Dirt
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Cast of Characters

The Loftin Family

EDITH, 35, mother, hard and soft at the same time.

LLOYD ALVIS, 45, father, has a permanently injured leg from being run over by a horse cart.

DEBBIE, 14, daughter.

UNEX (full name Timothy), 15, son.

FRANK, 18, son.

ALVIS, 20, Lloyd's son from his first marriage, suffers from schizophrenia.

GARY RAY (nicknamed Rayboy), 12, artistic and asthmatic, the baby of the family.

MIKE (full name Michael Lee), 16.

CUFFY, 68, Lloyd's father.

WINNIE, 41, Lloyd's sister.

PREACHER

DOOCHIE, 36, Edith's best and dearest friend.

RED CROSS WOMAN

ENSEMBLE, as many as needed, or can be doubled as Cuffy, Winnie, Preacher, and Doochie.

Note: The ensemble is integral in setting the mood of this show and aiding in transitions between scenes with their hums, voices, and movement.

Setting

1935—The Dust Bowl, Texas

Author's Note

Whether it's the Dust Bowl of 1935 or the Covid Pandemic of 2020, you will always find suffering mixed with hope. This play (a little bit of fact, mixed with a little bit of fiction) tells the story of Edith Loftin and her family, my family. Edith Emily Loftin was my Big Memaw. She lived a hard, but beautiful life. She taught me to laugh often and create beautiful things with whatever we had on hand. She was artistic and resourceful and compassionate. She raised some of my most favorite people on this planet; most importantly, my dad. Timothy Wayne (Unex) Loftin is a pillar of strength and determination. He is the hardest working man I know. I wanted to write this play to honor both him and my Big Memaw. I love you, Pops.

Acknowledgments

I want to give a special thanks to my husband, Chris, daughters, Edie & Josie, and parents Tim & Vickie Loftin for always being my biggest cheerleaders; my best friend Theresa Leckbee-Hornung for being my sounding board and constant encouragement when I'm riddled with doubt; my Aunt Debbie for her insight and love; and my precious students who loved this production with all their hearts and dedicated themselves to bring truth, grit, and hope to these characters, even though Covid ended their production prematurely.

dirt received its premiere production at Connally High School in Waco, TX in March 2020. The production was directed by Mandy Conner and featured the following cast and crew:

EDITH . . . . . Josie Womack
LLOYD ALVIS . . . . . Maximus Coronado
DEBBIE . . . . . Chloe Raines
UNEX (TIMOTHY) . . . . . Sean Hargrove
FRANK . . . . . Dezmon Myers
ALVIS . . . . . Kevin Mendoza
GARY RAY/MAN . . . . . Kevin Rosalez
MICHAEL LEE . . . . . Joseph Pertile
CUFFY/PREACHER . . . . . Carlos Hernandez
WINNIE . . . . . Ke'Ontranae Landrum
DOOCHIE . . . . . Abigail Hargrove
RED CROSS WOMAN . . . . . Kennidi Trotter
WOMAN. . . . . Kodi Macy
ANOTHER WOMAN . . . . . Onica Newell

Technical Crew: Emily Espinoza Tanori (Stage Manager), Breanna Seymore, Betzabeth Rodarte, Gabriel Lujan

DIRT
by Mandy Conner

Scene One

(A blue color wash rises on a stage full of broken individuals. A few notes are picked on a guitar or banjo. The people stomp or bang their shovel/broom handles and hum throughout.)

WOMAN. God has turned his back on this place.

ENSEMBLE. *(Hums.)* Ooooooh. *(Stomp.)*

MAN. No man should have to watch his family wither from starvation.

ENSEMBLE. *(Hums.)* Mmmmmmm *(Stomp.)*

ANOTHER WOMAN. No family should have to cough and sputter to draw a breath.

ENSEMBLE. *(Hums.)* Ooooooh. *(Stomp.)*

WOMAN. No woman should have to bury her baby.

ENSEMBLE. *(Hums.)* Mmmmmmm *(Stomp.)*

MAN. There IS no goodness to be found.

WOMAN. None.

MAN. Tribulation.

ANOTHER MAN. Starvation.

ANOTHER WOMAN. Desperation.

ENSEMBLE. *(Overlapping one another, while others hum and stomp:)* God has turned his back on this place. No man should have to watch his family wither from starvation. Tribulation. No family should have to cough an' sputter to draw a breath. Starvation. No woman should have to bury her baby. Desperation. There is no goodness to be found. There is no goodness to be found. THERE IS NO GOODNESS TO BE FOUND. *(Stomp.)*

EDITH. Tomorrow might be different.

DEBBIE. Because faith is th' substance a' things hoped fer

UNEX. An' th' evidence a' things not seen.

Scene Two

(Inside the Loftins' house. It is a run-down shack of a house with no indoor water or plumbing. EDITH, *and* WINNIE *are preparing dinner. [*EDITH *is a hard woman, who loves her family fiercely.* WINNIE, *Edith's sister-in-law, has had to move in with the family because of the depression.] There is a barrel of rainwater for indoor use.* GARY RAY *is painting with watercolors, coughing occasionally.* DEBBIE *is sitting on a stool with a bar of soap in her mouth.)*

DEBBIE. *(Pulling the bar of soap out of her mouth:)* Ma . . . are we . . . poor?

GARY RAY. Yep.

EDITH. *(To* GARY RAY:*)* You hush down there.

(To DEBBIE:*)*

Why're you askin' me that?

DEBBIE. That ugly girl at school stood up in front a' th' class an' said we was dirt poor an' not t' sit by those stupid Loftin kids.

EDITH. Well, you can tell that ugly lil hussie—nope—uh uh—

(Looks up to the heavens:)

Sorry, Lord—

(To DEBBIE:*)*

Don't you say a word back to that lil girl—an' put that soap back in yer mouth. I won't have you talkin' like that at school . . . no matter WHAT someone else says or does!

MIKE. *(Calling from off:)* MAAAAAAAA!!! MAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

GARY RAY. Tell 'er off, Debbie! Sock 'er in th' mouth one time an' she'll stop.

EDITH. Hush, Gary Ray! No fights, no words. Do you hear me, Deborah Jean?

UNEX. MAAAAAAAAA!!!

MIKE. SHUT UP UNEX!!! MMMMAAAAA!!!

*(*MIKE *and* UNEX *enter, scuffling with one another.)*

EDITH. Deborah Jean. I mean it.

GARY RAY. Juss one punch, Debbie!

DEBBIE. One punch from me is all it'd take!

UNEX. MAAAAAAAAAA!!!

MIKE. I'M TELLIN'!!! MAAAAAA!

DEBBIE. Yes, ma'am.

UNEX. GET OFF ME MIKE!!! MMAAAAAAAAA!!!

MIKE. YOU STUPID— MMMAAAAA! UNEX GOT IN—

EDITH. — What?! WHAT!? What is it? There is no need fer all that hollerin'.

MIKE. But, Ma! Unex juss—

EDITH. Stop calling him Unex. His gover'ment name is Timothy.

UNEX. Actually, it says TOMothy on my birth certificate.

EDITH. Yeah, well, yer father's not th' best speller, so—

MIKE. Ma. Unex—uh, I mean—Timothy got in trouble at th' school house.

EDITH. Again?

GARY RAY. Ohhhhhhhhhh . . . yer in trouuuuubleeeee . . .

UNEX. Stay out of it, Rayboy.

EDITH. Don't talk t' yer brother that way.

GARY RAY. Yeah. *(Coughs.)*

MIKE. Yeah, don't talk t' yer brother that way, Unex!

UNEX. Shut yer mouth, Michael Lee!

MIKE. Make me!

EDITH. I SAID STOP!!! Timothy, what did you do?

MIKE. He sassed Mrs. Jones—

UNEX. She called me dumb in front a' th' whole class, Ma—

MIKE. —an' then he—

UNEX. *(Rushes toward* MIKE*:)* I said SHUT UP!

EDITH. I've had enough a' both a' ya!

(Grabbing UNEX *by the scruff of the neck and leading him to the rain barrel:)*

Timothy, this is th' last straw. You Loftin kids have already been written off as hellions an' I'll NOT have ya give 'em more t' talk about! I have raised ya better than that!

UNEX. But, Ma, I didn't even—

*(*EDITH *dunks his head in the barrel.)*

EDITH. Boy, I brought ya into this world an' I'm not afraid t' take ya out!

UNEX. *(Sputtering:)* But, that . . . that teacher said—

*(*EDITH *dunks his head under a little longer.)*

EDITH. Is it gonna happen again?

*(*EDITH *holds him under as he struggles.)*

I repeat, is it gonna happen again, Timothy Wayne?

UNEX. *(Getting up, coughing and sputtering, with fear and near drowning:)* No—uh—no, ma'am.

EDITH. *(Dunking him one last time:)* An' one fer good measure. Ya wanna live t' see another day? Then, from here on out, ya walk a straight line in that lady's classroom. You are too smart t' be such a troublemaker. Ya gotta make somethin' a' yerself. Ya hear me?

UNEX. But why's Debbie home? She's supposta be at school.

DEBBIE. None a' yer business, UNEX!

GARY RAY. She got s'spended.

DEBBIE. I'll sock you, too, Rayboy. Now, shut yer pie hole.

UNEX. Then why ain't she in trouble, too!?

EDITH. I've already dealt with her. We're talkin' 'bout you now. You, Timothy Wayne Loftin. Don't ya be like all those other stupid boys. Yer somethin' special, ya understand?

UNEX. *(Mumbles:)* Yessum.

EDITH. Speak up, son, an' look me in th' eyes. Yer daddy works his pants off in that dirt field he calls a farm an' we STILL ain't got nothing t' show fer it. He cain't spell for nothin', but works harder than any man I know. *(Softens:)* But you. Ya got a sharp mind. Put it t' use. Do ya hear me?

UNEX. *(Understanding:)* Yes, ma'am. I understand.

GARY RAY. You're th' dumbest smart person I know, Unex.

UNEX. *(Tousling* GARY RAY's *hair)* Hahaha. Yer a lil rat, ya know that?

GARY RAY. *(Coughs.)* Yeah. I know.

UNEX. Now, keep yer mouth covered like yer supposta. Ya don't want th' doctor t' come back agin, do ya?

GARY RAY. Nuh-uh.

EDITH. *(Beat.)* Debbie, you an' Winnie git th' table set while I cover th' windows. Timothy, git goin' an' tell Cuffy an' yer pops t' c'mon. It's time t' eat. An' shut th' door!

*(*UNEX *exits)*

Scene Three

(A few notes on the guitar, hums and sounds from the ENSEMBLE, *and a stomp take us to where* LLOYD, CUFFY, *and* FRANK *are staring out across the horizon at the approaching dust storm.)*

LLOYD. *(Peering in the distance:)* This is th' third one in two weeks. S'like God's boiling dirt.

CUFFY. Last one was a complete blackout.

FRANK. 'Nuff t' keep us outta school, at least.

CUFFY. Lord knows, you NEED t' be in school, Frank. Ha ha ha

LLOYD. Not much left t' salvage. These dirt storms keep a' comin' an' rip up what we're strugglin' t' grow in th' first place. I hadn't tole Edith, but these dust storms have put us behind a bit on th' mortgage.

CUFFY. Ya gotta tell 'er, Lloyd.

LLOYD. I know, I know. She's juss . . . she's got so much t' deal with. An' . . . an' I don't wanna make it worse. She's th' backbone a' this family. Ya know that? When I got runned over by that horse cart a few years back, an' broke my leg, she had t' git that job at th' post office to help cover th' bills. I cain't harvest like I used ta. An' Alvis is givin' us so much trouble. Rayboy bein' sick . . . I cain't put this on 'er, too, Cuff.

CUFFY. She's yer wife. She'll understan'.

*(*UNEX *runs in.)*

UNEX. Ma says t' c'mon! Supper's ready.

FRANK. Heard you got in trouble at th' schoolhouse again, Unex.

UNEX. So'd Debbie! *(Rushes at* FRANK*:)* An' STOP CALLIN' ME UNEX!!

LLOYD. *(Grabbing him by the scruff:)* Well, you WAS an UNEXpected lil varmit. Ha ha ha. Sorry, son, but mos' ever'body knows you as Unex. Sometimes we cain't escape th' truth.

(Beat.)

LLOYD. Now, go on an' tell yer momma we're comin' . . . *(looking toward the storm:)* but so's that dust storm, so tell 'er t' cover th' winders an' git th' wet rags ready.

UNEX. Alright.

CUFFY. *(Scowling at his lack of manners:)* 'Scuse me, son?

UNEX. Yessir.

(He exits.)

LLOYD. Frank, head on after Unex an' make sure Gary Ray's good an' covered up.

FRANK. Yessir.

(He exits.)

CUFFY. Rayboy still got th' cough?

LLOYD. Rattlin' like an ole shutter. His lungs are too weak t' handle all this dirt 'n th' air. Doctor came last week t' take a look at 'im. Said t' just make sure he keeps his nose an' mouth covered up real good. Th' dirt's killin' 'im.

CUFFY. *(Looking out towards the storm:)* Then, this next storm might juss do him in.

Scene Four

(A few notes on the guitar, hums and sounds [or various shouts of the upcoming storm] from the ENSEMBLE*, and stomps take us back inside the Loftin house. Winds are beginning to pick up ahead of the impending dust storm. The family is eating a meager meal in silence. The dust storm howls outside, shaking the shack from time to time. It's unsettling and keeps everyone on edge, though they try and maintain normalcy.* EDITH *and* WINNIE *continue to cover up doors and windows with damp towels to try and keep the dirt from coming in.)*

EDITH. C'mon, c'mon! Y'all eat b'fore th' dirt gets in.

MIKE. Maybe th' dirt'll make th' beans taste better.

LLOYD. *(Sternly, pointing his fork at him:)* Michael Lee, you'd better be grateful you have sump'in t'eat at all.

MIKE. But we've had beans fer a week straight.

EDITH. Ya git what ya git an' ya don't throw a fit.

LLOYD. Ya hear yer momma, Michael Lee?

MIKE. Yessir.

LLOYD. Let's pray.

(They all bow their heads.)

LLOYD. Dear Lord, we juss wanna thank ya fer all ya give t' us . . . fer our family an' fer our food. Help us t' always have faith in you an' yer promises. Fer we know that faith is th' substance 'a things hoped fer an' th' evidence a' things not seen. Bless th' family. Bless th' food. Amen.

ALL. Amen.

EDITH. Tomorrow, YOU can cook fer ever'body, Mike Loftin. An' you can clean th' latrine, an' do th' laundry, an' fill th' water barrel—fer all nine of us that live under this roof!

UNEX. Ten.

EDITH. What?

UNEX. There are ten people who live here.

EDITH. *(Beat.)* Nine.

CUFFY. Where's Alvis?

EDITH. We're not talkin' 'bout that good fer nothin' piece a'—

DEBBIE. — Alvis ain't been here fer six days, Papa Cuffy.

GARY RAY. Momma, look . . .

CUFFY. Six days? An' no word?

EDITH. Wherever he is, he can juss stay there! One less mouth t' feed.

LLOYD. Yeah, but that's one less worker in th' field too.

EDITH. He ain't done nothin' fer this family but bring disgrace. Almos' cost me my work cleanin' at th' post office. Thankfully, Doochie was able t' smooth things over with th' boss man fer me.

CUFFY. How is ole Doochie doin'? Lloyd said Alvis took a swing at 'er.

WINNIE. What happened?

EDITH. Alvis was on a bender—

LLOYD. NOT on a bender. One a' his . . . his episodes.

EDITH. Might as well be a bender 'cuz he ain't in 'is right mind, I know that.

LLOYD. Anyway . . .

EDITH. So he shows up at th' post office askin' fer me, hollerin' at Mr. Robnett, talkin' about "they tole me to bring my gun."

WINNIE. Did he have a gun?!

EDITH. Shoot. It was juss crazy talk. Mr. Robnett was very kind an' tried to git him t' leave but he juss kept yellin'. Doochie stepped in an' tole him t' go home. Now, you know Doochie don't take nothin' off nobody.

DEBBIE. An' that's why I like Doochie.

GARY RAY. *(Coughs.)* Momma, I made this fer ya . . .

EDITH. He put his hands on Doochie an' shoved her away tryin' t' git into th' office. She shoved 'im back . . . hard. He swung at her an' she landed a good punch right on 'is jaw.

DEBBIE. Yeah!

GARY RAY. *(Coughing harder:)* Here, Momma . . .

EDITH. Whatcha got fer me? *(Hands him a damp rag.)* Here, cover yer mouth.

*(*GARY RAY *hands her his painting.)*

You know Doochie ain't skerred a' nothin'! Got 'im by th' ear an' out th' door before Mr. Robnett really saw what was happenin'.

WINNIE. That's scary.

EDITH. Yeah, well it juss keeps gittin' worse.

CUFFY. I juss don't understan' why you keep puttin' up with 'im? He's a grown man.

EDITH. *(Obviously a sore subject:)* Why don't ya talk t' Lloyd about that.

LLOYD. Look, Cuff, ya know he ain't . . . he ain't right. Cain't keep his head on straight an' gits mixed up real easy, thinkin' he's hearin' voices tellin' 'im what t' do—

EDITH. — He can think straight enough t' go hoot'n an hollerin' all over town, almos' gittin himself killed. Caused a big ole rigamarole at th' Red Cross last week. Scared that one lil ole gal so bad her daddy was going all over town with a shotgun lookin' fer 'im.

(To GARY RAY*:)*

Gary Ray, this is so nice.

LLOYD. He juss cain't help it sometimes. Says it's like another person's livin' inside his head.

EDITH. *(Looking over the painting, but not at* GARY RAY*:)* Where'd you learn to paint like that?

GARY RAY. From you, Momma . . . is it good?

EDITH. It's very good.

GARY RAY. How come you don't paint no more, Momma?

EDITH. I ain't got time, baby.

LLOYD. Well, why don't ya make some time, Edith. It's somethin' ya love an' yer real good at.

EDITH. Ya mean between raisin' this litter a' kids, an' cookin' fer a full house, an' workin' nights at th' post office, an' pickin' th' rest a' th' cotton you cain't git 'cause a' yer bum leg? Between all that's when I git t' paint?

DEBBIE. I can help more, Ma!

EDITH. *(Teasing and giggling:)* Why shore! Tomorrow, I'll just put on my fancy britches, fix a spot a' tea, eat some bon-bons an' whip out a beautiful watercolor paintin'. I'll be pootin' in th' silk!

DEBBIE. Hahaha pootin' in th' silk!

LLOYD. Hahaha yer ma's a mess.

GARY RAY. Look out ever'body! It's th' Queen a' England comin' through!

EDITH. Bow down, ya lowlifes! Behold, th' royal artwork!

MIKE. *(Holds up Gary Ray's painting:)* Looks like scribble-scrabble t' me.

GARY RAY. Shut up! No, it doesn't, Michael Lee.

UNEX. Don't lissen t' him. You done good, Rayboy.

(The house shudders as the dust storm rages. The winds continue to howl.)

GARY RAY. *(Beaming. Coughs.)* Thank ya.

UNEX. You alright?

GARY RAY. Yeah. I juss cain't breathe good. *(Coughs and labored breathing.)* Maybe I juss need some a' yer chocolate cake, Momma.

EDITH. *(Cleaning up from dinner:)* Maybe you juss need t'eat an lie down. Ya know we ain't got chocolate cake money. Keep yer nose 'n' mouth covered up like yer suppos' t'.

WINNIE. What'd th' doctor say when he came by yesterd'y?

EDITH. Tole us t' keep a close eye on 'im. Too much dirt 'n 'is lungs. Might need t' go t' th' hospital if he gits worse. But, we cain't afford th' hospital; so we juss keep doin' what we're doin'.

DEBBIE. He don't look so good, Ma.

EDITH. *(Switching out towels around the doors and windows:)* Don't worry, lil mother hen. Doc said t' juss make sure he's covered an' he'll be fine. This storms pickin' up somethin' awful. S'juss th' dust gittin to 'im a'gin. *(Handing her a wet rag:)* Debbie, give this t' Rayboy.

DEBBIE. Ma?

EDITH. Timothy, git those gaps over there.

DEBBIE. Ma!!! He's not breathing!!!

UNEX. No! Rayboy!

EDITH. *(Going to* GARY RAY*:)* Gary Ray! Wake up!!! Cuffy! Go git th' doctor!!! Hurry please!

LLOYD. Hang on, son! Help's a'comin'.

EDITH. Ohhhhhh Lord! Please help him! Somebody help himmmmm!!

(The winds howl. Lights fade to blue and the hymnal hums transition us to . . .)

Scene Five

(. . . the closing of a wooden casket. The Loftin family, friends and others stand around the small casket.)

PREACHER. Gary Ray Loftin. Born t' Lloyd Alvis an' Edith Emily Loftin on March 24, 19 and 23. Died April 23, 19 and 35. Survived by 'is brothers Alvis, Frank, Michael, an' Timothy an' 'is sister Deborah. Say not in grief: "He is no more," but live in thankfulness that he was. Help us t' have faith in you an' yer promises. Fer we know that faith is th' substance a' things hoped fer an' th' evidence a' things not seen. What came from dirt, returns t' dirt.

(Beat.)

I believe Miss Deborah has somethin' she'd like t' read.

DEBBIE. *(Reading from the Bible:)* "Fer I know th' plans I have fer you," declares th' Lord, "plans t' prosper you an' not t' harm you, plans t' give you hope an' a future. Then you will call on me—"

EDITH. *(Quietly:)* — That's enough—

DEBBIE. "—an' come an' pray t' me, an' I will listen t'you. You will seek me—"

EDITH. — Deborah, stop.

DEBBIE. "—an' find me when you seek me with all yer heart—"

EDITH. — I said STOP! He's not listenin'. God is not here. A child is lyin' in a pine box. Right here. My child. Where is God? We are all starvin' an' dyin'. Where is He? God has turned 'is back on this place.

ALVIS. *(From off:)* Where is he?!

WINNIE. *(Trying to calm her:)* Shhhhhh . . . s'okay, Edith.

DEBBIE. But Ma, we're still here with ya. He didn't take US. There is still goodness—

EDITH. There IS no goodness to be found. NONE!

ALVIS. *(Obviously not in his right mind. To* LLOYD*:)* You. You kilt him. You kilt Gary Ray.

LLOYD. *(Trying to calm him down:)* Alvis, don't do this . . . This ain't th' right place or time.

ALVIS. *(Shoves* LLOYD *off him.)* Don't touch me. Another dead body under yer belt, ole Pops?

EDITH. Alvis!

ALVIS. Git outta my way, Edith.

EDITH. Don't you dare talk to yer ma that way.

ALVIS. You're not my ma. He kilt her, too.

(Some of those gathered begin to disperse out of fear or embarrassment.)

CUFFY. Michael Lee, take Tim 'n' Debbie on ahead. They don't need t'see this. Winnie, will you go with 'em?

WINNIE. C'mon. Let's go.

DEBBIE. Ma—

EDITH. Go with yer brothers. Frank—

ALVIS. Don't look at Frank t' do nothin'. Frank's 'bout as useless as Pops, iddn't he? Failin' outta school, can't pick a boll a' cotton t' save his lousy life.

(The children exit.)

FRANK. Shut yer crazy mouth, Alvis.

ALVIS. Yer first wife's dead. Yer kids are dyin'. Yer stupid cotton farm's dead, too. Boy, have you got th' golden touch, Pa.

FRANK. *(Defending his family:)* GET OUTTA HERE!! GONE ON! Yer crazier than a bedbug.

CUFFY. Both a' ya need t'calm down! This ain't th' place fer this.

(To the family and friends still remaining:)

'Scuse us, folks.

ALVIS. *(Steps up on the casket:)* Shows over, folks! Nothin' t'see here!

(Others leave.)

EDITH. Alvis! Look at what yer doin'! *(Completely grief-stricken and broken:)* Wherever you been hidin', please juss go back there an' save us another heartache.

ALVIS. What!? What is it?? You don't WANT me here, Eeeeeedith!? You ain't my ma but I AM part a' this family! Or have ya already buried me, too?

(Realizing where he is and the gravity of his outburst:)

Oh. Ohhhh, Ma. Oh Ma, I'm so, so sorry. I didn't mean t'—

LLOYD. — Leave her be.

ALVIS. *(Struggling to understand himself:)* — But I didn't know— *(Tapping his head:)* They're INSIDE— They told me t'—ya know—oh no—they were tellin' me t'—ya havta know it wasn't me—they said—

LLOYD. —Alvis, you're my boy . . . but you cain't be here no more. You gotta go, son.

(Beat.)

Cuffy, can you—?

ALVIS. Ma, I AM sorry. Gary Ray didn't deserve this. Neither d'you.

*(*CUFFY *gently takes* ALVIS *away.* LLOYD *stands for a moment with* EDITH.*)*

LLOYD. Edith, I'm gonna head back to th' house. Winnie and Lula brought over some supper. *(Lovingly:)* Take yer time.

(He kisses her on the forehead and exits.)

EDITH. *(Furious tears, looking to the heavens:)* You. You did this . . . an' I . . . I can't fix it. Look at this place. Dirt an' dirt an' dirt fer miles. Where is th' hope ya promise? Wadin' through knee-high drifts a' grit an' sand . . . an' filth . . . an' death. Fillin' up th' house. Rattlin'

th' windows. Seepin' under th' door an' poisonin' th' lungs a' my boy! He didn't do NOTHIN' t' deserve this. Nothin'. Nothin' but . . . try t' breathe an' paint 'n' love his momma an' his family. An' you juss SNATCHED him right out from under us. *(Wrecked with guilt:)* Oh, God. What did I do? I couldn't save my boy. I try so hard t' raise these children th' right way an' teach 'em th' right things an' how t' know right from wrong, but I couldn't stop 'im from bein' sick . . . so . . . so sick. But you . . . you could'a. You could'a stopped this whole thing. But ya didn't.

(Beat.)

Ya didn't.

Scene Six

(Lights fade to blue and the ENSEMBLE's *hymnal hums transition us to the sounds of sweeping.* EDITH *and* DOOCHIE *are working the midnight shift cleaning at the old Post Office. They clean in silence a bit.* EDITH *still obviously wrapped in grief and anger over the death of Rayboy.* DOOCHIE, *unsure of what to say, allows the silence.)*

DOOCHIE. *(Deciding to break the silence:)* It's gonna be a long night at th' ole P. O. if ya don't talk t'me.

EDITH. *(Thinking carefully about her words, but deciding upon . . .)* I ain't got nothin' t'say.

DOOCHIE. How long've you known me, Edith? *(Silence.)* How long?

EDITH. Since we was in school.

DOOCHIE. Since we was nine years old t' be exact.

(Sits and pulls out her lunch.)

We have been through a whole lot in those twenty-six years. Hadn't we?

EDITH. But it's not—

DOOCHIE. Sit down a minute.

EDITH. Doochie, we got too much t' do. Th' farm's almost a complete loss an' I gotta—

DOOCHIE. —We'll git it done. Now, sit.

*(*EDITH *sits beside her and crumples on to* DOOCHIE's *shoulder.)*

EDITH. It's all too much. The farm is a mess. Lloyd juss cain't manage it on his own with that leg a' his an' Cuffy an' Frank aren't enough t' be proper help. An' Alvis. Lord, help me. You saw Alvis runnin' around crazy at Gary Ray's funeral. I don't know what t' do with 'im. Doc thinks he's schizophrenic. Most likely, we're gonna have t'put 'im in an institution or somethin'.

DOOCHIE. That might be best, Edith. I know ya don't want to, but—

EDITH. — I'm scared. Th' kids are scared. His . . . explosive . . . outburst really got t' Debbie. She won't sleep. Lloyd juss stays in th' field all day . . . an' I'm no good since Rayboy . . . since he . . . I cain't . . . I cain't even say it . . . I feel like I'm juss . . . juss . . . empty.

DOOCHIE. *(Grabbing her hand:)* I ain't no preacher. An' I'm pretty sure I ain't even made it t' th' bottom a' St. Peter's pearly-gate list. But I do know a thing or two about life an' death.

EDITH. *(A sad chuckle:)* I know ya do.

DOOCHIE. *(Sharing a bit of her lunch:)* When my ma died, it was like I lost who I was. I juss became a . . . a shell of a girl an' I couldn't make it a single day without cryin'. One day she was there, an' th' next she was gone. An' there I was with four sisters that were waiting fer me t' fill her shoes. Scraggly lil hungry things—

EDITH. —But, how . . . how did you get back t' . . . t' you?

DOOCHIE. I didn't really git a choice. I pulled up my britches an' did what I had t' do. Pa was on th' farm all day an' somebody had t' feed those lil rascals.

(Beat.)

What else could I do? There weren't anybody else t' do it. So . . . I did it.

EDITH. . . . How?

DOOCHIE. Lissen . . . at th' end a' th' day, all you need is hope an' strength.

EDITH. Oh that's all, huh? How d'you figure?

DOOCHIE. *(Taking* EDITH's *face in her hands:)* Hope that it will get better, an' th' strength t' hold on until it does. *(Holds her tight.)*

Scene Seven

(Lights fade to blue and the hymnal hums transition us to the bustle of the Breadline. There are lots of people about: people trading goods, the Red Cross handing out gauze masks, and many waiting in line for food.)

BREAD LINE WOMAN. Keep th' line movin' an' don't push. We got plenty.

FRANK. Keep yer head low. An' don't draw any attention t' yerself.

MIKE. Why? You ain't my pa. You cain't tell me what t'do!

UNEX. Shhhh. Jus' lissen' t' Frank.

RED CROSS WOMAN. Grab a mask or two fer yer fam'ly. 'Specially them babies an' th' elderly.

FRANK. Alvis got folks skerred a' th' Loftins. Like we're all animals or criminals or somethin'.

MIKE. He IS an animal.

UNEX. An' a criminal. We ain't like him.

FRANK. But they don't know that an' we don't need no more trouble. Ma'll kill us if we don't come back with our rations.

(A scuffle begins from the back of the line. ALVIS *enters in a disheveled, loud, and rowdy state.)*

MAN. Hey, no cuttin', pal.

WOMAN. Git back t' yer place in line.

ANOTHER WOMAN. We've been waitin' here fer hours.

UNEX. Please don't be Alvis, please don't be Alvis.

MIKE. Betcha a nickel it is.

ALVIS. Where's my brothers?

FRANK. Ignore 'im.

ALVIS. Where's them Loftin boys? Ma said you was here somewhere.

MAN. 'Scuse me, sir, but you'll have t' go t' th' back a' th' line.

ALVIS. Keep yer hands off me. Unex!? Mike!?

MAN. I said t' move t' th' back a' th' line, pal.

FRANK. Don't look at 'im. Juss keep yer heads down.

ALVIS. Frank! I know you're up there!

ANOTHER MAN. Whoa! Watch out! Yer gonna hit somebody with that!

FRANK. Mike, go git Pa b'fore they call th' sheriff on 'im.

MIKE. Why cain't Unex—

FRANK. JUSS GO!

*(*MIKE *exits.)*

Unex, you lay low an' stay in line. We gotta have somethin' to take t' Ma.

WOMAN. Keep th' line movin', people.

ALVIS. *(Beginning to get violent:)* Don't touch me! Get off me!

(Men in the crowd begin to try and restrain him. UNEX *grabs his food from the breadline.)*

MAN. Whoa! Whoa!!! Calm down. Calm down.

ANOTHER MAN. Watch out! You're gonna hurt somebody!

ALVIS. *(In a complete manic state:)* I juss need t' git to my brothers! UNEX!!! MIKE!!!

(In his rage, he grabs a shovel and begins to swing it around at the crowd gathering around him.)

ALVIS. Git away! Move back! I don't wanna hurt anybody . . . *(shaking his head to get the voices to stop:)* but they won't stop— They're juss tellin' me . . . that . . . that I HAVE t' . . . I juss . . . I juss want my brothers.

UNEX. Alvis . . .

MAN. Stay back! Ever'body give him some room.

UNEX. Alvis . . . I'm right here . . .

ALVIS. Unex!!! Make 'em leave me alone. Tell 'em t' be quiet. I cain't THINK with all them voices talkin'.

UNEX. Nobody's gonna hurt you . . . juss lissen t' me.

MAN. Put down th' shovel, boy. We don't want ya t' hurt these people.

ANOTHER MAN. He's gone crazy. Look at 'im. Ya can see it in his eyes!

ALVIS. *(Rushes at the man:)* I'M NOT CRAZY!!!

(There is a scuffle between ALVIS *and the* MAN. *At some point,* UNEX *is struck by the shovel handle and knocked out.)*

WOMAN. Oh no! Somebody help!

FRANK. Timothy . . . hey . . . hey! Git up . . . hey, hey . . . yer alright . . .

(The men restrain ALVIS *as* LLOYD, CUFFY, *and* MIKE *enter.)*

ALVIS. I'm sorry Unex!!! Oh gahhhhh . . . I'm so, so sorry!!!

(Breaks free and runs to LLOYD.*)*

Pa . . . Pa, lissen . . . I need yer help. They keep tryin' t' git me to hurt people. Ya gotta help me, Pa. Th' voices won't stop. Ya gotta help me stop 'em.

LLOYD. *(Holding onto* ALVIS*:)* I will . . . I will.

(Lights fade to blue and the guitar, hums, amd beats transition us to . . .)

Scene Eight

(Inside the Loftins' house. LLOYD *is sitting, staring blankly at two pieces of paper.* EDITH *comes in exhausted from work and grief.)*

EDITH. What now.

LLOYD. Ya want th' bad news . . . or th' other bad news?

EDITH. Juss tell me.

LLOYD. Alvis.

EDITH. What has he done now? We really have to do somethin' about—

LLOYD. They took 'im.

EDITH. Who took 'im?

LLOYD. There was an incident at th' bread line yesterday—

EDITH. — If he messed up our rations—

LLOYD. He took a swing at some folks an' accidentally knocked out Unex.

EDITH. What?! An' nobody came to git me? I can't—

LLOYD. — He was fine. I didn' wanna worry ya, 'specially after Rayboy . . . an' we need you t' have that job.

EDITH. I can't lose another child, Lloyd—

LLOYD. Edith, they took Alvis away. The Sheriff came an' got 'im . . . an' they . . . they put 'im in th' nuthouse.

EDITH. Oh.

LLOYD. Yeah. I mean, it's prolly fer th' best, but—

EDITH. Shhhh . . . I know.

(They sit in silence for a minute absorbing the news together.)

EDITH. What's th' other paper fer?

LLOYD. *(Hands her the paper:)* It's not good. Not good at all.

EDITH. *(Reading:)* "From th' U.S. Supreme Court, in pursuance of a judgement an' foreclosure a' said premises including Lots 365–369, fer a total a' 256 acres, duly made an' entered on April Nineteenth, Nineteen an' Thirty-five, will be sold fer auction—" *(Trails off.)* . . . They're takin' th' farm?! How can they do that??! You said you an' Cuffy—

LLOYD. — It's too late. I juss . . . I mean . . . I . . . I thought we'd be able t' catch up.

EDITH. Catch up?! Whadda ya mean catch up?!

LLOYD. We're . . . we've been behind on th' mortgage fer a few months—

EDITH. — MONTHS?!

LLOYD. —an' these blasted dirt storms have ruined everything that even thought about growin'—

EDITH. — Sounds like a lot a' blamin' an' not a lick a' takin' responsibility t' me! *(Hitting him with the papers:)* What're we gonna do? I cain't provide fer this family with my sad lil cleanin' job at th' post office! Doochie an' I split miserable hours as it is! We ain't got nothin' saved! Nothin'! This sad excuse fer a house is ON th' land that th' government is *(pushing him:)* TAKING—FROM US, LLOYD!

LLOYD. *(Grabbing her arms, shaking her:)* I KNOW THAT!!! What am I suppose t'do!?!? Tell me! I'm all ears, Edith! Whadda ya want from me?

EDITH. First, you'll git yer hands off me, Lloyd Alvis. Don't touch me a'gin, ya hear? I woulda liked th' truth, but I didn't git it, did I?! Ya didn't even TELL me we was in danger! Why would ya keep that from me?

LLOYD. I cain't control GOD! We ain't had rain in over six months! Whadda ya want me t'do?! HEY GOD, if you could please stop sending DIRT our way, that'd be mighty fine! It don't work that way. Cuffy . . . an' . . . an' Frank . . . an' th' young 'uns . . . we all

worked our pants off t'keep those cotton crops from dryin' up. Even th' tractor engines 're eat up an' ruined by th' grit. Seventeen dust storms since December! Seventeen, Edith! I cain't compete with acts a' GOD!

EDITH. God ain't here anymore.

LLOYD. That's blasphemous! I know things're rough right now an' you're hurtin', but I'll have none a' that talk in this house. Ya hear me?

(Grabs her by the arms again, but harder:)

D'ya HEAR me?

EDITH. *(Grabbing an ice pick from the counter and putting it to* LLOYD's *neck:)* You lay another hand on me ever agin, Lloyd Alvis an' I will put this through yer throat. Do ya hear ME? DO YA?! If ya know what's good fer ya, you'll git outta here an' give me some time t' think.

LLOYD. *(Shocked and shaken:)* I don't know what's happened t'you. My goodness.

EDITH. There is no goodness here.

(Stomp.)

ENSEMBLE. *(Low echo:)* There is no goodness here.

(Lights fade to blue and the guitar, hums, and beats transition us to . . .)

Scene Nine

(The farm. The family is working to salvage the sparse crop that is left before giving the land over to the government.)

DEBBIE. Why're we even pickin't this stupid cotton if th' guv'ment is takin' it?

EDITH. We ain't gonna leave nothin' fer 'em. They're takin' enough as it is.

FRANK. Might as well take all we can git b'fore they kick us out.

UNEX. Michael Lee, I'm pickin' here. Move somewhere else.

MIKE. I can pick here, too, Unex!

UNEX. Maaaa, tell him to stop callin' me Unex.

EDITH. If y'all don't stop yer fussin' an' fightin'—

UNEX. But, Ma, he—

LLOYD. Yer ma said that's ENOUGH! Git t' pickin' with yer mouths SHUT!

(Massages the pain in his left shoulder, wincing.)

EDITH. Debbie, git as much a' th' fallout as ya can. Th' storms have spread ever'thin' we own all over Texas.

DEBBIE. Ma, what're we gonna do?

EDITH. Whadda ya mean?

DEBBIE. When they take th' house . . . an' th' farm? Where're we gonna go?

LLOYD. God'll take good care of us.

EDITH. Quit fillin' their heads with this nonsense. God left us a long time ago. Keep pickin'. Yer pa an' I will figure somethin' out. No need fer ya t' worry yer pretty lil head.

WINNIE. Here, Debbie. Lemme help ya.

*(*MIKE *and* UNEX *are still scuffling and roughhousing, knocking over several baskets of cotton.)*

LLOYD. Boys! Yer ma done tole ya t' settle down—

EDITH. Pick all that up that ya juss spilt—I swear t' Pete, Michael Lee! That's yer only other pair a' school jeans an' yer tearin' them up, too! Lloyd, I know ya cain't help pick, but idn't there somethin' at th' house you boys can do an' juss . . . just git outta my hair?!

LLOYD. We'll go check on Cuffy. He was tryin' t' git th' tractor started. Hopin' we can sell it . . . or at least sell th' parts.

EDITH. Debbie, go with 'em an' see if th' beans're ready. Winnie 'n' I will finish up what's left here.

DEBBIE. But, Ma, I wanna stay an' help you.

EDITH. You ARE helpin' me by checkin' on supper. Now git outta here, my little kadeedle-hopper.

(Kisses her on the head, patting her on the bottom and continuing to pick.)

WINNIE. That girl's juss like you, ya know.

EDITH. Naw. She's full a' hopes an' dreams. That part a' me is long gone, Winnie. I wish it weren't . . . but it is. We juss keep gittin' knocked down agin an' agin . . . dirt juss . . . pilin' up on us, seepin' into everythin' an' we juss keep sinkin' lower an' lower.

WINNIE. But—

EDITH. — Spare me th' pep talk. I gotta figure out what we're gonna do . . . where we're gonna live . . . how we're gonna eat. We were barely scrapin' by as it was; now, we got one measly income from my job at th' post office . . . an' I cain't feed ten people on pennies.

WINNIE. Well, at least ya don't have Alvis t' worry about.

EDITH. Yeah . . .

(Beat.)

It broke Lloyd, ya know? Seein' his oldest like that . . . all messed up in th' head. They started th' shock treatments last week at th' hospital, but Lloyd put a stop t' that. Alvis just wept when he saw his pa there. But you're right . . . it's one less mouth t' feed.

*(*UNEX *enters slowly, in shock.)*

WINNIE. I know yer takin' on a lot, Edith. It's too much fer one person t' handle. I've talked t' Cuffy. We've decided t' head back to California—

EDITH. No, no, no . . . Winnie, yer fine here. We can handle it—

WINNIE. Lula an' Billy Boy're already there . . . an' we can stay with them fer a bit. I'm sure y'all could come, too . . .

EDITH. No. No. This is our home. Here. My boy's buried here, Winnie. I can't leave 'im.

WINNIE. But there's nothin' left fer ya here. A new place. A fresh start. A little hope.

UNEX. *(Quietly:)* Ma?

EDITH. My hope died when Rayboy died. But I thank ya, Winnie. I know yer juss tryin' t' help.

WINNIE. Yer my family. *(Grabs her hand.)* Through thick 'n' thin, right?

UNEX. Ma?

EDITH. What is it, Timothy?

WINNIE. What's th' matter, Unex?

EDITH. What is it? Say somethin'.

UNEX. It's Pa.

EDITH. What about yer pa?

UNEX. Pa . . . Pa's dead.

(A few notes on the guitar, ENSEMBLE *hums, and stomps take us to . . .)*

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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