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**THE SCAVENGER'S DAUGHTER  
BY GARY EARL ROSS**

**Act One**

**Scene 1**

(Darkness. The ringing of a telephone.)

OPERATOR (v.o.)  
Nine-one-one. What's the nature of your emergency?

CONNIE (v.o.) (Desperately.)  
Please! I need help!

OPERATOR (v.o.)  
Ma'am, if you'll—

CONNIE (v.o.)  
I need help! My parents have been shot!

OPERATOR (v.o.)  
Ma'am, my screen shows you're on a mobile phone. I need to know where—

CONNIE (v.o.)  
There's blood—

OPERATOR (v.o.)  
I need to know where you are so I can send help.

CONNIE (v.o.)  
So much blood . . .

(Flashing red and blue lights. Dark-clad MAXINE TRAVIS is upstage between the two sets. She moves downstage center as lights rise to dimness and answers her cell phone.)

TRAVIS  
Travis. Yes, sir, the ambulance is here now and the M.E.'s office is on the way. That's right, sir, a couple in their eighties. Their daughter found them. Yes, I'll bring her in. I'm just waiting for her brothers to get here. (Pause.) Yes, sir, I'm bringing them all in. I'm not buying the murder-suicide scenario just yet. Until I know different, to me this is murder. (Clicks off and walks back into the shadows.)

(Blackout.)

## Scene 2

(Lights rise on the interrogation room side. ALAN, BRIAN, and CONNIE are there. Standing, ALAN wears a cheap sports jacket. BRIAN, pacing, wears a black leather jacket. CONNIE, in modest top and jeans, is seated, a small purse on her lap. She wipes her eyes with a tissue from time to time.)

ALAN

What's taking them so long? It's obvious what happened.

BRIAN

Nothin' is obvious to cops, Alan. That's why they took our licenses. They need to check us out, to make sure.

CONNIE

Make sure of what?

BRIAN

To make sure this ain't murder.

ALAN

Murder? It's plain as hell what happened. Ruthie got Pop's gun, pointed it at him—

CONNIE

You mean, they think we did this?

BRIAN

Least one of us. Maybe all of us. That's why we're in this room.

CONNIE

But how? Daddy and Ruthie—

BRIAN

Damn it! None of this would've happened, Alan, if you'd done what I told you. If you'da taken that old gun when I told you to.

ALAN

Maybe you forgot, genius, she threatened to shoot me if I came near the house.

BRIAN

Man, I told you to call her and make up. I told you to swallow your pride, for Dad's sake. Ain't no sense feudin' with a Froot Loop. (Turns to CONNIE.) And I told you too, Connie. You weren't banned from the house. You went all the time.

CONNIE

Two or three nights a week, but she watched me like a hawk. I couldn't go past the kitchen, except to the bathroom. Then she waited by the door. I don't even know where the gun was.

BRIAN

Shoulda tore up the place myself when I had the chance. I'da found it. Crazy old bitch.

CONNIE (Swatting him.)

Brian!

BRIAN

What? Don't speak ill of the dead? She was a crazy old bitch. Long time ago she was a crazy young bitch. She was always crazy and we all know it.

ALAN (Moving downstage and grimacing in the "mirror.") And I suppose they're looking at us through that.

BRIAN (Following and frowning at the "mirror.")

Course they are, but in my line of work I know their limits. They ain't got dick to hook this on none of us. This is just what it looks like. Ruthie set out to shoot Dad and then herself.

CONNIE

Alan, should we get a lawyer?

ALAN

I guess we—

BRIAN

What'd you ask him for?

CONNIE

I just thought—

BRIAN

When was the last time you been in a police station, Alan? Huh? When?

ALAN

That has nothing to do—

BRIAN

I go to jails every damn day, not classrooms. Ask me if we need a lawyer.

CONNIE

Do we need a lawyer?

BRIAN

We gotta wait and see. (Looks at the mirror.) When their questions start feelin' like accusations, then we tell 'em we want a lawyer and they have to stop. Understand?

CONNIE

All right.

(ALAN nods.)

BRIAN

Good. If it gets to that point, I'll call Benefield.

(TRAVIS, holding a notepad and files, enters.)

TRAVIS

At this point nobody needs a lawyer, especially one like Rudy Benefield. All I want is information.

ALAN

What kind of information?

TRAVIS

About your parents. About how and why something like this could happen.

BRIAN (Glaring at TRAVIS.)

Then how come you took so long, and why are we in the box instead of at your desk in the squad room?

TRAVIS (Meeting BRIAN's gaze.)

Everybody's got their own way of doing things. This is mine. Besides, you know our limits. We don't have dick, so you got nothing to worry about.

(TRAVIS stares at BRIAN until he sits. ALAN sits.)

TRAVIS

Murder, accidental death, suicide—it doesn't matter. Everything gets a full investigation.

CONNIE

Can't we do this later? In the morning maybe? We've got to take care of—

TRAVIS

Things might have gone faster if you hadn't deleted the voice mail she left you. That could have told us a lot about her state of mind.

CONNIE (As her brothers comfort her, glaring at TRAVIS.)

She said they were too old and tired to go on. And wouldn't. I hit delete by mistake. Sorry.

TRAVIS

I need to know what drove your mother to do this.

ALAN

Ruthie wasn't our mother. She was our stepmother.

CONNIE

And she snapped because she couldn't deal with Daddy's Alzheimer's anymore.

TRAVIS (Looks at them a moment, then begins to write.) How long were she and your father married?

ALAN

Twenty-seven, twenty-eight years.

CONNIE

But they were together longer than that, since I was six or seven—more than forty years.

BRIAN

That wasn't the question, Connie. Just answer the question they ask. You too, Alan.

TRAVIS

Ruthie pulled the trigger, Mr. Pickett—Brian. I need to figure out why and if she had help.

BRIAN

Help?

TRAVIS

The faster I get through my questions, the faster you get out of here. (Pausing as if in thought, looking at each of them.) So, oldest to youngest, Alan, Brian, Connie—A, B, C. Was that on purpose?

ALAN

It was our mother's idea . . . according to Pop.

TRAVIS

Is your mother still living?

ALAN

She died in childbirth. Pop didn't talk much about it, except to say twins must have been too much for her.

CONNIE

They didn't make it either.

TRAVIS

I'm sorry.

CONNIE

I don't remember her much. I was only three.

BRIAN

I was six. None of us remember her that good, 'cept Alan. He was eight.

TRAVIS

So three or four years after your mom died your dad got together with Ruthie.

BRIAN

Yeah.

TRAVIS

Did she move in?

CONNIE

Not till they were married . . . after I moved out.

TRAVIS

And it took him almost fifteen years to marry her?

BRIAN

What's that got to do with what happened?

TRAVIS

Maybe everything. This kind of shooting usually comes from something that builds up over time. Did you have any idea your stepmother was reaching her breaking point?

(ALAN, BRIAN, and CONNIE exchange looks.)

ALAN

I'm not surprised. Lately, she had a lot of trouble accepting reality, Pop's and her own.

(TRAVIS and ALAN look at each other for a moment.)

TRAVIS

All right, Alan. I'll speak with you first. (Gestures toward the exit.) Brian, Connie, please wait outside. There's a bench down the hall, and a coffee pot if you get thirsty.

BRIAN

Thanks, but squad room coffee sucks everywhere, especially this time of night. (Gestures CONNIE ahead of him.) Remember what I said, Alan.

(BRIAN and CONNIE exit.)

TRAVIS

Okay, Alan, let's see if we can make this quick. Why don't we both sit?

(TRAVIS and ALAN take seats.)

ALAN

I should apologize for my brother. He can be kind of . . . abrupt.

TRAVIS (Opening a folder and looking at papers.)

He can apologize himself, later. For the moment, let me go over some background with you. (Opens another and slides a card to him.) Your license.

ALAN (Slipping the card into a wallet, which he pockets.) Thank you.

TRAVIS

You're a teacher at Franklin High School. History. Divorced. Two adult sons. You own a home on the north side. In the past twenty years your problems with the law have been six parking violations, one speeding ticket, and a citation for a faulty brake light. That about it?

ALAN

As far as I know.

TRAVIS

You and your brother are different as night and day.

ALAN (Shrugging at the obvious.)

Yeah.

TRAVIS

Alan, I'm curious about something. For someone banned from the house you seem to know an awful lot about what Ruthie could and couldn't accept.

ALAN

Brian and Connie have kept me informed. This past year was extremely hard for Ruthie, taking my father out of the nursing home and caring for him herself. I disagreed with her.

TRAVIS

Is that why she filed a report with the police to keep you away from the property?

ALAN

She did that for spite. (Pauses as if waiting for a question that doesn't come.) I guess I better begin at the beginning. It's kind of a long story. Goes back almost two years.

TRAVIS

I don't have a date. Do you?

ALAN (Laughing.)

Would it matter if I did?

TRAVIS

Nope.

(ALAN sighs as TRAVIS freezes. Interrogation room lights dim. Lights rise on the residence side of the stage. JOHN PICKETT, in a worn bathrobe, is lying on the floor in front of the couch. Shaking, he looks confused. RUTHIE PICKETT, in housedress and apron, enters from upstage and moves down, followed by ALAN. She points to JOHN.)

RUTHIE (Both angry and fretful.)

I been done wrong.

ALAN (Crossing to his father and kneeling.)

Pop, are you all right?

RUTHIE

I been done wrong, Alan.

ALAN (Looking at her.)

What happened?

RUTHIE

I got mad and we tussled. He fell off the couch and couldn't get up.

ALAN

You . . .tussled?

RUTHIE

I told you, I been done wrong!

JOHN

Alan?

ALAN

Yeah, Pop. It's me. Will it hurt if I pick you up, or do I need to call an ambulance?

JOHN

No, no, no. No ambulance. I'm all right. Just gimme a hand.

(ALAN struggles to get JOHN up on the couch. ALAN wrinkles his nose.)

RUTHIE

Been down there 'bout a hour. Musta peed hisself.

ALAN

Pop, I'm gonna give you a minute to catch your breath. Then I'm gonna take you to the bathroom so we can get you cleaned up. (Turning to RUTHIE.) Now what do you mean you were done wrong?

RUTHIE

All the years I been with your father, puttin' up with him. Not going nowhere 'cause he want to leave everything to you kids. After all that, now he gone and got a girlfriend.

ALAN

What?

RUTHIE

A girlfriend.

JOHN

Ain't got no girlfriend. Stop all that nonsense.

RUTHIE (Pulling a greeting card from her apron pocket.)

Then what's this, John? (Waving it in his face.) Happy birthday . . . from Lucy. Lucy Westbrook.

ALAN

The Westbrooks from church?

(RUTHIE reluctantly surrenders the card.)

RUTHIE

Yeah. She the big shot of the family, all them years in California. Husband left her and now she back. Rejoined the church 'bout six months ago. (Pointing at JOHN.) She got eyes for your father.

ALAN

This says, "The Hospitality Committee, Lucille Westbrook, Chairwoman."

RUTHIE (Snatching the card back and pointing.) Why she sign her name to it? She wrote Lucy, right there. Didn't do that with my birthday card.

ALAN

Ruthie, I think they grew up together. Miss Lucille, right? She's got to be about Pop's age.

RUTHIE

I tell you, she got eyes for your father. (Pulls a photo from her pocket.) Look right there. They in this picture together. See that, right there? She got her hand on your father's arm. Now that's not right.

ALAN (Incredulous.)

What is this, a Sunday school picture? Neither one of them is more than ten.

RUTHIE

She been likin' him that long, ever since then, and now she back.

ALAN

Jesus, Ruthie! Of all the—

JOHN

Alan? You gon' live a long time, son. I was just thinking 'bout you. Where you come from?

ALAN

Pop, I just picked you up off the floor.



JOHN (Smiling as if seeing the joke.)  
No, you didn't.

ALAN  
Ruthie, you better call 9-1-1.

(Blackout. Interrogation lights rise. ALAN and TRAVIS are in their chairs.)

ALAN  
Pop was in the hospital for almost a month. Irregular heartbeat. Low blood pressure. At first we thought that was why he was in and out so much—you know, some days clear, other days confused. But after a week or so they started talking about dementia, maybe Alzheimer's, so I got power of attorney and applied to Medicaid so he could go into a nursing home.

TRAVIS  
How was Ruthie through all this?

ALAN  
Difficult. Disagreeable. Unreasonable. Especially about the money.

TRAVIS  
What money?

ALAN  
Money my father had in the bank. Money to go to his children when he died.

TRAVIS  
Which you now had access to, with a power of attorney.

ALAN  
Detective, Medicaid has rules for all this. There's a limit how much you can have or the state begins to take it, but I couldn't touch it anyway. Everything had to be in Ruthie's name. The Medicaid caseworker said the only way to keep the money in the family was for Ruthie to give some away before Pop came up for recertification. I even told her to give some to Milton—anything to keep the state from taking it.

TRAVIS  
Who's Milton?

ALAN  
Her nephew in Chicago.

TRAVIS  
How did she take your suggestion?

ALAN  
She said she'd think about it. A few weeks later I helped her trade in the cars, the van and that 30-year-old Buick Pop never took out of the garage. Got her a smaller car. Then out of the blue she said she wanted to give us our money. We met her at the bank the next day.

TRAVIS  
How much did she give you?

ALAN

I suggested fifteen thousand each, with a little for Milton and her keeping the rest. She said, “No, your father wanted you to have that money.” She had three cashier’s checks for twenty thousand and kept ten for herself. I overnighted Brian’s, and Connie and I went to our own banks. (Lights rise in the residence. RUTHIE is in the armchair.) But then two days later she called me.

RUTHIE

Alan, I been thinkin’ ‘bout how your father never took me nowhere. It was like pullin’ teeth to get him out to the movies once or twice a year. some of that money is mine. I want it back.

TRAVIS

She wanted it back?

ALAN

I tried to tell her I didn’t have it.

RUTHIE

What you mean, you ain’t got it?

TRAVIS

What happened to it?

ALAN

Most went to charge card debt and legal bills from my divorce. I put the rest in a CD.

RUTHIE

You ain’t gotta gimme all of it, just a taste. Your sister puttin’ a roof on her house. She gon’ gimme what’s left.

TRAVIS

What about Brian?

ALAN

Brian’s share was in the bank. He hadn’t spent any.

RUTHIE

It ain’t fair for Connie and Brian to give it back and you don’t. After all he done for you—raise you, put you through school—it ain’t right for you to steal your father’s money like that. We gon’ fix this. I’m a get me a lawyer. (Rises and exits, determined. Residence lights dim.)

TRAVIS

She tried to sue you?

ALAN

Yes. Some half-assed real estate lawyer wrote me a letter saying I took advantage of a helpless old woman. I sent him a copy of the cashier’s check with her signature and never heard from him again. Connie told me later Ruthie paid him a hundred to write the letter but he told her he’d need several thousand to go forward because she voluntarily signed over the money.

TRAVIS

Talk about taking advantage of a helpless old woman.

ALAN

Oh, she was far from helpless. Next she launched her public relations campaign. She started talking to anybody who'd give her half a minute. Neighbors, church folk, other shoppers—told them all how John Pickett's ungrateful children stole his money and left them penniless. I even got calls from people I didn't know telling me how ashamed of myself I should be. And she started writing me these rambling letters telling me I was going to hell. (Pause.) But the worst thing was how miserable she made life for Pop. Almost every day she went to the nursing home and spent a couple hours telling him how rotten his children were.

TRAVIS

How did she get him out of the home if you had power of attorney?

ALAN

She brought her lawyer in one day and had Pop sign a new power of attorney. No, it wouldn't have stood up in court, but he'd still get care and she'd still get his pension and the house. Guess I thought a little victory would shut her up.

TRAVIS

But it didn't and things got worse, all of which must have made you pretty mad.

ALAN (Leaning toward her, angry just thinking about it.)

You have no idea. Which is why last night I said some of the things I did. (Pauses, looks down, shakes his head, wipes his eyes.) Dizzy old fool. All I ever tried to do was help her.

(Blackout.)

### Scene 3

(Lights rise on the interrogation room. CONNIE is seated, looking nervous, with a small purse on her lap. TRAVIS enters with a coffee cup and sits across from her.)

TRAVIS (Sipping, setting down the cup, opening a folder.)  
Your brother's right about one thing. This is not Starbucks. All right, Connie. Your license. (Slides it across to her.)

CONNIE (Slipping it into her purse.)  
I forgot you had that.

TRAVIS (Scanning her folder.)  
Let's see. You work for Verizon. Been there fifteen years. A house in the suburbs . . . (Looks up, smiles.) How the hell do you get to your age without even one parking ticket?

CONNIE  
I don't make the rules. I just follow them.

TRAVIS  
I guess so. If everybody was like you I'd be out of a job. Never been married, no kids . . .

CONNIE  
I . . . I haven't found the right man.

TRAVIS  
I wasn't asking. Okay . . . Alan told me how your father fell and couldn't get up.

CONNIE  
He tell you that Ruthie pushed him?

TRAVIS  
He says she told him they . . . tussled . . . and your father fell.

CONNIE  
Alan always tries to be polite. She pushed Daddy because she was mad at him.

TRAVIS  
Over a birthday card and a Sunday school picture? Really?

CONNIE  
Sure. Before he got married, Daddy and his cousin posed with two cocktail waitresses in Atlantic City. Ruthie almost had a stroke when she found that picture—three years ago.

TRAVIS  
So Ruthie was the jealous type.

(TRAVIS freezes as lights dim. CONNIE crosses to the residence side of the stage. She stands before the downstage couch, visibly uncomfortable at being there. RUTHIE is upstage standing at the kitchenette table with her back to the audience. She turns, holding a tea tray, and moves downstage to join CONNIE, setting the tray on the end table.)

RUTHIE  
You ain't no stranger, Connie. Sit down.

(CONNIE sits in the armchair.)

RUTHIE (Handing CONNIE a cup of tea.)  
Actin' like you didn't grow up in this house.

CONNIE (Taking the cup.)  
Thank you, Ruthie.

RUTHIE (Taking her own cup and sitting on the couch.) You must be wonderin' what I want to talk to you 'bout.

CONNIE (After sipping.)  
I'm guessing it's something to do with Daddy.

RUTHIE  
Yes, I'm thinking 'bout takin' him out of the nursing home and takin' care of him right here.

CONNIE  
Ruthie, I don't know. That's a lot on you. What if he falls and you can't pick him up?

RUTHIE  
I'm just as healthy as you and I can do just as good a job as them people and there won't be no funny business.

CONNIE  
Funny business?

RUTHIE  
Yeah, there's stuff go on at that place you don't know. Stuff that ain't right or proper.

CONNIE  
I don't understand.

RUTHIE  
One day I heard these two aides talkin' 'bout this man 'cross the hall from your father. They was talkin' 'bout how big he is—you know, his privates.

CONNIE (Standing, uncomfortable, moving away.)  
Oh.

RUTHIE  
Yeah. Now that ain't right. I don't want them talkin' 'bout John like that. And there's this one aide, the activities girl—I think she like your father.

CONNIE  
Ruthie—

RUTHIE (Rising, almost pursuing CONNIE.)  
I ain't crazy. I know what I'm talkin' 'bout. One day I'm up there sittin' with him and they gonna have a sing-along. She come over and put her arm 'round your father and say, "How you doin', honey?" Right in front of me.

CONNIE  
Which aide was this?

RUTHIE

That activities girl, Sandra.

CONNIE

I know who you mean. She's about twenty-two, light-skinned, kind of tiny.

RUTHIE

Yeah, yeah, that's her.

CONNIE

I don't think she likes him that way. She's engaged. I saw her at the movies with her fiancé.

RUTHIE

That don't mean nothin'. Sometimes these young girls likes to take up with older men.

CONNIE

Yes, but the older men have to be able to give them something—money, jewelry. A wheelchair ride isn't enough. And he's . . . you know . . . an 80-year-old man in diapers.

RUTHIE

Then why she call him honey right in front of me?

CONNIE

I'm sure she was just being nice.

RUTHIE

That ain't nice. That's disrespectful to the wife. They ain't s'posed to do stuff like that. I could make a complaint and have them shut down.

CONNIE

Having Daddy here would be a lot of work. I mean, we'd help you but Alan and I both work, and Brian's in Virginia. Trying to do everything could put you in an early grave.

RUTHIE

Here all alone I might as well be dead. And if he here, I ain't gotta watch him like a hawk.

(Blackout. Interrogation lights rise. CONNIE faces TRAVIS.)

TRAVIS

So she took him home because she thought he was screwing around on her?

CONNIE

Not then but later, mainly because she was mad at Alan.

TRAVIS

This may seem none of my business but I have to ask. Did she ever have reason to be jealous?

CONNIE

I don't know. Brian said once he thought Daddy had somebody on the side but Alan didn't think so. Brian laughed and said Alan had his head up his ass, as usual. But I just don't know.

TRAVIS

When was this?

CONNIE

About five years ago, at his cousin Teddy's funeral. This older woman kinda cornered Daddy and started talking to him.

TRAVIS

Ruthie got jealous and made a scene, right?

CONNIE

Not there. She waited till we were all back at their house and had it out with him. Brian said he wouldn't blame Daddy if the woman was his girlfriend because it meant he was getting some . . . you know . . . that didn't belong in a padded cell.

TRAVIS

He said this in front of Ruthie?

CONNIE

Oh, no. Even Brian's got more class than that. Ruthie and Daddy were upstairs arguing. We were in the living room, the three of us and Alan's wife Kit. They were still together then. In fact, she got mad at Alan for letting Brian talk to him that way. She went out to their car and I went out after her, to calm her down.

(Lights dim in the interrogation room and rise in the residence. ALAN and BRIAN in suits are standing in front of the couch.)

BRIAN (Suppressing a laugh.)

Look, man, I'm sorry about Kit but you do keep your head up your ass sometimes. You the one went to college. How is it you couldn't see that old broad was puttin' the moves on Dad?

ALAN

Maybe I was thinking about other things. You know, I really don't care how Pop gets his rocks off. I just . . . I just have other things on my mind.

BRIAN

You and her okay?

ALAN

I guess so, except I'm tired of fighting. (Sighs, turns to BRIAN.) I was surprised to see you here. I didn't expect you to come up for Teddy's funeral.

BRIAN

Dad's last blood relative? Course I came. Dad's got this dignified retired civil servant thing going on but him and Teddy ran the streets when they were kids—and you know Teddy was a straight up thug, an old school O.G. I ever tell you about the time I went out drinkin' with him and he pulled a knife on some rapper wannabe talkin' shit to him?

ALAN (Chuckling.)

No.

BRIAN

Yeah, Teddy was serious as a heart attack. Can't half stand up but wavin' this little knife like it's dangerous hardware. Everybody in the place was crackin' up 'cept the kid. I had to draw down on him to keep him from going into his pocket.

ALAN

Damn! What happened?

BRIAN

I grabbed Teddy's arm and backed him outside. Then I stopped 'cause I knew the kid was gon' follow. Sure enough, he came rushin' out, and I had to put my Glock— (Extends arm to show him, right at ALAN's forehead.) —right up against his forehead. I told him, "My favorite uncle is drunk, and I can't reach my car keys. If I gotta drop something, what you think it's gonna be, him, my gun—or you." He put this cheap-ass Italian revolver on the sidewalk and I kicked it down the sewer. Then we backed away, with Teddy going, "You cold, Brian, just like your daddy. Stone cold." (Lowers his arm and chuckles.) I loved Teddy but if it wasn't for Dad, I'da beat his ass myself when I got him home. (Unseen by either brother, JOHN, in a dark suit, enters behind them and moves toward them.)

ALAN

We all loved Teddy and he would've done anything for us, especially Pop, but Pop always was the smarter half of that team.

JOHN (Solemn as he moves between them.)

I'm gonna miss Teddy.

ALAN

Hey, Pop. Everything okay with you and Ruthie?

JOHN (Waving a hand dismissively.)

You know Ruthie gets beside herself sometimes. I just have to live with it. (Looking from one to the other.) What I want to know is if everything is okay between the two of you.

(No one speaks as ALAN and BRIAN exchange looks.)

JOHN

Didn't matter that Ruthie was bitchin' and moanin'. I know what goes on in this house. The door slammed and I looked out the window just in time to see Kit headin' to Alan's car with Connie a few steps behind her. I figured Brian said somethin' again.

BRIAN

Dad . . .

JOHN

Look, I know you don't like Kit, and I know she don't much care for you. But she's your brother's wife and she's never done nothin' to hurt this family. Until she does, you will respect her in my house.

BRIAN (Almost whining.)

I didn't say anything to her.

JOHN

No, most likely you said somethin' to Alan that pissed her off. I know how the two of you are when you get together.

ALAN

It's all right, Pop. She doesn't understand us. I've tried to explain . . .

JOHN (Slipping an arm around each son's shoulders.)

You go at each other too much, even in fun. You're brothers. What have I always told you?



ALAN

Nobody will take care of us—

BRIAN

—but us.

JOHN

That's right. Teddy was the closest thing to a brother I ever had, and goofy as he could be, I trusted him with my life. I want the two of you to trust each other the same way.

(Residence lights dim for exits. Interrogation lights rise.)

TRAVIS

Your brothers are exact opposites, aren't they?

CONNIE

Yes . . . but in a way each one is just like Daddy, like they're two sides of the same coin.

TRAVIS

Connie, how did you feel when Ruthie wanted the money back?

CONNIE

I couldn't believe it. She was the one who called us to come get it. But if it would shut her up, I was happy to give it to her. Me and Brian both told her to leave Alan alone and be satisfied with what she got from us.

TRAVIS

But she wouldn't do that and even tried to sue Alan—

CONNIE

Didn't have a thing to her name till she got here and met Daddy.

TRAVIS

Where was she from? Chicago?

CONNIE

Gary, Indiana—the worst part, according to her. She came east because she was the black sheep of her family.

TRAVIS

Did she get into a lot of trouble?

CONNIE

I couldn't tell you. All she ever said was her parents loved her two brothers more than they loved her so she left. Maybe they just had trouble dealing with a nutcase for a kid.

TRAVIS

Did she ever get counseling or treatment or anything?

CONNIE

You gotta know that where we come from real illness is physical. If you see blood on the floor or a bone sticking through the skin, then you can call the doctor. But you get no points for being crazy.

TRAVIS

Right. And you're either crazy or not crazy. There's no in-between.

CONNIE

Ruthie knew what people thought. If you looked at her funny because she said something weird, she'd say, "I ain't crazy," then repeat whatever made you look at her in the first place. (After a beat.) You know, that's messed up.

TRAVIS

What?

CONNIE

Being the least favorite child of a junk dealer.

TRAVIS

A junk dealer?

CONNIE

An honest-to-God horse and wagon junk dealer, or so she always said.

TRAVIS

You think she wasn't telling the truth?

CONNIE

I can't see why anybody would claim to have a junk man for a father if it wasn't true.

(TRAVIS scribbles something in her notes.)

CONNIE

About ten years ago Alan started calling her the scavenger's daughter.

TRAVIS

Behind her back, of course.

CONNIE (Meeting TRAVIS's gaze.)

There's something you gotta understand about us. For a long time after our mother died, we were all we had. Daddy had to work, so Alan took care of us, and later Alan and Brian both took care of me. Much as they fight—and they've been fighting since they were little—my brothers love each other—and me. And I love them. No way would we let her do something to hurt one of us.

TRAVIS (Pointedly.)

So you and your brothers would do anything for each other?

CONNIE

We'd do enough.

(They stare at each other. Then TRAVIS turns a page.)

TRAVIS

Connie, I need to ask you something that may seem to have no bearing on what went down with your father and Ruthie. In fact, it's about something that happened a long time ago.

CONNIE (Shifting uneasily.)

All right.

TRAVIS

Does the name Marco Easley mean anything to you?

(Reacting, CONNIE says nothing.)

TRAVIS

Marco Easley, Connie. I need to know if that name rings a bell.

CONNIE

What's he got to do with this?

TRAVIS

His name came up when I was checking your background.

CONNIE

You can't think he had anything to do with . . .

TRAVIS

I don't think he could have. Do you? (Pauses for an answer that doesn't come.) Of course you don't.

CONNIE

Then why did you mention him?

TRAVIS

I thought you might help me clarify something.

CONNIE

This is supposed to be about Ruthie and Daddy, not—

TRAVIS

Not what?

CONNIE

Not something from . . . from when I was eighteen.

TRAVIS

Soon after the assault charge you filed against him was dropped for lack of evidence, Marco Easley just . . . disappeared. Any idea what happened to him, Connie? Or should I ask Brian?

(Blackout.)

#### Scene 4

(Lights rise on the interrogation room. BRIAN is seated, looking annoyed. TRAVIS, in her chair, studies him.)

BRIAN

Detective, my question ain't all that complicated. I just want to know where my brother and sister are. They don't know how you people work.

TRAVIS

Neither one asked for a lawyer, neither one's been charged with anything, and neither one's rights have been violated. For the moment that's all you need to know.

BRIAN

All right then, lady, I want a lawyer.

TRAVIS

Why? You haven't been charged with anything. I'm just looking for a little help figuring out—

BRIAN

Cut the bullshit, detective. It's obvious what happened, but you think it was staged somehow and you're lookin' to tag a suspect, probably me.

TRAVIS

I want to put this to bed, Brian. The faster I do it, the faster you and your family can make all the arrangements you have to. Get a dickwad like Rudy Benefield involved and there's no telling when things'll settle. There I am with his thumb up my ass—or worse—and he didn't even buy me a drink.

(BRIAN stares at her for a moment, then laughs.)

TRAVIS

Look, I know some in the department don't like bounty hunters— especially since one of our uniforms got killed helping one a few years back—but I've got nothing against what you do.

BRIAN

I was sorry to hear about your guy. When it happened, all over the country we knew it would hurt our . . . arrangements with local law enforcement. (Taking a deep breath.) All right, I'll hold off on Benefield for a little while.

TRAVIS

Just help me understand—

BRIAN

And you're right. Benefield is a dickwad. That's why I call him whenever I'm in town. He knows your department and me have a past. But we're not gonna talk about that. Clear?

TRAVIS

I hear you.

BRIAN

And one more thing: where are my brother and sister?

TRAVIS

They're in a coffee room up on two. They've been very helpful. They told me all about the money and Ruthie's wanting it back and how miserable she was to Alan. Oh, and Connie told me how insanely jealous Ruthie was. Maybe that was why she decided to take your father out.

BRIAN (Shaking his head.)

No, no, no. You're going at this the wrong way. You're lookin' for a logical reason but what you gotta understand is that Ruthie was nuts. She was always nuts. From the time we were little kids and first met her we knew her Zip Code was in the Twilight Zone. People like that don't do things for reasons the rest of us understand.

TRAVIS

True. What made her seem crazy to you as kids?

BRIAN (Shrugging.)

Gut feelings, the look in her eyes, some of the weird stuff she said. She always seemed a little off. Nice enough but a little off.

TRAVIS

Why do you think your father married her?

BRIAN

Dad was a good-lookin' guy. A lot of women knocked on his door. Some of them were very nice to us and said things like, "If I was your mother, you'd be this or that." Dad promised us he'd never replace our mother. Truth is, I don't think Ruthie made too much noise about gettin' married.

TRAVIS

Like the others.

BRIAN

Yeah. She was happy to stay in her little apartment and see him when she could. It was a good gig for her, free to come and go as she pleased, no rent to pay . . .

TRAVIS

No rent?

BRIAN

Alan didn't tell you?

TRAVIS

No.

BRIAN

He called me after he went through Dad's papers. He said Dad kept every scrap he could, money order carbons, utility receipts from when we were kids. He found receipts for Ruthie's rent.

TRAVIS

How was he able to pay for two homes?

BRIAN

Alan found that too. Insurance. When our mother died, the house was paid off. Workin' at the water bureau won't make anybody rich but civil servants get decent money. Dad could afford to put Ruthie up while she worked at the grocery store.

TRAVIS

So he strung her along this way for nearly fifteen years and waited till you three were grown before he repaid her patience with marriage.

BRIAN

That's one way of lookin' at it. The way we saw it, he was keepin' his promise.

TRAVIS

How soon after they married did he retire?

BRIAN

About five years.

TRAVIS

What did he do in retirement?

BRIAN

Nothin' but sit on his ass.

TRAVIS

Ruthie spent twenty years waiting for a life with your father and all he could do was sit on his ass for another twenty years?

BRIAN

Sure, we thought Ruthie was nuts but she was our father's wife and she never did nothin' to hurt the family. Dad was big on that, not hurtin' the family. So we all tried to get him to take her on trips and do things with her. Dinner. Movies. But he wouldn't. I guess they did more of that stuff when she was livin' in her apartment.

TRAVIS

Now it's beginning to make sense. Disappointment pulls a lot of triggers.

BRIAN (Taking a breath.)

About the gun.

TRAVIS

What about it?

BRIAN

I'm sure you know by now it was registered.

TRAVIS

It was one of three handguns on your father's carry permit.

BRIAN

I got the other two, in my gun safe back in Virginia.

TRAVIS

Why do you have them?

(TRAVIS freezes as lights dim. BRIAN crosses to the residence. JOHN enters, carrying a small wooden box and a revolver. He moves downstage and hands the box to BRIAN.)

JOHN

The automatics. I'm keepin' the revolver.

BRIAN

Fine, Dad. You need somethin' for protection.

JOHN

I'll keep it on the shelf in the bedroom closet.

BRIAN

Unloaded, with the safety on.

JOHN

Yes. Can't have Kevin or Linc findin' it when Alan and Kit bring 'em over.

BRIAN

No, we can't have that.

JOHN (Sitting on the couch.)

Thing like that could destroy the family, one of them got hurt.

BRIAN

Yes, it could.

JOHN

I'll let the Ruger go but I hate givin' up my Colt. You know I had it in Korea.

BRIAN (Sitting on the couch's armrest.)

But you haven't taken care of it, or the Ruger. They're liable to blow up in your face. The Smith and Wesson's all you need. Easier to clean, no jams, just enough punch.

JOHN

I even taught Ruthie how to use it, case somethin' happens to me. It's a good gun.

BRIAN (Taking the revolver.)

Gun enough. But you gotta clean it and oil it and take it out to the range every now and then to keep it in good workin' order. You can't wait for me to visit.

JOHN

I know.

BRIAN

This is for the best, Dad.

JOHN

I know.

BRIAN (Rising, handing the revolver back to JOHN.)

Easier to keep track of one gun. C'mon. Let's go put it on that shelf.

JOHN

Lord, I hate gettin' old.

BRIAN

I know.

(Blackout. Interrogation lights rise. BRIAN is back in his seat.)

TRAVIS

And this was how long ago?

BRIAN

Maybe ten years.

TRAVIS

Before Uncle Teddy died.

BRIAN

You know when Teddy died?

TRAVIS

Connie mentioned a funeral five years ago, for your father's cousin Teddy.

BRIAN (Folding his arms and tipping his chair back a bit.) Huh.

TRAVIS

What?

BRIAN

I was startin' to like you, detective.

TRAVIS

Excuse me.

BRIAN

I was startin' to like you. I was thinkin' that maybe when this investigation into the obvious is over, we could get together, get to know each other a little better.

TRAVIS

You're hitting on me?

BRIAN

Not now. Now I'm wonderin' how the hell Teddy's funeral came up. Just what are you looking for?

TRAVIS

Connie was explaining how upset Ruthie got at his funeral—you know, to prove she was off.

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember. The old woman with the fire in her panties—for my father.

TRAVIS

What about Aunt Ida? Is she still living?

BRIAN

No. She died when me and Alan were in high school.



TRAVIS  
Any other family?

BRIAN  
Besides Alan's kids? Nope.

TRAVIS  
When did you get into town?

BRIAN  
Last night.

TRAVIS  
Why did you come?

BRIAN  
To see my family.

TRAVIS  
Did you see them today?

BRIAN  
I had dinner with Connie and Alan. I was going to see Dad and Ruthie tomorrow. But I never got the chance.

TRAVIS  
I understand you took a motel room. Why not stay with your brother or sister?

BRIAN  
I like my solitude, and so do they.

TRAVIS  
Did you have a specific reason for visiting?

BRIAN  
Like what?

TRAVIS  
Like maybe things were coming to a head because Ruthie had been caring for your father for almost a year all by herself.

BRIAN  
She had a visiting nurse.

TRAVIS  
Two days a week for eight hours.

BRIAN  
Connie tried to help.

TRAVIS  
Two or three nights a week? Better than nothing but it still left Ruthie holding the bag.

BRIAN

A bag she fought like a dog to hold! The nursing home, Medicaid, the three of us—she fought everybody to get him home. Why? Because she was stubborn and lonely and had no idea what she was doing. She said if she could take care of him he would get better.

TRAVIS

He didn't get better, though, did he?

BRIAN

He had clear moments, times when he could remember things and understand you and talk to you. Sometimes when I listened to him on the phone, callin' it Alzheimer's just felt wrong.

TRAVIS

But those moments were fewer and fewer in the past several months, weren't they?

BRIAN

Yes.

TRAVIS

And it must have been doubly hard when he got worse, especially for somebody who was with him twenty-four seven.

BRIAN

I suppose so.

TRAVIS

Ruthie didn't have a lot of patience, did she?

BRIAN

Not on her best day.

TRAVIS

Were you concerned that she'd abuse your father, out of frustration? Hurt him physically?

BRIAN

Most of her abuse came out of her mouth, but, yeah, I worried she might hurt him.

TRAVIS

Did you ever think she might get the gun and shoot him?

BRIAN

No.

TRAVIS

When did you last see your father and Ruthie?

BRIAN

About three months ago.

(TRAVIS freezes as the lights dim. BRIAN crosses to the residence and stands in front of the couch as the lights rise. RUTHIE and JOHN enter from upstage. Confusion evident in his expression, JOHN is in his bathrobe and moving slowly. RUTHIE is holding his arm, helping him walk.)

RUTHIE (Guiding him toward the armchair.)  
Look who come to see you, come all the way up from Virginia.

BRIAN  
Hey, Dad. How you feelin'?

JOHN  
I'm all right, thank the good Lord. How you doin', young fella?

RUTHIE  
John! It's your son. Brian.

JOHN (Uncertainty becoming dismissive certainty.)  
Oh, I know who it is. My son.

RUTHIE  
Your good son.

JOHN  
Alan?

RUTHIE (Snapping, forcing JOHN to sit.)  
No! The one didn't steal from you!

(RUTHIE and JOHN freeze as TRAVIS animates in shadow.)

TRAVIS  
He thought Alan was the good son, even after Ruthie spent a year convincing him Alan ripped him off.

BRIAN  
He always thought Alan was the good son, and Connie was the princess he worshipped.

TRAVIS  
How did he feel about you?

BRIAN (With a bitter chuckle.)  
I was his bad boy, the one who took him from the principal's office to city court. But he always knew I was the one who'd come through in a jam.

(TRAVIS freezes. RUTHIE and JOHN animate.)

BRIAN (Sitting on the couch near the armchair.)  
It's Brian, Dad. I wanted to come see how you're doin'.

RUTHIE  
If you can watch him a minute I got to go to the bathroom.

BRIAN  
Yeah, sure.

(RUTHIE exits upstage. JOHN still looks confused.)

BRIAN

Dad, you know Alan didn't steal nothin' from you, right?

JOHN

No?

BRIAN

No, Dad.

JOHN

But Ruthie—

BRIAN

Ruthie's confused, Dad. There's things 'bout money she don't understand. Alan loves you, just like me and Connie. He sends his love. He'd never do anything to hurt or disrespect you.

(JOHN seems to consider this but slips back into confusion.)

BRIAN

So, you're feelin' okay.

JOHN

Fine, thank the good Lord. Just a little tired these days. (Reaches up to rub his eyes.)

BRIAN (Reaching for JOHN's wrist, peeling back the sleeve.) What's that? A bruise?

JOHN

Now how'd that get there?

(Blackout. Interrogation lights rise. BRIAN is back in his seat.)

TRAVIS

Why didn't you get the gun then?

BRIAN

I tried. First chance I got, I snuck into their bedroom and checked the closet. But it was gone.

TRAVIS

Did you bring a sidearm this trip?

BRIAN

I sleep with one. But when Connie called me, I knew I'd have to come here. My registered Glock is in a lock box in my brother's house. I wouldn't leave it in the motel or my car.

TRAVIS

Very responsible of you. Is that the only one you brought?

BRIAN (Shrugging.)

Yeah.

TRAVIS

How do I know you didn't take all three of your father's guns years ago—

BRIAN  
Say what?

TRAVIS  
—and drive up with the revolver so you could rig it?

BRIAN  
Cause I told you—

TRAVIS  
Ruthie hurt Alan. She hurt your father. People don't get to hurt your family for free, right?

BRIAN  
Aw, shit! I want a lawyer.

TRAVIS  
Maybe you wanted to free your father from any more pain, to . . . what was it your brother told me? To put Ruthie out of everybody's misery.

BRIAN (Standing.)  
I said I want a lawyer . . . detective.

TRAVIS  
Maybe you thought things should be settled the same way they were settled before, for Connie, when Marco Easley disappeared.

BRIAN  
What?

TRAVIS  
If that was murder, maybe this was murder too.

BRIAN (Sitting down, very calm.)  
Prove it.

(Blackout.)

End of Act One

## Act Two

### Scene 1

(For Act Two, the interrogation room is now a restaurant. A table and three chairs sit midstage. Stage left remains the interior of the PICKETT home. Lights rise on both sides. ALAN sits at the restaurant table, reading a paper and sipping coffee. In the residence, wearing a robe and with a TV tray in front of him, JOHN is in the armchair, slowly slurping from a bowl. In jeans, CONNIE sits on the couch, steadying JOHN's hand when it shakes. Upstage RUTHIE, in housedress and apron, sits at the kitchenette table, a pile of papers before her. A pill bottle and cup are now beside the sewing box.)

CONNIE

Is it good, Daddy? I'm glad your appetite came back. The other night you hardly ate a thing.

JOHN (Almost unintelligibly, to no one in particular.)

I wondered what was goin' on 'cause it's so busy 'round here. All these people . . .

CONNIE (Wiping his chin with a napkin as he lowers the spoon.) I asked about your soup. Do you know what kind of soup this is?

JOHN (Staring at her blankly, then sipping from a cup she holds.) All these people comin' and goin'. It's Christmas. Am I right? Christmas?

CONNIE

No, Christmas was months ago. This is soup. Chicken noodle. Your favorite. (Sighing as she looks out toward the audience.) I can change the channel. I don't guess you care much which one is the baby's daddy. (Takes a remote from the end table, aims at the audience, and clicks three or four times.) There you go, a western with John Wayne. Remember how I used to sit in your lap and we'd watch stuff like this? Remember I'd fall asleep and you'd carry me to my room?

(JOHN slurps more soup, then squints at her as her shoulders slump.)

JOHN

You like your Christmas present, June?

CONNIE

Daddy, I'm not June. I'm her daughter. Your daughter. June's . . . dead.

JOHN (Genuinely surprised.)

Dead?

CONNIE

For a long time, since I was a little girl.

JOHN

I didn't know. Oh, Lord, I didn't know.

CONNIE (Stroking his arm.)

It's okay, Daddy. It's okay. You're married to Ruthie now. You've been married for years. And you better not let her hear you asking for June.

RUTHIE (Calling out.)

How he eatin'?

CONNIE

Fine. He's almost done.

RUTHIE

Can you help me with somethin'?

(CONNIE turns to look upstage at RUTHIE in the other room.)

RUTHIE (Holding up several papers.)

This here thing from the county. I don't understand it. I done give 'em everything they axed for. He'll be okay by hisself for a minute. I just need you to tell me what they mean by this.

(Frustrated, CONNIE rises, moves upstage to join RUTHIE. They talk in pantomime as JOHN looks stricken. Meanwhile, BRIAN enters the restaurant upstage. ALAN stands and embraces him.)

ALAN

Hey, man.

BRIAN

Hey yourself.

(They both sit.)

BRIAN

Well, I saw your boy Richard.

ALAN

He's not my boy. He's my lawyer.

BRIAN

Excuse me, your lawyer.

ALAN

How'd the deposition go?

BRIAN

Alan, I know how to give a deposition.

ALAN

But what did you say?

BRIAN

I told him how I hear Ruthie talkin' to Dad when I call. I told him 'bout the bruises I saw on Dad's arms my last visit. I told him the bizarre things she says to me whenever we talk.

ALAN

All right. Your deposition was the last one before we file.

BRIAN

Who else you got?

ALAN

Mine. Connie's. A couple from the nursing home, about how she used to scream at Pop when he was there. The bank officer who made up the cashier's checks. Three visiting nurses—

BRIAN (Chuckling.)

Please tell me you got one from the chick who spent too much time lookin' at Dad's dick when she changed his diaper.

ALAN

Yes, and the other one Ruthie fired for telling her not to scream at Pop so much.

(ALAN and BRIAN talk in pantomime. CONNIE points to a paper.)

RUTHIE

So this don't mean nothin'?

CONNIE

They have to see his environment, Ruthie. They have to make sure he's okay.

RUTHIE

Why wouldn't he be okay? I takes good care of him.

CONNIE

No, no. They're not saying there's anything wrong with what you do. They're just saying it's time for an inspection.

RUTHIE

They need to leave people 'lone in they own homes.

CONNIE

You know how the government is.

RUTHIE

Yeah, you right.

(CONNIE starts downstage toward JOHN, who stares off.)

RUTHIE

Oh, Connie. Is Brian in town?

(CONNIE stops in her tracks but doesn't turn to RUTHIE.)

CONNIE

He's . . . supposed to be here tomorrow.

RUTHIE

I seen Miss Starks at the supermarket a while ago. She say she seen Brian downtown today.

CONNIE

Maybe he came early to see one of his old girlfriends. You know he's got a ton of them. We won't hear from him till he comes up for air.

RUTHIE

Yeah, he just like his father, 'cept he ain't marry nobody. I ever show you that picture of your father and Teddy in Atlantic City?

CONNIE

Yes, I've seen it.



RUTHIE

S'posed to be seein' Brian and they out there playin' slot machines, standin' 'round with these cheap-lookin' women. Got drinks in they hands like high rollers but they with whores.

(Having heard it all before, CONNIE returns to the armchair as RUTHIE continues her rant.)

RUTHIE

Now Teddy could be with these women 'cause Ida was dead and gone. But your father had me back here waitin' for him. I know we wasn't married yet but I was faithful to him. He married me when he got back but he kept that picture all this time. Now that ain't right.

(Standing, anger and voice both rising.) Ain't never took me to no Atlantic City. Ain't never took me nowhere. You been a awful husband, John Pickett, just awful. Here I am tryin' to do for you and figure out all these forms and clean up after you like you's a baby and all you ever done was treat me like s-h-i-t. Everything was 'bout your children, your children, your children, like Ruthie don't count for nothin'. Wasn't for me you'd still be in that no-good nursin' home Alan put you in. Left you there to die but I got you out. I don't know why I done all I done for you. You ain't deserve none of it. Not none of it. (Exits almost tearfully.)

(When RUTHIE is gone, CONNIE stands and moves as far downstage as possible, taking a cell phone from her pocket. She dials, and we hear a musical ringtone. BRIAN takes a cell phone from his jacket pocket, looks at the display.)

BRIAN

Hey, Connie, we're waitin' for you so we can order some dinner.

CONNIE (In a hushed tone, looking toward where RUTHIE left.) I'm still at Daddy's. Ruthie knows you're here.

BRIAN

Damn.

ALAN

What?

CONNIE

Old Miss Starks from church saw you.

BRIAN (To ALAN.)

Ruthie knows I'm here.

ALAN

Does she have any idea why?

CONNIE

Tell him I don't think so, but she got a letter from the county. They want to do an inspection.

BRIAN

No, but the county sent an inspection letter.

ALAN

Shit! That wasn't supposed to come this early.

BRIAN

Okay, I'll order you a turkey sandwich and root beer. Get here ASAP.  
The back room at Lena's.

(BRIAN and CONNIE both put away their phones as RUTHIE enters from upstage and comes down to the couch. CONNIE turns to face her. RUTHIE's earlier distress is gone.)

RUTHIE

Who you talkin' to?

CONNIE

Uh . . . my friend . . . Tammy. We're gonna go to a movie tonight.

RUTHIE

That's nice. Girl like you oughta get out and enjoy herself more. Me and John, we'll just look at a little TV tonight. Maybe have a little ice cream. Oh, would you help me get him to the toilet 'fore you go? His bowels should be 'bout ready to move, so later he'll just have to pee.

(As BRIAN and ALAN talk and sip from their coffee cups, CONNIE and RUTHIE help JOHN to his feet, then lead him upstage and off. CONNIE returns, gathers the dishes and tray, and carries them off. Soon CONNIE and RUTHIE reappear, helping JOHN back to the armchair. RUTHIE sits near him as CONNIE, behind him, bends to kiss his cheek, then moves off. RUTHIE takes JOHN's hand and smiles. He does not react. Residence lights dim.)

BRIAN

We shoulda done this—you shoulda done this—a long time ago.

ALAN

Richard wanted to. I should have listened.

BRIAN

Sorry if I don't share your faith in Richard after watching you walk away from your divorce bowlegged.

ALAN

I thought I had Ruthie-proofed everything.

BRIAN

But a fool will outwit a genius by accident every time. It takes a Ruthie to prove you're not as smart as you think you are.

ALAN

No, I'm not as smart as you think I am. I never said I was the smartest guy in the world, but often enough I'm the smartest guy in the room, and that's just fine. (Momentarily looks down at his coffee cup, then up.) Right now, though, I'm not even the smartest guy in the room.

BRIAN

What are you talkin' about?

ALAN

Remember how I said Pop kept everything? He had all our stuff from school too—including copies of our permanent records, yours and mine.

BRIAN

I'd rather not see mine but I'm sure you found you were the genius we all thought you were.

ALAN  
Actually, my IQ is 136.

BRIAN  
Big surprise.

ALAN  
But yours is thirteen points higher. In the genius or near genius range.

BRIAN  
What?

ALAN  
You should have been a mathematician or an architect. Instead, you learned to count cards, to read people, to know their next moves before they do. You're a tough guy but a really smart tough guy, which is why you're so good at what you do.

BRIAN  
But you were the one Dad sent to college.

ALAN  
Correction. I sent me to college, with scholarships. Pop refused to do the financial aid form. It was nobody's damn business what he made.

BRIAN  
I never knew that. Man, I always thought—

ALAN  
That he gave me something he wouldn't give you? You resented me for it. (Cuts off BRIAN's reply with an uplifted hand.) But it's all good, Brian.

BRIAN (After a pause.)  
And he didn't have Connie's records?

ALAN (Shaking his head.)  
Mine because I skipped a grade and yours because you were in trouble so much.

BRIAN  
He didn't call her Miss Goody Two Shoes for nothin'. He paid for her, though, didn't he?

ALAN  
One semester at a state school—but she was his princess, the spitting image of our mother. He'd have paid right through graduate school.

BRIAN  
But then along came Marco Easley.

ALAN  
That breakdown cost her everything.

BRIAN (Almost wearily.)  
Bastard. If he knows what's good for his ass, he will stay disappeared.

## Scene 2

(Lights rise on the full stage. ALAN, BRIAN, and CONNIE are seated in the restaurant, their now empty plates in front of them, talking. In the residence, JOHN is now half-reclining on the couch, nodding off, head jerking every few minutes. RUTHIE is upstage, talking on the cordless phone, moving downstage slowly. As the action shifts from side to side in this scene, the side without dialogue will continue in pantomime.)

RUTHIE

No, Milton. You my only family, the onliest one I can talk to. They plannin' somethin'. I can feel it. Connie never could lie. She knew Brian was here and she ain't goin' to no movies. (Reaches the armchair. Glances at JOHN snoozing.) They plannin' somethin', maybe to take this house away and put me on the street. Uh huh.

(Sits in the armchair to listen.)

ALAN

Richard says guardianship proceedings can get very expensive if we're not careful. He'll represent us. Ruthie can get her own lawyer.

CONNIE

I think she still uses that real estate guy who charges her a hundred a phone call.

ALAN

Pop will need one too, and that's where the costs start to climb.

BRIAN

I thought the nursing home had somebody for him.

ALAN

They do, but we'll still have to pay, and Ruthie will probably fight to keep control of him.

BRIAN

Which means what? Richard's got to prove she's incompetent?

CONNIE

All the judge has to do is talk to her for five minutes.

ALAN

It's not a competency hearing. However crazy we think she is, Ruthie feeds herself and Pop. She drives everywhere and pays her bills on time.

CONNIE

Only because you helped her buy a car and taught her how to write checks.

ALAN

The point is, she can take care of herself.

BRIAN

The question is, can she still take care of Dad?

ALAN

Without leaving bruises on his arms when she jerks him around.

CONNIE

I don't think she means to hurt him. (Pauses.) She just can't do things the way she used to. She needs to be somewhere herself.

ALAN

True, but how do we get her to go? Voluntary commitment? I don't think so. But suppose she is declared incompetent? Who takes guardianship of her? Milton? One of us?

(For a moment, no one speaks. Then they all laugh, shaking their heads and gesturing as if to say, "No way" as RUTHIE rises, the phone still to her ear. JOHN stirs, then drops back into dozing.)

RUTHIE

Can they do that? (Pauses.) Course I know you ain't a lawyer. But you studied business. I want to know what you think.

ALAN

Richard's approach will be to prove Pop is better off with us as guardians, better off back in the home with round-the-clock professional care, instead of depending on an 80-year-old woman in declining health herself.

BRIAN

I know we shoulda got him away from her a long time ago, but it just don't feel right that we're takin' him out of his house to go back in there. It's like we're stickin' him in the joint.

ALAN

We've been over this, Brian.

BRIAN

Right. The state won't pay for—

ALAN

If the three of us sold everything we had we might keep him in private nurses for a year, year and a half. Then what?

CONNIE

And we'd probably have to live with him—and her.

ALAN

The home isn't so bad. They have activities, big flat screen TVs. And when he was there before he made friends. It doesn't mean we're throwing him away.

CONNIE

Most of the time, he doesn't know where he is anyway. It's like his brain is skiing downhill without the rest of him. Maybe Richard could fix it so the two of them shared a room there.

ALAN

Trying to set that up now would only drag things out. I put this off too long trying to give Ruthie some space for her happy homemaker fantasy. Right now I'm just thinking about Pop.

BRIAN

Me too. I know his mind is mostly gone, but every now and then there's this . . . this clear moment when he seems to know what's goin' on. I can't help thinkin' how horrible that moment will be when he realizes where he is.

CONNIE

Horrible to us because we wouldn't want to be there, but I've seen a peace in Daddy I never saw before.

ALAN

Peace my ass. I think dementia's his way of getting away from her.

CONNIE

You really hate her. Like, how dare she ban you from the house? At least you don't have to sit and listen to a play-by-play of how their bowels are working.

ALAN

She gave the cops my plate number and asked for extra patrols after she told them I might firebomb the goddam house. A detective came to my job and they got me out of class. He— (Takes a deep breath, then exhales, to calm down.)

RUTHIE

Whatever they doin', Alan behind it. Never thought that boy would do us dirt like that.

ALAN

I don't hate her. I just think she's too unstable to take care of Pop. Bruises? I worry what she'll do on that day we all know is coming, the day he doesn't recognize her anymore.

RUTHIE

All right. You right. I'll call him. I got his home number 'round here somewhere. (Clicks phone off. Moves upstage, away from dozing JOHN, and looks through papers on the table. She looks elsewhere, finally locating the business card inside her sewing basket, which she leaves open as she returns to the armchair. She squints at the card and finally dials.)

(We hear the same musical ringtone we heard earlier. BRIAN looks at his cell phone, then pushes a button.)

BRIAN

Pickett . . . Hey, Milton. How you doin', man? Really? That's great. And your wife? Good. (Holds up a finger to a puzzled ALAN and CONNIE.) She did, huh? Yeah, I'm with them now. Mmm hmm. Well, it's gettin' to be too much for her. No, nothin' like that. Nobody would do that to her. What kinda people does she think we are? But you understand, we gotta do somethin'. He's our father and needs more care than she can give him. Okay, I appreciate it. No, really. Yeah, we're good. (Clicks of and puts his phone away.)

CONNIE

If that was Little Milton, why was he calling you?

ALAN

Because Ruthie told him you're here and she suspects something.

BRIAN

He owes me one. Owed me. Yeah, Ruthie's worried we're gonna take the house away from her. He told her to call her lawyer.

CONNIE

Uh oh, Alan, another letter from the real estate guy.

ALAN

No sweat. Richard's filing in the morning. There's nothing anybody can do before then, even if Milton calls her back and tells her we've hired a SEAL team to get him out of the house.

RUTHIE

Mr. Antonucci? Ruthie Pickett. Sorry to bother you at home, but I think my husband's kids up to somethin'. I think they might be tryin' to take this house away. Put us on the street.

ALAN (Looking at BRIAN.)

What I'm curious about is what you had on Milton that'd make him call you and rat out his aunt.

CONNIE

That is right. We saw him what, three or four times when we were growing up?

RUTHIE

Then what can they do?

CONNIE

He'd come visit Ruthie for part of a summer and Daddy'd make us play with him. Has he been here since then?

ALAN

He was at the wedding, Pop and Ruthie's.

CONNIE

Really? That's how much I remember him.

ALAN

There couldn't have been more than ten or twelve people there, and you still—

BRIAN (Catching ALAN's attention, cutting him off.)

I don't 'member him all that well myself.

ALAN (Recalling CONNIE at the time and nodding.) Well, I guess he's not all that memorable. (Pause.) I believe my question was, what do you have on him?

RUTHIE

What you mean I can't take care of him? I been takin' care of him. No, my age ain't got nothin' to do with it. I'm in good shape. I might could live longer than all of 'em, even you.

BRIAN

Three or four years ago he came to Richmond on business.

ALAN

He still work for that department store chain?

BRIAN

Did then. I don't know about now. Anyway, he came to Richmond and got caught up in somethin' outside his business expertise.

CONNIE

Like what?

BRIAN  
He got robbed.

CONNIE  
What's that got to do with his business?

BRIAN  
He called me and I helped him get his stuff back.

CONNIE  
Why didn't he go to the police?

RUTHIE  
What am I s'posed to do? Let 'em take my husband away?

BRIAN  
Let's just say the situation was . . . embarrassing.

RUTHIE  
Calm down nothin'! All the money I pay you and you can't do nothin' to help me?

ALAN  
Man, you can't leave us hanging like that. You know Connie and I can keep a secret.

BRIAN  
All right. Milton got robbed in a bar. Watch, wallet, travelers' checks, even his wedding ring.

ALAN  
So he called you because he knew you were in Virginia, and you got his stuff back. How long did it take you, a day?

BRIAN  
Less.

RUTHIE  
I'ma get me another lawyer, one know what he doin', one don't charge me every time I ax a simple question. You'll see. (Punches the off button, seething.)

CONNIE  
I still don't understand why he didn't call the police.

BRIAN  
It was a gay bar.

CONNIE  
Oh . . .

ALAN  
So he got to keep his secret and you got to keep an IOU.

(BRIAN says nothing as RUTHIE's phone rings.)

CONNIE  
Does his wife know he's on the down-low?



(RUTHIE's phone rings a second time and she answers.)

RUTHIE (Rising.)

Hello. Oh, hi. Yeah, I called him. He wasn't no help. (Begins to move downstage slowly, shaking her head.) You talked to Brian? He was with Alan and Connie, wasn't he? They gon' try to take John 'way from me, ain't they? (Face contorting.) What you mean, better care? Ain't nobody can take better care of my husband than me. (Pause.)

What? You sound just like them, Milton. Just like them. I thought you was a better man than this. Turn on your own blood. (Angrily clicks off the phone, then speaks to herself.) What none-a y'all understand is how much John need me, and how much I need him. (Moves behind couch to shake JOHN awake.) John!

JOHN (Blinking, looking thoroughly confused.)

Guess it's time for me to get on up outta here and go on home.

RUTHIE

John, you gotta talk to your children 'fore they ruin our life.

JOHN (Looking at her, smiling widely, vacantly.)

Well, look who's here.

RUTHIE

Now listen to me, John. Stop talkin' out your head and listen. You got to talk to the children.

JOHN

The children?

RUTHIE

Yes, Alan and Brian and Connie.

JOHN

Good children. I'm proud of them.

RUTHIE

They ain't no good, John. How many times I gotta tell you. They ain't no good.

JOHN

No . . .

RUTHIE

They tryin' to hurt us.

(JOHN looks at her, his face both confused and pained.)

RUTHIE

You got to tell 'em to stop, to leave us alone. You got to tell 'em me and you, we just fine right here. You got to make 'em listen.

JOHN

Yeah?

RUTHIE (Holding up the phone.)

Yeah. I'ma call 'em and you got to talk to 'em. (Punches buttons, as JOHN stares off, drifting.)

(We hear BRIAN's musical ringtone. He produces his cell phone and stares at the display.)

BRIAN

Not tonight, Ruthie. (He presses a button and puts the phone away.)

RUTHIE (After listening to his message.)

Brian, your father wanna talk to you 'bout what y'all tryin' to do. I know Alan put you up to this cause he think he so smart but don't do us like this. Call your father soon as you get this message. (Clicks off, punches more buttons.)

(We hear a different musical ringtone. CONNIE produces a cell phone and shakes her head at the display.)

CONNIE

I guess it's my turn, but I'll pass. (Puts away her phone.)

RUTHIE (After a moment.)

Connie, I know you ain't at no movies. I know what you and your brothers is up to. And your father wanna talk to you 'bout it. He don't want you to put him back in that home, 'round all them other women. (Pause.) I wish you coulda been more of a daughter to me. Then I'da had somebody to talk to 'bout this. You oughta understand John and me too old to be apart. Too old and too tired. We can't go on without each other. We won't go on. Hear me? I'll make sure of that. (Clicks off, looks at JOHN, who's nodding off again. She begins to pace, eventually stopping at the table.)

(CONNIE and BRIAN rise, each reaching for the check.)

ALAN (Picking it up.)

No, folks. This is on me.

CONNIE

Thanks, Alan. That's really nice of you.

BRIAN

Yeah.

ALAN

Apart from my boys, you two are all I have. Good to be together again, just the three of us.

BRIAN

Listen, when Dad gets settled and things calm down, why don't you come visit me? Both of you. Get out of the frozen north. I'll take a few days off and show you a real good time.

CONNIE

That's a great idea. For now, though, let's just get through the next couple days. And you know we're doing the right thing for Daddy. I love you both. (Kisses each brother on a cheek, then yawns.) But I'm tired. This reminds me of when we were kids staying up to watch the Fright Night late show on Friday. I always fell asleep first. See you in the morning.

BRIAN

Hang on, Connie. I'll walk you to your car. (Turns to ALAN.) Thanks for dinner, my man . . . and everything. And even if I give you a hard time about some things, I know you've done your best for our father. (Embraces ALAN.) Later. (Joins CONNIE. They exit.)

ALAN

Richard's office, nine sharp.

(BRIAN and CONNIE nod and move upstage, exchanging waves with ALAN. After the others exit, ALAN picks up the meal check and reads it, then reaches into his pocket, leaving a few bills on the table. Meanwhile, RUTHIE punches buttons on her phone. We hear a buzz. ALAN produces his cell phone, looks at the display, hesitates. Finally he answers.)

ALAN

Hello.

(RUTHIE says nothing, holding the phone and breathing hard.)

ALAN

I know it's you, Ruthie. You might as well talk to me.

RUTHIE

I ain't got nothin' to say to you. Your father wanna talk to you.

ALAN

No, he doesn't. You called and you're going to tell him what to say. Say it yourself.

RUTHIE

You ain't gon' have no good luck for what you done to me and your father. Takin' 'vantage of us 'cause we old. Tryin' to throw us away like fishheads in newspaper.

ALAN

Nobody's throwing you away, Ruthie. All I ever did—

RUTHIE

Bad enough you stole all our money.

ALAN

Stole your—Jesus!

RUTHIE

Now you gon' take us 'way from each other.

ALAN

I never stole money from you.

RUTHIE

Couldn't wait to use that power of attorney. Took all the money your father worked his whole life to scrimp and save.

ALAN

I gave all the money to you, and you gave some of it back.

RUTHIE

No, I didn't. Why would I give it back? I ain't stupid. You a liar and a thief.

ALAN

Godammit, Ruthie—

RUTHIE

And now you cussin' me. Cussin' a old woman like she some tramp on the street. Plain as day your father didn't beat you enough. Wouldn't do me like this if I was your real mother.

ALAN

Because June Pickett was smart enough to trust me.

RUTHIE

I did trust you and look what it got me. No money. A sick husband. Well, I'm smart enough not to trust you again. I know the truth now. I see the real you.

ALAN

The real me?

RUTHIE

Selfish and nasty and sneaky but most of all evil. That's why your wife left you.

ALAN

What?

RUTHIE

That's why Kit left you. You too evil to live with, thinkin' you smarter'n everybody else.

ALAN

Not everybody. Just you.

RUTHIE

What?

ALAN

I've had it with you. Stamping your feet like a spoiled brat, yelling at everybody because it must be somebody else's fault that you don't understand how the world works.

RUTHIE

Why, I'ma tell your father—

ALAN

Shut the fuck up! For once in your miserable life shut the fuck up and listen!

(RUTHIE is stunned into silence.)

ALAN

I tried to help you, Ruthie. I tried to make sure the house was secure and Pop's pension was secure and you were secure. I never did anything but try to help you. Nothing ever mattered because you're like a child, an eighty-year-old child. But it's not that you're stupid, Ruthie. You're crazy. You're the craziest damn person I've ever met in my life. Only you would sign away sixty grand and deny it. Only you would look at a Sunday school picture from seventy years ago and think it meant Pop had a girlfriend now. Only you would think a twenty-year-old wants to screw an eighty-year-old man in Depends. "Yeah, baby, we're gonna have a real good time—once I get you cleaned up and changed." Do you ever stop to think how insane you sound? Do you ever stop to think, period? The answer must be no, because if you did you'd get the help you need—or you'd just put yourself out of everybody else's misery.

RUTHIE (Quietly, sniffing, on the verge of tears.)

I . . . I ain't crazy.

ALAN (Emotions exhausted, wiping his eyes.)

It doesn't matter, Ruthie. It's over. We're going to court to get guardianship of Pop. We'll see he gets whatever he needs. We can see you get what you need too. All you have to do—

(RUTHIE clicks off, and ALAN looks at his phone before putting it away. He stands and sighs heavily, moving upstage to exit. Lights dim to black on the restaurant side. Meanwhile, RUTHIE moves behind the couch to stand over JOHN.)

RUTHIE (Shaking him.)

John Pickett, your children 'bout to do us some awful dirt.

JOHN (Waking with a start, looking around.)

Huh?

RUTHIE

Your children, they . . . Don't you 'member what I said just a few minutes ago?

JOHN

You talkin' to me? Hope I'm not in some kinda trouble.

RUTHIE

We both in trouble.

JOHN

I . . . I don't know what happened. I was just workin' here, mindin' my own business, and all of a sudden it was . . . you know . . . but I . . . I didn't have nothin' to do with it. I was just workin'.

RUTHIE

You don't work no more! You retired! We in trouble, and it's all your fault!

JOHN

No, 'cause we been busy. You know . . . um . . . um . . . what is that thing? Can't 'member what you call it. It's . . . it's . . .

RUTHIE

You spoilt them children, spoilt 'em rotten. Give 'em everything they want and now they gon' throw us both away.

JOHN

Who?

RUTHIE

The children.

JOHN

What children?

RUTHIE

Your children! Can't you 'member nothin'!

(JOHN looks at her blankly, clearly concerned by her manner.)

RUTHIE

Alan and Brian and Connie! You know them?

JOHN (Relieved, smiling, obviously proud.)  
They my children.

RUTHIE

Why you smilin', you old fool? Them children you so proud of just stabbed you in the back!

JOHN

No . . .

RUTHIE

You been just as bad a father as you been a husband. They never treated me like no kinda mother 'cause you never treated me like no kinda wife. You treated me like your plaything for years. Come over and do your business and go home to them brats. (Pause.) You wanna know what your precious kids really like? Well, there's Connie, the best one of the lot, but she scared of her own shadow. Ain't her fault but she so weak she can't stand up to her brothers. (Leans closer.) Then there's Brian, your criminal. You let him run the streets and now look at him, wearing a gun under his arm like he the police. But now he done turned on you too. (Close to his ear.) And last but not least there's Alan, your college boy, the one who was gonna be somebody special. He the worst one of all, a liar and a thief who robbed us blind. Now he gon' throw us to the dogs!

JOHN (Shaking his head, trembling, beginning to cry.)

Good children. Good children. They wouldn't hurt the family.

RUTHIE (Taking his chin, turning his face to hers to mock him.) They wouldn't hurt the family. They wouldn't hurt the family. (Screaming, holding his head as if about to tear it off.) This ain't no family! Your children done destroyed it!

JOHN (Wrenching himself to his feet, shouting or crying.)

No, June! They wouldn't do that! They wouldn't hurt the family, June!

(Stunned, RUTHIE steps back as if slapped. Chest heaving, JOHN eases himself back into his seat. RUTHIE straightens to her full height and looks about as if unsure what to do next. After a moment she places her hands on JOHN's shoulders and pats him as if offering comfort. Gradually, he seems to calm. Then, wiping her eyes, RUTHIE moves upstage, shaking something out of the pill case, and getting the cup. Moving back to JOHN, she offers him a pill.)

RUTHIE (Very quietly.)

John, time to take your medicine.

(JOHN takes the pill from her hand and puts it into his mouth.)

RUTHIE (Handing him the cup.)

Here you go. Careful now. Don't spill it.

(JOHN takes the cup and begins to sip as RUTHIE steps back. He looks out at the audience, innocent, childlike, almost peaceful, a sharp contrast to the blend of dying fury and mounting pain on RUTHIE's face as she backs toward the sewing basket.)

RUTHIE (Quietly, almost to herself.)

You didn't even have ten years with June and you still call her name 'fore you call mine. What did she have that I ain't got?

(JOHN holds up the cup, as if expecting RUTHIE to take it, just as she moves aside balls of yarn and the like to remove the revolver from deep inside the sewing basket.)

RUTHIE (Sharply, wiping her eyes with her free hand.)

Just hold it a minute! (With two hands, levels gun at the back of his head.) I been with you more'n forty years, John Pickett. I can't let 'em separate us now. I ain't goin' to no court so they can put me in one of them funny places all by myself. I ain't crazy. Where you go, I go.

(Blackout. The sound of RUTHIE's weeping. An explosion.)

### Scene 3

(Lights rise on the house side of the stage. Dressed in a dark suit, ALAN is seated at the table, writing on a large pad, then scratching out what he has written. After he's done this two or three times, CONNIE, in a suit, enters from upstage and stops at the table. She puts a hand on ALAN's shoulder.)

CONNIE

Know what you're going to say yet?

ALAN

Most of it. Under the circumstances it's kind of hard to end it. I mean, what can I say about—  
(The doorbell rings. ALAN and CONNIE both look upstage.)

CONNIE

I'll get it. You keep working on the eulogy.

(ALAN resumes writing as CONNIE moves upstage and off. Presently, she re-enters, leading TRAVIS downstage. ALAN and TRAVIS regard each other a moment before TRAVIS speaks and ALAN stands.)

TRAVIS

Morning, Alan.

ALAN

Detective.

TRAVIS (To CONNIE.)

And you said Brian's here too?

CONNIE

He's upstairs with our nephews.

TRAVIS

I need to speak with all three of you.

CONNIE

I'll get him. (Goes upstage and off.)

(For a moment ALAN and TRAVIS say nothing.)

ALAN

Perhaps we should go up front. (Gestures her downstage ahead of him.) Feel free to take a seat.

TRAVIS (Moving to one side of the couch.)

I prefer to stand.

ALAN (Moving to the other side of the couch.)

That sounds official. Which one of us are you here to arrest?

(TRAVIS says nothing.)

ALAN

Wait . . . it can't be Brian because you came alone.



TRAVIS

And you think he'd try to cowboy up and go out in some kind of blaze, Butch and Sundance rolled into one.

ALAN

Not with my sons here. Kevin and Linc adore Uncle Brian because he never loses his cool.

(CONNIE and BRIAN, in a suit, enter from upstage.)

BRIAN

If it isn't Batgirl. (Holding up a cell phone, then slipping it into a pocket.) If you came to keep playing Murder She Hoped, Rudy Benefield is on his way over. Nobody gets to sucker punch me twice.

TRAVIS

No sucker punches. I'm not here to arrest any of you. I've been busy the past few days, and I've found a few things I think you all ought to know.

CONNIE (Moving downstage.)

Like what?

TRAVIS

Like some background information on Ruthie.

BRIAN (Following CONNIE.)

Do we care, Alan?

ALAN

Not particularly.

CONNIE

Hush, you two. I'd like to know. Aren't you curious?

ALAN (To BRIAN.)

What time are you supposed to get Milton from the airport?

BRIAN (Looking at his wristwatch.)

About forty minutes from now. (Looking at TRAVIS.) Which means, detective, you better start talkin' if you want to get it all in.

TRAVIS (Producing a pocket notebook as the others sit.)

All right. Ruth F. Hawkins, born eighty-three years ago in Gary, Indiana, the only daughter of Martin and Francine Hawkins, older brothers Harold and Walter. Yes, Martin Hawkins was a junk dealer.

ALAN

I could have told you all that.

TRAVIS

She never finished high school.

ALAN

And I could have guessed that. This is a waste of time.

CONNIE

Alan!

ALAN

It is. (To TRAVIS.) Tell me something I don't already know or can't figure out.

TRAVIS

She spent more than a decade in the Central State Hospital in Indianapolis getting a lot of ECT.

ALAN

Ouch!

CONNIE

ECT?

ALAN

Electroconvulsive—

BRIAN

Shock therapy. Got it.

CONNIE

That's bad, right?

ALAN

Sometimes there's brain damage or memory loss. Hemingway blew his brains out.

CONNIE

Poor Ruthie.

TRAVIS

During her time at Central State she got pregnant—nobody knows by whom—and delivered a baby, a boy given up for private adoption.

BRIAN

Milton?

TRAVIS

The record is sealed. In any case, she was sterilized, not uncommon for mental patients then.

CONNIE

That's why she and Daddy never had children. I wonder if he knew.

BRIAN

Maybe that's why he got together with her. No surprises. I wonder what Milton knows.

ALAN

No point bringing it up now.

TRAVIS

I also know what happened when Ruthie pulled the trigger.

BRIAN

We already know that.

TRAVIS

No, you just think you do. Ruthie's death was no accident.

(CONNIE, ALAN, and BRIAN all react with exasperation or frustration. Their reaction is cut short by a loud thud offstage.)

CONNIE

I'll go.

(CONNIE rises, goes upstage as BRIAN follows. ALAN and TRAVIS watch them exit. For a moment no one says anything. CONNIE and BRIAN return with JOHN, in open-collared shirt and with a big bandage plastered across the back of his neck.)

ALAN

Hey, Pop. You okay?

(JOHN looks at ALAN, confused, but says nothing.)

CONNIE

He was sleeping in the recliner in the den and knocked some books off the lamp table. Give him time to finish waking up.

(JOHN moves downstage slowly, helped by CONNIE and BRIAN, who seat him in the armchair. He gazes vacantly. CONNIE and BRIAN sit on the couch. ALAN moves behind the armchair.)

BRIAN

We have to brush him off and get his jacket on him soon.

ALAN

We've got time. Detective? You were saying something wasn't an accident.

BRIAN

Bullshit. We all know what happened. That piece hadn't been cleaned or oiled for years. It blew up in her face . . . and left shrapnel in his neck. Pretty lucky, you ask me.

CONNIE

And when I saw all the blood, I thought they were both shot.

TRAVIS

I'm afraid the gun blew up because somebody tampered with it.

CONNIE

What?

TRAVIS (Moving behind the couch, producing a photograph.)

I knew when I saw the gun at the scene that it was more than an accidental backfire. Look at the barrel, the cylinder, and the frame.

(TRAVIS passes the photo to CONNIE, who looks at it and holds it for ALAN to see, then passes it to BRIAN on the other end of the couch. JOHN gazes off into space.)

BRIAN (Sitting forward as he studies the photo.)

Oh, my God!

JOHN (Startled a bit, looking around, smiling at his children.)  
I'm okay, thank the good Lord.

(Everyone pauses to look at JOHN, but he says nothing else.)

TRAVIS

You know guns, Brian. Do you agree there was tampering?

BRIAN

Hell, yeah! (Passes the picture back through CONNIE to TRAVIS.)

TRAVIS (Pocketing the photo and looking at JOHN.)

Ru. . .the person in question suffered massive trauma to the face and head and multiple lacerations of the hands that held the weapon. More trauma than we would have expected.

CONNIE

But this could still be an accident, right?

BRIAN

No. Something was jammed real tight in that barrel. Had to be done on purpose. (To TRAVIS.) Which is why you had such a hard-on in the box. You thought I rigged the gun.

TRAVIS

Any of you could have. Connie, you were here several nights a week. Alan, I don't for a minute believe you gave up your keys when you were banned. Sorry, Brian, but you were the likeliest suspect because you know guns. And you have a history with our department.

BRIAN

I can't wait to get out of this half-assed town and go back home.

ALAN

Even if one of us did block the barrel, it's hardly the most reliable way to commit murder. How would we know who'd pull the trigger?

TRAVIS

Maybe it wasn't murder. Maybe it was self-defense.

CONNIE

I don't understand.

TRAVIS

If you hear often enough that somebody wants to shoot you, maybe you take steps to make sure you can't be shot.

ALAN

So now I did it?

TRAVIS

Or maybe you try to make sure somebody you love can't be shot. (Flips to another notebook page.) The crime scene techs have given me just what I need: a thumbprint on the head of the sheet metal screw used to block the barrel. (Pause.) The hit came back from the state firearms registry.

(CONNIE, ALAN, and BRIAN nod, then look at each other with confusion, until they realize what TRAVIS has said. Then, slowly, they look at their father.)

ALAN

That's impossible. He couldn't think that through if his life depended on it.

TRAVIS

But what if yours did? Or Brian's or Connie's?

BRIAN

Of course. Jesus!

(ALAN and CONNIE look at each other, still unsure.)

TRAVIS

One way or another you all told me how important it was to him not to have his family hurt. Imagine a full year of relentless nagging, of screaming tirades about his children and threats to hurt them. What would happen if he slipped into—what'd you call them, Brian?

BRIAN

Clear moments.

TRAVIS

A moment of perfect clarity when the Alzheimer's seemed to go away, and he had just enough time to make sure his children were safe.

(Silence. ALAN places a hand on each of JOHN's shoulders. CONNIE leans forward to pat his knee. TRAVIS approaches.)

TRAVIS (To JOHN, as she puts away her pocket notebook.)

Mr. Pickett? John?

JOHN (Smiling as he looks up at her.)

Well look who's here!

CONNIE

Daddy, you don't know who she is.

JOHN (Trying to point an unsteady finger.)

S-s-sure I do. That's . . . that's Reva. I know Reva. How you doin', girl?

CONNIE (To TRAVIS.)

Aunt Ida's sister.

TRAVIS (Nodding.)

Just fine, Mr. Pickett. You know, it's time you got your jacket on, a handsome man like you.

JOHN

Yeah?

TRAVIS

Sure thing. Maybe Connie can help you.

JOHN (Looking at CONNIE as if seeing her for the first time.)

Connie, that you? You gon' live a long time. I was just thinkin' 'bout you.

CONNIE (Rising.)  
Come on, Daddy.

(BRIAN rises. He and ALAN help CONNIE get JOHN to his feet. CONNIE helps him upstage and off as the others watch. When they are gone, ALAN and BRIAN face TRAVIS.)

ALAN  
You know he's not competent to stand trial.

TRAVIS  
I don't recall saying I wanted to arrest him.

BRIAN  
But you do want to talk to us about something else, don't you?

TRAVIS  
Maybe you should sit.

(BRIAN resumes his seat. ALAN sits in the armchair.)

TRAVIS  
You know, I would never have been so tough on anybody for a case like this. It was obvious what happened, except the gun was in worse shape than it should have been. But then I got the same hit twice, Marco Easley. Arrested for assaulting Connie, who hunkered down in her dorm room for five days before reporting the attack. With bruises faded and trace evidence gone, Easley's charges were dismissed, but two weeks later Brian was arrested for assaulting Easley. Those charges were not dismissed.

ALAN  
If her roommate hadn't been away, she'd have gotten help right away.

BRIAN  
And if I had Easley's lawyer I might have got paid for puttin' him in the hospital.

TRAVIS  
Brian gets to plead to a misdemeanor—if he agrees to leave town. He does, and then . . .

ALAN  
Easley goes poof. We know, detective. You suspect my brother but you have no evidence.

BRIAN  
Benefield must be caught in traffic.

TRAVIS  
Don't worry, Brian. I actually wanted to thank you both for helping me figure it out.

ALAN  
And thank you for sending Connie away.

TRAVIS  
You're welcome. I'll be quick. Neither of you had anything to do with what happened to Easley. You, Brian, were already in Atlantic City, working your first casino job, and you, Alan, just aren't the type. But each of you suspects what happened, don't you?

ALAN (Exchanging a nod with BRIAN.)

Pop again. We talked about it years ago and wondered if Pop had something to do with it.

TRAVIS

Yes. Easley hurt not one, but two of his children. Brian, on the pretext of visiting you, your father and Teddy must have given Marco Easley the ride of his life. I believe his body is somewhere between this house and the boardwalk, but the odds of finding it are very small.

ALAN

This is still just a theory.

TRAVIS

But a good one, supported by the first physical evidence we've had in the case.

BRIAN

What physical evidence?

TRAVIS

That 30-year-old Buick Alan helped Ruthie trade in. On a hunch I tracked down the VIN and found it in Florida. Guess what CSU found in the trunk? Traces of old blood. Human blood someone had tried very hard to clean up. It seems your father had a reason for keeping that car. If it was out of sight in his garage, nobody could process it as a crime scene.

ALAN

Now what? DNA testing?

TRAVIS

No. We have nothing from Easley for comparison and no living blood relatives. Teddy's dead, and your father can't stand trial. Besides, Easley tried to rape your sister and when she resisted hurt her. I like your sister. I say leave his sorry ass in whatever shallow grave has him—unofficially, of course.

(The doorbell rings.)

BRIAN (Standing.)

Must be Benefield. Let me see if I can get him to drive me to the airport. Then maybe he'll only charge me for gas.

(ALAN stands as BRIAN exits.)

TRAVIS (Circling to the front of the couch.)

One final thing. Since Ruthie really was mentally ill, you can stop blaming yourself.

ALAN

Easier said. You know, my nickname for her was the scavenger's daughter.

TRAVIS

Connie told me. Symbolic, as if Ruthie scavenged a life for herself.

ALAN (Shaking his head, smiling sadly.)

Actually, the scavenger's daughter was a medieval torture device.

TRAVIS

Oh.

ALAN

From the time of Henry VIII. It was sort of the opposite of the rack. It was shaped like . . . I seem to be lecturing again, don't I? Sorry, but it's kind of what I do.

TRAVIS

That's all right.

ALAN

Let's just say that sometimes dealing with Ruthie felt like torture. But it wasn't her fault. When I think of all I said—

TRAVIS

You were frustrated, and for good reason.  
(Offers her hand.)

ALAN (Shaking her hand.)

Thank you.

TRAVIS

Tell your sister I said goodbye. Oh . . . (Releasing his hand and handing him a business card.) If you need more information, or just to talk, give me a call.

ALAN (After searching her face for a moment, reading.) Detective Sergeant Maxine Travis.

TRAVIS (Starting upstage, glancing back.)

My friends call me Max. Goodbye, Alan.

ALAN

Goodbye . . . Max.

(TRAVIS moves upstage and exits. ALAN returns to the table and sits. He picks up the pen, writes a few words. Presently, CONNIE and JOHN enter upstage and stop. Then BRIAN enters. Seeing them, ALAN stands, pocketing the eulogy.)

BRIAN

The limo's here. Kevin and Linc are already inside. I'm gonna head off with Benefield. I'll see you all at the church.

ALAN

Okay.

JOHN

We gon' see Ruthie?

CONNIE

Yes, Daddy. We're gonna see Ruthie. At the church.

JOHN (Smiling with anticipation and relief.)

The church! I was wonderin' where she was.

(All three look at their father.)



(Blackout.)

The End

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