

The stage is grey. Lights hidden (perhaps a lamp covered in dust). The stage is cluttered with odds and ends. The furniture does not match, the drapes are yellowed, the pace is always slow. A girl enters. She assumes the qualities of one who is still in the early stages of discovery. In our time she is twenty. For her there are no years left. It is the simplicity of nightfall and sunrise. She carries a bag of flour that she cradles as a child. There may be strands of yarn for hair, a smile sloppily drawn on, a kerchief tied awkwardly around. She looks forlorn and lost. Do not mind her if she giggles and she will pay no attention to your apologies. She huddles center stage pulling at her gingham dress. The lights go down.

#### Girl's Voice

You're peeking! It should be darker in here so you can't peek. Stop peeking!

Lights up. A woman hurries in, the girl has left the stage. She is covered in a mud masque and her terrycloth robe billows behind her. She stands lost in the living room. On the porch (stage right) is a lamp, a leather swivel chair, and an old lawn chair. A man in a suit sits in the leather chair. A woman, dressed in a slim black skirt and a white blouse (reminiscent of a doily) stands pondering a cigarette. The two worlds never meet.

#### Shirley

Patrick! Amanda! Patrick! Are you home? Are you awake? My darlings? I was having a nightmare. It was, it was. Patrick? Patrick, you were learning how to drive. You were driving your father's car. The old Buick. You remember the old Buick. Patrick? I was dreaming and you were driving Amanda to the reservoir. I don't know why. Don't ask me why! You just were. I wasn't in the car. There was a truck. A big truck. Patrick? Can you hear me? There was a big truck and it ran into you. Oh, god. There was a monstrous truck and I watched the two of you die. Amanda? I wasn't waiting for anything but I could sense it was wrong—in the dream. In the fog. Patrick! in the fog you missed your turn and there was a massive truck. I'm sorry I let you bleed. I was naked. I tried to bandage the both of you but I was naked! Both of you were lost and there was nothing I could do. Amanda!

She closes the door and tries to compose herself. She goes

into the kitchen and begins to make breakfast. She makes coffee, eggs, and toast. If her movements remind you of Mrs. Gibbs' and Mrs. Webb's morning ritual, that is fine. The man in the leather chair turns on the lamp.

Amanda

I heard the door open at about two a.m. I hadn't heard her get out of bed. I think this is important.

Man

Why do think this is important?

Amanda

Because you asked. Because this is where it began. After she left, I went into her closet to find food. I thought I had found a box full of plums—instead I found the remains that I had been looking for all along. I slept well that night.

Man clears his throat.

Amanda

When I woke up in the morning there were a dozen lemons in a bowl on the kitchen table. In the pantry there were more crates. She left at two a.m. to go out to the store and buy lemons—all the lemons in the store. I was the first one to get up.

Man

What did you do?

Amanda

I vomited all over myself and started to cry. The lemons were yellow. They reminded me of when I had jaundice.

She begins to play with the cigarette.

Man

Are you sure you smoke?

Amanda

They reminded me of the sun because you put babies with jaundice in the sun. Yellow makes me feel crippled and I haven't been a cripple in years.

Man

How old were you when you had jaundice?

Amanda

The day after I was born I got it. It lasted for a week. I was yellow for a week—for the first week. Lemons make me vomit.

She sighs and starts frantically digging through her purse. An assortment of paper, safety pins, etc. falls onto the porch.

Man

Would you call yourself unhappy?

She stops and pulls out a pink lighter.

Amanda

Unhappy? No. I'm happy. I'm happy for exactly thirty-three seconds out of every day. It doesn't have to be a consecutive thirty-three seconds, but it's always thirty-three seconds. Exactly. I time it. Sometimes it happens in the morning. Then there's nothing to look forward to the rest of the day. Ribbon candy?

The man shakes his head and turns off the lamp. Shirley, who has been preparing breakfast in the dim light this entire time, switches on another lamp in the house. In this small house, the whole first floor is one room: a place for cooking, a place for eating, and a place for sitting in awkward silence. Wick enters and buries herself in the couch. She has put on her pink cowboy boots underneath her gingham dress. Shirley takes out a crystal fruit-bowl and goes into the pantry. When she returns, the bowl is full of lemons.

Shirley

Patrick! Breakfast is ready. You need your breakfast. You're a growing boy!

Wick slinks into the kitchen and notices the lemons on the table. She touches hand to hand and then touches her mouth. She pulls the doll closer and darts underneath the table while her mother's back is turned. The tablecloth hangs only halfway so she is still visible. She pulls another doll out that has been collecting dust under the table. Patrick enters from stage left. This is where a staircase would be. He carries a small stepladder. He places it beside the table and climbs to the third rung.

Shirley

There's my beautiful boy. My beautiful young boy. Here, let me fix your shirt. You're one button off.

Patrick

I can do it.

Shirley

No, no. Let your mother help you. Don't you look nice this morning. Don't you look just like a young gentleman.

Patrick

Where's Wick?

Shirley

Amanda hasn't come to the table yet.

Patrick

Has she been feeling (okay because)...

Shirley

I don't see why she would be sick. Are you feeling a little under the weather?

I heard her sneezing... Patrick

Was she? Shirley

Last night. Maybe she heard noises. (quietly) You know it upsets her. Patrick

What would upset her? I don't know what you're talking about. Shirley

(Over Patrick's last line) Take more than two eggs—you're a growing boy. Shirley

Maybe she went out into the yard. Patrick

Yes, yes. Maybe she did. Shirley

Patrick gets off his ladder and walks to the door.

She'll be here soon if she's hungry. Shirley

She hasn't been eating. Was she in her bed this morning? Patrick

I don't know! She doesn't want me in her room. And stop asking so many questions. You're toast will get cold and then the butter won't melt. It always so nice when the butter is evenly melted. You want your butter evenly melted, don't you? Give me a hand with the coffee. Shirley

Wick? Patrick

It's not as though she'll answer you. Shirley

Patrick returns to the table.

Where did the lemons come from? Patrick

Shirley

I found them in the pantry.

Patrick

I don't remember buying any lemons.

Shirley

They were dropped off the other day by one of our neighbors.

Patrick

Oh.

Shirley

Funny stuff it all is—isn't it. (pause) There is some milk in the fridge. Do you think you could be the wonderful boy that you are and get it for me?

Patrick

Sure. I have to go into town today.

Shirley

Fine. Quick as a bunny though. I need you around the house. (pause) If you're going to town, I would appreciate it if you could stop by the store and pick up some more oil. I used it last night making food for the guests. Most people don't use oil in biscuits—but I do. My father gave me that secret. I laid them out on a silver platter. I had sent out twenty-five invitations. I spent a hundred dollars having them printed and dabbed them in rose oil. The Tupperware woman got here at one and left by two. I bought fifty pieces of Tupperware just so the woman didn't think it was a waste. Because that was polite. I forget where the Tupperware woman came from. It was on the calendar, though. It said I was having a party. The calendar has little puppies in wheelbarrows this month. (pause) And milk—it seems we're running low.

Teakettle whistles from upstairs.

Shirley

Time for a nap.

Shirley does not leave immediately. She searches for something to help her remember. Unfound—she breezily wanders off. Wick begins her own search.

Today the dolls are not enough. Her tolerance has been built up. Head bobs, arms sway. Sometimes Wick is blind before she faints. Patrick enters with his ladder.

(calling) Quick like a bunny!  
Shirley

Patrick catches Wick as she falls.

Patrick  
I was looking for you Wick. Did you leave? The house. I mean—were you inside last night?

Patrick sits on his stepladder. Wick smiles and begins collecting blankets and pillows from the sofa.

Patrick  
I don't have time to play this game.

She starts constructing a fort at the base of his tower. Patrick gives in.

Patrick  
There are two holes in the roof today—yesterday there was only one. (pause) So—I got a job cleaning up a hair shop in town. Wick, there's almost no money left! I know, I know she doesn't want me gone for long, but she won't know if I'm just gone in the afternoon—while she's asleep.

Wick has been listening. She begins to panic.

Patrick  
Wick?

She grabs his wrist.

Patrick  
What's wrong?

She signs her own  
momentum.

Patrick

She won't do anything if she does find out. I promise. I mean—I know she won't notice while she's asleep.

Wick covers herself in the  
blanket.

Patrick

When there's no money, there's no food. You've got to understand. I'm the man—it's time I got a job.

Wick extends her arms out of  
the blanket and signs. Wick  
tries to pull him off his  
ladder.  
Wick motions to the window.

Patrick

It's still warm out. Why don't we go outside and play, Wick. We could play for a while outside before I leave.

She shakes her head.

Patrick

All the leaves fell. Just this morning a tree next to the house lost all its leaves—all at once. The big maple.

She smiles.

Patrick

Swear it's true—I saw it happen.

She puts the blanket around  
him.

Patrick

I was washing my hands and this gargantuan gust of wind came. He said, "I'm going to take all of your clothes Mr. Tree." The tree tried to stop him but he knew it was useless. With one blow—that tree was bare. Completely bare. All the leaves fell at once and made this kinda thud. I was so surprised that I almost forgot to finish washing my hands. I think I might have even left the water running.



Wick enjoys the sound—the sound of something peaceful. Wick digs something out from underneath the sofa as he finishes the retelling. She pulls out a cigar box. In it is a pack of cigarettes, the core of a plum, and magazine clippings of 30s or 50s movie stars. There is one black and white photo of a man. Wick and Patrick have never seen this man before. Wick smiles. Patrick becomes shaken.

Patrick

Whose is this Wick?

Wick signs, "These are gifts."

Patrick

Don't try to give it to me. I don't want this stuff. (pause) It isn't yours. Did you steal this stuff Wick?

Wick clutches onto him.

Patrick

Put it away! She might come down. She hates it when you make messes—you know that.

Wick places a photo in the palm of his hand. She helps him along.

Patrick

Who is this a picture of? I've never seen this man before.

Wick pokes and prods.

Patrick

He's very handsome. (pause) Maybe you should just get rid of this box, Wick. I don't want it.

Wick attaches herself to the box. Wick pulls a cigarette out of the pack.

Patrick  
Wick you don't smoke.

She pulls out matches.

Patrick  
Wick you don't smoke!

Patrick takes the cigarette out of her mouth. She begins to whimper. Patrick attempts to comfort her. She hurriedly pulls all the fragments together and sets it in the box. She maneuvers her way to the couch. Patrick gets up to go. As he nears the front door the lights inside go off as the porch light flickers on.

Amanda  
This is ridiculous. It all seems too heavy now.

Man  
Perhaps you're right...

Amanda  
About ten years ago I finally bought a bra.

Man  
Yes?

Amanda  
Don't take that tone with me.

Man  
Yes.

Amanda  
I never knew what a pain in the ass it was. It's really hard to find something that supports you just right. My breasts were never very large. I wondered if it would just be better if I looked for training bras. Slightly large training bras. I had no idea who I should ask about the situation. Hell if I was going to ask the saleslady. She smelled like a fruit salad

and every time I went to the store she was wearing a tight tee-shirt embroidered with her state of being that day: “Angel, Devil, World’s Greatest Bowler.” Finally I said to hell with lace. I never cared before, why should I care now. So I walked across the street to the hardware store and bought some duct tape. (pause) Do you remember the man that lived in the basement?

Man

Have you told me about him before?

Amanda

That isn’t what I asked. What about the picture—do you remember who was in that picture?

Man

I’m afraid our time is almost up.

Amanda

Funny stuff it all is—isn’t it. (pause) I’m afraid I can’t remember too clearly now.

She lights her pink lighter  
then puts the cigarette behind  
her ear.

Amanda

You wouldn’t happen to have any gum?

Man

I don’t eat sugar.

Amanda

You don’t eat gum—you chew it up and spit it out and sure a little sugar gets into your saliva and works its way down but who cares. Its not like eating a cookie—or a stale apple fritter that you’ve tossed back into the refrigerator a hundred times telling yourself that its just not the right time for an apple fritter really thinking to yourself, “I hate apple fritters. What the hell am I doing buying this lousy apple fritter that just sits in my fridge for weeks—I should just throw it out now.” But you don’t. Then you finally have nothing else to eat and you eat it and you remember how much you love apple fritters—how much you love apple fritters and warm milk. You wonder why you didn’t eat it when it was fresh. You just let it yellow in the Frigidaire.

Man

Do you like apple fritters?

Amanda

I hate them. In the fall she would buy crates and crates of bruised apples and bake pies. There would be flour all over the kitchen for days. She would set them on every

windowsill in the house—to let them cool and make a list of all our relatives that she would send them to. I could never remember any of our relatives. I have these vague images of cousins and aunts and uncles that I met at one family reunion once. We had to travel to get there. Not very far, but still a ways. No one else had to travel.

Man

Did you help your mother deliver the pies?

Amanda

They never got delivered. In the winter we would finally have to close the windows. By that time, the animals had eaten most of them. The man in the basement always had a couple—he was very poorly fed.

Man

You never brought him food?

Amanda

We never saw him, but we knew he was there. We felt his presence every day of our lives.

Wick approaches the porch. She carries a crate of bruised apples. The porch light goes off as she enters the house. All is dark for a moment as she gets her bearings. A small lamp in the corner goes on. She is marinating in the soft glow, examining each apple that she has collected from the ground. She begins to make piles around her. She attaches name, belief, beauty to each object. She refuses to lose her world. A teakettle whistles.

Shirley (offstage)

Has anyone seen my beautiful boy? Where is my young man?

Wick turns off the lamp as she hears Shirley approach.

Shirley

Sitting in the dark again? It's very bad for your complexion.

She turns on many lamps.  
She has put on a soiled green  
nightgown. The fabric runs  
thinner as the day goes on.

Shirley

You're not so ugly are you? You could use some color though. You look kind of sickly—a gas stove without any gas. You look as though you need glasses. You can see fine, though, can't you. Just refuse to talk. Fine. I'm tired of trying with you. One day Patrick will be too tired too—and then what I wonder. You have beautiful hair. It's stringy but the color is nice. You don't care though, do you? It isn't very polite what you put you're mother through. You never go out of your way like your brother to help me. You'd be perfectly fine if I just disappeared one day. It's common courtesy to ask how someone's day is. To pass them on the street and nod politely, pause, ask how they are. They, in turn, will say, "Fine, thank you. How are you?" You, in turn, will say, "Fine." You will be polite and acknowledge them. It doesn't matter if you're not fine. What does fine mean anymore anyway. People have used it all up. Who the hell cares what it means. It doesn't mean anything! It's a lousy state of being and we're all there it's just courtesy. I'm fine, Amanda! How are you?

Shirley notices the crate of  
apples Wick has brought in.

Shirley

Are those apples? Have you brought more rotting apples into my house? I just cleaned.

Wick begins to place the  
apples back into the crate.

Shirley

No. No. Fine. Save the poor apples from the cold. Don't expect me to make any pies though. I'm too exhausted to worry about the crust. It's just too hard to get it right. Mud! You dragged that disgusting red clay into this house—didn't you. Leaves scattered all around. They're just going to disintegrate in the corners—you watch. They'll be here 'til the Fourth of July unless you start cleaning now. (pause) You're brother has been gone for quite some time. It's almost dinner time and we are all out of eggs. I guess there will be no dinner tonight.

Wick does not mind the  
routine sound. The  
motionless search for truth  
dwindles in the now. She  
picks up her crate and goes  
into the kitchen.

Shirley

You can't make dinner. You're too stupid. He won't come to help you either. He went to town. He's gone to town and left me all alone! Do you think he's coming back? Of course he's coming back you stupid girl—don't give me that look. He would never just leave me.

Wick turns slowly. She places the crate on the table and shifts focus to the floorboards. She starts hitting the ground repeatedly.

Shirley

What are you doing? Stop it, Amanda! Stop it! He isn't there anymore. He escaped long ago and I'm not sorry. I'm not sorry!

Wick signs. She speaks of keys and locks and boards unbroken. Shirley moves closer to Wick. Wick maneuvers away.

Shirley

Fine. Run away from your own mother. I never locked him in you know. I simply locked the two of you out. I didn't want you exposed to that—creature. I swear, we are all given a path to follow. A righteous path. Some people just stray right off course as soon as they get on. I tell you—I never had trouble staying front and center on that path. It isn't hard at all. Life simply takes a little discipline. I used to be able to carry three cooking books on my head and walk all around my father's house when I was a girl--it was a much bigger house than this one—and not drop any of the books. My father was very proud of me and my books. He loved me dearly. (pause) No eggs, no milk, no oil. Things can't get much worse than that. At least there's bread. There's always bread.

Wick stands. She displays herself to the ghosts of a family unhad. She might speak—if she could. Her eyes are open, her throat is closed, she totters on heels, and if she could hum, she would hum a tune about a girl who lost her sheep. She signs in her own language.

Shirley

Well, I'll leave you to your theatrics. Don't think I don't remember raising you. I know about all those moist moldy things in your closet—just like you know mine. Funny stuff it all is—isn't it?

She goes into the pantry.  
Patrick scurries through the  
front door.

Patrick

I made fifteen dollars just today, Wick.

Wick hushes him.

Patrick

She awake?

Wick nods.

Patrick

Well, what are you doing? You brought home more apples? You're going to upset her.

Wick pulls the cigar box out  
from under the couch.

Patrick

Get rid of that! The more clutter you bring into the house, the more and more upset she gets—you should know that by now, Wick!

He gets his ladder. Wick  
asks if she may use it.

Patrick

What do you want it for? Fine. You can have it—but just for a minute.

She takes the ladder into the  
kitchen and sets it up to reach  
the flour that is on the top  
shelf in the cupboard.

Patrick

Stop using it for that. It's not used for that.

She quickly gets down before  
she can reach the flour.

Patrick

Why'd you do that Wick?

She apologizes through eye.

Patrick

It isn't used for that.

Patrick climbs the ladder and stares out. She finds her doll that is made out of flour. She cradles the doll and then slowly rips it open. Flour goes all over the kitchen.

Patrick

Wick you know--you know it upsets her when you get flour all over the kitchen. Why are you making pies again? Stop baking pies for relatives we don't have. I just, I just—I mean we just don't know any of their faces or names right now.

Wick motions, "yes we do." They aren't gone. There are images—no matter how fleeting that image is—somewhere in memory the faces make sense.

Patrick

Don't pretend that we know who they are. People all over the country are misplacing people. Why shouldn't we have misplaced a few? There are only a few people left who still haven't found someone oddly missing one day. It happens that way too—one day you just wake up and a certain someone is this fuzzy color and that's all. Nothing else—just a little khaki. Or yellow. Hay—that's the shade. Indiscernible hay.

Wick turns grey. She closes eye, ear, and lip. She pales and turns away.

Patrick

I don't know what you're trying to do, Wick. What do you want to happen? We're fine where we are for now. I've got a job, soon we'll have food all the time and not have to worry. I can see that time clearly from here.

Patrick stands on the ladder.



Patrick  
I can see it from here. I can see you talking.

Shirley comes out from the  
pantry.

Shirley  
See who talking?

Patrick  
I'm sorry (I was gone so long)...

Shirley  
And where was my beautiful young boy today?

Patrick  
I just went to town.

Shirley  
That was an awfully long time to take in town to collect a few groceries.

Patrick  
Are you—are you mad at me?

Shirley  
I could never be mad at my precious boy. I just wish my boy would tell me when he was going to be away all day. I would better prepare for him not to come back on time.

Patrick  
I meant to get back on time—I promise.

Shirley  
Who were you with anyway?

Patrick  
I wasn't with anyone.

Shirley  
You couldn't have been by yourself. No one can entertain themselves that much.

Patrick  
I wasn't anywhere.

Shirley  
Now you're lying.

Patrick

No I'm not.

Shirley

I can always tell when my little boy is blatantly lying to me. You're never gone that long. You've never been gone that long.

Patrick

I went to the store and got caught up.

Shirley

Ha. You have nothing to get caught up in. You didn't even get the eggs, did you?

Patrick

We have eggs.

Shirley

We don't have any eggs.

Patrick

Oh, I thought—I remember eggs this morning. Where did they go?

Shirley

Ask Amanda.

Patrick

Where did all the eggs go?

Wick shrugs.

Patrick

We had so many eggs. They couldn't all have just disappeared. What's happening to all the food?

Shirley

There's food.

Patrick

Lemons and rotting apples.

Shirley

I told her I wouldn't make her crusts. Now there's flour all over the kitchen. I just cleaned this kitchen. I can remember putting on my yellow gloves and filling that plastic water-bucket with searing hot water and it burning my skin through the gloves and me being on all fours and the yellow staying yellow and the brown staying brown and it was

brown when I got here the floor was a hideous brown linoleum and he said that he would get me red I love red and he said that I could have a vase with pink flowers and he would put down red tiles and you know he wore a pink shirt on our wedding day with a white carnation and a red tie. I hate red. I hate pink even more. And I surely will not clean this kitchen.

Patrick

I'll clean.

Shirley

You always clean it. For the last ten years you've been cleaning it. I think it's her turn. (pause) You bought bananas?

Patrick

I haven't had fruit in months.

Shirley

He loved his bananas—just ask Amanda. He fed her bananas every morning. Well this isn't funny. This isn't even comic. This isn't the slightest bit entertaining. It's pathetic dung that is being excreted from your lips. You've been with someone. I smell perfume on you. You've been with a girl this whole afternoon. I took out all the lights in your room when I saw you weren't home. I have all the light bulbs from the second floor and I'm not giving them back until you tell me what little tramp you buried your head in today! Tell me about the way she smelled and how she tasted like fresh cantaloupe and how you danced all the way home up the potholed excuse for a gravel road we have out there. I bet her name was Mary or Lucy or--

Patrick

There was no girl!

Shirley

(quietly) You left me here. All alone. I was sweaty. Just waiting here. How do you think that makes me feel? Have you ever had a nightmare when you're still awake? It's horrible. Opening your eyes doesn't help because it just reminds you of how it won't go away.

Patrick goes to Shirley and holds her as she weeps. He caresses her hair, massages her hands. Paints her touch full of hope. Wick whimpers.

Patrick

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I won't leave you at all for a week. We'll sit here for a week. We have plenty of food. Apples. Wick brought apples.

Shirley

I don't want her apples.

Wick falls into dream. She sketches in the flour as two embrace.

Shirley

We'll stay right here though and you won't leave. You'll be there when I go to sleep and when I wake up. You won't have moved an inch.

The lights dim. The porchlight takes a moment to warm up. Amanda is moving through the mud in a yellow plastic rain-jacket (the type you write you're name in and they keep for you in kindergarten). It is sunny out. The breeze is warm. The leaves have decomposed throughout the day. There is a light on in the distance. Five miles—maybe less. Not more. There is a sideways banister that she leans against. Black corrugated iron (one that didn't perish in the war).

Man

Are you hopeful?

Amanda

For what?

Man

Anything.

Amanda

You mean the future.

Man

Sure.

Amanda

The past is the only thing I believe in—it's the only thing that came true.

(pause)

Man

Now that we've turned the clocks back, it's getting much darker by five.

Amanda

Is that what time it is?

Man

Do you mean here?

Amanda

There isn't much left.

Man

I may go soon. It looks like rain.

Amanda

I like the plastic that they use for these coats. It's slick. It all runs off the side. I'm partial to clothes that don't get wet. I think it's a very good idea. Who wants to get wet anyway it seems completely unnecessary when technology is as good as it is.

Man

I suppose.

Amanda

The picture of the man in the cigar box...

Man

Yes?

Amanda

The one under the sofa.

Man

I know which one you're talking about. You've mentioned it before.

Amanda

The man in that photo was very attractive.

Man

Was he?

Amanda

My father had good taste. Too bad it didn't include her. Actually, it simply didn't include women. He told her about fourteen years too late.

Man

What are you talking about?

Amanda

Stop playing dumb. Life's just too easy when you fabricate your own idea of what happened. You might as well just enjoy whatever crap you're given. If it means going through a box of tissues a day—so be it.

Man

We're given many different things. If we weren't the selection at the bookstore would be quite dull. Don't you agree? I'm always partial to good mysteries. With that note, I believe I have other things to attend to.

Amanda

I don't think so. I think I have a few more minutes to explain.

Man

As far as I can tell, there is nothing left to be said.

Amanda

You haven't made any progress today. We aren't leaving until you start making some sort of effort.

Man

This is unnecessary.

Amanda

She always cried very loudly--following the teakettle. It reminded me of a car crash every time I heard it. I would listen and hope that she would just start beating me. It would have been a relief just to have her acknowledge me—take something out on me. Let him live. Her voice could go very high.

The light goes out as screams emanate from the house. When the lights come on from inside, Wick has dumped out all of Shirley's lemons. She can barely stomach the sight.

Shirley

My lemons! She's doing this on purpose!

Patrick

She just doesn't like it when we get mad at each other.

Shirley

Look at them. There everywhere. Patrick—help me find them.

Patrick

I'll clean it up.

Shirley

Give me a ruler.

Patrick

What are you doing?

Shirley

This will have to do. Come here you disgusting child. Child? Ha. Twenty years old and still playing with dolls.

Shirley pick up a knitting needle. She begins to beat Wick. Wick does move. She sits in the middle of the floor and smiles.

Patrick

Stop! Stop!

Shirley

This is the last time that you disturb my peace.

Patrick

Stop!

He grabs Shirley.

Shirley

What did you just do? You hurt me. Your nails cut me. Why are you all turning against me like this? I've stayed right here for years so you'd find me and now you're hurting me.

Patrick goes to comfort Wick.

Shirley

She's doing this on purpose. She's trying to take you from me. Patrick! Patrick!

Shirley runs off to hide her fear.

Patrick

Wick, are you all right?

Wick sits motionless. Content. She smiles. She hugs Patrick

Patrick

Why did you do that Wick?

Wick begins to collect her dolls.

Patrick

What are you doing, Wick?

Wick motions to the door. She is saying, “well that’s it,” “it’s over,” “let’s retreat.”

Patrick

Wick we aren’t going anywhere. This is our family! This is where we all belong!

Wick shakes her head and begins to whimper.

Patrick

It’ll be okay. She won’t hit you again if you just listen to her.

Wick is erratically shaking her head and begins pulling Patrick’s arm.

Patrick

This is our house. This is our home.

Shirley wanders down the stairs dazed.

*~Note: in the following sequences the lights change rapidly from the porch to the living room in conjunction with the action. It is reminiscent of a flashbulb memory. Just as the living have memory fragmented and quick—so do those almost dead.*



Amanda

She had cut herself somehow. Maybe she walked into a wall. I don't know. I wasn't there for that part.

Shirley

My boy. Help me. I tried turning on all the lights but there's no light upstairs. I hit my head on something. Hard. Something hard.

Patrick

Lie down here for a minute.

Shirley

I think I should lie down in my bed. Don't you think that's a good idea?

Patrick

I'm sorry.

Shirley

About what? It's only a little cut. I got blood on my nightgown, though, will you help me take it off?

Man

There wasn't any blood. She only got a bump.

Amanda

There was blood. It was all over.

Man

That was later.

Patrick

Yes.

Patrick disrobes Shirley. The weight of her world has fallen on her flesh. She sags over the loose bra and the stained underpants. The contrast to her eyes hidden by make-up causes the air to pause. Patrick takes no notice—he knows it well.

Shirley

That feels better already. I love to have the air touch me. I try to wear thin clothes all the time so it gets through but it isn't the same as being here—like this. Do you think it's the

same? You looked very depressed today, Patrick. I would be sad to if I had slept with some loose girl.

Patrick

I didn't sleep with anyone else today.

Shirley

You were gone all afternoon and you smelled like female fragrance.

Patrick

I just ran errands.

Shirley

You fucked some little girl! I know exactly what happened.

Patrick

I got a job at a barbershop.

Shirley

I don't believe you.

Patrick

I swear. I know we need money. I told Wick—she knows.

Patrick looks to Wick. She merely sits quietly with a doll.

Shirley

We don't need anything but eggs and milk and bread and oil.

Patrick

I need something else.

Shirley

Oh, please I give you all that you could ever need.

Amanda

I'm sorry you're having such trouble with this. Maybe I should help you some more.

Man

I'm not having any trouble noting that you have cultivated a nice eccentricity for yourself.

Amanda

Is that's what's happened here. All along I just thought I was being honest.

Man

Where are you really from?

Amanda

That's a completely illogical thing to ask. Are we playing charades now? I forget all the time that everything's routine—once forgotten—it's pointless even trying after a while. What was your name again?

Shirley

I know I'm not good enough for you. I'm a horrible human being. I'm not very pretty and I haven't read that many books—but I do love you.

Patrick

You're beautiful.

Shirley

Will you take care of me?

Patrick

Yes.

Shirley

Do you promise?

Shirley begins to caress his hair.

Shirley

It's almost time for the whistle.

Patrick

I know. But there are no lights up there.

Shirley

We'll find our way in the dark.

Shirley begins caressing him all over.

Shirley

You're my beautiful strong man, aren't you? You'll never leave me. I make you happy. Right?

Patrick

Yes.

Wick retrieves the box. She has thought about this moment. She has revealed in what may come undone. She thinks of consequence, necessity. Viewing the jaded seduction fuels the toes that move so slowly. Shirley takes no notice of her daughter.

Amanda

You remember, don't you? Do you remember what happened next?

Man

Stop this.

Amanda

You can't leave.

Man

I can leave whenever I feel like it.

Amanda

That wasn't true then and it certainly isn't true now. You want to stay because you want to know how this all turns out.

Man

I was never one for surprise endings—I don't find them believable.

Patrick notices Wicks approach. He feels the panic of safety expired. He tries to distract his mother.

Patrick

Do you remember holding me at night?

Shirley

How could I forget—it's the only thing I look forward to all day.

Patrick

Don't you think the world is getting smaller?

Shirley

Well, it certainly hasn't gotten any larger.

Patrick

Isn't it almost time we went to get warm?

Shirley

It's boiling hot in here.

Patrick

It's the fall. Its practically winter.

Shirley

I'm naked and I can't feel a thing.

Amanda

If I had just showed her earlier she probably would have beat me to death. I should have done that. I'm afraid I could barely speak. Let alone think properly.

Man

I thought you never spoke.

Amanda

I didn't. It wouldn't have changed anything. Can you remember the man yet?

Man

What man?

Amanda

The one you could never remember.

Shirley

Are you hot?

Patrick

Yes?

Shirley

It is hot in here and we haven't even started the furnace this year. Here let me help you with that.

She unbuttons his shirt.

Shirley

Let me help my beautiful young man get more comfortable. There. Now put that silly ladder away. We'll see fine upstairs.

She caresses his hand.

Shirley

I'm not mad at my young man anymore.

As she goes to kiss him,  
Wick opens the box. The  
three are stilled in the most  
unlikely family portrait.

Shirley

Where did this come from?

Patrick is stunned as she  
picks through the pieces.  
Shirley collapses from the  
inside out. Ceiling to  
floorboard with every beam  
breaking.

Shirley

This isn't him. Is this him? I can't stand up under the lights. (offstage) I've taken all the bulbs. You can't find me up there unless I tell you but that would be hard because you're not here. It keeps cutting me off so I can't talk long.

Patrick retrieves his  
stepladder. He opens it and  
sits waiting for the dust to  
settle on the window sills.

Shirley

I'm not trying to explain any of this. I wake up at six in the morning. The bed sheets are stained by that point but I never change them. It only hardens more. I get out a blue nightgown. I make eggs and try to sing songs from the school dance but I never went so I can never carrying a tune. All the fragments of verse and me without a tune. Re, mi, fa. Seven in the morning I picture him sleeping and he turns over just like you. He comes down and you have little chunks of yellow in the corner of your eyes. (giggles) I told you to rub your eyes before you come down. You chew. I watch. The teakettle whistles and Amanda comes down. There are two dogs that aren't ours that come up to the porch and paw at the door. I feed them yolk. You like your yolk runny. It gets in your beard and turns to cement and flakes of when you kiss me. When the sun goes down I go to sleep. But I can't sleep alone. I like my posture. I ran out of money though, I can't buy books.

Patrick starts humming.

Shirley

That's our son. I make love to him every night. Aren't you jealous?

Patrick has lost  
consciousness. He  
understands light fixtures.  
The two stay motionless.

Amanda

Do you have the time?

Man

No.

Amanda

That's funny. I thought you said it was getting late. Funny stuff it all is—isn't it?

Man

Where were you?

Amanda

I was outside—waiting for it to be over. Then I realized it wouldn't end.

Man

You were inside.

Shirley

I'm tired, Patrick. Patrick? Let's go to bed.

Amanda

I should have realized that even in martyrdom, I could not take anyone else's mistakes away. We were the silent prisoner of the past.

Shirley

Don't go to the store tonight. We're all too tired.

Patrick

Go to the store?

Shirley

There are plenty of lemons for our guests.

Shirley collects the lemons  
and goes to the kitchen table.  
She begins to zest them.

Patrick

There are no guests. There are no neighbors. There is no food. And there is no man.

A teakettle whistles. Shirley smiles.

~Note: from here until the end is a dance. The players move through space and time with a weight that is their own (reminiscent of Shirley's flesh).

Amanda

I didn't know what else to do. I went to the oven and turned on the oven to 450 degrees.

Wick's eyes tighten. A pain unlike no other knots the inside. Twenty and the first time.

Amanda

I lit all the burners with one of Dad's matches.

Wick drops both dolls onto the floor.

Amanda

I burned myself. It started to fill with puss right away.

Patrick's eyesight is going quickly.

Amanda

I thought about riding his knee.

Wick finds blood between her thighs. First only droplets, then a river that increases with the moans of remembrance.

Amanda

You gurgling in the cradle. Her in the kitchen making an apple pie for a Grandmother that probably wasn't ours.

Wick tries to stop the bleeding with her doll.



The blister callused right away.

Amanda

Wick searches for anything to stop the pain. She stands. The once white dress is covered in blood. Wick tries in vain to close her legs.

I thought you would see if I did it.

Amanda

Patrick does not see.

I took my bloody hand,

Amanda

Wick takes her hands,

I put two fingers down my throat,

Amanda

She puts two fingers down her throat.

Just to remember how,

Amanda

Wick stops.

And I screamed.

Amanda

She takes the cigar-box from the floor and takes out the matches, the cigarettes, and the photo. She goes into the kitchen. She turns on the oven and opens the door. She turns on the burners. She lights each one. One by one. She has left a trail of blood.

It was more of a yell.

Man

Amanda

I left a trail of blood. I even left my dolls.

Wick goes into the living room. The blood doesn't stop.

Amanda

Twenty years of me running out onto the floor. I tried to collect it all.

Wick gets down on her hands and knees. Hand to hand. Hand to mouth. Hand inserted into mouth. One pinch. Wick screams.

Amanda

You looked up, surprised to hear my voice.

Man

You were bleeding.

All lights begin to dim. The lights off the stove are the brightest on stage.

Amanda

My dress had turned from white to brown. Little pieces of me were falling all over the place.

Patrick goes to his sister. Confused, he lifts her into his arms. Blood begins to drip down his chest.

Amanda

I ran outside because you were upstairs in her bed. I knew you would take me away when you found me.

Man

We were all in the kitchen.

Patrick carries her to the front door.

Amanda

I knew I had time to get out of the house because you wouldn't come down naked. You put on a flannel shirt and old jeans. I hoped you would put on shoes because the ground was frozen. You hadn't. You're feet were bare.

Patrick opens the door to get his sister air. Patrick stares out not noticing the two figures in the shadows on the porch. Wick sees them, but can say nothing.

Amanda

I had all closed all the windows earlier that day. I waited for you to come outside and I closed the door when I saw you go out into the field.

Patrick cradles his sister as the blood continues to flow.

Amanda

Suddenly I could speak—but I didn't want to say anything until the door was closed and the house was locked.

Wick murmurs, delusional with pain.

Amanda

But I did—I got you. Click, click, click. Surprise!

All four eyes meet in quiet union with time.

Amanda

I put you in the Buick and we were gone. I knew she would still be asleep when the road was cracked open by the sun.

Patrick closes the door. Click, click, click. He lifts his sister and carries her up the stairs.

Man

He meant to take us with him. In the Buick. But it wouldn't start. He carried me back in his arms—you clutched onto his slacks. He set us down on the porch. You raised my

arm, we mimed goodbye and he was gone. (pause) Maybe we should go in now—it's almost dark.

Amanda

Yes.

The two enter the house.  
Shirley looks up at her children.

Shirley

There are my two beautiful children. Where have you been?

Shirley rises from the table and follows the two upstairs. The lights fade slowly. The man goes to the stepladder and sits on the top rung. As Shirley exits, her mumbling trails off into the dark.

Shirley

I was taking a nap. It was so hot up there. Stifling. Stifling hot. And dark...

She is gone.

Amanda

How does everything look from up there?

Man

Grey. (pause) He's a shade of grey.

Amanda takes out a pack of cigarettes and matches.

Man

Is the gas still on?

Amanda

I never turned it off.

Man

Wick?

Amanda

Yes Patrick?

You don't smoke.

Man

Just as Amanda lights a  
match the lights go out.

**End.**