CHARACTERS

JIM STOOLS ..................... 41, bar owner, former biker
ROY MANUAL .......................... 30, bar patron
JASON (JAY BOB) WILFONG ........ 15, a summer guest
CATHERINE EMPANGER .............. 22, a novice
EVE (EVA JUNE) WILFONG ........... 38, Catherine’s aunt

TIME

The present, one morning in September

PLACE

The Nice People Bar in Houston, Texas

ACT ONE

A parking lot. In it is the pickup truck of Jim Stools. It points slightly up right. To Stage Right, the facade and front door of the bar. The truck is at least fifteen years old, battered, dirty, exhausted-looking. The hood is up. Jim is working on the engine. He is powerfully-built, wearing low-riding jeans and a black T-shirt. He works quickly, almost feverishly. As he works he hums along—in a frustrated, guttural sort of way—with the truck radio, which is playing a kitschy version of “Deep In The Heart Of Texas.”

JIM. (Humming, as he strains to turn a bolt and fails.) Shoot. (He tries again, still humming, fails again. He strikes the engine hard twice with the wrench. The radio cuts out.) Dammit. (He tries a third time, strains as he hums, fails again, hits the engine with the wrench again. The radio comes on again.) You son of a bitch, you’re just toying with me, ain’t you? (Tries once again, quickly, fails.) Damn you, can’t you see I’m in a hurry? (He starts for the back of the truck, striking the fender idly with his wrench. The radio cuts out.) Dammit. (Speaking to the truck as he reaches the flatbed.) I once saw a man eat a truck. Know that? Saw it on one of them You Asked For It So You’re Gonna Get It shows. They had real film footage of a man eating a Ford Econoline.

*See special note on copyright page.
piece by piece. (Picking up a large tire iron from the back of the truck.) Bit by bit he downed that sucker, all the way from the luggage rack right on down to the tires. Even ate the flashlight in the glove compartment. (Moving once again to the front of the truck, brandishing the tire iron.) Took him eleven years, but he did it. Food for thought. (He addresses the problem bolt once more, carefully aligns the tire iron to it, then strikes it viciously several times. The radio comes on. He strikes once more. The radio cuts out.) There. Have I got your attention now? (Jim tries the bolt again. It turns with relative ease. Jim smiles and begins to work quickly again. Roy Manual enters from the bar, R. He is not large. He smiles almost constantly. His clothes suggest a hard worker, but with one or two gestures toward the image of the urban cowboy—dress shirt, dirty jeans, work boots.)

ROY. Hey Jim? Jim?

JIM. Thought I asked you to watch the bar for me, Roy.

ROY. Oh, there ain't nobody in there. Say, Jim—I got a question.

JIM. Go away, Roy.

ROY. It's just a little question.

JIM. (Still working.) Go away, Roy.

ROY. See, all I want to know is . . .

JIM. Roy! Will you leave me alone? I'm trying to prevent a murder!

ROY. A murder?

JIM. Yeah, a murder. And I can't prevent it, 'less I get this miserable mother truck of mine moving—so go away!

ROY. Who's gonna get murdered?

JIM. (As he works.) Damn truck. Electrical problems. Electrical problems! You can't see 'em, can't trace 'em—you touch the wrong thing and you shock the living . . . (He receives a shock.) Aaaagh! Damn it! (He works.)

ROY. Who's gonna get murdered?

JIM. A kid, dammit, ok? A young boy's gonna die unless I save him. Now go on and leave me alone.

ROY. Well sure, Jim . . . I didn't know, is all. Where is the boy, anyway?

JIM. (Pointing violently off R.) Right in there!

ROY. But . . . that's the bar, Jim. That's your own . . . (Realizes.) You mean little Jay Bob?

JIM. I mean little Jay Bob.

ROY. Who's gonna murder him?

JIM. Me, dammit! Me! If I can't get out of here in about one more minute.

ROY. But he's just a kid. What'd he do to . . .?

JIM. (Looking up.) Just a kid, huh? You ain't had to live with him all summer. Oh, you should've heard Eva June last spring, "He's fifteen years old, he can help around the place." Help! Takes that boy a day to do a job that'd take a chimpanzee ten minutes. If I tell him to go get more beer glasses, I got a guaranteed two-hour wait. If I just leave him alone, he eats up every sour cream 'n onion potato chip in the place—and that's when he's not out back breaking full bottles of beer just for fun. Hell, it's got to where I give him any pointless job I can think of now, just to keep him busy. (Receives a shock from the truck.) Aaaagh! Shoot!

ROY. Why are you mad at him today?

JIM. I caught him burning money.

ROY. Burning money? His money?

JIM. My money! Outta the till.

ROY. Well, how much did he . . .?

JIM. Not much. I caught him when he was still working on the ones. (Finishes on the engine.) There. Let's see if it starts. (Turns the key, gets nothing but a click.) Damn!

ROY. (As Jim returns to the engine and probes.) Didn't work, huh? Well, that's electricity for you.

JIM. (Receiving a bigger shock.) Aaaaagh!!! You damn thing! You damn, damn thing!!

ROY. Hey, easy, Jim!!
JIM. I don't want to kill anybody!
ROY. Well you don't have to...
JIM. I got to! Lend me your truck.
ROY. It's in the shop.
JIM. In the shop? Well—get me a truck!
ROY. There ain't any. It's morning. Nobody comes to a bar in the morning.
JIM. You do.
ROY. Look, can't you just sit down with Jay Bob and talk?
JIM. You can't talk with a dead kid. Which is what he's gonna be if I get near him. Oh, damn! (Jim kicks the truck viciously. The radio comes on, playing "I Got A Never-Ending Love For You." Jim kicks it again. The radio cuts out. He sits on a fender, dispirited.) You don't know what it's been like.
ROY. Well, when's he supposed to leave, anyway? I thought he was just here for the summer.
JIM. He is. He goes home tomorrow—to start torturing his father again.
ROY. Tomorrow? Hell, that ain't so bad.
JIM. It's twenty-four hours. You ever tried to hold a sneeze for twenty-four hours?
ROY. No.
JIM. That's how it feels. Not killing him. Feels just like I got a natural urge and I got to force myself not to fulfill it. It feels awful. (He goes back under the hood.)
ROY. So you're just going to drive away?
JIM. That's right.
ROY. Where?
JIM. Up and out. Just up onto the highway and out as far as I gotta go. That kid's cost me plenty of extra miles this summer.
ROY. How far... out do you go?

*See special note on copyright page.

JIM. Last time was to San Antone.
ROY. San Antone? That's 200 miles.
JIM. Can't help it. Got to keep going till the urge passes. Otherwise, I'll kill Eva June's son, and I can't do that. Never get involved with a woman who has kids, Roy.
ROY. Ok.
JIM. If you do, you'll be driving all over Texas. (Hits the truck with the wrench.) But not in this trash heap. Lump of garbage shaped like a truck! No woman is worth it, Roy. Believe me. No matter how much pleasure you draw from a woman, it ain't worth two minutes with a mean kid. (Roy nods.) I tried to be good to him. I did. I fixed his name—you know that? First thing, the minute he showed up. His real name is Jason, do you believe that? Jason? I practically vomited the first time I heard it. So I made up Jay Bob on the spot and gave it to him free of charge. Did he thank me? No way. Should've known right then he wasn't gonna work out. (Jim works.)
ROY. I'm sorry, Jim. I really am.
JIM. Thanks. Go away.
ROY. (Watching a moment.) Say Jim, you remember that question I was asking you?
JIM. Question?
ROY. You know. I said I had a question?
JIM. Well what is it?
ROY. You remember that woman that Eva June brought through the bar with her about an hour ago? You know, just before Eva June went out?
JIM. Yeah?
ROY. Who was she?
JIM. Who was she. She's another one of Eva June's damn relatives, that's who she is. Some kinda niece or something. God knows how long she's planning to stay. One after another they come down here—just one after another, I tell you.
ROY. (Smiling.) Eva June's niece, huh? That's great.

JIM. How come?

ROY. That means she'll be around for awhile.

JIM. What's on your mind, Roy?

ROY. Nothing. I just like her, that's all.

JIM. You like her?

ROY. Yeah.

JIM. You only saw her for three seconds before she went upstairs.

ROY. I know, but I really like her. What's her name?

JIM. I ain't got time for this. I got a truck to fix.

ROY. I just want to get to know her better.

JIM. She ain't interested in you. She's interested in me.

ROY. In you? What for?

JIM. She's here to check me out. Eva June's whole damn family's been doing it: coming down here one by one from Minnesota to look me over and then report back to Command Central, or whatever it is.

ROY. Well, I guess that's . . . understandable, seeing as you stole Eva June away from her husband.

JIM. What's wrong with that?

ROY. Nothing. Just a fact.

JIM. The best man won. Hell, it's what America's all about: comparison shopping.

ROY. I know. I got no objection.

JIM. Wasn't I set out to steal her. Our luggage got tangled up in a metal detector at the Dallas Airport. We started talking, that's all. By the time we got out to the end of the concourse, we were in love. Least, I was. She must've liked it ok, too, though. She changed her reservation.

ROY. (With admiration.) I love that story. Wish that could happen to me with a woman.

JIM. Well, it ain't no use, 'less she's a woman without relatives. (Gets another shock.) Damn! This thing's alive, I swear it. I'm gonna sneak up on it. (He goes underneath the truck.)

ROY. Electricity's one of the mysteries of the Earth, ain't it?

JIM. Shut up and get me that tire iron, will you?

ROY. Ok. (As Roy moves for the tire iron, Jason enters from R. He's a scrawny adolescent, not athletic, not intellectual. A little nervous, a little mean. He doesn't see Jim under the truck.)

JASON. Hey, Roy, you seen Jim?

ROY. (Looking around, unsure of how to respond.) Jay Bob! Um . . . how come you're asking?

JASON. No reason. Just want to know where he is. I'm thinking of knocking off for the day, you know? (Jason picks up the tire iron, idly but forcefully hits the truck.)

ROY. Hey—easy there. You're denting it.

JASON. So what? Fits right in with all the other dents. Go on. Tell me which one's the new one.

ROY. Well . . .

JASON. (Hitting the truck again.) It's that one, right there.

ROY. Jay Bob. . . . You really shouldn't . . .

JASON. Why not? (Hits the truck once more; the radio comes on, playing "T For Texas."*) Hey neat, the radio came on.

ROY. Jay Bob!!

JASON. Tell Jim I went to invest some of his quarters in the computer industry, ok? (Hits the truck once more, the radio quits.) This is a hell of a truck. (He takes a step left, is suddenly seized by Jim around the ankle.)

JIM. You should see it from under here.

JASON. (To Roy.) Who's under the truck?

JIM. I am, you little thief! Figured my change won't burn, so you're gonna spend it, huh?

JASON. I thought about melting it down . . .

JIM. (Giving a yank, which toples Jason.) I'll melt you down!

JASON. Help!

*See special note on copyright page.
ROY. Jim! Stop it, now!
JIM. (Dragging him under the truck.) Were you going to sell my truck, too?! Soon as you stop beating on it?!
JASON. It's not worth selling . . . help!
ROY. (Grabbing Jason's arms.) Cut it out, Jim. He's just a kid!
JIM. (Emerging behind the truck, as he continues to pull Jason.) You think I should let him live to be an adult?!
ROY. You can't kill him!
JIM. Not if you don't let go, I can't. Jay Bob, did you move those beer cases like I told you?
JASON. No!
JIM. Hear that? He's gotta go, Roy!
ROY. He will! Tomorrow. He'll fly away!
JIM. What if he comes back?
JASON. Why should I come back? I'd rather go to a concentration camp!
JIM. (Letting go.) Where's that tire iron? Keep hold of him, Roy.
ROY. Jim, calm down, now . . . (As Jim picks up the tire iron, Roy lets Jason go. Jason starts to scramble off R.)
JIM. Damn it!!! (Jim dives and tackles Jason.)
JASON. Let go of me!
ROY. Get off him, Jim!
JASON. Let me go, you big turkey!
JIM. (Slowly raising the tire iron, holding Jason down with his free band.) Say goodbye to everything.
ROY. JIM!!
JASON. If you hurt me, my Mom'll leave you! (Jim hesitates.) She will. You know she will! She'll walk right out and go home to Minnesota. You'll be all alone, you big cracker clown! (A pause. Jim looks at Jason with disgust, and slowly lowers the tire iron. Jason rises.) All right. 'Bout time I get a little respect around here.
JIM. Get inside.
JASON. I'll go inside when I want to.

JIM. Now!!
JASON. Ok. I want to. (Jason takes a step for the bar, then suddenly pulls the tire iron out of Jim's hand and strikes the truck once more. The radio comes on, and Jason drops the tire iron and dashes into the bar. Jim roars and starts after him, but Roy gets in his way. The radio plays a Tex-Mex instrumental.)
ROY. Easy, Jim! Easy! (A moment of tension. Then Jim suddenly turns and walks determinedly to the back of the truck.)
JIM. Right.
ROY. That was nice, Jim. You showed nice restraint. (Jim opens the gate, hops up onto the flatbed.) What are you doing? (Jim starts to unfold some canvas that lies in the truck.)
JIM. What are you working on there? Jim? What is that?
JIM. My tent.
ROY. Your what?
JIM. My tent, dammit! If I can't kill that kid, at least I can avoid him. If I can't take my truck someplace else, I can live in it here.
ROY. What are you talking about? You can't—
JIM. Roy. I didn't murder Jay Bob just now. But that don't mean I won't the next time. Safer all around if I stay out here till he's gone. I'll just pretend I'm 200 miles away, that's all.
ROY. You're gonna sleep in your own parking lot?
JIM. It's none of your business, Roy. (Jim stamps on the flatbed. The radio cuts out.)
ROY. (Watching Jim work.) This is silly . . .
JIM. I'm doing it! All right?!! Now get on up here and help me.
ROY. Why are you setting it up in the truck?
JIM. Always do. Keeps the snakes away.
ROY. There ain't no snakes on the asphalt here.
JIM. Get in the truck, Roy!
ROY. (Climbing up) Ok, ok.
JIM. Grab that rope there.
ROY. Ok.
JIM. And shut up. *(They work.)*
ROY. *(With nervous affability.)* Hey, Jim. ain't this gonna make it hard for you to introduce me to that niece of Eva June's?
JIM. Thought I told you to shut up.
ROY. Well, I think I may love the girl, is all. You know—the way it was with you and Eva June there, in Dallas International. Real sudden-like.
JIM. You're babbling. Hold this.
ROY. *(Holding a tent section.)* No I'm not. Really. I could tell the minute I saw her. Something about her just gave off a special... glint, you know?
JIM. Don't drink in the mornings, Roy.
ROY. All the bottles, the 10 High and the Early Times, just glinted. Honest. Hell, even the Old Grandad looked, uh... looked sorta...
JIM. Younger?
ROY. How old is she, anyway?
JIM. I don't know. About 20 or so.
ROY. Well, I'm only 30.
JIM. Yeah, but you look 45. Come on, pull. *(Roy pulls on a rope.)*
ROY. That's not my fault. I work in the ground. You get pale, working in deep ditches all day.
JIM. Roy, I got other things to think about.
ROY. I know, I know. I just need some information is all. Like, uh... like what's her name? You never said.
JIM. Catherine.
ROY. Catherine. That's pretty. You ain't gonna fix her name, are you?
JIM. Pull on the rope, Roy.
ROY. *(Doing so.)* What else do you know about her?
JIM. Nothing.
ROY. You must know something.
JIM. When Eva June talks about her family, I never listen. I know she's mentioned Catherine a few times, but whatever the hell she said I can't remember.
ROY. Please Jim, anything. Any sort of fact. *(A pause.)*
JIM. There was one thing Eva June said about her, but... nah, I can't remember.
ROY. Is she married?
JIM. Did she have a ring on?
ROY. Nope.
JIM. Then I guess she ain't. Turn that flap over.
ROY. We're fated, Jim, I just got that feel, you know? Oh, she may fight it, but it's inevitable. Fate's gonna keep slapping us together until we can't come apart no more.
JIM. One big lump, huh?
ROY. Sorta. And Jim, there's just one thing I'd like to ask you to do.
JIM. What's that?
ROY. Go in there and ask her if she'll go out with me.
JIM. Roy...
ROY. You know the bad luck I've had with women. You've seen me in the bar.
JIM. You don't have bad luck.
ROY. I do too. They hit me. They hit me all the time, 'cause I say stupid things. I can't help it, I get nervous, and... well, I just don't want to make a bad impression on Catherine. She means too much to me.
JIM. Three seconds is all you saw her.
ROY. I know when I'm in love! *(Jim glares at him.)* Besides, I think she liked me. There was something in her eye.
JIM. Hope she got it out.
ROY. It's time I got serious about a woman.
JIM. You don't want to get serious about a woman.
ROY. Yes I do... .
JIM. No man in his right mind wants to get serious about a woman.
ROY. You did. *(Jim glares at Roy again.)* You did. Think about that. Wasn't so bad for you.
JIM. What do you think it's like when a woman comes into
your life, anyway? You think it's a big plus or something? You think it's an add-on?
ROY. Well... sure.
JIM. Well it ain't! Whenever a woman comes to stay, you're gonna lose something. Never know what it'll be neither. When Eva June came down here the first word outta her mouth was asphalt.
ROY. Asphalt?
JIM. That's right. The parking lot. This asphalt parking lot without any snakes in it. Used to be dirt. Hard-packed dirt, as far as the eye could see—all the way out to the street. This used to be a biker's bar. Did you know that?
ROY. Yeah. This place had a hell of a reputation. I was afraid to come in here.
JIM. (A bit ruefully.) You ain't now though, are you?
ROY. Well, anyway, I think asphalt's kind of an improvement.
JIM. You do, do you? I was a biker myself. Had a Harley. Man, that thing just glittered. It was one proud beast, I tell you.
ROY. They can be pretty.
JIM. (Sarcastically.) Pretty? (With reverence.) A Harley stands erect. Like a man, on its own two wheels. Its engine stands erect. Not like the engine in this old swamp... (He strikes the truck: the radio plays a bit of the yodel from "Cowboy's Lullabye* before he hits the truck again and the radio cuts out.) Lying there like some kind of mechanical puddle. Roy, everything about a Harley is poised. You know that?
ROY. (Nodding.) Uh-huh.
JIM. No you don't. Don't pretend you do. (Goes and gets a beer from the cab of the truck.) Time was, we used to close this bar down, after drinking and fighting and rolling around in the dirt till dawn, and then we'd just mount up and bust on out for the hills. Up and out. Black knights of the highway. Seeking after a state of pure... disconnection. You know?
ROY. Well...
JIM. Shut up and blow on this. (He hands Roy an inflatable pillow. Roy starts to blow it up.) Those were some kind of weekends, believe me. And it's all changed now. All of it. 'Cause I got serious about a woman. Know what the second thing outta her mouth was?
ROY. What?
JIM. No Harley.
ROY. Really? (Jim nods.) So you sold it, huh?
JIM. You don't sell a Harley. I rode it to Utah.
ROY. Utah? Why'd you ride it way out there?
JIM. 'Cause there's a canyon in Utah. And there's a promontory. And there's a river.
ROY. So?
JIM. Were you born thick, or what? I took my bike out to Dead Horse Point, Utah and sailed it off the edge. Ok? It's a mile drop, straight down. At the bottom is the Green River. I sent my Harley out into space over the Green River, and never watched it fall. As far as I'm concerned, it's still going.
ROY. Isn't that dangerous?
JIM. No Roy, this is dangerous—trying to have an intelligent conversation with you. (Pauses.) Eva June calls motorcycles toys for men. Like that's a bad thing. Like men don't need toys.
ROY. Why don't you leave her?
JIM. You don't know a thing about love.
ROY. Well, I'm trying to find out. Come on, Jim—go inside and talk to Catherine for me, please?
JIM. You really are a glutton for punishment, aren't you? (Roy nods eagerly.) Well, I'm not going in.
ROY. Why not?
JIM. Jay Bob's in there, for one thing. I might kill him.
ROY. I'll keep Jay Bob out of your way.
JIM. Pretend I did ask her. And she did go out with you. It's long odds, but let's pretend she did. And let's say for once in your life you didn't say anything stupid, and she actually liked you. What would you do then?
ROY. I'd marry her.
JIM. You'd marry her. But Roy, don't you see what that'd do?
ROY. What?
JIM. Right now you're one of my best customers. You come in every day, you never get loud drunk and you tip too much. It's true you're the dullest man I ever met, but in my bar, that's no real problem. If you married Catherine, though, you'd have the right to take that dullness of yours outta my bar and into my house. I can't let you do that. (Pauses.) Now come on, why don't you go on inside and grab us some sour cream 'n onion chips? I got lots of beer in the truck. We can camp out here in the shade of my tent for awhile. Give us both a chance to cool off. Go on now. There'll be other women. (Roy starts dejectedly towards the bar, stops.)
ROY. Sure, you can say that—you already got one. Hell, I know I'm dull. I've always known it. Last time I asked a girl to marry me, she said, "Yes, Ray." I was too embarrassed to correct her. I know I'm dull. You can say you had to sacrifice this and that for Eva June, but my whole life is a sacrifice. I mean, if you're poor, there's always a chance you might get rich. If you're stupid, there's the chance you might get educated, but if you're dull . . .
JIM. I ain't gonna pity you, Roy.
ROY. Well, somebody has to. Some woman has to see me and say to herself, "That man needs help. That man needs the love of a good woman." Why shouldn't it be Catherine? (Suddenly shouting up to the house.) Catherine!? Catherine!!
JIM. What the hell are you doing?

ROY. Hey, Catherine! Hey?! It's me, Roy Manual!
JIM. Roy!
ROY. Can I come up and meet you?!
JIM. Shut up, Roy!
ROY. Jim won't introduce me, 'cause he thinks I'm boring, but . . .!
JIM. (Clapping a hand over Roy's mouth.) Calm down, Roy! (They listen for a moment.) I don't think she heard you. (He relaxes his grip.)
ROY. Catherine! You up there?! (Jim silences him again.)
JIM. What are you doing? You think this is any way to meet a girl?
ROY. It's the only way I got left.
JIM. Get over in that truck. (Roy trudges to the truck, sits on the gate.) You should be ashamed of yourself. Shouting at a woman you never met. You think she's a cocker spaniel, that comes when you call?
ROY. I'm sorry, I just . . .
JIM. You just nothing. This is not the jungle, Roy Manual. This is Houston, Texas.
ROY. I know . . .
JIM. This is an asphalt parking lot I'm standing on.
ROY. Sorry. (A pause.)
JIM. Now you behave. And maybe later I'll introduce you to her, like a human being. All right?
ROY. Would you? Oh, thanks, Jim. I knew you'd . . .
JIM. Shut up.
ROY. All right.
JIM. Not that she'd have anything to do with you anyway. (Going to get two beers in the cab of truck.) I mean, what's an educated northern girl gonna want with a laid-off ditch digger from Houston?
ROY. I ain't laid off. I'm on accidental sick leave. Hell, cave-ins happen all the time. I go back next week. Got nearly all my memory back.
JIM. Let me rephrase the question: what's an educated northern girl gonna want with a wrecked-up ditch digger from Houston?
ROY. (As they sit on the gate of the truck and drink.) You think I got nothing to offer, don't you? You think I'm satisfied to burrow in the ground my whole life. Well I ain't. I'm fixing to move up. Know what I did this week?
JIM. What?
ROY. Enrolled myself in a college.
JIM. College? You don't even have a high-school . . .
ROY. Don't need one. I enrolled in a two-year bachelor's certification program at the College of the Floodplain, down in Bonne Aire, Texas. They don't require a high school diploma to get in. Just grit.
JIM. Sounds like a hell of a school.
ROY. It's a start. And there's no telling how far you can go, if you stick with it.
JIM. (Nods, unconvinced.) Uh-huh.
ROY. Well, it's true. Hell, anybody can go to college if they want to bad enough. Here, look at this. (He takes an old, worn newspaper clipping out of his wallet.)
JIM. What's that?
ROY. It's a story I read in the paper a few years ago. Kept it with me for inspiration. It's all about how some students at Harvard University worked it out how to enroll a pig.
JIM. A pig?
ROY. That's right. They just gave him a name, and some good test scores, and sneaked all that into some computer someplace—and before you knew it, that pig was a freshman at Harvard.
JIM. He must've seemed kinda noticeable in class.
ROY. Nope, not really. See, they did it all on paper somehow—just sent in grades at the end of the semester or something. I'm not sure how they did it—it's in there, though.
JIM. A pig, huh?
ROY. They got him through a whole four-year program, too. He even got a degree.
JIM. What in?
ROY. Humanities. One of the other students even made a commencement speech, and called him the most well-rounded graduate in Harvard history.
JIM. What's all this supposed to mean, Roy?
ROY. Well, like I say—it's been an inspiration. I mean, if a pig can do that well at Harvard, I oughta clean up down in Bonne Aire.
JIM. I'm not introducing you to Catherine, Roy.
ROY. You just said you would . . .
JIM. I don't think you're really ready for a woman.
ROY. I am too. Come on now, you promised. Take me up there right now.
JIM. No.
ROY. Come on—I been nice. I sat here drinking beer and philosophizing with you, and now I need a woman. It's time for love.
JIM. Love, huh?
ROY. Yeah. Love.
JIM. (Sighs.) Roy, you don't know what you're messing with here. Love. You may as well say you're ready for a hurricane or an epidemic or a flood. Love don't repair your life, it wrecks it.
ROY. How do you mean?
JIM. Look, say your life's a tv show, ok? Something you can grasp.
ROY. Ok. What show?
JIM. I don't know—CHIPS or something. Where the cops ride around on their bikes all day, saving people so they can go to bed with 'em later?
ROY. Yeah . . . ?
JIM. Well, now, let's say one of those cops gets married. Suddenly, he won't be riding around saving and bed-hopping in quite the same way, will he? 'Cause now he's got
a serious woman at home, who'll seriously kill him if he tries it, right?
ROY. Well . . .
JIM. So suddenly we're talking a whole new TV show, ain't we? Something more like Hart To Hart or Ironsides or something, you see? Something with limitations.
ROY. Yeah . . .
JIM. I'm not saying you don't still have a good program, but somewhere in there you changed channels without even realizing it. You see what I mean?
ROY. I guess.
JIM. It's the chance you take when you fool around with a proven formula.
ROY. But you took a chance—with Eva June.
JIM. And I got a whole new TV show, didn't I? Called Leave It To Jay Bob. The ratings are lousy, believe you me. And I'm looking forward to a life full of reruns. (Pauses.) And that's only part of it. Being with Eva June hasn't just stopped me from being a biker, you know. It's stopped me from being the meanest, baddest, cruellest, dirtiest, toughest, most vicious . . . and happiest biker of 'em all. Hell, I could outdrink, out-fight, out-think and out-hump anybody in town. And I got plenty of practice, too. Every once in awhile one of the other boys'd slow up, get married. I watched 'em do it. And I thanked my damn stars that a fate such as that could never come to a man as dangerous and disgusting as me. Then I met Eva June on the day I turned 40. (Long pause.) She ain't the most beautiful woman I ever met. She ain't even the smartest, in some ways. And she ain't the nicest, either. And hell—she's not even in love with me. Says she never will be. But I took one look, and I knew I'd never be rid of her. (Slight pause, quietly.) And look where it's gotten me. Me. The most fearsome man in southwest Houston. Without my bike. Sitting in a damn truck that I can't even make go. (A beat, with disgust.) You want to know the worst part? I'm satisfied. (Pauses.) See what I mean? Suddenly you're on a whole new TV show. Suddenly you're on . . . You Asked For It, or My Mother The Truck or something, I don't know.
ROY. (Quietly.) Well, Jim . . . I guess that all may be true. And I'm sorry for you if it is. But I'm a man who wants to change channels. Hell, I feel like I had the Farm Report on all my life. I want to see some prime time. I'm going in there.
JIM. (As Roy starts for the house.) Hold on, Roy . . .
ROY. Thanks for the beer.
JIM. (Grabbing him.) You ain't going in there.
ROY. I want a new show!
JIM. It's too dangerous. What if you get Flipper or something?
ROY. (Tearing away.) I don't care! (He tries for the door, but Jim blocks his path. So he rushes for the truck and bonks the horn instead.) Catherine! Catherine honey!!
JIM. (Going for him.) Damn you . . . !
ROY. Come on down and meet the pride of Texas! (Jim whirs Roy away from the horn.)
JIM. Damn it, Roy—shut up!
ROY. No!
JIM. Go home. Will you? Will you just go home?
ROY. No! I got a right to meet her!
JIM. You ain't got a right to nothing!! Get outta here, right now!
ROY. No! I'm in love! And damn you to hell for getting in my way, you big son of a . . .
JIM. (Pulling back his fist to hit him, then pausing, staring at him.) Don't you hate love? Don't you just hate it?
ROY. What?
JIM. Look at us. Look what love did to us. We used to be friends, sort of. And now . . . It's just pitiful.
ROY. (A bit ashamed.) I don't know what you're talking about.
JIM. Just pitiful. (Jason enters from the bar.)
JASON. What's all the yelling about?
JIM. I thought I told you to stay inside.
JASON. Who's doing all the yelling and the honking? Catherine came down; she thought someone's yelling at her.
ROY. I was. Is she in the bar?
JASON. What were you yelling at her for?
ROY. (Dashing into the bar.) I love her, that's why.
JIM. Roy!
JASON. (As Jim starts after Roy.) He loves her? That's pretty funny.
JIM. (Stops.) What's funny about it?
JIM. There's nothing funny about a man's love. Even Roy's.
JASON. Love's the biggest thing you give up in your whole damn life. Remember that.
JASON. Ok. Just think it's funny that he loves Catherine, that's all.
JIM. Why shouldn't he love her? Give me one good reason why he shouldn't love that woman.
JASON. She's a nun.
JIM. (Pausing a moment, wincing as he remembers.) That's the thing I couldn't remember about her! She's a nun! Oh, why don't I listen to Eva June better? How come Catherine's not wearing nun clothes?
JASON. I don't know. Think her order gave it up or something.
JIM. She's a nun. Damn! Roy's gonna hate to hear that.
JASON. Yeah. Funny, ain't it?
JIM. Shut up. We ain't gonna tell him.
JASON. He's probably finding out from her right now.
ROY. (Returning.) Dammit. Oh, damn it.
JIM. What's wrong, Roy? Disappointment?
ROY. She wasn't there. Must've gone upstairs again.
JASON. (Snickers.) That's too bad.
JIM. Shut up, Jay Bob.
ROY. I was gonna ask her out, too.
JASON. (The snicker becomes a laugh.) Good idea, Roy.

JIM. (To Jason.) You get in the bar! Now! Get the hell in there!
JASON. (Exiting.) Don't give up, Roy!
JIM. Now! (Jason exits into the bar, laughing.) I'm coming in there in a minute, and you better be working! I'm gonna be on your butt all day, you vicious little creep! (Jim hops up on the truck, begins to take down the tent.)
ROY. Well, I came close, anyhow. Almost saw her.
JIM. Yeah, Roy. You . . . came close.
ROY. What are you doing now?
JIM. Taking it down.
ROY. You just got it up.
JIM. Don't need it. I'm gonna ride that kid into the ground in what little time he's got here. He's gonna wish he'd never set foot in my bar.
ROY. Aren't you afraid of killing him?
JIM. What I got in mind is worse. Little turd, laughing at you like that.
ROY. Everybody laughs at me.
JIM. (Stops, stares at Roy.) Well, they shouldn't. (He resumes taking the tent down.)
ROY. Say, Jim?
JIM. What?
ROY. You think I'll ever meet Catherine?
JIM. Um . . . sure. 'Course you will. I'll introduce you myself, um . . . soon as I . . . soon as I work myself up to it.
ROY. Ok.
JIM. Let's get drunk first.
ROY. (Smiling.) Not too drunk.
JIM. (Going to cab for beers.) You want some music?
ROY. Sure.
JIM. (Receiving a shock from the radio.) Aaaagh! Damn! Forget the music. (He hands Roy a beer.)
ROY. Thanks. Hell, this is the most we drunk together since I've known you, ain't it?
JIM. (As they sit on the gate.) Yes, it is.
ROY. I know she'll like me—when we finally do meet. I
could tell, even in those three little seconds.
JIM. You never know, Roy. Maybe she's got... things
wrong with her.
ROY. (Disbelievingly.) Like what?
JIM. Well... Jay Bob just told me that she's, um... Catholic.
ROY. (Disappointed.) Shoot. (Bucking up again.) Well, so
what? She's pretty.
JIM. No good being pretty if you got to go to confession all
the time.
ROY. If I married her, she wouldn't have nothing to confess.
(A pause. Jim looks at him and down.)
JIM. Well, maybe you got a point there, Roy.
ROY. (Smiles.) It's great being in love, ain't it?
JIM. Yeah... just great. (The radio comes on suddenly,
playing Elvis Presley's "Wise Men Say." Jim looks around at
it, annoyed, and strikes the truck. The song continues. Jim
strikes the truck again. The song continues. Jim sighs, shakes
his head, takes a swig of beer and stares into the distance as
lights fade and the music plays on.)

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ACT TWO

The scene is an outdoor deck, on the third floor of
an old house, the bottom floor of which is a bar.
Behind the deck is the peaked roof of the house, and
a small door, converted from an attic window. A
street light is visible Stage Right, and the top of a
telephone pole is Stage Left. On the deck, which is
surrounded by a simple railing, are a couple cheap
but comfortable pieces of furniture—chaise, chair,
etc. Also a sizeable flower pot, with soil but no
flower, and a hibachi. Just below the deck, is the
back of a sign which runs down the building out of
sight.

Catherine Empanger is on the deck. She's dressed
very simply in dark, casual clothes. She sits on the
chaise reading. She closes the book, looks around
restlessly. She stands, slowly moves into an
amateurish try at a two-step while singing quietly to
herself.

Catherine. The skies at night... are big and bright—
deep in the heart of Tex-as... (We suddenly hear Hank
Williams singing, "Your Cheatin' Heart."* She turns, walks

*See special note on copyright page.
U. and looks down over the railing. Over the song offstage a male voice shouts from below.)

VOICE. (Off.) Now that is music! Ain't it? That is no damn shit. (Another voice laughs derisively.) That's none of your mulepukie Kenny Rogers muppet show horse crap! That is Hank Williams—the King of music! (A moment passes, as Catherine listens. She starts to sway to the music, a little awkwardly. Eve enters from the house. She's wearing a cowboy shirt, jeans and loafers. She carries a hammer and nails. She is smiling, robust, and speaks in a broad Texas accent.)

EVE. There you are. There you are. We got you treed, don't we? I'm sorry, honey. Didn't mean to drive you way up here. That's what happened, isn't it? You were looking for a quiet place in this madhouse and you just kept on rising till you found one. (Looking over the railing.) Not too quiet even up here. That juke box sure carries, don't it? Well, hold on—I got a little project to take care of, then we'll get that door shut and it'll be quiet as you please. (Shouting down.) Hey! Hey, down there! I'm shouting!

CATHERINE. Eve, you don't have to . . .

EVE. Don't worry. They always hear me eventually. (Shouting.) Come on you boys! I'm shouting up here! Jim! Roy! T.R.!

ROY'S VOICE. (Off.) Who's that?

EVE. Up here, Roy! Look up! That's right!

ROY. (Off.) Oh, howdy, Eva June!

EVE. Do me a favor, Roy—toss up that rock down there. The one with the rope around it?

ROY. (Off.) What? Oh, sure! Here goes!

EVE. Watch out, Honey. (A rock with a line tied to it lands on the roof.) Thanks, Roy. Now could you shut that door down there? My little niece and me are drowning in Hank Williams.

ROY. (Off.) Your niece up there with you? Let me say hello to her and I'll shut the door.

EVE. Come on now, Roy . . .

ROY. (Off.) Just want to say hi.

EVE. (To Catherine.) Want to say hello to that Roy fella, honey? You saw him in the bar this morning, I think. (Catherine pauses, goes to the railing.)

ROY. (Off.) Evening, Miss Empanger! (Catherine waves, almost imperceptibly.) Will you be coming down later? I'd like you to dance with me is all.

CATHERINE. I don't know . . .

ROY. (Off.) What? You'd like to dance with me?

CATHERINE. (Louder.) I don't know.

EVE. Shut that door, Roy, or I'll come down there and dance on you! (The door closes, cutting off the music.) There. That's better. Almost livable out here now, ain't it? Imagine that Roy Manual holding us hostage that way just to get a dance with you. (Starting to pull up the rope attached to the rock.) The men in this bar sure take some getting used to. I got half a mind to tell him all about you. That'd shut him up.

CATHERINE. No—I'd rather you didn't.

EVE. Why not? Nothing's wrong with being a nun.

CATHERINE. I'm not a nun, though. I'm . . .

EVE. Nothing wrong with being a novice, then. Hell, I'm not ashamed of you. You should let me tell Roy. He'd leave you alone for sure.

CATHERINE. No. People . . . get nervous when they hear that about me. Jim, for instance.

EVE. Jim just hates Catholics, that's all. (Stops pulling.) He's treated you all right today, hasn't he?

CATHERINE. Oh, sure—pretty much. Once this afternoon he sort of . . . came up and stared at me.

EVE. Did he say anything?

CATHERINE. He just said, "A nun," shook his head and went back down. I haven't seen him since. I've been up here all day. Trying not to be any trouble.

EVE. How could you be any trouble?

CATHERINE. (As Eve begins pulling again.) Showing up
unannounced, for one thing. I'm sure you weren't too happy about that. What is that you're doing?
EVE. Pulling up a banner for the Labor Day weekend. Says, "Work Hard, Drink Hard". Made it myself. Brings in business. (Starting to nail it to the rail.) I'll tell you something, honey. You got an open invitation here. Couldn't be any trouble if you tried. It's so good to see my sister's little girl again. When I got your call last night, I was dancing around in a little circle, I was so happy. So talk to me—how's your life going?
CATHARINE. Oh . . . fine. (She moves away, kneels down by the bibachi.) Do you use this much?
EVE. That? not since last spring. Too hot out here in the summer. You're lucky it's September. Houston in July is inhuman. (Finishing the banner.) There.
CATHARINE. It looks a little grimy.
EVE. What? Houston?
CATHARINE. No—the grill.
EVE. There's probably birds nesting in it, for all I know. Why are you . . . ?
CATHARINE. I thought I could cook something.
EVE. Cook? Honey, I'm taking you out for dinner. Sweet Jesus, you think you got to do for yourself up here on the roof?
CATHARINE. I was only . . .
EVE. I'm taking you somewhere nice. We'll leave in about a half-hour, ok?
CATHARINE. Ok.
EVE. (Smiling.) Eating alone. Hell, I thought it was your mother that was mad at me, not you.
CATHARINE. Oh, I'm not mad at you. Really, I'm not. And Mom isn't either, really. Not really.
EVE. Sure. That's why I haven't heard from her in six months, huh? (Pause.) Well, I don't blame her. It's a hard thing for her to accept. One minute I seem to be a happily married mother of one, the next minute I'm divorced, leav-
shadow of a doubt, that I could not go through another day without becoming a dedicated scholar of Baltic Studies. So, after a few hours of listening to him, I would numbly nod my head, pick up some learned paper by a colleague of his—one of the eight—and study it like a little schoolgirl with her homework assignment before bed. And he would just sit there beaming at me. The next morning I always woke up knowing the coordinates of Riga and wondering how to kill my husband. (Pauses.) Well I knew that wasn’t a healthy situation. And about that time I met Jim, while changing planes—the luckiest connection of my life—and he took one look at me and knew just what to say.

CATHARINE. What was that?

EVE. He said, “I got a bar in Houston. Interested?” I was. Well, look at that.

CATHARINE. What?

EVE. That shingle's falling off. I might as well fix that right now. You don't mind, do you?

CATHARINE. Um . . . no . . .

EVE. (Straightening it.) I mean, the next thing you know, there's water damage. I just love going around this place with a hammer and nails. Always something to fix. (She starts to pound.)

CATHARINE. Eve, maybe I better just go.

EVE. Go? Are you talking about? You just got here.

CATHARINE. I know, but . . . you're so busy, and . . . I do have a standing invitation at Aunt Margaret’s . . .

EVE. (Intercepting her.) Don't be silly . . .

CATHARINE. I'm not. I just don't feel like I'm . . . fitting in here. I mean, this is a bar, and I come from a convent, and you're not married to the man you live with, and men keep shouting at me, and . . . Aunt Margaret would just be . . .

EVE. Aunt Margaret hasn't taken a deep breath in 25 years.

CATHARINE. Well, then . . . maybe Aunt Camilla . . .

EVE. Aunt Camilla is fat. And she hates men. And she hates women, too. Why on earth would you want to go see Aunt Camilla? (Catherine pauses.) Face it, honey. I'm the only relative you got that knows how to listen with both ears. Now you sit down while I finish pounding this sucker. (Catherine hesitates, sits down. Eve pounds.)

CATHARINE. At least my other aunts didn't walk out on their husband and son.

EVE. What?

CATHARINE. At least . . .

EVE. I heard you. Honey, when I walked out, it was not only for me. It was for Robert too. And for little Jay Bob.

CATHARINE. Jay Bob? You mean Jason?

EVE. That's right.

CATHARINE. Jay Bob?

EVE. Ain't it cute? That's what we call him now, while he's visiting. Jay Bob. Names just naturally get changed in Texas. Hell, I'm Eva June to most of these folks. Eva June Wilfong. Whoa! (Pauses, admires her work on the shingle.) There now. Let it rain. I'll tell you a little secret, Catherine: Jay Bob's better off since I moved down here. You know why?

CATHARINE. Why?

EVE. 'Cause now he's got a real mother to deal with in me. Now he's got an honest-to-God human being, 'stead of just a dead hum coming out of someone else's machine. (A beat.) It's been a real kick in the butt having him down here this summer. 'Course, he and Jim get into a fight now and then, but that's only natural.

CATHARINE. How often do they fight?

EVE. Every day. But no broken bones yet. (Smiles suddenly.) Oh, how do you like my new accent? I forgot you never heard it before this morning.

CATHARINE. Well, it's, um . . . it's . . .

EVE. It's a dinger, ain't it? I was only here a couple months before I was talking more Texas than the Texans. Well, why not? I get along better with folks this way. Besides, Jim and
I think it’s good for business.
Catherine. Are you and Jim ever . . . going to get married?
Eve. Why should we?
Catherine. Well, you live together, and . . .
Eve. That’s right. Living together is for having someone around. Marriage is for having someone around your neck. Jim and me share what we can about each other, and leave the rest alone. We don’t mess around on the side, and we don’t worry about love. ’Least, I don’t.
Catherine. But love is . . .
Eve. Love is an evil pain in the butt. For years, I was in love with a man who had more passion for Latvian self-rule than he had for my body. You can stick love. Besides, the real treat for me down here is this place. This little tavern is just heaven for me.
Eve. That’s all right. I know it looks strange, but this here bar is one place I can affect. Look at that railing!
Catherine. What?
Eve. It’s practically falling apart. I’m glad I came up. (She straddles the railing, starts to pound.) Maintenance—that’s what keeps a business alive. (The bar door opens. We hear a bit of “Red-Neck Mother” by Jerry Jeff Walker* before it closes. Eve calls down.) Hey, Joe Bill! Hey, Larry Lee! How’s it going? (We hear voices calling up.)
Voice. Hey, Eva June!
2nd Voice. Don’t fall off, now!
Eve. I won’t! Boy, this place sure has changed. You should’ve seen it when I got here. I near puked. Really. There was a broken-down sign that said, “JIM STOOLS BAR;” there was beer and broken glass on the floor; there was bikers coming in every night swearing, fighting, committing crimes of all kinds. Well, I told Jim he’d got me there all right, but

if he wanted to keep me, things were going to change. So he just backed off and let me go at it. It’s only been one year, but come here and look at this parking lot. (Catherine approaches, looks down.) Asphalt. Not dirt like there was. Not one damn motorcycle, either. Pickup trucks. Solid, dependable pickup trucks. This is a workingman’s bar now. (Taking Catherine towards the door.) And look at this. (Turning on the lights for the sign.) A new name. With a message. “NICE PEOPLE DANCING TO GOOD COUNTRY MUSIC BAR.” My idea. Honey, if you call yourself nice people, nice people’ll come. If you call yourself dancing, then they’ll dance, instead of spreading their fat, leather-covered rears on a barstool and letting farts all night. And if you play good country music, well, folks’ll be elevated, stead of teased and titillated. There’s a hall-of-fame juke-box down there now. Same way on weekends, too. Dance bands. For nice people. And Jim loves it. Wasn’t sure he would, but he does.
Catherine. Well, it’s . . . it’s a very nice bar.
Eve. We’re going to make it a restaurant.
Catherine. Really?
Eve. (Nodding, quivering with pleasure.) That’s where I was all day, after I got you at the airport. Non-stop meetings with the contractors. In six months this is going to be the “NICE PEOPLE EATING TO GOOD COUNTRY MUSIC RESTAURANT.” People’ll pop in here like salman up a ladder. God, I’m happy! (Pauses.) How’re you doing? I been talking all evening. What’d you do all day while I was gone?
Catherine. Well, I was . . . um, reading . . . up here.
(Eve picks up the book from the chaise.)
Catherine. Oh, I just . . . found it downstairs.
Eve. I got it for Jay Bob. It’s kind of advanced—says sex is ok, and like that. Why were you reading it? I thought you were getting all ready to be nunified.
Catherine. Well, nuns have to deal with sex. You know—advising, and . . .

*See special note on copyright page.
EVE. Advising against, as I recall. So how long 'til you get to be a nun, anyway? You going to be a novice all your life?

CATHARINE. Well, I've... been on retreat for awhile...

EVE. Retreat? How do you retreat from a convent? Sounds redundant.

CATHARINE. It's possible.

EVE. Just shows my ignorance. But you know me. Not the world's best Catholic. Fact, I'm a Methodist, now—that's how bad a Catholic I've become. (Catherine looks at her with surprise.) I didn't tell you about that, did I?

CATHARINE. No.

EVE. Well, I got tired of confession, but I still liked organ music. So, why were you on retreat?

CATHARINE. (Moving towards the hibachi.) You know, I really could cook up here...

EVE. You dodging the question?

CATHARINE. No. I like eating simply.

EVE. It's no shame to go on retreat, is it?

CATHARINE. No, it's just... no, it isn't.

EVE. (Jokingly.) I mean, it's not like them kicking you out or something. (Pause.) Is it?

CATHARINE. They don't kick people out. That's not how they do it.

EVE. How do they do it?

CATHARINE. They ask them to go on retreat.

EVE. (Quietly.) I see.

CATHARINE. And if that doesn't work out, they ask you if you wouldn't be more comfortable in a secular mode.

EVE. Secular mode? That sounds like IBM. Oh, honey, I had no idea... (She goes to hug Catherine, who moves away.)

CATHARINE. No. I mean, I'm not unhappy. There's no need. Really.

EVE. But you always wanted to be a nun. When you were nine years old, you used to talk about it. Oh, honey. What happened? Why'd they...?

CATHARINE. It was just the logical outcome of... certain events, that's all.

EVE. What events?

CATHARINE. Things I said. (The bar door opens downstairs. For a moment we hear Johnny Cash singing, "I fell in to a burning ring of fire..." then silence again.)

EVE. What things did you say?


EVE. Political things?

CATHARINE. Oh, no. No.

EVE. Reform kinds of things?

CATHARINE. No, not reform. Dirty words.

EVE. Dirty words? (The bar door opens again. We hear, "I fell down, down, down and the flames they got higher..." before it closes again.)

CATHARINE. It's a very sort of unexpected but not entirely unheard-of syndrome I developed recently.

EVE. Dirty words, huh?

CATHARINE. I noticed it one day a few months ago. I was going to breakfast one morning—a morning like any other morning—and I passed one of the sisters in the hallway. She's a woman I saw every day, someone I'd never harbored an evil thought about. She smiled as she went by, looking serene, and I smiled back at her and said, "Isn't this a lovely morning, Sister Shit?" (Eve laughs despite herself, covers her mouth.) I don't know where it came from. It's one of my clearest memories, though: the look on her face, the way she recovered almost at once, and asked me to excuse her, but she hadn't quite heard... And even I wasn't sure at that moment, just what I'd said. I couldn't have said what I thought I'd... So anyway, I smiled pleasantly and apologetically,

*See special note on copyright page.
and took a deep breath, and said, "You heard me, Fart-face," and walked on.

EVE. You didn't.

CATHERINE. I did.

EVE. Well, I'll be damned. I always wanted to say that to a nun.

CATHERINE. I swear I didn't mean to. Sister Beatrice never hurt me in her life. She was one of the ones I liked best. And it's not even a matter of that. We're in the same holy order, we're children of God.

EVE. You never heard a kid sweat?

CATHERINE. Don't tease me.

EVE. I'm sorry. Why'd you do it?

CATHERINE. I had to. It just came out of me. Like speaking in tongues or something. The words just leaped out of me. They had to be spoken. That's what my psychologist said.

EVE. You saw a psychologist?

CATHERINE. Wouldn't you? I saw everybody. I saw lots of people in the Church: priests, nuns, bishops—everyone.

EVE. How'd that go?

CATHERINE. I cursed them out. All of them. Except God and my psychologist. Eve, I never meant to say any of those things. But I couldn't help it. I started swearing like a linebacker every time I saw the convent. And I'd say other things, too.

EVE. Like what?

CATHERINE. Irrational things. I'd recite the backs of Wheaties boxes. Not at breakfast—other times: during devotions, working in the garden. I didn't even know I read the backs of 

Wheaties boxes. It was just there, suddenly, word for word.

EVE. Why Wheaties?

CATHERINE. I don't know, it's what we ate. But other things, too. Things I'd heard on the radio, rules from games

I played as a kid, bird calls, sounds from comic books: Bam! Rat-a-tat-tat! Ka-boom! Usually during meditation.

EVE. What did the psychologist think?

CATHERINE. That I wasn't cut out to be a nun. He said I was unconsciously trying to break out of the constraints of convent life.

EVE. He sure you don't just like dirty words?

CATHERINE. It's not the obscenity. I got no bigger thrill saying fart-face than yelling "red light green light" or barking like a dog. It was the impropriety of it. That's all I wanted. To shock people. To shock myself.

EVE. Guess it worked, huh?

CATHERINE. I've been numb for months. I mean, there was—I had everything planned out. I was committed to a life of service in the Church, and suddenly it was . . . Sister Shit.

EVE. What did your folks say?

CATHERINE. Nothing helpful. I went home to explain—you know, maybe stay a week? I was there three days. They didn't believe I'd failed at 'my life's mission.' They spent the whole time whimpering like a pair of lost puppies. (Sighs.) Finally, Mom accused me of wanting to have children, and I left.

EVE. And you came down here?

CATHERINE. I didn't know where to go. Nobody up there would talk to me. And I didn't want to go see Aunt Margaret.

EVE. Well, I am glad you came to see me. What do you think you'll do now? In life, I mean.

CATHERINE. Live a normal life, I guess. I always thought I'd be special, a little more . . . something than the usual person. But I'm just the usual person.

EVE. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Hell, people, don't end up what they plan to be. Except awful people. I planned to be a brain-dead housewife by now; am I?

CATHERINE. Not quite.
EVE. Stick with me, Kid. You'll become one extraordinary usual person. Why were you reading this book? (i.e., Sexual Advice For Teens.)
CATHARINE. What? Oh... well... no reason.
EVE. Honey, I got a whole library down there, and this is the only book that deals with...
CATHARINE. I was concerned about... mating.
EVE. Mating?
CATHARINE. Yes. Um, mating. You know, men and women and...
EVE. I know what it is. Why are you concerned about that?
CATHARINE. Why shouldn't I be?
EVE. No reason. Just seems like we're getting out of the convent awful fast here. How soon you fixing to mate?
CATHARINE. Not soon. It's not the physical aspects I'm worried about—I know all that...
EVE. You do, huh?
CATHARINE. But being around men and... dating. It's just that I always assumed I'd be a nun. I didn't think about boys. Now, I'll naturally begin to encounter them more. And—well, I couldn't exactly bring it up with Mom.
EVE. Bring it up with me, then. What do you want to know?
CATHARINE. Oh... I can read the book.
EVE. Not as good as a live witness. You still a virgin?
CATHARINE. Eve!
EVE. Well, you're a nun—figured you might be.
CATHARINE. What I mean is, I can't answer that.
EVE. Why not? Am I asking in Spanish?
CATHARINE. It's just a very private thing.
EVE. Kind of hard to get a read on you, if I don't know what your experience is.
CATHARINE. Nil. It's nil. I don't know a thing. Ok? Just start anywhere.
EVE. Ok. Let's see: men. Men are... not like you and me.
CATHARINE. You can go faster than that.
EVE. Better not. Men have different goals, mostly. And
ROY. (Off.) Howdy, Catherine! Listen to this! (He opens the bar door. We hear Hall singing "And I-I-I love you, too." He closes the door.) How about that? Ready to dance now? I'm getting pretty determined down here.
EVE. You're getting pretty well-oiled, is what you're getting.
CATHARINE. Um... well, maybe later.
ROY. (Off.) What's wrong with right now? Come on down and take a twirl!
CATHARINE. Well...
ROY. Come on, baby!
EVE. Roy Manual, do you know who you are asking up here to "take a twirl"? A nun.
ROY. (Off.) What?
CATHARINE. Eve...
EVE. That's right! My niece is a nun. You are coming on to a bride of Christ.

*See special note on copyright page.

ROY. (Off.) I don't care if she's the Bride of Frankenstein, send her down!
EVE. Roy! I can't believe you said that.
ROY. (Off.) Well, you don't really expect me to believe that she's a... that she's a... (Pause.) She's a nun?
EVE. She damn sure is. Didn't Jim tell you? (To Catherine.) I suppose Jim wouldn't—he hates talking to Roy.
CATHARINE. Roy, I'm not a nun. I'm a novice.
ROY. (Off.) A what?
EVE. (To Catherine.) Quiet.
CATHARINE. (To Eve.) Well, you're not being accurate. I was never a nun.
EVE. Accuracy ain't the point. You want to dance with him?
CATHARINE. Well, I don't know.
ROY. (Off.) Hey! Are you a nun or not? What's the verdict?
EVE. She's a nun, Roy! She's a mother superior!

*See special note on copyright page.
ONE OF THOSE GOALS IS TO KEEP AS MUCH TO THEMSELVES AS POSSIBLE. THAT'S WHY THEY'RE ALWAYS TURNING UP IN OTHER PARTS OF TOWN WITH OTHER WOMEN, OR WORKING 75 HOURS A WEEK, OR IGNORING YOU TO WATCH TV TILL THEY CAN'T EVEN ANSWER THE SIMPLEST QUESTIONS.

CATHERINE. Or reading Latvian?

EVE. (Smiling.) And when they aren't sitting all day like a stone idol, they're heading over the hills to do whatever doesn't include you. This they call freedom, but what it really is, is them just being afraid to get to know us. Takes a man about fifteen hundred years to get to know a woman. In the meantime, all we're left with is the hills. It's like the Bible says: "The hills abideth; and the men just get lost."

CATHERINE. Well . . . what hope is there in that?

EVE. Not much. A little, though. Sometimes you find a man who's capable of improvement. Jim is. He's coming along slow, but he's coming. But I'll give you a tip: it's a good precaution to learn how to love the hills, 'cause you're going to see a lot more of them than you will of most men. That's what Houston's all about for me.

CATHERINE. I don't see many hills here.

EVE. We're standing on one. The NICE PEOPLE DANCING TO GOOD COUNTRY MUSIC BAR. (The bar door opens. We hear Tom T. Hall singing, "I Love."* Roy calls from below.)

ROY. (Off.) Hey! Hey, up there! Eva June! You around?!

EVE. (Going to the railing.) Dear God. What is it, Roy?

ROY. (Off.) Can't you leave us in . . . ?

EVE. (Off.) Let me talk to that niece of yours again!

ROY. (Off.) No, I'm not going to let you talk to . . .

EVE. (Off.) Please! I got to say something to her right now! (Pause.) You want me to come up there? I will!

EVE. Honey! It's better'n him coming up.

CATHERINE. (Moving to the rail.) Yes, Roy?

*See special note on copyright page.

CATHERINE. (Suddenly calling down.) No, I'm not! Uh—

I'm not a nun, Roy. I used to be a novice, but I'm not even that anymore. I'm nothing. (With an uncertain look at Eve.)

And I'd be proud to dance with you.

ROY. (Off.) You would? Great!

EVE. Are you crazy? What are you doing?

CATHERINE. I'm dancing with Roy Manual.

ROY. (Off.) You want to come down?

EVE. (To Catherine.) Why?!

CATHERINE. Well, why not? I've got to get started sometime.

EVE. But . . . dinner.

CATHERINE. Just one dance.

ROY. (Off.) Or would you rather I came up?

EVE. Down, Roy! You stay down! Honey, let me talk to you first . . .

CATHERINE. Oh, Eve. It's just a dance. What's it matter who it's with? Besides, you'd rather have me dancing with the landscape.

EVE. I never meant to say that.

ROY. (Off.) I'm coming up.

EVE. I'll break your nose, Roy! (To Catherine.) It's just that it takes time to learn men. They're tricky. It's not a natural relationship.

ROY. (Off.) I'm coming up! (The bar door opens and closes. We hear Tammy Wynette, singing, "Stand by your man.").* EVE. Roy! No—Roy! Damn. You don't know what you're in for, little lady. You're about to dance with the least interesting man on the Gulf Coast.

CATHERINE. He can't be that bad, can he? (Eve stares at Catherine) Really?

*See special note on copyright page.

EVE. (Going to the door.) I'll go see if I can head him off.

Save you from yourself.

CATHERINE. Well . . . don't lie.
EVE. Sure, honey. You just be a little more careful in the future.
Catherine. (As she turns to go.) Um, Eve? In case someone else asks me, another time . . .
Eve. Yeah?
Catherine. Well, could you do me a favor? Could you teach me to dance?
Eve. I’ll think about it. (She turns again to go, stops when she hears a male voice from inside.)
Voice. (Off.) Can I come out?
Catherine. Oh, well—I’m not really sure I want to dance . . . (Jason enters.)
Jason. Who asked you?
Eve. Jay Bob! What are you doing up here?
(He moves around the perimeter of the deck, nervously looking down to the street.)
Jason. No way. I’m on vacation. Besides, he’s a jerk.
Eve. I thought you were helping Jim. You all done?
Jason. Yeah, kind of. Jim and me had sort of a fight, and he said I was all done.
Eve. What were you fighting about this time?
Jason. (Looking over the railing.) Nothing. Don’t tell him I’m up here. I faked like I was running outside. I don’t think he’s following me.
Eve. What did you do?
Jason. Nothing. I said. He just likes to persecute me. (Picks up the book.) “Sexual Advice For Teens.” Who’s reading this?
Catherine. I am.
Jason. They made you read it in the nun place?
Catherine. I found it downstairs.
Eve. Will you please tell me what’s going on?
Jason. (Shrugs.) I don’t know; I don’t want to talk about it.
Eve. Fine. Then you deal with it, son. I’m going downstairs.
(Eve exits. Jason regards Catherine.)
Jason. Hey, you look ok in real clothes for once. How come you’re not wearing your nun stuff?
Catherine. I don’t want to talk about it. (A pause. They look out over the city. The bar door opens. We hear Johnny Cash singing, “Life ain’t easy for a boy named Sue,” and the door closes. Jason hurries over, looks down, returns.)
Jason. False alarm. (They look over the city.)
Catherine. Don’t you have something to do?
Jason. I think I’ll just hang out. (A pause.)
Catherine. It’s a nice view. You can see most of the city. Isn’t it nice?
Jason. It sucks. This whole town sucks. Four billion people all talking like Gomer Pyle.
Catherine. Well, it’s not Minnesota.
Jason. I’m going back tomorrow. About time.
Catherine. I suppose you’ll be glad to see your Dad again.
Jason. Anything’d be better than here. Jim is nuts.
Catherine. Oh, I don’t think he’s . . .
Jason. What do you know? You only been here a few hours. I been here all summer. He’s nuts. He makes me work in his crumby business. I’m on my vacation, and he makes me push beer cases around in the back room down there. He’s a creepoid jerk.
Catherine. Well, I wouldn’t say that . . .
Jason. ‘Course not; you’re a nun. Today he told me to move twenty cases of Schlitz from the front wall to the back wall, and restack ‘em. It’s the same twenty cases I moved from the back wall to the front wall yesterday. He can’t decide

*See special note on copyright page.
where they're “the most efficient.” Efficient, my roaring butt. I'm going home tomorrow—what the hell do I care where they are? (A beat.) Does swearing bother you?
Catherine. I've, uh . . . I've heard worse.
Jason. So, anyway, I'm doing all this work for him, and when I'm done he comes in and looks at it, and says he liked it better the other way. So I dumped three cases of Schlitz on his foot.
Catherine. You didn't.
Jason. I sure as hell did. He started screaming like crazy, and threw a bottle at my head. It missed by this much. He could've killed me, the stupid mother. Day before I go home.
Catherine. Maybe if you tried talking with him . . .
Jason. Advice for teens, huh? Actually, I didn't feel like waiting around to talk. There were three guys holding him down when I left. Besides, he's killed people. Did you know that?
Catherine. No.
Jason. He told me. Said he used to have a son by his first marriage, and the kid was always pissing him off, so he killed him.
Catherine. How?
Jason. With a Schlitz bottle.
Catherine. That's ridiculous.
Jason. How do you know? He said he did it.
Catherine. He was probably just trying to make you behave.
Jason. (Picking up the flower pot, taking it to the edge of the deck just above the bar door, and sits with it in his lap.) I behave. I'm a damn good kid. But he's pushed me too far this summer, that's all I can say. Working in the back room—how'm I supposed to meet any girls?
Catherine. (After a pause.) What are you doing?
Jason. I'm going to wait for him to come out and drop this on his head.

Catherine. Jason!
Jason. You know, that's the only thing Jim ever did I liked. Started calling me Jay Bob. Jay Bob is just as stupid a name as Jason, but at least you can claim your folks didn't know any better.
Catherine. Look, um, Jay Bob—why do something like this? You're going home tomorrow. You'll be with your Dad again.
Jason. So what? He's not much better than Jim. Always talking to me about Latvia. He talks in a foreign language like 80% of the time. Nah, it doesn't matter where I am. I'm caught in a war between the generations.
Catherine. How about your mother? Don't you care about her?
Jason. She sleeps with Jim. Before that she slept with Dad. I mean, it's a pattern, you know? I know what side she's on. Go back and read your book. Don't mind me—I'll be all right.
Catherine. I'm going down and tell Eve.
Jason. You do and I'll drop something on you.
Catherine. Jason, it's my duty to warn you that Roy Manual may be up here any minute.
Jason. Roy Manual? Why's he coming up?
Catherine. He wants to dance with me.
Jason. What do you want to dance with him for? He's the biggest dipstick in Houston.
Catherine. So I'm told.
Jason. Besides, you're a nun. You can't dance. There's a commandment about it or something.
Catherine. Well . . . I left the convent.
Jason. How come?
Catherine. It's a long story.
Jason. You're not a nun then, huh? You're just, like—
what—like nobody, right?
CATHARINE. Pretty much.
JASON. (Considers this, puts the flower pot aside, stands.)
You wanna dance?
CATHARINE. What?
JASON. Come on, if you wanna dance, dance with me. I'm
a lot better than Roy Manual.
CATHARINE. What happened to the war between the
generations?
JASON. It'll wait.
CATHARINE. Jay Bob.
JASON. Jay Bob. Come on—you're not a nun anymore.
Hey—that's good; that's like an oldie. (Dancing with her
momentarily, singing part of the chant from "I want to be
Bobby's girl.") "You're not a nun any-more . . ."
CATHARINE. (Breaking away.) I'm your cousin, is what I
am.
JASON. You're not that much older than me.
CATHARINE. Jay Bob. Listen to me. I—am—your—cousin.
JASON. So? There won't be all that getting-to-know-you
crap. Come on, I've been trying to meet girls all summer.
Everybody here talks like hicks. (Approaching her again.)
Come on, we'll do a close number. I'll sing. (Softly.) "You're
not a nun any-more . . ."
CATHARINE. (Breaking away.) No! I'm going to tell your
mother.
JASON. You a virgin?
CATHARINE. Jay Bob!
JASON. I am. I'm not ashamed to admit it. I've been saving
myself. I get a feeling you have, too. Is that true? If we want,
we could do something about it.
CATHARINE. You shut up! Right now! Shame on you! (She
slaps him hard.)
JASON. (Beginning to cry.) Why'd you hit me? Geez!

*See special note on copyright page.

CATHARINE. You are the most offensive teenager I've ever
known!
JASON. (Still in pain.) Geez!
CATHARINE. Well, don't cry . . .
JASON. I'm not crying! Damn grownup. Why's everybody
always trying to hit me?
CATHARINE. Well, you were being so . . . aggressive.
JASON. I'm supposed to be aggressive. They said to be
aggressive.
CATHARINE. Who? Who said?
JASON. The book I read.
CATHARINE. What book?
JASON. (Pointing.) That book! "Sexual Advice For Teens."
Dating chapter. You just haven't gotten there yet.
CATHARINE. They said to be aggressive?
JASON. Well, kind of aggressive. I don't know. I never
picked up a girl before. 'Course I'm not going to do it right
the first time. Geez!!
CATHARINE. I'm sorry . . .
JASON. I'll be glad to get back to Latvia! (He moves to the
door, and just as he gets there Roy Manual appears.)
ROY. Hey, there. It's me, Roy Manual.
JASON. (Taking one look at him, exiting into the house.)
Geez!
ROY. What's wrong with him?
CATHARINE. (Releasing pent-up anger.) That stupid little
kid! Eve was right—I've never met any children, that's why
I like them. I'm going back to the convent, that's all there is
to it. I'll beg them to take me back. I'm not ready for the
world again.
ROY. (Cheerfully.) Yeah, it's a bitch, ain't it? (She glowers
at him.) Eve told me about your situation. Must take a lot of
courage to leave your order like that.
CATHARINE. I didn't have much choice.
ROY. Still, to get back out in the world, take a look around,
try and get used to things again—must take a bunch of guts.
CATHERINE. A bunch of guts?
ROY. Well, you know what I mean. I don't always express it. Did you notice me sitting down there in the bar when you came in this morning? I noticed you. Right away. Been down there ever since, hoping I'd see you again.
CATHERINE. In the bar?
ROY. (Embarrassed laugh.) Yeah. I ain't been drinking, though. I been thinking. Thinking there's not many times in a man's life when his whole future suddenly walks by, lighting up the room around her as she goes. That room's still glowing, you should see it.
CATHERINE. (Looking at him.) What do you do for a living?
ROY. Nothing. I mean, I'm between work. I'm normally in the trenches, though. (Laughs.) That makes me sound like General Patton, don't it? What I mean is, utility trenches. Gas, sewer, water, underground cable—like that. I dig 'em all. But right now I'm not digging, 'cause a little while back I got buried.
CATHERINE. Buried?
ROY. Yeah. Bunch of sand, gravel—happens all the time. I was buried maybe, oh, forty-five minutes? Couldn't get any oxygen for awhile. When they got me out my brain quit working for about three weeks. (A pause. She regards him. He smiles.) It's working again now, though. Honest. Better'n before, in fact. I go back on the job next week. (Slight pause.) It's a good brain. I'm going to college with it. Community college. Do you like me so far? I always tell too much about myself at the start, don't you think?
CATHERINE. Roy, I'm not sure I feel like dancing tonight . . .
ROY. Well, that's ok. That was just a suggestion. Dancing's just an ice-breaker anyway. Just a way to talk, and . . . stand next to each other, and . . . smell each other's perfume, and—well, I mean your perfume, of course, and my . . .

Well, each other's scent is what I'm trying to say. Scent.
CATHERINE. (Sitting on the chair.) Maybe we could just talk.
ROY. Sure, fine. Just talk, great. No problem there. (He sits next to her. A silence. He pulls out a package.) Beer nuts?
CATHERINE. (Shaking her head.) I wonder where Eve went.
ROY. Eva June? I think there was some ruckus with Jim or something. She went to talk to him. They're a fine couple, ain't they? That Jim is lucky. Always was. Inherited a great place like this bar. Jim Stool's Bar—that's what they used to call it. (Laughs.) Used to have a slogan, too: "Other towns got barstools, but only we got Stool's Bar." (Catherine buries her face in her hands.) Something wrong? You don't like the joke, huh? Well, the place has a new name now, anyway. (A pause.) So, uh . . . suppose it's been hard, having a spiritual failure the way you did.
CATHERINE. (Angrily.) It was not a failure, it was a . . . (Pauses, sighs.) It was a failure. That's exactly what it was. I'm not ready for the world.
ROY. (Smiling.) Who is? I know my Daddy always used to say . . .
CATHERINE. (Rises.) When I was a little girl, I was offended by human beings. You know that? Literally offended. I was . . . nauseated by the way they watched tv all the time and got married in Las Vegas and built ugly buildings and had mass murders and beat each other up in the park and never even thought about going to church—never sat quietly once and wondered who made their hands, for example, or . . . or anything. You know?
ROY. Kinda. But people get too busy sometimes . . .

CATHERINE. People do not get too busy. They want to get married in Las Vegas, they really do. They want to watch tv—they don't want to watch their hands. Well, I knew that as a kid, and I don't know why but it infuriated me and I had
to be away from it. I had to be a nun. For all the worst reasons. I wasn't attracted to God, I was repelled by the world He made. In a convent there's hardly any world at all, I thought; just a few walls, a few faces. But there was just as much stupidity there—that's what I found out. In those few walls and those few faces there was room for a universe of stupidity. And stupidity is like love, you know?
ROY. I . . . think I do.
CATHARINE. I mean, even the smallest amount of it suggests the whole world. To witness even one act of cruelty or anger or laziness is like . . . like being loved, if only once, by one person, for only a minute. You see? Both things transfigure experience. So that if it's love, let's say, then everything—people, animals, God Himself—everything becomes love, because love, pure love, in that one act, is suddenly seen as possible. Well, the same is true for stupidity. A stupid act will . . . destroy the world someday.
ROY. Not now; they got computers.
CATHARINE. (With a look at him.) Because stupidity does exist. Everywhere.
ROY. You're well-educated.
CATHARINE. (Flatly.) There are some excellent parochial schools.
ROY. You know, I think about religion now and then. (Pause.)
CATHARINE. What do you think?
ROY. I think God works in mysterious ways.
CATHARINE. (Violently.) Of course He does, as far as you can see! You're stupid! I know exactly how God works. He's created this incomparably lovely, incomparably stupid world for us to live in, and now He sits back and watches us break our hearts over it. I can't imagine how anyone can make love at night and then read the papers the next morning.
ROY. I do that all the time.
CATHARINE. How? How can you reconcile the two?
ROY. Making love and reading the paper? (She nods. He pauses, shrugs.) I only do the crossword puzzle.
CATHARINE. The murders! Wars! Starvations! What about those?
ROY. They're in another section. I read them later.
CATHARINE. But you read them. And I'll have to, too. You see? I have to remarry the whole world now. (Points at the city.) God's world, not the convent, but the world He made, with all the cruelty and despair and deformity and . . .
ROY. (Standing.) Are you a virgin?
CATHARINE. Why does everybody want to know if I'm a virgin?!
ROY. You are, ain't you? I could tell. You talk like one.
CATHARINE. Screw you.
ROY. (Ignoring her.) And I can see how someone with a virgin nun background the way you got might be taken aback by the world—especially Houston. I mean, it's a pretty wide-open place, isn't it? With some pretty wide-open ways. Hell, I don't know if God made Houston or not. Either way it's a pretty rough and ready town. Got a lot of rough and ready people. (He is standing right in front of her.)
CATHARINE. Why are you standing there?
ROY. I want to smell your perfume.
CATHARINE. I'm not wearing . . . (He kisses her.) I'm not wearing perfume. (Roy smiles broadly, lets her go.)
ROY. I'm not complaining. (A pause. He smiles again. She turns away. He looks out over the city with pride.) You know, I don't care if Houston is stupid. It's growing like a damn fungus. We can't dig the trenches fast enough. All which ways, too. The city don't know what it's doing anymore—the whole thing's too big for knowing. Guess that's about as stupid as you can get. But we go ahead and dig the trenches, and lay the cables, and fill 'em back in. We figure it's all going to look like something someday. Hell, I
don't even mind if you think I'm stupid, as long as you liked kissing me. You want to go out tomorrow night?
Catherine. Roy...
Roy. I ain't asking you to remarry the world, just date it a little bit. Come on, what do you say? Tomorrow night?
Catherine. Riboflavin.
Roy. What?
Catherine. What did I say?
Roy. You said riboflavin.
Catherine. I did? Oh, I'm sorry. I meant 100% of minimum daily requirement... No—that's not it, is it? I meant smelly butt.
Roy. What?
Catherine. Smelly butt?
Roy. What the hell are you...?
Catherine. What did I just say?
Roy. I don't want to say what you just said.
Catherine. Oh no, I'm doing it again.
Roy. What?
Catherine. I'm saying odd things. Arent I?
Roy. You sure are.
Catherine. Well, don't take offense. I mean, it's not you or your tiny penis.
Roy. My what?
Catherine. (Distressed.) I'm doing it again! Why am I doing it again?
Roy. What are you doing?
Catherine. (Ignoring him.) I'm not in the convent! I released the pressure.
Roy. Look, if you don't want to go out, just say so. You don't have to... (She barks like a dog.) What in hell?
Catherine. It's nothing. It'll stop. (She barks again.
Roy. Hey, forget I asked you. Don't know where I'd take you anyway.
Catherine. (Very upset.) Why am I doing this?! Because I'm in the world? I can't leave the world. (Turning to Roy, speaking deliberately.) Don't worry. I'm under control. My doctor told me to stay calm, and breathe slowly and... not talk. (She sits glumly.)
Roy. What does not talking do?
Catherine. It keeps me from calling you a... (She slaps her hand over her mouth.)
Roy. I see. You want me to go get Eva June?
Catherine. (Slowly removing her hand.) No, no. I'll be all right. Just let me rest.
Roy. Ok.
Catherine. I'll be fine.
Roy. Good.
Catherine. I just need to get used to the world a little more. Too much all at once, I think.
Roy. Would you like a glass of water? (Jason hurriedly reenters. He is clearly frightened, striving to hide it.)
Jason. 'Lo again. (He hurries to the rail above the bar door, looks down.)
Roy. Hey, Jay Bob. Anything wrong?
Jason. No, Jim's kinda mad again, but... Say Roy, could you help me with this? (Jason starts to lift the flower pot.)
Roy. What do you want with a dead plant?
Catherine. Dead plant?
Jason. Just want to lift it up to the rail here. Come on.
Catherine. Jason...
Jason. Come on, Roy.
Roy. Well, I don't know...
Catherine. Jason, put that down.
Jason. Come on, Roy! (The bar door opens. We hear Gogi Grant singing "The Wayward Wind" for a moment.)
Jason. Roy!
Voice. (Off.) Jay Bob! Come down here!
Roy. (Looking over the rail.) Oh—hey, Jim!

*See special note on copyright page.
JIM. (Off.) Jay Bob! You hear me?! (Pause.)
JASON. What do you want?
JIM. (Off, booming.) Come down here! (A pause.)
JASON. No.
JIM. (Off.) That does it. I'm going to kill him. (We hear
male voices attempting to dissuade Jim.) No, dammit—he's
not getting away with it. Jay Bob—stay right where you are.
I'm coming to kill you. (Sound of male voices again. The bar
doors opens and closes. Same song. Jason runs to the door,
stops.)
ROY. He don't mean it, Jay Bob.
JASON. How do you know? (Moving around the perimeter.)
I can't jump; it's too high.
CATHERINE. What's he mad about now?
JASON. Nothing much. I called him kind of a bad name.
CATHERINE. What?
JASON. If I told you, your whole head would probably turn
blue, ok? Anyway, he took it wrong. So come on, get me out
of here.
CATHERINE. How?
JASON. I'm going up on the roof.
ROY. Need a boost?
JASON. Yeah. (Just as they begin this, Eve enters.)
EVE. Where are you going?
JASON. For a walk.
ROY. Hey there, Eva June.
EVE. Shut up, Roy. Get down here. Come on, get down.
(Jason pauses, does so.) This has gone just about far enough.
Where's Jim?
ROY. He's on his way up. He was just down there, and
he . . .
EVE. Shut up, Roy. (To Jason.) We'll just calmly wait for
him to join us, then. (To Catherine.) You should've heard
what this boy said to Jim. (To Jason.) Language has plenty of
conventional weapons. I don't know why you always got to
go nuclear with it. (To Catherine.) Honey, even you would've
been shocked. Things'll be all right, though. I'll calm Jim
down. I always do.
ROY. She always does. (Jim enters. Menacing at his nicest,
he is at the moment not very nice. A dark cloud of imminence
catastrophe.) Hey, Jim. How's it going?
JIM. (Deadly serious, to Jason.) Take it back.
JASON. What?
JIM. You know what.
EVE. Now Jim, you know I don't like coming between you
two, but it seems to me we can talk this over . . .
JIM. You been mouthing me all summer, boy! Now, you
got just three seconds to say you're sorry.
JASON. Or what?
JIM. Or you'll die.
ROY. (With a forced laugh.) Hey, Jim . . . (Jim glares at
Roy, who shuts up.)
JASON. You won't kill me. They'd electrocute you.
JIM. It'd be a pleasure, knowing I got you first.
EVE. This is ridiculous. Jay Bob, apologize. That's all he
wants.
CATHERINE. Apologize.
JASON. (Pausing.) No. I'm on vacation, I don't have to.
JIM. (Going for him.) Good enough.
EVE. (Interposing herself.) Don't be stupid, Jay Bob.
JASON. (To Jim with bravado.) You don't dare kill me!
EVE. That's right, it doesn't make sense. Say you're sorry, Jay
Bob.
JASON. Hell I will. I meant every word—you're a low-
bellied, puke-faced . . . (Jim lifts Jason high in the air.)
JIM. Time's up. (He takes Jason over to the railing above the
bar door.)
ROY. Hey, Jim . . .
CATHERINE. Jim!
JASON. You're bluffing!
EVE. Set him down, Jim!
JIM. (To the others.) Get back! (They do so. Jim stares at Jason.) Well?
JASON. You're not a real cowboy. (Jim throws Jason over the railing.) Ji-i-i-i-m-m-m-m-m!!!!!
EVE. Jason!
CATHERINE. God!
ROY. Hey now! (They rush to the railing, where Jim has remained. Jim begins a slow, mountainous laughter, as we hear male voices from below booting with derision.)
VOICE. (Off.) Hey, boys—look who dropped in. It's Jay Bob! ANOTHER VOICE. (Off.) Howdy, Jay Bob. What's the matter? Thought you were gonna die? (Wild laughter from below. Comments such as "Thought he was gonna die!", "Did you have a good flight?" etc.)
ROY. A blanket. They caught him in a blanket!
JIM. 'Course they did. You didn't think I was going to kill him, did you?
ROY. Well . . . I wasn't sure . . .
JIM. Hell, he's all right. Hey, Jason—how you doing?
JASON. (Off.) You crazy son of a bitch! I'm gonna kill you!
JIM. See? He's fine. Think I'll go down and buy him a drink, now that we understand each other better.
CATHERINE. (Slowly recovering from her shock, to Jim as he goes.) You're going to buy him a drink? You just threw him off the . . . and now you're going to buy him a drink?
JIM. Why not? He can hold it. Come on, Roy—I'll even treat you. (Jim and Roy exit.)
CATHERINE. (To Eve, who is still looking over the railing, her back to the audience.) Are you going to let him do that? Eve, why don't you say something?
EVE. (Turning.) 'Cause I can't stop laughing, that's why.
(Indeed, she is laughing.)
CATHERINE. Eve!
EVE. Oh, you should see him down there now. I never saw anybody that mad in my life. His face is so red—I wouldn't be surprised if his head explodes.
CATHERINE. I can't believe this!
EVE. What?
CATHERINE. How can you talk that way? That man just threw your son off a balcony.
EVE. So what? He didn't mean to hurt him.
CATHERINE. Jay Bob didn't know that!
EVE. (Laughing despite herself.) Well, he knows it now.
CATHERINE. Eve!
EVE. Look, honey. I know how far Jim'll go, and how far he won't go. I admit he had me worried there for a second, but when I looked down and saw Jay Bob bouncing in that blanket—well, it was just funny, you know?
CATHERINE. No. I don't know.
EVE. (Smiling.) Don't be a drip. You've never had kids, that's all. My God, I can't tell you how good it felt to see somebody sending that boy over a balcony. About time. I've done it myself, 'cept he's been too big ever since he was ten. Hey, come on. Let's go to dinner.
CATHERINE. Dinner?
EVE. Yeah. Aren't you hungry?
CATHERINE. (Sitting.) I know what my problem with the world is. I know what it is.
EVE. You do? What is it?
CATHERINE. I'm trying to understand the world. That's my problem.
EVE. Honey, you're just not used to the frontier sense of humor.
CATHERINE. I'm going to forget about trying to understand anything. I'm going to sit here and stare at Houston.
EVE. (Looking out over the city.) It gets prettier as the lights come on.
CATHERINE. I mean, why should the world explain itself to me?
EVE. Hell, the world never explains itself. You just gotta make something up. That's what I did. I made up a whole
new way of life. Even built a sign to celebrate the fact: Nice People Dancing To Good Country Music. Hell, you're not doing so bad. You managed to pick out your single favorite person in the whole family, right in the middle of all your trouble. Why not stick with that awhile? You can use Jay Bob's room after tonight. Stay all winter if you want.

CATHERINE. Roy Manual wants to take me out tomorrow. If I don't bark.

EVE. Well go, if you want to. Roy's no fun, but he's no harm either. And you're just starting.

CATHERINE. I think he wants to go dancing. Does it matter if I can't dance?

EVE. With Roy? Nah. Come on — let's get something to eat. (Catherine smiles, rises. They move towards the door.) Houston's got a lot of great restaurants. I know a place where the food just fights to get into your mouth.

CATHERINE. Sounds great.

EVE. Yes it is. And we can work more on our men lessons, too. I swear, it's a lifetime study. (They exit as the bar door opens below. We hear Hank Williams singing, "The silence of a falling star/Lights up the purple sky..." and so on from, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry."* Slow fade until all we can see is the dimly glowing neon sign. Then it too fades to black.)

The End

*See special note on copyright page.