BIG BASTARD

A play

By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

In the remote woods of Sierra County, aging recluse Patrice Bean lives alone in the cluttered house her domineering father once ruled, clinging to her land, her grudges, and her failing health as neighbors and authorities circle with mounting concern. When she begins feeding – and befriending – a massive black bear she dubs "Big Bastard," what first seems like eccentric defiance slowly reveals itself as something far more complicated: a reckoning with a violent past buried in the 1970s, when two local girls disappeared and Patrice's tyrannical father fell under suspicion. As present-day deputy Cody Hodges – named after a teddy bear Patrice once gave his grandfather – reopens old wounds, the play shifts between past and present to uncover the truth of what Patrice sacrificed to stop a monster in her own home. Darkly comic, haunting, and ultimately redemptive, Big Bastard is a story about guilt, survival, and the complicated ways love and violence can take root in the same soil.

Characters

ARTHUR BEAN Male, 40s
PATTY BEAN Female, Late Teens
PATRICE BEAN Female, 60s
CODY HODGES Male, 30s
BRENDA SIMMONS Female, 40s
FLOYD HODGES Male, 30s
BIG BASTARD A Bear

Casting Notes

- Arthur Bean should preferably be played by a large, rugged man with a bear-like appearance.
- Big Bastard should preferably be played by the same actor who plays Arthur Bean.
- Floyd Hodges should preferably be played by the same actor who plays Cody Hodges.
- Characters may be played by actors of any race.

Place

Sierra County, Downieville, California.

Time

Present (2020) and Past (1975).

Setting

A small shabby house on a mountain in the woods. A stage two hoarder lives here. A front door and a small porch, large window, kitchen/dining/living room area. A hallway leading off to a bathroom and bedrooms.

Setting Notes

I understand this may present a challenge for the design team, but it's worth noting that the scenes set in the past take place in a relatively tidy house, while those in the present are set in a messier one. I realize (and yes, I'm fully aware) that constructing duplicate houses on stage might not be practical. That said, I invite you to get creative in how you bring out this contrast as the narrative moves between the past and the present.

PERUSAL

ACT 1

SCENE 1

The past. Early evening.

(A quiet moment passes before a large bear-like figure lumbers past the window. As it moves around to the front porch, we see it's not a bear at all but ARTHUR BEAN, returning home from work. He steps inside the house.)

ARTHUR

Patty. Patty!

PATTY

(Off.)

Yeah, Daddy?

ARTHUR

Don't "yeah Daddy" me. It's been a long day. And do you know what I'm not smelling? Dinner. That's what I'm not smelling.

PATTY

(Off.)

I'll be right out!

ARTHUR

And get me my beer. Good God, what are you doing in there?

(PATTY BEAN enters from the hallway.)

PATTY

Sorry, Daddy. I was waiting for the oven to heat up. I've got leftovers ready for you.

(She pulls a foil-wrapped plate from the fridge.)

ARTHUR

Oh, geez. / Leftovers?

PATTY

/ I know, I know. But it doesn't make sense to waste that ham loaf. We've got string beans and potatoes too. And you're always saying we need to watch our spending.

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

I might've said that.

PATTY

(Quietly.)

I mean, what the heck?

(She puts the plate in the oven.)

ARTHUR

Alright, enough chatter then. I'm starving.

PATTY

It's in the oven, Daddy.

(She sets a timer.)

And I packed you a big lunch this morning.

ARTHUR

What's your point?

PATTY

I put two snack cakes in there this time.

ARTHUR

And what's that got to do with the price of eggs?

PATTY

Did you eat your lunch?

ARTHUR

Of course I did. But that was lunch. Five hours ago. This is dinner. Not the same thing.

PATTY

Okay, okay. Sit down. Your food'll be ready in about ten minutes.

(Arthur sits in an armchair.)

ARTHUR

Where's the paper?

PERUSAL

PATTY

You're sitting on it. Nothing but bad news anyway.

(He pulls it out and opens it.)

And I had to climb onto the roof to get it this time.

(She takes a frosted mug from the freezer.)

ARTHUR

The newspaper?

PATTY

That's right.

ARTHUR

Jesus.

PATTY

(She grabs a beer from the fridge, opens it and pours it into the glass.)

I've told that paper boy a hundred times to walk it up onto the porch and stick it in the door, but he just won't listen. And his aim is terrible. Remember that time I had to pull it out of the bushes? I got poison oak up and down my arms and all over my face and neck.

ARTHUR

Wasn't pretty, that's for sure. Hope that kid ain't planning on a baseball career.

(She brings him the beer.)

I like the ham loaf.

PATTY

I know.

ARTHUR

Better than your mother's.

PATTY

You don't have to say that.

ARTHUR

It's true.

PERUSAL

PATTY

True or not – and it's not – I'd rather you didn't.

(She hands him the beer. He takes her hand, firm.)

ARTHUR

I say what I please in this house.

PATTY

(Unfazed.)

Of course, Daddy.

ARTHUR

Good girl.

(He releases her hand. She gets herself a glass of water.)

You'll make a nice wife someday.

PATTY

(Flatly.)

Can't wait.

ARTHUR

There's no rush. And he'd better treat you right if he knows what's good for him. Any man who mistreats my daughter will find himself six feet under, and in short order.

PATTY

Nothing like a death threat to secure a good man.

(She drinks. He reads.)

ARTHUR

(Quietly.)

Oh, Jesus.

PATTY

The Peterson girl's missing.

ARTHUR

What's that?

PERUSAL

PATTY

Marcy Peterson. Second girl this year.

ARTHUR

Yeah, I see that. It's awful.

PATTY

First was Casey Gilbert. Monsters everywhere.

ARTHUR

Out there, yes. But not in here. I won't allow it.

(Silence.)

Just bring me my dinner.

PATTY

It's not ready.

ARTHUR

I'm hungry. Bring it now.

PATTY

(Quietly.)

It's not like you're wasting away.

ARTHUR

What was that?

PATTY

Nothing. And I'm not serving you a cold plate. You'll just complain.

(Quietly.)

I mean, what the heck?

(He huffs. She heads down the hall.)

ARTHUR

Where are you going?

PERUSAL

PATTY

(Off.)

I'll be right back.

ARTHUR

That's not what I asked.

PATTY

(Off.)

A little patience would be much appreciated.

(She returns with a brochure.)

ARTHUR

What's this?

PATTY

A brochure.

ARTHUR

For what?

PATTY

Look for yourself.

(He glances, hands it back.)

ARTHUR

No.

PATTY

Why?

ARTHUR

Not what I want for you.

PATTY

What about what I want?

ARTHUR

I don't understand why women insist on complicating things.

PERUSAL

PATTY

Complicatimg / things?

ARTHUR

/ Everything's already set up in a way where you don't have anything you need to do.

PATTY

I'm sorry, what?

ARTHUR

It's been that way for a very long time, Patty. And if it works then why go messing with it?

PATTY

You think women don't have anything to do?

ARTHUR

At home, sure. But out there? It's harder. More stress, more responsibility. It's no place for a woman.

PATTY

You're acting like I'd just run off and leave you here to fend for yourself. It's not that far. I'll still be at home. I'd still have time to pack your lunch before I head off to class.

ARTHUR

And how would you get there, Patty?

PATTY

Bus.

ARTHUR

Nearest stop is five miles away.

PATTY

And it's on your way to work.

ARTHUR

(He chuckles.)

Oh, no. No, no, no. I won't be driving you.

PATTY

Not even to the bus stop?

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

Not even to the bus stop.

PATTY

Then I'll get a bike.

ARTHUR

You don't even know how to ride a bike.

PATTY

Teach me.

ARTHUR

No. And it's dangerous, you traveling on those roads.

PATTY

Daddy, I–

ARTHUR

Enough. I said no.

(Silence.)

Why wouldn't you want a life where everything you need is handed to you? It's what you have now, isn't it? And it'll have when you meet the right man. Get me another beer.

(Timer goes off.)

ARTHUR

My dinner's ready.

(Patty doesn't move.)

Well? Hop to it.

(Patty returns to the kitchen, removes the plate from the oven, and sets it on the stovetop. She unfolds a tray table beside Arthur, neatly arranging a knife, fork, and napkin. Then, retrieving the plate, she carries it to him. After a brief pause, she lifts it and brings it down onto his head. End of scene.)

PERUSAL

SCENE 2

The present. Early morning.

(CODY HODGES, the local deputy, appears at the window. He peers inside, then heads toward the front door, but slips and falls out of sight.)

CODY

(Off.)

Goddamit! Son of–!

PATRICE

(Off, down the hallway.)

What the heck is going on out there? Who is / that?

CODY

(Off.)

/ Oh, God, no. No, no, no, this can't be happening. Oh, Jesus.

(A toilet flushes.)

PATRICE

(Off, down the hallway.)

I'll be right out!

(Off, the deputy throws up.)

Whoever you are, you better not be drunk! I don't have patience for people who drink!

(PATRICE BEAN enters from the hallway, muttering.)

Not to mention it's not even seven o'clock in the GD morning.

(She goes to the window and opens it.)

Well, what do you know? Deputy Cody Hodges. Fine day to be sitting outside my window in your own filth.

CODY

(Off.)

I am not sitting in my own filth, and you know it.

PERUSAL

PATRICE

Between whatever that is and the vomit, your dry-cleaning bill's gonna be outrageous. Hope the taxpayers aren't footing that bill.

CODY

(Off.)

That's not funny, Patrice.

PATRICE

Yeah, well, I think maybe it is. Careful getting up there.

(Cody rises into view at the window.)

CODY

May I come in?

PATRICE

You may not. You're filthy. Go rinse off in the creek. I'll make coffee and meet you on the porch.

CODY

I don't have time for coffee. I need to talk to you now.

PATRICE

Then you'll have to do it from out there.

CODY

Not sure why it matters if I come in like this anyway.

PATRICE

You got something to say about how I keep my home, Deputy Hodges?

CODY

As a matter of fact, I do. And I've got plenty to say about the veritable minefield of bear excrement you've got out here.

PATRICE

I see. Well, go on. You've got my full attention.

(Cody leans in.)

CODY

We're getting complaints–

PERUSAL

PATRICE

From who?

CODY

Doesn't matter.

PATRICE

I'd like to know.

CODY

Why? So you can add them to that little hit list of yours?

PATRICE

Pfft.

CODY

You're this close to having us bring adult protective services out here.

PATRICE

Adult protect– What're you talking about? What the heck for?

CODY

It's not good for you to live like this.

PATRICE

Like what?

CODY

Take a look around.

PATRICE

So what? So, I've got a few too many things. What's that got to do with you? Or with anyone else for that matter?

CODY

You might be surprised to hear this, but I actually agree with you. What people do in their own homes is generally their business…

PATRICE

Perfect. Time for you to skedaddle then.

PERUSAL

CODY

… Except what's going on inside your home is causing problems outside of it. For me, in particular. So, here's what you're gonna do–

PATRICE

Oh, no. No one's telling me what to do. This is still a free country.

CODY

It is. But there are laws. And what you're doing, what you've done, is you've broken the law.

PATRICE

Oh? And which law would that be?

CODY

You're a public nuisance.

PATRICE

I'm flattered, but this is private property.

CODY

Doesn't matter. You've got garbage piled up all over the place out here.

PATRICE

I make my own compost.

CODY

Tossing trash onto your lawn isn't composting.

PATRICE

What do you know about it?

CODY

I know it's attracting wildlife. And it's dangerous.

PATRICE

We're surrounded by wildlife, Deputy Hodges.

CODY

Yeah, I understand that. But you're encouraging animals to come into people's yards, Patrice. In a way, you're training them to do just that. You understand what I'm saying?

PERUSAL

PATRICE

I barely made it through high school, dropped outta community college, but I've got a decent grasp of the English language, if that's what you're getting at.

CODY

Oh, Jesus. I'm just trying to have a sensible conversation with you. And I'd appreciate it if you took this seriously.

PATRICE

So, what do you want me to do?

CODY

You can start by cleaning up your yard. And if you need help, let me know.

PATRICE

I don't need help. I don't want anyone up here. Least of all you.

CODY

Fine. Easiest way to keep me out of your hair is to do what I've told you. And while you're at it, clean up in here too. It's a mess. And it stinks.

PATRICE

You stink.

CODY

Difference is, I'll fix that when I get home. Now, when I come back next week, I don't wanna see so much as a mouse turd within a hundred feet of your front door.

PATRICE

The only turd you'll find within a hundred feet of my door will be you.

CODY

I'll take that less as an insult and more as a commitment to cleaning things up around here.

PATRICE

Take it however you like. Are we done?

CODY

Not quite. There's something else I wanted to tell you.

PATRICE

Oh, geez. What now?

PERUSAL

CODY

Debbie and I got engaged.

PATRICE

What?

CODY

Debbie McKeever. Waits tables at the Carriage House Inn. Pretty brunette–

PATRICE

Yeah, I know who she is. Nice girl. I didn't know you two were, uh…

CODY

Little over a year now.

PATRICE

I see. Well, congratulations. Though I didn't realize she had problems with her eyesight.

CODY

Problems with her eye–? Ah. I get it. If you're saying I'm lucky to have her, you're absolutely right. Just thought I'd share some good news with you.

PATRICE

Good news for you, I suppose. Anything else?

CODY

No. I'll see you soon, Patrice.

PATRICE

Looking forward to it.

(He's off.)

You've been bumped to the top of that hit list, by the way.

CODY

(Off.)

I'm flattered.

(End of Scene.)

PERUSAL

SCENE 3

The present. Late at night. The house is dark.

(A quiet moment. A large black bear lumbers past the window, huffing and growling. A light clicks on in the hallway. Patrice peers out.)

PATRICE

I can hear you out there, you big bastard.

(She moves into the room, goes to the window, and opens it.)

You hungry? I think I've got some cake. It's not from scratch, or even from a box mix, but it does come in a box.

(She searches through the mess.)

Okay, now where the heck is it? Raspberry… maybe cherry… Might not even be a cake at all; could be a strudel or a Danish. Who the heck knows?

(She finds it.)

Here it is. Nope. Definitely cake. Iced lemon to be exact. Probably stale, but what do you care? You're a bear.

(She returns to the window, holds out the box, gives it a little shake.)

What do you think? You wanna give it a try?

(She opens the box.)

There's just a little mold around the edges, but I'll just, uh… pull that off…

(She does.)

And now it's as good as… well, as good as it's gonna get.

(Big Bastard growls softly.)

You know, despite what I've heard, you seem pretty docile. Though you are a very big fella. What are you, six hundred pounds? Maybe more? The largest bear on record was eight hundred and eighty pounds; I'll have you know. Read that on the internet. I'm just telling you, so you don't get all smug about it. You're big, but you're not that big. And you're not all that scary, either.

(Big Bastard huffs. She shakes the box again.)

So, do you want this or not?

(Big Bastard growls softly.)

Okay. I'll just… leave it right here. Help yourself.

PERUSAL

(She sets the cake on the windowsill.)

Listen… I feel like I should tell you this, though I'm not sure why, but I'm not well. Haven't been for a very long time. Honestly, I should've kicked it by now, but here I still am. It's mostly my kidneys and liver. Some intestinal issues too. I'm a GD mess. My doctor says I'm a miracle. Pfft. A miracle. You know how many pills I take a day?

(Big Bastard huffs.)

Yeah, me neither. Which is why I asked. I've got one of those seven-day pill cases. Jumbo size. If you can imagine. Packed full of medicines. I can barely even close it anymore.

(Big Bastard growls softly.)

I appreciate your concern, but there's nothing anyone can do. So, I take the pills and then I hope for the best. Some days are good, some are bad… I guess that's how it goes. For everyone. You included, I expect.

Oh, and hey. It took me two days to clean up that yard, so I'd appreciate it if you didn't make a mess out there. Otherwise, that could be the end of our special little visits.

(Big Bastard huffs.)

Mm hm. Deputy Hodges is onto us. Says I'm encouraging you. I mean, really… what difference does it make what I do if you're just showing up here? You are just coming here, right? Not wandering onto anyone else's property?

(Big Bastard huffs.)

Okay. I hope not. People like to feel safe, especially in their own homes. So maybe leave the neighbors alone, and I'll make sure you get what you need right here. You understand?

(Big Bastard growls softly.)

Good. Glad we've got that sorted. I don't need any more trouble. Got plenty of that already.

Well… I suppose it's time I went back to bed. Big day tomorrow.

(Big Bastard huffs.)

Hey. I don't need your sass. And what do you know? I'm a very busy woman. Lots to do around here. And I've gotta get up a little earlier than usual to take care of something I've been putting off for far too long.

(Big Bastard growls softly.)

Yeah, well, I'm not in the mood to talk about it. It's late. Sorry I brought it up.

(Big Bastard huffs.)

Enjoy your cake. And get some sleep. Or whatever it is you do at this hour. And whatever it is, keep to yourself. I mean it.

PERUSAL

(She closes the window and heads down the hallway. End of Scene.)

SCENE 4

The present. Morning. Sunlight fills the house.

(The room appears to be empty. A quiet moment, then the phone rings. Patrice snorts and pops up from beneath a pile of papers.)

PATRICE

What the heck?

(She makes her way to the phone and answers.)

Yeah…? Who's asking…? Jenna…? Well, I don't know any Jenna, so… Sorry, what's that…? Oh. Well, that's a very unfortunate last name, Jenna; I can see why you might hesitate to share it… You don't hear it? I mean, it's right there. Maybe if you say it out loud a few times…? Mm hm. Listen, can you hold on a second?

(She sets the receiver down, finds a Post-it pad and pen, and writes as she speaks.)

Reminder: Do not, under any circumstances, answer the phone ever again.

(She sticks the Post-it on the receiver, then picks the phone back up.)

Okay. So, what can I do for you, Miss Talia…? Mm hm… You're a what…? A paralegal…? Oh, I see. So, they've skipped the big guns this time and brought out the cap pistol. That can mean one of two things: either they're getting cocky, or they've given up… Uh-huh… No, I haven't had a chance to review those documents yet, but it's on my list, make no mistake… Right… Understood… Yes, you'll have my response soon. In the meantime, I do have an entirely separate response I'm prepared to share right now, but I don't think it'd be helpful for either of us… Okay then… Yes, of course. I'll be in touch… Oh, don't worry; I've got your number… Alright. You have a lovely day. Bye now.

(She hangs up, grabs the Post-it pad again, and writes.)

Reminder: Don't bother paying the phone bill.

(She digs through papers, finds the phone bill, and sticks the Post-it on it. A knock at the door.)

Who's there?

(BRENDA SIMMONS stands on the porch.)

BRENDA

Good morning, Patrice!

PERUSAL

PATRICE

Says you, Brenda. What do you want? I happen to be very busy at the moment!

BRENDA

I was hoping we could have a little chat!

PATRICE

(Quietly, to herself, as she heads for the door.)

I've been very popular lately. Must be what the Queen of England feels like. Except she's dead now. Lucky stiff.

(She opens the door.)

Alright. Make it quick, Brenda.

BRENDA

You mind if I come in?

PATRICE

As a matter of fact, I do. We'll talk out here.

(She steps out, closing the door behind her, moving past Brenda onto the porch.)

So, what is it?

BRENDA

Have I done something to upset you?

PATRICE

Is that what you came here to ask me?

BRENDA

No. But I'd like to know. I mean, because I feel like I've been nothing but nice to you.

PATRICE

How so?

BRENDA

Well… I guess I'm just trying to understand why you have all this animosity toward me. I mean, I'm not a terrible person.

PERUSAL

PATRICE

I'm like this with everyone, Brenda. Equal opportunity and all that.

BRENDA

I see. Well, I'm not discouraged. I'm determined to win you over.

PATRICE

In that case, I hope you've experienced disappointment at least once in your life. It'll soften the blow. So, can we get to the point? I mean, what the heck?

BRENDA

Right. Okay. Now listen. People around here are a little concerned. And it's not just me. I just happen to be the one delivering the message

PATRICE

Ah. I see. Brenda drew the short straw.

BRENDA

It was a pack of skewers, actually; we were having a neighborhood barbecue. But yes, it was me. And honestly, it probably would've been me anyway since no one else was willing to talk to you.

PATRICE

Fair enough. So, is this about that bear or what?

BRENDA

Well… yes. As a matter of fact, it is.

PATRICE

Then I assume you know Deputy Hodges has already been here. And if you hadn't noticed, my yard is now spotless. I did what I was told. Everything's in order. So, you're free to get the heck off my property.

BRENDA

We do appreciate what you've done. That hasn't gone unnoticed. Except–

PATRICE

Except what?

BRENDA

You need to be careful.

PERUSAL

PATRICE

Careful?

BRENDA

Come on, Patrice. What are you doing messing around with a bear? A wild bear. I get it. You're a little… unconventional. Cantankerous. You like being left alone to do whatever the hell you want. But you're gonna get yourself killed. You understand that?

PATRICE

You don't know what you're talking / about.

BRENDA

/ I know exactly what I'm talking about. I've got eyes and / ears.

PATRICE

/ Oh, do you? So, you've been spying on me? Is that what you've / been doing?

BRENDA

/ You're not as clever as you think, Patrice. Maybe you've got Deputy Hodges / fooled, but–

PATRICE

/ Maybe you and Deputy Hodges are conspiring against / me.

BRENDA

/ No one is conspiring against you.

PATRICE

Tell that to the people trying to take my land.

(Silence.)

BRENDA

What? What are you talking about? Who's trying to take your land?

(Patrice is tightlipped.)

Patrice?

PATRICE

(Slyly.)

Aliens.

PERUSAL

BRENDA

Aliens.

PATRICE

Mm hm. That's right, Brenda. Aliens are trying to take my land.

(She gestures to the sky.)

BRENDA

Right. Well, as I was just about to say, you can't fool me. Anyway… I've said what I've come to say. Take it or leave it; that's up to you. But if you're in real trouble and need to talk, you know where to find me. I'll be the one watching you through binoculars from my living room window.

(Brenda starts off.)

PATRICE

Wait. Hold on. I've got something for you.

BRENDA

Oh, do you?

PATRICE

Yeah. Just a second.

(Patrice heads inside, grabs the Post-it pad and pen, then returns. She writes as she speaks.)

Reminder: Brenda Simmons is a nuisance. Steer clear.

(She sticks the Post-it to Brenda's forehead.)

BRENDA

You know, this is why you don't get invited to the neighborhood barbecues.

(Brenda peels the Post-it off and exits. End of scene.)

SCENE 5

The past. Early evening. Continuous from Scene 1… except something is different.

(The kitchen timer goes off.)

ARTHUR

My dinner's ready.

PERUSAL

(Patty doesn't move.)

Well? Hop to it.

(Patty returns to the kitchen, removes the plate from the oven, and sets it on the stovetop. She unfolds a tray table beside Arthur, arranging a knife, fork, and napkin neatly. Then, retrieving the plate, she carries it over. After a brief pause, she sets it on the tray table.)

PATTY

Here you go, Daddy.

ARTHUR

Thank you, sweetheart.

(FLOYD HODGES, the local deputy sheriff, stands on the porch and knocks.)

What the hell's the matter with people? Who comes knocking at / dinnertime?

PATTY

/ You just keep eating. I'll get it.

(Patty crosses to the door and opens it.)

FLOYD

Hi, Patty.

ARTHUR

Oh, geez. Floyd, what're you doing here?

FLOYD

Hey, Arthur. Sorry to bother you.

ARTHUR

Are you, though?

PATTY

Don't mind him, Floyd. Come on in.

FLOYD

Thank you.

(Floyd enters.)

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

So, what do you want?

PATTY

Settle down, Daddy. I'm sure it's important or he wouldn't be here.

FLOYD

Patty's right, Arthur. I've been stopping by all the houses in the area. Got several more after this, so I expect I won't be very popular come tomorrow.

ARTHUR

I'd argue that you're already unpopular.

PATTY

Alright, that's enough. What's going on, Floyd? This about those missing girls?

FLOYD

Yeah, it is. And to be frank, we're not making much progress. There are similarities between the two victims. Casey and Marcy are about the same age, same build, dark blonde hair, brown eyes–

PATTY

Should I be worried?

FLOYD

What? No. No, there's no need for you to worry.

PATTY

And why not?

FLOYD

Well, for starters, they're both younger than you.

PATTY

Not by much.

FLOYD

Oh, come on now, Patty–

ARTHUR

You said "victims".

PERUSAL

FLOYD

What's that, Arthur?

ARTHUR

You called them victims. Victims of what? Maybe they just ran away.

FLOYD

Maybe. But it's not likely.

ARTHUR

And how do you know that?

FLOYD

Well… by all accounts, they were both happy. At home and at school. No signs of abuse or neglect. And then they just… disappeared. No warning. No trace. I mean, we can't rule out that they left on their own. But like I said, it's not likely.

ARTHUR

Uh huh. So, what do you want from us? You know, because nothing's changed since the last time you stopped by.

FLOYD

No?

ARTHUR

No.

FLOYD

I see. And how about you, Patty?

PATTY

I'm sorry, Floyd. We do know Casey; she doesn't live far from here, as you know, and we see her now and then. But Marcy… we don't really know the Petersons. Never had the chance to meet them.

FLOYD

Alright. Understood. Well, if anything changes, just let us know. If you see or hear anything unusual, just give us a call. You can reach me at home too. Day or night.

(He hands Patty a business card.)

PERUSAL

Because we've gotta keep looking. People are scared. Especially folks with kids. Me included.

ARTHUR

What're you talking about? You've got a boy. Nothing for you to worry about.

FLOYD

Maybe. But I'll sleep better when these girls are found and brought home safe. And if someone took them… we need to find out who and stop it.

PATTY

He starts kindergarten soon, doesn't he?

FLOYD

What's that?

PATTY

Your son. He starts kindergarten soon.

FLOYD

He does, yeah. Just turned five, actually.

PATTY

Oh, well, that's very sweet. I wish I'd known. I would've gotten him something.

FLOYD

No, no. He's spoiled rotten. He's got plenty, don't you worry.

PATTY

Hold on a second.

(Patty heads quickly down the hallway.)

ARTHUR

Patty!

PATTY

(Off.)

A little patience would be much appreciated. I mean, what the heck?

ARTHUR

Listen, I don't know what the hell she's doing in there, Floyd, but whatever it is, I think maybe we're done here. Don't you?

PERUSAL

FLOYD

Uh, yeah. Yeah, of course. Sorry, Arthur. I'll let you get back to your dinner just as soon as–

ARTHUR

I've already finished my dinner. I just think maybe it's time for you to go.

(Calling off.)

Patty!

(Patty enters from the hallway, holding a small teddy bear.)

PATTY

Here you go, Floyd. It's not much.

(Floyd takes the teddy bear.)

FLOYD

Oh. Well, / thank you.

ARTHUR

/ What do you got there?

PATTY

It's just my old teddy bear, Daddy.

ARTHUR

I gave you that teddy bear.

PATTY

Yeah, you did. And it's been sitting on a shelf in my closet for the last ten years or so.

ARTHUR

So, put it back.

PATTY

I will do no such thing.

(To Floyd.)

You make sure your son gets this. I expect he'll enjoy it.

FLOYD

I expect he will.

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

So, you're just gonna give away something your Daddy got for you? Is that what you're gonna do? Guess it means nothing to you.

PATTY

Maybe it does mean something to me. Maybe instead of throwing it out, I decided to give it to Floyd's son… so he can enjoy it the way I did. Ever think of that? Of course you didn't. You're too busy worrying about yourself.

ARTHUR

You've got a mouth on you. She's got a mouth on her, hasn't she, Floyd?

FLOYD

Oh, I don't know, Arthur. She speaks her mind. And I think that's alright.

PATTY

His name's Cody.

FLOYD

Cody?

PATTY

The teddy bear. I named him Cody. Of course, your son can call him something else if he likes.

FLOYD

No, no. Cody it is. I like it. It's different.

ARTHUR

Oh, geez. Alright. Maybe you and Cody can hit the road now, Floyd, huh?

FLOYD

You got it, Arthur. Long night ahead of me anyway. I should keep moving.

ARTHUR

Yeah, you do that.

FLOYD

Thanks again, Patty.

PATTY

My pleasure.

PERUSAL

(Patty studies the teddy bear.)

Oh, darn it. And would you look at that.

FLOYD

What's the matter?

PATTY

There's a… Oh, boy. I'm just now seeing a loose thread here on the top of his head. You know what, let me stitch that up real quick.

FLOYD

No, no. It's fine. I'll take care of it.

ARTHUR

Why wouldn't you let your wife handle it?

FLOYD

She's got plenty to do, Arthur. And I don't mind. I learned how to sew my own patches in the Boy Scouts. I think I can handle it.

ARTHUR

Oh, Jesus. Just give Patty the damn bear, Floyd. It's not a man's job to stitch up a goddam stuffed animal.

FLOYD

It's not a problem, / Arthur.

PATTY

/ It's alright, Floyd. I'm happy to do it. You should get going. Tell you what. I'll swing by the station sometime soon and bring him to you.

FLOYD

You sure?

ARTHUR

She's sure.

FLOYD

Alright then.

(He hands the teddy bear back to Patty.)

You both have a good evening.

PERUSAL

PATTY

Goodnight, Floyd.

(Floyd exits.)

ARTHUR

You know, you don't need to be so friendly with folks around here. Especially the police.

PATTY

I'm just trying to be helpful.

ARTHUR

Best we keep to ourselves. Mind our own damn business. And I don't appreciate you giving away something I gave you. Something I paid good money for.

PATTY

It's just a teddy bear, Daddy. I hardly think it's worth much.

ARTHUR

You need to show some respect. You understand? It doesn't matter what it cost. It's from me. From your daddy. And if that's not enough to keep you from handing it over to some nosy cop, then I guess you don't give a damn how much it means to me.

PATTY

(Unfazed.)

I see. Well, I'm sorry, Daddy. I had no idea.

ARTHUR

And before I forget, give me that card.

PATTY

What card?

ARTHUR

The one Floyd gave you. With his number on it. Give it to me. I'll hang onto it.

PATTY

Of course, Daddy.

(She hands him the card.)

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

Be careful, Patty. You're turning into your mother

(End of scene.)

SCENE 6

The present. Afternoon.

(Brenda sits on the porch with a laptop. An open folder of papers rests nearby. Patrice enters carrying a pitcher of tea or lemonade.)

PATRICE

You planning to scrutinize those papers all day?

(She refills Brenda's glass.)

BRENDA

These aren't just papers, Patrice. This is your land we're talking about. At least, I think it is.

PATRICE

What? What's that supposed to mean? This land's been mine since my daddy passed.

BRENDA

There are two deeds on file here. One from your father to you in 1985. And another from 1951, under a different name, with different boundaries.

PATRICE

So? Some old paperwork doesn't change what belongs to me.

BRENDA

It might. The older deed was never fully cleared.

PATRICE

Who's on it?

BRENDA

Dennis Birrell.

PATRICE

Never heard of him.

PERUSAL

BRENDA

He died in 1991. No will. No probate. And the county never completely resolved the title.

PATRICE

This land's been in my family since before I was born. My daddy built this house. If there was some other claim, he would've known about it. I mean, / what the heck?

BRENDA

/ Maybe. Maybe not. But someone from the Birrell family is claiming it now.

PATRICE

So what? So, somebody's gonna show up here with a backhoe? Start digging things up? Knocking things down?

BRENDA

Could be more than that. You might be getting yourself a new neighbor /, Patrice.

PATRICE

/ Oh, no. No, no, / no, no, no.

BRENDA

/ Look at this map.

(She pulls a map from the folder and shows it to Patrice.)

If this boundary's right, your property may only reach your vegetable garden out there. About forty, maybe fifty yards from the house.

PATRICE

That's not right. That cypress tree marks the boundary. Not the garden.

BRENDA

Are you listening to me?

PATRICE

I'm doing my best not to.

BRENDA

What I'm saying is, if they're right–

PATRICE

They're not.

PERUSAL

BRENDA

But if they are, a good chunk of this land might not be yours. You understand that?

PATRICE

Why are you getting involved, Brenda?

BRENDA

Because you asked me to look into it. And… maybe because you still have time to fix this. Maybe I can help.

PATRICE

Well, I've changed my mind. I don't want your help.

BRENDA

You don't want anyone's help.

PATRICE

That's right.

BRENDA

Okay. I suppose I should just head on / home then.

PATRICE

/ I planted that cypress tree.

BRENDA

Oh, yeah?

PATRICE

Mm hm.

BRENDA

Plenty of cypress trees around here, Patrice.

PATRICE

What's your point?

BRENDA

Just not an interesting choice is all I'm saying. Other than it just standing out there by itself, it mostly just mixes in with everything behind it. An Australian Willow would've been a better choice. Beautiful tree. Or a line of Western Rosebuds for some color. But a cypress tree? Hm. I don't know. I'm sure you had your reasons.

PERUSAL

PATRICE

Didn't cost me anything to plant it there.

BRENDA

It kind of reminds me of you. Trying to blend in but it's not doing a very good job of it.

(CODY HODGES appears.)

CODY

Oh, geez. Well, I'll be damned. Brenda Simmons, are you okay?

BRENDA

Of course I'm okay. Why wouldn't I be?

CODY

Blink twice if you're being held here against your will.

BRENDA

You really ought to know better than to show up here looking to cause trouble, Cody.

PATRICE

He's emboldened by your presence, Brenda. What do you want, Deputy Hodges?

CODY

Well, I happen to be a man of my word. I told you I'd be checking in to make sure you got things cleaned up.

PATRICE

Then by all means, take a look around. Maybe if you spent less time talking and more time walking, you'd notice I actually did what you asked.

CODY

Yeah, well… I already stopped by earlier this morning. Everything looks good. Nicely done, Patrice.

PATRICE

I see. Then what're you doing here? Hm? Arrested the last hooker in Sierra County and decided to move on to old ladies with messy homes?

BRENDA

Patrice!

PERUSAL

CODY

Well, as it happens, hookers aside, of course, I was actually hoping to get your permission to take a look inside your house.

PATRICE

Pfft. Absolutely not. I mean, what the / heck?

CODY

/ It's for your own health, Patrice.

PATRICE

My house is messy, I'll admit. But it is not filthy. I am not a filthy person.

CODY

I didn't say you were.

PATRICE

You sure about that?

BRENDA

Maybe you should go, Cody. Actually, I'm gonna head out myself.

CODY

You know, I heard you used to be a nice lady, Patrice. At least once upon a time.

PATRICE

Says who?

CODY

My Dad.

PATRICE

Your Dad's got a bad memory.

CODY

My Granddad was fond of you too.

PATRICE

Well, he wasn't a very smart man, so…

(She shrugs.)

PERUSAL

BRENDA

Come on. Let's go, Cody.

(Brenda starts gathering her things.)

Listen, Patrice. Ignoring this isn't gonna make it disappear. And you can't just bully your way through it on your own this time. You know that, right? So, if you need help, ask for it. And if you do need help… maybe next time don't act like such an ingrate

PATRICE

Oh, my goodness, Brenda.

BRENDA

I'm sorry, but it needed to be said.

PATRICE

Do you remember recently when you told me you were determined to win me over?

BRENDA

Yeah. What about it?

PATRICE

I think you just did.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 7

The present. Late in the evening.

(A pot of boiling water sits on the stove. A bowl and a box of instant oatmeal rest nearby. Patrice enters from the hallway, flipping through documents from the previous scene. Unseen by her, Big Bastard lumbers past the window and disappears. He's restless, impatient, agitated. Scratching at the exterior wall. Light at first, then louder. More insistent.)

PATRICE

What the heck? What on earth is he doing out there?

(Big Bastard strikes the wall.)

Oh, no. No, no, no. You will not be doing that. You behave like that; you don't get any treats. You understand? Now get outta here!

PERUSAL

(Big Bastard strikes the wall again. Patrice moves to the window, looks out.)

You stop that! You hear me? What's wrong with you?

(Big Bastard growls menacingly. Patrice shuts and locks the window and closes and locks the interior shutters. Big Bastard strikes the wall.)

Enough! You're gonna break something!

(Big Bastard strikes the wall. Something inside falls and shatters.)

Now what did I just say? Look at what you've done!

(Big Bastard strikes the wall.)

Enough is enough, do you hear me!?

(Big Bastard goes silent. A long, tense moment passes before he suddenly lashes out, smashing the window. Glass shatters as he slams into the interior shutters, straining but not breaking them. Patrice lets out a stifled scream.)

Alright then. If that's how you wanna do this, then that's how we'll do it. I've got something you're not gonna like. So, you better skedaddle if you know what's good for you!

(She grabs the pot of boiling water and rushes onto the porch, disappearing around back.)

Step away from my house, you big bastard!

(Big Bastard huffs.)

I mean it. Because if you don't, I'm gonna throw this. And it's gonna burn like hell!

(Big Bastard growls menacingly.)

So that's your answer?

(Big Bastard huffs.)

Alright. You asked for it!

(Patrice throws the water at Big Bastard. He bawls in pain. She hurls the pot at him. Another cry, he runs off.)

I mean, what the heck?

(She reappears, shaken, hurries back inside. She paces, then grabs the phone and dials 911, reluctantly.)

Uh, yes. This is Patrice Bean, over on Saddleback Road… Oh! Hi, Colleen. Sorry, didn't recognize your voice; maybe you should ease up on those cigarettes, what do you think, huh…?

PERUSAL

Right, uh… My emergency. Yeah. So, listen… What…? Oh, geez. Yes, it is about that bear, but I don't need the whole town getting their shorts in a knot over this. Okay? So, if you could just…? Uh huh. Yeah, so, he's, uh, the bear, he's gotten a little aggressive, I guess. But maybe he's just having a bad day. Or maybe he's not feeling so well… Mm-hm... Exactly. That's why I was hoping you could send Deputy Hodges over. If he's on duty or if he's not too busy… Oh, that would be great, Colleen. Thank you. Really. Thank you so much… Oh, and Colleen? I know you like to talk, probably why you got a job with a phone, but if you could just do me a big favor and keep this between us, I'd really appreciate it… Hello? Colleen?

(End of scene.)

SCENE 8

The present. Late evening. Not long after the previous scene.

(Patrice stands on her porch. A quiet moment. Cody appears from behind the house.)

CODY

Alright. Well, he definitely did some damage to your walls back there. A little sanding and some wood filler should take care of most of it, though there are a few deeper scratches. If you need to replace any siding, I've got a buddy who can get me cedar at a good price. And Glen Morris can handle that window. Happy to give him a call. You have insurance, Patrice?

PATRICE

Insurance? Well… it's possible. I'd have to take a look.

CODY

Right. Hey. Why don't you let me get in there and clean up that glass for you?

PATRICE

I'll take care of it.

CODY

I don't mind.

PATRICE

I don't want you killing that bear.

CODY

Oh. Okay. Well, if you mean you don't want anyone putting him down, that's not really up to me. And listen. I get it. You're not too worried about your own safety, but I've gotta make sure what happened here doesn't happen to anyone else. You understand? People have guns, Patrice. If they feel threatened, they'll do what they have to do to protect their families.

PERUSAL

PATRICE

(Quietly.)

Big bastard.

CODY

What's that?

PATRICE

Big bastard. That's what I've been calling him. The bear.

CODY

Better him than me, I guess.

PATRICE

Yeah. Well, you're not so big.

CODY

I see. Okay…

(He starts off.)

PATRICE

Oh, hey.

CODY

What?

PATRICE

Just curious how the wedding planning's coming along.

CODY

Oh, yeah?

PATRICE

Assuming Debbie hasn't come to her senses yet.

CODY

You actually interested? Or just looking to get one last dig in before I go.

PATRICE

Why can't it be both?

PERUSAL

CODY

Because either you're a decent human being or you're not. It's either one or the other but it's not / both.

PATRICE

/ Alright, settle down. I was / just kidding.

CODY

/ You keep hiding behind that sarcasm, / Patrice.

PATRICE

Oh, now / come on.

CODY

/ Always keeping me on edge. Waiting for me to slip up so you can pounce. Call out my mistakes. Remind me of my shortcomings. Make me feel small. And then what? I'm supposed to just keep coming back?

PATRICE

And yet here you are.

CODY

Because it's my job to protect and serve everyone. That includes people who don't understand what respect means. Before I go, though…

PATRICE

Mm hm.

CODY

I came across some evidence I thought you should see.

PATRICE

Evidence?

CODY

Yeah. Though I'm not sure it'll make any difference at this point.

PATRICE

What is it?

PERUSAL

CODY

(Cody pulls out the teddy bear.)

You recognize this?

PATRICE

I might.

CODY

You gave this to my granddad. A long time ago. A gift for my dad. You remember?

PATRICE

I remember.

CODY

It was a nice gesture.

PATRICE

It was nothing.

CODY

Was it? Because he appreciated it. And my dad kept it all these years; even named me after the little guy. Must've meant something to both of them.

PATRICE

It's just a teddy bear.

CODY

I think it's more than just that. I think it might be proof that you were, at least at one time, someone who cared. Really cared… about others. But like I said, I don't know if it matters now.

PATRICE

Well, you're right about one thing. I'm not the same person I used to be. And while I hate to burst your little bubble, my reason for giving that bear to your granddad wasn't as selfless as you think.

(She takes the teddy bear. Handles it gently, pressing its belly, stroking its ear, rubbing its head.)

But just in case it does make a difference… I'll ask you to remember one thing, Deputy Hodges.

CODY

What's that?

PERUSAL

PATRICE

It's the thought that counts.

(She taps the bear lightly on the head and hands it back. End of Act 1.)

PERUSAL

ACT 2

SCENE 1

The past. Early evening.

(A muffled scream in the darkness. As lights rise, Patty stumbles away from the house, shaken. Her clothes are dirt-streaked, her hair disheveled. She clutches a newspaper. Inside, Arthur enters in a bathrobe, calling out.)

ARTHUR

You find the paper, Patty? Patty!

PATTY

Yeah, Daddy?

ARTHUR

Did you find the newspaper?

PATTY

Uh… Yeah. I've got it right here.

ARTHUR

Well, bring it to me.

PATTY

I'll be right there.

(Arthur moves into the kitchen, checking things.)

ARTHUR

(To himself.)

Alright. What do we have going on in here?

(Patty, short of breath, makes it to the porch. Overwhelmed, she sits on the steps. Arthur calls out.)

So, what's for dinner? Looks like spaghetti?

PATTY

That's exactly what I'm making, Daddy. Very observant.

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

Don't get smart with me. And what the hell are you doing out there? I'm waiting on that paper. And my beer.

PATTY

I'm coming.

(She forces herself up, heads inside. Arthur is settled in his chair. As she passes, she drops the paper into his lap. He grunts, opens it. She continues into the kitchen, starting on his beer.)

ARTHUR

What the hell happened to you?

PATTY

I fell.

ARTHUR

You fell?

PATTY

Yeah. Tripped over a root getting the paper.

ARTHUR

You're getting clumsy in your old age.

PATTY

In my old age? I mean, what the heck? I haven't even turned twenty yet.

ARTHUR

You know what I mean.

PATTY

What you mean to say is, I'm too old.

ARTHUR

Too old? What the hell are you talking about?

(Patty brings him his beer.)

PATTY

Here's your beer. Nice and cold.

PERUSAL

(He takes it.)

I've gotta get dinner started.

(She returns to the kitchen.)

ARTHUR

Do I have time for a bath?

PATTY

I still need to chop the vegetables, cook them, and get them into the sauce. Water's on. Just waiting for it to boil. Once it does, the spaghetti goes in. So, you tell me.

ARTHUR

You know damn well I've got no idea how long that takes. And let me be clear, Patty… this attitude? I don't appreciate it. It stops now.

PATTY

Yes, Daddy. You've got time for a bath.

ARTHUR

(Quietly.)

Goddam mouth on you lately.

PATTY

I'm just trying to help.

ARTHUR

It'd help if you didn't have a smart-ass remark for everything.

(He looks down at the paper. Patty chops vegetables.)

They, uh… They found that girl.

PATTY

Which one?

ARTHUR

Marcy Peterson.

PATTY

Is she–?

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

She's dead. Found what's left of her. Some animal tore her up bad. Cougar, maybe.

PATTY

That's awful. What about the other girl? Casey.

ARTHUR

They mention her too. Sounds like they think she ended up the same way.

PATTY

But they haven't found her.

ARTHUR

Not yet. But they will. And I expect it'll be the same story.

(Silence.)

I need you to run my bath.

PATTY

Daddy, I–

ARTHUR

Now.

PATTY

Okay.

(She sets down the knife, heads toward the hallway.)

ARTHUR

Patty…

PATTY

Yeah?

ARTHUR

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. When I said you were old. What I meant was, you're not my… Well. You're not my little girl anymore. And I guess that makes me a little sad. And I suppose it makes you sad too.

PATTY

Sad? No. No, it doesn't make me sad. If anything, I'm relieved.

PERUSAL

(She exits down the hallway.)

ARTHUR

I don't know what you're suggesting, Patty. But it sounds like you're about to cross a line you do not wanna cross. You need to watch yourself. You hear me? Patty?

(End of scene.)

SCENE 2

The present. Morning. Cody Hodges' desk at the police station.

(Cody sits at his desk, flipping through old case files. The teddy bear rests nearby. A quiet moment and then Brenda enters.)

BRENDA

Hey, Cody.

CODY

Jesus, Brenda. You scared the hell of out me. What're you doing here? Everything okay?

BRENDA

Yeah, everything's fine. I'm just here to see Colleen.

CODY

Colleen? What for?

BRENDA

She's gonna start training me on the switchboard. I'm your new part-time 911 operator.

CODY

Really? What about Geraldine?

BRENDA

She put in her notice. Five more days and she's gone.

CODY

Well, damn. I had no idea. I always liked Geraldine. She was a nice lady.

BRENDA

She still is. Maybe you should tell her that before she leaves. Flowers, a card… maybe even a little party. For a crime fighter, you're not very observant.

PERUSAL

CODY

Crime fighter? Pfft. All we get around here are shoplifters and drunks. You know Kenny Elrod, right?

BRENDA

Only by reputation.

CODY

Couple weeks back, he stumbled in here thinking this place was a motel. Asked for a room. Lost his house keys. Said he would've broken into his own place except he couldn't remember where it was. So, we gave him a room for the night.

BRENDA

That's very generous.

CODY

We try to be good hosts. Do what we can with what we've got.

(They share a laugh.)

I'm sorry about Geraldine, but I'm glad you're stepping in. Welcome aboard.

BRENDA

Thank you. I could use the extra money. And I don't mind the late shift; I've got plenty of books to keep me company.

CODY

Fair warning about Colleen: She smells like a dirty old ashtray.

BRENDA

Jesus. Really?

CODY

It's… pretty bad.

BRENDA

I'll bring nose plugs. So, what're you looking at?

CODY

Just some old case files.

BRENDA

Oh, yeah? How old?

PERUSAL

CODY

About forty-five years.

BRENDA

Forty-five? Wow. That's going back. Unsolved?

CODY

Not exactly.

BRENDA

Then what's got you so interested?

CODY

Arthur Bean.

BRENDA

Arthur Bean? What about him?

CODY

His name kept popping up in these two missing girl cases. One of the girls was found dead – wild animal attack. The other was never found, but they closed the case, thinking she likely met the same end.

BRENDA

Why would they do that? That girl could've been alive. Hurt. Taken. And they just… stopped looking? That's crazy.

CODY

I don't know. Maybe they didn't want folks to panic. Two young girls disappearing that close together. And they got lucky. No other girls went missing after that.

BRENDA

That's just plain bullshit.

CODY

One hundred percent.

BRENDA

And Arthur? What'd he have to do with it?

PERUSAL

CODY

He was named as a person of interest. Nothing concrete. Some odd behavior. Didn't wanna talk to the police. Most folks said he was difficult. Little paranoid. Not exactly friendly. So, it's not surprising he didn't roll out the welcome mat.

BRENDA

Why are you digging into this now?

CODY

My Granddad… Floyd. He was deputy sheriff at that time, and he was working on these cases.

BRENDA

Oh. So, this was personal.

CODY

No. Nothing like that. He wasn't that kind of guy. I think he just wanted the truth.

BRENDA

And you think he believed Arthur killed that girl?

CODY

I think he didn't buy the "wild animal" story. Not for a second. And he sure as hell didn't think it was random. Someone was responsible. He believed that. But something tells me the higher-ups were more interested in closing this case than solving it.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 3

The present. Evening.

(Patrice is curled in a chair. She's unwell. Big Bastard lumbers past the window, calmer this time. A few low huffs, light shifting.)

PATRICE

Well, well… look who's back. Couldn't stay away, huh.

So, tell me. Did you come to finish the job? Because if you did, you'll be pleased to know I've made things a little easier for you. I left the window open. Figured you might appreciate not having to break the glass this time. I mean, what the heck? That cost me an arm and a leg to replace, you know.

Anyway… here I am. Easy pickings. Still breathing, surprisingly, barely.

PERUSAL

And hey. If you're too big to squeeze through that window, just say the word. I'll drag myself over to the front door, unlock it, and open it for you. Maybe even roll out a red carpet while I'm at it. Whatever's easiest. Because I aim to please.

You know, I was reading the other day that when a bear attacks, it'll rear up on its hind legs, to make itself look bigger, before swiping its victim down. Then it goes in with one or two bites to the arms or legs. And if it's feeling particularly ambitious, it'll go for the head. Snap the neck, finish the job. And in rare cases… it might even eat the poor son of a gun.

(She laughs.)

You barely made it past step one with me the other night. Which tells me you weren't really trying to hurt me. Just having a bad day, weren't you? Big bastard.

But listen. If you do decide to hurt me, I strongly suggest you don't make a meal out of me. I'm so full of medicines, it'd be like eating a human pill pocket.

My daddy liked to eat. A lot. Not the only thing on his mind, but one of the more important ones. A big man with an even bigger appetite. No self-control. Never satisfied. Not with anything. Funny thing is, he had impossible standards… for a man who didn't have any standards at all.

I caught on early, though. Maybe not as early as I should have, but early enough to do something about it. And it cost me more than I ever meant to pay. More than I understood at the time.

So… my body might be done. But with any luck… my soul's still intact.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 4

The past. Very late at night. Floyd Hodges' desk at the police station.

(Floyd sits at his desk, going through files, maybe typing a report. A quiet moment. Patty appears, holding the teddy bear.)

PATTY

Hi, Floyd.

FLOYD

(A little startled.)

Patty.

(He takes her in. She's dirty, disheveled.)

Are you okay?

PERUSAL

PATTY

I'm fine.

FLOYD

I'm sorry, but you don't look fine. Are you hurt?

PATTY

No. I'm alright. I just… couldn't sleep. Thought I'd get some work done in the garden.

FLOYD

In the dark?

PATTY

It's cooler at night. And it's quiet. A lot of people garden at night. Penty of light.

FLOYD

Alright. So, what can I help you with?

PATTY

Oh, uh… I almost forgot why I came. Just thought I'd drop off little Cody here, like I said I would.

(She hands him the teddy bear. He takes it, looks it over.)

I couldn't find a matching thread, so I used what I had. And instead of trying to hide it, I figured… why not just make it stand out? You like it?

FLOYD

I do. I really do. Thank you.

(Silence.)

Is there something you wanna tell me? Something you need to tell me?

PATTY

Uh… no. No, I don't think so.

FLOYD

You don't think so?

PATTY

I'm sorry, Floyd but… some things shouldn't be… can't be… spoken out loud.

PERUSAL

FLOYD

Patty, listen. I've got a job to do. And to do it right, I need people in this community to step up and do their part. And I can't shake this feeling about that Casey Gilbert girl. I know the Chief wants us to move on, close the file, but I think we might be rushing it. Maybe she's dead. Chances are she is. But there's this nagging thought in the back of my mind… that the answer to what happened to her is closer than we think.

PATTY

You might be right.

FLOYD

Oh, yeah? How so?

(Patty says nothing.)

You know… it's not good to live in fear.

PATTY

Pfft. I'm not afraid. Just… disappointed, I suppose. And stuck. Not even twenty and I already feel like an old woman.

FLOYD

You're not an old woman. And no offense. But if you're stuck, it's because you're choosing to be.

PATTY

I should go home, Floyd.

FLOYD

Alright. Before you do… I'm here. If you need anything. If you need to talk. Or just need somewhere safe to be.

PATTY

You just make sure your son gets that teddy bear. And mind that stitch. It might come loose again.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 5

The past. Early evening. Continuous from Scene 1.

(Patty has just exited down the hallway to draw Arthur's bath.)

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

I don't know what you're suggesting, Patty. But it sounds like you're about to cross a line you do not wanna cross. You need to watch yourself. You hear me? Patty?

(Off, water runs as the tub begins to fill.)

Patty!

(No response. Quietly, to himself.)

Goddamit.

(Arthur moves to the front door, steps onto the porch, and makes his way around the front of the house. He crouches near a patch of brush, peering under the house. As he stands, something catches his eye. He bends, picks it up. A barrette. He studies it briefly, then heads back inside. Patty re-enters from the hallway.)

PATTY

Jesus, Daddy. Fix your robe.

ARTHUR

What?

PATTY

Your robe. Close it. I mean, what the heck?

(He hastily pulls it closed. The barrette slips from his hand. He quickly scoops it up.)

What is that?

ARTHUR

This? It's just… something I found outside.

PATTY

You were outside dressed like that?

ARTHUR

No one saw me.

PATTY

It looks like a barrette.

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

A what?

PATTY

A barrette. A hair clip… for girls. Keeps the bangs out of their eyes.

ARTHUR

Right.

PATTY

And as a matter of fact, it's probably mine. Must've fallen out when I tripped over that root. Let / me see it.

ARTHUR

/ There's no root out there.

PATTY

There's roots all over the place out / there, Daddy.

ARTHUR

/ Not where I found this, there isn't.

PATTY

And where exactly did you find it?

(Arthur goes still. He's said too much.)

Can I see it please?

(He shows it to her.)

Yeah… it's mine.

ARTHUR

It is?

PATTY

Mm hm. Just leave it there. I'll get it later.

(He hesitates and then sets it down.)

ARTHUR

Maybe you should get back to making dinner. I'm gonna take my bath.

PERUSAL

PATTY

Tub's not ready. I haven't put the salts in yet.

ARTHUR

Then keep an eye on it. I don't want that water spilling over.

PATTY

You want me to make dinner, or watch your bath? It's one or the other.

ARTHUR

(Working to control his temper.)

I'll take care of it.

(He heads down the hallway.)

PATTY

You're too damn fat for that tub anyway.

ARTHUR

(Off.)

What's that?

PATTY

I said, it's been ages since I've been in that tub.

ARTHUR

(Off.)

What the hell are you talking about? You're locked in here every morning. Wasting time, wasting water, making me late for work.

PATTY

I take showers, Daddy. I'm talking about the last time I took a bath.

ARTHUR

(Off.)

Yeah? So, what about it?

PATTY

I was just thinking… I guess the last time was when I had that rash from the poison oak. Mom put oatmeal in the water. For the itching. The swelling. And she stayed in there with me while I

PERUSAL

soaked. I always liked bath time with her. Sometimes we talked about serious things… school, what I wanted to be when I grew up. Other times… it was just about stupid boys. Or girls I didn't get along with. But mostly… we laughed. A lot. It was nice. Took nearly three weeks for that rash to clear up. But I didn't mind. I enjoyed that time with her.

ARTHUR

(Off.)

Good God, Patty. I can hardly hear a word you're saying out there.

PATTY

(Rasing her voice.)

I said, I preferred it when Mom gave me baths. Usually, it was you. But during those few weeks… you didn't want anything to do with me. You said I looked like a little monster. With all those splotches. Said I was ugly. Wouldn't even come near me. And I gotta say, Daddy… Those were the best three weeks of my life.

(Silence.)

ARTHUR

(Off.)

Patty…

PATTY

What is it, Daddy?

ARTHUR

(Off.)

I need you to come in here. Help me into the tub. And then wash my back.

(Silence.)

Did you hear me?

PATTY

Yeah, Daddy. I heard you.

ARTHUR

(Off.)

Well? Hop to it.

PERUSAL

(Patty takes the knife, moves toward the hallway, then stops. She turns back, sets the knife down, grabs the pot of boiling water from the stove, then exits quickly down the hallway. End of scene.)

SCENE 6

The present. Morning. Cody Hodges' desk at the police station. Continuous from Scene 2.

(Brenda notices the teddy bear on the desk.)

BRENDA

And what do we have here?

(She picks it up, turning it over.)

Oh, well, isn't this sweet. A little worse for wear, but still cute. Where'd you find it?

CODY

Find it? It's mine. Had it for years.

BRENDA

Get outta here. Really?

CODY

You surprised?

BRENDA

A little. Most guys don't keep teddy bears on their desks, Cody. Out in plain sight, no less. You're practically inviting people to make fun of you.

CODY

Oh yeah? You gonna make fun of me, Brenda?

BRENDA

What? Noooo. Of course not.

(She studies it more closely, spots something.)

Hold on. What's this?

CODY

What's what?

PERUSAL

BRENDA

Right here. On the top of his head. There's a silver thread here.

CODY

Oh. Yeah. Well, that's been there as long as I can remember. Somebody must've patched him up at some point.

BRENDA

Maybe. But with all these other loose threads and little tears, it doesn't look like he's been mended otherwise.

CODY

Yeah? So, what's that supposed to mean?

BRENDA

I don't know. Probably nothing.

CODY

It used to belong to Patrice.

BRENDA

What? Patrice?

CODY

Yeah. She gave it to my Granddad as a gift for my Dad. And then my Dad passed it down to me. That's how come it's so old. And who knows? Maybe she's the one who stitched it up.

BRENDA

You might've led with that, you know.

CODY

Didn't seem all that important.

BRENDA

Not important? A gift from Patrice? That doesn't sound like her at all.

CODY

Yeah, well… she said the same thing. Made it pretty clear she wasn't trying to be nice. Like there was some other reason behind it.

BRENDA

So, you actually talked to her about it?

PERUSAL

CODY

Yeah. And no matter how many times I talk to that woman, I still can't figure her out. Last thing she said to me about it was, "It's the thought that counts." Honestly, half the time I can't tell if she's telling me the whole truth or if she's just talking in riddles…

(He trails off.)

BRENDA

You okay?

CODY

Huh?

BRENDA

You disappeared there.

CODY

Aren't you supposed to be meeting with Colleen?

BRENDA

Yeah. But I don't think there's any rush.

CODY

You really shouldn't keep her waiting. Trust me, you do not want Colleen thinking you bailed on day one.

BRENDA

Right. Okay. You sure you're alright?

CODY

Yeah, yeah. I'm good. I just have some work to do.

BRENDA

I'll leave you to it then. Talk to you later.

(Brenda exits. Cody reaches for the teddy bear. He runs his fingers along the thread stitched across the top of its head. He grabs a pair of scissors and, after hesitating briefly, begins cutting the thread. End of scene.)

PERUSAL

SCENE 7

The past. Early evening. Continuous from Scene 5.

(Arthur can be heard off, whimpering, moaning in pain. Patty enters from the hallway, holding the now-empty pot. She sets it on the counter, moves to the freezer, pulls out ice trays, empties the ice into the sink, and turns on the hot water, melting them away. A moment later, Arthur staggers in from the hallway, barely held together by his robe.)

ARTHUR

Patty…?

PATTY

Yeah, Daddy?

ARTHUR

Why?

PATTY

Well… it was either that or cut your nuts off with this knife here. The other way felt less messy. Easier to manage.

ARTHUR

It hurts, Patty. I need your help. I need to go to the hospital.

PATTY

You'll have to drive yourself then.

ARTHUR

Can you call someone?

PATTY

Sure, I can do that. Of course, we'd have to involve the police. And they're gonna wanna know what happened here.

ARTHUR

No. No. Don't do that. Jesus. Patty, please. At least get me some ice. I'm on fire.

PATTY

We're fresh out. Have a seat.

PERUSAL

ARTHUR

I don't think I can sit.

PATTY

Then lie down. Before you pass out and crack your head open. Though I don't imagine much would spill out.

(With effort, Arthur lowers himself to the floor, curling onto his side. He moans.)

You're gonna live. Good news for you, I suppose.

(She turns toward the hallway.)

ARTHUR

Where are you going?

PATTY

A little patience would be much appreciated.

(She exits. Arthur groans. A moment later, Patty returns with the teddy bear. She retrieves a sewing kit, a sandwich bag, and the barrette. She sits. As she works – cutting thread, placing the barrette into the bag, tucking it inside the bear, stitching it closed with silver thread – she speaks, calm and deliberate.)

Today's the day, Daddy.

(Arthur moans.)

And your dirty little secrets? Well, lucky for you, I won't be telling anyone what happened here. Everything stays between us. So, unless someone outside this house figures things out, it's just you and me. In here. With me watching you. Closely. For as long as it takes. Until you draw your last breath. And we both know that won't be by your own hand, now, will it? Because you're a goddam coward. Though if by some miracle you do find the courage… I won't stop you.

(Arthur moans/growls.)

You took everything from me, Daddy. My childhood. My trust. My voice. And you drove Mom away. I like to think she tried to take me with her. I just don't remember it. So, I choose to believe she did everything she could… to get me away from you. And now all that's left… are shadows… of you. Lurking in doorways. Watching. Muttering to yourself. Ready to pounce. Pretending to be human. I suppose that might as well be me under the house right now. I wish it was.

(Arthur moans/growls.)

PERUSAL

But don't you worry. You won't stand in front of a judge. You won't face a jury. You won't rot in some jail cell. Not because I'm offering mercy, but because what I have planned for you is far worse. Your punishment starts here. Now. And it doesn't end until you do.

(Arthur moans/growls.)

The rules are simple. You eat what I make. No complaints. No substitutions. No exceptions. You get a beer only if I decide you've earned it. Sneak one and that privilege is gone for good. Every morning, you get yourself ready for work. No help from me. You drop me at the bus stop. You pick me up on the way back. And if you cross me, look at me the wrong way, or give me any reason to think you're up to something… I will blow everything wide open. You understand?

(Arthur moans/growls.)

Big bastard.

(She finishes stitching the teddy bear.)

Good. Now what I need… is a shovel.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 8

The present. Late in the evening.

(Patrice sits in a chair, eyes open, lost in thought. A knock at the door. She doesn't move. Another knock.)

CODY

Patrice? Patrice?

PATRICE

The door's open.

CODY

What's that?

PATRICE

(Louder.)

I said, the door's open.

(Cody tries the handle, cautious. The door creaks open. He peers in.)

Come in, Cody.

PERUSAL

CODY

Is this a trick?

PATRICE

No. It's not a trick. And it's certainly no treat. Come in and close the door.

(Cody enters.)

It's late.

CODY

I know. I'm sorry.

PATRICE

Must be important.

CODY

It is. But before I get into that… I wanted to make sure you're alright. I heard the news. Sounds like you lost your land dispute.

PATRICE

That's right. They've redrawn the property line. So, now a driveway's gonna run straight through my yard. At the end of it, they're putting up a two-story house. Right in front of my mountain view. I'll have to tear up the garden. Start over. And the cypress tree… they'll be digging that up too. And if that's not enough, they're putting in a big fence. So, they don't have to look at my grubby little house.

CODY

I'm sorry, Patrice.

PATRICE

I suppose it was time.

CODY

Oh, and before I forget. Debbie and I mailed out the wedding invitations. Hopefully you got yours.

PATRICE

As a matter of fact, I did. It's on the table over there. Put a little Post-it on it. To remind me.

CODY

We'd really like you to come. If you can make it.

PERUSAL

PATRICE

So, is that it? Or can I be left in peace?

CODY

One more thing. Something I need you to look at.

PATRICE

Then bring it here.

(Cody pulls the barrette from his pocket and hands it to her. She takes it, studies it carefully.)

CODY

That look familiar?

PATRICE

Most women know what this is, yes.

CODY

Have you seen this one before?

PATRICE

I keep my hair short.

CODY

That's not what I asked.

PATRICE

Have done for a very long time now. Easier. No fuss. There was a time I kept it long. When I was younger. It was expected. Supposed to make us look pretty. Youthful. It was a lot of work, though. I didn't have the money for fancy shampoos. Or conditioners. Certainly couldn't afford a salon. And I hated brushing it. Every day. So, one night, long time ago, the same night I parted ways with that barrette… I came home, and I cut it all off. And I looked ridiculous. But I never felt freer in my life.

CODY

Who does it belong to, Patrice?

PATRICE

I was just getting to that. A little patience would be much appreciated.

PERUSAL

CODY

Patrice…

(Patrice looks up at him, calm, certain.)

PATRICE

It belongs to the girl under the cypress tree.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 9

The present. Middle of the night. Not long after the previous scene.

(The house sits in darkness, lit only by faint moonlight through the windows. Outside, Big Bastard comes into view, moving slowly. Calm. Quiet. He circles around the back of the house, his heavy steps muted, then makes his way onto the porch and stops at the front door. A brief pause. He sniffs, lets out a low huff, then shifts his weight and presses a paw against the door. Then, without warning, he knocks the door out of its frame. It splinters and slams inward onto the floor. Dust lingers in the air as the sound settles. Big Bastard steps forward, unhurried, and crosses the threshold. A light flicks on in the hallway. End of scene.)

SCENE 10

The present. Late morning. Two days after the previous scene.

(Brenda steps onto the porch and stops short when she sees the door lying on the ground. She peers inside but doesn't enter. Cody emerges from the hallway and meets her outside.)

CODY

What're you doing here, Brenda?

BRENDA

I saw you pull up. I got worried. She's gone, isn't she?

CODY

Yeah. She's… she's gone.

PERUSAL

BRENDA

I should've come by sooner. I hadn't seen her in days – she's usually out in the yard, always doing something – but… I guess I didn't wanna intrude. How long do you think she's been–?

CODY

Not long. I was here a couple nights ago. She wasn't feeling well; wanted some privacy. Coroner's on the way. I should have more details soon.

BRENDA

I should've checked on her.

CODY

There wasn't anything you could've done.

BRENDA

What made you come out here?

CODY

Mike Everdeen stopped by the station. He'd been delivering mail, and Patrice wasn't out on the porch yelling at him like usual… so, he figured something was off.

BRENDA

Did you have to bust the door down? I mean, geez.

CODY

What? No, that wasn't me. But I've got a pretty good idea who did it.

BRENDA

Oh, come on. Bears don't just break into people's houses, Cody. That doesn't make any sense.

CODY

Well, I won't go into the details. None of them are pleasant. But I can tell you this: Patrice didn't die of natural causes.

BRENDA

Oh, good Lord.

CODY

And that woman could push just about anyone, or anything, to their breaking point. So much so that they might–

PERUSAL

BRENDA

Alright, that's enough. You can keep that part to yourself. She's dead. Yes, she brought some of it on herself, but there's nothing to be done now. And I doubt she's interested in our opinions anymore.

CODY

She was never interested in anyone's opinion.

BRENDA

I don't think that's true. That's the one thing she cared about. She craved it. It gave her validation. Gave her purpose. Made her unforgettable. I mean, are you ever gonna forget Patrice Bean? The way she got under your skin? Made your blood boil? Made you think? Sure, she was mean. More than once she pissed me off. But I like to believe… she liked us. And that she appreciated us. Maybe, in her own way, she even loved us.

(They look at each other.)

BRENDA/CODY

Noooooo.

(They laugh.)

BRENDA

Hey…

CODY

What is it?

BRENDA

You gonna tell me why the ground's all dug up around that cypress tree out there?

CODY

It's coming down.

BRENDA

What? Why?

CODY

New neighbors moving in. They're building back there. They need the space. So the tree's gotta go.

BRENDA

Looks perfectly healthy to me.

PERUSAL

CODY

It is.

BRENDA

Seems pretty official with all that police tape around it.

CODY

Just a precaution. Wanted to keep people clear. For their own safety.

BRENDA

Mm hm. Be nice if you could salvage it. Move it somewhere else on Patrice's property, if that's doable.

CODY

I'll look into it.

BRENDA

I'll hold you to it.

(Brenda looks toward the cypress. Cody watches her before reaching into his pocket and pulling out a wedding invitation. She turns to him.)

What do you got there?

CODY

Patrice's RSVP. Mike dropped it off at the station.

BRENDA

You open it yet?

CODY

No. Not yet.

BRENDA

Well, go on. It's not like the answer's gonna change if you wait.

CODY

Yeah, you're right. Just hate to think what her final words to me might be. "I'd rather be eaten by a bear than attend your wedding."

BRENDA

Don't be morbid. Open it.

PERUSAL

(Lights begin to fade as Cody breaks the seal on the envelope. End of play.)

PERUSAL