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Product Code: A0553-F

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: *LEONARD 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. LEONARD 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

Still..... *(Looks 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?

MYRA

I remember.

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?

EILEEN

(Shrugs)

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.

MYRA

Can we please just DROP it?

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.

MYRA

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.

MYRA

Tell what?

EILEEN

When somebody's telling the truth.

MYRA

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.

MYRA

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.

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

EILEEN

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.

MYRA

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.

MYRA

Do what you must.

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.

EILEEN

(Pause)

What will you do?

MYRA

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.

EILEEN

What's wrong, Mama?

MYRA

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.

MYRA

I think she worried herself to death over that boy.

EILEEN

Like mother, like daughter, I suppose.

MYRA

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.

EILEEN

The eagle?

MYRA

(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.

EILEEN

Guess it didn't work.

MYRA

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

EILEEN

(Moves away from her)

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

MYRA

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

(Silence) Eileen?

EILEEN

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

MYRA

(Pause)

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

EILEEN

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.

MYRA

(*Faces her*)

What if he's not?

EILEEN

(*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.

MYRA

WHAT IF HE'S NOT, MAMA?

EILEEN

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

MYRA

The only person you owe is yourself.

EILEEN

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

MYRA

What?

EILEEN

In the letters.

MYRA

Would you like to read them?

EILEEN

(*Pause*)

No. They were meant for your eyes only.

MYRA

He mentioned you several times.

EILEEN

Really?

MYRA

He said you're a good woman.

EILEEN

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.*

MYRA

Leonard! *(Pause)* Leonard, we're home!

EILEEN

(Checks kitchen at SL)

He's not here.

MYRA

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.

EILEEN

The phone's fixed.

MYRA

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

EILEEN

What?

MYRA

Flowers—did you put those there?

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

EILEEN

No.

MYRA

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?

EILEEN

(Annoyed)

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

MYRA

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

EILEEN

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.

MYRA

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.

MYRA

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. EILEEN

Why? MYRA

So I'll know who I am. EILEEN

That's nonsense. MYRA

Your grandfather, for instance. What was his name? EILEEN

Which one? MYRA

What? EILEEN

I had two. MYRA

Well, your mother's father. EILEEN

Curtis. MYRA

Curtis what? EILEEN

Wilkens. MYRA

That's British. EILEEN

It's no such thing. MYRA

Sure it is. Just like Nichols, your maiden name. Now all we've got to do is trace them back to Britain. EILEEN

MYRA
My family's never been to Britain.

EILEEN
But that's where they're from.

MYRA
They certainly are not.

EILEEN
Then where?

MYRA
Where what?

EILEEN
Where are they FROM?

MYRA
Kentucky. Just like you.

EILEEN
But what about BEFORE that? (*Silence*) Mama?

MYRA
(*Captivated by something she sees in the newspaper*)
Good Lord.....

EILEEN
What? What is it?

MYRA
There's been another murder.

EILEEN
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: *LEONARD 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?

EILEEN
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.

EXITS, 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.

MYRA

Nothing. *(Tosses paper aside)*

EILEEN

What?

MYRA

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

EILEEN

I've never heard you swear before.

MYRA

Well, now you have.

EILEEN

It seems so strange.

MYRA

I've searched cover to cover. Nothing.

EILEEN

You promised you wouldn't get your hopes up.

MYRA

I'm not.

EILEEN

Sounds to me like you are.

MYRA

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

EILEEN

Don't forget what you said about faith.

MYRA

(Rubs temples)

I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about.

EILEEN

Oh. Guess I was mistaken.

MYRA

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

EILEEN

I'm sure he's okay.

MYRA

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

EILEEN

He doesn't seem fragile.

MYRA

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.

MYRA

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. MYRA

He's never told me that. EILEEN

Sure he has. In his own way. MYRA

You mean like shooting the dog? EILEEN

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

In that case I guess I'm next. EILEEN

He feels bad about it. MYRA

How do you know? EILEEN

I know your father. MYRA

Why do you do this, Mama? EILEEN

Do what? MYRA

Defend him all the time. EILEEN

I didn't know I did. MYRA

Well, you do. EILEEN

MYRA

(Pause)

Sometimes, in some ways, I suppose I feel responsible...

EILEEN

Responsible? For what?

MYRA

(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.

EILEEN

Protect me? Protect me from WHAT?

MYRA

I shouldn't have told you this.

EILEEN

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?

MYRA

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

EILEEN

(Bitterly)

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

MYRA

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.

EILEEN

(To AUDIENCE)

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.

EILEEN
What?

MYRA
The radio—turn it DOWN.

EILEEN turns off the radio, then returns to a reclining position.

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.

EILEEN

(Squinting)

There's something different about this room.

MYRA

Nothing. Not a word....

EILEEN

Stop it, Mama.

MYRA

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

EILEEN

He'll be out soon.

MYRA

How can you be so sure?

EILEEN

I just am.

MYRA

I wish I had your confidence.

EILEEN

(Points)

Wasn't that picture over there?

MYRA

What?

EILEEN

That picture—somebody moved it...

MYRA

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

EILEEN

That was over two years ago.

MYRA

No, I papered it again.

EILEEN

When?

MYRA
Sunday night while you were sleeping.

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

MYRA
Well, I had some rolls left over.

EILEEN
But why would you—

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

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

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

EILEEN
(Covers her ears)
STOP IT!!

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

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

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

MYRA
(Pause)
Do you have time to eat?

EILEEN
I'm not going anywhere.

MYRA
I thought you had a class this morning.

EILEEN
Nope.

MYRA
But you always teach a class on Thursday.

EILEEN
Not anymore.

MYRA
I don't understand.

EILEEN
I got fired, Mama.

MYRA
Dear God...

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

MYRA
But you were doing so well. What happened?

EILEEN
Nothing happened. They found another tutor.

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

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

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

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

MYRA
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.

I'm not going to work.

EILEEN

Why not?

LEONARD

I got fired.

EILEEN

You what?

LEONARD

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

EILEEN

Not who's fault?

LEONARD

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

EILEEN

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

LEONARD

Don't start, Daddy.

EILEEN

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.

LEONARD

You know that's not true.

EILEEN

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

LEONARD

You saw the article, didn't you?

EILEEN

What article?

LEONARD

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.

EILEEN

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?

LEONARD

That's none of my concern right now.

EILEEN

Because I'm ashamed.

LEONARD

Of what?

EILEEN

You.

LEONARD

(Pause)

What did you say?

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.

Eileen...

MYRA

*A SPOTLIGHT illuminates MYRA
DR sitting in a chair. EILEEN crosses to
her.*

Mama...are you okay?

EILEEN

I'm fine. *(Stares straight ahead)*

MYRA

Do you know where you are?

EILEEN

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

MYRA

In the hallway talking to the doctor.

EILEEN

Forgive me, Eileen.

MYRA

For what?

EILEEN

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?

MYRA

No.

EILEEN

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

MYRA

*MYRA reaches out to touch her;
withdraws.*

EILEEN

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.

LEONARD

'Course you don't.

EILEEN

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

LEONARD

You got some money saved up?

EILEEN

A little. *(Crosses toward bedroom exit)*

LEONARD

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'd'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.

EILEEN

(Sighs)

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.

LEONARD

What?

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.

LEONARD

Sure you can.

EILEEN

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.

LEONARD

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.

LEONARD

Yeah? Who?

EILEEN

The same person who's been egging the house.

LEONARD

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.

EILEEN
Guess not.

LEONARD
What else did she say?

EILEEN
Why? Does it worry you?

LEONARD
Just curious, I guess.

EILEEN
She talked about the picnic.

LEONARD
Picnic? What picnic?

EILEEN
Guess you've forgotten.

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

EILEEN
I know.

LEONARD
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)*

EILEEN
Daddy?

LEONARD
(Stops)
What?

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

LEONARD
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, goddamnit. 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!

EILEEN

(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)*

EILEEN

You look nice.

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.

LEONARD

Well, now you have.

EILEEN

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.

EILEEN

We've got to do something, Daddy.

LEONARD

Like what?

EILEEN

Who'll take care of her when I leave?

LEONARD

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

EILEEN

You won't even talk to her.

LEONARD

We'll be fine.

EILEEN

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

LEONARD

Who're you calling?

EILEEN

Shadyrest.

LEONARD

Put the goddamn phone down.

EILEEN

You said you had some money stashed away.

LEONARD

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

EILEEN

You can't take care of her, Daddy.

LEONARD

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