

ACT ONE

We hear a distant fog horn as the lights come up dimly on a large bridge. EDGER, a boy of nineteen, enters and crawls up the embankment under the bridge. He is awkward and uncomfortable in his body.

He throws a couple of small rocks into the water, watching them skip. He checks his his new sneakers to make sure he hasn't gotten them dirty. He sits and pulls out a pack of cigarettes. He lights a match, but before he gets it to the cigarette he hears someone coming. He shakes out the match and watches.

PEARL, a young woman of nineteen enters. She is crying quietly and carrying a baby. She is on top of the bridge and looks over into the water.

EDGER struggles to see who it is without being seen himself.

The baby starts to cry. EDGER watches and listens.

PEARL: *(Through her tears.)* Shhh.. Shh, my baby girl. You don't have to cry no more...

EDGER looks up at PEARL and the baby, then down into the water. He starts to panic, wondering what PEARL might do. The baby keeps crying.

PEARL: Shhhhh....

EDGER starts to say something then stops himself. He takes off his coat as though he is preparing to jump into the water. He takes off a sneaker.

The fog horn blows again. The baby wails.

PEARL: Shhh...it's all right....

PEARL wanders over to the side of the bridge and sits on the embankment. She rocks the baby and sings. As she sings, the baby stops crying.

PEARL: (*Singing:*) “Hush little baby don't say a word, Mama's gonna buy you a mocking bird. If that mocking bird don't sing, Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring.”

EDGER watches PEARL and the baby, but stays out of her sight.

PEARL looks down at her calm baby.

PEARL: Mommy's little girl.

She stands to look at the water.

EDGER stands, ready to jump.

PEARL touches her baby's face, wraps the blanket around the child and hugs her tiight

PEARL: I'm so sorry.

She looks up and out but then steps back and turns away quickly from the bridge, leaving EDGER there with no shoes on. He watches them leave then slumps down and starts to put his sneakers back on.

Lights cross to TESS's front porch. She is having a beer with IVOR JOHNSON.

TESS: We were listening here at the parlour. Imagine...being the Queen of England at twenty-seven.

IVOR: She could be queen right into the next century.

TESS: I'd love to get a hold of her and do her hair and makeup. She could be a pretty woman, but she's so plain.

IVOR: That'd be something, the day the queen drops by your beauty shop in Whitehall.

DUDDY enters. He is upset and out of breath.

DUDDY: I need a beer.

TESS: When don't you?

DUDDY: I'm tellin' you, Tess, you're lucky you never had any girls.

TESS: Twin boys was enough for me, Duddy.

DUDDY: Least boys can't get themselves knocked up.

IVOR: No, but they can get someone else knocked up.

DUDDY: You can say that again, Ivor. Then they just disappear. Oh, if I knew....

IVOR: "If you knew..." What would you do?

DUDDY: I don't know, but I'd do something. Anything that'd calm Minnie down.

TESS: How are her and Pearl doing?

DUDDY: I took Pearl and the baby in and told Minnie they had to talk. Then I booted it outta there and came runnin' back here.

TESS: You're a brave man, Duddy.

DUDDY: I don't wanna get between Minnie and her temper. But it ain't right. Our daughter havin' to stay up to Gabby's. Me having to go up there every day just to see my own grandchild. If Pearl would just tell Minnie what she wants to know, we wouldn't have this problem. She's some stubborn.

TESS: I wonder where she gets that?

DUDDY: Her mother, through and through. At this point I don't know why it matters who the father is. But if she don't tell, Minnie won't let her in the house.

TESS: Maybe Minnie's planning a shotgun wedding.

DUDDY: You're the one who's scary with a shotgun, Tess.

TESS: Yes, and you remember that the next time your hands start wandering.

DUDDY: I ain't touched you in years.

- TESS: Not since I shot that guy. I pretty much scared off every man in town that night.
- DUDDY: Yeah, most of us want to keep our kneecaps.
- TESS: He's just lucky I didn't aim a few inches higher. And if a stranger came into my house in the middle of the night I'd do it all over again.
- IVOR: So, Minnie and Pearl are talking?
- DUDDY: Far as I know. What a life! (*Beat.*) So, what's the news here?
- TESS: We were just talking about the Coronation.
- DUDDY: The what?
- TESS: The coronation. The Queen of England was crowned today.
- DUDDY: Oh, yeah. I heard about that. (*Beat.*) Speaking a queens, did you hear we got one movin' onto the snake?
- TESS: What?
- DUDDY: Yeah, Mink was telling me some big mucky muck from Cape Breton bought the lot next to me and is plannin' to build some kinda fancy house.
- IVOR: Really?
- DUDDY: Yeah, some woman. School teacher or somethin'. Why would she be wanting to live on the Snake? Ivor, you're the only person we had move onto this road in the past twenty years. And we don't need anyone else. I bet she'll be after me to move my collection.
- TESS: Oh, is that what it is? A collection?
- DUDDY: You know very well, that's the better part of a '36 DeSoto out there. And that tractor. They don't make 'em like that anymore. Them big wheels. That stuff is priceless.
- TESS: Priceless 'cause nobody'd pay for it.
- DUDDY: You'd be surprised.

- TESS: Yes, I would.
- DUDDY: I bet she'll be after me to move it.
- IVOR: It would be hard for her to build a house around it.
- DUDDY: I didn't even know anybody owned that lot. I think I might have them squattin' rights.
- IVOR: I don't think it works quite like that, Duddy.
- DUDDY: Well, I tell you, that woman ain't welcome here. A school teacher!
(*Beat.*) I need another beer.
- IVOR: When was the last time you brought any?
- DUDDY: Ivor, you know very well, I brought a two-four last Sare-dee night.
- IVOR: Yeah, and you drank two-six before the night was over.
- DUDDY: I put two dollars in the jar just a few days ago.
- TESS: Oh, he's bugging you, Duddy. Have one. You know, I got a five in the mail today from Larry Woods and he ain't been here in three years. He's working in Calgary, but said he wanted to keep paying in to the beer fund.
- DUDDY: Well, there you go, Ivor, I'm drinkin' Larry's tonight.
- EDGER enters. His sneakers are wet and he is sweaty as though he has been running.
- DUDDY: Hey, Edger.
- EDGER: Duddy.
- TESS: Your new sneakers are soaked!
- EDGER: Yeah, I know. So are my feet.
- DUDDY: Were ya out clam diggin' in the moonlight?
- EDGER: No, I was sitting under the Whitehall Bridge and the tide kinda snuck up on me.

- TESS: I been telling you since you were five years old, it comes in fast.
- EDGER: I know. I'm sorry. I just...I don't know....
- DUDDY: New sneakers, hunh? You still got blueberry money?
- EDGER: Yeah. I been saving it. Wanna get a car. I got just over a hundred.
- DUDDY: Y'ain't gonna get much of a car for a hundred dollars.
- EDGER: It don't need to be fancy. Just something to get around in.
- DUDDY: Something to get you around the ladies, hunh? Your brother don't need a car to get lucky. Then again, your brother don't hafta climb trees and peek in girls' bedroom windows either.
- EDGER: I didn't --
- DUDDY: Sitting up a tree peekin' at my daughter! I thought about coming over here and kickin' your arse, but I figured your arse was already sore enough from fallin' out of that tree. *(Duddy laughs at the thought of this.)*
- EDGER: Yeah, that was really funny. Is Pearl still staying up to Gabby's?
- DUDDY: She's over talkin' to her mother right now.
- EDGER: You sure?
- DUDDY: Yeah, I took her over a few minutes ago, why?
- EDGER: Well, I thought....I just thought I saw her up by the Whitehall Bridge.
- DUDDY: Figures. She probably left as soon as I did. Those women. I told you, Tess, you're lucky you ain't got no girls.
- PEARL suddenly comes rushing in with the baby in her arms.
- PEARL: *(Surprised to see him.)* Dad.
- DUDDY: What are you doin' here? I thought I told you and your mother to get this sorted out?

PEARL: She wouldn't talk to me. She said unless I was gonna tell her she got nothing to say. She just turned her back and started doing the dishes. So, I left.

DUDDY: That's just great.

PEARL: And Gabby's not home...I thought maybe she was here.

TESS: I ain't seen her tonight.

PEARL: (*Bursting into tears:*) I don't know what I'm gonna do....

TESS: It's all right, Sweetie. Come on. Let's get you in the house. I'll get you some tea.

TESS puts her arm around PEARL and leads her inside.

TESS: Come on.

DUDDY: Women!

IVOR: Tess is a good one, Duddy. Pearl will be fine.

EDGER: Pearl's a good one too.

IVOR: You noticed that did you, Edger?

EDGER: A little.

DUDDY: Ivor, do you think you might be able to talk to Minnie for me?

IVOR: I don't know, Duddy....

DUDDY: Please. She don't listen to anything I got to say. But she respects you. I don't even think we'd still be together if you hadn't a talked some sense into her after she caught me with Emily Matthews that time.

IVOR: I don't know if I talked any sense into her, Duddy. I told her you were an idiot. But I also said you loved her and asked her to find it in her heart to give you a second chance.

DUDDY: Well, whatever...tell her I'm an idiot again if you have to. Just get her to

let Pearl come home.

IVOR: (*Thinks for a moment, then:*) I'll give it a shot. But I can't make any promises.

DUDDY: That's all I'm asking.

IVOR: I was about to head for home anyway. I'll stop in on my way. (*Exiting.*) Edger, tell your mother I said goodnight. Duddy, give me a few minutes, then you and Pearl come on over.

DUDDY: We'll be there.

Lights cross to MINNIE, sitting at the kitchen table smoking furiously. She is a plain woman. Not unattractive, but she doesn't do much to make herself stand out.

IVOR lets himself in. MINNIE looks at him, but says nothing. She just keeps smoking.

IVOR: You're smoking. Rough day?

MINNIE: Rough week.

Pause.

IVOR: Everybody's mad or sad or upset, Minnie.

MINNIE: And I suppose that's my fault is it?

IVOR says nothing.

MINNIE: Am I the one who went and got herself knocked up? Am I the one who doesn't have enough respect for her own mother to tell her who the father is, so I can get my hands on the son of a bitch?

Pause. MINNIE smokes. IVOR watches her.

MINNIE: I love my children you know.

IVOR: I know.