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Cast of Characters

DADDY
AVA
DELMARIE
LONNIE
ED
LAMAR

Setting

A small town in North Florida. Interior of a house. There is a kitchen area (stage right) separated from the living room area by a counter with bar stools. There is a table, down right of the kitchen, with three chairs. A screen door at extreme stage right opens to the side of the house. The living room area (stage left) is made up of a sofa, an easy chair, two end tables and a television. The front door is up center, with a walk-in closet next to it. Entrance to the rest of the house is upstage left.

Acknowledgments

Bay at the Moon was produced in February of 1994 at Players-by-the-Sea, Jacksonville Beach, Florida with the following cast:

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| DADDY..... | Norman Howard |
| AVA..... | Simone Aden Reid |
| DELMARIE | Bacot Wright |
| LONNIE..... | Ian Mairs |
| ED | Kevin Bodge |
| LAMAR..... | Roger Burgett |

The play was directed by Donna Zell.
The set was designed by Mugwump Productions.
The lighting was designed by Abbie Weltsek.

BAY AT THE MOON

by Ian Mairs

Scene 1

(As the lights rise, we see a series of ceramic pieces in various stages of development on the kitchen table. DADDY is seated on the couch. He is a withered-looking man of 70 who spends as much time in the past as he does in the present. The phone begins to ring. It rings three times and then stops.)

DADDY. Edna...Edna...there's someone at the door.

(The phone rings three more times. DADDY looks at the lamp next to the couch. Turns it off on the last ring. Silence. He smiles.)

Never mind.

(The phone begins to ring again.)

Edna!

AVA. I'll be there in a minute, Daddy.

DADDY. She'll be there in a minute.

AVA. I'm comin'.

DADDY. She's comin'.

AVA. Just hold your horses, I'm comin' I said.

DADDY. Hold your horses.

(AVA enters. She is a slightly plump, plain woman in her mid-thirties. She is wearing a robe and a towel in her hair.)

AVA. *(Crossing to phone:)* Lordy, hang on. Hang on.

(She picks up the phone just as it stops ringing.)

Oh, dammit!

DADDY. Damn! Damn! Damn!

AVA. You watch your mouth. *(Begins dialing:)* Shoot! *(To DADDY:)* Do you want some supper?

DADDY. No.

AVA. Do you want a bath?

DADDY. No.

AVA. Do you want a beer?

DADDY. Yes.

AVA. That's what I thought.

(She crosses to fridge and gets beer during this speech.)

Hey Del— ...damn machine *(Hands DADDY a beer.)* Here. Don't spill it everywhere. *(Into phone:)* Hey! Are you there? It's me. Pick up. I called to see if you just called me—but I guess you didn't 'cause your car's not in the driveway. You're probably over at Teeny's so I'll see you in a bit. If you did try and call I was in the shower but I'm not now. I'm fixin' to dry my hair—so if you try and call again I probably won't hear you. See you in a few minutes. Bye.

DADDY. Bye.

AVA. Don't drink it all in one gulp. You'll burp all night long.

DADDY. Get me a biscuit.

AVA. I don't have none.

DADDY. Well, make some then.

AVA. Daddy, I don't have time. Teeny'll fix you a tuna plate when she gets here.

DADDY. I don't want any tuna.

AVA. Well, I guess you can starve to death then.

DADDY. The hell I will.

AVA. Here. Watch "Matlock."

(She crosses to table, picks up ceramics, and places them in a cupboard in the kitchen.)

Daddy, stop clickin' the channels all around. You'll give yourself a headache.

(She crosses to the TV, takes the control, puts it on "Matlock," sets control on end table. Goes back to cleaning.)

AVA. There.

DADDY. Shoot, I've seen this one.

AVA. Oh, really? Who's the killer? Who did it?

DADDY. That fellah. There.

AVA. That's the judge. He couldn't have done it.

DADDY. He did...I've seen it...and that little gal. She's in on it.

AVA. *(Smiles:)* I see.

DADDY. Change the channel.

AVA. No.

DADDY. Well, turn it off then.

AVA. I'm gonna turn you off. If'n you don't quit botherin' me.

DADDY. You don't have to get snippy.

(AVA laughs.)

AVA. How 'bout "Star Trek"? If I put it on "Star Trek" will you let me dry my hair in peace? *(DADDY nods.)* Good. Here's some chips.

(She exits. He reaches for control. Changes the channel several times.)

DELMARIE. *(Offstage:)* Hello, hello. Ava Lou? Right this way, Mr. Johnson.

(DELMARIE enters from the front door. LONNIE follows behind her with a heavy box of ceramics and supplies. He is dressed in a medical uniform. He wears glasses.)

DADDY. There's no need to yell.

DELMARIE. Hey, Daddy! It's Del.

DADDY. I want a biscuit.

DELMARIE. That's nice. *(To LONNIE:)* Come on in. *(To DADDY:)* What a pretty sweater. It's six o'clock—why aren't you watchin' "Matlock"?

DADDY. I've already seen it.

DELMARIE. Daddy, I have someone I want you to meet. This is Mr. Johnson. He'll be staying with you tonight.

LONNIE. How do you do, sir. I'm Lonnie Johnson.

DADDY. I'm Del.

DELMARIE. No. I'm Del. You're Daddy.

DADDY. I am?

DELMARIE. Yes.

DADDY. Okay.

DELMARIE. Where's Ava?

(DADDY shrugs. LONNIE crosses to put box on table.)

Oh, I wish you'd have let me carry that. I'm so scared you'll wrench your back.

LONNIE. Oh, no ma'am it's nothin'. *(Places it on table.)* It has been my experience that you can lift absolutely anything using proper body mechanics. Once you establish a firm base of support that is.

DELMARIE. *(Crosses to hallway. Looks.)* Oh, I couldn't agree more. I hope you don't mind. This is such short notice. But my Aunt Teeny threw her back out at a belly dancin' lesson at the senior's center and we are strapped—strapped for help. And when I rang the agency it was really just luck they had someone there.

LONNIE. No ma'am, it was not luck. It was fate. Why, I had just closed a case in the last 24 hours when the folks at Nimble Nurse gave me a holler.

DELMARIE. Oh, really? What was your last job?

(She crosses to box. Unloads supplies.)

LONNIE. I was employed by a family in Starke, the Winstons, when Grandmother Winston had debilitating seizure activity.

DELMARIE. And you took care of her?

LONNIE. No ma'am, I took care of Mr. Winston, until Saturday when he expired, since Mrs. Winston was unable to.

DELMARIE. Was he sick too?

LONNIE. Uh, no ma'am. Just ornery. Downright hateful when you get down to it. The whole family despised him so much they begged me to stay on with him.

DELMARIE. Must have been a challenge.

LONNIE. Oh, we got on okay after I figured out that there weren't any bullets in that .45 he kept wavin' at me. He'd holler more than anything else...and when I couldn't take that anymore, I'd just turn my ear off.

DELMARIE. Excuse me?

LONNIE. I wear a hearing aid. I was dropped on my head as a small child and as a result suffered auditory loss bilaterally.

DELMARIE. How awful.

LONNIE. It's not so bad. I wear what is called the Apollo invisible ear system. It's actually a fiberoptic transmitter that was used by Astronauts on the moon. It's extremely sensitive. I have been known to pick up football games in Perry (*Points to ear:*) right here.

DELMARIE. Sounds like somethin' my husband would be interested in.

LONNIE. Does he have a hearing problem?

DELMARIE. No, just an unnatural attachment to football games.

LONNIE. I see.

DELMARIE. Daddy's not mean. Are ya, Daddy? Just lost more than anything else. Has a hard time findin' his way around the house. You'd never know he built it. Here's the kitchen, in case you want a snack.

DADDY. Snack, hell! Where's dinner?

DELMARIE. It's comin'. Please forgive his foul mouth. He was in the Navy before he married my mother.

LONNIE. How long has she been gone?

DELMARIE. A year come June 1st...hard to believe. *(Short pause.)* I don't expect you to have to cook for Daddy, Mr. Johnson. I can always get Ed to pick him somethin' up.

LONNIE. Oh, no ma'am. It's no trouble. My training at the Cardega Health Institute prepared me for all sorts of situations in the home setting. I've done plenty of cookin'. I even had a client of the Judeo persuasion who taught me to prepare kosher meals.

DELMARIE. Well, it doesn't have to be that fancy. Basically, anything you can put ketchup on, he'll eat.

LONNIE. I see.

DELMARIE. Except not too much ketchup, full of salt and red dye #4. Just a dab will do. I teach the nutrition class at school.

LONNIE. I didn't realize you were a teacher.

DELMARIE. Actually, I'm a guidance counselor, but the lady who teaches the class had a nervous breakdown, so I took over until the end of the year. Just a few weeks, really.

LONNIE. I could fix him an omelet. Would you like an omelet, Mr. Northrup?

DADDY. Okay.

DELMARIE. Sounds great. Make sure it's two eggs not three. I believe y'all are gonna get along just fine. I'm gonna see if Ava is out in the shed. She does a lot of work out there. Make yourself at home.

LONNIE. Thank you.

(DELMARIE exits out the kitchen door. LONNIE crosses to the fridge.)

LONNIE. This is an awful nice place you got here, Mr. Northrup. Your daughter says you built it yourself. I must say I'm impressed.

(AVA enters in her slip, holding two dresses. She begins talking from offstage.)

AVA. Well, it's about time—I just got off the phone with that damn machine of yours—

(She crosses upstage left. Looks at mirror on closet door.)

Well, what do you think? I cain't make up my mind. This one is pretty but it makes me look poochy in here. But I have worn this one every Sunday but Easter. Which is it...? Del?

(LONNIE comes from the kitchen.)

LONNIE. Why you must be Ms. Northrup—

AVA. *(Startled:)* Oh my god!

LONNIE. *(Realizing she's in her slip:)* Oh, excuse me.

AVA. Don't touch him. You can have whatever you want.

LONNIE. Ms. Northrup, please allow me to explain—

AVA. There's \$50 in that peanut cluster tin and some jewelry upstairs—

LONNIE. No, I don't mean to—I'm from Nimble Nurse—your sister sent me.

AVA. She did?

LONNIE. Yes.

AVA. Where is she then?

LONNIE. Out in the shed.

AVA. What have you done to her?

LONNIE. Nothin'. She's lookin' for you. She called and called but you wouldn't answer.

DADDY. Will you two keep it down? I'm trying to watch TV!

AVA. Daddy!

LONNIE. I believe I'll go find Ms. Fletcher.

AVA. You do that.

(LONNIE heads for kitchen door. AVA throws a dress on quickly. DELMARIE appears at the door.)

DELMARIE. Hello! Hello! Ava Lou? Mr. Johnson? Did y'all meet?

AVA. Delmarie, get your fat ass in here pronto! You've got some explainin' to do.

LONNIE. Ms. Fletcher, I was under the impression that Ms. Northrup had been made aware of my presence. Apparently this is not the case.

DELMARIE. Well, I tried to call Ava but she was unavailable. She has a habit of turning her phone off. Especially when she thinks I'm calling her. I apologize for any embarrassment I caused you. I take it she was surprised.

LONNIE. Startled would be a better word.

AVA. DEL!

LONNIE. She was wearing her...undergarments.

DELMARIE. Oh no...I cain't apologize enough...please have a seat while I straighten this whole mess out. Excuse me.

(She crosses to living room.)

AVA. I'm waiting.

DELMARIE. Coming. I brought you those glazes you wanted. And Eunice had a couple of your pieces ready—

AVA. What is he doing here?

DELMARIE. Now, I don't want you to get upset but Teeny had a little accident. She threw out her back at her class at the senior's center.

AVA. Is she all right?

DELMARIE. Well, she didn't break nothin', but she's as stiff as a poker. Called me during my lunch hour at school.

AVA. So why didn't you just call and cancel. Just skip bingo for one week.

DELMARIE. Oh no ma'am. It has taken me and Ed a whole year to get you to come out with us on Tuesdays.

AVA. So what! We'll just skip tonight.

DELMARIE. We will not skip tonight. Tonight is important. It's a Mardi Gras theme and the prizes are bigger. The whole place is done up like the French Quarter. It's precious. Anyway, Teeny may be out of the picture for some time...and we have talked about getting some outside help before—

AVA. You mean you talked about it.

DELMARIE. It has been discussed. More than once. And this seemed the perfect opportunity.

AVA. Uh-huh.

DELMARIE. I spoke with the director of nursing. Mr. Johnson has excellent credentials...and, of course, he is bonded.

AVA. Forget it.

DELMARIE. I am not having this discussion with you for the six millionth time. You cannot stay holed up in this house forever.

AVA. In the first place, you should have asked me.

DELMARIE. I don't bother askin' questions I already know the answer to.

AVA. I don't like it. Stranger in the house.

DELMARIE. Lord, he's no stranger than Aunt Teeny.

AVA. Well, damn, Del, kick an old woman when she's down.

DELMARIE. You're the one who told me about findin' that waffle iron inside the dryer with all the towels.

AVA. It was an accident.

DELMARIE. The blind leading the blind if you ask me. This has been a long time coming. He really is very nice. They're giving away a fridge and two TVs...

AVA. So? ...Does it have an ice maker?

DELMARIE. Yes, I believe it does. So go put your hair up and a little lipstick, and we'll go win it.

AVA. I cain't.

DELMARIE. Fine. Be a party pooper if you like. But I have paid the agency, and Mr. Johnson will be staying until 10. Whether you like it or not.

AVA. Fine, he can sit on the porch.

DELMARIE. No ma'am. He will sit right here.

AVA. Whatever.

DELMARIE. In fact, we all will. I'll tell Ed to pick up some chicken.

AVA. That's not fair. Ed cain't miss bingo.

DELMARIE. He'll do what I ask him to—

AVA. It always comes to this don't it?

DELMARIE. What?

AVA. You think I don't know what you're up to? Oh, I'll go along 'cause it means so much to Ed and I don't want to hear him bellyachin' all week. But as far as I'm concerned this is blackmail.

DELMARIE. Call it what you want. Are you comin'?

(AVA grabs her purse.)

I knew you'd see things my way. Hurry up now. He'll be here any minute. *(DELMARIE crosses to kitchen.)* Did you find those eggs?

LONNIE. I haven't looked. Mrs. Fletcher—

DELMARIE. Please, call me Delmarie.

LONNIE. If you like. Mrs. Fletcher, it is going to be very difficult for me to provide the optimum therapeutic environment for your daddy with circumstances the way they are now.

DELMARIE. Oh, Ava is just all bark. She's a very frustrated woman, Lonnie. Can I call you Lonnie? Surely you of all people can understand that living a life in seclusion causes a person's mind to be out of sorts.

LONNIE. Are you referring to some sort of psychological psychosis.

DELMARIE. A psychosis? Yes. Ever since my sister has taken over this household, the pressure appears to have gotten the better of her. She's just not herself anymore.

LONNIE. How so?

DELMARIE. She's just withdrawn from us. Mutters a lot. Barely eats. Keep the strangest hours, up all night workin' on her crafts and things.

LONNIE. I see. What was she like before?

DELMARIE. (*Changing the subject:*) I spoke with our pastor, Reverend Moody, and he encouraged us to take Ava out more often...and she's always liked games since we were little...and since I've gotten her to bingo I've noticed a little bit of a difference.

LONNIE. Well, that's heartening I'm sure.

DELMARIE. Oh, it is...and this evening I have arranged for a fourth party to accompany us...a widower from my Sunday school class...and if I could just persuade you to reconsider and reassure you that Ava's behavior will improve.

LONNIE. Well, all right.

DELMARIE. Oh, you're an angel. An absolute straight-from-heaven angel.

(*Car honks.*)

DADDY. Edna...Edna...telephone.

DELMARIE. That's probably my husband. (*Calling:*) Ava—that's Ed. Get your fanny in gear.

AVA. Keep your skirt on—I'm comin'.

(*AVA enters and crosses to kitchen.*)

Don't let him out on the back porch. He'll start messin' with the gas grill and blow the house up.

LONNIE. Yes ma'am.

AVA. He gets these pills at 9 o'clock. You gotta wrap 'em in bread so he'll swallow them. Wonder bread, not the wheat. He'll spit it out at ya.

LONNIE. Wonder. Not wheat.

AVA. If he tells you he needs a beer to wash it down, tell him tough. He can have a sip of water or some tea. If he tells you he has to pee—you've got about a minute to get him to the bathroom. You think you can handle it?

LONNIE. Well—

DELMARIE. The man is a professional.

LONNIE. Is there somewhere I can reach you at?

DELMARIE. I put the number by the phone. Ed's got a beeper, try that number if you don't have any luck. Give me some sugar, Daddy. Ava and I are going to play bingo with Ed...Mr. Johnson will stay here with you.

DADDY. Where's Edna?

DELMARIE. Mama's in heaven.

DADDY. What's she doing there?

DELMARIE. Having lots of fun, I expect.

AVA. *(To DADDY:)* Be nice. I'll stop and get you some Lotto tickets.

DADDY. Goodbye, baby.

AVA. I'll be back in a couple of hours.

DADDY. I'll be here.

LONNIE. We both will.

DELMARIE. It's going to be fine.

(Car honks. AVA opens the door.)

AVA. WE'RE COMIN'! Del, who's that in the front seat with Ed?

DELMARIE. Is there someone with Ed? See you in a bit!

(DELMARIE exits.)

AVA. If anything does happen with Daddy, you be sure and call 911.

LONNIE. Of course.

AVA. 'Cause if somethin' does happen. You're gonna need an ambulance when I'm through with you.

(Lights out.)

Scene 2

(Lights up. TV is going. LONNIE is sitting on the sofa with a book—he has fallen asleep. Car sounds. AVA flies in, slamming the door. LONNIE bolts up.)

LONNIE. Who's there?

AVA. Just me.

LONNIE. Ms. Northrup—

AVA. Light is on upstairs. Is he shuffling the halls?

LONNIE. No.

AVA. Did he spit out his pills?

LONNIE. Nope.

AVA. Probably wouldn't eat a lick of supper.

LONNIE. He ate every bite...and four pieces of toast. Wonder not wheat.

AVA. Well, you must make a mean piece of toast. I'd better check on him.

LONNIE. No, please, I insist. It's only quarter of ten. I always like to make a last round before I go. I'll make sure he's comfortable and settled in.

AVA. Suit yourself.

LONNIE. Ms. Northrup, I was curious, was Edna his wife's name?

AVA. Yup.

LONNIE. I figured as much.

AVA. Edna Pauline Northrup. Hated her name. Cain't say I blame her. Most everybody called her Iddy Biddy.

LONNIE. Was she a small woman?

AVA. No. Why?

LONNIE. I just wondered. I'd like to apologize for scarin' you earlier. You must believe me when I tell you I was under the impression that your sister had informed you I was coming.

AVA. Oh, don't let it keep you up nights. You want a drink?

LONNIE. No, thank you.

AVA. One thing you gotta understand about Del is that she's a little on the twitchy side, 'specially since Mama died. The doctor had her on nerve pills but she had to give them up.

LONNIE. Why?

AVA. The idea of taking them made her even worse.

LONNIE. Does she exercise? I have found that a great amount of the body's tension can be reduced through some sort of physical activity.

AVA. The only thing on Del that gets a workout is her mouth muscle.

LONNIE. I'll check on your daddy.

(AVA crosses to TV. Turns it off. She crosses to kitchen and pulls a bottle of whiskey out of a cookie jar. DELMARIE enters.)

DELMARIE. Ava?

AVA. In here.

DELMARIE. It's not what you think it was—

AVA. It wadn't?

DELMARIE. Yes...I mean no. *(Pause.)* Where's Mr. Johnson?

AVA. Upstairs lookin' after Daddy.

DELMARIE. Everything okay?

AVA. He didn't burn the house down if that's what you mean.

DELMARIE. Did they get on okay?

AVA. Ask him yourself.

DELMARIE. Do you think it's gonna work out? Should we ask him back?

AVA. You're the one doin' the all the invitin' around here. It's up to you.

DELMARIE. Dwight is in my Sunday school class, and I just happened mention that we went to the Elks on Tuesdays.

AVA. Is that right?

DELMARIE. Yes, and he said he'd always wanted to go—but he didn't know anyone.

AVA. I guess you skipped the part about your old maid sister taggin' along.

DELMARIE. My darling husband Edward offered him the ride. Ask him. I didn't say a word.

AVA. Yeah, you were too busy kickin' Ed in the shins.

(ED enters.)

I need a drink. Hey, Edwert, you wanna drink?

ED. If you're gonna have one—

AVA. You wanna double?

ED. If you're gonna have one—

AVA. Don't let me twist your arm.

ED. Already twisted.

(AVA and ED laugh.)

DELMARIE. Edward, this is not a frat party. It's a weeknight and the sun has barely set.

ED. Oh, Del, let me have a little fun. It's bad enough—drivin' halfway 'cross town to lose everything but my shirt. Next time you recruit somebody from Sunday school, make sure he lives on the Southside.

AVA. Ah-ha!

DELMARIE. Remind me to shoot you when we get home.

ED. Poor Dwight. He's awful shy.

AVA. Barely said two words the whole night.

DELMARIE. He's sweet. Just quiet, that's all.

AVA. Damn, if he was any quieter he'd a been dead.

(ED laughs.)

DELMARIE. Edward, don't encourage her. You could've made it easier for him. Helped out a little. Every time he asked you a question all you said was "yes" or "no."

AVA. They were "yes" or "no" type questions. And he made me nervous the whole time. Kept lookin' over his shoulder.

ED. Guess he was waitin' for the police to raid the place.

DELMARIE. He told me he'd never been around so many Catholics in his life.

AVA. Well, after a while he got so fidgety it started to make me feel uncomfortable.

ED. That's just some sort of condition he's got from Vietnam.

AVA. Great.

DELMARIE. Well, I'm sorry. Next time I invite someone along I'll be sure and get a complete medical history.

ED. Turn and cough.

(AVA laughs.)

AVA. When he got up to get me a Coke, I thought he was gonna bolt for the door.

DELMARIE. Just tryin' to break the ice.

AVA. I wadn't there to break the ice. I was there to play bingo. If you talk through the whole thing, you miss the numbers.

DELMARIE. There are some things more important in life than a bingo jackpot.

AVA. It's just rude, Del, to talk so much. Ed is always makin' faces when you start up.

ED. Now don't get me in on this.

DELMARIE. Is that right?

AVA. Haven't you ever noticed how he inches himself down to the other end of the table so that by the second or third game he don't even look like he belongs to us.

DELMARIE. I didn't realize I was such an embarrassment to the both of you. I won't torture you any longer. There's plenty of things I can do with my Tuesday nights.

ED. Now, Del, you've gotten carried away as usual.

AVA. Fine by me.

ED. Ava!

DELMARIE. If you excuse me, I'll go see how Mr. Johnson is getting along.

(DELMARIE *exits.*)

ED. Well, thanks for gettin' me in the doghouse again, Ava. I owe ya.

AVA. I cain't help it. Ticks me off. Delmarie just asks for it...and I don't appreciate y'all settin' me up that way.

ED. Teeny was laid up. You can't expect her to be lookin' after Daddy too much longer. She's goin' on seventy-five herself.

AVA. I know the woman's age, Ed. Thank you. Teeny don't mind. Gets her out of the house.

ED. Just ain't the time to be startin' up with Del. She's always cranky between Easter and graduation. Things have been hectic up at the school. Del's practically puttin' on the senior dance herself.

AVA. That's because she's too bull-headed and bossy to let anyone help.

ED. Maybe what you don't understand is every time you snap at Del—I end up payin' for it. Wears me out. She'll spend the rest of the night pouting. Won't say two words.

AVA. Hallelujah.

ED. It's no wonder your daddy went loony with the way you two carry on. And I sit at the end of the table because it's my lucky spot. Been sittin' there since high school and I always win big.

AVA. That's 'cause you can hear 'em callin' out the dang numbers.

ED. Go upstairs and make up with Del. Please. You don't have to say you're sorry. Just talk to her and tell her you'll help her with the damn decorations.

AVA. I already volunteered a few ideas. She turned me down flat.

ED. Not like that. I know it sounds crazy, but I've come to realize that the only way I can ever get Del to do something I want her to do is by convincing her that it was her idea in the first place. Are you going to talk to her or not?

AVA. I suppose.

ED. I appreciate this, Ava Louise.

AVA. You owe me.

ED. Who's keepin' score?

AVA. I am. Next time Del sets on one of her strange notions—I expect you to get her to cool it.

ED. I just offered the man a ride home, that's all.

AVA. I know the way things work.

ED. Did you ever think it might be nice to have someone to talk to other than Daddy.

AVA. I hear plenty of talk all day long—TV blarin’ away. What I’m after is some peace and quiet. *(Pause.)* Daddy was always after Mama for stayin’ up to the wee hours. And she’d always tell him she had chores...but I’d get up in the middle of the night and find her there on the couch or the porch not movin’ a muscle, just lettin’ the silence roll in over her like the moonlight. I knew if I said a word, I’d spoil it. So we’d just sit there and drift for a while. You want another drink?

ED. The question is “Should I have another drink?” Probably not. I do have to be at work in the mornin’.

AVA. Suit yourself.

DELMARIE. You can have all the liquor you like. I’m goin’ home. I’ll leave the back door unlocked.

AVA. Del—

DELMARIE. Yes?

AVA. What I said before about...well, what I meant was...you want help with the dance or don’t ya? ’Cause if you do I need to know so I can clear some time to do it.

(ED gives her a look.)

But I’ll give you a hand.

DELMARIE. I’ll let you know.

ED. Awful kind of you to ask, Ava. Where is Mr. Johnson? I don’t believe he even exists.

DELMARIE. He’s messin’ with the toilet in the hall bathroom. Chain keeps jigglin’ and he just set to fixin’ it.

AVA. Del!

DELMARIE. What? I just went up there.

AVA. *(At foot of stairs:)* Mr. Johnson, could you come down here please?

DELMARIE. I didn't ask him to fuss with it. He was already doin' it. Not that it doesn't need some attention. Been makin' that little sound for as long as I can remember.

(LONNIE enters with plunger.)

AVA. I appreciate you watchin' over Daddy, but I don't need anybody messin' with my toilet.

LONNIE. It's no trouble.

AVA. IT'S MY TOILET. I'LL FIX IT, THANK YOU.

(AVA grabs the plunger and exits.)

LONNIE. I'm sorry if I stepped out of line. Just always liked fiddlin' with things.

ED. Don't pay Ava any mind. It has nothing to do with you or the toilet for that matter. Ed Banks, good to know ya.

LONNIE. Lonnie Johnson. Likewise.

ED. You're welcome to come over and fix things up at our house anytime.

LONNIE. I'll just get my coat.

DELMARIE. Thank you for everything, Lonnie. Are you free for next Tuesday?

LONNIE. You'll have to call the agency. But I think so. *(Hushed:)* I can spend the rest of the week reading up on this sort of disorder.

DELMARIE. I realize what sort of problems this case presents. It's hard to predict these mood swings, but I can tell you're the kind of person who likes a challenge. I really feel it's fate that led you to us.

LONNIE. I'll be in touch. Good night.

(LONNIE exits.)

ED. Daddy don't seem as bad as all that.

DELMARIE. He wasn't talkin' about Daddy.

ED. Well, who was he talkin' about then?

(AVA enters, a splash of water on her dress, plunger in hand. DELMARIE looks at ED. Lights out.)

Scene 3

(Lights up. AVA is seated at kitchen table, working on ceramic Christmas trees. She has her back to the living room. DADDY shuffles to the UC closet. He attempts to open it. A large box of decorations stands in his way. He continues to pull at the door.)

AVA. Hey Daddy!

DADDY. Hello.

AVA. Where ya goin'?

DADDY. Out for a walk.

AVA. But that's the closet door.

DADDY. I know.

AVA. What do you want out of the closet?

DADDY. Never you mind. I made this.

AVA. I know. You did a good job.

DADDY. You're damn right I did. *(Struggles with box. Kicks it.)* Get this blasted thing—

AVA. *(Turns to look:)* Oh, hold on, just a sec—

DADDY. What is all this crap, Edna?

AVA. It's decorations.

DADDY. Somebody havin' a party?

AVA. No, Del is havin' a dance at the school. I'm helpin' her decorate.

DADDY. You're a little old for dancin', aren't ya?

AVA. It's not for me. It's for the kids.

DADDY. Oh, Jesus, have we got kids?

AVA. *(Laughs.)* At the school. Don't mess with the shelves. I just straightened them out.

DADDY. Bossy, Bossy Betty. Leave me be! *(Pause.)* I built this closet—built this whole place.

AVA. That's right, you did.

DADDY. I'll let you know if I need anything.

AVA. Okay.

(She crosses to table. DADDY finds a woman's straw hat and puts it on.)

DADDY. There.

(He crosses to front door and discovers it has been locked. Tries to figure it out.)

Edna...Edna...What the devil is wrong with this thing?

AVA. It's locked.

DADDY. Why, for heaven's sake?

AVA. I don't want you to go out. I'm busy with my trees, and I cain't take a walk right this minute.

DADDY. I can manage.

AVA. No you cain't!

DADDY. Open it. Open it this instant! *(Bangs on the door hard.)*

AVA. All right! All right! I surrender. You make sure and stay in the yard. *(Crosses to door. Opens it.)*

DADDY. Aren't ya comin'?

AVA. No.

DADDY. You sure?

AVA. Yes, Daddy.

(He closes the door. She crosses to TV, turns it off. Silence. Crosses to table. The telephone begins to ring. She unplugs it. Sits back down. Knock at the door. She crosses to door and opens it.)

Look here! Make up your mind. Come in or stay out.

LONNIE. Afternoon, Ms. Northrup.

AVA. Oh, it's you.

LONNIE. Have I caught—

AVA. Oh, keep your skirt on. I didn't forget you were workin' extra this week. Del's been remindin' me every other minute. I just thought she said one o'clock.

LONNIE. It's a quarter 'til—

AVA. (*Looks at clock in kitchen:*) It cain't be. Dang it. Just crept up on me. Been a helluva mornin' ...Daddy been drivin' me half crazy. And I'm back-ordered on Christmas trees.

LONNIE. But it's June.

AVA. That's when I do my trees. Late June, early July. You don't think I do 'em at Christmas, do ya? Do you have any idea how much work goes into one of these things?

LONNIE. I guess not.

AVA. Come December I'm up to my ears in Easter bunnies and Mother's Day tulips.

LONNIE. Must ruin the spirit of the holidays for you. Reflecting on the death of our saviour just as we are celebrating his birth.

AVA. What's that got to do with Easter bunnies?

LONNIE. Very little, I suppose.

AVA. Whatever. I steer clear of holidays whenever possible.

LONNIE. I see.

AVA. You big on Christmas or somethin'? Lots of presents—all that bologna!

LONNIE. I'm usually working.

AVA. Oh, Del's a real nightmare. She starts doin' her house in November. By the time turkey day rolls around, she's done. Then

she starts in over here. I 'spect she'd do every house on the block if they'd let her. Your family big on Christmas?

LONNIE. I don't have any family to speak of. I was raised at the Talladega Ranch for Boys in Yulee.

AVA. Oh, I see. *(Pause.)* What was that like?

LONNIE. I'm afraid I don't understand the question.

AVA. Did you get lonely or what?

LONNIE. Yes, I suppose. Didn't you?

AVA. I meant when you were little.

LONNIE. So did I.

(Silence. LONNIE crosses to window.)

Is that Mr. Northrup I see in the carport seated in the Buick?

AVA. Oh, he does that. Likes to take it out for a spin at least once a week. Hadn't run in years. But I keep the battery workin' so he can play the radio if he wants to—listen to a game or the news. Let him stay out there as long as he wants. He's been a rascal all mornin' long. Won't do nothin' I ask. Didn't sleep all night. Peed in the bed.

LONNIE. Probably just the moon.

AVA. The moon?

LONNIE. Yes ma'am. We're comin' up on a full one tonight. Whole town is restless. They've done studies you know. I used to work at an extended care facility in Williston.

AVA. A what?

LONNIE. Nursing home. Shady Pines. Every full moon those old people would take to the strangest notions. Running through the halls. Throwin' their meal trays. Staying up all hours and the noise. Like a couple of old hounds baying at the moon.

AVA. Del ought to have her hands full with a gym full of horny teenagers.

LONNIE. Aren't you going to the formal as well?

AVA. On no! I'm strictly the set-up crew. I'll be outta that hellhole way before the moon is up.

LONNIE. I only asked because the secretary at the agency said I'd be needed until eleven o'clock.

AVA. Well, it'll be six-thirty at the latest.

LONNIE. Must have been some sort of misunderstanding.

AVA. Or Del's up to one of her tricks.

DELMARIE. What tricks?

LONNIE. Speak of the devil.

AVA. And the devil appears.

DELMARIE. Is your phone turned off?

AVA. No.

DELMARIE. Afternoon Mr. Johnson. How is your Saturday going?

LONNIE. Oh, fine. Just fine. Miss Northrup and I were just discussing when she'll be getting back this evening. Did you want—

DELMARIE. Ava, you're not even dressed yet.

AVA. Mornin' just slipped away from me.

(DELMARIE crosses to table.)

DELMARIE. *(Looking at tree:)* What an unusual pattern. All those colors just makes me dizzy to look at 'em.

AVA. I hadn't even glazed it yet. Looks like somethin' out of a magazine, don't it?

DELMARIE. Maybe you should hold off on the glaze.

AVA. Why?

DELMARIE. I think it commands enough attention without it.

AVA. Don't worry. I'm not giving you one this year.

DELMARIE. I didn't mean that. Edward and I love your crafts.

AVA. It's not crafts. It's ceramics. You make it sound like less than it is.

LONNIE. I believe I'll go check on your daddy.

AVA. (*To LONNIE:*) You could see buyin' this in some nice store somewhere, couldn't ya?

DELMARIE. Ava—

LONNIE. Well, I have seen quite a few at the swap meet down at the fairgrounds every year.

AVA. I didn't mean the fair. I meant a real store at the mall—Penney's or Belks.

LONNIE. Oh.

DELMARIE. Have you seen them there? I haven't.

LONNIE. Well, no. But I wasn't lookin' for 'em either.

AVA. Well, I have seen them there, and they're very expensive. I've been offered quite a lot for some of my pieces. 'Specially somethin' exotic like this. How much would you pay for one?

DELMARIE. I don't think Mr. Johnson said that he would pay anything.

AVA. How much?

LONNIE. Uh, five. Five dollars.

AVA. Five dollars?

LONNIE. Six?

AVA. That wouldn't even pay for my supplies.

DELMARIE. (*With a small grin:*) You asked him.

LONNIE. I think I'll see if Mr. Northrup is ready for a pit stop.

AVA. You do that.

(LONNIE *exits.*)

Let me just wash my hands and get rid of this smock and we'll be ready to roll.

DELMARIE. You'd be cooler in a skirt. That gym is a furnace.

AVA. It's only a couple hours. I'll survive.

DELMARIE. Actually, I was hopin' you could stick around awhile longer.

AVA. Oh, no! I never said I'd chaperone the dance. I don't mind helpin' those kids as long as I don't have to look at 'em. I've got dinner to fix.

DELMARIE. The man who is doin' the pictures called to say he needs someone to check people in—

AVA. So get Ed to do it.

DELMARIE. Ed is on bathroom detail. All I need is one of them brats smokin' pot and all H, E, double toothpick will break loose. Lonnie will stay over, and they can order a pizza.

AVA. I told Daddy I was makin' chicken tonight.

DELMARIE. When was this?

AVA. Sometime yesterday.

DELMARIE. And you think he's been rememberin' it all this time?

AVA. That's not the point. What's the big deal anyway? Just call up one of the teachers or the parents...

DELMARIE. I already told them you would do it. I need you to be there. People are expecting you. It'll be fun. Is it so hard to be around other people? Why is it every time I find us a bit of fun you put a stop to it. Keep pullin' away...just like Mama...

AVA. You take that back.

DELMARIE. I see it, Ava. You keep to yourself more and more—barely hear a peep out of you. Every night when I wipe down the kitchen just before I go to bed. I look out my window and see you sittin' here doin' your ceramics...and for a split second—it's her...the way she used to keep to herself. Puts a shiver through my spine.

AVA. Maybe you should pull the shades.

DELMARIE. I remember when she lost baby Joey and didn't talk for at least a month—

AVA. It was more like a week.

DELMARIE. Just stayed out there on that porch all day makin' those godawful potholders and plant hangers. I don't care if I see another piece of macramé as long as I live.

AVA. She was never a talker to begin with.

DELMARIE. I was real afraid of the dark then and I got up one night and found her out on the porch...and I asked her for some water and then I told her I was scared and you know what she said—"Me, too." I kept waitin' for her to say somethin'...somethin' kind...or just to hold me...but she kept on with her handiwork, and that old swing just kept creakin'.

AVA. I always liked that sound.

DELMARIE. Sometimes I still hear it.

AVA. Then you'd end up in my bed 'til I woke up and pushed you out...and even then sometimes I remember you'd stay on the floor.

DELMARIE. (*Quietly:*) Don't push me away, Ava Louise.

AVA. I'll do the damn picture table if it'll make you happy.

DELMARIE. There's nothin' to it. It'll be fun. Right in the thick of everything.

AVA. Guess I can drag somethin' out.

(DADDY *enters.*)

DADDY. Damn five o'clock traffic.

DELMARIE. Hello, Daddy! Where have you been?

DADDY. I went to town, if you must know.

LONNIE. (*Enters:*) Mr. Northrup, you forgot your hat.

DADDY. It isn't mine.

LONNIE. You were wearing it. I saw you.

DELMARIE. We all did.

DADDY. We all did. You need glasses.

DELMARIE. Did you go anywhere special?

DADDY. You're awfully nosy all of a sudden. Where's Edna?

DELMARIE. Ava went to her room to change.

(DADDY grabs hat.)

DADDY. I'll take that, thank you. *(Crosses to closet.)*

DELMARIE. That's the closet door, Daddy.

DADDY. *(Slams it. Exits.)* I know it.

DELMARIE. He'll come back in a minute or so.

LONNIE. Shouldn't we go after him?

DELMARIE. This gives us a chance to visit. I wondered how last Tuesday went.

LONNIE. Fine.

DELMARIE. No disruptions?

LONNIE. Your father was all right. I'm afraid Ms. Northrup still isn't comfortable with the idea. At times she does appear to harbor quite a bit of hostility. *(Stares at tree.)*

DELMARIE. You cain't take it personally. It's not that Ava dislikes you in particular. She's just very anti-social.

LONNIE. Are you referring to some sort of sociological sociopath?

DELMARIE. A sociopath? Yes. I suppose so. She's been coming to bingo with us for almost three months and she has yet to say two words to anybody. Can you imagine? I love meeting new people, don't you? Of course you do. You're in a people profession.

LONNIE. I feel that I've antagonized matters with my comments about her artwork.

DELMARIE. That does appear to be somewhat of a sore subject with her.

LONNIE. I find her sculptures quite stimulating. Some nights I find myself staring at them for hours.

DELMARIE. You don't mind staying until about eleven, do you?

LONNIE. No. It's no trouble. But I wish that—

DELMARIE. I know that I should have told Ava we'd be a little longer but it just slipped my mind.

AVA. Quit flappin' your jaws and get the car.

DELMARIE. Well, who is this vision of loveliness?

AVA. I didn't have time to iron nothin'.

DELMARIE. You'll be sitting at a table. Nobody will notice.

AVA. I'll just get these things.

DELMARIE. Lonnie will take them. I don't want you any wrinklier than you already are...

LONNIE. It would be my pleasure.

DELMARIE. Who says that chivalry is dead?

(LONNIE grabs box. Exits.)

DELMARIE. Ava, you could use a touch of lipstick. Let me just get my purse.

AVA. I've never worn that mess and I ain't fixin' to start now.

DELMARIE. Suit yourself. Will you let me fix your hair?

AVA. It is fixed.

DELMARIE. Ava...

(They exit.)

Oh, Mr. Johnson, I wish you'd have let me carry that.

(Silence. DADDY enters.)

DADDY. Edna? ...Edna?

(Car sounds are heard, then fade. He crosses to door. Closes it and turns the lock.)

LONNIE. You all drive safe. Bye-bye!

DADDY. Bye-bye!

(LONNIE is heard attempting to open the front door.)

Mr. Northrup...Mr. Northrup? Are you there?

(DADDY sits on couch, finds clicker. Turns on TV.)

DADDY. *(Smiles.)* Bye-bye.

(LONNIE continues to bang as lights go out.)

Scene 4

(Lights rise as LONNIE is coming out of the closet and AVA is walking out of the front door. They close the doors simultaneously and surprise each other.)

LONNIE. Ava—Ms. Northrup, it's eleven o'clock on the dot. How was your evening?

(AVA has crossed to cookie jar—takes out bourbon. Takes out two glasses.)

AVA. Hell on earth. Do you want a drink? *(Slugs first shot.)*

LONNIE. No, thank you. I'm on duty.

AVA. *(Looks at watch:)* It's eleven-o-one now. You're off duty.

LONNIE. I appreciate your hospitality, but it's against company policy to fraternize with families.

AVA. Who said anything about fraternizing? I just offered you a shot of whiskey. You don't want it? Fine, I'll take it.

LONNIE. I'm afraid I was right about that full moon. I haven't had a moment's peace all night long.

AVA. That makes two of us.

LONNIE. Your father has been downright—

DELMARIE. Hello-hello! Ava-Lou!

AVA. Damn, I meant to lock that door.

DELMARIE. Hello, Lonnie. I hope your night was a little less crazy than mine.

LONNIE. Actually—

AVA. If you stopped makin' trouble for yourself, things might go a bit smoother.

DELMARIE. *(To LONNIE:)* Ava didn't care for the fella she was workin' with.

AVA. There's just limits to how much I can take.

DELMARIE. Oh, you make it sound like torture. The man just thought you were attractive, only wanted to take you out for a cup of coffee.

AVA. I'd rather eat dirt.

DELMARIE. I found Mr. Wilkins quite charming...and he has a booming photography business. *(To LONNIE:)* His mother teaches with me at the school and she's always telling me what a wonderful son he is—

AVA. She must have left the part out about the time he did at Raiford, or his four ex-wives and six kids or pet boa constrictor, Charlie.

DELMARIE. He seemed to really open up to you.

AVA. I let him talk all he wanted. When he wadn't movin' his mouth, he started movin' other things. I tell ya if it wadn't for that security guy—that little peckerhead would be laid up at Tallahassee General with a couple of fingers missin'—

LONNIE. Was the law involved?

DELMARIE. Oh, it was just Lamar. He's sort of the night watchman at school...lives in a trailer out back. I asked him to keep an eye out for Ava—

AVA. Just some clown Ed knows from the Rotary Club.

DELMARIE. He was in the Merchant Marines until he hurt himself. How's Daddy?

LONNIE. I was just getting to that—

AVA. Where is Ed?

DELMARIE. He's catchin' a ride.

AVA. With who?

DELMARIE. A friend—Lamar—he's helpin' him lock up. I told him they could find us over here.

AVA. What the hell for?

DELMARIE. I don't know. Ed may have asked him over for a drink.

AVA. You're lucky I don't keep a gun in the house anymore.

DELMARIE. The man showed you a little courtesy. You could at least offer him some hospitality.

AVA. I thanked him, Del. If you want to throw him a hoop-de-doo at your place be my guest. I'm checkin' on Daddy and hittin' the sack. (*Crosses to upstairs.*)

LONNIE. I'm afraid you won't find him upstairs.

AVA. Where is he then?

LONNIE. (*Points to closet.*) He's spent the better part of the evening in there.

DELMARIE. Is he all right?

LONNIE. As far as I can tell. I've been watching him the whole time. His pallor is good. Respirations are even and unlabored.

AVA. Daddy!

LONNIE. If I try to open the door, he screams and hollers something awful. So I crack it, then he just growls.

AVA. Daddy, you get your hiney out here. Pronto!

DADDY. No!

AVA. This is not a question. It's an order, dammit.

DADDY. Go to hell!

LONNIE. I tried to move him myself. But he's as strong as an ox.

AVA. Fine, you can spend the night in there for all I care. I'll get you a pillow. Del, before you open your mouth. This has happened before and I can handle it.

(AVA exits to bedroom.)

DELMARIE. Daddy, wouldn't you like a nice bed to sleep in?

DADDY. Leave me alone.

DELMARIE. I'll fix you some warm milk—

DADDY. No!

DELMARIE. How about a beer?

DADDY. No!

DELMARIE. Daddy, we got company comin'. Come on out!

LONNIE. Maybe, Ms. Northrup is right. We shouldn't reward his behavior...just ignore it.

DELMARIE. Absolutely not! I've got a staff member comin' over here any minute, and I am not about to have him thinkin' that we keep Daddy in the front hall closet like a caged monkey.

(AVA enters with pillow/blanket. She tosses it in the door.)

AVA. Here ya go. Do you have to pee?

DADDY. None of your business.

LONNIE. Maybe if I put a chair in there, he'd sit on it.

AVA. There's a folding chair on the patio.

(LONNIE exits. AVA crosses to kitchen.)

DELMARIE. Where are you going?

AVA. I need a drink.

DELMARIE. What are you going to do about Daddy?

AVA. He's fine in there, Delmarie. Just wants a little peace and quiet. Hell, I have half a mind to join him.

DELMARIE. I think we should go in there and get him.

AVA. No, thank you. I've taken enough physical abuse for one evening.

(Car sounds.)

DELMARIE. Oh Lord, there's Ed. The one night we try and have a little fun and all H-E double toothpick breaks loose.

AVA. I'm goin' to bed.

DELMARIE. Don't you move from that spot you are standin' in Ava Louise Northrup. Now I have invited company over, and you will help me entertain them.

AVA. I'm done with helpin' you.

(Doorbell rings.)

DELMARIE. Just a second. *(To AVA:)* Take out some glasses and open up some chips.

AVA. Forget it.

DELMARIE. *(Simultaneously:)* You are the most inconsiderate, bull-headed—

AVA. *(Simultaneously:)* I have had my one drink and I am goin' to bed.

(Doorbell keeps ringing as they squabble in the kitchen. DADDY enters from closet and opens the door just as the argument reaches its height. Doorbell rings.)

DELMARIE. WE ARE COMING, DAMMIT!

ED. Well, that's a fine how do ya do. Hello, Pop!

LONNIE. *(Entering:)* Good heavens, Mr. Northrup! I never thought you'd come out.

(DADDY heads for closet. LONNIE shuts it. He places chair down, motions for DADDY to sit—DELMARIE cheerfully forces him into it.)

DELMARIE. Have a seat, Daddy.

(ED and LAMAR, a beer-bellied man of 40, enter.)

LAMAR. Well, there's the hostess with the mostess. Still rarin' to go—

DELMARIE. If it isn't our knight in shiny armor. Lamar, take a load off! Ava, look who's here!

(AVA crosses to doorway.)

You remember Mr. Jenkins?

AVA. Yeah.

LAMAR. Well, hello again, Miss Ava.

(Silence.)

DELMARIE. Lonnie, this is Mr. Jenkins. He's the night watchman at our school.

LAMAR. Security officer. Howdy.

LONNIE. Good to meet you.

DELMARIE. Lonnie is Daddy's sitter.

LONNIE. Health assistant. Home health assistant.

DELMARIE. Oh, excuse me, I keep pullin' my foot out one side my mouth and stickin' it in the other. And this is Daddy.

LAMAR. How do you do, sir.

DADDY. Go to hell.

ED. Don't mind him, Lamar. He's full of beans.

LONNIE. Full moon.

LAMAR. Of course.

DELMARIE. Can I get anyone somethin' to drink? Lamar, some coffee? Or a splash of Coke?

LAMAR. Well—

ED. You wanna beer?

LAMAR. Is it light?

AVA. No.

LAMAR. I'll take it.

AVA. I'll get it. *(To ED:)* You want one?

DADDY. I do.

AVA. No, Daddy.

ED. Oh give him one for cryin' out loud.

AVA. You can haul him back and forth to the john all night long. Nothin' to drink after "Wheel of Fortune" and he knows it. Del, I'll put some coffee on—

DELMARIE. I can get it. Won't take a second. y'all sit and visit.

AVA. It'd be a whole lot easier if you let me—

DELMARIE. I'll do it. *(Pulls her to couch.)* Sit. *(To ED:)* You too.

LAMAR. *(Army voice:)* Sir, yes sir!

(ED laughs.)

That sister of yours don't take no for an answer.

AVA. You've figured that out, have you?

ED. Ava!

AVA. I can tell you're a quick study. It took Ed here a little bit longer to catch on, and by then he was married to her.

(DADDY laughs.)

Daddy liked that one.

LONNIE. How was the cotillion?

LAMAR. The what?

AVA. The dance.

DELMARIE. Oh, heck, same as always. Everybody showed up late, stayed long enough to get a few pictures took and grab a slow one before headin' to the—

ED. Before Del descended on them.

LAMAR. Hell, I couldn't believe some of them young fellers. Fresh ain't the word. 'Course those little gals get fixed up and they look so mature, you'd swear they were at least 18. I know they fooled me a time or two. (*Winks at ED.*)

LONNIE. How was the decor?

LAMAR. The what?

ED. They managed to hold up.

AVA. They were okay. One of the guys from the football team knocked over the Eiffel Tower during a fast set. I told Del to put that blamed thing on stage with the band but she wouldn't listen.

LAMAR. That band was as bad as they were. That little guy—the front man—he was touched by somethin'. I remember Elvis and whatnot with his pelvis and all, but this fella was just plain nasty.

ED. Ava helped Del with the decorations.

LAMAR. They were very unusual.

AVA. Kids hated 'em. Nobody even tried to steal a centerpiece. You know that's bad when they don't try and sneak 'em out under their coats.

ED. I saw one girl with one.

AVA. That was the president of the senior class. Del forced it on her.

(*DELMARIE enters with drinks.*)

DELMARIE. She asked for it.

AVA. It was sittin' in the dempsy dumpster when I took out the trash.

DELMARIE. They're children. They don't appreciate somethin' classy like that.

LAMAR. I appreciated it. I just wasn't too sure what it was.

ED. Some damn thing. The triumph bridge in France. It's famous.

LONNIE. The arch of triumph?

DELMARIE. Exactly. Oui-oui. A voice in the wilderness! Have you been to Paris?

LONNIE. No, but I go to those travel movies at the library on Thursdays. Was it a French theme?

DELMARIE. I called it "An Evening in Paris."

LONNIE. Sounds lovely.

AVA. I know you didn't like my suggestion but I think a lot more people would have understood your theme.

LAMAR. What was that?

AVA. Puttin' up a picture of that little skunk from the cartoons—

ED. Pepé Le Pew?

AVA. Yup. That one.

DELMARIE. That's vulgar.

ED. Come to me my little crepe suzette. (*Grabs DELMARIE's arm, kisses it.*) My little mon chérie!

DELMARIE. (*Giggles:*) Edward, stop!

LAMAR. (*To AVA:*) Cain't blame a guy for tryin'.

AVA. No, but you can punch him if you want to.

DELMARIE. Lamar, here has an artistic side. Didn't you tell me you helped your brother with his studio on the weekends?

LAMAR. You mean, Whit? Yeah, I'll give him a hand or two at his shop when I have time.

LONNIE. What sort of work does he do? Paintings...sculpture?

LAMAR. Mostly wildlife...few fish, mostly deer.

LONNIE. Still life? He paints them?

LAMAR. He stuffs them.

DELMARIE. I bet that is very interesting.

ED. Pretty damn still.

LAMAR. *(To LONNIE:)* If you ever have somethin' you want done, let me know, I can get you a deal.

DELMARIE. That's very thoughtful of you.

AVA. I didn't pull the garage door down.

DELMARIE. I got it on my way in.

AVA. Well, I need another beer...unless you have one in your pocket.

DELMARIE. No, I don't.

(AVA crosses to kitchen, relieved to escape.)

DELMARIE. That's an awful nice suit you're wearin', Lamar.

LAMAR. I bought me this suit for my nephew's wedding. I know'd it had to be mine the minute I saw it. Then I decided not to go to the weddin' 'cause I didn't like the gal he was fixin' to marry.

ED. Who was she?

LAMAR. My ex-wife. You've probably seen her ridin' her broom around town on Saturday nights.

(ED laughs.)

DELMARIE. Lamar!

LAMAR. Then I remember what my daddy used to say—"Lookin' well is the best revenge."—and I got to puttin' on that suit and I just had to go.

LONNIE. Living well. I believe the term is living well.

LAMAR. Excuse me, maybe that's what your daddy said but mine said "Lookin' well."

AVA. *(From kitchen:)* He doesn't have a daddy. He's an orphan.

DELMARIE. Ava! (*Changing the tone:*) Well, I bet you cut quite a handsome figure at the ceremony.

LAMAR. I suppose I did...don't remember too much of it 'cause I was pretty far gone by the time I got to the chapel. Shots of Cuervo, don't ya know.

ED. I hear ya.

LAMAR. I was the only fella the ushers had to help to his seat. My ex's whole family was there just shooting fire at me with their eyes.

DELMARIE. Where was this?

LAMAR. Hillgrove. Hillgrove Baptist. It's on Road 13. If ya blink, ya miss it. I had kinda worked out in my head that when the preacher asked if anyone had any objections I was gonna get up and say "Yes, I object! I object to marriages in general and this one in particular..." 'cause they're just gonna end up divorced anyway so why even try...but I spent so much time tryin' not to fall over I missed that part—and then it was over—I was ahold of the pew tryin' not to pass out and saw her two little feet shoot right past me and I started into cryin' just like a baby 'cause I had missed my chance...and this ole gal come up to me and hands me some Kleenex sayin' "I always cry at weddings."

DELMARIE. And did they divorce?

LAMAR. Yes, but it didn't make me feel any better. I thought it would, but it didn't. She's workin' on hubby number three now.

DELMARIE. It's still a lovely suit. Isn't it, Ava?

AVA. (*Standing by the kitchen entrance:*) Yeah, I guess so. Do you want another beer?

DELMARIE. How about some coffee?

LAMAR. No, beer is fine.

DELMARIE. (*Hops up:*) I'll get it.

DADDY. Looks like rain again, Edna.

AVA. It's just the sprinkler system, Daddy. I better shut it off 'fore it floods the garden.

ED. I'll get it, Ava Louise. You set yourself.

AVA. I been sittin' all night.

DELMARIE. Mr. Jenkins, would you be a kind soul and turn it off?

LONNIE. Of course.

AVA. The shed needs lockin' too, and I'm the only one with the key.

DELMARIE. Ed can do that. Hand Lamar this beer.

AVA. Is your arm broke?

ED. I don't mind, Ava.

AVA. No!

LAMAR. Hell, I could stretch my legs. We'll make a party out of it.

AVA. No, I don't want you to.

LAMAR. Well, honey, just thought you'd like some company.

AVA. I said no! I don't want anybody touchin' another thing—diggin' through my kitchen, messin' with the sprinkler, jigglin' the toilet.

ED. Now hold on there, Ava.

AVA. No you hold on, Ed.

LAMAR. Well, darlin' there's no sense in blowin' a gasket. Just tell us what you want.

AVA. You know what I want? I'll tell you. I want to go outside and turn my sprinklers off, lock the shed and when I get back, I want to find your fat butt off of my sofa and out the door. Y'all, too. Party's over. Go home. *(Exits.)*

LONNIE. I'll just get Mr. Northrup to bed and be on my way. Good night.

DADDY. Edna! Edna!

(They exit.)

LAMAR. I guess I'll be headin' out. Gettin' late. Awful good to see you, Eddy.

ED. Let me walk you to your car.

LAMAR. You stay here with Del.

ED. Del's comin', too.

DELMARIE. I just wanted her to have some fun. Is that a crime?

ED. We've all had enough entertainment for one evening.

LAMAR. Yes, that was quite a show you put on Del, that "Evening in France."

DELMARIE. Paris. It was Paris, Lamar.

LAMAR. Of course.

DELMARIE. She wasn't always like this. We used to have such fun.

ED. Where is your purse?

DELMARIE. I'll get it, Edward. I just need a minute. You and Lamar go on.

ED. It's bad enough already. Just leave it be.

(DELMARIE gives him look.)

All right, suit yourself. If I hear gunfire, I'll call the sheriff.

LAMAR. Good night, Del.

(She nods. They exit. DELMARIE crosses to patio. Looks out. Crosses to table, takes Ava's beer, guzzles it. AVA enters. They exchange a long look.)

DADDY. *(Offstage:)* Edna! Edna!

(DELMARIE exits as AVA makes her way to the cookie jar, grabs whiskey, pulls curtains at kitchen door. Stares out. Lights out.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. AVA is asleep on the couch with a robe draped over her. The bottle of whiskey lays empty on the table. Many of her ceramic pieces from her private collection are out all over the room. DADDY enters and shuffles toward her.)

DADDY. Edna...Edna. Wake up.

AVA. Go away.

DADDY. Come on now. Get up.

AVA. Daddy, quit!

(Grabs clicker. Turns on TV.)

Watch TV.

DADDY. I've seen this one.

AVA. You just won't rest until I get up, will you?

DADDY. Edna—

AVA. What?

DADDY. Good morning.

AVA. Good morning, Daddy. Here, let me fix your collar. Are you hungry?

DADDY. Nope.

AVA. Did you eat?

DADDY. Yep.

AVA. Who fed you?

DADDY. He did.

AVA. Who is he?

DADDY. Damned if I know.

AVA. "Perry Mason." Dang, it must be gettin' on eleven o'clock.

LONNIE. *(Enters from upstairs:)* Eleven twenty-five. Hello.

AVA. Hi. Always losin' track of time.

LONNIE. I kept the shades pulled and turned the phone off to eliminate any stress factors from your environment.

AVA. What's that hum?

LONNIE. I'm afraid I don't hear anything.

AVA. I believe it's the back of my brain poundin' against my skull.

LONNIE. Your bath is ready, Mr. Northrup. Just need you to get undressed.

DADDY. Don't rush me.

LONNIE. How did you sleep?

AVA. You tell me. I don't remember falling asleep.

LONNIE. Actually you just sort of blacked out. I'd finally got your Daddy to the bedroom. I spent a solid hour tryin' to get him to put his pajama bottoms on.

AVA. He don't wear pajama bottoms.

LONNIE. I have come to that conclusion as well. After that, he tumped the water pitcher over. I cleaned that up, went to grab my coat, turned to say good night and there you were.

AVA. Where, exactly?

LONNIE. Hard to say really. Somewhere between the couch and the floor.

AVA. I feel like my head is about to explode.

LONNIE. Sounds neurological in origin. *(Gets doctor bag.)* Any loss in sensorium? Blurred vision? Paralysis?

AVA. No, but I think my foot's asleep.

LONNIE. Are you experiencing any balance problems?

AVA. I hadn't tried standin' yet. I think I'll wait awhile.

LONNIE. *(Removes pen light from bag.)* I'm going to flash a penlight in your eyes.

AVA. Do you have anything smaller?

LONNIE. This will only take a moment.

AVA. Look here. That's enough. If you're fishin' for a diagnosis—I'll give you one. I drank too much and I woke up with a bad case of Jim Beamitis. Where's my dress?

LONNIE. It's on the line. Poured whiskey all over it I'm afraid. I tried to call next door but then I figured that probably wasn't what you wanted...

AVA. You figured right. *(Pause.)*

LONNIE. I couldn't leave you in that state. 'Sides, by the time I got you settled in, it was close to 3 a.m. Please let me look you over. I promise it won't hurt.

(He begins testing her eyes, then moves on to her reflexes, arms and legs, all through the following speech.)

We had this collie we used to keep at Talladega. This couple brought as a present for us orphan boys one Christmas. It turned out to be the runt of the litter. But that's usually what folks would bring in to us—stuff they didn't want no more. He was the strangest little thing. As time went by, he became even stranger. Never would fetch anything. Hated bones. Couldn't even bark right. And he had these fits where he'd fall over into a dead sleep at the drop of a hat. The boys called him Crash.

AVA. We had a collie once, but it chewed up Daddy's Sunday belt so we gave him away.

LONNIE. I'd be walking along and I'd find him in the strangest places. Out cold. And last night, when I came down and found you slumped over in a ball with a little pool of saliva running out of your mouth, I got to thinkin' of old Crash. The memories came flooding back. *(Finishes assessing AVA.)* You're okay.

AVA. I know. Where did all this come from?

LONNIE. They were out when I came down this morning.

AVA. I'd better put 'em back. *(Stands up. Sits back down.)* Maybe later.

LONNIE. I must say I find them quite striking. Really adds a lot to this room.

AVA. I know what you think of these, Mr. five or six dollars—

LONNIE. I was speaking of those trees you were painting for other people, the green ones with the lights that look like Christmas trees—

AVA. And what do these look like?

LONNIE. It's hard to put...the best way I can say it is they look like feelings. Deep, dark feelings. I find them very revealing.

AVA. Of what?

LONNIE. Your passion.

AVA. Turn your head please, I want to put this robe on the right way.

(Telephone rings.)

DADDY. Edna! Someone's at the door.

LONNIE. Hush now, Mr. Northrup. Her head hurts. Shall I answer it?

AVA. No, I'm sure it's just Del checkin' up on me.

(Rings a few more times, then stops.)

That's more like it.

LONNIE. I'll be upstairs getting your father cleaned up and then I'll be going home, if you think you'll be all right.

AVA. Of course.

LONNIE. Let's go Mr. Northrup.

DADDY. Don't yell. My head hurts.

(They exit. AVA crosses to table picks up a ceramic, goes to put it away, then stops. The front door opens. DELMARIE enters.)

DELMARIE. Good morning.

AVA. Closer to afternoon.

DELMARIE. If you say so. You want some coffee?

AVA. No. I want a big Diet Pepsi with lemons in it and a handful of aspirin.

DELMARIE. I think I can handle that. (*Crosses to kitchen.*) Only the aspirin's no good. Thins your blood and tears up your stomach. I'll get some Tylenol.

AVA. Could I just have some Pepsi please? A Pepsi with aspirin—if you can give me that, I'd appreciate it. If you cain't, then I don't want nothin'.

DELMARIE. Where's the lemon?

AVA. In the butter box.

DELMARIE. Where's the butter?

AVA. Next to the milk.

DELMARIE. Why don't you keep it in here?

AVA. It's in a big tub. It won't...maybe you should go home.
(*Silence.*)

DELMARIE. I wish you would eat a little somethin' to settle your stomach. How about an egg or some pancakes?

AVA. (*Taking deep breaths:*) Please don't talk about food anymore.

DELMARIE. Well, Daddy will need some nourishment.

AVA. Lonnie made him somethin'.

DELMARIE. He come in early to check on things?

AVA. No, he spent the night.

DELMARIE. Oh. Awful nice of him.

AVA. Don't worry, Del. The car is pulled around back. Nobody will say anything.

DELMARIE. What is there to say?

AVA. Oh somethin'...somethin' ugly I'll bet. I don't keep tabs on the neighbors, but they're always watching me.

DELMARIE. Probably not worth repeating.

AVA. Irma Wilson spends a solid hour every Saturday makin' sure her sprinkler waters the lawn. Every time I come out on the porch, there's a flash in her eyes, gets up on her haunches like a cat.

DELMARIE. Irma Wilson is flake. Everybody knows that.

AVA. I think she's bored more than anything else. Stares at my front door. Just waitin'-waitin'-wanderin' what I'll do next. I'm sure she's told the neighborhood I'm up to no good... "Has the lights on all hours and does those strange sculptures. I wouldn't be surprised if she's smoking dope." Hell, I must fill up her fantasies—

DELMARIE. Drink some more Pepsi—

AVA. Am I an embarrassment to you?

DELMARIE. You're always like this after you have an episode.

AVA. Like what?

DELMARIE. Grumpy. You spend the whole evening making a horse's ass out of yourself and then next morning convincing yourself you hadn't done a thing wrong. It was everybody else actin' crazy.

AVA. Then why did ya come over?

DELMARIE. To see after Daddy.

AVA. Daddy is just fine—so you can go.

DELMARIE. All right, I will. Call me later.

AVA. Go to hell.

DELMARIE. I'm sorry about settin' you up with the horny photographer. It was a mistake, alright?

AVA. What was Lamar?

DELMARIE. A freak accident. I meant well. It just didn't work out.

AVA. Better luck next time, huh Del?

DELMARIE. Is it wrong for me to want you to have somebody? Don't you get lonely, Ava?

AVA. Who doesn't? I've got Daddy. He's fine company most of the time.

DELMARIE. Don't you ever want to wake up at night with someone next to you?

AVA. There's no need to get personal.

DELMARIE. No, I'm not supposed to get in the way or intrude. I'm your only blood relative left under the age of 70. No. It's my job to sit and watch you slowly rot away in this house, and I won't do it. I know it seems like a bridge between you and me, but it'll just get longer and pretty soon you're so far gone I can't even remember what you look like.

AVA. That's just on your end, Del. You keep thinkin' I got strange on you all of a sudden. Well, I got news for you, I been strange for quite a while now. You never could see it or wanted to see it. *(Pause.)* Ever since I can remember there's been the way things should be according to Del...and the way they really are.

DELMARIE. You're talking nonsense.

AVA. You remember that tree house Daddy made for me that summer you went to Bible camp.

DELMARIE. Rattly old thing.

AVA. He made the frame, but I did the inside. Filled it full of leaves, and twigs and Spanish moss for curtains. Mayonnaise jars jes full of tadpoles and guppies. Couple of lizard skeletons I was bleachin' in the sun. It felt like a museum. The Ava Louise Northrup Tree House Museum.

DELMARIE. It was unusual alright...

AVA. And one day I come home from swimmin' from the lake and Daddy said you was back from camp, and by the time I hit the door the insides of my tree house were layin' in two Hefty bags on the porch. Ran back to the yard, walls were bare except for some pictures from a coloring book about the Old Testament.

DELMARIE. It was junk. Dirty junk.

AVA. It was my junk.

DELMARIE. You can keep your house any way you want it. And I try to respect your privacy as much as possible.

AVA. I appreciate that, Del.

DELMARIE. I didn't like your tone of voice just now.

AVA. Tough shit.

DELMARIE. There's no need to swear. Not in this house.

AVA. What the hell does that mean?

DELMARIE. If Mama was around you'd never take the Lord's name in vain as freely as you do.

AVA. But Mama ain't here. She's gone. Been gone. I do the pickin' up and the cookin' and my money pays the bills.

DELMARIE. And Daddy's pension.

AVA. Barely covers the electric.

DELMARIE. Ed and I are aware of the load you carry. We try our best to pull our share of the weight. As soon as Mrs. Conyers died—we knew takin' this place was the best thing to do.

AVA. For who? Not me. Nobody asked me a thing. I didn't even know it was for sale until you bought it.

DELMARIE. What did we move here for then?

AVA. You tell me.

DELMARIE. I try and do right by this family. Honestly, I do. But you always end up turnin' it around on me.

AVA. If I want your help, I'll ask for it.

DELMARIE. That's Daddy talkin' now. Lord forbid you needed a hand. More stubborn than he ever was... 'course I don't think he could hold it as well as you do.

AVA. You better leave. I've had enough of this mess.

DELMARIE. *(Crosses to door.)* Isn't the first time you blacked out either.

AVA. You and Ed took the house 'cause you were running out of things to do...and I guess since Ed never wanted children, I was the next best thing.

DELMARIE. (*Stops. Turns.*) And where did you come by this information?

AVA. I'd rather not say. Ed told me one night that weekend you took all those brats to Disney World. I don't think that he meant to tell me, it just sort of slipped out. And he made me promise not to say anything.

DELMARIE. But some things are just too good to pass up. (*Pause.*) When Ed and I first got engaged I thought I was, and we were so scared, well, I was scared and young and broke. And then it turned out we weren't. Such a relief. And then I decided to wait until Ed's business took off...but it never did. So I went to get my teaching certificate and that was the last thing I wanted—could barely keep myself in clean clothes. And every year there was another reason to put it off—I guess deciding not to decide is some sort of choice...and then when I finally got up the nerve...we found out I couldn't. Ed's just tryin' to make excuses so it don't look like it was me.

AVA. I'm sorry.

DELMARIE. Don't be. I don't think I'd want them anyway. Why start a family when you could barely stand the one you got already? When Mama died—well, I knew she never liked Ed—so we went our own way—but I thought maybe we could be friends again...that things would change.

AVA. I don't want to change, Del. I couldn't even if I wanted to. This is it. This is me.

(*Long pause.*)

DELMARIE. (*Close to tears:*) I liked my Bible pictures. Oh this house. This awful, awful house. Why do? How can you stay?

AVA. It's home.

(*DADDY enters.*)

DADDY. Hey, Edna. I feel like a spin into town. You comin'? Well, are ya?

(AVA and DELMARIE start to laugh.)

AVA. No, Daddy, I don't think so.

DADDY. Suit yourself. *(Notices DELMARIE is upset.)* What's with the waterworks?

DELMARIE. Nothin' much.

DADDY. Have you two been at it again? Jesus, you two carry on like a couple of alley cats. Night and day. I've only got one thing to say—

DELMARIE. What's that Daddy?

DADDY. Santy Claus don't like little girls that's fightin' all the time, and if you two even think he's gonna bring you a bike or a dolly, you're gonna have to straighten up and fly right.

(AVA and DELMARIE start laughing.)

DELMARIE. I suppose you're right about that.

AVA. Well it won't be the first time we've pissed Santa Claus off.

DADDY. I know I am. I'm headin' over to town for a few things from the hardware—I sure could use some helpers and I might stop for some ice cream.

AVA. I'm too busy with work. Maybe later.

DADDY. Suit yourself. You comin'?

DELMARIE. I suppose a drive would do me good. Yes, sounds lovely.

DADDY. I'll just get my coat.

DELMARIE. Don't you go near that closet. I'll get it.

(She crosses and enters closet.)

DADDY. Why is everybody so damn bossy around this house? My house. I built this house.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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