To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by N. Brent Kennedy, III, entitled "*Reach Into Darkness*: A Play in Three Acts." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Speech and Theatre.

G. A. Yeomans, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

REACH INTO DARKNESS: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee

N. Brent Kennedy, III

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ABSTRACT

Reach Into Darkness is concerned with two days in the life of Andrew Greaves, a poor miner of the Appalachian coalfields. It is a particularly turbulent two days, for Andrew's only son, Michael, has been involved in a mining accident and is trapped deep in a mine shaft. The situation is even more poignant when we realize that it is merely the coup de grace to a man who has throughout his life been victimized by both his environment and himself.

The play centers around the anxiety and desperation of Andrew and his family as the search for Michael continues. As the drama unfolds we gain insight into Andrew and come to view the man not simply as a poor miner who is losing his son, but as a human being who is only now giving vent to the questions and uncertainties that half a century of suffering has thrust upon him. In the end, however, it is Andrew whose life is stolen away and Michael who is left to carry on the search for meaning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
CAST OF CHARACTERS	1
I. ACT I	2
II. ACT II	22
III. ACT III	37
VITA	52

REACH INTO DARKNESS

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(In order of appearance)

MAGGIE GREAVES	wife of Andrew Greaves
AMY GREAVES	her daughter-in-law
ANDREW GREAVES	a poor miner
MICHAEL GREAVES (as a child, an adolescent, and a young man)	Andrew's only son
PAUL	a friend of Andrew
MAGGIE'S FATHER	a farmer
ANDREW'S FATHER	a farmer
FIRST MAN	a townsman
SECOND MAN	a townsman
THE REVEREND	
WOMAN	a prostitute
ANDREW'S MOTHER	

I. ACT I

(It is Fall in the mountains. The scene is a kitchen in a lower class, rural home. Maggie Greaves and Amy, her daughter-in-law, are seated at a small, homemade kitchen table center stage. The walls are barren, rough textured planks with the colors dark gray and brown dominating. An ancient electric stove and refrigerator border the wall at right center stage, while down stage right there is a door to a bedroom. At upstage center there is a door to the outside. Left center stage there is an old couch of a dark color. Above the couch is a small picture of Christ. A single naked light bulb is suspended by a cord and hangs directly over the table center stage. Though the furnishings are meager, they are neat and clean. Maggie wears a dark calf-length skirt, a shawl covering her shoulders. She is poor but there is a certain proudness about her. Her expression is one of strength. Amy wears a dark dress somewhat shorter in length and a light colored blouse. Maggie's gray streaked hair and approaching wrinkles are in direct contrast to Amy's smooth skin and auburn hair. It is obvious that she has suffered much, while it is also obvious that Amy's life of suffering has only begun.

The room is dim with the only light seemingly coming from the bulb, creating a kind of spotlight effect on the kitchen table. The rest of the area is bathed in shadows. Maggie is relatively calm while Amy is upset and in tears, her hands running erratically through her disheveled hair. Her blouse and skirt, which is somewhat shorter than Maggie's, are slightly wrinked. By observing the two we sense an overwhelming duality of the beginning (Amy) and the end (Maggie) and the merging of the two at this particular moment.)

MAGGIE

Cryin's not gonna do no good. The time fer cryin's past, long past.

(Gets no response)

We've got to put our trust in God an' pray fer the best.

AMY

I'm sick and tired of trustin' in God.

(She rises, still sobbing)

I've got no trust left in me. He broke His promise with me, and you.

How can I still have trust?

MAGGIE

Stop that kind o' crazy talk. When ya stop trustin' in God ya got nothin'. Nothin' Amy.

(Pauses)

Andrew will be back directly. Maybe . . . maybe they'll find Michael today.

AMY

(Turns accusingly)

You don't believe that. I can tell from your eyes, your expression. You know he's lost just as well as I do.

MAGGIE

You jist don't give up hope, Amy.

(Forcefully)

He's my son, an' God knows I love 'im more'n jist 'bout any thing.

AMY

He's my husband and . . .

MAGGIE

(Rises, not hearing)

I 'member the day he was born.

(Smiles)

Yes, Andrew'd gone off huntin' an' lef' me here with the girls. Only Flo' was old 'nough to know what was happenin'.

(Laughs)

I had her run all the way to Doctor Henry's place . . . better'n three miles . . . to fetch 'im. Ol' Doc Henry got here 'bout the same time the baby did. I'd had seven children, but I . . . I jist knew I was dryin' with that 'un. The baby very nearly did die. When Andrew come

home that night, Lord how he 'pologized fer not bein' here. He was scared, too, scared o' that little boy dyin' like the last 'un.

(Her voice drops here. She looks at Amy who lowers her gaze. Maggie then looks up as the faint sound of thunder is heard in the distance.)

MAGGIE (continued)

Do you s'pose it'll rain?

(She looks out over the audience through an imaginary window.)

AMY

(Uncaring)

I don't know.

MAGGIE

I hope not. Andrew said this mornin' it looked like rain. Rain's the worst thing that kin happen when a man's trapped down there. It gits muddy an' cold an' people want to go on home. People'll help ya 'til they git uncomfortable.

AMY

(Looking out the window.)

It's not raining.

MAGGIE

(Thoughtfully)

You know, the mines has always been bad to us.

AMY

Please don't . . .

MAGGIE

Andrew thinks they've been good to us.

(Shakes her head regretfully.)

'Cause we're still a livin' he thinks that. He don't see that livin'

is a natural thing . . . jist 'cause you're livin' don't mean that ya owe your life to what ya happen to be doin' at that moment.

(Pause)

If he'd a been borned a thief, I guess he'd a thought that thievin' and stealin' was why he was livin'.

(Laughs)

Lord, but he's a good man.

(More solemn)

You know that don't ya?

AMY

(Unresponsively)

Yes. I know that.

MAGGIE

He jist gets a little confused at times. He means so well.

(Looks around the room)

You see this place? Well, it's not the ol' shack you think it is. No, not at all. To Andrew it's gonna be a fine, white mansion someday with big, strong columns.

(Gestures)

And it's not here on this dead mountain either. No . . . it's . . . it's way down in Tennessee somewhere, or maybe Georgia. Where it's warm and a man kin make his dreams come true by jist thinkin' about 'em. An' Andrew's there, too, with his friends all a likin' 'im, and, why he's got me all dressed up in finery!

(She's caught up momentarily in a self-conscious, almost embarrassing episode of half-daydreaming, half-wishing.)

An' he comes in from workin' the place an' says, "Maggie, I believe me an'

you'll go to town so's I kin buy ya somethin'." An' we git in that big, fine car of his an' take right off, like we don't have a care in the world!

(She settles slowly back to reality.)

That's where Andrew is . . . workin' his plantation an' makin' all the big decisions . . . not here on a sorry patch o' mountainside his daddy left 'im.

AMY

He could've had somethin' if he'd really wanted it.

MAGGIE

(Taken by surprise)

What's that?

AMY

He could've had a half-way decent house an' some half-way decent clothes if he'd wanted 'em. All he had to do was join the Union miners that time they come here signin' men up. He may not have had a mansion . . .

(Sarcastically)

. . . in Georgia . . . but you wouldn't be seein' black dust rise up in little swirls every time you walked across the floor. He was foolish Maggie, very foolish.

MAGGIE

We cain't hold that agin' 'im, Amy.

AMY

Can't hold it against him? You're sittin' there in rags with your son and <u>my</u> husband chokin' to death in some filthy little coal mine! And for what? Because he wanted his own dirty little mine? Because he was too proud, or too stubborn, or too plain stupid to give up on that hole in the ground!

MAGGIE

He's a proud man, Amy. He'd never work for somebody else. Why, it'd be jist like givin' up. He's put the best years of his life in that mine . . .

AMY

And it hasn't given enough coal to keep a chill off in April . . . much less build a mansion.

MAGGIE

He's his own man, and that's the way he wanted it.

AMY

(Accusingly)

And I suppose <u>this</u> is what he wants.

MAGGIE

(Bitterly)

You know this ain't what he wants. You jist don't understand 'im.

(Amy looks away. Maggie becomes complacent.)

They've been lookin' fer two days now. They're bound to be gettin' closer. Andrew said he wasn't over a hundred feet back in the shaf' when it happened.

(Trying to convince Amy)

They went back to fifty feet this mornin'. They might be a reachin' 'im by tonight.

(Obviously trying to comfort her, places a hand uncertainly on Amy's. Amy half smiles through her tears and places her hand on Maggie's. Suddenly the door opens and Andrew walks slowly in. He looks older than his fifty years, his hair gray and two days' beard gracing his face. He wears a miner's hat and boots. He is soiled from coal and rock dust. He peers hesitantly at the women and then at the floor. He walks to the table and Maggie gives him her seat. She crosses to the stove and pours a cup of coffee, placing it in front of him.)

ANDREW

Nary a sign. Nary a sign of 'im.

(Pauses)

AMY

Is anyone down there now?

ANDREW

Paul Craft an' his boys. He said they'd stay fer a couple a' hours yet, 'til I come back.

AMY

Are they diggin'?

ANDREW

Maybe. I don't know. There ain't much they kin do 'til mornin'. Ever' body else has gone home.

(Pauses, looking out toward the audience)

There's a rain a comin'. Gettin' all cloudy.

MAGGIE

Drink your coffee, Andrew.

ANDREW

(Not hearing her, he speaks to Amy)

Did ya fix 'im a lunch, Amy? Has he got somethin' to eat?

AMY

I always fix him lunch. You know that.

ANDREW

I hope he's got his hard hull on. He'll be a needin' that light down there.

(Hesitates)

That batt'ry needed replacin'. I should've got . . .

MAGGIE

Drink your coffee 'fer it gits cold, Andrew.

ANDREW

(Looks up at Maggie)

Drink my coffee? What the hell's so important about my coffee? Is that all ya kin say to me? I cain't even think half-way straight an' you're tellin' me to drink my coffee!

MAGGIE

(Hesitates, then crosses slowly over to Andrew)

You've got to rest, Andrew. No man kin take what you've been takin'.

ANDREW

I reckon this here's some kinda punishment. The Lord has seen fit to punish me.

MAGGIE

That ain't so, Andrew. God wouldn't punish a good man fer no reason.

ANDREW

Maybe He's got a reason. Maybe He thinks it's my fault that Michael's in there.

MAGGIE

It ain't your fault, Andrew. How many times do I have to tell ya that? You've got to stop blamin' yourself.

ANDREW

I'd noticed dirt fallin' fer sometime, but then dirt's always fallin'. I never said nothin' to Michael. I jist didn't think nothin' of it . . . 'til it happened.

AMY

(Shocked)

For God's sake, why didn't you say somethin'.

ANDREW

(Embarrassed, guilty)

I . . . don't know. I guess I thought it'd jist disappear. I didn't figure we had the time to stop workin' an' fix them boards. Besides, like I said . . . dirt's always fallin'.

AMY

My God, Andrew . . .

ANDREW

We was so far behind as it were, I didn't think we could afford it. I jist wanted to keep on diggin' as long as we could.

AMY

(Bitterly)

Well, you're still diggin' alright. Tryin' to dig, Michael out of that God-forsaken hole!

ANDREW

It weren't my fault, Amy.

AMY

You could've saved him.

ANDREW

I couldn't 've done nothin'.

AMY

But you didn't say a word. You didn't even warn him. You just stood there and let him die.

ANDREW

(Hits the table, almost at the verge of tears)

Goddam it!

(Pleadingly)

I didn't mean to do it! There weren't nothin' I could do!

AMY

(Suddenly aware of the damage she has done)

I'm sorry, Andrew . . . Maggie . . .

ANDREW

I'm tired . . .

(Long silence)

Go on to bed, Maggie. There ain't no need fer you and Amy to stay up no longer.

(They look at him)

Go on . . . I wanta be alone.

MAGGIE

You ought not to be alone, Andrew.

ANDREW

(Forcefully)

I wanta be alone. I got to . . . think awhile.

(Maggie looks sadly at him, then kisses him softly on the cheek. He holds her hand briefly in a gesture of love, and she and Amy then exit stage right. Andrew stares at the cup of coffee, then pushes it away. He gets up and walks slowly over to the cabinet, where he removes a bottle of whiskey and a glass. He returns to the table and pours a drink, killing it. He grimaces, then pours another. He drinks this one more slowly and pours yet another. He stares at it as the lights slowly dim out. When they brighten again we find the stage bathed in light of a dream-like bluish quality and we see Michael, as a little boy of eleven, standing beside his father.)

MICHAEL

(Pleadingly)

Please Pa! Say I can take it . . .

ANDREW

(Appears surprised to hear the child's voice. He is intoxicated.)

What? Michael? . . . What're ya . . . are ya . . .?

MICHAEL

Come on, Pa. Dr. Hicks say's he'll pay me twenty-five cents an hour. It's just after school.

ANDREW

(Reaching for his son)

Michael . . . you're alright . . . it's time . . .

MICHAEL

Please Pa!

(Andrew takes hold of the boy's shoulders and seems to gain an understanding of just where he is.)

ANDREW

(Seems to sober up somewhat. He turns away from Michael.)

No. I won't hear of it. You kin work with me at the mines if you wanta work.

MICHAEL

Aw, Pa.

ANDREW

What's the matter? Ain't the mines good 'nough fer ya? It feeds your belly, but it ain't good 'nough fer ya?

MICHAEL

It ain't that, Pa.

ANDREW

Well, what is it then?

MICHAEL

(Hesitantly)

He pays better'n you, Pa . . . an' he's been givin' me some books an' stuff. He's awful nice, Pa an'

(Proudly)

I think I'd like to be a doctor myself, someday!

ANDREW

(Stunned)

A . . . doctor? Why do ya have to be so much better'n me? Why cain't ya be satisfied to earn your livin' with your hands 'stead o' other men's sickness?

(Michael doesn't answer)

You're a shameful sight. Git on outta here an' don't let me catch ya talkin' that a way no more. You heard me, git!

(Michael, disappointed and hurt, runs out the door. Andrew staggers up and follows to the door. He motions feebly.)

Wait, Michael . . . son . . . I'm sorry . . . don't go . . . we'll find ya . . . I promise . . . I promise

(Maggie enters from stage right)

MAGGIE

What was all that shoutin' 'bout, Andrew?

ANDREW

(He lowers his gaze to the floor)

Weren't nothin'.

MAGGIE

(Knowingly)

It was Michael, wasn't it?

ANDREW

Yeh . . .

MAGGIE

What'd he want?

ANDREW

A job.

MAGGIE

(Apprehensively)

A job? At the mines? . . . Well?

ANDREW

No . . . he wants to work fer the doctor. I told 'im no.

(Maggie shakes her head silently, unnoticed)

Why does he say things like that fer? Don't he see that all that education cain't make ya a better man? He don't think I'm much of a man, Maggie. The boy don't respec' me. He wants no part o' me or the mines. I've been seein' it comin'! He never asks me 'bout my work. Like he don't care . . . a doctor!

MAGGIE

He's got to have dreams, Andrew. This world kin git ya down mighty fast if ya ain't got no dreams at all.

ANDREW

Has it got me down? An' I don't go 'round dreamin'.

MAGGIE

We all dream, Andrew. Life ain't no good if ya never dream.

(Andrew looks up at her as the light slowly fades out. When it comes back up, Maggie is seated at the table with Michael, now a young man, confronting Andrew stage right, whose back is turned to the table.

MICHAEL

I wanta go, Pa. I really wanta go!

ANDREW

(As if awakened from a dream)

Go . . . where?

MICHAEL

(Exasperated)

To college, Pa. Like I been tellin' ya. I think I can git in, but I'm gonna need your help. Just for awhile.

(Silence)

Mr. Caldwell says my grades are good 'nough, but I've gotta git the money.

ANDREW

No . . .

MICHAEL

It ain't like I'm beggin' ya for it, Pa. I'll work for it. But I cain't work while I'm off at school. I can pay ya back though.

ANDREW

Ain't got it.

MICHAEL

Please, Pa.

ANDREW

I ain't got it!

MICHAEL

(Frustrated)

Pa, I'm not askin' for the world. I just wanta make somethin' out of

myself. Things are different now. A man's got to have an education today if he wants to be anything.

(Andrew refuses to acknowledge him)

Would ya listen to me, Pa?

(Andrew still refuses to answer. Michael is now bitter)

What's the matter, Pa? Ya 'fraid I might get outta this slate dump and have somethin' decent for once in my life? What the hell's eatin' you?

(Andrew turns and walks slowly to Michael, and abruptly slaps his face.)

MAGGIE

No, Andrew!

ANDREW

Don't you never talk to me that a way! I've broken' ever' bone in my body to give ya everthin' I could. Ain't never thought of myself. Always wantin' your mother an' you and your sisters to have the best. An' you talk to me that a way. I ain't a rich man, but that ain't no cause to turn your back on me now. That mine is gonna make it someday.

(Looks upward, lost in his dreams)

It's jist like everythin' else. Ya gotta keep diggin' and scratchin' at it, 'til one day it jist opens up and spews its riches all over ya.

MICHAEL

Pa, it ain't never gonna do that. And all your talkin' ain't gonna make it so. I've been waitin' a long time and it ain't happened yet. I gotta think about <u>my</u> future. D'ya think I wanta spend my whole life diggin' in a hole that's empty? . . . Like you've done . . . If I'm ever gonna git outta here, it's gotta be now, Pa.

ANDREW

So your Pa ain't good 'nough fer ya. Ya gotta be better'n he is. Well, you go on and go to your college and do anythin' you wanta do. But when you turn your back on me, I'll turn mine on you.

MICHAEL

I never said that, Pa.

(Frustrated)

Why is it always like this? Why can't we talk to each other? Everytime I've ever tried to talk to ya, ya won't listen, or ya git mad and hit me. When are ya gonna quit fightin' me, Pa? What are ya so afraid of?

(Andrew stares dejectedly as Michael turns and walks slowly back into the shadows. Maggie starts to speak, but with a helpless expression on her face, joins her son. Andrew watches them stand motionlessly in the shadows. He assumes a defiant stance, but in a matter of seconds he lowers his gaze and appears confused. He motions for Michael to return, checks himself, but does so once again.)

ANDREW

Michael . . . I . . . need to talk to ya . . . I . . . need to tell ya why I done that fer, son. Michael!

(Beginning to sob)

Please come back! Maggie . . . tell him to come back.

(There is a change in the intensity of the light to a brighter blue. Michael re-enters and stands facing his father, warily.)

MICHAEL

Well, Pa, what'd ya want to see me 'bout?

ANDREW

I haven't done right by ya, Michael.

MICHAEL

How do'ya mean, Pa?

ANDREW

You know, 'bout the mines an' . . .

MICHAEL

And college?

ANDREW

Yeh, I've been a blind man, son.

MICHAEL

No you ain't, Pa. You've just been doin' what you thought was right.

ANDREW

Well, I see where my mistake was now. I never told ya why ya couldn't go to college, and why the mines was so important to me.

(Michael is disappointed for the answer is not the change-of-view he had expected, but merely more of Andrew's misplaced values.)

Ya see, Michael . . . the mines is somethin' ya kin always count on bein' there when ya wake up ever' mornin'. It don't desert ya. I mean, ya cain't touch a college education. Ya cain't feel it in your hands, or have other people see it an' say, "He's got somethin'". I want ya to have somethin', boy. Not spend your whole life chasin' after rainbows an' mist that jist floats away when ya touch it. I want ya to have somethin' ya kin feel, and that other people kin see. Don't ya understan' that I been thinkin' o' you an' not myself?

MICHAEL

Pa . . .

ANDREW

Ya cain't judge the success of this mine on what I've done. I jist ain't found the right key yet or dug in the right place or somethin'. You kin do it though. You kin learn from my mistakes an' you kin find the way.

Son, you kin be a rich man, but ya gotta start plannin' now. Kin ya see what I mean?

MICHAEL

I see, Pa. It means a lot to ya, doesn't it?

(Andrew nods)

I've got to go think awhile on it, Pa.

(He exits. Andrew watches him leave with emotion. He is alone on stage once again and his uncertainty returns. He begins sobbing very softly and, as if exhausted, he slowly drops to his knees, covering his face with his hands. The lights flow eerily, indicating a time change. There is a slight pause and Maggie and Michael re-enter. Michael rushes up to his father and removes his hands from his face. Andrew struggles to his feet and smiles through his tears, reaching for Michael who turns happily away to take the hand of Amy who emerges from the shadows stage right. She and Maggie step out of the shadows together. Andrew is confused and gropes aimlessly. Michael takes his father's shoulders and steadies him.)

MICHAEL

Pa, me and Amy's gettin' married.

MAGGIE

(Seeing Andrew's lack of acknowledgment)

Ain't it wonderful, Andrew? Amy's gonna be your daughter-in-law.

MICHAEL

And that ain't all, Pa. I've been doin' a lot of thinking about what you said and, well, I'm gonna need a job.

(Hesitates)

I'd like to work in the mine, if ya wouldn't care. With you, Pa.

(Maggie registers veiled disappointment, but with a resignation to his decision. Andrew's eyes brighten. Amy manages a half smile.)

ANDREW

I ain't belivin' it! Me and you, jist like I always dreamed it'd be.

You hear that, Maggie? My boy's gonna join his pa. We're gonna be a real team! Hey, we gotta go celebrate. I'll buy ya all the beer ya kin drink.

(Takes Michael's arm, but the boy stalls)

Come on, son, whatcha waitin' fer?

MICHAEL

(Looking uncertainly at Amy)

Well, I kinda promised Amy we'd go by and see her parents tonight . . .

ANDREW

That can wait, boy? We gotta celebrate!

AMY

(Softly)

It's alright, Michael. Go with him.

MICHAEL

Well . . .

ANDREW

Well nothin'! What are we waitin' fer? My boy's done made it!

(They exit. Maggie follows halfway to the door and watches as he shuts the door behind them.)

MAGGIE

He's happy now. He's got someone to reach up with 'im. It don't matter that there's nothin' to grab hold of. It's jist the reachin' that counts. And not bein' alone when ya open your hand and find there's nothin' there. That means somethin' too. Ya gotta stand back o' Michael, Amy. He's done chose his path to walk, an' it's a stony one. Don't deny 'im his dreams an' never, never make 'im feel he ain't givin' ya the best he kin. He'll know if he ain't an' believe me, honey, he'll suffer more jist knowin' it than you ever will by not havin' it. I know . . .

(She fails to finish her sentence, her head dropping in despair. The lights dim and when they come back, white now instead of blue, Andrew is seated at the table alone. He pushes the bottle of whiskey away and takes the half-filled glass and stares at it for a brief moment before throwing it against the wall stage left, breaking it. There is a knock at the door, and he composes himself and answers it. A man about his age steps in.)

ANDREW

(Anticipating news)

Paul . . .?

PAUL

(Somewhat embarrassed)

Nothin' Andrew. We moved a lot of rock an' dust, but there's jist so much. I gotta git home an' sleep a couple o' hours. The rest of the fellers is still diggin'. I'll be back down jist as soon as I kin.

ANDREW

Yeh . . . thanks, Paul. Let me git my hat.

(Picks it up)

I really 'preciate all the he'p ya been givin' me.

PAUL

Least a friend kin do. No more'n you'd do fer me. The boy's 'll be there early an' Bill Smith an' his brother-in-law. They're gonna he'p, too.

ANDREW

Good, I'll be a needin' it.

(Paul exits. Andrew starts out the door, stops, and casts a sad glance around the room.)

Lord knows, I'll be a needin' it.

CURTAIN

II. ACT II

Late the same day. (The scene is the same, but the table and chairs are gone and in their place is the entrance to a mine shaft. The remainder of the set is in darkness while the shaft and the area immediately surrounding it are brilliantly lighted. Paul crawls out and sits near the entrance. He lays his shovel near him. There are numerous rocks and some soil near the mouth of the opening. Andrew crawls out of the shaft and sits near Paul. He drops his pick in exhaustion and wipes his brow.)

PAUL

(Coughs)

Whew, that dust can sure clog a fellow up. We cain't be too far from the end.

(Looks at Andrew)

He's still alive, Andrew. I kin feel it.

ANDREW

Yeh, that's what I keep thinkin' in the back o' my mind. But somethin' keeps on gnawin' at me--tellin' me that it ain't so. Nothin's ever gone right before. Why should things change now?

(There is silence)

Did ya ever lose somethin' that meant a lot to ya . . . somethin' that couldn't be replaced by no amount of money?

PAUL

Oh, I reckon we've all lost things close to us Andrew. Life's one big loss after another. If you care to look at it that away.

ANDREW

Seems like all ya ever do is spend time learnin' to love somebody and to need 'em, jist so's ya can lose 'em and spend the rest of your life grievin' fer 'em. Do ya make any sense out of it, Paul?

PAUL

Oh, I reckon there's a purpose. I 'spose that jist knowin' 'em fer a little while's worth the hell of losin' 'em forever.

ANDREW

Maybe that's it. Maybe that's why I've been so troubled lately. Ya see, I don't know the boy. I don't understand 'im. Could be I never did. Maybe I never even knew myself. But it's been botherin' me bad lately. I jist don't think I kin go on without settin' matters straight.

(Looks at Paul)

I gotta get 'im outta there, Paul. I've gotta set matters straight with 'im . . . I've jist gotta set matters straight with 'im.

PAUL

You're an awfully troubled man, Andrew. Ain't good fer a man to let hisself git in that kind o' shape. When ya lose control of yourself, you're apt to lose ever'thin'.

ANDREW

If I lose that boy, I've lost ever'thin'.

PAUL

Ya shouldn't oughta say that, Andrew. Michael's a good boy, and I really believe we'll git 'im outta here. But to say, if we didn't, that that was ever'thin' . . . what about Maggie and your daughters?

ANDREW

My daughters is all gone away, and, well, a man's son carries a special meanin' that ya jist cain't describe.

PAUL

And Maggie?

ANDREW

(Slight pause)

Maggie's a real good woman an' I have strong feelin's fer her, but a son is as much a part o' ya as an arm or leg. I guess to me Michael's more important than that. I jist don't think I could live without lettin' 'im know . . . I'd best be diggin'.

(Starts to rise)

PAUL

You jist rest awhile. I'll go dig a spell.

(He grabs the pick and shovel and crawls in the mine. Andrew stares at the ground, hopeless and with a blank expression. His head nods and then falls forward on his chest. The lights dim and there is a flowing of colors before the light takes on a steady, bluish quality, suggesting a dream-like state. From stage left Maggie enters. Her movements are smooth and unhindered by age. She sees Andrew and rushes up beside him. She sits and, smiling, places a nearby blade of grass under his nose. He awakens with a start as Maggie giggles childishly.)

ANDREW

What? . . . Oh, it's you. I thought you'd changed your mind.

MAGGIE

Changed my mind? You know I wouldn't do that, Andrew.

(They kiss)

I jist love this meadow. It's so fresh an' clean an' romantic. It don't seem like it's a part o' these mountains, does it? I mean, up here away from ever'body. Ya know, from over there . . .

(Points upstage)

ya kin see both our houses at the same time. Jist look over that way an' ya kin see mine, an' over that way ya kin see yours. But they cain't see us.

(Giggles mischievously)

ANDREW

Does your Pa know you're here?

MAGGIE

(Looks away, more serious)

No. He's out in the field.

ANDREW

He didn't see ya?

MAGGIE

(A little impatient)

I don't think so, Andrew. Please, let's not worry.

ANDREW

I cain't do nothin' but worry. If he were to catch us it'd be the end of everything.

(Pause)

I saw 'im yesterday.

MAGGIE

Where?

ANDREW

At the feed store. I was gettin' some fertilize fer Mr. Shanks. Maggie . . . he looked at me like he'd seen a ghost. He jist stared at me fer a long time, an' I could feel the hate burnin'.

(Pauses)

I left.

(Embarrassed)

I jist turned 'round and walked out. I waited 'til he'd finished, an' then I went back in. I shouldn't 'o done that. I mean, I should've

been a man. If he don't like me, he might've at least respected me. Now he don't even respec' me.

MAGGIE

Oh, Andrew. He likes you as much as he's ever liked anybody. You take ever'thin' so personal. Besides, it's not important.

ANDREW

Anything that keeps us apart is important.

(There is silent acknowledgment of his statement and then Maggie takes his hand and pulls him to the ground. He embraces her in a long kiss.)

I love you, Maggie.

(She lies down on her back and pulls his face down to hers, their lips meeting. He begins unbottoning her blouse while she unbuttons his shirt. He kisses her neck and exposed shoulders as she pulls him down to her. She lifts her lips to his and they kiss once again. At that moment her father appears stage left. He stands menancing, his features distorted with anger.)

MAGGIE'S FATHER

That's far enough, Maggie.

MAGGIE

(Shocked)

Pa!

ANDREW

It ain't her . . .

MAGGIE'S FATHER

Shut up, boy.

(To Maggie)

I though I raised ya better'n that. I reckon I was wrong, awful wrong.

MAGGIE

(Buttoning her blouse and getting up)

It was all my doin', Pa. I . . .

MAGGIE'S FATHER

You keep your mouth shut. Now git on home an' stay there 'til I come.

MAGGIE

No, Pa!

MAGGIE'S FATHER

I said go home!

(She exits crying. He turns to Andrew)

You're the scum o' the earth, boy. An' ya won't be content 'til ya drag Maggie down with ya.

ANDREW

I ain't trying to drag nobody down.

MAGGIE'S FATHER

I've warned ya time an' again to stay away from Maggie, but ya keep after her to meet ya in ever' Godforsaken place ya kin find. She deserves better'n you an' I aim to see she gits it.

ANDREW

Maggie loves me an' nothin' ya do kin change that. Nothin'!

MAGGIE'S FATHER

An' if you loved her as much, you'd do what was best fer her.

ANDREW

Why are you so against me? What have I ever done to you?

MAGGIE'S FATHER

You're a dreamer. Wouldn't be so bad if ya did a little something to make 'em work. But ya jist sit around waitin' fer it all to come to ya. I don't want Maggie sittin' there with ya. A man's got the right to waste his life if he sees fit, but he ain't got the right to waste somebody else's. Stay away from her, boy.

ANDREW

Ya still don't think I'm good 'nough fer her? I'll show ya. I'm gonna make it big, real big. You jist wait an' see ol' man. I'll buy an' sell a hundred farms like that pig patch o' yours.

MAGGIE'S FATHER

I wish ya luck, boy. But in the meantime stay away from Maggie.

(He exits)

ANDREW

(Screaming after him)

I'm gonna marry her, ya hear me?

(Frustrated)

I'm good 'nough, damn you! Good 'nough!

(The lights flow for a brief moment, indicating another time change. Stage right an old man, Andrew's father, enters slowly, limping slightly. He is a gentle looking man and his expression shows concern.)

ANDREW'S FATHER

So this is where you are. What are ya doin' out here, son . . . all alone?

ANDREW

(Distressed, he bites his lower lip)

Uh? Oh, nothin', Pa. Nothin' at all. I was jist thinkin'.

ANDREW'S FATHER

Thinkin' what?

ANDREW

Oh, nothin' in particular. You know, jist thinkin' to be thinkin'.

ANDREW'S FATHER

(Concerned)

Come on home with me, son. Your Ma's worried sick 'bout ya.

ANDREW

Tell her not to worry, Pa. Tell her I'm jist out here enjoyin' the spring weather.

ANDREW'S FATHER

Ya ain't been home in two days. That ain't exactly what you'd call enjoyin' the weather.

ANDREW

(Walking away from his father)

I'll be home.

ANDREW'S FATHER

When?

ANDREW

Tonight. Tell her tonight.

ANDREW'S FATHER

Why don't ya come on home with me now, son?

ANDREW

I cain't Pa. I gotta think.

ANDREW'S FATHER

It means a lot.

ANDREW

I said I gotta think.

ANDREW'S FATHER

(Sighing, he places his hand on Andrew's shoulder)

I'm tryin' awful hard to understand ya, boy. I'll tell your Ma to expect ya fer dinner.

(He exits. Andrew buries his face in his hands. He looks up, almost pleadingly. There is a swirling of colors and then once again the light takes on a blue, dream-like quality. Andrew

stands and walks forward a few steps. He halts and stares down into the audience. A small group of people enter from stage left. They cluster about him. They wear suits and one carries a Bible. He is a minister while the others seem to be friends. We see that one lady is Maggie, while the other, we soon find out, is his mother. Andrew's mother is sobbing, while Maggie clutches Andrew's arm as if to protect him.)

1st MAN

We're terrible sorry for you and your ma, boy. If there's anything we kin do, you jist say so.

2nd MAN

I 'member when I lost my Pa. Takes a while to understand it, and a lot longer to git over it. But 'ventually ya do. Ya have to. Got no other choice.

ANDREW'S MOTHER

(Looking down toward the audience, she speaks in a faltering tone.)

Oh Samuel. I miss ya already. Why'd ya have to go?

(She finally breaks down and the minister steadies her.)

REVEREND

There, there now Mrs. Greaves. You jist go ahead and cry. Cry it all out. Tears can do wonders for you. The Lord has no qualms about tears.

ANDREW'S MOTHER

(Acknowledging his statement)

But what am I goin' to do? I'm all alone now, Reverend. Ain't got nothin' in the world.

ANDREW

(Pained)

You know I'll take care of ya, Ma.

ANDREW'S MOTHER

(To the Reverend)

Samuel was such a good man. It jist don't seem right that he's dead.

REVEREND

It's difficult sometimes to understand the Lord's work, Mrs. Greaves. But in the final judgment He is always right.

ANDREW'S MOTHER

(Peering down into the audience)

He looks so tired, so . . .

1st MAN

(To Andrew's Mother)

He looks real natural, Mrs. Greaves. Real natural.

2nd MAN

(To Andrew)

He was a fine man, Andrew. Why, I 'member once . . .

(Andrew turns and walks away before the man can finish his story. The minister, sensing the situation, takes Mrs. Greaves' arm.)

REVEREND

Well, we'd best go up to the cemetery, Mrs. Greaves. They'll be bringin' the casket along shortly.

ANDREW'S MOTHER

Goodbye, Samuel.

(Sobs)

I'll come back ever'day, and we'll talk, jist the two of us.

REVEREND

(Taking her arm)

Here, let me help you. Come along folks.

(Everyone follows them out except for Maggie, who remains. She extends a hand to Andrew, who takes it.)

MAGGIE

Let's go Andrew.

ANDREW

(Letting go)

I cain't right now, I'll be up shortly. I got to think awhile.

(She nods and backs into the shadows, where she disappears. Andrew stares out and above the audience. The lights flow, indicating a time change. From out of the shadows stage right a woman emerges. Her dress and manner immediately suggests a prostitute. She strolls up to Andrew and smiles coyly.)

WOMAN

Why, hello there Andrew. What ya doin' in town this time o' night? First time I seen ya out since your Pa died.

(Pause)

Not talkin' much, are ya? Where's Maggie? I sure figured you two'd be together tonight.

(Again, he doesn't answer)

Whatcha gonna do now, Andrew? I mean 'bout your work. Are you gonna run your Pa's farm?

ANDREW

I don't know. I though I'd come into town jist to git away from the farm fer a night. I . . . need time to figure out what I'm gonna do. I gotta do somethin' worthwhile . . . fer Maggie. A man's gotta provide the best he kin for his wife.

(Trying to convince her)

I got plans . . . I jist need to git 'em straightened out in my mind.

WOMAN

Leroy Franks went into mining. Lord God, that boy's bonna make a fortune. He had well over a hunderd dollars the other night.

(Smiles)

Never was one to hang on to his money, though.

(Laughs, but Andrew gives no notice)

Where is Maggie, anyhow?

(Sarcastically)

Ya keepin' her locked up now?

ANDREW

(Retaliating)

She's home, where any decent woman ought to be at this hour.

WOMAN

Why Andrew!

(Taunting)

Shame, shame. But then I guess I ain't exactly little Miss pure panties.

(Pause)

Everybody figures you two'll git yourselves married, but I know better don't I honey? Come on, Andrew. Why don't you and me head over to my place and have ourselves a party tonight?

(No answer)

Why Andrew, this ain't like you at all. What's the matter, uh? You been drinkin' again? Tryin' to drown your sorrows?

(Laughs, but Andrew looks away)

You really gonna marry Maggie?

(No answer)

Come on Andrew, I'll show ya a real good time. Yeh, I'll show ya the time of your life.

(She takes his shoulders and turns him so that he faces her directly. She plants a kiss firmly on his lips. She leans back and laughs.)

WOMAN

We're jist two lonely people in the night!

(She laughs again and kisses him again, more passionately this time. Andrew closes his eyes and responds, taking her in his arms and kissing her neck. She giggles and pulls away. He gropes for her, but she stays just beyond his reach.)

Gonna take me home, Andrew? It's gettin' late. Come on honey, Maggie ain't gonna know.

(He suddenly stops and looks about him, covering his eyes with one hand. He slowly motions her away with the other.)

What's the matter?

ANDREW

I'm sorry, you'd better leave.

WOMAN

Huh? What's that s'posed to mean?

(She takes his arm teasingly)

ANDREW

This ain't right.

WOMAN

(Placing her hand on his chest)

Surely you ain't changed that much since your Pa died!

ANDREW

I said go away!

(Pulls loose from her grasp. He knocks her about somewhat in the process and she angrily slaps his face. She appears apprehensive about what she has done. Andrew simply looks away.)

WOMAN

(Arranging her clothing as she leaves)

You're damned right I'm goin' honey. And by God, next time it'll cost ya!

(Andrew is angry, mostly at himself. He crosses over to the mine entrance where he sits down. He closes his eyes. The lights slowly regain their brilliance and Andrew is sleeping outside the entrance. Paul crawls out and wakes him.)

ANDREW

(With anxiety)

Did ya find 'im?

PAUL

No, Andrew, I didn't. But I reckon we will. We're awful near the end.

ANDREW

(Apologetically)

I must have fallen asleep. I keep dreamin' 'bout the past . . . not about Michael in particular, jist thing's that's happened. Did ya ever do that, Paul? I mean . . . dream about the past, when ya was young, fer instance?

PAUL

Oh, I reckon I have Andrew. I reckon jist about everybody has, at sometime or other.

ANDREW

I wonder what dreams like that mean, Paul?

PAUL

Does it have to mean somethin' Andrew?

(Seeing that to Andrew it must)

Well I guess we jist look back over our lives as we git older tryin' to

find some reason for livin'. And maybe we do it in our dreams 'cause we ain't got the courage to do it when we're awake.

(Laughs a little)

I guess that's why I used to stay out all hours of the night, so I wouldn't have to dream.

ANDREW

Paul, d'ya think I made a mistake?

PAUL

How do ya mean Andrew?

ANDREW

In tryin' to make this mine work. I've worked it by myself fer years and I'm still dirt poor. My life's 'bout over Paul, and I ain't made nothin' yet. This hole's took everthin' I got. And now it's got its claws wrapped 'round Michael. The only difference is that it's swallowed him whole while it jist kep' chewin' on me a little bit at a time. D'ya think I made a mistake?

PAUL

Each man's gotta make his own decisions an' live by 'em. I cain't say that your choice was wrong, no more than I can say my choice was right. You gotta be the judge of that, Andrew. No man alive's got the right to judge another man's life.

(There is the sound of men talking offstage)

Here comes some more help. Ya oughta go on home and rest a while. We can manage without ya. I mean it Andrew. Go on home. I'll come by if . . .

(He doesn't finish, but instead pats Andrew's shoulder gently. He turns and re-enters the mine. Andrew looks regretfully at the entrance and slowly exits as the lights slowly dim.)

CURTAIN

III. ACT III

(The scene is the same as the first act. The mine entrance is now gone and in its place are the table and chairs. The entire stage is well lighted. Maggie is seated at the table alone. She is looking at several yellowed photographs. There is a knock at the door and she turns instantly. There is definite fear on her face, but she slowly rises and crosses hesitantly to the door. She reaches halfway, stops, and then opens the door. Amy steps in.)

AMY

Good mornin', Maggie.

MAGGIE

Oh, Amy. I thought it . . . Can I fix ya some coffee or somethin'?

AMY

No . . . I just had some breakfast over at Momma's. She said she'd be over to see ya tonight.

(There is no answer from Maggie, though not from indifference but rather from a preoccupation with her own thoughts.)

Any news?

(She sits at the table)

MAGGIE

No. It's three days now. I believe we'll know soon.

(Amy looks up at her, apprehensively. Maggie becomes uncomfortable and very emotional for an instant, before diverting the conversation.)

I've been lookin' at some old pictures. That big one there's me and Andrew. It was taken when we'd jist gotten married. Had some others, but for the life o' me I cain't find 'em anywhere. The little pictures are the girls and Michael.

(Laughs)

I reckon ya could tell that.

AMY

(Almost wistfully)

They were so small, weren't they?

MAGGIE

Yes, they were small. We were all small at one time. Some of us jist grow more than others, but we all start out the same.

AMY

And then some of us don't even get the chance to grow.

MAGGIE

Yes, that's true.

AMY

Michael had so many dreams. You know, he never really got the chance to do much growin', as a person I mean. The few years we've been married he's done nothin' but work in the mine. You can't do any growin', any plannin' in there. You jist come home and rest, and get ready for the next day's work. And then, the next thing ya know . . .

MAGGIE

You're old and gray an' your clothes an' belongin's aren't no better'n they were forty years before. Fact is, they're probably the same with a few more patches here an' there.

AMY

(Hesitantly)

Yes, that's right. And then all the dreamin' in the world won't help. It's too late. Your whole life is gone and no one can bring it back. I know this may sound funny, comin' from me, but Maggie, I'm scared of gettin' old with absolutely nothin' to show for it. I wanted Michael and me to have somethin', but I guess that was an empty dream.

MAGGIE

No, no dream's empty. I had that dream myself. I guess I still have it, like Andrew. But we're both beginnin' to run outta time, jist like you're scared o' doin'. Ya don't really notice 'til one mornin' ya look in the mirror, and you're not there. And in your place is some wrinkled, gray, ugly old woman who never was young.

AMY

I'm sorry if I've upset ya.

MAGGIE

No need to be sorry. Besides, I'm not upset. Bein' upset is fer young people. Old people got no right to be upset with things. They had their chance.

AMY

(Drinking her coffee)

Where's Andrew?

MAGGIE

Asleep. Come in at dawn. I could hear 'im cryin' and talkin' in his sleep 'til about an hour ago. He's been quiet since then.

AMY

I pity 'im, Maggie, but I pity Michael an' me more. Andrew was blind to everythin', but Michael could see where he wanted to go. Then Andrew blinded him and made him feel so guilty he gave up any chance he ever had to git outta here. I try to feel sorry for 'im but it jist doesn't work.

MAGGIE

I don't want ya to feel sorry for 'im, Amy. I want ya to understand 'im.

(There is the sound of a door opening and Andrew shuffles in. He wears his boots, pants, and undershirt.)

Andrew, what are ya doin' up?

ANDREW

I couldn't sleep no more.

(Sits down)

Has anybody been here?

MAGGIE

No. Want some coffee?

ANDREW

(Nods his head and Maggie crosses to prepare coffee)

I had a dream . . . a nightmare, I reckon.

(Pause)

He's dead, Maggie. I dreamed he was dead.

AMY

You dreamed he was dead?

(Bitterly)

No! You've got no right to dream he was dead. He's a human being--not something you can just toss away when you're through with it!

ANDREW

(Defensively)

I weren't a wishin' fer it, Amy. I jist dreamed. It was a nightmare.

AMY

This whole thing's a nightmare. It should never have happened. None of it. There was no need. It's been senseless from the beginning. From the moment the dirt first started fallin' to those final seconds when the whole roof come tumbling down, it's been one big frightenin' nightmare.

ANDREW

I told ya before 'bout that dirt fallin', how ya cain't blame me . . .

AMY

Oh, it goes back long before any dirt started fallin'. It goes back to when you forced Michael to go work in your mine in the first place.

ANDREW

I didn't force 'im to. He come to me on his own. You was even with 'im . . .

AMY

That's right. He came on his own. Because if he didn't come his own father would've disowned him, and all because he committed the crime of wantin' a decent life for himself and his family. He could've been anythin' he wanted, but instead he was forced to spend his life searchin' for the impossible. You made him just like you, dreaming his life away and reachin' into a darkness that's full of nothin'.

ANDREW

(Pained)

I don't want to talk 'bout it.

AMY

That's right. Shove it away so you won't have to face the truth. If you try real hard, maybe you can even forget you ever had a son!

ANDREW

(Hurt)

I didn't mean it that a way, Amy.

AMY

Of course you didn't. You've never meant for anything to turn out the way it has. You never meant for Maggie to live in this shack, chokin' her life away on coal dust and empty promises! You never meant for Michael to be dirt poor, and you never meant for me to be a widow with my husband's bones rottin' away in . . .

MAGGIE

(Almost in tears)

Please, Amy!

AMY

(Beginning to sob)

Maggie's so afraid of hurtin' you that even she's become blind to the truth. But I can still see and I'm tired of tryin' to understand you! You're nothin' but a selfish, stupid, blind old man!

(She gets up, crying, and exits)

MAGGIE

Amy!

ANDREW

No . . . leave her be. She's right, Maggie. You an' I both know she's right. I am a selfish, stupid ol' man, but dear God, cain't she see I'm payin' fer it?

(Maggie doesn't answer)

Go after her . . . to set things right with her. Tell her that, Maggie, would ya?

MAGGIE

I'll do what I kin.

(She exits. Andrew gently picks up the photograph and muses over it. He wipes an eye and rests his chin on his hand, closing his eyes. He opens his eyes again and stands up slowly. He walks to the edge of the stage, peering out over the audience. He raises one arm as if to plead.)

ANDREW

Why? D'ya hear me, God? I'm askin' YOU! I want YOU to tell me why my family . . . my whole life . . . has been torn up an' scattered away? Have you gotta plan, God? Is there somethin' here I don't see?

ANDREW

(Pleadingly)

If there is, I wish you'd tell me.

(Pause)

If I'm bein' punished for a wrong I done, it seems ya'd at least have the common decency to tell me what I did.

(Pause)

Not talkin', huh?

(Suddenly realizing the ridiculousness of his query)

Tired . . . I'm so tired I ain't thinkin' straight, Lord. You'll have to forgive me . . . tired . . .

(He runs his hand through his hair as the lights slowly dim and change from white to blue. From stage right two men slowly enter. One of them is Michael. He is dirty and soiled by coal dust. The other is Andrew's father. They walk up to Andrew and stop. Andrew peers up at them.)

ANDREW

Pa? Michael? . . . What . . . I knew you'd be alright, Michael! I knew we'd find ya. Ya see, Amy . . . I told ya . . .

(Looks around and sees no one else is there. He turns back to Michael and his father.)

What are ya doin' here, Pa?

ANDREW'S FATHER

We've come to judge ya, son.

ANDREW

Judge me? I don't understand, Pa.

ANDREW'S FATHER

Ever' person has got to face up to a judgment sometime in his life, son.

ANDREW

Judgment fer what, Pa?

ANDREW'S FATHER

On how much ya got done in life. On the good ya done, as well as the bad.

ANDREW

No, Pa. I ain't ready to be judged jist yet. Ya cain't judge me now.

ANDREW'S FATHER

I'm afraid it's time, Andrew. We don't have no say over when we're to be judged.

ANDREW

But I got so much to do yet, Pa.

(Desperate)

Things is jist now goin' right fer me. I got lots o' plans . . .

MICHAEL

You ain't got no plans, Pa.

ANDREW

Michael . . .?

MICHAEL

No plans at all. I listened to your dreams for twenty years. I even started believin' 'em myself, but now I know they was just . . . dreams. You ain't got no plans, Pa.

ANDREW'S FATHER

Your boy's right, Andrew. Your Ma and me worried ourselves sick 'bout ya, and I can see now we was right in doin' so.

ANDREW

But I tried awful hard. Don't a man git credit fer tryin', Pa?

ANDREW'S FATHER

Yes, a man kin git credit fer tryin', but when ya don't make it an' ya drag a log of good people down with ya, that changes things.

ANDREW

I didn't mean to drag nobody down, much less my own family.

MICHAEL

Ya drug me down, Pa. Ya coulda taken a gun and shot me and not done no worse. In fact, it might've been better.

ANDREW

No, Michael! . . .

ANDREW'S FATHER

Are ya ready, son?

(Andrew doesn't answer. From stage right another small group of men enter, including Maggie's father, the Reverend, and Paul. They stand silently, confronting Andrew.)

ANDREW

Paul! You tell 'em I meant well, Paul!

REVEREND

I have to ask ya to hold your peace for a spell, Mr. Greaves. This hearing is to be conducted in a civil manner. Now, we are gathered here to judge one Andrew Greaves, a member of this community . . .

ANDREW

I tell ya I ain't ready. Don't ya hear me?

REVEREND

. . . and see if he is fit to join the rest of us. Does anyone here know of any good this man has done?

PAUL

Well, Reverend, he's been a friend, and he's never done me no harm, that I can think of. It's true he didn't do much in life, but I reckon he meant well. He always meant well. He jist had problems.

REVEREND

Thank you, Paul.

(Paul slowly exits into the shadows.)

ANDREW

No! Don't leave me here alone, Paul!

REVEREND

Does anyone here know of any harm this man has done?

MAGGIE'S FATHER

I do. He brought my family nothin' but ruin an' heartache. He took my only daughter an' gave her a life of nothin' ---- havin' nothin' and bein' nothin'. She was young an' pretty an' he made her old an' ugly before her time. Seems like ever'thing he ever touched jist withered away. I reckon that's all I got to say.

(He turns and exits)

REVEREND

Well, Andrew, is that right?

ANDREW

I didn't mean to, Reverend. No, it's not right.

REVEREND

(To Andrew's father and Michael)

And what do you have to say?

ANDREW'S FATHER

He was a good child . . . sweetest child ya ever laid eyes on. But he changed. He didn't git mean or anything like that, he jist changed for the worst. Nobody could talk to 'im or tell 'im nothin'. He jist didn't seem to care for nobody or nothin'.

ANDREW

I'm sorry, Pa.

ANDREW'S FATHER

He put me in my grave a sorrowful man, an', well, that's all I got to say.

(Exits slowly)

REVEREND

And you, Michael, what have you to say?

MICHAEL

He killed me. He drug me in that mine, an' dug a hole, an' laid me in it. Took 'im two long years to do it, but he finally got me buried.

ANDREW

No!

MICHAEL

He murdered me, Reverend. He plain murdered me.

(Turns slowly and exits)

ANDREW

Michael . . .

REVEREND

Well Andrew . . .

ANDREW

(Sobbing)

But where's Maggie? She'll tell ya I meant well. Where is she? She's s'posed to be here.

(There is a loud knock at the door. The Reverend exits and the lights brighten. Andrew is alone on stage. Again there is a knock. Andrew wipes his eyes on his shirt sleeve and answers the door. It is Paul who enters excitedly.)

PAUL

We've found 'im Andrew!

(Andrew is stunned, gives no answer, but his tired, searching eyes ask the question.)

Cain't be sure. We've got 'im on the outside. He's unconscious, I think. His skin's still got some color to it, though his leg's crushed pretty bad.

(Maggie and Amy enter)

MAGGIE

(Seeing the excitement)

What's happened?

AMY

It's Michael, have they found Michael?

PAUL

Yes ma'am, we've found him, but he's in terrible bad shape.

(Searching for words)

He . . . may already be . . .

AMY

O God! Please! Please let him be alive.

MAGGIE

(Her eyes closed)

Please dear God. Let our son come home.

(She exits frantically, followed by Amy and Paul)

PAUL

Come on, Andrew, we've got to he'p the women in case . . .

(He is out the door. Andrew looks upward and begins to cry uncontrollably. He sinks to his knees near the doorway and grasps the wall.)

ANDREW

(Angrily)

If he's dead . . . damn you, God! Damn you forever! Why'd ya hafta punish him fer? What'd he ever do to ya? Nothin', that's what! You jist wanna hurt somebody that don't know how to fight back!

(Pause)

He's innocent, Lord. I'm the one ya want!

(Becoming more contrite)

I swear to ya . . . he's never hurt nobody. He's been good, awful good. I know I've failed . . . I've failed ever'body . . . Michael, Maggie, you . . . an' me. But ya gotta let 'im go. He kin do somethin'. He kin straighten out the mess I've made.

(He hesitates, then breaks down again)

Oh, please God. Let 'im be alive. Take me if you want, but, oh God, don't let 'im be dead. I'm gonna change things, I promise ya.

(Smiling through his tears)

I got plans . . .

(The lights slowly fade out until there is complete darkness. When they come back up, the stage is empty. The table is in total darkness. Only the area extreme down center stage is well lighted. A line of people, including Maggie, Amy, Paul, and Michael, with crutches, enter from stage left. They gather down center stage and peer solemnly into the audience. Maggie wears a black shawl and she has been crying. She reaches down, appears to pick up a handful of dirt, and tosses it down toward the audience.)

MICHAEL

Don't ya think it's time we went home, Ma?

MAGGIE

(Sadly)

Yes, I guess we'd best go on home.

(Looks again at the audience)

MAGGIE

I never figured on losin' Andrew. I thought I'd lost my son, but all the while it was my husband I was losin'.

PAUL

He was a strong man, Maggie, but a man kin only take so much. He didn't suffer none. He jist dropped at the door, like he was layin' down to sleep. He didn't suffer none at all.

MAGGIE

(Blinking back the tears)

Oh no, he suffered. You don't know how he suffered.

AMY

We've got to go.

(Gently)

It's goin' to rain, Maggie.

MAGGIE

(Looking up)

Yes, I believe it is. We're leavin', Andrew, but I'll be back ever'day. An' we'll talk . . . jist the two o' us.

(Sobs)

Jist the two o' us . . .

(Amy leads her away and the others follow, save for Paul and Michael. Paul places his hand on Michael's shoulder, trying to comfort him.)

PAUL

What're ya goin' to do now, Michael?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

PAUL

I'd advise ya, as a friend, to sell the place an' buy ya a farm or go into business someway or other. You've got to think of the future an' your family.

(A moment's silence)

D'ya want to go on home now?

MICHAEL

(Looking toward the audience)

I cain't jist now. I gotta think awhile.

PAUL

(Understandingly)

I'll head on home with your Ma an' Amy. You come on directly.

(Exits)

MICHAEL

(Waits until Paul is gone)

What should I do, Pa? I tried hard to do what you wanted me to do. But it's just so tough to keep on diggin'.

(Hesitates)

Do ya think I can make it work, Pa?

(He acts as if he really expects an answer, but, of course, there is no answer. He peers down at the ground and stoops, taking some soil in his hand. He starts to toss the dirt on his father's casket but hesitates. He opens his hand, stares for a moment at the contents, and quietly places the hand, dirt closed tightly within, into his coat pocket. He lowers his head, turns reluctantly, and slowly exits.)

CURTAIN

VITA

N. Brent Kennedy, III, was born in Norton, Virginia on November 15, 1950. He attended J. J. Kelly High School in Wise, Virginia and was graduated in 1969. The following year he entered Clinch Valley College of the University of Virginia in Wise, Virginia. In May, 1973, he received from Clinch Valley College a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. He entered the University of Tennessee as a graduate student in the fall of 1973 and received the Master of Arts degree with a major in Speech and Theatre in June, 1974.