

THE RELUCTANT HEN

A play in two acts

By Craig Houk

SAMPLE

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Synopsis

Pete, a working-class schmuck, hatches an ill-laid scheme to console Peggy Lynn, a beautician & his allegedly infertile wife, by conceiving a child outside their marriage.

Characters

PETE ANDERSON Male, Late 20s/Early 30s

NANCY JO ANDERSON Female, Late 50s/Early 60s

PEGGY LYNN KENNEY-ANDERSON Female, Late 20s/Early 30s

SANDRA MILLER, Female, Late 20s/Early 30s

BUCKY TURNER Male, Late 20s/Early 30s

LAUREEN TURNER Female, Late 50s/Early 60s

WOMAN

Plays **DOROTHY BENNETT**, Female, Early 20s

Plays **VERLA CLAIRE BAKER**, Female, Late 30s/Early 40s

Time

1952 – 1953

Setting

McCurtain County, Oklahoma

Scene Breakdown

1-1	Early 1920s	Mid Afternoon	The Bennett House
1-2	Aug 1953	Early Morning	The Farmhouse
1-3	Oct 1952	Morning	The Farmhouse
1-4	Oct 1952	Mid-Morning	Murdock's Feed Supply
1-5	Oct 1952	Early Evening	The Farmhouse
1-6	Oct 1952	Around Midnight	Bucky's Cabin
1-7	Oct 1952	Around Midnight	The Farmhouse
1-8	Nov 1952	Dusk	Murdock's Feed Supply
2-1	Dec 1952	Middle of the Night	Laureen's Shack
2-2	Dec 1952	Midday	The Beauty Salon
2-3	Dec 1952	Midday	Laureen's Shack
2-4	Jun 1953	Late Afternoon	The Farmhouse
2-5	Jun 1953	Late Afternoon	Bucky's Cabin
2-6	Jun 1953	Early Evening	Bucky's Property
2-7	Jun 1953	Early Evening	Bucky's Cabin
2-8	Jun 1953	Evening	Laureen's Shack/Total Darkness
2-9	Jun 1953	Evening	Somewhere Along Route Two Fifty-Nine
2-10	Jul 1953	Midday	Bucky's Cabin
2-11	Aug 1953	Early Morning	The Farmhouse

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Early 1920s. The Bennett House in Spencerville.

(We hear police sirens in the distance. The sirens increase in volume as they draw closer. Dorothy Bennett appears on the front stoop holding an infant.)

DOROTHY

What on earth is going on out here?

(We hear a car pull up, tires screeching. She calls off, frightened.)

Frank!? Frank, what's happening!?

FRANK

(Off.)

Get back in the house, Dorothy! Go! Now!

(More tires screeching. As Dorothy turns to go, we hear a series of gunshots. Lights to black. End of scene.)

SCENE 2

1953. August. Morning. The farmhouse.

(We see Pete who is asleep in a chair, his feet up on an ottoman. His wrist is in a cast. An episode of Tom Corbett, Space Cadet or perhaps Sky King is playing on the television. We settle on this vignette for a moment. We hear a bicycle bell off. A few seconds pass before a rolled-up newspaper lands on the porch or knocks against the screen door. Pete stirs. At last, Nancy Jo appears in the kitchen archway. She lights a cigarette and begins to smoke it. She watches the program for a minute. A kitchen timer goes off. Nancy Jo returns to the kitchen. We hear her in there. Sounds of an oven door opening, pans, and dishes clattering. She's plating breakfast. In due course, she reappears with a tray in hand, cigarette pressed between her lips. She crosses to Pete and hovers over him. She then pushes his legs off the ottoman with her foot. He wakes up.)

PETE

Huh. What're you doing? What the hell's matter with you?

NANCY JO

Breakfast.

(She places the tray on the ottoman.)

Creamed chipped beef on toast.

PETE

Shit on a shingle.

NANCY JO

(Flatly.)

That's never not funny. You want some coffee?

PETE

Sure.

NANCY JO

Be right back.

(She returns to the kitchen. Pete yawns, stretches, rubs his eyes, and then digs in. He occasionally glances at the television. Nancy Jo returns with two coffees. She sets one on the tray or on a small table near Pete.)

PETE

Thanks.

(And with that cigarette still pressed between her lips, Nancy Jo takes her coffee and sits in another chair. She grabs an ashtray from nearby. She drinks and smokes, occasionally tapping ashes into the ashtray.)

You're not gonna eat?

NANCY JO

I'm watching my figure.

(This was a joke, but neither laugh. They sit quietly for a while, watching the program.)

Paper boy come yet?

PETE

I think so. Thought I heard something on the porch.

(Nancy Jo rises and exits onto the porch to retrieve the paper. She returns to the chair, settles in again and begins to read the paper. Pete continues to eat and to watch the program. We settle on this vignette for a moment.)

NANCY JO

Have you heard from Peggy Lynn?

PETE

Hm?

NANCY JO

Peggy Lynn. Have you heard from her?

PETE

Yeah. I talked to her on Friday.

NANCY JO

And?

PETE

And what?

NANCY JO

Well, she's been gone almost two weeks now.

PETE

So?

NANCY JO

So, is everything okay?

PETE

What do you mean? 'Course, everything's okay. Everything's fine.

NANCY JO

She was only supposed to be gone a week.

PETE

Jesus. She wanted to spend a little extra time with her brother Jack is all. She hasn't seen him in a while. You know, what with the war and all.

NANCY JO

All right. I mean, you could've told me sooner. Otherwise, how would I know? And frankly, I could do without the sarcasm.

(Pete backs down.)

PETE

She'll be home in a couple of days.

(They sit quietly. Nancy Jo begins pulling lightly at her hair to examine it.)

NANCY JO

I am long overdue for a shampoo and set.

PETE

(Not hostile, just irritated.)

Oh, so that's what this is about. You need to get your hair done...

NANCY JO

No.

PETE

...I'm getting the third degree about my wife's whereabouts because what? Because your roots are coming in?

NANCY JO

All right, now that's enough. I was not giving you the third degree. I just asked a simple question. You're the one who's making an issue of it.

PETE

She'll be back to the salon on Wednesday. I'm sure she'll be able to squeeze you in.

NANCY JO

Well, that'd be nice. Though that's not why I was asking after her.

(The fuse on the television blows. They are both startled.)

PETE

/ Dammit!

NANCY JO

/ Oh, for the love of—!

(We hear an infant crying off.)

PETE

You mind checking on your grandbaby?

(He crosses to the television. Nancy Jo takes a long drag on her cigarette and then puts it out in the ashtray. She rises from her chair.)

This house needs all new electric.

NANCY JO

And who do you suppose is gonna pay for it?

(She exits into a hallway to check on the baby.)

PETE

Whole place is gonna burn to the ground one day.

(He inspects the television, not that it'll do any good.)

NANCY JO

(Off.)

Is it busted?

PETE

Well, yeah, it's busted. Probably a capacitor.

NANCY JO

(Off.)

I'll give Jimmy a call. See if he can come over and fix it.

(Pete grabs the tray from the ottoman and exits into the kitchen. We hear him in there, putting dishes into the sink, maybe rinsing them. The baby continues to cry. Nancy Jo enters from the hallway and crosses to the kitchen archway.)

I can't get her to settle down.

PETE

(Off.)

She's probably hungry. I'll take care of it.

NANCY JO

I don't understand why your wife won't breast feed that child. I breast fed you and you hardly ever fussed or blubbered.

PETE

(Off.)

I don't wanna talk about it.

NANCY JO

All I'm saying is that baby'd be a lot happier and heathier if she had some of her mother's milk.

PETE

(Entering from the kitchen with a bottle.)

So, why don't you take it up with Peggy Lynn when she gets back then, huh? See how that works out for you.

NANCY JO

Not on your life.

PETE

And since you're all of a sudden so concerned about my daughter's wellbeing, maybe you oughtta cut back a little on those cigarettes. What do you think?

NANCY JO

Maybe I will.

PETE

All right then.

(Pete exits into the hallway. Nancy Jo calls after him.)

NANCY JO

I'm gonna go sit on the porch before it gets too hot.

(She grabs her coffee and exits onto the porch. She sits and lights a cigarette. The baby continues to cry but settles down quickly. A moment passes before we hear an old pickup passing by, honking its horn. Nancy Jo looks up, puts her hand over her brow to block the sun. She recognizes the driver and then calls off.)

Oh, hey, Millie!

(Nancy Jo smiles and waves. Her smile turns to a frown as the pickup drives off.)

Well, that little bastard.

(During the previous, Pete enters from the hallway, baby in tow. He exits onto the porch.)

PETE

Who was that?

NANCY JO

Millicent Brown. Driving by in her rusted-out pickup. Her son was playing around in the back of it. Can you believe he gave me the middle finger? Devil's spawn. I was half hoping he'd fall out and break his neck.

PETE

Oh, he's just a kid. No harm in it. So, you gonna call Jimmy about that television set or what?

NANCY JO

Darn it. I knew I was forgetting something. I'll call him right now.

(Pete stays on the porch as Nancy Jo goes back into the house. She moves to the phone and reaches for it. It rings. She's a little startled. She answers it.)

Hello...? Well, I'll be, I was just about to call you... Well, yeah. Our TV is on the fritz again, so I was hoping your husband might come over and take a look at it. Pete says it's something to do with the, uh...

PETE

(Calling into the house.)

Capacitor.

NANCY JO

...Capacitor, whatever the heck that is... Are you sure...? Well, that'd be wonderful. Anytime tomorrow morning is fine, I'll be here... Thank you, Emma. And you'll thank Jimmy for me, won't you...? What's that...? Oh, that's right. You called me. I nearly forgot. So, what's the scuttlebutt...? Mm hm... What...? Oh, come on now, Emma, that can't be true. Are you sure you heard right...? Oh my God... Oh my God, well that's awful. Do they know who it is...? I see... Well, if you hear anything more, please give us a call, okay...? Thanks again. I'll keep an eye out for Jimmy tomorrow morning... Bye, Emma.

(She replaces the receiver. Pete has settled in with the baby on the porch. Nancy collects herself before meeting him out there. She lights a cigarette and smokes. We settle on this vignette for a moment.)

I'm telling you right now, if that television can't be fixed, then we're gonna have to go without for a while.

PETE

All right, well there's no need to exaggerate. Things aren't as bad as you're making 'em out to be.

NANCY JO

Aren't they?

PETE

No.

(They sit quietly.)

NANCY JO

We never had to worry about money when your father / was alive.

PETE

/ Don't you ever get tired of reminding me / of what a disappointment I've been?

NANCY JO

/ All I'm saying is that your father took very good care of this house. And the farm. And you and me. And I... Well, I just miss him is all. I didn't mean anything else by it.

(They sit quietly.)

PETE

I'll start back at the lumber camp next Sunday.

NANCY JO

Oh. Okay. Well, that's good to hear. Though I expect Peggy Lynn won't like you being gone overnight, especially now with the baby.

PETE

I'll stay over only when I have to. Not much I can do about it, though, what with the long days. And it's not like I enjoy sharing a bunkhouse with a bunch of filthy men.

NANCY JO

And you're sure you're ready to get back to work?

PETE

Well, it's either that or fiddle around here and listen to you complain about how destitute we are.

NANCY JO

I was talking about your arm.

PETE

Oh. Right. Well, it's fine now. Cast is coming off in a few days. Shit, Bucky took the brunt of it.

NANCY JO

How's he doing?

PETE

I haven't seen him. I think he's pissed at me. Last I heard, he's still laid up with a busted head and a couple of cracked ribs. He's lucky that log didn't kill him.

NANCY JO

He'll bounce back. He always does.

(Nancy Jo continues to smoke. Pete manages the baby.)

You don't want to know what Emma told me?

PETE

I got no interest in gossip.

(They sit quietly.)

NANCY JO

They found a body.

PETE

A body? What do you mean, a body?

NANCY JO

Somebody dead. Floating in Hugo Lake.

PETE

That's awful.

NANCY JO

A fisherman spotted it wrapped in an old rug and tied up with rope.

PETE

Oh, geez. Well, I'm sorry to hear. Any idea who?

NANCY JO

Not yet. Emma said she'd call if she finds out anything more.

PETE

Well, that's just terrible.

(They sit quietly.)

NANCY JO

I don't understand why anyone would do such a thing.

PETE

There's no use in dwelling on it.

NANCY JO

Someone was murdered, Pete.

PETE

You don't know what happened out there. So, don't go jumping to conclusions. It may've been an accident.

NANCY JO

Someone took the time to wrap it up and dump it in the water.

PETE

I understand that. 'Cept what? You gonna worry yourself sick over something you know nothing about?

(They sit quietly.)

NANCY JO

So close to home.

PETE

Enough. Now listen. Why don't you find something else to do? Take your mind off it. You can start by putting the baby back in her crib.

NANCY JO

She'll just start crying again as soon as you hand her over.

PETE

No, she won't. Here now.

(Nancy puts her cigarette down as Pete hands the baby over.)

Take her slow.

(Nancy takes the baby.)

Careful.

NANCY JO

I think I know how to hold a baby, Pete. I only dropped you once. Maybe twice. But never on your head.

PETE

Shhhhhh.

NANCY JO

All right, all right. Let's go, Pearl. Grandma's got you.

PETE

Watch your step.

(Nancy Jo exits into the house with the baby and then disappears down the hallway. Pete watches them go. A moment passes before Pete retrieves Nancy Jo's still lit cigarette. He brings it to his lips and inhales deeply. We settle on this vignette for a moment. Nancy Jo reappears from the hallway and makes her way to the front door. She heads out onto the porch.)

NANCY JO

Weren't you just giving me grief about smoking?

PETE

You just left it there burning.

NANCY JO

Mm hm.

PETE

Did you get the baby settled?

NANCY JO

I did. She went straight down without a peep. She's fast asleep.

(We hear a car pulling up. Nancy Jo and Pete look off.)

Looks like we got visitors.

(End of Scene.)

SCENE 3

1952. October. Morning. The farmhouse.

(The stage is empty and eerily quiet for a moment. Suddenly, Peggy Lynn enters from the hallway.)

PEGGY LYNN

Pete! Pete, we gotta get going!

(She retrieves a coat from a hook on the wall or from a coat rack.)

Come on Pete! Let's go! I don't wanna be late! Pete!

(During the previous, someone enters from off, by way of the kitchen. Perhaps we hear a door close. Nancy Jo appears. She is dressed for Fall.)

NANCY JO

Good God, Peggy Lynn. Do you honestly have to be that loud? I heard you all the way out to the chicken coop.

PEGGY LYNN

(Putting on her coat.)

Well, I'm sorry, but Verla Claire Baker is first up in my chair this morning, and she's asking for the works. I've got back-to-back appointments all day, and if I don't get started on time, I won't be able to keep up.

NANCY JO

Well, Verla's got about as much hair on her chin as she does on her head.

PEGGY LYNN

Exactly. So, I think you know damn well what I'm up against today.

NANCY JO

All right, well calm down. Pete's outside with the truck. He's just waiting on you.

PEGGY LYNN

(She checks her hair and makeup in a mirror.)

Oh. Okay. Well, I didn't know.

NANCY JO

How would you since he evidently didn't tell you.

PEGGY LYNN

He's very sweet sometimes.

(She retrieves a large tote bag.)

NANCY JO

Well, he does take good care of you.

PEGGY LYNN

I never said otherwise.

(She tilts forward slightly, suddenly nauseous.)

NANCY JO

You okay?

PEGGY LYNN

Yeah, no I'm fine. My, uh... my stomach's a little unsettled is all.

NANCY JO

Oh, well that's no good. Here, let me get you some Alka-Seltzer.

(Nancy Jo starts off.)

PEGGY LYNN

No, don't worry about it. It'll pass.

NANCY JO

You sure?

PEGGY LYNN

Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay. In any case, there isn't time.

(She tilts forward again.)

No. No, I'm gonna be sick.

(She drops the tote bag and exits hurriedly through the hallway.)

NANCY JO

Oh, for...

(Following and calling after her.)

Peggy Lynn, you had better not make a mess in there! Do you hear me? Pull your hair back and put your head inside the bowl!

(Nancy Jo shakes her head and removes a pack of cigarettes from her coat pocket. She takes off her coat and hangs it up. She then sits in a chair, lights a cigarette, and begins to smoke it. Pete appears outside, also dressed for Fall. He is not wearing the cast. He heads up the steps and onto the front porch and makes his way into the house.)

PETE

What's going on? Where's Peggy Lynn?

NANCY JO

She's in the toilet.

PETE

Still? We gotta get going.

NANCY JO

She's throwing up.

PETE

Throwing up? What're you talking about?

NANCY JO

What do you mean, what am I...? Her tummy was upset, so she's in the bathroom throwing up. I don't know how I can say it more plainly.

PETE

Well, she was fine earlier.

(He starts for the hallway.)

Peggy Lynn!

NANCY JO

Leave her alone.

PETE

I was just gonna check on her.

NANCY JO

Oh, now come on, Pete. You can't be that stupid.

PETE

What? What'd I do now?

NANCY JO

The only thing you're any good at. Knocking her up.

PETE

You better not be messing with me.

NANCY JO

(Exasperated.)

To what end? Honestly, sometimes—

PETE

How far along is she do you think?

NANCY JO

Not sure exactly. Though I do know she's been trying to keep it from us for at least a couple of weeks now.

PETE

Can't say I blame her.

NANCY JO

I suppose not.

(Nancy Jo smokes. Pete is lost in thought.)

Pete...

PETE

Yeah?

NANCY JO

Don't get your hopes up.

(Peggy Lynn appears from the hallway. She looks rough. An awkward moment as the three of them stare at one another.)

PEGGY LYNN

Yeah, no I'm fine. Thank you for asking.

PETE

(He moves to Peggy Lynn.)

I'm sorry, baby.

PEGGY LYNN

Probably best you keep your distance.

(Pete backs off.)

PETE

How about I get you some water, huh?

PEGGY LYNN

That'd be wonderful. Thank you.

PETE

You got it.

(He exits into the kitchen.)

PEGGY LYNN

(Calling after him.)

With ice! Lots of ice! Mostly ice! You know what? Just forget the water and bring me a cup of ice!

PETE

(Off.)

Coming right up!

(We will hear Pete in the kitchen getting a cup of ice for Peggy Lynn.)

PEGGY LYNN

(She moves to Nancy Jo.)

So, uh... Listen, Nancy Jo...

NANCY JO

Mm hm.

PEGGY LYNN

Right, um... So, in case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm pregnant.

NANCY JO

You don't say.

PEGGY LYNN

Again.

NANCY JO

I've lost count.

PEGGY LYNN

And as always, I greatly appreciate your disdain. Ever so useful in situations like these.

NANCY JO

Glad I could be of assistance.

(Nancy Jo blows a puff of smoke into the air.)

PEGGY LYNN

You do understand that it's not my fault.

NANCY JO

Maybe not. But the rest of us are paying the price for your bad luck.

(This stings, but Peggy Lynn pushes through.)

PEGGY LYNN

I assume Pete knows.

NANCY JO

He does, though you can rest assured he wasn't able to sort it out on his own.

(Pete enters with a cup of ice. He hands it to Peggy Lynn.)

PETE

Here you go, baby.

PEGGY LYNN

(She takes the cup from Pete.)

Thank you. Now look. We really gotta get going.

PETE

Peggy Lynn—

PEGGY LYNN

I know what you're gonna say and I'm sorry but it's not up for discussion.

(She retrieves her tote bag.)

There are more than a few ladies lined up today just waiting for me to make 'em beautiful, and I don't wanna disappoint any of 'em. That, and we need the money.

(She checks herself in the mirror.)

Ack. I'll have to fix my face in the truck.

NANCY JO

(Rising out of her chair.)

I'll call Connie and let her know you're running late.

PEGGY LYNN

Well, knock me over with a feather.

NANCY JO

A simple "thank you" would suffice.

(With her tote bag and cup of ice, Peggy Lynn exits out the door and down the front steps. Pete starts to follow. Nancy Jo heads for the phone.)

Oh, and hey, Pete.

PETE

Yeah.

NANCY JO

I need you to pick up some chicken feed while you're out.

PETE

All right.

NANCY JO

We did pretty good this week. Almost four dozen. Even Miss Tillie laid a few.

PETE

That's good to hear.

NANCY JO

Oh, and listen. I don't want you going to Patterson's Feed Supply anymore. I don't like their mix. I know it's further out, but I hear that new place – Murdock's – is much better. And cheaper.

PEGGY LYNN

(Off.)

Pete!

PETE

I gotta go.

NANCY JO

Well, go on then.

(Pete exits out the door and down the front steps. Nancy Jo picks up the receiver and dials.)

Hi, Connie...? Yeah, hi, this is Nancy Jo Anderson calling... Well, I'm doing just fine, thanks for asking. And how have you been...? Oh, well that's good to hear... So, listen. Peggy Lynn is running a little bit late this morning... I know, I know, and she is fully aware, but listen, it's not her fault... No, no, everything's okay. It's just that my lower back seized up this morning and I had to ask her to clean out the henhouse and bring in the eggs... Well, isn't that the truth... Yeah, she's a hard worker, that one. I don't know what I'd do without her...

(She rolls her eyes and sticks out her tongue.)

Yeah, well I am sorry. I guess you'll have to keep Verla Claire entertained until Peggy Lynn gets there. Maybe toss a ball and see if she'll go fetch it...

(Nancy Jo laughs.)

Well, she and Pete left about five minutes ago, and I expect he's driving like a lunatic, so they'll be there before you know it... Okay then... All right, well you have a wonderful day... Mm hm... Bye.

(Nancy Jo replaces the receiver. She takes a long drag off her cigarette and then exits into the kitchen. End of scene.)

SCENE 4

1952. October. Later that same day. Outside of Murdock's Feed Supply.

(Sandra Miller appears. She removes a pair of work gloves and uses them to beat the dust off herself. Pete arrives behind her.)

PETE

Excuse me, Miss—

SANDRA

(Turning to Pete.)

Listen, I don't mean to be rude, but I don't like to be referred to as "Miss". Now 'course, I allow Mr. Murdock to address me that way, but only because he's my employer. So, I'd be grateful if you'd just call me Sandra.

PETE

(Taken aback.)

Well, shit. I'm sorry. Sandra. And you can call me Pete if you like.

SANDRA

Okay. So, is there something else I can help you with, Pete?

PETE

Uh, yeah. No. I mean, no, I don't need anything else. It's just that... Look, I feel real stupid about this, and I don't know exactly how to put it, but, uh...

SANDRA

Well, let's not beat about the bush, Pete. I gotta get back to work.

PETE

Understood.

SANDRA

So, what is it?

PETE

Right. I, uh... I guess I just wanted to say I appreciated you helping me load that chicken feed onto my truck.

SANDRA

Oh. Okay. Well, it was certainly my pleasure. And it's also my job.

PETE

Exactly. And that's uh... And that's what I wanted to, um...

SANDRA

Have I made you uncomfortable?

PETE

What? No. No, 'course not.

SANDRA

I only ask because I'm thinking that maybe you're having a hard time dealing with the fact that a woman helped you carry four fifty-pound bags of feed to your automobile.

PETE

Oh, now come on—

SANDRA

Look, it's fine, I'm not offended. And besides, I've gotten used to it.

PETE

Is that right?

SANDRA

I mean, the only man I've come across who hasn't taken issue with it is Casper Ferguson.

PETE

Oh, well I know Casper. Everybody knows Casper. Little guy, mostly keeps to himself, never been married if you know what I'm saying.

SANDRA

He's a sweet, old man. And he appreciates that women have more to offer than just sitting around each other's kitchens drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and gossiping until it's time to get dinner on the table. If you know what I'm saying.

PETE

I suppose I do.

SANDRA

Mr. Murdock's son usually helps the customers with their packages. But since he's off to school and since business has picked up a bit, I offered to pitch in until they hire someone else. Someone not of the female persuasion. Otherwise, I generally just run the cash register. So, there's no need to fret, Pete. The men are still in charge.

PETE

You are something else.

SANDRA

So, I've been told. Now, listen. I really gotta go.

(She starts off.)

PETE

You from around here?

SANDRA

Born and raised.

(She continues off.)

PETE

(Following her.)

Hey, hang on a second.

(She stops and turns to him.)

SANDRA

You're gonna get me fired, Pete.

PETE

Is it proper for a man to give a woman cash for helping him out?

SANDRA

I suppose it depends on what she's been helping him out with.

PETE

What? Oh God, no. No. No, that's not what I meant at all.

SANDRA

(She chuckles.)

You're making this easy for me.

(She extends her hand, palm up.)

So, how much do you got?

PETE

Oh. Yeah, 'course.

(He pulls a wallet out of his back pocket as he moves toward her.)

Oh, damn. The smallest I have is a five.

SANDRA

Oh, that's okay. I was just kidding around anyway.

PETE

No. No, it's fine. Take it.

(He offers her the money.)

SANDRA

I am not gonna take your money. And anyway, it's way too much.

PETE

Come on.

SANDRA

That's very generous. So, thank you but no thank you.

PETE

I'm happy to do it.

(An impasse. Pete then puts the money back in his wallet and tucks it into his back pocket.)

SANDRA

You interested in joining me this evening? Over at the Tap-N-Fill? You can use that five to buy me a drink.

PETE

Oh, uh—

SANDRA

Now, before you answer, I can see that you're married.

(She points to his wedding band.)

So don't go reading anything into it. It's just... Well, you seem like a respectable guy and, well, if you're free, I'd be happy to have the company. And anyway, they don't much appreciate it when the ladies show up without a chaperon.

PETE

Hey look, I am flattered, but—

SANDRA

Didn't I just tell you not to read anything into it.

PETE

Yeah, you did, but—

SANDRA

You know, it is possible for a man and a woman to go out for a drink and to not end up in bed together afterwards.

PETE

I think it's a little more complicated than that, don't you?

SANDRA

Well, I'm not looking to make things complicated.

PETE

I just don't think it's the right thing to do.

SANDRA

Understood. And you know, I have a great deal of respect for a man who's able to recognize his shortcomings.

PETE

I'm sorry, his what? What the heck is that supposed to—

SANDRA

And there you go again, reading into things. Now, I'm gonna be at that bar either way. Maybe I'll ask Casper to go with me. I expect he'll be able to keep his hands to himself. In the meantime, I should get back to work.

PETE

Yeah, no, 'course. That cash register isn't gonna run itself.

SANDRA

No, it is not.

PETE

It was nice to meet you, Sandra.

SANDRA

Likewise, Pete.

(She extends her hand. He takes it and they shake.)

PETE

I guess I'll see you next time I need some chicken feed.

SANDRA

Well, unless your chickens are gonna go through two hundred pounds of it in a month or so, there won't be a next time.

PETE

What are you saying?

SANDRA

I'm saying, I won't be here.

PETE

I don't understand.

SANDRA

I'm moving away.

PETE

You're moving? Where're you going?

SANDRA

(She chuckles.)

Wouldn't you like to know.

(She exits. End of scene.)

SCENE 5

1952. October. Early evening, same day as the previous scene. The farmhouse.

(The stage is empty for a moment. Pete appears carrying two bags of chicken feed. He dumps them on the ground near the porch. As he heads back off, Peggy Lynn appears carrying her tote bag. She is exhausted from the day as she heads up the steps and onto the front porch. She then makes her way into the house. As she enters, Nancy Jo appears from the hallway. She is dressed neatly, hair primped, makeup on, and putting on a clip-on earring.)

NANCY JO

Well, finally.

PEGGY LYNN

Finally, what?

NANCY JO

I'm gonna be late for card club.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh. Right. That's tonight. Sorry. It's been a very long day, Nancy Jo.

NANCY JO

Where's Pete?

PEGGY LYNN

He's getting the chicken feed outta the truck.

(Peggy Lynn takes off her coat and settles into a chair as Nancy Jo goes out onto the porch and calls off.)

NANCY JO

Pete!

PETE

(Off.)

Yeah?

NANCY JO

Get a move on! I need you to drive me to card club!

PETE

(Off.)

Oh, geez. All right, well keep your pants on! I'll be right there!

NANCY JO

You can just leave the bags on the porch for now! I'll take 'em out to the shed in the morning!

PETE

(Off.)

They're heavy!

NANCY JO

I can manage!

PETE

(Off.)

Yes, ma'am!

NANCY JO

And I'll need you to pick me up around eleven! That's about the time Evelyn gets especially drunk and extra mean! She can't stand losing to me, and she always does!

(She goes back into the house and checks herself in the mirror. To Peggy Lynn.)

What's he been up to?

PEGGY LYNN

Who? Pete?

NANCY JO

Who else?

PEGGY LYNN

I don't know what you mean.

NANCY JO

I sent him out this morning to run one errand and he's been gone all day.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh. Well, I guess he and Bucky found some daywork. At least that's what he told me.

NANCY JO

Oh yeah? Doing what?

PEGGY LYNN

I don't know exactly. Just said he made some money today.

NANCY JO

Oh. All right. Well, that's good to hear. 'Cept how am I supposed to know these things if no one tells me?

PEGGY LYNN

I just found out myself on the way home. And that's about the only thing I could get out of him. Otherwise, he just sat there, looking straight ahead with a sour look on his face. Something's up with him, and between you and me, I don't care to know what it is.

(During the previous, we see Pete carry the other two bags up onto the porch and set them down. He then retrieves the two he left on the ground and places them on the porch as well. He pulls the truck key from his pocket as he enters the house. He offers the key to Nancy Jo.)

PETE

Here.

NANCY JO

And what am I supposed to do with that?

PETE

Drive yourself.

NANCY JO

What? Are you outta...? I don't have time for this foolishness. Let's go.

(Nancy Jo pushes past Pete and heads to the front door.)

PETE

I'm not kidding. You can drive yourself. I'm tired and I'm in a mood.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh, now come on Pete—

PETE

Stay out of it, Peggy Lynn.

PEGGY LYNN

(Rising out of the chair.)

Never mind him. I'll take you, Nancy Jo.

PETE

No. You're gonna stay here. We got some things we need to talk about.

PEGGY LYNN

You're not the only one who's tired, so maybe I don't feel like talking.

PETE

It doesn't matter what you feel like. I have some things I need to get off my chest.

PEGGY LYNN

What has gotten into you?

PETE

(Quietly but with sternness.)

I need you to keep your mouth shut, okay?

(Peggy Lynn is bewildered. To Nancy Jo.)

Now, you take this key and get the hell outta here. You remember how to drive an automobile, don't you?

NANCY JO

(A little taken aback.)

I do. And all right. If you insist.

(She takes the key.)

If you two are hungry, there's a casserole in the fridge. Just set the oven to three fifty and the timer to twenty minutes

(On her way out the door.)

I hope I don't perish in some horrible accident.

PETE

(Calling after Nancy Jo.)

You trying to cheer me up?

NANCY JO

Well, I never.

(She heads down the porch steps and disappears off. In the house, silence. At length...)

PEGGY LYNN

I'll turn the oven on and then I'm gonna freshen up. Can you put the casserole in?

(She starts for the kitchen.)

PETE

Peggy Lynn, just... Just hang on a second. Please.

PEGGY LYNN

You know what, never mind. I've suddenly lost my appetite. So, I'm just gonna get a bath and then I'm gonna go to bed. And maybe you oughtta sleep out here tonight.

(She starts for the hallway.)

PETE

God damn it, now, you listen to me.

PEGGY LYNN

Do not raise your voice at me. Where do you get off talking to me that way?

PETE

Sit down.

PEGGY LYNN

I will not sit down.

PETE

You will. And you're gonna hear me out whether you like or it not.

PEGGY LYNN

Well, you can rest assured that I am not gonna like it. Not one bit.

(She makes a ceremony of sitting.)

I'm sitting down now. So, this better be good.

PETE

Peggy Lynn—

PEGGY LYNN

You have my undivided attention.

PETE

I want a baby real bad.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh, well good Lord, Pete. I know you do. It's all you ever talk about—

PETE

Boy, girl, it doesn't matter. And I want you by my side, every step of the way, for as long as you'll have me.

PEGGY LYNN

I'm not going anywhere. 'Cept for maybe away from Nancy Jo if that's even possible.

(They both smile, perhaps chuckle, at this.)

PETE

Well, I guess that's what I'm getting at. She's never gonna get rid of this farm. It's just gonna fall apart around her.

PEGGY LYNN

Well, she's not gonna live forever. At least I hope not. So, at some point, I expect it'll be yours to do with it whatever you want.

PETE

No, that's not gonna happen.

PEGGY LYNN

How do you figure?

PETE

Dad made her promise him that she wouldn't leave it to me. Said I didn't earn it, didn't deserve it.

PEGGY LYNN

You have got to be... Well, what the hell is she gonna do with it?

PETE

I honestly don't care.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh now, come on Pete. This land is worth something. And all that equipment just sitting out there in the barn? And you're just gonna let it go? You're not gonna fight for it? I mean, at least talk to her. Otherwise, what the hell are we doing here?

PETE

I think it's about time we left.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh yeah? Where to? And with what money?

PETE

I don't mean this second, but soon. We're gonna have a baby, Peggy Lynn, I promise you that. And I'm gonna get myself a steady job, something I like, something that pays well, and I'm gonna buy us a small house somewhere with a little backyard, and maybe we'll get ourselves a dog, but nothing too much, something simple, something we can call home. Now, I know I'm not much good at anything, but I do know that I'm gonna be the best Dad there ever was. I'm gonna have purpose. And I'm gonna give us a proper life together. The three of us.

PEGGY LYNN

I love you, Pete. I really do. And you're a good man with a good heart. But sometimes I think you're as dumb as they get.

PETE

(This hits hard, but he concedes.)

I suppose that's true.

PEGGY LYNN

You know, just because you want a baby doesn't mean I'm gonna be able to give you one. That is something you understand, isn't it?

PETE

I do. But I have hope.

PEGGY LYNN

I see. You have hope. So, what is it you need from me then, Pete? Hm? You know, because it doesn't really matter what I do, I expect we both know this is just gonna turn out the same way it always does. So, what then? You want me to take an extended break from the salon again? You want me to risk losing some of my regular customers? Maybe I oughtta just sit around this house, perfectly still, and do what's expected of me. Hm? And what is it exactly that I'm expected to do, Pete? I mean because no one really seems to know, now do they. I got Doctor Wheeler telling me, "You should take up smoking, maybe it'll calm you down." Doctor Bowman tells me, "A little vodka in your orange juice might stop you from going into labor too soon." "Stay in bed all day." "Don't read any books, it'll cause too much excitement." "Don't argue with your husband." – We know you love that one, don't you, Pete? Oh, and my favorite... "Don't reach above your head because there's a damn good chance that the cord might be wrapped around that baby's neck, you don't wanna to strangle your unborn child, now do you, Peggy Lynn?"

(She is nearly in tears.)

Because every time you get me pregnant, Pete, I gotta live through that same nightmare. Don't you understand? It doesn't matter what I do, my body is just gonna keep failing me. But hey! Suck it up, right? Full steam ahead because Pete has hope.

PETE

I'm going out.

PEGGY LYNN

Probably a good idea. Get some fresh air. Clear your head.

PETE

For a drink.

(He starts for the front door.)

PEGGY LYNN

A drink?

PETE

Yeah. Over at the Tap-N-Fill.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh, is that so? And how do you suppose you're gonna get there? You just sent your mother off in the truck.

PETE

I'm gonna walk.

PEGGY LYNN

Oh, for God's sake, Pete. You will do no such thing.

PETE

I love you, Peggy Lynn.

PEGGY LYNN

And this is how you show it? By going out and getting drunk? You can't be serious.

PETE

Don't wait up.

(He exits through the front door, heads down the porch steps, and disappears off. Peggy Lynn follows him.)

PEGGY LYNN

(On the porch.)

Pete! Pete, what is wrong with you? Come back here! Pete!

(She crosses back into the house and goes to the phone. She opens an address book and thumbs through it for a number. She picks up the receiver and dials.)

Bucky, it's Peggy Lynn... Yeah, well I guess I'm doing okay, but listen. I need you to pick Pete up... No, he's not here, he's run off... Well, not for good. Said he was going for a drink over at the Tap-N-Fill ... Yeah, I know he usually asks you along, but it seems he's just lost what's left of his damn mind and now he's walking there... Nancy Jo has the truck... Look, I don't have time to go into details. I just need you to pick him up... Well, I expect the quickest way is route two fifty-nine, so I'm sure you'll find him somewhere along that stretch of road... No. No. Just take him wherever he wants to go. Let him get drunk and then bring him back here when he's

had his fill. I'll leave the door unlocked. And you make certain he sleeps on the couch. I'll put out some blankets and pillows... Yes, I'm sure. And listen to me. I do not ever want to hear about whatever happens tonight. Do you understand...? Good.

(Peggy Lynn replaces the receiver. She sighs deeply and then winces after experiencing a sharp pain in her lower abdomen. She breathes lightly until the pain subsides, and then exits down the hallway. End of scene.)

SCENE 6

1952. October. Around midnight. Several hours following the previous scene. Bucky Turner's cabin.

(Near darkness inside, moonlight streaming through a window. After a moment, the front door opens, and we see a man and a woman in silhouette.)

BUCKY

Sorry. It ain't much but it's mostly clean. Stay here, I'll turn on a light.

(We barely see Bucky move in the darkness towards a lamp. He turns it on. The room is now lit but still fairly dim.)

There we go.

(He turns to Sandra who is still in the doorway.)

So, whatta you think?

SANDRA

You're right. It isn't much.

BUCKY

(He laughs.)

You don't have to stay if you don't want to. I can drop you back off at the Tap-N-Fill or take you home. Just say the word.

SANDRA

No, it's fine. I'm fine. I'm happy to hang out for a bit. But that's all I'm gonna do. Just hang out. Nothing else.

BUCKY

Okay. Fair enough. I'll get you a beer. You can sit wherever you like.

SANDRA

Thanks.

(Sandra sits. Bucky grabs two beers from a fridge, opens them, hands one to Sandra, and then sits.)

BUCKY

I was born just over there. By the fireplace.

SANDRA

You're kidding.

BUCKY

Nope. Just me and my Mom and Dad living here. I put in plumbing and electric about ten years back now. 'Til then, we bathed in the creek and did our business outside.

SANDRA

That's a little too rustic for my tastes.

BUCKY

For most people's tastes, I expect. Anyway, my Mom gave birth to me on top of some blankets in the middle of the floor there, and my Dad helped deliver me.

SANDRA

Now, why on earth would they do that? I mean, I know you're a long way out here, but there must've been a doctor somewhere nearby.

BUCKY

We didn't have much money. And anyway, Mom knew what she was doing, helped deliver three of her siblings when she was a teenager. Apparently, though, Dad was a nervous wreck. Just barely got me into Mom's arms before he passed out. He just sort of toppled forward and whacked his head on the hearth.

SANDRA

Jesus.

BUCKY

Mom was tired and too busy tending to me to look after him. Said she was pretty sure he wasn't dead, but she didn't have the energy nor the inclination to sort that out.

SANDRA

Well, your mother sounds like a real hoot.

BUCKY

She's something else, that's for sure.

SANDRA

And was he okay? Your Dad?

BUCKY

Oh yeah, he was fine. Rattled his brain a little. Had a lump on his forehead and a cut above his left eye that took some time to heal. He was an ugly man anyway, so it didn't matter much. I got my looks from him.

SANDRA

Oh, you did, did you? Well, if you're angling for a compliment, you're wasting your breath.

BUCKY

So, you agree that I'm an ugly man.

SANDRA

I'll only agree that you're a man. What is it you do, Bucky Turner? I mean, besides pick up strange women in bars.

BUCKY

Oh, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I'm what some might call, a day worker. I take odd jobs here and there. And sometimes – just for the hell of it – I'm a lumberjack.

SANDRA

A lumberjack? Now that's interesting.

BUCKY

Well, it ain't like I'm out there cutting down trees. What I actually do is help to get the logs up onto the trucks. So, it's not as interesting as you might think.

SANDRA

It's dangerous work, though, right?

BUCKY

It can be. I've seen lots of guys get hurt, some real bad, a few of 'em killed. I've been lucky so far, knock on wood. Other than that, there's really nothing too exciting about working at a lumber camp.

SANDRA

Oh yeah? Well, perhaps a woman might have a different point of view.

BUCKY

There's not many women in the lumber business. And the few there are... Well, they don't look nor act much different than the men. And that's the kind of woman no one pays much attention to.

SANDRA

That's a little narrow-minded, don't you think? There's a great variety of women in the world, so, I might suggest you do a little sampling first before you make up your mind. And who knows? Maybe underneath all that grime is the love of your life.

BUCKY

You ain't from around here, are you?

SANDRA

Born and raised.

(The bulb in the lamp blows. The room is dark again.)

BUCKY

Damn it. You okay?

SANDRA

Yeah, I'm fine. Spilled a little beer on the floor, though.

BUCKY

Well, that's not a problem. Plenty of booze spilled in here over the years. Stay put. I'm gonna grab another bulb.

SANDRA

Actually, I could sure use your toilet if you don't mind. It's kind of urgent.

BUCKY

Oh. 'Course. Sorry. It's just behind the kitchen here. Give me your hand.

SANDRA

Thanks.

(In the darkness, we scarcely see Bucky guiding Sandra off.)

BUCKY

Just on the right there. Here, let me get the, uh...

(We see a light come on and then hear a door close off. Bucky reappears and goes through some drawers to find a light bulb. He crosses to the lamp and replaces the busted bulb with the new one. Just as he turns on the lamp, there comes a loud knocking on the front door.)

PETE

(Elevated whisper.)

Bucky! Bucky, open the fucking door!

BUCKY

Jesus Christ.

(He crosses to the door.)

It's unlocked, you dipshit.

(He opens the door. The two men continue to speak in elevated whispers.)

What the / hell's the matter with you?

PETE

(Entering.)

/ What the fuck's going on in here?

BUCKY

There's nothing going on. We was just talking.

PETE

Bullshit. The lights just went out.

BUCKY

So, what's your point, huh? That's not your wife back there, is it? It's not even your girlfriend. But you come storming in here ready to stake claim to her like she was your personal property. You barely even know her.

PETE

You were supposed to honk the fucking horn. Wasn't that the signal we agreed on? Next thing I know, I see headlights flashing. I had to crawl out the back window. Tore a fucking hole in my pants. Meanwhile, I'm standing outside with my thumb up my ass while the two of you are getting it on in here.

BUCKY

Sounds like that hole came in handy then.

PETE

Fuck you.

BUCKY

Oh, come on now. Honking the horn was the dumbest part of that plan. And anyway, it wasn't like I was stopping you from knocking on that door sooner, was it? Yeah, and so what about that, huh? Didn't seem like you were in any rush to get in here. You know, just because you've got cold feet doesn't mean I'm in here taken advantage of the situation. What's going on, Pete?

PETE

You're supposed to be my friend, Bucky.

BUCKY

I am your friend. But listen, this is on you. Okay? I did what you asked me to do. I dropped you off here and I went to the Tap-N-Fill. And then I brought that girl back to my place. And now what? I'm supposed to ignore her? We was just talking in here. Okay? The fucking lightbulb blew on the lamp. That's why it got dark in here.

PETE

(Breathing heavy, befuddled.)

Fuck. Fuck. This was a dumb idea.

BUCKY

All right. All right. Well, that's okay. It ain't too late to change your mind, you know. There's nothing that's happened here that can't be undone. So, why don't you get on outta here and I'll—

(Sandra enters from the bathroom off.)

SANDRA

Pete?

PETE

(Quietly.)

Aw shit.

SANDRA

What... What're you doing here? You two know each other?

BUCKY

Oh, yeah. We know each other. Me and Pete, we go way back.

SANDRA

And?

BUCKY

And what?

SANDRA

And what's he doing here?

BUCKY

(To Pete.)

She wants to know why you're here.

PETE

Right, uh... Wow, this is awkward. Yeah, so, uh... So, my wife and I, we, uh... We had a pretty heated argument earlier. And she, uh... Well, she threw me out of the house. And since Bucky is my best pal, this was the only place I could think of to go.

SANDRA

Oh yeah? And what were you two fighting about?

PETE

I don't... I don't really wanna get into it.

SANDRA

I'm not talking about your wife. I heard you and Bucky going at it out here. Tossing curse words back and forth like a pigskin.

PETE

Oh, uh—

BUCKY

Yeah, so I'm gonna head outside and have a cigarette. And then I think I'll go and check on Lauren while I'm at it. Don't wait up.

(Bucky exits the cabin.)

SANDRA

Laureen?

PETE

His Mom. She lives in a shack down by the water.

SANDRA

A shack?

PETE

Yep. Said she didn't want to spend her twilight years living with her son, so Bucky built a small shack out back for her. Don't worry. She's comfortable.

SANDRA

And his Dad?

PETE

Oh, he left a long time ago. Bucky was just a kid.

SANDRA

I see.

PETE

Yeah, so...

SANDRA

And what about you?

PETE

What about me what?

SANDRA

Just you and your wife at home? Any kids?

PETE

No. No. Not yet anyway. We're trying, though.

SANDRA

And your folks?

PETE

My mom's still around. My Dad passed. A little more than ten years now.

SANDRA

Was he a good man?

PETE

Yeah. Yeah, he was. He was a serious man too. He wanted a shit-ton of kids. I mean, what farmer doesn't, right? And let me tell you, if he had his way, every last one of 'em was gonna be a boy. But my Mom was only able to give him one child. A son to be sure, but that's all she could manage. Anyway, I wasn't really cut out for farm work. I did it for a while, but it was just too much. Christ, I'd get up at the crack of dawn and then break my back until the sun went down. Too tired to do anything else 'cept eat and sleep. And I was missing out on being a kid as far as I was concerned. Got to the point where I'd just skip out and leave my Dad to fend for himself. He never complained, though. Just went out and got himself a bank loan, hired a bunch of men to work with him, got the farm running like a finely tuned machine, and eventually the money just started rolling in. For quite some time in fact. Until he passed. And then it all went to shit.

SANDRA

You know, the only thing any of us can do is to just appreciate what we have in front of us. In the moment. Otherwise, what? Pine after something that's not there anymore? And maybe something that was never there to begin with.

PETE

And you? I bet you got some stories.

SANDRA

I'm not one to look backwards. You went to a whole lot of trouble to get me to come all the way out here.

PETE

I'm not sure I know what you mean.

SANDRA

I think you do. Lucky for you, I don't mind a little adventure now and then.

PETE

No. No, you got this all wrong.

SANDRA

Is that a fact?

PETE

Listen—

SANDRA

What is it you want, Pete? Hm? You bored at home? You looking for a little something on the side? Or are you just planning on leaving your wife altogether?

PETE

I love my wife.

SANDRA

And that's why you're out here trying to get laid?

PETE

I don't know why you gotta talk like that.

SANDRA

So, is it?

PETE

(Not hostile, just irritated.)

You know, you're not so innocent in all this. All high and mighty, telling me just because a man and a woman might have drinks together doesn't mean they'll end up in bed together. But here you are planning to do who knows what with some guy you just met in a bar.

SANDRA

Yeah, well here's the difference between you and me: Whereas you can't wipe your ass without having to check in with the missus first, I'm not obliged to answer to anyone, at any time. Least of all you.

PETE

You're hard as nails, aren't you?

SANDRA

I'm soft when I need to be.

PETE

Is that so?

SANDRA

I'm not a complicated woman, Pete. I mean, just because you can't figure me out doesn't mean I'm a puzzle that needs putting together.

PETE

I'm not very good with puzzles.

SANDRA

I don't know many men who are. 'Cept for maybe Casper / Ferguson.

PETE

/ Aw, Jesus. Here we go again with / Casper Ferguson.

SANDRA

/ What? I happen to enjoy his / company very much.

PETE

/ Yeah, I know, I know. He's a sweet / old man.

SANDRA

/ He is a sweet / old man.

PETE

/ All right, fine. 'Cept why do we gotta talk about him now? Christ, it's just ruining the mood.

SANDRA

The mood? And what mood is that, Pete?

(Pete is confused, uneasy, a little tormented. He suddenly goes in for a kiss and Sandra receives it with gusto. They fumble to remove their clothing, all the while still kissing, grunting, and groping. It is anything but delicate. They are finally mostly undressed and grappling with each other. At this, we hear Peggy Lynn cry out in the distance as lights fade to black. End of scene.)

SCENE 7

1952. October. Continuous from the previous scene. The farmhouse.

(Peggy Lynn continues to cry out as Nancy Jo – who has just returned from card club – comes up the stairs and onto the porch. Peggy Lynn

appears from the hallway. She has blood on her nightgown. Nancy Jo crosses into the house.)

NANCY JO

(To herself.)

Oh, boy.

(She moves to Peggy Lynn. She is pragmatic.)

You're fine. Peggy Lynn. Peggy Lynn, listen to me. It's never gonna get easy, but you're fine. Okay? Now, come on. Sit down.

(Nancy Jo guides Peggy Lynn to a chair.)

I'm gonna get you some water, all right?

PEGGY LYNN

No.

NANCY JO

No?

PEGGY LYNN

I want a steak and a glass of wine.

NANCY JO

I'll open a jar of olives and once we get you settled in, then maybe I'll make you some eggs. How's that sound?

PEGGY LYNN

Don't do me any favors.

(Nancy Jo heads into the kitchen to retrieve the water and olives.)

NANCY JO

(Off.)

I would've been home sooner, but the girls and I decided to let Evelyn win a few hands, which 'course put her into a very good mood. So, we all had a really nice time tonight. No disagreements. Just some good old-fashioned pinochle and gossip.

(She returns from the kitchen and hands Peggy Lynn a glass of water.)

Here you go.

(Peggy Lynn takes the glass. Nancy Jo opens the jar of olives and hands those over as well.)

Eat as many as you like. They'll help.

(Nancy Jo retrieves her purse and pulls a pack of cigarettes from it. She sits and starts to light a cigarette but then looks to Peggy Lynn and decides against it.)

I'm an unkind woman. I know that. And I've been especially tough on you. Truth is, though, you're the best thing that's ever happened to Pete. He doesn't deserve you. But that doesn't change the fact that I just don't much like you. You're bossy and you've got a mouth on you. And there's only room for one she-devil in this house. But honestly, Peggy Lynn, what the hell do you care what I think or what I have to say? I'm an old lady and I'm set in my ways. So, you can either twist yourself into a pretzel arguing with me or you can just leave me to stew in my own resentment and simply find a way to be kind to yourself. Because that's all that matters really.

(Peggy Lynn eats some olives and drinks her water. Nancy Jo contemplates her cigarette.)

PEGGY LYNN

Go to hell, Nancy Jo.

(She rises from her chair and exits down the hallway.)

NANCY JO

(Calling after her.)

Leave your nightgown in the bathroom! I'll soak it in the tub overnight!

(Peggy Lynn's nightgown comes flying from the hallway and lands on the living room floor.)

Or you can just leave it there on the floor where I will most assuredly not miss it.

(She lights her cigarette. End of scene.)

SCENE 8

1952. November. Roughly six weeks after the previous scene. Outside of Murdock's Feed Supply.

(Laureen Turner appears. She is carrying bags of supplies that she just purchased. She is having difficulties balancing things when she drops it all. Sandra Miller has just finished locking the store door and dropping the key through a mail slot. She then comes rushing to Laureen's aid.)

SANDRA

I knew it. Now, I told you I was happy to help you get your things to your car. Are you okay?

LAUREEN

Yes, I'm okay. I'm just fine. And you were right. These bags are heavy. But I didn't want to bother you. I was already keeping you past hours.

SANDRA

It's no bother. Now here, let me take care of this for you.

(Sandra begins collecting items and putting them back into the bags.)

LAUREEN

Well, I appreciate it, but do be careful there. Don't go straining yourself.

SANDRA

Oh, don't you worry. I am nothing if not sturdy.

(Sandra continues picking up things.)

LAUREEN

Thank you. That's very sweet.

SANDRA

It's my pleasure.

LAUREEN

I'm sure you just wanna get home after a long day.

SANDRA

Actually, I'll be getting on the road straight from here. I've got a big trip ahead of me.

LAUREEN

Oh yeah? You got vacation plans?

SANDRA

No. I'm moving away. I just finished my last shift here at the supply store. Packed my car this morning, so I'll be heading out as soon as I get you organized and on your way.

LAUREEN

Well, that's exciting. 'Cept now I feel just awful. I bet your anxious to go, and here you are having to help some clumsy old lady with her bags.

SANDRA

I'm in no rush, so don't you worry.

LAUREEN

Listen, I hope you don't mind me asking... You know what, never mind, it's none of my damn business.

SANDRA

What is it?

LAUREEN

No. I shouldn't have said anything. I guess I'm just nosy is all.

SANDRA

Well, go on then.

LAUREEN

It's just that I have a hunch about these things sometimes. And I am rarely, if ever wrong.

SANDRA

Well, now you've got me in suspense.

LAUREEN

How far along are you, do you think?

(Sandra stops what she's doing and looks up at Laureen.)

I'm guessing about five, six weeks, maybe.

SANDRA

I'm just gonna finish up here and then get you to your car, all right?

LAUREEN

I've upset you.

SANDRA

No. No. Not at all. I just think it's an odd question to ask someone you don't know.

LAUREEN

For most women, it's cause for celebration.

SANDRA

Most women?

LAUREEN

That's right.

SANDRA

And have you had occasion to speak to most women?

LAUREEN

I ain't sure I understand.

(Sandra has finished repacking the bags and perhaps hands Laureen one and holds onto the others.)

SANDRA

When I was a little girl, I didn't much like baby dolls. And I didn't much care for real babies either. None of it ever felt right. Not for me anyway. And I know most people expect it of women, but frankly it fills me with dread. The idea of bringing another life into this messed up world... Well, it seems like an irresponsible thing to do. But since I'm here, I'm gonna make the most of things. For myself. I've been planning this trip for quite some time now and frankly there's nothing gonna stop me from moving on. So, what some might call a celebration, I might call a minor inconvenience. So, come on then. Let's get your car loaded up and get you on outta here.

LAUREEN

All right.

(The two women start off.)

SANDRA

I'm Sandra by the way.

LAUREEN

Laureen.

(As they exit, Bucky appears. He has a cigarette in one hand and a length of rope in the other. He takes a drag off the cigarette and tosses it to the ground. He then stretches the rope between both hands as he heads off after them.)

END OF ACT 1