

Back to the Beginning

A Play in Two Acts

By

Carla Duval

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Abstract

In terms of simple science, time is a force that moves in one direction: forward. This, however, is not the way time is usually interpreted by people experiencing it. Works of fiction can capture human perceptions of time far better than the hard facts surrounding it. For my thesis, I wrote a play in anachronic order. My play has scenes that alternate between the past (1960s) and the present (1980s). The present scenes move forward in time, and the past scenes move backward in time as the play progresses. The final scene is simultaneously the first and last scene of the play, chronologically. In this way, I hope to give more background information on the characters at the same rate that the story progresses further. My play is a 'slice-of-life' story of a broken family, alternating between the courtship of Caroline and Scott and Scott's return after a 18-year disappearance in order to connect with his daughter, Lori.

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Cast of Characters

<u>Red:</u>	The narrator and observer of the play. Red should be on the younger side.
<u>Caroline Springer:</u>	A woman who ages from 19 to 39 during the course of the play.
<u>Scott Brooks:</u>	A man who ages from 22 to 42 during the course of the play.
<u>Lori Brooks:</u>	Their 18-year-old daughter.

Scene

Ross, CA

Time

1965-1967, 1985

Author's Note: It might be helpful to rehearse the scenes in chronological order, in which case, that order would be: 2.7, 2.5, 2.3, 2.1, 1.7, 1.5, 1.3, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7. The character Red can be played by either a male or a female actor. This decision will change the meaning of Red's role slightly, but both interpretations are acceptable. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to Red with a masculine pronoun throughout.

ACT IScene 1

The stage is bare except for one seat off to the far right (Red's seat). The lights are on at half capacity. Red enters along with the audience and takes a seat. Red is dressed entirely in the color red, including his shoes, his watch, and even his underwear if possible (although this will never actually be seen in the show). Once the last of the audience trickles in, the lights come up, yet nothing happens. After a few uncomfortable moments, a spotlight shines on Red, who is seated within the audience. Red makes his way to the stage, clumsily jostling a few audience members along the way, and loudly whispering, "Excuse me" and "I'm so sorry." Red makes his way to center stage, and opens his arms in friendly welcome.

RED

Well, hello there ladies and gentlemen. So sorry to keep you waiting, but that seems to be a requirement in theatre, no matter what time is printed on your ticket.

(Pause.)

Actually, could I please see your ticket?

Red approaches an audience member in the front row and looks at his/her ticket. He then checks his watch. As Red speaks, the action he narrates begins to take place behind him.

RED

I guess we'd better get started then! The year is 1967. January, to be specific. The place: Ross, California. And yes, it's a real place. It's a little town near the coast of Southern California. It is often overlooked. Only an hour from San Francisco. We are in the small, quaint bedroom of Caroline Brooks (maiden name Springer) and Scott Brooks. The couple are preparing for bed after a very...demanding day. Caroline sits at an old vanity, brushing her hair.

Caroline enters, carrying a chair. She places the chair and sits, running her fingers through her hair.

RED

A record player plays music in the background.

Red snaps his fingers. Soft music begins to play. Something similar to the Beatles "Eight Days a Week."

(CONTINUED)

RED

Scott sits on the bed, going over some pretty extensive paperwork.

Scott brings a bed on stage and places it off to one side. The bed consists of only a mattress on a frame, no sheets, pillows, or blankets. Scott sits on the bed and goes through a stack of papers.

RED

(Smiling.)

See you soon.

Red takes his seat. Caroline starts to sing along to the music.

SCOTT

(Frustrated.)

Can you turn that off?

CAROLINE

Yes, of course.

The music stops. Scott mumbles under his breath. Caroline goes to sit next to Scott on the bed. She reads over his shoulder.

CAROLINE

How's it going?

SCOTT

(Mumbling.)

Codicils...codicils...

CAROLINE

(Gently.)

It means an addition that modifies a previous will.

SCOTT

I know what it means, Carrie. I just don't know what will it's talking about. There should only be one.

CAROLINE

Sorry.

(Pause.)

I was just trying to help.

SCOTT

I don't need help with this.

Red exits.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Look, I know you're upset. Shutting me out isn't going to do you any good.

SCOTT

I'm not shutting you out, I'm just trying to read this *fucking* stack of papers in peace.

Red has returned on stage with a basket, quietly humming a lullaby. He stands off to the side and doesn't move.

CAROLINE

Scott! Keep your voice down.

Caroline goes over to where Red is standing and reaches her hand inside the basket. She makes shushing and cooing sounds to calm her child.

CAROLINE

You need to control yourself in front of the baby.

SCOTT

(Mumbling.)

Kids adapt.

Caroline wheels around.

CAROLINE

What did you just say?

SCOTT

Will you let me finish this? Please?

CAROLINE

Look, you need to watch your volume, that's all I'm trying to say. Is that too much to ask?

SCOTT

My dad's *dead*, Caroline. *Dead*. All I'm trying to do is sort through his will, and you're telling me I should be more concerned with my *volume*?

CAROLINE

Yes, Scott, I am. And honestly...I'm surprised that you're still working on the will instead of being with your mother and your sisters. They need you.

SCOTT

I'm helping them by getting this all sorted out.

CAROLINE

That's not the kind of help they need right now.

SCOTT

(Yelling.)

Dammit, Carrie! You know we need that money.

Red starts crying. Caroline takes the basket and rocks it back and forth. Red goes to his seat worriedly.

CAROLINE

(Evenly.)

What you need, is to take a walk.

SCOTT

(Loudly.)

Don't you *dare* talk down to me, Carrie.

CAROLINE

I'm not talking down to you.

SCOTT

(Breathing heavily.)

You were never like this before. You always used to be on my side.

Caroline puts the basket on the bed.

CAROLINE

(Pleading.)

Scott...you're not the only one who needs my attention anymore. Can't you understand that?

Scott rubs the area below his collar bone, gripping slightly.

SCOTT

(Pause.)

I'm going to take that walk.

CAROLINE

Don't be gone for too long.

SCOTT

Yeah.

Scott storms off stage. The door slams. There is the sound of a car starting.

CAROLINE

Scott? Scott!

Caroline begins to run off stage, but stops. She looks back at the basket. She looks off stage. Lights fade. In the darkness, Caroline and Red take the bed off stage with the basket.

Scene 2

Red peeks on stage before entering.

RED

Let's take a peek into the future now. It's May, 1985. Eighteen years after the night Scott left, seemingly for good. We're now at Kelly's Diner, a quintessential, all-American diner. The kind with drawings done in crayon on the back of placemats that then get stuck to the wall. Music is playing from the radio overhead.

Red snaps his fingers at the sound booth. Music plays. The song is something similar to "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" by Tears for Fears. Red goes to his seat. Scott enters, carrying a table. He places the table in front of the already present chair. He sits. He realizes that there is a piece of freshly chewed gum under the table and reacts accordingly. A young waitress enters. Her name tag says, "LORI." She places a placemat on the table.

LORI

Hello there, welcome to Kelly's Diner. My name is Lori, and I will be taking care of you today. Can I get you a drink to start you off?

SCOTT

(Pause. Speaking softly as he stares at Lori.)

I'll, uh...um, I'll just have a cup of coffee. Black, please.

LORI

You got it.

Lori exits. Scott bounces his left leg and rubs the back of his neck. He is uncomfortable. He pulls out a newspaper clipping from his pocket, scans it, then quickly tucks it away again. Lori enters, carrying a cup of coffee.

LORI

All right, here we go.

She places the mug in front of Scott.

(CONTINUED)

LORI

Be careful, it's very hot.

SCOTT

Will do.

LORI

You know, I haven't met many people who drink their coffee black around here, other than me.

SCOTT

Is that so?

LORI

Yupp. The stronger the better.

(Smiling.)

Are you all set to order, or do you need a few more minutes?

SCOTT

I'm actually all set with just the coffee, thanks.

LORI

Oh, okay. Be sure to let me know if you need anything else.

She starts to leave.

SCOTT

Uh, miss?

LORI

Yes?

SCOTT

Do you...uh...know if it's supposed to rain later?

LORI

I'm not sure. I can see if someone left a newspaper by the counter if you'd like.

SCOTT

Oh, don't worry about it. Thanks anyway.

LORI

No problem.

She starts to leave.

SCOTT

Excuse me?

LORI

Yes?

SCOTT

(Awkwardly.)

This may seem like a strange question, but was your...picture in the paper last week?

Lori rubs the back of her neck.

LORI

Oh, yeah, it was actually.

SCOTT

I thought you looked familiar.

(Jokingly.)

Are you some kind of local celebrity or something?

LORI

(Laughing.)

No, no. It's nothing like that.

SCOTT

There must have been some reason.

LORI

It was part of the article on Redwood High's graduating class.

SCOTT

They picked your picture out of everyone's in the class? That's pretty special.

LORI

Well, the paper only prints the picture of the valedictorian, so...

SCOTT

Oh, wow...Congratulations.

LORI

Thank you.

Scott takes a sip of the coffee. He makes a gagging sound.

SCOTT

Actually, could you get me some cream and sugar after all? When you get the chance.

LORI

(Laughing.)

Right away.

(CONTINUED)

Lori exits. Red enters with a second chair, another cup of coffee (in a red mug, of course), and another placemat. He places the chair across from Scott. Red slouches in the seat and silently watches the scene, taking a sip from his coffee whenever Scott does. He occasionally colors on the placemat with a red crayon throughout the scene. Scott takes out the newspaper clipping from his pocket. He skims it quickly and then puts it away as Lori enters.

LORI

Here you go.

She puts down several sugar packets and creamer singles on the table.

SCOTT

Thanks.

LORI

No problem.

Lori starts to exit.

SCOTT

So, do you have any plans for after graduation?

He puts two packets of sugar and two creamers into his cup and stirs. Red sips the black coffee.

LORI

I'm actually going to this college out east.

SCOTT

Whereabouts?

LORI

NYU.

SCOTT

That's pretty far away from home.

LORI

Yeah, it is. I'm a little nervous, but I think I'm mostly excited. Go out on my own, you know? See new places, meet new people. Yadda yadda.

SCOTT

I know what you mean. What are you planning to study?

LORI

I'm not sure yet. I figure I'll just take whatever class sounds interesting and hope that something sticks. Maybe go into Law.

SCOTT

Well, whatever you do, I'm sure you'll do great. You're valedictorian after all.

LORI

Yeah, but being number one in a nowhere town doesn't really count for much.

SCOTT

Sure it does. Even if Ross isn't really the greatest place to be from, one thing the people here have is strong character.

(Chuckling.)

Now, whether or not that character is a good one is another issue...But you seem to be a good kid, so you'll do just fine.

(Pause.)

You'll have more of an edge than you think.

LORI

Hopefully...I do have some family out there in case I need anything. I haven't seen them since I was a little kid though.

SCOTT

It's still good to have family you can count on, even if you're not all that close.

LORI

Yeah, that's the truth.

Scott takes a final swig from his coffee, as does Red. Scott stands and hands Lori a fifty dollar bill.

SCOTT

Here.

LORI

I'll go grab you some change.

SCOTT

No, that's all right. You keep it.

LORI

But...but this is fifty dollars. Are you sure?

SCOTT

Good luck in college. And thanks for the chat.

LORI

Wow, thank you so much. Have a great day!

SCOTT

You too.

Scott exits as Lori clears the table. Lori exits.

Scene 3

Red stands and tucks the crayon into his pocket. As he describes the setting, he runs his hands over the imaginary objects.

RED

This is Scott and Caroline's kitchen as it was in April, 1966. It's small, and a bit worn down, but it's home, you know? These chairs were purchased at different tag sales last month, shortly after the couple moved in. We have an old, circular rug underneath.

Red crouches down and runs his hand over the floor's surface.

RED

A bit dusty. There's a lovely bouquet of flowers that sits on the table, brightening the room considerably.
(Aside.)

They also help with the smell left over from the apartment's previous owner.

Red picks one of the flowers and holds it to his nose. He walks to his seat as Caroline enters anxiously with a third chair and a dishrag. She sits in the chair and begins scrubbing viciously at a spot on the table with her face bent close. Scott enters.

SCOTT

(Surprised.)

What are you doing home early, Carrie?

CAROLINE

I wasn't feeling well, so Mr. Hollis told me that I should go home and get some rest.

SCOTT

That was nice of him. Are you feeling any better now?

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Yes. At least, I think so anyway.

Caroline stands. She unfolds the dishrag, smooths it, and begins to refold it with even more precision.

SCOTT

It was a pretty slow day for me.

CAROLINE

(Overlapping.)

I just had some stomach issues.

SCOTT

(Overlapping.)

Only three cars showed up.

CAROLINE

(Overlapping.)

Nothing to worry about really. I'm fine.

SCOTT

(Overlapping.)

Dad and I were able to take care of them in no time. There was a lot of just...doing nothing in between, you know?

CAROLINE

(Coyly.)

I'm glad to know that you're so good at taking care of things.

SCOTT

Hmm?

CAROLINE

It's an important skill to have.

SCOTT

(Confused.)

Yeah, I guess so. But you already knew that I can fix cars like nobody else in Ross.

CAROLINE

Especially when there are those who can't take care of themselves.

SCOTT

(Matter of fact.)

Well, yeah. People only come to the shop if they can't fix the problem themselves.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

(Pause. Trying to be more obvious.)

There are some *people* who need others to take care of them. So I'm glad to know that you are able to take care of things like that. Right?

SCOTT

Carrie...I don't understand.

Red walks over to stand next to Caroline. They both stare at Scott.

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

I'm pregnant.

RED

(Simultaneously.)

She's pregnant.

SCOTT

(Silence.)

What?

CAROLINE

We--we're going to have a baby, Scott.

SCOTT

A-are you sure?

CAROLINE

Yes.

SCOTT

Oh...

(Pause.)

Oh--oh my God. Carrie, I-I don't even know what to say.

CAROLINE

Just say something. Anything.

SCOTT

We...we can't afford...

CAROLINE

(Hurt.)

That's the first thing you say?

SCOTT

(Frustrated.)

It's true, Carrie. We can't afford to have a-a child.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

It's a little late for that, Scott. We'll have to make it work somehow. We don't have a choice.

SCOTT

I mean...we could always, you know...

CAROLINE

No.

SCOTT

Okay.

(Long pause.)

Okay.

Scott and Caroline stare at each other. Caroline takes a tentative step towards Scott.

CAROLINE

(Struggling to speak.)

Scott? Please Scott. I-I can't do this a--

Scott rushes at Caroline and they embrace. Scott swings Caroline in the air and lets her down gently. He suddenly looks nervous and checks Caroline's stomach in case he might have hurt the baby. She laughs. Red sits at the table and continues to scrub where Caroline left off. He continues throughout the scene, exiting only when he is satisfied.

SCOTT

I can't believe it.

CAROLINE

I can't believe it either.

SCOTT

(Pause.)

Jesus. I'm going to be a father.

CAROLINE

(Laughing.)

Yes, you are.

SCOTT

And you're going to be a mother.

CAROLINE

Yes...I am.

SCOTT

(Pause.)

What's wrong?

CAROLINE

It's nothing.

SCOTT

Carrie...

CAROLINE

What?

SCOTT

Come on. Talk to me.

CAROLINE

(Sighing.)

When you said that I'm going to be a mother...it all became a lot more *real* to me.

SCOTT

But isn't this what we wanted? I mean, maybe not right now, but...soon? Eventually?

CAROLINE

Yes. Absolutely. I want to have a child--we want to have a child. But, as silly as this sounds, I guess I didn't fully realize that having a child would make me a-a mother.

SCOTT

Oh Carrie, stop worrying; you're going to be a great mother.

CAROLINE

How can you know that?

SCOTT

Because you're already kind and caring. Having a child just puts that into overdrive. And with your dream, well, you must have at least *some* natural connection with children.

CAROLINE

I guess so...

SCOTT

I'd be freaking out too if I had a parasite growing inside of me.

Caroline lightly punches Scott's arm.

SCOTT

(Smiling.)

What?

CAROLINE

(Smiling.)

You're unbelievable.

(Pause.)

But you're right. This is what we wanted.

SCOTT

(Quietly.)

This is what we wanted...

(Pause.)

What should we name it?

CAROLINE

That depends on if it's a boy or a girl, I suppose.

SCOTT

Or we could pick something like "Alex" or "Sam."

CAROLINE

No...I think we should pick a name for if it's a boy,
and a name for if it's a girl.

SCOTT

I've always liked the name "Scott" for a boy.

CAROLINE

Really? I can't imagine why. It's such an awful name.

SCOTT

Hey.

CAROLINE

(Laughing.)

I'm just kidding. But I don't want our baby to be a
"junior" or a "the second." I want the name to be
something unique to her. Or him. Somehow...we'll just
know when we know.

SCOTT

All right then. We'll just know when we know.

CAROLINE

I think I'm going to lie down a bit before starting
dinner.*Scott rubs the back of his neck.*

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

That's probably a good idea.

CAROLINE

Don't let me sleep for too long, okay?

SCOTT

Sure thing.

Caroline exits. As soon as she is out of sight, Scott's shoulders slump. He braces himself against the table, breathing heavily. He grabs at the top of his chest, right beneath his collar bone and looks straight out. He grits his teeth. After a moment, Scott straightens himself decidedly and exits in the same direction as Caroline. Lights fade.

Scene 4

Red enters looking at his watch.

RED

Back to the future. But...not the one with plutonium and Michael J. Fox. No, this is back to May, 1985. The kitchen looks a little more lived-in than before, with dishes drying in a dish rack and papers stuck to the refrigerator with magnets. Lori works on a particularly difficult essay comparing the *Catcher in the Rye* to the *Communist Manifesto*.

Lori enters and sits at the table. She works on her essay.

RED

Caroline is going through a stack of bills.

Caroline enters and sits at the table next to Lori. She works through a stack of bills.

RED

She occasionally chews on the end of her pen, which is a bad habit of hers since childhood--although if you ask her about it, she will deny it entirely.

Red takes out a red pen and chews on the end of it as he goes to his seat.

LORI

Hey, Mom?

CAROLINE

(Not looking up.)

Yes?

LORI

What's the grammar rule about "lie" and "lay?" I can never remember that one.

CAROLINE

You lie on the sofa, but you lay the pillow on the sofa.

LORI

That's right.

Lori erases part of her sentence.

CAROLINE

But "lay" is also the past tense of "lie."

LORI

Yeah, I knew that one. The whole thing is so stupid.

CAROLINE

What whole thing?

LORI

The English language.

CAROLINE

(Smiling.)

Just be thankful you're almost done.

LORI

Yes. I'm so thankful that I'm almost done with this essay so I can start the next one. And then the one after that.

CAROLINE

I didn't mean almost done with the paper.

LORI

Oh. Well, I'm still in denial about that part.

CAROLINE

You've got time; don't worry.

There is the sound of someone knocking on a door.

CAROLINE

Could you go get that for me?

LORI

Sure.

*Lori stands and makes her way over to the door.
She peers through the peephole.*

LORI

That's weird...

CAROLINE

What is it?

LORI

Uh, hello again...

(Pause.)

Can...I help you?

SCOTT

Hi, uh, yes. I'm here to see Caroline Brooks.

Caroline stiffens.

LORI

(Confused.)

Oh. Okay. Just a second. Mom...it's for you.

Caroline does not respond.

LORI

Mom?

CAROLINE

Would you please go to your room?

LORI

What? Why?

CAROLINE

Just go to your room. Now.

LORI

All right, I'm going, I'm going.

*Lori gathers her homework from the table and exits
with a huff.*

SCOTT

Hi, Carrie.

CAROLINE

Don't.

SCOTT

Is it...all right if I come in?

Caroline stares at the stack of papers before her as Scott stares at the back of her head. He slowly walks over to the table and places his hands on the back of Lori's now vacant chair. He continues to stare at Caroline and she continues to avoid eye contact. They wait in silence.

SCOTT

Carrie?

Caroline's head snaps up.

CAROLINE

(In disbelief.)

What?

SCOTT

I-I know I'm probably the last person you want to see, but...

Scott's voice trails off. Long pause before Caroline launches herself at Scott.

CAROLINE

Get out! Get out! GET OUT!

Caroline tries to forcibly and violently remove Scott from their once shared home by swinging at him with her chair. She repeats the line, "How could you?" or something similar as Scott repeats, "Carrie, stop" or "Carrie, listen." Red makes his way under the table, closing his eyes and covering his ears. Scott eventually overpowers Caroline and takes the chair from her. He slowly puts it on the ground by his feet.

SCOTT

Are you out of your fucking mind?

Caroline reaches for another chair, threatening to start attacking again.

CAROLINE

GET OUT!

Caroline stands with her fists clenched. Scott exits and the door slams. Caroline brings the chair back to the table, breathing heavily as she removes the evidence. Lori peers at the scene from off stage. They freeze. The lights fade out.

Scene 5

Caroline and Lori exit during the blackout. Caroline takes the bills with her. When the lights come back up, Red crawls out from under the table and brushes himself off.

RED

March, 1966. This kitchen is mostly empty now, with a thin layer of dust coating every surface. There is the distinct smell of cat litter in the air.

There is the sound of rattling keys off stage.

RED

Here comes Scott, the somewhat proud, new owner of this apartment.

Scott enters, carrying two large boxes with the words "Kitchen" and "Living Room" scrawled hastily on the sides and tops with black marker.

RED

And here comes his new bride.

Red softly sings a short segment of something similar to Felix Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." Caroline enters, carrying a significantly lighter box with the word "Carrie" written neatly on the surface.

SCOTT

Well, here we are.
(Pause.)
What do you think?

CAROLINE

(Taking a moment to look around.)
I think it's absolutely wonderful, Scott!

Caroline puts the box down on the floor. She runs over to Scott and kisses him. Red goes to his seat.

SCOTT

It's all right for a starting point.

Scott goes over to the table and drops the boxes heavily. The bottom one rattles with silverware.

CAROLINE

(Laughing.)
Why would we need anything more than this?

(CONTINUED)

Scott doesn't reply.

CAROLINE

Don't forget that we still have all those wedding gifts, too.

SCOTT

(Groaning.)

Do we have to keep all that stuff? I mean, we don't need that many crock pots.

CAROLINE

We at least need to keep them until the person who gave them to us sees us use them. It would be rude otherwise. Let's just start unpacking these first.

Scott opens the silverware box first and slides it to Caroline. He then opens the box marked "Living Room" and then the one marked "Carrie." He pulls out the first item in the box. It is a very elegant, yet modest dress.

SCOTT

How come I've never seen you wear this?

CAROLINE

(Looking up briefly from her task.
Simply.)

I don't really have many occasions to wear something like that.

SCOTT

(Ashamed.)

Oh.

CAROLINE

(Smiling.)

But our firm is holding a big party in a couple of months. If I'm invited, I might wear it then.

SCOTT

Why wouldn't you be invited?

CAROLINE

I'm still at the bottom of the food chain. No one really notices me.

SCOTT

You've been working there for months. It has to be getting better.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

(Agitated.)

I don't understand how there can be so many water stains on these. I know my aunt and I dried them completely after every meal.

Scott picks up a small, red notebook from the box. He flips through it.

CAROLINE

I wonder if my uncle has been sneaking extra food at night--

SCOTT

Carrie?

CAROLINE

Yes?

SCOTT

What's this?

CAROLINE

Oh, that? That's nothing.

Caroline walks over and takes the notebook from Scott. She puts it back in the box.

CAROLINE

It's just something silly. It's like a diary.

Scott takes the notebook out of the box once again. He opens it and holds it high above his head.

SCOTT

Doesn't look like a diary to me.

CAROLINE

Come on, Scott. Stop.

SCOTT

I didn't think that showing an interest in you was an issue.

CAROLINE

It's just...it's kind of embarrassing. And really personal.

SCOTT

(Sighing.)

All right. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I just don't like you keeping secrets.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

You don't keep any secrets from me?

SCOTT

(Quickly.)

Not that I can think of.

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

You can open it.

SCOTT

Are you sure?

CAROLINE

Yes.

Red enters, carrying a red winter hat. He acts out the story.

SCOTT

(Reading.)

"Once upon a time, there was a little, worn-out winter hat. The hat wanted so much to be a lucky hat. He told all of the other clothes and shoes in the closet about all the good luck he could bring to anyone who put him on. But the other clothes just laughed and laughed at him, telling him that there was nothing lucky about a winter hat..." What is this?

CAROLINE

It's a children's story, or, at least, the scribbles of one. It ends with the hat helping a little girl get a kitten out of the tree.

Scott laughs. Red puts the hat on and pretends to lift a cat out of the tree. He pets the cat as he exits.

CAROLINE

I told you it was embarrassing.

SCOTT

(Catching his breath.)

No, no. I think it's great!

CAROLINE

(Overlapping.)

Please, don't.

SCOTT

Don't what?

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Pretend that you like it to make me feel better...

SCOTT

(Overlapping.)

I do like it! I think it'd be great for kids.

Scott flips through the book.

CAROLINE

Most of the pages are just filled with one-word notes or random rhymes...I am thematically stuck with making inanimate objects animate.

SCOTT

Nothing wrong with that. I'm sure kids are getting sick of barnyard animals by now.

CAROLINE

(Embarrassed.)

I-I always thought that I would be a children's author one day.

SCOTT

Hey.

Scott holds Caroline.

SCOTT

You still can be.

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

I'm nowhere near good enough for that.

SCOTT

Why don't you ask one of the publishers at your company to read these? See if they like them?

Caroline takes the notebook and puts it back in the box. She goes back to the silverware.

CAROLINE

(Mumbling.)

It was part of my plan.

SCOTT

What plan?

CAROLINE

(Taking a deep breath.)

I-I had a plan. To become a children's author. My senior year of high school, I applied for entry-level

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE (cont'd)

jobs at several publishing firms in New York, and a couple near where I had relatives. I got accepted to a few of them, but...I needed a change of scenery. So I came here--the farthest place I could go, and decided to just commute to San Francisco.

(Pause.)

I thought that if I worked really hard and was nice to all of my coworkers, I would eventually have the chance to get my work published.

SCOTT

Makes sense.

CAROLINE

But that didn't happen. No one cares about me at work. When I try to be nice they--they just think I'm a suck up. And I do work hard, I really do, but it makes me so tired that I...just don't have the energy to write anymore.

SCOTT

(Pause.)

Oh, Carrie.

There is the sound of a car horn coming from outside.

SCOTT

That's probably the furniture. I--I should go help out.

CAROLINE

(Quietly.)

Okay.

SCOTT

I'll be right back up.

Scott kisses Caroline on the forehead.

SCOTT

I promise.

Scott exits. Caroline picks up her notebook and slowly flips through it. She tosses it back into the box. The lights fade.

Scene 6

During the blackout, the boxes are removed off stage. Caroline and Lori resume their positions from at the end of Scene 4. The lights come up and Red enters. Caroline and Lori do not move.

RED

May, 1985. The same night, the same moment, actually, after Scott visited Caroline and Lori's home.

Red shivers and goes to his seat. Caroline and Lori regain motion. Caroline is breathing heavily, having just kicked Scott out. Lori peers on stage.

LORI

(Quietly.)

M-Mom?

CAROLINE

(Startled.)

What are you doing?

LORI

What the *hell* is going on?

CAROLINE

I told you to go to your room.

LORI

I was in my room but I--

CAROLINE

You should have stayed in your room.

LORI

Mom, I--

CAROLINE

(Shaking her head.)

Stop, Lori.

LORI

Mom! Listen to me!

Caroline looks up at Lori.

LORI

Please, just tell me what's going on.

CAROLINE

Nothing. Just someone trying to sell something. That's all.

(CONTINUED)

LORI

You're really going to lie to my face, Mom?

CAROLINE

Lori...

Caroline begins to cry.

LORI

Oh, Mom...don't cry.

Lori hugs her mother tightly. Caroline wipes away her tears.

CAROLINE

It's fine. I'm fine.

LORI

(Softly.)

I don't believe you.

(Pause.)

I've seen that man before, at the diner.

CAROLINE

What?

LORI

I told you about him. He's the one who gave me the really big tip.

CAROLINE

W-What did he say to you?

LORI

I'm not going to talk to you if you're not going to talk to me.

CAROLINE

Lori.

LORI

Mom.

(Pause.)

Mom...I think I might know who that guy is, but I just want to hear it coming from you.

CAROLINE

I promise you that it's...no one important to us.

LORI

Then why hide it?

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Lori, please. I'm way too tired for this right now.
We'll talk in the morning, okay?

Lori blocks Caroline's path.

LORI

No, Mom, we're going to talk now.

Long pause. Caroline begins to shake.

CAROLINE

He...he...

(Pause.)

He was your father, Lori, okay? But he gave up that title a long time ago.

LORI

I thought so...

CAROLINE

(Quietly.)

How did you know?

Lori rubs the back of her neck.

LORI

I'm not entirely sure, to be honest. Something about him just seemed familiar.

(Pause.)

But I guess that doesn't make any sense, huh?

CAROLINE

You were barely a month old when he left.

(Pause.)

What did he say to you? At the diner.

LORI

Not much, really. He just said that he saw my picture in the paper and we talked about college and stuff like that.

CAROLINE

I see.

LORI

(Pause.)

It's kind of funny. I always thought that he must be some sort of monster, you know, after doing what he did to you. To me.

(Pause.)

But he just seemed like a normal guy.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

That's exactly what he is.

LORI

I wonder how he saw my picture in the paper.

CAROLINE

(With hesitation.)

Lori, he came back to California several years ago.

LORI

What?

CAROLINE

He never came into Ross as far as I know, but he settled down a few towns over.

LORI

H-How do you know this?

CAROLINE

People talk.

LORI

(Getting angry.)

And you never thought to tell me?

CAROLINE

He made his choice, Lori. What he did after that was of no concern to either of us.

LORI

(Shouting.)

I can't believe you would keep that hidden from me. I can't believe--

CAROLINE

I didn't want you to go see him.

LORI

You don't even know that I would have. That--that isn't your choice to make!

CAROLINE

Do you want to see him now?

LORI

I don't know, maybe, but--

CAROLINE

He will only hurt you, Lori.

(CONTINUED)

LORI

You don't know that.

CAROLINE

Yes, I do.

LORI

Mom, listen--

CAROLINE

No, Lori. You need to listen to me. Your father...is a cowardly, jealous man who can't let anyone be happy unless he is happy first. He left me to raise you all alone...and as much as I wouldn't trade what you and I have for anything in the world...it certainly wasn't easy. But I had to keep going. I didn't have a choice.

LORI

Mom...

CAROLINE

And I can't just let him waltz back into our lives like everything is perfectly fine. I can't let him hurt you the way he hurt me. I won't. I won't.

LORI

(Pause.)

I love you, Mom.

CAROLINE

I love you too, Lori.

LORI

But...if something happened to make him want to see us, then...maybe he's changed. I appreciate all of the sacrifices you've made for me, more than I could ever say, but I think this is something that I need to do.

(Pause.)

I'll always be left wondering, "What if--?" if I don't.

CAROLINE

(Long pause. Quietly.)

Then I guess I can't stop you. You'll...you'll have to live by your own decisions.

Lori hugs her mother.

LORI

Thank you.

Lights fade.

Scene 7

Red moves two of the chairs so that they are on either side of the table. Scott and Caroline enter from opposite sides of the stage, each carrying a fork. They put the forks down on the table and take a seat.

RED

(With a bad French accent.)

Bonsoir mesdames et messieurs. It is January, 1966. An evening at a fancy, but not too fancy restaurant.

Red exits, taking the third chair off stage. Scott is looking around nervously. Caroline is agitated. She is in the middle of talking. She speaks very quickly as she talks about her day.

CAROLINE

So then my *mother* calls me at work--lord knows how she got my extension number--and she's going on and on about how there was this big storm all up the east coast. And she's calling me to figure out why I didn't call her to check in, like she's trying to make me feel like a bad daughter or something for not checking the national weather every stinking day.

SCOTT

Uh-huh.

CAROLINE

Turned out to just be a few snow flurries, but I should have called on the assumption that it *might* have been a storm. I mean, if I were expected to call every time something bad *might* happen, I'd never be off the phone with her.

SCOTT

Yeah that'd be a lot --

CAROLINE

(Counting on her fingers.)

Every time they go in the car, every time they open the mail and get a paper cut, every time they eat a meal, and hell, every time my mom turns on the stove it could be an absolute disaster. I swear, if I'm anything like her when I'm older, just do everyone a favor and lock me up somewhere far, far away.

SCOTT

Come on, Carrie, it can't be *that* bad.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

You have no idea.

Red enters with a red towel folded over his arm. He is carrying a two empty plates intended to be chocolate cake and apple pie. The "chocolate cake" has an engagement ring in it. Since the desserts are not there, the ring is clearly visible on the plate. He places them in front of Scott and Caroline respectively. Caroline and Scott do not look at him. Red goes to his seat.

CAROLINE

Coming out here and moving in with my aunt and uncle was the best decision I ever made. My mother didn't support it, of course, but my dad always had a soft spot for me. He had the final word.

SCOTT

(Hopeful.)

Well, I'm glad you moved out here too. I bet some of that cake will help with your bad day.

CAROLINE

(Not touching the cake.)

I just wish they had another flavor besides chocolate.

SCOTT

What? Why? You love chocolate cake.

CAROLINE

(Cutting him off.)

Yeah, I do, but I bought myself a big pack of M&M's after work to try to cheer myself up, so I've had my fill for the day. Even though I did end up spilling half of the bag...

SCOTT

Wow, Carrie, that sounds, uh, really rough.

CAROLINE

And you know that freak fifteen minute thunder storm we had? Of course that happened right as I was walking to the car.

SCOTT

Come on, Carrie. Just try some of the cake. I'm sure it will help.

Scott takes a bite of his pie.

SCOTT

See? I feel loads better.

CAROLINE

Let me try some of yours first.

Caroline pulls Scott's plate towards her and takes a bite. Red tucks his towel in his shirt like a napkin.

CAROLINE

Oh my God, this is amazing!

SCOTT

Uh, yeah, I guess it's pretty good.

CAROLINE

If you don't like it, do you want to switch?

SCOTT

What? No. You gotta eat your cake.

CAROLINE

But I'm not really in the mood for chocolate. And you don't seem to like yours very much, so...

Caroline switches plates with Scott

SCOTT

No, I think it's great. I want it back.

Scott moves the plates back to their original positions.

CAROLINE

Well, next time the waiter stops by, I'm ordering some of that instead.

SCOTT

N-no! You have to eat your cake now.

CAROLINE

Why?

SCOTT

This place isn't cheap you know. I'd hate for it to go to waste.

CAROLINE

I got paid on Friday. I can cover the second dessert, okay? It's fine.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

(Getting annoyed.)
Come on Carrie, you're being way too difficult.

CAROLINE

Why can't I eat the dessert I actually want to eat?

SCOTT

You're going to like the cake. I promise.

CAROLINE

(Raising voice.)
I'm just not in the mood for chocolate right now.

SCOTT

Stop causing a scene.

CAROLINE

I'm causing a scene? You're unbelievable. I think you're the one who needs to "stop causing a scene" here. I'm not eating the stupid cake.

Scott sighs, defeated. He leans on the table and pushes the cake as close to Caroline as possible, without knocking it over. He lets his hand linger and rests his head on the table.

SCOTT

(Mumbling.)
Will you please eat the fucking cake?

CAROLINE

If it's that important to you...

Caroline takes a bite of her cake.

CAROLINE

(Halfheartedly.)
Yum...

SCOTT

Keep going.

Caroline takes another bite of her cake. She bites into something hard.

CAROLINE

Ow!

Caroline spits a small diamond ring into her hand.

CAROLINE

What...what is this?

Scott gingerly takes the ring out of her hand and walks around the table, getting down on one knee.

SCOTT

Caroline Springer, even when you're having a bad day and being a real pain in the ass, I still wanna spend the rest of my life with you.

Caroline stares. Scott suddenly gets nervous.

SCOTT

Will...will you marry me?

CAROLINE

Oh. Oh, Scott.

Caroline looks between Scott and the ring, then back to Scott. Scott realizes that the ring is covered in half eaten cake and saliva. He wipes it on his shirt and hold it out again. Caroline begins to laugh.

CAROLINE

Yes. Absolutely, yes!

They kiss. Lights fade.

ACT IIScene 1

Red removes the table from the stage, and sets up the three chairs in the center so that they are touching side-to-side, suggesting a couch. Caroline is sitting in the center, frozen. Red stands behind her.

RED

Welcome back everyone! Is everyone still with me? Good. So, this is the living room of Scott's parents' home, as it was in December 1965. This is when Scott was still living with his parents. Caroline *Springer* is sitting on the couch, or rather, sinking into it, as the cushions are very squishy and fit loosely into the frame. There's a fireplace in the wall that hasn't been lit in about...oh...14 years, not since Scott's little sister almost burnt the house down trying to make s'mores. There are several pictures along the mantle capturing a variety family moments and memories.

Red goes to his seat as Scott enters.

SCOTT

That couch has a habit of eating the guests.

CAROLINE

I can believe it.

SCOTT

(Jokingly.)

Do you see our neighbor, Mrs. Gillman, in the cushions? I think they're going to put her picture on the milk cartons soon if she doesn't turn up.

Caroline stands.

CAROLINE

(Smiling.)

I really missed you.

SCOTT

(Teasingly.)

Yeah, I guess I missed you too. I've only been thinking about you nonstop all day.

They kiss. Scott lingers for some time before Caroline pulls away.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Stop it! Your mom's just in the kitchen.

SCOTT

So?

CAROLINE

So, you once told me that she would cut down a tree with me in it.

SCOTT

Oh, all right. I'll stop if I *have* to.

He sits on the couch. He sinks into it.

SCOTT

Come sit with me.

CAROLINE

I thought we were going to go see a movie.

SCOTT

We've got loads of time.

CAROLINE

(Doubtful.)

You told me to meet you here at six.

SCOTT

That's just because I wanted to spend some extra time with you. The movie doesn't start until seven.

CAROLINE

But...it's after six.

SCOTT

I know. The clean up was rough today. I think I'm going to smell like motor oil for the rest of my life.

CAROLINE

Well, I guess I don't mind spending the extra time with you.

As Caroline starts to sit, Scott pulls her onto his lap.

SCOTT

Oops.

CAROLINE

Oh, honestly.

Caroline laughs, but places herself decidedly next to Scott. She crinkles her nose and pulls her head back sharply.

CAROLINE

You do smell like motor oil.

SCOTT

Is that a problem?

CAROLINE

Not as long as you keep it to yourself.

Caroline kisses Scott on the cheek.

SCOTT

How come you're out here by yourself, anyway?

CAROLINE

I didn't want to bother your mother while she was cooking.

SCOTT

I'm sure she'd love the company.

CAROLINE

Not from me. No girl is ever good enough for a mother's precious little boy.

Caroline pats Scott's leg. She lets her hand linger on his knee.

SCOTT

Can a boy ever be good enough for a mother's precious little girl?

CAROLINE

(Scoffing.)

I'm sure my mom would be just thrilled if I finally had someone to bring home.

SCOTT

I take it you weren't big on the dating scene in high school?

CAROLINE

No...it never really fit in with my plans.

SCOTT

What plans?

CAROLINE

To get out of my hometown. Basically. I didn't want to be tied down.

SCOTT

Oh.

(Pause.)

You're kinda pinching my knee, Carrie.

CAROLINE

Sorry.

Scott stretches and puts his arm around Caroline. She leans into him.

SCOTT

At least your aunt and uncle seem to like me just fine.

CAROLINE

Of course they do. You're very charming, and they've been going to see your father at the repair shop for years now.

SCOTT

(Mumbling.)

Yeah, that's true.

CAROLINE

Is something wrong?

SCOTT

(Sitting up.)

Nah, it's nothing. Are you ready to go see that movie?

CAROLINE

(Quietly.)

If there's something the matter...I want you to tell me.

Scott doesn't respond.

CAROLINE

(Sighing.)

The sooner you talk to me, the sooner we can go see how Elvis Presley avoids assassinating the Arab King.

SCOTT

(Exasperated.)

Maybe I just don't wanna talk about it. Did you ever think of that, Carrie?

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

(Upset.)

It's just that...my mom and dad never really talked. I think that's the main reason why they don't get along anymore. I don't want that to happen with us.

SCOTT

Aw, come on Carrie. Don't be upset.

(Pause.)

I ran into Joey Hartley at the deli today during my lunch break. He only goes by "Joseph" now...Anyways, Joey and I, well, we went to Redwood High together. We were pretty good friends actually, but we sorta stopped talking over the last four years. He's graduating from the University of California in May. Turns out he's going to be a pharmacist.

CAROLINE

That's great for him.

SCOTT

Yeah.

CAROLINE

(Pause. Speaking softly.)

I still don't see what the problem is, Scott.

SCOTT

Let's go see that movie.

CAROLINE

Do you wish that you'd gone to college, too?

SCOTT

I wish I'd never dropped out of high school.

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

I didn't know that.

SCOTT

Well, that's because I didn't tell you until now.

CAROLINE

Why not?

SCOTT

Oh, come on, Carrie. You got your diploma. You're a smart girl. I was afraid you'd think I wasn't worth your time.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Oh, Scott.

Caroline wraps her arms around Scott.

CAROLINE

I don't think that at all. I think you're absolutely wonderful.

Scott puts his head in his hands.

SCOTT

(Mumbling.)

I'm going to end up just like my dad.

CAROLINE

What's wrong with that?

SCOTT

People...they just walk all over him all the time because he doesn't know any better.

CAROLINE

What do you mean, Scott?

SCOTT

(Sighing.)

My dad used to own Ross Auto Repair. It was really small, but the people of Ross liked to go to him, so he was able to get by. He never tried to overcharge them, or say that something needed replacing when it only needed to be patched up.

CAROLINE

What happened?

SCOTT

Some big shot lawyer shut him down when his client sued my dad for wrecking the car. It wasn't true. But just because the lawyer said so, the jury believed him. My dad just thought that the truth would win out or something naive like that. After that happened, he didn't have the money to keep the shop open. It got bought up by someone else. Just like that. He got to keep his job, but for a lot less pay. I had to drop out of school and work full time there, too, in order to make up the difference.

CAROLINE

Oh, Scott...I'm so sorry.

SCOTT

He was just so...stupid. And I'm stuck right there with him.

CAROLINE

Don't say that. You're dad's not stupid. And even though the situation is lousy, he still seems really happy.

SCOTT

It was always his dream to own a repair shop. I saw that taken away from him. The whole town did. But he's still smiling somehow.

CAROLINE

Isn't that all that really matters?

Scott ignores the question.

SCOTT

He...he used to be my hero, when I was growing up.

(Pause.)

If we don't leave now, we'll miss the movie for sure. And I really want to have time to get an OhHenry! bar.

CAROLINE

I think I want something salty. My stomach is rumbling and that popcorn isn't going to eat itself, you know.

Scott takes Caroline's hands as they struggle to get off of the couch.

SCOTT

One popcorn, coming right up.

Scott and Caroline exit.

Scene 2

Red stands. He takes one of the end chairs that make up the couch and places it apart from the other two. Scott enters and sits in the two chairs.

RED

This is Scott's latest apartment in Novato, California, June 1985.

(Whispering.)

It smells like cheap beer and cheese puffs.

(Speaking normally.)

Scott lounges in his La-Z-Boy armchair, watching TV.

(CONTINUED)

Red pauses before stomping on the floor three times. Scott looks surprised; he is not expecting anyone.

SCOTT

(Loudly.)

Come in.

Lori enters. Scott stands and Red takes a seat in the armchair. Red silently watches the scene.

LORI

(Shyly.)

Hello.

SCOTT

Uh, hi.

(Pause.)

W-What are you doing here?

LORI

Before I answer that, you should tell me what you were doing at Kelly's Diner the other day.

SCOTT

I-I have a habit of turning up places whenever I'm in the neighborhood.

LORI

(Pause.)

What does that even mean?

SCOTT

I just wanted a cup of coffee.

LORI

Well, I guess that I just want a cup of coffee, too, then. Black, of course.

SCOTT

Black, of course.

Long silence.

LORI

I-I know who you are.

SCOTT

You do?

LORI

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

(Pause.)

Would you like something to drink? Or a cookie or a snack maybe?

LORI

No.

(With a sigh.)

I don't know what to think.

SCOTT

I know this can't be an easy situation for you.

LORI

You're right, but...I don't think you really know...

(Suddenly.)

You tricked me.

SCOTT

What?

LORI

Why didn't you tell me who you were at the diner?

SCOTT

I-I didn't want to cause a scene. I figured that you'd probably hate me.

(Pause.)

I just wanted to see you, Lori.

LORI

(Agitated.)

I did hate you. I'm *supposed* to hate you. But you--

Lori waves her arms.

LORI

--show up, and you're normal. I grew up thinking that you were a monster.

SCOTT

(Pause.)

That's not entirely untrue.

LORI

(Quietly.)

Why now?

SCOTT

What?

(CONTINUED)

LORI

Why do you try to see me now, when you've been back here for years apparently?

SCOTT

It's the truth that I saw your name and picture in the paper. It talked about your hobbies, where you worked, and where you were going to school next year. I felt an odd mixture of pride and nausea. I figured it was my only chance to meet you before you left without...your mother finding out.

LORI

So asking me about college was another trick?

SCOTT

No, I was just trying to get you to keep talking to me.

LORI

If you didn't want my mom to find out, then why show up at our apartment?

SCOTT

Because I wanted to see you again. I wanted you to know who I was.

(Pause.)

Does your mother know that you're here now?

LORI

Yes.

SCOTT

And she's okay with that?

LORI

I...I don't really want to talk about her with you. I'm sorry.

Red stands from the chair and goes to his seat.

SCOTT

No, that's all right.

LORI

But, I would like to see you again. I think. To get to know you more.

SCOTT

(Surprised.)

Really?

LORI

I've always wondered...if we have anything in common,
or something like that.

Lori rubs the back of her neck.

SCOTT

Oh, well, do you maybe want to get lunch this weekend?

LORI

I'm kinda busy this weekend.

SCOTT

Oh. Of course--I just thought it would be better to
plan for earlier rather than later.

LORI

Are you planning to take off again?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry.

SCOTT

Don't be.

LORI

It's just that my graduation is on Sunday.

SCOTT

Oh, wow. That's right. Congratulations.

LORI

Thanks.

(Pause.)

Would you...would you maybe want to come to that?

SCOTT

Would you want me to?

LORI

I think so. But you really don't have to.

SCOTT

I wouldn't miss it.

LORI

It's at Redwood High, three o'clock.

SCOTT

(Smiling.)

That's where I went to school.

LORI

Really? Were you at the top of your class, too?

SCOTT

Hardly. More of the exact opposite actually.

(Pause.)

I did eventually get my GED though.

LORI

Good for you.

SCOTT

Are you ready for it?

LORI

I'm not sure. It still hasn't fully hit me yet. I guess I'm kind of in denial about the whole thing. I'm excited about what happens next, but at the same time, I don't want to leave all of this behind.

SCOTT

Sometimes you just have to take those chances.

LORI

I guess so. It's not like I have a choice in the matter anyway.

(Pause.)

Well, that's not entirely true; I did choose to go to NYU.

SCOTT

Then it was probably the right choice to make.

LORI

Do you want to hear what I have for my speech so far? I know I'm nowhere near ready for that part. I've been carrying it around everywhere just in case inspiration strikes.

SCOTT

Absolutely.

Lori sits in the chair. She pulls out a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket.

LORI

(Reading.)

"Thank you all for coming tonight--"

SCOTT

Oh, come on. That's no way to do it. Stand up.

Lori stands, confused. Scott holds out his hand and helps her stand on the armchair.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

This is your podium.

Scott moves the chair a distance away from her, close to the audience. Red joins him.

SCOTT

This is your audience.

Lori laughs and begins to read; the lights begin to fade as she speaks.

LORI

(Smiling.)

"Thank you all for coming tonight. I tried really hard not to procrastinate on writing this, but it's not easy to break a four-year habit so suddenly..."

Scene 3

Red moves two of the chairs far upstage so that they touch facing each other. Scott moves the chair he was sitting on over to stage right before exiting. Caroline and Lori move the bed onstage. Caroline lies on her bed, writing in her red notebook.

RED

November, 1965. We're in Caroline's new bedroom in her aunt and uncle's home. It's small with only one window. There are a few things around here that are reminiscent of girlhood, such as the stuffed animals on the bed, the floral blanket, and the discarded dress by the hamper. There are several unpacked boxes still stacked in the corner by an old rocking chair. Music plays from a record player on the the floor.

Red kneels and puts his ear up to the "record player." Nothing happens. Red snaps at the sound booth. Something similar to the Beatles "All My Loving" begins to play.

RED

This is what a typical evening looks like for Caroline: lying on her bed, listening to music, and writing in her--

There is the sound of someone knocking on a window. Red hurriedly goes to his seat. Caroline hesitates, but goes over to the two chairs upstage and opens the window with great effort. Scott enters through it.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE
Scott?

SCOTT
Hey, Carrie.

CAROLINE
W-What are you doing here?

SCOTT
(Smiling.)
Oh, you know, I just happened to be in the neighborhood. Thought I'd stop by.

CAROLINE
(Laughing.)
What does that even mean?

SCOTT
I mean, it might have been a *little* out of the way, but it was certainly worth it to see you.

Caroline turns off the record player.

CAROLINE
(Hushed.)
Keep your voice down; I don't want my aunt and uncle to hear you.

SCOTT
(Advancing.)
You don't think they'd like you having me around?

CAROLINE
Not in my *bedroom*. Not without them knowing ahead of time.

SCOTT
This is a very gossipy town. The neighbors might have seen me climbing the tree and already called the newspapers.

Caroline hits Scott playfully.

CAROLINE
Stop it! That would be so terrible.

SCOTT
I can just see the headlines now: "New England Girl Corrupted by Local Boy Two Months After Moving to Ross." Has a nice ring to it, don't you think?

CAROLINE

(Laughing.)
You're unbelievable.

SCOTT

(Laughing.)
I'm sure no one saw me.

Scott kisses Caroline.

SCOTT

But if you want me to go, I can. I just wanted to see you is all.

CAROLINE

(Somewhat dazed.)
No, no.
(Pause.)
That's very sweet of you.

Scott smiles. Caroline kisses Scott, but as he begins to kiss her more intensely, she pulls away.

SCOTT

Come on, Carrie. Why not?

CAROLINE

I think that's enough for now.

Scott rubs the back of his neck.

SCOTT

Can you blame a guy for trying?

Caroline smiles. Scott sits on the bed and bounces. He looks around.

SCOTT

Wow, this is nice. Much better than the setup I've got at home.

CAROLINE

(Coyly.)
Maybe I'll have to scale a tree so I can see your room sometime.

SCOTT

You're going to climb a tree in a skirt?

CAROLINE

I-I'd find a way.

SCOTT

Then you'd really be the talk of the town.

(Pause.)

Too bad I don't have a tree that close to my window. You'd have to go through Becky's window or something.

CAROLINE

I'm sure she would help me out. Us girls stick together.

SCOTT

No way. She's got a huge mouth. My mom would have my dad cut the tree down before you could even reach the second branch.

CAROLINE

Well, I'd just have to find another way to get to you then.

*Caroline sits on the bed next to Scott.
Comfortable silence.*

CAROLINE

How was work?

SCOTT

Why don't you tell me about your day?

CAROLINE

But I asked you first.

SCOTT

Ladies first, Carrie. You know that.

CAROLINE

Fine. But nothing all that interesting really happened.
(Pause.)

Let's see...Mr. Hollis spilled his lunch on the carpet, and Donna and I had to try to clean it up before it stained. That was the only time he noticed me all day.

SCOTT

It's something, right?

CAROLINE

I swear, someday he'll realize my true potential. I-I just know it. But until then, I'm stuck scrubbing rugs.
(Pause.)

We got most of it out at least, but then we just sort of moved the rug around so that the spot was under the desk instead of out in the open. I was complimented on my new haircut, which you haven't seemed to notice at all.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

(Laughing.)
Sorry, Carrie. I'm a guy.

CAROLINE

It was Larry who complimented me. And I'm fairly certain by the length of his beard that he is, in fact, a male.

SCOTT

Then I guess I'm all out of excuses.

Scott touches Caroline's hair.

SCOTT

Your hair looks great.

CAROLINE

Yeah, yeah.

SCOTT

(Leaning close.)
I think I have a way to make it up to you.

CAROLINE

O-oh really?

Scott stands abruptly.

SCOTT

Work was pretty slow today. My dad was still trying to get over that cough, so I told him to go home and get some rest. I said that I'd finish up for the day.

CAROLINE

And he listened to you?

SCOTT

Yeah, he must have been feeling even worse than he looked, since he never wants to stop working.
(Showman-like.)
Anyways, just as he left, I heard a faint pattering coming up the road. It was so quiet that I thought I was hearing things at first. I poked my head out of the garage and saw the most beautiful car I'd ever seen. A 1960 Chevrolet Corvette Coupe.

Scott shivers.

SCOTT

Sorry. Even the *words* that make up the name are beautiful. Chevrolet...Corvette...Coupe. C-C-C. In the deepest, purest blue that man can create.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

(Laughing.)

I think I get the picture.

SCOTT

Right. Sorry. Anyways, this man comes out of the car. He's wearing a fancy suit and has a mustache that just *shined* with all the wax in it. I wasn't entirely convinced that it was real hair. He told me that he was in a hurry to see his, uh, *mistress* in Fortuna. He actually called her something else, but I won't say it in front of you.

CAROLINE

Oh...

SCOTT

He told me that he only had ten hours to make it to Fortuna and then back to San Francisco before his wife got home.

CAROLINE

He actually told you all of this?

SCOTT

Yeah. I guess he wanted me to understand how much of a hurry he was in.

CAROLINE

Tsk.

SCOTT

Hey, I'm not paid to judge; I'm just paid to fix cars.

CAROLINE

So...*did* you manage to fix his car?

SCOTT

You doubt it? I managed to find *and* fix the problem in under nine minutes. His gas cap had a crack in it, so the fuel just kept sloshing out. I sealed the crack and told him to order a new one when he got home.

CAROLINE

Wow, great job, Scott.

SCOTT

(Cutting her off.)

I mean, it was pretty obvious, even if you only know the basics of cars. It's just a matter of figuring what the most likely problem is, and then working your way back from there.

CAROLINE

But still.

SCOTT

(Excitedly.)

He was really grateful.

CAROLINE

I bet. Can't keep the mistress waiting.

SCOTT

He was so grateful, that he gave me a really big tip-ah.

CAROLINE

How big?

SCOTT

Oh, you know, just fifty dollars or so.

CAROLINE

What?!

SCOTT

It's not a big deal, really. I think he was a lawyer. Pocket change to him.

CAROLINE

(Cutting him off.)

Oh my God, Scott. That's unbelievable!

SCOTT

It was definitely *one* of the highlights of my day.

CAROLINE

What's the other highlight?

SCOTT

The look on your face when I give you this.

Scott sits next to Caroline. He pulls a small jewelry box from his pocket.

CAROLINE

What is that?

SCOTT

If you opened it, you'd find out.

Caroline opens the box to reveal a small, silver chain with a pendant on it.

CAROLINE

Scott...it's beautiful.

SCOTT

Why don't you put it on?

CAROLINE

I can't accept something like this. It's way too much.

SCOTT

I want you to have it, Carrie.

CAROLINE

I...

*Scott takes the necklace and puts it around
Caroline's neck.*

SCOTT

You have to promise me you'll wear it every day.

CAROLINE

It's too nice to wear every day. I'm afraid I'd lose
it.

*Scott brushes Caroline's hair aside in order to
fasten the clasp.*

SCOTT

I want people to see you wear it every day. I want them
to know that you're my girl.

CAROLINE

It's beautiful. Thank you.

SCOTT

I'm glad you like it.

*Scott kisses Caroline. She doesn't push him away.
Lights fade.*

Scene 4

*The table comes back on stage. Red stands and puts
the three chairs around the table as he speaks.*

RED

It's June, 1985, the night before Lori's graduation.
It's also a Saturday night, and, as tradition dictates,
Caroline and Lori are about to have their weekly game
night.

(CONTINUED)

Caroline enters with a deck of cards and a bowl of popcorn. She sits at the table and begins to shuffle. Red sits next to her and eats some popcorn.

CAROLINE

(Loudly.)

Lori, are you almost ready to play?

Lori enters, carrying the red notebook.

LORI

Mom, what's this?

CAROLINE

Where did you find that?

LORI

I was looking to borrow some earrings, and I saw it on your night stand.

Caroline stands and walks over to Lori. Red starts to play solitaire.

CAROLINE

It's just something from when I was younger...Just some scribbles for story ideas.

(Pause.)

I used to think that I would be a children's author one day.

LORI

Are some of the stories you used to tell me as a kid in here? Like the one about the duck and the crocodile? Or the one about the legendary sandwich wars?

CAROLINE

Yes, they are.

LORI

Those were always so wonderful, Mom. My friends used to only want to have sleep overs here just so they could listen to your stories.

CAROLINE

(Smiling.)

I remember that.

LORI

Has Mr. Hollis seen these?

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

No, I wouldn't bother him with something like this.

LORI

But you're one of his best copy editors. I'm sure he'd make the time to read your work.

CAROLINE

I'm not so sure about that. Besides, most of that stuff is probably outdated anyways.

LORI

It's worth a shot, don't you think? I mean, it's better than never trying, if it's really your dream.

CAROLINE

When did you get to be so smart?

LORI

Probably around the same time I stopped hitting my head on the pipes in the basement.

Caroline laughs and gives Lori a hug.

LORI

Promise me you'll show Mr. Hollis your work?

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

I promise.

Lori hands Caroline the notebook.

LORI

Good.

CAROLINE

Are you ready for tomorrow?

LORI

I-I think so.

CAROLINE

I'm so proud of you, Lori.

LORI

Thanks, Mom.

Caroline kisses Lori on the head.

LORI

(Sheepishly.)

I should probably tell you that I did...invite Dad to come to graduation.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

(Pause. Speaking slowly.)

I...I suppose that the greatest revenge is living well.
He can see what he missed out on.

*Lori hugs her mother tightly. Red puts the cards
back in a stack.*

LORI

Shall we play Crazy Eights?

CAROLINE

Of course! The popcorn's probably cold by now though.

*Caroline and Lori sit across from each other at
the table, on either side of Red.*

LORI

I don't mind. It isn't going to eat itself, you know.

*Caroline deals out the cards. Red and Lori grab
handfuls of popcorn at the same time. Lori puts
down a card for her first move. The lights fade.
Caroline and Lori exit, taking the popcorn, the
notebook, the deck of cards, and the table with
them.*

Scene 5

*As he speaks, Red sets the three chairs down stage
right side-by-side, forming a bench.*

RED

November 1965. We're standing by a bench on the bank of
Ross Creek. It's a relatively warm day and the sun
filters through a few lofty clouds, making the water
sparkle. Oh, look! There goes a little fishy! And up
there? That cloud looks like a dragon!

(Pause.)

This is the last stop on Caroline's tour of Ross.

*Caroline and Scott enter, carrying soda bottles
with bendy straws inside. Red sits on the ground
towards the edge of the space, basking in the
sunlight.*

SCOTT

And this...well, this is probably my favorite place in
all of Ross. Maybe even the whole world.

CAROLINE

Wow. Would you just look at that view...

(CONTINUED)

Scott and Caroline sit on the bench and stare out across the river.

SCOTT

Back in high school, I used to come to this river with my buddies all the time. We'd spend most of our paychecks on cigars and act like real big shots.

CAROLINE

That's so silly. You don't come here with them anymore?

SCOTT

(Pause.)

Nah. Not anymore.

CAROLINE

Well, I'm really glad you decided to show this place to me.

SCOTT

Don't mention it. It's a little out of the way, but I figured you'd like it, Carrie.

CAROLINE

Carrie? My name's Caroline.

SCOTT

Yeah, I know...I just think that "Carrie" suits you a bit more. Don't you?

CAROLINE

Huh. Carrie.

(Pause.)

I like it.

Silence. The two awkwardly slurp their sodas.

SCOTT

This probably is nowhere near as good as the views up in New England, huh?

CAROLINE

It's certainly different here, but I wouldn't say it's better or worse. They each have their own unique charm.

(Pause.)

Thank you...for showing me around town today.

SCOTT

Well, somebody had to. I didn't want you getting lost all the time.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Hey, I would have been able to find my way around eventually.

SCOTT

(Chuckling.)

Not if you keep looking down while you walk.

CAROLINE

(Smiling.)

Maybe someday I can repay the favor?

SCOTT

Hmm?

CAROLINE

Of showing you around town. If you're ever out east.

SCOTT

I don't really see that happening.

CAROLINE

Why not?

SCOTT

Well...I haven't left Marin County yet, and I doubt that will change anytime soon.

CAROLINE

You've never gone out of the county?

SCOTT

Never.

CAROLINE

Really?

SCOTT

Nope.

CAROLINE

Wow.

SCOTT

Is that pathetic?

CAROLINE

No, not at all. If you're really that happy here, then I don't see a reason to change.

SCOTT

Yeah...

(CONTINUED)

Caroline takes the straw out of her soda bottle and blows across the top.

SCOTT

What are you doing?

CAROLINE

Making music.

SCOTT

(Laughing.)

You're so weird.

Caroline looks away.

SCOTT

It's cute.

Scott takes the straw out of his soda bottle and blows across the top as well. They sit there "making music" for a while before Scott interrupts the calm.

SCOTT

Would...would you maybe want to go on a date with me sometime?

CAROLINE

(Shyly.)

I thought this was a date.

SCOTT

Is it?

CAROLINE

I think so.

SCOTT

Oh.

(Pause.)

Can I kiss you then?

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

If this is any kind of *real* date, then I think we don't have a choice in the matter.

They kiss. Lights fade. Scott and Caroline exit.

Scene 6

As Red speaks, Caroline enters and sits on the bench. She wraps her arms around herself.

RED

This is it. June 1985, on the same bank of Ross Creek, almost 20 years later. It's the night after Lori's graduation. Everything went without a hitch.

(Smiling.)

Caroline could not have been more proud.

Red goes to his seat. Scott enters. Caroline stands.

SCOTT

Thank you for agreeing to meet me here.

CAROLINE

You said on the phone that it would be quick.

SCOTT

Just give me five minutes of your time, that's all. I promise.

CAROLINE

What good is your promise? You promised me a lot of things, Scott.

SCOTT

Carrie, please.

(Pause.)

I...wanted to give you something.

Caroline turns around. Scott gives her an envelope. She opens it. Red stands and peers over Caroline's shoulder.

RED

It's a photograph of Caroline and Lori hugging after graduation...they both look so happy.

Caroline stares at the image. Red goes back to his seat.

SCOTT

I stopped at the one-hour photo shop before coming here.

CAROLINE

I didn't even see you at the ceremony.

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT

I was in the back.
(Pause.)
She...asked me to come.

CAROLINE

I know she did.

SCOTT

She told you?

CAROLINE

Of course. We're very close, Scott.

Scott turns away.

CAROLINE

(Pause.)
Is this all you wanted?

SCOTT

No.

CAROLINE

(Controlled.)
Then what, Scott?

SCOTT

I don't know.
(Pause.)
Carrie, I--.

CAROLINE

(Wincing.)
Don't call me that.

SCOTT

Caroline.

CAROLINE

What?

SCOTT

I'm...I'm not happy.

CAROLINE

(Exasperated.)
I'm leaving.

SCOTT

I'm trying to explain myself.

CAROLINE

(Laughing coldly.)

Well, you're a little late for that, Scott.

SCOTT

(Slowly.)

I know I am. I'm just trying to tell you that I don't think I've ever *really* been happy. I could pretend, and even convince myself for a while, but it would eventually go away.

(Pause.)

You were the closest thing to happiness that I've known, Carrie.

CAROLINE

(Softly.)

Please, stop.

SCOTT

But I still felt like I had a lump of lead in my chest every single day. Before I met you, it was unbearable. But with you...it was as if a light bulb flicked on inside me. The darkness wasn't completely gone, but it was much, much less.

CAROLINE

Scott...

SCOTT

I desperately needed to be with you...so I rushed into things.

CAROLINE

(Pause.)

I rushed into things, too. I lost sight of myself.

SCOTT

But over time, all the horrible feelings started to creep back inside of me. It happened so gradually that I didn't even notice until we were already engaged. I stuck with it because I figured that even though we'd be married, I could still try to figure out what was wrong...with me. But then--

CAROLINE

But then you got me pregnant. Is that it?

SCOTT

Yes. And I was happy at first; I thought that this might finally be the secret to actually *keeping* me happy. I mean, why else would everyone have kids all the time? I thought, maybe this is why my dad was able to keep smiling every day. But then that hope faded. Just like every other time.

(CONTINUED)

(Pause.)

And then when Lori was born, and I held her in my arms for the first time...my God, she was just so small and helpless. And she--she *needed* me. I just felt so trapped.

CAROLINE

I was trapped.

SCOTT

I know--

CAROLINE

(Cutting him off.)

No, you don't, Scott. You don't know a goddamn thing. I was *alone* and *scared*. You walked out and I had no fucking idea what happened to you. I had no idea what was going to happen to me...or to my baby girl. But I couldn't run away. Because my life wasn't about me. Not anymore.

SCOTT

Carrie...

CAROLINE

(Heated.)

Everything became a burden. I couldn't go anywhere or see anyone. I couldn't afford to be sick or tired or sad because I had to take care of Lori. Whenever I went into town, to the grocery store or the post office, I would hear people whispering. Some weren't even subtle about it. Eventually, I heard their whispers so much that I stopped hearing them completely. It became the background noise to my new life.

SCOTT

I made a mistake.

CAROLINE

That's all you're going to say?

SCOTT

Would you accept an apology from me?

CAROLINE

Not even if you wrote it in your own blood.

SCOTT

That day my dad died, I just had to leave. I-I grew up watching his dreams fall apart, how his life became one day repeated for years and years and years. Always the same, never what he'd hoped for. I didn't want to be like him.

(CONTINUED)

CAROLINE

Don't worry. You're nothing like him. Your father would have never walked out on his family.

SCOTT

(Pause.)

After I left, I traveled along the southern border for a little bit, at least until my money ran out. Eventually I ended up back, just a couple of towns over, worse off than I was before. Not only was I miserable, I was a coward...and a failure, too.

CAROLINE

Scott--

SCOTT

(Interrupting.)

But Lori, I think she can make me happy. Truly happy.

Caroline opens her mouth to speak.

SCOTT

But I can't do that to her. I know she's not really my daughter, not anymore. I gave her up. And...I don't know how long it would last before I felt unhappy again.

(Pause.)

She's grown into such an amazing person and I...can't do to her what I did to you, Carrie. I won't fuck her up like I did everything else. She has so much hope. She's everything you were when I met you.

Caroline stiffens.

SCOTT

Sorry.

CAROLINE

She's going to New York--

SCOTT

(Overlapping.)

I know.

CAROLINE

--and I'm moving away, too.

SCOTT

What? Where?

CAROLINE

I don't know. But there's nothing left for me here without her. I couldn't leave before, because I needed the support from my aunt and uncle.

(CONTINUED)

(Pause.)
And your family, too.

Scott nods.

CAROLINE
But now...I'm free.

SCOTT
Do you still write?

CAROLINE
What?

SCOTT
Do you still write?

CAROLINE
(Closing her eyes.)
Not in a long, long time.

SCOTT
Well, I hope you find your muse out there. I really do.

CAROLINE
Scott...

SCOTT
My five minutes are up.
(Pause.)
And I promise I'm not coming back. For you or for Lori.

CAROLINE
(Softly.)
Thank you.

SCOTT
Just...tell her that I came to her graduation?

CAROLINE
No. I can't. That...that would hurt her more than the
disappointment.

Scott nods and begins to exit.

CAROLINE
(Stopping Scott.)
She has your eyes.

SCOTT
What?

CAROLINE

She has your eyes. I can't look into them without thinking about it.

SCOTT

She has your laugh. The same musical quality to it.

CAROLINE

I...I never noticed.

SCOTT

She's going to be great. She's going to be what you and I never got to be.

(Pause.)

I did love you, Carrie.

CAROLINE

It's...funny. I don't remember you ever saying that to me. I-I know you did, but...I just can't picture it in my head.

SCOTT

I guess I didn't say it enough then.

CAROLINE

I don't think I did either.

SCOTT

Goodbye, Carrie.

CAROLINE

Goodbye, Scott.

Scott reaches out his hand towards Caroline to tuck a stray hair behind her ear, but stops himself. He leaves his hand suspended before dropping it back at his side. Caroline leaves and Scott watches her go.

Scene 7

Scott remains on stage from Act 2 Scene 6. Wordless music plays softly in the background. Scott steps downstage and the lights dim behind him. He starts to walk off stage, one hand clasped beneath his collarbone, the other balled in a fist. Red and Lori enter from the opposite direction and take the three chairs off stage before reentering. Lori stands off to one side and Red stands off to the opposite side. Caroline enters from the direction Scott is going towards. She is in a hurry, her head buried in her red notebook. She bumps into Scott and drops the

(CONTINUED)

notebook. Scott's demeanor instantly shifts to the way it is in the past.

CAROLINE

Oh, I'm so sorry!

SCOTT

It's all right.

CAROLINE

Are you okay?

SCOTT

(Softly.)

Yeah, I'm fine.

The two stare at each other. Red picks up the notebook and goes back to where he was standing. Both are watching.

SCOTT

Hi, I'm Scott.

CAROLINE

I'm Caroline.

Scott and Caroline meet for the first time.

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