

Syd

by Craig Houk

PERUSSAL

SYD

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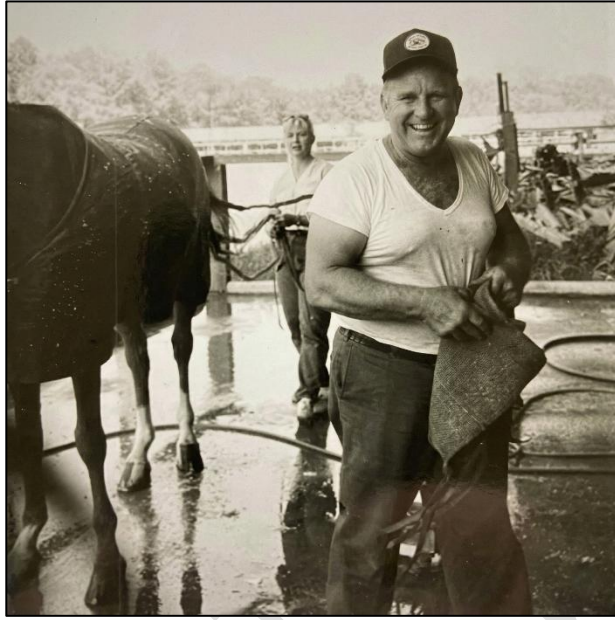
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SYD



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 action centers on the kitchen and back porch of the Trahan family home in Uptown New Orleans, with brief shifts to the Larson living room, the Canal Street dock, and a stretch of Highway 1 in Louisiana suggested through minimal staging.

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 4th	Evening	Near the Canal Street Dock
2-7	July 17th	Early Evening	Trahan Kitchen

SYD

SYD was originally produced by LAB Theater Project in Ybor City/Tampa, Florida, opening on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, and closing on Sunday, March 10th, 2024. The play was directed by Owen Robertson and featured the following cast and production team:

Mandy Keen as Sydney “Syd” Trahan
Tiffany Faykus as Helen Trahan
James Skinner as Robert “Bud” Trahan
Isabel Natera as Beverly Larson
John D. Hooper as Beauregard “Beau” Larson

Stage Manager: Idannys Suarez
Producer/Light & Set Design/Technical Director: Owen Robertson
Sound Designer: Rick Anthony
Scenic Artist: Cas Hardy
Costume Design: Corinne Todd
Assistant Producer/Props & Set Dressing: Beth Tepe-Robertson
Videographer: Kaplan Bryant
Scenic Painters: Caroline Jett, Beth Tepe-Robertson, Cas Hardy, Owen Robertson and Idannys Suarez

SYD

SYD

ACT 1

SCENE 1

June 24, 1973. Afternoon. A kitchen.

(Helen Trahan has nearly finished setting the dinner table. She is jovial. A television plays offstage. She calls out.)

HELEN. Sydney. Sydney, dinner's ready. Call your Daddy, please. I expect he's out back. *(She takes the main course from the counter and sets it at the center of the table. Calls again.)* Sydney, you hear me? Dinner's ready. Go get your Daddy. *(She waits. No response. She crosses to the archway, calling into the living room.)* Sydney!

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

HELEN. My goodness, you play that TV way too loud.

SYD. *(Off.)* Sorry, Mama. I'll turn it down.

HELEN. No, just turn it off. Now listen. I've put together a nice meal for the three of us, and I'd appreciate it if you and your Daddy came to the table.

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

HELEN. And wash your hands.

SYD. *(Off.)* Yes, ma'am. *(Helen retrieves a pitcher of lemonade from the refrigerator. The television goes quiet.)* Daddy! Dinner's ready!

HELEN. *(Quietly with a sigh.)* God give me strength. *(She sets out three glasses and begins pouring lemonade. Bud Trahan enters.)*

BUD. Somethin' smells real good in here. *(He kisses her cheek.)*

SYD

HELEN. Thank you, Bud. That's very sweet. Now sit before everything gets cold. (*Bud sits.*)

BUD. Where's Syd?

HELEN. I sent her to wash up. And honestly, how many times do I have to ask you to stop callin' her that?

BUD. Come on now. What's the harm? I've been callin' her that since she was in diapers.

HELEN. "Syd" sounds like a man's name, at least to me. And she's a grown woman. 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 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. Let me see your hands.

SYD. I think I know how to wash my own hands.

HELEN. Let me see 'em. (*Sydney shows her hands, palms up, then down.*) Sit down. (*They sit. Helen studies her.*)

SYD. What? What'd I do now?

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

SYD. Nothin's gotten into me, 'cept 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.

SYD

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. (*Calm but firm.*) / That's enough. Can we please eat in peace? You said it yourself, Helen. Food's gettin' cold.

HELEN. Yes, it is.

SYD. Fine with me, I'm starved. (*Sydney reaches for food. Helen stops her.*)

HELEN. Are you tryin' to upset me on purpose? (*Sydney pulls back.*)

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

SYD. Right. Sorry, Mama. (*Helen takes both their hands.*)

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

SYD. I can make my / own plate.

BUD. (*To Helen.*) / Sounds like a real good idea, sweetheart. I'd like that. And I expect Syd would too. Wouldn't you, Syd?

SYD. 'Course, Daddy. (*Bud hands over his plate.*)

HELEN. Thank you, Bud. (*She serves him.*)

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

HELEN. No, Bud. / I haven't.

SYD. / Maybe it fell out when the paper boy tossed it. I'll check out front. (*Sydney starts to rise.*)

SYD

HELEN. Stay right where you are. You can look after we've eaten. It's not urgent. *(Sydney sits.)*

BUD. No, I suppose it ain't. But of all days for that to go missin'. Hm... *(He sips his lemonade.)*

HELEN. Alright, what is it, Bud? Why're 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. It can wait forever, for all I care.

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

BUD. Hey, Syd.

SYD. Yeah, Daddy?

BUD. After dinner, if you can't find it, maybe run next door. See if the Larsons will lend us theirs?

SYD. Sure. *(Helen hands Bud his plate.)*

BUD. *(To Helen.)* Thank you, dear. *(Helen smiles, then reaches for Sydney's plate.)*

HELEN. Sydney. *(Sydney hands it over.)* Go ahead and eat, Bud. *(She prepares Sydney's plate – noticeably smaller portions.)*

BUD. You sure you ladies don't mind if I start?

SYD. 'Course not, Daddy.

BUD. Helen?

HELEN. Didn't I just say?

BUD. Alright then. Everything looks real good. Don't you agree, Syd?

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

SYD

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

BUD. *(Takes a bite.)* Mm... Mm, mm, mm. So good. You've outdone yourself, Helen.

HELEN. *(Blushing.)* You stop.

BUD. I'm serious. Best meal ever. Like heaven on a biscuit.

HELEN. Thank you, Bud. Now hush and eat. *(She laughs softly, hands Sydney her plate.)* Here you go.

SYD. Thanks, Mama. *(They eat. Helen serves herself.)*

BUD. So, how're your studies comin', baby girl?

SYD. Oh. Uh... good. Real good.

BUD. Nice to hear. And your grades?

SYD. Ninety-three percent.

BUD. Wow! Ninety-three! That's great. What does that mean exactly?

SYD. Anything ninety-three or above is "excellent." Grade point value of four.

BUD. Oh, boy. And?

SYD. I got an 'A', Daddy.

BUD. Ah! That's what I wanted to hear. 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—

SYD

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

SYD. Twenty a week. Forty-five during vacation breaks.

BUD. *(To Helen.)* You see?

SYD. And excuse me, Mama, if once in a while I like to sit in front of the TV. Sometimes it's nice to relax and not think about bed pans and bed sores for a couple hours. *(We hear Beau Larson calling after his wife, Beverly Larson.)*

BEAU. *(Off.)* Beverly! Beverly, get back here and leave these 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 appears at the kitchen door, peering through the screen before knocking on the frame. She holds the Dixie Roto Magazine insert.)* Helloooo. *(Beau appears just behind her, both slightly out of breath. Helen and Bud rise. Helen moves to the door.)*

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

BEVERLY. Do you mind if we come in?

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

BEAU. Oh, damn it, they're havin' dinner. I told you so. Sorry, folks. We can come back another time. Come on, Beverly. *(Beau takes her arm, starting to pull her away. Bud steps past Helen.)*

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

BEAU. You sure?

BUD. 'Course I'm sure. *(To Helen.)* Sweetheart?

SYD

HELEN. Well, certainly. We're always happy to have you. *(Beverly pushes in, wasting no time.)*

BEVERLY. Terrific. 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. *(Entering behind Beverly.)* Hey, Sydney.

HELEN. That looks like the Dixie Roto Magazine insert in your hand, Beverly. *(Sydney perks up, rising.)*

BEVERLY. It sure is.

HELEN. Funny, we were just talkin' about it. Sydney was gonna stop by after dinner to see if you might share yours, 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. He's been hintin' at somethin'. Seemed mighty anxious to get his hands on it.

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

HELEN. What surprise? What is goin' on?

SYD. Oh, for fu— *(She catches herself, crosses quickly to Beverly, and snatches the insert.)* I'll take that.

HELEN. Sydney! *(Sydney steps away. The others crowd in behind her as she opens it. Bud hangs back. Sydney beams, then looks to him.)*

SYD. Daddy!

HELEN. What? What is it? *(She reaches for the insert, but Sydney dodges her.)*

SYD

SYD. Guess who's on the cover of this week's Dixie Roto Magazine?
(Helen turns to Bud. He just smiles.)

HELEN. Oh, come on now. You're yankin' my chain. Why in the world would Bud be –? Alright, hand it over. Let me take a look at that.
(Sydney, teasing, finally gives it up. Helen studies the cover.) Well, I'll be.

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

BEAU. And look at that headline: "Big-City Blacksmith".

HELEN. Looks like the Guidry farm behind you.

BUD. S'right. *(To the Larsons.)* Sydney used to go horseback ridin' there on weekends.

BEVERLY. *(Quietly.)* Well, la-di-da.

HELEN. Alright, now I'm on pins and needles. What's this all about, Bud?

BUD. Go on. Read for yourself.

SYD. It's on page six. *(She takes the insert back, drops into her chair, flips through. The others gather close as she finds it.)*

BEVERLY. Go on, Sydney. Read it.

HELEN. Out loud. So, everyone can hear.

SYD. *(Reading proudly.)* "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 twenty years. 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.

SYD

BEAU. Ain't that somethin'.

BEVERLY. And that's not all. It talks about how Bud got into blacksmithin' after seein'... Oh, what's that man's name, Bud? Famous blacksmith?

BUD. Alexander Winkler Bealer, III.

BEVERLY. That's the one.

BUD. Saw him at the North Georgia State Fair in '43. Got my first anvil and hammer three years later and I've been playin' with fire ever since.

BEAU. Well, business is bound to pick up now. Not that you've been hurtin' for work.

BUD. No, we're doin' alright. But yeah. I expect a few more customers. Maybe even some from out of state.

HELEN. You really think so?

BUD. Free advertisin', ain't it?

HELEN. My God. I don't know what to say. This is real good news. I'm so proud of you, Bud. *(She hugs him tightly. Bud reaches out.)*

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

SYD. If you got room.

BUD. Plenty. Come on. *(Sydney joins. A brief, warm family embrace.)*

BEAU. Alright, Beverly. That's our cue. Let's get the hell outta here and let 'em get back to dinner. We've pestered 'em enough.

BEVERLY. Alright, alright. *(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? Celebrate the good news?

BEVERLY. Well, that sounds real nice.

SYD

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

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

BUD. You got it.

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

HELEN. Oh, no, no. You make yourself a plate, Beau. Plenty left. Then you and Bud can head out back and talk about whatever useless nonsense you men talk about. Beverly'll stay here with me. You hungry, Beverly?

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

BUD. Well, that settles it. Syd, grab the milk outta the fridge. I'll get started on those drinks. *(He exits through the archway.)*

HELEN. *(To Syd.)* And set up two tray tables on the porch for your Daddy and Mr. Larson.

SYD. Yes, Mama. *(She goes to the refrigerator, takes out the milk.)*

HELEN. Go on, Beau. Help yourself. Plates are in the cupboard, silverware in the drawer below.

BEAU. Yes, ma'am. *(He takes a plate, moves to the table.)*

HELEN. Have a seat, Beverly.

BEVERLY. Don't mind if I do. *(They sit. Sydney passes by them with the milk.)*

HELEN. Oh. And Sydney? When you're finished, I'd like you to come back and join us.

SYD. Oh. Uh... If it's alright, Mama, I think I'll pass. I've got some studyin' to do.

HELEN. *(With a forced smile.)* I wasn't askin', Sydney. And I expect your studies can wait until later this evenin', can't they?

SYD

SYD. Normally, I guess. But I'm headin' out with some of the girls tonight.

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

SYD. I'm goin' out. For a few drinks, maybe some dancin'—

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

SYD. Be right there, Daddy!

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

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

HELEN. That's not the same thing, now is it? We're celebratin' your Daddy's award. And the rest of us aren't tryin' to earn a nursin' degree. *(Sydney starts to interject.)* No. Not another word. And I don't appreciate you arguin' with me in front of company. You will not be goin' out tonight. That's all there is to it.

SYD. *(Quietly, a defiant smile.)* Well, it's already been decided. So, tough shit, Helen. *(She exits with the milk.)*

HELEN. *(Rising, slamming her hands on the table.)* Sydney! *(Beau and Beverly freeze. Helen collects herself, sits.)* I'm sorry.

BEVERLY. There's no need to apologize. Just take a breath. *(Beau hasn't moved. Bud enters.)*

BUD. What the hell happened in here?

BEVERLY. Everything's fine, Bud. Just a little misunderstandin'.

BUD. Sounded like more than that. *(To Helen.)* You alright, sweetheart?

HELEN. Mm hm.

BUD. You sure? I'm happy to have a talk with Syd.

SYD

HELEN. I'm fine, Bud. Just... leave it be. Please.

BUD. *(Unconvinced.)* Alright then. You comin', Beau?

BEAU. *(Distracted.)* Uh... yeah. Yeah.

BUD. Well, get your ass in gear. Drinks are comin' up, ladies. *(Bud exits. Beau lingers.)*

BEVERLY. Beau?

BEAU. 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 yourself a knife and 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. Oh, I'm fine. You know how it is. You've got your hands full with those boys.

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

HELEN. Oh, that's right. And how are Billy and Jack?

BEVERLY. They're doin' real well. They're visitin' Beau's parents down in Leeville, so we've got the house to ourselves for a few days.

HELEN. I bet that's nice.

BEVERLY. It sure is.

HELEN. And Roscoe? How's he doin'? He's been on his own for quite some time now, hasn't he?

SYD

BEVERLY. Almost two years. But we don't really stay in touch. We don't much appreciate the company he keeps. Not interested in havin' those types hangin' around, if you know what I mean.

HELEN. I see. So... where's he livin' now?

BEVERLY. Not sure exactly. Not sure I care to know. 'Cept I've been hearin' he's somewhere over in the French Quarter. *(Bud enters with 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. My pleasure. Think nothin' of it. *(He grabs his plate, starts off.)*

HELEN. Let me at least warm that up for you.

BUD. No, no. It's fine. Don't wanna keep Beau waitin'. You ladies enjoy. *(He exits. The women sip their drinks.)*

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

HELEN. I suppose I have. But that's all they are, Beverly... rumors. I'm sure there's little truth to 'em. And besides, Roscoe's a good man.

BEVERLY. No. No, I'm sorry, but he is not a good man.

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

BEVERLY. With the Metropolitan Community Church, Helen.

HELEN. Well... alright. I understand 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?

SYD

HELEN. No, we would not. But from what I understand, Roscoe's worked very hard for that church... to build it, to keep it goin', often out of his own pocket.

BEVERLY. Let me speak plainly. And this is difficult, because I don't care to discuss private family matters – least of all in this kind of language, especially about 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. And I'm not gonna be one of those mothers who pretends otherwise. Who spends sleepless nights beatin' her chest, prayin' to God, beggin' Him to save her son's soul, wonderin' what she did wrong. Because I did nothin' wrong. Roscoe has a disease. Of the mind and the body. The Devil's in him. And I want nothin' to do with the Devil.

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

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

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

BEVERLY. That's where they gather. That's where Roscoe goes. I don't even wanna imagine what goes on in there. But whatever it is, they better believe God is watchin'. And one day, every last one of 'em will stand before their Maker. And they will answer for the choices they've made. *(Lights down on the kitchen. Lights up on the porch. Bud and Beau sit with tray tables, plates and drinks before them. A copy of the Times-Picayune rests nearby.)*

BEAU. So, whatta you think? Roberts gonna turn the Saints into a winnin' team this year?

BUD. I doubt it. They had a shit-awful season last year. And aside from draftin' Manning in '71, he's been about as useful as Fears was before

SYD

him. Then they get second pick this year – earned by that same shitty record – and what do they do? Trade it away. Hell, I bet Roberts doesn't even make it to the regular season.

BEAU. Yeah, you're probably right. Be nice to make the playoffs once, though.

BUD. Sure would. 'Cept I don't see that happenin' anytime soon. *(They drink.)*

BEAU. Hot day today.

BUD. Sure is. Little bit of a breeze, though, so, not too bad.

BEAU. Hotter than yesterday.

BUD. Feels that way. *(They drink.)*

BEAU. How's Sydney doin'?

BUD. She's doin' real good. Workin' hard, gettin' good grades.

BEAU. Haven't seen her around much.

BUD. You will. First year she had to live in the nurses' residence. Hospital's strict – check-in by seven on weekdays, by ten on weekends. Between that, studyin', and workin', she didn't have much time for anything else.

BEAU. She's changed.

BUD. Changed how?

BEAU. 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.)* She's tough, though. Maybe a little rough around the edges?

BUD. She's always been that way.

SYD

BEAU. Has she?

BUD. ‘Course she has. You remember when she took one of my cross-peen hammers, marched over to the Nunez house, and beat Rodger Nunez with it? Lucky for him, he was a foot taller. Otherwise, she might’ve killed him had she whacked him on the head. And lucky for us she was nine at the time, or we’d’ve been in a heap of legal trouble.

BEAU. That Nunez boy had it comin’.

BUD. Hot head. Always causin’ problems. Guess Syd finally had enough of his teasin’ and tormentin’.

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

BUD. Yeah? That’s too bad.

BEAU. He, uh... runs around with my oldest boy.

BUD. Roscoe?

BEAU. Yeah. Same circles. You know what I’m sayin’?

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

BEAU. We try not to talk about it. (*Bud nods.*) I just thank God every day for my other two boys. Billy and Jack... they’re gonna be just fine. They ain’t like Roscoe. I mean... with him, I could tell early on. Somethin’ was off. (*They drink.*)

BUD. My mama died when I was eleven. After that, it was just me and my daddy.

BEAU. I’m sorry to hear that.

BUD. Long time ago. And I’m sure you’re wonderin’ why I’m bringin’ it up.

BEAU. I’m listenin’.

SYD

BUD. My daddy was a police officer. Kept crazy hours. Nearest relative was my Aunt Minnie, but she couldn't take me in. She ended up in an institution after a while. So, when my father was on patrol, he'd leave me with the neighbors. And when they couldn't take me, he'd drop me off at a bar. He was friends with the barkeep. I didn't mind. Jukebox, pool table, all sorts of characters comin' and goin'. There was this one fella... Leroy. Forties. Never married. Part-time roofer. Barely had two nickels to rub together. And he could talk. Lord, could he talk. Never knew when to shut up. One afternoon, I was lookin' for somethin' to do, so I offered to clean the cue sticks. I'm at the back when Leroy stumbles in, already half drunk. Orders a double whiskey. Downs it. Orders another. Then he comes over to me. Pulls up a stool. Leans in. Asks what I'm doin'. His face all swollen, teeth dirty, his breath somethin' awful. I backed off a little. And when I did, I saw him get... sad. So, I stepped back in. Told him, "I'm cleanin' these cue sticks, Mister." He smiles. Leans in again. Says, "I got a secret I ain't never shared with no one. You wanna hear it?" (*Bud exhales slowly.*) I didn't wanna hear it. I wanted to tell him no. But instead, I said, "Sure." And he said, "Lucifer has put a thorn in my flesh. And God is dead." Then he reached for my hand – his hand all cracked, red, and dry – and I wanted to run. Or call out. But I couldn't. He grabbed me and pulled me in. His hand on the back of my head... buried his face in my hair. Breathed in real deep. I thought I might be sick. And then – just like that – he let go. Stepped back. Eyes full of tears. Turned, walked to the bar, paid his tab... and left. (*Pause.*) Some things can't be fixed, Beau. And some things are worse than others. You understand? (*Sydney enters.*)

SYD. Daddy?

BUD. Yeah, baby girl?

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

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

SYD. No.

SYD

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 permission. I came to ask for money.

BUD. Says the grown woman.

SYD. Daddy...

BUD. Alright, alright. I can give you some cash. My wallet's upstairs.

SYD. I'll get it.

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

SYD. Thank you, Daddy.

BUD. You got it. *(Bud exits. Sydney starts to follow.)*

BEAU. Hey, Sydney. *(She stops, turns.)*

SYD. You can call me Syd.

BEAU. Alright. Syd.

SYD. Yes, Beau?

BEAU. You're headin' out tonight?

SYD. That's the word on the street.

BEAU. Bet you got a fun night planned.

SYD. I'm plannin' on havin' fun, yes.

BEAU. Where you goin'?

SYD

SYD. Don't know yet. Me and the girls'll play it by ear. Why're you so interested?

BEAU. Just curious. I'm an old man; I don't get out much. Wonderin' what women your age get up to. Lotta crazy shit in the world these days... maybe I'm thinkin' about your welfare.

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

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

SYD. Somethin' tells me if he were here, you wouldn't be sayin' that.

BEAU. Maybe not.

SYD. So, what makes you think he's a pushover?

BEAU. You're his daughter. That's all it takes. And while I'm at it... I think you're a little too hard on your Mama.

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

BEAU. See. That right there. That attitude. You got a mouth on you.

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

BEAU. You know what I mean.

SYD. I do. And I'm tellin' you again... it's none of your damn business. So, I guess we're done here. *(She turns to go.)*

BEAU. Now listen, Syd— *(He rises, reaches for her arm.)*

SYD. *(Sharp.)* You better be careful, Beau. You make one more move and, believe me, you'll be crawlin' outta here without your testicles. *(Beau pulls his hand back.)* And I think you know what my Daddy might do if he saw you puttin' your hands on me.

BEAU. I wasn't gonna put hands on you.

SYD

SYD. Sure looked like it.

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

SYD. I've seen how you and Beverly treat Roscoe, so I couldn't agree more.

BEAU. Your Mama's a good Christian woman. And nothin' comes before her faith. You need to trust she knows what she's doin'. God's got a plan for you, Syd. Even if it don't make sense now... it will.
(Lights down on the porch. Lights up on the kitchen. The space is mostly tidied. Two fresh Brandy Milk Punches sit on the table. Helen and Beverly are mid-conversation.)

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

HELEN. Francis and Faye have a good time. That's what matters.

BEVERLY. They're nuttier than a five-pound fruitcake. But they're good for a few laughs.

HELEN. Wouldn't be card club without 'em.

BEVERLY. No, I suppose it wouldn't. *(They share a laugh. Helen continues tidying.)* Listen, Helen...

HELEN. Mm Hm?

BEVERLY. Now, you stop me if I'm oversteppin'... *(Helen pauses, turns.)*

HELEN. Alright.

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

HELEN. Before what's too late?

SYD

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

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

BEVERLY. I don't see how she'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 good for two things: payin' bills and keepin' the bed warm. Beau only made things worse with Roscoe. And it's plain as day Sydney's got Bud wrapped around her little finger. Now don't get me wrong, Bud's a good man. But he doesn't see what you and I see.

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

BEVERLY. Pray for guidance. And then do whatever it takes to get that girl back on the right path. Her soul depends on it.

HELEN. I see. You know, it's gettin' late, Beverly. And I'm a little tired. Do you mind?

BEVERLY. Oh. No. 'Course I don't. I'll just... grab Beau and we'll be on our way.

HELEN. Thanks for stoppin' by.

BEVERLY. My pleasure. And thank you for lettin' us disrupt your day. We're very much lookin' forward to that award ceremony.

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

BEVERLY. It sure is. You get some rest. We'll talk soon. *(Beverly hugs Helen, then exits. Lights down on the kitchen. Lights up on the porch. Bud and Beau sit with fresh Sazeracs, their plates cleared.)*

BEAU. That just ain't accurate, Bud. I don't believe it. Now, what I heard – which makes a whole lot more sense – is that those men broke

SYD

into that hotel lookin' for intel on that DNC secretary... what's her name?

BUD. Ida Wells?

BEAU. That's the one. Goes by Maxie, right?

BUD. S'right.

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

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

BEAU. No, no. Listen. That John Dean fella – the White House Counsel – 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 arrives on the porch.*)

BEVERLY. Alright, 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 alright. We're havin' a good time.

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

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

BEAU. What? Nooo.

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

BUD. Probably a good idea. I'll catch up with you later, Beau. Gonna watch the sunset, then maybe have a little lie-down out here. Feels like another breeze comin' through.

SYD

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

BEAU. Alright, alright. The old ball-and-chain has spoken. You gonna help me up, Beverly?

BEVERLY. Why should today be any different? *(She starts to help him. Bud steps in.)*

BUD. I got him. *(Beverly steps aside.)*

BEVERLY. Thank you, Bud. *(Bud helps Beau to his feet, guiding him off the porch.)*

BEAU. Hey, Bud.

BUD. Yeah?

BEAU. Listen. I voted for Nixon. Both times.

BUD. I know, Beau. Everybody knows.

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

BEVERLY. Consider 'em marked.

BEAU. Oh, shit.

BUD. What's the matter?

BEAU. Almost forgot. I was hopin' to borrow your mower. Mine's busted – ran over a tree root.

BEVERLY. Well, you're not mowin' anything tonight. Not in your condition.

BUD. Tell you what. I'll take the lock off the tool shed. You come by tomorrow, pick it up whenever you like.

BEAU. Thank you, my friend.

BUD. Any time.

SYD

BEVERLY. I can take it from here.

BUD. You sure?

BEVERLY. Oh, yeah. He's been much worse than this.

BUD. Alright then. He's all yours.

BEVERLY. Ain't that the sad truth?

BUD. Just be careful. Take your time. *(Beverly leads Beau off. Bud watches them go, smiles, maybe lets out a small laugh, shakes his head. He turns back, settles into his chair on the porch. Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 2

June 24th, 1973. Before sundown. An empty kitchen.

(Sydney enters, dressed to go out in a long denim skirt, cotton button-down. She crosses to the refrigerator, pulls out a six-pack of canned beer. Turns and sees Helen in the archway.)

HELEN. Headin' out already?

SYD. Just gettin' an early start. I won't be late. Should be home by midnight.

HELEN. You finished with your studies?

SYD. I will be in about three years.

HELEN. *(A faint smile.)* I see. Well, I'm gonna ask you to put that beer back. It belongs to your Daddy.

SYD. I'll replace it when I get paid.

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

SYD. Me and the girls have been plannin' this for a while, Mama. I'm not missin' it. You're actin' like I'm out every night.

SYD

HELEN. Whatta you need the beer for?

SYD. We're meetin' at Marilyn Durand's first. I'm not showin' up empty-handed.

HELEN. And from there?

SYD. Out dancin'. Like I said.

HELEN. Where?

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

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

SYD. No harm. 'Cept we haven't decided.

HELEN. You just said you've been plannin' this.

SYD. You know what? I'm done talkin' about it. It's none of your concern where I'm goin' or what I'm doin'. So... bye, Mama. *(She heads for the door. Helen follows.)*

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

SYD. What!?

HELEN. Who do you think is payin' for your education? Hm? Who's puttin' a roof over your head? A bed to sleep in? Food in your mouth?

SYD. Not you. It's never been you. It's always been Daddy. Without him, we'd have none of this. So, let me ask you... what have you actually done for me?

HELEN. I gave birth to you. I raised you.

SYD. So what? You want a prize? For what, Helen? For openin' your legs that one time? You'd be hard-pressed to find a prize more useless at the bottom of a box of Cracker Jack. *(Helen crosses and slaps her. The beer drops, clattering. Helen recoils, stunned by herself.)*

SYD

HELEN. Sydney, I— *(Sydney steps in fast. Helen braces.)*

SYD. Sit down, Mama.

HELEN. Sydney—

SYD. Sit down. *(Helen sits. Head lowered. Sydney sits across from her.)*
You got somethin' you need to say? *(Helen looks up but stays silent.)*
Go on. Now's your chance. I'm givin' you some of my precious time.

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

SYD. What way?

HELEN. The sarcasm. The spite. The hate. You have no idea what I've had to put up with. The things people say. What I've overheard. At church, at social events, on the street. At card club, in my own home. The things they say about you. My daughter. My flesh and blood. The names they call you: tomboy... lesbian... dyke. The stories. And God help me, I defended you every single time. Even when I feared some of it might be true

SYD. You defended me? How?

HELEN. By callin' it what it was. Gossip. Trash talk. "She's a good Christian girl," I'd say. "She'll grow out of it." "It's just a phase." "She's got her eye on that Landry boy; I expect they'll be married one day." And I said it again. And again. Until they believed me. Or until they got tired of talkin' about it. That's how I protected you.

SYD. You protected yourself. 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. I see. Times are changin', I'm not blind to that. But not as fast as you think. You believe you can do and say whatever you want, whenever and however you want? That's not the world we live in. And it's not safe out there, Sydney. Not for any woman.

SYD. I'll take my chances. *(She heads for the door, then turns back.)*

SYD

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 anyway. *(Sydney exits. Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 3

June 24th, 1973. ~7:50 PM. The porch.

(Bud is asleep in his chair. Helen enters quietly, crosses to the top of the steps, and sits. The sun is nearly gone. She stares out, lost in thought. Bud stirs, wakes.)

BUD. Sweetheart? Helen? *(Helen turns back, offers a faint smile.)*
What're you doin'?

HELEN. Thought I'd catch the sunset.

BUD. Well, I'm glad you woke me. I was hopin' to catch it myself. *(Bud goes to her and sits next to her.)* You okay?

HELEN. I'm fine. Just a long day.

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

HELEN. You still tired after that long nap?

BUD. Didn't say I was tired.

HELEN. *(A polite smile.)* Not tonight, Bud.

BUD. 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. I don't know. I suppose I'd like to think I'm useful in some way.

SYD

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

HELEN. *(Unconvinced, self-conscious.)* You hush.

BUD. I'm serious. Without you, this whole house would fall apart. You cook, you clean up after me and Syd, you practically live in the laundry room 'cause we're always comin' home filthy. You run 'em bake sales at church, volunteer for just about everything in town... And none of that has a damn thing to do with how beautiful I think you are. *(A shift in Helen. Something unsettled.)* What? What's wrong?

HELEN. Do you smell that?

BUD. Oh, damn. Probably my breath. I oughta brush my teeth. *(Helen stands, alert now.)*

HELEN. No. Not that. Smoke. *(Bud stands. They both look out.)*

BUD. Yeah, I smell it now.

HELEN. *(Points.)* There. Over there.

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

BEAU. *(Off.)* Bud! Hey, Bud! You see that?

BUD. Yeah, Beau! We see it! It don't look good. *(Beau appears, staring out.)*

BEAU. Looks like it's over by Canal Street. Near the river maybe. Hard to tell. Listen, I'm gonna get my car, head that way. They might need help. You comin'?

BUD. Yeah. I'll be right there. *(Beau exits. To Helen.)* You gonna be alright here?

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

SYD

BUD. Nothin' to worry about. Me and Beau'll stay outta the way unless they need us. And I'll call you if I can. *(A car horn in the distance. Calling off.)* I'm comin', Beau! *(To Helen.)* Love you, sweetheart.

HELEN. Love you, too. *(They kiss. Another horn.)* You better go.

BUD. Try to get some rest. I'll be back soon. *(Bud exits. The sound of the car starting and pulling away. Helen lingers, staring out toward the fire. All lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 4

June 24th, 1973. ~11:00 PM.

(An empty kitchen. Fresh coffee sits in the pot. Helen enters, pours herself a cup. She is on edge. The telephone rings. She startles, sets the cup down, answers quickly)

HELEN. Bud...? Hello...? Oh, I'm so sorry, Dennis. I thought it was my husband callin' back. I've been waitin' for an update on that buildin', the one that caught fire. I don't suppose you've heard anything more...? You haven't...? Well, I'm a little surprised you're not over there yourself... You were called away...? 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... Alright. Well, if Bud isn't home soon, I'll come down to the station myself... No, you don't need to pick me up; I'll drive. That's very kind of you... Yes. Thank you, Dennis. Goodbye. *(She hangs up. Stillness. Helen stands there, hollow. Then, quietly at first, she begins to cry. It builds. Shoulders shaking. She struggles to contain it. Sound of footsteps approaching outside. The door opens and Bud enters, covered in soot, exhausted. Helen sees him and composes herself. Wipes her face, moves quickly to him.)* Oh, for goodness' sake, Bud. You're a mess. *(She pulls a chair center.)* Sit down. You must be thirsty. I'll get you some lemonade. *(Bud sits.)*

BUD. Just water, please, sweetheart.

SYD

HELEN. ‘Course. *(She gets a glass, fills it at the sink, brings it to him.)*
My God. You’re covered in ash. What happened over there?

BUD. It was awful.

HELEN. Awful how?

BUD. I don’t think you’re gonna wanna hear this.

HELEN. Maybe not but I need to. Has someone been hurt?

BUD. Several people. Bad.

HELEN. Oh, my God.

BUD. And that ain’t the worst of it.

HELEN. Bud... please don’t tell me that people are dead.

BUD. We stopped countin’ around twenty. All men.

HELEN. *(Quietly, shaking her head.)* No. Oh, God, no. No, no...

BUD. *(Rising, going to her.)* Helen—

HELEN. ...No... *(He takes her gently.)*

BUD. Look at me. *(She does.)* Roscoe’s dead.

HELEN. Roscoe? Where was the fire?

BUD. Over on Iberville Street. So, listen. I’m headin’ down to Leeville
in the mornin’ with Beau. We’ll pick up his other boys, bring ‘em home.
Maybe you can keep an eye on Beverly while we’re gone.

HELEN. *(Distant.)* Alright.

BUD. I’m gonna get cleaned up. Then we oughta try to get some sleep.
Tomorrow’s gonna be a long day. *(He pulls her into a tight embrace,
then starts off.)*

HELEN. Bud.

BUD. What is it?

SYD

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

BUD. Why not?

HELEN. Sydney.

BUD. She's not home?

HELEN. No.

BUD. What's wrong? Where is she?

HELEN. Detective Cormier called.

BUD. Dennis?

HELEN. Yes.

BUD. What'd he say? Is Syd in trouble? She alright? Helen... what happened?

HELEN. She's been arrested. (*Blackout. End of Act 1.*)

SYD

ACT 2

SCENE 1

June 25th, 1973. Morning. Somewhere along Highway 1.

(Beau is hunched over. He's just finished vomiting. Bud stands nearby.)

BEAU. I'm sorry, Bud.

BUD. Nothin' to be sorry about. Just glad you didn't throw up in my truck. *(Bud hands him a handkerchief.)*

BEAU. This clean?

BUD. 'Course it's clean. Why in the hell would I hand you a dirty hanky? I ain't no Neanderthal.

BEAU. Alright, alright. Just sayin'. When another fella hands you a balled-up hanky from his pocket, you gotta wonder what it's been through before you wipe your own mouth with it.

BUD. Fair enough. Fresh outta the dryer this mornin'. Go on. Clean yourself up before you get any of it on your shirt there. *(Beau wipes his mouth.)* You ready to get back on the road? We got another hour or so to Leeville.

BEAU. I need a minute. Can't quite catch my breath.

BUD. Take your time. *(Beau breathes.)* You wanna talk about it?

BEAU. No.

BUD. You sure? You ain't said a word since we left. Bottlin' it up ain't gonna help. Might be why you're pukin' your guts out.

BEAU. What have I done, Bud?

BUD. Oh, come on now. You ain't gonna blame yourself for this.

BEAU. Do you believe in the power of prayer?

SYD

BUD. ‘Course I do. God’s gonna see you and Beverly through this. And me and Helen... we’re here for you. No question.

BEAU. That ain’t what I mean. When Beverly was pregnant the first time, we prayed every day. Just wanted a healthy baby boy. That’s all. Roscoe... he was a good baby. Hardly cried. Ate like a little pig. Slept through the night most times. Always smilin’. Curious. Smart as a tack. In a lot of ways, he was just a normal kid. But I guess that wasn’t enough for us. He was six when we found him playin’ dress-up with his cousin, Delia. Not even five minutes before that, we had to break the two of ‘em up – they were fightin’ over baby dolls. Most folks laughed it off. Not me. Not Beverly. We knew somethin’ wasn’t right. So, we prayed harder. Thought maybe it was a message from God that we’d gotten off track. That we needed to get back into His good graces if Roscoe was gonna grow up to be a proper man. So, we did everything. Church every Sunday, sometimes durin’ the week. Prayers mornin’ and night. No drinkin’, no gamblin’, no cussin’. Cut out every goddam thing. Nothin’ changed. He just got more... peculiar. And the harder we pushed, the harder he pushed back. When he was about twelve, maybe thirteen, Beverly caught him upstairs messin’ around with that Nunez boy. She lost it. Rodger ran. Roscoe froze. So, she took my belt to him. He got away – made it to the landin’ – but she caught him again. Kept hittin’ him. And then he... he went over the handrail. Fell to the floor below. When I got home, Beverly was outta her mind. She’d locked him in the hall closet. Wouldn’t give me the key. So, I took a crowbar to the door. Found him on the floor. Curled up. Covered in welts. Blood everywhere. Head twisted all wrong. Snot dried all over his face. Didn’t look like he was breathin’. I thought he was dead. I hoped he was. And I prayed to God to make it so.

BUD. God ain’t in the business of answerin’ prayers like that. And if He is... I don’t want nothin’ to do with Him. You failed one of your boys; I ain’t gonna let you fail the other two. So, pull yourself together and get back in that truck. I got my own kid to deal with when we get back. *(Beau looks to Bud but doesn’t move.)* Let’s go. *(Bud takes him firmly by the arm, guiding him off. Lights fade to black.)*

SYD

SCENE 2

June 25th, 1973. Morning.

(Nearly the same time as the previous scene. The kitchen. Syd has just finished her breakfast. She's unkempt, hungover. Helen has been doing dishes. Several filled Tupperware containers sit on the counter. Coffee in the pot. Helen crosses to clear Syd's plate.)

HELEN. You finished?

SYD. Yes, Mama. Thank you. You didn't have to go to all that trouble.

HELEN. No trouble. I was up cookin' and bakin' anyway.

SYD. You must've been up all night.

HELEN. I slept a little. You feelin' better?

SYD. Yeah.

HELEN. Good. Looks like the color's comin' back to your face. *(She moves toward the sink.)*

SYD. *(Rising.)* Here, Mama. Let me take care of / those.

HELEN. / You stay right where you are. I'm just gonna leave 'em in the sink for now anyway. I've gotta get this food over to the Larson's. *(Indicates the Tupperware containers.)*

SYD. I can help carry 'em over.

HELEN. No. You just stay here and rest.

SYD. Mama, I'm fine. Really. Please let me help.

HELEN. You're not fine, you're hungover. Get yourself some water, take some aspirin, and go back to bed.

SYD. Mama, I—

HELEN. Now's not the time, Sydney. Do what I said. *(Helen gathers the containers into a tote. Syd doesn't move.)*

SYD

SYD. Mama, I'm sorry. *(Helen pauses. Composes herself.)*

HELEN. Sorry for what?

SYD. For yesterday. For last night. I shouldn't've spoken to you that way. And I should've listened to you.

HELEN. I need to get this food over to Beverly, so let's just forget it.

SYD. We can't just forget it. I fucked up.

HELEN. Sydney, please. Save it for when your Daddy gets home. He's the one who's gonna have to clean up your mess. And as for how you treat me... I've gotten used to it. One of us has to be the punchin' bag in this house. I drew the short straw on that a long time ago. *(Beverly appears at the door with a covered cake. She's in good spirits.)*

BEVERLY. Good mornin', Trahans! *(Helen moves to let her in.)*

HELEN. Mornin', Beverly. I was just on my way to you. What're you doin' here?

BEVERLY. Well, I made a carrot cake. Thought I'd share. I know how much you like carrot cake, Sydney.

SYD. I sure do.

BEVERLY. One of those new Betty Crocker recipes. I used toasted almonds instead of pecans. I hope that's alright.

HELEN. Well, that's very nice, but why would you do that?

BEVERLY. You don't like almonds?

HELEN. No. I mean yes, almonds are fine. It's just ... shouldn't you be home, Beverly? Beau and the boys'll be back soon. I expect you'll have visitors. Phone's probably ringin' off the hook.

BEVERLY. No. No phone calls. No visitors. *(Offers the cake.)* So, are we having this or not?

HELEN. 'Course. Sit down. I'll get plates. Coffee's still fresh.

SYD

BEVERLY. Well, what's cake without coffee? (*Beverly sits. Helen sets plates and cups.*) So, how are you, Sydney?

SYD. I'm doin' okay, I guess.

BEVERLY. You sure? I hope you don't mind me sayin', but you look like somethin' the cat dragged in.

SYD. Oh yeah? Well, cats have pretty mixed appetites. So, what am I? A mouse? A rat? Maybe a bird? Sparrow? Robin? 'Course cats like bugs too. Spiders. Grasshoppers and the sort. Or maybe I look like a snake. Or a lizard. So, which is it?

BEVERLY. You just can't help yourself.

HELEN. Why don't you go lie down, Sydney.

SYD. Oh, now Mama... I'd like to try some of Mrs. Larson's cake.

HELEN. You just had a big breakfast.

SYD. I've got room for one slice.

HELEN. Sydney, please. Aspirin's in the bathroom. Get a glass and go lie down.

SYD. Okay. (*She grabs a glass, exits. Silence as Helen pours coffee.*)

HELEN. Roscoe's gone, Beverly.

BEVERLY. I know.

HELEN. You don't seem upset.

BEVERLY. Why would I be? I don't question the Lord.

HELEN. Beverly—

BEVERLY. "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience."

HELEN. Thirty-two men died last night.

SYD

BEVERLY. And all of ‘em sodomites. If that’s not a message from the Almighty, I don’t know what is? *(Starts to uncover the cake. Helen stops her.)*

HELEN. The cake can wait.

BEVERLY. Did I say somethin’ to upset you?

HELEN. No. I just... don’t understand how a mother – whose son hasn’t been dead twenty-four hours – can’t shed a single tear for him.

BEVERLY. Roscoe nearly died once before. Fell down the stairs. Cracked his ribs, dislocated his shoulder, split his head open. Nearly broke his neck. We thought he was gone.

HELEN. I remember.

BEVERLY. Just a stupid accident. I’d just finished waxin’ the floors when he came runnin’ out of his room. Always in a hurry. Told him to slow down. And that’s when he slipped and fell. All the way down to the landin’. I believe God meant to take Roscoe from us that day. Seemed He changed His mind, though. Guess He wanted to give Roscoe a chance to right himself. But that never happened.

HELEN. So, you’re sayin’ God started that fire?

BEVERLY. Mysterious ways. *(The phone rings.)*

HELEN. Sydney!?

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

HELEN. Pick that up on the extension, please? That may be your Daddy. *(The ringing stops.)* Listen, Beverly...

BEVERLY. Mm hm?

HELEN. None of this makes any sense to me. But I do believe the Lord has a plan.

SYD

BEVERLY. I prayed for Roscoe every day. I did my duty as his mother. It's in God's hands now. *(Sydney appears.)*

SYD. Mrs. Larson, that call's for you.

BEVERLY. For me? Who would be callin' me here?

SYD. Coroner's office. They've been tryin' you all mornin'. Phone's in the den.

BEVERLY. Thank you, Sydney. Would you mind tellin' 'em—

SYD. I suggest you take it.

BEVERLY. Alright then. Excuse me. *(Beverly exits through the archway. Sydney turns to go.)*

HELEN. Sydney.

SYD. Yeah, Mama?

HELEN. Come here. *(She does.)* Yesterday, you called me a coward.

SYD. Mama, I—

HELEN. Let me finish. That wasn't kind. But maybe you're right. I don't have it in me to be brave. And that's why you scare me when you do the things you do. I think about what might happen to you out there. There are people who will hurt you, Sydney. But I don't want you livin' in fear. So, maybe you can leave that to me. It's all I know. It's the only way I know how to protect you. Now... who else knows about your arrest?

SYD. You and Daddy, 'course. Detective Cormier. Another officer... I don't remember his name.

HELEN. Who else?

SYD. Mama, why—?

HELEN. Who else?

SYD

SYD. They arrested Marilyn Durand too. They took us in together.

HELEN. And the others?

SYD. If you're worried about any of 'em girls sayin' anything, I promise you they won't. None of us'd be able to take our board exams if anyone at the hospital found out what went on last night.

HELEN. And if this shows up on a background check? You think you'll still get that degree?

SYD. No.

HELEN. Then you'd better hope your Daddy can fix this. Until then... not a word. To anyone. Understood?

SYD. Mm hm. *(Beverly appears in the archway. They turn.)*

HELEN. Everything alright, Beverly?

BEVERLY. Yes. They're ready to release Roscoe's remains. They want Beau and me to come claim the body.

HELEN. I can help with arrangements if you like. We used Hitchens funeral home when Bud's Aunt Minnie passed—

BEVERLY. That won't be necessary. Roscoe can stay where he is.

HELEN. I'm sure you don't mean that, Beverly. And I expect that Beau—

BEVERLY. You leave Beau to me. Sounds like you've got enough trouble in your own house. Maybe that fire was a blessin'. A convenient distraction. Wouldn't you agree? Well, I should be goin'. You enjoy the cake. *(She moves to exit.)*

HELEN. Beverly...

BEVERLY. Mm Hm?

HELEN. Before you go, I put together— Never mind. It's not important.

SYD

BEVERLY. Alright then. Don't forget. Card club on Wednesday. My turn to host. See you soon. *(Beverly exits. Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 3

June 25th, 1973. Early evening.

(At rise, the porch is empty. Sydney enters through the porch door, starting down the steps. She's on the verge of tears. Bud follows.)

BUD. Now hang on, Syd. Where're you off to? We ain't finished talkin'.

SYD. I can't, Daddy. I just... I can't.

BUD. Can't what?

SYD. I can't have this conversation. I can barely look you in the eye right now.

BUD. When have I ever given you a reason not to look me in the eye?

SYD. This is different.

BUD. I know it is. And it ain't gonna be easy for me neither. But we can't fix things by ignorin' 'em.

SYD. You sayin' I need to be fixed?

BUD. I didn't say that, so don't go puttin' words in my mouth. And now ain't the time to be feelin' sorry for yourself. Come on. Let's go back inside.

SYD. I'd rather not.

BUD. You wanna stay out here? Away from your Mama? *(He smiles, gives her a wink. She cracks a small smile.)* Alright then. Come up here on the porch. *(She joins him. They sit.)* Look. We don't have to talk about last night. Not yet. I'll let you start. You talk about whatever you

SYD

want, and I'll listen. Unless you got questions. Then I'll answer best I can. Whenever you're ready.

SYD. I'm angry. All the time. I know it. And I don't know what to do with it. When you're angry like that, you start forgettin' what it feels like to be happy. Or you start wonderin' if you ever were happy. Some days I feel so far gone... I don't know if there's any way back. And back to what? I can't change who I am, Daddy. And even if I could... I don't think I would. I don't know why. Maybe I'm stubborn. Or selfish. Or just plain spiteful. Or maybe I'm just so damn tired of bein' judged all the time. If God is love... then why is the world so full of hate? I haven't done anything wrong. Or at least... it don't feel wrong to me.

BUD. You are loved. You know that, right? Your Mama loves you...

SYD. Daddy...

BUD. I love you.

SYD. I love you too. But that just isn't enough. Not anymore.

BUD. So... this Marilyn – that's her name, right?

SYD. Mm hm.

BUD. You think maybe she can give you the kind of love you need?

SYD. I don't know. But I do know we broke the law last night. We knew what we were doin' wasn't proper. And we did it anyway. Maybe it wasn't love. Maybe it was rebellion. But it felt good. It felt right.

BUD. Two ladies dancin' together. Seems harmless to me.

SYD. I don't know. We women are criminals by virtue of our very existence.

BUD. When I found out your Mama was pregnant, I told her I didn't want no girl.

SYD. That's not exactly what I was expectin' to hear / right now.

SYD

BUD. (*Knowingly, with a smile.*) / Buuut the first time I held you – saw that chubby little face, those big blue eyes – I changed my mind real quick. I love every piece of you, Syd. Which means I love this piece too. We're all made up of pieces, right? And if we keep chippin' away at the ones we don't like, there won't be anything left. And that don't sound right to me. Now listen. I'm gonna talk to Dennis Cormier, see if I can get 'em charges dropped. And if I can't... we'll figure somethin' else out. Together. You understand?

SYD. I understand.

BUD. Alright. You head back inside. I got some thinkin' to do.

SYD. Thanks, Daddy. (*They hug tightly. She exits into the house. Bud sits quietly. Helen appears in the doorway, holding a plate with a slice of carrot cake, a fork, napkin, and a glass of milk.*)

HELEN. You want some of this cake? If not, I was just gonna toss it. Beverly made it.

BUD. Sure. I'll give it try. (*Helen hands him the plate, fork, milk. She settles in. Bud takes a bite.*)

HELEN. If you think I wasn't listenin' in on your little conversation with Sydney, you are sorely mistaken.

BUD. Oh, I figured you might be. (*He reacts, spits the cake into a napkin.*) Ack. This tastes funny.

HELEN. Funny how?

BUD. I don't know. Kinda sour.

HELEN. Well, you don't have to eat it. Between you and me, Beverly's never been much use in the kitchen.

BUD. Yeah... I'm gonna pass. (*He sets the plate aside, drinks his milk.*)

HELEN. I just don't understand it, Bud.

BUD. What's that?

SYD

HELEN. Why Sydney feels the need to hide things from me.

BUD. Is that right?

HELEN. Whatta you mean, “is that right”?

BUD. Nothin’. Just a turn of phrase.

HELEN. That’s all you’ve got to say?

BUD. Whatta you want me to say?

HELEN. You’ve got nothin’ to add?

BUD. I don’t know what you’re gettin’ at.

HELEN. So, you’re just gonna take Sydney’s side?

BUD. I ain’t takin’ sides. Didn’t know there was one to take.

HELEN. Your daughter gets herself arrested and then tells you she’s a... I can’t even say it.

BUD. We can say it or not say it; it don’t change nothin’. She is who she is.

HELEN. And you’re okay with that?

BUD. There’s nothin’ we can do about it.

HELEN. There’s plenty we can do.

BUD. Oh yeah? Like what? Pray?

HELEN. For starters.

BUD. And then what?

HELEN. Then maybe we send her somewhere. *(Bud lets out a short, incredulous laugh. Shakes his head.)* This funny to you?

BUD. No. Ain’t nothin’ about this funny. I’m just so damn worn out right now I don’t know what else to do but laugh. Why does everything have to be black or white with you? Right or wrong? This is our

SYD

daughter. Our only child. And you're talkin' about shippin' her off... to where? Some kind of madhouse?

HELEN. We have to do somethin', Bud. It's for her own good.

BUD. For her own good? The Larsons have been doin' what they thought was for Roscoe's own good for years. Look how that turned out. That what you want for Syd?

HELEN. It's not the same thing.

BUD. *(Raising his voice.)* It is the same thing. It's the same goddam thing. *(Helen is taken aback. Bud catches himself, steadies.)* By the time Beau and I got to Iberville Street there wasn't much left of that buildin'. Just bricks. Broken windows. Fire was almost out, but you could still feel the heat from it. Smoke everywhere. Ash in the air. And this... awful smell. We turned the corner and there's a crowd. People pointin'. Carryin' on. I heard one man say, "The only good faggot is a dead faggot." That's when we looked up. Took a second to see it. Beau saw him first. It was Roscoe. Hangin' out that second-floor window. One arm danglin'. Hair burned clean off. Eyes open. Mouth open. Just... stuck there. Beau begged 'em to pull him down. Said he'd do it himself. But they just left him there. Nearly two hours. And the whole time... folks just stood there. Pointin'. Laughin'. Mockin'. And I kept thinkin'... What must it be like to have to hide who you are from the world? To take all that pain... all that fear... and carry it around with you every day. And then tuck it away somewhere. Up high. Outta reach. In the dark. Because if you don't... you might not make it through another day. *(The silence is broken by...)*

BEAU. *(Off.)* Bud! Hey, Bud!

BUD. What the hell's goin' on now? *(Beau rushes in, out of breath.)*

BEAU. Hey. Is Syd around?

HELEN. She's in the house. What's wrong?

SYD

BEAU. I don't know exactly. It's Beverly. She's... she's in real bad shape. I was hopin' Syd could take a look at her.

BUD. Alright, okay. *(Calling out.)* Syd! *(He moves to the door, calls inside.)* Syd!

HELEN. Sydney!

SYD. *(Off.)* I'm comin'!

HELEN. Hurry, Sydney! *(Sydney rushes out onto the porch.)*

SYD. What's the matter? What's happened?

BUD. Beverly's not doin' well.

BEAU. She's all red and swollen. And now she's throwin' up.

SYD. Jesus, Beau. She needs to go to the hospital.

BEAU. I tried. She won't move. Every time I touch her, she screams. I don't know what else to do. The boys are scared outta their minds. I don't know if she's gonna make it.

SYD. Alright. Listen to me. We gotta get her to the hospital now. Go get your car, start it up, and wait in the driveway. I'll come over and see what I can do.

BEAU. Okay. *(Beau runs off.)*

SYD. Daddy, you come with me. I'm gonna need help gettin' her outta there.

BUD. Yeah. 'Course. *(Bud hurries off ahead of her.)*

HELEN. Sydney.

SYD. What is it, Mama?

HELEN. Billy and Jack.

SYD. Shit. Alright. They'll just have to squeeze into the car with the rest of us.

SYD

HELEN. No. I'll stay with 'em. Those boys have seen enough. I'll grab a few things from the kitchen and come right after. Make myself useful.

SYD. Thanks, Mama. *(Sydney turns to go.)*

HELEN. And Sydney—

SYD. I don't have time, Mama. I gotta go. *(Sydney rushes off. Helen stands alone for a moment, uneasy, gathering herself. She takes a breath, then quickly exits into the house. Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 4

June 25th, 1973. Late evening. The kitchen.

(The carrot cake still sits on the table. Sydney enters, crosses to the refrigerator, grabs a beer, opens it, sits, and drinks. Helen enters.)

HELEN. Where's your Daddy?

SYD. Out in the tool shed.

HELEN. What's he doin' out there?

SYD. Don't know. Said he needed to check on somethin'. Didn't say what.

HELEN. How'd you get back home?

SYD. We walked.

HELEN. You walked? That's nearly three miles. Why didn't you call? I would've come and got you.

SYD. It's fine, Mama. We wanted to walk. And it didn't make sense for you to leave 'em boys alone.

HELEN. They're fast asleep. Been that way for hours. *(Helen joins her. Notices scratches on Syd's face.)* What happened to your face?

SYD. It's nothin'. I'm alright.

SYD

HELEN. How's Beverly?

SYD. Not good.

HELEN. Did they say what's wrong?

SYD. They ran bloodwork. Cyanide in her system.

HELEN. Cyanide?

SYD. Almost enough to kill her. She's lucky.

HELEN. My God. Well, how did she—?

SYD. She drank it.

HELEN. She did what?

SYD. Mixed it with sweet tea. And she drank it.

HELEN. Why? Why would she do that?

SYD. Have you ever thought about killin' yourself, Mama?

HELEN. That's a terrible thing to ask.

SYD. Well, have you?

HELEN. 'Course not. It's a sin.

SYD. You remember when the dryer broke and we had to hang the wash outside?

HELEN. Oh, I remember. Nearly broke my back haulin' those wet clothes out there.

SYD. A couple times you had me bring it in and fold it.

HELEN. S'right. And I appreciated it. Sydney, why are you bringin' this up?

SYD. I think it was a Monday. I remember the smell of red beans cookin'. I grabbed the basket off the couch and went out back to collect the laundry. And I saw this little yellow bird. It flew outta the shrubs,

SYD

dipped into the grass under the cypress, then shot back up and landed on the clothesline. She perched there, right at the end, facin' away from me, her tail twitchin' a little like she was settlin' in. So, I moved closer. Then she turned – quick – looked right at me, tilted her head. And that's when I saw it. A little orange caterpillar in her beak, still wrigglin'. And I thought... what if I could startle her? Make her drop it. Give it a chance to get away. So, I reached up real slow. Put my hand on the clothesline. I was ready to tug it... just enough. But before I could, she tipped her head back and swallowed it whole. And then she flew off. And it made me sad. Sadder than it should've. Just a bird. Just a bug.

HELEN. Sydney...

SYD. So, I set the basket down in the grass. I saw one of Daddy's shirts hangin' on the line. I pulled the pins, took it down, and put it on – still warm from the sun, smelled like soap. Then I stepped forward and pressed my forehead against the line, felt the tension in it. I rose up on my toes, rested my chin there, nodded my head a few times... And then I walked myself forward until the rope met my neck. I remember takin' a deep breath... holdin' it... and then lettin' my knees go. I dropped quick. There was a sharp pain in my throat. And then I flipped back onto the grass. I laid there a long while... coughin'... tryin' to catch my breath... Then I got up. Dusted myself off. Brought the wash in. Folded it.

HELEN. *(In tears, horrified.)* Oh my God... Sydney... why didn't you tell me? I would've–

SYD. Beverly wanted to die, Mama. That's why I've got these scratches. She fought tooth and nail to keep us from draggin' her outta that house. Daddy had to slap her, knocked her out. Only way we could get her to the hospital. *(Bud enters suddenly. He's disheveled, agitated.)*

BUD. Goddamit.

SYD. *(Rising.)* What's wrong?

SYD

BUD. I took the lock off the tool shed yesterday. Forgot to put it back. I tore that place apart. It's gone.

HELEN. What's gone, Bud?

BUD. You gotta understand. I only keep it for work.

SYD. Daddy, what are you talkin' about?

HELEN. Bud, please!

BUD. I had a bottle of sodium cyanide out there. And now it's gone. And I expect that's what Beverly got into.

HELEN. What in the world do you need cyanide for?

BUD. It hardens the metal. Keeps my tools from warpin'.

HELEN. I see. This isn't your fault. You hear me? Put that outta your mind. I should go check on those boys. *(She starts off but then turns back.)* But before I do, I have something I need to say to you, Sydney... Syd. I am your mother. I always will be. And I am doin' my very best. For that reason alone, you will treat me with respect. Do you understand? *(Syd nods.)* I love you. No matter what. And I don't think you believe that. So, I'm tellin' you now, it's the God's honest truth. I need you to trust me. And I know that needs to be earned. And I intend to earn it. Because I never want you keepin' anything from me again. Have I made myself clear?

SYD. Yes, Mama.

HELEN. You are a gift. To me and to your father. We are blessed to have you. *(Sydney moves to her. They embrace. Helen kisses her forehead, then exits. Bud sits heavily at the table. Syd grabs another beer, opens it, hands it to him.)*

SYD. Come on, Daddy. Beverly was gonna do it one way or another. *(Bud drinks. His eyes drift to the cake. He pulls it closer, lifts the cover and then sets it back.)*

SYD

BUD. Syd.

SYD. Yeah?

BUD. Go see if your Mama needs help.

SYD. You alright?

BUD. I'm alright. Go on. *(Sydney hesitates.)* Go. *(Sydney exits. Bud watches her go, waits a beat. Then he takes the cake, carries it to the trash, and drops it in. He pulls the bag from the bin, ties it off, and exits with it. Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 5

July 4th, 1973. Evening. The Larson's Livingroom.

(Faint fireworks in the distance. Sydney sits on an ottoman facing Beverly, who is in an armchair. A tray table with dinner rests in front of her. Beverly is weak – limited movement, strained speech – but conscious and aware.)

SYD. I gotta say, Beverly. For a woman who's usually not at a loss for words, you've been awfully quiet this evenin'. *(Beverly says nothing.)* You need to eat somethin', you hear me? And look. Your hands aren't shakin' like they were a few days ago, so I think it's time you start feedin' yourself. Why don't you try pickin' up that fork. Just to see how it feels. *(Beverly grabs the fork clumsily, then tosses it to the floor. Sydney calmly retrieves it, sets it back on the tray)* Alright. Listen to me. Truth is, you're probably never gonna get back to exactly how you were. But you sure as hell can get better than this. You're gonna be fine. You know that, right? *(Beverly looks at Sydney and then squeezes her eyes shut.)* Okay. So, that's how it's gonna be, hm? Just gonna shut me out. Pretend I'm not even here? *(Beverly opens her eyes, turns her head away.)* I see. Well, I get it. You're upset about missin' the fireworks, aren't you? Well... so am I. But here we are. I'm sure your boys are havin' a nice time with their daddy tonight. Probably a good thing, 'em

SYD

gettin' outta the house for a bit. Everybody needs a distraction now and then. *(Beverly raises one middle finger.)* Well, my goodness, Beverly. That's not very Christian like. *(Beverly raises the other hand – two middle fingers.)* Alright then. Well, at least you're in better spirits today. And hey. I got a bit of news. Police think they've got the man who set the fire. Rodger Nunez. You remember him? *(Beverly's triggered but tries not to react.)* I never cared for him much. Mean kid. Always was. So, I'm not the least bit surprised he'd do somethin' like that. Turns out they wouldn't let him into the bar. So, he went across the street – Walgreens – bought himself some lighter fluid and a book of matches – Well... no need to get into all the particulars. Just thought you might wanna know. *(Sydney hands her a tissue. Beverly takes it.)* Roscoe was cremated, by the way. Church is keepin' his ashes under the altar for now. Till they can afford a proper burial. A lot of the men who died... they were part of the congregation. Costs are addin' up. They held a memorial this past Sunday. Over on Claiborne. Me, Daddy... even Mama went. It was beautiful. Place was packed. We had to stand way in the back, right by the vestibule. *(Beverly begins to cry quietly.)* So, I know you may not wanna hear this... but Roscoe was loved. By a lot of people. And I'm not sayin' that to hurt you. I'm not tryin' to rub anything in. I just thought... maybe it might bring you some comfort. Knowin' he mattered. *(Beverly continues to cry quietly.)* And I might be oversteppin' here, Beverly, but I really do think you need to find a way to let go of all that hate. I mean, look where it's got you. Stuck in your own house on the fourth of July and bein' hand-fed by a smart mouthed lesbian. Now come on. I'm runnin' outta patience. *(Sydney takes the fork, spears a bite, raises it toward Beverly's mouth.)* Just one bite. *(A standoff. Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 6

July 4th, 1973. Evening. Not far from the Canal Street Dock.

(Bud and Beau stand watching the fireworks.)

SYD

BEAU. We can move closer to the river if you want.

BUD. No, this is fine. Got a good view right here.

BEAU. I just figured... best to stay away from the crowd. I mean, I don't think I'm ready to—

BUD. No, no. 'Course not. I understand.

BEAU. (*Calling off.*) Billy! Jack! Don't go too far, you hear me? I need to see you! (*To Bud.*) 'Em boys are a handful. I don't know how Beverly manages it.

BUD. Well, they'll be young men before you know it. Then you'll have a whole new set of problems.

BEAU. Ain't that the truth.

BUD. Somethin' to look forward to. You gonna be okay?

BEAU. That's a hell of a question.

BUD. You don't have to answer it. But it don't have to be complicated neither. Sometimes when folks ask if you're gonna be alright, you can just say yes. And then do your best to make it true. I know that's easier said than done, but what's the alternative? You can't change what's already happened. You've got a wife who needs you. Two boys who need your guidance and your love. And if you ain't okay... well, then you say that. You say, no, I'm not okay. And if that's how you're feelin', then we're here. Me and Helen. For whatever you need.

BEAU. I don't know how you do it, Bud.

BUD. Do what?

BEAU. Find the silver linin' in everything.

BUD. Not everything. Some things can't be salvaged. And when that happens, I try to keep my mouth shut. Ain't my place to judge. I just don't see the point in livin' in fear of things I don't understand.

SYD

BEAU. When Roscoe moved out a couple of years back, I... I felt relieved. It was easier. Havin' him gone. Less shame. Fewer questions. We just told folks we asked him to leave. But I'll tell you somethin', Bud... I'd give anything to have him back.

BUD. I know you would.

BEAU. *(Calling off.)* Hey boys! What did I just say? Stay close! You hear me? I need you to stay close! *(Lights fade to black.)*

SCENE 7

July 17th, 1973. Early Evening. An empty kitchen.

(The telephone rings several times before Helen enters hurriedly. She's dressed nicely for an evening out, attempting to fasten a necklace as she crosses. She gives up, answers the phone.)

HELEN. Hello...? Oh, hey, Louise... No, no, it's fine. We're headin' out shortly, but I've got a minute... Yes, of course I'll be at card club; I wouldn't miss it. And as a matter of fact, I'm glad you called; you just reminded me. We'll need to stop by the bakery on our way to Gallier Hall tonight. I need to pick up some brioche... That's right. I'm makin' a bourbon bread puddin' to bring. Unless, of course, you had somethin' else in mind... Oh now, Louise, that's ridiculous. My bread puddin' is just okay; it is not the best in all of New Orleans... Well, I'm flattered, but that's just plain dumb... I'm sorry, what's that...? Yes, I am plannin' on bringin' Beverly. Why do you ask...? I see. Well, awkward or not, she needs to be there. It'll do her a world of good... Right. You let me worry about that, and you just focus on bein' a lovely hostess, alright? Besides, you're gonna have your hands full with the Baily sisters... No, not another word. We're all gonna have a wonderful time, and that's that... Good. Alright then. I'll see you tomorrow evenin'. Goodbye. *(She hangs up. During this, Bud has entered in formal attire. He grabs a beer from the refrigerator, opens it, drinks.)* Don't you look nice.

SYD

BUD. I clean up alright, I guess. You, on the other hand... You look beautiful.

HELEN. Stop it, Bud.

BUD. I will not stop it. *(He pulls her in. They embrace and kiss.)*

HELEN. Alright, fine. I guess I look beautiful.

BUD. And don't you forget it.

HELEN. I'll do my best. Now, can you help me with this? *(She hands him the necklace.)*

BUD. 'Course. Turn around. *(Helen turns. Bud fastens it.)*

HELEN. And why are you havin' a beer? I'd rather you weren't tanked-up when you go on stage tonight.

BUD. Oh, come on. Cut me some slack. I'm nervous. Never stood in front of that many people before. All 'em eyes on me. I might just freeze up; forget everything I'm supposed to say. And besides, one beer ain't gonna get me drunk

HELEN. Alright. Well, there's nothin' to be nervous about. You're a blacksmith, not an orator – expectations are already low. And if you get flustered, just read from the note cards I made for you. They're in your jacket pocket

BUD. I don't know what I'd do without you.

HELEN. You'd manage. You're not completely useless. Now, where's that daughter of yours?

BUD. I expect she's still gettin' ready. And why is she only my daughter when she's in trouble?

HELEN. She's not in trouble. But she will be if she doesn't get down here soon. *(Calling out.)* Syd! *(To Bud.)* Oh. And I gave her some money. Sent her to Maison Blanche to find somethin' nice to wear. There's this beautiful dress – long sleeves, midi length, bubble gum

SYD

pink, high neck, bodice covered in these tiny beaded flowers, looks like an empire waist, but it's not, so it's not too snug across the bust, very simple. And best of all, it was on sale.

BUD. I'm sorry, but I didn't understand a word of that.

HELEN. Oh, for goodness' sake, Bud. I just thought she should look pretty for your big night.

BUD. Well, I gotta say... That don't sound like somethin' she'd wear.

HELEN. And how often do you wear a tuxedo?

BUD. First time ever. Feels like a straitjacket. I'd be more comfortable in my overalls.

HELEN. Exactly. If you can manage it for a few hours, so can she. This is your night. *(Calling out.)* Syd!

BUD. Now don't rush her. We've got time.

HELEN. Bud...

BUD. We've got time. *(Helen lowers her head.)* What's the matter?

HELEN. Nothin'.

BUD. You sure? 'Cause I'm gettin' the feelin' I'm not the only one on edge tonight. We ain't gonna be able to cover up what's happened with a bubble gum pink dress. We've done what we can. Took a little money... and a lotta sweet talk... but the charges are dropped. And Syd's safe now. As safe as she can be.

HELEN. People know, Bud. And they're talkin'.

BUD. Let 'em talk. Nothin' we can do about it. They're gonna just keep talkin' until they find somethin' else to talk about. Everything I need – everything I care about – is right here. I'll look out for you. And I'll look out for my daughter. And I wouldn't mind if the two of you looked out for me, too.

SYD

HELEN. ‘Course, Bud.

SYD. *(Off.)* Mama? Daddy?

HELEN. Yeah, Syd?

SYD. Is it time to go?

BUD. Your Mama’s called for you twice now. We’re just waitin’ on you, baby girl.

SYD. *(Off.)* Okay. I’ll be right there. Just puttin’ on my other shoe.
(Helen and Bud look toward the archway. Helen takes a breath.)

HELEN. Oh, boy. Here we go.

BUD. How much you wanna bet she ain’t wearin’ that dress?

HELEN. Gamblin’s a sin, Bud. And besides... no way in hell I’d take that bet. *(They look back toward the archway.)*

SYD. *(Off.)* Alright. I’m comin’ out. *(Lights fade to black. End of play.)*