

THE RELUCTANT HEN

A play in two acts

By Craig Houk



© 2022 by Craig Houk
1711 11th Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
617-515-1838
hok1969@gmail.com

THE RELUCTANT HEN by Craig Houk

Synopsis

Set in the early 1950s, Pete, a working-class schmuck, and his beautician wife struggle to conceive, so Pete risks it all to have a child.

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

Time

1952 – 1953

Setting

McCurtain County, Oklahoma

Scene Breakdown

1-1	Aug 1953	Early Morning	The Farmhouse
1-2	Oct 1952	Morning	The Farmhouse
1-3	Oct 1952	Mid-Morning	Murdock's Feed Supply
1-4	Oct 1952	Early Evening	The Farmhouse
1-5	Oct 1952	Around Midnight	Bucky's Cabin
1-6	Oct 1952	Around Midnight	The Farmhouse
1-7	Nov 1952	Six Weeks Later	Murdock's Feed Supply
2-1	Jun 1953	Late Afternoon	The Farmhouse

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(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 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 over biscuits.

PETE: Shit on a shingle.

NANCY JO: Yep.

PETE: Looks good.

NANCY JO: 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.)

PETE: You're not gonna eat?

NANCY JO: I'm watching my figure.

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

NANCY JO: 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, is everything okay? 'Course, everything's okay. Everything's fine.

NANCY JO: She was only supposed to be gone a week.

PETE: Jesus. Jack just got back from Korea. Peggy Lynn wanted to spend a little extra time with her brother 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 honestly, I could do without the sarcasm.

(Beat. 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, Pete. 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: *(Overlapping.)* Oh, for the love of--!

(We hear an infant crying off.)

PETE: You mind checking on your grandbaby?

(Pete 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.)

PETE: 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.)

NANCY JO: 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 could 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. A beat. 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.)

NANCY JO: 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. *(Beat.)* So, you gonna call Jimmy about that television set or not?

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.)

NANCY JO: 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 me 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.)

NANCY JO: 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 them 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: *(Overlapping.)* Don't you ever get tired of reminding me of what a disappointment I've been?

NANCY JO: *(Overlapping.)* 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: 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.)

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

PETE: I'm not interested 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 a tarp and tied up with rope.

PETE: Oh, jeez. 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. Except 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 little Frances here 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.

PETE: Shhhhhh.

NANCY JO: All right, all right. Let's go, Frannie. Grandma's got you.

(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.)

(End of Scene.)

SCENE 2

(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, we hear someone enter 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 a 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.

(A moment.)

PETE: You better not be messing with me.

NANCY JO: *(Exasperated.)* To what end? Honestly, sometimes--

PETE: How far along do you think she is?

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.)

NANCY JO: 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, sweetheart.

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: *(She retrieves her tote bag.)* I know what you're gonna say and I'm sorry but it's not up for discussion. There are more than a few ladies lined up today just waiting for me to make them beautiful, and I don't wanna disappoint any of them. 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.)

NANCY JO: 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.

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 a 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.)

NANCY JO: 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 the eggs in... Well, isn't that the truth... Yeah, she's a hard worker, that one. I don't know what I'd do without her... *(Nancy Jo rolls her eyes and sticks out her tongue.)* Yeah, well I am sorry. I guess you'll have to keep Verla 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 3

(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 of 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. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. Sandra. And you can call me Pete if you like.

SANDRA: Okay. *(An awkward beat.)* 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.

(Beat.)

PETE: You are something else.

SANDRA: So, I've been told. *(Beat.)* Now, listen. I really gotta go. *(She starts off.)*

PETE: You from around here?

SANDRA: Born and raised. *(She continues off.)*

PETE: *(Following her a bit.)* Hey, hang on a second.

(She stops and turns to him.)

SANDRA: You're gonna get me fired, Pete.

(Beat.)

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? *(Beat.)* 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. An awkward beat.)

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. *(Beat.)* 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. *(Beat.)* 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: And 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 4

(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, jeez. 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. Take them to the shed when you get back from dropping me off!

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. Except 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: You 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 have some things that we need to talk about.

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

PETE: You don't have a choice in the matter.

PEGGY LYNN: What has gotten into you?

PETE: *(Quietly but with sternness.)* Keep your mouth shut. *(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: *(Quietly.)* Well, I never. *(She heads down the porch steps and disappears off.)*
(In the house, silence. At length...)

PEGGY LYNN: I'll turn on the oven 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 should sleep out here tonight.

(Peggy Lynn 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.

PETE: *(On the verge.)* I don't want to have to say it again, Peggy Lynn. Now, please. Do what I asked. *(Peggy grudgingly sits. A moment.)* Now listen, my Dad... *(He gets a bit emotional.)* Well, he wanted a shit-ton of kids. And let me tell you, if he had his way, every last one of 'em was gonna be a boy. *(To Peggy Lynn pointedly.)* But my Mom was only able to give him one child. You understand? A son to be sure, but that's all she could manage. So, when Nancy Jo starts giving you a hard time about the troubles you're having, you should know she's in no position to judge.

PEGGY LYNN: I see. And am I supposed to feel sorry for her?

PETE: No. And that's my point. But you gotta understand, Peggy Lynn. I want a baby real bad.

PEGGY LYNN: I know you do.

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, Pete. Except 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. *(Beat.)* 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. *(Beat.)* 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.

(A moment.)

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 that 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.

(A long moment passes.)

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 goddsake, 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 5

(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 isn'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, what do 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 bar 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. Near 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. Until 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. *(Beat.)* 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. *(Beat.)* What is it you do, Bucky Turner? I mean, besides pick up strange women in bars.

BUCKY: 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's not 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 them 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.

(Beat.)

BUCKY: You're not 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.)*

BUCKY: What the hell's the matter with you?

PETE: *(Entering, overlapping.)* What the fuck is going on, Bucky?

BUCKY: You need to calm down. You hear me? There's nothing going on. Okay? We were just talking in here.

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 horn, am I right? 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? *(Beat.)* Yeah, and so what about that, huh? Didn't seem like you were in any rush to get in here. *(Beat.)* You know, just because you've got cold feet doesn't mean I'm in here taken advantage of the situation. *(A tense but quiet moment passes.)* 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 was just doing what you asked me to do. You tell me to bring that girl back to my place and then what? I'm supposed to ignore her? We were just talking. All right? The fucking lightbulb blew on the lamp. That's why it got dark in here.

PETE: *(Breathing heavy, befuddled.)* Fuck. Fuck. This was a stupid idea.

BUCKY: Well, that's okay. It's not too late to change your mind, you know. There's nothing that's happened here that can't be undone.

(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 go into it.

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

PETE: Oh, uh...

BUCKY: 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: Lauren?

PETE: His Mom. She lives in a shack closer to 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...

(An awkward moment.)

SANDRA: 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: 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 got to talk like that.

SANDRA: So, is it?

PETE: 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 there's a big 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: One day some man's gonna put you in your place, you mark my words.

SANDRA: And until then, it's just you and me, right? So, let's can it with the bullshit, why don't we? Just tell me what you want, Pete.

PETE: ...

SANDRA: Huh. I'm gonna need a little more than that. Come on, don't be a coward now. Spit it out.

PETE: You're a goddam cunt, you know that?

(Sandra slaps Pete.)

SANDRA: The light is just about to turn red. So, I suggest you put your foot on the gas.

(Pete 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 somewhat undressed and grappling with each other, and ultimately have passionate sex, building up to orgasm. At this, we hear Peggy Lynn cry out in the distance as lights fade to black.)

(End of Scene.)

NOTE: The last bit of action is integral to the narrative and is not intended to be either graphic or gratuitous.

SCENE 6

(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 of 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. A moment.)* 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. *(Beat.)* 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.

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

PEGGY LYNN: Go to hell, Nancy Jo.

(Peggy Lynn 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 7

(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 crouches and 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. Except 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 fret.

(Beat.)

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. Silence.)* I'm guessing about five, six weeks, maybe.

(Beat.)

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'm not 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. *(Beat.)* 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. *(Beat.)* Now, do you understand?

LAUREEN: I suppose I do.

SANDRA: Good. 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 disappear off, Bucky appears. He has a cigarette in one hand and a length of rope in the other. He takes one last 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 One.)

ACT 2

SCENE 1

(1953. June. Late afternoon. The farmhouse. The stage is empty and eerily quiet for a moment. Suddenly we hear something crash to the floor in the kitchen.)

NANCY JO: *(Off.)* Oh, for the love of...!

(Peggy Lynn enters hurriedly from the hallway and crosses to the kitchen archway. She appears to be several months pregnant.)

PEGGY LYNN: Everything all right?

NANCY JO: *(Off.)* I suppose so.

PEGGY LYNN: What happened?

NANCY JO: *(Off.)* I just knocked over my nice ceramic bowl. It's all over the floor in here, so steer clear.

(During the previous, Pete appears outside and heads up the steps and onto the front porch. He then makes his way into the house. He is looking rough, dirty, maybe some cuts on his arms and face. He is wearing the cast on his wrist. Peggy Lynn notices him.)

PEGGY LYNN: Jesus, Pete, you look a mess. *(She notices the cuts.)* Are you hurt? *(She moves to him and sees the cast.)* What'd you do to your arm?

PETE: It's my wrist. I broke it.

PEGGY LYNN: And how in the hell did you do that?

PETE: There was an accident at work.

PEGGY LYNN: An accident?

PETE: Yeah. I lost my footing and I fell off the damn truck.

(Nancy Jo appears in the kitchen archway.)

NANCY JO: Did I hear right? You broke your wrist?

PETE: I did.

NANCY JO: Unbelievable. Are you okay otherwise?

PETE: I'm alive.

NANCY JO: I can see that. I expect this means you'll be outta of a job for a while.

PETE: I'll have to find some other work, something that doesn't take two hands to manage.

NANCY JO: Doesn't leave you many options then, does it?

PETE: No, I guess it doesn't. You gonna pester me about that now?

NANCY JO: No. You're right. I'm glad you're okay. So, go on, put your feet up. You've earned a beer at least. I'll get one for you.

(Nancy Jo disappears into kitchen. Pete sits.)

PETE: Bucky's in the hospital.

PEGGY LYNN: What? Well, what happened with him?

PETE: When I fell, I knocked one of the logs loose. It rolled off the truck and on top of him. He's in pretty bad shape.

PEGGY LYNN: Good Lord. Well, that's just awful. Will he be all right do you think?

PETE: No idea.

(Nancy Jo appears from kitchen carrying a beer. She hands it to Pete.)

NANCY JO: Here you go.

PETE: Thanks.

NANCY JO: You know, it is possible that this was a blessing in disguise.

PEGGY LYNN: Oh really? And how do you figure?

NANCY JO: Well, for starters, I'm hoping it'll stop you from taking that trip to visit your brother.

PEGGY LYNN: Nancy Jo, I --

NANCY JO: You're about ready to pop, so I don't think you need to be racing off to San Antonio. A pregnant woman driving nearly five hundred miles on her own. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. And I've got things to do around here, I'll have you know. I can't be waiting hand and foot on this one every second of the day.

PETE: I don't need anyone looking after me. I haven't lost the use of all my limbs. Jesus Christ, I can get around just fine on my own.

NANCY JO: *(To Peggy Lynn.)* And what are you gonna do if you go into labor? Hm? Or heaven forbid, something goes wrong with that baby? I just don't understand it. After all you've been through, you decide to do something so foolish.

PEGGY LYNN: Nobody asked you for your opinion, Nancy Jo. That doesn't stop you from sticking your nose in, though, does it? You have no idea what you're talking about.

NANCY JO: Is that so? So, why don't you fill me in then. Hard for me to offer guidance when nobody around here feels obligated to share things with me. Can't be helpful if I don't have all the information, now, can I?

PEGGY LYNN: Helpful? You've been anything but.

NANCY JO: You've got a roof over your head, don't you?

PEGGY LYNN: Yeah, and a lot of good that does any of us. Sitting on land that's just going to waste. Not to mention all that equipment out in the barn. Everything going to pot, us included. Struggling to make ends meet all the while practically resting on a gold mine.

NANCY JO: Except you don't have a say in any of that. And neither does Pete for that matter.

PEGGY LYNN: You're right. So, maybe you'll take that into consideration the next time you feel the need to offer me guidance on how to take care of this baby.

NANCY JO: If you in fact have that baby.

PETE: *(He rises.)* All right, that's enough! Outta both of you! *(To Nancy Jo.)* But especially you.

NANCY JO: You give me a grandchild and maybe we'll talk about selling this farm.

PETE: I said, that's enough! Now, give it a fucking rest. I'm not gonna have you talking to my wife like that.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE FULL PLAY, PLEASE CONTACT
CRAIG HOUK BY EMAIL AT HOUK1969@GMAIL.COM.