

FAITH

by

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## Cast of Characters

<u>Frank Westbrook:</u>	A young man of 18
<u>Laura Westbrook:</u>	Frank's precocious 16 year old sister
<u>Sam Westbrook:</u>	The father, in his 40's
<u>Ellen Westbrook:</u>	The mother, about 40
<u>Doctor Willard:</u>	The family doctor
<u>Walter Marz:</u>	The Elect of the Quam
<u>Brother Raymond:</u>	A member of the Quam Temple
<u>Brother Timothy:</u>	Another member of the Quam Temple
<u>Attorney Thompson:</u>	The family lawyer

Sam Westbrook and Doctor Willard can be multi-cast as Brothers Raymond and Timothy, Walter Marz, and Attorney Thompson.

Setting: Topeka and Salina, Kansas, summer 1913  
Topeka, Christmas, 1918

## Summary

Frank Westbrook, a young man in pre-WWI Topeka, Kansas, has become a smug atheist in a devoutly religious family. His apostasy is supported by his sister, Laura and violently opposed by his mother, Ellen, while his well-meaning father, Sam, merely wants to preserve peace. Frank's rich uncle, Lew, dies, leaving his fortune to Frank on the condition that he join the eccentric sect, the Brotherhood of the Quam, within the year. Laura suddenly falls ill and dies despite pleas raised through orthodox

prayer and the practices of the Quam. Frank decides he will join the Quam after Laura's death, hoping to find peace, but they reject him because he will not acknowledge that women are inferior to men. Frank abandons his plans to attend college and goes to wander in Europe. He is drawn into WWI as an ambulance driver, then returns to fight the Quam sect over his inheritance, only to find that they have disbanded and he is wealthy. He plans to use his wealth to open a rehab hospital for wounded veterans with his fiancé, whom he met on the Western Front. Convinced that he had fought the war to end all wars, he confidently intends to confront and vanquish religious intolerance next.

## FAITH

A beautiful spring Sunday morning in 1913 in Topeka, Kansas. FRANK, a young man of 18, lounges on the sofa, paging through a newspaper while his father, SAM, ties his necktie in a wall mirror. The windows are open and a soft breeze stirs the curtains as languid street sounds and bird songs waft in. LAURA, Frank's 16-year-old sister bustles in.

SAM

(to LAURA)

You'd better hurry up, Missy. You know how your mother hates to be late to church.

LAURA

I can't find my gloves. I know I put them down somewhere.

SAM

Don't you have another pair? You can look for them when we get home.

(Laura runs upstairs to get her gloves.)

SAM

Say, Frank, old pal. Don't you think you could find it in your heart to accompany us to church some time ... like today? It would mean a lot to your mother ... not to mention me.

FRANK

Sorry, Pop, no can do.

SAM

But why not? It's been a month now. And your mother chews my ear all the way to church and back. I'm not telling you what to believe, you know. Just go. You don't have to believe. Just go. For the sake of peace.

FRANK

You know I can't do that, Pop. It would be a lie. I'd be pretending to be somebody I'm not.

SAM

So what? Don't we all? Half the people at church are day-dreaming or thinking about their golf swing or whatever. And church isn't the half of it.

FRANK

I'm not lying about religion!

SAM

It's not a lie. ... It's ... It's ... a custom! That's it. It's a custom!

(FRANK looks askance.)

SAM (CONT'D)

Well, it would be good for your mother's peace of mind. You'd be doing it for her ... and me. She's worried that you'll burn in hell.

FRANK

Well, I've figured that one out. Mother loves me, right?

SAM

Sure ...

FRANK

Even though I'm not perfect? She loves me with all of my faults?

SAM

Sure ... of course.

FRANK

But Mother's not as all-loving as God, is she?

SAM

Well ... no ... I guess not.

FRANK

So, if Mother loves me with all of my faults, and God is more loving than Mother, won't God love me, too?

SAM

Well ... I suppose ... But how do you know God will think that way? Maybe he'll be mad because you haven't followed His commandments. You're going against His Word, His Will ...

FRANK

Relax, Pop. God made me an atheist. If He wants to change me, He'll just reach down out of Heaven and do it.

SAM

Your mother would say that's blasphemy.

FRANK

Oh, that's just because I say it in a funny way. She should think of it as just another way of having faith in God.

SAM

But you don't believe in God!

FRANK

So, I'm covered either way. Makes a perfect circle, doesn't it? That should give you some faith in it.

SAM is baffled for the moment. His wife, ELLEN, a handsome woman of about 40, bustles in in her Sunday best.

ELLEN

(to Sam)

It's time to go dear. Where is Laura?

SAM

Upstairs looking for her gloves.

ELLEN

She has plenty of gloves. I hope she isn't reading one of those tawdry new magazines. Frank, would you call her down, please?

FRANK

(without moving from the sofa, yells)

Laura! Time for church!

ELLEN

That was very helpful, dear.

(LAURA comes down, pulling on her gloves.)

ELLEN (CONT'D)

(to FRANK)

And it wouldn't hurt you to accompany us, either, young man.

FRANK

Aw, Mother. Really. We've gone over and over this.

ELLEN

I know, dear, but it's for your own good ...

SAM

(trying to avoid another harangue by Ellen)  
Well, well, we really must go. Come along, Laura.

(SAM and ELLEN exit. LAURA tarries briefly.)

LAURA

Stick by your guns, Frank. You've got to go your own way ...

SAM

(O.S.)

Come along, Laura, you're holding us up.

(LAURA exits. FRANK goes back to reading the paper as he lounges on the sofa. Soon, the paper sags over his face and he falls asleep. The light brightens as the day goes on.)

ACT I, Scene 2

(SAM, ELLEN, and LAURA bustle into the house. SAM is carrying a thick envelope.)

SAM

Frank! Frank! Wake up! ... We saw Attorney Thompson at church and he gave us this envelope for you. He said it has something to do with probating your Uncle Lew's will. He got it from Salina yesterday. He said he usually reads the will to the next of kin at his office and explains it to them there, but he said Lew's will is very unusual and that we all will want to talk it over first.

(SAM hands the envelope to FRANK. They all wait expectantly as he opens the envelope and scans the document.)

FRANK

It's a copy of Uncle Lew's will. Mr. Thompson marked a paragraph for me ...

LAURA

What's it say?

FRANK

(reading from the will)

"All the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate I leave to my beloved nephew, Frank Westbrook, provided, however, that he embraces the Quam faith within one year of the date of my death."

LAURA	SAM	ELLEN
You're rich!	What the ...	How ridiculous ...
Go for it!	What are you going to do?	You'll do nothing of the sort!

(They all pause, staring at each other.)

LAURA

What if you don't?

FRANK

Uncle Lew's estate goes to the Quam Temple in Salina.

SAM

Uncle Lew was a mighty wealthy man. He certainly thought a lot of you, son. ... So what does Mr. Atheist say to that?

ELLEN

It's out of the question! Just out of the question! You are not joining that loathsome cult and that's an end to it. ... Now I'm going upstairs to change.

(ELLEN exits. LAURA settles into a chair to watch the deliberations.)

SAM

(patiently)

So, what do you think, Frank?

FRANK

I don't rightly know, Pop. You know anything about these Quam folks?



SAM

No, not really. Lew tried to drag me to a couple of meetings, but your mother put her foot down on that. She wouldn't allow Lew in the house after he joined them, you know. And I really wasn't very interested. I just wanted to humor Lew.

FRANK

Did he ever talk about it?

SAM

Not much. He was very private. Never really said anything about it. But Lew was a fine man. Everybody thought well of him. And every penny of that fortune was honestly come by.

LAURA

Why don't you go for it? How would anyone know? You could become a Quamerainian or whatever they are, collect the fortune and go your own way.

SAM

That wouldn't be very true to Uncle Lew's memory. It would almost be like tricking him.

LAURA

Well, shoot, with Uncle Lew's fortune, Frank could become the head Quamerainian. He could make Quam into anything he liked. Who's to say? Somebody probably just thought Quam up anyway.

FRANK

I don't know. I think I should look into this Quam business a bit before I decide to do anything. I'll amble over to Salina myself and have a look see.

Act II, Scene 1

Interior of the Quam Temple, a modest hall draped in blue with a large blue disk on the wall. Several observants, cloaked in blue, kneel beneath the disk. Another figure, WALTER MARZ, the Elect of the Quam, also in

blue, stands downstage  
talking to Frank.

WALTER

Brother Lew was a fine man and a very loyal Quamerian. We were proud of him and feel his loss.

FRANK

He wanted me to find out about Quam, so I'm grateful that you'd take the time to see me.

WALTER

Always glad to. We don't proselytize, you know. Our members come to us as they will.

FRANK

So, if you don't mind my asking, what do you think about God?

WALTER

We don't.

FRANK

I'm sorry?

WALTER

We don't. We don't think one way or the other about God. You see we're what one might call an a-theistic religion. That's a religion without a supreme being.

FRANK

I didn't know you could have a religion without a supreme being.

WALTER

Oh, yes. Of course. Several Eastern religions have no deity.

FRANK

Well, where did Quam come from?

WALTER

We've explained it all in these little books (taking them from a table nearby). I think they will answer most of your questions. You should know, though, that all of the principles and practices are only guidelines for your use as you see fit. We are what's called a gnostic religion.

FRANK

Gnostic?

WALTER

Yes. It means "knowing." We believe that each person must find his own way. These principles and practices have helped many of us sincerely seek the Quam and we hope they'll be useful to you, too. But we all must strive to attain the Quam in our own way.

FRANK

What's the Quam?

WALTER

(gesturing toward the blue disk)

That represents the Quam. It's the clear blue light of objectivity. Freedom from passion, from emotion ... calm ... peace.

FRANK

How would somebody become a ...

WALTER

Quamerian. There's really very little to it. There are study guides in each of those books that we ask you to look through. When you're ready, you meet with me, the Elect of the Quam, and two other brothers. We make up the Apex of the Quam. We discuss what you've learned from the books and some of your attitudes and outlooks on things in general. It's called an exam, but it's really more of a conversation. We just talk about our mutual understanding of the principles and practices. We want to be sure that you understand – at a fundamental level – the principals and practices for seeking the Quam, not just know them as words in a book. Once you've achieved that level of understanding, we welcome you as a brother. We ask you to wear this small blue band around your arm to symbolize commitment. We wear it beneath our clothes to avoid ostentation. We meet twice a month for discussion and twice a month for meditation. That's about it for outwardly purposes. But as you will see, the quest for the Quam is a constant, life-long journey that absorbs all that we can give.

FRANK

Well, thanks again. I'll study the books.

WALTER

Every brother is pledged to help every other brother and in that same spirit, if I can help you at all ... especially in making your decision ... just let me know.

ACT II, Scene 2

Frank and Laura are playing chess in the parlor early on a rainy spring morning.

LAURA

So, Oh Great One, are you going to become a Quamerainian?

FRANK

Quamerian.

LAURA

So? Are you?

FRANK

I don't know yet. I need to read these books (waving toward the books on a nearby end table) and think about it. Maybe I'll attend some of their discussion sessions or meditations to see what it's like.

LAURA

Can I sneak out and come along?

FRANK

Gee, I don't know. I didn't see any women there. So far, the book hasn't mentioned it. I'll ask Brother Walter. But we'll have to be really careful or Mother will have a seizure ... and Pop won't be any too pleased either.

LAURA

So what was it like, their Temple? Was it creepy? Mother says they're a cult.

FRANK

No, it wasn't creepy at all. A bit strange, but not creepy. The walls were all blue and there was a big blue disk on one of them that represented the Quam ... that's the clear blue light of objectivity.

LAURA

The what?

FRANK

The clear blue light of objectivity. It's what they strive for. It means peace, freedom from the storm of passion that we're all caught up in.

LAURA

Freedom from passion? That sounds kind of boring. (Pensively) Say, not to be lewd or anything, but if they're free from passion ... ah ... well ... where do little Quamerians come from?

FRANK

(with false anger)

Gosh, Laura, how should I know? What a question!

LAURA

Well?

FRANK

I don't know. I've just started reading. Maybe it says somewhere further on.

LAURA

Well, let me know when you get to that part so I can check it out for myself.

FRANK

I will not, Laura Westbrook! Now stop pestering me about it.

(They play on for a little while.)

LAURA

So how does a good Quamerian get to the clear blue light of objectivity? Trolley?

FRANK

Very funny. Actually, I'm not sure yet. They have a set of principles and practices that are supposed to help you get there ... to put you in harmony with the universe.

LAURA

Principles and practices? What are these guys, accountants?

FRANK

I suppose they could have been more high-flown about it, but they're humble. They don't want to be pompous or grandiose.

LAURA

Well they rang the bell on that one!

(FRANK captures another of LAURA'S chess pieces.)

FRANK

Man, I'm cleaning up today! Guess I'm paying you back for beating me all the time.

LAURA

You'd have to beat me for a year to make up for that.

FRANK

Maybe you should get ready for a rough year.

LAURA

Well, I'm having a rough day, that's for sure.

(They play on for a while.)

FRANK

That was a really stupid move! ... You okay?

LAURA

Actually, I feel a bit warm. Would you get me a glass of water, please?

FRANK

Sure.

(FRANK exits. LAURA slumps over on the sofa. FRANK returns with the water, then runs to her side.)

FRANK

Laura! Laura! What's wrong? Wake up!

LAURA

(half conscious)

I ... I ... I need to ... I ...

FRANK

Here, take a sip of water.

(FRANK tries to help LAURA take a drink of water, but she falls unconscious.)

FRANK

Mother! Mother!

(FRANK runs off stage for help.)

ACT II, Scene 2

LAURA lies propped on a couple of pillows in her bedroom. FRANK, ELLEN, and SAM are gathered around the bed. DOCTOR WILLARD listens to LAURA'S heart. He draws back and packs his instruments in his bag.

WILLARD

She's very seriously ill. Critically ill.

SAM

She'll be okay, though, won't she Doc?

WILLARD

I don't want to raise false hopes ...

(ELLEN sobs and SAM hugs her. FRANK goes to LAURA'S desk and jots a note.)

WILLARD

We're not sure what this is yet. There's been a big outbreak of it in Kansas City and it seems to be coming this way, but everybody is still trying to identify it. We haven't had much luck with it so far. I'm sorry. Try to keep her comfortable. If anything changes, send for me right away. I'll call some colleagues in Kansas City to see if they've made any progress yet. I'll check back tomorrow.

(As DOCTOR WILLARD moves toward the door, FRANK approaches and hands him the note he just jotted down. They converse briefly, then DOCTOR WILLARD exits.)

SAM

Laura shouldn't be alone. We should take shifts. Can you take the first shift, Frank? I'll put your mother to bed for a while. She's in shock.

FRANK

Sure, Pop. I'll sit with her.

(SAM takes ELLEN out of the room as FRANK settles into a chair near LAURA'S bed. Several hours pass. Then, there is a quiet tapping at the door to the house (O.S.). FRANK leaves to answer it and returns with WALTER MARZ.)

FRANK

Thanks so much for coming, Mr. Marz. My sister Laura is so sick the doctor thinks she might die. I feel desperate, Mr. Marz. I need to do something for her. I need to do something for her ...

WALTER

You can't.

FRANK

What?

WALTER

You can't.

FRANK

What kind of help is that? What about the clear blue light and all of that crap?

WALTER

Oh. Well. The clear blue light can certainly help. But that's help for you, not for her. You see, you must strive for calm, for peace. First, look at the objective facts. You've called the doctor. You've made her comfortable. I see she's young and assume she's in good general health. All we know to do now has been done. So now just wait patiently. If more can be done later, you'll be fresh to do it. If nothing further can be done, you can grieve as you will, or help your parents in some other way, when the time comes.

FRANK

Wait patiently! Wait patiently! You don't know what you're talking about!



WALTER  
(patiently)

Now Frank, this only seems strange to you because it's a new way of thinking. You're not used to it. You haven't practiced it.

FRANK  
You can say that because you don't know her. You don't love her like I do. If you had ever lost ... I mean ... if she was your ...

WALTER  
(knowingly)  
Her name was Emily. A little younger than Laura, I would judge.

FRANK  
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't think ... I ...

WALTER  
Don't worry, Frank. I know how you feel. It wasn't personal.

FRANK  
Has the Quam given you the answer, Mr. Marz?

WALTER  
Oh, no. At least not yet. But then, nothing has. I'm hoping Quam will at least help me search. Maybe that's the way to start. Not even to look for an answer. Maybe just look for something else – the right question, or how to help others, or how to forget, or how to remember. I don't know. But for now, I've committed my spirit to the Quam. I am faithful – that has to be a start – I'm sure of that. Would you like to meditate together?

FRANK  
I'm so desperate Mr. Marz, I'd do anything. I mean, I need help, too. I ... Sure, why not, what can be the harm? What should I do?

WALTER  
It's very simple. Let's just sit side by side on this chest.

(They sit side by side on the large chest at the foot of LAURA'S bed.)

WALTER (CONT'D)

Now, I like to close my eyes. Sit up straight, but be relaxed. Now, breathe slowly in through your nose. Concentrate on the breathing. Feel the air moving gently through your nose into your lungs. Hold it for just the slightest moment, then breath out, slowly and naturally. Just repeat this process, over and over, thinking only of your breathing -- nothing else. If you find yourself thinking of something else, gently bring your mind back to your breathing. Don't be distracted by the fact that your mind wandered, that's perfectly natural. Just glide right back to thinking about your breathing. Now some folks like to chant while they meditate. I do, myself. Don't use a word, or anything that means anything. Just a pleasant, single note -- a drone -- as you breathe in and out. The Buddhists use "om." I like that one.

(They sit, side by side, on the chest, breathing and chanting. Suddenly, SAM bursts through the door.)

SAM

What's, what's ... What the hell is going on here? I thought your sister was dying. Who they hell are you?

(FRANK and MARZ jump to their feet.)

FRANK

Father, this is Brother Marz, from the Quam Temple. He's the Elect of the Quam. He came to help us.

SAM

He's the what?

FRANK

He's the head of the Quam Temple in Salina. I was desperate, Pop. I asked him to come here to help Laura. He really wants to help, really.

SAM

Well, we don't need that kind of help right now. We'll take care of ourselves! And your mother will have a stroke if she finds him here. I'm not kidding. She's beside herself right now, and, honestly so am I. I don't need any

damned interloper coming in with some snake oil that will only make things worse.

(to WALTER)

Get the hell out of my house right now, mister, and take your damned Quam bunk with you.

FRANK

(to Walter)

I'm so sorry, Mr. Marz. I really am. I know you only meant to help. I'm out of my mind with worry.

WALTER

(to Frank)

That's quite all right. Don't give it another thought. You know that I understand perfectly how dreadfully trying these emergencies are. We'll talk again as soon as you would like.

FRANK

Sure. Sure. I will.

(SAM shows MR. MARZ out and FRANK settles back into his chair. Time passes. FRANK walks over to LAURA'S bedside.)

FRANK

You can't go, Laura. You can't go. ... I never felt alone in my godless universe before. But now I do. ... I've always known you love me, Laura. ... I guess that's what has kept me company. ... Maybe God was floating around in my universe after all. ... But how can He strand me here in this lonely outpost? ... I'm lost, Laura ... for the first time, I'm lost.

(The day passes into evening. SAM and ELLEN come into the room.)

ELLEN

(hysterically to FRANK)

We've *all* got to pray for her. We're all *going* to pray for her.

FRANK

I want to Mother, but I can't ...

ELLEN

Yes you can, Frank! You've prayed since you were a baby and you're going to pray now!

FRANK

They were just words, Mother, just words. I didn't know ...

SAM

Stop! We can't argue about praying while Laura is so sick.

ELLEN

We can't insult God while we ask his help, either! If you can't pray with us, you have to leave the room – you have to leave my house! You can't pollute my home with your heathen attitude ...

SAM

Stop it, Ellen! Just stop it! We can't offer prayers colored with anger, either. Frank loves Laura and should be with us all. You should stay with us, Frank. You can do whatever you're called to do.

(SAM and ELLEN kneel at the chest at the end of LAURA'S bed and bow their heads in prayer. FRANK sits in the chair in a meditative pose. Evening passes into night and night becomes dawn, a la *Madama Butterfly* vigil scene. They are interrupted in the morning by a knock at the door of the house (O.S.). FRANK exits and returns with DOCTOR WILLARD.)

SAM

Hello, doctor.

WILLARD

Good morning to you all. Have you noticed any changes in her condition?

SAM

No.

(WILLARD examines LAURA.)

WILLARD

I'm sorry, but she's taken a turn for the worse. I'm afraid she won't last much longer. I'm sorry, but I have several urgent cases I have to attend to.

(ELLEN sobs on SAM'S chest. FRANK embraces them both.)

WILLARD

I'll see myself out.

(WILLARD exits.)

ELLEN

I have to stay with Laura now. Why don't you boys get a few minute's sleep. I'll call you if anything changes.

SAM

No, we'll stay, too.

ELLEN

You look drained. You've both been so strong. Just a few minutes of rest will make a world of difference.

SAM

I think I'll lay my head on the sofa for a few seconds. Can I get anybody anything?

FRANK

I could use some coffee if you'll be okay alone here for a few minutes, Mother.

ELLEN

(SAM and FRANK exit. ELLEN goes to LAURA'S bed and takes her hand. She looks prayerfully upward.)

ELLEN

Oh ... God ...

(Presently, ELLEN composes herself and goes to wait in the chair.)

ACT II, SCENE 4

Later the same day. ELLEN  
dozes in the chair.

LAURA

Mother? ... Mother?

ELLEN

(awakening and rushing to LAURA)

Oh, Laura! God be praised! Sam! Frank! She's awake.

(SAM and FRANK rush in. They embrace LAURA and ELLEN.)

SAM

How do you feel, dear?

LAURA

Dreadful. Just dreadful. I ache all over. I have a fever and chills. I'm dizzy and I have a pounding headache.

(They all gather lovingly around Ellen for a moment.)

ELLEN

Can we get you something to eat? A little light broth or something?

LAURA

Yes. That would be good.

(ELLEN leaves to get the broth.)

SAM

I'll get Doctor Willard. He should check on you now, dear. You stay with her Frank.

(SAM hurries out to get the doctor.)

FRANK

We were all so scared you were going to die.

LAURA

I was, too. I just kept slipping deeper and deeper away. I felt myself letting go.

FRANK

What brought you back?

LAURA

I have no idea. I just didn't go. That's all, I just didn't ... I like to think I fought my way back. Maybe I did, but I'm not so sure ...

FRANK

Well, whatever the reason, we're so grateful that you're here with us again.

LAURA

Say, I'm awful hungry. Could you see where Mother is with that broth?

FRANK

Sure. I'll be right back.

(FRANK exits. LAURA falls heavily back on the pillows. FRANK and ELLEN return, she with a bowl of broth. DOCTOR WILLARD and SAM are with them. All are talking cheerfully.)

ELLEN

I tell you, it's a miracle! The answer to our prayers!

WILLARD

Surely, it must be. I had no hope for her when I left here.

(ELLEN puts the broth on the table next to the bed and shakes LAURA'S hand gently, with no response.)

ELLEN

Laura dear. Doctor Willard is here and I have your broth.

(WILLARD feels for a pulse, checks LAURA'S eyes, listens for a heartbeat.)

WILLARD

I'm sorry. It seems she's passed on.

(ELLEN faints into SAM'S arms. He carries her to the chair. DOCTOR WILLARD gives her smelling salts and she rouses slightly.)

ELLEN

No! No! It can't be! We were just talking to her.

FRANK

How ...

WILLARD

I don't know for sure. Maybe there was a strain on her heart. Or maybe a stroke. Did she complain of a headache?

FRANK

Yeah. She did.

WILLARD

I'm so sorry. I'll call Johnson's for you, unless you prefer ...

SAM

No, no, they're fine. Thanks, Doc. There was nothing anyone could do.

(DOCTOR WILLARD exits. SAM, FRANK, and ELLEN stare in shock. Presently ELLEN rouses feebly and points at FRANK.)

ELLEN

This is your fault. God is punishing us for raising a heathen.

(ELLEN staggers toward FRANK. SAM intervenes.)

SAM

Now Ellen! You know that can't be true! And not with Laura here. Our love is the only thing that can get us through this. (To FRANK) She didn't mean that Frank. She's in shock. We all are. Don't take it to heart.

(FRANK walks over to SAM and ELLEN and puts his arms around them. They all embrace as the lights go down.)

ACT II, SCENE 5

Front parlor of the house.  
SAM, ELLEN, and FRANK return  
from LAURA'S funeral in  
mourning garb.

ELLEN

I feel faint. I need to lie down.

SAM

I'll go with you dear. Will you be okay down here, Frank?

FRANK

Sure Pop.

(SAM helps ELLEN upstairs. FRANK stands quietly, looking around the room. He sees LAURA'S picture and goes over to it.)

FRANK



So. You've gone ahead, have you Laura? That's what the pastor said. But where did you go, Laura? You can't really have gone. I can still feel you here, with us. I know I'll hear your footsteps upstairs in a minute. I'll see you come down the stairs and run out of the door, over to Clarissa's to gossip, maybe? Have you really gone to Heaven, Laura? What's it like up there? No need to eat and drink, I suppose – no hunger and thirst in Heaven. I suppose people who like to eat and drink could do it for fun. But where does the food come from and where does it go when they're done? No garbage dumps or privies in Heaven. Maybe people who like to eat and drink just *feel* like they've done it. So they can feel satisfied all the time. Maybe everyone in Heaven feels satisfied all the time. I hope you're not bored, Laura. No stupid asses like me to keep in line. Don't go fooling any of those folks in Heaven. Let them stay eternally satisfied. Can all of that beauty have left us?

(FRANK sobs as the lights go down.)

ACT III, SCENE 1

Some weeks later. FRANK is pacing back and forth in the front parlor. SAM and ELLEN enter. All are in mourning dress.

ELLEN

Why Frank, whatever is the matter?

FRANK

Mother. Pop. I have to talk to you. I've thought about it a lot and I can't go to college next month.

ELLEN

We certainly understand, dear. Losing Laura has turned the world upside down for all of us.

SAM

Why don't you wait and see how you feel in the next few weeks?

FRANK

I've made up my mind, Pop. I have to live my life in some new way. I can't stay here and let the world flow by without me.

SAM

So what do you plan on doing?

FRANK

I've decided I'm going to join the Quam.

ELLEN

Oh!

FRANK

I know, Mother. They're very unorthodox ...

ELLEN

They're a cult, a heathen cult! Oh, Frank, you can't do this, you really can't! Oh, please don't. I can't bear to lose both of my children at once. ... I didn't mean any of those hateful things I said when Laura died. You know that. I was beside myself.

FRANK

I know, Mother, I know. It's not that. When Laura died, my world fell apart, just like yours and Pop's did. Now I have to build a whole new world, from the ground up. I can't build the old world again, even if I want to, because Laura wouldn't be in it. It has to be new — completely new. How am I going to do it? I can't just start over again here. I'm afraid if I did, I'd wind up with a pale copy of the old life with a great big hole burned right through the middle of it.

SAM

But you said yourself that the Quam didn't have the answers.

FRANK

I know, Pop. But I think they might help find the right way to look for the answers. I have to try.

SAM

You'll break your mother's heart.

FRANK

You'll see her through. Her faith will see her through. And I won't leave her. I'll be here. Salina isn't on the moon. I'll help her pull through. Quam won't change how I feel about you folks. ... I'm going upstairs to pack for Salina.

(FRANK goes upstairs. SAM holds ELLEN.)

ACT III, SCENE 2

FRANK is being interviewed by WALTER MARZ and two other members of the Quam, BROTHER TIMOTHY and BROTHER RAYMOND, at the Quam Temple. The interview has gone very well and is just concluding.

TIMOTHY

We've enjoyed discussing the Quam with you, Frank. You have an excellent command of our principles and practices. Before we start our deliberations, do you have any questions or thoughts for us?

FRANK

Oh ... no ... not really. No ... I guess not.

RAYMOND

You seemed a bit hesitant. Are you sure?

FRANK

No ... that's okay ... really ...

RAYMOND

We certainly don't want you to join us with any reservations that we could resolve for you beforehand. Please, feel free ...

FRANK

Well, now that you mention it, I do have a minor question.

TIMOTHY

Certainly! Please.

FRANK

Um ... ah ... are there any ... lady Quamerians?

TIMOTHY

Oh, certainly not!

WALTER

We do have a small ladies' auxiliary, however. We take great care of our female charges. We do our best to guide and instruct them.

RAYMOND

Women can't be expected to understand the higher mysteries of the Quam. It really wouldn't be fair to them. ... You don't have any reservations about that do you?

FRANK

No. ... I suppose not ...

RAYMOND

Are you sure? You seem uncertain.

FRANK

I ... well ... I guess I haven't really thought about it much. I think I'm a bit uncertain about everything just now. That's what brought me to the Quam in the first place.

WALTER

Of course. That's entirely understandable.

RAYMOND

It's actually for their own good ...

WALTER

Brother Raymond, I'm sure we don't need to resolve this issue now.

RAYMOND

But the "issue" *has been* "resolved." Women are not allowed!

TIMOTHY

You're comfortable with that, aren't you, Frank?

FRANK

Um ... I can't say I'm "comfortable" ... I ... I'll have to think it over.

RAYMOND

Your Mom aint' one of them rabid suffragettes, is she?

FRANK

Oh. No. No.

RAYMOND

Well, what's your problem, then?

FRANK

I never said I had a problem. I just ...

RAYMOND

Look, Frank. Women are inferior. That's all there is to it. They can't vote because they shouldn't oughta. They can't learn business, they can't fight. We have to take care of them and they have to do what's best for them — what we tell them to. That's pretty clear, ain't it?

FRANK

Um ...

RAYMOND

Oh, come on Frank!

FRANK

Um ... inferior? Ah ... that's a pretty strong word.

TIMOTHY

That's only because the idea is so clear.

FRANK

But ...

RAYMOND

But what?

FRANK

Well, my sister, Laura, wasn't inferior. She was smart ... and clever ... and ...

WALTER

Of course she was, Frank. We understand what you're saying.

RAYMOND

Well, I don't! Look, Frank, we're not about to bring some radical nut into our fold ...

WALTER

He didn't mean that, Frank.

FRANK

I just can't be true to Laura's memory if I call her "inferior." She wasn't inferior to anybody. And that sure includes present company. I don't know if women should vote, or run companies, or be Quamerians, but Laura never was inferior and I'll never say she was.

WALTER

That's very well, Frank. Very loyal of you. We're only speaking in abstract terms, just generalities. We would never ask you to dishonor your sister.

What say we start our deliberations now gentlemen? Frank, if you'll excuse us.

(FRANK exits and the brothers huddle in a knot. Soon voices are raised.)

RAYMOND

That kid gives me the willies. Were'd he come from, anyway. Ya know, I can smell a radical a mile away and this nose has its doubts.

TIMOTHY

Kansas city? Thereabouts, ... But he's not slick, like most of them. Give him a chance ...

MARZ

Brothers! Brothers! Stop this instant! You have moved me to anger and that is not the way of the Quam – not the way at all.

I don't know if there is a god, or an Allah, or whether the Quam or any other peace exists this side of the grave. But I most surely know one thing, and that is where the man in each of us is, if there be a man at all. And that is in here (he pounds his chest with his fist). Deep, deep down in here. Not the man that walks up and down the streets of Salina, or the man that squires his gal to the dance. No ... oh no. He lives a lot deeper than that, my friends, much, much deeper than that. He's the man that watches the twisters sweep across the Kansas plains and leads his kin to safety. He's the man that watches death visit those he loves and finds the strength to shelter the living who depend on him.

(His anger is fading, now) So, brothers. Do we have men here in this little clutch of humanity at the Apex of the Quam?

TIMOTHY

I'm sorry, Brother Walter. You're right. We have to take this very seriously and just consider what really matters.

(They confer a bit more.)

RAYMOND

I'm sorry, Brother Walter, but I still have to vote no. We are a young sect. We need to take a firm stand on our basic beliefs now and not go experimenting with things that haven't stood the test of time. Our government hasn't seen fit to allow women to vote. There are lots of laws and customs that protect them because they need it. It's just not the time for us – it's so early for us – I just can't. I'm sorry, but I vote no, for the sake of the Quam.

TIMOTHY

He makes a good point. I'm not so sure as he is, but we can't afford the risk right now. Maybe some other time. Maybe in a few years. I have to vote no, too.

WALTER

I feel ashamed of our Brotherhood that we can't find it in our souls to admit a young man as fine as Frank Westbrook. I don't know about admitting women, either. But then, I don't know about a lot of things. I don't know about medicine, but I trust a doctor. I don't ... well ... whatever. But aren't faith and seeking, doubt and trust the closest kin? Could Frank do anything to bar our quests for peace, whatever he thinks about women? Well, we've made our decision and it's my bitter duty to let him know what it is whether I like it or not.

(MARZ invites FRANK back into the room.)

WALTER

Frank, I'm sorry, but the Apex feels that this just isn't the right time to add you to our brotherhood. I ... I'm most embarrassed.

RAYMOND

There's nothing to be embarrassed about. We need to be sure we're not buying trouble, Frank. We're a new organization. We're small and tight-knit, like we should be.

FRANK

But I said ...

TIMOTHY

We just don't know how you're going to come down on this point, Frank.

FRANK

Well, neither do I.

RAYMOND

But that's the point, son. We can't run the risk of some kinda schism or whatever.

FRANK

Schism? But ... I ...

WALTER

I'm sorry, Frank. Maybe once you've made up your mind on this point, you could talk to us again. We'd still like to have you at our meetings. Maybe that would help you find your way.

FRANK

I don't know if I'll ever find my way, feeling like I do right now. But I know for sure that I'll be proud of Laura 'til the day I die and I'll be damned if I'll ever think of her as inferior. She could stand up to any man I've ever known, and that's the truth. ... You claim the way of the Quam is a seeking after peace, do you? Is this how you seek? By closing out instead of gathering in? What was ever found that way? Of course peace may lie within you. Where else would it be? But seeking -- seeking is quite another thing. That is never done alone, ever. In a strange way, you may only see deep inside yourself by looking elsewhere, by looking into the souls of your brothers ... and sisters ... oh, yes, your sisters, too. Well, I will seek in my own way, and you may seek in yours. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

(He storms out.)

RAYMOND

So that's that as far as I can see.

(RAYMOND and TIMOTHY stalk out. WALTER follows, dejected.)

ACT III, SCENE 3

LAWYER THOMPSON is sitting in his office when FRANK enters.



THOMPSON

It's so good to see you again, Frank. So, I imagine you've become a Quamerian and you're here to begin the process of collecting your inheritance. You'll be a very wealthy young man, Frank.

FRANK

It's not that simple Mr. Thompson. I did decide to join the Quam. I interviewed with three elders. But they decided not to accept me.

THOMPSON

But why not?

FRANK

I guess they were afraid of my opinions on the status of women, suffrage and all of that.

THOMPSON

What are your opinions on the role of women, Frank?

FRANK

That's just it, Mr. Thompson. I don't have any. I've never thought much about it. At least in a formal way, like about voting and owning property and the like ...

THOMPSON

Then how can they turn you down? Did you tell them that?

FRANK

I did. But they said women are all inferior and I couldn't call Laura inferior. It would be disgraceful.

THOMPSON

Did they know you were just defending Laura and not stumping for women's rights?

FRANK

Yeah. I told them I hadn't made up my mind on that. But they were too afraid that when I did I'd come down on the wrong side of the fence, so they turned me down.

THOMPSON

But that's absurd. Many a man looks up to his wife or daughter without thinking they should vote or own property or whatever.

FRANK

What can I do now, Mr. Thompson? It's not so much that I want Uncle Lew's fortune, but it hardly seems fair that the Quamerians should get it by keeping me out.

THOMPSON

The law gives religious organizations a great deal of latitude in defining their own membership. But how that relates to your inheritance is another matter altogether. We may have to break some new legal ground here, Frank. I'll have to learn a lot more about the Quam and study up on the law, too, before I can give you a good guess on your chances. In any case, it's going to take a long time and cost some money to sort this out, Frank.

FRANK

I can't pay you even though I don't think it's fair for Uncle Lew's fortune to go to the Quam.

THOMPSON

What's fair counts for a lot in my book, Frank. And this could turn out to be a famous case, which wouldn't hurt my reputation any, win or lose. You can pay me out of your fortune if we win the case, Frank.

FRANK

But what if we lose?

THOMPSON

I'm a patient man, Frank. I think someday you'll be very successful, with or without your uncle's fortune. We'll leave it on the cuff if we lose.

FRANK

Let's give it a go, then, Mr. Thompson.

THOMPSON

I'll do my level best for you, Frank.

FRANK

Mr. Thompson? Can I ask you something?

THOMPSON

Why sure, Frank. What's on your mind?

FRANK

I just can't stay here anymore. I don't really belong here. I'm not a child. I don't belong at home with my

parents. The Quamerians don't want me. Sometimes I hardly know who I am.

THOMPSON

I thought you were going to college in the fall, Frank.

FRANK

It doesn't strike me as though I'd belong there, either, Mr. Thompson. I've been at terrible loose ends since Laura died.

THOMPSON

That's to be expected, Frank. Have you thought about Europe? A different culture has been a tonic to many a young man in your position.

FRANK

Pop says there'll be war in Europe soon. And how would I get there?

THOMPSON

You could work your way over on a steamer, Frank. It won't be the Grand Tour, but it doesn't have to be for your purposes. And as for the war, why it's likely just to be between Ireland and England, so just steer clear of them for now. The Balkans have been fighting over bits of the Ottoman Empire, but that's just a local tiff, too. And if it grows larger, it'll still be nothing but a skirmish. The German's will give the French a bloody nose, like they did in '72, and the whole thing will be over in six weeks. You can sit it out in the Swiss Alps.

FRANK

I like the sound of that. A different culture, huh? That sounds just like what I need. I just might give it a go. Thanks, Mr. Thompson. You've been a great help.

(FRANK exits.)

ACT IV, SCENE 1

Christmas 1918. SAM is sitting in the parlor on a sunny morning. FRANK enters in a soldier's greatcoat and uniform. SAM leaps up and runs to greet him.

SAM

Welcome home, son! Ellen! Ellen! Frank's home!

(ELLEN rushes in and hugs FRANK.)

ELLEN

Oh, Frank! Frank! Thank God you're home at last! Why, Frank, you're trembling. Are you unwell?

FRANK

Much better than most, Mother. Just a little memento of France. A shot of brandy will set things right.

ELLEN

Why certainly, Frank. I'll get it for you.

(ELLEN exits. SAM and FRANK sit down.)

SAM

Well, son, how was the trip home?

FRANK

Idyllic. Wasn't shot at once.

SAM

A great relief, I'm sure.

(ELLEN returns with the brandy. FRANK takes a shot.)

SAM

I know it's soon to be making plans – you can stay here in your home as long as you want – but have you given some thought to what you'll do next?

FRANK

Not too soon at all, Pop. I know just what I'll do. I found a few things on the battlefield, Pop, and one of them was my fighting spirit. I'm going to win my case against the Quam and claim Uncle Lew's fortune ...

SAM

But ... but ...

FRANK

No, Pop. Hear me out. I'm going to take the biggest, most beautiful farm he had and build a hospital and home for soldiers and sailors. They'll have nothing but the best. The best doctors and nurses, the best food. Rolling lawns

to walk on and trees to shade them. They'll want for nothing and won't pay a cent. I'm going to call it the Laura Westbrook Memorial Soldiers' and Sailors' Home.

SAM

Laura would be proud of that, Frank. But I guess you haven't heard from Mr. Thompson.

FRANK

No. I hope you understand why I cut off everybody like I did. I couldn't stand to think of my old life and never found the thread of a new one. Once the war started I drove for the French. Then, when the Americans came in, I switched over and drove for them.

SAM

Well, Frank, you won't need to use much of that fighting spirit against the Quam. There is no more Quam.

FRANK

I'm sorry. What?

SAM

There is no more Quam. Mr. Thompson wrote to them telling them that he was planning to sue because they rejected you and that knocked them into a cocked hat. Some wanted to admit you, others wanted to fight to the death, others wanted to compromise. It seems that everyone had a different opinion. They set to fighting each other so hard they had nothing left to fight you with. They just tore themselves apart. They closed up shop and just faded away. He wrote to tell us about their last gasp just last month. We wrote to tell you, but I guess you were already on your way back.

FRANK

But ... I never meant to ruin them. I just wanted to join them.

ELLEN

It's for the best, Frank. They were heathens. Without God's guidance they were lost. It was His justice that put them down.

FRANK

I wouldn't presume to know God's justice, Mother. If any of it was to be found on the Western Front, it was a very mysterious thing indeed.

ELLEN

We are all subject to God's justice, just as we are constantly surrounded by His love.

FRANK

Ah, yes. His love. I saw that at work many a day. My, how He must have loved the boys who gathered in the valley of the Somme. He took them to Himself in great armfuls, day after day. Funny thing, though. Some He ripped in half and some He tore to shreds the size of confetti. My French pals and I used to put the pieces in a burlap sack shaped like a man before we buried them. I suppose He put them back together again in Heaven, but it does seem a terrible waste of energy ...

SAM

That's enough, Frank! That's not fair and you know it!

FRANK

I'm sorry, Mother. Pop's right. I was being rude. I guess I'm a bit in shock. I thought the Quam would help me start over. I did a lot of thinking -- and some reading too -- Maybe I can use some of Uncle Lew's fortune to start up the Quam again. Maybe I could build a Quamerian chapel at the Soldiers' Home. I'll bet some of those boys are ready to trade in their old dogma.

ELLEN

Oh, Frank, how could you! Those heathens failed for good reason. It's sinful to even think of resurrecting them. And to desecrate your Soldiers' Home with a so-called "chapel" -- what ever are you thinking? I simply won't have your sister's beautiful memory soiled with such an association.

FRANK

You don't own Laura's memory, Mother. My fellows and I fought the war to end all wars. Thanks to us, there won't be any more wars. The home will try to put their shattered bodies and minds back together as best we can. Putting Laura's name on that kind of effort will be a great tribute, whether there's a Quam chapel there or not.

ELLEN

Dishonor Laura if you chose, but your father and I will never set foot on the place!

FRANK

As you wish, Mother. But I hope you will reconsider. The place won't lack for a woman's touch, anyway. I'm engaged to be married.

SAM and ELLEN

You should have said something! Etc. Tell us all about her.

FRANK

Her name is Mable Foster. She's from Boston. She's a 22 year old nurse. We met when I was driving an ambulance near Chateau Thierry and she was working in a hospital there. Of course, she's beautiful and talented. She's in Belgium now, doing relief work, but I'll join her in Boston at the end of next month to meet her parents. I hope you can come East for the wedding.

SAM

Does she know about your plan to start the home?

FRANK

We talked about it some. She lives for adventure and challenge and she's a natural nurse. I think the scariest part of it for her is the mystery of Kansas. But she'll solve that one when she hits the ground hereabouts.

ELLEN

Does she know about your interest in the Quam?

FRANK

Yes, actually, she does. She's reasonably comfortable with it. You have to understand, Mother — and Pop — when we were at the Front, we met people from all over the world, Sikhs from India, Chinese, Turks, Algerians. When it came to suffering and dying everyone did it in much the same way. And when you come to think about it, the way they lived wasn't all that different, either, at least when hunger, cold, mud, and terror were involved.

ELLEN

But how will our grandchildren be raised? Have you thought about that?

FRANK

Hardly at all, Mother. But we'll work something out when the time comes.

ELLEN

That's comforting to think, Frank, but differences about that kind of thing can tear a family apart. We've seen it happen, haven't we, Sam?

SAM

Unfortunately, yes.

FRANK

Listen, Mother, Pop. I have faith in Mable to be reasonable and understanding and she has the same faith in me. When you come right down to it, everything we do in life is a matter of faith. We might do everything in our power to prepare, but then, at last, there is a leap into the dark. Who knows what determines where we land, or even what makes us leap in the first place? Some say it is an all-powerful God. Or a committee of gods, or a local spirit. Maybe it's merely chance. But we have to be free to ask, to look for our answers, and jump when we will or must.

If my generation could win the war to end all wars, maybe now we can put an end to religious prejudice, too. I have to believe that it will happen some day. Why not start with us? Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to see my lawyer about my legacy.

(FRANK exits.)

(Lights down.)

THE END