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KENTUCKY WINGS

A Two-Act Drama by

Robert Leland Taylor

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Kentucky Wings
by Robert Leland Taylor

CHARACTERS:
2W / 2M

LEONARD: Father, 50’s
MYRA: Mother, late 40’s
EILEEN: Daughter, 21
GAYNER: Myra’s brother, 40’s

SETTING:
The interior of Leonard and Myra Clavor’s farmhouse in rural Kentucky and brief visits to a hospital, jail cell and cornfield requiring no additional set changes

TIME:
Early 1950’s
Kentucky Wings  
by Robert Leland Taylor

ACT I

Scene One

SETTING: LEO NAND and MYRA CLAVOR’s farmhouse in rural Kentucky. The set reflects a poor family by most standards with minimal and sparse furnishings. A dinette set is situated Stage Left and a love seat or small sofa, overstuffed chair, an old radio and telephone stand at Stage Right. A rifle rack is displayed on the wall near the main entrance at Center, as well as an old felt hat and umbrella which hang on hooks. Wallpaper roses adorn the walls in the living room portion.

AT RISE: Dinnertime. LEO NAND and MYRA are seated at the table. There are three places set. A newspaper is scattered on the floor around the overstuffed chair. EILEEN stands Downstage Center, facing the audience.

EILEEN
This is the house we lived in. What I remember most about it, I think, are the big wallpaper roses. Mama had this thing about roses. She always hung the paper herself, too, on account of Daddy’s back. Sometimes, when I was little, I’d sit and count those roses over and over. And each time I did, the count was never the same. I could never figure out why. (Pause) Civilization of sorts is about a half-mile down the road. Every Tuesday and Thursday I walked to Franklin Elementary to teach the slower kids how to read and write, among other things. Sometimes their parents would come along and I’d teach them too. When it was cold or raining Daddy would drive me in his old truck. But not when there was lightning. Daddy had this thing about lightning. Although he never talked about it, I sometimes wondered if he was struck during a storm. (Crosses toward table) They say lightning never strikes in the same place twice. (Looks at her father) Maybe they’re wrong. At least I like to think they are. (Takes her place at the table)

LEONARD
(To MYRA)
I know he’s your brother. I’m not saying he ain’t. It still don’t change anything.
MYRA
Gaynor wouldn't do something like that. He just wouldn't.

LEONARD
No? Then why'd they charge him with it? You don't charge a man with murder without any evidence. Christ, they even had an eye witness.

MYRA
You know that's not true.

LEONARD
'Course it's true. Says so right in the paper.

MYRA
The eye witness only saw them leave the bar together, and that don't prove a thing.

LEONARD
It proves a lot. He was the last one to see her alive. What more do you want?

MYRA
I don't want to talk about it anymore. Unless you have something good to say, I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention his name again.

LEONARD
Fine by me.

EILEEN
(Pause)
I got another letter from Uncle Gaynor today. (Silence) He said he saw a rat in his cell as big as a tom cat.

LEONARD
Well, prison ain't no country club. 'Least it shouldn't be.

EILEEN
He's got a radio in his cell, though. And he says there's a movie projector in the game room and they see movies all the time.

LEONARD
Yeah, and you know who's paying for all that? You're looking at him—Mr. John Q. Public, that's who. Comes right out of my paycheck.

EILEEN
Oh, Daddy, you haven't seen a paycheck in years.
LEONARD

(Glares)
You know what I mean.

MYRA

(To EILEEN)
Your uncle always hated to write. You should feel privileged to get a letter from him, let alone two.

EILEEN

They were only about half a page.

MYRA

(Feels away)

EILEEN

And I'm his only niece, after all. (Studies her mother; forces a laugh) He used to call me his "favorite" niece, remember?

I remember.

MYRA

EILEEN

Are you all right, Mama? (Pause) He says he's going to call you next Sunday.

LEONARD

Call here? How the hell's he going to call from Eddyville?

(Shrugs)

EILEEN

Reverse the charges, I guess.

LEONARD

I'll be goddamned. I'm not paying for any calls from death row.

MYRA

Oh, for God's sake, Leonard, he's not on death row.

LEONARD

You heard me. I'd better not see any long distant calls on that phone bill and I mean it.

Can we please just DROP it?

MYRA

LEONARD

Fine, 'scuse the hell out of me. (Mumbles) I can barely pay the goddamn bill as it is.
EILEEN
Uncle Gaynor says he only gave her a ride to the motel, that's all.

LEONARD
Right. And I guess she just strangled herself there in the motel room.

EILEEN
I guess we'll never know for sure what happened.

LEONARD
All you gotta do is read the paper.

LEONARD rises, crosses SL and picks up a section of newspaper from the floor. For the first time we're aware that he walks with a limp and a slight stoop.

EILEEN
You act like you're happy he's in jail.

LEONARD
Just trying to be realistic, that's all. (Returns to the table with the paper) They can say what they want about the Clavors but one thing we've always been is realistic. Here. (Tosses EILEEN the paper)

EILEEN
(Annoyed)
I've already read it.

LEONARD
It's all right there, picture and all.

EILEEN
Well, I don't believe it. Uncle Gayner's never hurt anybody.

LEONARD
You're sure of that, huh?

EILEEN
Yes, I am. And why would he take a medallion from around her neck and leave her purse with a hundred dollars in it? It doesn't make any sense.

LEONARD
The paper said the medallion dates back to the Civil War. And if anybody knows about antiques it's your uncle. Hell, he used to deal in antiques.
EILEEN
Maybe Mama's right. Maybe we should just drop it.

LEONARD
Look, I'll be the first to admit it if I'm wrong. All I'm saying is, it don't look too good right now.

EILEEN
I don't understand why you hate him so much.

LEONARD
I don't hate nobody.

EILEEN
Then why are you so.....

LEONARD
Hate don't have nothing to do with it. If I hated the man I wouldn't have taken him into my home when he was out of work, now would I?

EILEEN
You only took him in after Mama begged you.

LEONARD
I took him in, goddamnit. And don't sass me, understand? I won't be sassed under my own roof.

EILEEN
(Stands)
I think I need to be excused.

LEONARD
Sometimes you just gotta face facts. Both of you. I honestly feel he'd be better off anyway.

EILEEN
Better off?

LEONARD
Well, I mean he's been in and out of jail all his life, he gambles, he steals, he can't keep a job and he hasn't saved a goddamn nickel. That's no way to live. And they say the electric chair's not all that painful. That's a scientific fact. Once they put that hood over your head and pull the switch, you're talking thirty, forty seconds at most.

EILEEN
(Still standing; addresses the audience)
That's when Mama had her first breakdown. She didn't say a word, just put her fork down and rose from her chair and walked out the front door as big as you please.
MYRA rises and exits as EILEEN Speaks.
LIGHTS DOWN except for lone
SPOTLIGHT on EILEEN.

EILEEN, Continued
The police found her the next day at the Greyhound bus station. Nobody knows to this day why she was there, not even Mama. They took her to the hospital where she spent two whole days, just sitting in a chair with her hands folded in a strangely proper manner, not speaking to anyone.

A SPOTLIGHT rises on MYRA in chair
DR.

And just when I thought I'd never hear my mother's voice again, she said the words that still haunt me today.

MYRA
It's in a box.

EILEEN
(Enters MYRA's spotlight)
What, Mama?

MYRA
It's in a box in the cellar.

EILEEN
I don't understand. What's in a box?

MYRA
(Pause)
The gold antique medallion.

BLACKOUT.

ACT I

Scene Two

SETTING: Same; the following Sunday. The PHONE IS HEARD RINGING as blackout continues.

AT RISE: MYRA is seated at the love seat, sewing, while LEONARD reads the newspaper from his chair. THE PHONE CONTINUES TO RING. Neither makes a move to answer it. EILEEN enters from
the kitchen, still holding a dish towel, and looks anxiously at her parents and then the phone.

LEONARD
(Lowers the newspaper)
Isn't anybody going to answer the goddamn PHONE?

Nobody responds. Finally he throws the newspaper to the floor and EXITS, slamming the front door. RINGING STOPS.

EILEEN
(Pause)
I don't know how much longer I can take this, Mama.

What?

EILEEN
We should've answered it.

EILEEN sits on the arm of the overstuffed Chair and faces her mother.

We can't do this every Sunday. Somebody has to answer it sooner or later.

MYRA
Don't sit on your father's chair, Eileen.

EILEEN
(Rises)
I can tell, you know.

Tell what?

MYRA
When somebody's telling the truth.

Really.

EILEEN
It's in the voice. Always in the voice. Sometimes the eyes can lie but the voice....I should've taken the call.
MYRA
You know how your father feels about that.

EILEEN
I don’t care. I need to know.

MYRA
You’ll do as you’re told.

EILEEN
(Pause)
I want to see it, Mama.

See what?

EILEEN
The medallion.

MYRA
I don’t know what you’re talking about.

EILEEN
You don’t remember? (Silence) I dreamed about it last night...I was looking in the mirror, brushing my hair, and there it was...all shiny and bright, hanging around my neck on a long, golden chain. Then the chain got tighter around my neck, and I tried to take it off but it kept getting tighter and tighter until I couldn’t get my fingers under it and—

MYRA
You eat too late at night. You should never eat at bedtime.

EILEEN
MYRA rises, begins to pick up scattered newspapers around LEONARD’s chair.

You know what you have to do, Mama.

MYRA
I don’t have to do anything but pay taxes and die.

EILEEN
You know.

MYRA
It’s in the hands of God.
EILEEN
No, it's in your hands. You've got to turn it over to the police.

MYRA
Then I may as well pull the switch myself.

EILEEN
He might be guilty, Mama. You've got to face that possibility.

I don't have to face any such thing.

EILEEN
Then how did he get the medallion?

MYRA
You just stay away from that cellar, you hear me?

EILEEN
How did he GET it, Mama?

MYRA
He bought it from her.

EILEEN
He what?

MYRA
For a hundred dollars. She needed the money to buy a plane ticket. When he heard about her murder he gave it to me to hide. Only he used some fancy word. "Entrust," I think.

EILEEN
Then tell that to the police.

MYRA
They'd never believe him.

EILEEN
But, Mama, you can't just—

MYRA
He's my only brother, Eileen. Can't you understand that?

EILEEN
I suppose. (Pause) I've been thinking about moving out, Mama.
Do what you must.

(Myra)

Eileen

(Surprised by her nonchalance)
It's just that I need a life of my own. I'm twenty-one years old, for God’s sake. I just think that I—

(Myra)

If you want to go, then GO. Nobody has a gun to your head.

(Pause)

Eileen

What will you do?

I'll be fine.

Eileen

You'll be alone.

(Myra)

Don't be silly. I'll be with your father.

Eileen

Well, I know, but—

(Myra)

Whether you choose to believe it or not, your father has a lot of good qualities, Eileen.

Eileen

He's always so...bitter all the time.

(Myra)

He's just under a lot of pressure, that's all.

Eileen

I don't think I've ever seen him in a good mood. Not once.

(Myra)

Now, you know that's not true. He's in a good mood today, as a matter fact.

Leonard bursts through the door and grabs a rifle from the wall.
LEONARD

Goddamn sonsofbitches!

MYRA

What is it, Leonard?

LEONARD

Lowdown dirty rotten bastards.

MYRA

Leonard, what's wrong?

LEONARD

They stole half a goddamn field of corn, that's what's wrong.

MYRA

Now, Leonard, don't do anything foolish.

LEONARD

No, I'm doing something I should've done a long time ago.

MYRA

Put the rifle down, Leonard.

LEONARD

I bought that goddamn dog to keep intruders out of here. He's supposed to bark, for Christ's sake. That's what dogs do. They BARK. Did you hear any barking around here last night?

EILEEN

My God, Daddy, please tell me you're not going to shoot him.

LEONARD

I sure as hell ain't gonna give him no doggie treats, that's for sure.

LEONARD exits with the rifle. There is a long silence. A SHOT IS HEARD. After a beat or two THE PHONE RINGS. It continues to ring as MYRA and EILEEN stand in silence.

BLACKOUT.
**ACT I**

**Scene Three**

**SETTING:** *The cornfield.*

**AT RISE:** *SPOTLIGHT on LEONARD, DC, sitting in a lawn chair, holding the rifle. EILEEN's voice is heard.*

**EILEEN**

Daddy buried our dog, Buddy, behind the house that morning then spent the next two nights outside guarding the cornfield. I never cried over Buddy and was surprised to find myself curiously obsessed with Daddy after that.

*EILEEN enters spotlight and stands beside her father.*

I wondered who or what made this man, this man I hated and loved and feared. Is he real? If I touched him, could he feel it?

*EILEEN reaches out hesitantly to touch his face. There is no reaction as he continues a vigilant watch over the cornfield, oblivious to her presence.*

I doubted that he could. No more feeling than a cold ceramic mask, hanging on a wall...

*MYRA's voice is heard.*

**MYRA**

Eileen!

*EILEEN turns. SPOTLIGHT DOWN on LEONARD and EILEEN. LIGHTS UP on living room where MYRA stands in a housecoat. EILEEN crosses to her.*

What's wrong, Mama?

*EILEEN* 

I—I thought you left.
EILEEN
What?

MYRA
I dreamed you left home.

EILEEN
You know I'd never leave without saying goodbye.

MYRA
(Sits on love seat and rubs her temples)
I woke up with this awful headache....

EILEEN
Maybe you should go back to bed. It's after midnight.

MYRA
I'll be all right.

EILEEN
I couldn't sleep either. (Moves to window and looks out) God, I wish he'd come in before somebody gets hurt.

MYRA
Well. You know your father.

EILEEN
No....I don't. I know his cough. I know his snore. I know his aftershave. (Crosses to sofa and stands behind her mother) Mama?

MYRA
Hm?

EILEEN
Can I...touch you?

MYRA
Touch me?

EILEEN
Yes.

MYRA
Lord, child, what's gotten into you now?
EILEEN gently massages her mother's shoulders, then moves her hands down both sides of her face.

EILEEN
Your hair's so soft. Like corn silk. You should let it grow long.

MYRA
I've always wanted to.

EILEEN
Really?

MYRA
Your father likes it short.

EILEEN
Oh. (Pause) Mama, have you ever been....happy?

MYRA
Happy? Why on earth would you ask such a thing?

EILEEN
Just curious, I guess.

MYRA
Don't expect too much of life and you won't be disappointed.

EILEEN
Grandma said that, didn't she?

MYRA
You remember?

EILEEN
She also said: (Speaks in grandmotherly voice) If I'da known life would be this hard I woulda hung myself with my diaper.

MYRA
That's right. Your uncle Gayner used to say that too, remember?

EILEEN
(Pause)
If you don't mind I'd rather not talk about Uncle Gayner right now.
I think she worried herself to death over that boy.

Like mother, like daughter, I suppose.

He was always in trouble. When he was a teenager your grandfather kicked him out of the house for getting a tattoo on his arm.

The eagle?

*(Nods)*

He ended up in a juvenile hall in Paducah. We weren't allowed to write to each other so one day I mailed him an empty envelope. On the back I had drawn a checkmark enclosed by a circle. That was our secret symbol that meant everything would be okay...just a simple little check mark in a circle.

Guess it didn't work.

Please don't turn on him, Eileen. He needs us both.

*(Moves away from her)*

I should get some sleep. I'm teaching an early class tomorrow.

You two were so close. Like best friends, almost. Don't you think he'd be there for you? *(Silence)* Eileen?

I wish you hadn't told me about the medallion.

*(Pause)*

I know. I don't know why I did.

I just can't get it out of my mind. Now I see two Uncle Gayners—the one who laughed and played cards with me right there at that table and the one who... who—
He's innocent, Eileen.

*(Faces her)*
What if he's not?

*(Pause)*
Shortly before your grandmother died I promised her I'd look after him, to protect him from harm. I'm not going to break that promise.

WHAT IF HE'S NOT, MAMA?

I won't break my promise. I owe it to her.

The only person you owe is yourself.

Did he...did he say anything about me?

What?

In the letters.

Would you like to read them?

*(Pause)*
No. They were meant for your eyes only.

He mentioned you several times.

Really?

He said you're a good woman.
MYRA

*(Closes her eyes wearily)*
Yeah, that's me... *(Beat)* A good woman.

A GUNSHOT IS HEARD outside. MYRA’s eyes open wide as EILEEN rushes to the window.

BLACKOUT.

ACT I

Scene Four

SETTING: GAYNER’s prison cell.

AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT on GAYNER, sitting on a bench, DL, wearing prison garb. He is opening a letter. EILEEN’s voice is heard as he unfolds the first page.

EILEEN’S VOICE
Dear Uncle Gayner, I hope you're doing well. Or, at least as well as can be expected. There's not much going on around here except that Daddy fell asleep while guarding the cornfield last night, dropped his rifle and blew a hole through the kitchen wall. Mama said it's a miracle nobody was killed. I'm very worried about her, Uncle Gayner. She seems different lately, almost like a stranger. She's extremely worried about you, and I'm afraid it's taking a heavy toll on her. *(Pause)* Therefore, it breaks my heart to tell you that this will be my last contact with you. You've never lied to me, as far as I know, but I think it would be best for everybody concerned until this whole thing has passed. God, I wish you knew how very sorry I am. Please don't hate me. *(Pause)* Your niece, Eileen.

GAYNER lowers the letter ponderously as

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACKOUT.
ACT I

Scene Five

SETTING: Farmhouse interior; PHONE RINGS as blackout continues. "Mr. Sandman" by the Chordettes plays softly in the background.

AT RISE: LEONARD is seated in the overstuffed chair as before, reading the paper. MYRA is seated at the love seat, knitting, while EILEEN works on a stack of papers at the dinette table. THE PHONE CONTINUES TO RING. Finally, LEONARD springs from his chair and rips the cord from the wall, then turns off the radio.

LEONARD

There. Are you happy now?

EILEEN

Excuse me?

LEONARD

Go ahead and say it.

EILEEN

Say what?

LEONARD

That I'm a no-good sonofabitch.

MYRA

Now, Leonard, nobody's saying any such thing.

LEONARD

No? Sure as hell doesn't stop you from thinking it, does it? (Looks at EILEEN) You think I don't know what you're thinking?

EILEEN

I'm not thinking anything.
LEONARD
I know goddamn good and well what you're thinking.

*LEONARD removes a pint of whiskey from the drawer of the telephone stand.*

A sonofabitch and a dog killer is what I am. Never mind that the dog was so goddamn old he couldn't bark and had nothing to live for. Never mind that he was in misery. *(Takes a drink)* Know what I would do if somebody did that to me? *(Raises the bottle)* I would say THANK YOU, SIR. That's what I would say.

EILEEN
*(Rises)*
I think I'll go for a walk.

LEONARD
Yeah, why don't you do that. Get as far away from the sonofabitch as you can. I see what's going on here.

EILEEN
Nothing's going on. I just want to go for a walk.

LEONARD
Then go. Keep walking till you reach the goddamn ocean.

MYRA
There's no need to talk that way, Leonard. What in the world's gotten into you?

LEONARD
You can go too. Both of you. I've seen you in your little huddles, talking about me behind my back. You must think I'm pretty stupid, is all I can say.

MYRA
Nobody thinks you're stupid, Leonard.

LEONARD
I bust my ass on this farm for fifteen years trying to make the Clavor name mean something around here. But have I ever ONCE heard anybody in this house say THANK YOU, SIR? *(EILEEN crosses toward exit)* Fifteen years. Then somebody comes along — *(Leans in toward MYRA)* And I'm not mentioning any NAMES... somebody comes along and destroys in one night what it took me fifteen years to build. You see, EVIDENTLY it's okay to strangle a lady in a motel room but don't even THINK about putting an old dog out of his misery. But that's fine. Just fine. I'll be the sonofabitch.
MYRA  
(Rises)  
Wait, Eileen, I'll go with you.

LEONARD  
Where the hell do you think you're going?

MYRA  
For a walk.

LEONARD  
(Stares)  
Fine. See if I care.

EILEEN  
Come on, Mama.

LEONARD  
You can go back to the bus station as far as I'm concerned. Maybe the police'll take you back to the nuthouse where you belong.

MYRA and EILEEN exit. LEONARD shouts at the door.

THAT'S WHERE YOU BELONG! THAT'S WHERE YOUR WHOLE GODDAMN FAMILY BELONGS! PRISONS AND NUTHOUSES!!

LEONARD starts to hurl bottle at door, changes his mind and slumps into chair.

BLACKOUT.

ACT I

Scene Six

SETTING: Farmhouse interior; there are flowers on the table.

AT RISE: No one is in the room. The front door opens slowly. MYRA and EILEEN enter hesitantly and look around. MYRA crosses to door to bedrooms at SR and calls out.
Leonard! *(Pause)* Leonard, we’re home!

*(Checks kitchen at SL)*

He’s not here.

His truck’s here. Maybe he’s out back.

*EILEEN looks at the phone cord, then picks up the phone to check for a dial tone.*

The phone’s fixed.

My God...look. *(Points to dinette table)*

What?

Flowers—did you put those there?

*EILEEN crosses to the table and examines the flowers in a jar of water.*

No.

My God... *(Moves to table and picks up the jar)* Do you know how long it’s been since your father’s given me flowers?

*(Annoyed)*

It’s just a bunch of old weeds from the woods.

It’s been years. We were on a picnic. *(Looks at her)* You know, I think that might be the answer to your question.

What question?
MYRA
The last time I was happy... *(Snaps back to the present)* Dear God, where on earth could he be? *(Goes to front door and looks out)*

EILEEN
I don't know and I don't care.

MYRA
I hope he's not down at Huffy's bar again. He's been doing so well lately.

EILEEN
Till today.

MYRA
He promised me he wouldn't go down there anymore.

EILEEN
Maybe he's in the cornfield doing guard duty. Maybe he's in the truck with his brains blown out.

MYRA
*(Turns angrily)*
Eileen!

EILEEN
Well, it wouldn't surprise me. He's always talking about putting people out of their misery. Maybe he did himself a favor. *(Puts an imaginary gun to her head)* THANK YOU, SIR.

*MYRA crosses to the rifle rack and silently surveys the rifles.*

EILEEN
I don't know how you stand it, Mama.

MYRA
*(Rubs her temples)*
God, my head... I need some aspirin.

EILEEN
You've already taken half a bottle today. You need to see a good doctor.

MYRA
They don't know what they're doing. Talk is all they know. Talk, talk, talk.

EILEEN
Then we need to take you somewhere else. Not in this little town.
I'll be fine.

EILEEN
You always say that, Mama. I wish I could believe it. *(Crosses to window and looks out; Pause)* Know what I've been thinking about lately?

MYRA
*(Still rubbing temples)*
Running away from home. You've already told me.

EILEEN
I've been thinking about tracing our family history.

What on earth for?

EILEEN
To find out where I came from. I've even drawn up this little family tree on a poster board in my room. All I need to do now is fill in all the Clavors, maybe all the way back to—

MYRA
There's more than one side of your family, you know.

EILEEN
Well, I know. I didn't mean to—

MYRA
It's all right.

*MYRA begins to pick up newspapers around LEONARD's chair.*

EILEEN
*(Crosses to her)*
No, really. I didn't mean to ignore your side. It's just that I've always thought of myself as a Clavor, even though at one time you had a different—

MYRA
It's all right, I said. *(Pause)* There's no shame in this family, Eileen.

EILEEN
I didn't say there was.

MYRA
Then stop trying to find kings and queens. There aren't any. Just good, plain people.
But I want to know who they are.

Why?

So I'll know who I am.

That's nonsense.

Your grandfather, for instance. What was his name?

Which one?

What?

I had two.

Well, your mother's father.

Curtis.

Curtis what?

Wilkens.

That's British.

It's no such thing.

Sure it is. Just like Nichols, your maiden name. Now all we've got to do is trace them back to Britain.
My family's never been to Britain.

But that's where they're from.

They certainly are not.

Then where?

Where what?

Where are they FROM?

Kentucky. Just like you.

But what about BEFORE that? (Silence) Mama?

(Captivated by something she sees in the newspaper)

Good Lord......

What? What is it?

There's been another murder.

What?

_EILEEN snatches the newspaper from her mother and reads. MYRA sinks to the sofa and covers her face._

It was a strangulation......

_MYRA nods quickly, her face still covered._
EILEEN, Continued

HALLELUJAH, IT WAS A STRANGULATION!

_EILEEN tosses the newspaper into the air._

MYRA

_(Brings her hands into a prayer position)_

Glory be...... _Pause_ Perhaps we shouldn't rejoice. It doesn't seem right.

EILEEN

No, I want to see you REJOICE! Come on, Mama. _MYRA looks away_ Look, this is the way it's done...

_EILEEN pulls the corners of her mouth into a grin. She holds it there and leans in toward her mother._

See? See? You can do it, come on, now, Mama.

_MYRA tries desperately not to laugh. She glances at EILEEN then quickly looks away._

MYRA

Stop it.

EILEEN

Come on, let's see if those old rejoice muscles still work. _Moves in closer_ Give your daughter a big rejoice. Come on. _Tickles her_

_MYRA laughs audibly for the first time as she struggles with EILEEN_ I said STOP it! Lord, child, have you lost your mind?

EILEEN

_(Sits beside her and leans her head against her shoulder)_

You were right all along, Mama. I'm so happy for you.

MYRA

I musn't get my hopes up. That would never do.

EILEEN

I won't let you.
MYRA
They won't turn him loose that easily. There's bad blood between your uncle and the police department.

EILEEN
Sooner or later they'll have to.

MYRA
I pray to God that it's sooner.

EILEEN
(Pause)
I'm afraid I did something stupid, Mama. (MYRA looks at her) I wrote him a letter. I told him I didn't want anything more to do with him.

MYRA
My God, Eileen...

EILEEN
I know.

MYRA
Why on earth would you do such a thing?

EILEEN
I don't know. Just doubt, I guess.

MYRA
That poor man.

EILEEN
I started to tear it up but I—

MYRA
I don't understand how you could turn your back on your own family.

EILEEN
I'm SORRY, okay? (Pause) I just kept thinking about the medallion, I guess. And that poor lady in the motel room.

MYRA
Sometimes you just need to have faith.

EILEEN
Right. Faith....
MYRA
Lord knows that's something your father could use more of.

EILEEN
(Sits up)
My God...

MYRA
What?

EILEEN
Daddy—he knows. He had to have seen the story in the paper. He didn't even mention it.

MYRA
(Ponders it for a moment)
Well, your father's a decent man at heart.

EILEEN
Really? What heart?

MYRA
Now, Eileen...

EILEEN
Why don't you just leave him, Mama?

MYRA
Leave him? And go where?

EILEEN
Anywhere. It doesn't matter.

MYRA
Stop talking such foolishness.

EILEEN
It's NOT foolish. I'll bet you've thought about it, haven't you?

MYRA
Of course not. Now stop it.

EILEEN
We can do it. I'll take care of you.

MYRA
You can barely take care of yourself. You don't even have a car.
EILEEN
We'll take a bus. I'll work two jobs if I have to.

MYRA
It's out of the question.

EILEEN
We can go anywhere you want. Just pick a place, mama. We can go to California or Florida or—

MYRA
Stop it! Stop it right now. We're talking about your father, for God's sake.

EILEEN
Sure, Mama. Whatever you say.

MYRA
(Pause)
I'll answer the phone. When your uncle calls again, I'll answer it.

EILEEN
You'd do that?

MYRA
I have to do that.

EILEEN
I'm proud of you, Mama.

MYRA
Don't be. I'm not doing it for anybody's approval.

EILEEN
You've got to get rid of the medallion. TODAY. Burn it, bury it, throw it in the river. If the police connect it to Uncle Gayner all the faith in the world won't help him. (Pause) Mama?

MYRA
(Lost in another world)
It was on July fourth.

EILEEN
What was?

MYRA
The picnic.
EILEEN

Oh.

MYRA

He gave me flowers. For no reason at all. For no reason whatsoever...

LIGHTS DOWN except for lone
SPOTLIGHT on EILEEN.

EILEEN

Mama never got rid of the medallion that day. It stayed hidden in the cellar among the spiders and mildew in one of the countless boxes that lined the cellar walls. Late that night the police brought Daddy home from Huffy's bar and ordered him to bed. After they left he staggered out to the cornfield with a rifle and spent the rest of the night cursing God while blowing the scarecrow into tiny pieces. He never mentioned the article about the second murder. Not once. And that Friday I received a letter that I barely found the courage to open....

(Sits at table, opens letter)

GAYNER'S VOICE

Dear Eileen,

I hope life is treating you well. Things aren't so good around here, but I promised myself I wouldn't burden you in this letter. I saw an Abbott and Costello film, though, which made me laugh, something I hadn't done in a long, long time. Then toward the end of the movie the film broke and one of the prisoners punched a hole in the screen. They decided to punish us all, of course, so now we're confined to our cells till further notice. No more films, I guess, no more laughter.

LIGHTS FADE on EILEEN, UP on GAYNER. He paces slowly downstage left, hands in pockets.

It's three AM. Much too quiet to sleep. Sometimes at night it gets so quiet around here I swear to God I can almost hear the earth turn. Sometimes I wonder what makes it turn. Other times I wonder why it bothers at all. (Pause) No, I don't hate you, Eileen, for not believing in me. I've had lots of time to reflect on it and I guess, under the circumstances, I shouldn't expect you to. (Pause) So this will be my last contact, as you requested. Tell your mother that I love her very much and think about her constantly. Give your father my best and tell him that I will never call the house again. God bless you all. Love, Uncle Gayner.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.
ACT I

Scene Seven

SETTING: Farmhouse interior.

AT RISE: LEO NARD is on the phone, pacing. EILEEN is seated at the dinette table, writing in a tablet, while MYRA pours over the newspaper from the sofa.

LEONARD
No, this is the second time it's happened and I'm getting sick of it. I want a patrol car out here starting TONIGHT. (Pause) How the hell should I know? If I knew who was stealing the goddamn corn I wouldn't be talking to YOU, now would I? Another thing—they're egging my house with my own goddamn eggs from my own goddamn henhouse. What? Clavor. How many times do I have to tell you that? It happens to be a name respected throughout the county and I've been working this farm since you were a pissy little pissant wearing pissy little diapers... (Pause) Hello? (Slams phone down) Goddamn sonsofbitches.

MYRA
Don't go getting yourself all worked up, Leonard.

LEONARD
(Pacing)
I'm already worked up.

MYRA
That corn's not fit to eat anyway and you know it.

LEONARD
Yeah? Well you tell that to the sonsofbitches who're stealing it from under our noses.

MYRA
Even the bugs won't eat that corn.

LEONARD
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH THE CORN!

MYRA
And there's no need to raise your voice.
LEONARD
Sonsofbitches. *(Looks at her)* Just how long do you plan on hogging my goddamn newspaper?

MYRA
I'll be done in a minute.

LEONARD
*(Mostly to himself)*
Twenty-two years we've been married and all of a sudden she decides to take a liking to newspapers.

EILEEN
*(Without looking up)*
Well, you know, sometimes you just might come across some pretty interesting news stories in there.

LEONARD
*(Stares)*
Yeah?

EILEEN
That's what they say.

LEONARD
That's what who says?

EILEEN
Just me, I guess.

LEONARD
Really? And just who the hell are you?

EILEEN
I'm not sure.

LEONARD
You're not sure.

EILEEN
That's what I said.

LEONARD
What's that you're writing?
Just a letter.

LEONARD

(Steps closer)

To who?

EILEEN

(Shields it as inconspicuously as possible)

A friend.

LEONARD

Last time I checked you didn't have any friends.

MYRA

Leave her alone, Leonard.

LEONARD

Well, ain't that something. Our house is being egged, our crops are being stolen and we sit around reading and writing while my only daughter tries to figure out who the hell she is.

(Crosses to exit; puts on hat)

MYRA

Where are you going, Leonard?

LEONARD

Nevermind where I'm going.

MYRA

You're not going down to Huffy's bar again, are you?

LEONARD

Maybe I am and maybe I ain't.

MYRA

Please don't go down there.

LEONARD

Don't tell me what to do.

MYRA

I'm asking.
LEONARD
For your information I'm going into town to buy the biggest, strongest bear trap I can find. Maybe two of them. Maybe a whole goddamn TRUCKLOAD of them.

MYRA
Bear traps? What on earth for?

LEONARD
It's about time somebody around here took some action to protect this property, by God. I might be late. Don't forget to turn off the lights and check the doors before you.

MYRA
There's no need for traps, Leonard. It's probably just kids full of mischief.

LEONARD
Well, they're going to be full of metal CLAMPS if they set foot on this property again, I guarantee you.

EXIT, slams door. The SOUND OF AN ENGINE is heard, then THE PEALING OF TIRES.

EILEEN
I'm sorry, Mama.

MYRA
For what?

EILEEN
Everything, I guess.

(Tosses paper aside)
MYRA
Nothing.

EILEEN
What?

MYRA
Nothing in the paper. Not a word. Damnit. (Notices EILEEN's stare) What are you looking at?

EILEEN
I've never heard you swear before.

MYRA
Well, now you have.
It seems so strange.

I've searched cover to cover. Nothing.

You promised you wouldn't get your hopes up.

I'm not.

Sounds to me like you are.

Well, they could at least mention the fact that an innocent man may be in jail for murder. That's all I'm asking.

Don't forget what you said about faith.

(Rubs temples)
I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about.

Oh. Guess I was mistaken.

I need to talk to him, to tell him to hang on.

I'm sure he's okay.

He's not okay. You don't know him like I do. He's fragile. Very fragile.

He doesn't seem fragile.

When that phone rings this Sunday I want you to grab it on the first ring if I'm not in the room, understand?
EILEEN
Mama, I...I don't think he... *(Her voice trails off)*

MYRA
He what?

EILEEN
I don't think he's going to call again.

MYRA
What makes you say that?

EILEEN
That's what he told me. In a letter. I got it today.

MYRA
*(Rising)*
Is that who you're writing now?

EILEEN
Yes.

MYRA
Tell him...nevermind. I'll tell him myself.

EILEEN
I'm almost finished with it. I told him I was sorry about my last letter and—

MYRA
Don't bother. It's probably too late.

EILEEN
What do you mean?

MYRA
What do you think I mean? He gets a farewell letter from you and his own family won't accept his calls. He'd probably rather be dead right now.

EILEEN
Don't say that, Mama.

MYRA
It's true. You might as well just tear it up.

EILEEN
I don't want to tear it up.
MYRA
Tear it up. Tear the damned thing up, I said.

EILEEN

(Pause)
Sometimes, Mama, I wish I was a thousand miles away from here.

MYRA
And right now that would suit me just fine. *(Eileen covers her face; Pause)* I'm sorry, honey.

EILEEN

(Face still covered)
It's okay.

No, it's not.

*MYRA moves around behind her. Starts to place her hands on EILEEN's shoulders, changes her mind.*

I don't know why I said that. Please forgive me.

EILEEN

(Recovers)
Don't worry about it.

MYRA
I just want it to go away, that's all. I want it all to go away.

EILEEN
I know.

MYRA

(Pause)
Eileen...can I...touch you?

*EILEEN is taken aback at first, then nods. MYRA gently massages her shoulders. There is silence for a moment.*

I remember doing this once when you were a little girl. You sat right here in this chair eating your breakfast and I stood in this very spot rubbing your shoulders. Remember that?

EILEEN
No.
MYRA
Well, it was a long time ago. So much has happened since then.

EILEEN
(Softly)
So much, so little.

MYRA
You were about seven, I guess. Just starting out in the world. God, I wanted so much for you back then. Still do. (Pause) I don’t want you to go, honey. Unless it would make you happy. I want us to be happy. All of us.

EILEEN
Lots of luck.

MYRA
Your father wasn’t always like this.

EILEEN
That’s the only way I’ve ever seen him.

MYRA
(Looks away)
I suppose I’ve seen him with different eyes.

EILEEN
I wish I could borrow them.

MYRA
What?

EILEEN
Your eyes. To see what you see.

MYRA
He cut quite a figure at one time, I can tell you that.

EILEEN
I see him coming into the world looking exactly as he does today—a frowning, bitter old man, limping and cursing the moment he’s pulled from the womb.

MYRA
Oh, my.

EILEEN
And heading straight for the rifle rack.
He adores you, you know.

EILEEN

He's never told me that.

MYRA

Sure he has. In his own way.

EILEEN

You mean like shooting the dog?

MYRA

Oh, nobody ever paid any attention to that old dog anyway.

EILEEN

In that case I guess I'm next.

MYRA

He feels bad about it.

EILEEN

How do you know?

MYRA

I know your father.

EILEEN

Why do you do this, Mama?

MYRA

Do what?

EILEEN

Defend him all the time.

MYRA

I didn't know I did.

EILEEN

Well, you do.

MYRA

(Pause)
Sometimes, in some ways, I suppose I feel responsible...
Responsible? For what?

PTYA

(Pause, then haltingly)
When you were a little girl your Uncle Gayner begged us to take in your grandmother after her stroke. She could barely take care of herself. Your father said no, but offered to help put her up at the Shady Rest nursing home. Gayner wouldn't have it. A few days later he found her dead on her kitchen floor, face down.

EILEEN

My God...

MYRA

Gayner blamed your father. So they had a fight, right out on the back porch. Your poor father never stood a chance. Gayner would knock him down time after time. And your father always got up...until the last time. He went through the railing and landed flat on his back. He hasn't been the same man since.

EILEEN

(Softly)
Why didn't you tell me?

MYRA

His back never healed right. He lost his job at the plant and eventually gave up hope of ever finding another one.

EILEEN

You told me he fell off the tractor.

MYRA

We should've taken her in. I should've insisted.

EILEEN

(Moves away from her)
Why didn't you TELL me?

MYRA

Your father asked me not to.

EILEEN

So many secrets. So many lies.

MYRA

He was only trying to protect you, Eileen.
Protect me? Protect me from WHAT?

I shouldn't have told you this.

He was protecting his stupid pride over losing a stupid FIGHT. You told me he fell off the tractor. How many other lies have you told me?

Promise me you won't mention this to your father. (Silence) Eileen?

Don't worry. I'll protect your little secret if it means that much to you.

Yes—it does. Swear to me.

Eileen looks at her mother for a moment, then crosses slowly toward Center. LIGHTS DOWN except for lone SPOTLIGHT on Eileen. She stops and turns as Myra's voice pleads in the darkness.

Swear to me, Eileen.

I finished the letter to Uncle Gayner that night. It came back three days later, unopened. Mama wrote him a letter too, which also came back. On the back of her letter he had drawn a checkmark enclosed by a circle. (Pause) The next morning I drew the same symbol with my finger on the kitchen window, large and bold for all the world to see. Mama saw it first, then Daddy, and the next day...it was gone.

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT ONE
ACT II

Scene One

SETTING: Farmhouse interior; early morning, Thursday of the following week. Jo Stafford’s “You Belong to Me” fills the darkened stage.

AT RISE: MYRA is seated at the dinette table, flipping through the morning paper, a mug of coffee in front of her. EILEEN is stretched out on the sofa, hands clasped behind her head. LIGHTNING is reflected at the window SOUNDS OF THUNDER are heard.

MYRA

Turn it down, please.

What?

EILEEN

The radio—turn it DOWN.

MYRA

I said turn it down, not off.

EILEEN

I know.

MYRA

I just didn't want it to wake up your father.

EILEEN

It's okay.

MYRA

(Rifling through the paper)
I don’t know why we even bother to take the paper.
(Squinting)
There's something different about this room.

Nothing. Not a word....

Stop it, Mama.

I can't believe they're just going to let him rot in there.

He'll be out soon.

How can you be so sure?

I just am.

I wish I had your confidence.

(Poins)
Wasn't that picture over there?

What?

That picture—somebody moved it...

Oh. I probably moved it when I papered the room.

That was over two years ago.

No, I papered it again.

When?
Sunday night while you were sleeping.

(Sits up, looks around)
Mama, it's the exact same pattern.

Well, I had some rolls left over.

But why would you—

They're all against him. Every last one of them.

(Straining to comprehend)
They're the same. All the same....

I've got to find a way down there. Lord knows your father won't take me.

(Covers her ears)
STOP IT!!

(MYRA is startled by her sharp tone. There is silence for a moment. Finally she gathers herself and stands.)

I'd better...go put on some bacon. Your father will be up soon.

I'm sorry, Mama, but you're driving me crazy.

(Pause)
Do you have time to eat?

I'm not going anywhere.
I thought you had a class this morning.

Nope.

But you always teach a class on Thursday.

Not anymore.

I don't understand.

I got fired, Mama.

Dear God...

Don't worry about it. I'll find another job.

But you were doing so well. What happened?

Nothing happened. They found another tutor.

You don't get fired for no reason at all.

(Pause)
They said it was in the best interest of the community.

What does that mean? (Silence) Nevermind. I think I know.

It was only part-time. I didn't like it much anyway.

Yes you did. You loved it. You know you did.
EILEEN
I held up cardboard pictures and asked cardboard questions. "Do you know who this man is, kids?" "Do you know what this symbol represents?"

MYRA
It's just not fair...

EILEEN
And now they're upstairs in a cardboard box in my room. Guess I won't be needing them anymore.

MYRA
I'll go...start breakfast.

EILEEN
Are you okay?

MYRA
I've got to get out.

EILEEN
Get out?

MYRA crosses to exit.

Where are you going?

MYRA
To the hen house. We need eggs.

EILEEN
Mama, it's pouring down rain out there.

MYRA
(Grabs the umbrella from the wall)

I'll be fine.

She EXITS. EILEEN crosses to the window and looks out. LIGHTNING flashes. THUNDER is heard. LEONARD enters from the bedroom, buttoning his shirt. He crosses toward kitchen, notices scattered newspaper on table, shakes his head and begins to gather it.
EILEEN

(At window, looking out)
Good morning, Daddy.

LEONARD

What're you looking at?

EILEEN

Mama.

LEONARD

(Crosses to window and peers out)
What the hell's she doing out there?

EILEEN

Gathering eggs.

LEONARD

Eggs?

EILEEN

Uh huh.

LEONARD

Christ, there's lightning out there.

EILEEN

Not to mention the bear traps.

LEONARD

If that woman gets any loonier I'll have to get the whole goddamn house padded.

EILEEN

I guess somebody should go out there and get her.

LEONARD

I expect so.

LIGHTNING flashes, followed by THUNDER.

Jesus...

EILEEN

(Returns to sofa)
I've been wondering about something, Daddy.
LEONARD

(Looking out window)

What?

EILEEN

Grandpa Clavor—where was he born?

LEONARD

Why the hell would you ask me something like that?

EILEEN

Just curious, I guess.

LEONARD

He was born in Kentucky. Just like you.

EILEEN

What about his father?

LEONARD

What about him?

EILEEN

Where was he born?

LEONARD

Kentucky.

EILEEN

And his father?

LEONARD

Kentucky.

EILEEN

Well...who was the first to come over?

LEONARD

(Looks at her)

Come over where?

EILEEN

To America—to Kentucky.

LEONARD

We've always lived in Kentucky.
EILEEN

But that's impossible.

LEONARD

How so?

EILEEN

Because at one time there wasn't any Kentucky. At one time Kentucky wasn't even a state.

LEONARD

What the hell was it, a ferris wheel?

EILEEN

Daddy, at one time there was nobody here but Indians.

LEONARD

You don't see any around here now, do you?

EILEEN

No, but—

LEONARD

The Clavors took care of that, by God.

EILEEN

There WEREN'T any Clavors.

LEONARD

No? Then where the hell did you come from?

EILEEN

I DON'T KNOW. THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO FIND OUT!

LEONARD

(Stares)

What the hell's wrong with you?

EILEEN

I DON'T KNOW!

LEONARD

I swear to God, you're getting crazier than your mother.

EILEEN

I don't need your help. I'll walk down to the courthouse tomorrow and go through the records. I have friends down there.
LEONARD
Yeah? Name one.

EILEEN
Maybe I don't want to name one.

LEONARD
Maybe you CAN'T name one.

EILEEN
And Mama's not crazy.

LEONARD
Fine by me. Whatever she is you're getting just like her.

EILEEN
Is that why you started drinking again—because of Mama?

LEONARD
Last time I checked I was old enough to have a drink if I wanted one.

EILEEN
Is that why?

LEONARD
Nevermind why. It's none of your concern.

EILEEN
Neither's your back, I suppose.

LEONARD
My back?

EILEEN
Mama told me.

LEONARD
Told you what?

EILEEN
How you hurt it.

LEONARD
I fell off the tractor. That's how I hurt it.
EILEEN
You've lied to me all these years. Both of you.

LEONARD
I don't want to talk about it.

EILEEN
You had a fight with Uncle Gayner. Didn't you?

LEONARD
Maybe I did and maybe I didn't.

EILEEN
Mama said you did.

LEONARD
Maybe you shouldn't put a lot of faith in somebody who's gathering eggs in a typhoon.

EILEEN
I promised her I wouldn't mention it to you.

LEONARD
So, why are you?

EILEEN
I don't know.

LEONARD
You don't know. Seems like you don't know much of anything lately, do you?

LEONARD exits to the kitchen.

EILEEN
(Raises her voice)
Maybe I just want to know what you feel, what you think.

LEONARD, Off
Wanna know what I think? I think when you make somebody a promise, you'd better by God keep it, that's what I think.

EILEEN
I'm just trying to understand who you ARE.

LEONARD, Off
You don't know who I am and you don't know who YOU are. If you ask me, that don't give us a hell of a lot to go on.
EILEEN

Just forget it.

LEONARD

*(Enters with a mug of coffee)*

Christ, there's a whole refrigerator-full of eggs in there.

*LEONARD goes to the window and looks out.*

EILEEN

I'm worried about her, Daddy.

LEONARD

What in God's name is she DOING out there?

EILEEN

Maybe somebody should go outside and see.

LEONARD

I don't know what I'm going to do with her. This morning I woke up at 3 AM and saw her staring out the bedroom window. Just standing there staring. It was pitch black and there was nothing to see but there she was, staring out the window.

EILEEN

Kind of like you're doing, huh?

LEONARD

*(Still staring out window)*

Shouldn't you be getting ready for work or something?

EILEEN

I know you won't admit it but you're worried about her too, aren't you?

LEONARD

*(Almost to self)*

Worried she's gonna shove an ice pick through my brain.

EILEEN

You know she'd never do something like that.

LEONARD

All the same, starting tonight I'm sleeping with the lights on. *(Turns)* Guess I'll be driving you to work this morning.
EILEEN
I'm not going to work.

LEONARD
Why not?

EILEEN
I got fired.

LEONARD
You what?

EILEEN
Now, don't start. It's not his fault.

LEONARD
Not who's fault?

EILEEN
They don't want to deal with all the talk going around school, that's all.

LEONARD
All what talk? *(Pause, as it sinks in)* That sonofabitch.

EILEEN
Don't start, Daddy.

LEONARD
He's made ME crippled, my WIFE crazy and my DAUGHTER unemployed. Yet NONE of it's his fault. Eddyville is exactly where he belongs.

EILEEN
You know that's not true.

LEONARD
Next thing you know we'll have to wear disguises and sneak into our own goddamn house.

EILEEN
You saw the article, didn't you?

LEONARD
What article?

EILEEN
The one in the paper you were reading. There was another, murder while he was in jail. You didn't want us to know that.
LEONARD
Copycat murders happen all the time. Doesn't mean a thing.

EILEEN
It does to Mama. It does to me.

LEONARD
I didn't see no article.

EILEEN
You're lying.

LEONARD
(Glares)
Don't you ever call me a liar, do you understand? (Pause)

EILEEN nods. A loud THUNDERCLAP breaks the silence.

LEONARD
And don't ever raise your voice to me in this house again. EVER. (Pause; looks anxiously toward window) I expect I'd better go out there and get her.

EILEEN
I expect so. (Pause) Daddy?

LEONARD
What?

EILEEN
(Leans within inches of his face)
WATCH OUT FOR THE LIGHTNING.

LEONARD
(Studies her for a moment)
I want you out of here. As soon as you find another job I want you gone.

EILEEN
(Defiantly)
Are you kicking me out, Daddy?

LEONARD
It's high time you were on your own anyway.

EILEEN
I've always been on my own.
LEONARD
You've been fed, you've been clothed, you've been sheltered. That's a hell of a lot more than I ever got.

EILEEN
You want to know why I don't have any friends, Daddy? Do you really want to know?

That's none of my concern right now.

Because I'm ashamed.

Of what?

You.

EILEEN
I said I'm ASHAMED of you!

LEONARD raises his hand to hit her. She braces for the blow. Finally he regains control and exits. EILEEN remains in her recoiled position. LIGHTS FADE on set and concentrate on her only. Then, without facing the audience:

EILEEN
That morning...I almost wished Daddy had hit me. I'm not sure why. Maybe it was because I felt this need for punishment. Maybe I figured a slap across the face would, at least, be some form of contact between us. (Moves slowly Downstage) He searched for Mama in the rain that morning. As I listened to the thunder drowning out his calls I pictured lightning striking him dead. It's strange...the picture of him lying there, rain spattering off his cold, lifeless face stirred nothing inside me. Nothing. Perhaps it was true. Perhaps I had become just like him...or perhaps I was always just like him. (Pause) Out back Daddy found the cellar doors open. But Mama wasn't down there. He discovered her walking along the road, soaking wet. He said later that she wore the most intense expression on any face he'd ever seen. And around her neck, she wore the gold antique medallion...just as big as you please.

MYRA's voice is heard.
A SPOTLIGHT illuminates MYRA DR sitting in a chair. EILEEN crosses to her.

Mama...are you okay?

(Stares straight ahead)

I'm fine.

Do you know where you are?

I do. (Pause) Where's your father?

In the hallway talking to the doctor.

Forgive me, Eileen.

For what?

I never wanted it to be this way. This kind of life...it's hard. Hard to watch you. Sometimes I look away. (Looks at her for the first time) Did you notice?

No.

So young. So pretty. I wanted so much for you.

MYRA reaches out to touch her; withdraws.

We have to get you well, Mama.
MYRA

(Pause)
The driver wouldn't take me.

EILEEN

Driver?

MYRA
At the bus station. I remember now. I wanted to go to Eddyville but he said it wasn't on the route.

EILEEN

Oh...

MYRA
He told me to go home.

EILEEN

Why didn't you?

MYRA
I couldn't.

EILEEN

Why?

MYRA

(Cries)
I couldn't remember where it was.

EILEEN

(Embraces her)
Oh, Mama...

MYRA
I don't know what's happening to me.

EILEEN

We'll take care of you. We're going to take you home.

MYRA
I forget things. Little things. Big things. I'm so afraid.

EILEEN

There's nothing to be afraid of.
MYRA
I tell myself that. (Looks at her) Know what I'd do if I could do it all over again?

EILEEN
What?

MYRA
I'd let my hair grow long.

EILEEN
Then that's what we'll do. We'll let it grow long, Mama. As long as you want...

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

ACT II

Scene Two

AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT on EILEEN, writing in a tablet at dining room table. We hear her voice as she writes:

EILEEN'S VOICE
Dear Uncle Gayner,
I'm sorry that I tricked you into opening this letter but it's very important that I get in touch with you. Mama's getting worse. They're going to do more tests at the hospital but I have this horrible feeling deep down inside there's nothing they can do. I watch as she slips away.

SPOTLIGHT FADES on EILEEN, UP on GAYNER, DL, reading the letter.

I don't know what to do. I don't know who to turn to. Daddy stays drunk all the time and you won't answer my letters. It's just me and him now in this house. This house with the big wallpaper roses and secrets and lies. (Pause) I'm sorry, Uncle Gayner, for doubting you. I guess I've always had this need to tell the truth, no matter what. I suppose it's a curse of mine, this honesty thing. That's why I'm not surprised to find myself telling you that I know what happened to Daddy's back. After Mama told me, I couldn't help but wonder if the world might be better off, after all, with all its secrets, all its lies. Please call her.
Your favorite niece, Eileen

P.S.
The name on the envelope is a real one. Mathew Clavor was my great, great, great grandfather. I picture him with a handlebar mustache and a stare like Daddy's. I hope you're not mad at me.
We hear a DOOR SLAM. LIGHTS DOWN on GAYNER, LIGHTS UP on interior farmhouse. LEONARD has just entered and hangs his hat on the wall. He crosses to telephone stand and retrieves a bottle from the drawer, takes a drink, then takes it to his chair. He notices EILEEN's stare.

LEONARD

You say something?

EILEEN

(Looks away)

No.

LEONARD

Well, that's a first.

EILEEN

(Pause)

I've been looking for a job. Just wanted you to know that. Mr. Stewart down at the courthouse said he'll keep me in mind if anything comes up and I also talked to—

LEONARD

She didn't know who I was. (Pause) We've been together for twenty-two years and she don't even know my name. (Shakes his head) Ain't that a hell of a note?

EILEEN

Where is it, Daddy?

LEONARD

Where's what?

EILEEN

The medallion.

LEONARD

Twenty-two years down the drain. That's what it amounts to.

EILEEN

(Crosses to him)

Can I see it?

LEONARD

I don't have it.
EILEEN

What did you do with it?

LEONARD

Gave it to the police, that's what I did with it.

EILEEN

Oh, my God. (Pause) How could you do that to him, Daddy?

LEONARD

I did what I had to do, pure and simple.

EILEEN

And Mama—they're going to question her now...like some criminal.

LEONARD

They won't have much luck with that, I guarantee you.

EILEEN

(Turns away)

I don't think I can ever forgive you for this.

LEONARD

What am I supposed to do, bust him out of prison, maybe? Move him back into the house with us again? Would that make you happy? (Silence) Yeah, bet it would. Bet that'd make you real happy. As I recall you two seemed to hit it off pretty good while he was here. What were you, fourteen? Fifteen?

EILEEN

I don't remember.

'Course you don't.

LEONARD

I'll be moving out soon. With or without a job.

You got some money saved up?

LEONARD

A little. (Crosses toward bedroom exit)

EILEEN

I hated my father too, you know.
EILEEN stops.

LEONARD. Continued
Meanest sonofabitch that ever walked the earth. Used to haul off and whack me upside the head for no reason at all. I could never figure out why. *(Looks at her)* Did I ever do that to you?

EILEEN

*(Softly)*
No.......  

LEONARD
No reason whatsoever. Guess you might say I was ashamed of him. He'd spit in a coffee can right there at the table, company or no. Wore the same old shirt year round and smelled to high heaven. I don't expect I've missed the bastard if I never saw him again. *(Pause)* But I did see him again. Still see him. Saw him the other morning, in fact. He's been dead for more years than I can remember but the sonofabitch was standing right next to that front door, his hand raised to my baby girl. *(Pause)* I don't have any fancy suits and I don't know any fancy words. I'm sorry.

EILEEN
You don't have to apologize.

LEONARD
I've got a few bucks stashed away, though. It's not much but I want you to have it.

EILEEN
I don't need any money.

LEONARD
Sure you do. You can't get very far without money.

EILEEN
I don't need anything.

LEONARD
You mean you don't need anything from me. *(EILEEN looks away.)* That's what I thought. *(Pause)* Know what I need?

EILEEN
No.

LEONARD
Well, for starters, a weekly paycheck would be nice. A man needs to support his family. And a little walk would be good, too. Just like you and your mother did the other day. I took a stab at it when you two took off down the road. Figured I'd catch up with you. Figured we could all
LEONARD, Continued
walk together, like a family. But my back gave out so I caught a ride to Huffy's bar. Your back ever give out on you? (Silence) Hope it's something you never have to go through.

EILEEN
I'm going to bed.

LEONARD
It opens up.

EILEEN
What?

LEONARD
The medallion. The cops found a secret compartment for photos. Only they didn't find a photo. They found a thumb print. Know what? There's not another thumb print like it in the world. And it belongs to your uncle.

EILEEN
(Pause)
I suppose you're happy now.

LEONARD
Happy? Yeah, I'm one happy sonofabitch.

EILEEN
Goodnight. (Walks away)

LEONARD
Did he ever touch you?

EILEEN
(Stops at bedroom door)
Touch me?

LEONARD
You know what I mean.

EILEEN
I don't know why you'd ask such a thing.

LEONARD
I'm not sure either. Guess it's the way my brain works. (Pause) A man's brain is different from a woman's, you know.
EILEEN

Really.

LEONARD

A woman's brain is filled with trust, and hope, and love and all such other crap. Everything a man's brain preys upon. I've seen the way he looked at you.

EILEEN

Did you?

LEONARD

I might not know a lot, but I know that look when I see it.

(Sighs)

EILEEN

No, Daddy, he never touched me. Feel better?

LEONARD

I just don't want to see anything bad happen to you, that's all. At least not under this roof.

EILEEN

Don't worry. Your shingles remain undesecrated.

What?

LEONARD

EILEEN

Nothing, Goodnight.

LEONARD

Your mother had a fine brain once. It had all those things...trust, hope, love. All those things. (Takes a drink) And now she don't even know my name. (Looks at EILEEN) Ain't that something?

EILEEN Exits. LEONARD takes another drink and shakes his head.

LEONARD, Continued

Ain't that something....

BLACKOUT.
ACT II

Scene Three

SETTING: GAYNER’S cell.

AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT on GAYNER, DL, writing a letter. We hear his voice as he writes.

GAYNER’S VOICE

Dear Eileen,
It was so good to hear from you, and no, I’m not mad at you. I learned a long time ago that it doesn’t pay to be mad at any living being. So I’ve decided to direct all my anger toward Mathew Clavor, the guy with the mustache. I advise you to do the same. (Pause)
Remember when we used to play cards at your dining room table and laugh for hours on end? Your eyes smiled at me, and made me feel valued as a human being. The rest of the world, it seemed, looked at me as if I had horns, and a swastika carved in my forehead. I want you to know, Eileen, that I’m forever grateful for those smiles and how much they meant to me. Lord, what I’d give to see one of them now. I tried calling your mother at the hospital but they wouldn’t let me through. Maybe that’s a blessing. There are so few these days. Please tell her that I love her very much and I’m sorry for all the trouble I’ve caused. When we were kids she and I had a secret symbol that meant everything would be okay. I’m entrusting that symbol to you, which I’ve drawn on the back of this letter. God bless you.
Love, Uncle Gayner.

SPOTLIGHT on EILEEN, sitting at love seat At this point both she and GAYNER share the stage.

EILEEN

That was the last letter I received from Uncle Gayner. It was never mailed. They found it in his pocket after cutting the makeshift rope from around his neck.

GAYNER folds letter, places it in pocket; stands.

I never cried. Not once. And as the weeks went by his features faded from my mind until they were nothing more than a hazy dream.

EILEEN crosses to GAYNER and studies his face as he stares ahead.
EILEEN, Continued
I tried hard to picture him, to recall his voice, the shape of his face.

EILEEN reaches out to touch him; withdraws as SPOTLIGHT on Gayner DIMS TO BLACKOUT.

Three weeks later a man walked into the police station as big as you please and confessed to both murders. (Crosses to love seat) For his headstone I chose an eagle with an opened beak and wings spread as if about to fly away. The next day the wings were gone. I found them on the ground, broken in several pieces. For a long time I kept them wrapped in a pillow case in a drawer. Then one day, out of the blue, I threw them away.

MYRA seats herself at love seat next to EILEEN. She is wearing a robe. LIGHTS UP on farmhouse interior. LEONARD is seated in overstuffed chair, reading the paper. PHONE RINGS. He lowers the paper and looks at EILEEN. EILEEN looks uneasily at her mother. Finally she crosses to phone and picks it up.

EILEEN
Hello. (Pause) Who? (Slams down phone and returns to love seat) Wrong number, Mama.

LEONARD
Save your breath. She don't know what you're saying.

EILEEN
Sure she does. (Looks at her) Don't you, Mama? (No response) Aren't you going to talk to me today?

LEONARD
Not likely. She ain't said a word since they sent her home.

EILEEN
Maybe she doesn't have anything to say.

LEONARD
Well, I'm sure you'll pick up the slack.

EILEEN
Want me to get you something, Mama? You want your knitting? (No response) Can you give me a smile today? Just a little one? Look—like this. (Pulls the corners of her mouth into a grin) See? Come on, you can do it.
LEONARD

Why don't you just leave her alone?

EILEEN

I know she understands me. I can feel it.

Sure you can.

Why do you have to be so —

LEONARD

Just trying to be realistic, that's all.

EILEEN

(To MYRA)
You understand me, don't you Mama? Raise your right hand if you do. Raise either hand. Come on, Mama.

_EILEEN stands._

I've got to get out.

LEONARD

_(Lowers paper)_

Get out?

EILEEN

That's what I said.

Where you going?

EILEEN

I don't know. Maybe do some more job hunting. I—I don't know.

LEONARD

I thought you already checked everywhere.

EILEEN

Then I'll check again. I've got to get OUT.

LEONARD

Who's going to watch over her?
EILEEN

Guess you will.

LEONARD

Maybe I was getting ready to go somewhere myself.

EILEEN

Maybe you're afraid to be alone with her.

LEONARD

(Tosses paper aside)
If that's what you think then that's what you think. (Crosses to exit; puts on hat)

EILEEN

I suppose that's your answer to everything...just walk away.

LEONARD

Nope. I'm driving this time.

EILEEN

God DAMNIT, Daddy!

LEONARD

(Turns)
Hey! I didn't raise no daughter of mine to cuss. There will be no cussing in this house, you understand?

EILEEN

This isn't a house. It's a prison.

LEONARD

Fine. Then I'll leave the prison door open. You can escape anytime you want to. (Exits)

EILEEN

(Crosses to exit, screams at door)
SOMEDAY I WILL, GODDAMNIT! ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, I WILL!!

MYRA stands, crosses laboriously to newspaper and takes it to the kitchen table.

What are you doing, Mama?

MYRA sits, pours over paper.
EILEEN, Continued
Mama, there's nothing in there. He's gone, Mama. Uncle Gayner's gone. He's… (Slumps to sofa)

MYRA
(Looking at paper)
I know...

EILEEN stares at her, stunned.

BLACKOUT.

ACT II

Scene Four

SETTING: Farmhouse interior.

AT RISE: EILEEN is still seated at love seat. She is alone now. LEONARD enters; hangs his hat.

LEONARD
Well, I see the prisoner didn't escape. (Pause) What're you doing up so late?

EILEEN
Waiting for you.

LEONARD
Ain't that nice. Your mother in bed?

EILEEN
Yeah.

LEONARD
(Crosses to telephone stand; pulls out bottle)
You find a job?

EILEEN
I couldn't leave the house, remember? (Pause) I found out who's been stealing the corn, though.
Yeah? Who?

EILEEN
The same person who's been egging the house.

And who might that be?

EILEEN
You.

LEONARD
(Stiffens)
Is that a fact?

EILEEN
Yes. It's a fact. I need you to tell me the truth, Daddy.

LEONARD
You need shock treatment, is what you need. Who the hell told you that?

EILEEN
Mama.

LEONARD
What? She can't even talk.

EILEEN
She did tonight.

LEONARD
Where the hell would she get a fool notion like that?

EILEEN
She saw you—from the bedroom window. She saw you load up the corn, she saw you toss eggs at the house. It was you, Daddy. She knew all along.

LEONARD
And you believe her.

EILEEN
I don't know what to believe anymore. But I know she has no reason to lie about something like that.
LEONARD
And I suppose I have all kinds of reasons to steal my own corn and egg my own house.

EILEEN
I know the reason. You wanted to turn us against Uncle Gayner. Make life miserable around here and blame it on him.

LEONARD
You're crazy.

EILEEN
Is that why you did it, Daddy?

LEONARD
You don't know what you're talking about. Neither one of you do. You're both nuts as far as I'm concerned.

EILEEN
IS THAT WHY, DADDY?

LEONARD
(Stares at her a moment)
Now let me get this straight—you're going to believe somebody in her condition before you believe me. Somebody who wanders around in lightning storms, somebody who forgets how to talk for a whole month. Is that what you're telling me?

EILEEN
That's what I'm telling you.

LEONARD
Christ, the last time I checked she didn't even KNOW me.

EILEEN
Maybe she doesn't.

LEONARD
(Pause)
So, she's talking again, huh?

EILEEN
When she needs to.

LEONARD
Guess she doesn't need to talk to me.
Guess not.

What else did she say?

Why? Does it worry you?

Just curious, I guess.

She talked about the picnic.

Picnic? What picnic?

Guess you've forgotten.

We've been married for twenty-two years, you know.

I know.

Twenty-two years.... *(Takes a drink)* She was really something at one time, I can tell you that. *(Pause)* God, she was something... *(Snaps back to present)* I'm going to bed. *(Crosses to bedroom exit)*

Daddy?

*(Stops)*

What?

She loves you. *(Pause)* But she's not going to defend you anymore.

Fine by me. Don't forget to check the doors and turn off the lights.
EILEEN

(In clipped tones)
The doors will be locked. The lights will be turned off. Your castle will be secure and waste-free, as always.

LEONARD

(Stares)
Goodnight.

EILEEN
And we'll go to bed in your secure little castle and pretend that everything is FINE, as always.

LEONARD
What the hell's gotten into you now?

EILEEN
I'll tell you what's gotten into me—you killed the dog just to keep up your little charade, THAT'S what's gotten into me. My God, Daddy, what kind of man would do that?

LEONARD
That dog was old. He was—

EILEEN
Is there no limit to how far you'll go for your stupid, selfish—

LEONARD
I'm just trying to survive, that's all.

EILEEN
Survive? I don't know what that means.

LEONARD
This is MY family, goddammit. I won't be pushed out of my own family.

EILEEN
Nobody's trying to push you out of—

LEONARD
I WON'T BE PUSHED OUT AND I WON'T BE SASSED! GOODNIGHT! (Exits)

EILEEN

(Quietly, to herself)
Goodnight. (To AUDIENCE) As Daddy climbed the stairs that night I heard sobs that I knew he tried to suppress, knew he'd rather die than have me hear them. But I heard them. I heard my daddy cry. (Pause) Ain't that something...
BLACKOUT.

Rosemary Clooney's "Hey there" plays softly during blackout and continues into next scene.

ACT II

Scene Five

SETTING: Farmhouse interior.

AT RISE: MYRA is seated at love seat. EILEEN sits on floor, rummaging through a cardboard box.

EILEEN
Okay, how about this one? (Holds up cardboard cutout of Eisenhower) Do you know who this man is? (No response) It's Dwight D. Eisenhower. He's the President of the United States. Remember? He's a Republican. (Pulls out cardboard elephant) Look—this is the symbol for his party. (Tosses it aside; holds up donkey) How about this one?

MYRA looks toward window.

Don't do this to me, Mama. I know you can talk. You were talking to me last night. (Waves the picture) Look, Mama. Will, you look? Do you even know what kind of animal it is? Is it a cat, a dog, WHAT? What kind of animal says “hee-haw?”

LEONARD enters. He's wearing a sports jacket and tie; his hair slicked down and combed straight back. He crosses to the radio, turns it off.

MYRA (With sudden realization)
Jackass!

LEONARD (Radiant)
That's right, Mama, it's a jackass! (LEONARD squints at them.) I'm so proud of you, mama!

LEONARD Well, I see she's talking again. That's a good thing, I guess. (Hangs jacket)
You look nice.

EILEEN

LEONARD

Goddamn traffic's bumper to bumper out there. Sonsofbitches drive like old ladies.

EILEEN

(In awe)

I've never seen you dressed like that before.

Well, now you have.

LEONARD

You look so...different. *(Reaches out to touch him)*

LEONARD

*(Pulls away)* Christ, can't a man buy a new set of clothes without it making the national news?

*LEONARD crosses to his chair and picks up newspaper.*

We've got to do something, Daddy.

EILEEN

Like what?

LEONARD

Who'll take care of her when I leave?

EILEEN

Same person who always took care of her, I expect.

You won't even talk to her.

EILEEN

We'll be fine.

LEONARD

I wish I could believe that. *(Pause) But I can't.* *(Picks up phone)*

Who're you calling?
Shadyrest.

Put the goddamn phone down.

You said you had some money stashed away.

I said a little money. And that ain't the point.

You can't take care of her, Daddy.

No wife of mine is going to an old folks home, do you understand? Now put the phone DOWN.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes