

EXTRACT

SLEEPYHEAD

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Setting

An isolated country cottage, surrounded by dense woodland. The trees nearest the house have been razed, leaving only a decrepit willow tree in front by a gravel driveway. The house is old and in considerable disrepair – rotting wood, dust, paint-peeled walls. There is a porch at the front of the house; two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen running off a sole hallway. There is a laundry at the back of the house and a ragged clothesline in the yard beyond, a filthy and empty wooden crate beneath it.

Antique religious paraphernalia decorates the walls of the house, save those in the hall, where framed photographs of a beautiful woman in her twenties are displayed. Natural light barely penetrates the interior, if it does it is of chilly blues and muted greys; rooms are filled with darkness and shadow.

Characters

The sisters: Eleanor, 14; Genevieve, 12

The father: Tom, 39

The police officer: Donald, 35

The visitor: Polly, 13

The play friend: Mother, ageless

ONE

Porch. Dusk.

Wooden beams, rotting floorboards, and a roof that has started to droop on the left-hand side. A single rocking chair.

ELEANOR stands staring into the unseen yard beyond, amused. In her fist is a hammer.

Behind her, TOM is seated, taking swigs from a bottle of beer. He watches ELEANOR.

TOM: That chicken gonna give up or what?

ELEANOR: Fucking funny. Isn't it fucking funny?

TOM: Irritating is what it is.

ELEANOR: Why don't you put it out of its misery then?

TOM: It'll drop soon. Can't keep going all night.

ELEANOR: Dumb bird.

TOM: Gonna tell your sister?

ELEANOR: Can't you?

TOM: It's not *my* fault.

ELEANOR: It's its own fault. Making all that racket.

TOM: You got a temper on you.

ELEANOR: I didn't wanna hear its clucking anymore. Anyone else would have done the same.

TOM: Gen won't take it too well.

ELEANOR: She can get another. It's only a chicken.

TOM: I don't think you're seeing it right.

ELEANOR: Lay eggs and get eaten. That's what they're about. Everything in between is just clucking. Can't see why she bothers.

ELEANOR, looking out, laughs.

ELEANOR: About fucking time.

Pause.

She turns. Their eyes meet.

ELEANOR: What?

TOM: I didn't say anything.

ELEANOR: Why are you looking at me like that?

TOM: No reason. Just noticing.

ELEANOR: Noticing what?

TOM: You got big.

ELEANOR: I guess.

TOM: Scares the shit out of me.

ELEANOR: What?

TOM: Time. Fucking passes, doesn't it?

ELEANOR: So?

TOM: Doesn't that scare you?

ELEANOR: Course not. Nothing wrong with getting older.

TOM: Something a child would say.

ELEANOR: I'm not a child.

TOM: Maybe. Still got a lot to know about the world, Ellie.

ELEANOR: Like what?

TOM: The way – shit I dunno – the way it all works. Why things do the things they do. Why people are...like they are.

ELEANOR: And you know all those things?

TOM: Some. Enough.

Pause.

ELEANOR: Don't you ever get bored?

TOM: Of what?

ELEANOR: Being here.

TOM: It's quiet. That's something you'll appreciate one day.

ELEANOR: Why?

TOM: It's nice not to be bothered.

ELEANOR: Think I'd like to be bothered sometimes.

TOM: Jesus, girl. You don't know how good you have it.

ELEANOR: Why do you hate people so much?

TOM: I don't hate 'em. I don't. I just don't need 'em.

ELEANOR: Full of shit. Everybody needs people.

TOM: They expect things. You'll see.

ELEANOR: Like what?

TOM: When you're grown up...lotta things you have to do. Have a job. Have a family. Those things aren't easy.

ELEANOR: Can't be that hard.

TOM: I worked since I was thirteen. I got calloused hands and a fucked-up tan...and what for?

ELEANOR: Still beats being poor.

TOM: Maybe. Still poor either way. See, you're a girl. You work it right, you don't have to worry about shit like that. Get yourself one with a good job...the rest comes easy. That's where your mother fucked up. She probably could've married someone with money and moved far away from here.

ELEANOR: Not so bad. I wouldn't have been born otherwise.

TOM: And you think that's a great loss?

ELEANOR: Shut up...piece of shit.

TOM: I'll wash your mouth out with soap.

ELEANOR: I'll smack the smart from your mouth.

TOM [*amused*]: Please don't, daddy. I promise I'll be good.

ELEANOR: And what would you know about good, Eleanor?

Pause.

TOM: You got little titties like your mother.

ELEANOR: So?

TOM: Just an observation.

ELEANOR: Well I don't think it was a nice thing to say.

TOM: It probably wasn't.

ELEANOR: How would you like it if I said something unkind to you?

TOM: Like what?

ELEANOR: Like you got bags under your eyes...like your father did.

TOM: How do you know what my father looked like?

ELEANOR: From photos.

TOM: Well, I hope I don't get ugly like him.

ELEANOR: He wasn't so bad looking.

TOM: No. I didn't mean that. It's getting dark. Should fix dinner I suppose.

TOM rises.

ELEANOR: Baked beans again?

TOM: What do you think? Why don't you help your sister with her bath?

ELEANOR: Do I have to?

TOM: Yes, you do.

TOM moves to exit.

ELEANOR: Pop...

TOM turns.

ELEANOR: You ever been in love?

TOM: Bobbie Gentry. Woulda sold one of my balls just to stroke her big big hair.

ELEANOR: I'm being serious.

TOM: And I'm not? Shit, I loved a lot of women. Should've seen me in my prime.

ELEANOR: How do you know you're in love?

TOM: Why?

ELEANOR: No reason. Just so I know, in case it ever happens.

TOM: I guess...it's like being sick. And the only thing that makes you well is being around that other person. Then when they're away, you get sicker, and you stay sick til they come back. If they go away for good, you get really sick. And after that... sometimes you get better. Sometimes you don't.

TOM exits.

TWO

Bathroom. Night.

A single bathtub. A sink and a mirror. Dirty green tiles. A wheelchair.

GENEVIEVE sits in the tub, crying. ELEANOR kneels beside it, tenderly washing GENEVIEVE's back with a flannel.

ELEANOR: Please don't.

GENEVIEVE: Was already having one of my bad days.

ELEANOR: Why?

GENEVIEVE: That's a stupid question.

ELEANOR: Yeah. Guess it is.

GENEVIEVE: How'd she do it to herself? How'd a chicken do that?

ELEANOR: Humans do it to 'emselves. All we're talking is a chicken.

GENEVIEVE: Did she fall?

ELEANOR: Didn't see.

GENEVIEVE: Did you do it?

ELEANOR: How could you ask that?

GENEVIEVE: I know you didn't like her.

ELEANOR: Doesn't mean I'd take to it.

GENEVIEVE: I don't see how a chicken could just-

ELEANOR: Well it did. God knows how. God knows why. It just happened. Always get something else.

GENEVIEVE: It wouldn't be the same.

ELEANOR: Just a chicken.

GENEVIEVE: Nothing's just anything. What if I said you were just Eleanor?

ELEANOR: You'd be right.

GENEVIEVE: You're not more than that?

ELEANOR: Not far as I can see.

GENEVIEVE, perplexed, looks at ELEANOR, who returns her gaze with a smile.

GENEVIEVE: Why have you got that on your face?

ELEANOR: What's on my face?

GENEVIEVE: Smiling.

ELEANOR: So what?

GENEVIEVE: I don't see why you should be happy.

ELEANOR: Nothing wrong with smiling every now and again.

GENEVIEVE: But on the day Miss Chicken gets dead?

ELEANOR: Can't let things like that-

GENEVIEVE: Don't you ever have bad days?

ELEANOR: All the same, really.

GENEVIEVE: Today I cried so hard I laughed. It's all I could do. The pain was so much...I just had to laugh at it.

ELEANOR springs forward and kisses GENEVIEVE on the forehead.

GENEVIEVE: What was that?

ELEANOR: What'd you think it was?

GENEVIEVE: You never do that. Why you want do that for?

ELEANOR: Just felt like it.

GENEVIEVE: You're acting all strange.

ELEANOR: Nothing strange about it. I'll kiss you if I want.

ELEANOR pecks GENEVIEVE on the cheek.

GENEVIEVE: Stop it.

ELEANOR: Smile, Genevieve.

GENEVIEVE: I got nothing to smile about today.

ELEANOR: Plenty of things.

GENEVIEVE: Miss Chicken is dead.

ELEANOR: What about all those things still alive? Shouldn't you be happy for them?

GENEVIEVE: Maybe all them gets their necks snapped too.

ELEANOR: Maybe they will. Even those things need their kisses...need their smiles.

ELEANOR continues to wash GENEVIEVE's back. GENEVIEVE turns to face her.

GENEVIEVE: Are you getting in the bath?

ELEANOR: We're too old for that.

GENEVIEVE: I was just wondering. We used to...that's all.

ELEANOR: Does it matter?

GENEVIEVE: Probably not. Sometimes I just think about things I miss.

ELEANOR: Why would you miss that?

GENEVIEVE: I guess I miss being a kid.

ELEANOR: You're still a kid.

GENEVIEVE: I don't know what I am.

ELEANOR: Anyway, it's not right to do that anymore. My body's different now.

GENEVIEVE: And mine isn't?

ELEANOR: You know what I mean.

GENEVIEVE: I think some of my burns are looking better.

ELEANOR: You didn't get 'em bad.

GENEVIEVE: I got some.

ELEANOR: We all got some.

GENEVIEVE: *You* didn't.

ELEANOR: I did.

GENEVIEVE: I never seen any on you. You never got treated for any.

ELEANOR: Well, they weren't bad ones. They were ones all the same. I'm only saying that I got hurt too.

GENEVIEVE [*laughing*]: Is that so?

ELEANOR: Don't you laugh at me.

GENEVIEVE: Poor Ellie.

ELEANOR: I was trying to be nice. I was in a good mood. You gotta go and-

GENEVIEVE: I told you I was a having one of my bad days.

ELEANOR: Well, it wasn't nice, understand? Wasn't nice at all. (*BEAT*) You want your dolls?

GENEVIEVE: No.

ELEANOR: I'll fetch 'em if you want 'em.

GENEVIEVE: If I'm too big to have a bath with you, suppose that means I'm too old to play with dolls in the tub.

ELEANOR: Who gives a shit what you do in the tub? As long as you come out cleaner than when you got in...the rest is just sitting around.

GENEVIEVE: You won't make fun of me?

ELEANOR: I don't care.

GENEVIEVE: Maybe I'd like a couple.

ELEANOR: Fine.

GENEVIEVE: Thank you.

ELEANOR begins to exit.

ELEANOR: Which ones do you want?

GENEVIEVE: The ones with their hair burned and faces scratched off.

ELEANOR and GENEVIEVE sombrely look at one another.

ELEANOR: Okay.

ELEANOR exits.

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