

SKELETONS

A Play in Two Acts

by

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THE ACTION takes place in CARL RILEY'S condo in Atlanta, Georgia; it is a living room/kitchen combination.

The action necessitates an US hallway, a main entrance with an adjacent window, a closet in an US wall in clear view of the audience, kitchen appliances, typing table and living room furnishings.

The time is the present. It's August.

ACT I

Scene One: About 9:00 p.m.

Scene Two: Moments later

ACT II

Early the following day

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CARL RILEY is forty-eight years old. He is brother to BUDDY and ALICE.

BUDDY RILEY, a Gulf War Veteran, seems more a child than a man of forty. BUDDY is beautiful when he smiles.

ALICE RILEY, a tall, thin, elegant woman of fifty.

EVA RILEY, a plump woman of forty, is BUDDY's wife.

Production Notes

This script is not intended to be played for comic effect, and although some of the action seems farcical, the comedy of *Skeletons* should arise from the honest intentions of its characters, or clearly be the intent of the characters to be comic.

The action of the play necessitates practical light sources on the set: track lighting with separate controls, a bar over-hang light, and track lighting in the kitchen.

The sound of wind chimes should be a mix of practical off stage chimes and recorded chimes. The sound of chimes should range from incidental small flutters to almost rhapsodic swells.

BUDDY is not retarded and must not be played as such. He should speak normally. His thought processes are slow, and he becomes easily confused and upset. There should be an earnestness and vulnerability about BUDDY which make us love him.

EVA must not be overplayed; likewise, her costume should not be a visual joke. EVA is a real human being who happens to be a comic, even in her worst moments.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Carl sits on the sofa arranging flowers at the coffee table. He glances toward the open doorway of the apartment's main entrance. Off stage there is the sound of a plastic garbage pail hitting the ground. He moves quickly toward the door.

CARL

Buddy?

Buddy enters struggling with the pail

Close the door.

BUDDY

(without moving)

Huh?

CARL

Did you spill it again?

BUDDY

What?

CARL

The garbage. You spilt it last time.

BUDDY

I remember it. I made a mess last time.

CARL

Shut the door. Thank you. Buddy think. Did you make a mess out there again? There's crap on the rim, Buddy. Look at it.

(tapping on the pail to direct his brother's attention to it)

Did you spill the garbage again?

BUDDY

I was careful this time. I didn't spill it again.

CARL

Good boy.

Buddy smiles.

Clean it up.

Buddy simply smiles and observes the flower arranging; he does not comprehend.

Buddy, wipe off the rim, please.

BUDDY

What ya'doin?

CARL

(tapping the rim with the stem clippers)

Now.

(slamming clippers down)

What did I just say to you? Buddy, are you listening to me? Hey, are you listening?

BUDDY

I'm listening.

CARL

I want you to get a paper towel, wet it, and then wipe off the goddamned rim of the garbage can. You didn't hear one word I just said – close your mouth.

BUDDY

--I'm sorry.

CARL

(handing Buddy a pile of stems and leaves)

Throw this away for big bubba, please—but put in a plastic liner—

Buddy does not comprehend

put in a baggie--

(tapping the rim of the pail)

in here—put a baggie in here before you throw it away.

BUDDY

Flowers?

CARL

Yeah, now go on will you?

BUDDY

(moving toward the kitchen)

I'll . . . I'll put this in the garbage.

CARL

(placing the bowl of flowers in an exact position on the coffee table)

You do that. Don't forget the baggie. Christ.

BUDDY

Carl. Don't be mad with me.

CARL

Buddy, just do it.

Buddy hurries to the kitchen muttering "just do it" under his breath. As Buddy hunts out a plastic liner from under the sink, Carl puts the clippers away and wets a paper towel, then watches for a moment as his younger brother wrestles with the stems, leaves and the large liner.

BUDDY

Oh, shoot.

CARL

(wiping the crap off the rim)

Hey, relax. Relax, Buddy boy. It's OK, I'm not angry with you.

(turning Buddy to face him)

You've been just fine today. It's just that Alice is going to be here any minute and I need you to help me.

BUDDY

(smiling)

Alice.

CARL

Do you remember her?

BUDDY

I remember.

(The leaves and stems fall from his hands to the floor.)
Oh, shoot!

CARL
(pushing Buddy away)
I just vacuumed in here, dammit!

BUDDY
(trying to help)
I'm sorry.

CARL
Shut up.

BUDDY
(as Carl finishes the chore)
You're mad.

CARL
I'm not mad—

BUDDY
You are.

CARL
(putting the garbage can away in the kitchen)
Look, dammit, I'm not mad. Alright?

BUDDY
(very hurt)
Not mad.

Buddy embraces him.

CARL
(gently freeing himself and moving Buddy to sit)
So. You remember Alice. O.K. What does she look like? What does she look like?

BUDDY
She's got blonde hair. I remember she's got blonde hair.

CARL
Blonde hair. Is that all you remember about her?

Buddy smiles and shakes his head "no"

What then?

BUDDY

She's older than me.

CARL

She's older than me too.

He goes to the type writer; places a stack of pages in a drawer.

BUDDY

You gonna' type now?

CARL

No writing tonight.

BUDDY

No tap tap tap –

CARL

You are spared the tap tap tap. Just straightening up,

Buddy smiles broadly. Carl tickles his brother, who loves the playfulness.

Do you remember how beautiful she was? Alice? Do you remember—

BUDDY

I sure do.

CARL

Well, she's probably toothless and fat by now.

BUDDY

Fat?

CARL

Yeah, fat. Christ, she's obese.

Buddy doesn't understand

She's very fat.

(imitating a "fat" person)

Fat.

BUDDY

(very entertained)

Oh. She's fat.

Buddy tries the imitation. Both men laugh. Buddy falls back on the sofa, very relaxed and at ease again. Carl quietly inspects the room.

CARL

Well . . . that about does it. Everything in this room is handsome with the exception of you—quite handsome. Alice will not be slumming tonight as she doubtless expects she will.

BUDDY

I need to go to the bathroom.

CARL

Well go, but take careful aim—oh, Buddy, listen. Listen. When you've finished in the bathroom, get into your PJ's—it's already past your bedtime. I'll be back to tuck you in. So scoot.

BUDDY

I'm scootin'.

CARL

If you weren't such an obedient idiot, I'd give you back to your wife.

Buddy starts off, Carl holds him for a moment.

Hey, look at me—you know when I'm joking don't you?

BUDDY

I got to go.

CARL

(giving him a push)

Go, go, go.

Buddy is gone. Carl listens for moment, then hurries to the closet and takes from it a large framed, almost life-size photograph of Rufus Riley, their father. He places the photo so that it directly faces the main entrance into the apartment. He then finds a goose neck lamp, switches on its light and slowly bends the neck of

the lamp until it's beam hits his father squarely in the face.

CARL

Hello Daddy.

A flush is heard from off and then a proud, "I remembered!"

Alice is coming tonight.

(He stares at the photo for a moment.)

Buddy? Buddy, how's it going back there?

(There is no reply.)

Buddy?

(He places a black drape over the photo.)

Buddy?

BUDDY

(off)

What?

CARL

For the love of—damn, do I have to come back there and see for myself?

BUDDY

(off)

I'm putting on my PJ's.

CARL

Good boy.

BUDDY

(wearing pajama bottoms only)

I'm puttin' them on. See?

CARL

I see. That's very good.

BUDDY

I'm thirsty.

CARL

No more—

BUDDY

--just a little bit.

CARL
No, way. You've had far too much to drink already.

BUDDY
What's that?

CARL
--off to bed with you, now--.

BUDDY
--It's—

CARL
It's nothing. Come on, I'll race you —

Buddy
--what is it?

CARL
(becoming very irritated)
Buddy forget the Goddamned thing! I told you to get in the bed—now do it.

BUDDY
I'm sorry.

CARL
Stop saying that.

BUDDY
You're mad with me.

CARL
Buddy!

Buddy covers his ears and falls to his knees as if to crawl.

Don't do that. I didn't yell! I didn't yell. Come on, get up.

Buddy rises with Carl's assistance.

Come on.

Buddy hugs Carl, who pats him reassuringly.

You all right now? You OK? Yeah? So, what are you going to do?
 (speaks as though this will be their secret.)
 Hey, it's after twenty-one hundred hours. And what are you gonna do?

BUDDY
 (in a playful whisper)

Go to bed.

CARL
 What a man, you remembered. Go on.

Carl watches Buddy cross to the hall. As Buddy is about to exit, he turns and flashes a happy smile.

Go on.

When Buddy is off, Carl hurriedly dims the lights, then puts a spool of filament away, picks up a wind chime he had repaired earlier and moves to the main entrance. He quickly dims a second set of lights and checks the lighting effect on the draped photo before exiting to hang the chimes.

Buddy quietly reenters. He walks slowly to the photo, pulls the black drape away, and lets it fall to the floor. He looks at the photo for several beats.

I don't like that.

BUDDY

Carl reenters; he is extremely cautious in approaching his brother.

Buddy.

CARL

No.

BUDDY

Buddy boy, it's getting late.

CARL

No!

BUDDY

Carl attempts to move him, but Buddy resists. Then suddenly, Buddy rushes hard against Carl, knocking him aside.

CARL

This is bad.

He extends a hand to his brother, but Buddy hides his hands behind his back.

Buddy, it's just a picture. He can't hurt you—look, I'll show you, it's just a picture—

BUDDY

(a screaming child)

I DON'T LIKE THAT. I DON'T LIKE THAT. I DON'T CARL.

CARL

For christsake, Buddy, give me a break—

BUDDY

(crawling)

I DON'T.

CARL

(quietly)

Listen to me, Buddy boy—shhh—you've got to calm down—what if Alice comes and see you like this?

As Carl tries to touch Buddy, he breaks away in a panicked attempt to reach the front door.

BUDDY

I WANNA GO OUTSIDE.

As Buddy reaches the door, Carl stops him cold with:

CARL

MAE!

BUDDY

I want—

CARL

I'll throw Mae away.

Leaving the front door ajar, Buddy charges, crying a plaintive "NO," but Carl meets his rush with a hard blow to the stomach. Buddy drops to his all-fours. Carl soothes as he helps his brother up and out of the room.

Come on, let's get up. Att'a boy. I'll never throw Mae away. "hush little baby don't you cry—" Mae's waiting for you right now—"Ya' daddy's gonna sing you a lullaby—" she's waiting in your room—"Daddy's gonna wipe away those tears, then he's gonna chase away ya' fears . . ."

Carl continues humming the melody until he and Buddy are off. A tinkle of wind chimes from outside blends with the humming off stage. A silhouette passes the window and Alice Riley appears in the doorway. She knocks. Carl sings off stage, "Hush little baby don't say a word, etc." She knocks again. The door which Buddy had left ajar swings fully open as a gust of wind chimes fills the apartment. Alice is drawn into the room by the familiar strains of the song. The photograph of her father catches her eye.

Carl appears from the hall. He holds a hypodermic syringe.

ALICE

Carl, is that you?

CARL

You don't recognize me?

ALICE

I can't see you—it's dark in here.

He brings up the lights at right. He is now partially lit. Alice smiles, glances left to find the control for the lights at left, then brings them up. She stares impishly at him, then moves to him.

You're looking good.

CARL

So do you—I mean, you too. Do you really think I look good?

ALICE

Is that for me?

CARL

What?

(disposes of the syringe)

I should look like hell—I've been plagued with all that ails mankind since the day you took off to become whatever it is . . . you have become.

He goes to the bar.

ALICE

Vodka.

CARL

(lifting a bottle)

Just for you.

Alice inspects the room, sees the flowers and chooses another route.

CARL

Staying over?

ALICE

(near the photo of their Father)

I'm not sure.

CARL

I can't help noticing your noticing Daddy.

ALICE

It would be difficult not to notice Daddy. You have my wind chimes?

CARL

Yes. You want them back?

ALICE

No.

CARL

Good. When I hear them, I'm reminded of you. I just today restrung one of them.

ALICE

How dear. Where's Buddy?

CARL

Buddy? He's taking a nap.

ALICE

Alright.

CARL

Alright? That's it?

ALICE

May I sit down?

He ushers her to the sofa.

CARL

You've been away a long time. You're not very curious.

They stare at each other for a moment; she smiles.

ALICE

A game of twenty questions just now, might shatter the veil of mystery you're working your ass off to create.

CARL

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Would you say this tribute to old Rufus does the expression justice? Damn. I forgot to have it dated. He was sixty-seven. The stroke made him look older, don't you think?

ALICE

When was that?

CARL

Figure it out.

(pause)

If you want to see Buddy, take your first left off the hall. Do that, Alice, and you'll save me several thousand words.

ALICE

Boy, Carl, that is a meaningful stare—one of the best I've ever seen you do. The first left?

CARL

That's correct.

She slowly rises and moves to go, stopping very close to Carl for a moment. She turns, eyes him coldly, then playfully pats his cheek. Carl doesn't know how to respond. Alice smiles and happily sails off.

Remembering the drinks, Carl hurries to the bar. He places Alice's drink near the bowl of flowers on the coffee table; He keeps his scotch and hurries to look off through the hallway.

The oven buzzer sounds. He takes a casserole out of the oven, the gets a plate of meat from the refrigerator. Alice reenters carrying an old stuffed doll. She goes to the kitchen where Carl is still busy and leans against the refrigerator as if to say, "I am unmoved by my off stage visit."

CARL

I hope you're still fond of steak and asparagus, and that three cheese casserole Mother used to make—her one accomplishment. As I remember, you loved it. It's said that one's taste changes every seven years. With a little luck, yours has made more than three complete cycles. You'll recognize the plates—I think you'll recognize them—I got them out of storage for this unanticipated occasion. The Golden Wheat pattern from the Biz detergent boxes—do you remember that?

ALICE

I never lost my taste for cheese.

CARL

(pause)

Good. I made cheesecake. My version of the fattened calf in honor of my prodigal sister.

There is a brief silence.

Shall I put the steaks on now?

ALICE

I'm not hungry.

(She finds her vodka)

Is this mine?

CARL

If it's vodka, it's yours. I never drink that crap and Buddy's denied alcohol altogether.

She moves the flowers to the far end of the table, and takes a handkerchief from her purse.

ALICE

(blowing her nose)

Pardon me.

CARL

He was how old when you left? Mmm . . . fifteen? Yes, twenty-five and fifteen equal forty. . . figure it out, Alice, he's forty years old now. You really don't know that man lying in there with his mouth hanging open, so why the hell are you crying?

ALICE

It's my allergy, Carl. The flowers.

CARL

(fallen)

Of course.

(He moves the flowers.)

ALICE

What's wrong with him?

CARL

(regarding the photo of Daddy)

Have you guessed when this was taken?

ALICE

Why don't you tell me—I don't have a calculator.

CARL

I made this shot myself on December the 31st, as the 20th Century came to a screaming halt, and our Father passed through the fiery gates into everlasting hell. He's very life-like, wouldn't you say, or do you remember enough about your loving father to venture an opinion?

ALICE

Why are his eyes open?

CARL

He died like that. For once I was able to look him in the eye and he couldn't look away.

(pause)

Alice, why are you here?—

ALICE

--Is Buddy ill?—

CARL

(putting her coat away)

--I mean it was a bit of a shock when you phoned. After almost twenty-five years of no letters, no calls, no visits—just that one note from New York right after you left.

ALICE

I thought I might be catching you off guard,
(indicating the photo)
but . . .

CARL

I've had the old man framed for a long time—in the event How did you find us?

ALICE

I phoned your publisher.

CARL

Which one of those assholes gave you my number?

ALICE

I promised the asshole I'd never tell. I'm surprised you didn't have Daddy stuffed.

CARL

Too expensive.

ALICE

What's next little brother?

CARL

Why are you here?

ALICE

You are my family, and I missed you. How's that?

CARL

That's a crock. How did you know Buddy was with me?

ALICE

(She checks her watch.)

I received a peculiar phone call from a peculiar woman who called herself Eva Riley. She said she was married to Buddy.

CARL

(pause)

I see.

ALICE

She wanted to know where you had taken her husband.

CARL

And I suppose the irrational slut wanted money.

ALICE

I told her that I had no idea what she was talking about and then she, yes, asked for money. She sounded as though she knew me.

CARL

Surely you couldn't have forgotten little Eva Swenson.

ALICE

I'm afraid I have.

CARL

The only daughter of Leesville, Mississippi's only dime store owner?

ALICE

Oh, my God, not that chubby little girl we used to terrorize?

CARL

Yes.

ALICE

No! How could he?

CARL

He could and did—just across the Mississippi-Alabama line about two years after you deserted us.

ALICE
Deserted?

CARL
Is there another word for it?

ALICE
Yes.

(pause)
I have no intention of defending myself to you. Is that understood?

(pause)
Eva Swenson . . . Little Eva . . . what was that mean game we used to play with her?

CARL
You remember "God and the Devil?"

ALICE
Yes! Oh yes. We were very ugly to that little girl.

CARL
She was a very ugly little girl.

They both have a good laugh
It was fun.

ALICE
Yes it was, wasn't it? I hope she's forgotten all that. She never could figure out which of us was God and who was the Devil. I hope we didn't damage her spiritually.

CARL
Something did.

ALICE
They married two years after I left? Was she pregnant? Am I an Auntie?

CARL
Yes, no and, no-- apparently the woman is impregnable.

ALICE
Good lord, Buddy married at seventeen? He must have taken after Mother's side of the family. Did they live in a trailer?

CARL

Yes, they took Nanna's old trailer until Buddy left

ALICE

He left her?

CARL

Eva developed a really insane hatred of, let's see what did she call Muslims and all desert people . . . ? Ragheads. She practically pushed Buddy into the Army. The day he left, tears streaming down his cheeks, he solemnly promised her he'd kill as many of those "Dot Heads" as he could. He never could keep his epithets straight.

ALICE

Touching.

Carl begins to laugh.

What?

CARL

Just before he flew out in 91, the army let him come home on leave—it was Christmas—Little Eva had been screwing around a lot even before he left—but she really did it this time. She had a go at the Leesville Police Department in the basement of the courthouse, no less.

Alice is amused.

We didn't laugh then. Buddy thought it was his fault. Poor stupid Buddy was preparing to protect Eva from the "Dot Heads" while she stayed home humping every man, boy and dog in the county.

ALICE

This is fiction, isn't it?

CARL

She gets Buddy's disability check every month—all she needs so don't let little Eva ruffle your autonomy, sis.

ALICE

I won't .

(examines the doll)

I had forgotten about this doll. Mama made it for me, didn't she?

CARL

It was her gift to you on your . . . fourteenth birthday. You were outraged.

ALICE
(tossing the doll aside)

That's right.

CARL
So, Mama took it off your shelf and gave it to Buddy. He always thought she made it for him. I suppose having Mae—that's what he calls her—it didn't hurt so much that Mama never gave a crap about him.

ALICE
Poor little Buddy.

CARL
(takes the doll)
After Eva's stunt at the court house, Buddy stayed over with me in our old room. I happened to spot Mae in the bottom of his trunk. I asked how Mae liked the Army. We didn't talk any more that night. Of course his thing for Mae doesn't embarrass him now.

ALICE
Are you going to tell me why?

CARL
He left the US in January 91 and by February he was a POW. There was a tank battle near Basra. He was injured. His head. You may have seen him on TV—he was video taped delivering a prepared statement—I have a copy somewhere—his head all wrapped up like a mummy.

ALICE
I had no idea. When was this?

CARL
You don't remember the Gulf War?

ALICE
Vaguely.

CARL
You and the rest of this fucking country.

ALICE
How long was he held?

CARL
He was missing for a few weeks. They released him in March.

ALICE

Oh! For God's sake—that's all? You made it sound like he was a real prisoner—for years--

CARL

It was long enough!

(pause)

He lived through it. Less than half of the Gulf War POW's did. The poor baby just wasn't strong enough to survive coming home. Since I'm certain the long version wouldn't hold your interest, here's the short one: He was never right—you know that. But when he came back something broke, snapped. Now he sleeps with a doll name Mae cuddled in his arms and most of the time he can't remember his own name. I'd better put her back before he misses her.

Carl exits though the hallway. Alice lights a cigarette. She checks her watch, then looks toward the window; as she starts to look out, Carl returns—this stops her.

CARL

Alice, I went to great trouble to have Daddy ready for you. I'm sorry he made such a small splash.

ALICE

(attempting to follow his change of mood)

I am sorry too.

CARL

Not even a ripple?

ALICE

A ripple? I'd say so.

CARL

You look like Mama with that cigarette—put it out, please.

She puts out the cigarette.

Hell, what kind of host am I anyway? I forgot the hors d'oeuvres.

(He places a tray of hors d'oeuvres on the table before her)

You look as though you haven't eaten a bite since the last time I saw you and I expect you to make up for it tonight.

ALICE

Are you and Buddy hiding from Eva? Is it necessary?

CARL
 (focused on the tray)
 Yes, but it does make caring for a halfwit more interesting.

ALICE
 Buddy must at least be company for you.

CARL
 Maybe I just couldn't swallow the idea of his being locked in his room or even better, tucked neatly between white sheets in some V.A. hospital. You're not eating.

ALICE
 I'm not hungry.

CARL
 Not hungry?

ALICE
 Sorry.

CARL
 No problem. Well, have you been happy? Come on, tell me things about you—have you been happy? Successful?

ALICE
 I think so, yes. You are a writer?

CARL
 Yes.

ALICE
 What do you write?

CARL
 You haven't read any of my work? Not one of my novels? I might have known.

ALICE
 I'm not sure-- do you use a feminine pen name?

CARL
 I use my name. CR Riley. No photo on the jacket.
 (He pours another drink.)
 If you want a refill, you know where the bar is.

ALICE

I'll pick up a CR Riley novel as soon as I get back to New York.

CARL

Forget it—

ALICE

--don't be a maudlin. Big sister didn't know that you'd been published until little Eva told her. Romance novels? Can that be true?

CARL

You and Mrs. Riley must have had one hell of a chit-chat.

ALICE

She's a prolific conversationalist.

CARL

The woman has only ten words in her active vocabulary! Well, what did you think I'd been doing all these years—teaching English at Leesville High?

Alice

That's what you were doing when I left. Hell, even that was surprising—you never struck me as being particularly literate. How was I supposed to know you'd become a writer? And of Romance novels!? Really?

CARL

I stayed in my room writing all through high school—you know that. Of course it is possible you never noticed!

ALICE

Forgive me. I never knew you took yourself seriously—as a writer. I guess you'll tell me you've won the Pulitzer?

CARL

I've published seven novels and I don't know how many short stories—my paperbacks are at all the news stands, my short stories in women's magazines! My God, don't you read anything?

ALICE

No, I'm a literary midget! I've never read a romance novel. Do you have copies here? I'll start reading right now, for Chrissake!

Carl takes several books from a shelf and dumps them in her lap.

CARL

Here. With the author's compliments. I make a living at it. Why the hell shouldn't I take myself seriously?

ALICE

I have hurt your feelings.

CARL

Frankly I don't give a crap if you read my stuff or not. It's all a lot of cheap hack work anyhow.

ALICE

(baby talk)

I'm sorry, Carl.

CARL

Why did you come here? You could have asked about little Eva over the phone or sent a questionnaire for God's sake—why the hell did you come?

ALICE

If we don't settle into a lighter, more cheerful rapport—soon, I will leave.

CARL

I'm sorry.

ALICE

But before we become too cheerful, there's a matter we might want to get out of the way.

CARL

Oh?

ALICE

Would you say that Eva was a dependable person?

CARL

What do you mean?

ALICE

I mean is she true to her word?

CARL

Why are you asking these questions?

ALICE

She . . . should be here

(checks watch)

Soon.

CARL

Here in Atlanta?

ALICE

Here is this apartment.

CARL

Tonight?

ALICE

Uhm humm. I thought I should tell you before she arrives.

CARL

You are a craftier bitch than ever.

ALICE

Is that what you think? Really? Carl, I think you're a far craftier bitch than I am. Daddy to greet me, Buddy laid out like a corpse—the hurt, martyred looks, the bull shit. By now one might have thought your form would have improved.

CARL

Buddy's not much of a challenge. I don't get much practice. Why in hell's that woman coming here?

Alice

Is all that trash about Buddy true?

CARL

Yes.

ALICE

And Eva?

CARL

Yes.

ALICE

(she laughs)

Oh, well, that's too bad. Eva claims she wants her husband back. Sorry, but I suppose you'll have to deal with it. How long have you been hiding our little brother from his little Eva?

CARL

(peering through the window curtains)

Six months in Memphis, almost two years in Mobile—how she found us there I'll never know—and then here. Going on fourteen years. She made a horrible scene at Daddy's funeral. I had checked Buddy into the VA hospital here when I went back home for the dying and all that followed. I wouldn't tell her where he was or where we lived and she clocked me over the head with her purse. You don't know how much I detest that woman.

(He locks the door.)

ALICE

Are you afraid of her?

CARL

Eva's not the girl you remember—she grew up. Badly. Like a hoard of locusts, she's mindless and devastating. Sicking her on me may seem a marvelous joke to you, but you have no idea what you may have done to Buddy.

ALICE

So what? I don't know him. Remember?

Carl is silenced for a moment by her coldness.

CARL

--You called my publisher after the slut phoned you?

ALICE

That's right; therefore, I must have called Eva back and set you up? That is what I did, but—

CARL

--how could you do a thing like that without consulting me?

ALICE

I made a mistake.

CARL

I'll phone a cab for you.

Carl flips through a Rolodex

ALICE

Is that a Rolodex?

CARL
Yes, what of it?

ALICE
Nothing.

CARL
And this is a dial phone and that thing over there is a typewriter!
(He dials)

ALICE
I rented a car. Besides, my plane doesn't leave for another three hours or so and I loathe sitting around airports.

Carl replaces the receiver.

A precautionary measure. I had hoped things would go better than they have—

CARL
--let's see, how much time did you allow yourself to bury me—

ALICE
Oh, good lord!

CARL
So, your plane leaves in a few hours, little Eva should be here momentarily—no, you wouldn't want to miss all the fun. Hope it'll be worth it—you'll be getting back to New York at an unearthly hour.

ALICE
Carl, do you see that overnight bag? People don't carry them unless they at least hope to stay overnight, dammit!

CARL
You are an incredible liar.

ALICE
Is that wounded all-knowing look supposed to shame me? You were so ready to do battle when I walked through that door that you didn't notice that I came white flag-in-hand. I didn't come here to pick up where we left off. May we please stop all this?

CARL
Are you being sincere?

ALICE
(convincingly upset)

Yes.

CARL
You came white flag-in-hand?

ALICE
And you have yet to give me an opportunity to wave it. Carl, it took a lot of courage for me to call you last night, but it took a hell of a lot more to walk in here. And you—you . . . Christ, I can't start this now. Oh, hell.

(looking at the photo)

Really, do you resent me so much that you could be this cruel? Or are you crazier now? In spite of everything I loved that bastard, I really did.

(becoming more upset)

Living with the two of you was like living with leeches—if I'd stayed you'd have sucked my very being from me. Dammit! I didn't ask for all that Carl.

(She begins to cry)

CARL
Are you still being sincere?

ALICE
Yes, for Chrissake!

CARL
I've really upset you?

ALICE
Upset me? Oh, yes.
(She cries bigger.)

Oh, God, yes. Carl, please, no more meanness—no more meanness, please.

CARL
Stop that. Don't do that-

ALICE
Like hell I won't—

CARL
--it was stupid and childish of me, OK?

ALICE
Very childish. Very stupid.

CARL

(touching her)
Alice . . .

ALICE

(saving herself, pulls out of it with extraordinary quickness)
Silly me. Silly, silly me.

Alice blows her nose. Carl eyes her
suspiciously.

CARL

Yes . . . silly you...

ALICE

(with an impish smile)
No . . . silly you.
(pause)
I wanted to run screaming out of this apartment when I saw Buddy.

CARL

I get that urge several times a day.

Alice laughs at this, then:

ALICE

Carl, is Mother . . . ?

CARL

. . . alive?

Alice nods, "yes", while trying to keep a straight
face.

CARL

No.
(pause)
She smoked herself to death.

ALICE

Poor thing.

CARL

Yes, smoked like a ham—there was no need to embalm her.

Their feigned sadness melts into a burst of indulgent laughter.

ALICE

(gasping for breath)

Stop. Carl, stop.

(gaining control)

We're being horrible—shameful. Stop it! It reminds me of that night we sneaked out after—no, it was an afternoon, but it was dark wasn't it? A Sunday?

CARL

Yes. We took a quilt to the garage.

ALICE

I ripped my nightgown crawling out of my window. You couldn't stop laughing. You were delirious, and I was terrified that Daddy would hear us.

CARL

You wanted Daddy to hear us.

ALICE

(after a brief pause)

Then you became angry because—

CARL

--you wanted him to hear us.

ALICE

May I continue? You became angry because your clothes were wet, and I wouldn't let you run back to the house for pajamas.

CARL

I was indignant—after all, you'd put on a nightgown. But then it started to rain harder—it had been raining!

ALICE

--of course, that's why it was dark—

CARL

--and I was wet. And I decided that I didn't want pajamas.

ALICE

Yes . . . we knew we were behaving badly . . . very badly, but, lord, how we laughed.

CARL

Until Buddy stumbled in all soaking wet and said, "What 'ya doin'?" He wasn't very bright even then.

ALICE

No. He really wasn't. Do you think maybe Daddy beat him senseless?

(pause)

We were so young.

CARL

I was so young.

ALICE

(almost seductively)

Have you ever wondered what we might have done if Buddy hadn't popped in and frightened us to death?

CARL

Yes, I've wondered about that.

ALICE

Hummm...how many siblings, do you suppose, do inextricable damage to themselves in the name of sexual curiosity—yearly, I mean. There's a statistic the World Almanac should look into. The annual number of acts of sibling . . .

CARL

Say it.

ALICE

We never did it.

CARL

So there's no reason to feel guilty.

ALICE

Who said anything about feeling guilty?

CARL

You don't feel any guilt?

ALICE

(after a pause)

I would have never gone through with it—surely you realize that.

CARL

I wasn't aware you had boundaries. Of course, it's just as well you left, since old Rufus was on the prowl.

(pause)

You always seemed uncomfortable when we were alone after that.

ALICE

I started classes at Leesville State, and then my job at the dress shop every afternoon—we had little in common after—

CARL

--but that was no reason to show no sisterly affection.

ALICE

I want to drop the subject.

CARL

You left me standing in the rain, and I didn't know why. I thought you'd come back for me, but you never did. You kept me at a cold, safe distance, after that. From that day until you left, I couldn't get close enough to say "I'm sorry" for whatever I did wrong, and then suddenly one morning your room was empty. No Alice.

(pause)

ALICE

Little Eva should have arrived by now.

CARL

No guilt?

ALICE

None.

CARL

Then let's prove it to ourselves—that there's no reason to feel guilty.

ALICE

That's unnecessary.

CARL

You're afraid.

ALICE

I'm being sincere again, Carl. It's unnecessary.

CARL

Look, let me kiss you—one time, just once. It's not an outrageous request. We're starting from page one—you've walked in white flag waving. I'm your brother and I love you—I kiss you. Is that unnatural?

ALICE

(laughing it off)

Yes.

CARL

Awe, come on. A quickie before the slut arrives. Let me express the brotherly affection I've never stopped feeling for you.

ALICE

That would be perverse.

CARL

I'll pester you to death if you don't relent.

ALICE

Oh, what the hell, I feel adventurous. But it had better be brotherly.

He kisses her forehead.

CARL

Now, was that perverse?

ALICE

Unnatural.

CARL

Good.

Carl suddenly takes her face in his hands and kisses her forcefully on the mouth. She struggles but Carl, laughing, holds her in the kiss. The two fall into a reclining position on the sofa—there is a brief silence, then, still in the kiss, they both go weak with laughter. Buddy enters with Mae.

BUDDY

What 'ya doin'?

ALICE

Oh God.

CARL

Buddy. This is your sister, Alice. Alice, you remember Buddy.

BUDDY

Hi.

There is an awkward silence. Buddy becomes painfully aware that he has put Alice off.

CARL

O.k., Buddy boy, you've met your big sister, now back into the ole sac.

BUDDY

You're not fat.

ALICE

Thank you.

CARL

Alice, why don't you walk Buddy back to his room and tuck him in?

ALICE

I'd rather not.

CARL

Don't be shy Alice.

(to Buddy)

Alice is shy, isn't that cute?

(Carl glares at her)

Buddy, why don't you ask Alice to tuck you in?

(He pushes Buddy toward her)

Ask Alice to tuck you in.

BUDDY

Tuck me in.

CARL

Please.

BUDDY

Please.

ALICE

Carl, he's wet himself.

CARL

He's used to that. Go on, tuck him in, it's kind of fun. You came here for fun.

ALICE

You can't let him sleep like that.

CARL

Change him. After all it's your turn.

ALICE

You're embarrassing him.

CARL

Nonsense. Buddy, you're not embarrassed, are you?

BUDDY

No.

ALICE

That's enough!

BUDDY

(covering his ears)

No.

ALICE

What's the matter?

CARL

He doesn't like loud noises. It's OK. Go ahead.

ALICE

(carefully approaching him)

Come along, Buddy, I'll be happy to tuck you in. Wet.

She tentatively takes Buddy's arm.

BUDDY

(again notices the photo of his father)

--I don't like that.

ALICE

Neither do I.

BUDDY

(rushing to Carl)

I don't. I don't like that! I DON'T LIKE THAT.

ALICE

What's wrong with him—what's he doing?

BUDDY

I DON'T. I DON'T.

CARL

(to Alice)

Hand me that drape!

ALICE

What drape?

CARL

That one!

BUDDY

(avoiding Carl, he rushes toward Alice)

No.

ALICE

Carl!

BUDDY

(becoming more physically uncontrolled.)

NO. I DON'T LIKE THAT.

ALICE

(snatching for the drape as BUDDY moves closer)

Carl, do something, I'm frightened.

CARL

(attempting to hold BUDDY)

Just cover the damn thing. Hurry!

Buddy, crying "NO" throws Carl to the floor. Alice screams; Buddy runs headlong into a table. Alice screams again. Frightened by the crash and screams, Buddy runs for the hallway covering his ears. As he passes Alice, she screams again. Shocked by the shriek, Buddy turns and swats at the source of the awful noise.

ALICE

Make him stop, dammit!

Buddy continues to swat at Alice. Carl attempts a neck and arm lock; he is unsuccessful. Alice breaks away yelling, taking the drape with her. Buddy, now completely hysterical, follows Alice swatting her with Mae. Carl is thrown to the floor again. Buddy begins to choke Alice.

ALICE

PLEASE. PLEASE. HELP ME.

Carl attempts to pull Buddy away. Carl, panicked, hits him hard several times. Alice has gone silent. Carl, in desperation takes a bookend from the bookcase and delivers a controlled blow to Buddy's head. There is no effect. As a last resort, Carl hits Buddy too hard with the object. Buddy falls, crawls a few feet, then passes out.

CARL

Dear God . . . oh, dear God. I am so sorry.
 (to Alice, who is attempting to get up)
 Are you all right?

ALICE

(gasping for breath)

What do you mean am I all right! You let him choke me--Jesus, Carl, my neck!

CARL

You don't suppose I really hurt him.

ALICE

I hope you did—

CARL

(checking Buddy)

I'm serious.

ALICE

So am I.

Carl begins to shake Buddy and call his name. There is a knock at the door; Carl doesn't notice. Alice, however, reacts to the knocking. She moves to the door to listen—as she does this, Buddy raises his head slightly. It is important that the audience sees this and that Alice does not. Carl covers Buddy's mouth with his hand. Buddy is out again; his head again rests on the floor.

CARL

I Did. I can't get a pulse. I killed him, Alice.

ALICE

Are you sure?

CARL

(softly)
Buddy? Hey, Buddy?

There is a loud knock at the door.

ALICE

Listen.

CARL

I killed him. Hey, baby, Buddy—

ALICE

--Carl, will you listen!

The knocking has become pounding.

CARL

Shit. Oh, shit.

ALICE

My god, this is all so sick.
(She lights a cigarette.)
What are you going to do?

CARL

She'll look for him. Help me.

ALICE
I didn't kill him—you did.

CARL
Help me, Goddammit!

ALICE
What do you want me to do?

CARL
Get his other arm.

They drag Buddy to the closet.
Open the friggin' closet.

ALICE
Alright, I'll open the friggin' closet.

Buddy is deposited in the closet; the pounding at the door has continued; the door buzzer also blasts insistently.

ALICE
I'm going to the back of the apartment. I don't want that woman to know I'm still here.

EVA
(kicking the door)
YA'LL LET ME IN.

CARL
There's a TV set in my room—turn it on.

ALICE
We've been watching television?

CARL
(as she goes)
What else would normal siblings do together at night?

EVA
(now banging on the window)
BUDDY!?

Coming!

CARL

The sound of a Western is heard from off.
Carl checks Buddy.)

ALICE
(returning)
She's not going away, Carl. You'd better let her in. What are you doing?

CARL
(closes the closet door and hurries to the kitchen sink)
I'm trying to wash this blood off.

Alice, unseen by Carl, who is busy washing
"blood" from his hands, goes to the spot where
Buddy was struck, checks the floor.

EVA
I hear ya'! What the hell's goin' on in there? Caaaaar!

CARL
(At window)
Oh, lord, I might have known she'd set up a howl.

Alice quickly peeks into the closet.

CARL
Stay out of there!

Alice does so, but smiles unseen by Carl as she
leans against the door, as he straightens the
room.

EVA
(still off stage, a new tactic)
Buddy? Buddy, honey?

CARL
Alright, I'm ready.

He moves to open the door Alice spots her
purse, and hurries to get it.

ALICE
Wait.

Before Alice can exit, Carl flings open the door.

CARL

Eva, I—

EVA

(entering)

Cut the shit, Carl, where's my husband?

(Sudden Black Out)

ACT ONE

Scene Two

Eva sits on the sofa crying and eating the cheese hors d'oeuvres. Alice strokes Eva's hair; Carl moves nervously about. It should be clear through much of the following action that Carl is preoccupied with Buddy's being in the closet, and that Eva is preoccupied with finding out what is *really* happening, and Alice is enjoying it all.

CARL

When Alice arrived, you see, she mentioned that you might drop by. We had no idea that Buddy was listening.

ALICE

Hush now, it's going to be all right.

EVA

He just run off? Just run off?

CARL

Yeah . . . I guess what he heard upset him. Honestly, Eva, we did everything we could to stop him—

EVA

--I never knew he felt that way about me.
(She cries louder.)

CARL

Well . . . the police are doing all they can to locate him, but if what they said is true . . .

EVA

What?

CARL

They're afraid . . .

EVA

Of what?

CARL

He may have fallen into the Chattahoochee.

EV
What is that?

CARL
A river.

EVA
That's just . . . just . . . incredible.

ALICE
Yes . . . Yes . . . it is.

CARL
Eva, why don't you look on the bright side?

EVA
You mean the life insurance? Buddy can't swim a lick, ya'know. Ho, somebody take these cheese things away from me. Miss Piggy's 'bout to bust.

ALICE
Gladly.
(takes tray)

EVA
Ya'll know what? I really wanted to show Buddy that I could be a good wife to'im, an' I would have too. Shit, you know, I'll always wonder what he thought of me at the moment of his death.

CARL
It isn't a definite yet.

EVA
Oh, oh yeah---but ya' know? It just might be the best thing for him---bein' dead an' all. I mean, you know, since his mind got all missed up an' all.

ALICE
Yes, of course.

CARL
You're handling the whole thing beautifully.

EVA
Well you sweet thing. Carl, honey, I'm sorry I was bitchy with you a while ago. But you know? I was in a real state---Ya'll didn't hear me knockin' an' I thought I heard---I don't know what I thought I heard! Ha!

CARL

Think nothing of it. I'm sorry too.

EVA

Alice don't have to say she's sorry. Alice you was always so nice. But just think, if he's alive, ya' know? An' I'm just sure he is—we'll go home an' start all over. Be so happy.

CARL

You do realize that he's regressed even more since you last saw him—that he can't take care of himself at all?

EVA

Not at all?

CARL

Christ, he can't go to the bathroom alone or brush his own teeth.

EVA

You don't say.

CARL

He couldn't be trusted. More than once the poor baby peed in the sink and stuck his toothbrush up his—

ALICE

What Carl is emphasizing is the fact that Buddy has reverted even more . . . to his childhood.

Eva's anger begins to surface.

CARL

No sex drive. Absolutely none.

EVA

Hummm . . . Carl, I know you think that ought to mean somethin' to me, but it don't. Now, what's the jig?

CARL

The jig?

EVA

You know—when the jig is up? Catch on? Well, when that jig comes up, an' I know damn well it will, what's it gonna' be? I got ya' number, Carl, honey.

(She awaits a reply, tapping her nails on the coffee table.)

I reckon we ought 'a call up the cops an' see what's goin' on.

CARL

(more to Alice than Eva)

And then there will be all those questions.

EVA

Yeah?

ALICE

Yes. That's true. If it's all the same to you, Carl, I'd rather not be here when that happens.

CARL

You'd do that wouldn't you?

ALICE

--it's just that my being here would make it all the more complex; the police don't know I'm here—would it matter if they never know?

Eva has grown more suspicious; she moves about the room looking for clues.

CARL

I suppose not. Anyway, EVA, you'll be here won't you?

EVA

I don't know. Let me think on it. Where's the restroom?

CARL

Down the hall.

EVA

(going)

Thanks.

ALICE

(getting the overnight bag)

It was great seeing you again, Carl. Good luck with this.

CARL

Listen—listen. She's searching the bedrooms. She doesn't believe us.

ALICE

Who would? I'm leaving.

CARL

You can't.

(He takes the case.)

When the cops ask questions, and it's only a matter of time before they do, I'm going to tell them everything.

ALICE

If you're going to tell the police what happened, then why are you putting on this silly act for that disgusting woman?

CARL

Believe me, if she's still around when the dam breaks, she can make it a lot harder. She's playing it cool right now.

ALICE

This may sound crass, but the Chattahoochee River idea might work.

CARL

What do you mean?

ALICE

Report him missing in the morning. He obviously wandered off during the night and . . .

CARL

--you're not suggesting—

ALICE

What difference would it make?

CARL

Is that how you felt about all of us?

ALICE

I'm tired, Carl, don't press for an honest answer.

CARL

OK, OK, we'll dump him in the river.

ALICE

You'll dump him.

CARL

I buried the rest of them by myself. This is one funeral you'll attend, sis.

ALICE

(laughing)

I'm not trudging off to any damn river in the middle of the night.

CARL

(stamping his foot)

Oh, yes you will.

ALICE

How manly you say that. With such masculine authority.

CARL

Don't push me.

ALICE

(with a howl)

You're positively funny. What are you going to do, force me?

Carl, really angry now, wrenches Alice's arm behind her back.

CARL

Yes.

ALICE

Stop it. Don't be so damned dramatic!

CARL

Do you remember—

ALICE

--ah, that hurts, dammit—

CARL

--when we were kids and I twisted your arm?

ALICE

Yes, now let me go!

CARL

I once threatened to twist it off. Remember!

ALICE

Yes! Because I laughed at you. Still compensating, *little* brother? Ahh!
Carl, you're really hurting me!

CARL

This time I'm going to twist it off--

Alice yelps in pain

-- if you don't promise—

ALICE

--don't—

CARL

--you'll help me!

ALICE

NO.

He twists her arm with a sharp upward movement, forcing her to scream, "I'LL GO." A flush is heard from off stage.

CARL

The slut's off the pot. Pull yourself together. Smoke your cigarette and look like our ugly Mother.

ALICE

You're such a man—you make me melt.

CARL

Isn't this fun?

ALICE

(getting a cigarette)

You're sick, Carl. You're a freak.

CARL

Do something with your hair. You look like Medusa.

ALICE

Sick freak!

CARL

MEDUUUUUSSSSSAA

ALICE

FREEEEEEAAAAAK

EVA

(entering)

Well. I thought the whole thing over, an' ya' know what?

She awaits a reply.

CARL

(finally)

What?

EVA

I didn't bring a nightgown or a change a' panties or nothin'.

CARL

Awe.

EVA

An' ya' know what else?

She again awaits a reply. Carl nudges Alice.

ALICE

What else?

EVA

I don't have enough money ta' get home.

Eva giggles as she again awaits a reply. Carl and Alice stare at her for a moment.

So, I don't know what I'm gonna do.

CARL

She's not getting a cent from me.

EVA

Well, Carl, I'll pay ya' back. You always was a tight-assed-penny-pincher.

CARL

It's a tight-assed-penny-pincher who has Buddy's disability checks deposited into your account every month!? What the hell do you do with it?

EVA

Tight-tight-assed!

CARL

Did you ever get a job?

EVA

I'm lookin'.

CARL

Alice will be happy to lend you the money.

(to Alice)

After all, you've been spared up until now.

EVA

(smiling brilliantly at Alice)

Oh, Alice, you're not a stingy girl, I can tell by lookin' at you.

ALICE

How much?

EVA

Hundred, hundred fifty--two hundred—oh, whatever you got.

(She sees the bottles on the bar.)

Carl, you got anything to drink, or are you tight-assed with the booze too?

ALICE

(replacing her billfold in her purse)

I thought you were leaving.

EVA

(with a sparkling smile)

I will.

CARL

If you can wait, I'll get you a *to-go* cup.

EVA

(Pouring a tall bourbon in a glass)

Bitchy, bitchy. What time is it?

CARL

Do you need a cab to the airport?

ALICE

Almost ten.

EVA

I don't fly. What's the matter with ya'll . Ya' look so gloomified.

CARL
Your husband is dead.

EVA
Oh yeah?

CARL
The police phoned while you were in the john.

EVA
Oh. He's dead for sure?
(She looks to Alice for assurance; Alice simply smokes.)
What'd they say?

CARL
He's dead.

EVA
(forcing grief)
Oh my lord! Oh my lord!

CARL
Two witnesses identified Buddy as the man who fell into the river.

ALICE
And how'd they do that?

Eva looks at Carl; they both look to Alice.
Alice smiles sweetly.

CARL
They recognized him from the snapshot I gave the police. I told you that I gave them a photograph, remember?

ALICE
I don't remember that at all. I do remember something about your saying that Little EVA was a—now what were the words—oh, yes, you said that Little Eva is an irrational slut. Right?

EVA
Wa-What?

ALICE
For once I must admit I agree with you—

CARL

--what are you doing—

ALICE

--Eva, you are in every sense of the word irrational—at least that's what you'd have us believe, and if what Carl said about your having a go with the Leesville police force is true, then you are most certainly a slut.

EVA

I don't know what to say exactly, but I think I'm gonna be pissed.

CARL

Alice, the one-armed Medusa.

EVA

Carl, too bad you never had the balls to say all that shit to my face.

Eva hits him on the arm, then quickly withdraws ready for a fight.

CARL

(nursing his arm)

Ouch! Goddammit, Eva, that really hurt!

ALICE

Carl have balls?

EVA

Hardly touched you, big ole sissy.

CARL

Alice was the sole inheritor of balls in our family. Alice, the one-armed Medusa with balls.

ALICE

Eva, how stupid are you, really?

EVA

Stupid enough to ride my ass blue on a bus all the way from Mississippi just to have my reputation smeared by a castrated turkey and my mind attacked by a what—ever—it—was—with balls!

ALICE

Would you like to know what really happened to your husband?

EVA

I knew it! I knew it! Ya'll were lyin' to me! HA! The jig is up!

CARL

Alice, have you gone mad?

EVA

Where is he! Where is he! Carl, did you commit by baby?

CARL

I told you the slut would make a mess of everything.

EVA

Don't call me that, you fairy!

ALICE

Carl, is it true? I always thought it, but—

CARL

(slaps Alice's face)

One armed—

Alice slaps Carl back immediately

EVA

At'a girl!

ALICE

How dare you.

(slaps him again)

EVA

Do it again—I love it!

Carl slaps Eva. The slap is too hard—ugly.

You SOB. You son-of-a-rotten-mother-ruttin'-pig!

He dodges Eva who is swinging wildly.

Look dammit! I'm nobody's fool! Where the hell's my Buddy at?

ALICE

Your Buddy's dead. Carl killed him. Carl, tell this woman how you made her a widow—she has a right to know.

EVA
Yeah, I have a right to know.

ALICE
Isn't this fun?

EVA
I'm callin' the cops.

ALICE
Splendid idea.

EVA
My God, Is this a dial phone!?

Carl pushes Eva from the phone.

Hey, boy!

CARL
Yes, he's dead, Little Eva, I killed him—and I suppose it won't make any difference if I kill you too.

ALICE
Oh, Carl, give it up.

EVA
Yeah.

CARL
And you too, dear loving sister, cold-cruel-crafty-ballsy-Medusa.

EVA
Is he crazy?

ALICE
Yes.

Alice sits coolly as Carl moves to the kitchen.

EVA
Hey, he said he's gunna kill us.

ALICE
I know.

EVA

Well, I'm getting' out'a here.

Eva starts for the door, but Carl heads her off, plants himself against the door and locks it. He has a very large butcher knife. Eva looks to Alice for guidance, Alice feigns horror; Eva is really frightened.

EVA

Carl, now you get out'a my way. Dammit, Carl, you let me out'a here.

He moves toward her.

You may think this is cute, but it's givin' me the squirts.

He lunges at Eva who shrieks and runs.

Carl, you cut me one lil'o bit an'—an' I'll sure ya', honey, for everything you got an' ever will have!

With a horrible noise, Carl rushes Eva who hits him over the head with her purse. This stops him cold for a moment.

Now, Carl, you asked for that, honey. You did.

(to Alice)

Is he serious?

Alice simply waves and flashes a smile. Again, Carl rushes Eva, this time knocking her to the floor US of the sofa. He follows, bringing the blade down as he falls. There is screaming; the knife blade flashes up into sight from behind the sofa and then down again. There is a moment of silence, then Carl is thrown into view.

(rising, holds her finger)

Jesus Christ! You cut me, you stupid-turd-ass-son-of-a-bitch-I hate your guts maniac! I'm bleedin'! Now, you stop cuttin' the fool an' git me a Band-Aid!

(pause)

You are crazy . . . you . . . ARE. Carl, I didn't mean a thing I just said.

Carl stalks Eva. Alice smokes emotionlessly. Suddenly EVA runs off through the hallway screaming for "HELP." Carl follows. As Alice smokes, sounds are heard from off stage: screams, doors slamming, doors being kicked open or crushed, objects being thrown and broken. The battle noises off stage reach a peak, then stop sharply. After a moment, Alice becoming truly concerned, rises and moves toward the hallway. There is a loud scream, and Alice reseats herself just as Eva runs into the living room followed by Carl. Eva makes a desperate attempt to unlock the front door, but Carl pulls her away.

EVA

Help us! Somebody help us!

ALICE

CARL. This has been a most convincing display of your masculine authority. I'm in awe, now you can stop—someone might be hurt.

EVA

He's gonna' do it—I swear he's gonna' kill us both.

Carl attempts to speak, but he is too angry and out of breath to articulate a discernible sound.

ALICE

Eva, walk calmly to the sofa and sit down. Come on. If he were going to kill you he would have done it by now.

Eva obeys, but holds Alice tightly by the hand. Carl approaches ominously.

EVA

Can I bum a cig?

ALICE

Certainly.

(sensing he is directly behind them)

Well, Carl, you've always wanted to do it. Punish me. It will never be any easier.

CARL

I have to.

Of course you do. ALICE

No you don't. EVA

Shut up. I have to— CARL

But— EVA

He's crawled out on a limb, Eva, he has to. ALICE

I loved you. CARL

I know. ALICE

If you love'er then— EVA

Shut up! CARL

But— EVA

He pulls Eva to the back of the sofa with the blade at her neck. She melts in tearful fear.

Ahhhh...

(to Alice)
Why did you come here? CARL

I needed to see you. ALICE

Did you really come white flag in-hand? CARL

ALICE

I did.

CARL

I don't believe you.

(He draws the knife back, preparing to stab.)

EVA

Sweet Jesus forgive me for all--

ALICE

(turning to him at last)

--Carl, what are--

As he brings the blade down, both women scream and dive to the floor. Carl quickly crosses to EVA who is crawling away. THERE IS A NOISE FROM THE CLOSET. All action freezes for an instant, then: with a terrific burst, the closet door flies open; Buddy emerges screaming:
BUDDY

I DON'T LIKE THAT.

There is a general chaos, then BLACK.

ACT TWO

At the top of ACT TWO the rooms are a disaster. Buddy, unconscious, is stretched out on the sofa. He is covered with a quilt and an ice bag crowns his head. On a table near the sofa are a hypodermic and a small bottle. Eva sits staring at him. A blanket is draped over her shoulders, she is smoking and drinking.

EVA

An' if things work out like I'm hopin' they will, I might—might, now don't hold me to it—I might git my high school diploma by goin' to night school an' then go out to the technical college an' study up on—oh what was it they called it? Hummm, well, anyway I might become a beautician.

(She stares at him for a moment, with defeat:)

Well . . . ain't that wonderful . . . Shoot, I don't reckon I'd do much good at it anyhow. I never did nothin' much good except mess up things. Lord I'm getting' high again. Dammit, I wish you'd wake up an' talk to me. What kinda' dang fool shot did Carl give you anyhow?

(She looks directly into his face.)

You sure got to be an ugly ole boy. I hate your hair—I wish you'd let it grow out.

(She touches his hair.)

It's still soft, though, so soft. You was always so sweet to me. No matter what I done, you always was so damn sweet. I don't guess I never loved you, but I sure wish I had you back again. An' I wish you was OK again too, but that would take a ruttin' miracle, wouldn't it honey? I worry about you all the time stuck off somewhere with your crazy brother, but shoot, I'm in trouble too Buddy, I really am. Nobody'll speak to me, an' Daddy ain't never gonna' forgive me for screwin' around the way I done, an' I'm gittin' fat, an', I'm broke, baby! . . . maxed out on three credit cards . . . Have a big ole phone bill an' can't git my phone turned back on til I pay.

(She cries. Then, again excited:)

OH! I'm wearin' false eyelashes now—bet ya couldn't tell if you was awake.

(She yawns and stretches. She looks at Buddy in silence for moment. Buddy moves.)

God'a mighty, damn—you scared me, honey.

(She carefully replaces the ice bag on his head.)

My God . . . what has become'a you . . . ?

CARL

(who has entered unnoticed)

That's touching.

EVA

Lord, Carl, you made my heart bulge right up out of my chest.

CARL

Shut up. What time is it?

EVA

I don't know.

CARL

I said, shut up.

EVA

You're sure on the rag.

CARL

Is Alice awake?

EVA

I'm sure I don't know. Carl, I've been thinkin'.

CARL

That's a breakthrough.

EVA

Huh?

CARL

I said, that's a breakthrough. In other words, I had up until this time considered you incapable of thought. I think you're stupid. Catch on?

EVA

Boy, you really are on the rag.

CARL

Yeah.

EVA

Are ya' makin' coffee?

CARL

Eva, what the hell does it look like I'm doing?

EVA

Makin' coffee.

She fidgets a bit as Carl glares at her.

I was just tryin' to make talk.

CARL

The more you talk the more I am convinced that you and Buddy are a perfect match.

EVA

Thank you.

CARL

A matched set of idiots.

EVA

You mean thing.

CARL

When are you leaving?

EVA

When I get good an' ready. I think you ought'a know that I'm gonna' talk to a lawyer when I git back home. I'm gonna' press charges against you.

(She holds up an injured finger.)

Assault with a deadly butcher knife, attempted murder and kidnappin'.

With a growl, Carl suddenly moves toward her with a large spoon in his hand. She screams.

CARL

Oh, shut up.

(He tosses the spoon away.)

Yes, get a lawyer. You'll need one. You see, Buddy is divorcing you on the grounds of adultery and desertion.

(He prepares baked eggs.)

EVA

Ha! He can't do that. Dumb-dumb, he's not of sound mind an' body. Ya' gotta be sound to do anything legal.

CARL

Once the divorce is final, there'll be no financial support what-so-ever. You'll be out on your worn out can. Oh, I can just picture you standing behind the checkout counter in your Daddy's dime store, chewing gum an' wearin' a hairnet. It's your true callin' dumplin'. You'll love it.

EVA

I stopped workin' for my Daddy a long time ago an' ya' know it. Why do you want to keep Buddy anyway—ya treat 'im like an ole dog.

CARL

Everyone needs an' ole dog. So there's hope even for you.

EVA

Was that remark supposed to mean somethin' to me?

CARL

Look, Eva, you don't really want Buddy slung over your back. Hell, you'd have to hire a sitter every time you raced up to Memphis to crash a convention—or better yet, you'd lock him in his room.

EVA

I don't go to Memphis anymore. I don't go nowhere anymore much, Carl, I've changed. I really have. I'd never leave him alone again. I swear.

CARL

So that's it. Now that you can't so much as attract another dog, you're hot to trot yo' halfwit but well-hung husband back to yo' Mississippi bed. Fat chance.

EVA

(truly hurt, moves with regal nobility to the phone)

How do I call up a taxicab?

CARL

You dial.

She tries to smile, but the regal nobility becomes tearful anger.

EVA

The number, idgit! I want the number. How do I find the number?

CARL

I think I'll let you struggle with that problem. It might expand your mind.

Buddy shifts from back to side. This startles her. Carl smiles at her in an unnerving way.

EVA

God! I can't wait to git out'a this horrible place. I could just cry.

Eva cries and takes the phone to the floor; she settles there. Carl crosses to the bookcase and tosses the massive Atlanta Yellow Pages on the floor near Eva with a loud thud, then moves to bring up the track lights. Eva cries as she rips through the yellow pages. Carl watches for a moment, then he begins to sing, "Smile."

Oh, shut up! Shut up, I said! I can't think! PLEASE!

Eva breaks into a full sob as she thrashes through the yellow pages. He continues to sing and busy himself in the kitchen. Unseen by the others, Alice enters from the hallway. She is wearing a lovely "youthful" dress. She brushes her hair.

ALICE

Isn't it a little early, Carl?

Carl is momentarily speechless at the sight of his sister's loveliness. Wind chimes are heard from outside.

CARL

Early?

Alice gestures to Eva, who has by now given up on ever finding the number and simply cries.

ALICE

For that--

CARL

(with a finger to his lips to Alice)

--shhh.

Eva hushes.

Unless my aging eyes deceive me, It is the fair princess who crept into my bed in the twilight hours of my childhood, come back to haunt me.

ALICE

That was sweet. I had no idea of what mood you'd be in this morning. I'm relieved to find you . . . lyrical. But, after four hours' sleep, I should think I'd look more a Queen Mother than a princess.

CARL

Hush . . . hush . . . just now I feel poetry in the air.

EVA

Ya'll make me sick.

ALICE

Good morning, Little Eva. You look frightful, didn't you sleep well?

EVA

Don't call me Little Eva, please.

ALICE

Alas, for we are not little, are we?

CARL

I thought it was too early for that.

ALICE

The coffee smells delicious. Is it ready?

CARL

No.

ALICE

No? Just no? What happened to your lyricism?

EVA

(again fumbling through the phone book)

Hell. Damn. Shoot—

CARL

--Eva stole it from me.

EVA

--Shoot. Shoot. Heck.

ALICE

So she did.

I've been robbed. CARL

Damn. Damn. EVA

So you have. ALICE

CARL
(with a nod in Eva's direction)
Why don't you make yourself useful until breakfast.

Do I dare? ALICE

CARL
For old time's sake. After all, you brought her here.

Alice moves to Eva, then sincerely:

ALICE
Why Eva? Is there anything wrong? May I help?

Alice gently puts her arms around Eva and smooths Eva's hair out of her face. Eva is worried by this for a moment but is soon overcome by Alice's gentleness.

There now, Eva. The ugly night is over. The sun's come up and it will dry all our tears.

CARL
I don't know whether to be sick or dazzled.

EVA
Oh, shut up, meanie.

ALICE
Be dazzled just this once.

CARL
I'm dazzled.

ALICE
Thank you. Eva, what are you trying to find in this big ole phone book?

EVA

Taxicab.

ALICE

Oh. We'll look for it together. My goodness, have we been drinking this morning?

Eva nods "yes" in the manner of a guilty child. Alice mildly scolds with "tch, tch, tch." Eva, quite childlike now, is crushed by this and cries again.

Hush now. Look. Look. What have we here? What does that say?

EVA

(sniffing)

Yella' cab.

ALICE

Good girl. Now, can you dial it or do you want me to do it for you?

EVA

(stiffening a bit)

I can do that.

As Eva attempts to dial, Alice begins to sing "Smile". Eva does not know how to react. Carl joins his sister in song. Eva replaces the receiver with a loud bang. She sobs as Carl and Alice dance about the room in ballroom fashion "oo'ing" and "la'ing" the remainder of the song. As the song ends, Carl holds Alice in his arms. A sadness falls. Carl retreats.

CARL

Daddy missed you.

ALICE

He never wrote . . . or called. No one did.

Alice smokes. Carl prepares coffee. Eva watches them. A long silence is broken by:

Cream? Sugar? CARL

No, thank you. ALICE

For you, big Eva, black. CARL

Carl distributes coffee.

EVA
Why did ya'll tell me he was dead. That was so ugly.

CARL
For one dark moment, I thought he actually might have been.

ALICE
I knew he wasn't hurt badly when you washed the blood form your murderer's hands and there wasn't a drop to be seen –anywhere.

CARL
Damn, and I thought I had you going.

ALICE
I've always been one step ahead of you, little brother.

CARL
Always?

Pause; Eva slurps; all eyes turn to Buddy.

Good morning, Buddy boy. Like so many other mornings I find you detached, distant, but easy to please. Here we are, the sister who does not know you, the brother who cares for you, and . . . your wife. She bids you good morning, too.

(to Eva)
Don't you?

EVA
Yeah.

CARL
Don't wake up, little brother, don't wake up.

ALICE

(quietly)

No, don't wake up.

EVA

(attempting to match their mood)

I wish he would wake up.

There is a buzz from the kitchen.

CARL

The eggs are done.

EVA

Puke.

CARL

(moving to the kitchen)

Very good, little sister, you're becoming more articulate.

EVA

Thank you.

CARL

Baked to a turn at low heat. Lightly salted, pinched with garlic, and drowning in butter.

ALICE

Timidly awaiting the crushing jaws of mankind.

CARL

Their glory lasts but a minute and then, chomp . . .

ALICE

. . . gulp.

CARL & ALICE

And they are gone.

EVA

Ya' know what?

CARL & ALICE

What?

EVA
Sometimes ya'll talk just alike.

CARL
She noticed.

Eva relocates the phone number, dials.

EVA
It sticks out, sort'a.

ALICE
You mean it's obvious dear.

EVA
Yeah. Hello, Yella' Cab? I need a taxi. Right now. Hold on, darlin'.
What's this address? The address? I forgot the address.

CARL
My goodness, so did I.

ALICE
Me too.

CARL
You know, Eva, I'm going to miss you.

EVA
Well, I won't miss you. What's this address?

ALICE
Don't be unkind, Eva, parting in anger is so unnecessary.

CARL
And cruel.

ALICE
We want to be your friends.

EVA
Jerk off.

CARL
We'll write letters to you.

EVA

I won't read'um. I won't even open'um. What's the—

CARL

--we'll send postcards.

EVA

Ya'll keep right on talkin' 'cause nobody's listenin'—what's this address!?

ALICE

Why, Little Eva, just think of all the fun we've had together.

EVA

The damn address, please!

CARL

You must come back and we'll do it all again.

Eva replaces the receiver and struggles to maintain control.

EVA

Ya'll are crazy as loons—ya'll ought'a be locked in somewhere.

CARL

I cannot have you leaving my home feeling this way. What can I do to make you believe I love you?

EVA

Give me your fuckin' address.

CARL

I'll prove it. I'll prove that I love you.

(his arms open wide)

Give us a hug.

ALICE

What a lovely gesture. Eva, hug Carl.

EVA

Stay away from me pervert.

CARL

Honestly, Eva, you're hurting my feelings.

ALICE

Oh, don't hurt his feelings.

EVA

He tried to kill me last night! HA. An' now he wants me to hug'im?

ALICE

Let bygones be bygones, dear. He was going to kill me too, but I'm not going to hold that against him—that would be small.

CARL

(to Alice)

You are truly a gracious woman. But, Eva could never be small.

EVA

Ya'll just keep on talkin', cause like I say, nobody's listenin'.

ALICE

(to Carl)

Is my lip swollen. I think you bruised it.

CARL

When I hit you?

ALICE

No, when you kissed me.

Carl and Alice turn to look at Eva as if to say
"Uh-Oh!"

EVA

(thoroughly disgusted)

An' ya'll think I'm a tramp. Lord, I never did it with my brother.

CARL

I thought nobody was listening.

ALICE

But somebody was, and now our little secret is out.

EVA

Carl, I meant what I said about pressin' charges.

CARL

Sure you did.

EVA

I'm gonna' drag your skinny little ass through the courts an' I'm gonna' screw ya' to the wall.

ALICE

I think she means to do it, Carl.

EVA

When I git home I'm gonna file a complaint and git you arrested!

CARL

With the full weight of the Leesville Police Force behind you, once again!?

Alice and Carl have a good laugh.

EVA

(putting on her jacket)

Oh, ya'll think ya'll are so damned smart an' I'm so stupid. Well, at least I ain't crazy an' indecent—hadn't ya'll played with me enough?

(attempting control)

Hand me my purse, please.

Carl, still laughing, hands Eva the purse.

I'll tell you straight—ya'll are sick people an' ya need shrinks an' electro shock treatments, an' . . .

(She breaks into a sob.)

Carl and Alice cannot stop laughing. Eva courageously brings herself out of it.

I don't know why ya'll are bein' so hateful ugly to me, or why ya'll always was. I never done nothin' to ya'll.

The laughter stops. Pause. She meets their stares, then quietly:

Look, I'll get the hell out'a here if you'll tell me where I am.

Carl and Alice burst with laughter again. With a sudden thought, Eva digs through her purse.

Shit if I didn't use up them matches I wrote the damn address on.

CARL

No matter. You can't go yet.

ALICE

Why not?

CARL

I've been waiting for her to think of it, but apparently she's not going to.

EVA

What?

CARL

You haven't kissed you husband goodbye.

EVA

I'm not in the kissin' mood.

CARL

The very least you can do is give him a proper goodbye. The poor baby must have smelled the eggs.

(Carl wipes Buddy's mouth with the quilt.)

EVA

(after looking at her husband for a moment)

Poor ole Buddy. Poor, poor ole thing.

Eva kisses him; Buddy sits up.

Ya'll see that—I woke'im up with a kiss.

BUDDY

I . . . oh . . .

CARL

(quietly to Eva)

Move.

EVA

(as Carl nudges her out of the way)

Buddy, it's Eva, honey—

BUDDY

--I . . . remembered. I remembered.

CARL
At'a boy..

EVA
(withdrawing a bit)
What you reckon he remembered?

CARL
Hey Buddy boy, how's the head?

BUDDY
(holds his head and speaks softly)
Hurts.

CARL
(to Alice)
There's some pain capsules in an aspirin bottle in the bathroom.

EVA
(rushing off)
I'll git'um.

Buddy is in real pain. This is a pivotal moment in the action of this play. The reality of pain in the Riley family is manifest in Buddy's suffering. Both Carl and Alice sense this.

ALICE
Should he see a doctor?

CARL
He's seen doctors.

ALICE
Don't be flippant—the man's hurt.

CARL
Where the hell did your bleeding heart come from—you don't know the idiot.

ALICE
He's listening to you.

CARL
Do you really care?

ALICE
 (after a brief pause)
 Not really.

EVA
 (off)
 If there's an aspirin bottle in here I'm blind!

Carl looks at Alice; she exits to help Eva find the capsules.

CARL
 You all right?

BUDDY
 Hurts.

CARL
 I'm sorry, Buddy. Do you hear me—I said I'm sorry.
 (He strokes Buddy's head.)
 You sit tight. Stay here.

Carl gets a glass of water. As he goes, Buddy slips off the sofa to the floor, and begins to crawl. Alice and Eva, see this on their entrance. They stop in the hallway.

ALICE
 Carl.

Carl, water in-hand, takes the bottle from Alice.

EVA
 I'm sorry—they was starin' me right in the face—

CARL
 --shut up.

EVA
 I said I was sorry—

ALICE
 --shut up.

EVA

Well, excuse me.

CARL

(now beside Buddy)

Here ya'go fella'. Take a couple of these for me.

BUDDY

(sitting up on the floor)

OK

ALICE

Will they make him sleep?

CARL

No. Why?

EVA

(moving in too quickly, speaking too loudly)

Hi, Buddy.

Buddy chokes and coughs.

CARL

Get the hell out of here.

EVA

My husband's awake. I ain't goin' nowhere.

Buddy crawls again.

God, that is pitiful!

CARL

Lower your voice or I'll break your fucking neck.

EVA

(in a whisper)

He's my husband, an' I'll talk any way I want to.

CARL

Your husband? Then you take care of him.

Carl moves to the kitchen with the glass and the aspirin bottle. Eva is uncertain of what to do. She kneels near Buddy.

EVA

. . . well, now, baby . . . Alice, why don't ya' sit somewhere, you're makin' us nervous.

ALICE

Sorry.

Buddy crawls a few steps away.

EVA

Whoa, boy. Easy now boy.

CARL

He's not a horse.

EVA

I don't know what to'do. Give me a hint.

BUDDY

(climbing onto the sofa)

Mae.

EVA

Ya' want ya' dolly, sweety?

CARL

He wants his dolly.

EVA

Bug off, we're doin' just fine now. Here's your Mae, honey.

ALICE

Does he usually crawl?

CARL

Only when he's in pain, or frightened . . . or confused.

BUDDY

Thank you.

EVA

Ya' welcome, Buddy—now if I upset ya', just tell me an I'll leave ya' alone.

Carl dumps his uneaten breakfast in the
Garbage.

CARL

Cold.

EVA

(playing with Buddy's feet)

This little piggy went to market—

CARL

--nothing moves in the cold—

EVA

--this little piggy stayed home—

CARL

--nothing changes—

EVA

--an' this little piggy-boy had pot roast, an'—

ALICE

--why is he staring at me?

EVA

This little piggy had none, an'—hey look at me, honey, look at Eva—

BUDDY

--Alice . . .

EVA

Now. Where were we? Oh, an' this little piggy cried—

ALICE

--stop that! (Eva stops.) Why the hell is he looking at me?

CARL

I don't know. Talk to him, ask him.

ALICE

I don't like it.

CARL

Shall I knock him out again? Would that please you?

ALICE

(moving to go)

Do what you like. I have to get a flight out of here this morning.

CARL

The world turns cold and off she goes—

ALICE

--I can't wait around for the Spring thaw.

CARL

Spring only comes in nature. Don't kid yourself, this cold is a chronic condition—an unnatural permanent freeze.

ALICE

No doubt you prefer it that way.

CARL

He talks, he moves, he looks at you—he's real, and you can't take it. He's gentle now. He doesn't choke sisters when he has a headache.

During much following dialogue, Alice and Buddy are locked in a mutual stare.

EVA

Ya'll don't start fussin'---shhh.

ALICE

I've had enough.

CARL

Not yet!

EVA

Ya'll keep it down.

ALICE

(still looking at Buddy))

Shut up!

EVA

Honey. You tell me ta' shut up one more time--

BUDDY

Mae.

EVA

She's right here darlin'. See, ya'll are gitting'im all upset.
 (She cuddles him.)
 Everything's just fine, honey.

CARL

Halfwit in the arms of a halfwit—what a picture.

EVA

We didn't hear what the S.O.B. said, did we?

CARL

(Gently)
 Buddy? Are you a halfwit?

BUDDY

Huh?

EVA

Ignore that pinko-turkey.

CARL

(glaring at his sister)
 Are you a halfwit?

BUDDY

I'm a halfwit.

Alice finally moves to exit through the hallway.

CARL

You can't wait to get away from us, can you? But, before you go, you're going to know what you're leaving behind. Alice, take a good look at what's real and what's cold and what won't go away! Now just try and make it disappear!

Buddy, frightened, pushes Eva aside
 and crawls, leaving Mae behind.

EVA

I'm gonna' have t' beat shit out'a the next person who scares him.

ALICE

You asked for this—you took it on. I sure as hell didn't put you in this situation, and I'll be damned if I will stay here any longer to watch you enjoy it!

CARL

Somebody had to care for him—you wouldn't have—

ALICE

Had to hell! Your big chance for more self-pity—another reason to be miserable—

EVA

Ya'll better watch it!

ALICE

No, you wouldn't have missed out on this for the world. I'm sick of your self-indulgence! He'd be just as well off tucked neatly between white sheets in some damned V.A. hospital and you know it. You love this, because it excuses you from everything, including your pitiful failure as a man.

There is a long silence. Eva sits on the floor with Buddy watching and awaiting the next move. Carl moves away slowly, his back to Alice. Wind chimes are heard from outside.

CARL

I have Buddy. I have someone.

(pause)

I'm responsible for another human being. That makes me a failure?

ALICE

I left. I survived. If you'd done that, we might have something new to talk about.

CARL

Mama'd have one of her nervous breakdowns—

ALICE

--Carl, please don't—

CARL

--she'd always blame her nerves on you. Then Daddy would get mad with you but he'd take it out on Buddy. Buddy's head and back took all the blows

for you! And now Buddy is damaged, but he's with me and our parents are gone, so Alice doesn't have to be involved!?

Buddy runs off through the hallway
with Mae tightly clutched in his arms.

EVA

I'm goin' back yonder an' gittin' my husband up off the floor, an' I don't want'a be disturbed.

Eva exits.

ALICE

I never really knew Buddy. There were so many years between us.

CARL

What about me? Is it so easy to just make me disappear?

ALICE

No. Not easy, but well worth the effort.

(Pause)

I thought a lot about you during those first years on my own. In fact, I was never without you.

(pause)

It was as if all of you stalked me. Nights were the roughest. I'd go to bed trying like the devil to concentrate on other things, but before I could fall asleep my poor family had crept to my bedside— specters offering me a gift of their misery . . . demanding that I somehow be responsible. But I wasn't responsible, Carl, not for all the misery . . . so I fought you . . . until after a time, you specters about my bed at night began to fade. And then, I finally forgot. For years I didn't give one of you the first thought. Am I rationalizing, Carl, when I no longer belong to people I forget?

CARL

You're here now. If you'd forgotten, then why are you here?

She again turns to go, but Carl stops her.

When Mama died of cancer in ninety-four, Daddy cried for days . . . but he wasn't crying for Mama. He cried because you weren't there. After her death, Daddy seemed to wait, actively, painfully wait for you every day. He spent hours on the porch in the same exact spot Mother went to . . . to iron on Sunday afternoons while you and Daddy took your private Father/Daughter naps together. He waited for you until he couldn't wait any longer. Daddy's death was so slow. I sat with him in a goddamned off-white hospital room for eight days. I sat there waiting for him to die. He

held my hand. The son-of-a-bitch touched me for the first time in my life that I could remember, and, believe me, dear Sister, I was touched. Then, shortly before he died, he looked at me and said, "Is Alice home yet? Is Alice here?" You never gave the old man a chance to set things right with you. He loved you to the exclusion of all the rest of us. He loved you.

There is a silence.

ALICE

During the first couple of years after I left Leesville, I used to fantasize that the phone would ring, that it would be one of you telling me I was forgiven and begging me come home. My number was never unlisted, but nobody ever called. Then after so many years, finally the phone rings, this hysterical voice yaps out your name, your face looms up, I board a plane, and here we are.

(She laughs a tired faint sigh.)

Oh, Carl, for one weak moment, I wanted so much more.

CARL

So did I.

There is a trailing giggle from off stage. After a moment:

Eva's back there doing God-only-knows-what to our little brother.

ALICE

Why don't you let her take him?

Eva and Buddy enter arm-in-arm. Buddy carries a suitcase. They cross to the front door.

CARL

Where are we going with the basket of goodies, Eva?

EVA

We're goin' home—that's where. Ain't we, Buddy—we're goin' home right?

BUDDY

We're goin' home.

CARL

How's the headache?

BUDDY

Hurts.

EVA

Honey, you told Eva it was getting' better.

CARL

Put your suitcase back in your room like a good boy.

EVA

Butt out, Carl—you got no right—

CARL

Buddy, what did I tell you to do?

BUDDY

I don't remember.

CARL

Take your suitcase to your room and stay there.

Buddy starts off.

EVA

Buddy, you're comin' home with—

CARL

Buddy do as I told you.

EVA

Buddy! Carl, you're really pissin' me!

CARL

Buddy!

By now Buddy is greatly confused and anxious.
He drops to the floor and begins to crawl.

ALICE

Oh, stop it. Both of you.

EVA

Buddy, get up off the damn floor.

Carl goes to the closet and takes out the photo
of their Father.

ALICE

Eva, if you have any decency at all, you'll just leave.

CARL

(holding the photo)
Buddy! Look! Who is this?

Buddy sees the photo and rushes to the sofa
crying :“NO”.

EVA

Carl Riley, you gotta' be the meanest son-of-a-bitch in the whole damned world. Buddy? Buddy? Come on, we got to get out'a here. Buddy, please.

Buddy buries his face in the sofa.

Carl, why the hell did ya' do that to him? Why?

(She is terribly upset.)

He was respondin' to me real good, he was! Buddy, get up. Come on baby.

CARL

He'll stay there for a long time, Eva. Maybe days, an' you ain't got a change of 'a panties or nothin' so you might as well haul your ass on down to the bus station.

EVA

I'm gonna' sue you an' I'm gonna get me a court order an' I'm gonna take my husband home—you wait an' see, Mr. prissy-smart-ass-writer.

(She snaps out of her emotional state.)

I still need that money.

ALICE

(getting her purse)

Let's see, it was a hundred, hundred fifty--

EVA

--whatever you got. Come on, I want'a get out'a this hellhole.

(taking the money, to Carl)

Now, if you want'a get my ass out'a here so bad you can haul yours over to the telephone an' dial me up a taxicab.

CARL

There's a pay phone down the block. If you can read street signs, you can figure out where you are.

EVA

Suits the hell out'a me. Bye baby.

(She kisses his forehead.)

Ya'll are the screwed up-est family I ever saw, an' if it takes the rest 'a my life, I'm gonna' get my Buddy out. He has the right to a normal life.

(at the door)

I just hate ya'll's guts so much—in fact, I never hated anybody as much as I hate ya'll two . . . buttholes.

Eva is gone.

CARL

When you asked why I wouldn't let her take him . . . did you mean that?

ALICE

What difference would it make?

CARL

He's my brother and I love him. That's the difference.

ALICE

She's his wife.

CARL

You wouldn't have to feel guilty about me if I unloaded him—is that it?

ALICE

(pause)

No. When I leave here, Carl, I'm not taking any specters with me.

CARL

I wish I could turn that trick—c'est finis, no more specters. In all this time, Alice, I've never let you go. You're my sister and I love you.

Alice embraces him. They hold each other.
Finally:

ALICE

I'll collect my things.

Alice exits through the hallway. Carl goes to Buddy; he gently touches Buddy's head.

Better now?

Wind chime are heard. Carl looks out.

Looks like rain. That knocks out the park.

He moves to Buddy, leaving door open.

Hey, you gonna' be all right? Tell me—you gonna' be OK?

BUDDY

(rubbing his head softly against Carl's shoulder)

I'm gonna' be ok.

Buddy hugs him.

CARL

At'a boy. Well . . . what shall we do this fine rainy day?

(He takes Mae gently and checks her seams.)

BUDDY

I dunno.

CARL

Alice came, remember?

BUDDY

Alice came.

(He takes Mae.)

I'm hungry.

CARL

Hum...?

BUDDY

I'm real hungry.

CARL

Sure.

Carl goes to kitchen and prepares a bowl of Sugar Frosted Flakes.

BUDDY

Flowers?

CARL

Yeah . . . that's right. Flowers.

Carl watches as his brother eats breakfast.

Alice crosses, bag in-hand, to the door. The two men appear not to notice her. Alice pauses briefly at the door, then exits quietly without looking at them as the sound of wind chimes swells and dies. Carl continues to watch Buddy eat, then after a moment:

CARL

Use you napkin.

BUDDY

Huh?

CARL

Your napkin. Use it.

END