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Cast of Characters

TONY HOPEFUL, a young man with a fine mullet and in his early twenties

STEVIE BOB, a man in his early fifties

BEGGAR WOMAN, dirty, homeless woman in her late forties

ADOLPH GOODYEAR, fancy fellow with a large handlebar moustache in his forties

TOBY DRAGG, a large young man with a fine mullet and in his early twenties

WANDA LOVESITT, a woman in her late forties

JOSIE BELLE BAKER, a pretty, young and very well-endowed young lady of nineteen

DEPUTY BEETLE, a man in his early thirties with a fine mullet

SHERIFF TURDSPIN, a man in his fifties who sports a full beard

LACY, a young red-haired girl in her early teens

SIX "BIKER CHICKS," hardcore Harley gals

VARIOUS TOWNSPEOPLE, any genders, any amount

Time

Present, a few weeks before the Fourth of July.

Place

The small town of Fleetwood, Mississippi, aka Mulletville.

STEVIE BOB
THE VENGEFUL BARBER OF MULLETVILLE

by Geff Moyer

ACT I

Scene 1

(The stage consists of the three early 1900s storefronts, with the center building being the largest and most prominent and featuring two stories: downstairs, a doll shop; upstairs, a barber shop. The front of this building must be removable for interior scenes, and there must be an interior staircase from one floor to the other. The Stage Right building is a one-story Sheriff's office and jail and features a small alleyway between it and the dominant center building. A staircase in the alley leads up to an outside door to the barber shop. The Stage Left building, which abuts up to the center building, is a one-story ice cream parlor. Neither front of these two smaller buildings need be removable. Two old, but ornate tables and four chairs rest in front of Sickles Ice Cream Parlor. An old wooden bench rests in front of Lovesitt's Doll Shop. Two rocking chairs are in front of the Sheriff's office. To the far Stage Right is a freestanding sign reading "Bus Stop." To the far Stage Left is a small, freestanding booth.)

(In darkness we hear the sound of a Greyhound bus start its engine and drive off. As lights come up, it is mid-morning. We find a few people strolling the sidewalk. JOSIE BELLE is seated at a table in front of the ice cream parlor, eating an ice cream cone, and scribbling on a pad of paper. Resting against her chair are two fake pink flamingos. ADOLPH GOODYEAR is arranging his Stage Right booth, preparing to sell his special hair growing solution. He sports a large handlebar moustache and speaks with a British accent. DEPUTY BEETLE is relaxed in a rocking chair in front of the Sheriff's office. STEVIE BOB and TONY HOPEFUL are standing at the Bus Stop sign, suitcases in hand. TONY has a beautiful mullet.)

TONY. Home! Three years, Stevie Bob. Three years on that oil barge. Later on we're gonna get us a beer at The Pearl. Boy, I've missed that sleazy dive! Ya walk in the door and, SMACK!, it hits ya right in the face: the smell of hard boiled eggs and urine. My Mom's trailer just a few blocks walk down this...

STEVIE BOB. (*Upset:*) Why'd ya tell me this place was called Mulletville?

TONY. Huh!?

STEVIE BOB. Ya told me you were from a place called Mulletville. This is Fleetwood!

TONY. Oh! We call it Mulletville 'cause of the...hey, how'd you know its real name?

STEVIE BOB. The barber shop over the doll store, right between the Sheriff's office and Ice Cream parlor! Every barber in Mississippi knows about Fleetwood.

TONY. Sure they do, 'cause of our Fourth of July mullet growing contest. It's famous all over the state. Heck, all over the South! We get folks from Georgia, the Carolinas, all comin' in here sportin' their mullets, all tryin' to win that thousand dollar purse.

STEVIE BOB. You should've told me its real name, Tony.

TONY. We've called it Mulletville long as I can 'member. What's the big deal?

STEVIE BOB. You never heard the story?

TONY. What story?

(A ragged BEGGAR WOMAN comes out of the alley and approaches TONY.)

BEGGAR WOMAN. Got any spare change, fellas?

STEVIE BOB. (*Gazing at the barber shop:*) It was here! Right here! It all happened right here.

TONY. What happened?

BEGGAR WOMAN. (*To STEVIE BOB:*) How about you, pal, got any... (*She pauses a moment and studies STEVIE BOB:*) ...spare change?

TONY. Go 'way, ya old hag!

BEGGAR WOMAN. Jist tryin' to git my belly filled, fellas.

STEVIE BOB. It's still...it's just like the story says.

BEGGAR WOMAN. Jist enough for a cup of coffee!

TONY. I said get outta here!

BEGGAR WOMAN. Cheap redneck!

TONY. Stevie Bob, talk to me, buddy!

STEVIE BOB. Been close to twenty years.

BEGGAR WOMAN. Then, uh, how 'bout a little hanky panky?

TONY. What's been?

STEVIE BOB. Since it happened.

BEGGAR WOMAN. Over in the alley. What'd ya say?

TONY. *(To BEGGAR WOMAN:)* In about thirty seconds I'm gonna go git that deputy, lady!

BEGGAR WOMAN. Alright, alright! ! I'm goin'! But you don't know what yer missin'!

(BEGGAR WOMAN snorts and exits into alley.)

TONY. Since what happened, Stevie Bob? What're ya talkin' about?

STEVIE BOB. You've lived here all yer life and never heard the story of the Fleetwood barber?

(TOBY DRAGG enters from doll shop with an armful of elixir bottles and crosses to Goodyear's booth. He has a beautiful mullet.)

TONY. You mean Mr. Goodyear?

STEVIE BOB. Before him.

TONY. He's the only barber that I've ever known to be here in Mulletville.

STEVIE BOB. FLEETWOOD!!

TONY. Whoa! Maybe we better get that beer first, calm you down.

STEVIE BOB. You would've been a baby, but you'd think livin' here all yer life you'd have heard the story.

TONY. I don't even know what story you're talkin' about.

STEVIE BOB. Then...it must've been nothun to them.

TONY. Nothun to who?

STEVIE BOB. Just another day.

TONY. Stevie Bob, you're startin' to worry me.

STEVIE BOB. Almost twenty years ago there was a barber...Benny Baker...and, and he was married to the purtiest girl in town, Lucy Cavendish...they had a baby girl...but there was this sheriff here who... Who is the sheriff here?

TONY. Used to be Willie Turdspin. *(Chuckles.)* We always called him The Turdspinner, but that could've changed...

(WANDA LOVESITT, owner of the doll shop, comes out of her store and begins sweeping the area in front of her store.)

STEVIE BOB. That's him! Turdspin! The same one! The same...one. This sheriff, this Turdspin, you see, he wanted Lucy for hisself, so he snuck into that barber's shop one night...that shop right up there... and all over Benny Baker's scissors, clippers, razors, even his chair, he spread head lice. Purty soon, everyone who got a haircut from Benny Baker had head lice. They tarred and feathered him and ran him out of town on a rail.

TONY. Really?

STEVIE BOB. Really!

TONY. I didn't think they did that anymore—tarred and feathered?

STEVIE BOB. These here kind citizens of your lovely Fleetwood just did that! Then just...just forgot about it.

TONY. What happened to him, after he was run outta town?

STEVIE BOB. No one knows.

TONY. And Lucy?

STEVIE BOB. Don't know.

TONY. The baby?

STEVIE BOB. Don't know.

GOODYEAR. (*To TONY and STEVIE BOB, with a British accent:*) I say, you chaps here for the mullet contest? If so, I have an elixir that's guaranteed to grow you the finest mullet in the south, in just a matter of days.

STEVIE BOB. Impossible.

TONY. Hi ya, Mr. Goodyear. 'Member me? Tony Hopeful. My ma used to drag me kickin' and screamin' into yer barber chair every first Tuesday of the month. She used to say, "No son of mine is gonna run around lookin like some shaggy-haired Yankee."

GOODYEAR. Why, certainly! And how is your mother? I haven't had the, uh, opportunity to visit her recently.

TONY. Don't know. Ain't been home yet; just got into town. Me and my friend Stevie Bob here been workin' on an oil rig in the Gulf, 'til it petered out, that is. (*Rather curtly:*) Hello, Toby. Nice mullet.

TOBY. (*Also curtly:*) Hello, Tony. Nice mullet.

TONY. (*Gesturing to Toby's tee shirt:*) Still a "Dead Head," huh?

TOBY. Only clean one I had.

GOODYEAR. Well, gentlemen, you're back just in time for the contest, and I have just the elixir here for you.

STEVIE BOB. Nothin' grows hair in just a few days, Mister.

GOODYEAR. A skeptic! Wonderful! I love a good skeptic. (*Pulls TOBY towards them.*) See this young fellow? One month ago, just thirty days, I say...his head looked like a polished cue ball. Look at that head of hair. (*He grabs a handful of TOBY's hair.*) Thick as bear fur, and all because of my elixir: Goodyear's Instant Mullet Grower. I'm taking it on the road, by godfrey!

STEVIE BOB. And I say nothun grows hair in that short of time.

GOODYEAR. Sir, I've been a barber here for over a dozen years. I DO know my work, and I DO know my elixir.

STEVIE BOB. Well, sir, I say you are full of...

TOBY. (*Approaches STEVIE BOB.*) You don't speak to Mr. Goodyear like that, stranger.

(*WANDA slowly approaches the commotion.*)

TONY. (*Interceding:*) Whoa, whoa, hold on now, fellas. Excuse my friend, please. See, he was the barber on our oil rig and has his...

GOODYEAR. Barber!? On an oil rig!? Well, then you're just not up on all the latest inventions, Sir. They have chemicals now that could grow hair on an apple.

STEVIE BOB. An apple ain't no human head.

TOBY. (*Pulls out a large knife:*) But they both can be pared!

WANDA. You say you're a barber, Mister?

STEVIE BOB. Had a shop down in New Orleans, 'til Katrina took it. Then did some hair cuttin' and a little shavin' out on the oil rig.

WANDA. You lookin' to set up shop here?

STEVIE BOB. In Fleetwood!?

WANDA. That's where you're standin'! If so, I got a place for rent.

GOODYEAR. Now just one minute there, Wanda. That's my...

WANDA. Adolph, I need a renter who'll actually pay rent. Besides, you keep sayin' you're takin' your so-called hair grower on the road anyway, so take it!

GOODYEAR. I say, this is rather abrupt, Wanda!

WANDA. Not as abrupt as my bills are gettin' from you not paying rent for four months.

GOODYEAR. Wanda, you know this time of year is...difficult for a barber. Everyone's growing their hair for the mullet contest.

WANDA. Adolph, you been sinkin' all your money into that so-called miracle elixir and livin' off my generosity. No more, Adolph. People just ain't buyin' baby dolls like they used to. I gotta have a renter who actually pays rent. What'd ya say, Mister?

STEVIE BOB. Uh, well, I...I don't know if...

TONY. We ain't got no oil rig to go back to, Stevie Bob, and Mulletville's a decent place to...

STEVIE BOB. Fleetwood!

TONY. Okay. Fleetwood.

STEVIE BOB. A decent place!?

WANDA. And good folks...for the most part.

STEVIE BOB. (*A moment.*) I haven't any barberin' tools. The ones I used on the rig were the company's and stayed there.

GOODYEAR. Ah! You see, Wanda! A barber with no tools. Case closed.

WANDA. I got some tools you can use.

GOODYEAR. WANDA!?! You know who those tools belonged to! You can't...

WANDA. They been cleaned and sterilized.

GOODYEAR. And they haven't been used in fifteen years.

STEVIE BOB. Closer to twenty. (*They all look at him.*) So the story goes.

GOODYEAR. You know the story of the head lice barber?

STEVIE BOB. Like it's my own.

GOODYEAR. And you're willing to use his old equipment?

STEVIE BOB. The lady said they've been cleaned and sterilized!

TOBY. But is you good 'nuff to use 'em?

STEVIE BOB. Oh, I think I is.

TONY. I've seen Stevie Bob shave ten men in ten minutes flat, without a single nick!

GOODYEAR. A minute a shave!?! When he finished did those poor fellows' faces resemble something hanging in the back of a meat locker?

(He and TOBY laugh.)

TONY. How many did you nick, Stevie Bob?

STEVIE BOB. Nary a one.

TONY. Nary a one.

(GOODYEAR studies STEVIE BOB for a moment, then walks over the to ice cream shop, grabs a chair and brings it to STEVIE BOB, then plops TOBY down in it.)

GOODYEAR. Toby here still has his morning shadow; see if you can shave him in less than a minute.

TOBY. Huh?

STEVIE BOB. With your razor?

GOODYEAR. My dear sir, you know a barber never loans his tools. Someone might "tamper" with them.

(A moment.)

WANDA. I'll get a razor.

(She exits.)

TOBY. *(Starting to rise:)* Oh no! I ain't gonna be shaved with no lice-ridden razor!

GOODYEAR. *(Pushes TOBY back into chair.)* Toby, of all people, you surely trust Wanda to have properly cleaned and sterilized them.

TOBY. Well, it's just...just...I mean, yeah, of course I trust Miss Wanda, but...but...

TONY. Toby, you afraid a few little nits? I 'member when we played football in high school, you never took a shower after a game anyway.

TOBY. I took 'em at home.

TONY. Oh, so the rumor was true, huh?

GOODYEAR. What rumor?

TONY. *(Aside to GOODYEAR, but loud enough for TOBY to hear:)* He was ashamed of his shortcomings.

TOBY. *(Rises.)* THAT'S A LIE!

TONY. Just a little one!

(He and GOODYEAR laugh.)

TOBY. I like privacy when I shower; don't like lookin' at other guy's soapy butts, that's all! Makes me shiver! And I'm a warnin' you, Tony Hopeful, you start spreading that around again, and...well, we all know how your momma makes a livin'!

TONY. I thought I beat all the crap outta you back in high school, Toby, but I guess I'll have to do it again!

GOODYEAR. Gentlemen, gentlemen, the deputy is watching.

STEVIE BOB. What about lather?

GOODYEAR. THAT I will loan you.

(He removes a can of shaving cream from his bag.)

TOBY. You gonna be in town long, Hopeful?

TONY. Long enough, Dragg!

STEVIE BOB. "Canned" lather!?

GOODYEAR. *(Smiling:)* You know what they say about beggars.

WANDA. *(Returns with razor, towel, and small bowl of hot water.)* I think I got everything you had...everything you need.

(She and STEVIE BOB exchange a look. She hands STEVIE BOB a bowl of water.)

Hot water's from my tea kettle.

(A few townspeople begin to gather to watch the spectacle. The BEGGAR WOMAN tries to solicit a few of them, but to no avail.)

STEVIE BOB. Then let's go to work! *(He dips towel in hot water.)* Yes, nice and hot. Now, Toby, when I put this hot towel on yer face, don't flinch or jerk your head, try not to move a muscle, 'cause ifin you do, them whiskers just curl up into little balls and are harder to shave. If you're perfectly still when that hot towel hits them, they're so surprised they just stand up straight and squeal "Cut me!"

GOODYEAR. I see! I can't grow hair in a few days, but you can make whiskers talk!

STEVIE BOB. Tell ya what, Mr. Goodyear, when I put this towel on Toby's face, you lean down real close to his cheek and listen for them little squeals.

GOODYEAR. Mocking me, sir, will not convince me.

TONY. I hear 'em every time Stevie Bob shaves me, clear as a bell... *(A high voice:)* "Cut me, cut me!"

STEVIE BOB. Here we go. Now 'member, Toby, don't move.

(He places the towel on TOBY's face. Curiosity getting the better of him, GOODYEAR does lean down and listen.)

GOODYEAR. I didn't think so.

TONY. *(He has circled over to TOBY's other ear and leaned down next to it. In a high-pitched whisper:)* Cut me, cut me, cut me...

TOBY. Hey, hey, I hear 'em! I hear 'em. He's right, Mr. Goodyear. But only the ones on this side are talkin.' That's pro'bly 'cause I twitched that side of my face a little when the hot towel hit it.

STEVIE BOB. Give 'em a minute more to scream and then we'll lather you up.

TOBY. Do them whiskers on this side need to be talkin' too...afore ya lather me up?

STEVIE BOB. *(To GOODYEAR:)* Let's make this a little more interesting, what'd ya say, Mr. Goodyear?

GOODYEAR. I'm all ears.

STEVIE BOB. Instead of one minute, let's make it thirty seconds.

TOBY. *(Worried, starts to sit up.)* Huh?

STEVIE BOB. *(Pushes TOBY back down.)* If I can't shave Toby here, clean as a whistle, in thirty seconds, I won't take over your shop. I'll refuse Miss Wanda's offer and leave...leave Fleetwood.

GOODYEAR. *(A moment.)* And Miss Wanda must retain me as her tenant for one more year. For free.

(There is an anxious moment as heads go to WANDA.)

WANDA. *(Finally:)* Agreed.

STEVIE BOB. *(To WANDA:)* Thank you.

WANDA. Don't screw me!

STEVIE BOB. *(To GOODYEAR:)* And you have to leave me your barber chair.

(A moment.)

GOODYEAR. *(Smiles.)* Deal! That chair belonged to the first barber anyway. I don't want to haul it around. *(He pulls out a pocket watch.)* Besides, a thirty second shave? Toby'll be lucky if he still has a nose.

TOBY. Huh!?

GOODYEAR. Just kidding, Toby. You'll be...fine. Are you ready, my friend?

TONY. Uh, we start AFTER the lather goes on, right? I mean, that's only fair...right?

GOODYEAR. *(Thought he had them for a minute, but:)* Right. After.

(STEVIE BOB removes the towel in a fast, swooping manner, then smoothly applies the lather to TOBY's face. He then closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, spreads his arms, razor extended.)

STEVIE BOB. Ready.

TOBY. *(Pulls out his knife and points it at STEVIE BOB's throat.)* You nick me, barber, and I'll return the favor, from ear to ear.

STEVIE BOB. Toby, them little voices are growin' weaker and weaker.

TOBY. *(Quickly lowering his knife:)* Go, go, go...

GOODYEAR. *(Looking at his watch:)* Ready, set, go!

(With lightning speed, and with just four or five strokes of the razor, STEVIE BOB has shaved TOBY clean.)

STEVIE BOB. Done!

(TOBY is frozen in fright, GOODYEAR is checking his watch for accuracy, even TONY is amazed, WANDA smiles. STEVIE BOB calmly cleans off the razor.)

GOODYEAR. *(Awed:)* Fifteen seconds? Impossible! Fifteen seconds!

TOBY. *(Trembling, but afraid to move:)* Is...is...my nose still there?

STEVIE BOB. Toby, I didn't even pop that zit on your chin.

GOODYEAR. *(Studying TOBY's face:)* Amazing! Not a nick!

TONY. You can get up and wash your face off now, Toby, or would you rather go home and do it.

(The crowd that had gathered finally snaps out of their stupor and applauds, then begins to disperse. The BEGGAR WOMAN hangs around in the alley, still curious about the outcome.)

WANDA. Mister, if you can afford the rent, looks like you got yourself a barber shop.

TONY. Even a chair! Congratulations, Stevie Bob. This is great! *(A moment.)* What's wrong? Why ain't you jumpin' up and down?? You won yourself a business, man!

STEVIE BOB. Never thought it'd be here.

GOODYEAR. I have never been known as a poor loser, Mr..."Stevie Bob," so here are the keys to the shop. Toby, let us take our booth and its contents down to the town square. We'll set it up where the tourists are, by the statue of Jeff Foxworthy.

TOBY. *(Still dazed, but finally rising from chair:)* My...my face is okay?

GOODYEAR. Let's just say it hasn't been altered.

TONY. This is something for the books, Stevie Bob! In town for ten minutes and you already got yourself a business. I told ya Mulletville was a great place.

STEVIE BOB. Fleetwood! Mr. Goodyear?

GOODYEAR. Yes.

STEVIE BOB. Just to show you that I'm not a poor winner, before you leave town I'd be happy to give you a free shave.

GOODYEAR. Not a fifteen second one, I hope.

STEVIE BOB. A nice, slow, smooth one. For the road.

GOODYEAR. For the road. Good day, gentlemen, Wanda!

TOBY. (*Carrying the booth, but leaning into STEVIE BOB's face:*) I don't think I like you none.

(*He and GOODYEAR exit.*)

WANDA. Well, you wanna take a look at your prize? And the rest of your equipment?

STEVIE BOB. Tony and I were going to his mother's place and...

TONY. (*Having earlier spotted JOSIE BELLE:*) You go on ahead, Stevie Bob. I'll just hang around out here until you come back.

STEVIE BOB. (*Looking at JOSIE BELLE, then at TONY:*) Behave yourself.

TONY. Always.

(*STEVIE BOB and WANDA exit into doll shop. TONY saunters over to JOSIE BELLE.*)

TONY. That's quite a set you have there.

JOSIE BELLE. Pardon me?

TONY. Your flamingoes. That's quite a set of flamingoes.

JOSIE BELLE. Oh, thank you. I'm going to put them in front of my trailer.

TONY. You live in the trailer park?

JOSIE BELLE. Yes.

TONY. So do I. Well, I mean my momma does, and I'm gonna be stayin' with her for a while.

JOSIE BELLE. That's nice. Who's yer momma?

TONY. Hope. Hope Hopeful.

JOSIE BELLE. Oh. I see.

TONY. Yeah, yeah, I know. I heard all them rumors, too, and that's all they are...rumors.

JOSIE BELLE. She's always real nice to me. Always says Hello, good mornin', how ya doin'? Poppa Willie says I shouldn't be talkin' to her, but I like her anyway. I'm Josie Belle Baker.

(The DEPUTY has been watching this interaction and goes into the Sheriff's office.)

TONY. Tony Hopeful. "Poppa Willie?"

JOSIE BELLE. You prob'bly know him as Sheriff Turdspin.

TONY. HE'S yer poppa?

JOSIE BELLE. Not my real poppa. My foster poppa.

TONY. And he's still sheriff?

JOSIE BELLE. The Mayor appointed him "Sheriff for life."

TONY. I didn't know a Mayor could do that.

JOSIE BELLE. He can in Mulletville.

TONY. So...so who was yer real poppa?

JOSIE BELLE. Never knew him. He run off with a floozy, least that what Foster Poppa Willie says.

TONY. And yer momma?

JOSIE BELLE. Oh, she died when I was a baby. I almost had to be put in an orphanage, but Foster Poppa Willie took me in.

TONY. Yet you grew up here, in Mulletville?

JOSIE BELLE. Born and raised.

TONY. I don't understand. So did I and I don't remember you at school or nothin'.

JOSIE BELLE. Foster Poppa Willie home schooled me. Said I shouldn't be around other children 'cause of my shameful past: almost being an orphan. Then when I got high school age he said I shouldn't be around them high school boys. They all want the same thing.

TONY. Yeah, copy your homework.

JOSIE BELLE. *(Smiles.)* You know what he meant.

TONY. *(Smiles.)* Spell it out for me.

JOSIE BELLE. *(Coyly.)* My pleasures.

TONY. Well, not every single guy in the world wants just that. At least a few of them don't.

JOSIE BELLE. You said "them."

TONY. So?

JOSIE BELLE. You didn't say "us."

TONY. So?

JOSIE BELLE. So you're one of them who do!

TONY. *(Smiles.)* You caught me! Can we go on a date, Miss Josie Belle Baker?

JOSIE BELLE. I can't date. Foster Poppa Willie won't let me.

TONY. What!? How old are you?

JOSIE BELLE. In just three months I won't even be a teenager no more, and I ain't never even had a date. Foster Poppa Willie says, "Save yer pleasures for the right guy." If I don't date, how will I know he's the right guy? Would you buy a pair of shoes without tryin' 'em on first?

TONY. Nope. Would you sniff a flower without looking for a bee?

JOSIE BELLE. Nope. Would you buy perfume without smelling it first?

TONY. Nope. Would you stick yer butt in a hot bath before yer toe?

(They laugh.)

JOSIE BELLE. I like you, Tony Hopeful.

TONY. I like you, Josie Belle Baker.

SHERIFF. *(Storming out of his office with the DEPUTY at his heels:)*
JOSIE BELLE!!??

JOSIE BELLE. It's Foster Poppa Willie. You better leave.

TONY. Well, ifin' I'm gonna take you on yer first date, I should introduce myself to...

JOSIE BELLE. NO! No, don't mention a date.

SHERIFF. WHAT'RE YA DOIN', BOY!?

TONY. Just talkin', Sheriff.

DEPUTY. You be the Hopeful kid, ain't ya?

SHERIFF. *(To DEPUTY:)* Hope's mistake?

DEPUTY. That's him! Thought you was workin' on an oil rig somewhere.

TONY. They shut us down, so I came home to see my momma.

DEPUTY. (*Chuckling:*) Did you call her and tell her you was comin', so's she could chase her customers away?

TONY. I don't like that kinda talk, even if you are the law!

SHERIFF. Whatta you been sayin' to my Josie Belle?

TONY. We was just talkin'.

SHERIFF. (*In TONY's face:*) 'Bout what, boy?

JOSIE BELLE. Flamingoes, Foster Poppa Willie. Tony just said I got a nice set of flamingoes.

SHERIFF. I asked you not to call me that, darlin'. It's just Willie, honey lamb, now that you're a big girl. Now you run on home, sweetie pie.

JOSIE BELLE. But I'm not done shop...

SHERIFF. I said go home, Josie Belle!

JOSIE BELLE. Bye, Tony Hopeful. Hope I see ya agin.

(She has forgotten her flamingoes.)

SHERIFF. Don't count on it, baby face.

TONY. Bye, Josie Belle.

(She exits. The SHERIFF turns to TONY like a viper after a field mouse, and with a large knife in his hand.)

SHERIFF. Now you listen to me, you snivelin' weasel, come near that girl agin and I'll slice you from a rooster to a hen quicker than you can say RuPaul. If my jail weren't filled with that gang of biker chicks, I'd stuff you in it and swallow the key, and if you ever wanted out, you'd have to dig it outta my poop. You hearin' me, boy?

TONY. I ain't broke no law, Sheriff.

SHERIFF. It's my town, boy! Now you git on home to yer mamma. Tell her Hi for me.

(TONY starts to exit.)

DEPUTY. Hey, Hopeful! Don't go getting' yer hopes up about the mullet contest. I've won it for the past three years.

TONY. Then I guess it's time someone ended that reign! (*He exits.*)

SHERIFF. Of all the boys fer my Josie Belle to be seen with!

DEPUTY. (*Puzzled, looks up:*) Is he crazy? There ain't a cloud in the sky. It ain't gonna rain.

SHERIFF. Beetle, I want you to keep an eye on that one.

DEPUTY. Does it look like rain to you, Sheriff?

SHERIFF. Beetle, did ya hear what I said?

DEPUTY. *(Still searching the skies:)* Yeah, I heard. I'll be on him like white on rice.

SHERIFF. Good.

DEPUTY. Like fleas on a hound dog.

SHERIFF. Fine.

DEPUTY. *(Still scanning sky:)* Like flies on a cow paddy.

SHERIFF. Okay!

DEPUTY. Like Tommy Lee on Pamela...

SHERIFF. JUST DO IT DAMMIT! He's already a block away and you ain't moved yer butt yet!

DEPUTY. I'm on it! *(He runs off.)*

SHERIFF. AND FIND OUT HOW LONG HE'S IN TOWN!

DEPUTY. *(Offstage:)* I will!

SHERIFF. *(Shakes his head.)* Yeah, right. That boy couldn't find sand on a beach.

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights up on the interior of the doll shop. It features a counter with several life sized baby dolls displayed on it. Towards the back of shop is a large vat for melting plastic. WANDA is leading STEVIE BOB through the shop to the staircase.)

WANDA. There's a back staircase here up to the barber shop.

STEVIE BOB. Your dolls are very cute.

WANDA. Wish my customers thought that.

STEVIE BOB. *(Stopping at vat:)* What's this for?

WANDA. That's my melter. I melt the plastic and form the dolls, then paint on their faces. We go up here. There's also a staircase in the alley, so your customers don't have to come through my shop. Men don't care to look at baby dolls. Scares 'em, I think.

(They ascend the steps to the barber shop. WANDA flips on the light at the top of the stairs. It's a rather simple shop, just a barber chair, small sink, a counter for equipment, a large trunk in a

corner, and a small cot and small dresser in the background by the staircase they just ascended. STEVIE BOB crosses to the chair and gently touches it.)

WANDA. Like I said, nothin' fancy, but it works.

STEVIE BOB. Fine chair.

WANDA. Yeah. The old barber installed it. Drove all the way to Mobile to pick it up. Benny Baker was his name. Had a pretty thrivin' business until...until, well, about twenty years ago...

STEVIE BOB. I know the story.

WANDA. Yeah...I kinda figured ya did. (*A moment.*) So, what'd ya think?

STEVIE BOB. I got enough saved up to pay the first three months rent. After that, well, it's anyone's guess. What that Goodyear fella said, about no one getting' haircuts 'cause of the Mullet Contest... that true?

WANDA. Unfortunately, yes. But as soon as the contest is over, things should pick up. And there are a lot of the older folks who don't grow mullets, don't like 'em, but most of them are farmers and don't get into town on a regular basis. But when they do I'm sure an enterprizin' fella with some good ideas could grab their business.

STEVIE BOB. I got some. Ideas that is. Every Monday I'm gonna give free shaves.

WANDA. Free!?

STEVIE BOB. Once they've had a shave from me, they'll never want to shave themselves again.

WANDA. And most men shave several times a week. Smart!

STEVIE BOB. How's yer business doin'?

WANDA. I curse the day they invented them action figures.

STEVIE BOB. Maybe you need to adapt to the times.

WANDA. I ain't sellin' no action figures. They only teach kids how to shoot and chop and annihilate each other. Life size baby dolls teach responsibility. They get them little girls ready to be proper mommas.

STEVIE BOB. Yes. Yes, that they do, I suppose, never having played with 'em myself. (*An inspiration:!*) What about life size baby dolls with mullets?

WANDA. What!?

STEVIE BOB. All different kinds of mullets: curly, straight, frizzy, very long, kinda long...

WANDA. Baby dolls with mullets!?

STEVIE BOB. You could even do different colors: red, blue, rainbow, whatever they want. I've seen earrings on babies, why not mullets?

WANDA. Baby dolls with mullets.

STEVIE BOB. And since Fleetwood has come to be known as Mulletville, you could sell them year round, not just during the contest.

WANDA. And with our statue of Jeff Foxworthy drawing more and more tourists here...you know, it just might work.

STEVIE BOB. And you said you paint on all the faces, right?

WANDA. Right.

STEVIE BOB. So you must be a pretty good artist.

WANDA. I got straight A's in art all through school.

STEVIE BOB. Then what if...now this may seem a little crazy at first...but give it some thought...what if you painted faces of famous people on them baby dolls?

WANDA. You mean like...like Loretta Lynn? Patsy Cline?

STEVIE BOB. Yeah, yeah, and Elvis. You gotta have one of Elvis.

WANDA. Life sized baby dolls with mullets and faces of famous people! What an idea, Mr...Mr...you know, I don't even know your name.

STEVIE BOB. Stevie Bob will do fine, Wanda. For now.

WANDA. Pleased to have you as a tenant, Stevie Bob.

(A voice calls from downstairs in the doll shop.)

GOODYEAR. Hello. Anyone here? It's Adolph Goodyear. I've come for my free shave.

WANDA. Up the stairs, Adolph. You know the way.

GOODYEAR. *(Coming up the stairs and entering the barber shop:)* Yes indeed, I certainly do. I certainly do. I have a few things in the dresser to gather up.

STEVIE BOB. Go right ahead, Mr. Goodyear.

WANDA. I'll leave you to your work. *(She exits down the stairs, excited and mumbling to herself:)* Mullets and faces! Mullets and faces...

GOODYEAR. Getting settled in are we, Mr...uh, Mr...?

STEVIE BOB. Stevie Bob.

GOODYEAR. (*Removing a few items of clothing from dresser:*) Ah, yes...Stevie Bob. Does that mean "Bob" is your last name?

STEVIE BOB. Close enough.

GOODYEAR. "Close enough." Like your shaves. (*Chuckles.*)

STEVIE BOB. Have a seat, Mr. Goodyear.

GOODYEAR. (*Sits in barber chair.*) Strange feeling, sitting in my own chair. Ah, but it really isn't my chair, is it, Mr. Stevie Bob?

STEVIE BOB. No. It's mine now.

(He soaks a towel in hot water and begins sharpening his razor.)

GOODYEAR. Quite true. Quite true. But that's not exactly what I meant.

STEVIE BOB. Then what exactly did you mean?

GOODYEAR. This is the chair Benny Baker himself purchased. Drove all the way to...to, uh...uh...?

STEVIE BOB. Mobile. Wanda told me all about its history.

GOODYEAR. Yes, yes, of course. Wanda. Ever been to Mobile, Mr. Stevie Bob?

STEVIE BOB. Nope.

GOODYEAR. You're sure about that?

STEVIE BOB. I do know where I've been in my lifetime, Mr. Good-year.

GOODYEAR. (*Rises quickly from chair and with no British accent:*) And so do I, Mr. Benny Baker. You don't remember me, do you? Lionel! Lionel Bridgestone. I was your assistant.

STEVIE BOB. Lionel!? It's you!?

GOODYEAR. When they accused you of the head lice epidemic, I was implicated simply because I was your assistant, even though I'd only been with you a few weeks. I fled town and came back a few years later as... (*British accent returns:*) "Mr. Adolph Goodyear, Barber Extraordinaire, straight from London." I knew the shop would still be vacant. Your incompetence almost ruined my career, too!

STEVIE BOB. "MY INCOMPETENCE!?" Bridgestone, you know how clean I kept my equipment. Someone had to tamper with it, and you know who!

GOODYEAR. Still the same old story! Still blaming the sheriff!

STEVIE BOB. He wanted my wife!

GOODYEAR. And he got her, my dear man, for a short while anyway.

STEVIE BOB. (*Advancing towards GOODYEAR:*) What'd you mean "for a short while?"

GOODYEAR. First things first! You will give me fifty percent of your profits every month...

STEVIE BOB. What do you mean "for a short while...?"

GOODYEAR. ...OR, I shall reveal to this lovely community who you really are...Mr. Benny Baker, head lice spreader!

STEVIE BOB. (*Advancing closer to GOODYEAR:*) WHAT DO YOU MEAN "FOR A SHORT WHILE?"

GOODYEAR. (*Pulls a razor out of his pocket.*) You stay away from me, Benny Baker! I'm rather good with one of these, too!

STEVIE BOB. (*Closer to GOODYEAR:*) ANSWER ME, GOODYEAR! WHAT'D YA MEAN BY...?

(Screaming, GOODYEAR charges at STEVIE BOB, wildly slashing with his razor. STEVIE BOB avoids the first attack.)

STEVIE BOB. STOP IT, YOU FOOL!

(On GOODYEAR's second charge STEVIE BOB pivots the barber chair at him. It strikes GOODYEAR, who stumbles and falls to the ground...and lies motionless.)

STEVIE BOB. (*After a long moment:*) Goodyear? Goodyear, get up and tell me what you meant! (*Pause.*) Goodyear? (*He nudges GOODYEAR with his foot, but GOODYEAR remains motionless.*) Goodyear? What'd you mean for a short... (*He rolls GOODYEAR over to find that he has fallen on his own razor, which is sticking out of his chest.*) Oh my god! Oh my god!

WANDA. (*Running up the stairs into the room:*) What is going up...? What happened?

STEVIE BOB. He...he attacked me and fell on his own razor.

WANDA. Is he...is he...dead?

STEVIE BOB. It was an accident. He attacked me and...

TOBY. (*Calling from downstairs:*) Anyone here?

WANDA. It's Toby.

TOBY. Hello?

STEVIE BOB. What'd we do? How do I explain this?

TOBY. You all up there?

WANDA. You can't! Put him in the trunk. *(She grabs GOODYEAR's legs and starts dragging him to the large trunk.)* For god's sake, help me, before Toby gets up here!!

(They place GOODYEAR in the trunk just as TOBY's head appears on the staircase.)

TOBY. *(Chomping on an apple:)* Why didn't ya answer me?

WANDA. Uh, we didn't hear you; had the sink runnin'!

STEVIE BOB. Yeah! The sink was runnin'! The noise of the water, we didn't hear you.

TOBY. Oh. Where's Adolph?

STEVIE BOB. Who?

TOBY. Mr. Goodyear. He said he was comin' over here for his free shave.

WANDA. He hasn't been here.

STEVIE BOB. Nope. Not here. Not yet. Haven't seen him. Have you seen him, Wanda?

WANDA. Nope. Haven't seen him.

(A pause.)

TOBY. *(Sits on trunk.)* Well, I'll wait for him. He should be here soon.

WANDA. Uh, he might've been delayed by a customer.

TOBY. Yeah, maybe.

WANDA. Well...he might not be here for awhile, Toby. You know how chatty he gets with his customers.

TOBY. I know. Sometimes it drives me crazy, Miss Wanda, so I'll just wait here fer him.

WANDA. *(An anxious moment.)* Uh, Toby, could you run an errand for me?

TOBY. An errand?

WANDA. It's just down to the Piggly Wiggly. Please, Toby? *(Smiles.)* Pleeeease?

TOBY. *(Smiles.)* Shucks! You know I can't refuse you, Miss Wanda. *(Rises.)* What'd ya need?

WANDA. Need?

TOBY. Down at the Piggly Wiggly. What'd ya need?

WANDA. Oh...uh...uh, trash bags. Plastic trash bags.

TOBY. Trash bags?

WANDA. *(She leads TOBY to door to the exterior alley staircase.)* Yeah! Biggest ones you can find. Here! Here's twenty dollars. You can keep what's left.

TOBY. I can?

WANDA. Sure. Stop at the Pearl and have yourself a beer with it.

TOBY. *(Starts to leave.)* Okay! *(Stops.)* Before or after I brung ya the trash bags?

STEVIE BOB. After...

WANDA. Before...

STEVIE BOB. Before...

WANDA. After...

TOBY. Well, which one?

WANDA. Uh, get yer beer, too. I'm not in any hurry.

STEVIE BOB. You're not!?

TOBY. Okay! Trash bags and then a beer. *(He exits doorway and descends staircase talking to himself:)* Trash bags, beer. Trash bags, beer. Trash bags, beer...

STEVIE BOB. Now wh...?

WANDA. *(At top of stairs, making certain TOBY is leaving:)* SSHHH! *(A moment.)* What happened? Why did he attack you?

STEVIE BOB. He...he tried to...to blackmail me. His real name is Bridgestone and he used to be my assistant when...when...

WANDA. *(A pause.)* When you were Benny Baker?

STEVIE BOB. *(Pause.)* Yes.

WANDA. I knew it!

(She plops down on the trunk, realizes where she's sitting and quickly rises.)

STEVIE BOB. When did you know?

WANDA. Twenty years ain't changed you that much. 'Cept for the streaks of grey hair...

STEVIE BOB. Yeah...

WANDA. And the bags under yer eyes...

STEVIE BOB. Yeah...

WANDA. And the double chin...

STEVIE BOB. Yeah...

WANDA. And the pot belly...

STEVIE BOB. Yeah...

WANDA. And the saggin' buttocks...

STEVIE BOB. Okay, okay! But what'd we do about him?

WANDA. That's why I told Toby to get *big* trash bags.

STEVIE BOB. He won't fit! They don't make trash bags that...
(*Realizing what she intends:*) ...No! I...I couldn't...

WANDA. You gonna go to Turdspin? Tell him what happened? Let him remember you and... Look, people go missin' all the time in Mulletville. Some idiot goes out huntin' and stumbles across some hillbilly's illegal still and ends up in his wood chipper. Some folks just leave without ever tellin' anyone they're leavin'. We got a body and you got razors, and pretty soon we'll have trash bags. You wanna stay around here...you ain't got no choice.

(*A pause.*)

STEVIE BOB. I have to ask you a question.

WANDA. Okay.

STEVIE BOB. Where were you the night they tarred and feathered me and rode me out of town? (*Pause.*) I won't hurt ya!

WANDA. I was hidin' in the back of my shop cryin' my eyes out. Your wife and me...we was in art classes together...and...well, she knew I always kinda had a thing for ya, Benny.

STEVIE BOB. Stevie Bob!

WANDA. Stevie Bob.

(*A moment.*)

STEVIE BOB. Goodyear said Turdspin had my wife "for a while." What'd he mean by that?

WANDA. You don't wanna hear 'bout...

STEVIE BOB. YEAH! I do!

WANDA. After you were...were run out of town there was a big celebration and bonfire, drinkin' and, and...and...ya sure you wanna hear this?

STEVIE BOB. I've spent the last twenty years livin' in shame, too afraid to come back here, too afraid to even try to find my wife and daughter. You've never had to peel hot tar off your skin, have you?

WANDA. Just off my shoes after they've paved the...

STEVIE BOB. IT HURTS! IT HURTS LIKE HELL, WANDA! It's like ...like ripping off a layer of skin. And when they put it on you, it burns, sears into your pores and seals them shut so they can't breathe. You feel like you're suffocating, but your mouth is still taking in air, gasping, trying to get the rest of your body to just...just breathe. To get it off, you have to douse yourself in gasoline. And that burns, too! Your body is on fire and there's not a damn thing you can do, just...just suffer! And the stench! God awful stench! You can't even stand to be around yourself. All my hair was gone, pulled out at the roots. And I mean all my hair, all over my body. If Tony Hopeful hadn't convinced me to come home with him—to what I thought was a place called Mulletville—I still don't know if I'd have ever come back to Fleetwood. But I did. I'm here! No more runnin' in shame, Wanda! I'm gonna kill those head lice stories and I just may kill the person who started them: Turdspin! Now you tell me what happened to my wife.

WANDA. Alright. The Sheriff, he, uh, went to your place, dragged your wife out to the middle of the celebration and...and...right there, in front of that bonfire, in front of the everyone...had his way with her.

STEVIE BOB. "Had his way?"

WANDA. Yeah.

STEVIE BOB. What'd ya mean? What's "his way?"

WANDA. You know... (*With her hands, demonstrates copulation.*) ...his way...the dirty deed!

STEVIE BOB. (*Stunned for a moment, he lets out a blood curdling yell.*)

WANDA. SSSHH! QUIET! You wanna bring the whole town up here?

(*A moment as STEVIE BOB tries to calm.*)

STEVIE BOB. Where is she? What happened to her, Wanda? Did she run off? Does anyone know...?

WANDA. She's dead.

STEVIE BOB. Dead!?

WANDA. She must have been too humiliated to face anyone again, so she...she jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge.

STEVIE BOB. You mean...the same one...?

WANDA. Yeah. It's a popular bridge for jumpers.

STEVIE BOB. No, no, no!

(STEVIE BOB collapses onto the trunk, then realizes where he's sitting and rises quickly.)

WANDA. They never found her body. Not in the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge.

STEVIE BOB. And my baby?

WANDA. The Sheriff took her in, as a foster child. He's been raising her, getting' her ready I think.

STEVIE BOB. Ready for what?

WANDA. He couldn't have your wife, so he's...well...do I need to paint a picture?

STEVIE BOB. *(Moment.)* My daughter!? He thinks he's gonna have my daughter, too!? I'll kill him first!

WANDA. Then you'd be in even more trouble.

STEVIE BOB. I was in trouble the second I stepped off that bus, Wanda.

WANDA. Well, if it makes you feel any better, I don't think she's too keen on the idea either. But right now, we gotta figure out what to do with Adolph.

STEVIE BOB. *(Pacing:)* Look at me! I'm so angry I'm shakin' like a leaf, got goose bumps. Didn't think I could get goose bumps anymore! Feel 'em!

WANDA. Just calm down, Benny. We'll think of...

STEVIE BOB. IT'S NOT BENNY! IT'S STEVIE BOB!

WANDA. Sorry. Stevie Bob! Sure, sure! *(Pause.)* "Goose bumps!"

STEVIE BOB. Huh?

WANDA. Your skin. You said you had goose bumps.

STEVIE BOB. So what!?

WANDA. *(Pacing and thinking:)* Life sized baby dolls...with mullets...and...famous faces...and...what if...what if...?

STEVIE BOB. What if what, Wanda?

WANDA. What if we not only give the baby dolls mullets and famous faces, but what if we make them *feel* like they're real?

STEVIE BOB. *(Pointing at trunk:)* How does that solve this problem?

WANDA. We use real skin.

(They look at each other for a long moment, then look at the trunk.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(It is that evening. The exteriors of the doll and barber shops are back in place. TOBY comes stumbling onto stage, obviously drunk. He carries a small bag. Soon he makes it to the door of the doll shop and taps on it. There is no answer. Then he knocks a little harder. No answer. Then he pounds on it.)

TOBY. Miss Wanda!? MISS WANDA!?! *(Pause. He pounds again.)* MISS WANDA!?! MISS WANDA!?! *(Pause, then he hangs the small bag on the doll shop doorknob.)* I got your trash bags.

(He stumbles off into the darkness. After a moment, JOSIE BELLE cautiously sneaks onto stage and over to the table at the ice cream parlor. Her flamingoes are not there. She carries a small pad of paper and a pencil.)

TONY. *(Stepping out of the shadows, holding her flamingoes:)* Lookin' for these?

JOSIE BELLE. *(Startled:)* Oh! *(Smiling:)* Tony Hopeful. So you did read my mind.

TONY. I was hoping that was why you left them there. I wanted to see you again, too. How'd ya get away from The Turdspinner?

JOSIE BELLE. He's spending the night in the jail, with them biker chicks, said they'd been makin' a ruckus in there and he wanted to teach 'em some manners. Prob'bly hose 'em down or something. They need hosing anyway.

TONY. What'd they do to get thrown in jail?

JOSIE BELLE. Foster Poppa Willie hates anyone who rides a motorcycle. Any kind of motorcycle. Two boys from our trailer park had saved up all their money and bought a little scooter. Foster Poppa Willie took a sledge hammer to it, screamin' about how them little bikes just lead to bigger ones. Then he made them boys clean every still-existing outhouse in the county, and there's quite a few. He posted a sign outside of town that says, "No Bikers Allowed." But them six girls came roarin' into town anyway, so Foster Poppa Willie and Deputy Beetle got their shotguns and threw 'em in jail.

TONY. How long they been in there?

JOSIE BELLE. Two weeks. He hasn't said when he's going to release them yet.

TONY. Just keepin' 'em there for no reason? I think they call that "false pretenses."

JOSIE BELLE. Speaking of false pretenses, I have to admit that you reading my mind wasn't the only reason I came here. Oh, don't get me wrong, I'm glad ya did, but...but it wasn't the only reason. (*Sits at table.*) I like sittin' out here at night. It's peaceful and quiet. For now, at least.

TONY. (*Sits.*) What'd ya mean?

JOSIE BELLE. Old Pop Sickle and his wife owned the Ice Cream Parlor for years, long as I can 'member, but their business wasn't too good, so the Mayor—who owns the bank—was gonna take it over, but Foster Poppa Willie paid off their loan, so now he owns the parlor. He lets Pop and his wife stay around to run it.

TONY. Is that bad?

JOSIE BELLE. He and the Mayor are tryin' to buy up the Doll Shop, too, then tear 'em down and put in a casino. Miss Wanda, Pop Sickle, they'd be out of business. A casino would just ruin the whole feel of our little downtown.

TONY. Yeah, and bring in a bunch of Indians. What about the Sheriff's office. They'd have to tear that down, too, wouldn't they?

JOSIE BELLE. Oh, Foster Poppa Willie's already got himself a prime place picked out by the town square, right around the corner from our Jeff Foxworthy statue. He says that way he can keep a close eye on them "damn tourists." He arrests them for the dumbest things and makes them pay these big fines, then lets them go. He arrested one tourist for wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt with BLACK socks instead of white. Another was arrested for carryin' a "man purse." Foster Poppa Willie went out and bought a dress and made the fella wear it for a whole day *after* he had released him.

TONY. But won't a casino just bring in more "damn tourists."

JOSIE BELLE. And pad Foster Poppa Willie's pockets even more.

TONY. So if Wanda's Doll Shop goes under...

JOSIE BELLE. Where we're sittin' will be a flashy, noisy casino. So, I come out here at night as often as I can, soak in the memories...and it keeps me away from Foster Poppa Willie. He...he...well...he ain't seein' me as a daughter no more, if ya know what I mean.

TONY. That's why he told me to stay away from you.

JOSIE BELLE. And every other young man who even happens to glance at my...at me.

TONY. Don't ya get lonely?

(We see DEPUTY BEETLE lurking in the alley, spying on the two potential lovers.)

JOSIE BELLE. Sure. But I write poems to fill my time.

TONY. That what the paper and pencil are for?

JOSIE BELLE. Yeah. I figgered ifin you didn't read my mind then I'd finish my newest poem.

TONY. *(Moves closer to her.)* But I did read it.

JOSIE BELLE. *(Moving closer to him:)* And I'm glad ya did.

(Just as they are about to kiss, DEPUTY BEETLE starts to step out of the alley, but he is struck from behind by the BEGGAR WOMAN. BEETLE plummets to the ground and she drags him back into the alley. Disturbed by the noise, our lovers don't kiss, but turn their heads toward the alley.)

TONY. Did you hear that?

JOSIE BELLE. Pro'bly that ol' beggar woman. She lives back in that alley somewhere.

TONY. So...since I read your mind...will you let me read your newest poem?

JOSIE BELLE. Oh, it's not finished.

TONY. I don't care. Is it a love poem?

JOSIE BELLE. Well...!

TONY. Come on, Josie Belle, lemme read it.

JOSIE BELLE. A poem is only good when read by its arthur.

TONY. So you read it to me.

JOSIE BELLE. Well, okay, I'll read what I have so far. *(Opens her pad and clears her throat.)* "The Death Of A Wal-Mart Greeter." That's the title. "He came alive at sixty-five, throwing off the chains and shackles, but soon he found, his wife did hound, with her nagging and her cackles. So out of the house, quick as a mouse, he ran to find a part time job, but at his age, things looked grave..." That's all I got so far. But the gist of it is, after he finally gets a job as a Wal-Mart greeter, he gets shot by an illegal alien.

TONY. That's so sad.

JOSIE BELLE. That's 'cause it's a tragedy. Most of my poems are sad.

TONY. Because you're sad.

JOSIE BELLE. I guess so.

TONY. I'd like to make you happy, Josie Belle.

JOSIE BELLE. How? (*Excited:*) We gonna share our pleasures?

TONY. More than that.

JOSIE BELLE. There's more than that?

TONY. I wanna take you away from here. Away from Mulletville. Away from Foster Poppa Willie.

JOSIE BELLE. Where? What would we do? And Foster Poppa Willie would just come after us and...

TONY. When I got to my momma's today there was a letter for me. I been offered a new job on another oil rig in the Gulf, a BP oil rig, and they're a grand, big company. I'll be makin' even more money than I was makin' on the other rig. We could find us a little house in New Orleans and...

JOSIE BELLE. Oh, I've always wanted to see New Orleans...but Foster Poppa Willie says it's the home of the devil himself.

TONY. It ain't! It's a happy town. One of the happiest towns I ever been in.

JOSIE BELLE. When would we leave?

TONY. Right after the Mullet Contest. I'm gonna win it and put even more money in our pockets. Nobody's gonna beat this mullet.

JOSIE BELLE. It is a fine mullet, Tony Hopeful. Feels so soft...

TONY. You'd never be sad again, Josie Belle. I promise ya. All you gotta do is say you will.

JOSIE BELLE. You mean "I do." We'd have to be married, Tony Hopeful, 'cause ifin we are, than Foster Poppa Willie couldn't take me back here. I'd be yours, legal and all.

TONY. Josie Belle, I can't think of anyone I'd more like to be legal with then you. (*They kiss.*)

JOSIE BELLE. (*Pleased:*) Ooooh! First shoe fits.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 4

(Early morning. A few days later. Lights up on front of Sheriff's office. DEPUTY BEETLE, with bandages wrapped around his head, is seated in a rocking chair outside the office. The fronts of the doll and barber shops are removed, exposing the interiors, but unlit at this time.)

SHERIFF. *(Entering in a fluster:)* She done it again!

DEPUTY. What?

SHERIFF. Locked herself in her room. Four days now, since the night you saw her with that Hopeful fella, she's been lockin' herself up.

DEPUTY. Still ain't seen that beggar woman around neither!

SHERIFF. Who cares!? My Josie Belle has become a hermit.

DEPUTY. I cares! She ain't been around since I got conked. *(Lifts up a two-by-four resting at his feet.)* Looky here! Found this in the dumpster back there. Got some blood on it and it's dented. She being hidin' somewhere, my achin' head, a bloody, dented two-by-four! Do the math! One and one equals she did it all right, and I'm gonna make her pay.

SHERIFF. Right now your head and that dirty ol' beggar woman are the least of my worries. I gotta do somethun to get Josie Belle to come outta her room.

DEPUTY. Kick the door down.

SHERIFF. I wanna marry her, not scare her to death!

DEPUTY. Well, you catch more bees with honey, ya know.

SHERIFF. *(Sits in second rocking chair.)* She don't like honey, breaks her out in hives.

DEPUTY. I mean, nice things, Sheriff. Like flowers or candy.

SHERIFF. Every time I've given her flowers she starts sneezin', and she says candy just gives her pimples.

DEPUTY. Well, then, maybe you should "honey coat" yerself.

SHERIFF. You know, sometimes I think I should just shoot you.

DEPUTY. No, no, I mean...well, you know...fancy yourself up.

SHERIFF. Like how?

DEPUTY. Go see that new barber. He's supposed to be pretty good. Shave off the beard, or at lease comb last week's chili out of it. Trim

the hair, get some sweet smellin' cologne. Wear a nice suit, change your underwear. Lots of things you could do.

SHERIFF. I guess gals do like them things, don't they?

DEPUTY. When I do them things, you know, fancy myself up a bit, them gals down at The Pearl just flock all around me.

SHERIFF. Kinda like flies on poop, huh?

DEPUTY. Yeah! I have to fight 'em off with a pool cue.

SHERIFF. (*A moment.*) Guess it wouldn't hurt to clean up a bit. You say that new barber knows his stuff?

DEPUTY. Only been a town a week and already got a reputation. 'Member Clifton Clowers?

SHERIFF. What about him?

DEPUTY. He went in to see that barber, got himself all fixed up, and ain't been seen since.

SHERIFF. What the hell does that mean?

DEPUTY. Ol' Clifton was always sweet on Becky Love, the day waitress down at The Pearl. She went for a stylin' from that new barber and now she's gone, too. Get the picture?

SHERIFF. You're sayin' ol' Clifton and Becky got themselves all fancied up by that new barber, then finally took a strong enough likin' to each other to run off together?

DEPUTY. Do the math! One and one equals they run off together. 'Course, Clifton's wife is on the rampage, and The Pearl needs a new day waitress, but what the heck...love is love! Ya can't fight it!

SHERIFF. Maybe you got a point there, Beetle. Maybe that conk on your bean did ya some good. I'm going up there right now.

DEPUTY. He might have a customer already.

SHERIFF. I'm the sheriff, Beetle. (*He starts for staircase in the alley.*) Whew! Ol' Wanda's chimney is sure puttin' out a lot of stinky smoke.

DEPUTY. She said she's brewin' up a new plastic mixture for some doll idea. Smells like an outhouse if ya ask me.

SHERIFF. Like a whole bevy of dead possums.

(As SHERIFF ascends staircase, lights cross-fade to expose interior of barber shop. STEVIE BOB is sharpening his razor as WANDA sweeps the floor.)

WANDA. Abe Lincoln. That's my next one. Or maybe a whole line of great Presidents.

STEVIE BOB. Don't think there's been enough great ones to make a whole line.

WANDA. Mary Todd Lincoln!

STEVIE. No one would know who she is. Her face ain't that familiar. Hillary Clinton would be more well known, ifin you want a first lady baby doll.

SHERIFF. *(Knocks on door.)* Anyone there? It's Sheriff Turdspin.

(WANDA and STEVIE BOB freeze and look at each other.)

STEVIE. *(Smiling:)* I got him!

WANDA. He might just be investigatin' the smelly smoke. Beetle already asked me about it.

STEVIE. I don't care why he's here...he's here. And I got him! Get downstairs.

(WANDA hesitates.)

STEVIE. GIT!

(WANDA exits the interior staircase to the doll shop below.)

STEVIE. Come on in, Sheriff Turdspin.

SHERIFF. *(Entering:)* Don't have a customer, do ya? Wouldn't matter anyway. I am the Sheriff.

STEVIE. *(Extremely pleased:)* It just so happens that you caught me between appointments. Have a seat.

SHERIFF. Thanks. *(Sits.)*

STEVIE. And what can I do for you, Sheriff? A nice, very, very close shave perhaps?

SHERIFF. Make me handsome! Or should I say, handsomer. Like ya did with Clifton Clowers. I want the works. Close shave, haircut and styled, some nice, woman-grabbin' cologne, if ya know what I mean.

STEVIE. Ah, yes, the women do like a man who smells nice. *(Preparing a hot towel:)* 'Specially the purty women! You got a purty woman you want to impress, Sheriff?

SHERIFF. The purtiest! A sexy young filly with a fine set of... *(Gestures with his hands.)* ...you know what I mean?

STEVIE. *(Forcing a grin:)* Yes. Yes, I do. Sheriff, I'll make a new man outta ya.

(He takes a hot towel and covers the SHERIFF's face.)

SHERIFF. Whoa! Bit steamy, ain't it.

STEVIE. It brings them whiskers to attention, Sheriff, beggin' to be... cut. *(He opens his razor and approaches the SHERIFF.)* Yessireebob, just beggin' to be cut. When I'm through with you, your own mamma won't recognize you.

(Suddenly, TONY bursts in the door from the alley staircase.)

TONY. *(Excited;)* Everything's planned, Stevie Bob. I confirmed my new job and Josie Belle and me will be headin' out of here right after the mullet contest. I'm as happy as a tick on a fat dog!

SHERIFF. *(Whips the towel off his face and rises.)* And you'll be as dead as a fat dog ifin you even come near my Josie Belle. Barber, I don't like your friends, so I don't think I like you, and when I don't like someone, I make it awful hard for them to live in the same town as me. *(He exits.)*

TONY. *(Following SHERIFF down the alley staircase;)* You don't own her, Sheriff. You can't control her life.

SHERIFF. No, but I can make it miserable, for the both of you.

TONY. We're in love, damn it!

SHERIFF. *(Turns to TONY.)* Boy, she ain't gonna love nobody but me, 'cause soon she'll have no choice. *(Cross-fade lights to front of Sheriff's office.)* BEETLE!? BEETLE!?

DEPUTY. *(Almost falling out of the rocker;)* What!? What is it, Sheriff!?

SHERIFF. Escort this dried up piece of dog crap back down to his mamma's trailer and see that he stays there.

TONY. I know the way! *(He exits.)*

SHERIFF. Then keep on going 'til you hit the state line, 'cause you ain't safe in this one!

DEPUTY. What happened, Sheriff?

SHERIFF. Go get Josie Belle and bring her here.

DEPUTY. Here? You mean the jail?

SHERIFF. YES! HERE! I'm gonna lock her up and keep her there 'til she agrees to marry me.

DEPUTY. But them biker chicks.

SHERIFF. Perfect roommates.

DEPUTY. But you said she done locked herself in her room.

SHERIFF. KICK DOWN THE DOOR!

(He enters Sheriff's office as DEPUTY runs off. Cross-fade lights back to barber shop.)

STEVIE BOB. DAMN! (*He throws his razor across the room, barely missing the head of WANDA coming up the stairs.*) DAMN, DAMN, DAMN...

WANDA. What happened?

STEVIE BOB. I had him, Wanda! I had him right here, under my blade! I could've put a smile on him from ear to ear.

WANDA. Then what happened?

STEVIE BOB. Tony charged in yellin' somethin' about a new job and runnin' off with a...a...Josie Belle someone.

WANDA. Oh no!

STEVIE BOB. I was this close to his throat! This close to...to revenge.

WANDA. Stevie Bob!?

STEVIE BOB. I tell ya you couldn't have slipped a piece of paper between my blade and his throat!

WANDA. STEVIE BOB!?

STEVIE BOB. WHAT!?

WANDA. Josie Belle is your daughter.

(A pause.)

STEVIE BOB. Josephine? You mean...Josie Belle is...Josephine? That's who Tony's in love with? My daughter?

WANDA. Yes.

STEVIE BOB. That means he wants to take her away, away from Turdspin.

WANDA. Sounds that way.

STEVIE BOB. Away from Mulletville. Away from Fleetwood. Away from....we gotta do somethun, Wanda!

WANDA. What?

STEVIE BOB. (*Picking up his razor:*) I still see their faces, Wanda...all glowin' and grinnin' from that bonfire. Every one of 'em. Every face, just burned right into my brain, Wanda. Laughin' and slobberin' and screaming, "Git it hotter! Git it hotter!" They ain't gonna ruin my little girl's life like they did mine.

WANDA. What're ya gonna do?

STEVIE BOB. We, Wanda. We! Heat up your vat! We're gonna have dolls to make!

(Blackout.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(A week later. The interiors of the doll and barber shops are covered. Several town people and tourists are strolling about, some going in and out of the doll shop. There is a large banner across the front of the doll shop reading, LIFE SIZED BABY DOLLS OF FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH MULLET. A few smaller posters are plastered on the front of the upstairs barber shop reading, COME IN FOR A CLOSE SHAVE, WOMEN WELCOME, FREE SHAVE WITH EVERY HAIRCUT. TOBY is outside the doll shop by a small table with a few mullet dolls on it. He wears a Lynnyrd Skynnyrd tee shirt. The SHERIFF and DEPUTY are relaxing in their rocking chairs in front of the Sheriff's office. The DEPUTY no longer has his head bandaged.)

TOBY. STEP RIGHT UP, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! YES INDEED, THIS IS THE PLACE. THE PLACE YOU BEEN HEARIN' ABOUT. THE ONLY PLACE WHERE YOU CAN GET WANDA'S FAMOUS PEOPLE, LIFE-SIZED BABY DOLLS WITH MULLET. SEE WHO I'M HOLDIN' RIGHT NOW? Who's that look like, Sir?

MALE CUSTOMER. Johnny Cash!

TOBY. How right you are, sir. This here is our Johnny Cash baby doll, complete with a mullet. A jet black mullet, of course! We got Willie and Waylon, too, folks! *(Picks up another doll.)* And who does this look like, Ma'am?

FEMALE CUSTOMER. *(Holding the doll.)* Why that's Reba McEntire.

TOBY. Yes Ma'am, red hair and all.

FEMALE CUSTOMER. And the skin feels so...so real. *(She holds doll out to her friend, who touches it.)*

2ND FEMALE CUSTOMER. You're right. It's so soft and...and real feelin'!

TOBY. Go right on in and look around, folks. We got Elvis, we got Liz Taylor, we got Louie Armstrong, we even got...are you ready?... *(He holds up a doll.)* "W" himself!

(People are coming and going from the doll shop as WANDA comes out with a glass in her hand.)

WANDA. Here, Toby. I thought you could use some lemonade.

TOBY. Oh, thank you, Miss Wanda. I sure do 'preciate ya givin' me this here job, Miss Wanda. I still can't believe Mr. Goodyear would

just take off without me. I thought...well, I thought I meant more to him than that.

WANDA. He kinda raised ya, didn't he?

TOBY. He made me his assistant after my momma run off with that Civil War reenactor—a Yankee, to boot.

WANDA. How old were ya...when yer momma left?

TOBY. Twelve. I think.

WANDA. So you're what, twenty, twenty-two now?

TOBY. Yessum! I think.

WANDA. (*Distant.*) That'd make you about the same age as...!

(*A moment.*)

TOBY. As what, Miss Wanda?

WANDA. Nothin', Toby! Nothin'! Just rememberin' some past mistakes.

TOBY. What kinda mistakes, Miss Wanda?

WANDA. (*Pats his shoulder.*) Never you mind, Toby. What's done is done and then it just becomes somethun you learn to live with. Like you learnin' to live without your momma, and Mr. Goodyear. It's painful, I know...but life's like that.

TOBY. All the time? Life's painful all the time?

WANDA. And then you die. (*Starting to return to inside of shop.*)

TOBY. Miss Wanda?

WANDA. What, Toby?

TOBY. If life ever gets too painful for you, you just tell me and I'll do my darndest to fix it fer ya.

WANDA. Thank you, Toby.

TOBY. I mean that. I really do. Oh, not in...in...inna...inna, you know, inna lustful way, but inna...inna...!

WANDA. (*Smiles and pats his shoulder again.*) I understand. Thank you, Toby.

(*She goes back inside the doll shop, TOBY sips his lemonade.*)

DEPUTY. You talked to Mrs. Frog yet?

SHERIFF. About Jonas goin' missin'?

DEPUTY. Yeah!

SHERIFF. Yeah. Stupid ol' fool pro'bly went out huntin', came across some lunatic's illegal still and got hisself tossed in a wood chipper.

DEPUTY. Yeah, that's what I figgered, too. That what you told her?

SHERIFF. Yeah.

DEPUTY. How'd she take it?

SHERIFF. She said, "Good! Now I can move in with my sister over in Natchez."

DEPUTY. She always was a cold-hearted ol' biddy! *(Pause.)* What about Wilbur Higgins? He says his wife has been missin' for several days.

SHERIFF. Now how many times has that woman run off with some travelin' salesman?

DEPUTY. Four, last time I counted.

SHERIFF. And she always comes crawlin' back.

DEPUTY. And Wilbur always takes her back.

SHERIFF. She must be good at somethun. *(They laugh.)* Whew! This whole end of town is smellin' like a Dodge City feedlot.

(The BEGGAR WOMAN starts to emerge from the alley, but stops and steps back when she sees the DEPUTY.)

DEPUTY. I ain't never been to Dodge City. Does it smell like that?

SHERIFF. Being downwind of one of them feedlots could choke a skunk.

DEPUTY. But it's sure got Wanda's business boomin'! She's selling them famous people, mullet-haired baby dolls faster than she can make 'em.

SHERIFF. And that ain't good for us, Beetle. Long as her business is booming, the longer it's gonna take for us to get that casino in here.

DEPUTY. Nothun we can do about it. Legally, that is!

(A moment.)

SHERIFF. There might be.

DEPUTY. What?

SHERIFF. Somethun legal we can do. Surly this state has some kind of laws regarding stink pollution. Matter of fact, *(Rises.)* I'm going over to the library to do a little research on the subject. You hold down the fort!

DEPUTY. How long you gonna keep Josie Belle in there?

SHERIFF. Long as it takes! *(As he is exiting, a young red-headed girl, twelve or thirteen, runs up to him.)*

LACY. Sheriff!? Sheriff!? I can't find my pa!

SHERIFF. *(Pushing her aside:)* Talk to Deputy Beetle. I got better things to do *(He exits.)*

DEPUTY. What's going on, Lacy?

LACY. I can't find my Pa.

DEPUTY. Ya can't find him? *(Chuckles.)* Don't how you could lose him, with that bright red head of hair of his. Did yer mamma say where he might be?

LACY. She just said she hopes he got himself eatin' by a bear. He came into town yesterday for some groceries and a haircut and never came home.

DEPUTY. Well, maybe he's out huntin' or fishin' or...he went to get a haircut, you say?

LACY. Well, he said he was goin' to get one; I don't know if he did or not.

DEPUTY. *(Rises slowly, looking up at barber shop:)* You...you run on home, Lacy. Ifin yer daddy don't show up by supper, you come back here and tell me, okay?

LACY. Okay, but shouldn't you do like they do in them shows; put out an APB?

DEPUTY. What the devil is an APB?

LACY. All Points Bulletin. That's what they do on them crime shows. You don't know that and you're a deputy!?

DEPUTY. You know, you kids watch too much TV! Now git on home! *(Lightly kicks LACY in the rump, who exits begrudgingly.)* Little smart-ass!

(The DEPUTY stares up at the barber shop for a few moments. We can almost see how it pains him when the few wheels inside his head start to turn.)

DEPUTY. Maybe it's time to have a talk with that barber. *(He starts for the alley staircase and sees the BEGGAR WOMAN.)* YOU!?

(She takes off running up the alley and behind the buildings.)

DEPUTY. HEY, HEY, YOU DON'T RUN FROM ME. I'M THE LAW! *(He runs up the alley after her.)* COME BACK HERE! I GOTTA SCORE TO SETTLE WITH YOU!

(He's gone.)

TOBY. HEY THERE, HEY THERE! That's right, folks, the only life sized baby dolls of famous people with mullets in the state. Pro'bly in the South. Heck, could be the only ones in the whole USA! Come inside and take a look at all of them.

TONY. *(Enters and crosses to TOBY. Curtly:)* Hello, Toby.

TOBY. *(Curtly:)* Hello, Tony.

TONY. *(Gesturing to TOBY's tee shirt:)* Still a Skynyrd fan, I see.

TOBY. What's left of 'em. What'd ya want, Tony? I'm workin' here.

TONY. Toby, do you, uh, know Josie Belle Baker?

TOBY. The Turdspinner's foster daughter? Everyone knows her. Why?

TONY. Oh, just...just curious, that's all. You seen her around lately?

TOBY. Why?

TONY. Oh, just...

TOBY / TONY. ...curious.

TOBY. Look, Tony, you and I ain't never been on what you'd call the friendliest of terms, but that kind of curiosity could get yer liver cut out. The Turdspinner don't like nobody even talkin' to that girl.

TONY. She's missin', Toby.

TOBY. Missin' what?

TONY. She! Her! Josie Belle, she's missin', vanished. Ain't seen her in a week.

(The DEPUTY comes running out of the alley and up to TONY and TOBY.)

DEPUTY. Either of you seen that Beggar Woman run by here?

TONY / TOBY. Nope. No.

DEPUTY. Damn! *(He runs back into the alley.)*

TOBY. I don't know how she could've vanished. The Turdspinner never lets her outta his sight. Just as well have a collar and leash on that poor girl.

TONY. Well, if you see her and hear anything, would you tell me?

TOBY. Why should I?

TONY. 'Cause neither of us like The Turdspinner.

TOBY. *(A moment.)* Okay.

TONY. Thanks. *(He starts to exit.)*

TOBY. Tony?

TONY. Yeah?

TOBY. Nice mullet.

TONY. *(Smiles.)* You too, Toby. *(He exits.)*

TOBY. *(To himself.)* But I'm gonna win! HEYA, HEYA, HEYA! Life sized baby dolls of famous people with mullets. Come on in and take a look at 'em, folks. *(Holding out a doll to a passerby:)* Feel this, Ma'am! What's it feel like?

WOMAN PASSERBY. Oh my, it feels like real skin.

TOBY. LIFE SIZED SO THEY NOT ONLY LOOK REAL, THEY FEEL REAL. HEYA, HEYA, HEYA!

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(That night. Exteriors are off doll and barber shops. Doll shop and barber shop are dark. TONY enters and sits at his and JOSIE BELLE's table and sighs.)

TONY. *(Closing his eyes very tightly:)* Come on, read my mind, Josie Belle! Read my mind! Read my...

BEGGAR WOMAN. *(Cautiously poking her head out of alley, looking around. After she feels it safe...)* Pssst!

(TONY looks around.)

BEGGAR WOMAN. Over here!

TONY. *(Spots the BEGGAR WOMAN.)* No, I don't have any spare change.

BEGGAR WOMAN. *(In a loud whisper:)* Come here!

TONY. No! I'm not interested in any "hanky panky." Go 'way, ya ol' coot!

BEGGAR WOMAN. Ifin I do, you'll never know where she is.

TONY. Who's?

BEGGAR WOMAN. Who yer sittin' there pinin' over, that's who.

TONY. *(Rises.)* You know where Josie Belle is?

BEGGAR WOMAN. SSSHHHH! (*Runs over and leads TONY to far side of the ice cream parlor.*) Keep it down!

TONY. If you're bullin' me, lady....

BEGGAR WOMAN. Quiet! You'll get us both locked up! Or worse!

TONY. Where is she?

BEGGAR WOMAN. Spare change?

TONY. (*Reaching into his pockets and pulling out many coins:*) Here! Here! That's all I got.

BEGGAR WOMAN. So ya did have spare change. Liar!

TONY. (*Grabs the BEGGAR WOMAN.*) Where is she, ya old hag?

BEGGAR WOMAN. Where does Turdspin usually keep things for safekeeping?

TONY. How the hell should...the jail!? He put her in jail?

BEGGAR WOMAN. Right in there with them biker chicks and cockroaches.

TONY. He's crazy!! He can't leave her in there with them biker chicks!! They'll give her tattoos.

BEGGAR WOMAN. The stones around the bars in the back window are pretty old.

TONY. Huh?

BEGGAR WOMAN. Heard a story once about a fella back in 1904 who broke his friend outta that jail by tying a rope to his horse and then to them bars and just pulled out the whole window and half the wall. Oh, they fixed it after that, but ain't never kept up on the repairs...and it's a rottin'.

TONY. I ain't got a horse.

BEGGAR WOMAN. I think an enterprizin' fella like you can think of somethun.

(The door to the Sheriff's office opens and out steps DEPUTY BEETLE.)

BEGGAR WOMAN. Let's git outta here!

(TONY and BEGGAR WOMAN exit into darkness. BEETLE looks up the alley staircase, then ascends it and knocks on barber's door.)

STEVIE BOB. (*He is sharpening his razor:*) Who's there?

DEPUTY. Deputy Beetle, barber!

STEVIE BOB. (*A slow smile crosses his face, then he quickly puts down his razor and wipes off the barber chair.*) Come in, Beetle.

DEPUTY. (*Enters cautiously.*) Sorry about the hour, barber. But I just got off duty.

STEVIE BOB. Deputy Beetle, for you and Sheriff Turdspin, my hours are never ending. What'll it be? Shave? Haircut? Both?

DEPUTY. (*He meanders about the room.*) Well, I'm letting my hair grow—the mullet contest next week, you know...

STEVIE BOB. Oh, of course...

DEPUTY. (*Rubbing his chin.*) Just shaved this mornin'...

STEVIE BOB. One's face can never be too smooth, Beetle.

DEPUTY. Yeah, yeah, you're pro'bly right, 'specially since I'm goin' down to The Pearl to have a beer and check out the ladies.

STEVIE BOB. Women love a smooth cheek. Have a seat, Beetle. (*He picks up his razor.*)

DEPUTY. (*He does not sit.*) Say, uh, speakin' of The Pearl, you been there?

STEVIE BOB. Couple of times, with Tony Hopeful.

DEPUTY. Daytime or night?

STEVIE BOB. Uh, one time each, I believe. Yeah, one time each.

DEPUTY. (*Still roaming about room, doing his best Columbo impression.*) Ever meet a fella in there by the name of Clifton Clowers?

STEVIE BOB. Clowers? Clowers? Can't say I did.

DEPUTY. How 'bout that day waitress, Becky Love?

STEVIE BOB. Deputy, I haven't been in town long enough to get know the gals yet.

DEPUTY. Oh, you'd remember Becky Love all right. Had a fanny that looked like two basketballs dribblin' away in her blue jeans.

STEVIE BOB. (*Smiles.*) I seem to recall that feature on a young lady there. What about her?

DEPUTY. Well, rumor has it that she and ol' Clifton run off together.

STEVIE BOB. (*Sharpening his razor.*) It happens.

DEPUTY. Yeah. Yeah. It certainly do. (*Moment.*) How about Jonas Frogg?

STEVIE BOB. Are you asking if I know him?

DEPUTY. Thelma Higgins?

STEVIE BOB. Who!?

DEPUTY. Red Lawson?

STEVIE BOB. Beetle, I'm not followin' what you're...

DEPUTY. All them folks have come up missin' since you came to town, barber. Now, when I put them two things together—you and them missin' folks—well, one and one equals some purty suspicious goin' ons.

STEVIE BOB. I see. So...what?...you think I've...what...done away with them folks? *(He slowly crosses towards BEETLE.)* Why? What reason could I possibly have? They're my customers? Wouldn't that be a little...stupid? And what would I do with the bodies, Beetle?

(He keeps moving closer and closer to BEETLE, his razor flashing about. BEETLE continues to back towards the inside staircase.)

Bury 'em? Burn 'em? Feed 'em to some farmer's pigs? Dump 'em in a wood chipper? *(Chuckles.)* Cut 'em up and...bake 'em in a pie? Or how about...how about this: maybe...just maybe...maybe I tarred and feathered them and rode 'em out of town on a rail!

DEPUTY. Huh!?

STEVIE BOB. Yeah, that's what I did, Beetle. I heated up that tar to a boilin' point, then poured it on them folks...

DEPUTY. It can't be...

STEVIE BOB. ...scalded their skin, laughed at their screams, then dumped some feathers on 'em...

DEPUTY. *(Backing up:)* You're, you're...

(He falls backwards down the stairs into the doll shop.)

STEVIE BOB. *(Looking down the stairs:)* Convenient.

(WANDA, in a robe, hurries in from back of doll shop.)

WANDA. What is all the racket out here? Toby, you drunk again? *(Sees BEETLE's body.)* Oh my god! *(Looks up stairs to STEVIE BOB.)* What happened?

STEVIE BOB. Slipped. *(He crosses to table to put away his razor.)*

WANDA. His...his neck's broke.

STEVIE BOB. Pity.

WANDA. *(Coming upstairs:)* Well...what'd we do...I mean...?

STEVIE BOB. What a stupid question, Wanda! We do the usual: dunk, melt, skin!

WANDA. But...but this is Beetle! He's gonna be missed.

STEVIE BOB. I won't miss him.

WANDA. You know what I...

STEVIE BOB. Will you miss him, Wanda?

WANDA. Huh!?

STEVIE BOB. I SAID, WILL YOU MISS HIM, WANDA!?

WANDA. No, no...but...

STEVIE BOB. Dunk him, Wanda! (*Looking down the stairs:*) If he'd just fallen a little more to the left...splat!...right into the vat. Now *that* would've been convenient.

WANDA. We're lucky Toby's still down at The Pearl.

STEVIE BOB. If you hadn't let that big oaf stay in your storeroom we wouldn't have to worry about him.

WANDA. He ain't got no place else to go.

STEVIE BOB. (*Smiling:*) Oh, he'll be going somewhere very soon.

WANDA. No! You can't! Toby was just a baby when that happened to you. He don't even...

STEVIE BOB. Then you shouldn't have brought him under this roof. Sooner or later your stupidity disguised in so-called kindhearted generosity is gonna spit right back in yer face and he's gonna figger out what's going on. He may be a drunk and dumb as a Musk Thistle, Wanda, but he ain't blind! Now take care of Beetle!!

(Suddenly, TONY bursts into the room via the alley staircase. He has a thick rope over his shoulder.)

TONY. STEVIE BOB, STEVIE BOB, I FOUND HER! Turdspinner's got her locked up in jail...with them biker chicks. I gotta get her out before they give her a bunch of facial piercings! Wanda, where'd Turdspin put their bikes?

WANDA. Uh, in the mechanic's garage over at the Square.

TONY. Come dawn, stay inside, cause all hell's gonna break loose. (*He exits.*)

WANDA. Who's in jail? What's he talkin' about?

STEVIE BOB. Josie Belle.

WANDA. Turdspin put her in jail!?

STEVIE BOB. To keep her from Tony. Now I'm gonna have to do the same.

WANDA. What?

STEVIE BOB. I will not let Tony take her away from me! She's MY daughter, Wanda! She's all I got left.

WANDA. You've got me.

STEVIE BOB. Of a normal life, Wanda! My first life. My real life. She's the only thing that's left of it. No one's going to have her but me, Wanda! She's MY daughter! I'll...I'll protect her...I'll...I'll keep vermin like Turdspin away from her, and guys who want just one thing...like Tony! I know him, Wanda! Been workin' with him for three years. I know what's on his mind! No sir! No sir! He ain't gonna get her! No one's gonna get my little girl. I'll save her. I'll save her.

WANDA. Do you hear yerself? You sound like Turdspin.

STEVIE BOB. DON'T SAY THAT! DON'T EVER SAY THAT! I'M PROTECTIN' HER!

WANDA. YOU'RE TAKIN' HER FROM A TURDSPIN JAIL TO A BENNY BAKER JAIL!

STEVIE BOB. STEVIE BOB! *(He grabs her by the throat and starts shaking and squeezing.)* STEVIE BOB, STEVIE BOB, STEVIE BOB, STEVIE BOB, STEVIE BOB, STEVIE BOB... *(He releases her and she crumples to the floor. He stares at her for a long period, then kneels.)* Wanda? Wanda? Wake up, Wanda...we have to go to work. Wanda? *(Cradles her head.)* We can't stop now. You're doing such a good job paintin' on them faces, Wanda. You know...You know what doll I really like? The one of Evel Knevel, Wanda. His face? You nailed it. All the wrinkles, all the scars. Wanda? Wanda, did I tell you that my wife was a good artist, too? She painted a picture of me and Josephine—that's what we called her—never "Josie Belle." That sounds so...so redneck. From now on, Wanda, you can only call her Josephine. Josephine. It's more sophisticated. Josephine.

(As STEVIE BOB sits and rocks WANDA, a very drunk TOBY enters the doll shop and stumbles towards the store room door. When he reaches BEETLE's body, he simply steps over it.)

TOBY. 'Scuse me! *(He enters store room.)*

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up. Both Beetle's and Wanda's bodies are gone. It is dawn. Birds are chirping, a rooster crows, then we hear the distinct sound of a Harley Davidson start up from behind the Sheriff's office. The engine revs a few times, then the tires squeal and struggle until we hear the loud crashing of brick and iron, which is followed by female voices hooting and howling. Moments later, six "BIKER CHICKS" come pouring out of the alley. These are hardcore Harley Davidson ladies with fire in their eyes—so get outrageous with the outfits and make-up.)

GIRL #3. What is that stink?

GIRL #4. We in Dodge City?

GIRL #1. What'd we do first?

GIRL #2. Get our bikes!

GIRL #6. Then a beer!

GIRL #5. Beer!? It's been weeks since I tasted that worm in the bottom of a bottle of Mescal!

GIRL #3. That guy said they're in the mechanic's garage at the Square.

GIRL #4. And after we get our bikes?

GIRL #5. We rip this town to pieces!

GIRL #2. And we do a dance on that sheriff!

GIRL #1. Time to say good morning to that mechanic!

TONY. *(Comes runnin' out of alley:)* HEY, HEY! You guys promised you'd get your bikes and leave.

GIRL #6. *(Knees TONY.)* We lied!

(They exit hooting and howling towards the town square. JOSIE BELLE runs out of the alley, crosses to TONY and helps him rise.)

JOSIE BELLE. Tony, Tony, what happened?

TONY. They're breakin' their promise. They're gonna wreck the town. Wait for me upstairs in Stevie Bob's place. You'll be safe there. I gotta try to stop this.

(He runs off towards the town square. She waits a moment, then starts toward the alley. Hearing happy whistling coming from the other direction, she ducks into the alley. TURDSPIN, unaware of the happenings, enters with a piece of paper in his hand. He calls out just before he reaches his door.)

SHERIFF. Hey, Beetle, I was right. There is a law about stink pollution.

(He enters jail and JOSIE BELLE starts to carefully ascend staircase.)

I gotta fax from... WHAT THE HELL!? THERE'S A DAMNED HOLE IN MY WALL! BEETLE!? BEETLE, WHERE ARE YOU, YA IDIOT! ESCAPE!! JAIL BREAK!!

(He comes running out of the office with a shotgun, but not quite sure which way to go.)

JAIL BREAK, JAIL BREAK! BEETLE!? BEETLE!?

(Suddenly, in the distance, we hear windows shattering, wood splinterin', shouts and screams, followed by the scattered starting and revving of Harley Davidson motorcycles. Two frantic TOWNSWOMEN come running in from the direction of the town square.)

WOMAN #1. Sheriff, sheriff, them biker chicks...they got ball bats and are wreckin' the town square.

SHERIFF. Where'd they get ball bats?

WOMAN #1. They mugged our little league team!! Right there on the school bus!! Them poor boys are bawlin' their eyes out!!

WOMAN #2. They knocked the head off our Jeff Foxworthy statue!!

SHERIFF. Was Deputy Beetle down there?

WOMAN #2. I didn't see him.

WOMAN #1. Me neither.

SHERIFF. You ladies get outta here!

(The WOMEN run off. A few more panicked townspeople run screaming across stage from direction of Town Square. SHERIFF pumps his shotgun.)

Time for a little fun! *(Exits towards Town Square.)*

(JOSIE BELLE cautiously enters barber shop. BEGGAR WOMAN comes out of hiding and watches JOSIE BELLE enter, then quietly ascends staircase. Once JOSIE BELLE enters the barber shop, the sounds of the distant rioting in the square should lower, but still maintain under the remainder of this scene.)

JOSIE BELLE. Hello. Anyone here? *(She walks over to barber chair, then looks at razors and equipment on counter.)* Hello?

STEVIE BOB. *(Stepping out of shadows from back of shop:)* Hello, Josephine.

JOSIE BELLE. (*Startled, she turns.*) Oh, hello, Mr. Stevie Bob. You frightened me.

STEVIE BOB. Sorry about that, my dear.

JOSIE BELLE. Tony told me to wait here for him while he tries to stop those biker girls from wrecking the town. If that's all right with you.

STEVIE BOB. Of course. You're safe here, Josephine.

JOSIE BELLE. That sounds funny.

STEVIE BOB. What does?

JOSIE BELLE. Nobody calls me Josephine. Sounds too...too fancy.

STEVIE BOB. I think it suits you perfectly, Josephine. You are definitely a Josephine.

JOSIE BELLE. (*Uneasy:*) Maybe...maybe I should go down to the town square, see if Tony's okay.

STEVIE BOB. No, no, no. If he told you to wait here, then you should. Sit down, try to relax.

JOSIE BELLE. I don't think I can relax. I'm worried about Tony, and I don't want Foster Poppa Willie to find me...

STEVIE BOB. (*Takes her arm and leads her to chair.*) No one is going to hurt you ever again, Josephine. Now sit, please.

(She sits.)

JOSIE BELLE. Well, I...

STEVIE BOB. I'll get you some water. (*He crosses to counter and pours something from a bottle onto a white cloth.*) Josephine, did you know that I knew your mother?

JOSIE BELLE. My momma!? You!? But...but I thought you were...

STEVIE BOB. New in town? Actually, I lived here years ago.

JOSIE BELLE. You did?

STEVIE BOB. Long before it was ever known as Mulletville.

JOSIE BELLE. How did you know my momma?

STEVIE BOB. Everyone knew the purtiest girl in town.

JOSIE BELLE. She was purty?

STEVIE BOB. Just as beautiful as her daughter. And kind and gentle and...why, I could tell you stories about her that...oh, but we'll have plenty of time for those later.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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