

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

In the blackness you should see a line of rocks glowing on the black set.

At rise: The moon casts a cool light on the yard of the trailer. There is a chair and an old couch, some trash cans and an empty clothesline. A light from a television set is seen through the window of the trailer as Johnny Carson is heard. The sound soon fades out and a flashlight comes on as PAULETTE is seen shining the light on some of the glow-in-the-dark painted rocks that line the steps up to the trailer. She is wearing a large oversized man's shirt. She playfully bounces her flashlight around as she inspects the painted glow-in-the-dark rocks by the front door. She sings absentmindedly as she flashes the light.

PAULETTE

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells. . .

(PAULETTE crosses from the porch with several of the rocks and goes down to a small anemic looking garden. She places the rocks around the garden, then flashes the light into the dirt and discovers a discarded beer bottle)

And one BEER bottle right in the middle!

(She picks up the beer bottle and takes it back to the trash can by the front of the trailer. PAULETTE brightens as she pounds on the side of the trailer.)

Denny!

DENNY

Hey, Paulette, you're gonna wake up the whole neighborhood.

PAULETTE

I'm sorry. I just want you to come out and see our beautiful garden.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

It's the middle of the night, honey.

PAULETTE

Pretty please with a cherry on top!

DENNY

Okay, okay let me put some pants on --
(lights turns on inside the trailer)
I hope you're wearing something decent.

PAULETTE

Of course, silly. Now hurry before you miss the moon.

DENNY

Miss the moon! Jesus, I married one crazy woman. Miss the moon.

PAULETTE

(dancing)
Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater
Had a wife and couldn't keep her:
Put her in a pumpkin shell,
And there he kept her very well.

(PAULETTE starts spinning and crashes into the trash cans.)

DENNY

Paulette! Are you all right?
(DENNY runs out tripping on the rocks and hopping wildly on one foot. Sound of dog barking.)

PAULETTE

I'm fine honey, I was just dancing.
(PAULETTE gets herself up and fixes the trash can. The dog starts to bark again.)

DENNY

Quiet Red! (laughs) Dancing. Can you beat that. Damn it. Who put these rocks right under my feet.

PAULETTE

I am so sorry, honey, I just put them there today. Here hold onto me.

DENNY

I'm fine. Just a couple broken toes that's all.

PAULETTE

I sprayed 'em to glow in the dark. You'll see how nice it'll look. When I'm done they're going to look just like a ring of fire. Aren't they beautiful.

(MORE)

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CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

(DENNY hobbles over to where PAULETTE is placing more rocks into the garden)

DENNY

And you want to put more of these beautiful rocks out here?

PAULETTE

Oh yes Denny I'm gonna put them all the way 'round the trailer and out past the garden and right up to the road.

DENNY

Paint'em all different colors that glow in the dark. . . and put them along this. . . wonderful. . . garden and out to the road.

PAULETTE

Exactly!

DENNY

Now would you tell me honey, just why would you want to do that?

PAULETTE

So they would be pretty. So we could see them from the road when we walked home -- or looked out our bedroom window. It would be our own special ring of fire. So what'd you think?

DENNY

I think they look just like rocks honey.

PAULETTE

Well they'll always be rocks on the inside. But we can make them into something special and I would do it all myself I promise you wouldn't have to do a thing.

DENNY

I know you would Paulette, I just don't know why.

PAULETTE

If you love me, love me true.
Send me a ribbon, and let it be blue.
If you hate me, let it be seen,
Send me a ribbon, a ribbon of green.

DENNY

God knows I love you honey but between you singing and dancing and -- Paulette, you got nothing on under there!

PAULETTE

There's no one around.

DENNY

You promised.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

No one for miles.

DENNY

It wasn't two weeks ago Carter Brown's sister was taken right from her front yard --

PAULETTE

. . . to see us, or hear us. . .

DENNY

And you know what they did to her!

PAULETTE

Everyone knows I belong to you Denny. You told me that the very first time you kissed me. You took my breath away when you kissed me. You're mine forever, you said.

DENNY

Jesus, Paulette, don't you forget anything.

PAULETTE

I'm Denny's girl. That means something.

DENNY

Not as much as it used to.

PAULETTE

No one would dare hurt me.

DENNY

Some thing's a man can't stop. Hey, baby, you're going cut yourself on that old rusted thing. Get yourself some lockjaw and next thing I'll be all alone. You know I couldn't stand that.

(DENNY takes the flashlight away from her and shines it on the pathetic plants)

So tell me honey, just what are you growing in this beautiful garden.

PAULETTE

Spices. Like mint for tea.

DENNY

Which I don't drink, thank you.

PAULETTE

And this is parsley for cooking.

DENNY

Macaroni cheese and beans don't need spice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

I thought it would be nice.

DENNY

I'm sorry honey. You know how I hate buying food with those damn stamps. Makes me sick.

PAULETTE

I know.

DENNY

Soon as they see they're not getting real money they just look at you like shit under their shoes.

PAULETTE

It's just temporary, honey.

DENNY

(hugging her tightly)

You having a job is temporary. When we move I'll get you a big yard, biggest in Ohio and you can plant whatever you want.

PAULETTE

I thought it might be nice to grow something right from the beginning. Put some seeds into the dirt with your hands and watch 'em grow. Something nobody can take away. I thought it would be a nice thing. I thought you would like it.

DENNY

Nice is having a job, or a wife waiting with dinner like on TV. It's not having some dried up plants in front of an old sardine can.

PAULETTE

(breaking and dancing away from him)

Specks on the fingers, Fortune lingers; Specks on the thumbs, Fortune comes.

DENNY

There's still a fortune to be made working those mills, Paulette! I can outwork five of those Japs or Germans Paulette. I got three generations of steel men in my blood.

PAULETTE

The plant's closed, Denny.

DENNY

It's just temporary, baby.

PAULETTE

That's not what they're saying in the newspaper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

Aw hell, Paulette I told you not to read those lies. Those newspaper people don't give a damn about me or John Senior or you or Bertie. Just talk us down -- make us out to be stupid and lazy fools or worse. We need those jobs and they know it. And it's not like we don't want to work. We're dying to work cause we're nothing without those jobs and they know it. That's why they want to break us right back down to our hands and knees, but that's not the way we're going. No, honey, we're going to stand up and we're going to win. But you're not going to hear that from those newspapers cause they're not on our side. Never were and never will be."

PAULETTE

I hate when you talk like that Denny. It scares me.

DENNY

I talk the way it is.

PAULETTE

You make it sound like war.

DENNY

It is war. The one who wins -- wins everything. (overlap)

PAULETTE

But it can't --

DENNY

And the one who loses might just as well be dead. I'm not losing Paulette.

PAULETTE

Maybe we could just pick up and move away from here.

DENNY

Why would we do that?

PAULETTE

Maybe we could start all over again some place new.

DENNY

Where?

PAULETTE

Maybe I could go to college.

DENNY

(Pause) Oh. That again.

PAULETTE

Just for two years. . I promise I'd work real fast and I know I could get a good job when I done.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

I'm still the steel man around here, aren't I? You do believe in your steel man, don't you?.

PAULETTE

Of course I do, yes, always, but I really don't mind working.

DENNY

No, "buts" about it cause either you trust me or you don't. I either no what's happening or I don't. And I know, believe me, I go to the meetings. They're gonna take care of us.

PAULETTE

Cock-a-doodle dooo! My dame has lost her shoe.
My master's lost his fiddle stick and knows not what to do.

DENNY

Why won't you believe in me.

PAULETTE

I always believe in you.

DENNY

Then you gotta believe in all of what goes with me honey. This country invented steel and rubber, radio, TV and every other fucking thing the world has that's any good. We are the center of the universe because of people like me. We have to be. Where are you going now?

PAULETTE

I'm cold.

DENNY

Course you're cold. Not wearing enough to keep a fly warm and don't start telling me about how flies don't need to keep warm, thank you.

(DENNY holds her very close)

Now that's a whole lot better than any fly will ever know.

PAULETTE

I gotta go in now and finish reading my books. They're overdue tomorrow.

DENNY

I thought you might stay up and watch a little TV with me.

PAULETTE

We can't afford any more fines, Denny.

DENNY

Don't you think I know what we can't afford!

(DENNY sits down on the couch dejectedly)

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CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

(PAULETTE runs and collapses at his knees)

Oh, Denny, I'm sorry. Forgive me.

DENNY

No, honey, there's nothing to forgive when it's just Denny Griffith shooting my big mouth off. Making a fool of myself.

PAULETTE

---Shhhhhh---

DENNY

I can't help it baby. I just love you so much. You know that don't you. Always making a fool of myself over you.

PAULETTE

I know. (Kissing)

DENNY

I voted twenty-seven times for you to be the Apple Butter Queen.

PAULETTE

You voted twenty-seven times for me?.

DENNY

Which just always proved to me that Kelly Smiles cheated.

PAULETTE

It didn't matter.

DENNY

It mattered cause they cheated. Picked that girl 'cause her Daddy owns a hardware store.

PAULETTE

You cheated and voted twenty-seven times.

DENNY

That's different honey. I cheated for you.

PAULETTE

It was just a silly contest Denny. I don't want to think about it.

DENNY

What else don't you want to think about?

PAULETTE

It was a long time ago.

DENNY

You and me being close was a long time ago too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

I'm just feeling scared right now.

DENNY

I'm scared too.

PAULETTE

I didn't think you were scared of anything.

DENNY

Scared you and me are never gonna be close again like we need to be. Like I want to be. Like you use to want to be.

PAULETTE

I just need a little more time, Denny. (pulling away)

DENNY

Don't you see me growing' old right before your eyes? Am I so bad to look at now you can't even stand being close to me?

PAULETTE

Please, you promised you'd wait.

DENNY

I remember it was different Paulette and if you wanted you could remember too.

PAULETTE

I need more time! You know what the doctor said.

DENNY

And what do I need? What did that doctor say about me?

PAULETTE

Just a little more time. I promise.

DENNY

Just so long as I know you really love me.

PAULETTE

Don't be silly.

DENNY

Just so long as you don't start thinking about someone else. I couldn't stand that.

PAULETTE

There's no one else. (kisses him) No one but you. No one. (pulls away) You know all those stars are always moving.

DENNY

Uh-huh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Even though we can't see them moving apart it's true and in 50,000 years from now it won't even look like the Big Dipper.

DENNY

Fifty Thousand years from now I won't give a damn.

PAULETTE

It's so beautiful sometimes it makes me want to cry.

DENNY

Television makes you cry.

PAULETTE

You used to love learning all about the stars.

DENNY

When did I love learning about anything.

PAULETTE

When you had that science class in the twelfth grade.

DENNY

I didn't love learning about the stars in the twelfth grade.

PAULETTE

You did. I remember. You wrote a whole paper on it. I read every word of it and it was all about the stars. Denny?
(Pause) You got a "C" Plus and Mr. Leebow said he thought it showed real promise. You gotta remember.

DENNY

(pause) I bought it.

PAULETTE

What?

DENNY

I paid Chrissy Abbott to write the paper for me.

PAULETTE

Don't be funny.

DENNY

I'm not being funny Paulette. I paid Chrissy to write that paper for me and that's why I don't know one of those damn stars up there from the other and I never will.

PAULETTE

You paid her money?

DENNY

She was the smartest girl in my class and she said yes.

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CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

But you only got a C-plus!

DENNY

I paid her to write a C-plus. Hell, if she wrote an "A " paper he would have known it wasn't me. What's wrong baby? Didn't mean anything.

PAULETTE

I thought you liked the stars just like I did.

DENNY

You liked the stars and I liked you. Mr. Leebow liked the stars and he liked you, but I didn't like him and I couldn't give a damn if the stars were moving or standing still. Anyway, why'd I need to read about the stars when I got you here to tell me all about 'em.

PAULETTE

They are moving, but we can't see it. Why did you say Chrissy Abbott was the smartest.

DENNY

She was only the smartest girl in my class. You were the smartest girl in the whole school and Eric Vincent was the dumbest boy -- but I was sure runner-up.

PAULETTE

You weren't dumb.

DENNY

The only difference between me and Eric was he played the tuba and I could get my head beat in on the football field.

PAULETTE

Don't talk like that.

DENNY

Made me a lot more exciting. I mean, you weren't too interested in the tuba were you?

PAULETTE

You could be anything you want to be.

DENNY

No, you could be anything you wanted to be. I could be your boyfriend.

PAULETTE

I knew all the constellations by heart.

DENNY

You were so smart Paulette.

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CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

I can name 'em. Draw 'em. Tell you stories.

DENNY

Smart and hot. (getting close)

PAULETTE

I could teach you all the stories Denny. Wonderful stories. Like that one about the ones shining right up there.

DENNY

The Big Dipper.

PAULETTE

See! You do know them.

DENNY

Everyone knows the Big Dipper. It's no big deal hon.

PAULETTE

I like Ursa Major better. Don't you? It's sounds so much more mysterious to say "Ursa Major. " And anything that's been sitting up there for maybe a million million years should be very mysterious, don't you think?

DENNY

Ursa Major's just fine.

PAULETTE

See, you are interested. In the winter the Little Dipper is to the left of the Big Dipper and has its handle pointed up while the Big Dipper's handle points down.

DENNY

It's pointed the other way.

PAULETTE

Well in the summer they change positions.

DENNY

Nothing stays the same.

PAULETTE

But the amazing thing is to think how really far away those stars are. Can you guess?

DENNY

Further than Big Run West Virgin-ny.

PAULETTE

Don't be funny.

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CONTINUED:

DENNY

So, Miss World Book of 1978 -- just how far away are they?

PAULETTE

They say the nearest one of those stars in Ursa Major is 25 millions of miles away from us. Imagine that. Twenty-five million miles.

DENNY

You're right. That's a helluva lot further than Big Run.

PAULETTE

And we can still see it. Isn't it amazing? So far away and we can still see that light shining so bright.

DENNY

Not as bright as you?

(DENNY and PAULETTE are now on the ground, DENNY has his head in her lap as they watch the stars)

PAULETTE

And the brightest one of all, the one I've always loved the most, that's it right there at the end of my finger. See it? The one that's blinking? It's called Sirius, the Dog Star and it's the brightest one in the whole Northern Sky. Sirius (barks jokingly) the hunting dog. So strong and so bright that is that star died tonight we'd still be seeing it for the next eight years.

DENNY

Maybe it's already dead.

PAULETTE

What?

DENNY

You just said it could be dead and we'd still be seeing it so I just said maybe it's already dead and we don't know it.

PAULETTE

I don't know.

DENNY

So it could be dead is what you're saying.

PAULETTE

I'm not sure.

DENNY

Hell, all this astrology business isn't so tough after all.

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CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

(moving away from DENNY)

It's not astrology, it's science. That's what makes it so special. A world full of laws that keep us moving and apart -- moving and alone - moving and safe. All of those planets in their own little paths, and all of those millions of stars all part of this wonderful plan that keeps us planted on the earth and all of them up there dancing in the sky. It's a wonderful plan, a mysterious plan you could spend your whole life trying to figure out. And we're right there in the middle of it. I tell you it just takes your breath away.

DENNY

But if the law says it could be dead -- it could be dead and I could be right. Right?

PAULETTE

Yes, I guess you could be right.

DENNY

No guessing about it. Now let's just go in and see some TV and find out what else old Denny can be right about.

PAULETTE

I'm not tired.

DENNY

You just said you were cold.

PAULETTE

I am cold. But I'm not tired.

DENNY

You never sleep anymore. People can die from not sleeping you know. I read that in the Reader's Digest.

PAULETTE

You go in if you want. I'll come soon, I promise.

DENNY

Paulette can't you just forget all this junk about what's up there and help me work on what's down here.

PAULETTE

I'll be right in. I promise.

DENNY

It doesn't change anything, you know. Knowing every fucking name -- it doesn't change anything unless. Unless -- unless you could hook one of those bastards up to our electric line! Now that would change something. Hook that sucker up so we could quit paying a dime and you got something you can live with all right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

It doesn't work that way yet.

DENNY

It doesn't work that way yet!

PAULETTE

No.

DENNY

(Pause) That was a little joke, Paulette, maybe something Mr. Sweetass Leebow might like. I'm sure he liked your jokes a lot more than he liked mine. Fact is that he probably liked everything about you a helluva lot more than he liked me.

(DENNY goes inside the trailer and stands in the doorway)

PAULETTE

He was just my science teacher, Denny, nothing more. He was--

DENNY

--a man! At least, I think he was a man.
(slams the door)

PAULETTE

(pause) He tried to help you. I don't know why you want to make fun of him. He never knew you didn't do that paper. Neither one of us knew that. I think he would be really sad if he found out now because he believed in you.

DENNY (O. S.)

He believed in you. He tolerated me.

PAULETTE

He believed we could be better. Smarter. He thought I could be a teacher.

DENNY (O. S.)

I'll bet he did.

PAULETTE

Why are you acting like this?

DENNY

(storming out)

I'm no different than I always was honey. You were the one with your head up there in the clouds, not me. I got my hands full figuring out what's happening down here! Trying to make a living for the rest of my life so I don't end up drunk like half the old men I work with. My head's so full I don't even care anymore how those damn astronauts take a piss and Lord knows that was the only burning science question in my mind. (Pretending he is talking on the phone) Hello, Houston? This

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DENNY (cont'd)

is Denny Griffith up here in Ohio and I've always wanted to ask how those astronauts took a piss? Sure, I can wait. How long? Doesn't matter you see, cause I don't have anywhere to go, or anything to do, so why don't you just put me on fucking hold like the rest of the world.

(continuing to mime he is on the phone while

PAULETTE crosses to get her tools and goes to the garden where she starts working)

Paulette! What are you doing now? I need you, Paulette. I can't wait 'til some doctor says you can need me because he doesn't know what I need. He doesn't love you like I do.

PAULETTE

I married a wife on Sunday.

DENNY

Please be my wife again.

PAULETTE

She began to scold on Monday.

DENNY

No.

PAULETTE

Middling she was on Wednesday.

DENNY

Damn those rhymes.

(DENNY exits to trailer standing watching her in the doorway)

PAULETTE

Worse she was on Thursday.

Dead she was on Friday.

Glad I was on Saturday.

To bury my wife on Sunday.

(DENNY slams the door and PAULETTE stops working. She looks up at the empty doorway and freezes.)

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

At rise: It is the next afternoon. It is extremely hot. DENNY is sitting on the outdoor couch listening to the baseball game on the radio and drinking a beer. BERTIE enters slowly.

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CONTINUED:

She is wearing a big shirt and pants
and wipes her face with her bandana.
She carries a brown paper bag.

BERTIE

We winnin'?

DENNY

Not yet.

BERTIE

Then we're losin'!

(Sips DENNY's beer)

Beer's warm.

DENNY

It's hotter 'n Hades out here Bert. Now you just give me that
bag, sit yourself down and take a load off those feet.

(DENNY takes the bag inside and exits to the
trailer)

BERTIE

Don't mind if I do. Hot enough to cook this corn right in the
bag. And where'd you learn "Hotter 'n Hades. " Hadn't heard
that one in years.

DENNY (O.S.)

I learned it from you. Be right back with your beer.

BERTIE

Take yer time, I got no where to go.

(turns the radio off)

Learned it from me, now that's a good one. (shouting to
Denny) Where's my daughter?

DENNY

Went over to the library.

BERTIE

In this heat? I swear that girl'd rather read than eat.

DENNY

(comes out with two bottles of beer)

Nothing's changed. Just look in our refrigerator.

(hands her a beer)

So what're you picking today?

BERTIE

Corn today, beans last week, who knows what tomorrow. Only
thing sure about pickin' is unless the Lord floods you out or
burns you up there'll be somethin' to bend over for. How
long's Paulette stay'n at that library?

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CONTINUED:

DENNY

Since the funeral she gets a new stack of books almost every other day. You can hardly move for all the books.

BERTIE

(picking up a book)

What's she reading now?

DENNY

Everything from weather to water pollution but don't ask me cause I don't read 'em.

BERTIE

God broke the mold when he made that girl.

DENNY

What's in the bag?

BERTIE

Brought some corn. Paulette's always been partial to white so I'm always asking and lately all I get is - " It's too hard to grow " "too expensive " or " Too temperamental. "

DENNY

Looks good to me.

BERTIE

Sugar 'n spice's what they call it but that don't mean a thing. Man said it was special, but bettern' that, it was free.

DENNY

What's so special?

BERTIE

Made in a laboratory. Can you believe it? We're growing corn in a test tube.

DENNY

Just like that new baby born over in England.

BERTIE

They grew a baby in a test tube?

DENNY

Started it out there I guess. I saw it on the news.

BERTIE

Hope they do better than they did with the corn.

DENNY

Looked like a regular baby to me. Think you and John'd want a baby started in a test tube?

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BERTIE

Maybe, but John'd still want to do the startin' himself if you know what I mean.

DENNY

You're too much Bert. Shame Paulette didn't get all your sense of humor.

BERTIE

Oh, John swears Paulette was born serious.

DENNY

Like that damn star she likes so much. Ser-i-ous the dog star.

BERTIE

Some star looks like a dog?

DENNY

Don't look like a dog to me but don't tell Paulette. You want one of these?

(DENNY goes inside to get another beer)

BERTIE

Lord yes, but no, got to watch my sugar.

DENNY (O. S.)

We got water too. Bottles of it. I thought water was supposed to be free like the TV but Paulette says this is better than what we got in the tap.

BERTIE

Lordy, what's wrong with your water?

DENNY (O. S.)

Paulette's thinks it's making Red sick.

BERTIE

Where's that dog anyway? Usually barks my head off.

DENNY (O. S.)

She took Red to the library.

BERTIE

Now don't tell me she's teachin' that dog to read.

DENNY

(comes back out with drinks)

Might as well. Takes him everywhere.

BERTIE

She walked clear over to the library in this heat?

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DENNY

You can't argue with your daughter.

BERTIE

You can - but you won't win. I had a cousin said Paulette was just born at the wrong time. Something about the way the stars were crossing this way and that. Don't ask me. I didn't believe it then, but now I wonder. Child gets her teeth into something and chews it clear down to the bone.

DENNY

You think it really was something in the stars?

BERTIE

Paulette's smarter than half the people on God's earth, but smart don't always make happy. Losing that baby was hard on her. And you, too, I know that. But having no reason she can point to makes it worse. I can see her just playin' it over and over trying to make it right again.

DENNY

We did everything right. We're not criminals. We did everything right. She just died in that crib sleeping and no one knows why.

BERTIE

It's still had for a woman to accept, specially when it was that little one brought you together in the first place. You were a good father and Paulette was a fine mother but losing her baby can make any woman go all flat inside.

DENNY

Funny. She can look up into that sky and accept one of those stars dying a million miles off just because some teacher told her. Believes him with no problem, but won't take the word of the law, God or her husband - especially her husband. Just because I didn't carry that baby around for nine months doesn't mean I didn't love her as much as Paulette.

BERTIE

Give her time.

DENNY

I try Bert, but it's not easy when all you got is time. Maybe it wasn't the best way for me and Paulette to start off, but she's my wife now and I just want something to be the way I thought it would be.

BERTIE

I lost my first two babies early. They called it miscarriage, but I thought it was the coal dust. John Jr. grew up just fine 'til they sent him over to Viet Nam and all we got back was a box we couldn't open. Paulette was our baby and then

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CONTINUED:

BERTIE (cont'd)

she was your wife. You think you'll die from all the pain but you don't. You go on because that's just what you have to do. (Pause) Beer's already gone warm.

(DENNY takes the beer from her and exits into the trailer)

DENNY (O.S.)

Want some lemonade?

BERTIE

I shouldn't. But I'll take a small one.

DENNY

Paulette makes the best Bert -- just like you taught her.

BERTIE

Hell, she had to learn something from me.

DENNY

(comes back out with a glass of lemonade)

Here's a cool one for you. Just like you like it.

BERTIE

How long she's been down at that li-bery?

DENNY

She left right after lunch only she doesn't eat lunch. Personally, I don't think she eats enough to keep a bird alive, but her doctor says she's just fine so you know what that makes me.

BERTIE

Doctor knows if she's healing up or not.

DENNY

I guess. Hell, didn't see John Senior down at the Union Hall yesterday.

BERTIE

He wasn't feeling so good and I made him stay in and sleep.

DENNY

Anything I can do?

BERTIE

(BERTIE goes down to look at the garden)

Oh no, he's just a little tired. He'll be good as new.

DENNY

John Senior's a good man. You knew you were safe with John working over you, just he was born to it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

Well, he sure weren't born to it son. Nothin' but four generations of coal men working in the most beautiful graveyard Lord ever made. (pause) What the hell's this stuff?

DENNY

Paulette says it's some kind of spices.

BERTIE

Don't look like it could spice up much of anythin'.

DENNY

I keep saying we need some chickens or a cow but she says she's gonna cook with it. Did you think it was marijuana?

BERTIE

Now how the hell would I know what that looks like.

DENNY

Helluva fast buck to be made selling it.

BERTIE

Devil's money!

DENNY

That's just what I've heard.

BERTIE

I don't expect to find any of it growing here either.

DENNY

They say those college kid's pay plenty for it.

BERTIE

There's still a helluva lotta honest work to do out there if you got a strong back.

DENNY

They'll get it from somebody.

BERTIE

Somebody is not you and Paulette thank you.

DENNY

And get off lighter than the drunks.

BERTIE

We don't need anymore ways to forget our troubles, Denny. Lord knows I've seen 'em all.

DENNY

I know you weren't real happy about me and Paulette getting married the way we did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

You never heard me speak against you.

DENNY

I swear we loved each other.

BERTIE

I know that, son and believe me, that made it easier.

DENNY

But now, Bert, I'm afraid I'm losing her.

BERTIE

She's your wife, Denny. I know my Paulette and there's no one else but you.

DENNY

I want another baby. I want to be a good husband. I want her to come back from that damn library!

BERTIE

Paulette's your wife now and she'll be a mother again. When a man and a woman take those vows they got to keep 'em. Too many promises broken out there. I taught Paulette and she knows what's right.

DENNY

It's not like I want her to stay if she doesn't want me--

BERTIE

It's too damn hot out there for her to be walkin'. You shouldn't've let her go like that.

DENNY

You ever try to stop her when she's made up her mind?

BERTIE

She's strong-headed like her father.

DENNY

She says you're the strong one.

BERTIE

John Senior's run this family for thirty-five years.

DENNY

That's what I told her too.

BERTIE

He's just a little wore out. And hot. Hell, it must be ninety in the shade.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

You sit down here and put your feet up.

BERTIE

Not like me to tire but I won't fight'cha.
(BERTIE lays down on the couch)

DENNY

Paulette calls 'em the Dog Days. Something to do with her stars and the sun. She swears by it.

BERTIE

I better not hear her swearin'. Where'd you say that dog was?

DENNY

Down at the library. Not that he's any good for protection. He'd sooner lick the devil outta you than bite. But he looks fierce enough.

BERTIE

Hell, a cat looks meaner than Red. Paulette would always have some dog followin' after her when she was a girl. Then it'd git hit by a car or found dead at hunting time and she'd cry like a baby 'til we promised to get her another.

DENNY

That worked?

BERTIE

Oh, sure. Just bring that child a new pup and she'd be all smiles again. (gets up and looks out toward the road.) You sure she took that dog with cause less my eyes are a lot worse'en I think, Paulette walking right down the middle of that road and there's no dog with her.

DENNY

Paulette, don't you move!

(DENNY takes off after her and sweeps her up bringing her back in his arms. PAULETTE is carrying some books.)

BERTIE

Sweet and tart. Just like her lemonade. Denny! Put her right down here. Jesus, she's pale as water.

PAULETTE

I'm all right, Mom.

DENNY

I didn't give her any chance to argue about with me about this, Bert, I just picked her up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

You did right, Denny, she could'a stroked herself dead in that sun. Now you just take some of this lemonade girl.

PAULETTE

I'm fine, Mama. It's just a little heat is all.

BERTIE

You're smart, Paulette, but you're no doctor.

(BERTIE hands PAULETTE the glass of lemonade.)

Anyway, it's damn fine lemonade.

(PAULETTE drinks some as BERTIE hovers. When she doesn't finish it all, BERTIE glares until she drinks more and then a third stare until she empties the glass. BERTIE takes the glass back triumphantly.)

Now don't that feel better?

PAULETTE

Lemonade's fine but I know how I feel and there's nothing wrong with me.

BERTIE

But I bet you do feel better.

PAULETTE

Yes, Mama, I feel better now stop fussin' like I was an invalid.

DENNY

Your Mom's just tryin' to do right for you Paulette.

BERTIE

Oh, Paulette knows Bertie's always lookin' out for her, don't you hon ?

DENNY

Bert brought us a whole basket of that corn you like.

BERTIE

Good food always cures what ails yea.

PAULETTE

You didn't have to pick today in this heat did you Mama?

BERTIE

Hell, it's a lot better than the cold we'll be having next winter. Heat's no problem for Bertie, just a way of reminding me to keep on the side of right of the Lord. Paulette never did take the heat as good as the others.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

I didn't forget how to cook Mama.

BERTIE

Just seems silly for two kitchens to get all heated.

DENNY

Bertie's been here for quite a while. She was worried about you.

PAULETTE

I'm sorry, Mama. That corn will be good and the chicken was just fine too.

BERTIE

It's okay. Bertie's too old to be sensitive.

(Goes to sit down in the chair and moves the books DENNY had put there from PAULETTE)

Where's that dog of yours. Denny said you taught him to read.

PAULETTE

Red didn't come back here?

DENNY

That damn dog break his chain again?

(Goes looking for the dog behind the trailer)

PAULETTE

He's only done it twice before.

(stands up and starts to call for him)

Red!

DENNY

And that's twice in the last two weeks.

PAULETTE

He's not right, Denny. He's sick. Anyone can see that.

(looks under the porch)

DENNY

Sick of being tied up, that's all. Red!

PAULETTE

It's more than that. He's sick. Red!

BERTIE

Red?

DENNY

One of these days somebody'll shoot that dog and ask questions later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Denny! Don't talk like that.

DENNY

I'm sorry honey, but you know it's the truth.

PAULETTE

That doesn't make it right.

BERTIE

He's right, honey. People got no use for a dog runnin' free.

PAULETTE

I'll bet he went down the creek. I'll just go and look for him.

DENNY

No, Paulette, you can't go back out there again, can she Bertie?

BERTIE

Denny can go out and look for him later? Can't ya son.

DENNY

He doesn't come back by supper I'll take a ride out in the truck. I gotta get some gas anyway since I'm driving' to Youngstown in the morning.

PAULETTE

They called you back to work?

DENNY

No, nothin' like that. It's just me and a couple the guys thought we'd get together and. . . you know, just look around.

PAULETTE

It's all locked up, Denny. They won't let you in.

DENNY

I know that. But we can still get ourselves together, you know, discuss some possibilities. Right Bert?

BERTIE

Sounds like a good thing. Man's gotta have his possibilities.

PAULETTE

Maybe you could take John Senior with you. Daddy would like that wouldn't he Mama?

BERTIE

I don' know. Yer Daddy's been awful busy, Paulette.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

Did he get that job at the Quicky Mart?

BERTIE

Hell, no, gave it to some boy without a lick of experience. But he's real happy to get some time off. Man's been carrying a lunchbox since he was 14. Even the good Lord knew enough to put in a day of rest. Look's like John's finally got his Sabbath too.

DENNY

Well you know he's welcome to come with me and the boys anytime he wants. You tell him that. Wasn't a man on his shift didn't like John.

BERTIE

(Pause) That dog's not in heat, is she?

PAULETTE

HE certainly is not!

BERTIE

I just asked.

DENNY

Paulette took our entertainment money for the whole month to get him fixed.

BERTIE

Would'a made some cute pups.

PAULETTE

All pups are cute but most end up dead.
(PAULETTE picks up the empty glass)
I'm going in to get some lemonade.

DENNY

I'll get it for you.

PAULETTE

I feel better. I'm just fine. You want somethin' Mama?

BERTIE

Nothin' for me or I'll float clear down that crick.
(PAULETTE exits)
Sorry for bringing up all that about the dog.

DENNY

You just were asking.

PAULETTE

I can't hear you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

Nothing for me either.

BERTIE

She's right I guess. No reason to have animals when we can barely feed ourselves.

DENNY

Sometimes I think she wouldn't mind having me fixed too.

BERTIE

Denny!

DENNY

Well at least you can talk to a good dog.

BERTIE

You can talk to a good wife.

DENNY

Maybe you can.

PAULETTE

Lemonade's at the end but I can make some more tonight.

BERTIE

I was just telling Denny it's a good idea gettin' that dog fixed. In these hard times it's all a body can do to feed themself much less some pups.

PAULETTE

Oh Red never minded being fixed.

DENNY

That doctor of yours tell you that too?

PAULETTE

Denny!

BERTIE

Denny's jus making a little joke, right son?

BERTIE (CONT'D)

He's been very funny this afternoon. Funny and very thoughtful getting me lemonade and helping me with the corn. I like that in a man, don't you Paulette? Certainly was one of the first things your father and I noticed about him too.

(PAULETTE crosses down to her garden and starts fixing the rocks)

DENNY

Being polite's not gotten me very far in this life, Bert.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

Don't you quit son, cause the Lord hates a quitter. I can tell you that. You two never guess who I saw out there pickin' corn with me today.

DENNY

Elvis?

BERTIE

See what I mean about him being funny.

PAULETTE

So who'd you see out there Mama?

BERTIE

George Thomas.

DENNY

Most Valuable Player in the Thanksgiving game?

BERTIE

Only 'cause you had a broken foot as I remember.

DENNY

You saw that game?

BERTIE

I learned to share John Senior with a pigskin right from the start.

DENNY

Best damn game of the year. You remember Paulette?

PAULETTE

It was our first date Denny. . I couldn't ever forget that night.

DENNY

Best damn game I ever missed.

BERTIE

Should've been you winnin' that trophy not George and I didn't need John Senior to figure that out.

DENNY

You sure it was George Thomas picking corn out there today?

BERTIE

Bent over just like me. His sister was out there too.

DENNY

Can you beat that. And they said he was really going somewhere.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

Father died in some hunting accident last year and left his wife without enough life insurance to buryin' him proper.

DENNY

Can you believe that Paulette. George was out there picking corn and all along I thought he went to college.

PAULETTE

He couldn't read, Denny. Don't see why they'd want him in college.

DENNY

He could play football. That's what they wanted all right.

PAULETTE

And he wasn't much better at math.

DENNY

Nothing mattered on that field when you were good and that night he was the best.

BERTIE

Well I guess you could say he's changed fields is all.

DENNY

He sure was one big son-of-a-bitch in high school -- sorry Bert, but I got to ask if he was still in good shape?

BERTIE

From where I was standing we all looked the same size. What's wrong honey?

PAULETTE

(PAULETTE grabs onto the chair swaying weakly)
I'll be okay. It's just this heat is all.

BERTIE

Sit down here baby, you're weak as a pup.

PAULETTE

Mama, please. (sits)

BERTIE

Now don't you argue with Bertie. Stubborn as her father.

DENNY

She worked double shift at that store again yesterday.

BERTIE

Working double then walkin' in this sun'll make anyone sick.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

You tell her Bert.

BERTIE

But this boy's gonna get things right, now you go in there and get her something sweet. Paulette's always got some Jello in that frige and some pillows for her head and feet too. Then Bertie'll leave you two alone to yourselves.

DENNY

I love you Paulette. (kisses her)

PAULETTE

Love you too.

(DENNY exits)

BERTIE

You work yourself too hard girl. .

PAULETTE

They just pay the minimum Mama and now Denny's laid off.

BERTIE

What you need is maximum here with your husband. You're all bones child. You need time together so you can get some appetite back. Don't eat right since that baby's gone.

PAULETTE

Jenny died, Mama. You can say those words.

BERTIE

Words don't change nothin'. (pause) Everybody needs time Paulette. No shame in that. Time to eat, time to heal, time to sleep. You are gettin' some sleep baby?

(DENNY holds a bowl of Jello in his hands as he starts to come out, then listens to PAULETTE talking a moment and disappears.)

PAULETTE

I dream about her every night, Mama. When I close my eyes she's all I can see.

BERTIE

Not a day goes by I don't think of your brother and the those babies I lost fore they could take a breath. But we have to go on, honey. Leave 'em sleepin' in the arms of the Lord and get ready for our future. That means buildin' up your strength if you're gonna be a Mama again.

PAULETTE

What are you talking about Mama? What did Denny say to you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

Didn't say nothin'. Didn't have to. I see how you're feelin'. Near faint on that road. Lookin' pale as a ghost and cold as ice. Makes sense you be havin' a baby.

PAULETTE

No Mama. . . (laughing) I'm not having a baby.

BERTIE

I said it serious Paulette.

PAULETTE

It's just the heat.

BERTIE

Don't know why you'd be laughing Paulette, I said it serious.

PAULETTE

I know you did, but I wouldn't say anything to Denny, okay?

BERTIE

There's nothing wrong between the two of you.

PAULETTE

Everything's fine Mama. He just might not understand.

BERTIE

I can't imagine why a man would laugh at his wife being pregnant.

PAULETTE

Well, I'm not having a baby and that's the end of it.

BERTIE

And that's the end of it.

(BERTIE motions that she is locking up her lips and sits back down on the couch)

PAULETTE

But I do have something to tell you. Something only Denny and me know now but something everybody's got to find out soon.

BERTIE

What would that be?

PAULETTE

I've been reading at the library and I've been putting it all together ---

BERTIE

Puttin' what together?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Why everything's getting sick around here.

BERTIE

What's gittin' sick?

PAULETTE

I'm going know why my plants won't grow, Mama, and why that dog's been getting sicker by the day. I've almost got it all figured out now but as soon as I get the rest then I have to let everyone know.

BERTIE

Know what? You're talking a little crazy, honey.

PAULETTE

No, I'm talking sane, Mama. Because I can see the truth.

BERTIE

What truth?

PAULETTE

I think we're being poisoned.

BERTIE

Oh my Lord, Paulette, what're you sayin'?

PAULETTE

I think that's why Red's sick and the water smells so funny -- and it may be the reason little Jenny died.

BERTIE

Who would do a thing like that?

PAULETTE

Remember when we first came here and we'd see those big trucks going off Golf Road dumpin' those barrels.

BERTIE

Oh no, Paulette, if it's those trucks you're talking about you're wrong. They were jus bringin' in trash, that's all.

PAULETTE

We thought that's what they were bringing in those barrels but it wasn't trash, Mama, no it was chemicals. Poison and now I think that poison is leaking right into the ground and makin' everything sick.

BERTIE

Why are you doing this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

It's in the papers. You can read it for yourself.
(PAULETTE picks up a mason jar and starts filling it with dirt from the garden)

BERTIE

Bein' in the papers don't make it true. But thinkin'bout all those things on top of grieving will make you sick and that is true.

PAULETTE

I'm sick all right.

BERTIE

I know it.

PAULETTE

Sick of believing lies. Standing on lies, Mama. Eating and drinking lies that may be killing us while we just look the other way

BERTIE

(BERTIE takes the jar and dumps the dirt back into the garden)

Even if it's true, which I'm not saying it is, but even if it is -- what could we do? You got your life here Paulette. You got a husband needs you and someday, today or tomorrow, you will be a mother again. (pause) You think I ever knew why my babies died 'cause I didn't. But I let it go just like I let your Daddy go every morning to work in those mines. I let him go because otherwise I was no good to him or me. I put it away and went on. I had to. That's what we gotta do in this life or we got no life here at all.

PAULETTE

We don't have much Mama but we can take back what we have and say it's ours. We can stop looking the other way. We can stop being afraid.

BERTIE

Now listen here just a minute. Chuck Michael's was the Mayor when we came here.

PAULETTE

What's that got to do with it.

BERTIE

You went to school with his daughter Carrie. I took care of his wife Sue Ellen when she lost her breast to the cancer. He's a good man.

PAULETTE

I'm not saying anything bad about Mr. Michaels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

He wouldn't do nothin' to hurt us Paulette and I'm sure as hell not going to do nothin' to hurt him.

PAULETTE

I'm just sayin' if Red gets sick and dies then I'm taking that dog's body to a lab to find out what killed him.

BERTIE

You take that dog to the laboratory and the next thing you know we'll be having all those Washington people down here and you know what that means.

PAULETTE

Something will change.

BERTIE

Somebody will be out of work. Somebody like us.

PAULETTE

But Mama --

BERTIE

No, Paulette, I've seen it happen. They find somethin' wrong and next thing you know they're bringing in doctors and lawyers who live somewhere else. Everybody talks. Nothing changes 'cept the time on their watch. Nobody cares about the people at the bottom honey, and we are the bottom. Nobody cares about what's in the ground we sleep on, or the water we drink. And if it don't matter, it don't change. That's the way it works. I don't like it, but it's the truth. This is the last move for your Daddy and me. There is no place else after this, Paulette, 'cept heaven or hell. We just gotta live on this flat little place 'til we pass on to the arms of the Lord. Then we got no more pain. Just angels singing for the poor same's the rich. That's the Promised Land child. That's the true democracy. 'Til we get there we just gotta make due. If that means living quiet, then I'm living quiet.

PAULETTE

(pause) You always told me I had a special gift for learning.

BERTIE

You do honey.

PAULETTE

You always told me not to lie.

BERTIE

God hates a liar.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Well I believe those people lied to us when they put those barrels in the ground. And if I see something, know something and don't do something then it would be like lying twice. No matter what you think you taught me Mama, you never taught me to lie.

BERTIE

You told anybody but me and Denny 'bout this?

PAULETTE

Not yet.

BERTIE

Then we got a little more time.

PAULETTE

I guess.

BERTIE

Ten or fifteen years in the ground means we gotta have a little more time. Right?

PAULETTE

But you do believe me, Mama?

BERTIE

You're a smart girl Paulette. A whole lot smarter than your Mama. So you got to give me a little more time.

PAULETTE

And what about Red?

BERTIE

When Red comes back we'll give him a good look.

PAULETTE

Promise?

(Dropping back tired)

BERTIE

Promise. Now you come over here and lie down. Just close your eyes and rest.

PAULETTE

Okay Mama.

BERTIE

'Cause you know your Mama loves you.

PAULETTE

I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

Just a little more time.

PAULETTE

Just a little more time.

BERTIE

Next year you'll have your own little one to take care of again and Denny will be back at work and this will all seem like a bad dream. You hear me.

PAULETTE

(voice getting weaker and her eyes closed) I hear you.

BERTIE

(whispering to her) And one more thing, Paulette. It's hard for the men, too. They have a different pain than we can't always see. But we can help them forget their pain. We need to help them forget their pain even if it's not always what we think we want to do ourselves. What I'm saying Paulette is that sometimes we have to be wives to our husbands even if we're not really wantin' to be that close. Even if it hurts just a little. We can still do what needs to be done to keep our marriage strong. You do understand?

PAULETTE

Yes, Mama, do what we need to keep our marriage strong.

BERTIE

That's right baby. Now close your eyes, and when you wake up Bertie's gonna make everything right again. I promise.

(PAULETTE closes her eyes and falls asleep)

Everything will be just fine.

(DENNY holds a bowl of JELLO as he starts out the door of the trailer. BERTIE sees him.)

Shhhhh.

DENNY

She's okay?

BERTIE

Just sleeping

(BERTIE and DENNY whisper away from PAULETTE)

DENNY

Cause if you think she's sick I'll call a doctor right now.

BERTIE

No, honey, I just think we need to leave her sleep.

DENNY

She's been talking about the baby again, hasn't she?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

Yes, she talked about the baby.

DENNY

And the dog. She talk about Red and the water.

BERTIE

She did.

DENNY

You believe her about them poisoning us?

BERTIE

I believe I understand her Denny.

DENNY

'cause if I believed all that I'd have to move Bert and you know I can't do that.

BERTIE

I know honey. You gotta look at what Paulette believes. That's where you start. You gotta understand what she thinks and then you can help her. Help yourself.

DENNY

I try to understand, honest. I hate this damn cracker box but it's all I have and if I believed her I don't have nothing. (Pause) I just want it to be right again Bert.

BERTIE

Now, honey you know I'm not an asking person, am I Denny?

DENNY

No Bert. You never ask for nothin'.

BERTIE

That's right. So if I'm asking for somethin' now it's only 'cause I want to help, right?

DENNY

Right.

BERTIE

So what I'm asking is that you hear me all the way to the end, then you follow what I ask. Okay?

DENNY

Okay.

BERTIE

I want you to go out tonight and find that dog.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

Red?

BERTIE

Yes. Red. I want you to find that dog and I want you to take him back there in the cemetery where that little house is -- and then I want you to put him to sleep. Permanent.

DENNY

Jesus, Bert, I can't do that. Why'd I have to do that?

BERTIE

Paulette's got it into her head that dog's sick.

DENNY

He just hates being tied up is all.

BERTIE

If Red dies for any reason that girl may be lost to us forever.

DENNY

It was a present from me.

BERTIE

You heard her son.

DENNY

She loves that dog.

BERTIE

It's not about the dog honey. It's about getting that child back the way it was before. You do want that.

DENNY

More than anything.

BERTIE

Then you gotta trust me. Are you listenin'?

DENNY

I'm listenin'.

BERTIE

You got Red from the pound didn't ya?

DENNY

Yes.

BERTIE

It was an old dog right from the start.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

But she loves that dog Bert.

BERTIE

Listen honey. Sometimes you just got to just cut away everything old and start new again, even if it hurts.

DENNY

I don't know.

BERTIE

You can do this. You have to.

DENNY

You sure?

BERTIE

Lots of dogs die. Some get run over. Some get shot. She wouldn't ever have to know.

DENNY

I'd have to shoot him?

BERTIE

You don't want him to suffer, son.

DENNY

No, I wouldn't want that.

BERTIE

You don't want her to suffer anymore do you?

DENNY

No, I don't want that either.

BERTIE

Well she is sufferin'. Thinking 'bout things over and over in her head. Playin' with it til she can't think about anything else. About you. Believe me, you're just helping get her back. After a few days she'll know he's gone and then you can bring her home a present -- a new puppy. Then everything will be fine Just like before. You'll see.

DENNY

I don't know. How can you be so sure?

BERTIE

I'm her mother. I know what she needs Denny. Always have.
(Takes the bowl of Jello from DENNY while he goes to get a shovel)

Now let's dig up some of these old plants and put in something pretty. And for God's sake, son, put a smile on

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE (cont'd)

your face for that girl she wakes up. You'll see. After tonight everything will be just like you want it. Believe me, after tonight it will be just like it was before.

(DENNY starts digging as the music fades up and the lights fade out)

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

At Rise: Later that same night. PAULETTE is hanging sheets in the moonlight. She is singing a nursery rhyme as she skips in and out among the sheets on the clothesline.

PAULETTE

Little Sally Ann
Sittin' in the sand.
Weepin' and a waitin' for a nice young man.
Rise Sally Rise.
Wipe your sleepy eyes.

JOHN (O.S.)

(overlapping)

There's a long, long road a windin'....Oh, there's a long, long road a windin'....

PAULETTE

Is that you Daddy?

(PAULETTE runs to meet her father, JOHN SENIOR who is singing an old song, walking unsteadily and waving a liquor bottle.)

JOHN

Ohhhh. . . there's a long, long road a windin' to that little brown church in the vale. . . . Sweet Jesus!

PAULETTE

What're you doing out here this time of night?

JOHN

What's it look like.
(struggling to stay upright)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Nothing I ever saw before.

JOHN

Hell, I'm dancing of course!

PAULETTE

Where's the truck? Did you have an accident?

JOHN

Then I must be. . . . singing! Little brown "snatch" in the
vale. . . . 'scuse me little girl.

PAULETTE

Are you drunk?

JOHN

Hell no!

(Trips)

Well maybe just a little bit.

PAULETTE

Come on over here and sit down.

JOHN

I can walk by myself, thank you! But since you're such a
pretty little helper---

PAULETTE

(PAULETTE helps him down to the couch)

Lean on me, Daddy, I won't break.

JOHN

Did I tell you that I love you?

PAULETTE

You better tell me sitting down over here before you fall and
hurt yourself, John Senior.

JOHN

Whooooa. . .

PAULETTE

Now what's that for?

JOHN

I must be a bad boy '. . . . cause you sound just like Bertie
does.

PAULETTE

Nothing wrong with sounding like Bertie does sometimes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

You sound like Bertie does all the time now.

PAULETTE

You are drunk.

JOHN

See what I mean! You don't know Bertie like I do. She can be a mean woman.

PAULETTE

(PAULETTE goes back to hanging the sheets)
Bertie's just looking out for you and you know it. Besides taking care of you, what else is wrong with her?

JOHN

Not a damn thing.

PAULETTE

See.

JOHN

That's the problem! Not a damn thing.
(Pulls a bottle out)

PAULETTE

You've had enough of that, thank you.

JOHN

Just like Bertie.

PAULETTE

You never could drink if I can remember.

JOHN

See! Just like her.

PAULETTE

Daddy.

JOHN

What's it about all you women.

PAULETTE

You're not making any sense.

JOHN

So damn smart -- and so damn purrrrr-fect!

PAULETTE

And so damn sober, too!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Now you watch your language, little girl!

PAULETTE

We're not perfect, Daddy, except you. You were about the most perfect steel man that ever lived.

JOHN

Who said that ?

PAULETTE

Denny.

JOHN

Now there's a lie if I ever heard one.

PAULETTE

And his friends, too.

JOHN

A whole damn county of liars.

PAULETTE

Denny says there's no one better than you, not even his own brothers or father.

JOHN

He said that?

PAULETTE

Yes.

JOHN

And you believed him?

PAULETTE

Yes.

JOHN

Then you're as big a fool as he is.

PAULETTE

He wouldn't lie.

JOHN

Hell, then, it must be true! Now let's celebrate with that nice bottle and sit down here and talk! We never do talk anymore since you ran away and became a wife and --

PAULETTE

You can say it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Say what?

PAULETTE

Say it Daddy.

JOHN

Say get me up before I can say Jack Robinson!

(PAULETTE helps pull JOHN up as he goes to bury his face inside the sheets hanging on the line).

Nothin' in the whole world as good as the smell of clean white sheets. And dryin' them in the moonlight is a damn fine idea! Don't know why nobody ever thought of it before. Let me help you get these up before your mother gets home. .

.

(JOHN tries to hang up a sheet but gets tangled fighting with it)

Hell, why don't you come on out here and fight like a man! Where the hell are you anyway.

PAULETTE

There's no one there Daddy.

JOHN

Damn thing won't give me a chance!

PAULETTE

I'll take them down later. You just sit down and rest.

JOHN

I don't want to just sit down and rest. I'm not ready to die.

PAULETTE

Of course you're not ready to die.

JOHN

I'm sorry I'm not much help.

PAULETTE

You helped a lot. I remember.

JOHN

What do you remember?

PAULETTE

I remember you were always there .

JOHN

Where?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

For me, when I needed to talk.

JOHN

Bertie's the talker. I'm the listener, 'cept now when Bertie says I don't listen at all. She's right, you know. But what she doesn't know is that even when I'm not listening, I'm still thinking! Thinking and planning. Yes, I am. Thinking and --

(JOHN goes to take a drink but PAULETTE takes it)

PAULETTE

Talk to me now, Daddy. Please.

JOHN

Now that wasn't very nice. But I have another out in my truck.

PAULETTE

Talk to me.

JOHN

Talk about what, baby?

PAULETTE

You never said how you felt about me marrying Denny.

JOHN

I didn't say 'cause it didn't matter.

PAULETTE

Because I was pregnant.

JOHN

I don't hold with women and babies running around the world alone. It's a scary place out there. Scary enough for two but a lot worse when you're alone.

PAULETTE

But you liked Denny didn't you?

JOHN

You liked Denny, Didn't mean much to me. You liked him and I like you. Loved you. Hell, to me, Denny Griffith was just a . . . just a . . . where's my bottle honey?

PAULETTE

Just what Daddy? What did he mean to you?

JOHN

You were my little girl. Then you were gone. What the hell did it matter whether I liked Denny or not if you were gone for good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

But I wasn't gone for goo. I'll always be your daughter. Things change, you taught me that.

JOHN

Things change but I don't have to like it. You didn't hear me if you didn't hear the whole thing.

PAULETTE

Nothing can change between us. Nothing could ever change.

JOHN

Everything's changing between us. Everything's different between me and the whole damn world and all I can do is stand here and salute as it goes by me. You didn't hear me if you didn't hear the whole thing little girl. Things change but I don't have to like it. It's always been that way for me. Everything moving too fast for John. Maybe I'm just God's little joke and I don't know it. Maybe I'm just too stupid to lay down and die.

PAULETTE

You don't want to die. I know you.

JOHN

What do you know about me?

PAULETTE

I know you were the best father and the best steel man in the Valley.

JOHN

That's two I lost then. 'Cause you don't need no Daddy and this Valley don't make no more steel.

PAULETTE

Denny says it's just temporary.

JOHN

---Denny's a fool! They're all damn fools. That plant's gone and it's never openin' up again for me or him or any of 'em. Gone and blowed away.

(Blows into his palms and slaps his hands together)

Good-bye! Just like the damn mines and wanting it to be different don't make it so. Living is temporary. Dead is permanent and that damn mill is dead

PAULETTE

You gotta believe, Daddy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Believing is for people with hope, honey. Jesus Christ hisself couldn't make steel in this Valley.

PAULETTE

But Bertie says--

JOHN

--- Bertie lies. To me, to herself, to the whole damn world. She knows it, too. She's smart as whip. She's where you got your brains. Not from me, God knows. Hell, she could've been anything if she'd been a man. President of the United States maybe cause she's a helluva lot smarter than those assholes. A better fighter too. Been fighting all our lives together to keep me from giving up. She's no quitter. No, she's the fighter in this family, I'm just the man.

PAULETTE

She's been happy with you. She loves you. You know that.

JOHN

Well, that's real nice, but it ain't worth a damn if it's a lie and it has to be a lie 'cause I ain't no damn good for anyone. Not them, or me --- or her.

PAULETTE

She loves you, Daddy. I love you.

JOHN

Love? Love's cheap right now. And it better be, 'cause you don't see this man bringing home nothin'. 'Cause this man don't work. . . . and a man who don't work, don't----
(drinks from the bottle again)

PAULETTE

Why are you doing this?

JOHN

I been doing this for months honey. Maybe longer. Maybe I never really did anything right 'cept make you. God knows I did that right. Made the most beautiful little baby in the world. Maybe that's all I was here for in the first place. Just to pass through and pass on to you. And if it's true, hell, if it's true, it would be enough for me.

PAULETTE

You can't give up. You gotta believe.

JOHN

I believed in those mines and that son-of-a-black-bitch coal just like my daddy and his daddy but it killed 'em. Would a killed me too if I stayed. And I would'a. Stayed forever if I had my way. But Bertie said no. She said we had to leave. She

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN (cont'd)

was right. I was a family man. I had children to raise up. I had responsibilities. She was right. Part of me died in those mountains. Maybe the best part.

(Taking PAULETTE's face into his hands)

Listen, honey, I know people say bad things about those mountains. That don't mean you got to be ashamed of where you come from. Don't mean you got to be quiet 'bout who you are. Good people came from there Paulette, Good people stayed. Died So don't you ever hang your head, girl. Hear me?

PAULETTE

I won't Daddy, I swear.

JOHN

You shouldn't swear, you know. Your Mama doesn't like to hear her children swear though she's can't get by a day without swearin' herself. Children are supposed to be better than us. By God you were going to be more'n we could ever dream. I believed it then. I still believe it now. You're the only thing I really do believe in anymore. (Pause) Paulette. Maybe it was never so good as I remember. Maybe you shouldn't take any of it with you. But it's all I got left in my heart. It's all I got left to give you.

PAULETTE

I'll remember it Daddy. I promise.

JOHN

Remember you and me walking over a sea of green grass. No more black soot in my hair. No more black tar in my beard. No more dust in my blood. I can't sing, but that last day we spent on the mountain I swear I did. You sittin' so high on my shoulders and me pointin' out everything and everyone we knew in that valley. Forgive me Jesus, but I felt proud that day. I felt good that day. I felt like a man should. (Pause) Then Bertie came down with the truck and we drove off, just like old Lot and his wife except Bertie never looked back.

PAULETTE

Daddy? Are you okay?

JOHN

Coal dust in my eyes, honey. Just some old coal dust in my eyes.

PAULETTE

I'm here for you. We're all here together.

JOHN

Forgive me Jesus but it's not enough this time.

PAULETTE

Don't say that, please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

Honey, I'm too old this time. I'm just too tired to start again.

PAULETTE

We can all help.

JOHN

I'm sorry I'm such a bad man.

PAULETTE

You're not a bad man.

JOHN

I can't be what they say they want us to be -- running some machine I don't even understand. Damn computers gonna take over the whole world and no place for John.

PAULETTE

You're tired Daddy, you just need a little rest, now. Then you'll see how much better it will all look in the morning.

JOHN

I can't be anything new anymore.

PAULETTE

Even God took a day of rest.

JOHN

I'm so ashamed I got so little to pass on.

PAULETTE

All I ever wanted was to have you love me.

JOHN

A man should leave something better to his kin.

PAULETTE

Loving me is enough.

JOHN

Love is pretty, but it don't feed a family. Oh God --they do have stars in Ohio. (singing) Twinkle, Twinkle little star. .

.

PAULETTE

Beautiful stars.

JOHN

"How I wonder what. ". . . if I could just figure out how to touch'em . . .

(JOHN reaches up to the sky and then falters as he starts spinning)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

You all right?

JOHN

I'm fine. . . . but the rest of the world is sure spinnin'.

PAULETTE

You come in the house and lay down now.

JOHN

I gotta get home before Bertie comes after me. She'll be real mad if I come home drunk again, and believe me you don't ever want to get Bertie mad at you. Nooooo, she don't like me drunk. . . . and she's right. But I'm drunk tonight and I don't now how I could be sober again.

PAULETTE

You just go lay down in here and take a nap.

JOHN

Passed Denny way out there in the cemetery. Won't catch me out there on a dark night. No, sireeee.

(Pass behind the sheet on the way to the trailer
so they become silhouettes)

Ghosts out there come right out of the grave and snatch you. You remember that.

PAULETTE

Yes, Daddy. Just a little farther.

JOHN

You know that 'cause you're pretty smart. I mean you're pretty and smart. Smartest girl in the whole county. That's what everybody always said. Could'a been anything she wanted.

PAULETTE

Just keep walking, Daddy. One foot in front of the other.

JOHN

Hell, I still remember how to walk, girl. I just don't know where to work anymore

PAULETTE

We're almost there.

JOHN

You're so sweet lookin' - 'specially in the light like this. So sweet and so purty.

PAULETTE

Come on John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHN

" Come on John. . . Come on John. " Sounds like a damn horse race, don't it.

(They exit into the trailer as DENNY comes out of the darkness.)

Think John'll win this time?

PAULETTE (O.S.)

One step at a time.

JOHN (O.S.)

Don't put your money on it. No, not if you wantta win. You put your money away for that nice baby. I like that little baby.

(DENNY sits collapsed in a lawn chair)

PAULETTE (O.S.)

A few more steps.

JOHN (O.S.)

Please don't tell Bertie I'm drunk.

PAULETTE (O.S.)

I promise.

JOHN (O.S.)

Damn beautiful stars.

PAULETTE (O.S.)

Just a few more steps and you're there.

JOHN (O.S.)

Damn door got a life of its own, but I'm on my way now. Where's the light, damn it! (Pause) Ahhhhhh here's the bed.

PAULETTE (O.S.)

(Quiet) You all right in there? (pause) John Senior?

JOHN (O.S.)

(pause) 'Night Bertie.

PAULETTE

(PAULETTE stands in the doorway facing into the trailer)

'Night. . . John. . . 'Night.

(She gets her laundry basket and starts to pull the sheets off the line in a frenzy)

That's it! We're getting out of here. We're gonna get going, we're going move, we're going start all over again somewhere else --

(She sees DENNY and screams, dropping the basket)

---Oh, Denny! Thank God it's you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

You're shaking?

PAULETTE

I'm so glad you're here because I've been thinking a lot about us.

DENNY

You're gonna get in trouble thinking all the time, Paulette. I told you that. But then you never listen to me.

PAULETTE

What's wrong, Denny?

DENNY

Everything's right.

(DENNY gets up and disappears behind the sheet)

Nothing's wrong. That's what you should be asking your husband. What's right Denny. Because everything is all right isn't it? I mean, you don't think there's really anything wrong do you?

PAULETTE

You're so late. I kept dinner on the stove for a long time and then when you didn't come home I put it away. Were you down with the boys?

DENNY

You're all dressed up. You never wear anything that pretty for me anymore.

PAULETTE

You're talking so funny, tonight, Denny.

DENNY

I don't think I'm funny. I think I'm very, very serious. Maybe as serious as Mr. Leebow would be if he was here. If he was right here right now talking about all those stars I don't know a damn thing about.

PAULETTE

Look, I've been thinking about us and Jenny and the dog and this whole place and --

DENNY

Why do you do this, damn it!

PAULETTE

What?

DENNY

Why do you hang these sheets up in the middle of the night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

I was just taking them down.

DENNY

Like you think the moon could dry them, when the sun and moon are as different as man and woman, day and night, cats and dogs.

PAULETTE

I was just taking them down so we could talk about us maybe leaving here.

DENNY

Why would I do that? I don't want to leave here. What I want to do is understand why you want to do things so different. No one else in the whole damn county would be out here in the middle of the night hanging these sheets in the moonlight. No one. Not in a million years. Only you.

PAULETTE

I just do these things. . . . for myself. I thought you understood why I do things, I thought you understood me. Why are you looking at me that way?

DENNY

What way?

PAULETTE

So quiet.

(DENNY takes off his jacket revealing the blood on his shirt)

Dead quiet, oh, Denny you've got blood on your shirt. Something's happened hasn't it? Something bad has happened and you don't want to tell me.

DENNY

Something bad's always happening somewhere in the world. We just don't know everything.

PAULETTE

But I can see it's blood.

DENNY

Men can get used to blood too.

PAULETTE

Should I call someone?

DENNY

No! You shouldn't call anyone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Did you find him?

DENNY

Who?

PAULETTE

Red. Did you find him tonight?

DENNY

I never found him.

PAULETTE

You were gone a long time.

DENNY

I told you I never found him.

PAULETTE

Well, maybe I can go out now.

DENNY

No! There's no reason to go out now, it's late and you might get hurt out there all alone and hardly wearing anything.

PAULETTE

You look tired.

DENNY

I'm not tired.

PAULETTE

Then maybe you're hungry.

DENNY

Yes, I am hungry.

PAULETTE

John Senior came by before and I had to put him to sleep. I couldn't let him go home. He's asleep on the couch now. You were out looking for Red, weren't you?

DENNY

Was he drunk again?

PAULETTE

What do you mean.

DENNY

Everybody knows John Senior drinks more than he should.

PAULETTE

It's just temporary. Denny, don't look at me that way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

I'm just looking at my wife. You remember what that feels like don't you?

PAULETTE

Please.

DENNY

You just forgot what it's like to have a man look at you.

PAULETTE

You promised.

DENNY

You just don't remember anymore what a man looks like when he wants to make love to his wife.

PAULETTE

No.

DENNY

You're still my wife aren't you?

PAULETTE

Yes, I'm your wife.

DENNY

And I am still your husband.

PAULETTE

Yes.

DENNY

And there's no one else?

PAULETTE

Oh, Denny this is crazy!

DENNY

Making love to your wife is not crazy, honey. Hanging sheets in the moonlight, and not wanting to make love to your husband, now that's crazy.

PAULETTE

You said we could wait.

DENNY

You said we could wait.

PAULETTE

You promised.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

Then I lied, didn't I, just like everybody else lies, but I'm not lying to you anymore, Paulette, because I can't.

PAULETTE

But the doctor said--

DENNY

--I don't give a damn about the doctor. I don't give a damn about anything tonight except having my wife.

PAULETTE

There's so much we need to talk about---

DENNY

I'm tired of talking, honey. Sick to death of it. I don't want anything except the feel of you under me.

PAULETTE

No, please. This is crazy.

DENNY

Then it's my turn to be a little crazy, but it's crazy about you, isn't it? Isn't that what you always wanted? Me all crazy for you. Well I am honey.

PAULETTE

Not this way.

DENNY

----SHHHHHH. . . don't you hear it honey?

PAULETTE

What is it?

DENNY

It's my heart, Paulette. It's my heart breaking for you.

PAULETTE

Why is there all this blood?

DENNY

It's my heart bleeding for you. Without you I'm gonna be just as dried up and dead as your Daddy. You want that?

PAULETTE

He's tired. He just needs to get out of here. We all just need to get up and get out of here and ---

DENNY

There's no where to go, Paulette. Don't you see that. Nowhere.

(AS the lights go down, DENNY takes PAULETTE down
(MORE))

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY (cont'd)
onto the ground and falls on top of her as we
hear her voice)

PAULETTE

No, Denny, please.

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

At rise: Sunrise a few hours later.
The sky is turning and the sun will
continue to rise. PAULETTE sits in the
lawn chair wrapped in a sheet. BERTIE
comes walking up the road. She has
been up all night looking for JOHN and
collapses exhausted in the chair.

BERTIE

I can't find him anywhere, Paulette. Can't find John and I'm
too tired to walk one step more. (lays down)

PAULETTE

He's in the trailer Mama.

BERTIE

Thank the Lord. . . and he's all right?

PAULETTE

He's asleep.

BERTIE

Thank the Lord is all I can say. Up half the night walking
every street thinkin' John's dead and here he's not a mile
from me asleep in my daughter's trailer.

PAULETTE

He was pretty drunk.

BERTIE

But you said he's okay.

PAULETTE

He was drinking pretty hard.

BERTIE

Saw his truck out there in the field and all I could think of
he's had an accident.

PAULETTE

He came over, we talked, he drank. Then I put him to bed.

BERTIE

But he's all right. Thank the Lord.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

He said he was dying.

BERTIE

Oh John always says he's dying when he drinks.

PAULETTE

I think he meant it.

BERTIE

John don't mean nothin' when he's drinkin'.

PAULETTE

You never told me.

BERTIE

Told you what honey?

PAULETTE

You never said he was drinkin' like that.

BERTIE

You had your own troubles.

PAULETTE

He's still my father.

BERTIE

You had your own worries with Denny out of work and then your little girl gone so sudden.

PAULETTE

She died Mama. You can say that.

BERTIE

You had enough to worry 'bout Paulette.

PAULETTE

Why won't anyone say my baby died. Everyone tip toeing around that baby's name like it was death when that's not the thing that's killing us anymore. Her name was Jenny and she was beautiful and I loved her more than I loved my own life. She was too good and too young to die. She's gone and I can't bring her back. But she deserves to have her name spoken out loud by the people who loved her Mama, she deserves that.

BERTIE

I'm sorry, Paulette, sorry I can't speak her name, sorry I can't say what you need, sorry for the pain in the whole big world I can't do nothin' for . . . Paulette? Why's blood on this sheet. What happened here last night? You said John was all right!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

It wasn't John Senior Mama.

BERTIE

Thank you Jesus 'cause when he drinks he don't remember nothin'.

PAULETTE

It was Denny.

BERTIE

What? Your husband?

PAULETTE

It was my husband did this to me and he was sober as a judge. But I didn't scream out even though I should have. I did not cry out even when I was in pain and it was wrong to keep so silent. I didn't do anything, Mama, even when he did everything that is wrong between a man and a woman! It has to be wrong to do something like this, oh God, it has to be wrong. But I just closed my eyes and did nothing. No! I did something, I pretended I was dead. Yes, I pretended I was dead and it was the same thing as being dead. Then I didn't have to pretend anymore. It was the same. Because there was no love here last night, Mama. Not in this place. Not in him or me. Not on this cold, hard ground where he took me down lower than the lowest place on God's earth. I was in hell, Mama. I was in hell last night and there was no love here. Just this cold, hard metal of a man drillin' in to a woman he didn't even know. Drillin' into a woman who prayed she would die. Oh, Mama I prayed I would die and there was no love in this place last night, just darkness and two strangers. Just me and a cold fish-eyed man killing what was left of that girl he once loved. Just me and somebody with no name 'cause that man was not my husband and I was not his wife. No, no, no there was no love in this place, and those people that were here last night are dead. Those people died last night Mama. Their souls and their vows are broken and they can never be together again.

BERTIE

Oh Lord forgive me, I never wanted anything bad.

PAULETTE

Funny, Mama, funny how when it was over he just walked off and left me here alone.

BERTIE

I swear, I just wanted you to be happy Paulette. That's all I ever wanted. You havin a good life. No more babies dyin'. NO more coal dust. And you bein' so sad thinkin' 'bout your baby. Then you worrying about that dog and Denny worried about you. I thought if you two could start over. You know?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE (cont'd)

IF the dog were just gone and you could have a new pup. You know Paulette, like when you were a little girl?

PAULETTE

What're you talking about. What's this got to do with Red?

(DENNY appears quietly from behind the trailer)

BERTIE

I thought you'd go on, have another baby. Women do that. No matter what. I never wished any of this on you.

PAULETTE

What did you do to the dog Mama?

DENNY

Leave her Paulette.

PAULETTE

What happened to the dog, Denny. You can tell me.

DENNY

I wanted to tell you all along, Paulette. Honest. I wanted to tell you before.

PAULETTE

You can tell me now.

DENNY

I was gonna tell you when I came home. When you asked me about the blood. I was gonna tell you then. But I couldn't.

PAULETTE

I'm here, now and I'm all ears. Tell me what you were going to tell me last night. Tell me. Right now.

BERTIE

Denny!

PAULETTE

Shut up, Bertie! Denny's talking to me. Really talking to me and I'm listening. I'm listening to every word he says.

DENNY

I went out looking for Red like I said I would. I started down by the library, followed along the creek 'til it passed by the school and then up through the dump and into the cemetery and there he was. Sittin' by the side of the road. His eyes all big and sad and full of water. He knew me. He knew me all right and he was real happy to see me.

PAULETTE

After you found him, what did you do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY

I picked him up and carried him back of that little stone house. It was empty. Whole place was empty and quiet. Just the moon and me and Red. Him so light and so calm and quiet. It was real easy to carry him. And real easy to lay him down in those flower beds they have out back. And real....

PAULETTE

Real what? Real what?

DENNY

I laid him down on the flowers and I...

PAULETTE

And then? What did you do then?

DENNY

I took the gun out and put it next to his head.

BERTIE

No!

DENNY

And I shot him dead.

BERTIE

Lord have mercy.

DENNY

When I was sure he was gone, I picked him up and took him up to the hill. Where Jenny's buried. By the big tree we always liked. You know the one I mean?

PAULETTE

I know.

DENNY

I dug a little hole right there by the tree and I put him in the hole.

BERTIE

God forgive us.

DENNY

I felt better knowin' he was right there with Jenny. Like maybe it was so bad then. Like maybe they would both be company for each other.

PAULETTE

Yes.

DENNY

And then I came home.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

You came home.

DENNY

You think it could be like that Paulette? Like company for each other?

PAULETTE

Yes. Yes I do.

DENNY

Paulette, you understand why I did it?

PAULETTE

Because you love me.

DENNY

Making things right between you and me. That's all.

PAULETTE

That's all.

DENNY

What happened last night could never happen again.

PAULETTE

Because you love me.

DENNY

I could never hurt you again.

PAULETTE

Because you love me.

DENNY

I love you.

(PAULETTE overlaps in the manner of wedding vows)

PAULETTE

For better. Or worse.

DENNY

I love you.

PAULETTE

For richer or poorer til death. . . .

(JOHN's voice interrupts as he bellows from inside the trailer)

JOHN

What the hell's gonna on out there anyway?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

John? That you?

JOHN

The whole damn family's out here.

BERTIE

Denny and Paulette and me are all out here, but there's no need for you to come if you'd rather stay sleepin'.

JOHN

Sleepin' hell! The Lord himself couldn't sleep with all this racket goin'. You can be damn sure nobody's sleeping. Oh, Jesus, I got a head the size of West Virginia.

BERTIE

There's no need to be coming out right now John.

PAULETTE

No reason to stay inside.

JOHN

Damn right, not with all you carryin' on and shoutin' and screamin' out here like it's a regular weddin' party. How's my little girl this mornin'?

BERTIE

Come on home now John.

JOHN

"Come on home now John" -- well let me get myself fixed up here first Bert. (pause) What's going on here anyway? Hardly sun up and you're all standin' around like it's time hell's froze over. (unsteadily on the steps)

PAULETTE

Here, Daddy, let me help you.

JOHN

Why that's real nice of you. Don't you think that's nice Bertie?

BERTIE

Yes, John. You got a real fine daughter.

JOHN

She's a fighter just like her mother.

BERTIE

No, John, she's just like herself and that's a good thing to be. A real good thing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

Thanks.

BERTIE

Forgive me?

PAULETTE

Yes Mama.

JOHN

You got blood on these sheets girl.

PAULETTE

It's okay, Daddy.

JOHN

Nothin' okay 'bout blood, girl! Bertie? Come here and look. Somethin' wrong here.

BERTIE

She's okay, John. You heard her. She's fine and you gotta believe her. We all gotta believe her. Now come along. It's time to go home.

PAULETTE

Thanks Mama.

JOHN

Well I hope so. I sure hope so. And I hope you're lookin' after this woman, son. Like a man's supposed to?

DENNY

Yes sir.

JOHN

I hope you're doin' your job, 'cause if you're not--- Well, I don't want to think about that, son. You understand?

DENNY

Yes sir.

BERTIE

Let's get on home now, John.

JOHN

(whispering) The boy looks like hell, Bert.

BERTIE

You must be tired, honey.

JOHN

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BERTIE

You must be all wore out.

JOHN

Well I am. And thanks for asking. I walked a lot last night. Saw some of the boys and we talked and talked and I'm sure that those factories gonna open again real soon. Right son?

DENNY

Real soon.

JOHN

Paulette?

PAULETTE

Yes, Daddy?

JOHN

I just want to thank you for putting' up with your old Daddy last night. I hope I didn't say anything to embarrass myself 'cause sometimes I forget.

PAULETTE

You were fine.

JOHN

Well, now, that's real good. 'Cause I like to keep my sense about me. 'Specially when I'm 'round such a smart and purty girl. . . . no. (Pause). . . such a smart and purty woman like my Paulette.

PAULETTE

You didn't say anything to be ashamed of Daddy.

JOHN

And you stay closer to home, Denny. Hell, a young woman like my Paulette should always have somebody 'round for protection. You hear?

DENNY

Yes, sir

BERTIE

Let's go home, John.

JOHN

Why's she dressed like that? Paulette?

PAULETTE

Yes, Daddy?

JOHN

I really am sorry about last night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAULETTE

You didn't do anything to be so sorry about Daddy.

JOHN

I'm sorry I don't remember. I hate not rememberin' Bert.

BERTIE

I know you do.

JOHN

It scares the hell out of me.

BERTIE

Jus' puttin' one foot in front of the other, honey.

JOHN

One foot in front of the other.

BERTIE

(to Paulette) That's all we can do for now.

JOHN

One foot in front of the other.

(PAULETTE watches JOHN walk off. BERTIE stands looking at PAULETTE until she hears JOHN singing "It's a long, long road a windin'" and follows him off. PAULETTE waits a moment, then turns and runs up the steps and into the trailer. DENNY will follow her up as she slams the door in his face.

DENNY

I need you to talk to me Paulette. I need you damn it!

(DENNY kicks the garbage can in anger, then puts it back together looking somewhat lost as he hears the banging of drawers inside the trailer. Finally he goes and gets some of PAULETTE's garden tools and begins to dig furiously in the garden. He haltingly begins to recite some of the nursery rhymes)

Jack Sprat could eat no fat, his wife could eat no . . . lean.
That's it. What does that mean. Paulette?

(Looking back towards the trailer he begins to rearrange the rocks in the garden a ring.)

Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater, had a wife and couldn't keep her. Put her in a pumpkin shell and there he kept her very well. Paulette! You comin' back out here? Jack Sprat could eat no fat his wife could eat no lean! No lean. It's the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY (cont'd)

right words I know. Paulette I remember the words. (silence)
Little Jack Horner sat in the corner eating his Christmas
pie.

(PAULETTE appears at the door silently holding
her small suitcase)

He put in his thumb and pulled out his plum and said --

PAULETTE

(throwing open the door)

What a good boy am I.

DENNY

I'm really sorry, honey. I know I shouldn't have done those
things. I know it was wrong, all wrong. You know that?

PAULETTE

(Pause) I know.

DENNY

Wrong with you and me and what happened here,

PAULETTE

Yes.

DENNY

And it was wrong with me and Red and that gun.

PAULETTE

Yes.

DENNY

And I can promise you that none of that will ever happen
again.

PAULETTE

No! You can't promise that and I can't believe you. Not
anymore Denny. You'll never know how much I do want to.

(PAULETTE starts to leave and DENNY stops her)

DENNY

I can promise. Cross my heart and hope to die --

PAULETTE

Stick a needle in my eye!

DENNY

Wish I may, Wish I might! Wish you'll stay with me tonight.

(PAULETTE drops the small suitcase. She is now in
a state of complete conflict and we cannot

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DENNY (cont'd)
totally read her final decision as she is
alternately drawn to and away from DENNY.)

Please, stay with me baby. Here, under the stars. . . the constellations you love so much. I swear I'll learn the names of every one just for you. I'll learn'em and we'll wish on them together every night just like you always wanted. Together. I'll help you hang those sheets right out here in the moonlight to dry. If you stay. You'll see, it will be different. I promise, just give me one more chance. . . You gotta believe in me. You gotta give me one more chance so I can show you it's gonna be different. I'm gonna be different if you just believe --

(DENNY goes to touch PAULETTE who pulls away)

I won't touch you, not if you don't want me. I promise Paulette. I won't touch you anywhere you don't want me to touch you unless you want me. . . until you beg me. I'll change, you'll see. I won't be the man you hate right now. I swear I won't ever be that man again, Not if you stay. I'll change and you'll love me. Like you used to when we first met. I know you remember honey. Out behind the football field, me standing there in my uniform, my foot wrapped up, all lonely and waiting just for you. You'll see. If you stay. You'll love me like you used to. I'll get a good job with big money. We'll sell this old sardine can and move wherever you want. You can go to school. You can go to work or you can plant the biggest garden in Ohio. Anything you want baby. I'll treat you like a Queen. You'll see. I'll be anything you want if you just don't leave me now.

(PAULETTE comes to DENNY, dropping her small bag at his feet, perhaps touching him and finally walking away.)

PAULETTE! If you leave me now you can never come back. I swear to you if you keep walking down that road now it is over between us forever. Do you hear that? Forever. I'm through with you forever and you can never come back here. Do you hear what I'm saying to you Paulette! If you keep on walking you can never come back home again. Paulette!
(pause and then quietly) Don't you hear me?

BLACKOUT

In the dark the final image is a ring
of glowing rocks in the garden

END OF PLAY