

# *The Dolly*

a drama in three acts by

Robert Locke

1983 version, produced by American Conservatory Theater, San Francisco

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I used to write on my title pages something like: “All Rights Reserved: Nobody can use this unless they contact me or my agent in writing.” But I just turned 70; so screw that. This is a good play. If you want to do some scenes from it, go ahead and be my guest. But I hope that you will at least tell me about it, and give me the writing credit for it. If I am still alive—and that’s growing more and more doubtful—contact me at [boblocke@csus.edu](mailto:boblocke@csus.edu)

## NOTE FROM 2015

In 1978 (or thereabouts) I submitted a play titled *Family Secrets* to the American Conservatory Theater's Plays-in-Progress program. Larry Hecht, prominent in this program, had directed a stage reading of my play *Who's Richard?* a year or so earlier.

Larry did not get back in touch with me for several years, and when he did, he told his assistant, "This Locke guy is going to be so surprised to hear from me." And indeed I was. I had given up hope, but also I had rewritten *Family Secrets* because in the meantime I had discovered it to be didactic and talky. I had done a lot of research to write that play, and it was not easy. There were only about three articles on "incest" or "child molestation" in those days, and even a good researcher would have trouble. What a change from 1978 to today. But the trouble was that *Family Secrets* was full to bursting with my research, and the family drama was rather lost in its intentions to "enlighten the unenlightened public".

When I made this discovery due to a few months' objectivity, I was horrified and embarrassed and rewrote *Family Secrets* and broadened its theme to one about marriage, and the reasons people get married and stay married, or not. I retitled it *The Dolly*, and I inserted two characters that I liked a lot, a young couple getting married for a lot of wrong reasons, Junior and Darlene. (See *The Dolly* - FRTC version also available from the main webpage for *The Dolly*.)

I asked Larry if I could send him the new script, and he said okay. But it turned out he still wanted to do *Family Secrets*. He didn't like Junior and Darlene, didn't think they added anything but in fact got in the way of the play's movements.

So, always amenable, I asked Larry if I could submit a new script with Junior and Darlene omitted, but also with all the talky didacticism deleted. He said okay. And that is how this current script got performed, first as a staged reading, than as a full performance in the studio theater in the bowels of the ACT rehearsal building, and finally onto the Geary mainstage as one of the six ACT plays of the season. It was the first play from the Plays-in-Progress program to achieve such an honor.

I feared that the loss of Annette Bening and her soon-to-be husband Steve White from the roles they had created, Deborah and Laird, would be a terrible blow to the play's success. But Barbara Dirickson and Bruce Williams were equally outstanding in those parts. Barbara confided to me on the first day of rehearsal, "Annette's performance was so brilliant, her every choice so right in every detail, I'm afraid that I can't do the part justice."

But she did. Still, I appreciated that confession, especially since I had a similar fear, not yet knowing the depth of Barbara's talent and intelligence. When Annette came to opening night, she pulled me aside to tell me how much she appreciated some of the changes I had made in the script for Deborah, particularly the fact that Deborah was now an artist and had written the children's book "The Legend of Nothing". Yes. That was a lovely change, I agree.

CAST OF CHARACTERS  
(in order of appearance)

- BYRON O'HARE — a grandfather with a ribald sense of humor, father of Laird
- JIM RUTLEDGE — a school friend of Laird and Deborah, late 20s  
now a dermatologist recently returned to town
- LAIRD O'HARE — husband of Deborah, son of Byron, father of Susan, late 20s  
an iron worker putting steel rod into buildings
- DEBORAH — wife of Laird, mother of Susan, late 20s  
pathologically shy but of strong fibre
- SUSAN — six-year-old daughter to Deborah and Laird
- INEZ O'HARE — wife of Byron, mother of LAIRD

## ACT I

*THE SCENE: The living/dining room of Laird and Deborah O'Hare's California condo, late in the evening of December 22.*

*The living/dining room is separated from the open kitchen by a module containing cabinets and kitchen appliances on the kitchen side, and a bar with stools on the dining room side. In the dining area are a table and four chairs. In the living area are a sofa and coffee table, an armchair, and a television and stereo unit. A small Christmas tree with presents beneath is covered with a child's decorations; a child's toys are lying about the room.*

*The door to the outside is prominent. It has a strong, loud deadbolt. Near the door is a reception closet. A stairway leads off to the second story of the condo. On the wall backing the stairs and on the refrigerator are a child's drawings, obviously taped up by the child herself.*

*At curtain, BYRON O'HARE and JIM RUTLEDGE are at the table playing a game of "Bullshit". Byron is an outgoing man of 60 or so, a warmhearted jokester, and a very heavy drinker. Although he is never sober, neither is he ever quite drunk. Jim is in his late 20s, pleasant, quiet, cool. Both are bluffing.*

BYRON

*(discarding a card face down on the table)*

And a king.

JIM

Huh uh.

BYRON

A black king. You callin'?

JIM

Wait, just hold on a second, you old tinhorn. What have you got left? Two cards?

BYRON

*(hiding his hand)*

'Bout that.

*(laughs, nodding to Jim's handful of cards)*

What do **you** got left?

JIM

Okay, okay, I'll let the king slide and get you on your four. Three aces. Go ahead, call me.

BYRON

Not on your life. Pair of ducks, doc...

*(discards his last two cards)*

...and I'm out.

JIM

No!

BYRON

Yep.

JIM

Bullshit! Bullshit!

BYRON

Shoulda called the sevens, or that black king, but don't doubt them deuces.

JIM

Let's see 'em. *(turns over the cards)* Damn the luck!

*Byron pours into his glass the last of a fifth of Jim Beam bourbon, and goes into the kitchen to toss the empty bottle into the trash.*

BYRON

Count 'em up. What you got left?

JIM

*(as he collects all the discards and counts)*

Deceitful old bastard.

BYRON

I told you not to mess with me, didn't I sonny? You don't get my age without learning to bluff.

JIM

Lie, you mean.

*Byron takes a nearly empty brandy bottle from the cabinet under the sink to top off his glass of bourbon.*

BYRON

Whatever. Bluff is the professional phraseo-ology, I believe.

JIM

Thirty-three.

BYRON

Two bits a card?

JIM

What?

BYRON

Okay, nickel a card.

JIM

Byron, if you're going to set stakes, you have to do it before the deal.

BYRON

*(returning)*

Okay, play another one, two bits a card. I gotta get some money here; pay Lairdy back for my keep.

JIM

No thanks, I can't wait any longer.

BYRON

I keep tellin' you they'll be here any minute.

JIM

*(rising and putting on his jacket)*

Yeah, you keep telling me that, and they're still not here.

BYRON

Sit down, have another drink.

JIM

Huh uh, not for me.

BYRON

Sure, sure, sure, what's your hurry? Listen, call up your old mom, tell her not to worry, you'll be a little late.

*Jim takes three gifts from the table and places them carefully under the tree.*

JIM

Deborah and Laird'll probably want to go to bed when they get home now anyway.

BYRON

They never get to bed before midnight. Stick around. Look at me here, poor lonesome old grass widower with nothin' to do now but twiddle my thumbs or go off to bed lonely like and choke the old chicken neck, know what I mean?

JIM

You'll go blind, you know.

BYRON

Hell, I'm half-blind half the time. And now you want to desert this poor pitiful case? What do you say? One more game. Sit down, sit down.

JIM

All right, but let me use your phone.

BYRON

Be my guest.

*(gets Jim's glass and goes into kitchen)*

You stickin' to brandy? I hope so, 'cause it's all I got left.

JIM

*(dialing)*

Brandy's fine.

BYRON

And let's see, you gotta have ice and sody water in it, right? Waste of good liquor.

JIM

And not so much brandy this time.

BYRON

Glad you're stayin', Jimmy. I hate to drink alone. That's one thing I hate. But I do it. You bet I do.

JIM

*(into phone)*

Mother, hi, I'm at Laird's, I'll be a little late, the number's in the book. (beat) How bad? (beat) Do you want me to come home? (beat) Mother, if you don't want me to come home, why do you bring it up?

BYRON

*(from the kitchen)*

You can tell her I'll come over and keep her company. I'm at liberty now and lookin' for a mature woman.

JIM

*(into phone)*

No, it's Laird's father. I told you about him.

BYRON

Tell her I'm not bad.

JIM

No, I told you. Mother, I told you. He's staying with them.

BYRON

Temporary, that's all.

JIM

I did too. I told— No, he's very nice. Mother, I'm here, I'll be late, just go to bed, goodnight.  
*(hangs up abruptly)*

*Amused, Byron returns with Jim's drink, stirring it with his finger.*

BYRON

Here you go, Jimmy.

JIM

I hope you washed your hands.



BYRON

Course. What do you think, I was brought up in a outhouse? As my old dad used to say, bein' clean is next to bein' God. Hey? Hey?

JIM

Yeah, I get it. Deal.

BYRON

Two bits a card, fair warning.

*(starts the deal)*

JIM

We're not going to wake Susan, are we?

BYRON

Naw. That little dolly sleeps deep as a angel. Just like her grandma, right through earthquakes.

JIM

What do you hear from Inez?

BYRON

Old I—

JIM

Old Inez.

BYRON

Old what's-her-name. Not a word.

JIM

Think she'll take you back?

BYRON

Oh sure, she's just tryin' to throw a scare into me. She'll be callin' me up one of these days now sayin' come on home.

JIM

What if she doesn't?

BYRON

Well, ain't you the pessimist. Don't worry, she will.

JIM

But what if she doesn't?

BYRON

Well then, as my old dad used to say, that is a bridge I'll cross after I've burned it behind me.

*Having dealt a number of cards, Byron places the draw cards between them with a flourish.*

BYRON

Losers go first.

JIM

One ace.

BYRON

One little quacker.

JIM

Pair of threes.

BYRON

Bullshit.

JIM

Damn!

*(collects the discards)*

BYRON

Four.

JIM

*(as he sorts the new cards)*

How are things going here?

BYRON

Oh, I'm doin' great.

JIM

Laird and Deborah! Two fives. Do they, uh, seem happy now?

BYRON

Oh yeah, it's a good life they got. Say Jimmy — six — when you went off to college— hey, wadn't you in the same high school class as Laird and Debbie?

JIM

With Laird, yeah. Deborah was behind us. Why?

BYRON

Oh, it don't matter, just somethin' Laird said.

JIM

What?

BYRON

Oh, I disremember now, but listen, when you was off in Boston gettin' your doctor thing, did you have to go into that psychiatry or psychology of however you want to say it?

JIM

I had a few courses, why? Seven.

BYRON

I just got a coupla questions, you know.

JIM

Byron, I'm a dermatologist; see a shrink. One seven.

BYRON

No, this ain't about me, just someone I know. Let me just ask, okay?

JIM

You can go ahead and ask, I can't stop you, but I'm not promising to answer, I'm not qualified. One seven.

BYRON

Yeah, sure. What do you call it when, you know, when a woman won't uh ... you know, uh, have sex with you. When she don't like it?

JIM

Frigidity?

BYRON

Frigidity, yeah, when she's cold to you, won't take your lovin'. Is that kind of thing contagious?

JIM

*(Suppressing a laugh)*

How could it be contagious?

BYRON

You know, can the man catch it from the woman? You know, like when you got brewer's droop.

JIM

Byron, who's this friend of yours?

BYRON

Oh, no one in particular. I was just askin'.

JIM

I think you should tell your friend to seek professional help.

BYRON

No, nope, he don't believe in doctors much.

JIM

Well, chacun a son gout.

*(taps table)*

One seven.

BYRON

Jack off who?

JIM

Chacun a son gout!

BYRON

And just what's that mean?

JIM

To each his own. One seven.

BYRON

What's that, Greek or something? You're wastin' your breath, Dr. Hotshot, if you're tryin' to impress me with that stuff. I knew a little German kid once could talk German like a machine gun, but he couldn't say one damn word in English. So I said to him, "Drop dead," and he said, "Huh?" Pair of eights.

JIM

Nine.

BYRON

Ten.

JIM

This friend, it's not— —the one with the problem— it's not Laird, is it?

BYRON

Laird? You kiddin'? That boy of mine gets more nookie than a chinaman in a cathouse, you bet. Lairdy don't brag or nothin', but I'm pretty sure old Debbie delivers all right. I got a ten down there, where's your jacks?

JIM

One jack.

BYRON

Say, Jimmy—

JIM

Byron! Are we playing Bullshit or Bull Puckey?

BYRON

No, no, no, it's nothin' professional, I was just wonderin' now, no offense, why it is a good lookin' fella like you never got married. You probably really play the field, huh?

JIM

No, not professional, Byron, but did you ever stop to think it might be personal?

BYRON

Hey, Jimmy, you can tell me. We're friends, right?

JIM

Yeah, sure. I got a jack down there. Where's your queens?

BYRON

Lovely ladies, two abreast.

JIM

Just what did Laird say that made you ask about—?

*They hear Laird's furious voice outside the door.*

LAIRD

*(off-stage)*

Don't give me that shit, you did it on purpose, you had ...

BYRON

What'd I tell you, any minute.

*Laird bursts through the door; Deborah behind him. Both have bowling balls in carriers.*

LAIRD

... a big goddam smile on your face!

*(slams the door in Deborah's face)*

You can just stay out there!

*(throws the deadbolt, then turns, sees Jim)*

Oh, hiya Jim.

*(embarrassed; under his breath as he throws his bowling ball onto a chair)*

She can just stay out there.

BYRON

Laird, what in the world happened?

LAIRD

Goddam her! Screwed the whole goddam season. Four gutterballs in ...

JIM

So for that you slam the —

LAIRD

... a row! Four of 'em!

BYRON

Well son, she didn't mean to!

LAIRD

She damn well did. She had on that big shiteating grin.

JIM

You're just going to let her stay out there?

LAIRD

She's got a key. So Jim, whatcha doin'? You look great. Come on, come on, sit down. You want a drink or somethin'? Pip, you wanna get him something, I'm gonna check on Susan.

*(as he goes to the stairs)*

She give you any trouble?

BYRON

Naw.

LAIRD

What time you get her off to bed? You put her in our room?

BYRON

Yeah. 'Bout nine.

*Laird starts to run up the stairs, hesitates, then returns and unlocks the deadbolt and gives the knob a little jerk so that the door comes open a crack. Then he takes off up the stairs.*

*A moment of awkwardness between Jim and Byron, waiting for Deborah to come in. Finally Jim rises and would go to the door, but Byron stops him with a gesture.*

BYRON

*(calling upstairs)*

Son, she don't look like she's comin' in.

*There is another moment. Again Jim would go to the door, but it opens and he drops tactfully back. Deborah comes in, eyes down. Everyone is silent while she takes off her coat and hangs it in the closet. Finally she turns and sees Jim.*

DEBORAH

Oh, hi.

JIM

Are you all right?

*Deborah nods and begins immediately cleaning up, a long process involving Laird's bowling ball, the clutter of toys, ashtrays, drink glasses, and snack debris on the coffee table and kitchen counter. Though she says little, she should be given the*

*focus during the next scene, Jim watching her carefully.  
Meanwhile...*

LAIRD

*(coming back down the stairs)*

That's a matter of opinion, huh Pip?

BYRON

Oh, Lairdy, leave her be now.

JIM

Maybe I should come back another time.

LAIRD

No, no, no, no, look I'm sorry. I got mad, it's over with. Let's come on, let's have a drink.

JIM

Laird, I don't like it. I feel like I'm stepping into—

LAIRD

No, look it's over, right Deb? I get pissed off, but she's good about it, you know. Hey, put on a record, Deb. I'll make us some drinks. What are you drinkin', Jim? We got bourbon, we got—I'll take a look.

*(goes into kitchen)*

JIM

*(To Deborah)*

Should I stay?

DEBORAH

What?

JIM

Should I stay?

DEBORAH

Please, do, I'm sorry.

LAIRD

*(as he searches the cabinets)*

Hey, you look great, Jim. Doesn't he, Deb? How come you never come over? Deb, put on some music for Chrissake.



DEBORAH

I'll put on that Christmas tape Inez gave us last—

LAIRD

But don't put on any of that Christmas shit...

BYRON

*(laughs)*

Ain't that just like him?

LAIRD

... I can't stand all that happy happy happy all the time. All those bells and shit. Hey Deb, what did—

*(sees the almost empty bottle of brandy)*

Jeez, you two drink all that brandy?

BYRON

Well, it was mostly Jim. The boy drinks like a Saint Bernard.

LAIRD

*(laughs)*

Deb, where did you put the Jim Beam? I told you to get a bottle.

DEBORAH

It's in the cabinet in there where I always put it.

*(Laird starts the search again.)*

Byron, did Susan get off to sleep all right?

BYRON

Oh yeah, I put her down in your bed. She laid back and just like a dolly those little eyes went snap and she was off to dreamland.

DEBORAH

*(having selected a tape and put it on)*

I think I'll just look in on her.

*(starts up the stairs)*

LAIRD

You forgot it, didn't you?

DEBORAH

I put— It's not there?

*There is an uncomfortable moment all around, everyone understanding that Byron has drunk it all.*

DEBORAH

I guess I did forget. Sorry.

LAIRD

Damn!

DEBORAH

Sorry.

JIM

That's all right. I don't want any.

LAIRD

Well I do.

*(getting his and Byron's coats from closet)*

Tell you what, the Shortstop's open, what do you want, Deb? Brandy, bourbon, what else?

DEBORAH

*(going quickly to the kitchen to get an aspirin)*

Nothing.

LAIRD

What'd you do with my wallet.

DEBORAH

In my purse.

LAIRD

*(tossing Byron his coat, going to Deborah's purse for his wallet)*

Wanna come, Pip?

BYRON

Oh, sure.

*(as he follows Laird out the door)*

As my old dad used to say, never turn down fresh air 'cause the next breath you take may be your last.

*Deborah is left alone with Jim, ill-at-ease. We hear Laird's and Byron's receding adlibs.*

LAIRD

*(offstage)*

Oh, your old dad said that, huh? Why, MY old dad used to say that, too.

BYRON

*(offstage)*

Oh yeah? Talky old bastard.

DEBORAH

Eggnog.

*(runs to the door and calls after them)*

Laird, some eggnog.

LAIRD

*(Offstage)*

Yeah, right.

DEBORAH

*(turns back into the room, painfully shy)*

It's Christmas after all.

JIM

Not until Friday.

DEBORAH

It's the holidays. The whole thing's Christmas to me.

JIM

You know where that bourbon went, don't you?

DEBORAH

I don't know how that old man can keep standing.

JIM

I wanted to say something, but—

DEBORAH

No, no, that would just ...

*(waves it away, smiles self-consciously, then makes a sudden decision)*

I have a present for you.

She starts for it but is stopped by Jim's line.

JIM

I have one for you too.

DEBORAH

*(turns, genuinely astonished)*

You have a present for me?

JIM

Of course. You have one for me, don't you?

DEBORAH

Well yes, but— You do?

JIM

You didn't think I came over here to play "Bullshit" with Byron, did you?

DEBORAH

Where is it?

*Jim crosses to the tree and picks up the smallest of his three presents, hiding it behind his back.*

JIM

Guess.

*It's a game which embarrasses and confuses her, but she guesses. He pretends she has guessed the wrong hand, grimaces in fun, then hands her the present.*

JIM

Merry Christmas.

*She takes it gingerly, as though she might break it. He picks up another present.*

JIM

And this is for Susan.

*(picks up one last present, handling it gingerly, as though he might break it.)*

And this is ... for Laird.

DEBORAH

*(intent on her present)*

You even wrapped it yourself, didn't you?

JIM

Of course.

DEBORAH

Laird had the store wrap his.

JIM

It's nothing much.

DEBORAH

Oh no, it's a lot. It's the thought that counts. That's really true, it IS the thought that counts. Laird got me this baby doll nighty and these panties that—

JIM

Oh, my my my my my my my!

DEBORAH

Oh Jim, what a stupid— I mean, to just blurt it out like that, you're going to think I'm crazy.

JIM

Oh, Dr. Freud, would you step in here please?

*(she laughs)*

He's turned out to be quite the guy, hasn't he?

DEBORAH

Jim, don't—

JIM

What happened? What happened between you, what HAPPENED to him?

DEBORAH

Oh, you know, Jim, he just—

*(tries to wave it away)*

JIM

Deborah, he slammed the door in your face! He was like—

DEBORAH

That's just ... He's sorry now.

*(fingers the ribbon on her gift fondly)*

Gee, Susan's going to go just wild when she finds that present tomorrow.

JIM

*(gesturing to Deborah's present)*

Open it.

DEBORAH

Do you mind if I don't?

JIM

What? Never?

DEBORAH

Not while you're here. When I'm alone. Is that all right?

JIM

It's your present. Where's mine?

*(looks to the Christmas tree)*

*Deborah peeks out the front door, then goes quickly to her "special place" where she keeps her art things, a cabinet in the bookcase which she unlocks with a key.*

DEBORAH

Well, it's just from me, it's not from both of us. I mean, you can consider it from both of us if ...

JIM

That's okay.

DEBORAH

... you want. I did it as soon as Laird told me you were back in town, but I never dreamed you'd have anything for me though. Here.

JIM

*(hesitates before taking it)*

Why were you hiding it?

DEBORAH

Well ... I didn't want Laird to see it.

JIM

Why?

DEBORAH

Well because ... you know.

JIM

Deborah, don't you think that's being a little—

DEBORAH

Oh no, he'd get really jealous.

JIM

Of me? We've known each other since third grade!

DEBORAH

No, he would. And you can't ever tell him. Promise.

JIM

No, I don't promise.

DEBORAH

*(hesitates, then with a laugh)*

Come on, open it quick, before he gets back.

JIM

*(as he fiddles with the ribbon)*

What is it?

DEBORAH

Oh, just something. Well, it's nothing really, but you'll think it's cute. Just tear it, the paper's not worth saving. I had to be careful opening the ... Laird's gift, so I could tape it back up and he wouldn't know, but this is just—

*(rips the paper off for him)*

—oh, it's just such a stupid little thing. I'm embarrassed now.

JIM

Oh, it's a little picture book.

DEBORAH

Uh huh.

JIM

Did you do this yourself?

DEBORAH

Uh huh.

JIM

Just for me?

DEBORAH

Uh huh. Well no, not really, no. I mean I wrote it when I was a kid, but I kind of redid it, and all the pictures are new.

*(gathering up the wrappings)*

See, some of them are pretty good.

JIM

They are! They're so ... delicate. You should get them published.

DEBORAH

Oh sure!

JIM

*(reading the title)*

"The Legend of Nothing."

DEBORAH

*(excitement escaping)*

Yeah, it's about this beautiful princess named Leola, but everyone nicknames her "Nothing" because that's what she'll get when the king dies —nothing— Because the kingdom goes to her brother, Prince Brae.

JIM

Bray?

DEBORAH

Yeah, b-r-a-e. Brae.

JIM

Brae. Based on any jackass I know? Oh Dr. Freud, step back in here—

DEBORAH

(laughs) Stop it.

*(goes into the kitchen to throw away the wrappings)*



JIM

*(turning to the last page and reading)*

"And so to this day, if you hear a baby cry, and ask its mother why, the mother will reply, 'Oh, she's just crying for Nothing.'" Cute.

DEBORAH

*(returning, deeply hurt)*

You read the last page.

JIM

Sure. You, uh, you opened Laird's present ahead of time.

DEBORAH

But it's ruined now.

JIM

No, it's not.

DEBORAH

Oh, Jim, I wanted to give you something special but—

JIM

This IS special.

DEBORAH

You've been so good to me. You're the only one who ever just listened. Just talked. And listened. (laughs) Mostly talked.

JIM

Well Deborah, you're a very beautiful woman.

DEBORAH

Oh, sure.

JIM

You see what I'm talking about! You throw it away as fast as I give ...

DEBORAH

I'm sorry.

JIM

... it to you. You ARE beautiful, you ARE talented. You make YOURSELF his victim! You ask for it!

DEBORAH

I know, I'm supposed to be "assertive"!

JIM

Yes!

DEBORAH

Well, I am! I rolled four gutterballs in a row tonight. And I looked him right in the eye too.

Jim has to laugh. Deborah joins him. They hear the sound of Laird and Byron returning.

LAIRD

*(offstage)*

You told me it was Oklahoma!

BYRON

*(offstage)*

No, I did not! It was New Mexico, wasn't it?

LAIRD

*(offstage)*

That's not what you said. You said Oklahoma.

DEBORAH

Oh, hide it.

JIM

Deborah, no, I—

DEBORAH

No, shh, put it in your coat.

JIM

I won't.

*Deborah goes quickly up the stairs with her gift from Jim in her hand. As Laird and Byron noisily come in the front door, full of good-humor, Jim considers and decides not to hide the book. Laird is carrying a bag of drinks and snacks.*

LAIRD

Here we are!

BYRON

*(behind him)*

Well then, if I said Oklahoma, it WAS Oklahoma!

LAIRD

*(to Jim, holding up an already opened bottle of Jim Beam)*

We broke the cherry on the way.

BYRON

Just to keep off the cold.

*(takes the bottle from Laird as Laird begins taking out the snacks)*

I'll relieve you of that.

LAIRD

Where's Deb?

JIM

Uh, she went up to check on Susan, I think.

LAIRD

Hey Deb! We're back, booze is on! What are you drinkin', Jim?

JIM

I've had my limit.

LAIRD

Aw, come on, don't be such a wimp.

BYRON

Give him another brandy. He's been swillin' it all night.

JIM

No thanks, really.

LAIRD

*(getting Jim's glass)*

Straight?

BYRON

A little ice, but not much. He ain't interested in drinkin' water, right Jimmy?

JIM

I won't drink it, Laird, I'm telling you.

BYRON

Sure he will, it's Christmas!

LAIRD

Hey Deb!

BYRON

Can't let that girl out of your sight.

LAIRD

As my old dad used to say, give her an inch, she'll take six.

BYRON

No, that ain't it. That ain't how it goes.

LAIRD

Sure it is.

BYRON

No, it ain't. It's the one about beauty. Say, whose old dad is this, anyway?

LAIRD

Okay, how's it go then?

BYRON

Beauty ... as my old dad used to say, Beauty is only six inches deep.

*(Laird and Byron snort.)*

Right, Jimmy?

JIM

Like father like son.

LAIRD

Damn right. Deb!

JIM

Laird, aren't you afraid you're going to wake Susan, howling around like a—

LAIRD

*(handing Jim his drink)*

Naw.

JIM

I told you I don't want it.

*Laird thrusts the drink in his hand, then sits and takes a deep drink of his beer.*

LAIRD

Come on, you used to be able to drink all night, drink me right under the Goddam table.

JIM

Well, I've grown up a little bit.

LAIRD

Yeah? What's that feel like? Hey, look at you, you old son-of-a-bitch, God, it's great to have you back! How ya been? Hey, how come you never come over?

JIM

I come over. I'm here.

BYRON

Yeah, I was about to say he's here, ain't he?

LAIRD

You workin' out again or something. Jesus Christ, you're looking like the hulk.

JIM

Yeah, back at the old gym.

LAIRD

Yeah, old times, huh?

JIM

Yeah. Listen, I thought maybe you'd like to come along with me sometime.

LAIRD

Naw, huh uh.

JIM

It wouldn't cost you anything, I mean I got a deal, you know, it was one of those twofer deals, I just happened to luck out. I thought we could, you know, we could set up a schedule and—

BYRON

*(with a nudge to Laird)*

Yeah, son, make it a regular date.

*Laird grins at his father but looks away, embarrassed.*

JIM

*(sensing himself the butt of a private joke)*

I just thought, you know, it'd be like ... old times.

LAIRD

No, no thanks, Jim, really. It's real nice of you to think of me, but thing is, I pump enough iron on the job, you know.

JIM

Yeah, sure, fine.

BYRON

Oh yeah, workin' iron is good, but Lairdy, he prefers that night work, layin' pipe.

*(He laughs. Laird joins him.)*

JIM

Oh, Jesus, Byron, shut up.

LAIRD

Hey!

JIM

Well, come on, Laird, that macho bullshit, it's a little demeaning to your wife, don't you think.

LAIRD

No one said anything about Deb.

BYRON

Yeah, as my old dad used to say, a man's sex life ain't necessarily in his castle.

JIM

Jesus. Methinks the ladies do protest just a little too much.

LAIRD

What?

JIM

Oh, nothing.

LAIRD

No, what'd you say?

JIM

You wouldn't understand, Laird.

*Jim turns his attention back to "The Legend of Nothing", flipping pages openly so that Laird can see.*

LAIRD

*(after a tense moment)*

You know, Jim, I really missed you. I forgot just how much I missed you.

*(gives a look to Byron)*

Say, how's your mom, Jim?

*(Byron snorts.)*

JIM

*(warily)*

Fine. Getting better, I think.

LAIRD

Good!

*Deborah comes back down the stairs. She has a little box hidden in her hands. It is Jim's opened gift.*

JIM

I'll tell her you asked about her, Laird. She'll be pleased.

LAIRD

*(jumping up, wrapping his arms around Deborah's waist)*

Hiya baby, where ya been?

DEBORAH

Oh, I was just ... upstairs.

LAIRD

What can I get you? A little vino blanco? I bought you some of that kind you like.

DEBORAH

*(slipping the box into her purse)*

Huh uh, I'm fine.

LAIRD

What you got?

DEBORAH

Just ... nothing.

LAIRD

Jim was just tellin' us all about his mom. Hey, tell us some more about your mom, Jim.

BYRON

Lairdy—

JIM

*(crossing to his jacket and putting it on)*

Well, Deborah, you may have to put up with him, but I don't.

BYRON

Oh, Jimmy, it's just—

LAIRD

What do you expect, Jim? You come bringin' your attitude in here and—

DEBORAH

Did something happen in here?

JIM

I'll take the insinuations off your father, but I'm not taking it off you.

BYRON

Lairdy, hush! Jimmy, Jimmy, it's just kind of funny, you know, 'cause you're a grown fella, and you got your mother livin' with you, that's all.



JIM

Laird's a grown fellow and he's got his daddy living with him. Let's talk about that.

BYRON

Oh, for cryin' out loud!

LAIRD

It's a lot different, you know, Jim.

JIM

How's it different?

LAIRD

If you can't see it, I'm not gonna point it out to you.

BYRON

Yeah, and it's like you said, Jimmy, chalk up your own goo.

*(to Laird, putting himself between them)*

That's Greek for mind your own business.

JIM

You know, Byron, I always knew you and Laird were chips off the same old blockhead, but I thought—

LAIRD

Hey! That's it!

DEBORAH

Jim. Jim—

*There is a bristling moment, which Jim finally breaks.*

JIM

Hell, I'm sinking to your level.

LAIRD

Then get out.

JIM

Yeah, goodnight. It's been charming.

*(on his way out the door)*

I'll call you later, Deborah.

DEBORAH

Sure.

BYRON

*(going after him regretfully)*

Jimmy, hey big fella, I hope that— Jimmy—

*But Jim is gone. Then, as Byron returns and pours himself a drink, Deborah begins angrily cleaning up putting away the groceries, while Laird throws himself angrily onto the couch and flicks on the TV.*

LAIRD

God, he's changed!

DEBORAH

What happened in here?

LAIRD

Oh, he just got mad 'cause me and Pip were laughing about him and his mom.

DEBORAH

What about him and his mom?

LAIRD

You know, a guy his age movin' in with his mom.

DEBORAH

She's an invalid. His father is dead. What do you want him to do?

LAIRD

Let him hire a nurse for her.

DEBORAH

To satisfy you?

LAIRD

Well, let him— I don't know, I just want him the way he used to be, not so goddam sensitive. Jesus! The year's go by ...

BYRON

Oh yeah, them years, they'll do it.

LAIRD

... people change. You know, I just wish ... it'd all just stay like it was. Hey Pip, you remember that black Mustang Jim used to have?

BYRON

Oh yeah, that was a sweet little automobile.

LAIRD

And me and Jim'd go double-dating in that Mustang, and Jim was going with Jennifer Wells, remember her? And Jim and Jennie'd take the front seat and me and ... me and whoever'd be in back.

BYRON

*(with a nod to Deborah)*

Lairdy!

LAIRD

Aw, that was before me and Deb. I been faithful to you, haven't I, babe?

*(puts his arms around her)*

I got the last of the good girls, had to fight her old man to get her, and I'm gonna treat her right.

*(filches a smooch)*

*The phone rings. Byron, closest to it, picks it up.*

BYRON

Dial-a-prayer. (beat) Oh, hi there, honey. (beat) Yeah, she's here, but can't you say hello to me first?

LAIRD

Who is that, mom?

*Deborah eases out of Laird's arms to finish her work and bring out her art things from her "special place" to sketch.*

BYRON

Well, don't you think that's a little childish?

*(Laird switches on the TV, listening with anger to Byron.)*

You ain't gonna give me even one kind word? (beat) How long you intendin' to keep this up, Inez? I can't stay with Lairdy forever, you know.

LAIRD

*(taking off his boots)*

You can too, Pip, and you tell her that.

BYRON

*(lowering his voice)*

Well, you know, I'm gettin' lonesome. Ain't you gettin' at all lonesome back? Inez? Honey? Okay, okay, I'll put her on. Oh say listen, honey ...

*(lowering his voice again)*

... I was wonderin' if you couldn't send me a little somethin'. (beat) Well, I spent it all. It's only till the first when my check comes in. (beat) Aw forget it, forget it, for cryin' out loud! (beat) No, you may not be deaf, but you certainly are dumb! Debbie, she wants to talk to you.

*Deborah takes the phone and Byron joins Laird on the couch.*

DEBORAH

*(nearly inaudible in b.g.)*

Hi. (beat) Oh, pretty good. (beat) Well, I think I got the last one bought yesterday. I didn't really like what I got for Lucy and Dave, but maybe they will. (beat) Oh no, no, sure, Christmas is for kids anyway. (beat) Sure, any time tomorrow is fine. Okay, see you then. (hangs up)

BYRON

*(meanwhile, in f.g.)*

She's makin' it awfulhard on me, son.

LAIRD

Hey, that's okay, Pip.

BYRON

Not a kind, not a happy word from her. She's makin' me pay for everything, all those old debts, those old slights, little things I didn't think nothin' of at the time, and now she's redeemin' 'em out of my soul, out of my soul and askin' payment in small change. I remember her when she was just a little girl on the ranch, hardly no bigger'n Susie. She'd go ridin' those crazy, wild horses, little tiny slip of a thing up there on those big animals, and here she is now ridin' me. You just never woulda thought, you know?

LAIRD

*(to Deborah)*

What'd she want?

BYRON

She wants to punish me.

DEBORAH

She's coming over tomorrow to drop off her Christmas presents.

BYRON

It's a sad season this year. Who'd'a thought?

LAIRD

*(pulling out his wallet)*

You need money, Pip, you don't have to go to her for it. What do you need, fifty, a hundred?

BYRON

Oh no, son, I was just testin' her, you know, to feel out how kindly she was disposed to me.

LAIRD

You got a home here as long as you want it. And you don't have to get down on your knees to that bitch or anyone else.

BYRON

Don't you talk about your mother that way, you hear me? All your life that woman's worked for you, and worked hard, give up everything she had for me, and for you and Lucy, and worked herself sick. And not so's you can be standin' here tonight trashin' her. Not in front of me. Not while I'm alive.

LAIRD

Okay, Pip, okay. Let's don't think about it. It can make you crazy.

BYRON

Oh, listen now, your mother and me's gonna get this settled between us any day now. You're not gonna get stuck with your old dad.

LAIRD

No, I mean it, Pip, it's great havin' you here. I just wish— you know, it's like old times, you know?

BYRON

*(starts to the table)*

Well, I know about these in-laws, Debbie. Don't you worry; she'll be callin' me up any day now, you'll see. Tell you what, remember my cousin Cholly? You remember Cholly, don't you Lairdy?

LAIRD

That little guy, yeah, with the fat wife.

BYRON

That's him. Cholly and Ella.

(to Deborah, who visibly pulls into herself as he approaches her)

Well, I'll tell you what about Cholly and Ella. When they got married, Cholly was about the ugliest character you ever wanted to see, uglier than me even. You believe that, Debby? Uglier than me.

*(Deborah smiles politely, keeps drawing.)*

You believe that? Uglier than me?

DEBORAH

*(manages a laugh)*

If you say so.

*Byron sits beside her, too close; she keeps smiling, but without looking at him.*

BYRON

Well he was, uglier than me even. But in those days, Ella was just about as pretty as they come, little tiny woman, looked like a China doll her features was that pretty and delicate. Well sir, at first Cholly used to beat that woman up somethin' awful. It was criminal. Ella'd do some little ...

*Deborah stealthily begins to slide her drawing away from Byron, and to cover it with her arm.*

... thing Cholly didn't like and he'd up-end her over his knee just like one of the kids and take a strap to her. Then the years went by and Ella put on weight and lost her looks while Cholly stayed as skinny as the snake he is, and now she's twice't his size, and she's the one beats up on HIM. But there they are, still together there. And that's love. And that's why old Inez'll be callin' me back. You don't just turn your back on forty years. It's only a matter of waitin' for her to make up her mind to it.

LAIRD

Well, if that's what you want, Pip.

*(to Deborah)*

Yo! You gonna sit there drawin' all night? It's bedtime.

DEBORAH

I don't think I could sleep yet. Why don't you go on. I'll come later.

BYRON

Tell you what, we could play some pinochle if you want. How about a game of cutthroat.

LAIRD

*(motioning to him to leave them alone together)*

No thanks, Pip. Think I'll call it a night. How about you?

BYRON

*(catching on)*

Yeah, I guess so. Guess I'm sleepier than I thought.

*(yawns hugely and starts upstairs)*

I'll leave you two lovebirds alone. Goodnight.

LAIRD

Goodnight, Pip.

DEBORAH

*(intent on her drawing)*

Goodnight.

*Laird watches her draw for a moment, then goes around the room turning off the lights, leaving only the light on above the table and the lamp near the couch. Deborah grows more and more uncomfortable. As he comes to sit beside her at the table, she closes up her sketch book and picks up the deck of cards to deal out a hand of solitaire.*

LAIRD

Sorry about, uh ...

*(she keeps playing)*

Hey, you're looking good, you know that? You looked good out on the lane tonight. Real good. You're puttin' on some meat.

DEBORAH

Yeah, I noticed that. I'm starting a new diet after Christmas.

*Laird picks up her sketch book and begins thumbing through.*

DEBORAH

Laird, don't— get them dirty now.

LAIRD

*(puts the sketch book back down)*

How come you never let me in any more?

*(she hesitates, then keeps playing)*

You, uh, gave Jim one of your little books, huh? He took it with him.

DEBORAH

Yeah! He brought Susan something, can you believe it! And something under the tree for you! And we didn't have anything for him.

*(lays down the last card in the game)*

Look at this, will you, all played out.

*(collects the cards and starts a new hand)*

LAIRD

You look like my mother sittin' there with those damn cards.

DEBORAH

Yeah, I felt like your mother tonight.

LAIRD

What do you mean?

DEBORAH

You know where that bourbon went, don't you? And that brandy that's been under the sink all year. I wish— I'm sorry you told him he could stay here.

LAIRD

He's my father.

DEBORAH

But it's so crowded. And it's not fair to Susan to have to give up her bed and sleep down here.

LAIRD

She's a kid, she can handle it.

DEBORAH

And you're ... different when he's around.

LAIRD

Deb, he's my father. He needs me. I'm not gonna throw him out too. I gotta put him up.

DEBORAH

But for how long?

LAIRD

As long as he needs me to.

*(playing cards off randomly)*

Whyncha make 'em all wild. That way you can play 'em off real fast.



DEBORAH  
*(correcting the cards' positions)*

Thanks!

LAIRD  
Why'd you go and cut your hair? It was so pretty.  
*(massages her wired shoulders)*  
Come to bed.

DEBORAH  
Laird, I'd just toss and turn. I'm not a bit sleepy.

LAIRD  
I don't want to sleep.

DEBORAH  
Well, I ...

LAIRD  
Come on. You said you'd be better.

DEBORAH  
I said I'd try. And I will try, Laird, but—

LAIRD  
Come on. You know how long it's been? Too long.

DEBORAH  
I think ... you might try too.

LAIRD  
Try what, babe? I'll try anything.

DEBORAH  
Oh ... you wouldn't understand.

LAIRD  
Goddamit Deb, don't— I'm sorry, baby, but you gotta give me something! Tell me what you want! You know me; whatever you want.

DEBORAH  
Well, just ... try to be ... gentle.

LAIRD

I'm gentle. See how gentle I am.

DEBORAH

You slammed the door in my face.

LAIRD

Aw, baby, I said I was sorry but you ...

DEBORAH

And Jim was right there.

LAIRD

... just made me so mad I couldn't think.

DEBORAH

And what about blaming—

LAIRD

Shhh, shhh, shhh. Look, see how gentle I am now, like a little lamb.

*After a moment she takes his hand, rubs it softly against her cheek.*

DEBORAH

When you're like this, I ...

*(kisses his hand)*

*Laird begins to make love to her. This can go rather far; his hunger for her growing more and more ravenous, her efforts to satisfy him growing more and more impotent.*

DEBORAH

*(finally, trying to pull away)*

All right. I'll just make up the couch and bring Susan down here.

*(starts to rise; he pulls her to him and kisses her again; she laughs)*

Laird, you have to let me go make up the couch.

*She pulls away and exits up the stairs. He taps out an exuberant tattoo on the tabletop with his fingers, then messes up her game of solitaire. He quickly pulls the cushions off the couch and pulls out the hide-a-bed, flopping down on it in a sexy pose as*

*Deborah comes back down the stairs. He has Susan's stuffed toy "Cookie Monster" in his hand.*

LAIRD

*(animating the "Cookie Monster")*

Cookie!

DEBORAH

(laughs) Get off.

LAIRD

You look good like that. Don't go on any diets.

*(caresses her playfully and roughly as she starts to make up the couch)*

I want you to get big.

DEBORAH

(laughs) Ouch, hey! You know, Laird ... you know what you could do while I'm making up the couch?

LAIRD

*(laughs, smooching her)*

Uh huh.

DEBORAH

Why don't you go shave?

LAIRD

Aw, Christ!

DEBORAH

Please, Laird. Your beard hurts. Please. You're just in the way now anyway.

LAIRD

*(starting angrily for the stairs)*

Okay, okay.

DEBORAH

And Laird. Laird ...

LAIRD

What?

DEBORAH

Why don't ... why don't you take a shower too?

LAIRD

Shit! Got any antiseptic? I'll just rub it all over.

DEBORAH

Well, you worked hard all day then you went bowling—

LAIRD

How about some chloroform? We'll just put you under for the whole horrible thing.

DEBORAH

Well, it IS horrible! You make it horrible! I have feelings too, you know, I shouldn't have to ask a thing like that. You never used to be this way, coming at me all hands, and dirty, and smelling, and out for your own pleasure—

LAIRD

No, and I never used to have an ice cube for a wife either. I never ...

*SUSAN, aged six, comes down the stairs dragging Annie, an old ragdoll worn out with love and abuse.*

SUSAN

Mommy.

LAIRD

... used to have to get down on my knees and beg for it. When was ...

SUSAN

Mommy.

DEBORAH

For God's sake stop shouting. You ...

LAIRD

... the last time you wanted ME?

DEBORAH

... woke Susan!

SUSAN

*(rubbing her eyes)*

There's spiders in my hair.

DEBORAH

Come here, let Mommy see. No there aren't. You're just having a nightmare.

SUSAN

Nuh uh. There was a black rabbit under my bed.

LAIRD

*(regaining control of himself; very gentle but playful with her)*

A black rabbit? If it was black, baby, how could you see it in the dark?

SUSAN

My eyes hurt.

LAIRD

Well you got sleep in 'em is why.

*(gently rubs near her eye)*

SUSAN

*(taking his thumb)*

This little piggy went to market. This little ...

LAIRD

Oh no, no, that's sneaky.

DEBORAH

Honey, it's late now.

SUSAN

... piggy stayed home. Come on, daddy, I'll be the piggy and you be the back. This little piggy had roast beef, and this little piggy ...

LAIRD AND SUSAN

*(as he kneels to let her onto his back)*

... had none. And this little piggy went ...

SUSAN

*(as he piggybacks her all over the room)*

... Whee! Whee! Whee! Whee!

LAIRD AND SUSAN  
*(as they sit, Laird tickling her)*

... all the way home.

DEBORAH  
*(finishing making up the bed)*

Okay, it's ready, come on now, shhh.

LAIRD  
Ooops, better be quiet now, or Mommy'll call the cops on us and put us in jail.

DEBORAH  
Laird!

SUSAN  
Nuh uh.

LAIRD  
Oh, yes sir, Mommy loves jail. If she doesn't lock you in, then she locks you out.

DEBORAH  
*(pulls Susan away from him)*  
Come on, honey, slide in here and keep warm.

*She puts Susan onto the couch under the blankets and returns to Laird to retrieve Susan's doll from him. He flings it into her arms and storms off up the stairs. Deborah, stunned, moves to dim the remaining lights so that only the lamp near the couch and the Christmas tree lights are lit.*

SUSAN  
Why is daddy mad?

DEBORAH  
Oh, just ... no reason. You know who's coming over tomorrow? Grandma. She's bringing your Christmas present.

SUSAN  
Another dolly?

DEBORAH  
*(takes her hairbrush from her purse)*  
I don't know. We'll just have to wait and see.

SUSAN

Grandma always gives me a dolly. I don't like dollies. I want G.I. Joe.

DEBORAH

Well, G.I. Joe's a dolly.

SUSAN

Nuh uh, he's a action toy. I don't like dollies.

DEBORAH

What about Samantha? What about Annie?

*(teasingly grabs Annie away from Susan)*

Don't you like them anymore?

SUSAN

*(retrieving Annie)*

I don't like Grandpa.

DEBORAH

Sure you do. Everybody likes Grandpa. He's funny.

SUSAN

I don't like him.

DEBORAH

Now, do you want a song? Or a story about Nasus The Monster?

SUSAN

Spell Nasus.

DEBORAH

n-a-s-u-s.

SUSAN

Spell it backwards.

DEBORAH

*(with Susan joining her)*

s-u-s-a-n!

SUSAN

Susan The Monster!

DEBORAH

Nasus The Monster, Susan The Angel.

SUSAN

Susan The Monster!

DEBORAH

Now you're being silly. Which do you want, a song or a story?

SUSAN

Song.

DEBORAH

Which song?

SUSAN

Christmas carol.

DEBORAH

Which Christmas carol?

SUSAN

John Virgin.

DEBORAH

Which?

SUSAN

The one about John Virgin.

DEBORAH

John Virgin?

SUSAN

You know, round John Virgin, mother and child.

DEBORAH

(laughs) That's round YON virgin. Yon like yonder, over there; you know like Grandpa says sometimes, "It's over yonder."

SUSAN

Me and Grandpa gots a secret.



DEBORAH

A secret? That's nice.

*(singing, brushing and braiding Susan's hair the while)*

Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm. All is bright. Round John Virgin—

*(breaks off laughing)*

SUSAN

Mommy, don't laugh!

DEBORAH

I'm sorry.

SUSAN

Now you're being silly. I'm not going to fool with you no more.

DEBORAH

All right. *(singing)* Round yon virgin Mother and child—

SUSAN

What's a virgin?

DEBORAH

Oh, it's ... well, a virgin can be many things. In the song, the virgin is Mary, baby Jesus' mother, who was very pure and honest. *(singing)* Holy infant so tender and mild.

SUSAN

Mommy, that's too tight.

DEBORAH

If I don't make it tight, it'll come out in the night, and in the morning you won't be pretty. Little princesses must always be neat and pretty. *(singing)* Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.

*Deborah rises to do last tuckings and turn off the lamp.*

SUSAN

Can I tell you Grandpa and mine's secret?

DEBORAH

You're not supposed to tell secrets. They wouldn't be secrets any more if you told them.

SUSAN

I want to tell.

DEBORAH

Is it about Christmas? About a Christmas present?

SUSAN

No. Grandpa says if I tell, you won't let me play with him any more.

DEBORAH

Oh, grownups! Sometimes they just say things like that to make sure children don't ruin surprises. I don't think you better tell, okay? You can tell me after Christmas.

*(gives her a kiss and starts for the stairs)*

Nightnight. Sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs bite.

SUSAN

You can't go. You have to sing the rest of it.

DEBORAH

*(casting a glance up the stairs)*

Okay, but you try to go to sleep now.

*(lying down with her head in Susan's lap, fingering Annie's hair as Susan fingers Deborah's)*

Silent Night, Holy Night, Child of Heav'n, O how bright—

SUSAN

I told Daddy the secret.

DEBORAH

Did you? Did Daddy like it? (singing) Thou didn't smile ...

SUSAN

Oh, he just said nevermind and don't say anything.

DEBORAH

... when thou wast born. Blessed be—

SUSAN

Are you going to put Grandpa in jail?

*(Deborah breaks off from the song.)*

Can he still babysit me?

DEBORAH

Susan, what's the secret? What did you and Grandpa do?

SUSAN

Can I tell now?

DEBORAH

Yes. What did he do?

SUSAN

He touched me.

DEBORAH

*(a long moment, then very, very calmly)*

Did he? Can you tell me where Grandpa touched you?

SUSAN

It isn't nice.

DEBORAH

And you told Daddy— What did you tell— ?

*The stairway light comes on. Deborah freezes. Byron comes down the stairs headed for the kitchen.*

BYRON

Oh, Debbie, you still up? I just thought I'd get me some milk. Grandpa's little dolly.

*(going into kitchen and pouring a glass of milk)*

The image of her grandmother! How you doin', darlin' ?

SUSAN

Hi Grandpa.

BYRON

*(takes a drink of milk, makes face at Susan who giggles)*

Brr, it's cold.

*(gets the Jim Beam)*

Well, maybe I'll just put a little fire in this. Man could catch his death goin' to bed on cold milk.

*(to Susan)*

Pretty late for little monsters to be awake, idn'tit?

SUSAN

I'm a angel.

BYRON

*(coming to the sofa, playing with Susan's toes)*

You sure are, honey, the sweetest little angel on Satan's side of Heaven.

SUSAN

Who's Satan?

DEBORAH

Susan's been having a nightmare. I'm ...

BYRON

Oh, honey— !

DEBORAH

... going to sleep down here with her tonight.

BYRON

Goodnight then, angel doll. Give Grandpa kiss nightynight.

*(collects a kiss, Deborah pulls Susan gently away from him)*

Oh, that's sweet sugar! Goodnight now, you two.

SUSAN

Goodnight, Grandpa. Don't let the bedbugs bite you.

BYRON

*(singing as he starts upstairs, taking the Jim Beam bottle with him)*

Oh Susannah, oh don't you cry for me, I'm off to Alabama with a bedbug on my knee.

SUSAN

*(after he's gone)*

Mommy, if Grandpa—

DEBORAH

Hush. Baby, hush.

SUSAN

*(hushes a moment, then:)*

But if—

DEBORAH

Shhhh. Shhhhhhhhhhh.

*The lights dim out.*

END OF ACT I

ACT II

*THE SCENE: The same, early afternoon of the next day, December 23. The bed clothes have been folded from the night before and are lying neatly on the armchair, Annie the doll on top of them. The table has cereal bowls and cartons of cereal and milk on it.*

*After a moment, Deborah and Jim enter through the front door. Their manner is furtive.*

DEBORAH

*(calling upstairs)*

Byron? (to Jim) I'm sure he's not here. He always goes out during the days. Some bar I guess.

JIM

You'd better check.

*(she goes up the stairs; Jim goes to the phone, dials)*

Hi, Robin, it's Jim. What's on for this afternoon? (beat) Good. Could you call them and cancel? I can't make it in.

*(beat, Deborah comes back down the stairs)*

Don't tell them anything. It's none of their business, is it? (beat) Okay, good. See you tomorrow. (hangs up)

DEBORAH

I'm getting you into trouble at work.

JIM

I think this is a little more important than Deirdre Dougherty's pimples, don't you?

*They laugh, then there is an uncomfortable pause. He might say something but she heads him off.*

DEBORAH

You want some coffee or something?

JIM

*(going into the kitchen)*

I'll get it. Sit down.

DEBORAH

*(sees jar of coffee on the table)*

Oh, it's out here, just turn the fire on. It's just instant. We never have it. It's for Byron.

JIM

Instant's fine.

DEBORAH

*(as always, trying to escape, evade)*

I could go get some.

JIM

Deborah, it's fine, really. Just sit down.

DEBORAH

You're being so good with me. And your mother! I'm sorry, Jim, I just had to get out of there. I couldn't say it in front of her.

JIM

You did just right.

DEBORAH

You're sure Susan won't be a problem for her.

JIM

It's good for her to have a kid around. They'll be playing cards all day.

DEBORAH

Yeah, till Susan teaches her "Bullshit".

JIM

*(a little laugh, then an uncomfortable pause)*

So. What are you going to do?

DEBORAH

I don't know.

JIM

Who else have you told?

DEBORAH

Just you.

*(This surprises him. She tries to escape to the kitchen.)*

Uh, do you take milk and sugar?

*(remembers milk carton on the table)*

Oh, the milk's warm; I left it out. But it's probably still good, don't you think?

JIM

Deborah! What are you going to do?

DEBORAH

You keep asking me that; I don't know.

JIM

If I keep asking, maybe you'll come up with an answer. What are you going to do?

DEBORAH

What's best for Susan, that's what I want. I don't want her life ruined by this.

JIM

Could she have been lying?

DEBORAH

Lying? Why would she lie about something like this?

JIM

Making it up then. Playing pretend?

DEBORAH

No, I know when she's making things up. It happened, all right. It happened.

JIM

What did you tell her?

DEBORAH

I didn't know what to tell her.

JIM

What DID you tell her?

DEBORAH

That ... uh ... I don't think I said anything.



JIM  
*(watching her carefully)*

You must have said something.

DEBORAH  
No. I told her to hush! See, it was late, I wanted her to go to sleep! And this morning I wanted to get her out of here before Byron got up, so no, we didn't talk any more about it.

JIM  
Did she sleep with you last night?

DEBORAH  
I slept with her. Laird was so mad when he found me down here this morning. He thought I was ... uh ... that I ...  
*(waves it away)*

JIM  
What?

DEBORAH  
Nothing.

JIM  
Stop it. What?

DEBORAH  
Oh, that I was using Susan, I guess. To protect myself.

JIM  
From him? Why didn't you tell him about Byron? Why did you come to me?

DEBORAH  
Because Laird already knows.

JIM  
What?

DEBORAH  
Susan told Laird before she told me.

JIM

My God, what— what, what are you saying?

DEBORAH

He told her not to say anything to me about it.

JIM

She told you this?

DEBORAH

Yeah.

JIM

No, no, uh ... she must have meant—

DEBORAH

Jim, she said, "I told Daddy the secret and he said not to tell anybody about it!"

JIM

Oh, God!

DEBORAH

*(suddenly overwhelmed, fighting panic)*

What am I going to do?

JIM

Deborah, I can't— I'm sorry, this is— You've got to get help.

DEBORAH

Who?

JIM

I'll get you names. There are places you can go.

DEBORAH

No.

JIM

They deal with this.

DEBORAH

No.

JIM

Take Laird with you.

DEBORAH

He won't go.

JIM

What do you want! You want me to be your doctor and just fix it up for you? I can't! These people know about—

DEBORAH

No they don't!

JIM

You know I have to report this..

DEBORAH

To who? Why?

JIM

It's a state law. All doctors are required to report cases of child abuse within thirty-six hours.

DEBORAH

But ... but ... you're not that kind of doctor. It's not your business.

JIM

I'm a doctor.

DEBORAH

You're—

JIM

I'm a doctor! It's a law!

DEBORAH

But you can't! Please, Jim. Please. I wouldn't have told you!

JIM

Of course you would have. Who else do you have?

DEBORAH

Please. You don't have to. No one else knows.

JIM

Deborah, think about Susan! What if—

DEBORAH

I'll stop it, I will!

JIM

*(considers a moment)*

How far has it gone between them? What's Byron done to her exactly?

DEBORAH

Just ... touching I think.

JIM

"Just" touching? He touched her? Or did he make her touch him?

*(she shudders)*

Deborah, it always begins with "just touching"! If you turn your back on "just touching", you think ...

DEBORAH

I won't.

JIM

... he's going to stop? It leads to rape. Recurring rape.

DEBORAH

*(after this sinks in)*

What do I do?

JIM

Confront them. First, tell Laird. Tell him everything. Then tell Byron every—

DEBORAH

But you don't see! They already know everything!

JIM

They don't know **you** know.

DEBORAH

What difference does that make to them? If Laird already knows and isn't doing anything about it, it must be because he ... he ...

JIM

Why?

DEBORAH

I don't know! How can he not do something about it! How!

JIM

If Laird hasn't stopped it, you've got to. Get that old man out of here!

DEBORAH

I'm afraid of what Laird might do.

JIM

*(finally shouting at her)*

What choice do you have! She's your little girl!

DEBORAH

*(shouting back)*

Oh you're right, of course you're right, you're always right!

*(moves away from him)*

I'm sorry.

JIM

That's all right. Okay, you handle it. You'll get him out?

*She laughs suddenly, a hint of hysteria in it. He is surprised, but laughs too.*

What are you laughing at?

DEBORAH

I don't know. (laughs harder) I just suddenly thought of Mrs. Allen!

JIM

Mrs. Allen?

DEBORAH

You don't remember Mrs. Allen? Psychology? (laughs) And what she'd say if she could hear us, talking about something like this!

JIM

*(moving to her, taking her hand gently; she is greatly affected.)*

Deborah. You have all my support. Whatever I can do.

DEBORAH

I ... I opened your present last night while you were down here with Laird and Byron.

JIM

Did you like them?

DEBORAH

Oh yeah! But they're too beautiful. And, and they must have been very expensive.

JIM

They were my mother's. She doesn't have much use for earrings these days. It was her idea to give them to you.

DEBORAH

How sweet. How good. I don't think— huh!

JIM

What?

DEBORAH

Oh, I remember a few things my father gave me. A doll, little sort of ragdoll he made himself with, like, frayed rope for hair. Buttons for eyes. I don't remember my mother ever giving me a thing. Those earrings will be ... my treasure.

*She kisses him on the cheek, a shy, tender kiss. He puts his arms around her and kisses her back. It becomes passionate. They break from it tentatively, both surprised. There is a long moment when anything might happen next. Finally he goes to his coat and picks it up.*

JIM

I should go.

DEBORAH

Jim, I ... I don't suppose ... You couldn't stay with me when I talk to Laird? You couldn't help me?

JIM

Deborah, if you're going to do it, you have to do it yourself. I'd just get in your way; you can see the way Laird feels about me now. He's— God, he's changed. God.

DEBORAH

But Jim, if—

JIM

And Deborah, what just happened, it's ... it's not—

*The doorbell chimes twice, Inez's chime. They both start guiltily. Deborah goes to the door and looks out the peephole.*

DEBORAH

(whispers) Oh, it's Inez. You don't have to go, unless ...

JIM

No, I have to.

*Deborah opens the door and INEZ enters carrying three gifts in a bag.*

INEZ

Merry Christmas.

DEBORAH

Yeah.

INEZ

Did you see how pretty it is outside?

DEBORAH

No, is it? Inez, you remember Jim Rutledge?

INEZ

Jimmy Rutledge? Right field! Shoot! You back in town!

*(to Deborah)*

Made the sloppiest catch I ever saw. Came runnin' up for a little blooper fly, took a tumble and fell right on his face.

JIM

I caught it, didn't I?

INEZ

You sure did, came up wavin' that mitt with that ball in it, just seein' stars.  
Laird said it was the best catch of the season.

*Jim gets his present to Laird from under the tree, smiles to Inez.*

INEZ

What's that?

JIM

That mitt. I thought Laird might like it, for old times. He always—

INEZ

He always admired that mitt. Kept after me, he had a perfectly good mitt of his own, but "I want a mitt like Jimmy Rutledge." I said, "Jimmy Rutledge's father's a doctor." Where was I goin' to come up with money for a mitt like that? Well, he's got one now, doesn't he?

DEBORAH

You gave Laird your mitt?

JIM

Yeah, just a ... kind of sudden inspiration, you know.

INEZ

That's gonna make his day, Jimmy.

JIM

Well, listen, I was just on my way out.

INEZ

*(taking off her coat and gloves)*

Don't let me chase you off. I'm just runnin' here on my break and runnin' right back. I got 'em stacked and circlin'. Bet we'll be goin' till nine tonight. I got me a beauty shop over here now.

JIM

*(edging toward the door, jingling his keys)*

Oh yeah?



INEZ

*(sitting, kicking off her shoes and massaging her feet)*

Yeah, these old dolls comin' in to get cranked up for the holidays. I just got through with Old Lady Hoyle. What a mess. She's about bald. She has bleached and streaked and teased that hair till she ain't got nothin' left. Looks like that first little baby doll I gave Susan, that little one she calls Samantha that she's yanked almost all the hair out and the plug holes just showin' through all over. I tell you what, Debbie, some day you sit down with that Samantha and try to make her pretty again; that's what Old Lady Hoyle expects me to do with her every time she comes in. So anyway, Jimmy, don't rush off 'cause I gotta dive right back into it.

JIM

No, I was going anyway. I have my own work to dive back into. So Deborah ... I'll take care of that little package for you, and you let me know when you're ready to pick it up, okay?

DEBORAH

Oh, yeah. Thanks. I just— Thanks.

JIM

Bye.

*(exits)*

INEZ

Good seein' you again, Jimmy.

*(a bit suspiciously.)*

Well, seems like he turned out just fine, didn't he?

DEBORAH

Oh yeah, seems like it.

INEZ

Is, uh, idn't Byron here?

DEBORAH

No. He's out somewhere.

INEZ

Oh.

*(waits for more, then:)*

Well, here are the gifts.

*(placing them beneath the tree)*

DEBORAH

Oh, that's so nice.

INEZ

Now I want you to understand, I kept you and Laird exactly equal to Lucy and Dave, but since I allowed twenty-five dollars for each grandkid and since Lucy's got— —oh, and of course I got Susan— (whispers) —where is she?

DEBORAH

She's out ... playing.

INEZ

I got her another doll. And wait till you see this one; she does everything but the four minute mile, and I sewed her up a little bride outfit to boot. But anyway, with Lucy's three kids, her family naturally gets more money, but I ...

DEBORAH

No, I understand that, of course.

INEZ

... can't do a thing about that. If you want to even it up, you and Laird can just go have a coupla more kids, that's all. That's the fairest I can make it.

DEBORAH

*(picks a package out from under the tree)*

And here's yours.

INEZ

It's ... such pretty paper.

DEBORAH

I hope you like it.

INEZ

I'm sure I will. Thank you. I don't suppose there's anything there from Byron.

DEBORAH

Oh, he pitched in on that gift.

INEZ

*(reads from the card)*

"To Inez, from Laird, Deborah and Susan."

DEBORAH

I didn't put his name on it because I thought he'd want to write it in his own handwriting.

INEZ

That's okay, Debbie. After all these years I'm used to it.

*(takes back one of the three gifts)*

I guess I'd better take this one back then. I knew not to get him anything in the first place. I just figured maybe this time ... Oh well, I better get back.

*(gathering up her things)*

Listen, he said over the phone last night something about running short.

*(pulls a bill out of her purse)*

I don't want him takin' out of your purse, so here, give him this.

*(Deborah shakes her head and won't take the money. Inez tosses the bills onto the table and starts for the door.)*

Tell him it's his Christmas present from me.

DEBORAH

Inez—

INEZ

Oh say, could I steal Susan away Christmas night? There's gonna be a service down to the church and I want to take all the grandkids. I know Laird and Lucy won't want to go, and Byron ain't set foot in a church since the crucifixion.

DEBORAH

Uh ... let me think about it, okay?

INEZ

It'll only be a coupla hours, and I told Lucy I'll pick—

DEBORAH

Let me think about it!

INEZ

*(takes a moment, rises to Deborah's sharpness)*

All right, you think about it. I'll give you a call.

*(starts for the door again)*

DEBORAH

Inez. Would you stay a minute. I want to talk to you about something.

INEZ

It's Byron, isn't it?

DEBORAH

He has to go.

INEZ

Oh, I knew that. I wondered how long it would take you to find it out. So tell him to go.

DEBORAH

Laird wants him to stay.

INEZ

Guilt. Jealousy. Laird always worshipped Byron —who knows why— always wanted to come first with him, but Byron always favored Lucy, wouldn't cast Laird a sideways glance. But just let him go down to the park and toss him one measly little ball and, "Oh boy, me and Pip's playin' catch!" Oh, don't worry, give him time, Laird'll get fed up too.

DEBORAH

There is no time. He's got to go. Today.

INEZ

So pack him up and send him off. I did.

DEBORAH

Where to?

INEZ

Let him go to Lucy's. Wear HER out for a while.

DEBORAH

No, I ... I can't let him go there.

INEZ

Why not?

DEBORAH

She's got three kids. I ... don't think that's fair to Lucy. That's enough to take care of.

INEZ

You want me to take him back, don't you?

DEBORAH

I know it's asking a lot, but—

INEZ

It's askin' too much. All the years I put up with that man's drinkin', it's far too much. Drinkin' away Laird and Lucy's future —they might have gone to college, who knows— drinkin' away the food off the dinner table, runnin' from job to job. He's with that stuff like an old sow at her slops. I coulda had better, I want you to know that. But it was my own fault for fallin' in love with a no-good ... (fighting back tears) ... happy-go-lucky ... worthless ... sparkplug. That's what Grandma used to call him, "that sparkplug". Grown man didn't even have an eighth grade education. Well, I'm not gonna take him back. I haven't got all that many years left to me, and I want some peace. I earned it. I'm sorry, Debbie, I'll have my peace.

*Inez goes out. Deborah stands a moment, holding Annie, then in a sudden fury flings the ragdoll at the door after Inez. She retrieves it instantly, and pets it, carrying it with her through the following.*

*All Deborah's actions now are irresolute. She rises, looks around the room, goes to the phone, picks it up, puts it down. She picks up the yellow pages, looks for a number, throws the book down. She looks around, turns on the Christmas tree lights, holds up the ragdoll as though to show her the lights. She turns on the radio.*

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Good afternoon, the name is Charlie Anchor and it's one minute past 12 noon on December 23, just two more shopping days till Christmas, don't forget me, please, as we head into today's "Journey Through Rock", with Gracie Slick, little girl with a big voice, shattering rock in 1967 with "White Rabbit".

*Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" fades up under his voice. Meanwhile Deborah puts away the yellow pages and clears the cereal cartons and bowls from the table and takes them to the kitchen counter. She returns to the phone, picks up the receiver, puts it back down. She picks up the deck of cards and sits at the table and begins laying out a hand of solitaire, trying to be calm.*

*At the lyrics "When the men on the chessboard..." she returns to the radio and turns up volume full blast, so loud it hurts. She moves to the music a brief moment, then returns to her game, playing more and more frantically, trying to keep the cards in neat piles. But she messes up a stack as she plays. She tries to neaten it, and messes it more. She begins slapping cards on the table, scrambling the cards. She sobs. She picks up the ragdoll and holds it to her face as she screams into the doll's stuffing. She puts her head down on the doll on the table and slowly quiets as the lights and music cross-fade in a time passage scene into evening.*

*After the lyric "Remember what the doormouse said..." the music cross-fades with "The Rose" at the lyric "...the lucky and the strong, just remember that in the winter far beneath the bitter snows, lies the seed that with the sun's love in the spring becomes the rose."*

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Bette Midler, wrapping up another Journey Through Rock. It's 4:59 and coming up we have Jesse Jones taking over with "Fly me to the Moon". Two shopping days until Christmas, and if any of you fans out there want to show your appreciation to a really fine DJ, the address is KTLA Sacramento, and the name is Charlie Anchor. Thanks for listening. Merry Christmas to you all.

*Meanwhile Laird enters the darkened room just after the change of time is announced. He is dressed in work clothes. He is hard, cold, brittle, his hurt from the morning and the night before having cankered during the day. He stands in the doorway for a moment, looking at Deborah, then turns off the blaring radio and turns on a light, dropping his car keys on the table.*

*Deborah awakens, startled, disoriented.*

LAIRD

What're you, nuts, blaring the radio? Sittin' here in the dark? You sick?

DEBORAH

Just ... thinking.

LAIRD

*(going to refrigerator for a beer)*

Where's Pip?

I don't know. DEBORAH

Where's Susan? LAIRD

We ... have to talk. DEBORAH

Oh yeah? What's for dinner? LAIRD

It's ... uh ... I haven't ... DEBORAH

Shit! Goddam it, Deb, I'm hungry. I been out there workin' all day and — LAIRD

Please, please Laird ... it's so ... there's something— DEBORAH

Okay, okay, talk; you wanna talk, talk. LAIRD  
*(gives her a moment but she can't speak)*

I thought you wanted to talk.

Byron moles— DEBORAH  
*(breaks off, can't pull it together)*

What? LAIRD

Byron molested Susan. DEBORAH

What do you mean he molested Susan? LAIRD

He molested her. DEBORAH

*The following dialogue is delivered very tentatively by both.*

LAIRD  
What makes you say that?

DEBORAH  
She told me.

LAIRD  
What did she say, exactly?

DEBORAH  
She said he touched her.

LAIRD  
Where?

DEBORAH  
Through her panties.

LAIRD  
When? Last night?

DEBORAH  
Yeah, I think so. And before that too, I think.

LAIRD  
What else did she say?

DEBORAH  
I didn't want to push her about the details.

LAIRD  
Think she was lying?

DEBORAH  
You KNOW she wasn't lying! Why does everybody ask if she was lying!

LAIRD  
Wait a minute, what do you mean everybody? Who else have you told this to?

DEBORAH  
(beat) Jim Rutledge.



LAIRD

You told him this?

DEBORAH

I didn't know what to do. I had to get help.

LAIRD

Help? Why didn't you come to— you go to— you go talkin' this shit around!

DEBORAH

He'll keep it confidential.

LAIRD

For Chrissake, you don't even know for sure it even happened. She's just a little girl. You know how she makes things up. Pip just— he was probably just pickin' her up and he brushed her accidentally and she— When did she tell you this? Last night, right?

DEBORAH

Yeah, last night.

LAIRD

Yeah, right after— yeah, she probably saw me with my hands on you and her imagination got going, and out comes this story.

DEBORAH

*(watches him a moment in disgust and fear)*

What about the other time?

LAIRD

What other time?

DEBORAH

The time she told you.

LAIRD

What are you talkin' about?

DEBORAH

How long have you known?

LAIRD

What do you— what— What are you, going crazy on me, I don't know anything, what are you talkin' about?

DEBORAH

Sure you do. She said she told you.

LAIRD

Who, Susan? She never.

DEBORAH

Yes she did, she told me she did.

LAIRD

She didn't.

DEBORAH

She told me she did!

LAIRD

*(puzzling over it)*

She ... she—

DEBORAH

Why did you tell her to keep it a secret from me?

LAIRD

I never told her to keep any secrets from you!

DEBORAH

You told her that if I found out I'd tell the cops and they'd put Byron in jail.

LAIRD

I never did!

*(calling up the stairs)*

Susan!

DEBORAH

She's not here.

LAIRD

Where is she? I want her to tell me this herself.

DEBORAH

I don't think that's a good idea.

LAIRD

Where is she?

DEBORAH

She's at Jim's.

LAIRD

Aw Christ!

*(gets the car keys off the table)*

Come on, we're going for her.

DEBORAH

You better not. If you do, if you bring her back and Byron's still here, Jim'll call the cops. He said he would.

LAIRD

Goddam it! Okay then, call her.

DEBORAH

I don't think—

LAIRD

You call her. Someone's lyin' here.

DEBORAH

I don't want her put on the spot. If we make a big issue out of this—

LAIRD

If we make a big issue! It IS a big goddam issue. That kid's callin' my dad some kind of ... pervert, and you're callin' me a liar.

*(looking through the address book)*

What's Jim's number? Oh, I got it, I remember. Uh, no, I lost it.

DEBORAH

All right, but let me do the talking. I don't want you yelling at her. What do you want to know?

LAIRD

I'll talk to her.

DEBORAH

No, let me do it. You'll be too rough. She'll know something's wrong. She'll feel guilty and she's got nothing to be guilty about. None of this is her fault and I'm not going to let you make it seem like it is.

*(beginning to cry, her first tears)*

She's just a little girl. That's all she is, a little girl.

LAIRD

*(softening somewhat)*

I can talk to her all right. I won't make a big deal of it, I promise you. But I gotta know what she said.

DEBORAH

I told you what she said.

LAIRD

I gotta hear it from her. I got the right, I'm her father after all. You think I'm gonna hurt her? She's my little girl too.

DEBORAH

All right. But let me talk to her first.

LAIRD

*(hands her the phone)*

Okay here.

*(Deborah dials.)*

No, man, no, I can't believe this!

DEBORAH

Hi, Mrs. Rutledge, it's Deborah. *(beat)* Oh, pretty good. How's she been? *(beat)* Good. That's sweet. Uh, can I talk to her for a minute? *(beat)* Oh yeah? Thanks.

*(to Laird)*

She says Susan went out and brought back in all the neighbor kids. Jim's there, too.

*(into phone)*

Hi sweetheart, it's Mommy. You having a good time with your new friends?

LAIRD

*(reaching for the phone)*

Here.

DEBORAH

Wait now!

*(into phone)*

He did? Well, next time you just do it right back to him. Listen honey, remember the talk we had last night? (beat) No, about Grandpa, remember? Well, Daddy's here and he wants to ask you a few questions, all right?

*(Laird reaches for the phone; she pulls back)*

Well no, he only has a couple of questions, it's all right. Just tell him what he wants to know. All right? Okay, here's Daddy.

LAIRD

Hi baby, how ya doin'? (beat) Yeah, well he's a real nice man, isn't he? Sweetheart ... sweetheart, listen! Your mom says that Grandpa put his hands on you. Did you tell her that?

DEBORAH

Laird—!

*Laird waves her to silence while he listens to Susan's response.*

LAIRD

She says you said you told me about it. When was this, Susan?

*(beat, trying to be patient)*

No baby, no, she says you told ME about it. Do you remember telling ME about it?

*(beat, more impatiently)*

No, she says you said I told you to keep it a secret or she'd bring the cops down on Grandpa. Now did you say that or not?

DEBORAH

*(trying to wrest the receiver from him)*

Laird, stop it.

LAIRD

Susan, you said it or you didn't. Now if you're lying to your mother— Deb, cut it out!

*Deborah pulls the telephone cradle unit away from him and depresses the button, disconnecting him. He reaches for the cradle but she backs away from him.*

LAIRD

Goddam it! Give me the phone. Give me the goddam phone!

*He raises the receiver as though to hit her, and she falls to the floor away from him. He stands stock still a moment, horrified at himself. Then he puts the receiver to his ear, finds he has been cut off, and throws the receiver to the floor. She picks up the receiver, listens to make sure it is disconnected, then hangs up. He paces angrily, kicking furniture and sweeping dishes into the sink, the tension unreleased.*

LAIRD

(finally) Some day, Deb, you're gonna make me kill you.

DEBORAH

*(still on the floor)*

That's why I didn't want you to call. It doesn't matter what she told you. She said one thing, you understood something else. You're not lying, I see that now, but neither is Susan.

*The phone rings. Neither moves to answer.*

That's Jim.

LAIRD

Deb, he's my father. He wouldn't do that. Let's just forget it. Let's just forget all this ever happened.

*Deborah unplugs the phone. She stays on the floor for the entire scene, while Laird paces more and more frantically around her.*

DEBORAH

We can't. They can't be left alone together ever again. He has to get out.

LAIRD

What'll we tell him?

DEBORAH

We'll tell him why.

LAIRD

Oh no, no, I can't do that to him. All right, all right, we won't leave them alone any more, no more babysitting. We'll watch. We'll be careful.

DEBORAH

How close will you watch? You don't believe it happened! He has to go. And we have to tell Lucy and Dave.

LAIRD

Why!

DEBORAH

They have kids!

LAIRD

Deb, he's an old man! All he's got is family! He loves Susan, you know how he loves her. If we tell him this it'll kill him.

DEBORAH

We don't have any choice. It's Susan or Byron, and to me that's no choice. He'll find ...

LAIRD

No, we're not doing this to him!

DEBORAH

... a way to get to her, he'll do it again and again, he won't stop now he's ...

LAIRD

Did Jim tell you to say this?

DEBORAH

... started and t'll get worse, he'll go all the ...

LAIRD

Did Jim tell you— ?

DEBORAH

...way. Laird, he'll rape her!

LAIRD

No!

DEBORAH

He will, I'm telling you he will!

LAIRD

What the hell makes you such a Goddam expert!

DEBORAH

Because my father raped me!

*There is a stunned moment as both of them are taken by surprise. Then she careens on like a crazed fighter delivering blow after blow to a dazed opponent.*

The first time when I was eleven! And after that any time he could get me alone, he'd do it again! When my mother was in the hospital! Or weekends he'd take me down to his office! He even sent her on a trip once, back east to visit her cousin, so he could have me all to himself! Even sometimes when she went to the store, when there wasn't time for more, he'd just paw me, he couldn't keep his hands off me! Once in the car at the post office, she ran in ...

*Now she slows, remembering this one, the ultimate betrayal.*

... to buy a stamp, the motor was running, he reached over the back of the seat, and right there in the car, in plain sight of her, he put his hand up my skirt. I could see her where she was standing in line, she turned to talk to a neighbor, she smiled.

*A moment as this memory sinks into both of them.. Then she picks up the phone and plugs it back in.*

Well, I'm not going to smile.

*(dials)*

Jim, hi. (beat) Uh no, no, just disconnected somehow. Uh, listen could you ... could you keep Susan a while longer? (beat) No, please, it's a long story, but if you could—

*(finally begins to cry weakly)*

—no, please Jim, don't! Please, I'm doing it, I am. Please. (beat) Thanks. Thanks a lot. Uh, could I talk to her again?

*There is a brief beat. She looks for the first time at Laird. He is crumpled.*

Hi honey. (beat) Yeah, something must have broken at the phone company. Listen, Daddy says to tell you he remembers now, and it's all right. (beat) That's right. And, and, and Jim wants to know if you can stay over there a little longer so you can play with your new friends. Would you like that? Well good, okay then. You have a good time, and if you get tired, Jim'll show you where to sleep, and, and I'll see you later.

LAIRD

Say goodbye for me.

DEBORAH

And daddy says to send you a big kiss.

*(makes a kissing sound)*

Okay, I'll give it to him. Bye.



*She hangs up; waits for him to say something. But he doesn't.*

DEBORAH

Could you ... get me an aspirin please?

*He goes to the kitchen. She tries to rise from the floor, but has no strength; Laird returns with an aspirin and a glass of water.*

Thanks.

*He stands above her as she takes the aspirin, then takes the glass from her and puts it on the table. He uprights the chair he kicked over in his anger. He puts the phone back in its place.*

*Deborah watches him covertly all the while, still waiting for him to say something. Finally:*

Are you all right?

LAIRD

Yeah. I'm just ... Why didn't you go to the police.

DEBORAH

They'd put him in jail. He was my father. And I was so stupid! I was so stupid that when it first started I thought all the girls did it for their fathers. And then I'd listen to them talk, Sandy Green and Laurie Adams, all about their boyfriends and their stupid dreams, and I thought, no. It's just me. And him.

LAIRD

Why didn't you tell your mother?

DEBORAH

I tried to! Lots of times! But she didn't want to hear. Oh, she knew all right. See— you know how you always said how could she walk out on us like that, how could a mother leave her family— well, she didn't walk, she ran. As soon as she knew he had me, and she could run and he wouldn't go after her, she left me to him. (sobs) I kept waiting for her to come back and get me.

LAIRD

You coulda run too.

DEBORAH

Laird, he'd have found me, he'd have ... he'd have hit me, he'd have killed me, he said he would. You remember the way he was.

LAIRD

Did he ... do everything?

DEBORAH

Yeah. Everything.

LAIRD

It ... it must have ... (gently) How many times?

DEBORAH

What difference does it make?

LAIRD

(surprised) How many times?

DEBORAH

Laird—

LAIRD

How many times!

DEBORAH

There's no telling over the years! After my mother left, it was all the time, any time he wanted me!

LAIRD

(a soft moan, really) No.

DEBORAH

At nights sometimes, I still remember lying there in the dark waiting for him —I knew he'd come— sweating, the sheets sticking to my body. Maybe I'd fall asleep, but I'd hear that door open, and he'd be there like out of a nightmare.

LAIRD

(the same moan) No.

DEBORAH

Do you ever have a dream in slow motion, going on and on? His hands ... his hands were so ... gentle at first, so cold and gentle and slow, and then ...  
(shudders)

LAIRD

(kneels beside her)

Why didn't you ever tell me?

DEBORAH

I ... I didn't ...

LAIRD

*(waits for more, then:)*

Maybe you liked it.

DEBORAH

I hated it! I hated him! He touched— the way he touched me— his hands— his body—

LAIRD

Shut up. I don't want to hear any more about his hands and his ...

DEBORAH

I hated him. I hated him!

LAIRD

... his body. Why didn't you run then? Your mother ran. Why didn't you?

DEBORAH

Where? Where could I go? Who would have me?

LAIRD

Anywhere. Anyone would be better than him.

DEBORAH

I was only eleven! I was just a little girl.

LAIRD

The first time. But you stayed with him after that, didn't you? You stayed with him right up till the day he died.

DEBORAH

He wouldn't let me go. He said he'd kill me if I left him. He said he'd smother me with the pillow. He said ... he said ...

LAIRD

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!!!

*(gets his coat)*

I'm gonna bring Susan home.

DEBORAH

*(snatching the keys from where he put them earlier)*

No. She's not coming back here until he's gone. You've got to get rid of him.

LAIRD

Gimme those keys.

DEBORAH

*(backing away from him)*

Think. Think what you're doing to her.

LAIRD

Give 'em to me.

DEBORAH

Don't do this to her.

*Laird grabs her wrist and they struggle over the keys. When he does get them from her, she hits out at him furiously, pommeling him. Laird finally begins to hit back, and it becomes less a fight for the keys and more a fight for revenge. Deborah gets by far the worst of the fight, but Laird does not go unhurt as she beats at him savagely. Finally he gets her onto the couch where he hits her again and again across the face. She tries to shield her face with a pillow.*

LAIRD

Why didn't you fight him! Why didn't you fight! Why didn't you run!

*Byron bursts in the door, having heard the fight from outside.*

BYRON

*(pulling Laird off her)*

Laird, stop it! You'll kill her.

*(helps Deborah sit up)*

Come on, honey, sit up sweetheart or you'll choke. Are you all right? I'll get you a towel. You just sit right here.

*(to Laird as he goes into the kitchen)*

Don't you go near her. You touch her again and I'll beat the devil out of you.

*Byron wets a couple of towels in the sink. Laird and Deborah, meanwhile, catch their breath and come in some measure back to sanity. Both are bleeding from the nose or mouth.*

LAIRD

You all right, Deb?

BYRON

*(returning, throwing one of the towels to Laird)*

Here, clean yourself up. I hope that's your blood and not hers.

*(to Deborah, as he approaches her with a towel)*

Here honey, here we go. You're gonna be—

DEBORAH

*(musters just enough strength to grab the towel away from him)*

Get away. I'll do it.

BYRON

What in the world is goin' on between you two.

DEBORAH

Sit down, Byron, we're going to have a talk.

LAIRD

Deb, shut up.

BYRON

*(storming towards Laird)*

Don't you talk to her like that!

DEBORAH

Sit down, Byron.

BYRON

*(sitting)*

Is all this about me? Are you two tearin' each other up like this over me? Oh Lord, what am I doin'? It's money, ain't it, I know it is. That devil money, it makes—

DEBORAH

It's not money, Byron. It's about—

LAIRD

You keep your mouth shut, Deb.

BYRON

Stop it now! I said stop it right now! I'll tell you what. Startin' on the first, on the first of every month I'll give you over a good part of my check, then I figure—

DEBORAH

Byron, we know about you and Susan.

*(long moment. Byron looks from Deborah to Laird. Laird watches his father intently.)*

Susan told us what you've been doing to her.

LAIRD

*(quietly, almost a plea now)*

Deb ...

BYRON

Shhh. Shhh. Lairdy, hush.

*(to Deborah)*

What do you mean?

DEBORAH

We know you've been doing ... sex ... things to Susan.

BYRON

How can you say that? I'm sick. That makes me sick. How can you think ...

I'd do that ... to Susan?

*Retching, Byron lurches up the stairs.*

LAIRD

*(following him up the stairs)*

Pip? Pip, you okay? Pip?

*(after a moment, comes angrily back down the stairs)*

Get out of here. Don't come back.

DEBORAH

I'm keeping Susan with me.

LAIRD

The hell you are. I'll kill you first.

DEBORAH

*(a beat; then manages with difficulty to get to her feet, defiantly)*

I'll just pack some things.

*(moves to the stairway, but he is blocking it)*

Why don't you get out of my way!

*After a tense moment, Laird lets her by. She circles him cautiously, then goes stiffly up the stairs. Laird stands below her, watching her go as...*

*...the lights dim out.*

END OF ACT II

For a possible segue from ACT II to ACT III, in order to keep from having the audience break here for intermission, see the other version of THE DOLLY - FRTC Version.

### ACT III

*THE SCENE: The same, Christmas morning, late. All the Christmas presents have been opened and scattered, their wrapping papers strewn about. There are fast-food containers, bags, a half-empty pizza carton and empty tub of Colonel Sanders' chicken on the table and kitchen counter. Empty beer bottles are everywhere.*

*As lights come up, Laird is stretched out on the couch, wrapped in Susan's blanket, still in his clothes from ACT II. Jim's mitt is beside him on the arm of the couch. Laird is watching TV and tossing cards one at a time into the lid of the panties gift box, his neck and shoulders taut as he asks himself, "What now? What now?"*

*After a moment, Byron comes down the stairs. He is disheveled, wearing his robe over the wrinkled clothes he wore in ACT II. He goes into the kitchen and gets a beer from the refrigerator. Laird watches him covertly.*

LAIRD

*(as Byron heads back for the stairs)*

That the last one?

BYRON

Yeah.

LAIRD

I'll get some more. There's a coupla them egg sandwich things on the counter. They're cold now.

*But Byron is already offstage again. Laird resumes his card tossing. The doorbell chimes Inez' chime. Laird rises to answer it, stops, thinks better of it, sits back down. Inez chimes again. Laird tosses another card. Inez tries the door, finds it open and comes in, sees Laird.*

INEZ

Didn't you hear—

*(stops as he tosses another card)*

Where is he?



LAIRD

Susan's room.

INEZ

*(calling up the stairs)*

Byron?

*(surveys the mess)*

Look at you. Byron, did you hear me? You better start thinkin' about comin' out of there. Hidin's not solvin' nothin'; it's all gonna still be here when you come out.

*(to Laird as she takes off her coat)*

What about you? You just gonna lay there tossin' them cards? Boy, she has really done it to the pair of you, hasn't she?

*(moves the trash from one of the chairs, trying to find a place to sit, but uncovering more trash below.)*

Did she say where she— did she— My Lord, Laird, how can you stand it!

*(going into kitchen to return with the garbage can)*

Coupla pigs the both of you! Look, see how easy? Garbage: garbage can. Fits right inside like they was made for each other. What's this? Colonel Chicken. You ordered out Colonel Chicken on Christmas Eve. I taught you how to cook. Your wife walks out and suddenly you're helpless? Suddenly you're bringin' home Colonel Chicken and livin' like pigs in a sty?

LAIRD

Pip and I haven't exactly been in the mood to cook, you know?

INEZ

Yeah, what mood is that, I'd like to know. You show me the woman who's ever in the mood to cook and clean and I'll show you a perfect little fool. But shoot, we do it for you, don't we? You just trough long enough and some fool woman, like your mother, will come in and clean you up. It's high time you called me, I'll put a stop to her little highjinks. Look at these Christmas presents just—

LAIRD

Yeah, I shouldn'a said nothin', whyncha just go on home, I'll take care of this.

INEZ

You can't even take care of yourself! Look at these Christmas presents just layin' about gettin' soiled. Oh Lord ...

*(picks her bridal doll out of the clutter)*

... why did I bother? Twenty-five dollars, and all that time sewin', just so's you can open your daughter's presents ...

*(finds a spot on the dress)*

... and get a spot of Kentucky fried grease on the dress before she even sees it! Laird, I just made that dress!

LAIRD

I'll get the thing cleaned before I give it to her.

INEZ

I'll do it myself; you'd just make a mess of it. But you might have let the poor little thing open it herself, as if her Christmas ain't unhappy enough as it is. I could just cry for her.

LAIRD

Well, she isn't here; she's with her mother. It's Christmas and Christmas presents get opened on Christmas. If Susan wanted to open Christmas presents, she shoulda been here on Goddam Christmas.

INEZ

You shut up blamin' Susan, and usin' the Lord's name in vain, I'd be ashamed!

*(grabs the cards from him)*

And stop it throwin' these cards around!

*(on her knees picking up the cards)*

The first thing is get Susan back here. Debbie'll hit you for all the alimony she can get, you beatin' her up just like an animal, but they'll never give her Susan. If we bring out that story —

*(throws the cards into the lid of the panties gift box, sees the lacy panties and picks them gingerly out of the cards. She gives Laird a withering look.)*

You are such a sorry mess. You go to work yesterday?

LAIRD

I can't work. I can't even think.

INEZ

You call in sick?

LAIRD

No.

INEZ

You're gonna lose that job.

LAIRD

So I lose the Goddam job! All I can think about— when I keep thinkin' about it, I keep gettin' this picture of this old man and this little girl—

INEZ

I said stop it! I don't want to hear any more about that. I don't believe a word of it, I've known the man forty years, I've lived with him! I got eyes in my head, I can see the situation plain enough, and it's sick.

LAIRD

Mom, don't—

INEZ

The woman is sick. Any woman who beds down her own father—

*Laird breaks into sobs. Inez is struck dumb a moment. She goes to him, sits on the arm of the couch, tries to reach out to him, draws her hand back.*

INEZ

I guess it's love, idn'it? No accountin' for it.

*(reaches out again, touches his hair softly. He goes to her hungrily, puts his head in her lap, clutches her, crying like a little boy. She is very touched.)*

Tell you a story on your Pip. Oooh, wadn't he somethin' though! First time I ever seen him dressed up was a big harvest dance at the grange, first dance I was ever allowed to. Your Pip was just back from the marines, and I went lookin' for him. He was out in the middle of the floor when I got there, ooh just dancin' like a twister, hoppin' all over that floor, all spiffed out in black—I'd never seen him in nothin' but his farm clothes before— black pants, black silky shirt, pure white tie. He told me that night he was the best lookin' man in the county, and I guess I thought so too. He tried to slip his arm around me, but Grandma she had her eye on him and she yells clear across the floor, "You get your rascal hands off from around my granddaughter, you sparkplug you." Your Pip yells back, "I guess I can put my arm around my future wife."

*(Laird, who has quieted, laughs softly.)*

Everybody laughed. I sometimes wonder if he wouldn't been happier if I'd never married him. Or if I'd let him go that time he wanted to.

LAIRD

Why didn't you?

INEZ

You were just a baby, times were hard, I couldn't find a job, nothin' you could feed a baby on. And I'd sooner jumped off a bridge with you in my arms than ever gone back to that ranch. And the years went by, and then they were gone.

*They grow uncomfortable, so close. He pulls away from her lap. She pats his knee and moves away, taking the garbage can back into the kitchen.*

INEZ

Oh, don't you worry, baby, she'll be back, and I guess that's what you want. Where's she got to go to, who's goin' to take her? How much money's she got?

LAIRD

*(picks up the mitt, tamps the pocket)*

I don't know, coupla dollars.

INEZ

Laird, she's got Susan! You let her walk out of here without any money! Are they just out on the streets!

LAIRD

She didn't need any money. She had her faggot doctor friend.

INEZ

Who you talkin' about?

LAIRD

Jim Rutledge, he's a Goddam faggot.

INEZ

Jim—

*(starts to put it together)*

Shoot! She been with him these last two days?

LAIRD

Yeah, I guess so, I don't know.

INEZ

He tell you that, he's that way? Or she did, didn't she?

LAIRD

He didn't need to tell me, it's all over him.

INEZ

Shoot! When I came by here the other day, he was in here alone with her, and she was actin' all funny. And then she started in tryin' to get me to take Byron back. So that's what's behind this little stunt of hers.

LAIRD

It's not a stunt.

INEZ

That lyin' little tramp!

LAIRD

Don't you call her that!

INEZ

Can't you see nothing? She makes up this story—

LAIRD

You never gave her a chance. You never understood the first thing about us. Always on her back and telling her—

INEZ

And you so love blind that you can't see what's goin' on right in your own house. Why do you think she's makin' up this story about Pip? Can't you see what she's after? She says, "Oh, Susan —"

*Inez breaks off as the door opens with a tentative little knocking. Deborah comes in quietly, followed by Jim. There is a long moment as everyone adjusts to the instant change of tension. Inez withdraws quietly to the table and begins to sort the cards and deal out a hand of solitaire, all the while watching carefully.*

*Laird, shocked at the bruises on Deborah's face, goes softly to her.*

LAIRD

Oh, Christ baby, look at you.

*Laird would touch her, but she pulls away stiffly.*

DEBORAH

I came for Susan's presents.

*(sees the opened presents)*

Did you open them! Oh Laird!

LAIRD

Where is she?

JIM

Where's Byron?

DEBORAH

I'm not bringing her back here until—

LAIRD

*(to Jim, overlapping Deborah)*

What are you messin' in for?

JIM

I just came along to keep you off her and I'll ...

LAIRD

Oh yeah, well we don't need—

JIM

... tell you something, Laird, you're lucky it's you because if it was anyone else, anyone else!, I'd have you locked up right now for assault and battery, and I'd have Byron in jail for—

*(stops himself from saying more in front of Inez)*

I can't believe this, Laird, I just can't believe any of it.

*Deborah begins picking up the gifts.*

LAIRD

*(to Deborah)*

How is she?

DEBORAH

Not much of a Christmas. All those other kids were out playing with their new toys, and I didn't have money to buy her a thing.

JIM

Deborah I told you I'd loan you, I'd BUY the damn—

DEBORAH

She's got her own pres— ! Jim offered, he's been very sweet, but she's got her own presents right here, and she wants them. And you opened them.

LAIRD

Did she ask about me?

DEBORAH

She misses you. She said ... to tell you that. That she misses you.

LAIRD

Yeah, I miss her too. What'd you tell her?

DEBORAH

That you were sick and we had to stay away a couple of days.

LAIRD

She believe that?

DEBORAH

I think so.

*She stands with the gifts. Laird takes them from her and drops them onto the floor.*

LAIRD

These stay here.

DEBORAH

Please, please, Laird—

LAIRD

You go get her. You go bring her home

JIM

Laird, don't be such— You're like an animal!

DEBORAH

I'll never bring her back to this.

LAIRD

This is her home, it's Christmas, she wants to be home.

DEBORAH

Is Byron gone? Is he?

JIM

Get away from her!

INEZ

What did I tell you, Laird? "Is Byron gone? Is he?" Whose benefit do you think all this is for?

JIM

Did Laird tell you what's happened?

INEZ

He told me some sick story about Byron and Susan. Or tried to. I wouldn't listen.

*(to Deborah)*

Don't think you're gonna get away with this.

DEBORAH

He's got to go. And we're telling Lucy and Dave.

INEZ

You'll do no such thing!

DEBORAH

They have three kids; they've got to be warned.

INEZ

This stops right here in this room, do you hear me?

JIM

Inez, they're your grandchildren!

INEZ

It stops right here!

*Meanwhile, Byron has come to the top of the stairs.*

BYRON

*(to Inez)*

Hush. Honey, hush.

*All fall silent as Byron goes to Deborah. Laird and Inez draw away slightly. Jim moves to the door.*

DEBORAH

*(pleadingly)*

Jim ... don't ...

*(Jim stops, stays.)*

BYRON

I didn't do it, Debbie. I swear to God.



DEBORAH

Susan says you did.

BYRON

I didn't! I been up there thinkin' and thinkin' what makes you say this, 'cause I know I didn't do nothin' like that.

DEBORAH

I know you did.

BYRON

I didn't! I swear to God. I swear on my immortal soul. Inez honey, you don't believe this. You know me, the way I drink, sometimes I get in a bad way but... I'd sooner put this arm in fire than touch her like that.

INEZ

*(turning away)*

You stink like a brewery. Even now, oh, Lord!

BYRON

My soul is hangin' there but none of you is gonna believe me!

*Byron sinks into a chair, sobbing.*

INEZ

Don't you cry, stand up! Stand up, Pip!

*(to Deborah, as Byron tries to stand, but can't.)*

Why don't you just shoot him! I believe you, Pippy. I know you wouldn't do that. And don't you worry, she's not gonna do nothin' to you.

*(turns back to Deborah and Jim and attacks viciously ... not as a shrew ... but as a lioness might attack a couple of marauding hyenas, straightforward and deadly)*

And you're not stoppin' him from seein' Susan!

JIM

Inez, you have to think what's best for Susan.

INEZ

Where is Susan? Why isn't she here?

*(points at Deborah)*

All we've got is HER word for any of this. Let's hear Susan say it. IF she said it. You made all this up out of whole cloth, didn't you? You drug out your own filthy past and tried to fit it on Susan. A grown woman havin' sex with her own father, you think...

LAIRD

Mom!

INEZ

... we'd believe a word you'd say!

DEBORAH

*(to Laird)*

You told her that?

INEZ

Course he told me. You think he'd keep that from me? You're a fine one to be pointin' your ...

DEBORAH

*(to Laird)*

How could you?

INEZ

...dirty finger at Pip. He said you were doin' it for years, every time you were alone with the old man. Well you may get Laird ...

BYRON

*(to Deborah)*

Oh, honey!

INEZ

...to feel sorry for you with that rape story, but I'll never believe you didn't want it. You can ...

DEBORAH

No. No.

INEZ

... get raped once, but you don't get raped night after night, year after year. You got to ask for it. You got to want it.

DEBORAH

I didn't! He forced me!

INEZ

Why didn't you run away? Or go to the police?

DEBORAH

He said he'd kill me.

INEZ

Why didn't you kill yourself if it was as horrible as you pretend it was! I'd have ...

JIM

Deborah, my God!

DEBORAH

Jim, don't ... don't think—

INEZ

... killed myself, you bet I would! Ain't that right, Pip? Ain't that right, Laird?

BYRON

*(to Deborah)*

Oh, honey!

JIM

Why didn't you tell me? Why did you—

INEZ

Oh, she didn't tell you that? I guess she's not so pretty now, is she? Year after year after ...

DEBORAH

I was afraid you'd turn against me.

INEZ

... year. Her whole life is a lie. She got Laird on a lie, and now she's draggin' Susan in. I'll tell you ...

BYRON

*(starting for Deborah)*

Honey—!

DEBORAH

*(recoiling to Jim's side)*

Get him away!

INEZ

... something, little lady, and you listen hard to me. You're not gonna keep us from Susan. We're gonna see Susan any time we want, 'cause we're gonna take her from you!

DEBORAH

What are you talking about?

INEZ

There's not a court in this country would allow you to keep her, not with what you been doin'.

DEBORAH

You wouldn't take this to court.

INEZ

You bet I WILL take it to court. And we'll win. And Laird's comin' with us. Ain't that right, Laird?

DEBORAH

Jim?

JIM

Inez, you don't want to report this. If you go to court—

DEBORAH

Do you know what you're talking about! Susan would have to testify!

INEZ

Exactly, and she won't do that, will she?

DEBORAH

Yes she will, she will, because it's the truth. She'll tell it all.

JIM

Inez, think a minute about Susan up there on the stand! The lawyers asking her questions, the newspapers pick it up, Byron goes to prison—

INEZ

Just what do you know about this? Did Susan say anything to you?

JIM

No.

INEZ

Then shut up! I know what's goin' on between you two, don't think I don't. I guess Pip walked right into your little lovenest, huh? How long the two of you been shackin' up in here when Laird's off at work?

JIM

Inez, that's enough!

DEBORAH

Stop, you stop!

INEZ

And what kind of filthy ideas you been puttin' in Susan's head? What kind of lies you been tellin' her about Pip, you tramp!

DEBORAH

She told ME!

INEZ

She didn't tell you nothin'!

LAIRD

She told ME.

*Everyone turns in surprise to Laird where he has withdrawn, watching his mother's attack on his wife.*

INEZ

*(after a moment)*

What are you talkin' about? You said you haven't even seen Susan.

LAIRD

She told me before. Something.

INEZ

What do you mean, something?

LAIRD

I don't know, I was driving, I told her to shut up. I was driving, for Chrissake! You know how she's always jabbering on and on.

*(working back through his memory)*

I think ... it was something about a game.

INEZ

What kind of story you makin' up!

DEBORAH

*(to Inez)*

Be quiet!

LAIRD

Some kind of game Pip was playin' with her, and she didn't like it, that's all. That's what she—

*(realizes finally, looks at Deborah)*

—she told me. Aw, Christ, Deb, she tried to tell me and I wouldn't listen.

BYRON

Wait now, wait, she told me that same story, but it was ... it was about that little friend of hers, that little boy down the way, what's his name?

DEBORAH

Jason.

BYRON

Jason. That Jason. And Jason and her had a secret, she said. And I questioned her about it. And she told me they were playin' a game, a bad game. And I told her it was wrong and not to play it no more, and I wouldn't tell on her if she promised. And she did. She promised me she wouldn't do it again. And that's what she told you too, I think, Laird, wadn't it?

*They watch him a moment in silence, with disgust and pity.*

DEBORAH

You can't even admit it to yourself.

LAIRD

You did it, didn't you?

BYRON

No.

LAIRD

*(pulls him violently from his seat)*

I'll kill you!

*(but he hides his face in Byron's chest and begins to sob)*

Oh my God, Pip!

*(Byron clutches him, crying too. After a moment, Laird breaks away.)*

Get out! I said get out!

*Byron takes a step toward the door, but is lost, stops. Inez gets her coat and purse and, with resignation, gets Byron's coat.*

INEZ

Come on, Pippy. Let's go home.

*Inez holds his coat open for him; he slips into it; she opens the door for him; he goes out; she turns to Deborah.*

INEZ

(softly) Don't think I'm leavin' it at this.

*Inez follows Byron out. There is a moment as the tension readjusts; Deborah, Jim and Laird look at one another as if to say, "What now?" Then Laird rushes out after his parents.*

JIM

*(starting after him)*

Laird, let them—

*But Laird is already out the door. Jim turns to Deborah without really looking at her. He still has his carkeys in his hand. He shifts them from hand to hand.*

DEBORAH

Jim, I can't come back here. Could— would you let me stay on with you? No, don't say anything, don't say no. I'm not bringing Susan back here. But I don't have any money. And I don't know what to do anymore. You wouldn't have to keep us forever, unless—

*(at her most vulnerable, shyly touching him, grabbing at him really)*

—unless ... you wanted to.

*There is a tiny moment as she waits for him to answer; he starts to say something, but she rushes on, afraid.*

I'll get a job. Susan's in school now, so it won't be so hard to find work, and, and I'll take care of your mother, she likes me, you said so yourself and, and, and ...

*She stops herself, seeing the answer in his face.*

JIM

*(gently)*

Deborah, I—

DEBORAH

Of course, what am I saying, stupid me. Jim, I'm sorry. I do plan to get a job, but with you...  
*(her resentment moving from herself to him)*  
...of course, it's out of the question. Forget I ever said anything. (wryly) I'd just be running across town, wouldn't I?

JIM

You, uh ... you've been so strong. Don't—

DEBORAH

You're turning your back on me too, aren't you?

JIM

No, no.

DEBORAH

You are. Because of my father, aren't you?

JIM

No!

DEBORAH

I was a little girl!

JIM

You should have told me about that. I'd never have left you to do this alone.

DEBORAH

I got him out, didn't I?

JIM

Laird could have— He might have seriously hurt you! You need help. And if we report this now— I mean, I was supposed to report this within thirty-six hours. If we—

DEBORAH

You're just worried about yourself, aren't you?

JIM

Deborah, I broke a law! And look what happened because of it! You know what they can do to me?

DEBORAH

Tell them it was Christmas, everything was closed!



JIM

*(takes a moment, recovers)*

I ... I'm sorry about your father. I'm truly, very sorry. I can't even— Inez said years! All through ... all through high school?

DEBORAH

Yeah.

JIM

You should have got out of there.

DEBORAH

Yeah, that's what Laird said, that's what Inez said. When? When I was eleven?

JIM

No, of course not, but—

DEBORAH

When I was twelve? Thirteen? Fourteen? Fifteen? What's the best time, what's the optimum age, Doctor, for a girl to go out on the streets?

JIM

You didn't have to go out on the streets; there are places, foster homes where you could—

DEBORAH

Who would take me! A nice family! What woman would take me in her home, what man could be trusted with me. "You gotta ask for it, you gotta like it!" At least my father wanted me, at least he loved me. Me, he loved me. I just wanted him to stop doing that to me. Maybe Inez was right, I should have killed myself, maybe then you'd all forgive me.

JIM

Deborah, Deborah, it's not a matter of forgiveness.

DEBORAH

Oh yeah?

JIM

It's not your father. You want me to be some kind of hero, you want me to come swooping in and take you away, and make your life beautiful. I'm not a hero, Deborah. I've got my own problems, I've got my own LIFE, you know?

DEBORAH

Yeah, and you've got your mother, too, don't you.

JIM

Oh, Deborah, don't— come on, don't be like that. But yeah, I've got my mother. God, that's all I can do.

DEBORAH

Why did you kiss me ... like that?

JIM

I don't know. Because ... you wanted me to, because I don't know, I shouldn't have.

DEBORAH

Do you have any idea how it made me feel?

JIM

I'm sorry.

DEBORAH

You probably don't remember, but when Larid used to come over to your house and the two of you would play catch outside my window and ...

JIM

Sure, I remember.

DEBORAH

... and I used to sit in my window and watch you, and your mom would watch me through her window, just watch me, watching you. I would dream you were tossing my heart back and forth, but gently, you know, with love.

*(picks up the baseball glove)*

JIM

Yeah, he loved you so much. And then he'd start yelling and clowning around to make sure you were watching him.

DEBORAH

*(flinching at Jim's misunderstanding of whom she meant, but:)*

He was cute, wasn't he?

JIM

Yeah.

DEBORAH

And then you went away, and just Laird came.

*(laughs)*

My father'd go out and try to chase him off, but Laird always came back. And then when my father died ... uh!

JIM

You okay?

DEBORAH

Did you ever see anyone have a heart attack, all that pain, and all you can do is watch! One minute he was there ... everywhere ... and then he was gone. Your mom never told you this?

JIM

Told me ... told me what? About ... ?

DEBORAH

She was right there for me. She's the one got him off me. She never told you?

JIM

I ... I'm not ... understanding.

DEBORAH

Do you even remember when my father died?

JIM

Of course. I was in Boston. Laird called and told me.

DEBORAH

Yeah, I asked him to. I was standing right there listening, and he told you about the funeral, but you didn't come back.

JIM

Deborah, I wrote you, I was in the middle of finals, I couldn't come.

DEBORAH

No, you didn't come, I didn't even know how to find my mother to tell her, no one came. Just Laird. And your mom; she's so dear, and she kept it to herself, all these years. And Laird, he took care of it all for me. He did everything he knew how to cheer me up, kept making horns behind the funeral director's head. He was so cute, wasn't he? Truth now, Jim. No more lies, okay? Laird's the one you love, isn't he?

*(He doesn't answer immediately.)*

It's okay, Jim, you can't help who you love. Truth now.

JIM

Truth isn't simple like that. After so long, after all the things you teach yourself not to say, not to show, because you don't want him to find out, because he wouldn't know how to handle it, you get used to —

DEBORAH

You two didn't ever ... you know.

JIM

What difference does it make?

DEBORAH

Did you?

JIM

What in hell diff —

DEBORAH

Did you?

JIM

We were just kids. What difference does it make? Laird probably doesn't even remember, it didn't mean anything to him.

DEBORAH

It meant something to you.

JIM

It ... meant the world to me.

DEBORAH

I know the feeling.

JIM

Let me go, Deborah, just let me go home. You don't need me, look what you've done, you can handle your own life.

DEBORAH

Yeah.

JIM

Look what he just did for you. And Susan.

DEBORAH

Yeah. Go on home, Jim. No one'll ever know you were here.

JIM

*(starts for door, turns back)*

If, listen if you really want to get out, I've got some money put away. It's not much, but it could start you

DEBORAH

Yeah, thanks.

JIM

*(starts again for door, turns back)*

What about Susan?

DEBORAH

I'll come and get her.

*Jim opens the door. He finds Laird just outside. Jim draws back, startled. Laird comes in, and holds the door open for Jim.*

LAIRD

Take it easy, Jim.

JIM

*(starts out, turns)*

How were your mom and dad? Did you ... ?

*(Laird shrugs.)*

You two going to be all right?

DEBORAH

Sure.

JIM

Laird ...

LAIRD

*(opening the door wider)*

I'll call you.

*Jim goes out. Laird closes the door behind him, then throws the deadbolt home. Deborah jumps a little at the sound.*

LAIRD

*(wandering into the room)*

What are we gonna do? Deb?

*(She finally looks at him.)*

What are we gonna do?

*(She begins stacking up the Christmas presents again. Laird weeps softly.)*

Don't. Don't. Please.

*She goes to the door, throws back the bolt, but then just holds there there for a long moment, unable to leave.*

DEBORAH

*(finally)*

We could go for Susan. That's a start I guess.

LAIRD

*(beat, begins putting on his boots)*

Yeah, that's a good start.

DEBORAH

We're going to tell Lucy and Dave.

LAIRD

*(pauses)*

Yeah.

*(continues with boots)*

DEBORAH

Laird.

*(Her tone makes him stop.)*

What about us?

LAIRD

I don't know. I'll try.

*He goes to her and would embrace her but he's awkward and she's wary.*

LAIRD

You know, you know what we gotta do? We gotta wrap up these presents before we bring Susan home. Is there any paper left?

DEBORAH

In the closet in our room.

*He goes off up the stairs to return in a moment with wrapping paper and ribbons. In the meantime Deborah picks up the bridal doll and sits at the table with it, touching the veil gently, with wonder.*

*Laird comes back down the stairs, picks up his gift box of panties and hides it behind his back with a grin.*

LAIRD

Did you see this, what I got you?

DEBORAH

No, huh uh.

*Laird sees the doll in her hand and comes to her and fingers the dress. Shyly he moves his hand up to caress Deborah's hand.*

LAIRD

Mom says there's some grease on the dress. Can we get it out?

DEBORAH

Oh. I think so, but we'll have to do it later; she won't notice. It's all right for now.

*While Laird begins rewrapping his gift to her, Deborah puts the doll into its box and closes the lid. They pause, look to each other, both unsure. The lights dim out.*

THE END