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Back to the Beginning

A Play in Two Acts

By

Carla Duval

*********

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

Honors in the Department of English

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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.
Back to the Beginning

by

Carla Duval
Cast of Characters

Red: The narrator and observer of the play. Red should be on the younger side.

Caroline Springer: A woman who ages from 19 to 39 during the course of the play.

Scott Brooks: A man who ages from 22 to 42 during the course of the play.

Lori Brooks: 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 I

Scene 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)
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.*

(Smiling.)

See you soon.

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

(Frustrated.)

Can you turn that off?

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.

How’s it going?

(Mumbling.)

Codicils...codicils...

(Gently.)

It means an addition that modifies a previous will.

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

Sorry.

(Pause.)

I was just trying to help.

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.

(Continued)
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!

(CONTINUED)
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.
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
   Yup. 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?
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.*

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?
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.
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.

(continued)
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.

(CONTINUED)
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?

(CONTINUED)
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?

(CONTINUED)
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.

(CONTINUED)
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
(Qquickly.)
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
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)
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

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

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.

(CONTINUED)
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 II

Scene 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.

(CONTINUED)
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?

(CONTINUED)
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?
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.

(CONTINUED)
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?

(continued)
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.
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)
CONTINUED: 53.

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 puttering
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.
CONTINUED:

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.

(CONTINUED)
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.
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?
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)
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...
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.

(CONTINUED)
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.
(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?

(CONTINUED)
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
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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