

AS IS THE MOTHER

A Stage Play

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

DAUGHTER -- America's sweetheart.

MOTHER -- Mom of the year.

FATHER/BOYFRIEND -- Pillar of the community.

OFFICER/FIANCE -- Law and order.

ACT ONE

Present day. An upscale house. The DAUGHTER is handcuffed to a chair. Furniture is strewn about. Signs of a struggle are evident. The MOTHER, distraught and nursing a bruised face, is giving her statement to a young police OFFICER.

MOTHER

I'm not sure -- I can't -- it's just so unlike her. Oh --

OFFICER

Take your time, ma'am. I'm in no rush.

DAUGHTER

Maybe she'll choke to death on those bullshit tears.

MOTHER

Such gutter language.

DAUGHTER

Bull-shee-it!

MOTHER

Lovely.

DAUGHTER

Fucking bull-shee-it!

MOTHER

(to the OFFICER)
Could you say something to her?

OFFICER

Gladly.
(to the Daughter)
Quiet, you.

DAUGHTER

Or what? You'll tighten my cuffs you Motherfuckin' sadist?

MOTHER

I don't know where those words come from.

DAUGHTER

You should slap the cuffs on her. She's the guilty one.
The shit bitch.

MOTHER

Oh --

OFFICER

(to the Daughter)

I said, enough! That's your Mother! You should --

The MOTHER stops him.

MOTHER

Officer, don't waste your breath. My Daughter has no
respect for me. She has no respect for anything.

OFFICER

No Mother should hear words like that.

MOTHER

You should have heard what she called me outside church
last week.

OFFICER

She doesn't look like the type to go to church.

MOTHER

She isn't. She was waiting in her car. When I walked out
with the minister, she shouted -- oh, I can't say it.

DAUGHTER

I can.

(shouts)

Hey, Reverend! Hold onto your dick! She'll chew it off!

MOTHER

Bite your tongue!

DAUGHTER

Bite this!

OFFICER

Young lady, I'm warning you.

DAUGHTER

You better hold onto your dick, too. But then, what difference would it make? You're already dickless.

MOTHER

Filthy girl.

(to the OFFICER)

I am so sorry. And ashamed. I hope you don't think I raised her to be like this.

OFFICER

No family is immune these days. Not even the good ones. Just last week. A Father, the deacon of his church, and a Mother who was president of the PTA -- their son busted for crack.

MOTHER

Heavens.

OFFICER

It's the times we live in.

(taking out pad)

Now. Are you ready to finish your statement?

MOTHER

(looks at DAUGHTER, sighs)

I guess tough love is the only thing that might work.

DAUGHTER

You could always ask Daddy to beat me again with his belt.

MOTHER

She's out of control.

(to the OFFICER)

Please.

OFFICER

(to the DAUGHTER)

How would you like me to put you in the back of the patrol car?

DAUGHTER

Fine by me.

MOTHER

Officer, not that. The neighborhood. They'd all see.

DAUGHTER

My family keeps our shit-stained underwear in the closet.

MOTHER

Shut! Up!

(to the OFFICER)

I assure you there is no dirty laundry here. Except for her.

OFFICER

I don't doubt that for a minute. Now, for the record. What started the melee?

MOTHER

Well, I'm not really sure. It happened so fast. I remember I was coming in from the kitchen. I'd heard my DAUGHTER getting dressed in her room -- she sleeps so late these days. It worries me. Her sleeping. When she was a girl, she'd be the first one up in the house. Fixing breakfast, bacon, eggs, pancakes -- and not just for her but for the whole family. I swear, she spoiled us all. I'd tell my friends down at the --

OFFICER

You were coming in from the kitchen.

MOTHER

Yes. I'd fixed a pot of hot chocolate. This is a hot chocolate family. Always has been. Even in summer. Hot chocolate has a way of making chilly days seem warmer. Could I fix you a cup, Officer? Even though it's not a chilly day.

OFFICER

No thank you, ma'am.

MOTHER

It'll brighten your spirits.

OFFICER

I'm in a fine mood. But thank you. Now, if you would, please. Your statement.

MOTHER

Yes. You want to know what happened. What happened is --

(looks at DAUGHTER)

What happened --

The DAUGHTER leaves the chair and becomes an eight year old girl, cheerful, lovely. She sits at the bay window and pours seeds into a bird house on the ledge.

MOTHER

What happened is, she was such a wonderful girl. Happy. Sweet.

DAUGHTER

Mommy, when will the birds fly home?

MOTHER

Not until spring, honey.

DAUGHTER

Where are they now?

MOTHER

Someplace warm.

DAUGHTER

It's warm in here. They could stay with us.

MOTHER

Birds are happier outside.

DAUGHTER

Aunt Zoe's parakeet is happy in her house.

MOTHER

Some birds are different.

DAUGHTER

I like it in the house.

MOTHER

So do I.

DAUGHTER

I like my bedroom.

MOTHER

It's a beautiful room for a beautiful girl.

DAUGHTER

I like my bird house.

MOTHER

You'll have a whole flock of new friends in a few months.

DAUGHTER

I like your hot chocolate.

MOTHER

Hot chocolate makes chilly days seem warmer.

DAUGHTER

Can I have some hot choc -

(terrified by a looming shadow)

Mommy! What's that? Mommy!

MOTHER

(to the OFFICER)

That's when she first started seeing things.

DAUGHTER

No, Mommy! It's true! I can see him!

MOTHER

At first, the doctors thought it was an over-active imagination.

DAUGHTER

Please, believe me! He's coming at me!

MOTHER

Then they diagnosed her as being delusional.

DAUGHTER

Mommy! Help me! Please! He's going to hurt me!

MOTHER

(to DAUGHTER)

There's nothing there, honey.

DAUGHTER

Yes, he is! Look!

MOTHER

I don't see anything.

DAUGHTER

You're lying, goddamnit!

MOTHER

Watch your mouth. I'm your MOTHER.

DAUGHTER

You're a bitch!

(the DAUGHTER returns to being 21, to the chair)

You smelly bitch!

MOTHER

Smelly what?

DAUGHTER

You saw him! I know you did, you lying wet bitch!

The MOTHER looks to the OFFICER for help.

OFFICER

Settle down young lady.

DAUGHTER

Fuck you, you dickless piece of squat.

OFFICER

I'm warning you.

DAUGHTER

Or what? You'll give me a cavity search? You'd love that wouldn't you, you horny MOTHERfucker!

The OFFICER is on the verge of hitting her, but he regains his composure and turns to the MOTHER for more of her statement.

OFFICER

So your Daughter was up in her room getting dressed and you were in the kitchen making hot chocolate.

MOTHER

Hot chocolate has a way of making chilly days seem warmer.

OFFICER

You mentioned that.

MOTHER

Are you sure I can't fix you a cup?

OFFICER

I have a thermos of coffee waiting for me in the patrol car.

MOTHER

Coffee. I never cared much for coffee.

OFFICER

Different strokes for different folks, ma'am.

MOTHER

My husband loves coffee. Drinks ten fifteen cups a day. He gets so jittery sometimes, I swear, I think he's about to jump out of his skin. Tried to switch him to de-caf, but no siree. No de-caf. Just about snaps my head off if I even mention it.

(neatens some magazines)

Good man, my husband. He reminds me a little of you. Kind. Patient. It's going to kill him when he comes home and sees what happened. He'll be so --

She starts to cry. The OFFICER comforts her.

OFFICER

If we could just get through this statement, you'll have plenty of time to straighten the house.

MOTHER

Yes. Yes. I'll have everything looking perfect. He'll never know a thing. I can cover the broken leg on that chair with the plaid comforter.

(looks at the broken chair)

I used to feed her in that chair when she was a baby.

(touches the chair)

What a beautiful baby.

(turns her back on the chair)

She's been sleeping so late lately. I was worried. I came out of the kitchen and yelled upstairs. "Are you okay?" She jumped down my throat. "Shut your bleeping mouth!" I'm sorry. I can't say the word she used. You'll have to fill in something for your report. I've never said that word and I never will. Even if this ends up in court, even if I'm on the witness stand and I'm sworn to tell the truth on a stack of bibles, I will never say that word. "Shut your bleeping mouth." That's as far as I'll go.

OFFICER

I'll write down "bleeping." I'm sure the courts will get the picture.

MOTHER

Oh, such a filthy mouth. Where did those words come from? Not around here I assure you. My husband said "damn" once, and apologized for a week. Everyone in the neighborhood knows we won't tolerate profanity. Even the boys playing in the street started using the word "shoot" when my husband gave them a talking to.

(to the DAUGHTER)

Where did those words come from? Where on earth --

The DAUGHTER, now 15 and very happy, rushes over to the MOTHER carrying a school report.

DAUGHTER

I finished, Mommy.

MOTHER

So soon? The teacher just gave you the assignment today.

DAUGHTER

I know. But I need to get my grade up.

MOTHER

You have an A average.

DAUGHTER

A minus. English is my favorite subject. I have to do better.

MOTHER

Do you want to read it to me?

DAUGHTER

Can I? But you have to promise to say if you don't like it.

MOTHER

I'm sure I will. You have such a beautiful way with words.

DAUGHTER

Here goes.

(she reads)

The sparrow doth fly down from the chilly sky, weary from his long, winter journey. "I shalt stop here for the summer," the sparrow declared, landing on the ledge of a window, beaming from the warmth therein.

(to the MOTHER)

Like it so far?

MOTHER

Very much.

DAUGHTER

You don't like it.

MOTHER

Yes I do.

DAUGHTER

I can tell by your voice. You hate it.

MOTHER

I don't hate it. It's just that, well, some of the words you picked. Like "doth," and "shalt," and "therein." They're a bit --

DAUGHTER

Shakespeare used those words. So does the bible. This sparrow deserves words like that. He's a prince from a far-away land who hast come to save a fair maiden. Yon fair maiden hast been breached by the evil king. She hast been locked away in the dungeon of the royal castle --

MOTHER

(to the OFFICER)

Her delusions began to carry over to her school work.

DAUGHTER

She has been beaten and --

MOTHER

Her teachers would call to express their concern.

DAUGHTER

She has prayed for you sparrow to help her rescue.

MOTHER

We all agreed it was just a phase that she'd grow out of.

DAUGHTER

You whore!

(she's twenty-one again)

You street-walking pile of gonorrhea!

MOTHER

Where did those words come from?

DAUGHTER

You have maggots from fucking in the gutter!

OFFICER

(to the MOTHER)

May I use the phone?

MOTHER

Of course.

OFFICER

I think we should have her examined by a psychiatric worker before I take her in.

DAUGHTER

Why don't you have someone examine my MOTHER from the board of health?

OFFICER

(dials and speaks into phone)

Hello, County? I have a ten forty four here. Could you please send someone over A.S.A.P.

DAUGHTER

My Mother's a walking clap trap!

OFFICER

I believe the suspect is too unstable to be transported.

DAUGHTER

She has syphilis dripping down her leg!

OFFICER

Okay, I'll do that. Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Got it.

(hangs up)

County Clinic will send the next available person. Meanwhile, we should try to do what we can to calm her down.

MOTHER

I understand.

(to DAUGHTER)

Would you like a cup of hot chocolate?

DAUGHTER

I want nothing from your dirty hands.

MOTHER

You love hot chocolate, remember?

DAUGHTER

I love coffee. Like your husband. It makes him all jittery. It makes him want to hit people.

MOTHER

You're not going to start this again.

(to the OFFICER)

I'd like to finish my statement.

OFFICER

Any time you're ready.

MOTHER

So she comes downstairs, grumpy and depressed as usual. And smoking a cigarette. I don't know how many times I've asked her not to smoke in the living room. But does she listen? Anyway, it's one thirty in the afternoon. I'm worried about her. This is the fifth day in a row she's slept past noon. I haven't seen her act like this in two years. Not since her abor -- the incident.

DAUGHTER

Abortion.

(to the OFFICER)

Write that down. A-B-O-R-T-I-O-N. Maybe the local newspaper will notice it when they read the police blotter.

MOTHER

Officer. Please. Don't include that in your report. The neighbors. Nobody knows.

DAUGHTER

And it's about time they did.

(screams out the window)

I HAD AN ABORTION! DID EVERYONE HEAR THAT? THE DAUGHTER OF MRS. PRIM AND MR. PROPER -- I KILLED A BABY!

The MOTHER rushes to the window and slams it shut.

MOTHER

I hope they lock you up and throw away the key.

(to the OFFICER)

Can you take her downtown now?

OFFICER

The County Clinic says I should wait.

MOTHER

At least put her in the kitchen.

OFFICER

I'm afraid it wouldn't be wise to let her out of our sight.

MOTHER

Then I'm going to wait upstairs.

OFFICER

I'm not finished with your statement.

MOTHER

I need to go calm down.

OFFICER

Well, I suppose --

MOTHER

(starts to exit)
Five or ten minutes.

DAUGHTER
That's all the time he'll need to shove it in me.

MOTHER
Oh, my God.

DAUGHTER
When you told him I had an abortion, he got all excited.
He's like you. He thinks I'm an easy lay. Look at that
lump in his pants.

OFFICER
Um, ma'am, maybe it's not a good idea for you to leave.

MOTHER
I'm sorry. I am so, so sorry.

OFFICER
It's clearly beyond your control. When County gets here,
they'll tell us if we should move your Daughter to jail or
to a psychiatric ward. But for now, let's try some
silence.

They sit silently. The MOTHER
fidgets with the magazines. The
police OFFICER stares at his
shoes. The DAUGHTER gazes out the
window, serenely.

DAUGHTER
I was in love.

MOTHER
Shhh.

DAUGHTER
I was a virgin.

MOTHER
Shh!

DAUGHTER
He was too young to be a FATHER.

MOTHER

Quiet!

DAUGHTER

I'm telling the Officer what happened. You don't want him to think I was a slut, do you?

(to the OFFICER)

That's why I had the abortion. Austin wanted to get married, so did I, but it wouldn't have been right. He was on his way to college. He had his heart set on being a doctor. He was the sweetest boy in the universe.

MOTHER

He was a misfit.

DAUGHTER

Smelly bitch.

MOTHER

The Officer said silence! Now shut! Your! Mouth!

The DAUGHTER gazes back out the window. The MOTHER shrugs to the OFFICER: "Isn't she crazy?" The OFFICER, unnerved, begins to pace.

OFFICER

I like this neighborhood. Always have. When I was a kid, I'd ride through here on my bicycle. Sort of daydream. Imagine some day me striking it rich and buying one of these houses. My folks didn't have much. Dad was a cop, and mom was a mom. You know, cookies and milk waiting after school. Always tying a scarf around my neck. One day, I came home crying. I was about eight. My Mother wanted to know what happened. During recess, my gym teacher got mad at me for not running fast enough. To make an example, he chased me around the track. When he caught me, he shoved me to the ground. The rest of the class howled. My Mother was furious when I told her. She drove straight over to the school, went up to the gym teacher, and whacked him with her purse.

Self-consciously, the police OFFICER returns to his chair and stares at his shoes. The DAUGHTER

continues to gaze out the window.
The MOTHER re-stacks the
magazines.

MOTHER

He's a good man.

DAUGHTER

Shhh.

MOTHER

A moral, upstanding human being.

DAUGHTER

Shhh!

MOTHER

He provides a stable home life.

DAUGHTER

Quiet!

MOTHER

You attacked my husband. I can't let you dishonor his fine
character.

(to the OFFICER)

When I met him, he was a divinity student. He's still a
devout man. He does missionary work. Goes to Nicaragua
every summer.

DAUGHTER

To beat some decency into the young girls.

MOTHER

(to the OFFICER)

I pray to God that you are never cursed with the trials of
giving birth to an emotionally disturbed child.

DAUGHTER

Why don't you shove a sock in your mouth. Or a cock.

MOTHER

You are a rotten apple.

(to the OFFICER)

Help me here. Please.

OFFICER
(to the DAUGHTER)

SETTLE DOWN!

The DAUGHTER stares at him
quietly.

MOTHER
Thank you.

OFFICER
This is awful.

MOTHER
I'm grateful that you're here.

DAUGHTER
I'll bet you are.
(to the OFFICER)
Maybe she can talk you into giving me few kidney chops like
Dad does.

MOTHER
That is a lie and you know it!

DAUGHTER
You're right. I forgot. I'm delusional. There never was
a welt on my kidney and blood in my urine.

MOTHER
(to the OFFICER)
You realize of course, she's trying to manipulate you.
Take the focus off of herself. Try to blame others for her
despicable behavior.

OFFICER
It's the way things are today. The kids see it all over
TV. Two boys kill their parents and claim they were
molested.

MOTHER
With no proof that it actually happened.

OFFICER
Who needs proof any more?

MOTHER

Exactly.

DAUGHTER

What an adorable couple you two would make.

(to the OFFICER)

You're just her type. Moral. Self righteous. Yet at the ready to knock some sense into an out-of-line youngster.

MOTHER

That is enough out of you.

DAUGHTER

What's nice is that OFFICER Scumbag is trained to inflict pain properly.

OFFICER

Watch yourself.

DAUGHTER

Maybe you could whack me with the butt of your gun -- Dad never tried that one.

MOTHER

You apologize to this nice man.

DAUGHTER

Sorry, you jizz ball.

MOTHER

(to the OFFICER)

You don't have to take that.

OFFICER

Why don't we just ignore her.

MOTHER

Well...you're the expert.

They ignore her.

DAUGHTER

Mom, why don't you suck his prick while you're at it.

(they ignore her)

OFFICER, my dad fucks her up the butt.

(they ignore her)

Why aren't you porking her, OFFICER? You can't get hard? You afraid your Mother will find out you're a horny pervert?

Fuming, the OFFICER spins toward the DAUGHTER, his billy club raised. He catches himself at the last second, and lowers his hand.

DAUGHTER

Aw, he's inhibited. Or maybe he's shy because it's only your first date.

(to the MOTHER)

You could always have Daddy give him a few pointers.

MOTHER

You are a disgusting animal.

The police OFFICER, shaken, reaches for the phone and dials.

OFFICER

(into phone)

County? It's about that ten forty four. I have an emergency.

DAUGHTER

He hit me.

MOTHER

Don't start.

OFFICER

Budget cut backs -- baloney!

DAUGHTER

You saw him.

MOTHER

You're delusional.

OFFICER

Just get someone over here. Now.

DAUGHTER

He shoved me against the wall and kicked me.

MOTHER

He bumped into you accidentally.

OFFICER

I need help!

(he hangs up)

DAUGHTER

(to the OFFICER)

I know she saw it. It happened in front of her eyes. I was in his study, getting a lecture. I sneezed. He said I was an undisciplined snout nose. He took off his belt and whipped me until my back bled. Then he kicked me so hard, my body flew clear across his desk.

MOTHER

That is a damnable lie.

DAUGHTER

You rushed into the room when you heard me crash into the lamp.

MOTHER

I saw nothing of the kind.

DAUGHTER

You won't face the truth.

MOTHER

We could have called the police on you then and we didn't.

DAUGHTER

How would you have explained the blood on my back?

MOTHER

It's not too late for your FATHER to press charges.

DAUGHTER

On what grounds? I didn't fly far enough in the air?

MOTHER

(to the OFFICER)

She attacked him with the lamp. She told me that morning she was going to kill him.

DAUGHTER

You liar! He beat the shit out of me! If you hadn't come into the room, I might have been dead!

(to the OFFICER)

My FATHER should be put out of his misery. It's just a matter of time before he murders someone.

OFFICER

Those are very serious charges you're making.

DAUGHTER

I suppose you don't believe me.

OFFICER

I don't know what to believe any more.

(to the MOTHER)

Are you certain you can't substantiate these allegations.

MOTHER

Officer, last summer there was a fly loose in the house. My husband had to ask me to swat it.

OFFICER

You're convinced about him?

MOTHER

Is he the one on trial now?

OFFICER

I'm not a judge. I'm only witness to some extremely severe accusations. Child beating is a grave offense.

MOTHER

I won't dignify these charges with a response.

OFFICER

Ma'am, in my experience with cases of domestic violence, it's not uncommon for the wife to cover for the husband. Fear of reprisal is normal.

MOTHER

My DAUGHTER has succeeded in manipulating you.

OFFICER

I only want to reassure you that if, indeed, you are afraid of your husband, the police department will do everything

to protect you.

MOTHER

You are miles off base.

DAUGHTER

She's too weak to deal with me herself so she gets men to do the dirty work.

MOTHER

You are a product of the devil.

OFFICER

(to the DAUGHTER)

If your Father hit you, was any physical damage done to your body?

DAUGHTER

My left front tooth was once pushed up into my gum.

OFFICER

It looks perfectly straight.

DAUGHTER

That's because they sent me to the orthodontist.

MOTHER

Yes, she hurt her tooth. But nobody ever hit her. She stole our car and crashed it into a tree.

DAUGHTER

Another time -- he broke my arm in two places.

OFFICER

What does the doctor report say?

DAUGHTER

I'm not sure. My Mother filled it out.

MOTHER

She snuck off to a discotheque, got drunk, and fell off a barstool.

OFFICER

You mentioned he whipped you recently with his belt and you bled. Do you have any scars?

DAUGHTER

The scab went away.

OFFICER

Did you take any Polaroids?

DAUGHTER

No.

OFFICER

Did any of your friends see it?

DAUGHTER

No.

OFFICER

Anyone at school?

DAUGHTER

No.

OFFICER

Hmm.

DAUGHTER

You think I'm lying.

OFFICER

I didn't say that.

DAUGHTER

You think I'm delusional.

OFFICER

I'm not a psychiatrist.

DAUGHTER

I am not lying. My Mother knows the truth. She let my FATHER beat me. He's a monster! He's a --

The front door opens, and a gentle-looking man enters. He's stunned to see the furniture strewn about and his DAUGHTER handcuffed to the chair. The

MOTHER rushes to him.

MOTHER

Oh, dear.

FATHER

What the? What --

MOTHER

I wanted to have this cleared up by the time you got home.

FATHER

But -- this couldn't --

MOTHER

Everything's under control now.

FATHER

(noticing her bruise)

Look at your face.

MOTHER

It was just a little slap.

FATHER

No.

MOTHER

It looks worse than it is.

DAUGHTER

She started it!

FATHER

It's okay, sweetheart. You don't have to explain.

DAUGHTER

I was coming down into the living room minding my own business. She charged out of the kitchen like a maniac. Yelling at me for smoking.

FATHER

Honey, don't get all worked up.

DAUGHTER

Needling me about sleeping late.

FATHER

I'm sure it was annoying.

DAUGHTER

Then she started harping on me again about the incident.
As if I was the only girl on earth to have an abortion.

FATHER

Um, dear, maybe we better not discuss this.

MOTHER

It's too late. She already told the OFFICER about it, not
to mention the entire neighborhood.

FATHER

(to the OFFICER)

Is it possible to have that stricken from the records?
We're a religious family.

OFFICER

All I can do now is make your request known. If the
District Attorney feels the information is extraneous --
which wouldn't surprise me -- there'll be no mention of it.

FATHER

We'd appreciate that.

DAUGHTER

I'll bring it up myself in court.

MOTHER

Dear, God.

FATHER

(to the DAUGHTER)

Sweetheart, I know you're upset. But there's no need to
make things worse.

DAUGHTER

Ahhhhhhhh!

The FATHER turns to the OFFICER.

FATHER

We've been dealing with her outbreaks for years. Do you

suppose you could leave her in our care?

OFFICER

I'm afraid it's gone beyond that point. My desk sergeant's expecting either an arrest or hospitalization.

FATHER

I'm not sure how either will help her. What my DAUGHTER needs right now is love and support, not steel bars.

OFFICER

I don't doubt that.

FATHER

You seem like a compassionate man. Imagine how having this on her record could damage my DAUGHTER's life.

OFFICER

I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do.

FATHER

There would be if you could look into your heart.

DAUGHTER

The man has no heart. He tried to hit me.

OFFICER

That's a lie.

DAUGHTER

He had his billy club raised and everything!

FATHER

(to the MOTHER)

Is she telling the truth?

MOTHER

Well, you had to be here. He was provoked.

FATHER

(to the OFFICER)

You have the nerve to come into my house and threaten my Daughter with physical violence?

OFFICER

I never laid a hand on her.

FATHER

You're insinuating that my wife is a liar?

OFFICER

Okay, I admit my temper got the best of me. But your DAUGHTER was taunting me. She made a crack about my MOTHER.

FATHER

You're supposed to be a trained professional. What if I said your MOTHER had a moustache? Would you hit me?

OFFICER

No.

FATHER

What if I said your MOTHER gave birth to a moron? Would you hit me?

OFFICER

No!

FATHER

What if I said your MOTHER slept with --

The OFFICER raises his fist.

OFFICER

Look, pal, one more word about my MOTHER, and you'll wish you never came home. Have I made myself clear?

FATHER

Crystal clear.

(to the DAUGHTER)

Honey, wherever they take you today, I wouldn't count on staying. My lawyer will know everything about these extenuating circumstances.

OFFICER

You don't really think you can drag me into this.

FATHER

You've dragged yourself.

OFFICER

Your DAUGHTER's a whacko and you know it.

FATHER

All I know is what I see. And that is a young girl, terrified, who's been frightened into god only knows what behavior.

OFFICER

I suppose I'm the one who kicked over the furniture and bruised your wife's face.

FATHER

I make no speculations.

OFFICER

I suppose I'm the one who taught her words I've never even heard in the squad room.

FATHER

Fear does horrible things to young people.

OFFICER

I suppose I'm the one who accused you of being a child beater.

FATHER

She has called me that before and she'll call me that again.

OFFICER

So you deny that you ever hit her.

FATHER

I don't have to deny anything. It's a matter of record.

OFFICER

She claimed you whipped her with a belt until she bled, then kicked her clear across your desk.

FATHER

Did she tell you about the time I slapped her down the basement stairs and chained her to the oil burner?

OFFICER

No.

FATHER

Did she tell you how I burned her stomach with the end of a lit cigarette?

OFFICER

No.

(to the DAUGHTER)

Are these allegations true?

DAUGHTER

Yes.

FATHER

Honey --

DAUGHTER

Well, okay. There were never any lit cigarettes. But you did lock me in the trunk of your car.

FATHER

That's a new one. We'll have to discuss that with Dr. Peyser next session.

OFFICER

Nobody mentioned you were in counselling.

FATHER

It's not the kind of news we spread around. The neighbors.

OFFICER

Well, that may weigh in your favor with the judge. Meanwhile, I have to bring her in on assault and battery. I'm sorry.

(to the MOTHER)

If you want to drop the charges later, maybe the District Attorney will allow it. It's up to you.

MOTHER

I wish I knew what would be best for her.

FATHER

God will tell us.

The police OFFICER begins to lead the DAUGHTER away. Eight years old again, she stops at the

window. An imaginary bird lands
on her hand.

DAUGHTER

Mommy, look. A sparrow.

MOTHER

Oh, how beautiful.

DAUGHTER

(to the bird)

Where were you this winter?

(she listens)

He said he was in Miami Beach.

MOTHER

What a wonderful imagination.

DAUGHTER

He said he likes it here better.

MOTHER

I don't blame him.

DAUGHTER

He said next winter he'd rather live in our house.

MOTHER

But he'll be giving up his freedom.

DAUGHTER

He said he'd rather be safe and warm.

MOTHER

Then next winter it is.

DAUGHTER

(to the bird)

You can sleep in my room.

MOTHER

But he has to make his own bed.

DAUGHTER

He promised he would.

MOTHER

And he has to eat all the seeds on his dinner plate.

DAUGHTER

He'll even eat his spinach seeds.

MOTHER

What will we call him?

DAUGHTER

He said his name is Ron.

MOTHER

Now that's a lovely name for a sparrow.

DAUGHTER

He said he's a prince from a far-away land.

MOTHER

Is that so.

DAUGHTER

He said he hast come to save a fair maiden.

MOTHER

Hast he now?

DAUGHTER

Yon fair maiden hast been breached by the evil king.

MOTHER

Honey --

DAUGHTER

She hast been locked away in the dungeon of the royal castle --

MOTHER

Another delusion.

DAUGHTER

She hast prayed for yon sparrow to hie to her rescue.

MOTHER

You don't need a sparrow to rescue you.

DAUGHTER

She has seen the dark shadow.

MOTHER

I'm here to protect you.

DAUGHTER

You are?

MOTHER

Of course I am. I'm your MOTHER.

DAUGHTER

Then where were you when I needed you?

(she's twenty-one again)

I can't believe you're doing this to me. All these years you let this man beat me -- with his fists, with his belts -- and I slapped you once -- one slap! -- and you called the police. How could you let this happen, you fucking bitch!

MOTHER

Such profanity.

DAUGHTER

Profanity? You've never let a foul word cross your lips. But your tongue should be ripped clean out of your mouth.

MOTHER

My, God.

FATHER

(holding his wife)

Sweetheart, don't listen.

The OFFICER opens the front door and escorts the DAUGHTER out. She stops to look back and glare at the MOTHER.

DAUGHTER

One slap, after all you let him do to me.

The OFFICER leads her away and shuts the door. The MOTHER cries uncontrollably. The FATHER tries

to console her.

FATHER

Thy rod and thy staff do comfort me. He maketh me lie down
in still pastures. He restoreth my soul. Surely goodness
and mercy shall --

MOTHER

She broke the chair.

FATHER

It's only a cracked leg.

MOTHER

I used to feed her in that chair when she was a baby.

FATHER

It can be fixed.

MOTHER

She was such a beautiful baby.

FATHER

She still is.

MOTHER

Do you think she'll be okay?

FATHER

I hope so.

MOTHER

They won't mistreat her.

FATHER

I'm sure they won't.

MOTHER

My baby in jail --

FATHER

I'll call a lawyer in a few minutes.

MOTHER

Her life is ruined.

FATHER

It might not go on her record.

MOTHER

The neighbors.

FATHER

Let the person who has not sinned cast the first stone.

MOTHER

The things she said to me.

FATHER

Insanity.

MOTHER

I've been a good Mother.

FATHER

The best.

MOTHER

I've never done anything to hurt her.

FATHER

Of course not.

MOTHER

You've seen me -- aren't I there for her?

FATHER

Night and day.

MOTHER

She's well fed.

FATHER

More than.

MOTHER

Well dressed.

FATHER

Impeccably.

MOTHER

She's never missed summer camp, even when money was tight.

FATHER

Not to mention her trip to Niagara Falls.

MOTHER

I've always provided her with a stable home life.

FATHER

That you have.

MOTHER

And the things she said about you.

FATHER

Only words.

MOTHER

With all the missionary work you do. How many men would give up their vacations to live in squalor in the heat of Nicaragua?

FATHER

It's important work that needs to be done.

MOTHER

And it's not just any summer camp I sent her to. It was the most exclusive one around. But does she ever thank me?

FATHER

She has yet to receive the gift of gratitude.

MOTHER

She is so selfish, so unappreciative. Why I don't know how many times I've wanted to slap her myself.

FATHER

You've shown uncanny restraint.

MOTHER

It's not right for a Mother to strike her children.

FATHER

It never accomplishes anything.

MOTHER

No matter how awful they are.

FATHER

Exactly.

MOTHER

No matter how much they deserve it.

FATHER

Yes.

MOTHER

My hands are clean.

FATHER

You're above reproach.

MOTHER

I have done no wrong.

There's a silence as the MOTHER,
relieved, hugs her husband, who
grows disturbed.

FATHER

Except for one thing.

MOTHER

One thing what?

FATHER

You did do one thing wrong.

MOTHER

I know.

FATHER

What on earth came over you?

MOTHER

I'm not sure.

FATHER

Did you lose your mind?

MOTHER

I wasn't thinking.

FATHER

Were you begging for trouble?

MOTHER

She hit me and I panicked.

FATHER

It was a slap.

MOTHER

But she was screaming and throwing furniture.

FATHER

She's done that before.

MOTHER

Not this crazy.

FATHER

You should have phoned me.

MOTHER

I told you I panicked.

FATHER

So you called the police?

MOTHER

I thought she might kill me.

FATHER

You didn't think what she might tell them?

MOTHER

My brain was spinning.

FATHER

Are you that stupid?

MOTHER

I didn't know what --

FATHER

Are you as dumb as your DAUGHTER?

MOTHER

I wasn't --

FATHER

Do I have to pound some sense into you?

MOTHER

I --

The FATHER raises his fist and crushes it into the MOTHER's face. She crumbles to the floor and as she doubles over in pain, he kicks her and kicks her and kicks her.

ACT ONE
CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Five years later. The dining room/living room of a modest apartment. It's decorated for the most part with furniture we've seen in Act One. The DAUGHTER, quite elegant, is setting the dining room table for a dinner party. Her BOYFRIEND, an older man (played by the actor who was the FATHER in Act One) is sampling a sauce. He's impressed.

BOYFRIEND

Mmm. You have done it again.

DAUGHTER

And you, naughty boy, have again broken the rule -- no tasting.

BOYFRIEND

It's impossible to resist.

DAUGHTER

Where's that iron will you use at your board meetings?

BOYFRIEND

My iron turns to mush in your presence.

He reaches into the salad bowl for a crouton. She whacks hand lightly with a spoon.

DAUGHTER

Gotcha.

BOYFRIEND

You are so cold.

DAUGHTER

The ice woman cometh.

BOYFRIEND

Then let me warm you up.

He goes to kiss her, she jerks her face away.

DAUGHTER

Now how do you expect me to finish cooking if we start that.

BOYFRIEND

I was only going for a kiss.

DAUGHTER

Famous last words. Next you'll be chasing me around the table wanting to play Galloping Gourmet.

BOYFRIEND

Well, now that you mention it.

He goes to grab her, she backs away.

DAUGHTER

See? I know you men.

BOYFRIEND

It was your idea.

DAUGHTER

Like a little boy who's been caught with his hand in the cookie jar -- you want to blame your MOTHER for buying them.

BOYFRIEND

You're so beautiful you drive me crazy.

DAUGHTER

Crazy I don't need. Mature I need.

BOYFRIEND

In that case, I'll just sit quietly and pretend you're our Chief Auditor. She's six two and has hairy warts on her chin.

DAUGHTER

If that's what it will take, so be it.

She gives him a polite peck on the

forehead, then returns to setting the table. He sits there quietly, a bit rejected. She notices.

DAUGHTER

Oh, now don't get all sulky on me.

BOYFRIEND

I'm thinking about the shipping meeting we had today. Five cargo freighters. Darned trucking strike.

DAUGHTER

You're mad at me.

BOYFRIEND

Not in the slightest.

DAUGHTER

You hate me.

BOYFRIEND

I love you.

DAUGHTER

You want to leave me for some hot blooded Italian sex goddess.

BOYFRIEND

Not in a million years.

DAUGHTER

I really do have to finish cooking.

BOYFRIEND

I understand.

DAUGHTER

My MOTHER will be here any minute.

BOYFRIEND

You don't have to explain.

DAUGHTER

It does bother me when someone tastes while I'm cooking.

BOYFRIEND

It will never happen again.

DAUGHTER

If you want to eat something, I'll make us some hot chocolate.

BOYFRIEND

No thanks.

DAUGHTER

It'll brighten your spirits.

BOYFRIEND

I'm already Mr. Sunshine.

DAUGHTER

Just one cup. I come from a hot chocolate family. My MOTHER used to say, "A cup of hot chocolate -- "

BOYFRIEND

"Has a way of making chilly days seem warmer."

DAUGHTER

You remembered.

BOYFRIEND

You said it to me when I picked you up for our first date.

DAUGHTER

What a memory. No wonder you're C.E.O.

BOYFRIEND

It was ninety-eight degrees in the middle of August. The boy in the mail room would have remembered that.

DAUGHTER

(stirring the salad dressing)

Mmm, this does smell good.

BOYFRIEND

You have a magic touch.

DAUGHTER

Tell me if there's too much vinegar.

She holds a spoonful in front of

his lips.

BOYFRIEND

You said I shouldn't taste.

DAUGHTER

Chef's request.

BOYFRIEND

(sips)

Exquisite, perfect -- like you.

DAUGHTER

Smooth talker.

BOYFRIEND

Telling it like it is.

The DAUGHTER leans over and kisses him passionately.

DAUGHTER

Exquisite, perfect.

BOYFRIEND

But you said I shouldn't --

DAUGHTER

Chef's request.

The DAUGHTER kisses him again, this time stroking the inside of his thigh. Aroused, he begins to grab her breast. A cooking timer rings from off stage, and she breaks free.

BOYFRIEND

Where are you going?

DAUGHTER

The roast needs basting.

BOYFRIEND

So do I.

DAUGHTER

But we're not eating you for dinner.

BOYFRIEND

I wouldn't stop you.

DAUGHTER

Now you're going too far. Honestly. You're like a teenager in heat. All I did was give you one little kiss and you had your tongue half-way down my throat.

BOYFRIEND

It's called passion.

DAUGHTER

It's called immaturity. Now, please, go read a magazine or something. Or help out. You can open the wine and let it breathe a while. You're not sulking again, are you?

BOYFRIEND

No.

Sulking, the BOYFRIEND sits as he opens a bottle of wine. The chair wobbles. It's the chair that was broken in Act One.

BOYFRIEND

Whoa, a lawsuit begging to happen.

DAUGHTER

Not again.

BOYFRIEND

The leg is cracked clear through.

DAUGHTER

I've had it fixed a dozen times.

BOYFRIEND

Maybe it's time for a tag sale.

DAUGHTER

I'm too sentimental. My MOTHER used to feed me in that chair when I was a baby. Besides, have you seen the price of dining room furniture these days?

BOYFRIEND

I could help out.

DAUGHTER

You know that's not my style. If I can't afford to buy it myself, I don't buy it.

BOYFRIEND

Spoken like a true noblewoman.

DAUGHTER

An impoverished noblewoman.

BOYFRIEND

Your choice. I've offered you a mansion in the sky.

DAUGHTER

And I'm not saying I won't accept it some day.

BOYFRIEND

When you say you'll marry me.

DAUGHTER

If I say I'll marry you.

BOYFRIEND

If.

DAUGHTER

It's not out of the question. I just --

BOYFRIEND

Need more time.

DAUGHTER

Exactly. Now. There's a bridge chair in the closet. Please, switch them.

BOYFRIEND

What should I do with the broken chair?

DAUGHTER

Lean it against the wall and put some coats on it. I wouldn't want my MOTHER sitting down by accident and breaking her neck.

BOYFRIEND

Not a cheery thing to happen on the eve of her wedding.

DAUGHTER

My MOTHER with a broken neck -- how horrible.

BOYFRIEND

Imagine, your mom's getting hitched for the second time and I can't even talk you into marriage number one.

DAUGHTER

Enough already.

BOYFRIEND

Ms. Grouch.

DAUGHTER

I'm sorry. I guess I'm nervous. It's been a while since I've seen my mom. And I've never even met her husband-to-be.

BOYFRIEND

Your new Papa.

DAUGHTER

When Dad died, I never thought anyone could take his place.

BOYFRIEND

You loved him very much.

DAUGHTER

He was a good man. A moral, upstanding human being. He provided a stable home life. When my MOTHER met him, he was a divinity student. Such a devout man. He did missionary work. Went to Nicaragua every summer.

BOYFRIEND

I'm sorry I never met him.

DAUGHTER

He's probably here in spirit. In fact, I'm certain of it.

BOYFRIEND

Parents have a way of staying with us.

DAUGHTER

You are right as rain about that. Now. We've got to get snapping if we want to be host and hostess with the mostest.

The BOYFRIEND goes to the closet, takes out the bridge chair, and switches it with the broken chair, which he leans against a wall and covers with coats.

BOYFRIEND

I guess I'm a little nervous, too. I've never met a girlfriend's MOTHER who's younger than I am.

DAUGHTER

Only a year.

BOYFRIEND

By all rights, I should be dating her.

DAUGHTER

I hope you're not serious.

BOYFRIEND

I hope you're not, either.

DAUGHTER

Well, you see the talk shows these days. "Man sleeps with wife's MOTHER, then runs off to Mexico with her grandMOTHER."

BOYFRIEND

I've never in my life slept with a girlfriend's MOTHER. A sister, yes, a few cousins --

DAUGHTER

Very funny.

BOYFRIEND

My ex-wife's softball team. You still don't trust me, do you?

DAUGHTER

I guess I wonder if you're just playing games with me.

BOYFRIEND

I'm not a game player.

DAUGHTER

As long as I say no, you can put off taking the plunge.

BOYFRIEND

I'll dive straight into the deep end.

DAUGHTER

Maybe you're still shopping around.

BOYFRIEND

I haven't touched another woman in six months. I want to marry you. I'm willing to do anything to prove it.

DAUGHTER

I'm not asking you to --

BOYFRIEND

Here's how far I'll go. I'll take my clothes off right now and make love to you here on the table.

DAUGHTER

You are a prince.

BOYFRIEND

Self sacrifice -- that's my credo.

He begins to unbutton his shirt.

DAUGHTER

Don't you dare.

BOYFRIEND

It's not for me that I do this.

DAUGHTER

Don't come any closer.

BOYFRIEND

I have six months worth of love stored up inside --

DAUGHTER

I mean it.

BOYFRIEND

And it has your name on it.

DAUGHTER

Stop!

Instinctively, she takes a knife from the table and holds it out in front of her. The BOYFRIEND backs away.

BOYFRIEND

Yow.

DAUGHTER

You -- I -- you frightened me.

BOYFRIEND

I was fooling around.

DAUGHTER

It didn't seem that way.

BOYFRIEND

When have I ever forced myself on you?

DAUGHTER

Never, but --

BOYFRIEND

You would have stabbed me.

DAUGHTER

I --

BOYFRIEND

Cut me.

DAUGHTER

But --

BOYFRIEND

Killed me.

DAUGHTER

It was only a butter knife! For goodness sake, what do you take me for? I've never in my life hurt a living soul!

She begins to sob. The BOYFRIEND,
calmer, consoles her.

BOYFRIEND

Maybe it would do some good to talk about it.

DAUGHTER

Talk about what?

BOYFRIEND

What some man did to you.

DAUGHTER

A man?

BOYFRIEND

You know, the gender that chews loudly and watches
football.

DAUGHTER

What makes you think some man did something?

BOYFRIEND

Just a hunch. My theory is that a woman who pulls a knife
on a man had something unpleasant done in the past.

She begins fluffing the lettuce.

DAUGHTER

Do you realize that our guests could arrive any moment?

BOYFRIEND

Quit stalling.

DAUGHTER

I've got no stories to tell.

BOYFRIEND

Was it an old BOYFRIEND?

DAUGHTER

No wonder you're a C.E.O. You're so pushy.

BOYFRIEND

An uncle?

DAUGHTER

Really.

BOYFRIEND

Was it your fa --

DAUGHTER

Okay. I'll tell you my unpleasant man story. But you have to promise when I'm done to let me finish getting ready.

BOYFRIEND

It's a deal.

DAUGHTER

Mister hard-driving businessman.

BOYFRIEND

You'll feel so much closer when you marry me.

DAUGHTER

If I marry you.

BOYFRIEND

When.

DAUGHTER

(fiddles with the butter knife)

My Mother fixed me up with a boy she knew from church. Austin Powers. Austin won a citizenship award at school and was head of the boys' auxiliary at church. That's why I was so surprised. He came over one night when my parents were at a flower show. He unzipped his fly and tried -- I can hardly say this word -- "bleeping" me on the couch -- please forgive me for using such foul language. MOTHER would kill me. My family never tolerated profanity. Even the boys playing in the street started using the word "shoot" when my Father gave them a talking to.

BOYFRIEND

I was in the navy. I can handle rough words.

DAUGHTER

But I can't. Even if I was on the witness stand and I was sworn to tell the truth on a stack of bibles, I would never say that word. Austin tried "bleeping" me on the couch.

That's as far as I'll go.

BOYFRIEND

Did you call the police?

DAUGHTER

I was too confused, too frightened. I told my MOTHER, but she didn't believe me. She called me a misfit. I was so upset, I slapped her -- that's another story.

BOYFRIEND

I'm not going anywhere.

DAUGHTER

Yes, you are. You're going to march over and choose the seating arrangement.

BOYFRIEND

But I want to hear --

DAUGHTER

Tough. You made a deal. I told you my unpleasant man story, now I get to finish fluffing the lettuce. Besides, there's not much to it. I slapped my MOTHER, she got mad and sent me to my room. The end.

BOYFRIEND

Well, a deal is a deal.

He heads for the chairs.

DAUGHTER

Before you start, could I get a kiss?

BOYFRIEND

Is this my reward?

DAUGHTER

It's my reward.

She gives him a kiss.

BOYFRIEND

I could go for fifty years worth of those.

DAUGHTER

You're sure?

BOYFRIEND

Absolutely.

DAUGHTER

You're not mad at me?

BOYFRIEND

The opposite.

DAUGHTER

You don't hate me?

BOYFRIEND

I love you.

DAUGHTER

I was convinced that if I ever told a man that story he'd run for the hills.

BOYFRIEND

It makes me want to run for the altar.

DAUGHTER

I saw myself as the most horrible person on the planet.

BOYFRIEND

You don't know how wonderful you are.

DAUGHTER

It took all the trust I own to tell you that.

BOYFRIEND

And I will honor your trust and cherish it.

DAUGHTER

You've just moved from if I marry you to when.

He moves in for a kiss, she flinches, then kisses him. Then she hurries to stir something. He straightens the chairs.

BOYFRIEND

Now. The seating arrangement. Who sits where?

DAUGHTER

Your call.

BOYFRIEND

Okay. Let's see. I think we'll put Mom here. Do you think she'll mind me calling her Mom?

DAUGHTER

Are you ready to rush her straight to the morgue?

BOYFRIEND

And, Dad, we'll put here. How about that, a grown man and I'm getting a new Daddy.

DAUGHTER

You're slipping back to if.

BOYFRIEND

You I'll put across from me so I can see your angel face.

DAUGHTER

I'm afraid you'll be looking at a shriveled up prune face.

BOYFRIEND

Impossible.

DAUGHTER

When I'm around my MOTHER, I recede into a coma.

BOYFRIEND

Be patient. You're still her little girl.

DAUGHTER

God, I hope not.

BOYFRIEND

Said with a jolt.

DAUGHTER

Was there an edge in my voice?

BOYFRIEND

You sounded as if your toe was stuck in a light socket.

DAUGHTER

Well, my mom and I have a history.

BOYFRIEND

I'm here to listen.

DAUGHTER

But I'm not here to discuss.

BOYFRIEND

You saw before how purging lightened your load.

DAUGHTER

And you think it will work again.

BOYFRIEND

Don't you feel free?

DAUGHTER

Sort of.

BOYFRIEND

Like the weight of the world has been lifted from your shoulders?

DAUGHTER

Kind of.

BOYFRIEND

Like you're a different woman, capable of scaling new heights?

DAUGHTER

Okay, I'll give it a try. My Mother. Hmm. Where do I start? I was in the back yard before Church playing in my Sunday dress. I fell in the mud. My MOTHER made me wear the dirty dress to Church anyway. Everyone stared.

BOYFRIEND

The stuff that Greek tragedy is made of.

DAUGHTER

Okay. How about this? I'm in Bible class and the teacher asked me where to find, "The Lord is risen indeed." I said Revelation. The correct answer was The Gospel According to John. My Mother made me stay home from roller skating.

BOYFRIEND

Electra, the sequel.

DAUGHTER

You're not taking this seriously.

BOYFRIEND

I am. I'm waiting for the part where she goes to the closet and takes out the wire coat hangers.

DAUGHTER

That's not my Mother. She would never hit me.

BOYFRIEND

Then how bad could she have been?

DAUGHTER

You really want to know?

BOYFRIEND

I wouldn't have asked.

DAUGHTER

Alright. Imagine this. An eight year old girl comes to you with a story about a sparrow who's landed on the window ledge. The sparrow is actually a prince from a far-away land. He's come to save a fair maiden. Yon maiden has been breached by the evil --

The doorbell rings.

BOYFRIEND

Yon Mom.

DAUGHTER

She hast been locked away in the dungeon of the royal castle --

BOYFRIEND

Uh, hon.

DAUGHTER

She hast prayed for yon sparrow to hie to her rescue.

BOYFRIEND

The guests.

The doorbell rings again. It snaps her out of it.

DAUGHTER

Yes. Of course.

She opens the door. The MOTHER is standing there, arms wide open, beaming.

MOTHER

My baby!

DAUGHTER

Mom!

They embrace eagerly, then are joined by the MOTHER's young FIANCE (the actor who played the police OFFICER in Act One).

MOTHER

(gesturing to her FIANCE)

Well, here he is.

(noticing the DAUGHTER's BOYFRIEND)

And here you are.

BOYFRIEND

It's a delight to finally meet you.

MOTHER

I've heard so much about you.

DAUGHTER

(to MOTHER's FIANCE)

And I've heard so much about you.

FIANCE

And me you.

MOTHER

Well, since we've all heard so much about each other, there's no need for anyone to talk.

BOYFRIEND

Good idea. Let's just eat and go home.

FIANCE

I have nothing to say anyway. I'm boring.

DAUGHTER

Is this going to be a fun evening or what?

FIANCE

What.

MOTHER

What.

BOYFRIEND

Who.

MOTHER

(to DAUGHTER)
You didn't tell me he had a sense of humor.

DAUGHTER

I was afraid you'd steal him away from me.

FIANCE

Your Mother do better than me? Impossible.

BOYFRIEND

White wine anyone?

FIANCE

I usually drink only at communion, but under the circumstances.

BOYFRIEND

A quart?

FIANCE

Make it a gallon.

The MOTHER and DAUGHTER stare at them.

MOTHER

I'm not sure if I see the humor in this.

DAUGHTER

The alcohol problem in this country is no laughing matter.

MOTHER

Our youth is being decimated by substance abuse.

DAUGHTER

Our entire culture is being infected.

FIANCE

I'm sorry. We --

BOYFRIEND

Were only trying to break the ice.

FIANCE

Joke around a bit.

BOYFRIEND

Keep things light.

The MOTHER and DAUGHTER nod.

MOTHER

Well, boys will be boys.

DAUGHTER

I suppose that's what God had in mind.

MOTHER

(to BOYFRIEND)

I would adore a cool glass of water, please.

FIANCE

Coming right up.

BOYFRIEND

You pour the water, I'll hold the glass.

FIANCE

Deal.

The men hurry into the kitchen.

MOTHER

I see you finally hemmed those curtains.

DAUGHTER

The day after you were here last.

MOTHER

They look much, much better.

DAUGHTER

You made a good suggestion.

MOTHER

(seeing they're alone)

So?

DAUGHTER

So?

MOTHER

What do you think of him?

DAUGHTER

What do you think of him?

MOTHER

You first.

DAUGHTER

No, you first.

MOTHER

He's so old.

DAUGHTER

He's so young.

MOTHER

Young is relative.

DAUGHTER

Old is a state of mind.

MOTHER

But that man is old enough to be your Father.

DAUGHTER

That man is young enough to be my brother.

MOTHER

He makes me happy.

DAUGHTER

So does mine.

MOTHER

First tenor in the church choir.

DAUGHTER

C.E.O. of Sterling Industries.

MOTHER

Married before?

DAUGHTER

Once.

MOTHER

Children?

DAUGHTER

Two. And yours?

MOTHER

Never married.

DAUGHTER

Children?

MOTHER

Mind you, you're talking about a man of the lord.

DAUGHTER

Is he violent?

MOTHER

I noticed when we arrived that the lobby needs a coat of paint.

DAUGHTER

Mine has never hit a woman.

MOTHER

You should call your landlord first thing in the morning.

DAUGHTER

He hasn't laid a hand on me.

MOTHER

Tell him if he doesn't repaint, you'll withhold your rent.

DAUGHTER

He's gentle with me.

MOTHER

You have no business being in a shabby building like this.

DAUGHTER

He's kind.

MOTHER

With all the money I give you, you could do better.

DAUGHTER

He's nice to me.

MOTHER

Or maybe it's time for you to find a job.

DAUGHTER

He's sensitive.

MOTHER

Get out there and work like other people your age.

DAUGHTER

He's loving.

MOTHER

You've turned into a lazy --

DAUGHTER

You fucking bitch. You know I can't find a job. With assault and battery on my record, I've gotten turned down by every fucking company in the state.

MOTHER

Shhh. You don't want them to overhear.

DAUGHTER

Of course not. My last three boyfriends dumped me cold when they found out the truth. I'm becoming as big a fucking liar as you, you smelly wet --

The men re-enter with a trayful of water and hors d'oeuvres. The

women cover.

MOTHER

Oh, my, what gentlemen.

DAUGHTER

Rhett Butler and Beau Geste.

MOTHER

You are darlings.

DAUGHTER

Knights of old.

MOTHER

(to BOYFRIEND)

So. You're Chief Executive OFFICER of Sterling Industries.

BOYFRIEND

What can I say? I'm an under-achiever.

MOTHER

I love his sense of humor!

FIANCE

Uh-oh. Guess who's running to buy a joke book.

DAUGHTER

(to FIANCE)

My Mother tells me you're brimming with talent. First tenor.

FIANCE

Only because Mr. Pendergast has polyps on his tonsils.

MOTHER

Nonsense. He has a voice like Pavarotti.

DAUGHTER

I love Pavarotti. Maybe you'll sing a song for us.

FIANCE

Here?

DAUGHTER

Why not?

Now? FIANCE

Sure. DAUGHTER

But I -- FIANCE

Oh, go ahead. MOTHER

I can't -- FIANCE

Of course you can. MOTHER

But -- FIANCE

Quit being so stubborn. MOTHER

The FIANCE pounds his fist into the couch.

I said no! Now get off my case! Both of you! FIANCE

There's a stunned silence.

Honey, calm down. She didn't mean anything by it. MOTHER

Really. I didn't. DAUGHTER

She was only being friendly. MOTHER

I thought it would be fun. DAUGHTER

MOTHER

Give her another chance.

DAUGHTER

I was wrong for asking.

FIANCE

Maybe I'm a bit touchy. I'm not good acappella.

MOTHER

Unless he's in the shower. There he sings like an angel.

FIANCE

Well, I guess I could give it a try.

MOTHER

Here?

FIANCE

What the heck.

DAUGHTER

Thank you. Thank you very much.

FIANCE

It's the least I could do for causing a ruckus. I don't want your BOYFRIEND to get the wrong impression of me.

BOYFRIEND

If they pestered me to sing, you'd be calling 911.

FIANCE

When I get riled, I like to let God's words pass through me.

MOTHER

Hallelujah.

DAUGHTER

Amen.

FIANCE

So here goes nothing.

(sings)

SHOUT THE GLAD TIDINGS, EXULTINGLY SING;
JERUSALEM TRIUMPHS, MESSIAH IS KING.
ZION, THE MARVELOUS STORY BE TELLING

THE SON OF THE HIGHEST, HOW LOWLY HIS BIRTH
THE BRIGHTEST ARCHANGEL IN GLORY EXCELLING
HE STOOPS TO REDEEM THEE, HE REIGNS UPON EARTH.

They all applaud.

DAUGHTER

Bravo.

MOTHER

Bravissimo.

BOYFRIEND

You make me want to go back to church again.

MOTHER

Oh? You're not a church goer?

BOYFRIEND

Sunday mornings are the only quiet time I get to read reports.

MOTHER

I'm not sure if that's the Sunday literature God has in mind.

DAUGHTER

Mother, please. He didn't say he was against God.

BOYFRIEND

On the contrary. Every time I get our quarterly earnings report I drop to my knees and shout, "Thank you, lord."

(to FIANCE)

Have you ever sung at an annual stockholders meeting?

FIANCE

Uh, no. Can't say that I have.

BOYFRIEND

I think I have a proposition for you.

DAUGHTER

But not now. It's time for dinner.

MOTHER

Mmm. Doesn't it smell spectacular.

BOYFRIEND

Guess who got to taste?

MOTHER

You are a lucky man.

BOYFRIEND

And I have you to thank for it.

MOTHER

Oh.

(to DAUGHTER)

This one's a keeper!

DAUGHTER

Yes he is.

(to BOYFRIEND)

Come on, you. Help me make the coffee.

BOYFRIEND

Making coffee. Is that legal before marriage?

MOTHER

What a sense of humor!

FIANCE

Mmm. Sounds like food's on the way. Where's the Lava?

DAUGHTER

Down the hall to the left.

MOTHER

I'll show you.

As they head away, the BOYFRIEND
puts his arm around the FIANCE.

BOYFRIEND

Someone take a picture -- Lava and java.

The MOTHER howls with laughter.

MOTHER

Lava and java! This man is going to make me die of
laughter!

The MOTHER and FIANCE exit. The DAUGHTER studies the table.

DAUGHTER

Honey, do you think the blue serving bowl would look better?

BOYFRIEND

Is your MOTHER blind or what?

DAUGHTER

Blind?

BOYFRIEND

That man. Her FIANCE. The guy's a nut job.

DAUGHTER

You just met him.

BOYFRIEND

He nearly tore your couch apart.

DAUGHTER

He was nervous.

BOYFRIEND

Nervous is when your nose twitches.

DAUGHTER

I think the blue serving bowl would look better.

BOYFRIEND

And how about what your MOTHER did to you?

DAUGHTER

Honey, would you go get the blue serving bowl?

BOYFRIEND

She blamed you for the entire thing.

DAUGHTER

It's on the top shelf in the kitchen.

BOYFRIEND

She was egging him on just as much.

DAUGHTER

Next to the gravy turrine.

BOYFRIEND

She made it sound like it was all your fault --

DAUGHTER

Darling, please! We have dinner guests! Serving bowl!

A bit dejected, the BOYFRIEND
heads off to the kitchen.

DAUGHTER

There you go, sulking again.

(heading after him)

Honey, I'm sorry. I'm nervous. Let me give you a big
kiss.

The BOYFRIEND exits into the
kitchen, the DAUGHTER follows.

The MOTHER and FIANCE re-enter.
The MOTHER inspects the dining
room table.

MOTHER

Knife blades pointing in. I thought she'd never learn.

FIANCE

It would be nice if she'd learned some manners.

MOTHER

Napkins squared.

FIANCE

Nagging me, nagging me, nagging me to sing.

MOTHER

She was nervous.

FIANCE

She's lucky that jerk of a BOYFRIEND was here. I'd have
knocked some manners into her.

MOTHER

Sometimes a child needs tough love.

FIANCE

I didn't feel like singing.

MOTHER

(noticing the broken chair)

Oh, look. She still has it.

FIANCE

If they want to hear hymns, let them come to church.

MOTHER

I used to feed her in that chair when she was a baby.

FIANCE

Unless church isn't good enough for them.

MOTHER

What a beautiful baby.

FIANCE

It's clear that you were far too soft on her.

MOTHER

I never even spanked her.

The MOTHER removes the coats from the chair and sits. The chair collapses with a loud crash.

The DAUGHTER and BOYFRIEND run out from the kitchen. The MOTHER is sprawled on the floor.

DAUGHTER

Mom, are you okay?

MOTHER

I'm not -- yes -- fine. I'm fine.

BOYFRIEND

No bones broken?

MOTHER

Not a one. Watch.

(she stands)
Fit as a fiddle.

DAUGHTER
You could have broken your neck.

MOTHER
But I didn't, thank the lord.

DAUGHTER
Thank the lord.

FIANCE
(inspecting the chair)
This leg is cracked clear though.

DAUGHTER
It's been that way for quite some time.

FIANCE
Yet you leave it here for someone to sit on?

BOYFRIEND
We put coats on it.

FIANCE
I'm not talking to you.
(to DAUGHTER)
Is this what you call responsible behavior?

DAUGHTER
No. I don't know. I --

FIANCE
Your carelessness could have killed someone!

DAUGHTER
Yes. I --

BOYFRIEND
(to FIANCE)
Wait a minute here. You're not her Father yet.

FIANCE
But I'm in love with her Mother -- and I'll be damned if
I'll sit back and watch someone abuse her.

MOTHER

Now, boys. Nobody here's been abused.

DAUGHTER

For gosh sake, no.

MOTHER

It was an accident.

DAUGHTER

I should have thrown the chair away years ago.

MOTHER

But we're a sentimental family.

DAUGHTER

My MOTHER used to feed me in that chair when I was a baby.

MOTHER

And what a beautiful baby.

FIANCE

(looking at a different chair)

This one's a mess, too. The wood on the arm is all chewed up.

BOYFRIEND

(noticing)

Looks like someone was chained to it.

FIANCE

Or handcuffed.

BOYFRIEND

(to DAUGHTER)

When you were a little girl, did you play cops and robbers?

The MOTHER and DAUGHTER look at each other, to get their story in synch.

DAUGHTER

Every day after school.

MOTHER

What a tomboy.

DAUGHTER

My mom would be in the kitchen fixing hot chocolate. I'd barge in with a tommy gun and shout, "Gimme all your marshmallows!"

MOTHER

I swore I had another Bonnie and Clyde on my hands.

DAUGHTER

I'd hide under the piano and eat the marshmallows.

MOTHER

Then I'd sneak up from behind and arrest her.

DAUGHTER

She'd tie me to the chair with a piece of string.

MOTHER

It held her still for about ten seconds.

DAUGHTER

So we went to the store and bought a pair of toy handcuffs.

MOTHER

I'd pretend to eat the key.

DAUGHTER

Meanwhile, I'd be yanking on the cuffs up and down.

MOTHER

The neighbors must have thought we were cuckoo.

DAUGHTER

But what did we care what the neighbors thought?

BOYFRIEND

Well, my MOTHER sure wouldn't let me mess up one of our chairs.

FIANCE

Mine would have made me sleep in the garage.

MOTHER

My philosophy was always -- anything for my little girl.

DAUGHTER

That's why we're still good friends.

The MOTHER and DAUGHTER hug. The two men look at each other.

BOYFRIEND

Well, I can see our big competition.

FIANCE

Maybe we should all move in together.

BOYFRIEND

You take the top half of the house.

FIANCE

You take the bottom.

DAUGHTER

It wasn't all fun and games between mom and me.

MOTHER

Nonsense. We were two peas in a pod.

DAUGHTER

I told him before about the slap.

MOTHER

The slap.

DAUGHTER

The time I got mad and hit you. Remember?

MOTHER

Uh, vaguely.

DAUGHTER

And you sent me to my room for the rest of the day?

MOTHER

Oh, that slap.

FIANCE

You hit your MOTHER?

DAUGHTER

A love tap.

FIANCE

There's no such animal. Not from a child to a parent.

DAUGHTER

How about vice versa?

FIANCE

Sometimes it's necessary for a MOTHER to strike a DAUGHTER.

MOTHER

I never hit her in my life.

DAUGHTER

That she didn't.

FIANCE

Perhaps she might have turned out differently if you had.

DAUGHTER

Oh? You see room for improvement?

FIANCE

Not if you're content without a career or a dime to your name.

DAUGHTER

What I need is a new FATHER to straighten me out.

FIANCE

It may be too late for that.

DAUGHTER

Too late. You have a point. That smelly wet --

MOTHER

Hey, where's that dinner you promised?

(to the BOYFRIEND)

People tend to get so grouchy on an empty stomach. We should have all sat down right from the start with a piping cup of hot chocolate. This is a hot chocolate family. Always has been. Even in summer. Hot chocolate has a way of making chilly days seem warmer. Can I fix you a cup? Even though it's not a chilly day.

BOYFRIEND

Maybe not right now.

MOTHER

Well. Then. Hey. Anyone want to hear our wedding plans?

BOYFRIEND

Sure.

FIANCE

Of course.

MOTHER

Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock sharp, we meet at city hall. Judge Parker --

(to DAUGHTER)

You remember Judge Parker. He's the wonderful man who drove clear cross town when the road flooded to drop off groceries.

DAUGHTER

Judge Parker?

MOTHER

You looked in the bag and found a box of Wheat Chex.

DAUGHTER

Sugar Pops.

MOTHER

Exactly. He remembered I mentioned you loved Sugar Pops.

DAUGHTER

There were fresh strawberries in the bag, too.

MOTHER

We made tarts together.

DAUGHTER

You spilled flour on my shoe.

MOTHER

Buster Browns.

DAUGHTER

With the picture of his dog Tyke inside.

MOTHER

You'd fall asleep with your shoes on your pillow.

DAUGHTER

I loved looking at Tyke.

MOTHER

You were so good with animals.

DAUGHTER

We had a bird house by the window.

MOTHER

You'd paint it every winter.

DAUGHTER

I'd wait for the sparrows to return.

MOTHER

Of course. The sparrows.

DAUGHTER

She hast prayed for yon sparrow to --

MOTHER

Anyway, Judge Parker is marrying us in his private chambers.

DAUGHTER

Hie to her --

MOTHER

The last person the Judge married was the mayor.

DAUGHTER

Yon fair maiden hast been --

MOTHER

(to BOYFRIEND and FIANCE)

"Yon Sparrow and Yon Fair Maiden." That was the title of a paper she wrote in grade school.

(to the DAUGHTER)

I can't believe you still remember it. What an astounding memory.

(to BOYFRIEND and FIANCÉ)

She'd hurry home to write those papers. She had such a beautiful way with words. The other children in the neighborhood used foul language. Not her. Never an ounce of profanity. It was "shalt" and "doth." Words Shakespeare used. The words found in the bible. No wonder she got an A on every paper.

DAUGHTER

A minus. I got an A minus on one.

MOTHER

And if I remember correctly, that teacher was tarred and feathered the next day in the town square.

DAUGHTER

Mom --

MOTHER

Well, she should have been. That's what I told the principal when I marched into his office.

(to BOYFRIEND and FIANCÉ)

Maybe I was an over-protective MOTHER. I don't know. Maybe I'm old fashioned. To me, if a Mother doesn't defend her own children, who will?

FIANCE is studying the broken chair.

FIANCE

You know, I think I can fix this tattered antique.

DAUGHTER

You could?

FIANCE

A few bolts and a prayer.

DAUGHTER

Fantastic -- that chair means so much to me.

FIANCE

Where's the tool box?

DAUGHTER

So many fond memories.

MOTHER

Honey, the tools are in the kitchen.

DAUGHTER

Like the time some police offic --

MOTHER

I'll show you where the tool box is.

DAUGHTER

Mom, that's so helpful.

MOTHER

Anything for my baby.

DAUGHTER

Give me a hug.

The two women embrace.

FIANCE

(carrying the chair toward the kitchen)

Maybe some wood glue.

MOTHER

Don't bump the kitchen door.

The MOTHER hurries to open the door for the FIANCE. They exit into the kitchen with the chair.

The DAUGHTER notices something on the dining room table.

DAUGHTER

Oh, no. I put the butter on the wrong side of the bread.

BOYFRIEND

I have to admit. Watching you and your MOTHER in action is quite an experience.

DAUGHTER

Could you hand me the butter?

BOYFRIEND

Sometimes I think you're going to kill each other.

DAUGHTER

Honey, the butter.

BOYFRIEND

Next it looks like you're going to run away together to Tahiti.

DAUGHTER

Could you please reach it for me?

BOYFRIEND

I guess that's the way it is with MOTHERs and DAUGHTERs.

DAUGHTER

Honey?

BOYFRIEND

I suppose if we have a daugh --

DAUGHTER

Stop! Pay attention!

BOYFRIEND

Okay, okay.

DAUGHTER

I need that butter!

BOYFRIEND

(reaching for it)

Geeze.

DAUGHTER

I'm sorry.

BOYFRIEND

No need.

DAUGHTER

I snapped at you.

BOYFRIEND

A tiny snap.

DAUGHTER

I'm terrible.

BOYFRIEND

At least you didn't use the knife.

DAUGHTER

You hate me.

BOYFRIEND

I love you.

DAUGHTER

You're mad at me.

BOYFRIEND

I'm mad about you.

DAUGHTER

You don't like my MOTHER.

BOYFRIEND

Your MOTHER's fine, it's her new husband I can't stand.

DAUGHTER

Husband-to-be.

BOYFRIEND

He's got a mean streak in him.

DAUGHTER

Did you feel it?

BOYFRIEND

Thank God she's too old to have children. I swear, if I weren't around, I think he would have whacked you.

MOTHER

My MOTHER wouldn't have let him.

BOYFRIEND

He's a creep.

MOTHER

She's there to protect me. Always has been.

BOYFRIEND

A bully.

DAUGHTER

She'd beat the tar out of him if he ever laid a hand on me.

BOYFRIEND

Well, if that man ever tries anything funny -- and your Mother's not around -- call me.

DAUGHTER

I will.

BOYFRIEND

It'll be the last time he'll think of bothering you.

DAUGHTER

Thank you.

BOYFRIEND

I know I'll never be able to replace your Mother. But if you marry me, I promise one thing: I'll do everything to make sure nothing happens to you.

DAUGHTER

When.

BOYFRIEND

When what?

DAUGHTER

When you marry me.

(she kisses him)

Now, galley-boy. I'm going to serve the salad. Oh, no. Look at those wastebaskets. Filled to the brim. My Mother will have a conniption if she sees that mess. I am the worst hostess on earth.

BOYFRIEND grabs the wastebaskets.

BOYFRIEND

Ace Garbagegeman to the rescue.

DAUGHTER

You don't mind?

BOYFRIEND

Anything to save a conniption.

The BOYFRIEND begins to exit, the
DAUGHTER stops him.

DAUGHTER

When I was a girl, she always sent me to summer camp. Even
when money was tight. And not just any summer camp. The
most exclusive one around.

The BOYFRIEND kisses her, then
exits with the wastebaskets.

The FIANCE hurries in from the
kitchen carrying the chair. The
MOTHER follows, beaming.

MOTHER

Look, he fixed it.

DAUGHTER

Fantastic.

FIANCE

There was a metal brace that got loose. I tightened it up.
The chair's stronger now than when it was first built.

MOTHER

My genius.

DAUGHTER

Mom, how lucky can you get? A hymn-singing fix-it man.

MOTHER

What can I say? God loves me.

DAUGHTER

Yes he does.

FIANCE

Where's the new beau?

DAUGHTER

Taking the trash downstairs.

MOTHER

Imagine. A C.E.O. emptying garbage. So humble.

DAUGHTER

I like that in a man.

MOTHER

Humility, the king of virtues.

FIANCE

There's a heap of trash in the kitchen -- I think I'll help.

DAUGHTER

You are such a doll.

FIANCE

That way I can sneak a bite of what smells so good.

DAUGHTER

Normally I don't allow tastes, but for you --

FIANCE

I am growing fonder and fonder of this girl.

DAUGHTER

I hope so.

FIANCE

If I'm not back in an hour, send for pizza.

The women laugh heartily as the
FIANCE exits. Then they look at
each other.

MOTHER

So?

DAUGHTER

So?

MOTHER

He's perfect for you.

DAUGHTER

I can see why you'd like him.

MOTHER

C.E.O.'s don't grow on trees.

DAUGHTER

He has a beautiful singing voice.

MOTHER

And what a sense of humor.

DAUGHTER

It's impressive how he fixed that chair.

MOTHER

I hope you two will be
very happy.

DAUGHTER

I wish you both all the
happiness.

MOTHER

Thank you.

DAUGHTER

Thank you.

MOTHER

(re the salad)

Mmm. Smothered with croutons.

DAUGHTER

Just the way you like it.

MOTHER

Why don't I help you dish it out.

DAUGHTER

I'll slice the French bread.

MOTHER

Good.

DAUGHTER

Good.

The MOTHER serves salad into the
bowls. The DAUGHTER slices the
bread with a large, sharp knife.

MOTHER

You two seem to talk a lot.

DAUGHTER

A bit, though I really don't like discussions.

MOTHER

I understand how you feel.

DAUGHTER

Most things are better left unsaid.

MOTHER

Let sleeping dogs lie is my point of view.

DAUGHTER

And sleeping sparrows.

She aims the knife towards the
MOTHER, who's somewhat startled
until the DAUGHTER smiles.

MOTHER

I get my bread sliced down at the grocery.

DAUGHTER

It stays fresher this way.

MOTHER

You could cut yourself.

DAUGHTER

Are you worried about me?

MOTHER

I always worry about you.

DAUGHTER

You?

MOTHER

I don't appreciate the tone of sarcasm.

DAUGHTER

Worried about me.

MOTHER

You know good and well you --
(spills some salad on her blouse)

Darn. Now look what you made me do.

DAUGHTER

Sorry. Here, let me fix that.

She lunges at the MOTHER, the knife aimed at her heart.

MOTHER

No!

The knife barely misses the MOTHER's chest. The DAUGHTER whisks a leaf of lettuce off her blouse.

DAUGHTER

There. It's off. It didn't even leave a spot.

MOTHER

I --

DAUGHTER

Mother, you look like you've seen a ghost.

MOTHER

It --

DAUGHTER

You don't think I would hurt you?

MOTHER

I --

DAUGHTER

I thought we agreed to let sleeping sparrows lie.

MOTHER

But --

DAUGHTER

Aw. You're frightened. Come here. Let me give you a hug.

Nervously, the MOTHER extends her arms. Tenderly, the DAUGHTER embraces her. But the blade of

the knife lands pressed up against
the MOTHER's neck.

MOTHER

No. Please.

DAUGHTER

What on earth are you so jumpy about?

MOTHER

The knife. It's --

DAUGHTER

Resting on your jugular?

MOTHER

Yes.

DAUGHTER

Well, here. Let me move it for you.

With a slicing motion that nearly
draws blood, the DAUGHTER slides
the blade of the knife across the
MOTHER's throat. She studies the
MOTHER's terrified eyes, relishes
the moment, then steps back. The
hug is broken.

MOTHER

(grabbing her neck)

You -- you could have --

DAUGHTER

Killed you?

MOTHER

I don't know what you're trying to prove.

DAUGHTER

I'm only getting dinner ready.

MOTHER

Treating me like I was some kind of criminal.

DAUGHTER

Should I slice the bread straight or at an angle?

MOTHER

My only crime was to provide a stable home for you.

DAUGHTER

Straight or at an angle?

MOTHER

Summer camp every year.

DAUGHTER

Or lengthwise?

MOTHER

And not just any summer camp. The most exclusive --

The DAUGHTER attacks her with the knife.

DAUGHTER

Shut up, you smelly wet bitch!

She pins the MOTHER to the table, knife raised in the air.

MOTHER

Go ahead. Kill me for my sins.

DAUGHTER

Kill you?

MOTHER

You have such hatred for me.

DAUGHTER

I love you.

MOTHER

Such anger.

DAUGHTER

You're my MOTHER.

MOTHER

If I only knew what I did to deserve this.

DAUGHTER

I only wanted your opinion. Should I slice the bread straight, at an angle, or lengthwise?

MOTHER

(staring at the knife)

Lengthwise.

DAUGHTER

Lengthwise. Sounds good.

She holds the knife lengthwise, moves it closer to the MOTHER's body, then stabs it into the loaf of French bread.

The MOTHER steps away from the table. She's shaken. She holds her throat. She checks for blood.

Then.

Whack.

She slaps her DAUGHTER across the face.

DAUGHTER

Ouch!

MOTHER

(stunned by what she's done)

My god.

DAUGHTER

You hit me.

MOTHER

I didn't mean that.

DAUGHTER

By yourself.

MOTHER

I take it back.

DAUGHTER

Without sending a man to do it.

MOTHER

That wasn't me. That wasn't me. That wasn't me.

DAUGHTER

Don't cry, Mom.

The DAUGHTER comforts her MOTHER.

MOTHER

Go ahead. Stab me. I deserve it.

DAUGHTER

No you don't.

MOTHER

I've never hit you before in my life.

DAUGHTER

You didn't need to.

MOTHER

Not even a spanking.

DAUGHTER

You got Dad to do it for you.

MOTHER

Your FATHER was cruel to me also.

DAUGHTER

But you could defend yourself.

MOTHER

He was so big.

DAUGHTER

A lot bigger than me.

MOTHER

He was so mean.

DAUGHTER

You could have left him.

MOTHER

He had all the money.

DAUGHTER

There's no excuse.

MOTHER

I couldn't have afforded to send you to summer camp.

DAUGHTER

You didn't do your job.

The MOTHER reaches out for her
DAUGHTER.

MOTHER

I'm so sorry I hit you, darling.

DAUGHTER

For that I forgive you.

She hugs her MOTHER dearly,
tenderly, sincerely. They hold
their embrace.

MOTHER

I love you, sweetheart.

DAUGHTER

I love you, Mom.

The DAUGHTER looks at her face in
the mirror.

DAUGHTER

Boy, do you pack a wollop.

She smiles at her mom, then dials
a phone.

DAUGHTER

Hello, police. I'd like to report an assault.

CURTAIN