

THE IMMORTAL HINK

A REPRINT OF ACT 1, SCENE 5 FROM TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' *WILL MR. MERRIWETHER RETURN FROM MEMPHIS?*, FIRST PUBLISHED BY *THE MISSOURI REVIEW*, 1997, No. 2



WATERCOLOR OF A SCENE NEAR ROCK QUARRY ROAD BY ART PROFESSOR FRANK STUCK

Tennessee Williams, *Journ '32*, DHL '69, probably worked on this play about life and death starting in the late 1950s. It has been performed just once, in 1980 in Key West, Fla. In this scene, the adolescent Gloria senses her mortality.

The white room is now the English classroom at the library. The English TEACHER sits at a small desk with a bunch of marigolds on it. Her name is MISS YORKE. The weather outside the window is fair.

MISS YORKE: All but one of you turned in a sorry lot of themes yesterday. As usual the one who turned in a good one was Gloria McBride. Gloria, will you come up here and read your theme to the class. *(GLORIA enters from the wings and goes up to the desk)*

GLORIA: Let me help you, Miss Yorke. I'll look through half and you look through the other half.

MISS YORKE: Thank you, yes. We'll do that.

GLORIA: This is it, here it is.

MISS YORKE: Oh. Good. Read it. *(GLORIA face downstage and reads her theme to the class)*

GLORIA: "Yesterday afternoon my geology class went on a field trip up Hinkson's Creek to look for fossils. We didn't expect to find any along the creek, of course, but our objective was the old, abandoned, rock quarry. Almost as soon as we arrived there I discovered five or six fossils in the rock walls of the quarry and with my little chisel and hammer and the kind assistance of a boy in the class, I chipped them, or to be more accurate, he chipped them out of the rock. Two of them were fossils of ferns and three were fossils of very early and primitive kinds of organisms that existed in water millions and millions of years ago, you might say an incalculable time ago in the oceans and seas of the earth, which at that time were steaming like huge teakettles. And we were so absorbed in our five discoveries that the class went back down Hinkson's Creek without us, and we—"

(At this point there is snickering by the BOYS in the classroom. MISS YORKE rises indignantly)

MISS YORKE: Stop that right this moment! What are you laughing over? The next one that laughs will go to the principal's office and explain why he did it. Gloria, go on.

GLORIA: I've lost my place. Where was I?
MISS YORKE: You were so excited over the five fossils that you became separated from the rest of the geology class.

GLORIA: Oh. Yes. There.—"We found ourselves alone with our five immeasurably old mementos of the earth's first vegetation and simple one-cell organic beings. The afternoon was fading but still so clear and lovely, and for some reason that I can't analyze and explain, I began to cry and tremble. No, I don't know why. The boy who had chipped the fossils out of the quarry wall for me was mystified by my trembling and crying. I was trembling so that he had to lead me, support me, back up Hinkson's Creek to Indian Road and help me onto a streetcar that took me home, and even when I entered the house and said hello to my mother, I was still trembling and crying a little. She noticed my condition and asked me what had happened. I said to her, 'Oh, mother, look at these rocks, these little fossils on them! They give us evidence that there has been life on this earth for more time than we are able to estimate.' But she wouldn't look at the rocks, she wasn't interested in them. Then the phone rang. She said, 'Oh, that's for me!' She had been expecting a call from a friend in Memphis. But the call wasn't for her. The call was for me and it was a call from the boy who had chipped the fossils out of the quarry rock for me. 'Are you all right?' he asked me, 'Are you all right now?' I said, 'I've almost stopped trembling and I will be at the public library tonight to write an English theme about the geology field trip and I hope by that time I'll know why I trembled and cried.'" *(SHE turns to the dark door)*—I'm sorry, Miss Yorke.
MISS YORKE: I believe I can tell you

why the fossils disturbed you. They made you think of how transitory things are. In their living state.

A VOICE FROM THE WINGS: What is "transitory"?

MISS YORKE: Things that pass, things of brief duration. Take these flowers, these marigolds, for instance. They're lovely today, but tomorrow they'll begin to wither.

THE VOICE: And turn to fossils?

MISS YORKE: If we have a rock quarry to record our long-past existence.

(GLORIA, facing the dark door, makes a gasping sound and lifts her hands to her face. Turning her head) Miss McBride! *(Her only answer is another gasp. Gently)* Gloria? Gloria?

GLORIA: I'm all trembling again, I—
MISS YORKE: You've only got one more class.

GLORIA:—It's—geology!

MISS YORKE: Would you rather go home now? *(GLORIA nods)* I think someone in the class should take Miss McBride to the streetcar.

(The ROMANTICALLY HANDSOME YOUTH steps out of the wings)

YOUTH: I'm the, the, the,—the boy—that helped her get the fossils out of the rock, and put, put, put—her on the streetcar.

MISS YORKE: Then would you please do it again.

YOUTH: Gloria? *(HE takes her hand and leads her into the wings)*

MISS YORKE: The lesson—*(She takes a sip from a glass of water on her desk)* The lesson to be learned from Miss McBride's theme is simple in a way and difficult in a way. I think it is that we must dare to experience deep emotion even though it may make us cry and tremble. Will the monitor for this week please erase the blackboard. *(A bell rings)* The class is dismissed. Not for several million years, just till tomorrow. Good night. Good night . . . ●

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