

same, but it ain't. All night long it's been moving, coming in through the stream back there in the west, clipping out through the stream down east. Always quiet, always new, moving on. You can't hardly see the current, can you? But it's always there, the water's always moving on, and someday, after a long while, it comes to the ocean.

(The bullfrog again.)

JESSE: There's our friend singin' again.

(Another distant frog noise.)

MILES: And there's his brother's answer.

MAE: Or his mother's.

(They laugh softly. More frogs speak.)

TUCK: Know what happens then? To the water? The sun sucks it up right out of the ocean and carries it back in clouds, and then it rains, and the rain falls into the stream, and the stream keeps moving on, takin' it all back again. It's a wheel, Winnie. Everything's a wheel turning and turning, never stopping. The frogs is part of it, and the bugs, and the fish, and the wood thrush, too. And people. But never the same ones. Always coming in new, always growing and changing, and always moving on. That's the way it's supposed to be. That's the way it is.

MAE: Time to get a move on with your chores, boys.

MILES: I'll put the horse to bed.

JESSE: I'll help you with those dishes, Ma.

(They disappear.)

TUCK: But us Tuck's, Winnie, we're stuck. Stuck so's we can't move on. We ain't part of the wheel no more. Dropped off, Winnie. Left behind. And everywhere around us, things is moving and growing and changing. You, for instance. A child now, but someday a woman. And after that, moving on to make room for the new children.

(WINNIE stands suddenly, rocking the boat. A cry:)

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

WINNIE: I don't want to die!

TUCK: No, not now. Your time's not now. But dying's part of the wheel, right there next to being born. You can't pick out the pieces you like and leave the rest. Being part of the whole thing, that's the blessing. But it's passing us by, us Tucks. Living's heavy work, but off to one side, the way we are, it's useless, too. It don't make sense. If I knowed how to climb back on the wheel, I'd do it in a minute. You can't have living without dying. So you can't call it living what we got. We just *are*, we just *be*, like rocks beside the road. I want to grow again, and change. And if that means I got to move on at the end of it, then I want that, too. Listen, Winnie, it's something you don't find out how you feel about until afterwards. If people knowed about the spring down there in Treegap, they'd all come running like pigs to slops. They'd trample each other trying to get some of that water. That'd be bad enough, but afterwards—can you imagine? All the little ones little forever, all the old ones old forever. Can you picture what that means? Forever? The wheel would keep on going 'round, the water rolling by to the ocean, but the people would've turned into nothing but rocks by the side of the road. 'Cause they wouldn't know till after, and then it'd be too late. Do you see now, child? Do you understand? Oh, Lord, I just got to make you understand!

MILES: (*From offstage, panic stricken:*) Pa! Pa! Come back! The horse is gone. Can you hear me, Pa? Someone's stole the horse!

TUCK: It's begun, Winnie. Our secret's begun to unravel. Where will it all end? Oh, Lord, where will it all end?

(He bows his head.)

WINNIE: (*Her face anguished:*) I do understand. I do. I don't want to, but I do. Oh, how I want to feel safe again!

(Blackout.)

TUCK EVERLASTING

adapted by Mark Frattaroli
from the book by Natalie Babbitt

(A music box is heard playing in the blackout. VOICES are heard.)

VOICES:

August.

The first week of August hangs at the very top of summer,
like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in
its turning.

The weeks that come before are only a climb from balmy
spring,

And those that follow, a drop to the chill of autumn,
But the first week of August is motionless and hot.

Silent too.

Blank white dawns.

Glaring noons.

And sunsets smeared with too much color.

Often there is lightening at night. But it quivers all alone.

There is no thunder,

No relieving rain.

These are strange, breathless days...

The dog days.

...when people are led to do things they are sure to be sorry
for after.

*(MAE and TUCK are discovered on their wagon, driving
slowly. The clip-clop of horses' hooves can be heard.)*

MAE: We're almost home.

TUCK: Good. I was thinking I might nap.

MAE: Why? There's plenty of time to sleep.

TUCK: I want to dream that dream again. The good one where
we're all in heaven and never heard of Treegap.

Tuck Everlasting

MAE: It's no use having that dream. Nothing's going to change.

TUCK: You tell me that every day. Anyways, I can't help what I dream.

MAE: Maybe not. But, all the same, you should've got use to things by now.

TUCK: And all the same, I'm still going to nap.

MAE: Well, I'm going to take the horse and go down to the woods and meet them.

TUCK: Meet who?

MAE: The boys, Tuck! Our sons! I'm going to ride down to meet them. *(A pause.)* The boys'll be home tomorrow! The boys'll be home tomorrow!

(She hugs him.)

TUCK: I know. Still you'd better not go down there.

MAE: But I can't wait to see them. Anyways, it's been ten years since I went to Treegap. No one'll remember me. I'll ride in at sunset, just to the wood. I won't go into the village. Besides if someone did see me, they won't remember. They never have before now, did they?

TUCK: No, but be careful. Someone might see you, and follow you to the tree, and then they'd find the spring. And if that happened, it could be a disaster.

MAE: We found the spring.

TUCK: And look what it's done to us.

(Pause.)

MAE: The Fosters own the land now. It's private property. No one will trespass.

TUCK: Except you.

MAE: *(She looks at him.)* I'm still going.

TUCK: Suit yourself.

In the ring of trees around the pond, the birds are celebrating,
Giving the new day a brass band's worth of greeting.

(WINNIE has arisen and gone to the door to look over the pond. There is a noise from the stairs.)

WINNIE: Jesse!

(She straightens her hair and rumpled clothes. MILES appears with fishing poles.)

Oh, Miles. Good morning.

MILES: Good morning. Glad you're awake. Come on—you can help me catch some fish for breakfast.

(They move out of the house to the pond's edge. MILES gives her a pole.)

Watch out for the hooks. How'd you sleep.

WINNIE: All right.

MILES: That's good. I'm glad. Ever been fishing before?

WINNIE: No.

MILES: You'll like it. It's fun.

(He baits the hooks. WINNIE stares off.)

WINNIE: It's beautiful here. So peaceful.

(Pause.)

MILES: There'll be trout down in those weeds and stems. Here's your pole. Just ease the hook down in the water. You'll know when you get a bite.

(They sit silently, poles in the water.)

Remember I told you I had two children? Well, one of them was a girl. I took her fishing, too. Her name was Anna. Lord how sweet she was, that child. It's queer to think she'd be close to eighty now, if she's even still alive. And my son—he'd be eighty-two.

WINNIE: Why didn't you take them to the spring and give them some of the special water?

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

MILES: Well, we didn't realize about the spring while we was still on the farm. Afterwards, I thought about going to find them. I wanted to, heaven knows. But, Winnie, how'd it have been if I had? My wife was nearly forty by then. And the children—they'd have been near growed theirselves. They'd have had a pa close to the same age they was. No, it'd all have been so mixed up and peculiar. It just wouldn't have worked. The fewer people know about the spring, the fewer there are to tell about it.

WINNIE: You really are going to bring me home today, aren't you?

MILES: Of course, Winnie. Of course we are.

(She looks up at him then impulsively kisses his cheek. He smiles shyly. WINNIE turns away.)

(A pause. MAE crosses in the house from the bedroom to kitchen and disappears.)

WINNIE: There certainly are a lot of frogs around here.

MILES: That's so. They'll keep coming too, long as the turtles stay away. Snappers, now, they'll eat a frog soon as look at him.

WINNIE: It'd be nice if nothing ever had to die.

MILES: Well, now, I don't know. If you think on it, you come to see there'd be so many creatures, including people, we'd all be squeezed in right up next to each other before long.

WINNIE: I guess you're right.

(Her pole jerks.)

MILES: Hey! You got a bite. Fresh trout for breakfast, Winnie.

(The pole goes limp.)

Shucks, it got away.

WINNIE: I'm kind of glad. You fish, Miles. I'm not so sure I want to.

(Pause. TUCK comes out of the bedroom and stands at the doorway looking at them.)

(She crouches again and peers towards the back. The vines shift revealing a clearing and a huge twisted tree with roots and thick branches. The clearing is brightly lit and at the foot of the tree is JESSE, thin, sunburned, and looking up into the light. He is relaxed, self-assured and waving a twig idly, tucked between his toes.)

WINNIE: Look, Toad. It's a boy. He's beautiful!

(JESSE rolls over, moves some stones near the base of the tree, cups his hands, and drinks from them. He drinks again then runs his sleeve across his mouth. Meanwhile, WINNIE tries to get a better view and puts down the toad who hops away. She reaches for it and falls over. JESSE jumps up. They freeze. Finally, he lowers his arm.)

JESSE: You may as well get up.

(She does so, embarrassed.)

WINNIE: I didn't mean to watch you. I didn't know anyone would be here.

JESSE: *(Coming forward sternly:) What're you doing here?*

WINNIE: It's my wood. I can come here whenever I want to. At least, I was never here before, but I could have come. Any time.

JESSE: Oh, you're one of the Fosters, then.

WINNIE: I'm Winnie. Who are you?

JESSE: I'm Jesse Tuck. How do.

(He offers his hand. She takes it, gasping a little at his touch—and his beauty.)

WINNIE: Oh!—uh—do you live nearby?

(She lets go of his hand reluctantly.)

I never saw you before. Do you come here a lot? No one's supposed to. It's our wood. It's all right though, if you come here. I mean, it's all right with me.

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

JESSE: *(Laughs.)* No, I don't live nearby, and no, I don't come here often. Just passing through. And thanks, I'm glad it's all right with you.

WINNIE: That's good.

(She steps back and sits.)

How old are you anyway?

(A pause.)

JESSE: Why do you want to know?

WINNIE: I just wondered.

JESSE: All right. I'm one hundred and four years old.

WINNIE: *(Laughing:)* No, I mean really.

JESSE: Well then, if you must know, I'm seventeen.

WINNIE: Seventeen?

JESSE: That's right.

WINNIE: Oh, seventeen. That's old.

JESSE: *(Ironically:)* You have no idea.

WINNIE: *(Smiles:)* Are you married?

JESSE: *(Loud laugh.)* No, I'm not married. Are you?

WINNIE: *(Laughs.)* Of course not. I'm only ten. But I'll be eleven pretty soon.

JESSE: And then you'll get married.

(She laughs and sits back to admire him. He accepts her gaze proudly. Then in search of conversation...pointing at the spring:)

WINNIE: Is that good to drink? I'm thirsty.

JESSE: *(His humor goes.)* Oh, that. No...no...it's not. You mustn't drink from it. Comes right up out of the ground. Probably pretty dirty.

(He crosses to it and piles the stones on it.)

WINNIE: But you drank some.

Tuck Everlasting

JESSE: Oh, did you see that? Well, me I'll drink anything. I mean I'm used to it. It wouldn't be good for you though.

WINNIE: Why not?

(She stands.)

It's mine anyway. If it's in the wood. I want some. I'm about dry as dust.

JESSE: Believe me, Winnie Foster, it would terrible for you if you drank any of this water. Just terrible. I can't let you.

WINNIE: *(Pulling back:)* Well, I don't see why not. I'm getting thirstier every minute. If it didn't hurt you, it won't hurt me. If my papa was here, he'd let me have some.

JESSE: You're not going to tell him about it, are you?

(He stands, upset.)

I knew this would happen sooner or later. Now what am I going to do?

(There is a crashing of brush offstage and then a voice.)

MAE: *(Off:)* Jesse!

JESSE: *(Relieved:)* Thank goodness! Here comes Ma and Miles. They'll know what to do.

(MAE and MILES enter.)

MAE: Jesse! Where have you...

(She sees WINNIE and stops suddenly as does MILES.)

MILES: Who is...

MAE: Jesse?

(They exchange looks. Her hands fly to her bosom.)

Well, boys, here it is. The worst is happening at last.

(They all stare at WINNIE, who rises slowly, scared. Suddenly, the three Tucks break into a brisk pacing, back and forth in crisscross patterns.)

MILES: Does she know?

JESSE: No, I didn't say anything.

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

MAE: We been alone so long. I guess we don't know how to do with visitors. But still and all, it's a good feeling, you being here with us. I wish you was ours.

(She reaches out to WINNIE.)

MAE: Good night.

(MAE goes.)

WINNIE: *(To herself:) It can't be true. They're crazy.*

(She lies down. It is still.)

Mama...Papa...

(TUCK reenters.)

TUCK: You resting easy, child?

WINNIE: *(Surprised and embarrassed:) Oh! Uh, yes, thank you.*

TUCK: I didn't mean to go disturbing you. But I been thinkin' I ought to be sitting out here with you till you go to sleep.

WINNIE: *(Surprised and touched:) You don't have to do that. I'm all right.*

TUCK: Well...but if you want something, will you holler? I'll be just in the next room. I'd be out here like a shot. It's been quite a time since we had a natural, growing child in the house. Well, try to get some sleep. That sofa there, I guess it ain't the kind of thing you're used to.

WINNIE: It's fine.

TUCK: The bed's no better or I'd switch with you.

(He pauses, bends over, kisses her cheek and leaves. She watches him go, hand to cheek. JESSE sneaks into the room.)

JESSE: Hey, Winnie Foster? You asleep?

(She sits up suddenly pulling the blanket around her.)

WINNIE: *(Eyes wide:) No, not yet.*

JESSE: Well, then, listen. I been thinkin' it over. Pa's right about you having to keep the secret. It's not hard to see why. But the thing is, you knowing about the water already, and living

right next to it. Well, listen, how'd it be if you was to wait till you're seventeen, same age as me—heck, that's only six years off—then you could go and drink some, and then you could go away with me! We could get married, even. That'd be pretty good, wouldn't it! We could have a grand old time, go all around the world, see everything. Ma and Pa and Miles, they don't know how to enjoy it, what we got. Why, heck, Winnie, life's to enjoy yourself, isn't it? What else is it good for? And you and me, we could have a good time that never, never stopped. Wouldn't that be something?

WINNIE: *(Eyes still wide:) Y—y—yes.*

JESSE: You think on it, Winnie Foster. Think on it some and see if it don't sound good. Anyway, I'll see you in the morning. All right?

WINNIE: All right.

(He leaves. She sits bolt upright, smile wide.)

He's so beautiful. It must be true.

(Stops in confusion.)

Ohhhh!

(She pulls the covers over her head in frustration. End of scene.)

VOICES:

The darkness begins to lighten,
Circling back towards day.

But the heat still threatens its seemingly endless hold on the air.

Morning promises no relief.

(Enter the CONSTABLE, wheezing, followed by the STRANGER.)

CONSTABLE: First they rouse me out of bed in the middle of the night, after I been out since sun-up looking for that child, and now, I s'pose, you're going to try to run me all the way. I got to tell you that horse of mine is none too strong. I don't have to hurry her as a rule, so most of the time it don't matter. Seems to me we could've waited till dawn, anyway.

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

MAE: I am. Will you be all right by yourself? We won't be back till late tomorrow.

TUCK: What in the world could possibly happen to me?

MAE: That's so. I keep forgetting.

TUCK: I don't. Well, have a nice time without me.

(He leans back, covers his face and sleeps. MAE drives on, opens her music box and listens to its song. The music closes the scene.)

VOICES:

The sun opens its eye on the eastern horizon.

Another heavy morning.

Hot.

Windless.

Breathless.

Suffocating.

(The Foster's house. An iron, cage-like fence surrounds it. WINNIE storms out of the house and down to the gate. She picks up some pebbles and begins tossing them over the fence.)

WINNIE: I don't think I can stand it much longer!

GRANNY: *(From the door:)* Winifred! Don't sit on that dirty grass. You'll stain your boots and stockings. And don't stay out too long. This breathless morning air is no good for you.

(She leaves.)

WINNIE: *(In anger:)* Ohhhhh!

(She throws some pebbles very hard, then realizes there is something beyond the fence.)

Oh! Hello Toad. I'm sorry. I hope I didn't hit you. I'm just so cross today. My parents and Granny are always watching me. If I had a sister or a brother, there'd be someone else, but there's only me. I'm tired of being looked at all the time. I want to be by myself for a change.

(She leans over the fence.)

You can understand how I feel. I want to get out and do something! I'm not exactly sure what, but something interesting—something that's all mine. Something that would make a difference in the world. I'd like to be like you, out in the open and making up my own mind. Do you know, they've hardly ever let me out of this yard all by myself? I'll never be able to do anything important if I stay in here like this. I expect I'd better run away. You think I wouldn't dare, don't you? I will though. You'll see. I'll run away. First thing tomorrow. While everyone's still asleep.

GRANNY: (From within:) Winnie Foster!

WINNIE: All right! I'm coming!

(Pause.)

I mean, I'll be right there, Granny.

(She brushes at her dress and stockings.)

Hop away, toad. You'll see. Just wait till tomorrow.

(She turns to go. A STRANGER in a yellow suit and black hat appears out of the shadows. He might have been there watching for a while. As WINNIE reaches the door, he speaks.)

STRANGER: Good morning!

(WINNIE turns, taken by surprise.)

WINNIE: Good morning.

STRANGER: Out for air, are you?

WINNIE: Yes.

STRANGER: A lovely thing to do on a summer morning.

(He leans on the fence.)

A lovely entertainment. I used to do it myself when I was your age. But of course that was a long, long time ago.

(WINNIE frowns and studies him closely.)

STRANGER: Is this your house?

(She crouches again and peers towards the back. The vines shift revealing a clearing and a huge twisted tree with roots and thick branches. The clearing is brightly lit and at the foot of the tree is JESSE, thin, sunburned, and looking up into the light. He is relaxed, self-assured and waving a twig idly, tucked between his toes.)

WINNIE

JESSE: Look, Toad. It's a boy. He's beautiful!

(JESSE rolls over, moves some stones near the base of the tree, cups his hands, and drinks from them. He drinks again then runs his sleeve across his mouth. Meanwhile, WINNIE tries to get a better view and puts down the toad who hops away. She reaches for it and falls over. JESSE jumps up. They freeze. Finally, he lowers his arm.)

JESSE: You may as well get up.

(She does so, embarrassed.)

WINNIE: I didn't mean to watch you. I didn't know anyone would be here.

JESSE: *(Coming forward sternly:) What're you doing here?*

WINNIE: It's my wood. I can come here whenever I want to. At least, I was never here before, but I could have come. Any time.

JESSE: Oh, you're one of the Fosters, then.

WINNIE: I'm Winnie. Who are you?

JESSE: I'm Jesse Tuck. How do.

(He offers his hand. She takes it, gasping a little at his touch—and his beauty.)

WINNIE: Oh!—uh—do you live nearby?

(She lets go of his hand reluctantly.)

I never saw you before. Do you come here a lot? No one's supposed to. It's our wood. It's all right though, if you come here. I mean, it's all right with me.

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

JESSE: *(Laughs.)* No, I don't live nearby, and no, I don't come here often. Just passing through. And thanks, I'm glad it's all right with you.

WINNIE: That's good.

(She steps back and sits.)

How old are you anyway?

(A pause.)

JESSE: Why do you want to know?

WINNIE: I just wondered.

JESSE: All right. I'm one hundred and four years old.

WINNIE: *(Laughing:)* No, I mean really.

JESSE: Well then, if you must know, I'm seventeen.

WINNIE: Seventeen?

JESSE: That's right.

WINNIE: Oh, seventeen. That's old.

JESSE: *(Ironically:)* You have no idea.

WINNIE: *(Smiles:)* Are you married?

JESSE: *(Loud laugh.)* No, I'm not married. Are you?

WINNIE: *(Laughs.)* Of course not. I'm only ten. But I'll be eleven pretty soon.

JESSE: And then you'll get married.

(She laughs and sits back to admire him. He accepts her gaze proudly. Then in search of conversation...pointing at the spring:)

WINNIE: Is that good to drink? I'm thirsty.

JESSE: *(His humor goes.)* Oh, that. No...no...it's not. You mustn't drink from it. Comes right up out of the ground. Probably pretty dirty.

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Tuck Everlasting

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JESSE: You're not going to tell him about it, are you?

(He stands, upset.)

I knew this would happen sooner or later. Now what am I going to do?

(There is a crashing of brush offstage and then a voice.)

MAE: *(Off:) Jesse!*

JESSE: *(Relieved:) Thank goodness! Here comes Ma and Miles. They'll know what to do.*

(MAE and MILES enter.)

MAE: Jesse! Where have you...

(She sees WINNIE and stops suddenly as does MILES.)

MILES: Who is...

MAE: Jesse?

(They exchange looks. Her hands fly to her bosom.)

Well, boys, here it is. The worst is happening at last.

(They all stare at WINNIE, who rises slowly, scared. Suddenly, the three Tucks break into a brisk pacing, back and forth in crisscross patterns.)

MILES: Does she know?

JESSE: No, I didn't say anything.

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

MAE: I am. Will you be all right by yourself? We won't be back till late tomorrow.

TUCK: What in the world could possibly happen to me?

MAE: That's so. I keep forgetting.

TUCK: I don't. Well, have a nice time without me.

(He leans back, covers his face and sleeps. MAE drives on, opens her music box and listens to its song. The music closes the scene.)

VOICES:

The sun opens its eye on the eastern horizon.

Another heavy morning.

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Suffocating.

(The Foster's house. An iron, cage-like fence surrounds it. WINNIE storms out of the house and down to the gate. She picks up some pebbles and begins tossing them over the fence.)

WINNIE: I don't think I can stand it much longer!

GRANNY: *(From the door:)* Winifred! Don't sit on that dirty grass. You'll stain your boots and stockings. And don't stay out too long. This breathless morning air is no good for you.

(She leaves.)

WINNIE: *(In anger:)* Ohhhhh!

(She throws some pebbles very hard, then realizes there is something beyond the fence.)

Oh! Hello Toad. I'm sorry. I hope I didn't hit you. I'm just so cross today. My parents and Granny are always watching me. If I had a sister or a brother, there'd be someone else, but there's only me. I'm tired of being looked at all the time. I want to be by myself for a change.

(She leans over the fence.)

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

WINNIE: Yes. Do you want to see my father?

STRANGER: Perhaps. In a bit. But I'd like to talk to you first.
Have you and your family lived here long?

WINNIE: Oh, yes! We've lived here forever.

STRANGER: (*Like an echo:*) Forever.

WINNIE: Well, not forever, of course, but as long as there've been any people here. My grandmother was born here in Treegap. She says this was all trees once, just one big forest everywhere around, but it's mostly all cut down now. Except for our wood.

STRANGER: I see. So of course you know everyone, and everything that goes on.

WINNIE: Well, not especially. At least, I don't. Why?

STRANGER: Oh, I'm looking for someone. A family.

WINNIE: I don't know anybody much. But my father might. You could ask him.

STRANGER: I believe I shall. I do believe I shall.

(*The door opens and GRANNY appears.*)

GRANNY: Winifred?

(*She steps forward and pauses, seeing the STRANGER:*)

Who are you talking to out here?

WINNIE: It's a man, Granny. He says he's looking for someone.

GRANNY: What's that?

(*She comes down to the fence.*)

What did you say he wants?

STRANGER: (*Bowing slightly:*) Good morning, madam. How delightful to see you looking so fit.

GRANNY: And why shouldn't I be fit? (*Peering at him, squinting:*) We haven't met, that I can recall. Who are you? Who are you looking for?

STRANGER: This young lady tells me you've lived here for a long time, so I thought you would probably know everyone who comes and goes.

GRANNY: I don't know everyone, nor do I want to. And I don't stand outside in broad daylight discussing such a thing with strangers. Neither does Winifred. So...

(She pauses hearing a faint wisp of music, Mae's box.)

My stars! I do believe it's come again, after all these years! Do you hear that Winifred? That's it! That's the elf music I told you about. Why it's been ages since I heard it last. And this is the first time you've ever heard it, isn't it? Wait till I tell your father!

(She seizes WINNIE's hand and turns to go.)

STRANGER: Wait! You've heard that music before, you say?

(The music tinkles again. They all listen.)

WINNIE: It sounds like a music box.

GRANNY: Nonsense. It's elves! You'll have to excuse me now.

(She runs up the path into the house. The STRANGER tips his hat to WINNIE with an insidious grin then exits whistling the melody. WINNIE stands still, a determined look comes over her face. She runs to the fence.)

WINNIE: (Whisper:) Toad?

(She looks about.)

Toad?! Toad! Oh, there you are. Did you hear that music? Now I have something to do. Something that is all mine! I'm going to slip out—right now—and go into the wood, and find out—all by myself—what really makes that music. Of course, while I'm in the wood, if I decide never to come back, well that will be that!

(She walks to the gate and looks at it, sneaks a peak at the house, and then pulls the gate open. For the first time, we see her without the fence in the way. She steps out and stands in front of the fence, then she closes the gate and steps forward.)

right next to it. Well, listen, how'd it be if you was to wait till you're seventeen, same age as me—heck, that's only six years off—then you could go and drink some, and then you could go away with me! We could get married, even. That'd be pretty good, wouldn't it! We could have a grand old time, go all around the world, see everything. Ma and Pa and Miles, they don't know how to enjoy it, what we got. Why, heck, Winnie, life's to enjoy yourself, isn't it? What else is it good for? And you and me, we could have a good time that never, never stopped. Wouldn't that be something?

WINNIE: (Eyes still wide:) Y—y—yes.

JESSE: You think on it, Winnie Foster. Think on it some and see if it don't sound good. Anyway, I'll see you in the morning. All right?

WINNIE: All right.

(He leaves. She sits bolt upright, smile wide.)

He's so beautiful. It must be true.

(Stops in confusion.)

Ohhhhh!

(She pulls the covers over her head in frustration. End of scene.)

VOICES:

The darkness begins to lighten,
Circling back towards day.

But the heat still threatens its seemingly endless hold on the air.

Morning promises no relief.

(Enter the CONSTABLE, wheezing, followed by the STRANGER.)

CONSTABLE: First they rouse me out of bed in the middle of the night, after I been out since sun-up looking for that child, and now, I s'pose, you're going to try to run me all the way. I got to tell you that horse of mine is none too strong. I don't have to hurry her as a rule, so most of the time it don't matter. Seems to me we could've waited till dawn, anyway.

adapted by Mark Frattaroli

STRANGER: The Fosters have been waiting since yesterday morning. Naturally, they're very upset. The sooner we get there, the sooner that child will be with them again.

CONSTABLE: So you gonna tell me how long this is going to take? How far we got to go?

STRANGER: Twenty miles north.

CONSTABLE: Twenty miles? Clear up in the foothills? That's a fair way, all right. Might as well relax. We'll be riding three, four hours. Yes sir, it's something new for these parts, kidnapping. Never had a case like this before that I know of, and I been in charge going on fifteen years.

STRANGER: You don't say.

CONSTABLE: It's a fact. 'Course we got a brand-new jailhouse, did you notice? Listen, it's a dandy! Give those folks nice, clean accommodations. We even got a gallows of our own, if we ever need it. Keeps down trouble just having it there. (Pause.) Say, you're kind of a close-lipped feller, ain't you?

STRANGER: (*Looking directly at the CONSTABLE:*) Look here, would you mind if I ride on ahead? I'm worried about that child. You know how to get there, now. I'll go on ahead and keep watch.

CONSTABLE: Well, all right, if you're in such a ding-danged hurry. But don't do nothing till I get there.

STRANGER: I won't. I'll wait outside the house till you come.

(*He exits.*)

CONSTABLE: Humph! Did you get a gander at that suit? Oh well, takes all kinds. (*As he goes:*) Twenty miles?! Humph!

(*End of scene.*)

(*The TUCK'S house. WINNIE asleep.*)

VOICES:

Morning.

The light is still pale.

