

THE LEGEND OF FIDDLER'S GREEN

(A Play in Two Acts)

Prologue -

(As the curtain opens we see up left a small graveyard, one central stone surrounded by five small headstones. The whole area bathed in moonlight, one baby spot on the central stone which is about five feet tall. The backdrop is a wooded scene. Down stage right, in shadow, stands a scarecrow, the Narrator, his arms outstretched and supported by a crossbar. To his left, running from up right center to down center or near it, there is an old-fashioned split-rail fence. The effect wanted is that of a road running from up rt. to down left, between the scarecrow and the graveyard. The whole scene can be played twelve to fifteen feet deep in front of the first traveler.)

There is a pause, then a distant steamboat whistles. Other sounds - crickets, katydids, etc., now become audible. Off rt. we hear a harmonica playing softly. It draws closer, and a child appears playing the instrument. He sees the monument, stops playing, and moves cautiously down the road. He edges, back to audience, around the graveyard, then dashes off left. A whip-poor-will cries softly several times, then off rt. we hear someone whistling "Annie Laurie". The sound moves closer, an older child enters rt. He continues to whistle as he nears the monument, falters for a time or two, looks in back of him, an owl hoots sharply and the child dashes off left. The steamboat whistle sounds nearer, and we hear a cane tapping off rt. An old man appears, crosses stage past the monument, turns around and comes back to stand before the stone. He looks at the grave a moment, remembers the fiddler, and does a feeble dance step off left.

A long pause, then a ray of moonlight touches the scarecrow. He looks up, his face blank, squints at the moon, looks down, moves his arms a bit and frowns because they are stiff, stretches them, walks down toward center, looks off left, and turns to audience.)

SC: Along this road they came and went,
 Treading the mountain down.
 Good and bad, the young, the bent,
 The wise man and the clown.
 A curious legend lured them here, (Walks toward grave)
 Out of the valleys and the river mist,
 A legend rooted in love and fear,
 And as the story goes, here in the dust. (Points)
 For underneath this stone a fiddler lies,
 His hands at rest from dancing bow and strings.
 A hundred snows have lain upon his eyes,
 And sparrows twittered up as many Springs.
 The chisel here bequeathed to us his name;
 Recorded too the year, the month, the day.
 (He rubs his hand over blurred inscription below name, date)
 The wind and rain have leaned against his fame
 And rubbed it all away.

But there be those born hereabout
Who tell of a time now gone;
Tell of the fiddler young and stout,
And his fiddle that sang till dawn.
A fiddle that ~~ezed~~ eased their aches and pains,
Erased their worries and woes.
It flirted and reeled till their dancing brains
Caught up with their heels and toes.
They loved him, did those simple folk.
Most of 'em, I should say,
For some ~~were~~ piety like a yoke -
It was sinful to be gay.
These did not mourn when his fiddle was mute
And a wreath was hung on his door.
No more would frivolous slipper and boot
Rattle the old barn floor.

WD RE

But there were many who followed his bier
As they toted him up the draw.
I was younger then, with a wisp right here (Points to his waistline)
Where now there's a bale of straw.
They mumbled a psalm, they droned a prayer,
His kinfolk and his friends;
With his fiddle and bow they buried him there, (Points)
Where a story usually ends.

But not the yarn I have to spin;
For at night when the woods are still,
The sound of a ghostly violin
Goes dancing across the hill!
I do not say that his ghost has stirred
The dust of his family plot;
His answers either have all been heard -
Or his questions all forgot.
But on this peak his legend grew,
And multiplied in size.
The curious climbed to see if the tales were true --
Or lies.

So now with me unshoulder Time,
And you'll see what I have seen;
The river gnaws at the foot of this climb -
This is Fiddler's Green -
There's Cedar Grove and Warsaw Village (Points rt.)
Cheviot, Miamitown this way. (Sweeps hand rt. to left, over audience.)

Between are woods and fields and tillage,
Settler's houses and barns of hay.
Grapes are blooming along the steep,
Valleys are planted to wheat and rye.
People are born, grow old, and sleep,
And think, and feel, even as you andI?
(Scarecrow tries to find his heart, has none, smiles sadly,
stretches out his arms and assumes the blank look, again
a scarecrow.)

The moonlight fades still more, and across the dim stage walks Pris Yarborough carrying a green lantern. She sets it down beside the monument and exits rt., the way she came. Off rt. we hear a man's voice singing. Should have negroid quality as of escaped slave.

SONG: (To the tune of Old Dan Tucker)

VOICE: Ol' massa's at de cotton gin,
Ol' missus' gone away
Dey never see dey slaves agin'
Way up in Canaday.

Offstage ~~the chorus repeats the song,~~ then a fiddle picks up the melody in square dance tempo and the curtain falls.

ACT 1 - Scene 1.

The setting is an impressionistic, partial outline of the fronts of two small houses. Up right center, the home of Daniel Webbstreet. It consists of a door flat, facing down left, several bare rafters extending upward as though part of the roof. A second flat, partial and ragged top not more than four feet high, wanders off to nothing down right. All action within the house is visible. Up left center is the home of Abisha Kress. It is similar to Daniel's house in structure and design. In each house there is a table, several chairs, a few knick-knacks. Again all action is visible. The houses are supposed to be a quarter-mile apart. This scene uses the full stage. As action shifts from house to house, spots light the respective playing areas, alternate areas being dark. As the curtain rises we see the Webbstreet home. Mrs. Ida Webbstreet is sitting beside the table knitting. Off right we hear the jingle of a bridle, a horse whinnies, and Ida rises, goes to the door, opens it and calls:

IDA: Daniel !

DAN: (Off right) Ayah! Just beddin' old Pete down for the night.

IDA: Alice is not home yet !

DAN: I know! The dance was just breakin' up as I passed the barn!
She'll be along directly!

(Ida returns to her chair and knitting. After a moment's pause Daniel enters down right, goes up to his front door, enters and closes the door.)

IDA: I'm glad you're home. I was a mite scared.

DAN: Scared? What about? Nothin' to be scared of in these parts.
(Dan removes his jacket, throws it on a chair, starts to sit down, remembers his hat, throws it with jacket.)

IDA: Oh, just something I heard this afternoon. It can wait. What's the news in Cheviot?

DAN: Not good. (Sits at table) There's a slave hunter up from Maysville. Put up at the Seven Mile House two days ago.

IDA: There's been hunters here afore. They didn't rile you?

DAN: Ayah. This'n's different. He was seen yesterday snudgin' around the Anderson Place there in Cedar Grove. Reckon he musta got wind of that underground tunnel from the plank road to the Anderson cellar.

IDA: The one under the gravel path ?

DAN: Ayah. He was prowlin' around in that stand of cedar that grows down nigh to the river's edge.

IDA: What'd he expect to find there ?

DAN: He might could find a lot of things at the wrong time. That's the way we bring fugitives up the bank. They carry cargo off'n the packets, then disappear in the cedars. The regular roustabouts load firewood for the trip on to Cincinnati.

IDA: You think someone's been talkin' ?

DAN: Don't rightly know. Lots of copperheads hereabout sympathize with slave owners. Besides ther's rewards for information. We just gotta find another way of gittin' runaways up the bank an' on to West Fork. Leastways for a while. I 'low things'll simmer down when that hunter leaves Cheviot.

IDA: Oh, talkin' about Cheviot, I was over to Kresses this afternoon.

DAN: Cheviot ? Kresses ? Would you mind piecin' them two together for me?

IDA: Why, the very idea. It's as plain as plain can be! Alice went to a square dance in Cheviot, an' Sarah Kress was tellin' me this afternoon about some strange square dance music comin' from Henry Yarborough's grave up on the ridge. That's what I was scared about. Now do you see?

DAN: All except that part about Henry Yarborough. You'll have to re-plow that furrow.

IDA: Folks are sayin' that sometimes at night there's fiddle music comes from the grave where Henry's buried.

DAN: Fiddle music ? Fiddle sticks! Sarah's been takin' too much of that cough remedy she bought from the quack at the medicine show. Enough alcohol in it to fire a packet from here to Louisville.

IDA: Just the same there must be somethin' to it or folks wouldn't be sayin' it.

DAN: Well, I've heerd it said that Henry could play the he...the devil out of a fiddle, but I never heerd nobody say he played fiddle with the devil. I wouldn't believe it 'thout I heerd it. You hear it?

IDA: No, an' I don't want to. They say that pots an' pans jump right off the cupboard shelf when it plays....an' pictures dance around on the walls....an'...an'...

DAN: You're really scared, aint you ?

IDA: Course I am. So's everybody else in the neighborhood. They won't go near that ridge anymore. Day or night.

DAN: Is that so? (Then thoughtfully) Is that so?
(There is a sound of buggy wheels off left)

IDA: There comes Alice now.

DAN: 'Bout time that Haines boy was gittin' her home.
(Voice off stage calls "Whoa. Ho, now!" - buggy stops.)

IDA: Thomas is a nice young man. Oh, an' that reminds me. I've gotta bake gingerbread tomorrow.

DAN: For Thomas ?

IDA: Of course not. I promised to make some of those nice gingerbread men for the church bake sale.

DAN: Oh, I see. An' Thomas reminded you of it!

IDA: Where'd you ever get that idea ?
(Alice and Tom come around up stage side of the house and down to doorway. Alice is limping, Tom is helping her walk.)

TOM: Does your ankle still hurt bad ?

ALICE: It's a little better. I'm sorry you had to sit out the last few dances.

TOM: Well, it's my fault for steppin' 'on your foot that way.

ALICE: Fanny Rathburn looked daggers at me when we left her square an' went out to sit in the swing.

TOM: Aw, who cares about Fanny Rathburn ?

ALICE: For awhile I thought you did. The way you held her when you danced with her.

TOM: Aw, you know better'n that. I just wanted to dance with you. But it was kinda nice sittin' out with you....all by ourselves.

(Ida has risen and is now at the door. It opens.)

TOM: Oh, Hi, Mrs. Webbstreet.

IDA: Evenin', Tom. Have a nice time ?

TOM: Yessum. All except I stepped on

ALICE: (Quickly) Yes, we had a good time, Mother. Night, Tom!
Thank you for the lovely evening.

TOM: Here, let me help you in the

ALICE: I can manage, thank you. Good night.

TOM: Well.....nite. (Tom turns hesitantly, goes back around the
house and off left.)

..... (Alice enters the house and shuts door. She is no longer limping.)

IDA: What was Tom talkin' about just now, wantin' to help you ?

ALICE: Oh, he thought he stepped on my foot while we were dancing. He
was some worried about it.

IDA: Well, I'm some relieved you're home.

(Off left we hear "Giddup! Giddup there." Sound of hoof beats
and buggy wheels start and fade away slowly.)

DAN: So am I. Hear anything at the dance about strange music comin'
from old Henry's grave ?

ALICE: Have you heard about it, too. Everybody was talkin' about it.
And Acyl Bickford said the music made their cows dry up. And
Abner Crotty was tellin' that one of their ewes dropped twin
lambs, one white an' the other black.

DAN: Did, did they ?

IDA: You see, Daniel? I told you it was evil.

DAN: Ayah! Might be. Jus' might be. On the other hand....
(Gets up from chair) I'm gonna take me a walk. (Picks up coat)

IDA: A walk ? This time o' night!

DAN: Ayah. Talkin' 'bout lambs reminded me I gotta go an' prepare
a table.....fer some folks with enemies. Don't wait up.

(Opens the door, steps out and walks off ~~left~~ around up stage
side of house.)

(Ida and Alice look at each other, puzzled about the connection between lambs and preparing tables. Ida can't figure it out, Alice is too young to care. Ida shakes her head as the set light goes out.)

(The scarecrow walks to front of proscenium arch down right, the spotlight picks him up for the following.)

SC: Just west of Daniel's house a quarter-mile,
Abisha Kress now farms a thrifty piece.
Their fields adjoin, their common fence is stiled,
And passing years have seen their lands increase.
They differ some'at; Daniel hewn from oak,
Abisha from the buckeye's yielding form;
The one defiant to the lightning stroke,
The other bending to the wind and storm.
And Daniel now has left his rocking chair,
Has circled past his barn, the cider press,
And, knowing there's a "table to prepare",
Has gone to see his friend, Abisha Kress.

(The light comes up on Abisha's house)

ACT 1 - Scene 2.

Abisha and his wife, Sarah, are seated in their 'house' up left. Sarah is darning some socks, using as filler for the toe an old fashioned porcelain egg, the kind used years ago as encouragement for hens to 'get busy'. Abisha is near the door. He has a fly swatter in his hand and slaps it with annoying regularity against the sole of his boot. Now and again he swings it at a fly. The irritation is noticed by Sarah. She looks at him, decides to say nothing, but finally she looks sternly at Bish, he catches her look, stops the tapping. There is a pause, then a tapping on the door as Daniel enters the scene. Sarah looks again at Bish, he looks at the door, then rises and opens it.

DAN: Evenin', Bish.

BISH: Howdy, Dan'l. Come in. Sarah an' me wasn't 'spectin' no company tonight, but you're welcome.

DAN: (Enters) Sarah!

SARAH: Evenin', Daniel. Ida with you ?

DAN: No. She's woman-talkin' with Alice. I walked over.

BISH: Somethin' frettin' you ?

DAN: Well, it's likely. (Looks at Sarah)

SARAH: Oh, would you like a nice glass of buttermilk, Daniel?
I just churned today.

DAN: Think I would, Sarah. Sure it ain't no trouble ?

SARAH: Land sakes, not at all. (Exits)

BISH: Seat yourself, Dan'l.

(long pause)

DAN: Bish, you hear the news from Cheviot ?

BISH: 'Bout the Anderson Place? Yeah. Figgered you'd be over.
Didn't know when. What you aimin' to do ?

DAN: Don't know yet, but I got me a idea. You heard about the
goins-on up on Yarborough's ridge. Fiddle music an' all.

BISH: An' the green light ? (laughs)

DAN: Green light ? Never heerd about that.

BISH: That's the best part o' the story. Seems a green light dances
about the ridge keepin' time to the music.

DAN: Played by the ghost of Henry Yarborough. Anybody seen ary light ?

BISH: Not that I know of. Sarah didn't say where she heard it.

SARAH: (Entering) Heard what ? (Goes to Daniel) Here you are, Daniel.
(Turning) Heard what ?

BISH: 'Bout the strange music an' the green light. (Laughs)

SARAH: Laugh if you want to, Abisha Kress! But I'm not at all surprised!
Henry Yarborough acted strange right up to the day he died, ever
since his four children was took with cholera in forty-nine. He
was like one possessed!

BISH: He was! With a lot of hard lines. I climbed that hill beside
him all four times.

DAN: Ayah! It wrought on me, too, Bish. Who started this tongue-
waggin', Sarah ?

SARAH: Why, all the ladies were talkin' about it at Mattie Biker's
quiltin' last week.

DAN: Ida an' me didn't go.

SARAH: Well, Abisha would a'heard it if the men hadn't been out on the
porch drinkin' cherry cordial.

BISH: Sounds to me like you women folks lifted a jug or two.

SARAH: Abisha Kress! Such talk! Anyhow, they're sayin' that folks are scared to death of the place. They're avoidin' it like the plague! I told Ida about it today, Daniel.

DAN: (Thoughtfully) Ayah! She told me! (Sudden change) You know, Sarah, there must be somethin' in this! That place may be haunted! I've heard some say that the fiddle was nothin' but the devil's doin'.

SARAH: Well at least one of you will believe me! (Turns to leave)

BISH: What's got into you, Dan'l ?

DAN: (Pokes Bish in the ribs with his elbow) Sarha, this buttermilk's mighty good. Wish I had time for another glass, but I'd better be gettin' on. Mind steppin' outside for a minute, Bish ? Just a little man talk, Sarah. Won't be more'n a minute.

SARAH: I've got some darning to do anyhow, Daniel. Good night to you.

DAN: Night, Sarah.

(Bish and Daniel exit and stand down center from house door)

BISH: Like the old say goes, "A fool an' his wits are soon parted", an' you lost yours. An' what's the idea o' hunchin' me in the ribs?

DAN: I wanted Sarah to think I believed all that foolishness.

BISH: What for ? She'll tell it around, and if folks think you believe it they're gonna put stock in it.

DAN: That's what I'm countin' on, Bish! I told you I had a idea. You were goin' to Warsaw tomorrow mornin' weren't you ?

BISH: I was ? Uh...Yeah, I was! Why ?

DAN: Got a horse needs shoein'.

BISH: Um..m. Yeah!

DAN: Reckon you could get to talkin' bout this fiddle music an' all if you tried, couldn't you ?

BISH: Oh ? ...Yes, o' course. Easy.

DAN: You could make some more stops and do some more talkin'.

BISH: Sure could!

DAN: You might could get folks purty scared.

BISH: (Smiles) Yeah!

DAN: Comin' home by the ridge road near the Yarborough place, ain't you ?

BISH: Yes I was, now I think on it.

DAN: Widow Yarborough still lives there nigh to the ridge, don't she ?

BISH: Priscilla ? All by herself.

DAN: It's likely Henry taught her somethin' about fiddlin'. Always did like "Old Dan Tucker". I'd get outta bed to dance to that tune! Any time o' night! She might know it.

BISH: She might, Dan'l. (He knows now) She juust might!

DAN: Well, it's nigh on to bedtime! Good night, Bish.

BISH: Night, Dan'l. You was goin' to do some paintin' afore you go to bed, wasn't you.

DAN: Huh ?

BISH: That green paint you put on your roof last year.

DAN: Oh, that ? (Holds up his lantern, looks at it.) Yes, now that I think on it, I was. (Smiles at Bish)

CURTAIN

ACT 1 - Scene 3.

The setting is the same as in the Prologue, except that it is sunset. Abisha and Pris enter down right. He is carrying a green lantern and a fiddle. He stops right of center, she walks slowly to Henry's grave and stands. She is obviously moved.

BISH: I had no mind to hurt you by walkin' you here, Pris.

PRIS: Most of me is already here, Bish. The years of my days told in stone. Only the last chapter is missing. (Turns) You know, I think Henry would have liked your plan. It's such a huge joke.

BISH: A joke ?

PRIS: Don't you see ? When he was alive everybody ^{LIKED} ~~like~~ to be around him. He was such fun, him and his fiddle. And even when he was in one of his far-a-way moods folks didn't seem to mind. Now they won't come near his grave because of some silly rumor. Some nonsense about green lights and strange music.

BISH: Yeah, come to think on it, 'tis kinda funny, aint it ?

PRIS: And to make it even better, you and Daniel using their fear to

keep 'em away from the ridge while you run fugitive slaves right under their noses. Somewhere, I know, Henry's laughing. (Smiles) I'll help you.

BISH: Thank you, Pris. An' I know Henry'd thank you too. He was one of the first ones hereabouts to vote the Liberty Ticket. Him an' that school teacher down at Myers School in Delhi.

PRIS: He lost his job for that.

BISH: Well, Pris, you could git in trouble too by helpin' us. You know that.

PRIS: I know. I'll take my chances. "Old Dan Tucker" you said ?

BISH: "Old Dan Tucker". Can you play it ?

PRIS: Before the children came Henry used to spend hours teachin' me to play simple things. It's been a spell, an' my finger tips are soft, but I can manage, I think.

BISH: I brung this fiddle fer you. (Nods toward grave) Henry's still got his.

PRIS: I know. It belonged with him.

BISH: Now, when you play "Old Dan Tucker" that'll be the signal for Dan'l and me to hurry on up here and pick up the.... parcels.

PRIS: What about the green lantern? When do I light that ?

BISH: Every night. An' carry it about a bit, swing it around a time or two afore you set it down.

PRIS: Where do I set it ?

BISH: Right here by Henry's....well, set it right here. (He points to Henry's grave.)

PRIS: Do the slaves come from across the river ?

BISH: Some, maybe. Most of 'em will come from down river. They git on certain packets when they stop at wood landings.

PRIS: Right out in the open ?

BISH: Oh, yeah. You see, the roustabouts carry off freight an' then load firewood fer the boilers. Nobody counts how many gits off nor how many gits on. So the runaways jist git in line up on the bank an' carry firewood.

PRIS: I declare. I wondered how you got 'em here.

BISH: That's the easy part. Some of the packets are owned by abolitionists. The captains know all about it. As the old say goes ... "Always let one hand know what the other's gettin' into."

PRIS: Do the...parcels....as you call them, swim ashore here ?

BISH: Nope. Just afore the packet rounds that big bend west o' here the Captain blows his whistle three times...two long an' one short. Cyprian Hibber, lives this side o' the bend, rows out in his skiff(chuckles). He calls it "The Ark".....an' takes 'em off the boat.

PRIS: "The Ark"? How fitting.

BISH: Now Hibber an' his two boys will row up river till they see your green light. Then they'll pull in to the sand flat down there an' the boys will lead the runaways up here.

PRIS: And that's when I play "Old Dan Tucker" till you and Daniel come and get them. I see now.

BISH: (Gives her the fiddle) But, mind you, don't play nothin' else. An' don't play anywhere else but here.

PRIS: Play nothing else and nowhere else. I'll remember.

BISH: We're sure much obliged to you fer your trouble, Pris. We'd like to pay you somethin'.

PRIS: I'm already paid, Abisha.

BISH: How do you mean ?

PRIS: I have no idea how the future may judge what we are doing, but for Henry it's a....well....

BISH: Yes, Pris ?

PRIS: However strange and grotesque it may be, it is a kind of immortality.

CURTAIN

ACT 1 - Scene 4.

The stage is dark, and bare of all except ballet members and the scarecrow. He stands up rt. center. The backdrop is the outdoor scene. As the different ballet members speak lines concerning what is happening at the river's edge, they look off up left. Other lines are spoken in groups or singly as the situation changes. They are dressed in the ballet costumes which will be used at the opening of Act 2. When Jason and George enter later on, they carry small lanterns and old fashioned rifles. George also carries a light jacket over his arm.

VOICE: The small Ark now is 'moverin' along,
Stirring the dark waves into muted song.

SC: Four times its keel has marked the river's edge
Beneath a green light beckoning from the ridge.

VOICE: A strange unblinking eye, an evil eye,
A fiddler who is dead but will not die.

VOICE: Another story tells that it's an old
Chief of the Shawnees, long interred and cold.
Driven from his grave by that devils' riot,
He's looking for a place of peace and quiet.

SC: Nurtured in fear, a legend here has sprung;
Unchecked, it vaults the valleys tongue by tongue.

VOICE: The skiff draws near, it scrapes upon the sand.
See, there's a figure rises with outstretched hand.

VOICE: A dark hand, reaching in the lantern's light,
It takes the lantern from a hand that's white.

VOICE: Dark shadows blend together at the bow,
Bending to lift a smaller figure now
Gently, so gently, And without a sound
They wade the shallows onto Freedom ground.

SC: Not yet. They stand not yet on Freedom soil.
The hunters who'd return them to their toil
Will follow soon. Their thankful prayers can rise
In freedom only under northern skies,
Across Lake Erie.

VOICE: But they're weary,
And they're frightened

SC: They'll not be hurried on
Until they've rested and their fears are gone.

VOICE: Look! There's a dark one kneels with upraised hand
And pours upon his head the river sand.

VOICE: It is not sand. It is a shower of stars
That frees his soul of hatred, hurt and scars.

VOICE: They're coming now, climbing this land, grown wild
To willows. One of them carries

VOICE: A child!

SC: "One black steer, a heifer and calf, both brown",
They shall be called along the underground.

VOICE: The skiff moves off into the dark once more

VOICE: The waves will smooth again the ruffled shore.

ALL: Shh....Shhh....Shhh....

JASON: (Off left) Watch your fottin'. Caint show too much light. I'm feered someun'll see us from the hill cross river.

GEO: (Off) If'n they do, Jason, they'll likely figger we're out lookin' a throw line.

ELI: Don't worry none about us, Massa.

(Enter here in row...Jason, Woman and Child, Eli, George)

JASON: I aint your master. Aint nobody your master no more.

ELI: Yes, Massa.

GEO: What's your name ?

ELI: Folks call me Eli....suh. *AFORE*

JASON: That's better. You gotta git shet of that 'massa' talk. You got a space to go ~~for~~ you light in Canada. You git in a tight an' call somebody 'massa' they'll know right enuf you're a runaway.

GEO: Jason, let's rest a spell here. I low that woman could use a mite o' rest. I wanted to tote the youngun' up the hill fer 'er, but she wouldn't no ways hear of it.

JASON: I reckon we can stop fer a bit. That youngun' is sure some quiet.

(Woman sits down in front of scarecrow.)

ELI: Dey done give 'im some sleepin' spirits 'cross de river, suh. Some para....para...

JASON: Paregoric ? Your guides gave 'im paregoric ?

ELI: Yessuh, dat's it. We wuz hidin' in de woods an' dey wuz feered de youngun' would cry while de paterollers wuz goin' down de road.

GEO: Were the patrollers after you, Eli ?

ELI: No, suh. Dey done caught de pore slave dey wuz huntin'. We heerd de screamin' way back in de scrub where we wuz hidin'.

GEO: Screamin' ?

ELI: Yes, mas....yessuh. When dey ketch a runaway dey cuts off one o' his ears.

GEO: What !

JASON: Cut off one o' their ears ?

ELI: Dat's why my woman here won't let nobody tote de youngun'
She gonna....kill it....fore she let dem paterollers fetch
it back.

JASON: She can't do that. She'd be hung.

ELI: Beggin' yore pardon, suh....dey wouldn't hang her. Dey jest whip
'er fer killin' de massa's property. Same as a pig er a chicken.

GEO: Well, first critter tries to git aholt o' either o' you, I'm
gonna cut off both his ears down the middle o' his head. Don't
you be a-feered none, woman.

JASON: We better git movin', George. Must be nigh on two o'clock.
Bish an' Dan'l aint gonna git much shut-eye as it is.

(George goes to woman and holds out his arms for the baby.
She looks at him for a moment, then slowly hands the child
to him. He unwraps the ragged shawl from the baby, drops
it on the ground, and wraps the child in his own jacket.
He places the child on his left shoulder, grips his rifle
a bit tighter as Eli helps his woman to her feet. Silently
they move off into the darkness, stage right.

CURTAIN

ACT 1 - Scene 5.

This scene takes place in front of the Act Curtain while the stage
is being set-up for the next scene. Bigelow enters first carrying
the piece of shawl dropped by George in the preceding scene. They
enter down left and exit down right at end of scene. In the
distance we hear a cow bawling at frequent intervals.

BIG: I told you I thought there was something funny about those
ghost stories I've been hearing. I was right, Marshall. This
proves I was right. (Holds up the shawl.)

PIATT: I don't figger it that way. That rag mighta been dropped in
the clearin' a week ago.

BIG: Huh-uh. It rained yesterday. The rag is dry. It had to be last
night.

PIATT: Still don't prove nothin'. Mighta belonged to one of the
womenfolk hereabouts.

BIG: Marshall, once a year the plantation owners give the slave children a dress made of this material. When it's worn out the women cut it up to wrap their babies in. And the foot-prints on the river bank show two people wearing boots, two barefoot, an' as sure as my name is Bigelow, one of 'em carried a baby. An' there's a five-hundred dollar reward offered for a man, woman an' child who were trailed as far as Louisville.

PIATT: An' you think they landed here ?

BIG: Sure of it. One sniff of this and a bloodhound could trail 'em all the way to hell, or wherever they're hidin'.

PIATT: I don't think nobody hereabouts would take 'em in.

BIG: Whose side you on, Marshall ?

PIATT: Don't make no never-mind, Mr. Bigelow. Law's law. An' I gotta uphold it. But it don't mean I gotta side with it.

BIG: Marshall, I want those slaves and the people who are hiding them. They're breaking a federal law.

PIATT: Well, you find 'em, I'll arrest 'em. But I'll not do aught to help you.

BIG: I don't need your help to find them, Piatt.

PIATT: Are you bringin' in hounds, Bigelow ?

BIG: Don't need 'em, Marshall.

PIATT: You think you know where the fugitives are hidin' ?

BIG: Marshall, there are lots of southern sympathizers in this area. They trade with the south. They talk...for profit. I have a long list of names, and two of them live right below the ridge. If I used hounds they'd lead me right to the place, yes. But the underground would know that we had discovered their method of operation. I don't want that.

PIATT: Why not ?

BIG: Because I want them to continue, just as they are. They'll keep on bringing runaways up that ridge and I'll catch some more. And each one is worth at least two hundred dollars.

PIATT: Well, you better ketch 'em afore they git to Cheviot.

BIG: Why Cheviot ?

PIATT: Cause it's easier to git a saint outta Heaven than to git a runaway outta Cheviot.

BIG: Marshall, you noticed that cow that's been bawlin' for the past few minutes ?

PIATT: What about it ?

BIG: Somebody's not done their milkin' this morning. Somebody who was out too late last night....or else he's away from home.... maybe on his way to Cheviot. Come on, Marshall, let's find that cow.

PIATT: Yeah, an' your five hundred dollars.

BIG: Why, you sound upset, Piatt. What's the matter ?

PIATT: God forgive me, I sell my soul an' you git paid fer it.

ACT 1 - Scene 6.

The setting is the same as ACT 1, Scene 1, except that only Daniel Webbstreet's house appears on the stage. All of left stage is empty.

The scarecrow stands down right near the proscenium arch. As the action begins on stage, he slips off down rt.

SC: Most everyone's now been roostered from their beds,
And breakfast fires have spiced the morning air.
In Daniel's cellar though three dozy heads
Still wander in their dream and find it fair.

Rumor was served with breakfast at every table;
Beams of an unfinished barn flew into place
Last night, 'twas said....from hayloft up to gable.
Oh, heads were really bowed when saying grace !

Daniel is late performing his morning rites;
A bawling cow summons him to the chore.
Planting of days, and harvesting of nights,
The human frame was never fashioned for.

(Daniel and Ida enter down rt. inside house. Daniel carries a milk pail.)

DAN: Them was good vittles, Ida. Enjoyed breakfast.

IDA: You ought to after bein' out half the night.

DAN: Ayah. Now don't fret yourself. I'll be in the shed if'n you need me.

IDA: I know I shouldn't be afraid, Daniel, but I just can't help thinking what would happen if we were caught with those runaway slaves in the root cellar.

DAN: Aint nobody gonna catch us, Ida. An' if'n they should, there's a higher law that I'm a sight more afeered of breakin'.

IDA: When I looked in the face of that poor woman last night I saw things that made me ashamed. Do they have to stay down there all day ? That cellar is so damp this time of year.

DAN: No, don't reckon. Just keep 'em away from windows an' doors, an' don't let nobody in. The young-un might cry.

IDA: How long you plan to keep them here, Daniel ?

DAN: Just till dark. We'll move 'em to West Fork tonight. From there they'll go on to Dunlap, an' Oxford, an' on to Lake Erie. Let 'em rest long as they want. They're some tired from runnin' an' hidin' an' climbin' that hill last night. (Ida looks thoughtful) What's the matter ?

IDA: I was thinkin' about another hill the young one has to climb.

DAN: Ayah. That he does. Well, I'm gonna have an'ailin' cow if'n I don't git to her quick like.

IDA: Oh.....Jessie an' the boy are comin' over this mornin'. The baby's cut his first tooth an' Jessie wants his grandfather to see it.

DAN: (Chuckles) Well, whatta you know. His first one, eh ? The little rascal.....(Opens door, starts outside, looks up left and stops) Ida! Don't come to the door, but

IDA: What is it, Daniel ?

DAN: Marshall Piatt an' another feller, a stranger, are standin' at the edge of the woods over in the pasture.

IDA: The marshall ? Oh, Daniel !

DAN: Sssh! Send Alice over to fetch Jessie an' the boy right away.

IDA: Jessie ? What for ?

DAN: Never mind that now. Tell Jessie to wear a sun-bonnet. An' have her bring the hired man with her. He's to wear a big straw hat.

IDA: Daniel, I don't understand! You want Jessie to get in trouble too ?

DAN: Ida, do as I tell you.

IDA: All right, Daniel. (Starts off right)

DAN: Oh, an' Ida! Tell Alice to stop at Abisha's house an' give him this message. "There's a black steer, a brown heifer an' a calf I want him to take to market fer me." Got that ?

IDA: "A black steer, a brown heifer an' a calf you want him to take to market". But why doesn't she just tell him what's goin' on ?

DAN: There might be somebody at his house too. Now hurry! They're walkin' this way. They musta caught on to somethin'. I'm goin' out an' see what they're up to. (Exits)

IDA: Let's see...Alice is to come right away; she's to wear a sun-bonnet.....(Exits off rt. mumbling to herself)

DAN: (Crosses to center stage, holds up his hand in greeting to Marshall Piatt off upper left and calls out) Mornin', Marshall Piatt!

PIATT: (Calls off stage) Hiah, Dan'l.

DAN: (Calls) What brings you out this way ?

PIATT: (Enters with Bigelow up left) Jes lookin' around, Dan'l. (Piatt and Bigelow cross down to Dan.)

DAN:* Well, don't take it unkindly if'n I don't ask you in. Howdy, stranger.

PIATT: This here's Uriah Bigelow. Daniel Webbstreet.

DAN: Mr. Bigelow!

BIG: We quite understand, Mr. Webbstreet. Milking to do. A bit late, isn't it ?

DAN: Ayah. That it is....that it is.

BIG: Up late last night, Mr. Webbstreet ?

DAN: Up late ? You a farmer, Mr. Bigelow ?

BIG: No.

DAN: Never sat up all night with a ewe that's lambin', eh ?

BIG: Can't say that I have.

PIATT: Dan'l....Mr. Bigelow's lookin' fer some runaway slaves.

DAN: No, you wouldn't sit up with a ewe that's lambin'. A slave hunter, eh ?

PIATT: Sorry, Dan'l, but there's reason to believe they're hid hereabouts. Now I don't mean to hector you none, I jes' gotta search the place.

DAN: I hold no gredge agin' you fer that, Marshall....long as you got a warrant.

PIATT: Well, no, Dan'l....I....I haven't. Didn't spect you to give me no trouble.

BIG: Marshall, you can stand here and argue if you want to, but I'm gonna search the place right now.

DAN: You try that, Mr. Bigelow....an' I'll kill you. (Quietly)

BIG: Did you hear that, Piatt ?

PIATT: I did, Bigelow. I aint deaf. An' I wouldn't blame him. He's got the law on his side.

DAN: Ayah. You're not dealin' with slaves now, Bigelow. Marshall, I had no mind to trouble you with the warrant, but my daughter, Jessie, is bringin' her baby over after bit an' she's mighty easy upset. Now if'n you was to wait till she's gone I got no objections.

PIATT: Well, I calk'late that'll save me a trip to the city. That the way you figger, Bigelow ?

BIG: I say to hell with the warrant. Let's search the place now.

PIATT: Nope, dassent do that. How long's Jessie stoppin', Dan'l ?

DAN: Jest a few minutes. Long enough to pick up some apples I had winterin-over in the root cellar fer her.

(Sound of horse and wagon off rt. coming close and stopping.)

SAM L.: (Shouts off rt.) Whoa, there....Whoa!

DAN: That must be Jessie now. Sounds like Sam Laukridge, her hired man. So jest act peaceable an' don't let on that nothin's wrong.

PIATT: Don't fault me fer what I gotta do, Dan'l.

DAN: No hard feelin's, John.

JESSIE: (Comes around up stage of house and down toward Dan)
Papa...hello, Papa....(Sees the other men)....Why, what's wrong ?

DAN: (Going to meet Jessie and baby) Nothin' wrong, child....
These men are lookin' around fer....fer some property.

JESSIE: But Alice said.....

DAN: Alice tell you I had some apples, fer you to take home, did she ?
Well, I have. Let's go in the house. Your mother's waitin' fer you.

SAM: (Comes around up stage of house and down toward door.)

DAN: Howdy, Sam. Come right along...got some apples fer you to carry to the wagon. Right inside. I wanta see that grandson o' mine. Got a new tooth, has he ? (Chuckles) I'll be back in jest a minute, Mar...er....John.

PIATT: (Calls after him) Take your time, Dan'l.

(Dan, Jessie, et. al. enter house and close door.)

DAN: Jessie...San....I aint got time to explain everythin' now, but come into the kitchen. I need your help.

JESSIE: But, Papa....what's....

DAN: Ssssh...not so loud. In here quick. (They exit off rt.)

BIGELOW: Marshall, they're up to something. I say let's search the place right now.

PIATT: Got a warrant in your pocket there?

BIG: Damn your warrant !

PIATT: Only time you can search without a warrant is when you're sure a crime is bein' committed.

BIG: We are sure.

PIATT: Nothin' o' the kind. Aint sure at all. Leastwise I aint. An' you got nothin' to say about it.

BIG: If they get away, Marshall.....

PIATT: Aint nobody gettin' away. If you're so all fired worried about it, stand down there where you can see the back door. (He points to down left. Bigelow goes there and looks across to down rt.)

(Daniel enters down rt. inside his 'house', crosses to door and peeks through, sees the two men just standing around. He looks worriedly off rt., looks back out the front door, then exits again rt.)

PIATT: (Calls) See anythin' ?

BIG: No, not yet.

PIATT: Anyone comes out, front or back, one of us'd see 'em. Simmer down.

(There is a long pause.)

BIG: What's goin' on in there, Piatt. They're takin' a long time.

PIATT: Only bin' a couple minutes, Bigelow. Aint every day a grandson gits his first tooth. That five hundred dollars burnin' a hole in your pocket already ?

BIG: Aw, you give me a pain, Marshall.

PIATT: Yeah. In the pocketbook.

(Long pause)

(Inside the house we see Daniel and Ida, with three figures dressed as Jessie, the baby and the hired man, cross from rt. to the door. The figures must keep their faces from being seen by the audience. But not too obviously hiding. The man exits through the door first, followed by the woman, keeping their backs to Piatt and Bigelow. Dan'l and Ida do all the talking. As they exit there is the sound of a wagon approaching and stopping. After they round the upstage side of the house, the wagon starts up and fades off.)

IDA: Oh, I wish you could stay longer, Jessie. I see you so little. An' the baby is just precious !

DAN: Ayah! An' take care of that tooth. (He chucks the baby under the chin.) Just like his grandfather, that one. I had my first tooth when I was just a month old. That I did.

IDA: Oh, an' those apples make the best applesauce, Jessie. I made Daniel some last night. He loved it.

DAN: Come back again soon, Jessie. I'll try to git over your way next day or two. Put them apples in a cool place, Sam. They'll keep for several weeks.

IDA: Bye...Bye, dear.

(Dan and Ida return from around the house as the wagon pulls away.)

IDA: (Stands at the door) Comin' in the house, Dan'l ?

DAN: Nope, don't reckon, Ida. I'll git on with my milkin'. Well, Piatt, you can search now, if'n you're a mind to.

PIATT: Sure it's all right, Dan'l ?

DAN: Ayah. Go right ahead.

(Three figures dressed in the slave clothes cross the inside of the house and exit through the front door.)

BIG: Wait. Stop them! Marshall, stop those slaves. I told you....

(They turn around. Jessie, her baby, and the hired man.)

BIG: What's goin' on here ?

DAN: Nothin'. That's my daughter an' her baby. Sam's the hired man.

PIATT: They left a few minutes ago, Dan'l. Or did they ? Who was that left, Dan'l ?

DAN: Did you see their faces, Marshall ?

PIATT: No, I didn't.

DAN: Neither did I. Beats me. Jist caint figger it.

BIG: You'll figure it out in jail.

DAN: Oh, did you see their faces, Mr. Bigelow ?

BIG: No, I didn't; I didn't have to. I know who it was alright.

DAN: Oh, but you'd have to see 'em if'n you're goin' to swear to it in court.

PIATT: Dan's right, Bigelow. You know an' I know, but we can't prove nothin'.

BIG: (Starts off up rt.) Well, it's not too late to catch 'em.

DAN: Walkin', Bigelow ?

BIG: (Stops and comes back to face Daniel.) All right, Mr. Webbstreet, I'm not finished with you yet. Go milk your cow. Cause the day'll come when you won't be around to do it.

DAN: Well, in that case, I'd take it kindly if'n you milk 'er fer me.

PIATT: Come on, Bigelow. Aint no use hangin' round here.

(Piatt and Bigelow start off up left.)

DAN: Oh, Marshall....don't fault me fer what I had to do.

PIATT: (Smiles) No hard feelin's, Dan'l.

(CURTAIN)

ACT 2 - Scene 1

(A ballet depicting the conflict between escaping slave and slave hunter opens the act. Principal characters in the dance are, of course, the Fiddler, the Slave Hunter, a Woman Slave, and the forces of nature listed in the Incantation which follows: Flame, Bat, Raven, Willow Wand, Viper, Trees, Leaves, etc.)

Incantation - (To be prerecorded) This concludes the dance and precedes the entry of the Scarecrow.

I charge you by the Raven's Wing,
The Haunted Mill where buzzards swing -
Begone! (Echo) Begone!
By Willow-Wand and Hazel Clump,
Spunk-water Flame in an oak-tree stump -
Begone ! (Echo) Begone!

Begone, you hunter of men, this night!
Or here by a Venomous Viper's bite
You'll die! (Echo) You'll die!
Waiting for you at the head of the draw
A Black Bat flies with a poisoned claw -
You'll die! (Echo) You'll die!

Raven's Wing, Rattlesnake,
Willow-Wand, Hazel Brake,
Black Bat, Haunted Mill,
Drive the Hunter from this hill!

(At the conclusion of the ballet the Scarecrow enters down rt. in front of the Act Curtain. While he talks the next scene is set up.)

SC: The month of May has jumped the pasture bars,
And left the whole wide blooming world to June.
But still, when come the stealthy dark and stars,
The near hills echo to the Fiddler's tune.

So valley folk have shunned this haunted peak;
The hillside road, unused, has grown to thistle.
In nearby woods the deer play hide--and--seek;
They fear no hound, they hear no hunter's whistle.
The small 'Ark' has been moverin', spite o' fears;
Friendly hands have cared for its human freight,
Held back their unearned share of pain and tears,
Lessened for you a heritage of hate.

But then, it's peaceful now...the sun is bright,
And there's not one....(Looks up, and a crow caws)
Just one black crow to scold me!

There'll be a celebration here tonight.
How do I know so much ? (Crow caws again)
A little bird told me. (Scarecrow frowns)

This too I know....trouble is very near.
A wind from eastward whispers of gathering storms;
Low murmurings, scarce heard, of rage and fear
Drift from the South; Northward the lightning forms!

But as I said....it's peaceful here and gay.
The springtime air is vigorous and hearty...
And long before the sun unwinds this day,
These women-folk will plan a square-dance party.

(As the scarecrow speaks his last line, the Act Curtain rises on a tea party. It is mid-afternoon, the setting is to represent the front yard of the Webbstreet home. The house does not show. There are rustic outdoor chairs and benches around a small table. On the table an antique silver tea service and cups. A plate of small cakes sits to one side of the table. Jessie is pouring her tea, the others have been served and are seated. Occasional bird-songs are heard to add color to the outdoor scene. A steamboat whistle is heard far off during the scene.)

SARAH: Do you mean to tell me, Priscilla, that you're the one who's been scaring people to death all these past weeks.

PRIS: Yes, Sarah. I'm the guilty one.

SARAH: And to think I believed all those dreadful bodings.

JESSIE: Don't feel too bad, Sarah. Everyone else still believes them.

IDA: And don't forget, the men folks want people to go on believing.
At least until their work is done up there.

JESSIE: Papa says there are more fugitives coming all the time, so we must watch our tongues.

SARAH: That Abisha! Why didn't he tell me ?

PRIS: Daniel thought the less you and Ida knew about it, the more convincing your fear would be to the neighbors. And you were convincing, Sarah. (Smiles as Sarah looks abashed.)

JESSIE: Mother finally caught on when she noticed that every time we heard the music Papa left in a hurry.....

IDA: And when he returned there were more runaways to hide.

PRIS: That was bound to be noticed eventually.

IDA: I never knew there were so many ways to hide people

JESSIE: And feed them. Alice fed one group in the barn by carrying food out in the egg basket. She'd come in with the eggs, and anybody watching would think that's what she went out for.

SARAH: Abisha told me once how he hid a family of five in an old brick kiln near Cheviot.

PRIS: We'll soon have more men to help us and then they can take turn about.

JESSIE: Isn't that dangerous ?

PRIS: Not so much now as it would have been a few months ago. People are getting riled up about the new laws they're talking about in Washington.

IDA: Daniel says they would forbid jury trials for fugitives. And that way they could carry off freed slaves.

SARAH: I read in the Hillsboro News that in one town up river, some folks mobbed the courthouse and took the slaves right away from the sheriff.

JESSIE: Well, good for them.

PRIS: Ida, how do you suppose that slave hunter, Bigelow, ever found out about that young couple with the baby. You know, the ones Daniel hid a couple of weeks ago.

IDA: Oh, probably some of our copperhead neighbors who wanted to make trouble for us.

JESSIE: And they almost did. I never was so frightened.

IDA: Well, it didn't scare your father, thank heavens!

PRIS: Amen! Anyway we're almost through up on the ridge. We can go back to the Anderson Road station as soon as Bigelow leaves town. Then maybe I can get some sleep.

SARAH: Maybe everybody can get some sleep. That fiddling does keep a person awake. Though I won't be scared now that I know who's playing it.

IDA: More tea, Priscilla ?

PRIS: No thank you, Ida. I really must get back home. I have work to do, and I have to do it in the daytime. I never know when I'll be busy at night.

(Sound of approaching horse and buggy off rt.)

IDA: That must be Alice and Tom.

SARAH: Oh,....has Tom spoken for her yet ? I knew he'd been courtin' her all winter.

IDA: Not yet, Sarah. I don't think it'll be long though. They both graduated from high school this year.

JESSIE: You should see them. They're so much in love. They're wonderful to watch. (Laughs)

IDA: Don't laugh. You were even worse.

(A voice calls "Whoa....Ho, now.")

IDA: Ssssh....Not a word now. They'll hear us. Sure you won't have more tea, Sarah? How about another cake?

SARAH: No more cake. But I'll take the receipt for the cake. Finest I ever tasted.

(Alice's voice is heard off rt.)

ALICE: Well, it looks like we have company. (She rounds the house) Oh, what a nice party. May we join you. Afternoon, Mrs. Yarborough....Mrs. Kress....

(General greetings all around)

ALICE: Mother, guess what? Tom has a job with the Cincinnati and Indianapolis Railroad. Isn't that wonderful?

IDA: Railroad? Tom?

TOM: Yessum. They're gettin' ready to build a road along the river right below Prospect Hill and Warsaw. I saw the straw-boss today in Warsaw and he gave me a job.

IDA: Well, how nice. A new railroad, huh? Along the river, you said. (She and Pris exchange troubled glances)

TOM: Yessum. Goin' to start right away.

JESSIE: Congratulations, Tom. That's good news.

TOM: Thank you, Jessie. (He's shy)

ALICE: Oh, and Mother! They were sayin' in Warsaw that awful Mr. Bigelow had gone back to Maysville.

PRIS: The slave hunter....gone back?

TOM: That's what we heard, Mrs. Yarborough.

IDA: Well, that calls for a celebration.

ALICE: And, Mother....Tom wants to talk to Papa tonight. Do you think.....

IDA: (Quietly) I think it will be just fine, my dear. Just fine, Tom.

TOM: Thank you, maam.

JESSIE: (Hugs Alice) Oh, sister, I'm so glad....and Tom....Oh, it's....it's... well, this really does call for a party. Let's have a square dance!

(All delighted except Tom)

TOM: Well, I...I...I don't dance so good.

IDA: Nonsense, Tom. Are you afraid of dancing on Alice's foot? Let me tell you about that.

ALICE: Now, Mother! Please, Tom, it would be such fun.

TOM: Oh...all right, Alice....if you'd like to.

SARAH: Well, I hope Abisha hasn't been pullin' any stumps this afternoon, cause we're going to dance tonight.

TOM: Can I come up and fetch you down tonight, Mrs. Yarborough ?

PRIS: How nice, Tom...but I think I'd better not. I have some other plans already made. But I do hope you and Alice will be very happy.

TOM: Yessum! But I haven't talked to her father yet...he might not.....

PRIS: I think he will.....and be very proud, too.

IDA: Well, you two just climb back in the buggy and go invite the neighbors.

ALICE: Do we have to invite the Rathburn family, Mother ?

IDA: Yes, dear....

ALICE: Fanny, too ?

IDA: Fanny, too.

ALICE: Oh, shucks !

IDA: Shall I get out the bandages for tonight ?

ALICE: What bandages ?

IDA: For a sore foot, dear....for a sore foot !

CURTAIN

ACT 2, Scene 2

(This takes place in front of the olio curtain. Bigelow and Ferris enter down left and cross the stage during scene.)

BIG: It's very simple, Ferris. I let these farmers think I'd left town, because as long as I'm around they'll be too suspicious....too cautious. If they think I'm gone, they'll be easier to fool.

FERRIS: But aint it wastin' time hangin' round her this-a-way jist to git even with some hick. We could be runnin' down some more slaves, huh ?

BIG: This 'hick', as you call him, cost me five hundred dollars, by gettin' three runaways out right under my eyes. I saw 'em go, mind you, an' didn't know it. I'm not forgettin' a thing like that.

FERRIS: All right. (Sighs) Whadda we do ?

BIG: We catch him with an escaped slave, an' put him in prison.

FERRIS: Where do we get a slave, huh? If'n I had one, I'd turn him in for the bounty.

BIG: I've got one...a woman. An' when we're through with her, we still get the bounty.

FERRIS: Where'd you git a slave, huh ?

BIG: She was turned over to me by the court up in Columbus. I'm takin' her back to her master. But he can wait a few more days, I reckon.

FERRIS: Well, whadda you want me fer ? How do I earn my hire ?

BIG: Here's the whole plan. We'll fetch this woman up to Fiddler's ridge an' turn her loose...we'll tell her....

FERRIS: Turn her loose ? What makes you figger she'll wait around fer this... what's his name ?

BIG: Daniel Webbstreet.

FERRIS: What makes you figger she'll wait around fer him? Huh?

BIG: Simple. I'll tell her Webbstreet bought her and plans to set her free. She'll run right to him, you watch an' see. Tell these runaways they're gonna be free an' they'll believe anything.

FERRIS: Well, that settles that. What next, huh?

BIG: We'll send her to the house of that widow lady lives here. Course we'll watch every minute from the woods.

FERRIS: What's the widow lady got to do with it ?

BIG: I'm not too sure. She couldn't live so close up here an' not have something to do with the whole set-up. But, you mark my words, the fiddle music will start soon after, an' Webbstreet will come high-tailin' up the hill.

FERRIS: Webbstreet takes the girl....an' we take Webbstreet. Huh ?

BIG: (Mocks him) Un-huh! Right.

FERRIS: An' all this carryin' on will be on Fiddler's ridge ?

BIG: That's what I said.

FERRIS: Well....(hesitates)....I've heerd some mighty spooky things about that place. Suppose the fiddler's ghost is playin' that music ? What then ?

BIG: Well, what then ?

FERRIS: I don't want no part o' hants.

BIG: Well, there aren't 'no hants' up there. You satisfied ?

FERRIS: Well, I dunno....but I'll go with you.

BIG: That's brave of you.

FERRIS: Wait. I jist thought o' sumpthin' else. Suppose that slave woman tells the widow that we turned her loose? Huh?

BIG: She won't do that. (Smiles)

FERRIS: How do you know she won't ? Huh? She could spoil the whole plan if she talks.

BIG: I know she won't. Because she can't talk. She's mute.

CURTAIN

ACT 2, Scene 3.

(The setting is the same as Act 1, Scene 6, except that it is night and moonlight floods the stage. Off rt., out in the barn, a square dance is in progress and we hear the sounds of fiddle music and the caller's voice. There are occasional outbursts of talk and laughter. The Scarecrow is standing in the moonlight down stage rt. by the proscenium arch.)

SC: The legend now is drawing to its close,
And soon the sleepers shall return to rest.
What really happened next one only knows -
And he lies buried on the mountain's crest.
Much that I've told you'll find in ancient volumes,
Old letters, thick with dust upon a shelf,
In musty almanacs, newspaper columns;
The rest was known to no one but myself.

And I remember well - this night they danced;
The old folks wheezing through a quaint quadrille.
The youngsters swung their partners and romanced -
(Pause)
And danger climbed, cat-footed, up the hill!
And yet, this night they danced, not unaware
That trouble might be theirs at rooster-crow;
Tomorrow they will face tomorrow's care -
"Swing the lady on your left and do-si-do" ;

Oh, here were men brimmed with a dream so tall
They'd make Earth over. Not the narrow room,
But livable, and wide enough for all,
Where each might share the planting and the bloom.

(Fanny Rathburn enters from up rt. around the house. The Scarecrow watches her for a moment or two as she puts her fingers to her lips and smooths her eyebrows, brushes back her hair and primps. Then the Scarecrow points to the audience and then to Fanny as if to say, "Watch now". He exits. As he leaves, Jason follows Fanny on stage. He stops up stage rt.)

JASON: That moon shore is downin' purty.

FANNY: (Startled) Oh....Jason. (She wanted Tom) Is it ?

JASON: Pears to me it is. Reckon fer a girl, though, it looks better over a feller's shoulder.

FANNY: I wouldn't know.

JASON: Oh yeah, it does, Fanny. On t'other hand now, a feller don't like to look at the moon straight on. It looks purtier reflected like... in a girl's eyes.

FANNY: You don't say ?

JASON: Oh, yessum, I do say. Fer a fact. An' right now I've got a powerful handerin' to look at the moon fer a spell.

FANNY: You might try the watering trough by the barn. I'm sure it's reflected there.

JASON: Well, now, that's real thoughty of you, Fanny. Come to think on it though, mebbe the only thing a feller'd see in your eyes is...Tom ?

(Fanny is silent and turns away)

JASON: Tom's marryin' up with Alice. You heerd that tonight, didn't you ?

FANNY: (Whirls around) Good enough for him! Let him spend his life buried on a farm! I wanted him to be somebody!

JASON: Un-huh! Your husband.

FANNY: Well, I had better plans for him than scratching up the ground.

JASON: Yessum. Pears to me, though, a feller cain't walk the earth very long 'thout scratchin' it up one way or 'nother. Least he kin do is plant somethin' in the scratches.

FANNY: Oh, don't preach at me!

JASON: Well, now, I had no mind to sermon you.

FANNY: What did you follow me out here for then ?

JASON: Oh, I jist seen you dancin' in there, an' you looked purtier than blue mornin' glories on a fence.

FANNY: And you like to pick morning glories, huh ?

JASON: No maam...I'd jist like to see 'em growin' round my house.

(Fanny does not answer)

JASON: Fanny, you got no call to worry 'bout Tom. Lots of other fellers around.

FANNY: Meaning yourself ?

JASON: Yessum, that was my general idea.

FANNY: Aren't you afraid that I might jump at your offer...just to spite Tom?

JASON: No maam, you jist jump right ahead. I'll be glad to catch you.:

FANNY: Oh, Jason, go away! Leave me alone! (She's near to tears)

JASON: Yessum. (He does not move)

FANNY: (After a pause) Well...haven't you gone ?

JASON: No maam....I don't think so.

FANNY: Not even after the way I've treated you ?

JASON: No maam. You're skittish as a colt right now, but you'll simmer down some after we git married.

FANNY: Married ? You want to marry me ?

JASON: Oh, I meant to tell you. Must have slipped my mind.

FANNY: (Starts to laugh and it turns to tears)

JASON: (After a long pause) That moon shore is downin' purty.

FANNY: (Through tears) Is it ?

JASON: Pears to me it is. Reckon fer a girl though.....

FANNY: (Still a little weepy) It looks prettier over a feller's shoulder.

JASON: Now take a feller...he don't like to look at the moon straight on...

FANNY: I know.

JASON: An' I got a powerful hankerin' to look at the moon fer a spell.

FANNY: Through blue morning glories on a fence ?

JASON: Maam, that'd be the purtiest sight I ever saw.

FANNY: Thank you, Jason.

(Jason moves toward Fanny, she turns to face him, but they are interrupted by Daniel's voice off rt. Jason takes Fanny's arm and together they exit down left. Daniel enters a moment later, followed by Abisha. Both are mopping their faces with handkerchiefs, both are tired from dancing.)

DAN: (Off right) I cain't remember when I been so tarnal tired.

- BISH: I'm a mite tuckered myself. (Here they come on) I been dancin' with that Mrs. Hylop, an' every time the caller yelled "swing your partner" I felt like hollerin' "Giddy-ap, there".
- DAN: Ayah, she's a big woman to heft, all right. (Dan searches under a bench near the house) Let's see, I hid that demijohn hereabouts...Oh, here it is. Elderberry bloom wine. Try it.
- BISH: (Pulls the cork) Smells good. Well, here's to Alice and Tom.
(Drinks) Elderberry bloom, you say ?
- DAN: Ayah. Feller needs a tonic this time o' year. (Drinks)
- BISH: Couple o' drinks o' that I wouldn't care what time o' year it was.
(Dan puts the demijohn back under bench)
- BISH: Tom goin' to give you a hand here on the place ?
- DAN: Nope. He's good at cypherin' so he's gonna clerk fer the new railroad. That's the way I'd want it. They got to learn to plow their own furrow. Only way they'll grow strong. (Chuckles) Had to smile there a couple o' minutes ago when Tom stole a kiss from Alice. Right out in front of everybody. She turned red as a haw tree.
- BISH: Aw, shucks. Ain't no such thing as stealin' a kiss. It always happens right under the girl's nose.
- DAN: (Laughs) Youngun's....Not a worry in the world. Well, they'll git 'em soon enough. (Pause) Bish, how many runaway slaves you figger we've passed through here ?
- BISH: I never kept no reckonin', Dan'l, but I'd say nigh on two hundred. Here an' the Anderson place.
- DAN: (Thoughtfully) Two hundred.....that ain't a very important chunk o' the human race, is it ?
- BISH: Depends on how you're sightin'. It takes a heap o' huckleberries to make a pie. An' when you're eatin' it, there ain't no way of knowin' which huckleberry's givin' you the most flavor.
- DAN: Ayah, reckon you're right. But I was jist thinkin' 'bout all the slaves still down there. Must be thousands of 'em. (Sighs) It'll be a never endin' job gittin' 'em out.
- BISH: What's the matter with you tonight? You tired ?
- DAN: I reckon. Mebbe I'm afeerd, too.
- BISH: You, Dan'l ? I never seen you afeerd o' anything that bit, clawed or butted.
- DAN: Mebbe so, but seein' Alice so happy tonight worried me some. Made me wonder if I got a right to keep on riskin' the happiness o' my family the way I'm doin'.

BISH: Dan'l, your family is prouder o' you than a settin' hen on twenty eggs.

DAN: You don't reckon they'd wqnt me to quit, huh ?

BISH: Ask 'em, you'll see. Besides, we cain't quit. We're farmers.

DAN: What's that got to do with it ?

BISH: Well, that's what Luke says.

DAN: Luke ? Luke who ?

BISH: In the Bible.

DAN: What's he got to do with it ?

BISH: Well, he was a farmer, an' he said.....

DAN: Luke was a physician. Everybody knows that.

BISH: Shore, but I'll bet he farmed a garden in his back yard.

DAN: How you figger that ?

BISH: By what he said. He said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow.... an'...an' lookin' back...is fit fer the kingdom of God". Only a farmer'd talk like that.

DAN: Ayah, pears thataway. But these new laws they're talkin' about, Bish, shore makes me look back. They're gonna make our work a lot more risky.

BISH: An' they're makin' more Northerners mad, too. Folks that didn't pay no mind before. You mark my word, Dan'l, this whole business is gonna blow up into a real ruckus 'fore you know it.

DAN: Mebbe so. There is more slaves comin' through all the time now. And the South ain't gonna stand fer that too long.

BISH: That's the way I figger it. So now ain't no time to stop.

DAN: Two hundred, eh ?

BISH: 'Bout that. But there's thousands more down there yet jist waitin' fer a chance, Dan'l.

DAN: Fast as they're comin' we'll need some help.

BISH: An' we'll git it. Out there in the barn tonight several men nudged up to me an' asked did I know anyone connected with the Underground. Oh, they're riled up proper..

DAN: They are, eh ?

BISH: An' there'll be more all the time now. As the old say goes, "Truth squashed in the mud will heist itself up agin'."

DAN: I reckon you're right, Bish.

BISH: An' I never seen you leave a field with only half a crop in the barn.

DAN: Ayah, an' I guess I'm too old to start now. By the way, you was goin' to drive up an' see Pris tomorrow, wasn't you ?

BISH: I was ?....uh....Oh, yeah, I was. Why ?

DAN: You was goin' to tell her that we're goin' back to the Anderson place an' operate outta there agin', now that Bigelow's left town.

BISH: First thing after milkin' tomorrow mornin'. She'll be glad to hear it. Give her a mite o' rest.

(Music stops in the barn)

DAN: Well, reckon it's safe to go back now. You rested ?

BISH: I could stand a little more o' that berry juice under the bench.

(They start toward bench as "Old Dan Tucker" sounds from the ridge)

DAN: Wait, Bish. That the widow playin' ?

BISH: Must be. Ain't comin' from the barn.

DAN: Didn't 'spect no travelers tonight. No packet'd due by here. Maybe they rowed across the river from Kentucky.

BISH: Shall I tell the womenfolks we're goin' ?

DAN: Don't reckon they'll even miss us fore we're back. You figger to make it up the hill ?

BISH: Climbin' that hill's a lot easier than swingin' old lady Hylop. Let's go. All right, Luke, here we come.

(Daniel and Bish move off up left as the curtain closes)

ACT 2 - Scene 4

(The time is a few minutes earlier than the end of Scene 3. The setting is the same as in the Prologue. It is night, the moonlight shining on the monument area. The Scarecrow stands down rt. in the fenced enclosure, looking blank. Night sounds are heard -- crickets, tree frogs, and occasionally a distant steamboat whistle. Bigelow enters up left, stands for a moment near the monument, looks at it, chuckles in derision, and shrugs his shoulders. He walks across stage and looks off down rt. center. He takes an old-fashioned watch from his vest pocket and tries to see the time. He can't, so he returns to the monument area, holds the watch in the moonlight, looks and is satisfied. He starts to return the watch to his pocket, looks down at the Fiddler's grave, bows in apology, then holds the watch down for the Fiddler to see. Taunting the Fiddler with the idea of Time. He laughs at his joke, replaces the watch in his pocket. He walks down left into the dark. A pause, then Ferris enters cautiously. Suddenly he sees Bigelow in the shadows, he starts, turns to run.)

BIG: Ferris! Wait a minute !

FERRIS: (Stops running) Bigelow ? That you ?

BIG: Course it's me. (Walks into moonlight near grave) Who were you expecting ? A ghost ? (Laughs)

FERRIS: Whattcha tryin' to do, huh ? Scare me to death ? This place is spooky enough as 'tis. I don't like it.

BIG: Well, we won't be here long. If I didn't need you I wouldn't 'a brought you. Nothin' to be afraid of here. A graveyard can't hurt you. These people are all dead.

FERRIS: I wish I knowed that fer sure !

BIG: Now you just simmer down. You've got to hold on to that girl when Webbstreet comes. I'll take care o' him.

FERRIS: Think he'll come, hun ?

BIG: He'll come. Did you take the girl to the widow's house ?

FERRIS: Took 'er to the edge o' the clearin'. She ran the rest of the way. Like a scared rabbit she was. I felt like runnin' the other way. This graveyard ain't no place for decent folks. Do we gotta wait here, hun ?

BIG: Yes, we gotta wait here. Right here where the green light burns every night. And pretty soon you'll be hearin' the fiddle music.

FERRIS: That's what I'm afeered of....the Devil's music, that's what it is. I've heerd people say he was a strange sort o' feller when he was livin'.

BIG: Well, people say that about anybody who doesn't want to live in their narrow little world. The one he's in now is narrow enough. Six by three.

FERRIS: Yeah, but he might not like that one either. An' it ain't fittin' fer dead people not to stay put.

BIG: Ssssh! Look. (Points off right) There it is. See ? The green light bobbin' through the woods. That's them. Now, do you know what you're to do ?

FERRIS: Yep. Grab the girl as soon as Webbstreet gets here. Hun?

BIG: No. She's got to be in his possession before you take her. Otherwise he might claim in court that he was just wanderin' through the woods. Got that ?

FERRIS: Yep. I reckon.

(Far off there is the sound of fiddle music from Daniel's square-dance party.)

FERRIS: Hey...where's that music coming from ? (He's scared)

BIG: Oh, now don't get scared. Somebody's having a party down below the ridge somewhere. Sound carries out here in these hills.

FERRIS: Oh....(He's relieved)...But, with that racket carryin' on, how's Webbstreet goin' to hear the signal from up here ?

BIG: Just my luck! I never figgered on that....Well, we'll just have to chance it. Hurry up now, they're gettin' close. I'll hide in the scrub over there....(Points off left)...You squat down behind that stone there...(Points to gravestone). They won't see you in the dark.

FERRIS: You mean on the grave ?

BIG: Certainly. The Fiddler's dead. He can't bother you.

FERRIS: Yeah, but his hant could...an' I don't.....

BIG: You don't want any part of hants....I know. Now get on with you.

(Bigelow exits up left, and Ferris hides behind the stone. There is a pause, then we see a green light reflected on the stage from off rt. A moment later Pris and the negro girl enter. The girl carries the green lantern, Pris carries fiddle and bow. Pris points to Henry's grave and the girl walks slowly and fearfully toward the stone. She stops as far away as she can, and reaches out to put the lantern down in front of the stone. Pris, meantime, has tightened the strings of the bow. She is ready to play.)

PRIS: Now, don't be frightened, child. I'm going to play a song. This is the signal for Mr. Webbstreet to come and get you. You understand?

(The girl nods slowly. She is scared nonetheless.)

PRIS: Daniel will see to it that you will be free.

(The girl's face lights up. This verifies Bigelow's story.)

PRIS: Oh, you poor thing. I wish you could talk. But, at least you'll be free. You can count on that.

(The girl nods, then rises to run to Pris. She falls on her knees close to Pris.)

PRIS: All right, you may sit right there while I play.

(Pris gets ready to play, then listens, suddenly aware of the far-off fiddle music.)

PRIS: (Pats the girl on the head lightly and fondly) I'd better wait a moment, child. They won't hear me if I play now.

(The far-off music stops)

(Pris places the fiddle under her chin and starts to play "Old Dan Tucker". She plays one chorus and stops to listen. The other music is still silent. She plays again, this time three choruses, when all of a sudden "Turkey In The Straw" blares out and distorts her playing. She stops; "Turkey In The Straw" goes on, close by. Pris looks at the stone, the girl cringes in fear and grabs Pris around the legs. Now the music switches to the back of the theatre, then to one side, then to the other, then from everywhere. Ferris stands up behind the grave, looks toward Pris; she is not playing. Then the music switches to the stage again. Ferris looks in terror at the stone. Pris is startled by his sudden appearance. She reaches down and lifts the girl to her feet. Pris puts her arms around the girl and comforts her. Pris is not afraid.)

FERRIS: Bigelow! Bigelow! It's the hant. It's comin' from the grave. Do you hear me, Bigelow! It's comin' from all around. Run, Bigelow....run....(Ferris runs off left)

(Pris smiles and looks toward grave)

BIG: (Rushes in) What's goin' on here? Who's playin' that music.... Who's.....(He freezes)

PRIS: What were you saying, Mr. Bigelow ?

BIG: (Tries to follow the music as it bounces back and forth, then he can stand no more. He runs off left.)

PRIS: Come, child. Let's go back home...Wait. (She walks to the grave and looks down a moment. Then slowly she stoops and lays her fiddle and bow beside the stone. She pauses a moment, head bent, back to audience. Then she turns back to the girl. They exit slowly off rt. As they leave, the music stops - it dies away gradually.)

DAN: (Off left) Wonder what Bigelow was runnin' fer. Never seed a man run so fast.

BISH: (Laughs) He sure was high-ballin' it. Like the old say goes, "A rollin' stone sure picks up a lot o' speed!"

(Daniel and Bish enter down left)

DAN: Ayah. Good thing we come up through the woods. He's a seen us. Wonder what he was up to ?

BISH: T'warnt no good, that I know. Figgered somethin' was wrong when I heerd "Turkey In The Straw". Told Pris not to play nuthin' but "Dan Tucker".

DAN: Ayah, but the music seemed to be comin' from everywhere. Couldn't a been Pris.

BISH: (Sees her fiddle beside grave) Look, Dan'l. She was here right enough. (Picks up fiddle and bow)

DAN: That she was, that she was. (Dan looks at grave) I wonder if.....
(Shrugs it off)....No, that couldn't a been.

BISH: Reckon ?

DAN: Ayah, jist couldn't a been.

BISH: Henry's got his fiddle with him, as I recollect.

DAN: Don't make no never mind....jist couldn't a been. That's all.
Let's go see if Priscilla's all right.

(They start to cross rt. There is a sound of fiddle strings breaking,
and of music sinking into the earth. Cut from recording.)

DAN: (Walking in front) Bish, did you break that fiddle ?

BISH: (Holds it up) Nope. Did you hear it, too ?

DAN: Ayah. Sounded some'at like fiddle strings breakin'.

BISH: 'Peared to me like that too. But twarn't this one.....(Pause).....
Dan'l ?

DAN: Ayah ?

BISH: I wonder if Henry's fiddle is broken now.....down there.

DAN: Don't reckon we'll ever know, Bish. Don't reckon we'll ever know.

Epilogue

(After Daniel and Abisha leave the stage off left, the Scarecrow
walks to the edge of the graveyard, looks down a moment at the
monument, turns to audience.)

SC: A stone, a name, a date. The rest is silence,
Where ivy trails its slow crepe over the ground.
No grotesque shadow moves upon the highlands;
The wind must trouble trees to stir a sound.
The dreamers all have passed, the dream lives on.
For dreams, like seeds, deny the fact of death;
Who plants a dream, he knows some April dawn
Its growing edge will break the bonds of earth.

Was there indeed a fiddle-playing specter ?
Or was he just a prank, a masquerade ?
Our story, we'll admit, was pure conjecture,
But could have happened much as we portrayed.
Here we speak truth: the fiddler once did live,
And walked this very hill with singing bow;
And many a slave, a lonely fugitive,
Found freedom where these willowed waters flow.
The ghostly light, the restless Indian chief,

The phantom fiddle music, these entire
Parts of our play which lie beyond belief -
Were they but children's stories 'round a fire ?

Here on this hill the legend grew,
And multiplied in size.
We leave it now to you, and you -
The truth? Or lies?

(Off stage rt., as at the beginning, a man's voice is heard singing the following stanza to the tune of "Old Dan Tucker". The scarecrow walks toward stage rt...listens to the end, then takes his place as a scarecrow, blank look and all.

VOICE: Ol' massa he done in his grave,
Ol' missus' on de go -
Dey never ketch dis pore ol' slave,
Ah's safe in O - hi - o.

(Again, as at the beginning, the chorus repeats this stanza, the fiddle increases the tempo to square dance rhythm, and the curtain falls.)

THE END.