

Levi Clears Out

by

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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
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The sisters:

Tessie Sue	Hispanic. Foster Sister, free-spirited, rebellious, beaten down but not defeated	58	F
Mildred	Caucasian. Meek, obedient, tries to please her sisters	70	F
Bonnie	Caucasian. Bossy, matriarchal, concerned about legacy and appearances	71	F

Others:

Levi	African American. Tessie Sue's son, well-mannered, good-natured	28	M
Monica	Levi's wife, concerned about preserving her family and knowing their heritage. Race flexible	28	F

1999 HENRY and IRENE NAU's home. HENRY died one week previously. IRENE died the previous year. The house is in a rural area

Henry and Irene had three daughters: BONNIE, 71, and MILDRED, 70, are in Henry's study. TESSIE SUE, 58, their foster sister, is yet to arrive.

Only TESSIE SUE ever actually lived in this house.

A young black man discovers that his mother, who he believed was a foster child, was born of his aunt. His mother's father is also revealed, thus accounting for his Hispanic heritage. The discovery of his bloodline complicates the distribution of his late grandfather's property. Three late-middle-aged women, one Hispanic. Two young adults: a black male and a female of any race. Single interior set (can be suggested) Set in 1999.

SCENE ONE.

1999 Levi Nabors, 27, addresses the audience.

LEVI

Let me be right up front about this: my mother is bonkers. When I first noticed she was having some issues was when she sat in front of the TV for hours without changing channels. I remembered she had liked to listen to books on audio. I got her a recording of "A Streetcar Named Desire." Then every day when the mail carrier came through she'd yell, "Stella!" I told her to knock it off. She said, "Why? That's her name." I couldn't argue with that. Rather than filter through every play or story, I made mixtapes of her favorite songs. Now and as long as she's with her music, she does all right. It never seems to bother anyone if she sings "Hello Dolly," "Up, up and away in my beautiful balloon," or "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," (or as she sang, "Boogie Woogie Bugler Boy.") Just preparing you. I don't want you to think she's rude. The songwriter in me senses there might be country and western gold here. I dabble in the music business and these new mp3 players are just the sticky wicky ticket for Mom.

(The year of this play was changed to 1999  
when mp3 players were starting to catch on  
but a cassette player might give a better  
sense of the era if it's not a distraction  
changing tapes, etc.)

Last time I was here was 1982. My grandparents put me up one summer while I worked at Ball Metal earning some cash for college. Grandpa had this list when he died. Not a will, mind you, but a list. Lists for my mother and her two sisters. He even had lists for his church, the college that was his alma mater and workplace, his fraternal organizations, and even some fringe political groups (as if he could run their affairs from the grave). He had lists stuck around the house like maybe he had Alzheimer's disease or something. Maybe he did. He was stubborn. Mostly they were just notes about what was in drawers and closets. Information about where the trinkets and furniture came from, as if the stuff might want to tell their stories. As you can see, this place is not exactly the Smithsonian's American heartland warehouse.

My mother was a foster child. With no adoption, at least in her mind, there was no acceptance. But to the best of my knowledge, my grandparents treated her the same as my aunts. I doubt she even thought about her legal rights. I told Mom that I'd bring her back later to collect the stuff on her list. But for the funeral, she was on her own. I loaded her on the Greyhound with a suitcase, some tapes, and her Walkman.

The roots on my tree couldn't withstand that wind. The old family church was right across from the bus station so it seemed like a safe excursion. My aunts could take care of things after she made it to the church.

But here I am, regardless. My wife Monica, who you'll meet shortly, has this notion that my mother really is related to the family by blood. How did she get that notion? You can get a lot of weird ideas spitting into a vial and sending it off to a laboratory. She works at the Tucson police department. I think she got all worked up about it after that O.J. Simpson business. Bottom line is this: I don't care whether my mother is related to this gang by blood or not. They're all a bunch of fruitcakes, and I'd just as soon not be fermented with that mix.

Monica enters, sits at the desk, and opens photo albums.

That's my wife, Monica. She's looking through Grandpa and Grandma's photo albums. This is her first time here. We've been married 6 years and have two little girls. She's more interested in our family tree than I am. She thinks it's important for our daughters to know their lineage. She might be right.

Levi joins his wife in the study.

LEVI

I can barely remember coming here when I was little.

MONICA

These are your cousins?

LEVI

Yeah, why?

MONICA

They live around here?

LEVI

I guess.

MONICA

I think I saw that guy in Wilson's Hamburger Shop.

LEVI

Good eye. That's Roy. I started to say something but stopped when he didn't recognize me.

MONICA

Your own cousin?

LEVI

I'm the invisible man. They were so desperate for diversity here the kids had to call anyone the least bit dark the N-word.

MONICA

How will you stay invisible when you come back?

LEVI

Could be a challenge. Some of Dad's family stuff is still here in storage. I'll clear out the locker, get the house ready to sell, load up Mom, and get the hell out of Dodge.

MONICA

Did your granddad make lists for you and your cousins?

LEVI

Maybe. Who cares?

MONICA

I need to go to the bathroom.

LEVI

Don't mess with anything. No one's supposed to be here until things are inventoried. They'll change the locks and place armed guards at every entrance starting tomorrow.

She realizes he's joking after a moment.

MONICA

Idiot. So how did you manage to get a key?

LEVI

I stayed here one summer while I was in college. I roofed the house to pay my rent and worked at Ball Metal. I had a key, but they didn't usually lock the door.

MONICA

So you hung out with your cousins here?

LEVI

No. Not really.

MONICA

Friends from school?

LEVI

No. I was only here in elementary.

MONICA

Steady girlfriend?

LEVI

Give up. I slept, worked, ate, and got ready for more college.

Monica studies the photo album

MONICA

I bet that made you closer to your grandparents.

LEVI

Maybe.

MONICA

Who's this?

LEVI

Roy's girlfriend. They got married.

MONICA

She's pretty.

LEVI

Yeah.

MONICA

Are they still together?

LEVI

How should I know?



MONICA

He's your cousin. Right?

LEVI

So? Come on Let's go now.

MONICA

How about this guy? Looks like about 1945.

Levi holds the album under a light and shrugs.

LEVI

No idea. One of my mom's cousins, I guess.

MONICA

Light-skinned. He's in a uniform.

LEVI

We'll make note of that at ancestry dot com. Probably another foster kid.

Monica starts toward the hallway door

MONICA

I'll just be a minute.

LEVI

Don't use the bathroom by Granddad's bedroom.

MONICA

Why?

LEVI

It gives me the creeps.

MONICA

You're still mad. I can tell.

LEVI

Nah.

MONICA

Yes, you are.

LEVI

Look, I didn't want to come here, but I'm happy if you're happy.

MONICA

You're right. Neighbors probably have binoculars trained on us.

LEVI

I can play as dumb as the next person. I have a key. Let's just say I stored some stuff here while I was in college. Nothing to see here. Move along.

MONICA

So what do we do now?

LEVI

It doesn't change anything for me. Hurry up. Let's get out of here. We need to get back to Tucson so we can meet Mom's bus.

MONICA

They never talked about it while you were living here?

LEVI

No. Mom only told me she was a foster child.

MONICA

But you got a copy of her birth certificate.

LEVI

She never let me see it.

MONICA

You could have legal rights.

LEVI

To what?

MONICA

Part of the inheritance.

Levi laughs.

LEVI

That's a good one.

MONICA

We could use some help. She's still young. You need to talk to her.

LEVI

No thanks.

MONICA

Levi, we could be caring for her for years. Think of our children.

LEVI

We do fine.

MONICA

Okay. Just for medical history then.

LEVI

Down the hall to the left. Chop chop.

Monica exits to the bathroom. Levi leafs through albums. He opens drawers. Finds 3 journals, one for each daughter. He lays them open on the desk. He seems to know exactly what he's looking for. He tears out pages from 2 journals, Mildred's and Bonnie's. He pulls a fourth journal from the drawer, leafs through his grandmother's personal journal and buries it back in the drawer. He places the other three neatly on the desk. Monica returns holding a handkerchief with 2 pairs of false teeth. Levi folds the pages and pockets them.

LEVI

Let's get out of here. What's that?

MONICA

Teeth that were in a water glass.

LEVI

Why did you use that bathroom? I told you it was creepy. Put 'em back and let's go. Did they bite you?

MONICA

No, why?

LEVI  
Your bloody handkerchief.

MONICA  
It was on a shelf with a note.

LEVI  
God. Grandpa's notes.

MONICA  
"Baby's Boo Boo."

MONICA  
So what were you slipping into your pocket?

LEVI  
Later. Let's go.

MONICA  
Is there a safe?

LEVI  
Yes, but I don't know how to open it. Put the teeth back and let's go.

MONICA  
Yes sir! Chop chop!

Levi exits.

MONICA  
So bossy!

Monica looks at the journals. She puts the teeth and handkerchief in her purse and exits.

## SCENE TWO

Two weeks later. Bonnie is filming the room with her father's video camera.

Mildred enters.

MILDRED

I don't have any shoes.....

BONNIE

(whispers)

Just a minute. I want to record everything just as Dad left it.

MILDRED

Why?

BONNIE

Shh! This is recording.

MILDRED

You're recording papers?

BONNIE

Mom's journals.

MILDRED

You could copy them at the library.

BONNIE

Quiet! It's recording. I want to see them the way Dad left them.

MILDRED

You don't want talking in your movie?

BONNIE

Only if it helps identify their things.

MILDRED

Sounds like you're gathering evidence for the F.B.I.

BONNIE

We need to take inventory. A lot of this isn't on the lists.

(Bonnie speaks full voice for the recording)

I'm recording with Dad's camera, May 28, 1999, a little over two weeks after he died. Here we have Dad's desk. He put Mom's journals out for us. She died last year. He worked here and could look out the window and see our house. That house was torn down last year just before Mom died. He could see our son Roy when he learned to drive. He even knew what time he came in after dates and whether he'd been drinking. He was tough on him.

MILDRED

(whispers)

I need some shoes.

Bonnie shuts off the camera.

BONNIE

Good Lord, Mildred. I'm trying to record. Where are the shoes you wore when you came in? Whose slippers are those?

MILDRED

They were in Dad's closet. Funeral shoes hurt my feet.

BONNIE

Wear your own shoes. That's creepy.

Mildred takes a stuffed fish off the wall and studies it.  
Levi addresses the audience.

LEVI

Let me interrupt for a minute. Although Granddad didn't leave those books out, he *might* have. I just gave him a little boost.

MILDRED

We shouldn't do anything until Tessie Sue gets here.

BONNIE

God knows when that'll be. I had dinner ready for them an hour ago.

MILDRED

Is Levi with them?

BONNIE

The mysterious missing Levi? I doubt it.

MILDRED

At the funeral Tessie Sue said he was married.

BONNIE

That doesn't mean she's seen him. What's that?

MILDRED

A fish.

BONNIE

Okay. But what are you doing with it?

MILDRED

It was the biggest fish anyone in the family had caught at the cottage. We had it stuffed for Dad.

BONNIE

Are you taking it?

MILDRED

We gave it to him. Bob's brother is a taxidermist.

BONNIE

He is not. You should have had it done professionally. Nothing should be taken from the house until we've inventoried everything. We need to box up these books.

MILDRED

Bob will want the sheet metal pattern books.

BONNIE

Why?

MILDRED

He has a pressed tin ceiling in the garage.

BONNIE

So many of them are Tess's. True teen romance 1958.

MILDRED

Where are *our* books and magazines?

BONNIE

The folks were too poor to buy us books. The Great Depression? Ring any bells?

MILDRED

Dad brought us books from the school.

BONNIE

Simple-minded trash for Tess and discarded textbooks for us.

Levi speaks to audience

LEVI

Call me simple. Some of those covers gave me great comfort.

MILDRED

They're not all textbooks. I want the fish.

BONNIE

You gave it to Dad. Take it. I don't care. Have you seen the log cabin incense burner?

Bonnie turns on the camera and moves toward the door, aiming her camera as she walks.

MILDRED

No. Stop recording me.

BONNIE

We have one month to clear out. Where the hell is Tess?

Mildred takes off the slippers and rubs her feet.

MILDRED

I need shoes.

BONNIE

I'm not filming your gnarly feet.

MILDRED

*Your* feet are worse than mine. Mom had to have her toenails removed.

Bonnie aims the camera at Mildred's feet.



BONNIE

We'll let posterity decide.

MILDRED

Stop it! Maybe she forgot the date.

BONNIE

If she doesn't show up, all her things go to the yard sale.

MILDRED

She'll be here.

BONNIE

Or we'll just divide her stuff between us. It's a miracle she showed up at the funeral.

MILDRED

Did you call her?

BONNIE

Her phone number changes with the weather. Coming to Dad's funeral on a bus. Tacky.

A truck is heard in the driveway.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue's here!

BONNIE

Sounds like they need a new muffler.

Truck shuts off. Metallic sounds of a trailer being unhitched.

BONNIE

Did you know Mother kept journals?

MILDRED

I guess. I never read them.

BONNIE

I would have.

MILDRED

You can have them. I don't want to read any of it.

BONNIE

Not even your own?

MILDRED

No. Mine would just probably be mostly about you anyway.

BONNIE

Why?

MILDRED

You went to college and had adventures. My journal would be boring.

BONNIE

Me? I never did anything except grow up here. I even went to college here. I'll probably die here, too. This "heartland" stuff is so over-rated.

MILDRED

You're a teacher. You could travel in the summer.

BONNIE

Phhht! Who would look after Bernie?

MILDRED

Maybe when you retire you will travel.

BONNIE

Mildred, do you listen to me?

MILDRED

Right. Bernie. Will you please put that camera down?

Bonnie puts the camera in her face

BONNIE

Could we have a report on the bunions?

MILDRED

Is this how you want to be remembered?

BONNIE

An announcement to future generations: Mildred wills you her toenails. She keeps them in a jar with our mother's.

MILDRED

Oh, for heaven's sake.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI

I'm sorry you had to see that.

Bonnie turns off the camera

BONNIE

Mom's and Dad's teeth are still in a glass of water. Dad kept them together so they could kiss all night.

MILDRED

Stop it.

BONNIE

Go see for yourself. They got buried in their new teeth but the old ones are still in Dad's bathroom. My Roy was scared of those teeth when he was little. Yuck!

MILDRED

Why would they bury him in his good teeth? They could have switched them after the showing.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI

Am I the only one thinking that Aunt Mildred was secretly wondering if Grandpa's good teeth would fit her mouth?

BONNIE

And he just bought that toupee. I wonder if we can take it back?

MILDRED

I took it off before anyone came. No one would have recognized him.

BONNIE

Where is it?

MILDRED

I just tucked it under his feet.

BONNIE

Dang it, Mildred. It was brand new.

MILDRED

You have to be careful how you die.

Bonnie turns on the camera

BONNIE

What's that supposed to mean?

MILDRED

You want to have good teeth. And eyeglasses. When you go through the family records. "Uncle Frank fell while trimming a tree." "Grandma White blew her head off, sitting in a rocking chair." "Aunt Edith died of a broken heart." "My Jerry died when he was 19 years old."

BONNIE

Okay, Mildred, that's enough.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI

I always liked Jerry. He was a peacemaker who couldn't find peace for himself. He broke up a few fights between Roy and me.

MILDRED

What will they say about us?

BONNIE

Come on. Buck up. We have a lot to do.

She turns off the camera

MILDRED

30 years farming and all anyone remembers is how he died.

BONNIE

He wasn't a farmer.

MILDRED

Who?

BONNIE

Dad.

MILDRED

Well, I know that. I was talking about Uncle Marvin.

BONNIE

How did he die?

MILDRED

I don't know. I think he was killed by a jealous neighbor or something.

BONNIE

Over Aunt Coral??

MILDRED

No, I think a dispute about land. He got shoved into some kind of machinery.

BONNIE

He should have bailed before he got baled.

MILDRED

Huh? Well, I think I'll die in a house fire.

BONNIE

Why?

MILDRED

Fire is fearful and fascinating. That's all.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI

The dark underbelly of Aunt Mildred is revealed. Notice how Aunt Bonnie moves her lips in anticipation of a response.

MILDRED

Dad looked afraid. I hope he was right with the Lord.

LEVI

Hold on. She's still chewing her thoughts.

MILDRED

I folded his hands. Like when we were little.

LEVI

Show her, Aunt Millie.

MILDRED

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors. Where are the people?

LEVI

And now we get the happy Bible School version.

MILDRED

Here is the church. Here is the ...

BONNIE

All right Mildred. I get it.

Levi demonstrates the finger people version to the audience.

MILDRED

Thank you.

BONNIE

For what?

MILDRED

For leaving me with an empty church.

BONNIE

Dad's not here anymore. Act your age.

MILDRED

Oh my God!

LEVI

Here it comes.

BONNIE

What?

MILDRED

We buried Dad with an empty church in his hands.

BONNIE

He was fine.

MILDRED

Yes. Thank you for taking such good care of him.

BONNIE

I didn't want him to end up like Mom.

MILDRED

Winebrenner Extended Care Home was nice.

BONNIE

If you say so.

MILDRED

Are you still recording?

BONNIE

No.

MILDRED

How do you want to die?

BONNIE

Maybe like Grandma White. Dope me up and pull the trigger.

MILDRED  
Did you turn off the camera?

BONNIE  
Yes. Why?

MILDRED  
I want to ask you something. It's personal.

BONNIE  
Okay.

MILDRED  
Did Dad hit you?

BONNIE  
You mean like spankings? Of course. We all got spanked. You know that.

MILDRED  
How about Mom?

BONNIE  
Good Lord, yes. And slapped.

MILDRED  
That's all I wanted to know.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI  
He never hit me. Sometimes I wish he had. God, save us from well-meaning old white guys.

BONNIE  
Let's see if Tess needs some help.

MILDRED  
I wonder if she hit Tessie Sue?

BONNIE  
Dad hit. Mom hit. I hit. What's your point?



MILDRED

We weren't around.

BONNIE

She was 10 when we moved out. And adopted.

MILDRED

She wasn't adopted. She was a foster child.

BONNIE

Same thing.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI

No, it isn't. You can send a foster child back.

MILDRED

I think that's why she eloped so young.

BONNIE

She took our last name.

MILDRED

Not legally. Well, we all have different names now so who cares?

Mildred picks up the fish. The head falls off.

BONNIE

Maybe they needed the money. You know, they pay you to take care of a foster child.

Truck is heard starting up.

MILDRED

I want Tessie Sue to see the garden. I don't think she ever saw it when all the flowers were in bloom.

BONNIE

She was here in 1989.

Mildred tries to put the head back on the fish.

MILDRED

But Dad didn't have flowers then. Your Bernie had it as a vegetable garden. We've neglected it.

BONNIE

She didn't bother coming by when she was here for the funeral. That's her problem. Put that fish down.

They go to the window.

MILDRED

I don't want to forget it. Maybe I'll put it with the tools. Bob plans to pick them up tomorrow.

BONNIE

What will Bob do with tools?

MILDRED

He had his leg removed, not his hands.

BONNIE

I mean to say he's not particularly handy.

MILDRED

He wants a hobby. Maybe.

Truck is heard driving off.

BONNIE

Where are they going? Oh my gosh, they brought a trailer.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue's still here. She's over by the garden.

Bonnie aims her camera at a board mounted on a wall. On it is written "BOARD OF EDUCATION."

MILDRED

Make a movie of her coming in. What's that?

BONNIE

Dad's "Board of Education."

MILDRED

I wonder if he actually used it?

BONNIE

As a paddle? Probably. My Roy said Dad hit him. With his fist. In the face.

Pause

MILDRED

He hit my Jerry too.

BONNIE

We should have said something. That's our job, not Dad's. Discipline, I mean. Not necessarily hitting.

MILDRED

The day Jerry died, Bob and I had our first good night of sleep in years. We didn't know what to do with him. I guess God has His ways. No parent wants to bury a child, though. Can you erase that part?

Tessie Sue blusters in. She has earbuds in her ears leading to a Walkman in her pocket. She carries a suitcase and waves flowers around.

TESSIE SUE

Flores para los muertos! Good God! I feel like I came here on a wagon train. Give me a scotch, show me to the shitter, and put me in a coffin.

Bonnie and Mildred kiss Tessie Sue on the cheek.

BONNIE

Our delicate sister arrives.

TESSIE SUE

So sayeth the constipated face in the window.

(sings)

"Two silhouettes on the shade."

MILDRED

I would have come out, but I didn't have any shoes.

TESSIE SUE

You are adorable in bare feet. Here.

Tessie Sue opens her suitcase and takes out a pair of slippers that are huge bear claws.

Put these on.

(sings)

“Oh I'd step out in style with my sincere smile and my dancing bear!”

MILDRED

Look at this, Bonnie! How funny. Real “bear” feet.

BONNIE

Yes. Hysterical. So where did your Mack go? We had dinner ready for you.

Tessie Sue sees the board of education paddle.

TESSIE SUE

Mack couldn't come. Levi went to Wilson's for hamburgers and milkshakes. He'll be back soon with a feast for us.

Levi speaks to the audience.

LEVI

Dad didn't come because we haven't seen him in three years. I better get ready for my entrance.

BONNIE

I fixed dinner.

TESSIE SUE

First thing we do when we get to Findlay is load up on Wilson's.

BONNIE

Once every five years. Like clockwork.

TESSIE SUE

Shut up. I was here last year and just two weeks ago.

BONNIE

Funerals don't count.

MILDRED

1987. We had a grand time traveling through the old farms.

BONNIE

If I hear "knee high by the fourth of July" one more time, I think I'll barf.

TESSIE SUE

1989.

BONNIE

I stand corrected. Once every ten years.

TESSIE SUE

I thought funerals don't count.

BONNIE

This isn't a funeral. You don't have to be here.

TESSIE SUE

I didn't have to be here two weeks ago either.

MILDRED

I bet you're starved. Bonnie finally put your dinner away.

TESSIE SUE

Wilson's should be here any minute.

BONNIE

You and your Wilson's. Did you pick Dad's flowers?

Tessie Sue pulls one earbud out.

TESSIE SUE

It's okay. Didn't you hear? He died.

BONNIE

So the first thing you think of when you come home is to go to Wilson's and steal flowers.

TESSIE SUE

I didn't steal them from Wilson's. I stole them from your estate.

BONNIE

You know what I meant.

TESSIE SUE

You need to work on your sentence structure, college girl.

BONNIE

Could you give it a rest? Just for this occasion?

TESSIE SUE

You're just jealous because you didn't live here when you were in high school.

Tessie Sue picks up the paddle. She swings it and knocks over Bonnie's drink.

BONNIE

Damn it, Tessie Sue!

TESSIE SUE

Tut tut. Such language. Was that your Ensure?

BONNIE

Clean it up, and give me that before you wreck the place.

TESSIE SUE

I have a special place for it.

MILDRED

Birthday spankings!

TESSIE SUE

You're getting close.

MILDRED

Oooh, Tessie Sue, now I'm blushing.

BONNIE

Oh for God's sake.

TESSIE SUE

I'm going to the little girls' room. Tell the waiter to bring me a drink.

Tessie Sue puts the earbud back in.

BONNIE

Wash off that Arizona dirt while you're in there.

TESSIE SUE

Jealous. So unbecoming.

She exits, swinging the paddle on the way out.

Damn! This place smells like sewage.

MILDRED

The toilet in the basement is stopped up.

BONNIE

Jealous? Can you imagine?

MILDRED

Do you really think she drinks? I wish I had moved away. It's just so ...

BONNIE

To Arizona?

MILDRED

Are you recording this? It's lucky you recorded your house before they tore it down. It was nice to see the movie. It showed places other than the living room and kitchen at the holidays.

BONNIE

Now it's just bedrooms in the sky.

MILDRED

I like that. "Bedrooms in the sky." It sounds like a song. Maybe you could come record our house.

The board is heard being tossed into the empty trailer.

BONNIE

Why? Are you going to tear it down? What was that?

Mildred goes to the window.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue's tossing stuff into the trailer.

BONNIE

A one-woman wrecking crew. She better not take anything that's not on her list. What happened to Grandma White's dark lyre-back rocking chair?

MILDRED

The one Dad refinished? It's in the living room.

BONNIE

That's why I couldn't find it. It's stained light now. I was looking right at it and didn't even know it. Roy wanted it. Probably not now. He'd say the patina is gone.

MILDRED

You and your college words.

BONNIE

Aura. Personality. Never mind. Character!

MILDRED

It's on Tessie Sue's list anyway.

Noises of Tessie Sue tossing things into the trailer. A truck drives up.

BONNIE

Sounds like our dinner is here. I hate to see Grandma White's rocker stuffed onto that trailer. It will never make it to Arizona. It's too fragile. Mom was rocked in that chair as a baby.

MILDRED

We all were.

BONNIE

It shouldn't go to Tessie Sue.



MILDRED

She was rocked in it too.

BONNIE

Oh Mildred, she was too old to be rocked when she came here.

A door is heard opening and closing.

MILDRED

Pooh! Shhh, she'll hear you.

BONNIE

She has headphones on. Rude.

(calls into the hallway.)

Tess! Get in here and help.

TESSIE SUE (OFF STAGE)

I gotta get cleaned up.

MILDRED

Good luck with that, huh?

BONNIE

Why Mildred. You devil.

MILDRED

I shouldn't have said that.

BONNIE

Why in the world do they need a truck and a trailer?

Levi enters and talks to the audience as the action freezes.

LEVI

I'll probably have a whole new collection of songs by the time this thing plays out.

(Unfreeze. He talks to his aunts.)

We're hauling some of my dad's family stuff back.

MILDRED

Levi! Why didn't your dad come?

LEVI

I'll let Mom handle that one. I bring food for the hungry. Where's Mom?

MILDRED

She's cleaning up.

LEVI

I better do the same.

He kisses each of his aunts on the cheek.

BONNIE

We missed you at the funeral.

LEVI

I was buried. Sorry. Bad joke. Heavy load at work.

MILDRED

You can use the guest bathroom. It's down the hall to ...

LEVI

Yes, Aunt Mildred. I remember well.

He exits.

BONNIE

Just the things on her list. Tell her to keep that in mind.

(pause)

I wonder if she'd swap me the rocking chair for the dining room table and chairs?

MILDRED

You'd give that up? The dining room table? All the meals? Holidays? Mom's craft projects? Dad's scrapbooks? The journals? Oh, the stories that table could tell.

BONNIE

I'd rather have the rocking chair. I'd love to rock my grand babies in it. I'd like to die in that chair.

MILDRED

Grandma White did die in it.

BONNIE

So young. There are still stains. I don't think Tessie Sue even knows Charles was Mom's only natural brother. She thinks that Arizona bunch were Mom's real brothers and sisters.

MILDRED

Why wouldn't she?

BONNIE

How many times do I have to go over this with you?

MILDRED

I know they're sort of half cousins.

BONNIE

To *us*. They're not related to Tess by blood at all.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue has always been close to them.

BONNIE

Now she thinks she can haul back all our furniture.

Water is heard running in the bathroom

MILDRED

They can't take much. They're only making one trip.

BONNIE

A truck and a trailer.

MILDRED

The truck is for Mack's things. We have a lot to get rid of. Why don't you want Tessie Sue to have her things?

BONNIE

She's careless and crude.

A toilet flushes. Mildred starts eating a hamburger.

MILDRED

There's plenty of other things to divide up. I don't want any of it. Do you?.

BONNIE

My Roy might. But he probably wants the stuff no one else wants anyway. You should wait for the others to eat.

MILDRED

I'm hungry. I hope he didn't want the fish. We had it stuffed for Dad. It should go to us.

BONNIE

I'll back you on that.

MILDRED

Are you taking the bedroom suite?

BONNIE

It's on my list. The side rails on the bed were lengthened, and Mr. Wolery refinished it. It's not really authentic anymore.

Bonnie eats.

MILDRED

I'd like to have it, if you don't want it.

BONNIE

You can have the vanity.

MILDRED

No. Keep the set together. Even refinished.

BONNIE

Let me think about it. So Tess has the Board of Education. Check that off the miscellaneous list.

MILDRED

Why would Tessie Sue want that silly thing?

Another flush

BONNIE

What's she doing in there?

MILDRED

Tessie Sue! Bonnie needs to use the bathroom!

BONNIE

No I don't. Get in here and help!

Mildred picks up the camera.

MILDRED

Let's make a movie. Tinkle, tinkle, Tessie Sue!

Bonnie laughs.

BONNIE

Why, you *are* a devil! Go through the back so she doesn't see you. Just press the record button. If the red light's on you're recording.

Levi enters from behind them as Mildred exits.

LEVI

You two are terrible!

BONNIE

It's like we're in school again.

LEVI

Well that clears up a lot.

TESSIE SUE (OFF STAGE)

Mildred! For crying out loud!

MILDRED (OFF)

(imitating Bonnie's "film" voice.)

Here we have Mom and Dad's bathroom. Vintage 1964. Notice the crocheted toilet paper cover.

TESSIE SUE (OFF)

You two are off your nuts.

Tessie Sue enters and picks up a hamburger.

That was fast, Levi. Is this pickle and mustard?

BONNIE

Did you flush?

TESSIE SUE

Where are the fries? Yes, Bonnie, I flushed twice. What's she going to do, take a picture of it? Shit, so to speak, I don't know how these new toilets are supposed to save water if you have to flush twice.

LEVI

Here ya go, ma.

BONNIE

Well, don't use the one in the basement. It's clogged. It stinks to high heaven down there.

TESSIE SUE

You sure can ruin lunch.

BONNIE

It's nice to see you again, Levi. Last time I saw you, you must have been all of maybe 8 years old.

LEVI

I was here that one summer when I was in college.

BONNIE

Yes. I guess I forgot.

TESSIE SUE

Did you notice Dad's smell in the funeral home?

BONNIE

What?

TESSIE SUE

I put some of his cologne on him.

BONNIE  
Why?  
TESSIE SUE  
I couldn't stand that dead smell.  
BONNIE  
I hope the toilet in the basement is fixed for Christmas.

TESSIE SUE  
What does it matter now?

Mildred enters  
MILDRED  
Tessie Sue, you got mud all over the bath mat.

TESSIE SUE  
I hope you recorded it for posterity.

BONNIE  
For god's sake, Tess.

MILDRED  
Put it in the wash.

LEVI  
I'll take care of it.

Tessie Sue and Levi exit to the bathroom. Tessie Sue  
shakes her head in mock-shame.

TESSIE SUE  
Yes, mother.

BONNIE  
I think she took the log cabin incense burner.

MILDRED  
She just got here.

BONNIE

We don't know when it was taken.

MILDRED

If you wanted it, you should have claimed it a long time ago.

BONNIE

And my Shirley Temple doll. They were the only things I had from my childhood.

MILDRED

The incense burner wasn't yours. Mom got it as a souvenir during the centennial. It was supposed to be Fort Findlay, not a log cabin.

BONNIE

Whatever. I think Tessie Sue took them.

Levi enters

LEVI

What did Mom do now?

MILDRED

Levi, sit down and eat.

LEVI

I ate one on the way here. Just a malt for me. You two go ahead. I can hardly believe Grandpa isn't sitting right there looking out the window.

Levi eats the ice cream with a small plastic spoon.

BONNIE

Watch yourself. He might be there.

LEVI

We had a lot of long talks in this room. We didn't agree much about education or politics, but he had his head on straight about fixing stuff and keeping up with people.

BONNIE

He was a college professor.



LEVI

Well?

BONNIE

What could you tell him about education?

LEVI

We just talked. He was retired, and I was in college.

BONNIE

Did you finish?

LEVI

Finish?

BONNIE

College.

LEVI

Yes.

MILDRED

Of course he graduated.

BONNIE

I thought you were a songwriter or something.

MILDRED

He's a writer.

LEVI

I write for online teachers. But I also play in a band. You're both right.

BONNIE

And you thought you could lecture Dr. Henry Nau about education? Playing with your computer and singing rock and roll?

Levi eats and looks through photos. Tessie Sue enters

TESSIE SUE

I emptied the dryer. I put Dad's sheets in the bedroom.

BONNIE

It was the last load. You've missed all the fun.

TESSIE SUE

Looks like you saved a little for me.

BONNIE

I'm talking about the mess. You haven't been here for all of that. Rotting food in the basement. The messes in his clothes and bed.

MILDRED

Bonnie thinks you took the incense burner.

BONNIE

I just mentioned it. That's all.

TESSIE SUE

Mom gave me the incense burner when we were here for Christmas. A long time ago.

BONNIE

It must have been. She just gave it to you?

TESSIE SUE

I asked her if I could have it.

BONNIE

Didn't you think someone else might want it?

TESSIE SUE

Not really.

LEVI

Don't you have something for Aunt Bonnie, Mom?

TESSIE SUE

Oh! I almost forgot. Close your eyes, Bonnie.

BONNIE

Stop it. We have too much work to do.

TESSIE SUE

Don't be such a stick in the mud. I have a surprise for you. Ta Dah!

Tessie Sue pulls a large Shirley Temple doll from her suitcase.

BONNIE

What's this?

TESSIE SUE

Duh! A Shirley Temple doll.

BONNIE

Why?

LEVI

To replace your lost one.

MILDRED

Oh my goodness! She's beautiful!

BONNIE

Mine was smaller.

TESSIE SUE

I was afraid of that. Those small suckers cost a bundle. But enjoy it, anyway.

BONNIE

We need to get busy.

Bonnie tosses the doll onto the chair. Mildred goes to it and rocks it.

LEVI

We better get that trailer loaded.

BONNIE

Yes. By all means. Take care of your things and leave me to finish clearing out.

LEVI

Well, Okaaay.

He addresses the audience.  
You see why Mom cleared out of here as soon as she could?

MILDRED

I'll help you, Bonnie.

BONNIE

Forget it. Everyone pack up your crap, and I'll call for a dumpster.

MILDRED

I thought we were going to have a yard sale.

BONNIE

Just get out!

LEVI

I didn't mean to upset you, Aunt Bonnie. I'll go get started. I can stay to help clean out the garage and fix up the yard.

BONNIE

Just go on.

LEVI

Sure. It's tough. Well, I'll load a few things and then work over at Grandpa Nabors a bit.

BONNIE

You should stay here with us.

LEVI

We'll all get some rest and go to it tomorrow.

He exits.

TESSIE SUE

Come on, Mildred. Help me carry a few things out and I'll treat you to a Dietsch's sundae. Want to tag along, Bonnie?

BONNIE

Way too much to be done here. You two go on. Have your fun talking about me.

Tessie Sue and Mildred exit. Bonnie throws Mildred's shoes out the door.

BONNIE

Put your damn shoes on!

### SCENE THREE

Later that evening. The study is dark. Bonnie is dozing in her father's recliner. The phone rings. She looks at it as it rings three times. She answers.

BONNIE

Hello? Who? This is the residence of Henry Nau. Yes, I'm quite aware of that. Can I help you? I see. I'll pass the information along. Say it again. "The blood test came back positive." That's all?

She writes.

No. Please don't bother. I'd rather not say. Good bye.

She hangs up the phone and turns on the light. She smiles and holds a mirror in front of the clock that shows the time backwards. Mildred enters.

MILDRED

Who was on the phone?

BONNIE

Someone looking for Levi. You're awfully late.

MILDRED

Levi?

BONNIE

Nabors. Tess's son?

MILDRED

I know who you mean.

BONNIE

Was he at Dietsch's?

MILDRED

No. I guess he's getting the Nabor's house ready to sell..

BONNIE

One of his classmates saw Dad's obituary I suppose.

MILDRED

Levi didn't go to school here.

BONNIE

Elementary school. Then they moved. And he lived here rent-free while he was in college. Making good money.

MILDRED

What did you tell him?

BONNIE

Who?

MILDRED

The guy on the phone.

BONNIE

Her.

MILDRED

What did you tell her?

BONNIE

Did my Roy get to live somewhere rent-free? I don't think so. No, he's worked his whole life. Had his own apartment. Dad even let Levi use his second car.

MILDRED

So did you tell her that he's here?

BONNIE

Sort of.

MILDRED

What did she want?

BONNIE

She just asked for Levi. She knew Dad had died.

MILDRED

That's odd.

BONNIE

Why are you grilling me like this?

MILDRED

We better let Tessie Sue know.

BONNIE

Where is she?

MILDRED

I dropped her off at Nabor's.

BONNIE

Was Levi there?

MILDRED

I don't know. I'm going to move to Arizona with Tessie Sue, once Bob is gone.

BONNIE

You're going to what?!!

MILDRED

She invited me to move in with them.

BONNIE

That's crazy. They don't even have plumbing.

MILDRED

They have 5 bedrooms and several acres of land. Almost a ranch.

BONNIE

Since when? Did you light a candle?

MILDRED

Yes. I thought it would help with the smell.

Bonnie sniffs the air

BONNIE

No. It's more than that.

MILDRED

Maybe someone burned trash in the incinerator in the basement.

BONNIE

Go on down. I'll check outside.

MILDRED

It stinks down there.

BONNIE

If you open the door and there's smoke, don't go down.

Bonnie and Mildred exit through separate doors. Tessie Sue enters with the smoking log cabin incense burner. She removes one earbud. She laughs and sets down the log cabin. She looks through papers on the desk. She glances through the journals and takes hers. Bonnie is heard off stage.

TESSIE SUE

(sings with her mixtape)

"I fell into a burning ring of fire."

BONNIE (OFF)

The trailer's on fire!

Tessie Sue quickly exits, stuffing the journal in her purse. She takes the incense burner with her.

BONNIE (OFF)

I'll get the water hose.

MILDRED (OFF)

It stinks down there, but no smoke!



Mildred passes through to join Bonnie outside. Tessie Sue re-enters and rifles through Bonnie's and Mildred's purses then exits.

Bonnie enters with Mildred.

MILDRED

At least it's not near the house.

BONNIE

I couldn't get close to it. She had no right to take any of it and now it's gone.

MILDRED

She only had what was on her list.

BONNIE

Never even made it out of the driveway. What else was there? The cookie jar, and probably my Shirley Temple doll.

MILDRED

We need to call the fire department.

BONNIE

Too late. She wasn't even a blood relative. She never should have had any of it.

(Mildred is oddly cheerful)

MILDRED

Well, she doesn't have it now.

BONNIE

I didn't want it destroyed for God's sake.

MILDRED

Oh, dear.

BONNIE

We never should have let her touch anything.

MILDRED

She grew up here. We never even lived in this house.

BONNIE

We lived with that furniture. It belongs in the family. Shit, shit, shit!!

MILDRED

What?

BONNIE

Grandma White's rocker!

MILDRED

What about it?

BONNIE

It was on the trailer.

MILDRED

You said it had been refinished anyway.

BONNIE

Mildred! Grandma White was Mom's biological mother.

MILDRED

Yes. You've made that clear many times.

BONNIE

She was only 24 when she died. It was all we had of her. It was stained with her blood.

MILDRED

Maybe you can put the ashes in an urn.

BONNIE

No one keeps ashes of old furniture. It's just not right.

MILDRED

I keep a branch of the Ficus tree that Bob got me for my first mother's day. It froze dead two winters ago.

BONNIE

I'll bet this has something to do with that phone call.

MILDRED

What call?

BONNIE

That girl looking for Levi. Said something about a blood test. He's in trouble again, I bet. It all seems fishy to me. I'll be glad when this is over. I never should have moved. I was right across the street. I waved at Dad every day while he sat at his desk right at that window.

MILDRED

You only moved a mile away.

BONNIE

It was a lot easier caring for him when I was right across the street.

MILDRED

I'm sorry I didn't help more.

BONNIE

Of course, you and Bob had your business in Fostoria. And him with one leg. I couldn't expect you to drive twelve whole miles every day.

MILDRED

Don't be mean, Bonnie.

BONNIE

It's over now.

MILDRED

Yes. We need to move on.

BONNIE

I hate that phrase.

MILDRED

Bonnie, stop.

BONNIE

What's that supposed to mean? Move on?

MILDRED

It means that we clear out this house. It means that we'll just send cards instead of coming here every Christmas. It means we'll tend to our own families and not blame Tessie Sue for being Tessie Sue.

BONNIE

I'm not blaming Tessie Sue for anything. It's just a little odd every time she comes back here things get crazy.

MILDRED

She'll be just as upset about losing the furniture as we are.

BONNIE

I'll bet. How do you think that fire started anyway?

MILDRED

Bonnie.

BONNIE

I could make a guess.

MILDRED

Please don't.

BONNIE

Levi.

MILDRED

What???

BONNIE

It all burned too fast. And I could smell gasoline. Roy said Mack had called him once in a panic. Wanting to know if he'd heard from Levi. Roy made it sound like there were some shady characters out to get Levi. It's a hit job.

MILDRED

You think someone has been watching us?

BONNIE

Trailers don't just spontaneously burst into flame.

MILDRED

You and I have everything we wanted. We need to divide things up again so Tessie Sue has something.

BONNIE

Oh Mildred. You're too nice for your own good.

Bonnie hugs Mildred. She notices their purses.

MILDRED

What's wrong?

Bonnie picks up her purse.

BONNIE

Someone was in here while I was trying to put out the fire.

Mildred gets her purse.

MILDRED

How could that be?

BONNIE

Someone set that fire to get us out of the house.

She sniffs the air.

What the dickens?

Mildred can't quite keep up with the shifting events.

MILDRED

What?

BONNIE

Tessie Sue's here somewhere.

MILDRED

She's at the Nabor's.

BONNIE

Mildred, the log cabin incense. I can smell her.

MILDRED

That's my candle.

Mildred sniffs the air as Tessie Sue enters unnoticed

BONNIE

I'm an idiot.

MILDRED

I think you're right.

Tess laughs. Bonnie turns in fury

BONNIE

Check your purse. See what's missing.

TESSIE SUE

(sings)

"'cause you stole my heart and I want it back."

BONNIE

Well, look who's here.

Tessie Sue removes one earbud.

TESSIE SUE

My friend Glenda warned me that people try to take advantage of you during funerals.

MILDRED

Sometimes they take a check or credit card from the back so you don't notice for a while.

BONNIE

We don't even know what was in that trailer. How can we even report it to the insurance company?

Tessie Sue waves the smoking log cabin.

TESSIE SUE

"Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!" Fort Findlay is burning! The gas wells are exploding!

BONNIE

I'm glad you're amused.

TESSIE SUE

Calling all cars! Dumpster fire at the Nau estate!

MILDRED

Tessie Sue, I'm so sorry.

BONNIE

Yes. So am I.

TESSIE SUE

Why? What did you do now?

MILDRED

We'll fix your trailer.

BONNIE

Of course. Or we'll get you a new one. We have plenty of things we can give you.

TESSIE SUE

Why do you keep doing this?

BONNIE

What?

TESSIE SUE

Acting like I'm some kind of charity case. I'm your sister.

MILDRED

We're only trying to help.

TESSIE SUE

I wouldn't have set it on fire if I wanted your help.

A long silence. Mildred looks confused.

You were about to say something?

BONNIE

You burned the trailer?

TESSIE SUE

Sure. It was mine.

BONNIE

So what kind a statement is that supposed to be? No, wait. I get it. You've always been resentful that you were never adopted.

TESSIE SUE

Well, dadgum! You're way ahead of me.

MILDRED

Why would you say that?

Tessie Sue stares at Mildred

TESSIE SUE

Mildred, I'm kidding. Mom and Dad never treated me any differently than they did you.

MILDRED

Did you get spanked, too?

TESSIE SUE

Spanked? "Beat me daddy eight to the bar." That's for sissies. I got the board of education.

BONNIE

Grandma White's rocker is gone.

TESSIE SUE

Get over it.

BONNIE

Move on. Get over it. My sisters are full of such useless advice.

MILDRED

Bonnie.

BONNIE

No. This has got to end.



TESSIE SUE

Too bad we all didn't hold hands and watch it all turn to ashes.

(sings)

"someone's crying Lord, kum ba ya."

BONNIE

So why did you take the log cabin?

TESSIE SUE

I can watch it burn over and over again. It's spiritual.

BONNIE

And my Shirley Temple doll?

MILDRED

She gave you a new one.

BONNIE

I want my own back!

Tessie Sue begins to frantically lift cushions and open drawers.

TESSIE SUE

Where is Shirley? I know you're hiding her somewhere.

BONNIE

We've had enough of your games.

Tessie Sue gets in Bonnie's face with the log cabin.

TESSIE SUE

Bonnie! Look in the window! She's burning up!

BONNIE knocks the incense burner from her hands. It lands behind the love seat as Tessie Sue stumbles

MILDRED

Bonnie! I took your doll. I'm sorry.

Tessie Sue spreads her arms, rises in some sort of victory. She puts her earbuds in her ears.

BONNIE

Tessie Sue, we'll fix your trailer and get it loaded up again so you can go back home.

TESSIE SUE

"In a little honky tonky village in Texas." Skip it. The shit is easier to carry in a wallet. Write me a check.

BONNIE

Why do you have to be this way?

MILDRED

I'm sorry I took your doll, Bonnie.

TESSIE SUE

Don't bother. I have another book of matches anyway.

BONNIE

You need help.

TESSIE SUE

No thanks. I can manage.

MILDRED

I'm going to move to Arizona to live with you, Tessie Sue.

Smoke comes from behind the love seat.

BONNIE

Where is Levi?

TESSIE SUE

Here we go again.

BONNIE

Where is he?

TESSIE SUE

Why do you want to know?

BONNIE

I think maybe he had something to do with this. Oh shit!

Bonnie rushes behind the love seat and starts stamping on the smoldering incense as Tessie Sue picks up Bonnie's drink and douses the embers.

TESSIE SUE

Oops. Remind me to get a case of Ensure. So, you think my son burned up the trailer?

BONNIE

Someone who wanted to scare him. The girl who called here.

Tessie Sue removes an earbud.

TESSIE SUE

You watch too much television. Bonnie, look at me. I burned the furniture. Me. Only me. I know you think I'm incompetent, but I did it. All by myself.

BONNIE

Why?

MILDRED

I left your doll by the creek. When I went back to get it, it was gone.

TESSIE SUE

I don't know. I was angry about something.

MILDRED

And you're not angry any more?

BONNIE

You'll still get your share when we finish dividing things up.

TESSIE SUE

Just keep it all.

BONNIE

So you came all this way dragging a trailer just to burn it in front of us?

Tessie Sue shrugs, puts her earbud back in.

MILDRED

I don't need much. I won't bother any of you.

TESSIE SUE

Yes.

BONNIE

You broke Mom and Dad's hearts.

TESSIE SUE

You know, I've heard that story so many times over the years I almost started to believe it.

BONNIE

After all they did for you.

TESSIE SUE

They loved coming down. They visited with all of Mabel and Frank's families.

BONNIE

You have no right. You moved away.

TESSIE SUE

We didn't move "away." We started an adventure. We were bored. Restless. Why do you keep insisting it was something else?

MILDRED

I'm glad you're not angry. Bonnie, are you mad at me?

BONNIE

Mildred, shut up!

MILDRED

I really did take the doll. I'm sorry I let Bonnie think it was you, Tessie Sue.

TESSIE SUE

It doesn't matter.

MILDRED

I'm glad the fire has calmed you down.

TESSIE SUE

Let's talk about something else. Do you think you'll be coming to see us next summer? I mean some time other than when I'm in the hospital.

MILDRED

Yes, you have to visit us, Bonnie.

BONNIE

Is the house even finished? Mom and Dad had such a struggle there in the old one.

TESSIE SUE

They could have stayed in a hotel. Just like y'all did.

BONNIE

You didn't even have the plumbing hooked up.

TESSIE SUE

Mom said it reminded her of when she was a kid. It burned down so there's no use talking about it.

MILDRED

Would it be all right if I brought our dogs?

TESSIE SUE

The folks were coming with or without you.

MILDRED

My dogs hardly bark at all.

TESSIE SUE

So, what? You were protecting them from me?

BONNIE

Yes, of course we'll come down. I thought you wouldn't want us.

TESSIE SUE

You think too much.

(sings)

"Going down that long lonesome highway..."

BONNIE

You can't show up here every few years and expect us not to feel like this is our home too, even if we never lived here. No one even knows you anymore.

TESSIE SUE

Poof! It's all gone.

Levi enters.

BONNIE

We were starting our own families while you were in taffeta. No. Yes. Was it your wedding dress or your prom dress? Maybe both. I remember Mom and Dad went to get you when they heard about it, but it was too late. They brought you back and took pictures anyway.

LEVI

You gonna be okay, Aunt Bonnie?

BONNIE

I'm fine. You had a call. Some girl said that the blood test was positive.

LEVI

How about that?

TESSIE SUE

Mildred was only seventeen. No one said anything about her.

MILDRED

I got married in a church.

Mildred goes to the corner and sits like a child in time-out.

TESSIE SUE

Bonnie, you were only twenty yourself.

BONNIE

I was in college.

TESSIE SUE

La-dee-da.

BONNIE

What is that supposed to mean?

LEVI

Mom, you're related to this family by blood.

BONNIE

What are you talking about?

LEVI

My wife had tests done on a stained handkerchief.

BONNIE

Where did you get that?

LEVI

Now which of you had the handkerchief marked "Baby's Boo Boo?" Aunt Mildred?

MILDRED

I don't know anything about it.

LEVI

What's this all about Mom? What happened to the trailer?

BONNIE

Tell him, Tess.

TESSIE SUE

Whatever.

(sings)

"Gonna do things my way."

BONNIE

I see Dad's face reflected in the window.

TESSIE SUE

(sings)

"reflections of, the way life used to be."

BONNIE

He looks at peace. Those of us strong enough, will manage. Maybe we could all get together for breakfast before you leave.

TESSIE SUE

Are you suggesting we move on?

LEVI

We deserve some answers.

TESSIE SUE

Let it go.

LEVI

That's the same thing.

MILDRED

What will we do with your trailer?

LEVI

What happened to it?

TESSIE SUE

It's done. We all need to breathe deeply.

MILDRED

Well, as long as you feel better, I feel better.

TESSIE SUE

It's done.

BONNIE

You regret it?

TESSIE SUE

Not really.

MILDRED

How about Bob Evans?

TESSIE SUE

Sure. Let's call it a night.

BONNIE

Or a truce.



## TESSIE SUE

(sings)

“Reflections of

The love you took from me

Oh, I'm all alone now

No love to shield me

Trapped in a world

That's a distorted reality

Happiness you took from me

And left me all alone

With only memories”

## ACT TWO

The following morning. The sisters have slept in their father's study. Bonnie is asleep in the recliner and Mildred and Tessie Sue whisper on the love seat. Levi speaks to the audience.

## LEVI

I'm sure there are better ways to say this. Why am I here? I don't feel any particular connection to this place. I never even saw my grand dad after that summer I lived here. He sent cards to Mom until the address didn't work anymore. He never had my address, I guess. I feel even less connection to my other grand dad. Last time I saw my dad he gave me the keys to a storage locker and told me to come here and get whatever I wanted. The house was trashed and abandoned, ready for a sheriff's sale.

(sings)

“Sometimes I wake up, feel like a log. Roll ghetto graffitti, death from the smog.

Rise from my bed. Croak at the plate. Feel like a hammer. The guts of the state.”

MILDRED

The smell of slow decay.

TESSIE SUE

Hardware, sawdust, paint thinner, smoke from the incinerator in the basement.

MILDRED

He was too exhausted to turn on the radio. The smell of us too.

TESSIE SUE

Gluing pictures into an album for us to tear apart. Cutting and twisting his story to make it fit ours.

MILDRED

Bonnie made sure he had food every day and the dishes were washed.

TESSIE SUE

I'll get cleaned up for breakfast.

MILDRED

I washed the bath mat.

LEVI

(sings)

“Sometimes I feel like, the guts of America.”

Tessie Sue puts her earbuds in and exits as Bonnie pretends to wake up.

BONNIE

Don't forget to flush.

MILDRED

I feel bad for Tessie Sue. Dad should have had a will.

BONNIE

I suppose he thought his lists were just as good. He thought it through pretty carefully.

MILDRED

His lists of stuff. God help us.

BONNIE

He wanted the church and college to remember him.

MILDRED

They meant more to him than we did?

BONNIE

Apparently.

MILDRED

Why didn't you stop him? You were here every day.

BONNIE

You know Dad.

MILDRED

I haven't told you this but Dad went to the lake just a week before he died. He went with a lady friend.

BONNIE

Is that why he got a toupee? Still had his mojo. Even past 90. He shouldn't have been on the highway. Anyone we know?

MILDRED

He wouldn't talk about it. He said he was thinking about renting a place for us to have a reunion.

BONNIE

We'd need name tags.

MILDRED

I think he wanted to have us all together so he could introduce his lady friend.

BONNIE

Too late now. Maybe we can figure out who it was from his rolodex.

MILDRED

Maybe Tessie Sue knows.

BONNIE

She doesn't even know who her own parents are.

MILDRED

What do you mean?

BONNIE

She's not well.

MILDRED

It doesn't matter. Mom and Dad were proud to be her parents.

BONNIE

Why?

MILDRED

Why what?

BONNIE

Why would they be proud to be her parents? Did they think they rescued her or something?

MILDRED

Maybe they did. Are you proud of Roy?

BONNIE

Of course. Well, happy, excited, maybe even jealous. I don't know about "proud." I hope he's happy. At least happier than we've been. I guess we can all be proud of what we've done together. It's so tiring.

MILDRED

It's easier to say, "I'm proud of you."

BONNIE

Easier than saying, "I love you?"

MILDRED

Or even, "I'm excited for you."

Tessie Sue enters

BONNIE

Well, Tess, you cleaned up nicely. Are you proud of Levi?

TESSIE SUE

What?

BONNIE

Proud. We were discussing being proud.

TESSIE SUE

I can't take much credit for anyone else.

BONNIE

Are you proud of Levi?

TESSIE SUE

No. And I'm not ashamed, either. It's not about me.

BONNIE

I told Dad I loved him when he was dying.

TESSIE SUE

Better late than never, I guess. Was he proud of you?

BONNIE

Shut up.

TESSIE SUE

I'm sorry I missed your bedside confession.

BONNIE

He said, "I love all of you, too." Shit, I was the only one in the room. I wonder what he meant by "all of you?"

TESSIE SUE

Levi said he loved me.

BONNIE

Without you saying it first?

TESSIE SUE  
I don't remember.

BONNIE  
I'll get ready.

TESSIE SUE  
I flushed and stayed off the bath mat.

BONNIE  
I'll use the folks' bathroom.

MILDRED  
See if the teeth are still kissing.

TESSIE SUE  
Huh?

BONNIE  
Mom and Dad left their old dentures in a glass of water.

MILDRED  
My house is beginning to smell like this.

TESSIE SUE  
The lost smell of men. It seeps into everything.

Bonnie picks up the camera and starts to leave.

BONNIE  
I need to record the other rooms before everything is gone.

TESSIE SUE  
Make a movie of the kissing teeth.

Bonnie exits. Tessie Sue's facade slowly breaks down.

MILDRED  
Are we going to Bob Evans?

TESSIE SUE  
I wish Levi were here.

MILDRED

When is Mack coming? He didn't come to the funeral. We thought he'd come help you with things.

TESSIE SUE

He's been busy. Levi can handle it.

MILDRED

Does he know about the trailer?

TESSIE SUE

No.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue, you didn't burn the trailer.

TESSIE SUE

Of course I did.

MILDRED

Can't you stay a little longer?

TESSIE SUE

When you move to Arizona we'll have lots of time together.

MILDRED

But we're not finished here.

TESSIE SUE

Sure we are. We don't have family or friends here, anymore.

MILDRED

What about Bonnie and me? We'll have things cleared out soon.

TESSIE SUE

"Clear." Isn't that an interesting word?

MILDRED

Oh?

TESSIE SUE

“I can see clearly now the rain has gone.” “Clearly” we know what we should do. “Clear” the room, the battle begins. Clean the lens so the image is “clear.” We came here “clear” from Arizona for a bunch of junk. That clears up everything. “Stand clear, moving doors.” You have such clear skin. Ever clear? Chanticleer? Poor Clares?

MILDRED

We’ll have a new life.

TESSIE SUE

“All of the obstacles in my way.” Mack is a strong man. He built the first house himself. The one that burned down.

MILDRED

When you were in the hospital?.

TESSIE SUE

“I think I can make it now, the pain is gone.” Things are different now. I never thought about Levi having children. I have grand babies to take care of. I have to take care of things. Mack doesn’t know what to do.

MILDRED

When did Levi have children?

TESSIE SUE

I don’t know.

MILDRED

I want to go back with you.

TESSIE SUE

Shhh! Mysterious things are happening.

MILDRED

(whispers)

What is it, Tessie Sue? You can tell me.

TESSIE SUE

Why did they hide it from us?



MILDRED

It's too late.

TESSIE SUE

I have grand babies now.

MILDRED

Is Mack with them?

TESSIE SUE

Mack did his best. He couldn't do it anymore.

MILDRED

Do what?

TESSIE SUE

Understand my music.

MILDRED

On your earphones?

TESSIE SUE

My bones vibrate. My eyes buzz.

MILDRED

I'm sorry, Tessie Sue.

TESSIE SUE

I've got to get back to Arizona and clean my house. Mack built it himself.

MILDRED

The one that burned down?

TESSIE SUE

And the new one. We have a big house. Three stories. Six bedrooms, a swimming pool and a hot tub.

Mildred sits beside Tessie Sue and puts her arms around her.

I'm very happy for you.

MILDRED

I know you are.

TESSIE SUE

I don't care what Bonnie thinks.

MILDRED

Mack built the house himself.

TESSIE SUE

He's a wonderful man.

MILDRED

I'm safe. He went to Wilson's for breakfast, I bet.

TESSIE SUE

Levi, you mean..

MILDRED

This house smells like him.

TESSIE SUE

It smells like all of our men. Just faintly I can smell Mom.

MILDRED

Mildred picks up a throw or a pillow and smells it. She smells a stack of old Christmas cards and notices the journal is missing.

What's wrong?

TESSIE SUE

Bonnie enters. Tessie Sue regains her facade of the happy trouble-maker.

The teeth are missing!

BONNIE

Yep. I took them, They're chewing away at Shirley Temple.

TESSIE SUE

MILDRED

Where's Mom's journal?

BONNIE

What?

MILDRED

The journal you were looking at last night. Tessie Sue's. It was right here on the desk.

BONNIE

Tess?

TESSIE SUE

Here we go again.

BONNIE

Is yours still there, Mildred?

MILDRED

Yes.

BONNIE

No one else has been here. Unless it was whoever rifled through our purses.

TESSIE SUE

It's over now. Let's go get some breakfast,

MILDRED

We can go in my car. Go on. I'll be right there.

Bonnie and Tessie Sue exit. Mildred goes to the desk and picks up two volumes, Bonnie's and her own. She flips to a date in one.

MILDRED

"Today we brought home a sweet little sister for our two little girls."

SHE opens a desk drawer, searches, and pulls out another.

"Irene's Sad Story."

She puts two back on the desk. She drops her mother's into her purse, picks up the camera, pulls out the cassette and leaves.

SCENE 2

IN THE STUDY AFTER BREAKFAST

LEVI

In case you're keeping score, it's starting to look like Aunt Mildred will be coming home with us. Uncle Bob is drifting off into some other world like Uncle Bernie and my mom. Aunt Bonnie is determined to close out what's left of the estate, retire, and travel the world. Grand dad's savings and the house were left to the church and the college so it is mostly a matter of clearing out furniture and knickknacks. I never figured Aunt Mildred would be the one with her head screwed on right. Just goes to show you.

TESSIE SUE

You should move to Arizona with Mildred and me.

BONNIE

Going, going, gone.

TESSIE SUE

Poof go the men!

Mildred reads a note by the phone.

BONNIE

There's the mirror you wanted, Tess. You can still take it if you promise not to burn it.

MILDRED

"We can't live without each other."

BONNIE

What?

MILDRED

I was just reading a note Dad wrote by the phone.

Bonnie aims her camera out the window.

BONNIE

Just last week Dad was out there riding on his mower.

MILDRED

32 years.

BONNIE

The rose arbor we got him for father's day. Zooming in. What the heck?

Bonnie inspects the camera.

TESSIE SUE

I am a ghost.

BONNIE

The tape is gone.

TESSIE SUE

The plot thickens.

BONNIE

You have to make a soap opera out of everything.

TESSIE SUE

That's my life. One long soap opera. My gangster son. Arson in my DNA that I didn't even realize was there until I torched Mom and Dad's furniture, This has all turned to shit. I wish to god I'd never come back here. A beautiful ranch home with a hot tub and six horses, and here I am sitting in this shithole. I built a life for myself whether y'all like it or not. You can't stand it I got the hell out of here rather than continue on as your little servant girl. You would have had me as a free baby-sitter and a live-in caregiver for Mom and Dad. Sorry it didn't work out for you.

BONNIE

Well, that was refreshing.

MILDRED

Tess, that's not true.

TESSIE SUE

So where do we go from here?

MILDRED

Arizona!

BONNIE

You are pathetic.

MILDRED

We'll have a yard sale and sell the house.

BONNIE

The house doesn't belong to us. You know that.

MILDRED

I meant my house.

TESSIE SUE

Bonnie, you can move in, too.

BONNIE

Tess, please. Stop with the nonsense. We have too much to get done.

MILDRED

I'm ready for an adventure!

BONNIE

Mildred, you're not going anywhere. You have Bob to care for.

MILDRED

He can go with me. Tessie Sue has plenty of room.

BONNIE

Mildred, this much I read in your journal. "Mildred will always be here. She'll never go anywhere."

MILDRED

Liar. You're making that up.

BONNIE

Read it yourself..

TESSIE SUE

Let me see.

(all the following with fun and laughter, until  
the Shirley Temple doll.)

Tessie Sue snatches Bonnie's journal. Bonnie tries to get it back. Failing that, she pretends to stumble and hurt her arm. As Tessie Sue helps her, Mildred snatches the journal and begins to read aloud. Bonnie, suddenly "healed" goes after Mildred. Tessie Sue grabs her.

TESSIE SUE

Faker!

MILDRED

"Bonnie is so hard on herself. Bossy with the other kids at school. July 22, 1938."

TESSIE SUE

Imagine that!

Bonnie grabs Mildred's journal. Reads aloud.

BONNIE

"Mildred only wants to sit and read. She thinks her big sister is the cat's meow, so smart and pretty."

MILDRED

Give me that!

BONNIE

December 18, 1946

MILDRED

"Bonnie has the boys lined up at the door again. Take a number."

BONNIE

Jealous.

MILDRED

October 20, 1948

BONNIE

“Mildred will never find a boy friend if she keeps flirting with Bonnie’s dates.”

MILDRED

You never dated anyone except Bernie and you know it.

BONNIE

In your dreams. Well, bust my buttons.

MILDRED

What?

BONNIE

“Tessie Sue just adores Bonnie’s Shirley Temple doll.” There you go, Tess. Proof.

TESSIE SUE

Proof of what?

BONNIE

You took my doll.

TESSIE SUE

Good heavens.

BONNIE

Don’t say it.

TESSIE SUE

What?

BONNIE

Don’t say I need to move on.

MILDRED

I took the doll. I lost it.

TESSIE SUE

For god’s sake, what does it matter? Tell your goddam Roy that the one I gave you was yours. I paid two hundred dollars for the piece of crap.



BONNIE

I want my own doll back.

TESSIE SUE

50 years from now who will know or care? Your legend can live on.

MILDRED

“Some day my precious little girls will have children of their own. I wonder if any of them will wonder about me? How long will it take for me to disappear? April 10, 1938.”  
That’s depressing.

BONNIE

That was in my book??

MILDRED

Like your movies, the journals are riveting in their uselessness.

BONNIE

Mildred? Did you take the tape out of the camera?

TESSIE SUE

It’s a mystery.

MILDRED

Useless. There are pages missing. 1942 - 1944

TESSIE SUE

Mine doesn’t even start until 1945.

MILDRED

Is 1943 in your book, Bonnie?

BONNIE

You two have lost your minds.

TESSIE SUE

A new twist in the plot.

BONNIE

Why? Why did Dad tear out those pages?

MILDRED

You don't know that Dad did it.

BONNIE

The years right before Tess was born.

MILDRED

So you think there was something he didn't want us to know about?

BONNIE

Tess?

TESSIE SUE

Don't ask me. I just came here to burn shit.

MILDRED

So you think Dad was seeing someone?

BONNIE

Dad traveled a lot with the State Board of Education. He was always here on weekends.

MILDRED

And brought us gifts.

TESSIE SUE

And a new baby sister.

BONNIE

Well, this is a new kind of hell.

MILDRED

What?

BONNIE

Dad fathered Tessie Sue with some other woman.

MILDRED

Why in the world would you think that?

BONNIE

The girl who called said she had some DNA tests done.

TESSIE SUE

Oh come one, Bonnie.

MILDRED

No!

BONNIE

Who then?

MILDRED

We don't know!

BONNIE

If she's related to us and she's not Dad's daughter, I'd say it's pretty obvious who the mother is.

TESSIE SUE

So do I. I have my birth certificate. Should we compare notes?

BONNIE

Merry Mildred had a little lamb.

TESSIE SUE

Nice work, Bonnie.

BONNIE

The missing pages in the book. Mildred was staying at Grandpa Alexander's farm in Missouri for several month during that time.

MILDRED

So?

BONNIE

You were twelve years old.

MILDRED

Your point?

BONNIE

I think little Mildred had a baby.

TESSIE SUE

Now that's rich. Mommy! Now all I need is a daddy.

MILDRED

That's the wackiest thing you've ever said.

BONNIE

Laugh all you want. Let's see the birth certificate.

TESSIE SUE

Sorry. I don't carry it with me.

BONNIE

We can do it the hard way. Mom and Dad kept all our baby teeth. I'm sure they can be tested just like the dentures. Except it will be a bit more telling.

TESSIE SUE

Mildred?

MILDRED

Where would you ever get such an idea?

BONNIE

You called her "mommy" when you went to clean the bath mat.

MILDRED

Good grief, that was just a figure of speech.

BONNIE

That girl who called. The mother of Levi's children.

TESSIE SUE

Wait. I need to take notes.

BONNIE

She said that she'd had DNA testing done on her children. She said the blood tested positive. She was talking about the blood on Mildred's binky.

TESSIE SUE

So what do you think, Mom? Is it too late for us to bond?.

BONNIE

Who are your parents?

TESSIE SUE

Who's my daddy, Mom?

BONNIE

Glad you find this funny. I want to see your birth certificate.

TESSIE SUE

You have the journals. Figure it out.

BONNIE

Mildred??

TESSIE SUE

Leave her alone.

BONNIE

I beg your pardon?

TESSIE SUE

I said leave her alone. You've done enough damage.

MILDRED

I'm sorry, Bonnie. I've only tried to, well, never mind. It doesn't matter now.

BONNIE

How can you do this to me, Mildred?

MILDRED

What does it matter now?

TESSIE SUE

And you say *I* live in a soap opera.

BONNIE

Is Mildred your mother, Tessie Sue? Who is your father?

TESSIE SUE

Mommy, who's my daddy?

MILDRED

Leave me alone!

BONNIE

Mildred. We need to know. If you are Tess's mother, who was the father?

MILDRED

I'm moving to Arizona.

BONNIE

For god's sake, Mildred, shut up about that.

TESSIE SUE

What's wrong with that?

BONNIE

It's not true.

TESSIE SUE

Why? I've told her that she can even bring Bob, if she wants.

BONNIE

Tess, you need to tell her the truth.

TESSIE SUE

We'll even pay for your plane tickets.

MILDRED

We have a lot of packing to do.

TESSIE SUE

We'll pay for shipping, too. It will be nice to have all the family furniture.

MILDRED

We'll start a new life.

Bonnie picks up the journals.

BONNIE

You'll have to excuse me. I have some reading to do.

MILDRED

You can't take our stories!

BONNIE

Oh Mildred. Sweet little Mildred.

Bonnie leaves. Tessie Sue and Mildred embrace.

TESSIE SUE

We'll hike in the mountains and go to the Grand Canyon.

MILDRED

Bob will need assistance.

TESSIE SUE

We all will.

INTERMISSION

### ACT III

The house has been cleared out except for Henry's study. Bonnie and Mildred sort through papers and pictures.

BONNIE

I guess Tess was in a bigger hurry to get back than we knew.

MILDRED

I hope she didn't go back without me. I'm all packed.

BONNIE

Of course you are. You've been packed for years. So where is sister Sue? It's been three days. Isn't it funny how hollow it sounds in here?

MILDRED

She'll be here. All this emptiness.

BONNIE

I guess I'll have to call a locksmith to open the safe.

MILDRED  
There's nothing in it.

BONNIE  
What makes you think that?

MILDRED  
I looked.

BONNIE  
What did you do? Knock on it and it sounded hollow?

MILDRED  
No.

BONNIE  
We don't have the combination.

MILDRED  
I do.

BONNIE  
Mildred! Why didn't you say so?

MILDRED  
It's what Dad wanted.

BONNIE  
How do you know what Dad wanted?

MILDRED  
He gave me the combination.

BONNIE  
Have you opened it?

MILDRED  
There's nothing in it.

BONNIE  
Auto titles, photographs? No jewelry? Where's his dissertation?



MILDRED

It's empty.

BONNIE

I want to see it.

MILDRED

I have your Shirley Temple doll.

BONNIE

What?

MILDRED

Your Shirley Temple doll. I didn't really lose it. You never seemed to miss it.

BONNIE

Let's talk about the safe.

MILDRED

You never really missed it until now. You can have it back. I'm sorry. The longer I had it, the harder it was to admit I took it.

BONNIE

Keep it. I'm sick of this mess.

MILDRED

It's locked.

BONNIE

I guess I'll just have to call the locksmith then.

MILDRED

Go ahead. There's nothing in it.

BONNIE

What kind of game is this, Mildred?

MILDRED

Tessie Sue will be here soon.

BONNIE

Tess is not having you move in with her. Have some sense. She's gone.

MILDRED

I'm going to Arizona, and there's nothing you can do about it.

BONNIE

What's her phone number? What's her address? How will you find her? For the past three years her Christmas cards have been returned address unknown.

MILDRED

Take a breath, Bonnie. Take a deep breath.

BONNIE

I want to see everything in the safe. Right now. We have to get on with our lives!

MILDRED

Empty.

BONNIE

No! No, not empty! What have you done? I don't believe you. I'm calling the locksmith.

MILDRED

Suit yourself. I'm not smart like you. I just do the best I can. I know empty.

BONNIE

So you're leaving me?

MILDRED

I don't want it all to end here. I don't want to die without at least trying to find an adventure.

BONNIE

Fine. Go to Arizona. Have your adventure. But you can't rob me to do it.

MILDRED

There is no will. No will.

BONNIE

Well, probate here we come. You realize there will be nothing left? That Tess has no legal rights? That whatever you've stolen from the safe can be investigated?

MILDRED

Tessie Sue does have legal rights.

BONNIE

Good luck with that.

MILDRED

Bonnie, you've read the journals.

BONNIE

Yes. There are missing pages.

MILDRED

There are always missing pages.

BONNIE

Who is her father?

MILDRED

Don't you want something new in your life?

BONNIE

This is all the excitement I can stand.

MILDRED

You don't want to know what else is out there?

BONNIE

You'll regret it. Who is the father?

MILDRED

I'll regret it if I don't at least try. I know how to be a mother now.

BONNIE

That's what this is about? A redo?

MILDRED

What regrets do you have?

BONNIE

I regret lies and deception. I've never lied well. I'm not going to lie to you now.

MILDRED

I shouldn't have taken your doll. I guess I'm a pretty good liar.

BONNIE

You're not a liar.

MILDRED

I was ashamed. And scared.

BONNIE

I've lied. Not very well. I just can't stand the confused look on someone's face when they ...

MILDRED

It's not like it didn't bother me. I wanted a baby doll, too.

BONNIE

I understand.

MILDRED

It was the middle of the depression. You got your doll before Mom and Dad knew how bad it would get. I couldn't have a baby doll.

BONNIE

They just stare at you. Wondering if you even know yourself that you're lying. I sometimes wish it didn't matter to me.

MILDRED

You should go with me.

BONNIE

Where?

MILDRED

To live at Tessie Sue's house.

BONNIE

I have to care for Bernie.

MILDRED

Is that what you want?

BONNIE

Maybe I will go with you. Just walk away from all of this.

MILDRED

We can sell our business. You could get a job in Arizona.

BONNIE

Mildred, I'm 71 years old. No one is going to hire a 71 year-old teacher.

MILDRED

You can retire. And you have Social Security. And our inheritance.

BONNIE

It depends what was in the safe. Otherwise, there's not much here.

MILDRED

If we go to Arizona with Tessie Sue, we can have everything from the safe.

BONNIE

Ah, so that's what's going on. You and Tessie Sue have schemed to have us all shrivel up and die together.

MILDRED

Why are you always so suspicious?

BONNIE

I don't want to go to Arizona.

MILDRED

Why? Tessie Sue has a big beautiful home.

Bonnie takes a moment to imagine cultured life

BONNIE

I'd rather be in a place where I can go to museums and the theatre whenever I want. Hop on a plane and fly to Barcelona.

MILDRED

I don't think I'd be very good at that.

BONNIE

We could try out a few places. You might surprise yourself.

MILDRED

What about Tessie Sue?

BONNIE

She has her own life now.

MILDRED

But from Arizona we could go to Las Vegas, to Los Angeles. The Grand Canyon. Anywhere. Any time you wanted to. Tessie Sue could go with us.

BONNIE

I don't think Nevada or Los Angeles are very close to Arizona.

MILDRED

I'll get a map. Dad has one right here. He marked all their travels on it. They took their camper to almost every state.

BONNIE

I'd prefer to stay in hotels.

MILDRED

I didn't mean we'd take a camper. Whew! I think those days are over for me. What, Bob with one leg and all.

BONNIE

Would he be going with us?

MILDRED

Well of course. I can't leave Bob alone.

BONNIE

Oh.

MILDRED

What did you think?

BONNIE

I don't know. I guess when you said Bernie would go into a home, you meant Bob, too.

MILDRED

Bonnie, he's only missing a leg. He's not like Bernie.

BONNIE

Of course.

MILDRED

I don't think Tessie Sue would go with us. It would just be you and me. Bob could stay with Tessie Sue. I'm okay with that.

BONNIE

I suppose. What was in the safe?

MILDRED

Some jewelry. His coin collection. Some papers I don't understand.

BONNIE

We'll get things appraised.

MILDRED

How much do you think it might be worth?

BONNIE

With no will, just the two of us?

MILDRED

What about Tessie Sue? She's going to let us live in her house. She should get a share.

BONNIE

Sure. It's not worth fighting over it.

MILDRED

If she's going to let us live with her, we have to be fair.

BONNIE

She wouldn't want me anyway.

MILDRED

You could tell her you're sorry for knocking her down.

BONNIE

Let me take a look at what was in the safe.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue has it.

BONNIE

What?

MILDRED

I didn't know what else to do with it.

BONNIE

Mildred, we haven't seen Tess for three days.

MILDRED

She said it should be in a safe deposit box at the bank. That's why I opened it.

BONNIE

Without talking to me? How could you be so stupid?

MILDRED

What's wrong?

BONNIE

That's why we haven't seen her for three days. She's gone.

MILDRED

I don't think so. She's been busy at Mack's mother's house. They're getting ready to sell it.

BONNIE

Really? And what have you heard about a safe deposit box?

Mildred hangs her head, fidgets.

Hello? Any one home?

MILDRED

I'm sorry.

BONNIE

We have no way to reach her, do we?



MILDRED

She has to come back here for the rest of her things.

BONNIE

What things? She burned everything.

MILDRED

I told her she could have some of our things.

BONNIE

Mildred, you're not thinking straight. She's not coming back here. She's not letting you move in with her, let alone me and Bob.

MILDRED

How do you know?

BONNIE

Oh, Mildred. She burned the trailer full of furniture. We don't know who her parents are. She tricked you into giving her Dad's papers and whatever else was left. I was willing to forget about the trailer, but now it's time to call the police.

MILDRED

I gave her Dad's things. She didn't take them.

BONNIE

Then I'll call the police to report you.

MILDRED

I wanted the things to be in a safe place.

BONNIE

I'm the oldest. Why didn't you come to me?

MILDRED

Dad gave me the combination.

BONNIE

Did he tell you not to not to discuss this with me?

(silence)

Well?

MILDRED

Yes.

Bonnie raises her hand as if to strike her

BONNIE

How can you do this to me? Why is everyone against me?

MILDRED

I'm not against you.

BONNIE

You don't even know her phone number, let alone her address.

MILDRED

She's taking me to Arizona.

BONNIE

She is not taking you to Arizona. We're never even going to see her again. And there's nothing left here.

MILDRED

So you're going to call the police?

BONNIE

She'll burn it all. She's crazy. Don't you see it?

MILDRED

Bonnie, I burned the trailer.

BONNIE

Oh, this is rich. Why are you doing this?

MILDRED

I burned the trailer.

BONNIE

So why did Tess say she did it?

MILDRED

I guess she saw me. I don't know why she didn't say anything.

BONNIE

She watched you burn her things?

MILDRED

Yes.

BONNIE

And claimed she did it?

MILDRED

Yes.

BONNIE

Why?

MILDRED

I don't know.

BONNIE

I mean why did you do it, if you really did?

MILDRED

I thought you would be pleased.

BONNIE

How could that possibly please me?

MILDRED

Because Tessie Sue wouldn't have the things. I shouldn't have done it, but it's done.

BONNIE

And Tessie Sue was protecting you?

MILDRED

I don't know.

BONNIE

I don't want you to leave.

MILDRED

You're not going with me?

(Bonnie sags)

Bonnie?

BONNIE

Sure. I'll go pack.

Mildred hugs her.

MILDRED

I knew you would! We can do the things you want. I can learn to appreciate high culture.

Tessie Sue appears in the doorway

BONNIE

We'll drink champagne.

MILDRED

Now about that. I draw the line.

BONNIE

No better time than the present to start drinking.

MILDRED

I know Tessie Sue will be delighted.

TESSIE SUE

About what?

MILDRED

Tessie Sue! I knew you'd come!

TESSIE SUE

I heard there'd be drinking.

MILDRED

Bonnie and I were making plans.

TESSIE SUE

Without me?

MILDRED

Oh, uh, well, we're going to talk to you soon about it.

BONNIE

Tessie Sue, I think you might have some things that belong to us.

TESSIE SUE

Oh yes. Of course. That's why I'm here.

Tessie Sue opens a briefcase and shouts out.

Surprise!

Bonnie jumps back.

MILDRED

Tessie Sue! You scared us.

TESSIE SUE

Just teasing. Here. You take the things from the safe. I know you'll do the right thing.

BONNIE

Is everything there?

TESSIE SUE

Yes, Bonnie. Everything in the safe that belonged to Mom and Dad is right here. The bank wanted an i.d. to rent a box, and I wasn't comfortable with that.

BONNIE

We have some other things to discuss.

MILDRED

Later, Bonnie. We can discuss it later.

TESSIE SUE

We can all have breakfast again and talk through everything.

MILDRED

Bob Evans?

TESSIE SUE

Sure. Bob Evans always does us right.

MILDRED

Tomorrow?

BONNIE

Yes. Tomorrow. We'll do everything tomorrow.

MILDRED

I'm glad you came back, Tessie Sue.

TESSIE SUE

So when are we having that champagne?

MILDRED

Oh, we were talking about later. Just Bonnie. Not me.

TESSIE SUE

Bonnie and I will toast, By gones are by gones.

MILDRED

Oh Tessie Sue, that is so good to hear. I was afraid you left because you were mad.

TESSIE SUE

Nah, I always bounce back up.

BONNIE

I shouldn't have done that.

TESSIE SUE

Is that some sort of apology or just regret?

BONNIE

Both, I guess.

MILDRED

Bob Evans and Arizona!

BONNIE

I'll go get the journals. We each should have our own story.

MILDRED

They're all Mom's stories.

BONNIE

Yes. Even the missing pages.

MILDRED

We're leaving tomorrow.

BONNIE

Yes. I know. I'll be right back

MILDRED

You can come back for things.

BONNIE

No. I'm afraid I can't.

MILDRED

Tomorrow.

(Bonnie starts to leave)

Bonnie, you'll pack tonight. Right?

BONNIE

I'll leave you two to work things out.

Bonnie exits. Tessie Sue takes out her earbuds and puts the tape player with the Shirley Temple doll. During the following scene Tessie Sue spins off more and more into her fantasy of being fabulously able to take care of her sisters.

TESSIE SUE

Did you tell her who my father is?

BONNIE

I told her that I burned the trailer.

TESSIE SUE

I'll bet that flipped her out.

MILDRED

No. She seemed confused though.

TESSIE SUE  
I'll bet.

MILDRED  
I'll give you some of her things.

TESSIE SUE  
No. A jar of ashes will be fine.

MILDRED  
We need to talk.

TESSIE SUE  
What have you and Bonnie cooked up now?

MILDRED  
She'd like to move in with us. In Arizona.

TESSIE SUE  
Wow.

MILDRED  
Bernie would stay here.

TESSIE SUE  
I don't think that would be a good idea.

MILDRED  
I was afraid of that.

TESSIE SUE  
Bernie should come, too.

MILDRED  
And Bob?

TESSIE SUE  
Of course. They're your husbands.

MILDRED  
Mack wouldn't mind?



TESSIE SUE

Of course not. They can all play horseshoes and watch football on television.

MILDRED

And we can travel?

TESSIE SUE

Sure.

MILDRED

Bonnie wants to go to the theatre and see museums. She wants to go to Barcelona.

TESSIE SUE

Maybe you two should do those things together. I'll watch after the men while you travel.

MILDRED

This is more wonderful than I ever could have imagined.

TESSIE SUE

We're sisters. We need to stick together.

MILDRED

Can Bonnie bring Mom's bedroom suite?

TESSIE SUE

Of course.

MILDRED

She has her own furniture. Maybe she'd let me use it in my room.

TESSIE SUE

That would be fine. We have a room that's furnished but we can get rid of stuff. When it's cleared out you and Bob can furnish it however you like.

MILDRED

I can't wait to hang my fish on the wall. What about Bonnie?

TESSIE SUE

She can live in the guest house. It's on the first floor. The yard is securely fenced in so she won't need to worry about Bernie wandering off.

MILDRED

You've thought of everything.

TESSIE SUE

When can you leave?

MILDRED

Tomorrow! We've already started clearing things out. We have a fine manager who can handle the business.

TESSIE SUE

Perfect. How about Bonnie?

MILDRED

Roy will move into her condo. She just wants to take the bedroom suite.

TESSIE SUE

Wonderful. She'll have plenty of privacy. She can work on her projects.

MILDRED

She likes genealogy and scrap-booking. She'll have to turn in her retirement papers.

TESSIE SUE

It will be perfect for her.

MILDRED

Are you sure it's okay for us to travel without you?

TESSIE SUE

Don't give it a second thought.

MILDRED

I never expected to have such a grand adventure at my age.

TESSIE SUE

Dreams do come true.

MILDRED

I only wish Mom and Dad could share in our happiness.

TESSIE SUE

They're watching over us and smiling. Don't worry.

MILDRED

I'll pack a suitcase.

TESSIE SUE

We can ship your other things later.

MILDRED

We'll have a caravan! Arizona or bust!

TESSIE SUE

That's the spirit.

MILDRED

Bonnie will be happy there, too. It will take her a little longer to get used to it.

TESSIE SUE

You better get your bags packed. We can leave right after breakfast.

MILDRED

Is Levi ready?

TESSIE SUE

Yes. The truck is full and it looks like we have a buyer for the house.

MILDRED

Can we come back to visit sometimes?

TESSIE SUE

Good heavens, yes. And when the college takes over the house, we can all come here and have Christmas. Just like we did when the kids were babies.

MILDRED

We'll have a toast for my Jerry. I know it's a special place for you. We didn't live here, but you did.

TESSIE SUE

Yes. Well, you better get ready. We don't want to start off too late.

MILDRED

We've been as close as real sisters, haven't we?

TESSIE SUE

Closer than sisters. I've never thought otherwise. Now you better get going.

MILDRED

I need to pinch myself.

TESSIE SUE

You go right ahead. Levi will be here soon to pick me up. We'll meet at Bob Evans bright and early.

MILDRED

I'll be there first. See you in the morning.

Mildred starts to exit. She stops and pinches herself in delight. Tessie Sue puts the briefcase on the desk. She takes out her birth certificate and puts it on the desk. The sound of a truck is heard. She goes to the bathroom. Levi enters.

LEVI (OFF)

Hello?

Levi enters and looks around. He picks up the fish and tosses it in the trash.

Where is everybody?

He walks out, calling for his mother.

LEVI (OFF)

Anybody home?

TESSIE SUE (OFF)

I'm in the bathroom. Just a minute.

LEVI (OFF)

We can stop at Wilson's if you hurry.

TESSIE SUE

I'm almost ready.

They return Tessie Sue is dressed in a taffeta dress or a sweater and poodle skirt, saddle shoes and cat glasses, ala 1953. She swirls around.

LEVI

You're looking sharp.

TESSIE SUE

We're going to the Grand Canyon.

LEVI

Finally going on that honeymoon.

TESSIE SUE

Your dad is probably waiting for us.

LEVI

He's gone, Mom. He won't be back. Where is your music?

Tessie Sue takes a deep breath and closes her eyes.

LEVI

What's wrong?

TESSIE SUE

I can smell your dad.

LEVI

Smells like, well, let's just say, a bathroom.

TESSIE SUE

I've thought a lot about what he must have been like.

LEVI

Who?

TESSIE SUE

My dad.

LEVI

You never knew him?

TESSIE SUE

I can smell Mom, too. Incense and cinnamon.

LEVI

I'll get your suitcase.

TESSIE SUE

But I can't smell Bonnie..

LEVI

You have a sharp sense of smell. Maybe it will come to you.

TESSIE SUE

She and Mom each got married and moved away.

LEVI

You knew your mom?

TESSIE SUE

I wish she had married my dad.

LEVI

You're losing me.

TESSIE SUE

Magic.

LEVI

Hello! I bet they're in the kitchen.

TESSIE SUE

Shhh! Everyone is asleep.

LEVI

I lived here, too.

TESSIE SUE

I remember.

LEVI

Just one summer. Grandpa and Grandma and me. Aunt Bonnie kept a good eye on me.

TESSIE SUE

I'll bet she did.

LEVI

Time to hit the road.

Levi spots her Walkman

TESSIE SUE

She lived right across the street. Now it's just bedrooms in the sky.

LEVI

Here's your music Mom. You want your music.

TESSIE SUE

I know all the songs. I sing them over and over.

LEVI

Not the ones I'm writing. You haven't heard them yet.

TESSIE SUE

(ad lib song) Can we stop at Wilson's?

LEVI

And then Dietsch's.

TESSIE SUE

Candy or ice cream?

LEVI

I don't know. We'll go see.

TESSIE SUE

You'll like it. I had a boyfriend in high school.

LEVI

I'll bet you two snuck out of class and sipped on milkshakes.

TESSIE SUE

Did he tell you that?

Levi looks at her. He turns and goes to the backward clock.

LEVI

Yes.

TESSIE SUE

Kiss and tell.

LEVI

Crazy clock. I don't know how anyone tells the time unless they hold a mirror.

TESSIE SUE

Mom and Dad had that at the cottage.

LEVI

I think I remember it. I was too young to read a clock.

TESSIE SUE

Why were you there?

LEVI

I went with my mom and dad. Great fun with all my cousins.

TESSIE SUE

Too bad our families never got together. Imagine that. You had a backward clock, too.

LEVI

We'll clean up that trailer at Christmas. No time now.

TESSIE SUE

No. It's too late.

LEVI

Yes.

TESSIE SUE

It was just a bunch of old junk.

LEVI

Maybe someone will clear it out.



TESSIE SUE

That's good.

LEVI

Your sisters.

TESSIE SUE

Do you have a sister?

LEVI

No. Just me.

TESSIE SUE

Too bad. Sisters are something special.

LEVI

Yes. My daughters are very close to each other.

TESSIE SUE

Oh! You have children?

LEVI

Three girls. They're sweethearts. You'd love them.

(Levi pulls out his wallet.)

Here. Take a look.

Tessie Sue inspects the pictures.

TESSIE SUE

They're beautiful! I have pictures too. Somewhere. I think they might be in this house.

LEVI

We better get going.

TESSIE SUE

Yes. Did I tell you that my sisters are coming to live with me?

LEVI

That's wonderful!

TESSIE SUE

Yes. I need to get the house ready.

LEVI

I can help you.

TESSIE SUE

Would you?.

LEVI

Sure. I'm pretty handy.

TESSIE SUE

We built it ourselves.

LEVI

Wow!

TESSIE SUE

We put up the fence. Dug all the post holes by hand.

LEVI

I'd like to see that.

TESSIE SUE

It burned down. When are we coming back here?

LEVI

You just say the word.

TESSIE SUE

Are we going on a train?

LEVI

No. I have a truck. Go hop in. I'll go to the bathroom and be right there.

TESSIE SUE

You are a fine young man.

LEVI

Go on now. Here, you'd like some music, I bet.

He puts a tape in the Walkman as she puts the earbuds in.

TESSIE SUE

I don't know that song.

LEVI

I wrote it.

TESSIE SUE

It's very nice. What's it called?

LEVI

I haven't named it.

TESSIE SUE

I'll call it "Levi Blue." Just like your dungerees.

LEVI

Ha! That's a good one.

(sings)

"Sometimes I feel like the guts of America."

Tessie Sue relaxes. Levi goes to the desk. He picks up the journals and the birth certificate.. He looks at the clock. The phone rings. He waits a moment and then answers.

LEVI

Hello? Hey babe. Yeah, we're just ready to hit the road. Yes. Everything is finished. She did well. We went to all her old haunts. I'm so full of ice cream and hamburgers I had to let my belt out. We'll be home soon. No. I'll tell you later.

TESSIE SUE

That's my birth certificate.

LEVI

You have a copy.

TESSIE SUE

There's something special about the real thing.

He looks at the birth certificate.

LEVI

How about that.

TESSIE SUE

Yes.

LEVI

Does Aunt Mildred know?

TESSIE SUE

She knows now.

LEVI

Grandpa was pretty clever, I guess.

He looks closer at the paper.

Mildred appears holding a suitcase.

TESSIE SUE

We'll never know.

LEVI

Is it what you expected to find?

TESSIE SUE

I don't have any expectations.

LEVI

We need to talk to Bonnie. We have rights.

MILDRED

Too bad no one thought about his rights.

TESSIE SUE

Whose rights, Mom?

MILDRED

What?

TESSIE SUE

You said too bad no one thought about his rights.

MILDRED

Buddy. Buddy Farris.

TESSIE SUE

It's adorable. The way you carefully signed it "Mr. And Mrs. Julian Farris" on the birth certificate.

MILDRED

Julian wrote it. He was in love with me.

LEVI

How about that. Was he the fellow in the uniform?

MILDRED

Uniform?

LEVI

Light-skinned guy. I saw his picture in the photo album.

MILDRED

Oh my. No. That wasn't Buddy. Buddy was my age. He was my best friend.

LEVI

So who was it in the picture?

MILDRED

Another song. Another story..

LEVI

What ever happened to him? Buddy?

MILDRED

I don't know. When I got back from Missouri, his family had moved.

LEVI

Migrant families moved on.

MILDRED

But they usually returned each year.

TESSIE SUE

I bounced around to a couple of foster families until Henry and Irene took me in.

LEVI

But never adopted you.

TESSIE SUE

No.

LEVI

And you never knew your sister was really your mother?

TESSIE SUE

Not until Monica started her crusade. Dad got me my Social Security Card and driver's license. I always listed them as my parents, without question.

LEVI

Why didn't you let her know, Aunt Mildred?

MILDRED

I didn't know myself. She was named by her first family. I only held her one time.

LEVI

And the birth certificate was in the safe.

MILDRED

Yes.

LEVI

We better get on the road.

MILDRED

Aren't we going to Bob Evans? Oh, I see. You were fooling me.

TESSIE SUE

Yes.

MILDRED

You don't have a ranch, do you?

TESSIE SUE

(Sprechgesang)

"I'm aware

My heart is a sad affair

There's much disillusion there

But I can dream, can't I?

Can't I adore you

Although we are oceans apart?

I can't make you open your heart

But I can dream, can't I?"

LEVI

(addresses the audience)

The church built a nice little house for her after the other one burned. Two bedrooms. The only difference is that Dad is no longer with us. It was cheaper for her to get help without him. We look after her as best we can,

MILDRED

So Mack isn't there?

LEVI

No. We don't know where he is.

MILDRED

Bonnie loves you.

TESSIE SUE

(sings) Time to go. Maybe someday Bonnie will join us.

LEVI

You go on. I'll be out in a minute.

Tessie Sue exits.

MILDRED

I think I'll be a good mother.

LEVI

It's never too late to be a good mother. Go on. I'll close things up.

Mildred exits. Levi dials the phone.

Hey hon. Yeah, we're just getting started. We should be there midday tomorrow. We're leaving the trailer here. We should make good time.

(A horn honks.)

I better get going. Miss Daisy is getting impatient. How are the girls? Good. Tell them I'll be bringing ice cream and candy from Dietch's. Love you too. Oh, we'll be bringing Grandma Mildred with us. She's ready to look after her little girl. Later.

He hangs up the phone. He steps down to address the audience.

Mom died the following year without ever asking me to try and find Howard Frazer. But still, I wonder what my grandfather is doing. Somewhere there might be a seventy year old man who is wondering what ever happened to his little girl. He might even wonder about Monica, our girls, and me. My Grandmother Irene wrote in my mom's journal: "I followed your progress at each foster home until I was convinced that I'd be your best mother and Bonnie and Mildred would be your best sisters. Dad did his best, too." My wife didn't seem to have much interest in it after that. Maybe if I submitted some spit to Ancestry dot com I'd find some connections. Our daughters are fine young women but they seem a bit bored by our accounts of their Great Aunt Bonnie, the kissing teeth, and the burning trailer. They adore their Great Grandma Mildred. I'm clearing out.

Takes the clock off the wall, picks up the Shirley Temple doll, and exits.

END OF PLAY

Mood Indigo. plays



