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## ACT THREE

esther hirsh

sara chickering did come with me  
and we did gather  
sticks and sticks of rhubarbs from the garden.  
we did put the rhubarbs in my wagon  
and have squeaks, squeaks to town,  
pulling the rhubarbs behind us all the places  
and we did sell sara chickering's rhubarbs,  
ten sticks a nickel.  
and we had comings back with the rattle-empty wagon,  
and five jingle nickels.

percelle johnson

caught iris weaver  
with twenty bottles of bootleg whiskey in her car.  
but the man she was with  
said it was his hooch and iris didn't know what all she was carrying.  
now i know it was iris running that booze,  
but the gentleman's going to jail for her,  
serving the sentence she ought to serve.  
if you ask me,  
a girl goes and bobs her hair and her head starts  
filling with nothing but monkey business.

sara chickering

heard talk around town that  
the hearse of a slain klansman  
caught fire on its way to the cemetery.

what do you suppose the lord  
was trying to say about that?

johnny reeves

neighbor,  
as the hearse drove  
past hundreds of persons  
lining the sidewalks,  
an act of god,  
a thunderbolt  
struck the car itself,  
sparking it to  
smoke and flames.

an act of god,  
neighbor,  
to express the lord's anger  
that one  
of his special children  
had fallen.

reynard alexander

on arrival in a town,  
the klan appears to serve the best interest of  
the greater community,  
"cleaning" it up, keeping a vigilant eye out for  
loose morals and lawbreakers.  
they deliver baskets to the needy,  
and money to the destitute,  
but the needy the klan comforts are white protestant needy,  
the destitute white protestant, too.

a catholic with troubles, a negro, a jew, a foreigner?  
their problems are of no concern to the klan.

from state to state,  
from town to town,  
men join who cannot be trusted.  
unscrupulous men  
who work in the dark  
behind hoods and masks.  
it takes but ten dollars.

and when that sort of scoundrel  
starts hiding under hood and robes,  
no good can come of it.

johnny reeves

i have reached the pinnacle, neighbor.  
tapped by the exalted dragons.  
i, neighbor, led the klan  
in their opening prayers.

the gathering prayed with me,  
neighbor, in the summer morning  
with the bees humming in the clover.  
they prayed with me as i declared the klan a  
movement of god.

heads uplifted, we offered ourselves to the almighty,  
calling all  
protestants  
to band together  
for the sake of home and country

and we sang

*america.*

leanora sutter

i was on my way up main street when i saw esther.  
she was picking stands of dandelion, talking her strange talk  
about birds and kittens, about lewis and  
stopping the train  
so she could take flowers to heaven and visit her mother.

i walked with her a while, listening,  
then waved goodbye at the bottom of main street hill.  
i hadn't gone far  
when i heard the train whistle.  
i couldn't see the tracks  
or esther  
but

i saw my mother,  
running  
and i  
started running, too, toward her,  
racing between buildings.

then my mother was gone, but there was esther,  
looking up,  
still as a rock,  
gazing at  
that big train,  
rushing down on her,  
expecting it to stop and let her on.

i pretty near flew

it didn't seem i could ever move fast enough  
but i ran

as the whistle shrieked  
as the brakes screamed  
as the fireman crawled out onto the grinding locomotive.  
the train was nearly on top of her when i leaped,  
grabbed esther, and rolled her to safety,  
locked in my arms,  
the two of us cradled in a mess of seed and dandelion.

sara chickering

leanora sutter  
snatched esther from the path of the maine central locomotive,  
racing the engine while the fireman crawled out  
in the hope of a rescue,  
an impossible rescue.

they saw esther on the tracks.  
set their brakes  
but the train was so heavy,  
it ran a quarter mile more  
before  
screeching  
to a  
stop.

in that wrenching stretch  
the men were certain they'd killed her.

can't hardly think of anything  
but leanora sutter  
in my kitchen last winter, wrapped in my best quilt,  
and yesterday, esther, wrapped in  
leanora,  
inches from the railroad tracks,  
safe in a nest of dandelion.

esther hirsh

i do have the prickle scratches on my legs and on my arm  
from where  
leanora did push me down in the tangle grass  
and sara chickering says in a big scold voice  
that i am never, never, ever stopping a train  
not ever, never, never on the train tracks.  
but

i do miss my mamma and her summer  
skin.

reynard alexander

wright sutter  
received a letter  
in the mail  
warning him to leave town.

whoever wrote that letter said  
they saw the article about leanora  
saving the hirsh child from the train.  
said,  
they'd tie them both to the tracks next time,  
make sure neither walked away.

fearing for leanora,  
sutter took the letter to percelle johnson.

johnson  
asked the head of the local klan what they knew about such threats.

klan said,  
we didn't send it.

merlin van tornhout

put a colored girl in the paper,  
call her a hero,  
just cause she saved a kid  
from being hit by a train.  
a jew kid.

i could have saved the kid.  
i saw it, too. that train  
tearing along the track.  
i saw it, too.

i didn't run like that colored girl did.  
i didn't try.  
maybe i was thinking no one could.  
no one could beat that train.

but the colored girl,  
i never saw anyone move so fast.  
she ran like a deer,  
like a deer in a rifle sight,  
    one you let go  
    cause there's no way to hit  
    a swift brown rush weaving through the trees like that.

i'm not saying she did anything i couldn't have done,  
but when i think on it,  
maybe i didn't try because something,  
something kept me in my place,  
watching that colored girl run.

esther hirsh

bossie did stray from the pasture  
into mr. hobart's garden  
where she had eatings of all the good green stuffs  
and she did have happy goings up and down the garden rows.  
when mr. hobart had wakings up,  
he did see our bossie  
in his garden,  
and he did take his gun and fire at  
bossie.

bossie is a smart cow  
and right away she had runnings home to us.  
the animal doctor did make a good promise that  
bossie does not ever have the living coming out of her.  
and i am having big glads to hear this  
because i do like it better to play with  
bossie with the living in her.



fitzgerald flitt

some klansmen, goosed on bootleg whiskey, broke  
into the basement  
of the roman catholic cathedral in burlington  
expecting to find  
tanks and guns,  
airplanes and acid,  
ammunition enough to level new england.

all they found was dust,  
some worn vestments,  
and a dented chalice,

which they stole.

reynard alexander

what is the ku klux klan?  
is it the patriotic organization it claims to be?  
100 percent americans.  
what is a 100 percent american?  
what of catholics, jews, negroes,  
citizens of any other race or color born here,  
whose fathers were born here,  
and grandfathers.  
are they not every bit as 100 percent american as the klan?

viola pettibone

i accompanied oscar scott to the train station  
to meet john philip sousa  
and bring him to the auditorium  
to play with his band of eighty musicians.  
i handed mr. sousa a bouquet of flowers and  
the key to the city,  
which he accepted grandly.

the band played nine numbers though they  
had just three hours here in town.  
they gave a full concert,  
and a number of encores,  
all mr. sousa's compositions.

they saved for last  
*stars and stripes forever*  
and took the house by storm.

harvey held a seat for me.  
but  
i watched the concert from the wings,  
as mr. sousa's guest.

percelle johnson

viola pettibone, who mothers that cat of hers  
the way only viola pettibone can,  
found her maltese stuck way up in the crotch of a tree  
on the bank leading down to the railroad track.

she tried coaxing it out,  
tried getting her boy willie to go after it, but that boy's good for nothing,  
and her customers wouldn't climb that tree.  
danged cat.  
pretty near everyone with a place backing the river came out,  
vexed from listening to it yowl.

guess it was scared 60 feet up in the air,  
too scared to consider coming down on its own and no one  
willing to go up after it.

fire department came.  
they sized up the scene and  
called me.

i wasn't going up in my uniform.  
pulled on a pair of overalls,  
placed a ladder against the lowest part of the tree.  
12 feet i covered that way.  
the remaining 48 had to be shinnied up,  
one inch at a time in the pouring rain.

blasted cat wouldn't come.  
not even when i reached it.  
i tried sweet talking it into letting go of the bark.

finally had to pry it loose,  
put the thing on my shoulder, its claws stabbing into my back.

slowly we came down.  
6 feet from the ground the cat ripped my shirt, climbed my face  
and leaped  
into viola's arms.

put my uniform back on and wrote up a ticket, handing it to  
harvey pettibone  
next time, i said,  
keep your cat to home.

fitzgerald flitt

mr. clarence darrow,  
the lawyer defending those chicago boys,  
believes  
that under no circumstances  
should the state take a  
human life.  
that's why he's shouldering this case.  
the guilt of leopold and loeb,  
the two young murderers of bobby franks,  
is without question.  
it is darrow's intention  
not to prove their innocence,  
but to cheat the hangman  
in spite of their guilt.  
and perhaps in so doing  
remove the underpinnings  
of every gallows across this land.

a civilized man in america.  
how refreshing.

reynard alexander

leopold and loeb  
who had stuck together  
through the hearing,  
snickering and laughing  
as they moved to and from the courtroom,

sat silently,  
avoiding each other  
as they heard for the first time,  
their separate confessions read aloud  
each accusing the other of  
stunning young franks with a chisel  
and snuffing out his life.

esther hirsh

i did watch with daddy at the railroad tracks this morning  
as the circus had their summer comings. daddy did keep a tight  
hold on my hand and he did tell me again the ways of trains  
while the circus people did roll their big wagons  
off the flat cars.  
they did have elephants pushing the wagons  
and horses pulling.

all the circus people and animals  
had knowings of the job they must do.  
men and men with big hammerings.  
tent poles did stand up so quick  
and a cookhouse did nearly put itself together  
with breakfast sizzling inside it  
pancakes and fried eggs flipping  
and that good breakfast smell filling the meadow  
the same as is always in sara chickering's kitchen.

by the time sara chickering did come to get me  
the big tent did fill the meadow  
and the smaller tents did look like spiderwebs  
traced in raindrops.

sara chickering and i did rush to watch the parade pass by  
on main street.  
we did see lions and tigers,  
hippos and kangaroos,  
monkeys and zebras and bears,  
and the beautiful ladies in their sparkly clothes,  
and acrobats and tightrope walkers and clowns

who did make us laugh as they flopped past  
in their big shoes  
and i did tell sara chickering we must be bringing those clowns to  
daddy  
so he can give them better fittings for their feet.

merlin van tornhout

i've had this job with the paper nearly six months now,  
working the hours after the night men leave,  
before the day men come on and i have to  
get to school.

the klan doesn't think much of the paper.  
or its editor.  
but mr. alexander,  
he gave me this job,  
he got me out of jail,  
he made a set of three keys: the back door, the storeroom, the truck.  
no one ever trusted me like that before.

i could climb pretty high with the klan, handing them those keys,  
but i wouldn't do it.  
they'd use those keys,  
i don't know what for.

reynard alexander

clarence darrow pleaded for the life of leopold and loeb. he said:

*why did they kill little bobby franks?  
not for money.  
not for hate.  
they killed him  
because somewhere  
in the infinite processes  
which go into the making of the boy or the man,  
something slipped.*

something has slipped  
not only in chicago.  
something has slipped in towns everywhere across america,  
in maine and in kansas,  
in oregon and indiana and vermont,  
something has slipped and as a result  
we are all  
sliding  
back toward the dark ages.

johnny reeves

nathan leopold, jr.  
scratched out his last will  
and testament, neighbor,  
beneath the arc light  
in the prison cell  
where, if there is justice in the land, he will soon end his days.

he thanked his lawyer  
and  
he thanked his friends  
and  
he promised to contact them  
when he entered the afterlife.

but neighbor, his friends will be waiting  
a long time to hear from him. there are plenty  
taking that slippery path from chicago to hell.  
but there are none,  
neighbor,  
there are no souls who upon reaching the flaming inferno  
make the return trip from the devil's clutches  
back up  
to  
chicago.

iris weaver

chief justice caverly says  
he doesn't believe in capital punishment for minors  
and for that reason,  
leopold and loeb  
broke a date with the hangman.

not too many satisfied  
with a sentence that lets  
two cold-blooded murderers live.

caverly says  
his decision holds  
with the dictates of enlightened humanity.

enlightened humanity,  
now there's something the klan could discuss at their next  
cross burning.

sara chickering

first there was the circus,  
which esther still jabbars on about.  
so when the fair came,  
i knew i had to take her.  
esther never saw anything like a fair before.  
she said the midway reminded her of new york.  
and at the age of six,  
she knew already that games of chance  
were just that.  
she felt little affection for the sideshows, furious  
at the booth where people took shots at the "nigger's head."

she did like the horse races.  
for a while.  
but what she loved most was  
the livestock.  
she wanted the names of the cows:  
holstein, guernsey, jersey,  
ayrshire, hereford, angus.

she wanted the names of the horses, too,  
and the sheep.  
she cuddled one little lamb, whispering in its ear that funny way she  
does,  
telling the lamb that  
she'd be looking for it to come be counted tonight when  
she tunneled between her sheets,  
and i wouldn't be surprised at all  
to hear bleating from her bedroom come midnight  
and find droppings down the hall tomorrow morning.

harvey and viola pettibone

harvey says:

how was i to know

they'd be so pushy over a broom sale?

stinking stampede it was, vi.

viola says:

you never will learn, harv.

harvey says:

i thought putting those brooms out for one cent would be good business.

viola says:

twelve women taken to doc flitt, harv,

with cuts and bruises. we'll be

lucky if they don't ask us to cover the doctor bills.

harvey says:

doc flitt wouldn't charge us for that.

viola says:

doc flitt hasn't been too

happy with you lately, harv. you and your klan. he might just

charge us double.

harvey says:

klan will see to him if he does.

viola says:

oh fine, harv. you looking to drive away the

one good doctor we got here?

what happens if you need doctoring?

the two stand facing off, each as stout and solid as a house.

harvey says:

nothing's going to happen to me, vi.

viola shakes her head in disgust

and makes up baskets of food

and a free broom

for each of the women who got hurt.



merlin van tornhout

i was driving to the klan meeting  
when i picked up a man, his hood and robe in a paper bag.  
we were heading to the same place.  
but we hadn't gone far  
when he pulled a knife on me  
and made me get out.

i never have been out-bullied before  
but i thought about that boy in chicago,  
that bobby franks,  
and i looked at the drifter in my automobile,  
and i knew  
he would gladly do to me  
what leopold and loeb had done to that boy  
in chicago.

and i got out.

percelle johnson

halfway across the country,  
the body of a polish man was found  
hanging in an oak tree.

the sheriff's report ruled the man's death a suicide. they said there  
was a bottle of liquor in the man's coat pocket.

but certain neighbors made no secret of the fact that they  
were not pleased to have a polish national  
in their valley.  
night riders beat him up the month before.  
the bruises and cuts weren't half healed when the letter arrived  
saying:  
we're coming for you.  
signed, k.k.k.

dang,  
young merlin van tornhout is walking everywhere  
because he "gave" his car to a klansman.  
if the riffraff joining the klan these days  
can take the one thing most loved from an awestruck boy,  
why couldn't they plant a bottle of liquor  
in the pocket of a hanged man?

esther hirsh

daddy says this is the high holidays  
and i do need to come with him  
to the synagogue  
so we can have thinkings about  
what we did in the year that did just go by,  
and make a plan to do better in the year that is to come.  
he says mr. levin is locking up his shoes  
for the holiday.  
i did ask sara chickering if she will have locking up in the  
barn and in the field  
and have all the animals and the plants think about  
what they did last times and plan for the next times.

sara chickering says,  
the animals and the plants are too young for such things  
and esther is, too.

daddy says sara chickering is right.  
but he says  
i still have to come to the synagogue and  
have some deep thinkings and talkings to God.

i do have talkings to God and deep thinkings  
every day.  
but i will come with daddy,  
even if i can't go fishing there.

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## ACT FOUR