

**The Dead of Spoon River – Readers' Theatre Version**

A Photoplay Adaptation of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology

Adapted for the Stage by

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## Cast of Characters

20's Male : a male in his twenties.

40's Male : a male in his forties.

60's Male : a male in his sixties.

20's Female: a female in her twenties.

40's Female: a female in her forties.

60's Female : a female in her sixties.

Time Keeper – the person who starts the technology used in this photoplay.

## Time

It is midnight in a Midwestern cemetery. The year is any time in the future.

## Setting

In the opening scene, the stage is dark. Six chairs of varying designs appropriate for the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The chairs are set DS center. Each chair has a music stand in front of it.

The six characters wear formal black costumes that would have been appropriate for a 19<sup>th</sup> century funeral.

The rear center of the set contains a large screen television which will play the photoplay content including prerecorded images, video and classical music. The micro-photoplays for each character/reader, will be broadcast on the television while the readers read their lines. *Scripts are already set on the lecterns.*

On entering the stage, each character carries a battery-operated hurricane lantern which is preset to resemble flickering flames. Otherwise, **lighting for the opening scene consists of 6 LED lights focused on the chairs where the 6 characters will be seated.** The three stage walls are covered with a quilted, black fabric – the look of the interior of a casket.

Act 1

Scene 1

*(After the Time Keeper syncs the technology on stage and after the opening credits have played on the television and “The Hill” micro-photoplay opens. Characters enter from rear stage entrances with three entering from each side, carrying LED lanterns at face level and turning as if searching for something.)*

Audio/Video cue –



*(60s Female stands in front of her chair and addresses audience while other characters continue searching.)*

**60's Female:** Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley, the weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozier, the fighter?

*(Others stop searching and face audience still holding up lanterns.)*

**Cast:** All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

*(60s Female switches off lantern and takes her seat, placing the lantern on the floor beside her. At the same time, 20s Male stands in front of his chair and addresses audience, holding lantern at face height.)*

**20's Male:** One passed in a fever. One was burned in a mine,

*(20s Male switches off lantern and takes his seat, placing the lantern on the floor beside him. At the same time, 40s Female stands in front of her chair and addresses audience, holding lantern at face height.)*

**40's Female:** One was killed in a brawl. One died in a jail,

*(40s Female switches off lantern and takes her seat, placing the lantern on the floor beside her. At the same time, 20s Female stands in front of her chair and addresses audience, holding lantern at face height.)*

**20s Female:** One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife.

*(20s Female switches off lantern and takes her seat, placing the lantern on the floor beside her. At the same time, 60s Male stands in front of his chair, holding lantern at face height. Entire Cast faces audience.)*

**Cast:** All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

**60's Male:** *(to audience)* Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith, The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud, the happy one?

*(60s Male switches off lantern and takes his seat, placing the lantern on the floor beside him. At the same time, 40s Male stands in front of his chair, holding lantern at face height. Entire Cast addresses audience.)*

**Cast:** All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

**40's Male:** *(to audience)* One died in shameful childbirth. One of a thwarted love,

*(40s Male switches off lantern and takes his seat, placing the lantern on the floor beside him.)*

**20's Male:** *(to audience)* One at the hands of a brute in a brothel. One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire.

**20's Female:** One after life in far-away London and Paris was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and Mag.

**Cast:** All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

**40's Female:** Where are Uncle Isaac and Aunt Emily, and old Towny Kincaid and Sevigne Houghton?

**20's Male:** And Major Walker who had talked with venerable men of the revolution?

**Cast:** All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

**60's Male:** They brought them dead sons from the war, and daughters whom life had crushed.

**60's Female:** And their children fatherless, crying.

**20s Female:** All.

**60's Male:** All.

**20's Male:** All.

**40s Male:** Are sleeping.

**60s Female:** Sleeping.

**40s Female:** Sleeping.

**Cast:** On the hill.

**20s Male:** Where is Old Fiddler Jones who played with life all his ninety years?

**40's Male:** Braving the sleet with bared breast, drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin.

**40's Female:** Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven? Lo! He babbles of the fish-fries of long ago.

**60's Male:** Of the horse-races of long ago at Clary's Grove,

**60's Female:** Of what Abe Lincoln said one time at Springfield.

Scene 2- Micro-Photoplay of Jeduthan Hawley

LED light up on 60s Male.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Male:** Jeduthan Hawley. And I remember there would be a knock at the door, and I would arise at midnight and go to the shop, where belated travelers would hear me hammering sepulchral boards and tacking satin. And often I wondered who would go with me to the distant land, our names, the theme for talk, in the same week. For I've observed two always go together. Chase Henry was paired with Edith Conant; and Jonathan Somers with Willie Metcalf; and Editor Hamblin with Francis Turner, when he prayed to live longer than Editor Whedon. And Thomas Rhodes with widow McFarlane; and Emily Sparks with Barry Holden; and Oscar Hummel with Davis Matlock; and Editor Whedon with Fiddler Jones; and Faith Matheny with Dorcas Gustine. And I, the solemnest man in town, stepped off with Daisy Fraser.

LED light fades on 60s Male.

I-3-1

Political/Social Episode

Scene 3 – Micro-Photoplay of Daisy Fraser.

LED light up on 40s Female.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:** (laughs wildly) Daisy Fraser. Did you ever hear of Editor Whedon giving to the public treasury any of the money he received for supporting candidates for office? Or for writing up the canning factory to get people to invest? Or for suppressing the facts about the bank, when it was rotten and ready to break? Did you ever hear of the Circuit Judge helping anyone except the "Q" railroad, or the bankers? Or did Rev. Peet or Rev. Sibley give any part of their salary, earned by keeping still, or speaking out as the leaders wished them to do, to the building of the waterworks? But I, Daisy Fraser who always passed along the streets through rows of nods and smiles, and coughs and words such as "there she goes", never was taken before Justice Arnett without contributing ten dollars and costs to the school fund of Spoon River!

LED light fades on 40s Female.



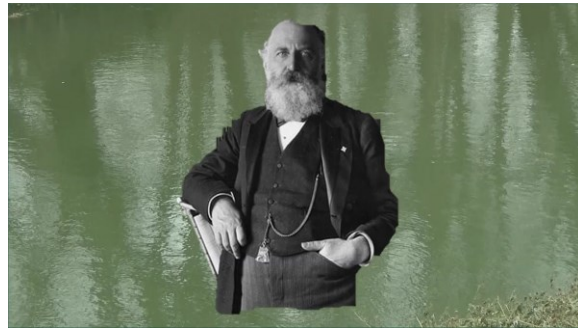
I-4-1

Political/Social Episode

LED light up on 60s Male

Scene 4 – Micro-Photoplay of Editor Whedon

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Male:** Editor Whedon. To be able to see every side of every question; to be on every side, to be everything, to be nothing long; to pervert truth, to ride it for a purpose; to use great feelings and passions of the human family for base designs, for cunning ends; to wear a mask like the Greeks actors. Your eight-page paper, behind which you huddle, bawling through the megaphone of big type, "This is I, the giant."

Thereby also living the life of a sneak-thief, poisoned with the anonymous words of your clandestine soul. To scratch dirt over scandal for money, and exhume it to the winds for revenge. Or to sell papers, crushing reputations, or bodies, if need be. To win at any cost, save your own life; to glory in demoniac power, ditching civilization, as a paranoiac boy puts a log on the track and derails the express train.

To be an editor, as I was, then to lie here close by the river over the place where the sewage flows from the village, and the empty cans and garbage are dumped, and abortions are hidden.

LED light fades on 60s Male.

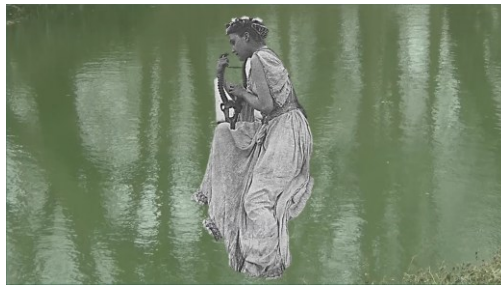
I-5-1

Political/ Social Episode

LED light up on 20s Female.

Scene 5 – Micro-Photoplay of Minerva, the Village Poetess.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:** Minerva, the village poetess. Hooted at, jeered at by the Yahoos of the street for my heavy body, cock-eye, and rolling walk. And all the more when "Butch" Weldy captured me after a brutal hunt. He left me to my fate with Doctor Meyers; and I sank into death, growing numb from the feet up, like one stepping deeper and deeper into a stream of ice.

Will someone go to the village newspaper, and gather into a book the verses I wrote?

I thirsted so for love! I hungered so for life!

LED light fades on 20s Female.

LED light up on 40s Male.

Scene 6 – Micro-Photoplay of Doctor Meyers.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Doctor Meyers. No other man, unless it was Doc Hill, did more for people in this town than I. And all the weak, the halt, the improvident, and those who could not pay flocked to me. I was good-hearted, easy Doctor Meyers. I was healthy, happy, in comfortable fortune, blest with a congenial mate, my children raised, all wedded, doing well in the world. And then one night, Minerva, the poetess, came to me in her trouble, crying. I tried to help her out. She died. They indicted me. The newspapers disgraced me. My wife perished of a broken heart, and pneumonia finished me.

LED light fades on 40s Male.

I-7-1  
Political/ Social Episode

LED light up on 60s Female.

Scene 7 – Micro-Photoplay of Mrs. Meyers.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Female:** Mrs. Meyers. He protested all his life long. The newspapers lied about him Villainously; that he was not at fault for Minerva's fall; but only tried to help her. Poor soul so sunk in sin he could not see that even trying to help her, as he called it, he had broken the law human and divine. Passersby, an ancient admonition to you: if your ways would be ways of pleasantness, and all your pathways peace, love God and keep his commandments.

LED light fades on 60s Female.

LED light up on 20s Male.

Scene 8 – Micro-Photoplay of Butch Weldy.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:** Butch Weldy. After I got religion and steadied down, they gave me a job in the canning works, and every morning I had to fill the tank in the yard with gasoline, that fed the blow-fires in the sheds to heat the soldering irons.

And I mounted a rickety ladder to do it, carrying buckets full of the stuff.

One morning, as I stood there pouring, the air grew still, and seemed to heave. And I shot up as the tank exploded, and down I came with both legs broken, and my eyes burned crisp as a couple of eggs.

For someone left a blow-fire going, and something sucked the flame in the tank. The Circuit Judge said whoever did it was a fellow-servant of mine. And so Old Rhodes' son didn't have to pay me. And I sat on the witness stand as blind as Jack the Fiddler, saying over and over, "I didn't know him at all."

LED light fades on 20s Male.

LED light up on 60s Male.

Scene 9 – Micro-Photoplay of Blind Jack.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Male:** Blind Jack. I had fiddled all day at the county fair. But driving home "Butch" Weldy and Jack McGuire, who were roaring full, made me fiddle and fiddle to the song of Susie Skinner, while whipping the horses till they ran away.

Blind as I was, I tried to get out as the carriage fell in the ditch, and was caught in the wheels and killed.

There's a blind man here with a brow as big and white as a cloud.

And all we fiddlers, from highest to lowest, writers of music and tellers of stories, sit at his feet, and hear him sing of the fall of Troy.

LED light fades on 60s Male

LED light up on 20s Female.

Scene 10 – Micro-Photoplay of Trainor the Druggist.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:** Trainor, the druggist. Only the chemist can tell, and not always the chemist, what will result from compounding fluids or solids. And who can tell how men and women will interact on each other, or what children will result.

There were Benjamin Pantier and his wife - good in themselves, but evil toward each other. He oxygen, she hydrogen. Their son, a devastating fire.

I Trainor, the druggist, a mixer of chemicals, killed while making an experiment, lived unwedded.

LED light fades on 20s Female

LED light up on 40s Male.

Scene 11 – Micro-Photoplay of Benjamin Pantier.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:**

Benjamin Pantier, Together in this grave lie Benjamin Pantier, attorney at law, and Nig,  
his dog, constant companion, solace and friend.

Down the gray road, friends, children, men and women, passing one by one out of life,  
left me till I was alone with Nig for partner, bed-fellow, comrade in drink.

In the morning of life I knew aspiration and saw glory.

Then she, who survives me, snared my soul with a snare which bled me to  
death, till I, once strong of will, lay broken, indifferent, living with Nig in a  
room back of a dingy office.

Under my jaw-bone is snuggled the bony nose of Nig.

Our story is lost in silence. Go by, mad world!

LED light fades on 40s Male



LED light up on 60s Female.

Scene 12 – Micro-Photoplay of Mrs. Benjamin Pantier.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Female:**

Mrs. Benjamin Pantier. I know that he told that I snared his soul with a snare which bled him to death. And all the men loved him. And most of the women pitied him. But suppose you are really a lady, and have delicate tastes, and loathe the smell of whiskey and onions. And the rhythm of Wordsworth's "Ode" runs in your ears, while he goes about from morning till night repeating bits of that common thing; "Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

And then, suppose you are a woman well endowed, and the only man with whom the law and morality permit you to have the marital relation is the very man that fills you with disgust? Every time you think of it, while you think of it, every time you see him?

That's why I drove him away from home to live with his dog in a dingy room back of his office.

LED light fades on 60s Female

LED light up on 40s Female.

Scene 13 – Micro-Photoplay of Emily Sparks.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:**

Emily Sparks. Where is my boy, my boy? In what far part of the world?

The boy I loved best of all in the school.

I, the teacher, the old maid, the virgin heart,

who made them all my children.

Did I know my boy aright, thinking of him as spirit aflame,

active, ever aspiring?

Oh, boy, boy, for whom I prayed and prayed in many a watchful hour at night.

Do you remember the letter I wrote you of the beautiful love of Christ?

And whether you ever took it or not, my boy, wherever you are,

work for your soul's sake, that all the clay of you, all of the dross of you,

may yield to the fire of you, till the fire is nothing but light! Nothing but light!

LED light fades on 40s Female

LED light up on 20s Male.

Scene 14 – Micro-Photoplay of Reuben Pantier.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:**

Reuben Pantier. Well, Emily Sparks, your prayers were not wasted, Your love was not all in vain. I owe whatever I was in life to your hope that would not give me up, to your love that saw me still as good.

Dear Emily Sparks, let me tell you the story. I pass the effect of my father and mother; The milliner's daughter made me trouble and out I went in the world, where I passed through every peril known of wine and women and joy of life.

One night, in a room in the Rue de Rivoli, I was drinking wine with a black-eyed cocotte, and the tears swam into my eyes. She thought they were amorous tears and smiled for thought of her conquest over me.

But my soul was three thousand miles away, in the days when you taught me in Spoon River. And just because you no more could love me, nor pray for me, nor write me letters, the eternal silence of you spoke instead.

And the black-eyed cocotte took the tears for hers, as well as the deceiving kisses I gave her. Somehow, from that hour, I had a new vision Dear Emily Sparks!

LED light fades on 20s Male

All LED lights up.

Scene 15 – Micro-Photoplay of Many Soldiers.

Audio/Video Cue –



**All Males in unison:**

We are Many Soldiers. The idea danced before us as a flag.

**20's Male:**

The sound of martial music;

**40's Male:**

The thrill of carrying a gun.

**60's Male:**

Advancement in the world on coming home;

**20's Male:**

A glint of glory, wrath for foes; a dream of duty to country or to  
God.

**All Males in unison:**

But these were things in ourselves, shining before us. They were not the power  
behind us, which was the Almighty hand of Life, like fire at earth's centre making  
mountains, or pent up waters that cut them through.

**60's Male:**

Do you remember the iron band the blacksmith, Shack Dye, welded around the oak  
on Bennet's lawn, from which to swing a hammock, that daughter Janet might  
repose in, reading on summer afternoons?

**20's and 40's Males in unison:**

We do!

**60's Male:**

And that the growing tree at last sundered the iron band?

But not a cell in all the tree knew aught save that it thrilled with life,

Nor cared because the hammock fell in the dust with Milton's Poems.

All LED lights fade.

LED light up on 20s Male.

Scene 16 – Micro-Photoplay of Knowlt Hoheimer..

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:**

Knowlt Hoheimer. I was the first fruits of the battle of Missionary Ridge.

When I felt the bullet enter my heart, I wished I had staid at home and gone to jail for stealing the hogs of Curl Trenary, instead of running away and joining the army.

Rather a thousand times the county jail than to lie under this marble figure with wings, and this granite pedestal bearing the words, "Pro Patria."

What do they mean, anyway?

LED light fades on 20s Male

LED light up on 60s Male.

Scene 17 – Micro-Photoplay of English Thornton.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Male:**

English Thornton. HERE! You sons of the men who fought with Washington at Valley Forge, and whipped Black Hawk at Starved Rock, Arise!

Do battle with the descendants of those who bought land in the loop when it was waste sand, And sold blankets and guns to the army of Grant, and sat in legislatures in the early days, taking bribes from the railroads!

Arise! Do battle with the fops and bluffs, the pretenders and figurantes of the society column, and the yokel souls whose daughters marry counts; and the parasites on great ideas; and the noisy riders of great causes; and the heirs of ancient thefts. Arise! And make the city yours; and the state yours.

You who are sons of the hardy yeomanry of the forties!

By God! If you do not destroy these vermin my avenging ghost will wipe out your city and your state.

LED light fades on 60s Male



**LED light up on 60s Female.**

Scene 18 – Micro-Photoplay of Mrs. Kessler.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Female:**

Mrs. Kessler. Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army, and he drew six dollars a month as a pension, and stood on the corner talking politics, or sat at home reading Grant's Memoirs. And I supported the family by washing, Learning the secrets of all the people from their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts. For things that are new grow old at length. They're replaced with better or none at all: People are prospering or falling back. And rents and patches widen with time. No thread or needle can pace decay, and there are stains that baffle soap. And there are colors that run spite of you, blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.

Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets - the laundress, Life, knows all about it. And I, who went to all the funerals held in Spoon River, swear I never saw a dead face without thinking it looked like something washed and ironed.

**LED light fades on 60s Female**

LED light up on 20s Male.

Scene 19 – Micro-Photoplay of Harry Wilmans.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:**

Harry Wilmans. I was just turned twenty-one, and Henry Phipps, the Sunday school superintendent, made a speech in Bindle's Opera House.

"The honor of the flag must be upheld," he said, "Whether it be assailed by a barbarous tribe of Tagalogs or the greatest power in Europe."

And we cheered and cheered the speech and the flag he waved as he spoke.

And I went to the war in spite of my father, and followed the flag till I saw it raised by our camp in a rice field near Manila. And all of us cheered and cheered it.

But there were flies and poisonous things; and there was the deadly water, and the cruel heat, and the sickening, putrid food; and the smell of the trench just back of the tents where the soldiers went to empty themselves.

And there were the whores who followed us, full of syphilis; and beastly acts between ourselves or alone, with bullying, hatred, degradation among us, and days of loathing and nights of fear to the hour of the charge through the steaming swamp, following the flag. Till I fell with a scream, shot through the guts. Now there's a flag over me in Spoon River! A flag! A flag!

LED light fades on 20s Male

LED light up on 40s Male.

Scene 21 – Micro-Photoplay of Elliot Hawkins.  
Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:**

Elliott Hawkins. I Looked like Abraham Lincoln. I was one of you, Spoon River, in all fellowship, but standing for the rights of property and for order. A regular church attendant, sometimes appearing in your town meetings to warn you against the evils of discontent and envy, and to denounce those who tried to destroy the Union, and to point to the peril of the Knights of Labor.

My success and my example are inevitable influences in your young men and in generations to come. In spite of attacks of newspapers like the Clarion; a regular visitor at Springfield, when the legislature was in session. To prevent raids upon the railroads, and the men building up the state. Trusted by them and by you, Spoon River, equally. In spite of the whispers that I was a lobbyist. Moving quietly through the world, rich and courted. Dying at last, of course, but lying here under a stone with an open book carved upon it, and the words "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

And now, you world-savers, who reaped nothing in life and in death  
have neither stones nor epitaphs, how do you like your silence  
from mouths stopped with the dust of my triumphant career?

LED light fades on 40s Male

LED light up on 40s Female.

Scene 22 – Micro-Photoplay of Hannah Armstrong.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:**

Hannah Armstrong! I wrote him a letter asking him for old times' sake to discharge my sick boy from the army. But maybe he couldn't read it. Then I went to town and had James Garber, who wrote beautifully, write him a letter. But maybe that was lost in the mails. So I traveled all the way to Washington. I was more than an hour finding the White House. And when I found it they turned me away, hiding their smiles. Then I thought, "Oh, well, he ain't the same as when I boarded him and he and my husband worked together and all of us called him Abe, there in Menard."

As a last attempt, I turned to a guard and said: "Please say it's old Aunt Hannah Armstrong from Illinois, come to see him about her sick boy in the army."

Well, just in a moment they let me in! And when he saw me, he broke in a laugh, and dropped his business as president, and wrote in his own hand Doug's discharge, talking the while of the early days, and telling stories.

LED light fades on 40s Female

LED light up on 20s Female.

Scene 23 – Micro-Photoplay of Anne Rutledge.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:**

Anne Rutledge. Out of me unworthy and unknown the vibrations of deathless music. "With malice toward none, with charity for all." Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions, and the beneficent face of a nation shining with justice and truth.

I am Anne Rutledge who sleeps beneath these weeds, beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln; wedded to him, not through union, but through separation.

Bloom forever, O Republic, from the dust of my bosom.

Readers exit through rear stage entrances with three exiting from each side. They leave their lanterns and scripts on their music stands.

House lights up.

**Intermission**

Act II

Scene 1

At Scene Opening -

*(Readers enter from rear stage entrances with three entering from each side. They take places in front of the chairs. They seat themselves in unison.)*

LED light up.

Scene 1 – Micro-photoplay of Mrs. Merritt.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:** Mrs. Merritt. Silent before the jury, returning no word to the judge when he asked me if I had ought to say against the sentence, only shaking my head. What could I say to people who thought that a woman of 35 was at fault when her lover of 19 killed her husband? Even though she had said to him over and over, "Go away, Elmer, go far away. I have maddened your brain with the gift of my body: you will do some terrible thing." And just as I feared, he killed my husband; with which I had nothing to do, before God! Silent for thirty years in prison! And the iron gates of Joliet swung as the gray and silent trustees carried me out in a coffin.

LED light fades.

Scene 2 – Micro-photoplay of Tom Merritt.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Tom Merritt. At first, I suspected something. She acted so calm and absent-minded. And one day, I heard the back door shut, as I entered the front, and I saw him slink back of the smokehouse into the lot, and run across the field.

And I meant to kill him on sight. But that day, walking near Fourth Bridge, without a stick or stone at hand.

All of a sudden, I saw him standing, scared to death, holding his rabbits,

And all I could say was, “Don’t, don’t, don’t,” as he aimed and fired at my heart.

LED light fades.



Scene 3 – Micro-photoplay of Elmer Karr.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:** Elmer Karr. What but the love of God could have softened and made forgiving the people of Spoon River toward me, who wronged the bed of Thomas Merritt, and murdered him beside?

Oh, loving hearts that took me in again when I returned from fourteen years in prison! Oh, helping hands that in the church received me, and heard with tears my penitent confession, who took the sacrament of bread and wine!

Repent, ye living ones, and rest with Jesus!

**LED light fades.**

Scene 4 – Micro-photoplay of Ida Frickey.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Female:** Ida Frickey. Nothing in life is alien to you: I was a penniless girl from Summum who stepped from the morning train in Spoon River. All the houses stood before me with closed doors and drawn shades. I was barred out; I had no place or part in any of them.

And I walked past the old McNeely mansion, a castle of stone 'mid walks and gardens, with workmen about the place on guard, And the County and State upholding it for its lordly owner, full of pride.

I was so hungry I had a vision: I saw a giant pair of scissors dip from the sky, like the beam of a dredge, and cut the house in two like a curtain. But at the "Commercial" I saw a man, who winked at me as I asked for work – It was Wash McNeely's son. He proved to be the link in the chain of title to half my ownership of the mansion.

Through a breach of promise suit, the scissors. So you see, the house, from the day I was born, was only waiting for me.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 5 – Micro-photoplay of Roscoe Purkapile.  
LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Roscoe Purkapile. SHE loved me. Oh! how she loved me! I never had a chance to escape from the day she first saw me. But then after we were married I thought she might prove her mortality and let me out, or she might divorce me.

But few die, none resign.

Then I ran away and was gone a year on a lark. But she never complained. She said all would be well that I would return. And I did return. I told her that while taking a row in a boat I had been captured near Van Buren Street By pirates on Lake Michigan, and kept in chains, so I could not write her. She cried and kissed me, and said it was cruel, outrageous, inhuman!

I then concluded our marriage Was a divine dispensation and could not be dissolved except by death. I was right

LED light fades.

Scene 6 – Micro-photoplay of Mrs. Purkapile.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:** Mrs. Purkapile. He ran away and was gone for a year. When he came home, he told me the silly story of being kidnapped by pirates, on Lake Michigan and kept in chains so he could not write me.

I pretended to believe it, though I knew very well what he was doing, and that he met the milliner, Mrs. Williams, now and then when she went to the city to buy goods, as she said.

But a promise is a promise and marriage is marriage, and out of respect for my own character I refused to be drawn into a divorce, by the scheme of a husband who had merely grown tired of his marital vow and duty.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 7 – Micro-photoplay of Mrs. Sibley.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:** Mrs. Sibley. The secret of the stars, gravitation.

The secret of the earth, layers of rock.

The secret of the soil, to receive seed. The secret of the seed, the germ.

The secret of man, the sower. The secret of woman, the soil.

My secret:

Under a mound that you shall never find.

LED light fades.

Scene 8 – Micro-photoplay of Amos Sibley.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Amos Sibley. Not character, not fortitude, not patience were mine the which the village thought I had, in bearing with my wife, while preaching on, doing the work God chose for me.

I loathed her as a termagant, as a wanton. I knew of her adulteries, every one.

But even so, if I divorced the woman, I must forsake the ministry.

Therefore, to do God's work and have it crop, I bore with her! So lied I to myself!

So lied I to Spoon River!

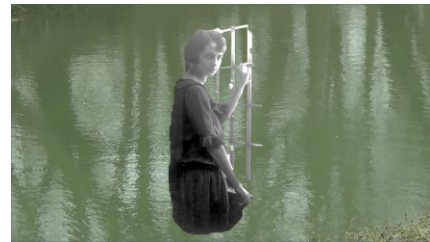
Yet I tried lecturing, ran for the legislature, canvassed for books, with just one thought in mind:

If I make money thus, I will divorce her.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 9 – Micro-photoplay of Amanda Barker.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:** Amanda Barker. Henry got me with child, knowing that I could not bring forth life without losing my own.

In my youth therefore, I entered the portals of dust.

Traveler, it is believed in the village where I lived that Henry loved me with a husband's love.

But I proclaim from the dust that he slew me to satisfy his hatred.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 10 – Micro-photoplay of Ralph Rhodes  
LED light up.

Audio-Video Cue –



**60s Male:** Ralph Rhodes. ALL they said was true: I wrecked my father's bank with my loans to dabble in wheat; but this was true I was buying wheat for him as well, who couldn't margin the deal in his name because of his church relationship.

And while George Reece was serving his term I chased the will-o'-the-wisp of women, and the mockery of wine in New York. It's deathly to sicken of wine and women when nothing else is left in life.

But suppose your head is gray, and bowed

On a table covered with acrid stubs Of cigarettes and empty glasses,

And a knock is heard, and you know it's the knock

So long drowned out by popping corks and the pea-cock screams of demireps

And you look up, and there's your Theft,

Who waited until your head was gray, and your heart skipped beats to say to you: The game is ended. I've called for you,

Go out on Broadway and be run over, they'll ship you back to Spoon River.

LED light fades.



LED light up.

Scene 11 – Micro-photoplay of Ida Chicken.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:** Ida Chicken. After I had attended lectures at our Chautauqua, and studied French for twenty years, committing the grammar almost by heart, I thought I'd take a trip to Paris to give my culture a final polish.

So I went to Peoria for a passport (Thomas Rhodes was on the train that morning).

And there the clerk of the District Court made me swear to support and defend the Constitution – yes, even me, who couldn't defend or support it at all!

And what do you think? That very morning the Federal Judge, in the very next room, to the room where I took the oath, decided the Constitution exempted Rhodes from paying taxes for the water works of Spoon River!

LED light fades.

Scene 12 – Micro-photoplay of Thomas Rhodes.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:** Thomas Rhodes. Very well, you liberals, and navigators into realms intellectual, you sailors through heights imaginative, blown about by erratic currents, tumbling into air pockets, you Margaret Fuller Slacks, Petits, And Tennessee Claflin Shopes – you found with all your boasted wisdom how hard at the last it is to keep the soul from splitting into atoms.

While we, seekers of earth's treasures, getters and hoarders of gold,  
are self-contained, compact, harmonized, even to the end.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 13 – Micro-photoplay of Eugene Carman.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Eugene Carman. Rhodes' slave! Selling shoes and gingham, flour and bacon, overalls, clothing, all day long, for fourteen hours a day for three hundred and thirteen days for more than twenty years, saying "Yes 'm" and "Yes, sir" and "Thank you" a thousand times a day, and all for fifty dollars a month.

Living in this stinking room in the rattle trap "Commercial".

And compelled to go to Sunday School, and to listen to the Rev. Abner Peet one hundred and four times a year, for more than an hour at a time, because Thomas Rhodes ran the church as well as the store and the bank.

So while I was tying my necktie that morning, I suddenly saw myself in the glass: my hair all gray, my face like a sodden pie.

So I cursed and cursed: You damned old thing! You cowardly dog! You rotten pauper! You Rhodes' slave!

Till Roger Baughman thought I was having a fight with someone, and looked through the transom just in time to see me fall on the floor in a heap from a broken vein in my head.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 14 – Micro-photoplay of Shack Dye.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Shack Dye. The white men played all sorts of jokes on me. They took big fish off my hook and put little ones on, while I was away getting a stringer, and made me believe I hadn't seen aright the fish I had caught. When Burr Robbins circus came to town they got the ring master to let a tame leopard into the ring, and made me believe I was whipping a wild beast like Samson. When I, for an offer of fifty dollars, dragged him out to his cage. One time I entered my blacksmith shop and shook as I saw some horse shoes crawling across the floor, as if alive – Walter Simmons had put a magnet under the barrel of water. Yet every one of you, you white men, was fooled about fish and about leopards too, and you didn't know any more than the horse-shoes did what moved you about Spoon River.

LED light fades.

Scene 15 – Micro-photoplay of Barney Hainsfeather.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:** Barney Hainsfeather. If the excursion train to Peoria had just been wrecked, I might have escaped with my life.  
Certainly, I should have escaped this place. But as it was burned as well, they mistook me for John Allen who was sent to the Hebrew Cemetery at Chicago, and John for me.  
So I lie here.  
It was bad enough to run a clothing store in this town.  
But to be buried here.  
Ach!

**LED light fades.**

Scene 16 – Micro-photoplay of Nancy Knapp.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Female:** Nancy Knapp. Well, don't you see? This was the way of it: we bought the farm with what he inherited, and his brothers and sisters accused him of poisoning his father's mind against the rest of them. And we never had any peace with our treasure.

The murrain took the cattle.

And the crops failed.

And lightning struck the granary.

So we mortgaged the farm to keep going. And he grew silent and was worried all the Time. Then some of the neighbors refused to speak to us, and took sides with his brothers and sisters.

And I had no place to turn, as one may say to himself, at an earlier time in life; "No matter, so and so is my friend, or I can shake this off with a little trip to Decatur."

Then the dreadfulest of smells infested the rooms. So I set fire to the beds and the old witch-house went up in a roar of flame, as I danced in the yard with waving arms, while he wept like a freezing steer.

LED light fades.

Scene 17 – Micro-photoplay of Barry Holden.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Male:** Barry Holden. The very fall my sister Nancy Knapp set fire to the house, They were trying Dr. Duval for the murder of Zora Clemens, and I sat in the court two weeks listening to every witness.

It was clear he had got her in a family way; and to let the child be born would not do.

Well, how about me with eight children, and one coming, and the farm mortgaged to Thomas Rhodes?

And when I got home that night, (after listening to the story of the buggy ride and the finding of Zora in the ditch,) the first thing I saw, right there by the steps, where the boys had hacked for angle worms, was the hatchet!

And just as I entered, there was my wife, standing before me, big with child.

She started the talk of the mortgaged farm, and I killed her.

**LED light fades.**

Scene 18 – Micro-photoplay of Yee Bow.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:** Yee Bow. They got me into the Sunday-school in Spoon River and tried to get me to drop Confucius for Jesus.

I could have been no worse off if I had tried to get them to drop Jesus for Confucius.

For, without any warning, as if it were a prank, and sneaking up behind,

Harry Wiley, the minister's son, caved my ribs into my lungs,

with a blow of his fist.

Now I shall never sleep with my ancestors in Peking, and no

children shall worship at my grave.

**LED light fades.**



Scene 19 – Micro-photoplay of Abner Peet.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



*(This is the first poem in the Wisdom Episode. All readers turn on lanterns to reading level as lights dim. All LED stage lights are dim.)*

**60's Male:** Rev. Abner Peet. I had no objection at all to selling my household effects at auction, on the village square.

It gave my beloved flock the chance to get something which had belonged to me for a memorial.

But that trunk which was struck off to Burchard, the grog-keeper!

Did you know it contained the manuscripts of a lifetime of sermons?

And he burned them as wastepaper.

*(Stage light goes out on reader as the reader ends the speech and turns off the reader's lantern.)*

Scene 20 – Micro-photoplay of Professor Newcomer.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Male:** Professor Newcomer. Everyone laughed at Col. Prichard for buying an engine so powerful that it wrecked itself. And wrecked the grinder he ran with it. But here is a joke of cosmic size: the urge of nature that made a man evolve from his brain a spiritual life – oh miracle of the world! – the very same brain with which the ape and wolf get food and shelter and procreate themselves. Nature has made man do this, in a world where she gives him nothing to do after all (though the strength of his soul goes round in a futile waste of power, to gear itself to the mills of the gods) – but get food and shelter and procreate himself.

*(Stage light goes out on reader as the reader ends the speech and turns off the reader's lantern.)*

Scene 21 – Micro-photoplay of Lucinda Matlock.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**20's Female:** Lucinda Matlock. I went to the dances at Chandlersville, and played snap-out at Winchester. One time we changed partners, driving home in the moonlight of middle June, and then I found Davis.

We were married and lived together for seventy years, enjoying working, raising twelve children, eight of whom we lost ere I had reached the age of sixty.

I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick, I made the garden.

And for holiday, rambled over the fields where sang the larks, and by Spoon River gathering many a shell, and many a flower and medicinal weed – shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.

At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all, and passed to a sweet repose.

What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness, anger, discontent and drooping hopes?

Degenerate sons and daughters, Life is too strong for you –

It takes life to love life.

*(Stage light goes out on reader as the reader ends the speech and turns off the reader's lantern.)*

Scene 22 – Micro-photoplay of Washington McNeely.

LED light up.

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Male:** Washington McNeely. RICH, honored by my fellow citizens, the father of many children, born of a noble mother, all raised there in the great mansion-house, at the edge of town. Note the cedar tree on the lawn!

I sent all the boys to Ann Arbor, all the girls to Rockford, the while my life went on, getting more riches and honors – resting under my cedar tree at evening.

The years went on. I sent the girls to Europe: I dowered them when married.

I gave the boys money to start in business.

They were strong children, promising as apples, before the bitten places show.

But John fled the country in disgrace. Jenny died in child-birth –

I sat under my cedar tree.

Harry killed himself after a debauch, Susan was divorced. I sat under my cedar tree.

Paul was invalided from over study, Mary became a recluse at home for love of a man - I sat under my cedar tree.

All were gone, or broken-winged or devoured by life – I sat under my cedar tree.

My mate, the mother of them, was taken – I sat under my cedar tree,

O maternal Earth, which rocks the fallen leaf to sleep!

*(Stage light goes out on reader as the reader ends the speech and turns off the reader's lantern.)*

Scene 23 – Micro-photoplay of Mrs. George Reece.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**40's Female:** Mrs. George Reece. To this generation I would say: memorize some bit of verse of truth or beauty. It may serve a turn in your life.

My husband had nothing to do with the fall of the bank – he was only cashier. The wreck was due to the president, Thomas Rhodes. And his vain, unscrupulous son. Yet my husband was sent to prison, and I was left with the children, to feed and clothe and school them.

And I did it, and sent them forth into the world all clean and strong.

And all through the wisdom of Pope, the Poet: “Act well your part, there all honor lies.”

*(Stage light goes out on reader as the reader ends the speech and turns off the reader's lantern.)*

Scene 24 – Micro-photoplay of The Village Atheist.  
**LED light up.**

Audio/Video Cue –



**60's Female:** The Village Atheist. Ye young debaters over the doctrine of the soul's immortality, I who lie here was the village atheist, talkative, contentious, versed in the arguments of the infidels.

But through a long sickness coughing myself to death, I read the Upanishads and the poetry of Jesus.

And they lighted a torch of hope and intuition and desire which the Shadow, leading me swiftly through the caverns of darkness, could not extinguish.

Listen to me, ye who live in the senses and think through the senses only:

Immortality is not a gift, immortality is an achievement; and only those who strive mightily shall possess it.

*(Stage light goes out on reader as the reader ends the speech and turns off the reader's lantern. After a brief moment in darkness, stage and house lights up.)*

**Fine**