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Cast of Characters

TAYLOR ARMSTRONG, a white male; early 30s.

TRUDY ARMSTRONG, Taylor's wife; late 20s.

ANDY ARMSTRONG, Taylor's father; a white male; 62 years old. His right arm is paralyzed and hangs at his side.

GLENDA ARMSTRONG, Taylor's mother; a white female; 49 years old. Glenda is attractive and looks younger than her actual age.

STEVEN GILES, late 50s; Steven is slightly overweight, well-dressed, and has been known to sport a beard.

Time

Summer 1985

Place

Charleston, South Carolina. The living room of Taylor and Trudy Armstrong's small, two-bedroom bungalow home. It is modestly appointed with eclectic furnishings and Charleston prints and wall adornments.

HAND JIVE

by Lew Holton

ACT I

(It is late Friday afternoon. The room is almost completely dark—not because it is dark outside, but because the sun has been closed out of the room and no lights are on. The room is dark because TAYLOR has chosen to be in the dark. The furnishings of the room include a sofa, two chairs, a coffee table, and a couple of occasional tables. In the upstage-left corner of the room is a slightly raised platform. Upon that platform is a desk, a chair, and a low bookcase. On the desk are an old manual typewriter, an old baseball, and assorted papers and desktop paraphernalia. In the upstage-right corner of the room is another raised platform. Upon it are a desk, a chair, and a bookcase also. In fact, the only visual difference in the two platform sets is that upon this desk there is a new personal computer. There is, however, another difference—a structural one. The deck of the platform in the upstage-left corner [ANDY’s corner] might be constructed of reinforced translucent white Plexiglas. Lighting is installed under the platform, so that lighting cues that call for lights to “come up” on ANDY at his desk do, in fact, come up from beneath him.)

(At rise, ANDY ARMSTRONG sits at this upstage-left desk. The light comes up dimly to illuminate him. He sits and slowly, intently types—with his left hand only—at the old manual typewriter. His right hand hangs at his side. Near the center of the room, TAYLOR ARMSTRONG sits on the sofa. He sits in darkness, smoking a cigarette. He has been drinking, but he is not really drunk. As TRUDY ARMSTRONG enters and turns on the light, lights come up on all of the room except for the corner in which ANDY sits. As the room lights come up, the lights go out on ANDY, leaving him frozen in shadow.)

TRUDY. *(Opening the front door slightly:)* Taylor?

(TRUDY enters and turns on the room lights.)

Taylor?! What are you doing sitting here in the dark?

(TAYLOR is sitting on the sofa and staring at his left hand. He doesn't look up immediately.)

TAYLOR. I saw this TV show once—or maybe it was a movie, I forget—and there was this guy, this character, and he said, “I woke up one morning and realized I had my father’s hands.” It’s funny. I don’t remember anything else about the show or whatever it was, but I remember that line.

(Lights come up, dimly, on ANDY, who is still sitting at his desk. Anytime the lights come up on ANDY, he may become “unfrozen.”)

TAYLOR. And I remember realizing myself one day that I had MY father’s hands. *(A beat.)* Well...hand, actually. Just the one; the good one. I mean, everything about it—the fingers, the nails, the same ugly knuckles, even the hairs—everything. It was his hand. Right there at the end of my shirtsleeve.

TRUDY. Are you drunk?

TAYLOR. No. Well, yeah. Maybe. I don’t know. But I do know that hand. Trouble is—I don’t know where I got this one. *(Looks at his right hand a moment before lapsing into a crazy grin and slapping his forehead. With the slap, the lights go suddenly out on ANDY.)* I can’t believe you missed that cue! A second hand store?! Huh? I can’t believe you didn’t jump on that line!

TRUDY. And I can’t believe what a whacko you are. What are you doing sitting here in the dark?

TAYLOR. Couldn’t stand to look at this hand anymore. I’d become fixated. I was just sitting here staring at it. It was almost spooky. I turned off the lights so I couldn’t see it anymore.

(TRUDY sits on the sofa beside TAYLOR. She takes Taylor’s right hand in her hands and holds it in her lap.)

TRUDY. It’s a hand. That’s all. Your hand. *(She kisses Taylor’s hand.)* Quit picking on it. I like it. *(Raising her eyebrows a’ la Groucho:)* Sometimes I love it.

TAYLOR. *(Making no effort to withdraw his hand:)* Stop that. You don’t know where that’s been.

TRUDY. Oh? And just where has it been?

(TAYLOR reaches suddenly around with his free hand and pinches her “derriere.” When TRUDY releases the hand she has been holding to defend herself, TAYLOR begins tickling her with that hand as he delivers the next line.)

TAYLOR. Around the corner and it’s goin’ again!

(TAYLOR sings the following, during which he continues to playfully tickle TRUDY briefly and then he pulls away quickly and finishes the verse with accompanying “hand jive” claps and gestures.)

Hand jive! Hand jive! Hand jive! Doin’ that crazy hand jive!

TRUDY. *(Laughing:)* Idiot!

TAYLOR. *(Also laughing:)* Idiot lover!

(Laughter subsides. Both catch their breaths, look at each other a moment, and sigh.)

TRUDY. So. You wanna get this place straightened up before they get here, or do you need to get back into the doldrums?

TAYLOR. Well...I had really planned to sit in the corner, naked, and eat coffee grounds. Maybe rock back and forth and whimper softly to myself. But...you’ve destroyed the mood now. *(Rising:)* Guess there’s nothing to do now but plunge back into reality and reason.

TRUDY. *(Also rising:)* It’s just as well. We don’t have any coffee grounds anyway.

TAYLOR. *(With mock surprise, bordering on mock alarm:)* You mean that coffee this morning was...?

TRUDY. Yep. Instant.

TAYLOR. No!

TRUDY. *(Striking a Carol Merrill-holding-up-a-jar-of-coffee pose:)* That’s right! Try it out on your own severely depressed, shit-for-brains caffeine addict. Nine out of ten blithering idiots can’t tell the difference.

TAYLOR. Gosh, you do that well.

TRUDY. I practice. In front of the mirror at night. When you're asleep.

TAYLOR. I knew it! No wonder my reflection looks like hell in the mornings; you've had the mirror up all night!

TRUDY. So report me to the Mirror Police. *(Exiting toward the bedroom [stage left].)* I've got things to do.

TAYLOR. *(Shouting after her.)* You think I won't?! Dial 1-1-P and hand me the phone! You'll see!

(Silence. TAYLOR sits back down on the sofa. Lights come back up dimly on ANDY at his desk, and TAYLOR is momentarily lost again in thought. TRUDY re-enters and stops in doorway. She pauses before she speaks.)

TRUDY. You're right. Cleaning up this place is a mistake and a waste of time. It's time your mother saw her son in his natural habitat.

TAYLOR. Sorry.

TRUDY. No! The bathroom's clean. The bed's made. The kitchen's halfway straight. The rest is just a little cluttered. There's nothing wrong with a little clutter. A cluttered house is a lived-in house.

TAYLOR. Oooo—do we have time to cross-stitch that before they get here?

(There is a knock at the front door. The lights go out on ANDY. TRUDY crosses toward the front door.)

TRUDY. You get the thread and a stopwatch. I'll call the Guinness people.

(TRUDY opens the front door. GLENDA ARMSTRONG and STEVEN GILES enter.)

Hi! Come in! *(To GLENDA.)* Don't you look nice!

(TAYLOR rises, crosses to the front door, and hugs GLENDA.)

TAYLOR. How's my favorite Mom?

STEVEN. Hey?! What about me?

TAYLOR. (*Crossing toward STEVEN as if to hug him:.*) And how's my favorite round person?

STEVEN. (*Retreating and laughing:.*) Whoa!

(*TAYLOR and STEVEN shake hands.*)

TRUDY. Y'all have a seat. Does anybody need anything to drink?

GLEND A. Some iced tea would be just wonderful.

TRUDY. We got it! Y'all sit; I'll get everything.

(*All sit, as TRUDY exits to kitchen [stage-right].*)

TAYLOR. So. What's goin' on at home?

GLEND A. Let's see. ... I'm repainting the Florida room.

TAYLOR. YOU'RE painting?

GLEND A. Well...I'm having it done. It should be finished by the time we get back.

TAYLOR. Who's doing it? You didn't leave the house wide open to some painter?

GLEND A. Kate's there. She's been staying with me a lot since...since the funeral.

TAYLOR. Good. I mean, I'm glad she's been staying with you. (*Short pause.*) I'm, uh... (*Quickly:.*) I'm sorry I couldn't stay longer, but—

GLEND A. (*Interrupting:.*) It's okay. I'm fine. Really. The house is fine. Everything's...fine.

TAYLOR. Good. How's Aunt Kate?

GLEND A. The same. Very Kate-like. She said to give you a hug.

TAYLOR. Great. Hug her back.

(*A few moments of silence.*)

STEVEN. Say! I saw the article in *Southern Magazine*. Nice story. Got anything else like that lying around that an old word-peddler could make some calls about for you?

TAYLOR. I'm working on something, but nothing's really ready yet.

STEVEN. Just say the word.

TAYLOR. I know. Thanks.

(Another moment or two of silence.)

GLEND A. Oh! I didn't even tell you yet—I traded the car.

TAYLOR. Traded? When did that happen? What was wrong with... I mean, what'd you get?

GLEND A. A Honda. I got it last week. One of those sporty- looking ones.

TAYLOR. A Honda?

(Lights come up dimly on ANDY.)

GLEND A. Yes.

TAYLOR. A Honda?! An import?

GLEND A. I didn't really need that big car. And Steven knows one of the salesmen down at the Honda place and got me a really good deal.

TAYLOR. Steve-o! A Honda? My dad would die! *(A beat.)* Sorry.

(TRUDY enters from the kitchen.)

TRUDY. I didn't even ask. Does anyone want anything else besides tea? A snack; some munchies?

(All answer together.)

TAYLOR. No.

GLEND A. Nothing for me.

STEVEN. No; thanks.

TAYLOR. But I'll help you get the drinks.

STEVEN. *(Rising:)* Keep your seat, T-Bo. Let me help. You visit with your mom a while. I'm tired of sitting anyway. Need to stretch my legs after that drive.

TAYLOR. Sure. Knock yourself out.

(TRUDY and STEVEN exit to the kitchen. A few more moments of silence, then TAYLOR and GLENDA begin to speak at the same time.)

Mom...

GLENDA. Taylor...

TAYLOR. I'm sorry; go ahead.

GLENDA. No. What were you going to say?

TAYLOR. Nothing. Go ahead.

GLENDA. You were going to say something.

TAYLOR. Really; it was nothing. I've just...well, I've just never seen Uncle Stevie so...I don't know... helpful.

GLENDA. He's just being sweet. He's really been a big help since the funeral.

(Lights come up full on ANDY.)

TAYLOR. Oh. What about Aunt Kate? Isn't she enough help?

GLENDA. Taylor—Steven was really more of a friend to your father than I think you realize. Why do you think your father made Steven his executor?

TAYLOR. I always thought he was friend-ly, but... I could just never picture them as such big buddies. I sort of thought it was—you know—business.

GLENDA. You can't work together that long and not become friends. Or enemies. And remember—your Dad and Steven go back a long way. Before you and me, even.

TAYLOR. I know. It's just that—I don't know—they're so different.

(ANDY rises, crosses down, and stands behind GLENDA.)

GLENDA. Not so different. Just...different. And Taylor, he really would like to help you, if you'd just give him the chance.

TAYLOR. Mom, we've talked about this. It just doesn't feel right. I've told you...and I've told Steven...

GLENDA. What? Told us what? You've never—

TAYLOR. I've— All right; maybe I haven't exactly said. Maybe I don't know how to say it. (*Short pause.*) It's hard to explain.

ANDY. Try.

TAYLOR. (*To GLENDA:*) Do you remember Scott Yeager? Scott? He had an older brother, Rusty; remember? ... When Scott and I were in high school, he could never do anything as well as Rusty had. Scott played football. But—the coach always reminded him—when Rusty was there, he was captain of the team. Rusty lettered in three sports. And Rusty got that scholarship to Alabama. ...After we'd win a game—which wasn't every week, if you remember—but when we did win one, everybody'd be celebrating and whoopin' and hollerin', and I'd look around, and Scott would just be sitting there. The thing was—everybody else had sweated and busted a gut against this other team, and now they felt like winners. But Scott had been playing against a...a legacy. He couldn't win.

ANDY. Well...let's just have Rusty put to sleep for bein' a hard act to follow.

TAYLOR. (*Shot back with just a hint of bitterness:*) You see...it's like Dad had two sons—one flesh and blood, and one paper and ink. But my big brother didn't go off to college and play football. He went off to college and just waited around to ambush me.

ANDY & GLENDA. (*Together:*) Ambush you?!

GLENDA. Why, Taylor Armstrong, what in heaven's name is that supposed to mean?

TAYLOR. When did you first read *The Last Southern Gentleman*, Mom?

GLENDA. I...was in college...

TAYLOR. Did you have to read it in class?

GLEND A. Well, no, Taylor. It hadn't been out that long. (*Short pause.*) Oh, it was very popular, and everyone was reading it. My room-mate gave me her copy to read...

ANDY. Marty Something, wasn't it?

GLEND A. Marty McGraw. And I remember seeing your father's picture on the back of the book jacket. That was the first time I saw him. (*Remembering:*) He was something.

ANDY. Actually, Steven picked out that picture for the book jacket.

TAYLOR. When did I first read it?

GLEND A. Well, I...I don't know.

TAYLOR. No; you don't. Isn't that kind of funny? To live with a book like that all your life and never even pick it up and read it? (*Short pause.*) The first time I ever read it was in college, too. A Modern American Lit class. It was assigned! I had to do a paper on it. Isn't that the funniest thing?

ANDY. You didn't tell your professor who you were?

TAYLOR. I didn't say anything. I just read it and did the paper.

GLEND A. What happened?

TAYLOR. I got a C-plus.

ANDY. A C-plus?!

TAYLOR. Yeah. How's that? Andy Armstrong's flesh and blood offspring had a slightly better than average understanding of Andy Armstrong's literary offspring. Of course, several non-family members of the class walked away with As, but I...I met my big brother and...and he beat me up. (*Pause.*) It almost killed the desire to write. Sometimes I wish it had. Don't you see? I've got to do this myself. I sit there at night and... Do you have any idea how many late, late shows I've denied myself—just to sit and tinker with some stupid story that doesn't seem to want to be told in the first place?

ANDY. What'd you expect? A short-order muse? "Gimme two bestsellers and a side order of Pulitzer!"

TAYLOR. I mean, it would be nice to have the luxury of playing the wordsmith—of carefully crafting your manuscript at your leisure—but I’ve got to make a living, ya’ know. *(Short pause.)* So it’s busy-work. I’m barely beating out the IRS definition of “hobby.” If it sells, it sells. If it doesn’t, well, that’s fine too. I’m not sure I even care anymore. *(Short pause.)* Hell—by the time Dad was my age, co-eds were passing his picture around on the back of a best-seller.

(ANDY moves back to his desk and sits.)

GLEND A. That’s still no reason to shut Steven out. He just wants to help. Your Dad often said that if it weren’t for Steven, *The Last Southern Gentleman* would have been just another cedar-chest novel for some future generation to find and say, “Why, I didn’t know old Grandpa Armstrong wrote!”

TAYLOR. Exactly. And being the good agent that he is, Steven knows the easiest way to market me is with the opening line, “Taylor Armstrong. You know, Andy Armstrong’s son?”

ANDY. So?

GLEND A. What’s wrong with being Andy Armstrong’s son?

TAYLOR. Nothing—if the rest of the world would accept that *The Last Southern Gentleman* was, in fact, the last. There is no Andy Armstrong sequel. There is no “Last—Part II.” The last is the god-damn last! What comes next is either nothing, or a new beginning.

ANDY. Sounds pretty cut and dried.

TAYLOR. The end is the end. Dead is dead.

(Lights go out on ANDY.)

GLEND A. I think I know that—as well as anyone.

TAYLOR. I’m sorry. I...

(TRUDY and STEVEN enter with iced tea from the kitchen.)

STEVEN. *(As he enters:)* Hey, T-Bo—did your lovely mother tell you— *(A beat.)* Problems?

(TRUDY places tray with iced tea on the coffee table. TAYLOR lights a cigarette.)

TAYLOR. No. We were just...talking. About Dad.

STEVEN. Oh.

(STEVEN sits beside GLENDA and puts his arm around her shoulders.)

It's okay, T-Bo. We all miss him, and it's still a little hard sometimes, but... *(Short pause.)* Hell, I don't know what to say. Let's just...well, let's just have some of this delicious ice tea and... *(Raising his glass of tea in a toast:)* ...talk about the future.

TAYLOR. Right.

(TAYLOR picks up his glass, but does not toast.)

The future.

(He drinks. TRUDY crosses to TAYLOR and stands behind him.)

TRUDY. Well. When you called to say y'all were coming, you said you had something else you had to do in Charleston? Is this some big secret or what?

GLENDA. No. I just didn't want to try to explain it all on the phone. And besides, you know I'll just use any little excuse I can find to come to Charleston. It's kind of funny, isn't it, Taylor? The way your father always wanted to come back and live in Charleston. He used to say it was a shame that somebody wrote that country music song about, "When I die, I hope I go to Texas," or something like that, because, he said, anybody who had ever been to Texas knew it was hot as heck—except he didn't say "heck"—and Charleston was the place that anybody with any appreciation of the nicer things would want to spend eternity. And yet—that whole year y'all lived here before he got sick, we never spent one night down here.

(GLENDA pauses, momentarily overtaken by the sadness of her own last statement.)

STEVEN. Glenda? The College?

GLENDA. Oh! *(Back again.)* I'm sorry, Trudy—I didn't mean to get melancholy on you. I don't know what happens to my mind

sometimes. The College; yes. That's what I was talking about on the phone.

TRUDY. The college?

GLEND A. The College. The College of Charleston?

TRUDY. Oh.

GLEND A. Andy left a little gift for the College, but, you know how he was—always doing things the oddest way. He wanted me to deliver it to them in person.

TAYLOR. Books? Notes? What?

GLEND A. Oh, no—money. That's why I asked Steven to come along with me. I just didn't feel safe coming alone with that kind of money.

TAYLOR. Didn't feel safe? I don't... You don't mean MONEY money, do you? You mean a check, right?

GLEND A. No. I mean money.

TAYLOR. Cash? Well, how much money are we talking about?

GLEND A. Let's see...after the car, it's a little over ten thousand dollars.

TAYLOR. Cash?! After the car? Mother, what are you talking about?

GLEND A. Your father left a letter that told me where he had hidden some cash. And he told me how he wanted me to spend some of it—to get a new car, and to fix up a couple of things around the house. And then he wanted me to give the rest of it to the College.

TAYLOR. He had cash hidden?! Where?

GLEND A. In his locker at the bowling alley. It was in a bowling bag, you see, and—

TAYLOR. Wait a minute! Just...just wait a minute. (*A beat.*) No—I'll get back to that. Mother, I'm sure he didn't mean for you to give this money to the school in cash. He must have meant for you to write them a check.

GLEND A. No; he said cash. I'd show you the letter, but I burned it after I read it, just like he asked me to do in the letter.

TAYLOR. He asked you to burn the letter?! Wait, wait, wait. How 'bout let's start at the beginning. Where did you get this letter?

STEVEN. I gave her the letter. Andy gave it to me when he went into the hospital. He told me, if anything happened to him, I should give it to your mother.

TAYLOR. You knew about this cash?

STEVEN. Not really.

TAYLOR. Not really? What does that mean?

STEVEN. No. Not until your mother told me about it last week.

GLEND A. I didn't read it right away. I waited 'til later— when I could be alone. I didn't know what to expect, but I knew it was going to make me cry.

TAYLOR. What did the letter say?

GLEND A. It said stuff that made me cry. *(Pause.)* And then it said for me to look in his jewelry case on the dresser, and I would find a key that went to his locker at the bowling alley. It said I should go to the bowling alley and empty out his locker and bring everything home. It said that there would be two bowling ball bags and that I shouldn't open them there, but wait 'til I got home.

TAYLOR. Okay. And what else?

GLEND A. Nothing else about that. Just some more stuff that made me cry. And he told me to burn the letter.

TAYLOR. What about all that stuff about the car and the school and all?

GLEND A. That was in the other letter.

TAYLOR. What other letter?

GLEND A. The one in the bowling ball bag. For heaven's sake, Taylor.

TAYLOR. All right. You went and got the stuff out of the locker, I take it. And then what happened?

GLEND A. Well...I brought it all home, and I opened the lightest bag first, and it was almost full of money. And there was the second letter for me.

TAYLOR. Full of money? What about the other bag? What was in it?

GLEND A. Well, a bowling ball, Taylor. Honestly! What else would be in a heavy bowling ball bag?

TAYLOR. (*Sigh.*) Never mind. What did the second letter say?

GLEND A. First—it said I shouldn't tell anybody about the money—because of inheritance taxes and stuff like that. But I don't think he meant y'all. I think he meant strangers and lawyers and people like that that you can't trust. Anyway, he said he had had that money put back for a long time. For an emergency or something.

TAYLOR. An emergency? He didn't say where it came from?

GLEND A. No. He just said it was very important to him that I do exactly as he asked.

TAYLOR. And what did he ask exactly?

GLEND A. He said that he had tried to make sure that he had enough insurance to cover his hospital expenses, but that if there were any bills left over, I should pay them off. Well, of course, there weren't any. He said that Steven would explain to me that the house was paid for and that all the funeral expenses had been taken care of in advance, but that he would feel better knowing that he had provided for a few other things that he normally handled—so that I wouldn't have to worry about them for a while.

TAYLOR. Like the car.

GLEND A. Like the car. He said that sometimes it takes a while for things like life insurance and settling estates and all to get worked out. And—you know how your father was—he said there was just no good reason for things that needed to be done to sit around UN-

done 'til a bunch of over-dressed grave- robbers got off their legal duffs. So—he told me to go ahead and get a couple of things around the house fixed up, and he said he wanted me to get a new car. Said it was about time to trade anyway, and he just didn't like the idea of me driving the old car and it starting to get a little age on it.

TAYLOR. So you traded the car.

GLEND A. And I got the house painted.

TAYLOR. And what else?

GLEND A. Well...nothing else.

TAYLOR. (*Just a touch impatiently:*) I mean, what else did the letter say? About the school and all?

GLEND A. Well, I wish you would say what you mean, Taylor. And I don't know what you're getting so upset about.

TAYLOR. I'm sorry. I'm just tryin' to understand all this. (*A deep breath:*) Now...what did the letter say about the school?

GLEND A. The letter said that after the estate and all got settled, whatever was left over—of this money, I mean; the emergency cash—I should give to the school. Specifically—to the English Department. You know how much Andy thought of the school. They were the first ones to use his book in the classroom; plus—being his alma mater—well...I guess he just wanted to show his appreciation, that's all. Anyway—he said for me to donate it to them in my name so that I could use the donation for taxes and for me to donate it just like it was—in cash. Of course, I'll stipulate to the school that I'm donating it in his memory, but that's the way he asked me to do everything, and that's how I'm doing it.

TAYLOR. Mother...doesn't any of this strike you as a little odd?

GLEND A. Well, Taylor, your father could sometimes BE a little odd. You should know that. Besides—it's done. I'm meeting some people at the college this evening, and Steven's with me, so it will be perfectly safe.

TAYLOR. Speaking of safe—can I ask a question? Where is the money now?

GLEND A. Oh, it's in the car.

TAYLOR. You have ten thousand dollars in cash sitting in the car?!

GLEND A. It's in the trunk.

STEVEN. Along with a package for you.

TAYLOR. For me?

STEVEN. Yes. Apparently, your Dad also left you a package that wasn't mentioned in the will.

GLEND A. Yes; the second letter also told me to get it from the desk in his study and give it to you.

TAYLOR. What's in it?

GLEND A. I don't know. I didn't open it.

TAYLOR. Well, what did the letter say?

GLEND A. It just told me to get it and give it to you. Then it said to burn that letter, too.

TAYLOR. What if it's more of this mystery money? I don't want this. I don't understand this and I don't want to play.

STEVEN. You don't know that it's money. Just open it.

TAYLOR. Where is it?

GLEND A. In the car.

TAYLOR. I know...

GLEND A & TAYLOR. *(Together.)* ...in the trunk.

TAYLOR. Can we, at least, bring this stuff in the house?

STEVEN. *(Rising:)* I'll get it. I've got the car keys.

TAYLOR. *(Also rising:)* I'll come with you. Maybe I should get my gun or something. I mean, transporting that kind of cash and all...

GLEND A. Oh, Taylor! Just sit down if you can't behave sensibly about this.

TAYLOR. I was just kidding! Jeez. *(To STEVEN:)* C'mon—I'll give you a hand.

(STEVEN and TAYLOR exit the front door.)

GLEND A. *(Watching the door close:)* Trudy, I don't think I have to tell you how much I love my son, but, I swear...sometimes I think that boy belongs at Six Flags Over Looney Land—as one of the RIDES. Why, he's an emotional roller-coaster.

TRUDY. It's just that all of this has been hard on him, too.

GLEND A. He's just like his father. He's either on top of the world and everything's fun and games, or he's gloomier than the Black Hole of Calcutta.

TRUDY. I think he's just a little bumfuzzled by all this. I mean, the money in the locker and all is a little...unusual.

GLEND A. Honey, I learned long ago to let Andy handle the money matters—regardless of how “unusually” he did it. If he was going to be a worrier anyway—and he certainly was—well, he might as well worry about something of value. Andy liked to buy things “cash on the barrelhead.” He was just one of those people who didn't like to buy things on credit. He always paid cash for things like appliances and cars and fixing up the house—things like that. Besides, he said, you always got a better deal that way.

TRUDY. I suppose that's nice, if you can do it.

GLEND A. Oh, I didn't mean... I'm sorry; I know it's impolite to discuss financial matters. Andy never discussed them.

TRUDY. Not even with you?

GLEND A. Not really. Oh, he'd complain or cuss about 'em every now and then, but, if I asked if he wanted to talk about it, he'd just grumble something and change the subject. I suppose that's one of those generational things—one of the differences between my generation of women and yours. Of course, I guess now I'll have to learn to worry a little about money matters. I guess Andy kind of spoiled me. If I asked, he'd say, “You worry about the spending; I'll worry about the investing.” After a while, it was just easier to shop.

TRUDY. Are you going to get a job now? I mean, I don't mean to pry or anything, but...

GLEND A. No. Like I said, the house is paid off, and I'll be all right for a while. I mean, I may decide to go to work after a while, but between the life insurance money and Andy's investments, I think I'll be all right.

TRUDY. Investments. Unfortunately, Taylor or I either one wouldn't know a stock from a rock, I don't think.

GLEND A. Oh, not stocks. Gold.

TRUDY. Gold?

GLEND A. Gold. I told you—Andy liked to deal in cash. Years ago, he started buying gold coins. The safe deposit box was just full of them. (*Amused:*) It was so heavy, that little man down at the bank almost couldn't get it pulled out of that little cubby-hole they keep those boxes in. I know he must've wondered what in the world was in there.

TRUDY. Glenda! What are you going to do with them?

GLEND A. Well, I knew he'd been buying them for years. I didn't realize he had quite so many of them. He'd go to those coin shows that would come to town, or close by at least, and buy one or two. And pay cash for it, of course. Then he'd take it and put it in the safe deposit box. Every now and then, he'd sell some of them for really big things that might come up. That's how we sent Taylor through college—selling off gold coins. And then he'd buy more from time to time. He said it was the only really safe investment. I guess I'll do the same thing—sell them little by little as I need to.

TRUDY. A drawer full of gold coins; I can't even imagine! Does Taylor know about this?

GLEND A. Probably not. But, I'm not sure.

TRUDY. What are they, like Krugerrands or something?

GLEND A. I don't really know too much about them, but, yes, I think some of them are Krugerrands. But, Steven said they're mostly British Sovereigns and old twenty dollar gold pieces, I think.

TRUDY. Steven knows about them?

GLEND A. Well, yes. He's going to help me with some other investments. He says I ought to make some investments that will pay me some dividends.

TRUDY. Glenda, I don't know what to say. It's like... pirate treasure or something. It's almost too amazing to be...real.

GLEND A. I was a little surprised myself. But then I thought about it, and I realized that...even though Andy may not have let me in on everything he did, I'm sure that everything he did he did because he loved me. *(Pause.)* Sometimes he could be so funny. And sometimes he could be so sad. I know you never really saw it, but, for all his bravado, Andy could be very insecure.

TRUDY. Andy Armstrong insecure?

GLEND A. There was a time when we had a pretty bad time of it—just for a little while—because of that insecurity. He was...well, I guess he was just jealous or something. You see, Andy worried about being older than me. He thought, for a while there, he had to buy me things to keep my attention, and, I guess, my affection. We got through that. But, for a long time, I'm not sure he ever really believed that all he ever needed to hold my attention was one of those Andy Armstrong looks—and maybe one of those special one-armed hugs. All the other stuff was just icing. I finally figured out that the thing about icing is not where it comes from...but who you enjoy it with. I like to think Andy finally figured the same thing. Anyway—I'm not going to start questioning that now.

(TAYLOR and STEVEN enter the front door. TAYLOR carries a package wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. STEVEN carries a bowling ball bag.)

TAYLOR. I still don't see why y'all don't, at least, put it in something else. I mean, I just can't see delivering that kind of money to the college in a bowling ball bag!

STEVEN. That's what it came in.

TAYLOR. Mother—didn't you have a nice briefcase or anything to put this money in? If you're not going to do the sensible thing and

write a check, you can at least be tastefully eccentric about this presentation.

GLEND A. I really didn't think about that, but I suppose it would be okay. The letter didn't say anything about leaving it in the bowling ball bag. Steven—maybe we ought to leave in time to stop somewhere and pick up a nice bag.

STEVEN. In that case, we really better get moving.

TRUDY. You're not staying for dinner?

GLEND A. Oh, no. We couldn't do that anyway; the College is having a little reception at the Blacklock House and... I'm sorry; but I didn't know if— Well...I mean, you're both welcome to come along if— I know I should've said something when I called, but...

TAYLOR. It's all right. Really, Mom—it's fine.

(An awkward moment.)

STEVEN. *(Coming to the rescue:)* Hey, T-Bo! So're you going to open your package or what?

TAYLOR. Right now?

STEVEN. Why not? It's not tickin', is it?

TAYLOR. Oh. I just thought I'd... Well—I guess I could.

TRUDY. Aren't you just dying of curiosity?

TAYLOR. Not really. But I'll go ahead.

(TAYLOR takes a pocket knife from his pocket, cuts the twine, and removes the brown paper. Inside the paper is a box for a new briefcase. TAYLOR opens the box and removes—surprise! a new briefcase. Taped to the side of the briefcase is an envelope. Typed on the envelope, in the unmistakable typeface of ANDY's old manual typewriter, is "TAYLOR." The briefcase is the kind that has 3-digit combination locks on either side of the handle. TAYLOR pulls the envelope off of the side of the briefcase and looks at it for a long moment.)

STEVEN. What does it say? Open it!

TAYLOR. I will!

(TAYLOR pauses, takes a deep breath, and opens the envelope. He removes a sheet of paper, unfolds it, and stares at the typed message.)

STEVEN. Well? What does it say?

TAYLOR. (Pause.) Bunt it open.

STEVEN. I beg your pardon?

TAYLOR. Bunt it open.

STEVEN. Bunt it open?

TAYLOR. Bunt it open.

STEVEN. (He pantomimes bunting a baseball with a bat.) As in...?

GLEENDA. Well, Taylor...do you know what it means?

TAYLOR. Bunt. It. Open. (A beat; then incredulously:) My father's last words to me are—"Bunt. It. Open?"

GLEENDA. Something to do with baseball?

TAYLOR. Oh, it's something to do with baseball, all right.

STEVEN. How exactly do you "bunt" something open?

TAYLOR. I'm not sure. I'll have to think about it.

STEVEN. That's a shame. We really could've used the briefcase; would've saved us a stop.

TAYLOR. You're a real shit, Steve! Did I ever tell you that?

STEVEN. Hey! I just meant—I was just trying to lighten things up a little.

GLEENDA. (Rising:) Well—we really do need to be on our way.

TAYLOR. Oh, yeah. Sorry, Mom.

GLEENDA. (Hugging ANDY:) Don't you worry. And whatever's in the briefcase, just remember—it's something your father wanted you to have. Okay?

STEVEN. (Picking up the bowling ball bag and moving to the front door:) Yeah. Sorry, T-Bo. Come see us sometime, huh?

TAYLOR. Sure.

TRUDY. (*Following GLENDA and STEVEN to the front door:*) Y'all be careful, okay? And have a good time this evening.

GLENDA. We will.

("Bye"s and replies all around, then GLENDA and STEVEN exit through the front door. TRUDY stands at the door and waves. TAYLOR sits and stares at the briefcase.)

TAYLOR. (*After a moment:*) Bunt it open. What the hell kind of note is that?

TRUDY. It doesn't mean anything to you?

TAYLOR. Oh, it means something, all right. But I don't have any idea what it's got to do with opening a damn briefcase.

TRUDY. Well. You'll figure it out.

TAYLOR. Thanks.

TRUDY. (*After a moment:*) I was thinking about Chinese for supper.

TAYLOR. I don't know. I'm not very hungry.

TRUDY. Okay; skip the mainland and we'll go for something smaller. How 'bout Taiwanese; is that more your size? (*A beat.*) Since your Mom and Steven didn't stay, I thought maybe I'd just pick up some shrimp- fried rice and egg rolls.

TAYLOR. Fine.

TRUDY. "Fine," what?

TAYLOR. Fine...Trudy-san?

TRUDY. (*She smiles.*) You want to ride? That'll still be here when you get back.

TAYLOR. No. You go ahead. I'm gonna sit here and stare at it a little while longer.

(TRUDY crosses to TAYLOR and kisses him on the cheek.)

TRUDY. I'll be back soon. (*Crossing to the front door:*) Stay out of the coffee grounds.

(TRUDY exits the front door. TAYLOR continues to stare at the briefcase for a few seconds, then rises and exits to the kitchen. Lights come up on ANDY at his desk. TAYLOR re-enters with a screwdriver and sits back down in front of the briefcase. Using the screwdriver, TAYLOR pries and pops open the latches of the briefcase. ANDY rises, picks up the old baseball from his desk, and crosses to ANDY.)

ANDY. I knew you wouldn't finesse it open.

TAYLOR. Well, what the hell kind of message was that? Bunt it open.

ANDY. Just seein' if you remembered the sign.

TAYLOR. Oh, I remember the sign, all right. Damn sign caused me two of the worst moments of my life.

ANDY. Well, that's probably an over-statement, as usual, but...the opportunity was there. Both times. If you'd've just concentrated and really put your heart into it, it would've worked. Would've caught 'em flat-footed.

(ANDY tosses the ball to TAYLOR. TAYLOR catches it.)

TAYLOR. The All-Star game. Two outs; bottom of the ninth. Do you have any idea how stressful it is for a kid to come to bat in that situation anyway? And then you give a bunt sign?!

(TAYLOR tosses the ball back to ANDY. ANDY catches it, one-handed, of course.)

ANDY. If you'd've just concentrated on the ball half as hard as you glared at me, you could've pulled it off.

TAYLOR. A bunt sign. *(He performs the coach's sign as he says it.)* Three tugs on the left ear. Two pats on the right arm. Disregard anything after that. I couldn't believe it!

ANDY. You see? You do remember it.

(ANDY tosses the ball to TAYLOR again, and TAYLOR catches it, and then sets the ball on the coffee table.)

TAYLOR. Remember it?! I still get tense when I see somebody tug on their ear. Carol Burnett used to drive me crazy when she'd say, *(Tugs his ear:)* "Good night!" on her TV show.

ANDY. *(Setting the dials on the briefcase locks:)* Left—three, zero, zero. Right—two, zero, zero. Was that so cryptic?

(ANDY tries the buttons to open the already sprung latches.)

Sprung. Got over-anxious again. Had to force it, didn't ya'? *(Short pause.)* Well—won't work now.

TAYLOR. Not just once. Twice! Figure the odds! How can one kid find himself in that situation twice? Two years in a row? And then...there's that damn bunt sign again! Wasn't once enough?!

ANDY. Wasn't the same thing at all that time.

TAYLOR. What're you talkin' about?! Ninth inning—

ANDY. *(Interrupting:)* It was a sacrifice.

TAYLOR. What sacrifice?

ANDY. It was supposed to be a sacrifice. The second time. ... A man on first, remember? Nobody out?

TAYLOR. Okay. So? And a home run would've cinched it. But do I get the "hit away" sign? No! *(He performs the bunt sign again.)* There it is again! A goddamn bunt sign! First strike wasted. Both times.

ANDY. Sacrifice would've put us a man in scorin' position.

TAYLOR. I didn't wanna be a damn sacrifice! I wanted to be a...

(Pause.)

ANDY. A hero?

(A moment of silence; then, ANDY picks up the ball from the coffee table and moves downstage left.)

I guess you just never saw the beauty in it. Bunting is an art form, ya' know. Any gorilla off the street can swing a bat and eventually connect with the ball. But... *(He demonstrates, as well as he can with one arm.)* ...to watch someone square-around and concentrate on that ball; slide the other hand up and maneuver that bat so that it

just catches the ball perfectly— absorbs its velocity—and softly plunks it down in front of him... *(flipping the ball onto the sofa beside ANDY, as if he had bunted it:)* ...right where he wants it? Ahhh— now that's an artist. *(Sigh.)* But...it's a two-handed art; and we just never could seem to master it. I didn't have the hands for it; you didn't have the patience. Had to have those three full cuts at the ball. Swingin' for the fences.

TAYLOR. Can you even imagine how humiliating it is to strike out like that in front of your friends? Twice? Two years in a row?

ANDY. Just didn't concentrate. Too busy fumin' at me.

TAYLOR. And what do you have to say afterwards? "So you're no Mickey Mantle. Don't worry about it." *(A beat.)* Bunt it open.

ANDY. Doesn't matter. It's done now.

TAYLOR. Bullshit.

ANDY. You haven't even looked inside yet.

TAYLOR. What do you want from me anyway?

ANDY. I want you to look inside.

(TAYLOR opens the briefcase and removes a Lone Ranger-type eye mask. He holds it up.)

TAYLOR. A little late for trick-or-treat, isn't it, Kemosabee?

ANDY. Don't forget the paper.

(TAYLOR removes an old newspaper from the briefcase.)

TAYLOR. So what's this?

ANDY. Look at the date.

TAYLOR. *(Reading:)* November first, 1961. Okay. So?

ANDY. Look at the article under the drawing.

(TAYLOR scans the news story. ANDY goes to his desk and gets a cigarette and lights it, while TAYLOR reads the article.)

TAYLOR. Okay. So now I've read an old paper.

ANDY. Now look at the journal.

(TAYLOR removes an old three-ring binder-type notebook from the briefcase, opens it, and begins to read.)

I'll get us a couple of glasses.

(ANDY exits to the kitchen. He returns with two glasses, crosses to a cabinet behind the sofa, and gets a bottle of liquor. ANDY returns and sits across from TAYLOR and pours two drinks. TAYLOR stops reading, picks up the newspaper and looks at the composite drawing/sketch above the article. He looks back at the journal, and then at ANDY.)

TAYLOR. This is you!

ANDY. *(Handing a glass to TAYLOR.)* Yep.

TAYLOR. You robbed a bank?!

ANDY. *(Sips his drink.)* Just the one.

TAYLOR. My father robbed a goddamn bank?!

(Blackout.)

End of Act I

ACT II

(Thirty minutes later. TAYLOR and TRUDY sit on the sofa. A bag of take-out Oriental food sits on the coffee table. The briefcase and its contents are strewn about the coffee table and the floor. ANDY sits at his desk, invisible again, in darkness.)

TAYLOR. I'm serious! He was a bank robber.

TRUDY. Andy Armstrong robbed banks?

TAYLOR. Not banks. Just one bank. *(A beat.)* Of course, I guess one is all it takes to make you a bank robber.

TRUDY. I don't believe it.

TAYLOR. It's all there! The whole story!

TRUDY. I don't believe it. What are you gonna do with it?

TAYLOR. He wants me to make it into a book.

TRUDY. About him?

TAYLOR. Not exactly. It's supposed to be fictional.

TRUDY. Why?

TAYLOR. Legal reasons.

TRUDY. Legal? You're not gonna get into any trouble over this, are you?

TAYLOR. I'm not gonna get into anything over this. I'm not writing it.

TRUDY. Well, what are you gonna do?

TAYLOR. I don't know.

TRUDY. Oh, no! What about your mother? Does she know?

TAYLOR. No. He never told anyone.

TRUDY. Then why'd he do this? Why tell you? I don't understand.

TAYLOR. It's a great story.

TRUDY. What?

TAYLOR. It's a great story. Noted and respected author, cruisin' down the straight and narrow, hits a slick spot one day and skids off into the Bermuda Triangle of Bizarre Behaviors; robs a bank, and then spends the rest of his life tryin' to figure out what the hell to do with this incredible secret. If he weren't my father, it'd be a hel-luva story. He thinks it needs to be told.

TRUDY. Then why didn't he write it?

TAYLOR. I told you—legal problems. If he wrote it as non-fiction, well, he might as well've gone to the cops and made a confession. And—all Mom would've inherited would've been a bunch of financial complications about the proceeds of the robbery. And, of course, he couldn't write it even as fiction while he was alive, because the authorities would've seen right through that, and it would've been the same kind of hassles.

TRUDY. What's the difference whether he wrote it then, or you write it now? Won't they still know it was him?

TAYLOR. Maybe. Probably. I don't know. But nobody can prove anything, and...

(TAYLOR stops and looks around.)

TAYLOR. What time is it?

TRUDY. What?

TAYLOR. The college! *(A beat.)* Shit!

(He laughs.)

TRUDY. What?!

TAYLOR. The money in the bowling ball bag. That's the last of it. Ya' see? If any of the money could've ever been traced, that's the last of it. And Mother just gave it to the college.

TRUDY. What'll happen?

TAYLOR. I imagine they'll put it in the bank. And, of course, nobody at the bank's gonna raise an eyebrow about the college depositing that kind of cash. It'll be right back in circulation and forever untraceable.

TRUDY. What about the gold?

TAYLOR. Gold?

TRUDY. The gold coins. Your mother said there was a box full of them. Didn't he steal those, too?

TAYLOR. No. He bought those. Apparently that's how he laundered most of the money.

TRUDY. Wait a minute. How long ago'd this happen anyway?

TAYLOR. 1961. I was six years old. ... Jeez—if he'd've been caught... *(Pause.)* I used to watch him, ya' know? Every night. Sittin' there at his desk—tappin' away at something. Making his journal entries. Filing his life away in those three-ring binders. ... I used to wonder... "Why?"

TRUDY. I still can't believe it. I mean, why would he do something like that?

TAYLOR. I'm still not sure. There's more stuff here I haven't looked at yet, and... *(A beat.)* That sonuvabitch.

TRUDY. What?!

TAYLOR. That son of a bitch! It's HIS story! 'S not MY story, MY idea; it's his. Poor Taylor Armstrong—born with only half an imagination, ya' know. Oh, yeah—sad; very sad. Ya' know who his Dad was, don't you? Yep. Pretty sad; pretty pitiful. *(Looking wildly around the room:)* Right? Right?! Still in the coach's box, Dad?! Still got all the answers?! 'Zat it? Huh? Not catchin' on quick enough, so you thought you better spell it out for me? Keep it! Keep your damn story! Ya' got the wrong boy! Hear me?! Ya' got the wrong boy!

TRUDY. *(Overlapping TAYLOR's lines:)* What?! What're you doing? Stop it! Taylor?! What're you talkin' about?

(TAYLOR stops, then collapses into a sitting position on the sofa, his head in his hands. Several long moments of silence, then...)

TAYLOR. *(Without looking up; quietly; to TRUDY:)* I didn't mean to do that. I can't believe I let him do that to me.

(TRUDY sits beside TAYLOR.)

TRUDY. (*Quietly:*) I think it's break time.

(*TAYLOR looks up.*)

You want something to eat?

TAYLOR. Maybe later. ... You go ahead though. I'm not gonna be very good company for a little while yet.

TRUDY. Are you gonna call your mother?

TAYLOR. (*Short laugh.*) And say what? "So...how'd things go at the College? Oh! By the way! I found out why that money was stashed in that bowling ball locker; it was just a little something left over from a BANK JOB Dad pulled twenty-four years ago. So...how was your trip back?"

TRUDY. You're not going to tell her?

TAYLOR. I don't know...what I'm going to do. I...I just don't know.

TRUDY. (*Leaning over; a quiet, soft kiss on TAYLOR's cheek:*) I'm sorry. ... You gonna be all right?

TAYLOR. Yeah. Either that or I won't be. I just need to think. Look—really, why don't you go ahead and eat and get some rest?

TRUDY. Sure you don't want something? One eggroll?

(*TAYLOR shakes his head.*)

Something to drink?

(*TAYLOR just looks at her.*)

Wanna dress up like the Three Stooges and wreck the house tryin' to have sex?

TAYLOR. You always get to be Moe.

TRUDY. I know. But I've told you, sweetheart—that's because I'm the one with the brains in this outfit; remember?

(*A blank expression as if trying to remember, TAYLOR slowly shakes his head; then a faint smile crosses his face.*)

TAYLOR. I'm...I'm just gonna finish lookin' through this stuff, okay?

TRUDY. I wish you wouldn't.

TAYLOR. I wish Cotton was a monkey.

TRUDY. I wish I had a watermelon.

TAYLOR. I wish... *(A short pause; he smiles again.)* I'll be fine.

TRUDY. You sure?

TAYLOR. I'm sure.

(A moment; then TRUDY rises, takes the bag of food, and exits to the kitchen. As she exits, lights come up on ANDY at his desk. He rises and crosses down to TAYLOR.)

ANDY. So—now you've told somebody. Feel any better?

TAYLOR. What's that supposed to mean?

ANDY. Nothing. Except—you see how easy it is? The story practically tells itself. All you have to do is write it down. And did you see her? She ate it up! It's an incredible story. And you didn't even get to all the little interesting details yet!

TAYLOR. Of course she ate it up. It was Trudy. She was shocked and amazed.

ANDY. Wouldn't've made any difference. A total stranger would've been just as intrigued.

TAYLOR. Stop it! Just wait a minute! Give me a break here, huh? I know what you're doin'. I don't understand it all yet, but I know what you're doin'.

ANDY. What I'm doin'? What the hell're you—

TAYLOR. Pretty sneaky; I'll give you that. Kinda adds a whole new twist to the term "ghost-writer," doesn't it? Did you really think I was that stupid? Or just that desperate?

ANDY. What're you gettin' so pissed about? I never said you were stupid. Or desperate. I just had to tell somebody. After hearing

about it, I thought you might want to tell somebody too. What good's the perfect crime if nobody even knows it happened?

TAYLOR. Perfect? *(Short laugh.)* Maybe. We might just see. Maybe it's not over yet.

ANDY. And what's that supposed to mean?

TAYLOR. I can still turn all this stuff in, ya' know. Skip the fictional bullshit and expose everything for real.

ANDY. Why? Why would you do that? *(A beat.)* What? To get me?! Is that it? A chance to hurt the old man?

TAYLOR. Hurt? Hurt?! You're gonna talk to me about hurt? Who betrayed whom here, huh?

ANDY. When did this become a betrayal?

TAYLOR. It became a betrayal the day you told me it was wrong to steal. *(Pause.)* I walked out of Propst's Drug Store with that nickel pack of baseball cards, and you asked me—"Where'd you get the cards?" I still remember that feeling. Standin' there in that drug store, lookin' up at Mr. Propst. Scared and cryin' and feelin' the eyes of all those people in there starin' at me. You made me apologize—out loud—"I don't think he heard ya', son." Handed him the cards back. And then you made me give him the nickel for the cards anyway. Out of my allowance. *(A beat.)* Wait a minute; where'd the allowance money come from?! Was that part of the stash?! Huh? Did I pay for my first lesson in honesty with a stolen nickel? A lie! Everything you were to me was one big goddamn lie!

ANDY. No. It wasn't all a lie. Everything I tried to teach you was true. Important. I think you know that. ... All right—I did make one big mistake. And, yes, there were some lies to cover up that mistake. But none of it was even about you—much less to hurt you.

TAYLOR. So what was it about then?! I mean...why? Why?

ANDY. Why. Hmmm; 's a good question. A genuine sixty four thousand dollar question. I...I had all the right reasons, and all the wrong reasons—depending on where you're sitting when you look at 'em. I don't know. The only way I can even try to explain it is to

tell you a little bit about Andy and Glenda. Not Dad and Mom. Andy and Glenda.

TAYLOR. I'm not sure I want to hear this.

ANDY. I'm not sure you do, either. But I don't know how else to do it. *(Short pause.)* Well? Do we pack all this stuff up—or do I go on?

TAYLOR. *(After a moment:)* Go on.

ANDY. Let's see... Where to begin?

(ANDY crosses to the cabinet to retrieve the liquor and glasses as he begins.)

Mind if I have a little toddy? You might want one, too, as we go along here.

(ANDY slowly works his way back to chair and sits.)

May as well start here in Charleston. At the College. After the war. *(Pause.)* Probably the best buddy I had in the Navy lived here before the war. All he talked about was Charleston. Charleston this and Charleston that. Charleston food. Charleston girls. *(Short laugh.)* I came here originally to see his family. Checked out the food—and the girls—and decided he was right. I also found out right quick that there wasn't much of a demand for hungry, one-armed womanizers at the moment. So—I enrolled at the College of Charleston. With my V.A. benefits for school and my disability check, I could just about survive. I also discovered I was a lot older than most of the students here. Not really all that much older chronologically, but, inside—inside I was somehow older. Not many vets here then—at the College, I mean. I guess most of 'em took off to study something a little more practical than English Lit. But...I had this idea that I might want to teach. I figured it only takes one hand to hold a piece of chalk, right? So...while most of the guys I knew were preparing to set the business world on fire, I languished about in Liberal Artasia. Lost my direction and started getting foolish notions about writing. My senior year, I met Steven. Well, I guess, actually, I'd seen him around before. Even though I was several years older, he was ahead of me academically. He was out and had a few contacts in the publishing business, and I let him look at some stuff I'd written. Short stories. We started hangin' around together. Still

not sure why; we just sort of hit it off. Anyway, he gave me a few names—some leads—and a little encouragement, and about the time I was graduated, I sold one of my short stories. Well, shit—I was hooked! I thought I was a goddamn writer!

TAYLOR. I thought this was about you and Mom?

ANDY. It's gettin' to be; just hold your horses a minute. I had this other story. Steven read it and said to me, "This isn't a short story. There's a novel in there." And he was right. Not just A novel—THE novel. That's where *The Last Southern Gentleman* came from. I finished it up and gave it to him over the Christmas holidays, 1952. By the next spring, hell—I was a novelist! Travelin' around; signin' book jackets. It was great!

TAYLOR. Things sure don't happen that quickly anymore.

ANDY. Maybe not. But they were poppin' in '53. Anyway, Steven scheduled me for a book-signing session at this little bookstore near the old campus. It was fall by then. I was sittin' around, sippin' coffee, signin' some books and talkin' to folks, when this little co-ed comes up and asks me to sign her copy of the book. Well, I look at her a second and say, "Tell you what—I'll trade you my name for your phone number." I thought it was clever at the time.

TAYLOR. Mom?

ANDY. Glenda. Well, she said only the phone company could approve such a trade, but that she didn't think I looked much like an ASHley 6-2582, anyway.

TAYLOR. You picked her up in a bookstore?!

ANDY. Hey! I didn't "pick her up." It was all very respectable.

TAYLOR. You make her sound like some kind of novelist groupie.

ANDY. We went out for spaghetti. There was this little Italian restaurant near the Citadel. Wonderful spaghetti with this shrimp sauce...

TAYLOR. Then what?

ANDY. Then... (*A short pause, as he remembers.*) ...none of your business what. This is your mother we're talkin' about, ya' know.

TAYLOR. What happened to “Glenda”?

ANDY. The next summer I married her. That’s what happened. She...she never went back to school. That’s the only regret I ever had about that. ... The next summer after that, you were born.

TAYLOR. That’ll teach you to go around molesting innocent young co-eds in bookstores.

ANDY. Actually, everything was going great. Eventually Steven sold the movie rights. I got to co-write the screenplay. They made the movie. The money was good.

TAYLOR. So you asked yourself, “How can I fuck all this up really good?” And you decided, “I know! I’ll go out and rob a bank!”

ANDY. Not yet. Not quite yet. After a while, though, people started asking, “What’s next?” ...And I didn’t know. I mean, there wasn’t any reason to panic. Money was still comin’ in. It wasn’t pouring in, but it was okay. And I still had my disability check. We were fine. We just weren’t on top of Everest anymore. Plus—I started asking the question, too. What is next? What if nothing’s next? And then I started wondering about Glenda. Was she asking the question, too? Had she figured out that she was stuck with an old, one-armed has-been. ...Every time we’d go out someplace, if I saw her even glance at some other guy, I’d just get crazy. I don’t mean, I’d do anything. I didn’t get violent or anything. But later—later when we’d get home—I’d say things. Sometimes horrible things. I’d accuse her of all kinds of crap. And there was no reason; I knew that. I knew it here. *(Indicating his head.)* But something was eating me up in here. *(Indicating viscus.)*

TAYLOR. The two of you fought?

ANDY. I fought. Mostly with myself. Glenda cried a lot. You were too young to see what was goin’ on.

(ANDY rises and begins to work his way back towards his desk.)

Finally, I knew something had to happen. Something had to change, or I was going to drive her away. Somehow I had to find a way to get back on top; or at least make Glenda think we were back on top.

TAYLOR. Why didn't you write?

ANDY. You don't think I wanted to?! You don't think I tried?! It wasn't there. There was that one great story and then I was empty.

TAYLOR. No. No! That's bullshit! Later you wrote. Later you weren't empty!

ANDY. But that was later.

(ANDY sits at his desk.)

Then—right then—I was empty. And right then, more than anything else in the world, I needed to NOT be empty. ... I sent you and your Mom out of town to visit her sister, Kate. I had it all planned out.

TAYLOR. You had nothing planned out! You selfish bastard! You didn't care if you got caught. You didn't even think what would happen to us. All you thought about was yourself!

(TAYLOR picks up his glass and throws it against the corner of the wall. The glass shatters. With the crash, lights go out on ANDY at his desk, and TRUDY rushes in from the kitchen.)

TRUDY. What...?!

TAYLOR. Nothing! Forget it. It was just me.

TRUDY. *(Angry, but an anger due to concern and frustration:)* What are you doing?! That's enough! Just put all that shit away and—! *(Pause; then more calmly:)* Please. You don't have to go through all this right now. Why don't you put it away for tonight and get some rest?

TAYLOR. I'm all right. I'm fine.

TRUDY. "All right" doesn't throw glassware at the furniture.

TAYLOR. I'm sorry. It's just incredible to me that... *(Sigh.)* You knew him. Would you say my father was a relatively bright man? I mean, he didn't seem to be stupid, did he?

TRUDY. Taylor...

TAYLOR. Do you know what he did? I mean, how he did what he did? *(Picking up the mask:)* You see this?

TRUDY. Yes.

TAYLOR. Does this look like something that would baffle the kinds of investigative minds that are supposed to solve bank robberies? It's incredible! This...and a makeshift metal brace are all that stood between him and a career in making license plates. *(Holding the mask up to his face:)* Look! *(Affecting a goofy voice:)* Boy—I bet you can't tell who this is behind this clever disguise! *(Back to his normal voice:)* Who investigated this thing? Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen?

TRUDY. So you know how he did the whole thing?

TAYLOR. Oh, yeah. *(Sarcastically:)* It was a masterstroke of criminal genius. Absolutely, diabolically mystifying. He put THIS over his eyes. Stuck a cowboy hat on his head. Walked into the bank and said, "Stick 'em up." Mind-boggling, huh?

TRUDY. He had a gun?

TAYLOR. Well, sure he had a gun. You can't be a real live, no-shit bank robber without a gun. A genuine, imitation-pearl-handled Colt six-shooter, little lady. Unloaded, of course.

TRUDY. Unloaded?

TAYLOR. Certainly! He didn't want to accidentally hurt anyone. At least not any total strangers. And here—here's the really tricky part. This—according to him—was what made it the perfect foil. He held the gun... You ready for this? He held the gun...in his RIGHT hand! Ta-da! That's it! A dime-store mask, a cowboy hat, and the old, fake-dead-hand trick. All the ingredients for an insoluble crime.

TRUDY. How'd he hold the gun in his right hand?

TAYLOR. *(Sarcastically:)* Temporary divine re-animation.

TRUDY. Look—if you don't want to tell me...

TAYLOR. He propped it up. *(Demonstrating as he narrates:)* He took a piece of metal; bent it into an L-shape; lay his arm on the table; bent his arm at the elbow; and adhesive-taped it to the brace.

(TAYLOR stands up straight, demonstrating the image—right arm at his side, elbow bent with forearm sticking straight out in front of him.)

Put his black glove on his right hand; put the gun in his right hand; and wrapped his fingers around the handle. Then, he simply taped his fingers in place with black electrical tape. Presto! Instant right-handedness.

TRUDY. And then just walked into the bank?

TAYLOR. Yep. And with everything that could possibly go wrong with such an utterly shallow, absurd plan... nothing did. *(Short laugh.)* He parked his very own, undisguised car in the parking lot of the shopping center behind the bank. Walked to the bank with this pearl-handled, semi-obscene protuberance jutting out in front of him. Strolled through the front door at a time when there just happened to be not one other customer in the place. Announced his “stick up.” And then just walked back to his car and drove home. *(Another short laugh.)* With nearly a hundred thousand dollars.

TRUDY. Jesus! A hundred thousand dollars?!

TAYLOR. It was a big Friday. Pay day.

TRUDY. What about alarms and cameras and all that stuff?

TAYLOR. Oh, one of the tellers activated the camera. It didn't work. And apparently everybody thought somebody else had hit the alarm, so it wasn't 'til after he left that they figured out that nobody had actually hit the button. Then they called the cops.

TRUDY. And nobody else saw anything?

TAYLOR. Nope. Amazing, isn't it? And while they all sat around with a police artist, drawing pictures of the Lone Ranger and describing this bold, right-handed bandito, he was puttin' the money in a bowling ball bag, stopping at the bowling alley, and stuffin' the bag in his locker. Then he joined us at Aunt Kate's.

TRUDY. And nobody ever even suspected him? The police never talked to him or anything?

TAYLOR. No. But I think he halfway expected them to come pick him up at just any time.

TRUDY. Why?

TAYLOR. Come on! That's about as close to a kamikaze bank job as you can come and still maintain some pretense of self-preservation. I'm still not sure it wasn't some kind of suicide attempt. I mean, you think he didn't see the headlines—"Noted Author and War-Hero Shot Dead in Bizarre Bank Robbery Attempt"?

TRUDY. Taylor! You don't really believe... I mean, that's crazy.

TAYLOR. Well, with some luck, maybe it's not hereditary.

TRUDY. Okay, stop it! Just...stop it. *(Pause.)* You wanna sit around and get crazy over this yourself? Fine. But you can't laugh this one off. You can't joke it away; you can't drink it away; and you can't chase it away by throwing things at it. Either forget it or deal with it. You wanna get crazy? Go ahead. I'll stand right here and keep the guys in the white jackets away while you sort it out. IF you're really going to sort it out. But don't expect me to just sit here and watch you chase your tail 'til you melt down to butter.

TAYLOR. Parkay. *(A beat.)* Sorry. But I was serious. You've heard of pieces of shrapnel from old war wounds workin' their way to the surface of the skin years after everything's supposed to be all healed up? I think it's kind of the same thing. You know what happened to his right arm, right?

TRUDY. Well...roughly, yeah. It was some kind of wound from the war, wasn't it?

TAYLOR. Once, when I was a kid—twelve, thirteen, somewhere around there—I was checkin' out the closets. It was around Christmas; I was snoopin'. And I found this box of stuff. Old stuff from the war—medals, papers, stuff like that. ... You know, he never told me exactly what happened to his arm. He just said an airplane blew up and he got hurt. Never sat down and told me the whole story. And once I found out, I never told him I knew. ... In the box, there were these ribbons and pins, and two separate boxes—like jewelry boxes. One box had his Purple Heart; the other held a Navy Cross. I didn't know then what a big deal that was. Later, one summer

when I was home from college, I looked around and found that box again. That time I looked through the papers and found the citation that went with the Cross. That's how I found out what happened.

TRUDY. What...did it say?

TAYLOR. It was the last few months of the war. He was aboard a destroyer in the Sea of Japan. They were attacked by Japanese planes. He shot down this... no. No, he didn't just "shoot down" a plane—he SAVED an entire ship. *(Short laugh.)* An entire ship! Right now, there's this humongous gray Navy ship floating around out there someplace 'cause my Dad saved it. *(Short pause.)* I hope that's not one of those "after-life" questions...like from St. Peter or somebody... *(In St. Peter's voice, whatever that sounds like:)* "What did you save, Andy? *(Snapping to attention, saluting with his left hand, and answering as ANDY:)* "One United States Navy destroyer and countless American sailors, sir!" *(As St. Peter again:)* "Excellent! And you, Taylor?" *(As himself:)* Ummm...some old baseball cards? *(Short pause.)* I mean, it's weird, ya' know? You think you've got your old man pegged, and suddenly you're reading stuff like "ran through the twisted, burning metal," and "above and beyond the call...". All this John Wayne shit. ... Anyway—even though he saved the ship, I guess some of his friends didn't make it. You've heard of survivor guilt? I'm not sure it didn't just take all those years for that guilt to work its way to the surface...like a piece of old shrapnel.

TRUDY. I don't really know much about all that Army-Navy stuff. This "Cross" thing's a pretty big deal, I take it?

TAYLOR. Yeah. A Navy Cross is a big deal. Not something most people hide away in a box in a closet, I don't think. Unless maybe it cost too much to be remembered. More than they describe in those official citations.

TRUDY. There's nothing in the stuff you've been looking through about it?

TAYLOR. Not yet.

TRUDY. Are you gonna keep looking?

TAYLOR. *(Short pause.)* Not tonight. I think you're right. I think maybe I need a break. A little sleep. Just let me get this glass up, and I'll be right there.

TRUDY. *(Taking TAYLOR's hand and leading him towards the bedroom:)* Leave it. Think of it as cheap protection against barefoot burglars.

(TAYLOR and TRUDY exit to bedroom. As the lights go down on the room, light comes up dimly on ANDY at his desk. He looks at his watch, and the lights go back down to darkness for a few seconds. These few seconds of darkness represent several hours passage of time. The lights come up on ANDY, still at his desk. He rises, stretches, and crosses to the sofa. He sits and lights a cigarette, and speaks to the audience.)

ANDY. Oh, don't worry. *(Holding up the cigarette:)* One of the few benefits of the nature of my existence. Can't hurt me now. *(Short pause.)* So 're you buyin' any of this? I know a lot of you probably won't believe this story when it comes out. But—a lot of you will. To be quite honest—and I don't mean to come across as some kind of snob here— but I really don't much care what most of you think. I mean, I realize that a great many of you are going to judge this story with the same keen literary insight as the story—"Baby Born With Tattoo of Elvis"—that you glance over in the supermarket check-out lane. So...at the risk of alienating THAT entire segment of the "reading" public—hey... sorry; but your opinion really doesn't mean jackshit to me. *(Short pause.)* Who I do care about is that one English graduate student who is going to decide one day to "get to the bottom of this mystery." It'll happen. And then some other young scholar will take issue with those findings. It'll be great! D'ya see this? *(Holding up the police artist sketch in the newspaper:)* Whadaya' think? Is it me? Wait. *(Holding the mask to his face:)* Now. Huh? Well, of course it looks like me! The neat thing about these sketches is that they look like half the population that meets the race, sex, and general age requirements. You see, if I didn't raise the issue with this two-bank-shot sort of confession and this trail of debatable "evidence," it would never even occur to anyone to make the connection. But, this... This is the kind of stuff that makes a writer immortal. Just give the later generations of scholars something to try to prove or disprove, and they'll form a literary society to pick you

apart quarterly. *(A beat.)* Yeah—that’s what I want; to be drawn and quarterlied! *(Laughs.)* Did I really do it? *(Smiles.)* Hmmm. *(Stopping and looking around:)* Well—morning already. I hear somebody stirring. Taylor’ll be up shortly. I really do hope he got some rest. I’m afraid he’s gonna need it.

(ANDY stops and listens again. TAYLOR enters from the bedroom. Lights come up on the room. TAYLOR heads directly towards the kitchen, oblivious to ANDY’s presence.)

ANDY. *(To TAYLOR:)* Don’t worry...

TAYLOR. *(Jumping; clearly startled:)* Jeez! You scared the shit outta me!

ANDY. Sorry. How unghostly of me.

TAYLOR. Not funny.

(TAYLOR crosses to the sofa and sits to collect himself.)

What were you starting to say?

ANDY. About what?

TAYLOR. “Don’t worry.” You said, “Don’t worry.” Don’t worry about what?

ANDY. The barefoot burglars.

TAYLOR. What?

ANDY. The barefoot burglars. Don’t worry about them. They didn’t try to steal any of the broken glass you left lyin’ around.

TAYLOR. Oh. Great.

ANDY. Trudy still asleep?

TAYLOR. Yeah. Either that or I am.

ANDY. Good. You want some coffee or something before you hear the rest of this?

TAYLOR. It’s too early for this shit.

ANDY. Everything in life comes either too early or too late. You want coffee or not?

TAYLOR. *(Rising and crossing towards the kitchen:)* It's too much trouble. I'll just get a Pepsi.

ANDY. First thing in the morning? God, I don't know how you do that.

(TAYLOR exits into the kitchen and returns quickly with a can of Pepsi.)

TAYLOR. Probably just the result of some horrible child-rearing mistake you made. *(Opening the can:)* I wouldn't worry about it if I were you.

(He takes a drink from the can. He may even belch.)

ANDY. You see what drinkin' that stuff so early in the morning does to you? Did you know that among laboratory rats it's even been know to make them attack their dead fathers? Yeah. Posthumous Patricide Syndrome, I think they call it. PPS, for short.

TAYLOR. Okay; okay. *(Sitting on the sofa and continuing with increasing sarcasm:)* You were a good father. How's that? No! Better than that; you were a perfect father. Huh? How 'bout the king of perfect fathers? Yeah; there ya' go. Isn't that appropriate? I mean, isn't it just wonderfully Shakespearean? *(With an affected English Shakespearean-actor accent:)* Here I sit with my father's ghost, while my ambitious "Uncle Steverino" cunningly courts my unsuspecting widowed mother. *(Returning to his normal voice:)* So—what's next? What do you want out of this, anyway? Revenge? What? Do I swear some kind of oath? I know! *(Rising and beginning to pace and gesture widely:)* You want me to write this damn book; name Steven as your co-conspirator and accomplice; and, since the authorities can't get you...they'll grab him. *(The Shakespearean actor voice again:)* And thereby I am to serve as the instrument of your revenge! *(Back to his own voice:)* Right? Right?!

(ANDY has sat calmly and observed this all with quite the poker face. He now begins to smile, and then to laugh.)

ANDY. Steven and your Mom? Is that what you're seeing in all this? I hadn't really considered that, but... what a terrific idea!

TAYLOR. What?!

ANDY. No, no; just listen. Your mother's life is her business now. Let her live it. I looked out for your mom. She'll be fine by herself for as long as she cares to, but, if their friendship develops into something more...well, that would be...nice. *(Pause.)* Do Steven in? *(Short laugh.)* Steven was my best friend. Even he didn't know what was going on. Oh, he knew SOMETHING was going on. He handled the financial end of most everything I did. So, finally...I...I lied to him.

TAYLOR. About what?

ANDY. About where the money was coming from. He knew there wasn't THAT much money coming in from The Gentleman. And any of the articles or anything I did went through him, so the only thing I could do was lie to him.

TAYLOR. What'd you tell him?

ANDY. He hasn't mentioned anything to you?

TAYLOR. About what?

ANDY. I told him I was writing porn.

TAYLOR. What?!

ANDY. You know—skank books. I told him I needed more money, and I just couldn't seem to get things down on paper like I wanted 'em right then. So, I told him, I met this guy who published erotic books—you know the stuff. I told him I'd been ghost-writing these books for this adult book company, and I hadn't told him before because I was a little embarrassed about it, and because, if it ever came out, I didn't want his good name smeared along with mine. I told him I had insisted that they pay me in cash—outright purchases; no contracts—and that I had been crankin' these stories out for extra money.

TAYLOR. What'd he say?

ANDY. I told you—he was my best friend. He said if there was anything he could do to help, just let him know. I even offered him his standard commission on the profits if he wanted it. He said, "No." He said whatever I needed to do to keep the legitimate writing process going, to just...do it. And, if that meant writing fuck-

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