

**Mountains on the Prairie**  
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**Act 1**

**Scene 1 – (August) –Town Meeting**

*Chaotic scene as the adult members of the town try to assemble for a meeting.*

**Clyde:** *(arguing with the doctor at the front of the room)* I should think you'd be happy your niece is comin' to Prairie View.

**Silas:** I am, Clyde, it's just that...

**Clyde:** *(cutting him off)* Look, this meetin' is about bringin' in a teacher, not a preacher.

**Silas:** Clyde, my point is that a preacher could preach on Sunday and teach on Monday through Friday.

**Clyde:** I moved out west to be free, not to be badgered 'bout religion by some preacher.

*Clyde and Silas quietly ad lib while the audience's attention is drawn to the conversation between Frank and Russell.*

**Frank:** *(to Russell)* We need a mayor so we can bring this meeting to order.

**Russell:** *(knowing that Frank is suggesting himself)* Did you have someone in mind?

**Frank:** *(with false humility)* Well, now that you mention it, I'd make a good mayor.

**Russell:** (*understanding Frank's meaning, not agreeing with him that he'd make a good mayor*) That's what I thought.

**Frank:** So, you think so too?

*(to Andrew)* Russell thinks I'd make a good mayor.

**Russell:** That's not what I meant! Besides, we don't have enough people to warrant a mayor.

**Andrew:** (*to Frank*) What makes you think *you'd* make a good mayor?

**Frank:** (*proudly*) Everyone knows I'm the most intelligent man here. After all, I went to college for half a year.

*Russell rolls his eyes.*

**Andrew:** Doc is the most intelligent man here.

**Russell:** (*trying to be funny*) To be totally frank, Frank...

*Russell starts to chuckle. Frank looks at him as if to say, "That was a lame joke." Russell clears his throat, realizing he's not funny*

**Russell:** Andrew's right.

**Patience:** (*to Frank, quietly*) Maybe we should just sit down.

*Silas looks over at the audience. Everyone in the scene freezes in place.*

**Silas:** (*to audience*) Oh, good evening. Welcome to Prairie View, Wyoming. As you can see we're in the middle of a mayor, I mean a major, decision here. We're voting on bringing in a teacher from back east – my great niece, Verna, to be exact. As you probably noticed, though our town is small, we definitely have a variety of strong personality types.

*Silas walks through the group as he talks, pointing out the different people.*

You've already met Frank. It's obvious that he has a bit of a pride issue. His wife Patience tries to be just that – patient. She doesn't say much – never

has much room to talk except to try to get her husband to stop talking. They have three children: Virginia, Jake, and Callie. This is Clayton Mitchell. He's a good man – loves the Lord. Clayt is a widower with two children: Lonnie and Eva. Over here is Andrew Foster and his wife, Kate. Both are very likable, practical people. They also have two children: Sarah and Jimmy. Russell Smith tries to be funny, with the emphasis on *tries*. That's Russell's wife, Emma, over there talking to Sadie Willis. Sadie's an interesting person, as you'll find out. She means well – sometimes a bit too well, if you know what I mean. There are a couple of people in our community that you'll be introduced to later; there are "reasons" why they're not present at the meeting. And this...this is Clyde Davison. He's a self-made kind of man, doesn't think he needs God. Truth is, he doesn't want to have to answer to anyone – including God. Sound like anyone you know? His wife Celia is just the opposite of Clyde. They have two girls. Cora, the oldest takes after her father. Their daughter Caroline is more like her mother, which is fortunate for the rest of us. They have a son, Clem. He's just a baby so no one knows at this point exactly which parent he'll resemble. Just between you and me, I'm praying he'll have more of mom's traits.

*People in background "come to life" and start to take their seats at the meeting.*

Oh, by the way, I'm Silas Nickerson. I'm a retired doctor. But, since folks in this area don't have a regular doctor, I do the doctoring when necessary.

*All are seated by now.*

*Enter Silas.*

**Silas:** All those in favor of Verna Nickerson coming to be our teacher, please raise their right hand.

*Everyone raises his hand.*

Done!

*Lights down.*

**Scene 2**

**Scene 3**

#### **Scene 4 –Classroom – the next morning**

**Verna:** Good morning, class.

**All Students:** (*except Cora, who has her arms defiantly crossed in front of her and refuses to look up*) Good morning, Miss Nickerson.

**Verna:** Now, yesterday, we all were introduced to each other and talked about some goals we'll have for the year and who will be in what grade depending on what you already know. Today, I have something very special to give to...

**Sadie:** (*calling loudly as she enters the classroom*) Yoohoo! Oh, Miss Nickerson!

**Verna:** Yes? May I help you?

**Sadie:** Well, I don't want to interrupt or nothin'. It's just that I heard you had a bit of trouble controllin' the children yesterday and...

**Verna:** The children were fine. We only had...

**Sadie:** Well, I know it must be difficult for you, comin' from Boston and all. You see, things are different here than in high society.

**Verna:** Ma'am?

**Sadie:** Oh, please, call me Sadie.

**Verna:** Yes, Ma'am...I mean, Miss Sadie.

**Sadie:** Now, you just go about yer business and pretend I'm not even here.

**Verna:** (*slowly, not being impolite*) Why are you here?

**Sadie:** Why, to help you control these children, of course!

**Verna:** Well, I...I appreciate your concern, but I'm not sure I need help.

**Sadie:** Why, everybody needs help – 'specially when yer young and have no idea how to do things!

**Edith:** (*timidly*) Really, Miss Sadie, Verna did just fine yesterday.

**Verna:** (*as politely as possible*) I...I went to school for this.

**Sadie:** ‘Course you did. And that’s good, that’s good, but there’s more to it than just book learnin’.

*The children have gotten restless during the conversation.*

**Sadie:** Now there, ya see. You have absolutely no control over these children. Children! (*claps her hands in the air*) Children! Now, ya’ll just hush up and let the teacher talk.

*All the children stop talking and look at Verna.*

**Sadie:** (*sitting down in the back, satisfied*)  
(*To Verna*) You may proceed.

**Verna:** (*takes a deep breath*) Thank you. As I was saying, children, I have something special to give you. These are some wonderful books we’ll be using.

**Lonnie:** Teacher, I can’t read no books.

**Verna:** You can’t read *any* books.

**Jimmy:** That’s what he said, teacher.

**Sarah:** (*to Verna*) That’s cause he ain’t had no learnin’ yet.

**Verna:** Well, I intend to learn him – (*glances over at Sadie*) I mean, teach him.  
(*to Lonnie*) Your name was Lonnie, right.

**Lonnie:** Yes, Ma’am, still is.

*The children snicker.*

**Verna:** (*smiling*) Well, Lonnie, you don’t need to be concerned about not knowing how to read yet, because that’s the first thing I will teach you. You see, some

of these books teach you *how* to read and some give you wonderful lessons to enjoy once you've mastered reading. (*Verna goes to her desk and picks up a book*)

**Sadie:** My, how interestin'. (*gets up from her seat and goes to Verna's desk, starts looking through the books. Makes comments about the books as Verna is still talking*)

**Verna:** They were written by a man named William McGuffey. He's a president of a college in Cincinatti. That's a town in the state of Ohio, back east. Anyway, these two books (*carefully takes the primers from Sadie*) are for those of you who can't read yet. There's also a speller and two levels of eclectic reading books.

**Caroline:** What does eclectic mean?

**Verna:** It means that he's chosen prose and poetry from many sources. Things that have been written by different people.

**Eva:** How different are these people?

**Jake:** (*to Eva, as if trying to scare her*) They're giants with long filed teeth and green polka dots!

**Verna:** He's teasing you, Eva. They're not different people.

**Cora:** (*nastily, like a "know-it-all"*) That's what you said.

**Verna:** Well, what I meant to say was...

*Nagamao looks in the window.*

**Edith:** (*clutching Ellie fearfully*) Indians!

**Jake:** Help!

**Sadie:** Run fer yer lives!

*Everyone in the classroom goes into a panic. Sadie hides behind the desk. Ellie cowers into a corner with her mother.*

**Verna:** *(realizing that it's Nagamao)* Children, it's all right. Please, sit down. *(She goes outside. Calls to Nagamao who is running away)* Please, come back! Come back, it's all right! *(sighs--trying to convince herself)* It's all right.

## Scene 5

## Scene 6 - Saturday

*The town is getting together to welcome the new teacher. The adults are in the schoolhouse where there is a table of refreshments and a sign across the front, reading "Welcome Miss Nickerson." The children are playing outside, eating, etc. Everyone is present except Edith and Ellie who are in the doctor's office talking with Silas. Nagamao and Winona are also absent. Clayt and his children enter during the scene.*

**Patience:** *(to Russell, Emma, and Kate. Verna can hear them)* Poor Edith. She doesn't dare take her daughter to school. Not with that "girl" attending. Poor little Ellie was just cowerin' in the corner. Edith said she liked the new teacher, too. She just didn't understand what Miss Nickerson was thinkin' allowing that little savage to...

**Russell:** I'm thinkin' she wasn't thinkin' what everyone else would be thinkin'. *(Laughs at himself. No one else finds it to be funny. Russell clears his throat.)*

**Emma:** *(Embarrassed, pulling Russell away)* Why don't we go over and meet Miss Nickerson, dear? Excuse us, please.

*They cross to Verna's group.*

**Kate:** *(to Patience -- serious, practically speaking)* I really don't like my Sarah and Jimmy goin' to school with a savage, but Andrew and I do want our youngins' in get some learnin' so we don't have much choice about it. He said since she's a girl, our children are probably safe enough.

*Patience nods her head in agreement then walks over to where Frank is standing. Kate gets some punch and snacks before joining Andrew. Clyde is talking to Verna. Andrew, Frank, and Sadie are also there. Celia is standing by quietly.*

**Clyde:** *(to Verna)* Well, Miss Nickerson. You've managed in less than one week to gain one student and lose three.

**Verna:** Three, Mr. Davison?

**Clyde:** You don't think Celia and I are sending our children, do you? No sir, not until you get rid of that little half...

**Verna:** Little what, Mr. Davison? Just because her mother's an Indian and her father was white shouldn't make her an outcast. You all act as if you're afraid of her. Winona is a child, not a brave with war paint. If you ask me, the people in this town are the savages, shunning Nagamao and her daughter.

**Emma:** What about poor little Ellie?

**Verna:** From what I've gathered, no one in this town cared about "poor little Ellie" until now. I am concerned for her. I'm hoping that, in time, she can overcome her fear.

**Sadie:** *(overhearing and cutting into the conversation)* Overcome her fear? Miss Nickerson – do you have any idea what that little girl saw?

**Verna:** No – I can't begin to imagine it. I only know my intentions were good. *(pauses)* My...timing was bad.

**Russell:** Well, I guess! *(laughs at his own outburst)*

*Emma tries to discreetly elbow Russell to be quiet. Russell clears his throat.*

*Enter Clayt with his children. He enters the school in time to hear the rest of the conversation, but does not join the group.*

**Clyde:** That's not *all* that's bad. Every day has had some catastrophe taking place!

**Frank:** That's why we need a mayor in this town – to keep things in order.

*Everyone looks at him like they can't believe he just said that—again.*



**Patience:** (*embarrassed, smiles sheepishly, points to a bench*) Maybe we should just sit down.

**Celia:** (*quietly to Clyde*) This is supposed to be a welcoming celebration for our new teacher.

**Clyde:** Welcoming...I'd like to send her right back to where she come from, just as soon as possible!

*Verna walks away quietly, fighting tears. She crosses to the table and pours herself some punch – her hands shaking*

**Clayt:** Miss Nickerson?

**Verna:** (*startled*) What? (*spills some punch*) Oh, I'm sorry.

**Clayt:** No, I'm sorry. (*takes a towel and wipes up the spill*) I didn't mean to startle you. I...I couldn't help but overhear. (*Verna looks away*) Please, don't take it too much to heart. Not everyone feels the way Clyde does.

**Verna:** Apparently most of them do.

**Clayt:** And there are some of us who really appreciate what you've already accomplished with the children. My little Eva is reciting half the alphabet and knows how to read three words.

**Verna:** It doesn't bother you and your wife that Winona...

**Clayt:** I'm a widower, Miss Nickerson, and no, (*pauses, trying to convince himself*) it doesn't bother me in the slightest. I'm glad someone finally did the right thing by her and her mother. David was a friend of mine. As long as he was alive, people at least tolerated Nagamao and Winona, but once he was gone...

**Verna:** I know. She told me. I can't imagine being isolated from everyone – even your own people.

**Clayt:** I'm sure it's been... (*thinking of his deceased wife*) very lonely for her.

**Verna:** *(nodding in agreement)* Mm.

**Clay:** I hope you won't give up on us – not just yet. Some of us take a little...  
*(lowers his voice so the others won't hear)* getting used to.

**Verna:** *(chuckles)* I'll try to last – with the Lord's help. Thank you, Mr. – *(trying to think of Eva's last name)* Eva's father – Mr. Mitchell!

**Clay:** Yes. The first name is Clayton. Folks call me Clay.

**Verna:** It's been nice to meet you, Mr. Mitchell. Eva is a delight to teach and Lonnie is a good boy.

**Clay:** I'm glad to hear that. It's...it's not easy being both father and mother to two young children. Thank you for your words of encouragement.

**Verna:** And thank *you* for *your* words of encouragement. The Lord knows they were needed.

*They smile slightly at each other.*

**Scene 7**

**Scene 8**

**Scene 9 – (October) – Classroom inside the school**

*The children are just leaving the building, playing outside, heading home, ad lib talking, etc. Ellie is standing by the window staring blankly ahead.*

**Edith:** *(coming from the back to Verna's desk)* I appreciate what you've done for Ellie – not letting that...that girl come to school anymore.

**Verna:** *(calmly)* Winona *is* coming to school, Edith. She's just not coming during the day with the other children. I'm teaching her at night. She's very bright and is learning quickly.

**Edith:** I... hope you don't think I'm terrible because...

**Verna:** No, Edith, I don't think you're terrible. But I do believe that if we're going to really help Ellie, she needs to be able to overcome her fear. She needs to see Winona as a friend, not an enemy.

*It should be obvious that Ellie hears what is said.*

**Edith:** I don't know if that's possible.

**Verna:** It might be possible if *you* could see Nagamao as a friend.

*Ellie turns toward her mother, but says nothing.*

**Edith:** *(turns away from her)* I don't know. I don't know if I can.

**Verna:** *(gently)* Do you want to?

**Edith:** *(turning back towards Verna)* I... I don't know.

*(pauses)* Verna, I'm not a Christian, but I know that you are and, well, I guess what I'm asking is... Will you pray for me?

**Verna:** I have been praying, Edith, and yes, I'll continue to pray, not just for this situation but that you'll come to Christ someday, too.

**Edith:** I can't. Not yet.

**Verna:** You're angry at God for what happened?

**Edith:** *(emotionally)* Can you blame me? *(runs out, almost in tears, takes Ellie with her)*

**Verna:** *(having a hard time holding back tears, closes her eyes in prayer, is startled by Clayt knocking on the open door at that moment)* Oh, hello. You startled me.

**Clayt:** *(laughing)* I seem to have a habit of doing that. *(seriously)* Do you mind if I come in for a minute? I'd like to talk to you about Lonnie.

**Verna:** Of course. Please, have a seat.

**Clayt:** I'd rather stand.

**Verna:** Oh, please don't say that. That's what Mr. Davison said the first day I got here when he was so upset about...

**Clayt:** (*cutting her off*) I'm not upset. I just...

**Verna:** You just wonder why Lonnie isn't learning very quickly?

**Clayt:** I know he's a bright boy, but...

**Verna:** For some reason the academics are difficult for Lonnie, but...look at this (*pulls a paper from her desk and hands it to Clayt*) I found this on Lonnie's seat yesterday after school was over.

**Clayt:** Lonnie did this?

**Verna:** Yes, (*questioningly*) he must have done drawings at home?

**Clayt:** Well, to tell you the truth, I don't have much in the way of paper at home – or books for that matter. I have seen him making pictures outside in the dirt with a stick.

**Verna:** Lonnie has talent – lots of talent. I think he could grow up to become a very good artist.

**Clayt:** But he needs to learn reading, writing...skills that will help him make a living someday.

**Verna:** I think those things will come. It's only been a little over a month. This (*pointing to the picture*) is a God-given gift. Please don't make light of it or discourage it.

**Clayt:** (*not totally understanding or agreeing, but polite*) I just don't see how it will be of any value.

**Verna:** Every child is unique. Each is born with God-given potential. It's your job as a parent and mine as a teacher to discover that potential and develop it. I'm not minimizing the academics; but they come hard for Lonnie. It may take him longer to read or comprehend what he's reading than it does for the

other children. This (*taking the paper*) is an encouragement to him, something in which he can excel.

**Clayt:** (*looks at paper and sighs*) All right. I'll give it more time.

*Lights Down*

**Scene 10**

**Scene 11**

**Scene 12**

## ACT II

**Scene 1**

**Scene 2 - outside the schoolhouse the next morning. Everyone is assembled but just the adults are discussing the fire.**

**Frank:** If we had a mayor...

**Russell:** (*rolling his eyes*) I know – none of it would have happened.

**Frank:** You think so, too? (*to Andrew*) Russell thinks we need a mayor.

**Russell:** I didn't say that!

**Andrew:** Maybe what we really need is a sheriff...

**Frank:** (*proudly*) Well, now that you mention it, I'd make a good sheriff.

**Andrew:** ...to bring Clyde Davison to justice!

**Frank:** Clyde? (*frightened by the thought of standing up to Clyde*).

**Russell:** What makes you think Clyde did it?

**Andrew:** With everything he's said against Miss Nickerson, who else would want to burn down the schoolhouse?

**Clayt:** Besides, if you noticed, he was the only man who wasn't here to put out the fire.

*Sound of a wagon in back of the school.*

**Verna:** Mr. Davison *was* here earlier last night—just before the fire.  
(*to Silas*) That's what I wanted to tell you, Uncle Silas. He threatened Nagamao, Winona, and me. I've...been teaching Winona at night. Somehow he found out about it. He said he'd make us all sorry and that I had...ruined the town. (*pauses, lowers her voice as she sees Clyde approaching*) He had a gun.

**Frank:** (*loudly, his eyes wide with fright*) A gun!

*Enter Clyde and Celia*

**Russell:** (*to Frank*) Well, this is your chance...sheriff.

**Frank:** Ah, on second thought I...I don't think I'd make a very good sheriff.

**Patience:** (*to Emma*) Sheriff? I thought he wanted to be the mayor.

*Russell pushes Frank towards Clyde.*

**Frank:** Ah, (*frightened, in a high squeaky voice*) Clyde.

**Clyde:** (*gruffly*) Yes?

**Frank:** (*lowers his voice to sound intimidating*) Clyde. Ah... (*pauses, pulls Russell in front of him, speaks in a normal voice*) Russell has something he wants to tell you.

**Russell:** (*scared*) Me?

**Clyde:** (*puts his hands on his hips and stares at him*) What did you want to say, Russell?

**Russell:** Ah...(stammers for a while) quite the exciting event last night, wasn't it?

**Clyde:** What?

**Clayt:** *(crossing over to Clyde)* What he wants to say is “Why did you start a fire outside of the schoolhouse?”

**Clyde:** *(somewhat angrily)* What are you talking about?

**Silas:** Someone set fire to the woodpile outside the schoolhouse last night, Clyde.

**Clyde:** *(defensively)* So, what makes you think I started the fire?

**Verna:** We found broken glass and melted black metal from a lantern like the one you had last night.

**Clayt:** *(firmly)* And everyone knows that you were out here threatening Miss Verna.

**Andrew:** Besides, everyone in town showed up to put out the fire, ‘ceptin’ you.

**Celia:** We didn’t know nothin’ about the fire ‘til we rode into town this morning and saw the burned wood pile.

**Verna:** I rang the bell...

**Clyde:** Well, what you don’t know, Missy, and what Andrew has apparently forgotten is that I live further out of town than anyone else. You can’t hear the bell from my ranch.

**Celia:** That’s true. *(upset that her husband has been accused, starts to cry)*

**Emma:** *(comforts her)* It’s all right, Celia. Everyone’s just jumping to conclusions.

**Clyde:** *(to Verna)* Besides, I wasn’t the only one who had a lantern. For all you know, it could have been that Injun woman.

**Verna:** Nagamao would never do anything like that! You had no right to threaten her and Winona and no right to try and burn down this school.

**Clyde:** *(angrily)* I didn’t try to burn down this school!

**Clayt:** *(starting to get angry)* You’re going to stand there and lie about it?

**Clyde:** (*pushing Clayt*) Get out of my way!

**Sadie:** (*nervously*) Oh! Oh! There's going to be a fight!

**Russell:** Do something...(*pushing Frank towards Clayt and Clyde*) sheriff.

**Frank:** (*in a stage whisper to Russell*) I told you...I don't think I'd make a good sheriff.

**Clyde:** (*to Celia*) Let's go!

**Clayt:** There's not gonna be no fight, Miss Sadie. (*calling to Clyde*) But you'd better not be threatening Miss Verna again, Clyde!

**Silas:** I think everyone needs to go home and cool down. Let's just be thankful that no one was hurt and it was just the wood pile outside the school and not the schoolhouse itself that was destroyed. (*sound of wagon leaving*)

**Edith:** (*to Verna after others have started to leave*) I—I kinda feel like it's my fault all this happened. I mean, you wouldn't be teachin' Winona at night if it weren't for me and Ellie. And I...I told some others that you were teachin' her. That's how come Clyde knew.

**Verna:** (*reassuringly*) It's not your fault, Edith. It was my decision to teach Winona and it doesn't bother me that people know. I still plan to teach her; I just hope they'll come back.

### Scene 3

#### Scene 4 – Town Meeting

*The townspeople are entering the school, the children remain out in the street, play various games.*

**Sadie:** (*to Emma*) I know I don't have no youngins or nothin', but I thought I'd come anyway because I'm curious as to how this is all gonna turn out.

**Russell:** Or NOT turn out or turn upside down or inside out. (*Laughs at his own joke, clears his throat and stops talking when Emma looks at him.*)

**Sadie:** Oh, Russell, you are just too funny!



**Emma:** *(smiling slightly)* Yes, well, where would you like to sit, dear?

*Russell points to the second row. Sadie follows them.*

*Frank and Patience sit in the third row, in front of Andrew and Kate.*

*Emma Nods in agreement*

*Enter Silas.*

*Silas walks up behind the desk.*

*Enter Verna, quietly from the back room.*

*Verna whispers something to Silas just as Clayt enters the room.*

*Enter Clayt.*

*Verna and Clayt exchange glances. He should look sympathetic. She should look slightly embarrassed. Verna sits in the front row. Clayt sits on the back bench by Andrew. Edith walks in with Ellie. They sit in the back on the two chairs. Clyde and Celia enter last and take the remaining seats next to Frank and Patience. Clyde doesn't look at anyone.*

**Silas:** Well, I guess you all know why we're here.

*Frank raises his hand.*

**Silas:** Yes?

**Frank:** *(standing up)* I know this must be difficult for you, since Miss Nickerson is your niece, so I'd like to volunteer to chair the meeting if you'd like. After all, Russell thinks I'd make a good mayor, so...

**Russell:** I never said that!

*Everyone is totally quiet.*

**Frank:** *(sheepishly)* Oh. *(looking around, comments when he finds no support, says sheepishly)* Maybe I should just sit down.

**Andrew:** *(patting him on the shoulder)* Good idea, Frank.

**Frank:** *(to Andrew)* Which idea—to chair the meeting or sit down?

**Andrew and Kate:** *(at the same time)* Both.

*Andrew and Kate look at each other. Frank looks at Patience, confused.*

**Patience:** *(trying to be supportive)* Everyone knows you were just trying to help, dear. *(Frank smiles, as if assured he had done the right thing)*

**Silas:** Yes, I do appreciate the offer, Frank, but I think I'll be able to be impartial. We're just here to see how the town feels about Verna remaining on as our teacher for another year.

**Clayt:** *(stands up)* I think Miss Verna should be commended for staying through this year. *(pauses, as if he's having difficulty saying what needs to be said)* There are some present *(looks at Clyde)* who have done all they could to discourage her, yet she has continued with dignity. I can't speak for anyone else, but my children have learned a great deal, and so have I – particularly about the importance of God-given talents and how to encourage my children to develop and use them. *(sits down)*

**Sadie:** *(to Emma in a stage whisper)* I think he likes her, and not just as a teacher.

**Silas:** Excuse me, Miss Sadie. Did you have something you wanted to share?

**Sadie:** *(embarrassed)* No, no—carry on.

**Silas:** Thank you. Someone else?

**Andrew:** *(stands up)* Kate and I have been impressed by what our children have learned this year. I know there have been a few rough spots, but...that's to be expected in any new situation. *(sits down)*

**Frank:** *(starts to get up, looks at Patience, thinks better of it, raises his hand)* We agree with Andrew. *(Patience smiles at him, proud of her husband that he didn't say more.)*

**Russell:** *(stands up)* I've gotten a few good laughs out of some of those situations. *(laughs at himself, no-one else does, clears his throat, gets serious)* Yes, well, at any rate, I know Emma and I don't have any little ones yet, so maybe our vote doesn't count. But, after seeing some of the work the children have done, we've talked it over, and, well, we're hoping Miss Nickerson will be around for quite a few more years so our children can have her for a teacher someday.

**Edith:** *(raises her hand)* I've been here most every day with my Ellie. Verna's a right good teacher. She takes her job real serious. She's done her best to help Ellie—and me. *(pauses, looks at Ellie with concern)* Not sure how much has actually gotten through, but I think Miss Verna really tried.

**Silas:** Thank you. Anyone else?

*Enter Nagamao*

*Nagamao has left Winona on the bench outside. There is ad-libbed discussion about why she's there, speculation about her causing the fire, etc. The children outside back away from Winona, pointing and whispering.*

**Nagamao:** Please, I like to say something.

**Silas:** Of course. You may come up here, if you'd like.

**Nagamao:** *(goes over to Verna, speaks nervously, but courageously)* I like to stand here by Miss Verna. She is true friend. She try to be fair, to help all –even me and Winona. I not have many friends – not here, not with my people. I have caused her much problems. Because of that, Winona and I will leave; we go far away so you can keep good teacher.

**Verna:** *(looking up at her)* No! Nagamao, it's not right for you to have to leave so I can stay.

**Clyde:** *(standing)* I ain't had a chance to say nothin' yet.

*Nagamao sits quietly by Verna*

**Silas:** *(taking a deep breath)* Then—this is your time, Clyde.

**Clyde:** I'd like to come up front, if you don't mind.

**Silas:** *(hesitating at first)* Ah—fine. Certainly. Come on up.

*Clyde goes to the front, bringing The McGuffey Reader with him.*

**Clyde:** I'm the one who called for this meetin' so I think it would be best if I start out by statin' my reasons.

As all of you know, Miss Nickerson and I got off on the wrong footin' from the very first day she arrived in Prairie View. I was angry with her for how she had handled some things that happened with my daughter. I was also upset that she invited this woman here and her daughter to be a part of our school. The thing that was the last straw for me was the use of these books – the McGuffey reader. They're full of do-good stories and quotes from the Bible. I didn't cater to her teachin' religion to my children, so I took them out that day and they've not been back since. I was glad my daughter brought one of the readers home; I hid it away in a drawer by my bed. I—I planned on burnin' it when no one else was around. Then I had the accident. As you all know, it was Miss Nickerson who—saved my life.

That made me all the angrier because I thought she'd use it, that she'd hold it over my head, so to speak, to try and get my children back in school. I also heard she had prayed with my wife that I'd get “saved.” That really made me angry.

I've always been an angry person. I know I've been difficult to get along with. I created the attitude my daughter, Cora, has. I've been proud of the fact that she stood up for herself.

What you all don't know, includin' my family, is that, while I was laid up from the accident, I read this McGuffey reader. I read it from cover to cover. The more I read, the angrier I got. The angrier I got, the more determined I was to get rid of Miss Nickerson. No—contrary to what some of you believe, I didn't start that fire by the schoolhouse, but I did threaten Miss Nickerson. I told her she had ruined this town and I was goin' to get rid of her and her Indian friends.

I was determined to do that—right up until last night. And, after hearin’ what everyone else had to say, I’m glad I had a change of mind, or I should say, a change of heart. I’d like to read a section from this book. It’s written by Mr. McGuffey himself, *(read page 74, numbers 3 and 4, then pauses)*. That pretty much explains what happened. God’s Holy Spirit got ahold of my life. He showed me how wicked a sinner I was and that Christ died for those sins. *(pauses)* I accepted His invitation for salvation.

**Celia:** *(elated)* Oh, Clyde!

**Clyde:** I owe an apology to you, Miss Nickerson—and Nagamao, to the whole town. I’m sorry for all the grief I’ve caused and for frightenin’ the two of you and Winona.

I especially want to apologize to my family. I—robbed my daughters of a year of their schoolin’. My wife has had to put up with my rottenness for a long time—for years. I’m thankful for her patience and godly example; it was a rebuke to me every day. Anyway, I hope to be a better husband and father; I just hope it’s not too late.

*(looks at Silas)* I guess that’s all I have to say.

**Silas:** *(stands up as Clyde goes back to his seat)* Thank you, Clyde. Well, *(breathing a sigh of relief)* that was unexpected! That’s wonderful news! Verna told me before the meeting started that Nagamao asked Christ into her heart just last night. *(said in a half-teasing manner to Clyde)* Maybe now, you’ll agree with me as to what this town really needs is *(excited, Frank starts to stand up)* ...a preacher! *(Frank sinks slowly back in his seat.)* *(looks at Verna)* And, I’m not meaning someone to replace the current teacher. *(to all)* Well, we can vote on that at a different date. For now, I guess, if everyone’s agreed for Verna to remain as the teacher, we can dismiss this meeting.

**Patience:** *(in a stage whisper to Frank)* Don’t worry, dear. Someday Prairie View will be big enough to need a mayor.

**Russell:** *(loudly to Frank)* Or a sheriff! *(laughs at his own joke, clears his throat and stops when he sees Frank isn’t laughing)*

**Andrew:** *(stands up)* Speaking of a sheriff, there’s just one more item of business we need to take care of; if Clyde didn’t start that fire, then who did?

*There is a slight pause, people mumble their ideas each other.*

**Verna:** *(standing and facing everyone)* I know some have blamed Nagamao. But I know she wouldn't have started it.

**Nagamao:** I not know of any fire till today.

**Andrew:** Miss Verna was the one who first alerted me about the fire. To my knowledge, there was no one else out there that night except Clyde, Nagamao and her daughter and Miss Nickerson.

**Clay:** *(defensively)* Are you trying to suggest that Verna started it?

**Andrew:** Relax, Clay. I'm not suggesting anything: I'm just trying to lay out the facts. We know it was started by someone breaking a lantern by the woodpile. We know it had to be one of us. The person who's responsible knows who they are. They could save a lot of trouble by just admitting it.

*There is a long, awkward pause. Everyone whispers, looking at each other suspiciously.*

**Ellie:** *(stands up, talks nervously)* It was me. *(Everyone should act shocked.)*

**Edith:** *(surprised that she talked)* Ellie! *(hugging her)* Ellie, you can talk again!

**Ellie:** *(stilted, slowly)* I've been ready for a while—ready to talk again, ready to live again. But, when everyone was so upset about the fire, I got scared.

**Edith:** But you couldn't have started that fire. You were at home asleep.

**Ellie:** No, I wasn't. I sneaked out of my window that night.

**Edith:** Why? Why would you go out at night by yourself?

**Ellie:** *(doesn't answer but goes outside to look for Winona. She sees her sitting on the bench by herself, pauses a moment, then reaches out her hand.)* Come.

*Winona draws back.*

**Ellie:** It's alright. No one's going to hurt you.

*Winona hesitatingly takes her hand and follows her into the schoolhouse*

**Ellie:** *(to Edith, somewhat stilted)* I went out of the house to look for Winona. I knew Miss Verna was teaching her at night; I'd heard her tell you. I also heard her say that maybe I could overcome my fear of Winona if you could be friends with her mother. I knew you were hurting as much as I was; you just didn't show it in the same way. I thought that maybe—maybe if I could be friends with Winona, you could overcome your fear of Nagamao.

**Edith:** *(hugging Ellie, crying)* Oh, Ellie!

**Ellie:** The fire was an accident. I was coming around the corner of Miss Sadie's house when I heard Mr. Davison yelling, so I hid. After he was gone, I started toward the schoolhouse to talk to Miss Verna, but, then I thought Mr. Davison might come back, and I got scared and ran. I tripped over the woodpile and my lantern broke. I just kept running. I'm sorry. Mama. I didn't mean to...

**Edith:** It's alright, Ellie. *(looks at Verna, remembering back to their conversation about the Lord)* Everything's going to be alright!

*Everyone starts getting up. Clayt goes to talk to Verna. Nagamao shyly walks over to Edith and Ellie. Clyde shakes hands with Russell and Frank, then goes outside with Celia. Andrew and Kate follow.*

**Silas:** *(to the audience)* So, how does our story end? It's doesn't really. In some ways *(looks at Sadie who has gone outside with Emma and is laughing at a joke Russell has just told; Patience and Frank's children come to them while Patience is reassuring Frank that he would make a good mayor. Other groups "freeze" during this time)* it just continues *(pauses)* and in other ways...

*First group "freezes." Silas looks at Verna and Clayt as Clayt's children come running in to him, then looks at Nagamao, Edith, Ellie, and Winona talking together, then Clyde and his family smiling and talking to Andrew, Kate, and their family.*

...our story's just beginning

*Everyone “comes to life and slowly start to exit as Silas goes into his house and exits out the other door as lights come down.*

*THE END*