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CRISIS CENTER

A One-Act Play

by

Colette Mazunik

Cast of Characters

- Sarah: 25, an idealist, whose passion is wearing thin. A blend of Julia Stiles and Frances McDormand. An avid composter and recycler, she makes the yearly trip down to the School of the America's Protest. Her idea of the devil is a rich white male manager in corporate America.
- Gussie: 38, a homeless woman. I wish you knew Gunther Burnside—but be glad you don't. She'd been in the "system" longer than any of the social workers. Knows all the loops and only tells the truth if it will serve her purposes. But her situation is truly desperate. An endangered species, always on the verge of extinction, she survives either by claws and teeth, or by purring.
- Natonya: 4, Gussie's daughter, who has been exposed to the worst life has to offer. She is desperate for attention. I remember a little boy whose shoe had come off. His mother screamed at him, and he leaned up against me as I pushed his foot into the shoe—hungry for human touch.
- Connie: 36, Natonya's aunt.
- Dave (voice only): 24, Sarah's boyfriend.

SCENE I

(SARAH's office. A wooden desk that was donated from Grady hospital—one leg is broken and propped up with a telephone book, an eight-line telephone with a long, hopelessly tangled cord, and a donated Apple computer, circa 1996. Several hospital waiting-room chairs with stained seats. Paper forms galore in files on every free surface. On the wall is a large monthly calendar, completely filled in with handwritten appointments, and some inspirational posters with sayings like: "You can't change the past, but you can change the future." Posters for free GED programs and free computer classes. SARAH consults the form in her hand. SHE takes a deep breath, slaps her face a couple of times and picks up the telephone.)

SARAH

(into the loudspeaker)
Gussie Jackson, please come to the job counseling office. Gussie Jackson, please come to job counseling.
(SHE replaces the phone, consults the computer screen. There is a KNOCK at her office door, she gets up and answers the door. It's GUSSIE and her daughter NATONYA.)
Gussie?

GUSSIE

Gussie Jackson.

SARAH

Hey, Gussie. Come on in. Is this your little girl?

GUSSIE

Yeah. She's mine.

SARAH

Would you like to take her back to the children's area?

GUSSIE

No. I don't trust those people.

SARAH

You don't want to take her to the play room?

GUSSIE

Nuh-uh. Miss Beverly's not back there today. They said she called in sick and they don't have anybody else in.

SARAH

Okay. Okay. That's fine. Come on in. How are you doing today?

GUSSIE
Blessed. How you?

SARAH
Here, have a seat.
(to NATONYA)
And what's your name?

GUSSIE
Tell the lady your name.
(Pause. No response.)
I said, tell the lady your name.

SARAH
That's okay. When I was your age, I wouldn't talk to any adults. Would you like to color while I talk to your mom? I've got some paper and markers. Would you like that?

NATONYA
Okay.

SARAH
(Getting out the paper and markers.)
How old is she?

GUSSIE
Four.

SARAH
(to NATONYA)
Four years old. Wow. Here you go. Just make sure you only get the marker on the paper, okay?

GUSSIE
(to NATONYA)
I'll whup you, you mess anything up.

SARAH
She'll be okay. So how can I help you today, Gussie?

GUSSIE
I don't know—they told me I had to come see you. They said you could help me.

SARAH
Do you need to get a job?

GUSSIE

Yeah.

SARAH

Alright, we can start there. Do you have Georgia ID?

GUSSIE

No. I need you to help me get that.

SARAH

Okay. Give me just a second here to pull up your record on the computer.

GUSSIE

But I can't get a job cause I don't have nobody to watch my girl.

SARAH

Gussie, do you spell your first name G-U-S-S-I-E?

GUSSIE

G-U-S-S-I-E.

SARAH

Okay, here we go. We can find you some childcare if you can get a job. Um, okay, I've got more than one Gussie Jackson in the computer, so I'll need to get your birthday.

GUSSIE

11-8-63.

NATONYA

(showing a completed picture.)

Look. Look. See?

GUSSIE

Be quiet.

SARAH

That's beautiful. I like the colors you chose. What are you going to draw next?

NATONYA

'n airplane.

SARAH

An airplane! Are you going to grow up to be a pilot?

NATONYA

I don't know.

SARAH

Okay. You draw your airplane.

(to GUSSIE)

I'm sorry, was that 11-8?

GUSSIE

63. Look, I need to get our birth certificates too—okay?

SARAH

All right. Wait a second. I just need to get your record pulled up first.

NATONYA

(coming over to sit on SARAH's lap)

Look. Look. Look at my airplane.

SARAH

Yes. That's very good. I can see the wings. And are these clouds?

NATONYA

No. They're circles.

SARAH

Yes. Yes they are. Now I need to work with your mom, so can you go back over there and sit down?

GUSSIE

Natonya, get over here and sit down.

NATONYA

Okay.

SARAH

Gussie, I've got two records for you here, listed under two different social security numbers. Do you have a social security card I can see?

GUSSIE

No. See I got robbed and they took all my stuff and that's why I've got to get all my things again.

SARAH

So you'll need to get a social security card too.

GUSSIE

Yeah. Cause they took it all.

NATONYA

I want some candy.

SARAH

Alright. Could you, um, tell me what your social security number is, because we have two different numbers here.

GUSSIE

Somebody else must be using my name.

NATONYA

(on top of previous line)

I want some candy.

GUSSIE

(to NATONYA)

Shut up. We don't have any candy.

(to SARAH)

When they stole my things. Somebody else must be using my name.

NATONYA

But I want some candy.

SARAH

(to NATONYA)

You know what? I want candy too, but we don't have any. Why don't you draw another picture.

(to GUSSIE, testing her story)

Did you file a police report when you were robbed?

GUSSIE

Yeah. But those police—they just acted like it wasn't anything.

SARAH

Do you, by any chance have a copy of the police report?

NATONYA

(coming to sit on SARAH's lap again)

Here's my picture.

SARAH

Uh-huh.

(adjusting NATONYA on her lap and letting her sit there.)

GUSSIE

Yeah. Well, the police—they said—they didn't really write a report.

NATONYA
Look. Look.

SARAH
You did go to the police.

NATONYA
Look!

SARAH
Shh. I'm talking to your mom, now.

GUSSIE
Yeah, but they like, they wouldn't take me seriously and . . .

NATONYA
Look, here's a flower and a bird . . .

SARAH
Okay. Gussie, you know, I don't want to hear it. Let's just focus on getting you all your ID, okay?

(to NATONYA)
Uh-huh. That's beautiful.

GUSSIE
I was born in California, and she was born in South Dakota.

SARAH
I'm sorry. I still need your social security number.

GUSSIE
That other one in there isn't me. That's someone else trying to use my name.

SARAH
Well, what's your social security number?

GUSSIE
492-13-9231.

SARAH
Great. Do you have a food stamp card, or Medicaid, or anything that could verify your social security number?

GUSSIE
No. I told you they got everything.

NATONYA

You're prettier than my mom.

SARAH

Oh, honey. Everybody's just different. Everybody is pretty in their own way. We're just all different.

GUSSIE

Natonya, you get over here and stop bothering her.

NATONYA

No.

SARAH

No, you had better listen to your mom, and do what she says.

NATONYA

No. I like you better.

SARAH

No you don't. Go on now. Go back to your mom.

(SARAH has to physically force her off of her lap. There is some crying involved, but she is finally transported back to the mother's side. NATONYA continues to cry noisily. At the same time the telephone has been ringing. SARAH answers the telephone.)

Hello, Atlanta Crisis Center for Women and Children, how can I help you?

(By this point, NATONYA is throwing a full-blown temper tantrum. GUSSIE is unresponsive.)

NATONYA

I want to sit on her lap!

SARAH

Yes. Uh-huh. Listen, ma'am, I'm going to transfer your call to someone else on our staff who should be able to help you, okay?

NATONYA

I wanna sit on her lap!

SARAH

I'm gonna put you on hold now.

(to GUSSIE)

I'm sorry about this, just a second.

(over loudspeaker)

Could a staff member please take a call on line four. Call on line four.

NATONYA

Please. Please.

GUSSIE

(to NATONYA)
Shut up!

SARAH

Okay. Have you gotten a new Georgia State ID within the past four years?

GUSSIE

Yeah. I think so.

SARAH

(talking over the crying)
Good. Okay. What you're gonna need to do is—to get a new social security card, they require you have state ID—so you're going to go down to the Georgia Department of Public Safety—the one on Memorial Drive . . .

GUSSIE

I don't have any money.
(to NATONYA)
Didn't I tell you to shut your mouth?

SARAH

Don't worry about that. I'll give you a check.

GUSSIE

Shut up or I'll whup you. Yeah, you better be quiet.

(Telephone is RINGING again.)

SARAH

Just a . . . Hello, Atlanta Crisis Center for Women and Children. What? I'm sorry ma'am. I transferred your call. No. No, wait. Look, I'll try to transfer it again, just hold on.

(on loudspeaker)

Would a staff member please pick up on line four. Staff member, pick up on line four, please.

(back to GUSSIE)

Okay, after you get your Georgia ID, go to the social security office and bring the forms I'll give you and they'll get your new cards to you within a couple of weeks.

GUSSIE

What about the birth certificates?

SARAH

Oh, right. Okay. Just a second here, let me . . .

(SHE finally looks over the record that she has been able to access with the social security number.)

Gussie—it says here that you were here the first time in '96.

GUSSIE

Yeah, that's right.

SARAH

(Continues to read the record.)

And, um, we've ordered your birth certificate a number of times.

GUSSIE

No you haven't. Just one other time. That was all.

SARAH

I have records of five different times.

GUSSIE

Uh-uh. I know that's not true. That must be that other person who's using my name.

SARAH

Gussie, true or not, this is the record I have, and this is what I have to go by and it says we've ordered your birth certificate five times and helped you get Georgia ID and social security cards a large number of times. It says here that back in October we helped with a Georgia ID and that you were told that was the last time we would help you.

GUSSIE

Uh-uh. That's not true. Nobody ever told me that.

NATONYA

I have to go potty.

GUSSIE

Hold it.

SARAH

Why're you trying to lie to me?

NATONYA

But I have to go.

SARAH

Do you need to take her?

GUSSIE

No, she's fine. She just wants attention. And I never—that computer's wrong.

SARAH

I don't have time for this, Gussie.

GUSSIE

Nobody ever told me!

SARAH

Okay. That may be, Gussie, but I have to go by the record—and based on the record, I can't help you with any more ID.

GUSSIE

Just one more time?

SARAH

No.

GUSSIE

Well then, what am I supposed to do?

SARAH

I can refer you to another agency . . .

NATONYA

Can we go now?

GUSSIE

(to NATONYA)

Shut up!

(to SARAH)

Which one? Crossroads won't let me come back.

SARAH

Have you tried at Second Presbyterian?

GUSSIE

Yeah. They told me they wouldn't help me unless I'd go into rehab—but I can't go into rehab, I've got a daughter to support.

(telephone begins RINGING)

And besides, the only program that has openings for mothers and children is Safe Haven and that place is worse than not being in a program at all.

SARAH

I know.

(answering phone)

Hello, Atlanta Crisis . . . oh good grief! Ma'am, I am so sorry. I will get someone to answer your call, no no no no, don't do that, just, let me put you on hold and I promise you, someone will take your call.

(on loudspeaker)

Hello staff members! We have an irate woman who has been waiting on hold because nobody in this place besides me seems to be doing their job. So please, somebody, get off your lazy ass and answer the damn phone. Thank you.

GUSSIE

How come they've got more beds if you're a man or don't have kids?

NATONYA

Mom!

SARAH

What? Oh, every place is hard to get into—every place is crowded.

NATONYA

Mom!

GUSSIE

Yeah, but I was looking at one that takes kids and it's got a two-year waiting list. I could be dead by then.

SARAH

Well that sucks. So, what are you going to do.

GUSSIE

You tell me. I'm at Blood and Fire now, those people are like a cult or something and it's not even clean—but they're only giving me until the end of the week there, and no place else will take me in without ID.

NATONYA

Mom!

SARAH

Gussie, why are you using two different Social Security numbers?

GUSSIE

I don't know anything about that.

(Pause.)

NATONYA
Mom!

GUSSIE
(to NATONYA)
What?!

NATONYA
I have to go potty real bad.

GUSSIE
Not now.

SARAH
I don't want her wetting in my office.

GUSSIE
She's fine.
(to NATONYA)
Just hold it.
(Pause.)

SARAH
So you've got until Friday and then you've got no place, no job, no ID, no money.
(Pause.)
Gussie—I don't know what you expect me to do.

GUSSIE
You people are all the same—you don't want to help anybody. You just want to sit there behind your desk and tell us what to do.

SARAH
You cannot say that to me. You know I've had just about enough of you and your daughter.

NATONYA
MOM! I'm gonna wet myself.

GUSSIE
Go. Just go.

(NATONYA runs out.)

SARAH
You need to supervise your child.

GUSSIE

She'll be fine.

SARAH

And you need to learn to have some respect. It's no wonder you can't get a job with your attitude.

GUSSIE

I don't gotta respect you. You haven't done anything for me. Who do you think you are?

SARAH

Gussie, you listen to me. I come here every day from nine to five and sit here and do everything I can to try to make your life a little easier. And I don't get paid for it. Okay? I am volunteering one year of my life to come here every day, and guess what? I hate every minute of it, but do I leave? No. I don't. I come in every morning because I've made a commitment to help you people. Now the least you could do is show a little gratefulness and a little bit of respect.

GUSSIE

You know, I don't need you. I don't need this place. I don't have to come here.

SARAH

Yes you do. Yes you do, Gussie. Cause we're the last place in town that will keep bailing you out when you get yourself into these situations. Not that it does any good. But I guess we're just too squeamish to let you freeze to death. Or starve.

(pause)

So here's what I'm going to do, Gussie. I am going to do you a favor—so don't you ever say I didn't do anything for you—I'm going to give you a check to get your Georgia ID and I am going to give you two tokens. I want you to go down and get your ID, then I'm gonna give you a list of shelters that you can stay at as long as you stay clean and have your ID. I want you to start calling the numbers on that list and keep calling until you find an opening. Once you find a place to stay, you've got to get a job—and you're gonna earn the money to get those birth certificates. Okay?

GUSSIE

Okay.

SARAH

And I don't want to see any more of this get a job, loose it two weeks later, get another job, loose it . . .

GUSSIE

Hey, those jobs don't even pay enough to get a room to live in. When I'm at work I have to pay for childcare, and you can't do that on McDonald's salary. And then she gets sick and I have to miss work, and they fire me. And who else is gonna hire me? Huh?

SARAH

Maybe you should have thought about that before you got pregnant.
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. Do you want the check or not?

GUSSIE

Yeah.

SARAH

This is the absolute last one of these I'm going to give you.

(GUSSIE takes the check.)

GUSSIE

Thanks. What about the tokens?

SARAH

Here you go. Now go on and find your daughter. And I don't want to see you again until you've got that ID.

(GUSSIE takes the tokens and leaves.)

SARAH (continued)

Good luck.

(Pause. SARAH begins typing at the computer. Speaking what she types:)
Gave client check for ID and two tokens. Client needs detox and rehab, shelter,
childcare, job.

(There is a knock at the door.)

Who is it?

(There is no answer.)

Who is it?

(Under her breath)

Somebody else, looking for a handout.

(SARAH gets up and answers the door. It's NATONYA.)

NATONYA

Is my mom here?

SARAH

Oh, honey, come on in. She just left, but I can page her for you. Just a second.

(picking up phone, on intercom)

Gussie Jackson, please come back to the job counseling office, your daughter is here.

Gussie Jackson, please come back to job counseling and retrieve your daughter.

(Telephone begins ringing as LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)

SCENE II

(SARAH's office. NATONYA is sitting on a chair. SHE is playing with a doll. SARAH is speaking on the phone.)

SARAH

Gussie Jackson. No. I searched the whole building, she's not here. I already tried that. Blood and Fire says she hasn't been there for over a week now.

NATONYA

(underneath SARAH's line—to doll)
You want a bottle? Here's a bottle

SARAH

She won't tell me. No—her record doesn't even show that she *has* a child. No—surely not. Just a second.

(to NATONYA)

Hey, Gussie's your mom, right? That lady you were in my office with this morning—she's your mommy, right?

(NATONYA nods)

Yeah—she says that's her mom. Do you think I should call DFACS? Yeah, I know. But last time they came they were here until nine at night—I can't stay that . . . This is not even my department. I'm supposed to be doing *job counseling*.

NATONYA

(underneath, to doll)
You have to go pee-pee? You wet your pants?

SARAH

Right. It's not like DFACS ever really does anything—not unless there's visible bruises. Just a second, I've got another line ringing.
Hello, Atlanta Crisis Center for Women and Children, how can I help you?

NATONYA

(underneath, to doll)
You take your panties off. You wet your panties so take them off.

(During the following phone conversation SARAH gets a curling iron out of her desk drawer and plugs it in.)

SARAH

No. No ma'am, I'm sorry we don't provide overnight shelter. Actually we're already closed today. What you need to do is call Taskforce for the Homeless—they can tell you which shelters have openings. They did? No, I'm sorry—they gave you incorrect information. Call them back—no—no—no, listen to me—call them back . . . No. No.

SARAH (continued)

No, ma'am. Ma'am—you do not need to yell at me. Ma'am—I'm going to hang up now, I hope you find a place to stay. Goodbye. Goodbye.

(back to the other line)

Karen? No—I'd just let it ring, but in case she tries to call . . . Listen, Karen, Dave's supposed to pick me up at 5.30—yeah, we're going out tonight—do you think you could . . . Okay. No. No, that's fine.

(NATONYA begins to cry.)

Oh, honey, don't cry—it's okay.

Karen, I've got to go—yeah. Bye.

Hey, listen to me, don't cry okay? We're not going to leave you alone, if that's what you think. We're gonna stay here with you until we can find your mommy, because unlike her we have some sense of responsibility. Just stop crying, okay.

(Pause.)

You want to hear a story? Will you stop crying if I tell you a story? Well, one day when I was a little girl, my family forgot me at church. They all just left without me and were halfway home before they realized I was missing. I thought they were never going to remember me—but they did.

(Pause.)

Well that's better, isn't it. More peaceful without all the crying. Now I'm gonna ask you one more time. You wanna tell me your name? Cause, you know it just might help us find your mommy if we knew your name.

(Pause.)

Okay, then.

Are you in school yet? Do you go to school? Are you in pre-school or kindergarten?

NATONYA

No.

SARAH

No? Let's see, how old did you say you were?

NATONYA

Four.

SARAH

Four-years-old! What do you know. Is there a daycare you go to?

NATONYA

No.

SARAH

No. Well, when your mommy has a job—when she's at her job, where do you stay?

(Pause.)

Cat got your tongue? Honey, do you have any relatives that you sometimes stay with? Do you have a Grandma or an Aunt or anything?

(Telephone begins ringing.)

NATONYA
Uh-huh

SARAH
You do?

NATONYA
Uh-huh.

SARAH
(answering phone)
Atlanta Crisis Center—please hold.
(to NATONYA)
And who would that be?

NATONYA
Aunt Connie.

SARAH
Great! Good. Does Aunt Connie live here in town?
(pause)
Do you know where your Aunt Connie lives?

NATONYA
Uh-huh.

SARAH
Where does she live?

NATONYA
Aunt Connie lives in a big blue house and she has a cat and the cat's name is Sadie and she bit me.

SARAH
Did she!

(Telephone begins RINGING.)

NATONYA
Uh-huh. On my finger.

SARAH
Well I can see why she'd do that.

SARAH (continued)

(Answering phone)
Atlanta Crisis Center. Please hold.

NATONYA

I don't like her. But Aunt Connie gave me a band-aid and it had Donald Duck on it.

SARAH

Do you know your Aunt Connie's last name?

NATONYA

No.

SARAH

Do you by any chance know her phone number?

NATONYA

Uh-huh.

SARAH

You do!

NATONYA

Yes.

SARAH

Can you tell me what it is?

NATONYA

Uh-huh. It's um . . . 404 . . 79 um 24 um 3 um 6.

SARAH

Okay—is there another number in it?

NATONYA

No.

SARAH

I've got 404.792.436.

NATONYA

Uh-huh.

SARAH

But it needs to have one more number. Can you dial it?

NATONYA

Uh-huh.

SARAH

Okay—here, I'm going to give you the telephone—I want you to tell your Aunt that I want to talk to her, okay?

NATONYA

Do I have to?

SARAH

Yes you have to. I sure am not keeping you and we don't know where your mommy is right now, and so we need to see if you can stay at your Aunt Connie's. Okay?

NATONYA

I don't want to go to Aunt Connie's. I want my mommy.

SARAH

Well she's not here right now, so I want you to call your aunt.

NATONYA

Sadie will bite me.

SARAH

I'm sure she won't bite you if you're really nice to her. Now I want you to take this telephone and show me what a big girl you are and dial your Aunt's number.

NATONYA

Okay.

(SHE dials. Waits.)

Hello? Aunt Connie? Yes. Yes. My mommy left me and there's a lady who wants to talk to you. Yes. Yes. Okay.

SARAH

Hello? Are you her aunt? Yes. My name is Sarah—I work at the Atlanta Crisis Center. Gussie Jackson and your niece . . . Natonya?—no, she wouldn't tell me her name—Natonya? Anyway, Gussie apparently left without her daughter and we can't find her anywhere. Yes. Really? Really? That's horrible. Oh my goodness. Listen, would you be able to come over and pick her up? Of course—do you know where Northside Drive is? Right. Yes. We're on Ethel Street—which direction will you be coming from? Yeah. Okay—you'll want to take a right onto Northside Drive. Then go down the hill a little bit and you'll make a left onto Ethel Street. We're at the end of the street. Yes. It's a dead end. How long do you think it will take you to get here? Great. Thank you so much. Just ring the bell. Thank you. Of course.

(Hands the phone to NATONYA.)

NATONYA

Uh-huh. Okay. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I won't. Okay. Bye.
(SHE hangs up the phone.)

SARAH

So, your aunt's gonna come and pick you up.

NATONYA

I don't want to go with her.

(SARAH gets a bag of makeup out from her desk and a stand-up mirror. SHE begins to apply her makeup.)

SARAH

Well your aunt's gonna be here in a few minutes and you are going to go with her, so you better just make up your mind to enjoy it. Okay?

NATONYA

Will you keep my doll for me?

SARAH

Well, you can take your dolly with you, can't you?

NATONYA

I don't want to take her there.

SARAH

Then leave her here, what do I care?

(on the phone)

Karen? She knew her aunt's telephone number. Her aunt's gonna come and pick her up. She lives practically around the corner. And listen to this—the aunt says she's had troubles with DFACS before. Right. I know, right? No, I think we're going to some Italian place. I'll give you a full report. Okay. See you tomorrow then. Bye.

NATONYA

Is my mommy dead?

SARAH

Oh honey, no! What makes you say that.

NATONYA

Why isn't she here?

SARAH

I don't know, but she's not dead.

(Telephone begins RINGING.)

NATONYA

Maybe somebody killed her.

SARAH

No. I'm sure she's all right.

(Answering phone)

Atlanta Crisis Center, please . . . Yes we do. We're not open right now. HIV testing is on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. No, you can just walk in. No, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. No, in the mornings. No, not on Tuesday. On Monday morning or Wednesday morning or Friday morning. Okay. You too. Bye.

NATONYA

Have you ever seen somebody be deaded?

SARAH

No. Honey, listen, you don't have to worry about that.

(Telephone begins RINGING.)

NATONYA

There's a lot of blood.

SARAH

Oh, Good Lord!

(Answering phone.)

Hello, Crisis Center. Ma'am, I can't understand you, you're gonna have to stop crying. Yeah? Yes. Um, I hate to interrupt you, I'm sure this is hard for you, but let me just tell you what to do. Call the police and ask them to take you to a domestic violence shelter. That's right. No, take the kids along with you. And, ma'am, if you have any credit cards, passports, your children's birth certificates, social security cards, be sure you take those along with you. Okay, I've got to go, I've got a call on the other line. Good luck.

(Answering the other line.)

Hola. Buenos dias. No. No. No habla English. Ciao.

(Hangs up the phone and it immediately starts ringing again. SARAH just lets it ring this time.)

SARAH

What has your mother done to you?

NATONYA

Was I bad?

SARAH

No, no you weren't bad. Your mommy was bad, not you.

SARAH (continued)

Now, Natonya, can I ask you—I need you to tell me something, okay? Your aunt said . . . Does your mommy ever . . . hurt you?

(no answer)

SARAH (continued)

Does she ever hit you?

(No answer. The BUZZER sounds.)

SARAH (continued)

That's probably your aunt.

(SARAH pushes button and speaks.)

Hello.

CONNIE

I'm Connie. I'm here to pick up my niece.

SARAH

Come on in. We're in the second office.

(SHE presses the buzzer.)

Well, you get to spend some time with your aunt that should be nice.

(Goes to the office door, opens it and looks out into the hallway.)

Hello, Connie, we're right here. Hi, I'm Sarah, come on in.

(CONNIE enters the office. SHE is wearing a short skirt and a low-cut blouse. SHE clearly has extensions. Her makeup is heavily, but skillfully applied.)

CONNIE

Thank you so much for calling me.

(to NATONYA)

Hi there cupcake. I can't believe your mama would do this to you. But you're gonna come home with me, okay?

(to SARAH)

This is not the first time something like this has happened. I swear to you, one of these days . . . I've offered she could come and live with me, but she refuses to listen to reason—carting the child from shelter to shelter and who knows where all. I've called DFACS on her more than once, but they never seem to do anything.

SARAH

I know.

(NATONYA has grabbed onto her chair for dear life. SHE starts to throw a tantrum.)

NATONYA

I don't wanna go.

CONNIE

I'm sorry about this. Let me get your card, so I can get in touch with you.

NATONYA

I don't wanna go.

SARAH

Of course. Here you go. This is the main number and then this is my extension.

CONNIE

Great. Cupcake you stop your whining. Now let go and let's get out of this lady's hair.

NATONYA

No. I wanna stay here and wait for my mommy. Nooooo.

SARAH

You've got to go with her.

(CONNIE manages to pry her loose.)

CONNIE

Come on now. Okay, okay.

(CONNIE is dragging NATONYA to the door. To SARAH:)

Thank you again. I'm so sorry my sister put you through this.

SARAH

That's okay. I'm just glad you could come pick her up.

(NATONYA manages to break loose, she hides her doll, which she has been carrying, under SARAH's coat.)

NATONYA

Noooooo.

SARAH

You take care now, okay?

CONNIE

Okay. Bye now.

(THEY exit.)

SARAH

(calling after them)
Thank you.

(SARAH shuts the door and slumps down against it, sitting on the floor. SHE shuts her eyes and takes some deep breaths, then gets up, goes to her desk begins curling her hair. The telephone RINGS. SHE burns her self a bit and reacts to that. She picks up the phone receiver and replaces it. Then she unplugs the curling iron, and turns her computer off. SHE organizes her desk, sticks a few files in her briefcase, and unlocks the drawer with her purse, when the BUZZER sounds. SARAH pushes the button.)

SARAH (continued)

Hey, Dave? Come on in. I'll be ready in a minute.

(SHE checks her appearance in the mirror, and gathers up a huge pile of files. She fits what she can in the briefcase. The rest she'll have to carry by hand. SHE hears someone approaching and calls through the door.)

Dave, you will not believe what an absolutely horrible day I've had.

(GUSSIE opens the door. SARAH is alarmed.)

Gussie?

GUSSIE

Where is she?

SARAH

How'd you get in here?

GUSSIE

You buzzed me in. Where's my daughter?

SARAH

Gussie, you can not leave your child here and just walk off.

GUSSIE

I didn't leave her here. Harriet was supposed to be watching her.

SARAH

Really? Oh. I suppose that explains why she's been sitting in my office since two o'clock this afternoon.

GUSSIE

Where's my daughter? Did you call DFACS?

SARAH

Since two o'clock I've been babysitting your daughter. Because I didn't have anything more important to do. I didn't have any clients to see. I didn't have any paperwork to

SARAH (continued)

do. I didn't have to update the job board or fax client, client resumes—or answer the telephone. Oh, no.

GUSSIE

Tell me where she is!

SARAH

What do you care where she is?

GUSSIE

What do you, what do you, you can't tell me I don't care about my child.

SARAH

You can't even talk right, Gussie. Look at you.

GUSSIE

Fucking bitch.

SARAH

What did you say? I don't think I heard you.

GUSSIE

I said you're a fucking bitch.

SARAH

Is that supposed to hurt?

GUSSIE

Fuck you. What did you do with her?

SARAH

I should have called DFACS on you.

GUSSIE

So where is she?

SARAH

Where were you, Gussie?

GUSSIE

Where's she?

SARAH

Where were you.

GUSSIE

You fucking . . . I was at some job interview.

SARAH

Right. Sure you were.

GUSSIE

I was! I was getting that ID.

SARAH

Show me.

GUSSIE

They were closed.

SARAH

No they weren't. Are you high?

GUSSIE

Fuck you. You know, fuck you. I was out sucking some man's dick so I could get some money to get my daughter a room to sleep in tonight, okay. You want me to take her along for that? I tried calling your fucking list of shelters. They didn't have any room for us. I'm sorry I was late to pick her up and had to waste some of your precious time, okay?

(Pause.)

Now will you tell me where she is?

SARAH

Aunt Connie?

GUSSIE

You called my sister?

(Telephone begins RINGING.)

SARAH

Lucky for you that your daughter knew her number.

GUSSIE

You fucking idiot. You had no right to call my sister—I'm her mother.

SARAH

Would you rather I had called DFACS?

(answering phone)

Hello, Crisis Center, I'm sorry, we're closed.

(hangs up)

GUSSIE

My sister—do you know anything about my sister? I used to let my child go over there and play, and she come back talking like she know too much.

SARAH

Your sister says you've had some trouble with DFACS before.

GUSSIE

Yeah, cause *she* reported me! I wasn't even doing nothing—she's just mad because I told her she was a slut. She's fucking the DFACS worker, gets him to say all kinds of things—but that doesn't change the fact that I'm her mother. I loose my apartment, she says I should be using my girl to get a little money—she won't help me out if I don't even have the sense to make a little money on her—and you just think you can call her and have her take my girl home? She's probably got some guy going down on my girl right this minute.

SARAH

(topping GUSSIES last line in volume and intensity—with disgust.)
Well, too bad she's getting the money and not you, huh?

(Silence. SARAH and GUSSIE stare at one another. The telephone RINGS. SARAH picks up the receiver and immediately hangs it up. The BUZZER sounds. Silence. BUZZER sounds again.)

GUSSIE

Aren't you gonna get that?

SARAH

(pushing the button)
Hello?

DAVE

Hey, it's me.

GUSSIE

Who's that, your boyfriend come to pick you up?

(Pause.)

Must be rough, huh.

(BUZZER sounds. Pause. BUZZER. GUSSIE pulls out a twenty-dollar bill and hands it to SARAH.)

Here.

SARAH

What? What are you doing?

GUSSIE

For babysitting. I'm paying you.

SARAH

You can't do that.

GUSSIE

Now I don't owe you anything.

SARAH

No. Wait. I can't take your money. I'm a volunteer.

GUSSIE

I don't want your charity.

(BUZZER sounds. GUSSIE turns to leave.)

You shouldn't keep your man waiting.

(GUSSIE leaves. SARAH calls after her.)

SARAH

Wait. I'm sorry.

(BUZZER sounds. SARAH stands, in silence, with the twenty-dollar bill in her hand. BUZZER sounds. SARAH pushes button and talks.)

I'll be down in a second.

(SARAH sits at her desk deflated, holding the bill. Puts her head down on the desk. A moment, and then she picks up her coat, ready to leave. Underneath is the doll NATONYA has left. LIGHTS fade to BLACKOUT.)