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## Exploring the Creative Process: A Study in Playwriting

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### Recommended Citation

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EXPLORING THE CREATIVE PROCESS: A STUDY IN PLAYWRITING

A THESIS

In the Department of English

by

Alexander Evenson

Under the direction of

Nancy Hynes

May, 2000

CREATIVE LITERATURE IN PERFORMANCE: A STUDY IN PLAYWRITING

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INHERIT THE EARTH

by ALEXANDER EVENSON

*With thanks to*

*Daryl Evenson  
Elmer Evenson  
and Juanita Evenson  
for inspiraton;*

*Kim Evenson  
for vision;*

*Kaarin Johnston  
Elizabeth Stoltz  
and Mara Faulkner  
for instruction;*

*Nancy Hynes  
David Rothstein  
and friends  
for support and criticism;*

*and*

*Erin McEllistrem  
for pulling this play out of the mire  
in which it was so deeply entrenched.*

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**GEORGE** Born: 1920. Died: 2010. Male, 41 years old. He is strong and his body shows many years of hard work. He is a farmer. He is married to ROSE and has two children, ROBERT and JOHN. There is one other character with the same name GEORGE, who represents the same character at a different age:

**GRANDPA GEORGE:** 75 years old.

**ROSE:** Born: 1921. Died: 1996. Female, 40 years old. She is healthy and looks younger than she is. She is a great mother. She is married to GEORGE and has two children, ROBERT and JOHN. There is one other character with the same name ROSE, who represents the same character at a different age:

**GRANDMA ROSE:** 74 years old.

**ROBERT:** Born: 1949. Male, 61 years old. A cocky, arrogant businessman. He has a "type-A" personality and a full head of white hair. He often wears aviator sunglasses. He is the child of GEORGE and ROSE. There are three other characters with the same name ROBERT, who represent the same character at different ages:

**CHILD ROBERT:** 12 years old.

**TEENAGE ROBERT:** 17 years old.

**ROBERT:** 47 years old.

**JOHN:** Born: 1953. Male, 57 years old. He is healthy and strong, although his face shows years of hard work. He was a farmer for about thirty years. He is married to CLAIRE and has one child, BEN. There are four other characters with the name JOHN, who represent the same character at different ages. They are:

**CHILD JOHN:** 8 years old.

**TEENAGE JOHN:** 13 years old.

**YOUNG JOHN:** 30 years old.

**JOHN:** 43 years old.

CLAIRE: Born: 1954. Female, 56 years old. She grew up in the city and lived there until her husband, JOHN, became a farmer. She and JOHN have one child, BEN. There are two other characters with the name CLAIRE, who represents the same character at a different age:

YOUNG CLAIRE: 29 years old.

CLAIRE: 42 years old

BEN: Born: 1980. Male, 30 years old. He is the child of JOHN and CLAIRE. There are two other characters with the name BEN, who represent the same character at different ages. They are:

CHILD BEN: 5 years old.

TEENAGE BEN: 16 years old.

SARAH: Female, 30 years old. She is married to BEN. She grew up in the city.

A VOICE

*(Act I, scene 1. Friday, late July, 2010. Early afternoon. A bare farmyard in rural North Dakota. The stage is an open lawn. The farmhouse is offstage in one direction, the driveway is offstage in another direction, and the Quonset and field areas are offstage in a third. There are trees in the background, and the two nearest to the farmhouse are close enough together to hang a clothesline between. Closer to the driveway is a section of handmade wooden fence. The fence is rough from years of weathering, and the white paint has worn off in all but a few places. The audience can hear the sound of a car drive up. A couple of doors open and slam shut. BEN enters from the driveway. He is thirty years old, and dressed in nice, casual clothes. He never wears ties, dress shirts, or shiny shoes. He carries two suitcases.)*

BEN

Hello? Is anyone here? (Pause.) Are you coming, Sarah?

*(He sets down the suitcases. SARAH enters from the driveway. She is also thirty years old, dressed casually, in shorts. She is married to BEN. She grew up in the city. She and BEN are a good match for one another.)*

SARAH

Are we the first ones?

BEN

It looks that way. That's funny. I thought Robert would have gotten here a while ago.



SARAH

Maybe he just ran to town or something.

*(Pause, as BEN stares at the yard.)*

Are you OK?

BEN

Yeah, I'm fine. It just feels so deserted. . .

SARAH

Come on, honey. Don't start off this way, or it'll be a long weekend for both of us.

BEN

I know, you're right. Maybe it's just the suitcases. They make me feel like a stranger.

SARAH

Well, let's get into the house. Maybe you won't feel like a stranger in your old bedroom.

*(She picks up the suitcases, and starts to lug them out. BEN keeps staring at the yard. After about five steps, SARAH purposely drops one of the suitcases. She speaks jokingly, and BEN snaps out of his little daze.)*

God! What in the hell did you bring, Ben? These suitcases weigh a ton!

BEN

Me? You're the one— (He picks up the suitcase while teasing her back, as they exit together, to the farmhouse.) Oof. This is all your stuff, not mine.

SARAH

*(Exiting.)* I didn't bring anything besides clothes and shoes. . .

*(Another car drives up. Two doors open and slam shut.)*

CLAIRE

*(From offstage.)* Hello? Ben? Sarah? We're here!

*(CLAIRE enters from the driveway. She is 56 years old, and wears casual travel clothing. She carries a large purse over her shoulder. She looks around for BEN and SARAH.)*

Where is everybody?

*(JOHN enters from the driveway, carrying a suitcase and a garment bag. He is 57 years old and healthy, although his face shows years of hard work. He wears jeans, tennis shoes, and a T-shirt. He is married to CLAIRE, and has one child, BEN.)*

JOHN

Ben and Sarah must be up at the house. Their car's back in the garage.  
*(BEN enters from the farmhouse.)*

BEN

Mom, Dad! I didn't think you'd get here 'till later.  
*(BEN hugs CLAIRE.)*

CLAIRE

There wasn't much traffic, and we got an early start. Hi.

BEN

Hi dad.

*(BEN hugs JOHN.)*

JOHN

Hi.

BEN

How're you doing?

JOHN

*(Quietly.)* Pretty good, considering everything.

CLAIRE

Where's Sarah?

BEN

She's in the house, unpacking. I think we were the first ones here.

JOHN

Robert isn't here yet?

BEN

I'm not sure. He might be in town.

CLAIRE

I just knew he wouldn't be here.

*(JOHN walks around the yard,  
checking things out.)*

BEN

Don't get started, mom. (Quietly.) How's dad doing?

CLAIRE

He seems all right. We both knew this was going to happen sooner or later.

BEN

It's sad, though.

CLAIRE

At least George isn't in that damn nursing home anymore. I couldn't stand seeing him in there.

BEN

Me neither. Grandpa never liked being indoors very much, and that place smelled like no one had opened a window in years.

CLAIRE

(Sigh.) Anyway, dad's okay. He doesn't talk very much, but I think he's dealing with things. (Pause.) How's the house look?

BEN

Fine. Empty.

CLAIRE

Are you and Sarah staying in your old room?

BEN

Yeah. I thought that you and dad could take the big bedroom.

CLAIRE

Okay. (To JOHN.) John?

JOHN

(Turning around.) Yeah?

CLAIRE

Should we go unpack?

JOHN

I suppose. Where's Sarah?

BEN

She's in the house. I can take your bags up if you want to poke around out here.

JOHN

No, I can take them—

BEN

(Picking up the bags.) Don't worry about it. I've got 'em.

*(BEN exits to the farmhouse.)*

JOHN

Thanks, Ben.

BEN

(From offstage.) No problem! Take your time!

*(CLAIRE approaches JOHN.)*

CLAIRE

Are you finding anything interesting over there?

JOHN

There's barely anything left to find. Robert must have cleaned up the yard or something.

CLAIRE

I was wondering where all of your junk went. He didn't just throw all of your stuff in the trash, did he?

JOHN

Oh, I'm sure he just moved it somewhere--probably the Quonset. I'll ask him about it later.

*(JOHN looks out across the audience.  
Pause.)*

Looks weird, doesn't it?

*(CLAIRE looks out across the "plains"  
as well.)*

CLAIRE

It certainly is bare.

JOHN

I don't think my dad's old fields have ever gone unplanted at the same time since he started farming. It looks like another planet.

CLAIRE

You'd think Robert would have been dying to rent it out as farmland.

JOHN

He was.

CLAIRE

Why didn't you guys rent it to someone?

JOHN

Technically, it's not our land to rent.

CLAIRE

Well I know that, but I figured that you two would work something out with your dad.

JOHN

(Forced.) Dad didn't want to deal with the trouble of being a landlord, and Robert couldn't get through all of the paperwork in time for planting season.

*(Pause. CHILD JOHN enters from the farmhouse. He is eight years old, and wears outdoor playclothes typical of a child in 1961. He carries a pail full of molded plastic farm toys. Included are some sections of plastic fencing, cows, horses, pigs, cowboys, and "Indians." He is oblivious to JOHN and CLAIRE, as they are to him. CHILD JOHN sits down near the two trees and dumps the pail out in front of him, then begins setting up a small "corral" of animals. He plays in the background while CLAIRE and JOHN talk.)*

CLAIRE

(Pause.) With the bare fields and empty yard, I can hardly recognize the farm. I'm almost scared to see the house.

JOHN

Shouldn't be any worse than when we moved out.

CLAIRE

Unless Robert's "cleaned" that up too.

JOHN

Oh, Claire. Remember, it's not ours.

CLAIRE

Maybe not legally, but it's not Robert's house either. We're the ones who lived here. I don't care what anybody says, I refuse to be a "guest" in my own home. Ick.

JOHN

Don't worry, it won't be so bad with Ben and Sarah staying the weekend too.  
(Pause.) Should we go in?

CLAIRE

I suppose so. I'm hungry.

JOHN

Come on then. I'll make some lunch.

*(They exit to the house as JOHN holds his arm around CLAIRE's waist. As they exit, ROSE enters from the farmhouse. ROSE is oblivious to JOHN and CLAIRE. She is 40 years old, and is dressed in handmade clothes. She carries a basket of laundry, and a pouch of clothespins with a length of cotton clothesline rope. She sets the laundry basket down behind CHILD JOHN and ties the clothesline between the two trees. She hangs laundry on the clothesline as she speaks to CHILD JOHN.)*

ROSE

What are you working on, John?

CHILD JOHN

(Intent on his toys.) I'm making a corral for my cows.

ROSE

Oh. Where are you going to put your horses?

CHILD JOHN

The cowboys are riding them. But there's some rustlers on horses too.

ROSE

Rustlers? How are you going to keep them from getting to your cows?

CHILD JOHN

That's why I'm building the corral, mom.

ROSE

You had better build a strong fence.

CHILD JOHN

I will—I'm a great fence builder, remember?

ROSE

You sure are.

CHILD JOHN

No rustlers are going to get through this fence! My cowboys are watching the hills while I build it. (Pause, as he struggles with a piece of string.) Mom? Could you help me?

*(ROSE crosses to CHILD JOHN and crouches beside him.)*

ROSE

Of course, John. What do you need?

CHILD JOHN

I can't tie a lariat for my cowboy.

ROSE

Here, I'll show you. (CHILD JOHN gives her the string.) Loop it around this way, and tie the knot around the string so it can slip through, like this. Then pull it until it's the right size for your cowboy. Here.

CHILD JOHN

Thanks, mom. Will you watch my cows while I get my cowboys ready?

ROSE

Sure. Where should I be looking for the rustlers?

CHILD JOHN

They're off that way.

*(ROSE plays with the cows and other farm animals while CHILD JOHN puts his cowboys on their horses and gets the lariat fixed in one of the cowboys' hands.)*



ROSE

You should set your fences so that you can keep your animals in a line while they enter the corral.

CHILD JOHN

Okay.

*(They move the fences around. As they play, GEORGE enters from the Quonset area. He is 41 years old, strong, and his body shows years of hard work. He has been working in the fields, and wears 1961 farm clothes. He is somewhat dirty, and carries a broken shovel from a cultivator.)*

(To GEORGE.) Are you already done?

*(CHILD JOHN keeps playing with his toys.)*

GEORGE

I've barely started. Where's Rob?

ROSE

I thought he was in the field with you.

GEORGE

He was supposed to be out there cullivating with me over an hour ago.

ROSE

Maybe the tractor is broken, and he's trying to fix it. Did you check by the barn?

GEORGE

(In disgust.) Aaaaah, it's not broken. He's inside, watching programs on the television set. (He starts toward the house, then turns back.) Do you know what else he forgot to do?

*(CHILD JOHN begins to pay attention to GEORGE.)*

ROSE

Oh, George--

GEORGE

(Ignoring her.) He didn't pick the rocks in that field yesterday! I broke a cullivator shovel this morning!

ROSE

Maybe he just missed that one rock.

GEORGE

The whole field is full of them! (He yells offstage, towards the farmhouse.) ROBERT! (Pause.) ROBERT! Get down here right now!

ROSE

Don't yell so loudly, George. He's only twelve.

GEORGE

(Turning around.) Well, somebody's got to do the work around here. It's going to rain tonight, and if I don't get that field planted, we'll get behind. (Again yelling toward the house.) ROBERT!

CHILD JOHN

I'll help you, dad.

*(GEORGE glances at him, then speaks to ROSE.)*

GEORGE

Well, I've got to go pick rocks. I don't have time to go looking for him. If you see him, tell him he's got work to do, and he'd better get on it!

*(GEORGE strides off to the Quonset, knocking over CHILD JOHN's corral in the process. CHILD JOHN is not upset and collects the pieces again.)*

CHILD JOHN

My corral!

ROSE

Oh—I'm sorry, honey. He didn't mean to knock your cows over. He just didn't see them. Here, you set the fences back up while I finish the laundry.

*(CHILD JOHN goes back to work on his corral. ROSE goes back to hanging laundry on the clothesline. As the two*

*of them work quietly, the audience hears a car drive up and park in the driveway. The door opens and shuts again, and ROBERT enters. He is 61 years old, and is dressed in nice pants, a dress shirt and tie, with aviator sunglasses and slicked back hair. His hair is entirely white, but not thin. He carries a briefcase and has a "Type-A" personality. He is oblivious to ROSE and CHILD JOHN, on the opposite side of the stage; they are oblivious to him as well. ROBERT pauses before walking up to the house, and removes a cellular phone from his briefcase. He makes a call, pausing to let the phone "ring.")*

ROBERT

Yeah, can you get Dave on the phone? Thanks. (Pause.) Dave, this is Robert. Hi. How's the repair shop? It must stink to be in the shop on a beautiful day like today, hmmm? (Pause. Fake laugh.) Say, I just got my boat out for the season and I was wondering if you'd come out to my dad's farm and give it a tune-up. (Pause.) I'll be up here for a few days. (Pause.) Mmm-hmm—I go nuts trying to do business from up here. (He laughs.) Thanks, Dave. (Pause.) I don't know, whatever it needs—check the oil pan or something. (Pause.) Well, would Tuesday work for you? Great.

*(ROBERT hangs up. He folds up the phone and puts it in his briefcase before exiting towards the house. ROSE and CHILD JOHN continue working. CHILD ROBERT enters from the farmyard. He is twelve, and wears casual, clean clothes. He carries a new Louisville Slugger baseball bat and a ball. He attempts to sneak past ROSE, who speaks to him without looking in his direction. CHILD JOHN watches CHILD ROBERT.)*

ROSE

Stop right there, mister. (CHILD ROBERT stops.) Where've you been?

CHILD ROBERT

In the field.

ROSE

Really? That's not what dad told me. He was just up in the yard, looking for you. By the looks of things, I'd say you were practicing baseball somewhere.

CHILD JOHN

He was really mad, Robbie!

CHILD ROBERT

Shut up.

ROSE

Hey! Be nice to your brother. Dad says that you were supposed to be cultivating this morning.

CHILD ROBERT

I had to pick rocks.

ROSE

Mmm-hmm. He also said that you were supposed to do that yesterday. He broke a shovel on the cultivator because the field was full of rocks.

*(Pause. CHILD ROBERT looks at the ground, angrily. ROSE speaks in a comforting tone.)*

If I were you, I'd get to work and stop goofing around all day.

CHILD ROBERT

(Referring to CHILD JOHN.) You let him goof around all day! I hate farm work! I have to pick rocks in the sun, while all he does is play with these stupid toys!

*(As he says "stupid", he kicks a little dirt at CHILD JOHN's corral with his foot.)*

CHILD JOHN

(Rubbing his eyes.) Ow! You got sand in my eyes! Leave my cows alone!

ROSE

Robert! Stop that!

*(CHILD ROBERT starts to storm off to the Quonset. ROSE kneels by CHILD JOHN to make sure he is all right.)*

(To CHILD ROBERT.) Come back here!

*(CHILD ROBERT stops, but doesn't turn around. Seeing that CHILD JOHN is fine, she approaches CHILD ROBERT, and gently turns him around to face her.)*

I know you don't like picking rocks, Robbie. But this is a tough time of year for your father, and it's best not to get on his bad side. John is only eight. When he's your age, he'll be picking rocks too. Now apologize to your brother.

CHILD ROBERT

(Insincerely.) Sorry, John.

ROSE

Now go do your chores.

*(CHILD ROBERT exits to the Quonset. ROSE crosses to CHILD JOHN, who is putting his toys back in the pail.)*

Are you all right, John?

CHILD JOHN

Yes. I'm going inside.

ROSE

Do you want some lunch? (He nods.) Okay. . . I'll be in there in a second.

*(ROSE returns to her laundry as JOHN finishes picking up his toys. When he has them all, he exits to the house, rubbing his eyes again. After he*

*exits, ROSE leans up against the fence, and takes a deep breath, sighing as she exhales. She grabs her empty laundry basket and exits to the house. The audience hears two people approaching from the house. ROBERT is leading JOHN towards the driveway. It is unintelligible chatter until they enter, ROBERT first. JOHN is only semi-interested in ROBERT's conversation.)*

ROBERT

I told him that I'd never bite on that deal. So I got the car for a good price. (He indicates toward the driveway.) I just had it washed today. Brought my boat down, too.

*(JOHN gives a glance towards the driveway.)*

JOHN

You bought a boat?

ROBERT

Yeah, she's a beauty. I've had her for a couple of years. Usually, I just store her out in the marina.

JOHN

The marina?

ROBERT

Yeah, I've got dock space on the lake back at home.

JOHN

Why'd you bring the boat this weekend?

ROBERT

Well, I was telling Dave Nelson about the boat's engine a while back, and he said he'd like to take a look at it. On Tuesday he's going to come by and check it out. I think he wants to make me an offer.

JOHN

Oh. (Pause.) So what's the plan for tomorrow?

ROBERT

Tomorrow morning we need to go to the funeral home and finalize a couple of things. Dad took care of most of the details himself, a couple years ago. They're reading the will in the afternoon.

JOHN

All right. (Pause, looking around.) Well, you've certainly got things cleaned up around here.

ROBERT

Yeah, I had Brad Larson's boys come out here one day and clean out the whole yard.

JOHN

Where'd they put all of the leftover tools and things?

ROBERT

You didn't need the stuff that was in the yard, did you?

JOHN

Well—

ROBERT

(Cutting JOHN off.) Because I just told the boys that they could keep anything they wanted, and what they didn't could go to the junkyard.

JOHN

(Surprised.) What about all of the stuff in the Quonset?

ROBERT

The Quonset was empty, except for some little junk.

JOHN

(Restrained, but calm.) Well, there were a few things that I was going to pick up one of these days. (Pause.) It's entirely cleaned out?

ROBERT

I think so. You can check it out if you want. There might be some leftover junk. You should have told me that you wanted to save things in the Quonset. (He pulls the key off the key ring in his pocket.) Here's the key. Go ahead and look.  
*(He hands the key to JOHN. He exits to the Quonset, pensively. As he exits, CLAIRE, SARAH, and BEN enter from SR.)*

BEN

Hey, dad—where are you going?

JOHN

I'm going to the Quonset to look around.

BEN

Wait up.

*(He joins JOHN and they exit to the Quonset. CLAIRE feigns sincerity when she greets ROBERT. ROBERT is insincere as usual.)*

CLAIRE

(To ROBERT.) I haven't seen you in ages! (She gives him a quick hug.)

ROBERT

Hi there. Hello, Sarah.

SARAH

(Shaking hands.) Good to see you again. How have you been?

ROBERT

Things have been pretty good; the market's doing well. I've made a killing cashing in some of my small investments—

CLAIRE

Are you staying out on the farm with us?



ROBERT

No, I've got a hotel room. I have some side business I need to take care of while I'm up here this weekend, so I thought it would be easier to operate from in town. (Pause. To SARAH.) How's the city treating you?

SARAH

Pretty good—Ben and I are thinking about moving across town into a new apartment.

ROBERT

Great! Are you still working with welfare?

CLAIRE

(Surprised.) Um. . . I've never really "worked with welfare." I'm a counselor with family services in Minneapolis.

ROBERT

But, that's the same job you had the last time I saw you?

SARAH

Yes.

ROBERT

That's what I meant.

*(Pause. ROBERT looks at CLAIRE and SARAH in a way that suggests that he is waiting for them to ask him about his boat.)*

CLAIRE

(Feigning interest.) So, is that your boat in the driveway?

ROBERT

Yes, it sure is. Usually I'd just leave it at the lake, but there's a guy in town who wants to look it over.

SARAH

You know what they say about boat owners—

ROBERT

What's that?

SARAH

The two happiest days in their lives are the day they bring their boats home, and the day they actually get rid of them.

*(CLAIRE laughs.)*

ROBERT

Well, I'm not trying to get rid of her. I'll only sell if the price is right; then I'd get a new boat with the money.

SARAH

*(Rolling her eyes.)* Of course.

ROBERT

That reminds me, Claire. I was wondering if you could fix up the upholstery on one of the seats. The fabric is torn and I need it sewn back in before I start showing it to people.

CLAIRE

*(Uneasily.)* I don't know. I haven't sewn anything since Ben stopped putting holes in his jeans as a little kid. I don't know a thing about fixing upholstery on a boat.

ROBERT

Well, come with me and take a look.

*(ROBERT and CLAIRE exit to the driveway. Pause. JOHN and BEN enter from the Quonset. JOHN walks directly up towards the house, not bothering to talk to anyone. BEN crosses to SARAH.)*

SARAH

*(As they enter.)* Hi guys. *(To BEN, after JOHN exits.)* Where's your dad going?

BEN

Up to the house.

SARAH

Is something wrong?

BEN

I'll tell you about it later. Where's my mom?

SARAH

She went down to the driveway with Robert. He's trying to get her to sew up the upholstery in his boat.

BEN

Good lord. I suppose I should rescue her. (Motions to exit to the driveway.)  
Oh, here they come.

*(ROBERT and CLAIRE enter from the driveway.)*

CLAIRE

It's only a little tear; I'm sure no one would notice if you left it.

ROBERT

I don't know, it's little things like that which really hurt a selling price. Buyers will look at something little like that and try to shave a few hundred bucks off their offer. (Pause, as he looks at SARAH and BEN.) Where's John?

BEN

He went up to the house. He wanted to finish unpacking.

ROBERT

Oh, okay. (He checks his watch.) I suppose I should get going too. Everything's working up there?

CLAIRE

I think so.

ROBERT

I'll see you tomorrow morning, then.

*(ROBERT exits to the driveway. The car door slams and the audience can hear his car drive away.)*

CLAIRE

(Sarcastically.) Boy, I sure missed him!

BEN

(Laughing.) What did he want you to do? Fix his upholstery?

CLAIRE

I don't know. That was weird.

SARAH

It's getting a little chilly. Let's go inside.

*(BEN trails off as CLAIRE, SARAH,  
and BEN exit to the house.)*

END OF ACT 1 SCENE 1

*(Scene 2. Spring 1996. 10:30 A.M. The Quonset yard. Trees protect it from the wind. There is one exit to the fields, one leading into the Quonset, and one to the farmyard. The Quonset is a large structure made of corrugated galvanized steel and has a large fiberglass overhead door, which is open. The Quonset houses the workshop, where frequent and necessary repairs are made to the equipment, and also serves as a giant garage for grain trucks, tractors, a 1940 GMC pickup, and a lot of tools. There is a lot of clutter leaning up against the front and sides of the Quonset, as well as the inside: concrete cinder blocks, old tires, plastic and aluminum pails, wooden pallets, a few fifty gallon barrels, grain shovels, grain hoppers, a shop vacuum, etc. There is a bent steel shank, which is about two feet long, leaning up against the workbench. Everything shows years of use. A workbench and a pegboard are covered with tools. From inside the quonset, the audience hears the sound of a hammer pounding on steel. The blasts are heard in an irregular pattern. JOHN enters from the field, walking at a brisk pace. He is 43 years old. He wears jeans and a worn-out white T-shirt. He is dirty and sweaty. He goes to the Quonset workbench, and rummages around for a socket wrench. Once finding it, he looks for the right sized bit. He doesn't know the exact size he needs, so he holds them up in the air or fits them on his finger to estimate. The pounding stops. GRANDPA GEORGE enters*

*from inside the Quonset. He is 76 years old, and wears bib overalls over a white collared shirt. His cap bears the logo of a seed company or the farmer's union and is worn too high on his head, a little crooked. He wears workboots. He is a little out of shape and walks somewhat slowly. He has been retired for ten years, but won't stop working on the farm. He holds a hammer in his hand. As he speaks, he puts the hammer in his top front bib pocket, where it sticks out too far and looks awkward.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

Whatcha' doin'?

*(JOHN doesn't turn around.)*

JOHN

Working on the cultivator.

GRANDPA GEORGE

What's the matter with it?

JOHN

Something with the cylinder.

*(Pause, while GRANDPA GEORGE waits for more details. JOHN finds what he is looking for and strides off to the fields. GRANDPA GEORGE grabs his hammer and returns to work. The hammering resumes. TEENAGE BEN enters from the farmyard on a ten-speed mountain bike. He is 16 and wears a T-shirt and jeans with rubber-soled boots. He leans the bike up against the Quonset, and wanders inside.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Dad?

*(The hammering stops.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

*(Barked from inside the Quonset.)* What? Whattya need?

*(GRANDPA GEORGE enters from the back of the Quonset. His hammer is back inside his front chest pocket.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Morning, Grandpa. Have you seen my dad?

GRANDPA GEORGE

He's working on the cullivator this forenoon.

TEENAGE BEN

Oh. Did it break down?

GRANDPA GEORGE

I didn't get out here until 8:30. Did he tell you what you're supposed to do this morning?

TEENAGE BEN

No, not really.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Good! You can help me!

*(He grabs his hammer and begins walking back into the Quonset, still speaking.)*

Come back here, I'm trying to fix the brakes on the GMC pickup.

TEENAGE BEN

I don't know, Grandpa, I—

GRANDPA GEORGE

I need you to hold this while I try to bang it into place. Come over here!

*(TEENAGE BEN sighs and follows GRANDPA GEORGE to the Quonset.)*

*Almost immediately, the audience hears a clanging of hammer on steel. After a few moments, CHILD ROBERT enters from the farmyard. He is fourteen years old and wears the same clothes he wore in scene one, except for some brown jersey gloves. He carries his bat and baseball. He sets them up against the outside of the Quonset, then grabs a hammer from the workbench. Next to the workbench is a two foot steel shank, which is bent. He sits down, using a nearby pail for a stool, and begins straightening the shank with the hammer. As he bangs away, GEORGE enters from the field. He is wearing the same clothes as in scene one, and is sweaty and tired.)*

GEORGE

Robert! There you are!

*(CHILD ROBERT keeps working, and doesn't reply.)*

Where were you this morning? I thought I told you to be out in the field!

CHILD ROBERT

I was practicing baseball.

GEORGE

That west field I was going to cullivate this morning was full of rocks. I broke a shovel on the cullivator! I'm sick of you doing everything halfway. (Pause. No reply.) Here. I'll straighten this. (Indicating the metal shank.) You go out and cullivate the rest of that west field, then come back for lunch.

*(Pause. CHILD ROBERT is visibly angry. He turns around and begins to exit to the field.)*

Okay, okay—hold up. (CHILD ROBERT stops.) Would you be a little more willing to get to work if I toss you a few pitches first?



CHILD ROBERT

Yes.

GEORGE

All right, then. Get your bat.

*(CHILD ROBERT does. He crosses away from GEORGE and stands at an imaginary home plate. GEORGE backs up as the pitcher.)*

Get ready, I'm throwing a fastball!

*(GEORGE throws a hard pitch. CHILD ROBERT misses and the ball goes away. CHILD ROBERT retrieves the ball.)*

Come on, Robbie—you've got to do better than that!

*(The next pitch yields the same results. Before CHILD ROBERT can get the ball, GEORGE crosses to and stops him.)*

Robbie, your swing is way off. Give me the bat. (He does. GEORGE demonstrates.) You've got to keep your head in, like this. If you're afraid of the ball, the pitcher's gonna toss 'em inside all day. Keep your eye on the ball and connect! Got it?

CHILD ROBERT

Got it.

GEORGE

Okay, you've got two strikes on you. Go get the ball and we'll see what we can do.

*(CHILD ROBERT retrieves the ball and tosses it to GEORGE, then gets in his stance.)*

Now remember—eye on the ball!

*(GEORGE winds up and throws an inside pitch, hitting CHILD ROBERT on the shoulder.)*

CHILD ROBERT

(Angry.) Ow! Dad, that hurt! (He rubs his arm.)

GEORGE

(Excited.) Good job, Robbie! Way to keep your head in there!

*(CHILD ROBERT throws the bat down and goes back to straightening the shank with the hammer. GEORGE picks up the bat and the ball.)*

What's wrong—you're mad at me? (No reply.) If you get mad every time someone pitches it inside, you're not much of a ballplayer.

*(CHILD ROBERT pounds the shank three times, loudly.)*

Stop that—you're doing more harm than good, hitting it that hard. (CHILD ROBERT stops.) It's time to get back to work. Go out and cullivate before dinnertime. I want you to clean up the barn this afternoon.

CHILD ROBERT

(Stands up, angry.) Clean the barn? I hate cleaning the barn! You always give me the worst jobs!

GEORGE

I can't stand a messy farm. We need to get this place picked up before we get too busy to do jobs like this.

CHILD ROBERT

But—

GEORGE

Stop it. I don't want to hear any more excuses. Get out there and do your chores. Give me the hammer.

*(CHILD ROBERT stares at GEORGE for a moment, the hammer in his hands. He turns around to exit to the fields. As he passes the Quonset, he throws the hammer underneath the bench into a mess of tin pails and rusted scrap metal. It makes a loud*

*crash. CHILD ROBERT storms out US.)*

Robert!

*(GEORGE follows him, placing the steel shank against the Quonset while exiting to the field, the ball and bat in his hands. As he exits, the audience once again hears the occasional pounding from inside the Quonset.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

This isn't working. We need a pliers and a better hammer.

*(TEENAGE BEN enters from the Quonset and pulls a pliers from the mess on the workbench. He looks around, and notices the cross-peen hammer CHILD ROBERT just threw underneath the bench. He picks it up and begins to walk towards GRANDPA GEORGE. He stops, looks at the hammer, and realizes what he's doing before returning the cross-peen for a much smaller but safer ball-peen hammer. He then exits back towards GRANDPA GEORGE in the Quonset. The hammering from the Quonset starts again. JOHN enters from the field and notices TEENAGE BEN's bike.)*

JOHN

Ben! Are you in there?

*(TEENAGE BEN enters from the*

*Quonset.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Hi, dad.

JOHN

Hi. What are you working on?

TEENAGE BEN

Grandpa needed some help fixing the GMC. I think we're repairing the brakes somehow, but it doesn't look like anything's getting any better. He's basically just hammering the crap out of it.

*(Three loud hammer clunks are heard from inside the Quonset, then GRANDPA GEORGE speaks.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

(In disgust.) Oh, hell!

*(TEENAGE BEN and JOHN look into the Quonset. JOHN rolls his eyes and shakes his head in the air.)*

JOHN

I need you to help me. I'm going to start putting Anhydrous Ammonia on the fields today. I want to beat the rush to rent the tanks before things get too crazy at the elevator.

TEENAGE BEN

Aren't the fields are too wet?

JOHN

I don't think so, but just to be safe, I want you to try cultivating some patches in a few fields to make sure I won't get the tank stuck in the mud.

TEENAGE BEN

Nothing like pulling a giant tank of ammonia out of a muddy field to ruin a day.  
(JOHN laughs.)

JOHN

Something's wrong with the hydraulic cylinder on the cultivator, though, so first we have to carry that in here.

*(Three more pounds from inside the Quonset. The last one makes a different sound.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

(In disgust.) Ack!

JOHN

We had better get to work before Grandpa decides to fix something we actually use.

*(TEENAGE BEN laughs. They start to exit to the fields, but GRANDPA GEORGE enters from the inside of the Quonset. He is holding a pliers and wipes his other hand on his pants. He speaks to JOHN as they walk by him.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

What's going on?

JOHN

*(Keeps walking.)* I'm going to put Anhydrous on.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Well, it's too wet for that.

JOHN

Ben's going to test it out with the cultivator.

GRANDPA GEORGE

He'll get stuck in the field. Besides, he was helping me fix the GMC.

JOHN

We can work on it later.

*(JOHN and TEENAGE BEN exit to the field. GRANDPA GEORGE waves his hand at them as if to say "to heck with you," and walks over to another part of the Quonset area. JOHN and TEENAGE BEN exit to the field. GRANDPA GEORGE mutters to himself as he cleans up the yard.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

All these breakdowns. . . why doesn't he take better care of things around here?  
*(Pause.)* Junk all over the yard. . .

*(JOHN and TEENAGE BEN reenter with the cylinder. They set it down on the Quonset floor. JOHN grabs a pliers, a socket wrench, and a crescent wrench from the work bench, and pulls up a pail to sit on for a stool. GRANDPA GEORGE enters from the Quonset.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

What's the matter?

*(No reply from JOHN.)*

TEENAGE BEN

There was a broken hydraulic hose on the cultivator. We couldn't disconnect it, so we had to bring the whole cylinder in here.

GRANDPA GEORGE

*(In disgust.)* I saw that hose leaking two weeks ago. I told you about it, John.  
*(No reply.)* Gosh. We can't afford these breakdowns all the time.

TEENAGE BEN

*(To GRANDPA GEORGE.)* Do you need help with anything? Are you still working on the GMC?

*(GRANDPA GEORGE approaches the workbench. JOHN stands up.)*

JOHN

I'll be right back. I need the tools we left out in the field.

TEENAGE BEN

I'll go get them--

JOHN

No, you keep grandpa occupied.

*(JOHN exits to the field, leaving the cylinder on stage. GRANDPA GEORGE approaches TEENAGE BEN.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

I don't know how he can stand to let it get so messy around here. You know that nice canvas I bought?

TEENAGE BEN

Yeah--

GRANDPA GEORGE

Your dad just left it in the rain last week with grain on top of it. When I found it, there was rotten grain all over! That was a good canvas! He just can't leave things out all of the time!

TEENAGE BEN

Well, he's busy.

GRANDPA GEORGE

That's no excuse for a messy yard. I can't stand a messy shop, either. (Pause.) I need you to carry some batteries over to the 706. (A tractor, pronounced "seven-oh-six.")

TEENAGE BEN

Where are the batteries? In the Quonset?

GRANDPA GEORGE

Yeah, they're hooked up to the charger in there.

*(TEENAGE BEN exits into the Quonset while GRANDPA GEORGE arranges tools on the workbench. TEENAGE BEN reenters carrying two 12-volt tractor batteries, which look like car batteries with handles.)*

Got 'em?

TEENAGE BEN

Yep. Be right back.

*(TEENAGE BEN exits to the fields as JOHN reenters with a few tools. He stops at the workbench and grabs a can of WD-40 before returning to the cylinder. He sits on his pail-stool, with*

*his back to GRANDPA GEORGE. He works on the hose some more.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Approaching JOHN.) What's the matter with it?

JOHN

I broke it.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Well, how'd you do that?

JOHN

Forgot to check the hoses, I suppose.

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Grumbly.) Gosh. (Pause. Walks away as he speaks.) Yep, you've got to check that stuff before you get started. You've got to keep an eye on what you're doing.

*(They work in silence for a moment.)*

I'm going up to the house, if you need me.

*(GRANDPA GEORGE exits to the farmyard. Pause. TEENAGE BEN reenters from the field.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Where's grandpa going?

JOHN

Up to the house. I think it's time for his nap.

*(TEENAGE BEN laughs. JOHN is still struggling with the hose.)*

God, it's rusted solid. (He sprays the connection with WD-40, a rust solvent.) I'm going to look for another hydraulic hose while that sets. Hopefully it'll loosen up.

TEENAGE BEN

Okay. I'll clean up the workbench.



JOHN

Thanks.

*(JOHN exits to the fields. TEENAGE BEN starts to arrange the tools on the workbench. The audience hears a car drive up, and two door slams. ROBERT enters from SR. He is 47 years old, and dressed in a businessman's shirt and tie. He approaches the Quonset. TEENAGE BEN crosses to them.)*

TEENAGE BEN

(Not recognising them.) Hello--

ROBERT

Hi there. I'm looking for George and Rose. . . are they here?

TEENAGE BEN

Yeah, they're up at the house. I think grandpa might be taking a nap, though—can I can help you?

ROBERT

(Surprised.) *Grandpa!* Is George your grandpa?

TEENAGE BEN

Yeah—

ROBERT

So, you're John's son?

TEENAGE BEN

Mmm-hmmm.

ROBERT

(Laughing.) God! Look at that! John's got a son! (Addressing TEENAGE BEN.) How old are you?

TEENAGE BEN

Sixteen. (A little annoyed with Robert.) How old are you?

*(ROBERT laughs.)*

ROBERT

*(Joking.)* Too old, apparently! Do you know who I am?

TEENAGE BEN

*(Confused.)* No, should I?

ROBERT

I'm your uncle Robert.

*(Pause. TEENAGE BEN is stunned. ROBERT continues.)*

I'm your dad's older brother—

TEENAGE BEN

*(Snapping back into reality.)* Yeah, I—wow. This is a surprise, I mean--

ROBERT

It's a surprise for me too, buddy!

*(ROBERT reaches over and musses up TEENAGE BEN's hair. TEENAGE BEN doesn't like it, and tactfully backs away. Pause.)*

So, John helps your grandpa on the farm?

TEENAGE BEN

Actually, grandpa sort of helps my dad.

ROBERT

*(Surprised.)* Oh yes, of course— God, this is strange. John probably looks as old as I do!

*(He laughs again. TEENAGE BEN stands awkwardly.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Well, actually—

ROBERT

So, where is everybody?

TEENAGE BEN

Grandma and Grandpa are up at the house, my dad's out in the field.

ROBERT

Great, I think I'll just go up there to see them.

*(ROBERT turn to exit to the farmyard.)*

Thanks, buddy. And tell your dad to come up to the house, too.

*(ROBERT exits to the farmyard. TEENAGE BEN stands for a moment, still stunned. He begins to run out to the fields, but JOHN enters. He carries a new hydraulic hose.)*

JOHN

*(Referring to the hose.)* Found one. Now, if that broken hose will just come off.

*..*  
*(TEENAGE BEN doesn't know what to say. JOHN crouches and works on the cylinder again.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Dad, the weirdest thing just happened.

JOHN

*(Struggling with the hose.)* Grab a bar to put on the end of the wrench. I think we can get it off if I get some more leverage.

*(TEENAGE BEN gets up to find a pipe. He looks in the scrap metal under the workbench.)*

Yeah? What happened?

TEENAGE BEN

Well, I was cleaning things up—

*(GRANDPA GEORGE yells from offstage.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

John! John!

JOHN

What's his deal? I thought he was working on the GMC.

TEENAGE BEN

No—

*(GRANDPA GEORGE enters from the farmyard, elated. He walks as fast as he can, and has a giant smile on his face. JOHN keeps struggling to remove the hydraulic hose with a pliers. TEENAGE BEN just stands back to watch.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

John!

JOHN

(Intent on his work.) What's wrong?

GRANDPA GEORGE

Didgya see him?

JOHN

See who?

GRANDPA GEORGE

Your brother!

*(JOHN rolls his eyes and gives BEN a glance as if to say "Grandpa's gone nuts." BEN doesn't know what to do. JOHN keeps working.)*

JOHN

Are you okay, dad?

BEN

He's telling the truth. Robert just came back.

*(The pliers slips off and JOHN bangs his hand on the cylinder.)*

JOHN

Ouch!

*(JOHN sets the wrench down and turns toward GRANDPA GEORGE.)*

What do you mean?

GRANDPA GEORGE

Didn't you see him up at the house?

JOHN

*(Confused.)* What? No—what are you talking about?

GRANDPA GEORGE

*(Excited.)* Robert's back! He's up at the house right now, talking to Rose.  
*(JOHN is stunned.)*

TEENAGE BEN

That's what I was trying to tell you. He came down here just a couple of minutes ago while you were looking for the new hose.

JOHN

What did he say to you?

TEENAGE BEN

He kept calling me "buddy." It was weird.

JOHN

*(Exasperated and shocked.)* Didn't he tell you where he's been, or why he came back, or anything?

TEENAGE BEN

Uh-uh.

*(JOHN looks to GRANDPA GEORGE for an answer.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

Well, no—he just got here.

TEENAGE BEN

God, I thought he was— (Realizes that this is a sensitive subject and lets his thought trail off.)--wow.

*(There is a long, almost comical pause as the three of them kind of stand around, not knowing what to do. GRANDPA GEORGE stares at JOHN. TEENAGE BEN maintains a look of confusion and alternates his gaze between JOHN and GRANDPA GEORGE. JOHN remains silent. He stares at the ground, trying to get a handle on what is going on.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

Well, come on! Let's go up and see him!

*(The situation is a little too surreal for him. Finally, JOHN sets down whatever is in his hands and starts to exit to the fields.)*

Where are you going?

JOHN

I'm going to put Anhydrous on that front field.

TEENAGE BEN

What about the cylinder? I can't test the fields without the cultivator.

JOHN

I don't want to work on it just now.

TEENAGE BEN

What should I do?

JOHN

(As he exits.) Fix the GMC.

*(JOHN exits to the fields. Pause. GRANDPA GEORGE, stunned, stands still for a minute, then exits to*

*the farmyard. TEENAGE BEN looks at the cylinder. Pause. He winds up and kicks the metal pail-stool as hard as he can. The pail flies into the Quonset and makes a loud crash. TEENAGE BEN grabs a hammer and walks back into the Quonset. Pause. The hammer's clanging resumes as the lights dim, and continues for a few moments during the blackout.)*

END OF ACT 1 SCENE 2

*(Scene 3. Friday, late July, 2010. Early evening. The farmhouse porch, connected to the south wall of the house. The farmhouse is in slight disrepair. Some patches of bare wood show through the chipped white paint. The flowerbeds are unplanted. The porch has two wooden chairs and a wooden bench swing, hung from the ceiling by chains. There is an old screen door with a creaky spring that leads into the house. There is one other exit to the farmyard. BEN enters from the house, followed close behind by SARAH and CLAIRE, who carries a cup of coffee.)*

BEN

(Stretching.) Wow, what a meal! I haven't eaten that much since—

SARAH

The last time you were out here?

BEN

(Laughing.) I think so. No wonder I'm getting sick of the city.

*(BEN and SARAH sit down on the chairs.)*

CLAIRE

I wonder if this swing will still hold me.

*(She tests it out with her hand, then sits down. JOHN enters from the house, drying his hands off with a dishtowel.)*

JOHN

Dishes are done.

CLAIRE

Thanks—sit down.



JOHN

Actually, I was going to go for a walk around the farm and work off some of that spaghetti.

*(JOHN steps off the porch.)*

BEN

I think I'll join you, if you don't mind.

*(BEN follows him. They exit to the farmyard. CLAIRE swings lightly, making a slight creaking noise. SARAH relaxes on the chair.)*

SARAH

It's so peaceful out here.

CLAIRE

I know. When we lived here, we used to sit out here for hours every night during the summer.

SARAH

That doesn't sound too bad.

CLAIRE

*(Laughing.)* We did it because we didn't have any air conditioning in the house. We would have roasted inside!

*(SARAH laughs.)*

Yeah, I sure miss the peace and quiet.

SARAH

You and John have a porch, don't you?

CLAIRE

Yes we do. It gives us a beautiful view of all the cars and buses on Walnut Street.

SARAH

Doesn't quite match up, huh?

CLAIRE

Hmmm-mm. So, how are things going with you? We haven't had a chance to talk. How's Ben dealing with this?

SARAH

Pretty well, I think. He was quiet on the day that we found out that George had passed away, but since then, he's been fine. How about John?

CLAIRE

Oh, I don't know. He was kind of expecting this, I think. I feel bad for him. You know, when we got married, I expected John's parents to be around for a long, long time. Both of them seemed so healthy and full of life.

SARAH

I remember that it was a big shock to Ben when his grandma died.

CLAIRE

Oh, when Rose died—that was tough. Nobody expected it. One day she was working in the garden, the next she was gone. John took it especially hard. He had a close relationship with his mother.

SARAH

I don't think one ever really recovers from losing a parent.

CLAIRE

Or any family member, for that matter. Families are strange that way—you get to a point where you never want to see them again, and then one day someone's gone. They take part of you with them, and you realize how much you needed them in the first place. (Pause.) So, what's this about moving to a new place?

SARAH

Oh, Ben and I are looking for a bigger apartment. I'd like to find somewhere that's closer to where I work, and I think Ben's feeling a little cramped in the place we are now.

CLAIRE

That's because you two don't have enough windows. I think I'd go nuts if I looked out my bedroom window and had a brick building staring me in the face.

*(Pause. SARAH looks out at the farm.  
CLAIRE goes back to her coffee.)*

SARAH

It's such a nice evening.

CLAIRE

I know. It's too bad we're up here under such sad circumstances. I feel like I shouldn't go out and enjoy myself.

SARAH

Is the funeral tomorrow or Sunday?

CLAIRE

Sunday. Tomorrow, they're reading the will.

SARAH

Ben mentioned that. Why are they reading it so soon?

CLAIRE

I don't know. I'm sure Robert had something to do with it. I don't even try to understand what makes him tick anymore. *(Pause.)* I suppose I'll go inside and get settled in. The house looks so empty to me. Maybe if I make the bed, things will feel a little more "homey."

*(CLAIRE exits into the house. CHILD BEN, an eight year old boy; and YOUNG JOHN, age 35, enter from the house. They wear jeans and T-shirts. CHILD BEN wears a baseball glove and carries a baseball. He jogs out into the yard. YOUNG JOHN tosses his glove out onto the lawn, and carries his beat-up Louisville Slugger baseball bat. SARAH is oblivious to them.)*

YOUNG JOHN

Don't get too far back, Ben. I need to warm up.

CHILD BEN

You've got a bat, dad.

YOUNG JOHN

Yeah, but you haven't been shoveling grain all day.

*(CHILD BEN comes closer, and tosses the ball to YOUNG JOHN.)*

Okay, I'll hit you some grounders.

CHILD BEN

Okay.

*(YOUNG JOHN tosses the ball up a little, and hits it along the ground for CHILD BEN to field. They find a rhythm and keep it up while talking. YOUNG JOHN encourages CHILD BEN occasionally, saying "good job," or "nice grab.")*

CHILD BEN

Hey dad, I'm going to be a professional baseball player when I grow up.

YOUNG JOHN

That would be quite an accomplishment. . . it takes a lot of hard work, though.

CHILD BEN

I know, but you'll practice with me every day, won't you?

*(JOHN smiles.)*

YOUNG JOHN

Of course I will.

CHILD BEN

(Pause.) Dad?

YOUNG JOHN

Yeah?

CHILD BEN

When are you going to get a job?

YOUNG JOHN

(Laughs.) What do you mean? I have one.

CHILD BEN

You do?

YOUNG JOHN

Of course I do. I'm a farmer.

*(CHILD BEN accidentally throws the ball over YOUNG JOHN'S head and offstage. YOUNG JOHN turns around to get it.)*

CHILD BEN

Whoops... sorry, dad. (When YOUNG JOHN returns.) Yeah, but farming isn't a job.

YOUNG JOHN

It's not?

CHILD BEN

No. A job is when you have a boss and you have to go to work every day.

YOUNG JOHN

Just because I don't have a boss doesn't mean I don't have a job, Ben. Farmers work for themselves. We're self-employed.

CHILD BEN

How do you make money?

YOUNG JOHN

I sell the grain I grow to the elevator.

CHILD BEN

(Confused.) Why don't they just grow their own grain?

YOUNG JOHN

They need a lot more than they can grow, Ben. The elevators sell it to food companies and to other countries.

CHILD BEN

So you don't have a boss or anything?

YOUNG JOHN

Nope.

CHILD BEN

No one helps you?

YOUNG JOHN

(Indicating his own two hands.) Just Charlie and Joe.

*(CHILD BEN laughs.)*

CHILD BEN

Wow! I want to be a farmer when I grow up!

YOUNG JOHN

That takes a lot of hard work, too. (Pause.) It's probably best for you to keep your options open for a while, Ben.

*(JOHN and BEN return from their walk. They enter from the farmyard and walk up to the house, crossing through the center of CHILD BEN and YOUNG JOHN's game of catch.)*

SARAH

Have a good walk?

BEN

Yep. Have a good rest?

*(SARAH nods and yawns. They all enter the house and exit through the screen door.)*

CHILD BEN

(To YOUNG JOHN.) It's hard to see the ball.

YOUNG JOHN

It is getting dark. Should we go in?

*(CHILD BEN nods.)*

Come on. I'll give you a piggyback ride.

*(They stop playing catch. YOUNG JOHN turns around and crouches down, waiting for CHILD BEN to hop on his back. YOUNG JOHN carries CHILD BEN inside the house, through the door.)*

END OF ACT 1 SCENE 3

*(Scene 4. Later that night. Outside, at the farmyard. It is night time. The yard is visible from the light of a harvest moon. The distant sound of combines can be heard from the rear of the theater. JOHN is sitting on the ground, looking over the audience, watching the "fields." He has a cup of coffee in his hand, and sips from it occasionally. The audience hears the screen door from the farmhouse open and slam shut. After a few moments, CLAIRE enters from the farmhouse.)*

CLAIRE

John?

JOHN

Yeah?

CLAIRE

Where are you?

JOHN

Over here.

CLAIRE

What are you doing? I thought you'd already gone to bed. I went upstairs and couldn't find you.

JOHN

*(Indicating the fields.) I'm watching the combines.*  
*(CLAIRE sits down next to him.)*

CLAIRE

The farmers are pulling an all-nighter, huh?

JOHN

Yep. I didn't catch the weather forecast, but they must be expecting a storm.



CLAIRE

They've certainly got enough moonlight to work with.

JOHN

(Referring to the moon.) Isn't that a nice one? (Pause.)

CLAIRE

How many combines are there? I don't have my glasses on.

JOHN

I can see the lights from six of them. (He points from left to right.) There's one over there, near the old Reslock place; one on Wayne's field; one off in the distance a ways; and three in a bunch in the west.

CLAIRE

Those look like they're on our old land.

JOHN

I think they are.

CLAIRE

I'm surprised they've got their employees working this late.

JOHN

Yeah, me too. If there was a storm coming, you'd think they would have brought a few more combines out here to get the job done this afternoon.

CLAIRE

Well, maybe they had other farmers to exploit today.

*(JOHN laughs. Pause.)*

JOHN

When I was a kid, I used to sit out here, waiting for my dad to finish in the field so we could go to bed. I'd stand out here for hours with my baseball bat, tossing up rocks and hitting them into the darkness.

CLAIRE

Ben used to do the same thing when he was waiting for you. When he was little, I used to sit out here with him and watch you work at night with your

dad. (JOHN smiles.) Ben never wanted to go to bed until you got home.  
(Pause.) I didn't either.

*(Pause. JOHN puts his arm around  
CLAIRE.)*

Do you miss it?

JOHN

I don't know. Yeah, I guess I do.

CLAIRE

Ever since we got back you've been wanting to get out there. I can tell.

JOHN

Maybe the grass is just greener on the other side. If I was out there in the  
combine right now, I'd be cursing the weather.

*(Pause.)*

I wish we could have held on, Claire.

CLAIRE

I know. Me too.

JOHN

I didn't want to quit.

CLAIRE

I didn't want to move.

*(Long pause.)*

Do you think your dad left us the house?

JOHN

I don't know.

CLAIRE

Are you worried about it?

JOHN

A little. I think Robert is expecting it just as much as we are.

CLAIRE

That's silly. We're the ones who lived here. We're the ones who farmed the land with your dad.

JOHN

I can't figure out any other reasons why Robert would have bothered to clean everything out if he wasn't expecting that the farm would be his.

CLAIRE

Were your things in the Quonset?

JOHN

No. It was completely bare.

CLAIRE

(Astonished.) You're kidding. He can't do that!

JOHN

Well, he did.

CLAIRE

What did you have in there?

JOHN

I don't know. Nothing too important. Some old tools and junk. When we moved into the house, I took most of the things that were in the attic out to the Quonset. There were some old games and toys, pictures—those kind of things.

CLAIRE

Were you looking for anything in particular?

JOHN

No, not really. I kind of wanted to keep my baseball bat.

CLAIRE

From when you were a kid?

JOHN  
Yep.

CLAIRE  
I'm sure Robert would have saved that.

JOHN  
He probably didn't even know it was a bat. It was dirty and splintered. To hold it together, I had to wrap it with tape. Those kids Robert hired probably thought it was junk.

CLAIRE  
(Pause.) I'm sorry, honey.

JOHN  
It's no big deal. I'll get over it.

CLAIRE  
You say that a lot.  
*(Pause. CLAIRE yawns.)*

I think I'm going to go to bed. It's late.

JOHN  
Okay.  
*(CLAIRE stands up.)*

CLAIRE  
Are you coming in?

JOHN  
No, I think I'll sit out here for little while longer. If it rains for the rest of the weekend, this might be the last chance I have to watch the combines.

CLAIRE  
All right. Don't fall asleep out here. Goodnight.  
*(She leans over and gives JOHN a quick kiss and hug goodnight.)*

Goodnight.

JOHN

*(CLAIRE exits to the farmhouse. Pause. The combines get considerably louder, as if one is working on the field right next to the farm. TEENAGE JOHN enters from the Quonset area. He wears jeans, a T-shirt, a baseball cap, and a light jacket. He is 16 years old and carries the slightly-used Louisville slugger and a ball. He and JOHN, still seated on the ground, are oblivious to one another. TEENAGE JOHN stares out at the combines for a minute. Pause. TEENAGE JOHN tosses up the ball and catches it a few times. On the third time, he winds up with the bat and nails the ball, out of sight. Anger creeps over his face. He stares in the direction he hit the ball. The combines get louder. He looks at the combine, and the headlights illuminate his face for a moment, until the combine turns around. TEENAGE JOHN pauses. He examines the bat. The voice of TEENAGE ROBERT can be heard.)*

TEENAGE ROBERT

If you so much as make a *sound*, I'll knock you out with this bat, understand?

*(TEENAGE JOHN then picks up a stone from the ground, tosses it up in the air, and hits it with the bat out over the fields, making a loud CRACK sound. He does this three or four times in rapid succession, angrily, intending to chip the bat. He pauses and watches the combine work. After a few moments, YOUNG CLAIRE and*

*CHILD BEN enter from the farmhouse. They and the two JOHN's are oblivious to one another. CHILD BEN wears a light coat and sweatpants with tennis shoes. YOUNG CLAIRE wears casual clothing. They cross to an empty area on stage and sit down on the ground, looking at the combine. Periodically, combine lights sweep across the yard, as it turns around for another pass. CHILD BEN is visibly excited to see the combine. He curls up against YOUNG CLAIRE, tired, but not allowing himself to fall asleep. Pause. TEENAGE BEN enters from the quonset area. He too is 16 years old, dressed in a plain T-shirt and dirty jeans, and is oblivious to all characters on stage. He carries an old, dirty, splintered Louisville Slugger baseball bat with black tape around the handle and part of the upper barrel. He looks out at the combine like the others. He picks up a few stones and bats them, but without the anger that TEENAGE JOHN had earlier. After a few swings, TEENAGE JOHN stands up and bats a few more rocks.)*

CHILD BEN

Mom?

YOUNG CLAIRE

Hmm?

CHILD BEN

Is dad almost done?

YOUNG CLAIRE

Almost, Ben. Are you tired?

CHILD BEN

(Yawning.) No..

*(The combine lights point at the yard,  
and TEENAGE JOHN and  
TEENAGE BEN stop batting rocks.  
The voices come from offstage,  
preferably the rear of the theater.  
Characters not being addressed are  
oblivious to the offstage voices.)*

GEORGE

(From offstage, addressing TEENAGE JOHN.) JOHN!

JOHN

(From offstage, addressing TEENAGE BEN.) BEN!!

TEENAGE JOHN

(Yelling to GEORGE.) What?

GEORGE

(Addressing TEENAGE JOHN.) Bring the truck around so I can unload!  
*(TEENAGE JOHN drops his bat and  
strides offstage to the Quonset.)*

JOHN

(From offstage, addressing TEENAGE BEN.) BEN!!

TEENAGE BEN

(Yelling to JOHN.) Are you done?

JOHN

(Addressing TEENAGE BEN.) Yeah, I'm done! Go open the Quonset door!

TEENAGE BEN

All right, dad!

*(TEENAGE BEN exits to the  
Quonset.)*

## YOUNG CLAIRE

(Addressing CHILD BEN.) OK, Ben—I think dad's coming into the yard. Should we go up to the house?

*(CHILD BEN nods. YOUNG CLAIRE picks him up and exits to the farmhouse. After a few moments, the combine noises and lights fade away, leaving JOHN in silence and moonlight, looking somber as he gazes around the yard. He gets up, stretches, grabs his coffee cup, and returns to the house, exiting SR. Pause. Silence. GEORGE and TEENAGE JOHN enter from the Quonset area. GEORGE walks gingerly. He wears dusty overalls and carries a metal lunchbox. TEENAGE JOHN follows, and stops off to pick up his bat. He walks sleepily. They exit to the farmhouse. Pause. JOHN from 1996 enters from the Quonset. He is 37 years old, and wears jeans and a T-shirt, covered in grain dust, dirt, and grease. He carries a small lunch cooler and a coffee thermos. He is followed by TEENAGE BEN, bat in hand. They also walk towards the farmhouse. Pause. JOHN crosses to exit to the farmhouse, but stops and gets a look at the harvest moon.)*

## JOHN

Look at that moon, Ben.

*(JOHN takes a few steps towards the fields, his tired eyes fixed on the moon. TEENAGE BEN, a few steps back, watches JOHN, then looks at the sky.)*

Makes you feel great to be alive, doesn't it?



TEENAGE BEN

Yeah. Yeah, it does.

*(TEENAGE BEN crosses to JOHN and takes his cooler and thermos. They exit to the farmhouse. The voice of BEN from 2010 can be heard from offstage.)*

BEN

I remember watching the moon with my dad. Every muscle aching, struggling to hold those heavy eyelids open, grain dust in every pore, smelling of sweat and chaff and God knows what else—

*(Pause.)*

And there was my dad, loving every minute of it.

*(Lights fade to black.)*

END OF ACT 1 SCENE 4

*(Scene 5. Nighttime, late July. In the farmhouse. There are two bedrooms, which share a wall. One is BEN's old room, the other is JOHN and ROBERT's. Each room has a window. BEN's room, set in 2010, is not decorated. It has bare walls, a double bed, a small dresser, and a lamp. SARAH and BEN's suitcases are on the floor, open. The second bedroom has one doorway, two twin beds, two small dressers, a lamp, and is set in 1966. TEENAGE JOHN who is 13, keeps his half of the room neat and orderly. He has pennants of football teams, and a poster of Harmon Killebrew. A baseball bat leans up against his bed. TEENAGE ROBERT, who is 17, keeps his half of the room in a chaotic mess of clothes and junk. He has a lava lamp, a guitar, and a record player. Albums lie around the room. Both rooms are dark. BEN turns the light on as he enters his bedroom. He removes his shoes and socks and sits down on the bed, facing the doorway. He looks around the room, lost in memory. Pause. He gets up and removes a few toiletry items from his suitcase and exits, turning his light off. Simultaneously, TEENAGE JOHN enters his room, turning his light on. He wears grass-stained jeans and a T-shirt. He carries a baseball glove. He lies down on his bed, and repeatedly tosses the baseball up in the air, catching it. The light in BEN's bedroom is turned on as YOUNG CLAIRE enters. She is 31 years old, and wears clothing that would be comfortable on a late summer night in*

*1985. She is followed by CHILD BEN, who is five years old. He wears one-piece pajamas with feet, and carries a toy tractor. He walks reluctantly behind YOUNG CLAIRE at a distance.)*

YOUNG CLAIRE

Come on, Ben. Enough pouting. It's time for bed.

CHILD BEN

But I'm not tired!!

YOUNG CLAIRE

You've got a big day tomorrow, and you will be tired if you don't get some sleep now. Let's go.

*(She waits for CHILD BEN to catch up and walk past her. They enter through the doorway. CHILD BEN sits on the bed and drives his tractor around the bedspread. YOUNG CLAIRE pulls back the covers, which aren't many--it's hot inside the house.)*

Climb in.

*(CHILD BEN climbs under the covers. YOUNG CLAIRE begins to tuck him in.)*

CHILD BEN

Mom?

YOUNG CLAIRE

Yes?

CHILD BEN

When's the bus going to get here?

YOUNG CLAIRE

Eight o'clock.

CHILD BEN

How many other kids are going to be on it?

YOUNG CLAIRE

I don't really know, Ben.

CHILD BEN

What if there aren't any seats left for me?

YOUNG CLAIRE

You don't have to worry about that. They won't send a school bus that can't hold everybody. There'll be enough space for you. (She finishes tucking him in.) Don't worry about this stuff. You're going to like school.

CHILD BEN

(Indicating his toy.) Can I bring my tractor with?

YOUNG CLAIRE

I don't know about that, you might lose it. Better wait a few days first, okay?

CHILD BEN

Okay.

YOUNG CLAIRE

Goodnight. Sleep tight, Ben. Love you.

CHILD BEN

You too. Goodnight, mom.

YOUNG CLAIRE

See you in the morning.

CHILD BEN

You too.

*(YOUNG CLAIRE turns off the light and exits. TEENAGE JOHN is still lying on his back, tossing the baseball in the air. The audience hears the voices of TEENAGE ROBERT,*

*GEORGE, and ROSE. They are loud enough for the audience and TEENAGE JOHN to hear, but are muffled—they come from a room downstairs, beneath the bedroom.)*

GEORGE

(Angry.) Where do you think you're going? We've got work to do tomorrow!

TEENAGE ROBERT

I'm going to town.

GEORGE

No you're not. I need you to be out in the field by 7:00. It's already 10:30. You'll never be out in the field by 7:00 if you go out now, and even if you were, you'd be no use to me half asleep.

TEENAGE ROBERT

Just get off my case, all right?

GEORGE

Don't talk to me like that! This lack of respect has gone far enough. I am your father, Robert. You'll do what I say!

ROSE

Maybe you should just get some sleep, Robbie. We'll deal with this in the morning.

GEORGE

A fine farmer you're going to make.

TEENAGE ROBERT

You just don't get it, do you? I don't want to be a farmer! I hate farming! I hate this town, and house, and this stupid family!

GEORGE

You're walking on thin ice, Robert!

## TEENAGE ROBERT

I don't care! I didn't ask for this! I never once said that farming is something I want to do! I'd rather be dead than end up wasting my life like you!

*(A loud slap is heard. TEENAGE JOHN winces.)*

## ROSE

George!

*(A screen door opens and slams shut as TEENAGE ROBERT leaves the house. TEENAGE JOHN stops throwing the baseball and crosses to the window to look for his brother. Seeing no one, he sits down on the side of his bed. He places the ball inside of his glove and sets it next to his bat. Pause.*

*TEENAGE JOHN gets pajamas out of his dresser drawer, and exits the room, turning the light out as he leaves.*

*SARAH enters BEN's bedroom, turning the light on. She rummages around in her suitcase for a moment before BEN enters behind her. They are oblivious to CHILD BEN in the bed, and he is oblivious to them. BEN sits down on the edge of his bed.)*

## SARAH

Are you going to bed already?

## BEN

I think so. All of that driving tired me out, plus I want to get up early tomorrow and talk to my dad.

## SARAH

What was wrong with him earlier?

## BEN

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. We went over to the Quonset to look around, and I guess Robert paid some kids to clean the whole yard out. They threw a bunch of my dad's things in the trash.

SARAH

You're kidding--what kinds of things?

BEN

Old tools and scrap metal, mostly. There were some boxes of my dad's junk that my mom made my dad move out of the house when I was a kid. I think his old yearbooks were in there, maybe some family movies. I don't know.

SARAH

Why would Robert do that? I thought that your dad owned the Quonset.

BEN

Actually, my grandpa owns-- I mean, owned it. He owned everything in the farmyard: the barn, the Quonset, the land, the house--

SARAH

He owns the house? I assumed that this was your dad's too. I thought that your grandpa just owned the land.

BEN

Uh-uh. When my dad decided to become a farmer, he and my mom didn't have very much money to get started with. Since my grandpa owned two vacant farmyards, he sort of gave my parents their choice of farmhouses to live in until they got their feet on the ground. They picked this one, since the house was in better shape. As it turned out, farming was never profitable enough for them to be able to afford to buy the house from my grandpa, but he just let us live here rent-free. My parents fixed the place up and paid all of the utilities, but technically it was always my grandpa's house.

SARAH

What about the farmland? Did your grandpa just let your dad farm it for free?

BEN

Well, when my dad started farming, he bought some land from my great-grandpa, which is down the road a few miles. Since my dad couldn't afford any equipment, he made a deal with Grandpa George to share his equipment. My dad helped my grandpa produce his crops, and in return for the labor, my grandpa let my dad use his equipment to farm the new land my dad had bought. Once my grandpa retired, my dad worked out a system where my

grandpa would provide some of the production costs while my dad provided the labor. They split the profits.

SARAH

Did your dad buy your grandpa's equipment from him when he retired?

BEN

Most of the equipment became outdated by the time my grandpa retired. My dad had to keep buying land and expanding the farm in order to produce enough to keep his head above water. The tractors and implements that grandpa had weren't large enough to get the job done. My dad had to buy new, larger things.

SARAH

How could he afford that if he couldn't afford to buy the house?

BEN

Farmers have to take out huge operating loans that pay for most of their equipment. Most small farmers today spend the majority of their lives in debt.

SARAH

Yuck. (Pause.) So, that's how it worked the whole time your dad was a farmer?

BEN

Well, no. It got complicated because my dad had to buy more land of his own. Because my grandpa was providing production costs for his land, my dad would have to keep the wheat he grew on the new land separate from the wheat he grew on my grandpa's land. It was just easier for my dad to rent it from my grandpa. That's how it worked most of the time I was growing up.

SARAH

I don't get it. How does Robert come into the whole picture? He was never a farmer, was he?

BEN

(Laughing.) No. He still thinks a five-hundred acre farm is large enough to pay the bills. I don't know much about how he got involved in all of this, but he is the oldest son. When my dad was forced out of farming and we moved away, there wasn't anyone around to take care of my grandpa's land. My grandpa was in the nursing home by that time. Robert lived closer to the farm than the rest of



us, so he kind of took control of maintaining the yard and the house and stuff, even though it was always my grandpa's.

SARAH

(Carefully.) So who owns it now that your grandpa. . . passed away?

BEN

That's the big question. I have no idea. My grandpa owned two farms: this one, and a vacant one down the road which he bought in the fifties. I would hope that my dad would get the farmland and this house, since he stayed and lived here and helped my grandpa for all of those years, but who knows?

SARAH

What's that supposed to mean?

BEN

I don't know. You've seen how Robert is about financial things. He acts like this place is his.

*(TEENAGE JOHN reenters his room, turning the light on. He is dressed in pajamas. He lays down on his bed, staring at the ceiling.)*

SARAH

Do your parents want to move back out here?

BEN

I don't know if he wants to move here again, but my mom, dad, and I think of this as our house. The original farmland has been in our family since my great-great grandparents came here from Europe. I guess we'd like to hang onto it. After the corporations took over my dad's land, this is the only connection he still has to the farm. It's where he grew up and where he and my mom raised me.

SARAH

I'm sure your grandpa felt the same way.

BEN

Oh, I know he did... but I feel like Robert sees this as an opportunity to make some money. I doubt he ever let my grandpa know his intentions. (Pause.) To heck with it. I'm sick of worrying. We'll find out soon enough.

SARAH

When are they reading the will?

BEN

Tomorrow afternoon.

SARAH

I'll let you get some sleep. I'm going to go downstairs and read for a while.

BEN

All right. Goodnight.

SARAH

Goodnight .

*(SARAH kisses BEN, then exits. BEN reaches up and turns out the light before rolling over to sleep. Pause. There is a knock at TEENAGE JOHN's door.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

Yeah?

ROSE

Can I come in?

TEENAGE JOHN

Sure.

*(ROSE enters TEENAGE JOHN's bedroom, closing the door behind her. She smiles when she sees TEENAGE JOHN in his pajamas.)*

ROSE

Are you all ready for bed?

TEENAGE JOHN

Yeah.

*(Pause.)*

ROSE

How are you doing?

*(TEENAGE JOHN leans over, picks up his glove and baseball, and resumes tossing it up in the air. Pause. ROSE sits down on his bed and watches him.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

Mom?

ROSE

Yeah?

TEENAGE JOHN

Why do dad and Rob fight so much?

ROSE

You heard that, huh? *(TEENAGE JOHN nods.)* I don't know why it's so hard for them to get along. Robbie's having a hard time with things right now, and it's tough for your father to understand—especially during harvest.

TEENAGE JOHN

Oh.

ROSE

Your father loves you and Robbie very much. I'm sure he didn't mean what he said.

TEENAGE JOHN

I just wish they'd stop fighting.

ROSE

Me too, me too.

TEENAGE JOHN

I feel like dad and Rob wouldn't fight if dad wasn't a farmer.

*(Pause.)*

ROSE

Okay, you should get some sleep. Close your eyes. (TEENAGE JOHN does.)  
Don't worry anymore. Things always work out.

*(ROSE gets up to leave.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

Where did Rob go?

ROSE

I'm sure he just went for a walk. He'll be back in a bit. Goodnight, John.

TEENAGE JOHN

Goodnight, mom.

ROSE

I love you.

TEENAGE JOHN

Love you too.

*(ROSE smiles and exits, turning the light off as she goes. Pause. CHILD BEN reaches up and turns his light on.)*

CHILD BEN

(Yelling.) Mom!

YOUNG CLAIRE

(Muffled from downstairs.) What is it, Ben?

CHILD BEN

I can't sleep!

*(Pause. YOUNG CLAIRE enters the bedroom.)*

YOUNG CLAIRE

What's the matter?

CHILD BEN

I can't sleep.

YOUNG CLAIRE

You're just nervous.

CHILD BEN

Is dad back yet?

YOUNG CLAIRE

No, he's still out in the combine. It might rain tomorrow, so he's trying to finish the whole field. He probably won't be home until morning.

CHILD BEN

(Pause.) Could you read me a story?

YOUNG CLAIRE

It's too late for that, Ben. It would just wake you up again.

CHILD BEN

But--

YOUNG CLAIRE

Ssh. Close your eyes. (CHILD BEN does.) Now don't worry anymore-- things always work out.

(YOUNG CLAIRE sings softly.)

*Lullaby, and good night,  
in the soft evening light...  
Like a rose in its bed,  
Lay down your sweet head.  
When the morning is here,  
I will wake you my dear  
When the morning is here,  
I will wake you my dear.*

(CHILD BEN and BEN are asleep.  
YOUNG CLAIRE reaches over and  
turns out CHILD BEN's light before  
exiting. Pause. TEENAGE JOHN  
sleeps in darkness. The door to the  
bedroom is cracked open, and light  
from the hallway leaks inside.)

*TEENAGE ROBERT enters, taking care to be quiet. He pulls a suitcase out from underneath his bed, lays it on top of the covers, and opens it. He steps over to his dresser, quietly opens up a drawer, and grabs an armful of clothes. He continues packing in darkness. Occasionally, TEENAGE JOHN rolls around and stirs in his sleep. When he does this, TEENAGE ROBERT stops what he is doing and waits until it is silent once again. He rummages around the floor for a couple of records, and clunks his leg or his head on something, waking TEENAGE JOHN.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

(Groggily.) Robert? (No reply.) Rob? Are you in here?

*(TEENAGE ROBERT stays down on the ground. TEENAGE JOHN sits up.)*

I can see you on the ground. What are you doing?

*(TEENAGE ROBERT stands up and tosses the record into his suitcase.)*

TEENAGE ROBERT

(Quietly.) Shut up. Go back to bed.

TEENAGE JOHN

Are you packing a suitcase?

TEENAGE ROBERT

No. Go back to sleep.

TEENAGE JOHN

(Worried.) Yes you are. Where are you going?

*(TEENAGE ROBERT walks over to TEENAGE JOHN's bed, still in the darkness, and pushes him down on to*

*his pillow, and pins TEENAGE JOHN down to the bed by holding his hand on TEENAGE JOHN's chest. He talks in an angry whisper.)*

TEENAGE ROBERT

(Threatening.) I told you to shut up, now you listen to me. I want you to be quiet and go back to sleep. If you so much as make a sound, I'll—

*(He looks around the room, sees TEENAGE JOHN's baseball bat, and grabs it with his free hand. He holds the bat up in the air.)*

I'll knock you out with this bat, you understand? (TEENAGE JOHN nods.)  
Now shut up, roll over, and go to sleep!

*(TEENAGE ROBERT releases TEENAGE JOHN and walks back to his side of the room. Immediately, TEENAGE JOHN rolls over and shuts his eyes. ROBERT pulls a guitar case out from underneath his bed, packs his guitar, and closes the case and the suitcase. He slings the guitar case over his shoulder, picks up the suitcase and moves to the door. He opens the door a little bit, then stops and shuts it.)*

(Whispering.) John?

*(TEENAGE JOHN rolls over and talks in a frightened whisper.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

Yeah?

TEENAGE ROBERT

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

TEENAGE JOHN

Where are you going, Robbie?

*(Pause. No reply. TEENAGE ROBERT cracks the door open, and steals out as quietly as he can. The light from the hallway reveals TEENAGE JOHN's eyes, which are wide-open and frightened. As the door shuts, the lights fade to black.)*

END OF ACT I



INHERIT THE EARTH

ACT II

*(Act II, Scene 1. Saturday, the next morning. The porch. CLAIRE is seated on the porch swing. She wears a bathrobe and drinks coffee. JOHN enters from the farmyard. He wears casual dress clothes.)*

Morning.

JOHN

*(CLAIRE is startled.)*

Oh! I didn't think anyone was out here! What were you doing back there?

CLAIRE

Looking for my keys. I thought I might have left them in the Quonset.

JOHN

They're on the kitchen table. You left them in your jeans pocket.

CLAIRE

What would I do without you?

JOHN

Probably lose your own head.

CLAIRE

*(JOHN enters the house to get the keys. He reenters a moment later.)*

I've got to go. Robert's waiting for me. I'll meet you and Ben in town at the reading.

JOHN

*(JOHN exits to the driveway.)*

Okay, bye!

CLAIRE

*(From offstage.)* Bye!

JOHN

*(ROSE enters from the house. She is 40 years old. She wears comfortable clothes and a sun hat. She carries a*

*small stool, a pail full of peas, and a bowl. She and CLAIRE are oblivious to one another. She sets the small stool in the yard in front of the porch, sits down, and begins to shuck the peas. As she gets situated, SARAH enters from the house. She wears sweatpants and a T-shirt.)*

CLAIRE  
Good morning, Sarah.

SARAH  
Good morning.

CLAIRE  
Did you sleep well?

SARAH  
I slept great.

CLAIRE  
Is Ben up yet?

SARAH  
Yeah, he's getting ready. (Pause.)

CLAIRE  
I should go get ready, too. Ben and I have to be in town by ten-thirty.  
*(CLAIRE gets up and enters the house. Pause. SARAH stands up to exit to the farmyard. As she is exiting, BEN enters from the house. He wears casual dress clothes.)*

BEN  
Where are you going?

SARAH  
I'm going for a walk--want to join me?

BEN

I've got to go to town pretty soon. You go ahead.

*(SARAH exits to the farmyard. BEN sits down on the porch swing. ROSE stops shucking peas for a minute. She removes her hat and examines her hands, occasionally curling and extending her fingers. She eats a couple peas out of the bowl. GEORGE enters from the farmyard. He is 41 years old. He is dressed in workclothes and looks tired. He and ROSE notice one another. ROSE looks at him, then goes back to her peas.)*

GEORGE

*(Referring to his shoulder.)* Oh boy—am I sore. *(No reply from ROSE. GEORGE looks at the bowl.)* We've got beans already?

ROSE

*(Looking at the bowl.)* These are peas, George.

GEORGE

Oooh!

*(He grabs some out of the bowl to eat. ROSE pulls the bowl away. GEORGE takes a cautious pause, then sits down across from ROSE. He rubs his shoulder.)*

I must have been shoveling too much.

ROSE

*(Coldly.)* Mmm.

*(SARAH enters from the farmyard with JOHN's old, splintered, dirty Louisville Slugger baseball bat. The barrel is wrapped in tape.)*

SARAH

*(To BEN.)* Look what I found in the trees.

BEN

Hey! It's my dad's old baseball bat! I thought that was tossed out!

SARAH

(Handing it to BEN.) Looks like it's gotten a fair amount of use over the years.

BEN

(Examining the bat.) Yeah, both my dad and I used to bat little pebbles and rocks out into the field while we'd wait for a truck to unload or for the combine to come in. My dad will be happy to see this. I wonder how it ended up in the trees?

SARAH

Are you and your mom leaving?

BEN

As soon as she's ready. Would you rather come to town with us or stay here?

SARAH

I'm fine staying out here. It's relaxing. I'm just going to sit on the porch and read my book.

BEN

Okay, I'll be back in a little while. Love you.

SARAH

Love you too. (He kisses her goodbye.) Bye.

BEN

Bye.

*(BEN exits into the house, leaning the bat up against the house on the porch.)*

Mom! Are you coming?

CLAIRE

Yes... I'll be there in a minute.

*(BEN reenters from the house and exits to the farmyard, waving at*

*SARAH as he goes. CLAIRE follows a few seconds later. After a few moments, the audience can hear a car start up and drive away. SARAH sits down and reads her book. She is oblivious to GEORGE and ROSE.)*

GEORGE

It's hard, you know. With Robbie gone—there's just so much work. I'm already three days behind schedule harvesting the wheat.

*(Pause. GEORGE waits for a response from ROSE, who looks up at GEORGE in disbelief.)*

ROSE

Are you looking for sympathy?

GEORGE

No—what?

ROSE

*(Sarcastically.)* I'm sorry your arm hurts, George. Can I get you anything? Would a hot towel make it feel better?

*(GEORGE, sensing ROSE's sarcasm, answers cautiously.)*

GEORGE

I don't think—

ROSE

Maybe it's not your shoulder that's causing the pain.

GEORGE

Rose, don't do this—

ROSE

*(Angrily.)* What shouldn't I do?

GEORGE

You've got to stop being so sentimental about all of this.

*(Long pause.)*

ROSE

(Deeply sad, but not shaken.) George, maybe you can leave your emotions out there in the fields, but I can't. (Pause.) I don't like what this family has become. I know you struggle. I know how hard you work. But you can't keep putting your entire life into this farm. Something is slipping between your fingers.

*(Long pause. GEORGE has a somber look and avoids eye contact with ROSE, who sets the peas aside and looks out to the fields.)*

ROSE

Do you miss him?

GEORGE

(Pause.) Yes.

*(Pause. ROSE approaches GEORGE and looks him straight in the eyes.)*

ROSE

Is it still worth it?

*(No reply. ROSE picks up the bowl of peas and exits into the house. GEORGE sits down on ROSE's stool. Pause. He reaches down, picks up a handful of dirt from the ground, and holds it out in front of him. The dirt slips out of his hand on to the ground. SARAH exits into the house.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 1

*(Scene 2. 1996, the Quonset. It is harvest time. GRANDPA GEORGE and TEENAGE BEN are unloading grain offstage. The audience hears the rat-tat-tatting of a gas-powered grain auger, muffled by distance. GRANDPA GEORGE enters from the field, dressed in work clothes and a cap. He carries a grain shovel and a five-gallon pail. He walks gingerly and turns the pail over for a stool, sitting down on top. Occasionally, he looks back towards the fields to make sure things are working okay. TEENAGE BEN enters from the field. He is dressed in a dirty T-shirt and jeans, and also carries a grain shovel. A disposable dust mask hangs around his neck. It is soiled with grain dust. He sits down next to GRANDPA GEORGE as he speaks.)*

TEENAGE BEN

(Groaning.) Ohhh boy.

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Teasing TEENAGE BEN.) Are you stiff?

TEENAGE BEN

I will be tomorrow.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Just think—when I was your age, we had to harvest the wheat with a threshing machine! Everything had to be bundled up in the field. We used pitchforks to throw it into the top! Boy, if you think you're sore now, you should have tried doing that all day!

TEENAGE BEN

I couldn't handle it.



GRANDPA GEORGE

(Pause.) So, when do you have to go back to school?

TEENAGE BEN

I have a week left.

GRANDPA GEORGE

A week? We'll still be in the middle of harvest!

TEENAGE BEN

I don't know why we always start in August. Most schools wait until after Labor Day.

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Pause.) Pretty soon you'll be off to college, I suppose.

TEENAGE BEN

Yep, next year.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Are you going to go to the university in town here?

TEENAGE BEN

The community college? No, I'll probably go somewhere out of state.

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Surprised.) Gosh. (Pause.) What are you going to be? People keep asking me if you're going to be a farmer. I don't know what to tell them.

TEENAGE BEN

A farmer? (Hesitantly.) I don't know, Grandpa. (Pause.) Tell them I'm going to be a teacher.

GRANDPA GEORGE

A teacher? Is that what you want to do?

TEENAGE BEN

I don't know. Maybe. There's just so many options. Sometimes I feel like if I pick the wrong one, I'll mess up everything else.

*(The auger stops. TEENAGE BEN looks back at the fields.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

What happened over there?

TEENAGE BEN

I'll go check.

*(TEENAGE BEN gets up and jogs off to the field to check the auger. Pause. TEENAGE JOHN, 13 years old, enters from the farmyard. He crosses to the Quonset.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

Dad?

*(GEORGE, 44 years old, enters from the Quonset. He wears dirty, sweaty work clothes.)*

GEORGE

There you are. Come on. I need to fix this cultivator shank.

*(TEENAGE JOHN crosses to GEORGE, who goes back into the Quonset and drags out the cultivator shank. They kneel down with a hammer and a crescent wrench to fix it. GEORGE delivers a few hammer blasts.)*

Were you helping your mother?

TEENAGE JOHN

She's still in bed.

GEORGE

She's still asleep? You should wake her up. Hold this.

*(TEENAGE JOHN holds the shank while GEORGE attempts to loosen a nut with the wrench. TEENAGE BEN*

*reenters from the field. He sits down next to GRANDPA GEORGE.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

I don't think she's asleep, I think she's sad.

*(GEORGE is reluctant to respond. Pause.)*

GEORGE

Is that so?

*(GEORGE pounds with the hammer.)*

Here. You do this.

*(GEORGE hands the hammer to TEENAGE JOHN, who begins to pound the shank straight. GEORGE stands up and wipes his brow.)*

TEENAGE JOHN

*(In between hammering.)* Dad?

GEORGE

What?

TEENAGE JOHN

When's Rob coming home?

*(GEORGE becomes very awkward, and ignores the question.)*

GEORGE

What're you doing? You're hitting it in the wrong place. Gimme that. *(He does.)* You've got to start paying attention to your work, John.

TEENAGE JOHN

I was fixing it just fine.

GEORGE

You weren't paying attention! Get out of here! Why don't you go take a nap too?

*(TEENAGE JOHN pauses, then runs off to the farmyard.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

What was wrong over there?

TEENAGE BEN

The auger ran out of gas, but the truck had finished unloading. No spills. It doesn't look like my dad is going to have to unload for a little while, either.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Mmmm.

TEENAGE BEN

(Pause.) Did you always want to be a farmer, grandpa?

*(Once TEENAGE JOHN is gone,  
GEORGE drops the shank and walks to  
the workbench.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

What do you mean?

TEENAGE BEN

Did you ever want to do something else besides farming?

GRANDPA GEORGE

Well, I don't know. I suppose I didn't have much of a choice, since neither of my brothers were farmers and someone had to take care of everything.

TEENAGE BEN

(Surprised.) I didn't know you had any brothers! I thought it was just you and Irene.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Oh, no. I had two older brothers. We all used to help out on the farm when we were kids. I remember, one summer we all worked on a threshing crew.

TEENAGE BEN

Just the three of you?

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Laughing.) No, no... a threshing crew needed at least ten men.

TEENAGE BEN

How old were you?

GRANDPA GEORGE

Let's see... that must have been in 1934 or 1935, so I would have been about sixteen. (Laughs.) We had some good times that summer. Threshing crews would travel all over the area from farm to farm. We'd get to a place in the morning and work as long as the weather would let us. If the moon was bright enough, we'd work well past dark. We slept every night on a pile of hay in the barn of whoever we were working for at the time.

TEENAGE BEN

Sounds uncomfortable.

GRANDPA GEORGE

After working that hard, we didn't care--I could have slept on a pile of rocks. It was dangerous work, you know. Have you ever seen a threshing machine?

TEENAGE BEN

Not really.

GRANDPA GEORGE

They're huge, with a lot of moving parts. We'd take these big piles of wheat and feed it through the top. There was a whirling cylinder inside that chopped up the straw and separated the grain—like a combine. A lot of times, I had to stand on the top near the conveyor belt to make sure the grain got inside without jamming up. A lot of guys on those threshing crews got hurt that way.

TEENAGE BEN

Oh my gosh. . . and you were only sixteen?

GRANDPA GEORGE

I was the youngest of the bunch.

TEENAGE BEN

Sounds like a tough summer. Nothing but work, huh?

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Laughs.) Well, it wasn't all work. We'd have rain delays or breakdowns, and some farmers would have barn dances after we finished his harvest. (Pause. GRANDPA GEORGE is lost in memories.) I was really somethin' back then. All the girls wanted to dance with me. My brothers were jealous sometimes.

*(TEENAGE BEN laughs. Pause.)*

TEENAGE BEN

Why didn't your brothers become farmers?

GRANDPA GEORGE

They both went to the war. Orrin moved away to California and started his own business afterwards. Gary didn't make it back.

TEENAGE BEN

Oh.

GRANDPA GEORGE

(Pause.) Sometimes I wish I had been drafted too. Maybe I'd have gone somewhere else besides this farm. Who knows what I would have ended up doing.

TEENAGE BEN

You might not have made it back.

*(GRANDPA GEORGE ignores  
TEENAGE BEN's comment.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

But, one of us had to keep farming. Someone always had to keep the farm going.

TEENAGE BEN

What if no one in the family wanted to?

*(GRANDPA GEORGE laughs.)*

GRANDPA GEORGE

Well, that doesn't matter—there wasn't a choice. (Pause.) I don't know what's going to happen to this place if you don't take over.

*(In disgust, GRANDPA GEORGE  
continues to talk to himself.)*

Aaah. . . John won't be able to hang on to this place much longer, anyway. You've really got to know financial things to be a farmer these days. Now Robert—he's got a sense for the numbers. . .(Pause.) I suppose your dad's about ready to unload.

*(He trails off before standing and exiting to the field. TEENAGE BEN stands up, grabs his shovel, and wanders toward the field. He pauses to think. GEORGE goes back to working on the shank. As he pounds, TEENAGE BEN exits to the field. ROSE, 43 years old, enters from the farmyard. GEORGE has his back to her as he works.)*

ROSE

George?

*(GEORGE does not hear her.)*

George!

GEORGE

What?

ROSE

Stop that for a minute. (He does.) What did you just say to John?

GEORGE

What do you mean?

ROSE

John just came running into the house, crying. What did you say to him?  
*(GEORGE keeps working with the wrench, keeps his back to ROSE.)*

GEORGE

Nothing. He was asking all kinds of questions. . . wasn't working. . .

ROSE

He told me that you don't love Robbie anymore.

GEORGE

That's ridiculous.

ROSE

George, I want you to listen to me. The fact that Robbie ran off is not John's fault. He's struggling to deal with this just as much as you and I are. (Pause.) I suggest you stop blaming John for this before he leaves as well.

*(She turns around and exits to the farmyard. GEORGE stares ahead of him, then goes back to fixing the cultivator shank. As he works, the auger starts up again, as TEENAGE BEN and GRANDPA GEORGE are unloading some more grain. GEORGE stands up and walks to the workbench. He has a stubborn look on his face. He rummages around for a tool. TEENAGE JOHN enters from the farmyard and notices GEORGE in the Quonset. GEORGE doesn't notice TEENAGE JOHN. As GEORGE looks for a tool, he bumps a tray of socket bits, which falls down onto the floor, spilling everywhere. Pause. GEORGE turns around in rage and pushes armfuls of tools onto the floor. When he gets his anger out, he slumps against the workbench, crying. TEENAGE JOHN watches, confused and frightened. Lights fade, but the sound of the auger continues in the darkness.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 2



*(Scene 3. 2010, the porch. It is Saturday afternoon. SARAH is seated on a chair, reading. The baseball bat is leaned up against the house. The audience hears a car drive up and park in the driveway, then a door opens and slams shut. BEN enters from the driveway. He looks frazzled.)*

Hi.

SARAH

Hey.

BEN

Back so soon?

SARAH

*(BEN chuckles to himself.)*

What happened?

*(BEN steps up onto the porch and sits down in the other chair. He stares out across the fields.)*

Robert got everything.

BEN

What?

SARAH

It's all his. The house, the farmyard, the Quonset. . . everything.

BEN

How could that happen?

SARAH

I don't know. I have no idea.

BEN

Oh my God. (Pause.) Are you okay?

SARAH

BEN

I feel fine—I don't think it's sunk in yet.

SARAH

How are your parents taking it?

BEN

They were pretty calm. Neither of them said much. They're still in town, I think. My dad said he had some errands to run, but I think he just wanted to go for a drive to sort things out in his head. My mom went with him.

*(Pause. SARAH looks out at the fields. BEN grabs the bat and holds it in his hands.)*

SARAH

All of this. . . is Robert's?

BEN

*(Still in shock.)* I guess so.

SARAH

*(Pause.)* Do you want to talk about it?

*(BEN shakes his head. He examines the bat for a moment. SARAH watches him.)*

BEN

Actually, I think I'd like to just sit out here for a while, if it's all right with you.

SARAH

No problem. I'll be inside if you need me.

BEN

Okay. Thanks.

*(SARAH gets up to exit. She places her hand on BEN's head.)*

SARAH

I'm sorry.

*(BEN smiles at her and touches her hand. SARAH exits into the house. A car drives up and two doors slam. Pause. JOHN and CLAIRE enter.)*

BEN

Hi.

CLAIRE

Hi there.

JOHN

Where's Sarah? Are you just sitting out here alone?

BEN

Yeah, I thought I'd just get some fresh air.

*(Pause.)*

How are you two doing?

JOHN

Fine, I guess. Has Robert been out here yet?

BEN

No, was he going to?

JOHN

I don't know, I just figured he'd come out to do paperwork and stuff.

BEN

*(Pause.)* I think I'm going to go inside.

CLAIRE

Okay.

*(BEN exits into the house.)*

CLAIRE

*(Sarcastically.)* He looks like he's doing about as well as I am.

*(JOHN chuckles.)*

Why don't you get some rest? It's going to be a long day tomorrow.

*(JOHN nods. The two of them begin to exit into the house. CLAIRE notices the bat and picks it up.)*

What's this?

JOHN

Hey! It's my bat!

CLAIRE

I thought Robert threw it out!

JOHN

I know, I did too. I wonder where it was?

*(He holds it in his hands for a moment then puts it back against the tree. They exit into the house.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 3

*(Scene 4. Saturday evening, on the porch. JOHN is seated on a chair. He has something cold to drink—pop, or a beer—next to him. The baseball bat is still leaned up against the house. A mourning dove can be heard occasionally in the distance. CLAIRE enters from the house. She sits down on the porch swing and looks out at the farm as well.)*

JOHN

I think it's better this way.

CLAIRE

Why do you say that?

JOHN

I can stop worrying, now that none of this is ours.

*(CLAIRE laughs quietly.)*

*(Smiling.)* What? I'm serious.

CLAIRE

I don't believe you for a minute, John.

*(Pause. JOHN takes a sip of his beverage.)*

JOHN

All right, me neither—but it was a noble effort.

*(CLAIRE laughs again. Pause.)*

CLAIRE

So what are we going to do?

JOHN

There's nothing we *can* do.

CLAIRE

Are you going to talk to Robert?

I hadn't planned on it.

JOHN

*(The mourning dove coos again.)*

Well—you've got to say something to him. If you don't, I will.

CLAIRE

What good's it going to do?

JOHN

It'll keep you from hating your brother for the rest of your life, for one thing.

CLAIRE

I don't hate him.

JOHN

*(Pause. CLAIRE rolls her eyes at him.)*

I don't!

*(CLAIRE smiles, stands up, and exits into the house, patting JOHN on the back as she exits. JOHN takes another drink. The mourning dove coos once more. JOHN sits in silence for a moment.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 4

*(Scene 5. Saturday night, the farmyard. The combines are running off in the distance. Occasionally, headlights sweep across the yard. JOHN enters from the farmyard. He carries the baseball bat, and uses it as a walking stick. He walks over to the fence and leans up against it, watching the combines for a moment. Pause. BEN and SARAH enter from the driveway. They are going for a walk. BEN squints to see JOHN in the shadows.)*

BEN  
Dad? Is that you?

JOHN  
Hi.

BEN  
What're you doing?

JOHN  
Getting some fresh air. I thought I'd watch the combines for a while. You?

BEN  
Same thing. We just went for a walk down the driveway.

SARAH  
I hadn't seen combines at night before. It's weird.

BEN  
(Indicating JOHN, addressing SARAH.) We used to pull all-nighters sometimes.

SARAH  
Why do they do it?

JOHN

You have to get as much harvested as you can before it rains. They've been predicting a storm all weekend, but there hasn't been much to show for it.

BEN

I see you got your bat.

JOHN

Yeah—who found it?

SARAH

I did. It was back in the trees by the Quonset.

JOHN

Well, thank you.

SARAH

No problem.

BEN

Did you hit a few?

JOHN

(Laughing.) No—I can't swing a bat anymore.

BEN

Mind if I try?

*(JOHN shakes his head "no" and hands BEN the bat. BEN finds a rock on the ground, tosses it up in the air, takes a mighty cut, and completely misses the rock.)*

SARAH

Oooh! That's a strike.

BEN

(Laughing.) It's hard to do it when the moon's covered up by clouds. Oof. I don't think my back was ready for that.



JOHN

(Joking.) You're slowing down in your old age!

BEN

I guess so. (Pause. BEN gives the bat back to JOHN.) Mind if we join you for a minute?

JOHN

Nope. Have a seat.

BEN

I don't think this old fence would hold me anymore.

*(BEN tests it out with his hand. The fence creaks a bit.)*

Maybe I'll just lean up against it.

*(SARAH and BEN lean up against the fence and watch the combines.)*

JOHN

Hey—don't make fun of my fence.

SARAH

Did you make it?

JOHN

A long time ago. I helped my dad build this fence when I was a little kid.

BEN

Really? I didn't know that.

JOHN

Yep. Grandma wanted to grow morning glories one year, and they needed something to climb. That was a while ago. I must have been seven or eight years old.

SARAH

Wow—looks like you did a good job.

JOHN

I remember working on it in the garage with my dad at night. It was the first thing I really ever helped him do. While we built it, he showed me how to use a hammer and saw.

BEN

(Joking.) That explains all the hammer marks on the joints.

*(JOHN and SARAH laugh.)*

JOHN

He let me paint it all by myself, too. I was so proud of our fence—I felt that the morning glories grew so well that year because they had such a nice fence to climb.

*(BEN smiles. Pause.)*

BEN

Weird. Now it's Robert's fence.

*(Awkward silence. The combine headlights sweep across the yard.)*

I wonder what he's going to do with the place?

JOHN

He'll sell it, I suppose. Maybe he'll rent it.

BEN

Maybe he'll tear the whole place down.

SARAH

Stop it, Ben.

BEN

I was just kidding.

*(A gust of wind blows through the yard.)*

Brrrr! Maybe we'll have a storm, after all!

JOHN

I wouldn't doubt it. Those are some thick clouds.

BEN

(To SARAH.) Are you getting cold?

SARAH

No, I'm okay.

BEN

Are you sure?

SARAH

Yes, I'm fine.

*(Pause.)*

BEN

Okay, I'm not fine. I'm freezing. I need to go inside.

*(JOHN and SARAH laugh. BEN steps away from the fence.)*

Are you two going to stay out here?

SARAH

No, I'll come in with you.

BEN

Dad?

JOHN

I'll stay a little longer. Maybe there'll be some lightning to watch.

BEN

Okay. Goodnight.

SARAH

Goodnight.

JOHN

Goodnight, you two. Sleep well.

*(BEN and SARAH exit to the farmhouse. JOHN stares up at the sky. The wind blows once more. JOHN steps away from the fence, leans over, and picks up a small rock. He tosses it up in the air a few times and catches it in his hand. On the fourth toss, he throws it high in the air, winds up with the bat, and hits the rock. It makes a loud, satisfying crack. JOHN smiles. He tosses up another one, and takes a swing at it. He continues batting rocks until he hits three or four. He then crosses to the front of the stage, carrying the bat.)*

What happened to this place?

*(He sits down on the edge of the stage and holds the bat across his lap. The combines get louder as the wind blows. JOHN prays to the sky.)*

When's it going to end, Lord? How much more am I going to have to take?

*(The headlights sweep across the yard as usual, but stop on JOHN, bathing him in light. JOHN seems oblivious to this. Characters speak over the top of one another, gradually building louder and louder.)*

CHILD BEN

No boss? I want to be a farmer when I grow up!

GRANDPA GEORGE

(In disgust.) He never keeps this place clean.

CLAIRE

We're not going to be able to stay in debt forever, John.

ROBERT

The markets aren't going to bounce back, John. Face it.

CLAIRE

Face it.

GRANDPA GEORGE

I always kept this place clean as a whistle.

TEENAGE BEN

How are you going to run the farm while I'm at school?

CLAIRE

You can't keep doing this alone.

TEENAGE ROBERT

I don't care! I didn't ask for this! I never once said that farming is something I want to do! I'd rather be dead than end up wasting my life like you!

ROSE

Your father loves you and Robbie very much. I'm sure he didn't mean what he said.

GRANDPA GEORGE

Look at all of this spilled grain! What a waste of money!

ROBERT

I've been talking to some guys who work for an agribusiness company--They're interested in buying your land.

GRANDPA GEORGE

I'd never treat this machinery as rough as he does.

JOHN

(Yelling, to the sky.) HOW MUCH MORE DO I HAVE TO TAKE?

ROBERT

You're going to lose the farm, John. Admit that, at least.

CLAIRE

John, I think it's time to let go. We have to sell the farm.

GRANDPA GEORGE

And look at all of these breakdowns!

CHILD BEN

Can I ride in the tractor, dad?

ROBERT

You can sign a contract, or you'll be forced out in a couple of years. Once these corporations get a foot into an industry, there's no stopping them.

TEENAGE BEN

You're going to do what?

*(Long pause. JOHN stands up.)*

CLAIRE

John, you're not going to believe this, but today, your mother had a heart attack.

BEN

Everything went to Robert.

CLAIRE

She's not okay, John.

SARAH

All of this... is Robert's?

*(All voices stop. CLAIRE speaks.)*

CLAIRE

Rose died this morning, John.

*(The audience hears a loud thunder crash. The stage flashes. Leaving only JOHN in the center of the stage, staring at the field, the bat a few feet away from him. Long pause. JOHN grabs the bat, and stands up to exit. He catches sight of the fence.)*

BEN

Now it's Robert's fence.

*(JOHN runs at the fence with the bat, attacking it. He pounds at it, violently*

*and rapidly. He yells the following lines while attempting to break the fence.)*

JOHN

This is MY fence! God damn it, it's my fence!

*(Lightning flashes, then another thunderclap. JOHN winds up and puts all of his strength into hitting the fence. The bat breaks in half. JOHN falls to his knees, picking up the barrel of the bat. His back is partially to the audience as his head falls between his knees. His hands slowly drop, allowing the halves of the bat to fall to the ground. He covers his face with his hands. The audience can see from the way his back bounces that he is crying. He continues crying as all lights fade to black.)*

ROSE

Don't worry anymore. Things always work out.

*(Thunder rumbles gently. The combine noises fade away and the audience hears it begin to rain. Blackout. It rains for a minute in the blackness.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 5

*(Scene 6. Sunday morning. The Quonset area, 2010. It is late afternoon. The area is bare. The Quonset itself is completely empty. The overhead door is closed. JOHN enters from the farmyard. He is dressed casually, and walks slowly. His gaze occasionally drifts around the farm, but focuses primarily on the ground in front of him. He leans up against the overhead door and stares out at the horizon. Pause. The audience hears a car drive up and a door slam. JOHN stops. He looks over towards the farmyard. Pause. ROBERT enters from the farmyard. He carries a briefcase. He is impersonal and business-like.)*

ROBERT

There you are.

JOHN

Hi.

ROBERT

What are you doing down here?

JOHN

Walking around.

*(Pause. ROBERT opens up his briefcase and rummages around for some papers.)*

ROBERT

I need some info from you.

*(ROBERT continues rummaging. JOHN looks on, annoyed.)*

JOHN

What kind of "info"?



ROBERT

I need to find out a few things about the ground around the house.

*(ROBERT finds his paper. He sets the  
briefcase down on the ground, open.  
speaks in a condescending tone,  
pointing out elements of the map.)*

Here it is. Now, this is a map of the property.

JOHN

I know.

ROBERT

The house is here, and the Quonset is over here. (He pulls out a pen.) Could you show me where things are buried around here?

JOHN

(Pause.) Buried?

ROBERT

You know--the septic tank, the well, power cables--that sort of thing.

JOHN

Why?

ROBERT

(Pause.) Property insurance.

JOHN

What are you talking about? The funeral's in two hours. Can't we do this later?

ROBERT

They've got to know this stuff for insurance.

JOHN

The house is already insured. Are you changing insurance companies? Why don't you just have them send the documents to the new one?

ROBERT

(Pause.) Well, yeah. I just thought it would be easier to check with you.

*(JOHN takes the map and ROBERT's pen.)*

JOHN

(Marking the map.) There's cables here, and the septic tank is over here.

ROBERT

Thanks.

*(ROBERT takes the map and crosses to his briefcase.)*

JOHN

What are you planning to do with the house?

ROBERT

What do you mean?

JOHN

Are you going to sell, or rent, or what?

ROBERT

I'm still looking into that.

JOHN

Come on, Rob. You know exactly what you're going to do with the house--stop with the B.S.

*(ROBERT pauses, then turns back to JOHN.)*

ROBERT

A guy I know gave me a heck of a deal on the house and the land. I'm selling it to him.

JOHN

Really? Who is it?

ROBERT

Tom Davis. (Pause.) He owns Davis Construction.

JOHN

What's he want with the house?

ROBERT

Actually, he doesn't really want the house. He wants the land.

JOHN

Why would Davis Construction want *this* place? It's too far away from town to use it—unless. . . You're selling the land for gravel and fill, aren't you!

*(No reply.)*

*(Angry.)* You're kidding me! You're having the place leveled? So all the buildings are going to be ripped down?

*(Still no reply. Pause. JOHN crosses away, while ROBERT maintains his arrogant expression.)*

When does all this happen?

ROBERT

They're coming in on Monday to tear down the house.

JOHN

Jesus! What the hell are you thinking?

ROBERT

It's an old house, John. Nothing works anymore, the foundation's shot. No one's going to rent the place, and I don't want to deal with being a landowner--

JOHN

*(Turning around, approaching ROBERT.)* Bullshit. That's complete bullshit. Do you think dad left you the farm for you to sell it off and destroy it? *(Pause.)* Dad built that house! That's where I grew up!

ROBERT

I grew up here, too. You've got to stop being so god damned sentimental about all of this.

*(ROBERT crosses to his briefcase and arranges the contents as he speaks, crouching down to the ground.)*

You already lost the farm once. Don't do this again.

*(JOHN strides over to ROBERT, who is arranging the insides of his briefcase. He winds up and kicks the lid closed, sending the briefcase across the yard.)*

(Angry.) What the hell?

JOHN

(Yelling.) You did *not* grow up here!

ROBERT

What are you--

JOHN

Shut up! I'm sick and tired of you blowing me off like I'm still a child! Now, listen to me: for some reason I'll never be able to fathom, dad left you this farm. Do you honestly believe that he would have done it had he known what you're planning to do?

ROBERT

It doesn't matter.

JOHN

How can you say that? Of course it matters! Dad loved this place.

ROBERT

Dad didn't know his hand from a bowl of pudding when he died. How often did you visit him in the home? (Pause.) I went to see him every single week. Don't try to tell me what dad would have wanted--he left me this place because I was the one who cared about him.

JOHN

I can't believe you just said that.

ROBERT

Why not?

JOHN

You left for thirty years without a single word! You want to talk about who cares more? I stayed here. (Pause.) While you were out doing whatever it was you did for thirty years, I worked on the farm with dad. You missed everything—every harvest, every planting season. I forgot what you looked like! For god's sake, Robert, we thought you were dead! (Pause.) Don't talk to me about caring—I put everything I had into this farm and got nothing in return. Nothing. (Pause.)

ROBERT

I had reason to leave.

JOHN

You didn't think for a minute about anyone else in this family. Mom was crushed. (Pause.) Have you ever seen dad cry? (Pause.) A week after you left—I came down here to work and I found dad slumped against the workbench, tears streaming down his face. Do you have any idea what that does to a kid?

ROBERT

I don't know where all this sentimentality comes from, John. This place has brought us nothing but hard times and stress. That night I left, dad hit me—right across the face. My whole life, I've had this god-damned farm hanging over my head. I left to escape it, but you know what? It followed me. The damn place followed me everywhere I went. No matter how successful I became, I couldn't feel anything but guilt.

JOHN

So that's why you came back.

*(Long pause. JOHN and ROBERT are exhausted. ROBERT picks up his briefcase and papers. JOHN crosses away and keeps his back to ROBERT.)*

ROBERT

This isn't even a farm anymore, John. It's an empty shell. There's nothing left here. (Pause.) You need to accept that.

*(ROBERT exits to the farmyard. JOHN has a sober look on his face. He pauses for a moment. Gradually, the audience begins to hear the metal pounding coming from inside the Quonset. JOHN seems oblivious to it. The pounding gets louder, more frequent, and unsettling. JOHN crosses to the front door of the Quonset. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a key, and unlocks the door. The pounding stops. JOHN opens the overhead door, and as he raises it above his head, every character from the past exits the Quonset: CHILD JOHN, CHILD ROBERT, CHILD BEN, TEENAGE JOHN, TEENAGE ROBERT, TEENAGE BEN, YOUNG CLAIRE, GEORGE, ROSE, GRANDPA GEORGE, and JOHN, ROBERT, and CLAIRE from 1996. JOHN and these characters are oblivious to one another. All characters on stage rapidly exit to the field and the farmyard. JOHN stares into the Quonset for a moment. Lights fade.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 6

*(Scene 7. The farmyard. The weather is sunny. Birds chirp in the background. A VOICE sings.)*

VOICE

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me--  
I once was lost, but now am found.  
Was blind, but now I see.*

*(1996: CLAIRE, 43 years old; and JOHN, 44 years old enter from the farmhouse area, followed by TEENAGE BEN. ROBERT, 48 years old, follows with GRANDPA GEORGE. All are dressed in funeral attire. They cross the stage as the VOICE continues to sing.)*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.*

*(All characters exit to the driveway. Five car doors open and slam shut. The car starts and pulls away. The VOICE continues.)*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;*

*(2010: BEN and SARAH enter from the farmhouse area, followed by JOHN and CLAIRE. All four are dressed in funeral attire. They cross the stage as well.)*

*'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.*

*(The characters exit to the driveway. Four car doors open and slam shut. The car starts and pulls away. Pause.)*

*The world shall soon to ruin go,  
The sun refuse to shine--*

*(Abruptly, the lights blackout, the robin stops singing, and the VOICE stops singing without finishing the last verse, leaving an unsettled feeling.)*

END OF ACT II SCENE 7



*(Scene 8. Sunday evening, 2010. The field. The ground is covered in soil. There are a few trees in the distance, with one exit back to the farm. A mourning dove coos in the distance. JOHN enters. He wears work clothes. The sun is setting. It is evening time. JOHN's hands are in his pockets. As he slowly paces across to center stage, he stares down at the ground. He seems defeated and self-reflective. BEN enters, followed by SARAH. They are dressed in casual clothing. He carries their suitcases, and quietly sets them down at his sides. He approaches JOHN, while SARAH stays back.)*

(Carefully.) Dad?

BEN

*(JOHN turns around, slightly surprised.)*

Hi there.

JOHN

I think we're about ready to leave.

BEN

*(He indicates SARAH, who crosses over.)*

You're leaving tonight? I thought you'd wait until tomorrow.

JOHN

I know, but Sarah's got to work tomorrow morning.

BEN

I tried to get it off, but my supervisor is a real stickler.

SARAH

*(Pause. JOHN approaches SARAH.)*

JOHN

(To SARAH.) Well, it was sure nice seeing you.

SARAH

You too. Maybe we can get together during Labor Day weekend.

JOHN

Yeah, that'd be nice. (They hug.)

SARAH

(To BEN.) I'm going to go pack up the car.

BEN

Okay, I'll be there in a couple of minutes.

*(SARAH exits to the farmyard.  
Pause.)*

So, what are you doing way out here?

*(JOHN leisurely paces away.)*

JOHN

I was just checking things out. This was always the best place on the farm to watch the sunset.

*(Pause. They sit down on the ground  
and look out over the fields.)*

BEN

Dad?

JOHN

Yeah?

BEN

If Grandpa had left the place to you instead of to Robert, what would you have done with it?

JOHN

I was thinking about that. I don't really know. I wouldn't try to get back into farming, that's for sure.

BEN

Would you and mom have moved back out here?

JOHN

I don't think so. Even though mom's been acting protective of this place lately, I think that once she remembered the well water, the leaky roof—

BEN

The lack of an air conditioner—

JOHN

Yeah, those things. She wouldn't want to stay too long.  
*(They laugh.)*

BEN

What is it about this place that gets everyone so upset? The house is falling apart, the shop is empty, no one from our family is going to be farming the land—why do we care so much?

JOHN

I don't know.

*(Pause. BEN casually draws designs in the soil with his finger.)*

BEN

I mean, look at Robert. He's not very close to anyone--he treats his relatives like crap. What's important to him?

JOHN

Things.

BEN

Yeah—things. What's he trying to prove?

*(Pause. BEN picks up a handful of soil and lets it slip through his fingers to the ground.)*

You get to a point where you have to ask yourself, is it still worth it?

*(JOHN looks at BEN, who is still examining the soil.)*

Anyway, you shouldn't get too down about all of this. Look at what you've got that Robert doesn't. A loving wife, a family; a relationship with your parents—I almost think that grandpa was doing you a favor by leaving this place to Robert.  
*(Long pause. BEN stands up.)*

Well, Sarah's waiting for me. I should get going.  
*(BEN offers JOHN a hand in getting up.)*

JOHN

Yeah, I suppose it's time.

BEN

It was good to talk to you.

JOHN

You too. Thanks.

*(They hug.)*

BEN

Bye, dad. I love you.

JOHN

I love you too.

BEN

Thanks for caring more about me than about this farm.

*(BEN turns around and exits to the house, waving as he goes. Pause. JOHN paces around a bit. He stops walking at center stage and crouches down once more, examining the soil. He lightly draws designs with his index finger on the ground, and picks up a handful of dirt, allowing it to slip through his fingers. Pause. He looks out past the audience, at the fields and the horizon. He takes a long, reflective gaze. CLAIRE quietly enters. She watches her husband for a while and*

*approaches him from behind as he  
stares once again down at the ground.)*

CLAIRE

(Comforting.) I wondered where you ran off to. Ben told me you were "saying  
goodbye to the farm." I didn't expect to find you out here.

*(Pause. CLAIRE crosses next to  
JOHN and crouches next to him. She  
places a hand on his back.)*

Are you alright?

JOHN

Yeah, I think so. I just can't believe it's gone.

CLAIRE

It's not gone, John.

*(JOHN stands up and slowly crosses  
away, taking in the surroundings.)*

JOHN

Look around you, Claire. It's not bigger than us anymore.

*(Pause. JOHN crouches down and  
picks up a handful of soil, letting it  
slowly slip through his fingers to the  
ground. The mourning dove coos.)*

The hills are going to be leveled. Our house is going to be demolished. (Pause.)  
Acres and acres of *progress* as far as the eye can see.

*(JOHN gives CLAIRE a hug. They  
face the horizon again, and watch the  
sunset. JOHN smiles. He holds  
CLAIRE around her waist from  
behind. Long pause.)*

CLAIRE

Goodbye, prairie.

JOHN

Goodbye, fields.

Goodbye, trees.

CLAIRE

*(Pause. Mourning dove coos again.)*

Goodbye, farm.

JOHN

*(CLAIRE kisses JOHN on the cheek and slowly walks off SL, back to the farmyard. JOHN stays, and returns to his crouch as he watches the sunset. CLAIRE takes one last look at the fields, then at JOHN. She exits. JOHN stands and begins to follow. Halfway, he pauses and removes his shoes and socks. He wiggles his feet around in the soil for a while, enjoying the sensation of the soil between his toes. A hint of a smile creeps on his face when he closes his eyes.)*

I don't want to go.

JOHN

*(A VOICE answers him. The speaker is unseen.)*

*You must.*

VOICE

I want to swim in your sloughs.

JOHN

*You still can--my reeds will hide you like a mallard.*

VOICE

They'll burn you.

JOHN

*I've been burned before.*

VOICE

They'll tear you up—

JOHN

*I've been torn.*

VOICE

*(He bends down, picks up two handfuls of dirt and slowly lets them fall over his head and his back. Pause. He stands up, grabs his shoes and socks, dusts himself off and moves to exit. He takes one last look, as the light is dim from the sunset. He picks up a fistful of soil, and looks out at the horizon. The VOICE speaks again.)*

*Is it still worth it?*

*(JOHN watches the soil slip between his fingers for a moment. After it is half gone, he shakes his head "no," and throws the rest of the dirt into the air. After the dirt lands, he turns around without hesitation and exits.. Mourning dove fades. The lights dim, then fade to black as if the sun were setting.)*

THE END

## APPENDIX



## *Writing Inherit the Earth*

Here is a quotation from my thesis proposal, which was turned in almost a year ago, May 1999:

The bulk of my thesis would deal with the process of writing a full-length play of my own design. I intend on exploring my creative writing abilities further than I ever have before. I plan on coming back to the school in the fall with at least a detailed scene-by-scene outline of plot and character development. After writing the dialogue, I would like to hold a private reading with selected students and faculty members of my rough draft, then utilize their critiques and comments to rework and polish the play. Finally, after final readings and revisions are complete, I would like to hold a public reading of the script (most likely during spring semester 2000).

I can see the playwriting gods up in the sky somewhere getting a good belly laugh out of that one. The pompous attitude that I maintain throughout my proposal is amazing--a year ago, I operated under the assumption that the creative process is something that can be planned out or constrained to deadlines. Anyone who is familiar with my project knows that this is certainly not the case.

The journey from proposal to defense has not been an easy one, nor has it been enjoyable; it would have made things a lot less stressful had things went according to plan. In fact, I would go so far as to describe this project as a

painful experience. I intended to write a play and learn about what it takes to be a "writer." I did not anticipate the massive amounts of stress, anxiety, self-doubt, fear, and worry I would have to endure. However, this is not what I want to focus on. The question that is important is this: was it worthwhile?

In contrast to the proposal, it wasn't until mid-November that I actually started to write plot outlines and construct scenes. Most would attribute this to procrastination, but for once in my life the delay was mainly due to the fact that this project required me to do an enormous amount of research. Knowing only that I wanted to examine the farm crisis through a dramatic medium, I spent the summer and most of the fall semester researching the topic. Over those four months, I read and collected no less than 112 newspaper and magazine articles, two novels, a memoir, a collection of poetry, and a collection of personal essays. Each one reflected on scientific, political, personal, and local issues arising from a situation that is changing the way of life for tens of thousands of individuals every year. I interviewed both prosperous and struggling farmers, and toured a number of farms in the area. Also, during the summer of 1999 I worked on my family's farm as usual, this time keeping a journal of situations that could portray farm life in an interesting and accurate manner.

Many people questioned the logic of doing this amount of research for a topic with which I was already quite familiar. In addition, I wasn't writing a research paper, I was writing *a play*. I should be studying the mechanics of plot and characterization, right?

I respond by stating my intentions. I wanted to write a play about the farm crisis--an issue largely ignored in most of society outside of rural areas. Many people have no idea that this crisis even exists. Using theater as a medium, I intended on writing a play that would inform audiences while challenging their stereotypes of farming, farmers, and rural life. As a result, I knew that if I wanted to be successful, my work had to draw on much more than just my own experiences growing up on a small family farm. I needed to develop a larger perspective and become familiar with this issue from a number of differing viewpoints.

When it came time to sit down and write a play, I had absolutely no idea what to do. I figured that characters and plots would jump out from the research. As I read articles and stories, I noted things that would be conducive to drama: interesting characters, dramatic elements, controversy, visual images, etc. I used these things to sketch out the basics of a plot--a map of how I would attack "the issue." However, fitting characters to the plot seemed to be an insurmountable task. Many of the character ideas I had sketched out from the research conflicted with one another and with the plot. I spent more time deleting than I did writing, and was stuck with a case of writer's block right from the start.

I cured this writer's block by using characters and situations directly from my family and our experiences on our farm. This play, which began as a didactic

analysis of an issue through research, was becoming a memoir on stage-- something infinitely more difficult.

Now I was operating from two standpoints: on one hand, I had a plot outline that arose from an analysis of an issue. On the other hand, I had characters from my life experience to carry that plot along. These were real people from real life. From a writer's standpoint, they were inflexible; for instance, I knew that my father would never say certain things or act in a certain manner. I had no idea that there would be so much conflict between these characters and the plot. Often, it seemed as though I couldn't get my characters from "point A" to "point B." This is one of the worst conditions for a playwright to work with. However, I managed to force out a partial draft in this manner.

The first draft was less than satisfying. I had unmotivated actions and forced lines and unrealistic situations. I felt defeated and was about to give up, but nevertheless I remained persistent and tried new approaches. I read books on writing and discussed my struggles with friends and colleagues. I discovered that in my efforts to write a "good" play, I was stifling the creative process which I had endeavored to cultivate in the first place.

I scrapped the plot outline, and went back to the drawing board with my characters. I made massive character sketches and filled notebooks with writing about the world surrounding the farm I was writing about. I wrote scenes and dialogue that never appeared in the actual script in an effort to get to know how my characters would act, speak, and feel. Armed with this, I made a second

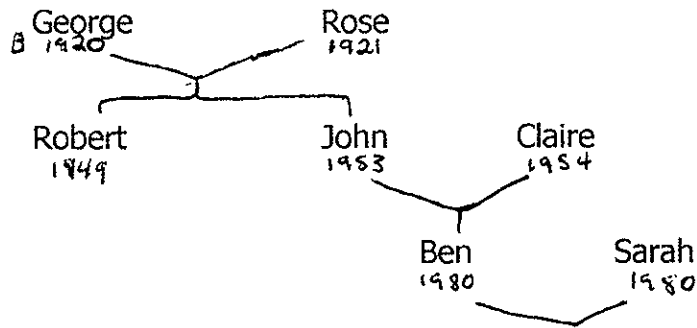
crack at it. The result, after a number of revisions, is *Inherit the Earth*. Despite the amount of work I've put into helping this story reach its present form, I still consider this a work in progress.

Painful? Yes. Worthwhile? Certainly. I hope you agree.

--Alexander Evenson, May 2000

## ***Inherit the Earth:*** **Synopsis and other pertinent information**

Cast of characters:



Synopsis: I-1 to I-5

The play is set on the farm where George and Rose (and later John and Claire) lived and raised their family. Something that is difficult to convey in a reading of the script is the fact that I don't maintain a consistent sense of time. The play's "present" action takes place in 2010, after George and Rose have died and John, Claire, and Ben have moved away. All characters are returning to the farm for George's funeral.

Instead of organizing the play chronologically and beginning the first scene in 1950, I have chosen to organize the play thematically. Therefore, in one scene I may have three versions of the same character, at different ages. When characters from different time periods are on stage at the same time, they go about their business as if the other wasn't there. For ease of explanation, I'll refer to these jaunts into the past as "memory scenes."

During the action in the present, it is revealed through memory scenes that George and Robert have a rocky relationship—Robert is a child of the sixties, George a hard-working farmer who expects his oldest son to keep similar values. It is also revealed that John, who becomes a farmer and works with his dad despite their difficulties, has a healthier father-son relationship with his son, Ben. A recurring symbol in these relationships is a Louisville Slugger baseball bat, which starts out as Robert's, then is passed on to John. When John returns to the farm in 2010, he is sad to see that Robert has cleaned out the farmyard, tossing the bat out along with it.

Returning to the "present," 2010: Robert, now 60 years old, is now a high-speed businessman and a jerk. He treats the rest of the characters in a condescending manner. During the weekend, there is to be a reading of George's will, which is going to dole out what remains of the farmland: the house, the shop area, etc.

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