

I Ain't So Tough

By Rose Scollard



I AIN'T SO TOUGH

I Ain't So Tough was produced by Urban Stories at Motel Theatre Arts Commons, Calgary, May 3 – 14, 2016. A workshop production, it was directed by Helen Young and dramaturged by Caroline Russell-King.

Cast, Production and Crew:

1943:

Young Jesse	Mira Maschmeyer
Young Iris	Alyson Dicey
Walter	Jacob Kolodzjeij

1993:

Jesse	Diana-Marie Stolz
Iris	Sandy Lucas
Ace	Gordo Blakhart

Director	Helen Young
Assistant Director	Erin Noble
Stage Combat	Jenny Daigle
Stage Manager	Amanda Wheeler
Lighting Designer	A.J. Jutras
Dramaturg	Caroline Russell-King

Characters

1943:

Young Jesse

Young Iris

Walter

1993:

Jesse

Iris

Ace

SETTING

Past action takes place on the fringe of the Sarcee Barracks in 1943 where a dance is taking place. Present action (1993) takes place in Jesse's home in Inglewood and on Walter's crumbling farm near Finlake, Alberta. The sets should be free form and suggestive with the minimum furnishings and props.

Although the past scenes are clearly marked for reading purposes, in performance they should not be clearly separated but should flow in and around the present as though permeating it with mood and memory.

ACT ONE

(Lights up on a corner of a dance hall. We get the distinct impression of looking at a faded war time snap shot. We hear the sound of people partying and dancing. A band Circa 1943 is playing the popular music of the times, "Stomping at the Savoy" or some other Big Band music.

(YOUNG JESSE, a young woman of eighteen, limps on and sits, nursing her feet. A very young man in uniform, WALTER, comes in. Shy and tentative, he approaches JESSE)

WALTER: You want to dance?

YOUNG JESSE: I was gonna sit this one out. My feet are killing me.

WALTER: How about I get you a beer?

YOUNG JESSE: That's not necessary...

WALTER: No problem. Be right back! (Exits)

YOUNG JESSE: Wait! (Irked) Swell!

(YOUNG IRIS enters. She's blond, sassily dressed, a hot number.)

YOUNG IRIS: Jesse. How's it going?

YOUNG JESSE: Ask me when I get my shoes off. I don't know why I let you talk me into buying these meat grinders.

YOUNG IRIS: They looked great in the store.

YOUNG JESSE: They still look great, Iris. But is having your feet mashed to a pulp worth looking great for?

YOUNG IRIS: Oh, quit your whining. Meet anyone interesting?

YOUNG JESSE: Na. They're all kids. One of them's gone off to buy me a beer.

YOUNG IRIS: So what are you complaining for? Mine's getting lemonade!

YOUNG JESSE: You know, Iris, as a way of meeting guys, this is really sad.

YOUNG IRIS: Maybe we should have gone to the Cochrane Elks Club. The parties there are really hot.

YOUNG JESSE: (Rubbing her feet) You said *this* would be hot. The trouble with you, Iris, you always think every party's gonna be like the magazines. I mean, think about it. How can a party at Sarcee, or Mewata, or the Cochrane Elks hope to be like the magazines.

YOUNG IRIS: You always believe me though, don't you. You always hope I'm right.

YOUNG JESSE: Oh No!

YOUNG IRIS: What?

YOUNG JESSE: It's the farmer boy.

(WALTER enters holding up two overflowing beers.)

YOUNG IRIS: The one spilling it all down his pant leg?

YOUNG JESSE: Did you ever see such a joke?

YOUNG IRIS: You haven't seen the Lemonade Kid. (Looking off) Speaking of which (Rises and exits.)

WALTER: (Hands her the beer unsteadily.) There you go.

(Music swells, a romantic dance tune "You Made Me Love You".)

WALTER: Hey! They're playing our song.

YOUNG JESSE: That's not our song.

WALTER: It could be.

YOUNG JESSE: Let's just sit this one out, OK?

WALTER: OK by me. Uh. . . What's your name, anyway.

YOUNG JESSE: Jesse.

WALTER: Short for Jessica?

YOUNG JESSE: No. Short for Jesse.

WALTER: Hi Jesse. I'm Walter.

YOUNG JESSE: (VERY BORED) Cheers, Walter.

(Glasses clink. Music fades and light dims on the young couple. We are aware of but not distracted by their presence as they sip their beer.)

Inglewood Calgary 1993

(Lights up on shabby living room where IRIS in dressing gown and slippers, is watching a movie on TV: "THE WAGONS ROLL AT NIGHT". There is a sea of plastic shopping bags round her chair. We hear the gloomy violins and hushed voices of Bogart's death scene.

JESSE enters carrying a bag of groceries. Stumbles on a number of IRIS's shopping bags.)

JESSE: Iris! What are you doing here?

IRIS: Hi Jesse!

JESSE: Every time I turn around, there you are.

(Climactic music from TV)

IRIS: Just thought I'd use your bathroom if that's OK, Jesse.

JESSE: Do I have a choice? (Puts groceries on counter.)

IRIS: Ours is stopped up. Garvy flushed his sock down it.

JESSE: Again? How does he do that!

IRIS: You know Garvy. He's not always right in the head.

JESSE: (To herself) He's not the only one. (Regards screen.) Isn't that Bogey? The guy in bed.

IRIS: Yeah.

JESSE: He don't look too good.

IRIS: He's dying. He's saying his good-byes to Sylvia Sydney.

JESSE: I remember her. The gal with the cheeks.

IRIS: I always wanted cheeks like that. Didn't you?

JESSE: There was things I wanted more.

(Climactic music again as movie ends.)

IRIS: (Turning off TV.) 1941 that movie was made. No wonder he looked so young. What age would you have been then, Jesse?

JESSE: I was seventeen and you were nineteen. God. I had so much energy then and so much brass.

IRIS: And look where it got you.

JESSE: What's that supposed to mean?

IRIS: Don't you wish you'd done better?

JESSE: I did all right

IRIS: But didn't you have in the back of your mind you'd be rich one day?

JESSE: Married to Jim? Jim worked every hour God gave him, but you don't get rich changing flats and pumping gas. Not unless you're pumping it straight out of the ground.

IRIS: It's better nowadays, isn't it? Having the lotteries and that.

JESSE: (Scorn) Lotteries!

IRIS: There's always the chance you'll make it big.

JESSE: You spend too much of your life waiting to be bailed out, Iris.

IRIS: There you are, your life totted up at zero dollars and zero cents on the cash register, and the finger of fate reaches over, punches out a few numbers and bingo – a million bucks!

JESSE: I don't need no finger of fate interfering in my life.

IRIS: Really. You could do with a few extra bucks right now and you know it.

JESSE: I like my money coming through the normal channels.

IRIS: A little lottery win right now would get Sherman and Betty Jean off your back.

JESSE: I can handle Sherman and Betty Jean and their Layaway Plans.

IRIS: And what about the house?

JESSE: Are you going to tell me about the peeling paint? The roof falling in on my head? The plumbing all shot to blazes? Believe me, I've been told.

IRIS: Yeah. That bathtub of yours, the plug don't work any more. I had to stuff a sock in it. (Gets up and tidies her bags.)

JESSE: Who's side are you on anyway! Maybe you should take notes. The fridge is leaking too. You want to write that down? Sherm and BJ are always looking for ammunition.

IRIS: Why do you always have to be so darned touchy!

JESSE: Oh, don't mind me. (Unpacks groceries.) Grocery shopping always makes me grouchy.

IRIS: Yeah. Me too. They never give me enough bags. (Takes JESSE's bags as they're emptied.) The kids are ganging up on you, eh?

JESSE: They just can't wait to get me out of this house. Betty Jean figures if I sell the house I can put her through college. Sherman would like to play the stock markets with the proceeds. They both would like to tidy me away. But I spent the best part of my life here and I mean to pop off here too. It's my neighbourhood. All my friends live here.

IRIS: Yeah. Mine too.

(JESSE cracks open a couple of beer and hands one to IRIS.)

IRIS: Thanks Jesse.

JESSE: Sherm and Betty Jean figure I can get a hundred and ten thou for this "dump", as they call it. They want to put it into a bank and "manage" it for me. Meanwhile, I move into some high rise waiting room

they've picked out for me where I won't have to worry about anything for the rest of my life.

(A thud off.)

IRIS: There's the mail.

JESSE: I know it's the mail! (Tripping on a shopping bag.) Darn it, Iris! I can't take a step any more without tripping over one of your bags.

IRIS: Watch it, Jesse! Oh! You got them out of order! (Goes over to fix them.) They've got to be arranged properly.

JESSE: How many have you got here? (Focusing on bags) Really Iris. I don't remember you having this many. I don't like you being like this.

IRIS: Like what?

JESSE: You've always been such a take-charge person. Everything and everyone in your range. I mean you've been pushing me around most of my life.

IRIS: I have?

JESSE: Like a freaking sergeant major. That's why these bags . . . (IRIS starts to protest, to gather in her bags out of Jesse's reach.) What's in here anyway. Socks. Bank statements. Library books. *Three* umbrellas? You must have your entire worldly possessions in these things. (Spills things out.)

IRIS: (Refilling the bags as fast as they're emptied.) There's no lock on my door, Jesse. Any of those guys in the rooming house could come in and take stuff.

JESSE: (Giving up, goes for the mail.) I think you're getting a little weird with it, Iris. (Returning.) Why don't you just put a lock on the door?

IRIS: It's better having bags, Jesse. You never know when you're going to need something. (Puts the bags from JESSE's groceries in one of her bags.

(JESSE riffles through her mail, keeping bills, hurling junk into waste basket.)

JESSE: Bill, junk, bill, junk, junk, junk. Hello. (Retrieves an envelope she threw into the basket.) There's one here from a law company, it looks like. Cooper and Atchinson. What'll you bet it's Sherman up to something shady. (Opens envelope.)

IRIS: Sherman's putting the law on you?

JESSE: Wouldn't put it past him. He's been hinting at having a shrink look me over.

IRIS: A shrink. That's serious.

JESSE: Yeah. Once Sherman gets power of attorney over me I might as well pull the plug. (Reads letter.) Hmm... I don't get it.

IRIS: What? Is it Sherman?

JESSE: No... someone else. These Cooper and Atchinson guys. They say I've been left a farm.

IRIS: A farm!

JESSE: From someone in Finlake. But I don't know anyone in Finlake. It says here I danced with him in 1943.

IRIS: Danced with who?

JESSE: A guy called Walter Kreble. It says I danced with him at a serviceman's dance at the Sarcee Barracks, in 1943.

IRIS: I remember Sarcee Barracks.

JESSE: And he's left me all his possessions in fond memory of that night.

IRIS: *Did* you dance with him?

JESSE: I suppose I must've.

IRIS: You mean you don't remember?

JESSE: It was fifty years ago, Iris!

(As the lights fade, there is a soft flurry of Swing music. Light rises on WALTER and YOUNG JESSE sipping their beer. Behind them are shadows of people dancing. YOUNG IRIS swings by, locked in the grip of a very inexperienced dancer.)

YOUNG IRIS: All those neat guys and I've been lumbered with this baby. (Dances off.)

WALTER: You know her?

YOUNG JESSE: Iris? She's my best friend. She's very popular.

WALTER: Yeah. There's a whole lineup of guys over there waiting to dance with her.

JESSE: Yeah, that's Iris. She won't miss a dance tonight. It's always that way. A guy comes into the room looks around and says, "Now where's the prettiest and smartest one."

WALTER: Well sure. That's what I did.

JESSE: No need to get fresh.

(Music fades. Lights dim and come up on . . .

JESSE'S living room. JESSE is just finishing getting dressed. IRIS, wearing her coat, is sitting in a sea of bags. There is a plastic wrapped package of stockings on the arm of her chair. While JESSE dresses she searches for and finds makeup and a mirror in her bags.)

IRIS: (Opens her lipstick and is about to apply it but halts in confusion.) Why are we getting all dressed up again?

JESSE: We're going to see the lawyers. (Iris looks blank) Atchison and Cooper. (Blanker.) They're handling Walter Krebble's estate.

IRIS: Walter?

JESSE: Darn it Jesse, how many times do I have to tell you. The guy who left me his farm.

IRIS: Got it! Walter's the guy you danced with in the war.

JESSE: It's been a week now, and I still don't remember any Walter. I was hoping you would.

IRIS: Sorry, Jesse. I just don't remember him.

JESSE: Well think, Iris. You must have been there with me. Anywhere I went in those days was in your wake.

IRIS: I don't remember anyone called Walter. (Touches up her lipstick. In spite of her deterioration she still acts like a woman of glamour.) There was a "Guy". I know that. Guy Lombardo. Remember him? And that Miller boy. He used to dance with me all the time. Glennie, that's what I called him. He called me "Baby".

JESSE: You never danced with Glen Miller, Iris, and you know it.

IRIS: Did too.

JESSE: Look. I don't want any of your nonsense, all right? I haven't the patience. It's bad enough not being able to remember Walter.

IRIS: Maybe I have a picture of him in my bags

(IRIS searches through her bags.)

JESSE: It's been fifty years, Iris. Besides, why would *you* have his picture.

IRIS: How come you don't have one, Jesse?

JESSE: Don't start in on me, OK? Oh nuts. Will you look at this thing. (Picks lint from the dress and tries to make the collar lie down.)

IRIS: Here let me. There that's better. You'll be able to get yourself something a little more stylish when the money comes through. A whole wardrobe.

JESSE: I don't know if there's actual money. It's a farm, mainly.

IRIS: So. When you sell the farm. Talk about in the nick of time. Your taxes go up. The roofs falling in. They're cutting out a new benefit every day and suddenly you get this gift from the gods.

JESSE: Not the gods. Walter Kreble. And I don't even know him. Hand me those stockings, will you.

IRIS: (Hands over the package.) You can fix a lot of things with money, Jesse.

- JESSE: It's just too easy, Iris. Besides, who says the money will fix anything? (Looks at IRIS who once again is fussing with her bags.) Maybe it'll just open a bigger can of worms. (Rips ineffectually at the package.) Darn! Why is it they never make a package you can open any more?
- IRIS: Wait. I'll get you a knife. I got one here somewheres. (Searches through bags.) Have you told Sherman and Betty Jean about Walter?
- JESSE: Are you kidding? They'd never understand why a complete stranger would leave me his loot. (Pause.) I'm having trouble understanding it myself.
- IRIS: (Finds knife, a deadly sharply pointed item.) Here you go. You were nice to him, Jesse.
- JESSE: (Rips open the package.) I wouldn't have been that nice. You know how I am. You know how those dances were.
- IRIS: Yeah. I sure do. Sarcee Barracks. Mewata. Those ones they used to hold at the Cochrane Elks Club. Remember those?
- JESSE: (Trying to get a stocking over her foot.) Shees! My feet are so rough any more. I'm gonna rip these to shreds before I get them up my legs.
- IRIS: I met a lot of guys at those dances. Airmen. Sailors. Boys you'd see once, have a few beers with, and then never see again.
- JESSE: Nobody you ever thought would have any money to leave you.

IRIS: I remember one I went with, a dental assistant. Big chin and talked all educated.

JESSE: Now where did my shoes go? They were right here by the chair.

IRIS: He'd never seen the inside of a mouth until he joined up. And that's all he got to see too. Never got overseas, just spent the whole war cleaning teeth. Used to cry on my shoulder about how he wanted to see the action.

JESSE: They can't have just walked off by themselves.

(JESSE searches among the bags.)

IRIS: He used to call me, "Baby".

JESSE: (Locating shoes in Iris's bag.) Honestly, Iris! No wonder I couldn't find them!

IRIS: What?

JESSE: My shoes. They're right here in one of your bags.

IRIS: Isn't that something? It's amazing what turns up in those bags.

JESSE: This bag business is getting out of hand, you know that? We're going to have to do something...

IRIS: But if I didn't have the bags, Jesse, you wouldn't have found your shoes.

JESSE: I give up. Oh rats! Will you look at my hair!

IRIS: I don't see why you're fussing like this, Jesse. He's dead isn't he?

JESSE: What are you talking about?

IRIS: Walter. The way you're going on, worrying about your shoes and your hair. Anyone would think you were going on a date with him.

JESSE: A date! Don't be such a darn fool.

IRIS: You don't have to snap.

JESSE: I know. I'm sorry. It's just unnerving, all right? Having this Walter, this absolute stranger reach out of the past like I've always been part of his life. And I can't remember a darned thing about him. It's like having one of those stalker fellows crouching outside your window.

IRIS: Outside the window? Really? (Nervously looks out.)

JESSE: How did he know where to find me? Was he watching me all those years?

IRIS: You think he's watching us now?

JESSE: No, Iris. Walter's dead.

IRIS: That's what I thought. So why *are* you getting all gussied up.

JESSE: Oh for Pete's sake! We're going to the lawyer, remember? To pick up the keys for the farm. And sign the papers.

IRIS: Sign the papers? Shouldn't you have Sherman along?

JESSE: I think I know how to sign my name without Sherman holding my hand, Iris. Sherman doesn't think I can pour a bowl of corn flakes without help.

IRIS: And here you are, renting a car and everything and getting the key from the lawyers. Sherman would be amazed.

JESSE: His mother as a sentient being? He'd have a fit. Well, are you ready? We'd better get going.

IRIS: Uh. You don't mind if I just stick around for a while.

JESSE: What. Here?

IRIS: Yeah. It's not safe right now back at my place.

JESSE: But you're coming with me.

IRIS: I am? I don't know, Jesse.

JESSE: I'm not going out to a lonely farm all by myself, Iris. Come on!

(IRIS reluctantly gathers up her bags.)

IRIS: How far do you think it is?

JESSE: Not that far. We're getting a car, remember? Here, let me help.

IRIS: No! I can manage. (Follows JESSE unhappily.) Jesse?

JESSE: Yeah?

IRIS: Can we rent a *red* car?

JESSE: You bet. We'll get the sportiest red in the shop.

IRIS: We'll get a hot and swanky souped up baby of a car!

JESSE: Let's hit the road!

(They exit, lights dim and come up on YOUNG JESSE and WALTER. Swing music in the background.)

WALTER: The beer's terrible, ain't it

YOUNG JESSE: I've had better. It's probably watered down.

WALTER: Anyways, it's better than the hard stuff. What they do to that you wouldn't want to know. The medical core Johnnies supply the alcohol and they ain't too particular where they. . .

YOUNG JESSE: I suppose you get the real thing in Botrell, Walter

WALTER: What?

YOUNG JESSE: Isn't that where you're from, Botrell, or Water Valley. You look like a farm kid.

WALTER: Our farm's more to the east. Up near Thirty Mile Coulee. Closest town is Finlake.

YOUNG JESSE: What kind of farm? Dairy?

WALTER: Yeah. Plus a few chickens and pigs.

YOUNG JESSE: Sounds like a going concern.

WALTER: We manage to get the meals on the table, but that's about it. Dad wasn't no agricultural genius and now he's gone, well, to tell the truth, I don't know how Mom will manage without me.

YOUNG JESSE: You won't be gone that long.

WALTER: The First War lasted over four years.

YOUNG JESSE: This one's already been going for three. My boss says it'll be over by the winter.

WALTER: I wish it was true. I just wish...

YOUNG JESSE: You'll be back milking them cows before breakup. You'll see. When are you shipping out, anyway?

WALTER: They don't really tell us, but they made us pack up this morning. They always do make us pack up but they seemed more serious about it today, kept saying we didn't want to leave anything important behind.

JESSE: So you think it might be tonight?

WALTER: Some of the guys saw a couple of big trains this afternoon, pulling into the station downtown.

JESSE: Wow! That sure isn't much warning.

WALTER: Yeah! It's kind of unsettling. I...

(YOUNG IRIS enters and beckons to JESSE who breaks away from WALTER.)

YOUNG JESSE: Excuse me for a minute, will you? (Goes to YOUNG IRIS.) What's up?

YOUNG IRIS: Listen, I met a couple of really nifty guys. They want to give us a good time, Jesse.

YOUNG JESSE: (World weary.) You don't say.

YOUNG IRIS: Honestly. See, they're standing over there.

YOUNG JESSE: You mean that tall blond guy? He's not so bad.

YOUNG IRIS: He's mine, OK. The other guy is yours.

YOUNG JESSE: The skinny guy with the camera?

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah he takes pictures at all the dances and sells them to his buddies.

YOUNG JESSE: Won't he want to stick around here then?

YOUNG IRIS: He's not tied to it. They can leave any time.

YOUNG JESSE: He looks sort of slick.

YOUNG IRIS: He's dreamy and you know it. *And* they've got a car.

YOUNG JESSE: No kidding!

YOUNG IRIS: And a bottle of Canadian Club.

YOUNG JESSE: Well okay! Just give me a minute to dump the kid here. (She heads back to WALTER who has been trying without success to look nonchalant and suave.)

(Lights dim and come up on kitchen and living area of an abandoned farm in great disrepair. Bits of garbage lie about – newspapers,

bottles, an old broom handle. Among the furnishings a sofa, black with use, a rickety table with some dirty rags and bits of dried and decayed food. A broken window is stuffed with newspaper, another, completely paneless, looks onto a wide prairie landscape. There is a feeling of continuity between house and land as though the house is being reclaimed by the prairie.

The late afternoon light is pouring into the room and drifting in from the outside are the sounds of gophers whistling, and swallows twittering. On a table by the sofa is an old radio with a photograph beside it, a picture of a young woman dancing with a serviceman. We hear a clunking sound and a lean nimble looking man in his early seventies comes in from the back carrying a milk can. He sets it down and takes off the lid, searches through it finding nothing but ordinary paper garbage. He sighs, spots the picture and picks it up, smiles shaking his head as if at some fond memory, puts it down. Then he resumes his search in earnest. But before he can really get into it he is distracted by a car pulling up and women singing "Has Anybody Seen My Gal" loudly and self indulgently. Casting a furtive glance out the window he pops into the bedroom just as JESSE enters with a clipboard and marker. She stands in the doorway talking to IRIS who's still approaching.)

IRIS: Wasn't that the best? Wasn't that the greatest!

JESSE: Yeah I'd forgotten how much fun it was to drive a convertible.

IRIS: Remember that little yellow coupe you had with the rumble seat.

JESSE: And no floor. I sure do. You should leave those bags in the car. We won't be here long.

IRIS: I can't. Someone might take them, Jesse.

JESSE: *Iris.* You just bullied me into parking the car behind that old tool shed so that no one could see it from the road. So even if someone

did drive by this old place, and I bet that happens about every five years, they won't even know the car is there. Come on! I want to get this inventory done before dark.

(IRIS comes in with all her bags. JESSE helps her.)

IRIS: There's a truck out there beside the barn, Jesse.

JESSE: No kidding. (Sees it out the door.) Nice looking!

IRIS: We're going to have us some real adventures in that truck, Jesse.

JESSE: (Shuffles through list. Gives up.) Can't find it on here. I'll mark it off when I come to it. You're right. It'll be great to have wheels. So. (Turns her attention to the room.) Let's get this over with.

My sainted aunt! (Long silence as she looks about unbelieving.) Will you look at this place! Will you look at this filth! I can't believe anyone would let things go like this.

IRIS: Poor old guy! Must of been getting feeble at the end, eh.?

JESSE: Feeble my donkey! He was a dirty old coot and that's the truth of it. There's thirty years of dirt in here. Thirty years of never cleaning up. These windows are a clue. Every one of them cracked or broken. See the way the sand's drifted in? He obviously didn't give a darn whether it came in or not.

IRIS: (Discovering an old gramophone, complete with horn.) Look at the old Victrola! "His master's voice".

JESSE: There's a lifetime of clutter in here – soiled papers, old rags, dried up old medicine bottles. I don't see these on the inventory.

IRIS: (Looking at a record.) "You Made Me Love You". I used to have this one. (Puts it in one of her bags, singing.) "I didn't wanna do it. I didn't wanna do it."

JESSE: (Moving to the back.) I suppose this was the kitchen... judging by the bits of old cheese and puddles of grease. I don't know how he could live like this!

IRIS: Probably just got tired of holding it all together. (Pause.) Jesse? Are we gonna look for the money?

JESSE: What money?

IRIS: You know. That lawyer said Walter hid all his money somewhere in this house. (She spots the photo by the radio, picks it up and looks at it, trying to place it.)

JESSE: He said there was a *rumour* he hid his money. Does this look like the home of a person that had money?

(Pigeons cooing and fluttering. A slight clunking sound off.)

IRIS: What's that? (Clutches the photo to her breast.)

JESSE: Just pigeons. I hate to think what kind of mess they're making in there.

IRIS: We could clean this up, you know. It would make a great cottage.

JESSE: Cottage! You want to fix it up, be my guest! You want to scrape the spit off the floors... I don't think Walter ever heard of the invention of Kleenex. Setting a match to it all would be doing the world a favour. (Shivers and clasps her hands around herself.)

IRIS: Are you okay, Jesse?

JESSE: Don't you find this place upsetting? Don't you get the feeling, that Walter was decaying for years before he was really dead?

IRIS: That's spooky, Jesse.

JESSE: You see these old houses from the highway all the time, slowly crumbling back to the soil, weather-beaten, unoccupied, only Walter was in his, watching the dust piling up inside the windows. How could he give up like this?

(IRIS shuffles about, unable to take in what JESSE's saying.)

IRIS: Must have been real lonely living out here.

JESSE: A legacy is not such a nice thing, Iris. It's a way of reaching back and touching someone who never would have let you touch them in real life.

IRIS: Touching. (Looking about anxiously.)

JESSE: I know this sounds crazy, Iris, but I feel like Walter wanted to make me his prisoner. There's lots of people like that. If you don't watch them they take you prisoner. I don't know if they want it that way but that's the way it turns out. Look at Betty Jean. Wrapping me round with her misery. Wanting me to fix her life.

IRIS: She does?

JESSE: Sure she does. She wants to put me into a home and use the money from my house to go back to school. And Sherman. He wants everything neat and filed away. So if I want them to be happy I have to agree to be tidied up and swept under the carpet.

IRIS: I don't know about that, Jesse.

JESSE: And now there's Walter. Oh yes. There's no shortage of people who want to be your jailer. Hanging about, putting all their darned problems onto you. Everybody wants me to fix their lives.

IRIS: Not everybody.

JESSE: Why does everyone have to be so helpless? Why does everybody think that it isn't as difficult for me as it is for them? (Trips on a bag.) What's *with* all these shopping bags!

IRIS: I told you there's no lock on my door. It's not safe to leave things.

JESSE: Every time I see you, you have a few more. How do you carry all this?

IRIS: I *need* this stuff. Quit picking on me, Jesse!

(JESSE throw up her hands in defeat, goes to window and looks out in silence. We're aware of birdsong and wind and Jesse's growing entrancement.)

JESSE: That's some view.

IRIS: (Looking out with her.) And it's all yours, Jesse.

JESSE: Yes, but Walter didn't just leave me his view. He left me his life. His whole lonely wretched unbearable life!

IRIS: But his life is over, Jesse.

(Moment of silence. Hawks crying in the distance.)

IRIS: (Touches an antimacassar.) Did you hear what the lawyer said about his mother dying while he was overseas? And his sister drowned up at Sylvan lake a year or two after.

JESSE: So? Everybody has tragedy in their lives. Why should he think he was so special? Both my brothers were shot down in Normandy. My Jim died, didn't he? With five years of pain before he went. I dealt with my troubles, God knows, and dealt with them well, and now here's his all bundled up and saved over the years to be handed on to me. It isn't fair. And he isn't going to get away with it!

IRIS: Get away with what, Jesse?

JESSE: What I mean is I'm not taking the legacy. No way I'm taking it.

IRIS: But Jesse, if you don't take the legacy you're going to lose your house.

JESSE: I'd rather lose my house than put up with this sort of crap.

IRIS: But if you lose your house, whose bathroom am I gonna use?

JESSE: (A moment's speechlessness.) Honestly Iris! How did you get to be so stupid! Sometimes I don't know how we stayed friends all these years. Look at you. You're so muddle headed you don't know if you're coming or going. And all those stupid bags. You know, Betty Jean's right about you.

IRIS: Betty Jean. Your Betty Jean?

JESSE: Yeah. She said you're turning into a goldarned bag lady.

IRIS: I'm not. . . I'm. . . That's not true! (Pushes the picture into her bag.) It's just my *stuff*, Jesse.

JESSE: A bag lady!

(IRIS gathers up her bags.)

JESSE: Where're you going?

IRIS: I'm taking my *bags* outta here. Don't have to fix *my* life.

JESSE: I didn't mean that!

IRIS: And I don't need your darned bathroom. It's all plugged up anyway.

JESSE: Iris, Wait!

IRIS: And I'll tell you something else too, Jesse. Walter didn't want to feel you up.

JESSE: Iris, that's *not* what I said.

IRIS: And he didn't want you to be sorry for him. He just wanted to be friends, that's all. (Suddenly she's not dithery at all but extremely sober and deliberate.) I'll see you in the car.

JESSE: Oh rats! Iris. Look, I'm sorry, OK? I . . .

IRIS: Don't touch me. And don't follow me, neither! (Exits.)

JESSE: Honestly! My house is falling down around my ears. My kids want to put me in a home. Some weirdo crank is reaching to me out of the past and my best friend is going funny in the head!

(Goes to the door and calls out.) Iris! Come back here! I didn't mean it. I'm a jerk, OK? Look, I'll make some coffee. (Looks at her a minute.) What am I worrying about? She'll have forgotten all about this in five minutes. Still, coffee's a good idea. If there *is* coffee.

What do you know. (She finds coffee and an old kettle, exclaims at the rusty water in the tap.) Eughh! Nothing like fresh spring water. (Runs it a while.) That's more like it. (Fills and puts on the kettle.)

JESSE: (Leaving the stove, she bumps into a chair and runs her stocking.) Great! As if there wasn't enough to worry about. (Examines the run and finds it goes right up her thigh.)

(ACE, comes back into the room from the bedroom. He heads on tiptoe for the door but is transfixed by the show of leg. JESSE spots him and grabs up an old broomstick handle.)

JESSE: Who the blazes are you? (Grips the handle more tightly and swings at him.)

ACE: Wait! There's no need for violence!

JESSE: Really? How do I know you're not an axe murderer?

ACE: Well for one thing I don't have an axe. (Dodges another blow.)

JESSE: That don't make no difference. You're trespassing? Who knows what you're up to. (Brandishes again, violently.)

ACE: (Protects himself.) You're trespassing too.

JESSE: On my own property?

ACE: This is not your property. It's Walter Kreble's place.

JESSE: (Eases up on the attack.) You knew Walter?

ACE: Yeah, I was his best friend.

JESSE: His best friend! And you let him live like this?

ACE: Hey. No one told Walter what to do. And you haven't said what *you're* doing here.

JESSE: (Holds up the keys.) I came in the by the door. I'm the new owner.

ACE: You mean they sold it already.

JESSE: Well, not exactly

ACE: Can you believe it? The poor guy is still warm in his grave and they've already turned it over. Lawyers huh? No offence.

JESSE: Were you hoping he'd leave it to you?.

ACE: Nah. He wouldn't have left it to me. We were great pals, though. Always joking and fooling about, Wally and me.

JESSE: Must have been a riot. What were you doing back there?

ACE: In the bedroom? Just looking around.

JESSE: Oh yeah? What's in there that's so interesting?

ACE: Nothing much.

JESSE: (Looks in door.) Ugh! Will you look at that mattress. It's black! How did he live like this?

ACE: Yeah well, Wally went a little funny these past few years.

JESSE: More than a few, I'm thinking. Not much of a life, eh?

ACE: I don't know. Wally was essentially a happy kind of guy. He woke up every day knowing he was going to have a good time.

JESSE: Here?

ACE: Sure here. He loved it here. (While he talks he furtively looks about the room.) He loved his farm and he loved his cows. That boy just loved cows. Knew every doggone thing about them.

JESSE: But he lived alone.

ACE: Lotsa women set their cap at old Wally but he was always more interested in the cows.

(JESSE still grips broom handle, unconvinced.)

JESSE: I don't see any cows.

ACE: 'Course the cows went some years back now. But for most of his life, well you don't get everything in this life, and Wally got more than most folks, I'd say. The farm, a successful business, respect of the community. Yeah and see this? (Indicates a framed object on the wall. Takes it down and opens it up.) A medal. Got it in World War Two. Me, I had the women and not much else. I sure didn't get no medal.

(JESSE puts down the broom handle and goes and looks at medal.)

JESSE: Walter got a medal? How? Do you know anything about it?

ACE: (Takes it out of frame.) Well I was there, eh? Oh yes. It was one hell of a bad time. Our company was trapped between two machine gun posts. The captain was the first to get killed and they were picking off the rest of us about one every three minutes.

We were finished. And surrender wasn't a choice either. The non com ran out with a white flag and got shot in the head. We were all crouching there saying our prayers when old Wally just up and went.

JESSE: How do you mean, "went"?

ACE: We thought he was making a run for it. Saving his butt. But the next thing we know there's a big bang to the left of us, and a few minutes later a big bang to the right, and the firing just stopped. I thought maybe I was dreaming it. But no. That bugger had done the impossible. Took out *two* machine guns. I mean it sounds so easy; they do it in the movies all the time, right? But that was an *impossible* situation we were in. A dead end. And suddenly old Wally finds the exit. If they hadn't given him a medal, we would've.

JESSE: That must've been something else. I've never been in a situation like that.

ACE: Imagine how he felt, eh? Everything was going to hell and he stepped up. A moment like that can go on spreading out through your whole life.

JESSE: Yeah. Not all of us get a moment like that, that's for sure.

ACE: Or we get it and we don't seize it. We were all there. We all had the opportunity. It was Wally that snatched it up.

JESSE: Well luck has something to do with it. (Turns medal over thoughtfully.) Maybe if *you'd* tried to deal with the machine guns you'd have been killed. I mean sometimes it's not up to you.

ACE: Well, all I know is I never seized any moments like that.

JESSE: So you were with him all through the war?

ACE: We more or less had the same war. Except there wasn't nothing spectacular in my deeds. And after, I was never able to settle down to business the way Wally could. The war made a lot of us restless, you know. I never felt quite so up to things after it was over.

(Now that the conversation seems to be flowing smoothly, ACE becomes more confident and subtly continues his search.)

JESSE: You get married?

ACE: Yep. Not exactly a marriage made in heaven.

JESSE: Mine was OK. But back then, eh, you thought the world was your oyster. Not that I'd ever seen an oyster.

ACE: Yeah, times have sure changed. It's no fun any more. In the old days you could have a good life no matter what you were earning.

JESSE: Yeah. Getting out to a dance on Saturday night and you'd be ecstatic.

ACE: No kidding! (Preen's a little to Jesse's amusement.) I'm a good dancer, you know.

JESSE: I bet you didn't have much trouble finding a good time.

ACE: Me? (Lifts up a the lid of a box and looks in.) Well yeah. Any kind of wild life going on, I seemed to gravitate to it. I could tell you stories all right.

JESSE: So why don't you?

ACE: Well most of my stories are hard on delicate ears. I don't think you want to hear how many girls there were in my past, how many gambling joints, how many bootleggers.

JESSE: You might be surprised.

ACE: After the war I hired myself out in the summer, whatever I could get. In the fields. The harvest. A stint or two in the mines, even railway

work. But winters you couldn't get me outside. The missus was always sore at me. Well, with three kids to feed.... She didn't have the best time of it with me. That's for sure.

JESSE: So what *did* you do in the winter?

ACE: It would be gambling joints that sort of thing. I'd look for games. Poker. The social clubs, the poolhalls. It got so that I made a sort of living at it.

JESSE: Gambling?

ACE: That and bartending, or keeping order at the games, making sure no one got out of hand.

JESSE: And what about Walter? Did he ever gravitate to the wild life?

ACE: Wally? Yeah, sometimes. But he always woke up sober. Yeah. Wally liked a good time but he liked the farm better. 'Course this is the old days we're speaking of. The last few years he never left the farm.

JESSE: Yeah, I can see that. So, do you still gamble?

ACE: Well, not in any organized way. You could say I've retired from the business. I still go to the races though. When I can. I've been living in Drumheller these past few years with my daughter so the opportunities don't come up that much. Just the fairs and rodeos.

JESSE: Your wife's dead?

ACE: Hell no. We just can't stand the sight of each other. We've been separated for over ten years. (Casually looks in a cupboard.)

JESSE: You act like you're looking for something

ACE: Me? (Laughs.) No. Well, yeah. I just thought I'd like a keepsake of old times. Something to remind me of Wally. (Pats radio.) Now here's a bit of the past. Wally made it, you know. Built it just before the war for his mom. (Turns it on. Instant music. Starts moving to it.)

JESSE: Funny. Those old radios used to take forever to warm up. That came on right away.

ACE: (Stops dancing, thoughtful.) Yeah, it did. Yeah! You're right. Huh. He must have put a transistor in it. Way to go! (Picks up the radio, starts to shake it, thinks better of it.) Good old Wally!

JESSE: Maybe you'd like to have the medal.

ACE: Medal?

JESSE: You said you wanted a keepsake.

ACE: Oh yeah. Well to tell you the truth, ah... I'd sooner have the radio.

JESSE: Isn't it rather big?

ACE: It's not that big.

JESSE: It's amazing how clunky these things were. Nobody minded wasting space in those days, huh?

ACE: All the tubes and things. That's what took up the room. But it's got a nice design, eh. Kind of nostalgic. I just have to look at that and I think of old Wally.

JESSE: Well if you're sure that's what you want.

ACE: It is!

JESSE: Be my guest. (Finds that she's holding the medal close, too close. Shakes herself out of her mood.) And take the medal too. (Tucks it in his shirt pocket.) I'm sure Wally would have wanted you to have it.

ACE: Thanks! This is great!

JESSE: There's coffee if you'd like some.

ACE: Uh, I'd better be going. It's getting late.

JESSE: Yeah it is. Sun'll be down in another half hour.

(ACE shifts the radio into a more comfortable hold.)

JESSE: You need help with that?

ACE: No. I can manage.

JESSE: That your truck out back?

ACE: Yeah.

JESSE: You couldn't even see it from the road.

ACE: Yeah well . . . (grasping.) I always parked there when I came to see Wally. A tradition, you know? See ya. (Moving off.)

JESSE: Sure.

ACE: (Turning back.) You know, you really remind me of someone. I can't put my finger on it. But I just have this feeling we met somewhere.

JESSE: Must've been another life.

ACE: It's your legs.

JESSE: What's wrong with my legs?

ACE: Not a damn thing!

(JESSE glowers at him. He's gone too far.)

ACE: Yeah. Well. Thanks for the radio.

JESSE: Don't mention it.

(ACE exits. JESSE goes to the door and watches him go to his truck with an almost dreamy expression.)

JESSE: You look familiar to me too, Buster.

(Almost gives in to the moment then shrugs it off impatiently, goes to the table, finds and washes cups and pours the coffee.

IRIS enters urgently with bags.)

IRIS: Some guy just drove off in Walter's truck!

JESSE: I wasn't Walter's. It was his own.

IRIS: I know him, don't I? Guy. That's who it was.

JESSE: It was not *Guy*. Or *Glennie*.

IRIS: Then who was it?

JESSE: An old friend of Walter's. You know, I didn't even ask him his name.

IRIS: You look like you had fun.

JESSE: Not that much fun.

IRIS: He looked nice. Kind of a frisky old dog.

JESSE: Yeah, the kind you can't teach new tricks to. Look quit fussing with those bags for a minute and come and have some coffee. (Presses Iris into a chair and gives her a cup of coffee)

IRIS: You made coffee? (Tastes it.) You got any milk?

JESSE: Look around you! Is there gonna be milk? Look at this! You can tell how he lived. Nothing store bought. He made himself some kind of pan bread, There's still lumps of it sitting out. Water and flour and soda probably.

IRIS: I ain't had soda bread since I was a kid. Those olden days. They were the best, eh?

JESSE: You didn't think so at the time.

IRIS: Home made bread and fresh farm eggs. Nothing like it. Chickens and ducks and a little vegetable patch. That's what I'd do if I had this place.

JESSE: Well, Walter didn't give it to you. He gave it to me. You go and dance with some one. OK?

Wait look I'm sorry. (Stops IRIS from leaving again.) I don't know why but this whole thing has me on a short fuse. Going through his pathetic possessions like this. Thinking of his pathetic life. I guess it's got something to do with independence, keeping control of *my* life. If I accept the money from Walter Kreble it makes a lot of what I did in my life meaningless. A lot of what Jim and I had meaningless.

IRIS: A lot of what you and Jim had *was* meaningless.

JESSE: Iris!

IRIS: Yeah?

JESSE: You don't even know what you said, do you.

IRIS: What did I say? Was it about the old days?

JESSE: Forget it. Just finish your coffee and let's get out of here.

IRIS: We can't.

JESSE: Why not?

IRIS: We got a flat. Must've driven over a nail or something.

JESSE: A flat! Why didn't you tell me!

IRIS: I am telling you.

JESSE: Yes but if you'd told me when that old geeser was here he could have fixed it for us.

IRIS: What old geeser? (JESSE groans clenches her fists as though keeping from strangling IRIS and leaves.) Where are you going? It's not my fault. You should never have left the driveway to park behind that toolshed! (Gathers up her bags and hurries after JESSE.)

(Back to the Sarcee Barracks dance and WALTER and JESSE .)

WALTER: You really have to go?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah I promised someone. You know how it is.

WALTER: Yeah. (Trying not to look desolated.)

YOUNG JESSE: I'll finish my beer though.

WALTER: Swell! I'll get you another if you like.

YOUNG JESSE: No this'll be fine. (Awkward pause.) So. Uh. You don't look old enough to be in the army, Walter.

WALTER: I'm eighteen. Old enough.

YOUNG JESSE: So what's it like being a soldier boy?

WALTER: It's not that great. Some of the guys like taking the mickey out of you. You get pushed around by the sergeants. I don't mind hard knocks. I can take any amount of it. It 's the way you're kind of faceless.

YOUNG JESSE: How do you mean?

WALTER: Oh the way you're just a number among a whole bunch of other numbers. No one knows who you are. And no one cares, either.

YOUNG JESSE: It'll get better, though. It takes a while to know people. You'll end up making some real good buddies, I bet.

WALTER: I like talking to you, Jesse.

YOUNG JESSE: Oh yeah?

WALTER: Yeah. You're easy to talk to. I feel kind of like myself right now. Like I'm back home.

YOUNG JESSE: Next you'll be talking about my angelic face, saying it's just like your Mom's.

WALTER: Hey, I'm not kidding, you know!

YOUNG JESSE: So why did you join up, anyways, Walter?

WALTER: Everybody was joining up. It wouldn't have been right not to.

YOUNG JESSE: You could have stayed and farmed. They let you do that.

WALTER: Sure, but the farm's not so great. It's good land and everything but I don't know what to do with it.

YOUNG JESSE: You should go to the agricultural school when you get back.

WALTER: If I get back.

YOUNG JESSE: Come on. What way is that to talk?

(YOUNG IRIS beckons and YOUNG JESSE half rises.)

WALTER: The family on the next farm to us lost three men at Dunkirk. My cousin in Manitoba lost both his legs in a... You're not goin', are you? You haven't finished your beer.

YOUNG JESSE: No. Not right away. Look uh maybe I do want to dance.

WALTER: But what about your feet?

YOUNG JESSE: What about my feet?

WALTER: Oh. They're great feet. It's just that you said....

YOUNG JESSE: Oh forget what I said. Let's dance!

(YOUNG IRIS gestures "Let's go!" YOUNG JESSE shrugs, throws her arms out helplessly as she and WALTER dance off.)

(JESSE and IRIS come in from outside.)

JESSE: You know there was a time when I could have changed that tire in ten minutes flat. I must've spent the better part of an hour out there and I couldn't even get the hubcap off.

IRIS: But what are we gonna do?

JESSE: Sit it out, I guess.

IRIS: Here? You mean spend the night here?

JESSE: You got a better idea? We can't walk out of here in the dark. We'll have to wait till morning and hope that we can flag someone down then.

IRIS: But it's cold and where are we gonna sleep?

JESSE: We'd better try to make ourselves comfortable.

IRIS: There's the sofa.

JESSE: I'm not sleeping on that thing. Gives me the willies just looking at it.

IRIS: Jesse. What about supper?

JESSE: There's a scrap of bread here about five hundred years old.

IRIS: When's Guy getting back.

JESSE: He's not Guy and he's not coming back.

IRIS: But he took your truck.

JESSE: It wasn't my truck, Iris. It was his.

IRIS: That was Guy Lombardo's truck? Why did he leave?

JESSE: He had other fish to fry. (Wraps her coat round her and sits on the floor.)

IRIS: You liked him, didn't you.

JESSE: No! I don't go for that type any more, all spit and no polish. Besides I'm too old for all that nonsense.

IRIS: (Bringing all her bags over and sitting beside JESSE.) Boy, wait till Sherman finds out about this.

JESSE: Why should Sherman find out about this? *I'm* not gonna tell him

IRIS: Me neither. Honest. (Pause.) But if he did find out, he could put you away, huh?

JESSE: Let him try. He'd have to prove I was incompetent. (Pulls her coat around her and tries to get comfortable.)

IRIS: You mean like getting that psychiatrist he was talking about.

JESSE: He can roust up all the two bit shrinks and dime store lawyers he wants.

IRIS: You sure are lucky, Jesse.

JESSE: Am I ever.

IRIS: All these people that care about you. Walter and Betty Jean and Sherman. Nobody cares about me. My daughter Annie? She hasn't been in touch with me for years.

JESSE: What are you talking about! Annie was here at Easter.

IRIS: She was?

JESSE: Sure. She tried to get you to go home with her. She brought you that big box of chocolates, remember?

IRIS: I don't remember any chocolates.

JESSE: Well she did. You know what? I bet you never even ate them. They're probably tucked away in one of those bags.

IRIS: You think so?

(IRIS searches through bags and comes up with a chocolate box.)

IRIS: Here they are! Black Magic! My favourite (Rips open box.)

JESSE: There, you see? Annie does care about you.

IRIS: Wasn't that nice of her? (Looking at the chocolate map.) There's hazelnuts and almonds and cherry creams and . . . You want one?

JESSE: Yeah. (Resigned.) Give me one with a soft centre.

IRIS: (Checking the map to get it right.) There you go. (Watches JESSE chew it.) You want another one?

JESSE: No thanks. I'm going to try to get some shuteye. You should too.

IRIS: Gotta fix my bags first.

JESSE: Those darned bags.

IRIS: They have to be arranged a certain way. So that I know where everything is.

JESSE: Do you need all this light to do it?

IRIS: (Turns off the lights and grabs one of her bags. Takes out giant flashlight and sets it up.) I have lots of light. (Pulls out another smaller flashlight and starts composing her bags. While she's fussing JESSE selects a plump soft bag and tucks it under her head. IRIS spends some minutes arranging and rearranging the bags peeking inside with the second flashlight. She finally gets them all done, but then looks unhappy. She peeks in a couple of them, then scratches her head.) I can't find my sock bag, Jesse.

(There is no answer. She goes over and shakes JESSE.) Jesse, I can't find my sock bag and my toothbrush is missing too. I can't sleep till I find them. (All her shaking does not waken JESSE, who is out for the count.) Jesse? (She looks closer, then shines her light on her friend.) Darn it Jesse! You're sleeping on my sock bag!

(She goes to the couch, takes one of the grimy couch cushions and replaces her sock bag with it. She smiles with satisfaction and is about to settle down herself when there is a sound of a car door slamming far off. She turns off her flash lights and tries to waken JESSE.) Jesse! Wake up ! Wake up! There's someone coming. Wake up!

(She huddles with her bags as a tall skinny figure comes through the door. He trips on one of Iris's bags, then turns on a light of his own, a pencil flash, and bends to see what he stumbled on. IRIS grabs her big flashlight and wallops him on the head. He groans and drops to the floor.)

IRIS: (She rummages in her bags and pulls out a long, glittering, deadly looking knife.) You think you're so smart, Mr. Guy Lombardo. But no one messes with my bags!

(There is a long passage of swing music while YOUNG JESSE and YOUNG IRIS confer. Throughout this conversation WALTER stands apart trying not to listen in, trying to look cool but managing only to look foolishly hopeful and eager.)

YOUNG IRIS: Jesse, these guys aren't going to wait much longer. What's keeping you?

YOUNG JESSE: I don't know. I just can't seem to find the right moment to leave.

YOUNG IRIS: Well, find it. Ace is really anxious to meet you.

YOUNG JESSE: Ace?

YOUNG IRIS: That's his name. He thinks you have great legs. And can he dance!

YOUNG JESSE: I know. I saw him over there

YOUNG IRIS: He's hot!

YOUNG JESSE: Walter's a pretty good dancer too. Not bad for a sap. Anyway, just one more dance and I'll be with you. I told him I was leaving.

YOUNG IRIS: You did? Then leave!

YOUNG JESSE: (Looks sheepish.) I got to let him down easy. (IRIS rolls her eyes.) He's just a kid. (IRIS is not impressed.) Look. He's shipping out tonight, okay?

YOUNG IRIS: These guys are not going to wait for ever. (Drifts off, turns and whispers.) *Leave!*

YOUNG JESSE: (Moving back. There is an awkward moment of silence.) It must be tough living on a farm. How do you stand it?

WALTER: It's okay.

YOUNG JESSE: What do you do for kicks?

WALTER: Not a lot. Sometimes there's dances. They're okay. In between, we play cards, throw horseshoes. That's about the extent of it.

YOUNG JESSE: You have a car?

WALTER: No. I'm going to get a car though, when this is over.

YOUNG JESSE: Oh yeah?

WALTER: Yeah. You have to have a car in the country. You can't hope to get ahead. I know what I want too, a Ford Deluxe. It's the best thing on the road.

YOUNG JESSE: You're good with cars?

WALTER: Not bad. I can handle most mechanical stuff. You should see my radio.

YOUNG JESSE: You got a radio?

WALTER: I built it myself. It runs off of batteries and it's got more dials and switches than a Frankenstein's machine.

YOUNG JESSE: One of those ones you get Paris and London on?

WALTER: No. But we get all the American shows. I really like the dance music. Kay Kayser and Sammy Kay. Benny Goodman. My sister Gemmy and me dance to it all the time. We push back the couch and carpet and make believe we're at the Ritz or something. Sometimes we even get Mom up for a waltz.

(Band starts up, "You Made Me Love you.")

WALTER: Hey! They're playing our song again.

YOUNG JESSE: (Sternly.) It's not our song, Walter.

WALTER: (Cheerfully.) I know.

(They dance on to muted music as the lights come up on. . .

Dawn, the farmhouse. There is a deafening sound of birds and a faint red glow to the light. There is no sign of the intruder. JESSE and IRIS are fast asleep on the floor. JESSE awakens first, groans and stretches to alleviate stiffness and the roughness of the night. She then notices the cushion she's been sleeping on, freaks out, throws it away and checks herself for bugs.)

JESSE: Eugggh! There must be fifty years of bugs in that thing. Ohh! I need coffee and food! (Spots chocolates and takes a couple. Puts coffee on to heat up. Comes to the front of stage and takes in the view. Behind her WALTER and YOUNG JESSE are talking.)

WALTER: You'd like my farm. You can see a hundred miles in every direction. Sometimes I think it's the most beautiful spot in the world

YOUNG JESSE: I'm not crazy about the country. Too lonely.

WALTER: It's funny, I don't feel lonely there. There's something about it that just makes you feel part of everything. You look out over the prairies and you know it's probably been just like that for a million years.

JESSE: (Almost as if she can hear him over the years.) At least.

WALTER: And there's just so much life everywhere. Sunrise is the best time. The birds start about an hour before the sun comes up. The noise of them. It's deafening sometimes.

JESSE: There must be a million birds out there

WALTER: There's a big slough near the house. When the sun comes up it turns all red and you can see the waders and dippers and the coots and all the little birds round the edge.

(The light on JESSE'S face reddens and she smiles in wonder.)

YOUNG JESSE: Well if you like the land so much, you should be a good farmer.

WALTER: You really think I could hack the Agricultural College?

YOUNG JESSE: Of course.

WALTER: There is stuff I like, you know. That I'm good at.

YOUNG JESSE: Like what?

WALTER: Cows.

YOUNG JESSE: Cows?

WALTER: Don't laugh.

YOUNG JESSE: I'm not laughing.

WALTER: You are too.

YOUNG JESSE: Well *cows*.

WALTER: Cows are great. You can breed them, you know, so as to get better milk and lots more of it. That's the kind of stuff they teach you in the college.

YOUNG JESSE: Well then you should definitely go.

WALTER: You make it sound so easy.

YOUNG JESSE: Well why wouldn't it be? You joined the army, didn't you?

WALTER: Yeah.

YOUNG JESSE: So join the Agricultural College.

WALTER: Maybe I will. When I get back. I'll see what Mom says.

YOUNG JESSE: Your Mom will love the idea.

WALTER: Yeah, she will. She sure will. So what about you Jesse, what are you good at?

YOUNG JESSE: I don't know.

WALTER: But there must be something you want to do.

YOUNG JESSE: I'd like to get out of this place. You know. Have a good time, go places.

WALTER: Travel and stuff?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah. Maybe *I* should join the army. (Dance in silence a moment or two.)

WALTER: You should be one of those women, what do they call them? They work on airplanes.

YOUNG JESSE: Like Rosie the Rivetter?

WALTER: No, not making them, flying on them. Stewardesses. That's what they call them. You get to fly all over the world. Wouldn't that be great?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah well. You have to pass a lot of tests, I hear.

WALTER: It'll be a snap.

YOUNG JESSE: I've got the brains. I don't know if I've got the charm. And don't go telling me I have, all right? I know what I'm like. First guy that throws up I'm gonna be all over him like the wicked witch of the west.

WALTER: I don't believe that.

YOUNG JESSE: I just don't have the patience, you know.

WALTER: So what are you gonna do?

YOUNG JESSE: Beats me. I mean, what do *you* see me doing? Telephone operator? *Sor ree wrong number, you dumbell!* Or nurse? *It's only a broken leg, you big crybaby.*

WALTER: You're a real tough guy.

YOUNG JESSE: James Cagney could take lessons.

WALTER: Yeah, so could Bette Davis.

YOUNG JESSE: You like Bette Davis!

WALTER: She's the best!

YOUNG JESSE: I thought maybe you'd like someone fluffy and sweet, like Loretta Young. The girl next door.

WALTER Fluffy! What do you take me for! I like Myrna Loy and Rosalind Russell - the ones with *character*.

YOUNG JESSE: No kidding!

(A jitterbug number starts up and WALTER dances her off in a wild and crazy fashion. JESSE, reminiscing, does a lively step or two.)

(IRIS wakens looks puzzled, gets up.)

IRIS: Whatcha doing, Jesse?

JESSE: Aw nuthin'. Just warming myself up. Better get up. We're going to have to hoof it out of here soon. We're not exactly shoed for the occasion either. You don't have a pair of Reeboks in those bags of yours, do you?

IRIS: I got lots of socks. (Wipes the knife on one.)

JESSE: Well soon as we have our coffee we'll . . . (Notices for the first time the knife that IRIS is clutching.) What are you doing with that?

IRIS: It's to defend myself, Jesse. In case of intruders.

JESSE: Intruders. Right.

IRIS: You'd be surprised.

JESSE: (Takes the knife from IRIS.) Aw! There's blood on it!

IRIS: (Her hand has a sock wrapped round it.) I cut myself in the struggle.

JESSE: Here let me look at that. (Starts to unwrap her hand then stops.)
What struggle? What's been going on?

IRIS: It was the bags, Jesse. I can't let them be broken up. You know that. I have to keep them together.

JESSE: Those darn bags again. They're going to be the death of you. (Take the bandage off to survey the damage.) Honestly Iris, you can't be left alone for a minute.

IRIS: Can too.

JESSE: You need a keeper.

IRIS: Don't say that! Don't you ever say that!

JESSE: It was just a figure of speech.

IRIS: I don't need a keeper and I told her so.

JESSE: Told who?

IRIS: That woman that gave me the chocolates.

JESSE: Annie. Your daughter Annie.

IRIS: That's right. I told her I don't need no keeper. I just need taken care of a little bit. That's all.

JESSE: That's what she wants to do. Take care of you.

IRIS: Put me away!

JESSE: Nobody wants to put you away.

IRIS: Annie does. And so do you!

JESSE: No I don't. Calm down. (IRIS wrenches away.) *Calm down.*

IRIS: No! I'm not calming down

JESSE: You don't have to shout.

IRIS: I feel good when I shout!

(Lights dim and come up on YOUNG JESSE and YOUNG IRIS.
Swing music in the background.)

YOUNG IRIS: I thought you said you were coming.

YOUNG JESSE: I don't know, Iris.

YOUNG IRIS: What do you mean you don't know?

YOUNG JESSE: I don't think I can.

YOUNG IRIS: Oh great. These guys want to take us to Cochrane. To the *Elks* Club.

YOUNG JESSE: I can't let the kid down.

YOUNG IRIS: So it's OK to let *me* down.

YOUNG JESSE: Come on, Iris.

YOUNG IRIS: If you don't go, I can't go.

YOUNG JESSE: You don't need me.

YOUNG IRIS: I'm not going off with two guys I hardly met... Two strangers! Oh you make me so mad! We finally meet up with some really swell guys and you want to babysit some farmer boy.

YOUNG JESSE: He's not a farmer boy!

YOUNG IRIS: What is he then?

YOUNG JESSE: He's just... not from the city.

YOUNG IRIS: You're not sweet on him, are you?

YOUNG JESSE: Of course not! I just have to say good-bye.

YOUNG IRIS: You were just saying good-bye before. Let's go.

YOUNG JESSE: No. Give me a minute.

(They continue to argue silently as we segue back to IRIS and JESSE.)

IRIS: I said I feel good when I shout!

JESSE: I heard you the first time.

IRIS: Just because I get little dithery at times. It's perfectly normal to get a little absent-minded at my age.

JESSE: A little? You don't even remember your own daughter! You're half way to gaga-land, Iris. You've got one foot in the padded cell. And you expect me to take care of you. I can't take care of you.

IRIS: Who said anything about taking care of me. I only wanted to use your bathroom!

JESSE: I don't want to take care of you. I'm not taking the farm.

IRIS: I'm fine. Look at me. My teeth are all there. I still look pretty good. I've been letting myself go, I admit, but nothing a bit of exercise and a good diet won't fix.

JESSE: I'm not taking it.

IRIS: Old age is a state of mind. Right? In which case you're the one to worry about.

JESSE: Me!

IRIS: Crabby and pessimistic. You're no fun any more. I can take care of myself. (Takes up knife and puts it in her bag.) But you. Look at you. You're an old woman. You're getting near the end and you can't face it. Can't face the fact you never did anything of any value.

JESSE: That's because I hung around you too much. And because I always let you be the one who called the shots.

IRIS: Somebody had to call the shots.

JESSE: Everything I did was because you thought it was a good idea. "Let's do this and let's do that." I even married Jim because of you.

IRIS: That is such nonsense!

JESSE: It's true and you know it. Jim and I – it would have been a couple of dates and move on to the next. But you didn't want that. Jim was Artie's best friend. You kept us together.

IRIS: No!

JESSE: You finagled and maneuvered and pouted and just kept at it till I gave in. And all because Jim was Artie's best friend.

IRIS: We had a lot of fun together. the four of us.

JESSE: You finagled and maneuvered and pouted and just kept at it till I gave in. And all because Jim was Artie's best friend.

IRIS: That is not true. That is so *twisted*.

JESSE: It was always you! "Let's go to this party. Let's go to that. Try this job, try that."

IRIS: You could have had your say. You have a tongue in your head.

JESSE: And then what you said last night. After all your bossing and manipulating you go and say that my life with Jim was *meaningless*.

IRIS: I said that?

JESSE: Yes you said that, darn it. Why can't you own up to things instead of hiding them in these stupid bags. Your socks. Your underwear. Your goldarned responsibilities. Own up!

IRIS: I thought we were friends.

JESSE: We are not friends.

IRIS: Last night you said we had good times.

JESSE: Not as many as I would have had without you.

IRIS: This is crazy. I don't understand you.

JESSE: You've always gone ahead, always done what you wanted and dragged me in your wake.

IRIS: You liked it at the time.

JESSE: I don't want to go along, any more. You're dragging me to something I don't want to be dragged to.

IRIS: We've got good times ahead of us Jesse. Lots of good times.

JESSE: You're going to pull me down.

IRIS: You think I'm senile, don't you. But I can take care of myself. I still have all the old moxie. I can still draw blood when it's necessary. I'm not like Walter. I'm not going to sit and let the sand blow over me.

JESSE: Don't you say anything about Walter.

IRIS: So now you're defending Walter? I thought you said he was a weirdo crank

JESSE: He went with dignity. You're going out like a clown.

IRIS: I am not going out. And I'm not a clown!

JESSE: Then what's with the bags? (Picks up a bag.)

IRIS: Don't!

JESSE: This is a routine, Iris. You got it down pat. (Shuffles about gathering bags in imitation of IRIS.)

IRIS: Put them down. (Grabs at bags.)

JESSE: (Avoiding her.) You can't do without them, can you?

IRIS: Sure I can. It's a temporary thing, Jesse.

(Jesse lifts up a bag and scatters it's contents.)

IRIS: Stop it!

JESSE: See?

(JESSE tears up the bags. IRIS madly tries to stop her.)

(Then in the midst of their struggle Walter's medal falls out. JESSE, suddenly sober, picks it up, looks at IRIS.)

JESSE: Where did this come from?

IRIS: It must've got knocked off the shelf, or something.

JESSE: No Iris. I gave this to that fellow that was here. He took it away with him.

IRIS: It's just an old medal.

JESSE: What have you done? What have you done, Iris?

IRIS: I don't know.

JESSE: Tell me.

IRIS: He was messing with my stuff, Jesse. (Gathers up a bag restoring its contents.)

JESSE: Iris. (Stops her from gathering.) Listen to me. Tell me where he is. Tell me. No. (Keeping her from moving.) Not till you tell me.

(IRIS breaks free and looks worried as JESSE searches.)

IRIS: I don't remember. I don't know. I don't remember.

JESSE: I know he's here, Iris. Else how did you get the medal? (Looks up and beyond IRIS to something on the floor.) Oh my God!

(Jesse moves slowly and fearfully to a pile of rugs and blankets heaped up at the side of the room. There is a boot sticking out of the end of the pile. A motionless boot. IRIS tries to block her.)

IRIS: No! Don't Jesse. I wouldn't do that.

(JESSE pushes past her, alarmed by what she sees.)

IRIS: I told you not to.

JESSE: What have you done to him? He's not moving. Oh God! I think he's dead.

IRIS: (Gathering her bags.) Good.

As JESSE approaches, the heap starts to move and moan.

JESSE: No. He's alive Thank God. Bring me that knife. (A muffled yell from the heap.) Keep still. I'm trying to help you.

(ACE comes lunging out of heap of blankets. He is gagged and his hands are bound.)

(IRIS comes forwards with the knife and tries to cut his gag. He leaps away yelling, dragging Jesse, who is trying to untie his hands, with him.)

JESSE: (Working on his bonds.) Just let me get this knot. There.

(She frees his hands. He tears the gag off and leaps back.)

ACE: Keep her away from me! She tried to *kill* me.

JESSE: You were messing with her stuff.

ACE: I could have died! Look! I'm all covered with blood.

JESSE: Is it your blood?

ACE: (Looks.) No.

JESSE: Then shut up.

ACE: But she *attacked* me. She...she...

JESSE: You were trespassing.

ACE: Come on. I was just...

JESSE: What were you doing?

ACE: Nothing. I was just looking around.

JESSE: For the money, maybe?

ACE: What money?

JESSE: It wasn't in the radio, after all?

ACE: I don't get you.

JESSE: Wally supposedly hid his money somewhere. I thought maybe you figured it was in the radio.

ACE: I never heard of any money.

IRIS: See I was right. He was after my bags.

ACE: Keep her away from me!

JESSE: Calm down. She's harmless.

ACE: Harmless! (Rubs his wrists.) You should feel the lump on my *head*. And that gag. I could have suffocated!

JESSE: Are you OK now?

ACE: I'll live. But she sure packs a mean wallop.

JESSE: Yeah well Iris gets carried away at times. But basically she's a very good person.

IRIS: Really, Jesse?

ACE: She should be committed. (Suddenly alert.) Wait. *Jesse*? Is that your name?

JESSE: You still haven't explained what you're doing here.

(He looks her a minute then the light slowly dawns.)

ACE: I knew I'd seen you before.

JESSE: Stop trying to change the subject

ACE: No, really. I never forget a leg You're Jesse. The biggest sourpuss I ever dated.

JESSE: Sourpuss! Listen buddy.

ACE: That pain-in-the-ass girl.

JESSE: I beg your pardon!

ACE: Really. You did nothing but gripe the whole time. We had a car and bottle of Canadian Club and we took you to the Elks Club and you would have thought we were taking you to hell and back. You wouldn't even dance with me. Not one dance.

JESSE: What are you talking about?

ACE: I didn't recognize you at first. But it's unmistakable. The legs. The lippy manner. You're Jesse Peterson.

IRIS: Yeah, she is!

ACE: He talked about you all the time. Walter. You were really important to him. You were his moment to remember. Mine too in a way. Look. I got your picture in my wallet. I don't know why I didn't recognize you. It's a perfect likeness, eh?

JESSE: Give or take fifty years.

ACE: I must need my eyes checked. Not to see it.

IRIS: Why does he have your picture in his wallet?

JESSE: Beats me.

IRIS: So is that why you're here? To see Jesse?

JESSE: Of course not. He didn't think anyone was here, remember?

ACE: No, you were right the first time. It was the money.

JESSE: I doubt there's any money.

ACE: Wally made a lot of dough over the years. I figured they'd be tearing the place down and if the money was going to be trashed, why shouldn't I have it? Of course, I didn't know who you were.

JESSE: Well if you can find any you're welcome to it. I wasn't planning on keeping it. I wasn't planning on keeping any of this in fact.

ACE: Not keep it!

JESSE: You heard me.

ACE: Do you know what that would do to Wally? Wally wanted you to have it. It's what he worked for all those years. He talked about nothing else. I just didn't realize he'd gone through with it. That he actually made a will.

JESSE: And that he knew where to find me.

ACE: That too. I had no idea he knew where you were. But it was a major thing with him, to give you a nest egg. It gave him a whole lot of pleasure thinking about it.

JESSE: Maybe a nest isn't what I'm looking for.

ACE: All I know is Wally would have wanted you to keep the farm.

JESSE: I'm sick and tired of Wally. Look, maybe you can give us a ride into town. I'm going to give the key back to the lawyers.

ACE: How could you do this to him! He didn't want anything from you. He just had a dream of one day making you feel the way he felt that night, that anything was possible.

JESSE: Yeah, well, it's too late. I'm well past the point where things are possible.

ACE: That's no way to talk. Look at you. You've got everything going for you.

JESSE: A lot you know. The way it is right now, every time I turn around another little prop is taken away, another bit of the support system gone. My kids want to put me away. My taxes doubled last year, did you know that? And the gas and electric went up. Every time I turn around there's a new user fee. Pretty soon there'll be a user fee for turning around.

ACE: Yeah, yeah, and your teeth drop out and your legs go on you.

JESSE: It isn't funny.

ACE: But Wally's gift is supposed to take care of all the user fees. How can it be hurting you?

JESSE: It's taking away the biggest prop of all – my self-respect.

ACE: That's not the way he meant it. Besides no one would question your self respect. Huh! They wouldn't dare.

(JESSE glowers at him.)

ACE: Look. You're just afraid to admit you can't hack it alone, right? None of us can hack it, really. And pretty soon there comes a time when we won't be able to hack it at all. That's inevitable. Walter's legacy buys you a little time, that's all. And there's no shame in that.

IRIS: It's like winning the lottery, Jesse.

ACE: No. It's like a friend buying you a drink. That money was earned in good cheer and it's given in the same spirit.

JESSE: If I didn't know better I'd say Sherman hired you. Somehow he found out about this legacy and... *did* Sherman hire you?

ACE: Sherman. Uh uh. The only Sherman I ever knew was a tank.

IRIS: I know who you are! I do, I remember. You're Ace.

JESSE: Iris, would you pipe down for a minute?

IRIS: You were a terrific dancer and you had a camera.

ACE: Yeah, I did. How did *you* know?

IRIS: He took that picture in his wallet. (He nods.) And he took this too. (takes out photo from bag.) See? You and Walter.

(WALTER comes into view as they look at the photograph and seems to be listening to their conversation)

JESSE: Me and Walter? I don't believe it. (Takes photo and looks at it seriously for a minute.) You took this? I... (Looks at it for a time.) I remember him, you know. I didn't at first. I hadn't even thought about him for fifty years. It's been coming back bit by bit. He was just a big, gawky farm boy. Talked about his mother and sister. He was scared stiff of going to war. Scared of just about everything. But he was nice too. A really nice kid.

ACE: I told him to write to you. I told him how miserable you were that night after you left him.

JESSE: I left him? I guess I must have. That's kind of crappy isn't it?

ACE: I told him to write you. But he said you didn't go for letters.

JESSE: Sounds like something I would've said. Me and my big mouth, eh? My tough-guy act.

ACE: Then after the war he was gonna look you up but by then you were married.

IRIS: Yeah, to Jim.

JESSE: Jim was a good guy. He was all right. I was happy with him. (Thinks a little.) But, back to Wally. I remember he talked about the agricultural college.

ACE: He enrolled as soon as he was demobbed.

JESSE: He did? That's great!

ACE: Graduated with honours. He was well respected, did really well on his farm. Awards for his cows. I told you that.

JESSE: So how did he end up like this?

ACE: I don't know. The body just gets tired. And the head. A touch of senility. I dropped in on him a couple of times.

JESSE: It can't have been pleasant.

ACE: There were bad moments. He'd be right out of it sometimes. Or depressed. I came over here one day and he had a big fire going in the back yard. He was burning all his papers. All the business files and breeding records. I tried to stop him. I mean there was probably

valuable information in those records. But he couldn't be argued out of it. "That's forty years of your work, your life!" "Yes", he said, "and see what it's worth? a handful of ashes."

JESSE: Well that's a cheerful little story. What a way to end up.

ACE: You can't just rate a life by the way it ends, you know. And, even at the end, it wasn't all bad. He liked looking out at his land – the birds, the deer. The slough – always something to see there. He'd look out all summer long.

JESSE: Winter must have been just dandy too.

ACE: There was an attempt to get him into a home. But he wouldn't have any of it. He just slowly just wound down. For a while they kept trying to persuade him, to help him, but eventually people forgot him.

JESSE: Well, maybe I can do something about that.

ACE: What do you mean?

JESSE: It's all coming together in my head. A plan. (She walks about as she thinks.) This place, it's not far from the Agricultural College, am I right?

ACE: Yeah. So?

JESSE: So I think that's what I really want to bring up with Cooper and Atchinson – transferring Walter's bequest

ACE: Transferring...

JESSE: To the college. The Agricultural College. I'm sure they can make good use of this place.

ACE: Well yeah, but...

JESSE: And Walter's name will go in the records. No one will forget him then. He won't be forgotten so quickly.

ACE: It's an interesting idea, but you...

JESSE: I think he'd like that and I feel good about it too. The more I think about it. Yeah. That's what he'd want.

ACE: But what will you do?

JESSE: Me? I have options. I have my health, my family, friends. I own my own house.... (Moves to the the window.) Will you look at that view. Maybe it wasn't so bad looking out on that every day. I seem to remember him talking about it.

(WALTER moves up behind her and speaks gazing out at the landscape. JESSE looks out too and sees what he's seeing.)

WALTER: You'd like my farm. You can see a hundred miles in every direction. Sometimes I think it's the most beautiful spot in the world.

JESSE: I'm not crazy about the country. Too lonely.

WALTER: It's funny, I don't feel lonely here. There's something about it that just makes you feel part of everything. You look out over the prairies and you know it's probably been just like that for a million years.

JESSE: At least.

(WALTER slips into the background and off stage. While JESSE is looking out and remembering IRIS is adding a few things from the room to her bags. A cup, a doily from the couch, and the picture but before she can put it in her bag, ACE sees her.)

ACE: Not so fast. (Removing the photo from her grasp, he looks at it, smiling, remembering.)

(IRIS grabs it again and they wrestle for it. The frame comes apart and something falls out. IRIS marches off to her bags with the picture, thinks better of it and sets it up on the Victrola. ACE picks up what fell from the frame, a booklet of sorts. He opens it up and looks at Jesse, who is staring out of the window. He slips the booklet into his pocket.)

JESSE: There must be a million birds out there.

(JESSE smiles in wonder. She notices she's clasping something – it's the medal. She turns and hands it to ACE.)

JESSE: I guess Iris took this off you when she beaned you.

ACE: I think Walter would have wanted you to have it.

JESSE: Actually, yes. I'd like to keep it.

(IRIS winds up the Victrola.)

IRIS: We had a Victrola just like this when I was a kid. Now where did I put that. Here it is. (Pulls a record out of her bags and puts it on.) I've had this for years. (Music starts, "You made me love you".)

JESSE: That song.

IRIS: Remember that? It was all the rage '42, '43. You're crying, Jesse.

JESSE: Something in my eye.

IRIS: You crying for Walter?

JESSE: Well darn it. Someone has to. Wow. (Getting a grip.) Does that song bring back memories, or what? (Goes to picture.) Look at him. Just a nice young kid. It's been hard for me to accept that. Well, you can understand it. Some old recluse leaves you his money. And all the time he was just a young kid getting older, remembering someone who might have been, who was almost, his friend. I wish I had been his friend. I remember that I wanted to stay with him. I really wanted to stay.

ACE: You're telling me.

JESSE: I really took it out on you, didn't I.

ACE: Wally kept your picture. I told him he was crazy, that you had a real mean tongue on you. Didn't seem to make any difference to him. That picture's been thousands of miles, back and forth across the ocean and then some.

JESSE: Just to think of him keeping it all these years. It really blows me away. That picture in your wallet...

ACE: It's from the same one. I enlarged the bit with you in it.

JESSE: But why. If I was such a pain in the neck.

ACE: It's a reminder of an unkept promise. A promise you made over fifty years ago.

JESSE: A promise *I* made?

ACE: Yeah. (Holds out his hand.) I believe this is my dance.

JESSE: I'm too old for this nonsense.

ACE: Yeah? (He grabs her around the waist and expertly moves off with her.)

IRIS: You always were a good dancer, Glenny.

ACE: What's she talking about?

JESSE: Oh It's just Iris being Iris. Well no. She's not being Iris. She's not being Iris at all. I have to do something about her. I really have to. It's been on my mind for a while. I just didn't want to face up to it.

ACE: Who is she again? A relative?

JESSE: My best friend. My roommate.

IRIS: Roommate, Jesse? Did you say roommate!

JESSE: Yeah. Roommate. You need somewhere to park all those bags.

(IRIS does a little dance of glee.)

(ACE pulls JESSE close and they begin to dance. IRIS lost in the moment sways to the music.)

(Behind them WALTER and YOUNG JESSE enter dancing, moving slowly across the room.)

(ACE slows to a halt.)

JESSE What?

ACE: Well...

JESSE We were doing so well. At least I thought we were.

ACE: Yeah, we were. We were born to dance together. It's just. Well I've been trying to figure out how to give you something.

JESSE: Oh?

ACE: Yeah. Only you'll probably throw it back at me. Tell me to go to hell or something.

JESSE: I know I'm prickly but I think I have better manners than that.

ACE: Prickly doesn't begin to describe it. Whoa whoa whoa. (Stops her from going off.) Look all you have to do is promise...

JESSE: Promise what.

ACE: That you'll keep it.

JESSE: What is this thing I'm supposed to keep? Another medal? (He remains silent.) Do I get to know what it is? Can't I even guess?

IRIS: Is it bigger than a bread box?

ACE: Promise.

IRIS: Promise him, Jesse.

JESSE: I don't think so.

IRIS: (Shakes her arm.) Jesse!

JESSE: (Rubbing her arm.) Okay. *Okay!* I promise.

ACE: On Walter's medal.

JESSE: Are you kidding? (He isn't. She holds it up reluctantly.) On Walter's medal.

(ACE removes the booklet from his pocket and gives it to her.)

IRIS: What is it?

JESSE: It's a bank book... Walter's bank book. (Opens it.) Holy Christmas! This can't be... I can't take this. (Hands it back to ACE who folds his arms.)

ACE: *You promised.*

JESSE: I know but I didn't realize...

ACE: Doesn't matter. A promise is a promise. You can't go back on your word.

JESSE: You tricked me! I can't believe I was such a pushover. (Looks uneasily at bank book.) Why didn't Cooper and Atchinson know about this.?

ACE: They wouldn't have found any record of it in the house. He burned all his papers, right? Probably burned the bank statements as well. And they wouldn't have checked with the bank. The Royal Bank moved out of Finlake some years ago. And they probably didn't think of looking for a bank account for him, say, in the city.

JESSE: He was just feeble-minded old guy, to them, living on his pension.

ACE: No doubt.

JESSE: But what am I going to do with all this... this...

IRIS: Loot! (She grabs up two of her bags and starts swirling round the room.)

ACE: (Looking at IRIS shakes his head.) You'll think of something.

JESSE: (Following his gaze.) Yeah. I guess I will. But you. You could just take this to the bank and pretend to be Walter. This is what you were looking for. Right?

ACE: Well, yeah. I'm always out for the main chance. (Hold out his hand to JESSE.) Shall we?

(IRIS drops her bags, turns the handle of the Victrola and the music swells. ACE and Jesse resume their dance.)

IRIS: (Laying out the box of chocolates from her bag. That Jesse, isn't she something. Always playing the tough-guy act.

(YOUNG IRIS enters from the side fixing her shoe.)

YOUNG IRIS: She always did. (Takes a chocolate.)

IRIS: But underneath she was just. . . well what she was like was Jimmy Cagney. Remember him in that movie? What was it?

YOUNG IRIS: *Public Enemy.*

IRIS: *Public Enemy*, that's it.

(WALTER and YOUNG JESSE dance on.)

WALTER: This is a great song.

YOUNG JESSE: I like fast songs better. "Chattanooga Choo Choo." "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy."

WALTER: (Sings.) "You made me love you. I didn't wanna do it. I didn't wanna do it."

YOUNG JESSE: Don't do that.

WALTER: I guess my voice ain't that great huh?

YOUNG JESSE: Na. It's just I don't like guys getting sentimental on me.

WALTER: Dancing makes you forget for a while. Somehow when you're in a big sea of people like this, holding on to someone, it doesn't seem so bad. But over there. There won't be anyone to hold onto. You could just vanish, right off the face of the earth, and no one would ever know.

YOUNG JESSE: You'll be okay.

WALTER: Will I?

ACE: (Breaks away from JESSE momentarily to snap a picture.) Picture? Hold still kids.

WALTER: Sure Ace.

(Ace holds us the camera and there's a flash.)

YOUNG JESSE: Darn thing blinded me.

WALTER: He's a friend of mine. He takes pictures and sells them to the guys later.

YOUNG JESSE: You know him?

WALTER: Yeah. Ace is A - OK.

YOUNG JESSE: I bet he does a roaring trade in those pictures.

WALTER: Yeah, almost everyone buys them. It's a good thing to have pictures like that, of yourself with someone. They say it isn't so bad if you have someone to remember. Someone real.

YOUNG JESSE: (Looking off to ACE.) You been friends a long time?

WALTER: We went to school together.

YOUNG JESSE: He's kind of cute.

WALTER: He's real popular with the ladies. Everyone want to be with Ace.

(Music ends.)

WALTER: Well that 's it, I guess. You'll want to be off with your friend?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah, I kind of promised. Too bad. I was having a great time.

WALTER: You were?

YOUNG JESSE: You're some dancer.

WALTER: Thanks. You should see my sister.

YOUNG JESSE: Well then...

WALTER: Yeah. Uh... You don't suppose you could write to me, Jesse.

YOUNG JESSE: Hey Walter. If I wrote to every guy that asked I'd have to hire a secretary.

WALTER: Yeah, I guess.

YOUNG JESSE: Well, I really should be going.

WALTER: Yeah. So long.

YOUNG JESSE: Bye.

YOUNG IRIS It's about time.

(YOUNG IRIS pulls YOUNG JESSE off, but she lingers at the edge of the stage looking back at WALTER.)

WALTER: It was swell meeting you Jesse. (Softly.) Swell.

(Music rises and segues into a fast song. "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy", for example.)

IRIS: What was I saying?

YOUNG IRIS: (Leaving YOUNG JESSE.) You were saying Jimmy Cagney in *Public Enemy*.

IRIS: That's it. The one where he has this dear old mother, who brings him up right and everything but it doesn't take, and against her wishes he becomes this hardened criminal.

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah!

IRIS: And he has this showgirl girlfriend.

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah!

IRIS: And he pushes the grapefruit in her face.

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah! I remember that!

IRIS: And he gets worse and worse

YOUNG IRIS: And finally when he can't get any worse someone cuts him down with a bullet.

IRIS: In the rain, right! He sinks into the gutter soaked with rain and he looks up and you remember what he says? He says "I ain't so tough."

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah.

IRIS: Well that's Jesse. Isn't that Jesse all over?

YOUNG IRIS: All over!

(IRIS joins up with the YOUNG IRIS and they boogie with the others as the lights fade on WALTER and YOUNG JESSE still gazing at each other across the room.)

- THE END -

I AIN'T SO TOUGH

I Ain't So Tough was produced by Urban Stories at Motel Theatre Arts Commons, Calgary, May 3 – 14, 2016. A workshop production, it was directed by Helen Young and dramaturged by Caroline Russell-King.

Cast, Production and Crew:

1943:

Young Jesse	Mira Maschmeyer
Young Iris	Alyson Dicey
Walter	Jacob Kolodzziej

1993:

Jesse	Diana-Marie Stolz
Iris	Sandy Lucas
Ace	Gordo Blakhart

Director	Helen Young
Assistant Director	Erin Noble
Stage Combat	Jenny Daigle
Stage Manager	Amanda Wheeler
Lighting Designer	A.J. Jutras
Dramaturg	Caroline Russell-King

Characters

1943:

Young Jesse

Young Iris

Walter

1993:

Jesse

Iris

Ace

SETTING

Past action takes place on the fringe of the Sarcee Barracks in 1943 where a dance is taking place. Present action (1993) takes place in Jesse's home in Inglewood and on Walter's crumbling farm near Finlake, Alberta. The sets should be free form and suggestive with the minimum furnishings and props.

Although the past scenes are clearly marked for reading purposes, in performance they should not be clearly separated but should flow in and around the present as though permeating it with mood and memory.

ACT ONE

(Lights up on a corner of a dance hall. We get the distinct impression of looking at a faded war time snap shot. We hear the sound of people partying and dancing. A band Circa 1943 is playing the popular music of the times, "Stomping at the Savoy" or some other Big Band music.

(YOUNG JESSE, a young woman of eighteen, limps on and sits, nursing her feet. A very young man in uniform, WALTER, comes in. Shy and tentative, he approaches JESSE)

WALTER: You want to dance?

YOUNG JESSE: I was gonna sit this one out. My feet are killing me.

WALTER: How about I get you a beer?

YOUNG JESSE: That's not necessary...

WALTER: No problem. Be right back! (Exits)

YOUNG JESSE: Wait! (Irked) Swell!

(YOUNG IRIS enters. She's blond, sassily dressed, a hot number.)

YOUNG IRIS: Jesse. How's it going?

YOUNG JESSE: Ask me when I get my shoes off. I don't know why I let you talk me into buying these meat grinders.

YOUNG IRIS: They looked great in the store.

YOUNG JESSE: They still look great, Iris. But is having your feet mashed to a pulp worth looking great for?

YOUNG IRIS: Oh, quit your whining. Meet anyone interesting?

YOUNG JESSE: Na. They're all kids. One of them's gone off to buy me a beer.

YOUNG IRIS: So what are you complaining for? Mine's getting lemonade!

YOUNG JESSE: You know, Iris, as a way of meeting guys, this is really sad.

YOUNG IRIS: Maybe we should have gone to the Cochrane Elks Club. The parties there are really hot.

YOUNG JESSE: (Rubbing her feet) You said *this* would be hot. The trouble with you, Iris, you always think every party's gonna be like the magazines. I mean, think about it. How can a party at Sarcee, or Mewata, or the Cochrane Elks hope to be like the magazines.

YOUNG IRIS: You always believe me though, don't you. You always hope I'm right.

YOUNG JESSE: Oh No!

YOUNG IRIS: What?

YOUNG JESSE: It's the farmer boy.

(WALTER enters holding up two overflowing beers.)

YOUNG IRIS: The one spilling it all down his pant leg?

YOUNG JESSE: Did you ever see such a joke?

YOUNG IRIS: You haven't seen the Lemonade Kid. (Looking off) Speaking of which (Rises and exits.)

WALTER: (Hands her the beer unsteadily.) There you go.

(Music swells, a romantic dance tune "You Made Me Love You".)

WALTER: Hey! They're playing our song.

YOUNG JESSE: That's not our song.

WALTER: It could be.

YOUNG JESSE: Let's just sit this one out, OK?

WALTER: OK by me. Uh. . . What's your name, anyway.

YOUNG JESSE: Jesse.

WALTER: Short for Jessica?

YOUNG JESSE: No. Short for Jesse.

WALTER: Hi Jesse. I'm Walter.

YOUNG JESSE: (VERY BORED) Cheers, Walter.

(Glasses clink. Music fades and light dims on the young couple. We are aware of but not distracted by their presence as they sip their beer.)

Inglewood Calgary 1993

(Lights up on shabby living room where IRIS in dressing gown and slippers, is watching a movie on TV: "THE WAGONS ROLL AT NIGHT". There is a sea of plastic shopping bags round her chair. We hear the gloomy violins and hushed voices of Bogart's death scene.

JESSE enters carrying a bag of groceries. Stumbles on a number of IRIS's shopping bags.)

JESSE: Iris! What are you doing here?

IRIS: Hi Jesse!

JESSE: Every time I turn around, there you are.

(Climactic music from TV)

IRIS: Just thought I'd use your bathroom if that's OK, Jesse.

JESSE: Do I have a choice? (Puts groceries on counter.)

IRIS: Ours is stopped up. Garvy flushed his sock down it.

JESSE: Again? How does he do that!

IRIS: You know Garvy. He's not always right in the head.

JESSE: (To herself) He's not the only one. (Regards screen.) Isn't that Bogey? The guy in bed.

IRIS: Yeah.

JESSE: He don't look too good.

IRIS: He's dying. He's saying his good-byes to Sylvia Sydney.

JESSE: I remember her. The gal with the cheeks.

IRIS: I always wanted cheeks like that. Didn't you?

JESSE: There was things I wanted more.

(Climactic music again as movie ends.)

IRIS: (Turning off TV.) 1941 that movie was made. No wonder he looked so young. What age would you have been then, Jesse?

JESSE: I was seventeen and you were nineteen. God. I had so much energy then and so much brass.

IRIS: And look where it got you.

JESSE: What's that supposed to mean?

IRIS: Don't you wish you'd done better?

JESSE: I did all right

IRIS: But didn't you have in the back of your mind you'd be rich one day?

JESSE: Married to Jim? Jim worked every hour God gave him, but you don't get rich changing flats and pumping gas. Not unless you're pumping it straight out of the ground.

IRIS: It's better nowadays, isn't it? Having the lotteries and that.

JESSE: (Scorn) Lotteries!

IRIS: There's always the chance you'll make it big.

JESSE: You spend too much of your life waiting to be bailed out, Iris.

IRIS: There you are, your life totted up at zero dollars and zero cents on the cash register, and the finger of fate reaches over, punches out a few numbers and bingo – a million bucks!

JESSE: I don't need no finger of fate interfering in my life.

IRIS: Really. You could do with a few extra bucks right now and you know it.

JESSE: I like my money coming through the normal channels.

IRIS: A little lottery win right now would get Sherman and Betty Jean off your back.

JESSE: I can handle Sherman and Betty Jean and their Layaway Plans.

IRIS: And what about the house?

JESSE: Are you going to tell me about the peeling paint? The roof falling in on my head? The plumbing all shot to blazes? Believe me, I've been told.

IRIS: Yeah. That bathtub of yours, the plug don't work any more. I had to stuff a sock in it. (Gets up and tidies her bags.)

JESSE: Who's side are you on anyway! Maybe you should take notes. The fridge is leaking too. You want to write that down? Sherm and BJ are always looking for ammunition.

IRIS: Why do you always have to be so darned touchy!

JESSE: Oh, don't mind me. (Unpacks groceries.) Grocery shopping always makes me grouchy.

IRIS: Yeah. Me too. They never give me enough bags. (Takes JESSE's bags as they're emptied.) The kids are ganging up on you, eh?

JESSE: They just can't wait to get me out of this house. Betty Jean figures if I sell the house I can put her through college. Sherman would like to play the stock markets with the proceeds. They both would like to tidy me away. But I spent the best part of my life here and I mean to pop off here too. It's my neighbourhood. All my friends live here.

IRIS: Yeah. Mine too.

(JESSE cracks open a couple of beer and hands one to IRIS.)

IRIS: Thanks Jesse.

JESSE: Sherm and Betty Jean figure I can get a hundred and ten thou for this "dump", as they call it. They want to put it into a bank and "manage" it for me. Meanwhile, I move into some high rise waiting room

they've picked out for me where I won't have to worry about anything for the rest of my life.

(A thud off.)

IRIS: There's the mail.

JESSE: I know it's the mail! (Tripping on a shopping bag.) Darn it, Iris! I can't take a step any more without tripping over one of your bags.

IRIS: Watch it, Jesse! Oh! You got them out of order! (Goes over to fix them.) They've got to be arranged properly.

JESSE: How many have you got here? (Focusing on bags) Really Iris. I don't remember you having this many. I don't like you being like this.

IRIS: Like what?

JESSE: You've always been such a take-charge person. Everything and everyone in your range. I mean you've been pushing me around most of my life.

IRIS: I have?

JESSE: Like a freaking sergeant major. That's why these bags . . . (IRIS starts to protest, to gather in her bags out of Jesse's reach.) What's in here anyway. Socks. Bank statements. Library books. *Three* umbrellas? You must have your entire worldly possessions in these things. (Spills things out.)

IRIS: (Refilling the bags as fast as they're emptied.) There's no lock on my door, Jesse. Any of those guys in the rooming house could come in and take stuff.

JESSE: (Giving up, goes for the mail.) I think you're getting a little weird with it, Iris. (Returning.) Why don't you just put a lock on the door?

IRIS: It's better having bags, Jesse. You never know when you're going to need something. (Puts the bags from JESSE's groceries in one of her bags.

(JESSE riffles through her mail, keeping bills, hurling junk into waste basket.)

JESSE: Bill, junk, bill, junk, junk, junk. Hello. (Retrieves an envelope she threw into the basket.) There's one here from a law company, it looks like. Cooper and Atchinson. What'll you bet it's Sherman up to something shady. (Opens envelope.)

IRIS: Sherman's putting the law on you?

JESSE: Wouldn't put it past him. He's been hinting at having a shrink look me over.

IRIS: A shrink. That's serious.

JESSE: Yeah. Once Sherman gets power of attorney over me I might as well pull the plug. (Reads letter.) Hmm... I don't get it.

IRIS: What? Is it Sherman?

JESSE: No... someone else. These Cooper and Atchinson guys. They say I've been left a farm.

IRIS: A farm!

JESSE: From someone in Finlake. But I don't know anyone in Finlake. It says here I danced with him in 1943.

IRIS: Danced with who?

JESSE: A guy called Walter Kreble. It says I danced with him at a serviceman's dance at the Sarcee Barracks, in 1943.

IRIS: I remember Sarcee Barracks.

JESSE: And he's left me all his possessions in fond memory of that night.

IRIS: *Did* you dance with him?

JESSE: I suppose I must've.

IRIS: You mean you don't remember?

JESSE: It was fifty years ago, Iris!

(As the lights fade, there is a soft flurry of Swing music. Light rises on WALTER and YOUNG JESSE sipping their beer. Behind them are shadows of people dancing. YOUNG IRIS swings by, locked in the grip of a very inexperienced dancer.)

YOUNG IRIS: All those neat guys and I've been lumbered with this baby. (Dances off.)

WALTER: You know her?

YOUNG JESSE: Iris? She's my best friend. She's very popular.

WALTER: Yeah. There's a whole lineup of guys over there waiting to dance with her.

JESSE: Yeah, that's Iris. She won't miss a dance tonight. It's always that way. A guy comes into the room looks around and says, "Now where's the prettiest and smartest one."

WALTER: Well sure. That's what I did.

JESSE: No need to get fresh.

(Music fades. Lights dim and come up on . . .

JESSE'S living room. JESSE is just finishing getting dressed. IRIS, wearing her coat, is sitting in a sea of bags. There is a plastic wrapped package of stockings on the arm of her chair. While JESSE dresses she searches for and finds makeup and a mirror in her bags.)

IRIS: (Opens her lipstick and is about to apply it but halts in confusion.) Why are we getting all dressed up again?

JESSE: We're going to see the lawyers. (Iris looks blank) Atchison and Cooper. (Blanker.) They're handling Walter Krebble's estate.

IRIS: Walter?

JESSE: Darn it Jesse, how many times do I have to tell you. The guy who left me his farm.

IRIS: Got it! Walter's the guy you danced with in the war.

JESSE: It's been a week now, and I still don't remember any Walter. I was hoping you would.

IRIS: Sorry, Jesse. I just don't remember him.

JESSE: Well think, Iris. You must have been there with me. Anywhere I went in those days was in your wake.

IRIS: I don't remember anyone called Walter. (Touches up her lipstick. In spite of her deterioration she still acts like a woman of glamour.) There was a "Guy". I know that. Guy Lombardo. Remember him? And that Miller boy. He used to dance with me all the time. Glennie, that's what I called him. He called me "Baby".

JESSE: You never danced with Glen Miller, Iris, and you know it.

IRIS: Did too.

JESSE: Look. I don't want any of your nonsense, all right? I haven't the patience. It's bad enough not being able to remember Walter.

IRIS: Maybe I have a picture of him in my bags

(IRIS searches through her bags.)

JESSE: It's been fifty years, Iris. Besides, why would *you* have his picture.

IRIS: How come you don't have one, Jesse?

JESSE: Don't start in on me, OK? Oh nuts. Will you look at this thing. (Picks lint from the dress and tries to make the collar lie down.)

IRIS: Here let me. There that's better. You'll be able to get yourself something a little more stylish when the money comes through. A whole wardrobe.

JESSE: I don't know if there's actual money. It's a farm, mainly.

IRIS: So. When you sell the farm. Talk about in the nick of time. Your taxes go up. The roofs falling in. They're cutting out a new benefit every day and suddenly you get this gift from the gods.

JESSE: Not the gods. Walter Kreble. And I don't even know him. Hand me those stockings, will you.

IRIS: (Hands over the package.) You can fix a lot of things with money, Jesse.

- JESSE: It's just too easy, Iris. Besides, who says the money will fix anything? (Looks at IRIS who once again is fussing with her bags.) Maybe it'll just open a bigger can of worms. (Rips ineffectually at the package.) Darn! Why is it they never make a package you can open any more?
- IRIS: Wait. I'll get you a knife. I got one here somewhere. (Searches through bags.) Have you told Sherman and Betty Jean about Walter?
- JESSE: Are you kidding? They'd never understand why a complete stranger would leave me his loot. (Pause.) I'm having trouble understanding it myself.
- IRIS: (Finds knife, a deadly sharply pointed item.) Here you go. You were nice to him, Jesse.
- JESSE: (Rips open the package.) I wouldn't have been that nice. You know how I am. You know how those dances were.
- IRIS: Yeah. I sure do. Sarcee Barracks. Mewata. Those ones they used to hold at the Cochrane Elks Club. Remember those?
- JESSE: (Trying to get a stocking over her foot.) Shees! My feet are so rough any more. I'm gonna rip these to shreds before I get them up my legs.
- IRIS: I met a lot of guys at those dances. Airmen. Sailors. Boys you'd see once, have a few beers with, and then never see again.
- JESSE: Nobody you ever thought would have any money to leave you.

IRIS: I remember one I went with, a dental assistant. Big chin and talked all educated.

JESSE: Now where did my shoes go? They were right here by the chair.

IRIS: He'd never seen the inside of a mouth until he joined up. And that's all he got to see too. Never got overseas, just spent the whole war cleaning teeth. Used to cry on my shoulder about how he wanted to see the action.

JESSE: They can't have just walked off by themselves.

(JESSE searches among the bags.)

IRIS: He used to call me, "Baby".

JESSE: (Locating shoes in Iris's bag.) Honestly, Iris! No wonder I couldn't find them!

IRIS: What?

JESSE: My shoes. They're right here in one of your bags.

IRIS: Isn't that something? It's amazing what turns up in those bags.

JESSE: This bag business is getting out of hand, you know that? We're going to have to do something...

IRIS: But if I didn't have the bags, Jesse, you wouldn't have found your shoes.

JESSE: I give up. Oh rats! Will you look at my hair!

IRIS: I don't see why you're fussing like this, Jesse. He's dead isn't he?

JESSE: What are you talking about?

IRIS: Walter. The way you're going on, worrying about your shoes and your hair. Anyone would think you were going on a date with him.

JESSE: A date! Don't be such a darn fool.

IRIS: You don't have to snap.

JESSE: I know. I'm sorry. It's just unnerving, all right? Having this Walter, this absolute stranger reach out of the past like I've always been part of his life. And I can't remember a darned thing about him. It's like having one of those stalker fellows crouching outside your window.

IRIS: Outside the window? Really? (Nervously looks out.)

JESSE: How did he know where to find me? Was he watching me all those years?

IRIS: You think he's watching us now?

JESSE: No, Iris. Walter's dead.

IRIS: That's what I thought. So why *are* you getting all gussied up.

JESSE: Oh for Pete's sake! We're going to the lawyer, remember? To pick up the keys for the farm. And sign the papers.

IRIS: Sign the papers? Shouldn't you have Sherman along?

JESSE: I think I know how to sign my name without Sherman holding my hand, Iris. Sherman doesn't think I can pour a bowl of corn flakes without help.

IRIS: And here you are, renting a car and everything and getting the key from the lawyers. Sherman would be amazed.

JESSE: His mother as a sentient being? He'd have a fit. Well, are you ready? We'd better get going.

IRIS: Uh. You don't mind if I just stick around for a while.

JESSE: What. Here?

IRIS: Yeah. It's not safe right now back at my place.

JESSE: But you're coming with me.

IRIS: I am? I don't know, Jesse.

JESSE: I'm not going out to a lonely farm all by myself, Iris. Come on!

(IRIS reluctantly gathers up her bags.)

IRIS: How far do you think it is?

JESSE: Not that far. We're getting a car, remember? Here, let me help.

IRIS: No! I can manage. (Follows JESSE unhappily.) Jesse?

JESSE: Yeah?

IRIS: Can we rent a *red* car?

JESSE: You bet. We'll get the sportiest red in the shop.

IRIS: We'll get a hot and swanky souped up baby of a car!

JESSE: Let's hit the road!

(They exit, lights dim and come up on YOUNG JESSE and WALTER. Swing music in the background.)

WALTER: The beer's terrible, ain't it

YOUNG JESSE: I've had better. It's probably watered down.

WALTER: Anyways, it's better than the hard stuff. What they do to that you wouldn't want to know. The medical core Johnnies supply the alcohol and they ain't too particular where they. . .

YOUNG JESSE: I suppose you get the real thing in Botrell, Walter

WALTER: What?

YOUNG JESSE: Isn't that where you're from, Botrell, or Water Valley. You look like a farm kid.

WALTER: Our farm's more to the east. Up near Thirty Mile Coulee. Closest town is Finlake.

YOUNG JESSE: What kind of farm? Dairy?

WALTER: Yeah. Plus a few chickens and pigs.

YOUNG JESSE: Sounds like a going concern.

WALTER: We manage to get the meals on the table, but that's about it. Dad wasn't no agricultural genius and now he's gone, well, to tell the truth, I don't know how Mom will manage without me.

YOUNG JESSE: You won't be gone that long.

WALTER: The First War lasted over four years.

YOUNG JESSE: This one's already been going for three. My boss says it'll be over by the winter.

WALTER: I wish it was true. I just wish...

YOUNG JESSE: You'll be back milking them cows before breakup. You'll see. When are you shipping out, anyway?

WALTER: They don't really tell us, but they made us pack up this morning. They always do make us pack up but they seemed more serious about it today, kept saying we didn't want to leave anything important behind.

JESSE: So you think it might be tonight?

WALTER: Some of the guys saw a couple of big trains this afternoon, pulling into the station downtown.

JESSE: Wow! That sure isn't much warning.

WALTER: Yeah! It's kind of unsettling. I...

(YOUNG IRIS enters and beckons to JESSE who breaks away from WALTER.)

YOUNG JESSE: Excuse me for a minute, will you? (Goes to YOUNG IRIS.) What's up?

YOUNG IRIS: Listen, I met a couple of really nifty guys. They want to give us a good time, Jesse.

YOUNG JESSE: (World weary.) You don't say.

YOUNG IRIS: Honestly. See, they're standing over there.

YOUNG JESSE: You mean that tall blond guy? He's not so bad.

YOUNG IRIS: He's mine, OK. The other guy is yours.

YOUNG JESSE: The skinny guy with the camera?

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah he takes pictures at all the dances and sells them to his buddies.

YOUNG JESSE: Won't he want to stick around here then?

YOUNG IRIS: He's not tied to it. They can leave any time.

YOUNG JESSE: He looks sort of slick.

YOUNG IRIS: He's dreamy and you know it. *And* they've got a car.

YOUNG JESSE: No kidding!

YOUNG IRIS: And a bottle of Canadian Club.

YOUNG JESSE: Well okay! Just give me a minute to dump the kid here. (She heads back to WALTER who has been trying without success to look nonchalant and suave.)

(Lights dim and come up on kitchen and living area of an abandoned farm in great disrepair. Bits of garbage lie about – newspapers,

bottles, an old broom handle. Among the furnishings a sofa, black with use, a rickety table with some dirty rags and bits of dried and decayed food. A broken window is stuffed with newspaper, another, completely paneless, looks onto a wide prairie landscape. There is a feeling of continuity between house and land as though the house is being reclaimed by the prairie.

The late afternoon light is pouring into the room and drifting in from the outside are the sounds of gophers whistling, and swallows twittering. On a table by the sofa is an old radio with a photograph beside it, a picture of a young woman dancing with a serviceman. We hear a clunking sound and a lean nimble looking man in his early seventies comes in from the back carrying a milk can. He sets it down and takes off the lid, searches through it finding nothing but ordinary paper garbage. He sighs, spots the picture and picks it up, smiles shaking his head as if at some fond memory, puts it down. Then he resumes his search in earnest. But before he can really get into it he is distracted by a car pulling up and women singing "Has Anybody Seen My Gal" loudly and self indulgently. Casting a furtive glance out the window he pops into the bedroom just as JESSE enters with a clipboard and marker. She stands in the doorway talking to IRIS who's still approaching.)

IRIS: Wasn't that the best? Wasn't that the greatest!

JESSE: Yeah I'd forgotten how much fun it was to drive a convertible.

IRIS: Remember that little yellow coupe you had with the rumble seat.

JESSE: And no floor. I sure do. You should leave those bags in the car. We won't be here long.

IRIS: I can't. Someone might take them, Jesse.

JESSE: *Iris*. You just bullied me into parking the car behind that old tool shed so that no one could see it from the road. So even if someone

did drive by this old place, and I bet that happens about every five years, they won't even know the car is there. Come on! I want to get this inventory done before dark.

(IRIS comes in with all her bags. JESSE helps her.)

IRIS: There's a truck out there beside the barn, Jesse.

JESSE: No kidding. (Sees it out the door.) Nice looking!

IRIS: We're going to have us some real adventures in that truck, Jesse.

JESSE: (Shuffles through list. Gives up.) Can't find it on here. I'll mark it off when I come to it. You're right. It'll be great to have wheels. So. (Turns her attention to the room.) Let's get this over with.

My sainted aunt! (Long silence as she looks about unbelieving.) Will you look at this place! Will you look at this filth! I can't believe anyone would let things go like this.

IRIS: Poor old guy! Must of been getting feeble at the end, eh.?

JESSE: Feeble my donkey! He was a dirty old coot and that's the truth of it. There's thirty years of dirt in here. Thirty years of never cleaning up. These windows are a clue. Every one of them cracked or broken. See the way the sand's drifted in? He obviously didn't give a darn whether it came in or not.

IRIS: (Discovering an old gramophone, complete with horn.) Look at the old Victrola! "His master's voice".

JESSE: There's a lifetime of clutter in here – soiled papers, old rags, dried up old medicine bottles. I don't see these on the inventory.

IRIS: (Looking at a record.) "You Made Me Love You". I used to have this one. (Puts it in one of her bags, singing.) "I didn't wanna do it. I didn't wanna do it."

JESSE: (Moving to the back.) I suppose this was the kitchen... judging by the bits of old cheese and puddles of grease. I don't know how he could live like this!

IRIS: Probably just got tired of holding it all together. (Pause.) Jesse? Are we gonna look for the money?

JESSE: What money?

IRIS: You know. That lawyer said Walter hid all his money somewhere in this house. (She spots the photo by the radio, picks it up and looks at it, trying to place it.)

JESSE: He said there was a *rumour* he hid his money. Does this look like the home of a person that had money?

(Pigeons cooing and fluttering. A slight clunking sound off.)

IRIS: What's that? (Clutches the photo to her breast.)

JESSE: Just pigeons. I hate to think what kind of mess they're making in there.

IRIS: We could clean this up, you know. It would make a great cottage.

JESSE: Cottage! You want to fix it up, be my guest! You want to scrape the spit off the floors... I don't think Walter ever heard of the invention of Kleenex. Setting a match to it all would be doing the world a favour. (Shivers and clasps her hands around herself.)

IRIS: Are you okay, Jesse?

JESSE: Don't you find this place upsetting? Don't you get the feeling, that Walter was decaying for years before he was really dead?

IRIS: That's spooky, Jesse.

JESSE: You see these old houses from the highway all the time, slowly crumbling back to the soil, weather-beaten, unoccupied, only Walter was in his, watching the dust piling up inside the windows. How could he give up like this?

(IRIS shuffles about, unable to take in what JESSE's saying.)

IRIS: Must have been real lonely living out here.

JESSE: A legacy is not such a nice thing, Iris. It's a way of reaching back and touching someone who never would have let you touch them in real life.

IRIS: Touching. (Looking about anxiously.)

JESSE: I know this sounds crazy, Iris, but I feel like Walter wanted to make me his prisoner. There's lots of people like that. If you don't watch them they take you prisoner. I don't know if they want it that way but that's the way it turns out. Look at Betty Jean. Wrapping me round with her misery. Wanting me to fix her life.

IRIS: She does?

JESSE: Sure she does. She wants to put me into a home and use the money from my house to go back to school. And Sherman. He wants everything neat and filed away. So if I want them to be happy I have to agree to be tidied up and swept under the carpet.

IRIS: I don't know about that, Jesse.

JESSE: And now there's Walter. Oh yes. There's no shortage of people who want to be your jailer. Hanging about, putting all their darned problems onto you. Everybody wants me to fix their lives.

IRIS: Not everybody.

JESSE: Why does everyone have to be so helpless? Why does everybody think that it isn't as difficult for me as it is for them? (Trips on a bag.) What's *with* all these shopping bags!

IRIS: I told you there's no lock on my door. It's not safe to leave things.

JESSE: Every time I see you, you have a few more. How do you carry all this?

IRIS: I *need* this stuff. Quit picking on me, Jesse!

(JESSE throw up her hands in defeat, goes to window and looks out in silence. We're aware of birdsong and wind and Jesse's growing entrancement.)

JESSE: That's some view.

IRIS: (Looking out with her.) And it's all yours, Jesse.

JESSE: Yes, but Walter didn't just leave me his view. He left me his life. His whole lonely wretched unbearable life!

IRIS: But his life is over, Jesse.

(Moment of silence. Hawks crying in the distance.)

IRIS: (Touches an antimacassar.) Did you hear what the lawyer said about his mother dying while he was overseas? And his sister drowned up at Sylvan lake a year or two after.

JESSE: So? Everybody has tragedy in their lives. Why should he think he was so special? Both my brothers were shot down in Normandy. My Jim died, didn't he? With five years of pain before he went. I dealt with my troubles, God knows, and dealt with them well, and now here's his all bundled up and saved over the years to be handed on to me. It isn't fair. And he isn't going to get away with it!

IRIS: Get away with what, Jesse?

JESSE: What I mean is I'm not taking the legacy. No way I'm taking it.

IRIS: But Jesse, if you don't take the legacy you're going to lose your house.

JESSE: I'd rather lose my house than put up with this sort of crap.

IRIS: But if you lose your house, whose bathroom am I gonna use?

JESSE: (A moment's speechlessness.) Honestly Iris! How did you get to be so stupid! Sometimes I don't know how we stayed friends all these years. Look at you. You're so muddle headed you don't know if you're coming or going. And all those stupid bags. You know, Betty Jean's right about you.

IRIS: Betty Jean. Your Betty Jean?

JESSE: Yeah. She said you're turning into a goldarned bag lady.

IRIS: I'm not. . . I'm. . . That's not true! (Pushes the picture into her bag.) It's just my *stuff*, Jesse.

JESSE: A bag lady!

(IRIS gathers up her bags.)

JESSE: Where're you going?

IRIS: I'm taking my *bags* outta here. Don't have to fix *my* life.

JESSE: I didn't mean that!

IRIS: And I don't need your darned bathroom. It's all plugged up anyway.

JESSE: Iris, Wait!

IRIS: And I'll tell you something else too, Jesse. Walter didn't want to feel you up.

JESSE: Iris, that's *not* what I said.

IRIS: And he didn't want you to be sorry for him. He just wanted to be friends, that's all. (Suddenly she's not dithery at all but extremely sober and deliberate.) I'll see you in the car.

JESSE: Oh rats! Iris. Look, I'm sorry, OK? I . . .

IRIS: Don't touch me. And don't follow me, neither! (Exits.)

JESSE: Honestly! My house is falling down around my ears. My kids want to put me in a home. Some weirdo crank is reaching to me out of the past and my best friend is going funny in the head!

(Goes to the door and calls out.) Iris! Come back here! I didn't mean it. I'm a jerk, OK? Look, I'll make some coffee. (Looks at her a minute.) What am I worrying about? She'll have forgotten all about this in five minutes. Still, coffee's a good idea. If there *is* coffee.

What do you know. (She finds coffee and an old kettle, exclaims at the rusty water in the tap.) Eughh! Nothing like fresh spring water. (Runs it a while.) That's more like it. (Fills and puts on the kettle.)

JESSE: (Leaving the stove, she bumps into a chair and runs her stocking.) Great! As if there wasn't enough to worry about. (Examines the run and finds it goes right up her thigh.)

(ACE, comes back into the room from the bedroom. He heads on tiptoe for the door but is transfixed by the show of leg. JESSE spots him and grabs up an old broomstick handle.)

JESSE: Who the blazes are you? (Grips the handle more tightly and swings at him.)

ACE: Wait! There's no need for violence!

JESSE: Really? How do I know you're not an axe murderer?

ACE: Well for one thing I don't have an axe. (Dodges another blow.)

JESSE: That don't make no difference. You're trespassing? Who knows what you're up to. (Brandishes again, violently.)

ACE: (Protects himself.) You're trespassing too.

JESSE: On my own property?

ACE: This is not your property. It's Walter Kreble's place.

JESSE: (Eases up on the attack.) You knew Walter?

ACE: Yeah, I was his best friend.

JESSE: His best friend! And you let him live like this?

ACE: Hey. No one told Walter what to do. And you haven't said what *you're* doing here.

JESSE: (Holds up the keys.) I came in the by the door. I'm the new owner.

ACE: You mean they sold it already.

JESSE: Well, not exactly

ACE: Can you believe it? The poor guy is still warm in his grave and they've already turned it over. Lawyers huh? No offence.

JESSE: Were you hoping he'd leave it to you?.

ACE: Nah. He wouldn't have left it to me. We were great pals, though. Always joking and fooling about, Wally and me.

JESSE: Must have been a riot. What were you doing back there?

ACE: In the bedroom? Just looking around.

JESSE: Oh yeah? What's in there that's so interesting?

ACE: Nothing much.

JESSE: (Looks in door.) Ugh! Will you look at that mattress. It's black! How did he live like this?

ACE: Yeah well, Wally went a little funny these past few years.

JESSE: More than a few, I'm thinking. Not much of a life, eh?

ACE: I don't know. Wally was essentially a happy kind of guy. He woke up every day knowing he was going to have a good time.

JESSE: Here?

ACE: Sure here. He loved it here. (While he talks he furtively looks about the room.) He loved his farm and he loved his cows. That boy just loved cows. Knew every doggone thing about them.

JESSE: But he lived alone.

ACE: Lotsa women set their cap at old Wally but he was always more interested in the cows.

(JESSE still grips broom handle, unconvinced.)

JESSE: I don't see any cows.

ACE: 'Course the cows went some years back now. But for most of his life, well you don't get everything in this life, and Wally got more than most folks, I'd say. The farm, a successful business, respect of the community. Yeah and see this? (Indicates a framed object on the wall. Takes it down and opens it up.) A medal. Got it in World War Two. Me, I had the women and not much else. I sure didn't get no medal.

(JESSE puts down the broom handle and goes and looks at medal.)

JESSE: Walter got a medal? How? Do you know anything about it?

ACE: (Takes it out of frame.) Well I was there, eh? Oh yes. It was one hell of a bad time. Our company was trapped between two machine gun posts. The captain was the first to get killed and they were picking off the rest of us about one every three minutes.

We were finished. And surrender wasn't a choice either. The non com ran out with a white flag and got shot in the head. We were all crouching there saying our prayers when old Wally just up and went.

JESSE: How do you mean, "went"?

ACE: We thought he was making a run for it. Saving his butt. But the next thing we know there's a big bang to the left of us, and a few minutes later a big bang to the right, and the firing just stopped. I thought maybe I was dreaming it. But no. That bugger had done the impossible. Took out *two* machine guns. I mean it sounds so easy; they do it in the movies all the time, right? But that was an *impossible* situation we were in. A dead end. And suddenly old Wally finds the exit. If they hadn't given him a medal, we would've.

JESSE: That must've been something else. I've never been in a situation like that.

ACE: Imagine how he felt, eh? Everything was going to hell and he stepped up. A moment like that can go on spreading out through your whole life.

JESSE: Yeah. Not all of us get a moment like that, that's for sure.

ACE: Or we get it and we don't seize it. We were all there. We all had the opportunity. It was Wally that snatched it up.

JESSE: Well luck has something to do with it. (Turns medal over thoughtfully.) Maybe if *you'd* tried to deal with the machine guns you'd have been killed. I mean sometimes it's not up to you.

ACE: Well, all I know is I never seized any moments like that.

JESSE: So you were with him all through the war?

ACE: We more or less had the same war. Except there wasn't nothing spectacular in my deeds. And after, I was never able to settle down to business the way Wally could. The war made a lot of us restless, you know. I never felt quite so up to things after it was over.

(Now that the conversation seems to be flowing smoothly, ACE becomes more confident and subtly continues his search.)

JESSE: You get married?

ACE: Yep. Not exactly a marriage made in heaven.

JESSE: Mine was OK. But back then, eh, you thought the world was your oyster. Not that I'd ever seen an oyster.

ACE: Yeah, times have sure changed. It's no fun any more. In the old days you could have a good life no matter what you were earning.

JESSE: Yeah. Getting out to a dance on Saturday night and you'd be ecstatic.

ACE: No kidding! (Preen's a little to Jesse's amusement.) I'm a good dancer, you know.

JESSE: I bet you didn't have much trouble finding a good time.

ACE: Me? (Lifts up a the lid of a box and looks in.) Well yeah. Any kind of wild life going on, I seemed to gravitate to it. I could tell you stories all right.

JESSE: So why don't you?

ACE: Well most of my stories are hard on delicate ears. I don't think you want to hear how many girls there were in my past, how many gambling joints, how many bootleggers.

JESSE: You might be surprised.

ACE: After the war I hired myself out in the summer, whatever I could get. In the fields. The harvest. A stint or two in the mines, even railway

work. But winters you couldn't get me outside. The missus was always sore at me. Well, with three kids to feed.... She didn't have the best time of it with me. That's for sure.

JESSE: So what *did* you do in the winter?

ACE: It would be gambling joints that sort of thing. I'd look for games. Poker. The social clubs, the poolhalls. It got so that I made a sort of living at it.

JESSE: Gambling?

ACE: That and bartending, or keeping order at the games, making sure no one got out of hand.

JESSE: And what about Walter? Did he ever gravitate to the wild life?

ACE: Wally? Yeah, sometimes. But he always woke up sober. Yeah. Wally liked a good time but he liked the farm better. 'Course this is the old days we're speaking of. The last few years he never left the farm.

JESSE: Yeah, I can see that. So, do you still gamble?

ACE: Well, not in any organized way. You could say I've retired from the business. I still go to the races though. When I can. I've been living in Drumheller these past few years with my daughter so the opportunities don't come up that much. Just the fairs and rodeos.

JESSE: Your wife's dead?

ACE: Hell no. We just can't stand the sight of each other. We've been separated for over ten years. (Casually looks in a cupboard.)

JESSE: You act like you're looking for something

ACE: Me? (Laughs.) No. Well, yeah. I just thought I'd like a keepsake of old times. Something to remind me of Wally. (Pats radio.) Now here's a bit of the past. Wally made it, you know. Built it just before the war for his mom. (Turns it on. Instant music. Starts moving to it.)

JESSE: Funny. Those old radios used to take forever to warm up. That came on right away.

ACE: (Stops dancing, thoughtful.) Yeah, it did. Yeah! You're right. Huh. He must have put a transistor in it. Way to go! (Picks up the radio, starts to shake it, thinks better of it.) Good old Wally!

JESSE: Maybe you'd like to have the medal.

ACE: Medal?

JESSE: You said you wanted a keepsake.

ACE: Oh yeah. Well to tell you the truth, ah... I'd sooner have the radio.

JESSE: Isn't it rather big?

ACE: It's not that big.

JESSE: It's amazing how clunky these things were. Nobody minded wasting space in those days, huh?

ACE: All the tubes and things. That's what took up the room. But it's got a nice design, eh. Kind of nostalgic. I just have to look at that and I think of old Wally.

JESSE: Well if you're sure that's what you want.

ACE: It is!

JESSE: Be my guest. (Finds that she's holding the medal close, too close. Shakes herself out of her mood.) And take the medal too. (Tucks it in his shirt pocket.) I'm sure Wally would have wanted you to have it.

ACE: Thanks! This is great!

JESSE: There's coffee if you'd like some.

ACE: Uh, I'd better be going. It's getting late.

JESSE: Yeah it is. Sun'll be down in another half hour.

(ACE shifts the radio into a more comfortable hold.)

JESSE: You need help with that?

ACE: No. I can manage.

JESSE: That your truck out back?

ACE: Yeah.

JESSE: You couldn't even see it from the road.

ACE: Yeah well . . . (grasping.) I always parked there when I came to see Wally. A tradition, you know? See ya. (Moving off.)

JESSE: Sure.

ACE: (Turning back.) You know, you really remind me of someone. I can't put my finger on it. But I just have this feeling we met somewhere.

JESSE: Must've been another life.

ACE: It's your legs.

JESSE: What's wrong with my legs?

ACE: Not a damn thing!

(JESSE glowers at him. He's gone too far.)

ACE: Yeah. Well. Thanks for the radio.

JESSE: Don't mention it.

(ACE exits. JESSE goes to the door and watches him go to his truck with an almost dreamy expression.)

JESSE: You look familiar to me too, Buster.

(Almost gives in to the moment then shrugs it off impatiently, goes to the table, finds and washes cups and pours the coffee.

IRIS enters urgently with bags.)

IRIS: Some guy just drove off in Walter's truck!

JESSE: I wasn't Walter's. It was his own.

IRIS: I know him, don't I? Guy. That's who it was.

JESSE: It was not *Guy*. Or *Glennie*.

IRIS: Then who was it?

JESSE: An old friend of Walter's. You know, I didn't even ask him his name.

IRIS: You look like you had fun.

JESSE: Not that much fun.

IRIS: He looked nice. Kind of a frisky old dog.

JESSE: Yeah, the kind you can't teach new tricks to. Look quit fussing with those bags for a minute and come and have some coffee. (Presses Iris into a chair and gives her a cup of coffee)

IRIS: You made coffee? (Tastes it.) You got any milk?

JESSE: Look around you! Is there gonna be milk? Look at this! You can tell how he lived. Nothing store bought. He made himself some kind of pan bread, There's still lumps of it sitting out. Water and flour and soda probably.

IRIS: I ain't had soda bread since I was a kid. Those olden days. They were the best, eh?

JESSE: You didn't think so at the time.

IRIS: Home made bread and fresh farm eggs. Nothing like it. Chickens and ducks and a little vegetable patch. That's what I'd do if I had this place.

JESSE: Well, Walter didn't give it to you. He gave it to me. You go and dance with some one. OK?

Wait look I'm sorry. (Stops IRIS from leaving again.) I don't know why but this whole thing has me on a short fuse. Going through his pathetic possessions like this. Thinking of his pathetic life. I guess it's got something to do with independence, keeping control of *my* life. If I accept the money from Walter Kreble it makes a lot of what I did in my life meaningless. A lot of what Jim and I had meaningless.

IRIS: A lot of what you and Jim had *was* meaningless.

JESSE: Iris!

IRIS: Yeah?

JESSE: You don't even know what you said, do you.

IRIS: What did I say? Was it about the old days?

JESSE: Forget it. Just finish your coffee and let's get out of here.

IRIS: We can't.

JESSE: Why not?

IRIS: We got a flat. Must've driven over a nail or something.

JESSE: A flat! Why didn't you tell me!

IRIS: I am telling you.

JESSE: Yes but if you'd told me when that old geeser was here he could have fixed it for us.

IRIS: What old geeser? (JESSE groans clenches her fists as though keeping from strangling IRIS and leaves.) Where are you going? It's not my fault. You should never have left the driveway to park behind that toolshed! (Gathers up her bags and hurries after JESSE.)

(Back to the Sarcee Barracks dance and WALTER and JESSE .)

WALTER: You really have to go?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah I promised someone. You know how it is.

WALTER: Yeah. (Trying not to look desolated.)

YOUNG JESSE: I'll finish my beer though.

WALTER: Swell! I'll get you another if you like.

YOUNG JESSE: No this'll be fine. (Awkward pause.) So. Uh. You don't look old enough to be in the army, Walter.

WALTER: I'm eighteen. Old enough.

YOUNG JESSE: So what's it like being a soldier boy?

WALTER: It's not that great. Some of the guys like taking the mickey out of you. You get pushed around by the sergeants. I don't mind hard knocks. I can take any amount of it. It 's the way you're kind of faceless.

YOUNG JESSE: How do you mean?

WALTER: Oh the way you're just a number among a whole bunch of other numbers. No one knows who you are. And no one cares, either.

YOUNG JESSE: It'll get better, though. It takes a while to know people. You'll end up making some real good buddies, I bet.

WALTER: I like talking to you, Jesse.

YOUNG JESSE: Oh yeah?

WALTER: Yeah. You're easy to talk to. I feel kind of like myself right now. Like I'm back home.

YOUNG JESSE: Next you'll be talking about my angelic face, saying it's just like your Mom's.

WALTER: Hey, I'm not kidding, you know!

YOUNG JESSE: So why did you join up, anyways, Walter?

WALTER: Everybody was joining up. It wouldn't have been right not to.

YOUNG JESSE: You could have stayed and farmed. They let you do that.

WALTER: Sure, but the farm's not so great. It's good land and everything but I don't know what to do with it.

YOUNG JESSE: You should go to the agricultural school when you get back.

WALTER: If I get back.

YOUNG JESSE: Come on. What way is that to talk?

(YOUNG IRIS beckons and YOUNG JESSE half rises.)

WALTER: The family on the next farm to us lost three men at Dunkirk. My cousin in Manitoba lost both his legs in a... You're not goin', are you? You haven't finished your beer.

YOUNG JESSE: No. Not right away. Look uh maybe I do want to dance.

WALTER: But what about your feet?

YOUNG JESSE: What about my feet?

WALTER: Oh. They're great feet. It's just that you said....

YOUNG JESSE: Oh forget what I said. Let's dance!

(YOUNG IRIS gestures "Let's go!" YOUNG JESSE shrugs, throws her arms out helplessly as she and WALTER dance off.)

(JESSE and IRIS come in from outside.)

JESSE: You know there was a time when I could have changed that tire in ten minutes flat. I must've spent the better part of an hour out there and I couldn't even get the hubcap off.

IRIS: But what are we gonna do?

JESSE: Sit it out, I guess.

IRIS: Here? You mean spend the night here?

JESSE: You got a better idea? We can't walk out of here in the dark. We'll have to wait till morning and hope that we can flag someone down then.

IRIS: But it's cold and where are we gonna sleep?

JESSE: We'd better try to make ourselves comfortable.

IRIS: There's the sofa.

JESSE: I'm not sleeping on that thing. Gives me the willies just looking at it.

IRIS: Jesse. What about supper?

JESSE: There's a scrap of bread here about five hundred years old.

IRIS: When's Guy getting back.

JESSE: He's not Guy and he's not coming back.

IRIS: But he took your truck.

JESSE: It wasn't my truck, Iris. It was his.

IRIS: That was Guy Lombardo's truck? Why did he leave?

JESSE: He had other fish to fry. (Wraps her coat round her and sits on the floor.)

IRIS: You liked him, didn't you.

JESSE: No! I don't go for that type any more, all spit and no polish. Besides I'm too old for all that nonsense.

IRIS: (Bringing all her bags over and sitting beside JESSE.) Boy, wait till Sherman finds out about this.

JESSE: Why should Sherman find out about this? *I'm* not gonna tell him

IRIS: Me neither. Honest. (Pause.) But if he did find out, he could put you away, huh?

JESSE: Let him try. He'd have to prove I was incompetent. (Pulls her coat around her and tries to get comfortable.)

IRIS: You mean like getting that psychiatrist he was talking about.

JESSE: He can roust up all the two bit shrinks and dime store lawyers he wants.

IRIS: You sure are lucky, Jesse.

JESSE: Am I ever.

IRIS: All these people that care about you. Walter and Betty Jean and Sherman. Nobody cares about me. My daughter Annie? She hasn't been in touch with me for years.

JESSE: What are you talking about! Annie was here at Easter.

IRIS: She was?

JESSE: Sure. She tried to get you to go home with her. She brought you that big box of chocolates, remember?

IRIS: I don't remember any chocolates.

JESSE: Well she did. You know what? I bet you never even ate them. They're probably tucked away in one of those bags.

IRIS: You think so?

(IRIS searches through bags and comes up with a chocolate box.)

IRIS: Here they are! Black Magic! My favourite (Rips open box.)

JESSE: There, you see? Annie does care about you.

IRIS: Wasn't that nice of her? (Looking at the chocolate map.) There's hazelnuts and almonds and cherry creams and . . . You want one?

JESSE: Yeah. (Resigned.) Give me one with a soft centre.

IRIS: (Checking the map to get it right.) There you go. (Watches JESSE chew it.) You want another one?

JESSE: No thanks. I'm going to try to get some shuteye. You should too.

IRIS: Gotta fix my bags first.

JESSE: Those darned bags.

IRIS: They have to be arranged a certain way. So that I know where everything is.

JESSE: Do you need all this light to do it?

IRIS: (Turns off the lights and grabs one of her bags. Takes out giant flashlight and sets it up.) I have lots of light. (Pulls out another smaller flashlight and starts composing her bags. While she's fussing JESSE selects a plump soft bag and tucks it under her head. IRIS spends some minutes arranging and rearranging the bags peeking inside with the second flashlight. She finally gets them all done, but then looks unhappy. She peeks in a couple of them, then scratches her head.) I can't find my sock bag, Jesse.

(There is no answer. She goes over and shakes JESSE.) Jesse, I can't find my sock bag and my toothbrush is missing too. I can't sleep till I find them. (All her shaking does not waken JESSE, who is out for the count.) Jesse? (She looks closer, then shines her light on her friend.) Darn it Jesse! You're sleeping on my sock bag!

(She goes to the couch, takes one of the grimy couch cushions and replaces her sock bag with it. She smiles with satisfaction and is about to settle down herself when there is a sound of a car door slamming far off. She turns off her flash lights and tries to waken JESSE.) Jesse! Wake up ! Wake up! There's someone coming. Wake up!

(She huddles with her bags as a tall skinny figure comes through the door. He trips on one of Iris's bags, then turns on a light of his own, a pencil flash, and bends to see what he stumbled on. IRIS grabs her big flashlight and wallops him on the head. He groans and drops to the floor.)

IRIS: (She rummages in her bags and pulls out a long, glittering, deadly looking knife.) You think you're so smart, Mr. Guy Lombardo. But no one messes with my bags!

(There is a long passage of swing music while YOUNG JESSE and YOUNG IRIS confer. Throughout this conversation WALTER stands apart trying not to listen in, trying to look cool but managing only to look foolishly hopeful and eager.)

YOUNG IRIS: Jesse, these guys aren't going to wait much longer. What's keeping you?

YOUNG JESSE: I don't know. I just can't seem to find the right moment to leave.

YOUNG IRIS: Well, find it. Ace is really anxious to meet you.

YOUNG JESSE: Ace?

YOUNG IRIS: That's his name. He thinks you have great legs. And can he dance!

YOUNG JESSE: I know. I saw him over there

YOUNG IRIS: He's hot!

YOUNG JESSE: Walter's a pretty good dancer too. Not bad for a sap. Anyway, just one more dance and I'll be with you. I told him I was leaving.

YOUNG IRIS: You did? Then leave!

YOUNG JESSE: (Looks sheepish.) I got to let him down easy. (IRIS rolls her eyes.) He's just a kid. (IRIS is not impressed.) Look. He's shipping out tonight, okay?

YOUNG IRIS: These guys are not going to wait for ever. (Drifts off, turns and whispers.) *Leave!*

YOUNG JESSE: (Moving back. There is an awkward moment of silence.) It must be tough living on a farm. How do you stand it?

WALTER: It's okay.

YOUNG JESSE: What do you do for kicks?

WALTER: Not a lot. Sometimes there's dances. They're okay. In between, we play cards, throw horseshoes. That's about the extent of it.

YOUNG JESSE: You have a car?

WALTER: No. I'm going to get a car though, when this is over.

YOUNG JESSE: Oh yeah?

WALTER: Yeah. You have to have a car in the country. You can't hope to get ahead. I know what I want too, a Ford Deluxe. It's the best thing on the road.

YOUNG JESSE: You're good with cars?

WALTER: Not bad. I can handle most mechanical stuff. You should see my radio.

YOUNG JESSE: You got a radio?

WALTER: I built it myself. It runs off of batteries and it's got more dials and switches than a Frankenstein's machine.

YOUNG JESSE: One of those ones you get Paris and London on?

WALTER: No. But we get all the American shows. I really like the dance music. Kay Kayser and Sammy Kay. Benny Goodman. My sister Gemmy and me dance to it all the time. We push back the couch and carpet and make believe we're at the Ritz or something. Sometimes we even get Mom up for a waltz.

(Band starts up, "You Made Me Love you.")

WALTER: Hey! They're playing our song again.

YOUNG JESSE: (Sternly.) It's not our song, Walter.

WALTER: (Cheerfully.) I know.

(They dance on to muted music as the lights come up on. . .

Dawn, the farmhouse. There is a deafening sound of birds and a faint red glow to the light. There is no sign of the intruder. JESSE and IRIS are fast asleep on the floor. JESSE awakens first, groans and stretches to alleviate stiffness and the roughness of the night. She then notices the cushion she's been sleeping on, freaks out, throws it away and checks herself for bugs.)

JESSE: Eugggh! There must be fifty years of bugs in that thing. Ohh! I need coffee and food! (Spots chocolates and takes a couple. Puts coffee on to heat up. Comes to the front of stage and takes in the view. Behind her WALTER and YOUNG JESSE are talking.)

WALTER: You'd like my farm. You can see a hundred miles in every direction. Sometimes I think it's the most beautiful spot in the world

YOUNG JESSE: I'm not crazy about the country. Too lonely.

WALTER: It's funny, I don't feel lonely there. There's something about it that just makes you feel part of everything. You look out over the prairies and you know it's probably been just like that for a million years.

JESSE: (Almost as if she can hear him over the years.) At least.

WALTER: And there's just so much life everywhere. Sunrise is the best time. The birds start about an hour before the sun comes up. The noise of them. It's deafening sometimes.

JESSE: There must be a million birds out there

WALTER: There's a big slough near the house. When the sun comes up it turns all red and you can see the waders and dippers and the coots and all the little birds round the edge.

(The light on JESSE'S face reddens and she smiles in wonder.)

YOUNG JESSE: Well if you like the land so much, you should be a good farmer.

WALTER: You really think I could hack the Agricultural College?

YOUNG JESSE: Of course.

WALTER: There is stuff I like, you know. That I'm good at.

YOUNG JESSE: Like what?

WALTER: Cows.

YOUNG JESSE: Cows?

WALTER: Don't laugh.

YOUNG JESSE: I'm not laughing.

WALTER: You are too.

YOUNG JESSE: Well *cows*.

WALTER: Cows are great. You can breed them, you know, so as to get better milk and lots more of it. That's the kind of stuff they teach you in the college.

YOUNG JESSE: Well then you should definitely go.

WALTER: You make it sound so easy.

YOUNG JESSE: Well why wouldn't it be? You joined the army, didn't you?

WALTER: Yeah.

YOUNG JESSE: So join the Agricultural College.

WALTER: Maybe I will. When I get back. I'll see what Mom says.

YOUNG JESSE: Your Mom will love the idea.

WALTER: Yeah, she will. She sure will. So what about you Jesse, what are you good at?

YOUNG JESSE: I don't know.

WALTER: But there must be something you want to do.

YOUNG JESSE: I'd like to get out of this place. You know. Have a good time, go places.

WALTER: Travel and stuff?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah. Maybe *I* should join the army. (Dance in silence a moment or two.)

WALTER: You should be one of those women, what do they call them? They work on airplanes.

YOUNG JESSE: Like Rosie the Rivetter?

WALTER: No, not making them, flying on them. Stewardesses. That's what they call them. You get to fly all over the world. Wouldn't that be great?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah well. You have to pass a lot of tests, I hear.

WALTER: It'll be a snap.

YOUNG JESSE: I've got the brains. I don't know if I've got the charm. And don't go telling me I have, all right? I know what I'm like. First guy that throws up I'm gonna be all over him like the wicked witch of the west.

WALTER: I don't believe that.

YOUNG JESSE: I just don't have the patience, you know.

WALTER: So what are you gonna do?

YOUNG JESSE: Beats me. I mean, what do *you* see me doing? Telephone operator? *Sor ree wrong number, you dumbell!* Or nurse? *It's only a broken leg, you big crybaby.*

WALTER: You're a real tough guy.

YOUNG JESSE: James Cagney could take lessons.

WALTER: Yeah, so could Bette Davis.

YOUNG JESSE: You like Bette Davis!

WALTER: She's the best!

YOUNG JESSE: I thought maybe you'd like someone fluffy and sweet, like Loretta Young. The girl next door.

WALTER Fluffy! What do you take me for! I like Myrna Loy and Rosalind Russell - the ones with *character*.

YOUNG JESSE: No kidding!

(A jitterbug number starts up and WALTER dances her off in a wild and crazy fashion. JESSE, reminiscing, does a lively step or two.)

(IRIS wakens looks puzzled, gets up.)

IRIS: Whatcha doing, Jesse?

JESSE: Aw nuthin'. Just warming myself up. Better get up. We're going to have to hoof it out of here soon. We're not exactly shoed for the occasion either. You don't have a pair of Reeboks in those bags of yours, do you?

IRIS: I got lots of socks. (Wipes the knife on one.)

JESSE: Well soon as we have our coffee we'll . . . (Notices for the first time the knife that IRIS is clutching.) What are you doing with that?

IRIS: It's to defend myself, Jesse. In case of intruders.

JESSE: Intruders. Right.

IRIS: You'd be surprised.

JESSE: (Takes the knife from IRIS.) Aw! There's blood on it!

IRIS: (Her hand has a sock wrapped round it.) I cut myself in the struggle.

JESSE: Here let me look at that. (Starts to unwrap her hand then stops.)
What struggle? What's been going on?

IRIS: It was the bags, Jesse. I can't let them be broken up. You know that. I have to keep them together.

JESSE: Those darn bags again. They're going to be the death of you. (Take the bandage off to survey the damage.) Honestly Iris, you can't be left alone for a minute.

IRIS: Can too.

JESSE: You need a keeper.

IRIS: Don't say that! Don't you ever say that!

JESSE: It was just a figure of speech.

IRIS: I don't need a keeper and I told her so.

JESSE: Told who?

IRIS: That woman that gave me the chocolates.

JESSE: Annie. Your daughter Annie.

IRIS: That's right. I told her I don't need no keeper. I just need taken care of a little bit. That's all.

JESSE: That's what she wants to do. Take care of you.

IRIS: Put me away!

JESSE: Nobody wants to put you away.

IRIS: Annie does. And so do you!

JESSE: No I don't. Calm down. (IRIS wrenches away.) *Calm down.*

IRIS: No! I'm not calming down

JESSE: You don't have to shout.

IRIS: I feel good when I shout!

(Lights dim and come up on YOUNG JESSE and YOUNG IRIS.
Swing music in the background.)

YOUNG IRIS: I thought you said you were coming.

YOUNG JESSE: I don't know, Iris.

YOUNG IRIS: What do you mean you don't know?

YOUNG JESSE: I don't think I can.

YOUNG IRIS: Oh great. These guys want to take us to Cochrane. To the *Elks* Club.

YOUNG JESSE: I can't let the kid down.

YOUNG IRIS: So it's OK to let *me* down.

YOUNG JESSE: Come on, Iris.

YOUNG IRIS: If you don't go, I can't go.

YOUNG JESSE: You don't need me.

YOUNG IRIS: I'm not going off with two guys I hardly met... Two strangers! Oh you make me so mad! We finally meet up with some really swell guys and you want to babysit some farmer boy.

YOUNG JESSE: He's not a farmer boy!

YOUNG IRIS: What is he then?

YOUNG JESSE: He's just... not from the city.

YOUNG IRIS: You're not sweet on him, are you?

YOUNG JESSE: Of course not! I just have to say good-bye.

YOUNG IRIS: You were just saying good-bye before. Let's go.

YOUNG JESSE: No. Give me a minute.

(They continue to argue silently as we segue back to IRIS and JESSE.)

IRIS: I said I feel good when I shout!

JESSE: I heard you the first time.

IRIS: Just because I get little dithery at times. It's perfectly normal to get a little absent-minded at my age.

JESSE: A little? You don't even remember your own daughter! You're half way to gaga-land, Iris. You've got one foot in the padded cell. And you expect me to take care of you. I can't take care of you.

IRIS: Who said anything about taking care of me. I only wanted to use your bathroom!

JESSE: I don't want to take care of you. I'm not taking the farm.

IRIS: I'm fine. Look at me. My teeth are all there. I still look pretty good. I've been letting myself go, I admit, but nothing a bit of exercise and a good diet won't fix.

JESSE: I'm not taking it.

IRIS: Old age is a state of mind. Right? In which case you're the one to worry about.

JESSE: Me!

IRIS: Crabby and pessimistic. You're no fun any more. I can take care of myself. (Takes up knife and puts it in her bag.) But you. Look at you. You're an old woman. You're getting near the end and you can't face it. Can't face the fact you never did anything of any value.

JESSE: That's because I hung around you too much. And because I always let you be the one who called the shots.

IRIS: Somebody had to call the shots.

JESSE: Everything I did was because you thought it was a good idea. "Let's do this and let's do that." I even married Jim because of you.

IRIS: That is such nonsense!

JESSE: It's true and you know it. Jim and I – it would have been a couple of dates and move on to the next. But you didn't want that. Jim was Artie's best friend. You kept us together.

IRIS: No!

JESSE: You finagled and maneuvered and pouted and just kept at it till I gave in. And all because Jim was Artie's best friend.

IRIS: We had a lot of fun together. the four of us.

JESSE: You finagled and maneuvered and pouted and just kept at it till I gave in. And all because Jim was Artie's best friend.

IRIS: That is not true. That is so *twisted*.

JESSE: It was always you! "Let's go to this party. Let's go to that. Try this job, try that."

IRIS: You could have had your say. You have a tongue in your head.

JESSE: And then what you said last night. After all your bossing and manipulating you go and say that my life with Jim was *meaningless*.

IRIS: I said that?

JESSE: Yes you said that, darn it. Why can't you own up to things instead of hiding them in these stupid bags. Your socks. Your underwear. Your goldarned responsibilities. Own up!

IRIS: I thought we were friends.

JESSE: We are not friends.

IRIS: Last night you said we had good times.

JESSE: Not as many as I would have had without you.

IRIS: This is crazy. I don't understand you.

JESSE: You've always gone ahead, always done what you wanted and dragged me in your wake.

IRIS: You liked it at the time.

JESSE: I don't want to go along, any more. You're dragging me to something I don't want to be dragged to.

IRIS: We've got good times ahead of us Jesse. Lots of good times.

JESSE: You're going to pull me down.

IRIS: You think I'm senile, don't you. But I can take care of myself. I still have all the old moxie. I can still draw blood when it's necessary. I'm not like Walter. I'm not going to sit and let the sand blow over me.

JESSE: Don't you say anything about Walter.

IRIS: So now you're defending Walter? I thought you said he was a weirdo crank

JESSE: He went with dignity. You're going out like a clown.

IRIS: I am not going out. And I'm not a clown!

JESSE: Then what's with the bags? (Picks up a bag.)

IRIS: Don't!

JESSE: This is a routine, Iris. You got it down pat. (Shuffles about gathering bags in imitation of IRIS.)

IRIS: Put them down. (Grabs at bags.)

JESSE: (Avoiding her.) You can't do without them, can you?

IRIS: Sure I can. It's a temporary thing, Jesse.

(Jesse lifts up a bag and scatters it's contents.)

IRIS: Stop it!

JESSE: See?

(JESSE tears up the bags. IRIS madly tries to stop her.)

(Then in the midst of their struggle Walter's medal falls out. JESSE, suddenly sober, picks it up, looks at IRIS.)

JESSE: Where did this come from?

IRIS: It must've got knocked off the shelf, or something.

JESSE: No Iris. I gave this to that fellow that was here. He took it away with him.

IRIS: It's just an old medal.

JESSE: What have you done? What have you done, Iris?

IRIS: I don't know.

JESSE: Tell me.

IRIS: He was messing with my stuff, Jesse. (Gathers up a bag restoring its contents.)

JESSE: Iris. (Stops her from gathering.) Listen to me. Tell me where he is. Tell me. No. (Keeping her from moving.) Not till you tell me.

(IRIS breaks free and looks worried as JESSE searches.)

IRIS: I don't remember. I don't know. I don't remember.

JESSE: I know he's here, Iris. Else how did you get the medal? (Looks up and beyond IRIS to something on the floor.) Oh my God!

(Jesse moves slowly and fearfully to a pile of rugs and blankets heaped up at the side of the room. There is a boot sticking out of the end of the pile. A motionless boot. IRIS tries to block her.)

IRIS: No! Don't Jesse. I wouldn't do that.

(JESSE pushes past her, alarmed by what she sees.)

IRIS: I told you not to.

JESSE: What have you done to him? He's not moving. Oh God! I think he's dead.

IRIS: (Gathering her bags.) Good.

As JESSE approaches, the heap starts to move and moan.

JESSE: No. He's alive Thank God. Bring me that knife. (A muffled yell from the heap.) Keep still. I'm trying to help you.

(ACE comes lunging out of heap of blankets. He is gagged and his hands are bound.)

(IRIS comes forwards with the knife and tries to cut his gag. He leaps away yelling, dragging Jesse, who is trying to untie his hands, with him.)

JESSE: (Working on his bonds.) Just let me get this knot. There.

(She frees his hands. He tears the gag off and leaps back.)

ACE: Keep her away from me! She tried to *kill* me.

JESSE: You were messing with her stuff.

ACE: I could have died! Look! I'm all covered with blood.

JESSE: Is it your blood?

ACE: (Looks.) No.

JESSE: Then shut up.

ACE: But she *attacked* me. She...she...

JESSE: You were trespassing.

ACE: Come on. I was just...

JESSE: What were you doing?

ACE: Nothing. I was just looking around.

JESSE: For the money, maybe?

ACE: What money?

JESSE: It wasn't in the radio, after all?

ACE: I don't get you.

JESSE: Wally supposedly hid his money somewhere. I thought maybe you figured it was in the radio.

ACE: I never heard of any money.

IRIS: See I was right. He was after my bags.

ACE: Keep her away from me!

JESSE: Calm down. She's harmless.

ACE: Harmless! (Rubs his wrists.) You should feel the lump on my *head*. And that gag. I could have suffocated!

JESSE: Are you OK now?

ACE: I'll live. But she sure packs a mean wallop.

JESSE: Yeah well Iris gets carried away at times. But basically she's a very good person.

IRIS: Really, Jesse?

ACE: She should be committed. (Suddenly alert.) Wait. *Jesse*? Is that your name?

JESSE: You still haven't explained what you're doing here.

(He looks her a minute then the light slowly dawns.)

ACE: I knew I'd seen you before.

JESSE: Stop trying to change the subject

ACE: No, really. I never forget a leg You're Jesse. The biggest sourpuss I ever dated.

JESSE: Sourpuss! Listen buddy.

ACE: That pain-in-the-ass girl.

JESSE: I beg your pardon!

ACE: Really. You did nothing but gripe the whole time. We had a car and bottle of Canadian Club and we took you to the Elks Club and you would have thought we were taking you to hell and back. You wouldn't even dance with me. Not one dance.

JESSE: What are you talking about?

ACE: I didn't recognize you at first. But it's unmistakable. The legs. The lippy manner. You're Jesse Peterson.

IRIS: Yeah, she is!

ACE: He talked about you all the time. Walter. You were really important to him. You were his moment to remember. Mine too in a way. Look. I got your picture in my wallet. I don't know why I didn't recognize you. It's a perfect likeness, eh?

JESSE: Give or take fifty years.

ACE: I must need my eyes checked. Not to see it.

IRIS: Why does he have your picture in his wallet?

JESSE: Beats me.

IRIS: So is that why you're here? To see Jesse?

JESSE: Of course not. He didn't think anyone was here, remember?

ACE: No, you were right the first time. It was the money.

JESSE: I doubt there's any money.

ACE: Wally made a lot of dough over the years. I figured they'd be tearing the place down and if the money was going to be trashed, why shouldn't I have it? Of course, I didn't know who you were.

JESSE: Well if you can find any you're welcome to it. I wasn't planning on keeping it. I wasn't planning on keeping any of this in fact.

ACE: Not keep it!

JESSE: You heard me.

ACE: Do you know what that would do to Wally? Wally wanted you to have it. It's what he worked for all those years. He talked about nothing else. I just didn't realize he'd gone through with it. That he actually made a will.

JESSE: And that he knew where to find me.

ACE: That too. I had no idea he knew where you were. But it was a major thing with him, to give you a nest egg. It gave him a whole lot of pleasure thinking about it.

JESSE: Maybe a nest isn't what I'm looking for.

ACE: All I know is Wally would have wanted you to keep the farm.

JESSE: I'm sick and tired of Wally. Look, maybe you can give us a ride into town. I'm going to give the key back to the lawyers.

ACE: How could you do this to him! He didn't want anything from you. He just had a dream of one day making you feel the way he felt that night, that anything was possible.

JESSE: Yeah, well, it's too late. I'm well past the point where things are possible.

ACE: That's no way to talk. Look at you. You've got everything going for you.

JESSE: A lot you know. The way it is right now, every time I turn around another little prop is taken away, another bit of the support system gone. My kids want to put me away. My taxes doubled last year, did you know that? And the gas and electric went up. Every time I turn around there's a new user fee. Pretty soon there'll be a user fee for turning around.

ACE: Yeah, yeah, and your teeth drop out and your legs go on you.

JESSE: It isn't funny.

ACE: But Wally's gift is supposed to take care of all the user fees. How can it be hurting you?

JESSE: It's taking away the biggest prop of all – my self-respect.

ACE: That's not the way he meant it. Besides no one would question your self respect. Huh! They wouldn't dare.

(JESSE glowers at him.)

ACE: Look. You're just afraid to admit you can't hack it alone, right? None of us can hack it, really. And pretty soon there comes a time when we won't be able to hack it at all. That's inevitable. Walter's legacy buys you a little time, that's all. And there's no shame in that.

IRIS: It's like winning the lottery, Jesse.

ACE: No. It's like a friend buying you a drink. That money was earned in good cheer and it's given in the same spirit.

JESSE: If I didn't know better I'd say Sherman hired you. Somehow he found out about this legacy and... *did* Sherman hire you?

ACE: Sherman. Uh uh. The only Sherman I ever knew was a tank.

IRIS: I know who you are! I do, I remember. You're Ace.

JESSE: Iris, would you pipe down for a minute?

IRIS: You were a terrific dancer and you had a camera.

ACE: Yeah, I did. How did *you* know?

IRIS: He took that picture in his wallet. (He nods.) And he took this too. (takes out photo from bag.) See? You and Walter.

(WALTER comes into view as they look at the photograph and seems to be listening to their conversation)

JESSE: Me and Walter? I don't believe it. (Takes photo and looks at it seriously for a minute.) You took this? I... (Looks at it for a time.) I remember him, you know. I didn't at first. I hadn't even thought about him for fifty years. It's been coming back bit by bit. He was just a big, gawky farm boy. Talked about his mother and sister. He was scared stiff of going to war. Scared of just about everything. But he was nice too. A really nice kid.

ACE: I told him to write to you. I told him how miserable you were that night after you left him.

JESSE: I left him? I guess I must have. That's kind of crappy isn't it?

ACE: I told him to write you. But he said you didn't go for letters.

JESSE: Sounds like something I would've said. Me and my big mouth, eh? My tough-guy act.

ACE: Then after the war he was gonna look you up but by then you were married.

IRIS: Yeah, to Jim.

JESSE: Jim was a good guy. He was all right. I was happy with him. (Thinks a little.) But, back to Wally. I remember he talked about the agricultural college.

ACE: He enrolled as soon as he was demobbed.

JESSE: He did? That's great!

ACE: Graduated with honours. He was well respected, did really well on his farm. Awards for his cows. I told you that.

JESSE: So how did he end up like this?

ACE: I don't know. The body just gets tired. And the head. A touch of senility. I dropped in on him a couple of times.

JESSE: It can't have been pleasant.

ACE: There were bad moments. He'd be right out of it sometimes. Or depressed. I came over here one day and he had a big fire going in the back yard. He was burning all his papers. All the business files and breeding records. I tried to stop him. I mean there was probably

valuable information in those records. But he couldn't be argued out of it. "That's forty years of your work, your life!" "Yes", he said, "and see what it's worth? a handful of ashes."

JESSE: Well that's a cheerful little story. What a way to end up.

ACE: You can't just rate a life by the way it ends, you know. And, even at the end, it wasn't all bad. He liked looking out at his land – the birds, the deer. The slough – always something to see there. He'd look out all summer long.

JESSE: Winter must have been just dandy too.

ACE: There was an attempt to get him into a home. But he wouldn't have any of it. He just slowly just wound down. For a while they kept trying to persuade him, to help him, but eventually people forgot him.

JESSE: Well, maybe I can do something about that.

ACE: What do you mean?

JESSE: It's all coming together in my head. A plan. (She walks about as she thinks.) This place, it's not far from the Agricultural College, am I right?

ACE: Yeah. So?

JESSE: So I think that's what I really want to bring up with Cooper and Atchinson – transferring Walter's bequest

ACE: Transferring...

JESSE: To the college. The Agricultural College. I'm sure they can make good use of this place.

ACE: Well yeah, but...

JESSE: And Walter's name will go in the records. No one will forget him then. He won't be forgotten so quickly.

ACE: It's an interesting idea, but you...

JESSE: I think he'd like that and I feel good about it too. The more I think about it. Yeah. That's what he'd want.

ACE: But what will you do?

JESSE: Me? I have options. I have my health, my family, friends. I own my own house.... (Moves to the the window.) Will you look at that view. Maybe it wasn't so bad looking out on that every day. I seem to remember him talking about it.

(WALTER moves up behind her and speaks gazing out at the landscape. JESSE looks out too and sees what he's seeing.)

WALTER: You'd like my farm. You can see a hundred miles in every direction. Sometimes I think it's the most beautiful spot in the world.

JESSE: I'm not crazy about the country. Too lonely.

WALTER: It's funny, I don't feel lonely here. There's something about it that just makes you feel part of everything. You look out over the prairies and you know it's probably been just like that for a million years.

JESSE: At least.

(WALTER slips into the background and off stage. While JESSE is looking out and remembering IRIS is adding a few things from the room to her bags. A cup, a doily from the couch, and the picture but before she can put it in her bag, ACE sees her.)

ACE: Not so fast. (Removing the photo from her grasp, he looks at it, smiling, remembering.)

(IRIS grabs it again and they wrestle for it. The frame comes apart and something falls out. IRIS marches off to her bags with the picture, thinks better of it and sets it up on the Victrola. ACE picks up what fell from the frame, a booklet of sorts. He opens it up and looks at Jesse, who is staring out of the window. He slips the booklet into his pocket.)

JESSE: There must be a million birds out there.

(JESSE smiles in wonder. She notices she's clasping something – it's the medal. She turns and hands it to ACE.)

JESSE: I guess Iris took this off you when she beaned you.

ACE: I think Walter would have wanted you to have it.

JESSE: Actually, yes. I'd like to keep it.

(IRIS winds up the Victrola.)

IRIS: We had a Victrola just like this when I was a kid. Now where did I put that. Here it is. (Pulls a record out of her bags and puts it on.) I've had this for years. (Music starts, "You made me love you".)

JESSE: That song.

IRIS: Remember that? It was all the rage '42, '43. You're crying, Jesse.

JESSE: Something in my eye.

IRIS: You crying for Walter?

JESSE: Well darn it. Someone has to. Wow. (Getting a grip.) Does that song bring back memories, or what? (Goes to picture.) Look at him. Just a nice young kid. It's been hard for me to accept that. Well, you can understand it. Some old recluse leaves you his money. And all the time he was just a young kid getting older, remembering someone who might have been, who was almost, his friend. I wish I had been his friend. I remember that I wanted to stay with him. I really wanted to stay.

ACE: You're telling me.

JESSE: I really took it out on you, didn't I.

ACE: Wally kept your picture. I told him he was crazy, that you had a real mean tongue on you. Didn't seem to make any difference to him. That picture's been thousands of miles, back and forth across the ocean and then some.

JESSE: Just to think of him keeping it all these years. It really blows me away. That picture in your wallet...

ACE: It's from the same one. I enlarged the bit with you in it.

JESSE: But why. If I was such a pain in the neck.

ACE: It's a reminder of an unkept promise. A promise you made over fifty years ago.

JESSE: A promise *I* made?

ACE: Yeah. (Holds out his hand.) I believe this is my dance.

JESSE: I'm too old for this nonsense.

ACE: Yeah? (He grabs her around the waist and expertly moves off with her.)

IRIS: You always were a good dancer, Glenny.

ACE: What's she talking about?

JESSE: Oh It's just Iris being Iris. Well no. She's not being Iris. She's not being Iris at all. I have to do something about her. I really have to. It's been on my mind for a while. I just didn't want to face up to it.

ACE: Who is she again? A relative?

JESSE: My best friend. My roommate.

IRIS: Roommate, Jesse? Did you say roommate!

JESSE: Yeah. Roommate. You need somewhere to park all those bags.

(IRIS does a little dance of glee.)

(ACE pulls JESSE close and they begin to dance. IRIS lost in the moment sways to the music.)

(Behind them WALTER and YOUNG JESSE enter dancing, moving slowly across the room.)

(ACE slows to a halt.)

JESSE What?

ACE: Well...

JESSE We were doing so well. At least I thought we were.

ACE: Yeah, we were. We were born to dance together. It's just. Well I've been trying to figure out how to give you something.

JESSE: Oh?

ACE: Yeah. Only you'll probably throw it back at me. Tell me to go to hell or something.

JESSE: I know I'm prickly but I think I have better manners than that.

ACE: Prickly doesn't begin to describe it. Whoa whoa whoa. (Stops her from going off.) Look all you have to do is promise...

JESSE: Promise what.

ACE: That you'll keep it.

JESSE: What is this thing I'm supposed to keep? Another medal? (He remains silent.) Do I get to know what it is? Can't I even guess?

IRIS: Is it bigger than a bread box?

ACE: Promise.

IRIS: Promise him, Jesse.

JESSE: I don't think so.

IRIS: (Shakes her arm.) Jesse!

JESSE: (Rubbing her arm.) Okay. *Okay!* I promise.

ACE: On Walter's medal.

JESSE: Are you kidding? (He isn't. She holds it up reluctantly.) On Walter's medal.

(ACE removes the booklet from his pocket and gives it to her.)

IRIS: What is it?

JESSE: It's a bank book... Walter's bank book. (Opens it.) Holy Christmas! This can't be... I can't take this. (Hands it back to ACE who folds his arms.)

ACE: *You promised.*

JESSE: I know but I didn't realize...

ACE: Doesn't matter. A promise is a promise. You can't go back on your word.

JESSE: You tricked me! I can't believe I was such a pushover. (Looks uneasily at bank book.) Why didn't Cooper and Atchinson know about this.?

ACE: They wouldn't have found any record of it in the house. He burned all his papers, right? Probably burned the bank statements as well. And they wouldn't have checked with the bank. The Royal Bank moved out of Finlake some years ago. And they probably didn't think of looking for a bank account for him, say, in the city.

JESSE: He was just feeble-minded old guy, to them, living on his pension.

ACE: No doubt.

JESSE: But what am I going to do with all this... this...

IRIS: Loot! (She grabs up two of her bags and starts swirling round the room.)

ACE: (Looking at IRIS shakes his head.) You'll think of something.

JESSE: (Following his gaze.) Yeah. I guess I will. But you. You could just take this to the bank and pretend to be Walter. This is what you were looking for. Right?

ACE: Well, yeah. I'm always out for the main chance. (Hold out his hand to JESSE.) Shall we?

(IRIS drops her bags, turns the handle of the Victrola and the music swells. ACE and Jesse resume their dance.)

IRIS: (Laying out the box of chocolates from her bag. That Jesse, isn't she something. Always playing the tough-guy act.

(YOUNG IRIS enters from the side fixing her shoe.)

YOUNG IRIS: She always did. (Takes a chocolate.)

IRIS: But underneath she was just. . . well what she was like was Jimmy Cagney. Remember him in that movie? What was it?

YOUNG IRIS: *Public Enemy.*

IRIS: *Public Enemy*, that's it.

(WALTER and YOUNG JESSE dance on.)

WALTER: This is a great song.

YOUNG JESSE: I like fast songs better. "Chattanooga Choo Choo." "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy."

WALTER: (Sings.) "You made me love you. I didn't wanna do it. I didn't wanna do it."

YOUNG JESSE: Don't do that.

WALTER: I guess my voice ain't that great huh?

YOUNG JESSE: Na. It's just I don't like guys getting sentimental on me.

WALTER: Dancing makes you forget for a while. Somehow when you're in a big sea of people like this, holding on to someone, it doesn't seem so bad. But over there. There won't be anyone to hold onto. You could just vanish, right off the face of the earth, and no one would ever know.

YOUNG JESSE: You'll be okay.

WALTER: Will I?

ACE: (Breaks away from JESSE momentarily to snap a picture.) Picture? Hold still kids.

WALTER: Sure Ace.

(Ace holds us the camera and there's a flash.)

YOUNG JESSE: Darn thing blinded me.

WALTER: He's a friend of mine. He takes pictures and sells them to the guys later.

YOUNG JESSE: You know him?

WALTER: Yeah. Ace is A - OK.

YOUNG JESSE: I bet he does a roaring trade in those pictures.

WALTER: Yeah, almost everyone buys them. It's a good thing to have pictures like that, of yourself with someone. They say it isn't so bad if you have someone to remember. Someone real.

YOUNG JESSE: (Looking off to ACE.) You been friends a long time?

WALTER: We went to school together.

YOUNG JESSE: He's kind of cute.

WALTER: He's real popular with the ladies. Everyone want to be with Ace.

(Music ends.)

WALTER: Well that 's it, I guess. You'll want to be off with your friend?

YOUNG JESSE: Yeah, I kind of promised. Too bad. I was having a great time.

WALTER: You were?

YOUNG JESSE: You're some dancer.

WALTER: Thanks. You should see my sister.

YOUNG JESSE: Well then...

WALTER: Yeah. Uh... You don't suppose you could write to me, Jesse.

YOUNG JESSE: Hey Walter. If I wrote to every guy that asked I'd have to hire a secretary.

WALTER: Yeah, I guess.

YOUNG JESSE: Well, I really should be going.

WALTER: Yeah. So long.

YOUNG JESSE: Bye.

YOUNG IRIS It's about time.

(YOUNG IRIS pulls YOUNG JESSE off, but she lingers at the edge of the stage looking back at WALTER.)

WALTER: It was swell meeting you Jesse. (Softly.) Swell.

(Music rises and segues into a fast song. "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy", for example.)

IRIS: What was I saying?

YOUNG IRIS: (Leaving YOUNG JESSE.) You were saying Jimmy Cagney in *Public Enemy*.

IRIS: That's it. The one where he has this dear old mother, who brings him up right and everything but it doesn't take, and against her wishes he becomes this hardened criminal.

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah!

IRIS: And he has this showgirl girlfriend.

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah!

IRIS: And he pushes the grapefruit in her face.

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah! I remember that!

IRIS: And he gets worse and worse

YOUNG IRIS: And finally when he can't get any worse someone cuts him down with a bullet.

IRIS: In the rain, right! He sinks into the gutter soaked with rain and he looks up and you remember what he says? He says "I ain't so tough."

YOUNG IRIS: Yeah.

IRIS: Well that's Jesse. Isn't that Jesse all over?

YOUNG IRIS: All over!

(IRIS joins up with the YOUNG IRIS and they boogie with the others as the lights fade on WALTER and YOUNG JESSE still gazing at each other across the room.)

- THE END -