

VICTORIAN

a

play

by

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ACT ONE

Scene 1

San Francisco. Late night. It's the living room of a Victorian house. The living room is dimly lit by a streetlight coming in through a bay window half-covered by curtains. Its furnishings are modest and the room is messy as though with the activity of a busy family. There's an unrepaired hole in a wall.

The front door opens. A shaft of light from the door illuminates decorative busts of Dante and Beatrice on the mantle. The mantle clock says 1:45AM.

Peter enters noisily, stumbling on the throw-rug that gets caught in his shoe. It's obvious he's drunk as he emits a grunt and catches himself on the banister of the stairs. The brow above his right eye is swollen with a large butterfly bandage over it. He moves into the living room and collapses on the couch, putting his big feet on the coffee table. He feels in his pocket and comes out with a crumpled flyer. He switches on the lamp and is startled...a young woman is sitting in the corner of the room. He sits up.

Peter. Jesus Christ, Brij...! What are you doing?

Brigit. Shshshshsh. Quiet.

Peter. You scared the shit outta me!

Brigit. I don't want to wake Mom. I thought you might be Dad.

Peter. What are you doing here? *(When he turns his head, Brigit sees his swollen eye.)*

Brigit. What happened to your eye? My God!

Peter. A fight.

Brigit. What happened?

Peter. Guy named Franklin...tossed a beer bottle at the dance. Melissa took me to Mission Emergency. *(He struggles up and sits on the coffee table.)*

Brigit. *(She reaches out to touch the wound, but Peter jerks his head away.)* Are you sure...?

Peter. Never mind the eye. Why are you hiding in the living room?

Brigit. *(Returns to the corner to come out with a large gym bag to her side)* I'm leaving home.

Peter. What?

Brigit. I'm leaving. I'm going to live with Kim.

Peter. Why?

Brigit. I'm pregnant.

Peter. Pregnant? Shit!

Brigit. Yeah...shit.

Peter. Is it that guy from Berkeley?

Brigit. *(annoyed)* His name is Dan. Yes.

Peter. *(tying his shoes)* Does he know?

Brigit. Who?

Peter. Dan

Brigit. *(Softly and uncertain)* Yes.

Peter. What are you going to do about the baby?

Brigit. What do you mean?

Peter. I mean, are you...?

Brigit. I'm **not** having an abortion.

Peter. *(He nods. He sits on a kitchen chair and fiddles with the napkin holder)* What about Cal? Are you going to drop out...you just started.

Brigit. *(sighing)* I don't know.

Peter. *(He nods again, abstractly)* Does Mom know?

Brigit. I told her tonight.

Peter. Dad?

Brigit. I'm not waiting for him. I'm not going through that.

Peter. Does Mom know you're leaving?

Brigit. *(Whispering)* No. And I don't want her to. She'll only try and stop me and make it messy.

(Just then there's the sound of a car pulling up. Peter bolts up, turns off the light and tiptoes quickly to the window and peers out. He scampers back nervously.)

Peter. *(Whispering excitedly)* It's him!

(There's the sound of footsteps climbing the stairs outside. Brigit pulls Peter back with her further in the dark corner.)

Brigit. *(She puts her hand over his mouth)* Shshshshshsh

(The door opens. Streetlamps illuminate Stephen moving heavily forward. He's drunk. He wears a police cap sideways on his head. He carries an SFPD uniform with sergeant stripes as well as the pistol belt over his shoulder. His breath is steady and deep as though in asleep. He begins to moan, or more precisely, growl, as he struggles to close the door when the throw rug gets in the way.)

Stephen. Motherfucking sonavabitch! Goddamnit! *(He finally manages to close the door and is about to climb the stairs when he changes his mind and shuffles toward the kitchen. He drops his cop uniform and pistol belt on the sofa, but keeps the hat on. He mumbles indecipherably as he approaches the couch. He peers into a back room. Brigit and Peter are right next, but Stephen never sees them. He flops on the couch.)* I'll be goddamned if I let anybody talk to me like that. No way! *(He takes out a small bottle of whiskey and sips. He chortles after taking another gulp.)* "You should be a lieutenant in the SFPD by now." Well, fuck you! You should be President of the United States. You've probably been snatching from the till. I should fucking arrest you. *(He laughs louder and bellows)* I don't see you knocking the world over as a fucking bartender. It's all who you know. I should have got out of the department when the getting was good. But you can't control the kids. You got kids, you gotta support 'em. Can't have the little rats running around without clothes. You'd know that, if you had any, you impotent fucker. Fuck you, you've been snatching from the till. I should have you arrested.

(He enters the living room and flops on the sofa. He almost falls asleep, but is bothered by the pistol and belt that jams his back. He gets to his feet. Before tramping off, he snatches up his belt and pistol and takes them with him, leaving his uniform on the sofa. As he leaves the stage he continues to mumble. In a few seconds Peter switches on the light. Brigit is sitting at the table shaking her head with relief.)

Brigit. That's why I'm leaving. I can't take that shit anymore. I'm supposed to tell that mad man I'm pregnant...? No way.

Peter. *(He sits at the table)* Does Dad...?

Brigit. Not so loud.

Peter. Oh, you know Dad. He's probably dead asleep by now... probably still in his clothes.

Brigit. *(She listens a second for a noise off stage.)* How does Mom put up with that?

Peter. Why not live with your boyfriend...what's his name...?

Brigit. Dan. Never mind that. I'm not going to force anything on anybody.

Peter. Force anything? What does he think?

Brigit. Who cares? I'm ready to go this alone.

Peter. What was he talking about?

Brigit. Who?

Peter. Dad...just now.

Brigit. Who knows? Did you hear him mumbling about being a lieutenant? He can't get over not being making the lieutenant's list two years ago. He hates the police department and he hates coming home? He likes being in the saloon or with that theater lady where he feels good. It reminds him of failure to come home.

Peter. What theater lady? And who told you all that psychological crap, some Berkeley professor?

Brigit. He's taken out his frustration on your head few times...when you were shorter. Anybody can see he hates home, unless your only interest in life is being horny. *(pokes Peter playfully)* I suppose you didn't know he's been doing that Landini woman.

Peter. Landini? You mean that woman who directed that play Dad was in?

Brigit. He's doing her.

Peter. What? No way! She's young. She's like your age.

Brigit. It doesn't make any difference. Peter...wake up. Of course he's doing her. Why do you think he's been doing this theater thing? Dad's going through a mid-life crisis. He thinks he's Grandpa. He's trying to make up for Grandpa's giving up acting.

Peter. *(He gets up restlessly roams the room. He peers at his cut in the mirror above the mantle.)* Maybe he just likes going to plays. He used to watch Grandpa act and maybe he just likes it. How do you know all this? Have you seen them together?

Brigit. Come over here a minute. Let me see that eye.

Peter. Don't worry about it.

Brigit. No, no, come here. Let me see. *(She stands)* Come on. *(Peter poses reluctantly, as she inspects the eye.)* How did it happen?

Peter. I was arguing with Melissa on the dance floor about something when this guy Franklin *(He can't contain his excitement and begins to act out the fight.)* bumps me as he walks by. Then he starts talking to Melissa in a way I didn't like. At first I figured it was an accident and he was just drunk. But when I looked at him a little ways off he mouths the words..."Fuck You". I saw red and went for him and knocked him to the ground. But then someone grabbed me and I saw Melissa looking up at me. She touched my head and I saw blood all over her hand. Then I looked at my hand and it was all bloody. Melissa was panicking and someone told me the guy threw a beer bottle at me. I never saw it, I swear. I was hustled out. Melissa took me to get stitches. Afterwards I went back to the dance to look for Franklin, but everyone was gone.

Brigit. *(She backs up to adjust stuff in her bag.)* You were probably too drunk to feel any pain. Boys, I swear. You probably spent the night talking all about the fight like you were some Greek hero. You need to ice it. *(pause)* What were you arguing about?

Peter. What?

Brigit. What did you and Melissa argue about?

Peter. Oh...I don't remember.

(pause)

Brigit. For God's sake, Peter, you need to see the truth about Dad. Pay attention to what's going on. There are other humans besides Melissa in this world.

Peter. *(In a burst of just-contained fury)* Never mind Melissa, all right!? This has nothing to do with her! So fucking drop it!

Brigit. *(His anger startles her. She places her hand gently over his mouth to stifle the volume. Whispering)* Okay, okay. Shshshsh. *She watches him curiously as he almost tears up for a second, before catching himself. She looks away.)*

(Pause)

Peter. *(Calming down)* You keep saying Dad's done something. How do you know?

Brigit. I saw him with her.

Peter. Where?

Brigit. At Baker's Beach. I was with Kim while she took photos of seaweed for art class. We were both leaning over as she was taking a picture. When I looked up, I saw them. It was lucky we were bent over because he probably would have recognized me. They were walking together.

Peter. Walking?

Brigit. She was holding his arm.

Peter. That's not sex. I don't know, Brij.

Brigit. Well, you should start noticing these things. If there's a divorce everything will change.

Peter. *(Concerned)* You think Mom and Dad will get a divorce?

Brigit. The other night Christine and I watched that movie Grandpa was in. Dad's been watching it over and over again since he started going to theater with that director. It's been in the DVD player for weeks now.

Peter. *(sits back on the coffee table.)* You mean where Grandpa's a thief and gets shot up in the living room?

Brigit. He's got Grandpa on his mind.

Brigit. Grandpa hated giving up acting and Dad was always urging him to go back to it once Grandma died. Grandpa regretted not trying to make a living acting and ending up a in San Francisco, a beat cop...just like Dad. Grandpa was a great tough guy in that movie, but couldn't make money. When Grandma died he walked away from everything. He was an artist...Dad's got a touch of it.

Peter. You think Dad's gonna quit the force like Grandpa?

Brigit. No way... too many bills. If you haven't noticed, Mom hasn't worked in a few years.

Peter. Teaching made her nervous.

Brigit. Mom's nervous all right. Dad's been drinking and she's nervous as hell. One hell of a life, ain't it? He's probably doing other women too.

Peter. God, what is all this shit? You're suddenly such a fucking expert. You go to Cal one year and suddenly you're a damn shrink.

Brigit. I'm just observing... just observing. You should try it.

Peter. What do I care... I like that Dad's outta the house most of the time. He's been a pain in the ass about my playing football. He thinks I'm gonna be some big time college player. Maybe I don't want to play anymore.

Brigit. You're crazy. You're good in football. You have natural talents. You have to keep playing.

Peter. You're just like Dad. That's not all I do.

Brigit. Wait a minute! I've never heard you talk like this before. You've always loved football. Last year you were all excited that I was going to Cal and how you might go too for football. Hey, does this change in attitude have something to do with Melissa?

Peter. No. *(He flushes again and is quite uncomfortable. He gets up and wanders off. In the silence his breath seethes.)*

Brigit. *(Attempting to soothe him.)* She seems like a sweet girl.

Peter. Sweet. *(Pause)* Why does everybody want to get away? I don't. If just... *(He stops himself.)*

Brigit. Is she going away? You mean to college?

Peter. Some place in New York City. Juli...Juli

Brigit. Julliard? Oh, that's right. She's a pianist. Well, there's no football team at Julliard, that's for sure. Is that why you're...?

Peter. I don't wanna talk about it. *(Pause. He becomes uneasy feeling his sister staring at him with concern. He sits on the couch.)* Maybe Mom and Dad should get divorced.

Brigit. *(Sits on the coffee table near him. Hits him on the arm.)* Don't say that. You're being self-centered. Wouldn't you rather have him and Mom in love again? Jesus, Mom's

depressed...has been for a while. Even those pills don't seem to help that much. She'd crack up in a divorce. Dad used to be so in love with her.

Peter. Hey, you're not helping things by running off.

Brigit. *(She gets up.)* This is different. I'm having a baby.

Peter. So you're gonna leave me and Christine with the shit tomorrow.

Brigit. *(She goes for her gym bag)* I'm tired of being scared of him all the time. I'm exhausted. *(Heaving the bag's strap over her shoulder, she heads for the door)*

Peter. *(Gets up.)* Let me carry that to the car.

Brigit. No, that's okay.

Brigit. *(She turns to her brother and touches his eye lightly)* Ice it before you go to bed. Hey, can you play football with that thing?

Peter. *(He opens the front door.)* Sure. It'll heal.

Brigit. Goodbye Peter. Keep icing that eye.

(He watches his sister leave before closing the door. He returns to the living room pulling out a half-pint of whiskey. He's just about to drink from the bottle when he hears something and stuffs it back into his pocket. He sits at the table. Pauline slowly appears pulling on her robe as she does. She moves through the living room softly, almost floating, as though used to keeping things undisturbed. She sees Peter, doesn't notice Peter's swollen eye because he's turned his head to hide it.)

Pauline. You're up late. Where have you been? I was going to make some tea.

Peter. I went to a dance at St. Thomas...then we went to get something to eat. . *(He takes the sports pages from a newspaper on the coffee table and pretends to read it.)*

Pauline. *(She watches Peter with a quiet contentment. She walks toward him concerned and suspicious as he tries to hide his swollen eye. She places her hand affectionately on her son's temple. Peter flinches his head.)* What's wrong? *(She lifts his head by the chin to see the wound)* Oh Jesus, Mary and Joseph...what happened?

Peter. It's all right, Mom

Pauline. *(She stands over him and grasps his head with both her hands for a good look. Tsking and shaking her head.)* What have you done to yourself?

Peter. (*Gently resisting her touch.*) I didn't do anything to myself, Mom. It happened to me. It's all right. It's only a few stitches. It looks worse than it is.

Pauline. Stitches? (*Still inspecting his eye. She's calmer.*) What happened? (*She sits back down.*)

Tell me.

Peter. There was trouble at the dance.

Pauline. (*She reaches for his head again.*) Who would do a thing like that?

Peter. It just happened, Mom. I've been injured in football games worse than this.

Pauline. (*Nervously*) That's why I never wanted you to play football. I told your father I didn't want it. I didn't want you permanently injured.

Peter. No need to worry about my head, Mom. I'm just as dumb now as when I started playing.

Pauline. Don't make light of this thing. Maybe you need to see another doctor. Maybe you should go to Kaiser. (*Rubs his cheek and sits down with him on the couch.*) Are you sure you're okay?

Peter. Mom, I'm fine. I went to the Emergency. I already saw a doctor.

Pauline. How are you going to play football with that thing?

Peter. It'll be fine.

(*Pauline gets up as though about to go to another room, but changes her mind and looks back.*)

Pauline. Are you still going out with that Hispanic girl? What's her name?

Peter. Melissa. I don't know, Mom. I don't...

Pauline. Melissa...that's right. (*Without thinking, straightens some things around the living room.*) It's just that you don't mention her much, that's all. (*pause*) I thought I heard talking down here.

Peter. Dad was here a bit ago.

Pauline. (*She nods. She goes to the window and looks out. mumbling*) Christine has an Irish dancing contest this weekend. I still need to work on her dress. Oh well...(*She perks up.*) Hey, you must be excited. Dad says you guys are already guaranteed to play in

the Championship game on Thanksgiving. That's a whole month away. You guys must be good.

Peter. We're undefeated and everybody else has been losing. It's working out okay.

Pauline. I'd like to go to that game. But I don't know, dear. Someone has to prepare Thanksgiving dinner. *(Almost under her breath)* I love Thanksgiving. It's the only holiday that hasn't been corrupted by money and marketing. *(moves away from the window)* Your father tells me you boys are the greatest team Jesuit Prep ever had. *(Petershrugs in half-interested agreement)* Your father liked to play football. He was a...umm...quarterback...or...

Peter. Halfback.

Pauline. That's right. *(She sits with Peter on the couch, but really isn't looking at him. She's lost in thought.)* He played in the Thanksgiving game. They won. Of course, I didn't know him then. I still don't know much about the game. *(pause)* Sometimes I'd sit with my Dad as he watched a game on TV. He'd explain why this person was catching the ball...why this person was running, why another player was colliding into another player. *(Staring down)* You would have liked him had he lived longer.

Peter. Who?

Pauline. My father...your grandfather.

Peter. I read about his being shot. Brigit showed me the old article from the Chronicle on the Internet.

Pauline. It was the most absurd thing in the world. To be shot in an instant for nothing... for no reason...not even robbery. He and Mom had just gone out to Westlake's Joes to eat dinner. I was at school working late on the yearbook. He was on call that evening for the Water Department. He had gotten an emergency page because of a broken water main on Mission, so he dropped Mom off in front of the house. *(She points vaguely toward the front of the house.)* When Daddy drove off, he must have looked in his rearview mirror and saw this homeless man come up and start talking to Mom. When Daddy came back, the man turned, pulled out a gun from his jacket and shot Daddy in the face. I remember Sister Mary Perini calling me out of the yearbook editing room and said I should phone Mom. Uncle Gene picked me up and drove me home. The cops were everywhere. They had taken Dad off by then. When I went into the house, I found Mom sitting on the edge of the bed. She wasn't crying until she saw me, and then she couldn't stop for weeks.

(Pause. Peter simply nods slowly, staring at the sports pages.)