel's likeness.

And the thing I see is: Hazel Shoots was given *a tiara.* Hazel Shoots was *crowned* Queen of the Tournament. Never mind that she only made it out over to Humboldt to marry a player from the Humboldt boys' team, because she got a *tiara.* Well, this leads me to the other bit I noticed in my study of Hazel Shoots' features, which is:

*She isn't no better looking than me.*

For one, she has an inferior Cupid's bow. And still! She was given a tiara. Only think on what could've happened to me if I'da been old enough to go Downstate with my superior Cupid's bow three years back. It was then I pulled out my old copy of *The Red Book* – you know the one with the photo of the Babe's Ballers inside. (I don't spend time on that picture, Babe Dublin looks like a sweaty wrestler in a wig). No, I flip through the close-ups of starlets and socialites in satin and, again, do you know what I found?

There are plenty of starlets and socialites who don't look all that much better than Hazel Shoots, meaning that there are plenty who don't look half as good as

me. So now I'm thinking to myself, could be I should be in satin. To do that, I'd need to leave Poor Prairie. They're all wearing white in those photos and you know as well as me it's near unthinkable to keep white bleached and clean here. But what if I could leave Poor Prairie? (And not for trouble of the nine-month variety neither. Lord knows the girls who get sent away for a little less than a year…those girls certainly ain't wearing white.) No, I gotta go somewhere where I could wear nail paint everyday.

And donchaknow it was with that thought in my head that I answered the door this morning and saw Cyril Cosgrove standing there with his hat in his hand. I said: "Cyril, I don't mean to bust up your heart – I never wanted it to end this way – but I come to see that I am a better looker than not only former Tournament Queen Hazel Shoots," – I showed him the photograph at that point, since I had it, like I been saying, handy. "But also a good number of the starlets and socialites in *The Red Book,* which leads me to say that I am not long for Poor Prairie. Which leads me to say that we are not long for our love. Please, go quietly, I don't think I could survive a scene!"

*(***PUPPY** *enters, carrying a basket of apples.* **PUPPY** *is 18 years old, but might pass for 12. She is tiny and wears a neat, girlish dress; her clothing is of significantly better quality than anyone else's.)*

**PUPPY**. I don't want to disappoint, but.

This was everything I could reach from the top rung.

**LURLENE**. And with that, I lit up the cigarette I been holding and took a long drag –

*(***LURLENE** *mimes the action.)*

**PUPPY**. I don't want to disappoint, so.

I got up onto my tippy toes.

**LURLENE**. – and blew the smoke in his face like in a photograph from *The Red Book* and said again:

"Just go, I don't think I could survive a scene!"

*(A beat.)*

**PUPPY**. So, what then?

*(***LURLENE** *turns her head, but the rest of her body remains frozen in the pose.)*

What'd *he* say, Lurlene?

*(***LURLENE** *unfreezes from the pose, slumps.)*

**LURLENE**. He, uh.

He said nothing.

He waved away the smoke and turned and walked back to his pa's truck and drove away.

**PUPPY**. He did?

**LURLENE**. Turns out he'd come to tell me he was going away to St. John's seminary on scholarship.

I didn't ever expect *Cyril* to bust it up with *me.*

**PUPPY**. Better he become a priest, Lurlene.

I would've missed you too much if you'd gone and married Cyril.

**LURLENE**. He did show a restraint when it came to my charms that is, in my experience, uncustomary to the male sex.

*(***LURLENE** *looks at the basket of apples.)*

This isn't even half a bushel.

**PUPPY**. It's everything I could reach.

I'm small.

**LURLENE**. I'm meant to bake 20 pies.

I told you I would tell you the story in return.

Now I've told the story and I can't take it back but you haven't held up your end.

**PUPPY**. I have prayed every night since I was eight years old for a growth spurt.

That's ten years of unanswered prayers, Lurlene.

**LURLENE**. I'm likely to ruin my nails.

I've stretched this coat six days now.