BAD SEED
ONE ACT VERSION
BY MAXWELL ANDERSON
THE DRAMATIZATION OF WILLIAM MARCH’S NOVEL THE BAD SEED

AHS ONE ACT 2013–2014
NEWS REPORTER: Good afternoon, we begin this broadcast with the news that one of the children on the annual outing of the Fern Elementary School was accidentally drowned in the bay this afternoon. (Christina has heard this in kitchen and comes running out, followed by Monica.) The name of the victim is being withheld until the parents are notified. More news of the tragic affair is expected.

MONICA: It was not Rhoda. Rhoda is too self-reliant a child. It certainly wasn’t Rhoda.

NEWS REPORTER: The name of the victim of the drowning at the Fern School picnic is Claude Daigle, the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Daigle. He appears to have fallen into the water from an abandoned wharf. It is a mystery how the little boy got on the wharf, but his body was found off the end of the landing, wedged among the pilings. There were bruises on the forehead and hands, but it is assumed these were caused by the body washing against the pilings. And now back to national news. (Emory rises and turns television off).

CHRISTINE: That poor child—poor little boy!

MONICA: They’ll send the children home immediately. They must be on their way now.

EMORY: This will be the end of the picnic.

CHRISTINE: Monica, I don’t what to say to her!

EMORY: Children get these shocks all the time. Life’s a grim business.

Rhoda comes in the front door humming “Au Claire de la Lune”

CHRISTINE: Darling!

MONICA: (To Rhoda) You sound like Fred Astaire, tap-tapping across the room. What have you got on your shoes?

RHODA: I run over my heels, and Mother had these iron pieces put on so they’d last longer.

CHRISTINE: I’m afraid I can’t take any credit. It was Rhoda’s idea entirely.

MONICA: Oh, you penurious little sweetheart! But I’ll tell you one thing, Rhoda, I think you worry too much when you’re not the best at everything. (She takes out present from her purse.)

RHODA: A present!
MONICA: The first is from Emory. It’s a pair of dark glasses to keep the sun out of those pretty eyes. I’ll try them on you. Now who is this glamorous Hollywood actress? And now for the second present. (She holds up a little gold heart with a chain attached.) This was given to me when I was eight years old, it has a garnet set in it, and we’ll have to change that for a turquoise since turquoise is your birthstone.

RHODA: Could I have both stones? The garnet too?

CHRISTINE: Rhoda! Rhoda! What a—

MONICA: (Laughing turns to Christine.) But of course, she may! (Rhoda goes to her, puts her arms around her waist and hugs her)

RHODA: (Looking at locket.) Am I to keep this now?

MONICA: You’re to keep it till I find out where I can get the stone changed.

Rhoda: Then I’ll put it in my box. (She goes to her table, opens the drawer and a box which once held chocolates and places the locket carefully inside. A voice says “Leroy” as the front door. The house-man, or janitor, comes in carrying a pail, sponge and equipment for washing windows.)

LEROY: Guess I’m pretty early, Ms. Penmark, but it’s my day for doing the windows on this side.

CHRISTINE: Oh, yes, you can begin in the bedroom, Leroy. (He crosses and rather than going around Monica comes behind her.)

LEROY: ‘Scuse me, just getting’ some water. (He goes toward the kitchen).

RHODA: I like garnets, but I like turquoise better.

MONICA: Monica and I thought you should have some presents today. You wanted that school medal very much, didn’t you?

RHODA: It’s the only gold medal Miss Fern gives. And it was really mine. It was mine! The medal was mine!

CHRISTINE: Rhoda forget it.

RHODA: I won’t. I won’t. I won’t. (Leroy comes out of the kitchen with the pail, passes near Rhoda, spills water on her shoes)

MONICA: Leroy! Have you completely lost your senses? You spilled water on Rhoda’s shoes!
LEROY: I’m sorry, ma’am. I guess I was just trying to hurry.

CHRISTINE: He didn’t mean it, Monica. It was an accident. I’m sure it was.

RHODA: He meant to do it.

CHRISTINE: Rhoda!

LEROY: Oh, I never, I never, I’m just clumsy. (He takes sponge and wipes Rhoda’s shoes.)

CHRISTINE: Oh, Leroy, please, please!

MONICA: Go about your work.

LEROY: Yes, ma’am. (Leroy leaves.)

MONICA: He has the mind of an eight-year-old, but he has managed to produce a family so I keep him on.

RHODA: Mother, you know we didn’t really have our lunch because Claude Daigle was drowned.

CHRISTINE: I know. It was on the television.

EMORY: We’d better go.

MONICA: I’ll be upstairs in case you need me.

CHRISTINE: Thank you, Monica. Thank you both. (Monica and Emory go out front door.)

RHODA: Claude was drowned, so then they were all rushing and calling and hurrying to see if they could make him alive again, but they couldn’t, so then they said the picnic was over and we had to go home.

CHRISTINE: Did you see him, dear?

RHODA: Yes, of course. Then they put a blanket over him.

CHRISTINE: Did you see him taken from the water?

RHODA: Yes, they laid him out on the lawn and worked and worked. But it didn’t help.

CHRISTINE: I want you to get those pictures right out of your mind. I don’t want you to be frightened or bothered at all. It was an unfortunate thing to see and remember. I understand how you feel, my darling.

RHODA: I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t feel any way at all. Could I have a peanut-butter sandwich?
(Christine is puzzled. She crosses to L. of chair. Rhoda, seeing she has displeased her mother, rises and throws her arms around her waist.)

CHRISTINE: Have you been naughty?

RHODA: Why, no, Mother. What will you give me if I give you a basket of kisses?

CHRISTINE: (Feeling a rush of affection, sits in chair and hugs Rhoda.) I’ll give you a basket of hugs!

Blackout for scene change.
SCENE TWO – MISS FERN & THE DAIGLES COME TO VISIT.

A few days later, in the same apartment. The doorbell chimes. On the second chime, Christine comes out of the kitchen and opens front door.

MISS FERN: May I come in, Ms. Penmark?

CHRISTINE: Come in Miss Fern. I meant to come and see you. I got your note.

MISS FERN: We’ve suffered such a blow, losing one of the children that way, I’m sure you’ll excuse us for going over and over things!

CHRISTINE: I think everybody has been puzzled and worried and saddened.

MISS FERN: I don’t think I’ve ever known any happening to puzzle so many people in so many ways. And I can help so few of them. I’ve just come from seeing Mrs. Daigle. I have seen her several times, and each time she has asked me to find out from you if you had any possible clue to where the penmanship medal might be.

CHRISTINE: Was it lost?

MISS FERN: Yes, it wasn’t found with the body and has completely disappeared.

CHRISTINE: I didn’t know of this.

MISS FERN: It did occur to me that that Rhoda might have told you a detail or two, which she hadn’t remembered when she talked with me. You see, she was the last to see the little Daigle boy alive—

CHRISTINE: Are you sure of that?

MISS FERN: Yes. About an hour after we arrived one of the older students came on Rhoda and the Daigle boy at the far end of the grounds. The boy was upset and crying, and Rhoda was standing in front of him, blocking his path. The older girl saw Rhoda shove the boy and snatch at his medal, but Claude broke away and ran down the beach in the direction of the old wharf. Rhoda followed him. At one o’clock the lunch bell rang and Claude was missing. You know the rest, I think.

CHRISTINE: But you’re not saying that Rhoda had anything to do with the Daigle boy’s death.

MISS FERN: Of course not! I think that few of us are courageous when tested, and that like many a frightened
soldier, she deserted under fire. Smooth the lines from your brow, my dear. You're so much prettier when smiling.

(At this moment the doorbell chimes.)

CHRISTINE: I had better answer that. (Christine goes to the front door, Mr. and Mrs. Daigle come in, he tentatively, she boldly. She has been drinking.)

MRS. DAIGLE: We're Mrs. Daigle and Mr. Daigle. You didn't have to let us in, you know. (To Miss Fern as she crosses) You realize we followed you. We shouldn't have done it. I'm a little drunk (To Christine.) I guess you never get a little drunk.

CHRISTINE: You're quite welcome, both of you.

MRS. DAIGLE: May I call you Christine? I always considered Christine such a gentle name. Hortense sounds flat—that's me, Hortense. You're so attractive, Christine. You have such exquisite taste in clothes, but of course you have amples of money to buy 'em with.

MR. DAIGLE: Please, Hortense.

MRS. DAIGLE: What I came to see you about, I asked Miss Fern how did Claude happen to lose the medal, and she wouldn't tell me a thing.

MISS FERN: I don't know, Mrs. Daigle. Truly.

MRS. DAIGLE: You know more than you're telling. You don't want the school to get a bad name. But you know more than you're telling Miss Butter—Wouldn't—Melt Fern. There's something funny about the whole thing. We won't have any more children. No more.

MR. DAIGLE: Please, Hortense. Let me take you home where you can rest.

MRS. DAIGLE: Rest. Sleep. I lie and look at the water where he went down. There's something funny about the whole thing, Christine. I heard that your little girl was the last one who saw him alive. Will you ask her about the last few minutes and tell me what she says? Maybe she remembers some little thing. I don't care how small it is! No matter how small! Oh, my poor little Claude! What did they do to you?

CHRISTINE: I will ask Rhoda, Hortense.

MRS. DAIGLE: (Grabs Christine's arm) Somebody took the medal off his shirt, Christine. It couldn't come off by accident. (Fingering Christine's dress.) I pinned it on
myself, and it had a clasp that locks in place. It was no accident. He was such a lovely, dear little boy. (Christine puts her arms around Mrs. Daigle.) Why do you put your arms around me? You don’t give a damn about me. You’re a superior person and all that.

MR. DAIGLE: Hortense—Hortense!

MRS. DAIGLE: Oh, God forgive me! (Looks at her hands.) There were those bruises on his hands, and that peculiar crescent-shaped mark on his forehead. He must have bled before he died. That’s what the doctor said. (To Christine.) And where’s the medal? (To Miss Fern) Who took the medal? I have a right to know what became of the medal! If I knew, I’d have a good idea what happened to him. (To Christine) I’m as good as you are. And Claude was better than your girl. He won the medal, and she didn’t—I’m drunk. It’s a pleasure to stay drunk when your little boy’s been killed. Maybe I’d better lay down.

MR. DAIGLE: We’ll go home, and you can lie down there.

MRS. DAIGLE: Why not? Why not go home, and lay down?

MR. DAIGLE: I’m sorry.

MRS. DAIGLE: (Giving him a little push.) Oh, who cares what they think? (The Daigles go out the front door. Christine close the door and crosses to Miss Fern.)

CHRISTINE: Oh, the poor woman!

MISS FERN: I’ve tried to think of any little thing I could tell her. But nothing helps. Good-bye Ms. Penmark. (offering her hand.)

CHRISTINE: Goodbye Miss Fern. (Christine starts to her hand—suddenly embraces Miss Fern).

Monica enters as Miss Fern is leaving, they exchange greetings.
SCENE 3- CHRISTINE FINDS THE MEDAL

MONICA: I’ve found a place where they’ll change the stone in Rhoda’s locket and clean it in one day. They didn’t agree to this without a little pressure...

CHRISTINE: (Crossing to Rhoda’s table) I’ll get the locket. I know where she keeps it.

MONICA: Good. I had to use pressure, influence, bribery, and blackmail on old Mr. Pageson. He said this little job would take at least two weeks. I told him straight that I’m handling the Community chest again this year, and if he were as busy as all that, I’d be happy to revise my estimate of his contribution. (Christine has opened Rhoda’s table drawer and found the locket in the box. She turns toward Monica, then looks back to drawer and lifts the edge of the drawer’s felt lining, and sees Claude’s medal. She quickly closes the box and drawer and crosses to Monica with the locket.) Ah you found it! And now I’ll take to the air dear Christine.

CHRISTINE: Goodbye, Monica. (Monica goes out front door. Christine returns to the table, opens the drawer and takes out the medal. She looks at it with a kind of horror mixed with incredulity.

(Rhoda comes in quietly)

RHODA: Did you want me to come in Mother?

CHRISTINE: (She slaps the medal down on the coffee table.) So you had the medal, after all. Claude Daigle’s medal.

RHODA: Where did you find it?

CHRISTINE: How did the medal happen to be hidden in the drawer of your table, Rhoda? Now I want you to tell me the truth.

RHODA: (Innocently). I don’t know how the medal got there, Mother. How could I?

CHRISTINE: (Controlling herself.) You know. You know very well how it got there. Did you go on the wharf at any time during the picnic? At any time?

RHODA: (After a pause.) Yes, Mother. I went there once.

CHRISTINE: Was it before or after you were bothering Claude?
RHODA: I wasn’t bothering Claude, Mother. I told him—if I didn’t win the medal, I was glad he did.

CHRISTINE: One of the older students saw you try to snatch the medal off Claude’s shirt.

RHODA: (Crosses to cupboard and puts her shoes on shelf and takes out her slippers) Oh that big girl was Mary Beth Musgrove. She told everybody she saw me. You see, Claude and I were just playing a game we made up. He said if I could catch him and touch the medal with my hand he’d let me wear the medal for an hour. How can Mary Beth say I took the medal? I didn’t.

CHRISTINE: She didn’t say you took the medal. She said you grabbed it. And that Claude ran away down the beach. Did you have the medal even then?

RHODA: No, Mommy. Not then. (She turns to her mother and kisses her ardently. This time Christine is the passive one.)

CHRISTINE: Rhoda, how did you get the medal?

RHODA: Oh, I got it later on.

CHRISTINE: How?

RHODA: Claude went back on his promise and I followed him to the wharf. He said I could wear the medal all day if I gave him fifty cents. (She plays with pony).

CHRISTINE: Rhoda, stop that! Why didn’t you tell this to Miss Fern when she questioned you?

RHODA: Oh, Mommy, Mommy! Miss Fern doesn’t like me at all. I was afraid she’d think bad things about me if I told her I had the medal.

CHRISTINE: Rhoda, you knew how much Mrs. Daigle wanted the medal, didn’t you?

RHODA: Yes, Mother, I guess I did. But it was silly to want to bury the medal pinned on Claude’s coat. Claude was dead. He wouldn’t know whether he had the medal pinned on him or not. (She senses her mother’s sudden feeling of revulsion, and hugs her mother.) I’ve got the sweetest mother. I tell everybody I’ve got the sweetest mother in the world!—If she wants a little boy that bad, why doesn’t she adopt another one?

CHRISTINE: Rhoda! Get away from me! Don’t talk to me. We have nothing to say to each other.
RHODA: Okay. Okay, Mother. *(She turns away and starts to
den)*

CHRISTINE: Rhoda, did you have anything to do, anything at all, no matter how little it was, with Claude getting drowned? Look me in the eyes and tell me. I must know.

RHODA: No, Mother. I didn’t.

CHRISTINE: No. It can’t be true. *(She takes Rhoda in her arms)* It can’t be true.

*Blackout for scene change.*
SCENE 4 – LEROY SEES THRU RHODA

Rhoda is seated putting a puzzle together. As the curtain rises Monica enters carrying a cardboard box.

MONICA: Anybody here?
RHODA: Hello, Aunt Monica.
MONICA: Hi, Honey.
RHODA: (Hollering) Mother!

Christine enters from Kitchen.

MONICA: Oh, Christine! You said I might have Rhoda for a while. And here’s a package for you.

CHRISTINE: Oh—it’s for Rhoda, from granddaddy--
RHODA: For me?
CHRISTINE: Rhoda, it should be opened in the kitchen.
RHODA: Okay.

MONICA: I wish she were mine! Can she stay up and have dinner with Emory and me?

CHRISTINE: Yes, she could. I’ve asked Regina Tasker over for drinks and to talk to me about some writing I want to try.

MONICA: I shall run up and look at the simmering meat sauce. Send Rhoda up any time. It must be nearly ready.

Rhoda comes from the kitchen. Christine opens the envelope she has taken from the package, and reads the message with pleasure.

CHRISTINE: Well! He’s coming here.
RHODA: Grandfather?
CHRISTINE: Yes. He’ll be here tonight.

LEROY: Leroy. (Leroy enters with a garbage pail).

CHRISTINE: Oh, Leroy, don’t bother to sweep the kitchen, I’ll do it.

(Leroy heads to kitchen.)

CHRISTINE: I’ll run up and ask Monica if Grandfather can sleep in her extra room. Be right back. (She goes out front door. Leroy emerges from kitchen. He pauses at the door- looks around to see if they are alone.)

LEROY: There she sits at her little table, doing her puzzle and looking cute and innocent. Looking like she wouldn’t melt
butter, she’s that cool. She can fool some people with that innocent look she can put on and put off when she wants to, but not me. Not even part way, she can’t fool me. *(He drops the broom—just missing her foot. She kicks at it, then turns back to the puzzle.)* She don’t want to talk to nobody smart. She likes to talk to people she can fool, like her mama and Mrs. Breedlove and Mr. Emory.

RHODA: Go empty the garbage. I know you made a bed in the garage behind the old couch, and you sleep where nobody can see you.

LEROY: I got your number, miss. I been hearing things about you that ain’t nice. I been hearing you beat up that poor little Claude in the woods. I heard you run him off the wharf. *(Jabs at her foot with the broom)* He was so scared. *(Jabs at her again.)*

RHODA: *(Kicks at the broom.)* If you tell lies like that you won’t go to heaven when you die.

LEROY: I know what you done to that boy when you got him out on the wharf.

RHODA: What did I do, if you know so much?

LEROY: You picked up a stick and hit him with it. You hit him because he wouldn’t give you that medal like you told him to. I thought I’d seen some mean little girls in my time, but you’re the meanest. You want to know how I know how mean you are? Because I’m mean. I’m smart and I’m mean. And you’re smart and you’re mean. And I never get caught and you never get caught.

RHODA: Nobody believes anything you say.

LEROY: You want to know what you did after you hit that boy? You jerked the medal off his shirt. Then you rolled that sweet little boy off the wharf, among them pilings.

RHODA: You don’t know anything. None of what you said is true.

LEROY: You took that bloody stick and washed it off good, and then you threw it in the woods where nobody could see it.

RHODA: I think you’re a very silly man.

LEROY: It was you was silly, because you thought you could wash off blood—and you can’t. *(She pauses in her work, looks up.)*

RHODA: Why can’t you wash off blood?

LEROY: Because you can’t, and the police know it. You can wash and wash, but there’s always some left. Everybody knows that. I’m going to call the police and tell them to start looking for that stick in the woods. They got what they call “stick bloodhounds” to help them look—and them stick bloodhounds can find any stick there is that’s got blood on it. And when they bring in that stick you washed so clean the police’ll sprinkle
that special blood powder on it, and that little boy’s blood will show up on the stick. It’ll show up a pretty blue color like a robin’s egg.

RHODA: What you say about me, it’s all about you! You’re scared about the police yourself! They’ll get you with that powder.

CHRISTINE: *(She enters front door)* What were you saying to Rhoda?

LEROY: Why, Ms. Penmark, we was just talking.

CHRISTINE: *(Seeing the anger on Rhoda’s face, the smirk of triumph on Leroy’s.)* Just the same you’re not to speak to her again. If you do I’ll report you! Is that entirely clear?

LEROY: Yes, ma’am. *(He exits, closing door behind him).*

RHODA: Mother, is it true that when blood has been washed off anything a policeman can still find it? Was there if he puts powder on the place? Will the place really turn blue?

CHRISTINE: Who’s been talking to you about such things? Leroy?
SCENE 5 — REGINA TASKER & MR. BRAVO ARRIVE

Doorbell chimes. Christine crosses and opens the door revealing Regina Tasker.

TASKER: Good evening. (Rhoda picks up puzzle crossing to door).

CHRISTINE: This is my daughter, Rhoda.

TASKER: Hello, Rhoda. Well, isn’t she a little sweetheart.

RHODA: I’m having dinner upstairs.

TASKER: The loss is ours, all ours.

CHRISTINE: You may go now, Rhoda.

RHODA: Yes, Mommy. (She crosses toward door below coffee table carefully putting braid over her should and exits out front door).

TASKER: That’s a little ray of sunshine, that one. Isn’t she?

CHRISTINE: Since I called you I’ve had a letter from my father, and he’ll be here tonight.

TASKER: Bravo’s coming?

CHRISTINE: Yes.

TASKER: Now there’s a man I always wanted to meet. By the way, if you’re thinking of writing mystery stories your father was quite an authority on crime and criminals early in his career.

CHRISTINE: Yes, I know he was. Coffee? The story I was thinking of writing made me wonder—tell me, do children ever commit murders? Or is crime something that’s learned gradually, and grows as the criminal grows up, so that only adults really do dreadful things?

TASKER: Well, I have thought about that. Yes, children have often committed murders, and quite clever ones too. Some murderers, particularly the distinguished ones who are going to make great names for themselves, start amazingly early.

CHRISTINE: They grew up in the slums, or among criminals, and learned from their environment. (The doorbell chimes.) Oh—I wonder if that could be father! (She opens the door) Daddy!
BRAVO: Hello, darling. You said you wanted to see me, and I wanted to see you, so—

CHRISTINE: I’m so glad! (Suddenly realizes Tasker is present.) This is Regina Tasker, father.

BRAVO: Ah, one of my favorites! You’ve done some impressive research for the Classic Crime Club.

TASKER: Haven’t you ever considered coming back into the criminology racket? I’ve always thought the best papers they ever printed were by Richard Bravo. And now your daughter is going to try her hand.

BRAVO: At writing? She can’t even spell.

TASKER: I was rather stumped by her last question. She was asking whether criminal children are always the product of environment.

BRAVO: Nothing difficult about that one. They are.

TASKER: They say there’s a type of criminal born with no capacity for remorse or guilt—not even able to love, except physically. No feeling for right or wrong, This clinic I frequent came long ago to the conclusion that there are they are bad seeds—just plain bad from the beginning, and nothing can change them.

CHRISTINE: And this favorite murderess of yours—the one you were speaking of the other day—is she an instance?

TASKER: Bessie Denker—(Bravo reacts to the name) was Bessie a bad seed? Well, yes, I should say so because when the full story of her career came out it was realized that she must have started at the age of 10. Isn’t that so Mr. Bravo? I know you covered all her trials...

BRAVO: I’ve forgotten all about those gloomy cases.

CHRISTINE: How did she end?

TASKER: She disappeared, just vanished. Wait, a minute. Wasn’t there a child, a little girl?

BRAVO: Never heard of one.

CHRISTINE: She’d have been better off if she’d died young?

TASKER: Perhaps, and on that merry note I think I should take my leave. Good night.

CHRISTINE: (Precedes her to the door) I’ll call you early in the week.
BRAVO: Good night Ms. Tasker. *(Tasker goes out, Christine closes front door.)*

BRAVO: Are you really planning on writing something?

CHRISTINE: I was just asking questions.

BRAVO: Am I looking too close, or is there something heavy on your mind?

CHRISTINE: Does something show in my face?

BRAVO: Everything shows in your face. It always did.

CHRISTINE: My landlady here, you’ll meet her, because she’s offered a wonderful room for you to stay in while you’re here. Rhoda’s upstairs having dinner with her now.

BRAVO: You were going to come out with something.

CHRISTINE: I confessed to her the other day that I had always worried about being an adopted child—had always been afraid the daddy I love so much wasn’t really my daddy.

BRAVO: Has something made you think of this lately?

CHRISTINE: Yes.

BRAVO: What is it?

CHRISTINE: My little girl, Rhoda.

BRAVO: What about her?

CHRISTINE: She terrifies me. I’m afraid for her. I’m afraid of what she may have inherited from me. Father—daddy—whose child am I?

BRAVO: Mine.

CHRISTINE: Daddy, dear, don’t lie to me. I’ve told you about a dream I have—Whose child am I? *(He looks away.)* Are you my father? For Rhoda’s sake—and mine—you must tell me.

BRAVO: What has Rhoda done?

CHRISTINE: I don’t know. But I’m afraid.

BRAVO: It cannot be inherited. It cannot.

CHRISTINE: You don’t have to say any more. You found me somewhere. I know the place.

BRAVO: I don’t think you could. You were less than two years old.
CHRISTINE: I either remember it or I dream it.

BRAVO: What kind of dream?

CHRISTINE: I can hear my mother some distance away calling my name. I hide in the weeds and don’t answer because I’m afraid. Is this a dream?

BRAVO: What name did she call?

CHRISTINE: It isn’t Christine. It—it is—could it be Ingold? “Ingold! Ingold Denker,” Denker!! Oh, daddy, you concealed something from me all these years, haven’t you?

BRAVO: It was the neighbors found you and saved you. I was there covering the case for a Chicago paper and I called my wife to join me. We couldn’t resist you.

CHRISTINE: I wish I had died then. I wish it. I wish it.

BRAVO: It hasn’t mattered where you came from! You knew nothing but love and kindness from us and you’ve given love and kindness, and sweetness all you life! And Rhoda’s a perfect, sweet, sound little girl!

CHRISTINE: Is she, father? Is she?

MONICA: (Entering) Excuse me, please, but Rhoda has eaten her dinner, and now she wants a book. And I haven’t met Mr. Bravo. How do you do. (Puts out her hand) I’m Mrs. Breedlove. I’m going to put you up, and promise not to annoy you.

RHODA: Granddaddy! (Runs to Bravo).

BRAVO: Rhoda! (Picks her up and puts her down.)

MONICA: Isn’t she perfection?

RHODA: Why do you look at me?

BRAVO: I just want to see your face. Maybe I should find my room and get ready for the evening.

MONICA: I’ll take you up if you’d like to go now.

BRAVO: If you’ll be so kind. (Bravo picks up his bag and hat. Christine who has been trying to catch his reaction to Rhoda, looks at him as he stands in the doorway. He smiles at her and shakes his head, whisper “no.” He goes out. Christine stands for a moment, slowly turns and looks at Rhoda who has been watching her. Rhoda rises, goes to her table, opens drawer and pretends to be busy. Christine exits to kitchen to prepare supper.)
SCENE 6 — RHODA HIDES SHOES

Rhoda watches her disappear, then quietly closes the drawer and tiptoes to the kitchen door, looks in, then goes quietly out into the hall. She reappears with a brown paper bag, checks the kitchen again, then goes to the cupboard and picks up her shoes, dropping them into the bag. As she drops the second shoe into the bag Christine enters from the kitchen. Rhoda closes the cupboard door and tries to hide the bag behind her. Christine stops and turns to Rhoda.

CHRISTINE: What are you doing?

RHODA: Nothing.

CHRISTINE: (Indicating bag Rhoda holds.) Is that for the incinerator?

RHODA: Yes.

CHRISTINE: What is it?

RHODA: Some things you told me to throw away.

CHRISTINE: (Grabs Rhoda’s arm) Let me see what’s in the package.

RHODA: (Tries to pull away.) No.

CHRISTINE: Let me see it! (She tries to take the bundle from a sullen Rhoda. Rhoda fights back. Christine holds on determinedly and Rhoda begins to bite and kick like a little animal. The package tears, revealing Rhoda’s shoes. Christine wrestles the bundle away, and pushes Rhoda violently from her. Rhoda stares at her mother with cold, fixed hatred.) You hit him with one of the shoes, didn’t you? Tell me! Tell me the truth! You hit him with those shoes! That’s how those half-moon marks got on his forehead and hands! Answer me! Answer me!

RHODA: (After a silence, with contempt.) I hit him with the shoes. I had to him with the shoes, Mother. What else could I do?

CHRISTINE: Do you know that you murdered him?

RHODA: It was his fault. If he’d given me the medal like I told him to I wouldn’t have hit him! (She sits in chair and begins to cry, pressing her forehead against table.)

CHRISTINE: Tell me what happened. Start from the beginning and tell me the truth. I know you killed him, so there’s no sense in lying again. I want you to tell me the truth. (She beats the last line out with the shoe on the table.)
RHODA: (Throwing herself into her mother's arms.) I can't, Mother! I can't tell you!

CHRISTINE: (Shaking Rhoda violently.) Rhoda, I want—(She suddenly realizes what she is doing and stops, clasping her hands behind her.) I'm waiting for your answer. Tell me. I must know now.

RHODA: He wouldn't give me the medal like I told him, that's all. So then he ran away from me and hid on the wharf, but I found him there and told him I'd hit him with my shoe if he didn't give me the medal. He shook his head and said, "No," so I hit him the first time and then he took off the medal and gave it to me.

CHRISTINE: What happened then?

RHODA: Well, he tried to run away, so I hit him with the shoe again. He kept crying and making a noise, and I was afraid somebody would hear him. So I kept hitting him, Mother. I hit him harder this time, and he fell in the water.

CHRISTINE: What are we going to do? What are we going to do?

RHODA: Oh, I've got the prettiest mother! I've got the nicest mother! That's what I tell everybody! I say, "I've got the sweetest—

CHRISTINE: How did the bruises get on the back of his hands?

RHODA: He tried to pull himself back on the wharf after he fell in the water. I wouldn't have hit him any more only he kept saying he was going to tell on me. (Throws herself into her mother's lap. Christine hesitates, then clasps her daughter to her.) Mommy, Mommy, please say you won't let them hurt me!

(Pause)

CHRISTINE: Nobody will hurt you. I don't know what must be done now, but I promise nobody will hurt you.

RHODA: Mommy, if I give you a basket of kisses what will you give me?

CHRISTINE: (Unable to bear it) Please, please.

RHODA: Can't you give me the answer, Mother? If I give you a basket of kisses—
CHRISTINE: Rhoda, go into your room and read. I must think what to do. *(Rhoda crosses, takes book from table.)* Promise you won’t tell anyone else what you’ve told me.

RHODA: *(With contempt)* Why would I tell and get killed? *(Starts off)*

CHRISTINE: Rhoda— *(Rhoda stops.)* What happened to old Mrs. Post in Baltimore? The old lady promised you a crystal ball with opals when she died. One afternoon when you were alone with the old lady she somehow managed to fall down the backstairs and break her neck.

RHODA: There was ice on the steps—and I slipped and fell against her, and that was all.

CHRISTINE: That was all?

RHODA: *(Pause.)* No. I slipped on purpose.

CHRISTINE: Take the shoes and put them in the incinerator! Hurry! Burn them quickly!

*Blackout for scene change.*
SCENE 7 - LEROY FINDS OUT MORE

Leroy enters front door. He is carrying a garbage can. Rhoda is reading her book.

RHODA: I found out about one lie that you told. There’s no such thing as a “stick blood-hound.”

LEROY: I’m not supposed to talk to little Miss Goody-goody.

RHODA: Then don’t.

LEROY: Where’s your Mama?

RHODA: Upstairs.

LEROY: For your own sake, though, I’ll tell you this much. There may not be any stick blood-hounds, but there’s a stick. And you better find that stick before they do, because it’ll turn blue and then they’ll fry you in the electric chair. You know the noise the electric-chair makes? It goes z-z-z, and then you swivel all up the way bacon does when your mother’s frying it.

RHODA: Go empty the garbage. They don’t put little girls in the electric chair.

LEROY: They don’t? They got a little blue chair for little boys and a little pink one for little girls. I just remembered something. You used to go tap-tap when you walked. How come you don’t wear them shoes anymore?

RHODA: You’re silly. I never had a pair of shoes like that.

LEROY: I spilled water on ‘em and I wiped ‘em off.

RHODA: They hurt my feet and I gave them away.

LEROY: you know one thing? You didn’t hit that boy with no stick. You hit him with them shoes. Ain’t I right this time?

RHODA: (Ignoring him) You lie all the time.

LEROY: How come I’ve got those shoes then?

RHODA: (Looks up quickly) Where did you get them?

LEROY: I came in and got them right out of your apartment.

RHODA: (Looking at book.) It’s just more lies. I burned those shoes. I put them down the incinerator and burned them. Nobody’s got them.
LEROY: *(After a pause.)* Now listen to this and figure out which of us is the silly one. I’m in the basement working, and I hear them shoes come rattling down the pipe. I open the door quick and there they is on top of the coals only smoking the least little bit. I grab them out. Oh, they’re scorched some, but there’s plenty left to turn blue and show where the blood was. There’s plenty left to put you in the electric chair!

RHODA: *(calmly)* Give me those shoes back.

LEROY: Oh, no. I got them shoes hid where nobody but me can find them.

RHODA: You’d better give me those shoes. They’re mine. Give them back to me.

LEROY: *(laughing)* I’m keeping those shoes until—*(His laughter dies under her fixed, cold stare. He begins to be afraid of her. He no longer wants to play this game.)* Now, listen, Rhoda, I was just fooling and teasing you. I haven’t got any shoes. I’ve got work to do.

RHODA: Give me back my shoes.

LEROY: I haven’t got nobody’s shoes. Don’t you know when anybody’s teasing you?

RHODA: Will you bring them back!

LEROY: I was just fooling at first, but now I really believe you killed that little boy.

RHODA: You’ve got them hid, but you’d better get them and bring them back here! Right here to me! *(She shouts the last as footsteps are heard. Leroy stops as if interrupted. Picks up the garbage can as Rhoda runs to the sofa, picks up book and sits reading)*

CHRISTINE: *(Enters front door. She is wearing a sweater over her dress.)* What was Leroy saying to you?

RHODA: Nothing.

CHRISTINE: You may go Leroy.

LEROY: Yes, ma’am. *(He exits.)*
SCENE 8 – RHODA STARTS THE FIRE/PANDEMONIUM

Monica enters carrying the locket.

MONICA: Look what I have for you, Rhoda? Turquoise! And here’s the garnet too.

RHODA: Thank you, Aunt Monica.

(Sound of ice cream bells)

MONICA: Ah, the ice-cream man.

RHODA: Mother, could I have a popsicle?

CHRISTINE: (Answers as though in a trance.) Yes. Take the money from my purse in the kitchen. (Rhoda goes into kitchen picks up matches from kitchen stove. Christine observes this and stops her.) Rhoda, what have you got those matches for?

RHODA: I guess I just wasn’t thinking.

CHRISTINE: I’ll take them, please. (Rhoda hands the matches to Christine, who replaces them on stove in kitchen. Rhoda stars off toward door, as she gets to coffee table she stops—looks to see if her mother is looking and quickly grabs the matches off the coffee table and runs out the door. Christine comes wearily in from kitchen as Monica turns from the window.)

MONICA: Christine, you won’t mind too much if I’m nosey and ridiculous, but you haven’t been yourself lately.

CHRISTINE: Does it show to other people?

MONICA: Do you sleep enough?


MONICA: You must have some sleeping pills. That much we can do. And now I won’t bully you any more Christine. I’m only going to say that I love you truly and deeply, my dear. (Monica goes into her purse and pulls out bottle).

CHRISTINE: Oh thank you Monica.

(Offstage two muffled shouts—“fire”—“fire.”)

CHRISTINE: What was that?

MONICA: It sounded a little like somebody shouting, “Fire!” It sounded close by.
(Rhoda comes in. She has finished her second popsicle, and goes calmly to the den.)

CHRISTINE: Rhoda, who was shouting?

RHODA: I don’t know, Mother. (She goes to den and begins to play the scales on the piano)

Offstage voices: Fire! Fire! The garage door! There’s a man in there! That’s Leroy’s door! Break the door down! Fire! I can hear him! Break it down! One-two-three—There is a sudden ragged crash as if a door were split from top to bottom and a man’s screaming, as if he were in extreme pain.)

LEROY: (screaming) I haven’t got ‘em! I wasn’t gonna do nothing! I never had ‘em, I just—

MONICA: There’s a man on fire!

CHRISTINE: His clothes are burning! His hair is burning! He’s lying still! I should have known it was coming! I should have known! Why am I so blind? (Piano starts slowly paying Au Claire De La Lune).

MONICA: Christine, Christine! You aren’t making sense!

CHRISTINE: Tell her to stop the piano—How can she play that tinkle now? Rhoda! Rhoda! I can’t bear it! I can’t bear it! She’s driving me mad!

MONICA: What is it, Christine? What is it?

CHRISTINE: I can’t bear it! I can’t, it’s heartless. Rhoda! Rhoda! Will you stop that music! Rhoda! Stop that music! (The music stops abruptly. Rhoda comes out of the den wide eyed and innocent.)

RHODA: Is Mommy sick, Monica? (Christine tries to get to Rhoda but Monica holds her.)

CHRISTINE: Don’t let me get my hands on her. You could look away and play the piano, but it happened. MONICA: Christine, she’s only a child. Christine, Christine... (these lines are spoken over each other.)

MONICA: (Pushing Christine away) What has she done!

CHRISTINE: (Pause) It’s not what she’s done—it’s what I’ve done. Blackout end of scene.
SCENE 9 – CHRISTINE GIVES RHODA AN OUT

After dinner in the apartment, the same day. Rhoda, ready for bed, lies on the sofa. Christine, somehow, has recovered her poise. She is also in her robe ready for bed, and sits on stool reading.

CHRISTINE: (reading) Polly put one toe out from under the covers to find out how cold it was, and it was nipping cold. She remembered why she had wanted to wake up, and got out of bed very softly, shivering and pulling on her dress and her stockings. (Christine pauses, looks at Rhoda and takes bottle of pills from pocket of robe.) You have some new vitamins to take tonight.

RHODA: Okay, Mommy. Swallowing pills is just a trick.

CHRISTINE: You’re very good at it.

RHODA: Do you love me, Mommy?

CHRISTINE: Yes.

RHODA: Will you read more now?

CHRISTINE: Yes, but first you have to take these.

RHODA: So many?

CHRISTINE: They’re a new kind. I’m to take them too. (Christine looks away. Rhoda takes four pills with a sip of juice.)

RHODA: Mommy do you know about Leroy?

CHRISTINE: Yes.

RHODA: I like apricot juice. It doesn’t even need ice. (Takes four more pills and a sip of juice.) It was Leroy’s fault. He shouldn’t have said he’d tell the police about me and give them my shoes.

CHRISTINE: I know.

RHODA: (She takes the rest of the pills and drinks once more) There. That’s all. Don’t let them hurt me, Mommy.

CHRISTINE: I won’t let them hurt you. Sleep well, and dream well, my only child, and the one I love. I shall sleep too. (The stage is dark and empty for a bit, then a shot is heard.)
SCENE 10 – THE FUNERAL

A few days later. Monica is seen coming from the kitchen with a coffee tray.

MONICA: I’ve made coffee if anybody wants it.

BRAVO: When it happened how did you find her? Did you hear the shot?

MONICA: Yes—we heard it—and ran down. She’d shot herself after giving Rhoda a deadly dose of sleeping pills. She had obviously planned that they should die together.

BRAVO: I don’t know how I’ll live. I don’t know that I will. (The piano begins playing “Au Claire De La Lune”)

MONICA: Mr. Bravo, you have a lot to be grateful for. If we hadn’t heard the shot you’d have lost Rhoda too. (Monica goes to den door and calls) Rhoda. (Piano playing stops-Rhoda enters)

RHODA: Did you like it Granddaddy? I played it for you.

BRAVO: Oh, Rhoda. My Rhoda.

RHODA: What will you give me for a basket of kisses?

BRAVO: For a basket of kisses? Oh, my darling—I’ll give you a basket of hugs! (She runs to his arms and he holds her with her face over his shoulder smiling out toward the audience.)