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For Brett, Robyn, Spencer and Clifford

FAMILY LIFE:
THREE BRUTAL COMEDIES

by Wendy Hammond

The Transmogrification 11

Minna and the Space People 25

Mom and the Razor Blades 33

Acknowledgments

Family Life: Three Brutal Comedies originated in Bob Moss' workshop at Playwrights Horizons. It was originally produced by Home for Contemporary Theatre and Art and the Stonehill Theatre Project, New York City. It opened on April 12, 1989 with the following cast and creative contributors:

The Transmogrification

JANE . . . . . Paula Redinger
MRS. WHITE . . . . . Cecilia de Wolf
MR. WHITE . . . . . .Barry Kramer

Minna and the Space People

MINNA. . . . . Sarah Halley
BRIAN. . . . . .Barry Kramer

Mom and the Razor Blades

MOM . . . . . Cecilia de Wolf
GRACE . . . . . Sarah Halley
FAITH . . . . . Paula Redinger

Director. . . . . .Barry Jay Kaplan
Set design . . . . . .Geoffrey Makstutis
Costume design. . . . . .Donna Langman
Lighting design . . . . . .Susi Levi
Sound design . . . . . Andy Stein
Prop design . . . . . Lou Storey
Stage Manager . . . . . Osiris Hertz
Production Manager. . . . . Murphy Davis

Cast of Characters

JANE

MRS. WHITE

MR. WHITE

THE TRANSMOGRIFICATION

(A kitchen. MR. WHITE *sits at the table center, facing the audience, completely hidden behind the* New York Post. *On his right sits* MRS. WHITE, *on his left daughter* JANE. *The women watch him, trembling with terror, their forks poised above their untouched dinners.* MR. WHITE *wears a black suit and bow tie with a white shirt.* MRS. WHITE *and* JANE *are also in black and white. The only color on stage is a giant pink bow in Jane's hair.)*

JANE. M-m-mom?

MRS. WHITE. Sh.

*(*MR. WHITE's *hand appears from behind the paper. He snaps his fingers then points to his empty plate.* MRS. WHITE *jumps up, races to the counter, shovels more food onto his plate, and runs back to the table.* MR. WHITE's *hand grabs the plate and pulls it behind the paper. Horrible gobbling sounds. The plate reappears, empty.)*

JANE. A-ask him.

MRS. WHITE. Sssh.

*(*MR. WHITE's *hand snaps again and points to his martini glass.* MRS. WHITE *jumps up, dashes to the counter, pours a martini from a shaker, throws in two olives, and sprints back to the table. The martini glass disappears behind the paper. Horrible gurgling sounds. The martini glass reappears empty.)*

JANE. P-p-please?

MRS. WHITE. In a minute.

*(*MR. WHITE *snaps and points to the martini glass,* MRS. WHITE *scurries to fill it,* MR. WHITE's *hand pulls it behind the paper, horrible gurgling sounds, and the glass reappears.* JANE *watches, trembling with terror, her fork poised over her dinner.)*

MR. WHITE. *(From behind the paper:)* My boss called me a cockroach today.

MRS. WHITE. Cockroach?

(Gets it.)

Oh, it's a joke. Jane, it's a joke.

(Forced gales of laughter from MRS. WHITE. JANE *looks confused. Suddenly the paper smashes down on the table giving us for the first time a view of* MR. WHITE's *face which is, at the moment, red and puffed with anger.)*

MR. WHITE. It's not FUNNY!

MRS. WHITE. *(Frantically:)* Of course not, dear. Not funny at—

MR. WHITE. I work my GUTS out for the company. I come up with IDEAS! No one else around there has any ideas! I've got more ideas than all of them put together, but do they reward me?!

MRS. WHITE. *(Desperately:)* Not at all. They don't appreciate you one little—

MR. WHITE. WRONG! THEY DO REWARD ME!

MRS. WHITE. *(Emphatically:)* They reward you. I was wrong—

MR. WHITE. My boss says I'm a cockroach, THAT'S HOW THEY REWARD ME! He calls me into his office. He says I'm about as useful as an irritating BUG. He says he's tried to get rid of me but I just won't LEAVE. He called me a COCKROACH!

*(*MRS. WHITE *jumps up, hugs and strokes him.)*

MRS. WHITE. *(Effusively:)* You're not a cockroach. I don't care what anybody says. The only reason he called you that is because he's jealous of you. Don't you think the man's jealous, Jane?

JANE. I th-th-th-th-ink m-maybe D-Daddy is b-bad at his j-j-j-j-job.

MR. WHITE. *(To* MRS. WHITE*:)* When is she going to learn how to talk? I can't understand a friggin' word.

MRS. WHITE. We're working on it, dear.

JANE. A-ask him, M-m-mom.

MR. WHITE. Where was I?

MRS. WHITE. You were saying your boss is jealous of you.

MR. WHITE. That's right. He's jealous. That's why he treats me like shit. I got ideas ten times better than his!

MRS. WHITE. Of course you do. Of course.

MR. WHITE. I know it. He knows it. He knows I know he knows it. He knows I know he knows everybody knows it. So he's jealous. I mean, who wouldn't be jealous?

MRS. WHITE. Of course he's jealous. Of course.

MR. WHITE. They're going to make me president of the company, you wait and see. Any day now. President of the whole damn company!

MRS. WHITE. Any day. Any minute. Any second now that phone's going to ring. Don't you think so, Jane? Don't you think your father will make the best president the company ever had?

JANE. N-n-n-n-n-no since he d-doesn't seem to g-g-g-get along with p-p-people.

MR. WHITE. *(To* MRS. WHITE*:)* You've got to do something with her. I can't understand a friggin' word.

JANE. P-p-please, Mom?

MRS. WHITE. In a minute.

JANE. I'd ask him m-m-myself b-but he d-d-doesn't understand a f-f-riggin' word.

MR. WHITE. Where was I?

MRS. WHITE. President.

MR. WHITE. President, that's right. I'm going to be president of the whole damn conglomerate. That's why my boss is jealous of me.

MRS. WHITE. Of course that's why. Of course.

MR. WHITE. You know? I feel better. I think. I was depressed when I came home from work but now I think I feel better. I think. Thank you, Snooks.

MRS. WHITE. Anytime, Sweetums.

MR. WHITE. *(Pinching her cheeks:)* You are the cutest thing, Mufkins.

MRS. WHITE. So are you, Darling Pie.

JANE. M-m-mom?

MRS. WHITE. Alright, Jane.

JANE. P-p-please?

MRS. WHITE. Ok. Ah… Sugarlips?

MR. WHITE. What?

MRS. WHITE. We've got a…

MR. WHITE. What?

MRS. WHITE. We want to… Well…

MR. WHITE. What.

MRS. WHITE. Ah…well…

MR. WHITE. What.

MRS. WHITE. You see…

MR. WHITE. WHAT.

MRS. WHITE. It's just…

MR. WHITE. WHAT!

JANE. W-w-w-we have s-s-s-s-something to ask y-y-y-y-y-y-you.

MR. WHITE. WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE SAYING?

MRS. WHITE. We have something to ask you.

MR. WHITE. *(Calming down:)* Oh. OK. What?

MRS. WHITE. Well. It'll mean so much to Jane.

MR. WHITE. What!

MRS. WHITE. Jane really has her heart set on it.

MR. WHITE. WHAT.

MRS. WHITE. I mean all day long she plays records—Beethoven, Bach, Brahms—and she practices her dancing. So I thought… Well…

MR. WHITE. WHAT!

MRS. WHITE. In the middle of the night, too. I get up to go to the bathroom and there she is humming waltzes—Strauss mostly—and dancing all around her room. So we were wondering… Well…

MR. WHITE. WHAT!! WHAT!! WHAT!!

MRS. WHITE. I mean if you could see how lonely she looks as she pirouettes across the back of the couch, tears streaming down her face making puddles all over the cushions, so we though…ah…

MR. WHITE. You're beginning to bug me.

MRS. WHITE. Well…ah…

MR. WHITE. You're really beginning to bug me.

MRS. WHITE. We want… Well Jane wants…

MR. WHITE. I am definitely BUGGED!

MRS. WHITE. Well maybe Jane better tell you. Tell him, Jane.

JANE. I w-want to g-go to the ch-ch-church d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d—

MRS. WHITE. Come on, Jane.

JANE. d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d—

MRS. WHITE. Come on!

JANE. d-d-dance tonight.

MR. WHITE. WHAT THE FUCK IS SHE SAYING?

MRS. WHITE. *(Blurts.)* She wants to go to the church dance tonight. *(Winces.)*

(Silence.)

MR. WHITE. She what?

JANE. P-p-p-p-p-please?

MR. WHITE. There's something I don't understand here. Who paid for this house? Did you pay for this house?

MRS. WHITE. No, dear.

MR. WHITE. Did you pay for this house?

JANE. N-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n—

MR. WHITE. Then who paid for this house?

MRS. WHITE.
You did, dear.

JANE.
Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE. Who pays for food around here? Who pays for clothes and electricity and heat?

MRS. WHITE.
You do, dear.

JANE.
Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE. Who pays for TVs and DVD players and stereos and iPods?

MRS. WHITE.
You do, dear.

JANE.
Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE. Who pays for cell phones and laptops? Who pays for refrigerators and stoves and dishwashers and sinks and counters and tiles and wallpaper and lamps?

MRS. WHITE.
You do, dear.

JANE.
Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE. Who pays for pans and dishes and silverware and glasses and dust pans and sponges and mops? Who pays for Ivory soap and Ajax cleanser and Mr. Clean?

MRS. WHITE.
You do, dear.

JANE.
Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE. And therefore, who is the boss around here? Who gets to make up the rules?

MRS. WHITE.
You do, dear.

JANE.
Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y—

MR. WHITE. Good. Very good. Now I seem to recall a rule, one of the most important rules, that says that my daughter and my wife are supposed to be there each evening when I get home from working my GUTS out ALL DAY. That they are supposed to take CARE of me, give

me LOVE and AFFECTION. They are NOT supposed to ABANDON me. The are NOT supposed to FORSAKE me for things like church dances after I've been DEFILED and DEBASED and ABUSED and HUMILIATED ALL DAY EVERY DAY AT WORK so they can have things like TVs and DVD players and stereos and iPods and cell phones and lap tops and refrigerators and stoves and dishwashers and sinks and counters and tiles and wallpaper and lamp and pans and dishes and silverware and glasses and dust pans and sponges and mops and Ivory soap and Ajax cleanser and Mr. CLEAN!

JANE. M-m-m-mom? H-help m-m-m-m-me.

MR. WHITE. Can't you shut her UP!

JANE. I w-w-w-w-w-want to g-go to the d-d-d-d-d-dance.

MRS. WHITE. *(Terrified:)* Ah…well…it's just we've been thinking, dear. Jane isn't so young anymore. Most girls her age have careers and families by now. What's so awful about letting her go out just this once?

MR. WHITE. Wait a minute. Are you defying me?

MRS. WHITE. No. I'm just…asking a question. I think I should be…allowed to ask a question…now and then… And I think Jane… should be allowed to go to this dance!

MR. WHITE. My God. This is mutiny.

MRS. WHITE. If that's how you want to put it.

(Pause.)

MR. WHITE. I seem to recall there was once another mutiny. Do you remember that mutiny?

MRS. WHITE. Yes.

MR. WHITE. What happened after that mutiny?

MRS. WHITE. You put us out. You locked the doors.

MR. WHITE. And?

MRS. WHITE. It was cold.

MR. WHITE. And?

MRS. WHITE. We got frostbite.

MR. WHITE. And?

MRS. WHITE. Jane lost a finger and I lost three toes.

MR. WHITE. Good. Very good. Now I'm going to read my paper and there will be no more talk of mutiny. Terrible things happen

when there is talk of mutiny. Betrayers are punished. Remember Brutus? Remember Judas?

> *(He opens the paper completely covering himself again. His hand appears from behind the paper, snaps and points to his empty plate.* MRS. WHITE *jumps up, shovels more food onto the plate, and throws it back on the table.* MR. WHITE *pulls it behind the paper. Horrible gobbling sounds. Immediately the plate appears, empty.)*

JANE. *(To* MR. WHITE*:)* I d-d-d-don't have any f-f-friends.

MRS. WHITE. Sssh.

JANE. I w-want to g-g-g-go to the d-dance so I can make f-friends.

MRS. WHITE. Let him read, Sweetheart. He's had a bad day.

JANE. Other p-p-people have f-friends.

MRS. WHITE. Sssh.

JANE. W-w-why c-can't I?

MRS. WHITE. We'll ask him tomorrow.

JANE. *(To* MRS. WHITE*:)* Ask him n-now! I'm t-tired of tomorrow. I'm thirty-five years old and I've never made any friends. I want to go to the dance tonight!

MRS. WHITE. Jane, your stutter!

JANE. I want to go to the dance!

MRS. WHITE. Your stutter is gone!

JANE. *(Joyously:)* Please let me go to the dance!

MRS. WHITE. *(Joyously:)* Please let Jane go to the dance, please!

> *(*MR. WHITE *slams down the paper. Silence.)*

MR. WHITE. *(Very calm:)* You know? You are really really bugging me. In fact, you're beginning to look like a bug. In fact, you're beginning to look like a cockroach.

MRS. WHITE. Cockroach?

MR. WHITE. Yes.

MRS. WHITE. *(Gets it.)* Oh, it's a joke. Jane, it's a joke.

> *(Forced gales of laughter.)*

MR. WHITE. IT'S NOT FUNNY!

> *(Silence.)*

MR. WHITE. What's that?

MRS. WHITE. What?

MR. WHITE. On your arm.

MRS. WHITE. Where?

MR. WHITE. There.

MRS. WHITE. I don't see anything.

MR. WHITE. I do. It's changing color.

MRS. WHITE. No.

MR. WHITE. Cockroach color.

MRS. WHITE. I don't think so.

MR. WHITE. Oh my God.

MRS. WHITE. What?

MR. WHITE. Your eyes are getting bigger.

MRS. WHITE. Oh now…

MR. WHITE. You're growing antennae. Little insect legs are popping out of your body.

MRS. WHITE. Don't be silly.

MR. WHITE. You're doubting my word?

MRS. WHITE. No, but—

MR. WHITE. I've always been right before.

MRS. WHITE. I know, but—

MR. WHITE. I'm boss in this house. Right?

MRS. WHITE. Yes you're the boss, but—

MR. WHITE. Jane? Isn't she looking more and more like a cockroach?

(Stands over JANE *threateningly.)*

Tell the truth.

JANE. *(Terrified:)* W-w-well. Sh-sh-she is ch-ch-changing c-c-c-color.

MR. WHITE. She is changing color.

MRS. WHITE. I thought you couldn't understand a word Jane says.

MR. WHITE. You thought wrong.

(Points to MRS. WHITE's *head.)*

What are those up there, Jane?

JANE. Ant-t-tennae.

MR. WHITE. Antennae.

MRS. WHITE. I can't change into a cockroach just because you say so.

MR. WHITE. Oh no? Look at that.

(He holds a shiny pan in front of her face. She looks at her reflection and screams.)

MRS. WHITE. OH MY GOD! OH MY GOD!

(She starts running around in circles trying to pull the skin off her arms and face.)

MRS. WHITE. HELP! HELP! WHAT DO I DO?! WHAT DO I DO?!

MR. WHITE. I'M not the cockroach. My boss was wrong. YOU'RE the fucking cockroach. It's YOU.

JANE. *(Anguished:)* M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-mom!

MRS. WHITE. *(Screams and doubles over:)* MY BODY IS CHANGING! I CAN FEEL IT! MY BODY IS CHANGING!

(Her body curls and writhes as it changes into the shape of a cockroach.)

JANE. D-d-don't l-l-listen to him!

MR. WHITE. *(As* MRS. WHITE *changes:)* It's finally coming out, how disgusting you are, how ugly you really fucking ARE.

JANE. D-don't let him d-d-d-do this to you!

MR. WHITE. The way you grovel before me, it's fucking DISGUSTING. The way you try to please me doing every little thing I say—

JANE. D-don't b-believe him!

MR. WHITE. Tonight's the second time in your life you ever even QUESTIONED me and look where it's got you. YOU'RE TURNING INTO A COCKROACH!

JANE. He's n-not God, he's just y-your husband! D-d-don't b-believe him!

MR. WHITE. You HAVE to believe me, you disgusting little cockroach. You can't think for yourself. Every thought in your head was put there by ME. You're not a person; you're a BLOB, a little fucking spineless BUG scurrying around every time I fucking snap my fingers!

JANE. Ty-tyrant!

MR. WHITE. I fucking HATE being married to you, do you fucking know that? Whimpering, simpering, this whole fucking marriage you've fucking disGUSTED me and now I fucking know why!

JANE. D-dictator!

MR. WHITE. You're a fucking COCKROACH! That's why my fucking boss fucking called me that today. Your fucking cockroachness fucking rubbed the fuck off on ME!

MRS. WHITE. Help me! Please! I don't want to be a cockroach!

MR. WHITE. Then you better choose. Either you're MY WIFE. Or you're her mother THE COCKROACH.

JANE. D-d-don't l-l-listen to him!

MRS. WHITE. NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(Silence.)

I'm not the cockroach! I'M NOT THE COCKROACH!

(She points a crooked finger at JANE*.)*

SHE'S the cockroach!

JANE. C-c-c-c-c-cockroach?

(Gets it.)

Oh, it's a j-j-j-joke. R-right?

(Gales of forced laughter.)

MRS. WHITE. IT'S NOT FUNNY!

(Immediately JANE *is silent.* MRS. WHITE's *body begins to straighten out.)*

MR. WHITE. *(Points to* JANE's *arm.)* What's that?

MRS. WHITE. *(Takes the cue:)* Yeah. What's that?

JANE. W-w-w-what?

MRS. WHITE. Your arms are changing color.

JANE. N-n-n-n-no.

MR. WHITE. She's calling you a liar.

MRS. WHITE. *(Takes the cue:)* ARE YOU CALLING YOUR MOTHER A LIAR?

JANE. N-n-n-no.

MRS. WHITE. Good. Because mothers don't lie. Do they?

JANE. N-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n—

MRS. WHITE. DO THEY?

JANE. M-m-m-m-mothers d-d-don't l-l-lie.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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Cast of Characters

MINNA

BRIAN

MINNA AND THE SPACE PEOPLE

*(*MINNA*—in a dress from the donated clothes box, her hands in fists—stands facing* BRIAN. BRIAN*—in a rumpled business suit, his lips pursed—stands facing* MINNA. *Throughout the scene he pops pills and then candy into his mouth, arranges items on the table into geometric patterns and dabs his brow with a handkerchief which he then folds carefully into a tiny little square. Overlapping:)*

MINNA. YOU WILL NOT KILL MY BABY!

BRIAN. It's not killing. It's just taking it out of your body.

MINNA. YOU HAVE NO RIGHT KILLING MY BABY!

BRIAN. But they'll take it away from you. They don't let babies stay in the nuthouse!

MINNA. YOU WON'T KILL MY BABY! I WON'T LET YOU KILL MY BABY!

BRIAN. I'm not killing it. THE DOCTOR IS KILLING IT. I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. Minna, you are driving me *crazy!*

MINNA. *(Pointing to her stomach:)* This baby is more important than Jesus Christ.

BRIAN. Minna, they don't let lunatics raise children in the loony bin.

MINNA. This baby will save the world from nuclear holocaust.

BRIAN. Is that what you want, Minna? You want them to give your baby away?

MINNA. Jesus Christ didn't save the world from nuclear holocaust. Jesus Christ just said turn the other cheek!

BRIAN. You want your child put up for adoption? You want strangers raising it? What if some corrupt Wall Street hedge fund broker gets a hold of your child and teaches it to harm other people in the most despicable ways?!

MINNA. That will never happen! That's what I'm trying to tell you. You can call a sanity hearing. You can say Mom and Dad made a mistake; I'm really NOT crazy. You're my brother. You could tell them I never once did anything crazy the whole time we were growing up.

BRIAN. Minna…

MINNA. I never did anything crazy, right?

BRIAN. That isn't the—

MINNA. The whole time we were growing up. Never once!

BRIAN. We're off the subject.

MINNA. This IS the subject. I never did anything crazy, right?

BRIAN. The subject is you've got to have an abortion. There are no obstacles to this, Minna. You have no religious beliefs against this. You used to say you were pro-choice when you were a kid.

MINNA. I'm not talking to you 'til you tell me I'm right. I never did anything crazy.

BRIAN. Minna!

> *(*MINNA *sits on the floor, closes her eyes and puts her fingers in her ears.)*

BRIAN. Alright. You're right.

MINNA. About what?

BRIAN. You're right about not being crazy when we were growing up.

MINNA. *(Jumping up:)* That's right. So all you have to do is tell them that at the hearing and then buy me a little apartment and a crib and some food—

BRIAN. I can't buy you an apartment—

MINNA. Yes you CAN!

BRIAN. I don't have the money.

MINNA. Yes you DO!

BRIAN. No I DON'T!

MINNA. YOU AND RITA MAKE LOTS OF MONEY!

BRIAN. WE ALSO HAVE LOTS OF BILLS!

MINNA. CUT BACK!

BRIAN. WE CAN'T!

MINNA. YES YOU CAN!

BRIAN. NO WE CAN'T!

MINNA. YES YOU CAN!

BRIAN. NO WE CAN'T! NO WE CAN'T! NO WE CAN'T!

> *(*MINNA *stomps her foot, then plops down furiously into a chair facing away from* BRIAN. *Then* BRIAN *stomps his foot and plops down furiously into a chair facing away from* MINNA.*)*

BRIAN. OK. Who's the father? Maybe I could figure this out better if you told me who the father is.

MINNA. There isn't a father.

BRIAN. There has to be a—

MINNA. The space people put her inside me.

BRIAN. Space people.

(Dabs brow and pops pills.)

MINNA. They took me into their spaceship and put a machine on my stomach and told me I would now bear a girl child who would save the world from nuclear holocaust.

BRIAN. How did you get into their ship?

MINNA. They came to me at night—they're really weird looking; I was scared out of my mind—and they made me stand this certain way. Then all of a sudden I was out of the hospital and zooming straight up in the air.

BRIAN. Minna, there has to be a father. I was sitting right next to you when Mom explained the facts of life to us, so I know you know there has to be a father.

MINNA. Jesus didn't have a father.

BRIAN. Then who did you have sex with? You had to have sex with SOMEbody!

MINNA. The space people told me not to have sex.

BRIAN. Stop talking about the space people! There's no such thing as space people!

MINNA. Then how come I talk to them all the time? How come they tell me how to be happy? How come they want to talk to you and tell you how to be happy, too?

BRIAN. *(Pops pills and candy.)* I am happy!

MINNA. You fight with Rita all the time.

BRIAN. I do not.

MINNA. Rita drinks so much you have to call her work and make excuses. Sometimes she hits you just like Mom did.

BRIAN. *(Flaring:)* She doesn't—!

MINNA. Sometimes she throws things at you.

BRIAN. *(Collects himself.)* Rita drinks no more than anyone else and she never hits me.

MINNA. Then how come you have a giant bruise on your back?

BRIAN. I don't have a bruise on my back.

MINNA. Yes.

BRIAN. No!

MINNA. The space people told me. You were fighting. You turned away. She threw the vacuum cleaner at your back.

BRIAN. We're off the subject! The subject is you having an abortion!

MINNA. *(Jumping up:)* I WILL NOT HAVE AN ABORTION!

BRIAN. *(Jumping up:)* YOU DON'T HAVE A CHOICE!

MINNA. YOU have a choice! YOU can save my baby!

BRIAN. I CAN'T SAVE YOUR BABY!

MINNA. All you have to do is get me out of here and give me a little money!

BRIAN. I DON'T HAVE A LITTLE MONEY!

MINNA. Then get me out of here and I'LL FIND THE MONEY!

BRIAN. I CAN'T get you out of here! You're not ready to get out of here!

MINNA. YES I AM!

BRIAN. NO YOU'RE NOT!

MINNA. SAYS WHO?

BRIAN. SAYS YOUR DOCTORS!

MINNA. WHAT DO THEY KNOW?

BRIAN. They know you're CRAZY!

MINNA. I AM NOT CRAZY!

BRIAN. YOU BELIEVE IN SPACE PEOPLE! THAT'S CRAZY!!

MINNA. *(Deep breath:)* You mean, you're not going to help me?

BRIAN. I can't. I'm sorry.

MINNA. You won't save the savior of the world?

BRIAN. Minna.

MINNA. What if Jesus had been an abortion? Think of that.

BRIAN. Jesus' mother didn't live in a nuthouse.

> *(Beside herself,* MINNA *kicks a chair, then plops down into it facing away from* BRIAN.*)*

BRIAN. Minna, someday, if you do everything the doctors tell you, maybe you'll get out of here. And then you'll find a job and a

husband and then you can start a family, a normal family. Isn't that what you really want? Isn't that the way you really want it?

> *(*MINNA *doesn't respond.)*

I just think it will be emotionally easier on you to have this abortion now than to have to give the baby away later… You know I'm right. I know you know I'm right.

> *(*MINNA *doesn't respond.)*

Minna, we've got to talk about this. We're not going to get anywhere if we don't start talking.

> *(*MINNA *doesn't respond.* BRIAN *picks up a Christmas present and drops it in* MINA's *lap.)*

The least you could do is open your Christmas present.

> *(*MINNA *rips the bow and paper off, opens the box and pulls out a scarf and a glass fish. She reaches into her bra and takes out a lighter.)*

Where did you get that? You're not supposed to have that!

> *(*MINNA *sets the scarf on fire.)*

Minna!

> *(*BRIAN *lunges for the scarf, throws it on the ground and stomps the fire out. Meanwhile* MINNA *has picked up the fish and calmly places it on the floor. She stomps on the fish smashing it into tiny pieces of glass.)*

MINNA! MINNA! STOP IT! STOP IT!

> *(*BRIAN *crosses to the glass bits and begins picking them up. He blinks back tears.)*

I spent three lunch hours shopping for this. Three! I could have been clearing my desk. I could have been making phone calls or seeing clients or dictating reports, but no, I was searching and searching for the exact perfect replica of the little glass fish you had when we were kids. And now you've smashed it to bits. Three hours wasted. I work 'til nine every night, do you have any idea what that's like? I get home at ten, eat, do the dishes, take the garbage out, go to bed, then get up at 5:30 the next morning and start the whole thing again! I ask Rita to help with the garbage but…well, things can get tense in a marriage… And now you want to have a baby and I don't care WHAT you say I just know I'M the one who's going to end up taking care of you AND your baby and Rita's not going to like that at ALL, not at ALL! And when Rita doesn't like things…well I don't want to talk about Rita. Don't move. You'll cut yourself.

MINNA. What do you care?

BRIAN. You think I don't care?

MINNA. The only reason you're here is because Nurse Doyle called you and said you better make me get an abortion quick.

BRIAN. That isn't the only reason.

MINNA. You never visited me before.

BRIAN. I call you all the time but you always hang up on me. Why do you always hang up on me?

MINNA. Why didn't you stop Mom and Dad from putting me in here?

BRIAN. How could I? I wasn't around.

MINNA. No. You ran away and left me there.

BRIAN. I had to run away. You know I had to.

MINNA. You could have taken me with you.

BRIAN. You were too young.

MINNA. Yeah. Well they were worse after you left. I got all of it. And then Dwayne got me pregnant but Mom made me have the baby. I had to drop out of school, I had to give the baby away, and then I started having these temper problems and I couldn't stop yelling at people and once I threw eggs at the front door and the windows—I broke some of the windows—so Mom brought me here and told them I was crazy.

BRIAN. Jesus, Minna. I didn't know all that.

MINNA. You could have found out.

BRIAN. Didn't you tell the doctors what happened?

MINNA. I couldn't stop crying long enough to talk. No matter what drug they gave me, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stop crying.

BRIAN. You're not crying now.

MINNA. Not since the space people taught me how to be happy. They've even given me a baby again.

> *(She reaches under her dress and pulls out a mascara wand hidden in her underwear. She unscrews the wand, talking into one end and listens to the other.)*

Yes?… Now?

> *(To* BRIAN*:)*

They want to talk to you.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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Cast of Characters

MOM

GRACE

FAITH

Author Note

The props in this play can be unrealistic, such as two-dimensional cartoon drawings. Any or all of the characters can be played by men. For example, FAITH can be played by a man in a little girl skirt until he comes out at the end with the suitcase and wearing pants.

MOM AND THE RAZOR BLADES

(Lights up on the living room: a couch, mirror, ironing board, music stand, violin case, trash can, a table with a birthday cake on it, and several cleaning items. Center stage is a big door. This is the door to Father's Office.)

*(*MOM *runs on wearing heels, stockings and a slip. She places a dress on the ironing board.)*

MOM. *(As she irons:)* Gracie? Faith? Don't you want to come help your mother?

(No answer.)

Constance? Patience? Joy?

(No answer.)

It's your mother's birthday. Bobbie? Doesn't anyone want to help their mother on her birthday? Isn't anyone going to help their mother clean for her own birthday party?

(No answer. As she puts on her dress—)

Jimmy? Jerry? Johnny? Jody? Jamie? Jose? Jenny? Jannie? Joshie? Jeremy? Janie? Jerry? Joey? George?

(No answer.)

Julie? Jeffery?

(Whimpers:)

Tad?

(No answer.)

It's awful quiet around here. Are you planning a birthday party surprise? Are my children planning a birthday surprise for their mother?

*(*GRACE, *11 years old, enters crawling. A pad of paper and a pen hang from a string around her neck. She crawls to the middle of the floor and begins writing furiously.* GRACE *doesn't walk but crawls everywhere. She is played by an adult.)*

MOM. *(Panicked:)* Get up, Grace! Get up! Your father's coming out of his office any minute! Your father's coming out of his office any minute! What if he trips over you? What if he trips over you?

*(*GRACE *rips a page off her pad and drops it on the floor, then continues writing furiously on the next page.)*

MOM. *(Points to the page on the floor.)* No! No! Bad girl! We don't make messes! You know how your father feels about messes! Pick it up.

*(*GRACE *doesn't.)*

Pick it UP!

*(*GRACE *doesn't.* MOM *reaches under the couch and pulls out a mean-looking cartoon baseball bat. She holds the bat over* GRACE's *head.)*

MOM. PICK IT UP!

*(*GRACE *picks up the paper.)*

MOM. Good. Now I want you to put this letter under the door for your father.

(Takes the letter out of a pocket and reads:)

"Dearest Larry. If it's not too much trouble, could you please come to my birthday party? Your loving wife, Hope." Well. I think that should do it.

*(*GRACE *won't take the letter. Instead she scribbles a note on the pad hanging from her neck and hands the note to* MOM.*)*

MOM. *(Reads:)* "He's not going to come." You never know, Grace. He might. I think it pays to always think the best of people.

*(*GRACE *scribbles another note.)*

MOM. "He hasn't come out of his office in 25 years." He had to figure out the phone bill, Grace. Phone bills take awhile to figure out.

(Threatening:)

Now put this under the door!

(Trembling with fear, GRACE *takes the letter and slides it under the office door. Immediately a piece of paper slides back out.* MOM *picks it up and reads.)*

MOM. "Dearest Hope. I'm sick of your letters. One more letter and I'll do something drastic." Oh dear.

(A scraping noise starts.)

Did you hear that, Grace? He's moving around! I think he's coming out!

(She quickly fixes her hair then poses, ready to great him. But the door doesn't open. She is devastated.)

Maybe he recognizes it's my handwriting. Grace? Please write him a note, please? All you have to say is "Daddy, when you coming out?"

*(*GRACE *throws one note after another on the floor.)*

MOM. No! No! Bad girl! You want me to get the baseball bat?… Oh well.

(Picks up one note and runs across the living room to the trash can.)

I guess I don't have the heart to discipline you kids. I just let you run wild. Wild!

*(*MOM *runs back and forth picking up notes and throwing them in the trash can.)*

If your father came out of his office we'd have some discipline around here. If your father came out of his office he'd put some order into the house.

*(*FAITH, *10 years old, enters carrying an enormous stack of books.* FAITH *is also played by an adult.)*

FAITH. *(Urgently:)* Mom! Guess what?!

*(*MOM *is still running back and forth.)*

MOM. What, dear?

FAITH. I think there's something wrong with the family!

MOM. *(Running:)* There's nothing wrong with our family. We have a lovely, lovely family. We're well-educated, upper-middle class. We believe in God and Jesus Christ. We go to church four times a week—

FAITH. You don't go to church, Mom. Dad hasn't let you out of the house for 1,463 days.

MOM. *(Still running:)* Well I would go to church if I could. We have 37 beautiful children, a brilliant, successful father, and a mother who loves you so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so very very much much much much much much much much much much—

FAITH. *(Finally interrupting:)* I know you love us! Mom, would you please sit down and listen to me?

MOM. *(Running faster and faster:)* I can't sit down. I have to clean this place for my birthday party. This house is never clean. I clean and clean but it never gets clean. I never get to rest. There is no rest for the wicked the Bible says. I must be so wicked. So very wicked. So so so very very wicked. So so so so so so so so so so very very wicked wicked wicked wicked—

FAITH. Grace! Stop it, OK?

*(*GRACE *stops writing notes.* MOM *collapses on the couch, exhausted.)*

FAITH. There's something wrong, Mom. John and Jeffery are heroin addicts. Robbie, Bobby and Babs are in jail. Thad is a thief. Candy sells crack. Sandy snorts coke. Randy's a rapist and Mary's a mass murderer. And the rest of the kids have either flunked out or been kicked out of school.

MOM. Sandy does not snort coke.

FAITH. See for yourself.

(Holds up objects on the table.)

Mirror. Razor blades. Cocaine. Now, according to the family therapy books I've been reading… *(Checks her notes:)* these are all symptoms of deeply rooted family problems.

(Scraping noises come from Father's Office.)

MOM. Faith, do you hear that noise? I wonder what he's doing in there?

FAITH. Mom, you gotta listen to me!

MOM. They're just going through a phase, dear. When you're a mother you'll understand that children are always going through phases.

FAITH. What about Henry, David, Scott, Cindy and Pat?

MOM. What about them?

FAITH. They all committed suicide. Suicide's a phase one can never grow out of.

MOM. *(Weeping:)* Oh the grief! The grief! I keep asking myself why? Why did they do it! They had everything. Money. Education. A brilliant, successful father and a mother who loved them so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so very very much much much much much much much much much—

FAITH. I know you loved them!

MOM. I don't think you do. I don't think children really understand about love. They haven't the capacity.

(Gestures and accidentally slaps GRACE.*)*

It takes being a mother to really learn about—

FAITH. Mom! Look at Grace!

*(*GRACE *has imitated* MOM's *slap and is now slapping herself over and over.)*

FAITH. That's what Joey was doing last night before he hung himself!

MOM. Oh no! Not Joey too! *(Heart wrenching sobs.)*

FAITH. We gotta do something fast before the whole family is killed!

MOM. But what can we do?

FAITH. Therapy.

MOM. *(Panicked:)* Therapy?

FAITH. *(Checking her notes:)* Freudian, Jungian, Reichian, Adlerian, Lowian, Piagetian, Masserian, Frankian, Millerian, Horneyian, Laingian, Rogerian, Jonesian, Johnsonian, Ericksonian as in Milton and Eriksonian as in Erik, Gestalt, Transactional, RET, NET, CBT, DBT, EFT and TFP! We'll do them all if that's what it takes!

MOM. Grace! You're not wearing shoes! You'll get grease spots on the carpet! Go put your shoes on this minute!

*(*GRACE *is writing furiously and ignores* MOM.*)*

FAITH. First individual and then family therapy.

MOM. THIS MINUTE!

FAITH. We'll start with you, Mom, since according to my family therapy books "the parents are responsible for behavioral dynamics within the family."

MOM. But why would I need therapy? I have my faults, I know, but I am certainly not CRAZY. PUT YOUR SHOES ON THIS MINUTE, GRACE, OR I'LL GET THE BAT!!!!

FAITH. She doesn't wear shoes, Mom. She doesn't walk.

MOM. If you don't put your shoes on right now you'll get cancer. I read about this in *Better Homes and Gardens.* Going barefoot on carpet causes cancer of the feet.

(Points at GRACE's *feet.)*

Look! It's started already!!!!

(Terrified, GRACE *quickly crawls off.* FAITH *picks up* GRACE's *writing pad.)*

FAITH. Mom, listen to this. "Dark knives stabbing. Black blood warm in my eye sockets. Intestines slide across red-slimed floors."

MOM. I don't think writing should depress people, do you? I think writing should cheer people up.

FAITH. But Mom. You don't understand. Johnny was writing stuff like this yesterday before he threw himself under a car.

MOM. *(Weeping:)* Oh no! Not Johnny too!

FAITH. And it looks like Grace is next! Mom, we gotta do therapy fast!

MOM. But can't I have my birthday party? I promise I'll do anything to keep my children alive. But first may I please have my birthday party?

*(*GRACE *crawls in wearing socks. She holds her feet up to show* MOM, *but* MOM *doesn't notice.)*

MOM. It's the one day of the year when the party's for ME. When I get appreciated. When I'm not cleaning or cooking or comforting or changing diapers or weeding the lawn or going without food so my children can eat or going without clothes so I can keep my children warm or going without sleep staying up all night washing orange crayon scribbles off the wall.

*(*GRACE *is now trying to choke herself.)*

FAITH. *(Runs to her.)* Grace! Stop!

MOM. For a few moments each year my family sings to ME, gives ME presents, tells ME they love ME so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so very very much much much much much much much much much much—

FAITH. Mom, we'll have a birthday party!

(Finally gets GRACE's *hands away from her throat.)*

Grace, do you think you can keep from killing yourself long enough for a birthday party?

*(*GRACE *writes furiously.)*

OK, Mom, we'll try it. But if Grace starts displaying suicidal tendencies again, we'll have to stop.

MOM. *(Suddenly cheerful:)* Good! Constance? Patience? Joy? It's time for my birthday party!

(To FAITH*:)*

Why don't they answer?

(To Father's Office door:)

Sweetheart? It's time to come out! It's time for my birthday party! Jimmy? Jerry? Johnny? Jody? Jamie? Jose? Jenny? Jannie? Joshie? Jeremy? Janie? Jerry? Joey? George?

(No answer.)

Julie? Jeffery?

(Whimpers:)

Tad?

(But then excited:)

It's awful quiet around here. I wonder why it's so quiet? Do you think it's a birthday surprise?

*(*GRACE *hands* MOM *an envelope.* MOM *smiles with delight and opens it.)*

MOM. "If you think it's a little quiet around here…"

(Turns page.)

"that's because we've run away. All of us except Grace and Faith. Oh yeah, Joy didn't run away either. She stuck her head in the lawn mower so she couldn't."

(Weeping:)

Oh no! Not Joy too!

FAITH. Mom. I'm sorry.

MOM. 35 children either dead or gone.

FAITH. I'm really sorry.

MOM. What about you? Are you going to run away too?

FAITH. 'Course not, Mom.

MOM. Why not? It seems to be the going thing around here. I must be a terrible mother!

FAITH. You're a good mother, Mom.

MOM. I must be terrible. Why else would 35 children either kill themselves or run away.

FAITH. I don't know. But all the psychologists agree: it's not the mother's fault. We're all just victims of victims.

MOM. Is that what you think?

FAITH. Yes I do.

MOM. Then you don't hate me for failing you in some terrible way?

FAITH. No Mom. I love you very much.

MOM. *(Prompting:)* You do?

FAITH. *(Reluctantly:)* So much. So very much.

MOM. So so so very very much? So so so so so so so so so so—

FAITH. *(Enough already:)* All that!

MOM. Oh thank you. Thank you for being my beautiful daughter.

(Embraces her. Scraping sounds again.)

There's that noise again. I wonder what he's doing.

FAITH. Mom! Look at Grace!

*(*GRACE *has a belt around her throat and is banging her head against the floor.* FAITH *runs to her.)*

FAITH. Grace is going fast, Mom. We gotta do therapy now!

MOM. OK! OK! How do we start?

FAITH. Lie down on the couch and tell me about your childhood.

MOM. What about my childhood?

FAITH. How do you feel about your parents?

MOM. They were lovely, lovely parents. Well-educated, upper-middle class. They believed in God and Jesus Christ and went to church four times a week.

*(*GRACE *is drinking Windex.* FAITH *runs to stop her.)*

MOM. My father was brilliant and successful and my mother loved me so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so so so very very much much much much much much much much much—

FAITH. I know she loved you! Can't you tell me about conflicts? Anger?

MOM. Anger?

FAITH. *(Struggling with* GRACE*:)* Yeah, Mom.

MOM. *(Murderously:)* There was never any anger.

*(*GRACE *is trying to strangle herself by putting a plastic bag over her head.)*

FAITH. *(Struggling:)* There had to be some anger. Everyone experiences anger at some point.

MOM. *(Even more murderously:)* NO ANGER!

(Rising off the couch:)

Not one little BIT!

FAITH. *(Struggling harder:)* All the psychologists agree, Mom. You can't do therapy without talking about anger.

MOM. We were a GOOD family! WELL-EDUCATED! UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS! WE BELIEVED IN GOD AND JESUS CHRIST. WE LOVED EACH OTHER SO MUCH, SO VERY MUCH, SO SO SO VERY VERY MUCH, SO SO SO SO SO SO SO SO—

FAITH. *(Desperately struggling:)* I KNOW YOU LOVED EACH OTHER!

MOM. *(Desperate:)* Every day after school I sat waiting by Daddy's office door. I would dress up in my prettiest pink dress and my sweetest pink bow. My hands were folded so nicely in my lap and my knees were pressed so tightly together and every day I waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited but Daddy never came out of his office. He never even peeped just to see what I looked like. It wasn't his fault. I guess he didn't know I was there.

*(*GRACE *has gotten ahold of the razor blades.)*

FAITH. Mom, help!

MOM. Momma said it would be different when I got married but it wasn't. An hour after the wedding vows my groom excused himself. "You don't mind, do you? I have some work to catch up on." I never saw him again. Sometimes at night I felt his rough hands fumbling with my secret parts, but did he ever turn on the light? Did he ever look at my face?

FAITH. Mom, you gotta help me!

MOM. GRACE! You haven't been using your Chapstick, HAVE YOU?! You've let your lips get chapped AGAIN! Do you know what doctors do when lips get chronically chapped? THEY CUT THEM OFF!

FAITH. *(Desperately, desperately struggling with* GRACE*:)* Mom!

MOM. I read about this in *Better Homes and Gardens.* They don't put you to sleep. They don't give you anything to dull the pain. They cut slowly around your mouth and if you move or scream HALF YOUR FACE GETS SLICED OFF, TOO!

*(*FAITH *is now trying to keep* GRACE *from slitting her own throat.)*

FAITH. Help me, Mom! I can't control her!

*(*MOM *reaches under the couch and pulls out the baseball bat.)*

MOM. Grace? Don't you have some practicing to do? Aren't you playing music for church tomorrow?

(Threatening with the bat:)

I WANT YOU PRACTICING NOW!

*(*GRACE *stops trying to kill herself and begins crawling quickly over to the music stand and instruments.)*

MOM. *(Threatening with the bat:)* STOP!

*(*GRACE *stops.)*

Stand up!… STAND!

(With tremendous effort, GRACE *stands.)*

WALK!

(Tentatively, GRACE *takes a step, then another, then another.* MOM *follows her with the bat.* GRACE *picks up the violin case.)*

NOT THE VIOLIN, GRACIE! THE GUITAR!

*(*GRACE *opens the violin case.)*

I SAID THE GUITAR!!!!!

FAITH. Let her play the violin if she wants. We don't even have a guitar.

MOM. I SAID PLAY THE GUITAR, GRACE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

*(*GRACE *looks at her mother. She starts to put the violin down. But then suddenly she picks it up and plays it.)*

*(*MOM *goes wild. She grabs the violin and throws it across the room, throws music all over, knocks over chairs, smashes up the cake and rips cushions off the couch, all the while yelling "PLAY THE GUITAR! PLAY THE GUITAR!"* FAITH *follows her mother around trying to find some way to stop this tirade.)*

FAITH. *(Crying:)* Mommy. Mommy.

(Meanwhile, GRACE *has crawled to the violin and now begins playing it again.* MOM *smashes* GRACE *over the head with the bat.* GRACE *screams and crawls away.* MOM *follows, hitting.* FAITH *is screaming as well.* GRACE *crawls behind the couch;* MOM *follows. Over and over we see the bat smash down on* GRACE *who is hidden by the couch.)*

MOM. *(In a frenzy as she hits:)* Hit me back! I can't stop! Hit me back! I can't stop! Hit me back! Hit me back!

*(*FAITH *slaps* MOM. MOM *stops swinging.* FAITH *helps her mother up.)*

MOM. *(Weeping bitterly:)* I'm a terrible mother. I'm a terrible mother. I try to be a good mother but it never works out. I don't know what happens. It's not my fault. I guess Momma was right. I'm wicked. I soiled my bed. I got dirt on my white church gloves. The devil was in me, she said. Every day I see it more in your face, she said. You're wicked. So very wicked, so so so very very wicked, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so…

(With FAITH's *help,* GRACE *crawls from behind the couch. She is badly beaten. Her limbs shake.)*

MOM. *(Sinks to her knees.)* Heavenly Father, take my life, please? I don't deserve to live. I love my children and look what I do. Let me

die so my children can stop suffering so. Take my life before I hurt another hair—

*(*GRACE *holds a razor blade out to* MOM.*)*

MOM. *(Seeing the blade:)* You want me to kill myself? You want your own mother to kill herself?

(Jumps up and starts running in circles.)

Alright! I'll kill myself! I'll do it! If my own child wants me dead I might as well kill myself! I'll drive off a cliff and smash myself against the rocks below!

*(*MOM *lunges for the front door.* FAITH *throws herself in front of* MOM *preventing her exit.)*

FAITH. You can't leave, Mom! Dad won't allow you out of the house!

MOM. *(Suddenly calm:)* That's right.

*(*GRACE *collapses.* FAITH *runs to her, feels her pulse.)*

FAITH. She's dying, Mom. What do we do?

MOM. We can't take her to a hospital. Your father won't let me out of the house.

FAITH. I'd take her myself but I can't lift her. I'm only ten. I know! Isn't Dad a doctor?

MOM. I can't exactly remember. It's been so long.

FAITH. We get mail delivered here to a Dr. Larry Love so he must be a doctor. I'm going in there and tell him to come out.

MOM. *(Terrified:)* You're going into his office?

FAITH. It's the only way, Mom.

MOM. But you've never met the man. Who knows what he's like?!

FAITH. I've got to try it!

MOM. But that door hasn't been opened for 25 years! What if he's annoyed?

FAITH. We can settle all that in family therapy. Right now we've got to think of Grace's life!

*(*FAITH *opens Father's Office door just a crack and peeks in. Immediately she slams it shut again.)*

FAITH. Oh my God.

(Terrified, MOM *steps slowly up to the door, peeks in, slams it shut.)*

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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