Feathers and Teeth

By Charise Castro Smith
CHARACTERS

Carol, 32. Coiffed like Farah Fawcett.

Arthur, 40. A higher-up at one of the factories in town. Not the highest-up.

Chris, 13. Sullen.

Hugo Schmidt, 11. German.

TIME AND PLACE

The play takes place in the spring of 1978, in a factory town in the Midwest.

The stage is split between the very modern kitchen of an upper middle class home, and the crawlspace under the house, directly below the kitchen.

In the kitchen, there are wallpapered walls, linoleum floors and a lot of wood paneling. There’s a steel sink below a window with curtains. A table with three chairs is center stage. Stage right is the entrance to the house. Stage left is the door to the backyard.

The crawlspace below is just leftover insulation, some tarps and dirt.

A NOTE

This play is to be played a little broadly. The characters are just slightly larger than life. All of them (with the exception of Chris) probably wish that they were characters on ‘The Brady Bunch’. There might even be laugh tracks. They all proceed with the mindset that everything will turn out right in the end, until that becomes impossible.
Scene One

(Carol’s real done up, for someone who’s sitting in a kitchen on a weekday evening. She’s got a pot roast in the oven. She smokes a cigarette and reads ‘The National Geographic’. The front door of the house opens offstage. She perks up.)

Carol

Chris?

(No response.)

Chris hon, is that you?

(Silence.)

Hon?

(Carol walks offstage and finds the front door open.)

Chris? You gotta remember to close the door when you come in, okay hon?

Chris? Hon?

Chris

OKAY!!

(Silence.)

Carol

You got any schoolwork tonight?
I can help you with your schoolwork if you want.

(No response. The oven starts to smoke, she doesn’t notice.)

Okay, well you just let me know if you want help.
I’m making a pot roast.
I just hope you haven’t spoilt your appetite on hamburgers.

(Silence. A door slams upstairs. Loud music starts to play from a record player upstairs. Led Zeppelin ‘When The Levee Breaks’.)

Carol smells the smoke, runs over to the oven and opens it. The pot roast is burnt, black. Unsalvageable. Smoke pours out of the oven into the kitchen. The smoke detector starts to go off.)
Carol

Oh, for crying out loud!

(She reaches into the oven impulsively with no mitts on. She burns her hands, lets out a tiny cry then shoves her hands between her legs, determined not to scream. Very quietly-

Jesus Mary and Saint Joseph the carpenter!!

(After the first wave of pain subsides, she removes her hands, looks at her fingers and blows on them gently.

She calmly gets potholders, removes the singed pot roast and carries it out the back door of the house and hoists it out onto the lawn. She returns with the empty pot and places it in the sink.

She waves a tea towel in front of the smoke detector until the smoke dissipates and it shuts off.

The phone starts to ring. Carol answers it.)

Carol

Hello?

Good afternoon Mrs. Schmidt.

No, everyone is all right.

False alarm.

Just ruined a pot roast I’m afraid! Hahaha!

Sorry to have alarmed you.

All right.

You take care now.

Goodbye.

(She hangs up the phone, goes into the pantry and retrieves a box of hamburger helper. Calls upstairs.)

Change of plans sweetheart. I’m going to fix up some Hamburger Helper.

(Silence.)

Chris?

Is that all right?

(No response. Carol goes to the fridge and takes out a package of ground beef to start in on the Hamburger Helper.

Carol unwraps the raw ground beef. She dumps it into a metal bowl to start prepping. Then she very furtively wads some of it into a little ball and eats it.
Suddenly, the back door opens and slams shut. The music from upstairs stops. A man with a moustache, in a brown polyester three-piece suit hurries in. His hands and forearms are dripping in blood.)

Carol
ARTHUR!!!
What have you done ohmylord ARTHUR!!

Arthur
Now don’t go getting excited Carol it’s just a-

(Arthur starts to look around the kitchen for something. Blood is getting everywhere.)

Carol
It’s all over the kitchen now, Arthur! What have you done?

Arthur
I SAID IT’S NOTHING, CAROL.
I was pulling into the driveway and I hit-- well, something got stuck under one of the tires and I tried to save it but- where’s a bucket Carol?

Carol
I just don’t know what to make out of this Arthur. There’s blood all over the floor.

Arthur
A bucket, Carol-

Carol
I…I just did the floors this afternoon Arthur.

(Carol is paralyzed, staring at the trail of blood on the floor. Arthur sighs and grabs the scorched pot out of the sink. He goes out the back door.)

Carol
Where are you going with the- not the pot Arthur! NOT THE POT!

(Arthur returns carrying something in the pot. It’s heavy for something small enough to be carried in a pot. Arthur heaves it onto the kitchen table.)

Carol
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ARTHUR?!!?
I SAID NOT THE POT.

Arthur
It’s still breathing. I couldn’t just leave it there.

(Silence. There is a small, injured whine from inside the pot.)
Carol
Well now. What is it then?

Arthur
It’s dinged up pretty bad but ah, it’s a possum Carol.
We used to get possums out here all the time
Maybe a little possum. Or a squirrel most likely.
I’m guessing it’s either a possum, a squirrel, a little ferret, a fox, or a rat.

(Carl looks into the pot. She recoils in horror.)

Carol
Oh NO Arthur.

Arthur
Like I said it’s pretty dinged up.

Carol
Oh Heavens Arthur.

Arthur
Nothing to be afraid of Carol.
It’s just a possum, a squirrel, a little ferret, a fox, a rat or a…
Hold on a second Carol, are those feathers?

Carol
A turkey maybe?

Arthur
Turkeys don’t have- Oh for Pete’s sake Carol- Turkeys don’t have teeth. Like that.

(There is another whine from inside the pot, more urgent. And a desperate scratching sound.)

Carol
Arthur, I think it’s- is it scratching?

(More scratching. It’s trying to climb up the walls of the pot.)

Arthur
Get me the lid, Carol.

Carol
What?!?

Arthur
Don’t make any sudden moves Carol. Just get me the lid.
Carol gets it together and hands Arthur the lid. The thing in the pot is still scratching and struggling to get out. Arthur creeps over to the pot and slams the lid down. There is an enraged snarl from inside the pot. It’s struggling. Arthur has to really fight to keep the lid on.)

Carol
Oh my oh my oh my GOD Arthur!!

(The thing in the pot makes one last attempt and then stops struggling.)

Do you think it’s passed Arthur?

Arthur
Your guess is as good as mine Carol.

(There is a tiny whine from inside the pot.)

Carol
Oh. Well I guess it’s still….amongst us.

Arthur
Maybe we should take it to the veterinarian?

Carol
Maybe we should just put it to rest. Because it seems like it’s in pain.

Arthur
Not to worry Carol, I’ll just run it right over to the veterinarian.

(Carol stares off, stoic.)

What?

Carol
I think it might be an endangered species.

Arthur
Oh sweetheart, it’s no danger to us.
Not in the shape that it’s in, and not inside the pot.

Carol
Well Arthur, it’s just that… An endangered species is--I read about this in the National Geographic-- an endangered species is when there’s practically no animals left of a species. And I don’t know exactly what this thing is, but I know I’ve never seen anything like it, so don’t you think that maybe it might be endangered Arthur?
Arthur
Well then that’s all the more reason for us to take it to the veterinarian Carol.

Carol
Well here’s just one small problem with that Arthur: According to the National Geographic, that son of a gun Nixon passed a law where if you harm an endangered species it’s... Well, you could go to jail.

Arthur
That son of a gun! They send you to jail Carol?

Carol
Well, yes. I’m afraid that’s the case. So.

(The thing in the pot whines again. It’s really pitiful, painful to listen to.)

Arthur
It just shot out of nowhere before I could hit the brakes.

Carol
Oh no. This is terrible.

Arthur
I’m so sorry Carol.

(Carol starts to cry in a really pretty way. Arthur goes to comfort her.)

Carol
Arthur maybe could you- your hands still have the-

Arthur
Oh, right.

(Arthur goes to the sink and starts to wash the blood off his hands.)

That’s strange.

Carol
What is?

Arthur
It’s not coming off.

Carol
Use the Palmolive.
Arthur
I did. But it’s…. (He sniffs his fingers.)

Sticky.

(Carol sighs, ‘Oh men’, goes under the sink and takes out rubber gloves, some Ajax and a scrub brush.)

Carol
Hold still.

(Carol goes to town scrubbing Arthur’s hands and arms.)

Huh.

Arthur
You see!

Carol
Yeah I see what you mean. It is sticky.

(The thing in the pot lets out the most desperate sound yet. Arthur and Carol turn around to face it, Arthur’s arms still covered in blood, Carol’s gloves now covered in blood as well.

At this moment we should realize that Chris, dressed in a 1960’s flower child Mumu has been quietly watching them for some time.)

Chris
So what’s in the pot?

Carol
Oh! Chris hun, it’s just—your father accidentally hit an animal with his car.

Arthur
It’s badly hurt, honey. It’s not going to make it. But it’s still alive. And so we’re—

(Chris goes to one of the kitchen drawers and pulls out a large carving knife. She’s at the table in a flash, lifts the lid from the pot and stabs the thing in the pot over and over and over again. Arthur and Carol scream. The thing in the pot screams. Chris is calm.

Finally the thing in the pot stops screaming. Arthur and Carol stop screaming. They stare at Chris, who has blood splattered all over her face and arms. Chris drops the knife into the pot.)
Chris
It’s over now.

(Arthur and Carol stare at her, slack jawed.)

Can we get some Chinese for dinner?

Carol
Oh, Chris. Hun--

Chris
I’ve asked you to stop calling me hun, Carol. You’re not my mom.

(Chris turns and goes back upstairs.

Blackout.)

Scene Two

(A little while later, Carol, Arthur and Chris sit around the dinner table with takeout containers of Chinese food. They’ve all still got still spatters of blood on them because they couldn’t scrub it off. Carol picks at her food. Arthur eats slowly. Chris eats with gusto, clacking her chopsticks.)

Chris
Sure beats pot roast, right Dad?

Arthur
Christine, that’s rude. Apologize to Carol.

Chris
Sorry Carol.

But I guess no more pot means no more pot roast- In the future. Right Dad?

(Arthur glares at her.)

Sorry Carol.

Carol
Oh that’s all right Chris.
It’s only that…well I might as well tell you that was my mother…my mother’s pot.

Chris
Well this was my mother’s house.
Carol
That’s solid cast iron Chris. It gets seasoned over time. The more you use it, the better it gets. My mother got that pot as a bride, cooked in it for forty years, Then passed it down to me.

Arthur
Oh no, sweetheart. I had no idea.

Chris
Stop calling Carol sweetheart. It’s disrespectful to Mom.

Arthur
Eat your food.

Carol
It’s all right Arthur. It’s only a pot.

(They eat in silence for a moment. Then Carol bursts into tears.)

Oh I guess there’s no use in trying to hide it Arthur. I am. I am heartsick over the pot. We didn’t have much back when I was growing up. But my parents were hardworking and decent people. And even when times were tough, You could count on my mother to have a warm meal waiting in that pot. I suppose that’s why I’m so busted up over that pot Arthur. I’d hoped that pot would be a source of comfort for our family too.

Chris
You aren’t in our family.

Arthur
Yes she is Chris. We’ve been over this. You know that Carol’s a part of our family now.

Carol
It’s all right Arthur. She’ll come around in time

Chris
I’m sitting right here Carol. / I can hear you.

Carol
And I suppose that really when you look at it, Things will turn out right over the pot. Because look at this beautiful house, Look at the wonderful….bounty of things in this house.
You’ve been blessed to never know want the way I have Chris. So maybe I’m just making a whole big racket over a silly old pot.

(Carol laughs sweetly. Like it’s all just been a big silly misunderstanding but, hey, lesson learned.)

Arthur
Carol you are a treasure. You are just an absolute treasure.

Chris
I’m a treasure too though right Dad? I also am a treasure.

Carol
Of course you are a treasure Chris. No one is saying that you’re not.

Chris
Dad?

Arthur
Why don’t you finish your supper Christine? Before it gets cold.

(Chris starts to make small anxious sounds, under her breath. Like she’s trying to self soothe or something, but it’s not working. Her sounds start to sound like the sounds the animal was making in the pot.)

Carol
Chris, would you um- do you think you might stop that hun?

Chris
What?

Carol
Those noises Christine, they’re disturbing. And maybe your Dad will back me up here- I’m not so sure they’re appropriate for the dinner table.

Arthur
She’s right, knock it off Chris.

Chris
Dad, are we in China right now?

Arthur
What?
Chris
Are we in the United Soviet States of Russia?

Carol
Of course not Christine. We’re in America.

Chris
Okay. Well, just checking to make sure that we do actually live in a free country with free speech instead of an oppressive communist regime where you’re not allowed to make sounds that you feel like making at the dinner table.

(Carol gets up and goes into the pantry.)

Arthur
Carol, what are you doing?

Carol
I need a flashlight Arthur.

Arthur
What for?

Carol
And a shovel.

Arthur
There’s one in the garage.

(Carol starts to go.)

What are you doing Carol?

Carol
I want to give it a proper burial.

Arthur
Oh, honey. It’s late already. It’s dark out.

Carol
That’s why I need the flashlight.

Arthur
Why don’t you wait until morning?

Carol
I’d just like to put it to rest. So that other animals won’t get at it.
Chris
Get at its dead body you mean?
Those other animals can dig, you know.
They can just dig it right up and eat it.

Carol
That’s why I’m going to make the hole very deep.

Arthur
I’ll help you.

Carol
That’s okay Arthur. You finish your supper.

(Carol finds a flashlight, heads out the back door. Chris stares at her father. Arthur avoids eye contact.)

Arthur
Christine.
Where’d that dress come from?

Chris
My closet.

Arthur
Well how about you just put it in the wash and I’ll run it down to the Salvation Army after work tomorrow.

Chris
Well how about let’s not Dad.

Arthur
Don’t start up again over this Christine.
We both know it’s not healthy for you to be wearing Ellie’s clothes around like this.

Chris
How about you just run Ellie’s picture and records and ashes down to the Salvation Army too while you’re at it? That’d probably be real healthy too, right Dad?

Arthur
JESUS CHRISTINE!
I’m doing my best.
Cut me some goddam slack here!
(Chris takes him in and cuts it out.)

Chris
I just don’t want us to forget about Ellie, Dad.

Arthur
I haven’t.
Christine, I want to say something to you- Carol and I have both noticed this-
It seems like
Your behavior has been getting more and more…bizarre lately.

Chris
Bizarre?

Arthur
Like with that creature in the pot.

Chris
Well, it’s just that I heard you and Carol talking about how you’d better put it down and I
didn’t want to have to listen to that sound it was making anymore so I just went for it.
_Because that thing in the pot made me sort of think about Mom, those last three days._
And how she would have been better off dead than alive those last three days.
_Just the same as the thing in the pot._

Arthur
……………

Chris
I just felt so sorry for it dad. And so sad for it.

(Chris starts to cry for real.)

Arthur
There, there now Christine. It will all turn out right somehow. Don’t you cry now.

(Chris goes and sits on her father’s lap and wraps her arms around his neck. He pats
her back, although clearly this makes him uncomfortable.)

Chris
And I think I might have lost Ellie’s necklace too Dad….She’s slipping away, I can feel it.

Arthur
That necklace will turn up somewhere Christine. Might have gotten sucked into the
vacuum cleaner-

Chris
Sometimes I feel so sad about Mom,
It’s like I’ve got a rock choking the life out of my heart.
And I know you’re really busy with Carol these past two months but,
I’ve really missed you Arthur.

(Chris softly, awkwardly attempts to kiss her father on the cheek? The mouth? We can’t
tell and neither can he. Arthur is shocked and pushes her off of him. Chris falls on the
floor and howls with rage.

Carol enters from the backyard, her hands and knees covered in soil.)

Carol
Arthur, what happened?

Arthur
Christine, I just- I have had it!
Go to your room.

(Chris gets up, chucks a takeout container of Chinese food at Carol, and runs offstage.)

Arthur
Goddamit Carol! This is just a...
A Grade A example of what I’ve been saying about Chris and her acting out.
I don’t know how much more of this I can put up with Carol.

(Re: the General Tsao’s all over Carol’s shirt.)

Oh for Christ’s sake Carol, let me get you a dishtowel or something.

Carol
I’m fine Arthur, nothing a can of seltzer won’t fix.

Arthur
She’s out of control Carol!
I don’t know what I’m supposed to do here.

Carol
I’m sure she’s just being a teenager Arthur. It’s hormones. It will pass.

Arthur
You think?

(Carol shrugs.)

So. You buried it?

Carol
I did. At the base of the oak tree, right next to the grill.
Arthur
You buried it next to the grill?

Carol
It was the only spot where there wasn’t roots or lawn.

Arthur
What about your mother’s wedding pot?

Carol
I buried that too. I buried the poor thing inside the pot, may it rest in peace.

Arthur
I really am sorry about the pot Carol.

Carol
How could you have known Arthur?

Arthur
Still.

(Pause.)

I’ve been thinking Carol,
That Chris’ acting out episodes probably are on account of Ellie.

Carol
Might could be…

Arthur
Well, just what am I supposed to do about that Carol?
It’s not like I can bring Ellie back from the dead.

Carol
Sure can’t.

Arthur
Plenty of young girls’ mothers die and probably most of them don’t go around stabbing poor innocent creatures in pots.

Carol
I’m sure most don’t, Arthur.
But just- try not to get too worked up about it. Okay?

(She starts to rub his shoulders. He relaxes for just a moment. Then Night Sun’s ‘Livin with the Dying’ starts to blast from the record player upstairs.)
Arthur
I tell you what Carol, I don’t think those records are helping any with Chris and her acting out.

Carol
The rock and roll?

Arthur
I can’t stand the sound of it. But Ellie loved all sorts of music- that’s how come she let Chris have those records. All of this acting out might be that music she listens to.

(Arthur stares off into space.)

Carol
It might be, with Chris, I’m thinking that maybe part of the acting out problem might be…me.

Arthur
Don’t say that Carol!!

Carol
Well, ever since Ellie passed, Chris has sort of taken a dislike to me.

Arthur
She’s just a teenager. It’s the hormones.

Carol
Maybe we rushed things Arthur-

Arthur
Now hold on a minute Carol-

Carol
I’m just saying that maybe it wasn’t right for us To have started with our relations so fast after Ellie passed.

Arthur
It’s been two months Carol!

Carol
And with Chris going around hating me like that…. Oh Arthur, I don’t think she’s the only one who disapproves. Your colleagues at the plant-

Arthur
They like you! Sure they like you, Carol.
Carol
And those people from the country club-

Arthur
Well they’re just a perfect example of rich people poor manners-

Carol
Even the other nurses at work, I can just tell, they’ve cooled to me Arthur. Perhaps they think I’ve taken advantage of a grief-stricken widower?

(Arthur takes just a moment too long to respond.)

Arthur
No, of course not. I love you Carol. And I suppose life has to go on… Can’t just sit here crying over spilled milk, can I?

(A pause.)

Carol
I ought to go.

Arthur
What? No! Please don’t Carol-

Carol
They’re all right, everybody’s right about us-

Arthur
No, please stay Carol; I don’t want to be alone!

Carol
I’m taking advantage of you-

Arthur
You aren’t!

Carol
I just need to know whether I should stay or go Arthur.

Arthur
Stay.

(A beat.)
Carol
Well then damn them all Arthur.
Damn all their nasty condescension.
What do they know about love, real love?

Arthur
Nothing. They don’t know a thing.

Carol
When love enters your life, you’ve got to be a real big fool to say no.

Arthur
That’s true.

Carol
We’re just mortal. We’re just all so mortal.
Who are we to say “No love, go away from my heart right now, because my co-workers and my sullen teenage daughter disapprove.”

Arthur
No one. No one at all.

Carol
Oh Arthur, let’s not wait then.
Why wait and throw a whole big wedding when we know right now?

Arthur
Well just hold on Carol-

Carol
You’re sure, I’m sure. What are we waiting for?

(Arthur wants to protest but can’t think of a good argument.)

Arthur
Okay.

Carol
Oh Arthur, do you really mean it?

Arthur
I do. I really do. You’ve got to be a real big fool to say no to love. We’ll just head on down to city hall and that will be that.

Carol
Oh, Arthur.
Arthur
I’m going to make an honest woman out of you Carol.

Carol
Arthur, sweetheart.

Arthur
You and me and Chris will just head right down there and then we’ll be a real family.

(A pause.)

Carol
Do you really think we ought to bring Chris along?
She might not like it.

Arthur
Well, she’s my daughter. And you’re going to be her mother. Don’t you think that’s right?

Carol
Well, I’m sure that whatever you think is right Arthur.

Arthur
You don’t think it’s right?

Carol
You’re the man in the family.

Arthur
Well- I just- what’s your opinion about it?

Carol
You’re the boss Arthur. I won’t impose myself. But I just think that Chris might not like it.

(A pause.)

Arthur
Maybe she wouldn’t.

Carol
Well don’t lets not bring her on my account.

Arthur
No, you’re probably right Carol. She might not feel comfortable.
She’ll come around eventually though.
It’s just those pesky hormones.
Isn’t that right Carol?
Carol
Oh Arthur, you've made me so happy!

(She wraps her arms around him and kisses him. He picks her up and takes her upstairs. Shortly thereafter, we start to hear pretty loud sex sounds.

Chris storms into the kitchen to escape the sex sounds. She sets her casette player on the table and hits play. The Grateful Dead’s ‘Ripple’ mostly muffles the sex sounds.

She goes the fridge and pours herself a glass of milk.

She sits at the table, sipping her milk and listening to the music. Finally the sex sounds reach a climax and stop.

When she’s sure it’s really over, Chris takes a different cassette out of her pocket and put it’s on.

It’s a home recording....

Ellie
Did you hit play?

Chris
Yeah.

Ellie
You have to hit record and play.

Chris
Okay.

Ellie
Are you ready?.....I’m Ellie Cook.

Chris
And I’m Chris Cook.

Ellie
And the name of our band is….do you want to say it?

Chris
The name of our band is- Captain Cook and Peter Pan!

Ellie
And this is our latest hit single-
Chris
Mr. Tambourine Man.

Chris and Ellie sing Mr. Tambourine Man. Ellie accompanies them on the guitar. Chris is tentative at first, then becomes more confident. Ellie takes a verse or two on her own and she’s wonderful. Her voice is beautiful and earthy and rich.

As the tape plays, Chris rests her head on the table.

Then a terrifying animation sequence flickers to life on the kitchen window. The figures are crude and nightmarish. A woman lies in a hospital bed. Then a nurse enters her room to give her a shot. As the nurse gets larger, the woman in the hospital bed gets smaller and smaller until the woman in the hospital bed is consumed by the nurse.

Chris wakes up with a shudder. Sips the last of her milk, then discovers an egg at the bottom of her glass.

She takes out the egg, ponders it for a moment.

Then she crushes the egg.

Inside the egg there is a single strand pearl necklace.)

Chris
Mom?
Are you there?

(Christine puts on the necklace, scans the empty kitchen. Blackout.)

Scene Three

(It’s early the next morning. Carol comes downstairs in a crisp nurse’s uniform. Today is the first day of the rest of her life! She starts to make some coffee. She calls upstairs.)

Carol
Chris?

(No response.)

Chris are you up yet?
It’s almost 7:30 and you wouldn’t want to be tardy for school, would you?
Chris?

(No response.)
I'm going to fix you some eggs and toast for breakfast, is that all right?

(No response.)

Or would you rather just have some oatmeal and juice?

Chris?

(Carol turns and sees that the pot from last night is back on the kitchen table, covered in dirt. She screams. Arthur calls down from upstairs.)

Arthur
Carol, honey you all right?
Hey Carol?

(Carol seethes by the sink. Arthur lumbers down the stairs, a towel wrapped around his waist, half shaven.)

Arthur
What happened?

(Carol does not respond. She just points to the pot on the table.)

Oh for the love of--Christine get down here!

(No response. Arthur charges up the stairs. A moment later he drags Chris down the stairs in her pajamas.)

Chris
What?!?

Arthur
What do you mean, what?
Look at the table Christine; you see what I'm seeing?

Chris
Yeah.

Arthur
Why did you do that?

Chris
Do what?

Arthur
Why did you dig that back up and put it on the kitchen table?
Chris
I didn’t do that.

Arthur
Then how do you explain the fact that it’s sitting on the kitchen table?

Chris
I don’t know. Maybe Carol did it.

Carol
You’re a liar.
You’ve been a very, very bad girl Christine. And what’s more you’re a liar because there is no other way that this pot could have gotten dug up and put back on this table other than you. You should be ashamed of yourself, you twisted little brat.

(Carol is suddenly icy calm. She digs her nails into Chris’ arm and pulls her in close.)

Chris
Arthur she’s scratching me!

Arthur
Hey now Carol! Stop it!

Carol
All I can say is thank goodness your poor mother isn’t here to see what a horrible, nasty little girl you’ve become.

(Chris bites Carol’s arm, hard. Carol screams, throws Chris onto the floor.)

YOU BIT ME!! YOU EVIL LITTLE CUNT.
(Chris screams and lunges back at Carol. Arthur gets between them.)

Arthur
Hey! Hey now.
Calm down.
Christine, apologize to Carol.

Chris
No way Dad. It was self defense.

Arthur
Carol, apologize to Christine.

Carol
Are you insane?
Look at what she did Arthur.
(Re: the bite mark on her arm.)

You watched her kill that poor little animal last night. She’s merciless. You said yourself that you’re scared of her. And now she’s done this, just to frighten me.

She’s deranged. She’s not normal, Arthur. She’s just being nasty and naughty and trying to get rid of me twelve ways to Sunday and you just keep taking her side.

Arthur
Did you dig up that pot Christine?

Chris
No.

Arthur
Then how’d it end up there?

(A pause. Chris sees her opportunity and seizes it.)

Chris
I dug it up.

Carol
I knew it! You see Arthur. You’re just a lying little troublemaker Christine.

Chris
I thought I’d clean up the pot for you Carol. And give it to you as a wedding present. Because I overheard you and Dad talking last night, And you said at dinner how much you loved that pot, so I wanted to do something nice. And I lied because I wanted it to be a surprise for you.

(There’s a big pause.)

Arthur
Well.

Chris
I thought it would make you feel welcome, Carol.

Arthur
That was very thoughtful Christine.
Carol
She’s-
I know you’re lying Christine.
You may be able to fool your father, but you can’t fool me.

Arthur
Carol, that’s enough.

(Carl turns away from them, facing the sink. Chris starts to whimper.)

Chris
She called me the C word Dad. She scratched my arm up bad.
And all I wanted to do was help Carol out with her pot and give her a surprise.

(Arthur goes over to comfort her.)

Arthur
You just run along upstairs. There’s some bactine in the bathroom cabinet.
Finish getting ready and I’ll drive you to school myself and maybe we’ll even find time to
pick up a Krispy Kreme on the way in.
Would you like that?

(Chris nods and heads upstairs. As she leaves-)

Chris
I’m really sorry you didn’t like your present, Carol.

(Chris goes. Carol is still facing the sink, with her back turned away from us.)

Arthur
Carol, it seems pretty clear to me that you overreacted.

Carol
She drew blood you know.
And I’m going to have to get a suture probably.
It might even get infected.
Humans got dirtier mouths than dogs.

Arthur
You said some awful things to my child just now.
You owe her an apology.

(Carl slowly turns back around to face Arthur. Suddenly she’s back to Mrs. Brady on speedballs.)
Carol
Oh Arthur, you’re right.
I really botched that one up didn’t I?

Arthur
What?

Carol
It’s well, it’s different times I suppose.
I don’t have to tell you that back when you and I were growing up,
The sort of lip that she serves up would have gotten us a swift kick in our britches,
But times have changed right?
I suppose I’m just an old fashioned kind of girl.
I just hope you and Chris will be able to find it in your hearts to forgive a poor old fuddy-duddy like me.

(Carl tries to laugh it off again, like it’s the end of the episode, but Arthur’s not buying.)

Arthur
Carol, what’s gotten into you?

Carol
I feel just fine Arthur.

Arthur
This isn’t funny.

Carol
I’m so sorry Arthur. Honest to God I am.

(A pause. She kisses him.)

Carol
Will you get rid of that awful thing Arthur? Will you do that for me?

(Before she goes, she pauses and gives Arthur a kiss goodbye. Somehow the kiss escalates and the peck goodbye gets really hot and dirty. On both sides. Carol cuts it off.)

Carol
I’d best be going.
I just hope you have a good day at work Arthur.

(Carl exits. Arthur takes the pot and shovel and heads out the back door.)
Scene Four

(It’s later that afternoon, after school. The dirty pot is back, under the kitchen table. The front door opens. Someone runs up the stairs. Then, the opening strains of Pink Floyd’s ‘Breathe’ start to play.

Chris appears in the kitchen, in school clothes plus the pearl necklace. She notices a note on the refrigerator, grabs it and starts to read it out loud.)

Chris

Dear Christine. All I can say is how sorry I am for- blah blah blah fucking blah-
I hope you can find it in your heart to blah blah blah fuck you.
With love, Carol.

(Chris goes to one of the kitchen drawers and takes out a matchbook. She lights the note on fire, tosses it in the sink.

She strikes another match and watches it burn down to the quick. Lights another one and watches it burn. Then she disappears into the pantry and retrieves a candle.

She lights the candle.)

This is an invocation to Eleanor Joanne Cooke,
   Wherever her soul may lie.

Once upon a time, many many years ago in 1963
A girl named Ellie lived in a little factory town in the Midwest
   With her mom and dad, nana and gramps.

(Very faintly, an animation starts to appear in the kitchen window, sketches that follow the story that Chris is telling. The drawings are flowing and vivid, slightly childlike but with a great deal of sorrow in them. Like a Chagall, or one of Lorca’s sketches.)

More than anything, Ellie loved to sing and play the guitar.
   But Nana and Gramps thought she ought to go to secretary school.
      So one night, Ellie kissed her sleeping parents goodbye
         And she got on a bus bound for San Francisco, California.

When she got there, she got a job in a bookstore during the day.
   But every night she would go to a coffee place and sing and play the guitar onstage.

Then one night, a soldier named Arthur was on his way home from the war in Vietnam.
   And on his way home, he stopped in San Francisco.
      And one night while he was in San Francisco, he went to a coffee place.
         And in that coffee place, he saw Ellie and heard her sing.
And he fell in love with her at first sight.

*(Animation Arthur falls in love with animation Ellie at first sight.)*

And so he decided not to go straight home to the Midwest, where Arthur also was from.

Instead, he stayed in San Francisco and tried to get Ellie to go out on a date with him. And Ellie didn’t really want to go on a date with him at first because Arthur could be a real square sometimes, but finally Ellie saw that Arthur had a warm smile and was very persistent and so finally she said yes to a date, And two weeks later they got married in San Francisco.

Then Ellie got pregnant,
And so they came back to the Midwest because their families wanted to be around Ellie’s baby, which was me.

*(Chris closes her eyes and focuses hard.)*

Mom? Are you there?
This is your daughter, Christine.
If your spirit is present Ellie, please make that presence known somehow.

Ellie, this is your daughter Christine.
I love you and miss you so much.
If your spirit is present Ellie, please give me a sign.

Mom?

*(Chris gives up and blows out the candle. Then Chris notices Carol’s magazine on the counter.)*

Fucking Carol.

*(Chris strikes a match and lights it on fire. This time the blaze catches unexpectedly and there’s more smoke. Chris throws it into the sink. The smoke detector starts to go off.)*

Shit.

*(She grabs the smoke detector and starts pulling the batteries out. The phone rings and rings and Chris doesn't answer it.)*

When the phone stops ringing, there’s a moment of silence before we hear a rustling from the pot under the table. Chris hears it. Then it stops.

Maybe she’s misheard? But there it is again, somewhere between the chirp of a baby bird and the whine of a newborn fox. As she approaches the pot, the sound gets louder.
She stands before the pot, braces herself and removes the lid. Several small animals start to scream in pain from the broad daylight.

Chris slams the lid back on, then opens it just a crack. The animals chatter happily.)

Chris
Oh. My. God.
Ellie?

(There’s a knock on the back door. Chris shoves the lid back down on the pot. From offstage-)

Hugo
Hello?

Chris
Who’s there?

Hugo
Hugo Schmidt.

(Hugo Schmidt lets himself into the kitchen.)

Chris
Jesus Hugo, you just walk into someone’s house?

Hugo
My mother sent me.
She heard the…the ah, Feueralarm?
You are adequate? With the smoke?

Chris
Just peaches Hugo.
Had a little trash fire, nothing to write home about.

(Hugo doesn’t leave.)

Goodbye Hugo.

(The thing in the pot starts to make the chirping sound. It’s loud enough so that they can both hear it. There’s an awkward moment where they try to pretend that they didn’t both hear it. But then-)

Hugo
Well. What is that?
Chris
Crickets. For my science fair project.

Hugo
And they are in the...pot?

Chris
You sure are nosy.

(The sound again.)

Hugo
Okay. This is not crickets.
If you have small foxes or hens, you should free them from the pot lest they asphyxiate.

(Chris removes the lid a little because she doesn't want them to die.)

Can I see?

Chris
I don’t think so Hugo.

Hugo
I love all animals.

Chris
I just don’t know if you’re the sort of dork that would tell on me to my Dad if I showed you.

Hugo
I am not that sort of dork.

Chris
You sure?

Hugo
Ja.

Chris
Then you’re gonna have to come close Hugo. I can only open it a crack. They’re not too keen on daylight. That’s called nocturnal Hugo.

(Chris removes the lid, and the creatures call out loudly. Chris and Hugo stare at the things in the pot, which are equally revolting and adorable. Then Chris gently places the lid halfway onto the pot.)
Hugo
Oh. Mein. Gott.
What is this?

Chris
Well Hugo, it’s a pot full of beast creatures with feathers and teeth.

Hugo
And big black eyes!
And eggshells?

Chris
Eggshells…
They’re hatching.

Hugo
They’re revolting.
And adorable.
Where did you find them?

Chris
Well Hugo,
My father hit some weird thing with his car last night.
Then he put it in the pot then I stabbed it and they buried it.
But now it’s back.
And it must have been carrying eggs when it died,
Because just now I’m noticing that there are many many more of them.

Hugo
This is what they are consuming?

Chris
This is what who are consuming?

Hugo
The meat they are consuming. It is their mother?

(Chris had not considered this.)

Chris
Yes. It seems like yes.

Hugo
There is almost no more left. What will you feed them?
Chris
Meat?

(Chris goes to the refrigerator and takes out the silver bowl of ground beef. Hugo and Chris take turns making little wads of ground beef and tossing them into the cracked open pot. We can hear the animals eating.)

Hugo
Wow. They have great hunger.

Chris
Yeah.

(Hugo goes out on a limb, because he has a blazing crush on Chris and cannot believe she is actually talking to him.)

Hugo
I….am sorry for your mother.

Chris
Me too Hugo.

Hugo
She was very beautiful and kind.

Chris
I know.

Hugo
What caused her death?

Chris
Carol, my dad’s fiancée.

(There’s the jiggling of keys in the front door.)

Carol
Chris? Hun?

(Chris slams the lid down on the pot, shoves it into Hugo’s arms. Carol gets the door open-)

Chris
Take this out back.
Hide it somewhere.
Hugo
Where?!

Chris
JUST HIDE IT SOMEWHERE Hugo.
And put a rock on the lid to make sure they can’t escape.

Hugo
What about asphyxiation?

Chris
Leave it open a crack, but not so they can escape. GO!

(Hugo vanishes just as Carol enters the kitchen carrying groceries.

As the following is happening upstairs, Hugo finds the entrance to the crawlspace, jimmys it open and hides there with the pot.)

Carol
Who was that just now?

Chris
My friend.

Carol
You have a friend?

Chris
Yes.

Carol
What’s your friend’s name?

Chris
Pam.

Carol
Why did Pam run away just now?

Chris
She had to get home in time for supper.

(Hugo calls out into the darkness of the crawlspace. Chris and Carol can both hear him.)
Hugo
Hello?

Carol
What was that?

Chris
What was what?

Carol
Is there someone in the crawlspace?

Chris
I didn’t hear anything.
Did you hear someone in the crawlspace Carol?

(A momentary stare down. Carol knows Chris is lying but can’t push it. Chris wins.)

Carol
How was school?

Chris
Fine. How was your job?

Carol
Good. Did you get the note I left you?
I’d like it if we could be friends…

(Chris heads upstairs.)

Why does it smell like smoke in here?

(Carol notices the box of matches on the kitchen table.)

Wait, were you smoking cigarettes?
Were you and your friend Pam sneaking cigarettes?
And that’s how come she shot out of here like that?

(Carol is sort of impressed.)

Cigarettes. Well. You could have just said so.
I didn’t know you were into that sort of thing.

(As Chris leaves-)  

Your Dad won’t be home for half an hour…
You want to have a cigarette with me?
(Chris doesn't leave. Carol goes into her purse and takes out a pack of cigarettes. She offers one to Chris. After a beat, Chris takes it. Carol lights it for her. Chris has clearly never smoked before.)

You have to inhale.

(Chris inhales and starts coughing violently.)

Not in your lungs so much.

(Chris gets it under control. Carol lights one for her self and takes a big drag. Surprised, delighted.)

Never thought I’d see this day.
    So what do you think?

    Chris
    About smoking?

    Carol
    Sure.

    Chris
    It's cool.

(A pause.)

    Carol
    Wow. We're talking.
    I just can't believe we're actually talking.
    It's really nice.

    Chris
    Sure Carol.

    Carol
    I know things have been pretty strained between us and I just hope that maybe this can be a new beginning.

(Chris notices Carol's arm is bandaged where she bit her earlier.)

    Chris
    They bandaged your arm?

    Carol
    Yep. Gonna be just fine.
I’m on oral antibiotics for a couple of days just to be sure, but I should really be just fine.

*(Carol gestures to where she scratched Chris on the arm.)*

You doing alright?

**Chris**
Just fine Carol.

**Carol**
I don’t know whether or not your read my note Christine, but I really am sorry. It was wrong of me to call you a liar. And those other things that I said…they were terrible. Please forgive me?

You know,
If you ever feel that you’d like to talk about your mother, about Ellie, I’m here for you. That’s not just lip service. I can imagine it’s a real puzzling and a real hard time for you?

*(No response.)*

You meet so many different people doing what I do Chris, It’s a real intimate type thing, going into someone’s home to watch over their passing. But your mother was real special. She and I got real close those last few days.

Those treatments, well, you know as well as I do, the treatments are almost worse than the cancer itself, but your mother fought hard and she wasn’t going to give up because she had you.

**Chris**
So then why did she die?

**Carol**
Well.

**Chris**
If she was so strong and she was such a fighter how come she died?

**Carol**
This is very hard, I know.

**Chris**
I know that you know, Carol.
Carol
What’s that Chris?

(Chris stands, silently trying to contain her grief and rage. She paces around the kitchen. Finally she stands staring Carol straight in the eyes. She does not break eye contact as she extinguishes her cigarette on her own forearm. She doesn’t scream. When it’s over, she tosses the cigarette on the ground.)

Chris
Go to hell Carol.
You’re a filthy fucking liar and I see right through you.

Carol
Well.
If that’s how you feel about it, then all right.

(Chris starts to head upstairs.

Note: However this is staged, the audience should not be able to see Carol’s eyes directly.

Carol calls after Chris-

Chris, hun?

(Chris turns around and looks over her shoulder to meet Carol’s gaze.

A horrible, animal moment passes between them.)

Chris
What just happened with your eyes Carol?

Carol
My eyes?

Chris
Your eyes went black Carol.

Carol
What are you saying Chris?

Chris
Like two black holes Carol, I’ve never seen anything so horrible in my life.

(A beat.)
Carol
Sounds like somebody needs a nap Chris. Why don’t you go have a lie down Chris? Rest up before supper.

(Chris backs out of the kitchen and runs up the stairs. Carol very calmly starts to unpack the groceries she’s bought. It’s all manner of meat products: bacon, chicken legs, hot dogs, cold cuts and a whole lot of ground beef.)

Scene Five

(A little later. Dinnertime. Carol and Chris, with matching bandages on their arms, flank Arthur at the table.)

Arthur
Christine, Carol told me about your accident. She said you burned your arm helping her make supper?

Well it was very nice of you to offer to help. I’m glad you two were able to make up and be friends.

There’s something that I- that we- need to tell you Christine. It’s actually a bit of good news.

Carol and I got to talking just now and well, you’ve got to be a real big fool to say no to love. Right, Carol?

Carol
A real big fool.

Arthur
We’ve decided, and I think you’ll actually be happy about this, we’ve decided that we just don’t want to wait anymore and so Carol and I are heading right down to city hall tomorrow and we’re going to get married and come back and be a real family. Because a young girl needs a mother, Chris. I know you do. What do you think about that?

Chris
Dad, I’m going to say something right now, and I know you’re not going to like it. But just remember when I say it that you’ve known me for thirteen years and you’ve known Carol for three days and two months.

Carol killed Mom. And also I think she might not be human. Please don’t marry her.
Arthur
Christine-

Chris
You know how I know this? Here’s why:
Mom was sick, but she was getting better.
Then Carol decided she wanted to take Mom’s place.
So Carol made Mom really sick for those last three days.
And made her so weak that she couldn’t fight back those last three days.
And now Mom is dead and Carol’s marrying you.

Carol
That’s fine. / That’s just fine Arthur.

Arthur
You’re still young Christine,
But you’re old enough that you should know the weight and the implication
of slandering another person in that way.
Put yourself in Carol’s shoes.
Here she is, trying the best she knows how to take care of us, to be a family with us and
you sit there and accuse her of murdering your mother.
How would you feel if you were Carol?

Chris
I would feel scared. Because the truth was finally coming out.

Carol
Arthur, I’m going. I’m going to pack my things and I’m going to go.

Arthur
Hold on a second Carol, we’re going to figure this out.

Carol
No, we’re not.

Chris
If it’s not true, then say it’s not true Carol.

Carol
I won’t dignify that with a response.

Chris
She won’t say it’s not true because she knows she did it.

Arthur
That’s not why she won’t say it.
Chris
Remember when we used to be a family with just you me and Mom?
You can’t get that back by marrying your wife’s killer.

Arthur
That’ll do Christine.

(Arthur tries to ignore her. Chris starts to lose it.)

Chris
You have to believe me Dad, I’m your daughter.
You used to love Mom so much.
Do you love Carol just the same as you loved Ellie?
She murdered Mom.
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND DAD?

Arthur
Shut up!

(Arthur suddenly backhands Chris, knocking her to the floor.)

Chris
SHE’S SOME SORT OF FUCKING ANIMAL DAD! SHE CAN MAKE HER EYES TURN INTO BLACK HOLES IF SHE FEELS LIKE IT. HER EYES GO BLACK. I SAW HER DO IT JUST THIS AFTERNOON.

Carol
Oh God / Arthur

Arthur
Go to your room Christine.

(Chris is up in a flash, at the knife drawer. She pulls out the big knife from last night and goes after Carol. Arthur grabs Chris just as she’s about to lunge at Carol, who at the last possible moment, holds out her hands to protect herself-)

Carol
I’m pregnant!
Arthur don’t let her hurt me, I’m pregnant.

Arthur
What?

Carol
This morning Arthur, remember how I was acting funny?
Well I got worried and thought something might not be right.
It turned out it was the hormones.
I took the test today, and I'm pregnant.
    Oh God.
I won't put our child in harm's way Arthur.

(Carl grabs her bag and heads for the door.)

Arthur
    Carol, stop.

Carol
    It’s not safe for me here Arthur.
    Look what she’s capable of.
    Oh I am so afraid!

(Carl starts sobbing.)

Arthur
    Go wait in the car Carol, I'll take care of this.

Carol
    It’s her or me. One of us has got to go Arthur-

Arthur
    Carol, go wait in the car.

(Carl exits. Arthur is left holding Chris, who is still holding the knife.)

Put down the knife Christine.

(Chris puts it down.)

Chris
    Dad-

Arthur
    I want you to listen to me very carefully Christine.
    You’re at a crossroads here.
    You choose to keep going down the road you’re on,
    Then I can’t make any promises about what’s going to happen to you.
    I know you loved Ellie. I loved Ellie too.
    But you just tried to stab the woman who is carrying my child.

    Carol and I are going to go for a drive now.
    We'll be back in a couple of hours.
    While we’re gone, you’re going to pack your things.
And when we get back,  
I’m going to either drive you to grandma and pops’ house, or to a hospital.  
Your call.

Chris  
How long do I have to go away for?

Arthur  
………..

Chris  
Dad, please don’t do this to me.

Arthur  
………..

(Arthur exits. Chris sinks onto the floor, numb.

Then there’s a knock on the kitchen floor.)

Hugo  
Ah…This is Hugo Schmidt speaking.

Chris  
Jesus.

Hugo  
I have concealed myself with the pot beneath your home.

Chris  
Just leave the pot down there and go home Hugo.

Hugo  
Ah, yes well.  
It seems their appetite has increased.  
Perhaps you might bring them more of the meat?

(Chris goes to the fridge and pulls out ground beef, chicken legs, hot dogs, bacon and cold cuts. She grabs a couple of flashlights out of the pantry.

She goes out the back door and reappears in the crawl space.)

Chris  
You picked a good hiding place Hugo.
Hugo
It is the Luftschutzkeller, no?
This is something in most homes?
In case of bomb attacks?

Chris
It’s the crawlspace.
There aren’t bomb attacks in America.

(The things in the pot start chirping and whining loudly.)

Hugo
Perhaps they can smell the food.

(Illuminated only by flashlights, Hugo and Chris remove the pot’s lid and shine the flashlights into the pot. Chris tries to feed the animals. The animals scream.)

Chris
Come on, little beasties.

(They do not eat.)

Hugo
Huh.

Chris
Put down your flashlight, Hugo.

(He does. They eat.)


Hugo
They are robust.

Chris
Wow. Are they? Have they gotten bigger since?

Hugo
I thought perhaps this was typical for this species-

Chris
Yeah, probably. Right?

Hugo
Yeah. Probably.
From my perspective, it seems that when we feed the species, their hunger increases.

**Chris**
Yeah. From my perspective too Hugo.

*(Chris dangles a chicken leg above the pot. Something black and half-seen pops up from the pot and grabs it, slicing open her hand as it does so.)*

*Her hand starts to bleed. The animals’ cries become frenzied.)*

Little shit ball!
That little beast just tore my hand open!

*(She slams the lid down onto the pot and the sound of the animals is muffled. Hugo grabs her hand-)*

**Hugo**
Here let me.

*(And starts sucking on the wound- boyscout snakebite style- to stop the bleeding.)*

You must put some ah- peroxide on it, so that it does not become inflamed.

**Chris**
Something terrible’s happened Hugo.

**Hugo**
I dropped the eaves from here of what you said to your Papa.

**Chris**
Carol isn’t just a murderer Hugo.

**Hugo**
No.

**Chris**
I saw something today that I can never unsee.

**Hugo**
Her eyes?

*(Chris nods.)*

**Hugo**
Perhaps Carol is Teufel?
Chris
What the hell’s a Teufel Hugo?

Hugo
A devil.
When I was small child, my Großmutter told me stories about Teufel.

Chris
I don’t think we have Teufels in America.

Hugo
During the war in my country, she said
There were Teufel that disguised themselves in human form.
They snatched people from their homes in the night and burned them.
Their hearts were ice, and their eyes were black pitch pots.
And no one believed they were real until much too late.
The tuefels stole her husband, and two of her sons.

Chris
That’s Nazis, not devils.
Right?

(Hugo shrugs.)

What did your Grandma say to do about Teufels?

Hugo
This part was past my bedtime.

Chris
Do you think I’m crazy Hugo?

Hugo
No.

Chris
That’s good.
Because I think my Mom’s communicating with me Hugo.
From…beyond.
She sent me a necklace and this pot full of beast creatures.
What does that mean Hugo?
Did your Grandmother know any stories about that?

(Hugo shakes his head no.)
Hugo
So what will you do?

Chris
I have to kill Carol.

Hugo
You jest?

Chris

Hugo
It is terrible.

Chris
You know what’s terrible Hugo?
Watching your Mom die slowly because your future stepmom murdered her. And then having to go live somewhere else because your Teufel stepmom is brainwashing your Dad.

Hugo
How will you deliver the justice?

Chris
I don’t know yet Hugo.

Hugo
And how will you be rid of Carol’s body?

(Chris thinks for a second, glances at the pot.)

Chris
The more they eat, the hungrier they get. Right Hugo?

Hugo
Right.

Chris
They’re getting bigger by the minute. Pretty soon they’re going to be hungrier for more than just hot dogs.

Hugo
Much hungrier.
Chris
I bet these little monsters could eat their way through 110lbs of pure bullshit in no time flat.

(A beat.)

I think my mom sent me a bunch of little beast creatures in a pot
So that they could eat Carol, Hugo.

Hugo
Wait. What?!!

Chris
There’d be no trace left of her, and nobody would ever have to find out.
It’s probably the only way to even kill a Teufel Hugo.

Hugo
Ah…

Chris
Godzilla v Mothra
Jaws v Beach
Beast creatures v Carol

This could be our little secret. Would you like that Hugo?

Hugo
I don’t know.

Chris
Don’t be a little shit Hugo.

Hugo
I am not a small shit.

Chris
I’m not so sure about that Hugo.

Hugo
Why?

Chris
I see you at school Hugo, I see you on the bus.

Hugo
I have also seen you on the bus. And many times I have watched you at school.
Chris
You’re not a cool guy Hugo.

Hugo
I am very cool.

Chris
What kind of music do you listen to Hugo?

Hugo
Ah, Beethoven? Polka? Petunia Clark?

Chris
Who the hell is Petunia Clark?

(Hugo sings in a very high-pitched voice.)

Hugo
When you’re alone and life is making you lonely you could always go Down-town.

Chris
You are not cool Hugo.

Hugo
No.

Chris
I bet you’d like to be cool Hugo.

(Hugo would really like to be cool.)

I think there’s a simple solution here. I’ll be your friend, you help me kill Carol.

Hugo
But-

Chris
All you have to do is help feed the animals Hugo. You wouldn’t even be doing anything bad.

Hugo
I cannot do this Christine…

(Chris musses Hugo’s hair till it looks cooler. Hugo can’t believe she’s touching him.)
Chris
I just made you five times cooler Hugo. You owe me.

Hugo
It is not bad to feed animals.

Chris
It's a kindness Hugo.

Hugo
Okay.

Chris
Okay!

Hugo
What do we do?

(The animals in the pot whine with hunger.)

Chris
We go find them some food.

Hugo
What food?

Chris
They eat meat.

Hugo
We're out of meat.

Chris
You know that lady up the street with all those cats?

Hugo
Yes.

Chris
Well, we're going to need some trash bags Hugo.

(Hugo and Chris exit the crawlspace.)
Scene Six

(Just a little while later, Hugo and Chris stumble into kitchen. They’ve both got some blood and some cat fur stuck to them. Hugo carries a couple of cat collars.)

Hugo
Oh God Christine, I will be sick-

Chris
You did a good job Hugo.

Hugo
Oh Christine, the meowing! And the crunching. The poor little kitty pussies!

Chris
We’re not looking back Hugo.

Hugo
I think the pot will not contain them any longer.

Chris
They’re getting stronger Hugo, that’s a good thing.

(There’s a loud banging and howling sound from the crawlspace. Then the sound of a car pulling up to the curb outside. Arthur and Carol get out.)

Arthur
Chris? Chris hun, are you there?

Hugo
Oh Got. What do we do?

Chris
I’ll think of something Hugo.

Arthur
Chris? Hun?

Chris
It’s all going to work out Hugo.

(Arthur starts to unlock the door. Hugo panics and hides in the pantry. Chris runs upstairs just as Arthur and Carol enter the kitchen.)
Arthur
Christine?
We’re back now.
You all packed up?

(No response.)

Christine?

(Nothing.)

She must still be upstairs.
I’ll go check on her Carol, won’t take me but a moment.

Carol
Please don’t leave me Arthur, I’m afraid.

Arthur
We’re going to get all of this sorted out Carol.
CHRISTINE!

Carol
I’m sure she’ll be down in a minute.

(Carol fiddles anxiously around the kitchen, cleaning things. Arthur reaches into his pocket.)

Arthur
There’s something I’ve been meaning to give you Carol.

(Arthur a small box of his pocket.)

Carol
Oh Arthur what’s this now?

Arthur
I’d hoped to give it to you on our wedding day Carol.
But considering the circumstances….
I think it might be a source of comfort to you,
And a promise that I’m a man of my word.
Go ahead and open it.

(Carol opens the box. Her reaction quickly turns from delight to a sort of horror.)

Carol
Oh, Arthur.
Arthur
Don’t you like it?

Carol
It’s lovely Arthur.
Only, isn’t this the same necklace that Ellie used to wear?

Arthur
Chris’ got that one.
I had the jeweler make a replica for you.
It’s just like the one I gave to Ellie the day we were married.
Shall I help you put it on?

Carol
Well it’s such a sweet gesture but I’m not sure that’s right Arthur…

(There’s a loud thumping and scratching sound from the crawlspace.)

My God what is that sound?

Arthur
It’s an old house Carol. Could be the water heater.

Carol
Oh. Well then.

Arthur
You’re probably right about the necklace Carol. It was so foolish of me to do that.

Carol
No, no hun it was such a sweet gesture. It’s only-
Well if it’ll make you happy Arthur I’ll wear it.

Arthur
No, it was just so foolish Carol.

Carol
Will you help me with the clasp?

(Arthur takes the necklace out of the box and puts it on Carol.)

Arthur
You look beautiful.

(Carol goes in to embrace Arthur. He demurs.)
Carol
Arthur sweetheart what’s the matter?

Arthur
Oh Carol, I know I shouldn’t do it,
But sometimes I still think about what happened with Ellie.

Carol
You know it’s no use looking back Arthur.

Arthur
She struggled so at the end Carol-

Carol
She was suffering so-

Arthur
So frail that something as soft as a pillow-

Carol
What you did was a kindness Arthur.

Arthur
You sure Carol?

Carol
I’m sure.

(He hugs Carol.)

Arthur
Carol, I know you and Chris have had some… run ins lately
I mean hell, we’ve had some pretty serious run ins in this house lately-

Carol
That’s putting it pretty mildly Arthur.

Arthur
But honest to God Carol, I believe that Chris really is a good girl.
She’s just been having a hard time lately, with the hormones and all-

Carol
I don’t want to talk about Chris anymore.

Arthur
If you’d have met Chris before Ellie got sick.
She was…night and day.
She was just the most curious, beautiful child you’d ever seen
She had these joyful green eyes…

Carol
Arthur.

Arthur
Then with everything that happened, well…
She’s obviously very different now.
I know it’s going to take some time for all of this to heal,
But I really do believe that we’ll be a family one day.

When I met you Carol I just thought to myself,
Here is a woman who is so kind and so good
Maybe she could help as a sort of mother to Chris bring some light back into those green eyes?

(A pause.)

Carol
Is that what you thought when you met me Arthur?

Arthur
You’re just so gentle and good Carol.

Carol
I thought you loved me Arthur.

Arthur
Well yeah, that too.

(A pause.)

Carol
Can’t just bring Chris’ eyes back from the dead, can I?
No crying over spilt milk?

(In the crawlspace, the pot seems like it’s about to burst. The crawlspace is almost roaring now.)

Arthur
Did you hear that Carol?

Carol
You said yourself it’s just the water heater Arthur.
Arthur
Might be a possum got stuck in the crawlspace.

Carol
Doesn’t sound like any possum I’ve ever heard Arthur.

Arthur
No, I reckon not Carol. Best go check on it. Won’t be a minute.

(Arthur exits to go investigate the crawlspace. Carol lights a cigarette and sits at the table. Arthur reappears at the entrance to the crawlspace. Using only a lighter to guide his way, Arthur approaches the howling pot.)

Arthur
Oh my- what is that smell?
Carol! Hey Carol hun.
You know of any reason why your pot is in the crawlspace?

Carol
No.

Arthur
Carol hun, you best call animal control. There’s something living in the pot.

Carol
In the pot Arthur?
Didn’t you bury it?

(The animals can smell Arthur and are going wild. They’re just about to burst through the pot-)

Arthur
It’s ah, I’m coming up now Carol.
Oh heck, of all the times for my lighter to go out.
Carol?!

(Arthur’s lighter goes out. In the dark, the pot tips over and the animals escape. We hear what sounds like dozens of squealing animals released from the pot. In the darkness we hear the sound of screaming and grisly eating sounds. Then no screams and just eating-)

Carol
Arthur? Are you alright?
(After the eating ends, we suddenly start to hear the sound of many small animals all around. They’ve crawled into the walls, the floor, the ceiling, into all the bones of the house. It’s impossible to ignore.

Then suddenly Hugo bursts out of the cabinet, brandishing two cans of Raid as weapons. He streams raid into Carol’s face as Carol screams. Carol passes out, hits her head on the floor and starts bleeding.)

Hugo
Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no.

(He goes to staunch Carol’s wound, gets blood all over his hands. It’s sticky.)

It’s sticky…

(Chris bursts in.)

Chris
Good job Hugo.

Hugo
This is a very bad job Christine! And what is the scratching sound in the walls?

Chris
The animals must have gotten into the walls Hugo.

Hugo
Oh Got! She needs a doctor.

Chris
We’re going to have to restrain her Hugo. Until I can figure out what to do.

Hugo
Eins, zwei, drei.

(They Carol onto a chair. Chris duct tapes Carol to the chair.)

Chris
Good job.

Hugo
What about your Papa Chris? Did not you hear him in the Luftschutzkeller?
(Chris nods.)

We must help him Chris.

**Chris**

I don’t know if there’s anything left to help.

**Hugo**

Your mama was beautiful and kind.
Why would your mama’s beast creatures wreak such horror upon your Papa Chris?

**Chris**

What if these aren’t my mother’s beast creatures Hugo?

(Carol momentarily regains consciousness.)

**Carol**

She’s mad.
Oh little boy, she’s crazy, please don’t let her kill me.

**Hugo**

You killed her mama.

**Carol**

Her mother died of Breast Cancer.
Please!

**Chris**

SHUT UP CAROL!!

**Hugo**

I will phone the police.

**Carol**

That’s right honey, call the police. Do it right now. I need to see a doctor right away-

(Carol slips out of consciousness.)

**Chris**

No police Hugo.

**Hugo**

What? Why?!

**Chris**

Because I know just what they’ll say.
It happens all the time on TV.
   There’s no proof.
They’ll let her go and she’ll move on to another town and do this to someone else.

**Hugo**

She will be tried.
The police will deliver justice.

*(Hugo goes for the phone, Chris yanks it out of his hand and smashes it on the kitchen floor.)*

**Chris**

I’m all alone now and she’s the reason why.
   You want to set her free?

**Hugo**

You are not all alone.

*(Hugo grabs Chris’ face and kisses her. Chris is stunned.)*

You must stop this now Christine.
   I am sorry but I cannot continue to be complicit in this tragedy.

*(Hugo goes for the door. In a panic, Chris tackles him and pins him to the floor. She manages to get him in a headlock, and drags him kicking and screaming into the pantry. She props a chair against the door so he can’t open it.)*

**Chris**

JUST SHUT UP FOR JUST ONE SECOND HUGO!
You don’t have to be a part of this but I can’t let her go.
   I’m going to figure all this out Hugo.

**Hugo**

It is so dark in this pantry Christine.

*(Then we start to hear the scratching sound again.)*

I think that the animals are- Christine, you must free me from the pantry.
   It is so dark Christine!

*(Soon we just hear Hugo’s screams and the sound of eating. Chris tries frantically to get the door open but it’s stuck. Then no more screams and just eating. Then they retreat back into the walls. After a moment, Chris opens the pantry door. A pool of blood oozes out onto the kitchen floor.)*
Chris picks up what’s left of Hugo’s bones. She goes offstage for a moment, returns with the shovel, then exits out the back door with the bones and the shovel.)

Scene Seven

(A little while later. Carol sits passed out, still duct taped to the chair. The opening strains of Pink Floyd’s ‘Wish you were Here, starts to play from upstairs. Carol rouses. She notices the blood on the floor. She screams.

She struggles in her chair, tries to tear at the tape with her teeth. She squirms her way over to the knife drawer, pulls it open. She manages to get one out, but then drops it. We suddenly notice that Chris has been silently watching this. She’s carrying her cassette player and wearing one of Carol’s nursing uniforms, and a gas mask. Chris very calmly walks over to the oven and turns on the gas.)

Carol
CHRIS!?! 
Oh Chris, for the love of God!

(Suddenly, Chris starts to dance along with the song. It’s an incredibly weird dance, sort of like a ritual shamanic grief trance. She just dances to the song over Carol and seems not to notice a word she’s saying.)

Carol
Chris honey, listen to me.
What happened to that little boy who was here before?
Is that his blood on the floor?
Where has he gone Chris?
I think you did something to him.
Oh no, I think that you did….

Okay, it doesn’t matter, it’s all going to be okay.
You’re in way over your head, I can see that.
But I can help you if you’ll let me.

You’ve had a very bad trauma Chris.
This is not my opinion, it’s medical fact.
And trauma can make people act in ways that are unhinged.

But nobody is blaming you. It’s perfectly understandable.
You need to let me go so that I can get you some help, and so that I can get some help for that little boy and for Arthur if they need it.

Your mother loved you very much Chris.
Even in the midst of this tragedy, you're lucky.
   Because you've been loved.
   That's something that not everyone gets.
   Don't dishonor her memory by...hurting me.
   I never even knew my parents-

*(Chris abruptly stops.)*

**Chris**

Then where'd you get the pot?

**Carol**

What?

**Chris**

Where'd you get your mother's pot from?

**Carol**

I was adopted.

**Chris**

Liar.

**Carol**

Chris, could we please not mince words at the moment because
   RIGHT NOW I AM OUT OF MY HEAD!
   I've ingested a whole lot of Raid, which could kill me.
   The oven is slowly filling this room with gas, which could also kill me.
   My head is bleeding.
   For all I know, Arthur is dead.
   I am currently pregnant,
   And you duct taped me to a chair and possibly killed a little boy too.

   Please?
   *Please?*
   Let me help you with all of this.
   You don't have to be alone.

*(Chris stops. She notices the necklace that Carol is wearing.)*

**Chris**

That's my mom's necklace.

**Carol**

What necklace?
Chris
The necklace you’re wearing.

Carol
Chris, that’s your mother’s necklace you’ve got on, isn’t it?

(Chris touches her neck. She is wearing her mother’s necklace.)

Chris
It’s right there around your neck. Why are you wearing it?

Carol
Do you see a necklace?

Chris
Yes.

Carol
There’s no necklace Christine.

(A beat.)

Do you know something that your mother told me? That the two of you used to on adventures together. She said that when you were eleven she took you to a Grateful Dead concert in Cincinnati, even though your Dad said you were too little. I could take you to go see the Grateful Dead.

Chris
She told you that?

Carol
She sure did Chris. I’ll be Captain Cook if you’ll be Peter Pan…

Chris
Did you kill her?

Carol
No honey, I didn’t.

Chris
Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. If I let you go, will I get electrocuted for letting the animals eat Arthur and Hugo?
Carol
Hugo and Arthur are dead?

Chris
Yes. They'll electrocute me, won't they?

Carol
Hey there hun...hey, it's going to be okay.
Where are their bodies?

Chris
Hugo's bones are buried out back next to the grill.
The animals got all the rest.

Carol
That's....you know what that's good Chris.
There's a silver lining here.
That's evidence for the police that the animals did it.

Chris
Really?

Carol
Yeah. They taught me all about this kind of stuff in nursing school.
The police can just take a swab and they'll know right away that it was an animal
because of the bacteria. They'll know right away that it wasn't you.
Okay?
Everything's going to be okay.

Chris
They can tell from a swab?

Carol
They sure can.

(Chris turns off the gas. A shadow woman appears in the window. Chris doesn't see
her.)

Good girl.

Chris
My mom had such a beautiful voice.
This one time when I was seven, I asked her why I didn't have any brothers or sisters
and she told me it was because she knew she couldn't love anybody else as much as
she loved me.
She used to make fun of my Dad for liking country music, but this one time I found them
slow dancing in the backyard to a Johnny Cash song.
She smelled like…my mom.
And I'll never smell her smell again as long as I live.

Carol
Oh hun.
The next thing I need you to do is to untape me from this chair.
(The shadow woman starts to bang and claw at the window in total silence.)

Chris
You'll hurt me.

Carol
No honey I won't.

Chris
I'm going to be in so much trouble.

Carol
I will protect you, I promise.
Come here.

(Chris shakes her head no.)

You're not alone pumpkin.
You've got me and I've got you.

(Chris slowly makes her way over to Carol.)

You see? Everything is okay.
I'm not mad.
In the morning, this will all be like a bad dream.

(Chris nods. She kneels in front of Carol and places her head on Carol's lap.)

Good girl Chris. Everything is going to be okay.

(Then very suddenly, Carol crosses one leg over the other and starts choking Chris with her thighs. Chris fights, but Carol squeezes harder, and then after a moment it's over.
The shadow woman watches this happen, powerless and horrified.

Chris rolls to the floor. Carol tips over in her chair, retrieves the knife from the floor, and cuts herself loose. The shadow woman disappears.

Carol takes a moment to survey the wreckage in the kitchen. She rubs her belly, and all
of a sudden we can hear the strange chirping of the newborn animals in the pot.

Then Carol very deliberately turns off the lights in the kitchen. She exits.

In the dark, we hear the sounds of scraping and scrabbling all around.)

THE END