

Esta Hargis Script

Libretto based on *Plowing Time* by Delmas W. Abbott

Overture

Scene 1: Esta Hargis' Home

(Pa and Esta are still sitting at the table. They've had breakfast and now are having a heated discussion as the scene opens.)

Recitative:

Pa: (Complaining) I thought that's why you went to school, to catch yourself a husband. That's what God made a woman for, to be a wife and mother. Just because you went to college. And got some book learnin. It don't mean you can forget that and work this farm by yourself. You need a man to warm your bed as well as plow the fields. I don't care what anybody says. A girl ought to have her a man and children.

Esta: (Matter of factly) I did not go to Berea, just to find a husband. I did go there to learn economics. So I could get a job teaching!

Pa: (Sarcastic) Then why did you come home before you finished. Before you found a man.

Esta: (Defiantly) Maybe I came home because I learned enough, enough to come back here and stay.

Pa: When I deeded this farm to you I meant you to have a man with you.

Esta: (Exasperated) You're the only man I need around, or want around. I can take care of both of us just fine!

Spoken dialogue:

Pa: What about Lester Thomas across the creek? Hargises and Thomases have always been. . . Why, Lester'd be proud to wed. . .

Esta: This is one Hargis who doesn't need or want a Thomas. I guess the right man for me just hasn't been born yet.

(Esta's Conscience is standing off to the side listening to what Esta is saying to her father.)

Recitative:

Conscience: Why do I say, words that I don't really mean? Words that have no ring of truth, words that cost me so?

Spoken dialogue:

Esta: I'm just going to leave these dishes now. I'll wash them with the supper dishes later. You want anything before I go?

Pa: I reckon I can get it if I do. And if I can't, I'll phone Andrew to send of his younguns to help me.

Esta: No need to do that. Just ring the dinner bell, and I'll come.

(With the help of his cane, Pa gets us and stands for a moment looking at Esta)

Pa: I wish you'd listen to me, Estie. I know more about some things than you think I do. What'll you do when I'm in a hole in the churchyard yonder? I cain't understand what happened to you out there. No girl as pretty as you wants to be an old maid.

Esta: I know that in a way Pa, you know more than anybody else I've ever seen. But you don't understand everything about me. You never have.

Recitative Duet

Esta: (Pensively) How can I tell anyone what I feel?

Conscience: (Reflective) How can I ask anyone what I need to know?

Esta: Why do birds sing out when the blossoms come in spring?

Conscience: And why is it so easy for Pa to see me married?

Esta & Conscience: When what I need to know he does not seem to understand.

Esta: When will I find answers

Conscience: (Intense) Remember Eldon Hager and how he pawed and grabbed you. Down in the college garden.

Esta: How I want to forget.

Conscience: He wanted you

Esta: But I just can't forget.

Conscience: to meet his need.

Esta & Conscience: But that was not the only time. There was the boy Kenneth when I was only twelve.

Conscience: He tried to pull me down, and get on top of me.

Esta: So I hit him!

Conscience: With a stick!

Esta: Fought him off!

Conscience: And made him fall

Esta & Conscience: into the creek.

Conscience: How was I to know?

Esta: he would drown?

Conscience: How I want to forget.

Esta: Why did they want

Conscience: But I just can't forget

Esta: to force me?

Esta & Conscience: What do I lack that makes men feel I need, a man to do for me instead of me?

(Esta & Conscience move to front porch)

Esta & Conscience: Is what I ask part of the mystery? Which living things share ev'ry Spring? But I am not part of the birds and the bees.

Conscience: I have a questing mind and I have desire to be

Esta & Conscience: a person who will find the reason and the purpose of me. When will I find answers to questions about me? (End of recitative)

(Enter Pa on front porch, sits in rocker)

Pa: Guess big meetin's starting tomorrow night. But I don't feel like going any time. I'm not afraid of going to Hell anyways.

Esta: Ring the dinner bell if you want or need me. (Esta exits with urgent long strides.)

End Scene 1

Scene 2

While the music is played, the scene shifts from Esta's front porch to a field not far from the house. On one side of the stage, there is a clump of trees and a creek running along side.

(From backstage Lester Thomas can be heard calling to his mules.)

Esta and her Conscience enter. They walk over to the creek, take their shoes off and dip their feet in the water, wriggling their toes and splashing the water around. Esta lays back and looks at the sky through the trees. Her Conscience is sitting up still splashing the water and looking at Esta.

Conscience: (sung convincingly) You are a woman. You have a choice! You can demand more or lose yourself, within the mystery that uses death and life and makes the earth start fresh again each year.

Female chorus: Like a willow, bringing forth new shoots to grow. Bending to the seasons' change. Is that for you?

Esta: (singing) I am a woman. I have a choice! But there's this murm'ring, this inner voice which says to me "Be firm, and don't let Nature try to decide for you!"

Female chorus: What do you want? To be known as more than Mother and the mate of Man. Is this for you?

Esta & Conscience duet: There's more to living. There's more to dying too!

Female chorus: There's more to life!

Esta, Conscience & Female chorus: There is a need to know the diff'rence. You are, I am, a woman. You (I) have a choice. And yet, I have no answers for questions of nature. (End of song)

Lester: (Sarcastically) You look might cute lying there on the ground in your boy's britches. You going to wear duds like that to Andrew's dance tonight? I'll be mighty proud to dance with you anyhow.

Esta: (Jumps up) Nobody's going to dance with me in these britches or a dress either. I'm not going to any dance at Andrew's or anywhere else.

Lester: I'm putting in my bid for the first dance anyhow. I'll wait for you.

Esta: Be a mighty long wait. (Esta exits hurriedly)

End Scene 2

Scene 3: Esta's Kitchen

(Supper is finished. Pa is sitting at the table watching Esta wash the dishes from the two meals. As she is finishing. . .)

Pa: I been wondering, Estie, if I oughten to go over to Andrew's and live there. I've already give this farm to you, and it's too hard for you to look after it and me, too. You've got no time. . .no time to go nowheres. . .no time. . .why tonight, for instance, you ought to be going to that square dance at Andrew's house. Dance with some boys. Talk to some women-folks. You ought. . .

Esta: (To be played during the scene's opening dialogue) (singing) All right! If you want to get me out of the house tonight, all right! Leave your own home where you've lived most your life, all right, all right! I can do ev'rything that needs to be done. Men are not the only ones who can do the work around a farm. Do you think I'm helpless? I'll get out and go to that dance tonight, all right! I'll tell Andrew you're glin' to move in with them, tonight all right?

(Esta moves from the kitchen to her room. She looks at herself in the mirror before she takes off her shirt and jeans. She then puts on her best blue silk dress and ties a blue ribbon around her head, Indian fashion.)

Esta: (singing) What will I wear? Will Lester be there? Why should I care? Tryin' to please him. I'm still the same, in jeans or dresses. I am what counts! All this just wears me down. I am going dancing at Andrew's house, tonight! To keep the peace between Pa and me. When I see Lester there I will dance with him once. Then my duty will be done. And then in the moonlight I'll walk between the trees. Knowing I'm alone and not afraid. I will get out of the house for tonight all right!

Scene 4: Dance at Andrew's House

(As the scene opens, Luther Lovell is tuning his fiddle while Milton Vaught sets up to call a dance set. All the furniture is pushed against the walls to make room for the dancing.)

(Esta is talking to Andrew and Melva about Pa wanting to move in with them. Lester Thomas enters wearing his Sunday best.)

Andrew: (to Esta) Over there's somebody who'll be glad you finally decided to come to one of the dances.

Esta: I didn't come here to see Lester Thomas. I just came to tell you about Pa. He says he does want to move over here and live with you and Melva and all your brood.

Andrew: He'd never do anything like that. You know he puts a lot of store by you and even made sure you'd get the home place.

Melva: Hey Lester, look who's got away from her mules and back into a pretty dress just to come here and dance with you tonight!

Milton Vaught: (yells) One more couple; then we can start the set.

Lester: (walks over to Esta, grabs her arm) I told you I'd dance the first dance with you, Estie. All right, Milton.

Square dance music

Lester: Estie, I never really knew how good you could dance. You never let a body.

Esta: I can get around a tune if I want to. But don't you ever ask a girl before you drag her out on the floor and onto a set?

(There is a short pause between the end of the dance and the start at CC, just enough time for Lester and Esta to complete the dialogue above.)

Lester: I thought I asked you this afternoon when you were lying there by the creek in those boy's britches you get yourself up in most of the time these days. But, all right, I'll ask again. What about the next one?

Esta: Won't be a next one for me. I've got to be getting home. I just came to tell Andrew something. Pa's alone and he's feeling poorly.

Lester: Why you've been here no longer than the shake of a lamb's tail. Dance just once more; then I'll walk home with you. I want you for my woman. My intentions are all honorable, if you'd just give me a chance to talk about them.

(Esta's Conscience is off to the side, listening)

Conscience: (singing) Remember Lester's brother.

Female chorus: (singing) Kenneth wanted you.

Conscience: He also had intentions. Now Lester has that look!

Esta: (singing) Yes, I know. But he held me so gently, and his eyes are warm and shy.

Esta: (speaking softly) I'm going home.

Lester: I'll walk with you. Lots of these old country boys have got evil eyes for a girl as pretty as you. Something or somebody might get you. I'm aiming to protect the girl I mean to marry. I've got things to talk to you about tonight. Lovely things.

Esta: (with emphasis) I said I was going home alone! (exits hurriedly)

End Scene 4

(The Grand Pause is a short pause between the scenes, not to be determined by change of scene. The music starts again before the next scene opens)

Scene 5: Esta's House

(Esta lights a lamp and carries it into the room where her Father is sleeping. She puts the lamp on a table and stands by the bed looking at him.)

Esta: (singing - **Lullaby**) Where do your dreams take you, to a distant place and time? And do you see yourself as a virile yet tender man? Who took pride in the land he plowed, pride in the woman he wed; pride in the children who came from his seed. What do you dream on these starry nights, as you lie upon the bed? And are you dreaming that time has stopped, and your dreams are real instead. When I was a child, we shared the world of dreams. Now I am grown and you turn away. What has changed to take our world from me. Where do your dreams take you? Am I no longer a part of the world you dream. Do you not see me, as I am, in the dreams you weave.

(Esta gently sits on the bed and lays her head next to her father's.)

(Suddenly, Pa's eyes open. He jerks his head back and then lifts it off the pillow entirely.)

Pa: (speaking) What're you doin' layin' here? What's the matter with you? Are you so lonesome tonight you have to come in here and. I told you you needed a husband. Didn't you see Lester Thomas at. . . ?

(Esta gets up quickly, moves away from the bed, and picks up the lamp.)

Esta: (speaking) Nothing's the matter with me. You were making so much racket in your sleep I thought you were wrestling a wildcat. I just laid down a minute to gentle you out of your nightmare.

End Scene 5

Scene 6: Esta's House

(Sunday night, suppertime: Neither Pa or Esta has anything to say to each other. Pa sits looking at his plate eating very little. Esta's Conscience is off to the side watching both of them.)

Conscience: (singing) He's sayin' nothin'. Just sittin' quietly. Barely eating. He worries me. Did he call Andrew? And tell him he'd live with him? (spoken) "If so, why hasn't Andrew come?" (singing)

What can I say to him? Get him to understand. Instead of arguing. I get so mad! Why does he try to push me, when I'm not ready. He knows I don't want to marry Lester. How can I make him see? (spoken) "There are so many things I need to know!" (singing) If my Mother was alive, would I have this need to know the reasons and the whys? It does not make sense. Who says girls have to marry? Why has this been the way it's always been? He's sayin' nothin' just sitting quietly. He wants me married fulfill his duty. What I need is not marriage, just answers about me.

End Scene 6

Scene 7: Esta's House

(Esta gets up from the supper table and goes outside where she hears the church choir singing from backstage. She walks around outside listening to the music and occasionally humming along. She leans against the corner of the house for a moment then goes back inside. By the time the third verse begins, Esta is changing her clothes and singing along with the choir, planning on going to the big meeting. During this time, Esta's father has moved to the porch and sits in his rocking chair.)

Church choir (SATB) (singing "Wells") Life is the hour that God has giv'n. To escape Hell and fly to heav'n. The day of grace and mortals may. Secure the blessing of the day. (Esta joins in humming along with the choir) The living know that they must die. But all the dead forgotten lie. Their mem'ry and their sense is gone (Esta sings with choir.) Alike unknowing and unknown. Life is the time to serve the Lord. The time t'insure the great reward. And while the lamp holds out to burn. The vilest sinner my return.

(Esta comes out the front door wearing her prettiest dress.)

Esta: (speaking) I'm going down to the church house to the big meeting. You want anything before I go?

Pa: I reckon not. I reckon Andrew's crowd'll be there. And Lester Thomas. Why don't you. well, I guess there's no need to say it again.

End Scene 7

Scene 8: Church house

Reverend Souder: Yes, my friends, life is the time to serve the Lord and who among you is willing to commit himself tonight to serve the Lord.

(Three young women hesitantly rise and step forward)

Rev. Souder (singing - **Gospel**) All you brothers and sisters, gather 'round to welcome these. Three women to the fold of Christ our Savior and King.

Rev. Souder & church choir (SATB) O let us sing praises. To Christ our God and King. Who died to save us. Lift up your voices and sing!

Andrew: (singing) We all have travelled that road, the road of sin and death. Our souls were lost in the dark. But Jesus, came down to show the way of everlasting life. (Rev. Souder joins in) Now our path is full of light, and we sing His praise.

Church choir: We sing His praise.

Rev. Souder & Basses: O let us sing

Andrew & Choir: O let us sing praises (Andrew & Rev. Souder sing the Tenor & Bass parts of the chorus respectively) To Christ our God and King who died to save us. Lift up your voices and sing. Though God is in your heart, flesh will lean t'wards sin. Do not forget that Satan (Rev. Souder sings Bass line) wants to win. **Melva joins in:** Back ev'rything he lost to Jesus and His love. So ask for God's help ev'ryday **The 3 young women join in:** and sing His praise. O let us sing, O let us sing praises, Yes, hear us sing, To Christ our God and King. Who died to save us. Lift up your voices and sing, sing praises to Him. Lift up your voices and sing, we're goin' to lift up our voices and sing, sing His praise, let us sing His praise.

Rev. Souder: (speaking) Let us pray. (Everyone bows his head except Esta, she has turned her head to look at her conscience with a questioning expression on her face.)

(Rev. Souder will ad lib. The Benediction, making sounds as if he were really speaking.)

Conscience: (singing) Maybe I want him to walk me home. Am I trying to please my Pa? Or is it something which I need to learn? And can Lester be enough like his brother to teach me what I need to know. Perhaps he could take away the mem'ry of Kenneth, the mem'ry of Eldon too. Maybe I want him to walk me home.

Rev. Souder & Congregation: (speaking) Amen.

(As the congregation breaks up to leave, Lester approaches Esta.)

Lester: (singing) After the way you ran out on me at Andrew's, I reckon there's no use for me to ask if I can walk you home.

Esta: (singing) Why don't you ask me and see what I say.

Lester: (singing) Can I?

Esta: (singing) Yes.

Lester: (singing) Why did you run away from me down at the creek, yesterday Estie? Are you afraid to be alone with me? Are you afraid of yourself?

Esta: (singing) I had to get back to plowin' the field that's why I left.

Lester: (singing) All day you acted like I did not exist. Yet tonight you let me walk you home. Estie, why don't you let me be the one who plows your fields and warms your bed?

Esta: (speaking) What?

Lester: (singing) It just isn't natural for a woman.

Esta: (singing) Why do men think ev'ry girl wants and needs a man?

Lester: (singing) Ah Estie, let me show you what I mean.

(Lester throws himself against Esta and kisses her. He is not as gentle now as he has been. She turns towards him, puts her arm around him and grips the back of his shirt in her sweating hand. The fingers of her other hand are still locked with his. She is letting him have his way.)

(Esta pulls away from Lester and clasps her arms in front of her, tight against her taut bosom. She drops her arms to her side and rubs the palms of her hands against her hips. She walks two steps away from Lester; then she steps back to him and holds the fingers of both hands softly against his slightly bristled cheeks.)

(At letter JJJ Esta jerks her hands from Lester's face holding them stiffly in front of her with the fingers wide apart. She stands tense. She moves back a few steps and spins around 3 or 4 times until one of her feet hits a small broken limb. She picks up the fallen limb.)

Conscience: (singing) Esta! Look at you! What have you done?

Women's chorus: (singing) Is he Eldon or Kenneth?

(Esta springs at Lester, flailing him across the arms, chest, and shoulders as he stands with his arms at his sides and his mouth slightly open in surprise.)

Esta & Conscience: (singing) I let you have your way with me.

Women's chorus: (singing) Now there's no need to forget.

Esta & Conscience: (singing) If I had known. (Esta drops the limb; feeling tired as guilt and shame surface, she expresses with disappointment.)

Esta, Conscience & Women's chorus: (singing) It's not something that important // after all.

Lester: (speaking) Estie, listen. I

Esta: (speaking) (disappointed) You'd better just leave now.

Lester: (speaking) Now listen, Estie, You know I want to marry you. I've always meant to do that when you tamed down enough to listen to me. Why else do you think I would have done. . . . done anything to.

Esta: Go on home. Stay on your own side of the creek. Not all Hargises and Thomases can

End Scene 8

Scene 9: Esta's house

(Breakfast the next morning)

Esta: (Drained of energy singing) Did you call Andrew? Well, did you?

Pa: (singing) Well, no I thought it might be best to wait 'til he comes over here. I could talk to him face to face and get him to haul me and my clothes to his place.

Esta: (singing decidedly) I'll phone him myself before I start my chores. I'll tell him to come and get you. I know now you were right to want to go. You'll be better off over there. Where someone will be with you all the time.

(Esta goes into the front room and calls Andrew. She then goes to the front porch and sits down. Esta's Conscience stands behind her and places her hands on Esta's shoulders.)

Conscience: (singing) Now that I know sex holds no myst'ry. There is nothing to fear.

Esta & Conscience: (singing) I still have myself. I have lost nothing. All that I am no one // can take from me.

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