"The Dining Table"

by

Chris D. Cox

104 Bartholomew Drive Sterlington, LA 71280 318-665-4699 FADE IN:

EXT: LUMBER COMPANY-DAY

Trucks bringing in timber are rumbling into a dusty lumber yard. It's hot and men are working with their shirts off in the morning heat. The trees are being sawed and prepared for shipment.

CUT TO:

INT: LEVINE'S FURNITURE MANUFACTURING- DAY

Men are using machines to plane and sand the recently cut pieces, while others are varnishing other pieces. Men are assembling tables, chairs, and various other pieces.

CUT TO:

EXT: LEVINE'S FURNITURE MANUFACTURING-DAY

Men are loading completed pieces onto large truck where our table and chairs along with numerous other pieces are loaded for shipment to retail furniture stores. Truck pulls away from loading area and begins long trip deep into the southern U.S. to deliver the furniture.

CUT TO:

EXT: HIGHWAY- DAY

The furniture truck passes municipal sign:

Welcome To Brookhaven

The Heart of Mississippi

CUT TO:

EXT: BROOKHAVEN, MISSISSIPPI -DAY

The furniture truck is parked at Ulmer's Fine Furnishings. Two men unload the furniture.

CUT TO:

INT: ULMER'S FINE FURNISHINGS-DAY

Two African-American men are unwrapping the protective material from the furniture and moving it inside the store. A white man with a tie and straw hat watches the men unwrap and move the pieces. JERSEY Sho is some good lookin' pieces here Missuh Ulma.

RAY Uh huh, sho is.

ULMER Yeah, boys. These should move pretty fast. I got a lady from Laurel that's gonna come by here tomorrow to look at this shipment.

Ulmer turns and walks back into the store as Ray and Jersey continue unloading the truck.

CUT TO:

INT: ULMER'S FINE FURNISHINGS-DAY

Claire Rogers is wiping perspiration from her neck as Ulmer brings her a glass of water.

ULMER

Here ya go, Mrs. Rogers. You shore picked a hot day to look at furniture.

Claire fans hersef with her hankerchief as she sips the water.

CLAIRE

Thank you so much.

ULMER

I can see that you have an eye for quality. That's one of the new pieces just come from the factory. When will the house be finished?

CLAIRE

In a month says the builder. If the weather holds that is. We want to be in it before September.

ULMER

That's good and I know you'll be happy to begin settling in. Have you thought about your dining room, yet?

CLAIRE

We have a dining set that belonged to my husband's grandparents. But the table wobbles terribly and I just hate it.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

He puts these little bitty pieces of wood under the legs and declares it "good as new!" Can you imagine such a thing, Mr. Ulmer? What would my house guests think if they saw chunks of firewood sticking out from under the table legs? Shameful! That's what it is, just shameful.

ULMER I agree completely. A new house deserves the best and wobbly tables just won't do.

Mr. Ulmer looks around for Jersey and Ray.

ULMER

Jersey, you and Ray move this dining suit out so Mrs. Rogers can see it better.

Jersey and Ray begin moving the table and chairs into open area. Claire steps aside and then walks around the table to see it from all angles.

> CLAIRE (walking around slowly, never taking her eyes off the table) Yes. That would be perfect.

JERSEY Yesm'. Sho is a nice table.

RAY Uh huh, sho is.

ULMER

With the house almost finished, this dining set would just set things off, perfectly.

CLAIRE

Mr. Ulmer. Could I get you to hold this table until I talk to my husband about it? I had not intended to buy a dining set, and he thinks I'm spending too much now.

ULMER

You can assure your husband that my prices cannot be beat within a fifty miles of Brookhaven.

Jersey and Ray look at each other with expressions of confusion.

CLAIRE

Oh, Mr. Ulmer. I never meant to suggest that your prices were too high. My husband just thinks we should keep our old furniture from the house in Biloxi.

ULMER

Well, I'm sorry if I sounded ungrateful. But, I have a reputation to maintain in this area and I can't afford to have folks thinkin' that I'm high priced.

CLAIRE

I'll tell you what. Go ahead and arrange to have these pieces stored and I'll have a draft made out for half the balance now. When the house is finished, I'll pay the rest.

ULMER

But, what about your husband? I mean, will he agree to this?

CLAIRE Trust me, Mr. Ulmer. He'll agree.

Claire hands the empty water glass to Mr. Ulmer and starts toward the door as Ulmer watches her.

ULMER We'll have your furniture wrapped and ready for ya' Mrs. Rogers.

CLAIRE Thank you for your patience, Mr. Ulmer.

Ulmer, Jersey, and Ray watch her walk outside an along the street in front of the large plate glass window of the store.

JERSEY

Missuh Ulmer? Why you tell that lady yo' prices can't be beat in fifty miles? They ain't no other furniture stows within a fifty miles of Brookhaven.

RAY Uh uh, sho ain't. Not within no fi-ty mile. ULMER Well, then. I told the truth. My prices can't be beat if there ain't nobody to beat them.

Jersey and Ray begin to shake their heads unbelieving.

JERSEY Yous a rascal, Missuh Ulmer.

RAY Uh huh. Sho is a rascal.

EXT: ROGERS' HOME-DAY

Ray and Jersey are unloading the new furniture that Claire bought. Her husband, Jeff, is on the porch and not very happy with the large purchase. Claire is moving about frantically giving instructions about where the furniture goes. Ray and Jersey begin moving the dining room table out of truck. Jeff sees the table and becomes visibly upset. Jeff walks down steps to confront his wife. Ray and Jersey stop to watch. Jeff walks up to Ray and Jersey. Jeff and Claire's sons, William and Joseph run around the yard yelling as they play cowboys and Indians.

> JEFF Y'all can put that back on the truck. We got a dinner table already.

Ray and Jersey begin moving back toward the truck.

CLAIRE No! That dining set goes inside. I'll show you the way.

Ray and Jersey begin moving back toward the house.

JEFF I said, put that back on the truck. We don't need it, and I'm not paying for it.

Ray and Jersey stop moving and look at each other with concern.

CLAIRE Jefferson Davis Rogers! First of all, the furniture is already paid for. You signed the draft a week ago.

JEFF But Claire, you never said a word about a dining set. What's wrong with the one we have now? CLAIRE (Raising her voice to a high pitch as she stomps her foot) What's wrong with it? What's wrong with it? It wobbles. It is not appropriate for this house.

JEFF But honey, I keep shims under the legs. If they're worn out, you should tell me.

William and Joseph have left their play upon hearing Claire. They have crept up to peek in from outside one of the dining room windows that is open.

> CLAIRE Why should I have to tell you if the table wobbles. I bought this new table and that's it.

 $${\rm JEFF}$$ I am the man here and I'll say when we buy a new table.

CLAIRE Fine! Have it your way.

CLAIRE (looking at the moving men) Take it back, gentlemen. I'll make it right with Mr. Ulmer later.

William and Jospeh almost trip over themselves trying to get away from the window to avoid being detected.

CUT TO:

INT: ROGERS' HOUSE-NIGHT

Jeff,Claire, William and Jospeh are seated at their old dining table. Jeff is getting his spoon ready to dip some hot soup up. Claire pushes down on her end of the table causing the hot soup to spill out onto Jeff's lap. He jumps up frantically trying wipe the hot liquid off of his pants.

JEFF Dammit to hell!

William and Joseph's heads snap up, wide-eyed to watch Jeff as he continues to jump around wiping the hot soup off his pants. CLAIRE (sips her soup slowly without looking up) Sugar, the table is wobbling again. Could you fix it when you get time?

Claire addresses the boys

CLAIRE Finish your soup boys. You don't want it to get cold.

WILLIAM AND JOSEPH (in unison and with reverence/fear) Yes ma'am.

The boys return to eating with haste.

CUT TO:

EXT: ROGERS' HOUSE-DAY

The moving truck from Ulmer's is in front of the house again. Ray and Jersey are moving the new table in. Jeff is sitting in the den behind a newspaper trying to appear not to care. He doesn't want Ray and Jersey to see him. They smile at one another and wink after passing the den and seeing Jeff.

CUT TO:

INT: ROGERS' HOUSE-MONTHS LATER-1941-DAY

Jeff and Claire are in the kitchen talking about World War II. Claire is crying. William and Joseph, are in the back of the house pretending to be bomber pilots.

> CLAIRE (visible upset) Why do you have to go? You have a family now and a good job. They can't make you go. Why now?

> > JEFF

Darlin'. No one is making me go. I have to go. It's my duty as an American to go. They need men who know how to build things for the effort. You understand, don't ya? I won't be with a combat outfit. There is no danger. You'll see. I'll be back in no time to tell you and the boys all kinds of stories. CLAIRE Stories! Is that what this is about? Telling stories like some ol' Confederate soldier sittin' in front of a camp fire!

JEFF What do I tell the boys when they begin to ask why didn't their Daddy go the war? Huh?

Jeff looks around for the boys as he lowers his voice.

JEFF

I have to do this. I won't be able to live with myself if I don't. So many of the boys from the factory have already enlisted. Even the War Department says our jobs are valuable to the wart effort. And yes, most of 'em had kinfolks in the Civil War and they ain't about to let this get by without being a part of it. My job will be here when I get back. The plant can practically run by itself. They army needs men that know engineering.

Claire begins to sob. The boys have secretly crawled under the table and are sitting on the decorative supports. They are pretending to be in a dog fight with planes of the Japanese air force. As they hear their parents walk into the room, they become quiet. One boy has on an aviators cap with goggles on top of his head. Jeff and Claire are standing beside the table as they continue talking. Claire has calmed down.

JEFF

You'll see that this job with the Army is no more dangerous than what I do now. It's more dangerous for me to drive to work than being in the Army.

Jeff pulls Claire close to him.

JEFF

(embracing Claire) I'll be fine. You've always taken care of the boys and the house. Shreveport's not that far away and I know Sandra would love to come and stay.

CLAIRE I know, but still... (grinning) But nothin'. Hey, don't ya' wanna give a soldier a memory to take to war with him?

JEFF

CLAIRE (shocked) Not in here.

JEFF Why not? I paid a pretty penny for this table. I say let's see if it's worth the money.

Jeff reaches behind Claire and lifts her onto the table.

CLAIRE Jeff! What about the boys? They could run in any minute.

JEFF Those two are out conquering the skies above Tokyo.

Jeff takes Claire into his arms and begins to kiss her. Claire finally relents after looking around for the boys.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERNEATH DINING TABLE-DAY

Under the table, the boys have confused looks on their faces as they stare at each other. Suddenly the table begins to move slowly from side to side. Then the pace quickens. William pulls his goggles over his eyes. The other boy throws his aviators scarf around his neck and holds on to the table leg nearest him. Claire and Jeff moan from above as they make love. The boys can see Jeff's legs with his pants around his knees. The boys can't see much because of the table cloth hanging down so low. The boys are imagining sounds of air war instead of lovemaking.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM-DAY

Claire is straightening her dress and Jeff is tucking in his shirt. They walk out of the room holding hands without saying a word. William lifts goggles away from his face and rests them on his head. He acts as if he is tired. Joseph slowly unwraps the scarf from his neck. They are both taking deep breaths. WILLIAM (wiping his face as if sweaty) Whew! Another Zero in the Sea of Japan.

JOSEPH Smoke 'em if ya' gottem'.

William looks around the underside of the tabletop. He reaches into his pants pocket and removes a small pocket knife. He begins carving his name into the underside of the dining table.

JOSEPH

(very excited) Do mine, Dub! Do my name, too!

WILLIAM (continuing to carve) Sure thing. Just don't say nothin' to Mama. She'll use this jackknife to skin us both.

Joseph pulls his fingers across this mouth to indicate his lips were sealed.

CUT TO:

EXT: RAILROAD DEPOT-DAY

There are several people walking around the train station. The train engine is rumbling as the train prepares to pull out. Claire, William, and Joseph have come to see Jeff off.

> CONDUCTOR One-thirty to Baton Rouge, now boarding.

William and Joseph are running along the passenger walkway making train whistle noises. Claire is looking up at her husband sadly.

> CLAIRE How long will you be on the train?

> > JEFF

Oh, I don't know. We have several stops for mail and other men going to training. With the action in the Pacific so strong now, they aren't putting us through the entire program.

CLAIRE

Well, isn't that dangerous? I don't like the thought of you being unprepared.

JEFF Don't worry. With the job I have, about the only enemy I'll ever see are the ones brought through on the POW transports.

Claire turns to look around station. Many men dressed in military uniforms wander around, some kissing wives, others hugging parents and children.

CLAIRE Dub! Joseph! Come say bye to your daddy.

The boys run up to their father. Jeff looks down smiling as he kneels down to get on their eye level.

JEFF

Boys, now remember what we talked about. I'm gonna need y'all to help take care of things around the house while I'm gone.

WILLAIM Daddy? Are you goin' to kill ol' Hitler?

JOSEPH Yeah Daddy! You gonna blow his ugly head off?

CLAIRE Boys! That's no way to talk to your father!

JEFF That's alright. No boys, I doubt I'll ever see ol' Hitler, but if I do, he'll wish he had stayed in Germany.

WILLAIM Yeah! Daddy's gonna get Hitler. Daddy's gonna get Hitler.

Passersby are laughing and smiling at the boy's song.

CLAIRE

(stomps her foot) That'll do. Another word like that and I'll tear you up!

JEFF

Alright now, Dub. We had our talk. You're the oldest and you have to help take care of Momma and Joe for me. Ok?

WILLAIM

Yes, Daddy. I'll take care of everything till you get back.

JEFF Good boy. I know you'll be fine.

JEFF

(turns to Joe) Joe? Can I count on you to help Dub when he gets busy? I'm dependin' on ya' now.

JOSEPH Daddy, I ain't never gonna be bad again till you get back.

JEFF (laughs as he rubs Joe's head) That's my boy!

Jeff stands and Claire begins to weep. Tears are running down her face. The boys are hugging their father as he prepares to leave. Jeff embraces Claire and kisses her. He pulls out his handkerchief and wipes her tears.

JEFF

I'm dependin' on you, too. The service will be sendin' my pay directly to the bank. So, be sure to check it when you can to be sure it gets here. Ok?

CONDUCTOR

Last call.

CLAIRE

We'll be fine. Please hurry back. I don't know what I'm gonna do without you for so long.

JEFF

Shoot. I 'magine by the time I get there, the war'll be over. I'll be lucky to see England.

CLAIRE

I love you. You know that.

JEFF

I know. I wish I had the words in me to let you know how hard this is for me and how much I'll miss you and the boys. CONDUCTOR Sir, we need to leave now.

JEFF Yeah, just a minute. Thanks.

JEFF

Sandra will be here in two days and y'all will spend the rest of the war talking about old boyfriends. You'll never know I'm gone.

CLAIRE

I miss you already.

She begins to cry again as the train whistle sounds.

JEFF I gotta go honey. Boys! Remember now, you're the men of the house. Look after Momma and feed the dogs.

He begins to jog toward the train car and suddenly stops and turns around with a grin.

JEFF

Claire!

CLAIRE Is something wrong?

JEFF

What ever you do.....have that dining table shined up when I get home.

The train pulls away as Jeff waves and then goes into the car. Claire and the boys wave to him.

CLAIRE (blushing) Your Daddy has no shame.

JOSEPH What's shame?

WILLAIM That's when you do somethin' wrong and get caught.

JOSEPH Momma? What did Daddy get caught doin'? CLAIRE

Nothin' baby. Nothin' at all. Let's get on home. You're Aunt Sandra will be here soon and we need to get the house ready.

Claire stops to look at rear of train as it moves out of sight. The lonesome train whistle is barely audible as the train moves out of sight.

CUT TO:

EXT: ROGERS' HOUSE-SIX MONTHS LATER-DAY

Claire and her sister, Sandra, are sitting on the front porch drinking ice water. The boys are playing in the back yard. An old truck makes its way up the dusty driveway. The women sit up to see who it is.

> SANDRA Isn't that Brother Posey's truck?

CLAIRE Yeah. What in the world is he doin' out here in the middle of the week?

SANDRA Lord, please don't let it be another revival.

CLAIRE Sandra! Listen to yourself!

SANDRA

Damn Claire! That man prays longer than Methusala was alive and you know that. How many poor shut-ins and afflicted people can there be in Mississippi?

CLAIRE

Sandra! Please! Brother Posey is a dedicated and anointed man of God. His life has been a model for most of the folks around here. I can think of some who could learn a thing or two from him.

> SANDRA nat? How to sleep w

Like what? How to sleep with their eyes open?

The old truck pulls up in front of the house and the preacher slowly gets out. Claire looks at Sandra with pleading eyes.

SANDRA (whispering) OKOK. Don't have a fit.

William and Joseph run up to the preacher. They are very excited to see him

WILLIAM Brother Posey! Jerry Sims said you was taking the boys to the lake after church Sunday!

JOSEPH Yeah, swimmin'!

The preacher is struggling to put on a good face. It is obvious that he is here to deliver bad news.

PREACHER

Yeah boys! We gonna load up a tub of belly washers and maybe some red worms just in case the fish are bitin' and we might not ever come home.

WILLAIM

I knew it! Mama can we go?

JOSEPH Yeah mama! Can we go?

CLAIRE

We'll see how you behave between now and Sunday.

The boys' faces drop.

PREACHER

Dub? Have you managed to grow a single watermelon in that sickly little garden of yours?

WILLIAM Yes sir! Watermelons so big, can't nobody tote 'em off.

CLAIRE

Good idea! Why don't you boys go see if you can fetch one of those big rascals around here?

The boys scramble toward the garden to find the largest melon. The preacher's face drops as boys disappear and he looks up at Claire and Sandra.

SANDRA

Brother Posey, come on up here out of the heat. Ya' look like your just about blistered.

PREACHER Thank you, Sister. I believe I will.

He starts up the steps and takes off his straw hat to wipe the sweat off the inside of the brim.

> CLAIRE Sandra, would you get Brother Posey a glass of water?

> > SANDRA

Sure.

Sandra stands up.

PREACHER No, Sandra. Thank ya' sug' but I'm not really here to visit.

The preacher looks at Claire and then the floor. He scuffs the bottom of his shoe along the wooden porch floor.

CLAIRE

Brother Posey? What's wrong?

PREACHER

Claire, I don't know how to tell you this. I've been driving around for hours trying to figure out how the right words.

CLAIRE

Tell me what? The ladies in my Sunday School class aren't throwing me out are they?

PREACHER

No. I wish it were that simple. The Lord has blessed me in so many ways girls, but here lately it seems like he's determined to make me earn my place in glory.

Sandra walks over and sits by Claire on the porch swing.

CLAIRE It's Jeff. Something's happened to Jeff. Oh my Lord. Please God, not Jeff! Sandra begins to cry and hugs Claire. The Preacher reaches into his pocket and removes the telegraph from the War Department telling news of Jeff's death. Claire begins to sob. You can see the preachers' hand shaking as he holds the telegraph message. The boys come around the corner carrying a huge watermelon. Their big smiles disappear as they see the scene on the porch. William drops the melon to one side and it smashes into large chunks on the ground. The boys run up the steps to Claire and Sandra. Claire kneels down to hug them as she sobs. They rock from side to side wailing. Sandra puts her head in her hands and sobs. The preacher stands behind the boys, patting their heads as they grieve.

CUT TO:

INT: ROGERS' HOUSE-NIGHT

People are gathered drinking coffee, eating, talking in hushed tones.

CUT TO:

EXT:ROGERS' HOUSE-NIGHT

Several men are outside smoking and chewing tobacco. William is outside with the older men. The surrounding woods echo with night sounds of insects mixed with the muffled conversations of local people who have gathered to pay their respects to the family.

> HUBERT JENKINS (talking to William) Dub, you must be about ready to start huntin'.

William shifts from foot to foot, unsure of what to say.

JENKINS

I was about your age the first time I went squirrel huntin'. My daddy took me and an ol' bluetick hound that we called Highpockets. Boy, I mean to tell ya', ol' Highpockets could tree a squirrel in a cypress thicket standin' in the middle of the Mississippi River!

WILLIAM

My daddy can't teach me how to hunt. He died.

The other men stop talking and watch as William and Mr. Jenkins talk.

ODELL TEMPLE Hubert Jenkins, that dog of yours couldn't smell a polecat under the porch!

The men laugh nervously. William smiles weakly and looks up at Jenkins.

JENKINS Odell, if I had a dog as sorry as that black and tan of yours, I wouldn't bother talkin'. That dog is so gun shy, he wets himself when somebody breaks wind.

The men all laugh more as William begins to smile more.

TEMPLE What you know about black and tans wouldn't fill a thimble Hubert Jenkins. Dub, my boy, I gotta dog that speaks squirrel.

The men chuckle as the attention becomes focused on Temple.

WILLIAM Your dog can talk like a squirrel?

TEMPLE (stoops down to get eye level with William) Weelllll.... not exactly. Ya' see, he understands what them busytails are sayin' up in the tops of them trees. He just sits and listens and then he tells me where the squirrels are and where they're goin'.

WILLIAM Wow! Is that true?

Men around smiling appreciatively as story is being told.

TEMPLE Yessir, it's true! Why, last fall, me an ol' Jack was in a hardwood thicket. Out in the swamp ya know?

TEMPLE

Jack was sniffin' the air like a wolf. I knew he done found a mess of them bushy tails. Well, I just sat down right there on a stump.

The group of men begin to lean in to hear the story.

WILLIAM Why ja do that?

TEMPLE

Well, I knowed ol' Jack was listenin' to them squirrels talkin' up there and I didn't wanna disturb him. So, Jack listens and listens and listens some more and finally he jumps up, grabs a limb in his mouth and starts shaking it like he's gone plumb crazy.

The men are listening intently.

WILLIAM

Wh...What happened?

TEMPLE

Well, I didn't know what to think. Jack had never acted like that before. I thought maybe he was havin' a fit. He would drop the limb and bark like he was somethin' crazy, then he'd pick up that limb again and start shakin' it. I started tryin' to settle him down before he scared off all the squirrels, but he weren't havin' none of it. He wouldn't quit barkin' and shakin' that limb. I swear, it was like he was tryin' to talk to me.

Temple pauses and looks around at the men and finally settles on William. He lets the anticipation build.

> WILLIAM Was Jack tryin' to tell ya somethin'?

> TEMPLE Yeah Dub, ol' Jack was trying to tell me somethin' alright.

WILLIAM What was he tryin' to say? (looking around carefully) Ol' Jack was sayin', "There's more durn squirrels out here than you can shake a stick at!"

A brief pause and then the men laugh loudly as they realize they have just been suckered. William laughs out loud. Mr. Temple pats William on the back.

> TEMPLE Boy! I can't believe you fellas fell for that old yarn!

Temple turns to look around at the people milling around. He turns back to the men and boys around him.

TEMPLE Boys, I think I'm gonna hafta step off out here behind a live oak and water my mule.

Temple begins to walk toward some trees in the dark.

JENKINS Be sure that ol' mule is outta the barn before you start.

TEMPLE (still walking) At least my mule can still get out of the barn.

The men begin to snicker as Temple begins to walk toward one of the large trees to urinate behind it.

WILLIAM (looks around carefully) Yeah, I think I better go water my mule, too.

JENKINS

(stifling a laugh) Alright Dub, but watch old Mr. Temple now. Don't let 'em pee on your leg.

William laughs as he begins to stroll toward the tree that Temple is behind. The men turn their heads and wink as they muffle their laughter at William's feeble attempt to sound grown up.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE-NIGHT

Claire is watching through a window and smiling. Sandra is sitting with Joseph at the dining table. Joseph is asleep. Claire sits down beside her and watches her son for a moment and then moves her gaze to the table with a far away look on her face. Several people are moving about the room bringing Claire coffee and cake.

SANDRA

Claire, I know this is a bad time, but have you thought about what you and the boys are gonna do?

CLAIRE

Huh? What? Oh, uh, no, I haven't had time with all of the arrangements and everything.

SANDRA

Why don't you come to live with me and Earl. We have plenty of room and the boys will love Shreveport.

CLAIRE

Thanks, Sandra. That's sweet, but this is our home and the boys have friends here and I don't want to put them through anymore right now.

SANDRA

But what about this house? How are you gonna pay for it? Jeff wasn't in the service long enough draw any real pension and

CLAIRE

I know you're thinking about me and the boys, but please don't worry. I'm gonna work this out somehow.

CUT TO:

INT: BANK-DAY

Claire is seated in front of the desk of Jimmy Evans, Jr. Mr. Evans is a loan officer. Sandra is in the main lobby with the boys.

EVANS

Mrs. Rogers, I was so very sorry to hear the news about Jeff. He was a good customer and a friend. I thought he was with an engineer corp building bridges.

CLAIRE

Jeff was with the engineers. He led a group that built bridges. According to his Company Commander, he and his men were getting ready to go on a short leave. They had been working so hard to keep the bridges open for supplies and moving wounded soldiers. A German fighter plane attacked and Jeff was killed trying to protect the bridge.

EVANS

That's just awful. You and your boys can certainly be proud of Jeff and his sacrifice. I tried to enlist, but they told me that my job here was of vital importance to the war effort since people would need money during these hard times.

Evans laughs nervously.

CLAIRE

Well, Mr. Evans, I'm sure you are providing a priceless service to our country.

EVANS Well, what can I do for you today?

CLAIRE

Mr. Evans, as you know, Jeff was the manager at the factory before the war. He does have some pension from there and the military as well.

Evans opens a file and begins to shuffle papers.

EVANS

Yes...Yes. Jeff certainly didn't go into the service for the pay did he?

CLAIRE

No, Mr. Evans, he went out of his sense of duty.

EVANS Sense of duty doesn't pay mortgages does it Mrs. Rogers?

CLAIRE

No, it doesn't. However, I think if the bank will allow me to adjust my payments to a slightly lower amount, I can handle the note.

EVANS

Mrs. Rogers, please understand our position. Jeff was the main source of income. How can you believe that you and your boys can possibly live on the small amount of pension coming in each month and pay for this house? Things gonna break down and it takes money to fix them. Money, I'm afraid, that you don't have.

CLAIRE

But Mr. Evans, as I said, if the bank will just work with me and lower the payments a small bit, we can make it. I know we can.

EVANS

I'm really very sorry Mrs. Rogers. There is no way I can help you. Unless you can meet the current obligation, I am afraid we will have to foreclose.

CLAIRE

My husband gave his life to protect cowards like you and you repay that by throwing his family out of their home!

Several bank customers are looking toward the source of the outburst. Sandra and the boys stand up and begin to walk toward the office.

EVANS

Mrs. Rogers! Please calm yourself. The bank is not throwing you out of your home. I simply said...

CLAIRE

I know what you said. I just can't believe you said it!

Claire stands up and storms out of office. Sandra and the boys stare back toward the embarrassed loan officer. An old man at a cashier's window has watched all of this.

> OLD MAN I guess I'll be takin' my money out of here, if you don't mind.

CASHIER

But Mr. Bryan, you've been a customer here since this bank was built.

OLD MAN Yep, and I've never been ashamed of that fact until right now. My money, please. All of it!

Several other customers at other windows begin demanding their savings. Mr. Evans looks afraid as the customers leave, staring at him as they go.

CUT TO:

EXT: ROGERS' HOUSE-DAY

An auction is going on to sell movables, including furniture. A small group including Mr. Evans and Mr. Ulmer have gathered to watch the proceedings.

AUCTIONEER

Alright folks, we have right here a fine little bedroom arrangement that would go well in your home. Who'll give 50, 50 50, who'll give me 50, 50 50. 50 dollars is the start. Who'll give me 50.....

ULMER

I didn't expect to see you here Jimmy.

EVANS

Well, I have to be here representing the bank.

ULMER

I figured your Daddy would handle this one.

EVANS

I'm capable of handling a simple matter like this for the bank.

ULMER

Yea, I heard how good you handled that run on the bank the other day. I bet your ol' Daddy dropped a brick, didn't he?

EVANS

Mr. Ulmer, my ol' daddy trusts me as do the many fine customers that remain loyal to our bank and your bank as-well. (loos directly at Evans) Don't start skinnin' that squirrel just yet boy. News travels slow in these parts and no sir, I am no longer a customer in your Daddy's bank.

Ulmer walks away. Evans stares angrily after him. The auctioneer continues his furious banter.

CUT TO:

EXT: ROGERS' HOUSE-LATE AFTERNOON

Mr. Ulmer, Ray, and Jersey are finishing tying belongings on top of car.

CLAIRE Mr. Ulmer, you shore did pick a hot day to look at furniture.

ULMER It's never too hot to look at nice furniture Mrs. Rogers.

Mr. Ulmer smiles slightly - remembering their first meeting.

CLAIRE

I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate all you and Ray and Jersey have done for my family.

ULMER

Mrs. Rogers, I'm a businessman looking out for good opportunities, that's all.

CLAIRE Well, whatever the reason, the auctioneer said you bought all the furniture without inspection and for well above the appraised value.

ULMER Don't ever believe what an auctioneer tells ya'. They talk so fast, their brains get all jumbled up and they can't think right or talk right.

CLAIRE Thank you for being our friend.

Claire hugs Ulmer as Jersey and Ray have finished tying and are now talking to the boys.

JERSEY Y'all goin' to Shreveport huh?

WILLAIM Yeah. My Aunt Sandra lives there.

JERSEY Shreveport is real nice town. The folks is nice and the food is real good.

RAY Uh huh, sho is good food.

CLAIRE Jersey, Ray, thanks again for all of your help.

Jersey takes off his hat and Ray looks at the ground.

JERSEY

Yesm'

CLAIRE Well boys, I guess we better go. Thanks again.

ULMER Drive careful, Mrs. Rogers. Take of yourselves now.

Claire starts the car and slowly pulls away down dusty drive as Ray, Jersey and Ulmer watch.

> JERSEY Missuh Ulmer? Why you tell that lady you a bidnessman, You paid as much for that furniture as she did when she bought it.

RAY Uh, uh. Sho ain't no bidnessman.

ULMER

Well then, I told the truth. I never said I was a smart businessman. I've already sold the whole lot to my idiot cousin. He has a used furniture store in Jackson.

The men start to grin and then laugh, except for Ray.

JERSEY Missuh Ulmer, You sho is a rascal.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUIS AND SONYA GREGG HOME-DAY

African-American children play in the street in Birmingham, Alabama. Traffic is slow as the occasional car drives by. Two black men are moving the dining room set into the house of Sonya and Louis Gregg. The men are being directed by Sonya as to where the table should go.

LOUIS

Thank ya. Thank ya so much.

MOVER #1

No problem.

Sonya stands admiring table as Louis lets the men out. You can hear Louis bidding the men so long in the background.

LOUIS

Thanks again.

Sonya is beginning to put things on the table to see what she likes as a center-piece.

SONYA

Louis, are you sure you didn't pay too much for this table?

LOUIS

Sonya, how many times am ah goin' to hafta hear this? I paid what I paid woman! I may be old but I ain't stupid.

SONYA

Well, I sure do love it.

Sonya leans over, grabs Louis, and kisses him.

LOUIS

I think that furniture polish done made you crazy.

SONYA Ok, it that's the way you gonna be.

Sonya begins to move away.

LOUIS (reaching for Sonya) Wait a minute gal. I guess I can be a hero for a little while.

CUT TO:

INT: GREGGS' HOUSE-THANKSGIVING DAY

Greggs' family members are moving around table. Women are moving in and out of kitchen bringing plates of food and other things.

CUT TO:

INT: KITCHEN-DAY

Sonya Greggs, her nineteen year old daughter Janey, and Sonya's sister-in-law Jewel are tending to pots and pans of food begin prepared for Thanksgiving.

JANEY

Mama, this sweet potato pie smells like a dream. I don't remember you ever cookin' like this before.

JEWEL

You don't remember cause they ain't nuthin' the remember. That mama of yours could burn water.

SONYA

Jewel, you think because your man eats everything you put in front of him that makes you a good cook.

JANEY

Mmmmm...Mmmmmm Y'all shouldn't talk about Uncle Ellis like that because he's big.

JEWEL

Big! Child, did you say big. Yo Uncle Ellis ain't big Janey. He's a whale. That man would eat the wrapper on a candy bar if I didn't watch him. Big....shooooooooo, that man gains weight just smellin food.

CUT TO:

EXT: PORCH-DAY

Louis Gregg, his twenty-one year old son Robert Gregg, and Louis's younger brother Ellis Gregg are standing on the porch talking. Robert is wearing his U.S. Army uniform. ELLIS Robert my boy, you sho look good in that uniform. Louis, this boy looks less and less like you everyday.

LOUIS

Yeah Ellis, Robert is sure lucky. He could have been born ugly like you.

ROBERT

Aunt Jewel says I look like mama.

ELLIS

Let me tell ya 'somethin' about ja Aunt Jewel. She's crazy. Yessuh, ain't no brains up in huh head.

LOUIS

That's the truth. Jewel has always been crazy. How did you and Jewel ever get married to start with?

ELLIS Had to get married.

LOUIS Had to? Ellis, you and Jewel never had any children.

ELLIS I know that. I had to because I would have starved to death if I had to keep eating our mama's food.

LOUIS Now that's that the truth.

The three men laugh aloud.

CUT TO:

INT: KITCHEN-DAY

Sonya Gregg, her daughter Janey, and Ellis' wife Jewel are in the kitchen preparing the Thanksgiving meal. They can hear the men laughing outside.

> JEWEL Listen to them fools out there. Laughing like hyenas or somethin'. Specially that Ellis.

JANEY Aunt Jewel, I hope I find a man that loves me as much as Uncle Ellis loves you.

JEWEL

Janey, go outside and find me the mangiest dog in the neighborhood and bring him here.

JANEY Why do you want an old mangy dog Aunt Jewel?

JEWEL So's yo Uncle Ellis will have someone he can talk to on his same level.

The women all laugh.

CUT TO:

EXT: PORCH-DAY

The three men can hear women laughing.

LOUIS

Well dinner must be about ready from the sound of them women.

ELLIS

You see what I'm sayin boy. Yo' Aunt Jewel don't even know the sun is shinin'.

LOUIS Well let's get in and get them womenfolks to workin'. I know Ellis is ready for a plate.

ELLIS I don't know, Louis. My stomach been kinna tow up. I can't each too much today.

Robert rolls his eyes as he look at Louis with a smile. Ellis opens the front door and goes into the house rubbing his belly.

> ROBERT Daddy, can I talk to ya for a minute?

> > LOUIS

Sure son.

ROBERT Sit down daddy.

LOUIS Uh oh, one them "sit down Daddy" talks.

The father and son sit in porch chairs.

ROBERT Daddy, I got my orders in this week.

LOUIS Son, why didn't you say something?

ROBERT Well, I didn't want to worry you and mama.

LOUIS Worry us? About what?

ROBERT I'm goin' to Korea, daddy.

LOUIS

Korea?

Louis sits back with a sigh. He looks up at the ceiling for a moment and then at Robert.

ROBERT

I'll be with an artillery group, Daddy. I won't be nowhere near no real fightin'.

LOUIS Do the KO-reeans have artilree?

ROBERT

Sure daddy.

LOUIS

Then why you think you ain't gonna be near real fightin. Mr. Bobby's boy, James, was in a artilree outfit in Germany. They never did find all...Oh, Lord. Your mama's gonna lose her mind.

ROBERT

This is different, Daddy. There ain't no real fightin. This is just a police action. We jus' tryin to keep the North Koreans from moving south. LOUIS

Ain't there nor KO-reeens in the south?

ROBERT Yes, daddy. You know that.

LOUIS

Then how you know they ain't workin for the ones in the north.

ROBERT

Daddy, they don't want communism. They want to be like us.

LOUIS What? Poor? They can sho have it! Hell, I can teach KO-reeeans about that.

ROBERT Daddy, it's going to be alright. I'll be there and back before you even miss me.

LOUIS Uh, let's don't mention this until later. I don't want to upset your mama during Thanksgiving.

ROBERT

Sure, daddy.

Ellis swings the door open. He has a napkin stuffed in the top of his shirt and a piece of ham in his hand and is chewing furiously.

ELLIS Y'all eatin today?

LOUIS I thought yo stomach was tow up

Louis and Robert stand up and walk into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM-DAY

JEWEL Stomach tow up? Somethin' tow up alright, but it ain't his stomach. He done tow up that good lookin ham.

ELLIS Hush, Jewel. Woman with no brains ought not talk so much. Everyone else in house is laughing.

JEWEL Sonya! Girl! That table is beautiful.

SONYA

Thank ya'. We like it. It was like pullin' teeth to get Louis to buy it.

JEWEL (leaning in to whisper to Sonya) So, how'd you convice that tight wad to pay for this table?

SONYA (looks around suspiciously and then whispers) I used the gift girl.

JEWEL (still whispering) The gift? What's that?

Sonya leans toward Jewel again and whispers. Sonya shakes her hips slightly and raises her eyebrows as she smiles broadly.

> JEWEL (stepping back suddenly) Lord, have mercy! Shut yo' mouth! Sonya Greggs, you better get out of here with that!

The two women share the laugh together. The families sit down at the dining table and enjoy a bountiful Thanksgiving Day meal.

CUT TO:

INT: LIVING ROOM-DAY

Everyone is finished eating except Ellis. Ellis is sitting in the living room eating pie. Louis and Robert are outside putting trash away. The women are washing dishes in kitchen. Someone is knocking on the front door. Ellis has a plate full of sweet potato pie and his mouth is full.

> ELLIS (mouth is full-his words are muffled) Somebody at the doe.

Ellis' voice is muffled due to all the food stuffed in his mouth. The knocking continues.

ELLIS (louder-still muffled) Somebody get the doe.

Ellis attempts to get up while carefully balancing his plate and coffee. The knocking continues. Louis walks into the room followed by Robert.

LOUIS

Damn, Ellis! Why don't you open the door? Can't you hear somebody knockin?

Louis moves quickly toward the door to open it. Ellis rolls his eyes- still chewing. Janey's boyfriend Jesse Williams is at the door.

> LOUIS Hey! It's Jesse! C'mon in Jesse. How you doin boy?

JESSE Thank you. Happy Thanksgiving!

LOUIS Happy Thanksgiving! Janey! Jesse's here.

Sonya comes into the room removing her apron.

SONYA

Louis! What you yellin for? We all in the same house, not down tha street. Hey Jesse! Happy Thanksgiving.

Sonya hugs Jesse. Jesse begins to unbutton his coat.

JESSE Happy Thanksgiving.

SONYA How's ya folks? Yo' mama feelin' betta?

JESSE Yesm' She's feelin good today. I guess her flu's finally over.

ELLIS Her flu finally flew, huh Jesse?

Ellis laughs at his own joke.

JESSE Yessir Mr. Ellis, I guess it finally flew.

Jewel walks and stands beside Ellis' chair.

JEWEL (sarcastic) Are you gonna quit eatin' today?

ELLIS Woman, you betta get on back in that kitchen. I'll let you know when I'm through.

JEWEL Will I be alive then?

Everyone laughs.

ELLIS I know you ain't gonna be alive if you keep pesterin' me. Go on now. Scat!

Janey walks into the room feigning surprise to see Jesse.

JANEY Hey Jesse! What are you doin here?

ROBERT (looks around the room amazed) What do you mean,"What are you doin here?" He's over here everyday.

Robert laughs and winks at Jesse.

SONYA Robert! Hush and help me put this food up.

ELLIS Umm...Ummm (trying to swallow his food) I'll be right there to hep ya' Sonya.

Ellis struggles to get up. Jewel shaking her head and speaking softly to Sonya.

JEWEL If I knew that fat man didn't love me, I do believe he would follow any woman with a bologna sandwich home.

SONYA Jewel! You're so mean to Ellis.

JESSE (quietly to Janey) Let's go out on the porch. Robert and Louis look at each other and smile knowingly as the young couple move outside.

CUT TO:

EXT: PORCH-DAY

Jesse and Janey walk outside to the porch. They sit close together on the porch swing.

JESSE Have you said anything to your folks?

JANEY

About what?

JESSE You know....about us gettin' married.

JANEY Oh...that. No, I haven't had a chance.

JESSE Janey! I don't think you love me. You just keep me hangin' around to make you feel good.

Jesse stands up suddenly and faces the street.

JANEY Jesse, you know I'm just teasin' and you know I love you more than anything.

Janey stands and walks to Jesse's side and looks up at him.

JESSE Then why are we waitin'. Let's tell your parents today.

JANEY It's not that simple, Jesse. You know mama wants me to finish college first.

JESSE Finish college! That's two more years.

JANEY

If you love me, you'll wait.

JESSE

Wait! That's all I do is wait! Can we at least tell them that we're engaged?

JANEY

Well, maybe if we were engaged. I mean, a girl usually gets a ring when she's engaged.

JESSE

C'mon girl.

Jesse grabs Janey by the hand and leads her back into the house slamming the door.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM-DAY

Ellis is asleep in his chair. He is snoring. Jesse and Janey come in and slam the door. Ellis is startled awake.

ELLIS (snorts andlooks around confused as he waves his arm toward the floor at an imaginary animal) Huh! Go on cat!

Louis looks up from his newspaper. Jesse leads Janey to the dining table as the women and Robert come out of the kitchen to see what is going on. Jesse turns Janey around and sits her in a chair at the dining table.

JESSE

I hate to interfere with your Thanksgiving folks, but there is something that I have to do.

Janey looks terrified. Ellis and Louis get up and walk slowly over to the table to get a better look. Jesse looks at all the faces of the family standing around.

> JESSE I been trying to get this girl to marry me for months now.

> > JEWEL

Have mercy!

JESSE Mrs. Greggs, Janey says you won't let her get married until she finishes college.

SONYA That's right, Jesse. I think Janey needs to have an education before she settles down to begin a family. I have to agree with Mrs. Greggs, Jesse. We think the world of you son, but her mother and me always said Janey would have the benefits that we didn't. The army is teaching Robert and Janey needs to finish school.

JESSE

I respect that, but nobody said we couldn't get engaged.

Jesse reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a ring box and opens it as he kneels down in front of Janey. Janey puts her hands to her face as she tear well up in her eyes.

> JESSE Janey Gregg, will you marry me?

> > JEWEL

Have mercy!

Jewel and Sonya begin to cry. Janey looks at her mother and father, both smiling broadly. She then looks directly at Jesse.

JANEY (tearfully) Yes Jesse, I'll marry you.

Janey allows Jesse to slip the ring onto her finger and she cries more. Ellis walks over and puts his arm around Jewel.

ELLIS I hope ya'll will be as happy as we are.

JEWEL (looks up at Ellis wide-eyed) Let's hope for more than that.

ELLIS Woman! You mean as a snake. Why I spend all these years with you, I'll never know.

Robert taps a fork on a drinking glass to get everyone's attention.

ROBERT Well, I guess this is as good a time as any.

Louis's eyes get big as his expression pleads with his son telepathically.

SONYA What are you talking about boy?

ROBERT I got my orders. I'm goin' to Korea right after Christmas.

All sound stops as everyone stares at Robert.

ROBERT What? I'm going to see the world!

SONYA Korea? My boy is goin' to Korea?

LOUIS (putting his arm around Sonya) Now Mama, he ain't a baby anymore.

SONYA He's my baby!

Sonya begins to cry again.

JEWEL

Robert, why in the world are you goin' way over there to Korea for?

ROBERT Communists from China tryin' to take over the country. We spose' to stop 'em.

ELLIS Comnist. What da hell a comnist?

ROBERT Communists, Uncle Ellis. You know, the Russians and Chinese.

ELLIS The Russians done helped us win the war that just got over didn't they?

LOUIS Yeah Ellis, they helped, but now they are wantin' to spread out some.

SONYA (looking at Louis) What do you know about communists? LOUIS I know as much as the next man, I guess. I know they want everybody to be like them and not own property or believe in Jesus.

JEWEL Have mercy! Jesus help me! Ain't no commanist gettin my bible. Robert,

you kill all them bastards you see baby.

SONYA Jewel! My boy could git hisself shot over there.

JEWEL Oh baby, you know yo Auntee Jewel didn't mean nuthin'. I talks crazy when I get upset.

ELLIS (whispering to Jesse) She ain't got no brains. Did you know that?

JESSE (quietly) No sir.

ELLIS (quietly) Sho don't. Not a brain in her head. She can cook though.

CUT TO:

INT: GREGG HOUSE-NIGHT

The guests are gone. Robert, Janey, and Sonya are asleep. Louis is in the kitchen getting a midnight snack. He prepares his plate and walks from the kitchen to the dining room. He sits down and stares at his plate for a long time thinking about the revelations of the day. He realizes that he left his drink in the kitchen. He stands up to walk and stops suddenly. He begins to feel chest pains and as the pains worsen he attempts to stand up and knocks his plate on the floor. Louis rolls over onto the floor moaning and clutching his chest. He rolls over where he can see under the table. He sees where William and Joseph carved their names. Sonya runs into the room.

> SONYA Louis! What happened? Robert! Get up! Your daddy's hurt!

JANEY'S VOICE

Daddy!

The children run from their bedrooms into the dining room. They all kneel around Louis.

LOUIS

I'm alright. Let me get up.

Louis grimaces as he tries to move and then lies back on the floor.

LOUIS

I guess you better get the car.

CUT TO:

INT: HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM-DAY

Doctors, nurses, and other people pass back in forth in front of the waiting room. Sonya and Janey are huddled together. Robert is staring out of the window. The doctor walks in and sits down heavy in the nearest chair and looks at Sonya. Robert moves slowly over to the couch to listen.

> DOCTOR Mrs. Greggs, Louis has had a heart attack.

Sonya buries her head in her hands. Janey begins to cry softly. Robert bites his lip to maintain composure.

DOCTOR He is resting now and we'll know more in the morning when tests can be done.

SONYA Is he, I mean, will he.....

DOCTOR

I wish I could tell you folks. I just don't know. A lot depends on Louis and what he wants.

SONYA:

My husband loves his family and would not won't to leave us.

DOCTOR

(looking around at the family) I can understand why. Go home and get some rest. You can't do anything here tonight. The doctor stands up and walks away. The family sits and cries.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM-DAY

Sonya, Robert, Janey, Jewel, and Jesse are all seated waiting for news about Louis. A nurse walks into the room and looks at Sonya.

NURSE

Mrs. Greggs?

SONYA

Yes?

Sonya stands up.

NURSE You can see your husband for a moment now.

Everyone stands up. Sonya looks around the room slowly and stops on Janey who is huddled with Jesse.

JANEY Tell Daddy we love him.

SONYA

I will baby.

Sonya follows the nurse to Louis's room.

NURSE Just a few minutes. He needs to rest.

Sonya steps cautiously into the room and walks over to Louis's bed. Louis is lying very still in the bed with his eyes closed. Sonya sits down in a chair next to the bed. Sonya leans over to get closer to Louis. Louis opens his eyes slowly.

> LOUIS (whispering) Hey baby.

SONYA Good morning. How you feelin' honey?

LOUIS I'm as sore as a risin'.

SONYA The kids are here. They love you.

LOUIS

I hope they ain't worryin too much.

SONYA

Louis, we all worryin' a lot. You had a heart attack!

LOUIS

You think I don't know that? I mean I hope y'all ain't lettin' this worry you as far as money goes.

SONYA

I don't think we need to talk about that now. You need to worry about gettin' better.

LOUIS

We have to talk about it, Sonya. The doctor says I'm gonna be in here awhile and they don't give away these rooms ya' know.

SONYA

Louis Greggs! You could be dead now and I could be talking money with Swayzer's Funeral Home. You wouldn't have no say about that. So don't worry about money. We'll work it out.

NURSE

Mrs. Greggs, he needs to get rest now.

SONYA

(turning to face the nurse) Thank you.

SONYA

Don't worry. Get well and come home. Jewel says she'll send Ellis over to keep you company.

LOUIS

Oh Lord! Ellis couldn't handle the food here.

SONYA I'll be close by. I love you.

Sonya leans over and kisses Louis on the forehead.

LOUIS I love you, too. Tell the kids for me.

SONYA

I will.

Sonya stands up and walks toward the door. She opens the door and starts out. She stops and turns around to look at Louis. His eyes are closed again as he goes back to sleep. Sonya walks out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM-DAY

Sonya walks into the waiting room. Ellis and Jewel have joined Robert and Janey. They all stand up when they see Sonya.

JANEY How's daddy?

ROBERT Is he alright?

Sonya walks over and hugs Robert and Janey.

SONYA

He seems fine. He said he was sore and he's tired.

JEWEL

Thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus! I knew Louis was goin' to be alright. I just knew it. Your daddy is a strong man. It's gonna take more than a heart attack to put him down.

Janey hugs Jesse and Aunt Jewel hugs Robert as Sonya sits down and stares at the floor. She can't quit thinking about the money that it will take to pay the medical bills.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGGS' HOUSE-NIGHT

Sonya, Robert, and Janey are sitting around the dining table.

JANEY What time is Uncle Ellis supposed to pick up Aunt Jewel?

ROBERT (looking at his watch) Seven or seven-thirty. Aunt Jewel said he had to go home and eat first to have enough strength to drive to the hospital.

SONYA

Robert, when is your train leaving?

ROBERT

I'm not goin' yet. I called the company commander and told them about Daddy. The army is giving me a hardship exemption until Daddy is well.

SONYA

Son, I know you're anxious to see the world. I can't say I'm sad that you get to stay home a little longer.

JANEY

Mama, I'm going to be here. There's no need for Robert to stay.

SONYA

No. You're almost finished with school. I know it's gonna be hard, but your daddy and me have already talked about it and we don't want you to quit. It's too hard to start back once you stop.

ROBERT

Mama's right, Jane. I'll be around to help and you can concentrate on your books.

JANEY

School costs money. Hospitals costs money, too. How are you and daddy gonna pay the hospital and doctor bills?

SONYA

That's not for you to worry about. Your daddy has some insurance through the company and we have some money put away.

ROBERT

That's for daddy's retirement though mama. If you spend that now, what are y'all gonna do later.

SONYA

When did my children become experts on money? I wish someone would tell me.

ROBERT

Mama! Ain't nobody sayin' they an expert. Janey and I are just worried about you. You take care of daddy all night and fix and do for us all day. You don't have time to do everything. Let us take some responsibility. The army still pays me and Janey can take a couple of classes and work parttime. People do it all the time.

SONYA

No! No! No! Your daddy wants Janey in school and I don't think he wants his children supporting him.

JANEY

Daddy's in the hospital sick. He don't get a vote!

Sonya suddenly slaps Janey across her face.

SONYA

(yelling at Janey) Your daddy held you and walked you all over this house when you had the croup and cried all night. He carried you to comfort you when he was dead on his feet and I was tending to Robert. Your daddy built this house and worked hard to provide for all of us. Now you sayin' he don't get a vote. You better look at who you talkin' to girl

Janey hides her face and sobs. Robert looks at the floor. Sonya stands up and walks over behind Janey's chair. She leans over and hugs her from behind.

SONYA

(softly)
Baby...shhhh, I'm sorry. I'm just
tired. Please forgive me.

Sonya begins to cry.

JANEY

I forgive you, mama. I just want to help. You and daddy give me and Robert so much. We just want to give some back. Ok. Ok. Two classes and an afternoon job. You'll need the nights to study and tell Jesse the only time he needs to stick his head in the door is on Sunday after dinner.

JANEY

Mama!

ROBERT: Sounds fair to me.

SONYA: Hush boy! I'm sorry Janey. You ain't married yet and you can't study with Jesse around.

ROBERT: Mama's right, Jane. Jesse will wait..... if he loves you.

Robert grins and makes a face at Janey. Janey responds by throwing a biscuit at Robert. Robert ducks and laughs out loud.

> ROBERT Yep. Still throws like a girl.

SONYA Alright children, you want to help so much. Get these dishes washed and take me to the hospital to see your daddy.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREGGS' HOME-SIX MONTHS LATER-DAY

A moving truck is parked outside on the street in front of Louis and Sonya's home. Two African -American men are moving the dining table out to put it on the truck.

CUT TO:

INT. GREGGS' HOME-DAY

Sonya is sweeping the floor where the table had been sitting. Louis is standing at the door, leaning on a cain, watching the men move the table and chairs.

> LOUIS I sure did like that table.

SONYA It's just a table. Sonya continues to sweep and Louis stares out the screen door.

LOUIS I know. What time was Robert's ship supposed to leave?

SONYA

Why?

LOUIS I don't know. Jus' wonderin'. I was afraid he wasn't gonna go.

SONYA He's a good son and a good soldier. He knew he would have to go.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREGGS' HOUSE-DAY

Louis continues to watch as the moving truck pulls away from the curb and moves down the street.

LOUIS (talking to himself) Sure did like that table.

Sonya stops sweeping and leans the broom against the wall. She walks over to Louis and puts her arms around him from the back.

> SONYA Old, broke-down folks like us don't need a fancy table to put our cornbread on.

Louis turns around to face Sonya.

LOUIS Who you callin' broke down?

Louis embraces Sonya and begins to kiss her neck.

SONYA Louis! Your heart! The doctor said no romantic activity for another month.

Sonya pulls away from Louis and walks to the rear of the house. Louis turns and stares out the screen door. Louis gets a look of determination on his face. He turns around and starts toward the rear of the house where Sonya went. He stops with a surprised look as Sonya walks out of the hallway with her house coat on. As they stand there starring at each other, Sonya unties the bathrobe belt and opens the robe to reveal her nudity. Louis is wide-eyed with surprise.

SONYA (sexy voice) I was coming out here to kill ya.

Louis swallows hard.

LOUIS I was comin' in there to die.

The couple hug and begin kissing and laughing as they make their way to the bedroom. Jewel and Ellis are standing at the front screen door quietly. It is obvious by their facial expressions that they heard and witnessed the entire discussion.

JEWEL

Have mercy.

Ellis gets a thoughtful expression and begins to sniff the air.

ELLIS Do you smell peach pie?

CUT TO:

EXT. SUSAN AND INEZ RENWICK HOME-DAY

Susan Renwick and her mother Inez live in Jacksonville, Florida in 1970. Susan is thirty-three and has spent her early adult life caring for her ailing mother. Inez suffers from Alzheimer's. Several small strokes have left Inez frail and weak. Susan works in a dime store as a cashier to meet the bills. Inez, sixty-eight, is cared for by a sitter while Susan works. The mood is often hostile because of illness, fate, and economics. Susan is putting her mother's breakfast on our dining table.

> SUSAN Mother! Mother! I have your breakfast ready!

Susan hears her mother's walker slowly moving toward the dining room.

INEZ Did you say somethin'?

SUSAN Yes Mother. I have your breakfast ready. Aren't you hungry? INEZ Starved nearly to death! Why are we having breakfast so late in the day?

SUSAN

(heavy sigh) Mother, it's seven-thirty in the morning. I have to go to work now. Glenda will be here any minute.

Susan helps her mother into a chair at the dining table. She moves the walker to one side.

INEZ Glenda! Who the hell is Glenda? I swear, you let strangers in this house and they all look the same!

SUSAN Mother, Glenda has been sitting with you for over a year now honey.

INEZ Aw, my foot! You think I don't know what you're doin'. I know alright. You're waiting to get your hands on my money.

SUSAN Your money! Mother, what are you talking about? You don't have any money.

INEZ What? You already got it all. (Struggling to get to her feet) I'll whip your ass with a switch!

Glenda comes in the back door.

SUSAN

Thank God!

GLENDA Whooeeee! I can hear you two outside. Lord, have mercy! Miss Inez! Gettin' started a little early today aren't we?

INEZ (slams the table with her hand) Don't you Miss Inez me! Who the hell are you and why are you in my house?

Glenda looks at Susan.

SUSAN

(whispering) She came in here that way. I never know from one minute to the next what I'm gonna get.

INEZ

You can quit your whisperin' now! I know what you two have planned. Oh yeah! You're gonna lock me up and take my money! Well, by God, I'll just call my husband. You'll see! Henry will take a twelve gauge to both your backsides. Henry!

SUSAN Mother! Please calm down!

INEZ (slapping the table with her hands) Henry! Get in here! There's thieves in the kitchen! One of 'ems a nigger!

Glenda bursts out into laughter. Susan is embarrassed.

SUSAN Glenda, I'm sorry. She just

GLENDA

Don't worry about. I know she don't mean anything. Lord, I remember when Miss Inez's mind was sharp as tack. She sho' was kind to me and my family.

Inez has quieted down and is now looking around the room in a confused manner.

SUSAN

I'm glad you can remember those days. I wish I had your patience.

GLENDA

I'm with her just a few hours a day. You have her all the time. I'd say your normal.

SUSAN

(looking at her watch)
I wish I knew what normal was. Shit!
I'm late.

INEZ Susan! I didn't raise you to use that kind of language. Susan is walking toward the back door and suddenly stops, turns, and looks at her mother. Inez's attitue and facial expression has completely changed to a calm, concerned mother.

SUSAN

Why, no mother, you didn't. I'm sorry.

INEZ

Well, you just see that you watch it young lady. I may be old and senile, but I'm not deaf. I can still wear you out with a switch.

SUSAN

Yes ma'am.

Susan walks over to Inez, bends over, and kisses her gently on the forehead.

INEZ

(looking at Glenda) Well, my goodness, Glenda! When did you come in? You're as quiet as a church mouse.

GLENDA Yes Miss Inez. I just got here a minute ago.

INEZ

Lovely! Susan! You better hurry or you'll be late for work. Glenda and I are going to have some breakfast and a little coffee. So, get on with you.

SUSAN

(smiling)

Yes ma'am. Have a good day ladies!

Inez rubs her hand across the top of the table.

INEZ

I can still remember when my Henry brought this dining table home brand new from the store. Glenda, did I ever tell you about my Henry?

GLENDA

No ma'am, what was he like.

Susan eases out the back door quietly shaking her head.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME STORE-DAY

Susan is a cashier at Dempsey's. She's in the storeroom stacking some boxes. The store manager, Larry Futch enters. Susan tries to ignore him. Despite being skinny, unattractive, and keeping his this dark hair greased and combed back, Larry imagines himself to be a real stud.

LARRY

(looking around) How's everything goin' there Suzy Q?

SUSAN

Larry, you know I hate it when you call me that and everything is just fine.

LARRY

Aw, come on now, you think it's kinda cute when I call ya' Suzy Q.

SUSAN

(turns around to face Larry) You're the only one that thinks it's cute Larry. I don't think it's cute and I'm pretty sure that your wife wouldn't think it was cute.

LARRY

Dammit! Why do have to do that?

SUSAN

(turns back around to boxes) Do what?

LARRY

Bring my wife into everything. Can't two adults have a conversation without bringing up wives?

SUSAN

Sure. Why don't you go out there and find me another adult to talk to if it means that much to you.

LARRY

You are a cold woman, Susan.

SUSAN

Yeah, well you ain't gonna be the one to thaw me out, that's for damn sure.

Larry storms out of the storeroom and nearly runs over Lucille, another clerk, as he storms out. Lucille is in her late forties and keeps her cat eye glasses around her neck on a silver chain. Lucille is very conservative, but loves Susan's free spirited attitude.

LUCILLE Whew! What's wrong with our fearless leader?

SUSAN Aw, you know Larry. He gets a hard-on every couple of hours and feels compelled to share it with someone.

LUCILLE (embarrassed) Susan Renwick! You are so bad!

Lucille looks around carefully. She leans over to Susan.

LUCILLE You're not letting him share it with you are you, Sue?

Susan drops the empty box she was moving and spins to face Lucille.

SUSAN Are you crazy? I'll admit, it's been awhile but I wouldn't let that little, dried up turd get near me.

LUCILLE Oh, you are so bad!

The two women laugh.

LUCILLE How's Inez? I've had her on my mind so much lately.

SUSAN

I wish I knew. She has moments when she's just like her normal self and then just that quick. (snaps her fingers)

She's talking about things like it forty years ago. When I left this morning, she was telling Glenda that Daddy bought that old dining table of ours.

LUCILLE (shaking her head with pity) The one you got from Charlie's uncle?

SUSAN

(her eyes tear up) Yeah! Can you believe that? I saved for six months to buy that old table because it was sturdy and would take her beating it everytime she had a fit and she thinks someone else bought it brand new.

LUCILLE (still shaking her head) Well, bless her heart. Poor thing.

Larry yells from the front of the store.

LARRY Susan! Lucille! We have customers waiting!

SUSAN

(wipes her eyes with a tissue) Well shit! You'd think that Dumbass could wait on them himself.

LUCILLE You're lucky that he relies on you so much.

SUSAN Yeah, real pot of gold kinda luck, Lucy.

Susan tosses away the tissue and composes herself as the two women walk out of the storeroom.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME-DAY

Susan and Lucille walk to the front of the store. There are two young boys standing near the cash register. One boy has a pack of gum and the other has a candy bar. Susan can't believe Larry called them away for this.

> SUSAN My goodness Larry! You may have to hire more help to handle these crowds!

Lucille snickers.

LARRY Customers are customers. Y'all are cashiers, so get to cashiering! Alright boys, let's see what we have here. Robby wants a pack of Juicy Fruit. That's a dime, sir.

The young boy lifts his clenched fist up to the counter and opens it. He has several pennies in his hand. Susan counts out ten pennies and rings up the sale.

> SUSAN Thank you Mr. Robby. And Mr. Todd wants a candy bar. That'll be twenty cents sir.

The same scene is repeated as the young boy opens his fist to reveal a collection of pennies.

> SUSAN Would you just look at all that money! I believe you boys must've robbed the bank.

ROBBY We sold all our soda bottles.

TODD Now, we're rich!

SUSAN

Well, I just imagine you are! My goodness, I wish I had two good lookin' rich boys to call on me.

The boys giggle as Susan counts out the pennies for the candy bar. The boys leave. Susan and Lucille watch them run down the sidewalk.

LUCILLE They are so cute at that age.

SUSAN Yeah. Too bad they have to grow up and become men.

LARRY What would you women do if there weren't any men around to look after you?

SUSAN Gosh, I don't know Larry. I guess we would just be happy.

LARRY I think something's wrong with you Susan. You don't act like a normal woman. SUSAN What in the hell would you know about a normal women? You married your damn cousin!

LARRY

She ain't my real cousin! Plus, what would you know about it? You can't even get a man to stay around long enough to get married.

LUCILLE Alright you two. That's enough.

SUSAN

No, he's right. He's right. The men in my life have been few and far between.

Larry smiles thinking he has finally gotten the best of Susan. He turns and begins to walk away with a smirk.

SUSAN But at least they weren't related to me!

LARRY (furious as he spins around) Dammit! Lucille, you need to talk to your friend here. She's gonna lose her job if she keeps being disrespectful.

Larry turns and storms off. Lucille and Susan burst into laughter as-soon-as Larry is out of sight.

LUCILLE

Susan, you must be tryin' to get fired! I can't believe he lets you get away with that!

SUSAN

Aw, foot! What's he gonna do? Fire me and then what? He would have to actually learn how to run this place. If the folks at the district office knew half the things he tried to do before I stopped him, they would fire his ass in a New York minute!

LUCILLE

Why do you keep bailing him out then? You should be runnin' this store.

Susan hesitates for a moment. Her once strong expression fades.

SUSAN

I could never tend to Mama and the store at the same time. Plus, when have you ever heard of a woman store manager?

LUCILLE

You have Glenda helping with Inez and you already spend, who know's how many hours helping Larry run the place now when he has to turn in financial reports, daily receipts, and what not.

SUSAN

I know, but that's different.

LUCILLE

No Sue, it's not different. You're doing Larry's job, but he's the one that gets paid more. It's not right.

SUSAN Damn Lucy! When ju' burn your bra?

LUCILLE (clutcing her chest) Oh Lord!

SUSAN

So, you want me to up an quit? Can you imagine ol' greasy head up there tryin' to operate this register and order everybody around? He he wouldn't know whether to shit or wind his watch!

LUCILLE

(fanning herself with a paper bag)

You need to get to church. I swear girl, you say anything that comes to your mind. Plus, don't kid about Larry working a register.

SUSAN

(pointing to the second floor railing) You think Larry's gonna give up the roost to come down here and actually

LUCILLE

(looking up at the railing) Why you reckon he stands up there all the time?

SUSAN Lucy. Come on now. You don't know why he keeps his skinny ass glued to that rail?

LUCILLE No. Really I don't.

Susan shakes her and sighs. Susan walks from behind her cash register and takes Lucille by the elbow and leads her to the foot of the steps leading to the rail.

SUSAN

Alright. This may be hard for you honey, but it's a lesson you need to learn. Walk up there and assume the position of authority.

LUCILLE What are you talkin' about? And what if Larry comes out?

SUSAN

He's in the john lookin' at that Playboy he keeps behind the Clorox. Come on now, up you go.

Susan gives Lucille a little shove and she slowly walks up the steps. Susan watches Lucille until she gets to the second floor. Susan backs up onto the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. SECOND FLOOR RAILING-DAY

Lucille walks to rail and looks around the store. You can see the entire floor from here. She finally looks down at Susan.

> LUCILLE (whispering) Ok, you happy now?

> > CUT TO:

EXT. FIRST FLOOR-DAY

Susan is looking up at Lucille.

Ok, stay right there and do your best Larry the Loser impression.

LUCILLE Sue! Come on now!

SUSAN Ok, just stand there. Keep your eyes on me and all will be revealed.

CUT TO:

EXT. SECOND FLOOR RAILING-DAY

Susan starts toward the stairs. Slowly she begins to walk up the steps. As Susan steps on the fifth step, Lucille can clearly see down the front of Susan's blouse.

> LUCILLE Oh my goodness! I can see your bra plain as day!

Susan looks up smiling and nodding.

SUSAN As Paul Harvey says, "Now you know the rest of the story."

LUCILLE That man stands up here all day to get cheap thrills.

Susan walks up the stairs and joins Lucille at the railing.

SUSAN Can you imagine the thrill he gets when Carolyn Ann comes in?

Lucille's eyes get big.

LUCILLE (looking around and whispering) The Lord has blessed that girl.

SUSAN And no one appreciates it more than Larry.

LARRY'S VOICE Larry appreciates what?

Lucille and Susan jump at the sound of Larry's voice. Larry is standing at the open door of the restroom. The water in the toilet is running. LARRY You said, "...no one appreciates it more than Larry." What do I appreciate?

LUCILLE

 $\mathtt{Uh}\ldots$

SUSAN

I was just telling Lucy here about how much you appreciated the hard work she does and that maybe one day she would standing here as Manager.

Larry looks suspiciously at Susan and then to Lucille.

LARRY

(bursts into laughter) Manager! A woman? Oh my Lord! A woman manager! I have heard it all!

SUSAN

Some places have women managers. I even heard about this big company in Chicago that has a woman president.

LARRY

God help those poor bastards if that's true. A woman president. I swear, what is this world comin' to when a woman is runnin' things?

LUCILLE I don't know. It might not be too bad.

LARRY

(looking at Lucille suspiciously) Well, one thing's for damn sure. This store ain't never gonna have no woman runnin' it. Now, that storeroom needs someone to manage it. So, I'll be real progressive in my thinkin' and let you two female executive types have the job.

SUSAN

(saluting) Sir, Yes sir.

Susan and Lucille walk past Larry toward the stairs. He turns to watch them. The two women start down the stairs. Susan leans over to Lucille.

62.

SUSAN

(whispering) Now's your chance to make some points girl.

> LUCILLE (looking at Susan)

Susan cuts her eyes upward and uses her head to motion upward toward Larry. Lucille looks up to see Larry grinning as he watches the two women. Lucille clutches the neck of her blouse.

LUCILLE

Oh Lord!

Susan burst out laughing.

Huh?

CUT TO:

INT. SUSAN AND INEZ RENWICK HOME-NIGHT

Susan and her mother are sitting at the dining table eating. Walter Cronkite is on the television delivering the daily count of Killed, Wounded, and Missing from the war in Vietnam. Susan is listening intently.

> INEZ Looks like we won today.

> > SUSAN

(coming out trance) Hmm? Ma'am?

INEZ

I said it looks like we won today. Mr. Cronkite said our boys killed a bunch of them Viet Congs.

SUSAN Mother! A lot of our boys died, too.

INEZ

I know, but as long as our numbers are lower than there's, we're in good shape.

SUSAN (standing up and clearing table) Well, that's an odd way of looking at it. I'm just glad Wayne got home when he did. INEZ

Who?

Susan walks back into the dining room and begins to pick up Inez's dishes.

SUSAN

What?

INEZ Who came home?

SUSAN Wayne. You remember Wayne. Aunt Rosie's boy.

INEZ Wayne was on TV?

SUSAN No Mama! He was in Vietnam last year, but he came home. You know Wayne. He works at the Post Office.

INEZ Wayne does?

SUSAN Yes, Mama. He came by here two weeks ago and brought you some okra and tomatoes.

INEZ (Pause a beat as she thinks about this.) Well, I swear! Was that Wayne?

Susan turns her back to Inez, rolls her eyes, as she continues to clear off the table.

CUT TO:

INT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM-NIGHT

Susan is lying on her back in bed. She's staring at the ceiling. The radio is playing softly. She closes her eyes and dozes. Something falls to the floor with a thud. Susan's eyes fly open. She lies in bed a moment, not moving. She sits up and listens. She can hear movement and then groaning from Inez's room. Susan jumps up, grabs her house coat and runs down the hall. She flips on the light in the hall as she goes.

SUSAN

Mother?

Pause a beat and Susan waits to hear.

CUT TO:

INT. INEZ'S ROOM-NIGHT

Susan throws Inez's door open. The light from hall is enough for Susan to see Inez on the floor, blood is on her mouth.

SUSAN

Oh, mother! What happened? Are you hurt?

Inez looks at Susan with a dazed expression. Inez tries to speak, but she can only make sounds. Susan uses the sleeve of her house coat to wipe the blood from Inez's mouth. She realizes that Inez has had a stroke.

> SUSAN (quietly) Hang on, Mama. I'm gonna call for help.

Inez watches Susan without really understanding what's going on. Susan stands and runs to the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN-NIGHT

She turns on the light and fumbles for the telephone. Susan can barely see because of the bright light. She dials the phone.

SUSAN

Hello. Yes, this is Susan Renwick. I think my mother has had a stroke. Please send an ambulance to 1233 Carver.

Susan listens as she grows more frantic.

SUSAN

Yes! Please hurry! Yes!

Susan hangs up the phone and runs back to Inez's room.

CUT TO:

INT. INEZ'S ROOM-NIGHT

Inez is on the bed, her mouth is moving as if she is trying to speak. Susan runs in and sits on the sit of the bed. Ok, Mama. Everything's gonna be fine. Help is on the way. Don't worry.

Inez looks frightened as she continues to struggle. Susan holds Inez's hand and strokes her cheek. Susan is crying, but she tries to keep Inez calm.

SUSAN

You scared me half to death. Did you know that? You did. I thought I was dreaming. Dr. Cruz is going to find out that you have a crush on him if we keep taking you to the hospital. Do you want him to find out?

Inez's mouth is bleeding again.

SUSAN

Mama, let me get a wash cloth. You have something on your mouth and we want you looking your best when you see your boyfriend!

Susan starts to rise. Inez holds onto Susan's hand. Susan stops and leans over to touch her mother' face.

SUSAN

(whispering) It's ok, honey. I'll be right back.

Inez slowly releases her grip. Susan leans over and kisses Inez on the forehead. She turns and walks quickly to the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM-NIGHT

Susan walks in and turns on the bathroom light. She opens a small linen closet and takes out a small wash cloth. She turns on the lavatory faucet and dampens the cloth. She wrings it out and walks quickly back to her mother.

CUT TO:

INT. INEZ'S ROOM-NIGHT

Susan quickly sits at Inez's side and begins to wipe the blood away from Inez mouth with the damp wash cloth.

SUSAN There now. Isn't that better? Inez is no longer trying to speak. Her mouth just stays open as she stares at Susan. Susan realizes her condition is getting worse. The doorbell rings.

> SUSAN Mama, the ambulance is here. I'll be right back.

> > CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

Susan stands up and runs to the front door. She tightens her house coat and flips the switch to turn on the outside light. She opens the door and stands behind it. Two men with an ambulance cart walk in quickly.

EMT #1

Where is she?

SUSAN

(pointing toward Inez's room) In the back bedroom. Please hurry!

The two men rush back to Inez's room. Susan closes the door, steps back against the wall, and slowly slides down it crying.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME-DAY

Lucille is stocking shelves. Larry is sitting at his desk on the second floor going over daily receipts. Susan walks in the front door carrying her purse and wearing sun glasses. She looks very tired and she is late for work.

> LUCILLE (looking around quickly) Sue! Where have you been girl? Larry has been rantin' and ravin' all mornin'.

Susan walks in quickly and goes to her register. She stuffs her purse and sun glasses under the counter.

> SUSAN Well, let him pitch a fit! Mama had another stroke last night.

LUCILLE Oh, Sue! I'm sorry. Why didn't you call me honey? SUSAN

It was late and by the time we got her admitted and the doctor examined her, it was after two o'clock this morning before I closed my eyes.

LUCILLE Bless your heart. How's Inez?

SUSAN

(heavy sigh)
I don't know. Ok, I guess. The doctor
says she may have had a bunch of
small strokes and we didn't even know
it. With all her other problems, she
wouldn't think to say anything if she
was feelin' bad.

Lucille and Susan turn to face the stairs as they head Larry walking down. He stares are Susan when he is in sight. Larry walks slowly to Susan's counter. He lifts his arm and looks at his watch.

SUSAN

Larry, I know I'm late. I'm sorry. It couldn't be helped. I'll make it up.

LARRY

(smiling)

Aw now, Suzy Q. I know you're not loafing. I just want to be sure that you understand something. You bein' late has kept your friend Lucille here from being able to finish her work on time or even take a break for that matter. So, you'll both have to stay late to make up for the lost time.

SUSAN

Dammit Larry!

LUCILLE

Uh, uh, that's fine Larry! Sue, why don't you help me finish stockin' these shelves. It'll be gettin' busy in here before long.

Larry watches Susan with an evil grin. Susan glares back with hate. For a moment, Susan doesn't move.

LUCILLE

Sue?

Lucille pauses

LUCILLE (with greater concern now) Susan?

Susan looks at Lucille.

LUCILLE Come on, baby. Let's get this stuff put up.

Slowly, Susan makes her way around the counter and joins Lucille at the shelves. Larry smirks and turns to walk back to the stairs.

> SUSAN I could kill that son-of-a-bitch!

LUCILLE

(Looking around to see where Larry is before speaking) Larry saw a chance to get under your skin and he took it. That's all. You do the same thing to him.

SUSAN

But it's not right to make you work late because of something I did.

LUCILLE Hush! When have you ever known me to be in a hurry to get home to Travis?

Susan smiles a little.

LUCILLE

There. Now that's better. Girl, you better shake it off. You're the only thing that keeps me coming to work every day.

Susan grabs a can of motor oil and stamps a price tag on it.

SUSAN Hell, Lucy! I thought you only came to work to see how Larry was going to cover his bald spot.

Lucille bursts out into laughter.

LUCILLE You see! That's what keeps me goin'.

Susan tags another can of oil.

SUSAN Ok, I'll be good. It still ain't right though. I'll have to come up with something special for Larry the Loser.

LUCILLE

Now, Sue, don't you go an antagonize him. He's just waiting for an excuse to fire you.

SUSAN (grinning) Just leave it to me. It'll be alright.

Susan looks up to Larry on the second floor. Larry looks down and sees Susan staring at him and smiling. He suddenly feels uncomfortable and shifts his chair so that he doesn't have to look her direction.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM-NIGHT

Inez is sleeping soundly in her hospital bed. Susan is sitting in a chair nearby reading a romance novel. Inez's doctor walks in. Susan puts the paperback book away and stands.

> DR. CORTEZ Susan! Hello!

SUSAN Hey Doctor C! How are you?

DR. CORTEZ Good, thank you! How's mother feeling tonight?

Dr. Cortez walks over to Inez's bed and looks at her chart.

SUSAN She's been asleep for the last hour or so. I don't know if that's good or bad.

DR. CORTEZ (closing the chart) That's good. The body likes to shut itself off when repairs are being made.

SUSAN Are repairs being made Doctor Cortez?

The doctor looks at Inez with a sympathetic expression.

DR. CORTEZ Your mother was one of the first patients I saw when I moved my practice here.

He pauses as he looks at Susan.

DR. CORTEZ That was before her dementia began to manifest itself so noticeably.

SUSAN (looking sympathetically at Inez) I remember.

DR. CORTEZ She would bring me tea cakes. Does she still make tea cakes?

SUSAN Not for a long time now.

DR. CORTEZ (looking back at Inez) Oh! They were so good! And huge! My God, those things were as big as saucers!

SUSAN I never could stand those tea cakes.

DR. CORTEZ

What?

SUSAN (laughing) Really. I hated them. She would make them and I would gripe about it.

DR. CORTEZ You really didn't like the tea cakes?

SUSAN

(looking at Inez) That wasn't it. I hated the idea of my housewife mother being able to do something so well, without the benefit of a high school education. There I was making straight A's and I didn't think I could do anything right.

DR. CORTEZ That must have been very hard for you.

SUSAN

(looking at Dr. Cortez)
I always found a way to make things
more difficult than they needed to be.
If I could just learn to keep my big
mouth shut.

DR. CORTEZ

Hmmm. Sounds like someone is having regrets.

SUSAN

(snapping out of her self-pity trance) Huh? Oh, I don't know. I start feelin' sorry for myself every so often, but it doesn't last long. Mama didn't ask to have strokes or an ungrateful daughter. The only thing that I can control is the ungrateful daughter.

Dr. Cortez walks over to Susan and puts his arm around her.

DR. CORTEZ Will you take some advice from an old man?

SUSAN (smiling) Give it to me straight, Doc. I can take it.

DR. CORTEZ (chuckle) Ok, here it is. Quit thinking that you owe your mother some debt.

SUSAN

I don't...

DR. CORTEZ

Whoa! Let me finish. You don't have children, so this may be hard for you to understand. When children are born to stable parents, the value of the parents' lives are reduced significantly, at least in the eyes of the parents. Why? Well, because parents, in most cases, would sacrifice their own lives for their children. Mothers are especially connected here.

SUSAN I'm sure.... DR. CORTEZ Hang on. Still not finished.

SUSAN (rolling her eyes and smiling) Excuse me.

DR. CORTEZ

Mothers literally give up their bodies for their children. They give up their nice figures, quiet hours with their husbands, all of that to serve their child. Do they expect repayment? Of course not! It's instinctive. Inez appreciates everything you do, I'm sure. Especially when she's at herself.

Susan stands silent for a moment. She looks down at her mother sleeping peacefully. Tears begin to well up in her eyes as she looks back at Dr. Cortez.

> SUSAN Your wrong about one thing Doc.

DR. CORTEZ And what's that?

SUSAN I do know what's like having a child.

Dr. Cortez looks at Inez and to Susan. He realizes the Alzheimer's has made Inez a child in many respects.

DR. CORTEZ Yes, I suppose you do. Which only further illustrates my point. Do you feel that Inez owes you some debt because of the care you have given her?

Susan shakes her head as she wipes her tears.

DR. CORTEZ Of course not. So, you shouldn't feel obligated to Inez.

SUSAN She's all I have.

Dr. Cortez steps closer to Susan. He looks her directly in the eyes.

DR. CORTEZ No, Susan. She's all that you have allowed yourself to have. The doctor leans forward and kisses Susan lightly on the forehead. He turns and walks out of the room. Susan stands pondering the doctors' advice.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME-DAY

Susan and Lucille are counting out their cash drawers, getting ready to close and prepare for the next day. Larry walks down the stairs and up to Susan's register.

LARRY

Suzy Q?

Susan looks up from her register with fire in her eyes.

LARRY

Excuse me! Susan. I need you to look over the monthly income and inventory reports real quick. I have to send them in tonight.

SUSAN

Larry! My mother is in the hospital or haven't you heard?

LARRY

I know, but the district manager shits a brick if these things aren't in on time and perfect. Come on Susan!

SUSAN

You never have them filled out. You just let me do it.

Susan stops a moment and an idea comes to her.

SUSAN

I tell ya' what. You fill it out and I'll look it over and check for mistakes.

LARRY

But Susan.

SUSAN

Nope! That's the deal. I have to get to the hospital. Of course, you can do them yourself and save the time.

Larry spins around and stomps toward the stairs.

LARRY

(turns quickly and begins to walk toward the stairs to his office) Fine then! Dammit! You ask for a little help and this is what you get! You girls don't appreciate anything I do for you.

Susan looks at Lucille.

LUCILLE You know he's gonna mess it up. You'll spend twice the time fixin' it.

SUSAN (grinning) No I won't.

LUCILLE But, he can't do it?

SUSAN Hey! He's the manager. Let him manage.

CUT TO:

LARRY'S OFFICE-DAY

Larry frantically fills out the required reports. He shuffles papers around as he tries to comprehend what is needed for each line.

CUT TO:

FIRST FLOOR-DAY

Lucille turns over the sign that says "Sorry, We're Closed." She opens the door to go out.

LUCILLE Good night y'all.

CUT TO:

INT. LARRY'S DESK-DAY

Susan is sitting at Larry's desk correcting the reports.

SUSAN (looking down to the front door) Good night Lucy. See ya in the mornin'. Lucille closes the door. Susan goes back to the reports.She can plainly see that he hasn't gotten any of the information correct. She finally finishes the last one, puts her pencil down, and sits back.

SUSAN Alright, Larry!

LARRY Well, it's about time! I thought I would be here all night.

SUSAN Hey, you're the one that's making the big money to be manager! This is your job.

LARRY (smiling) Well, I mean, I don't know why I acted so surprised. Hell, anyone ought to be able to fill out a simple report. You did it.

Susan controls herself despite the remark.

SUSAN (standing up) Well, I guess I'm just not management material.

Larry steps behind Susan, moves the chair, and begins to rub her shoulders. He leans down and whispers to her.

> LARRY You could manage my material, Suzy Q.

Susan moves away quickly and starts for the stairs.

SUSAN Like I said, I guess I'm not management material.

Larry smiles as he looks down at Susan's blouse as she walks down the stairs. Susan looks up at Larry and smiles slightly. Larry folds the reports and stuffs them into their respective envelopes. Larry doesn't notice the small red "X" on the back, lower left corner of each envelope.

CUT TO:

EXT. POST OFFICE-NIGHT

Larry walks up to the large blue mail receptacle outside the post office.

He flips through the envelopes containing the reports going to the district office. He smiles as he drops them into the box. Larry turns and walks away whistling as he scratches his behind.

CUT TO:

EXT. POST OFFICE-LATER SAME NIGHT

A postal carrier walks up to the mail receptacle. He pulls a ring of keys from his pocket. He leans over and unlocks the door on the back of the box. He lowers the door to reveal a large pile of envelopes. The postal carrier begins to remove the envelopes and place them in a canvas bag. The postal carrier picks up the envelopes with the small red "X's" on the back. He brings them closer to his face and examines them. He then looks up. Susan is standing there with a smile on her face.

MAIL CARRIER

(holding up the envelopes) Are these the items that you're looking for ma'am?

SUSAN

That's what I'm looking for. I don't know how my boss could have made such a mistake. He's normally not this careless. If the district office received the rough draft copies of those reports, my boss would have hell to pay.

The postal worker hands Susan the two envelopes. She hands him two different envelopes addressed to the district office.

> MAIL CARRIER You let me know if that bastard Larry gives you any more trouble Sue and I'll handle it.

SUSAN

Thanks Wayne, but this ought to take care of it. Tell Aunt Rosie I said "Hey" and I'll bring Mama by to see her as soon as she's up and about.

MAIL CARRIER Alright, sugar. Take care of yourself.

Susan turns and walks to her car smiling. She stuffs the envelopes into her purse as she walks.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME-ONE WEEK LATER-DAY

Susan and Lucille are checking out customers. Larry is standing at the second floor railing looking around the store. The telephone rings. Larry walks over to answer it.

> LARRY (picks up the phone) Dempsey's.

Larry listens for a moment.

LARRY

Oh, hey Mr. Allen. Yes, I mailed the reports last week. You should have gotten them by now.

Larry listens.

LARRY Oh, you have them there. Great! Sir?

Larry's face drops as he listens to his boss.

LARRY

But...but I don't understand.

Larry looks down at Susan. She is looking at him smiling. Larry realizes that he's been double crossed.

LARRY

Huh? I mean, sir? Yes sir. Yes sir. I'll be there in the morning. Yes sir. I don't know. Yes sir.

Larry slowly places the phone back on the cradle. He stares into space for a moment.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME-DAY

Susan is standing in the exact same spot where Larry stood along the second floor rail. She is staring into space, almost trancelike.

> YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE Miss Renwick? Miss Renwick?

Susan snaps out of her trance.

SUSAN Huh? What is it, honey? YOUNG WOMAN (holding out a check) I'm sorry, Miss Renwick. Miss Lucille said I should ask you to approve this check.

Susan takes the personal check from the young woman and examines it.

SUSAN What do we have here? Oh yeah, Lacy. This is fine. He's good for it.

Susan looks over the rail to see the customer.

SUSAN R.D.! You and Gladys goin' fishin' this week?

R.D. Yeah! You wantin' to go?

SUSAN

No! Some folks gotta work for a livin'. I just see you buyin' all that gear. I wanna be sure that somebody's gonna be bringin' me some filets come Saturday afternoon.

CUT TO:

INT. DEMPSEY'S FIVE AND DIME-DAY

R.D.

(looking at Lucille) I swear! You let some folks get a promotion like store manager and it just goes to their head.

LUCILLE (smiling) Ain't it the truth though.

Lucille looks up to see Susan. They smile at each other.

CUT TO:

INT. SUSAN AND INEZ RENWICK HOME-DAY

Men are carefully moving in new dining room furniture into Susan's house. Inez is in a wheelchair watching all of the activity. Susan is giving directions to the movers. The men slowly place the new dining table. Susan pushes Inez's chair up to the table. SUSAN See there, Mama! Perfect fit.

INEZ

(rubbing her hands across the top of the table) Oh yes! Perfect! I love this table. Your daddy bought me this table when we were first married.

The moving men look at Susan with concern.

SUSAN Yes, Mama. I remember you telling me about that.

The men smile as they continue to move the chairs into the home.

CUT TO:

INT. ANTIQUE STORE-WINNSBORO, LA-DAY

A casually dressed couple, Chris and Lynn Maxwel, in their early thirties with their seven year old daughter, Katie, are looking at antique furniture. Chris and Katie are walking around the store hand-in-hand. Lynn has found the dining table and is very excited. She calls to Chris across the store.

LYNN

Chris!

Chris doesn't hear her. He and Katie atart clowning around pretending to be professional wrestlers. She tries again and a little louder.

LYNN

Chris!

He still can't hear her especially since he's doing his professional wrestler impression.

CUT TO:

INT. ANTIQUE STORE-DAY

CHRIS (deep voice-inpersonating pro wrestler) Let me tell ya' brother, I'm the best there is. I'm ready to defend the title. Let Krazy Katie come out and face me and we'll settle this once and for all. KATIE (lowering her voice for same effect) I'm Krazy Katie! Toot! Toot! I'm here with the Pain Train!

CHRIS (raises his arms) You're just a girl Krazy Katie. No one can defeat the greatest!

Chris raises his arms over his head and jumps around simulating crowd noises. Katie jumps on Chris. They fall back onto a stack of old rugs. Chris and Katie have a pretend wrestling match. Lynn is deperately trying to get Chris' attention.

LYNN

Chris!

He has allowed Katie to pin him. Katie is sitting on Chris' chest holding him down and counting.

KATIE One, Two, Three! Ding! Ding! Ding!

CHRIS (pushing Katie off and jumping up) No! I was robbed! I was robbed!

Katie marches around the rugs with her small arms raised triumphantly. Customers walking by are laughing at the sight of the man and child wrestling.

KATIE Once again, I am the undefeated champ!

LYNN'S VOICE

Chris!

Chris looks questioningly at Lynn and then to Katie.

CHRIS What has your mother found now?

KATIE (serious) I don't know.

Chris and Katie begin to walk toward Lynn. Lynn has already turned her attention back to the table. Chris and Katie approach Lynn and the table slowly. LYNN Look! Isn't it beautiful? This is exactly what I have been looking for. I can't believe it!

Katie's eyes grow wide with amazement.

KATIE Gah...leee, Mama! It's humongous!

LYNN It is large isn't baby?

Chris walks around the table cautiously as though it might bite him. He moans softly to himself but just loud enough for his wife to hear as he thinks about having to move it and pay for it.

LYNN

(looking at Chris) I know what you're thinking. We don't have room for it.

CHRIS

Trust me, if you had an inkling of my thoughts and emotions at this moment, you would run for your life.

Lynn ignores the comment.

LYNN

I already have it figured out. Listen to this. We move the buffet from the dining room to the den and use it to store Hattie Sue's old china. Right? Then, we will have tons of room for the table.

Lynn smiles triumphantly, so proud that she came with this plan. Chris sits down at the table and puts his elbows on top. The table moves a little.

CHRIS It wobbles. That stinks. Why would you buy an old table that wobbles. New ones don't wobble.

LYNN We can put a shim under the leg. It'll be good as new. Besides, it's an antique. The wobble gives it character. CHRIS How do you figure we need a new table anyhow? Hell, the one we got ain't ten years old.

KATIE Ooooooohh, daddy said a bad word.

Chris looks at his daughter and pats her on the head.

CHRIS I'm sorry honey. Daddy didn't mean it.

Lynn gets defensive about the comments.

LYNN Wait a minute now. You said, "If you find a good buy on a table, big enough to seat both of our families, I'll look at it." Take a good long look big boy. This is it.

Lynn turns her attention to trying to find a sales person.

LYNN Where's the guy?

The store owner, a man in his late fifties and dressed in khaki pants and a plaid shirt, walks to the couple smiling broadly. Chris stands up.

STORE OWNER: Is anybody helpin' y'all?

LYNN

No, sir. We were wondering about the price of this table.

Chris gets a frightened expression. The store owner leans over to look at a tag on one of the chairs.

STORE OWNER:

Hmmmmmm. Let's see. Four, Nine, Six, Seven, One. Let me check my book. Different people own different pieces in here and I have to see how they priced it. I remember thinking that this particular piece was a real bargain though. I think it was just reduced.

CHRIS (Barely audible) Uh huh. The shop owner walks to nearby desk repeating the number to himself. He thumbs through a notebook of pages detailing all of the inventory.

STORE OWNER: Here it is. Yep. That's the one I remember.

The store owner hands a small piece of paper to Lynn.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERNEATH TABLE-DAY

Katelin has crawled under the large table. She sits down on the decorative supports and looks around. She sees words that were crudely carved in the bottom of the table that say "Dub and Joe Was Here."She also sees the other names of previous owners carved in the wood. She moves the tips of her fingers across the names.

CUT TO:

INT. ANTIQUE STORE-DAY

Chris moves beside Lynn to see the price tag.

CHRIS Damnation! Is that the price or the year it was built?

KATIE (from underneath the dining table) Ooooooo....Daddy.

Instinctively without looking, Chris reaches out to pat Katie's head and apologize. Katie is peeking out from under the table. Chris patting air.

> CHRIS (still lookint at the price tag) I'm sorry, honey. Daddy didn't mean it.

Katie giggles and moves back under the table. The store owner takes the piece of paper and examines one side and then the other.

STORE OWNER:

No, sir. That's the price. The year of construction is on this side. The table was built in the 1930's. It is a Levine's original. You can tell by the intricate detail on the legs and feet.

LYNN

It's beautiful. Do you deliver?

STORE OWNER:

No, ma'am, I'm afraid not. We just don't have enough business to keep a full-time delivery person around. Where do y'all live?

CHRIS

In the poor house after today.

LYNN

(gives Chris an angry look) We live on Loop Road.

STORE OWNER:

Well, my goodness! You can just borrow my truck and move it. Get a couple of buddies that owe you a favor and you'll have it in and ready to eat on in thirty minutes.

CHRIS

My friends would kill me if I asked them to move this monster.

LYNN They don't mind asking you to help move deer stands and all that hunting stuff.

KATIE (from under the dining table) Are y'all fighting?

CHRIS

I'm sorry, honey. I didn't mean it.

Chris doesn't even realize what he's apologizing for. He looks around for Katie. Katie begins to laugh again. Chris looks under the table and sees Katie.

> KATIE You're funny daddy.

CHRIS Uh huh. Get out from under there!

CHRIS (standing up and looking at Lynn) Now that's different and you know it. We help each other with deer stands. Plus, we use winches to lift them. I don't see you lettin' me hook up a winch in the dining room.

Katie has crawled out from under the table and is walking aimlessly around the adults.

KATIE Daddy. What's a winch?

CHRIS Huh? Nuthin'. Uh.....It's a...It's a thing.

LYNN Well, I'll just get Tim and Darron to come over. They'll help you move it.

CHRIS No, that's ok. I wouldn't turn the gruesome twosome loose on anything worth more than ten bucks. I guess I could call Gary and Ronnie.

STORE OWNER: Great! See there, I knew y'all could work it out. Will that be cash or charge?

Chris walks away shaking his head. Katie skips along behind him trying to avoid stepping on cracks in the floor.

> CHRIS (pointing to Lynn as he walks to the door) You'll have to deal with Mrs. Kissinger there about that. I've said too much already. I'm goin' to find some coffee and a cigar. Come on pumpkin.

The store owner and Lynn begin to walk to the desk. Chris and Katie walk outside. As Chris pulls the door open, it bumps against a bell attached to the top of the door frame to alert the shop owner of customers entering and leaving. Chris and Katie walk down the sidewalk with Katie still jumping over cracks. As the door closes it strikes the bell again. STORE OWNER: Sure. That's fine. Don't forget to...

CUT TO:

INT. ANTIQUE STORE-NIGHT

It's dark outside and the store owner leaves the store. The bell on the door rings as he goes out and locks the door behind him. The streetlight casts and eerie glow within the antique store and especially on the dining table.

FADE OUT.