

VOICES

by

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VOICESCAST OF CHARACTERS

STAGE MANAGER/COLE 38 (William Cole Shelby b. 12/8/1957 d. 9/4/1996)

GLEN “almost” 15 (Glen Allen Gyger b. 2/6/1929 d. 1/31/1944)

PEGGY 76 (Peggy June Gyger Martinez Clark b. 3/19/1928 d. 2/12/2005)

JEANNIE 20 (Jeannie Gunter Hampton b. 3/23/1900 d. 5/4/1920)

MARTHA 97 (Martha Ann Gyger b. 8/17/1861 d. 7/18/1959)

HOW THEY ARE RELATED

**Martha Ann Gyger** was born on August 17, 1861 and died on July 18, 1959 at 97. Among her six children was *Bessie Gyger Gunter*, whose daughter, **Jeannie Gunter Hampton** was born on March 23, 1900 and died on May 4, 1920 at 20. (Martha also raised the two sons of her much older husband’s deceased first wife.)

Martha’s youngest son was *Charlie Gyger*, who married *Georgetta Shelby*. Georgetta’s brother was *Curt Shelby*. *Curt Shelby*’s grandson was **William Cole Shelby**, who was born on December 8, 1957 and died on September 4, 1996 at 38.

*Charlie Gyger* and *Georgetta Shelby Gyger* had four children. Their third child was **Peggy June Gyger Martinez Clark**, who was born on March 19, 1928 and died on February 12, 2005 at 76.

*Charlie* and *Georgetta*’s youngest son was **Glen Allen Gyger**, who was born on February 6, 1929 and died on January 31, 1944 at 14.

(**Martha Ann Gyger**’s son, *Frank*, married *Carolina Anderson*, called “*Kina*” by her nieces and nephews.)

VOICES

SETTING     *The cemetery. Strawn. Palo Pinto County. Texas.*

TIME         *February 15, 2005 and after.*

AT RISE       *Lights go up to half as STAGE MANAGER brings chairs onstage. He is wearing a dress shirt and suit pants. He arranges five chairs in a curving line facing the audience, then checks the positions of the chairs and sight lines. He signals the tech booth and the lights come up to full. He checks his watch and faces the audience.*

## STAGE MANAGER

In about five minutes you're going to be thinking you've walked in on the last act of *Our Town*. (*Smiles.*) Trust me...you haven't.

*He walks off-stage and quickly returns with a tie and a suit coat that matches his pants. He places the coat on the back of the chair nearest stage left and puts on the tie loosely but does not tighten it.*

OK, here goes.

Welcome to Strawn, Texas, population 700 or so. Well, that's the living, here in the cemetery...who knows? First house around here was built in 1870. First burial in the cemetery was...1870. We're about eighty miles west of Ft. Worth...that way. Further west, along Interstate 20...the road T's in down there a bit...you get Ranger, then Abilene, Sweetwater...finally, after a couple of hundred miles, Midland and Odessa...the real West Texas. Only three hundred or so miles after that, you hit El Paso and you're at the border...of Texas...and Mexico...New and Old. Now, just a couple of miles east of here you'll find what's left of Mingus...only a few families and a couple of abandoned storefronts. Then a couple of miles south of that...you're right back on I20...and you get to Thurber.

Well, not really. (*pause*) Thurber's gone. (*pause*) What's left? The smokestack from the old brick factory and two restaurants. The Smokestack Café in the old hotel near the...smokestack...and New York Hill Restaurant on...New York Hill. Overlooking the whole place. The place where Thurber used to be. It's called New York Hill because that's where the snobs lived...sorry...the people with money. Try the Smokestack if you like chicken-fried steak. The truckers do. Try New York Hill if you like real steak. It's pretty good.

A hundred years ago Thurber was the biggest town between Ft. Worth and El Paso...ten thousand people and an opera house. Biggest coal mine in Texas. Supplied the Missouri-Pacific railroad, which runs east to west just over there (*pointing behind him*). Then an oil strike, out toward Ranger. This place was *booming*. Oh, and the brick factory...supplied most of the bricks in Texas for a while. There's still a major road in Ft. Worth paved with Thurber bricks. Runs right by the Kimbell Art Museum. All that's gone now...I mean Thurber...not the Kimbell.

Drive north a bit and you come to Olney. Still doing pretty good, for this area. Population of around 3,000...living. Remember "The Last Picture Show"? Great movie. You get a real taste of this part of Texas from that movie. The interior of the movie theater, where the eponymous last picture show was (*pause*) shown...was shot in Olney, though the exterior was shot in Archer City. (*Pause*) "Eponymous"...don't get to use that one much.

This area, though...well, it's not West Texas...but it's certainly not what you'd describe as *lush*. Some low sedimentary hills poking up oddly here and there. This was once under an ocean. Lots of scrub trees and brush and enough grass for some cattle. Enough rain for some decent farming. Now south of here maybe thirty miles or so, you get to Stephenville...there and on towards Comanche it's more "lush"...and the largest concentration of dairy farms in Texas.

Strawn, though is...well, quiet, now. The grandest house in town is the old Watson place just up the road...built in the late 20's by a family that came into money in the boom years. On a bluff above Palo Pinto Creek. Red Thurber brick, white wood trim and four square wood columns...Texas Georgian, I guess you'd call it. Sorta small, though. And it hasn't aged well. The trim needs paint...and the columns. It's a funeral home, now. Doesn't get much business. Most families use the one in Ranger...though it's the same owner. Sometimes, though...it's, well, a sentimental choice. And today...it's busy.

Oh...today is Tuesday, February 15, 2005. Bright and sunny. Not cold...high will be in the upper 50's and low tonight in the mid 40's. A typical day...

*Lights dim as he tightens the tie and puts on the coat. The others enter while he is doing this. First JEANNIE enters from stage left. She briefly turns and looks wistfully back, then takes her seat in the middle chair. GLEN enters running from stage right and slides into the second chair from stage right. He and JEANNIE lean briefly towards each other, but MARTHA enters with great dignity from stage left and they both look at her and immediately sit up in their chairs and look straight ahead. MARTHA takes the second seat from stage left. Then STAGE MANAGER, now COLE takes his seat in the chair nearest stage left. He and MARTHA briefly glare at each other, then look straight ahead. The chair nearest stage right is empty. The lights dim much further, then come up to full,*

*but only on the first two chairs stage right: the empty chair and GLEN's. As characters enter the conversation, lights will go up on them.*

*PEGGY enters from stage right, looks around, a bit confused, then takes her seat in the empty chair.*

GLEN

Who are you?

PEGGY

What? *(pause)* Glen Allen? It's *you!* I...*(Looking around)* But...I'm *here?* I'd never thought *this* would be where they'd...Glen, it's Peggy. I'm your sister.

GLEN

My *sister?* But you're *old!*

PEGGY

I am. I *(pause)*... I guess I am. To you...now.

GLEN

So, how'd you get to be so old?

PEGGY

It's been a long time. For me. *(Looking around)* This is the *old* part of the cemetery. I didn't know there'd still be Gyger plots back here.

GLEN

Purt' near filled up. Some open over to there. *(motioning)* Ain't been no one new since...*(looks in COLE's direction, looks back quickly)*...for a bit. *(Pause)* Peggy! I can't believe it! I sure missed you, sis!

PEGGY

Oh, Glen...I've missed you so much. You can't know. For so many years I'd come here and just...cry. That lamb on your stone...it made me...

GLEN

I like the lamb!

PEGGY

...so sad. So very sad. You were too young.

GLEN

Still am. But...well, not you. Anymore. *(He saddens, then brightens.)* You 'member, though? All the fun we had? The stuff we did together? You an' me! You'd be almost never my big sister, too much! 'scept gettin' us outta trouble. You were a sure 'nough big sister doin' that.

PEGGY

*(A bit confused, trying to remember)* I...it was...so much has...*(a brightening smile)*...but, I do remember we'd always have such a *time*. *(Long pause)* I can just... There was...us running down a dirt road? *(Pause)* Laughing? Summer. You had something...something you were carrying. In a bag...it was...?

GLEN

Peaches! From Old Lady Swift's place! T'weren't supposed to go there, but you said she had "too damn many" peaches! Oh, we got a bunch of 'em that time!

PEGGY

I remember! Half were full of worms.

GLEN

Like Old Lady Swift. But half were *real* sweet!

PEGGY

*Not* like Old Lady Swift. I got sick, I ate so many peaches. *(Laughing)* Oh, and the funniest thing! Remember when we were pickin' the cotton and Mother dropped her coin purse in the pit toilet and...

GLEN

...oh, yuck! And you and Wilson had to hang onta my legs and let me down to fish it out of the...*stuff!* That was just somethin' *awful!*

PEGGY

But it was all the money we had that week...

GLEN

And we ran! We ran everywhere! Remember?

PEGGY

Yes... Yes! To school...

GLEN

Did *not!* *Home* from school!

PEGGY

I always beat you...

GLEN

Did *not!* Least not after I got my growin' in...

PEGGY

You did get fast. Do you remember Old Man Short's bull?

GLEN

That's when I knew I'd got *damn* fast!

PEGGY

You were so funny to see! Running, scared and laughing at the same time! You hit the fence and just flew right over it. That was a sight!

GLEN

Then we chunked horse apples at that stupid bull! Remember?

JEANNIE

What *bad* children!

PEGGY

What?

GLEN

(To PEGGY) Cousin Jeannie.

JEANNIE

Your mother shoulda strapped your behind, young man.

PEGGY

Jeannie? Jeannie...Hampton...of course. I forgot you were back here.

GLEN

It *was* a stupid bull...

PEGGY

You were...Aunt Bessie's daughter. That's right. And you...

GLEN

Been here longer'n most.

JEANNIE

Longer'n you, boy...

GLEN

Not much older'n me, *girl*...

JEANNIE

I was a *woman*...and *twenty*...

PEGGY

...with those four kids...

JEANNIE

...*five*...Baby never took a breath, but he was my *son*...and the last face I ever saw.

PEGGY

They'd always talk about you...the aunts and uncles...mother...

JEANNIE

They did?

PEGGY

I can remember that...as a kid. Such a sad story. Your husband was...

GLEN

Dad sure 'nough hated him. Said Bob Hampton shoulda been horsewhipped for takin' ya up ta Oklahoma, away from your family, him saying he wouldn't and all.

JEANNIE

Leavin' ever'one broke my heart, but...there was gonna be some good land there to farm, Bob said. (*Pause*) That's...what he said...

PEGGY

Aunt Bessie and Frank and Dad brought you back here...after...after you died.

JEANNIE

Bob was...

PEGGY

...a drunk, according to Grandma Gyger...

*JEANNIE and GLEN glance furtively toward MARTHA*

...and "one damn poor excuse for a husband". In that *voice*...like God's very judgment. And it'd been thirty years since you... Well...she wasn't forgetting.

JEANNIE

I...(confused pause) I...was a good wife.

GLEN

Girl...

PEGGY

I know you were. And mother. You just didn't get much time at it.

GLEN

Sis! Remember the time Dad was gonna whup me for knockin' over that shed behind...

Hush, Glen...  
PEGGY

...but...  
GLEN

Jeannie...  
PEGGY

...Peggy? You'd be Uncle Charlie's...  
JEANNIE

...third child.  
PEGGY

...but you're so *old*.  
JEANNIE

I know. And you are so young. That's hard to get over.  
PEGGY

How 'bout *your* children?  
JEANNIE

Two wonderful kids. Six grandkids, so far. They've made me very happy.  
PEGGY

Did ya live near them?  
JEANNIE

Oh, *always*. We were always a *very* close family, of course. They wanted their mother and "granny" to know what they were doing *all* the time. You know, they were all there when (*long pause*) just before I (*pause*) ...I came here.  
PEGGY

Oh, you got to see that...I jes' wish... (*Pause*) My babies were so *good*. Jes' my little *angels*. But, Oklahoma was...it was hard...real hard. The flu took so many people...then the boll weevils took the cotton. Had no family there...jes' us. Jes'... (*pause, remembering*) Bob was...a hard man. Right hard.  
JEANNIE

That must have been... (*pauses*)  
PEGGY

Wasn't no one to talk to, that much. 'course, now...we was...(*pause*)..."private people"...yeah...private...(*pause*)..."like God meant", Bob said.  
JEANNIE

PEGGY

I remember thinking about you. What your life was like there...with...him.

JEANNIE

Cold.

PEGGY

*(Shakes her head sadly. Pauses. Looks around.)* You know...now I never would have thought it'd be like *this*. Do we just...talk? From now on?

*GLEN and JEANNIE glance furtively toward MARTHA*

JEANNIE

No. It's quiet, mostly. 'scept for a while, when someone new...

GLEN

Yup...jes' quiet. But I remember! Before...*(pauses, lowers his voice)*...there were these...

JEANNIE

...*voices*. I think I remember there'd be...jes' barely I could hear...I *think* I...like in another room...

GLEN

*(Interrupting)* Sis, *you* had kids! What were they like?

PEGGY

My kids were the most wonderful thing to happen to me! I so loved my family. That last time, when I went into the hospital...to have them there...Freddie...Lyanna and her wonderful boys. She's been so *good* with them.. you know. When you see what your children are like with *their* children, you *know* you've done something *right* with your life. I was so *proud* to see...

MARTHA

*SILENCE!*

*The others react with visible shock.*

GLEN

*Criminy!*

MARTHA

*Be silent!* If you've got nothing but lies to tell, keep them to yourself, woman .

PEGGY

*Grandma Gyger!* I forgot you were...

MARTHA

You forgot a lot, Peggy June. (*Pause*) Conveniently. You will not go on telling lies. Not in this place.

PEGGY

What...?

MARTHA

You *abandoned* your children. Left and ran off to California with some no account...honky-tonk *bum*. Your kids still in diapers.

PEGGY

Lyanna was seven and Freddie was nine. They were hardly...

GLEN

*Sis?*

MARTHA

They were *children*...with no mother. You were a disgrace. *Everyone* said so. A selfish, self-centered, no account...hussy!

JEANNIE

Grandma?

PEGGY

That is not true! It was...it was not *like* that! I did what...what...

MARTHA

What no right mother...

PEGGY

What I *had* to do! You couldn't *know*...

MARTHA

I couldn't know what? *What?* About family? Woman, I lived ninety-seven years. Had five brothers and sisters. I bore six children and raised 'em with the two step-children my husband brought me. When I *died* I had such a *passel* of nieces, nephews, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren...why, my family lines stretched out from here to...to *Kingdom Come!* Don't you think I've seen *everything*, woman? I know *family!* I know what family is *owed!* You, Peggy June...*never did.*

PEGGY

And...(almost *shaking*) now...just what was I owed? How about a life? I lived ten years with a man I hated for nine, who hauled me away to Ft. Worth to keep me

shut up in a house without friends and no family could come near. I gave him two kids and worked my damndest to keep from giving him more. I...I *loved*...those two kids...but I was going *crazy*!

MARTHA

That ain't...

PEGGY

Ft. Worth wasn't Olney, Grandma! You can't know...

MARTHA

I *know* what...what *duty* means. You had a duty to those kids. Never matter what *you* wanted. I *know* that.

JEANNIE

Who took care of your babies?

PEGGY

The blond slut next door. She'd been taking care of my husband. Why not?

MARTHA

You will mind your tongue...

PEGGY

You *will* hear my...

MARTHA

(*Booming*) You *will* mind your tongue, woman! This is *family* land. *My family!* And you will be...

COLE

SILENT! Fear and heed the command of the ageless Gyger witch! Got so old because neither God nor the Devil would have *anything* to do with her!

MARTHA

(*Almost amused, almost a cooing*) ...huhhhooo.... The jack in the box! Wind him long enough and *up* he pops!

COLE

...so to speak. But not really. Not *here*, witch. You can't conjure that one up for me.

MARTHA

I wouldn't be calling no names...*fancy boy*...

COLE

Just did.

PEGGY

Cole? Cole Shelby? I thought all the Shelby's were over near Olney.

COLE

Why, Cousin Peggy. So good to see you again. But, yes. I seemed to have been exiled from the family plots. Can't imagine *why*. Still, though...your mother, my Aunt Georgetta's just up there in the new part...so it's still family of sorts.

MARTHA

Sodomite!

COLE

Canaanite! (*To PEGGY*) Just not *hers*, blessed be the Name! (*crosses himself*).

MARTHA

Shelby's were always so *high class*. So it's no surprise they breed...

COLE

Brilliant, devastatingly handsome, consummately refined, incredibly tasteful...

MARTHA

...sissy boys...

COLE

Gay men.

JEANNIE

Lord...

COLE

Amen?

GLEN

Sis?

PEGGY

(*To GLEN*) We'll talk about it later.

GLEN

Oh, we done talked. (*Seems to be proud of himself*) Cole and Grandma talked a lot! 'Bout a *bunch* of stuff! I *know* what...

MARTHA

Hush up, boy.

COLE

Oh, *Martha!* The boy *knew* what it was to *do* gay. He just didn't know what it was to *be* gay. Now he does. Big deal.

MARTHA

You will *not*...

COLE

*(Simultaneously)* So, *Peggy*. No one would ever talk about your Great Escape to LA. What was the place like in the late 50's? I didn't manage to get that far until '79 and the gay scene was so wild it'd make your toes curl!

PEGGY

*(Hesitant, at first)* I...it was...*(beginning to brighten)*. A *long* way from the stockyards in Ft. Worth, I can tell you now. Did you know me and Dan lived next to the stockyards?

COLE

No. Actually...uhm...no.

PEGGY

I *sang!* Bud got a job playing at this country-western bar...

COLE

In LA? Country western? Back then? You're kidding me!

PEGGY

No...it *was!* And I sang with the band! They said I was *good!* It was off Mulholland. Just a little place. But regular work for over a year.

COLE

Good for *you, girl!* I never knew that. Why didn't we ever talk about...

PEGGY

Because I only saw you at the reunions. I was back in Texas and married again. One of my "respectable" phases and you were this rather odd teenager...

COLE

...sulking and lusting after your much too straight son!

PEGGY

Did you two...?

COLE

...only in my early adolescent wet dreams. Now, there were a couple of other cousins...

MARTHA

You will *not*...

PEGGY

*(Simultaneously)* Then I heard you went away. And no one would talk about you. That was so odd. And sad.

COLE

So, no one talked about the faggot?

PEGGY

Well, maybe...just a little. But not where you were or what you were doing for a long time. We heard about...you getting sick and...

MARTHA

Plague! The wages of your sins, boy.

COLE

Silence! The wages of yours, Grandma Witch. *(To PEGGY)* What did they say?

PEGGY

You were in San Francisco. I never got that far. How was it?

COLE

Oh, so beautiful! You can't...imagine a city of hills and houses, seashore and bayshore and streets that seemed to go right up to the sky. A city where everywhere was a neighborhood and everywhere my friends! I could never get lost there. A place to never be lonely...never...*exiled*.

PEGGY

How lovely.

COLE

We had this wonderful Victorian near the Castro and a cabin on the Russian River and friends to fill both...or not, when we needed private time.

JEANNIE

You were married?

COLE

Yes! No. *(Pause)* It didn't matter. I met Dwayne my first day in San Francisco and for twelve years we were never apart.

GLEN

*(To JEANNIE)* It was another *guy*.

JEANNIE  
I know, ninny!

MARTHA  
Two men together...

COLE  
Heaven...

MARTHA  
Touching...

COLE  
Heaven...

MARTHA  
It's...

COLE  
Heaven...the only one I'll have, apparently.

MARTHA  
It's...it's...not *right!* Not right...at all...not...

COLE  
It was *so right*. When I needed someone Dwayne was there. When I had no family my friends were there. We *were* a family...better than the perfect family that exiled me...better...so much better.

PEGGY  
I didn't know. They just said you died and wouldn't say anything else. We didn't hear anything about Dwayne. Aunt Viola said there was some property and stuff your brothers got...

COLE  
*What? (Incredulous...he almost stands)* My *brothers got?! My brothers?! That was my property...and Dwayne's.* When I died everything went to him! We agreed!

PEGGY  
I don't know anything about that. Just what I heard. Must have been lawyers involved. I had one husband die on me and two I divorced and nothing ever goes the way it's supposed to with lawyers around.

COLE  
Fuck!

MARTHA

Boy!

COLE

Fuck, old woman! Witch! Fuck! I'll say it! I hated my brothers! They hated me! How could they... Twelve years I lived with the most wonderful person there could ever be...and he has *nothing* of me? To *remember*? Nothing? *Why am I here?! In this place?!*

MARTHA

Because you're dead, boy. I done told you.

COLE

No *grave!* It was supposed to be the mountains! Where Dwayne would take me...after...and I would always be there for him. Not...*here!*

PEGGY

Your family...

COLE

Are *evil!*

GLEN

(*Tentatively*) Cole? (*Long pause*) *We're* family.

COLE

No. Family's *conversation*. (*Quickly, lyrical*) Conversation that goes on for days and weeks and never concludes...picks up tomorrow where it leaves off today and goes in a thousand directions and always circles back comfortably home to start off all over again. (*Pause*) *That's* what family is. *My* family is in a city with hills. Here's just...*silence*.

MARTHA

*As it must be*. Silence is order. And what is good. The world is too full of...*voices*. And noise. And...what shouldn't *be*. Things that can pull you apart and away from...where you *should be*. (*Pause*) Quiet. No...*fuss*. That's what's important. I've always insisted on...that...

PEGGY

Olney...that big old house...so...*quiet*...

COLE

What?

PEGGY

Grandma's place. The silence seemed to...*seep out* from there and down the streets. This big house. Dark. No sound. Except...you'd hear Grandma moving

around upstairs...the creak as she came down the stairs. Then in her big chair. Like visiting some kind of...

COLE

*(Quietly)* Witch...

PEGGY

*(An annoyed look at COLE, then a pause.)* Grandma, how long did you live there? The house on Fourth Street?

MARTHA

Forty-one years...until I...came here.

JEANNIE

Yes, m'am. I remember. You moved from the farm in Mingus the same year Bob took me up ta Oklahoma. 1918, it was.

PEGGY

Grandpa died in 1906. Twelve years in Mingus, on the farm. Forty-one years in Olney. You never remarried. Fifty three years...a widow. I always wondered. Why didn't you remarry? All those years?

MARTHA

I bore six kids and raised eight. I'd done my duty.

PEGGY

But we all remarried...I certainly did. Uncle Ernest, Aunt Bessie, Mae, Lula. Even Uncle Frank married after Aunt Kina died...and he was with her for...

MARTHA

*Fifty* years. Those were...Carolina was...a good woman. A...*good* woman. When she died... *(pause)*. That Olive now...he didn't choose well, there. Not at all.

PEGGY

I remember Aunt Kina. She was my favorite. So sweet. She and Uncle Frank were the only ones who stayed...in Olney after the war. The only ones who stayed...with you.

MARTHA

Oh, Frank was never there. He sold Fuller Brush 'cross't East Texas. Carolina was...always there. It was a big house and...she helped me take care of it. I could...*depend* on Carolina. After the others left.

JEANNIE

What happened, Grandma?

MARTHA

The coal was gone. The oil wasn't much. Drought took the farms. They all went off to Midland...or Ft. Worth or God-forsaken Dallas.

PEGGY

I hated it when we moved to Ft. Worth.

MARTHA

There was money in them places. Just no...

JEANNIE

Family?

PEGGY

My family was a drunken husband and bawling kids...

COLE

Oh, *god!* You had game shows, soap operas and cheese whiz! Who needs family or friends? I had family and might as well not have. You had Ft. Worth? I had Plano. Perfectly clean, perfectly white and perfectly soulless. Big, perfect house and perfect family and not a bit of *fuss*, Grandma Gyger. A 50's idiot tube *perfection* of a family...and I didn't *know* any of them and they didn't *know* or want to know me!

MARTHA

You hush, young man...

COLE

Don't you see it? The reason? You lost...

*They begin to talk over each other's lines.*

MARTHA

Life can be hard.

COLE

...touch. Grandma Gyger...except with...

MARTHA

It's always...

*Alone*

COLE

...Kina.

*Alone*

MARTHA

...hard and lonely. (*Long pause. She composes herself.*) Son...you lose touch with everyone. Eventually. If you live long enough.

*They begin to talk over each other's lines again.*

COLE

(*Quietly, rather dreamily*) Touching. With your hand. With your voice. With your body...

MARTHA

The one you thought would be there forever is not and the ones you were young with die and there's...

COLE

...the *touching* and what every day brings to go over in the night, together...

MARTHA

...silence.

COLE

...whispering, because you've friends drunk and sleeping over again...

MARTHA

A long silence. A good silence.

COLE

So you touch again, softly, and fall asleep...

MARTHA

It takes away the loss.

*Alone*

COLE

...touching.

MARTHA

They all go away and it's proper. As it always has been. You lie awake at night and hear...nothing. No sound. All the *fuss* is gone. And it's quiet. And you know you've done well. And it's good...the silence. (*Long pause*) I know. (*Another long pause. She's waiting for COLE.*) That's the way it always was.

GLEN

(*Some anguish*) No! It wasn't like that *at all!* It wasn't... Don't you remember, Grandma? The house was always *full*. There...

MARTHA

(*Interrupting*) Boy, my *memory* is...

GLEN

(*Interrupting*) There'd be... (*Pause, then in a rush*) We'd always come over and Mae and Bessie would bring a dish and Aunt Kina would be there makin' pies and Dad was hammerin' on somethin' over there and Jake and Carl and John Robert and I would race to see who could...(continues under MARTHA's lines)

MARTHA

(*Over GLEN's lines*) It wasn't...that wasn't...

GLEN

...get there first and I never knew who all the cousins were related to or what kind of aunt and uncle it was because it *didn't matter*. They were family and they was everywhere! Your house was never silent! It was...a *commotion!*

JEANNIE

In Mingus....the *farm*. I remember!

MARTHA

(*Over JEANNIE's next lines*) Now, Mingus...there *was* more family...

JEANNIE

I'd run home from school and ever' house I passed was family of some sort or t'other. First the Mitchell place and Aunt Nancy would wave from the porch and the Watson place and Aunt Mary'd be shelling peas under a tree and Cousin Molly'd stick out her tongue at me again, then Aunt Emmeline jes' before the stock pond and then it'd be our farm and you cookin' and Charlie and Frank comin' in from the pasture...and at supper there'd always be...

GLEN

...extra places for extra cousins, I'll bet! *Jeeppers!* *That's* the way it was in Olney!

JEANNIE

Oh, and my wedding quilt! Remember? The kitchen was jes' full of aunts! It took *three days* to finish and there was Mama cooking and Aunt Lula and Mae and Nancy stitching and makin' jokes and you and Aunt Kina fussin' and laughing over those hearts that went right 'round the edge...

GLEN

Olney...oh, Grandma, 'member the summers? You had the widest porches and everyone'd come over and bring somethin' to eat and the boys would have cots on the porch on one side and the girls on t'other and I can 'member...you'd all just *talk*...in the parlor or the front room or the uncles on the back porch...and just talk and talk...and...talk on into the night. I'd go to sleep listenin'...Couldn't really tell what you were talkin' 'bout...or maybe a bit...but it'd get fuzzy and I

MARTHA

*(Softly, languid, over the end of GLEN's lines and the beginning of COLE's)*  
Summer nights...my porches...

COLE

*(Dreamily, lyrical)*...I'd hear Jason or Carl or maybe Deirdre in the living room drone on about bad poetry and great art or Napa cafes or the best pick-up bar in the Castro and I'd feel the fog cool air slip through the bedroom window and snuggle closer to Dwayne and he'd say don't bother, they're drunk and they can just talk themselves out and sleep on the futons and go to sleep my love...they'll clean up in the morning...oh, do you want ...

GLEN

*...biscuits in the morning!* And Aunt Kina and you'd be in the kitchen before anyone else first thing...*still* talkin'...

MARTHA

*(Over PEGGY's lines, softly)* Oh, Carolina...we should make...

PEGGY

...about one of us kids or Mother or whether Uncle Frank would make anything on the cotton this year or how big the Catholic Church in Thurber got when all the Italian's came to work at the brickyard and what day the quilting circle would be getting together that week...

GLEN

...and Aunt Kina'd smile and *you'd be jes' so happy* and Dad would slap my butt and tell me to get busy and help Wilson with puttin' the cots back up...

COLE

*(Dreamily)*...and then I'd slap Dwayne on *his* butt and I'd hear Deirdre's "You guys cut that out!" from the living room and we'd both...

MARTHA

*...laugh!* She'd...*(Long pause)* The most beautiful laugh you'd ever... *(Pause)* And there'd be *flour* from the biscuits on her cheek she'd wipe away with the back of her hand and I'd... *(Pause. Then emotional, almost choking)* I'd... I... *(Tentatively, MARTHA lifts her hand, as if to touch something in the air in front of her.)* I... *(Softly, embarrassed)* Oh, dear. Oh, dear. *(She wipes away a tear)* *(Softly)* How'd I forget?

*There's a very long pause. MARTHA looks at each of the others, slowly. She then seems to compose herself, come to some inner resolution as the others wait. She folds her hands in her lap.*

Cole.

COLE  
Martha?

MARTHA  
Tell us about Dwayne.

COLE  
About Dwayne?

MARTHA  
Yes, boy...about Dwayne. He's your...(pause)...he's...he's family, ain't he?  
(Pause) So, go on. Tell us about Dwayne. Don't you leave nothin' out. We've got  
all the time...

PEGGY  
Grandma?

MARTHA  
It's...it's...*right*. It's *due*. (Pause) (To COLE) Go on, son.

JEANNIE  
Yes...*please* do.

COLE  
(Taken by surprise, a bit confused.) Well...he's...he's a runner. Loves  
marathons. A sound design tech for theatre and we met at the marina Safeway  
my first day in San Francisco.

GLEN  
What's...? What's...?

PEGGY  
It's like a really big grocer's and a marina is where they keep boats for the ocean...

COLE  
And he makes the sounds in plays and runs for twenty-six miles...

GLEN  
Twenty-six miles! Jes' for *fun*?

JEANNIE  
I bet that grocer had pineapple! I had pineapple once...it was...

GLEN  
(Interrupting) For Christmas Aunt Bessie once made a pineapple upside down  
cake!

MARTHA

His family...now where were they from?

COLE

Utah.

MARTHA

Oh. *Mormons*?

COLE

Yes. They'd kicked him out. "Unchurched" and "unfamilied", he said.

MARTHA

Sakes alive, those Mormons are strange people...

GLEN

What's...

PEGGY

I knew some really nice...

GLEN

What's a *Marmunt*?

JEANNIE

Did they have bananas at the grocer's? I love banana puddin'!

PEGGY

So, a Safeway! In San Francisco I'd a thought you would have met in a club...

COLE

My UHaul was in the parking lot and he helped me move in to my place that day and he moved in the next.

PEGGY

Now *that's* San Francisco.

MARTHA

Pretty short courtship, young man...

GLEN

I always made friends fast! Why, when the Cajun family moved in over past Mr. Swift's place, I jus' went over and...

JEANNIE

(*Interrupting*) I always had friends...at school we'd as like...

*MARTHA raises her hand with the slightest arcing gesture. The group becomes silent immediately. First, quite imperceptibly, there is an indistinct sound, that begins to rise. It comes from all directions. It's the sound of dozens, then hundreds of voices in quiet conversation. All kinds of conversations, but no argument and none unpleasant. The sound of the voices rises, but not to a level that would make it at all difficult to hear the characters, who listen in surprised silence. There will be a strengthening projection of tiny, flickering lights onto the stage and backdrop and perhaps the audience through the end of the play.*

GLEN

It's...

JEANNIE

The voices!

COLE

*(Listening, in wonder)* Oh, my god...

PEGGY

How...?

*They continue to listen and on each face we see that each seems to be listening to an unheard interlocutor. In the following, we hear only one half of a conversation. For each of the characters the conversation shifts interlocutors throughout as the characters turn their heads to address a new interlocutor.*

...yes, Dad, Lyanna and her boys are doing well and Freddy is healthy and well...

GLEN

Peggy is here, too! And she's *old*...(pause), well, I *know* you are...but you're s'posed to be...(pause) Yes, Mother...is Dad...?

MARTHA

Georgetta, I just have to say those Shelby's can be *mean* people...they've always needed a comeuppance...and, I know...

JEANNIE

Aunt Lula! Yes, I *am*...it's been...(pause)...Yes'm, we've been having a good talkin'...

MARTHA

Oh, Lula...(emotional)...it's been too long...*too* long...

COLE

Brad, you outrageous old queen! Where *are* you? I *know* I dumped your scuzzy ashes into the ocean myself!

JEANNIE

Oh, my *babies*! You're all growed up. Tell me...jes' tell me everything...I want to know all that happened. Now, Roger...

PEGGY

Donnie...oh, Donnie. I loved you so much...

GLEN

Hi dee, big brother! You gotta tell me about the war! What were those Nazi's...

COLE

...like? It can't be *anything* like *here*. There's got to be *acres* of opportunity for Hollywood *dish*. How's Marilyn? Is she still...

PEGGY

...beautiful, Mother. Gary's little girl became such a beautiful young woman. She's gonna break...

COLE

Hearts? Don't be ridiculous. How can you play hearts just in your head? That's the silliest thing I've ever heard, Tad. You always cheated and you'd still cheat...

GLEN

Rob! Stevie! Carl! Where have you guys *been*?!

MARTHA

Oh, *Carolina*...you can't *know* how I've *missed* you. When we were together...I...(pause). I... (pause) When we were together...

*She hesitates. The others turn to her. Long pause.*

COLE

Martha...it's alright. (pause) Now. (pause) Finally.

MARTHA

I (pause) always, *always* loved you. (Pause) Always. (Pauses, waiting for a response. At the unheard response, she smiles.)

*The voices rise.*

BLACKOUT. THE VOICES HANG IN THE DARKNESS FOR A MOMENT,  
THEN SOUND OUT.  
END OF PLAY.