

WEEK 1 SKETCH

SETTING: It is the mid 1930s in the Oklahoma panhandle during the time of the “Dust Bowl”. The family has lost everything in this drought-stricken region, and they are lamenting their losses. However, there is still a glimmer of hope.

SURROUNDINGS:

Can hear the winds blowing outside. The characters look relatively disheveled and somewhat dirty, due to the fact that there is a lot of fine dust that has blown through the cracks of the doors and windows. In addition there is a semi-darkness that surrounds them as they sit together around the table.

MOODS OF CHARACTERS:

- The father feels he’s at the end of his rope. His mood is one of desperation, but his faith is still strong, and this is the glue that binds the family together.
- The mother is frustrated and disappointed with God, and her faith is beginning to falter.
- The daughter seems relatively optimistic, and basically possesses a trusting faith that both the father and mother cling to.

NAMES OF CHARACTERS:

Eli (the father)

Sarah (the mother)

Grace (the daughter)

DIALOGUE:

Opening Scene: Woody Guthrie song, “Dust Bowl Blues”, is playing as the father sits alone reading a letter, next to a table that has a wreath with Advent candles and a Bible on it. The lights come up slowly, as the mother and daughter enter the scene, and join the father around the table.

Eli: Looks like that’s it. The sheriff’s done auctioned off the last of our neighbor’s homes. And now the bank has foreclosed on our house. I never imagined it could’ve gotten this bad. (Eli looks down, and moves his head back and forth a couple of times.)

Sarah: Even though our country’s been goin’ through this depression, we was still doin’ fine here in Oklahoma. We was plowing and planting wheat from one year to the next.

Eli: Then these god-awful winds started up a few years ago - back in ‘31 - and they hasn’t stopped since then.

Sarah: Dust, dust, and more dust everywhere! All we’ve got is this dirt, dust and heat!

Eli: No wonder they call this “the dust bowl”. Them dust storms and drought have done destroyed everythin’. Our crops have gone to pot! Our animals are gone and our food

has run out! And now the bank is aiming to take our home!

Sarah: Eli, what in tarnation are we goin' to do? It all looks so hopeless. It's bad 'nough you and me don't have any food, but what about Grace? She's so young . . . and it breaks my heart, knowing I can't give her nothin' to eat. And where's God? I thought he'd provide for us and help us through all of this. But it don't feel like He's there – or even cares. (Sarah puts her hands over her face, and begins to weep.)

(Grace puts her hand on her mother's shoulder.)

Grace: Awwww . . . don't worry about me Ma . . . I'm not that hungry. I still have you and Pa. And I know that everythin' will be all right.

(Sarah looks up thoughtfully at Grace, and strokes her hair. Eli reaches over and takes Sarah's and Grace's hands in his.)

Eli: I love you both so much, but I feel as weak as water right now. If I could only make things right again!

Sarah: Eli, I'm not blaming you . . . I know how hard you've worked to keep everythin' together. I'm just so darn scared, 'specially since it seems like God has forsaken us.

Eli: Even though times are tough, and it seems like God's nowhere to be found, we can't give up hope. God's ways aren't always clear to us, but I trust He's not forsaken us.

(Sarah nods and gives a slight smile, and then looks down. Grace also smiles, and looks at her father's face.)

Eli: Christmas will be here in 5 weeks, and the celebration of Jesus' birth. (Eli looks at the candles on the table.) We'll light the first candle today to begin the celebration of Advent.

Grace: Pa, what is Advent? Why do you always light those candles, all those weeks before Christmas?

Eli: Advent's a way of rememberin' that Jesus came into our world to deliver us from darkness, and to give us hope in a new life . The candles show that Jesus is the light in the world that pushes out the darkness. So we know there's hope, and that He's here with us . . . even though our times have been mighty tough.

Grace: Is Jesus only with us when you light the candles?

Eli: He's always with us, even though we can't see him with our eyes. The candles are a way of showing that His light surrounds us – even during the dark, painful times in our lives.

Sarah: (Looking up toward the roof with a thoughtful and anticipatory expression): Also, this Advent's a way of remembering that Jesus will return to this world.

Grace: Does that mean Jesus will come back real soon? (Her expression is one of excitement.)

Eli: No one knows when Jesus will be coming back. But his Holy Spirit is with us and guiding us in everythin'. Knowing this, our hearts can be happy. And we can still carry on our traditions.

Grace: Well, I'm glad we can all still celebrate, even though everythin' is gone.

Eli: (Looking at Grace and smiling) Yes child, we'll surely celebrate during this Christmas season as well, even though things are awfully bad right now. We'll celebrate God's promises that He'll be giving us hope and a new way of life as we wait for Him.

Grace: (Looking thoughtfully at her father.) I'm so very glad for that Pa.

(Sarah also looks at Eli, and this time she gives him a smile that lingers for a few seconds.)

Eli: (Eli picks up a match and lights 1 candle.) This first candle reminds us that we have hope, and that this hope is in God. (Eli bows his head, and Sarah and Grace then both bow their heads.)

Eli prays: Lord God, we know you're here with us, and knowing this we have faith in the future, no matter what it may bring. We're open to whatever new things you have in mind, and we ask you strengthen us and give us hope. As it is said in the Good Book: "For in hope we have been saved". In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Ending Scene: The lights fade, and spot comes up on candle and radio as song comes back on. Slow fade to black, song lingers.

WEEK 2 SKETCH

Sarah: That was good fixins . . . I felt like I hadn't eaten in near a month.

Eli: I reckon it was more like two days.

Grace: That was the best corn bread I've ever eaten – except, of course, for yours Ma.

Sarah: The neighbors was so kind. I can't believe all of them chippin in like that.

Eli: The beans, the corn bread, and the pie tasted mighty fine! 'Course, I'd rather eat yours.

Sarah: Nonsense, you don't need to flatter me. I'm just grateful for a meal.

Grace: And we have enough for leftovers tomorrow.

Eli: I talked to some people in town today. There ain't no jobs! Nothin' where a man can earn a wage.

Sarah: So what are we gonna do now?

Grace: Can't we get another farm?

Eli: No child . . . it seems our farmin' days are done. I don't know what we're gonna do now. Lots of folks been moving to California.

Sarah: I heard there are earthquakes out there! No way!

Grace: Is that where the ocean is? I've always wanted to see the ocean.

Sarah: I don't want to go nowhere . . . this is where I was born! There must be a way to make it here!

Eli: We have nothin' left here. No farm, no money and no future. We wouldn't have ate today, if it hadn't been for the neighbors.

Sarah: But we do have neighbors, and today they lifted us up when we needed liftin'. I'm not gonna leave my friends behind!

Eli: What if they all leave first?

Sarah: Nobody's goin' nowhere.

Grace: I'd like to see the ocean.

Eli: Well, the neighbors were great, and that means a lot. We know we ain't gonna starve.

Sarah: And it's not like they be givin' out of their extras. They're hurting just as bad as we are.

Eli: The fact is that it was only enough for one meal . . . maybe two. What happens a week from now? Maybe even a couple days from now? We're flat broke – we lost everythin'.

Grace: Shouldn't we be more thankful? That's what you always tell me.

Eli: I am thankful for today . . . for this meal. I just ain't sure where tomorrow's meal is coming from – or the next day, or the day after that.

Sarah: You blamin' God for that?

Eli: God called me to provide for my family. Now, I ain't got nothin' to provide with.

Sarah: Isn't God the one who's supposed to do the providen?

Grace: Remember the manna in the desert?

Eli: Well, I could use somethin' now!

Grace: You always tell me to count my blessings, Pa.

Eli: Well, aint' you right honey! I'm just a little down right now. I'm having trouble seeing the blessings. It's been kind of blurred by the dust.

Sarah: Well today we was blessed by the love of our neighbors.

Eli: You know that's so right! So right.....Sometimes we need the love of others to remind us of God's love. The Good Book tell us that "nothin, will be able to separate us from the love of God".

Grace: Do you think that covers dust storms?

Eli: Yes child, I think it does.

(Eli lights 2 candles)

Eli: The first candle, is about our hope in God. The second candle, is about His love.

WEEK 3 SKETCH

Grace: What's that letter, Pa?

Eli: It's from Cousin Earl. He says there's jobs in California.

Sarah: Not this California stuff again!

Eli: We may not have much choice. We have to eat. Do you think the neighbors want to feed us for the next 10 years?

Grace: What would you do there, Pa?

Eli: They have thousands of lemon and orange groves. Someone has to pick 'em.

Grace: Where is it? Is it on the beach?

Eli: I don't know where it is, child. Some place called Cucamonga.

Sarah: Cucamonga?! What kind of a crazy place would have a name like that?

Eli: They can call it Hicksville, for all I care . . . as long as there's jobs!

Grace: Eileen's parents are moving to Salinas. Is it close to them?

Eli: It can't be too far. It's in the same state.

Sarah: Are you really thinkin' of movin' to Cucamonga? Who would wanna go there?!

Eli: Maybe that's where God's leading us. The doors all seem to be closin' here.

Sarah: Why can't He lead us to some place normal like Iowa?

Eli: I'm gonna have to write back to Earl. I gotta work somewhere.

Sarah: What am I suppose to do?

Eli: Just keep an open mind. It might be our best chance for a fresh start.

Grace: How big is Cucamonga?

Eli: I don't think it's real big. We'll have plenty of room to roam. Won't have to worry about traffic or nothin.

Grace: I'd like to move! Lots of my friends are moving anyway.

Sarah: I don't know . . . all I've ever known is Oklahoma.

Eli: Well, Sarah, Oklahoma is a tough place to make a livin' right now. Land's cheap in California.

Sarah: 'Cause no one wants to live there!

Eli: I think we need to pray about this. God promised Israel a future and a hope. This might be God's answer to our plea.

Grace: I've been praying, pa. I think this letter is an answer to that prayer.

Eli: Well, this is definitely a time to put our trust in Him.

Sarah: Trusting Him to send us to Cucamonga? What a deal!

Eli: Trusting Him to send us wherever He would have us go.

Grace: Remember the meal from the neighbors? That was God providing for us. Maybe this letter is God providing for us too.

Eli: Maybe.

Sarah: I have to think about this. Why can't God provide something here?

Eli: Sometimes God calls us to step out . . . to move with Him . . . to follow Him.

Sarah & Grace: To Cucamonga!

Eli: The Good Book tells us to rejoice in the Lord, always . . . regardless of our circumstances. I think we need to be joyful for the news that maybe we can go somewhere and start over. This could be the promised land. Who knows?

Sarah: Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.

Grace: They shall go out with joy.

Eli: And be led forth in peace.

Grace: I'm ready to trust God and be happy in whatever tomorrow brings.

Eli: Be careful! It could be Cucamonga!

(Eli lights 3 candles)

Eli: Hope, love – now joy. God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.

WEEK 4 SKETCH

The stage is set in the new kitchen in Cucamonga, California. There is a box or trunk with lots of newspaper and a wrapped vase inside. The kitchen table has the family advent candles in the center. There are some cut flowers lying on the table along with some cookies with a welcome note from a neighbor. Things are lighter and brighter.

The Scene opens with Mom wearing an apron, unpacking a vase (as seen in their other home). She proudly arranges the flowers inside. She steps back to admire them and her surroundings. Grace comes in humming happily, holding her schoolbooks...

Grace: Ma! You'll never guess what happened at school today!

Sarah: What happened?

Grace: Emily Parker asked me to sit with her at lunch. I really like her ma! Boy. . . I sure never thought I'd find a new friend this soon!

Sarah: That's wonderful dear! Why don't you invite her to supper sometime, so we can meet her?

Grace: Oh ma, can I?! I can show her my new bedroom. *(looks around)* I just love it here. It's so clean and fresh and best of all, *(drags her finger across the table and shows her)* no dust! I feel like God's given us a brand new start! *(notices the cookies, grabs one and takes a bite)* Mmmmm, where'd these come from?

Sarah: Well, let's just say I made a friend of my own today. Our neighbor, Mrs. Foster, stopped by to say hello. She's a widow and a lovely woman of faith. We shared in length about our struggles and how God brought each of us to Cucamonga. I know we're going to be best of friends.

Grace: I'm so glad ma!

Mom smiles as she hugs Sarah and goes back to unpacking. Grace sits down to do her homework. Just then Eli comes home in his nicest clothes after looking into the job they came for.

Eli: *(offstage pretending to be dejected)* I'm home.

Sarah: We're in here! *(Eli walks into the kitchen)* Just finished unpacking the last of it. *(she wipes her hands on her apron. Sarah and Grace both look at him cautiously and wait expectantly for him to fill them in on the job situation. He purposely makes them wait)* It didn't go well?

Grace: *(cautiously)* Tell us what happened, Pa.

Eli: *(from sad faced to beaming)* I got the job! *(they all hug together then he motions them to come sit at the kitchen table as he continues)* And there's more! I got offered \$10 to go back and fix one of their tractors. I guess ours that kept breaking down back home was good for somethin' after all!

Sarah: Praise God!!

Grace: That's wonderful Pa!

Eli: Yep! It'll be just enough to cover our 1st months rent! Can you believe it? The Lord is so good to us! *(looks around the room grabs a cookie and breathes in deep)* It's really beginning to feel like home, only better. Hey, where'd the flowers come from?

Sarah: It's the most amazing thing! I was walking around the side of the house and found them hiding behind some old crates. I almost walked right past them but something caused me to stop and see what was there. Aint they beautiful,

Eli: Just like your Ma.

Grace: Can you imagine flowers in December!?

Eli: It's been so long since I've seen you this happy.

Sarah: I know. Please forgive me, you two. I've been so unsure. I just couldn't see God's hand in all this. Thank you for being so patient with me! I have such a fine Peace about everything now.

Grace: It's sort of like the flowers ma. You didn't see them at first. But they were always there, just sort of hidden from view. You had to look past the mess to see them. It's the same with God. We don't always see His hand right away, but He is always there.

Eli: We didn't get to finish lighten our advent candles on our journey to California, so let's thank Him His perfect peace right now..... *(while lighting the candles)*

...Father, we light this candle to remember the peace that we have when we seek you and trust You with. Your Good Book says that your peace, surpasses all. We thank you that even when we don't understand or see things clear.

All:
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AMEN!

WEEK 5 SKETCH

SETTING: Cucamonga, California. Christmas Day. Sun is shining.

OPENING SCENE: Sarah and Grace are at the table waiting for Eli to arrive. Two simple gifts are on the table. The mood is happy and expectant.

Sarah: Well, I never did hear of sunshine on Christmas Day! But it's a nice change from that ol' dust we had fer the past five years! (pause) I recon' I can get used to this.

Grace: Oh, Ma, I don't miss Oklahoma at all! Where's Pa? He said he was taking us to this new church.

Sarah: Well I don't know if he knows what he was a-talking about. I heard those people was meetin in a chicken coop!

(Sounds of Eli arriving. He enters proudly with a bushel basket of oranges.)

Eli: Look what the foreman gave us! Enough oranges to fill us up all week. Here, have one.

(Everyone takes one orange respectfully.)

Sarah: I guess that's what they mean by California gold. They're beautiful. Now, Eli, I have a small gift for you. (She hands him a tissue-wrapped gift). Merry Christmas.

Eli: A new pair of socks! I never even saw you knitting them. Thank you, honey.

Grace: And, Ma, this is for you. I made it at school.

(Grace hands her mother a colored picture.)

Sarah: Well you do seem to have a hand at drawing; this is something I will treasure, for sure.

Eli: Grace, you have been our one ray of light throughout this terrible time. Me and Ma bought you this at Woolworths. (He hands her a small brown bag)

Grace: Ribbons!! Oh just what I love. Thank you, Ma. Thank you, Pa. I'll wear the red one to church this morning.

Eli: Before we head to church, let's light our candles. Grace would like to help?

Grace: Can I? (Grace lights the candles except the center white one).

Eli: The first candle is for Hope. I remember not so long ago when Ma and me had almost lost all hope. Grace reminded us that everything would turn out well, and that we needed to hope because of His word.

Sarah: The next candle is for Love. Things didn't seem to get much better, but we were showered with love from God through our neighbors who shared what they had with us. I will never forget that.

Grace: The third candle is for Joy. We were so happy to hear of work in California. We were scared of leaving our home, but we continued to trust God. Remember the joy we had when we made our decision to move?

Sarah: The fourth candle is for Peace. When we got here, as scared as we were, we had a certain peace, and we kept close to the Word. My faith has grown stronger.

Eli: We now light the Christ candle. Just as He had a plan to redeem mankind by sending Jesus, to save us, we can look back and see that God also had a plan for us. The Good Book says: "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

