

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Original Works Publishing

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this play is subject to royalty. It is fully protected by Original Works Publishing, and the copyright laws of the United States. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion pictures, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

The performance rights to this play are controlled by Original Works Publishing and royalty arrangements and licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur royalty fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a royalty quotation and license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Royalties are payable with negotiation from Original Works Publishing.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured from Original Works Publishing through direct contact.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

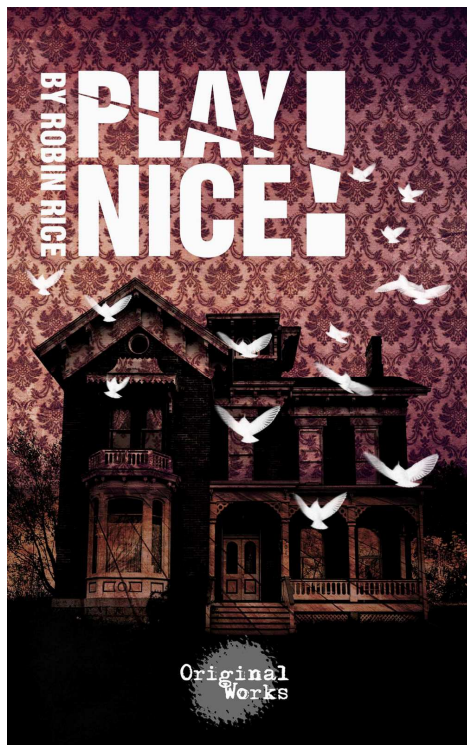
Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing, and advertising for the play:

**“Produced by special arrangement with
Original Works Publishing.
www.originalworksonline.com”**

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

Boy Small
© MT Cozzola
Trade Edition, 2016
ISBN 978-1-63092-086-9

*Also Available From
Original Works Publishing*



Play Nice by Robin Rice

Synopsis: The Diamond siblings use the only resources they have, the dramatic role-play of their imaginations, to cope with the abusive Dragon Queen - their mother. Play Nice! is a mystery in which Isabel, Luce and Matilda embark on a journey within themselves to discover who poisoned her.

Cast Size: 3 Females, 1 Male

BOY SMALL
By MT Cozzola

*Moral Clarity and Psychological Complexity:
The World of “Boy Small”*

By Michael F. Troy, Ph.D.,LP

“Who can understand such suffering as mine? I’d put money on it, not a soul.” With his opening line, the title character in *Boy Small* captures the fundamental challenge to all who seek to understand the pathology of abuse.

As a clinical psychologist, my interest in this play was sparked by its dramatic exploration of that space within which parental commitment distorts into damaging control, and how a child’s evolving sense of autonomy can lead to irresolvable conflict. Understanding the processes that drive typical child and adolescent development, as well as its deviations, has been the work of my career. *Boy Small* moved me, unsettled me, and caused me to see with a fresh perspective the human cost of adaptation to profoundly maladaptive circumstances.

The story of *Boy Small* is simple. Two adolescents strive to meet the challenges of growing up despite the fact that Boy lives in a dog cage and his sister is his keeper. Keeping a close watch are their frustrated father and his ambitious new wife. But Boy is bent on escape, no matter what the cost. The play was inspired by the heart-breaking story of an eleven-year-old Indiana child, Christian Choate, who died in 2011 as the result of abuse and neglect. The boy’s father, Riley Choate, was convicted in 2013 for neglect and other crimes related to the case. At his sentencing he said, “All my actions will haunt me forever. I loved my son.”

In the context of this fictional exploration of those events, Boy's fight to become his own person both sustains and ultimately destroys him. The paradox inherent in such a struggle is uniquely suited to a work of theatre, where it can be explored through multiple character perspectives and opposing objectives.

For professionals working with troubled families, Boy's fight resonates at several levels. It captures not only the brutality of abusive acts, but the brutality of fearing and anticipating such acts. It addresses with sophistication and sensitivity the larger web of intrapersonal and interpersonal issues that perpetuate abusive family systems. *Boy Small* also considers the well-intended, but often insufficient, community safeguards designed to protect and rescue maltreated children.

Of particular interest to students of social sciences is the play's dramatization of human development itself. In the character of Dad, we see how a parent's misinterpretation of normal-range developmental transitions cause him to see only attempts to undermine order and disrupt the status quo. Healthy development is a complex adaptive system, and watching the continual iterations of power and support in the relationship between Sissy and Boy reveals the unpredictability of that system. *Boy Small* shows how the natural developmental drives of each child can lead to distinct, dangerous trajectories.

Playwright MT Cozzola's grasp of developmental theory, both intuitive and informed, transforms *Boy Small* from a compelling story to a deeper and more meaningful exploration of how abuse and neglect can become embedded in family systems and maintained over time. She understands that ours is a social brain that develops within the context of relationships. It is seen in the universal

drive to connect to others—a human drive that supersedes all others. Consequently, it is not a question of whether or not we form relationships, but rather the quality of the relationships—and how those relationships in turn affect who we become.

Perhaps most significantly, to me, is the way in which this play makes sophisticated developmental constructs accessible and relevant to a wide audience. *Environmental sensitivity*, for example, represents a domain of scientific inquiry rooted in developmental and evolutionary theory. At its heart, this approach suggests that children are, at a genetic and biological level, differentially susceptible to adverse conditions and responsive to supportive conditions. Some children, it is suggested, are markedly resilient in the face of stressful, challenging circumstances. These individuals are sometimes referred to as “dandelion children.” Other children, known as “orchid children,” seem to be especially reactive and damaged under such challenging circumstances. At the same time, however, growing up in an enriched environment may be of limited value for the dandelion child, while the orchid child flourishes under such conditions.

While the playwright may not have had this conceptual model specifically in mind, Sissy and Boy Small bring this theory to life in a compelling manner. While Sissy seems to weather the abusive and oppressive parenting of her father to some degree, she lacks both the spark and the vulnerability of her brother. Boy Small is unable to survive such a cruel and destructive home, but would surely have thrived had the conditions been right. He would have, we imagine, developed into an adult of erudition and insight. Indeed, he would have become someone like Boy Grown.

There are other, more general developmental principles clearly at work in this play as well. The concept of environmental sensitivity is a specific expression of the fact that human development is fundamentally contextual. In the context of the family represented in *Boy Small*, each child's adaptation to the father's pathology exacts a cost. Indeed, it is a reflection of Ms. Cozzola's psychological sophistication that she so clearly depicts both children in this story as victims—in one case immediate and obvious, and in the other insidious and indirect.

Boy Small, with its combination of moral clarity and psychological complexity, raises important questions for scholars, artists, and anyone seeking to foster a more healthy society. How is it that the role of parent can distort in form and function from protector to victimizer? What is the force that binds others to the victimizer and compels them to acquiesce and even enable acts of cruelty and abuse? Why does innocence and goodness seem to serve, by its very nature, as a provocation to evil? What sparks hope and empowers resistance in the face of seeming hopelessness?

There are no easy answers. But a work of art such as *Boy Small*, that examines without oversimplifying, helps to broaden and deepen our shared understanding of the challenges. Most importantly, it renews the vital resolve to never turn away from a child in need of rescue.

Michael F. Troy, Ph.D, LP
Medical Director, Behavioral Health Services
Associate Medical Director, Neuroscience Program
Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota

The world premiere of *BOY SMALL* was produced by The Fine Print Theatre in Chicago, Illinois, and opened on August 23, 2013. Jarrod Bainter designed the set and lighting, Ashley Ann Woods designed the costumes, Steve Labeledz designed the sound, Mark E. Penzien was the fight choreographer, and Dave Belden composed the music. The assistant director was Emmi Hilger, and the stage manager was Sydney Ray.

The production was directed by Patrick Michael Kenney.

The cast was as follows:

BOY—Stephen Cefalu, Jr.

SISSY—Taryn Wood

DAD—Malcolm Callan

SHERRY—Cat Dean

OUTSIDERS—Deanna Moffitt

This play received development from Chicago Dramatists, Chicago, Illinois.

Cast of Characters

BOY SMALL and BOY GROWN, a 12-year-old boy and his spirit (played by a young adult)

SISSY, Boy's big sister, 14 (played by a young adult)

DAD, father of Boy and Sissy, 30s-40s

SHERRY, Dad's second wife, 30s-40s

OUTSIDERS, a female neighbor, a social worker, and a teacher, 30s-60s

Setting

Action occurs in Dad's bedroom, over several weeks in spring, from Tax Day to Flag Day. Additional scenes occur in a neutral space, and should be staged in or near the bedroom.

Time

The present, and a possible future.

Acknowledgments

This fictional play is dedicated to the memory of Christian Choate.

Quotation from "The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower," from *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*, published by New Directions. Copyright © 1952, 1953 Dylan Thomas.

BOY SMALL

SCENE 1: WHO CAN UNDERSTAND

(In darkness. The silhouette of a large dog cage is just visible. Near it stands the dim shape of a man, BOY GROWN.)

BOY GROWN: Who can understand such suffering as mine? I'd put money on it, not a soul. Not even the Greeks. Two infants served up for their father's unwitting appetite? They go quick and into the pot. But mine's a slow pattern. Take Shakespeare. His Romeo and Juliet? Poison and a stab. His MacDuff and Lady M and Gertrude and Ophelia? Off this earth before the blood could dry. In their suffering, they had a measure of freedom. Or maybe we all see through the glass of our own predicament. I feel mine is the worst fate, but that's the way I see it. Okay, maybe Desdemona knew a little of my pain. That scene with the maid, all the questions? No. She at least had the novelty of fear where before was just lover's anticipation. You see I'm selfish in my suffering. Truly, I recognize no one's but my own. I am selfish. I belong here.

SISSY: Good.

BOY GROWN: I am self-centered.

SISSY: You totally are.

(Lights shift. BOY GROWN gets into cage and becomes BOY SMALL.)

BOY SMALL: But I really do gotta go to the bathroom.

SISSY: You just used it.

(Afternoon. The crowded but organized bedroom of a modular home. Boxes and bins stacked neatly. An electric guitar hangs on a wall. The only messy area is a dresser spilling jewelry and makeup.)

SISSY stirs a noodle cup.)

BOY SMALL: I'm thirsty.

SISSY: There's water on the ramen.

BOY SMALL: Sissy.

SISSY: I can't. *(A beat.)* You are such a pain.

BOY SMALL: I know.

(SISSY unlocks the cage. BOY SMALL crawls out. He stretches; he's been in there a long time.)

SISSY: Hurry up.

BOY SMALL: Gotta get my parts shook out so it don't come out my nose.

SISSY: I'm coming with.

BOY SMALL: No one's home.

SISSY: I'm coming with or you don't go.

BOY SMALL: What for, you wanna watch?

SISSY: Gross.

(BOY dances and sings a made-up pop song.)

BOY SMALL: “Catch me, baby, you never can/Touch me, baby, in Neverland/You can try but I can fly...”

(DAD enters. SISSY and BOY freeze. DAD sets down his keys and wallet.)

SISSY: He was coming right back.

DAD: There’s food getting cold.

(DAD exits.)

SISSY: I like a boy. Hey. Brother-boy. I have a crush on someone.

BOY SMALL: What does he smell like?

SISSY: I don’t know. He has black hair. He’s new. He said hi to me yesterday. And then today, too.

BOY SMALL: I wasn’t running.

SISSY: You would have.

(SISSY gets her backpack, chooses a book. BOY sniffs the air.)

BOY SMALL: Some kind of meat.

SISSY: Maybe Jack-a-loaf! “Best burger...”

SISSY & BOY: “Or you don’t know Jack!”

BOY SMALL: Nope. Pizza. Mmm, pepperoni.

(SISSY gives BOY a book.)

SISSY: The page is marked.

BOY SMALL: Ugh. Not algebra.

SISSY: Today he said hi, and he was like, what are you up to? And I said, nothing, what are you up to? And he said, nothing.

BOY SMALL: And you couldn't smell him.

SISSY: I don't know. Soap.

BOY SMALL: So, lathery? Flowery-deodorant-musky-melony? Citrusy-waterfall-cinnamon-sea breezy?

SISSY: No way. Not bringing him here.

BOY SMALL: You could. Early in the day.

SISSY: He doesn't know about us. I'd bring him to Mommy's.

BOY SMALL: Don't be stupid.

SISSY: You're the one.

BOY SMALL: I wasn't running.

SISSY: I'd bring him to Babylon. If I just had a couple dollars.

BOY SMALL: I must smell him to see if I approve.

SISSY: Just a twenty.

BOY SMALL: Gave you twenty last week.

SISSY: Ten, then.

BOY SMALL: You don't need money to hang out. Hang Out.

SISSY: You're so mean. You're so unfair. I might not even like him. I might never want to hang out with him again. Probably I won't. I'll bring you something. Piece of pizza. I'll bring you a Jumbo bar. I'll bring you whatever you want.

BOY SMALL: Something he wears. A sock would be best.

SISSY: You goofball. How 'bout his underwear?

BOY SMALL: His underwear. I didn't.

SISSY: You want his underwear.

BOY SMALL: You do.

SISSY: You do!

BOY SMALL: Nuh-uh.

SISSY: Uh-huh.

DAD: (*Offstage*) Sissy!

BOY SMALL: Sh-h!

SISSY: Coming right now! Just getting his homework!

(DAD enters, tax form in one hand, piece of pizza in the other.)

DAD: Forget that.

BOY SMALL: No. I need it.

DAD: Thanks to you, I can't even eat.

BOY SMALL: Smells good.

DAD: *(To SISSY)* Take the book. Get in the kitchen.

BOY SMALL: You can't do that.

DAD: I can't? Get over there.

BOY SMALL: It's not fair.

(BOY kneels in his accustomed position for punishment, and DAD whips him with the belt.)

DAD: Oh, you call the shots? You wanna tell me? I'm out there working my ass off. You don't tell me.

(DAD tosses the belt aside. BOY sneaks DAD's wallet from the bedside table, takes a twenty.)

SISSY: It's my fault, I took too long.

DAD: What did I just tell you?

(SISSY exits, without book.)

DAD: Ain't even your book.

BOY SMALL: The books in my grade are stupid.

DAD: Maybe you're too smart for school.

BOY SMALL: I still want to go. Dad. Dad.

DAD: The gas money alone, driving around to hunt you down.

BOY SMALL: I know.

DAD: You don't know. One second, work is so slow I can't sleep. I can't think of nothing except is this the day they do it, the bastards. Then it picks up and I'm working 12-hour days in global fucking warming.

BOY SMALL: You look tired.

DAD: All of a sudden it's April 15 and I'll be up all night tonight, 'cause they don't even give you a day off. No. I gotta spend my own time trying to figure out how to get the government to gimme back my own money.

BOY SMALL: If it's too hard for you, I could do it.

(A beat.)

DAD: Why are you like this? Why can't you do one little thing to give me a minute of peace?

BOY SMALL: Dad, please. One more chance. I wouldn't run.

(DAD gestures to his piece of pizza.)

DAD: You can eat that.

(DAD exits with book.)

(BOY SMALL becomes BOY GROWN. During the following, he tosses pizza in trash and returns to cage.)

BOY GROWN: Bolingbroke is crossing the river, getting his Henry-the-Fourth name badge all ready, slapping his millions of soldiers on the ass and saying, pay you back man, come see me in the castle and I'll set you up. Good, good, you do that, Bolingbroke, but I'm gonna win. I will have my victory. Me and he who keeps his court right smack in the hollow crown that rounds the mortal temples of a king. He's my right-hand man. He's my ally. He's my strength. When you have time, real time like I have, all the years of all my futures, to spend just how I want, you can see what Shakespeare's talking about. You can see what the bible's talking about. You can see this whole conversation the world is having. Back and forth, like strings across a guitar. He never did play that guitar. I don't know why he kept it. But that was part of the conversation, it helped me to hear. It helped me to see how I will win. Me here, every moment, every action, winning.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 2: OUR LOVE IS PROUD

(A few days later. SHERRY enters, getting into her work uniform. BOY sits in cage.)

SHERRY: *(calls)* This is once-in-a-lifetime. Take it or leave it.

BOY SMALL: Better hurry up. You're gonna be late.

SHERRY: *(ignores BOY, calls)* Just getting to the finals. Just getting there.

(SHERRY waits but no reply.)

SHERRY: Don't tell me we wouldn't win. I know we would. We screw better than anyone else in the world, tell me you don't know that.

(DAD enters, working on a tax form.)

DAD: I don't need to prove to a bunch of strangers how good I fuck.

SHERRY: How good we fuck. You and me, how we do it. Just getting picked gets you a thousand dollars. I'm not even talking winning, I'm not even talking the finals.

DAD: Thousand. And how much goes to taxes.

SHERRY: Who cares, you already missed the filing date.

DAD: This pen won't write.

SHERRY: I got a pen. And look at this! Gets us to the front of the line. Guaranteed.

DAD: You blew money on a pass.

SHERRY: My tips.

DAD: Whose tips?

SHERRY: It's the one thing I'm good at.

DAD: Jesus.

SHERRY: Make fun if you want, go ahead. But. Does it not mean something that my one skill, my one God-given talent, does it not mean anything that it's finally being recognized on national TV? And don't say porn. Married sex is not porn.

DAD: "Watch out, fans. It's wa-a-a-y dirtier."

SHERRY: Go ahead, I don't care. It's just something I want. Something that matters to my heart of hearts. If it was her, it would all be different.

DAD: Why don't we have any pens.

SHERRY: Give her a son, give her a daughter, what do you give me? Dried-up pen. He smells, did he get washed?

DAD: (*calls*) Sissy!

SHERRY: Not home yet.

DAD: What time is it?

SHERRY: It eats at me. Having to look at his face and see her staring out. Looking all sweet and innocent when you know they got their eye somewhere else.

DAD: What are you saying?

SHERRY: Nothing.

DAD: You saying I got left.

SHERRY: I'm talking about him. Running to her every chance he gets.

DAD: At least she calls us.

SHERRY: And how she loves to call. I bet she eggs him on. She gets him to run, just so she has another reason to get you on the phone.

DAD: Well, he's not running now.

SHERRY: Point is, look what you did for her. And she's not even grateful. She just uses it to make trouble for you.

DAD: We don't know that was her.

SHERRY: Who else would call? 'Cross-the-street? Next door? They mind their business.

DAD: Could be 'Cross-the-street. Ever since she sold it to us, "Where's the dog, when you getting the dog."

SHERRY: If I knew when they're coming, I could borrow Karen's dog. Have it running around.

DAD: You would do that.

SHERRY: If they would just call first. If they could just make it a little easier on a person.

DAD: My good girl.

SHERRY: It's about me being proud. Wanting to show you off. Don't you see, she's not worthy of you. Look what she made you, his teeth aren't even straight, hands all buckled. Not like your hands.

DAD: What about my hands.

SHERRY: I love your hands. On me. I dream about them.

DAD: What for, I'm right here.

SHERRY: Day dream. At work. At the store. All the time.

DAD: You know that's my one day off.

SHERRY: Four hours max. We get down there, we got the pass, we're in front of the line, we do our thing, we blow them away. I don't care, I know we blow them away. And if we don't get picked we go home.

DAD: And if we do, a thousand bucks. More like seven hundred.

SHERRY: I know we get picked. I know we are sharing something sacred and hot, and any judge who can't see that should die.

DAD: I'll think about it. Think about it, I said. He does smell. You pee on yourself? You trying that now?

SHERRY: I'll tend to him.

DAD: It's her job. Where the hell is she?

SHERRY: Not important. I got it. Get a drink, give me the taxes.

DAD: It's my job.

SHERRY: It's no problem, I'll finish it on my break.

DAD: That supposed to be funny?

SHERRY: I want you to rest now. I want you to close your eyes. Think what you'll do with a thousand dollars. Seven hundred.

DAD: If that.

SHERRY: Motorcycle. Vacation. Down payment on a house.

DAD: You got no money sense.

SHERRY: I got dreams. Go get your beer.

(DAD exits. SHERRY hides the tax forms in her purse and gets ready for work.)

BOY SMALL: My hands are not buckled.

SHERRY: I've always hated pretty girls. They don't have to do anything but be pretty. But they act so superior, like they accomplished something. Congratulations on being born.

BOY SMALL: My mommy was pretty. She had long blond hair.

SHERRY: Your mommy had short hair. Short and butch.

BOY SMALL: Long and silky. The ends of it tickled my nose.

SHERRY: Where do you come up with this crap?

BOY SMALL: It was before you. She used to look at Daddy just like you do.

SHERRY: No one looks at him the way I do.

BOY SMALL: If you get on the show, I could help. I could be the fluffer.

SHERRY: You dirty brain. There's no fluffer. How do you know about a fluffer.

BOY SMALL: It's on the videos.

SHERRY: Watching when you're supposed to be sleeping.

BOY SMALL: Sometimes it's loud.

(SHERRY opens cage, sets out paper and pen.)

SHERRY: Get your mind dirty and you'll never get it clean. Boy, here. Paper. Homework. Why doesn't anyone like me.

BOY SMALL: Okay. Why doesn't anyone like you.

SHERRY: Like you, like *you*. Are you that stupid or do I get your daddy?

BOY SMALL: I am that stupid.

(SHERRY goes back to getting ready. BOY starts to write.)

BOY SMALL: “Why doesn’t anyone...” Hey, this pen won’t write.

SHERRY: So what, no one’s going to read it. *(BOY is hurt.)* Oh geez, here. *(tosses BOY a pen.)*

BOY SMALL: *(almost in tears)* Forget it.

SHERRY: You dish it out, no problem. That’s why no one likes you. You think you can live by two sets of rules, one for you and one for everyone else. Just like a pretty girl.

BOY SMALL: I want people to like me.

SHERRY: Then you gotta try harder.

BOY SMALL: Will you help me?

SHERRY: *(sighs)* Go get yourself a mint.

(BOY goes to dresser and takes a mint; also steals some money from her cocktail apron.)

SHERRY: I count my singles, you know.

BOY SMALL: Just looking for chocolate.

SHERRY: There’s no chocolate. There’s mints. That’s enough, you get back now.

BOY SMALL: *(returns to cage area; hides the money)*
Mm, starlights.

SHERRY: We probably don't even have a chance.

BOY SMALL: Of course you do.

SHERRY: You better not be watching.

BOY SMALL: 'Course not. I happen to think you have a great chance.

SHERRY: You do?

BOY SMALL: Sure. Sherry, look at you. You're so special and you're so smart, and... so easy.

SHERRY: You're sick, you know that?

BOY SMALL: No, seriously. Your technique is fine, but you're missing that something extra.

SHERRY: Sicko. Someone should wash your mouth out.

BOY SMALL: Someone really should.

(SHERRY starts to drag BOY to bathroom.)

SHERRY: You think I won't do it? *(Changes her mind)*
Oh no, I'm not falling for that.

BOY SMALL: I won't run.

SHERRY: Damn right you won't. Get in there and I'll bring you the soap.

(BOY SMALL gets into cage. SHERRY locks him in and exits. BOY SMALL becomes BOY GROWN.)

BOY GROWN: The first few days are the hardest. Peanut butter and jelly, the way it squishes all sticky-slidy. My favorite burger. Teeth sinking into a soft bun. But that's normal. Just my brain, craving glucose. In a few days, the craving fades. My brain gets more determined. We all out of glycogen? No problem, we synthesize fats and proteins instead. The brain keeps going, all on its own. It moves on. It leeches acid waste from stored-up pizza sticks and taco tots. That's not the prettiest part, but acidosis is a great appetite suppressant. And the payoff? Normalization. That's where the blood chemistry corrects itself. My tissues and organs actually start to heal. It's amazing, what the brain knows how to do. Weeks go by, and it cleans the body of everything except vital tissue. It keeps readjusting to maximize reserves. Except of course, if you don't have reserves. If the food you eat doesn't have actual food in it, well, that speeds up the amazingness.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 3: PARENTING

(A few days later. DAD enters, SISSY behind him, carrying her backpack.)

SISSY: I swear. I had to stay late.

DAD: I call over there right now, that's what they'll say.

SISSY: Yes. Of course.

(SHERRY enters. She gets her purse and prepares for work.)

SHERRY: Office is closed by now.

DAD: Who were you talking to.

SISSY: No one. I was helping with the bulletin boards.

SHERRY: Ha.

SISSY: I was. Please Daddy I was. You can call the school tomorrow. Ask Miss Carmen.

DAD: You know the rules.

SISSY: I didn't talk to anyone. I never said anything.

DAD: *(gets belt)* Four o'clock is the rule.

SISSY: *(kneels at bed, preparing to be hit)* I didn't know it was so late. I swear I didn't.

DAD: You go off giving it to some boy—

SISSY: I wasn't.

DAD: And you know what you end up with? This.

(DAD offers belt to SISSY.)

SISSY: Huh?

DAD: Come on, let's make sure you can do it.

SHERRY: Do what?

DAD: *(to SISSY)* You think it's easy taking care of a kid?

SISSY: You mean...

(DAD opens cages, motions to BOY.)

DAD: Get over there.

(SISSY stands. BOY takes SISSY's place, kneeling at the bed. DAD demonstrates.)

DAD: Fold it over. You want the buckle at the thumb side. Bend your arm. And that's where you want the buckle. Any longer and you hit yourself. Don't want to be doing that.

(SISSY follows instructions.)

DAD: Stand solid, feet farther apart. Step that foot forward, that's where you hold your weight. Good. Now when you swing it, you want it to go diagonal, top to bottom, like you're making an X.

(SISSY makes an half-hearted attempt to whip BOY.)

DAD: Try again.

(SISSY tries harder. BOY flinches.)

DAD: Better. Make the X the other way. Good. Seems hard to you now, but it just gets harder. The older you get, the more people counting on you, the more people watching you.

SHERRY: I don't know about this.

DAD: Hey. What are you doing next Saturday.

SHERRY: Next Saturday? You don't mean...

DAD: It's her chore now. He don't do his exercise, he don't eat, he tries anything, she knows what to do.

SHERRY: Wait. Are you telling me . . . ?

DAD: *(to SISSY)* You keep the door locked. You don't leave the key in the deadbolt.

SISSY: I hide the key.

SHERRY: Oh my God. Oh my God. What am I gonna wear.

DAD: What did we learn?

SISSY: I do my chores.

DAD: When do you do them?

SISSY: Four o'clock.

DAD: Sherry's gonna be late for work now.

SISSY: It will never happen again.

SHERRY: I had to give him his food, not that he ate it. First it wasn't warm enough. Then it was too hot. I'm back and forth to the microwave a million times, with 'Cross-the-street out there on patrol.

SISSY: She asked again, when I came in.

DAD: Jesus. "Where's the dog? When you gonna get the dog?"

SHERRY: I can talk to Karen.

DAD: Yeah, ask her.

SHERRY: 'Text her right now.

DAD: Gonna see her at work.

SHERRY: It's ten cents.

DAD: Unless you're over, then it's seventy-five.

SHERRY: I'm not over. I mean, how am I supposed to know if I'm over? Half my texts I don't even get. Then they all come at once. Karen has this thing where it doesn't even go through a text thing, we should have that.

DAD: In your own little world.

SISSY: *(to BOY)* Come on. Let's do your pushups. One. *(BOY does a pushup.)* Two.

(BOY does a second pushup. DAD watches SISSY.)

SHERRY: *(to DAD)* I gotta go.

DAD: Hold on.

SISSY: Three. Come on.

(SISSY snaps belt. BOY does a third pushup.)

SHERRY: She's got it.

(SHERRY and DAD exit.)

SISSY: Four. *(BOY does fourth pushup. She clears her throat; he rests.)* Five. Six.

BOY SMALL: *(whispers)* Did you see him?

SISSY: *(nods; full voice)* Seven. Eight. *(whispers)* We went to Babylon. Nine! He said, what are you up to and I said not much what are you up to? And we just went.

BOY SMALL: I bet you spent the whole twenty.

SISSY: It's my money. *(Snaps the belt, a little vindictively)* Nine! Do it. *(BOY does it.)* Ten. *(He does another pushup; it's hard for him.)* Ten, good! Now your sit-ups. One! Two! *(whispers)* It was so fun. We talked. I mean, not about anything you know, but we just hung out, and we got freezy-bombs, and I bought, and I did not spend it all. But I could of.

BOY SMALL: You could've.

SISSY: But I didn't. I want to have lots more times. Just like that time. And I got you a surprise, weirdo. *(Opens her backpack; full voice)* Now you gotta eat.

(Whispers) No way was I asking for a sock. *(Gives BOY a baseball cap.)*

BOY SMALL: You are the best sister in the world.

SISSY: You want ramen or coco-pops?

BOY SMALL: Will you tell Mommy...

SISSY: Stop asking me.

BOY SMALL: I mean this Mommy. Tell her you fed me.

SISSY: But I haven't even—

BOY SMALL: Just say I ate. Do it, and I'll give you a ten.

SISSY: You have to be hungry. What is your problem?

(BOY sniffs the hat.)

BOY SMALL: I don't smell anything.

SISSY: *(reaches for hat)* What do you mean? Let me see.

BOY SMALL: *(clutches it to him)* No. Mine.

SISSY: Then give me the money.

(BOY digs into hiding place in his cage and gets out money for SISSY.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 4: NEIGHBORLY

(NEIGHBOR enters. Her entrance defines a neutral space, separate from the bedroom, which represents her home and then the street outside. She seems to watch BOY counting out money for SISSY. She addresses us.)

NEIGHBOR: Something over there ain't right. It's not my business. Maybe I shouldn't be calling. I'm nosy. My pop said it, now my daughter says it. She says, what you need is another dog. I said, why? When I die you gonna get another Ma? Henry wasn't a dog. He was Henry.

(SISSY exits. NEIGHBOR seems to watch her.)

NEIGHBOR: I see the girl going back and forth. I used to see the boy. Lately I never see the boy. Maybe there wasn't a boy. Maybe he didn't live there. Do I have to give my name? And the man. Something not right about him. Used to be an A-hole, now he's all neighborly.

DAD: *(enters)* Hey, neighbor!

NEIGHBOR: Hey, neighbor.

DAD: Warm for April. Global warming, right?

NEIGHBOR: Right. *(to us)* Probably wonders what else I got to get rid of. My dog Henry was one hundred percent Bernese. My daughter kept saying Bur-MEEZ. I said Bur-NEEZ, Bur-NEEZ, oughta call him Bernie so you remember. But Henry's what we went with. *(to DAD)* Perfect puppy weather.

DAD: Yeah?

NEIGHBOR: For taking them out, yeah. Don't want to be starting all that in the winter, right?

DAD: Got that right.

NEIGHBOR: So when you getting him? When you getting the dog?

DAD: Soon.

NEIGHBOR: Henry loved that crate.

DAD: Yep, you told me.

NEIGHBOR: Yeah, even after he got housebroken. Every night, ten o'clock, he'd go stand by the door. He was so polite, Mr. French my dad called him. He said, you should've called that dog--

DAD: Shoulda called him Mr. French, yeah.

NEIGHBOR: He'd stand there and look at me and I'd go, Okay Henry, go to bed. And he'd go in there and curl up and go right to sleep.

DAD: Yeah, dogs are great.

NEIGHBOR: When you getting one? I keep hoping I'm gonna look out and see the dog.

DAD: I look out, all I see is this darned trash. It's terrible.

NEIGHBOR: Terrible. They just throw it out the windows.

DAD: Throw it out, world is their trashcan. Lucky we got people like you around, always keeping an eye on things. Kids better watch out for you.

NEIGHBOR: That's just me. How many you got again?

DAD: Huh?

NEIGHBOR: Kids.

DAD: Let's see, that I know of? Ha, ha.

NEIGHBOR: (*jokes*) Uh-oh, steer clear of that one. (*DAD exits*) After he passed, I couldn't look at that damned crate. I gave them the whole thing for practically nothing. But that's not why. I mean, I was happy to do it. I don't want bad feelings. But, he was the best listener, the way he'd look in your eyes. My daughter said yeah he's listening for Bacon Henry, Cheese Henry. She told me not to call. None of your business, Ma. Get a dog, Ma, keep you out of trouble. But if I did, I don't even have a crate. I guess that's why I did it. Yeah. In honor of Henry. So I won't be tempted, you know? ... Yeah. I can hold.

(*NEIGHBOR exits.*)

(*End of scene.*)

SCENE 5: GIRLS DAY OUT

(A few days later. BOY is in cage. SISSY and SHERRY enter, each carrying fancy shopping bags brimming with teddies, negligees, slip dresses.)

SISSY: I love the blue one.

SHERRY: It's not too short?

SISSY: Not at all. Your legs look amazing in that.

SHERRY: Better than the two-piece one?

SISSY: Did I see the two-piece one?

SHERRY: I'll try it on.

(SHERRY looks through various bags. SISSY unlocks BOY's cage.)

SISSY: Come on, let's do your business.

(BOY crawls out. SHERRY pulls out a pink garment.)

SHERRY: Oh I forgot this one. I thought I didn't buy this.

SISSY: I love that one.

SHERRY: I've never been a pink person.

SISSY: You could wear anything. With a French manicure oh my god. *(to BOY)* Come on.

SHERRY: Is the front door locked?

SISSY: Yes. Key's not in it.

SHERRY: I'll check.

SISSY: I hid the key.

(SHERRY exits.)

BOY SMALL: How could you stand it?

SISSY: It wasn't so bad. We went all over Babylon, in every store. She just kept pulling out her card, buying and buying.

BOY SMALL: You smell.

SISSY: They spray you for free.

BOY SMALL: *(holds his nose)* It's like flower needles.

SHERRY: *(entering)* Okay, go ahead. Hurry up.

SISSY: *(leads BOY out)* I got some of them on little cards. Just 'cause I was with her.

SHERRY: *(holds a garment up to herself)* "Couple number one, speaking for all the judges, I have to tell you that you really brought it. Everyone was amazingly talented, but you two brought something to the table that I have to say, blew us away." "Oh, thank you, it's just kind of the way we always do it." "Wow. I thought I knew what married sex was all about. But I speak for all of us, the entire audience, the entire world, when I say that you are going to Regionals!"

(BOY and SISSY have returned. SISSY, carrying BOY's ramen cup, cheers wildly.)

SISSY: And then they hand you the check.

SHERRY: I don't care about that.

BOY SMALL: You will when the VISA bill comes.

SISSY: Eat your food.

(SHERRY continues unpacking purchases.)

SHERRY: Just like your father. A thousand is nothing. You get through regionals, you get to finals, and I'm talking ten grand, plus they do news stories, interviews, everything opens up.

BOY SMALL: Opening up, he'll love that.

SISSY: Eat.

BOY SMALL: I'll do my stuff first.

(BOY does some desultory exercises.)

SHERRY: Here's the black one.

(SHERRY changes into black garment.)

SISSY: Ooh, I didn't see that one. You got so many. You're so lucky.

SHERRY: Get a job, get a credit card.

SISSY: I've asked.

SHERRY: I didn't say to ask. Jesus, where am I gonna hide all these.

SISSY: Hide them?

SHERRY: Maybe your room. Unless... he comes in there.

SISSY: Not in my room.

SHERRY: No?

SISSY: Hardly. Not when I'm there.

SHERRY: Oh.

SISSY: Why?

SHERRY: I don't know. (*Answers earlier question*) In case he says, Why you buying all those, blah blah.

SISSY: Oh Sherry... You look so beautiful.

SHERRY: Yeah? Get the tags off.

SISSY: With red nails and big silver hoops. I like your hair down, but I like it up too.

SHERRY: I'm thinking, if I go with the black I'll get red lowlights. But if I go with the blue, or that teal one, I don't know. Get them off.

(*SISSY carefully cuts the tags off the garments as SHERRY unwraps them.*)

SISSY: You look so young in the teal one. Like my age. Blond highlights if you do that one, right? And silver shadow.

SHERRY: (*holds the teal garment up to herself*) There's this facial now called a Shimmer. It's half-price if you order it with a derm, but you don't do it when you get the derm.

SISSY: Derm is like a peel?

SHERRY: You have to do that every two weeks or there's no point. Your pores just grow back.

SISSY: I bet my pores are huge.

SHERRY: Didn't your mom teach you anything? Here. Try on the pink.

SISSY: Oh, no.

SHERRY: You have to learn, if you want to do anything with men, how to handle them. Let them think they're in control yes, but... You think I tell him what I do all day? Every place I go?

BOY SMALL: You sure tell him enough.

SHERRY: Little tip. Tell them so many details they stop listening. Then they don't know what you told 'em. Hurry up, try it on. We'll hear the car.

(*SISSY exits with pink negligee.*)

BOY SMALL: I advise against the teal.

SHERRY: I should tell your dad what you say to me.

BOY SMALL: You should. But then you'd never get my secret special tips for victory.

SHERRY: Your secret tips, right.

BOY SMALL: I'll tell you how to win for one hundred dollars.

SHERRY: Ha!

BOY SMALL: Fifty. Twenty dollars. Come on, ten dollars.

SHERRY: What do you think you're gonna do with money?

BOY SMALL: It's not about sex, you know.

SHERRY: It's Married Sex. It's the whole point.

BOY SMALL: Sex is just the thing. Like the singing shows. Yeah you got to do it good, but you need more.

SHERRY: I got an entry pass, fourteen outfits, a shimmer facial, and a positive attitude. I got plenty.

(SISSY enters in pink negligee.)

SISSY: Feels weird.

SHERRY: You keep that.

SISSY: I couldn't.

SHERRY: No. You keep it. You're beautiful.

(In their negligees, SHERRY and SISSY hug.)

BOY SMALL: She can't wear that.

SISSY: (*gathers the shopping bags*) We can keep them under my bed.

BOY SMALL: You wouldn't wear that. Sissy?

SISSY: (*busy with bags*) Huh?

BOY SMALL: Hey, I'm not eating this ramen cup. Hey, what about my homework? I want poetry.

SISSY: (*tosses BOY her backpack.*) Poetry. There's some in here. (*to SHERRY*) Maybe we should save the tags.

SHERRY: God no. They need to go in the outside garbage.

SISSY: I can do that.

SHERRY: See how easy?

(*SISSY and SHERRY begin to exit. BOY pulls out a book, pages through it.*)

BOY SMALL: Hey, Sissy, hey. Poetry for Today. (*Clears throat dramatically*) "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, drives my green age."

SISSY and SHERRY: Whatever.

(*SISSY and SHERRY exit.*)

BOY SMALL becomes BOY GROWN. He throws his ramen cup in the garbage.)

BOY GROWN: "The force that through the green fuse,"
Yes. But what can that mean to Sissy? So removed

from forces that would nourish her, all she sees is the one fluorescent light buzzing above her head. She seeks it, meristem feeling its way, but the green is wrong. Green with eyeliner, green with lash envy, green with Shamrock Shakes that only mean Easter is coming. They take away even her knowledge that she is ignorant, and they wrap her in padding. They who are they? Just the people making a buck to feed their family. They pad her fineness and her possibilities with the fats, the mood eveners, the entertainments, that render her redundant. She trundles through her day, unaware of photosynthesis, unaware of insect colonies, unaware of the miracle of her own anatomy. Of course teenage girls get pregnant. Of course pre-teen girls get pregnant. They're reaching for the light. They're reaching for one touch of the elemental fire. (*Returns to cage, becomes BOY SMALL*) Also, their boyfriends are jackasses.

(End of scene.)