# THE RELUCTANT HEN

A play in two acts
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

Pete Anderson, a well-meaning but dangerously misguided husband whose desperate longing for a child collides with his wife Peggy Lynn's repeated miscarriages and emotional exhaustion. As financial strain, small-town gossip, and the suffocating presence of Pete's sharp-tongued mother Nancy Jo tighten around the couple, Pete hatches a reckless plan to secure the family he craves, entangling himself with the fiercely independent Sandra Miller in a decision that spirals into betrayal, violence, and devastating consequences. What begins as a portrait of working-class domestic tension deepens into a tragic examination of masculinity, ownership, motherhood, and the brutal cost of hope in a world that offers few choices and even fewer mercies.

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**, Early 20s and **VERLA CLAIRE BAKER**, 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 |

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# ACT 1

## SCENE 1

*Early 1920s. The Bennett House in Spencerville.*

*(Police sirens wail in the distance, growing louder. Dorothy Bennett appears on the front stoop, an infant in her arms.)*

**DOROTHY**

What on earth is going on?

*(A car screeches to a stop. Dorothy calls out, alarmed.)*

Frank!? Frank, what's happening!?

**FRANK**

*(Off.)*

Get back inside, Dorothy! Now!

*(Tire squealing. Dorothy turns to go. A series of gunshots. Lights out. End of scene.)*

## SCENE 2

*1953. August. Morning. The farmhouse.*

*(Pete sleeps in a chair, feet propped on an ottoman, his wrist in a cast, as Tom Corbett, Space Cadet or perhaps Sky King plays on the television; otherwise, the house is quiet. A long moment. Suddenly, A bicycle bell rings off, followed by a rolled newspaper thudding against the screen door, stirring Pete. Nancy Jo appears in the kitchen archway, lights a cigarette, and watches the program for a beat before a timer goes off, pulling her back into the kitchen, followed by sounds of an oven door, pans, dishes. She returns with a tray, cigarette still in her lips, crosses to Pete, and nudges his legs off the ottoman with her foot, waking him.)*

**PETE**

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

**NANCY JO**

Breakfast.

*(Sets the tray down.)*

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Creamed chipped beef on toast.

**PETE**

Shit on a shingle.

**NANCY JO**

*(Flatly.)*

Never gets old. You want coffee?

**PETE**

Sure.

**NANCY JO**

Be right back.

*(She exits. Pete yawns, stretches, rubs his eyes, starts eating, glancing at the TV. Nancy Jo returns with two coffees, sets one beside him. She sits, ashtray in hand, smoking.)*

**PETE**

Thanks.

*(They sit. He eats; she smokes and watches.)*

You're not gonna eat?

**NANCY JO**

Watching my figure.

*(A joke. Neither laughs. A long moment passes.)*

Paper boy come yet?

**PETE**

Think so. Heard something on the porch.

*(Nancy Jo exits, returns with the paper, settles, begins reading. Another quiet stretch.)*

**NANCY JO**

You heard from Peggy Lynn?

**PETE**

Hm?

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Peggy Lynn. Have you heard from her?

**PETE**

Yeah. Talked to her on Friday.

**NANCY JO**

And?

**PETE**

And what?

**NANCY JO**

She's been gone near two weeks now.

**PETE**

So?

**NANCY JO**

So… is everything alright?

**PETE**

Of course it is. Everything's fine.

**NANCY JO**

She was only meant to be gone a week.

**PETE**

Jesus. She stayed a little longer with her brother, Jack. Hasn't seen him in a while. You know, what with the war and all.

**NANCY JO**

Alright. Well, you could've said that sooner. Otherwise, how would I know? And I could do without the sarcasm.

*(Pete backs off.)*

**PETE**

She'll be home in a couple days.

*(They sit quietly. Nancy Jo idly tugs at her hair.)*

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**NANCY JO**

I'm overdue for a shampoo and set.

**PETE**

*(Irritated, not hostile.)*

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

**NANCY JO**

No.

**PETE**

I'm getting the third degree about my wife's whereabouts because your roots are showing?

**NANCY JO**

Alright. That's enough. I just asked a simple question. You're the one who's making something of it.

**PETE**

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

**NANCY JO**

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

*(The television pops and goes dead. They are both startled.)*

**PETE**

/ Dammit!

**NANCY JO**

/ Oh, for the love of–

*(A baby cries off.)*

**PETE**

You mind checking on your grandbaby?

*(He moves to the television. Nancy Jo takes a long drag, stubs out the cigarette, rises.)*

This place needs new wiring.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

And who's paying for it?

*(She exits down the hall.)*

**PETE**

Whole house'll burn down one day.

*(He fiddles unsuccessfully with the TV.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

Is it busted?

**PETE**

Yeah. Probably a capacitor.

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

I'll call Jimmy. See if he can fix it.

*(Pete takes the tray into the kitchen. We hear dishes, running water. The baby continues crying. Nancy Jo re-enters, moves to the archway.)*

I can't get her to settle.

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

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

**NANCY JO**

I don't understand why your wife won't breastfeed. That's how I fed you; you hardly fussed at all.

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

I don't want to talk about it.

**NANCY JO**

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

PERUSAL

**PETE**

*(Pete enters with a bottle.)*

Then take it up with Peggy Lynn when she gets back. See how that goes.

**NANCY JO**

Not on your life.

**PETE**

And since you're so concerned about my daughter, maybe you could cut back a little on those cigarettes?

**NANCY JO**

Maybe I will.

**PETE**

Alright then.

*(Pete exits down the hall.)*

**NANCY JO**

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

*(She takes her coffee, exits. Sits. Lights another cigarette. The baby cries, then settles. An old pickup passes, honking. Nancy Jo shades her eyes, recognizes the driver, calls out.)*

Oh, hey, Millie!

*(Nancy Jo smiles and waves. As the pickup passes, her smile curdles into a frown.)*

Well, that little bastard.

*(Pete enters from the hallway with the baby and steps onto the porch.)*

**PETE**

Who was that?

**NANCY JO**

Millicent Brown. In her rusted-out pickup. Her boy was playing around in the back of it. Gave me the middle finger. Can you believe that? Devil's spawn. I almost hoped he'd fall out and break his neck.

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**PETE**

He's just a kid. No harm in it. You gonna call Jimmy about the television or what?

**NANCY JO**

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

*(Pete stays on the porch. Nancy Jo goes inside, crosses to the phone, and reaches for it. It rings. She startles slightly, answers.)*

Hello…? Well, I'll be, I was just about to call you… Yes, our TV's on the fritz again, and I was hoping your husband could come take a look. Pete says it's something to do with the, uh…

**PETE**

*(Calling into the house.)*

Capacitor.

**NANCY JO**

Capacitor, whatever the heck that is… Well, that'd be wonderful. Tomorrow morning's fine; I'll be here. Thank you, Emma. And thank Jimmy for me, won't you….? What's that…? Oh. That's right, you called me. I nearly forgot. What's the scuttlebutt…? Mm-hm… What…? Oh, come on, Emma, that can't be right. You sure you heard correctly…? Oh my God… Oh my God, that's awful. Do they know who it is…? I see… Well, if you hear anything more, you call us, alright? Thanks again. I'll keep an eye out for Jimmy in the morning. Bye, Emma.

*(She hangs up. She gathers herself, then heads back out to the porch. Pete has settled with the baby. Nancy Jo lights a cigarette. They sit quietly.)*

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

**PETE**

Alright, well, there's no need to exaggerate. Things ain't that bad.

**NANCY JO**

Aren't they?

**PETE**

No.

*(They sit in silence.)*

**NANCY JO**

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

PERUSAL

**PETE**

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

**NANCY JO**

/ All I'm saying is, your father took real good care of this house. The farm. You and me. And I… well, I miss him. That's all I meant.

*(They sit quietly.)*

**PETE**

I start back at the lumber camp Sunday.

**NANCY JO**

Oh. Well, that's good. Though I imagine Peggy Lynn won't like you being gone overnight. Not with the baby.

**PETE**

I'll stay over only when I have to. Long days, so there's not much I can do about it. And it's not like I enjoy bunking with a bunch of filthy men.

**NANCY JO**

And you're sure you're ready to go back?

**PETE**

It's either that or sit around here listening to you talk about how broke we are.

**NANCY JO**

I meant your arm.

**PETE**

Oh. Right. It's fine. Cast comes off in a few days. Hell, Bucky took the worst of it.

**NANCY JO**

How is he?

**PETE**

Haven't seen him. I think he's sore at me. Last I heard, he's still laid up with a busted head and cracked ribs. Lucky that log didn't kill him.

**NANCY JO**

He'll bounce back. He always does.

PERUSAL

*(Nancy Jo smokes. Pete tends to the baby.)*

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

**PETE**

I've got no interest in gossip.

*(They sit quietly.)*

**NANCY JO**

They found a body.

**PETE**

A body? What do you mean?

**NANCY JO**

Someone dead. Floating in Hugo Lake.

**PETE**

That's awful.

**NANCY JO**

Fisherman found it wrapped in an old rug, tied up with rope.

**PETE**

Jesus. That's terrible. They know who it is?

**NANCY JO**

Not yet. Emma said she'd call if she hears more.

**PETE**

That's just… terrible.

*(They sit quietly.)*

**NANCY JO**

I don't understand how someone could do that.

**PETE**

No use dwelling on it.

**NANCY JO**

Someone was murdered, Pete.

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**PETE**

You don't know that. Could've been an accident.

**NANCY JO**

An accident? Someone wrapped it up and dumped it in the lake.

**PETE**

I hear you. But what good does it do, getting worked up over something you know nothing about?

*(They sit quietly.)*

**NANCY JO**

So close to home.

**PETE**

Enough. 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 start crying the second I take her.

**PETE**

No, she won't. Here.

*(Nancy Jo sets her cigarette aside as Pete hands over the baby.)*

Take her easy.

*(Nancy Jo 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**

Shhh.

**NANCY JO**

Alright, alright. Come on, Pearl. Grandma's got you.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Watch your step.

*(Nancy Jo exits into the house with the baby, disappearing down the hallway. Pete watches them go. He picks up Nancy Jo's still-lit cigarette, brings it to his lips, and inhales. Nancy Jo returns from the hallway, crosses to the front door, and steps out onto the porch.)*

**NANCY JO**

Weren't you just giving me grief about smoking?

**PETE**

You left it burning.

**NANCY JO**

Mm-hm.

**PETE**

You get the baby settled?

**NANCY JO**

I did. Went straight down without a peep. Fast asleep.

*(A car pulls up. They both look off.)*

Looks like we've got company.

*(End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 3**

*1952. October. Morning. The farmhouse.*

*(The stage sits empty, quiet, almost eerie. Suddenly, Peggy Lynn rushes in from the hallway.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

Pete! Pete, we gotta go!

*(She grabs a coat.)*

Come on, Pete! I don't want to be late! Pete!

*(Nancy Jo enters from the kitchen, dressed for fall.)*

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

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

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Pulling on her coat.)*

Well, I'm sorry, but Verla Claire Baker's first up in my chair this morning, and she's asking for the works. I've got a full day, back-to-back, and if I don't start on time, I'll never catch up.

**NANCY JO**

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

**PEGGY LYNN**

Exactly. So, you know what I'm up against.

**NANCY JO**

Alright, alright. Pete's outside with the truck. Waiting on you.

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Checking herself in the mirror.)*

Oh. Okay. Well… I didn't know.

**NANCY JO**

How would you since he didn't tell you.

**PEGGY LYNN**

He's sweet sometimes.

*(She grabs a large bag.)*

**NANCY JO**

He does take good care of you.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I never said otherwise.

*(She suddenly tilts forward, nauseous.)*

**NANCY JO**

You alright?

PERUSAL

**PEGGY LYNN**

Yeah, no, I'm fine. It's just… my stomach's a little off.

**NANCY JO**

Well, that's no good. I'll get you some Alka-Seltzer.

**PEGGY LYNN**

No, don't bother. It'll pass.

**NANCY JO**

You sure?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Yeah. There's no time anyway.

*(She doubles over.)*

No. No, I'm gonna be sick.

*(She drops the bag and hurries off down the hall.)*

**NANCY JO**

Oh, for–

*(Following, calling after.)*

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

*(Nancy Jo shakes her head, pulls out a cigarette, removes her coat, hangs it, sits, and lights up. Pete enters from outside, dressed for fall – no cast – and steps inside.)*

**PETE**

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

**NANCY JO**

In the toilet.

**PETE**

Still? We gotta go.

**NANCY JO**

She's throwing up.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Throwing up? What're you talking about?

**NANCY JO**

Her stomach's upset, so she's in there throwing up. I don't know how else to say it.

**PETE**

She was fine earlier.

*(He moves toward the hall.)*

Peggy Lynn!

**NANCY JO**

Leave her be.

**PETE**

I was just gonna check on her.

**NANCY JO**

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

**PETE**

What? What'd I do now?

**NANCY JO**

The one thing you're good at. Knocking her up.

**PETE**

You better not be messing with me.

**NANCY JO**

*(Exasperated.)*

To what end? Honestly–

**PETE**

How far along?

**NANCY JO**

Not sure. But she's been hiding it at least a couple weeks now.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Can't say I blame her.

**NANCY JO**

I suppose not.

*(Nancy Jo smokes. Pete processes.)*

Pete…

**PETE**

Yeah?

**NANCY JO**

Don't get your hopes up.

*(Peggy Lynn reappears from the hallway, pale. An awkward pause as they look at her.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

Yeah, no, I'm fine. Thanks for asking.

**PETE**

*(Pete moves to her.)*

I'm sorry, baby.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Best keep your distance.

*(Pete backs off.)*

**PETE**

I'll get you some water.

**PEGGY LYNN**

That'd be wonderful. Thank you.

**PETE**

You got it.

*(He exits into the kitchen.)*

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**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Calling after.)*

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

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

Coming right up!

*(Peggy Lynn moves closer to Nancy Jo.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

So… Nancy Jo…

**NANCY JO**

Mm-hm.

**PEGGY LYNN**

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**

I do appreciate your disdain. Ever so useful in situations like these.

**NANCY JO**

Happy to help.

*(Nancy Jo blows a puff of smoke.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

It's not my fault.

**NANCY JO**

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

PERUSAL

**PEGGY LYNN**

I assume Pete knows?

**NANCY JO**

He does. Didn't figure it out on his own, of course.

*(Pete returns with a cup of ice.)*

**PETE**

Here you go, baby.

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Taking it.)*

Thank you. Now, we really have to go.

**PETE**

Peggy Lynn–

**PEGGY LYNN**

I know what you're gonna say. It's not up for discussion.

*(She retrieves her bag.)*

I've got a full day of women waiting to be made beautiful. And we need the money.

*(She checks herself in the mirror.)*

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

**NANCY JO**

*(Rising.)*

I'll call Connie. Tell her you're running late.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Well, knock me over with a feather.

**NANCY JO**

A simple "thank you" will do.

*(Peggy Lynn exits with bag and ice. Pete follows. Nancy Jo heads for the phone.)*

Oh. And Pete.

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**PETE**

Yeah?

**NANCY JO**

Pick up some chicken feed while you're out.

**PETE**

Alright.

**NANCY JO**

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

**PETE**

That's good.

**NANCY JO**

And don't go to Patterson's anymore. I don't like their mix. It's farther, but that new place, Murdock's, is better. Cheaper, too.

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Off.)*

Pete!

**PETE**

I gotta go.

**NANCY JO**

Go on, then.

*(Pete exits. Nancy Jo picks up the phone, dials.)*

Hi, Connie? Nancy Jo Anderson… I'm fine, thank you. How are you…? Good, good… Listen, Peggy Lynn's running a little late… I know, I know, and she knows too, but it's not her fault… No, everything's fine. My back seized up this morning, so I had her clean out the henhouse and collect the eggs… Isn't that the truth… She's a hard worker, that one. Don't know what I'd do without her.

*(She rolls her eyes, sticks out her tongue.)*

Yes, I'm sorry. I guess you'll have to keep Verla Claire entertained in the meantime. Maybe toss a ball, see if she fetches it.

*(She laughs.)*

PERUSAL

They just left, and Pete's probably driving like a maniac, so they'll be there soon… Alright. You have a lovely day… Mm-hm… Bye.

*(She hangs up, takes a long drag, and exits into the kitchen.)*

**SCENE 4**

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

*(Sandra Miller stands, pulling off her work gloves and knocking dust from them. Pete approaches from behind.)*

**PETE**

Excuse me, Miss–

**SANDRA**

*(Turning.)*

I don't mean to be rude, but I don't care for "Miss." Mr. Murdock gets a pass because he signs my paychecks. You can call me Sandra.

**PETE**

*(Taken aback.)*

Well, shit. Sorry. Sandra. And you can call me Pete.

**SANDRA**

Alright then, Pete. What else can I help you with?

**PETE**

Uh… nothing, really. It's just… Look, I feel a little foolish saying this, but–

**SANDRA**

Let's not beat around the bush. I've got work to get back to.

**PETE**

Right. I, uh… I just wanted to say, I appreciate you helping me load that feed onto my truck.

**SANDRA**

Well… You're welcome. It is my job.

**PETE**

Exactly. And that's… what I wanted to–

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

Have I made you uncomfortable?

**PETE**

What? No. No, of course not.

**SANDRA**

Only asking because you seem to be struggling with the idea that a woman helped you carry four fifty-pound bags of feed to your automobile

**PETE**

Now hold on–

**SANDRA**

Relax. I'm not offended. I'm used to it. Only man who doesn't seem to mind is Casper Ferguson.

**PETE**

Oh. Well, I know Casper. Everybody does. Quiet fella. Never married, if you catch my meaning.

**SANDRA**

He's kind. And he understands women are good for more than just sitting in kitchens, drinking coffee, smoking, and gossiping till it's time to get supper on the table. If you catch mine.

**PETE**

I suppose I do.

**SANDRA**

Mr. Murdock's son usually handles the heavy lifting. But he's off at school, business picked up, so I stepped in. Temporary, of course, until they find someone less… female. Otherwise, I run the register. So, no need to fret. The men are still in charge.

**PETE**

You are something else.

**SANDRA**

So, I've been told. Now, I've got to get back.

*(She starts off.)*

**PETE**

You from around here?

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**SANDRA**

Born and raised.

*(She keeps moving. Pete follows.)*

**PETE**

Hey, hold on a second.

*(She stops, turns.)*

**SANDRA**

You're gonna get me fired.

**PETE**

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

**SANDRA**

Depends on what she helped him with.

**PETE**

What? Oh. No. No, that's not what I meant.

**SANDRA**

*(Amused.)*

You're making this very easy for me.

*(She holds out her hand.)*

So… how much you got?

**PETE**

Oh. Yeah, sure.

*(He pulls out his wallet, steps closer.)*

Damn. Smallest I've got is five.

**SANDRA**

That's alright. I was just kidding anyway.

**PETE**

No, it's fine. Take it.

*(He offers the bill.)*

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

I'm not taking your money. And it's too much besides.

**PETE**

Come on.

**SANDRA**

That's generous. But no.

*(An impasse. Pete relents, tucks the money away.)*

**SANDRA**

Tell you what. You can use that five to buy me a drink tonight. Over at the Tap-N-Fill.

**PETE**

Oh–

**SANDRA**

Before you answer, I can see you're married.

*(She nods to his wedding band.)*

Don't read into it. You seem decent, and if you're free, I wouldn't mind the company. Besides, they don't like ladies showing up without a chaperone.

**PETE**

I'm flattered, but –

**SANDRA**

Didn't I just say not to read into it?

**PETE**

You did, but–

**SANDRA**

You know. A man and a woman can share a drink without ending up in bed together.

**PETE**

Feels more complicated than that?

**SANDRA**

I'm not looking for complicated.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

I just don't think it's right.

**SANDRA**

Fair enough. I respect a man who knows his limitations.

**PETE**

My what now?

**SANDRA**

There you go again. Reading into things. I'll be there either way. Maybe I'll ask Casper to join me. I expect he'll keep his hands to himself. I should get back to work.

**PETE**

That register won't run itself.

**SANDRA**

No, it will not.

**PETE**

Nice meeting you, Sandra.

**SANDRA**

Likewise, Pete.

*(She offers her hand. They shake.)*

**PETE**

Guess I'll see you next time I need feed.

**SANDRA**

Unless your chickens burn through two hundred pounds in a month, there won't be a next time.

**PETE**

What do you mean?

**SANDRA**

I mean, I won't be here.

**PETE**

You're leaving? Where to?

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

*(A small chuckle.)*

Wouldn't you like to know.

*(She exits. End of scene.)*

**SCENE 5**

*1952. October. Early evening, same day. The farmhouse.*

*(The stage sits empty. Pete enters carrying two bags of chicken feed, drops them near the porch, and heads back off. Peggy Lynn appears, bag in hand, exhausted. She climbs the steps and enters the house. Nancy Jo emerges from the hallway. She is dressed neatly, hair set, finishing 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**

Getting the chicken feed out of the truck.

*(Peggy Lynn removes her coat, drops into a chair. Nancy Jo steps onto the porch.)*

**NANCY JO**

Pete!

PERUSAL

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

Yeah?

**NANCY JO**

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

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

Alright, keep your pants on! I'll be right there!

**NANCY JO**

Leave the bags on the porch! I'll take them to the shed in the morning!

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

They're heavy!

**NANCY JO**

I can manage!

**PETE**

*(Off.)*

Yes, ma'am!

**NANCY JO**

And pick me up around eleven! That's when Evelyn gets especially drunk. And mean. She can't stand losing to me. And she always does!

*(She reenters, checks herself in the mirror.)*

What's he been up to?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Who? Pete?

**NANCY JO**

Who else?

PERUSAL

**PEGGY LYNN**

I don't follow.

**NANCY JO**

I sent him out for one errand this morning. He's been gone all day.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I think he and Bucky picked up some daywork. That's what he told me.

**NANCY JO**

Doing what?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Didn't say. Just that he made some money.

**NANCY JO**

Hm. Well, that's something. Except how am I supposed to know these things if no one tells me?

**PEGGY LYNN**

I just heard it myself on the way home. That's about all I could get out of him. Otherwise, he just stared straight ahead, sour as anything. Something's going on with him. And between you and me, I don't care to know what.

*(During this, Pete carries the remaining bags onto the porch, then enters, pulling the truck key from his pocket. He offers it to Nancy Jo.)*

**PETE**

Here.

**NANCY JO**

What am I supposed to do with that?

**PETE**

Drive yourself.

**NANCY JO**

What? Are you out of your–? I don't have time for this. Let's go.

*(She moves past him toward the door.)*

**PETE**

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

PERUSAL

**PEGGY LYNN**

Oh, now come on, Pete–

**PETE**

Stay out of it, Peggy Lynn.

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Rising.)*

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

**PETE**

No. You're staying right here. We've got things to talk about.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I'm tired too. Maybe I don't feel like talking.

**PETE**

Doesn't matter what you feel like. I've got things to say.

**PEGGY LYNN**

What's gotten into you?

**PETE**

*(Quiet, controlled.)*

I need you to keep your mouth shut. Alright?

*(Peggy Lynn is bewildered. To Nancy Jo.)*

Take the key and go. You remember how to drive, don't you?

**NANCY JO**

*(Taken aback.)*

I do. And alright. If you insist.

*(She takes the key.)*

If you're hungry, there's a casserole in the fridge. Set the oven to three-fifty. Twenty minutes.

*(On her way out.)*

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

PERUSAL

**PETE**

*(Calling after Nancy Jo.)*

You trying to cheer me up?

**NANCY JO**

Well, I never.

*(She exits down the porch steps. Silence in the house.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

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

*(She heads toward the kitchen.)*

**PETE**

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

**PEGGY LYNN**

You know what, never mind. I've lost my appetite. I'm gonna take a bath and go to bed. Maybe you ought to sleep out here tonight.

*(She turns toward 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 like that?

**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, I can promise you, I won't like it. Not one bit.

*(She makes a point of sitting.)*

PERUSAL

I'm sitting. 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, good Lord, Pete. I know. It's all you ever talk about.

**PETE**

Boy, girl. It doesn't matter. And I want you by my side. Every step. For as long as you'll have me.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I'm not going anywhere. Except maybe away from Nancy Jo. If that's even possible.

*(They share a brief, weary smile.)*

**PETE**

That's just it. She's never giving up this farm. It'll fall down around her first.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Well, she won't live forever. At least I hope not. And when she's gone, it'll be yours.

**PETE**

No. It won't.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Why not?

**PETE**

Dad made her promise not to leave it to me. Said I didn't earn it. Didn't deserve it.

**PEGGY LYNN**

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

PERUSAL

**PETE**

I don't care.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Oh, come on. This land's worth something. The equipment alone… just sitting out there in the barn. And you're gonna let it all go? Not even fight for it? Talk to her? Otherwise, what are we doing here?

**PETE**

I think it's time we left.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Oh yeah? Where to? And with what money?

**PETE**

Not today. But soon. We're gonna have a baby, Peggy Lynn. I promise. And I'll find steady work, something I'm good at. Something that pays. I'll buy us a small house. Little backyard. Maybe a dog. Nothing fancy. Just ours. I may not be much good at anything, but I'll be a good father. The best I can be. I'll give us a life. The three of us.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I love you, Pete. I do. You're a good man. With a good heart. But sometimes… I think you're as dumb as they come.

**PETE**

*(Quietly, conceding.)*

That's probably true.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Wanting a baby doesn't mean I can give you one. You understand that don't you?

**PETE**

I do. But I have hope.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Oh. I see. You've got hope. So, what do you need from me then? Because it doesn't matter what I do, we both know how this ends. Same as every time. So, what? Do you want me to quit the salon again? Risk losing my clients? Sit around this house, perfectly still, doing what's expected of me? And what is expected of me, Pete? Because nobody seems to agree. Doctor Wheeler says, "Take up smoking; it'll calm your nerves." Doctor Bowman says, "A little vodka in your orange juice might help." Stay in bed. Don't read… too exciting. Don't argue with your husband… you

PERUSAL

like that one, don't you? And my favorite… don't reach above your head, or the cord might wrap around the baby's neck. God forbid I strangle my own child.

*(Nearly in tears.)*

Every time you get me pregnant, I have to live through that again. Don't you see? It doesn't matter what I do, my body keeps failing me. But sure. Full steam ahead. Because Pete's got hope.

**PETE**

I'm going out.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Probably for the best. Get some air. Clear your head.

**PETE**

For a drink.

*(He moves for the door.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

A drink?

**PETE**

Over at the Tap-N-Fill.

**PEGGY LYNN**

And how exactly are you getting 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 not.

**PETE**

I love you, Peggy Lynn.

**PEGGY LYNN**

And this is how you show it? By getting drunk.

**PETE**

Don't wait up.

PERUSAL

*(He exits. Peggy Lynn rushes after him.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(On the porch.)*

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

*(She reenters, goes straight to the phone, flips through an address book, dials.)*

Bucky, it's Peggy Lynn… I'm alright but listen. I need you to pick Pete up… No, he's not here, he took off… Not for good. He's headed to the Tap-N-Fill… I know, he usually asks you, but he's lost his damn mind and he's walking there… Nancy Jo has the truck… No, I don't have time to explain. Just find him… Route 259's your best bet… No. Just take him wherever he wants to go. Let him get it out of his system, then bring him home. I'll leave the door unlocked. Make sure he sleeps on the couch, though. I'll set out blankets… Yes, I'm sure. And Bucky. Listen to me. I don't want to hear a word about whatever happens tonight. Do you understand? … Good.

*(She hangs up. A long breath and then a sharp pain hits. She winces, breathes through it until it passes, then slowly exits down the hallway. End of scene.)*

**SCENE 6**

*1952. October. Around midnight. Bucky Turner's cabin.*

*(Near darkness. Moonlight filters through a window. After a moment, the front door opens. Two figures in silhouette.)*

**BUCKY**

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

*(He moves through the dark, finds a lamp, clicks it on. The room glows dimly.)*

There we go.

*(Turning to Sandra, still in the doorway.)*

What do you think?

**SANDRA**

You're right. It isn't much.

**BUCKY**

*(Laughs.)*

Well, you don't have to stay. I can take you back to the Tap-N-Fill. Or home. Just say the word.



PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

No, it's fine. I'm happy to hang around a bit. But only for a bit.

**BUCKY**

Fair enough. I'll grab you a beer. Sit wherever you like.

**SANDRA**

Thanks.

*(She sits. Bucky pulls two beers from a small fridge, opens them, hands one over, and sits.)*

**BUCKY**

I was born right over there. By the fireplace.

**SANDRA**

You're kidding.

**BUCKY**

Nope. Just me and my folks. Put in plumbing and electric about ten years ago. Before that, we bathed in the creek, did our business outside.

**SANDRA**

That's a little too rustic for me.

**BUCKY**

For most folks, I reckon. Anyway… Mom laid down some blankets right there on the floor, and that's where I came into the world. Dad helped deliver me.

**SANDRA**

Why on earth would they do that? There had to be a doctor somewhere nearby.

**BUCKY**

Didn't have the money. And Mom knew what she was doing; delivered three of her siblings when she was young. Dad, though… nervous wreck. Barely got me into her arms before he passed out. Dropped like a sack of flour and cracked his head on the hearth.

**SANDRA**

Jesus.

**BUCKY**

Mom figured he wasn't dead but didn't have the energy to check. Had her hands full with me.

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

Your mother sounds like quite a woman.

**BUCKY**

That she is.

**SANDRA**

And your dad? Was he alright?

**BUCKY**

Oh yeah. Lump on his head, cut over his eye. Ugly man to begin with, so no real loss. I got my looks from him.

**SANDRA**

Did you now? Well, if you're fishing for a compliment, you're wasting your time.

**BUCKY**

So, you agree I'm an ugly man.

**SANDRA**

I'll agree you're a man. What is it you do, Bucky Turner? Besides picking up strange women in bars.

**BUCKY**

A little of everything. Day work. Odd jobs. And sometimes, just for the hell of it, I'm a lumberjack.

**SANDRA**

A lumberjack? Well, now that's something.

**BUCKY**

Not as much as you'd think. I load logs onto trucks. That's about it.

**SANDRA**

Still dangerous work, isn't it?

**BUCKY**

Can be. Seen men get hurt. Some bad. A few killed. I've been lucky so far, knock on wood. Otherwise, it's not much to write home about.

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

Maybe that's how it looks to you. A woman might see it differently.

**BUCKY**

Not many women in that line of work. And the ones who are? Well… they don't look or act much different from the men. Not the kind folks tend to pay attention to, anyway.

**SANDRA**

That's a pretty narrow view, don't you think? There are all kinds of women out there. Might be worth sampling before you make up your mind. Who knows? Your great love could be hiding under all that grime.

**BUCKY**

You ain't from around here, are you?

**SANDRA**

Born and raised.

*(The lamp bulb pops. Darkness.)*

**BUCKY**

Damn it. You alright?

**SANDRA**

I'm fine. Spilled a little beer, though.

**BUCKY**

No harm done. This place has seen worse. Hang on. I'll grab another bulb.

**SANDRA**

Actually, I could use your toilet if you don't mind. Kind of urgent.

**BUCKY**

Oh. Sure. Sorry. It's just past the kitchen. Give me your hand.

**SANDRA**

Thanks.

*(He guides her through the dark.)*

**BUCKY**

Right there. On your right. Here, let me just get the, uh–

PERUSAL

*(A light clicks on offstage. A door closes. Bucky returns, rummages through a drawer, finds a bulb, replaces it, and switches the lamp back on. Just as the light comes up, there's loud knocking at the front door.)*

**PETE**

*(Harsh whisper.)*

Bucky! Bucky, open the damn door!

**BUCKY**

Jesus Christ.

*(He crosses, opens it.)*

It's unlocked, you dipshit.

*(The two speak in urgent, hushed tones.)*

What the / hell's the matter with you?

**PETE**

*(Entering.)*

/ What the hell's going on in here?

**BUCKY**

Nothing's going on. We were talking.

**PETE**

Bullshit. The lights just went out.

**BUCKY**

So? What's your point? That's not your wife back there. Not your girl either. And here you come, ready to stake a claim like she's yours. You barely know her.

**PETE**

You were supposed to honk the horn. That was the signal, wasn't it? Next thing I know, I see headlights flashing, I gotta crawl out the back window, tore a damn hole in my pants. Standing outside with my thumb up my ass while the two of you get it on in here.

**BUCKY**

Sounds like that hole came in handy then.

**PETE**

Fuck you.

PERUSAL

**BUCKY**

Oh, come on. Honking the horn was the dumbest part of that plan. And I didn't stop you from knocking sooner, did I? You weren't exactly rushing in. Just because you've got cold feet doesn't mean I'm in here taking advantage. What's going on with you, Pete?

**PETE**

You're supposed to be my friend.

**BUCKY**

I am your friend. But this? This is on you. I did what you asked. Dropped you off, went to the Tap-N-Fill, brought her back here. What, I'm supposed to ignore her? We were just talking. That's it. The bulb blew on the lamp. That's why it went dark in here.

**PETE**

*(Breathing hard, unraveling.)*

This was a stupid idea.

**BUCKY**

Alright. Okay. It ain't too late to change your mind, you know. Nothing's happened that can't be undone. So, why don't head on out and I'll–

*(Sandra enters from the bathroom.)*

**SANDRA**

Pete?

**PETE**

*(Quietly.)*

Aw shit.

**SANDRA**

What… what are you doing here? You two know each other?

**BUCKY**

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

**SANDRA**

And?

**BUCKY**

And what?

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

And what's he doing here?

**BUCKY**

*(To Pete.)*

She wants to know why you're here.

**PETE**

Right. Uh… Yeah. This is… awkward. My wife and I had a fight. Pretty bad one. She threw me out. And, well… Bucky's my best pal, so this is the only place I could think to go.

**SANDRA**

Oh yeah? What were you two fighting about?

**PETE**

I don't… I don't really want to get into it.

**SANDRA**

I'm not asking about your wife. I heard you and Bucky out here tossing curse words back and forth like a football.

**PETE**

Oh, uh–

**BUCKY**

Right. Well, I'm gonna step outside, have a smoke. Maybe check on Laureen while I'm at it. Don't wait up.

*(Bucky exits.)*

**SANDRA**

Laureen?

**PETE**

His mom. Lives in a little shack down by the water.

**SANDRA**

A shack?

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Yeah. Didn't want to spend her twilight years under her son's roof, so Bucky built her a place out back. She's comfortable.

**SANDRA**

And his Dad?

**PETE**

Left a long time ago. Bucky was just a kid.

**SANDRA**

I see.

**PETE**

Yeah, so…

**SANDRA**

What about you?

**PETE**

What about me?

**SANDRA**

Just you and your wife? Any kids?

**PETE**

No. Not yet. We're trying.

**SANDRA**

And your folks?

**PETE**

Mom's still around. Dad passed little over ten years now.

**SANDRA**

Was he a good man?

**PETE**

Yeah. He was. Serious, too. Wanted a whole passel of kids… boys, if he had his way. But my mom… she could only give him me. Truth is, I wasn't cut out for farm work. Tried it but it near killed me. Up before sunrise, breaking my back till dark. Too tired for anything but eating and

PERUSAL

sleeping. Felt like I was missing out on being a kid. So, I started slipping away. Leaving him to it. He never said a word. Just took out a loan, hired some help, got the place running like a machine. Money came in steady… for a while. Then he died. And it all fell apart.

**SANDRA**

Only thing any of us can do is appreciate what's in front of us. Right now. Otherwise what? Chase after something that's gone? Maybe something that was never there to begin with.

**PETE**

And you? I bet you've got stories.

**SANDRA**

I don't dwell on the past. You went to a lot of trouble to get me out here.

**PETE**

I don't know what you mean.

**SANDRA**

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

**PETE**

No. You got this wrong.

**SANDRA**

Do I?

**PETE**

Listen–

**SANDRA**

What is it you want, Pete? Bored at home? Looking for something on the side? Or planning to leave your wife altogether?

**PETE**

I love my wife.

**SANDRA**

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

**PETE**

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

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

So, is it?

**PETE**

*(Irritated, not hostile.)*

You're not exactly innocent either. All high and mighty. Telling me just because a man and a woman have a few drinks doesn't mean they'll end up in bed together. And yet here you are, alone in a cabin with a man you just met.

**SANDRA**

Yeah, well. Here's the difference between you and me: you can't wipe your ass without checking in with the missus first, and I don't answer to anyone. At anytime. Least of all you.

**PETE**

You're hard as nails.

**SANDRA**

I'm soft when I need to be.

**PETE**

Is that so?

**SANDRA**

I'm not complicated, Pete. Just because you can't figure me out doesn't make me a puzzle needs putting together.

**PETE**

I'm not much good with puzzles.

**SANDRA**

Most men aren't. except maybe Casper / Ferguson.

**PETE**

/ Aw, hell. Not him / again.

**SANDRA**

/ I happen to like his / company.

**PETE**

/ Yeah, yeah. Sweet / old man.

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

/ He is a sweet old man.

**PETE**

/ Fine. But why are we talking about him now? You're killing the mood.

**SANDRA**

The mood? What mood is that, Pete?

*(Pete hesitates, uneasy, conflicted. He then closes the distance and kisses her. She meets him with equal intensity. They pull at each other, messy, urgent, unresolved. The moment is charged, not tender. As it builds, Peggy Lynn cries out in the distance. Lights snap to black. End of scene.)*

**SCENE 7**

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

*(Peggy Lynn continues to cry out. Nancy Jo, just back from card club, climbs the porch steps and enters. Peggy Lynn emerges from the hallway, blood on her nightgown. Nancy Jo takes it in, steady.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(To herself.)*

Oh, boy.

*(She moves to Peggy Lynn, practical, composed.)*

Peggy Lynn. Listen to me. You're fine. It never gets easy, but you're fine. Alright? Come on. Sit down.

*(She guides her into a chair.)*

I'll get you some water?

**PEGGY LYNN**

No.

**NANCY JO**

No?

**PEGGY LYNN**

I want a steak. And a glass of wine.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

I'll open some olives. Once you're settled, maybe I'll make you some eggs. How's that?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Don't do me any favors.

*(Nancy Jo heads into the kitchen.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

I would've been home sooner, but we let Evelyn win a few hands. Put her in a fine mood. So, we all had a lovely evening. No fuss. Just good old-fashioned pinochle and gossip.

*(She returns with water, hands it to Peggy Lynn, then opens a jar of olives and passes it over.)*

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

*(She sets down her purse, takes out a cigarette, starts to light it, and then stops. She glances at Peggy Lynn, thinks better of it, but keeps the cigarette in her hand.)*

I'm not a kind woman. I know that. And I've been hard on you. Truth is… you're the best thing that's ever happened to Pete. He doesn't deserve you. But that doesn't mean I have to like you. You're bossy. You've got a mouth on you. And there's only room for one she-devil in this house. But really. Why should you care what I think? I'm old. Set in my ways. You can twist yourself up arguing with me. Or you can let me stew in my own bitterness and be kind to yourself instead. Because that's the only thing that matters.

*(Peggy Lynn eats olives, drinks. Nancy Jo studies the unlit cigarette in her hand.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

Go to hell, Nancy Jo.

*(She rises and heads down the hallway.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(Calling after.)*

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

*(The nightgown flies out from the hallway, landing on the floor.)*

Or just leave it there on the floor, where I most certainly won't miss it.

*(She lights the cigarette at last. End of scene.)*

PERUSAL

## SCENE 8

*1952. November. Roughly six weeks later. Outside Murdock's Feed Supply.*

*(Laureen Turner enters, arms full of supplies. She struggles and then drops everything. Sandra Miller, having just locked up and slipped the key through the mail slot, rushes over.)*

**SANDRA**

I knew it. I told you I'd help you to your car. You alright?

**LAUREEN**

Yes, I'm fine. Just fine. You were right. These bags are heavy. I just didn't want to keep you past hours.

**SANDRA**

It's no trouble. Here. Let me get that.

*(She starts gathering the items, repacking them.)*

**LAUREEN**

I appreciate it but be careful. Don't go straining yourself.

**SANDRA**

Don't worry. I'm sturdier than I look.

*(She continues collecting things.)*

**LAUREEN**

That's very kind of you.

**SANDRA**

Happy to help.

**LAUREEN**

I imagine you're eager to get home after a long day.

**SANDRA**

Actually, I'm hitting the road from here. Got a long drive ahead.

**LAUREEN**

Oh? Vacation?

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

No. I'm moving. Just finished my last shift. Packed the car this morning. Soon as you're squared away, I'll be on my way.

**LAUREEN**

Well, that's exciting. Though now I feel terrible, holding you up like this.

**SANDRA**

You're not. I've got time.

**LAUREEN**

Listen. I hope you don't mind me asking– No. Never mind. None of my business.

**SANDRA**

Go on.

**LAUREEN**

I shouldn't. I'm just being nosy.

**SANDRA**

Now I'm curious.

**LAUREEN**

I've got a sense for these things. And I'm rarely wrong.

**SANDRA**

Alright…

**LAUREEN**

How far along are you?

*(Sandra stops, looks up at her.)*

Five… six weeks, I'd guess.

**SANDRA**

I'm just gonna finish this up and get you to your car.

**LAUREEN**

I've upset you.

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

No. Not at all. Just… an odd question for someone you don't know.

**LAUREEN**

For most women, it's something to celebrate.

**SANDRA**

Most women?

**LAUREEN**

That's right.

**SANDRA**

And you've spoken to most women?

**LAUREEN**

Not sure I follow.

*(Sandra finishes repacking, hands Laureen a bag, keeps the others.)*

**SANDRA**

When I was a girl, I didn't care for baby dolls. Didn't care much for real babies either. It never felt right to me. I know what's expected. But the idea of bringing a child into this messed up world… it doesn't sit well with me. Since I'm here, though, I'll make the most of it. For myself. I've been planning this trip for a long time, and nothing's going to stop me from moving on. What some might call a blessing; I might call an inconvenience. Come on. Let's get these loaded.

**LAUREEN**

Alright.

*(They start off.)*

**SANDRA**

I'm Sandra, by the way.

**LAUREEN**

Laureen.

*(As they exit, Bucky appears. A cigarette in one hand, a length of rope in the other. He takes a final drag, drops the cigarette, grinds it out. Then he pulls the rope taut between his hands and follows them. End of Act 1.)*

PERUSAL

# ACT 2

## SCENE 1

*1952. December. Middle of the night. Laureen's shack.*

*(Sandra lies on a bed, restrained, but with enough slack to move her arms and legs. She appears asleep, though it's more likely she's passed out from exhaustion. The space is dim, lit only by thin moonlight through a window. A long, quiet beat. A faint squeak. Another beat. Another squeak. Sandra stirs. A third squeak, closer. She turns her head. Another squeak. She turns again. Silence. She faces forward, then slowly looks up. A sudden squeak as the rat drops from the rafters, landing on her. She screams, then instinct takes over. She traps it, thrashes, and beats it until it goes still. Silence returns. End of Scene.)*

## SCENE 2

*1952. December. Midday. The salon.*

*(Peggy Lynn has just finished with Verla Claire.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

You're all set, Verla Claire.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

You mind if I see the back?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Right. Of course.

*(She turns the chair, hands her a mirror.)*

Here you are.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Thank you.

*(She studies her hair.)*

I'll be honest, Peggy Lynn. This isn't your best work.

**PEGGY LYNN**

You're right. I'm sorry. Here, let me fix it.

PERUSAL

**VERLA CLAIRE**

No, no. It'll do just fine. I look presentable, and that's a win. Except I'm worried about you. Everything alright?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Of course. Everything's fine.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

I don't buy it.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I'm sure you've got places to be.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Three brats at home, and the only time my husband's willing to watch them is when I'm here. After this, I'm buying myself a purse, a pair of pumps, and having a cocktail before I go home to make dinner. So do me a favor… tell me what's wrong. Might make me feel a little better about my own unfortunate life when it comes time for me to get back to it.

**PEGGY LYNN**

You regret having kids?

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Of course not. I love my kids. It's other people's I can't stand. I'll tell you a secret if you promise not to repeat it.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Okay.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

I love my husband too.

*(Peggy Lynn smiles.)*

It's not for everyone.

*(Peggy Lynn laughs.)*

You and Pete still trying to–?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Verla–

PERUSAL

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Come on. It's no secret. And it's alright to talk about it… with me. I'm no gossip. I know what folks say about me, and none of it's very nice. Doesn't bother me, though. I don't have time for pettiness. So, go on.

**PEGGY LYNN**

If you were in my position. And you had a chance to have a child. But not of your own choosing, and maybe not in a way that's entirely proper… What would you do?

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Oh my.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I've said too much.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

No, you haven't. But before you say more, answer me this: do you want a baby?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Very much.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

And Pete?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Of course. He wants a baby more than anything.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

No. What I mean is… Do you want Pete?

**PEGGY LYNN**

He's all I have.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Embroider that on a pillow and you'll make a fortune. Listen to me. If you want a baby, you do whatever you have to do. And Pete… well, he's a man. Useful, until he isn't. And if he becomes a problem – or worse, puts you in danger – you get away from him. As far and as fast as you can. Do you understand me?

**PEGGY LYNN**

I don't think–

PERUSAL

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Do you understand me?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Yes.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Good. And if you need anything, call me. No details, though. I don't want to be tangled up in anyone else's mess. But from a distance… I'll help where I can.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I haven't earned that kind of support.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

You're a good woman. Maybe you get caught up in the gossip now and then, but you work miracles in this chair. Today being the exception. So, get your shit together.

*(She stands, pulls out cash, hands it over.)*

Here. And a little extra.

**PEGGY LYNN**

*(Looking at it.)*

I think you made a mistake, Verla. This is way too much.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

There's more where that came from.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Thank you.

**VERLA CLAIRE**

Don't mention it. See you in two weeks.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Of course. Bye, Verla Claire.

*(Verla Claire exits. The phone rings. Peggy Lynn checks the time, then answers.)*

Thank you for calling 'How Do You Do'. This is Peggy Lynn; how may I help you…? Oh. Hey, Geraldine… Mm-hm… Yes, I can fit you in late next week… Now? I was just about to close… I see… No, you're right, that is an emergency. How soon can you get here…? Good. The sooner

PERUSAL

the better. I can get you in and out before your dinner… My pleasure. I'll see you soon. And Geraldine? Don't you worry, your husband's getting that promotion. And I'll make sure you look gorgeous when it happens.

*(End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 3**

*1952. December. Midday. Laureen's shack.*

*(Sandra lies on the bed, still restrained. She's calmer now, still tired, uneasy, quietly afraid. A tray with utensils, an empty plate and glass rests on her lap. Bucky sits nearby at a table, absorbed in a game of solitaire.)*

**SANDRA**

I've finished.

*(Bucky doesn't hear her.)*

Bucky.

**BUCKY**

Yeah?

**SANDRA**

I've finished my lunch.

**BUCKY**

You have? Good. That ought to make Laureen happy.

*(Sandra looks down at the tray. Bucky keeps playing.)*

**SANDRA**

Would you mind?

**BUCKY**

*(Looking up.)*

Oh. Yeah. Sure.

*(He crosses, takes the tray, pauses.)*

You alright?

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

Why do you ask?

**BUCKY**

There's… looks like some blood there.

**SANDRA**

Sorry. Not much I can do about it.

*(She indicates the restraints.)*

**BUCKY**

Something wrong with the baby?

**SANDRA**

No.

**BUCKY**

Okay. Well… that's good.

*(He sets the tray down, returns to his seat, resumes his game.)*

**SANDRA**

There's nothing wrong with the baby because there is no baby.

**BUCKY**

Whatta you mean, no baby? You lose it?

**SANDRA**

What? Like it slipped out in the night and wandered off into the woods?

**BUCKY**

That ain't funny.

**SANDRA**

There's not much around here that is.

**BUCKY**

You better be pulling my leg.

**SANDRA**

That blood you saw? I got my period this morning.

PERUSAL

**BUCKY**

Aw, come on. No man wants to hear about that.

**SANDRA**

You know what that means, don't you?

**BUCKY**

Yeah, I know what it is; I just don't want to hear it.

**SANDRA**

It means I'm not pregnant. It means I never was.

**BUCKY**

No. No. You're lying.

**SANDRA**

Bucky–

**BUCKY**

I know what you're gonna ask and it ain't happening.

**SANDRA**

You have to let me go.

**BUCKY**

I can't.

**SANDRA**

There's no baby. There's no reason for any of this.

**BUCKY**

You think I'm stupid.

**SANDRA**

I'm hoping you'll be sensible.

**BUCKY**

I think we're past that. There ain't nothing I can do for you. You want to talk; you wait for Laureen. She'll have plenty to say. Me? I'm done.

*(He settles back into his game.)*

PERUSAL

**SANDRA**

Sometimes… it's not the woman who's to blame.

*(Bucky stops but doesn't look at her.)*

Bucky. Look at me.

*(He does, reluctantly.)*

Maybe Pete… now, how do I put this? Say you're fixing yourself a nice big bowl of pudding. And you've been looking forward to it. Maybe you even plan to share it with everyone. But the recipe calls for three cups of milk. And all you've got is one. You know what that means, don't you? No pudding. Not for anyone.

**BUCKY**

There's a whole lot I don't know. And a whole lot more I don't care to know. But I know this: there's a bond between men that ain't like anything else. And I ain't talking about being queer, so don't go there. Pete's more than my best friend. He's a brother to me. I'd do anything for him. So, if he needs three cups of milk and he ain't got it, I'll make sure he gets what he needs.

*(End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 4**

*1953. June. Late afternoon. The farmhouse.*

*(The stage sits empty, eerily quiet. Suddenly, a crash from the kitchen.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

Oh, for the love of–!

*(Peggy Lynn hurries in from the hallway, visibly pregnant, crosses to the kitchen archway.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

You okay in there?

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

I'm fine.

PERUSAL

**PEGGY LYNN**

What happened?

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

Knocked over my good ceramic bowl. It's everywhere, so watch your step.

*(Pete appears outside, climbs the porch, enters. He looks rough, dirty, cut up, wrist in a cast.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

Jesus, Pete. You look awful.

*(She notices the cuts, then the cast.)*

Are you hurt? What happened to your arm?

**PETE**

It's my wrist. I broke it.

**PEGGY LYNN**

How the hell did you manage that?

**PETE**

An accident at work. Lost my footing, fell off the truck.

*(Nancy Jo appears in the kitchen archway.)*

**NANCY JO**

Did I hear that right? You broke your wrist?

**PETE**

I did.

**NANCY JO**

Unbelievable. You alright otherwise?

**PETE**

I'm alive.

**NANCY JO**

I can see that. I suppose this means you'll be out of work for a spell.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

I'll find something. Something that doesn't need two hands.

**NANCY JO**

Doesn't leave you many options.

**PETE**

You gonna start in on that now?

**NANCY JO**

No. You're right. I'm glad you're okay. Sit down, put your feet up. You've earned a beer. I'll get it.

*(She heads into the kitchen. Pete sits.)*

**PETE**

Bucky's in the hospital.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Well, what happened with him?

**PETE**

When I fell, I knocked a log loose. He was underneath it when it rolled off.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Good Lord. That's awful. You think he'll be alright?

**PETE**

No idea.

*(Nancy Jo returns with a beer, hands it to Pete.)*

**NANCY JO**

Here.

**PETE**

Thanks.

**NANCY JO**

You know. This might be a blessing in disguise.

PERUSAL

**PEGGY LYNN**

Oh really? How's that?

**NANCY JO**

For one, it might keep you from running off to see your brother.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Nancy Jo, I–

**NANCY JO**

You're about ready to pop, and you think it's wise to drive five hundred miles to San Antonio alone? It's ridiculous. And I've got plenty to do around here; I can't be tending to this one every second of the day.

**PETE**

I don't need tending to. Christ, I can manage just fine on my own.

**NANCY JO**

*(To Peggy Lynn.)*

And what happens if you go into labor? Or something goes wrong with that baby? After everything you've been through, you go and do something this foolish. I don't understand it.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Nobody asked for your opinion. Doesn't stop you, though, does it? And it doesn't matter anyway; you've got no idea what you're talking about.

**NANCY JO**

Oh, is that so? Enlighten me then. Hard to be helpful when no one shares anything with me. Can't give proper advice without the full picture.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Helpful? You've been anything but.

**NANCY JO**

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

**PEGGY LYNN**

And what good is that doing us? Sitting on land going to waste, equipment rotting away in the barn, while we scrape by on top of a gold mine.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Except you don't have a say in that.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Neither does Pete.

**NANCY JO**

That's right.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Then maybe keep that in mind the next time you feel like telling us how to take care of this baby.

**NANCY JO**

If you even have that baby.

**PETE**

*(He rises.)*

That's enough!

**NANCY JO**

*(To Peggy Lynn.)*

You give me a grandchild, and maybe we'll talk about selling the farm.

**PETE**

I said, that's enough! I'm not gonna have you talking to my wife like that. And I'm not using our baby as some bargaining chip. Do whatever the hell you want with the farm. I don't give a goddam.

*(The phone rings.)*

Fucking phone!

*(Nancy Jo answers the phone. NOTE: Laureen's dialogue, in gray, is not heard by the audience.)*

**NANCY JO**

Hello?

**LAUREEN**

Hey Nancy Jo. It's Laureen.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

I'm sorry, who?

**LAUREEN**

Laureen Turner. Bucky's mom.

**NANCY JO**

Oh, Laureen. My goodness, it's been a long time. How are you?

**LAUREEN**

I'm doing just fine.

**NANCY JO**

Good. Good. And how's Bucky? I just heard.

**LAUREEN**

He's hurt pretty bad. Doctor says he'll be alright, though.

**NANCY JO**

Oh. Well, that's a bit of good news, I suppose.

**LAUREEN**

Yeah, listen. I need to speak to Pete. Is he there?

**NANCY JO**

Of course. Yes, he's right here.

*(She extends the receiver.)*

It's Laureen Turner.

**PETE**

*(Taking it. To Nancy Jo.)*

Yeah, I figured that out.

*(Into phone.)*

Hey, Mrs. Turner.

**LAUREEN**

What the hell did you do to my son?

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Alright, okay, now just calm down. It was an accident.

**LAUREEN**

You nearly killed him, you dumb shit.

**PETE**

I know, and I'm sorry. I don't know what happened. I must've got distracted.

**LAUREEN**

Oh, you got distracted. Well maybe I ought to get distracted. Maybe I ought to forget about this whole damn thing…

**PETE**

Mrs. Turner, listen–

**LAUREEN**

Because I don't have time to deal with your little problem over here. Not when my son can't get off the couch, ribs cracked, head stapled shut.

**PETE**

Fuck.

**LAUREEN**

But guess what? Today just happens to be your lucky day.

**PETE**

I'm not feeling very lucky right now.

**LAUREEN**

She's in labor.

**PETE**

Are you screwing with me?

**LAUREEN**

You'll know when I'm screwing with you. So, listen. I suggest you tell Peggy Lynn to get herself ready…

**PETE**

I'll let her know.

PERUSAL

*(He looks to Peggy Lynn.)*

**LAUREEN**

… Because between delivering this baby and tending to Bucky, I won't have time to call you back. So, you'd better get moving.

**PETE**

Understood.

**LAUREEN**

Oh, and Pete?

**PETE**

Yeah?

**LAUREEN**

I'm fresh out of patience. So, you keep your head on straight. Or I'll knock it clean off.

**PETE**

Yes, ma'am.

*(Pete hangs up the phone.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(To Pete.)*

Everything alright?

**PETE**

*(To Nancy Jo.)*

Why don't you head out back, check on the hens. It's about that time.

**NANCY JO**

I want to know what's going on, Pete.

**PETE**

Miss Tillie hasn't had much of an appetite. Might be coming down with something.

**NANCY JO**

I'm not talking about the damn chickens.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Peggy Lynn, you want to go for a ride?

**NANCY JO**

A ride?

**PEGGY LYNN**

Well… I suppose I could be persuaded. Let me grab a sweater.

*(She starts toward the hallway.)*

**PETE**

No need. There's one in the truck. Everything we need is in the truck. Go on. I'll meet you outside.

*(Peggy Lynn exits out the front door and off.)*

**NANCY JO**

What the hell are you two up to?

**PETE**

It's a beautiful afternoon. I'd like to spend it alone with my wife.

**NANCY JO**

I see.

**PETE**

So, listen. I don't want Tillie ending up in a stew. So, make sure you check on her. We can't afford to lose any hens.

**NANCY JO**

I take very good care of those hens, don't you worry. And before you go…

**PETE**

What is it?

**NANCY JO**

You been out to the barn lately?

**PETE**

No. Why?

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

I was out there this morning. Looked like someone's been tampering with the lock.

**PETE**

Probably just kids trying to get in. I'll take a look later, make sure nothing's missing.

**NANCY JO**

I can check it.

**PETE**

No. Too much shit out there. You'll hurt yourself. Just leave the key on the kitchen table. I'll handle it.

**NANCY JO**

Alright. Enjoy your afternoon.

**PETE**

Will do.

*(Pete exits out the front door and off. Nancy Jo stands for a moment, thinking. She then crosses to the telephone, picks up the receiver, dials.)*

**NANCY JO**

Hi, Millie. It's Nancy Jo… I'm well, thank you. Listen. I was wondering if I might borrow your old pickup for a few hours. Got some errands to run… Oh, that's wonderful. And you're sure you don't mind…? That's very kind… No, no. I'll walk over. No need to bring it by… What's that…? Your youngest won a blue ribbon for his potbellied pig? Well, isn't that something. Good for him, that's exciting… Yes, he's a good boy. I especially enjoy the sweet little hand gestures he makes at me when he rides by on his bike… You know what, never mind. He's a very good boy.

*(She rolls her eyes, sticks out her tongue.)*

Alright then. I'll see you shortly. Thanks again

*(She hangs up, grabs her purse, pulls out a cigarette, lights it as she heads for the door, and exits down the porch steps. End of scene.)*

**SCENE 5**

*1953. June. Late afternoon. Bucky's cabin.*

*(Bucky lies on the couch, barely visible in the dim light, wrapped in blankets, bandaged and broken. A quiet beat. The front door swings open.*

PERUSAL

*Laureen enters in a hurry, wiping her hands on a rag as she heads straight for the phone.)*

**BUCKY**

Laureen–

**LAUREEN**

Stop calling me Laureen. I'm your damn mother. And what the hell are you doing out here?

**BUCKY**

I can't move. I hurt all over.

**LAUREEN**

You'd hurt a lot less if you'd stayed in bed.

**BUCKY**

It's stuffy in there.

**LAUREEN**

Did you open the window?

**BUCKY**

Didn't have the strength.

**LAUREEN**

And yet you made it all the way out here.

**BUCKY**

Just barely. It's cooler out here.

**LAUREEN**

You take the Percodan?

**BUCKY**

I did.

**LAUREEN**

Take another. Where are they?

**BUCKY**

I got no damn idea.

PERUSAL

**LAUREEN**

Watch your mouth.

*(She searches quickly, finds the pills, grabs a glass, fills it with water, and returns.)*

Here.

*(Bucky moans.)*

Sit up.

**BUCKY**

I can't move.

**LAUREEN**

Oh, for–

*(She shakes out one pill… and then a second pill.)*

Take two. You'll be fine. You're a sturdy fella.

*(She lifts his head.)*

Open.

*(He does. She drops the pills in.)*

Good. Now drink.

*(She tips the glass; he swallows.)*

There you go.

*(She sets the glass and bottle aside.)*

Now… I've got a baby to deliver.

**BUCKY**

What?

**LAUREEN**

That's right. She's in labor.

**BUCKY**

Holy shit. It's / happening.

*(Laureen goes to the phone and dials.)*

PERUSAL

**LAUREEN**

/ I told you to watch your mouth.

*(NOTE: This is the same phone call from Act 2, Scene 2, now seen from Laureen's perspective. Nancy Jo's dialogue, in gray, is not heard by the audience.)*

**NANCY JO**

Hello?

**LAUREEN**

Hey Nancy Jo. It's Laureen.

**NANCY JO**

I'm sorry, who?

**LAUREEN**

Laureen Turner. Bucky's mom.

**NANCY JO**

Oh, Laureen. My goodness, it's been a long time. How are you?

**LAUREEN**

I'm doing just fine.

**NANCY JO**

Good. Good. And how's Bucky? I just heard.

**LAUREEN**

He's hurt pretty bad. Doctor says he'll be alright, though.

**NANCY JO**

Oh. Well, that's a bit of good news, I suppose.

**LAUREEN**

Yeah, listen. I need to speak to Pete. Is he there?

**NANCY JO**

Of course. Yes, he's right here.

*(She extends the receiver.)*

PERUSAL

It's Laureen Turner.

**PETE**

*(Taking it. To Nancy Jo.)*

Yeah, I figured that out.

*(Into phone.)*

Hey, Mrs. Turner.

**LAUREEN**

What the hell did you do to my son?

**PETE**

Alright, okay, now just calm down. It was an accident.

**LAUREEN**

You nearly killed him, you dumb shit.

**PETE**

I know, and I'm sorry. I don't know what happened. I must've got distracted.

**LAUREEN**

Oh, you got distracted. Well maybe I ought to get distracted. Maybe I ought to forget about this whole damn thing…

**PETE**

Mrs. Turner, listen–

**LAUREEN**

… Because I don't have time to deal with your little problem over here. Not when my son can't get off the couch, ribs cracked, head stapled shut.

**PETE**

Fuck.

**LAUREEN**

But guess what? Today just happens to be your lucky day.

**PETE**

I'm not feeling very lucky right now.

PERUSAL

**LAUREEN**

She's in labor.

**PETE**

Are you screwing with me?

**LAUREEN**

You'll know when I'm screwing with you. So, listen. I suggest you tell Peggy Lynn to get herself ready…

**PETE**

I'll let her know.

*(He looks to Peggy Lynn.)*

**LAUREEN**

… Because between delivering this baby and tending to Bucky, I won't have time to call you back. So, you'd better get moving.

**PETE**

Understood.

**LAUREEN**

Oh, and Pete?

**PETE**

Yeah?

**LAUREEN**

I'm fresh out of patience. So, you keep your head on straight. Or I'll knock it clean off.

**PETE**

Yes, ma'am.

*(Laureen hangs up the phone.)*

**BUCKY**

Why you gotta give him such a hard time? It was just an accident.

**LAUREEN**

I used to wonder which one of you was dumber. Well, the verdict's in. And it's you.

PERUSAL

*(Laureen exits. End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 6**

*1953. June. Early evening. Outside, somewhere on Bucky's property.*

*(Pete enters, Peggy Lynn following, struggling to keep up.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

Hold on, Pete. Can you just… slow down a second. Please.

**PETE**

What's wrong?

**PEGGY LYNN**

I can't breathe. I need to take this thing off. I feel like I'm suffocating.

**PETE**

Here, let me–

*(He moves toward her.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

No. I've got it.

*(She pulls the padding from beneath her dress, gasping, trying to steady herself.)*

**PETE**

You alright?

*(He steps closer.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

Keep your distance.

*(Pete backs off.)*

**PETE**

Alright. Take your time. No rush.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I want to go home.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

We just got here.

**PEGGY LYNN**

No. I want to see my brother. I need to be with my family.

**PETE**

Oh, for Christ's sake, Peggy Lynn. We're about to be a family. I did this for us. I did this for you.

**PEGGY LYNN**

You did what for me? Go on. Say it.

**PETE**

I'm telling you… I can feel it. The second we hold that baby, nothing else is gonna matter. It'll take all this pain away. It'll make us whole.

*(Peggy Lynn slaps him hard. He stumbles.)*

Jesus Christ! What was that for?

**PEGGY LYNN**

You are a pathetic, conniving, ignorant, miserable excuse for a man.

**PETE**

Aw, geez, Peggy Lynn.

**PEGGY LYNN**

I don't think I will ever forgive you for what you've done. Maybe someday I'll make peace with it. Maybe. But right now… Right now, I am so full of rage I feel like I might just split open and spill out onto the ground. One thing I do know, one thing that will never change… that baby will never be mine. Hell hath no fury, Pete. And by my count, you've got two women scorned.

*(End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 7**

*1953. June. Early evening. Bucky's cabin.*

*(Bucky lies asleep on the couch. The room is dim and eerily quiet. A sudden knock at the door. Bucky stirs, groans. Another knock. The knob turns and the door opens. Nancy Jo stands there, purse in hand.)*

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Hello? Anyone home? Bucky?

*(She steps inside.)*

Pete? Peggy Lynn?

**BUCKY**

They're out back.

**NANCY JO**

*(Startled.)*

Oh! Good Lord, Bucky. You scared me half to death.

**BUCKY**

Sorry, Mrs. Anderson.

**NANCY JO**

No, it's fine.

*(She moves closer, taking him in.)*

How're you holding up?

*(He groans.)*

You don't look so good.

**BUCKY**

Don't feel so good neither.

**NANCY JO**

I'm not surprised. I'm sorry about what happened.

**BUCKY**

You and me both.

**NANCY JO**

Pete feels awful about it.

**BUCKY**

What for? He didn't do nothing wrong. I don't blame him none. He knows that, right.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Of course he knows. Still… he's torn up with guilt. And if you ask me, he ought to be. Anything I can get you? Another blanket? Pillow? I could fix you something to eat.

*(She starts toward the kitchen.)*

**BUCKY**

No, I'm alright. I appreciate it, though.

**NANCY JO**

It's no trouble.

*(She glances at the prescription bottle.)*

**BUCKY**

Really… I'm good.

**NANCY JO**

Alright then. But I bet you're thirsty. How about a beer.

**BUCKY**

Well… probably shouldn't. But I wouldn't turn one down.

**NANCY JO**

Thought as much.

*(She grabs a beer from the fridge, opens it, brings it over.)*

Here you go.

*(Bucky takes it, struggling to sit up.)*

You gonna manage that?

**BUCKY**

I'll give it a try.

*(He grunts, lifting it.)*

**NANCY JO**

Hold on. I might have something that'll help.

**BUCKY**

Oh yeah?

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

*(Digging through her purse.)*

Just a second… I know it's in here…

*(She finds it.)*

There we go.

*(She produces a drinking straw.)*

**BUCKY**

A straw? Ain't no way I'm drinking beer through a straw. That's downright unmanly.

**NANCY JO**

Nonsense.

*(She unwraps it, drops it into the bottle. Bucky eyes it with suspicion.)*

Go on. It's not like your dick's gonna drop off.

**BUCKY**

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

**NANCY JO**

Women have been talking like that for a very long time, Bucky.

*(Bucky continues staring at the straw.)*

**BUCKY**

I'm sorry. I just… I just can't do it.

**NANCY JO**

You'd better drink that beer, or I'm gonna attach a nipple to it and feed it to you myself.

**BUCKY**

Alright, alright. Just… Jesus. Just stop. Please.

*(He awkwardly drinks through the straw.)*

**NANCY JO**

You and Pete have always been good boys.

**BUCKY**

You think so?

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

I do. Better than most. You got into your share of trouble, sure, but never anything worth losing sleep over. Except lately… Feels like something's shifted. Like things might've gone a little too far?

**BUCKY**

You asking?

**NANCY JO**

In the nicest way possible. What's going on out back, Bucky?

**BUCKY**

I'd rather not say.

**NANCY JO**

Fair enough. Then I'll just go take a look for myself.

*(She rises.)*

**BUCKY**

Hang on a second.

**NANCY JO**

What is it?

**BUCKY**

I think… maybe you ought to stay here.

**NANCY JO**

Oh yeah?

**BUCKY**

And we can talk.

*(Nancy Jo sits.)*

**NANCY JO**

Alright. I'm listening.

**BUCKY**

Right. Well… For starters… Peggy Lynn ain't pregnant.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Mm-hm. Tell me something I don't know.

**BUCKY**

Okay. So… there's a young woman out back. Holed up, so to speak. In the shack.

**NANCY JO**

Your mother's shack?

**BUCKY**

That's right.

**NANCY JO**

Go on.

**BUCKY**

And… well… she's about ready to pop.

**NANCY JO**

Pop how? She's in labor?

**BUCKY**

Mm-hm.

**NANCY JO**

I see. Pete's baby?

**BUCKY**

That was the plan, yeah.

**NANCY JO**

And Peggy Lynn? She in on this? Or is she just along for the ride?

**BUCKY**

Hard to say.

**NANCY JO**

This girl have a name?

**BUCKY**

Sandra.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Sandra what?

**BUCKY**

Miller.

**NANCY JO**

Sandra Miller.

**BUCKY**

Says she's from around here, but I ain't so sure.

**NANCY JO**

Well… You might be interested to know… that's Frank and Dorothy Bennett's daughter.

**BUCKY**

What? No. No, that ain't right.

**NANCY JO**

I can see how you might be a little confused.

**BUCKY**

I ain't confused. That baby's name was Ruby. Everybody knows that story. Ruby Bennett. Shot dead on the front steps… along with her parents

**NANCY JO**

That's how the story's been told, yeah.

**BUCKY**

Those cops fired over fifty rounds. There's no way that baby lived.

**NANCY JO**

Well… maybe I heard different.

**BUCKY**

Oh, come on. You're just pulling my leg.

*(Nancy Jo shrugs.)*

Doesn't matter anyway. Ain't got nothing to do with all this.

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

I knew Dorothy Bennett. She was a very nice woman. Quiet, reserved, devoted, and well-liked by just about everyone. Frank, on the other hand… well, he was troubled, to put it mildly. In and out of jail before he ever met her. First time for stealing two hundred dollars from the Haworth post office. He got six months for that. Then a payroll robbery over in Choctaw County. He got out early on parole. That's when he met Dorothy, at a church social. Claimed he'd turned his life around, and she believed him. Maybe he even believed it himself, for a time. They married. And then came Ruby.

**BUCKY**

I ain't feeling so great, Mrs. Anderson. Might be best you head on home. Everything's gonna be just fine.

**NANCY JO**

You see, the trouble with Frank Bennett was… he was a selfish bastard. Never satisfied. Angry at the world for not giving him what he thought he was owed. And when a man decides he's owed something, he'll do just about anything to get it. Problem was, Frank didn't have the brains to match his ambition. Can you imagine? Barely a grown man and trying to hold up the First National Bank & Trust in Oklahoma City… with a pistol.

*(Bucky groans.)*

Well, you know how that ended. Damn fool ran from the police and led them straight back home to Spencerville. And poor Dorothy, hearing the commotion, stepped out onto the porch at the worst possible moment. Ruby in her arms. And then the bullets started flying. But I doubt you understand what a woman's capable of when her child's in danger.

**BUCKY**

Mrs. Anderson–

**NANCY JO**

Now, you can say that baby died. But I know different. Dorothy had a sister who lived nearby, and she took little Ruby; hid her away for a very long time. And those of us who knew kept it to ourselves. Because that child had been through enough.

**BUCKY**

Christ.

**NANCY JO**

Bucky.

**BUCKY**

Yes, ma'am?

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

I asked you if that baby out there belonged to Pete.

**BUCKY**

Yes, ma'am, you did.

**NANCY JO**

And you said, "that was the plan."

**BUCKY**

I did.

**NANCY JO**

What did that mean?

**BUCKY**

I think maybe I misspoke.

**NANCY JO**

I don't think you did. Bucky… did you have your way with Sandra?

*(Bucky is silent.)*

I need you to answer me. Truthfully.

**BUCKY**

Pete's my best pal.

**NANCY JO**

I know he is.

**BUCKY**

There ain't nothing I wouldn't do for him.

**NANCY JO**

And that includes helping him have a child if he couldn't do it on his own.

**BUCKY**

Yes, ma'am.

**NANCY JO**

You are a good boy, Bucky.

PERUSAL

**BUCKY**

I like to think so.

**NANCY JO**

Well… I think it's time I was going.

**BUCKY**

Okay.

**NANCY JO**

You comfortable?

**BUCKY**

I'm alright, I guess.

**NANCY JO**

Here. Let me take that. You've had enough.

*(She takes the beer, sets it aside. Gently adjusts him tenderly. Pulls a blanket up, eases him back.)*

I'll grab you another pillow before I go.

**BUCKY**

Thank you, Mrs. Anderson.

*(She retrieves a pillow and returns, standing over him for a moment. Then, without hesitation, she presses the pillow over his face and holds it there. He struggles weakly, then goes still. She keeps the pressure on a moment longer before releasing. She exits, leaving the door open. After some time passes, she returns with a length of rope, moves behind the couch, and pushes Bucky's body off so it drops onto a rug with a dull thud. End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 8**

*1953. June. Evening. Total darkness.*

*(The following dialogue may be done live, or pre-recorded. Either way, the voices should feel hollow, echoing, distant. Time is compressed. Sandra can be heard throughout – breathing, moaning, crying, possibly wailing. The action is not visible to the audience.)*

PERUSAL

**LAUREEN**

Now listen to me, Sandra. You're gonna be alright. I just need you to breathe, but don't push. Not yet. Okay? I'm gonna reach in and break your water to move things along. Do you understand? It's gonna be uncomfortable, but I won't hurt you. Alright now… you'll feel some pressure… there we go. That's it. You're doing just fine. Don't push. Don't push yet. You gotta hold it. That's it. Good girl. Keep breathing. Keep breathing. Keep breathing. Okay. Good. Now go on… push.

*(We hear Sandra strain, grunt, and breathe for an extended period.)*

That's it. You're doing great. Keep going. Don't stop now. Keep pushing. Keep pushing.

*(Sandra screams.)*

That's it. Good. Good! There she is!

*(We hear an infant cry.)*

And look at her. My God, she's beautiful.

*(End of Scene.)*

**SCENE 9**

*1953. June. Not long after the previous scene. Somewhere along Route 259.*

*(Sandra stumbles onstage, disheveled, shaken, freshly postpartum. She's disoriented, unsure which way to go. Headlights flash as a truck pulls up. Engine cuts. A door opens, then shuts.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(Off.)*

Sandra!

**SANDRA**

Leave me alone!

*(Nancy Jo appears.)*

**NANCY JO**

Sandra–

**SANDRA**

Don't come any closer!

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

It's Nancy Jo.

**SANDRA**

I don't know any Nancy Jo.

**NANCY JO**

No. I'm sure you don't. But I knew your mother. Though I imagine you don't remember much of that?

*(She takes a cautious step closer.)*

**SANDRA**

Back off!

**NANCY JO**

Alright. I won't come any closer. Are you alright?

**SANDRA**

No, I'm not alright. Do I look alright to you? I need to get out of here.

**NANCY JO**

I understand. Now listen. I can get you somewhere safe. My truck's right over there. I can take you wherever you need to go.

**SANDRA**

And why would I trust you?

**NANCY JO**

I know what's happened, though I had nothing to do with it.

**SANDRA**

What do you mean, you know?

**NANCY JO**

I know about the baby.

**SANDRA**

Who are you?

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

Pete's mother.

**SANDRA**

Oh, good Lord. Just my luck.

**NANCY JO**

Sandra–

**SANDRA**

No. You listen to me. You can go fuck yourself, Nancy Jo. And while you're at it, the rest of them can join you.

*(Sandra turns, starts off.)*

**NANCY JO**

*(Calling after.)*

Before you go… You need to look in the back of that truck!

*(Sandra stops. Turns.)*

**SANDRA**

Do I look like an idiot to you?

**NANCY JO**

You do not.

*(She pulls out a key.)*

Here. Take it.

**SANDRA**

I don't need a key to look in the back of a pickup.

**NANCY JO**

I want you to know you can trust me. Take it. Call it collateral. I'll stay right here. Give you your space. And if you decide to take off in that truck, I'll understand. Though it doesn't technically belong to me. But first… you need to look.

**SANDRA**

This better be worth it.

*(She snatches the key.)*

PERUSAL

**NANCY JO**

That depends on you.

*(Sandra moves off, never taking her eyes off Nancy Jo. A long, tense beat. Then she reappears.)*

**SANDRA**

Is that–?

**NANCY JO**

It is.

**SANDRA**

And you–?

**NANCY JO**

I did.

**SANDRA**

You're just as crazy as the rest of them.

**NANCY JO**

All I care about right now is that baby.

**SANDRA**

I see. And what about me? What about what I've been through?

**NANCY JO**

Like I said, I can help you. If you let me. You've got a car, I assume.

**SANDRA**

I do. But I've got no idea what they've done with it.

**NANCY JO**

I think I know where it is. So, are you coming with me, or not?

**SANDRA**

As long as I don't end up dead in the back of that truck.

*(End of scene.)*

PERUSAL

## SCENE 10

*1953. June. Several days after the previous scene. Bucky's cabin.*

*(Laureen sits quietly on the couch. A long stillness. At last, she rises, crosses to the phone, picks up the receiver, and dials.)*

**LAUREEN**

Hi, Nancy Jo. It's Laureen… Listen, I'm sorry to bother you again. I was hoping Pete might be around…? No…? I see. Have you had a chance to talk to him…? Right… No, I suppose everything's fine. It's just I still haven't seen nor heard from Bucky, so I thought maybe Pete might know where he is… Mm-hm… Okay. Well, he's been working a lot lately, hasn't he? That's good to hear… So, you haven't heard anything then… Understood… Yes, I filed a police report, but no word yet… Well, I imagine you've been busy with the new grandbaby. How's she doing…? That's wonderful. I'm sure she's precious… Oh, alright. I won't keep you… You'll call me if you hear anything…? Thank you… Alright then. Bye.

*(She replaces the receiver. End of scene.)*

## SCENE 11

*1953. August. Morning. The farmhouse.*

*(Continuous from Act 1, Scene 1. Nancy Jo has just exited down the hall with baby Pearl. Pete smokes her still-lit cigarette. Nancy Jo reappears from the hall, crosses to the front door, and steps onto the porch.)*

**NANCY JO**

Weren't you just giving me grief about smoking?

**PETE**

You left it burning.

**NANCY JO**

Mm-hm.

**PETE**

You get the baby settled?

**NANCY JO**

I did. Went straight down without a peep. Fast asleep.

*(A car pulls up. They both look off.)*

Looks like we've got company.

PERUSAL

**PETE**

Well, I'll be. That's Peggy Lynn.

**NANCY JO**

Oh yeah?

**PETE**

That's her brother's car.

*(A car door opens and shuts.)*

**NANCY JO**

Well, hey, Peggy Lynn! I was wondering when you'd be getting back!

*(Peggy Lynn appears.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

You can cut the shit, Nancy Jo. Where are my bags?

**NANCY JO**

Oh. Alright. Well, they're packed. In the closet in my bedroom. Help yourself.

**PETE**

What the hell's going on?

*(Peggy Lynn pushes past him into the house. He follows.)*

Peggy Lynn–

*(She exits down the hallway. Pete stops, then turns back out to the porch.)*

What the fuck is going on?

**NANCY JO**

Language, Pete. I've got no idea.

**PETE**

Bullshit.

**NANCY JO**

I prefer not to take sides.

**PETE**

Take sides? Looks like you're in on it.

PERUSAL

*(He pivots, storms down the steps.)*

Jack! Jack! Over here! Hey! Why don't you come inside? We got beer! Maybe we can talk this through!

*(He bristles.)*

Son of a bitch.

**NANCY JO**

Oh my. That's the second time this morning someone waved a middle finger in my direction. Though I don't believe that one was meant for me.

**PETE**

Fuck this!

**NANCY JO**

Pete–

**PETE**

Peggy Lynn!

*(He storms back inside. Peggy Lynn reappears from the hallway with her bags. Pete reins himself in.)*

Peggy Lynn, please–

**PEGGY LYNN**

Get out of my way, Pete.

*(They face off.)*

You do understand that if I'm not in that car in ten seconds, my brother is coming in here. And he will beat the tar out of you.

*(Pete steps aside. Peggy Lynn passes him, exits onto the porch, and down the steps. Pete follows.)*

**PETE**

Peggy Lynn–

*(She turns.)*

**PEGGY LYNN**

You said you wanted purpose. Isn't that what you told me?

PERUSAL

**PETE**

That's right.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Well, now you have it. All six pounds, nine ounces of it.

*(She turns and goes.)*

**NANCY JO**

Bye, Peggy Lynn.

**PEGGY LYNN**

Drop dead, Nancy Jo.

*(Peggy Lynn exits. A car door slams. The car drives off.)*

**NANCY JO**

I have been nothing but nice to her.

*(Pete stares at Nancy Jo, silent, unraveling.)*

You're at a loss for words, aren't you? I can see the gears turning. Trying to figure out who to blame. Come inside.

*(She goes in. Pete follows.)*

Sit.

*(Pete sits. Nancy Jo exits into the kitchen, returns with a waste basket. She begins pulling cigarette packs from her purse, and from around the room, dropping them in.)*

Money's tight. No two ways about it. So, I'm selling the equipment out in the barn. And I don't feel the need to involve you in that decision. You understand? Anyway… that money's already gone. Took an advance from my savings and used it to help a young lady in need.

**PETE**

Peggy L–?

**NANCY JO**

No. Not Peggy Lynn. Jesus, Pete. Do I really need to spell it out for you? So, now it's just you and me. And that sweet little baby girl. And everything's going to be just fine.

*(The phone rings.)*

I think you ought to get that.

PERUSAL

*(Pete doesn't move. The phone keeps ringing.)*

Pete.

**PETE**

Yes ma'am?

**NANCY JO**

Answer the phone.

**PETE**

Alright.

*(Pete crosses, picks up the receiver.)*

Hello…? Oh. Hi, Emma… Yeah… yeah, she told me. Said they found a body floating in Hugo Lake…?

*(End of play.)*

PERUSAL