

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by George Jarrard Pate entitled "Ragdoll." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

Michael Knight, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Allen Wier

Stanton Garner, Jr.

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

RAGDOLL

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

George Jarrard Pate
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ABSTRACT

Ragdoll is a play in two acts telling the story of Jeff Stiles and his children, Annie and Andy. Jeff's wife is a life-sized rag doll, and Annie and Andy have both human and doll parts to their physiology. Much of the play revolves around Andy and Jeff's debate over the nature of their family's existence.

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Why the Stage?

Bad art often creates a special sense of community in its audience which develops through predictable stages. This process begins with each individual's initial distaste. Social awareness kicks in, and each viewer attempts to judge her distaste against the responses she can perceive from the rest of the audience. Upon realizing that everyone else, in fact, dislikes the offering equally, the viewer first moves into a stage of shared discomfort. Do we admit that this is as bad as it is? Or do we politely show false approbation? In most cases, the development stalls awkwardly at this phase, or, in extreme cases of artistic ineptitude, the audience moves into the final phase, which consists of unabashed derisive laughter. But works that leave audiences floating uncomfortably in that place just short of derision do have a purpose in the world: they inspire us to ask what makes them so bad. If they were any better, we might point out their flaws but accept them as the inevitable failure to reach perfection. If they were any worse, we would not waste time understanding the nature of their failure, as we could better use that time making jokes at their expense.

It was after a premier of a new play that I found myself part of an audience stalled in the penultimate phase. After several awkward congratulations and handshakes, I managed to find a friend of mine, a fellow playwright, outside the theatre, removed somewhat from the rest of the crowd. "Why," I said, "was that as bad as it was?"

"It wasn't bad," he said. "It just wasn't a play. Cut it in half and it's a pretty solid sitcom pilot, but not a play. You should only put a story on the stage if that's the only place it will work."

At first, this seemed like one of those things one says to sound very clever but is meaningless at its bottom. But it stuck with me, and over time it has become something of a personal creed. When starting a play project, I always ask myself, “why the stage?” I do not necessarily agree with my friend’s idea that the story a play tells must be essentially and exclusively theatrical, nor do I even know exactly what that would mean. However, I think it is important to ask how any play takes advantage of the unique opportunities of the medium of theatre.

So what are these unique opportunities that drama provides as a form? Drama’s main advantage, and challenge, rises out of the relationship between the audience-- and I mean audience in the theatre, not readers of the published play-- and the text. An audience in a theatre moves along through time simultaneously with the actors on stage. The text has a literal, embodied presence that is not possible in any non-performance media. In fiction and poetry, the reader most often engages with the printed word itself. These forms can jump erratically through time and pause to focus on representing a specific emotion or perception purely through language. On the stage, such moments of extended contemplation are trickier because the audience cannot help but be aware of the living, breathing human beings in front of them, a fact which limits the potential for narrative distance. Whenever a play does work with narration, it must be embodied in a character such as Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*. Even characters designated “narrator” have a way of developing their own personalities; the pull between the characters Prologue and Epilogue (embodiments of the narrative devices for which they are named) in Will Eno’s *The Flu Season* is at least as compelling as the conflict of the story they

narrate. Language, and therefore story, in plays cannot escape its entanglement with the body.

One of my major turning points in thinking about the physicality of the stage and the narrative limits and opportunities it offers was in reading *Sticks and Bones* by David Rabe. In this play, David, the protagonist and a Vietnam vet blinded due to a combat injury, returns to the states and finds himself unable to readjust to civilian life in America. As the play progresses, the bodies on stage cease to represent his family members as they exist in the “real world” of the play and gradually become reflections of David’s own psyche, projections of his delusions. By the end, the play completely shifts to David’s point of view. It may seem strange to talk about point of view in terms of theatre, as generally there seems to be one point of view available: the object perspective of the audience. But in *Sticks and Bones*, the stage, the entire space of the theatre, becomes interpolated into David’s mind, although the workings of his mind are still represented by actual people, physical bodies in a physical space. In no other medium can a writer present the imagination with such immediacy, such presence. Although Rabe plays with this device in other plays, nowhere does it achieve such an effect as in the end of *Sticks and Bones*, as David’s family lovingly and cheerfully encourages him to commit suicide. That final scene was one of the reasons I wanted to start writing plays in general and *Ragdoll* in particular. I like to deal with the imagination, but my meditations on the imaginative have a tendency to lose emotional content and devolve into wit and cleverness for their own sakes. Theatre offers a unique solution to this storytelling problem because the presence of actors increases the gravitational pull towards reality.

The physical presence of the audience also draws me toward dramatic writing. In my writing, I'm always interested in asking questions rather than answering them. I never begin with the goal of teaching the audience something or offering some bit of wisdom that I, the wise and sensitive artist, have found and graciously decided to share with the huddled masses. I hope an audience member leaves thinking about ideas they maybe had not thought of or from angles they had not previously considered. The simultaneous reception of a text by multiple audience members in a theatre fosters this kind of thought provocation. Audiences experience a show as a group, and immediately after the curtain closes, they have an obvious and immediately available shared topic of conversation. My deliberately leaving the ending of *Ragdoll* ambiguous came out of my desire to encourage such conversation. In my ideal world, someone leaving a production of the show would turn to their friend and say, "so, did he put her back together or not?" And hopefully that fosters discussions about the imagination and its limits, its dangers, etc. One of the challenges of writing (and especially of rewriting) this play was balancing Jeff and Andy's respective argumentative prowess. If one is too overwhelming, then he becomes a mouthpiece for me and undermines authentic conversation about the play. The audience's experience instead revolves around agreeing or disagreeing with what I appear to believe. I learned this lesson about rhetorical balance while working on my first fullish-length play, *Indifferent Blue*, which is essentially an extended debate between two characters. One of my friends and trusted personal critics read an early draft and said, "this is ok, but I think as it is your audience can only align themselves with or against Stanley. Gerald is so weak that his argument doesn't even seem worth consideration." Again, this struggle

for balance is so key to me because of my belief in fostering authentic conversation instead of offering wisdom to be accepted or rejected. When people read books, they each do so in their own way, at their own time, and under their own conditions. When people see a play, they do so at the same time, packed in near each other, unable to escape the sense of shared experience, a kind of forced camaraderie which, ideally, engenders discussion.

Even film lacks the level of embodiment that theatre reaches. While real people do appear in films and speak the written text, those actors are not actually there in front of us. We see light projected on a screen and hear sounds playing through speakers. We know, even if only subconsciously, that these performances happened months, years, even decades ago, and have been rearranged, cut, and cleaned in the intervening time. I have always thought film has more in common with fiction than with drama partially because of this lack of physical presence. But film can also do things that fiction can and that drama cannot. Film, like fiction, can cut rapidly from place to place or show us a location from many different perspectives. Again, the physical reality of the theatre limits such shifts, or at least imposes certain constraints on how they may be done. It is very difficult to change a stage from a realistic mountainside, for instance, to an elaborate Victorian drawing room. The more scene changes needed on stage, the more simplistic and usually the more abstract the sets must be. The playwright who wants thirty vastly different settings in a play must anticipate such elements of stage design and how an audience will respond to a set comprised of simple chairs and those little black cubes all actors come to know so well. A screenwriter, provided sufficient budget, can write scenes set in New

Zealand and Switzerland for the same project and trust that both will be represented fully.

As an example of a playwright taking full advantage of the theatre as medium, take Luigi Pirandello and his famous *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. In the play, the eponymous six characters find themselves stranded in reality, having been rejected from the imagination of a writer unwilling or unable to tell their story. Even within that single-sentence premise lies a confrontation between the imagination and reality, one of the central tensions of the work. Within the world of the play, these characters have somehow left the realm of fantasy and entered into reality. Pirandello pushes this problem even further by taking full advantage of the realm of the theatre, by making the reality of the play part of our immediate reality as audience. The play opens with a company of actors preparing for a rehearsal in the very space the audience occupies. The theatre itself is the setting, and therefore the audience becomes interpolated as part of the world of the play. The characters intrude into this world; moreover, they do so through the aisles according to the stage directions (Pirandello 8). By entering into a world not clearly separated from the audience through any physical means and in fact passing between rows of audience members, the characters have invaded not only the reality of the story but the audience's reality as well. Pirandello uses the physical presence of actors to create a hopelessly entangled web between three different realities: the "real world" of the audience, the reality of the play, in which a company of actors rehearses for a play, and the reality of the characters, which comes from the mind of a character somewhere far offstage in the reality of the play. This blending of realities may be possible to some extent through other means of storytelling, but only in theatre can the audience be so

ensnared in the web. In other words, the same story can be told in other media, but the experience will necessarily differ.

In fact, *Six Characters* has been told in another medium: film. There have been several film adaptations, but I'm going to focus on the 1992 BBC adaptation directed by Bill Bryden. The film follows the plot-- and often the letter-- of the play very closely, with one very important change. The setting has been moved from a theatre to a movie lot. Bryden's change in location is shrewd; he attempts to recreate the effect from the play of establishing a "real" world into which these fundamentally unreal characters intrude. But his choice also betrays an awareness of the inadequacy of film as a medium to recreate the effects of the play. The change shows that Bryden knew setting the film in a theatre would defeat the purpose. These characters are supposed to be entering into our world, causing discomfort and uncertainty about our own notions of reality and fantasy, but to have them enter a theatre on film while we are in a movie house lets us off the hook. They are merely crossing from one fantasy world to another. The setting of the movie studio allows the six characters to enter the world the film actors inhabit, but it does not involve the audience. In the play, the characters literally enter the theatre where the audience sits. But almost no one will be watching this film while on a movie lot. We watch it on a screen, the actors playing the roles probably asleep in their beds somewhere far away. The characters in the film cannot enter our world. They cannot, however momentarily, disrupt our notion of our own reality. This is not, of course, to say that theatre is always an intrinsically superior medium. It is merely to point out that a certain effect-- a key effect, for this story-- can only be achieved in the physical space of a

theatre.

So what does all this have to do with the play at hand? *Ragdoll* has been in the works, even if only in my mind, for several years now. And from the very beginning, when I only had that one word, the title, scrawled in my notebook, I have been asking myself that question inspired by my friend. Why the stage? There are two main reasons: the visual impact of Annie's and Andy's doll-parts and the implication of the audience into the questions about how and why Annie and Andy exist. The former of these may seem strange. After all, the same visuals could just as easily be achieved on film as in a play, in fact probably with more convincingly. But my hope is that presenting these physical anomalies in person will enhance the sense of strangeness they are meant to encourage. As I said above, such effects are easily and often achieved in movies, to the point where I suspect we somewhat lose our sense of wonder over them. But to see represented before you on a real human body this concept of a doll-human hybrid demands attention and provides an instant visual clue that we are not in the realm of strict realism. Before I let myself get too far into the project, I stopped and asked some colleagues of mine, makeup and costume designers, if the effects I was describing would be possible on stage. If the doll parts did not read realistically, especially on Annie, then the play would not work. However, the doll parts being believable on stage does not necessarily mean they have to be "realistic." In fact, I'm not sure how one would represent a half-doll, half-person realistically. Annie and Andy's design is an instance of what Tony Kushner, in his introduction to *Angels in America* calls "theatrical magic." In discussing the visual effects to be used for the angels and other imaginary characters in

the play, Kushner says that “it’s ok if the wires show, and maybe it’s good that they do” (Kushner 5). An audience knows they are watching a play. It can be insulting and even inorganic to the play to try to hide the workings of “theatrical magic.” That Annie’s costume and makeup will look like costume and makeup does not hinder their impact on stage. The important thing in theatre is not to deceive the audience into thinking that everything portrayed on stage is real but instead to provide them with a complete world which adheres to its own rules, the artificiality of which they can quickly acknowledge, accept, and move past in order to get to the emotional and narrative content.

The believability and impact of the doll parts is so crucial because it feeds directly into the question of whether or not Andy and Annie exist as independent entities or merely as figments of Jeff’s imagination. The question works best if the audience at once believes that, within the world of the play, Annie and Andy have these functioning doll parts on their bodies while simultaneously knowing that they are impossible. It would be one thing to describe Annie, say, in a passage of prose or even to see her on a screen, but to have her in the flesh and cloth, right in front of the audience, makes her harder to dismiss as an object of mere fancy. Of course, these design elements are not the only aspects geared specifically towards theatrical production. Jeff’s waltz with the ragdoll breaks the reality of the play for a moment, dropping the audience completely into his point of view, à la David Rabe’s *Sticks and Bones*. In a sense, the entire theatre is in that moment transformed into the inside of Jeff’s mind, a projection of his subconscious. This moment is meant to show the audience how powerful Jeff’s imagination can be, powerful enough, at least, to transform the space around them for a few moments. Having had this

experience, Andy's arguments in Act II hopefully seem more plausible than they would otherwise.

I do not believe that every story we have to tell contains within it some code to tell us in which form it will work best, nor do I necessarily believe that every story will only work in one medium. But I do believe that asking that question-- why the stage?-- can only ever help the storytelling process. This is not, of course, a question of one genre's superiority over another. It is a question of fitting form to content. One might just as easily ask "why prose?" or "why verse?" But for me, the question is always the same as it was that night standing outside the theatre wondering what makes a play go so wrong. I constantly think about what the stage has to offer and what it will not allow. A playwright has to keep in mind, always, that he is only a part of the production process, only that first step towards full realization of the story. And the more he understands about how the theatre works, the better the final result will be.

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Act I

The Stiles household.
JEFFERSON STILES, the father,
sits in an armchair. There is
a human-sized rag doll slumped
in the chair next to his; this
is Mrs. Stiles. There is also
a sofa in the room. JEFF
occasionally pauses to look
over and smile at her. Playing
on the floor is their
daughter, ANNIE. Parts of her
body are made of rough sack
cloth which matches her
mother's, including a quarter
of her head. Her eye on this
side is a button. Wherever the
ragdoll parts of her body meet
skin, there are large, black
stitches. She is sixteen
years old but plays with her
cars like a child.

ANNIE

Vroom! Vroom!

(She crashes two of the cars into
each other.)

Screeeeech! Bang! Oh, my leg! Dear sweet lord, I think he's
dead. No, we were going to be married tomorrow. Oh, the
ironing.

JEFF

Irony, honey.

ANNIE

Don't interrupt. It is rudeness.

JEFF

Sorry.

ANNIE

And the driver of the sedan went to prison for vehicular
homicide.

(JEFF puts down his paper.)

JEFF
Where did you learn that?

ANNIE
I watch television.

JEFF
Are you supposed to watch violent shows?

ANNIE
I have toes.

(JEFF smiles and shakes his head.)

JEFF
Yes, you do. You have wonderful toes. But you did not answer my question, young lady.

ANNIE
What question.

JEFF
Never mind, silly.

ANNIE
Don't call me silly.

JEFF
Why not?

ANNIE
I don't remember. But don't.

JEFF
But you've always been my silly little girl.

ANNIE
Don't!

JEFF
Sweetie, what's wrong?

ANNIE
I can't remember!

(ANNIE grabs the doll side of her head and screams in pain. JEFF holds her.)

JEFF

It's ok honey. It's ok.

(ANNIE calms down.)

JEFF

Now, do you remember why didn't want me to call you silly?

ANNIE

Yes, I do.

JEFF

Really? Ok, then, why don't you tell me.

ANNIE

Tell you what, daddy?

JEFF

Tell me why you don't want me to call you silly.

ANNIE

Andy said that when people call me silly they're really just calling me stupid and trying to make it sound cute.

JEFF

Andy said that?

ANNIE

Yes he did, daddy. I do not lie.

JEFF

I know you don't sweetie.

ANNIE

Well that's settled then.

(Picking up her cars)

Vroom!

JEFF

(Taking the car from her)

I need you to listen to me. Being silly and being stupid are very different things. Lots of very intelligent people are silly.

ANNIE

Like who?

JEFF

Oh, I don't know. Steve Martin. Steve Martin is very silly and also very smart.

ANNIE

Who's Steve Martin?

JEFF

He's a very famous actor and comedian. And everyone loves him because he's so silly.

ANNIE

Really?

JEFF

Absolutely.

ANNIE

I want to be Steve Martin when I grow up.

JEFF

That's a good goal to have. You just forget what your brother said. Your mother and I are going to have to have a talk with him when he gets home.

ANNIE

Andy's in trouble.

JEFF

Well, not-

ANNIE

You're going to in trouble Andy.

JEFF

No, sweetie, I won't.

ANNIE

Promises?

JEFF

I promise.

ANNIE

And mommy?

JEFF

She promises, too. But you need to remember that Andy isn't

always right.

JEFF (cont.)

Are you always right?

ANNIE

Probably not. But next time Andy tells you something that makes you feel bad, I want you to come and tell me about it, ok?

JEFF

Ok.

ANNIE

Why so sad?

JEFF

I did something bad.

ANNIE

What?

JEFF

I got Andy in trouble.

ANNIE

Aw, now sweetie, we just promised you that he's not in trouble.

JEFF

I shouldn't have said.

ANNIE

It's ok. I'm just going to have a talk with him.

JEFF

You fight.

ANNIE

Well, sometimes people fight. Even people who love each other.

JEFF

(ANNIE starts to grab the doll side of her head.)

Calm down. You're just going to have to trust me. Everything is going to be ok.

ANNIE

Ok?

JEFF

Yep. Things have a way of working out.

ANNIE

Ok.

(There is the sound of a door closing somewhere offstage.)

ANNIE

Andy!

(ANDREW, JEFF's son, about 18, enters. He looks like a normal teenager except for his right arm, which is a large stuffed cylinder of cloth with no hand. It is the only rag doll part of his body. He runs over and hugs ANNIE, who has jumped to her feet in excitement at his arrival.)

ANDY

Hey there, smart girl.

ANNIE

Andy, I'm Steve Martin!

ANDY

Oh yeah? Why's that, huh? Is it because you're a wild and crazy guy?

ANNIE

Nope. It's 'cause I'm silly and intelliment all at the same time.

(ANDY glances fiercely at JEFF, who gives him a look as if to say, "not now." ANDY reluctantly lets it go for the moment.)

ANDY

Sounds like you've been talking to Dad.

ANNIE
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said.

ANDY
No, it's ok, kid.

ANNIE
You're mad.

ANDY
Hey, come on. How could I be mad at such a beautiful young lady?

ANNIE
Why thank you.

JEFF
Hi, Andy.

ANDY
Hi, Jeff.

JEFF
You know, a 'dad' would be nice.

ANDY
It sure would.

JEFF
(sighs)
You could at least say hello to your mother.

ANDY
How insensitive of me. Hi, mom. By the way, thanks for that delicious breakfast you made this morning. Whew, I was stuffed.

JEFF
That's enough, Andrew.

ANDY
Sure thing, Jefferson.

(ANNIE starts playing with her cars again.)

ANNIE
Screech! Boom! Can you believe it officer? His blood alcohol

was forty persons.

ANNIE (cont.)

Forty percent, Annie.

ANDY

Forty percent.

ANNIE

And that much alcohol would kill you.

ANDY

Oh.

ANNIE

Have you been letting her watch violent shows?

JEFF

Violent and educational.

ANDY

I don't want her watching them.

JEFF

Well, what does mom think?

ANDY

Andy, don't.

JEFF

Let's ask her, shall we?

ANDY

(He crosses over to the rag doll.)
Mom? What do you think? Do you think it's alright if Annie watches whatever she wants on tv?

JEFF

Stop it.

ANDY

Hey, Mom says it's ok.

ANNIE

Yay! Thank you Mommy.

JEFF

Cover your ears, sweetie.

(ANNIE covers her ears.)

JEFF (cont.)

You know I can't take that back now.

ANDY

Oops.

JEFF

I don't know what has gotten into you lately, but-

ANDY

Well you won't have to worry about it for much longer, now will you?

JEFF

I don't want you leaving with us on bad terms.

ANDY

Like Mick Jagger said, you can't always get what you want.

JEFF

You don't have to make everything so difficult.

ANDY

I'm not making things difficult, dad. Things are difficult. I didn't choose to be a part of the freak show.

JEFF

Would you please just try to-

ANNIE

Daddy?

JEFF

I thought you were supposed to be covering your ears, sweetie.

ANNIE

I was.

JEFF

Why did you stop?

ANNIE

I wanted to ask you a question.

JEFF

What's that?

ANNIE
How did you meet mommy?

JEFF
What made you think of that?

ANNIE
I don't know.

JEFF
Well it's kind of a long story, and I'm sure your brother
doesn't want to hear it.

ANDY
No, no. I'd love to hear this, actually. Come on, Annie,
don't you want Daddy to tell us a story?

ANNIE
Yes, please.

JEFF
This isn't really a good time.

ANNIE
Please.

ANDY
Yeah, come on, Dad, please.

JEFF
Annie, your brother is just-

ANDY
(chanting)
Story, story, story

ANNIE
(joining in and crescendo until
it's almost a screech)
Story! Story!

JEFF
Alright. Fine.

(JEFF sits down on his chair. ANNIE
and ANDY sit on the floor facing
him.)

JEFF

Now, when I was twenty-one, I had just graduated college. I was working in the admissions office and trying to figure out what to do with my life. And I was engaged.

ANNIE

To mommy?

JEFF

No, sweetie, to a wonderful woman named Jane.

ANDY

And she was what, a mannequin?

JEFF

No Andy, she was just a woman. Anyway-

ANDY

Whoa. Hold on a second there. You were engaged to a woman?

JEFF

Yes.

ANDY

We're talking a human fucking being?

ANNIE

Andy said fuck.

JEFF

I heard. And yes, Andy, I was engaged to a human being before I met your mother.

ANDY

So what you're telling me is that Annie and I could have been normal.

JEFF

You are normal.

ANDY

We are demonstrably not normal.

JEFF

Andy, normal is just a set of standards-

ANDY

Oh, no. We're not going there again. Just because the

ANDY (cont.)
standards aren't intrinsic-

(ANDY and JEFF notice that ANNIE
has begun to grab her head and
moan.)

JEFF
Stop it.

ANDY
What I mean to say is we could have been one-hundred percent
human.

JEFF
No, you couldn't. Because even if I had married Jane and had
children they wouldn't have been you guys. They would have
been completely different people. Without your mother, you
two would have never existed.

ANDY
If only.

JEFF
Not around your sister.

ANNIE
What about me?

JEFF
Nothing, sweetie, your brother is being very silly.

ANNIE
Silly?

ANDY
He means I'm being stupid, because that's what he means when
he says silly.

ANNIE
Daddy thinks I'm stupid?

(ANNIE begins to cry.)

JEFF
No, sweetie. I don't think that.

ANNIE
I don't want to be Steve Martin.

JEFF
(to ANDY)
Why would you do that to her?

(ANDY looks at ANNIE crying, then
he holds her.)

ANDY
I'm sorry, kiddo. I didn't mean it.

ANNIE
You lied?

ANDY
Yeah, I lied. Because I was angry with Dad. No one thinks
you're stupid. You're a very bright girl.

ANNIE
Really?

JEFF
Of course you are. Who's my smart girl?

ANNIE
Me!

ANDY
There you go.

ANNIE
How'd you meet Mommy?

JEFF
Oh, right. Sorry, I got distracted. Now, I was at a flea
market looking for something to get Jane for our
anniversary.

ANDY
Wow, dad, I always knew you were a big spender.

ANNIE
Stop interrogating.

ANDY
Interrupting.

ANNIE

Stop it.

JEFF

Thank you, Annie. Jane had always had a taste for the peculiar-

ANDY

Sounds like you two were perfect for each other.

ANNIE

Shh!

JEFF

So anyway, I was at this flea market, and I went to look at this booth selling handmade toys. And that's where I first saw your mother. She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

(All of the lights fade except for an isolated spot on the rag doll. JEFF crosses the room and picks her up. A slow, melancholy waltz begins playing quietly and full of static as though through a distant tube radio. JEFF waltzes her around the room. He then kisses her passionately, and finally, returns her gently to her chair.)

JEFF

And then you two came along and blessed our lives.

ANDY

I think you've left out a step or two somewhere in there.

ANNIE

What steps?

JEFF

Damn it, Andy, will you just stop it.

(ANNIE begins to get upset.)

JEFF

No, sweetie. Daddy's sorry.

ANNIE
Tell Andy sorry.

JEFF
I'm sorry, Andy.

ANDY
Sure thing, pops.

ANNIE
Hooray! Everyone's happy forever!

(ANDY and JEFF exchange a wary look.)

ANNIE
Another story.

JEFF
Ok, what do you want to hear?

ANNIE
When I was little.

ANDY
I got one.

JEFF
Andy.

ANDY
Don't worry, Dad, I really got this.

ANNIE
Tell it. I don't have all day, you know.

(JEFF and ANDY laugh.)

JEFF
Of course you don't.

ANDY
Ok, so you were about six years old, which would have made me. . .

ANNIE
Um.

ANDY
Come on, Annie. Six plus two.

ANNIE
Uh.

JEFF
Andy, there's no need.

ANDY
Hold on, dad, she can do it.

ANNIE
Six plus two.

(ANNIE grabs the doll side of her head.)

ANDY
Come on, sis, fight through it.

JEFF
Andy, for God's sake-

ANNIE
Eight!

ANDY
Very good.

ANNIE
(exhausted)
Eight.

ANDY
See, dad, I told you she could do it.

ANNIE
See, dad.

JEFF
Weren't you telling a story?

ANNIE
Story.

ANDY
Ok, so I was eight and you were six, and you and me and Dad

ANDY (cont.)

took a trip to the beach.

JEFF

Your mother was there too.

ANDY

Yes, well we also took some towels and beach toys but I didn't think Annie needed a complete inventory of the luggage.

JEFF

Andy, I swear to God.

ANNIE

Story!

ANDY

Right. So anyway, we all went to the beach. Now you gotta keep in mind you had never seen the ocean before. So we get you out on the beach and you completely freeze. And Dad and I keep trying to snap you out of it, but you just keep staring at the ocean. Then, without any warning whatsoever, you start screaming and take off towards the ocean. And when you get there, you start punching the water. I mean really going at it. And even though it just kept coming, you were ready to fight the entire ocean by yourself.

ANNIE

I guess that was stupid.

JEFF

No. You didn't know any better.

ANDY

Dad's right. And considering how scary the ocean obviously was to you, it was really brave of you to go after it like that.

ANNIE

Really?

JEFF

Yeah. You're a brave little girl.

ANDY

And don't you ever lose that. You're going to need it.

JEFF
We could all use that kind of courage.

ANNIE
You guys tell boring stories.

(JEFF and ANDY laugh.)

ANDY
Hey, dad, do you think it would be ok if Annie and I had a few minutes to ourselves?

JEFF
Why?

ANDY
Come on, Dad, I'm leaving. I just want to spend some quality time with my little sis while I can.

JEFF
I guess that's alright.

ANDY
It's fine, Dad.

ANNIE
Fine, dad.

JEFF
Well, if Annie says so. Do you mind if your Mother stays in here with you?

ANDY
As long as she promises to stay quiet.

JEFF
Andy-

ANDY
Hey, don't blame me. You're the one who keeps setting me up, pops.

ANNIE
Daddy, leave!

JEFF
(smiles at ANNIE)
Ok, sweetie.

(JEFF exits)

ANDY

How's it going, smart girl?

ANNIE

Are you leaving, Andy?

ANDY

Yeah, I am.

ANNIE

Why?

ANDY

I've got to.

ANNIE

Why?

ANDY

Because I'm going to college.

ANNIE

Why?

ANDY

Because I want a good education.

ANNIE

Can I go to college?

(ANDY is silent for a moment. He touches the doll part of ANNIE's head with the end of his doll arm and sighs.)

ANDY

College is overrated.

ANNIE

Then why go?

ANDY

I guess I just can't come up with a good enough excuse not to.

I'm not good enough?

ANNIE

It's not that simple.

ANDY

Sure it is. Watch me not go.

ANNIE

(ANNIE sits perfectly still)

ANDY
(laughs)

I'm sorry. It's just something I have to do.

ANNIE

I don't want you to. Stay here. Or take me with you.

ANDY

I wish I could. Believe me, I hate the thought of leaving you behind. Hey, why don't we do some lessons.

ANNIE

Let's play cars instead.

ANDY

Come on, Annie.

(ANNIE picks up her cars.)

ANNIE

Vroom!

ANDY

Annie.

(ANNIE holds out a car for ANDY.)

ANNIE

You can be the drunk driver.

ANDY

Don't you want to be a smart girl?

(ANNIE sniffles a little.)

ANNIE

Yes.

ANDY
Ok, then. Let's practice some lessons.

ANNIE
It hurts, Andy.

ANDY
I know it does.

ANNIE
You want to hurt me?

ANDY
Never, sis. I never ever want to hurt you.

ANNIE
Cars it is, then.

(ANNIE holds out the cars. ANDY
takes them and puts them down.)

ANDY
Listen to me, sis. This is real important. So I need you to
focus as hard as you can, ok?

ANNIE
Ok.

ANDY
I mean really think hard about what I'm saying.

ANNIE
Focus.

ANDY
Good. Now, sometimes we have to go through some pain to make
things better in the long run. And it hurts while we're
going through it. I mean it really sucks. But it's always
worth it, because we come out stronger on the other end
because of it.

ANNIE
I thought I was trying to get smarter.

ANDY
Or smarter.

Oh.

ANNIE

Do you understand?

ANDY

I think so.

ANNIE

So, you ready for your lessons?

ANDY

(ANNIE nods her head.)

Say it. You ready for your lessons?

ANDY

I'm ready.

ANNIE

Ok, good. Why don't we start with math?

ANDY

(ANNIE rubs her head.)

No.

ANNIE

It's important, Annie. Remember, it's all for the best. At least try it. For me.

ANDY

Ok.

ANNIE

Now, we'll start easy. Simple addition.

ANDY

(ANNIE looks like she is about to be struck.)

Ok.

ANNIE

One plus one.

ANDY

(slight pause)

Two!

ANNIE

Good job, sis.

ANDY

That one's easy.

ANNIE

Well, then, we'll just have to make the next one a little bit harder.

ANDY

Not too hard.

ANNIE

Ok, not too hard.

ANDY

Ok.

ANNIE

Three plus five.

ANDY

(ANNIE is silent for a bit, then she begins to cringe as if in tremendous physical pain.)

Come on, Annie.

ANDY

(ANNIE grabs her head and rocks back and forth.)

Seven?

ANNIE

No, Annie.

ANDY

I'm sorry.

ANNIE

Come on, try again. Three plus five.

ANDY

ANNIE
It hurts, Andy.

ANDY
Fight through it. Three plus five.

(ANNIE starts to use her fingers)

ANDY
No!

ANNIE
Don't yell at me.

ANDY
Don't use your fingers. Figure it out in your head.

(ANNIE thinks for a moment and then, without thinking, tries to use her fingers again. ANDY grabs her hand.)

ANDY
No! No fingers!

ANNIE
You're hurting me.

ANDY
Figure it out. You can do this.

ANNIE
Uh. Crushing my fingers.

ANDY
Tell me the answer and I'll stop.

ANNIE
Please, Andy.

ANDY
Three plus five. It's so simple, Annie. I know you can do this if you just calm down and think about it. Three plus five.

ANNIE
Eight?

(ANDY hugs her.)

ANDY

Yes. That's it. Who's the smartest girl?

ANNIE

My hands hurt.

ANDY

Come on, sis, who's the smartest girl?

ANNIE

I am.

ANDY

Who's the smartest?

ANNIE

(getting excited)

I am! I am!

ANDY

Damn right you are.

ANNIE

Damn right.

(ANDY laughs.)

ANDY

Ok, so you ready for another one, smart girl.

ANNIE

But I got eight.

ANDY

You sure did, and I'm very proud of you for that. But you gotta keep going.

ANNIE

I don't want to.

ANDY

You have to.

ANNIE

Why?

ANDY

Because you have to be smart. You have to be a smart girl.

ANNIE

I can't.

ANDY

Yes you can!

(ANNIE cringes.)

ANDY

I'm sorry, sis. It's just that the world is rough out there, and it's going to be especially hard on you and me.

ANNIE

Why?

ANDY

Because we're different. (beat) No, not different. We're freaks.

ANNIE

Daddy says we're unique.

ANDY

Dad doesn't like to face reality. And he's not always going to be around to make things better for you. And neither am I. So you have to be smart. It's the only way you'll be able to get by.

ANNIE

But I can't do it, Andy.

ANDY

Yes, you can. You just need to keep working at it. So what do you say, one more?

ANNIE

I don't want to.

ANDY

How about subtraction?

ANNIE

No.

ANDY
Six minus four.

ANNIE
(starting to cry)
Andy, I can't.

ANDY
You can do this.

ANNIE
No. Can't do.

(ANDY grabs her shoulder
violently.)

ANDY
You have to do it, Annie. You have to be smart.

ANNIE
Let go. It hurts.

ANDY
You have to be smart.

(ANNIE starts to scream.)

ANDY
Shh! I'm sorry.

ANNIE
(screaming)
Daddy!

ANDY
No.
(He holds her.)
Come on, sweetie, calm down. I'm sorry.

(JEFF runs back in.)

JEFF
Annie?

ANDY
She's ok, Dad.

ANNIE
(starting to calm down)

Daddy?

JEFF
I'm right here, baby. It's ok.
(JEFF holds ANNIE and turns to
ANDY.)
What the hell happened?

ANNIE
My head hurts, Daddy.

ANDY
We were just going over some lessons, and she-

JEFF
Oh, damn it, Andy, I only left her here with you because I
thought you weren't going to pull that shit.

ANNIE
Daddy.

ANDY
Well, excuse me for trying to take an active role in her
education.

JEFF
You know that's not her strength.

ANNIE
My head.

ANDY
You can't just sit there and shrug your shoulders. She needs
help.

JEFF
The only thing you're accomplishing is to hurt and confuse
her.

ANNIE
(screaming)
Words! Words!

(ANNIE collapses in Jeff's arms.)

ANDY

Annie?

JEFF

I'm taking her to her room to make sure she's ok. Why don't you just sit here with your Mother?

ANDY

My mother? Are you kidding?

JEFF

Just stay here, Andy.

(JEFF carries ANNIE out. ANDY sits down on the sofa and looks at his mother.)

ANDY

So, Mom, how's tricks. Oh, me? I'm pretty good. Trying to deal with this whole "freak of nature" thing that you and Dad so lovingly endowed me with, but you know, other than that. You? No, of course I don't really blame you, Mom. You're an inanimate fucking object. It's Dad I blame.

(JEFF enters.)

JEFF

She's fine. If you're interested.

ANDY

Of course I'm interested.

JEFF

I wasn't sure. You don't seem to have any problem hurting her, so-

ANDY

I'm trying to help her. Which is more than you can say.

JEFF

Just because she isn't like everyone else doesn't mean there's anything wrong with her.

ANDY

Oh my God, Dad. You can reason it out however you want. But at the end of the day, there are things that Annie simply can't do. Things which are essential to surviving outside of this house.

JEFF

I can't change the way Annie is.

ANDY

You could at least take responsibility for it.

JEFF

Excuse me.

ANDY

I said you could at least admit that you're responsible for the way she is.

JEFF

So that's what this is all about.

ANDY

What?

JEFF

You're using Annie to punish me.

ANDY

No.

JEFF

Yes, you are. You get her all upset just so you can throw it in my face.

ANDY

No, Dad. If I wanted to punish you, I'd rip your fucking doll to pieces.

JEFF

You wouldn't.

ANDY

Oh, you're right. I wouldn't dream of it. I know how much Jeffie loves his toys.

JEFF

She is not a toy.

ANDY

I think you'd have a hard time arguing that point.

JEFF

I will not apologize for loving your mother.

ANDY

Well then how about at least apologizing for the fact that your daughter's a retarded little freak.

JEFF

How could you say that about your sister?

ANDY

Because it's true, Dad. Come on, tell me it isn't true.

JEFF

Only if you pay attention to what other people have to say.

ANDY

I do, dad. I have to. I live in a place called the real world, where artificial and nonexistent don't mean the same thing. It doesn't matter where these standards come from, they're real.

JEFF

Screw their standards. We're normal in our own way.

ANDY

Ok, Dad. Whatever you say. I really don't have it in me to fight about this right now.

JEFF

Are you alright?

ANDY

I'm fine. Why?

JEFF

I've just never known you to back down from a fight with me before.

ANDY

I've never left for college before.

JEFF

I can't believe it.

ANDY

Why, because someone else said it was so?

JEFF

I thought you didn't want to fight.

ANDY

Sorry.

JEFF

I just can't believe how quickly you've grown up.

ANDY

It happens.

JEFF

So they tell you, but I never wanted to believe it.

ANDY

Certainly not the first thing you've chosen not to believe.

JEFF

Is it just reflex for you at this point?

ANDY

I guess it kind of is. Sorry. I'll stop. For real, this time.

JEFF

Look, I wanted to tell you. I want to make sure you know how proud I am of you.

ANDY

Thanks, Dad.

JEFF

I know you don't care, but I am proud.

ANDY

Jesus, Dad, I just said thanks.

JEFF

Ok.

ANDY

Of course I know you're proud of me. And I appreciate it. I really do.

JEFF

Ok. Sorry. I didn't mean to, you know.

ANDY

Yeah, it's ok.

JEFF
So, how you feeling about the whole thing. Nervous? Excited?
Scared?

ANDY
Yes, yes, and yes.

JEFF
I remember that feeling.

ANDY
Plus, I worry about Annie.

JEFF
She still has your mother and I.

ANDY
I know, Dad. I just can't stand the thought of not being
here to help her.

JEFF
That's a little insulting, Andy.

ANDY
What?

JEFF
Well, you're acting like I can't take care of her without
you. And that she can't take care of herself.

ANDY
She can't, dad.

JEFF
She will, one day. And before you know it, she'll be off to
college herself.

ANDY
No, she won't.

JEFF
I'm surprised to hear that attitude from you. You're the one
who's always trying to teach her.

ANDY
I know.

JEFF

See, you know deep down that I'm right. That there's nothing wrong with her.

ANDY

Yes there is, Dad. There is something very wrong with her. See this is why I worry about leaving.

JEFF

It's all a matter of perspective.

ANDY

Perspective?

JEFF

Can we just drop this.

ANDY

No, Dad, I have an idea for a perspective. Why don't we get a scan of her brain? What do you think that perspective would show us?

JEFF

I don't know.

ANDY

My guess? On one side we would see a perfectly normal hemisphere of the human brain, and on the other side, a fucking teddy bear.

JEFF

Stop it, Andy.

ANDY

Stop what? Stop forcing you to face facts? Well excuse me.

JEFF

I know the facts, Andy.

ANDY

Oh, and what are the facts.

JEFF

That Annie has some obstacles to overcome.

ANDY

Obstacles?

JEFF

Yes, just like anyone else.

ANDY

Dad-

JEFF

I let you have your say, didn't I.

ANDY

Fine.

JEFF

Now we both know that Annie struggles with certain things, but the way I see it, we can either get mad about it and take it out on her, or we can be brave for her and smile and move on.

ANDY

You want me to smile because my sister is retarded.

JEFF

I wish you wouldn't use that word.

ANDY

It's what she is.

JEFF

She's also beautiful and funny, but somehow you don't choose to call her those things.

ANDY

Because her being beautiful and funny isn't going to keep her from living a normal life.

JEFF

But that's my point. You're choosing to focus on the negative. Look, your world can be whatever you want it to be. It all depends on how you choose to look at things.

ANDY

Ah, see that means that it is your fault that Annie is fucked up.

JEFF

What?

ANDY

Yeah, because you see, in my world, I choose to see that your to blame, so, according to your logic, that's my reality. You see, dad, after a certain point, your perspective doesn't count for a damn thing. When you get right down to it, things either are or are not.

JEFF

Not necessarily, because in my world it's not my fault. So we can each just have our own reality.

ANDY

But at the end of the day we live in the same world. And it isn't my world or your world. It doesn't belong to either of us. We belong to it. And in that world, our lives follow a pretty simple chain of events. Well, maybe not simple, but at least there's a clear narrative. It starts with you and your doll, there are some unmentionable acts in the middle, and it ends with a girl who is sixteen years old and still can't do basic addition and subtraction because half of her brain is cloth and stuffing.

JEFF

It is not my fault.

ANDY

Maybe you're right, Dad. After all, the doll parts come from Mom. Maybe it's her fault.

JEFF

It's nobody's fault.

ANDY

No, that's no good. It's someone's fault. We just need to figure out whose. Hey, I know. Why don't we ask Mom what she thinks?

JEFF

Stop it.

(ANDY goes over to the rag doll.)

ANDY

Hey, Mom, I've got a question for you. Who do you think is to blame for the way Annie is, huh?

JEFF

This is not funny, Andy.

ANDY
What's that, Mom? You take full responsibility?

JEFF
Please, Andy.

ANDY
You hear that, Dad? She takes full responsibility.

JEFF
Why are you doing this?

ANDY
It sounds to me like you need to be punished.

JEFF
Don't.

(ANDY climbs on to the chair where
the rag doll is sitting.)

JEFF
I said don't.

ANDY
Sorry, Dad, but you heard Mom. It's her fault. So she just
has to be punished.

(ANDY punches the doll, over and
over again. JEFF eventually manages
to pull him off the chair.)

JEFF
Andy!

(JEFF holds ANDY, who is struggling
to get back to the doll.)

ANDY
I'm not done yet.

JEFF
You don't hit your mother.

ANDY
(turning viciously)
And you don't fuck a doll!

(JEFF is stunned for a moment.
Then, calmly:)

JEFF

That is enough, Andy. In fact, it's quite a bit more than enough. You are done talking about your mother like that, understand?

ANDY

That thing is not my mother.

JEFF

Of course she is.

ANDY

No, it isn't.

JEFF

Then who is?

ANDY

I don't know, but it's not that. Maybe I don't have a mother.

JEFF

What are you talking about?

ANDY

Let's go over the things a mother does, shall we?

JEFF

Andy.

ANDY

A functional definition of the concept of mother, if you will.

JEFF

You know she can't-

ANDY

A mother makes you breakfast on your birthday. Ever whip me up something special, Mom?

JEFF

Andy-

ANDY

Shut up, Dad. I'm going to settle this. Now, where was I? Oh yeah. A mother tucks you into bed. A mother takes care of you when you are sick. A mother takes pride in your accomplishments and consoles you during hard times. Hell, a mother pisses you off and fights with you and smothers you and can make you just as miserable as she can make you happy. A mother loves you.

JEFF

Your mother loves you.

ANDY

That thing is not capable of love.

JEFF

That's not true. She loves me, and she loves you.

ANDY

I've never heard her say it.

JEFF

That doesn't mean it isn't so.

ANDY

You know what, let's put all the bullshit aside for just one second, shall we? Because I want to make damn sure that this sinks in, Dad. Your son has never heard his mother say, "I love you." Can you at least register that? Can you acknowledge that that is part of the life you have given me?

JEFF

I- I'm sorry, Andy.

ANDY

He's sorry. Hear that, Mom? He's sorry.

JEFF

Please stop it, Andy. Just because she can't say it-

ANDY

Doesn't mean it isn't so? I think that's exactly what it means.

(He goes back over to the chair.)

So prove me wrong, Mom. Tell me that you love me and prove me wrong. Come on, Mom, there's a lot on the line here. So tell me you love me.

JEFF

Leave her alone.

ANDY

Say it, mom. I want to hear it from you.

JEFF

Leave her alone!

ANDY

Come on, Mom, it's so simple. Just three words. Give it a try.

JEFF

Andy!

ANDY

Tell me you love me, Mom! Tell me you love me!

JEFF

This isn't her fault.

(ANDY stops. He turns and faces JEFF.)

ANDY

No, you're right, Dad. It's not her fault. It's yours. But you're about as likely to admit that as she is to say she loves me.

JEFF

I'm sorry that you've never heard your mother say she loves you, I am, but she does love you. We both do.

ANDY

For the last time, Dad, that thing is not my mother.

JEFF

I think you only need to look at your arm to see that's not the case.

ANDY

This arm?

(He holds up his doll arm.)

This thing right here? This abomination attached to my shoulder?

JEFF

The part of you that comes from your mother.

(ANDY rips off the doll arm using
his other hand.)

ANDY

What mother?

(ANDY throws the arm at JEFF and
leaves. JEFF sits down and holds it
on his lap.)

JEFF

(in a whisper)

Jesus Christ.

BLACKOUT

Act II

At Rise:

The Stiles house, two years later. Lights up on JEFF sprawled on the couch, ragged, tired. The RAGDOLL still sits in the same position in the chair. JEFF wakes up briefly, looks around, lays back down.

JEFF:

(eyes still closed)

No, honey, still no sign. Just like all the other nights. (pause) I'm fine. I get plenty of rest. It's a good couch for sleeping. (pause) He will come back. I know it. He just needs time. (pause) You could have jumped in and said something. (pause) Sorry. (pause) I said you're right. Sorry. (long pause) Two years, one month, three days. (pause) I can't go to sleep if you keep arguing with me. (pause, then sitting up) Look, we've been over this. I'm going to stay out here every night until Andy comes home, and that is final. (brief pause, as if interrupting) I said I'm not discussing it. (long pause) Are you still awake? (pause) I don't know why I got so upset.

(The waltz from before starts to play softly, and the lights start to change)

JEFF:

No. No dancing tonight.

(The lights abruptly change back and the music stops.)

I don't want to miss it when Andy comes.

(JEFF shuffles around on the couch, getting comfortable, then goes back to sleep. ANNIE enters and shakes him gently.)

ANNIE:

Daddy?

(JEFF stirs a bit. She shakes him again.)

Daddy?

JEFF:
(groggy)
Annie?

ANNIE:
(smiling)
Who else would it be?

JEFF:
I thought you might be Andy.
(ANNIE laughs, a little cruelly.)

ANNIE:
Andy? Andy's gone.

JEFF:
I know.

ANNIE:
And he isn't coming back.

JEFF:
You don't know that.

ANNIE:
Yes, I do. And so do you. Yet you make this pathetic display
of yourself every night. You're obsessed. And meanwhile you
have another child who really needs your care and attention-

JEFF:
I do everything I can for you.

ANNIE:
Do you?

JEFF:
Why did he leave? I know things weren't great, but I never
expected this.

ANNIE:
You never got it. All Andy wanted was to be right. Just
once. For you to admit unequivocally that he was right.

JEFF:
Unequivocally?

ANNIE:

Yes, it means-

JEFF:

I know what it means. But you don't.

ANNIE:

Of course I do. I can be just as smart as Andy. I always could. You just never let me. You were so preoccupied with your little genius.

JEFF:

I-

ANNIE:

(continuing over JEFF)

But you don't need Andy at all. You never did. I could have been everything you wanted in a child.

JEFF:

I never knew.

ANNIE:

That's too bad. To have lost two perfect children.

JEFF:

What do you mean?

ANNIE:

Andy had it right. It's the only way any of us can be free.

JEFF:

Annie, please.

ANNIE:

Bye, Jeffie. Hope you and mom have a great life.

JEFF:

(struggling in place)

I can't move. Why can't I move?

ANNIE:

Because you know this is for the best. Now lay back down.
(he does)

Goodbye, Dad.

JEFF:

(struggling to get up, screaming)

Annie. Please, Annie.

(He trails off, repeating ANNIE's name softer and softer until he is asleep again. He sits up, suddenly, again screaming)

Annie. (pause) Sorry, darling. I was having a bad dream.
(pause) Annie's fine. I have the baby monitor right here.
(pause) Let's not do this again. (pause) It seems to me I wouldn't have had a nightmare at all if someone hadn't forced me to go to sleep. (long pause) You certainly do make a good argument. Maybe it is time to move on. (pause) Fine, tonight. If he doesn't come tonight, that'll be it. (pause) Yes, I mean it. I just hope to god he comes. (pause) Of course I do. (pause) Let's just go to sleep, alright. If he comes, he comes. If not, we try our best to explain it to Annie, though god knows she won't understand, and we move on. (pause) Absolutely. Good night, dear.

(JEFF waits, watching for the RAGDOLL to go to sleep. He sees the cue that she's asleep.)

JEFF

(to himself)

Come on, Andy. Last chance.

(As soon as JEFF has finished speaking, there's a knock on the door. JEFF is frozen.)

JEFF

Andy?

(Offstage, the sound of a door opening and closing.)

ANDY(off)

Hello?

JEFF

Andy?

ANDY

Jeff?

JEFF

In here. The living room.

(ANDY enters carrying a duffel bag. He drops the bag on the floor and stands staring at JEFF. JEFF rises, unsure what to do next.)

ANDY

Yes, you can.

(JEFF rushes across the room and wraps ANDY in a big hug.)

ANDY

And that will be plenty, thanks.

(JEFF releases him.)

ANDY

You should really lock the door.

JEFF

I didn't know if you still had a key.

ANDY

I don't.

JEFF

Then I'd say good thinking on my part, huh? You only brought that one bag?

ANDY

Dad. It could have been anyone. They could have come in here and done whatever they wanted.

JEFF

How long are you staying?

(JEFF goes to pick up the bag. ANDY knocks it out of his hand.)

ANDY

Dad. I'm serious. You have to be more careful.

JEFF

Relax. Don't be so paranoid. I'm fine.

ANDY

Frankly, I don't care if you're fine or not. But what about Annie? It's her safety I'm concerned with.

JEFF

I'm sorry, Andy. You have a point. I'll be more careful. For Annie's sake.

ANDY

Good. Speaking of Annie, where is she?

JEFF

Asleep. It's the middle of the night.

ANDY

I'm going to go wake her up.

(ANDY starts to leave towards the interior of the house. JEFF blocks his way.)

JEFF

Oh, let her sleep. You can see her in the morning. Besides, you just got here. You've barely even said hi.

ANDY

Hi, Dad.

JEFF

And. . .?

(ANDY offers no reaction.)

And. . .?

ANDY

I'm not playing tonight.

JEFF

Playing what?

ANDY

Jeffie's little make-believe games.

JEFF

You say hello to your mother or you can just get the hell back out of this house.

ANDY

You don't want that.

JEFF

You can't tell me what I want. You are still my son, and this is still my house.

ANDY

I'm not going to engage you on this, Dad. And I'm not leaving, either.

(JEFF tries to maintain a firm and imposing posture, but deflates after a moment.)

JEFF

Come on, Andy, just say it.

ANDY

No.

JEFF

Just say it. I don't see how it would hurt you. Just a simple "Hi, Mom." You don't even have to mean it. And then we can just put it behind us. Please. For me.

ANDY

No.

JEFF

Then leave. Get out.

(Stare down for a moment. ANDY sighs and rolls his eyes.)

ANDY

Fine, I'll play along.

(ANDY starts to leave.)

JEFF

Wait.

(ANDY stops.)

JEFF

I'm sorry. You don't have to say anything you don't want to. Please.

ANDY

Fine. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to go see my sister.

(ANDY starts towards the interior of the house again.)

JEFF

I told you she's-

(grabbing ANDY's arm, then letting go as if he's burned his hand on it)

Hey, what's this?

ANDY

It's my new arm, Dad.

JEFF

New arm?

ANDY

Yes. It's a prosthetic.

JEFF

It's cold.

ANDY

Plastic. I went from raggedy Andy to Ken doll.

(JEFF laughs)

ANDY

You're not going to chew me out for that?

JEFF

For making a joke? Why would I?

ANDY

You always have.

JEFF

I know. But your mother and I have had lots of time to talk, and-

ANDY

Don't tell me you've spent the last two years talking to that thing about me.

JEFF

"That thing" is your mother, young man.

ANDY

That thing is a thing.

JEFF

If you're going to keep-

ANDY

I don't "keep" doing anything. You insist on steering us back to that conversation. I'm quite content to leave it alone. I didn't come here to pick a fight.

(beat)

JEFF

No. I'm sorry. I just wish you would-

ANDY

You can wish all you want, but that doesn't-

JEFF

Would you let me finish a sentence?

(beat)

ANDY

Sorry.

JEFF

I'll leave it alone if you want. I wish you would show your mother some respect, but I know I can't force you. Just wanted to register that.

(beat)

ANDY

Ok.

(beat)

JEFF

(breaking the silence)

So, come on, sit down. Tell your old man what's been going on.

(JEFF sits down on the couch. ANDY remains standing.)

ANDY
Not much to tell. College stuff, you know? Classes, et cetera.

JEFF
What are you majoring in?

ANDY
Chemical engineering.

JEFF
That sounds fun.

ANDY
It's not.

JEFF
Then why do it?

ANDY
It's lucrative.

JEFF
Oh. Well.

ANDY
Can we please not have a "do what you love" speech?

JEFF
Wasn't planning on it.

ANDY
Ok.

JEFF
Doing well?

ANDY
Yep.

(beat)

JEFF
This isn't what I pictured.

ANDY
What?

JEFF

This isn't how I imagined this moment.

ANDY

That sounds like your problem, not mine.

JEFF

Didn't come home to fight?

ANDY

How did you imagine it, then?

JEFF

I thought we'd either hug and make up and be a family again, or we'd scream and yell and you'd walk right back out the door.

ANDY

I could still do the latter, if you'd like.

JEFF

No. Please. I'm just saying. Us sitting here shooting the breeze. It's the last thing I would have guessed.

ANDY

Well, that's what we're doing.

JEFF

And that's fine. It's great, you know, that we're talking at all. It's just, I don't know

ANDY

Boring.

JEFF

No. I didn't mean that.

ANDY

It's ok, Dad. It's boring.

JEFF

Stop it. Stop saying that.

ANDY

Sometimes boring is good. Boring is normal.

JEFF

I could never be bored by my family.

ANDY

Of course not. Everyone has fun at the freak show.

JEFF

You say you're not trying to fight. Like I'm dragging you into it. Like you are just sitting above it all and I'm clawing at you to pull you down to my level. But you keep provoking me. Not always that flagrantly but over and over again. You want to have a discussion? Then sit down and talk to me. But stop all this sniping.

(beat)

(ANDY sits down)

JEFF

So why did you come back?

ANDY

Annie.

JEFF

Just Annie?

ANDY

(nodding)

Just Annie.

JEFF

Do you hate me?

ANDY

What?

JEFF

Do you hate me? That's not a guilt trip question or anything. I just want to know. Honestly. Do you hate me?

ANDY

A little. Yeah.

JEFF

I see.

ANDY

But I also care about you.

JEFF

You don't have to say that. I can take it.

ANDY

I do, though. I worry about you.

JEFF

Thank you for the condescension, then.

ANDY

Now who's sniping?

JEFF

I don't need you to worry about me.

ANDY

Everyone needs to have someone worry about them every now and then.

JEFF

What about my life causes you worry?

ANDY

I think you were taking it better when I just hated you.

JEFF

Don't avoid the question.

ANDY

Let's just forget it, ok? This conversation is going nowhere good.

JEFF

Maybe we should both get some sleep, then. You can see Annie in the morning. Make fun of me if you want, but there's clean sheets on your bed-

ANDY

I didn't just come to see her, Dad.

JEFF

What?

ANDY

I didn't come home just to see Annie.

JEFF

What are you talking about?

(ANDY collects himself. He has gone over this moment endlessly in his head.)

ANDY
Annie's coming with me. To live. With me.

(A moment of tense silence, broken by JEFF's laughter.)

ANDY
I don't see what's so funny.

JEFF
Andy. You're in college. And it's very impressive that you can provide for yourself. But you're talking about supporting another person here.

ANDY
I'm assisting on some research projects. I get paid for it. A lot. I make more than enough to support both of us.

JEFF
And I assume all this research would leave you plenty of time to take care of Annie.

ANDY
I'm mostly doing grunt work, entering data and stuff. A lot of it I can do from home. And when I'm in the lab or in class, Annie can take care of herself.

JEFF
Annie cannot take care of herself.

ANDY
Only because you've never let her.

JEFF
And let's say she could. Are those the only times you're going to leave your apartment? Class and lab time? What about hanging out with friends?

ANDY
I don't have to do that.

JEFF
Andy, that's what this time in your life is about. You should be socializing.

Socializing?

ANDY

Yes.

JEFF

With people? Human beings?

ANDY

Alright.

JEFF

Or maybe I could take after the old man. Get some action figures and talk to them all day.

ANDY

That's enough.

JEFF

Because then I wouldn't have to leave the apartment.

ANDY

I never said I wanted you to be just like me. And I used to go out with people.

JEFF

Chatting up the dolls at Toys R Us doesn't count as going out.

ANDY

You're dodging. You don't have any friends. Do you?

JEFF

Why should I?

ANDY

Andy.

JEFF

Seriously, why should I have to go out if I don't want to? It's not vital.

ANDY

It's healthy.

JEFF

I'm going to leave that one alone. Can we please get back to

the point?

ANDY (cont.)

Which is?

JEFF

Annie. Leaving with me.

ANDY

Not going to happen.

JEFF

Because it's going to impede my social life?

ANDY

Let's forget the practicalities for a moment.

JEFF

I left them at the door.

ANDY

And focus on the why.

JEFF

The why?

ANDY

Yes. Why do you want to take Annie with you.

JEFF

She needs me, Dad.

ANDY

Because I'm not enough.

JEFF

This isn't a competition.

ANDY

I've taken care of her by myself. For most of her life.

JEFF

By yourself?

ANDY

(JEFF doesn't understand the question. ANDY motions towards the RAGDOLL.)

JEFF

With your mother.

ANDY

That came dangerously close to an admission, Jeffie.

JEFF

Your mother and I have taken care of her.

ANDY

I always helped.

JEFF

Until you abandoned her.

ANDY

That's not what happened.

JEFF

And even before that I did most of the work.

ANDY

I was a kid.

JEFF

My point exactly. You were a kid. You still are a kid. If Annie started to have a seizure, would you know what to do?

ANDY

I could learn.

JEFF

When? While she's on the floor, jaw locked, eyes vacant? Andy, taking care of anyone is a huge responsibility, but Annie is a very special girl. Taking care of her is a lot of hard work.

ANDY

Since when does Annie have seizures?

JEFF

That's beside the point.

ANDY

How? How is that beside the point?

JEFF

Andy?

ANDY

Is she ok?

JEFF

She's fine. But things have changed a little since you've been gone.

ANDY

What do you mean?

JEFF

I mean Annie requires a little more care and attention than she used to.

ANDY

What did you do to her?

JEFF

But that's my point. Maybe if this were the Annie you'd left two years ago you could handle it. Maybe. But as things are, no. Your mother and I together can barely-

ANDY

Stop calling it that.

JEFF

She.

ANDY

It. It, it, it. That is why Annie needs to come with me. I can't let her grow up thinking all this is real.

JEFF

You don't get to decide what's real.

ANDY

Neither do you.

JEFF

You're damn right. No one does.

ANDY

You do it on a daily basis. You've been doing it for yourself and me and Annie for years.

JEFF

Your mother isn't real because I say she's real. She's real because she's real.

ANDY

That is an argument for another time.

JEFF

I think it's a discussion for right now.

ANDY

It doesn't have anything to do with Annie.

JEFF

It has everything to do with Annie. You're the one who brought it up in regards to Annie.

ANDY

Well now I'm dropping it.

JEFF

And besides that, besides this issue being the cornerstone of your lifelong crusade against me, if your mother isn't real, then neither are you and Annie.

ANDY

Right.

(Silence)

JEFF

Right?

ANDY

Right.

JEFF

You think-

ANDY

Yes.

JEFF

That you're not real.

ANDY

It's not important.

JEFF

No of course not. It's only your existence. It's not important at all. A trifle really.

ANDY
I didn't say I don't exist.

JEFF
You're just not real.

ANDY
Yes.

JEFF
Thank you for clearing that up.

ANDY
I don't want to talk about this.

JEFF
You can forget that notion.

ANDY
Dad-

JEFF
No. Explain this to me, Andy. Explain to me how you're not real.

ANDY
You already know.

JEFF
What?

ANDY
I think- it sounds sort of stupid, saying out loud.

JEFF
You should try hearing it.

ANDY
I think I'm a part of you.

(beat)

JEFF
Of course you are. And I'm a part of you. We're family.

ANDY
No, I mean literally. A part of you. A product of your imagination. Mom and Annie, too.

JEFF

So your mother isn't actually sitting in that chair.

ANDY

I'll grant you there is a physical doll slumped in the chair. Maybe. But its life, its personality, its feelings, those are all of your invention.

JEFF

And you. You're not standing there.

ANDY

No.

JEFF

I'm talking to thin air right now.

ANDY

Yes.

JEFF

I see you.

ANDY

Only because you believe you see me.

JEFF

No, Andy. I see you because you're there, and I have two working eyes.

ANDY

Can we please just table this for right now.

JEFF

I get it. You know you're wrong. You said something stupid and now you want to back off because you don't want to lose.

ANDY

You're goading me into a fight?

JEFF

I'm trying to get you to explain what the hell you're talking about.

(beat)

ANDY

Try this. Close your eyes, and think me away.

JEFF

Why would I do that?

ANDY

To prove your point. Only you really have to try. Close your eyes and really try to make yourself believe that I'm not here. Once you do, once you really believe that, open your eyes, and I'll be gone.

JEFF

This is ridiculous.

ANDY

Then show me. Get it over with.

JEFF

I'm not doing this.

ANDY

Because you're scared it will work.

JEFF

This is childish.

ANDY

You're the one making it up.

(beat)

JEFF

Fine. Let's do this.

(JEFF closes his eyes. Lights down.)

Are you there?

ANDY

That's not how it works. If you're addressing me, you're not believing I'm gone.

JEFF

Fine, fine.

(a few moments pass)

Ok.

(The lights come up. ANDY is gone. JEFF opens his eyes.)

Andy? Andy?

(JEFF seems on the verge of panic, then calms down.)

JEFF
You're behind the couch, Andy.

(ANDY pops up from behind the couch.)

ANDY
So maybe I am.

JEFF
Was that worth it?

ANDY
But that's what it would be like if you really did it.

JEFF
I really did do it. Which means you're real. Of course that also means you were wrong, so the only logical explanation is that I didn't do it right.

ANDY
Yeah.

JEFF
Besides, you cheated.

ANDY
What do you mean?

JEFF
You were behind the couch.

ANDY
Once you said I was.

JEFF
Christ, Andy, give it a rest. You're really reaching.

ANDY
Maybe I haven't proven anything, but neither have you.

JEFF
You're here.

ANDY
But if I'm right, that's how it would seem.

JEFF

Andy, this is the worst kind of bullshit. You're smarter than this sophomoric pseudo-philosophy. It's Descartes for dummies.

ANDY

Don't condescend to me.

JEFF

Did you come up with this while doodling your way through Philosophy 101?

ANDY

I'm serious, Dad. I think you've made us up.

JEFF

Then why would I even let you say this stuff to me. Huh? If I were going to make up children, don't you think I'd have done a better job.

(Silence. ANDY lets JEFF register the implications of what he has just said.)

JEFF

I didn't mean-

ANDY

Maybe you're masochistic.

JEFF

I couldn't ask for better-

ANDY

Maybe you did invent better kids at first. Maybe that was boring. So you built some conflict into the system to keep it interesting.

JEFF

This is absurd.

ANDY

And what's the alternative? That I'm actually a human being with a doll arm?

JEFF

Stranger things have happened.

ANDY

Name one. In the history of ever. Name one stranger thing that has actually happened. Documented to have happened. And Annie, let's not forget our plush Frankenstein. How does that happen in the real world?

JEFF

I know you love your sister, but I will never understand how you can say such horrible things about her.

ANDY

It's not horrible to acknowledge the way things are.

JEFF

Yes it is. Because things are horrible. So we lie to ourselves a little. Fine. Tailor the world, a bit, through our perceptions. It's a survival mechanism.

ANDY

That's my point, Dad. I don't know what made you this afraid of real people and the real world. But we're your survival mechanism. We're the substitute for the real thing. But it's horrible to be us. And if you'd stop for one second and think about it you'd realize how poorly off you are. And how you need to get rid of us just as much as we need to be free of you.

JEFF

It's not true. Your mother and I had two beautiful children. It was natural and beautiful.

ANDY

How? How did that happen?

JEFF

Andy, I think you're old enough to know how that works.

ANDY

Reproduction? Yeah, I got it. But how did you and that doll produce children.

JEFF

In the normal way.

ANDY

You really don't know what the word means, do you?

JEFF
The same way everyone-

ANDY
Where is its vagina?

JEFF
Andy!

ANDY
Does it have little cloth ovaries in there?

JEFF
Stop it.

ANDY
You say that we were born in the normal way. Well, most people are born through a vagina. Let's see if we can find it.

JEFF
Stay away from her.

(ANDY crosses to the doll and picks it up, spreading the legs and looking between them.)

ANDY
I'm not seeing anything under here.

(JEFF grabs the doll from ANDY and puts it carefully back in its chair.)

JEFF
Was that really necessary?

ANDY
I was trying to help you make your point. If we were born like normal children, there must have been a vagina for us to slide out of.

JEFF
That doesn't prove anything.

ANDY
Then how the hell were we born?

JEFF

You were both c-sections.

ANDY

(laughs)

Now who's reaching?

JEFF

You were.

ANDY

That doesn't even make sense. And it still doesn't explain how you achieved fertilization.

JEFF

Why do you have to over think everything?

ANDY

You're under thinking this. I mean, if you really wanted to convince me of the c-section thing, maybe you could have made a little scare out of black thread. Some stitching right across-

JEFF

Stop it.

ANDY

So make me a counterargument. Explain to me how I was born.

JEFF

Not everything has to have an explanation.

ANDY

You know I'm right. Because I'm you. My thoughts are your thoughts.

JEFF

That is not true. Your mother's lack of a traditional vagina does not preclude your existence.

ANDY

I think it does.

JEFF

Wait a minute. If you don't exist, then why do you want to take Annie away? How would that work?

ANDY

I want you to let go of us. I got away for a while, but I think I had to come back for her.

JEFF

So you haven't really been at college? You've been hiding away somewhere in my addled brain for the last two years.

ANDY

Exactly.

JEFF

And Annie's been-

ANDY

I don't know. That's why I need to see her.

JEFF

Maybe you should.

ANDY

What?

JEFF

Maybe you should see Annie. Maybe you'll understand.

ANDY

What did you do to her?

JEFF

I didn't do anything to her. But she's-

ANDY

She's what?

JEFF

She's worse.

ANDY

Worse?

JEFF

Yeah. Worse.

ANDY

I want to see her.

JEFF

I'll go get her. But it isn't good, Andy. I just want you to be prepared.

(ANDY starts towards the interior of the house. JEFF stops him).

JEFF

I'll go get her. Trust me. It's the better way. If you wake her up, she'll be scared and confused. I'll be right back.

(JEFF exits into the house. ANDY watches him go, then takes a look around the living room, occasionally touching a piece of furniture, remembering. He stops near the RAGDOLL.)

ANDY

Here we are again, Mom. Just you and me. Sorry about all that stuff with your

(whispers)

vagina,

(back to normal voice)

but it was worth it. If only for the look on Jeffy-boy's face. What's that? Oh, don't worry. One way or another we're going to be rid of him tonight. You're right, that did sound a little sinister. Sorry. I was only-

(ANNIE wails horribly from offstage.)

JEFF

(off)

Annie. Annie calm down. It's me, it's daddy.

ANDY

(yelling)

Is everything ok?

JEFF

(off)

Yes, Andy. Everything's fine. Don't come back. We'll be out in a minute.

(ANDY sits down, shaken, all the joking gone out of him.)

ANDY
I swear to god, if he did anything to her
(to RAGDOLL)
He'll lose you.

JEFF
(off)
Here we come. Now just stay calm. Don't want anybody getting
too excited.

(JEFF pushes ANNIE onstage in a
wheelchair. She is absent, lost.
ANDY gets to his feet and begins
screaming at JEFF.)

ANDY
What is this?

JEFF
It's Annie.

ANDY
Of course she is. That's not what I meant. I meant what the
fuck is going on?

JEFF
Language.

ANDY
Stop being so calm, you creepy fuck.

(ANNIE starts to moan.)

JEFF
You need to calm down. She's very easily upset these days.

(ANDY drops the volume of his voice
but not the intensity.)

ANDY
She seems to be a lot of things these days.

JEFF
I tried to tell you-

ANDY
When? When did you try to tell me?

JEFF

This is why she can't go with you. This is what I've been trying to tell you.

ANDY

Is this why you've kept me locked away? So you could do this to her?

JEFF

First of all, I didn't do this.

ANDY

So it just happened?

JEFF

Yes, it happened. And secondly, what do you mean "kept you locked away?" You're the one who left.

ANDY

You control all this.

JEFF

For the last time I don't. Do you know how many times I've wished you were here to help me with Annie? But you just left. I didn't know how to get in touch with you. But I wanted to. I needed to. More and more the worse she got.

ANDY

The worse you made her.

ANNIE

Words.

ANDY

That's convenient.

JEFF

Andy, stop it. You're the one who made me get her up. At least speak to her.

(ANDY stares at JEFF a moment,
shakes his head and crosses
cautiously to ANNIE)

ANDY

Annie.

Annie.
ANNIE

It's Andy, sweetie.
JEFF

Andy.
ANNIE

Yeah, sis. It's me.
ANDY

It's your brother, Andy.
JEFF

Would you shut the hell up?
ANDY

Andy bye bye.
ANNIE

That's right. I left. And I'm sorry I couldn't come back.
But here I am.
ANDY

Not Andy.
ANNIE

Where are you, sis?
ANDY

Maybe we should let her go back to sleep.
JEFF

Not yet.
ANDY

Are you trying to torture her?
JEFF

Leave us alone.
ANDY

Won't you both just disappear if I'm not in the room?
JEFF

Nice to see I've rubbed off on you a bit.
ANDY

(beat)

JEFF

Fine. I'll give you some time. But don't upset her.

ANDY

Go.

(JEFF exits into the house)

ANDY

Sis.

ANNIE

Sis.

ANDY

Look at me.

(ANNIE avoids ANDY's eye contact)

ANDY

Come on.

(ANNIE keeps rolling her head to avoid ANDY's eyes, and ANDY keeps trying to force eye contact. Finally, he grabs her face. She whimpers as though in pain.)

ANDY

Look at me.

(ANNIE struggles. ANDY grips her tighter.)

ANDY

Look at me.

(ANNIE struggles more, begins to make sound. ANDY holds his grip. She suddenly calms and holds Andy's eyes. ANDY lets go, holding his hands just off her face for a moment in case he needs to grab her again. He drops his hands.)

Andy. ANNIE

That's right. ANDY

Andy. ANNIE

Yeah sis. ANDY

Three plus four. ANNIE

No, you don't have to- ANDY

Three plus four. ANNIE
(louder, a bit panicked)

No, no, no. It's ok. You don't have to. Just calm down. ANDY

Down. ANNIE

Yeah. ANDY

Yeah. ANNIE

Listen, I don't know how much of this you'll understand, but I think I'm going to have to do something kind of drastic. And I don't know what's going to happen to us. We might go away forever. ANDY

Forever. ANNIE

Forever. But trust me. That's got to be better than this. It's kind of scary, I know. But if it works, then that's not going to matter. It won't even be a memory. Because we won't exist to remember it. I know you probably aren't processing

ANDY (cont.)
any of this, but I just couldn't do it without telling you.
I'm doing this for both of us. For you and me.

ANNIE
You and me.

ANDY
That's right.

(ANDY touches the cloth part of
ANNIE's head. In a lightning-quick
motion, she grabs his hand.)

ANDY
Don't pull on that.

(ANDY tries to free his hand but
can't. ANNIE pulls it closer to her
face.)

ANDY
Let go, Annie.

ANNIE
(softly)
Not Andy.

ANDY
What?

ANNIE
(louder)
Not Andy.

ANDY
No, Annie. It's a prosthetic. It-

ANNIE
(screaming)
Not Andy.

ANDY
Please, Annie. Dad's going to-

(ANNIE begins shaking ANDY's arm.)

ANNIE
(screaming, over and over)
Not Andy. Not Andy. Not Andy-

(JEFF runs in, pulling ANNIE off of
ANDY, who retreats to the other
side of the room. JEFF calms ANNIE
down. She stops screaming.)

JEFF
It's ok.

(ANNIE's head rolls over to the
side limp.)

ANNIE
Andy.

JEFF
What did he do to you?

ANDY
Me?

JEFF
She was fine when I left.

ANDY
That's a fucked-up definition of 'fine'.

ANNIE
Words.

JEFF
Stop it. I'm taking her back to bed before you do any more
damage.

ANDY
I did not do this.

JEFF
Come on, Annie. Let's go to bed.

ANNIE
Goodnight.

JEFF
That's right.

(JEFF starts to push her back to her room.)

ANNIE

Goodnight, Andy.

(JEFF stops.)

ANDY

Goodnight, sis.

(JEFF takes ANNIE offstage. ANDY collapses on the couch. After a few moments, JEFF enters again.)

JEFF

I hope you're happy.

(ANDY sits up but doesn't speak.)

JEFF

I can't believe you would do that to her. I mean I could almost understand it when you were younger, when you thought in your own way you were doing her some good. But in her current condition. You couldn't just leave her alone.

ANDY

It's one thing for you to do this kind of shit to me. But to do that to her. To make her into that, just to get at me. You have to stop.

JEFF

I didn't make her into that. That's what she is.

ANDY

You did this.

JEFF

Even if I had these mystical powers you accuse me of, why would I do that to Annie?

ANDY

So you could have another simple doll. One who won't fight back when you- (beat) You've never touched her, have you.

JEFF

Jesus Christ, Andy.

ANDY
I swear to god-

JEFF
No.

(beat)

ANDY
Just let us go.

JEFF
Why would I do that?

ANDY
Why can't you do without us? Is the real world that bad?

JEFF
The real world is awful. But it has it's good parts. Our family could be one of those good parts.

ANDY
Except that it's not real.

JEFF
It is.

ANDY
Then explain it to me. Offer me an explanation.

JEFF
I don't know. It just is.

ANDY
It just is?

JEFF
You have to take some things on faith.

ANDY
No, you don't. Not if faith is just a lazy way to short-circuit reason.

JEFF
What you're suggesting doesn't make any sense.

ANDY
It makes a hell of a lot more sense than Annie and I being

real-life doll-people.

ANDY (cont.)

JEFF

That's what you are. Embrace it.

ANDY

Oh, yeah. That's the ticket. We should embrace our proud plush heritage. Maybe they'll give us a museum. Or a month.

JEFF

Is everything a joke with you?

ANDY

Hey, you made me that way.

JEFF

Stop saying that.

ANDY

Do you see any more of us out there?

JEFF

We're special.

ANDY

Why? Why can't you just let us go?

JEFF

You're free to leave whenever you want.

ANDY

You know that's not what I mean. Please, let me and Annie go. Why would you make her go on like that?

JEFF

I don't-

ANDY

You do. You know you do. It's just stupid to sit here and deny it. If I know it, that means you know it.

JEFF

Let's say your right.

ANDY

I'm right.

JEFF

I mean hypothetically. Let's say you are made up. So what?

ANDY

So what?

JEFF

Yeah, I mean who's to say I'm not made up. What does it matter if you're real- by your definition- or not? Can't you just be happy with things the way they are? Is it really such a bad life?

ANDY

Yes.

JEFF

Why?

ANDY

Are you kidding?

JEFF

Why can't you be happy with the life I've given you?

ANDY

Annie.

JEFF

If Annie were better, you'd be happy?

ANDY

Yes.

JEFF

Maybe we can find a way to make her better.

ANDY

You'll change her?

(JEFF hesitates)

ANDY

You'll fix her?

JEFF

We'll do everything we can to help her. Together. Spare no expense.

ANDY
And at the end of all that she'll be better.

(beat)

JEFF
We can only hope for the best.

ANDY
I need a promise.

(beat)

JEFF
I can't promise what I can't control.

ANDY
Then we're leaving.

JEFF
You're not taking Annie.

ANDY
Yes, I am.

JEFF
How are you going to take care of her? She requires constant attention.

ANDY
Once we're out that door, we go away.

(ANDY starts to go for ANNIE.)

JEFF
Are you sure?

(ANDY pauses)

JEFF
How sure are you? Let's say you're wrong. And you get back to school and your shitty apartment, and you're in way over your head. Trying to take care of Annie, who needs 24 hour attention, and go to school and somehow earn money all at the same time. Are you that sure? Because if you have even the smallest doubt, then it's not worth it. What kind of life would that be for her?

ANDY

I'm not wrong.

JEFF

But what if you are? Isn't there even the smallest chance that this is all real?

ANDY

No. This is impossible.

JEFF

Then go get her.

(ANDY hesitates, then moves towards the front door.)

JEFF

Where are you going?

ANDY

I don't know. I need to clear my head.

JEFF

It's the middle of the night.

ANDY

Oh, don't you worry. I'll be back.

(ANDY exits through the front door. The sound of a car engine trying to start but failing to turn over comes in from offstage. ANDY returns after a few moments.)

ANDY

You said I could leave.

JEFF

Car trouble?

ANDY

Let me go.

JEFF

You think I had something to do with your car not working?

ANDY

Let me go.

JEFF

Just stay the night, Andy. We'll call someone to come look at the car in the morning.

ANDY

Fix the car.

JEFF

I don't know the first thing about cars. You're being unreasonable.

ANDY

Fine. But we're not done.

JEFF

Ok. Just get some sleep, ok kid?

ANDY

Ok.

(JEFF leaves. ANDY turns out the lights and lies down. After a moment, there is the sound of someone moving about the room.)

ANDY

Hello?

ANNIE

Quiet.

ANDY

Annie?

ANNIE

Shh. We have to be quiet and fast.

ANDY

You're alright.

ANNIE

Yes, it's wonderful. Come on, we have to go.

ANDY

(getting up)

How are you alright?

ANNIE

I don't have time to explain. I wish I had known you were coming. We could have planned this better.

ANDY

I'm sorry.

ANNIE

Don't worry, you couldn't have known.

ANDY

I guess not. Where are we going?

ANNIE

Anywhere that Dad won't find us.

(ANNIE starts to leave)

ANDY

Wait.

ANNIE

Are you kidding me?

ANDY

I want to tell you something.

(ANNIE walks over to him)

ANNIE

I know.

(ANNIE kisses him on the mouth.)

ANNIE

We can't go, Andy.

ANDY

Why not?

ANNIE

Don't fool yourself.

(She lays him back on the couch.)

Don't make yourself believe it just because you want it to be true. Don't be dad. You know what to do.

(ANDY goes back to sleep. Lights out. Lights up. Next morning. The

RAGDOLL has been ripped to pieces
and strewn about. Stuffing litters
the stage.)

JEFF

(off)

Andy? Are you up? I'm going to make us all some breakfast.
We'll feel better after a good family meal.

(beat)

Andy?

(JEFF enters wearing pajamas and an
apron. He sees the RAGDOLL and
freezes.)

JEFF

Oh my god.

(ANDY enters from the direction of
the front door.)

ANDY

Morning, Dad.

JEFF

You did this.

ANDY

Sure did.

JEFF

Why? Why would you-

ANDY

I have to keep this brief. Annie's in the car. We've really
got to hit the road. But you asked a question. Why did I do
this to dear old Mom? To give you a choice.

JEFF

It doesn't seem like I have one.

ANDY

Dad, please. Shh. You have a very simple choice, with rather
complicated implications. On the one hand, you could sew it
back together, and go on pretending its alive. But then
you'd have to acknowledge that you control it, that you
determine whether or not it has a life. Or, you can honor
your fantasy and maintain its deceased status, but that

ANDY (cont.)

means you lose her, forever. Either way, Annie and I are gone. And I can promise you won't see us any more. We've become more than you can handle.

JEFF

Don't take her.

ANDY

That's not on the table. So, what's it going to be? Continue to insist that this fantasy is real, or admit it's made up and keep your sick little doll? To be honest, I don't really care. You should have let me take Annie.

(ANDY exits. JEFF finds and picks up the RAGDOLL's head. He holds it in both hands at arm's length, then pulls it closer and examines it. He pulls it to his lips, holding it in a long kiss. Lights out.)

Vita

George Pate was born and raised in Spartanburg, South Carolina. After graduation from the Honors College at the University of South Carolina with a B.A. in English, George spent some time living in Chicago pursuing his passions of comedy and playwriting. During this period, George won the Tennessee Williams National One-Act Play Contest for his play *Indifferent Blue* and was a regional finalist for Comedy Central's Open Mic Fight. He finishes his M.A. in English with Emphasis in Creative Writing at the University of Tennessee in May 2010 and will begin work on a PhD in Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Georgia in Fall 2010.