

"THE PLAYHOUSE"

written by

Jeremie Rhodes

Copyright (c) 2020 This screenplay may not be used or reproduced for any purpose including educational purposes without the expressed written permission of the author.

THE PLAYHOUSE

FADE IN:

INT. SUBURBAN HOME — DAY

The empty living room of a typical suburban home. The front door opens and a real estate agent, SUSAN, enters, followed by RICHARD AND MONICA COLLINS, a couple in their mid-30s.

SUSAN

So, here it is. Nice open floor plan. Three bedrooms, two bath. Have a look around and tell me what you think.

Monica stands alone in the kitchen area while Richard, trailed by the agent, quickly walks through the one-story home, then returns to the main room.

RICHARD

Everything looks pretty good.

SUSAN

Now, you'll remember I had said there was some work to be done?

She moves to a sliding glass door on the back wall, pulling aside a heavy curtain, flooding the room with light.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

That's where the back yard comes in.

She slides open the glass door.

EXT. BACKYARD — DAY

A standard issue suburban backyard, bounded by fences on two sides but lacking the back section of fence. A spooky-looking dead tree stands to one side on the fence line. Beyond is an overgrown, open field.

A slightly dilapidated children's playhouse sits to one side of the yard, surrounded by unkempt shrubbery. Its paint is peeling, and here and there a board is missing.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

We had planned to have everything finished this week, but since you said you're in construction and don't mind doing some work. . .

Monica advances slowly toward the playhouse, walking as if in a trance. Richard follows her, a look of concern crossing his face.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

(strolling toward the back of the yard)

That tree will have to be removed of course, before the fence can be built.

The agent looks back to where Monica and Richard are standing by the playhouse. She turns and moves toward them.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

And this old playhouse you'll have to tear down. Maybe some of the wood can be reclaimed? Or

if you have children it could be
fixed up.

(to Monica)

Do you have children?

Monica stands frozen, looking down. She does not respond.
Richard moves closer, putting an arm around her.

RICHARD

Uh, no.

Susan moves away from the pair.

SUSAN

Well in that case it shouldn't
be much trouble to remove it.

(turning back toward
them)

So, what do you think?

RICHARD

Do you mind if we talk it over
for a minute? We can meet you
back at your office.

SUSAN

No, that's fine. If you would,
just lock up when you leave.
And I'll see you two later this
afternoon?

RICHARD

We'll lock up. And yes, we
shouldn't be long.

Susan exits, closing the sliding glass door behind her.
Richard remains with Monica in the backyard, near the
playhouse.

RICHARD

What do you think, hon? If it's all too much for you right now we can go back to the hotel and think about it for a day or two.

MONICA

No, I'm alright. It's just, seeing this playhouse made me think. . .well, you know.

She looks down, her face long with grief. He holds her to him, stroking her hair.

RICHARD

I know, honey. I know.

MONICA

I was just so ready Richard. Ready for us to finally be a family. And now it can never. . . I'm sorry. I know this is all crazy. I just couldn't stand to be in that house anymore.

She straightens herself, wiping tears from her eyes.

RICHARD

It's ok, honey. It's ok. I know how you feel and - look at me - you have nothing to be sorry for.

She shakes her head 'yes', but then begins to cry. He pulls her closer as she cries into his chest.

INT. THE HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

A large bearded man in sleeveless shirt enters carrying a box. This is Richard's close friend and employee JIM, mid-30's. He is followed by a thin young man, PHIL, early-20's, in an oversize basketball jersey.

Monica is unpacking pots and pans from a box in the kitchen. Richard moves to take the box from Jim.

JIM

This is the last of 'em.

RICHARD

Awesome. Man, we really appreciate you guys. Now how about that beer?

JIM

Hell yeah!

PHIL

(checking his phone)

Thanks, but i've gotta get a move on. Good luck with the place.

Richard pulls some folded bills from his front pocket and passes them to Phil with a handshake.

RICHARD

Thanks for your help.

With a salute Phil leaves as Richard retrieves two cans of beer from the refrigerator and hands one to Jim.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Richard and Jim are standing beneath the dead tree, sipping their beers in the late afternoon sun.

JIM

(indicating the tree)

So this is it I'm guessing?

RICHARD

Yeah, it's gotta go down to ground level so I can put in the fence.

JIM

No problem. I can bring everything we need from the shop this weekend.

(points at the
playhouse)

What about that?

RICHARD

Monica decided she wants to keep it. She wants to fix it up.

JIM

She gonna turn it into a garden shed or something?

RICHARD

I think she's planning to keep it like it is.

(in a lower voice)

Like some kind of a fucking shrine.

JIM

Is she doing alright? Are you
doing alright?

RICHARD

Yeah. We're fine. It's
been tough, but we'll get
through it.

JIM

Alright, but if you ever need
anybody to talk to. . .just let
me know. You're my boss,
but you're also my friend.

RICHARD

(patting Jim's shoulder)

Thanks. I appreciate that.
Hey, let's stop standing around
here talking and fire up that
grill, whaddaya say?

JIM

Hell yeah!

INT. THE HOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard and Monica are in bed, sleeping. In the silence of
the darkened room we hear the sound of CHILDREN GIGGLING.
Richard slowly wakes as the sound is heard again. Monica
remains asleep.

Richard rises from the bed and moves slowly down the
hallway toward the living room. He hears the giggling
laughter again.

He switches on the light. The room is empty, no intruders

to be seen.

He jumps as Monica puts a hand on his shoulder.

RICHARD

Jesus! You scared the crap
outta me.

MONICA

Sorry. I saw you get up. Is
everything alright?

RICHARD

Yeah. I just thought i heard
something. Maybe birds in the
attic. I'll have a look tomorrow.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Richard and Jim stand by the stump of the tree in work clothes and safety goggles. Wood from the tree is piled nearby and certain pieces have been trimmed and set apart from the rest. A tall stepladder stands near the fence opposite the stump.

Jim moves a large stump-grinding machine into place and signals to Richard. They both put on ear mufflers and Richard steps back a safe distance as Jim fires up the machine.

INT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Monica is in the kitchen, stirring a glass pitcher of iced tea. She picks up the pitcher and moves toward the sliding glass door.

She hears the sound of GIGGLING. It is loud, as if coming from within her. She stops, looking out into the back

yard.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Jim is grinding away at the tree stump. The large machine takes a swath from the wood with each swipe, sending out a fishtail of sawdust that piles on the ground.

Richard stands back, watching his friend make quick work of the stump.

THROUGH A KNOTHOLE

in the fence and from a low angle we see Richard's back and beyond him Jim is grinding away at the stump.

We see the lower portion of a child's leg, bare down to a black sock and a shiny black, old-fashioned shoe. The GIGGLING is heard again.

INT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Monica stands motionless, silhouetted in the window. She looks out, still holding the pitcher of tea. Sound of ICE CUBES TINKLING mingles with children's LAUGHTER.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Jim is straining, having some difficulty with a particularly hard part of the stump.

A child's hand and arm reaches over the fence and pushes at the side of the empty stepladder, rocking it side to side, attempting to push it over.

Richard hears the giggling laughter now. The sound seems to project from inside his ear protectors, drowning out the noise of the machine, and to come from directly behind him.

Richard turns around just as the ladder is coming down onto his head. It hits him in the forehead and sends him hurtling toward the stump grinder.

The handle of the stump grinder jumps from Jim's hands and its metal spinning head lurches to one side.

Richard hits the ground as the grinder moves directly toward his face. Jim grabs the handle and stops it just inches from Richard's nose.

Jim turns off the noisy machine and for a brief moment we can still hear the laughter, then all is silent. Richard and Jim exchange a look of puzzled relief.

INT. THE HOUSE - DAY

Monica still stands, immobile before the sliding glass door. Her face is blank, trancelike. Beads of sweat have formed on her forehead. A faint WHISPERING sound seems to swirl around her.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Richard sits in an armchair with a beer, flipping television channels. A gauze bandage is wrapped around his head and he is obviously in some discomfort. Monica is at the kitchen island, chopping vegetables with a large knife while pots of water boil on the stove behind her.

The DOORBELL RINGS and Monica moves toward the front door. Richard rises painfully from his chair and follows her toward the door, limping slightly.

The door is opened and there stands a smiling couple in their 50's, GEORGE FRANKLIN and his wife KATHY. She holds a large glass baking dish covered with aluminum foil.

GEORGE

Hi, we're your neighbors from next door. I'm George Franklin. This is my wife Kathy.

MONICA

Uh, yes, it's nice to meet you.
Come in, please.

The Franklins see Richard approach and notice his bandaged head.

KATHY

We wouldn't want to intrude.

RICHARD

(indicating his bandage)

Oh, this? No, it's nothing.
Just got into a bit of a scrape
with a ladder earlier today.

George pushes his large frame through the door.

GEORGE

Looks like that ladder got the
better of you, eh?

Kathy hands the baking dish to Monica.

KATHY

This is for you.
(proudly)
It's my "famous" chicken potpie
casserole. Well, George calls
it that.

GEORGE

You bet I do. Wait'll you
taste it. It'll knock your
socks off!

MONICA

Thank you. Come in. I was just
starting to cook, but we'll heat
this up instead and I'll make a
salad.

Kathy pushes her way in, looking around.

KATHY

Well, if you insist. We really
wouldn't want to intrude though.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT (LATER)

Richard and George are standing in the living room, holding
beer cans and admiring a stuffed fish mounted on a plaque
on the wall.

It is a well done piece of taxidermy depicting the animal
in a valiant fight for its life. In the background Monica
and Kathy can be seen, moving about in the kitchen with
wine glasses in hand.

GEORGE

Largemouth?

RICHARD

Yessir. I caught that one a
few years back out on Twin Lakes.

GEORGE

She sure is a beauty! Say, you
fish the Twin Lakes? Can't
believe I haven't seen you out

there before. I'm out there almost every weekend. We should go sometime.

RICHARD

(touching his sore head)

Yeah. We should do that.

In the kitchen Kathy is prattling on while Monica chops vegetables for the salad:

KATHY

It's so nice to have somebody in the neighborhood who likes to cook. I've always loved to cook, but it seems like all anyone wants to do anymore is go out to eat. Or heat up a package in the microwave. It's a shame really. When I was a girl everybody cooked and shared recipes. Oh, I can smell that casserole. I bet it's ready.

MONICA

I think you're right. Let's have a look.

Monica puts on a pair of mitts and opens the oven.

KATHY

But you know, even I don't cook as much as I used to. Since the kids are all grown up there just doesn't seem to be as much reason to go to the trouble. Isn't that funny? You'd think that with all the free time I

have now I'd cook more, not less.
Do you have children?

Monica has the baking dish in both hands and is moving to set it on the counter. She becomes lightheaded and begins to swoon.

Kathy stares in horror and begins to move toward Monica as the dish holding her precious casserole slides from the oven mitts and falls to the floor, shattering into a mass of chicken potpie and shards of glass.

Richard and George rush in from the living room. Richard catches Monica as she is slumping to the floor. He holds her upright and, limping heavily now, helps her to the living room couch.

RICHARD

Honey, are you OK?

MONICA

(dazed)

Yeah, i think so. I'm very dizzy.

RICHARD

Lie down here and I'll get you a glass of water.

He moves toward the kitchen where the Franklin's are standing. George looks concerned, but Kathy is trying in vain not to show her annoyance.

RICHARD

(to George and Kathy)

I'm so sorry about this. We've been under a lot of stress lately what with the move and. . .and all.

He fills a glass with water and wets a dish towel.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We'll replace your baking dish.
There's one just like it here
somewhere.

He opens a couple of cabinets but doesn't see the dish.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I know it's here somewhere-

KATHY

Don't worry about it, it's no
big deal. I have another one.

She shoots George a look.

GEORGE

Uh, hey, listen, is there anything
we can do to help?

RICHARD

No, that's OK, she'll be fine.
And again, we're sorry about
your casserole-

GEORGE

In that case we're going to clear
out and give you guys your space.

They hustle toward the front door.

RICHARD

Uh, alright, thanks for stopping by.
Sorry again. We'll talk later about
that fishing trip.

GEORGE

Uh, yeah, we should do that.

They exit and Richard brings the glass of water to Monica, who lies on the couch looking not-too-well. He holds the glass to her lips and she takes a sip.

MONICA

Thanks. I don't know what happened. I was just listening to her talk and—

RICHARD

Babe, it's fine.

He places the damp towel on her forehead. She nods and closes her eyes. He gives her a long look. . .concern mixed with slight annoyance.

INT. BEDROOM — NIGHT

RICHARD

Feeling better?

Monica is in her night gown, lying in bed. Richard, still clothed, stands beside the bed.

MONICA

Yes. Much better. Thanks for cleaning up the mess I made in there.

RICHARD

No problem. And on the bright side I don't think we'll be seeing a whole lot of the Franklins around here.

They both chuckle.

MONICA

You're terrible. I'm so embarrassed. They must think I'm a freak.

RICHARD

Well, you're my freak.

He places a knee on the bed, leaning down to kiss her on the forehead.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

You get some rest. I'll be in in a while, alright?

MONICA

Alright.

She smiles a little, closes her eyes and rolls over into her pillow.

EXT. BACKYARD — NIGHT

Richard sits in the backyard, a beer in hand, listening to COUNTRY MUSIC from a JAM BOX plugged into an extension cord.

A small fire burns in a hole dug in the ground and he sits on a section of the felled dead tree, looking out toward the as-yet unbuilt back fence. His wounded forehead is now dressed with a smaller bandage several inches square.

RICHARD

Here's to you, Hank.

He crushes the beer can and tosses it at the playhouse, hitting its side. Reaching into a small cooler, he fumbles around for another beer, opens it and knocks back about half the can in one gulp. He lets loose with a sizable belch.

He tosses some sticks on the fire, which flares in response. He tilts his head back to down the rest of the beer, then he hears THE GIGGLING.

Slowly lowering the beer can he peers through the fire and, as his eyes adjust, he sees TWO CHILDREN, a BOY and a GIRL, aged about nine, standing beside the playhouse. In the darkness they are little more than two silhouettes standing close together and stock still.

RICHARD

What the. . .

With one hand he rubs his eyes and looks again. *The Children are now standing directly in front of him on the opposite side of the fire.* They have pale, sickly complexions and are dressed in old-fashioned black clothing.

Stunned, he falls backward off the log, spilling his beer onto the portable radio, which fizzles and sputters out. His head comes down hard on a rock and he is out like a light.

EXT. BACKYARD — NIGHT (LATER)

Richard slowly wakes, shaking his aching head, and stumbles to his feet. He is alone in the darkness of the backyard, the fire having burned to embers.

He winces as he touches the bleeding wound on the back of his head and staggers toward the sliding glass door. He

opens the door and goes inside, but we stay in the backyard and slowly float toward the exterior of their bedroom window.

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

In the dim light of the bedroom we see Monica in bed, sweating and panting. The little BOY is on the bed beside her in a position that is like praying, his hands cupped as he whispers into Monica's right ear.

The little GIRL stands beside the bed on the opposite side. She leans down to whisper into Monica's left ear. We cannot make out any words, but only hear an UNEARTHLY WHISPERING that seems to fill the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Richard turns on a light switch, but nothing happens. He limps to the breaker box, feels in the dark and flips a switch, flooding the room with light.

He grabs some paper towels from the kitchen, wets them in the sink and daubs at the back of his head.

Slowly he moves down the hallway toward the bedroom, drawn toward the uncanny whispering sound. Reaching the door he quietly opens it and looks in. The whispering suddenly stops. Monica is alone, asleep on the bed.

INT./EXT. PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING)/RURAL ROAD – DAY

Richard's work truck moves at a steady clip on a tree-lined rural road, passing a station wagon.

Richard is at the wheel, his head wrapped in gauze and a baseball cap covering the bandages. Monica is in the

passenger seat, looking somewhat flummoxed.

RICHARD

Look, I'm sorry, okay? I can't tell you what I saw because I'm not sure I saw anything at all. I just need to get away from the house for a couple of days. I figured you of all people would understand.

MONICA

Me of all people? What exactly are you saying? That I'm crazy?

RICHARD

No, I didn't mean it like that—

MONICA

Well, maybe i haven't been the perfect June Cleaver wife you had in mind. I'm sorry I embarrassed you in front of the neighbors. I didn't know this was a normality contest, I would have tried harder.

RICHARD

Monica, come on now. You know I didn't mean it like that. I'm just saying we've both been stressed out and a couple of days away might do us some good. I'm sorry, OK?

She sits back in her seat, arms crossed, still obviously mad, but she shoots him a side glance that says forgiveness is not out of reach.

The vehicle continues on, passing another car.

MONICA (V.O.)

Okay, but you have to let me catch
the biggest fish.

EXT. GRADY'S TWIN LAKES MOTEL - DAY

As the truck pulls into an overgrown parking lot we see a large, somewhat faded 50s-ERA SIGN advertising Grady's Twin Lakes Motel. The partially vine-covered image shows a fish jumping out of the lake, being caught by a man who sits in a boat with his wife and two children, a boy and a girl.

The car pulls into a space near the office of the one story, twelve-room motel. The place looks like it was last painted sometime in the eighties, but is otherwise reasonably maintained.

INT. GRADY'S TWIN LAKES MOTEL/OFFICE - DAY

The door to the dimly-lit office swings open, flooding the doorway with light and dust particles. Richard and Monica enter the office as an old-fashioned spring-loaded screen door smacks shut behind them.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Weeeell, look who we have here.

A man in his mid-60s, JEFF GRADY JR., large and tall with short-cropped grey hair, overalls and a white t-shirt, stands behind the counter, surrounded by all the bric-a-brac of a motel office that doubles as general store and bait shop.

GRADY (CONT'D)

If it ain't Rick and Monica, my
two favorite city slickers.

RICHARD

Well Grady, I don't know if we live in the city exactly, but-

GRADY

Compared to here it is. So what brings you all out here to my neck of the woods? It's been quite a while.

MONICA

Uh, we just need-, uh, wanted to get away for a couple of days. Just to relax, you know.

GRADY

(filling out the registration card from memory)

Just like I figured. City life got you down. Well, you folks don't worry about a thing, we got you covered. Gonna need a boat?

RICHARD

Yessir, we were thinking about going out this afternoon, if possible.

GRADY

Of course it's possible. Here you go. Room 12 on the end, as usual.

(to Richard)

If you need anything for that head let me know. Dolores keeps a first aid kit around here somewhere.

RICHARD AND MONICA

Thanks.

GRADY

Yup.

LAKE MONTAGE

-- Monica is sitting in a small boat with an outboard motor as Richard unties it from a wooden dock. He steps into the boat and pushes off into the lake.

-- Monica is smiling in the front of the boat and Richard steers as they motor along the surface of the water. He cuts the engine and they drift into a small cove.

-- Monica is wrestling a sizable bass onboard the boat as Richard watches with enjoyment, sipping a beer. She removes the hook and the fish flops around wildly in the boat. They both laugh and try to grab it, but the fish wriggles and squirms its way overboard to safety. She sits down close to him and leans back laughing in his arms.

END LAKE MONTAGE

INT. MOTEL ROOM — NIGHT

Monica and Richard sit at a small round table, eating pizza off of greasy paper plates. A candle burns between them on the table next to a bottle of wine and two small plastic cups. Several other candles glow in various places around the room. The pizza box sits on the bed beside them.

RICHARD

Well, it's not Mrs. Franklin's
"famous" chicken potpie casserole,
but it'll have to do.

MONICA

(lifting a plastic cup
of wine)

This is all I need.

Richard lifts a slice of greasy pizza and looks at it, then puts it back down and moves to fill their plastic cups from the bottle of wine.

RICHARD

I think you've got the right
idea.

(lifting his cup)

To. . .to new beginnings.

MONICA

New beginnings.

They touch the plastic cups together and down the contents.

MONICA

(a bit unsteady)

Whew! This wine's going
straight to my head.

He moves to steady her and she allows him to support her, falling into his arms and smiling. They look at each other for a few seconds and then, both feeling the sense of attraction, they begin to kiss – tenderly at first and then more insistently.

Richard moves the pizza box from the bed with one hand and places it out of the way on the table. They maneuver onto the bed, still locked in embrace and beginning to remove clothing. . .

EXT. GRADY'S TWIN LAKES MOTEL — MORNING

The Collins' truck pulls up and stops outside the motel office. They get out of the car and meet Grady and DOLORES (mid-50's), a hispanic woman of about half her husband's height, who move toward them across the gravel lot, the screen door slamming behind them.

GRADY

You folks leaving us already or
just going out for the day?

RICHARD

You know Grady, we had such a
relaxing day yesterday and such
a good night's sleep last night,
we decided just to head on back to
the house today.

Richard hands Grady some money for the room. Grady shoves it into his pocket without looking.

GRADY

Back to the big city, eh?
(knowing look to
Richard)
Well, I'm glad you had a good
nights sleep. Don't be strangers
next time. I'll be here. . .
until I'm not.

DOLORES

(ribbing Grady)
Lucky me.

They shake hands/hug and Richard and Monica get back in the car and drive away, Grady and Dolores watching as they go.

INT. THE HOUSE — DAY

For a long moment we are in the house alone. The sound of LAUGHTER is insistent and maniacal, echoing loudly throughout the house.

INT. THE GARAGE — DAY

The garage door opens and Richard's truck pulls in next to Monica's sedan.

INT. THE HOUSE — DAY

The maddening sound of the laughter continues and then suddenly *falls to a hush*.

A moment later the door leading into the garage opens and Monica and Richard enter. The relaxed laughter we now hear is theirs as they trundle into the house carrying coolers and shoulder bags.

MONICA

Hey, city boy!

She throws a shoulder bag to him and he catches it, dropping another bag in the process.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Dibs on the shower. I feel like
I've been dunked by my ankle into
a petrie dish—

She stops suddenly and looks toward the kitchen area. All the cabinets are open and their contents scattered across the floor. Every glass and porcelain dish is shattered to pieces.

The refrigerator door is open and all the food is strewn about. Orange juice, milk and spaghetti sauce pool together in the wreckage of the kitchen.

RICHARD

What the?. . .

They give each other a quizzical look. Richard runs to the sliding glass door and tries it. It is locked. He tries the front door. Locked and bolted from the inside.

EXT. THE HOUSE — AFTERNOON

Two UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS are in the kitchen. One officer takes notes on a small pad while the other questions Richard and Monica.

OFFICER #1

So, you stated that both you and your wife were away from the house when the incident occurred. Does anyone else have a key to the house?

RICHARD

No. I mean it's possible the real estate agency still has a key. I haven't had a chance to change the locks yet, but the doors were bolted from the inside, both of them.

OFFICER #1

And the garage door?

MONICA

It was closed. And the door into the house was locked. I unlocked it myself.

OFFICER #1

Well, we've checked every square inch of the place. There's no one - or no thing - in here now.

RICHARD

But i don't understand. This doesn't make sense.

OFFICER #2

(a suspicious
look at Richard
and Monica)

No. No it doesn't.

Officer #1 gives his partner a look and a quick nod of the head. They both start toward the front door.

OFFICER #1

Look, if I were you I'd call animal control. Maybe it was a raccoon or something. You'd be surprised how small of a space they need to get in.

RICHARD

Alright, I guess so. Thanks for coming out officers. I uh, I'd offer you guys a drink, but. . .

He gestures toward the wrecked kitchen.

OFFICER #1

That's OK, thanks anyway. Just keep the doors locked and keep an eye out and call us if anything else happens.

EXT. THE HOUSE — EVENING

The Officers exit to the front walkway. From the neighboring porch the Franklins look on suspiciously. George Franklin puts an arm around his wife's shoulder and they go inside. After a moment their front window curtain opens and Kathy Franklin's face peers out.

Richard and Monica stand in their doorway, the weariness seeming to radiate from them. Richard closes the door.

INT. THE HOUSE/BEDROOM — NIGHT

Richard and Monica are in bed, he in boxers and a t-shirt and she in a simple black negligee. The TV is on at the foot of the bed and she is watching while Richard reads an automotive magazine.

Richard's eyes are heavy. He blinks to stay awake, but they slowly close again, as the magazine in his hands moves toward his lap.

A hand reaches out to grab his arm. It's skin is sallow and the long, green fingernails are chipped and broken. He looks up and sees Monica. Well, at least it's a version of Monica.

Her simple black negligee is now a complex thing with garters and ornate lace. Her whole body is of a sickly brown color, as if she'd been soaked in nicotine or tanned like a strap of leather. Her hair is wild, untamed, and her overly-painted face wears an insane smile.

The hand grips his arm tightly — too tightly — like a blood pressure machine that will not stop squeezing.

He rips his arm from the grasp, leaving jagged wounds across his flesh that begin to bleed. He falls to the floor beside the bed, suddenly feeling the paralysis which has overtaken his body.

Rigid in a fetal position, he looks toward the foot of the bed, his vision coming in and out of focus.

For a long moment he sees nothing, but he begins to hear a HEAVY WHISPERING, followed by GIGGLING.

Monica, in her current gruesome form, walks slowly out at the foot of the bed. She is followed by the TWO CHILDREN, who take up places on either side of her. The three advance slowly toward Richard, who still lies paralyzed on the floor. All three giggle and laugh and 'Monica's' tanned arms reach out toward him.

As the sickly hand again wraps around his wounded arm *he starts awake*. He is in his bed, the magazine lying on his blanketed legs.

Monica, now back to her normal appearance, is beside him, still watching television. She is laughing at some joke by a stand-up comedian on the late show, but turns to him in concern when she sees him start.

MONICA

Richard, are you alright?

RICHARD

(eyes still
out of focus)

Yeah, yeah, i'm OK. I just had
a bad dream, that's all.

He sits up on the side of the bed, shaking off his nightmare.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Richard and Jim sit at the bar in a crowded, dimly-lit roadhouse. Southern rock music blares as hard-working men and women drink beer and play pool.

JIM

Damn. That's one hell of a nightmare.

RICHARD

I don't know what's wrong with me, Jim. I think I might be losing my mind.

A local HOT MOMMA approaches Jim.

HOT MOMMA

Hey Jimbo. You're looking way too serious. Come and dance with me. I'll make it worth your while.

JIM

Hell Y-. You know what, I can't right now, baby. But I'll take a rain check.

HOT MOMMA

Oh c'mon Jimbo! Rain is wet and so am I. I wanna dance!

JIM

(loud whispers
to her)
Baby, my boy needs me right now.

Just look at him.

She looks at Richard, who smiles at her weakly. She waves back, disappointment on full display.

HOT MOMMA

Alright, but you're missing out.

JIM

Don't I know it, baby.

She moves away and finds a grungy-looking cowboy to dance with.

RICHARD

Hey man, don't let me spoil your fun. I should probably get home anyway.

JIM

Bullshit.

(to the bartender)

Hey Sera! Two shots of Turkey and two more beers when you get a chance. Thanks honey.

(to Richard)

Look, you're my buddy and you ain't going nowhere 'til we put a smile on that mug of yours.

The Bartender, SERA, a young woman with long red hair and a cowboy hat, places the beers and shots in front of them, gives Jim an easy smile. And now it's time for a

DRINKING MONTAGE

-- They each down a shot and chase it with beer. Empty bottles and shot glasses litter the bar.

-- They are playing pool. Jim plays air guitar with his cue stick. Richard laughs and totally whiffs the cue ball.

-- Jim dances with Hot Momma while Richard dances with Sera the bartender.

-- Jim dances with Sera while Hot Momma mauls Richard.

-- Back at the bar, the four of them pounding more shots. Jim shouts "Hell Yeah!".

-- Jim and Richard dance with each other while the girls watch, critiquing and instructing. Shaking their heads "no, no you guys are terrible" and "put some sexy into it".

END MONTAGE

INT. BAR - NIGHT (LATER)

It's later now and the crowd has thinned out. Country music plays low as Richard and Jim sit at the bar. They're both obviously intoxicated. Richard sits there with a beatific smile on his face.

JIM

You feel better now Richie boy?

RICHARD

I feel. . .I feel drunk is what I feel. But I don't feel afraid anymore.

(suddenly serious)

Jim, there's something I need to tell you.

JIM

Whoa, whoa boy. I don't think I can

drink enough to cheer you up again.

RICHARD

No, it's OK. I'm OK. But this has been weighing on me and I think it might have something to do with the, uh, problems I've been having lately and I - I just think it might feel really good to just, tell somebody.

JIM

OK, bro. Shoot.

RICHARD

Shit. This is gonna make me sound like a real asshole, but when Monica went in the hospital, after the complications started, I - I sort of hoped something would happen. Just so we could maybe go back to the way things were before.

Jim motions to Jen, silently ordering another round.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

And then when it happened. . .when the baby. . .well, you know. I felt guilty as hell. But I could never tell Monica. Fuck, man, I'm sorry to be putting all this on you. It's too much. I'm just drunk, you know-

JIM

Hey, when I said if you ever needed someone to talk to I wasn't

just blowing smoke up your ass.

The drinks arrive and Jim throws back the shot.

JIM (CONT'D)

And as far as you feeling guilty
and all that shit - Man, those
feelings are natural. Everybody
thinks that kind of shit.

(winking)

Maybe you just pay more attention
to yourself than some others do.

RICHARD

(chuckles)

Yeah. No, yeah you're right.
Hey man, you're really the best.
I appreciate it. Everything. I
better get going. Monica's gonna
wonder where I'm at.

He pulls his keys out of his pocket, but Jim takes them
with a deft move.

JIM

Nope. I'll drive you home.

RICHARD

You're as drunk as I am. At least.

JIM

Drunker. C'mon.

Jim throws some cash on the bar and thanks Sera. He holds
Richard up as they stagger out the door.

EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim's muscle car roars up to the house and parks. He turns down the southern rock as Richard gets out on the passenger side.

JIM

Alright amigo, get some rest.
I'll come by tomorrow and we'll
go get your truck.

RICHARD

Hey, thanks again. Really. I
feel better. Lighter.

JIM

Good. See you tomorrow man.

RICHARD

Mañana.

Jim turns the music up as he roars off into the distance.

Richard staggers to the front door, fumbles with his keys and goes in.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Richard walks through the darkened house to the bedroom. Slowly pushes open the door. The room is dark and Monica is asleep on the bed, resting peacefully.

He smiles to himself and closes the door. Moves back down the hallway to the kitchen. Opens the refrigerator and pulls out a six-pack ring with three beers on it.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Richard opens the sliding glass door and comes out into the back yard. He takes a beer from the ring and pops the top.

Takes a swig and looks up at the moon.

His attention moves to the playhouse and he notices that its door stands open. He walks over to it slowly, then stoops down and goes inside, closing the door behind him.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard sits in the darkness of the playhouse, sipping his beer. He strikes a match and lights a small oil lamp. We can see now that he's sitting in a tiny chair at a tiny table. The ceiling is just above his head.

All of the stuffed animals and toys that his wife had bought in anticipation of their child being born fill every corner of the place. The stuffed animals wear all the little outfits she'd bought for the baby.

RICHARD

Jesus Christ. . .

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

A coiled extension cord sits on the concrete landing outside the sliding glass door. We hear the sound of CHILDREN LAUGHING, followed by a SHUSH, then QUIETER LAUGHTER.

Little hands reach out and pick up the extension cord.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard looks around the playhouse, taking in the meticulousness of his wife's deranged masterpiece. He picks up a little stuffed bear in a Hawaiian shirt.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Hey little guy. How are you?

My name's Richard. What's yours?

Holds the bear up to his ear.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Psychowife? Psychowife the bear?

Kind of a weird name, but OK.

He starts to throw the bear but stops himself and sets it down on the table, straightening the bear's collar and dusting its shoulder.

EXT. BACK YARD/PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Little hands tie the extension cord to the handle of the playhouse door. Giggling that grows louder, then another SHUSH.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Monica's sleeping form, at first still, begins to move slightly. Her face twitches almost imperceptibly as sweat gathers on her forehead. A SLIGHT WHISPERING is heard.

EXT. BACK YARD/PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

The little hands have wrapped the extension cord around the playhouse several times. They are tying the other end to the door handle.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard downs the can of beer and cracks another.

RICHARD

You want one Psychowife?

He opens the last beer and places it next to the stuffed

bear, six pack rings still attached.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Don't worry if you can't finish
it all. I'll help you.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Near a lawnmower sits a gallon plastic gasoline can. A
little hand reaches out and grabs its handle.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Monica tosses uncomfortably in the bed. She's sweating
profusely. HEAVY WHISPERING SOUNDS fill the room.

EXT. BACK YARD/PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

A pair of little hands holds the gas container and slowly,
deliberately sloshes the gasoline onto the sides of the
playhouse.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

DING! An EasyBake Oven bell goes off. Richard reaches in
and pulls out a tiny tray. Places it on the table next to
the stuffed bear. A tiny plastic pizza is on the tray.

RICHARD

Pizzas ready buddy! Get it while
it's hot!

He laughs drunkenly, then gets a little vertigo and falls
over onto a miniature daybed covered in stuffed animals.

EXT. BACK YARD/PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

A little hand strikes a wooden match on an antique

matchbox. The flame leaps up and lights two pale, smiling faces. The faces begin to laugh quietly.

The Girl smiles. Her hand drops the match onto the gas-soaked door. The Boy laughs louder. The Girl raises a finger to her lips to quiet him.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard is passed out in a most awkward position, hugging a pile of little dressed-up stuffed animals. His nose twitches as if he smells something, but he continues to snooze.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Monica's body shakes wildly, though her eyes remain closed, like she's fighting to wake herself but cannot.

Flickering light moves across the walls, the reflection of the flames outside. The whispering sound morphs into a vortex of LOUD HISSING.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard's still passed out. He smells something in his sleep, enough to wake him from his stupor. He opens his eyes. Smells the smoke.

He rouses himself, tries the door. Confused, he tries again, then throws himself against it.

EXT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

The door opens a little, but is held by the encircling extension cord. Flame shoots up the door.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Richard tries one of the little windows, but the extension cord has been run several times through the handles of the shutter and it will not open.

Dark smoke builds near the floor and rises up, choking him. Panicking, he tries the other window. Same situation. Flames shoot up outside both windows.

More smoke is seeping in. He pulls his shirt over his nose, coughing and struggling to breathe. Then he hears the LAUGHTER. Low at first but growing louder.

He makes a run at the playhouse wall and collides painfully against it.

RICHARD

Ow! Who built this fucking thing?

EXT. BACKYARD/PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Flames shoot up on all sides of the playhouse. The building rocks side to side as Richard struggles within.

Silhouetted by the burning playhouse, the Girl and the Boy stand side-by-side, holding hands, laughing heartily.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Monica writhes and struggles as if against some unseen force. Reflections of flame light the room bright as day.

Suddenly, she bolts awake with a gasp, sitting upright in bed. Through the bedroom window she sees the playhouse on fire and the silhouetted children.

She rushes through the door and into the hall.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

The smoke is getting thick and Richard is sweating and choking. He hurls himself against the playhouse door but it doesn't give.

He backs up to take another run at it and knocks over the oil lamp, spilling flame onto a pile of stuffed animals that instantly ignites.

Panicked, like a trapped animal he throws himself against the door again and again.

EXT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Flames are beginning to melt the cords that wrap the door. Each of Richard's attempts pushes the door open a little more.

INT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Monica runs across the living room, her nightgown flowing. Through the sliding glass door she can see the playhouse fully engulfed in flame.

She stops at the door and watches, entranced, as the Children turn around to face her. The Girl places a finger to her lips as if to say "you better not tell on us".

Then the Children disappear, dissolved in the light of the flames. Monica breaks from her trance and slides open the door.

INT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

The interior walls of the playhouse are on fire. Stuffed

animals burn up and melt, falling from shelves. Richard chokes and sweats. He's becoming exhausted. He backs up to the wall of flame behind him, lets out a fearsome yell and runs at the door.

EXT. PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

The melting extension cord gives and the door flies out. Richard and the playhouse door land with a thud on the backyard grass.

Richard coughs and spits. Jumps to his feet and brushes away small fires from his clothes. The playhouse is burning to the ground. He looks up to see Monica staring back at him, in shock.

RICHARD

What the hell, Monica? Are you crazy? Are you trying to kill me?

MONICA

No-

Monica shakes her head, tries to speak but cannot find her breath. A pained expression takes over her face. She places her hands on her stomach and calls out in pain.

Richard runs to her as she collapses onto the lawn.

INT. HOSPITAL/WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard looks a mess. Covered in soot, with burn holes in his clothes, he sits under the bright fluorescent tubes of a hospital waiting room.

A female doctor in scrubs, DR. LEE (40's), approaches him.

DR. LEE

Mr. Collins. I'm Dr. Lee. You can
come in now, she's awake.

He gets up quickly and follows her into the room.

INT. HOSPITAL/MONICA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Monica is sitting up in the bed, the covers up over her
stomach. She looks more refreshed than she ever has before
and has a big smile on her face. Richard notices that Dr.
Lee is smiling too.

RICHARD

Monica, are you OK? What happened?

MONICA

Did you tell him the good news
Dr. Lee?

DR. LEE

No. Would you like to tell him?

MONICA

No, you go ahead and tell him.

RICHARD

Tell me what?

DR. LEE

Well, Mr. Collins. It seems that
you are going to be a father!

RICHARD

A wha-? A father? But that's-
impossible. The doctors said-

DR. LEE

Well, you'll have to tell that to
the twins, Mr. Collins.

Dr. Lee moves to the side, revealing a monitor with a
flickering sonogram image of two little floating fetuses.

Richard stares at the monitor as a crazy look begins to
come over his face.

RICHARD

Twins?

He hears the sound of the children's laughter as he
continues to stare at the monitor. He begins to laugh, low
at first but then gradually louder.

RICHARD

(laughing)

Twins. Twins!

His face flickers with the light from the sonogram as the
image of the fetuses is gradually superimposed over his
face and his maniacal laughter mixes with that of the
Twins.

FADE OUT.

THE END