

*HOUSE OF SEVERAL STORIES:*  
a tragedy in two acts of nonsense

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in Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of ARTS

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother for her adoring words of “You *can*...” that always sang with the subtext of “*You* will...”

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

*HOUSE OF SEVERAL STORIES:*  
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SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: JOHN FLEMING

This thesis is comprised of two parts: creative and academic. The creative element is in the form of a two-act play titled *House of Several Stories*, which is supported by the academic cogitation on the development and exploration of the script and its elements. Chapter One introduces the rest of the thesis, explaining Chapters Two through Five as the academic elements which showcase the creative process. Chapter Six encompasses the creative element: the final version of the two-act script. The chapters are followed by several appendices of supporting materials, such as poster graphics and production photos. The entirety of the product serves as research materials on the topic of *House of Several Stories*, this new tragedy in two acts of nonsense.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.”

--Samuel Beckett

With four full-length stage plays and three feature-length screenplays under my belt, I am still unable to recount a succinct formula to the madness of my writing process. Each of my scripts has had their own unique creative development, and *House of Several Stories* has proven to be a sheer delight each step of the way. From inspiration to inception, research to rewrites, and performance to remounts, the entire process has been a blessing undisguised. In the following pages, I provide a firsthand account of the development of the script (lovingly referred to by its catchy acronym--*HOSS*), as well as each production with its supporting materials. Chapter Two provides biographical information and my writing process to give insight into the world which shaped my writing and ultimately from which the script sprang forth. Chapter Three gives brief synopses for each act, and Chapter Four focuses on each of the five characters of the play. Chapter Six is comprised of the two-act play text. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with my afterthoughts on the finished product and the journey from page to stage. The thesis closes with various supporting materials from the premiere production, i.e. poster, photos, letter from director Jeremy O. Torres. I provide the following materials to proffer a primary resource for future research on the topic of this play.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTEXT

“If the writing is honest it cannot be separated from the man who wrote it.”

--Tennessee Williams

#### **Biographical Information**

I was born at 3:17 am on August 17, sometime during the 1970s, in Aransas Pass, Texas--the town that is better known as “The Shrimp Capital of the World.” I spent the first 17 years of my life in the neighboring town of Ingleside, population 5346, living in three to four very modest homes in the same eight-block radius, with my father (a mechanic), my mother (a maid), and two older sisters--the eldest of whom I viewed as an overachiever for receiving her driver’s license at 15, her high school diploma at 16, and her emancipation from our house at 17.

My parents divorced when I was eight years old, or perhaps I was 12, and I was uncertain at the time as to why I was the only child requested to attend the divorce hearings. While I felt fortunate for getting to skip half a day of school (which always meant an ice cream treat in some form), I didn’t fully comprehend that I was actually receiving the much sweeter prize of a last name, my last name: Boulanger. I apparently was not their legal child until that day--the day I realized that there was something to this word “adopted” which I had heard, but only through the gossip of various townsfolk, and always outside the confines of our family’s walls.

I was part of a school system that, for some reason, felt it necessary to divide each grade into sections, grouping students that were of the same aptitude level. I am not sure exactly how we proved intelligence as six year olds, but I was placed in the “top section” in the second grade, and carried that luxury for the remainder of my academic career in Ingleside, an honor that also carried with it the collective name for our class as “egg heads” by the other young students.

School had always seemed easy to me, especially math and science. I never recall actually doing homework, even throughout high school, but I apparently did enough to graduate seventh in my class. During the summer of my sophomore year, I don’t remember how or why, I attended a drama camp at Texas State University-San Marcos (then Southwest Texas State University), and it was clear from that point forward that a career in theatre arts was inevitable. The camaraderie, the production process, the applause!--each filled a void within me that I was not even aware was there until that summer. The camp proved to be so monumental to my young brain that Texas State was the sole university to which I applied.

I ran to San Marcos as soon as the tassel crossed my blue, brimmed cap, and at 17 I soon discovered that embracing the newfound freedom of adulthood was far more endearing than the attendance policies implemented in the college classroom. After two years of Texas State, I decided to turn in the pencils and bluebooks for booze. I would become, for the better part of a decade, the pusher of the last legal drug: a bartender.

Bartending for ten years did two great things for my life: the bartending itself provided me a wealth of material for future scripts; and the ten-year investment made me realize that there was little as far as adult benefits accompanying that pocketful of cash

that came with each night's shift, and disappeared as quickly as it had come. I had reached a point in my life where I decided to go back in time--to do my 20s over again. I realized it was actually possible to address that old wish of "going back after knowing what I know now." I went back to school.

I enrolled in a junior college, and received my Associates of Arts in political science, with honors, but mainly because it had the shortest list of degree requirements. I continued to stay active in theatre, acting in Craig Lucas' *Reckless* and Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, and directing Arthur Bicknell's *Masterpieces*. I was also active in Phi Rho Pi forensic arts, winning the national honor of best Dramatic Duo Acting in 1998, with my best-friend partner, Molly Cox. She and I sought out theatre challenge after theatre challenge, working in every venue Corpus Christi had to offer. She was my wife in *Reckless*, my "Charlotte Bronte" in *Masterpieces*, my sister in *Twilight of the Gods*, and my best gal in *The Sisters Rosenzweig* (to name a few). Soon we found ourselves uninspired by the work coming our way, so creating an original work was the only logical next step. I sat down and wrote my first show: *The Totally Fierce, Completely Opinionate, Partially True Misadventures of Him and Her*, which was a totally self-indulgent romp of scenes that showcased Cox and me, displaying various relationships a guy and a girl can share. It performed to sold-out audiences at 10th Street Theatre by Bugg Productions, and to (dare I say) rave reviews by Corpus Christi's sole entertainment critic.

After receiving my associate's degree, and exhausting all creative juices that I could muster in South Texas, I decided to sever my ties with the world I had known for the better part of a decade in exchange to relive a life I had abandoned in San Marcos. I

returned to Texas State to complete a bachelor of fine arts in directing. I achieved that in two years, graduating magna cum laude. It was during those two years that I began to see writing as a career option rather than a diversion. Thanks to a theatre program known as At-Random Theatre, several of my short plays were produced for students by students. One 10-minute play, *Zing!*, even progressed into a full-length play that was later produced off campus by the theatre group Troupe Texas in Austin, Texas. It was a great learning experience, but nothing that set the world on fire.

Upon graduation, I moved to New York City. This was a promise I made myself when I decided that I would go back to school to do things right. I wanted to live outside of Texas to expose myself to peoples and cultures (and ways of speaking) that were not necessarily tied to the South. I set a limit of two years and soaked up everything I could from the challenging and highly rewarding city. After two years, I found myself with an incredible job as an editor at Fordham Law School, a wonderfully inexpensive living situation, and the option of a free education...in law. I knew something had to change; I knew a change had to be made that reflected and utilized my 20-year investment in theatre.

In a quick sequence of events, I found myself embracing the return to Texas and to Texas State to pursue my graduate studies in playwriting. In the fall of 2007, during my first playwriting course since undergrad, I penned the script of *House of Several Stories*. Everything that has transpired since then has reinforced the fact that returning to Texas and to Texas State has been the wisest and most valuable decision for my writing career.



## Playwright's Process

I am still quite dumbfounded each and every time I am fortunate enough to type the words “The End,” on roughly the 120th page of a script. Those two simple words are inevitably accompanied by a well-earned exhalation to the skies, in gratitude, in relief, and with pride. But where do the ideas come from? And how do they continue to stay surfaced long enough to reach completion? I have no clue; I have no clue; I have no clue. There are, however, a few elements that seem to work and find their way into every one of my writing ventures.

I have tried to map out stories in the way the “great books” on playwriting instruct, writing character back stories, researching and compiling information before sitting down to actually start the story. But each of those attempts has never lived to completion. However, each completed script of mine has always stemmed from one single line of dialogue. That line of dialogue, in turn, has to be answered by *some* one. It is through this initial banter that gives birth to (at least) two characters who, if it is the right conversation at the right time, will share their story in the following hundred pages. The birth of every script--story and characters--has spawned from an epiphany in dialogue. In fact, from my first script to my last, it has always been apparent that the dialogue has been the strongest feature. I am a dialogist by design. I have always had an affinity for the discourse of characters in plays by Oscar Wilde, where words are swords, or less lethal weapons such as ping pong paddles. The ability to volley words back and forth with agility has always strengthened a character in my eyes, and for my ears. After an initial discourse is laid forth, I move on to the next step: music.

Music has always played a big role for me as an actor, director, and in my most recent years as a writer. After I have felt out a couple of characters or few, I normally have the overall tone of the piece in mind. It may simply be a feeling, one that can shift with each passing page, but a mood is definitely set after this first-written scene. I immediately open my library of digital music and scour the more-than-700 entries for 10-12 songs that I feel encompass the colors, rhythm, and mood of the piece. I then place these songs into an “album,” which will serve as the “soundtrack” of the play and serve as the aural inspiration in writing each subsequent scene. The songs are not necessarily pieces I expect to be used in production, but rather they play, continuously on repeat, during each writing session, and fuel the rhythm of both my typing of the scenes, and usually--more times than not--as the tempo of the scenes themselves. Songs will be added as the script takes further form, and, of course, songs will be deleted. But by the time I reach the end of the script, I have a strong repertoire of tunes that underscore the action of the play.

Because the songs are compiled in an album specific to a particular story, it is easy for me to manipulate the order, as well as repeat a single song to work longer and more intently on a single scene. This has led to the prevalence of self-editing, internal editing as I write. I tend to focus on a single passage of dialogue, rereading it over and over obsessing over each word, the length of a sentence or its response, and the placement of a comma or semicolon. Doing this continually throughout each page of the script has made the overall rewriting process of the first draft more bearable.

Another element of inspiration that has always served me in writing is that of a character-image album. From the very beginning of the process, I have a mental image of

the characters as they beginning to speak. They are usually attached to one of the many actor-friends I have amassed over the years. It helps to visit such ubiquitous sites as Facebook or Myspace for image inspiration. I search the “rolodex” known as my friends list on either site to narrow down actors, usually ones currently in my life, who possess a look or speech pattern similar to a character--it could be something as innate as an acting style. I build a photo album of “characters,” usually making a collage of headshots, each in proximity of character relationship, and then plaster it across my laptop desktop. This coupled with the tunes of the soundtrack serve as an integral inspiration anytime I find myself at a loss for words.

Because I obsess over each scene or section for lengths at a time, I always feel compelled to invite a few actors over after I have completed roughly 20 new pages to hear the words aloud. If I am lucky enough to score the same set of actors each time, I really get a sense of a character unfolding organically and holistically. Having a certain air about a character in mind, it is great to match an actor who shares those qualities; this allows me to better imagine what that character might do next or need next, sometimes based on the actors’ response to the new pages.

After the scenes have been amassed and “The End” falls from my fingertips, it is ready to host a fuller version of a read through, calling upon the help of a group of actors I have used in the past, peppered with a few new ones, whose work I have admired over the years. Again, like the music, they are not necessarily people who I expect to be used in production, but simply artists who have mastered a certain level of ease with new scripts. And then sometimes, stars align, and I am fortunate enough to see my original muses originate the roles in production (as was the case with *HOSS*).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PLOT OVERVIEW**

“A play is fiction--and fiction is fact distilled into truth.” --Edward Albee

#### **Act One**

Thirty-two-year-old Bastian Fuller returns home to the humble town of Easton for Thanksgiving. He is warily greeted by his mother, Sue, who seems preoccupied with something upstairs. Bastian is concerned for Sue who is wearing window curtains as if they were a dress and wielding a half-empty bottle of scotch, even though she does not drink. After Bastian convinces Mother to remove the curtains, which “make her look fat,” Mother scurries upstairs. Bastian shares with the audience that their father, Martin, used to weed eat their carpet--“not that he would remember, of course.” He tells how Mother made sure curtains were always hung and drawn to prevent neighbors from seeing this. His monologue gives way to the entrance of his older sister, Rissa, sneaking into the house through the living room window.

Rissa, thinking she has come home for Christmas, insists that Bastian swear on his pinky that he will keep her secret of being out with “Max” all night. Rissa fears that if her parents find out, she will be “grounded for life.” Bastian reminds Rissa that (1) she’s 35 years old, well beyond the grounding age; (2) “Max” is her husband; and (3) their father is dead, and has been for a year. Rissa still insists he keep her secret, even offering

him her most prized possession: her red, patent leather pumps. Bastian promises, discounting the bribe, and Rissa deems him her favorite brother, even if he is adopted and the only brother of whom she knows.

Mother returns, discovering Rissa, and is elated that “all of her children” have made it home for Thanksgiving. Mother reminisces about the time she made their father’s favorite meal, rabbit stew, forgetting to skin the rabbit first, and then escapes back upstairs. Bastian dwells on Mother’s reference to “all of her children,” if there is only two of them, and Rissa laments the death of her childhood friend, Jacques Brel--the pet rabbit which met its demise at the hands of Mother...into their father’s stew.

The children hear a loud noise from upstairs. Bastian goes to check on their mother; Rissa begins to escape through the window, but not before sharing a coveted memory with the audience. Rissa tells of sneaking out of the window when she was fifteen to meet her beloved “Max” on the fifty-yard line of the football field. She wore her red patent leather pumps, but no bra or panties. She remembers experiencing her first kiss that night and how it tasted like bourbon. She also remembers her mother finding a spot of blood on her dress the following morning.

Mother comes back in to finally re-hang the curtains on the window. The phone rings. Rissa hopes that it is Max; Bastian, however, discovers it is a Young Woman with a baby that will not stop crying. The Young Woman asks for “Thom.” Bastian assumes the Young Woman has the wrong residence, but Mother suggests he invite her over, or at least the wailing baby.

While Rissa is upstairs, feverishly searching for her missing red pumps, Bastian tells Mother that he plans on joining the service. Mother suggests he simply join a gym.

Rissa returns, sans pumps, and learns that the Young Lady is on her way over with her baby. Rissa decides that she, too, should have a baby, and breaks the news to Mother and Bastian that she is expecting a child. She also breaks the news to Mother that she is married--to "Max." Bastian tells Mother that his best friend died last week. Mother is immediately saddened...that Bastian has not made the pitcher of martinis he promised. Rissa reenters, now suddenly three-months pregnant, after discovering a man in Mother's bed. This immediately piques Bastian's interest. After several attempts at evading the issue, Mother finally shares with the two siblings that their "brother" is upstairs. Rissa runs upstairs, thinking it is the "real" Bastian. Mother glides upstairs. There is a knock at the door, and a baby cries from outside. Bastian is left alone in wonderment.

## **Act Two**

Act Two opens with a monologue from Bastian expounding on the recent death of his best friend, Alex, who has taken his own life by shooting himself. Mother enters at the end of Bastian's story to the audience, dressed in a very weathered vintage prom dress. She is eager to greet the guests, but Bastian suggests they address the recent discovery of his "brother" instead. Mother tells Bastian that Rissa has locked herself in the room with Thom, but will prepare him for a presentation as soon as Rissa comes out.

The Young Woman is allowed in with her baby, and Mother is disappointed that the baby does not cry. She takes him into the kitchen, leaving an uncomfortable Bastian alone with the Young Woman. Bastian soon discovers her name is "Abigail"--the name of Rissa's imaginary childhood friend; it just so happens that Abigail is clad in a shiny pair of red, patent leather pumps. Rissa returns from upstairs, appearing now to be nine

months pregnant, and is numb at the sight of her--Abigail's--shoes. Both Rissa and Bastian are wary of the arrival of Abigail.

Mother returns, and Rissa is enraged at the sight of the baby, jealous that "hers" did not arrive first. Bastian harkens back to the Thom character, demanding an explanation. At the mention of his name, Abigail becomes ecstatic, not knowing before that he was upstairs. Bastian runs upstairs, expecting to finally meet him. Mother exits to the kitchen, once again with the baby, to make tequila slammers. She tells the baby a fairy tale that sheds light on who Thom is--her firstborn given up for adoption by her husband. The fairy tale also speaks of the arrival of Rissa, and the arrival (adoption) of Bastian. She ends her story with a newfound vigor to take control of her life, in the absence of her controlling husband.

Bastian rushes in and grabs tools, rushing back upstairs to break into the locked room where Thom "hides." Mother returns with tequila slammers. Bastian returns, having cut himself on the tools, with his bloody hand wrapped in cloth. Abigail sneaks upstairs.

Outside the bedroom door, Abigail speaks to Thom, without answers. She tells him that she had no idea he was going to be there when she stopped by to "drop something off." Downstairs, Rissa inquires about the cloth wrapped around Bastian's bloody hand. She discovers it is her dress--the dress from her past; it is blood-stained. Rissa storms out the front door, grabbing the dress. Abigail continues to talk to Thom, wondering if he will ever open the door, and hoping that he remembers her from a year ago. She decides to let him "sleep" and to stay for Thanksgiving dinner.

Mother asks Bastian about the death of his friend. Bastian tells her that "Alex" died from a gunshot to the head. This reminds Mother that Martin had left something for

Bastian. Handing him a gift-wrapped box, Bastian opens it revealing a loaded gun. The tension is interrupted as Rissa enters, wearing the blood-stained dress. Abigail comes in saying Thom asked her to stay for dinner. Bastian slowly goes upstairs with the boxed gun. Soon after this, there are two gunshots. Abigail runs upstairs; Mother vacantly exits to the kitchen, having left the baby in the dish drainer; Rissa doubles over in pain, having been shot.

This brings the arrival of Thom, the soldier. In a monologue to the audience, we learn about his travels to Easton to attend Martin's funeral, who he only knew as the lawn boy. At the funeral he meets Sue (Mother) for the first time. After the funeral he meets Abigail for the first time, spending the night with her intimately on the fifty-yard line of the football field. By the end of the monologue, Thom raises a gun to his head and pulls the trigger; his falling action brings the house back to life. Bastian drags Thom's dead body to the couch; Abigail is frantic, thinking Bastian has just shot him; and we discover Rissa was not shot at all.

Mother tries her best to introduce her two children to their new brother, who is in fact dead. She then requests that Bastian escort her outside to the shed, and that Rissa tray the turkey. In their absence, Abigail addresses the audience in a monologue that closely mirrors Rissa's opening monologue, but with more detail. It recounts her encounter with a stranger on the 50-yard line of the football field. She speaks of the sexual proclivities that would eventually lead to her pregnancy. We also learn that she had not seen or heard from him since that night, until now--now that he is dead. During the course of the monologue, Thom comes to life and exits the front door. Mother has clued Bastian in on who Thom is and how he came to be there for Thanksgiving. Rissa had been



eavesdropping on Abigail's detailed story, stopping her with a vehement "Liar!" Mother gets angry when Bastian suggests that Thom committed suicide, as opposed to what she thought was "friendly fire" in the line of duty.

Rissa and Bastian vacantly return to the living room, followed by Mother. Rissa carries a large origami sculpture of a turkey on a tray. Bastian enters and grabs the gun. Mother enters with a shovel and a pair of Martin's overalls. Bastian runs to the kitchen with the gun, after learning that Rissa might have left the baby in a pot on the stove. Rissa exits upstairs, in search of Abigail, with a large carving knife. Mother is left alone on the couch with the origami turkey dumbfounded. Thom enters the front door with a weed eater. Mother declares that she does not want to be a mother anymore. While dancing with the weed eater, Thom suggests she tries being a father. This spurs Mother to disrobe and to dress in Martin's overalls. Mother notices a "live" Thom for the first time. They share a touching slow dance, viewed by Bastian upon entering, now holding the gun--and the baby in a pot.

Bastian exits with the gun and baby. Thom tells Mother that it is time he goes. He exits the front door, advising her to "care for her carpet." Rissa descends the stairs, making a phone call to report a murder. She returns upstairs with her knife, beckoned by a mysterious Abigail. Mother returns with a watering can for her carpet. Bastian apologizes to the baby for having to witness his suicide. Unable to pull the trigger, Bastian releases a scream to the heavens; screams are heard from upstairs; Mother has her own release. In the midst of the aural chaos, Abigail descends the stairs, calmly, now wearing the blood-stained dress and no red pumps. She exits the window. Rissa appears at the stairs, dressed as an adult, holding the red pumps. Abigail says "bye" from outside

the window and disappears. After Mother and Bastian have regained composure, Bastian explains to the baby that he has to kill himself, and as though clarity hits him, he explains that he should also shoot the baby. Rissa puts on her red pumps. Mother renounces her children and familial obligations, declaring only to care for her carpet from now on. Rissa looks out the window, seeing Bastian with the baby at gunpoint. They connect one last time through the window. Bastian pulls the trigger on the gun at the baby, and then on himself.

Rissa walks to the window to exit. She decides to exit the front door, leaving it wide open behind her. Mother is left alone, completely exhausted, completely destroyed. She is vaguely happy for the return of her children. She returns to her carpet, stroking it and pacifying it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHARACTERS

“I have found it easier to identify with the characters who verge upon hysteria, who were frightened of life, who were desperate to reach out to another person. But these seemingly fragile people are the strong people really.”  
--Tennessee Williams

#### **Mother**

Sue Fuller is the matriarch of 1309 Sunflower Lane, recently widowed and a mother of three, all of whom have long-since flown the coop. Sue raised two of her three children, having only given birth to one of the two she raised. Thanks to Martin, her high school “sweetheart,” Sue had little to do with the making of big decisions in her life, like dances, marriage, children and adoption. Her firstborn, Thom, was given away, and her second born was, well...a girl, Rissa. Martin later decided they needed a son, so Sue was blessed with a third child, Bastian. She has a hard time dealing with real issues, especially since Martin’s death. Sue would rather hide their household behind closed curtains, shutting the world out, in hopes to protect her children from “evil doers who press upon the kingdom of Easton.” She is obsessed with cleanliness and appearances, and will do anything to hide the secrets that her family has amassed over the years. This particular Thanksgiving, in which all of her children have come home, calls for the celebration of a few (too many) drinks. She tries to gain control of the many situations and surprises which arise, but continues to spiral out of control with the emptying of each cocktail glass.

### **Actress Melissa Grogan on playing Mother**

“I remember the cast was asked to think of legends in their own families that started out as truths, but had been retold so many times that the stories wound up with little resemblance to the original events. I immediately realized that all my family does is create these legends. No moment, no person, nothing can ever be average. I’m not sure if there is any truth at all in my family’s lore--anymore. And since truth is defined by one’s own perception, people change the ‘truth’ all the time--Sue’s ‘truths’ change ALL the time. Sue is a dreamer, like all good storytellers. Problem is, she married a man who suppressed this. Since her spirit is too strong to be kept in tight reigns for too long, she got even better at being a dreamer. In fact, she becomes so strong after the death of her husband that her stories start taking on a life of their own. They start having babies, having opinions of their own, rebelling against her. That confuses her even more. She is a fundamentally confused woman who has tried to find a way to explain a horrible reality by putting a sugary icing on everything. All to protect her children; to protect herself. I found the more I listened in rehearsals the more I understood Sue and the journey she’s taking. Always listening. Even more intensely, perhaps, when not on stage. This play is so beautifully layered that you have to listen to everything. It all fits, though. If you just listen enough. And listening gives you the proper clues to fill in the gaps that need to be filled. I realized early on that I was playing my own Mother/Grandmother on stage. It made it all so very real to me. I’ve seen my Mother/Grandmother go through a journey like Sue’s time and again. It’s very healing for me to get to see the world through Mother’s eyes. I am so blessed to have had the opportunity to work on such a meaty role and with such an incredible writer, director, and cast.”

**Bastian**

The adopted son, and youngest of the family. He is never been able to keep a job for more than a month and for some reason has never been able to shed a tear, not even for the recent loss of his one and only friend, Alex--or his dad. He has little investment in anything, and has come to realize, little invested in life itself. He decides to join the service out of lack of options. Bastian appears to be the rock of the family, anchoring it, while humoring both his mother's and his sister Rissa's disconnections from reality. He is constantly reminded by his sister about his "affinity" for red pumps--and his being adopted. Being raised in a house that championed stories over reality or actual family concerns, Bastian has learned to go through life smiling, as opposed to actually feeling. He wears a consummate smile, even at his lowest.

**Actor Travis Hackett on playing "Bastian"**

"Whether you've lost a mother, a beloved family pet, or a father; we all seem to understand basic human emotions. It's knowing this that made playing Bastian all the more difficult. I never knew my father, and in a sense, Bass didn't either. What do we do with the love? I have too often negated and discredited things that have happened in life, that I now see, after the 'process' introspection, have shaped who I am and will serve as the foundation for who I am becoming. Feelings I've suppressed, mistakes I've made, 'impulsive decisions with harsher consequences,' and even indecision at times. We are ever changing and developing people, and sometimes this can be a bit much to take in. In the case of Bastian, I found a person who couldn't quite make that same leap, someone who was so much a product of the mold, so broken, he just ran out of options."

## **Rissa**

Rissa is a thirty-five year old child. Whether by choice or design, she continues to sneak in and out of her parents' window out of sport. She acts attention starved, and leaps at any opportunity to control, lead, or participate in a conversation. She detests stories, but loves telling them. She relishes the fact that she is three years older than her brother, Bastian. She yearns for love in any form and revels in opportunities to side with a family member against another. Rissa always has to be "in the know" but is usually slow at processing what it is she "knows." She cherishes her red patent leather pumps from her youth, which have since been lost, as if they symbolize something else that was lost years ago. She has not had many friends in her lifetime, save "Abigail" (imaginary), "Jacques Brel" (a rabbit), and "Max"--the subject of her most recent story, that of being married.

### **Actress Ashley Rhodes on playing "Rissa"**

"Rissa is my very core that I think I've spent the past several years suppressing, which made the process uncomfortable at times. But I have to say that Rissa came out of me with very little forethought. My biggest challenge was to constantly question the choices that came more easily than others. My overall goal for Rissa was to obtain love--any and all. She lies to get what she wants, as well as to conceal the truths that she, for years, is unable to accept. Creating her forced me to confront my own demons, while healing this 35-year-old lost soul that is Rissa Fuller. She will always be a huge part of me, not only as an actress but as a woman. This project changed me in a way for which I am eternally grateful."

## **Abigail**

A 16-year-old new mother, Abigail is a mysterious and mature girl. She dresses and conducts herself well beyond her years. She is not afraid of much, because she has not seen much. She knows nothing outside of Easton city limits. She uses her sexual prowess, to maneuver through life. Abigail does not make the best decisions, but even the bad decisions give her an opportunity to feel her life. She would rather make a mistake than regret not knowing. She falls in love at first sight with a soldier, Thom, who represents a life outside of Easton for which her heart so strongly yearns. Even though her meeting with Thom is by chance and extremely brief, she stays devoted to him through letters, knowing one day she will have the love that she has innocently nurtured in her own mind. Becoming pregnant, and becoming a mother, prove to be obstacles for her wants and desires, so she makes the rash (or adult, depending upon interpretation) decision to leave her newborn with the Fullers. This serves a dual purpose--the baby's welfare and her freedom.

### **Actress Ragan Rhodes on playing "Abigail"**

"Developing Abigail was a stagger down memory lane; finding my own life's influences that were comparable to hers. Every night was an emotional whirlpool; I loved her and all of her bad decisions. I remember my 'Thom' and how easy it was to feel as if my world had been shattered by his death. When she is waiting behind the door, she is grappling with her baby, as if saying to him "If he doesn't love me, then why should I love you." The decisions she makes are so heartbreaking, but I know, in her position, I might make the same ones."

## **Thom**

On the surface, Thom is a soldier, who lived up the road from Easton. We discover, along the way, that he is a brother, a son, a lover, a father. In this light, Thom is my “every man.” Thom speaks through one single monologue, sharing a story of his trek to Easton to attend Martin Fuller’s funeral. Martin Fuller, Thom has learned, is his biological father, not simply the man who cared for his lawn. On leave from the service, Thom is the only child who attends the funeral, where he meets Sue (“Mom”) for the first time. Thom is stoic by nature, but is able to tell a good story infused with several off-colored jokes, keeping in line with qualities of the Fuller Family. He, too, is looking for love, but nothing transitory that might satisfy Rissa. Again, he serves as the man in each of the other characters’ lives. To Mother, he is the abandoned first child finally come home (as well as also the loving-side of a husband she never knew); to Rissa he is that first kiss on the football field; to Bastian he is a best friend and potential lover; to Abigail he is a first love.

## **Actor Kenneth Hill on playing “Thom”**

“Thom is interesting because he represents more than just a character. He is the lost son; a father; a husband, an asshole; an unrequited love. The lost life he’s lead seems to me like a waking dream of loss and heartache. He is constantly seeking to attach himself to some kind of source or root, or home. But carrying the weight of it all crushes him like a warrior unable to defend his land--a land he does not know. And collapsing into himself, he takes his own life, forever placing him like a ghostly memory within the hearts of the people he influenced, if even inadvertently.”



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

“If literature isn’t everything, it’s not worth a single hour of someone’s trouble.”  
--Jean Paul Sarte

#### **Inspiration**

*House of Several Stories* began as, or because of, a classroom assignment. My final project for Advanced Playwriting in Fall 2007 was to complete a full-length script. The beginning of the semester called for a treatment of a script, and I gladly turned in one entitled, *Durang is Dead!*--a project I have yet to start, but one I feel is still lurking beneath the surface, waiting to break the light of page. The project was immediately accepted by Playwriting Professor John Hood, who seemed as eager to receive the pages as I was to start writing them. His only concern was obtaining rights from Christopher Durang’s camp to use his name, and person, as the title character. I was successful at reaching Durang’s agent, but after forwarding my treatment as was requested, I never heard back from Durang personally as was expected. I toyed with the idea of continuing with the project, as it was a mere classroom project, but the clock was ticking away the semester and dialogue would not come. I had the entire story mapped out in my head, but I could not get the characters to speak--to me or through me. Then things began to shift.

Interestingly enough, one night while listening to my iPod, with the songs on random shuffle mode, I was smoking a cigarette on my patio trying to come up with that

first line of dialogue for *Durang is Dead!*. I was facing a large window that looked into my living room, and had a sudden image of my mother's head poking through the blinds and then her coming away from the window, with the window blinds still attached around her neck. The line, "Oh, Mother" immediately popped into my head. This occurred simultaneously with the sounds of The Fleetwoods coming from my iPod. By the time I had finished my cigarette, and two subsequent ones, I had envisioned several images of a living room, and a reunion between two characters who are now "Mother" (Sue) and "Bastian" of *House of Several Stories*. I did not have a storyline or a conflict or a reason to start a new script, but I had an opening line that seemed to ignite a fire within me to write the story that is now my thesis.

I raced back to my laptop where dialogue flowed seamlessly and without end. Because the Durang script was still floating around my head, the dialogue and circumstances that transpired in *HOSS* were still in that same light, of that same vein. I had begun a wacky comedy, complete with a vitrola, red patent leather pumps, and a dead father who used to weed eat the living room carpet. I knew I was onto something that was Durang-esque if nothing else. The entirety of the first draft took three weeks, luckily in time to fulfill the classroom assignment. I was not exactly sure what would come of the script, but I knew as soon as I had typed out the words "The End" on page 142, that I had surpassed my previous works in structure, style, and character. It was unlike anything I had previously written, but still possessed my knack for quick-witted dialogue. The more I read and reread the script, I began to see puzzles appear then solved within the text; however, the more I solved, the more puzzles that appeared. I was eager to get actors behind it and start a buzz for a possible production--somewhere, anywhere.

I knew the script was joke-heavy. But I also knew that every joke held a purpose, even if not evident until 30 pages later, or after a fourth read. I had created a literary labyrinth that possessed several valid escapes but also several evident pitfalls. Holy objects ran rampant throughout the text. Symbolism was mildly disguised from page to page. Characters were echoes of each others past, and some existed simply because of the strength of their stories. A vitrola lingered forebodingly, as much a character as anything, and a dead soldier would come to life long enough to explain his existence. There was a lot to accept, but it was not clear what could stick and what should go until the script reached the next step in the process: (at least) a workshop, a public reading.

Luckily, I and *HOSS* were granted that opportunity.

### **Workshop Reading**

Working Man's Clothes Productions is a New York City-based theatre company "dedicated to developing and producing authentic and original theater by supporting new works and new talent that will incite an evolution within modern theater." It was co-founded by Texas State University-San Marcos theatre alumni Isaac Byrne and Jared Culverhouse. Dr. Charles Ney had organized a workshop reading in conjunction with Working Man's Clothes with a public performance in March 2008. The first draft, still the three-act comedy, was matched up with Director Isaac Byrne and a cast of actors from the BFA Acting programs. After three days of intense rehearsals, Isaac was really able to cut to the meat of the script, uncovering nuggets of the script within a short period of time.

As part of the workshop performance, I devised an audience feedback form to be filled out anonymously by those who stayed for the talk back conducted by Dr. John Fleming. The form asked the following questions:

- (1) Was there anything that prevented you from following the story?
- (2) How did you respond to the Abigail character?
- (3) How did you respond to the Thom character?
- (4) Did the characters of the central family (Mother, Bastian, Rissa) interest you enough to merit a subsequent story?
- (5) Any other comments you'd like to add?

It was from these feedback forms as well as the audience comments during the talkback that either made me address the weaknesses of the script, or pushed me closer to defend why some elements existed, and ultimately would stay. I received upwards of 30 forms and processed each comment. In addition, a few days after the event, Isaac emailed me a lengthy email giving an in-depth account of his experience with the workshop and his reaction to the text. The following are some of Issac's thoughts:

Director Isaac Byrnes on *House of Several Stories*

“Did you know your play had such a [sweet] acronym? HOSS!”

“I really had a great time working on the play. I was a little nervous beforehand because I knew it needed a strong cast and I wasn't sure if the jokes would play out loud. But fortunately the actors threw themselves into the material, proving the script really pops when spoken out loud.”

“All of the positives and the wonderful possibilities of play--the humor, the connecting threads, delightful ideas and wonderful images--lean a little heavy on the clever side.”

“I want to see more of the heart. That heart in Abigail’s speech about the letters; in the letters from Bastian and Mother. Those emotional undercurrents are what ground and give depth to HOSS that it needs to sustain all that cleverness and witty dialogue.”

“I’m not entirely sure that The HOSS is a comedy as much as it is a hilarious tragedy.”

“For me its about the vacuum left after a death of a child or parent, the stories we hold onto (false or true) that shape who we are, and how the story of our family and the story our family tells about us shape who we are.”

It was largely from Isaac’s feedback that made me reevaluate the text in search for a finite story, though I was strongly tied to the ambiguity in the script. It was from his feedback that I was able to finally answer the questions that many had posed: “What is the story about?” or “Why did you write it?” or “What are you trying to say with this script?” I no longer was at a loss for an answer. I was determined to come up with a sentence that told the story. Isaac led me to the answer: “*HOSS* is about how stories (whether true, false, or borrowed) help us fill the vacuums in our lives caused by death, loss, and dysfunction.” It was from this clarity that *HOSS* began to grow, deepening its meaning.

### **First Production**

The response from the workshop reading led to HOSS to be placed up for consideration for The Texas State Theatre Department’s 2008-2009 Main Season. After several faculty deliberations, the “little play that could” went back and forth from being on the bill to not. Ultimately, it would be accepted as part of the season with a limited

three-day run, but fortunately it was entered as a participating entry into the Kennedy Center's American College Theatre Festival.

Texas State theatre alum Jeremy O. Torres was approached to guest direct *HOSS*. As co-founder of his own production company, The Search Party, Jeremy would take on the challenge as not only director but also co-producer, with co-founders Adam Smith and Teresa Mikulastik. After my first meeting with Jeremy in May 2009, I knew my script was in safe and capable hands. He came fully prepared with non-intrusive questions for me, as well as reasons he would love to present this story. We were months away from the actual production, but we both knew I had several revision issues in store before solidifying an acting edition. I would spend that summer reworking the text for an October premiere.

I spent the first month of summer in classes and rehearsals for other projects, and the following month in Europe; neither of which lent itself to devoted writing time. I returned from Europe facing a major time crunch. I knew I needed to rewrite, but I still had no specifics on what needed to go to appease the critical masses.

After a meeting with the director, Jeremy, and my mentor and project supervisor, Dr. John Fleming, specifics were laid out and a direction became evident as to where I needed to start and to where it would hopefully lead. It was agreed that the length would be a start. Cutting 10-20 pages from the ending would be my first feat. Problem was, without the ending, a new climax and resolution would have to be devised. The original text contained a lovely scene where four characters presented to the audience letters, each written to an unreachable male in their lives. The letters were woven in a way that produced a symphony of heartfelt questions about, pleas for, and declarations of love.

After readings from various advisors and actors, and after the workshop, it was evident that this scene not only surpassed the others as a favorite, but it also seemed to possess great little nuggets for each character that tied neatly into their purpose, their journey, and ultimately their resolutions. It was strongly believed by some that the letters could be the end of the play. I never considered this an option, though I, too, loved the scene.

I successfully cut the final scene that was a comical episode of a Thanksgiving dinner amidst the craziest of circumstances. This change took the play to a whole new level as I tried to make sense of where these people would end up without a comical, happy, hopeful ending. The second draft was applauded by the director, for being tighter and ultimately shorter, but for some reason I felt utterly depressed with the new work for several days. I was not asked to alter the second draft, but after a few days of feeling at odds with this new text, and myself, I sat down and in seven consecutive hours of nonstop rewriting, I had come up with a third draft that not only pleased me, but also haunted me--in the best of ways. What started as a three-act Durang-esque comedy was now a two-act tragedy, ending in the deaths of our two “hero” characters. I think it was partially out of spite, partially out of anger for having to do a rewrite at all that *HOSS* is the script it is today. It was this third draft that was “frozen” as the acting edition, and the one from which the actors created and originated their roles.

Through the course of rehearsals, Jeremy and I discovered that the “letter scene”--still everyone’s favorite--no longer fit in the momentum or the arc of the story. After days of deliberation, I made the final decision to remove the scene from production. The actors were devastated, but after its removal, all involved knew it was the best decision for the

sake of the production. The scene remains intact in this thesis, and will remain in any future publications (or productions), with the disclaimer of being an optional cut.

*HOSS* premiered and ran October 2-4, 2008 at The Blue Theatre in Austin Texas. The response I received from the performances was amazing. It was never total praises, but rather it was lengthy discussions, in-depth questions, pleas for clarifications--in the best of ways. After each show, audiences would linger in the parking lot discussing interpretations; sometimes I would just get long, disconcerting looks from people, but I knew the show had hit them in a way that they did not soon forget. Nothing was crystal clear, nothing was cookie-cut. It made them think; it took them somewhere that nudged them with discomfort. I had created an experience, rather than simply entertainment.

The actors had, from months of diligent rehearsals, created memorable characters that not only touched hearts but changed them. The design team had fully created a world that encompassed my outlandish requests for these characters. An original score was composed that embodied the feel of The Fleetwoods, and was truly inspired by the text. The response was incredible; it was now up to two judges representing our region of the American College Theatre Festival to green light our project or to stop the play in its tracks. Luckily, again, it was a “go.”

### **Remount Production**

After being viewed by a Regional respondent, *HOSS* was asked to be “held.” This meant the production was being considered to show at the 2009 Region VI American College Theatre Festival, which hosts colleges across the six southern states, showcasing the strongest college performances from the previous year. Ultimately, through further



deliberation by representatives of a regional panel, *HOSS* was chosen to be one of seven productions to be showcased at the festival in February, hosted by Texas State.

Stakes had been raised with this honor, and Jeremy, Dr. Fleming and I knew that the script should be revisited, taking in consideration the feedback from the Austin production. The rehearsal process for the “remount” of *HOSS*, to be performed at the PHS Foundation Studio Theatre at Texas State, would be limited, so it had to be done quickly. Inspiration, however, is never there when I need it, so...exasperated, I threw my hands in the air and refused to rewrite. Even though I knew in my heart that the criticism about the lengthy ending, the belaboring climax, and the confusing feeling that pervaded from the final moments were true, I was completely at a loss when it came to “fixing” the script. I always thought the script could be “solved” by the director and actors, rather than fixed from external criticism. I have also found it hard to edit my scripts because of outside advice, when the advice merely states a problem without suggesting a solution. This is a fault of mine, I am sure.

Because we were on a time crunch before the February remount that would play to a public in the new space before performing at the festival, Jeremy suggested that I attend every rehearsal and play a more-involved role in the process, as opposed to the premiere where I attended a total of six rehearsals, and kept my opinions to myself. During the course of the rehearsals, we were fortunate to have had the action adapt so well to the new space; this gave us more time to clarify textual concerns that were missed in the previous production. Through the discussion I had with actors on specific lines, character development soared, character relationships strengthened, intentions became clearer. The production was elevating, but the ending still posed a problem.

One night during rehearsal, two days before opening to be exact, I was struck with the sudden urge of competition. I realized the opportunities that festival contained, and I thought to myself, “You have to step up your game.” It was partly out of the actors’ dedication to the project, each bringing their A-game every night, that I thought I owed it to them to improve the ending for a better showing. I immediately left the rehearsal space with the final 10 pages in hand, and a pencil to manipulate the text. After an hour of deliberating with myself and these words, which I had loved, the result was the omission of six pages, and the reordering of lines in the final moment. I returned to the rehearsal room with the new cuts, and the actors accepted them eagerly. They and Jeremy had two days to make sense of them, but after reading the pages aloud before the end of rehearsal, a new light was shed on the play. I knew that we had moved one step closer to perfecting the script.

The remount played to two sold-out audiences, and received two standing ovations. The cast and crew had been resurged with a new sense of pride in the production, and welcomed with open arms the next challenge of the festival the following week.

### **ACTF Regional Performance**

Texas State hosted the 2009 Region VI Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival the last week of February. The script for *HOSS* was up for all of the Michael Kanin playwriting awards, and the production was up for consideration to advance to the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, to be performed in the weeklong national festival held in April.

Seven productions were chosen to show in San Marcos, and after being viewed by a panel of three national judges, *HOSS* was, once again, asked to be “held,” along with three other productions from our region. *HOSS* received two performances during the festival, once again to packed houses and two standing ovations. The buzz seemed positive in the lobby and around the Texas State theatre building moat. Confusion still ran rampant from the final moments of the play, but I never felt that it was negatively received. There was a genuine interest to solve the puzzles that made up the world of *HOSS*.

Nothing changed textually or in production between the remount and the regional performance; we all had hoped that what we put forth was enough to be recognized by the national selection committee. Fortunately, once again, it was. Not only did my script, *House of Several Stories*, win the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival National Student Playwriting Award, but the production of *HOSS* also advanced to the KC/ACTF National Festival. Out of 56 productions, four were chosen to play at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, April 13-18. *HOSS* was asked to be the final production to close the weeklong festival.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SCRIPT**

“A work of art is above all an adventure of the mind.” --Eugène Ionesco

# **HOUSE OF SEVERAL STORIES**

a tragedy in two acts of nonsense

by

A. John Boulanger

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CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

BASTIAN, 32, BROTHER, MASCULINE, VAGUELY CHEERFUL

RISSA, 35, SISTER, SKITTISH, AFFECTED, CALCULATING

MOTHER, 53, SUE, WARM BUT ABSENT, DOTING, SECRETIVE

THOM, 35, SOLDIER, CHARMING, RUGGEDLY ANGELIC

YOUNG WOMAN/ABIGAIL, 16, MYSTERIOUS AND MATURE

TIME

Thanksgiving, we think.

PLACE

Easton. Home sweet home.

ACT I Scene 1: All My Children

GRAINY SOUNDS of an LP.

Lights come up to reveal MOTHER at the vitrola, wearing a slip, high heels and pearls. MUSIC begins to play.

Mother looks about the room with an eagle's eye for something to do, occasionally sipping her cocktail.

Her attention finally stops on the large window of the room. With purpose, Mother climbs onto a chair and begins cleaning the pane.

She steps down to inspect her work.

Content, she gathers her glass, a dingy cloth, and a bottle of scotch, turning her back to the window.

BASTIAN appears just outside, wearing a peacoat and hugging an overnight bag.

Mother pours the contents of her glass in a corner of the room. She looks up suddenly as if she has heard something and then exits up the stairs.

Bastian enters the front door and looks around the room. He places his bag and coat on the chair below the window.

He notices a spot on the pane and wipes at it with his beanie. He inspects his work. Content, he moves to the vitrola and watches the record spin.

He rubs his hand through his hair intently, walks to the window, and places his hand on the glass, smearing his hand down the length of it.

He walks the perimeter of the room, eyeing where the wall meets the floor, all the while enjoying the music from the vitrola.

He stops at a corner and squats down.

BASTIAN

(to audience) My father used to weed eat our carpet.

MOTHER

(entering) Oh, Thom--

BASTIAN

(rising) Oh, Mother.

Mother remains on the stairs. She has a curtain draped around her neck, and is carrying another folded in her arms, along with the bottle of scotch.

She looks upstairs and then at Bastian.

MOTHER

(pause) You aren't Thom.

BASTIAN

That's a relief.

MOTHER

(to herself) Isn't it?

BASTIAN

I'm Bastian.

MOTHER

My son.

BASTIAN

That's the one.

MOTHER

Then I must be your--

BASTIAN

Mother.

MOTHER

Bastian!

She rushes to greet him, without ever really touching him.

BASTIAN

No, you're my mother "Sue". I'm Bastian. Who's Thom?

MOTHER

Who cares? You're Bastian--

BASTIAN

(echoing) Who cares I'm Bastian?

MOTHER

My favorite son is home.

BASTIAN

The competition is pretty slim.

They've joined hands. Bastian spins mother and they begin a familiar dance to the music.



MOTHER

I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow.

BASTIAN

It is tomorrow.

MOTHER

So soon.

Bastian spins Mother and dips her.

BASTIAN

But Mother.

MOTHER

Yes, dear?

They "rhumba" their way to the window.

BASTIAN

What happened?

MOTHER

To whom?

BASTIAN

The window.

MOTHER

What happened to the window?

They have reached the window, parted, and are now staring at the dirty glass with cocked heads.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Heavens.

Mother measures her hand to the print.

BASTIAN

Did you fall down or something?

MOTHER

Not that I recall.

Mother lifts Bastian's hand to the window. He dodges her inspection by grabbing the bottle of scotch.

BASTIAN

And what the hell is this?

MOTHER

Scotch I think, and mind your language.

BASTIAN  
You think?

MOTHER  
Perhaps it's bourbon.

BASTIAN  
It says scotch on the label.

MOTHER  
That's right; we're all out of bourbon. Mystery solved. It's scotch. Now give the bottle.

BASTIAN  
But you don't drink, Mother.

Mother drinks.

BASTIAN (CONT'D)  
You never used to drink.

MOTHER  
You never used to cry as a baby.

BASTIAN  
I--

MOTHER  
Do you remember?

BASTIAN  
I remember the stories you used to tell--

MOTHER  
Not once.

BASTIAN  
About me not crying.

MOTHER  
You were the quietest baby anyone had ever seen.

BASTIAN  
Or heard.

MOTHER  
I always thought--

BASTIAN  
Or not heard.

MOTHER  
I always thought it was something I was doing wrong.

What? BASTIAN

You not crying. MOTHER

Was it? BASTIAN

(beat) I used to cry myself to sleep at night-- MOTHER

Because you/I never would. MOTHER/BASTIAN

Yes. You do remember. (beat) Do you cry now, Bastian? MOTHER

Everyone cries. BASTIAN

At what do you cry?

Nothing comes to mind. BASTIAN

I wish it would. It really isn't healthy not to cry. MOTHER

I'm sure that I cry. BASTIAN

You promise? MOTHER

I swear. BASTIAN

I'm glad. Now promise not to swear. MOTHER

I swear. BASTIAN

(smiles) Cheeky bastard. (quickly) I'm sorry. MOTHER

For what? BASTIAN

MOTHER  
(covering) I should mind my language.

BASTIAN  
I should mind my mother.

Mother touches Bastian's cheek.

MOTHER  
(smiling) My son.

BASTIAN  
But mother?

MOTHER  
Yes, dear.

BASTIAN  
Why're you wearing our curtains as if they were a dress?

MOTHER  
They just came back from the cleaners.

Mother finds a spot in the room, moves to it, twirls and poses.

BASTIAN  
That doesn't make it OK.

Mother continues to model the curtains about the room.

MOTHER  
I had not a thing to wear.

BASTIAN  
Now neither does the window.

MOTHER  
Are you saying I look fat?

BASTIAN  
That's all I'm saying.

MOTHER  
I'll just go change then. (beat) I'll just go change.

She tosses the folded curtain over her head and struts up the stairs.

Bastian catches the curtain, drapes it around his neck, and struts around the room in the same way Mother did.

Feeling ridiculous, he suddenly stops and looks at the

audience.

BASTIAN

(to audience) My father used to weed eat our carpet. Right here in this room as a matter of fact. Not that he would remember of course. But once a week, every week, for years, he swore that the carpet had actually grown--sometimes as much as a whole inch or two. And since the riding lawn mower wouldn't fit through the front door, weed eating was the only logical solution. He only did it around the walls, but especially in the corners and under the windows. Mother was always afraid someone was going to see him through *this* window, so she made sure curtains were always hung and drawn. Which would eventually lead to the carpet's death according to my father.

Bastian makes his way to the vitrola.

BASTIAN (CONT'D)

I was always afraid he would eventually run out of carpet.

Bastian moves the needle to the record.

BASTIAN (CONT'D)

My sister Rissa--

RISSA walks past the window outside, leaning back to peer in.

BASTIAN (CONT'D)

Was always afraid of everything.

NEW SONG begins. Bastian hides to witness her antics.

Rissa comes back to the window and looks in through cupped hands. She is dressed incognito--in an overcoat, oversized sunglasses and a scarf wrapped around her head and neck.

Rissa opens the window, sees the chair with the overcoat and nudges it as if it were a person. She tosses a suitcase through the window and climbs in.

Knocking over a chair in the process, she stops mid-movement to see if anyone has heard. She shushes the chair.

Finally inside, she peers over her glasses, scoping out her environment.

She begins quick, elaborate maneuvers throughout the room--ducking behind furniture, leaning against walls, miming a gun with her fingers, crawling across the floor on

her belly.

Finally certain that she is safe and alone, she walks to the vitrola.

She removes the needle ever-so-gently. She carefully removes the record, touching only its edges. She walks the record to the open window with great reverence.

RISSA

(tossing record out the window, to herself) It wasn't me it was Bastian. (without looking at Bastian) Bastian, what the hell are you doing here?

BASTIAN

(caught) What the hell are you doing here?

RISSA

It's Christmastime, and mind your language.

BASTIAN

It's Thanksgiving.

RISSA

Already? Why're you up so late?

BASTIAN

It's 4:30 in the afternoon.

RISSA

Are Mom and Dad asleep?

BASTIAN

Mom is taking off the curtains and Dad is dead.

RISSA

If you rat on me, I'll tell Dad you found his dirty magazine stash. (gasps) Why did Mom take off the curtains?

BASTIAN

They made her look fat.

RISSA

Did you tell her that?

BASTIAN

Somebody had to.

RISSA

You beat me to it.

BASTIAN

Why are you sneaking through the window?

RISSA

You aren't going to tell on me are you?

BASTIAN

Tell on you for what?

RISSA

If they catch me sneaking in again, I'll be grounded for life.

BASTIAN

You're thirty-five years old.

RISSA

How embarrassing would that be?

BASTIAN

And you don't live here anymore.

RISSA

It's so good to be home.

Rissa goes to hug Bastian, but catches herself.

RISSA (CONT'D)

I can't believe I just said that.

BASTIAN

Neither can I.

RISSA

Don't you say a word about Max.

BASTIAN

What is the "word" about Max?

RISSA

Promise you won't tell. (holds up pinky) I was out with him all night.

BASTIAN

(unenthused) Oh.

RISSA

I knew you wouldn't approve.

BASTIAN

He's your husband.

RISSA

Don't say a word to Mom or Dad. (beat) Dad's dead?

BASTIAN

Almost a year.

RISSA

(beat) How was the funeral?

BASTIAN

I didn't make it.

RISSA

You little bastard. Are you going to tell on me?

Bastian shakes his head "no", smiling.

RISSA (CONT'D)

Liar. I can always tell when you lie.

BASTIAN

How?

RISSA

I get a slight pang in my right ear and a twitch in my big toe.

She removes a shoe; her big toe moves.

RISSA (CONT'D)

Why do you want to destroy me?

BASTIAN

(mouths) It's fun.

RISSA

I'll give you my red patent leather pumps!

BASTIAN

Oh, yeah?

RISSA

The ones you've always adored.

BASTIAN

Have I?

RISSA

You'd like that wouldn't you?

BASTIAN

Would I?

RISSA

My red patent leather pumps?

BASTIAN

The ones I found at the football field?



RISSA

The ones you would sneak into my room to try on.

BASTIAN

That wasn't me.

RISSA

Every time I snuck out to meet Max.

BASTIAN

That wasn't me.

RISSA

He only hit me once. Max. (silence) Despite what anyone else might say? He's gotten better about his temper. And I've learned to duck. (beat) What size do you wear?

BASTIAN

Nine.

RISSA

Pumps are seven; they're yours if you keep your mouth shut.

BASTIAN

I don't want your shoes.

RISSA

But they're red.

BASTIAN

I know.

RISSA

You're adopted.

BASTIAN

I know that, too. (beat) I won't tell.

RISSA

(holding up pinky) You're my favorite brother.

BASTIAN

I'm your only brother.

RISSA

The competition is pretty slim. But since you're adopted that was a very nice thing of me to say.

MOTHER

(offstage) Bastian...

RISSA

(frantic) Shit.

BASTIAN

(fake frantic) Better sneak upstairs.

RISSA

Before she finds out about Max.

The two begin to scurry about the room.

RISSA

Cause a commotion in the kitchen or something.

Bastian grabs something and chunks it through the kitchen doorway.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(enjoyment) Wait--you should hide, too.

BASTIAN

(still playing along) Good thinking.

RISSA

Don't say a word. (hiding)

RISSA/BASTIAN

Pinkies!

Bastian stops scurrying and leans against the chair under the window casually.

Mother enters, now fully dressed.

MOTHER

(entering) What was that noise?

BASTIAN

(nonchalant) A gust of wind knocked over the chair.

Bastian knocks over the chair.

MOTHER

The window's closed.

BASTIAN

It was a large gust of wind.

MOTHER

Must be a southerly.

BASTIAN

I'll put another log on the fire.

Bastian resets the chair. Mother finds a spot in the room, moves to it, twirls, and poses.

Bastian notices her and whistles.

MOTHER

What, this old thing?

BASTIAN

You said you had nothing to wear.

MOTHER

I found it in your old room. I hope you don't mind. I had to let it out a bit. (to herself)  
Does that mean *I'm* fat? Are you hungry?

BASTIAN

No.

MOTHER

Are you sure?

BASTIAN

Yes.

MOTHER

I can make you some pancakes.

BASTIAN

No.

MOTHER

Blueberries are in season.

BASTIAN

I'm not hungry.

MOTHER

It'd be nice if we had some, but we don't.

BASTIAN

Hopes dashed.

MOTHER

What's that smell?

BASTIAN

Rissa.

MOTHER

Rissa! Get down here!

RISSA

(emerging) You swore on our pinkies!

MOTHER

I really wish you wouldn't swear.

RISSA

I knew I could never trust you.

MOTHER

Rissa, help me hang these curtains.

RISSA

He's lying, Mother. I was with Abigail all night! Not Max!

Mother stands on the chair.

MOTHER

Abigail. That name sounds *so* familiar.

RISSA

Call Abigail's mother if you don't believe me.

MOTHER

Abigail...

RISSA

Yes! Not Max.

MOTHER

Wasn't that the name of your imaginary friend, Bastian? When you were five?

RISSA

She was my imaginary friend first. I'm three years older.

MOTHER

I haven't seen Abigail in years.

BASTIAN

You've never seen Abigail, Mother.

RISSA

You never took an interest in our friends.

MOTHER

It's never too late to try. (to Bastian) How is she?

RISSA/BASTIAN

Who?

MOTHER

Abigail.

BASTIAN

Imaginary.

RISSA  
Stop calling her that.

MOTHER  
Abigail, Abigail, Abigail.

RISSA  
She goes by Constance now.

BASTIAN/MOTHER  
“Constance”?

MOTHER  
Sounds like a loose girl. Really, Rissa. I wish you’d be more discriminating about the imaginary friends with whom you associate yourself.

RISSA  
You’ve never liked my friends.

BASTIAN  
You never had any.

RISSA  
(through clenched teeth) Bastard.

BASTIAN  
Except for Jacques.

Rissa gasps. Mother has hung the curtains.

MOTHER  
I’ve a good mind to talk to her imaginary parents, this “Constance”.

RISSA  
Don’t embarrass me, Mother. And she isn’t imaginary. I was with her all night.

MOTHER  
Imaginary or not, “Constance” sounds like a loose girl.

RISSA  
I didn’t imagine it. And I wasn’t with Max.

MOTHER  
Max?

RISSA  
And I’m not lying. He is.

MOTHER  
Bastian, I wish you wouldn’t lie. It really is a great embarrassment to this family when

you do so.

RISSA

No more embarrassing than that time he was caught by Coach Rice having sex on the school bus. During the senior trip.

BASTIAN

That was you.

RISSA

(to herself) Oh, shit.

BASTIAN

And it *was with* Coach Rice.

RISSA

You promised you would never tell! He's lying.

MOTHER

Bastian, promise me that was your last lie.

BASTIAN

I swear.

RISSA

Lie.

MOTHER

Why is there a footprint on this window sill?

RISSA

What size is it? (inspects the sill) Looks like a nine. Bastian, you're grounded.

MOTHER

These curtains just came back from the cleaners.

ALL THREE

This will never do.

MOTHER

Rissa, help me remove them.

RISSA

Wha!--huh!--bu!--Why doesn't Bastian have to help? It's clearly his print. (pointing)  
Nine-seven-seven-nine.

Rissa is on the chair, removing the curtains. Mother goes to Bastian.

MOTHER

I really am happy that all of my children have come home for the holidays. It makes me feel...all warm and fuzzy inside.

Mother turns to Rissa and, linking arms, pulls her in for a quick story.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Remember that time I made your father's favorite: rabbit stew? And I forgot to skin the rabbit first? Your father didn't even notice. He simply slurped up every last drop and said, "This stew makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside."

BASTIAN

It did, too.

Rissa is petrified.

MOTHER

(to Bastian) I really am happy that all my children have come home for the holidays.

Mother glides up the stairs with her curtains.

BASTIAN

What does she mean "all of her children" have come home for the holidays?

RISSA

(numb) I cried for a week when I found out she cooked Jacques Brel.

BASTIAN

He was your best friend.

RISSA

And oh-so soft.

BASTIAN

She said it was an accident.

RISSA

You think Jacques hopped into that pot of boiling water all by himself? He had bad knees. I'm sticking with foul play.

BASTIAN

She was just trying to hide from us the fact that we were so poor.

RISSA

We weren't so poor.

BASTIAN

(smiles) We ate your pet rabbit.

RISSA

Poor us.

BASTIAN

Poor Jacques Brel.

RISSA

I cried for a week.

BASTIAN

Max hit you?

RISSA

. Only once. I've learned to duck. If you tell her I was with him last night...I'll kill *your* best friend (like she killed mine).

BASTIAN

I don't have a best friend. And he's your husband. Isn't he?

RISSA

Isn't he? (beat) Sorry you couldn't make the wedding.

BASTIAN

The invitation was--

RISSA

It was standing room only and I know how crowds hate you.

BASTIAN

"How *I* hate *crowds*"?

RISSA

Yes.

BASTIAN

What did she mean by "all of her children"?

Bastian goes to the vitrola; MUSIC plays.

RISSA

We're both home for Christmas.

BASTIAN

Thanksgiving.

RISSA

Do you smell bourbon?

BASTIAN

I think it's scotch.

RISSA

I wish it were bourbon.

BASTIAN

Mother said we're all out.



RISSA

How tragic.

A LOUD CRASH form upstairs.

BASTIAN

What the hell was that--?

Rissa rushes to the window. Bastian rushes to the foot of the stairs and freezes. Rissa opens the window, turns around and smiles.

RISSA

(to audience) One night when I was sixteen, I snuck out the window to meet Max on the 50-yard line of the football field. I wore my red patent leather pumps and my hair in a French braid, which Bastian had fashioned after I woke him for advice on my outfit. He was better at those kinds of things and, imaginary or not, Abigail was nowhere to be found. I wasn't exactly sure what was going to happen that night, but I remember not wearing panties or a bra. It was cold out, but the breeze was invigorating as I barreled down toward the school, smiling from ear to ear--through clenched teeth to prevent the fluttering butterflies from escaping my stomach. When I got to the field, the gate was chained and padlocked. Without a second's thought, I began to scale the looming fence; perhaps I was eager. But the hem of my skirt, which was already frayed, because apparently we were poor, caught on a link and tore as I made my way down. Being a gymnast, I dismounted fine, but the link must have scratched my leg, because the next morning Mother found a spot of blood on my dress. (beat) That night I experienced my first kiss. It tasted like bourbon. The butterflies must've become drunk because the fluttering stopped. Everything stopped. That night I had my first kiss and it tasted like bourbon. That night I also lost my--

BASTIAN

(whispers) Red patent leather pumps.

RISSA

Red patent leather pumps. I ran home from the football field, hoping the speed coupled with the wind would wash away the smell of the--bourbon. And I prayed to God the whole way that Mother was still asleep, or if she wasn't, that she wouldn't be able to  
(MORE)

RISSA (CONT'D)

smell me or the bourbon, and I remember praying for the safe return of my red patent leather pumps. It was that night I was convinced God did exist. When I got to this window, I noticed Daddy in his recliner. I knew it was safe to enter because his favorite show was on and he was resting his eyeballs. But when I stepped into the bush just below the window, I landed on the tail of a skunk, which must have pissed him off, because he sprayed me with his stink. I had asked God to wash away the smell of the bourbon and He did. And my red pumps showed up outside my door the following morning. I smelled like a skunk's ass, but I knew there was a God.

The same LOUD CRASH from upstairs. Rissa closes the window.

BASTIAN  
(unfreezes) What the hell was that noise?

MOTHER  
(entering) A large gust of wind knocked over a chair.

BASTIAN  
Must be a southerly.

RISSA  
I'll put another log on the fire.

MOTHER  
(suddenly) What's that smell?

BASTIAN  
Rissa.

MOTHER  
Rissa!

RISSA  
It's bourbon!

BASTIAN  
It's scotch.

RISSA  
I wish it were bourbon.

MOTHER  
Me, too. I'm almost out of scotch. How about a mojito? I can make us all a nice pitcher of mojitos.

RISSA  
You don't drink, Mother.

MOTHER  
You should've told me that before I opened the last bottle of scotch.

RISSA  
You never used to drink.

MOTHER  
You never used to cry as a baby.

BASTIAN

That was me.

MOTHER

Oh. Yes. Rissa used to cry enough for everybody. Do you remember?

RISSA

I remember the stories.

MOTHER

She never stopped as a matter of fact. I thought it was something I was doing wrong. I used to cry myself to sleep at night, because she never stopped. Finally, I got used to it. In fact--

MOTHER/RISSA

It was the only way I/you could fall asleep there for a while.

MOTHER

Yes. You do remember.

RISSA

Stories.

MOTHER

Do you still cry, Rissa?

RISSA

Yes.

MOTHER

At what do you cry?

RISSA

Everything.

MOTHER

I'm so glad. Will you help me hang the curtains now?

Rissa and Mother joyously make their way to the window.  
Rissa stands on the chair.

BASTIAN

The window looks better without them, Mother. It actually brings more light into the room.

RISSA

It'll be dark soon.

MOTHER

What if someone should see in?

RISSA  
Yeah, Bastian. What then?

BASTIAN  
Who?

MOTHER  
You never know.

RISSA  
You just never know.

BASTIAN  
Nobody is out there. Nobody is looking in.

Rissa and Mother quickly look at Bastian.

RISSA  
Somebody is always out there.

MOTHER  
Somebody is always looking in.

RISSA  
Quick, Mother, before someone sees.

BASTIAN  
Sees what?

MOTHER  
You never know.

RISSA  
You just never know.

The phone RINGS.

BASTIAN  
I'll get it.

RISSA  
*I'll* get it!

Rissa jumps off the chair.

RISSA (CONT'D)  
It could be Max.

MOTHER  
Who's Max?

RISSA  
Bastian, you promised not to tell! He's lying, Mother.

MOTHER

Bastian, you promised not to lie.

RISSA

Grounded! (sexy voice into phone) Hello, Max?

BASTIAN

(to Mother) You've never met Max?

MOTHER

Who?

RISSA

Are you there? Talk to me, Max. Just talk to me. I know you're sorry for what you did, and I--I'm ready to forgive you. (to Mother) Isn't that rather adult of me?

MOTHER

(to Bastian) What did he do?

RISSA

(to Mother) Shh!

Sound of a BABY CRYING from the phone.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(to phone) Are you crying?

MOTHER

I don't think I'm crying. Bastian, am I crying?

RISSA

He's crying like a baby.

MOTHER

How nice. Bastian never cried like a baby or anything else.

RISSA

Do you hear him? He's wailing like a babe. Just like me; right, Mother?

MOTHER

I don't know; bring me the phone.

RISSA

He's so sad. I need my red patent leather pumps!

Rissa drops the phone and runs upstairs.

MOTHER

That'll cheer him up. Surely.

A YOUNG WOMAN appears on the side of the stage,  
holding a phone receiver and a bundled-up baby.

BASTIAN

(into phone) Hello? Max? It's Rissa's brother, Bastian.

MOTHER

Did I ever make that pitcher of mojitos?

YOUNG WOMAN

Hello?

BASTIAN

(to phone) Yes.

MOTHER

Did we drink it already?

YOUNG WOMAN

Can you hear me?

BASTIAN

(to phone) Yes.

MOTHER

I'll just go make another pitcher then.

BASTIAN

(to phone) Can I help you?

MOTHER

I'll be fine. (exits to kitchen)

YOUNG WOMAN

Is this the Fuller's residence?

BASTIAN

The fullest.

YOUNG WOMAN

1309 Sunflower Lane?

BASTIAN

As long as I can remember.

Sound of BABY CRYING.

YOUNG WOMAN

Stop it!

BASTIAN

You stop it.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm trying. (to baby) Shh. There, there now.

BASTIAN

Can I help you?

YOUNG WOMAN

You can help me find-- Shit.

She accidentally drops the baby.

RISSA

(entering) You can help me find my red patent leather pumps; all I could find were my old tap shoes.

Rissa sits to put on the shoes.

The baby continues to CRY.

RISSA (CONT'D)

Is he still crying like a baby?

BASTIAN

I think it *is* a baby.

RISSA

Don't you call Max a "baby." He's bigger than you and will kick your ass if I want him to.

BASTIAN

There's a real baby on the phone.

RISSA

Real babies don't use phones. Their fingers are too small and they rarely have anything to say.

BASTIAN

It's someone *with* a baby.

RISSA

What's Max doing with a baby?

BASTIAN

It isn't Max.

RISSA

What did the baby do with Max???

BASTIAN

It's a lady on the phone.

RISSA

What is Max doing with a lady on the phone?

Rissa struggles for the phone.

BASTIAN

It's a lady with a baby on the phone--not Max!

MOTHER

(entering with Mojitos) How is Max?

RISSA

Max who?

MOTHER

I was wondering that myself.

BASTIAN

It's not Max.

MOTHER

Not that I would know who that was either way.

RISSA

(to Bastian) Are you sure?

BASTIAN

Shh!

RISSA

Then why the hell am I wearing my tap shoes?

MOTHER

You aren't. Those are Bastian's tap shoes.

RISSA

They were mine first. I'm three years older.

BASTIAN

(to phone) Hello?

MOTHER

Since you have them on, you might as well do a number.

BASTIAN

(to phone) Are you there?

RISSA

What am I? Some sort of show pony?

YOUNG WOMAN

(to Bastian) Yes.

RISSA

Anyway, I'm glad I didn't find my red patent leather pumps. I ran all the way upstairs for some stupid lady with some stupid baby.



MOTHER  
What lady with what baby?

YOUNG WOMAN  
(to herself) Stupid baby.

RISSA  
Why are you asking me? Ask Bastian.

BASTIAN  
(to phone) Are you there?

MOTHER  
He's on the phone.

ABIGAIL/RISSA  
Yes!/Yes!

RISSA (CONT'D)  
With some lady with a baby!

MOTHER  
How nice. Babies are so nice to have around for the holidays. That isn't a collect call is it?

BASTIAN  
Who are you looking for?

YOUNG WOMAN  
(mistaken) Thom?

BASTIAN  
Thom who?

Baby continues to CRY.

YOUNG WOMAN  
(to baby) I don't know what to do.

MOTHER  
You should invite her over, Bass--or at least the baby. Is the baby still crying?

YOUNG WOMAN  
Why won't you stop?

BASTIAN  
(to Mother) Yes.

MOTHER  
Maybe she could drop him off for a while.

YOUNG WOMAN

I can't do this anymore.

BASTIAN

He apparently won't stop.

MOTHER

How nice is that?

RISSA

Oh, Mother, for God's sake. I can cry, too. Look.

Rissa starts to cry, and then she starts to tap.

RISSA (CONT'D)

I can also tap. I bet that stupid baby can't tap.

MOTHER

Rissa, stop calling the baby "stupid;" we haven't even met him yet.

RISSA

(still tapping) Babies *are* stupid. Have you ever tried having a conversation with one? They're idiots!

MOTHER

But they're so nice to have around for the holidays.

RISSA

Or at a barbecue.

MOTHER

Mojito?

RISSA

Fine. (taking a glass) But I'm not doing another tap routine.

MOTHER

(to Rissa) That isn't a collect call, is it?

RISSA

I can't hear you, Mother; I'm taking off my tap shoes.

Rissa runs upstairs. We hear a THUD.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(offstage) I'm all right.

BASTIAN

(to phone) I think you might have the wrong residence.

YOUNG WOMAN

1309 Sunflower Lane?

BASTIAN  
(to phone) There isn't a Thom who lives here.

YOUNG WOMAN/MOTHER  
Of course, there isn't--

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Now, Hang up.

YOUNG WOMAN  
I'll be right there.

BASTIAN  
What?

MOTHER  
Hang up, Bass.

YOUNG WOMAN  
I'll be right over.

BASTIAN  
(into phone) What? Why?

YOUNG WOMAN  
I've no where else to go.

Lights suddenly go out on Young Woman.

MOTHER  
Because I don't want a large phone bill from some stupid lady with some stupid baby;  
now, do I?

BASTIAN  
(into phone) Hello?

MOTHER  
Hi there.

BASTIAN  
She hung up.

MOTHER  
First she calls collect, and then she hangs up on you. It's probably best that you didn't  
invite her over. You didn't invite her over did you?

BASTIAN  
No.

MOTHER  
It's probably best.

BASTIAN

But she's on her way.

MOTHER

And she wasn't even invited; how rude. Is she bringing the baby that wouldn't stop crying?

BASTIAN

I assume so.

MOTHER

All is forgiven. What's that smell? Rissa, get down here!

RISSA

(entering with bunny slippers) What did I do now?

MOTHER

Help me tidy up a bit for our guest.

RISSA

Bastian's not a guest.

MOTHER

Just help me tidy up.

RISSA

I can't. I have a blister from doing my tap routine.

MOTHER

I'm not asking you to tidy up with your toes. Take this into the kitchen.

RISSA

Which way is the kitchen?

MOTHER

Take a right at the window and then a sharp left. You can't miss it.

RISSA

What if I get lost on my way back?

BASTIAN

Follow the sounds of our voices.

RISSA

Say something so I know what to listen for.

MOTHER

"Cry Baby Bunting. Daddy's gone a-hunting--gone to fetch a rabbit skin, to wrap the Baby Bunting in."

RISSA

(horrificed) Oh, Jacques. (exits to kitchen)

BASTIAN  
What was *that*?

MOTHER  
Must be the scotch.

BASTIAN  
Lay off the scotch.

MOTHER  
I have, dear. This is a mojito.

BASTIAN  
(smiles) Mother--

MOTHER  
I'm so excited about our little visitor; aren't you excited about our little visitor?

BASTIAN  
Ecstatic. But Mother--

MOTHER  
It's been years since we've had a baby in the house.

BASTIAN  
That's true. Mother, I need to--

MOTHER  
This is going to be the best Thanksgiving ever.

BASTIAN  
Talk. To. You.

MOTHER  
All my children are home and some aren't even mine.

BASTIAN  
Mother!

MOTHER  
(shocked silence) Yes, Bastian?

BASTIAN  
(smiles) Before they arrive, there's something I'd like to discuss.

MOTHER  
With whom, dear?

BASTIAN  
You.

MOTHER

Is it about the carpet?

BASTIAN

What?

MOTHER

I've watered it and watered it; it just doesn't seem to want to grow.

Mother empties the contents of her glass onto a corner of the carpet.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Is it not getting enough sunlight? Should I remove the curtains, like you said?

BASTIAN

It's not the carpet.

Mother opens the curtains. Bastian sits down for a heart to heart and taps on the couch as an invite.

MOTHER

This seems pretty serious.

Mother pours herself another drink. Bastian taps again on the couch.

Mother, after several seconds, sits.

MOTHER

I wish your father was here. (laughs)

BASTIAN

(laughs) I miss him, too.

MOTHER

No. (beat) He was just better at this "serious-discussion" thing than I.

BASTIAN

Was he?

MOTHER

Wasn't he?

BASTIAN

I don't remember. Comparatively, I guess he was.

MOTHER

Of course, he was. (beat) You look so serious.

Bastian feigns a more serious look.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

You look as if someone has just died.

MOTHER/BASTIAN

(to themselves) Well...

MOTHER

Are you?

BASTIAN

What?

MOTHER

Dying?

BASTIAN

No.

MOTHER

Am I?

BASTIAN

I don't think so.

MOTHER

You aren't certain?

BASTIAN

I'm certain that's not what I was going to tell you.

MOTHER

I'm so relieved.

They share a relieved laugh.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Well, I'm not dying, and you're not dying. Your father's--

BASTIAN

Already dead.

MOTHER

I guess that leaves Rissa. (smiles)

BASTIAN

Nobody is dying.

MOTHER

I wish that were true.

BASTIAN

None of the three of us are dying.

MOTHER

No? No. We're stuck here for a while longer, I guess; aren't we?

BASTIAN

None of us are "dying".

MOTHER

Yet we're still having a serious conversation.

BASTIAN

Trying.

MOTHER

I wish Martin were here.

Mother downs her drink.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Perhaps I should sit down.

BASTIAN

You are.

MOTHER

Then I must be ready.

BASTIAN

(beat) I'm a little nervous.

MOTHER

I don't know what you have to be nervous about; you already know what you're going to say, so just say it!

BASTIAN

I've decided to join the service.

MOTHER

Oh. (beat) What service would that be, dear?

BASTIAN

The armed one. The military. The United States military.

MOTHER

Oh. (beat) How nice; I've been thinking about joining a gym.

BASTIAN

Is that so?

MOTHER

It's never too late to take pride in one's own appearance.



BASTIAN

A gym?

MOTHER

I know, it's silly. It sounds silly. It's silly. The idea: silly. It's a silly idea. Me...a gym. Isn't that silly?

BASTIAN

A gym.

What do you think?

BASTIAN

I think it's a fabulous idea.

MOTHER

Because I'm fat? (beat) I think so, too.

BASTIAN

Fabulous idea.

MOTHER

I think so, too.

Mother tries to down her empty drink.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

I'm so glad we had this talk. I'm better at them than I thought. We didn't need Martin after all.

BASTIAN

(subtly) We never did; did we?

RISSA

(offstage) If you guys expect me to follow your voices, you're going to have to talk louder!

MOTHER

(whisper) I should freshen up for our guest.

Mother tiptoes to the stairs, grabbing the bottle of scotch on her way.

BASTIAN

(suddenly) Mother!

MOTHER

(stopping) Yes, dear?

BASTIAN

(beat) Happy Thanksgiving.

Mother smiles and starts out.

RISSA

(entering) Mother!

MOTHER

Yes, Rissa?

RISSA

Where are you going?

MOTHER

To make myself more presentable.

RISSA

For whom?

MOTHER

Some lady with a baby, I suppose. (exits upstairs) Perhaps you should do the same.

RISSA

What? Ugh. No fun at all. A lady with a baby is just a stupid lady with a baby. Stupid babies. (as Mother) "Babies are nice to have around for the holidays." (herself) Babies are nice to have with beans and potato salad at a barbecue.

Rissa loses herself in laughter alone. She quickly snaps out of it.

RISSA (CONT'D)

Or in a stew. (calculating) How about that, Mother? We can have baby stew for Thanksgiving dinner. (stoic) I miss Jacques Brel. (snaps out of it) Babies. (beat) Baby. (beat) A baby could be nice. Babies are just what you need when you are home for the holidays. Babies are just what you need...Bastian, I have something to tell you.

BASTIAN

I have something to tell you.

RISSA

Of course you do. Everything's a competition with you. News flash: I'm three years older; I have something to tell you first.

They sit down to have a heart to heart.

RISSA (CONT'D)

But it's very important, so it'll have to wait for Mother.

They sit in silence.

BASTIAN

What took you so long in the kitchen?

RISSA

I was making the turkey.

BASTIAN

You were making the turkey?

RISSA

It's Thanksgiving and we're fresh out of rabbits.

BASTIAN

*You* were making the turkey?

RISSA

I didn't touch the stove.

They sit in silence. Rissa begins filing her nails. More silence.

RISSA

What are we doing?

BASTIAN

Waiting for Mother?

RISSA

That's right; I have news.

BASTIAN

So do I.

RISSA

I'm older.

BASTIAN

We don't need Mother for my news.

RISSA

Mine must be more important.

BASTIAN

She already knows what I have to say.

RISSA

No, she doesn't.

BASTIAN

Yes, she does.

RISSA

No, she doesn't.

BASTIAN  
Yes, she does.

RISSA  
No. She doesn't.

BASTIAN  
Yes. She does.

RISSA  
No, she doesn't!

BASTIAN  
Yes, she does.

Rissa grabs Bastian's face with both hands.

RISSA  
No! She! Doesn't!

BASTIAN  
(pause) I already told her my news.

RISSA  
(releasing him) Wha!--huh!--bu!--You told her your news before you told *me* your news?

BASTIAN  
You were in the kitchen.

RISSA  
Making the turkey!

BASTIAN  
Without a stove!

RISSA  
I don't think you're my favorite brother anymore.

BASTIAN  
I don't think you have a choice.

Rissa stands up to over-dramatically compose herself.

RISSA  
Mother!!! (to herself) Where is that wretched woman?

BASTIAN  
Getting ready for our guest.

PHONE RINGS.

RISSA  
Uncle Clifton?

BASTIAN

Who?

Rissa lifts the phone receiver and hangs it up.

RISSA

What guest?

BASTIAN

The lady from the phone is on her way over.

RISSA

Where?

BASTIAN

Here.

RISSA

Why?

BASTIAN

I don't know.

RISSA

Should we hide?

BASTIAN

I don't see why not.

RISSA

She could be dangerous.

BASTIAN

She could be drunk.

RISSA

What was her name?

BASTIAN

I didn't get it.

MOTHER

(entering) Maybe the baby's drunk. Did you get the baby's name?

BASTIAN

(to himself) Did she say it was "Thom"?

MOTHER

(to herself) Cheeky bastard.

RISSA

Who is this mysterious lady?

BASTIAN/MOTHER

I've no idea.

RISSA

And you invited her over?

BASTIAN

I didn't invite her anywhere.

MOTHER

I invited the baby; I don't care much for the lady.

RISSA

She's coming.

MOTHER

Someone has to pay for the baby's cab.

RISSA

No one ever pays for my cabs.

BASTIAN

I'm not sure we even have cabs in Easton.

MOTHER

The baby can't drive himself.

RISSA

It'd have to be a big baby to reach the pedals.

MOTHER

And if he walks, he'll be too tired when he gets here. A sleeping baby is no fun at all.

RISSA

Maybe that wasn't a lady on the phone.

MOTHER

Maybe it was Max.

RISSA

Max who?

MOTHER

I've no clue.

BASTIAN

It was a lady, she had a baby, and she's on her way over.

RISSA

And you're not afraid?

BASTIAN

I've no reason to be.

RISSA

Perhaps. (beat) Perhaps it was just Aunt Ruth, playing a trick on us.

MOTHER

(upset) What is your Aunt Ruth doing with a baby?

BASTIAN

We don't have an Aunt Ruth.

MOTHER

Oh--

RISSA

Then who am I thinking of?

MOTHER

Your Aunt Barbara.

RISSA

Oh--

BASTIAN

We don't have an Aunt Barbara.

MOTHER

Then who am *I* thinking of?

BASTIAN

I've no idea. We don't have any aunts as far as I know.

RISSA

I think he's right.

MOTHER

It's probably best. Neither your Aunt Barbara nor your Aunt Ruth has ever sent cards or gifts around the holidays.

RISSA

Maybe they're poor, too.

MOTHER

You were always better at remembering those kinds of things, Bastian.

RISSA

What was I better at, Mother?

MOTHER

Origami.

RISSA

What the hell is Origami?

Mother makes her way to the vitrola.

MOTHER

Do you remember how your father and I used to--

RISSA

I remember.

Rissa rushes for the window. Bastian rushes for the door.  
They both freeze.

MUSIC comes in softly. Mother turns around, pleased. She  
grabs a drink and looks at the audience.

MOTHER

I remember...When I was fifteen, Martin Fuller walked up to me during homeroom and told me that we were going to the Spring Dance together. And instead of waiting for a response, he simply walked away. I'm sure I would have said "yes," but since it wasn't a question, there really wasn't a reason for me to come up with an answer--which is probably best, because I'm incapable of making decisions on my own. Even when I do, it's invariably the wrong one.

RISSA/BASTIAN

(still frozen, whisper) Yes.

MOTHER

I'm certain I would have said "yes," had there been an actual invitation. Two and a half years later, Martin walked me home after the Homecoming Dance, and when we reached the front porch, he let me know that we had been dating for two years and that I was going to marry him after graduation. I remember him trying his best to get the ring around my finger, when he said he must've bought it a size too small. I said, "No. I must've been born a size too large." He finally gave up, and just handed me the ring. And then he started in on how he was going to provide for me, and take care of me and some other business about love, I think. But I couldn't stop thinking about that lime green taffeta dress Priscilla Jackson wore to the dance, and how she glowed when the crown went atop her head. And wishing I had worn a lime green taffeta dress, and that Glenda Barnes had won Homecoming Queen because at least she was still a virgin. And then I started to cry.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Which must have made Martin feel uncomfortable, because he quickly left. After he was gone, I walked home. I didn't have the heart to tell Martin he pseudo-proposed to me on the neighbor's front porch. He already seemed so nervous. Perhaps he was drunk. But as I lay in bed that night, I remember thinking, Aren't I fortunate? To have someone like Martin in my life to help me make big decisions about dances and marriage. Since I'm incapable of making decisions on my own. And when I do, it's invariably the wrong one.



RISSA/BASTIAN

(still frozen, whisper) Yes.

MOTHER

I'm certain my answer would've been "yes," had there been an actual proposal.

Rissa and Bastian unfreeze and slowly make their way back  
into the room.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Do you remember how your father and I used to make up relatives who lived in far-off,  
exotic places--

BASTIAN/RISSA

(exanimate) To give us a better sense of familial connection.

MOTHER

You do remember.

RISSA

My favorite was always Uncle Clifton.

BASTIAN

I almost forgot Uncle Clifton.

MOTHER

How could you forget your Uncle Clifton?

RISSA

He lived in Malaysia!

BASTIAN

With his eight children and their *au pair*.

RISSA

Eight children...

BASTIAN

(to Rissa) Can you think of anything more tragic?

MOTHER

Two.

BASTIAN

I remember their eight names.

RISSA

I remember their eight names first; I'm three years older.

MOTHER

How could you forget? They're your cousins.

RISSA

In order!: Merle, Michelle, Guy, Timothy, Ferrel, Jonathan, Benji, and Melissa.

BASTIAN

I thought Benji was the youngest.

RISSA

That was in order by height. Melissa was dwarfish; wasn't she, Mother?

MOTHER

I thought the *au pair* was a dwarf.

RISSA

Sybil couldn't be a dwarf and look after eight children all by herself.

MOTHER

Of course not. That's why they were all eaten up by tigers, while visiting the National Zoo in Kuala Lumpur.

BASTIAN

Dad said they died of consumption.

MOTHER

Your father had little flair for fiction.

RISSA

What did he have a flair for?

MOTHER

Landscaping.

RISSA

That's right; look at the carpet.

They all do. Mother empties her drink on the floor.

RISSA

What did I have a flair for?

MOTHER

Origami is all I recall.

RISSA

(to Bastian) What the hell is that?

BASTIAN

Mother. Rissa has news!

MOTHER

(to Bastian) What is it?

RISSA

Why are you asking him? It's my news, and I think you should sit down.

MOTHER

I thought I was. (she sits) If this is about Bastian joining the service, I've already heard, and I think--

RISSA

Not everything is about Bastian, Mother. (quickly to Bastian) What service are you joining?

MOTHER

(to Bastian) Was it a secret?

RISSA

The Secret Service?

BASTIAN

The military. (beat) The United States military. (beat) The navy to be exact.

Rissa smiles, then chuckles, and then laughs maniacally.

MOTHER

Bastian, I've been thinking; this group you want to join?

BASTIAN

Navy.

MOTHER

Are you sure they take people like you?

BASTIAN

What does that mean, "People like me"?

RISSA

(stops laughing) Adopted.

MOTHER

Your age.

RISSA

Oh.

BASTIAN

Don't ask, don't tell.

MOTHER

Surely they have ways of figuring it out. They'll probably ask for a birth certificate, and if they have a calculator, they can simply do the math.

BASTIAN

I'm thirty-two.

RISSA

(gasp) When did you get so old? (to Mother) How old does that make you??

BASTIAN

The cut off age is thirty-four.

RISSA

(gasp) How old am I again?

Mother looks to Bastian.

BASTIAN

Thirty-five.

MOTHER

Thirty-five, dear.

Rissa faux faints to the floor.

BASTIAN

I can still enlist, but I'm running out of time.

RISSA

Wait! Does that mean I can't join the service?

MOTHER

Did you want to?

RISSA

I'd at least like the option. If Bastian gets to join, why can't I? I'm three years older.

MOTHER

I think we've established that as the reason.

RISSA

I don't like that one bit. I think I'll file a complaint.

MOTHER

I think I'll file my nails. Has anyone seen my emery board?

Rissa gets a pad and pen from the desk. She hands Mother her emery board.

RISSA

To whom should I address the letter?

MOTHER

Clark Gable.

RISSA

Who the hell is that?

MOTHER

Address it to me. I always enjoy receiving your letters. There's a stamp in the bureau.

RISSA

I've never written you a letter.

MOTHER

That's right you haven't.

RISSA

In fact, I've never written a letter at all.

MOTHER

Don't you think it's about time you did?

RISSA

I'm too busy, Mother. I'm trying to change the world.

Rissa goes to the phone.

MOTHER

Oh, Rissa. Activism is so unlady-like.

RISSA

Who's in charge of the United States military?

BASTIAN

The President.

MOTHER

What will the neighbors think?

RISSA

The curtains are hung. (into phone) Hello, Rosie, I'd like the President of the military, please.

BASTIAN

The United States.

RISSA

He's also the President of the United States. (confused) Business or residence?

MOTHER

He lives in a white house on a hill.

RISSA

Residence.

BASTIAN

You can't just call the White House.

MOTHER

It's so unlady-like.

BASTIAN

Hang up the phone.

RISSA

(to Bastian) You just don't want me to kill more people than you when I'm in the military. (to phone) Yes, that's what I said. (to Bastian) Everything's a competition with you. (to phone) No, this isn't a joke. Doesn't he have a secretary or someone with whom I can leave a message?

MOTHER

I hate seeing my little peanuts get their hopes dashed.

RISSA

(to phone) Don't you dare tell me to have a nice day!

Rissa chunks the receiver out the window.

MOTHER

(smiles) I really do.

RISSA

She hung up on me.

MOTHER

Are you going to cry?

BASTIAN

I think the military--!

MOTHER

It might make you feel better.

BASTIAN

Is exactly what I need to--!

MOTHER

Come on, Riss.

RISSA

I so wanted to join. Max would've really liked that.

Bastian steps out the front door and lets out an enormous yell, which goes completely unnoticed.

RISSA (CONT'D)

Why couldn't you have adopted Bastian before giving birth to me? That way I'd be younger and be able to join the service and make Max happy.

MOTHER

Whoever the hell that is.

Bastian shuts the door, and is completely composed.

BASTIAN

(to Mother) Language. (to Rissa) How would that make Max happy?

RISSA

Max was in the military himself. Are you trying to steal him from me?

MOTHER

First Abigail; now Max.

BASTIAN

Max wasn't in the military.

RISSA

Why would I lie?

MOTHER

If anyone else lies today, they're grounded.

RISSA

His heroism was part of his appeal. He fought in the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and that war in the gulf. The Cold War was excruciating on his rheumatism.

MOTHER

I imagine it would be.

RISSA

He also served in both World Wars, the French *and* Indian wars, and the War on Drugs.

BASTIAN

And he also hit you.

MOTHER

Riss?

RISSA

He has seven purple hearts and two green thumbs like Daddy.

MOTHER

Max hit you?

RISSA

Only once.

BASTIAN

She's learned to duck.

MOTHER

I guess serving in so many wars must've had an amplifying affect on his aggression level. But still, hitting you is unacceptable. Maybe I should speak to *his* imaginary parents, too.

RISSA

Don't embarrass me, Mother. And he isn't imaginary. I was with him all night.

MOTHER

I thought you said you were with Abigail all night.

BASTIAN

Constance.

MOTHER

That loose girl?

RISSA

I lied.

MOTHER

You're grounded. Go to your room.

RISSA

(to Bastian) I knew I could never trust you.

BASTIAN

You can't ground her.

RISSA

Not if I run away she can't.

MOTHER

I have no other choice, Bastian. She told a lie.

RISSA

Cause a commotion in the kitchen or something.

Bastian throws something into the kitchen. Rissa dashes for the window.

BASTIAN

She's thirty-five years old.

MOTHER

Is that the cut-off age?

Rissa chunks her suitcase out the window.

RISSA

I'm running away with Max! And you'll never see us again!



BASTIAN

She just didn't want to upset you.

MOTHER

Upset me about what?

RISSA

(running upstairs) And I'm taking my red patent leather pumps!

BASTIAN

Maybe that's part of her news.

MOTHER

I don't know how much more news I can handle. (hiccups)  
Or mojitos.

BASTIAN

Let's move away from the mojitos.

MOTHER

What'd you have in mind?

RISSA

(entering) All I could find were my old tap shoes.

MOTHER

Bastian's old tap shoes!

Rissa throws the tap shoes at Bastian. She grabs a random  
piece of furnishing (*i.e.* vase) and climbs out the window.

BASTIAN

How about some coffee?

MOTHER

How about a dirty martini? I can make us a nice pitcher of dirty martinis.

RISSA

(stops) Dirty martinis...? No! I'm running away!

Rissa continues out the window.

BASTIAN

I'll make us all martinis after we hear her news.

RISSA

(outside) Don't you dare try to stop me!

BASTIAN

(loudly) But you haven't told us your news.

RISSA

That's right; I haven't! (ducks down)

Bastian opens the window, inviting Rissa back in.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(hidden) Am I still grounded?

Rissa slowly comes up. She hands Bastian the random vase, then her suitcase, and then herself.

She sits down for a heart to heart.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(pause) I thought we were having martinis.

MOTHER

That's the only reason I'm still here.

BASTIAN

Rissa. News.

RISSA

I don't know how you're going to take this.

MOTHER

Easier with a martini.

RISSA

I'm pregnant. (beat) I'm having a baby. (beat) I'm going to be a mother, just like you. And you're going to be a grandmother, just like...Grandmother. And Bastian will be an uncle like Uncle Clifton and move to Malaysia, thank god. And we'll all live happily ever after and I helped. (beat) What do you think?

Mother smiles, then chuckles, and then laughs maniacally.

BASTIAN

(to himself) Pregnant. (goes to the window and looks out)

MOTHER

I thought you wanted to join the service.

RISSA

I did, but--

MOTHER

The military is hardly the place to have or raise a child. What if he grows up aggressive and hits you like Max?

RISSA

I'm not joining the service anymore, Mother. That was a silly, childish dream. I'm all grown up now. I'm pregnant.

MOTHER

I see. (looks at her stomach)

RISSA

Now we won't have to have that stupid lady over with her stupid baby.

BASTIAN

(still looking out window) Stop calling the baby "stupid." You haven't even met him.

MOTHER

Why? Are you going to have your baby today?

RISSA

I'll certainly try.

MOTHER

We'll just have to see which baby arrives first.

RISSA

But mine will be your grandchild. He should be your favorite.

MOTHER

If he cries the loudest, he will be. You better get a move on; that lady should be here any minute. Which reminds me, I should check on the turkey. (rising)

BASTIAN

Rissa took care of the turkey.

MOTHER

*Rissa* took care of the turkey?

BASTIAN

She didn't touch the stove.

MOTHER

(sitting) Bastian, I think it's time for those martinis.

RISSA

Why can't you just be happy for me? It's not like Bastian is ever going to provide you with grandchildren.

BASTIAN

Why is that?

RISSA

People like you can't have babies.

BASTIAN

We can't?

RISSA

Sure, you can adopt, but do you really want to subject a child to that kind of

psychological nonsense?

BASTIAN

What do you mean, "People like me" can't have babies?

RISSA

You're a boy. You don't have a uterus--fact of life. If you want to file a complaint, address the letter to Mother Nature.

MOTHER

There's a stamp in the bureau. But, Rissa, I've been thinking; this child that you're having?

RISSA

Jacques? What about him?

MOTHER

Well, peanut, I don't want to dash your hopes again, but--

RISSA

But what?

MOTHER

I thought we had this discussion years ago.

RISSA

What's wrong with my baby, Mother?

MOTHER

Sweetie, you can't get pregnant unless you're married.

BASTIAN

Fact of life.

MOTHER

Mother Nature.

BASTIAN

Stamp's in the bureau.

RISSA

Oh, Mother. I know you can't have babies unless you're married.

MOTHER

It has to be to a man.

RISSA

I know that, too. (to Bastian) You haven't told her?

BASTIAN

Pinkies.

Told me what? MOTHER

That's why I have Max. RISSA

Oh, I see. So, Max is...? MOTHER

"Her husband." BASTIAN

Rissa flashes a ring in Mother's face.

I cried when he put it on. RISSA

I'm so glad. (beat) Why is it on your pinky? MOTHER

He bought it a size too small. I heard that happens sometimes. RISSA

Maybe you were born a size too large. That happens sometimes, too. (beat) I don't know what to say. MOTHER

"Congratulations". RISSA

Sorry I didn't make the wedding. MOTHER

That's OK. It was a small elopement at the courthouse. RISSA

I thought it was standing room only. BASTIAN

There was a lot happening in court that day. RISSA

Congratulations. MOTHER

So you're happy with me? RISSA

Of course. MOTHER

RISSA

Then why are you crying?

BASTIAN

Must be the scotch.

RISSA

(to Bastian) She should drink Bourbon.

MOTHER

We're all out.

RISSA

Bastian, quick with the martinis.

MOTHER

Your father cried every time he drank scotch. He tried to hide it from you as best he could.

BASTIAN

He did a great job.

RISSA

Daddy drank bourbon.

MOTHER

I never knew the difference.

BASTIAN

He didn't either.

RISSA

I did.

Mother and Bastian look at Rissa.

MOTHER

(beat) Well. I guess it's my turn.

BASTIAN

Your turn?

RISSA

Ow. I just felt the baby kick. Look, Bastian.

BASTIAN

He must be doing a tap routine.

MOTHER

It's my turn, now--

RISSA

Oh, Mother. You can't tap.

MOTHER

To share with you *my* news.

RISSA

Can it wait until Jacques is done with his routine?

BASTIAN

Should I put on some music?

Bastian makes his way to the vitrola.

RISSA

Oh! Jacques just did a chug-shuffle and then a riff-drop. Now I have to pee. (exits upstairs) Hold the news.

MUSIC begins.

MOTHER

Why on earth would you want to join the military? Are you angry about something?

BASTIAN

I need to do something with my life.

MOTHER

End it.

Bastian smiles, then looks inquisitive.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

If you join the military, you're just going to get shot-- or blown up. If you get shot or blown up, chances are you'll die. If you die, they'll just end up sending you back here, and then I'll have to deal with the mess.

BASTIAN

What would the neighbors think?

MOTHER

You're better off just joining a gym. (beat) Why are you so unhappy? Why do you seem so sad all the time? (smiles)

BASTIAN

(smiles) My best friend died last week. My only friend actually.

Smiles fade. MUSIC ENDS.

MOTHER

(long pause) You aren't going to make those martinis like you promised, are you? (exits to kitchen)

Rissa rushes in from upstairs. She is now, what appears to be, about three months pregnant.

RISSA

I still can't find my red patent leather pumps! But I'm getting closer. (heading for front door) Mother, there's a man in your bed! (exits)

Bastian opens the window. Rissa crawls through laboriously.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(out of breath) If I get any bigger; I'll have to sneak in through the back door from now on.

BASTIAN

How tragic. What did you say about a man?

RISSA

There's a man in Mother's bed.

Mother enters with a martini service.

MOTHER

What were you doing in my room?

RISSA

Looking for my missing pumps. For which I'm holding you both suspect.

MOTHER

What have I told you about going through my things?

RISSA

(to Bastian) I think the dirty magazine stash is really hers.

BASTIAN

Who is the man in Mother's bed?

RISSA

I didn't get his name, but he's dressed like a crossing guard.

MOTHER

She's always telling stories.

BASTIAN

Is there a man in your bed dressed like a crossing guard?

MOTHER

Like a navy seal; and no, there isn't.

Bastian goes for the stairs. They do a cat-and-mouse routine, as Mother keeps Bastian from going upstairs.



MOTHER (CONT'D)

Bastian!

RISSA

Bastian!

Bastian stops.

MOTHER

Dirty martini?

RISSA

I'll take his. (doing so)

Bastian goes for the stairs.

MOTHER

Bastian!

RISSA

Bastian!

Bastian stops.

MOTHER

Help me remove the curtains; we need more light in the room.

RISSA

It'll be dark soon.

Bastian goes for the stairs.

MOTHER

Bastian!

RISSA

Bastian!

MOTHER

Where are you going?

BASTIAN

Why is there a man in your bed?

RISSA

And not mine?

MOTHER/BASTIAN

You're "married".

RISSA

Oh, that's right.

Mother over-dramatically staggers about the room in preparation to faint.

MOTHER

I didn't know where else to put him. I--I was waiting for the right moment to--tell--

Mother faints in a big way, pulling the curtains down on top of her. Rissa and Bastian seem unconcerned.

RISSA

She always had a flair for the dramatic.

BASTIAN

Are you dating again?

MOTHER

(rising) What? No.

RISSA

Eww.

MOTHER

I'm a married woman.

RISSA

I thought Dad was dead.

BASTIAN

Who is this man?

MOTHER

It's not a man.

RISSA

If that wasn't a man, she's one masculine woman. (gasp) Mother's a lesbian.

BASTIAN

Rissa!

RISSA

It happens all the time with women her age after their husbands die. He is dead, isn't he?

MOTHER

(to Rissa) Your father is dead. (to Bastian) It isn't a man.

RISSA

Lezbo.

MOTHER

It's your brother.

BASTIAN

What?

RISSA

(to Bastian) Lezbo. (to Mother) What??

MOTHER

(beat) Your brother. Is upstairs.

Rissa is confused.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

All my children are home for the holidays.

RISSA

*My brother is upstairs?*

MOTHER

Yes, Rissa.

RISSA

(to Bastian) Then who the hell are you?

BASTIAN

Your brother.

RISSA

Liar! Mother, he's lying whoever he is. Ground him! (running upstairs) I'm coming, Bastian! I'm coming. You can help me find my red patent leather pumps!

BASTIAN

I'm Bastian!

RISSA

Lies!

We hear a THUD.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(offstage) The baby's all right!

Mother is at the vitrola. MUSIC comes in softly. She turns to Bastian.

BASTIAN

(beat) Who is upstairs?

MOTHER

Your brother.

Mother grabs curtains and a martini.

MOTHER

Thom. (exits upstairs)

DOORBELL RINGS. A KNOCK. A BABY CRIES.

Bastian looks to the front door, then to the stairs, then to the audience.

He rushes to the window and exits. Black out.

Vitrola MUSIC continues.

END ACT I

## ACT II: Nice Family Dinner

MUSIC from the vitrola.

Spotlight comes up on the window. Bastian crawls in.

He goes to the vitrola and removes the needle. He listens to the silence. He closes his eyes and enjoys the stillness of the room.

He tilts his head back and exhales the biggest breath. He smiles, opens his eyes, and looks at the audience.

BASTIAN

My best friend died last week. And for some reason I've been totally incapable of crying. Actually, he was my one and only friend, but still I've yet to shed one tear. When I went to the funeral, I didn't want his other friends and family to think I was heartless, so I faked it. I over-compensated by trying to look like I was crying, and I ended up wailing loudly, with an occasional body writhe, which must have looked more like a mockery than sincerity, because I was asked to leave the funeral. It's probably best; I was already twenty minutes late for work by that point. I ended up losing that job two days later for spilling hot coffee all over a coworker. I told the manager it was an accident, but he refused to believe me since the coworker was on the other side of the room from where I was when the coffee spilled. He also said it was because I had spilled coffee twice the week before on that same coworker. It's his job to keep production cost down, so I was fired. I've never been able to keep a job for more than a month. His last words to me were, "You should take an anger management course," which puzzled me, because I've never been angry a day in my life. I don't think I've cared enough about anything to get angry. Maybe I haven't cared enough about anything to cry yet either. Wouldn't that be tragic? Wouldn't that be sad? (sudden burst of tears. Suddenly stops) Apparently, not sad enough. So I smile. (smiles) I bet he was smiling, too. When he pulled the trigger: my best friend, Alex.

A KNOCK at the door. Mother rushes down the stairs, in an old homecoming gown.

MOTHER

Rissa has locked herself in my room. I hope she isn't going through my things. I borrowed this from your closet; I hope you don't mind. (twirls, poses) Wasn't there a knock at the door?

BASTIAN

No.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

MOTHER

Why are you being rude to our guests?

BASTIAN

Maybe we should dispense with the guests due to the recent discoveries in our personal family business.

MOTHER

I'm not sure I understood what you just said.

They might do a cat-and-mouse routine, as Bastian keeps Mother from reaching the door.

BASTIAN

What about this Thom character?

MOTHER

Rissa is in there with him. How much damage can she do?

BASTIAN

I'd like to meet him.

MOTHER

As soon as she unlocks the door, I'll prepare him for a presentation.

BASTIAN

Presentation?

MOTHER

He's still in bed.

BASTIAN

Shouldn't you explain to us how he came to be our brother?

MOTHER

As soon as Rissa comes down, I'll explain everything.

Bastian grabs Mother forcefully by the arm. There is an odd tension.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(quickly) You're right about the curtains. It brings more light into the room this way. It'll be good for the carpet.

BASTIAN

What if someone should see in?

MOTHER

Who?

BASTIAN

You never know.

MOTHER

Nobody is out there. Nobody is looking in.

The Young Woman is now at the window looking in.  
Young Woman taps on the window. Mother and Bastian turn.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Don't be rude to our guest, Bastian.

Bastian releases Mother, a bit embarrassed. Mother opens the window.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Where's that wonderful little baby of yours?

Young Woman hands Mother the baby. Mother shuts the window on her. Bastian goes to the front door.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Well, what have we here? It's a baby, baby boy. Yes, it was. It's a big baby, baby boy. With big baby boy feet, and big baby boy hands, and toes, and a nose, and eyes, and a big baby boy belly. I'm going to eat that belly. Yes, I am. Arr, arr, arr. (beat) Arr, arr, arr. (beat) This baby isn't responsive to my coos. He hasn't cried, spit or gurgled once. (beat) He isn't dead, is he? I'm not holding a dead baby, am I?

YOUNG WOMAN

(entering front door) He's finally asleep.

MOTHER

His eyes are open. What is he a fish? Is that what you are? A big baby boy fish? Yes, you are: a big fish baby with big brown fish eyes. (no response) This is no fun at all.

YOUNG WOMAN

It's the first time he's stopped crying since we left the hospital.

MOTHER

How nice is that? You didn't make him walk all the way over here, did you?

YOUNG WOMAN

It was only twelve blocks. I did the walking.

BASTIAN

Twelve blocks?

YOUNG WOMAN

From the pay phone by the football field.

MOTHER

You should have brought him over in a cab. He's all worn out now. He'll probably never cry.

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't have money for cabs.

BASTIAN

I'm not sure we even have cabs in Easton.

Mother raises the baby above her head.

MOTHER

Ah-boo!

No response. She shakes it slightly.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Ah-Boogety, boogety, boogety, boo!

Still no response.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

No fun at all. I guess we'll just have to wait for his second wind. (shakes him) He's so sleepy! (beat) I hope he cries at least once before dinner. I bet if we don't feed him, he'll get hungry. And hungry babies love to cry. That's what we'll do. We'll not feed you. Speaking of crybabies: Rissa! I should go check on her turkey. Do you mind if I take him into the kitchen?

YOUNG WOMAN

Take him.

MOTHER

I bet he'd like to play with Rissa's turkey. Wouldn't you fishy, fishy baby. (exits) Why won't you cry?

BASTIAN

Mother, don't forget we still have family--!

There is an awkward silence--a familiarity, an uncertainty.  
Young Woman crosses the room, as Bastian counters her position. They stop.

BASTIAN (CONT'D)

I should go check on my sister. Or my new brother. That might be easier to deal with after you leave. Can I take your coat?

YOUNG WOMAN

And do what with it?

BASTIAN

Lay it across this chair.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm not staying long.

BASTIAN

You're not leaving--



ABIGAIL

You going to stop me?

BASTIAN

Until she hears that baby cry.

ABIGAIL

Who?

BASTIAN

Sue. My mother. The lady who took your baby into the kitchen. (smiles) I'm sure he's safe.

YOUNG WOMAN

That's your mother?

BASTIAN

Sue.

YOUNG WOMAN

Funny. You don't look like Thom at all.

BASTIAN

Hilarious. I'm not Thom. I'm Bastian. Why would I look like--? How do you know about Thom?

YOUNG WOMAN

(smiles) I think I will sit down for a minute.

Young Woman removes and drops her coat on the floor,  
revealing an outfit meant for someone much older.

Bastian goes for the coat.

BASTIAN

Anyway, I'm Bastian.

YOUNG WOMAN

Bastian? Unusual.

BASTIAN

It's French for adopted.

YOUNG WOMAN

No, it isn't.

BASTIAN

(quickly) So, I'm Bastian.

YOUNG WOMAN

(sitting) My feet are killing me.

BASTIAN

That was my mother Sue.

Young Woman removes a shoe--a red patent leather pump.

BASTIAN

My sister Rissa--

RISSA

(upstairs) Mother!

BASTIAN

(sees shoe) Probably shouldn't see those shoes. What did you say your name was?

YOUNG WOMAN

Abigail.

BASTIAN

Abigail.

ABIGAIL

It's a horrible name.

BASTIAN

You should think about changing it.

ABIGAIL

To something more sophisticated?

BASTIAN

Like Constance.

ABIGAIL

Nice. I'll have to dye my hair. I like it: "Constance".

They are both temporarily lost in each other's vague smile.  
She nears him.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

No. I take it back. In this light, you do look like Thom.

Rissa descends the stairs, appearing now to be about six  
months pregnant.

RISSA

Mother, that may be my brother upstairs, but I tell you what; he looks absolutely nothing like Bastian. And he wouldn't lift one finger to help me find my--

Rissa stops when she notices Abigail.

BASTIAN

(whispers) Red patent leather pumps?

Rissa takes in Abigail in her entirety, especially her shoes.  
The tension in the room is palpable and thick.

RISSA

(slowly) Who the hell are you?

BASTIAN

Abigail.

ABIGAIL

You must be--

RISSA

(vehemently) Constance.

ABIGAIL

I thought her name was "Rissa".

RISSA

Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't.

ABIGAIL

Sorry to barge in like this on Thanksgiving.

RISSA

After all of these years.

ABIGAIL

I didn't have anywhere else to go.

RISSA

Abigail, Abigail, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

It's horrible; I know.

RISSA

Maybe you should change it.

BASTIAN

She has.

RISSA

To what?

ABIGAIL

Constance.

RISSA

Constance is a loose girl's name.

Abigail smiles knowingly.

ABIGAIL

Hmmm.

RISSA

Those are some nice shoes you've got there. Very nice. What color would you say they were?

ABIGAIL

Red.

RISSA

Shiny.

ABIGAIL

Patent leather.

RISSA

Two inch?

ABIGAIL

Three.

RISSA

Size?

ABIGAIL

Seven.

RISSA

Bastian's a nine. Aren't those nice shoes, Bastian?

BASTIAN

I really didn't notice.

RISSA

Bastian has an affinity for red patent leather pumps.

BASTIAN

Grounded.

RISSA

I'd keep a real tight grip on them if I were you.

BASTIAN

She's lying.

ABIGAIL

The man at Mack's Resale Shop said they were vintage.

BASTIAN

Really?

RISSA  
You bought them at Mack's?

ABIGAIL  
The resale shop on--

BASTIAN  
Bluebonnet and Main.

RISSA  
Next to the football field.

RISSA/BASTIAN  
We know.

BASTIAN  
I wonder how they got there.

RISSA  
Mother.

BASTIAN  
Wretched woman.

ABIGAIL  
I thought maybe they belonged to a movie star or something.

RISSA  
Or something.

BASTIAN  
Not many movie stars pass through Easton.

ABIGAIL  
Not much of anything passes through Easton...except Thom.

RISSA  
What movie star do you think they belonged to, Bastian?

BASTIAN  
Clark Gable.

ABIGAIL  
I just meant they're old--the shoes. And all old things have stories.

RISSA  
Did you hear that, Bastian?

BASTIAN  
I'm standing right here.

RISSA

“All old things have stories.”

BASTIAN

Mother’s full of them.

RISSA

What is she?

BASTIAN

A hundred and seven by now.

ABIGAIL

I wonder what story these shoes have to tell.

BASTIAN

Riss?

RISSA

Maybe those shoes don’t want to tell you their story.

BASTIAN

(to Abigail) Maybe you should tell us your story.

ABIGAIL

I’m not good with stories.

BASTIAN

We’re still not certain why you’re here.

ABIGAIL

I just came by to drop something off. I should be going.

Mother enters. Rissa sees the baby.

RISSA

Mother, put that thing down! Drop that thing at once.

MOTHER

Just because he arrived first, there’s no need to throw a tantrum.

RISSA

There’s no need to throw that baby out the window either, but for some reason I want to.  
(to Abigail) Are you responsible for this?

ABIGAIL

Half responsible.

RISSA

How careless. I think mothers should take *full* responsibility for their children.

ABIGAIL

Not all women should be mothers.

RISSA

Of course they should. It's our god-given right.

MOTHER

It's our god-given obligation.

BASTIAN

It's not like men can be mothers.

RISSA

So that only leaves us.

ABIGAIL

Not all women want to be mothers.

MOTHER/RISSA

Don't they?

RISSA

(to Abigail) Are you a lesbian?

BASTIAN

(laughs) Rissa.

RISSA

What? Lesbians are women who don't want to be mothers.

BASTIAN

That's not true.

RISSA

Apparently they don't want to be mothers if they don't want to fuck men.

MOTHER

And some women don't have a choice in the matter. (to Rissa) What did you say? (re: "fuck")

RISSA

How old are you?

ABIGAIL

Sixteen.

BASTIAN

With a baby?

MOTHER

Maybe she's a loose girl, like that Constance.

BASTIAN

I think she is Constance.

MOTHER

I've a good mind to talk to your parents, young lady.

RISSA

Tell them she's a lesbian.

MOTHER

What's their number?

BASTIAN

(to Abigail) You should've gotten out when you had the chance.

RISSA

She's so young. She probably doesn't even know what a lesbian is. It happens all the time with girls her age. They don't discover it until they're in college.

MOTHER

I never went to college.

ABIGAIL

I know what a lesbian is.

RISSA

And?

ABIGAIL

I'm pretty sure I'm not one.

RISSA

Yet. Give it time. My mother's a lesbian.

MOTHER

I am?

BASTIAN

No, she isn't.

RISSA

Isn't she?

MOTHER

Am I?

BASTIAN

No.

RISSA

(inspects the baby from afar) That sure is a big baby. Mother, was I a big baby?



BASTIAN

You still are.

RISSA

What do we call a baby like that? A baby so big?

MOTHER

We haven't been properly introduced. I've just been calling him fish baby. Maybe we should call him Martin.

BASTIAN

Why? Is he drunk?

MOTHER

He should be by now.

RISSA

I think we should call him Quasimodo. And lock him up in the bell tower, so he doesn't frighten all the other little children.

MOTHER

I vote for Martin.

BASTIAN

I vote for fish baby.

RISSA

Yes, that sure is a big baby. My baby's going to be bigger than yours. He'll be bigger than all of us and will kick your baby's ass if he wants to. I'll tell him not to fight; it's the right thing to do, but since he'll be bigger than me, I probably won't be able to stop him. And being so big, he'll probably only have to hit your baby once.

MOTHER

Fish baby will just have to learn to duck.

ABIGAIL

When is your baby due?

RISSA

Any minute now.

MOTHER

(quietly to baby) Isn't that right?

RISSA

I was shooting for seven o'clock-ish.

MOTHER

(same) Fishy, fishy baby.

ABIGAIL

Shouldn't you be at the hospital?

RISSA

Why? I'm not sick.

MOTHER

(same) Ah-boo.

BASTIAN

OK. No more baby talk!

Bastian breaks something on the floor. Mother, who was  
"cooing," stops.

BASTIAN (CONT'D)

No more talking about babies, pregnancies or anything else!

MOTHER

Bastian, I've never seen you so animated.

RISSA

I really wish you'd stop screaming.

MOTHER

I think it's nice.

RISSA

It won't be nice when he deafens my baby. Jacques will have little or no play dates if he's deaf. All of his friends will think he's a snob for ignoring them. They'll be saying "Red rover, red rover, let Jacquie come over." Poor little Jacques will still be on the merry-go-round unable to hear their requests.

MOTHER

(to Abigail) Maybe your baby is deaf, too, Connie.

RISSA

See what you did, Bastian? Now Quasimodo's deaf.

Bastian pulls Abigail by the arm. She does not mind the forwardness.

BASTIAN

(to Abigail) There is a strange man upstairs in my mother's bed.

MOTHER

There isn't a strange man in my bed.

BASTIAN

Would you like to meet him?

ABIGAIL

(smiles) Let me go, Bass. (starts to exit)

MOTHER

It's simply their brother, Thom.

BASTIAN

How the hell is he our brother?

ABIGAIL

(whipping around) Thom? Here?

BASTIAN

How do you know Thom?

RISSA

Who the hell is Thom?

MOTHER

Your brother.

RISSA

I thought your name was Bastian.

BASTIAN

It is!

ABIGAIL

Tell him I'm here. (at stairs) Thom? Thom!

RISSA

Stop screaming! It won't do you any good. That man in mother's bed is dead to the world. Drunk as a skunk.

ABIGAIL

Thom doesn't drink.

RISSA

Really? Neither does she.

Mother is licking her martini glass.

BASTIAN

Why am I the last person to meet this guy?

RISSA

I tried to meet him a few minutes ago; he just ignored me. At first I thought it was Daddy. He looks like Daddy, only younger. In fact, he looks like me, now that I think about it. We've the same earlobes. Mother, is that man upstairs my brother?

MOTHER

Thom. I've been trying to tell you all evening.

BASTIAN

I think it's time Thom wakes up!

Bastian runs upstairs.

ABIGAIL

I can't believe he's here. Give me the baby!

RISSA

You think I would've remembered having a brother named "Thom".

MOTHER

He only showed up ten months ago.

RISSA

(to Abigail) What does my baby brother Thom have to do with you?

MOTHER

Thom is your older brother.

RISSA

Wha!--huh!--bu!--Now, I'm just utterly confused. I need to sit down.

MOTHER

I need a drink.

RISSA

I need a drink, and I need to sit down.

MOTHER

The baby and I just finished off the martinis.

RISSA

So make some tequila slammers.

MOTHER

Excellent idea. (takes the baby from Abigail)

RISSA

No salt for me. My ankles are swollen.

MOTHER

Bastian's old tap shoes will never fit you now. (exits)

RISSA

My days in show business are over! (staring at Abigail) So. Just who the hell are you?

BANGING from upstairs.

BASTIAN

(offstage) Who the hell are you???

Lights go out on living room and come up on Mother, side stage, holding the baby and a bottle of tequila

MOTHER

Once upon a time, there was a boy named "Sue". That isn't right. (shot) Once upon a time, there was a homecoming queen named "Sue," who wore nothing but lime green taffeta dresses. She was married to a tall, handsome, sober king named Martin, who fell in love with her rabbit stew. One evening, while enjoying a piping hot bowl, the castle bell rang. It was the mailman with a navy blue package addressed to Queen Sue, in care of King Martin. The package sat on the table until every last drop of the stew was gone and then like a jack-in-the-box, the package flew open and out came a bouncing baby boy. King Martin said, "We shall call him Prince Thomas Fuller of Sunflower Lane, and send--" (pause) "And send him out into the world to kill evil doers who press upon the Kingdom of Easton." King Martin placed Prince Thom back into the box, sealed it with many kisses, took a stamp from the bureau, and threw the box with all of his might high into the heavens. Ten months later, the mailman delivered another package addressed to Queen Sue. King Martin was away battling the Weeds and the armies of Ants, so Sue opened the red, patent leather box, and out rolled a big, fat baby girl. And Sue said, "I shall call her Princess Rissa Fuller, and hide her away from the evil doers of Easton, and she shall never leave my side." Sue even hid her from King Martin as best she could. Three years later, King Martin decided they needed a child in order to keep the kingdom from collapsing, so Sue brought out the red box, and introduced him to Princess Rissa. King Martin said princesses were of little use in battling weeds and ants, and that they'd have to wait for the arrival of a son. Except...no packages were ever delivered to that castle again. So one day during battle, King Martin usurped a pink box containing a baby boy from a neighboring kingdom. When King Martin returned home, he threw the box on the table, beside the rabbit stew, looked at the Queen and said, "This'll do." (shot) Queen Sue loved both of her packages more than anything in the world, but was never quite able to stop looking to the high heavens, waiting for the day that her first box, containing the warrior Prince Thom, fell back down from the sky and into her arms. Sue was lucky to have the King Martin; she would've never had the strength to throw Thom's box up so high. Or to battle the neighboring kingdom for Prince Bastian. (shot) Maybe she would have. She probably had the strength of ten Martins inside of her. Yes. I could be just like Martin. You could be just like Martin. Yes you could. All we'd need is another bottle of scotch. And a weed eater.

Lights out on Mother. Lights up on living room.

RISSA

How much you want for those shoes?

ABIGAIL

They're not for sale.

RISSA

I'll give you ten bucks. (beat) All right, for each.

BASTIAN

(entering) He's locked the door, and he won't come out.

ABIGAIL

Did you tell him I was here?

RISSA

Maybe that's why he won't come out. Bastian, where's your purse? I need to borrow twenty bucks.

Bastian is sifting through the bureau.

RISSA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

BASTIAN

Looking for Dad's tools.

RISSA

Why?

BASTIAN

To build Jacques a tree house in the backyard. Where's Mother?

RISSA

She and Quasimodo are making tequila slammers.

Bastian exits upstairs with the tools.

RISSA (CONT'D)

(to Bastian) The backyard is that way.

ABIGAIL

(after Bastian) What are you going to do with those tools?

RISSA

The question is, "What am *I* going to do with *you*?"

Rissa stands up and squares off with Abigail.

RISSA (CONT'D)

That. Is the question.

ABIGAIL

What is the answer?

RISSA

Kick. Your. Ass.

ABIGAIL

What?

RISSA

If you're not going to give them those shoes, I'm just going to have to take them.

Rissa chases Abigail around the room..

ABIGAIL

What're you doing?

RISSA

About to kick your sweet ass, Abigail-Constance.

ABIGAIL

Thom!

RISSA

I'll let you throw the first punch, you big baby.

ABIGAIL

You're pregnant.

RISSA

Shut up, and hit me!

MOTHER

(entering) Tequila slammers.

RISSA

(to Abigail) I'm not through with you. (goes for a shot)

MOTHER

Where's Bastian?

RISSA

Building a nursery or something. I'll take his.

We hear BANGING upstairs.

MOTHER

What is that noise?

RISSA

Must be a southerly.

BASTIAN

(offstage) Ow! Shit!

MOTHER

I've never known him to be so animated.

ABIGAIL

Sue?

Mother looks at Rissa.

RISSA

*She's* talking to you.

ABIGAIL

When did Thom get into town?

What is today? MOTHER

Tuesday. RISSA

Thursday. ABIGAIL

Thom arrived on Tuesday. MOTHER

Why didn't he find me? ABIGAIL

Priorities. MOTHER

Did he mention me? ABIGAIL

To? MOTHER

You. ABIGAIL

When? MOTHER

Ever? ABIGAIL

What's your name again? MOTHER

Abigail? ABIGAIL

Name sounds familiar, but not from Thom. Weren't you Bastian's friend when he was five? MOTHER

I'm Thom's friend. ABIGAIL

Abigail was my friend first! RISSA

Bastian descends the stairs with a pained look on his face  
and his hand wrapped in a dingy cloth.



MOTHER

How's the nursery coming, dear?

BASTIAN

I sliced my hand open on the-- (doesn't know the name)

MOTHER

Are you going to cry?

RISSA

I might cry, Mother.

Abigail sneaks upstairs.

BASTIAN

He won't come out.

RISSA

Was it easy for you to come out? (about her belly) These birth-things take time.

BASTIAN

I'm talking about Thom.

RISSA

Oh. Thom, Thom, Thom. I'm so sick of everyone talking about this Thom all the time. Can someone please pay some attention to me for a change? I'm the one with the swollen ankles.

MOTHER

Tequila slammer?

RISSA

Please. But no more talking about Thom. (shot) Where's Constance?

The three of them freeze; lights shift.

Abigail appears at the top of the stairs. Though she faces out, she is speaking to Thom at the bedroom door.

ABIGAIL

Thom? It's Abigail. Abigail Fairchild. Remember me? Of course, you do; what am I saying? Open the door; it's Abigail. (beat) Actually, I go by Constance now, but you shouldn't remember that; I only changed it today. It was your brother's idea. (MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

You two look nothing alike. I'll change it back if you want. Did you get my letters? I wrote every day like you asked. I'm sure you were too busy killing foreign people in those far-off places to write back, but I hope you got mine. I tried sending you pictures of me, that way we talked about, but my father found them before I could get them in the mail. He only hit me once; I ran away. For a while. But then I found out I was...anyway, I had to come. For a while. Funny; I had no idea you were back in town. No idea you were

even going to be here when I dropped by. I was only stopping by to drop something off. But then your mother told me you were here, and now they *insist* that I stay for dinner. Isn't that something? Will you just open the fucking door?

Lights shift to the living room.

RISSA

What's that wrapped around your hand?

BASTIAN

I found it in your old room.

RISSA

What have I told you about wearing my things???

Rissa grabs the cloth and shakes it out, revealing a blood-stained dress. It is the dress from her past.

RISSA (CONT'D)

This is my--You--There's blood on it!

She rushes out the front door.

MOTHER

(to baby) Tequila slammer?

Bastian aggressively takes the shot from Mother.

Lights shift back to Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Let's see. What else is new? I have a birthday coming up. You probably do, too. Are you going to come out of there? You're sister said you were drunk. It's like she doesn't even know you. I told her you didn't drink unless someone has died. I hope no one has died. Look, if you're avoiding your family, I can definitely see why; just let me in and we'll sneak out the window. Are you just tired from the war? Is that it? I bet that's it. Keep sleeping. I can wait. If you don't mind. I'll write you a letter for when you wake up. You do remember me, don't you? Fuck.

Lights shift back to the living room.

MOTHER

How did your friend die?

BASTIAN

What?

MOTHER

Your best friend.

BASTIAN

Alex?

MOTHER

Yes. How did he--?

BASTIAN

A gunshot. (smiles) To the head.

MOTHER

Just like your father. (smiles)

BASTIAN

(beat) Dad died in a lawn-mowing accident.

MOTHER

That's right. (beat) Think Rissa's at the football field by now?

BASTIAN

Not without those shoes.

MOTHER

Sorry about your loss.

BASTIAN

Sorry about yours.

MOTHER

(beat) A gunshot...

BASTIAN

To the head.

MOTHER

That reminds me. He left you something.

BASTIAN

Alex?

MOTHER

Your father.

Mother goes to the vitrola and removes a small wooden box from underneath it.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

I was going to wrap it and save it for Christmas, but I see no reason to make you wait. Who knows the next time we'll--

She hands the box to a wary Bastian.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Don't tell, Rissa.

BASTIAN

(reading card) To Bass, Love Dad. (beat) Your handwriting.

MOTHER

His thoughts.

Bastian opens the box and removes a gun. Bastian and Mother stare at each other; words are not needed.

Rissa climbs through the window. She is now wearing the blood-stained dress. Bastian hides the gun.

RISSA

What'd I miss?

ABIGAIL

(entering) Thom should be down shortly.

MOTHER

I'll decide when Thom comes down. (beat) I'm the Mother.

BASTIAN

Then decide that he comes down now.

ABIGAIL

He's sleeping.

MOTHER

He'll be down for dinner.

RISSA

(to stomach) Since I'm your Mother, I've decided you'll come down *after* dinner. Ow! Don't you talk back to me.

ABIGAIL

He insisted I stay for dinner.

MOTHER

Did he?

RISSA

She can eat at the kid's table. (to stomach) What's that? I should wash your mouth out with soap.

BASTIAN

(vacant) I should wash up for dinner. (heads for stairs)

MOTHER

(standing) Bastian.

He stops. Mother is silent. Bastian slowly exits up the stairs with the box; Mother slowly sits.

Rissa is rubbing her belly, staring calculatingly at Abigail.

ABIGAIL

(to Rissa) What's that on your dress?

RISSA

Love.

Soft KNOCKING from upstairs.

BASTIAN

(offstage) Thom?

MOTHER

(looks up) Bastian?

Two LOUD GUNSHOTS.

ABIGAIL

Thom?

Rissa grabs her stomach in pain. Abigail runs upstairs.

BABY CRIES from the kitchen.

MOTHER

(vacant) I must've left Quasi in the dish drainer. (exits to kitchen) I'm so glad he cried before dinner.

RISSA

I'm so glad someone noticed I was shot!

Rissa stumbles to the couch and drops dead. ABIGAIL  
SCREAMS from upstairs.

ABIGAIL

(offstage) Thom? Thom! (beat) What have you done?!

Lights fade, leaving a small spot on the victrola. It begins on its own, and MUSIC comes up softly.

### ACT II SCENE 3: Thom Foolery

The actors shift with the lights.

Abigail walks to the window chair and sits. Bastian stands at the top of the stairs holding a gun.

Mother stands in the doorway to the kitchen, holding the baby. Rissa remains on the couch dead.

The front door opens; it is THOM.

THOM

I was on leave when I heard Marty had died--a lawn-mowing accident up the road in Easton. I'd already buried two parents, so one more wasn't going to be that difficult. Especially one I hardly knew. I borrowed my buddy's car to make the trip, and I remember feeling weird the whole way down--about meeting these people, who lived twenty minutes from where I grew up, and yet whom I'd never met, and still yet, who were my own flesh and blood. How many brothers or sisters did I have? I'd had none up until then. Were they going to look like me? Were they going to like me? My anxiousness caused me to pull into Thom's Liquor Store, just outside of Easton city limits. I have no idea why, I didn't even drink, but I walked into that store, grabbed two pints of scotch, or perhaps they were bourbon, and threw cash on the counter. The guy at the register asked where I was headed as he placed the bottles into brown sacks. I told him to Martin Fuller's funeral over in Easton. The man looked at me, shaking his head; tears began to well in his eyes. "He was a fine, fine man, that Marty. I'm sorry for your loss," he said. Then he asked if I was of any relation and I said, "No. He simply cared for our lawn." Which was both true and a lie. I didn't want to bore him with details and I was already twenty minutes late for the funeral by that point, but I sure was grateful that he refused to take my money for the scotch or bourbon. He saluted me on my way out, and thanked me for protecting his country. I opened a bottle as soon as I got into the car and had finished it by the time I ran into the sign at the funeral home. I was saddened, perhaps drunk, when I discovered there were no brothers or sisters waiting for me. Once again I was the only child; the entirety of the funeral party consisted of me and Sue. Marty's wife. Mom? She looked exactly as I thought she would, except wearing a lime-green taffeta dress, not typically fitting for a funeral. After our introductions, she immediately grabbed me and held me for what seemed an eternity. And then we went to the cemetery for the burial. As they lowered Marty into the ground, there must have been a crane malfunction, because Marty ended up caddy-corner to the burial plot, stuck and immobile. We stood there for half an hour, while the workers mapped out a strategy for removal. Then Sue politely turned to me and asked if I would cry--out loud. I don't know if it was out of obligation to this woman for losing her husband, or simply the scotch, but I began to wail--loudly and uncontrollably. She smiled and thanked me. And then said she had to be going. (MORE)

THOM (CONT'D)

Something about looking into joining a gym, but she said I was welcome to stay the night if I didn't have to rush back off to war. She gave me her address, 1309 Sunflower Lane, and walked away. I just stood there wailing. (beat) Ten months later, I will be killed while serving your country. But three hours later, I will meet a sweet girl named Abby, and spend an entire evening with her intimately. Which was odd, because up to that point, I always thought I was gay.

Thom walks to the top of the stairs, and takes Bastian's gun.

THOM (CONT'D)

Protecting an entire country can really get to a guy after a while. Among other things.

Thom raises the gun to his head. GUNSHOT. He collapses on the stairs.

ABIGAIL

(frozen) Thom? Thom! What have you done???

[Act II, Scene 4 omitted from production]

ACT II Scene 4: Return to Sender

Lights shift, as the actors position themselves to address the audience from where they are to deliver “letters”.

BASTIAN

Dear Alex: You're dead. I'm thinking about joining the service. The armed service. The navy to be exact. My mother suggests I join a gym, but you know how I hate to sweat. I just discovered that I had a brother who served in the military. He came home for Thanksgiving this year--dead.

I hope I come home for Thanksgiving next year the same way.

MOTHER

Dear Martin: All the kids have come home for Thanksgiving. I wish you were here to enjoy it as I have. Bastian is thinking about joining the navy. Rissa made the turkey. Even Thom returned home this year--dead, but he looks great. He looks just like you, only younger. You might not remember Thom, but I do. I remember.

ABIGAIL

Dear Thom: It's Abigail Fairchild. Remember me? I met you on the football field in Easton last year. I haven't heard from you in a while, but I'm going to keep writing you letters until we're together again. I hope you're not dead.

RISSA

Dear Mr. President: I wish you were dead. (pause) I've never written a letter before; I'm sorry.

BASTIAN

I'm sorry I wasn't enough to make you forget your sadness. You were enough to make me forget mine, but then I'm never sad. I'm also sorry I didn't cry at your funeral; I just had other things on my mind--I was late for work. I lost that job, too.

MOTHER

I've been doing a wonderful job at keeping the carpet at bay. Actually, I don't think it's grown an inch since you left. I don't have two green thumbs like you or Max. I hope I haven't killed it.

ABIGAIL

You're probably too busy fighting in that war to write back, but I've told my girlfriends all about you, and they're all so proud. How many people have you killed?

RISSA

I'm writing to express my grievance toward your policy against me joining the military. Although, I'll be a mother soon and won't need to join your stupid group, I still think it's completely unfair and sexist of you to deny me the option because of my age.

BASTIAN

I don't know what other options I have. I'm not as strong as you. Or decisive. If I were you, I'd have asked someone else to pull the trigger, so I wouldn't have had to. Maybe that's why I'm joining the military.

MOTHER

Let's stop beating around the bush, Martin. Why did you leave?

BASTIAN

Who knows?

ABIGAIL

When are you coming back?

RISSA

I don't know...

MOTHER

Was it something I said?

ABIGAIL

I have something important to tell you.

BASTIAN

I miss you.

ABIGAIL

Even though I think I should tell you in person.

BASTIAN

In that non-gay sort of way.

RISSA

Just as it's my god-given right to be a mother, it should be my god-given right to kill people in the name of your country.

MOTHER

Perhaps I wasn't the best wife or mother--

ABIGAIL

I'm going to be a mother.



RISSA

Any minute now--

ABIGAIL

I'm pregnant.

RISSA

I'm going to give birth to my enormous baby boy Jacques.

ABIGAIL

And you're going to be a father.

MOTHER

But killing yourself with a gun, or a lawnmower for that matter, is a bit dramatic.

RISSA

And if he grows up to be a 35-year-old woman, I think it only fair that he be able to join the service if he so wishes.

MOTHER/BASTIAN

I wish you would have talked to me about it first.

ABIGAIL

Do you hate me?

BASTIAN

You'd probably slug me for saying this, but--

ABIGAIL

I love you.

BASTIAN

I love you.

MOTHER

I loved you.

BASTIAN

I loved you.

RISSA

So now you know how I feel.

BASTIAN

In that non-gay sort of way.

ABIGAIL

Do you still love me?

BASTIAN

I--

ABIGAIL

I know you never said it, but I felt it.

BASTIAN

Can't believe I just said that.

MOTHER

I know you did, too. Though you never said it.

RISSA

So get with the program. And start making changes for the better. I don't want to have to say it again.

BASTIAN

I wonder if I'll ever say it again.

ABIGAIL

Anyway...

MOTHER

I should get back to my children. It's Thanksgiving.

BASTIAN

Wish you would have held out until Thanksgiving.

ABIGAIL

Maybe I'll get to see you at Thanksgiving.

RISSA

Merry Christmas!

ALL (BUT RISSA)

Wish you were here.

MOTHER

Your devoted wife,

BASTIAN

Your loving friend,

ABIGAIL

Your baby's mother,

RISSA

A concerned militant mother,

MOTHER

Sue.

BASTIAN

Bass.

ABIGAIL

Abby.

RISSA

Clark Gable. (beat) PS...How many people have you killed?

The GUNSHOT from before.

Rissa falls dead on the couch. Mother exits to kitchen.

ACT II, Scene 5: Nice Family Dinner

Bastian grabs the gun from Thom's hand and places it in the box.

Abigail rushes down the stairs.

Mother enters from the kitchen with no baby.

ABIGAIL

Thom's dead!

MOTHER

Again? (gasps) And Bastian?

BASTIAN

I'm right here.

Bastian is carrying the box and Thom's body down the stairs.

MOTHER

My sons! Make some room on the couch, Riss. Place Thom over here, Bass. Rissa, move!

ABIGAIL

You shot Thom!

MOTHER

No, he didn't. (to Bastian) Did you?

RISSA

He shot me. (still playing dead)

BASTIAN

I shot the door handle to get in.

RISSA

(disappointed) Oh. When's dinner? Jacques's hungry.

BASTIAN

But Thom *is* dead.

Bastian places Thom on the couch.

RISSA

More for us. When do we eat?

MOTHER

Now's as good a time as any. Who wants to hold Quasi-Martin?

ABIGAIL

(fascinated) I want to hold Thom.

MOTHER

I'm sure he won't mind, though he's incapable of holding you back.

Mother hands Rissa the baby. Bastian has placed the box near the vitrola.

ABIGAIL

What the fuck did you do to him?

MOTHER

Gave birth is all I remember, and mind your language.

RISSA

I thought we were dispensing with the Thommy-talk.

Rissa has placed the baby on the spinning turntable of the vitrola.

RISSA (CONT'D)

It's going to cause me to miscarry. (to stomach) I'm only kidding, bunny.

MOTHER

Rissa, don't be crass in front of our guest.

RISSA

(to Abigail) Are you still here?

MOTHER

I meant your new brother. Thom this is Rissa. Say "hello," Riss.

RISSA

Make him say it first.

BASTIAN

He can't.

RISSA

Then neither can I.

BASTIAN

He's dead.

ABIGAIL

Stop saying that!

BASTIAN

Mother, what's going on?

MOTHER

Thanksgiving. Thom this is your younger brother Bastian.

RISSA

(whispers) He's adopted.

MOTHER

My children usually aren't this rude. I guess you already know Abigail-Constance. Though, I'm still not quite sure how. (whispers to Thom) If you were still alive, I'd do my best to keep you away from the likes of her, but what's the worst she can do to you now? Bastian, I need your help getting a few things from the shed. Rissa, I need you to go into the kitchen and tray the turkey.

Rissa is about to drop the baby out the open window.

BASTIAN

Rissa!

RISSA

I heard her!

MOTHER

(taking the baby) I think we'll eat Thanksgiving dinner in here this year. Thom seems to take so well to all the light this room now provides without the curtains.

BASTIAN

I think we should re-hang the curtains.

MOTHER

Why?

BASTIAN

So no one sees in.

MOTHER

What are you ashamed of?

Rissa has found the gun on the vitrola.

RISSA

Much too little if we're to judge from his lifestyle. Or his clothes.

BASTIAN

There's a dead body on the couch. Something for which I'm quite sure our neighborhood is not zoned.

MOTHER

Rissa will help me re-hang the curtains after dinner. Now come with me to the shed.

RISSA

Mother, I have to give birth after dinner.

MOTHER

Then maybe little Jacques will lend us a hand.

BASTIAN

Explain to me what is going on!

MOTHER

First, help me in the shed.

RISSA

(pointing the gun at him) Yeah, Bastian. Help her in the shed.

BASTIAN

Fuck the shed!

MOTHER

Rissa!

RISSA

Bastian said it!

MOTHER

What have I told you about guns?

RISSA

They're for boys?

Bastian takes the gun.

RISSA (CONT'D)

Then why does Bastian get to hold it?

MOTHER/BASTIAN

Because Bastian has more of a use for it.

RISSA

Drama queens.

BASTIAN

(points to Rissa) Pot! (points to himself) Kettle!

MOTHER

I've about had it with both of you. Cut your shit or you're both grounded! (beat) That sounded just like Martin.

RISSA

Must be the scotch.

BASTIAN

You can't ground us!

RISSA

Not me; I'm thirty-five. You on the other hand...

MOTHER

Both of you! Bastian, outside. Rissa, march into that kitchen, put the turkey on a tray, and bring it back in here so we can sit down and enjoy a nice family dinner.

BASTIAN

How are we supposed to enjoy a nice family dinner like this?

RISSA

Fake it. That's what I plan to do.

MOTHER

Outside. Now!

BASTIAN

We're just going to leave them here?

MOTHER

Abigail-Constance apparently needs a little alone time with your brother.

RISSA

(under her breath) Slut.

MOTHER

And if we don't eat soon, we're going to waste away and blow off with the next southerly.

BASTIAN

How can you expect us to eat at a time like this?

MOTHER

It's nearly seven-thirty.

RISSA

I'm famished.

BASTIAN

And how the hell is this considered a family dinner? With some strange lady with some strange baby? And this--this--this fucking dead body sitting on our couch!

Mother slaps Bastian forcefully across the face. Silence.

Rissa chuckles. Mother looks at Rissa. Rissa cowers.

RISSA

Let's go tray the turkey, Martin.

Rissa exits to kitchen with the baby.

MOTHER

(Pause) I'll explain everything to you outside.

She waits for him to exit, grabbing the gun and placing it in the box near the vitrola. She follows him. Lights shift.

## ACT II SCENE 6: Johnny James

Abigail composes herself and addresses the audience.

ABIGAIL

I was coming out of Mack's Resale Shop on Bluebonnet and Main when I saw him for the first time. I had just bought a pair of shoes, having talked Mack down from twenty bucks to ten. I wasn't wearing a bra that day, which helped, but I really wanted those shoes--shoes of which my mother would surely disapprove. But I sure was happy to walk out of that shop wearing red patent leather pumps. Anyway, he was dressed in his Winter Blues and a pea coat. He looked like a cross between Johnny Cash and James Dean, neither of whom I could picture in my mind at the time, and neither of whom I remember ever seeing cry the way he was crying when he passed by. I liked the way he smelled, so I followed him for several blocks, which irritated me, because we ended up right back at the football field, which was directly across the street from Mack's. My feet were beginning to hurt, but I had to find out who he was, and what he was doing in Easton.

Mother and Bastian appear side stage. Mother is holding a flashlight, overalls and a pair of goggles. Bastian is holding a shovel.

MOTHER

(to Bastian) Apparently he discovered we were living in Easton, and he made his way down here for your father's funeral ten months ago. You could've met him then, but apparently you two had better places to be than your father's funeral.

ABIGAIL

The sun was going down, which cast a purple hue across the field, but there he was, sitting dead center on the fifty yard line. I felt both nervous and excited--I felt like Cinderella in my red patent leather pumps, meeting my Prince Charming, Johnny-James, for the first time. I did my best to glide across the field in my new heels as they dug deeper and deeper into the dirt with each step. Eventually, I fell, but luckily, not before reaching the forty-ninth yard. I thought he was going to laugh; he just kept crying.

Mother is fidgeting with the overalls and Bastian appears to be digging a hole.



MOTHER

(to Bastian) I was actually quite moved and quite pleased and quite surprised the way he cried so. It was totally unexpected.

Rissa listens from the doorway to the kitchen.

ABIGAIL

I asked him why he was crying and he said his mother had asked him to. And then he took a big swig from a bottle of bourbon. He said he didn't drink and then he took another one. I asked if there was anything I could do, and then he immediately grabbed me and held me for what seemed an eternity. Then he began telling me his story--about his dead father, who was also their lawn boy, his years in the service, and some other sadness about having no siblings once again. By the end of it I found myself crying, too.

RISSA

How sad.

BASTIAN

(to Rissa) Apparently, Dad made her give him away.

RISSA

(to Bastian) Then why did they need you?

ABIGAIL

He asked if he could kiss me. My first impulse was to say "No," but since his hand was already on my breast, I didn't see the point. So he kissed me eighteen times. I counted each and every one. It wasn't my first kiss, but it was my first time to taste bourbon. He asked if he could kiss me again when I noticed my panties were now lying beside me. He said kissing me made him forget his sadness. I asked how he could be sad for someone he never really knew.

Thom awakens.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Which I think made him angry.

MOTHER

(to Rissa) And so he hit you?

RISSA

(to Mother) Only once.

ABIGAIL

The kisses were more enjoyable than asking questions, so I let him fuck me. We did it five times. (beat) By the last time--

ABIGAIL/RISSA

There were no kisses.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

I'm not sure how important kisses really are during the fifth time, but I knew we were in

love. Afterwards, I told him my name.

THOM/RISSA

Abby.

ABIGAIL

Strangely, no one had ever called me “Abby” before, and no one has since. He said his name was Alex, but asked that I call him--

THOM

“Thom.”

ABIGAIL

We noticed the sun was coming up, and Thom said he had to be going, because his mother was surely worried sick.

THOM

Or--

ABIGAIL

That he had to return his buddy’s car.

THOM

Or--

ABIGAIL

That he had to rush back off to war.

Thom gets up from the couch and pulls out a cigarette.

ABIGAIL (CONT’D)

I told him I’d write to him every single day until we were together, as long as he promised me not to get shot.

Thom smiles at Abigail and gives her an audible wink. He heads to the front door.

ABIGAIL (CONT’D)

He promised me with a wink.

Bastian is still digging. Mother is holding the flashlight.

BASTIAN

Suicide.

MOTHER

The letter said “friendly fire.”

BASTIAN

Same thing.

ABIGAIL

He didn't kiss me good-bye, or offer me a ride home, but he did say we should get married the next time he was in town.

Thom quickly exits the front door.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

And that was enough.

RISSA

(vehemently) Liar!

ABIGAIL

That was enough.

BASTIAN

Suicide.

MOTHER

That's enough!

Lights out on side stages. Abigail exits upstairs. Rissa exits to the kitchen. Thom walks past the window outside.

### ACT II, Scene 7: Family Matters

Bastian enters the front door with the shovel.

BASTIAN

(to no one) Suicide.

Rissa enters with a large origami turkey on a tray and a carving knife.

RISSA

(to no one) Our dead brother is Quasimodo's father.

Bastian removes the gun from the box and lays down the shovel.

BASTIAN

(to no one) Suicide is just what you need.

Mother enters with the overalls and goggles.

MOTHER

What's that smell?

Rissa places the turkey on the couch.

RISSA

I must've left fish baby in that pot on the stove.

Bastian exits to the kitchen with gun.

Rissa exits upstairs with the knife.

Mother sits on the couch and stares at the turkey.

Thom enters the front door with the weed eater. Thom looks at the vitola and MUSIC BEGINS.

MOTHER

(to herself) I don't think I want to be a mother anymore.

THOM

Try being a father.

Thom dances around the living room with the weed eater.

Mother takes off her dress and puts on the overalls and goggles.

Thom and Mother meet and begin to dance together around the room. The dance is lovely and familiar.

Bastian enters with the baby in the pot and the gun. He watches them dance.

THOM/BASTIAN

It's time I go.

MOTHER

I'm so glad.

Bastian exits the front door.

MOTHER

I'm so glad you made it home for Thanksgiving.

THOM

I know.

Thom grabs the shovel; hands mother the weed eater; and heads for the door.

MOTHER

Thom you know I--

Thom nods "yes" and winks. He exits the front door with the shovel. MUSIC ends.

Mother rushes to the window where Thom is seen outside.

MOTHER

Thom! (beat) What am I going to do about this carpet?

Lights begin to dim on Thom.

THOM

(softly) Care for it.

He is gone. Mother smiles and exits to the kitchen slowly.

Rissa slowly descends the stairs with the knife; she bumps into the vitrola on her way to the phone. MUSIC starts.

RISSA

(into phone) Rosie, I'd like to report a murder.

Lights up on Bastian side stage, holding the gun.

BASTIAN

Suicide is just what you need when you're home for the holidays.

RISSA

(into phone) I mean, suicide. Yes. No--you have a nice day.

Rissa drops the phone and slowly exits upstairs with the knife.

Mother enters with a watering can and a new bottle of scotch. She waters the perimeter of the room.

Bastian talks to the baby, who is still in the pot on the floor.

BASTIAN

Sorry you have to witness this. But look at it this way; you'll have a great story to tell your children. Oh, that's right. Boys can't have babies--

Bastian quickly raises the gun to his head. He panics, and is unable to pull the trigger. He lets out a guttural scream.

There is a different SCREAM from upstairs.

Mother lets out a gut-wrenching scream.

Abigail calmly descends the stairs. She is now wearing the bloodstained dress and is barefoot. She appears to be about nine months pregnant.

Mother's scream turns into a violent fit. Bastian is having his own release.

Abigail exits the window.

Rissa descends the stairs. She is dressed completely

different--very adult and no longer pregnant. She holds her red patent leather pumps in her arms, but is still wearing her bunny slippers.

Mother and Bastian slowly calm.

ABIGAIL

(outside the window) Bye.

MOTHER

(confused) Did you see that?

BASTIAN

(to the baby) Stupid baby.

RISSA

(sitting) Yes.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(to the carpet) You grew!

RISSA

(smiles) Yes.

BASTIAN

Stupid baby tell me a story. No--I'll tell you one. Once upon a time, *your* father's dead. (laughing) Cheer up. I never knew either of mine; look how I turned out. (shaking the gun) That's not why I'm doing this. There's a whole world of information you will never know. A whole world of information that stories could never tell. And even if they could, who would listen?

MOTHER

(ear to the carpet) Listen.

RISSA

(to no one) Once upon a time...

MOTHER

You can almost hear it grow.

BASTIAN

Once upon a time, there was a boy named "Sue." I've just decided your name is Sue--

MOTHER

It's not much, but it's definitely a start.

BASTIAN

And he was stuck in a pot and left on the doorstep of a cryptic house. A house full of several stories.

RISSA

Stories...

BASTIAN

Several stories and a gun and...

RISSA

Babies...

BASTIAN

(shift) It makes perfect sense to me now why you'd want to kill yourself.

RISSA

Baby.

BASTIAN

Makes perfect, perfect, perfect, perfect, perfectly good sense to me that you must die.  
You do want me to shoot you, don't you Sue?

MOTHER

Yes--

Rissa laughs.

BASTIAN

All you have to do is say the word and I'll shoot.

MOTHER

It'll probably grow an inch or two before breakfast.

BASTIAN

Just say it.

RISSA

(looking to the window) Where's Quasi-Martin?

MOTHER

I'm done caring for Martin, and fish, and babies, too. From now on, I care for my carpet.

BASTIAN

Just say it!

RISSA

(looking out the window) Bastian!

Bastian looks to the audience as if at Rissa.

BASTIAN

(to Rissa) Pinkies.

RISSA

(vague) Say "I love you."

MOTHER

Say it first.

RISSA

I--

BASTIAN

(gun on baby) I can't?

MOTHER

Neither can I.

BASTIAN

(gun on baby) But I will.

Lights out on Bastian. Rissa walks across the living room in her red pumps; Mother is looking to her carpet, weed eater in hand.

There is a deafening GUNSHOT. Mother and Rissa stop moving.

There is another deafening GUNSHOT, and then the longest silence. Rissa gets Mother's purse and walks to the window.

RISSA

(vacant) Well, I'll be home before dark.

MOTHER

It is dark.

Rissa deliberately locks the window and laughs.

RISSA

Then I guess you shouldn't wait up for me.

Mother lifts the goggles to her forehead.

Rissa exits the front door.

MOTHER

I really am glad that all my children made it home for Thanksgiving.

Rissa is seen walking past the window.

Mother sits on the floor with her bottle of scotch.

MOTHER

(quietly to carpet) Shh. There, there now. There, there.

Lights fade to black.

THE END.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

“I'm not suggesting that the play is without fault; all of my plays are imperfect, I'm rather happy to say-it leaves me something to do.” --Edward Albee

To say that this journey that started back in October 2007 has been an easy one would be...well...the truth. Telling stories is something I have prided myself in doing for several years now. I never seem to tire of the strategic positioning of words, the proffering of retorts that top one character for the other, the creation of cyclical worlds to recreate an emotion or trigger a memory for a reader, listener, or viewer. I no longer view playwriting as a choice, but rather look at it as a necessity to feed as well as cleanse my soul. The telling of this particular story has been the pinnacle of my writing experience to date. I look forward to the challenge of recreating even a fraction of the joy I have experienced with this project in subsequent ventures. I have always looked at *House of Several Stories* as “the little play that could.” What started out as a mere classroom assignment has grown into something that possesses a life of its own--a life outside of the pages that encompass its text; a life that transcends its premier production; a life beyond even the playwright himself--myself.

Winning the 2009 KCACTF National Student Playwriting Award is a huge honor, one that I am not quite sure has fully sunk in yet. I am still dumbfounded when I recall some of the names of past winners; I cannot help but think to myself, “Wow. Is this really

happening?” Winning has also personally fueled a desire within me to persevere with my craft. I am excited about future writing projects, which I have started in the past, but which have resided as mere icons on my laptop for months, in some cases years. With this award comes a great responsibility, if only to myself; I now have a greater want or need to follow up with something that merits the attention that *House of Several Stories* has received--if not more.

I am not exactly sure what can or will transpire from winning this award, but the Kennedy Center offers an extensive package that could lead to future opportunities. Membership into the Dramatist Guild of America alone is a great step forward as a writer; the resources it provides are invaluable. The publishing option with Samuel French will hopefully lead to the script reaching a wider audience through future productions across the country. And after speaking to Isaac Byrne, I have come to realize that the Sundance Theatre Lab Fellowship that I take part in July 2009 can prove to be a wonderful door opener. And I cannot lie: hearing about the cash prize brought a huge smile to my face.

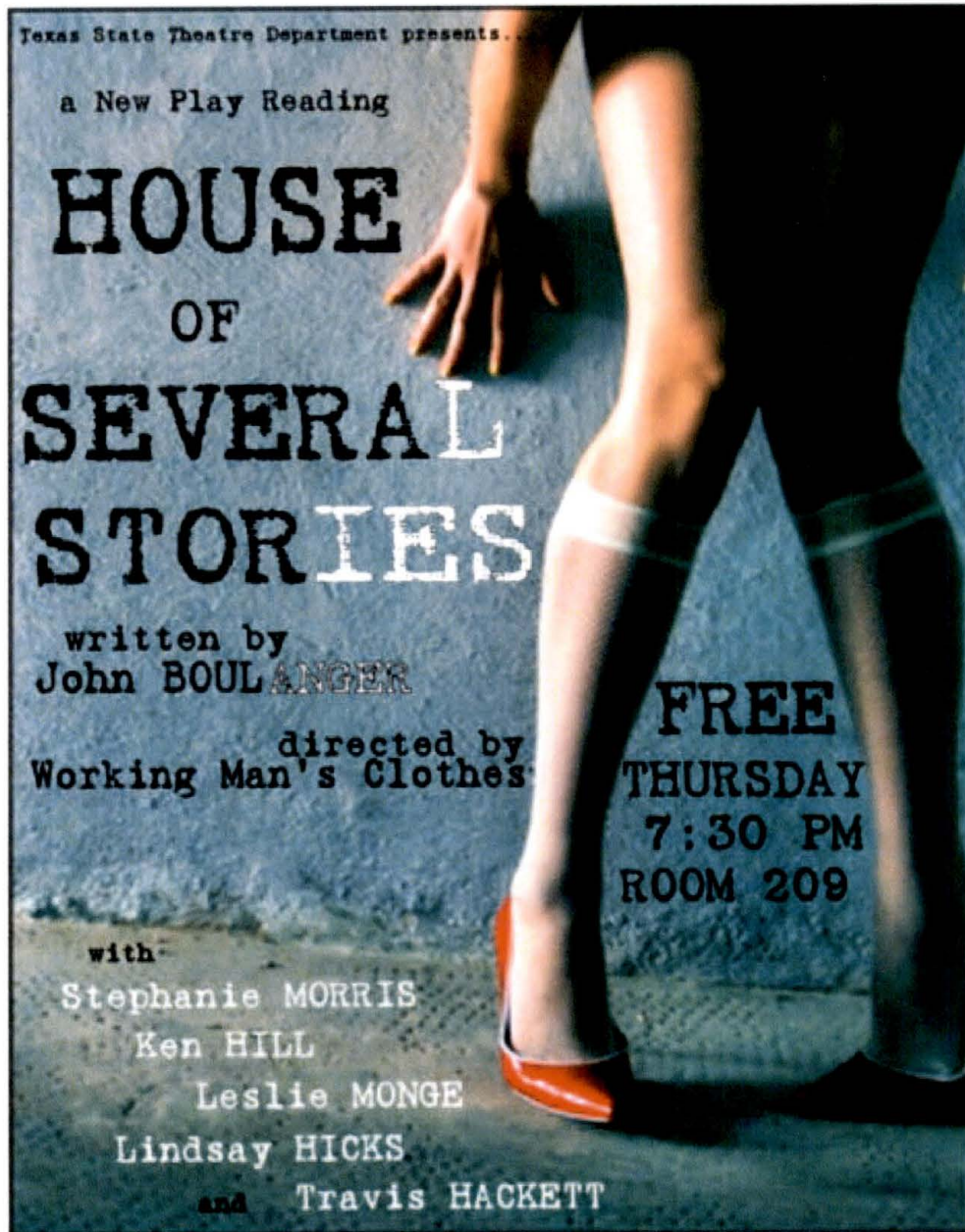
It has been a great honor to be recognized nationally for my writing, but I have to believe that it is for the high caliber of Texas State’s production that the play has been recognized by audiences. What I have received from the Texas State Theatre Department has unquestionably been the highpoint in my academic and writing career. For young playwrights, it is extremely difficult, most times impossible, to receive that first production of a new script. But being at Texas State and through the support of the theatre department, I have been fortunate enough to see my script receive a staged reading under the direction of a New York City-based director; an Austin

premiere; a remount production on our studio theatre stage; and it will soon be seen at the John F. Kennedy Center Family Theatre.

The strength of the Texas State Theatre Department in all areas of production is why my script has been able to shine and I am ever grateful for the talents of our highly capable and fully-invested actors, designers and directors. I could not imagine accepting this award, or anything that transpires in the future for *HOSS*, without sharing it with everyone who was graciously involved from the beginning.

APPENDIX A

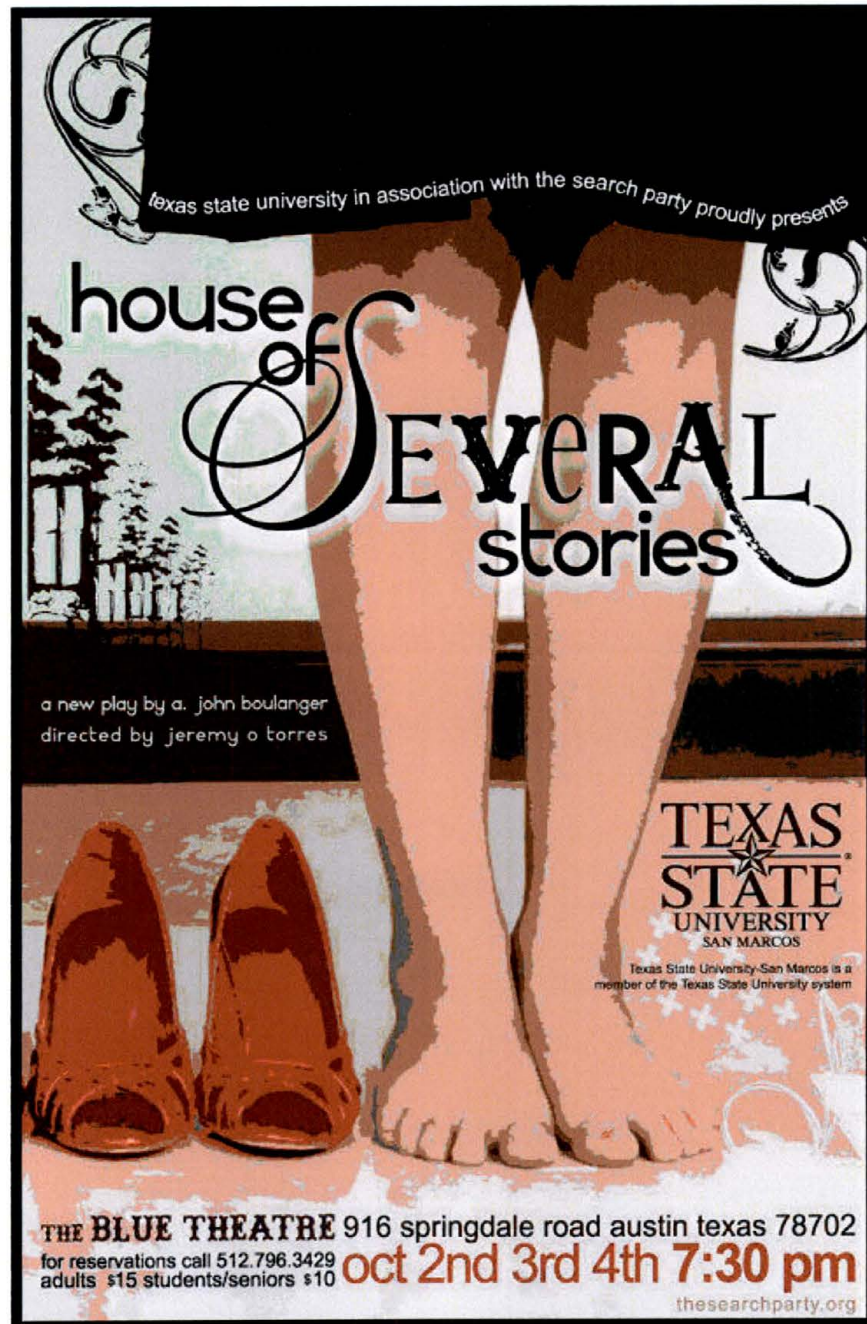
WORKSHOP FLIER



designed by: John Boulanger

## APPENDIX B

### PRODUCTION POSTER



designed by: Michelle Jackson

## APPENDIX C

### PRODUCTION LISTS

HOUSE OF SEVERAL STORIES received a workshop reading at Texas State University-San Marcos on March 26, 2008. It was directed by Isaac Byrnes, co-founder of Working Man's Clothes of New York City. The cast was as follows:

Mother.....	Stephanie Morris
Bastian.....	Kenneth Hill
Rissa.....	Leslie Monge
Thom.....	Travis Hackett
Young Woman/Abigail.....	Lindsay Hicks

HOUSE OF SEVERAL STORIES was produced at The Blue Theatre (Texas State University and The Search Party) in Austin, Texas, opening October 2, 2008. It was directed by Jeremy O. Torres. The production company was as follows:

#### CAST:

Mother.....	Melissa Grogan
Bastian.....	Travis Hackett
Rissa.....	Ashley Rhodes
Thom.....	Kenneth Hill
Young Woman/Abigail.....	Ragan Rhodes

#### DESIGN and STAFF:

Director.....	Jeremy O. Torres
Scene Design.....	Vanessa Velasquez
Costume Design.....	Abbey Graf
Lighting Design.....	Chris McKnight
Sound Design.....	Daniel Schaetz, Adam Smith
Associate Director.....	Teresa Mikulastik
Stage Manager.....	Lara Willars

HOUSE OF SEVERAL STORIES was remounted for a limited run at the PHS Foundation Studio Theatre in San Marcos, Texas, opening February 17, 2009. As part of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, HOUSE was performed at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, on April 18, 2009. Both productions used the latter company listed above.



## APPENDIX D

### SET DESIGN



white model (above) and set design (below) by Vanessa Velasquez



## APPENDIX E

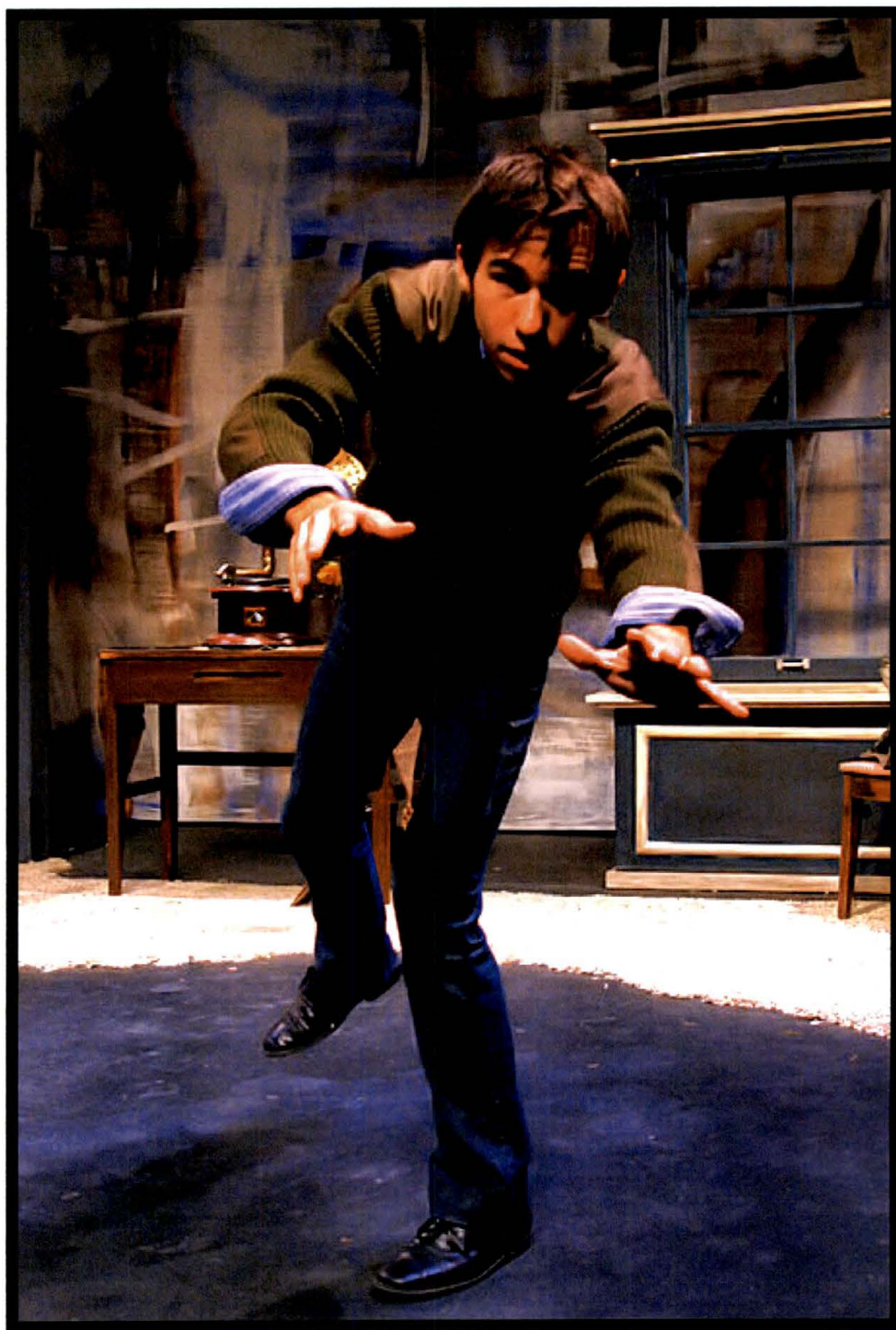
### CAST OF CHARACTERS



Melissa Grogan as Mother



## CAST OF CHARACTERS



Travis Hackett as Bastian

## CAST OF CHARACTERS



Ashley Rhodes as Rissa

## CAST OF CHARACTERS



Kenneth Hill as Thom



## CAST OF CHARACTERS



Ragan Rhodes as Abigail

APPENDIX F

PRODUCTION PHOTOS



ACT I

Rissa makes a stealthy entrance.



## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT I

Rissa and Bastian swear secrecy on their pinkies.

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT I

Mother: "Remember when I made your father's favorite?  
Rabbit stew...and I forgot to skin the rabbit first."



## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT I

Mother waters her carpet in hopes that it'll grow.



## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Mother: "Nobody is out there; nobody is looking in."

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS

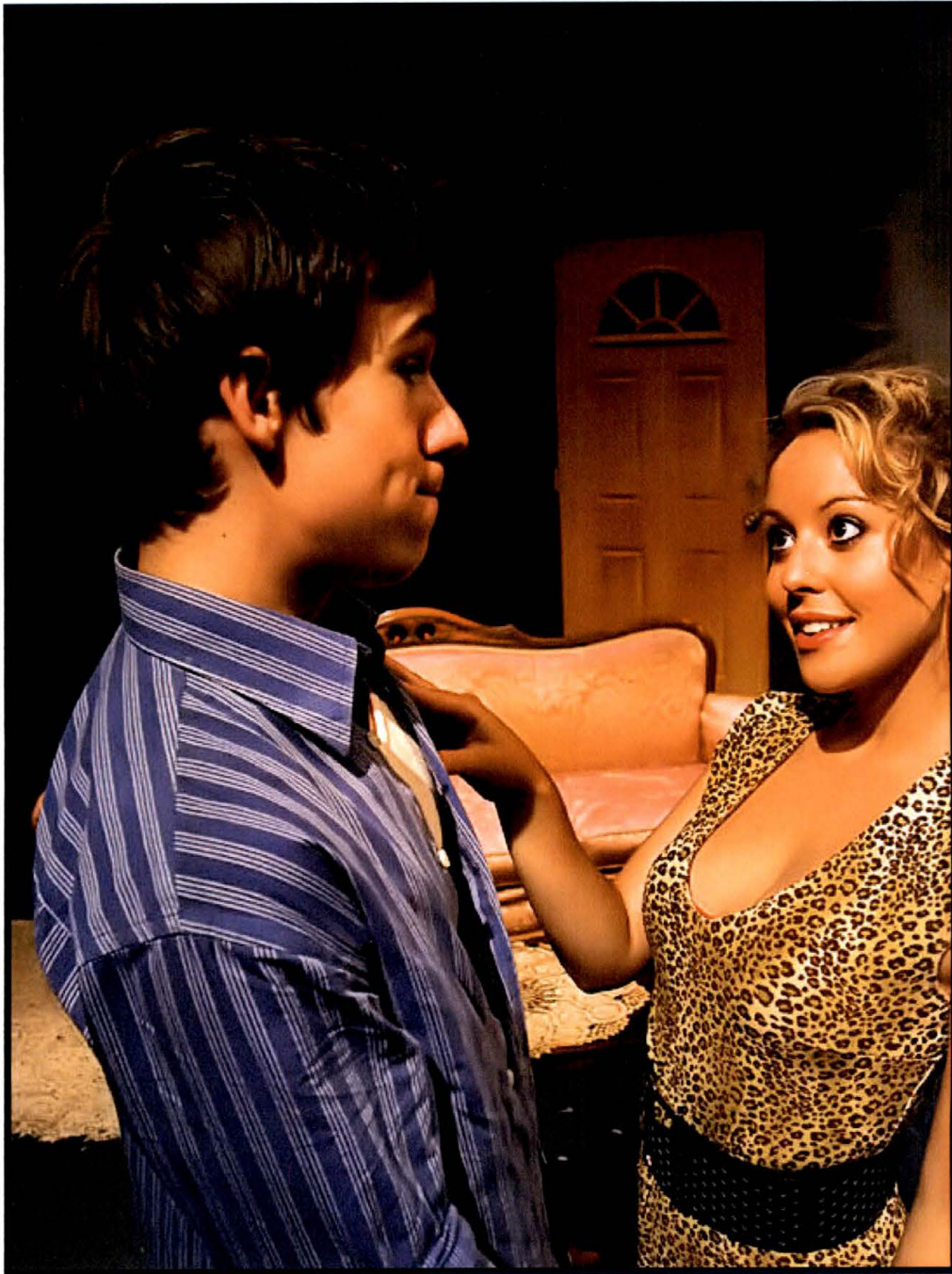


## ACT II

Mother: "This isn't a dead baby, is it? I'm not holding a baby, am I?"



## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Abigail: "I take it back; in this light, you do look like Thom."

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Rissa: "Just *who* the *hell* are you?"



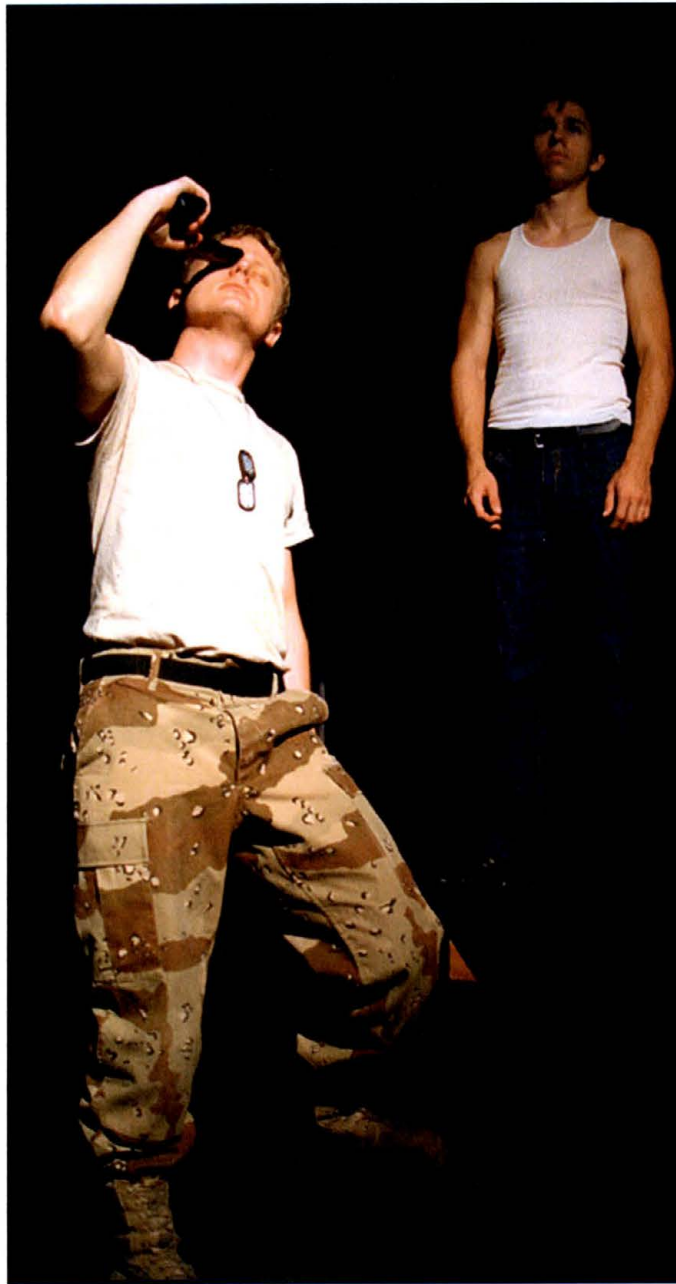
## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Abigail waits for Thom to descend the stairs.

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Thom: "Protecting an entire country sure can get to a guy after a while.  
Among other things."

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Abigail and a dead Thom are reunited.

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Rissa: "LIAR!"



## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Mother shares a dance with Thom.

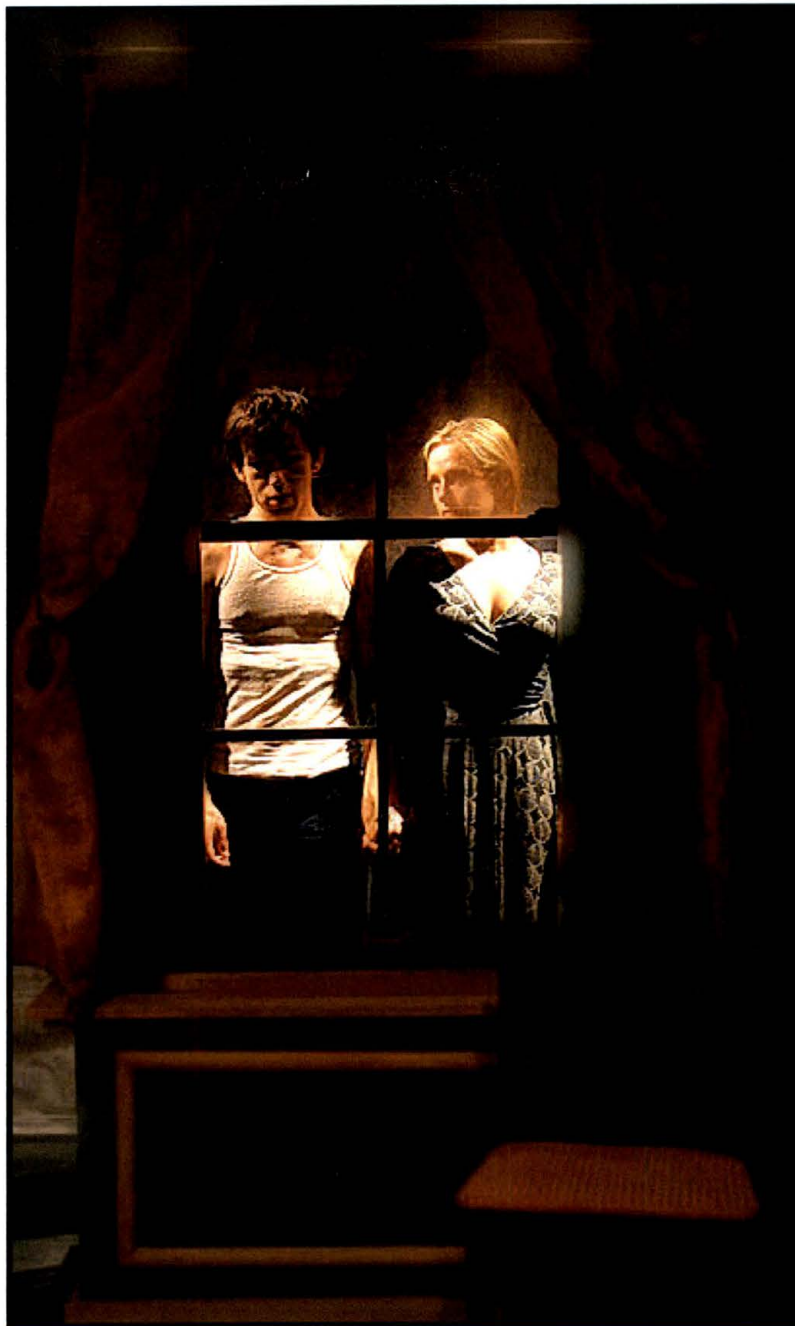
## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## ACT II

Bastian tells fish baby a story.

## PRODUCTION PHOTOS



## END OF PLAY

Bastian and Rissa leave home for the last time.

## APPENDIX G

### DIRECTOR'S NOTES

#### On Directing House of Several Stories

In my career as a director I always enjoy the process of working on a new play with the writer as an active member of the production team. When I first received *House of Several Stories* written by A. John Boulanger I was taken aback at how well it was written and how tightly constructed the plot was. I was immediately drawn into the world of the play and fascinated by the characters and their situations. This is not a play that reveals its' secrets with one initial reading. I understood from the beginning that directing this play would be a worthwhile journey for the entire team involved. I was not disappointed. The experience of working with John Boulanger and the Texas State University actors and designers was rich and rewarding.

The first draft of the play had few issues. In meetings with the playwright and his advisor Dr. John Fleming we discussed tightening up the ending with the goal of making the play shorter. We also discussed the characters in great detail with the intention of making sure that each of the actor's motivations would be clear and precise. Before the play was cast the playwright had the opportunity to change anything he felt necessary. There were two major changes to the text before the rehearsal process began. Therefore, much to my benefit, the script the actors received after casting was "frozen" and very few changes were made during the rehearsal process.

The rehearsal process was a joy. As a group we made very important decisions from the get go about the characters and their given circumstances. This process was a bit like dissecting a Chekov play. The play reads like a comedy—with verbal wit and pun that matches Christopher Durang—yet underneath the surface there is a tragic human story. Making sure the actors and I were all on the same page throughout the process was paramount to making the text work. The world we created that these characters existed in was ripe with emotion, tragedy, and love. We used our own understanding of basic human emotion to underscore the comedy and heighten the drama of the text. We also studied and discussed the tenets of Absurdism during the rehearsal process which influenced many of the decisions we made concerning the staging and evolution of the story.

The play to me is a rendering of the downfall of the American family unit. We are left wondering who is real, who is imaginary, and if the knowledge of this really matters at all. The production team took great pleasure in the fact that in performance many audience members left with more questions than answers. We reveled in the idea that people left the theatre wondering about the secrets and hidden relationships that made up this family. We live in a world where nothing is black and white and often we are left with more questions than answers. The play was not wrapped neatly in a box with a bow and delivered to the audience, rather it was funny, raw, and confusing much like life itself. It is rare that a theatrical production of a new play works as beautifully as House of Several Stories. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to work with an amazing playwright, incredibly talented actors and designers, and a dedicated faculty to bring such a powerful story to life.

Jeremy O. Torres  
November 2008

**APPENDIX H**  
**DVD OF PRODUCTION**

The attached DVD is a recording of the October 3, 2008 performance at The Blue Theatre. Production information available in Appendix C (page 155).



INSERT DVD  
IN  
SLEEVE

Videographer and editor: Marc Spier

## **APPENDIX I**

### **CD OF PRODUCTION PHOTOS**

The attached CD contains digital photographs from the October 3, 2008 performance at The Blue Theatre. Production information available in Appendix C (page 155).



INSERT CD  
IN  
SLEEVE

Photographer: Jeremy White



## VITA

A. John Boulanger is a graduate playwright at Texas State University-San Marcos, receiving his masters in May 2009. Boulanger also holds an AA in Political Science, *cum laude*, and a BFA in Theatre Directing, *magna cum laude*. During his

more than 20 years in the theatre, Boulanger has been recognized for his achievements in acting, directing, and writing, having worked within community, regional, and professional theaters. He is a past National Champion of Phi Rho Pi Forensics in Dramatic Duo Acting, and has received honors for directing by the William Inge Center for the Arts in 2009. Boulanger has twice traveled abroad to study at the Royal Shakespeare Institute in Stratford, England, taking master classes addressing Shakespeare's work in both text and performance. Boulanger received the 2009 Michael Kanin National Student Playwriting Award from the Kennedy Center American Theatre College Festival, garnering a full production of his play House of Several Stories at The Kennedy Center Family Theatre. Boulanger is a member of the Dramatist Guild of America and has received a fellowship to the Sundance Theatre Lab in Sundance, UT.

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This thesis was typed by A. John Boulanger.