

Syd

by Craig Houk

SYD

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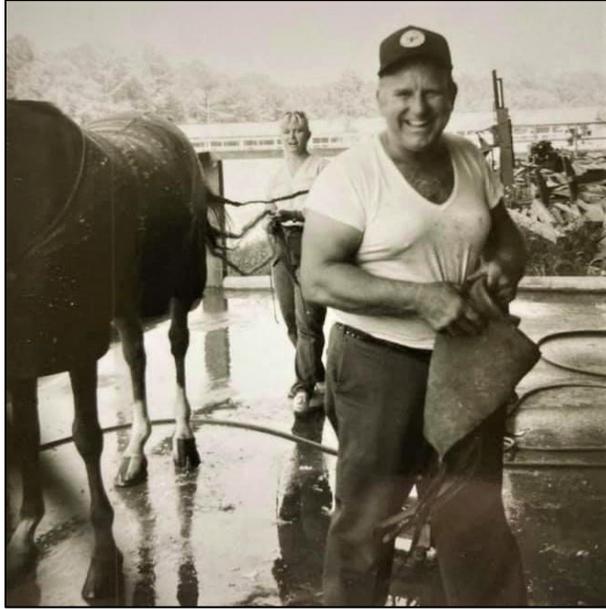
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SYD



For Diana.

Thank you for sharing your wild and wonderful story with me.

And for allowing me the opportunity to honor your father.

SYD

CHARACTERS

HELEN TRAHAN Female, Late 30s

SYDNEY (SYD) TRAHAN Female, 19 y/o

ROBERT (BUD) TRAHAN Male, Early 40s

BEVERLY LARSON Female, Early 40s

BEAUREGARD (BEAU) LARSON Male, Mid 40s

SETTING

The kitchen and back porch of the Trahan’s single-family home in the Uptown neighborhood of New Orleans, somewhere along Highway 1 in Louisiana, and the Larson’s living room.

TIME

1973.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

1-1	June 24th Afternoon	Trahan Kitchen/Porch
1-2	June 24th Near Sundown	Trahan Kitchen
1-3	June 24th Sundown	Trahan Porch
1-4	June 24th Near Midnight	Trahan Kitchen
2-1	June 25th Morning	Highway 1
2-2	June 25th Morning	Trahan Kitchen
2-3	June 25th Early Evening	Trahan Porch
2-4	June 25th Late Evening	Trahan Kitchen
2-5	July 4th Evening	Larson Living Room
2-6	July 17th Early Evening	Trahan Kitchen

SYD

SYD

ACT 1

SCENE 1

June 24, 1973. Afternoon. A kitchen. We see HELEN TRAHAN, late 30s, female, who has nearly finished setting the table for dinner. We hear a television playing off. Helen calls out.

HELEN. Sydney. Sydney, dinner's ready. Call your Daddy, please. He's on the back porch. *(She takes the main course from the counter and sets it center on the table. She calls out again.)* Sydney, you hear me? Dinner's ready. Go get your Daddy. *(She stands quietly, waiting for a response. None comes. She crosses to the archway and calls off into the living room.)* Sydney!

SYD. *(Off.)* Yeah, Mama?

HELEN. Have you gone deaf? Now, listen to me. I've been slavin' away puttin' together a nice meal for the three of us. And I'd appreciate it if you and your Daddy'd come to the table.

SYD. *(Off.)* Okay, Mama.

HELEN. And wash your hands. And turn off that TV.

SYD. *(Off.)* Yes, ma'am.

(Helen heads to the refrigerator to retrieve a pitcher of lemonade.)

SYD. *(Off.)* Daddy!! Dinner's ready!! *(We hear the television turn off.)*

HELEN. God give me strength.

(She retrieves three glasses from the cupboard, brings them to the table and begins to pour the lemonade. BUD TRAHAN, early 40s, male, enters.)

BUD. Somethin' smells real good in here. *(He kisses Helen on the cheek.)*

HELEN. Thank you, Bud. That's very sweet. Now, sit down before everythin' gets cold.

(They both sit.)

BUD. Where's Syd?

SYD

HELEN. I sent her to wash up. And I've asked you to please stop callin' her that.

BUD. Oh, come on now. What's the harm in it? We've been callin' her that since she was in diapers.

HELEN. "Syd" sounds like a man's name. She's a grown woman. And it's time she started actin' like one.

BUD. She's nineteen. She's my little girl. She'll always be my little girl.

HELEN. (*Calling off.*) Sydney!

(*SYDNEY TRAHAN, 19, female, enters.*)

SYD. I'm right here, Mama. Excuse me for not movin' at the speed of light.

HELEN. Please don't speak to me that way. (*Beat.*) Now, let me see your hands.

SYD. Oh, now come on, Mama. I think I know how to wash my hands.

HELEN. Let me see 'em. (*Sydney extends her hands, palms up. She then turns them over, palms down.*) Sit down. (*Sydney sits. Helen stares intently at her.*)

SYD. What? What'd I do now?

HELEN. I just wanna know what's gotten into you today?

SYD. What's gotten into me? Nothin's gotten into me. Except you've been all over my ass since church this mornin'...

BUD. Syd, please...

HELEN. Well, I hardly think that danglin' your spit over the balcony and then repeatedly suckin' it back into your mouth was proper behavior for church...

SYD. You pinched me so hard, you broke the skin, Helen...

BUD. Don't be callin' your Mama by her first name...

SYD. She's always givin' me a rough time...

HELEN. I'm almost at my limit with you, young lady...

BUD. That's enough! Can we please just eat in peace? You said yourself, Helen. Food's gettin' cold.

HELEN. Yes, it is.

SYD. Fine with me. I'm starved.

(*Sydney reaches for a bowl or a plate of something. Helen grabs Sydney's hand, perhaps a little too tightly.*)

HELEN. Stop. You are tryin' to upset me on purpose, ain't you?

(*Sydney pulls her hand away.*)

SYD

BUD. Come on, Syd. You know better than that. Prayers first.

SYD. Right. Sorry.

(Helen extends both hands. Bud takes one, Sydney reluctantly takes the other. Helen starts the prayer and the other two chime in quickly.)

HELEN. Bless us, O Lord, and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen. *(They all make the sign of the cross, Sydney half-heartedly.)* Now, how about I make everyone's plate? Whatta you say? Like old times?

SYD. I can make my own plate...

BUD. Sounds like a real good idea, sweetheart. I'd like that very much. And I expect Syd would like that too. Wouldn't you, Syd?

SYD. Sure, Daddy.

(Bud hands his plate to Helen.)

HELEN. Thank you, Bud.

(Helen begins to put a plate of food together for Bud.)

BUD. Oh, and before I forget. I was readin' the paper out back, and I saw that the Dixie Roto Magazine insert was missin'. Have either of you two seen it?

HELEN. No. I'm sorry, Bud. I haven't.

SYD. Maybe it fell out when the paper boy tossed it onto the porch. I'll take a look out front... *(Sydney starts to rise out of her chair.)*

HELEN. Stay right where you are. You can look for it after we've eaten. I expect it ain't urgent.

(Sydney returns to her chair.)

BUD. I suppose it ain't. But I tell you, of all days for that insert to go missin'. Hm... *(He takes a sip of his lemonade.)*

HELEN. Well, what is it, Bud? Why are you actin' all coy?

BUD. Oh, never mind.

HELEN. Come on, now. Out with it.

BUD. No. No, I'm sure it can wait. *(He winks at Sydney.)*

HELEN. Fine. I've lost interest anyway. It can wait until the end of time now, for all I care.

SYD. Well, I don't wanna wait that long.

SYD

BUD. Hey, Syd.

SYD. Yeah, Daddy?

BUD. After dinner, if you can't find the insert, maybe you can run next door to the Larson's to see if they don't mind givin' us theirs. Whatta you say?

SYD. Sure.

(Helen hands Bud his plate.)

BUD. *(To Helen.)* Thank you, dear.

(Helen smiles and then reaches for Sydney's plate.)

HELEN. Sydney. *(Sydney hands her plate to Helen.)* Go ahead and eat, Bud. *(Helen begins to put a plate of food together for Sydney. The portions will be conspicuously smaller.)*

BUD. You sure you ladies don't mind if I start without you?

SYD. 'Course not, Daddy.

BUD. Helen?

HELEN. Didn't I just say?

BUD. Well, all right then. Everythin' looks real good. Don't you agree, Syd?

SYD. Looks so good I can't wait to get it into my mouth.

HELEN. Oh, for goodness' sake, Sydney. You'll have your food in just a second here.

BUD. *(After taking a bite.)* Mmmmmmm. Mm, Mm, Mm. So good. You have outdone yourself, Helen.

HELEN. Stop.

BUD. I am deadly serious. Best meal ever. It's like heaven on a biscuit.

HELEN. Thank you, Bud. Now, shut up and eat. *(She hands Sydney her plate.)* Here you go, Sydney.

SYD. Thanks, Mama.

(Sydney eats. Bud continues to eat. Helen begins to serve herself. A quiet moment.)

BUD. How're your studies comin', Syd?

SYD. Good. Real good.

BUD. And your grades?

SYD. I'm at ninety-three percent.

SYD

BUD. Wow, that's great. (*Beat.*) And what does that mean?

SYD. Well, anything at ninety-three or above is considered "excellent", grade point value of four.

BUD. Oh, boy. I see. (*Beat.*) And?

SYD. I got an "A", Daddy.

BUD. Ah. Okay. All right! Well, that's just what I wanted to hear. That's real nice, Syd. That's my girl.

HELEN. She can do better.

BUD. Better than an "A"?

HELEN. Just barely an "A". Maybe if she didn't spend so much time in front of that TV out there...

BUD. All right, let's cut her some slack. I expect studyin' to be a nurse ain't easy. And she works hard too. How many hours you puttin' in at the hospital, Syd?

SYD. Twenty a week, forty-five durin' vacation breaks. And excuse me, Mama, if once in a while, I like to plant myself in front of the TV. Sometimes it's nice to just sit down, relax a little, and not have to think about bed pans and bed sores for one hour while Kojak is on.

(We hear Beau Larson calling after his wife, Beverly Larson.)

BEAU. (*Off.*) Beverly! Beverly, get back here and leave 'em nice folks alone! It's Sunday, for Chrissake! Ain't nobody wants to be bothered on a Sunday!

BEVERLY. (*Off.*) Well, I'm sorry, Beau, but this cannot wait! (*BEVERLY LARSON, early 40s, female, appears at the kitchen door. She peers through the screen, perhaps knocks on the frame. She holds a copy of the Dixie Roto Magazine insert in her hand. She calls in.*) Helloooo. (*BEAU LARSON, mid 40s, male appears just behind her. They are both out of breath. Helen and Bud rise out of their chairs. Helen moves to the door.*)

HELEN. Well, hi, Beverly. What're you doin' here?

BEVERLY. Do you mind if we come in?

HELEN. Well, normally I wouldn't, but we were just...

BEAU. Aw, damn it. They're havin' dinner. I told you so. Sorry about that, folks. We can come back another time. Come on, Beverly. Let's go. (*Beau takes Beverly by the arm and starts off.*)

(Bud moves past Helen to the door.)

SYD

BUD. No. No, it's okay, Beau. Why don't you two come on in? *(He opens the screen door.)*

BEAU. You sure it's all right?

BUD. 'Course it's all right. *(To Helen.)* Sweetheart?
(Beat.)

HELEN. Well, certainly. We're always happy to have you over.
(Beverly pushes past everyone and makes her way into the kitchen.)

BEVERLY. Terrific. Because I've been desperate to talk to Bud about what I found in today's Times-Picayune. Hi, Sydney.

SYD. Hi, Mrs. Larson, Mr. Larson.

BEAU. *(Having just followed Beverly in.)* Hey, Sydney.

HELEN. That looks like the Dixie Roto Magazine insert in your hand, Beverly.
(Curious, Sydney rises out her chair.)

BEVERLY. It sure is.

HELEN. Funny that, we were just talkin' about it. Sydney was gonna stop by after dinner to see if you might share yours with us since ours went missin'. Bud was askin' about it.

BEVERLY. Oh, my goodness. So, he hasn't told you yet? Bud, you haven't told 'em yet?

BUD. Not yet no.

HELEN. But he's been hintin' at somethin'. Seemed pretty anxious to get his hands on that insert.

BEAU. Damn it, Beverly! See! Now you've gone and spoiled the surprise!

HELEN. What surprise? What is goin' on?

SYD. Oh, for fu... *(Sydney stops herself. She then crosses to Beverly and pulls the insert from her hand.)* I'll take that.

HELEN. Sydney!

(Sydney moves away a bit. Beverly, Beau and Helen huddle around, looking over Sydney's shoulder. Bud stays put. Sydney excitedly unfolds the insert to see what all the excitement is about. A big smile as she turns to Bud.)

SYD. Daddy.

HELEN. What? What is it? *(Helen reaches for the insert, but Sydney moves away.)*

SYD

SYD. Well, guess who's on the cover of this week's installment of Dixie Roto Magazine?

(Helen turns to Bud. Bud smiles.)

HELEN. Oh, come on now. You've got to be yankin' my chain. Why in the world would Bud be...? All right, Sydney, hand it over. Let me take a look at that.

(Sydney, in jest, reluctantly hands the insert to Helen. Helen takes it and inspects the cover.) Well, I'll be...

BEVERLY. That's a real nice picture of Bud, ain't it?

BEAU. And check out that headline: "Big-City Blacksmith".

HELEN. Looks like the Guidry farm in the background there.

BUD. S'right. Sydney used to go horseback ridin' there on weekends.

HELEN. What's this all about, Bud?

BUD. Well, read for yourself.

SYD. Says on the front that the article's on page six.

(Sydney grabs the insert from Helen and crosses to the kitchen table. She sits down and begins thumbing through the pages. The rest huddle around her. Sydney finds the article.)

BEVERLY. Well, go on, Sydney. Read it.

HELEN. Out loud, so everyone can hear.

SYD. *(Reading from the insert.)* "New Orleans resident, Robert "Bud" Trahan, will be honored with the Metalist Award of Excellence for his extensive and lasting contributions to the blacksmithing community throughout the great state of Louisiana over the last two decades. The Metalist is the most prestigious award bestowed by the Pelican State Blacksmiths Association and will be presented to Mr. Trahan at Gallier Hall in Lafayette Square on Tuesday, July 17th, 1973, at 7:00 PM..."

HELEN. Oh my God.

BEAU. Ain't that somethin'?

BEVERLY. And that's not all. Goes on to talk about how Bud fell into blacksmithin' after seein'... Oh, darn it. What's that man's name, Bud? Famous blacksmith?

BUD. Alexander Winkler Bealer, III.

SYD

BEVERLY. That's the one.

BUD. I saw him at the North Georgia State Fair in 1943. Got my first anvil and hammer three years later at the age of sixteen. And I've been playin' with fire ever since.

BEAU. And you know, business is gonna pick up for sure, Bud. Not like you been strugglin' to find work otherwise, though.

BUD. No. No, we're doin' okay. And yeah, you're right. I expect I'll get a few more customers after this. Probably even some from out-of-state.

HELEN. You really think so?

BUD. 'Course I think so. I mean, free advertisin', right?

HELEN. My God. I just don't know what to say. This is real good news. I'm so proud of you, Bud.

(Helen hugs Bud tightly. Bud reaches out to Sydney.)

BUD. Whatta you say, Syd? You gonna join us over here?

SYD. If you got room for me.

BUD. We'll make room. Come on.

(Sydney joins them for a group embrace.)

BEAU. Okay, Beverly. Let's get the hell outta here and let the Trahan's get back to their dinner. We've pestered 'em enough already.

BEVERLY. All right, all right. *(They start off.)* I'll see you at card club on Wednesday, Helen.

HELEN. Oh, now wait a minute you two. Why don't you stay and have a drink with us? Hm? To celebrate the good news?

BEVERLY. Well, that sounds real nice.

BUD. I'll make us a couple of Sazeracs, Beau.

HELEN. Oh, and a couple of Brandy Milk Punches for me and Beverly.

BUD. You got it.

BEAU. Now, hold on, hold on. While I hate to pass up one of Bud's Sazeracs, I think Beverly and I need to get out of y'all's hair.

HELEN. No, now listen. You make yourself a plate of food, Beau. Plenty left over. And then you and Bud can head out back and talk about whatever worthless

SYD

nonsense you men generally talk about. And Beverly'll stay with me here in the kitchen. You hungry, Beverly?

BEVERLY. Not especially, but I may pick a little.

BUD. Well, that's settled then. Syd, can you grab the milk outta the fridge? I'm gonna get started on those drinks. *(He exits through the archway.)*

HELEN. And set up two tray tables for your Daddy and Mr. Larson on the porch.

SYD. Yes, Mama. *(She goes to the refrigerator and retrieves the milk.)*

HELEN. Go on, Beau. Help yourself. Plates are in the cupboard up there. Flatware in the drawer below.

BEAU. Yes, ma'am. *(He grabs a plate and then goes to the table to help himself.)*

HELEN. Have a seat, Beverly.

BEVERLY. Don't mind if I do.

(Beverly and Helen sit. As Sydney passes them with the milk...)

HELEN. And Sydney. When you're done doin' what I asked, I'd like you to come back and join me and Beverly here.

SYD. No thanks, Mama. I've got some studyin' to do.

HELEN. I wasn't askin'. And I expect your studies can wait 'til later this evenin', can't they?

SYD. Normally they might. But then I'm headin' out with some of the girls tonight.

HELEN. I'm sorry, you're what?

SYD. I'm goin' out later. For a few drinks and then maybe some dancin'...

BUD *(Off.)* Hey, Syd! I need that milk, baby girl!

SYD. I'll be right there, Daddy!

HELEN. Oh, no. No, no, no. You will not be goin' out tonight; do you understand me? Especially on a Sunday night.

SYD. What difference does it make? It's not like you and Daddy ain't havin' drinks at home with the neighbors.

HELEN. Well, it's not the same thing. We're doin' it in honor of your Daddy's award. And none of us here is endeavorin' to get our nursin' degree. *(Sydney starts to interject.)* No. Not another word. And I don't appreciate you arguin' with me in front of the Larson's. You will not be goin' out tonight.

SYD

SYD. Well, it's already been decided. So, tough shit, Helen. (*She exits through the archway with the milk.*)

HELEN. (*Rising up, she slams her hands on the table.*) Sydney! (*Beau and Beverly freeze. A long, uncomfortable moment. Helen sits.*) I'm sorry.

BEVERLY. There ain't no need to apologize. Just take a deep breath. (*Beau has not moved. Bud enters.*)

BUD. What happened in here? Syd looks pissed off.

BEVERLY. Everythin's fine, Bud. Just a little misunderstandin' is all.

BUD. Sounded like a little more than that. You all right, sweetheart?

HELEN. Mm hm.

BUD. (*Unconvinced.*) Well, okay then. You joinin' me, Beau?

BEAU. (*Distracted.*) Ah, yup.

BUD. Well, get your ass in gear then. Drinks are comin' up, ladies.

(*Bud exits. Beau remains still.*)

BEVERLY. Beau?

BEAU. (*He looks to Beverly.*) Yeah?

BEVERLY. Did you get what you wanted?

BEAU. Uh, yeah. Yeah, I sure did. Looks delicious.

BEVERLY. I'm sure it is. Now, why don't you grab a knife and a fork and head on out to the porch?

BEAU. Yes, ma'am.

(*Beau does so and exits through the archway.*)

BEVERLY. You sure you're okay?

HELEN. I'm fine. You know how it is. You've got your hands full with those three boys.

BEVERLY. Indeed, I do. Though we got just the two of 'em livin' at home now.

HELEN. Oh yeah?

BEVERLY. Yeah, well Roscoe packed up and left about three months ago. So, it's just Billy and Jack with us now. And the two of 'em are visitin' with Beau's parents down in Leeville, so we've got the house to ourselves for a few days.

HELEN. Wow. Well, I bet that's nice.

SYD

BEVERLY. It sure is.

HELEN. You know, we were wonderin' why we hadn't seen Roscoe around. We didn't wanna pry, though.

BEVERLY. Well, he was too old to be livin' at home anyway. And besides, we didn't much appreciate the company he was keepin'. Didn't want those types hangin' around. You know what I mean. So, we didn't object much to his movin' out.

HELEN. Where's he livin' now?

BEVERLY. Not sure exactly. Not sure I care to know. Except I've been hearin' that he's somewhere over in the French Quarter.

(Bud enters with the drinks.)

BUD. And here we go. One Brandy Milk Punch for the beautiful Mrs. Larson and one for the even beautifuler Mrs. Trahan. *(He kisses Helen on the cheek.)*

HELEN. Thank you, Bud.

BEVERLY. You are way too much, Bud.

BUD. It was my outright pleasure. Think nothin' of it. *(He grabs his plate and starts off.)*

HELEN. Let me at least warm that up for you, Bud. I'm sure it's gone completely cold by now.

BUD. No, no. It's fine. And I don't wanna keep Beau waitin'. You ladies enjoy. *(Bud exits. The ladies are charmed by his cheerfulness, Beverly especially so. They drink. A moment.)*

BEVERLY. Well, anyway. I'm sure you've heard the rumors.

HELEN. That's all they are, Beverly. Rumors. I'm sure there's little truth to 'em. And besides, Roscoe's a good man.

BEVERLY. He's not.

HELEN. 'Course he is. He's a Pastor, for goodness' sake.

BEVERLY. With the Metropolitan Community Church.

HELEN. Well, okay. I mean, I understand that they're an unconventional bunch.

BEVERLY. The congregants are all deviants and perverts.

HELEN. I'm not sure that's entirely true.

BEVERLY. Would you and Bud go there?

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HELEN. No. We would not. But from what I understand, Roscoe has worked very hard for that church, to build it and to keep it goin' in the face of many obstacles, sometimes out of his own pocket.

(Beat.)

BEVERLY. Let me speak plainly with you, Helen. And this is very difficult for me because I prefer not to discuss private family matters. And I do not like to use this kinda language, especially as it relates to my first-born son, but Roscoe is a faggot. And that's all there is to it.

HELEN. Beverly, no. That's not true.

BEVERLY. It is true. And I ain't gonna be one of 'em Mothers who pretends it's not, who spends sleepless nights beatin' her chest and prayin' to God, and beggin' Him to save her son's soul, tryin' to figure out what she's done wrong. Because I've done nothin' wrong. Roscoe has a disease. A disease of the mind and of the body. He's got the Devil in him. And I want nothin' to do with the Devil.

HELEN. I'm sorry. That's awful.

BEVERLY. Do you know? They've opened some makeshift homosexual bar over on Iberville Street.

HELEN. Sydney mentioned somethin' about it. Upstairs Lounge, I think it's called. Opened maybe a year ago. I didn't ask questions.

BEVERLY. Well, that's where most of 'em congregate. That's where Roscoe goes. I don't even wanna imagine what they're gettin' up to over there. But whatever it is, they better believe that God is watchin'. And one day, every last one of 'em is gonna come face to face with their Maker. And when they do, they'll have to answer for the choices they've made.

(Lights down on the kitchen and up on a porch. Bud and Beau are settled in, both sitting behind tray tables, upon which sit their dinner plates and drinks. A copy of the Times-Picayune lies somewhere near Bud.)

BEAU. Well, whatta you think, huh? J.D. Roberts gonna turn the Saints into a winnin' team this year?

BUD. *(Laughing.)* Oh, I doubt it. I mean, they had a shit-awful season last year. And other than draftin' Archie Manning back in '71, Roberts has been about as useful as Tom Fears was before him. Then, of course, they get second pick this

SYD

year, which they earned by virtue of their shitty record, and whatta they do? They trade it away! Hell, I bet Roberts doesn't even make it to coach the regular season.

BEAU. Yeah, you're probably right. Be nice to at least make it to the playoffs once, though, you know?

BUD. Sure would. Except I don't see that happenin' anytime soon.

(They drink. A moment.)

BEAU. Hot day today.

BUD. Sure is. Little bit of a breeze, though. So, not too bad, I guess.

BEAU. Guess not. Hotter than yesterday.

BUD. Feels that way, yeah.

(They drink. A moment.)

BEAU. Hey, Bud.

BUD. Yeah?

BEAU. How's Sydney doin'?

BUD. Oh, she's doin' real good. She's workin' hard and gettin' good grades.

BEAU. Haven't really seen her around much.

BUD. Well, she'll be around more. Her first year, she had to live in the nurses' residence. Hospital was pretty strict. On weekdays, she had to check in by seven o'clock and on weekends by ten. So, between studyin' and workin', she didn't have time for much else.

BEAU. She's changed a lot.

BUD. Whatta you mean? Changed how?

BEAU. Well, she's a grown woman now.

BUD. Yeah, that's what Helen keeps sayin'. She's still a teenager, Beau.

BEAU. True enough. *(They drink. A moment.)* She's tough, that's for sure. Maybe a little too rough around the edges?

BUD. Well, she's always been that way, Beau.

BEAU. Has she?

BUD. 'Course she has. Do you remember the time she took one of my cross-peen hammers, marched right on over to the Nunez house, and beat Rodger Nunez with that thing? Lucky for him, he was more than a foot taller than she was. Otherwise, she mighta killed him had she wacked him over the head with it. And lucky for us,

SYD

she was nine at the time. Otherwise, we woulda been in a heap of legal trouble for sure.

BEAU. Well, that Nunez boy had it comin'.

BUD. He was a hot head. Always gettin' into trouble. And I guess Syd had had enough of his teasin' and tormentin'.

BEAU. He's still a hot head from what I hear.

BUD. Oh yeah? Well, that's too bad.

(Beat.)

BEAU. He, uh... he hangs around with my oldest boy.

BUD. With Roscoe?

BEAU. Yup. They, uh... they run in the same circles. You know what I'm sayin'?

BUD. Yeah. Yeah, I know. Wow. Well, I had no idea.

BEAU. Well, you know, we try not to talk about it. *(Bud nods.)* So, I just thank God every day for givin' me my two other boys. Billy and Jack are gonna be just fine. They ain't like Roscoe. I mean, with Roscoe, I could just tell, from an early age. Somethin' was off with him.

(They drink. A moment.)

BUD. My Mama, she passed away when I was eleven.

BEAU. Aw, I'm sorry to hear, Bud.

BUD. Well, it was a long time ago. And I'm sure you're wonderin' why I'm bringin' it up.

BEAU. I'm listenin'.

BUD. My old man was a police officer when she died. He kept crazy hours. Nearest relative was my Aunt Minnie on my mother's side, but she wasn't able to take care of me. She ended up in an institution after a while. So, when my father would go out on patrol, he'd sometimes leave me with one of the neighbors. And when there wasn't anyone around to watch me, he'd drop me off at the local bar. He was good pals with the barkeep. And I didn't mind. Plenty of stuff to keep me entertained. Jukebox, pool table, all sorts of characters comin' and goin'. *(Beat.)* So, there was this one guy who'd swing by late afternoons. Leroy. He was in his forties, never married, worked part time as a roofer, hardly had two nickels to rub together. And oh boy, he was a talker. Always flappin' his gums, never knew when to keep his mouth shut. *(Beat.)* On this one particular day, I was lookin' for somethin' to do, so

SYD

I offered to clean all the cue sticks. I was at the back of the bar when Leroy came stumblin' through the front door. Usually, he'd come in sober and then leave drunk, but on that day, he was already half in the bag. So, he goes to the bar, and he orders a double whiskey neat. He downs that pretty quick and then he orders another. After that, he makes his way back to me. He pulls a bar stool over, sits down on it, leans into me, and asks me what I'm doin'. I mean to tell you, his face was all swollen, his teeth were dirty, and his breath smelled god-awful. So, I backed off a little. And when I did, I could see that he got real sad. I felt bad for him. So, I bolstered myself, moved closer to him, and answered, "I'm just cleanin' these cue sticks, Mister." That's when he smiled, leaned in again, and whispered to me, "I gotta secret that I ain't never shared with no one. Do you wanna hear it?" I gotta tell you, Beau, I did not wanna hear it and I wanted to tell him so, but instead I just said, "Sure, Mister." And this is what he said to me: "Lucifer has put a thorn in my flesh. And God is dead." Then he reached out his hand. It was all cracked and dry and red. I wanted to run or at least call out, but I just couldn't. Then he grabbed my hand real tight and pulled me in to him. He put his other hand around the back of my head and he... he buried his face into my hair. And he breathed in real deep. He stank so bad I thought I might be sick. But before anyone saw what was happenin', Leroy all of sudden just let go of me. He stepped back, his eyes wellin' up with tears. And then he turned and walked backed to the bar, paid his tab, and left.

(Beat.) Some things can't be fixed, Beau. And some things are worse than others.

(Bud drinks. A moment. Sydney enters.)

SYD. Daddy?

BUD. Yeah, baby girl?

SYD. Hey, listen. I'm headin' out in a bit with some of the other nurses.

BUD. You get your mother's "okay"?

SYD. No.

BUD. You want me to talk to her?

SYD. I'm a grown woman, Daddy.

BUD. So, I've been hearin'.

SYD. Anyway, I didn't come out here to ask for permission. I came out here to ask for money.

BUD. Says the grown woman.

SYD

SYD. Daddy...

BUD. All right, okay. I can give you some cash. My wallet's upstairs.

SYD. I'll get it.

BUD. (*Rising.*) No. No, I'll get it. Gonna get me and Beau here another drink anyway. I think he needs it. And I'm gonna check on your Mama and Mrs. Larson while I'm at it.

SYD. Thank you.

BUD. You got it.

(*Bud exits. Sydney starts to follow him.*)

BEAU. Hey, Sydney.

(*Sydney stops and turns to Beau.*)

SYD. You can call me Syd.

BEAU. All right. Syd.

SYD. Yes, Beau?

BEAU. (*With a half-smile.*) So, you're headin' out this evenin'?

SYD. That's the word on the street.

BEAU. Bet you got a fun night planned.

SYD. I'm plannin' on havin' fun if that's what you mean.

BEAU. (*Another half-smile.*) Where you goin'?

SYD. Well, I don't know just yet. Me and the girls are gonna play it by ear, I guess. Why're you so interested?

BEAU. Oh, just curious is all. I'm an old man. Don't get out much. Just wonderin' what women your age get up to. Lots of crazy shit goin' on in the world right now. So, maybe I'm just thinkin' about your welfare.

SYD. I already have a Daddy. Don't need two of 'em.

BEAU. Fair enough. Though I do wonder if Bud might be a little too easy on you.

SYD. Somethin' tells me if he was here right now, you wouldn't be sayin' these things.

BEAU. Maybe not.

SYD. Seems like you might be a little scared of him. (*Beat.*) So, what makes you think he's such a pushover?

SYD

BEAU. I ain't scared. And you're his daughter. That's a very different thing. And while I'm at it, I think maybe you're a little too hard on your Mama.

SYD. And I'm thinkin' maybe that's none of your business.

BEAU. See, now that's exactly what I'm talkin' about. That attitude right there. You got a mouth on you.

SYD. Well, we all got mouths on us, don't we? One of the first things I learned in nursin' school.

BEAU. You know what I mean.

SYD. I do know what you mean. And I am tellin' you again, it's none of your damn business. *(Beau rises suddenly and grabs Sydney by the arm. She stands her ground.)* Hey! Better be careful there, Beau. You make one more move and, believe me, you will be crawlin' outta here without your testicles. And I think you know what my Daddy might do to you if he saw you puttin' your hands on me.

(Beau releases Syd.)

BEAU. You're lucky you ain't my kid.

SYD. Well, I've seen the way you treat Roscoe, so I couldn't agree more.

BEAU. Your Mama's a good Christian woman. Ain't nothin' comes before her faith in Christ. And you need to trust that she knows what she's doin'. God has a plan for you. And even though things might not make sense right now, sooner or later they will. Your Mama has God's ear. So, you best mind what she tells you.

(Lights down on the porch and up on the kitchen. The kitchen has been mostly tidied by Helen and Beverly. There are two freshly made Brandy Milk Punches on the table. They are in the middle of a conversation.)

BEVERLY. Well, I can't think of anyone dumber than the Baily sisters. I mean, how long have they been playin' Canasta with us, and they still ain't figured it out? They lose every hand.

HELEN. Francis and Faye have a good time. And that's really all that matters.

BEVERLY. They're both nuttier than a five-pound fruitcake. But they are good for a few laughs, I suppose.

HELEN. It wouldn't be card club without 'em.

BEVERLY. No, I suppose it would not.

(They share a laugh. A moment. They continue to drink. Perhaps Helen is finishing putting things away and/or cleaning up.)

SYD

BEVERLY. Listen, Helen.

HELEN. Mm Hm?

BEVERLY. Now, you stop me if you feel like I'm oversteppin' here.

HELEN. *(She stops what she's doing.)* All right.

BEVERLY. I think you need to put your foot down with Sydney. *(Helen starts to interject.)* Now, I saw how upset you got earlier, and I don't like to see you in that condition, but that young lady could use some firm discipline from you. Before she gets too outta control. Before it's too late.

HELEN. Whatta you mean? Before what's too late?

BEVERLY. Beau and I went through somethin' similar with Roscoe.

HELEN. Oh, come on now, Beverly. Sydney ain't nothin' like Roscoe. And I'm sorry, but you don't know what it's like to raise a daughter. It's very different.

BEVERLY. I hardly see how Sydney's any different than a boy.

HELEN. And what's that supposed to mean?

BEVERLY. A Mother knows, Helen. A Mother always knows. And Fathers... well, they're only good for two things: payin' bills and keepin' the bed warm. I mean, Beau only just made things worse with Roscoe. And it's plenty clear that Sydney has Bud wrapped around her little finger. Now, don't get me wrong. Bud's a good man, no doubt about it. But he doesn't see what you and I see. So, it's up to you.

HELEN. And what do you suggest I do, Beverly?

BEVERLY. I suggest you pray. Pray to God for guidance. And then you do whatever it takes to get that girl back on the right path. Sydney's soul depends on it. *(A moment. Helen thinks on it. Beverly finishes her drink.)* Well, okay then. I think it's time for me and Beau to go home.

HELEN. *(Distracted.)* It's gettin' late. And I am a little tired. Do you mind?

BEVERLY. 'Course not. I'll grab Beau and then we'll be on our way.

HELEN. Thanks for stoppin' by Beverly.

BEVERLY. My pleasure. And thank you for lettin' us disrupt your day. We are very much lookin' forward to that award ceremony in a few weeks.

HELEN. *(Halfheartedly.)* Oh, my goodness. I almost forgot. It's always nice to have somethin' to celebrate, isn't it?

SYD

BEVERLY. It sure is. You get some rest. We'll talk soon.

(Beverly moves to Helen, gives her a hug, and then exits the kitchen. Lights down on the kitchen and up on the porch. Bud and Beau have finished eating and are drinking fresh Sazeracs.)

BEAU. That just ain't accurate, Bud. And I don't believe it. Now, what I heard, which is more likely to be true, is that those men broke into that hotel lookin' for intel on that DNC Secretary, what's her name?

BUD. Ida Wells?

BEAU. That's the lady. She goes by Maxie, though, right?

BUD. S'right.

BEAU. Anyway, that Maxie Wells woman was supposedly usin' her office phone to set up little rendezvous between committee members and high-class hookers.

BUD. Aw, now come on, Beau. First off, you ain't even gettin' the story right.

BEAU. No. No, now listen. That John Dean fella – the White House Counsel guy – his girlfriend was one of 'em hookers. And Maxie had pictures of her, and a bunch of other prostitutes locked in her desk drawer...

(Beverly enters the porch.)

BEVERLY. All right, Beau. That's just about enough of that. Sorry, Bud. I married a conspiracy theorist. And a drunk one at that.

BUD. Oh, Beau's okay. We're havin' a good time.

BEAU. S'right, Beverly. Bud and me are havin' a real good time. And then you come along.

BEVERLY. And it looks like I came along at just the right time. Come on, Beau. We're goin' home.

BEAU. What? Noooo.

BEVERLY. Yes. Let's leave these good people be. You can come over and play with Bud some other time. *(Beverly winks at Bud.)*

BUD. Probably a good idea. I'll catch up with you later, Beau. I'm gonna watch the sun set and then I think I'm gonna have a little lie-down here on the porch. Feels like another nice breeze comin' through.

BEVERLY. Sounds lovely. Let's go, Beau.

SYD

BEAU. Oh, all right, all right. The old ball-and-chain has spoken. Can you help me up, Beverly?

BEVERLY. Why should today be any different? *(Beverly starts to help Beau up, but Bud steps in.)*

BUD. I got him.

BEVERLY. *(Stepping aside.)* Thank you, Bud.
(Bud helps Beau up and guides him off the porch.)

BEAU. Hey, Bud.

BUD. Yeah?

BEAU. Hey, listen. I voted for Nixon. Both times.

BUD. I know, Beau. Everyone knows.

BEAU. And he's gonna get through this second term, no matter what 'em far left radical commies throw at him. You mark my words.

BEVERLY. Consider 'em marked, Beau.

BEAU. Aw, shit.

BUD. What's the matter?

BEAU. I almost forgot. I was hopin' to borrow your mower. Mine's busted. Ran over a tree root.

BEVERLY. Well, you ain't mowin' the grass right now, are you? Not in your condition.

BUD. All right listen, Beau. I'm gonna take the lock off the tool shed and you can pick it up tomorrow whenever you like. Okay?

BEAU. Thank you, my friend.

BUD. Any time.

BEVERLY. I can take it from here.

BUD. You sure?

BEVERLY. Oh yeah. He's been much worse than this many times over.

BUD. Well, okay. He's all yours then.

BEVERLY. *(With a feeble laugh.)* Ain't that the sad truth?

BUD. Just be careful there. And take your time.

SYD

(Beverly guides Beau off, perhaps they improvise some dialogue as they go. Bud smiles, maybe laughs, and shakes his head. He goes back onto the porch and sits down. All lights fade to black.)

SCENE 2

June 24, 1973. Before sundown. An empty kitchen. Sydney enters. She is dressed for the evening out. She is wearing a long denim skirt and a cotton button-down shirt. She crosses to the refrigerator, opens it, and pulls a six pack of canned beer from it. She then turns to see Helen in the archway.

HELEN. Headin' out already?

SYD. Just gettin' an early start. I'm not plannin' on stayin' out late. Should be home by midnight.

HELEN. You finished with your studies?

SYD. I will be in about three years.

HELEN. *(With a half-smile.)* I see. Well, I'm gonna ask you to return that beer to the fridge. It belongs to your Daddy.

SYD. I'll replace it when I get paid in a couple of days.

HELEN. If you can't afford to drink, Sydney, then maybe you shouldn't be goin' out at all.

SYD. Me and the girls have been plannin' this for some time now, Mama. So, I'm not gonna miss it. You're actin' like I'm out every night of the week.

HELEN. Whatta you need the beer for anyway?

SYD. We're meetin' up at Marilyn Durand's place first. And I don't wanna show up empty handed.

HELEN. And from there?

SYD. I already said. Out dancin'.

HELEN. Where?

SYD. Jesus, Mama. I'm not gonna share every detail of my evenin' with you.

HELEN. What's the harm in tellin' me where you're goin'?

SYD. No harm, I guess. Except we ain't decided yet.

SYD

HELEN. You just said you and the girls have been plannin' this for a while.

SYD. You know what? I'm done with this. Point bein', it's none of your concern where I'm goin' or what I'm doin'. I'll see you later, Mama.

(She starts for the kitchen door. Helen follows her.)

HELEN. I don't know where you get off talkin' to me that way. *(Sydney has opened the screen door.)* Sydney!

(Sydney stops and turns to Helen.)

SYD. What!?

HELEN. Who do you think is payin' for your education? And who do you think's responsible for puttin' a roof over your head? And providin' you with a bed to sleep in? And puttin' food in your mouth?

SYD. Well, it ain't you, Mama. It ain't never been you. It's always been Daddy. And if it wasn't for him, we'd have none of this. So, let me ask you, what have you ever actually done for me?

HELEN. I gave birth to you.

(Beat.)

SYD. So, what is it you're lookin' for then, hunh? Some kinda prize? And for what, Helen? For spreadin' your legs that one time? I doubt you'd be able to find a prize more useless at the bottom of a box of Cracker Jack.

(Helen moves to Sydney and slaps her across the face. Sydney drops the beer. Helen retreats, surprised at herself.)

HELEN. Sydney, I...

(Sydney suddenly moves to Helen. Helen braces herself.)

SYD. Sit down, Mama.

HELEN. Sydney...

SYD. Sit. Down.

(Helen sits and lowers her head. Sydney joins her at the kitchen table.)

SYD. You got somethin' you need to get off your chest? *(Helen looks at Sydney but does not say anything.)* Go on, Mama. Now's your chance. I'm gonna give you some of my valuable time.

HELEN. Your Daddy and me didn't raise you that way.

SYD. What way?

SYD

HELEN. The sarcasm. And the spite. The hate. You have no idea what I've had to put up with over the years. The things that've been said to me. The things I've overheard. In church, at social events, on the street, at card club in my own home. The awful things people have said about you. About my daughter. My flesh and blood. The terrible names they called you: tomboy, lesbian, dyke. And the nasty stories they told. And God help me, I defended you every single time, even though I expect that some of what I was hearin' was quite possibly the horrifyin' truth.

SYD. You defended me, Mama? And how exactly did you do that?

HELEN. By callin' it what it was: trash talk and gossip. "She's a good, Christian girl", I'd remind 'em. "She'll grow out of it; it's only a phase", I'd say. "As a matter of fact, she has her eye on that Landry boy down in East Riverside; I half-expect they'll be married one day". And I'd just repeat 'em same things over and over, until either they believed me, or they just stopped talkin' about it. And that's what I did. To protect you.

SYD. You were protectin' yourself, Mama. And let me make one thing clear. I don't hate you. I never have. But I do hate that you're a coward.

HELEN. True enough. (*A moment.*) Times have changed. I'm not blind to that. But they ain't changin' quite as fast as you think they are, Sydney. You suppose it's okay for you to just do and say whatever you want, whenever and however you want? Because that's not how the world works, not the one we're livin' in anyway. And it ain't safe out there, Sydney. No woman is safe out there.

SYD. I'll take my chances. (*Sydney starts for the door.*) Oh, and if it's any consolation, I did have a crush on that Landry boy. Turns out, he likes girls with big tits and empty heads, so I never had a chance with him anyway.

(*Sydney exits.*)

HELEN. Only God can protect you now.

(*All lights fade to black.*)

SCENE 3

June 24, 1973. ~7:50 PM. The porch. Bud is asleep. After a moment, Helen enters. She crosses to the top of the stairs and sits. The sun will completely set in a few minutes. She stares out. Bud rouses and sits up.

SYD

BUD. Sweetheart? Helen? (*Helen looks back to Bud and smiles faintly.*) What're you doin'?

HELEN. I thought I'd try and catch the sunset.

BUD. Well, it's nearly gone now. I was hopin' to see it myself, but I guess I slept through. (*Bud goes to her and sits next to her.*) You okay?

HELEN. I'm fine. Long day is all.

BUD. Let's turn in early then. Whatta you say?

HELEN. You still tired after that long nap?

BUD. Didn't say I was tired.

HELEN. (*Smiling politely.*) Not tonight, Bud.

BUD. Sorry. Bad timin' on my part.

HELEN. No, it's fine. I love that you still find me desirable.

BUD. Well, 'course I do. What'd make you think otherwise?

HELEN. Oh, I don't know. I guess I'd like to think that I'm useful in some way.

BUD. What in the world are you talkin' about? Useful? What does you bein' the most beautiful woman I ever laid eyes on have to do with bein' useful?

HELEN. (*Unconvinced, self-conscious.*) You shut up.

BUD. What? I'm deadly serious here. I mean, come on, Helen. Without you, this entire house would come down on its foundation. Hell, there are so many things you do that are useful. You're an amazin' cook. You're always cleanin' up after me and Syd; spend most of your time in the laundry room 'cause we're always comin' home dirty. You head up all 'em bake sales at church. And you're all the time volunteerin' for somethin' or other in the community. And ain't none of it has anything to do with how beautiful I think you are. (*A strange look comes over Helen's face.*) What? What's wrong?

HELEN. Do you smell that?

BUD. Damn it. It's probably my breath. I should go and brush my teeth.

HELEN. (*She stands.*) No. No, it ain't that. I smell smoke. Smells like somethin's burnin'.

(*Bud stands. They both look off into the distance.*)

BUD. Oh yeah. I smell it too.

SYD

HELEN. (*Spotting something.*) There. Over there, Bud. Looks like a fire.

BUD. Holy Mother of... That's a real big fire.

BEAU. (*Calling from off.*) Bud! Hey, Bud! You see that?

BUD. Yeah, Beau! We just saw! It don't look good! Don't look good at all.

(*Beau appears. He looks in the direction of the fire.*)

BEAU. Looks like it might be over by Canal Street, close to the river maybe. Hard to tell exactly. Hey, listen. I'm gonna get my car and head that way. They may need help. You wanna come with?

BUD. Yeah. Sure. I'll be right over. (*Beau exits. To Helen.*) You gonna be okay here by yourself?

HELEN. 'Course I'll be okay. You be careful, Bud. Don't do anything stupid.

BUD. Ain't nothin' to worry about. Me and Beau are just gonna stay back outta the way unless they need us for anything. And I'll call you if I can.

HELEN. All right.

(*We hear a car horn in the distance.*)

BUD. (*Calling off.*) I'll be right there, Beau! (*We hear a car start. To Helen.*) Love you, sweetheart.

HELEN. Love you, too. (*They kiss. Another car horn.*) You better get goin'.

BUD. Get some rest if you can. I'll see you in a bit.

(*Bud heads off. Helen watches. She waves as we hear Bud get into the car and the car speeds off. All lights fade to black.*)

SCENE 4

June 24, 1973. ~11:00 PM. An empty kitchen. The coffee maker is on and has just finished brewing. Helen enters and pours herself a cup, perhaps she puts cream and sugar in it. A long moment passes. She's anxious. The phone rings. She puts her coffee down and answers the call.

HELEN. Bud...? Hello...? Oh... Oh, I am so sorry, Dennis. I thought it was my husband callin' back... Well, I was waitin' for an update from him on that buildin' that caught fire. I don't suppose you've heard anything more...? You haven't...?

SYD

Well, I'm actually kinda surprised you're not over there too... You were called away...? Whatta you mean...? A disturbance? Where...? Oh... Oh my... I see. Well, what does any of that have to do with us...? Oh, dear God, Dennis, that can't be true... Oh my God... No. No, it's fine. I'm glad you called... All right, well, if Bud isn't home soon, I'll just come over there myself and take care of things... No, you don't need to pick me up. I'll drive myself. It's very sweet of you to offer, though... Yes... Thank you, Dennis... Goodbye now.

(Helen hangs up the phone. She stands quietly, showing no emotion. Slowly, a look of sadness comes across her face. She begins to cry, softly at first. This will turn into heavy sobbing. Suddenly, we see and hear Bud approach the kitchen door. He is covered in soot and is extremely disheveled and tired. Helen sees him and hurriedly composes herself. She moves quickly to the door as Bud enters.)

HELEN. Oh, for goodness' sake, Bud. You're a mess. *(She pulls a chair from the kitchen table and moves it to the middle of the floor.)* Why don't you sit down here? You must be thirsty. We've got some lemonade left in the fridge. *(She starts for the refrigerator.)*

BUD. *(He sits.)* Just some water, please, sweetheart.

HELEN. 'Course. *(Helen pulls a glass from the cupboard and gets Bud a glass of water from the faucet.)* What in the world happened over there? You've been gone for almost three hours. And you're completely covered in ash.

BUD. It was real bad. Real bad.

HELEN. Whatta you mean? Bad how?

BUD. I don't think you're gonna wanna hear this, Helen.

HELEN. Well, 'course I wanna hear. Has someone been hurt?

BUD. A lot of men have been hurt, yes.

HELEN. What? How many?

BUD. I don't know exactly. Ten or more.

HELEN. Oh my God.

BUD. And that ain't the worst of it.

HELEN. Oh, dear Lord, Bud. Please don't tell me that people are dead.

BUD. We stopped countin' when we got to about twenty or so. All of 'em men.

HELEN. *(Beside herself with shock and grief, though not hysterical.)* No. Oh, God, no. No, no, no, no, no...

SYD

BUD (*Rising out of the chair.*) Helen...

HELEN. No, no...

BUD. (*He goes to her and gently soothes her.*) Helen, look at me. Look at me. Roscoe is dead.

HELEN. Roscoe? Where was the fire, Bud?

BUD. Over on Iberville Street. (*Beat.*) So, listen. I'm gonna head down to Leeville in the morning with Beau to pick up Jack and Billy and bring 'em home. Maybe you can keep an eye on Beverly while we're gone? Should take us a little less than five hours.

HELEN. (*Distracted.*) All right.

BUD. I'm gonna get cleaned up now. And then I think we should go to bed. Try to get some sleep. Tomorrow is gonna be a long day. (*He hugs Helen tightly and then starts off.*)

HELEN. Bud.

BUD. What is it?

HELEN. We can't go to bed just now.

BUD. Whatta you mean? Why not?

HELEN. Sydney.

BUD. She ain't home yet?

HELEN. No.

BUD. Well, what's wrong? Where is she?

HELEN. Detective Cormier called.

BUD. Dennis?

HELEN. Yes.

BUD. Well, what'd he say? Is Syd in trouble? She okay? (*Beat.*) Helen! What's happened with Syd?

HELEN. She's been arrested.

(All lights fade to black. End of Act 1.)

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