

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY - MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404

612-872-5108

Fax 612-874-8119

Our Only May Amelia

Story by

Jennifer Holm

Adaptation by

John Olive

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MAY AMELIA JACKSON, 13
WILBERT, 15, her brother
MATTI, 18, her oldest brother
KAARLO, 16, her cousin
JALMER, her father
ALMA, her mother
ALICE, her maternal aunt
PATIENCE, her grandmother
MARY O'CASEY

The action takes place in the Nasel River valley in southwestern Washington and in Astoria, Oregon, in the years 1899 and 1900.

Three settings are required:

The Jackson Farm, on the banks of the Nasel. We see the yard, a porch and a combination sitting room/diningroom/kitchen. A hallway leads off to bedrooms. The house is small and primitive, clean and homey. A path on one side leads to a river landing, on the other to the barn and pasture. We should see and feel the near-presence of the wilderness out of which the farm has very recently been carved.

The Sorcerer's Tree, an enormous dead redwood on the banks of the Nasel. It's everybody's secret place, with twisted branches giving it a sheltered bower-like feeling.

Aunt Alice's Parlor, in Astoria. It's modest but well-appointed in a turn-of-the-century style, the home of a woman with taste and modest means.

Several of the scenes take place during a steady gray misty Pacific Northwest rain. Anything that can create this atmosphere, without being "special effectsy" will be very helpful.

The clothing should reflect the frontier poverty of the Jackson family, the physically demanding work they do and their pride in themselves.

Baby Amy appears in the first two scenes of Act 2 and the assumption is that some technical device capable of making her a physical presence, crying and kicking and laughing and coughing, will be used.

If you don't go, you can't return

Finnish proverb

ACT ONE

(The Jackson Farm. At rise: a bright sunny day and an empty stage.)

Then JALMER and KAARLO enter, from the boat landing. JALMER's a large florid man wearing worn and dirty farmer's overalls. KAARLO's a scrawny kid with a defeated air about him, wearing the thin tattered clothing of a big city waif. He's green around the gills from a boat ride)

JALMER:

Well... This is it.

KAARLO (looks around)

JALMER:

Where is everybody? Wait here.

(Crosses up the steps into the house, exits toward the bedroom, then returns)

Alma's resting. Well, she's going to have a baby, and this one's tiring her out. Where the hell is-- Excuse me, where the heck is everybody else? I'll be right back.

(Looks at him)

What's the matter with you?

KAARLO:

Ain't used to riding in boats.

JALMER:

Better sit down.

KAARLO (sits on the porch)

JALMER:

You'll get used to it, believe me.

(Exits. From offstage, angrily)

May Amelia!

(Re-enters, glowering)

May Amelia left the draw horses hitched in the pasture. If she's fishing I'll give her a hiding she won't soon forget.

(Looks again at KAARLO)

JALMER, con't:

You want some water?

KAARLO (nods)

JALMER:

Well, it's in the hou-- I'll get it.

(Goes into the house, pumps a cup of water, then goes back outside, gives KAARLO the water)

It's not much but we got plans. With a new baby coming and now you...

KAARLO:

Ain't gonna be here long.

JALMER:

I'm gonna build two new rooms, over here, if I can find enough extra money for lumber. Hey, maybe you could work part time up at Armstrong's.

KAARLO:

Armstrong's?

JALMER:

Lumber camp, just up river. They'll pay you in lumber.

KAARLO:

What could I do at a logging camp?

JALMER:

Be the whistle punk.

KAARLO:

Whistle punk?

JALMER:

When they open the splash dam to let the logs downstream they send a boy to get everybody off the river. Whistle punk. You could--

MAY (offstage, shouting):

Pappa!!! PAPPA!!!

(MAY AMELIA JACKSON enters, running, face wild and flushed. She's 13, wearing dirty overalls, braided hair mostly undone)

Pappa!

JALMER:

For the love of God, May Amelia, your mother is sleeping.

MAY:

Pappa--

JALMER:

Why did you leave those draft horses hooked up?

MAY:

Pappa--

JALMER:

You ought to know better than--

MAY:

A mountain lion got Mrs. Petersen!

JALMER:

Ah, God! When?

KAARLO (stands, alarmed)

MAY:

Twenty minutes ago. Matti went after him with the rifle.

JALMER:

Alone?

MAY:

Wilbert's with him.

JALMER:

Those idiots!

(Starts to exit. MAY starts to follow. JALMER stops)

You stay here, May Amelia, I got no time for your foolishness, not now.

MAY:

But I want to go--

JALMER:

This is no business for useless girls.

(Exits. Moment. MAY looks at KAARLO)

MAY:

Who're you?

(JALMER returns)

JALMER:

This is your cousin Kaarlo. He's going to live with us.

(Exits again, for good this time. MAY stares at
KAARLO, who's getting visibly agitated)

MAY (after a long moment):

I didn't know I had any cousins.

KAARLO:

Neither did I.

MAY:

Where you been living?

KAARLO:

Minneapolis.

MAY:

That's a city.

KAARLO:

Yeah...?

MAY:

What're you doing here?

KAARLO:

Pappa was working in a grain mill but a drag chain snapped and busted his legs. He and
Mamma're gonna--

(Hears something, starts)

MAY:

What's the matter?

KAARLO:

Is there really a mountain lion?

MAY (looks at him, noticing his nervousness):

Big one. Claws this big and teeth like razors. We call him Cyclops 'cause he don't got
but one eye. And you know what kind of sound he makes?

KAARLO:

What.

MAY:

He cries like a baby. A baby from the nether reaches of Hell.

KAARLO:

I don't believe you.

MAY:

Don't, then. I don't care. But if you hear a baby crying you better say your prayers. You can bet it was the last thing Mrs. Petersen heard.

(From a distance we hear a rifle shot, then another series of them)

They missed. Poor Mrs. Petersen. She's the third one.

KAARLO:

Really?

MAY:

And she was so nice. Such a sparkling personality. Everyone liked her. Where's your parents?

KAARLO:

Vancouver. Pappa got a job in a dry goods store. He and Mamma'll send for me when they get... settled.

MAY:

Where's your luggage?

KAARLO:

When we got to San Francisco they had to, to... sell some things to buy passage to Vancouver.

MAY:

Oh.

(A moment, then, rushing:)

Well, I don't know where you're gonna sleep, we only got two rooms and there's Mamma and Pappa and Wilbert and Matti and me and pretty soon a new baby.

KAARLO:

I don't care where I sleep as long as it isn't in the same room as you.

(Enter JALMER, along with MATTI and WILBERT. They look bedraggled and defeated. JALMER carries a rifle. MATTI's 17, big and strong. WILBERT's 15, also strong but with an air of elfin intelligence. MATTI and WILBERT see KAARLO and stop short)

JALMER:

Boys, this is your cousin, Kaarlo. He'll be staying with us for a little while, just till his parents can send for him. This is Matti--

MATTI:

Hi.

JALMER:

And Wilbert.

WILBERT:

Welcome to our estate. All the land here, right down to the river, right here, is ours.

MATTI (referring to MAY):

Has our maid served you refreshment?

(MAY moves away, angry, sulking. A moment)

WILBERT:

Sorry, we're not giving you much of a welcome. We're a little dispirited. We lost Mrs. Petersen.

KAARLO:

Did she have any children?

MATTI and WILBERT (stare, then burst out laughing)

JALMER:

May, did you tell Kaarlo Mrs. Petersen was a woman?

MAY:

No.

JALMER:

It's nothing to joke about, May.

WILBERT (to KAARLO):

Mrs. Petersen was a sheep.

MAY:

I didn't tell him--

JALMER:

I don't want to hear any of your excuses.

(Exits into the house. He draws a glass of water then exits toward the bedrooms. MAY moves downstage, a sulk. MATTI and WILBERT size KAARLO up. Moment. Finally:)

MATTI:

May's the only girl on the Nasel.

KAARLO:

Oh?

WILBERT:

It's the water.

KAARLO:

What's wrong with it?

WILBERT:

Nothing, it's fine, you can drink it and everything, but...

KAARLO:

What.

WILBERT (whispers):

It's boy water.

MATTI:

May'll have a beard by Christmas.

MAY (turns, glares)

KAARLO:

Really?

MAY (flares):

Are you so dumb you can't tell they're kidding?

MATTI:

Did you see that big snag at the bend? Full of brambles and all that green slime hanging off it?

KAARLO:

Yeah...?

MATTI:

That's May's Snag.

KAARLO (after a beat):

Oh, yeah. It does look like her.

MAY (flares):

Look at you! With your city rags and those ridiculous shoes, you're gonna be worse than useless!

MATTI:

I think I do see a beard coming in.

KAARLO:

And look at you, you hick, you got hayseeds coming out of your ears.

(Turns away)

I don't have to take no insults from a useless stupid girl.

(MAY kicks him. They fight, rolling around, swinging wildly. MATTI and WILBERT watch in amused fascination. JALMER enters the house, goes outside)

JALMER:

MAY AMELIA!

(MATTI and WILBERT take this as their cue to finally step in, pulling KAARLO and MAY apart. MAY's flushed with anger. KAARLO's breathing jaggedly, on the verge of tears)

I am so tired of your childishness. With your mother trying to sleep, and another sheep gone, and poor Kaarlo's first day here and this is what you do? I wish I were rid of you.

(MAY exits, sprinting)

May Amelia, you come back here! You come back here this instant! MAY!!!

(Lights shift. The Sorcerer's Tree, a bit later. The stage is empty and filled with the soft sounds of a summer day along a cold river. Moment.

Then WILBERT and MATTI enter. WILBERT's carrying fishing gear, the kind used for rivers with swift currents, i.e., a heavy weight at the end of the line and the hook dangling a few feet up. They look around. MATTI starts to say something but WILBERT gestures: sh. Then he comes downstage, assuming a theatrical pose)

WILBERT:

Oh, great and powerful spirit of the Sorcerer's Tree, hear my prayer. Bring the brave salmon to my lonely hook. How my rod longs to bend and dance to the anger of a salmon soon to be baked with milk and potatoes and carrots and wild leeks and then eaten.

(Reaches into a can and holds up a large wriggling angleworm)

See the succulent worm which I offer the salmon. See it wiggle. See it wiggle even more as I put it on the hook. See the brown stuff squirt out. Please, oh spirit of the Sorcerer's Tree, let my offering be accepted.

(Swings the line over his head and then throws it into the Nasel. Then he picks up the rod, takes up the slack and sets the rod in the branches of the Tree)

MAY'S VOICE (from inside the Tree):

You'll never catch a salmon with a worm.

WILBERT:

Fishing tips from the Spirit of the Sorcerers Tree!

MAY'S VOICE:

And I'm not coming out.

MATTI:

Oh, yes, you are, Pappa sent us to get you.

MAY'S VOICE:

I don't care what he does.

MATTI:

I'm gonna get a river snake and throw it in there.

MAY'S VOICE:

You're more scared a snakes than I am.

MATTI (trying for paternal sternness):

May Amelia. You're being childish, and selfish, and ridiculous, and--

MAY'S VOICE:

You sound like Pappa.

MATTI (reacts)

WILBERT (laughs)

MAY'S VOICE:

You really don't know, do you?

MATTI:

Know what?

MAY'S VOICE:

Why I'm here.

MATTI:

I can't read your mind, May.

MAY'S VOICE:

You can't read anything.

MATTI:

I'm gonna drag you outa that tree and toss you in the Nasel.

WILBERT (nudges him):

Matti.

MATTI:

What?

(WILBERT goes to the bag, reaches in, pulls out a small homemade model of a pirate ship.)

WILBERT (whispers something to Matti)

MATTI:

You knew, all day? Why didn't you say anything?

WILBERT (smiles, then moves to the tree; in a stern voice):

May Amelia, it's time to come out of that tree and come home with us.

MAY'S VOICE:

No.

WILBERT:

If you don't, we're going to take measures. I can't be responsible for what we might do.

MAY'S VOICE:

I don't care what you do.

WILBERT:

All right, then. You've left us no choice. Matti?

WILBERT and MATTI:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU

(MAY scrambles out of the Tree, spitting mad:)

MAY:

Nobody knew! Nobody cared! It's bad enough Pappa thinks I'm worse than useless and Mamma's so tired I got to do everything, and I'm the only girl in the family, in the whole valley, probably the only girl in Washington State, it's my birthday and you all forgot! You forgot! All Pappa cares about is whether that mountain lion's gonna get another sheep, and you two're dumber'n a river fulla cedar logs, and it's my birthday! My birthday!!!

WILBERT and MATTI (when they're sure she's finished):

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MAY AMELIA

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU

MAY (turns away)

MATTI (starts the second verse):
HOW OLD ARE YOU
HOW--

(WILBERT nudges him; MATTI stops)

We're sorry we forgot your birthday, May. That was terrible.

WILBERT (hands her the boat):
I didn't forget.

MAY:
Wilbert, it's wonderful! A pirate ship! Thank you.

MATTI:
C'mon, let's go home.

MAY:
I'm not going home. I'm celebrating my birthday right here.

MATTI:
Pappa'll have a conniption.

MAY:
Let him.

WILBERT (after a beat):
Too bad Kaarlo had to come on your birthday.

MAY:
I don't care.

(Quick beat)

Where's he gonna sleep?

WILBERT:
He can have my bed.

MAY:
Where're you gonna sleep?

WILBERT:
In the front room.

MAY:
It's not fair!

WILBERT:
I don't guess Kaarlo likes it any more'n we do.

MATTI (after a moment):

Pappa wants us to get Mrs. Petersen hung and quartered. He wants to see if they'll buy her up at Armstrong's.

MAY:

I'm staying here.

MATTI:

May--

(WILBERT nudges him, then motions, let's go. Exultant MATTI and WILBERT. MAY's defiance becomes dejection. Moment. Then, suddenly:

The rod bends deeply and the reel screams. MAY jumps up, staring. Then she grabs the rod. It's bent to the snapping point, jumping around in her hands)

MAY:

WILBERT!!! MATTI!!!

(She fights the fish. WILBERT and MATTI rush in. MATTI starts to grab the rod)

No!!! This is my birthday fish!

(MATTI rushes to the river. WILBERT watches MAY, grinning as she fights the salmon)

WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

(The rod dances wildly.

Lights shift. The Jackson farm again, later. KAARLO's sitting in the yard. Inside the house JALMER is sitting with his wife ALMA and her sister ALICE. ALICE looks out of place, as she's wearing stylish, and clean, clothes. ALMA is in the latter stages of a very tiring pregnancy.

After a moment, MATTI, WILBERT and MAY enter. MAY's carrying an enormous Chinook salmon. She sees KAARLO, notices that he hasn't seen her, goes to him, holds the salmon near his face)

MAY:

Hi, Kaarlo.

KAARLO (looks up, sees the fish, reacts):

Aaaagggghhhh!!!

(He scampers away, frightened. MAY, MATTI and WILBERT laugh)

That was a dirty trick.

WILBERT:

We have slain the dragon! Peace and prosperity returneth to our valley!

(ALMA and JALMER come out onto the porch.
ALMA sits on a porch chair. ALICE stays inside)

MAY (holds up the salmon):

Look!

ALMA:

Matti, that's marvelous.

MATTI:

May caught it.

JALMER (skeptical):

Really?

(Everyone looks at MAY. There's an awkward moment)

MAY:

Really

ALMA:

May Amelia. We are sorry that we forgot your birthday. It was unforgivable. It's just that. Well, I'm not going to make excuses. You deserve a happy birthday.

(Looks at JALMER)

JALMER:

I'm sorry, May.

MATTI:

Sorry, May.

ALMA:

We do have a surprise for you, though.

(ALICE appears in the door, smiling)

MAY:

Aunt Alice!

ALICE:

Dear girl, what happened to your face?

MAY:
My...?

ALICE:
It's covered with mud.

MAY:
Oh.

(Wipes at her face with her hands)

ALICE:
Oh, May, no, don't. Your hands are covered with fish slime. Here.

(ALICE takes out a handkerchief and wipes MAY's face)

MAY:
Ouch.

ALICE:
Wilbert, will you fetch us in the box on the kitchen table? There. I knew there was a pretty girl under there somewhere.

(WILBERT goes inside, finds a wooden box on the table, brings it out, gives it to MAY. She sits on the porch. Everyone watches her. Moment: she holds the box)

MATTI:
Aren't you going to open it?

MAY:
Yes.

MATTI:
Well...?

ALMA:
We're all anxious to see what's in there.

(MAY opens the box. Her eyes widen. Then she reaches into the box and holds up a beautiful porcelain doll. Everyone reacts: it's an exquisite gift. MAY suddenly sets the doll down, moves away)

ALMA:
What's wrong?

MAY:
It's too nice.

ALMA:
May.

MAY:
I'll break it.

ALICE:
Every girl needs a doll.

MAY:
It's... It's really... Thank you.

(Picks the doll up, hugs it)

ALMA (after a beat):
Well. It's wonderful to have fresh salmon. We can make *laksloda*.

(Stands, then sways, woozy)

Oh.

ALICE:
Are you all right?

ALMA:
I'm fine.

MAY:
I'll make it, Mamma.

ALMA:
Not on your birthday.

MAY:
I don't mind. *Laksloda's* my favorite.

(Carefully puts the doll down. Then she goes to the fish, picks it up and throws it to MATTI)

Matti'll clean it for me.

ALMA:
Thank you.

MAY:
Make sure you get all the bones out.

MATTI (glares, then smiles)

ALMA:

Wilbert and... Kaarlo can peel the potatoes.

ALICE:

Alma, Jalmer? Could I have a word with you? Inside? And May? Would you join us, please?

MAY:

Me?

ALICE:

Please.

MAY:

Okay.

(JALMER, ALMA and ALICE go inside. MATTI takes the fish off. WILBERT goes inside and grabs an armload of potatoes. MAY approaches KAARLO tentatively)

Kaarlo.

KAARLO:

What.

MAY:

I'm sorry about what I said. Before. I was mad.

KAARLO:

I'm going to Vancouver pretty soon, anyhow.

MAY:

I hope so.

KAARLO (defensive):

What's that 'sposed to mean?

MAY (flustered):

I just meant that-- that I, I hope you--

ALMA (in the house):

May?

MAY:

Jeez.

(MAY goes inside, passing WILBERT who's coming out with potatoes and two knives. He and

KAARLO sit on the porch, peeling spuds. MAY
sits at the table, looks at her parents and her aunt)

JALMER:

Something on your mind, Alice?

ALICE:

I would like May Amelia to come live with me in Astoria.

(ALMA and JALMER are shocked - so's MAY, but
she smiles)

JALMER:

What?

ALICE:

This is no place for a young lady. This is raw wilderness.

JALMER:

It's not wilderness, it's a farm!

ALICE:

Barely.

JALMER (stands)

ALICE:

There are schools in Astoria.

JALMER:

Astoria's nothing but drunken sailors and evil saloons!

ALICE:

That's not true.

JALMER:

It's no place for a decent Finn girl like May Amelia.

ALICE:

This is no place for a--

JALMER:

It's out of the question. We need her here. There are chores and Alma's pregnant, and I
won't let her go.

(MATTI rushes in, face wild)

MATTI:

Pappa!

JALMER:

What!

(Taut moment, then we hear a strange crying sound, like a wailing infant, but with almost demonic resonance)

ALICE:

What is that?

(JALMER grabs the rifle and bullets, then goes outside and exits toward the barn loading the gun. MATTI and WILBERT follow him. The crying sound continues)

ALMA:

It's the mountain lion.

ALICE:

It's dreadful. It sounds like a crying baby.

ALMA:

They do.

(MAY stands, trying to be as lady-like as possible)

MAY:

May I please be excused?

ALMA:

Yes, dear.

(MAY runs out, toward the barn)

MAY:

Wait for meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!

ALICE:

Alma, you can't let that child go out there.

ALMA:

No power on earth could keep her in the house.

(Smiles at ALICE)

We're quite safe, don't worry.

ALICE:

Alma, you're not in any pain?

ALMA:

I'm just tired.

(Beat)

It may look primitive to you, but we are happy here. Mountain lions and all.

(From offstage we hear the sharp CRACK of a rifle, then several more in rapid succession)

Oh, dear. He missed.

(Lights shift. The Farm, late that night. MAY enters the front room. WILBERT's in a bedroll on the floor)

WILBERT:
May?

MAY:
I didn't mean to wake you.

WILBERT:
You didn't.

(Sits up)

Can't you sleep?

MAY:
No.

WILBERT:
Me either. Did you have dreams?

MAY:
Didn't sleep at all.

WILBERT:
I dreamed I was riding the Sorcerer's Tree all the way out into the ocean.

MAY:
Were you scared?

WILBERT:
No.

MAY:
Liar.

WILBERT:
Let's go outside.

(They leave the house and go down the porch into the yard)

Do you think Paradise looks like this? Trees and mountains and the moon on the river?

MAY:

Paradise would have more girls.

WILBERT:

You're right.

(Moment)

I'll be sad to leave here.

MAY (looks at him)

WILBERT:

I've decided: I'm gonna be a doctor.

MAY:

Really?

WILBERT:

Yeah.

MAY:

You'll have to go to school forever.

WILBERT:

I know.

MAY:

And you'll come back and be the first doctor in the Naselle Valley.

WILBERT:

If you say so.

MAY:

When I grow up I'm gonna be a pirate, and I'm never coming back.

WILBERT:

Really?

MAY:

Pirates come to the Naselle to bury their treasure and I'm gonna follow them into the forest and dig it up and then I'll run away to San Francisco and buy a ship and I'll sail the seven seas, taking hostages and sinking ships! Avast and ahoy!

WILBERT (is laughing; after a beat):
Have you made your birthday wish?

MAY:
No.

WILBERT:
You better, your birthday's almost over.

MAY:
I don't want anything.

WILBERT:
Be a shame to waste a perfectly good birthday wish.

MAY:
Well...

WILBERT:
You don't have to tell me what it is.

MAY:
All right.

(Closes her eyes. Moment. Then she opens them)

WILBERT:
Did you wish?

MAY:
Yep.

WILBERT (after a pause):
You don't have to tell me...

MAY:
I wished for Mamma to have a baby girl.

(Lights shift.)

The Farm, day. A week or two later. MATTI, KAARLO, WILBERT and MAY are in the yard, gutting and scaling salmon, slitting their bellies open, yanking guts out, tossing them into a tub, lopping the heads off and tossing them into another tub, scaling the fish with wire brushes, etc. This should be as graphic as possible. MAY, MATTI and WILBERT work calmly, but KAARLO's having a tough time)

KAARLO (finally gives in to his disgust):

Aaaagggghhhh! What do these things eat?

WILBERT:

I don't think they eat anything. They're spawning.

KAARLO:

They stink.

MATTI:

They're salmon.

(MAY grabs a handful of guts and waves them at
KAARLO. KAARLO moves away, nauseous)

MAY:

Something wrong?

KAARLO:

How can you do this?

MAY:

We need the money.

KAARLO:

Can't we just rob a bank?

KAARLO:

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

MAY:

Let's tell stories. Get our minds off the work.

KAARLO:

Like Rip Van Winkle?

MAY:

Like the story of Eino Sjöblom.

(MATTI and WILBERT stop working. WILBERT
stands, moves away, spooked)

KAARLO:

Who's Eino Sjöblom?

MAY (looks at WILBERT and MATTI, sees their reactions):

I shouldn't have said anything. Sorry.

KAARLO:

Who's Eino Sjöblom?

WILBERT:

Eino...? That doesn't ring a bell.

MATTI:

Me either. Never heard the name before in my life.

KAARLO:

Come on.

MATTI (looks at MAY and WILBERT):

Probably best if he hears it from us.

WILBERT:

I suppose. Well, all right. Eino Sjöblom was one of the first settlers in the valley. Came here in 1879. A good Finn. He killed himself, back in '82.

MATTI:

'81.

WILBERT:

Was it '81? I think you're right. He fell in love with a Chinook woman. She was beautiful. But Eino was not, and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. He got howling crazy. One night he climbed to the top of a red cedar with a hundred foot length of rope.

MATTI (shudders):

Ooooooooooooooooooh...

WILBERT:

Swung for weeks before they found him.

KAARLO:

I'd never hang myself over some woman.

WILBERT:

I know that, Kaarlo. But... we haven't told you the worst.

KAARLO:

What.

WILBERT:

Eino comes back. Some nights. When the wind is right. Almost everyone's seen him. With a broke neck, crying for his Chinook princess.

MATTI (after a beat, suddenly):

Aaaaaaaaaoooooooooooooooooh!!!

KAARLO (jumps, startled/frightened):

Hey!

MAY, MATTI and WILBERT (laughing):

Aaaaaaaoooooooooooooh!!! Aaaaaaaoooooooooooooh!!!

(Everyone's laughing -- even KAARLO joins in)

KAARLO

Aaaaaoooooooooooooooooooooh!!!

MATTI (blurts)

I'm in love.

(They stare at him for a beat, then laugh even harder. MATTI's not laughing. MAY's the first to notice this, followed by WILBERT. They stop laughing. Quick beat, then KAARLO stops laughing as well.)

MAY:

Really?

MATTI (nods)

WILBERT:

Who could you possibly fall inlove with? May Amelia's the only girl around here.

MATTI:

Someone up river.

MAY:

What's her name?

MATTI:

Mary O'Casey

WILBERT:

Oh.

MATTI:

She's-- She's beautiful.

MAY:

I bet she is, Matti. 'Cause you're the handsomest boy on the Naselle.

KAARLO:

Hey I knew a girl named Mary O'Casey in Minneapolis. Maybe it's the same girl. Does she have one million four hundred thousand freckles?

(Laugh, then notices the tense atmosphere.)

What's wrong?

WILBERT:

Are you gonna tell Pappa?

MATTI (after a beat, firmly):

Yes.

MAY:

Really?

MATTI:

Today.

WILBERT:

I just wanna tell you, Matti, what a privilege it's been to be your brother.

KAARLO:

What are you talking about?

MAY:

Pappa doesn't like the Irish. He thinks they're nothing but trouble, always coming around, taking some Finn's job. He says they're like locusts.

(JALMER enters. Everyone jumps.)

JALMER:

What're you doing, standing around?

WILBERT:

We're almost done, Pappa.

JALMER:

The fence in the sty's broken. We need to fix it before we bring the pigs out.

WILBERT:

I'll do it, Pappa. May and Kaarlo can help.

JALMER:

All right.

(Beat. They're looking at MATTI)

Well, get going.

(Exuent MAY, KAARLO, and WILBERT. MATTI doesn't move – working up his courage.)

Well, finish the fish, Matti, I want 'em in the smokehouse by lunch time.

MATTI:

Yes, Pappa.

(Sits in front of the fish. Jalmer starts to leave.)

Pappa?

JALMER (stops, turns):
What is it?

MATTI (starts to say something, stops)

JALMER:
Yes..?

MATTI:
The tide's running.

JALMER (looks at the river):
Yes..?

MATTI:
Maybe we can catch some more fish.

JALMER:
Maybe. If there's time after lunch.

(Exuent JALMER)

KAARLO (offstage, a howl of rage):
I'll kill you, May, I'll drown you like a rat!!!

(MAY dashes in, KAARLO in hot pursuit. He's covered in mud. WILBERT follows)

MAY:
It was an accident!

KAARLO:
You did it on purpose!

MAY:
I did not!

KAARLO:
You moved the wedge!

MAY:
I didn't but even if I did you deserve it, you're so horrid!

(Suddenly, impulsively KAARLO grabs a fileting knife and faces MAY)

MATTI and WILBERT:
NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

(They grab KAARLO and pull him back. MAY's shocked. JALMER strides in, face glowering with anger.)

JALMER:

What's happened here?

WILBERT:

One of the crossbeams in the pig corral slipped out so we were pounding in a wedge, and Kaarlo was swinging the mallet and he missed and fell into the pig slop.

KAARLO:

You moved the wedge.

JALMER:

Did you?

MAY (hesitates for a moment):

I guess maybe, but not on purpose.

KAARLO:

You did it on purpose! You ruined my shirt! My Mamma made this shirt for me!

(Starts to cry. WILBERT and MATTI let him go.
He sinks to the ground)

I'm not staying in this place any more. I'm going to Vancouver.

JALMER:

You're not going anywhere. I promised your parents I'd take care of you, and that's what I'm going to do. May Amelia. You can't even hold a piece of wood steady. You're more trouble than you're worth.

MAY:

It was an accident.

JALMER:

That's just my point. We can't trust you to do anything, you're worse than useless!

(MAY runs off)

May Amelia! Bah!

(To KAARLO, MATTI, and WILBERT)

Back to work with you.

(Exits.)

Lights shift. The Sorcerer's Tree, day. MAY is sitting on the ground, leaning against the Tree, holding her doll, daydreaming. A long moment, then:)

MAY:

I bet Mrs. Petersen is up in the Sky.

'Cause that's where we go when we die. When the Chinooks die they put the dead ones in fancy canoes, all dressed up with feathers and beautiful clothes and they stick 'em up in trees so they can paddle up to Sky Heaven. I'll take you to the Chinook Tree Cemetery and show you. You'd think it would be scary but it's not it's Peaceful and Magical. It's Magical all over the Nasel Valley.

I wonder if it's Magical in Astoria.

I'm gonna take you up to Armstrong's so you can see 'em cutting the big redwoods. Oh, that's something to see. Kaboom!

Wilbert's good with his hands. He's gonna be the best doctor in the world and people'll come from all over the world to be cured by Wilbert.

I'm a Miracle. 'Cause I was the first girl born on the Nasel.

But I wonder if I was a Mistake. 'Cause I don't know if there's room for girls here. Pappa says I'm the most Useless Girl Can't You Do Anything Right You're The Death Of Me May Amelia What Kind Of Mischief Have You Gotten Yourself Into You're No Good For Any Kind Of Farm Work and his brows come together and I betcha Aunt Alice can hear him in Astoria.

(Picks the doll up, holds her, rocks her)

Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

(Lights shift. The Farm, evening. A few weeks later. A steady Pacific Northwest rain is falling. Light is gray and dense. The JACKSON FAMILY is inside the house, eating lunch. No one's talking. Moment.

Then PATIENCE JACKSON enters from the river landing. She's in her 70s, small, with a penetrating voice. She walks slowly, with a cane. She looks at the house for a long beat, then walks up the porch. Her cane makes a sharp sound on the wooden porch. She uses it to rap on the door. Everyone stops eating. JALMER stands, goes to the door, sees his mother and stares, surprised)

PATIENCE:

Yes, yes, Jalmer, it's me.

ALMA:
Mother Patience?

PATIENCE:
Yes.

ALMA:
This is a... surprise.

PATIENCE:
Of course it's a surprise, what do you expect when you live half way to Hell? There's no way to get a message to you.

ALMA:
That's not true, there are people going from here to Astoria all the time. You could give a note to one of the boatmen, or--

PATIENCE:
Speaking of boatmen, there's one waiting at the landing now. Send your boys down for my things.

ALMA:
For your...?

PATIENCE:
Why should I pay the boatman to carry my things when you have perfectly healthy sons?

(JALMER goes out into the yard and peers toward the landing)

JALMER:
The boat is full of furniture.

PATIENCE:
Of course it is. If I'm going to live in the wilderness I have to have nice things.

(ALMA covers herself with a shawl and moves into the yard)

PATIENCE, con't:
Of course, Jalmer, you knew this day would come. I am on in years.

JALMER:
What about your house?

PATIENCE (to KAARLO):
Who are you?

KAARLO:

Kaarlo.

ALMA:

This is my nephew. He's fostered in with us, while his parents get themselves settled in Vancouver.

KAARLO:

I'll be going up there soon.

PATIENCE:

Humph. I'm very tired, I'd like to sit.

(MATTI stands to let her sit. She peers at the food)

What's this?

ALMA:

Fish head stew.

PATIENCE:

Where's the rest of the fish?

JALMER:

In the smokehouse.

PATIENCE:

You couldn't spare a little fish to feed your family?

JALMER:

We need the money they bring.

PATIENCE:

Humph.

ALMA:

Would you like some, Mother Patience?

PATIENCE:

It's very thin, and what are those?

ALMA:

Turnips.

PATIENCE:

I can't eat coarse food like this. The boatman will be fit to be tied if we don't fetch in my things. He didn't want

PATIENCE, con't:

to bring me this far up river in the first place. Oh, and Jalmer, he'll be wanting his fee.

(ALMA pulls JALMER aside)

ALMA:

Did you have any idea?

JALMER (shakes his head)

ALMA:

What happened to her house?

JALMER:

I, I don't know.

(JALMER goes to PATIENCE, hesitating. This turn of events has shocked him badly)

Mother...

PATIENCE:

What.

JALMER:

Your house...?

PATIENCE:

They've put me out of it.

(Beat)

You've no idea what it's like to be an old woman living on her own, in a town filled with sharps and sharks and smugglers and thieves in the night.

JALMER:

Why did they--?

PATIENCE:

I'll give you one piece of advice: never borrow money from a bank.

JALMER:

Why did you borrow mon--?

PATIENCE:

I had to live!

ALMA (looks at her for a moment, concerned):

Mother Patience. Drink some water.

PATIENCE:

Yes.

ALMA:

Are you sure you won't have some stew?

PATIENCE:

Well, perhaps I'll... try a bit.

(Suddenly raps her cane on the floor)

My things!

(Everyone looks at JALMER. Moment, then he nods. MATTI, WILBERT, KAARLO and MAY stand and start to exit. PATIENCE stops MAY, though)

Where are you going, young lady?

MAY:

Get your things.

PATIENCE:

You will not. That's work for the boys.

(To the BOYS)

Well, go on.

(Exuent MATTI, WILBERT and KAARLO)

Let me look at you.

MAY (faces her)

PATIENCE:

What have you done to this child? She's covered with filth. I can smell her. And look--

(Jabs at MAY's clothes with her cane)

Trousers. And her hair. I wouldn't be at all surprised if there was something living in it. You are a disgusting girl.

ALMA:

She is not, Mother Patience. We work hard up here.

PATIENCE:

I see you've got yourself pregnant again. I pray God it's a boy, if this child is any indication of what you do with girls.

(Looks at MAY again)

I've arrived in the nick of time, obviously.

(Enter MATTI, WILBERT and KAARLO, loaded down with chairs, trunks, etc)

MATTI:

Where should we put this jun--? These things.

(JALMER looks at them, too stunned to answer.
MATTI shrugs, puts his load down on the porch.
WILBERT and KAARLO do the same. They head
back toward the landing. During the following they
come and go)

ALMA:

Mother, we've a room here, just off the kitchen. We're using it as a pantry right now but I guess we could put a bed in it for you.

PATIENCE:

I'm sure it's crawling with vermin.

ALMA:

We've only three bedrooms. Jalmer and I have the one at the back, Matti and Kaarlo and May share one, and--

PATIENCE:

Do you mean to tell me this girl sleeps with her cousin? A boy? That will not do. May Amelia and I will share the bedroom.

MAY (gives her parents a look of heart-breaking desperation)

ALMA:

No, Mother Patience. You may have the bedroom to yourself. May and the boys will sleep out here.

MAY (relaxes)

ALMA:

The boys can protect her, since she's just a girl.

PATIENCE:

Humph.

(By now, the boys have fetched in all of
PATIENCE's things. MATTI goes to JALMER,
whispers. JALMER goes to a shelf, takes down a
metal box and takes some money out of it, gives it
to MATTI. MATTI exits toward the landing)

ALMA:

Well, everyone, let's welcome Mother Patience to our house. Family is God's greatest gift and so let's thank him for bringing our Grandmother to us.

PATIENCE:

Humph.

ALMA:

We have a lot of work to do before nightfall.

(EVERYONE begins the job of carrying PATIENCE's things.)

Lights shift. The Farm, day. MAY's in the yard, chopping wood, stacking it in a neat pile, working efficiently. Her doll is in one of the porch chairs. PATIENCE is inside, at the table, nursing a cup of tea. MAY works efficiently. WILBERT enters, smiling, his hands behind his back. It takes MAY a moment to notice him)

MAY:

I thought you were all helping Olaaf Kuula tan his gillnets.

WILBERT (airily):

Oh, I told Pappa I was working out a difficult philosophical conundrum and that I needed some time to myself, to think.

MAY (after a beat, laughs):

Oh, sure.

WILBERT:

He said I could think while I was cutting brush.

(Beat)

You're doing an excellent job with the firewood, May.

MAY:

You gonna help me?

WILBERT:

No.

MAY:

Why are your hands behind your back?

(WILBERT brings out a doll's dress)

Oh. Wilbert.

WILBERT:

I noticed the dress was getting dirty, so--

MAY:

You made it out of a gunny sack. It's beautiful. And you made a slip.

WILBERT:

Flour sack.

(MAY goes to the porch, picks up the doll, clumsily/carefully takes off the dress. She looks at WILBERT)

Oh.

(Turns around, smiling. MAY removes the old dress and puts on the new one)

MAY:

There.

WILBERT (turns, looks at the doll):

She looks just like you.

MAY:

How did you do it?

WILBERT:

Mamma let me use her needle.

MAY:

When did you have time?

WILBERT:

At night.

MAY:

You're a genius.

WILBERT:

Yes.

MAY:

I could never do anything so wonderful.

WILBERT:

C'mon, I'll help you finish chopping the wood, then we can go fishing. I bet they're biting at May's Snag.

MAY:

I can't.

WILBERT:

Why.

PATIENCE:
May Amelia.

WILBERT:
Oh.

PATIENCE:
May Amelia!

MAY (goes to the porch):
Yes, Grandmother?

PATIENCE:
My tea is cold.

(MAY goes inside, takes PATIENCE's cup, dumps it into the sink then pours fresh tea from a pot, sets the cup down, starts to leave)

May Amelia.

(MAY stops. PATIENCE looks at her)

Is it hard for you, being the only girl?

MAY:
I won't be the only girl for long.

PATIENCE:
Let me see that doll.

(MAY doesn't move)

Please.

(MAY hesitates, then picks the doll up, giving it to PATIENCE)

Humph. Where did you get a lovely doll like this?

MAY:
From my Aunt Alice. She's Mamma's sister.

PATIENCE:
I know very well who she is. She lives up on the hill, in that fancy neighborhood. Her house is the smallest one.

(Looks at the doll)

Porcelain. You're lucky, I never had anything so nice when I was a girl.

(MAY holds out her hands. PATIENCE returns the doll. MAY starts to put it back)

Do you know...?

MAY (stops, looks at her):
What?

PATIENCE:

In Finland, in the winter, it's dark all the time? And cold that gets into your soul. You'd think Finns would emigrate to places like California, Arizona, but no, we come to the Pacific Northwest, Minnesota. Why is that, eh? What's wrong with us?

MAY (says nothing)

(WILBERT goes up the porch, appears in the door)

WILBERT:

Afternoon, Grandmother.

PATIENCE:

Humph. That doll is a ridiculous frivolity.

(Lights shift. The Farm, deep night. The house is dark and shadowy. KAARLO is gently shaking MAY awake. WILBERT and MATTI sleep soundly on the other side of the room)

KAARLO:

May. May, wake up. May.

MAY:

Oh!

KAARLO:

Sh.

MAY:

What is it?

KAARLO:

I heard something. I don't know what it was. It was... strange. Gave me the willies. Outside. There it is again. Can't you hear it?

MAY:

No.

KAARLO:

Oh!

I-- I-- I--

(MAY stops screaming. She's taut, wide-eyed, not breathing)

I was playing a joke on May Amelia.

JALMER:

Do you know what time it is?

WILBERT (to MAY):

May...?

KAARLO:

It was a joke.

(ALMA appears, pulling on a robe, moving slowly)

ALMA:

What has happened?

JALMER:

Kaarlo played a joke.

KAARLO:

She's always trying to scare me with stories 'bout Eino Sjöblom, so I...

(Gestures at the effigy of Eino Sjöblom. ALMA goes to MAY, looks at her, touches her gently)

ALMA:

May...?

(MAY starts crying. It's soundless at first, but it soon becomes a tension-relieving wail. ALMA holds her)

JALMER:

I wonder if I can think of a funny joke to play on you. Oh, I know: clean the privy tomorrow. Before breakfast.

KAARLO:

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

JALMER:

Ha, ha, ha.

KAARLO:

I'm sorry.

(MAY keeps on crying; it builds and builds. The BOYS, and JALMER, are very uncomfortable)

ALMA (after a long moment):
Jalmer.

JALMER:
Eh?

ALMA:
Come comfort May Amelia.

JALMER:
Me?

ALMA:
Put your arm around her.

JALMER:
I don't understand why she's carrying on like that. It was just a silly joke. This thing's made with straw and gunny sacks.

ALMA:
Come on.

(JALMER reluctantly goes to MAY, looks at her.
He starts to touch her, then pulls back. Moment)

JALMER:
May Amelia, quit your blubbering.

MAY:
Okay...

JALMER (to ALMA):
There. Are you happy?

MAY:
It was... pretty funny, and if.... I wasn't crying so much I'd... laugh. Oh! Why does everything make me cry!

ALMA (holding her):
You're a big girl now.

MAY:
Because I'm crying?

ALMA:
Mm-hm. There, there.

(Moment. MAY's crying subsides as ALMA holds her. JALMER and the BOYS are embarrassed. Awkward silence. Then:)

WILBERT:
What's that?

MATTI:
What's what?

WILBERT:
That sound.

JALMER:
Don't you start, I'm not in the mood.

WILBERT:
I'm not kidding, I hear something.

KAARLO:
What?

WILBERT:
Sh.

(They listen. Then we hear it: snoring. It's deep and guttural, almost super-natural)

MAY:
What is it?

KAARLO (genuinely frightened):
It's in the house!

WILBERT:
It is Eino Sjöblom! He's coming for us!

ALMA:
It's Mother Patience.

(Another snore. Scary-loud. They listen. Another snore)

MATTI:
Sounds like a foghorn.

JALMER:
Matti.

WILBERT:
It's true.

(MAY starts to laugh. One by one the BOYS join her, then ALMA, then, reluctantly but inevitably, JALMER joins in. The snoring and the laughter continue for a long moment. Finally, the laughter fades)

MAY:
Grandmother Patience is a witch.

ALMA:
May.

JALMER:
What?

MAY:
She's evil.

JALMER:
She's my mother.

MAY:
Not any more.

JALMER:
What is that supposed to mean?

ALMA:
I think May means that your mother has changed.

JALMER:
Everybody changes.

MAY:
Not like that. There's something wrong with her.

JALMER:
There's nothing wrong with her, she's my mother. Damn it, May Amelia, I've no desire to hear that kind of talk from my daughter.

MATTI:
I'm...

(Everyone looks at him. MATTI swallows)

JALMER:
You're what?

MATTI:

I'm going to work at Armstrong's.

JALMER (after a beat):

You're too old to be a whistle punk.

MATTI:

As a logger.

(A moment, as this sinks in)

Mr. O'Casey offered me a job. I'll be an apprentice in the Mount St. Helen's crew.
Regular logger in six months.

ALMA:

That's dangerous work.

MATTI (with sudden vehemence):

Farm work is dangerous! It's dangerous here on the Nasel, it's dangerous in Astoria, in San Francisco, in the west, if you wanna be safe you should go back to Finland!

(JALMER takes a step toward him. MATTI steps back but faces him. Tense moment)

JALMER:

I won't let you do it. There's too much work to do here.

MATTI:

I wanna work for myself.

JALMER:

I'm not going to let you work for those filthy Irish.

MATTI:

Everybody's filthy here. It rains and rains, and there's mud and fish slime everywhere you turn. You can't get dry and you can't get clean. As a logger I can make two dollars a day. In a year I could earn enough money to buy this farm.

ALMA:

Oh.

(ALMA sits heavily on the porch)

JALMER:

Then go now. Go on, start walking, you can get up there in time for the six o'clock whistle.

MATTI:

I, I, I will.

ALMA:

Jalmer.

JALMER:
Go on!

ALMA:
Jalmer.

JALMER:
Clear on outa here!

ALMA:
Jalmer.

JALMER:
What?

ALMA:
Send one of the boys for Mrs. Petersen.

JALMER:
She's dead.

ALMA:
Mrs. Petersen, our neighbor.

MAY (looks at her):
Mamma, you're bleeding!

ALMA:
It's not blood, dear. Oh. You'd better hurry, Jalmer.

JALMER (after a stunned beat):
Wilbert! Go get Mrs. Petersen!

(WILBERT exits, running)

Matti, Kaarlo, let's help Alma inside. May, light the stove.

ALMA:
Oh!

(They help ALMA up the steps and into the house. They exit down the hall as MAY begins lighting the stove. We hear one last blast of snoring. Lights shift. The Farm, afternoon. A grey rainy day. PATIENCE is sitting at the table a teacup in front of her. MATTI, WILBERT and KAARLO are sitting around the room. MAY is working at the stove. There are pots of boiling water. Atmosphere

is fraught with tension. After a moment, JALMER comes in from the bedrooms)

JALMER:

May, we need more cloths.

(MAY carefully fishes sterile rags out of one of the pots, puts them in a bowl, gives them to JALMER)

MAY:

Pappa, is she hurting?

JALMER:

I... don't think so, not too much. She isn't even hardly awake. I'm afraid she'll be too weak to, to...

(Taut beat)

Mrs. Petersen'll be wanting these.

(Exits. MAY picks up her doll and sits. No one says anything. A moment, then PATIENCE takes a small sip of tea, grimaces, bangs the cup down)

PATIENCE:

May Amelia.

MAY (says nothing)

PATIENCE (bangs her cane):

May Amelia!

MAY:

Yes, Grandmother?

PATIENCE:

You forgot the honey.

MAY:

No, I didn't.

PATIENCE:

There's no honey in this tea.

(Pours the tea out onto the floor, bangs the empty cup down)

Get me another cup.

MAY:

There is no honey.

PATIENCE:
You're lying.

MAY:
No, I'm not.

PATIENCE:
I know when you're lying. I can't drink tea without honey.

MAY:
There's no honey because you ate it all up, you greedy old hag.

(Moment. The BOYS don't move)

PATIENCE:
How dare you speak to me like that, you worthless, ridiculous excuse for a girl.

MAY:
You should have stayed in Astoria and died.

PATIENCE (to the BOYS):
Are you going to let her speak to me like this?

KAARLO (after a beat):
Yes.

PATIENCE:
Get me another cup of tea.

MAY:
I will not.

PATIENCE:
This instant.

(MAY doesn't move. PATIENCE stands, with some effort)

MAY:
Witch.

(PATIENCE raises her cane)

WILBERT:
NO!!!

(MAY cowers, expecting to be beaten. But instead PATIENCE smashes MAY's porcelain doll: bang, bang, bang!)

MATTI (a howl of rage):

Aaaaaagggggghhhhhhhh!!!

(Leaps forward, snatches the cane out of PATIENCE's hand, breaks it over his knees. PATIENCE backs away and for a moment we wonder if she's in danger.

Then we hear: a crying baby, howling with the full-throated strength of a healthy infant.

MATTI rushes outside and hurls the pieces of PATIENCE's cane away. He's breathing shallowly.

Inside, MAY straightens up. She, WILBERT and KAARLO look down the hall. The baby cries on)

PATIENCE:

I pity the child born into this house.

(JALMER appears in the door, pale, exhausted, trembling. They look at him)

JALMER:

It's a girl.

(JALMER collapses. MAY and WILBERT rush to him)

PATIENCE (to KAARLO):

You. What's your name.

KAARLO (looks at her)

PATIENCE:

Get me a cup of tea.

(KAARLO leaves the room, going outside)

I want tea! I want my tea!

END OF ACT ONE