

The Dolly

a drama in two acts by

Robert Locke

1983 FRTC version, produced by Front Row Theater Company

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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

This 1983 revised version of *The Dolly* was submitted in 1981 to American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco CA, when Larry Hecht, a director within ACT's Playwright-in-Progress, contacted me. At that time I was in the theater company of the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts in Santa Maria CA, and I remember Larry said to his assistant, "This Locke guy is going to be so surprised to hear from me."

Several years earlier Larry had directed a staged reading of my play *Who's Richard?* for ACT's original play program, and I had eagerly submitted to him my next play *Family Secrets*, which was the forerunner of *The Dolly*.

Surprised indeed I was to hear from Larry's assistant, and very glad; it had been many years since I had submitted *Family Secrets* to Larry. But having meanwhile rewritten *Family Secrets* — which I considered dead at ACT after such a long time without a single word from Larry— I asked Larry if I could send him the new script, now titled *The Dolly*. I had meanwhile had time to develop a more subjective view of *Family Secrets*, and I found I hated my writing in that first script. It was talky and didactic.

In *The Dolly* I added two characters, Junior and Darlene, to whom I had become quite attached. They not only brought some very nice and much needed comic relief into the piece, but they also broadened the theme of it. It was no longer merely an intense family story about incest and child sexual abuse, marching to its grim conclusion, but it was now more broadly a story about marriage —good and bad— and love.

But to my horror, Larry still wanted to do *Family Secrets*. He did not like Junior and Darlene. So now I asked Larry if I could rewrite the script, getting rid of Junior and Darlene, but also getting rid of all the terrible dialogue I had written for *Family Secrets*.

Larry agreed, and that's how there came to be two versions of *The Dolly*: the ACT version without Junior and Darlene, preferred by Larry Hecht, and this version preferred by Bob Locke and produced the same year, 1983, by Front Row Theater Company. Actually I confess that I do like both scripts, rather in the same way that I like both American coffee and espresso; they are quite different from each other, but still the same stuff.

Every time a new production offer came about, the new producer and director would always ask which version I preferred, and I would always tell them this one, and they would then choose to do this one. Probably smart of them. One of the audience members for the NYC studio production —including many people previously associated with ACT— came up to me after the play was over saying, "I can't imagine this play without Junior and Darlene to bring in some comedy. Jeepers!"

P.S. 2015 - I have incorporated into this 1983 FRTC version several ideas from later productions.

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
- JUNIOR — next door neighbor and co-worker of Laird
- DARLENE — girlfriend to Junior, a very sweet and genuine girl of few brains
but loads of sensitivity
- 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 Tuesday evening, December 22.

The outside door is prominent. It has a strong, loud deadbolt. Near the door is a reception closet. Another doorway leads to the kitchen; cabinets and a counter can be seen. Onstage are a dining table and four chairs, a telephone on a stand, a loveseat sofa, an ottoman on coasters, a stereo unit, a TV. There is also a small Christmas tree with gifts beneath. A stairway leads off to the bedrooms and bathroom, a child's drawings are taped to the stairway wall, obviously taped there 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 65 or so, a warmhearted jokester, and a very heavy drinker. Although he is never sober, neither is he ever quite drunk. Jim is 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, 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.*

BYRON

Count 'em up. What you got left?

JIM

(collecting the discards)

Deceitful old bastard.

BYRON

(from kitchen)

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

*(returning with a nearly empty brandy bottle and topping off his
bourbon)*

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. But anyway, I think I've got to be —

BYRON

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

JIM

No thanks, I really can't wait any longer. I shouldn't have even come by, but it's Christmas and I thought I'd catch them home.

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

(taking three gifts from the table and placing them under the tree)

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)

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

JIM

(dialing)

Brandy's fine.

BYRON

(going into kitchen)

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

(from kitchen)

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 home 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

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 Byron. You remember, Laird's father.

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. Mother, I'm here, I'll be late, just go to bed, goodnight.

(hangs up)

BYRON

(returns with Jim's drink, stirring it with his finger)

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. Huh?

JIM

Yeah, got it, deal.

BYRON

Two bits a card, fair warning.

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

So Lairdy's been talkin', huh? But sure, Inez is 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, places the draw cards between them with a flourish)

Losers go first.

JIM

One ace.

One little quacker.

BYRON

Pair of threes.

JIM

Bullshit.

BYRON

Damn!

JIM

(collects all the discards)

Four.

BYRON

How are things going here?

JIM

(as he sorts the new cards)

Oh, I'm doin' great.

BYRON

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

JIM

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?

BYRON

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

JIM

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

BYRON

What?

JIM

Oh, just nothing, but listen, when you ...

BYRON

JIM

No, what?

BYRON

... 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?

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, it's nothin' 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)

Contagious? 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

Why do you want to know, Byron? Who is 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, I don't think so. He don't believe in doctors much.

JIM

Well, chacun a son gout.

(taps table)

One seven.

BYRON

Jack off who?

JIM

Cha-cun-a-s...

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, hot shot, 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 of yours, it's not --the one with the problem -- it's not Laird, is it?

BYRON

Laird? You kiddin'? Like father like son, that boy of mine gets more nookie than a chinaman in a cathouse. He 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 Therapy?

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, with ad libs from Junior and Darlene.

LAIRD

(off stage)

Don't give me that shit! She did it on purpose! She had a big goddam smile on her face!

BYRON

What'd I tell you, any minute.

LAIRD, JUNIOR, and DARLENE enter in a jumble of overlapping dialogue and activity. LAIRD, late 20s, is dressed in the work clothes of a construction worker. JUNIOR, somewhat younger, is dressed snappily. DARLENE, early to mid-twenties, is dressed in tight pants and blouse with an eye toward revealing all her assets.

JUNIOR

Aw, come on, Laird, you know Deb —

DARLENE

(same time)

She was not smiling, Laird, I was watching too, she tried for you. She looked at you and smiled for forgiveness 'cause she knew she was letting you down? Why on ...

LAIRD

(same time)

Come on in, come on in and shut up, I don't want to hear it.

DARLENE

... earth would she roll a gutterball on purpose for?

LAIRD

She wants to see me lose.

DEBORAH appears in the doorway, but Laird slams the door in her face and throws the deadbolt.

LAIRD

You can just stay out there!

There is a moment of shocked silence during which even Laird is taken aback by what he's done. Then the jumble of dialogue begins again.

LAIRD

She can just stay out there.

JUNIOR

Come on, Laird, that's a little, you know, come on, let her in.

DARLENE

(same time)

Oh, Laird, honestly! This is it! Open the door and let her in! Honestly! You're acting like a big baby! Junior, make him open the door and let that poor girl in here!

BYRON

(same time)

Laird, what in the world happened?

LAIRD

(answering Byron)

Four gutterballs in a row. Screwed the whole goddam season!

JIM

(to Laird)

So for that you — ?

JUNIOR

Come on, Darlene, cool it. It's his wife, let 'em work it out, okay?

BYRON

Well, she didn't mean it, son.

LAIRD

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

DARLENE

Well, she's out there in the cold.

LAIRD

She's got a key.

JUNIOR

Sure, she's got a key. Let THEM work it out, huh, Darlene?

LAIRD

Oh, hiya, Jim. Jeez, two times in a week? And after all these years?

JIM

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

LAIRD

She's got a key!

(faces off with Jim a moment, then:)

Sit down, sit down, come on everyone and sit down. So, Jim, whatcha doin'? You want a drink or somethin'? Pip, you want to get us all something, I'm gonna check on Susan.

(as he heads for stairs)

She give you any trouble?

JUNIOR

(underneath)

Darlene, would you sit down? It's Laird's place, right?

DARLENE

(underneath)

I'm not going to can't sit down while she's out there.

(but sits anyway)

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 jerk so the door comes open a crack. Then he takes off up the stairs.

A moment of awkwardness among all onstage, waiting for Deborah to come in. Finally Jim is about to stand and go to the door, but Byron stops him with a gesture.

BYRON

Jimmy.

(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.

DARLENE

Debbie, hon, maybe you —

JUNIOR

Darlene, you want to just cool it, huh?

DEBORAH

(turns from closet, sees Jim)

Oh, hi.

JIM

Are you all right?

DEBORAH

All ... these years and ... it's tonight you come ... But sure, fine, but ... let me just ...

Deborah immediately turns herself to cleaning up the clutter of toys, ashtrays, drink glasses, and snack debris on the coffee table and kitchen counter.

LAIRD

(coming back down the stairs)

So, Jim, great to see you. Deb, did you say hello to Jim?

DEBORAH

I'm just ... I'll be back.

(goes into kitchen with her clutter)

JIM

Maybe we should all go.

LAIRD

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

JIM

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

JUNIOR

(same time)

I don't know, Laird, maybe —

LAIRD

No, look it's over, I said. Right Deb? I mean, I get pissed off, but she's good about it, you know.

BYRON

Lairdy's right. It's all over, we'll all just cool down and get sociable, here. I ain't even had the pleasure yet of this young lady's acquaintance, and that's not a thing I intend to miss out on.

The next dialogue happens with a general rush of relief and good-natured laughter; lots of overlapping. Audience focus should be on Deborah as she continues to straighten things up.

JIM

(to Deborah)

Should I stay?

DARLENE

I'm Darlene. I'm with Junior.

LAIRD

Yeah, Pip, this is Junior's latest.

JIM

Deborah?

DEBORAH

Huh?

JIM

Should I stay?

DARLENE

Latest? Well, I like that. It sounds like I'm in some sort of line or something.

DEBORAH

Oh, please do. I'm sorry. But all these years, and ... yes, please stay. Would you like ... ? Would you like ... ?

JIM

No, nothing, but you're sure?

JUNIOR

Yeah, whatcha tryin' to do, Laird, break up my romance?

BYRON

He'll do it, too, Junior, if you don't watch him.

LAIRD

This here's my dad, Darlene. His name's Byron, but we all call him the Pip.

DARLENE

Hiya, Pip.

BYRON

My pleasure, my dear, it's all mine.

DARLENE

See Junior, this is a gentleman. And I'll tell you, Pip, there aren't many left.

LAIRD

And this is Jim.

DARLENE

Hiya, Jim.

JIM

Good to meet you.

LAIRD

Me and Jim went to school together, played baseball for the Wildcats, didn't we, Jim? God, it's great to have you back! 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

How you been? You workin' out again or something? Jesus Christ, you're lookin' like The Hulk.

JIM

Yeah, back at the gym.

LAIRD

Like old times, huh?

JIM

Yeah. Listen, I thought maybe you'd come along sometime.

Byron and Junior exchange looks, snort softly.

LAIRD

Naw, huh uh.

JIM

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

JUNIOR

Yeah, Laird, make it a regular date.

(Byron snorts; so does Junior)

JIM

(sensing he's the butt of a 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

(to Darlene)

Jim's a doctor.

DARLENE

No kidding? You better watch out, Junior, I'm gonna trade you in for an educated man. Oooooeee, all these good-looking men. You live around here, Jim?

DEBORAH

(underneath) Byron, did Susan get off to sleep all right?

BYRON

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

JIM

Well, not too far.

DARLENE

You know Junior just lives next door here.

JIM

Yes, I know.

DEBORAH

(starts for stairs)

I'll just look in on her .

DARLENE

Oooooeee! I'll tell you what, we'll throw a party at Junior's for the whole unit. Debbie and me'll be hostess. You wanna Debbie?

DEBORAH

I'm just looking in on Susan. I'll be right back.

(goes off up the stairs)

LAIRD

Jim, sit! I'll just put on some music and we'll start the heavy drinking.

(looks through his music)

DARLENE

Susan, is that your little girl, Laird?

LAIRD

Umhmmm.

DARLENE

(gesturing to the drawings on the stairway wall)

She do all these drawings?

LAIRD

Yeah, Deb did the good ones though.

DARLENE

Susan, that's a nice name. Bet she's got a little button nose, huh?

BYRON

Looks just like her grandma when she was a little girl.

DARLENE

Aw, I bet.

(with a smile to Junior)

I love little girls. I want one of my own. I love 'em.

JUNIOR

I eat 'em up.

DARLENE

Stop it. So, Jim, you married?

JIM

No.

Junior snorts again. JIM turns to him, ready for a fight, but Byron is quick.

BYRON

Hey Lairdy, whyncha put on that Christmas album me and Inez give you last year?

DARLENE

Oh yeah, I love Christmas carols. It's my favorite time of year, Christmas is. Don't you just love Christmas, Junior?

JUNIOR

I get kind of sick of it. All those bells and shit.

LAIRD

(holding up an album)

This the one, Pip?

BYRON

Yeah, that's it, ain't it?

JUNIOR

Whyncha put on something we can dance to? I get the one with tits here.

DARLENE

Junior, honestly!

Deborah comes back down the stairs.

LAIRD

(putting on the Christmas album)

I don't think so, Junior. We gotta keep it down, you know, 'cause of Susan.

(to Deborah)

She asleep all right?

DEBORAH

I guess you woke her up. She wants to kiss you goodnight.

DARLENE

Isn't that sweet? Kissing daddy goodnight.

JUNIOR

Yeah, real sweet. You wanna give daddy kiss?

(receives peck from Darlene)

Nighty night!

DEBORAH

She's just on the edge. It'll only take a minute.

LAIRD

I'll be right back.

BYRON

Give her a little peck from her grandpa.

DARLENE

Come on in, Debbie. *(pats sofa)* Sit down. I love what you've done to your place.

DEBORAH

Thank you.

DARLENE

It's the same floorplan as Junior's, isn't it?

DEBORAH

Well, this is a two-bedroom. His is a one-bedroom.

DARLENE

But this room is the same, isn't it, with the kitchen, only backwards?

DEBORAH

Yes.

DARLENE

Well, you just wouldn't believe it. Just shows what a woman's touch will do. I keep telling Junior what he needs is a good woman to clean things up and just give ...

BYRON

No, I think we got more square feet than you, don't we, Junior?

JUNIOR

I don't know, Pip.

BYRON

I think we do. I think you'll find we do.

DARLENE

... the place that feminine quality. See Junior, your place could look like this.

JUNIOR

It's fine with me how it is.

BYRON

No now, more I think of it, I'm pretty sure we got more area here than you.

JUNIOR

You got a tape measure or ruler or something?

BYRON

(with a wink to Darlene)

Only a six-incher.

DARLENE

Oh you!

JUNIOR

Yeah? Well whip it out, why don't you, and lay it along that wall.

Junior and Byron guffaw. Darlene shows goodnatured opprobrium.

JIM

I don't think it's really fair to call it the woman's touch. I like to think some of the things I've done to my place are very nice.

DARLENE

Oh, I'm not saying the right kind of man can't be every bit as artistic and clean as a woman, but Junior's place ... !

BYRON

(with a wink to Junior)

And besides, Jimmy, it's really your mom's place, ain't it?

JUNIOR

Hey, how IS your mom, Jim?

DARLENE

Oh, are you the one who —

JUNIOR

(quickly)

Darlene!

(she stops, realizing)

You, uh, wanna hand me the peanuts?

DARLENE

(to Jim)

They, uh, the boys were telling me about this friend of Laird's who moved in with his mother. That you?

DEBORAH

She's an invalid. Jim takes care of her.

DARLENE

I think that's very generous. I think your mother should be proud of you.

LAIRD

Okay, all set for the heavy drinking! Deb, what are you doin'? What are you all, just sittin' here?

(gives Deborah a love pat, sending her toward the kitchen)

Come on, come on, let's make with the drinks.

JIM

I'll help.

DARLENE

(following Deborah to the kitchen)

Ah, ah, ah, we'll get the drinks. You men stay out here and do whatever you do to stay out of the kitchen. Don't you ever wonder, Debbie, how they manage before they meet up with us? They probably ...

The two women go into the kitchen. The next dialogue is hushed and hurried.

BYRON

Hey, Junior, where'd you pick up that piece of merchandise?

JUNIOR

Fuck! D'ya ever see a pair of tits any prettier'n them?

LAIRD

Those are what you call your perfect 36, right Pip?

BYRON

Yeah, and how are you ever gonna manage, Junior, with that little double aught of yours? You're gonna need help from a older, more experienced hand here.

JUNIOR

Don't you worry about me, you old fart. I manage okay.

BYRON

As my old dad used to say, beauty's only six inches deep, right Jimmy? Huh?

(Jim smiles, nods.)

Only in your case, Junior, I'd say it's more like only two, three inches at most.

JUNIOR

You old fart! I'll tell you though, remember Laird, this morning when I was late and you had to come bangin' on the door?

LAIRD

Yeah, and how about that, Junior! You're gonna get us canned.

JUNIOR

Yeah, yeah. You know what we was doin'? Darlene stayed over last night, you know, and this morning she gets me out of bed and she's screamin', "Junior, Junior, get up!" you know, "you're late!" you know. So I tear out of bed and shave, you know, cuttin' hell out of my face, and Darlene's out in the kitchen burnin' the fuckin' breakfast. The fuckin' eggs, the bacon, the toast, all black and scabby, except the coffee which is piss-yellow 'cause she only filled the

whatchacallit, top thing half-full, you know. So I run out to the lot and you're nowhere, so I'm waitin' and waitin' for you, turnin' into a fuckin' triple-decker fuckin' icicle, and I look at my watch and Darlene's got me up an hour early. So I go back in ready to kick ass, but Darlene's all laid out in bed for me, you know, all warm and juicy like a big Mac, so I jump in with her, you know, and start ridin' it, bam, bam, bam, you know, till she's screamin' for a fuckin' saddle, and she goes —

LAIRD

That's what you were doin' when I was waitin' out in the truck?

JUNIOR

Fuckin' A, and she goes —

BYRON

You're out in the cold shriveled up like a walnut and he's in the sack playin' hide the salami!
(hoots, Junior joining in)

DARLENE

(entering, leaning against the kitchen doorjamb)

Now that's a laugh I don't like the sound of.

(over her shoulder)

Debbie, what do you suppose these men talk about when we're in the kitchen?

BYRON

You better not come in here, little girl. We'll burn your ears off.

DARLENE

I just bet. Grown men acting like a bunch of highschoolers. Laird, Debbie wants to know what you did with all the booze. You turning alchy on us?

LAIRD

It's in there on the liquor shelf.

DARLENE

He says it's there, Debbie. So Jim, you're not getting yourself mixed up with these bad boys, are you?

JIM

They're not so bad.

DARLENE

They're not so good. Look at the three of them. Just like highschoolers. You got the right idea, Jim. You just stay with your mom.

LAIRD

(in all innocence)

Hey, Jim, how IS your mom?

Junior and Byron laugh openly. LAIRD laughs too, not knowing just why.

JIM

Look, Laird, maybe Deborah has to put up with your shit, but I don't. I've been taking ...

LAIRD

No, Jim, no, sorry, what are you talking about?

JIM

... insinuations all night from your father and from your friends, but I'm not taking it from you.

BYRON

No, Jimmy, you got it all wrong. We're just, it's just, it's what we saw the other day, remember Lairdy? The little old mom? You were there, Junior, at the cafe, and the little old man and his mom?

JUNIOR

Oh yeah, Jesus! Darlene, shit, this was too much!

LAIRD

Aw, Christ! Jim, you shoulda seen this, you'da cracked up. Do it for Jim, Pip. Hey, Deb!

BYRON

You gotta help. You do him and I'll do her.

(trying unsuccessfully to ease Jim into a chair)

Sit down, Jimmy, sit down. Little old lady, and I mean she was old, Methuselah old ...

Laird brings Deborah in from the kitchen, sneaking an arm around her and filching a kiss. Deborah, confused, keeps her eyes on Jim. Darlene follows.

LAIRD

Okay, okay. Deb, you gotta see this.

BYRON

... and she's on the arm of her son, little old gentleman 95 at bottom guess, and he's took her out to dinner out on the town, don't you know, and they're leavin' the cafe, takin' these feeble mincey steps —come on, Lairdy, do him now— these mincey steps ...

(Laird, laughing, falls in beside Byron)

... and her about ten times more weak and knobbly-kneed, so he's got to hold the old gal up — come on, Lairdy, stop your foolishness, hold me up— and they get to the parkin' lot, about five hours later, and they got this little curb there, don't you know, two, three inches high! And she goes ...

(pantomimes getting over the curb)

... gets over it finally, then they get to the car ...

(pulls up dining table chairs, one with Jim's coat on hanging over the back)

... here's the car...

Jim jerks his coat from the chair and starts to put it on.

JIM

Sorry, I don't think any of this is very funny.

LAIRD

Aw, come on Jim, you didn't even let him finish, for Chrissake! Where'd your Goddam sense of humor go to!

DEBORAH

Did something happen in here?

BYRON

Oh, 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 laugh about that.

BYRON

Oh, for cryin' out loud!

LAIRD

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

JIM

How is 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 block, but I thought you at least had brains.

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)

Sorry, Deborah. I'll call you later.

DEBORAH

Sure.

BYRON

(going after him regretfully)

Jimmy, hey big boy, I hope that ... Jimmy

But Jim is gone.

JUNIOR

Jeez, that guy gives me the creeps.

LAIRD

God, he's changed! He used to ... God!

JUNIOR

I just don't like havin' queers around me. I get all kind of shivery, you know, like he's gonna, you know —

DEBORAH

Why do you say a thing like that?

LAIRD

Aw, come on, Deb, how dumb can you be?

DEBORAH

Why do you say that!

LAIRD

A guy his age, moves in with his mom.

DEBORAH

She's an invalid. His father died. 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. Jesus, the years go by and ...

BYRON

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

JUNIOR

He's soft and gooey alla time, for Chrissake. He's like a woman, for Chrissake. Ever notice the way he looks at you, like he's gonna, you know —

LAIRD

... people change on you.

DARLENE

He wasn't looking at you, Junior, he was looking at Laird.

LAIRD

(snorts)

Sure!

JUNIOR

He was too lookin' at me! I looked over there and he was lookin' right —

DARLENE

You didn't see, Laird? He couldn't take his eyes off you.

LAIRD

Listen, me and Jim were best friends. We used to go double-dating. He had this black Mustang, remember that, Pip? And Jim ...

BYRON

Oh yeah, that was a sweet little automobile.

LAIRD

... was going with Jennifer Wells and ...

BYRON

Jennie Wells, goodlooking girl.

LAIRD

... Jim and Jennie'd take the front seat, and me and ... whoever'd be in back.

DARLENE

(with a nod to Deborah)

Laird!

LAIRD

Aw, that was before me and Deb. I been faithful to you, haven't I, babe? Hey Deb, for Chrissake, where's the booze?

(encircles Deborah with his arms)

What do you have to do to get a drink around here?

DEBORAH

(starting for the kitchen)

I've got water on for coffee. I'll see if it's ready.

LAIRD

Coffee? Did anyone here order coffee, for Chrissake?

DEBORAH

(at kitchen doorway, without turning)

It's coffee or straight mixer.

LAIRD

You scared we're gonna get drunk, Deb? How about something hard to put in it?

DEBORAH

There's nothing left. I'll get the coffee.

LAIRD

Wait, wait, what do you mean? I told you to get some Jim Beam for Pip. Where is it?

DEBORAH

There's nothing left.

(pause for this to sink in)

I'll get the coffee.

LAIRD

What are you sayin'? You forgot it?

DEBORAH

Yes, all right. I forgot it.

LAIRD

Aw Christ, Deb! You knew we were havin' people here tonight.

DARLENE

That's all right, Laird. We can just have coffee, can't we, Junior?

LAIRD

That's not the point. The point is she was supposed to get it and she didn't.

DEBORAH

I'll get the coffee.

(exits into the kitchen)

LAIRD

What about that brandy under the sink? Bring that out for the coffee, for Chrissake.

BYRON

(holding up the near-empty bottle)

Oh, I scouted that out for Jim already, but the boy drinks like a Saint Bernard.

DARLENE

(softly)

Laird, don't yell at her like that, hon. It only makes things worse.

LAIRD

Yeah, yeah.

DARLENE

Look, we're just gonna go, okay Laird? Okay, Junior?

LAIRD

No, come on, let's don't —

DARLENE

No, 'cause we should anyway, right Junior? 'Cause we want to have some time together.

JUNIOR

Yeah, and I gotta get up in the morning and all.

LAIRD

Well, so do I.

JUNIOR

Yeah but, you know, Darlene and me, uh, you know, uh ...

DARLENE

Yeah, Junior, I think he knows. So come on, Laird, give baby kiss nighttime.

(kisses him on the cheek)

You too, Pip.

BYRON

Nope, no sir, put her there, right on target.

(pulls her close for a kiss on the lips)

DARLENE

Why you dirty old man, you! You're just like these young ones, only worse.

(going into the kitchen)

Debbie? We're gonna go, hon, and let you guys get to bed.

JUNIOR

Bam bam bam!

BYRON

I tell you what, Junior, that last one, make it for me and ...

JUNIOR

Yeah, yeah.

BYRON

... howl good and loud so I can hear it all the way over here.

The three men laugh. Darlene enters. Deborah is behind her with a tray set for coffee.

DARLENE

Just once I'd like to come back into a room and not meet men laughing. I just can't stand you!
(over her shoulder as she exits out the front door)

Bye, Debbie, thanks.

JUNIOR

(following her out)

Hey, Darlene!

BYRON

Hoo boy! I think Junior's got hisself a hot one!

LAIRD

Yeah, he's in for trouble all right.

(gives Deborah a squeeze)

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

(she doesn't respond)

Hey, Pip! We gotta get you some booze! Tell you what, short stop's open. What do you want, Deb? Brandy, bourbon, what else?

DEBORAH

Nothing.

LAIRD

What'd you do with my wallet?

DEBORAH

In my purse.

LAIRD

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

Wanna come, Pip?

BYRON

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 standing alone with the coffee tray in her hands listening to Laird and Byron's receding ad-libs.

LAIRD

(offstage)

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

BYRON

(offstage)

Talky old bastard.

Deborah takes the tray back into the kitchen. She comes back in and turns off the music. The doorbell chimes. She looks through the peephole, then opens the door.

DEBORAH

Oh, hi.

JIM

Hi. Party break up? I guess I broke it up, huh?

DEBORAH

No, it wasn't you.

JIM

Laird go off to bed, leave the little woman to clean up?

DEBORAH

He just went out to the store with Byron. He'll be right back.

JIM

I've been driving around the block, kicking myself. It's Christmas, damn it. I came over here tonight to give you guys your Christmas presents, and then I let him—

DEBORAH

You got me one, too?

JIM

Of course.

DEBORAH

(touched beyond words)

Really, did you?

JIM

You want me to take it back?

DEBORAH

(tries to laugh)

Well, where is it?

JIM

(takes a small present from under the tree)

Here.

(She takes it as though it might break.)

And this is for Susan. And that's for Laird.

(gives it a little kick, shakes his head)

DEBORAH

You even wrapped it yourself, didn't you?

JIM

Sure.

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

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, he's 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)

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

JIM

(gesturing to Deborah's present)

Open it.

DEBORAH

Oh. 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.

DEBORAH

I have one for you, too.

JIM

I should hope so. Where is it?

DEBORAH

(hesitates, looks quickly out the front door, then runs to the closet)

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

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)

Open it. Quick, before he gets back.

JIM

(as he fiddles with the paper, trying to be neat)

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 ...

(gathering up the wrappings)

... I wrote it when I was a kid, but I kind of redid it, and all the pictures are new. 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

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 anyone 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 I didn't have enough —

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 person.

DEBORAH
Oh I'm not, look at me.

JIM
You see the way you always are? 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, it was New Mexico, wadn'tit?

DEBORAH

Quick, hide it.

JIM

Deborah...

DEBORAH

No, shh, put it in your coat.

JIM

I won't.

Deborah goes quickly to the closet and puts her gift from Jim into her coat pocket. Jim considers but decides not to hide the book, as Laird and Byron come in the front door. Laird is carrying a bag of drinks and snacks and an open bottle of Jim Beam.

LAIRD

Here we are!

BYRON

Home again, safe again.

LAIRD

(stopping when he sees Jim)

Oh, hiya Jim. Glad you came back. Sorry about, uh —

BYRON

(taking the bottle from Laird)

Here, I'll relieve you of that.

LAIRD

We broke the cherry on the way.

BYRON

Just to keep off the cold. I'll get your glass, Jimmy.

(goes into kitchen)

DEBORAH

(taking from under the tree Jim's gift to Laird)

Jim just came back to give you your Christmas present.

LAIRD

Oh yeah?

DEBORAH

Isn't that nice? And he got one for Susan, too. Isn't that nice?

LAIRD

Thanks, Jim, that's real nice.

JIM

I hope you like it. It's just ... I got this inspiration, you know?

LAIRD

(pointing to "The Legend of Nothing" in Jim's hand)

What's that?

JIM

Oh, nothing.

(laughs to Deborah at the pun)

LAIRD

What's the joke?

JIM

That's the title: "The Legend of Nothing." Oh, you wouldn't understand, nevermind.

The phone rings as Byron returns. He answers it.

BYRON

Dial-a-Prayer. Oh, hi there, honey! (beat) Yeah, she's here, but can't you ...

JIM

(same time)

Well, I guess I'd better be on my way.

BYRON

... say hello to me first? Well, don't you think that's bein' a little childish? You ain't gonna give me even one kind word? How long you intendin' ...

DEBORAH

Thanks again, Jim.

JIM

Bye.

LAIRD

Yeah.

BYRON

... to keep this up, Inez? I can't stay with Lairdy forever, you know.

LAIRD

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

Laird takes off his boots and turns on the TV, angry and embarrassed as he listens to Byron. Through this next, Deborah takes the bag of snacks into the kitchen, lingering in the kitchen doorway to listen and to watch Laird's reactions. Then she seats herself at the table with her drawing materials.

BYRON

(lowering his voice)

Well, you know, I'm gettin' kinda 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.

DEBORAH

(under the men as they continue conversing below)

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

(hangs up)

BYRON

She's makin' it awful hard 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 slights, those 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 Sissy, 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

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 Byron sits at the table with 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, keeps drawing.)

You believe that? Uglier than me?

DEBORAH

(manages a laugh)

If you say so.

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 he used to beat that woman up somethin' awful. It was criminal. Ella'd do some little thing Cholly didn't like and he'd up-end ...

(She covers her drawing with her arm.)

... her over his knee just like one of the kids and take a strap to her. Then over the years 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 Byron behind Deborah's back to leave them alone)

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

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 nervous. As he comes to sit beside her at the table, she puts aside her drawings and picks up the deck of cards to deal out a hand of solitaire.

LAIRD

Sorry about, uh ... 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 sketchbook.)

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, well, he brought those presents, could you believe that! 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 young, 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 all off real fast.

DEBORAH

(correcting the cards' positions on the table)

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 know how long it's been? Too long. I been ... Deb, I been usin' my hand, I shouldn't have to do that. Sometimes at night I want you so bad but you put your back to me, you pull away like, I don't know, like ... I got feelings too, you know? Come on, you said you'd be better.

DEBORAH

I said I'd try. And I will try, Laird, but ... I think ... you could try too.

LAIRD

Try what, babe? I'll try anything.

DEBORAH

Oh ... you wouldn't understand.

LAIRD

Goddamit Deb, don't —

(recovers quickly)

— 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.

DEBORAH

You slammed the door in my face.

LAIRD

Aw, baby ...

DEBORAH

And Jim was right there.

LAIRD

I said I was sorry, but you just ...

DEBORAH

And that cow Darlene.

LAIRD

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

DEBORAH

And what about blaming me —

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, then gently kisses it.

DEBORAH

When you're like this, I ...

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.

LAIRD

God, I love you so much.

DEBORAH

(finally, trying to pull away)

Okay. Let me just make up the couch and bring Susan down here.

(He pulls her back with a laugh and kisses her again; she tries to laugh, too.)

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 pulls the bed out of the couch and flops down on it in a mock sexy pose as Deborah comes back with sheets and blankets. He picks up Susan's stuffed toy "Cookie Monster".

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 as she starts to make up the couch)

I want you to get BIG, like Darlene.

DEBORAH

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 and —

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 ...

LAIRD

... the last time you wanted me?

DEBORAH

... you 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

(quickly regaining control of himself; 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 ...

LAIRD

Oh no, no, that's sneaky.

DEBORAH

Honey, it's late now.

SUSAN

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

DEBORAH

Susan, you're too old for that now, honey.

LAIRD AND SUSAN

(as he kneels to let her onto his back)

This little piggy had roast beef, and this little piggy 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.

LAIRD

(seeing Deborah's look of vexation)

Ooops, better be quiet now. 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

(slips 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 for the doll. He flings it into her arms and storms off up the stairs. Deborah, stunned, takes a moment then 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

(taking Annie back)

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
What?

SUSAN
The one about John Virgin.

DEBORAH
John Virgin?

SUSAN
You know, round John Virgin, mother and child.

DEBORAH
(laughing)
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's 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.

(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 me, 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, putting 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

Where?

*The stairway light comes on. Deborah freezes. In a moment
Byron comes down the stairs.*

BYRON

Oh, Debbie, you still up? I just thought I'd ... get me some milk. Grandpa's little dolly.
*(goes into the kitchen to return in a moment to stand in the
doorway, sipping a glass of milk)*

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

SUSAN

Hi Grandpa.

BYRON

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

Brr, it's cold.

(fetches the bottle of Jim Beam)

Maybe I'll just put a little fire in it, warm it up a little. Man could catch his death goin' to bed on cold milk.

(comes to the couch)

Pretty late for little monsters to be awake, idn't it?

SUSAN

I'm a angel.

BYRON

(playing with her 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 and 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 with him)

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

SUSAN

Mommy, if Grandpa ...

DEBORAH

Hush. Baby, hush.

SUSAN

(hushes a moment, then:)

But if...

DEBORAH

Shhhh. Shhhhhhhhhh.

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 a jar of instant coffee, bowls, and cartons of cereal and milk on it.

After a moment, Deborah unlocks the front door and enters furtively, followed by Jim who has his car keys in his hand.

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.

(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, evades.

DEBORAH

You want some coffee or something?

JIM

(going into the kitchen)

I'll get it. Sit down.

DEBORAH

(sees the coffee jar 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

(returning)

Instant's fine.

DEBORAH

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. She's always been so good to me. When ... my mother left. When my ...my ... my father died. You don't think she ... ?

JIM

You did just right.

DEBORAH

But 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.

(sees this surprises him, heads for kitchen)

Uh, do you take milk and sugar? 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. I just wanted her to go to sleep, it was late, she was tired, 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?

DEBORAH

I think your water's done.

(goes into kitchen to return with the kettle and a mug to pour Jim's coffee)

JIM

Why didn't you tell Laird? 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 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 no, 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 these —

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? 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

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

What? What?

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!

(paces a moment)

I'm sorry.

JIM

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

(She laughs, a hint of hysteria. 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? And what she'd say if she could hear us now, talking about something like this!

JIM

(takes her hands gently)

Deborah.

(She is greatly affected by his hand; her hysteria subsides.)

You have all my support. Whatever I can do.

DEBORAH

I ... I opened your present last night ... after ...

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. How like her. 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 kisses her back. It becomes passionate. They break from it tentatively, both surprised and scared. 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

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

The doorbell chimes twice, Inez's chime. They both start guiltily.

DEBORAH

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.

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 flat 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.)

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 gonna 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 rushin' here on my break and rushin' 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 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

(going out the front door)

Bye.

INEZ

Good seein' you again, Jimmy.

(somewhat 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? (beat) Well, here are the gifts.

(placing them beneath the tree)

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 Lucy's got— —oh, and of course I got Susan — (whispers) Where is she?

DEBORAH

Oh, 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 this little bride outfit. But anyway, with Lucy's three kids, her family naturally gets more money, but I can't ...

DEBORAH

No, I understand that, of course.

INEZ

... 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 her 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.

(begins to gather 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 bill 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 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, idn'tit?

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 sidewise 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. You know what he said to me this last time? That I was cold, and hadn't no heart. No heart, when he's broke it so many times? 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 a a really fine DJ, the address is KTLA, Sacramento, and the name is Charlie Anchor. Thanks for listening. Merry Christmas to you all.

Right after the time is announced on the radio. Junior barges through the door and heads for the kitchen. He is in work clothes.

JUNIOR

Can you see the parking lot from your kitchen window?

Deborah awakes, stunned, and ultimately gets up and turns off the radio as Junior returns and blabs ever on.

That Darlene, Jesus Christ, she's driving me nuts. Why do you have that radio on so loud, Jeez! Laird got any beer here?

(starts for kitchen again)

DEBORAH

No, there's nothing.

JUNIOR

I'll wait till he gets up here. He picked up a case on the way home.

DEBORAH

Where is he?

JUNIOR

(going to the door, looking out)

In the lot tryin' to dump Darlene. She's like a spider alla time hangin' around for me to come home, talkin' alla time how she's gonna fix up the place and all. Lucky thing I saw her before we turned in —out in the lot blabbin' to Pip— and Laird let me out before she saw me. Jesus, you hate to hurt her feelings but Christ, you know? What a shame too, you know, 'cause Christ she was good, you know ... I mean, uh, you know ...

BYRON

(offstage)

But look now, it's only till the first and then I'll be gettin' it back to you.

LAIRD

(same time, offstage)

Fine, fine, Pip. Don't worry about it. It's just money, you know?

JUNIOR

(runs to door)

Oh good, here they come and she's not with them.

(as Laird and Byron enter, Laird carrying a case of beer)

What did you tell her? Hey, hey, what'd she say?

BYRON

We told her she was just too much woman for you and you was all petered out.

LAIRD

(same time to Deborah as he turns on the light and drops his car keys on the table)

What're you doin' sittin' in the dark? You sick?

JUNIOR

No, come on, come on!

DEBORAH

Just thinking.

BYRON

(taking the case of beer from Laird and heading into the kitchen)

Here you go, I'll relieve you of these.

LAIRD

We told her you were at your brother's for dinner and wouldn't be home till late.

JUNIOR

For Chrissake, I don't even have a brother! You know that for Chrissake!

LAIRD

Well, she doesn't know. Hey, Pip ...

LAIRD

Aw shit, now I'm gonna have to make up this big story about this brother and his life history and then remember what I told her 'cause you know she's gonna ...

LAIRD

... bring me in one of those beers, when you come, will you?

DEBORAH

Laird ...

JUNIOR

... give me the third degree about what's his name and where's he live and all, and then she'll say how come he's not in the phone book.

LAIRD

Tell her he lives in New York.

DEBORAH

Laird ...

JUNIOR

Then how come I'm goin' over there for dinner if he lives in New York and all? Aw Laird, you screwed me.

Byron re-enters, still laughing, with three beers for the men.

BYRON

Tell her you're —

DEBORAH

Laird, I want to talk to you. Alone.

Silence. The three men turn to her.

LAIRD

What's the deal?

JUNIOR

Oh sure, Deb, I was just, uh, waitin' in here, you know, till the coast was clear. I'll just —

LAIRD

Wait a minute, wait a minute. What's the deal, Deb?

DEBORAH

I've got to talk to you.

LAIRD

Can't it wait? You know, it's kinda rude.

DEBORAH

No, it can't wait.

BYRON

Oh Lairdy, that's okay, we'll just step over to Junior's. That's okay with you, ain't it, Junior?

JUNIOR

Sure, I just came in 'cause of Darlene, you know, but I —

BYRON

(to Deborah as he moves Junior to the door)

You go ahead, honey, and talk all you need to. And listen now, if you want the place to yourself tonight like a kind of, I don't know, second honeymoon or anything like that —'cause I remember when me and Inez'd have these talks they always turned kind of romantic like— you just say the word, hear, and me and Susan'll bunk over Junior's tonight. That's okay with you, ain't it, Junior?

JUNIOR

Oh yeah, yeah. I got a sleeping bag and the couch and all, you know, that's cool.

LAIRD

Okay then, see you guys later.

(closes the door behind them; turns to Deborah)

What's with you? Last night, you're like— and this morning, you're a zombie walkin' around here, I been out there workin' all day, I come home, you're sittin' in the dark, there's no food, what do you want a divorce, okay, you want to go marry somebody else, Jim maybe, yeah sure—

DEBORAH

Please, please Laird, be quiet, please.

LAIRD

Okay, okay, talk. You wanna talk, talk.

(waits a moment, but she just stares at him with accusation)

I thought you wanted to talk.

DEBORAH

Byron moles—

(can't say it)

LAIRD

(waits, then:)

What?

DEBORAH

Byron molested Susan.

LAIRD

What do you mean he molested Susan?

DEBORAH

He molested her.

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

(after a beat)

Jim.

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— 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 ... maybe 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.

(calls 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 keys to the car from 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.

(picks up the phone)

What's Jim's number?

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.

(holding back tears, tears for the first time)

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

(surrendering 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. Oh, that's so sweet, thank you. 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. I hope they weren't too much for her. Jim's there now, too.

LAIRD

Just—

DEBORAH

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, he's not a very nice little boy, is he, next time you just do it right back to him. Listen honey, hush honey, listen now, 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!

In blind rage he raises the receiver to hit her with it. She falls to the floor away from him. He stands stock still a moment, horrified at what he has almost done. Then he puts the receiver to his ear, finds he has been cut off, and throws the receiver to the floor. She checks the receiver to make sure Susan 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

(from the floor, where she stays for the entire next scene, fighting him without moving)

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 answers immediately.

DEBORAH

That's Jim.

LAIRD

Deb, this is my father. He wouldn't do that. Let's just forget it. Let's just forget any of this ever happened.

Deborah unplugs the phone, Laird pacing around her frantically, furiously.

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, 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 left 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 started, and it'll ...

LAIRD

You're so full of shit!

DEBORAH

... get worse, he'll go all the way.

LAIRD

You're so— !

DEBORAH

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!

(a stunned moment, then she careens on as though reciting a list, battering him with each detail)

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 ...

(slowing now as the list fixates on this 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.

(reconnects phone)

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, please don't — please, I'm doing it, I am ... please. (beat) Thanks. Thanks a lot. Uh, could I talk to her again?

(pause, she looks at Laird; he's 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.

(Deborah hangs up; waits for him to speak; then:)

DEBORAH

Could you ... get me an aspirin please?

*(he goes to the kitchen; she tries to rise, but has no strength;
Laird returns with an aspirin and a glass of water)*

Thanks.

*Laird goes about straightening the room a bit, uprighting the
furniture he kicked over earlier, and putting the phone back in its
place. Deborah watches him covertly.*

Are you okay?

LAIRD

Yeah, I just ... Why ... 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 were doing 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 ... she didn't walk, she ran. As soon as she could. As soon as she knew he had me, and she could run and he wouldn't go after her, she left me to him. I kept waiting for her to come back and get me.

LAIRD

You coulda run too.

DEBORAH

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 ... How many times?

DEBORAH

What difference does it make?

LAIRD

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 moan, really)

No.

DEBORAH

At night sometimes, I can still remember lying there in the dark waiting for him —I knew he'd come— sweating, the sheets wet and sticking all over 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

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, but then they'd change and he'd be over me, and he—

(stops, quivering)

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

(after a moment, horrified)

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 ...

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 was there to go? Who'd 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 said ...

LAIRD

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!!! I'm gonna bring Susan home.

DEBORAH

(snatching the keys from where Laird put them down 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, beating him about the face and neck, biting his hand until he drops the keys. Laird finally begins to hit back. It becomes less a fight for the keys and more a fight of 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 and hits her again and again across the face, while she tries to shield herself with the cushions.

LAIRD

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

Byron and Junior rush in and pull them apart. Ad libs: "Laird, stop it. You'll kill her." etc. Finally Junior is able to hold Laird back and Byron is able to help Deborah from the floor. She is badly battered.

BYRON

(helping Deborah to a chair)

Come on, honey, sit here. Are you all right?

JUNIOR

Should I call an ambulance or something?

BYRON

No, I think she's okay. You okay now, Debbie? 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 slap the devil out of you.

Byron goes to the kitchen to return in a moment with a couple of wet towels. Laird and Deborah, meanwhile, catch their breath

and come in some measure back to sanity. Both are bleeding from the nose or mouth.

JUNIOR

Hey, hey, Laird, Jesus!

LAIRD

You all right, Deb?

BYRON

(returning)

It's no thanks to you if she is. Junior, why don't you take off now, son, I'll take care of this.

JUNIOR

Sure, yeah

BYRON

(throwing a towel to Laird)

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

JUNIOR

Deb, you gonna be okay and all?

(as he exits)

Jesus, Laird!

BYRON

(as he approaches her with a towel)

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

DEBORAH

(musters her strength and grabs the towel)

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 pension check, then I figure —

DEBORAH

Byron, we know about you and Susan.

(long moment. Byron looks from Deborah to Laird. Laird watches him closely.)

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 runs up the stairs for the bathroom.

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, defiantly, pulling herself to her feet with all she has left)

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 throws himself onto the couch, curling up protectively. The lights dim out.

END OF ACT II

SEGUE — NO INTERMISSION

For the City Theatre Company's production in Nevada City, CA—which I myself directed—I decided not to give the audience a break between the tensions of ACT II and those of ACT III. Larry Hecht had felt, for the ACT production, that if there were some way **NOT** to have a break for the audience, that the effect of the play would be heightened. And I agreed.

Larry could not achieve the scene change in a satisfactory way for the Geary Theater stage and abandoned the idea of doing away with the second intermission. But I did manage it for the City Theatre Production. Since this production was staged in a long room with comfortable household furniture for the audience so that the audience perception was that they were actually in the living room of the O'Hare apartment, I directed the Stage Manager to introduce herself to audience members as they arrived in the theater, welcoming them as though into the actual apartment. She was also prominent at the beginning of the play, turning on the O'Hare's lamps, arranging some of the props, etc., housekeeping.

Since she had been introduced this way, the audience now easily accepted her presence as she came onto the stage, now—in the dimmed stage lights, also with house lights on dim—as she made the changes for ACT III. She brought on opened gifts and strewed torn wrapping paper, and she took off the wrapped gifts from the first two acts. She placed an empty pizza box on the table, also a Colonel Sanders tub, plus a couple dozen empty beer cans all about, the living debris of two days without Deborah in the apartment.

But even as she makes these changes for ACT III, the Stage Manager is in the background with the focus remaining on Laird as he tears open several of the gifts, most particularly his gift from Jim, the baseball glove that he has always so admired when he and Jim were teammates together. He stands and at first strokes the glove fondly, then he puts it on and begins a pantomime of playing catch, at first throwing the ball smoothly, but as his fury overtakes him, the throwing grows much more violent.

In the end, with the scene changes now completed by the Stage Manager, Laird exhausts himself with his violent game of catch, and he throws himself back on the sofa, and the lights change for ACT II-Scene 2.

ACT II-Scene 2

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, and a half-empty pizza carton and empty tub of Colonel Sanders on the table. Empty beer bottles are everywhere.

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. He would seem relaxed, but under it all is a terrific tension as he keeps asking 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's chime. Laird rises quickly to answer it, stops, thinks better of it, sits back down. Inez chimes again. Laird throws another card. Inez tries the door, finds it open and comes in, sees Laird.

INEZ

Didn't you hear—

(stops as he throws another card)

Where is he?

LAIRD

Susan's room.

INEZ

(calling up the stairs)

Byron?

(sees the mess all around her)

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?

(moving trash, trying to find a place to sit)

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

(going into kitchen)

Coupla pigs the both of you!

(returning with garbage can, starting to clean)

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

Me and Pip ain'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 told me about this, I'll put a stop to her little highjinks. Look at these Christmas presents just layin' —

LAIRD

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

INEZ

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

(picking 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 present ...

(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 like that, 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 we do 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 —

(sees him watching the TV. She snaps off the TV with the remote. Laird takes the remote and snaps it back on. Inez snaps it off again and drops the remote into the garbage can. Laird shrugs. Inez goes back to picking up cards.)

Did you go to —

(gingerly picks out the lacy panties, gives Laird a withering look, then drops them back into the box and picks up the last of the cards)

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

LAIRD

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

INEZ

I knew it. 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.)

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

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

Hey, tell you a story on your Pip. Ooh, wadn't he something though! First time I ever seen him dressed up was a big harvest dance up to 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.)

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 just leave him?

INEZ

Times were hard, you were just a baby, 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 truth to tell, I guess I was always just crazy about him. 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 (cont.)

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 gonna take her?

(calls up the stairs)

Byron, I said get down here, and I don't mean maybe. We're goin' to settle all this, and I'm not —

Junior comes in through the front door.

JUNIOR

Hey Laird. Oh, hiya, Inez, how ya doin'?

LAIRD

Whyncha knock sometime?

JUNIOR

(as he goes into the kitchen)

You got any beers left?

INEZ

Kind of early to start that, ain't it? You just let that guy come in here whenever he wants to? Tie one on?

(takes box of cards to table, sits, and begins to sort them to eventually lay out a hand of solitaire)

LAIRD

Hey, Junior ...

JUNIOR

(re-entering)

Jeez, you guys sure go through it.

LAIRD

Yeah, Pip's been kind of down. Hey, listen ...

JUNIOR

You got any of that pizza left?

INEZ

In the garbage.

JUNIOR

Naw, no thanks.

LAIRD

Listen, Junior, me and mom was just —

JUNIOR

Aw man, I got problems. I don't know, whatcha gonna do, you know? Darlene's still on my back. I can't get rid of that chick but you

LAIRD

Yeah, well I can't talk.

JUNIOR

... know? something funny? I keep thinkin' about her, you know? It's this damn Christmas, and I'm sittin' over there all last night all alone, you know, and the TV every time I turn it on, it's playin' these Christmas movies, you know, and shit, the Goddam Scrooge thing and knickerbocker ... nutcracker, whatever. And the thing is I know she's just sittin' over her place feelin' the same way and why can't we get together except I'm such an asshole about it — Oh, sorry, Inez, you know, but uh ... what was I sayin', you know? Oh yeah, 'cause, uh, she's talkin' alla time kids this kids that, you know, and I'm not ... you know, I don't want kids. What do I want kids for? 'Cause when you got kids, your life's your kids' life, you know? Yeah, well sure, **you** know. But then, you know, I'm thinkin', you know, there's Jim. And he's got his mother, you know, and he's sittin' there and his mother's sittin' there, and I'm comin' up to 30, and I should, uh, get me a wife. So, that's what I'm thinkin'.

LAIRD

So what are you sayin'? You're thinkin' about marryin' Darlene?

JUNIOR

Well yeah, sort of.

LAIRD

But you don't even like her.

JUNIOR

Sure I do. I like her all right.

LAIRD

You don't even have common respect for her. What are you gonna marry her for?

JUNIOR

Well I'm just thinkin' about it, you know. I mean I just wanted to talk it, you know, a little 'cause sometimes when you ...

The doorbell chimes.

LAIRD

(as he goes to the door)

No, Junior, no. Think what you're doin' to her. You gotta feel something for her. You gotta love the girl.

JUNIOR

... talk it out loud, you know, you get a better you know, whatchacallit, prospection on the whole thing, you know?

Laird opens the door. It's Darlene.

DARLENE

Hi, Laird. Is Junior over here? Junior, you said you were coming right back.

JUNIOR

Yeah, well I was talkin' to Laird.

DARLENE

(puts her left hand up to her neck, rippling her fingers)

So, did he tell you?

LAIRD

What?

DARLENE

(holds hand out to Laird)

What do you think of it?

LAIRD

(confused, takes her hand)

What?

INEZ

(still at her cards)

Honey, the way we used to do it at the ranch. You put your left hand up to shield your eyes from the sun, wiggle the fingers and say, "Has anybody seen my heifer?" She's got a ring, Laird.

LAIRD

Oh, Darlene. This is my mom.

DARLENE

Hi.

INEZ

(back to her solitaire, without hope)

Best wishes.

LAIRD

So what's this? You guys gettin' married? Junior?

JUNIOR

Well, yeah, I guess so.

LAIRD

You went out and bought a ring?

DARLENE

It was my grandmother's. We're just using it temporary.

The phone rings.

LAIRD

(to Darlene as he goes for the phone)

Well, I hope you're gonna be happy.

DARLENE

Thanks, Laird. I'm happy already. I got what I wanted for Christmas.

LAIRD

(into phone)

Yeah? (beat) Oh. Sure. (beat) I won't make any trouble. (beat) Honey ...?

(beat; then hangs up; to Inez)

That's Deb. She's down at the short stop. She's comin' up.

JUNIOR

Where's she been?

DARLENE

Is something wrong?

JUNIOR

Oh, Laird and Deb had a, you know, a ... thing.

LAIRD

Uh, listen you guys, we're just gonna have a family pow-wow here, so you know ...

DARLENE

Oh, sure. Come on, Junior. Laird, you be good to her now, hon. She loves you.

JUNIOR

And you know, uh, if you need me, you know, or uh, you know ...

LAIRD

No, no, I'll tell you. I'll give you a call, okay?

JUNIOR

Yeah, sure, uh, you know, uh ...

DARLENE

Junior, let's go.

(pulls Junior gently out the door)

INEZ

She say where she's been?

LAIRD

No.

INEZ

What'd she do, run out of money?

LAIRD

She didn't have any money.

INEZ

Laird, she had Susan! You let her walk out of here without any money! Were they just out on the streets!

LAIRD

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

Who you talkin' about?

INEZ

Jim Rutledge, he's a Goddam faggot.

LAIRD

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!

LAIRD

What's wrong?

INEZ

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 about —

LAIRD

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

INEZ

And you so love blind 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 goes back to her solitaire game. Laird, shocked at the bruises on Deborah's face, goes softly to her.

LAIRD

Oh, Christ baby, look at you.

He would touch her face, 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 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 you!

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 before 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

She ask about me, send me a message or anything?

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 back on the floor.

LAIRD

These stay here.

JIM

Laird ...

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

(putting himself between Laird and Deborah)

Get away from her.

INEZ

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

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 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. 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.

(turns to Inez)

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

My Lord, Byron, you stink like a brewery.

(turning away)

Even now, my good Lord!

BYRON

My soul is hangin' here 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' more to you.

(turning on Deborah)

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

Note to the actress: in this attack, stay clear of the trap of shrewishness or sneering. Fighting for her family, Inez is more like a she-wolf protecting her cubs, strong and forthright and devastating. And she has God on her side.

JIM

Inez, you have to understand that for Susan's sake ...

INEZ

Where IS Susan? Why isn't she here?

(gesturing to 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.

LAIRD

Mom!

INEZ

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

DEBORAH

You told her that?

INEZ

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

DEBORAH

How could you?

INEZ

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

BYRON

(to Deborah)

Oh, honey!

INEZ

... 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 every 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 cops?

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! Or I'd have killed him. 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 we WILL take it to court. And we'll win. And Laird's comin' with us. Ain't that right, Laird?

DEBORAH

Jim ...

JIM

Inez, calm down, think about this, 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 of 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, but —

INEZ

Then shut up! I know what's goin' on between you two, don't think I don't. I guess Pip walked in and messed up your little lovenest, huh? So you had to find some way to get rid of him. How long the two of you been shackin' up in here when Laird's off at work? And what ...

JIM

Inez, that's enough!

DEBORAH

Stop, you stop!

INEZ

... 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 standing alone where he has withdrawn.

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 be quiet. I was driving, for Chrissake! You know how she's always jabbering on and 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

(intent on Laird)

Be quiet!

BYRON

(same time, intent on Laird)

Hush, hush honey.

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, 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?

DEBORAH

You can't even admit it to yourself.

LAIRD

You did it, didn't you?

BYRON

No.

LAIRD

(pulls him violently to his feet)

I'll kill you!

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

Oh my God, Pip!

(Byron cries with him. 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 goes for Byron's coat.

INEZ

Come on, Pippy. Let's go home.

(She holds his coat open for him; he slips into it; she opens the door for him; he goes out; she turns to Deborah; 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?"

Laird goes tentatively to the door, looks back at Deborah, then goes 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 jingles them nervously.

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, clutching at him really)

... unless ... you wanted to.

(a small moment as she waits for him to answer; he starts to say something, but she rushes on)

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, and she's done so much for me all my life and, and, and —

(stops herself, seeing the answer in his face)

JIM

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 ...

(resentment transferring 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 killed you! You need help. And if we report this now ... I was supposed to report this within thirty-six hours! If we —

DEBORAH

You're 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 —

DEBORAH

Juvenile Hall.

JIM

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. 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, it ...

DEBORAH

Oh yeah?

JIM

... doesn't have anything to do with your father. You want me to be some kind of hero, to come swooping in and take you away, and make your life beautiful. I'm not a hero, 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 juts holds 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