

REDEMPTION
An American Family Tragedy

a play by
Ron Talarico

In a family ripped apart by forbidden desires, secrets, and crippling fears that create a stranglehold on their willingness to forgive, its members descend into a whirlwind of destructive anger that threatens to destroy them all.

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Dramatis personae

Adam

60, distant emotionally

Lena

49, Adam's wife, sensuous and aging nicely

George

30, their son, doctoral student, living on his
own

Billie

22, their daughter, social work student, living
at home

Seth

18, their son, high-strung and complex, living
at home

County Coroner [could be an unseen and unheard character;
no lines]

Setting

A modest home in a mid-size American city, late twentieth
century

Set Requirements:

All action takes place in the living quarters of a single
dwelling.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

Setting: Living room in modest home in mid size American city, late twentieth century.

At rise: Married couple Lena (49) and Adam (60) are in the living room. ADAM is reading on a sofa and LENA is arranging flowers on a nearby table.

(LENA reminisces while staying focused on arranging the flowers. She does not look at Adam until where indicated later in the scene.)

LENA

(nostalgically and with some tenderness)

Do you remember our first date, dear?

(ADAM's face is hidden in what he is reading. He acknowledges but is not listening attentively or with much interest.)

ADAM

Mm-hum.

LENA

That beautiful summer day...strolling along the river without a care in the world...

ADAM

Mm-hum.

LENA

People filling the boardwalk...children skipping about...speedboats jumping among the waves...a skier here and there--

(ADAM interrupts.)

(MORE)

ADAM (cont'd)

(without interest)

--Mm-hum. Oh yes.

LENA

We had our first kiss...so in love--

(ADAM interrupts again.)

ADAM

(again without interest)

--Mm-hum.

(LENA glances over at him with a puzzled look, then turns and faces him.)

LENA

(tenderly, patiently, but starting to doubt his sincerity)

Adam, love! Are you listening?

(ADAM looks at her over his eyeglasses and reading material.)

ADAM

(feigning interest)

Of course I am, dear! Of course!

(LENA approaches him from behind, slowly and affectionately sliding her arms around him and hugging him passionately. Gradually she smothers him with kisses. ADAM resists her moves gently but coldly and with indifference.)

ADAM

Now, now dear...we mustn't just now...

(LENA insists, throwing off his resistance and getting more physical.)

LENA

(playfully)

Oh come on, Adam! I need a little loving from you! Gimme a kiss! Come on, now! A big sexy kiss!

(MORE)

LENA (cont'd)

(LENA attempts to turn his head and force a kiss but ADAM resists more forcefully than before. Finally he jerks her arms away from him and turns away.)

ADAM

(insistent and irritated but not angry)

Stop, Lena! Just stop now, dear! I need to finish what I'm doing or I'll be late for my meeting.

LENA

(her frustration and irritation with his rejection of her turn to anger)

You give me so little loving anymore, Adam! So little marital anything. Just chains and suffocation: I'm stuck with you for the vows and I can't breathe for the lack of air that surrounds you!

And love?...do you remember that? Can you tell me what love is anymore?

(ADAM does not respond.)

No...of course not! You turn me away at every turn, refuse me at each advance. You show no interest in me, the woman.

I need touch, Adam! Do you remember even that? Remember years ago? I need arms around me like before. I need someone next to me at night. I need skin on skin again!

I need a husband!

(screaming)

God-Damn I need a man!

(She storms into their bedroom slamming the door behind her.)

LENA (O.S.)

(screaming)

A man!

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT I

SCENE TWO - ANOTHER DAY

Setting: Kitchen, and Lena and Adam's bedroom with opaque glass entrance door.

At rise: Seth (18), son of Lena and Adam, is in the kitchen smoking and making coffee. The cigarette is hanging from his lips, and the rising smoke makes him squint. Lena calls to him from the bedroom. Rather sensuous music can be heard coming from her room. No one else is home.

LENA (O.S.)

(softly, and vaguely seductively)

Seth, could you come and help me for a minute, dear? Your father and sister are gone or I'd ask them.

SETH

(somewhat irritated)

I'm busy right now!

LENA (O.S.)

(imploring and whining)

Please, baby...come and help Mama. I'm stuck...

(SETH pounds his fists down hard on the kitchen counter and swears, causing his cup and other items on the counter to rattle, none of which Lena hears.)

SETH

(angry, to himself)

Damn!...damn!

(Then he responds immediately to Lena.)

(sweetly)

All right! All right, Mama! Give me a second...

(MORE)

SETH (cont'd)

(SETH slams down the package of coffee, snuffs out the cigarette, immediately lighting another, and storms off to Lena's room. As he flings open the door to her room he stands in shock at the threshold, though what he sees he has seen before. We hear the music and see LENA in a somewhat dimly lit room, scantily clad in bra and panties and holding a dress. Upon seeing her and despite knowing no one else is home, SETH turns around quickly to scan outside the room. LENA looks over at him.)

LENA

(warmly, lightheartedly)

Well now, honey, don't just stand there! Come on in and help Mama!

(SETH enters, giving the door a push to close it, then approaches Lena. The door does not close completely, leaving a gap wide enough to allow anyone passing by to see what is going on inside. Both characters are unaware the door is ajar.

LENA begins to slip on the dress.)

LENA

Now I need you to straighten it in the back, hon', then zip it up. But be careful!...the zipper's tricky. Keep pressing in against me on the one side, at the bottom, while zipping slowly and carefully...otherwise we'll be in a mess! When you're done, straighten all the back side of the dress, would you, pressing it out all the way down to iron out any wrinkles so it'll look nice. (She says this for the pleasure of feeling his hands against her.)

(At that moment we hear a key turning in the lock of the front door, which Seth and Lena don't hear. GEORGE (30), eldest son of Lena and Adam, enters the home.

(CONTINUED)

REDEMPTION/Talarico

CONTINUED:

En route to the kitchen, GEORGE sees movement in the bedroom through the crack in the doorway and hears the music. Curious, he stops to peer in without the other two aware he is there.

Standing behind Lena, SETH extinguishes the cigarette while LENA finishes slipping on the dress. He begins working away at the stubborn zipper, all while LENA is making suggestive movements with her body, more or less keeping in time with the music, slowly and cunningly pressing her body lightly against Seth's body. When finished with the zipper he uses the palms of both hands to press out the dress all the way down. He puts up weak resistance to Lena's erotic movements.)

LENA

(softly)

How's it coming, hon'?

(SETH does not respond.)

(GEORGE has been watching it all but is too appalled and disgusted to continue looking. As GEORGE proceeds to the kitchen, the scene inside the bedroom fades.

GEORGE slams his fist into his palm, which Seth and Lena do not hear.)

GEORGE

(loudly but not enough for Lena and Seth to hear)

Jesus!...again! What the hell?!

(GEORGE briefly ponders what he has just witnessed, then slams his fist again into his palm.)

Jesus!

(CONTINUED)

REDEMPTION/Talarico

CONTINUED:

(GEORGE begins to prepare himself a sandwich. At a certain point he looks toward the bedroom, from which the music can still be heard, and angrily he makes a couple of very loud noises by slamming objects together - e.g. a metal pan and its lid, a can of coffee and the counter top. The music stops.)

After a bit, SETH slowly pokes his head out from the bedroom door, looking in both directions. SETH exits the room quietly, leaving the door ajar as he found it. Proceeding to the kitchen to finish making the coffee he is surprised to encounter George there.)

SETH

(nonchalantly as a cover up, as though nothing happened in the bedroom)

Hey!

(GEORGE is eating on his sandwich for the remainder of the scene.)

GEORGE

(unemotionally)

Hey.

(SETH lights a cigarette, letting it hang from his lips, then finishes setting up the coffee maker, inhaling constantly and nervously on the cigarette while moving his head to prevent the smoke from getting into his eyes.)

SETH

So what've you been up to, Bro'?

(mildly sarcastic)

Still trying to figure out your crazy family in that psychology department of yours?

(SETH puts out the cigarette.)

GEORGE

(quickly, evading the question)

Oh...just studying and working...not much.

(uninterested)

You?

SETH

Looking for work of course.

(SETH lights another cigarette and takes drags on it almost constantly.)

Nothing really out there to match my interests.

GEORGE

(irritation mounts in his voice)

Yeah...but are you really trying? Do you actually want to work or would you rather just stay here at home all day, living off Father and Mother, waiting for your next invitation to--

(SETH quickly interrupts to sidetrack George.)

SETH

(louder than George, feigning excitement)

--Hey!...Father got the company's employee of the year award last week! Pretty impressive don't you think?--

(GEORGE interrupts, irritated by Seth's abrupt change of subject.)

GEORGE

(laughing derisively)

--Seriously?! Are you kidding me?! You wanna play a little game of hide-and-go-seek here, do you?...is that it? Maybe a round of "what's been going on around here?" while we're at it?!

(accusingly)

And why haven't you been going to your therapy appointments, anyway? Mother told me you haven't shown up for them lately. You and I know looking for work hasn't exactly gotten in the way!

SETH

*(pretending not to understand the first
round of questions and wishing to avoid
the rest)*

Hide-and-go-seek?--

(GEORGE interrupts.)

GEORGE

(fed up and even angrier)

--You know what I'm talking about, Seth! You know what I mean!'

*(GEORGE shakes his head, insulted by Seth's
attempted camouflage. He looks quickly at the
uneaten portion of his sandwich which no longer
interests him, and goes immediately to throw it
in the trash.)*

(furious)

Jesus!

(GEORGE heads for the front door.)

I'm outta here!

*(GEORGE stomps out slamming the door behind
him.)*

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

Act I

SCENE THREE - MID AFTERNOON A
FEW DAYS LATER

*Setting: Living room, bathroom,
and front door. The front door's
lock is a deadbolt with a noisy
thumb turner on the inside.*

*(Note: The noisy door lock will
be significant at the very end
of the play.)*

*Seth is home alone and is the
sole character in Scene Three
except for someone unseen (could
be a stagehand appointed to the
task) who makes noise at the
door at the very end.*

*At rise: Seth is sitting in a
chair in the living room. He is
reading something and just
finishing a cigarette.*

(Note: SETH conveys visibly nervous inner
turmoil throughout this scene.)

(SETH quickly and nervously extinguishes the
cigarette in a large ashtray that is
overflowing with cigarette butts and is on the
coffee table near him. He then walks with short
hurried steps to the front door.

With deliberate quiet he slowly opens the door,
gives a perfunctory look out, then quickly and
quietly shuts the door, engaging the deadbolt
with the thumb turner - slowly, in order to
minimize its noise.

Quickly he enters the bathroom, washes his
hands whipping up an unusually large mound of
lather, rinses and dries them and returns

(CONTINUED)

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CONTINUED:

to his chair. As he nervously grabs for his pack of cigarettes on the coffee table the pack falls to the floor. He very gingerly picks it up and removes a cigarette. Upon returning the pack to the table, he lights the cigarette, and with it dangling from his lips and the smoke obviously irritating his eyes he rubs his hands obsessively on his pants, apparently trying to clean them from the cigarette retrieval process.

After resuming reading but only very briefly, he hurriedly extinguishes the cigarette and repeats the door ritual, through engaging the deadbolt. Obsessed with safety, he conveys putting pressure at length and needlessly on the thumb turner as if assuring himself the deadbolt is still truly engaged.

Next, he heads for the bathroom to repeat the hand-washing ritual, but before reaching the bathroom he stops and returns to the front door where he quite visibly conveys applying lingering pressure on the thumb turner again to once again assure himself the door is locked. He repeats again this back and forth ritual between bathroom and front door, walking always quickly and with short steps. Finally he enters the bathroom and repeats the hand-washing ritual, including building up a heavy lather.

After drying his hands he returns quickly to the chair, bringing with him the towel he used for drying. He sits and takes a cigarette from the pack, again gingerly. He lights the cigarette and lets it hang from his lips as he balances the reading material on his lap. He then wipes his hands with the towel over and over in an exaggerated fashion as though quite intent on cleansing them thoroughly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He resumes reading for a bit while smoking. He then hurriedly snuffs out the cigarette and rushes to the front door intending to begin the thumb-turner ritual yet again. But just before arriving he hears someone making noise at the door [the stagehand or whomever was appointed for this task]. Assuming it's a family member returning he makes a mad dash back to the chair and gets into a relaxed position in an effort to appear as though none of the above ritualistic activity has taken place and he has been simply reading for the entire scene.

With noise heard again at the door, the blackout and end of scene occur before anyone enters.

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT I

SCENE FOUR - MORNING OF ANOTHER DAY

Setting: Lena and Adam's bedroom and the door to Billie's bedroom. BILLIE (22) is Lena and Adam's daughter. The doors to both rooms are ajar, but the parents' room is in profile and visible to the audience.

At rise: Lena and Adam are in their bedroom getting dressed for the day.

LENA

Adam, dear, I wish you would discipline Billie a little more.

Adam

(as though this is news to him)

Oh...? How so?

LENA

Well...for one thing she stays out too late.

ADAM

What do you mean?

LENA

(genuinely surprised and not angry)

Oh for heaven's sake! Where have you been, Adam?! Don't tell me you haven't noticed!

ADAM

Come now, dear. What are you talking about? Sometimes I think you exaggerate just to annoy me.

LENA

(irritated and loud)

Exaggerate?! She's been getting in after midnight or one, night after night. Don't you hear her for God's sake?

(BILLIE exits her room, curious about what her parents are arguing about. Cautiously she sneaks up closer to their door to hear better without their seeing her.)

ADAM

I can't say that I do. You know I sleep like a log.

LENA

You are a log, Adam! A-big-dense-log!

The point is...God only knows where she's been or what she's been doing or who she's been with.

Obviously she's not a child anymore...but she does still live under our roof and she should be more considerate because of it.

Plus, the other morning I swear I smelled alcohol on her breath.

This is too much! She's going too far!

ADAM

(calmly and with curiosity)

What is your assessment of what's going on?

LENA

I don't know. Maybe she hangs out at bars or dance places. How would I know? She never shares with me...hardly even talks to me!

And another thing, Adam: Have you ever seen Billie with a man? Never a man! Always with girls...just girls. No man-energy. It's not normal. It can't be good. It's not right!

And wouldn't it be nice to see her dressed more like a woman than a man sometimes?! A dress now and then wouldn't hurt her...a touch of makeup...a little more stylish hairstyle...something feminine!

ADAM

(without emotion, matter-of-factly)

Well...have you tried saying anything to her, dear?

LENA

(furious)

Me?! No I haven't said anything for Christ's sake! She's undisciplined thanks to you! You know how she doesn't get along with me...only listens to you! Why...the last time I tried to say anything to her she snapped back. "You can't tell me what to do!," she said, and walked off.

Truth is she has always run from me to jump into your cozy warm lap or ever-ready arms!...your "there, there now, Sweetie, tell daddy all about it" crap.

(LENA shrugs her shoulders and spreads out her arms and hands in frustration.)

Do something, Adam! She's your damn daddy's girl, so you take care of it!

ADAM

(conciliatory)

Now now, dear, don't worry. I'm sure Billie will change on her own in time - mature more - you'll see, and it will all turn out for the better--

(LENA interrupts him.)

LENA

(incredulous and loudly)

--for the better?! Seriously?!

(then calmly and sincerely, as though maybe he will see her point)

Better?

(She pauses, thinking he will answer, but Adam does not respond.)

(quite surprised that he has said nothing)

Really?

(then disgusted and with sarcasm)

Brother!

What in the hell planet have you been living on - or escaping to?

(MORE)

LENA (cont'd)

(LENA aims her finger squarely at him.)

(menacingly from the core of her guts)

You--just--listen--to--me--mister...if you hadn't come at me that once-in-a-blue-moon night all honey-horney and handsy, she wouldn't even be here and we wouldn't be having this discussion! You got your tasty little split second of a moment with me and I got stuck for a lifetime with the result!

And as if that disastrous night wasn't enough of a blow from fate: if I could have had my way and you had had a decent paying job, you know very well what I would have done!

(BILLIE covers her mouth with both hands,
shocked, horrified, devastated.)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT ISCENE FIVE - A COUPLE OF MONTHS
LATER

Setting: The family living and dining rooms.

At rise: The entire family has just finished dinner, and all are rising from the table to proceed to the living room.

GEORGE (to Lena)

Thanks for inviting me over. Everything was really nice, Mother.

LENA

You're welcome, dear. It's always good to hear you're doing well at school. Just think: soon you'll be a professor! PhD in psychology! That will be a real accomplishment, won't it now! And then with Billie almost done with her social work studies, I guess your father and I will have done all right as parents!

(GEORGE smiles at Lena but unconvincingly.)

(The characters disperse to the living room as follows:

LENA proceeds to a chair, where she begins to leaf through various magazines.

GEORGE goes to another chair, where he becomes engrossed with whatever on his laptop.

ADAM settles himself on the sofa, using the nearby coffee table as a workspace. He busily makes computations on a noisy calculator and records the results on a writing pad.

SETH and BILLIE seat themselves at a nearby card table and begin working on an in-progress jigsaw puzzle. SETH lights a cigarette and begins smoking it.)

LENA

Well look here! Adam, there's a play at the Westgate Playhouse Thursday evening. The drama department at George's university is putting it on.

(enthusiastically)

Why don't we go?

(ADAM keeps his nose in his work and doesn't look at Lena.)

ADAM

Oh...I don't know, dear, if that's such a good idea. I'm pretty busy at work these days.

What's it about, anyway?

LENA

(enthusiastically)

It's a comedy and it sounds entertaining! God knows we could use a few laughs, what with all the unpleasant things that are going on in the world these days. Don't you think?

(ADAM continues working, still not looking at Lena.)

ADAM

Yes of course dear...but you know I don't care much for comedy. I--

(LENA interrupts him.)

LENA

(sarcastically)

--You prefer tragedy! Yes, yes, how well we all know it! But a good laugh now and then does us all a bit of good.

(ADAM is still not looking at Lena.)

ADAM

Still...I don't care for comedies. Tragedies are what toughen us. And besides, I'm rather stressed at work on an important project, as you know, and my colleagues are depending on me.

LENA

Ohhh...Adam! Don't be so narrow. What a dud you have become! Comedies can toughen us too...and they can help us deal with the pain that tragedies bring. Why not think about it that way?

(GEORGE, SETH, and BILLIE begin carefully observing Lena and Adam's interactions. SETH extinguishes his cigarette and immediately lights another.)

(ADAM looks at Lena.)

ADAM

Perhaps...but nevertheless I really don't want to take the time away these days, and I--

(LENA interrupts.)

LENA

(slowly, irritated, snarling)

--And-you-what-Adam?! You'll make any excuse if it means you won't have to go out into the world and enjoy it.

We never do anything fun anymore. We don't go out because ...well, just guess who is too busy. And we don't have friends over because...well, just guess again who's too tired or too stressed.

We don't do anything because just guess who can't do even that! Now who would think that doing nothing at all would be a physical challenge? - my man, that's who!!

(LENA gets up, tossing the magazine carelessly on the chair.)

Honestly! This is all too boring for me, Adam! Godawful boring! Life here is boring! Our marriage is becoming an unmatched model of...of...well...of guess what?...boring!

(LENA walks over to Seth and Billie and stands a while watching them work on the puzzle. She puts a piece or two herself in place.

Finally ADAM speaks up to Lena.)

ADAM

(in a conciliatory manner which comes across as false and insincere)

Jim Watson paid you a fine compliment yesterday...said how lovely you always look and I told him I couldn't agree with him more! You really do justice, dear, to the clothes you wear...always have...that's for sure! I mean...the dress you're wearing right now, even...it's just swell on you, honey.

(He fishes for an additional compliment.)

And...and...and well...I meant to tell you how wonderful dinner was tonight...just really tasty, that roast pork! I'm sure the children all enjoyed it as much as I did and will agree with me when I say--

(GEORGE has had enough of Adam's unconvincing compliments and the general dysfunction of the moment. He begins gathering his things noisily which turns everyone's attention to him. He stands and deliberately does not look at anyone until where indicated toward the end of the scene.

Emotions that have been pent up for some time come to the surface and explode.

GEORGE interrupts Adam and paces the floor as he levels his criticisms that follow.)

George

(angry, yelling)

--Stop! Stop! Just Stop!

All of you! Stop it! Now!

You all should have known...and should have done something about it!

One of you...

(GEORGE looks at no one.)

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

...Judas! - you know who you are...you know your deeds and the sickness and pain they've caused. Yet it goes on in one form or another - still, whenever whim, I guess, appears on the scene causing you to strike again.

And you...

(GEORGE looks at no one.)

...Blind One, Missing-in-action One. Have you just been repressing what you think? All along? Watching quietly as the quicksand of this family sucks us all deeper and deeper into its darkness?

And I'm sure that one of you...

(SETH has now finished his cigarette and is trying with some difficulty to light another. Only the audience sees that the hand the match or lighter is in is shaking and requires him to use his other hand to steady it in order to light the cigarette.)

(GEORGE looks at no one.)

...I'm sure that one of you could have said no a little more often, especially as time passed. Said "no" more convincingly now and then. Or did even you enjoy it much too much?!

And the other of you...

(GEORGE looks at no one.)

...should have noticed. You should have noticed! And you quite possibly would have if it wasn't for your fixation on yourself and attention-grabbing!

(GEORGE now looks at all of them ad lib as he delivers the remainder of his lines.)

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

This is all too much for me. And don't you think it's about time it was for you, too?

(GEORGE finishes gathering his things while delivering the remainder of his lines.)

A sad charade of a family we have!

(his anger swells)

Well...no more for this guy! I didn't ask for it. I don't deserve it. And--I--won't--have--it!

I want out!

(With hot-headed rage, GEORGE exits with his things through the front door after banging his fist loudly on the door and slamming the door.

ADAM, LENA, SETH, and BILLIE are left dazed and seemingly confused. LENA is looking at Adam; ADAM at Seth and Billie; BILLIE at Seth; and SETH at Lena.

Each of them displays various gestures and overall body language that communicate not understanding what just happened, though none of them appears entirely convincing.)

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT I

SCENE SIX - VERY NEXT DAY

Setting: Lena and Adam's bedroom.

At rise: Lena and Adam are in their bedroom.

(LENA is moving through the bedroom quickly and angrily, packing a suitcase, throwing items into it helter-skelter. She continues this activity throughout the scene. ADAM is standing around watching her, following her moves, at times moving along with her.)

ADAM

Lena, what's wrong, dear? What are you doing?

LENA

What am I doing? I'm packing, that's what I'm doing! I'm moving out, Adam. I'm leaving you! Can you get at least that much right?!

ADAM

(pleading)

But why?...why are you doing this? I thought everything was fine between us.

Oh, sure, of course we have our little differences, like all couples. But we're still together...so we must have known how to patch things up through all these years. Right?

Please don't be doing this, dear. Please...we can fix things!

(Other than where specifically indicated, LENA looks at Adam ad lib while packing, as the moment moves her. She also paces jerkily ad lib.)

LENA

(tired of it all, confident and determined)

You're not aware - you've never been aware - of what's going on around you. Even now you don't see. You--don't--think! Oh...you can put the pieces of a stupid goddamn puzzle together alright, but when the pieces regard your own life, or your family, you let them just lie there all jumbled up, immobile, bewildered...nowhere!

You see Seth washing his hands over and over and over!...till he misses meals or is late for an appointment or he tries everyone's patience to the point of boil-over. And you say not a word.

You don't insist or even encourage him to keep the therapy appointments I make.

You see him repeatedly sneaking around checking the door lock to no purpose, filling ashtrays miles high with his cigarette butts, drinking coffee after coffee all the day long till his nerves are ready to blow us all up. But you don't connect the dots! You give it no thought. You just let the pieces lie there motionless, with no resolve, no solution. Your face is so close to the picture, Adam, that all you see is a blur and dots, not what's going on.

He paces the house day after day, week after week, jobless yet not trying to get work. You see that but pretend not to. "Nothing matches my skills," he says. And you don't push him to get out there and find work, even nudge him to take on any employment, anything at all that might jolt him off course, set him on a new path - push him into a new orbit for Christ's sake where things might get better!

(ADAM stands speechless and numb while LENA continues her tirade and packing. He tracks and turns to her various movements while she packs.

She stops to look at him.)

(MORE)

LENA (cont'd)

*(sincerely, softly, spirit-broken,
focused)*

Don't you see, Adam?

(slowly and very painfully)

Don't you see even yet that what you're doing with our son isn't working? Even yet?

(ADAM does not respond. LENA resumes packing as before and looking at him ad lib.)

But no! You turn instead to Billie - your little personal security blanket, your trustworthy little go-to in times of stress - your timeout from life, Adam! You cloud your mind and satisfy yourself with puny alibis and dead-end excuses. With pitiful pointless playtime with daddy's little girl--

-but she's a grown woman for Christ's sake!

(She continues packing and pacing.)

(resolute)

So you do what you have to do, Adam, and I'll do what I have to do...because I can't take it anymore! I really have had it with you. I don't feel connected to you anymore.

(screaming)

I--don't--feel--anything!

(LENA begins to cry, and continues some form of crying for remainder of scene.)

Never in years have I seen one single solitary minimum of a goddamned emotion coming out of you. Do you know what you are? You're a cold, complacent, empty, sorry specimen of a man if you're even that! You're dead, mister, is what you are! A goddamn walking dead man.

In...in...in what?...in more years than I can count you never once have touched me in any way that excites even the most remote parts of my body.

(MORE)

LENA (cont'd)

(She points her finger at him.)

Y--e--a--r--s! Day after day after goddamned day --
nothing!

ADAM

Please give me another chance! I really--

(She interrupts him.)

LENA

--When we were young and new at love, in the first
years...yes...yes!...we devoured each other. We were
vulnerable. And--we--were--happy, Adam.

(yearning emotionally, voice breaking)

God--knows--we--were--happy!

But now? Passion can flow strong, like a river gone wild,
through every artery and vein, every hill and valley of
my body, searching for a match in you, a yearning
similar, a sign of life in even the most distant
frontiers of your passion...and what do you do? What--
do--you--do?! You build up a goddamn barricade that stops
the flow and shrivels the passion - a straight line and a
bleep on the heart monitor is what you are!

(deeply painfully, and more tearfully)

Well you know what? I found a piece of that youth -
elsewhere - years ago...to relieve the suffocation, the
disconnect, the intolerable, loathsome void I felt with
you. It was disgusting and it was vile and it was
miserable - and only a measly crumb - but it was
something! And I loathe myself for it! Oh...God!...how I
have loathed myself for it. For the guilt and the
disgrace and the shame of it!

(She continues packing.)

You left me an old goddamn god-forsaken dried up desert
of a woman, Adam, and I'll not forgive you that. I won't!

(MORE)

LENA (cont'd)

My good looks and youth are all but gone - wasted! - and what measly, sick, mixed up part of them survives remains a pathetic uninhabited wasteland - an all but dead, dried up ditch!

(LENA looks hard and pointedly at Adam for the remainder of her lines.)

Well...so I may be, Adam...so--I--may--be. But I'll find it. I'll find what I'm looking for yet! I'll find it all right. I--will--find--happiness!

Happiness!

(borderline desperate)

I will!

And I'll just thank God Almighty it's not with you!!

(LENA exits flying out of the room with her suitcase, hat, and coat in tow.)

ADAM watches her leave, staring dumbfounded and overwhelmed at the empty doorway.)

(BLACKOUT)

CURTAIN
END OF ACT I

<<<<<< **BRIEF INTERMISSION** >>>>>>

ACT II

SCENE ONE - A FEW WEEKS LATER

Setting: Kitchen table.

At rise: Billie and Seth are playing a board game, seated at the kitchen table. Billie's back is to the front door. Seth is smoking, and drinking from a mug of coffee.

(SETH makes a move on the board.)

SETH

Ha! Victory! Take that!

BILLIE

Come on, Seth...you can't make a move like that!

SETH

Yes I can...any way I please! I do it all the time.

BILLIE

(with sarcasm)

Sounds good...real good...but how would you know if the rules allow it, right? You haven't read the rules. You never read the rules. You don't read anything! You just jump right in, with practically no knowledge of what you're doing, then you get all hot when you screw up.

(SETH raises his eyebrows a few times while smiling wryly.)

SETH

Gets me where I need to go!

BILLIE

Where you need to go?

Where you need to go is to the streets, buddy! We wouldn't even be here if you'd get off that ass of lard you own and find a job like the rest of us around here instead of quoting from your book of sorry excuses!

SETH

There's no job out there for my skills.

BILLIE

Sorry excuses!

(SETH extinguishes the cigarette, stands, and begins walking to the front door, a move which BILLIE is seemingly not paying much attention to, including while he is at the door.)

SETH

(On his way to the front door.)

Nothing appealing. You know that. I've told you that!

BILLIE

Sorry excuses!

SETH

(At the front door.)

If there was something out there I'd take it. And why wouldn't I? Who wouldn't?

(While BILLIE is delivering the lines below, SETH looks back at her sneakily - she has not turned around - then presses at some length on the door's thumb turner to assure himself that the door is still locked. He returns rather quickly to his place at the table while BILLIE is still speaking.)

BILLIE

Bull! You don't want to work, Seth. You'd much prefer the "royal option" you do so well. You know: stay home all day; chain smoke; drink black coffee till it makes you shake; wash your hands in the john till the lather you whip up is as big as you and one of us is waiting to get in!

(SETH is back at the table by now, and BILLIE looks at him.)

Oh and did I mention?...check multiple times a day to make sure the front door is locked just in case the big bad wolf is out there waiting to get you!

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

Do nothing, really - Your Royal Highness!

(SETH, calmly and unimpressed, lights another cigarette.)

BILLIE

You try in sneaky ways to hide it all, but do you think we don't notice, Seth? That we don't drop hints about you to each other when you're not around? Just hints of course, 'cause God knows we can't ever say what we're really thinking in this family!

We--notice--all--right, Seth! In fact your obsessions are driving us all cuh--ray--ZY!

(with sarcasm)

Or maybe with all your many...[she gestures quotation marks]..."pressing activities," you've been too busy to think about this? Not to mention your insisting we keep up appearances as though [she gestures quotation marks again] "it's all good."

(continuing the sarcasm)

R--i--g--h--t!...like we're some kind of model family! Try that idea on your shrink sometime and see where it lands you!:

[Note: The words "Scene 1," "Scene 2," and "Scene 3" below are to be actually delivered as part of Billie's lines.]

(mockingly)

Scene 1...ooh, ooh, listen carefully now...

(Cups her hand over one ear showing excitement.)

Scene 2...hark!, the asylum doorbell sounds...the door opens...

Scene 3...hark hark!: "Oh hello, I'm the ding-dong Seth you've been expecting - you know...the one with the model family!"

SETH

(angrily and threateningly)

You just watch it or I'll--

(BILLIE interrupts.)

BILLIE

(more sarcasm)

--When a person's as busy as you are - I mean in the grip of his special [she gestures quotation marks again] "agitations" - I guess he doesn't have time to think about other things, huh? Like what's churning deep inside, right? He doesn't have time to figure out that the decoys he throws at us don't really keep us from seeing what might be going on there.

(slowly, matter-of-factly and without malice, shaking her head sadly while looking at Seth in the eyes)

How--very--strange--you--are, brother. So very strange. And I wonder...I mean I just wonder sometimes what it is you really don't want to think about--

(SETH interrupts.)

SETH

--What's it to you, anyway?

BILLIE

What's it to me? What's it to me?! Do you think I enjoy having my friends ask, "What's wrong with Seth? Why is Seth always ready to explode? Why doesn't Seth have friends? Why no girlfriend, never a date?"

You've driven them all away, Seth! You and your anger and your sick rituals have destroyed the hope of every girl who ever tried to come near you, the interest of anyone at all who ever thought they might want to get to know you.

What's it to me? Just a major goddamned embarrassment, that's what!

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

You just stay home all day doing God knows what: drinking that fancy coffee you can't hardly afford now that Mama isn't here to pay for it. Smoking those cheap coffin-nails. Wishing Mama would call to you again from her room wanting you for something... [she looks at Seth suggestively]...or other.

Sometimes I wonder what you and Mama--

(SETH interrupts.)

SETH

(exploding)

--S--H--U--T----U--P! Just shut the fuck up!

(long pause)

(then slowly, hurt, almost pleading)

You--don't--know--anything!

You--don't--know. You don't.

Nothing.

At all.

(pause)

*(very quietly and mainly to himself,
shaking his head)*

Nothing.

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT II

SCENE TWO - MORNING A COUPLE OF MONTHS LATER

Setting: Kitchen and living room.

At rise: Adam is sitting at the kitchen table having breakfast. Billie is sitting on the sofa reading a newspaper.

(ADAM looks up from his breakfast.)

ADAM

So what's the weather for today going to be, honey?...yesterday was so cold!

BILLIE

The paper says sunny and 60s. That should be comfortable for a change!

Say, Daddy...hold on a second...

(BILLIE goes over to the kitchen table, pulls up a chair, and sits very close to Adam. For the remainder of the scene ADAM strokes her head and face and puts his arm around her, ad lib, showing his fatherly affection for her.)

BILLIE

(somewhat uncomfortably)

So...uh...well...Mama hasn't been home in a couple of months now. You never told us, exactly, why she left...or when she's coming back.

Why did Mama leave, Daddy?

ADAM

Oh I don't know. She just did. I found her packing her suitcase one day. She said mean things to me during that meeting. Really mean. She was acting rather crazy actually ...irrational you know, and not making sense. I never was much good at handling your mother's irrational
(MORE)

ADAM (cont'd)

moments - far less her anger. I guess she thought I was too gentle, too easy on some things.

BILLIE

What kind of things, Daddy?

(ADAM sidesteps the question.)

ADAM

Oh...gosh...sweetie...I don't think I can answer that. She hit me with so many things, you know?...from so many angles. Reminds me of the pictures you see of St. Sebastian being martyred - the one...where they shot so many arrows into him from so many different directions and angles there was no way to tell which one killed him or which one to focus on. That's kind of how your mother came at me. From everywhere. I couldn't tell what the real problem was. It was confusing.

So you see?...there's not much use trying to figure it out or dwelling on it. A waste of time, I'm quite sure. Suffice it to say she was angry and she left.

BILLIE

Have you heard from her? When is she coming back?

ADAM

I rather think she won't be coming home again, sweetie...at least not any time soon. And no, I've heard nothing from her since the day she ran out on us.

BILLIE

Where did she go?

ADAM

I have no idea. She may even have left town by now.

I did call around...inquired of a couple of her friends. Nothing. And I went several times to places I knew she used to frequent. Nothing there either. She apparently just vanished...like a wispy cloud or a puff of smoke on a windy day. Gone...[Snaps his fingers.]...like that.

BILLIE

Was she mad at me, Daddy? Did she leave because of me?
Did I do something wrong?

ADAM

No, no, no, sweetheart! You mustn't think that. Nothing of the kind. You had nothing to do with it. Nothing. Your mother just left, that's all. Think of it that way.

BILLIE

But I know she didn't like me, Daddy. I know it. I know she didn't want me, not at all, even a little. You must know that. And she didn't like me being your special girl. Maybe you and Mama would have been closer if I had never been born.

ADAM

(saddened by this news and attempting to console)

Oh, now, hush now, dear! Don't talk that way! Nothing on earth could be farther from the truth. Your mother loved you like every mother loves her child...you must try and believe that!

BILLIE

No. I can't. I can't! I know she didn't like me, Daddy - I heard her say so. Besides, she was mean to me...always looking at me with a scowl on her face...never anything pleasant. I don't think she ever once smiled at me...certainly nothing I'd want to remember. Never made me feel special...like you do, Daddy!

(She leans into him with affection.)

Never once said even just a few nice words to me.

And she used to pinch me when I was little, without you or anyone else knowing. I never knew why. Sometimes she'd even pull my hair while brushing it, till I cried.

(ADAM gives her a special hug.)

ADAM

Oh, dear...I--am--sorry, honey! I didn't know. I had no idea or I would have done something about it, wouldn't I have?

BILLIE

She barely even helped me when I was going through the change, when a girl is becoming a woman and needs her mother.

(BILLIE leans more into Adam and focuses her gaze intently on him.)

So we're not close, Daddy, and I hope she never comes back.

Never ever!

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT II

SCENE THREE - A COUPLE OF WEEKS
OR SO LATER

*Setting: Kitchen and living
room.*

*At rise: Billie and Seth are
home alone. Billie is in the
living room sitting on the sofa
reading a newspaper, her face
not visible to Seth because of
the way she happens to be
holding the paper. Seth is at
the kitchen table working on
something. Billie's backpack,
visible, is slung across the
back of one of the chairs at the
table.*

SETH

Hey Bill, can I bum a cigarette?

(BILLIE does not look up from the paper.)

BILLIE

Yeah sure...they're in my backpack.

(SETH searches the backpack for the cigarettes
and in the process discovers several magazines
for gay women and a couple of pornographic
lesbian action photos. He examines the
material, still inside the backpack, then
angrily jerks it out of the bag, repeatedly
slapping the back of his hand against it.)

SETH

What the hell is this??!

(BILLIE looks at Seth, sees the material,
throws aside the paper, jumps to her feet, and
rushes over to the table with her hands
outstretched.)

BILLIE

GIVE THOSE TO ME!!

(BILLIE and SETH struggle fiercely to get control of the material. SETH is prevailing.)

BILLIE

(sobbing)

Stop it! Stop it, Seth!! Just give them to me. They're mine! You have no right!

(BILLIE sobs quietly and woefully, ad lib, from this point to the end of the scene.)

SETH wins the struggle over the material, shoving BILLIE to the floor.)

SETH

(violently angry)

You're a lesbo! A fucking dyke!

(BILLIE struggles some to get up from the floor while reaching out her hand for the material.)

BILLIE

(desperate)

Please Seth! Please give those to me!

SETH

(mocking her viciously)

A doughnut on the prowl for...guess what folks...another doughnut! The kind with the hole in the middle...and...but ...

(SETH ingests a sigh and puts his fingers over his mouth, playfully feigning shock.)

oh dear!...but missing the middle things...
what are those called?

Oh yes!...the balls! Whatever happened to the balls?
Where--are--the balls?!

(SETH looks at Billie playfully but cruelly.)

(MORE)

SETH (cont'd)

Awww...shucks...seems they rolled away...howling no doubt!

(SETH raises his index finger to his lips soliciting silence.)

Shhhh!

(Directs the palm of his hand in an aside to the audience, whispering loudly.)

Her not need them!

(Turns back to Billie.)

(yells in absolute disgust)

You--turn--my--stomach! You really do!

BILLIE

(pleading)

Please Seth...

SETH

(chuckling)

Hey folks, listen to this!...my big sister here does it with girls! All that social work stuff finally turned her!

You're disgusting, Billie! Get that part of this right!

BILLIE

Stop it! Just stop!

SETH

Disgusting!

It's not enough to be Daddy's little big girl, to blind him with charm, keep him spinning inside your perverted little orbit till he sees almost nothing of what goes on around him. Noooo...

(chuckling)

Ohhhh-no! No-no-no! That's not enough for my big sister! That won't do!

(MORE)

SETH (cont'd)

You see...there's more, folks: on top of neutering our father my pervert sister here has to bring shame to the family. Daddy's little big girl has to flaw and stain the family name--

(BILLIE interrupts.)

BILLIE

--Please Seth...don't do this to me!

(SETH ignores her.)

SETH

...introduce disgust and filth to the family name! Dirty, filthy, dis-gust!

(SETH slowly tears the magazines and photos into bits and pieces, taunting Billie while angrily throwing them to the floor as he does so.

BILLIE begins to frantically gather up the paper bits, rather reminiscent of a starving dog rushing for food crumbs fallen from a table, trying to get all it can before being stopped. Utterly humiliated, she continues picking up the paper bits through the end of the scene.)

SETH

(After throwing down the last of the papers.)
There!...have at it! Put 'em together. Make the mother of all pictures...then go turn yourself on!

You've really done it this time, kid!

BILLIE

Please Seth...please don't tell anyone!

SETH

(with sarcasm)

Ohhh...right! You hit that nail on the head! Don't tell anyone, now! Shhh...quiet now...not nice!

Right!

BILLIE

(pleading while continuing to gather the bits of paper)

No Seth...really. Please don't let this out. Don't tell anyone! Especially not Daddy! I couldn't bear it. I just could not!

SETH

Guess we'll see about that!

BILLIE

No one!

(She looks up at him)

Please.

(Returns to picking up the papers.)

Daddy can't know...not Daddy! Not that! His new image of me would kill him...be his end! He couldn't survive first Mama, now me!

(The stage slowly darkens to blackout as BILLIE's lamenting and tears continue, heartfelt and moving, and as she continues picking up the bits of paper and delivering her remaining lines.)

BILLIE

No more Seth. Please...no more...please
Seth...don't...you can't do this...you mustn't...

(BLACKOUT)

END OF SCENE

ACT II

SCENE FOUR - A WEEK LATER

Setting: Living room and entrance to Seth's bedroom.

At rise: Adam is reading a newspaper on the sofa in the living room, and Billie is reading a book on a nearby chair.

(After a bit, BILLIE gets up and goes with her book to sit on the sofa with Adam, sitting sufficiently close to support a quiet, private conversation.)

BILLIE

(privately, with cunning and manipulation)

You know - just between us, Daddy - I hope you realize by now that Seth lies all the time about not being able to find work.

ADAM

Ohhh...?

BILLIE

(still privately)

Mm-hum. When you're gone at the office all day, you think he's out there looking hard for a job, but he's not. He's lying when he tells you nothing out there matches his skills. You must know that's not true by now...or at least suspect something about his story doesn't jive.

ADAM

Well I--

(BILLIE interrupts.)

BILLIE

(still privately)

--Think about it: just about every day the TV and papers say employers can't fill the jobs they have open, even

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

when they increase the pay. So there's plenty of jobs out there and not enough takers - that's the truth, Daddy; what Seth tells you is not.

Seth doesn't want to work, Daddy! He's been lying...lying all along! I wouldn't be surprised if maybe he lies about other things too.

(continuing the cunning)

He's so good at the lies he tells about his job search that he throws off course every effort you make to question him about it. He's a liar. Every time you ask he tells another lie.

He's scared to death to work, Daddy...scared to leave the house even.

And he used to be uptight, I know, that he wouldn't be there all those times whenever Mama--

(Billie interrupts herself very abruptly, gasping in horror at what she has just revealed, and covers her mouth with both hands.)

ADAM

Whenever Mama what?

(At that moment GEORGE enters through the front door, interrupting the scene. He looks at Billie and Adam.)

GEORGE

Sorry to interrupt but...Father...the bank says I need your signature for next term's college loan.

(GEORGE hands the papers to Adam.)

They're the usual papers you've signed before. Do you think you could just sign where it says, and I'll be on my way?

(ADAM quickly reviews the loan papers, which by now he is used to signing for George. He runs a

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

finger rather quickly over each new item, nodding and mumbling his assent to it. He signs the document and hands it back to George.)

GEORGE

(unemotionally)

Thanks. We'll be in touch.

(GEORGE starts to leave, but before he gets to the door ADAM calls out to him.)

ADAM

Say George...hold on a moment.

(GEORGE stops and turns around to face Adam.)

ADAM

Some time back when you had your blow-up with us, you said, "You all should have known." You didn't say what you meant and I didn't understand or ask. Since you were so loud and insistent about it, I need to ask now: what did you mean? We should have known what?

GEORGE

(brusquely)

I don't want to talk about it. Not now.

ADAM

Well I think I need to know, Son.

GEORGE

Yeah...well...I think I don't want to say.

ADAM

I insist, George! For some reason, what you said that day and the way you said it, I--

(GEORGE interrupts.)

GEORGE

(caustically and loudly)

--I-said-NO!

(SETH exits his room, smoking a cigarette,
curious to know the source of the arguing.)

SETH

Hey...what's all the noise about?

ADAM

(losing his patience with George)

George!...for the last time tell me what you meant that
day when you said "You all should have known."

Known what?!

SETH

*(matter-of-factly, confident, with cruel
and profound derision)*

Known she's a dyke of course!

(BILLIE lowers her head in utter shame. ADAM
responds with a look of confusion, then shock,
turning to Billie.)

GEORGE

(with contemptuous ridicule and anger)

Je-zuz-Chuh-RIST! No, not Billie!

(GEORGE looks at Adam.)

Even now you are blind, Father! Even goddamn now you
don't see what's been going on in this house!

(laughs derisively)

Still!

(GEORGE turns and heads for the front door with
the papers in hand.)

(still laughing, incredulous)

My God!...still!

(While GEORGE is going to the door, ADAM turns
and looks at Seth, searching for the meaning of
what George has been saying, then to Billie the
same, but suddenly changing his look at her as
though he might no longer know who she is.)

(CONTINUED)

REDEMPTION/Talarico

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Just as GEORGE reaches for the door knob the door bell rings. GEORGE answers the door, exchanging a few indistinct words with the visitor.

GEORGE turns to the others with a puzzled look.)

GEORGE

It's the County Coroner.

(GEORGE makes way for ADAM, who approaches the door and speaks privately with the CORONER.

GEORGE stands apart from his siblings and Adam.

All three siblings are out of hearing range but focused intently on what is going on at the door. At a certain point ADAM sinks into himself, standing frozen in shock.

After a few moments, ADAM and the CORONER resume talking privately and briefly. The CORONER hands ADAM a piece of paper, then takes leave. ADAM slowly closes the door while reading the paper to himself, then gasps.)

GEORGE

(softly, caringly)

What is it, Father? What's the matter?

(ADAM, still holding the paper, looks at his children.)

ADAM

(distraught, softly)

It's your mother.

She's dead!

GEORGE

(surprised)

What?!!

BILLIE

(concerned)

What happened?

(pause)

SETH

(calm and without emotion)

Of what?

ADAM

She drowned...the river...down by the south bridge.

SETH

(still calm and without emotion)

Drowned? But she's afraid of water. She never goes near water - there must be a mistake.

ADAM

Your mother...Seth...she...she took her own life!

(ADAM looks at the children again, all of whom are frozen in shock.)

(pause)

SETH

(still calm and without emotion)

The paper...what's on the paper?

ADAM

It's a note.

SETH

(still calm and without emotion)

A note? What does it say?

ADAM

They found it inside her pocket.

SETH

(still calm and without emotion)

Read it.

ADAM

(tenderly, trying to protect Seth)

I...I can't, Son. It's not something--

(SETH interrupts.)

SETH

(demanding but still calm)

--Read it!

(ADAM obliges, reluctantly.)

ADAM

(reading quietly but audibly for all to hear)

"My dearest Seth.

(He looks painfully at Seth, then continues.)

My sweet, sweet baby."

(He pauses briefly.)

That's it. The rest is scribbled out, not legible.
That's all there is.

(SETH holds out his hand defiantly, signaling he wants to see the note. ADAM hands it to him. SETH reads the note, examines it carefully up close, turns it over, desperate to see more, know more. Then he wads it up in a mad fit and casts it aside passionately as if that act of dissociation might actually dissociate himself from the contents of the note. His arms drop to his sides, dangling and limp.

SETH moves to center stage left, slowly, clearly separating himself from the others, and begins to cry.)

SETH

(confused and intensely curious)

But how? How did she drown?

ADAM

(in a caring, fatherly tone that indicates it would be better not to know)

You don't want to know, Son.

SETH

(calmly)

I do want to know, Father.

ADAM

(giving in reluctantly)

She tied a weight to her neck and--

SETH

(interrupting, exploding, covering his ears and shrieking as loudly and tensely as possible.)

--GOD--DAMN--IT!!

(He descends slowly to his knees, then onto his heels, pounding the floor in desperation.)

(shrieking again same as before)

GOD--DAMN--IT!! No! No! NO!

(SETH coils gradually into some form of a fetal position, in a state of complete and utter breakdown, now quietly sobbing and whimpering as he continues to process the news.)

(moaning painfully that the answer might be yes)

Was it me, Mama? Was it me?! Was it because of me?!

(SETH intersperses soft cries of "Mama!" among his moans and groans, ad lib for the remainder of the monologue in addition to where specifically indicated)

No. No. It cannot be. How can you be gone? Don't be gone, Mama! How can I know now why you did it - those things - loved me like that...in those ways...?

(ADAM, GEORGE, and BILLIE do not go to Seth to offer solace; in fact they quite noticeably back away somewhat, BILLIE even more so.)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLIE, hands over her mouth in horror, slowly backs up to down stage right, separating herself from the others as if attempting not to be noticed, fearing that her turn to self-disclose might be close at hand.

For the duration of his monologue SETH moves back and forth emotionally, ad lib, between being a small child talking quietly to himself, and the adult that he is. He cries, sobs, whimpers ad lib, as he feels it.

There is a long pause, after which SETH resumes.)

SETH

(emotionally collected for the next 2 paragraphs)

At first it was easy...even fun. I was little. The bed... she'd hold me...close...talk...soft...so sweet. She'd say I was a good boy - "You're a good little boy, honey" - running her warm fingers through my hair over and over and over till I'd almost fall asleep.

I'd climb on top...you'd pull me to you tight...all of me tight...warm - and I knew you loved me then, Mommy. I was your little boy - "my special secret man," you said.

(He sneaks a glance at the others, uneasy and looking somewhat ashamed.)

A few times I forgot the door and it stayed open a little.

(squirming, whining apologetically)

I didn't mean for anyone to see! I didn't!

(He looks at George quickly, embarrassed; then at Adam.)

(matter of factly, acknowledging but not accusing)

Daddy must have known we were in there but he never asked me what we were doing. Never how I was.

(MORE)

SETH (cont'd)

I was just a kid. It was his job to keep me safe but he never did anything, never said anything. Nothing at all.

(SETH is back to addressing the group but not necessarily looking at them.)

Once or twice, maybe more, when I'd forget to close the door all the way, George would be standing there in the crack-way, hiding, peeking. Sometimes when Mama laughed...or made her...her pleasure noises, I saw shadows go by the door and I knew it was George sneaking around again. George hates Mama and me for those times, for what we did, for what he had to see, and Father too I think for not figuring it out, never stopping it. George can't forgive any of us.

Even till not long ago, once in a while Mama would call me in. Maybe she needed help with her dress again or...or...well

(He looks at the others furtively, barely.)

...with other things. She told me I got my nice body and good looks from her. Only her. She'd hold out my arms in front of her and say how handsome and strong I was getting.

The last few times we were together she started asking where everyone was...when you all were coming home.

If there was a noise at the front door she'd get away from me fast and start talking like we were having a conversation but we weren't. It happened that way when George came home once; we did stop but I could tell he knew.

No matter what I told myself, I knew it was wrong by then but I couldn't stop...I couldn't let you down, Mama. You said you would always love me and I knew you would. I would always be your special man...just yours.

A couple more times before she went away she called me in but it wasn't the same. I saw tears. No talk. Just tears. And I didn't understand.

(MORE)

SETH (cont'd)

Father never did tell us why she left or where she went. Not really. I figured it was my fault so I tried to find her myself. I thought maybe I could bring her back...I don't know. I missed her!

I miss you, Mommy!

Every day while you were all out, I looked. First in stores I knew she liked, then in the bad part of town - the dirty part!

(pause)

Well I found Mama. Her clothes were ugly, tight, cheap-looking, and her skirt was very very short. She stood like those other women down there. Her shoes had really high and thick heels, and there were straps around her ankles and higher up. She wore a hat that kind of hid her face. But I knew. In the light there I knew it was her. My mother. It was Mama.

(excited while briefly forgetting himself)

It was you, Mama! I found you!! I miss you!

(calmly returning to himself)

Her face was tired...wrinkled...puffy. She smiled even so. Sweet...like before when I was little...and I thought maybe she might come home. But then the muscles on her face went to war and pulled in every direction till the smile lost and was gone and her face went dead. She started to cry. So many tears. "I'm sorry" I think she was saying..."I'm so sorry." But no words...just tears...the kind that wash but never clean.

(pause)

You stared so long that day, Mama. One last look you took. I guess...for...forever.

(pause)

(MORE)

SETH (cont'd)

(with gradually mounting emotional pain)

Then you were gone! You ran away so fast! You looked scared when you looked back at me...like an animal running away looks back at the hunter.

(loudly and longingly)

But-it-was-ME, Mama - Seth! Why-did-you-run-so-fast?
From ME! WHY?

(cries a long scream)

Ma--ma!

Why did you run?

(slowly, very softly to himself, with agony)

You did not have to run...you did not have to run...not that! You did not have to do it like that, leave me like that.

(pause)

(slowly and very collected and resigned)

I'm alone now. I can't say things to you now. I know that now.

(does a quick and unexpected emotional about-face screaming with intense and painful longing as the permanence of his mother's death registers with him fully)

Mom--MY!

(BLACKOUT)

CURTAIN

END OF ACT II

<<<<<< **INTERMISSION** >>>>>>

ACT III

SCENE ONE - SAME DAY

Setting: Same as at the end of Act II.

At Rise: Adam, George, Seth, and Billie are in the same positions they were in at the end of Act II, except that Adam and George are now facing Billie, and Seth gradually comes out of the position he was in and also faces Billie.

(BILLIE looks ad lib at her family collectively or at individual members except where otherwise indicated.)

BILLIE

I was eight or nine when I knew I didn't look at women the same as other women do. I didn't have a word for it but I knew I was attracted. Maybe other women appealed because Mama was so mean and they were not.

I knew I couldn't tell anyone--

(She looks pointedly at the others.)

--the club you're in makes sure of that. I was desperate to keep it a secret from Mama or she'd find some new way to hurt me. I knew she didn't want me in the first place. "I didn't want a girl," she told me more than once, "and then there you were!" One time not long before she left she even called me a big fat mistake.

I was afraid even Daddy wouldn't love me if he found out. I wouldn't be his "perfect little girl" anymore. No one would look at me the same.

I was isolated and alone. I felt shame. Everything...everyone around me said it was wrong...disgusting...a sin. That was the message I got no matter where I went, which way I turned, who I saw.

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

"Yet how could who I was be wrong?" I asked myself. We all start out life beautiful and good and everyone agrees - right? - everyone agrees!
Then someone, at some point, somehow, makes us feel -

(She looks at the others.)

makes even you feel - that we're not good enough the way we are.

So what do we do? We spend half our lives trying to become someone we are not - for those around us - and the other half searching for who we were before we got lost...separated...from ourselves.

Yet all of you...

(She looks at the others.)

...all of you held me back from that search. You pushed me away from it, put up roadblocks.

(She looks at Adam.)

You too, Daddy, by keeping me safe inside your little girl image of me, guarding your status quo at all costs, keeping things the same for you and for Mama. Safe for you it was - but not for me.

But where was I in all of that? Trapped inside the cocoon you spun around me is where! It did not protect me, Daddy; it only stopped me from figuring out who I am. And it stopped me from telling you, which would have brought us closer instead of causing the resentments I've come to feel because of my secret.

(pause)

Well I don't want to be there anymore, in your trap...and I don't want to live that way anymore.

(She looks at each of them carefully,
painfully.)

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

I don't want to waste one day more of my life trying to be this for you Daddy, or that for you Seth, or who knows what for you George. I'm not in this world to learn how to cope with your nightmare expectations. That's--not--my--job!!

I want to be who I am!

(with strong emotion)

I--AM--GAY! That's the way I was made and the way I'll always be!

(pause)

Most of us hold back from showing who we really are, because we're afraid. Some fear we're not able to name keeps a tight hold on us. Without even understanding it or naming it we long to be free of it...the weight of it. We long to be who we are, the real us. We cling to some vague hope for freedom - an escape, a liberation. But for most of us the basic fear remains and keeps its grip on us...keeps sucking us in. And the drawing near to others that we so desperately yearn for doesn't come - and it won't come! because it cannot come! - until we understand that what we keep holding back from the people around us for dread of seeming so shockingly different is-what-makes-us-so-incredibly-alike-all-along!

Don't you see?

(She giggles, adamantly confident.)

We're all the same! Made of the same stuff. Equal! Like it or not. Curse it or not!

(pause)

(very calmly)

But aren't you tired of it?...the fear?

I am.

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

I want to be me no matter how you see me. I want to be free - unhitched from the wagon of hopelessness fear keeps us in. Untangled from it all.

(She looks at Adam.)

Even from you, Daddy, if that's what it takes to be free. Not like Mama left - to be free from you - but really free: inside myself!

(longer pause)

(with growing excitement, re-living the following incident, forgetting that it was all in the past and is over now)

I knew in high school track I wanted to do more with a woman than just have thoughts. Coach Adams...she came over to me once at practice to set me up into position for the sprint. She planted her big strong hands on me, one on each side. Like giant magnets they held me firm as she pulled up on my back till I was deep inside the hollow of her chest. She held me there tighter than I had ever been held, and her warm breath against my face smothered my thoughts, blurred my focus. "Do you feel that, Billie?" she whispered. "Can you feel the position now, hon'?" But in her arms all I felt was intense heat racing through every part of me...protection from every hurt. And I did not want it to end!

(She pauses, leading into a let-down; the excitement has left her.)

But...nothing. Nothing at all came my way after that day. Just lonely deserts, and chasms between me and every love I ever dared to imagine.

(She looks at each of the three in turn.)

(sadly)

And no one saw. And no one knew. And nothing was.

(She nods, resigned and sad, to indicate it's true.)

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

(harshly self-abasing)

Just measly meaningless mock-love porn pics I buy on the sly, look at on the sly, trash on the sly. Afraid someone will see me, judge me, crush me.

(She looks at Seth.)

...like you do, Seth.
And Daddy and George would probably have done no better.

(pause)

Do you think I haven't punished myself for the shame I've been told to feel?

I've punished myself all right, every day...plenty!

(pause)

But the thing is, we all need physical affection and physical love. One way or another we satisfy the need or we don't stay normal. We go nuts, get screwy, weird - like you think I am sometimes. Because that need must have its day. It must come out, one way or another. All sorts of crazy thoughts and things you do are born in the death that comes from not responding to that need. Without the physical love and affection, some of us jump frantically into dream-filled nirvana lands of our own invention. Some of us fall into self-destructive behavior that seduces us with open arms. Still others of us take off on flights of fancy: to new amusements we run, the latest trend, a fresh addiction, an old obsession, another partner.

(explosively, jolting the audience as well)

Then **BAM!** **FRAUD!**

All those actions have been just meaningless distractions leading nowhere. Because there is no substitute for the affection and the love we need. No amount of money or fame or power or sex can fill the need.

(longer pause)

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

Truth is I did find a girl once. And I thought for a moment

(tearfully with strong emotion)

- for one...brief...goddamn beautiful moment - maybe she was the one...maybe finally it could be. Could last.

But no.

And you know why? Because I -- because we,

(She draws a circle with her finger, toward and to include her family.)

none of us knows a goddamn thing about getting along...about relationships...or love - about anything that's not dysfunctional!

Yet I still keep thinking maybe some woman I'll have a chat with here or there will be the one...or someone I'll meet in a class...or sometimes she'll even be a complete stranger just saying hello on a street corner I get so desperate!

(pause)

(Billie turns abruptly here and looks at the audience directly, addressing them intimately for the next five paragraphs.)

[1] In a book I read once there was this kitten that was starving for milk because it hadn't had any for way too long. And this sorry piece of a man who owns her puts a bowl of milk on the floor in the middle of the room. And just as the tips of the cat's whiskers al-most touch the rim of the bowl he takes her back to the corner and makes her start all over again. Over and over again.

[2] And you wanna know something? That's what looking for love has been like for me: almost but never quite.

(pause)

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

(softly, movingly, with deep feeling)

[3] I get so lonely without the love. I feel so far from life without the love - sometimes not even part of life. Do you know what that's like?

(collected, without judgment)

[4] No... I'll bet most of you don't.

(She nods her head a few times to affirm what she is about to say.)

[5] And it's a hell worse than hell to feel also unloved. But just try believing that you're not...even...lovable!

(There's a long pause here while she slowly turns to focus again on her family.)

I'm tired of feeling I live on the fringes of life, not in the heart of it like you. Oh sure, I exist in your mainstream...but I live on its fringes. In your own ways you tell me the entrance fee to "acceptance land" is worth - a worth you say I don't have.

Yet we all matter the same...not some of us more, some less. The fact alone that I'm here - that I exist at all - says I have worth. Not your mainstream or your judgments: I don't need them...they are not required.

I cannot be part of a cosmos that is obviously of supreme grandeur -

(giggles while extending arms outward and upward)

just take a good look at it!

- and at the same time be worth anything less than it. Yet I am part of the cosmos, and that fact alone is the single greatest and most basic, undeniable testimony to my worth.

(pause)

So you see:

(MORE)

BILLIE (cont'd)

*(insisting slowly, with strong and
confident conviction)*

There-are-no-degrees-of-worth-because-there-are-no-
degrees-of-worth!

Just worth. Just that simple. Just that's all!

(BLACKOUT)

CURTAIN

<<<<<< **BRIEF INTERMISSION** >>>>>>

Act III

SCENE TWO - SAME DAY

Setting: Same as at the end of Scene One.

At Rise: All are in the same basic positions they were in at the end of Scene One.

GEORGE

(calmly)

First Mother...then Seth...now Billie.

(Looks at everyone.)

What's going on with us? What are we?

(Shakes his head.)

One big mountain of a mess of a family, that's what we are! We don't forgive. We're bitter and resentful...all of us! Me too.

But can we hate each other so much? Is it really possible?

I don't think so.

God knows none of us is perfect; no one in the world is. And no one is all good or all bad. The whole world is a combination of good and evil, not just us.

Good and evil are opposite sides of the same coin - and we are that coin! These two enemies are inside us always, tugging constantly at our shirt sleeves to be noticed. They both want to conquer us, dominate us - same as we so often try to do with each other. Or one country or system tries to do with another. It's this way because...I guess because it just is! That's the way of life, how we all developed, evolved. Take it or leave it but we're not all one way or the other.

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

We fight for years to live up to the good, to the virtuous good, unable to imagine living with less than a hundred percent good. As we get older many of us start to imagine the possibility - the unavoidable necessity! - of living with both options, both extremes, good and evil side by side within us all the time, every second. We begin to understand that we cannot be all good only. We're not perfect and we can't measure up to a hundred percent good.

We try to come to terms with the conflict we feel over this, the contradiction, the pain and guilt of it that live hidden inside the prisons of our minds. Most of us manage most of the time to control the worst of the negative we find there. Others cave and it escapes - and you've heard of war and hate and the many other ways we humans destroy!

(pause)

Mother taught us nothing about how to manage the evil inside...how to deal with the resentment and anger we've come to feel toward each other - how to forgive, really.

Father has done little better...and his silence has not been helpful.

Instead we've been left on our own to manage the open wounds we have with each other. Rust-filled wounds that offer us only fear and anger as a healing remedy when what we need is to forgive and be free because of it.

But that fear and anger only keep us unable to act, unable to forgive...and sometimes I think they're even some kind of death wish, some primal, vague desire for self-destruction that hides in the scary shadows deep inside us. Afterall, are we not destroying ourselves? Isn't that what we're doing?

Fear and anger lead nowhere good; they only diminish us. How else can we explain the depth to which we have sunk with each other?

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

I think we might be afraid of even trying to forgive because...well let's face it...who would we be without it? What would be our anchor then, without the fear I mean?

(He pauses, then turns to Adam.)

Mother could not forgive you, Father, for not giving her what she needed. And she couldn't forgive herself for what she did to Seth or how she treated Billie.

(He turns to Seth.)

You, Seth, were not able to forgive Mother, and you can't forgive Father for not figuring out what she was up to and stopping her. Even less I bet can you forgive yourself. And you can't forgive Billie for being gay, or me for discovering your big secret and not telling.

(He turns to Billie.)

And Billie, you can't forgive anyone either - including me I know for abandoning the family and not accepting you as gay and living a life I still am uncomfortable just to think about. But maybe you, too, like Seth, can't forgive yourself, because you know you must have noticed the strange behavior between Mother and Seth over the years but, like me, said nothing. You kept your focus instead on whatever was the best way to suck up to Father to feed your own self-centeredness--

BILLIE

(interrupting loudly)

--You shut up!

(screaming, with hands over her ears)

Just shut the fuck up!

(GEORGE ignores Billie's outburst, and continues, looking at everyone.)

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

No doubt Father should have done more to hold us together. And he should have been able to connect the dots about Seth a long time ago and get him the help he needed...and I'm not sure I can forgive him those things--

(SETH interrupts.)

SETH

(with sarcasm)

--Oh great, big brother!

(SETH holds out his hand mockingly and as if a presenter at an awards ceremony.)

And the envelope p-l-e-a-s-e!

What about you, George, huh? Good boy George, huh?

Huh?

(with ridicule)

Smart boy George! College boy George! Wow! The genius whose brilliant mind told him to study psychology and then turn on his own family! Can I please be first in line to forgive him that one?!

And the winner...

(Seth elongates a tone of anticipation as one about to announce a winner, shouting "George" as the unmistakable climax.)

...iiiiiii...zzz: GEORGE!!

So tell us mister-knows-it-all, tickle our ears all about your contribution to this family crap pile?

GEORGE

(calmly)

So okay, I'm sorry. I know I should have said what I knew about Mother and you, but I was afraid. I was a coward.

(GEORGE covers his face with his hands, crying briefly in shame, then wipes the tears from his eyes.)

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

(forcefully and ashamed)

A chickenshit! I admit that, okay? Okay?! I chose Father's way instead...silence. I caved, and I will never get away from that guilt--

(SETH interrupts again.)

SETH

(with sarcasm and mockery)

--Ooooh Brother G, soon-to-be Professor G, sounds soooo intense! Shall I close my eyes before they cross from such news?! Or maybe shall I plug my ears to keep out the shock waves?! Or...

(facetiously while holding up his index finger)

...wait!...maybe shall I keep them both open and on edge for more lecture on...

(with anger and mockery)

...FOR---GIVE---NESS?!!! Tell me! I'm dying to know! You know I'm dying, can't you tell?

GEORGE

(calmly, softly, caringly)

Look...we're all in this mess the same, okay? I don't claim to be an exception. I'm no better than any of you. And I don't say I know the way out. But I do believe we all want out, want peace in the family.

(Billie begins to cry quietly and the others notice it. She continues crying, ad lib and unobtrusively, to the end of the scene.)

We want release from the anger and resentment and negative feelings we have toward each other...I can't believe we don't!

(with loud and confident insistence)

We-want-FORGIVENESS-for-Christ's-sake!!- the cure for the poison that's been eating us alive!

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

And that forgiveness doesn't come from nowhere! It has to come from someone else. Only you can offer me the forgiveness I need from you, and only I can offer you the same. Only you can let go of the resentment and anger you feel toward me, and only I can do the same toward you. Don't you see? - Forgiveness is what could connect us again to each other?

(with longing emotion)

Don't you see?

(pause)

Now it seems pretty obvious we're not ready to forgive, and maybe we never will be: we're that full of the poison. But like it or not, truth is we still have *Choice*: we still have a will that is free to choose what it wants, and that will can never be taken away or lost.

And we still have *Time*: for as long as we live we have time.

(pause)

(slowly)

Choice...and Time. Both - together - can help get us onto the road to forgiveness.

So maybe with a little time we could choose to try, just try...in some way...to consider forgiving...see how that feels. Or Christ!...even choose for now just to say we're willing to try to consider and that's all. That would be a start. Wouldn't it? A first step that's not so hard?

(slowly)

Choice...and Time...together.

(pleading, softly, gently)

Don't you see? Choosing even just to be willing to try to consider forgiving might open the door some day to actual forgiveness...

...and freedom.

(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

Because forgiveness IS freedom!

Forgiveness means deliverance from the alienation we feel toward ourselves and each other.

Forgiveness is redemption.

In the end, forgiving each other will be the only way to stop the destruction in our relationships.

Forgiving is the only way. The only way!

But for now, even just choosing to be willing to try may be our best first achievable step.

Choice...

(pauses)

...and Time.

(GEORGE pauses again, looking at each of the others for a reaction but gets none.)

(continuing softly, with hesitation and some uncomfortableness with the new feeling of his own words)

I...I could be willing...to try...

(with a look of sudden optimism)

Maybe that would--

(He stops short, looking at each of them again.)

You?

(SETH without a moment to waste gives an immediate thumbs down and an expression of defiance, quickly looking down.)

(BILLIE looks at George first - searching him carefully in an effort to discern the truth or not of his words.

(CONTINUED)

REDEMPTION/Talarico

CONTINUED:

Then slowly she searches her father for some sign of consensus but finds nothing there. Finally she shakes her head as a sign of refusal, wiping tears from her eyes in a moment that is visibly sad for her and obvious to the others. She then turns her gaze away from everyone.)

(Adam is not considered. This play has given up on him.)

(Lastly, GEORGE shakes his head and opens his hands with a gesture and look of utter disbelief and sadness.

Defeated, he walks slowly toward the front door. He opens the door and proceeds slowly through it.

Turning back for one long, poignant look at his family, he repeats softly and slowly: "Choice. And time."

Then, exhausted, he shakes his head again, closes the door slowly behind him, inserts his key into the lock, and turns the key in the lock, leaving the only thing heard at this point the harsh, distinct sound of finality produced by the heavily noisy, clanky deadbolt latching shut.)

(BLACKOUT)

CURTAIN
END OF ACT III

<<<<< **THE END** >>>>>