

Act 3 Scene 13

Setting: Ham Clarkson's General Store

Cast: Vera Hutchins and Ham Clarkson

Vera

Ham, I'm done talking, we've waited long enough; it's time to move.

Ham

What in the world... are you talking about, young lady?

Vera

Didn't you hear about Letha's Jeff? Raz Porter's selling him off. That poor kid's done nothing to deserve this. Every time something like this happens, we get all fired up and start railin' about how things need to change. But what do we do? Not a darn thing!

Ham

Well, I don't like it either Vera. But you have to understand, folks around here are set in their ways, and they believe what they're doing is right. Changing just ain't in their makeup.

Vera

Maybe so, Ham. You've been around these parts longer than most. But I don't see how folks can stand there and see that child taken from his mama; then go about their business like nothing happened. And when I ask them about it, all they'll say is, 'Settle down hon', that's the way we do things around here. We're not breaking any laws you know; it's within our rights'.

Raz Porter don't give tinker's damn about that kid. Just lookin' to line his pockets so he can buy up some more land. They tell me Jess' ma Letha, and his grandma Lena been with Raz's folk for more years than you can count. But with all this talk of war, and slaves leaving to join up with the north, the price of help has jumped sky high; so Raz can sell that child down the river and make a bundle.

Well, I don't intend to take this sitting down. I don't know about you, but if we can't do something to help some poor soul, what good are we anyhow?

Ham

Well, I don't disagree. I met a fellow recently, name of Dutch Leonard and we had a right interesting talk. There's people around here who feel just like you; and they're not just talking, They're doing something about it. It's just possible they can do something to help Charles and Charlotte.

But this is all so new to me. I just don't know, Vera; I could be taking an awful risk. Half the farmers around here get their dry goods from me, and if word gets out I'm involved in something like this, it won't go well. I might be getting in over my head.

Vera

Maybe, maybe not. Ham, how long have we been trying to lick this thing on our own and got nothing to show for it. Could be we're going about it the wrong way. This guy Dutch, if he's all you say he is; could be the thing we've been needing to get us off dead center.

Ham

Yeah, but is now the time. Things are happening fast back east, troops movin' around and all. And just across the river John Brown's bunch is stirring things up. I'd say it won't be long 'til all-out war breaks out. Let's not get ahead of ourselves with this thing.

Vera

(Showing strong emotion)

For Pete's sake, Ham. Who's got time to wait? You saw what they did to Jess. We gotta do something now.

(Getting in his face)

They keep telling us to leave well enough alone. Well, well enough's not good enough.

If I could do it alone, I would. But now that we've got some help, let's find a way to do this. I'm willing to give it a try, and I know a couple folks in St. Joe that'll help.

But you're right, there may not be much time.

Ham

Whataya mean?

Vera

The other night Charlotte had one of her notions; that one of them was about to be sold. And when she gets those feelings, she's pretty much spot on.

I don't want to speak for you, but I think I know how you feel. Sure, we'll be taking a big chance, and I'm not saying it'll be easy; but when's the last time you did something decent and didn't feel right about doing it?

(Ham sighs)

Ham

These last couple of days have certainly opened my eyes. I want to do the right thing, but knowing what that is can be awful tricky.

(Rubbing his chin)

I need to talk to my wife; but if it's left up to me, well....

Vera

That's what I wanted to hear.

(Hugging Ham)

I knew if I could count on anyone it would be you. I'll get with Charlotte and Charles and see where they stand. You talk to Dutch Leonard and see what he has in mind. Then we'll all get together and figure this thing out.