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# American Standard & The Princess of Rome, Ohio: Two Plays

Jonathan Joy

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Thesis

*American Standard*

&

*The Princess of Rome, Ohio*

Two Plays by Jonathan Joy

Thesis Committee:

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## *Introduction*

By Jonathan Joy

I returned to Marshall University as a part time graduate student in English in the Fall of 2001. The decision to enroll in the MA program followed a three year hiatus since completing my undergraduate degree with Marshall's Theatre program. It also coincided with a time in my life when I made a serious commitment to developing my craft as a writer. I have always been fascinated with the art of playwriting and the challenge of creating a story primarily with dialogue. I am still early in what I hope will be a successful and long lasting writing career. My days at Marshall have helped me to form an important creative foundation for my work.

I have now completed seven plays in the past three years. Some are short plays. One is a long one act. Two are full length. The shortest is a two page verse play about contemporary American politics called *The Rise and Fall of Master George*. The longest is *The Princess of Rome, Ohio*, for which I would estimate a running time of approximately two hours. For my thesis I am including two full length plays - *American Standard* and *The Princess of Rome, Ohio*. These two pieces represent my most complete and involved work. They are my only full length plays to date and each one has taken up to two years to develop, from inception to completion of the second draft. I believe they also show a variety in my writing and the progress that I have made since the production, and subsequent publication, of my first play (*Simply Selma*) in the summer of 2001. Since then I have studied the plays of Sam Shepard and the great Irish dramatists (Shaw, Friel, McDonagh) and of course, William Shakespeare. I have paid close

attention to dramatic techniques that work for others and in turn may benefit my writing. I have become more mature and patient with my work. And it takes a great deal of patience to spend this much time with one project. This introduction briefly traces the development of these two plays, their inception and inspiration, as well as the vital role graduate study played in my growth and development as a disciplined and confident writer.

I came up with the idea for *American Standard* during the tumultuous presidential campaign of 2000. I was working for the Democratic National Committee and Vice President Al Gore as a campaign field representative in Eastern Kentucky. I had no previous experience in politics. To this day it is one of the few jobs that I have taken outside of the theatrical field. What I quickly learned was that a background in performance and producing was an ideal preparation for life on the campaign trail. In fact politics and drama are more closely related than I ever would have envisioned. While performing my campaign duties I was struck by the extremity of both political parties. It seemed that most regular people (as opposed to irregular politicians) felt left out of the loop. The people that I met didn't feel truly represented by either Republicans or Democrats. They complained about extremes and desired a moderate likable candidate. I imagined the comic possibilities of having two men at opposite ends of the political spectrum forced to travel the campaign trail together. In addition I created two moderate characters, Faith and Charlie in the play, that could voice my own attitudes (and I believe the attitudes of many people) concerning politics. The play is fun and it is intended to entertain and make people laugh. I also wanted to show, however, that in politics the

truth is often found somewhere in between the extremes that political propaganda can produce.

It was no more than an idea for about a year. Eventually, I was able to put myself in a disciplined environment that could help me to concentrate solely on the work at hand. It is in that regard that my graduate study played a crucial role. During the first year of my three year stay in the English Department at Marshall University I focused a great deal of time on *American Standard*. I worked to create a compelling story of the characters that had been rattling around in my head for so long. Initially, I developed the story as a screenplay for Daniel Boyd's Screenwriting class. He helped me to find and accentuate important plot points and create detailed character development. In the following semesters I worked with Professor Manilla and Dr. Rodier to adapt that screenplay into a stage play and to produce that play in the Fall of 2002 on the heels of election day. I had been intrigued by Dr. Taft's lecture about rabbits and ducks (and the notion of differing perceptions) in Shakespeare's *Henriad*. As a result, I attempted to write a play that could have very different meaning to those from a variety of political and social backgrounds. Following the premiere production of the play I learned that liberals tended to hate Marcus and like John and root for John to win in the end. To the contrary, conservatives didn't necessarily like Marcus but they did seem to enjoy the play as a clear picture of how dirty both sides can be. Nobody suggested that it was overtly liberal or conservative, though I believe my own views do give the play a bit of a liberal slant.

*American Standard* is now in its third draft. The first draft was the screenplay, the second the stage play, and a third revision that immediately followed the premiere production. I am happy with the way the play has grown over the last three years. I'm not entirely convinced that I'll ever consider myself 100% finished with it. I continue to revise and come up with new and interesting ideas. I have entertained the idea of adding low budget political commercials that would act as a bridge between certain scenes. I thought about introducing John's mother and Charlie's ex-wife as an ally for Marcus. I've even considered adding a radio talk show host character that could narrate the action of the play and serve as a transition between the road trip portions of the story. Also, I fear the ending may be a bit abrupt and I am continuing to look for ways to write more detail into the conclusion and extend those last five pages into seven or eight. On the other hand, I like the quickness and efficiency of the story and I am hesitant to add too much and increase the running time beyond ninety minutes.

The second play in this collection is very different from *American Standard*. *The Princess of Rome, Ohio* is more like to my first play, *Simply Selma*, though more developed. *American Standard* is a road trip. In *Princess*, like *Selma*, the characters are tied to one location (i.e. the front porch in *Princess*) for the entirety of the play. One thing that all three plays do have in common is their regional location - the eastern Kentucky, southern Ohio, and western West Virginia region in which I have lived all but two of my twenty nine years. It is a region full of interesting and odd characters and tall tales that could supply any writer with a lifetime of inspiration.

The writing process was as different as the stories. *American Standard* was very structured with a detailed scene by scene outline written well before I began writing dialogue. For *The Princess of Rome, Ohio* I used a more free and fluid stream of consciousness method to develop the characters, setting and story. I began only with a brief character description for each role. Over the last fourteen months I have let those characters lead me where they want to go. As a result, the dialogue has been subject to many revisions as I encounter new directions that I want to take the play.

My favorite playwrights from the Irish theatre inspired the story. I love reading Martin McDonough, J.M. Synge and Brian Friel. They often write about the small town country people of outer lying Irish counties. These dramatists inspired me to write about the people around me without hiding any of the good or bad qualities. And like Sam Shepard, another favorite, I wrote about bizarre family problems that I have observed in others. Additionally, some of the ideas come from conversations that I have heard, fights that I have witnessed and moments that my neighbors most likely should have kept private. I've noted that many people in this area, and possible everywhere, solve their problems with loved ones in a very public way. Often a bizarre form of conflict resolution is acted out with no regard for privacy and for the entire world to see. It is a sort of unintended play within a play but it's real. I've seen brutal pieces of real life like these acted out on the plaza in front of the Cabell County library, in the Wal-Mart parking lot, at the Mall, and on numerous front porches neighboring both my old home and the homes of friends. As a result, the front porch seemed an ideal setting for my story. It is the cool alternative to the sweltering indoor heat of a house with no air conditioning. The violent undertones in the play are also reminiscent of and perhaps

inspired by Synge and McDonough as well as Sam Shepard, all playwrights that I have studied in depth in various dramatic literature courses.

At the heart of the story is Hattie, the Princess, a teenage girl who has already matured beyond her parents. She is stuck in the middle of this bizarre dark comedy that plays out in front of her each and every day. She is at times totally invisible to her loved ones and longs to get away from Rome without really understanding where she would escape. Rome, Ohio is based on the real town in southern Ohio though I've taken some artistic license with its size. The name of the town has always seemed funny to me as it contrasts so dramatically to the Rome that almost everyone thinks of when you mention that city name.

*Princess* is currently in its third complete draft. I like the way the characters and the story are set up and progress but I feel that the ending is still a bit abrupt. It may be as close to completion as is possible without having yet had the opportunity to produce it. A group of actors always provides valuable insight to work out the bugs in a play and I look forward to staging *Princess* someday soon.

Both plays have proven challenging and I have learned a great deal about myself through the process of writing. I have been inspired by my favorite playwrights in ways that go far beyond what I could possibly record here. There is no doubt that reading the long lyrical monologues of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams or the crisp dialogue of David Auburn and Marsha Norman have provided me with a countless measure of literary support. And I have used my expert people watching skills and a vivid imagination to come up with characters and situations to put my characters. I have used

my surroundings in an attempt to tell stories of real people and issues from this region that are rarely approached by other writers. And I have used the supportive and encouraging surroundings of my fellow artists, graduate faculty and University facilities to aid me in my preparation and presentation of this work.

I hope this introduction serves as at least a basic starting point for reading my work and understanding where it comes from. As mentioned beforehand, my background is in acting and it goes without saying that any actor given free reign to write about himself or herself could go on until the end of time. It is with this in mind that I will end my preface and let the work speak as it will.

*American Standard*

By Jonathan Joy

*(The time is October, the fall of 2000. Presidential, state and local elections are only one month away. The setting is Ashland, a small city of twenty thousand people in Boyd County, Kentucky. The lights rise on MARCUS WOODARD, 50, a man on fire with gusto and arrogance. He stands behind a lectern delivering a speech in what appears to a political campaign rally.)*

**MARCUS:** This part of Kentucky is often ignored, left out, looked down upon even, when it comes to state politics. I bet sometimes you feel like you don't have a voice at all. I bet some of you feel that your vote doesn't mean a damn thing come November seventh. Well, I'm here to change all that. I want to tell you something, and I want you to listen nice and close. You have a friend in Marcus Woodard. Together we can! Together we can confront our problems and come up with smaller government solutions. Together we can return jobs and economic prosperity to Eastern Kentucky. Together we can restore good old-fashioned Kentucky values to the State Senate! Together we can elect the right man for the job. When you go out to vote next month elect the moral man! The experienced man! The man with the plan! Together we can do it! You and me! Together we can! Thank you for coming out today ladies and gentleman. God bless you!

*(MARCUS waves to the crowd triumphantly. The lights cross fade to another area of the stage, the bar. JOHN BLEVINS, 25, looks like he's lost his best friend. He is seated at the bar with a drink in hand. He is drunk. MASON, 25, the bartender, is wiping down the bar close to JOHN. A pale blue light emanates from a point just beyond audience view. It is the light of a television screen that JOHN watches with a particularly disgusted interest. JOHN swigs down the last of his drink. On the TV, a NEWSCASTER is heard reporting.)*

**NEWSCASTER:** Heading into the last month of the campaign, Republican candidate Marcus Woodard has built a double-digit lead in the polls and appears to be set to finish strong in his race for the State Senate seat of...

*(JOHN is furious. He slams his glass down hard on the bar, where it almost breaks.)*

**JOHN:** Double digit lead? They haven't even polled Morgan County yet. There's nothing out there but yellow dog Democrats. Will you turn that off?

*(MASON turns off the TV. JOHN sulks.)*

Give me another one.

*(JOHN hands his glass to MASON, who begins to fix a drink.)*

What is this bullshit about Kentucky values and electing the moral man? I can't believe people still fall for that. I guess that in Marcus Woodard's world three divorces constitute family values. I've seen the way guys like him work. He's probably got a girl

in every county seat from here to Louisville. Kentucky values. These guys make me sick.

**MASON:** Can I ask you something, John?

**JOHN:** (*indicating TV*) They make *me* out to be the idiot, and *this guy*...would you vote for somebody like that?

**MASON:** He's been kicking your ass for some time...

**JOHN:** He is not kicking my ass...

**MASON:** John...

**JOHN:** It's a lot closer than it looks. It is.

**MASON:** Well, I only brought it up because you've been spending a lot of time in here.

**JOHN:** So?

**MASON:** Shouldn't you be out there pounding the pavement, or something?

**JOHN:** I don't need to hear this from you. Not now. What do you know? You wouldn't understand the first thing about how these elections work...

**MASON:** I understand that you're losing, and to most people you seem to be playing the part of the idiot they make you out to be.

**JOHN:** Whose side are you on?

**MASON:** You know what this reminds me of?

**JOHN:** I'm afraid to ask.

**MASON:** It's the cross-country thing all over again.

**JOHN:** Will you stop it with that? We were in high school.

**MASON:** You spent the whole summer training with me and then you go and quit two days before our first race. This election is the same damn thing...

**JOHN:** That was ten years ago, and I had problems with my knee. You never remember that.

**MASON:** You're always raring to start something, but you never finish. November seventh is a month away and you've given up on this election already.

**JOHN:** Fuck off. Give me that drink.

*(He gives JOHN the drink and goes back to wiping down the bar.)*

**MASON:** I'd just rather see somebody other than that asshole up in Frankfurt. I'd rather it be some asshole I kind of like.

*(Long pause.)*

**JOHN:** *(nostalgic)* I remember going to rallies with my Dad when he was in Congress. Everybody loved him. I was the proudest kid in the world. All I ever wanted to do was to help people the way he did. He was a real good guy, you know. They don't make politicians like him anymore. These guys today, it's all razzle-dazzle with them. Somebody like me doesn't stand a chance.

**MASON:** Is he gonna endorse you?

**JOHN:** My dad? I don't know. I wouldn't count on it. He's not exactly thrilled that his "promising young son turned out to be a bleeding heart liberal Democrat". His words, not mine.

**MASON:** He'll come around. Why don't you get out of here? Get some sleep.

**JOHN:** Are you cutting me off?

**MASON:** Yes. Get the hell out of here.

**JOHN:** Can I stay at your place tonight?

**MASON:** No.

**JOHN:** Why not?

**MASON:** I got kids this weekend. You set a bad example for them.

**JOHN:** Excuse me?

**MASON:** You've got to get your shit together. I mean it.

**JOHN:** Fine. You think I don't have anywhere else to stay? There are plenty of people that'll take me in. I'm John Blevins. I'm going to be the next State Senator from the fifty...shit...the fifty...

**MASON:** Seventh?

**JOHN:** Yeah, shit, fifty-seventh district. Fuck you, I knew that. I'll just call one of my girlfriends. Probably keep me up all night if you know what I mean, but hell I'm up for it.

*(JOHN gets up clumsily, and falls hard onto the floor. He gets up quickly and composes himself. Hardly able to hold himself upright, he struggles to put on his jacket. He starts to exit the bar, his back to MASON.)*

I don't need to stay at your place...lots of places I could go. And if I can't find anyplace I'll just sleep in my car. And if you can live knowing that I might be sleeping in my car in the middle of some dark alley somewhere, fine. If you can sleep tonight with that on your mind...

**MASON:** I can live with it if you can.

**JOHN:** Because it might come to that.

**MASON:** Yeah, knowing you, it might.

**JOHN:** Come on, this is the last time, I swear. I'll owe you one.

**MASON:** You owe me a lot already.

**JOHN:** You too, huh? Everyone is turning on me. Fine! There are plenty of ladies that would love to get a call from me at...*(stops, looks at his watch)*...one thirty seven in the morning. Will you put this on my tab?

**MASON:** Sure. You ever plan on paying that tab?

**JOHN:** Yeah, yeah. Float me another month and you won't be sorry. I promise.

**MASON:** Sure.

**JOHN:** One month, you'll see. One month and I'll be living in the lap of luxury. Your old friend is going to make something of himself.

**MASON:** Good night!

*(Lights cross fade from the bar back to the lectern that MARCUS spoke from. MARCUS is sitting DS of the lectern, his feet dangling off the edge of the stage and into the front row of the audience. His triumphant demeanor has melted away and he appears melancholy. His political partner, JOANNA WIGGINS is at his side. She is a stately woman with gray hair, a bit older than MARCUS. She reads a newspaper.)*

**JOANNA:** You see this?

**MARCUS:** I know...ten point lead...

**JOANNA:** You should be more excited.

**MARCUS:** Ten points is nothing. They haven't even polled Morgan County yet. I don't think they've polled Elliot either. It makes me wonder what the hell they're doing up there with my money.

**JOANNA:** What's on your mind?

**MARCUS:** Nothing.

**JOANNA:** Nothing, huh?

**MARCUS:** When the hell is that old man going to make up his mind?

**JOANNA:** Don't worry about that. He is going to endorse you...

**MARCUS:** Damn it, Joanna, I do worry about it. Charlie Blevins' endorsement wins this election. He should have sponsored me by now. It makes me look bad.

**JOANNA:** He's going to sponsor you.

**MARCUS:** If he endorses that no good son of his...

**JOANNA:** He's not going to do that. Blevins is a drunk. I ran into Marge the other night at the Republican Women's fund raiser.

**MARCUS:** Marge?

**JOANNA:** Marge Scott. Her husband slipped you those hundred dollar bills at...

**MARCUS:** Oh, yeah. Good man.

**JOANNA:** She said that her son saw John Blevins sleeping one off in his car behind that old bar on Winchester the other night. Really, Marcus, you've had a lot tougher opponents.

**MARCUS:** Than why the hell hasn't Charlie announced it?

**JOANNA:** He's waiting for the right moment. People are just starting to realize there's an election at all. If he'd endorsed you two weeks ago, they would have forgotten already. Come on, look at these numbers. (*indicating newspaper*) You could win it without the endorsement.

**MARCUS:** Do you really believe that?

**JOANNA:** Don't you? What happened to the egotistical, overconfident Marcus Woodard that I used to know?

**MARCUS:** I just have a bad feeling about this.

**JOANNA:** Well stop worrying about it for God's sake.

**MARCUS:** I don't want to think about it anymore. Why don't we get out of here. Maybe grab a bite to eat or something.

**JOANNA:** Don't even think about it.

**MARCUS:** It's a perfectly innocent invitation, Joanna.

**JOANNA:** With you there's no such thing. Sorry, I'm too old and too tired to play along. Unless you have a ring in your pocket, I'm going home. You should too. It's late. Get some rest.

*(JOANNA exits and MARCUS is left alone. He picks up the newspaper she has left behind and opens it to a specific article. He reads, then looks up and stares at the audience. His face ekes out a confident smile. He rises and exits. Blackout. The lights rise on another lectern. This time JOHN is preparing to speak. He looks tattered and nervous. At his side is DONNA DAVIS, a young woman. She is organized and dressed smartly. She hands him a suit jacket.)*

**DONNA:** Put this on.

**JOHN:** Thanks.

**DONNA:** *(straightening his tie)* You look like shit. What were you thinking?

**JOHN:** Don't exaggerate. *(pushing her away)* Stop doing that.

**DONNA:** You're on in one minute.

**JOHN:** Jesus, it's ten o'clock already.

**DONNA:** Your dad wants to talk to you.

**JOHN:** What?

**DONNA:** He called me this morning. He said he wants you to meet him at Marcus Woodard's office after the rally.

**JOHN:** Fuck.

**DONNA:** What?

**JOHN:** Woodard's office. You don't think that's a bad sign?

**DONNA:** John, you don't have an office. He has to meet you somewhere, doesn't he?

**JOHN:** Fuck.

**DONNA:** Don't worry about lunch. He'll have sandwiches or something. Are you okay?

**JOHN:** I think I'm hyperventilating.

**DONNA:** Jesus John, why didn't you take that public speaking class that I told you about?

**JOHN:** Will you cut that shit out. Say something to help me relax.

**DONNA:** You're on.

**JOHN:** Donna...

**DONNA:** I'm serious. You're on...go!

**JOHN:** I'm not ready.

**DONNA:** Knock 'em dead.

*(DONNA exits the stage and takes a seat with the audience. JOHN is apprehensive. He slowly takes his place behind the lectern and adjusts the microphone to his liking. He is noticeably nervous and speaks distractedly.)*

**JOHN:** Good morning.

*(He places his hand in his suit pocket and retrieves a handful of note cards, and with them, accidentally, a pack of cigarettes which he immediately drops on the floor beneath.)*

...shit...excuse me ladies and gentleman...

*(He leans down to pick them up and his head slams hard into the corner of the lectern. He picks up the cards and begins rearranging them with one hand while the other hand is gripped tightly to his injured head.)*

Oh, God, I think I'm bleeding...

*(DONNA darts from her seat and heads toward JOHN. She is halfway to there when he waves her off. Slowly she returns to her seat.)*

I'm okay...all right...*(composing himself)* I want to thank you all for coming out today...A professor I had in college told me one time you should always open up a speech like this with a joke...so, here goes...what do you call a thousand politicians at the bottom of the Ohio River...a good start...a good...start...

*(JOHN stands speechless with the appearance of a deer caught in headlights. Lights down on him and up on the other lectern. This time it is MARCUS delivering a fiery and passionate speech.)*

**MARCUS:** You want to be represented by someone like yourselves. A person with good old fashioned Kentucky values. You want a man that will stand up for your right to own a gun. You want a man that will fight for your children's right to pray in school. You want a man endorsed glowingly by the Right to Life movement. I'm that man! Smaller government, that's the key, smaller government. I'm the man for the job. Together we can! My name is Marcus Woodard and I want to be your next state senator from the fifty seventh district of the great state of Kentucky. Thank you for coming out today, ladies and gentleman. God bless you.

*(The lights dim on MARCUS and rise again on JOHN. His rally is over and he stands at the lectern. He is disheartened. DONNA sits next to him with her head in her hands. Silence as JOHN flips through his note cards.)*

**JOHN:** I don't think it went that bad. Do you? *(No response.)* Donna? I'm going to take the joke out.

*(Long pause.)*

Oh, come on, it started out kind of rough, but I think I was getting a lot of momentum there at the end, don't you?

**DONNA:** You called them 'old people.'

**JOHN:** What?

**DONNA:** "the importance of a prescription drug plan for old people." Not seniors, or senior citizens, or our maturing American population. Old people.

**JOHN:** I did that?

**DONNA:** You did.

*(Pause.)*

**JOHN:** But other than that it went pretty good, right?

**DONNA:** Yes, John, other than dropping your note cards and cigarettes, using extensive profanity, cracking your head open on the corner of the podium, telling that awful joke, calling them old people and debating with the VFW over whether or not we should have been in 'Nam in the first place, I thought it went fine.

**JOHN:** That sounds pretty bad.

**DONNA:** You should have seen it from out there.

**JOHN:** Don't look so down. Things will turn around. I promise.

**DONNA:** I got involved with this campaign because I thought you were different. I thought, here's this young guy with a lot of enthusiasm and good ideas, and he's not like all of those other politicians I grew up hating. I don't see that guy anymore. I haven't for a while now. I don't know what to think.

**JOHN:** Hey, hey, Donna, I need your help. I need somebody to believe in me...

**DONNA:** You're falling apart. Find someone else to believe in you John.

*(She begins to exit.)*

**JOHN:** Wait, don't run off. Let's go get a bite to eat.

**DONNA:** I have class. I'll see you later.

**JOHN:** Donna...Donna...we're still on for tomorrow, right?

**DONNA:** Don't forget to meet your dad.

*(She exits and JOHN is left alone onstage. Lights fade on him and laughter is heard coming from another area of the stage. As the lights rise MARCUS is chatting with CHARLIE BLEVINS, a dignified man in his mid-sixties. They are sitting in Marcus' office, an untidy little place with files and newspapers tossed everywhere.)*

**MARCUS:** It's good to sit down with you like this. We don't see nearly enough of each other Charlie. It's been too long. I miss those old days.

**CHARLIE:** I don't. I've never been happier in my life. You know what I did today?

**MARCUS:** What?

**CHARLIE:** Not a god-damned thing.

**MARCUS:** That doesn't sound like Charlie Blevins.

**CHARLIE:** Oh, I might go fishing on the weekends or read a good book. I watch a lot of television. It's great. I don't have to be anywhere. I don't have appointments I can't keep with people I don't like. I don't envy you one bit.

*(JOHN appears.)*

John, my boy! Come on in and join the conversation.

**JOHN:** *(reluctant)* Hi, dad.

**CHARLIE:** I was just telling Marcus about the joys of retirement.

**JOHN:** I would have knocked but the door was wide open.

**CHARLIE:** We left it open for you. We weren't sure you'd be able to find the place.

**JOHN:** Yeah, I didn't even know they had offices above the 'We'll cash your check and hold it up to three weeks' place.

**MARCUS:** It beats the backseat of a Chevy Cavalier.

**CHARLIE:** Have a seat son.

*(JOHN and MARCUS stare each other down for a moment, and then JOHN has a seat next to him. There is a long silence and tension between the three.)*

Well, there's no reason to make small talk. The two of you have plenty of work to do. I won't keep you long. I'm glad you could both come on such short notice. I don't need to explain what an important day this is and what a difficult decision I have to make...

*(CHARLIE stops mid-sentence, pauses, and then leans in close. His voice takes on a starkly more serious tone.)*

You both make me want to puke.

*(Both men seem shocked. Pause.)*

**JOHN:** Excuse me?

**CHARLIE:** Look at you both. John, you look like you slept one off in your car last night, and if anything I hear about you is true you probably did. And Marcus you look and sound like a pathetic used car salesman. Is this the future of American politics? You both make me sick.

**MARCUS:** Is...is this about the endorsement, Charlie?

**CHARLIE:** Shut up! You don't deserve my endorsement. And you (*indicating JOHN*) can wipe that smirk off your face because you're not getting it either. My own flesh and blood is a damn Democrat. Do you know how embarrassing that is to me? (*CHARLIE takes a moment to compose himself*) I think you've both lost sight of something. What is the reason you want to serve the public? And don't give me your manufactured horse-shit response that you use on stage. I want to know why you got into this in the first place?

*(No response.)*

It's not all about winning and losing. It's not about coming up with the best one liner about the other guy. It's about the people, boys. Do you remember them? Neither one of you could give two shits about the people. John, I can't figure out for the life of me how you're even in this race.

*(JOHN fumbles in his pockets and retrieves a pack of cigarettes.)*

Put those away!

*(JOHN hurriedly attempts to get rid of them. He accidentally drops the entire pack on the floor. CHARLIE rolls his eyes in frustration.)*

**MARCUS:** How the hell could you not endorse me? All these years I've busted my ass for you and for the party and this is the thanks...

*(CHARLIE gives him a look that stops him dead in his tracks.)*

**CHARLIE:** Here's the deal. You both want my endorsement. Well, you're going to have to earn it and do exactly as I say. Do you understand?

**JOHN & MARCUS:** Sure. Yeah. Anything you say.

**CHARLIE:** Back in my day, I got along with my fellow man. I'm not just talking about the constituents. I'm talking about the guys on the other team – the Democrats. We worked together. We compromised. Together we came up with common sense solutions that worked for the good of the people. Today, politics is such a cesspool of corruption and lies that people don't want anything to do with it. It's pathetic. And the two of you are perfect examples of the problem. You're making a mockery out of the system. So, I have a plan.

*(CHARLIE opens a briefcase and pulls out several folders. He lays them down on the desk and leafs through them as he addresses the men.)*

For the next twenty days, the two of you are going to pool all of your expenses and travel together. I want you both out there in the counties, staging your rallies and meeting the people you want to represent, but you're going to do it together. That's the condition. John, you'll drive. Marcus, you can take care of the hotels. You both split food.

*(Pause. MARCUS bursts out laughing. JOHN is too shocked to move. CHARLIE remains stone-faced. As MARCUS slowly realizes that CHARLIE is serious, the laughing dissipates and his expression turns to horror.)*

**MARCUS:** Are you insane?

**JOHN:** You can't be serious...

**MARCUS:** If you think that I'm going to travel with this...

**JOHN:** There is no way in hell...

**CHARLIE:** You'll do it! John, you can't afford to go out there any other way and you need the votes. Marcus...you get a driver.

**JOHN:** Oh my God!

**CHARLIE:** And you both need my endorsement.

*(CHARLIE again reaches into his briefcase pulls out two more folders and tosses one to each of the men.)*

I've checked your schedules and the plan fits just perfectly with each of your appearances. I double checked to be positive. This is your itinerary. You'll follow it to every specification. I'm warning you now. I'm going to have people watching you and making sure that you're both behaving yourself and sticking to the guidelines I've detailed in those folders. When you get back, I'll decide which one of you has best learned the most valuable lesson of all and I'll hand out my sponsorship accordingly. That candidate will undoubtedly win the election next month, so don't take this lightly. I would ask if you have any questions, but frankly, I don't give a shit if you do or not. You'll figure it out. Now go home and get your stuff packed. You leave tomorrow.

**JOHN:** No! There's no way I'm going through with this.

*(CHARLIE walks out of the room, ignoring his son.)*

**MARCUS:** *(yelling after CHARLIE)* This is bullshit, Charlie. You have completely lost your mind. I won't do it!

*(JOHN and CHARLIE are left in the room alone together. They are both speechless. Long silence.)*

What are you looking at me for? He's your old man.

**JOHN:** Me? You know him a lot better than I do. The two of you practically grew up together. What is he thinking?

**MARCUS:** Yeah, and what was all that he said about the two of us not caring about the people...

**JOHN:** And politics being a cesspool?

*(Long Pause.)*

**MARCUS:** *(teasing)* It would be nice to have a driver, though.

**JOHN:** Don't even think about it. If I thought I had to spend ten minutes alone in a car with you I'd blow my head off. When I think what three weeks would be like...

**MARCUS:** I'm not exactly your biggest fan either you know...

**JOHN:** Well, that settles it...

**MARCUS:** We don't need his endorsement.

**JOHN:** Fuck him!

**MARCUS:** I could spend the next twenty days in Cancun and still beat you...

**JOHN:** I'm going to go talk to him and get this straightened out.

**MARCUS:** You do that.

*(JOHN bolts out of the room. MARCUS is left alone onstage. He is motionless for a few moments and then becomes irate and begins throwing a tantrum. He knocks over a large stack of files from his desk to the floor and then begins to throw papers, pencils, anything he can grab. He is angered beyond the point of controlling himself. Blackout. The lights rise and reveal a cheap, peach decorated hotel room center stage. There is one queen-sized bed, two end tables each with a small lamp, and a mini-fridge. JOHN enters the room, suitcase in hand. He is tired and frustrated. He notices the bed and freezes. MARCUS enters behind with luggage. He looks around the room, disgusted. He walks around JOHN and flops his luggage on the bed. Silence. MARCUS is staring at JOHN, who remains standing, motionless, glaring at the bed.)*

**MARCUS:** What's wrong with you?

**JOHN:** Is this the only bed?

**MARCUS:** Yeah...

**JOHN:** Well, this is awkward.

**MARCUS:** It's all they had left.

*(They are both silent. They look at the bed, then each other.)*

Oh hell, it's a big bed. We'll...

**JOHN:** We'll what?

**MARCUS:** Well, you know...we'll share it.

**JOHN:** We will?

**MARCUS:** It's all they had left!

**JOHN:** I'm sorry, I must be going fucking insane. I'm in a hotel room in the middle of Mason County with Marcus Woodard, and I could swear that he just told me we were going to be sleeping together.

**MARCUS:** What the hell was I supposed to do? This is the only hotel in Maysville.

**JOHN:** We'll share it. That makes perfect sense.

**MARCUS:** Sure.

**JOHN:** Even in my worst nightmares...

**MARCUS:** Give it a rest! We'll get another room tomorrow. It's late and I'm too tired...

**JOHN:** You're tired?

**MARCUS:** I'm exhausted.

**JOHN:** You slept the whole way.

**MARCUS:** No! I only pretended to sleep so I wouldn't have to talk to you and listen to you go on and on and on...the next three weeks are going to be long enough without...

**JOHN:** You pretended to sleep so you wouldn't have to drive!

**MARCUS:** That's a damn lie!

**JOHN:** I'm not doing all of the driving on this trip...

**MARCUS:** You drive. That's the deal. You drive and I take care of the hotels. You tell me who's getting the short end of the stick? You start paying up for some of the hotels and then maybe I'll do some of the driving...

**JOHN:** This is fine hotel, Marcus. How much is it setting you back? Thirty-five bucks?

**MARCUS:** What do you recommend we do? Do you want to sleep in the car?

**JOHN:** Let me see, would I rather share this room with you or sleep in the car? That's a tough one...

**MARCUS:** Be my guest. I don't care what you do.

**JOHN:** If you had any balls, you would have told my dad what he could do with his deal...

**MARCUS:** You'd like that, wouldn't you? Where were your balls that day? You're here with me. What does that say about you?

*(Long pause. JOHN sits on the bed, with his head in his hands.)*

Who are we kidding? Neither one of us have much room to bargain. *(Pause)* How much you getting from the DNC? *(No response)* I'll tell if you do.

**JOHN:** *(hesitant)* Not a damn thing. All the money has gone into Gore and the race in Franklin. I'm not a high priority. They're expecting you to win.

**MARCUS:** That's nice.

**JOHN:** What about you?

**MARCUS:** What?

**JOHN:** How much?

**MARCUS:** I don't feel comfortable discussing it.

**JOHN:** You asshole!

**MARCUS:** All right, all right. Nothing. They don't think I need any help to beat you. I've got some private money but nothing from the party.

**JOHN:** You're kidding?

*(MARCUS doesn't answer. He is eyeing JOHN.)*

**MARCUS:** You don't want that side, do you?

**JOHN:** *(defiantly)* Yes. I want this side. Why?

**MARCUS:** It's just that...

**JOHN:** What?

**MARCUS:** I'd like the side closer to the bathroom. I have problems with...

*(JOHN laughs.)*

You little...

**JOHN:** Take it, take it, take it. I don't want you pissing on me in the middle of the night.

*(JOHN re-positions himself on the other side of the bed. He takes his shoes off, and then opens his suitcase and begins rooting through his clothes. MARCUS places his luggage on the opposite end of the bed. He opens it and retrieves a pint of Maker's Mark whiskey, a glass, and a two liter bottle of Coke.)*

Well, well, well, did you bring any clothes on the trip?

**MARCUS:** Shut up! I don't drown myself in the stuff.

**JOHN:** I never touch it.

*(MARCUS scoffs at the remark. He places the items on the end table and begins to fix himself a drink.)*

Are you sure you're secure enough in your masculinity to share a bed with me, Marcus?

**MARCUS:** I don't want to think about it.

*(Silence. Both men are sitting on opposite sides of the bed, JOHN going through his suitcase and MARCUS fixing his drink. MARCUS looks over his shoulder at JOHN.)*

Hey...

**JOHN:** What?

*(Pause.)*

**MARCUS:** I guess we have to make the best of this.

**JOHN:** It looks that way.

*(Pause.)*

**MARCUS:** You want one?

**JOHN:** One what?

**MARCUS:** A drink! I'm offering you a drink.

**JOHN:** Well, usually I wouldn't, but, sure. Why not?

*(MARCUS hands him a glass.)*

**MARCUS:** Here you go...

*(He holds his own glass in the air.)*

Here's to your crazy old man!

**JOHN:** Here, here!

*(They toast glasses. MARCUS begins to take a drink, but JOHN stops him.)*

Here's to our...pact, if you will...and may the best man win.

**MARCUS:** Damn right!

*(Both men stare each other down, clink their glasses together, and then take a long, slow drink. Each man chugs the entire drink while peeking at the other. Neither one wants to be the first to quit. Lights fade on the room. Blackout. Lights come up on a bare center stage. It is the next morning. FAITH CARSON, 24, enters. She is a small town country girl with a big city attitude. She wears a waitress outfit. She addresses someone in the distance.)*

**FAITH:** *(yelling)* I'll be right back...I'm taking my break. Yes, I'm going somewhere else. It's bad enough I have to serve the food. You're not going to make me eat it... don't shush me!

*(As she crosses the stage, JOHN bursts onto the scene, panicked. He has the look of a man that has been dressing hurriedly. He ties his tie and pays no attention to where he is going when he slams directly into FAITH, knocking her to the ground. JOHN almost falls, but he is able to compose himself.)*

**JOHN:** Oh, God! I'm so sorry...

**FAITH:** Jerk!

**JOHN:** No, no. Let me help you up.

*(JOHN leans down to help, but she disregards him and rises on her own.)*

I'm sorry.

**FAITH:** You should pay more attention to where you're going.

**JOHN:** I know. You're right. I wasn't looking. I woke up late. My alarm didn't go off and I'm supposed to be somewhere...soon.

*(FAITH ignores him, instead examining her dress. She notices a large tear. JOHN notices it too.)*

**FAITH:** I just bought this dress, asshole.

**JOHN:** I'll make it up to you. I'll buy you a new one. It's such a nice...dress.

**FAITH:** It is not. It's my waitress uniform. You can stop trying to flatter...

*(JOHN reaches into his pocket and grabs one of his business cards. He hands it to her.)*

**JOHN:** Here, this is my card. It has a number that I can be reached...well, not really...sometimes I can be reached there. You know, I'm staying here for a few days, and I'm going to be in and out of Maysville campaigning for the next few weeks...

**FAITH:** *(reading the card)* Democrat for State Senate?

**JOHN:** I'm John Blevins.

*(He extends a hand. She stares at him blankly for a moment and he puts it away realizing the gesture will not be returned.)*

**FAITH:** *(sarcastically)* Well, it's a pleasure.

*(She walks past him examining the rip in her dress and starts to exit. He jumps in front of her.)*

**JOHN:** And you are?

**FAITH:** I'm Faith.

**JOHN:** I hope you don't hold this against me on Election Day.

**FAITH:** I thought you were late.

**JOHN:** Let me make it up to you. I'll take you out to dinner.

**FAITH:** *(offended)* Are you hitting on me?

**JOHN:** No!

**FAITH:** Is this what you do? You run down a lady on the street so you can ask her out to dinner. Get away from me.

*(She brushes past him a second time, only now, he lets her go.)*

**JOHN:** *(yelling after her)* Could you at least tell me how to get to the War Memorial? Please?

**FAITH:** *(stopping and turning)* Run that way about four blocks, take a left, go up the hill, and the War Memorial is in Armco Park, on you're right.

**JOHN:** Up the hill?

**FAITH:** Yeah?

**JOHN:** How far up the hill?

*(FAITH turns for the last time and walks away.)*

**FAITH:** Watch where you're going!

**JOHN:** Three blocks...four blocks...left...up the hill...right...

*(JOHN looks at his watch and then bolts down the street and off the stage. Lights fade center stage and rise on Marcus' lectern. MARCUS speaks to his crowd in the manner of a spirited and fervent evangelist.)*

**MARCUS:** My opponent doesn't believe your children should be allowed to pray in school. If it were up to John Blevins, God and the Ten Commandments would be expelled from every public school in the state of Kentucky. *(He leans in locking eyes with the audience.)* I support your child's right to pray. *(applause and cheering)* I do. My opponent will not decry the unborn baby holocaust the way I have. He calls the woman's right to kill her baby a choice. I have been endorsed by the Right to Life movement. He supports the rights of homosexual marriage. I can't believe it either. Do you want an ungodly man like that as your next representative in the State Senate? Or do you want a man of integrity and fairness? You need a man that stands for good old

fashioned Kentucky values. I'm Marcus Woodard and I want to be your next State Senator. Together we can!

*(Lights down on MARCUS and up on a lectern. JOHN bursts onto the scene and approaches the lectern, panting and out of breath.)*

**JOHN:** I'm...I'm sorry...I'm sorry I'm late. *(composing himself)* It's good to be back in Maysville. I'm sorry I'm late...but that's a really big hill. You see, I got up this morning and thought I would take a little walk around this beautiful city and I got lost in the wonder and beauty of it...I kind of lost track of time.

*(JOHN reaches into his pocket and a panic expression takes over. He roots around in the pocket vigorously, but there are no note cards to be found.)*

Well, well, well. I'm glad to see you all here today. As I look at all of your faces...I am reminded of what strong and vibrant...senior citizens...make up the Eastern Kentucky landscape. I want to talk to you today about something that will be very important to each and every one of you...drugs...no, no...prescription drugs...health care and a prescription drug plan, Social Security...and many of you have requested action against the smoking ban that will go into effect next year...I'm here for you!

*(Lights down on JOHN and up on Earl's Diner, consisting of a table and two chairs. MARCUS sits at one of the chairs, his head buried in a menu. FAITH appears to take his order.)*

**FAITH:** Can I help you?

**MARCUS:** *(without acknowledging her)* Coffee. Black.

*(FAITH leaves. MARCUS places his menu down and picks up a newspaper, which he skims. Momentarily, FAITH returns with a cup of coffee.)*

That was quick...*(looking up at her)*... Well, well...excuse me. You'll have to pardon my manners. If I'd realized that such a beautiful young lady was waiting on me...

**FAITH:** Save it.

**MARCUS:** Oh, come on, it was a perfectly innocent observation.

**FAITH:** You know what you want to eat?

**MARCUS:** What do you recommend?

**FAITH:** I recommend that you take that menu and...

*(JOHN appears in the audience, walking up the aisle to the stage.)*

**JOHN:** You son of a bitch!

**MARCUS:** Oh, God, what now?

**FAITH:** You know him?

**MARCUS:** Sort of.

*(JOHN is on stage now. He confronts MARCUS at the table.)*

**JOHN:** You son of a...

**MARCUS:** Calm down! What the hell has got into you?

**JOHN:** I was late for my rally today because my alarm clock didn't go off. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?

**MARCUS:** What are you implying?

**FAITH:** Ah-hem.

**JOHN:** *(noticing FAITH)* Ohhh...hi.

**FAITH:** *(sarcastic)* Hi! How was your day?

**JOHN:** Well, thanks for...

**FAITH:** Why don't the two of you work this out and decide what you want to eat. I'll be back.

*(FAITH leaves.)*

**MARCUS:** You know her?

**JOHN:** We ran into each other this morning just before I was a half hour late for my rally, thanks to you...

**MARCUS:** I don't have the slightest idea...

**JOHN:** Oh, don't give me that. My note cards were missing all of the sudden. I keep them in my right pocket all the time. I didn't realize they were gone until I was on stage...

*(MARCUS laughs.)*

I don't suppose you know anything about them, either.

**MARCUS:** I think it was that girl that was helping you...

**JOHN:** Donna?

**MARCUS:** Yeah...I think it was her that made sure they were in your pocket. You're lost without her, aren't you?

**JOHN:** She left.

**MARCUS:** No shit. That's a surprise.

**JOHN:** Stop! Don't change the subject.

**MARCUS:** Why would I sabotage you? Come on, John, note cards, alarm clock? That's petty stuff. I'm kicking your ass. And I decided something today. You don't bother me anymore. And this arrangement we have doesn't bother me either. It's just going to make me a better man and a better public servant...like all that stuff your dad said...

**JOHN:** You're so full of...

*(FAITH returns.)*

**FAITH:** Okay, third time's the charm.

**JOHN:** I can't apologize enough for this morning.

**FAITH:** Don't worry about it.

**JOHN:** Just give me a fruit salad.

**FAITH:** *(turning to MARCUS)* And you?

**MARCUS:** I think my boy is watching his weight. I'll have the sixteen ounce steak special.

**FAITH:** All right, that's one fat boy, and one fruit.

*(FAITH leaves.)*

**JOHN:** Isn't she something?

**MARCUS:** Huh? Oh, yeah. You should have seen the way she was coming on to me before you got here and screwed it all up.

**JOHN:** Yeah, right.

**MARCUS:** She was.

**JOHN:** I'll bet she was.

**MARCUS:** She was. I think she's into older guys. Too bad for you.

**JOHN:** You didn't see the way she was looking at me this morning. There was definitely a connection. Watch this. Faith!

**MARCUS:** Don't make an ass out of yourself...

*(FAITH re-enters)*

**FAITH:** Yes?

**JOHN:** Umm, could I get a water...too...with the salad.

**FAITH:** Sure. Anything else for our next State Senator?

**MARCUS:** *(staggered)* Wait a minute. Don't jump to any conclusions, sweetheart. I'm his opponent, Marcus Woodard...*(He hands her a card.)*...returning good old fashioned values to politics.

**FAITH:** *(mocking)* Oh, that's nice. *(to JOHN)* What's your angle?

**JOHN:** Are you seeing anyone?

**FAITH:** That's good, but I still don't know who to vote for.

**MARCUS:** You're undecided?

**FAITH:** You could say that.

**JOHN:** This is great. Why don't you come to Morgan County tomorrow? I'm giving a speech at the Democratic Women's Club...

**MARCUS:** I hate to interrupt, but Faith would probably be more interested in hearing me speak at the Chamber of Commerce tomorrow. There will be a lot of important people there. You wouldn't even have to leave Maysville. Can you break free of this place tomorrow?

**FAITH:** Thanks, boys, but I'm not really into politics. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to check on your food.

*(FAITH leaves. There is a long pause as JOHN and MARCUS watch her walk away. They look at each other in disbelief.)*

**MARCUS:** What did she say?

**JOHN:** She's not into politics?

**MARCUS:** Bitch. She's probably one of those pinko-socialist Femi-Nazi's. Maybe she is your type.

**JOHN:** Watch it!

**MARCUS:** Shut up!

**JOHN:** *(looks at his watch)* Shit!

*(JOHN leaps out of his seat.)*

**MARCUS:** What got into you?

**JOHN:** I have to go. I forgot...*(addressing FAITH, who has appeared at the table to refill Marcus's coffee)* Faith!

**FAITH:** Yeah.

**JOHN:** I have to go.

**FAITH:** *(with feigned pity)* Ohhh.

**JOHN:** Could I talk to you...over here...for a moment.

**FAITH:** Sure.

*(She follows him a few steps away from the table.)*

**JOHN:** I have to go. I'm sorry. Could you cancel the fruit?

**FAITH:** No problem.

*(She starts to walk away, but JOHN stops her. He pulls a crumpled flyer out of his pocket and hands it to her.)*

**JOHN:** Wait. I know you're not into politics. This is the rally I was telling you about...maybe if you're not doing anything...I have to go. You know, I'll also be speaking at the Women's Club here in Maysville next Thursday, and at a rally in the park on...

**FAITH:** I'll keep that in mind.

**JOHN:** Well...goodbye.

*(JOHN exits.)*

**FAITH:** *(to herself)* Goodbye, weirdo.

**MARCUS:** Excuse me!

**FAITH:** *(returning to the table)* Yes.

**MARCUS:** If you don't mind could I get some more coffee.

**FAITH:** *(refilling his glass)* Your steak will be out in just a minute.

**MARCUS:** You should sit down and get some rest. I hate to eat alone, and it's emptying out here anyway. What do you think?

**FAITH:** I think you should stop looking at me like that. I'm not on the menu.

*(FAITH walks away, and MARCUS is left at the table alone. He scoffs at her remark, and returns to reading the newspaper. Blackout. Lights up on JOHN's lectern. He is performing slightly better than in the past. He appears a bit more comfortable.)*

**JOHN:** ...at the bottom of the Ohio River? A good start. Thank you. What a great audience. My name is John Blevins. Many of you know that name because of my father, Charlie Blevins. He is a good man, a kind father and a spectacular politician. Some of you that supported him, and many that rallied against him, might be hesitant of voting for me because of my last name. Some people have told me that they're not exactly sure what I stand for...surely a son of Charlie Blevins isn't running as a Democrat. Well...while I look up to my old man, I do differ with him on policy. I assure you that I am my own man, and I do stand for something. I stand for Kentucky! I've been out here for the past week and I've met so many great people, and I've enjoyed living among the beautiful hills of these counties. I hope I can count on you for your vote next month. When my father endorses me in a couple of weeks, look upon that as a vote of confidence in a politician that will not play partisan games. Look at me as a man that will work with Republicans and Democrats alike to better this great state of ours. I stand here for the working man. I want to be your next State Senator for the fifty...seventh district. Don't believe the lies that my opponent...

*(Lights fade on JOHN mid-speech and rise on MARCUS behind his lectern.)*

**MARCUS:** This is a man who openly admits to smoking pot in college. He'll tell you straight to your face that he's for the working man, but to my knowledge he's never had a real job in his life. He's been spoiled by the good life that his daddy's money afforded him. I don't mean to speak disparagingly of the Blevins family. Charlie Blevins was one

of our greatest Congressmen. But John Blevins is no Charlie Blevins. I know. I have spent a great deal of time with both of them, and they are as different as night and day. John Blevins is an immoral man and he doesn't represent the average everyday Kentuckian the way I do. I see great days in our future, my fellow Kentuckians, and I want to lead the way to prosperity. I'll do that for you if you give me your vote on November seventh. Together we can!

*(Blackout. Lights up on hotel room. MARCUS sits in bed reading a newspaper. JOHN enters whistling.)*

**MARCUS:** You're in a good mood.

**JOHN:** What?

**MARCUS:** You get laid?

**JOHN:** Marcus, I'm not going to let you ruin this.

**MARCUS:** Ah-hah. Who was it?

**JOHN:** I did not get laid. That's exactly what I would expect someone like you to say...

**MARCUS:** Someone like me? Well, aren't you high and mighty?

**JOHN:** I've had a good day, and you can't spoil it.

**MARCUS:** You wanna bet? *(indicating the newspaper)* Look at these numbers.

**JOHN:** I don't care. I finally feel like I'm in this thing. I'm connecting with people.

**MARCUS:** *(laughing)* According to this, you're still connecting with nine percent less people than I am.

**JOHN:** Fuck off.

**MARCUS:** Oh, did I spoil your good day.

*(Silence.)*

Where were you? Did you have that women's dinner, or what?

**JOHN:** The Democratic Women's Club...

**MARCUS:** Whatever...

**JOHN:** Guess who was there.

**MARCUS:** A bunch of withered up old hags?

**JOHN:** Very funny.

**MARCUS:** Well?

**JOHN:** Faith.

**MARCUS:** That broad from the diner?

**JOHN:** Yep.

**MARCUS:** I passed her on the street in the pro-life parade two days ago. She flipped me off. Bitch!

**JOHN:** I looked out across a room of hundreds of eager supporters...

**MARCUS:** Hundreds, huh?

**JOHN:** ...and I saw her at the back of the room. Our eyes connected for just a moment. By the time I worked my way back there, she was gone. I knew that she liked me. There was something about that night at the diner. I stopped there this evening, but she wasn't working.

**MARCUS:** I hate to burst your bubble, but Faith was at my rally tonight. She was wearing a tight blue dress. You couldn't miss her. I took her out for a drink afterward. She wasn't working because she was with me.

**JOHN:** You liar.

**MARCUS:** No, I mean it.

**JOHN:** She wouldn't go out with you.

**MARCUS:** She did. I told her I saw her flip me off the other day, and she apologized... said it was all a misunderstanding.

**JOHN:** Bullshit.

**MARCUS:** Are you drunk?

**JOHN:** No!

**MARCUS:** You smell like...

**JOHN:** I am not drunk.

**MARCUS:** Where have you been?

**JOHN:** Nowhere.

**MARCUS:** Bullshit. You smell like whiskey and cigar smoke.

**JOHN:** Hey, if you want to meet the constituents you have to cover all the bases. I got a lot of votes tonight playing pool down at The Mediterranean.

**MARCUS:** The Mediterranean? That's a half hour away.

**JOHN:** Something like that.

**MARCUS:** Well, I would have liked to go. Did you ever think about that?

**JOHN:** No I didn't.

**MARCUS:** I'm stuck in this hotel all damn night, and you're out...

**JOHN:** Are you crazy?

**MARCUS:** I'm calling Charlie...

**JOHN:** Marcus, go fuck yourself.

**MARCUS:** *(getting out of bed)* I'm going out for a walk. I can't stand to be alone with you. This is driving me...

**JOHN:** A few days ago you said this arrangement didn't bother you anymore. You said, *(mockingly)* "it's just going to make me a better man and a better public servant."

**MARCUS:** Go to hell!

**JOHN:** Oh, did I ruin your good mood?

*(MARCUS begins to leave as JOHN rolls over in bed to go to sleep. MARCUS carefully and delicately steps back toward the bed, stops at the end table on JOHN's side, takes his alarm clock in his hand, and turns off the alarm.)*

**MARCUS:** *(to himself)* I'd hate it if you over slept tomorrow.

**JOHN:** Did you say something?

**MARCUS:** No.

*(Blackout. Lights up on the diner. MARCUS and JOHN are seated at the table having dinner.)*

**JOHN:** These people need good jobs. They want their kids to go to good schools. That's what's important to them...

**MARCUS:** Jesus, haven't I taught you anything. People don't care about jobs and schools. Not here. That's big city stuff.

**JOHN:** I can't believe I even agreed to meet you here. I can't talk sensibly to you...

**MARCUS:** Three things. They care about three things and three things only: guns, abortion, and prayer in schools.

**JOHN:** I don't want to talk about this anymore.

**MARCUS:** Of course you don't. You know that you're wrong.

**JOHN:** And what are the chances of us getting a room with two beds in it? Would that be too much to ask? You said one night. Tonight will make nine. I'm beginning to think you like...

**MARCUS:** I told you I'm working on it...

**JOHN:** You're working on saving as much money as you can...

**MARCUS:** We're in Olive Hill tomorrow. I have two separate rooms booked. Are you happy now?

**JOHN:** Yes. Thank you.

**MARCUS:** Three things, John.

**JOHN:** Oh, God.

**MARCUS:** No, make that four.

**JOHN:** This should be good.

**MARCUS:** Character. They want a man of good moral fiber.

**JOHN:** I don't whether to laugh or vomit.

**MARCUS:** I represent the people. I don't want to change them into something that they're not.

*(FAITH enters. She is not wearing her waitress outfit. She is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. She walks briskly past the table pretending not to notice the men.)*

**JOHN:** Faith!

**FAITH:** *(disappointed at being noticed)* Oh, hi. Well, what are the chances...

**MARCUS:** There's not a lot of restaurants in town, you know.

**JOHN:** You're not working tonight.

**FAITH:** I came in to get my check. It was nice seeing...

**JOHN:** Can we ask you a few questions?

**MARCUS:** What are you doing?

**JOHN:** Just a few questions? Hear me out.

**FAITH:** *(hesitant)* Okay, why not?

**JOHN:** Great.

**FAITH:** If either of you ask me out, I'm leaving.

**JOHN:** Faith, as a resident of these fine hills...

**FAITH:** Yes.

**JOHN:** What are you most concerned about from your government?

**FAITH:** Oh, God.

**MARCUS:** Why are you doing this?

**JOHN:** I'm proving a point.

**FAITH:** Okay, I'll play along. What do I want from the government? *(Pause.)* Well, I guess you could say I don't want a damn thing from the government. I want you all to stay as far out of my life as possible.

**MARCUS:** There you go! Smaller government. That's the fifth thing. I was just about to mention that when you came along.

**FAITH:** No, Marcus. Staying out of my life includes staying away from my body and minding your own business concerning any decisions I make about what I do with it. It

includes keeping your nose out of my private affairs. It includes minding your own business if I want to smoke a joint after work...

**JOHN:** See! I like the sound of this. Keep talking. Tell him how it is.

**FAITH:** *(to JOHN)* It also includes having some of my paycheck left after some fat cat Democrat has raised taxes again.

*(MARCUS laughs.)*

**MARCUS:** This is fun. This is the first good idea you've had, boy. Okay, my turn. I have a question.

**FAITH:** I really don't feel like discussing this anymore. Do you know why? Neither one of you is really interested in the answers I have to your questions. It's both of your pathetic attempts to engage someone else in a conversation on your favorite topic – yourselves. Don't you ever talk about anything else? When was the last time you went to the movies?

*(Silence. JOHN and MARCUS look at one another and shrug.)*

That's what I thought. A concert? A play? A baseball game? Not to be seen shaking hands and kissing babies, but just to sit back and relax.

*(No answer.)*

When was the last time either of you were doing anything other than promoting yourselves and your agenda? You are supposed to represent the people, but you're really not anything like the people. You'll spend your entire lives crammed into little offices, pouring through documents, or better yet, having someone do it for you, making decisions that will affect the people that you represent. And at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter whether it's a positive or negative affect. What really matters is to try to get it all done by five o'clock so you can hit the bar in time for happy hour and flirt with the cute young interns. And why do you do it? Because you love the power. You love the feeling of being important. You live off the excitement of beating the other fucking political party like you were playing a goddamned football game or something and don't even get me started on the homosexual overtones in that. Then, every couple of years you'll come back out here and try to convince all of us dumb country bumpkins that you've done great things for the state of Kentucky, especially our part of the state, but you can do so much more if we just give you two more years. And then, of course, after you win we'll never see you again. You two are no different. And you wonder why people don't vote. You wonder why we hate politicians? Well, there you go. I hope that answers any subsequent questions you may have had.

*(Silence.)*

What do you know? You're both speechless. If anyone had told me it would have been possible in a million years I never would have guessed it. Good night, boys.

*(She starts to exit, then turns to them one last time.)*

And stop sending me gifts, both of you. You don't know anything about women, either.

*(FAITH exits. Long pause. JOHN and MARCUS are completely stone faced.)*

**MARCUS:** Bitch!

**JOHN:** I think I'm in love.

*(Blackout. Lights up on JOHN at his lectern. Standing at his side is BERTIE LOU MULLINS, an elderly woman with a smile on her face and a blank look in her eyes.)*

**BERTIE LOU:** Hello...hello ladies and gentleman. *(She taps the microphone.)* Is this working? *(Pause.)* Can you hear me in the back? In the back? Can you...you can. All right. It's time to get started if you all want to take your seats. *(Pause.)* Wasn't that pot-roast good? I thought it was delicious. Is everyone ready? We have some old business to clear up before we bring out our guest. The Democratic Women's Club is still looking for a new Vice President. If anyone wants to volunteer you just have to see Bertie Lou *(indicating herself)* sometime before November 13. I'm expecting volunteers. Don't make me come after you. *(Pause.)* Can you all hear me? *(Pause.)* Good. I'd also like to thank the good people at Ponderosa for donating this lovely banquet space. They're a good bunch of Democrats, they are. Not like those bastards at Shoney's. We have a real treat in store for you all today and I'm not talking about the cobbler. Our very own Democratic State Senate candidate is with us. He's going to say a few words before we have dessert. Everyone put your hands together and give him a nice warm welcome. Here's John Blevins.

*(BERTIE LOU exits.)*

**JOHN:** It's great to be here in Olive Hill...

*(Lights up on MARCUS, standing at his lectern. The lights remain up on JOHN and he continues to give his speech, though the audience cannot hear him. A voice is heard offstage introducing MARCUS.)*

**VOICE:** Ladies and gentleman put your hands together and welcome your Republican candidate for State Senate, Marcus Woodard!

*(Applause. The following dialogue is spoken with rapid fire enthusiasm, each line almost overlapping the one before.)*

**MARCUS:** Good evening ladies and gentleman. I want to sincerely thank the wonderful citizens of Olive Hill for opening their arms and welcoming me to this fine city...

**JOHN:** I want to begin today by talking about what is important in Eastern Kentucky...

**MARCUS:** In less than two weeks you will go to the polls and vote...

**JOHN:** A vote for John Blevins is a vote for improved health care, a vote for a prescription drug plan for the elderly, a vote...

**MARCUS:** ...for your second amendment rights, a vote against big tax and spend government...

**JOHN:** ...for the future of our youth and finding a way to bring jobs to the area so our young people don't have to leave in droves...

**MARCUS:** ...elect a man of integrity, a man of good moral fiber...

**JOHN:** I'm not sure what his definition of good moral fiber and integrity is ladies and gentleman, but...

**MARCUS:** ...A drunkard, a pothead...

**JOHN:** ...three divorces...

**MARCUS:** ...a man with a bankrupt business in his past...

**JOHN & MARCUS:** ...don't let him fool you...

*(Lights up on FAITH in the diner. She sits with a newspaper open across the table in front of her.)*

**FAITH:** Can you believe this shit?

**MARCUS:** ...with his talk about jobs and education. Ask him specifics about his welfare to work program and increased teacher salaries and see if he has any. Oh, he talks a good game but you want a man with substance behind the talk...

**FAITH:** *(again, directed offstage)* I'm on a break. *(Pause.)* No, I will not come back early.

**JOHN:** Ask him about his voting record with the unions...

**MARCUS:** I worked with Charlie Blevins in the good old days. Some of you probably remember those days. Next week, when Charlie endorses me, I want you to take that as a sign of confidence in Marcus Woodard. Together we can return to those good old days...

**FAITH:** I'm reading the paper. Leave me alone. What am I reading? What am I reading? It may as well be the comics...

**JOHN:** I want to talk to you and I will listen. I will listen to your concerns and I will work with you to find answers.

**FAITH:** Get this Earl, John has been endorsed by the teachers and steel workers...

**MARCUS:** ...and I have the endorsement of the Right to Life Society and the National Rifle Association...

**FAITH:** ...and the tobacco farmers. *(Pause.)* What? *(Pause.)* I'm not going to vote. I just think it's interesting is all. *(Pause.)* Well it is. It's sad all the same, but you've got to admit it's interesting. Who do you think will win?

**JOHN:** My name is John Blevins and I want to be your next State Senator. You and I will present a United Front against our problems and come up with lasting solutions that matter...

**FAITH:** No, I mean if you had to pick one. *(Pause.)* If you absolutely had to pick one who would it be? *(Pause.)* I still have five more minutes, damnit! *(to herself)* God, I hate this place.

**MARCUS:** Together we can! Together we will! Thank you, thank you, thank you.

**JOHN:** Get out and vote November seventh. Talk to your neighbors, your friends, and tell them that a vote for John Blevins is a vote for the prosperity of Eastern Kentucky.

**FAITH:** Earl, I need tomorrow off. *(Pause.)* I have to go somewhere. *(Pause.)* Olive Hill. *(Pause.)* Yes, Olive Hill. *(Pause.)* It's none of your business what for. Cyndi will cover for me.

**MARCUS:** Thank you ladies and gentlemen!

**JOHN:** Thank you all!

**FAITH:** Thanks, Earl.

*(Blackout. Lights up on a different hotel room. It appears the same as before, but now there is a small cot in the room and a television directly in front of the bed. JOHN and MARCUS are both seated on the edge of the bed. They are glaring a television set, laughing. Each man has a drink in hand. They are watching a pornographic movie.)*

**MARCUS:** ...that's Eastern Kentucky for you. Yesterday, I met a guy named Skeeter. Skeeter couldn't read or write, and he damned sure didn't want anything to do with me. I tried to explain the election to him, but he said he don't vote.

**JOHN:** That's a shame.

*(They both burst out laughing. It is apparent that they are very drunk. They stop and watch the movie, stone-faced. The drunken stupor has melted away some of their animosity, if only for the time being.)*

**MARCUS:** She looks like a girl I used to know.

**JOHN:** Really?

**MARCUS:** Melba Fankle. The love of my life.

**JOHN:** You knew a girl that looked like that and her name was Melba Fankle?

**MARCUS:** Yeah.

**JOHN:** *(indicating TV)* Did you ever do that to Melba Fankle?

**MARCUS:** All the time. She was a wildcat.

**JOHN:** You liar.

**MARCUS:** I've been around the block a few times.

**JOHN:** I don't doubt that.

**MARCUS:** Hey, are you sure the names of these movies don't show up on the bill?

**JOHN:** *(laughing)* No, actually they do. I was lying to you earlier when I said that it wouldn't show up. *(He laughs more. MARCUS doesn't.)*

**MARCUS:** *(upset)* What was that?

**JOHN:** *(glaring at TV)* Huh?

**MARCUS:** The bill. What was that you said...

**JOHN:** Oh, come on. It's a joke.

**MARCUS:** A joke.

**JOHN:** Yeah, lighten up.

**MARCUS:** Lighten up! That's easy for you to say. I'm the one that has to go down there in the morning and pay for the damn thing...

**JOHN:** Don't do this, Marcus. We've been getting along so much better than...

**MARCUS:** You've been lying a lot lately, you sleazy little prick...

**JOHN:** (*serious*) Look who's talking...

**MARCUS:** (*belligerent, getting in John's face*) It's two divorces not three, and I don't think my relationship history has anything to do with my stand on family values...

**JOHN:** Get out of my face.

**MARCUS:** Two divorces, not three.

**JOHN:** While we're clearing the air, what the hell does smoking a joint have to do with anything...

**MARCUS:** People should know if they're going to elect a pot-head...

**JOHN:** That was six years ago...

**MARCUS:** Pothead!

**JOHN:** Marcus, knock that shit off. And get out (*pushing him away*) of my face.

**MARCUS:** (*pushing him back*) I can't believe you even brought up my divorces. That's personal you son of a bitch.

**JOHN:** Personal?

**MARCUS:** Yeah!

**JOHN:** Personal? You think I'm the one that's pulled our personal lives into this...

**MARCUS:** Damn right you have, you hypocrite.

*(John darts back to the end table and retrieves a newspaper. He opens it and throws it at Marcus.)*

**JOHN:** No Marcus, "personal" is a campaign ad with a John Blevins cartoon smoking a joint and pick pocketing a group of senior citizens...

**MARCUS:** You deserved it you pinko! It wasn't harsh enough if you ask me.

**JOHN:** *(pointing his index finger into Marcus' chest)* People see through you for the phony you really are. They don't believe this shit.

**MARCUS:** *(pushing John back)* Listen here, boy. I've been easy on you because you're Charlie's son and we're suppose to make it look like we're getting' along fine out here, but you put your hands on me one more time...

**JOHN:** And *(pushing him)* what?

**MARCUS:** Don't make me kick your ass.

**JOHN:** Ohhhh, I'm scared. Don't threaten me again please. I don't want you to kick my...

**MARCUS:** Shut up!

**JOHN:** Fuck you!

*(MARCUS grabs JOHN and gets him in a headlock. JOHN gets out by punching MARCUS hard in the kidneys. Neither man is a good fighter, but they manage to scuffle all around the room. In the process, they break a lamp and a mirror. The fight moves in front of the bed and JOHN is on top of MARCUS, choking him. All of the sudden MARCUS punches him in the stomach and JOHN freezes. He begins to gag and looks like he may puke. He takes his hands off MARCUS, and rises, barreling offstage to the bathroom. MARCUS sits up, touching his hand to his face. His nose is bleeding. JOHN is heard offstage puking. Silence. MARCUS is sitting on the bed with his face in his hands. He looks up. Silence.)*

**MARCUS:** *(to himself)* I'm sorry, kid.

*(JOHN re-enters. He looks sick. He walks through the room and to the cot, ignoring MARCUS. Silence.)*

No, you take the bed tonight. It's your night.

*(JOHN doesn't speak. He simply trades places with MARCUS, and settles into the bed. MARCUS is solemn. He sits on the cot and stares at JOHN in the bed.)*

Barbara used to baby-sit you. You probably don't remember that. I forgot all about it. It was back when the two of us were still...never could have expected this. I'm sorry, John. John...

*(John turns out the one remaining lamp, and the room is dark.)*

I really did turn your alarm off. It was just a joke...like the movie thing...I don't mean to be an asshole. It's just kind of my nature. It runs with the territory. You've got a hell of a mouth on yourself, too, that's for sure. Anyway, my point is...

**JOHN:** Marcus...

**MARCUS:** Yeah.

**JOHN:** Shut up.

**MARCUS:** Okay.

*(Lights out. The sound of an alarm clock is heard. The lights rise on MARCUS asleep on the cot. It is the next morning. He sits up, groggily gets out of bed and walks offstage presumably toward the bathroom. He is gone only an instant when he returns to the room. Confused, he notices that JOHN is not in bed. A note has been left on JOHN's pillow. MARCUS crosses to the bed, picks up the note and reads it. After a few moments, he looks up. He appears sad, but the moment passes and a smile comes over his face. He picks up the phone and begins dialing frantically. )*

**MARCUS:** Charlie Blevins, please...

*(Blackout. Lights up on the diner. JOHN is seated, FAITH standing over him.)*

**FAITH:** I haven't seen much of you lately.

**JOHN:** *(downhearted)* No. We've been out in Morgan County. Spent a bit of time in Elliot, too. I just came back to Maysville to tie up some loose ends at the courthouse. I thought I'd stop in and see if you were working.

**FAITH:** I'm always working.

**JOHN:** Did you miss me?

**FAITH:** It hasn't been quite as exciting without you boys around, that's for sure.

**JOHN:** I can imagine.

**FAITH:** Where is the old guy?

**JOHN:** I don't care.

**FAITH:** It seems like you would know...

**JOHN:** I quit.

**FAITH:** You what?

**JOHN:** I quit the race.

**FAITH:** What the hell are you talking about?

**JOHN:** Faith, everything you said about us was true. I can't stand this anymore.

**FAITH:** So he says nasty things about you. I thought that was what politics is all about.

**JOHN:** He's running an ad in Daily News that shows me with a drink in my hand and my tongue hanging out of my mouth and do you know what it says?

**FAITH:** Don't let this skirt chasing alcoholic get your guns.

**JOHN:** You've seen it.

**FAITH:** It's kind of funny.

**JOHN:** It's humiliating.

**FAITH:** You've said some pretty bad things about him.

**JOHN:** Nothing like that!

**FAITH:** I've been watching the two of you. Don't put on that innocent act for me.

**JOHN:** It's not all Marcus. It's everything about politics. All that stuff you said, and everything my dad said. You were both right. It just took me a while to figure it out. It's all about is winning... and it's not for the people...it's for ourselves or the party or the power or something, but it damn sure isn't for the people.

**FAITH:** I've seen you knocking on doors and talking to people. You got into this because you wanted to help people, same as your dad. Do you deny that?

**JOHN:** I don't know why the hell I got myself into this.

**FAITH:** People out here like you. I'm not sure what it is, but they like you. Sure, you're kind of screwed up but so are they, and you kind of remind them of themselves that way. Listen, I meant everything I said to you and Marcus, but maybe it's time to get someone in office who feels the way you do. Maybe you could change things. Hell, I might even vote for you.

**JOHN:** I don't want to hear that right now, Faith. I'm out. And I don't care if I never see Marcus again.

**FAITH:** Oh, yeah. What are you going to do?

**JOHN:** I don't know. I've always thought about moving to Alaska and working on one of those big boats that they fish on.

**FAITH:** You mean a fishing boat?

**JOHN:** Yeah, a fishing boat.

**FAITH:** Are you sure about this?

**JOHN:** I've never been more sure of anything in my life.

**FAITH:** You really quit?

**JOHN:** I really quit.

*(Blackout. Lights rise on the office. CHARLIE sits at the table scribbling furiously in his checkbook. FAITH enters, tossing her waitress uniform to the floor.)*

**FAITH:** I guess I won't need this anymore.

**CHARLIE:** No, you won't.

**FAITH:** I hate being a waitress, Charlie.

**CHARLIE:** I don't want you to feel unappreciated, Faith. You've done a hell of a job.

**FAITH:** *(sits down)* I don't get it.

**CHARLIE:** What?

**FAITH:** This whole thing. I don't know how you could have expected...you're a Republican. I thought you guys stuck together. Why did you even give John a chance? You could have endorsed Marcus weeks ago.

**CHARLIE:** It's complicated.

**FAITH:** Try me.

**CHARLIE:** I didn't think either one of them...I thought maybe they would learn a lesson...I don't know what I thought. Politics is a lot different today.

**FAITH:** *(disbelieving)* Really?

**CHARLIE:** Maybe it's just me that's different.

**FAITH:** Better late than never.

**CHARLIE:** *(handing her a check)* Congratulations, you've earned it.

**FAITH:** This is more than we agreed on. Not that I'm complaining.

**CHARLIE:** I know the past couple of weeks have been rough. They never suspected, did they?

**FAITH:** Are you kidding?

**CHARLIE:** Perfect woman for the job. I told them. I'll have people watching you and making sure you're behaving yourselves. I should have known it would go in one ear and out the other.

**FAITH:** Are you going to endorse Marcus?

**CHARLIE:** Doesn't matter much what I do now, does it?

**FAITH:** Well, thank you. If you ever need anything, forget you know me, all right?

**CHARLIE:** I appreciate it, Faith.

*(FAITH rises and begins to leave. CHARLIE stops her.)*

He was coming around wasn't he?

**FAITH:** I thought he was beginning to do great. I told him I was even going to vote for him...and I might have. I've never voted. I think you're all a bunch of assholes. I don't know exactly what happened. He didn't fill me in with all the details. It couldn't have been any picnic living with Marcus...

*(At that moment, MARCUS bursts into the room. He struts around, cockily to address CHARLIE, then addresses FAITH.)*

**MARCUS:** I heard my name. Faith. You can't stop thinking about me, can you? It's all right. You don't have to pretend anymore. I know it all. Charlie picked him a perfect spy, didn't you Charlie? I suppose you told him I was on my best behavior, Faith. I hope my continued rejections of the advances you made against me didn't taint your report to Charlie. I had too much work to do fool around...

**FAITH:** Marcus, kiss my fuckin' grits.

**MARCUS:** Right, right. So, Mr. Blevins, I guess you'll be making that endorsement

soon. One less candidate to choose from. Hmmm. Who will it be?

*(CHARLIE is unresponsive. FAITH is sneaking out of the room. Silence.)*

Charlie? Oh, I know your endorsement doesn't carry as much weight now as before. That's all right. I know which way you were leaning. You still want to be on board, don't you? The Woodard train is heading for Frankfurt. It would sure look good for you if you were with me. What do you think?

**CHARLIE:** *(coldly)* I'm going to make a speech tomorrow after the debate. You'll know then what I think.

**MARCUS:** All right. Sounds good. Should be some debate, huh?

**CHARLIE:** Should be. I thought it was interesting that you were still going through with it.

**MARCUS:** I never miss an opportunity to speak directly to the people. You know that about me.

*(MARCUS looks around the room. He realizes FAITH is gone.)*

**MARCUS:** Charlie, don't believe a word she says. She had a thing for John. It's natural she's going to take his side. I was a perfect gentleman. I realize now what you were trying to do. Get some of the old Woodard charm to rub off on your boy. It was a good idea. I tried to show him the ropes.

**CHARLIE:** Marcus...

**MARCUS:** He's got some problems, though. He's a good boy, but I think this turned out for the better, don't you? Charlie?

*(Lights out. Patriotic music plays through a brief interlude. Lights rise on MARCUS standing at his lectern. He exudes the triumphant confidence of his upcoming victory. It is the night of the only scheduled debate between candidates and MARCUS is onstage alone. He addresses questions from a MODERATOR that is heard but not seen.)*

That is an excellent question, sir. Perhaps my opponent would like to address that...

*(MARCUS gestures to the empty lectern across the stage. Silence. MARCUS howls with laughter.)*

Maybe not. I no longer have an opponent, do I? I thought there would at least be some crazy Libertarian candidate here.

*(He laughs at his own joke, then pauses, and puts on a serious face.)*

Jobs, jobs, jobs. Together we can bring back jobs to Eastern Kentucky. I'll work for you. Together we can do it. But jobs aren't all we need. We need a man of integrity, with a strong moral fiber, and a dedication to family values in our State Senate. We need Marcus Woodard. Together we can.

*(Long pause.)*

**MODERATOR:** With all due respect, I'd like to repeat the question, Mr. Woodard. You're former opponent accused you of stirring up emotions rather than appealing to intellect. Is this a fair criticism of the way you've run your campaign?

**MARCUS:** Well...no...I would like to address that directly...

**MODERATOR:** If you could do that, we only have time for...

**MARCUS:** I'm trying to answer your question if you'll stop interrupting me...you asked about the campaign and I would like to address that concern...that you spoke of...

*(During the latter part of this exchange, JOHN has appeared onstage behind the other lectern. The lights rise on him.)*

**JOHN:** So would I.

*(JOHN is nicely dressed, clean cut. MARCUS is visibly shaken.)*

I'm sorry I'm late. I would like to address that question.

**MARCUS:** Wait a minute! Wait a minute!

**JOHN:** Mr. Woodard, I believe you had a chance to answer. Now all I ask for is the same respect during my response that I gave to you...

**MARCUS:** You weren't here! You're not in this race!

**JOHN:** If I'm not mistaken, it appears that I'm more popular out of the race than when I was in it, if the poll in this mornings' Independent is correct. I'd like a chance to address that if you'll give me a chance.

**MODERATOR:** Go on, Mr. Blevins.

**MARCUS:** Go on? This isn't fair.

**JOHN:** Please, Marcus. I just want to explain myself. Ladies and gentleman here in the hall and listening or watching at home...I would like to apologize...for wasting your

time. There are a lot of things I've said throughout the course of this campaign that I would like to take back. I said a great deal about my opponent, and even if those things are true, I should have been talking about the issues that matter to the people of Kentucky. And as far as I can see there are five issues that matter most to the people. Guns, abortion, prayer in schools, character, and smaller government.

**MARCUS:** What?

**JOHN:** I'd like to address each of those tonight and clear up a few things that have been said about me in regard to those issues. Maybe I can make it clear why I feel the way I do. But first, I want to say something. It's easy when you're running for office to only think about winning and what you can do to shake your opponent up. I've had a lot of time to think the past few days. I should have spent more time talking about my own plan, my agenda. If you'll give me a chance, that's what I'd like to do tonight. There's still six days before you go out and vote. It's not too late to make the right choice. All I ask is that you hear me out and then make up your own mind.

**MARCUS:** Those are my five things...what you said about all the...

**JOHN:** Issues?

**MARCUS:** Yeah, that people care about most...you stole those from me...

**JOHN:** Oh, Marcus.

**MODERATOR:** Gentleman, we need to move on.

**JOHN:** Certainly.

**MODERATOR:** Mr. Blevins, are we to understand that you are re-entering the race?

**JOHN:** Yes, I am.

**MARCUS:** Could we take a short break?

*(BERTIE LOU MULLINS has appeared in the crowd. She stands among the audience members and reprimands MARCUS.)*

**BERTIE LOU:** Don't let him take a break. You can't squirm out of this one, Woodard.

**MODERATOR:** Maam, please.

**BERTIE LOU:** You shut up now and listen to me. That's the problem with all of you. You don't listen to us. Now I have something to say. John, it's good to see you back in the race. When I heard you dropped out I was furious with you...

**JOHN:** I'm sorry...

**BERTIE LOU:** Now be quiet and listen. It's about time we had some young people like yourself take some initiative for once. I have a grandson named Dean. He's about your age. He doesn't do anything but sit around the house and play video games. He's a real shithead. So many young people don't even vote, and here you are working so hard for us. You keep up the good work. We're all pulling for you. You'll get Elliot County, that's for sure.

*(JOANNA, who is also in the audience, stands up and addresses BERTIE LOU.)*

**JOANNA:** Are you done? Because if you are I would like to hear what the candidates have to say...

**BERTIE LOU:** Oh, you'll know when I'm done.

**JOANNA:** What is that suppose to mean?

**MODERATOR:** I'd like to take a short break and restore order in here. Ladies and gentleman if you will please refrain from outbursts for the remainder of the debate it would be greatly appreciated. Let's take five.

*(JOHN and MARCUS eye each other from across the stage. MARCUS is fuming, JOHN smug. MARCUS looks at the crowd and smiles. He walks slowly to JOHN and extends his hand to shake it. JOHN returns to gesture. As they shake hands, MARCUS pulls JOHN close to him. Both smile and wave to the crowd.)*

**MARCUS:** *(whispering)* You won't get away with this you son of a bitch.

**JOHN:** I think I just did.

*(Blackout. Patriotic music plays while lights slowly rise on CHARLIE standing center stage. He pauses and then addresses the audience.)*

**CHARLIE:** I am here to make my endorsement for the State Senate seat in contention between John Blevins and Marcus Woodard. I saw an old friend of mine this morning and he asked me, "How could you possibly go against your own party, Charlie?" I thought about that for a second, as I have laid in bed awake and thought of it many times. How can I go against the Republican Party that has served me well. The party that I believe holds conservative values that lie at the heart of most American people. I can't. At the same time, how can I not endorse my son, my own flesh and blood. Am I not confident enough in the way that I raised him to know that he can carry on the Blevins tradition no matter what political party he belongs? Is it about political parties? Is it about family? It's not, or it shouldn't be. I am going to endorse the candidate that I believe will work the hardest for the people of Kentucky. I am going to vote for the candidate that will work together with other members of the Senate. I am going to

sponsor the candidate that I believe has learned a little something about himself and about the people in these past few weeks. I'm going to endorse my son John Blevins. And when you go out to the poles tomorrow, I think you should do the same. Ladies and gentleman, John Blevins.

*(Lights up on JOHN's lectern. He waves and smiles at the crowd.)*

**JOHN:** Thank you, thank you. Tomorrow is the big day...

*(Lights up on MARCUS at the other lectern.)*

**MARCUS:** He's gone completely out of his mind. You know it. I know it. Endorsing a man with no political experience...

**JOHN:** I know I don't have a lot of experience, but I think that is just what we need in Frankfurt to root out the corruption left behind by a generation of career politicians. Tomorrow begins a new wave of youthful energy sweeping through the ranks of state government...

**MARCUS:** I want you to go to the poles tomorrow and vote with your hearts, not because of the rantings of a has-been politician who's completely lost touch with the people that he used to represent. A vote for Marcus Woodard is a vote for good old fashioned conservative values. It's a vote for experience, integrity, fairness, and prosperity. It's a vote for the Republican Party and everything it stands for. Your vote is a vote for lower taxes and smaller government. Vote for me! Together we can! Together we will!

**JOHN:** Go home tonight and call a friend or a neighbor and get one more vote for John Blevins. Each and every one of your voices is important in this election. If you believe what the polls tell you than it's going to be a close one. Get out there and vote. If anyone has questions, I would be glad to answer...

*(Blackout. Scene shifts to election night. Onstage the Blevins party (JOHN, MASON) has gathered at the bar from Act I. It is sparsely decorated with red, white and blue streamers. John is writing. The Woodard party (MARCUS, JOANNA) is represented at MARCUS' office, also from Act I. As the lights rise, JOHN is seated at the bar listening attentively to a small radio, MASON standing closely. MARCUS, also equipped with radio, is seated behind his desk. JOANNA is pacing the room.)*

**MASON:** Anything new?

**JOHN:** Last report was still to close to call.

**MASON:** You want a drink?

**JOHN:** No.

**MASON:** Hey, lighten up. You've done a hell of a job. If the people can't see that then screw 'em. What are you doing?

**JOHN:** Nothing.

**MASON:** (*grabbing the paper*) Let me see that.

**JOHN:** Damnit, Mason.

**MASON:** You've written a concession speech. What the hell is wrong with you? Have you at least written a victory speech?

**MARCUS:** Just tell me if this sounds too pompous...

**JOANNA:** What is that?

**MARCUS:** It's the speech I'm going to make tonight after I win.

**JOANNA:** It sounds too pompous...

**MARCUS:** I haven't said anything yet.

**JOHN:** Yes, I have a victory speech just in case.

**MASON:** Good. Why don't you have a drink?

**JOHN:** You have any coffee back there?

**MASON:** Sure. Coffee.

**JOHN:** I haven't slept in three nights. I think I'm beginning to hallucinate. For ten minutes I tried to convince a telephone pole to get out and vote.

**MASON:** Where's your dad?

**JOHN:** He's out trying to get some last minute votes. A lot of people forget altogether about the election. Some can't get out their house to go to the polls.

**MASON:** That's nice of him.

**JOHN:** Yeah, I'm surprised like hell he's doing it. I didn't think he'd endorse either one of us.

**MASON:** Well, he must see something in you I don't.

**JOHN:** Shut up.

**MARCUS:** What the hell is taking so long?

**JOANNA:** Calm down. Poles just closed in Boyd County.

**MARCUS:** They've been closed everywhere else for over an hour.

**JOANNA:** No, everyone closes at the same time now.

**MARCUS:** Well, what is taking so long?

**JOANNA:** Don't you want to go downstairs. There's a room full of people that came to support you. How does it look for you to be all locked up in your office? You should be down there talking to them.

**MARCUS:** I will. Just give me a minute. Joanna...

**JOANNA:** Yes?

**MARCUS:** Thanks for all your help. I appreciate it.

**JOANNA:** That's means a lot, Marcus. Especially coming from you.

**MARCUS:** What does that mean?

**JOANNA:** I'm going down to mingle. You want to join me?

**MARCUS:** I'm going to wait for them to announce. I'll be down then.

*(CHARLIE and FAITH enter the bar.)*

**JOHN:** That's a pretty date you have there, dad. How much did you have to pay her?

*(FAITH slaps JOHN hard.)*

**CHARLIE:** Didn't I teach you how to talk to a lady, son?

**JOHN:** *(hurt, holding his hand to his face)* No.

**CHARLIE:** Mason, how are you?

**MASON:** What'll you have, sir.

**CHARLIE:** Can I get a glass of water?

**MASON:** Sure. Anything for you darling?

**FAITH:** Gin and tonic.

**MASON:** Finally, someone is gonna have a drink.

**FAITH:** I'm sorry, John.

**JOHN:** I was only kidding.

**FAITH:** I know. I didn't mean to hit you that hard.

**JOHN:** What are you doing here?

**FAITH:** I've been helping your dad today.

**JOHN:** You were? He didn't mention anything about it.

**CHARLIE:** Turns out Faith is a hell of a politico. You should thank her. She got you a lot of votes today.

**JOHN:** Thanks. I don't know what to say.

**FAITH:** No need. There is something you could do for me.

**JOHN:** What's that?

**FAITH:** Seems to me that you'll need an assistant up in Frankfurt...a moral compass...someone to keep your priorities in line.

**JOHN:** I suppose you know someone who'd be interested.

**FAITH:** I'm only bringing it up as a suggestion. You do what you want to do. By the way, you were great the other night...the debate...I'd given up on you.

**JOHN:** You saw it?

**FAITH:** I saw it. You were great. A bit too sentimental...a little obvious...nothing we can't work on.

**JOHN:** Can I ask you something?

**FAITH:** Sure.

**JOHN:** How much of that was really you...in that diner...how did you...

**FAITH:** John, it was all really me. With Faith Carson, what you see is what you get. Hey, I like that.

**CHARLIE:** You better watch out. You might be running against her in two years.

**FAITH:** Anyway, apart from the whole waitress thing, that was me. I'm sorry I had to trick you boys like that. It was all for good reason.

**JOHN:** Faith, I have to talk to you about something else.

**FAITH:** Okay...

**JOHN:** I...look...I didn't mean to come on too strong...I just think that you and I could...

**FAITH:** John, wait...

**JOHN:** No, hear me out. I think you are an amazing woman and I've always felt this connection between the two of us. I really care about you...

*(MASON sweeps by and gives FAITH a kiss and a drink.)*

**MASON:** Here you go, honey.

**JOHN:** *(shocked)* This is hands down the worst day of my life and I haven't even lost yet.

**FAITH:** John...

**JOHN:** I can't believe this.

**FAITH:** John, I will go anywhere in the world with you if you can tell me something...what's my last name? I just told...

**JOHN:** I know it. I know it.

**MASON:** Carson.

**FAITH:** What's my favorite movie?

**MASON:** Strangers on a Train.

**JOHN:** Damnit.

**FAITH:** Quick...can you tell me what color my eyes are?

**JOHN:** Umm...

**CHARLIE:** Brown!

**MASON:** A warm golden brown with flecks of green when the light hits them.

**JOHN:** Oh, shut the fuck up!

**FAITH:** John, you've been trying to go out with me for the last month and you don't know anything about me. What's more you don't know anything about yourself. You're going to have a hard enough time figuring yourself out without having a woman like me involved.

**MARCUS:** It's time! It's time!

*(DONNA enters.)*

**DONNA:** John, what the hell are you all doing? Turn that radio up. They're about to announce.

**RADIO ANNOUNCER:** ...it appears that George W. Bush will easily win Kentucky's eleven electoral votes and stays ahead of Al Gore in the race for the presidency that is at this time too close to call. In local news...with over ninety percent of the precincts reporting...in the race for State Senate District number seventy five Marcus Woodard will win the seat by the slimmest of margins...

*(MARCUS leaps out of his seat in celebration. The bar is silent with disappointment.)*

**MARCUS:** Light em up boys and girls! There's a new State Senator and you're looking right at him. I'm coming down...

*(Long pause.)*

**MASON:** I don't believe this...

**JOHN:** I do. It was too little too late. If I hadn't dropped out...

**FAITH:** John, don't do that to...

**JOHN:** ...or if you'd endorsed me sooner...

**CHARLIE:** What the hell are you saying?

**JOHN:** The slimmest of margins. What do you think that means?

**FAITH:** Both of you, stop it.

**MASON:** They said with over ninety percent. Maybe with the other ten...

**JOHN:** It doesn't usually work that way, Mason.

*(Silence.)*

I'm leaving. Thank you all for everything. I appreciate it.

**CHARLIE:** John...

**JOHN:** I have a concession speech written do you all want to hear it...

*(Lights up on MARCUS at his lectern.)*

**MARCUS:** I thank you all! You've made the right decision. Together we can! Together we will! I'm Marcus Woodard. You're new State Senator!

**JOHN:** I've learned a lot about myself over the past few weeks. I've learned a lot about politics. Maybe it doesn't matter which one of us you elected today. After all, when it comes down to it we're all really the same. I suppose that's why I dropped out in the first place. I suppose I got back in the race because I thought I could change things. I thought I could make a difference. If that's even a possible in politics today. Or maybe I just missed seeing my name in the headlines. I want to thank everyone that voted for me. I want to wish Marcus Woodard all the luck in the world. And I would like to remind him of one thing that I needed to be reminded of. It's not about the race or the party or the power. It's about the people. I want to thank all of the people that have been so kind to me these weeks. I only wished I had realized this weeks and not days ago. I only hope I'm a better man for it. Good night. *(Pause.)* Give me a beer, Mason.

**MASON:** Coming right up.

*(Lights out. Music plays through brief scene change. The lights rise on the bar. All of the decorations are gone. It is the next day. JOHN is sitting at the bar, depressed and drinking heavily. MASON is standing behind the bar washing glasses. The scene is identical to the one at the bar at the beginning of the play.)*

**JOHN:** Give me another one.

**MASON:** John...

**JOHN:** Oh, come on, just give me one more.

**MASON:** *(Pause, fixing drink)* You want to talk about it?

**JOHN:** No. *(Pause.)* Thanks, though.

**MASON:** This one's on me.

**JOHN:** I won't have you taking pity on me.

**MASON:** All right, you pay.

**JOHN:** Huh?

**MASON:** I'll put it on your tab.

**JOHN:** Wait a minute.

*(FAITH rushes into the bar, out of breath.)*

**FAITH:** I might have known I'd find you here.

**JOHN:** Faith! Have a drink.

**FAITH:** Charlie and I have been looking for you.

**JOHN:** Calm down.

**FAITH:** I will not calm down. Turn on the TV.

**JOHN:** No, it's nothing but Woodard strutting his stuff and talking about all the good things he's going to do...

**FAITH:** Mason, turn on the TV!

**MASON:** What, did Gore win after all?

**FAITH:** No...well maybe...forget about it...John might have.

**JOHN:** What?

**FAITH:** It's all over the news.

*(MASON races to the television, turns it on. All three gaze at the screen. The local news is reporting. The NEWSCASTER and SKEETER are heard from offstage.)*

**NEWSCASTER:** This man, known to his friends as Skeeter...

**JOHN:** Where do I know him from?

**FAITH:** Shhh!

**NEWSCASTER:** ...found the ballot box while...bathing in the Lewis River...

**SKEETER:** I was in the water, and this box come falling from the sky. It came lessin' ten feet away from killing me.

**NEWSCASTER:** Did it appear that the ballot box was thrown from a truck moving across the bridge just above you?

**SKEETER:** Well, now, it mighten a' been. Just came falling from the sky. Damn near killed me.

**MASON:** What the hell is going on?

**FAITH:** Listen.

**NEWSCASTER:** If you're just joining us, a missing ballot box was reported at the main polling location in Maysville late last night. The ballot box may contain uncounted votes from last night's State Senate election which was decided by only an almost indistinguishable margin. Additionally the box is believed to contain votes from heavily Democratic Wolfe County...

*(Lights slowly rise on MARCUS. He sits in his office and listens to the same report on the radio. His face is a pained mixture of anger and fear.)*

...if all of this proves true than the Woodard camp may have celebrated too soon. John Blevins won Wolfe County with over eighty percent of the vote, while losing the State Senate election by only a few dozen votes. It certainly is a confusing election year, both on the national level with presidential race still too close to call and even here in our little neck of the woods...

**MARCUS:** Joanna! Joanna!

**JOHN:** Oh, my God!

**FAITH:** Can you believe it?

**MASON:** This is incredible.

**MARCUS:** *(screaming)* Joanna, what the hell does this mean?

**FAITH:** You have to come downtown with me. Your father wants to talk to you.

**JOHN:** When will they know?

**FAITH:** They're counting the ballots now.

**MARCUS:** Joanna!

*(Lights out. Music plays. Lights rise on JOHN's lectern. He speaks with great enthusiasm and gratitude. The stage picture should duplicate that of the opening scene inserting JOHN into MARCUS' position.)*

**JOHN:** I have just been informed that with the uncounted ballots...the Blevins campaign will win the election by fifteen votes. *(cheering and applause from the Blevins camp that now surrounds him)* There is a re-count that has been ordered by Mr. Woodard, but we believe that in the end the vote will stand and if that is the case...well then, I guess you're looking at your new State Senator from Eastern Kentucky. *(cheering)* It seems hard to believe, I know. I want to thank my father Charlie Blevins and Faith Carson, both of whom will be joining me in Frankfurt to keep me on the straight and narrow. I want to thank all of the people who voted for me. I sincerely appreciate it. And for those that didn't, I want you to know that I will work together with the other side...I've learned my lesson. I will make you proud, Kentucky. I will serve...

*(Lights rise on Marcus' office. Joanna reclines behind the desk. Marcus is pacing. They are listening to John's speech on the radio.)*

**MARCUS:** This is good stuff. The honesty angle this kid has is really good. He tricked everyone. We can do that. We can pretend to be honest and keep apologizing to people for all the bad stuff we did. And we can do it even better than him. There's another campaign in two years, Joanna. We're going to be there and this time we'll wipe the floor with John Blevins. Once the people see that he can't govern his way out of a paper bag they'll be begging me to run. What do you think? Joanna? Are you asleep? Damn it, Joanna, wake up. This is important.

**JOHN:** And to Marcus Woodard...

**MARCUS:** What did he say about me? What the hell did that son of a bitch say about me?

**JOHN:** I want you all to have confidence in John Blevins. This is the beginning of a new day in state politics.

**MARCUS:** No it isn't. This is the same old same old. The same bullshit I'd be saying if I'd won.

**JOHN:** A new voice in Frankfurt. Your voice. Thank you again! *(to himself)* I need a drink.

*(Cheering. Blackout.)*

THE END

From *American Standard* to *Princess*...

The premiere production of *American Standard* involved a combination of simple sets and complex lighting. A great deal of effort was spent trying to communicate a variety of locations within the confines of a small black box theatre. The intimacy of this approach focused the audience attention on the actors and the story. There is little spectacle. It is a comedy principally of people and ideas. As a result, producing organizations should consider that the play can fit into almost any space. There is a lot of “foul” language which has upset some potential producers and publishers. I stand by the use of such “filthy mouths” as they are an accurate portrayal of the politicians that I worked with. In fact, the profanity in the play is muted to some extent. Besides, the language and behavior used in political commercials is often more annoying, if not also more offensive, than anything said behind closed doors.

I started writing *The Princess of Rome, Ohio* three weeks after the staging of *American Standard*. With *American Standard* the story came to me first and the characters grew into that story as I brainstormed and improvised my writing. With *Princess* I used the opposite approach. I created the characters first. Each one was fleshed out on paper well before they began speaking to each other through dialogue. The play centers around six characters that often inhabit the front porch of a small home in Rome, Ohio. It is the kind of small town that one could easily imagine John Blevins and Marcus Woodard visiting while touring through Eastern Kentucky. In fact, I’ve often considered a separate play that would revolve around John and Marcus independently knocking on doors to rally voters only to meet a family like the one

introduced in *Princess*.

*Princess* can be staged in variety of ways. The explicit staging instructions that open the play can be interpreted or re-designed to fit the needs of a specific theatre company at any given time. The set and lighting is not as important as the characterization and performance. Obviously, it has to be a porch as the language of the play indicates. But merely a few chairs and a small table could indicate the front porch area, if necessary.

The plot and sub-plots that weave the characters together is a simple one. The characters on the other hand are quite complex. Hattie is a young girl, who at fourteen is more book smart than her parents are at thirty. She longs to get away from Rome so she can be wise in the world as well. But she is tied to a lifestyle that neither one of her parents have been able to escape. Her mother Lulu is intelligent and outspoken but her teenage pregnancy with Hattie stunted her educational growth. She has attempted to break out the mistakes of her past by killing the husband that took her to Logan County. Lulu's best friend Alma is a fidgety woman who is also struggling with tough decisions that she makes in life and love. As far as the men are concerned Dicky gave me an incredibly fun vehicle to point out the uselessness of authority figures in Rome. Bud, who isn't dead at all, may as well be. He has never listened to his wife or daughter the way that a husband or father should, a fact accentuated by his loss of hearing. Jimmy doesn't have a clue (what fourteen year old boy does?) and is drawn to Hattie's strength and personality. You have to go to a land far far away to find a male suitable for any of the women in the story and that's where England comes in.

Both plays have roots in the Appalachian area that I call home. In grand terms they are small town stories that reach deep and show the dirty underside and the big heart of rural America. In somewhat more realistic terms they are simply fun characterizations of some of the people and offbeat stories that decorate the landscape.

*The Princess of Rome, Ohio*

By Jonathan Joy

## Act 1, Scene 1

*(Lights up on the front porch of a dilapidated one story white house. At the front of the house is a large picture window with a sizable crack that has been temporarily fixed with duct tape, and the front door. The porch is adorned with two chairs, a small table and various Appalachian front porch knick knacks: a wind chime, candles, empty beer cans, plants, stained glass, etc. There is a small yard directly in front of the porch and in audience view. The yard is unkempt and littered with candy wrappers, an old tire and the remnants of a gate that stood long ago in the house's heyday. References are made to a sidewalk beyond the yard. This is visible to the characters only. Not the audience. ALMA, a sheepish, nervous, fidgety and easily frightened woman in her thirties, enters SR onto the front yard and crosses slowly to the front door. She looks around.)*

**ALMA:** *(knocking lightly, pause)* Lulu? *(a little louder)* Lulu? *(knocking)* Hattie? *(pause)* Hello? Is anybody home? Hello? *(to herself)* Oh...

*(ALMA, frustrated, gives up, starts to leave. The front door swings open and on the other side is a girl, HATTIE, 14. Her clothes are wrinkled and her eyes are weary. She's been sleeping. ALMA doesn't notice her at first.)*

**HATTIE:** Hey, Alma.

**ALMA:** *(surprised, stopping)* Oh...hi Hattie.

**HATTIE:** Where ya' goin'?

**ALMA:** I didn't think anyone was home.

**HATTIE:** You knock like you don't want anyone to answer.

**ALMA:** *(hurt)* Oh.

**HATTIE:** I'm not saying it to hurt your feelings.

**ALMA:** I know. I know.

**HATTIE:** I'm just saying if I hadn't heard you yelling I never would've known anyone was out here.

**ALMA:** Oh...is your mother around?

**HATTIE:** No. She left 'round an hour ago.

**ALMA:** Shit.

**HATTIE:** Flea market.

**ALMA:** Oh. Do you know when she'll be back?

**HATTIE:** Shouldn't be long.

**ALMA:** *(disappointed)* Oh...okay.

**HATTIE:** I'll tell her you stopped by.

**ALMA:** You do that. Have her call me.

**HATTIE:** I will.

**ALMA:** *(starts to leave)* I appreciate it.

**HATTIE:** *(stopping her)* Hey. You can probably catch her down there if you try...

**ALMA:** No, no. That's all right. It wasn't no big deal.

*(Pause)*

**HATTIE:** Is something on your mind?

**ALMA:** No, no, no.

**HATTIE:** You sure?

**ALMA:** Yes, yes, oh yeah.

**HATTIE:** Okay, then.

*(HATTIE closes the front door and ALMA is left alone on the porch. She is motionless. After a few moments, the front door creaks open and HATTIE observes ALMA.)*

**HATTIE:** You're still here.

**ALMA:** Yeah. I think I'm just gonna wait here till your Mom gets home.

**HATTIE:** You want to wait inside?

**ALMA:** No, no. I don't want to be any trouble. I'll just wait out here.

*(Pause)*

**HATTIE:** You want to sit down or anything?

**ALMA:** Oh, no.

*(For the first time HATTIE emerges out of the doorway and joins ALMA on the porch.)*

**HATTIE:** You want some company?

**ALMA:** Oh...well...you don't have to...I mean if you want to...

**HATTIE:** Can I get you something to drink?

**ALMA:** *(sitting, nervously wringing her hands)* Y'all got any beer around the house?

**HATTIE:** You want a beer?

**ALMA:** Yeah.

**HATTIE:** It's ten o'clock in the morning.

**ALMA:** Damnit, Hattie, are you gonna stand there and lecture me or are you gonna get me a beer...

*(Silence.)*

Oh, dear...I'm sorry...I didn't mean to speak to ya' that way. I'm sorry. I'm just all nerves today.

**HATTIE:** *(exiting into the house)* I'll get you two.

**ALMA:** *(calling after her)* One will be plenty.

*(ALMA sits staring off into the distance. She notices someone walking by on the sidewalk out of audience view. She politely smiles and waves.)*

Hi. *(emphatic)* Hello! *(offended)* Well...I'll be. People are so rude today. Just walking by on the street, not even waving or saying hello. *(screaming)* I know you can hear me. Hello! Don't say hi back or even give me a polite smile you stupid son of a...

*(HATTIE has appeared in the doorway, carrying two beers, and observing the last part of ALMA's rant.)*

**HATTIE:** Alma!?

**ALMA:** Oh...I'm sorry.

*(HATTIE joins ALMA on the porch, hands her a beer, and opens the other for herself.)*

**HATTIE:** What's gotten into you? I've never seen you act like this before.

**ALMA:** I don't want to talk about it. I'll just wait for your mother to get back. Thanks for the beer.

*(ALMA sips. HATTIE chugs. At this moment ALMA realizes HATTIE is drinking the other beer.)*

**ALMA:** Hattie!

**HATTIE:** It's okay. Mom won't mind.

**ALMA:** I don't believe that. If she gets home and sees you drinking that...

**HATTIE:** What's she gonna do, ground me?

**ALMA:** Maybe. Well, yes.

**HATTIE:** Oh, no. I hope not that. *(imitating her mother)* Hattie, you stay in your room.

**ALMA:** It's not...

**HATTIE:** What?

**ALMA:** It's just not proper for a young lady your age...

**HATTIE:** Don't tell me about what's proper. You're not my mom.

*(Long pause.)*

**ALMA:** I see you got some new neighbors.

**HATTIE:** Yeah, a bunch of uppity folks from across the river. I think they work at the university.

**ALMA:** Land sakes, can you imagine how much that car cost them?

**HATTIE:** There goes the neighborhood. They're takin' over. You got that whole subdivision of big houses goin' in across the street. They'll be drivin' us out of here before you know it, unsightly as we are.

**ALMA:** I just can't imagine spending that much on a car. It's just a car. It seems so

wasteful.

**HATTIE:** I can't imagine why they'd want to move over here. That's what I wonder.

**ALMA:** It's not as bad as all that.

**HATTIE:** No, it's worse.

**ALMA:** It is not.

**HATTIE:** It's not?

**ALMA:** Every fourteen year old in the world dreams of moving on to somewhere else... somewhere better. But like they say, wherever you go there ya' are.

**HATTIE:** Whatever that means.

**ALMA:** You don't know how lucky you really...

**HATTIE:** *(finishes her beer)* You want another one?

**ALMA:** Oh dear. You didn't.

**HATTIE:** *(burps)* Ahhhh...

**ALMA:** *(crying)* Ohhhh.

**HATTIE:** Hey...what's wrong?

**ALMA:** *(crying harder, shrill)* Nothing!

**HATTIE:** Alma, what the hell?

**ALMA:** I did it this time. That's for sure.

**HATTIE:** Did what?

**ALMA:** Oh...I left him.

**HATTIE:** You what?

**ALMA:** Chester. He's gone.

**HATTIE:** *You left him.*

**ALMA:** Yeah.

**HATTIE:** Is there anything I can...

**ALMA:** I couldn't hold it in...I'm sorry. I had to tell somebody. I don't mean to dump on ya' like this but I think this beer is going to my head. I've really done it this time.

**HATTIE:** It's a good thing though, right?

**ALMA:** Yeah. Your mom is right. I'm making a clean break.

**HATTIE:** Good.

**ALMA:** The thing is...I'm gonna need a place to stay for a few days.

**HATTIE:** Why do you need a place to stay? I thought the trailer was yours.

**ALMA:** It is.

**HATTIE:** He's the one that should be looking...

**ALMA:** It's gone. He up and drove off with it. I don't even know where he went to. I spent the night over at Bertie Lou's after it all happened. I told her we'd had a fight, that's all. Then I got up early this morning to go back and get my stuff, and it was gone. I thought he'd be at work. But everything's gone. He just took off with my house and everything I own and drove off into the sunset.

**HATTIE:** I'm sorry.

**ALMA:** I don't know what I'm gonna do. What if he never comes back?

**HATTIE:** Would that really be so bad?

**ALMA:** Oh...

**HATTIE:** I mean apart from your stuff.

**ALMA:** You'll understand men when you get older, girl. I'd probably take him back. I was just trying to get his attention off that whore and back on me.

**HATTIE:** You're better off without him. Screw him. You can stay here.

**ALMA:** I know ya'll don't have a lot of room...

**HATTIE:** You're welcome here. We'll make room. Let me get you another beer.

**ALMA:** *(crying)* Thank you.

*(HATTIE exits into the house. LULU, 30, is seen in the yard. She carries two large bags overflowing with flea market finds.)*

**LULU:** Well, well, well. Look who washed up on my front porch. Alma, what the hell are you crying about?

**ALMA:** Lulu, I got to talk to you.

**LULU:** Don't bother.

**ALMA:** Listen...

*(LULU crosses to the porch, sets bags down, sits next to ALMA.)*

**LULU:** I just talked to Bertie Lou. Heard all about it.

**ALMA:** Bertie Lou?! She wasn't supposed to tell no one.

**LULU:** You left him again, didn't ya'?

**ALMA:** I did. But that's not the worst part. He went and drove off with the house.

**LULU:** He did? She didn't tell me that.

**ALMA:** She didn't know that. Nobody does. Well, Hattie knows.

**LULU:** Hattie knows?

**ALMA:** Yeah. We've been talkin'.

**LULU:** Where is Hattie?

**ALMA:** Oh, I know he's not coming back this time. I just know it. What've I done?

**LULU:** Honey, you've done the only sensible thing you'll ever do in your life. I've been telling you for months to kick him to the curb, haven't I?

*(HATTIE enters carrying two beers.)*

Hattie, what're you doing with those?

**HATTIE:** I was bringing them to Alma.

**LULU:** Sugar, does this woman look like she needs another beer. It's not even noon. Put 'em up.

**HATTIE:** I already opened this one.

**LULU:** Well then here. *(grabbing one)* Give it to me.

*(Throughout the following conversation ALMA speaks but neither LULU nor HATTIE pay attention to her.)*

**ALMA:** I don't know what I'm gonna do.

**LULU:** Hattie, why don't you run off and do something. You're always cooped up in that bedroom of yours, reading.

**HATTIE:** I like to read.

**ALMA:** I never been with nobody but Chester.

**LULU:** It's a bad habit is all. Nobody your age reads as much as you do.

**ALMA:** I feel like I'm gonna die.

**HATTIE:** That's not true, mom. Just because you don't like to read...

**LULU:** I don't understand how you're my kid at all. I swear there must have been some baby switch at the hospital.

**HATTIE:** Mom...

**ALMA:** I've lost everything.

**LULU:** I don't understand why you can't act like other kids your age...

**ALMA:** What's a woman my age who's lost everything supposed to do?

**LULU:** ...you don't play sports, you don't have any friends, you hardly leave the house...

**HATTIE:** Okay, fine. That's exactly what I'll do. I'll start acting like other kids my age!

**LULU:** Don't yell at me.

**HATTIE:** I'm not yelling. You want to hear yelling!?

**LULU:** Hattie...

**HATTIE:** I'll start acting like all the other kids. I'll smoke pot and have sex and skip

class and get bad grades. Maybe if I'm lucky I'll wind up pregnant and married in time to drop out of high school like my mom did...

**LULU:** (*standing up, slapping her*) That's enough. Get out of here.

**HATTIE:** What?

**LULU:** I'm not gonna send you to your room. You hardly ever come out. Go to the park and play or something.

**HATTIE:** (*screaming in her face*) Fine!

**LULU:** (*screaming louder*) Stop yelling at me. People can hear you. You're making an ass out of us right out in front of the neighborhood.

**HATTIE:** (*leaving*) Be sure to get nice and drunk by the time I get back.

**LULU:** (*screaming after her*) What...well maybe you could get a job while you're out there. Start pullin' your own weight around here, huh?

**ALMA:** (*crying*) Ohhhh.

**LULU:** Can you believe the way she talks to her mother? She's got a mouth on her. (*Pause.*) Well, say something, dear. You're startin' to worry me.

**ALMA:** I need a place to stay. Hattie said it'd be fine if I stayed here for a little while.

**LULU:** Of course you can. We'd be thrilled to have you. You're gonna get through this. I know it doesn't seem like it, but as long as you've got Lulu around, I'm gonna take good care of you.

**ALMA:** It's so hard.

**LULU:** Alma, it's not nearly as hard as it is hearing you go on and on about it. Calm down. Let's go shopping or something.

**ALMA:** I don't want to go shopping.

**LULU:** It'll make you feel better.

**ALMA:** How do you do it?

**LULU:** Do what?

**ALMA:** You're so strong. How could you just leave Bud behind without a second thought? Don't you ever miss him?

**LULU:** Hell no.

**ALMA:** I don't believe that.

**LULU:** Alma...

**ALMA:** No, no. Supposing he showed up here on the porch with a bunch a flowers in his hand, real romantic like, and apologized and showered you with compliments and said he had changed, and maybe he really had...you wouldn't take him back?

**LULU:** That ain't gonna happen.

**ALMA:** It could.

**LULU:** No it couldn't.

**ALMA:** I'm saying supposing that happened...

**LULU:** Alma?

**ALMA:** Yeah.

**LULU:** It just ain't gonna happen.

**ALMA:** How do you know?

**LULU:** I know, all right. *(long pause)*

**ALMA:** Fine...I mean...if you don't want to talk about it...

*(Pause)*

**LULU:** Alma...oh, damnit...I got a confession to make.

**ALMA:** Okay.

**LULU:** There's a reason all that ain't gonna happen.

**ALMA:** I said supposing...

**LULU:** Supposing nothing. Bud is dead.

**ALMA:** *(horrificed)* What? You never told me that.

**LULU:** I never told you a lot of things. Now listen close if you wanna hear. What I'm

about to tell you is between the two of us. Nobody else needs to know about this.

**ALMA:** I won't tell anybody.

**LULU:** Nobody. I mean it. This is my life we're talking about.

**ALMA:** I swear.

**LULU:** Not even Bertie Lou.

**ALMA:** No.

**LULU:** 'Cause you tell her and the whole town'll know before the sun goes down.

**ALMA:** I won't tell. What is it?

**LULU:** Me...leaving Bud...well...it didn't exactly happen the way I told you before.

**ALMA:** Uh-huh. *(Pause)* You didn't...kill him...did you?

**LULU:** Oh God no. *(laughter from both)* Okay, maybe I did. *(More laughter.)*

**ALMA:** Oh, you always can cheer me up. Look at me. I was crying like a little girl a minute ago. I'm so sorry.

*(Pause)*

**LULU:** Alma, I really did...kill him. On accident.

**ALMA:** What?

**LULU:** It wasn't planned ahead of time or anything. I think they call it manslaughter on the Law and Order show. I was trying to teach him a lesson. You see, he was going out on me, doing me just like Chester's been doing to you. He was working a lot of "late nights" which I knew was a pack of lies cause he'd always come home on these nights smelling like whiskey and Lady Stetson and then he'd pass out on the couch. This was happening three or four nights a week and I just couldn't take it anymore. So this night I made the couch real nice for him. I put down a sheet and everything so he'd be nice and comfortable. He comes home as usual and in a few seconds he's out cold. I got my sewing kit out and I took that sheet he was layin' on and wrapped him up in it and tied him real tight inside. It took almost an hour to sew him up in it. He never budged once. I was sewing the whole time scared to death he might wake up and find out what I was doin'. I got him all tied up in that sheet like he was in a cocoon or something. Then I grabbed the broom out of the kitchen closet and came back and with the wooden handle end I started beating him with it. I just pounded away on him like a Mexican kid with a piñata. It didn't take much of this to wake him up and he starting cussing and struggling

only he couldn't do nothing about it 'cause he was...ya' know. I really should have stopped there. I know that I should have stopped. To be honest, I was having a lot of fun listening to him squeal and cry like a baby. I was yelling all kinds of stuff to him about whoring around and drinking too much and neglecting his wife and little girl at home. I'm figuring the whole time that this is gonna teach him a lesson, right? Right? And it would've, only I got a little carried away and after ten or fifteen minutes of this I noticed that he wasn't struggling anymore. He wasn't sayin' nothin' either. And the white sheet that I'd laid out for him wasn't white anymore but it was all covered in red blotchy spots and the spots were heavier and drippin' in some places, like where his head was...and so I knew that at this point maybe I'd gone too far. And maybe that I'd killed him even. Not on purpose, mind you. I blame the whole thing on the Enquirer. I'd read this story about Willie Nelson and his second wife. Apparently she was having the same kind of problem with him and so she devised this plan, about the same one I used on Bud. It worked for her. Straightened ole Willie right up. I figured if it was good enough for the former Mrs. Willie Nelson than it was good enough for me. I didn't reckon that I'd get as carried away as I did. *(Silence)* To be honest, I didn't feel that bad about it. Still don't.

**ALMA:** Did you call 911 or anything?

**LULU:** Hell, no. No such thing in Logan County anyway. I just grabbed Hattie out of bed. She slept through the whole thing if you can believe that. She could sleep through the end of the world. I told her that daddy hit me for the last time and that we were leaving and going somewhere that he'd never find us.

**ALMA:** That's a terrible thing to do.

**LULU:** Which part?

**ALMA:** Well...all of it. That's the worst thing I've ever heard.

**LULU:** I wasn't lying to her, really. He'd put a hand to me every once in a while, it's true. He never hit Hattie and I don't know if he would've or not, but I wasn't gonna take that chance.

**ALMA:** Lulu, this is shockin'.

**LULU:** Well, now it would be if...

**ALMA:** It's like I don't even know ya'. I don't believe it.

**LULU:** Well, that's good 'cause I made the whole thing up.

*(Long pause.)*

**ALMA:** You didn't.

**LULU:** Damnit Alma, I'm trying to cheer you up or at least get ya' to think about

something else. You're in such a rotten mood.

**ALMA:** You was pulling my leg. Oh, thank God.

**LULU:** You should have seen the look on your face.

**ALMA:** I can't believe you'd do that to me.

**LULU:** Got your mind off Chester, didn't it? Come on, you really think I killed Bud with a broom, skipped town and never got caught. You're easy.

**ALMA:** Oh...land sakes...you had me goin'.

**LULU:** You look like hell. You get any sleep last night.

**ALMA:** No. Bertie Lou was up all night watching the Home Shopping Club and scratching lotto tickets while I was crying my eyes out. I can't sleep over there anyway with those skinny cats of hers always looking at me like they're real hungry.

**LULU:** Uh-huh.

**ALMA:** They're not like any other cats I've ever seen. I have nightmares about 'em.

**LULU:** You need some rest.

**ALMA:** I'd love a nap. That beer made me all drowsy.

**LULU:** *(at the front door)* Come on inside. *(teasing)* I'll fix you a place on the couch.

**ALMA:** Oh.

**LULU:** Just kidding. You all right?

**ALMA:** Yeah, I'll be right there.

*(ALMA finishes her beer and follows LULU inside. Blackout.)*

## Act 1, Scene 2

*(That night. HATTIE sits on the porch, reading. JIMMY, 14, crosses slowly in front of the porch, eyeing HATTIE. She looks up at him and the two stare at each other. Then HATTIE resumes reading.)*

**JIMMY:** Hi.

**HATTIE:** Hi.

*(Silence)*

**JIMMY:** I just moved in next door.

**HATTIE:** Uh-huh.

**JIMMY:** What are you reading?

*(No response.)*

I'm Jimmy.

**HATTIE:** Go away, Jimmy.

*(Long pause. He leaves. HATTIE still reading. LULU enters through the front door and onto the porch. Silence.)*

**LULU:** Hattie?

**HATTIE:** Yeah.

**LULU:** *(looking around)* Who were you talking to?

**HATTIE:** Nobody.

**LULU:** I worry about you talking to yourself like that.

**HATTIE:** I wasn't talking to myself. It was the new kid next door.

**LULU:** Oh, I see.

**HATTIE:** He keeps giving me weird looks.

**LULU:** I saw him earlier mowing the lawn with his shirt off. I thought he was kind of cute. You?

**HATTIE:** No.

**LULU:** So, he has an eye for you.

**HATTIE:** That's one way of putting it. I caught him staring at me through my bedroom window last night.

**LULU:** You should consider that a compliment.

**HATTIE:** If he gets much more complimentary I'm gonna give him a black eye.

**LULU:** Now, Hattie.

**HATTIE:** Don't now Hattie me.

*(Pause.)*

**LULU:** What are you reading?

**HATTIE:** The Bible.

**LULU:** Don't be a smart ass. Let me see that. *(grabs book)*

**HATTIE:** It's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*.

**LULU:** I see that. D.H. Lawrence.

**HATTIE:** You've heard of it.

**LULU:** Yes, I've heard of it. You think you're mom's stupid or something.

**HATTIE:** You haven't heard of it. You've seen the dirty movie version of it late at night on Cinemax.

**LULU:** *(pause, she hands the book back)* I don't know what you're talkin' 'bout.

**HATTIE:** It's probably a bit too steamy for you, huh?

**LULU:** *(sitting next to HATTIE)* I like steamy as much as the next person.

**HATTIE:** Mom, stop right there.

*(Pause. HATTIE resumes reading.)*

**LULU:** Can you put the book down for a minute and talk to me?

**HATTIE:** Sorry.

**LULU:** No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I yelled at you earlier. I didn't mean anything by it.

**HATTIE:** It's okay.

*(Pause)*

**LULU:** You think you can forgive me.

**HATTIE:** Yeah. I'm sorry too. I guess that beer made me kind of irritable.

**LULU:** What beer?

**HATTIE:** I'm kidding.

**LULU:** You're always kidding. Never a serious word but always a smart mouth. You're just like your mother.

**HATTIE:** Don't say that.

**LULU:** It's true.

**HATTIE:** By the way, I got a job.

**LULU:** You're only fourteen. You don't need a job.

**HATTIE:** You said...

**LULU:** I was teasing you.

**HATTIE:** Still I got one. It's good money, too. On my way out to what you call the park I passed by a store that was hiring "lovely young ladies" so I peeked in and got an application.

**LULU:** *(shocked)* Hattie, you didn't! You know better...

**HATTIE:** The owner is a big guy named Ron. He smells like onions. It was awful. But he was nice enough. He said I was just what he was looking for and that I could make at least a hundred bucks a night but I'll have to work late.

**LULU:** That sleazy prick...

**HATTIE:** He was actually pretty nice. At the audition he told me...

**LULU:** The audition?

**HATTIE:** ...he told me that I moved better than any of the women there. I'm not sure what that means, though.

**LULU:** (*rising*) Oh, my God. I'm going down there.

**HATTIE:** It's not his fault. I told him I was eighteen.

**LULU:** That is no excuse...

*(HATTIE laughs. Long pause.)*

You little liar.

**HATTIE:** A chip off the old block, huh?

**LULU:** Do you see the state I'm in? Do you see what you've done to me? Are you trying to kill your mother?

**HATTIE:** I thought you'd think it was funny.

**LULU:** You think giving me a heart attack is funny.

**HATTIE:** I really did get a job. Ms. Mullins is gonna give me twenty dollars a week to mow her lawn.

**LULU:** Good.

**HATTIE:** She's going out of town next week and she said she'd give me an extra twenty to feed her cats while she's gone.

**LULU:** Well, that's nice of her. You'll have to take Alma with you. She loves those cats. It'll give her something to do instead thinkin' on Chester.

**HATTIE:** How is she?

**LULU:** I don't know. She was in some state this morning. She laid down on that couch before noon and hasn't stirred since. That's more than nine hours she's slept. I figure I'll let her snooze as long as she needs.

**HATTIE:** I hope she feels better when she gets up. She can be a real head case sometimes.

**LULU:** That's not nice.

**HATTIE:** It's true.

**LULU:** Yes it is. But don't let her hear you say anything like that, though. You'll hurt her feelings. And when Alma gets her feelings hurt she pouts all day long.

**HATTIE:** I won't. You think Chester is gone for good?

**LULU:** I don't know. I doubt it. It'd be the best thing for her if he was.

**HATTIE:** Is she gonna stay here for a while?

**LULU:** I don't figure she has anywhere she'd rather go.

**HATTIE:** Sucks about the trailer.

**LULU:** We can squeeze her in can't we?

**HATTIE:** Yeah, as long as I don't have to give up my room.

**LULU:** No. She's fine on the couch.

*(DICKY, a slovenly dressed, obviously drunken man, appears in the lawn and addresses HATTIE and LULU.)*

**DICKY:** Where is she?

**LULU:** Who the fuck are you?

**DICKY:** I'm Dicky Daniels. That's who the fuck I am.

**LULU:** Dicky?! I didn't recognize you out of uniform.

**DICKY:** I want to talk to Alma. I know she's here.

**LULU:** Alma's not receiving any gentleman callers at this time, Dicky. You'll have to come back later.

**DICKY:** Damn it, bring her out here.

**LULU:** No. She's sleeping and she won't be for long if you don't hush up. What do you want to talk to her about?

**DICKY:** You know damned well what I want to talk to her about. She drove my brother out of town and I got to find out where he went to.

**LULU:** Alma doesn't know where he is.

**DICKY:** Bullshit. Chester drove off and didn't even tell me. I got my whole e-bay

business set up in that trailer of his and a whole set of Go-Bots about to go on the auction block. Now get her out here.

**HATTIE:** Are you deaf? She said Alma don't know where Chester ran off to.

**DICKY:** You shut your mouth, little lady. I wasn't talking to you.

**LULU:** Don't you dare talk to my daughter that way. Listen to me. I don't care who you are. The fact is you're off duty now and you best get off my property before I go inside and grab my shotgun and shoot off some of your vital parts you ignorant hick. Don't think I won't do it.

**DICKY:** Now wait a minute, wait a minute. There's no need to be like that. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...I just got an awful temper when I've...you know...had a drink or two...now listen to me...

**HATTIE:** No, you listen to us. You say one more word and I'm gonna go get a rope and tie you to the back of mom's car and make her give me the drivin' lessons she's been promising for months now, do you hear?

**DICKY:** I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cause no trouble.

**HATTIE:** That's it. I'm gonna get the rope you stupid hillbilly.

**DICKY:** Wait...no...I didn't mean to anger ya'...I just want my e-bay back...

*(DICKY passes out on the front lawn. He falls fast and hard.)*

**LULU:** Oh, my.

**HATTIE:** Is he dead?

**LULU:** No, honey. He's dead drunk is all. You got quite a temper on you when you need it, don't you?

*(JIMMY enters.)*

**JIMMY:** Are you all okay?

**HATTIE:** Great. The peeping tom. We expecting any more visitors tonight?

**JIMMY:** I heard all the yelling. I wanted to make sure everything was okay.

**LULU:** Everything's fine.

**JIMMY:** I tried to call the police.

**LULU:** That's a real sweet gesture, darling, but this town only has one cop and he only works part time on account of the police levy bein' voted down last fall and it would've mattered anyway cause right now Officer Daniels is passed out shit faced drunk on our front lawn, but thanks anyway.

**JIMMY:** Him.

**LULU:** Yeah. Welcome to Rome.

*(ALMA appears in the doorway.)*

**ALMA:** Was that Dicky yellin' for me?

**LULU:** He woke you up. I knew he was going to.

**ALMA:** Is that him...oh...did you kill him?

**LULU:** Alma, nobody killed anybody. Officer Daniels just got a little soused and passed out on the front lawn. It's not the first time and it sure won't be the last. Come on inside. You should eat something. Can I get the two of you anything?

**HATTIE:** I'll have a beer.

**LULU:** Very funny. What about you? What's your name, little boy?

**HATTIE:** Mom!

**JIMMY:** It's Jimmy. Well, it's James. All my friends call me Jimmy.

**LULU:** Some friends. I'm gonna call you James if you don't mind cause I just think Jimmy sounds ridiculous. If you want anything you better say so now. It's not often I'll be offering.

**JIMMY:** No, thank you.

**LULU:** *(to ALMA as they enter into the house)* Come on. Inside.

**ALMA:** *(offstage, but audible to the kids and the audience)* Is that a good idea to leave the two of them alone on the porch together?

**LULU:** *(offstage, but still heard clearly on the porch)* Settle down. Hattie can't stand the boy.

*(Long pause.)*

**HATTIE:** Well...

**JIMMY:** Yeah...

**HATTIE:** It was nice of you to come and try to save the day.

**JIMMY:** It didn't really sound like you needed much saving.

**HATTIE:** No?

**JIMMY:** I like the thing you said about the driving lessons.

**HATTIE:** You did?

**JIMMY:** Yeah, it was funny.

**HATTIE:** Thanks.

**JIMMY:** That guy kind of scared me, though.

**HATTIE:** Oh, he's like that. You'll get used to it. Lots of things to get used to around here.

**JIMMY:** I can tell.

**HATTIE:** Yeah.

*(Silence)*

**JIMMY:** Yeah.

*(Long pause)*

**JIMMY:** Well...

**HATTIE:** What are you waiting for?

**JIMMY:** Excuse me?

**HATTIE:** Are you gonna kiss me or not?

**JIMMY:** *(shocked, flustered)* I...I...well...I...didn't know...uh

**HATTIE:** Hmm. That's a shame.

*(HATTIE exits into the house. Long pause.)*

**JIMMY:** Damn. Damn. Damn.

**DICKY:** *(mumbling in his sleep)* I'll have another...

*(Pause. JIMMY walks off in frustration.)*

**JIMMY:** Damn!

*(Blackout.)*

## Act 1, Scene 3

*(The next morning. DICKY is still passed out in the same position on the front lawn, only now he is tied up haphazardly with a rope that stretches around his body. His hands are tied behind his back. The end of the rope is tied to the porch. Throughout much of the scene he resembles a dog that has been tied to a post in the yard. He has the ability to get up and move around but only so far. HATTIE is standing in the doorway watching with curiosity as DICKY awakes.)*

**DICKY:** Ahhh! Hey...

**HATTIE:** *(calling inside)* Mom...mom...he's waking up!

**DICKY:** What the...hey!

*(He tries to stand, then falls. A second attempt is more successful, though he is still weary and confused.)*

**DICKY:** Hey! Where the hell am I? Somebody tied me up.

**HATTIE:** Mom, Alma, hurry up. This is hilarious.

*(LULU and ALMA join HATTIE in the doorway. All three observe DICKY, who is attempting in vain to free himself.)*

**DICKY:** Help! Somebody untie me! I'm the police.

*(DICKY attempts in vain to free himself during the following exchange.)*

**HATTIE:** Mom, how did he become an officer?

**LULU:** I'm not sure.

**ALMA:** Oh! I know. Bertie Lou told me that when the old Officer Vance retired there wasn't anybody to take his place. Dicky there was the janitor down at the jailhouse at the time and somebody got the bright idea that he'd make a good replacement on account of he knew his way around the jail and all. They figured that was all it would take.

**HATTIE:** Do they let him carry a gun?

**ALMA:** Oh, I don't know.

**LULU:** I don't think they do now, honey.

**DICKY:** *(desperate, crying)* Somebody help me!

**LULU:** *(entering onto the porch)* Oh no, no, no. Not until you apologize for your behavior last night.

**DICKY:** *(noticing her, standing)* Apologize!?

**LULU:** Yes, Dicky. Say you're sorry.

**DICKY:** Lady, I could put you in jail for this. You untie me right now or I will be forced to read you your rights.

**LULU:** That kind of talk isn't gonna get you untied any sooner.

*(ALMA enters onto the porch, crosses into the yard and near DICKY. She places a cup of coffee within his reach and quickly retreats back onto the porch.)*

**ALMA:** Have some coffee.

**DICKY:** Oh, thank you...Alma.

*(DICKY attempts to drink without the use of his hands.)*

**ALMA:** You're welcome.

**LULU:** What are you doin'?

**ALMA:** I feel bad for him. He is family.

**DICKY:** How the hell did I end up here? What happened last night?

**LULU:** You don't remember a thing, do you?

**HATTIE:** Mom, the food's getting cold.

**LULU:** Dicky, you just sit there and think about what you've done. Try to remember.

**DICKY:** Come on, now. I'm starvin'. What're you having?

**LULU:** Biscuits and gravy, cheesy hash browns drippin' in grease and the biggest Bloody Marys you've ever seen in your life.

**DICKY:** You're killing me. Come on, untie me and let me join you. Please.

**LULU:** I don't much like the way you showed up here drunk and threatening and calling names last night. I don't know that I feel safe untying you.

**DICKY:** All right. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I passed out on your front lawn. I'm sorry for

anything stupid I said or did before I passed out.

**LULU:** I don't know.

**DICKY:** Damnit, woman, I have a disease.

**LULU:** Alma, will you fix Officer Daniels a plate and bring it out to him?

**ALMA:** *(exiting)* Sure.

**DICKY:** Alma. Oh, hell. I remember.

**LULU:** You're not gonna start acting up again are you?

**DICKY:** No. My head is killing me. You got any aspirin inside?

**LULU:** I think we got some. I'll look and see. *(exiting into house)* Hattie, will you watch him?

**HATTIE:** I don't think he's goin' anywhere.

*(JIMMY enters.)*

**JIMMY:** Hattie. Hi!

**HATTIE:** Morning James.

**JIMMY:** Officer Daniels.

**DICKY:** Huh?

**JIMMY:** How are you, Hattie?

**HATTIE:** Pretty good. Yourself?

**JIMMY:** A little hungry. Something smells good.

*(ALMA enters with a plate of food and aspirin. She lays it down in front of DICKY then re-enters the house.)*

**ALMA:** *(offstage)* Your mom says breakfast is ready.

**HATTIE:** *(exiting)* See ya' later James...Officer.

**JIMMY:** *(starting to leave)* Yeah, see ya'.

**HATTIE:** *(appearing at the front door)* Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Yeah.

**HATTIE:** You want to join us. There's plenty to go around.

**JIMMY:** I'd love to.

**HATTIE:** Well, come on then. Mom doesn't cook that often but when she does there's enough to feed the whole neighborhood. You want to ask your parents over.

**JIMMY:** No! No. I don't think they're ready to meet the new neighbors yet. No offense.

*(JIMMY and HATTIE enter into the house and DICKY is left alone onstage. There is a plate full of food sitting in front of his face though he seems at a loss on how to eat it. His hands are bound behind his back. After a few moments of contemplation he dives his face into it and begins to eat. He attempts to get drink from the cup of coffee that ALMA brought earlier but spills it burning his nose in the process.)*

**DICKY:** Ohhh!

*(After a few moments DICKY recovers and resumes eating like a dog. This goes on for a while. BUD, 30, enters into the yard. He is carrying a bundle of flowers. He speaks every line very loudly, almost screaming, a trait that greatly irritates DICKY's hangover.)*

**BUD:** Excuse me.

**DICKY:** What?

**BUD:** Does Lulu Adkins live here?

**DICKY:** What? I don't know. What the hell are you screaming for?

**BUD:** I said does Lulu Adkins...

**DICKY:** Ohh! Cut out the screaming.

**BUD:** Lulu...

**DICKY:** *(screaming)* Yeah, I think that's her name.

**BUD:** What?

**DICKY:** Yes!

**BUD:** Thank you. (*facing the house, screaming*) Lulu!!! Lulu Ellen Adkins, my wife. I have found you. Come out and give your old estranged husband a hug.

(*Immediately, LULU, HATTIE, ALMA and JIMMY appear at the front door.*)

**LULU:** Holyshit!

**BUD:** Your Bud has come to rescue you from this town and take you home where you belong.

**LULU:** (*entering onto the porch, angry, screaming*) I thought you was dead you son of a bitch. Can't you do anything right?

**ALMA:** What?

**LULU:** Alma, stay in the house. Everybody stay in the house.

**BUD:** No, no, honey. You didn't kill me. Doctor man said I should have died with all the blood that I lost but they saved me and I have turned my life around. I'm a new man. I've come to bring you and Hattie back home. A home without gambling and drinking and screwing around...

**LULU:** Why are you screaming like an idiot? (*BUD moves a little closer*) Don't you dare take one step closer. I've got a shotgun in the house. (*He stops.*)

**BUD:** I'll do as you ask, Lulu...but, oh girl, it's so good to see you. At least come over here and give me a hug.

**HATTIE:** Mom.

**LULU:** Hattie, get the gun.

**DICKY:** (*as if noticing the commotion for the first time*) What seems to be the ruckus here?

**BUD:** I'm down on my hands and knees.

(*HATTIE returns with the gun and gives it to LULU.*)

**LULU:** All right, Hattie...

**HATTIE:** Yes, mom.

**LULU:** Go untie Officer Daniels from the porch. (*pointing the gun at BUD*) If you

make on move toward me or that girl I'll shoot you. I swear to God, I will.

*(HATTIE begins to untie DICKY.)*

**BUD:** Lulu...I didn't come to hurt no one...I came to find you...

**LULU:** Shut up! There's a gun pointing at your head. Can you see that?

**DICKY:** *(free of the rope)* Oh, thank you so much, little lady.

**LULU:** Officer Daniels, I insist that you arrest that man.

**DICKY:** What?

**LULU:** Arrest him.

**DICKY:** Aw, hell no. Y'all gonna have to work this out on your own. *(exits)*

**LULU:** Damnit! Officer Daniels! Get back here. *(No response.)* All right. Everyone go back into the house and close the front door and finish your breakfast.

**HATTIE:** Mom...

**LULU:** Do it Hattie.

**HATTIE:** But mom...

**ALMA:** Lulu, listen to me.

**BUD:** Lulu...

**LULU:** Excuse me! Everybody shut up and listen to the woman with the big gun in her hands. Go inside, shut the door, and finish your breakfast.

*(They obey. The front door is closed behind them. LULU and BUD are left alone onstage together.)*

You bitch. How'd you find me?

**BUD:** I been looking for ya' for months. I want you back. Give me another chance. All that drinking and cheating I used to do. I'm over it. I'm a new man. I ain't never gonna hurt no one again. 'Specially you and my little Princess.

**LULU:** Shut up. Stop it. I don't want to hear it. I left you behind me and I got no interest in picking up where we left off, you understand? *(looking around, whispering)* God Bud, I tried to kill you. Can't you take a hint?

**BUD:** I'm sorry honey but you're gonna have to speak up a bit. I lost 'bout eighty percent of my hearing in a hunting accident last month when Donny thought I was a squirrel. That's a long story. I'll tell you all about it. We got a lot of catching up to do. Come to me, Lulu. Look, I brought you flowers.

*(LULU is inching closer, gun in hand, still pointed at BUD. The following conversation moves slowly as they size each other up.)*

**LULU:** Bud...

**BUD:** Lulu...

**LULU:** Stand up.

**BUD:** Oh, honey...

**LULU:** Now shut up.

**BUD:** I haven't seen ya' in so long.

**LULU:** I said shut up.

**BUD:** Okay.

**LULU:** Now do what I say.

**BUD:** Anything you want, baby.

**LULU:** Give me the flowers.

**BUD:** Here you go.

**LULU:** *(smelling them)* They're nice. *(She throws them aside.)* Now close your eyes.

**BUD:** You ain't gonna shoot me are you baby?

**LULU:** Maybe I will. Maybe I won't. Close your damn eyes.

*(BUD closes his eyes. LULU looks at BUD long and hard. She lets the gun fall to her side. She grabs him, kissing him violently and the two fall into a prolonged, passionate embrace. They withdraw. Pause. LULU punches him hard in the face. He falls to the ground. She picks up the flowers, smells them again, picks up the gun and goes into the house. BUD is writhing in pain on the ground. Blackout.)*

## Act 2, Scene 1

*(Several days later. HATTIE and JIMMY on front porch. HATTIE is sitting, reading. JIMMY sits next to her looking anxious, bored. He begins reading over her shoulder.)*

**HATTIE:** What are you staring at?

**JIMMY:** Nothing.

**HATTIE:** You were trying to look down my shirt.

**JIMMY:** No, I wasn't!

*(Pause. Hattie resumes reading.)*

**HATTIE:** You're always looking at me funny.

**JIMMY:** I didn't mean anything bad by it.

**HATTIE:** Well, cut it out. Will ya'?

**JIMMY:** Fine.

*(Silence.)*

**JIMMY:** You wanna do something?

**HATTIE:** I'm reading.

**JIMMY:** I know. I just thought you might want to run around town or something.

**HATTIE:** And do what?

**JIMMY:** I don't know. Just get away for a while.

**HATTIE:** Get away. That'd be nice.

**JIMMY:** Well, let's go.

**HATTIE:** I didn't mean for now. I meant for good.

**JIMMY:** Yeah.

**HATTIE:** I can't wait until I'm eighteen and I can get the hell out of here.

**JIMMY:** Me too. Where you gonna go?

**HATTIE:** I don't know. Somewhere. Anywhere. Someplace where an evening of culture involves more than a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken and the Lifetime network for women.

**JIMMY:** Or a demolition derby at the County Fair.

**HATTIE:** I kind of like those.

**JIMMY:** Oh.

**HATTIE:** I'm kidding.

**JIMMY:** I'm bored. Let's do something.

**HATTIE:** Like what?

**JIMMY:** I don't know. We could play a game?

**HATTIE:** What game?

**JIMMY:** I don't know. *(starts to leave)* I'm going home.

**HATTIE:** Wait.

**JIMMY:** What?

**HATTIE:** Don't go.

**JIMMY:** Now all the sudden you want me here. You've barely looked up from that book since I came over.

**HATTIE:** I'm sorry.

**JIMMY:** You've been ignoring me the whole time.

**HATTIE:** *(puts book down)* Okay, there. I put it down. Let's do something.

**JIMMY:** What do you want to do?

**HATTIE:** I don't know. What do you want to do?

**JIMMY:** I don't know.

**HATTIE:** Whatever we do, let's go someplace else. I don't want to be here when they

get up.

**JIMMY:** Why not?

**HATTIE:** They're disgusting. Dad's been back three days and they're all over each other all the time. I hate it when they act like that.

**JIMMY:** Ahh. They're in love.

**HATTIE:** Shut up.

**JIMMY:** At least they're not fighting. My parents fight all the time.

**HATTIE:** Yeah, I know. I can hear them.

**JIMMY:** You can?

**HATTIE:** Yeah. At night. Sometimes.

**JIMMY:** All the time. I don't know why they stay together.

*(ALMA enters from inside the house. She is almost annoyingly happy, the total opposite of Act I.)*

**ALMA:** Yoo-whoo. Good morning. I see the two of you are up bright and early.

**JIMMY:** Morning, Alma.

**HATTIE:** Hey.

**ALMA:** You kids want some breakfast?

**HATTIE:** No, we were just leaving.

**ALMA:** Oh, don't be silly now. You've got to have a little something on your stomach before you go. I'll make some Hot Pockets. Don't go anywhere.

**HATTIE:** Alma...

**ALMA:** I won't take no for an answer.

*(ALMA exits.)*

**JIMMY:** She's in a good mood.

**HATTIE:** Yeah, isn't it gross. She was like that all day yesterday too.

**JIMMY:** What got into her?

**HATTIE:** She met some guy on the internet.

**JIMMY:** Really?

**HATTIE:** His name is Bruce. She calls him England. He lives in England. Can't get her away from that computer.

**JIMMY:** Well, it's nice she met someone I guess.

**HATTIE:** I don't know. Mom thinks she's making the whole thing up. Something about coping with Chester bein' gone. I don't know. Sure has cheered her up, whatever it is.

**JIMMY:** I'm starving.

**HATTIE:** Come on. Let's get out of here.

**JIMMY:** What about the Hot Pockets?

**HATTIE:** I got some money. I'll take you to Tudor's. Get you a real breakfast.

**JIMMY:** What about Alma?

**HATTIE:** She'll be fine. Hurry up before she gets back.

**JIMMY:** Hattie!

**HATTIE:** Come on.

**JIMMY:** All right.

*(JIMMY follows HATTIE quickly off stage. ALMA re-enters with boxes of Hot Pockets in hand.)*

**ALMA:** Do y'all want the pepperoni pizza or the...well...I'll be...that was rude...Hattie?! Jimmy! Hot pockets on the way! Last chance! That's just fine! More for me! People are so rude...

*(BUD and LULU enter. They are clutched tight to one another. BUD speaks so loud he almost knocks ALMA over with his voice.)*

**BUD:** Who the hell you talkin' to?

*(ALMA jumps. BUD pinches LULU's ass. LULU slaps him, probably harder)*

*than she intends.)*

**LULU:** You better watch it.

**ALMA:** Those kids just up and ditched me. Can you believe that?

**LULU:** It don't surprise me none. Where'd they go?

**ALMA:** I don't know. They were here just a few minutes ago.

**LULU:** Oh, let 'em be. They're fine.

**BUD:** I don't know. I worry 'bout Hattie spending that much time with that kid. What's his name?

**LULU:** It's Timmy or something like that.

**ALMA:** Jimmy. His name is Jimmy.

**LULU:** Oh...Jimmy. That's right James.

**BUD:** I seen the way he looks at her. I know what's on his mind. Hattie's too young to be dating.

**LULU:** She's not dating him, Bud. That's ridiculous. And pipe down. You're the one that's deaf.

**BUD:** What?

**ALMA:** They have been spending more time together.

**LULU:** Well, I'll have a talk to her later on if that'll make the two of you feel better.

**ALMA:** I think it's a good idea.

**BUD:** I could talk to that little boy.

**LULU:** You stay away from him. He's a sweet boy.

**BUD:** Say again.

**ALMA:** *(loud in BUD's ear)* I'll leave the two of you alone.

**BUD:** Got a date with the computer, do you?

*(He laughs. LULU kicks him in the shin.)*

**ALMA:** Maybe I do.

**LULU:** Alma, don't you think you're getting a little too wrapped up in this guy.

**ALMA:** England is very sweet.

**LULU:** I know. I'm just not sure if I believe in that internet love.

**ALMA:** Just so you know. It might not be only over the computer no more. We're gonna meet.

*(Silence.)*

**LULU:** You are?

**ALMA:** Uh-huh.

**LULU:** Umm...but...you just met this man. And in a chat room at that. He could be an ax murderer.

**ALMA:** He's not an ax murderer, Lulu. He ain't got no job.

**LULU:** Oh that's good. Have him move in. *(to BUD, louder)* We could use another mouth to feed that don't have no job.

**BUD:** Hey...

**LULU:** Shut up, Bud.

**BUD:** There's no kind a work a man with as bad a back as me can find. That's the truth.

**LULU:** Bad back. You don't have a bad back.

**BUD:** I do!

**LULU:** Bud why don't you re-enlist. You was more use to me when you was at war. I was gettin' five hundred dollars a month.

**BUD:** Damnit...

**LULU:** If you'd have had the good sense to die, I would have got a cool ten grand. You know that? Jesus, you can't do anything right.

**BUD:** Is that right?

**LULU:** Honey, I'm not saying this to be mean...

**BUD:** Could have fooled me.

**LULU:** ...but if you was killed over there at least Hattie would have a chance of going to college someday.

**ALMA:** Hattie's a smart girl. She'll get a scholarship or something.

**BUD:** Yeah, if she doesn't get knocked up first.

**LULU:** You shut your mouth. Don't talk about her like that. I've given that girl everything I had so she could have a better life than me. You think I want her to end up like this.

**ALMA:** This ain't bad, is it?

**LULU:** I thought you had a date.

**ALMA:** I can take a hint.

*(ALMA exits into the house.)*

**BUD:** That girl's a fruit loop.

**LULU:** Quiet down. And don't talk about her that way. She'll hear you. Besides, she's my best friend.

**BUD:** You think we kept 'em up last night.

**LULU:** I don't think I kept 'em up. I'm sure they heard you. Probably scared everybody to death. You sounded like Chewbacca.

**BUD:** Lulu, why you got to be so mean to me?

**LULU:** *(rising)* I'm going shoppin'.

**BUD:** *(grabbing her by the arm)* Don't go.

**LULU:** Bud, let go of me.

**BUD:** *(pulling her close to him)* I don't want to be away from you for one minute, baby.

**LULU:** Oh, you sweet talker, you. *(They kiss.)* Now let me go.

**BUD:** Lulu...

**LULU:** Bud...

**BUD:** What is it, sweetie?

**LULU:** Listen...I don't mean to sound ungrateful...and I've had a real nice week and all... but don't you think it's about time you headed back home.

**BUD:** This is my home.

**LULU:** You know what I mean. We talked about this.

**BUD:** Where am I gonna go?

**LULU:** Go *home*.

**BUD:** I though you liked the new Bud.

**LULU:** I prefer the new Bud to the old Bud. Let's not get carried away with likes and dislikes. It doesn't change anything...you know...in the big picture and all...

**BUD:** Well, sure it does.

**LULU:** Bud...

**BUD:** Lulu, hear me out.

**LULU:** I really don't want to get into a long dragged out conversation about the whole thing...

**BUD:** I sold the house.

**LULU:** What?

**BUD:** I sold it weeks ago.

**LULU:** Why would you go and do something like that?

**BUD:** I was having trouble with the payments.

**LULU:** Oh, God.

**BUD:** Anyway, it wasn't the same there without you and Hattie. It just reminded me of bad things, like almost dying wrapped up in a blanket. You can't blame me for wantin' to get away.

**LULU:** How much did you get?

**BUD:** Why?

**LULU:** Cause it's half mine you stupid son of a bitch.

**BUD:** How you figure?

**LULU:** How do I figure?

**BUD:** Yeah.

**LULU:** I paid for the house Mr. Mom. While you were at home with your bad back in the day and out "working" late nights doing who knows what I was busting my ass forty hours a week in that dive...

**BUD:** I brought in my fair share...

**LULU:** And you spent it on whiskey and your girlfriend. Hattie and I didn't see a penny of what you made. I've been supporting this family since I was sixteen.

**BUD:** Now don't raise your voice...

**LULU:** You're telling me not to raise my voice. I'm raising my voice Bud. I'm raising it to tell you that I'm going shoppin' and when I get back I don't expect you to be around no more, do you hear me? And a check for my half of the house wouldn't exactly be frowned upon either.

**BUD:** Now, wait...

**LULU:** I mean it, Bud...

**BUD:** I know damn well you mean it, that's not what...

**LULU:** Out! I'll be back before dinner and I expect to have one less mouth to feed tonight.

*(LULU brushes past him in an attempt to leave. BUD grabs her by the arm again, this time violently.)*

Let go of my arm.

*(BUD clenches LULU by the arm and holds her close against him.)*

**BUD:** I ain't lettin' go till you can settle down and we can talk about this.

**LULU:** I'm done talkin'. Let go.

**BUD:** I think you need to settle yourself.

**LULU:** Is this the new Bud? This what I been missin' all these months?

*(BUD leans in close to kiss her. She spits in his face. He lets go. Long silence. They stare at each other.)*

**BUD:** I think I've worn out my welcome.

**LULU:** Yeah, I think you have.

**BUD:** You weren't exactly complaining last night.

**LULU:** I didn't want you to stay so we could take long walks and hold hands. I told you that.

**BUD:** You bitch.

**LULU:** Get out. I mean it. When I get back I want you gone.

*(LULU exits quickly off the porch. BUD is alone onstage. Blackout.)*

## Act 2, Scene 2

*(That night. BUD and DICKY sit on the front porch drinking beer, smoking pot and laughing. JIMMY sits between them, stone-faced.)*

**DICKY:** *(nudges BUD)* Look at him.

**BUD:** Hey, Jimmy.

**DICKY:** Man, he's fucked up.

**BUD:** Jimmy...you fucked up?

**JIMMY:** No...man.

*(DICKY and BUD laugh.)*

**BUD:** You tellin' me you ain't never been stoned before.

**JIMMY:** Yeah...yeah...I been stoned before.

**DICKY:** The hell you have, kid. You look fucked up.

**BUD:** Dicky, you got any more of that?

**DICKY:** Hell, yeah. I got a truckload down at the station.

**JIMMY:** I don't get chicks, man.

**DICKY:** What's that boy?

**JIMMY:** Mr. Adkins...I don't want to make you mad...but I really like your daughter and I...well I don't think she likes me...she always acting strange...like she doesn't want me to be around or something. But as soon as I'm not around she comes knocking to see if I want to hang out or something.

**DICKY:** You kissed her yet?

**BUD:** Dicky, that's my girl you're talking about.

**DICKY:** I'm just trying to help the boy out.

**BUD:** You want to help out then let me tell him about women. Son, I can tell you everything I know about them women and it won't take any longer than it did for Dicky to piss off the side of the porch.

**JIMMY:** All right.

**BUD:** When a woman gets to be a certain age...well she kinda changes. Just take my little Hattie. She's my little girl. I was there when she was born. She was the sweetest thing I'd ever seen. And I was her daddy. I was there when she took her first steps, said her first words all that important shit. She was my little Princess. That's what I always called her. The sweetest little girl in the world. Daddy's little Princess. But now she's gettin' older and well she's taking on a lotta her momma'. She probably tells you one thing and means just the opposite. That's the way they all are. Messin' with guys minds all the time, you know?

**JIMMY:** Yeah. I know...

**BUD:** I know you do. And you ain't seen anything yet. Wait till you get a bit older.

**DICKY:** Yeah, they're fuckin' evil, man.

**JIMMY:** Yeah.

**DICKY:** Where are they anyway?

**BUD:** Lulu called up couple hours ago. Said she ran into Bertie Lou downtown and got sucked into the Bingo Hall. She called up Alma to come and save her. Hattie went too.

**JIMMY:** I ain't kissed her yet.

**BUD:** What?

**JIMMY:** I've never kissed anybody.

**BUD:** How old are you boy?

**JIMMY:** Fourteen.

**DICKY:** Jesus damnit son, what the hell's wrong with you?

**BUD:** Leave him alone, Dicky.

**DICKY:** You like girls don't ya'?

**JIMMY:** Hell, yeah.

**DICKY:** By the time I was fourteen I'd already got to second base with Molly Campbell...and Trish McAlister.

**BUD:** When I was fourteen I met Lulu. God I fell hard. I didn't ever want to be with

nobody else. Till I married her. Than I wanted to be with everybody else.

*(DICKY laughs hard.)*

Didn't matter much who it was provided she was a she and she had a two legs...no, hell that's not true, either...

**DICKY:** What you got to do son is just go for it.

**BUD:** No he don't have to do any such thing.

**DICKY:** You wouldn't be saying that if she wasn't your daughter.

**BUD:** Well, she is my daughter and he don't need to be going for nothing. You hear that, kid?

**JIMMY:** Yeah, yeah, of course.

*(The women enter.)*

**LULU:** I could swear that's Bud up on the porch...

**ALMA:** Lulu, don't start...

**LULU:** But no way. It can't be him 'cause I'm sure I told him to leave hours ago.

**BUD:** Not until we talk this out.

**LULU:** There's nothing to talk about Bud.

*(LULU enters the house. BUD follows. HATTIE sits on the porch close to JIMMY.)*

**DICKY:** Alma, where the hell is that husband of yours?

**ALMA:** I don't know. And I don't care. I got a new love now.

**DICKY:** Oh, you do?

**ALMA:** His name is England.

**HATTIE:** His name is Bruce.

**ALMA:** Well, I call him England.

**HATTIE:** What's that smell?

**JIMMY:** Pot.

**ALMA:** Speakin' of England, I better go. I got an online date.

*(ALMA goes into the house.)*

**DICKY:** What the hell was that all about?

*(Silence.)*

Well, I can tell where I'm not wanted. Ya'll have a good night now. Hattie, don't let your parents kill each other.

*(DICKY exits. HATTIE and JIMMY are left alone together. Long pause.)*

**HATTIE:** Ya'll were smokin' pot?

**JIMMY:** Little bit. You were playing Bingo?

**HATTIE:** Yeah, a little.

*(Pause.)*

**JIMMY:** How was it?

**HATTIE:** Boring.

**JIMMY:** You okay?

**HATTIE:** Yeah.

*(Pause. HATTIE starts to cry.)*

**JIMMY:** Hattie...what's wrong?

**HATTIE:** Nothing.

**JIMMY:** Why are you cryin'?

**HATTIE:** Just leave me alone for a little while, okay.

**JIMMY:** Is it your parents?

**HATTIE:** No.

**JIMMY:** 'Cause I know what it's like to have messed up parents. You can talk to me

about it.

**HATTIE:** Get out of here.

*(Pause. JIMMY rises to leave.)*

**JIMMY:** Okay.

**HATTIE:** *(rising)* I'm sorry.

**JIMMY:** It's no big deal.

**HATTIE:** I didn't mean to yell at you.

**JIMMY:** I don't care.

**HATTIE:** I just can't stand to see them acting like this. This is how it was before we left. They were fighting like dogs one minute and makin' out like a couple of kids the next.

**JIMMY:** I'm sorry.

**HATTIE:** And me...I might as well be invisible. When they're together neither one of 'em pays a bit of attention to me.

**JIMMY:** Listen...

**HATTIE:** I just wanna get out of here.

**JIMMY:** You talk a lot about leaving.

**HATTIE:** It's all I think about.

**JIMMY:** You ever think about running away?

**HATTIE:** Sometimes.

**JIMMY:** You want to run away...with me?

**HATTIE:** What?

**JIMMY:** Seriously.

**HATTIE:** No.

**JIMMY:** Okay.

**HATTIE:** Anyway, you're not serious.

**JIMMY:** I'm gonna go home.

**HATTIE:** You don't have to. I didn't mean what I said...

**JIMMY:** I know. I just wanna go home.

**HATTIE:** Jimmy...

**JIMMY:** Yeah.

**HATTIE:** Thanks for listening to me. Sorry I'm goin' on like this.

**JIMMY:** Just knock on my window if you need anything.

**HATTIE:** I will.

*(JIMMY exits. HATTIE sits. She stares off in the distance. Sounds of fighting from inside. At first, the sounds are barely audible to the audience. Slowly, they grow in volume and intensity. Sound of something being thrown, crashing breaking. HATTIE starts to cry. Screaming voices louder now, but still difficult to understand. Pause. BUD enters from the front door, slamming it behind.)*

**BUD:** *(noticing HATTIE)* Oh...hey.

**HATTIE:** Hey.

**BUD:** Your mother thinks it'd be better if I slept out here. You okay?

**HATTIE:** I'm fine.

**BUD:** You look like you was cryin'.

**HATTIE:** No.

**BUD:** I'm beat. I'm just gonna lay down out here under the stars. Won't be the first time.

**HATTIE:** You need anything.

**BUD:** No. I'll be all right.

**HATTIE:** Just let me know.

*(Door swings open. LULU throws an armful of clothes outside in BUD's*

*direction. She slams the door.)*

**BUD:** I guess that's a hint.

*(Pause. BUD is collecting his clothes.)*

**HATTIE:** Why'd you come here?

**BUD:** What?

**HATTIE:** You came looking for her. Why'd you do it?

**BUD:** Well...it's hard to explain. We got an attachment...me and your mother. Anyway, I didn't just come looking for her. I missed my little Princess.

**HATTIE:** I'm not your Princess anymore, dad.

**BUD:** You're not?

**HATTIE:** No. I haven't been for a long time.

**BUD:** Now honey, you'll always be my little...

**HATTIE:** *(under her breath)* Fuck off, dad.

**BUD:** What's that, honey?

*(HATTIE exits into the house. Door slams behind her. Blackout.)*

## Act 2, Scene 3

*(The next morning. BUD asleep in the yard. He has arranged a make-shift bed using the clothing LULU threw at him. A pile under his head acts as a pillow, a collection of shirts and pants his blankets. LULU opens the front door of the house, looks out at him. She enters onto the porch and stares down at him. She sits. She seems in a melancholy mood. She stares at him intensely. Slowly, ALMA enters from the house and joins LULU on the porch. She sits next to her. Neither one of them say anything for a long time.)*

**ALMA:** You okay?

**LULU:** Yeah.

*(Pause)*

**ALMA:** It's not like you to be so quiet.

**LULU:** No.

**ALMA:** I thought you told him to leave.

**LULU:** I did.

**ALMA:** He didn't take it too well.

**LULU:** He didn't leave either.

*(Pause)*

**ALMA:** Can I make you some breakfast?

**LULU:** I'm not hungry.

**ALMA:** What's on your mind?

**LULU:** He wants to take Hattie back with him.

**ALMA:** He doesn't.

**LULU:** Said he can live without me but he can't stand the thought of missing his little girl growing up. That's what we fought about.

**ALMA:** He can't expect...

**LULU:** It don't matter none. He's not gonna leave.

**ALMA:** Did you really try to kill him? I mean...that whole story you told me...that wasn't no joke after all...was it?

**LULU:** No. It really happened...more or less.

**ALMA:** And you thought he was dead this whole time.

**LULU:** I thought for the first time in my life that I was on my own. And it felt good. I never felt a bit bad about killing him. I guess that makes me an awful person.

**ALMA:** No...I've felt like killing him a couple times myself this week.

**LULU:** You did?

**ALMA:** What with him talking so loud all the time. It's about enough to drive a person crazy.

**LULU:** He said that bullet that took most his hearing came inches away from killing him. He's like a cat.

**ALMA:** Nine lives.

**LULU:** I'd kill him in his sleep right now if I didn't think he's find a way of hanging on and tormenting me further.

**ALMA:** Where's Hattie?

**LULU:** I imagine she's in bed. It's not like her to sleep this late.

**ALMA:** I'll go check on her.

*(ALMA exits. LULU stares at BUD and then out toward the audience. Inside, a loud, shrill scream is heard. It is ALMA. LULU jumps up. BUD wakes up. ALMA appears at the door. She carries a note in her hand.)*

**LULU:** What is it?

**BUD:** Did somebody say my name?

**LULU:** Alma, you look pale as a ghost...

**ALMA:** It's Hattie...she's gone.

**LULU:** What?

**BUD:** *(still in "bed")* Can you two keep it down? I'm trying to sleep.

**LULU:** What do you mean she's gone?

**ALMA:** She left a note.

*(LULU snatches the note away from her. ALMA sits down. BUD is up now and joins LULU on the porch. He tries to get close to her and read over her shoulder but LULU pushes him away. She reads.)*

**LULU:** I knew that boy was trouble!

**ALMA:** Where could she be?

**LULU:** I knew it. I said it from day one. I told her to stay away from him.

*(BUD grabs the note from LULU.)*

**LULU:** Why would she do this? What is she thinkin'?

**ALMA:** I don't believe it.

**BUD:** Son of a bitch.

**LULU:** Bud...

**BUD:** Who the hell is Jimmy?

**LULU:** Bud! You idiot! The little neighbor boy...

**BUD:** That kid.

**LULU:** Yes.

**BUD:** *(crossing into the house)* I'm calling the cops.

**LULU:** Some good that'll do.

**ALMA:** What do we do?

*(Long pause.)*

**LULU:** Nothing.

**ALMA:** What?

**LULU:** We're not gonna do a damn thing. Hattie's not stupid. She didn't run away with that boy.

**ALMA:** But the note.

**LULU:** Oh, forget the note. Don't you see what's happening? She's foolin' us all.

**ALMA:** I'm worried.

**LULU:** It's all a big joke. She'll be back here tonight and she'll have this tall tale to tell and not a bit of it'll be true. Always a smart mouth but never a serious word. That's her. It's just like when she told me she got a job as a stripper and the time she said she joined the army.

**ALMA:** I don't know.

**LULU:** Don't you see? She's just trying to get a rise out of us. That's all.

**ALMA:** Are you sure?

**LULU:** I know it. But this time she's pushed me too far. This time we're gonna teach her a lesson.

**ALMA:** What are we gonna do?

**LULU:** I'm gonna go inside and get Bud and tell him that...

*(The conversation continues but LULU's words fade away as the lights slowly dim. Blackout.)*

## Act 3, Scene 1

*(That night. The porch is empty. The front door opens slightly and ALMA pokes her head out. She looks around and then quickly returns and closes the door. Silence. Again, the front door opens and this time LULU pokes her head out. She looks around and then enters onto the porch leaving the door open behind her. She is still looking around. Her disappointment turns to worry. ALMA enters and crosses to her.)*

**LULU:** Where could they be?

**ALMA:** I don't know.

**LULU:** It's getting' late.

**ALMA:** What should we do?

**LULU:** I thought they would have been here by now.

**ALMA:** I know.

*(BUD enters from the house onto the porch.)*

**BUD:** Any sign of 'em?

**ALMA:** No.

**BUD:** Dicky's been lookin' all over. He knows all the teen hang-outs. Says he ain't seen nothin'.

**LULU:** They should have been back by now. If this is joke, it's gone too far.

**BUD:** This ain't no joke. I'm tellin' you they're gone. Same as you and I did.

**LULU:** You and I weren't fourteen.

**BUD:** Sixteen. Not much older. Kids are growing up faster nowadays. Last night Hattie told me she wasn't my Princess anymore.

**LULU:** What do you expect?

**ALMA:** She always talks about wanting to get out of here.

**LULU:** Same as back home. She couldn't wait to get out of there either. First few weeks she was so excited about bein' here. It bein' a new place and all. Then she got...

**LULU:** (*continued*) ...bored of it. Starting talking again about leaving. Maybe it was just me she wanted to get away from. I guess I can't blame her. I haven't exactly been the best mother.

**BUD:** You haven't exactly been the best wife, either.

**LULU:** Bud, you wanna compare scorecards in the bad husband-bad wife category, that's fine with me. How many times did I hit you?

**BUD:** I can't hear half of what you're saying, honey.

**LULU:** Yeah right. You hear when it's convenient for you to hear ...

**ALMA:** Will you two stop it! Listen to both of you. Your daughter is out there...who knows where doin' who knows what and all the two of you can do is bicker.

*(Silence.)*

What are we gonna do?

**BUD:** I told you Dicky was lookin'.

**ALMA:** And that's enough for you?

**LULU:** Dicky is lookin'?! Have you met Dicky? He can't find his way home five nights a week.

**BUD:** It was better than your idea. Let's just wait here. It was all a joke. They'll be back. Hell, they could be in Indiana by now and we'd never see either one of them again.

**ALMA:** Should somebody go over and talk to Jimmy's parents. It's gettin' dark. They're gonna know something is wrong when he don't come home.

**LULU:** Why don't you go and do that, Alma.

**ALMA:** I don't want to go. You go.

**LULU:** I don't wanna tell 'em.

**ALMA:** I wish England was here. He'd know what to do.

*(Pause. LULU and BUD look at each other.)*

**ALMA:** What?

**BUD:** Nothin'. I'd just like to meet this England fella is all.

**LULU:** What if they're not comin' back? What if we never see Hattie again? I know we don't always get along but...I can't believe she'd just run off and...

**ALMA:** That's it. I'm goin' to look for her myself.

**LULU:** Where you gonna look?

**ALMA:** I don't know. I have to do something. This sitting around and waiting is driving me crazy.

*(ALMA exits.)*

**BUD:** What is she doing?

**LULU:** She's gonna look for Hattie and Jimmy.

*(Pause)*

**BUD:** So...

**LULU:** So what?

**BUD:** She's gonna be okay, you know.

**LULU:** I hope so.

**BUD:** She's gonna be fine. She'll come back. And when she does...it might not be a bad idea for me take off...

**LULU:** What?

**BUD:** I think I should go. What do you think of that?

**LULU:** I liked the idea plenty when I told you to go. I'm not gonna put up a fight now.

**BUD:** That's not really what the fight was about...

**LULU:** If you think I'm gonna let you take that little girl back...

**BUD:** No, I figure she's better off here with you.

**LULU:** *(shocked)* Well, my. You really have changed.

**BUD:** What was that?

**LULU:** Nothin'.

**BUD:** You're a beautiful woman, Lulu. I'm sorry I ruined your life.

**LULU:** Have you been drinkin'?

**BUD:** No. I'm just sayin' what needs to be said. I'm sorry. I ain't never said that to you before and I'm sure I owe you a few.

**LULU:** Well...thank you...Bud...I don't know what to say...

**BUD:** You don't have to say anything.

**LULU:** You didn't ruin my life you know. Not all the way. You gave me Hattie.

**BUD:** At least we did one good thing, right?

**LULU:** Yeah.

**BUD:** Lulu?

**LULU:** What is it?

**BUD:** You wanna do it?

**LULU:** What!

**BUD:** Just one more time...

**LULU:** Are you out of your mind? Do you realize that our daughter is out there somewhere and we don't have any idea where she is or if she's in trouble...and that's all you can think of? You wanna know what I want? I wanna see my little girl again. I wanna hold her in my arms and tell that I'm sorry a thousand times for bein' a terrible mother.

**BUD:** Lulu...

*(During the following monologue HATTIE appears in the yard. She watches and listens. BUD and LULU don't notice her.)*

**LULU:** Hell, what did I know about mothering a baby. I was sixteen. I didn't know anything about anything and all the sudden I have a baby and a full time job and a husband with a bad back and bills to pay. We didn't have a chance. We didn't give *her* a chance that's for sure. I just wish I could make it right. I wish I could see her and hold her and tell her it's gonna be all right...that everything is gonna be okay...which of course is a lie cause I don't know any more than she does...but I love her, Bud. She's my little girl. I don't know what I'll do...

**HATTIE:** Mom...

**LULU:** Oh, Hattie.

*(LULU runs to HATTIE and gives her a hug. She holds on tight. Both are crying.)*

Where have you been?

**HATTIE:** Did you mean all that you were sayin' about me?

**LULU:** What?

**HATTIE:** I heard you. I heard every word.

**LULU:** Hattie...baby...

**HATTIE:** It was...so...

**LULU:** Where have you been? Are you okay?

*(BUD joins them.)*

**BUD:** You had us worried sick.

**LULU:** Bud, don't yell at her. Can't you see she's trembling? Come over here dear. Have a seat.

*(LULU leads her onto the porch and into a chair.)*

Where is Jimmy? Is he okay?

**HATTIE:** He's fine.

**BUD:** Did he make you do this?

**HATTIE:** No.

**LULU:** Now, honey, it's all right. You can tell us anything...

**HATTIE:** Nobody makes me do anything. It was all my idea.

**LULU:** What exactly was all your idea?

**HATTIE:** Well...everything...the running away...and...

**LULU:** And what?

**HATTIE:** And getting' married.

**LULU:** What?

**HATTIE:** We got hitched.

**BUD:** You did what?

**LULU:** Calm down, Bud.

**BUD:** Calm down! You're crazy if you think I'm gonna sit here and listen to this and you tellin' me to calm down.

**LULU:** She's not married.

**HATTIE:** Yes I am.

**LULU:** She's pulling a fast one on us. Can't you see that?

**HATTIE:** I'm not lying.

**LULU:** Who's gonna marry two fourteen year old kids? Tell me that.

**HATTIE:** There's this place in Kentucky...

**LULU:** Oh, stop it!

*(A robust gentleman wearing a Union Jack t-shirt enters. He speaks in a thick British accent.)*

**ENGLAND:** Excuse me?

**LULU:** Yes.

**ENGLAND:** I'm looking for Alma Davenport.

**BUD:** I'll be damned.

**ENGLAND:** I'm Bruce...

**LULU:** I don't believe this...

**ENGLAND:** What's wrong?

**LULU:** Is everybody messin' with me? *(to ENGLAND)* You expect me to believe...*(to HATTIE)*...and you...

**HATTIE:** I don't see what the big deal is. You and dad weren't much older.

**LULU:** That's your example. You wanna end up like me and your father?

**HATTIE:** No, but...

**ENGLAND:** I don't mean to interrupt...

**LULU:** *(composing herself)* No, no, no. I'm sorry. How rude of me. Come on up here. *(He does.)* I'm Lulu...

**ENGLAND:** Nice to meet you.

**LULU:** This is Bud...and Hattie...we've heard...so much about you.

**ENGLAND:** I could say the same of you. Is Alma here?

**LULU:** No, not at this moment. Is she expecting you?

**ENGLAND:** Not exactly.

**LULU:** Well, it'll be a grand surprise, won't it? She should be back anytime now. Bud...

**BUD:** What?

**LULU:** Why don't you take Bruce inside and make him at home until Alma gets back. And call Dicky and tell him we found Hattie.

**BUD:** Sure. Come on England.

*(BUD leads ENGLAND into the house.)*

**LULU:** Good. Now that's five people and not a job between us.

**HATTIE:** Six.

**LULU:** Six?

**HATTIE:** When the baby comes...

**LULU:** Sh! Sh! Shhh! Okay. Let's calm down now. *(She sits next to HATTIE.)* Dear...

**ALMA:** *(entering)* There you are! Oh, my heavens, we've been worried sick. Where have you been?

**LULU:** Hattie and Jimmy got married and now they're gonna have a baby.

**ALMA:** Oh...really...

**HATTIE:** That's not all...

*(ENGLAND appears in the doorway.)*

**ENGLAND:** Alma dear!

**ALMA:** Oh my God!

*(ALMA faints. LULU and HATTIE jump up from their seats. ENGLAND runs to ALMA on the ground. BUD is in the doorway drinking a beer. DICKY enters with JIMMY in his grasp.)*

**DICKY:** *(noticing ALMA on the ground)* You see, it can happen to the best of it. I don't wanna hear no more 'bout passing out on yer' lawn...

**ENGLAND:** She fainted you idiot.

**DICKY:** Who the hell are you and...

*(ALMA is waking up. LULU rushes to her. HATTIE brushes past BUD to get into the house.)*

**LULU:** Alma, dear...Alma...are you okay...

**ALMA:** *(looking up, sees ENGLAND)* Am I in heaven?

**ENGLAND:** No, dear. But I am.

*(He kisses her passionately.)*

**LULU:** Oh, God.

**BUD:** I'll be damned.

**ENGLAND:** I couldn't wait to meet you dear. I've been thinking about you every second of the day and finally I said to myself, I've got to come and meet her face to face.

**ALMA:** Oh, I'm glad you did.

*(They kiss again. HATTIE has re-appeared on the porch with rifle. She fires it into the air. Loud bang. Everybody hits the ground. HATTIE remains standing, rifle in hand.)*

**HATTIE:** Got everybody's attention now?

**LULU:** Hattie...

**HATTIE:** Shut up! Everybody shut up and listen to the little Princess with the gun in her hand, all right?

**DICKY:** We're listening.

**BUD:** Anything you say, Hattie.

**HATTIE:** We're all gonna play a little game. And the name of the game is "Everybody is gonna shut the fuck up and listen to Hattie for two minutes and do whatever the hell she says to do." Got it?

**ALMA:** *(still in ENGLAND's arms)* It's not usually like this, England.

*(HATTIE fires gun into the air again. Everybody flinches.)*

**HATTIE:** That is against the rules of the game.

**ALMA:** Sorry.

**HATTIE:** Now the first thing that needs to happen is...Dicky...

**DICKY:** Yes, maam.

**HATTIE:** Let go of Jimmy.

**DICKY:** I can do that. *(He does).*

**HATTIE:** Now everybody listen real close. 'Cause I'm gonna tell you a story. The name of the story is "Does anybody care about Hattie?" It's a story about a little girl who ain't so little anymore 'cause she had to grow up faster than most little girls her age. In this story the girl is born to a teenage mother and deadbeat father and she grows up watching the two of them duke it out in front of her. But that's not the real interesting part of the story. The best parts come in the later chapters when Hattie moves from her hometown of Logan, West Virginia to a new home in beautiful Rome, Ohio. Home of the Rome Apple and the annual Lawrence County Fair, the largest county fair in southern Ohio. She had to move to Rome with her mom because her mom killed her dad. Now Mom thinks Hattie doesn't know about the killing. In fact, Mom doesn't give Hattie much credit for knowing anything at all. Only the big twist is that Dad's not really dead.

He show's up one day with a bunch of flowers and a hearing problem. The strange part about him showing up again is that nobody's really that excited to see him. Not even Hattie. I can't explain why. Just a fact of life. And the even weirder thing is Mom and Dad hit it off like it was old times. Fighting and fucking and completely ignoring the little girl. So on this one night Hattie grabs the cute boy next door and tells him her plan. She knows just what she can do to get some attention. Just the right thing to get everybody back on track again. Hattie and the boy will run away one day. They plan to come back late at night and tell everyone that they eloped and they're having a baby and everybody will be so upset, angry, surprised whatever that they'll actually care about Hattie for a day or two. But that doesn't happen, see. Even after all this everybody's still wrapped up in the e-love couple and the drunken policeman and the on again off again backwoods couple and everybody, including me, is living their life and all their business out on this front porch for all the world to see and so Hattie decides the only thing she can do to get anybody's attention is to grab a gun and start shooting them all one by one. *(Pause. Silence.)* But she decides against that because after all Hattie is a smart girl and she wouldn't do something like that. But maybe she could use the gun to get everybody's attention she thinks. And maybe when she has their attention and she tells everyone how she feels and everyone actually listens then maybe they'll realize and maybe things will be different. Maybe everyone can talk to one another instead of yelling. Maybe we can sit down to dinner and talk about our days like they do on TV. Maybe we can care a little more about each other and a little less about our stupid little problems. Maybe we can be a real family. Maybe we can clean up this yard before Richie Rich *(indicating JIMMY)* and his family here decide to run us off back farther into the woods than we already are. Maybe I'm just dreaming. Anyway, that's my story. It's not finished yet. I got a little work to do. What'd you think?

*(No response.)*

I'm putting the gun down now.

*(She lays the gun on the porch and sits. Everyone is frozen for moments and then BUD makes a move for the gun. He grabs it up and returns to the doorway clutching it in his arms. LULU walks slowly to the porch and sits next to HATTIE. Simultaneously, ENGLAND helps ALMA up and leads her to the porch where they stand behind LULU and HATTIE. JIMMY and DICKY have also congregated. They sit on the porch floor. This all happens slowly and without a sound. When everyone is in place, LULU puts an arm around HATTIE. As lights fade, they hug. Blackout.)*

## Act 3, Scene 2

*(Days later. No one outside. The front yard and the porch have been cleaned up a bit. A pair of suitcases is placed in the front yard alongside a passed out DICKY. JIMMY enters onto the yard, steps over DICKY and crosses to the front door. He knocks. In moments, HATTIE answers the door.)*

**HATTIE:** Hey.

**JIMMY:** What's up?

**HATTIE:** Nothing.

**JIMMY:** You...wanna do something?

**HATTIE:** What?

**JIMMY:** I don't know. You wanna see a movie?

**HATTIE:** Sure, let me get my stuff. You wanna come in?

**JIMMY:** No. I'll wait.

*(LULU appears in the doorway.)*

**LULU:** Don't be silly, James. Come on in. Bud is packing his stuff and you won't be seeing him for a long while. Come on in and say goodbye.

**JIMMY:** Okay.

*(JIMMY goes in the house. The door shuts. The porch is empty. Silence. ENGLAND and ALMA enter from offstage into the yard. They are holding hands.)*

**ALMA:** Do you have to go? I wish you could stay longer.

**ENGLAND:** There's nothing stopping you from coming with me, is there?

**ALMA:** Oh...I don't know. I'd love to come and visit.

**ENGLAND:** Well come and visit then.

*(They kiss.)*

**ALMA:** I've...loved spending all this time with you.

**ENGLAND:** Sh...I don't like to say goodbye. I'm gonna see you real soon.

*(They kiss. The front door opens. BUD enters onto the porch. HATTIE, JIMMY and LULU follow. Awkward moment while they wait for ENGLAND and ALMA to finish. ALMA encourages BUD to interject. He does so begrudgingly.)*

**BUD:** Hey, England. You ready?

**BRUCE:** *(still focused on ALMA)* Sure.

*(BUD picks up both suitcases, walk to ENGLAND, hands him one.)*

**BUD:** Come on now. Your plane leaves in an hour.

**BRUCE:** Thanks again for taking me.

**BUD:** *(irritated)* Yeah, yeah.

**LULU:** Thank you, Bud.

**ALMA:** Yes, thank you.

**BUD:** Yeah, yeah. *(lightening up a bit)* Do I get a hug from my big girl before I go?

**HATTIE:** Sure, dad.

*(HATTIE joins him in the yard. LULU and JIMMY stay on the porch. HATTIE and BUD hug.)*

**BUD:** Don't go shooting anybody or anything like that all right.

**HATTIE:** Sure dad.

**ENGLAND:** I want to thank you all for your hospitality these past few days. It certainly has been a memorable trip. Alma, I'll see you soon.

**ALMA:** Next month.

**ENGLAND:** I can't wait.

*(They kiss.)*

**BUD:** Oh, come on.

*(BUD exits. ENGLAND and ALMA slowly break apart. ENGLAND leaves. ALMA and HATTIE rejoin LULU and JIMMY on the porch. ALMA and LULU*

*sit. HATTIE and JIMMY stand next to one another.)*

**HATTIE:** Mom, Jimmy and I are goin' to the movies.

**LULU:** What are you gonna see?

**HATTIE:** I don't know. Something with lots of sex and violence and drugs probably...

**LULU:** Well, the two of you just keep a seat between each other...

**HATTIE:** Mom!

**LULU:** Have fun.

**HATTIE:** Can I borrow the car?

**LULU:** Very funny.

**HATTIE:** Come on, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** See ya'll later.

**LULU & ALMA:** Bye. Have fun. Be careful.

*(HATTIE and JIMMY exit.)*

**ALMA:** Isn't that sweet?

**LULU:** Sweet wasn't the word I had in mind. Dangerous...that's what it is...

**ALMA:** It's a lot less dangerous than her swinging that gun around like she was Annie Oakley or something.

**LULU:** I don't know.

**ALMA:** You should be happy for them.

**LULU:** She's fourteen...she's too young...

**ALMA:** Yeah, she's fourteen and you can't tell her anything either.

**LULU:** At least she's getting' out the house every once in a while.

*(Pause.)*

**ALMA:** You okay? I mean about Bud and all.

**LULU:** Am I okay? I didn't think he was ever gonna leave. Thought it was part of my punishment or something...

**ALMA:** He'll be back.

**LULU:** Next month. Hattie's birthday. He wants to take her up to Logan for a weekend.

**ALMA:** He does?

**LULU:** Yeah. Least I can do is let him take her every once in a while, right? I don't know. It'll be weird having the house empty. Ain't never been in an empty house.

**ALMA:** I'll be in England.

**LULU:** England'll be in you...

**ALMA:** Lulu, stop it! That's crude.

**LULU:** I didn't mean nothin' by it.

**ALMA:** Yeah, right.

*(Pause)*

**LULU:** *(indicating DICKY)* Do you think he's dead?

**ALMA:** I doubt it.

**LULU:** Should we check on him?

**ALMA:** No. I can smell him from here.

**LULU:** *(screaming at DICKY)* Hey stinky!

*(The women wait for a response. DICKY doesn't budge.)*

**ALMA:** You see. Some things never change.

**LULU:** And other things are changing all the time. I'm getting' old Alma.

**ALMA:** Stop it. You're barely thirty.

**LULU:** I feel like I'm sixty. I feel like I've lived two lives.

**ALMA:** I know it.

**LULU:** You sad about Bruce?

**ALMA:** Naw. I'll be okay. Get to talk to him online tomorrow. Get to see him next month.

**LULU:** Yeah. Nice guy.

**ALMA:** Everything'll be okay, Lulu.

**LULU:** You think so?

**ALMA:** I know it.

**LULU:** Should be a little quieter around here.

**ALMA:** Yeah. You want something from inside.

**LULU:** Yeah, bring me a beer.

**ALMA:** *(rises)* Sure thing.

**LULU:** *(rises)* Wait a second. I think I'll go in with ya'.

*(Their conversation continues as they enter into the house.)*

**ALMA:** I could show you that website that I was telling ya' about. The place I met England...

**LULU:** I know...I know...

*(The porch is empty. Lights slowly fade. DICKY stirs but remains asleep. Blackout.)*

THE END

## Epilogue

Both shows are dark comedies. Most good comedies poke fun at somebody. American Standard criticizes politicians in a comical way. In *Princess*, authority figures of all kinds (police, parents) are singled out. But I also wanted to show the heart of these characters. As in life, there are no completely good or bad people in these stories. Hattie wants attention. Lulu wants her life back. Bud doesn't know what he wants and admits as much. Deep down Marcus and John both want to serve the public. With everything there for us to laugh at there is also something to admire or at least something to make us smile.

The production of my first two plays was an integral part of the writing process. It is an amazing experience to work with a group of actors and hear them reading lines that I wrote and performing actions that I have written. It is the quickest and easiest way to work the bugs out of a play. It is the ultimate workshop with actors, director, stage manager and, of course, the writer all working to fine tune the product and prepare it for an audience. And the audience is the ultimate test of what works in a play and what needs re-worked.

With *Princess* I have not yet had the benefit of such a production. When a group of actors is assembled I believe the parts of the story that I will focus most on re-writing and editing will be the first five pages and the last five pages. I am almost too close to the project to know, but it seems that the play starts a little slow and ends a bit too quickly or cheerily or something. I'm not sure. I've had as much told to me by the few people that have read it. The rest of play feels comfortable and quite nice and I can't wait

to see actors performing it in front of an audience.

**Jonathan Joy** 1034 10<sup>th</sup> Ave Rear, Huntington WV 25701. (304) 544-0696

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## Work Experience

May 2001—present, Theatre Artist-in-Residence  
Paramount Arts Center, 1300 Winchester Ave, Ashland KY 41101, (606) 324-3175

- Teach weekly theatre workshops/classes for youth ages 4-18. These workshops expose students to all aspects of theatre with a focus on performance and playwriting.
- Teach annual professional development theatre courses for elementary school teachers.

Sept 2001—present, Theatre Educator/Performing Artist  
Huntington Museum of Art, 2033 McCoy Rd, Huntington WV 25701, (304) 529-2701

- Teach theatre workshops/classes for youth ages 4-13.
- Perform for special events/readings (i.e. *Poe* for Taste of the Arts luncheon).
- Organize events for the Theatre at the Museum Series.

Aug 1998—present, Managing Director  
Free Spirit Productions, 5801 Cline Dr, Ashland KY 41102

- Responsible for all aspects of theatre production including show selection, material rentals, budget, dramaturgy, acting, directing, marketing, set construction, etc. Shows include *Fool for Love*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Glass Menagerie* and more.

Aug 1999—Apr 2000, Actor/Technician/Assistant Director  
Virginia Stage Company, Corner of Monticello/Tazewell, Norfolk VA, (757) 627-1234

- Assistant Director for world premiere play *The Dream Keeper*.
- Perform in *A Christmas Carol* (Ghost of X-mas Future). EMC credit.
- Various shop crew/scenic artist/technician work for eight show season.

Sept 1998—May 1999, Actor/Educator  
Phoenix Theatre Circle, 1250 Chambers Rd Ste 225, Columbus OH 43212

- Perform in five show season. Roles included Dickon in *The Secret Garden* and Stuart Little in *The Adventures of Stuart Little*.
- Teach theatre classes/workshops for youth ages 5-12.

## Education

Master of Arts in English (Drama/Creative Writing) – Marshall University, 2004  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre (Acting/Directing) – Marshall University, 1998

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## **Publication**

June 2003

One Act Play Depot, Box 335, Spiritwood Saskatchewan Canada, SOJ 2MO  
*Simply Selma*, a long one-act play, was published June 24, 2003.

July 2003

A monologue from the play *The Princess of Rome, Ohio* was contracted for publication in *Millennium Monologues II*. Editor - Gerald Lee Ratliff. The book will be available Summer 2004.

August 2003

An essay titled *Shakespeare Comes to Ashland...KY* was contracted for publication in *Shakespeare Festivals Around The World*. Editor – Marcus D. Gregio. The book will be available Winter 2004.

January 2004

Brooklyn Publishers, 1841 Cord Street, Odessa, TX 79762 1-888-473-8521  
*A Match Made in Heaven*, a ten minute play, was published January 12, 2004.

## **Awards and Recognition**

2004 – 1<sup>st</sup> Place, Maeir Award for Creative Writing for the play *The Princess of Rome, Ohio*.

2003 - Wallace E. Knight Award for Writing Excellence for the play *American Standard*.

2003 - 1st Place, Maier Award for Creative Writing for *American Standard*.

2002 - Honorable Mention, Maier Award for the original play *Simply Selma*.

2001 - Top 25, Oxford New Play Festival (Ole Miss) for the short play *The Stranger*.

1997 & '98 - Irene Ryan acting nominations for roles in *Blithe Spirit* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come*.

## **References**

1. Tressa Preston, Artistic Director-Free Spirit Productions, (740) 591-5539
2. Katherine Cox, Education Director-Huntington Museum of Art, (304) 529-2701
3. Mike Hildebrandt, Education Director-Paramount Arts Center, (606) 324-3175
4. Kenton Yeager, Associate Artistic Director-Virginia Stage Company, (865) 974-4867
5. Steven Andersen, Artistic Director-Phoenix Theatre Circle, (614) 481-4360

## Jonathan Joy

Jonathan Joy is in his fourth year as theatre artist-in-residence at the historic Paramount Arts Center in Ashland, Kentucky. Annually, he works with over two thousand students (K-12) in educational theatre classes at the Paramount and at the Huntington Museum of Art in Huntington, West Virginia. His first play, *Simply Selma*, was published in 2003 by the One Act Play Depot. *A Match Made in Heaven* is now available at Brooklyn Publishers. His full length, *American Standard*, won two regional awards for playwriting including the 2003 Wallace E. Knight Excellence in Writing Award. His written work will also be included in two upcoming books: *Millennium Monologues 2* and *Shakespeare Festivals Around the World*. His new play, *The Princess of Rome, Ohio*, was a 2004 Finalist for the Seven Devils Playwriting Conference in McCall, Idaho and a Semi-Finalist at the prestigious Dayton Playhouse Futurefest. Professional acting and directing credits include work with the Phoenix Theatre Circle in Columbus, Ohio; Virginia Stage Company in Norfolk, Virginia, and Huntington Rep in Huntington, West Virginia. Since 1998, Mr. Joy has served as Managing Director of Free Spirit Productions ([www.freespiritproductions.info](http://www.freespiritproductions.info)), a regional theatre troupe based in Kentucky and West Virginia. He holds an MA in English (Drama/Writing emphasis) and a BFA in Theatre (Acting/Directing emphasis) both from Marshall University.