

The Governor's Hand

The time is early September, 1940

The place is a very small town in rural S. E. Oklahoma

Jesse Randel– Approx 30 yrs old. He had been a farmer and a hell raiser before going to prison for 7 years for a crime he never committed. He has been given a pardon by the Governor and has come home to be with his wife again,.

Marylou Randel – In her late 20's. Wife of Jesse. A typical farmer's wife. Very little make up, but is clean and well groomed.

Mr. Stevens – The county DA

Warden Yates – The warden of a state penitentiary.

Guard – A prison guard at the state penitentiary.

Governor Connely – Governor of the state

Waitress – She has no lines

Scene I – The county DA’s office

Marylou is sitting in front of the DA’s desk and they are talking

MR. STEVENS – Mrs. Randel I asked you to visit me here in my office because I have some good news which I wanted to tell you in person.

MARYLOU – I could use some good news. It’s been a long time since you sent my husband Jesse away to the penitentiary. I know he couldn’t have done that armed robbery but no one would believe him or me. And now he has been in there for over 7 years.

I’ve spent 7 years trying to find a way to prove we was innocent but nothing Seems to work.

MR. STEVENS – I understand Mrs. Randel but those so called friends of his didn’t help him much with all the different stories they told. And he was just running with a bad crowd. He did just about everything he could to make himself look bad.

MARYLOU – Yes, I know. I told him he needed to work on our farm and get away from his friends. But he just liked the drinkin’ and the runnin’ around more than he liked doing the work on our farm.

It’s been all I could do to keep the farm going my self and not lose it back to the bank. I just get so tired.

MR. STEVENS – I’m sure you are but now I’ve got something to tell you that should Make you very happy.

MARYLOU – What is that Mr. Stevens?

MR. STEVENS – A couple of months ago some new evidence was uncovered and so my office investigated it. We had two new witnesses that said that did not see your husband at that convenience store that was robbed. Apparently he was telling to truth when he said he was passed out in the park when the robbery took place. You have to admit that was a pretty flimsy alibi.

MARYLOU – What does that mean Mr. Stevens?

MR. STEVENS – I told your attorney about this new evidence and so he filed some

Papers to request that the charges be dropped, which I did, and then he filed some papers with the Governor to ask for a pardon. And the Governor signed the pardon yesterday. So in a couple of days your husband will be coming home to you. I imagine the warden is presenting that pardon to your husband right now.

Marylou bury's her face in her hands and she starts crying.

FADE OUT

SCENE II – The Warden’s office

The warden is setting behind his desk and Jesse is brought in by a guard. Jessie is very surly.

JESSIE – What have I done now warden? What ever anyone has said about me is a lie!

WARDEN – Calm down Jesse. You haven’t done anything wrong. I just need to talk to you for a minute so set down. By the way, I want you to meet someone.

The guard opens the door and a well dressed man walks in

WARDEN – Jesse, I want you to meet Governor Connely

GOVERNOR – How do you do Jesse?

JESSE – Hello Governor.

They shake hands

GOVERNOR – Jesse I am about to do something that I don’t get to do very often and because of that I wanted to meet you in person. But first, please set down.

Jesse sets in a chair in front of the wardens desk. The warden walks around the desk and stands by Jessie.

WARDEN – I know you’ve been telling us for over 7 years that you are an innocent man but that’s what every con in this place says year in and year out. However every so often we find that we have incarcerated an innocent man.

JESSE – What are you driving at?

WARDEN – Some new evidence has been found and the Prosecutor has withdrawn the charges against you and then your attorneys asked the Governor to sign a pardon for you.

JESSE – Are you kidding me. Is this true? I can’t believe it.

GOVERNOR – It’s true Jessie and I am holding your Pardon in my hand. And I wanted to sign it in front of you..

The Governor places the pardon on the desk, signs it and then hands it to Jesse.

Jesse examines it closely

JESSE– It does say Pardon on it and that is the Governor’s signature. I saw him sign it.

WARDEN – Yes, that is the Governor’s signature. And don’t the Governor write a pretty Hand Jesse?

GOVERNOR - That means you are a free man again Jesse and we are going to put you on a bus tomorrow and send you home. I’m sorry it took so long to find the evidence needed to set you free and I realize you’ve lost 7 years of your life but don’t be hateful or vengeful. Learn to have a forgiving heart.

Son, you have an opportunity to start over again and if you keep hate and vengeance out of your heart you will be able to move forward to a good life

Jessie grabs the Pardon and then Jessie and the Warden and the Governor all shake hands

WARDEN – You know Jesse, for the past 7 years your wife has been working very hard trying to prove your innocence. Now you have a second chance to take care of her. When you get back home dump those friends of yours and start treating your wife right. She deserves a good life.

FADE OUT

Scene III – The inside of a diner which also serves as a bus stop.

Marylou is sitting in a booth. She's kind of nervous. You can hear a bus pull in outside and start unloading and loading passengers.. Some people come into the diner. One of them is Jesse. He is carrying a small bag. Marylou and Jesse see each other, she gets up from the booth and they embrace but very awkwardly.

JESSE: Oh Marylou it is so good to see you. I never thought this day would ever come.

MARYLOU: I know what you mean Jesse. I always believed you were innocent and that hopefully they would eventually find the right evidence to prove you not guilty. But 7 years in prison is a long time. How are you? Let me look at you. You've lost some weight but you still look very handsome to me.

(They set back down in the booth)

JESSE: Marylou you look so good. But you always were beautiful. I know these 7 years had to be tough on you, running the farm by yourself and all.

MARYLOU: It was tough. There were many times I thought I wasn't going to be able to pay the mortgage payment, but thank God, the Lord was always watching over me and I would come up with the money I needed. But let's not discuss that right now. It's so good to see you Jesse and to know you are a free man.

They are holding hands above the table and looking into each other's eyes.

JESSE: Marylou, you are all I ever thought about when I was in prison. I felt so bad about being taken away from you and leaving you alone to run the farm. But now I'm going to be here to help you. And I promise I am changing my ways. No more honky tonkin around with the guys and drinking and gambling. I've got a lot to make up for and I've got lots of ideas as to how I can fix the place up and make it nicer for you.

MARYLOU: I want to hear all about it Jesse: But let's just spend a little time together and get to know each other again.

JESSE: Sure we can Marylou, sure we can.

Oh, I almost forgot. I want to show you the pardon that the governor signed. He was a very nice man. I was called into the warden's office so I could meet the Governor. He said he wanted me to watch him sign the pardon. So he signed it while I watched him and then he apologized that it took 7 years to find the evidence that cleared me of the crime. He said he knows I've lost 7 years of my life but he told me not to be hateful or

vengeful and to learn to have a forgiving heart. He said “Son, you have an opportunity to start over again and if you keep hate and vengeance in your heart it will keep you from moving forward to a good life”. While I was on the bus I thought a lot about what he said and you know, he is right, I’ve got no room in my heart for hate and vengeance.

Jesse lays the pardon on the booth table.

JESSE: Here, look at his signature. (They look at it together)
: Don’t the Governor write pretty hand?

MARYLOU: His signature is so graceful. He does write a nice hand.

Jesse, let’s have one more cup of coffee and then we’ll drive home. I just want to look at you for a while.

JESSE: That sounds fine to me. You are so beautiful MaryLou. I can’t believe I didn’t stay home with you more. I was such a fool.

(to the waitress)

JESSE: Ma’am could we have 2 more cups of coffee.

(to Marylou) That seems so strange, to be able to order a cup of coffee I mean.

FADE OUT

SCENE IV **Inside an older but nice car. Marylou is driving and Jesse is sitting in the passenger's seat. There is an uneasy silence in the car.**

JESSE This is a very nice car Marylou. It's a lot better than that junker we had before I went away. It's nice and clean and it doesn't have my beer bottles rattlin' around in it. How were you able to afford to buy it?

MARYLOU: (She doesn't say anything)

JESSE: I never thought I would ever see this country side again. It sure looks nice and smells nice. Oh, there's the Miller place. Do they still live there?

MARYLOU Yes they do. Their son just graduated from college last year. They had quite a graduation party for him. They even sent me an invitation. I was really surprised and felt so good that they had invited me.

JESSE: They must have just cut their grass. I love the smell of fresh cut grass. That's the kind of life I want us to have. And we could have had it if I hadn't been so selfish and such a fool.

MARYLOU: Like you said Jesse we can change things now.

JESSE: When I think about all of those times that I should have been working on our farm, fixing the equipment, feeding the animals rather than making you do it or just patching up the buildings. It makes me so ashamed of myself. When I was working in prison I would have given anything to be able to be working on our farm instead.

MARYLOU: It was a lot of work Jesse and it was so difficult to try to do it when you weren't helping me with a lot of it. And while you were in jail and later when they sent you to prison. I was so afraid and scared. I was afraid of being alone, afraid of not keeping everything fixed and running and scared of losing the place to the bank and not having anywhere to live

JESSE: I know Marylou and I am so sorry I put you through all of that. But I'm going to try to make it up to you.

Marylou makes a quick turn in the car.

Whoa, when you turned just now I didn't realize this was the entrance to our farm. It really looks good. You've painted the fences and I like the flowers you planted along entrance and the drive.

MARYLOU: I fixed it up a little bit.

They pull up to the house

JESSE: You really fixed up the house too. That looks like new paint and a new roof. And you even repaired the porch. It was about to fall down when I went away.

Marylou stops the car and turns the engine off. She then turns and looks at Jesse.

MARYLOU: (she starts crying) There's something I need to tell you Jesse.

While you were gone I couldn't do all of the work by myself. It was just too much.

Jesse, I had to hire a hand to help around the place. So I didn't do all of this by myself.

And when we go inside Jesse, you are going to see something else. You are going to meet a little boy and he is only three but he is very sweet and I love him so very, very much.

They walk in silence to the house

SCENE V – The kitchen inside the house.

MARYLOU: Let me go see if he is in his bed.

Marylou goes into a back bedroom, then comes back out.

MARYLOU: He's taking a nap right now and I don't want to wake him. You'll have to meet him later.

Jesse, I know what you are thinking and I'm so sorry but there is nothing I can do now. But if you'll let me and the boy stay here I will try my best to make it up to you.

Jesse drops heavily in a kitchen chair and looks down at the table.

JESSE: Where is his father Marylou?

MARYLOU: He was in the back bedroom with the boy when we drove up. As soon as we came in, he left out the back door. He was wanting to meet you and talk with you but I convinced him that it wouldn't be a good idea right now and that I should talk to you first instead.

JESSE: Who is he Marylou? Do I know him?

MARYLOU: He's no one you would know. Like a lot of drifters who came by here, he was looking for some work and a meal and I needed some help.

JESSE: Do you know anything about him?

MARYLOU: I didn't then. But he seemed to be honest and truthful and mannerly and even though he was wearing worn out clothes he seemed to keep himself clean and well groomed.

JESSE: Is he good to you and the boy?

MARYLOU: Yes Jesse he is very good to both of us. But you are my husband, I still love you very much and this is your house and your farm. I am just so confused about all of this, I really don't know what to do other than try to make it up to you.

Since I am still your wife I want to stay here with you and help you get started again with your new life. I know I can be a big help to you and that with time we can straighten all of this out. But you have to tell me you want me to stay.

JESSE: I still love you Marylou, more than you can imagine. And I will do my best to try to understand what has happened here.

God and the Governor pardoned me and now I can see that I have to find it in my heart to pardon you.

I know what it is like to have your dreams and your future taken away. It is a terrible thing to suffer through and I didn't think I could survive but I did. And now I could do the same thing to you, your little boy and his father. I could take all of this from you.

I have to think about this Marylou. I am very confused myself.

MARYLOU: Jesse, Jesse, Jesse (crying inconsolably). You were punished for something you didn't do and you deserve to have a fresh start. And as you said, God and the Governor gave it back to you and I don't want to be the one to take it away from you either.

(She cups his face in her hands)

You are still a good man Jesse and I love you and I believe in you.

There is a long awkward pause while the two of them look away from each other and it is obvious they are pondering their situation

JESSE: Thank you for saying that Marylou, but we both know I was not a good husband to you nor was I a good man before I went to prison. I was a pretty miserable guy. My own mother told me that one time. And she told me you were a far better wife than what I deserved and I knew in my heart she was right.

MARYLOU: But Jesse I saw the goodness in you. That's why I fell in love with you and married you. I don't know what made you want to drink and carouse around. I just thought I didn't do enough for you. And you never hit me Jesse or treated me bad in that way. I just wanted you to be home with me and I needed you to help me run the farm.

JESSE: I appreciate you saying that Marylou, but I know what kind of person I was and I know I was the source of all of your unhappiness. I don't want to be that kind of person again. I learned many things, both good and bad, while I was in prison, but the one thing that kept me going was I that I hoped to be given an opportunity to treat you right and make up for what I never did for you. I don't want to be the one to hurt you again Marylou and take all of this from you. It was my fault that I left you with nothing. It's obvious that you tried your best and I can't blame you for finding

comfort with someone else, someone to lean on and to help you.
Sometimes we have to take our comfort where we can,

MARYLOU: What can we do Jesse, what can we do?

JESSE: I can do the first decent thing I've done in my life. I said I had hoped I would be given an opportunity to make you happy again. And I think I have been given that opportunity.

MARYLOU: What are you talking about Jesse?

JESSE: As much as it breaks my heart, I can give you up Marylou. Not because I don't love you anymore, but because I still love you so very, very much and I want you to have what you deserve.

I can start over again and I think I have learned what it takes to have a family and how to appreciate a woman who loves me.

So I am going to move on Marylou. I want you to have the farm and I wish you and your boy and his father the best. I know you will have a good life together.

Jesse reaches inside his bag and pulls out his pardon and looks at it.

JESSE: Yes, I am a very fortunate man Marylou. I've been given a new chance and I'm even more fortunate to have been given a chance to help someone I love to be happy again.

Jesse picks up the Pardon and looks at it.

Yes, Marylou, the Governor does write a pretty hand.

THE END