

“They Don't Make ‘Em Like They Used To”

A Play in Two Acts

Written by

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CAST

CASEY SPENCER – A white male, late thirties to early forties, father to Nikki. Returning after leaving home twenty years ago with his African American wife Jessica. Casey and Jessica were in a motorcycle accident. Jessica was killed instantly and Casey left partially paralyzed in his left arm.

NIKKI SPENCER – Casey’s daughter. A white female, mid to late teens, Nikki wears mid-eighties fashions and listens to her Walkman cassette player constantly. She is a bit of a reckless fun-loving girl who enjoys motorcycles and life with her father. Upon arrival, she becomes infatuated with orphan Dakota.

NAOMI “PISTOL” MARQUETTE – African American female, mid to late thirties, who had been friends with Jessica. She is manufacturing lead supervisor at a local motorcycle factory where Casey applies for work. She blames him for Jessica’s death, but is also attracted to him.

DAKODA CLARK – A white male, late teens to early twenties. An unpaid handyman for Mr. Johnson, Dakota has a long history of being “at the wrong place at the wrong time in town”, and winds up being the prime suspect in the death of Mr. Johnson.

JOHN “GAMPER” CREED – A white male, mid-sixties, suffering from mild form of Tourette Syndrome, a neurological disorder that manifests itself in the form of verbal and facial "tics". Gamper blames Casey for the death of Jessica. He is best friends with Mr. Johnson.

YOSHIHIKO TAKAHASHI – Asian male, mid-thirties, runs the motorcycle manufacturing plant in town. A mean, bigoted person who will sacrifice hard working employees for the sake of the “bottom line”.

CALVIN “CAL” JOHNSON – A white male, mid-sixties, a widower, friends with Gamper. Casey was friends with his only son, Joe, who was killed in action in Vietnam. Mr. Johnson is in the midst of closing his store down due to his inability to compete with the new “Wal-Mart” in town. Gets shot and killed.

SHERIFF BENTON – A male, late forties to mid fifties, the local law enforcement. Old friend of Casey, but never really approved of his relationship with Jessica. Investigating the murder of Mr. Johnson.

DEPUTY KNOX – Male, early twenties. Sheriff Benton’s deputy. Friends with Dakota. Likes Nikki.

BLUTE – A white male, early fifties to early sixties, owner of “Fat Chance Diner”, the local hangout.

MRS. CLAFLIN – A woman, late fifties to early sixties, a Wal-Mart Personnel Manager.

CAL - A Caucasian child, can be played either by a two or three-year old child.

Time: 1986

Setting: Bisonville, Wisconsin

ACT ONE

Act 1, Scene 1 – Main Street - Bisonville, Wisconsin

(IN DARKNESS we hear the sound of a motorcycle revving multiple times before it comes to an unseen stop. At LIGHTS UP, CASEY SPENCER is seen dismounting from a “Harley Davidson” motorcycle with his 16 year-old daughter, NIKKI. NIKKI sits on the front of the bike, CASEY in the back. BOTH wear black motorcycle leather jackets with various insignia and patches strewn along the back, colored shirts and ratty old blue jeans. It is obvious that they have been traveling a few days. Only NIKKI wears a helmet while CASEY wears a tie dyed bandana along his forehead. The set depicts his hometown of Bisonville, Wisconsin. CASEY takes a long slow look around the town)

CASEY – (Reading the town sign situated stage right, sighs) Ho-lee Christ. “Bisonville, Wisconsin. Population 614.” (Turns to Nikki) Here it is, kid. This is the town where even the buffalo get up in the morning and ask the question: “How the hell did we wind up in Bisonville, Wisconsin?”

NIKKI – (Nikki takes a joint out of her leather jacket and lights it up) Do they answer, “Looking for work like my old man”?

CASEY - Cute. My guess is there’s probably not enough buffalo left who can answer the question. (Looks around some more, bending half-way from feeling pain in his left shoulder, which does not move too much from his side) Ow.

NIKKI – Arm hurting you again?

CASEY – (Carping) When doesn't it? (Sees Nikki smoking the joint. In a scolding tone) Hey! Is that weed?

NIKKI- (Not phased) Yeah. So?

CASEY - (Walks over and grabs it from her) Gimme that! What's the matter with you? (After a beat, turns his back and takes several loud hits of what’s left of the joint, then crushes it out on the ground) You know I'm running low, and I gotta conserve.

NIKKI – (Annoyed) Okay, okay!

CASEY - I need it for my shoulder.

NIKKI- (Sarcastic) Yes, Daddy.

CASEY - We've gotta be careful around here, too. This isn't Van Nuys, you know. This is the "boonies", and the folks around here tend to scrutinize newcomers a *little* more closely.

NIKKI – I thought you said this was your home town. (As CASEY begins to answer, she quickly becomes bored and puts on her headphones to her “Walkman” cassette player and tunes him out)

CASEY – Yeah, well, twenty years is a long time, so I might as well be a newcomer. (Looks around at the scenery) Man, you know, on the one hand, it all looks the same to me. But, on the other hand, it all seems so different. (NIKKI has tuned CASEY out. JOHN “GAMPER” CREED enters from stage right, sneaking up on NIKKI at the motorcycle. GAMPER wears work overalls, work boots and a white t-shirt) So, what do you think, Nikki? Nikki? (Turns around to see GAMPER by NIKKI)

NIKKI – (Taking off headphones) Think about what? You know I was tryin’ to listen to the Bangles on my Walkman and...

GAMPER – (Startling NIKKI) Gotcha! (NIKKI shrieks as GAMPER laughs) Oh, I don’t care how old you get, kiddo, that’s still so much fun!

NIKKI – (Turns to see her grandfather) Gamper! (NIKKI gets off the motorcycle quickly and gives GAMPER a huge hug) Gamper! It’s so good to see you! (CASEY smiles and walks over to him. CASEY extends his hand to GAMPER. GAMPER ignores him, instead turning NIKKI around to speak to her with his back to CASEY)

GAMPER – Nikki! Lemme see how you’ve god-god-god damn...grown. (NIKKI does a flirty spin around) Look at how big you’ve gotten. I remember when you only came up to (points to his kneecaps) here on me. How long has it been?

NIKKI – Four years, Gamper.

GAMPER – Four years? (GAMPER turns to CASEY, remembering the last time he saw them was at his daughter’s funeral) Oh, yeah. Four years. (GAMPER puts on a smile, pulls out some money and hands it to NIKKI) Say, Nikki, <facial tic or twitch> why don’t you go over to the “Dunkin’ Donuts” across the way there and get us some dammit-dammit oh, hell...just get us something that’ll be totally bad for our hearts, whaddayasay?

NIKKI – Sounds cool. Thanks, Gamper. Be back in a few, Dad.

CASEY - (As NIKKI hurriedly exits stage left) Sure thing, Nikki. Be careful crossing the street. You may get attacked by a prairie mole, or pine marten, or...something. (NIKKI does not respond)

GAMPER – (Watching NIKKI go) She’s a fine looking young girl, Casey.

CASEY – She’s hell on wheels.

GAMPER – Name me a sixteen year old girl who wasn’t. (Melancholy) Jessica was. (Walks over and looks at the motorcycle) Got a leak over behind here. (Points out where it’s leaking. CASEY looks at it)

CASEY – I know. Had it since we left L.A.

GAMPER - Take it over to Johnson's Hardware. He's got a new handyman, Dakota, who can fuh-fuh-fuh fix anything. But you better hurry, fast. Cal's closing the store in a week or two.

CASEY – Have things been that rough for him since Margo passed away? How's he holdin' up?

GAMPER – Same as me when Esther died *eight* years ago. I *suppose* same as you when Jessica was killed. He's depressed. He's angry. The man's alone. You at least <tic> had Nikki when Jessica got killed.

CASEY – Yeah, these last few years Nikki and I have definitely been leaning on each other more than ever since she lost her mother in the *accident*. (Pulls out a joint and lights it up. GAMPER, still looking at the oil leak, doesn't see it) She's had it rough. I haven't been able to get work and my unemployment's run out. I need to find work and fast.

GAMPER – Well, she could do worse, I guess. (CASEY takes a beat to react, but is not sure how to take that comment) You have this looked at?

CASEY – Dealer looked at it before we left. Could be the rear cylinder.

GAMPER – (Getting back to the subject of Nikki) Nikki been having bad-bad-bad problems in school, has she?

CASEY – (Shaking his head) Van Nuys never was the best place for her, but Jessica wanted to be close to the movie studios so she could sell her screenplays. Who would've thought that one bad turn on Laurel Canyon (pauses to feel his arm) would change everything?

GAMPER – (Still examining the bike) Well, you prick-prick-prick...you did all you could do.

CASEY – I see the Tourette's no better, huh?

GAMPER – Bad as ever. When I was a kid, they didn't really have a <tic> treatment for it. It subsided some after I got to be about Nikki's age. Now I need this new medication to help me some, but it's still not a hundred percent effective. Quite honestly it's a goddammit-dammit-dammit pain every now and then. Yeah, they <tic> prefer I not come to the Sunday Church of Christ services anymore.

CASEY – That sucks.

GAMPER – I get by. (Points to the sky) He knows what's in my heart.

CASEY - I just hope I'm doing right by Nikki. She didn't like being pulled away from her "friends" in Van Nuys. But those kids she was getting hooked up with were all in gangs. That's when I said we'd better split and come home.

GAMPER – Nearest thing we got to a gang is folks at <tic> Tuesday night Bingo over at the "Fat Chance Diner". Lord, that competition can get ugly, lemme tell ya. (Rises and sees that CASEY is smoking a joint) Hey! (In a scolding tone) Hey! Is that a joint?

CASEY - (Not phased) Yeah. So?

GAMPER - (Walks over and grabs it from him) Gimme that! What's the matter with you? (After a beat, turns his back and takes several loud hits of the joint, then stamps it out on the ground) You know you gotta be careful around here. This isn't Van Nuys, for Christ's sake. This is the <tic> "boonies", and they scrutinize people a *little* more closely around these parts. If this fracken-fracken (Stops and takes a deep breath) If this the kind of thing you've been teaching Nikki, no wonder she's messed up.

CASEY – She's not "messed up", Dad...

GAMPER – And stop calling me "Dad"! Pervert-Pervert! You don't have the right! I'm <tic> not your father!

CASEY – But you *told* me to call you Dad.

GAMPER – That was before you got my daughter killed! You send me a Christmas card once a <tic> year, and expect me to now all of a sudden be like a cheap-cheap-bastard father to you and bail you out? What the <tic> hell gives you the right? Huh? What?

CASEY – C'mon, Da...John! You know full well I would've done anything if it had been me who got killed and not Jessica. It was an accident. (Softly) Please, John. Nikki and I need help. We have no money. Nobody'll hire me with this bum arm. I sold the Ford, bought the Harley. We barely made it here on fumes. We have nowhere else to go. I want to try and make a new life for us here. Can't you help us? Please?

GAMPER – (Considers, then, after a beat) Shhh. Here comes Nikki. (NIKKI returns with a tray of three coffees and a bag of donuts)

GAMPER – Hey! There's my girl. What'd you bring us?

NIKKI – Three coffees, double-up on creamers, ten sugars, and six triple chocolate donuts.

GAMPER – Sounds delicious.

CASEY – Sounds like diabetes in a bag.

GAMPER – (Taking a donut and eating) Shut up. Great job, <tic> Nikki. Let's go over to the park over there (indicating stage left) and eat. (ALL cross left over to a park bench to eat)

CASEY – John, do you still know some people over at the Hanson Motorcycle Factory at the edge of town? (GAMPER continues to eat) I figured...I hoped...you might at least help me get my foot in the door...

GAMPER – (Shakes his head) If I could help you out, Casey, I would, especially for my little Nikki here. I really would. But, just a little over a year ago, some God damn Japanese outfit bought the fuh-fuh-fuh factory. Changed everything around, <tic> fired workers left and right. This town, <tic> went from building awesome American bikes to cheap Chink-Chink-Chink Jap knock-offs.

NIKKI – (Reprimanding) Gamper. (Handing CASEY his donut) Here, Daddy.

CASEY – (Takes the donut with his good arm and hand) Thanks, kid.

GAMPER – (Pulls out another donut from the bag and eats during the following) It’s true, I tell ya. They laid off 35 people. Families had to move out of town in order to find mental-mental manufacturing jobs elsewhere in the state.

CASEY – Shit.

GAMPER - If they hadn’t built a Wal-Mart two towns <tic> over, there’d be nothing left of Bisonville. (Looks around the town) Look around here: (points out to different sections of town) “Dunkin’ Donuts”? Used to be “Ben’s Donut Shoppe”. Remember everybody used to call him “Uncle Ben”? He was so gentle.

CASEY – (Realizing GAMPER’s being silly) John!

GAMPER – Sorry. (Pointing off again) “Kay-Bee Toys”? Used to be “Charlotte’s Children’s Fashions”. “Walgreens”? Used to be “Henry Cabot’s Apothecary”. All gone. This town’s going the way of our namesake...fast into extinction.

NIKKI – Hey, Dad. Maybe, if you can’t find work, I can try over at the Wal-Mart. I’m sixteen now, and its summer, so why not?

CASEY – That would be fine, honey, but you’re still only fifteen for a few more weeks. Don’t rush it. Anyway, I don’t think we can pay any kind of decent rent on minimum wage. I need to find some real work and get us back on our feet again. John, I hate to ask.

GAMPER – Oh, sweet Jesus. Here it comes.

CASEY – Yeah, could you possibly put us up for awhile? Just until we find a place?

GAMPER – (Shakes his head) You can sleep over. Best I can do. But, I haven’t got any room in the house, so you’ll have to look for a new place first thing tomorrow. I turned Esther’s room into a <tic> model train room, and between me and the cats, there ain’t a lot of space left over. (NIKKI looks at CASEY)

NIKKI – Gamma’s room? She had her own room?

CASEY – (Explaining) Your grandma was very sick last few years. She was hooked up to a lot of medical equipment at their home.

GAMPER – It was so stupid, really. I mean, putting her there, me way over in another room. Just stupid.

CASEY – (Explaining to NIKKI) He never left her side.

GAMPER – Anyway, I barely have enough space for myself. Now, Cal Johnson, though, he may have a raunchy-raunchy room to let.

CASEY – (Suspicious) Tourette’s?

GAMPER – Not really, the room really sucks. Let’s go over to the hardware store and see what he says. He may even have a <tic> lead or two on some cheap-ass-sweathouses some places that may be hiring around town. (Rises, looks at CASEY) What? *That* was the Tourette’s. (Throws the donut bag onto the bench and crosses off right)

CASEY – Litter bug. (Rising, picks up the bag, says to NIKKI) C’mon, then. Let’s go. (They exit off right. LIGHTS DIM as the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 2)

Act 1, Scene 2 – Johnson’s Hardware Store

(LIGHTS UP on a typical hardware store center stage. There is a large sign displaying the name “Johnson’s Hardware Store”. CAL JOHNSON is behind a counter center stage. He wears a long white work apron with the store’s logo on it. He reads a local newspaper as CASEY, NIKKI, and GAMPER enter through a door stage right)

GAMPER – Wake up, Cal! You got customers, you old fart-fart-fart rat bastard!

CAL – (Reading his newspaper) Shut up, Creed. You’re a pain in the ass, you know that?

CASEY – Hi, Mr. Johnson.

CAL – (Briefly looking up from the paper) Cut your hair, hippie!

CASEY – (Takes bandana off his head with his good arm and hand) Actually, sir, we prefer to be called the “counterculture”, now, and, anyway (smiling) it’s me. Casey Spencer. Joe’s friend. I used to work for you?

CAL – (Recognizing, puts down paper and crosses over to CASEY) Casey? Oh, my! Sorry, Casey. I didn’t recognize you. (Shakes CASEY’s hand) Anyway, you should still cut your hair, though. You look like a bum. (Smiling) How have you been, boy?

CASEY – I’ve been okay, sir. This is my daughter, Nikki.

CAL – You have a little girl? Goodness, now how about that? (Shakes hands with Nikki) Well, hello, Miss Nicole.

NIKKI – Uh, hi. Truth is its just “Nikki”. N-i-k-k-i.

CAL – (Curious) What for?

NIKKI – Like, I dunno. (Indicating CASEY) Ask him.

CAL – (To CASEY, curious) What for?

CASEY – Her mother’s idea.

CAL – Oh, Jessica, right. (Indicating GAMPER) The old fart told me about the accident. I'm so sorry, Casey.

CASEY – (Changing the subject) So, how's business these days, Mr. J?

CAL – Well, not too good, I'm afraid. I'm closing the shop up next week.

CASEY – John said. How come?

CAL – Just look around, you two. (CASEY and NIKKI look around the store)

NIKKI – I don't see anything.

CAL – Exactly, girlie. Anything or anybody. I just can't compete. Wal-Mart's been absolutely killing me. They "underprice" which means for whatever I'm charging they can beat my prices by almost a third! People don't care that I've been around here for thirty years or that I offer other services. They just want to save money.

NIKKI – (Sarcastic) Duh. What's wrong with that?

CASEY – (Realizing NIKKI is being rude) Nikki.

NIKKI – (Not thinking her question is rude) What? I mean, isn't that what we do in this country? Try to make money by outselling everybody else with the best prices?

CAL – (To NIKKI) Spend thirty years building up a business only to have it wiped out in a matter of months, girlie girl, and then you'll have your answer. (DAKODA CLARK enters from the stage right door. A typical grease monkey, DAKODA is wearing a messy t-shirt with a rock band logo on it, a slovenly, loose-fitting, opened button-down flannel shirt over it and grimy jeans. He is wiping grease off of his hands with a rag) Eight stores have closed in town in the past six months; all because they can't compete with these big chains comin' in. (Sees DAKODA) All set with the Dodge, Dakoda?

NIKKI – "Dakota"?

DAKODA – (To NIKKI) DakoDa. With a "D". Not a "T". (Emphasizing the "D" sound) Da...da...da...

GAMPER – (To CAL) Sounds like he's got the Tourette's, too.

CAL – He's been working on my '68 Dodge Dart. Car's older than he is.

DAKODA – (Sliding on up next to NIKKI, attracted) Hey there.

NIKKI – (Playing disinterested, but really finding him attractive) Dakoda? Who names their kid "Dakoda"?

DAKODA - Don't know. Never asked my folks.

NIKKI – You mean, like, never?

DAKODA - Couldn't. They ain't been around in years.

NIKKI – Oh, I see. They left because they were embarrassed they gave you that stupid name? (Laughs, then realizes nobody else is and that he's not kidding)

DAKODA - (Emotionless) Plane crash.

NIKKI – (Realizes he's not kidding, sighs) Shit. (Embarrassed) Well, I'm sorry. It's, um, just that "Dakoda" sounds like a name someone gives their dog, like a Doberman pinscher or something.

DAKODA - (Getting closer to Nikki) Well, what's your name?

NIKKI - Nikki.

DAKODA - Well, no offense, "Nikki", but (quickly tickling her once) "Woof-Woof". (Nikki retreats behind CASEY)

NIKKI – All right, all right. You made your point.

CASEY – (To DAKODA) My father-in-law here says you might be able to take a look at my hog out back.

DAKODA - Sure. I seen it outside. Nice bike. '84? (CASEY nods) What's the problem?

GAMPER – It's a piece of crap-crap-crap junk. (To CAL) Got any M&Ms?

CAL – Gonna buy them this time?

GAMPER – No.

CAL – Fuck off.

CASEY – (To DAKODA) Yeah, well, it's leaking like crazy. I can build 'em and normally I could fix it myself, but this arm has been causing me some problems. But it's this leak that has me stumped.

DAKODA – What happened?

CASEY – Well, during the trip, I think the center rocker box cover on the rear cylinder shifted, making this real pissier of an oil leak. Got worse as soon as we hit Platteville.

DAKODA – (Guessing) You do an S/E head swap recently?

CASEY – As a matter of fact, yeah. I had them give it a full tune-up at the dealership. Think they screwed it up?

DAKODA – (Nodding) Might be the rocker box was torqued down wrong by the last dude who touched it during the swap.

CASEY – (After a beat) That's just what I was thinking.

NIKKI – No you didn't, Daddy. You thought...

CASEY – (To NIKKI) Shut up. (To DAKODA) Think you can take a look?

DAKODA – Sure thing. I'll take a look at her right now, if you want.

CASEY – That'd be awesome. Thank you.

CAL - (To DAKODA) Thanks again for repairing that radiator, Dakoda.

DAKODA - No problem, Mr. J. I took a look at that bum outlet in the back, too, and that whole wall will have to be re-wired before the building inspector comes in to appraise the place. (GAMPER checks for change in his overalls)

CAL - Appreciate it. (Embarrassed) I'll, um, pay you for everything when the sale closes.

DAKODA – Whenever, dude. I know you will.

CAL - Dakoda's gonna be startin' work over at the Wal-Mart. He was always a good worker. I'll miss having him around.

GAMPER – (Laughing) You'll miss the cheap labor. Cal hasn't paid Dakoda in weeks. (Pulls out change and shows CAL) I got eighteen cents. How about half a bag of M&M's?

CAL – (Annoyed) Shut up, you pain in the ass! (Throws down the newspaper as the two ad lib argue)

NIKKI – (To CASEY) They've always been like this?

CASEY – (Nodding, says to NIKKI) Nice to know some things haven't changed. They've been a thorn in each other's sides for years. (Looking around, says to CAL) So, Mr. Johnson, when you sell the place, what'll you do? Retire?

CAL – Can't. Ran up a lot of bills trying to keep up with Wal-Mart. Put myself into some serious debt. Never fully recovered financially from all of Margo's medical expenses, neither. You know it's strange. (Looks around the store) Margo always hated the store. Said it kept me away from her and Joe. Said I missed most of his early years growing up. They're both gone. In the end, store's all I had left. Now? (Long pause) Can't retire. Not sure what'll come next, but, I'll get by.

NIKKI - I still don't know what the big deal is. So Wal-Mart's got the best prices. So?

CAL – Young lady, what's your name again?

NIKKI – Nikki. N-i-k...

CASEY – Nikki!

NIKKI – Sorry!

DAKODA – (After a beat, smiles at NIKKI, teasing her) “Woof”. (NIKKI smiles at DAKODA)

CAL – Nikki, used to be people cared about substance...about quality in products and services. Now, all folks care about is convenience and cost efficiency.

NIKKI – I still don’t see nothin’ wrong with them.

CASEY – There’s gotta be a balance, kid.

CAL - Seems as though, these days, if the people want cost efficiency, the cost will be quality. If they want convenience, then the cost will be substance. The biggest thing we lose? The individual character of every small town in America.

GAMPER - These goddamn Wal-Marts are <tic> popping up everywhere.

CAL - You just wait. In a few years, you won't be able to turn a corner or cross a town line without bumping into one.

GAMPER - C'mon now, Cal. Let's not get <tic> ridiculous. That’d be as stupid as seein’ a Dunkin’ Donuts or Starbucks at every street corner. (ALL laugh) Why don't we all head on over to the fuh-fuh-fuh “Fat Chance” to get a bite to eat?

NIKKI and DAKODA – (Simultaneously, smiling at each other) I’m not hungry.

CAL – (To GAMPER) You buyin’?

GAMPER – (To CAL) Shush.

CASEY – (To GAMPER) You just had a donut.

GAMPER – (To CASEY) Shush.

CAL – “Fat Chance Diner”. Surprised it ain’t a “Denny’s” by now. (Shrugs) Well, sure. Let’s go. Not much keeping me here today. (Comes out from behind the counter, takes off his work apron) Dakota, you watch the store for me, okay?

DAKODA – Sure thing, sir.

CASEY – Fine, I’ll go. Nikki, you stay here and show Dakota my hog outside. You practically know the thing better than I do.

NIKKI – I *do* know it better than you do, Dad.

CASEY – Great. Then *you* can fix it while *Dakoda* watches! We should be back in about an hour.

NIKKI and DAKODA – (Simultaneously, smiling at each other) Yeah, okay. (As GAMPER, CASEY and CAL exit through the door, CASEY looks back at NIKKI and DAKODA while GAMPER turns back to CAL and asks)

GAMPER – When we get back, can I get those M&Ms?

CAL – Fuck off! (GAMPER, CAL and CASEY exit left as the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 3)

Act 1, Scene 3 – Fat Chance Diner – Moments Later

(LIGHTS UP on typical roadside diner. There is a large sign indicating “Fat Chance Diner”. There are several booths in place. It is just a few moments later. GAMPER, CAL and CASEY enter through door far left. THEY sit at a table near center stage and a large man named BLUTE comes over and gives them all menus. He is dressed in white chef’s pants, a white t-shirt and a cook’s hat)

CAL – So, what are your specials today, Blute?

BLUTE – We got fish & chips, or we got fettuccini.

GAMPER – Alfredo?

BLUTE – Nope. Fired him last week. Jimmy’s the cook, now. (Laughs as the MEN groan)

GAMPER – That joke’s as old as you, you fat-fat-fat bastard. How’s the <tic> chicken today?

BLUTE – The chicken?

GAMPER – Yeah.

BLUTE – Stick with the fettuccini.

CAL – Why don’t you give us a minute while we decide?

BLUTE – Fine. But don’t take all day. I got the noon rush from the motorcycle plant coming through any minute. (NAOMI MARQUETTE enters through the door far left and sits a few tables near the trio)

GAMPER – Don’t worry, Blute. We’ll order fast to give you enough time to <tic> put together your latest ptomaine-ptomaine special.

BLUTE – You know you give people with *real* Tourette’s a bad name, Creed? I swear you use it just to piss people off on purpose.

GAMPER – (Feigning innocence) That is a terrible thing to say, Blute. I have a documented medical condition which I have no control over. Don’t believe me? Ask Doc Wilkins. To <tic> to think I would abuse it in any way is just...

BLUTE – All right, all right. I’m sorry, John.

GAMPER – Apology accepted cocksucker-cocksucker. Oh, there it goes again. I’m sorry. (CAL and CASEY laugh)

BLUTE – (Annoyed) Screw you, Creed! (After a beat, sees NAOMI, pleasantly) I'll be over in a minute. (Turns to go, then turns back to the MEN and screams) You jokers decide what you want and I'll be right back, but don't waste my time and be ready! (BLUTE goes over to take NAOMI's order. The MEN peruse their menus. Pleasantly) What'll ya have, miss? (NAOMI silently gives her order to BLUTE)

GAMPER – What looks good to you, Casey?

CASEY – (Pulls out his wallet, checks for money, sand and dust falls out of the wallet) Water.

GAMPER – (Shakes his head) It figures. Don't worry. I'll cover you.

CAL – You'll cover him? In my store you had to scrounge up eighteen cents for M&Ms. Now you're Daddy Warbucks?

GAMPER – (Explaining) Ah! Eighteen cents out of my overalls. That's where I keep my snack money. I keep my breakfast and lunch money in my wallet.

CAL – (After a beat, sighs) You are such an idiot.

GAMPER – (Ignoring the slight) Never mind. What about you, Cal? What are you having?

CAL – (Pulls out his wallet, and it falls apart in his hands) Um (Frustrated) Ah, hell, John. Can you cover me, too? I'm already running a pretty hefty tab here. (BLUTE finishes taking NAOMI's order)

GAMPER – It figures. I'm out with two big spenders, here. Well, don't worry. I got you both covered. Blute! (As BLUTE comes over)

BLUTE – Ready to order?

GAMPER – Yes. I'll have a bacon double cheeseburger with <tic> fries, extra grease please, with two of your best pickles on the side. And give us all a round of junk-junk Diet Cokes.

BLUTE – (Looks at the other two who say nothing. Asks GAMPER) And what'll these guys have?

GAMPER – My pickles. (BLUTE, frustrated, walks away) See? No problem. You're <tic> covered.

CAL and CASEY – (Ad-lib, overlapping, staggered) Gee. Thanks. So generous. What a guy.

CAL - You are such an asshole.

NAOMI – (Recognizing CASEY, walks over to the table) Excuse me, aren't you Casey Spencer?

CASEY – (Turns to her) Yes?

NAOMI – (Slaps CASEY hard) You shit!

GAMPER – Naomi!

CASEY – (To GAMPER) "Naomi"? (To NAOMI, recognizing her, rises) Naomi Parks? Pistol? Is that you?

NAOMI – It’s Mrs. Marquette to you, you fat piece of garbage.

CASEY – What? You married that racist asshole Cole Marquette? What are you, crazy? He made Malcolm X look like Bishop Sheen! (Feeling his face) Ow! This hurts! You been working out?

NAOMI – Never mind! What the hell are you doing back here?

GAMPER – Casey’s thinking of moving back to town with his <tic> daughter. (After a beat, awkward) Isn’t that nice?

NAOMI – (Angry) Are you Casey, old man?

GAMPER – (To CAL) I think I’ll shut up, now.

CAL – So *that’s* what I gotta do to get you to shut your pie hole?

CASEY – (Still holding hand to where his face got slapped) Maybe this was a bad idea.

NAOMI – You got that right, asshole. Jessica was my best friend, and you got her killed.

CASEY – Pistol, it wasn’t like that...

NAOMI – Don’t call me that. Nobody’s called me that in years and I certainly don’t want to hear it from you. You just stay the hell away from me, scumbag, or else. (NAOMI storms out the restaurant door as BLUTE returns with her food and places it on her table, then deadpan comes over to CASEY and gives him NAOMI’s check. CASEY sits back down at the table slowly)

CASEY – Guys, so far, I’ve been home just three hours and things haven’t exactly gone great so far.

GAMPER – You thu-thu-thu think?

CASEY - My bike’s crapped out on me, I’m broke, the town’s just about dead, and on top of all that I’ve just been slapped in the face by a girl who blames me for the death of her best friend.

CAL – Well, just so it doesn’t go to waste...(Rises, crosses to NAOMI’s booth and starts eating her food)

CASEY - I’m beginning to think maybe we were better off in Van Nuys.

GAMPER – (Taking NAOMI’s check from CASEY) Casey, *nobody’s* better off in Van Nuys. (Serious) Look, it’s just a shock for Naomi, that’s all. Did you invite her to the <tic> funeral?

CASEY – (Shakes his head) Jessica didn’t invite Naomi to the wedding, Dad.

GAMPER – Why?

CASEY - Naomi didn’t think blacks and whites should marry. They lost touch over the years, so when Jessica died, it didn’t even occur to me to invite Naomi. Now, I kind of wish I had.

GAMPER – Boy, I’ll tell you I don’t think I’ve ever seen her that pissed-pissed-pissed angry before.
(Laughing) You certainly do have a way with the <tic> ladies. (BLUTE returns with GAMPER’s meal and an extra smaller plate. He takes the pickle off of GAMPER’s plate and places it onto the smaller plate. BLUTE then hands the smaller plate to CASEY and exits to the kitchen)

CASEY – I need to talk to her. See if I can calm her down.

GAMPER – I’d give it awhile, Casey.

CASEY – (Sits back down next to GAMPER) Why? Think she’s that mad?

GAMPER – (Indicating his lunch) No, I wanna finish my meal.

CASEY – (Still feeling the burn from the slap on his face) Ouch. (Eats his pickle. LIGHTS DIM as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 4)

Act 1, Scene 4 - Wal-Mart - Bennett, Wisconsin – Two Months Later

(LIGHTS UP on the hardware department of America’s largest department store, Wal-Mart. It is two months later. DAKODA, now wearing a Wal-Mart standard blue vest, is stocking shelves with hardware items from boxes along the floor as NIKKI peeks out from behind one of the shelves to surprise him)

NIKKI – Boo! (Comes out from behind the shelves) Hi!

DAKODA – Babe! What’re you doing here? I’m not on break for another hour.

NIKKI – So I’m early! So sue me! Christ! Chill, Mr. Assistant Manager. We’ve been going out for over a month. You’d think by now you’d know that I always “get there” before you! (Tries to snuggle up to DAKODA, but he gently avoids her, trying to remain collected as he attempts to work) Have you heard anything on my application yet?

DAKODA – Nothin’ yet, babe.

NIKKI – I gotta get this job. (After a beat) I want a new cassette player. My Walkman’s a piece of crap. Guess what? My Dad’s got another interview today. Third one this week.

DAKODA – Hope it happens for the dude. You guys are awesome, but you can’t keep living in that loft over the hardware store. Or at least, what *was* the hardware store.

NIKKI – You talked to him lately? Mr. Johnson?

DAKODA – No. Not since he shut down. He’s been avoiding me for some reason.

NIKKI – You sure?

DAKODA – Think so. He won't return my calls. (Changing the subject) Hey! I heard your dad got himself bitch-slapped last month at the Fat Chance.

NIKKI – (Laughing) Yeah, and like, all he does is whine about it, too. I'm like, if you wanna talk to her, go find out where she lives and see her. But, he's got other things on his mind, too, so I guess she'll like have to wait, or whatever.

DAKODA – (Chuckling) Whatever. (Looks in a box on the floor and pulls out a home pregnancy test) What're these doin' here? This whole box is nothing but lady stuff like make up junk, uh, "unmentionables" and home pregnancy tests. This is hardware. Some clerk sure screwed up big time. (Continuing to stock the shelves with hardware items as NIKKI starts to help him. After a beat) So, your mom was black, huh?

NIKKI – Yeah.

DAKODA – (After a beat, chuckling) That's cool.

NIKKI - They moved here from Alabama. Man, I guess it was like hell for them down there. (In a badly drawled out southern accent) "White main and black wimmern? Like hell! Not 'round cheer! Nossirree!"

DAKODA – You are such a dork, Nikki. (After another beat) So, umm...how come you ain't black?

NIKKI – (Shrugs) Ain't got a clue. Go figure genes, I guess. I dunno.

DAKODA – Gotta admit, I don't know how I'd handle being with a black woman, and all. (NIKKI looks at him) Not that I think there's anything wrong with African Americans. It's just that, like, that type of relationship seems to come with a whole shitload lot of problems, especially if they have "mixed" kids. I mean holy shit! I'd just assume not have that in my life, y'know what I mean? I hope you're not offended by that.

NIKKI – No. I'm not offended. Just...disappointed, I guess. You know, I get it. It's like, some people can handle it and some people can't. (Changing the subject) Hey, look at this! (Pulls out an old lady wig) I grabbed this from costumes. It's not even Halloween yet and they already got this shit out! This is like so totally awesome! (Puts on wig and in an old lady voice says) So, ya wanna grow old with me, Dakodee? Give us a smooch! (Smacks her gums as if she has no teeth)

DAKODA – If you wind up lookin' as raggedy ass like that, babe, forget it!

NIKKI – (Starts smacking him) What's the matter? Don't ya' care fer me, ya' young upstart? (DAKODA looks around to make sure no one is watching them. Then, he pulls her close. The two sneak a kiss. DAKODA then heads out first, slowly followed by NIKKI, who turns back and picks up a home pregnancy test from the box. LIGHTS DIM as NIKKI exits and the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 5)

Act 1, Scene 5 – Wal-Mart, Human Resources Department – Same Day

(LIGHTS UP on a small office with a single desk and various Wal-Mart paraphernalia. It is later the same day. CASEY enters through a door stage right with MRS. CLAFLIN. MRS. CLAFLIN sits at her desk and CASEY sits in a chair across from her)

MRS. CLAFLIN – Well, Mr. Spencer, the paperwork seems to be all in order.

CASEY – Great! That’s really good.

MRS. CLAFLIN – But, I’m afraid there is a problem.

CASEY – That’s bad. It isn’t my arm, is it?

MRS. CLAFLIN – Oh, no-no-no. We pride ourselves on employing many physically challenged individuals here at Wal-Mart. (After a beat, writes a note on his application)

CASEY – (To HIMSELF) Mentally, too. I’ve seen some of your clerks.

MRS. CLAFLIN – What was that?

CASEY – Nothing, nothing. So, what was the problem, Mrs. Claflin?

MRS. CLAFLIN - Well, (pulls out file) it appears you failed the mandatory urine sample drug testing.

CASEY – What? What did you say? My *urine* failed?

MRS. CLAFLIN – Yes, well, in a way. It appears you tested positive for traces of several different combinations of marijuana.

CASEY – Well, I explained on the application, Mrs. Claflin, I was in a motorcycle accident in L.A. in ‘82. I was pretty banged up. The bike was totaled. I lost...(Stops. Considers that MRS. CLAFLIN may think he’s using the death of his wife as an excuse for taking drugs) And because of my arm, for the last four years I’ve been taking it for medicinal purposes.

MRS. CLAFLIN – “Medicinal purposes”? Marijuana? Come now, Mr. Spencer, that’s absurd. I’ve never heard of such a thing.

CASEY – Well, my arm bothers me quite a bit, and the marijuana helps me with the pain.

MRS. CLAFLIN – Well, normally for marginal usage of the substance, I would recommend that you abstain from using for about a month, then re-submit your application and try the urine test again.

CASEY – Oh, well, that’s good.

MRS. CLAFLIN – No, it’s not.

CASEY – It’s not.

MRS. CLAFLIN – No, it’s not. Because you just admitted to me that you take an illegal substance to assist in dealing with an ongoing permanent medical condition. That means your application would be rejected in the future as well. I’m sorry.

CASEY – (Rises) Mrs. Claflin, please. I’ve been all over the county looking for work these past eight weeks. I’ve interviewed everywhere, and either people aren’t hiring or they’re just not interested in hiring me. I’ve applied at the motorcycle plant five times. I was interviewed by all sorts of department heads, but all they do is take one look at this arm and tell me that they “have no immediate openings”.

MRS. CLAFLIN – I’m sorry, Mr. Spencer. I am sympathetic, but there’s very little I can do. (Opening a folder on her desk) Besides, I think you have more pressing matters.

CASEY – (Disturbed) What do you mean?

MRS. CLAFLIN – (Pulling out another application from her folder) Well, we had another applicant who also failed the drug test. Normally, I wouldn’t divulge the applicant’s name to just anyone, but seeing as you are the *parent* of the girl, I thought you should know. (Hands CASEY NIKKI’s Wal-Mart application. CASEY is stunned) Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a two o’clock orientation. (There’s a knock at the door left) Here he is now. Good day, Mr. Spencer, and good luck to both of you. (CASEY slowly gets up and goes over to the door. He opens it up, and CAL JOHNSON enters wearing a Wal-Mart vest. CASEY looks at him for a moment, stunned. CAL looks down slightly, avoiding eye contact with CASEY. CASEY exits. CAL closes the door) Well. Right on time, Mr. Johnson.

CAL - (Stoic, unemotional) Yes, ma'am.

MRS. CLAFLIN - Good. Good. I just paged the person who'll be training you. He's the Assistant Manager for the hardware department. Oh, would you straighten your vest, please? (CAL does so) Very good. You’re first impression is very important. I'm sure you'll enjoy working...(there's another knock at the door) Oh, that must be him. Come in. (DAKODA emerges from behind the door. CAL is shocked)

DAKODA – (Seeing CAL) Mr. Johnson? (CAL says nothing but is obviously angry and embarrassed as LIGHTS DIM as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 6)

Act 1, Scene 6 – Apartment Loft Over Johnson’s Hardware Store – Later Same Day

(LIGHTS UP on a small loft apartment. It is later in the day. The space is very cramped, but there are furnishings. There is a clock on the wall and two doors, one on stage right to the bathroom and an entry door on stage left. NIKKI is seated in a chair as CASEY paces back and forth)

NIKKI– (To CASEY) I’m sorry, Dad. I didn’t think this would happen.

CASEY – I didn’t even know you had applied. (Takes out some stash from his pocket and heads offstage to the bathroom) That’s it. From now on, (a flushing sound is heard as he re-emerges from the bathroom) we stay as clean as hydrogen.

NIKKI – Hydrogen?

CASEY – Yeah. Basic high school science, Nikki. Hydrogen.

NIKKI – Wow. That’s just...dumb.

CASEY- Anyway, neither one of us does weed. You got it?

NIKKI – (Pointing to his arm) But Dad, what about your...?

CASEY – So, I’m just going to have to live with some pain for awhile! (Starts to put on a jacket) Now, I’m heading down to the motorcycle plant for yet another interview. I got one last shot at a job down there. (Feels a twinge of pain) Ow.

NIKKI – (Joking) Want some...?

CASEY – No! (After a beat) Why? You still holding? (NIKKI laughs and shakes her head) Crap.

NIKKI – (Looks at the clock on the wall) Wait. You have a job interview? But Daddy, it’s four o’clock.

CASEY – I know, but I got a call from a temp agency about an hour ago, and they want me to meet with their new manager about filling in for an assembler who’s going on his honeymoon. It doesn’t pay much, but it could get my foot in the door. We’ll see. As for you, I want you to keep your nose clean and stay out of trouble. Got it?

NIKKI – Got it. (He exits. After he leaves, NIKKI goes to the bathroom. We hear her open the medicine cabinet and close it. When she returns to the couch she is holding the pregnancy test. From the look on her face, she did not expect the results. It is obvious, she is pregnant. LIGHTS DIM as the scene TRANSITIONS to ACT 1, Scene 7)

Act 1, Scene 7 – Takahashi Motorcycles Production Plant – Later Same Day

(LIGHTS UP at a plant office. It is 4:00pm precisely. CASEY enters through a stage right door to report to work, where he is about to meet his new immediate supervisor. NAOMI is seated behind her desk with her chair turned around. She rises with her back to the door. She leans over to put a file away in a file cabinet located behind her desk. CASEY knocks on the door)

NAOMI – Come in. (CASEY enters and sees NAOMI bent over. He likes what he sees)

CASEY – (Smiling) Hi. I’m here about the job. (NAOMI hears CASEY’s voice. She stands and turns slowly around to see CASEY before her. CASEY recognizes NAOMI’s surprised look immediately and tries to be funny) Oh, shit. Does this mean I shouldn’t ask about extended coffee breaks?

NAOMI – (Slowly stands) You? You’re the best the agency could send me? (Annoyed) Get out. I’m busy. I do not have time to deal with you.

CASEY – (Approaches her desk) Wait a sec. Listen, Pistol...(She glares at him) Listen, Naomi... whatever you think of me, you remember how good I was with motorcycles? Well, I still am. In fact, I'm better now...even with the bum arm. I'm asking not only for my sake, but for the sake of my daughter, for mine and Jessica's daughter. Please. Let me do this. I don't *want* be asking you, but I'm out of options. (NAOMI looks away) I won't cause any trouble. I swear. I'll stay out of your way. Please?

NAOMI – (Turns back to him, after a beat) One month. If I hear one complaint from anybody, you're gone. (Lifts some papers off her desk) Fill this out. Bring these down to the floor supervisor. He'll take care of anything I'll need to give your temp agency. Two half hour breaks or one hour for lunch. You get minimum wage, no benefits, and no overtime.

CASEY – Sounds like I won't be able to afford to starve. (Smiling at her) Thank you...Mrs. Marquette.

NAOMI – (After a beat, admitting) Actually, it's "Ms." Cole split on me few years back. Now, get the hell outta here. (CASEY exits as LIGHTS DIM and scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 8)

Act 1, Scene 8 - Takahashi Motorcycles Production Plant – One Week Later

(LIGHTS UP on a manufacturing production floor. CASEY is seen working on a partially disassembled motorcycle. It is one week later. CASEY is now wearing work clothes and a hardhat. MR. TAKAHASHI enters stage right wearing a suit and hardhat. TAKAHASHI sees CASEY and notices CASEY favoring one arm over the other. TAKAHASHI then crosses to NAOMI, who is also wearing a hardhat)

MR. TAKAHASHI – Ms. Marquette. Who is that man?

NAOMI – That's Casey Spencer, Mr. Takahashi. He just started with us last week.

MR. TAKAHASHI – I see. (Takes off his hardhat) Fire him.

NAOMI – (Shocked) What?

MR. TAKAHASHI – Let him go, immediately. He has a physical impairment which will slow down the assembly line.

NAOMI – (Looking at her clipboard) Mr. Takahashi, he's with us as a temp. He'll only be with us for the month while Jenkins is out. (Ironic) But, I must confess, Casey's been doing an outstanding job for us while he's been here.

MR. TAKAHASHI – (Unimpressed) Ms. Marquette, you're new to the manager's position?

NAOMI – (Nodding) Lateral transfer from Customer Service where I managed for five years, sir.

MR. TAKAHASHI – I'll explain, then. We have an order for sixty-five units to be shipped out to California by Friday. I do not wish anything to go wrong.

NAOMI – We’re pretty much on schedule for that delivery, sir.

MR. TAKAHASHI – “Pretty much”? “Pretty much on schedule” doesn’t keep us profitable, Ms. Marquette. I want us to be *ahead* of schedule. Where is the man he is replacing?

NAOMI – Jenkins? Why, he is on his honeymoon.

MR. TAKAHASHI – Call him back. He has had his one week for “slap-and-tickle” fun and games. Now I want all capable men back on the job at once.

NAOMI – “Slap-and-tickle”? He went to Israel to meet his new bride’s family, sir. The country gets bombed and shot at every other day. I don’t know how much “fun and games” there would be. And anyway, I wouldn’t know how to reach him.

MR. TAKAHASHI – Then, bring in another temp. Have him start tomorrow, but I want you to get a more “able bodied” person at once.

NAOMI – Don’t you think you’re being a little discriminatory? There are laws...

MR. TAKAHASHI – (Firmly) I do not want to risk any chance of failure. (Threatening) If you cannot perform your job as instructed, I can also replace *you*. Am I understood?

NAOMI – Yes, sir. (As MR. TAKAHASHI exits off right, NAOMI hesitantly approaches CASEY) Casey? Could I see you a moment? (CASEY puts down his wrench and approaches NAOMI center) Casey, I’m afraid I have to let you go. Today’s your last day with us. I’m sorry.

CASEY – (Shocked) What? Why? Naomi, I’ve been on time. I do my work. I thought I was getting along with everyone...(Looks at NAOMI) with...

NAOMI – You’ve been doing fine, Casey, even as far as I’m concerned. But we have this new manager, Mr. Takahashi, and he’s afraid that you’re going to slow us down.

CASEY – (Disbelief) But, that’s crap. I’ve kept up with everyone on this assembly line, if not more.

NAOMI – (Trying to keep a professional demeanor) I argued all that for you, but he threatened to fire me, as well. I’m sorry, Casey, but it’s your job or mine. I just moved into this job. I can’t blow it. If you give me your timesheet, I’ll sign it for you so you get paid through the end of the day. (After a beat) Casey, I’ll try to talk to Mr. Takahashi again tomorrow. Maybe I can convince him to keep you on. If I do, I’ll call.

CASEY – (Turns to go, then turns back) Do me a favor, Naomi?

NAOMI – What?

CASEY – Call me, anyway? Right now, you’re the only friend I feel I can talk to. (NAOMI smiles. CASEY exits as the LIGHTS DIM and the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 9)

Act 1, Scene 9 - Apartment Loft Over Johnson's Hardware Store – Later Same Day

(At LIGHTS UP, we are back at the loft later that day. CASEY enters the room, which is in darkness. CASEY barely makes out the silhouette of Nikki sitting alone on a couch in the darkness)

CASEY – Hey! What gives? Nikki? Is that you?

NIKKI – Yeah, Dad.

CASEY – Why are the lights out, kiddo? We paid Johnson for the electricity, didn't we? (Turns on the lights. NIKKI is visibly upset and has obviously been crying for awhile. CASEY doesn't immediately notice as he takes off his jacket)

NIKKI - (Subdued) Yeah.

CASEY – (Moving towards the kitchen area offstage, he still hasn't noticed NIKKI) Well, I got some bad news today, kid. They laid me off at the plant. (Pauses offstage as NIKKI doesn't respond) Did you hear me?

NIKKI – (Still not saying much) Yeah, Dad.

CASEY – (Returning into the room) Naomi told me she'd call tomorrow morning. She was gonna talk to this guy...(He stops in the middle of the room in front of the couch as he now sees that NIKKI has been crying) Whoa. What's up, kiddo? Why're you crying?

NIKKI – (Welling up) I'm so sorry, Dad.

CASEY – (Sits next to her) Sorry about what?

Nikki – It's Dakota.

CASEY – (Concerned) What about him? Did he hurt you or something?

NIKKI – No. (Confessing slowly) He-he got me...I'm...I'm pregnant, Dad.

CASEY – Pregnant? (Rises) Pregnant? Please tell me you're pulling my leg! (She shakes her head) Sweet Jesus, Nikki! Oh, my God! What the hell were you thinking!?! (She begins to speak) Never mind! I *know* what you were thinking!

NIKKI – (Confused) Daddy, don't yell at me. I'm scared. I don't know what to do.

CASEY – (Angry) Tell me, while you were having your kicks with the poster boy for Wal-Mart, did it ever occur to you that we're already in big trouble here? We can barely afford to support ourselves. Now we're going to have to figure out a way to support (long pause) my grandchild? (Exasperated, sighs) Ho-lee shit.

NIKKI – (Distraught) I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for this to happen.

CASEY – (Sighs, exasperated but turning more compassionate) No, Nikki. It’s not you. It’s me. You know, I knew you were already “seeing” boys in Van Nuys. Moving here, I thought this was one of those things I could help keep from happening. Jesus. (After a long beat, gets up, goes into the kitchen and retrieves his jacket. He heads to the door)

NIKKI – Where are you going? You’re not going to do something to...?

CASEY – No, I’ll deal with Dakota later. *Trust* me on that.

NIKKI – Then where are you going?

CASEY – Where else? To get my friggin’ job back! (Exits as LIGHTS DIM and the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 10)

Act 1, Scene 10 - Takahashi Motorcycles Production Plant – Later Same Day

(LIGHTS UP again on the shop floor. CASEY returns into to the plant from stage left. NAOMI and MR. TAKAHASHI, wearing their hardhats again, are talking as CASEY approaches them, NAOMI sees him)

NAOMI – Casey! I thought I told you to come back tomorrow.

CASEY – Tomorrow may be too late, Naomi.

NAOMI – What do you mean?

CASEY – I’ll tell you someday when you have kids. (Crosses from NAOMI to MR. TAKAHASHI) Look, Mr. Tallahassee.

MR. TAKAHASHI – (Slowly turns, insulted, but stoic) That’s “Takahashi”.

CASEY – Right, sorry. Naomi tells me that you’re worried about me slowing down the rest of the line here. If you’re worried about me and my arm, well I’m here to tell you, that if you want these bikes finished, give me twenty four hours and I’ll do them all for you right now.

NAOMI – Casey, don’t be ridiculous! You can’t assemble sixty motorcycles in twenty-four hours by yourself. Besides, the day’s almost over.

CASEY – Maybe I can maybe I can’t. But if you’re that worried then just gimme the wheels to do.

MR. TAKAHASHI – (Incredulous) The wheels?

CASEY - The rims are already completed. It’s just a matter of getting the tires mounted. I’ll make sure there are no cuts or foreign bodies in the tires, and that the tread has no wear.

NAOMI – You’d also have to check the wheels and inspect them for loose or broken spokes before mounting them all.

CASEY - No problem. I'd *want* to do that, anyway.

MR. TAKAHASHI - (Interested) You will mount one hundred and twenty rims and tires by yourself in twenty-four hours? (Considers) What about the condition of wheel bearings and runout? You will have to QC* those, as well. (*=QC = quality control)

CASEY – All right. Good point. Fair enough. If there is any vibration when riding, I'll do a wheel-balance check on every hog. But here's the deal. If I do this, I want my job back, and *not* as a temp. Full time and with benefits. My family...my family needs the benefits. What do you say, Mr. T? We both have everything to gain. (MR. TAKAHASHI nods politely and exits. CASEY says to NAOMI) I'm not up on Asian customs. Was that a "yes"?

NAOMI – It was, but...(whispering) you realize he could still say "Sayonara", right?

CASEY – He could. If so, I'll have found out the hard way that this guy isn't "honorable", huh?

(In a live montage set to the sound of whirring torque wrenches and other factory plant sounds, CASEY is seen working on motorcycle after motorcycle, mounting each tire on each bike, every so often wincing in pain. NAOMI occasionally passes by to watch him. Other WORKERS pass by CASEY and watch how hard he is working, punching out at a time clock for the day and exit off right. MR. TAKAHASHI crosses and sees CASEY's progress. He continues off-stage unimpressed. CASEY becomes physically exhausted, and NAOMI brings him a cup of coffee. He drinks it then gets back to work. NAOMI watches as all the WORKERS return and in pantomime help CASEY finish assembling the motorcycles. All the motorcycles have been completed. MR. TAKAHASHI returns, suit coat off and rolling down his shirt sleeves as all the WORKERS exit quickly off-stage)

MR. TAKAHASHI – Mr. Spinster?

CASEY – (Slowly turns, exhausted, insulted, but stoic) "Spencer", sir. Casey Spencer.

MR. TAKAHASHI – Right, sorry. I have personally inspected all the motorcycles. I am a man of my word. An "honorable" man. You have done as you asked, and now so shall I. You are now manager.

NAOMI – (Runs up and hugs CASEY) Oh, Casey congratulations! (Pauses, realizes) Wait a minute. Manager? But that...that's my job.

MR. TAKAHASHI - Not anymore.

NAOMI – But, Mr. Takahashi, I

MR. TAKAHASHI – Consider. Any man who inspires others to help him as Mr. Spencer just did is an invaluable asset to me and this company, more so than any *woman* ever could be. (To CASEY) You will help on the floor during the morning and then you will work in the office that used to belong to Ms. Marquette. Come with me. We have much to discuss. (TAKAHASHI exits. CASEY looks at NAOMI, who runs off upset. CASEY then slowly turns to follow MR. TAKAHASHI as the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 11)

Act 1, Scene 11 – The Fat Chance Diner – Several Weeks Later

(LIGHTS UP on the Fat Chance Diner again, several weeks later. GAMPER enters wiping his brow with a handkerchief and sits down at the same table he sat at in Act 1, Scene 3)

BLUTE – Coffee’s brewin’, Creed. Just put it on. Have a seat and it’ll be there in a minute.

GAMPER – Great. God, it’s really hot today. (Looks quickly at his handkerchief and puts it away. Grabs a menu and opens it up) Blute! What’s the best of today’s <tic> specials...you know, the ones least likely to <tic> kill me?

BLUTE – (From the counter near the kitchen) Hold your horses.

GAMPER – Not a good thing to say in a diner where the meat is always found to be <tic> questionable.

BLUTE – I’m breakin’ in a new waitress.

GAMPER – She has my <tic> sympathies.

BLUTE – Gimme a minute. (Exits out back to the kitchen)

GAMPER – (Looking at the menu) Bet he says the same thing to his slut-whore-bitch <tic> wife. (CASEY enters through the diner door and crosses up to GAMPER. He is now dressed in a “Takahashi Motorcycles” foreman’s uniform)

CASEY – Hey, John.

GAMPER – You look beat.

CASEY – So do you. (GAMPER just nods) Ah, Takahashi’s got us working round the clock. We got another two hundred bike order going to Switzerland by the end of next week.

GAMPER – Switzerland? Not the <tic> first place I think of when it comes to motorcycling.

CASEY – Oh, yeah. Through the Swiss Alps, it’s beautiful. Jess and I were planning to go there when we were first married.

GAMPER – What happened?

CASEY – (Smiles) Nikki.

GAMPER – Ah.

CASEY – Not a bad trade, though, in the long run.

GAMPER – How’s she holdin’ up?

CASEY – Not great. Sixteen year old kid about to become a mom. She’s scared shitless.

GAMPER – Casey... (Begins to tell CASEY something, then shifts gears) Life can throw some curves at you, huh?

CASEY – Like Nikki?

GAMPER - Like falling in love.

CASEY – (Smiling) Marrying a “woman of color”.

GAMPER – Well, we both know about that. (BOTH laugh)

CASEY – For you it was a much different time, though. Rougher.

GAMPER – No shit, “rougher”. Alabama in the 1950’s? It was <tic> hell. We were lucky to get out with our lives. (Smiles) But I’d go through all that hell over again if I could have just <tic> one more day with my Esther. Or Jessica.

CASEY – I guess Jess and I did have it easier, but not by much. God those days were brutal at times.

GAMPER – It may be “brutal” for Nikki, too. Did you talk with her about the possibility of...

CASEY – (Shaking his head) No. Not yet.

GAMPER – You might <tic> want to have that talk, just so she isn’t shocked when... (Pauses, considers) She...is keeping it, right?

CASEY – Yeah. We talked about it for days. She has no plans to give the baby up. And the “other” alternative she’d never do, anyway. Guess I love her for that. Strange, huh?

GAMPER – Not really. She did a stupid thing, but she’s not a stupid girl. And, in time, and with your help, I think she could be a terrific mom. (Looks up) What about Dakoda?

CASEY – She sees him when I’m not at home.

GAMPER – Ah. It’s probably safer for him that way.

CASEY – Hell, yeah. She says he wants to marry her. I don’t know, though. She may be pregnant but, God dammit, Gamper, she’s still a kid.

BLUTE – (Sees that CASEY has joined GAMPER. Calls out to the kitchen) Better make it two cups. (Exits)

CASEY - You seen Mr. Johnson?

GAMPER – (Looks a little nervous) Yeah, well, Cal hasn’t <tic> been himself since he closed up shop. I talk to him every now and then, y’know, usual <tic> small talk. (Calls out) Hey Blute! Where’s the crud-crud-coffee?

CASEY – Say, those tics getting worse?

BLUTE - (Offstage) Creed! Coffee's comin'!

GAMPER – Thanks for the warning. I'll alert the National Guard.

CASEY – (To GAMPER) You all right?

GAMPER – Fine, fine. Just a little <tic> warm. (NAOMI enters from the kitchen carrying GAMPER's coffee pot and two cups on a tray. She brings it up to the table and puts the cup and pot down on the table in front of GAMPER.)

NAOMI – You ready to order? (Both GAMPER and CASEY slowly look up and see that it is NAOMI)

CASEY – Naomi.

NAOMI – Our lunch special of the day is baloney, cheese on wheat or rye. Comes with chips and a drink.

GAMPER – But that was yesterday's special.

NAOMI – He didn't sell any yesterday so he has to repeat the special today.

BLUTE – (From offstage) It's a savings, Creed! I'm being frugal!

GAMPER – Frugal? He was always a cheap bastard.

CASEY – (To GAMPER) And you aren't? (To NAOMI) Naomi, what the hell are you doing here? I've been trying to reach you for the past month.

GAMPER – (Referring to BLUTE, though CASEY has stopped listening) He's worse. Probably got the baloney just after the <tic> expiration date. Penny pinching prick-prick-prick.

NAOMI – (To CASEY) We've got nothing to say to each other.

BLUTE – (From offstage, to GAMPER) You're welcome!

CASEY – (To NAOMI) I didn't know Takahashi was going to do what he did, but I can't say no. This is the only way I can support me and Nikki.

GAMPER – (Looking at the menu) There's gotta be something off this menu that won't <tic> kill me.

NAOMI – (To CASEY) By stealing my job?

CASEY – (To NAOMI) I didn't steal anything. You said it yourself. "It's your job or mine". I'm sorry, Pistol.

GAMPER – (To NAOMI) How's the chicken?

NAOMI – (To GAMPER) Same as the baloney. (To CASEY) Don't call me "Pistol".

GAMPER – Expired? Cheap bastard.

BLUTE – (From offstage, to GAMPER) You're welcome!

NAOMI – (To CASEY) My experience is in customer service and human resources. I hated moving to manufacturing but they phased out customer service. Where the hell else was I supposed to go? Do you know how hard it is to find a human resources job in today's economy, especially in these parts? I may have to move, Casey. And I (Looks at him) and I don't *want* to move.

BLUTE – (Entering from the kitchen, to NAOMI) Do you *want* to take their order?

GAMPER – (To NAOMI) What about the pastrami?

CASEY – (Frustrated, to GAMPER) Gamper, just order whatever the hell you Goddamn want, wouldja?

NAOMI – (To GAMPER) I wouldn't recommend it.

GAMPER – (Looking at the menu) Older than the chicken, eh? Hmm...

BLUTE – (Comes up to NAOMI, threatening) Look lady, do you want this job or not? Cause I can find me another waitress.

GAMPER – (Putting the menu down, to BLUTE) Fine. I'll take the special. But if I need my stomach pumped, I'm suing.

BLUTE - (To GAMPER) Good luck trying to collect, you stuh-stuh-stuttering prick.

CASEY - (To BLUTE) Hey!

NAOMI – (To BLUTE) What the hell is the matter with you?

BLUTE – You takin' his side, lady? You can just walk, then. Another word, and you're outta here! (NAOMI backs off)

GAMPER – (Angry to BLUTE) No-no. I don't need anyone's help to fight my battles. Least I'm not a cheap fat bastard like you!

BLUTE – (To GAMPER) I serve good food here!

GAMPER – (To BLUTE) If you're into ptomaine poisoning, sure, it's good. It's a regular buffet to the stars.

NAOMI – (To CASEY) I already gave notice to my landlady. I'm out by the end of next month.

CASEY – (To NAOMI) Naomi... please don't go.

BLUTE – (To GAMPER) If you don't like it here, then go eat someplace else!

GAMPER – (To BLUTE) I'm trying to support local business.

BLUTE – (To GAMPER) You're kind of support I don't need. You'll put me out of business. (ALL continue ad lib arguing when DAKODA bursts through the diner door. He is covered with blood. There are police lights flashing after he comes in. DAKODA collapses into a booth, winded)

DAKODA – (Out of breath) It's Mr. Johnson. He...He's dead! (CASEY and NAOMI all go up to DAKODA to see if he's all right. BLUTE turns to GAMPER)

BLUTE – (Concerned) Oh, shit. (After a beat, indicating the menu) I sure hope he didn't eat the chicken. (ALL look at BLUTE as the LIGHTS DIM)

(Blackout)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Act 2, Scene 1 – Bisonville Funeral Home – Days Later

(LIGHTS UP on a typical funeral parlor. It is a few days later at a memorial service for CAL JOHNSON. All are dressed accordingly. There is an urn visible on a table stage right. There are chairs organized in diagonal rows on either side of downstage. CASEY, NAOMI and NIKKI are all seated together. MOURNERS include BLUTE, who is seated opposite CASEY. Also present are SHERRIFF BENTON and DEPUTY KNOX, dressed as if they are present in an official capacity. GAMPER is standing at a lectern toward the rear center stage)

GAMPER – Pastor Wicks asked me to say a few nice words about Calvin Johnson. Guess he fuh-fuh-fuh forgot about the Tourette's. (After a beat) I promised him I'd do my best to keep it in check. (Pause) Cal...Cal could be a real <tic> jerk sometimes. (ALL look at GAMPER who continues) He was a sour, bitter, mean old man. He was a cantankerous old fart-fart-fart fool and everybody knew it.

CASEY – (Whispering, rising) Uh, Gamper?

GAMPER – (Holding up a hand to stop CASEY, takes a deep breath then continues) But...he was my friend. (CASEY sits back down) See, guys like us...well...we're a <tic> dying breed. We came up through hard times. A depression, a world war, Korea... (Looks at NAOMI and CASEY) Civil rights. (Scratches his head) But today, <tic> seems as though people our age have gotten a bit lost in the shuffle. Seems we couldn't keep up with or <tic> hell, we just flat fell out of the human *race*, exhausted by the very speed of it. (Indicating the urn) He was bitter about it...and dammit, so was I. Apologies to Pastor Wicks for the language, by the way. Trust me, Pastor, this is a *miracle* so far. When our <tic> wives passed, Cal and me, we'd go over to Fat Chance, take a walk, or maybe we'd share a <tic> beer at the store, especially on

those days when either of us was feeling a bit, I don't know...alone, I guess. There wasn't a <tic> week that went by, I don't think, when one of us wasn't telling the other, "You know, they just don't make 'em like they used to". Well, they <tic> sure as hell don't make 'em like Cal anymore. (Looking out) I see Pastor Wicks keeps looking at his watch. Guess I gotta wrap this up. So, anyway, we <tic> shared our bitterness and, as friends, we were able to cut that bitterness in half. After all, in the end, hell, we (takes a deep breath and struggles to finish) we were all we had left. (Heavy sigh) Nope...they sure don't make 'em like they used to. Thank you all for coming today. I know Cal would have appreciated it. (GAMPER motions to BLUTE who rises)

BLUTE – (Rising) There'll be a special buffet taking place now in the parlor. I brought some chicken and baloney sandwiches. (After a beat) No charge. There's also drinks if anybody wants some. (After a beat) Cash bar. (BLUTE and the other MOURNERS exit as CASEY, NIKKI and NAOMI come up to GAMPER. NIKKI gives GAMPER a hug)

NIKKI – I'm so sorry, Gamper. I know how hard this must be.

GAMPER – (Unnerved by the comment, breaking the hug) Whoa, careful, there. Don't hug too hard. I don't want to knock that kid around too much.

CASEY – You okay, John?

GAMPER – Fine, fine. I'm just gonna wait outside. Take a walk. Excuse me. (Exits off right)

NAOMI – (To CASEY) I better go help Blute in the parlor before he fires me again. (Turns to NIKKI) Wanna come with me, Nikki?

NIKKI – Sure.

CASEY – (To NAOMI) Thanks, Pistol.

NIKKI – Why *does* he call you that?

CASEY – She shot me in high school.

NAOMI – I did not.

NIKKI – What? Really?

CASEY – (After a beat) I got better.

NAOMI – (To CASEY) Stop it. Leave. Go tell Blute I'll be in after I talk with Nikki. (CASEY doesn't move) Well, go on. (CASEY chuckles, then exits off right. NAOMI continues her story to NIKKI) Okay, real quick. Your mother, father and I were out with some friends on a duck hunt, and we were all partying, having a good time. Jessica and him had only been going out a few months, so she was still seeing him through white, excuse me, rose colored glasses I guess, because she was bragging what a kickass shot he was.

NIKKI – What'd you do?

NAOMI – We decided to have a contest. Seven shots at seven beer cans. Ladies first, I started shooting. Bang! Six out of seven. Then he went up. Bang! Seven out of seven.

NIKKI – So, he won.

NAOMI – Not quite. See, on his last shot he knew he *missed* the target.

NIKKI – But you said...

NAOMI – If he had just turned around he would have seen me standing behind a tree way in back. I shot the last beer can.

NIKKI – (Shocked) Did anybody else see?

NAOMI – Nope. I timed it just right.

NIKKI – So, it would have been a tie, but you let him win. Why would you do that?

NAOMI – Your mom asked me to. She knew that male pride can be an awfully foolish thing, but it can also be quite fragile. Girls just sometimes know these things. So, I let him have his win...for her.

NIKKI – Was it only just for her?

NAOMI – (Defensive) Sure. Why else would I have done it?

NIKKI – (Not believing her, smiles) Right.

NAOMI - But he came up to me at the end and said, “Nice shooting, Pistol”.

NIKKI – That has to be the dumbest thing he’s ever said.

NAOMI – I know, right? Tell me about it. But, thanks to your *mother*, all around school the alliterative nickname “Pistol Parks” just stuck. It took me a long time to bury that one. Nobody calls me “Pistol” anymore.

NIKKI – Except Daddy. Are you okay with it?

NAOMI – Not really...(Looks to where CASEY exited, then whispers to NIKKI) but it’s growing on me. (NIKKI smiles) C’mon, let’s get to the food. (They start to exit off right as CASEY re-enters with SHERRIF BENTON and DEPUTY KNOX) Oh. We were just coming in.

CASEY – Blute’s got it okay. I’ll be back in a sec. The sheriff wanted to speak with me about Cal.

KNOX – (To NIKKI) Hey, Nikki.

NIKKI – (Smiles) Hey. (To BENTON) How’s Dakoda? Is he all right?

BENTON – He’s fine, Miss Spencer. Doctor’s saying is in mild shock, is all.

NIKKI – When can I see him? You’ve had him locked up for almost a week.

KNOX – He’s a prime suspect in a murder investigation, Nikki. He’s being moved from the hospital to a holding cell in Gableville.

CASEY – Gableville? But that’s twenty miles outside of town.

BENTON – We don’t have a place to keep him in custody in town. We share the county cell in Gableville.

NIKKI – But he...

CASEY – Nikki, please. Go help Naomi in the other room. Let me talk with the sheriff and I’ll let you know what we can do for Dakota. Okay?

NIKKI – Okay, but this sucks.

CASEY – I know it does, honey.

NAOMI – C’mon, Nikki.

NIKKI – Whatever. (NAOMI and NIKKI exit)

CASEY – You can’t believe the boy is responsible for Cal’s death, Sheriff.

DAKODA – It’s not for me to decide, Casey. All I can go on are the facts. Dakota went to see Cal at the hardware store and the next thing is Cal is dead and Dakota is the only one who is the most likely suspect.

CASEY – Wait a sec. Why would either one of them even go there? It was closed up.

BENTON – Knox, you got them notes?

KNOX – What? Oh, sure. (Pulls out a notebook and flips to a page) Telephone records show two calls from Mr. Johnson’s home. One was to your father-in-law and the other was to Wal-Mart where Dakota was his manager.

BENTON – According to the boy, Cal asked him to meet him at the hardware store. When he got there, Cal was already dead, his head cracked open by a big glass jar.

KNOX – There were pieces of the shattered jar all over the place near where Johnson’s body was found.

BENTON – When we picked up Dakota he was covered in Cal’s blood.

CASEY – He told us at the diner that when he found Johnson dead on the floor he was so shocked he knelt down and cradled the body, crying.

KNOX – I been thinkin’ about that. Could it have been self defense?

CASEY – For what reason? Guys, Johnson wouldn't have tried to kill Dakoda. Johnson was as close to that boy as he was to his own son. Closer, even. And remember, Joe and me, we were best friends.

BENTON – That's a fact, Knox. When Joe died in Vietnam, Cal was never the same. Before the funeral John was telling me that when Dakoda came along Margo and Cal became like second parents to the boy. Told me it felt like it gave Cal another chance. Ah, it's just so damn frustrating. I don't want the boy to be guilty, Casey, but at the same time Cal was murdered and I've got to think about him, as well.

KNOX – And don't forget the evidence.

BENTON – (Considering) Knox is right, Casey. There's only Dakoda's word against everything we found which implicates him as the killer. It may be circumstantial but judges and juries have convicted on a lot less.

CASEY – (Looks at the urn then back at BENTON and KNOX) Give me some time, fellas. Let me talk to the boy in Gableville. Maybe I can find out something you guys, or something we've *all* missed.

BENTON – (Considering) I don't know, Casey.

Knox - We got people to do this sort of thing.

BENTON - Well, the state does. We got diddly squat.

CASEY – Maybe, but guys...(Admitting) the boy is my grandchild's father.

KNOX – (Shocked) Hot spit! Nikki's pregnant? But she's only...

CASEY – Sixteen? Yes, officer, I know, and thank you for reminding me. But Dakoda is the father, and while part of me wants to leave him in Gableville to rot, the other part knows that he loves Nikki and that he's going to be a good father. So, I need to find a way to help give him the chance he needs to be that parent. So, can I see him? (LIGHTS DIM as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 2, Scene 2)

Act 2, Scene 2 – Gableville Holding Facility – Two Days Later

(LIGHTS UP on a darkened, bare stage with only a door, a toilet and a bench. It is two days later.

DAKODA is sitting on the bench when there is the sound of a key turning. The door opens and CASEY and NIKKI step through, accompanied by DEPUTY KNOX. NIKKI rushes up to DAKODA, hugging him)

DAKODA – Babe. You look terrible. Are you all right?

NIKKI – (Breaking away) That's the funniest thing I've ever heard. I'm pregnant. You're locked up. No, I'm not all right, you stupid son of a bitch. (Hits him on the shoulders and chest several times then hugs him again) But I love you and I wouldn't rather be anywhere else.

DAKODA – (To CASEY) You shouldn't have brung her here, dude. There's so much ridin' against me on this.

CASEY – I'll make you a deal. I'll help get you out and you stop calling me "Dude". All right? (DAKODA nods then has a seat next to NIKKI on the bench. KNOX stays by the door. CASEY looks around and sees nowhere else to sit so winds up sitting on the toilet) Now, Knox gave me all the details as far as the police know. You fill in the blanks for me. When Cal called you, what did he say?

DAKODA – It was so hard to hear. Something about some chick. There was a lot of background noise.

NIKKI – Well, you were at Wal-Mart. Must be tough to hear on any phone there.

DAKODA – No. Not at my end. At Cal's end.

KNOX - At the store?

CASEY - What kind of background noise?

DAKODA – Like boxes of nuts, bolts, things like that, being dropped. Maybe even thrown, I dunno.

CASEY – (To KNOX) The store wasn't empty?

KNOX – There was some construction going on in the place. We found some boxes of screws along the back wall in the store. Could've been thrown, I suppose.

CASEY – (To DAKODA) What "lady"? Did you hear a name?

DAKODA – I dunno. Ethel? Edna, maybe? It was really hard to hear.

CASEY – (Rises) Knox, could I have a few minutes alone?

KNOX – Sure, I'll be right outside. Nikki, wanna wait with me?

CASEY – No. I need her here, as well. Look, it's a truly personal family matter. It's not related to the case.

KNOX – I don't know. I'm not supposed to leave.

CASEY – Please?

KNOX – (Considers, then reluctantly agrees) All right. Five minutes, but that's all. I'll be right outside if you need me. (Exits out the door)

CASEY – Look, I need to talk to the two of you about something and in all this bullshit we haven't had the chance. But pretty soon that child is going to be here and whatever happens, your lives are gonna change in a big way and there's something you need to prepare yourselves for.

NIKKI – What is it, Daddy?

CASEY – Well, first: Dakota, I already know how Nikki feels about you. (Takes a deep breath) I’m sure of the answer already, but for my own peace of mind I just need to hear the words - Dakota, do you love my daughter?

DAKODA – Yes, sir. More than anything else in the world. From the moment I first *laid* eyes on her...

CASEY – (Annoyed) Yeah, Yeah, yeah. All right. Shut up. Do me a favor? Don’t say “laid” ever again in my presence, got it? (DAKODA nods) Now, second: She is going to be an unmarried sixteen year-old and that’s just the way it’ll have to be. Got it? There’s no way in hell I’m going to let her marry until I feel she’s ready. If your relationship lasts, and assuming we can get past this little *murder* thing in order for that *to* happen, (Takes another deep breath) you eventually want to make her an honest woman?

DAKODA – (Earnest) If she’ll still have me, sure. (NIKKI smiles and hugs him)

CASEY – (Letting out a deep sigh) All right, okay. Good. Then you need to know one more thing. There’s a very good possibility this child...will be black. (NIKKI seems impassive about the news but DAKODA is slightly unnerved)

NIKKI – Yeah, so?

CASEY – You already knew?

NIKKI – Sure. Like, Mom and Grandma were both African American, so I guess it makes sense.

CASEY – (Cautioning) Well, it could cause some real problems for you guys in the future.

NIKKI – Daddy, it’s a whole new world. It’s not 1965 anymore. We’ll get by. Right? (Looks at DAKODA who is much more unnerved by the news) Dakota. (DAKODA rises) We talked about this. Remember? (DAKODA doesn’t answer) What’s the problem? Don’t you remember...

DAKODA – I do remember, Nikki, but I guess you don’t.

NIKKI – What do you mean?

DAKODA - You said it yourself. “It’s like some people can handle it and some people can’t”.

NIKKI – (Becoming upset) What are you saying? Dakota, this is *your* baby. *Our* baby.

DAKODA – I just don’t think I *can* handle it, Nikki.

NIKKI – (More upset) What are you talking about? You fucking asshole! This is your kid, too. (NIKKI starts to hit DAKODA, much harder, as CASEY pulls her off and KNOX returns)

KNOW – What the hell?

CASEY – (Restraining NIKKI) I’ve got her. I’ve got her. (To KNOX) Let’s go. (To NIKKI) Calm down. Calm down. Let’s go. (NIKKI pulls away and heads out with KNOX. CASEY turns back to DAKODA) You’ve got a lot of time to spend in this room, Dakoda. Use the time to think, son. Just...just think. (Exits. DAKODA sits back down on the bench as LIGHTS FADE as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 2, Scene 3)

Act 2, Scene 3 – Front Porch at Gamper’s House – Next Night

(LIGHTS UP on a typical farmer’s porch with a large swing and a couple of deck chairs. There is a door stage right. It is the next evening. CASEY and NAOMI enter through the door)

CASEY – So, Takahasi spoke with Mrs. Claflin at Wal-Mart. Turns out she’s retiring. He recommended you for her job. (Hands NAOMI a piece of paper) This is her number. Give her a call tomorrow.

NAOMI – How did you manage that?

CASEY – (Smiling) Mrs. Takahashi. Apparently you made an impression on her at last year’s company picnic. He told me that when she found out Takahashi bounced you for me she made life a living hell for him at home.

NAOMI – Ah, you mean...

CASEY – No “slap-and-tickle” for Mr. T. right. (They BOTH laugh)

NAOMI – But, my place.

CASEY – Funny you should mention it. I just got a lease on a house near where my parents used to live on Walnut Street.

NAOMI – I love that area. All sorts of trees, right near the park.

CASEY – I know. So, until you find a place, maybe...maybe you could...I don’t know...stay with Nikki and me awhile? (CASEY moves in very close to NAOMI, who reciprocates)

NAOMI – What’s happening here, Casey?

CASEY – I don’t know.

NAOMI – This is moving so fast.

CASEY – Not for me, but if you want me to slow down...

NAOMI – (Eagerly) No. No-no. But what is it with you, anyway? You got some sort of “thing” for black chicks, is that it?

CASEY – I got this “thing” for beautiful women, Pistol. (The two kiss as GAMPER comes out onto the porch carrying a beer)

GAMPER – Wow. Just had a flashback. This sure does bring back muck-muck-muck memories. (Goes to sit down on the porch swing)

NAOMI – (Asking politely) You don't mind, do you, old man?

GAMPER – (Smiling) No. And in case either of you were <tic> wondering, Jessica wouldn't have minded, either. (CASEY and NAOMI smile at each other, then CASEY realizes he has something to discuss with GAMPER)

CASEY – (To NAOMI) Give me a few minutes?

NAOMI – (Nodding) Sure. But don't be too long. Nikki is trying her hand at baking.

CASEY – Baking?

NAOMI – Told me it helps keep her mind at ease. But she made this cake and we have to eat it fast.

CASEY – Why? (Realizing) Oh.

CASEY, NAOMI & GAMPER – (Simultaneously) The cats.

GAMPER – Can I help it if they love crap-crap-crap frosting? (NAOMI laughs and exits through the door) I'm glad you could come over tonight. And I'm real glad you and Naomi are now officially an <tic> "item".

CASEY – Thanks. That means a great deal to me. John, we gotta talk.

GAMPER – You know, this is my favorite spot in the entire <tic> house. This is where Nikki first called me "Gamper". Try and try as she would, she just couldn't say "Grandma" or "Grandpa". Of course, she was just barely out of diapers. Esther hated being called "Gamma". But me? (Big smile) I loved being "Gamper". I thought it was a hoot.

CASEY – (Smiling, recalling) I remember.

GAMPER – I lost count how many sick-sick-sick summer nights Esther and I would sit out here for hours (pointing out) just looking out at the <tic> sunset along those hills off in the distance.

CASEY – (Grim) John, I know what happened.

GAMPER – (Continuing) Oh, there was this one night (chuckling), we were all <tic> sitting out here, we kept hearing this thumping sound. (Rises, looks around) We looked from one end of the porch to the other, up at the ceiling, down among the fuh-fuh-fuh floorboards. All four of us, wandering around this porch like a bunch of idiots. We just couldn't <tic> figure it out.

CASEY – It was Margo and...

GAMPER – (Interrupts) No, turns out it was this huge flying <tic> squirrel. (Pointing up to the roof) Made its way up onto the roof and it was...

CASEY – How long were you and Margo having the affair, John?

GAMPER – (Still pointing up to the roof, slowly lowering his hand, more somber) It was Cal...Cal found the flying squirrel. (After a beat, slowly sits down on the swing again) Two months. It was a different time around here back then, Casey. Late sixties. Esther and I were separated. She had taken Jessica, who was just a little girl, back to her mother's in Atlanta.

CASEY – Esther never said anything.

GAMPER – She wouldn't have.

CASEY – (Stunned) She didn't know.

GAMPER – For years I tried to tell her. Then, she got sick and, when I finally got up enough courage enough to tell her, she told me she had already known.

CASEY - Margo told her?

GAMPER - No. She just suspected. Women just sometimes know these things, son. But she said she had forgiven me years ago. She said even through the bad times she always knew I loved her. That's why she came back.

CASEY – Then why did you...?

GAMPER – (Frustrated) Oh, hell, I didn't want to. Like I said, it was a long time ago. After Joe died they had some bad times. Really bad times. I was confused, she was lonely. It just happened. Cal never knew about it.

CASEY – Until last month when he called you to come to his store. (GAMPER looks at CASEY surprised) The police have the phone records.

GAMPER – (Quietly, solemn) Damn. I knew it was only a matter of time. Is Dakota all right?

CASEY – Now you're worried about him? Jesus! What the hell, John. What were you going to do? Let the boy take the fall? What about Nikki?

GAMPER – (Nervous, emotional) I got scared. I got scared, Casey. Scared of going to prison, not seeing <tic> Nikki or my great grandchild.

CASEY – (Pacing along the porch) My God, you even went to the diner to eat as if nothing happened.

GAMPER – I went to a place Cal and I would always go to together. I swear, Casey, it was like being in a damn-damn-damn dream. I kept <tic> half expecting him to walk in through Blute's door and we'd eat and talk and everything would be as if nothing had happened. Then, when *you* came in...I wanted to say something. I was sweating like crazy. My heart <tic> pounding.

CASEY – And the funeral?

GAMPER – (Considering) Well, by that point, I was like, <tic> who the hell *else* was gonna speak for him?

CASEY – (Shocked) Who the...What? (Shaking his head in disbelief) You are...absolutely mind-boggling. (Sits down next to him, takes a breath) All right. Let's work this out. That day, tell me what happened?

GAMPER – He called me. I was surprised he still had a <tic> phone but he said the company hadn't disconnected it yet. Said he was going to <tic> kill himself so he could be with Margo. So, I rushed over there.

CASEY – I know things were bad, but were they that bad?

GAMPER – (Nodding) Hell, he works his whole Christ-Christ-Christ life, Casey. He raises a family, builds up a business. Then he sees it all start to slowly erode, <tic> rotting out from underneath him. Son killed, wife suffers a long and painful death. And worst of all, this horrible <tic> secret about her sleeping with his best friend.

CASEY – So you got there, he told you what, that he knew?

GAMPER – (Nodding) I got there and he was tearing the place apart. He was throwing boxes all over the room.

CASEY – Wait. Why was he there in the first place?

GAMPER – He was looking for his <tic> gun which he had left there. He put it with some old boxes of Margo's he had placed in an old storage closet after her death. He opened one of the boxes...

CASEY – (Realizing) He found something.

GAMPER – (Nodding) He found letters from Margo to me. She never muh-muh-muh mailed them. I never even knew she had them. Anyway, he threw them at me. Then he pulled out the <tic> gun, screamed that he was going to <tic> kill me, then Dakoda, then himself.

CASEY – Dakoda? But he loved that boy.

GAMPER – He felt betrayed...betrayed by everybody he ever loved. He thought the boy stuh-stuh-stuh stabbed him in the back.

CASEY – Why? Cal knew Dakoda was going to work for Wal-Mart.

GAMPER – He didn't think he was going to have to work *for* him, though. That's when he <tic> went over the edge. He just lost it.

CASEY – What did you do?

GAMPER – We fought. I was just trying to get the <tic> son of a bitch to calm down. Then, he aimed the gun at me.

CASEY – Hold it. I just remembered. Benton didn't say anything about a gun.

GAMPER – He wouldn't, because I <tic> took it, and Margo's letters. (Recalling) Cal was waving it around, saying he was going to kih-kih-kih kill the boy when he got there. We heard Dakota pull up. He pushed me aside and went to the <tic> window of the store. He raised the gun, aiming for the kid. Next thing I know is I'm <tic> grabbing the jar, y'know, the one that used to hold the M&M's? Well, it was right there on the fluh-fluh-fluh dammit floor next to some boxes. He turned...I lifted it...

CASEY - The glass shattered into a million pieces.

GAMPER – (Nodding, very sad) I tried to see if he was all right...the bluh-bluh-bluh blood...I took out my handkerchief cause I saw the blood...I was gonna <tic>...but he was...(Closes his eyes. He can't continue)

CASEY – You saved the boy. It was self defense.

GAMPER – I want to do the right thing, but at the same time, as much as Cal and I arg-arg-arg argued, he and Margo were our best friends. I don't want word of the affair to get out.

CASEY – (Considers, then offers) What affair? (GAMPER looks at him) Really, think about it. Why even bring it up? Cal went a little crazy, you hit him to protect the boy. The rest of it never leaves this house. That's all there is to it. (Reassuring) John, it *was* self defense.

GAMPER – Oh, but who will believe it, Casey? People round here used to see how we fuh-fuh-fuh fought all the time.

CASEY - They also know you two were best friends.

GAMPER – Sweet Jesus, Casey. I'm so <tic> damn afraid. What will people say? What will they believe? (The door opens. NIKKI and NAOMI come out. It is obvious they have heard everything)

NIKKI – I...I believe *you*, Gamper. (Runs up and hugs GAMPER)

CASEY – (Putting a gentle hand on GAMPER's shoulder) Come on. Let's call the police. (LIGHTS DIM as the scene TRANSITIONS to Act 2, Scene 4)

Act 2, Scene 4 – A Hospital Room – Later

(LIGHTS UP on a hospital room. NIKKI is seen in a hospital bed center just waking up. Her hair is pulled back as if she's just been through a long and painful procedure. She looks exhausted. There is a door entering into the room stage right. CASEY and NAOMI are both seated by NIKKI's bedside. It is obvious some time has passed but we don't know how much)

CASEY – Hey, kiddo. How you doing?

NAOMI – Hi there, baby.

NIKKI – Daddy? How'd I get...

CASEY – It's all right, sweetheart. You had some problems in the delivery. You're all right now.

NIKKI – Where's...? (DAKODA enters with a small Caucasian boy, LITTLE CAL, walking along with him.

LITTLE CAL runs up to NIKKI)

LITTLE CAL – (Happy) Mommy!

NIKKI – (Smiles) Hi, baby.

CASEY – Easy, Cal. Mommy's got some new stitches there.

DAKODA – You okay, babe? Doctor said it was all right if Cal saw his Mommy for a sec. Got another surprise for you. Are you up to it, babe?

NIKKI – (Nodding, smiling) Sure. (GAMPER enters the room wheeling a little stroller. There is an African American TODDLER seen in the stroller)

LITTLE CAL – (Happy) Gamper! It's Gamper, Mommy!

NIKKI – I see him, baby.

GAMPER – (Smiling) Just bringing my <tic> grandson in for a little stroll. Hope you don't mind.

NIKKI – What do you think? (Waving to the TODDLER) Hey there, little bro'!

NAOMI – (Annoyed) Gamper! (Takes over at the stroller) Old man, the nurse said the stroller couldn't come in here.

GAMPER – That's why I waited till she <tic> wasn't looking and snuck it past the bit-bit-bit...(Realizing he's in front of children, tries to curb himself and for once is successful) the nice nurse lady.

CASEY – New meds working for you?

GAMPER – So far. Keep your fingers crossed at the next <tic> Christening.

CASEY – Me and probably Pastor Wickes, too. (BOTH laugh)

NAOMI - (Taking the BABY out of the stroller) Hi there, precious baby! Mommy's here.

NIKKI – (To DAKODA) Dakoda, the baby!

DAKODA – Relax, babe. She's great.

CASEY - She's just fine, sweetheart.

NIKKI – (Pleased) A girl? I had a baby girl? (Curious) Is she...?

CASEY – (Teasing) Healthy?

DAKODA – (Smiling) As healthy as can be.

NIKKI – (Annoyed) Guys...the stitches? Please, you know I'll love her anyway. Just tell me.

NAOMI – (Smiling) She's black...

CASEY - (Gently wiping her forehead, smiling) ...and she's beautiful. (LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

The End