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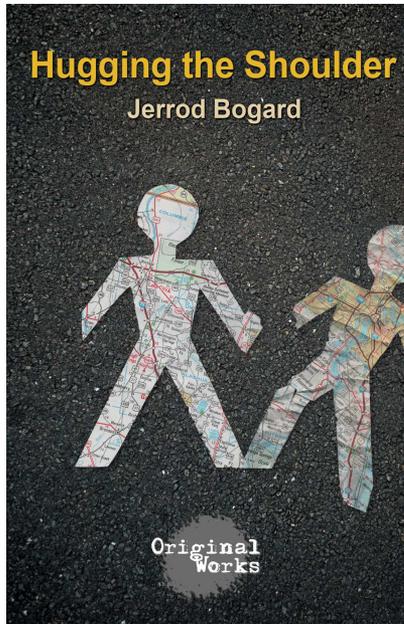
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How to Make a Rope Swing
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Hugging The Shoulder by Jerrod Bogard

Synopsis: A young man kidnaps his big brother, locks him in a van, and drives him across the country in an attempt to get him off heroin. Mile after mile, their relationship is put to the test, and little brother must decide how far he is willing to go. *Hugging the Shoulder* asks the question; Am I my brother's keeper?

Cast Size: 2 Males, 1 Female, 1 Either

*"Packs an emotional wallop...
rings vibrantly and violently true to life"*
—Times-Picayune

HOW TO MAKE A ROPE SWING

A full-length play

by Shawn Fisher

As part of a two-company rolling world premiere,

HOW TO MAKE A ROPE SWING was originally produced by SALT LAKE ACTING COMPANY (Keven Myhre and Cynthia Flemming, Executive Producers) opening on February 6, 2013. It was directed by Adrienne Moore; the set design was by Keven Myhre; the costume design was by Kevin Alberts; the lighting design was by Jesse Portillo; the sound design was by Josh Martin. The cast was as follows:

ARTHUR “BO” WELLS.....Glenn Turner
MRS. DELORES WRIGHT.....Jayne Luke
“MICK” McCAFFREY.....Lucas Bybee

and

HOW TO MAKE A ROPE SWING was originally produced by CAPE MAY STAGE (Roy Steinberg, Producing Artistic Director) opening on May 17, 2013 after an initial staged reading on October 17, 2011. The production was directed by Roy Steinberg; the set design was by Spencer Potter; the costume design was by Michele Sinacore; the lighting design was by Cyrus Newitt. The cast was as follows:

MRS. DELORES WRIGHT.....Lynn Cohen
ARTHUR “BO” WELLS.....Barry Phillips
“MICK” McCAFFREY.....Ben Rosenblatt

CHARACTERS:

ARTHUR “BO” WELLS, a black custodian in his seventies.

“MICK” McCAFFREY, a white custodian in his twenties.

MRS. DELORES WRIGHT, a white town matriarch in her eighties.

TIME:

Mid Fall, 2002.

PLACE:

An old elementary schoolhouse in a rural New Jersey town near the Delaware Bay.

How to Make a Rope Swing

ACT 1, SCENE 1

(An old elementary school classroom in a small town in South Jersey. It is snowing. The room is being prepared for demolition. Old desks, boxes, a teacher's desk, a record player and miscellaneous supplies are throughout the room. Decades of class photos, some black and white and others in color, line the walls and fill boxes. A door with a frosted window reads "Grade 5" in reverse. A second door leads to the kitchen, basement and a fire exit. ARTHUR is neatly dressed in custodial attire and wears a bowtie. MICK is in similar clothes, except the bowtie, although sloppy and youthful. An unlit cigarette dangles from his lips or is tucked behind his ear most of the time. MICK has some food and drink and occasionally snacks. ARTHUR has a thermos and cup of coffee. He occasionally refers to a clipboard, inventorying the room. ARTHUR and MICK are packing up.)

MICK: So you're trying to tell me that you are basically, you are like the Jackie Robinson of the Oakbranch Public School System.

ARTHUR: Jackie Robinson?

MICK: Yeah.

ARTHUR: I said I was ONE of the first. Started here in '52. But they said because I been here longer than anybody, I get to choose the name.

MICK: *You* get to name the new school?

ARTHUR: Yup.

MICK: Anything you want?

ARTHUR: Yup.

MICK: So you could name it after yourself?

ARTHUR: *(pause)* Yes I could.

MICK: Bo Wells Elementary?

ARTHUR: Yes I could! Probably will. But I'll use my proper name. Arthur Wells Elementary. More dignified. With a statue out front. *(poses as if sweeping a floor)* Me sweepin' like this. *(laughs)*

MICK: Won't the old lady have something to say about it?

ARTHUR: Prob'ly. She's paying for it. But I'm still pickin' the name.

MICK: You mean you're gonna *suggest* the name!

ARTHUR: Fine, but suggesting is practically picking and still that's something. That is something isn't it?

MICK: It's something. *(pause)* So if you weren't the first then why are they letting you do it?

ARTHUR: The first person ain't here to pick the name-

MICK: Suggest

ARTHUR: The first person ain't here to *suggest* the name, right? So I was second, by three days, but they gave me points for not dying! *(beat)* If I said I was the

first then your Jackie Robinson question would not sound so ignorant. But as I am the second... you sound ignorant.

MICK: Shoot, I ain't ignorant.

ARTHUR: Now, if you'd stop distracting me and what-not, maybe we can get all this packed up before the snow gets too bad. (*looking out a window*) You believe this? They said it was gonna be nothin' but rain.

MICK: I don't know Bo... I might have to take you off my list of role models, now that I know you're not like Jackie Robinson.

ARTHUR: You still on that? You even know who that was?

MICK: Of course I know-

ARTHUR: *Who* he then?

MICK: He's-

ARTHUR: *Who* he then?! (*beat*) See you don't know.

MICK: I know. Everybody knows who Jackie Robinson was.

ARTHUR: If you know, then say something that isn't dumb. Go'head.

(*MICK writes "Jackie Robinson" on the chalkboard.*)

MICK: My report is on Jackie Robinson, one of the greatest men in American history-

ARTHUR: Just flappin' your gums. Trying to look smart.
(*laughs*)

MICK: (*still reciting*) Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball. While all other African-American ball players were relegated to the so-called Negro Leagues-

ARTHUR: Oh "relegated"? You learn that in them classes of yours? Just 'cause you took two years of college-

MICK: While all other African-American ball players were re-le-gat-ed... You can look that up old man-

ARTHUR: Oh I know what it means.

MICK: ...to the Negro Leagues, Jackie was able to smash down the walls that separated men by color-

ARTHUR: Oh you on a first name basis even, callin' him Jackie. I see. "Smash down the walls?" Please. He didn't smash nothin'. Just 'cause he was the first, don't mean he *broke* the color barrier. He did no breakin'. Now Larry Doby... He did some breaking. (*pause, no response*) You don't know who Larry Doby is? (*He changes the writing to "Larry Doby"*) Now start talking. (*laughs*)

MICK: (*pause*) So what! I don't know who Larry Doby was.

ARTHUR: *Is...* You don't know who he *is*. He ain't dead yet. Don't go killing him off before his time. Now who he is, is the second one to play in the Major Leagues. But he was the first one to break, or should I say, smash the color barrier.

MICK: Not Robinson?

ARTHUR: Nope.

MICK: Wasn't he first?

ARTHUR: Yup.

MICK: Wasn't he black?

ARTHUR: Come on now!

MICK: Huh. He did play baseball, right?

ARTHUR: Awww, you are getting dumber with every word you say. It's like with each syllable that you breathe out, you leak a couple IQ points. *(beat)* Yeah, he played ball, and he was first, and he was black. *(pause)* He was the "right kind" of black. The "right kind of negro" they said. See, he been to college. And he talked... he talked like your folk.

MICK: My folk? Shoot. My folk farmed oysters down on the bay. They didn't sound like they been to college. They sound like they got socked in the mouth and came up missing a few teeth. Like my Aunt Margie... She looked just like a fat sweaty little sunburned jack-o-lantern. *(pause)* So you're saying he wasn't "black" black.

ARTHUR: Oh don't go black-black on me! You don't know a damn thing about black-black. Let me tell you something. Everybody knows that the greatest ball club of all time was the 1935 Pittsburgh Crawfords of the Negro Leagues. Right? Everybody with half a brain knows that.

MICK: I didn't know that.

ARTHUR: My point exactly. They were called the "Yankees of Black Baseball" which was a generous compliment to the Yankees of white baseball. Oscar Charleston, Cool Papa Bell, Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe... I's just five years old but I knew every one of 'em. But see, that didn't matter, because they weren't allowed to play the white Yankees. They didn't get to play in the real World Series. *(pause)* That's where the other brother comes in, round 'bout *(beat)* thirteen years later.

MICK: Larry Doby.

ARTHUR: La-rry Do-by! That's right! He did the breakin'. Weren't no question when he did it neither. Fourth game of the '48 series. That's the World Series. The *white* one. Indians-Braves. Doby step up, people calling him coon, jackamammy and few names I won't repeat. They scared of the *black boogie-man*, see. Every time he step up half the place'd boo and hiss and the rest'd go out for a hotdog. I'll tell you what, he made them hotdog vendors rich just by stepping up to the plate! *(laughs)* But then... *(takes an old spanking paddle out of a box and mimes a batter)*...with one swing, one mighty swing, they's choking on them dogs. CRACK! *(swings, whistles and gestures the path of a baseball)* Four hundred, four fifty, maybe even five hundred feet of screaming baseball later and he changes some minds! From then on, people were still scared of him. But it wasn't the black boogiemán no more. Nah. Now they were scared of that mighty *mighty* swing!

MICK: *(pause)* So then you're the Larry Doby of the Oakbranch Public School System.

ARTHUR: Yeah that's right! I'm Larry Doby! And I'm entering the Haaaall of Fame. Me naming the school, this is my... what do they call it? My "induction" into the Hall. *(pause)* They givin' me a plaque too.

MICK: No shit, a plaque? Aw man, they ain't givin' you a plaque.

ARTHUR: Probably they will. With my name on it, you know? *(He mimes a plaque with his hands.)* "Arthur Wells welcomes you to Arthur Wells Elementary School."

MICK: You really gonna name it that? You should, see if she goes for it. Then you can name something after me. Like the lunch room.

ARTHUR: You want me to name the lunch room "McCaffrey"?

MICK: Yeah. Lunch was my favorite class. "The McCaffrey Lunch Room".

ARTHUR: That's stupid. Nobody names a lunch room.

MICK: No wait... I got it. *(pause)* "The McCaffreteria!" *(laughs)* Huh? That sounds good! You should do that, if the old lady lets you.

ARTHUR: Let's me? Look... This here school is my house now. She ain't principal here no more. She been gone for ten years. So she ain't in charge.

MICK: Yeah well she's paying for the new school, so I think that makes her in charge.

ARTHUR: They said *I'm* the one pickin' the name and *I'm* the one gonna be guest of honor at the ground breaking ceremony, so that means *I'm* in charge.

MICK: You're gonna be the guest of honor?

ARTHUR: That's right.

MICK: No shit. You scared?

ARTHUR: Scared of what?

MICK: Scared of the fact that you gotta make a speech.

ARTHUR: I don't gotta make a speech.

MICK: Yeah you do. You gotta wear a suit and you gotta make a speech.

ARTHUR: Well I ain't making a speech.

MICK: You got a suit?

ARTHUR: 'Course I got a suit.

MICK: Because you gotta look good. At a ground breaking ceremony even the shovels look good. They make 'em out of silver or gold or something. So you gotta have a suit or else the shovels will look better than you.

ARTHUR: I said I got a suit! I got two of 'em. I got a brown one for church and I got a black one for funerals.

MICK: (*pause*) Black looks better when you make a speech. (*beat*) Can I borrow the other one? The brown one? I don't have a suit.

ARTHUR: What you need a suit for?

MICK: 'Cause I wanna come see you make a speech. Can I borrow it?

ARTHUR: Boy, I don't want you stinkin' up my church clothes! And I ain't making a speech. I'll let the old lady do it.

MICK: That's a good idea. She was the old mayor's wife for all those years and she's been giving away all his money, so she's probably been to ground-breaking ceremonies before. Half the town's named after her. Wright Park. Wright Boulevard.

ARTHUR: Yeah well if she wants to give away any more money, I got a suggestion... How about the "Bo Wells Foundation for the Advancement of a new Fishin' Boat!" (*laughs*)

(MRS. WRIGHT enters, unseen. She has white hair and is confident but frail. She carries a cane but rarely uses it to walk. Her clothes are neat and practical including snow boots. She watches the two men.)

MICK: (*laughs*) I guess she never had any kids to give her money to. Probably was all dried up. Full of dust. Full of *cobwebs*, if you know what I mean. (*beat*) She was a mean old shit too. One time she made me scrape all the gum from under the desks and turn it into a sculpture of the Washington Monument, just 'cause she caught me with a wad of Hubba Bubba in my mouth. You remember Hubba Bubba? That stuff was

good. Then she put it in the trophy case with my name on it for everybody to see.

(ARTHUR turns and sees MRS. WRIGHT. MICK is unaware.)

MICK: And she had this voice... like a nasty old black crow. She said to me one time, “If you insist on this oral fixation regarding the constant chewing of bubble gum, then soon it will be cigarettes, then prison then death.” She didn’t know what she was talking about. *(tries to light a cigarette)* Something like that can make an impression. She’d let out a screech. She’d yell-

MRS. WRIGHT: *(loudly, with intent to startle)* Mr. McCaffrey!

MICK: Shit!... *(drops his cigarette)* Hello... I mean, Good Morning... Good Morning Mrs., Principal Wright.

MRS. WRIGHT: It’s afternoon Mr. McCaffrey. I see your powers of observation have not improved. I also see you have been promoted from gum chewer to cigarette smoker. You are well on your way.

MICK: Yes ma’am. *(pause)* Shit, shoot! No ma’am. I haven’t been arrested yet. I’m in college now.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well, the community college is just three blocks from the county jail so the transition should be a quick one. *(beat)* So what are you doing here? Cleaning the *cobwebs* from my school?

MICK: Well yeah we... Cobwebs?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Didn't I hear you say something about cobwebs? (*long pause*) Mr. Wells, I was pleased to learn you are still working here.

ARTHUR: Pleased? For real?

MRS. WRIGHT: Of course. I wouldn't say it if it weren't true.

ARTHUR: It's just a surprise to me, that's all. In all those years you barely said nothin' to me.

MRS. WRIGHT: Why would I have done that? My job was rescuing the minds of young people and yours was making sure the toilets flushed. Your work was of no concern to me. And as you kept the toilets in generally good working order, I saw little need.

ARTHUR: Was there a compliment mixed in there, ma'am?

MRS. WRIGHT: If you insist.

MICK: Bo, I don't think that was a comp-

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. McCaffrey! I do not believe you were being addressed.

MICK: Uhhh, I'm... gonna go... check the truck... (*pause, exits*)

MRS. WRIGHT: For someone who spent so much time trying to avoid doing his school work, I am surprised to see Mr. McCaffrey employed.

ARTHUR: He's alright. Slow as molasses, but alright.

MRS. WRIGHT: If you say so. (*Long pause. She examines the room.*) This place has certainly fallen from its former glory... since I left.

(*She needs to rest her legs and finds a place to sit. ARTHUR attempts to assist her. She resists.*)

ARTHUR: Well ma'am, old age will do that.

MRS. WRIGHT: Will it? (*pause*) So Mr. Wells, it seems you are to assist me in the naming of the new building. You know, I selected you personally. Did they tell you that?

ARTHUR: Well, actually no they-

MRS. WRIGHT: They asked me to do it, and I insisted that you be part of the discussion.

ARTHUR: They asked you? By yourself?!

MRS. WRIGHT: Of course. I'm paying for it. Who else are they going to ask?

ARTHUR: Well, I don't know what to say.

MRS. WRIGHT: Good, because I'm not interested in your gratitude. I selected you because you were the right person for the task.

ARTHUR: Well I been here a long time... and I know the ins and the outs of this here school. Came in 1952. I was just a handyman back then-

MRS. WRIGHT: Save it Mr. Wells. I do not need to hear your curriculum vitae.

ARTHUR: My what?!

MRS. WRIGHT: I know all I need to know about you.

ARTHUR: Oh yeah?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. You've worked at this school for God knows how many years and you are African American.

ARTHUR: What you mean by-

MRS. WRIGHT: And if you think I just said something wrong, you are mistaken. Half of this town is now African American and I was asked to name the school after someone who represents the spirit of Oakbranch. I cannot do that unless someone of your kind can represent that side of town. Do you understand?

ARTHUR: I guess I do.

MRS. WRIGHT: Good. And when I learned you were here at the school, I decided this would be an appropriate venue for our discussion. So...

ARTHUR: Can't do it.

MRS. WRIGHT: Excuse me?

ARTHUR: Can't do it. You gonna have to wait.

MRS. WRIGHT: Wait for what?

ARTHUR: I didn't know you were comin'.

MRS. WRIGHT: I tried to call.

ARTHUR: Ain't no phone.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well I'm here now.

ARTHUR: Good. You can help us load the truck then.
(*yelling offstage*) Mick, make some space! Mrs.
Wright's comin' with some boxes!

MRS. WRIGHT: I am not carrying boxes.

ARTHUR: Don't worry, we'll give you the light ones.
Mick and me'll get the ones with books and stuff.

MRS. WRIGHT: I do not carry boxes. Can't that wait?

ARTHUR: They knocking this building down next week.
Gotta get this here stuff over to the warehouse on account of the snow getting too deep. That truck don't like the snow. It's gettin' real old.

MRS. WRIGHT: I'm a lot older than that truck and I make out just fine. Nothing a good pair of boots can't overcome, or in the case of the truck, a good set of snow tires. But nevertheless, if you are afraid of a little sprinkling of snow-

ARTHUR: Afraid? Ma'am, I ain't afraid. I been driving in the snow around here since my daddy put me behind the wheel when I was twelve. I ain't afraid of a little snow. (*pause*) But I don't drive no more. My eyes are no good. So Mick's gonna drive us back to the warehouse. You can meet me there at four. After work.

MRS. WRIGHT: Four o'clock? So you are quitting early today?

ARTHUR: Seven am until four pm with an hour lunch break. That's eight hours of work. A full day.

MRS. WRIGHT: If you say so. When I worked here I arrived at seven am to unlock the doors and departed at seven pm every day.

ARTHUR: Well then it seems that rescuing the minds of young people is more time consuming than making sure the toilets flush.

MRS. WRIGHT: It does seem so doesn't it?

(MICK enters covered in snow. He raises his hand.)

ARTHUR: What are you doing?

MICK: One, I wanted to tell you the truck is full and the roads are getting real bad, and second, I want to apologize in advance to Mrs. Wright for the next thing that I do or say that is either stupid, rude or generally offensive to your opinion of me.

MRS. WRIGHT: *(sighs)* Well Mr. McCaffrey, I think that statement was it.

MICK: Good! "A good plan makes a good man!" It's what you always said Principal Wright. Is it not? I was just planning ahead! *(exits)*

(ARTHUR grabs one last box and starts to exit. MRS. WRIGHT sits. She looks in a drawer and reminisces.)

ARTHUR: Well, Mrs. Wright, I guess I need to get on out of here and over to the warehouse. *(long pause. MRS. WRIGHT ignores him.)* I gotta lock up the building. *(long pause)* Can I walk you out?

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells, for decades I was the last person to leave this building. I know, when locking the front door, the key must be pulled upwards and slightly to the right to allow it to turn. The lock on the back fire exit can only be engaged if the handle is slightly compressed and the third window in the second grade classroom cannot be adequately secured unless a board, two feet three inches long is placed in the window track. During all my years there was not a single crime recorded on these grounds. You may go on your way and I will be sure to secure the building, as I have always done.

ARTHUR: But-

MRS. WRIGHT: As I have always done!

ARTHUR: (*pause*) Alright ma'am. You're right. This here is your house. I's just the help! (*pause*) I'll see you at four o'clock then. Don't be too long in here. OK?

MRS. WRIGHT: I will leave when I am ready!

ARTHUR: I meant on account of the snow.

MRS. WRIGHT: I have my snow boots on Mr. Wells!

ARTHUR: Well... what do you know? I see that now. I'm sorry I hadn't noticed that. Those are some fine boots. I should have noticed them boots.

(*ARTHUR begins to leave then stops.*)

ARTHUR: By the way, there's a snow shovel around back, in the shed. You wait much longer, you gonna need it.

(ARTHUR exits. MRS. WRIGHT examines the room. She erases the board. She crosses to an old record player and plays a record of children's music, perhaps "Ten Little Indians". She sits at the desk, lays her head down and closes her eyes as memories fill her. Pause. The lights begin to flicker. Power outage. The record player slows to a stop. Blackout.)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

(Later that evening. It is dark outside and the lights are still out. MRS. WRIGHT still sits with her head down, asleep. The sound of a door offstage. ARTHUR enters. He is cold. He sees MRS. WRIGHT and freezes.)

ARTHUR: Mrs. Wright? *(no response)* Mrs. Wright? *(no response)* Delores!

(MRS. WRIGHT awakens abruptly. She is confused.)

MRS. WRIGHT: What?! What do you want? *(calling to her late husband)* Edward? *(pause)* Why did you turn out the lights?

ARTHUR: Delores? You alright?

MRS. WRIGHT: You startled me, Edward.

ARTHUR: It's me, Arthur. Arthur Wells. But don't worry about it.

MRS. WRIGHT: Arthur?

ARTHUR: That's right. My name is Arthur. But it's alright, we all forget sometimes. Nothing wrong with forgetting.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr...

ARTHUR: It's alright Delores.

MRS. WRIGHT: *(pause, realizing)* What makes you think that we are on a first name basis Mr. Wells?

ARTHUR: I'm sorry... I heard you-

MRS. WRIGHT: You heard me what?

ARTHUR: Well ma'am, you were calling me Edward.

MRS. WRIGHT: I most certainly was not!

ARTHUR: Yes ma'am you were. I heard you clear as day, even with my ears froze off like this. I could still hear you clear as day.

MRS. WRIGHT: I know who you are perfectly, Mr. Wells. I certainly would not call you by your first name let alone by the wrong first name.

ARTHUR: Well then you must have been calling somebody else. Somebody named Edward.

MRS. WRIGHT: What is it you want? I thought you left.

ARTHUR: Yes I did.

MRS. WRIGHT: Then what, may I ask, are you doing here? We were to reconvene at the Oakbranch Public School warehouse. Were we not?

ARTHUR: Yes ma'am we were. Four o'clock.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well then, Perhaps you didn't trust that I could secure the building as we discussed.

ARTHUR: Well Mrs. Wright-

MRS. WRIGHT: Because I assure you, I can do so with my eyes closed. Why is it so dark in here?

ARTHUR: Mrs. Wright-

MRS. WRIGHT: I was just about to leave, after first making final rounds through the building-

ARTHUR: Ma'am-

MRS. WRIGHT: ...to make sure that all is secure and safe. Fire extinguishers, exit signs, kitchen stove and so forth-

ARTHUR: Delores!

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) Why did you call me Delores again Mr. Wells? I thought I had been abundantly clear about such informality.

ARTHUR: It's nighttime. You been here for hours.

MRS. WRIGHT: I most certainly have not! I just sat down here a moment ago. It is no later than two thirty. It says so right there on the clock. I assume that even custodians know how to tell time.

ARTHUR: Yup. We also know... and I'll go real slow here, so you can stick with me... that if the electricity goes out, electrical things, including clocks, generally speaking, stop workin'.

MRS. WRIGHT: Why are you talking to me like that?

ARTHUR: But that's something that only many years of custodial training and experience can prepare you to know. Don't feel bad. It's complicated. My expertise tells me that the power went out 'round about (*looks at clock*) two twenty-seven.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells, I don't like your tone.

(MRS. WRIGHT attempts to stand but becomes light-headed and must sit again. ARTHUR attempts to help.)

MRS. WRIGHT: I can handle myself!

ARTHUR: *(pause)* I know you can. I was just worried...
And then you were just sitting there. *(pause)* I was afraid you were...

MRS. WRIGHT: *(pause)* What? You were afraid I was what? *(beat)* Because I am most certainly not dead yet.

ARTHUR: That's not what I was-

MRS. WELLS: Yes it was. And I am not... quite. People have been showing up at my house for months checking to see if I am dead yet, so I know what it looks like. I told all of them that they aren't in my will, but they keep coming anyway. They just smile and pretend like they didn't hear me. Bringing me casseroles, cookies. That won't keep me alive. It will just make me look fat when I am lying in my casket. So I send them away with their junk food and I continue to take care of myself, as I have always done.

ARTHUR: That's good to hear. *(pause)* I waited for you at the warehouse but you never showed. I couldn't call, so I come here to check.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well you wasted your time. So I dozed off for a few hours. I was tired. Everybody dozes off once in a while when they get tired. You doze off once in a while. I bet you have a little cot hidden away in a store room somewhere so you can take a nap in the middle of the work day. Your kind have a propensity to do that.

ARTHUR: My kind?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes, custodians.

ARTHUR: (*pause*) You a firecracker, lady. You always were. And now I'm gonna get in trouble, comin' here 'cause of you. Me and Mick borrowed the truck to see if you were stuck on the side of the road somewhere in the snow.

MRS. WRIGHT: So where is Mr. McCaffrey then?

ARTHUR: That's the problem. He's with the truck, stuck on the side of the road in the snow. (*pause*) He's diggin' it out and he'll come pick us up when he does. We slid off the road on Butler Avenue. I told you that truck is no good in the snow. If you had just did what I told you-

MRS. WRIGHT: How did you get here?

ARTHUR: I walked.

MRS. WRIGHT: You did not. Butler Avenue must be miles from here.

ARTHUR: Yes it is. (*pause*) But I'll survive. It's not that far.

MRS. WRIGHT: No, of course it isn't. Well... Then I guess... I still have my car.

ARTHUR: Your car ain't goin' nowhere 'til the plow truck come around. Can't even make it out the driveway.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well then you are going to have to push. (*exits abruptly*)

ARTHUR: I'm gonna have to push? I ain't gonna push! Who you think you are lady? Telling me I gotta push. I don't even know if I got any toes left. Can't feel a damn thing down there. I ain't pushing nothin' 'til I figure out if my toes been froze off.

(*MRS. WRIGHT re-enters*)

MRS. WRIGHT: Where's my car?

ARTHUR: Did you see two piles of snow out there?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: One of em's your car. The other one is a pile of garbage and I ain't fixin' to dig out either one of 'em right now.

MRS. WRIGHT: I am not going to sit here-

ARTHUR: Yeah well stand if you want. But I am sitting right here until my toes come back to life and Mick shows up.

MRS. WRIGHT: And it's cold in here.

ARTHUR: There ain't no heat.

MRS. WRIGHT: Thank you for elaborating.

ARTHUR: That's on account of the electricity going out. See, the pump on the furnace... The heat just don't work without electricity.

MRS. WRIGHT: This is a fine situation.

ARTHUR: Well I ain't too happy about it myself.

(They sit. MRS. WRIGHT breathes heavily. A long uncomfortable silence follows.)

ARTHUR: Well then let's go.

MRS. WRIGHT: Go where?

ARTHUR: Let's do this.

MRS. WRIGHT: What are you talking about?

ARTHUR: We got something to do. Let's do it.

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't think-

ARTHUR: I pick Larry Doby.

MRS. WRIGHT: Larry-

ARTHUR: Yeah, Doby.

MRS. WRIGHT: What about him?

ARTHUR: That's who we should name the school after.

MRS. WRIGHT: I am not in the mood to discuss-

ARTHUR: We are stuck here for a while and I am not about to sit here listening to you sigh and huff and puff about our situation. I pick Larry Doby.

MRS. WRIGHT: You PICK? You don't get to pick anybody. You are here to discuss, suggest, confer or advise, but not to pick.

ARTHUR: Lady, what are you a human dictionary?

MRS. WRIGHT: Pardon me?

ARTHUR: You are like a walking dictionary, full of words. You just said four words that mean the same thing.

MRS. WRIGHT: Then you mean thesaurus. I am a walking thesaurus. If you are going to be offensive, at least use the right word.

ARTHUR: What's wrong with my word?

MRS. WRIGHT: There's nothing worse than somebody using lazy language.

ARTHUR: Lazy?... It's just as much work for me to talk as it is for you to talk. My word's just as good as yours.

MRS. WRIGHT: You used the wrong one. Thesaurus would have been better.

ARTHUR: Thesaurus ain't better. That's a terrible word. It's hard to say. Too many thhh's and s-s-s-ses.

MRS. WRIGHT: You should speak correctly.

ARTHUR: And it sounds like a dinosaur.

MRS. WRIGHT: A dinosaur?

ARTHUR: Yeah. You know... like a dinosaur with a large vocabulary.

MRS. WRIGHT: Are you trying to make a joke?

ARTHUR: A Tyranno-thesaurus Rex.

(MRS. WRIGHT chuckles then stops herself.)

ARTHUR: I saw that! That's what you are, a dinosaur with a large vocabulary! Ha!

MRS. WRIGHT: You're calling me a dinosaur?

ARTHUR: I was making a joke.

MRS. WRIGHT: You are being insulting.

ARTHUR: I am?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Calling me a dinosaur.

ARTHUR: But I said with a large vocabulary.

MRS. WRIGHT: What does that have to do with it?

ARTHUR: It's a compliment.

MRS. WRIGHT: A dinosaur is an insult.

ARTHUR: Not to a dinosaur.

MRS. WRIGHT: I'm not a dinosaur.

ARTHUR: Then what are you?

MRS. WRIGHT: What does that mean?

ARTHUR: Tell me what you are and I can stop calling you a dinosaur.

MRS. WRIGHT: I am not interested in your games-

ARTHUR: We saw each other every day for most of our lives, but we are basically strangers and I don't think strangers work well together.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells-

ARTHUR: What did you do this morning?

MRS. WRIGHT: Why is that any of your-

ARTHUR: When I got up this morning, I made a tomato and cheese omelet.

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't really care about your eating habits-

ARTHUR: I tried to make it just the same way my wife used to.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*sarcastically*) That's touching.

ARTHUR: Today is our anniversary, my wife and me. Every year on our anniversary, I try and make a tomato and cheese omelet. Just like the ones she used to make. Mmmm, she made 'em good too. They were creamy but not runny. Just a little bit of brown, but not enough to make em' taste burnt. Three eggs, sharp cheddar, a little bit of chives and one fresh tomato. I try to make it every year. But either the eggs are too dry, or the cheese isn't melted and mixed in enough. I keep a close eye on it. I check the bottom to make sure it ain't getting brown or drying out. But every time-

MRS. WRIGHT: Stop fussing with it.

ARTHUR: I'm sorry?

MRS. WRIGHT: Stop fussing with the eggs.

ARTHUR: I don't fuss.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes you do. And use a shallow pan with a low lid. You're cooking it without a lid.

ARTHUR: No I'm not.

MRS. WRIGHT: I think you are.

ARTHUR: *(pause)* Maybe I am.

MRS. WRIGHT: Little bit of butter. Turn down the heat. Turn it way down. Pour the egg in. And leave it alone. For five minutes do not even look at it. You are messing with it too much.

ARTHUR: Is that so?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes it is.

ARTHUR: Hmph. *(pause)* After that, I went over to the cemetery to visit my wife. I dug up her flowers. Chrysanthemums. Yellow ones. Those were her favorite. So every Spring, on her birthday, I plant 'em at the cemetery, and then on our anniversary, in the Fall, I dig 'em up. I bring them home and keep them in the window.

MRS. WRIGHT: You never remarried?

ARTHUR: No I didn't.

MRS. WRIGHT: That's too bad.

ARTHUR: Why is that bad?

MRS. WRIGHT: A man needs to be married. Or else he will get himself into trouble.

ARTHUR: I *am* married.

MRS. WRIGHT: I mean he shouldn't be alone. A man needs a wife.

ARTHUR: I can wait.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) I knew Marian.

ARTHUR: I know.

MRS. WRIGHT: I worked with her.

ARTHUR: I know.

MRS. WRIGHT: In this very room.

ARTHUR: You were still a teacher then.

MRS. WRIGHT: I was. And so was she.

ARTHUR: Naah. Not here she wasn't. They wouldn't let her. They called her a "Teacher's Helper". She didn't want to come here. But they moved her from the colored school anyway. Her and them seven children. The first seven to come over. They didn't want to come here neither. (*pause, smiles*) But I did. I always wanted to be where she was. Keep her close. I was afraid she'd come to her senses and realize she's too good for

me. So after she come here, after three days, they let me switch buildings. (*pause*) I don't know what she was thinking, marrying a man like me. She college educated, with a real important job and I convince her that a handyman'd make a good husband. "Who you gonna pay to fix the plumbing?", I said. "And when a doorknob come loose, who you gonna pay to fix it on a teacher's salary from over at the colored school?" Again and again she turn me down. 'Til one day she come up to me and say she got a problem. She say the light in the kitchen stop working and could I come over and fix it. So I do. It just wasn't screwed in tight enough 'sall. So I fix it for her. (*pause, smiles*) But, I make it look reeeeeal hard. Get out all my tools. Lay 'em out on the table. Spend a half hour on that loose light bulb. And to thank me, she offer me some cake. Some *good* cake too. So I go into the bathroom to wash my hands, I gotta make a good impression, and clean hands is part of that. So while I'm in there, (*whispers*) I make sure she can't hear nothin', and I loosen up the drain pipe... under the sink. (*chuckles*) Yup. Just a little bit. So it drip... drip... drip. Guess what happens the next day? (*in a woman's voice*) "Bo, could you come over and fix my sink?" (*his voice*) "Sure thing Miss Marian, I think I could find some time to do that for you. So long as you got more of that fine cake." Then, you know what happen? (*feigning surprise*) The next day the hinge on the cabinet come loose! Then it's a floorboard! Then a door latch! (*woman's voice*) "Bo, I think my whole house is fallin' apart. Can you come over again?" See I was smart right? I had her right where I wanted her. She *need* me to be around. So I convince her to marry me. (*pause*) I didn't find out until our wedding night when she confess... She knew it all along. She knew it was me messing up those things. Shoot, she played me the

whole time. Then you know what she told me? She told me, she had went and loosened up that light bulb in the first place! (*laughs*) Believe that? That right there... That's the kind of woman you wanna marry.

MRS. WRIGHT: I suppose.

ARTHUR: It's the truth. I was never gonna pull anything over on her. I was trouble when I was a kid. In trouble with the law. Nothing big, but always something. And she knew it. I said to her, "I ain't that person no more." And she said, "part of you is." And I said, "but most of me ain't!" And she said, "I know... and that's the part of you I want." (*pause*) So she keep me straight. Just like those children... her students. But then they move her here, to the white school. Here she was just a... just a "nanny". But over at the colored school, she was a great teacher.

MRS. WRIGHT: That's why she was chosen to teach here, in this school. That's why she was first.

ARTHUR: I said they didn't let her teach. At the colored school the kids all wanted Miss Marian. That's what they called her there. But then they bring her here and change who she was. Start calling by her fancy name... Mrs. Wells. Said it was *civilized*. (*beat*) But all they let her do was walk those seven children to the bathroom. Told her to make sure they didn't pee on the floor. (*pause*) *Civilized*. (*pause*) She said some teachers, they treat her real bad too. Ordered her around... Never let her talk. She would come home with tears in her eyes.

MRS. WRIGHT: I didn't like Marian.

ARTHUR: I know.

MRS. WRIGHT: And she didn't like me much either.

ARTHUR: Much? (*pause*) You were mean.

MRS. WRIGHT: I was not. I just didn't want her here any more than she wanted to be here. She always wanted to do things her way.

ARTHUR: 'Cause her way was the better way. You know it was.

MRS. WRIGHT: It was my classroom.

ARTHUR: Says who?

MRS. WRIGHT: Said the Mayor. He made the rules, I just followed.

ARTHUR: Awww Mrs. Wright, you never just followed in your life. This here was your classroom. You made the rules. You still makin' the rules in here.

MRS. WRIGHT: There could only be one teacher.

ARTHUR: Yeah, and they pick the wrong one.

MRS. WRIGHT: What makes you so sure?

ARTHUR: 'Cause she the one who ain't here no more.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) What does that have to do with it?

ARTHUR: You tell me.

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't know anything about any of that.

ARTHUR: Yeah I know. Been hearing that for years.

MRS. WRIGHT: It was a long time ago.

ARTHUR: Long time? She died fifty years ago, but just this morning, I was having a *sweet* dream about her and me. I won't tell you the details, but I promise you it was sweet. But then I wake up, and I look for her next to me, but she ain't there. I realize it's just a dream. That happened *this morning*. And this morning weren't a long time ago at all. (*pause*) You ever have dreams about your husband? And then you wake up and realize he's gone?

MRS. WRIGHT: That's personal.

ARTHUR: Tell me about them personal dreams.

MRS. WRIGHT: You don't listen do you?

ARTHUR: Oh I hear you. Tell me about them dreams.

MRS. WRIGHT: Can we just move on to our business?

ARTHUR: (*moves close to MRS. WRIGHT.*) Depends on how good the dream is. You tell me... and I'll go sit over there and leave you alone.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*shifts uncomfortably*) You are impossible.

ARTHUR: That's what Marian used to say. (*beat, moves very close*) Go ahead. And I'll leave you be.

MRS. WRIGHT: Fine. (*dismissive*) We are sitting under a tree. Having a picnic... like we used to do. That's my dream.

ARTHUR: (*pause*) That's it? That's your dream? That dream's no good.

MRS. WRIGHT: Well there's more to it than that. But I don't feel like-

ARTHUR: Well tell it!

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) We are enjoying ourselves with some sandwiches and some cake. And then it's interrupted. It turns into a nightmare after that and I'd rather not talk about that part.

ARTHUR: That's the good stuff. Come on.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) Edward and I are sitting under the tree-

ARTHUR: You say Edward? That's your husband's name?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. And so Edward is-

ARTHUR: See I knew you were screamin' Edward!

MRS. WRIGHT: Are you going to allow me to finish my story or aren't you?

ARTHUR: I'll be quiet.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) It's sunny and beautiful. I can hear children playing. I look up and see the tree above me is endless... branches reaching as far as the eye can see, and children are swinging from every branch. Laughing, singing. (*pause*) Then the sky starts to get cloudy. The wind begins to blow and the children clutch the ropes of their swings. They begin to cry and the wind blows them harder and faster and higher. Then one of them gets blown so hard that the knot at the top of the rope swing gets pulled loose and the swing breaks free sending the child through the sky and to the ground far below. Then a second child. And another... and another. Until, amidst the thunder and lightning, it begins to rain children. Thousands of them. Then I turn to Edward and say "Edward, do something. They are falling! Catch them!" And I see him just lying there enjoying his cake with a big smile, like nothing is happening.

ARTHUR: (*pause*) That there's a messed up dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: You told me to tell you. I didn't want to.

ARTHUR: You know what the problem is with that dream?

MRS. WRIGHT: Now you are going to critique my dream?

ARTHUR: No. I am going to fix it. See, I'm a handyman. I fix things. The problem is with them rope swings. They weren't tied right to the tree. See, I know how to make a rope swing. What that dream needs is a handyman. So here, do this. Close your eyes.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells-

ARTHUR: Close 'em. Just do what I'm askin'.

(MRS. WRIGHT closes her eyes reluctantly.)

ARTHUR: Picture that dream of yours. Describe it to me.

MRS. WRIGHT: *(opens her eyes)* I am not going to-

ARTHUR: I'll fix it!

MRS. WRIGHT: This is silly. *(closes her eyes)* We are sitting under the tree. Having a pic-

ARTHUR: Describe the tree, exactly how you see it.

MRS. WRIGHT: It's a large Oak tree. Ancient. And on the side of the tree is a black burned scar.

ARTHUR: A scar?

MRS. WRIGHT: It was where the farmhands would build a fire to cook meals.

ARTHUR: Farmhands, huh? What's it look like?

MRS. WRIGHT: It's an old scar. Two hundred years, maybe three. And as the trunk grew larger and thicker, it started to close over the old fire mark, making the scar deeper but harder to see.

ARTHUR: You talking about the big tree over there by the river?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: I know that tree. Everybody knows that tree. That's the "Slave Tree". I know that scar too. That's where the slaves cooked.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes... That's what I said.

ARTHUR: No you didn't. (*pause*) Go 'head, finish the dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: The tree blocks the wind and the branches shade us from the sun. It is the perfect day.

ARTHUR: This is when you see the children.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. They are swinging, laughing.

ARTHUR: And then the sky goes dark, right?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. And the wind blows, and I look up to the branches-

ARTHUR: And you see all the children.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: And they are scared.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: They are being blown around.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: And there I am sitting on a branch.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes... What? No!

ARTHUR: Yes I am sitting on a branch and I got wings.

MRS. WRIGHT: That isn't in the dream.

ARTHUR: Put it in. I am sitting there on a branch with wings.

MRS. WRIGHT: That's absurd.

ARTHUR: Yeah, your dream was so normal to begin with! Keep your eyes closed. So I got my wings and I fly up to one of the kids and I say "Don't worry kiddo... Bo got ya."

MRS. WRIGHT: You can't just put yourself in the middle of my dream.

ARTHUR: Close 'em. And then real fast, I fix the rope. I tie a clove hitch and then two half hitches just like them oystermen use. Then I fly to the next kid and then the next until finally just as the wind gets real bad I finish the last one. They are swinging all over the place, but they hang on tight and they don't go nowhere. Those swings hold tight. Now tell me what happens in the dream next?

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't know. The story is different now. You changed it.

ARTHUR: See? It's workin'. What happens next?

MRS. WRIGHT: They hold on?

ARTHUR: Right! And?

MRS. WRIGHT: And then the wind starts to die down.

ARTHUR: They safe now?

MRS. WRIGHT: Sure, Fine but-

ARTHUR: See Bo Wells knows how to make a rope swing.
Bo Wells knows how to tie a knot.

MRS. WRIGHT: But that's not all.

ARTHUR: I took care of them kids. Next time you dream
it, they safe.

MRS. WRIGHT: There's another part in the dream-

ARTHUR: But this is the new dream. This one is different.

MRS. WRIGHT: But there's another part.

ARTHUR: Them kids are safe, right?

MRS. WRIGHT: But in the old dream-

ARTHUR: But this is the new dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: There's still one left-

ARTHUR: That's the old dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: There's still one person left.

ARTHUR: But that person is OK. That person is safe now.

MRS. WRIGHT: Hanging there on that rope swing. But
she's not OK. She got tangled up-

ARTHUR: It don't matter.

MRS. WRIGHT: In the rope swing. She fell off and got caught. By the leg-

ARTHUR: Mrs. Wright... it don't matter!

MRS. WRIGHT: And she-

ARTHUR: It don't matter!

MRS. WRIGHT: She died-

ARTHUR: It's just an old dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: And she is just hanging there.

ARTHUR: She ain't real and she didn't die 'cause I saved her this time.

MRS. WRIGHT: And-

ARTHUR: I saved her!

MRS. WRIGHT: *(pause)* OK.

ARTHUR: *(long pause)* Why you dream her like that?

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARTHUR: Why you dream her up in a tree?

MRS. WRIGHT: I can't help it. It's just a dream I have.

ARTHUR: But why you have THAT dream?

MRS. WRIGHT: Why does anybody have any dream?

ARTHUR: No. Uh uh. That ain't just any dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: Of course it is.

ARTHUR: You listen to me! That ain't any dream. What you come here for?

MRS. WRIGHT: I'm sorry I told you.

ARTHUR: Whatchu come here for?! (*pause, no answer*)
How did Marian die?

MRS. WRIGHT: I wasn't there.

ARTHUR: How did she die?

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't-

ARTHUR: HOW SHE DIE?!

MRS. WRIGHT: She drowned.

ARTHUR: Right! How she drown?

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARTHUR: Yes you do.

MRS. WRIGHT: No.

ARTHUR: It was in the paper. Front page. What it say?

MRS. WRIGHT: She drowned.

ARTHUR: HOW SHE DROWN?!

MRS. WIRGHT: I DON'T KNOW!

ARTHUR: In the river right?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: Middle of the night.

MRS. WRIGHT: Evidently.

ARTHUR: And she been drinking.

MRS. WRIGHT: That's what they said. That's what the paper said.

ARTHUR: And she went crazy.

MRS. WRIGHT: That's what it said.

ARTHUR: Out of control. They wrote "a colored woman was stumblin' down the street like a dog with rabies."

MRS. WRIGHT: I remember the quote.

ARTHUR: Then she stumble down to the river and dive in.

MRS. WRIGHT: She was reckless.

ARTHUR: Went for a swim. Outa her mind.

MRS. WRIGHT: She should have known better.

ARTHUR: She couldn't swim.

MRS. WRIGHT: I guess that's why she drowned.

ARTHUR: No.

MRS. WRIGHT: She should have stayed out of the water.

ARTHUR: I said she couldn't swim! She was afraid of the water. She'd close her eyes goin' over a bridge, she so afraid. She never been within fifty yards of the side of that river. She didn't go for a swim! She couldn't. She wouldn't!

MRS. WRIGHT: Well then... maybe she...

ARTHUR: What?! Maybe she what?!

MRS. WRIGHT: Maybe she wanted to-

ARTHUR: She didn't want to! Don't you say that. I know her. Don't you ever say that.

MRS. WRIGHT: She was upset.

ARTHUR: Who found her?

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARTHUR: Yes you do. Who found her?!

MRS. WRIGHT: The police I think.

ARTHUR: No, *I* found her.

MRS. WRIGHT: OK.

ARTHUR: They never wrote that in the paper.

MRS. WRIGHT: Did it matter who found her?

ARTHUR: They didn't write that I found her with her head underwater.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells-

ARTHUR: Or that her hands and arms were stuck down in the mud up to her elbows like she was trying to push herself above the water.

MRS. WRIGHT: It was a horrible accident.

ARTHUR: Or that-

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells, don't-

ARTHUR: Or that she was-

MRS. WRIGHT: Don't do this.

ARTHUR: Her foot was wrapped up in the old rope swing. Just like in your dream. She was hanging by the ankle with her head under the water. Her hands trying to push her out, so she could breathe, but they just sank deeper in the mud. She was hanging from that old rope swing... just like in your dream.

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) It was just a dream.

ARTHUR: Nah. You know something. Or you hear something. Or you see something. Fifty years ago, you know something.

MRS. WRIGHT: I don't... I can't remember anything. It was just an accident. A horrible accident.

ARTHUR: That's what they always said.

MRS. WRIGHT: She wasn't thinking. She was upset.

ARTHUR: I know she was.

MRS. WRIGHT: And she was drunk.

ARTHUR: She earned that drunk! Sometimes nothing but bein' drunk gonna make you feel better. And that night, she earned it didn't she?

MRS. WRIGHT: I suppose she did. That was the day she lost her job.

ARTHUR: She didn't lose it. They took it. She the first in her family who didn't work on the farms or the boats or in some lady's kitchen. It's all she ever wanted. And they take that from her.

MRS. WRIGHT: She broke the rules.

ARTHUR: What rules?

MRS. WRIGHT: She struck a child.

ARTHUR: If she hit a child it's because that child needed to be hit!

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) Paddling wasn't allowed. Not up here in the North. Not in this state.

ARTHUR: No? (*pulls out the paddle.*) Then what's this?

MRS. WRIGHT: (*pause*) That's nothing. It hung on the wall. A piece of history.

ARTHUR: But this was it, wasn't it? This is the one she woulda used.

MRS. WRIGHT: Might have been. Maybe it was.

ARTHUR: So why they do it Mrs. Wright? Why they fire her? Why they take everything that mattered from her?

MRS. WRIGHT: They were protecting the children.

ARTHUR: Protecting? From what?

MRS. WRIGHT: Pain.

ARTHUR: That's a lie.

MRS. WRIGHT: Corporal punishment wasn't allowed in schools. It was illegal.

ARTHUR: Then what about this? (*holds up the paddle*)

MRS. WRIGHT: It's just a token. It wasn't real!

ARTHUR: Look at the handle.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells-

ARTHUR: The varnish. See it? It's all worn off. From hands. From being swung... hard, like a bat. Like an old worn out baseball bat.

MRS. WRIGHT: It was just a reminder! A little fear never hurt them.

ARTHUR: A baseball bat ain't scary just hanging on a wall. It ain't scary until there's a mighty swing behind it.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells-

ARTHUR: Did you ever swing it, Delores?

MRS. WRIGHT: Mrs. Wright.

ARTHUR: Did you ever swing it, Mrs. Wright? You a small lady, but you got fire. I bet you had a mighty swing!

MRS. WRIGHT: Paddling has been illegal here for a hundred years Mr. Wells.

ARTHUR: Did you ever give a beatin' to a child in this school?

MRS. WRIGHT: A beating?!

ARTHUR: Did you ever pick up this here paddle and beat on a student like Marian did? I bet they was afraid of that mighty swing of yours.

MRS. WRIGHT: I never *beat* a child!

ARTHUR: Did you ever paddle one, like that scary Mrs. Wells did?

MRS. WRIGHT: Don't be re-

ARTHUR: Did you ever-

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells!

ARTHUR: DID YOU EVER?!

MRS. WRIGHT: (*long pause, deliberately*) Yes. Yes we did. Sometimes. We all did.

(*ARTHUR begins to leave.*)

MRS. WRIGHT: But only in severe circumstances! I will not apologize for that. Those were the times!

ARTHUR: (*returning*) You said it was against the rules.

MRS. WRIGHT: We lived in South Jersey Mr. Wells. Not Philadelphia. A small town. Practical people. Farmers. Oystermen. Men of tools, not men of words! Words took too long for them. (*holds up paddle*) This, is a tool. Nothing more. And it was either this, by my skinny arm, or it was the strap when they got home, by the arm of their big strong farmer daddy. This left no scars. It was what the people knew... what they expected. It was what the *children* expected!

ARTHUR: Well they didn't expect it this time did they? Not from her.

MRS. WRIGHT: No. Not from her.

ARTHUR: (*pause*) I'm leaving. You can fend for yourself. Wait here for Mick. He'll be back soon. But then maybe he won't. But I ain't heartless. I'll tell somebody you're here, eventually, after I walk on out of here. But I don't have them good boots like you got. I just got these old shoes. Can't promise nothin' without a good pair of boots.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells-

ARTHUR: There's some snacks in the kitchen. I found a few little packages of cookies in the pantry. Probably a couple years old. I was gonna throw 'em out, but those things never seem to go bad. Probably can still eat 'em. Enjoy 'em while you wait.

MRS. WRIGHT: Mr. Wells.

ARTHUR: Somebody'll be by soon I'm sure. Oakbranch only got one plow truck, but it'll get around to this part of town by Sunday... Monday at the latest. I'll check on you then.

MRS. WRIGHT: You'll what? You'll check... Monday? That's three days. You can't just... You must-

ARTHUR: I don't work for you no more! I don't "must" nothin'.

MRS. WRIGHT: But I... Mr. Wells... I-

ARTHUR: I'll tell somebody. I ain't heartless. I'll tell some-

MRS. WRIGHT: Arthur?

ARTHUR: (*pause, surprised*) Arthur? You call me Arthur now? No more Mr. Wells? Nobody call me Arthur. My friends call me Bo. They call me that on account of my ties. Did you know that? I always wear a bow tie, see. A regular tie is too long. It gets in the way when I'm workin'. So I wear this bowtie. It's dignified. So they call me Bo. That's something my friends know. People who aren't my friends, they call me Mr. Wells.

MRS. WRIGHT: Please don't leave Bo.

ARTHUR: We friends now?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

ARTHUR: You think so?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Please don't leave.

ARTHUR: You think so?

MRS. WRIGHT: I hope so.

ARTHUR: You *need* me?

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes. Please don't leave me here.

ARTHUR: (*pause*) Alright then... If you *need* me, I'll stay.

MRS. WRIGHT: I do.

ARTHUR: (*long pause*) Well then, I'ma go down the basement. There's an old generator down there. See if I can get it running, get some heat up in here. It's gonna be a cold night.

MRS. WRIGHT: Thank you.

ARTHUR: How 'bout you go find us those cookies. I missed dinner. I guess we both did. Some cookies would be real good right now... Delores.

(*ARTHUR exits. MRS. WRIGHT slumps down into a chair. She weeps. Blackout.*)

(*END OF ACT I.*)