

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

By
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GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

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GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Preface

Upon finding her father's memoir, and noticing its very poor tablet paper was beginning to crumble, Dorothy took it upon herself to type the pages so they would be saved. This play is based on that memoir and dedicated to her efforts to save my great-great-grandfather's story for our family. His memoir begins during the civil war and continues through 1932, providing a fascinating look at the world of settling Texas. As I read it, I wondered about his wife's story that seemed to whisper to me through the pages. Some of the play is exactly word-for-word from the memoir, and some is imagined. All of it is done to honor their love story and their faith and to ensure the truth of the phrase WP Duckett inscribed on his beloved wife's headstone:

Gone But Not Forgotten

"Naturally at times they had differences but they were sweethearts all of their lives. Perhaps this was why they were the most devoted and kindest mother and father a girl could have."

~Dorothy Lorea (Duckett) Jones
(daughter of William and Eliza Duckett)

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Cast of Characters

ELIZA (DICKENSON) DUCKETT	A crisp, pioneer woman, not yet 20 and 70s
WP (WILLIAM) DUCKETT	An adventurous pioneer man, 20s and 70s
MARYANN	WP's mother, 50s
GEORGIA	Eliza's sister-in-law, not yet 20
ANDY	WP's brother, not yet 20
CAROLINE	A young pioneer woman, barely 20
ENSEMBLE	Various roles, various ages: 2-4 Females 2-6 Males

Note: All characters not specifically listed here can be played, doubled if necessary, by ensemble members. More ensemble members can be added if desired.

Suggested Doubling: Female 1: Nora, Nancy
 Female 2: Townswoman, Emma
 Male 1: Eliza's father, Townsperson, Bandit
 Male 2: Asa, John (injured man), Cowboy

TIME: Late 19th century through 1928.

PLACE: Various locations on the Texas Plains.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

ACT 1 SCENE 1

A light comes up on a crisp and proper pioneer woman, ELIZA, singing and playing an old upright piano, lost in the music. A real artist.

ELIZA.

AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND
THAT SAVED A WRETCH, LIKE ME.
I ONCE WAS LOST, BUT NOW I'M FOUND.
WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE.

WP. *(Another light comes up on a distinguished man, WP Duckett, holding some journal pages. He gazes lovingly at Eliza as she continues to play.)* That's my beautiful wife, Eliza, doin' one of the things she loved most. Playin' and singin'. I miss her so much. I'm William Pierce Duckett. Everyone calls me WP, except for Eliza. She always called me-
ELIZA. *(She stops playing, and lovingly smiles at WP).* William. *(She begins to play again.)*

WP. *(Refers to the pages in his hands.)* These pages tell our story. I wrote this in 1928, the year following Eliza's death. *(Eliza's light slowly fades as does her music.)* Since losing my companion I never seen the day I did not want that angel wife of mine back. Since she was gone I felt so alone in this world. I try to console myself, but every effort fails. I lie awake nights in grief, my mind whirling around. I cannot control it. If I close my eyes, I can almost see her. My perfect, angel bride. *(An angelic choir sings from some heavenly place. Fog fills the ground. A light comes up on Eliza as she is swept into the memory by ensemble members who lift her into an angelic landscape they have created. WP joins them. They all stare at her adoringly.)*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

ELIZA. *(In an affected southern-accented voice, like Scarlett O'Hara.)* When I first saw you, I just swooned. And ya know, young ladies aren't really supposed to swoon in God's house. But I couldn't help it.

(Suddenly, as if waking from a dream, she looks around. Shakes her head. The affected voice is gone, but the Texan accent is clear.) No, no, no, no! Stop! And put me down! *(The ensemble puts her down and exits. Fog retreats. Music stops. Simplistic area lighting returns, and she turns to speak to WP.)* This is how you're writing about me in that memoir of yours? *(WP shrugs and attempts an innocent smile, and Eliza speaks to the audience.)* Listen, he's livin' in his romanticized memories, bless 'im, but I think it might help for me to give you some of my truth where I can. *(She whistles that only-a-mom-can-do-this whistle with two fingers.)* Can we get a little help here? *(The ensemble members enter as a set and costume crew. They recreate WP's and Eliza's appearances until they are young and full of breathlessness. He is overflowing with energy and wild spirit, and she is innocent, hopeful, giddy. She sits at the piano and begins to play when her transformation is complete.)* Ya know, the real truth is as beautiful as his memories really, just, in a different way. *(Beat.)* The year was 1873 when I met William. I was playing the piano and singing songs for church. William came walkin' in the doors lookin' at me like I was some kinda creature he'd never seen before. *(WP enters the church and stops in his tracks.)*

WP. The prettiest girl I'd ever seen...a perfect picture. *(He takes Eliza's hand, lifting her off the bench. The music stops abruptly.)* I'm WP, uh...William Duckett, and I just arrived here in Texas from Mississippi.

ELIZA. Hi William. I'm Eliza Dickenson, and I was playing the piano for church. I should probably keep doing that.

WP. Oh, yeah. Sorry, I just--I'll just go sit down--*(Eliza giggles and starts to head back to the piano.)* Wait--just so you know, Eliza Dickenson, I'm gonna marry you.

ELIZA. I'm fifteen.

WP. Okay. I'll wait 'til your sixteen.

ELIZA. Alright, then.

WP. *(To the audience.)* She said yes! *(The ensemble begins getting them ready for the wedding.)*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

ELIZA. *(To the audience.)* So, on May 8th of that same year, me and William were married. I wore my Ma's dress. She would've loved it.

WP. Can I look yet?

ENSEMBLE. Not yet! *(WP laughs a little. He's so excited. Slowly, ELIZA'S FATHER enters and halts when he sees her in the dress.)*

ELIZA. *(To the audience.)* That was one of the only times I've seen a tear in Pa's eyes. *(The transformation seems to be complete. The make up crew holds up a small mirror, and looks at her questioningly. "Did we get it right?")* Oh, don't forget Ma's veil. *(With great ceremony, they bring it out and place it on her head. It's lovely. She takes her father's arm, WP turns to see her.)*

WP. Angelic.

ELIZA. *(She "walks down the aisle," and the ensemble helps them enact the wedding. It becomes a beautiful dance for a few beats and then the guests slowly exit. Finally, they are alone and unable to look away from each other, glowing.)* I'm sure glad your adventures led you to Texas.

WP. And to you, Mrs. William Pierce Duckett. *(They kiss, and then WP steps back to admire his bride.)*

ELIZA. How strange that I won't be Eliza Dickenson anymore. *(Sounding out her new name.)* Eliza Duckett. It'll take me some time to get used to that.

WP. Well, I like the sound of it, my innocent little angel bride.

ELIZA. You don't get to call me innocent anymore, William. Not after tonight. *(WP looks a little shocked, and Eliza gives him a mischievous look.)* Don't look so surprised, Mr. Duckett. My Grandma told me all about what happens next. Don't worry. I'm ready. *(They kiss, and he picks her up as if to carry her across a threshold.)* I always dreamed of looking up at this big sky with the man I love, spending our days helping my Pa farm his land, and spending our nights...well, you know. *(A guilty look crosses his face and he sets her down, turning away from her.)* William, what is it? Did I say something wrong?

WP. No. You didn't. *(Silence.)* I just got somethin' I gotta say, and I was hopin' it could wait 'til tomorrow, but..I gotta tell you.

ELIZA. What is it, William? Is everything okay?

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

WP. It's just--you're young, Eliza, and you don't understand things about men. We got desires and interests that are bigger than a woman's. I can't just stay here.

ELIZA. Wait. What does that mean?

WP. I can't stand lookin' out at that horizon and not knowin' what's out there. I know a lot of people who've been tellin' me all about how this country is expandin'. That means we're growing. Gettin' bigger. I gotta be a part 'a that, Eliza. And you're my wife, so *we* gotta be a part a' that.

ELIZA. But, we can't. You told my Pa you would help. He's got crops to harvest and no help since the war. You're gonna go back on your word?

WP. No. That's not what I'm sayin'. We're gonna help with the harvest, and then we're gonna head out west. (*She hesitates. WP's mother, MARYANN, has entered in time to hear this last line.*)

MARYANN. I heard that, WP! (*He grimaces. He's almost a child again.*) When are you gonna settle down, son? Ya just got married!

WP. Now, Ma--(*He crosses to Maryann and exits arguing with her, as Eliza's sister, NORA, runs on.*)

NORA. Eliza, Asa just told me you and William are leaving. Is it true? (*Eliza crosses to her sister in a panic.*)

ELIZA. Nora, help me! He wants to go, but I can't leave you and Pa.

NORA. Tell him no!

ELIZA. I can't do that, Nora! He's my husband. Where he goes, I go.

NORA. I know, but he can't just expect you to up and leave us! We need you both here!

ELIZA. He says we're staying through the harvest.

NORA. Harvest. I'm talking about more than harvest, Eliza. (*WP and ASA enter, with WP trying to convince Asa to join in on the adventure. Eliza's demeanor changes with their entrance; she smiles and plays the part of supportive wife.*)

WP. We gotta go find our own piece of land. Come with us.

ASA. We ain't comin' with ya, WP. I can't leave Nora's Pa out here all alone. (*He puts an arm around Nora. Under Eliza's next monologue, the ensemble enters. They begin packing up the wedding scene, moving slowly. They remove the veil and make slight changes to WP's and*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Eliza's clothing. Eliza begins to panic, trying to hold on to her veil and other items as they take them.)

ELIZA. *(To the audience.)* Harvest came and went, and I never spoke my piece. I kept hopin' William would settle in...or something. But before I knew what was happening, he was loading up our wagon, and it was time to say goodbye. *(WP starts loading up items they'll need for their journey. Asa helps. Nora and her Pa bring out a cedar chest of Eliza's things--memories.)*

NORA. All of our sister pact diaries are in there, hidden underneath some of Ma's quilts and her family Bible .

ELIZA. Oh...the sister pact diaries!

NORA AND ELIZA. Nobody gives up.

ELIZA. Nora, I just--*(She starts to have a full-on panic attack. WP is too busy to notice; this is just between sisters.)* What if I never--

NORA. I think we both knew you'd go chase that wild heart of yours at some point.

ELIZA. But it was gonna be the both of us, Nora.

NORA. Go have that adventure we always talked about, and come home to me so you can tell me all about it. You have to remember every detail, because I want to imagine it all. *(Eliza nods and they hug, clinging to each other.)*

ELIZA. I will, Nora. I'll remember everything. *(Only the cedar chest and piano are left. Eliza hurriedly wipes her eyes, as WP searches the wagon for room to put everything.)*

WP. Eliza, sweetheart, these aren't things you can take on an adventure out west! Where would we put 'em?

ELIZA. *(She touches the cedar chest.)* This has the memories from my Ma, William. I can't just leave it! And you know I can't be without my piano. Maybe I can drive a second wagon.

WP. Oh Eliza, that would never work. I'm sorry, but you'll have your horse that you said reminded you of your Ma, and I'll buy you a new piano when we get settled. I promise. *(Eliza looks as if she might sob, but she doesn't. She and Nora just look at each other with silent words only sisters can hear. WP shakes hands with Asa and with Eliza's father,*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

as Nora quickly goes to the cedar chest and takes out a giant Bible and a medicine bag, giving them to Eliza to hold.)

ELIZA. Ma's family Bible and Grandma's medicine bag.

NORA. They'll both be with you, and I'll keep your piano polished and perfect for when...you know, for when you come back.

ELIZA. *(She's holding it together, but the panic is in her eyes.)* Okay, Nora. I'll send word when we settle. *(Nora nods and they hug, holding on for dear life as if this could be their last hug. Eliza hugs her father one last time, and they are leaving. Lights fade on them waving their goodbyes.)*

SCENE 2

WP's light comes back up as he steps into it and speaks excitedly to the audience.

WP. So, I took my Eliza and started for the west. Me driving the wagon and her riding a white horse that her father had given her. She was a splendid rider and every day on the trip she would chase rabbits on that fine horse. We enjoyed the trip so much, and I was so proud of my beautiful wife. *(Eliza slips into her light and addresses William.)*

ELIZA. I did love that horse. *(WP reacts to her with giddy excitement, slaps his hat on his hand and jogs back into the scene. Eliza turns her attention to the audience as her demeanor changes.)* Pearl, I called her. My last piece of home. I couldn't believe I'd had to leave my family, and I was so angry with William. Angry with myself for not tellin' him how I really felt. But it wasn't really my place to speak about all those feelings. So...I rode. And chased rabbits. And kept all of it inside. *(Her light goes out suddenly as a violent thunder strike pulls her back into the story. She jumps, pulls a shawl around herself, and runs to join WP under the canvas of their covered wagon. The night sky cracks open as lightning strikes reach with electricity. The rain is coming down in sheets, and they are freezing.)*

WP. Eliza!

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

ELIZA. *(She carries two bowls of some kind of stew.)* I'm here! And I saved our supper just in time!

WP. I'm glad you saved our supper, Eliza, but you can't be out from under the wagon during one 'a these storms! You gotta stick close to me! *(They settle in eating and trying to stay warm. A thunder strike makes Eliza jump and gasp, and she almost spills her food.)* It's okay, Eliza. I'll keep you safe.

ELIZA. I hope so. These strikes are hitting pretty low.

WP. *(He is fascinated and enamored by all things Texas adventure.)* I know...Ain't it pretty?

ELIZA. Pretty? We're wet and cold, and the rain seems like it'll never stop.

WP. But just look at that sky. You can see it lightin' up all the way to the edge of the earth.

ELIZA. *(She studies him for a moment and then allows herself to relax, looking out at the horizon. They are silent and watching for a beat.)*

Wow. You're right, William. It is beautiful. *(They watch for a beat, and then another crash of thunder breaks the moment, and the rain starts to fall even harder.)* How will we cross the river tomorrow, William? What if our wagon breaks? Or one of us falls?

WP. Eliza. We have to keep our heads about us. We'll make it across the Trinity tomorrow, don't you worry. I've crossed a river before with my Ma when I was a boy, and I know exactly what to do. We're gonna be okay. *(They eat and watch the lightning storm for a beat.)*

ELIZA. Did your Ma say she crossed this river on her way to where we're goin'?

WP. She did. She crossed with Andy and Georgia just fine, and we will too. They're all in Hood County now gettin' settled. It'll be good to be back with some family.

ELIZA. Yeah.

WP. Don't worry. We'll make it over the Trinity tomorrow, and then we should be headed into Hood County in a day or so. *(Another crash of thunder, and this time WP jumps.)*

ELIZA. It's okay, William. I'll keep you safe. *(She smiles at him a little mischievously, and he returns the smile.)*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

WP. We got nothin' to worry about, sweetheart. (*They both look up at the sky, trying to hide their worried expressions. The lights shift as WP crosses into his light.*) But I was worried. Women need their men to be brave, though, so I could never show her how I was really feelin'. And it turned out she was right to be concerned. We lost her horse in the river the next day. I think they call it quicksand what took that animal and nearly took my Eliza, but she was a strong swimmer, so she made it out. I thought she might grieve over that horse forever, but when we finally pulled into Hood County, she jumped right in to help our new neighbors. People we didn't even know yet! She was a faithful helper with the sick and could simply work miracles for people who were ailin'. (*Eliza glides into the space, the lights and fog accompanying her. She is prim and perfect, like Mary Poppins.*)

ELIZA. If you're feeling ill, I have just the thing! (*The ensemble all hold up ailments--bruises, sprains, headaches, etc. She opens her black bag and pulls out a long piece of white flowing fabric which she twists and twirls among the ensemble. As she touches them they all "get well" and are in awe of her. Suddenly, she stops and turns to WP, her voice back to normal.*) William, you're doing it again.

WP. Sorry. (*The innocent shrug is back.*)

ELIZA. Y'all know what to do. (*Again she whistles, and the ensemble takes away the fabric and creates a dusty settlement, adjusting WP's and Eliza's costumes and make up to show evidence of their difficult travel as she speaks to the audience. Lights show the shifting from night to sunrise.*) That river came to me in nightmares for a long time. Devouring me. Gripping me. My poor Pearl was lost. I couldn't save her. The grief of losing her felt like drowning. But maybe if I could help the people in our new settlement, it would somehow make up for failing to save Pearl.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

SCENE 3

Eliza and WP have arrived at Hood County in the afternoon. The crew has become townspeople who rush past and accidentally bump into them. A man lies in the road, moaning. Everyone is crowded around him. WP approaches one of the townspeople.

WP. What is goin' on here? Do y'all need some help?

TOWNSPERSON. Y'all new in town, or somethin'?

WP. Just pulled in and settled with the livery, and then we noticed the commotion.

TOWNSPERSON. Indians. We chased 'em outta here this mornin', but they got 'ol Ed with a poisonous one I think.

WP. An arrow? Do you think they're comin' back?

TOWNSPERSON. We sent some men after 'em, so I bet they won't be comin' back. You sure you wanna settle here?

WP. Yes sir. We've got family here, and we'd like to help where we can.

TOWNSPERSON. Well, unless you know how to get rid of poison from one-a-them arrows, I don't know what else can be done right now.

WP. I wish we could help, but--

ELIZA. I can help.

WP. Eliza, you need to rest after--

ELIZA. I'd like to try and help if I can.

WP. Now, Eliza, you don't need to--

TOWNSPERSON. Everybody spread out. This woman said she could help. Y'all let 'er in there. Can't be any worse than what we been tryin'.
(She starts to go and WP tugs her arm a bit, not wanting her to get involved. She brushes him off and goes to the moaning man. Everyone clears away and watches as she pulls some items from a bag she carries. She's done this before.)

ELIZA. Where is the wound? *(One of the men who has been trying to help shows her the wound on the man's torso, under his left arm. She pulls his shirt away and then gasps, turning away. The wound is horrific and more than she bargained for.)*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Can someone bring me some water? (*One of the ensemble members runs off stage and comes back shortly with a bucket.*)

WP. Eliza! Just--

ELIZA. I'm gonna try, William. Just give me a second. (*She splashes her face and then goes to work on the wound. Crushing herbs, wetting cloth, concentrating. The wounded man yells as she presses the herbs into it, but soon he relaxes. She bandages up the wound the best she can with bits of fabric.*) Okay, take this man home so he can get some rest. I don't know for sure if it has worked, but if anything'll work, this will. (*Two of the men carry him offstage. CAROLINE, a young pregnant woman follows behind them, stopping for a short beat to nod thanks to Eliza. She returns the nod, and the woman exits. Just then, Maryann enters in a rush.*)

MARYANN. What is happening out here? I heard someone collapsed! (*She stops short as she sees Eliza and WP.*) WP! Eliza! I was worried when that rain storm hit! (*She runs and hugs WP, and then reaches down to help Eliza stand.*) What are you doin' in the road?

ELIZA. I was--

WP. She helped that man who collapsed! I didn't even know you knew how to do that, Eliza!

MARYANN. (*She sizes up Eliza.*) I'm just glad y'all got here safe. I figured you might not head out this way, what with all the rain and with all of the attacks we been gettin'.

WP. Yeah, we heard, but we came on anyway.

MARYANN. Of course you did. Nothin' can stop you when you get that itch. That river give you trouble?

WP. We...We made it here fine. We just...we lost Eliza's horse. (*Eliza tries to muster some courage at the mention of Pearl. WP's brother and his wife, ANDY and GEORGIA, enter. They see WP and Eliza and quicken their pace to come greet them. They all hug.*)

ANDY. How was your journey? We've been worried. Especially Ma.

MARYANN. You hush now, Andy.

ANDY. Well, WP, let's go get you unloaded, and we can make some plans. Ladies, we'll be back. Just wait for us here. (*They exit excitedly talking.*)

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

GEORGIA. There they go again. A meetin' of the minds. (*Maryann scowls.*) Eliza, someone told me on the way over that a new woman in town cured that man with the arrow. Was that you?

ELIZA. I don't know if he's cured, but I did what I could for him.

GEORGIA. The Indians came through this mornin'. I've never been so terrified. That's when Ed got shot with that arrow, but they cleaned 'im up, and he seemed fine. From what I hear, he just collapsed in the road right before y'all got here.

ELIZA. I don't know what poisons were in that arrow, but most of 'em don't start really showing their true signs until some time has passed.

MARYANN. Where'd you learn all that?

ELIZA. My Grandma taught me.

MARYANN. Your Grandma?

ELIZA. Yes. After my Ma passed, she pretty much raised me and my sister. She was always great at taking care of people. She learned when she was young and lived back East, and then she became sort of a real doctor on our journey out here. Over the years, she taught me everything she knew, and I helped her as much as I could. We even learned some things from the Indians near us--how to use herbs and plants as medicine. (*A woman enters angrily and aggressively crosses to Eliza.*)

TOWNSWOMAN. What did you do to him?

ELIZA. Me? I just--

TOWNSWOMAN. He's dead! You killed him!

ELIZA. No! I was tryin' to help.

TOWNSWOMAN. Well, my neighbor is a widow now, thanks to you. A widow with a baby on the way. (*She gives Eliza one last judgemental look and then exits in a hurry. The townspeople lean in. Curious and a bit threatening.*)

ELIZA. I did the best I could for him. He was already almost dead when we got here. I did nothing to hurt him, okay? (*The lights fade as they all start to disperse and exit. Eliza slowly crosses into her light where she addresses the audience.*) His name was John. His wife's name was Caroline, and even though we saw each other in town almost everyday, we just didn't speak to each other. At all. I was certain that she hated me, and I was even more certain I deserved it. I was drowning again. I

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

did my best to just keep going. I mean it wasn't that hard to do. William got that restless itch he tends to get, and pretty soon that was all any of us could think about. (*Lights fade as Eliza slips into the next scene.*)

SCENE 4

Lights come up on a noon sun. Time has passed since they first arrived, and we see that they live in a tiny log house where Eliza sits sewing. After a few beats we hear a timid knock on the door. Eliza rises to answer it, a curious expression guiding her. When she opens the door, Georgia comes angrily falling in.

ELIZA. What's wrong, Georgia?

GEORGIA. The men. They're meetin' again.

ELIZA. How do you know?

GEORGIA. Andy got up this mornin' and told me he was goin' huntin' with WP. Took his rifle and everything just to make it seem real. I could tell somethin' wasn't right, so I waited until he was a little ways off, and I followed 'im.

ELIZA. Did he go to the spot?

GEORGIA. He went right to the same spot as last time, and I saw WP there waitin' just like before. They started talkin'--schemin', more like. And pretty soon, wouldn't ya know it? The others started showin' up.

ELIZA. How many others?

GEORGIA. I'm not sure. A dozen maybe, give or take.

ELIZA. And they didn't see you?

GEORGIA. (*With the smallest of mischievous smiles.*) You know how good I am at climbin' trees.

ELIZA. I do know. It's one of your best traits. So, did you hear? Are we about to move on again?

GEORGIA. It sounds like it. And soon.

ELIZA. (*She sighs.*) I guess I should be used to moving on by now.

This'll be our third move since we got married. He's just...restless. We think we've found the place, and then he just can't seem to settle.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

GEORGIA. Well, I'm *not* used to it, and I like living here! If only we could be there for the meetings. I mean, we should get some kinda say in this.

ELIZA. I agree, but that's not gonna happen. (*Beat.*) Every time William gets this...urge, we leave. Settle somewhere new. Meet people. And then have to leave 'em as soon as we get to know 'em. Seems like that's all we ever do.

GEORGIA. I had to leave my family when we married. That was hard enough. I can't imagine doing it over and over again.

ELIZA. I guess if we have to go--at least I get to take you with me.

GEORGIA. (*She takes Eliza's hands.*) Maryann's not gonna like this one bit.

ELIZA. (*Laughing.*) Not at all. I think she made him promise that we'd settled this time.

GEORGIA. Well, we're gonna let the boys handle their Ma. Meanwhile, I'm gonna go home and see if I can get a big lunch going for Andy. A big meal always makes him more talkative. And if that doesn't work, I do have other ways of getting information outta that man. (*She raises an eyebrow and lifts her skirt--devilish.*)

ELIZA. Georgia! You are wily!

GEORGIA. (*She laughs a little and opens the door to leave just as WP is entering. It's awkward for a beat.*) Good morning, WP. I was just...uh...asking Eliza about her...biscuit recipe. I got it. Bye! (*She goes.*)

WP. What was that all about? She alright?

ELIZA. She was spying on you again.

WP. Wh--spying? What did--did she hear something? Did she-- (*Beat.*) She heard everything, didn't she?

ELIZA. So, we're leavin' again? Did she hear that right?

WP. (*He hesitates. Gives in.*) Yeah. She heard that right.

ELIZA. I thought you were happy here.

WP. I am, but I think we *have* to know what's on the other side 'a that river. And the men agree.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

ELIZA. You know, Georgia did bring up an interesting point--maybe the women should be invited to these meetings. I mean, it might do you men some good to hear what we think about all this.

WP. (*He laughs.*) Oh, my little wife with all of her spunk.

ELIZA. (*Rolls her eyes.*) William!

WP. Look, we had enough opinions to wrestle with. Besides, you ladies would just get bored.

ELIZA. Uh-huh. (*Beat.*) Okay, William. When do you want to go?

WP. We wanna leave as soon as we stock up on supplies.

ELIZA. Okay, it's settled then. We'll pack up and move on, just like last time.

WP. I don't know how to tell you this, Eliza, so I'll just say it.

(*Beat.*) You're not comin' this time.

ELIZA. Of course I'm coming. Where you go, I go.

WP. Not this time.

ELIZA. So, you think you're just gonna leave me here?

WP. Not forever, sweetheart--

ELIZA. Don't sweetheart me, William! Not when you're about to leave me here.

WP. It's not for long. The way we planned it, we should only be gone for ten days or so. (*She turns away.*) Eliza, I'm not leaving you. I would never do that.

ELIZA. Well, I'm confused, *WP*, because you just said you were leavin', and I can't come.

WP. Oh, don't do that! You only call me that when you're angry.

ELIZA. Well.

WP. (*He slowly crosses to her. She stands unmoving, arms crossed and eyes closed.*) I'm goin' to scout out the land, find us some place perfect, Eliza. Just like we always dreamed. Give me ten days--eight! Maybe we can do it in eight! And then we're comin' straight back!

ELIZA. How could you possibly know how many days you'll be gone? You don't even know what's out there!

WP. I ain't takin' you across another river without checkin' it out first! Not after what happened last time. (*Eliza puts her head down.*) I'm your husband, Eliza, and I aim to keep you safe. We don't even know what's

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

out there on the other side ‘a that river! It’s too dangerous for you until I go find out.

ELIZA. (*Abruptly turning to him.*) That land is just as dangerous for you as it is for me!

WP. I promise, as soon as we find the perfect spot, we’ll come back. (*He reaches for her, and ELIZA backs away.*) I’m doin’ this for *us*, Eliza.

ELIZA. (*Giving in. There will be no changing his mind.*) Okay, William. But you have to promise this is *it*. This is the last time! And *you’re* dealing with your Ma. Have you said anything about this to her yet?

WP. Not yet.

ELIZA. (*She turns to the small cookstove.*) I gotta make lunch. You should wash up. (*Lights fade.*)

SCENE 5

Lights come up on the evening before the men leave. The air is tense. WP enters his room to find Maryann packing his things.

WP. Ma, you don’t have to do this, ya know? I’m a man grown. I should be packing my own things.

MARYANN. Yes, I suppose you should, son. I suppose you should be doin’ a lotta things you just aren’t gonna do.

WP. Now, Ma, we been through this. I gotta go. I can’t stand it! I gotta see what’s out there. A man’s gotta have a little adventure in ‘is life, and I’m a curious man, Ma! A man who needs...

MARYANN. (*Turning on him.*) That’s enough! I didn’t lose two husbands and bring my boys across this land just to hear you speak to me about needin’ adventure. What about your wife, WP?

WP. Eliza agreed. She--

MARYANN. Of course. Proper wife that she is. Just doin’ as her husband says. She’s a child, William, and she followed you out here on that pretty white horse chasing this perfect life you promised, and now what? You’re gonna leave her to be widowed just like me?

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

WP. Widowed? Ma, I'm leaving for ten days!

MARYANN. You're letting this wild streak take all the smarts outta your head.

WP. Ma, I remember when you loaded up the wagon on our way to Mississippi. Everyone thought you were crazy. They thought we wouldn't make it, but just look at us? We made it all the way to Texas-- dangerous creek and all. I'm just trying to follow your example.

MARYANN. Oh, don't give me that, WP! I wasn't headin' out on some grand adventure! I was tryin' to find us a safe place to live. Well, we're here! In a safe place. Crops are growing. You got plenty 'a cattle, and a good life for yourself here. *(Beat. And then she pleads.)* If you decide not to go, Andy will decide not to go. He follows in his big brother's footsteps. *(Breaking.)* I can't lose my sons, William. I can't do it.

WP. *(He crosses to her and hugs her. He almost gives in maybe, but he can't.)* Ma, I'm goin'. We got plenty of firearms. We're ready. We just gotta do this. *(She pulls away from his embrace, looks at him for a beat and exits. He sighs, and then picks up where she left off packing his things as lights fade).*

SCENE 6

Lights come up just outside the house. Eliza stands looking up at the stars, holding her mother's Bible in her arms. Maryann hangs back by the door and watches her for a beat.

ELIZA. God, I know what kind of wife I'm supposed to be, and I'm tryin' to be that. I follow him from town to town without argument. Always tryin' to keep him settled. Wash all his clothes. Learn how to cook all his Ma's recipes, even though her cornbread is *completely* wrong-- *(Beat.)* How could he be so selfish? I've given up everything just for him to leave me here to go be a wild west cowboy! And I'm supposed to what? Read this Bible to help me be a *more* supportive wife? I'm sorry, but I don't think so. *(She throws the Bible onto the ground.)*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

MARYANN. Amen. (*Eliza spins around, horrified that her mother-in-law has heard these words. She immediately picks up the Bible and brushes it off.*)

ELIZA. (*Wiping angry tears on her sleeves.*) I'm sorry, Ma—I—I didn't—

MARYANN. I wondered how you really felt about my cornbread recipe. I saw your face the first time we made it together. Your Grandmother didn't make it like that?

ELIZA. No. She didn't make it like that. (*A stand off.*)

MARYANN. Well, no need to make that poor Bible pay for it. (*Silence. Maryann crosses to Eliza, and they look up at the stars together.*)

MARYANN. You know, you're not the first woman to get angry and yell at God.

ELIZA. You mean, you--

MARYANN. Now, I didn't say me, but I'm sure other women have, you know, gotten angry a time or two...(*Beat.*) But, yeah. Me. I've gotten angry. So angry I didn't even know how to handle it. And God was supposed to be in control of everything, so yeah, I was mad at God. I'm sure these stars have heard all kinds of women yelling up at him.

ELIZA. Do you really think so?

MARYANN. I do. But, just think, if WP didn't have this wild streak, he never would've met you. And Eliza, I really am glad he met you. Maybe God knew what he was doin' after all.

ELIZA. Thank you.

MARYANN. Maybe. (*Eliza laughs a little.*) We should turn in. We gotta see those fellas off early in the mornin'. Somebody's gotta make the biscuits. (*She exits. Eliza stares at the stars gripping the Bible again as the lights fade.*)

SCENE 7

It's morning. A stunning sunrise fills the stage, putting the little house in silhouette. After a beat, lights come up on Eliza serving WP his breakfast. They are quiet.

ELIZA. Did you boys get everything loaded?

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

WP. We did. We just finished up a bit ago.

ELIZA. *(She nods and then looks up at him, finally determined to say her piece.)* I know you're gonna go. No matter what I say, but William, I swear--you had better come back to me. Don't you dare leave me here alone because I got more stuff to say to you! I can't--*(At that he pulls her into a passionate kiss. They cling to each other. He pulls away at last, cups her face, taking in every inch of her.)*

WP. I'll be back soon. Ten days at the most.

ELIZA. You said you'd try for eight. So try for eight. *(He gives her one last kiss and hug and then Maryann enters.)*

MARYANN. I see you two have worked things out.

WP. Ma, we're gonna be careful. We been plannin' and--

MARYANN. Now, don't go tellin' me and that pretty wife 'a yours a bunch of lies, WP. You've never been a careful man, and this is not a careful trip. Just come home to us, son.

WP. I will, Ma. Don't you worry. It's a short trip, and then we're all back. Safe and sound. I love you both. *(He hugs and kisses them both and grabs his belongings. They all exit the house together where a group of men are preparing to leave. Maryann and Eliza linger by the house, as Georgia enters and joins them. More women enter to say goodbye, including the pregnant woman from earlier, Caroline. She stops short, seeing Eliza. Caroline's expression is unreadable but she stares for an uncomfortable beat. Eliza shrinks. The women watch as the men exit with hoops and hollers and last goodbyes. Lights fade, as Eliza crosses into her light, speaking again to the audience.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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