

POETS' CORNER

by

Eliza Wyatt

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

CARRIE Late thirties, looks younger because she has an old-fashioned innocent pioneer quality. Feminine but questioning.

DAVID Twelve, he also looks young for his age. An emotional, intelligent child, about to take on the adult world.

LENA Heavy-set, happy because she likes her teaching job even though she cannot feel secure in it. Inclined to live in her head.

BELLA Immediately attractive, city clothes and style but she is unrelaxed. Once a sensitive person, she is now focused on her career.

SETTING The play takes place in CARRIE's New England living room.

SCENE

*CARRIE is sitting at the typewriter, trying to write.
DAVID comes up behind her.*

DAVID How do you spell "appalling"?

CARRIE A...p...p...a...l...l...

DAVID Wait a minute, one or two?

CARRIE Two p's, and two l's...

DAVID Start again... please, I've got it mixed up.

CARRIE A...p...p...a...l...l...i...n...

DAVID Thanks.

(They go back to working)

CARRIE Now this typewriter's broken.

DAVID It doesn't type "h's".

CARRIE I know it doesn't type "h's", but you can write those in afterwards, now it's not working at all.

DAVID Let me have a look.

CARRIE No, you can't do it.

DAVID Let me have a look.

CARRIE Forget it, I'll use a pen. Where are the pens?

DAVID How do you spell "catastrophe"?

CARRIE C...a...t...a...s...t...r...o...p...

DAVID That can't be right.

CARRIE What are you writing about? And with my pen?

DAVID This isn't your pen. You never have any pens.

CARRIE Because you take them. No wonder I can't write.

DAVID About Hiroshima!

CARRIE What?

DAVID Five pages! Can you read it for spelling mistakes?

CARRIE I can't.

DAVID Why not?

CARRIE I don't want to read a paper about Hiroshima for spelling mistakes. If you're old enough to write about it, you're old enough to spell, for heaven's sake.

DAVID Fine help you are...

CARRIE I can't! Not right now... Oh...

(She tears paper out of the typewriter and exits to kitchen. DAVID tries to do some more writing while CARRIE lays the coffee table with three napkins, and cheese board and knife. While she is out, DAVID eats some cheese and acts out with the knife. He hears her enter and hides the knife under the sofa.)

DAVID How come you didn't set a place for me?

CARRIE You want to eat with us?

DAVID I'm not going to get any lunch?

CARRIE It's going to be a very boring poetry workshop.

DAVID What for? If it's boring...

CARRIE Take your feet off the chairs.

DAVID Why did they bomb Hiroshima?

CARRIE I have no idea.

DAVID You must have been alive.

CARRIE Me?

DAVID Anyway, why?

CARRIE I don't know. Honestly...

DAVID Why didn't they bomb Tokyo?

CARRIE I don't know.

DAVID I bet Granddad will know. He's ancient.

CARRIE I think they were tired... the soldiers. They'd just come back from fighting a war, World War II, remember? Then they had to think about fighting the Japanese, and I think they lost patience. They wanted it all over and done with so that they could get back to peace. Put away, tied up.

DAVID Neat!

CARRIE Something like that...

DAVID *(Thinking back)* Poetry?

CARRIE I'll bring your lunch upstairs.

DAVID I should have gone to school.

CARRIE So you won't disturb us.

DAVID You want to talk about us kids.

CARRIE No we don't. Not now, you're grown up.

DAVID You're going to read po-et-ry. Po-et-ry, po-et-ry...

CARRIE We're going to work!

DAVID POETRY???

(He starts hitting her with her cloth)

DAVID *(cont)* PO-ETRY... Yahooooo! Hey, why don't you use your own name when you write poetry?

CARRIE Ringer is my own name, my maiden name.

DAVID It's like you don't belong to this family.

CARRIE Women use their own names all the time these days.

DAVID What do you want, a divorce? Like your friend Lena?

CARRIE When you act up, I do want a divorce - from you.

DAVID You can't get a divorce from me.

CARRIE Stop hitting me with that cloth!

DAVID *(Scornfully)* Poetry... po-etry.

CARRIE Besides, Ringer has a certain ring to it.

(She grabs him and pretend-strangles him. They are playing, but there is an undercurrent of seriousness)

DAVID It's TREASON!

CARRIE Go upstairs and finish your homework.

DAVID That's what I call work, and I can't do it
- I'm sick.

CARRIE That's for sure.

DAVID Sick of staying home, writing five pages
and sick of you.

CARRIE *(She pushes him)* Then go to school.

DAVID I'm sick of school.

CARRIE You're just SICK.

DAVID *(Falls down on the floor)* I have this
unknown disease that's killing me... *(He
coughs and does a dying act)* Some tropical
disease is eating away at my stomach, my
guts...

(He falls on floor. CARRIE bends over him)

CARRIE You can take my name if you like. Call
yourself Ringer. Daddy could have taken my
name too.

DAVID You're crazy!

*(Doorbell rings. CARRIE answers it. LENA enters, taking off
her coat, scarf etc)*

LENA It's freezing out there. Cold enough to
freeze your tits...

(She sees DAVID)

LENA *(Cont)* Hello, DAVID? What's DAVID doing
home?

CARRIE Wondering why we bombed Hiroshima.

LENA Could be home a while then.

DAVID Do you know why?

LENA Sure I do. Sure. Revenge!

DAVID That makes sense.

LENA Sure it does. Love, Jealousy and Revenge.
Your three basic murder plots.

DAVID Then what happened?

CARRIE It was mass murder!

LENA Don't tell him that.

CARRIE Want some sherry?

DAVID Can I have some?

CARRIE You can have some Coke, and go upstairs.

LENA How's school, David?

DAVID Okay.

LENA Writing any poetry?

DAVID No...

LENA My kids are... I have one class that's really
good.

CARRIE Stay in your room when Bella comes.

DAVID Who's she?

LENA She's successful. Unlike us. Even when it
comes to men.

DAVID Men?

LENA Forget it!

CARRIE Please... Behave yourself!

DAVID Can I have some Coke?

CARRIE Only because you're sick. Have some Coke
and go to your room.

DAVID Have some Coke and go to your room.

(He exits)

LENA He gets better looking every day.

(CARRIE gives her drink)

CARRIE Is Bella coming?

LENA Said she was.

CARRIE Is her poetry any good?

LENA It's a miracle she finds the time to write poetry. She edits our poetry magazine, writes books and is a full-time therapist.

CARRIE Does she have kids?

LENA *(Shaking her head)* She's nice, bit of a successnik...

CARRIE What's that? I wish I could make up words like you.

LENA You can't make a living doing that. You have to make up things like banks. She's looking for someone to help with the magazine, while she's so busy, to coordinate answer the telephone and well, type.

CARRIE I want to get a job after the holidays. I guess, the New Year.

LENA *(Seeing card on shelf)* Your father coming for Thanksgiving?

CARRIE Yes, and he's bringing his wife. She's got relatives nearby too, it seems. And my brother is in Florida and so is a son of hers... so geographically that marriage is solid.

LENA Jim away on business again?

CARRIE Arizona.

LENA I remember those Conferences. They always came at the wrong time.

CARRIE It's Hawaii next. I might go along.

LENA *(doubtfully)* That'll be fun...

CARRIE It'll be nice to get away.

LENA I don't go further than my backyard these days, and that's a trip I don't take too often. Too much work out there.

CARRIE Jim could help you...

LENA He could? You better check with him first.

CARRIE I love your backyard...

LENA So did I...

CARRIE You still have those big canvas chairs that we could never get out of? *(LENA nods)* We'd sit and sit, drinking white wine, watching the kids grow from the sandbox to the tree house.

LENA I took down the tree house.

CARRIE David told me this morning he wants to join the Army.

LENA He's kidding, surely!

CARRIE Go right now to a military academy.

LENA He's not old enough...

CARRIE Fortunately, we can't afford it.

LENA They grow up so fast.

CARRIE I suppose I should encourage him. Better than joining a street gang, which is what some of the kids are doing.

LENA It's the age.

CARRIE Yes... And the tension.

LENA Does David know what's happening?

CARRIE I haven't told him. There's nothing definite to tell.

LENA I still have those chairs, whatever that means... It means I got them in my settlement.

CARRIE You okay?

LENA Sure, I'm working hard.

CARRIE That's good!

LENA Only way through it. And I'm really working hard at my romance. He's a control freak. When I'm gung ho, he avoids until I turn and run. Then he comes on strong. Where I come from we don't call that romance, we call it Tag.

(CARRIE exits to kitchen. Doorbell rings)

LENA *(Cont)* I'll get it.

(BELLA enters)

LENA *(Cont)* Halloo then...

BELLA Hallo, great to see you again. *(They embrace)*

LENA You too. You look...

BELLA I've got the smarts! *(She turns for LENA)*

LENA It suits you.

BELLA Is it too dressy for a workshop?

LENA No! You had no trouble finding the house?

BELLA No, wonderful old neighborhood. Red brick, blue sky, yellow leaves... wonderful fall day.

LENA Chilly New England...

BELLA Crisp... I can't stand New York City, I can't stand it.

(CARRIE enters)

LENA Carrie, this is Bella...

BELLA Hi...

CARRIE Very pleased to meet you. *(She shakes BELLA's hand)* Heard a lot about you.

BELLA Glad to be here!

(DAVID approaches them)

CARRIE This is David.

(She goes to shake hands with DAVID, who fools her by hugging her. She laughs a little)

DAVID You've written a book on men?

BELLA No, marriage, actually re-marriage.

CARRIE David, you promised to stay in your room...

BELLA *(Takes one step back)* Is he sick?

CARRIE No, no, a little sore throat...

(She might be baiting BELLA waiting for her reaction)

BELLA Oh, I don't know whether I should come in the house with a strep throat. Has he been on penicillin?

CARRIE Yes, yes...

BELLA For the proper time period?

CARRIE Oh, yes...

BELLA I'm recovering from the flu, and I don't want to...

CARRIE *(Mock horror)* THE FLU?

(She clings to DAVID, who brushes her off)

BELLA I'm better, really I am...

LENA Come and have some sherry.

BELLA I came down with it on Friday. I'm standing in a department store signing copies, which is very exhilarating... But people kept brushing past and taking lumps of flesh out of my BODY. By the end of the day I felt naked, an inch away from a skeleton with a briefcase, signing away my inheritance! Never mind my health, my temperature was a hundred and two...

DAVID *(To stop BELLA)* What do you think of Hiroshima?

BELLA What?

DAVID Hiroshima?

BELLA The Rock Group?

CARRIE and LENA No.

DAVID So, what do you think?

BELLA Me? I don't know... I didn't think... who could?

DAVID I've got to write an essay.

BELLA GOD!

DAVID Was it His fault?

CARRIE Don't be cute.

BELLA It wasn't our fault. Not the American people's fault. We didn't know what was going on. We had no idea. We were innocent. I know that's the trouble with us as a nation. We're far too innocent, and inclined as a nation to go overboard in an orgiastic way but in this case, we were kept in ignorance.

DAVID What's orgiastic?

CARRIE DAVID... *(She pushes him towards the staircase)*

BELLA What isn't it? *(DAVID reluctantly exits)*
What an edible child! I could eat him up.

CARRIE Lunch is almost ready.

LENA Amazing when you think that a few years ago they were babies. Now you meet them in the Pharmacy. John's had a girlfriend since Junior High and I wondered, you know... If, when! Last week I came home late, and they came out of his room. They didn't say anything, they just walked straight past as if I wasn't there. Then I knew for sure... I tried writing a celebration poem about it, but I couldn't.

CARRIE I've got to start writing seriously, but what... poetry? Novels? Essays? Short stories?

LENA We could use help on Lone Rider... the magazine.

BELLA We always need volunteer work.

CARRIE Lone Rider? Sounds like a cowboy.

BELLA It might lead to a job. We're looking for a general manager.

CARRIE I went to a resume writing workshop and they asked what I did for a living for the last fifteen years. I said, sleep with my husband. And the pay's not that good.

BELLA How can you see yourself in that negative image?

CARRIE I have kids! I'd like to work in the field of art and literature.

BELLA Perhaps you'd like to come to the office of Lone Rider and get to know us.

CARRIE I've got to do something. But does the world need another poetry magazine?

(DAVID creeps in unseen and hides behind BELLA)

BELLA You wouldn't ask that if you were a poet. You'd be desperate for another poetry magazine. So, it sells because it sounds romantic like a cowboy, and we shouldn't be perpetuating male myths, but in print we've got a chance to being read.

(DAVID fires a cap gun behind her)

BELLA *(Cont)* Ahhhh!

DAVID *(Circling them)* YAHOOOOOO!

(SHE chases him out)

BELLA *(Smiles weakly)* That sounded like a real gun, didn't it? Don't real guns sound like that?

CARRIE *(Flustered)* No!

LENA (*Factual*) No, they sound much bigger, like they can really blast your body to a thousand bites.

CARRIE Of course, that's right. There's an echo. My father used to shoot off one of his guns every year to let the New Year in.

BELLA He didn't?

CARRIE Yes, he did. Happy New Year, bang, bang, bang. Happy New Year, bang, bang, bang.

(SHE calms down)

CARRIE (*Cont*) He has this fascination for guns.

LENA He still does..

CARRIE You have a fascination for knives. You always pick up knives from the table and play with them.

LENA Do I?

BELLA KNIVES?

(DAVID enters)

LENA My brother used to throw knives. He taught me too.

DAVID Can you teach me?

LENA No... He used to throw knives at me. Stand me up against the garage wall and show people how well he could throw knives.

DAVID Terrific!

CARRIE Come and get some lunch...

(CARRIE and DAVID exit)

BELLA What's the matter with that kid?

LENA Nothing. You should expect some aggression from school kids. That's what they told me when I was hired.

BELLA Why?

LENA I've been assigned a special (Some of them are murderers) program to teach poetry in the inner city. Poetry. I walk into the classroom and someone says, "Another fuckin' bitch." You know... But they write! I have to put everything I've got into reading them poetry, though. I dress up in funny hats, and tell jokes. It's a performance to win them over. Last week I was reading them an Indian war chant about the magic locked up inside of stones, so I brought in some stone... the office took out extra insurance. I was nervous, but I wanted to do it... And it happened.

Hey ya, jijo, hey ya now
 hey a nijo un nijo niji
 ya ha ha

Those stones became magic stones. I could see it happening.

(Pause)

BELLA But doesn't that make them more dangerous, magic stones?

LENA More powerful, yes.

BELLA Right, weren't they wishing they were bullets?

LENA Not necessarily more dangerous. But the Indians were a violent people.

BELLA Oh, no, I don't think so. Not like we are. No, no. They were sexy. I just read a beautiful book about their sex life. How strong they were, hardy. Fucking in the winter on the snowy ground. Indian warriors sliding in and out of their squaws, semen spilling out onto the frozen earth.

LENA Fri..., fiction or non-fiction?

BELLA By this poet, Leonard... something. Maybe Carrie's got some of his records.

(We hear a gun in the background)

BELLA WHAT'S HAPPENING?

LENA Nothing!

BELLA The suburbs make me nervous.

LENA You're hungry.

BELLA Yes...

LENA You doing okay?

BELLA Trying to write another book. Not knowing whether I'm going to be able to do it again.

LENA You will.

BELLA I hope so.

LENA Sure you will.

BELLA You're a love.

LENA How's Donald?

BELLA Oh, you know... fine!

LENA That's good! I rely on you to keep up the myth that TOGETHER is better.

LENA There should be some preparation in the educational system for divorce.

BELLA Well, I've written a book... and in the process I've discovered the secret to a happy marriage is negotiation. Forget chasing attractive hunks.

LENA I'll try.

BELLA When you look for a partner insist on sanity. If there's no chemistry, there's no nasty explosions.

LENA What about poetry?

BELLA I thought we were talking about men.

LENA Yeah...

BELLA *(A new idea)* Men, poetic?

(We hear another bang from outside in the street. BELLA jumps nervously. CARRIE enters with soup)

CARRIE Won't be long now.

BELLA What was that?

BELLA Do you know that poet Leonard...
whatshisname.. He wrote that book I was
talking about.

CARRIE No.

BELLA About the Algonquin Indians. BEAUTIFUL
LOSERS!

CARRIE No!

(THEY eat soup)

BELLA This is excellent soup.

LENA It is.

BELLA Did you make it?

CARRIE No, it comes from a can.

BELLA I'd never have guessed. Okay, you can
bring in the hidden cameras now.

CARRIE Lentil soup cans well. Not chicken.

LENA Oh, well, you have to be Jewish to make
chicken soup.

BELLA That's no problem. You could make sure the
caners were Jewish.

BELLA What's that smell?

CARRIE I don't smell anything.

*(DAVID turns his music on loudly. CARRIE goes to stairs and
shouts up)*

CARRIE DAVID, turn that off! DAVID! Too loud! We
can't hear ourselves think! DAVID! *(HE
shuts music off. She seems tired)* KIDS! How
do you cope with them all day, Lena?

LENA Can I have another glass of wine before I
answer that?

(CARRIE serves her wine)

LENA I took the class bowling yesterday. The place was deserted, and I said as we poured in, "Looks like we've got the place to ourselves." Then this woman, who's on her way out of the place anyway with a creepy-looking boyfriend, says in a loud voice, "Look what they've let in here." I completely lost my temper. "WHAT SORT OF FUCKIN' BITCH ARE YOU?" I yell at her. "WHY DON'T YOU CRAWL BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM?" She sort of fell back, and so did the kids. I got everyone shoes, and we started to bowl as if nothing had happened. Except that I was shaking.

CARRIE Lena, they might have been waiting for you outside.

LENA Yeah, but as we bowled on I suddenly felt that they weren't waiting for us outside.

BELLA That's frightening.

LENA Imagine me losing my temper like that. In a public place, in front of the kids...

CARRIE But you were in the right.

LENA I know, but at the time I had no control. Only RAGE! I feel like one of the kids.

BELLA That's not the same rage as the kids.

LENA Why not?

BELLA What makes you think it is?

LENA I don't know. I had no control...

CARRIE *(Trying to pass of LENA's intensity)* Oh, who does anymore?

BELLA *(Shocked)* What?

CARRIE Now that we're sexually liberated.

BELLA We should have MORE, now that we're not frustrated...

(LENA throws glass, which smashes)

LENA WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT!

(Pause)

BELLA *(Quietly)* Why did you do that?

LENA I've had enough to drink. We used to do that at home. Smash your glasses when you've had enough to drink.

CARRIE You probably had someone clear it up.

LENA I will.

CARRIE No, I will.

(She exits to get brush and pan)

BELLA You have to have control. You choose it at a very early age, but I believe it is a conscious choice. My mother was insane. Oh, didn't you know? Quite mad.

LENA I didn't know that about your mother!

BELLA So you can understand why I had to have control. And I did, from early on. I think you can 'choose' from birth. You do have a choice. Even before birth...

LENA A pre-natal choice? *(The idea is so outrageous she laughs)*

BELLA Yes, there's scientific proof. *(She is determined)*

LENA You can't control everything. I can't control my anger. It comes over me about three o'clock in the afternoon. I can't control the mood. No more than the kids.

BELLA But you're not going to kill anyone.

LENA Except my ex.

(CARRIE enters, holding dustpan)

CARRIE I wanted to kill once. I was in the car, and I wanted to run down pedestrians. I've only felt like that once. And with good reason, of course.

BELLA GOOD REASON? You can control your emotions. There's scientific help...

LENA Haven't you ever wanted to kill anyone?

BELLA Me? No, thank God. Me? Not me. The only person I've ever wanted to kill was myself.

CARRIE SHIT! *(The others are surprised by this outburst)* Women poets are always killing themselves.

BELLA I haven't yet. *(But this remark has sobered them all up)*

LENA You can't control everything! I had a vaginal infection recently.

BELLA *(Too quickly)* That's interesting.

LENA And in casting around for a cause, I discovered we had a rusty water heater in the house, and I take a lot of long baths. The plumber said it would cost six hundred dollars for a new water heater, and I panic and say okay, because the water does run brown, and for years now that brown water's been going up inside me, and I never thought... But six hundred dollars... I could stop taking baths, but bathing relieves the pressure on internal organs... of course, so does yoga, but for that you have to go to classes and do it all consciously, even breathing, regulate all your bodily functions, and I don't want to do that. But my vagina I should have some control over, right? So I pay the six hundred dollars and I think - shit, I don't have control over that, or why would I get horny at two o'clock every afternoon? Where does that come from? And what about the water in the new water heater? Is that pure? Where does that come from?

BELLA You get horny at two and angry at three, I think that's significant.

LENA Yeah, and depressed at four.

CARRIE It's almost two o'clock, Lena.

BELLA Are we going to do poetry now?

CARRIE Yes, yes... immediately.

(DAVID turns the music up very loud)

CARRIE *(Cont)* DAVID, we're going to work now.
DAVID... Sorry about this.

BELLA Who's going to go first?

CARRIE Oh, you go first.

BELLA No, I don't have to.

(We see DAVID creep downstairs and hide behind a chair)

LENA You may as well.

BELLA Okay, I'll go first. I've been trying to
write a poem about my mad mother but it's
difficult. I wrote this at the beach.

think of it
along the shore
white shells kiss the ocean
with scalloped lips

think of it
continuously the surf scratches
wet messages that vanish

think of it
seabirds lifting hot dogs
from garbage cans

think of it
fresh air doing a dance
a winding dance around fish
swimming in the wind

CARRIE *(enthusiastically)* That's awesome! Sorry,
been around kids too long. Great!

LENA Some Haiku influence.

BELLA Definitely!

CARRIE What's that?

BELLA There's not much of a rhyme scheme.

CARRIE Oh I thought so.

LENA What's rhyme scheme? Only stuff to teach
kids.

BELLA Do you think 'scallop lips' or 'scalloped lips'? I agonized for hours over that.

LENA Umm, scalloped's okay.

CARRIE Oh yes, perfectly okay.

LENA A poem like that makes you forget the ocean's polluted.

CARRIE I wrote a landscape poem. If you want to hear it..

The Tundra

ice tries to hold a round horizon
humped-backed shadows line up because
they can't sleep, snow drifts across the
white land
shifting on the dark water

That's it!

LENA Good first line.

BELLA I liked the last line.

CARRIE But in between it's no good.

LENA No, no, there's certainly an image.

CARRIE Too many?

BELLA Perhaps! It's the feeling we're all interested in.

CARRIE What is the feeling?

LENA It's flat.

BELLA The Tundra's flat, but is the feeling?

LENA Maybe, is that right Carrie?

CARRIE I don't know, I just wrote.

BELLA Ah! But where is it, 'the Tundra'?

LENA Antarctica, with the penguins.

CARRIE Maybe I should write about them? Maybe that's what I was writing about? OH TO HELL WITH IT! (*SHE throws envelope on floor, but*

immediately picks it up) I typed that poem at least a hundred times, it's not even poetry.

LENA Of course it is.

CARRIE Bad poetry.

BELLA Maybe you should take a course?

CARRIE No.

LENA Then don't.

CARRIE I've taken enough courses, I want to earn some money like you. If I write at home I'll be able to fit my work into everybody's schedule.

BELLA Not if you're a success. Some weeks I have to go to Texas, or the West Coast and the hairdressers to make sure my hair's okay for those people... It's a good thing Donald's busy, too, or I wouldn't have a marriage to write about.

CARRIE I'm losing my job here, at home. I'll have to do something.

LENA Take your time...

(DAVID, who has entered during BELLA's poem, and who has been listening to all of them, picks up peanuts from table and throws them at CARRIE)

DAVID What about that poem you wrote about me dying of some disease? You wrote a poem about me, didn't you?

CARRIE It was only a poem.

DAVID Read that...

CARRIE It was no good...

DAVID Read the poem about me!

CARRIE It didn't work.

DAVID They're bad poems anyway. ALL OF THEM.

BELLA Where does he get his anger from?

LENA Cool it, David.

DAVID Why do you write such rotten poems, Mother? They're so embarrassing.

CARRIE The Tundra's embarrassing?

DAVID No, the ones you didn't read.

CARRIE They're too embarrassing.

DAVID RIGHT, RIGHT, THAT'S WHAT I MEAN.

CARRIE Did you read them? What are you doing in here anyway?

DAVID This is my living room.

CARRIE This is my party. Your father says I don't discipline you, and he's right...

DAVID *(Circling women)* Why aren't you successful? Why don't you get a book published like Bella? Embarrassing the family.

LENA She's just starting out.

DAVID I wish she'd stop.

LENA Your mother's a real person, and she has a right to fail too.

CARRIE Thanks, Lena.

DAVID Why can't you succeed?

BELLA Don't always think in terms of competitive success.

CARRIE You're much too competitive.

DAVID Better is better, and best is best.

CARRIE Don't be a little shit.

DAVID Dad doesn't like you swearing like that.

CARRIE Stop acting up.

DAVID It's not attractive.

CARRIE David, not in front of my friends...

DAVID Don't upset me, I'm supposed to be dying.
I'm so sick.

CARRIE You're not sick, you stay home from school
to spy on me.

DAVID You? I've got better things to do.

CARRIE I hear you creeping behind the bedroom door
at night.

BELLA I have to be going.

CARRIE Listening...

BELLA I have an appointment.

DAVID I don't hear nothing.

CARRIE HE ADMITS IT!

LENA Carrie...

BELLA It was fun!

(She trips over DAVID's feet)

CARRIE He's going to the ARMY, he says...

DAVID Yahooo.

CARRIE But he won't let me have my own life.

DAVID You better not write about me again, that's
all.

LENA That's a reasonable request.

BELLA What else is she going to write about?

DAVID That's all women know how to do, put people
down on paper.

BELLA So what? It's better than some things...

DAVID You better not write about me, that's all!

(He exits, and CARRIE, very upset, exits to kitchen)

LENA You know, he sounded exactly like my ex...

LENA David doesn't realize women are only just
now getting things down on paper. It used

to be the men. Now they're off somewhere - doing what?

BELLA Is Carrie's husband screwing around?

LENA Yes, in Arizona. David's too beautiful.

BELLA That wretch?

LENA Hairless at that age. No hair at all, except on their heads.

BELLA Lena, if I didn't know you better..

LENA You do.

BELLA Why can't she control him?

LENA He's too old.

BELLA He's her kid.

LENA No, it's much too late.

BELLA Help! I have to go, I'm speaking at a bookshop this evening.

LENA The Greeks used to buy and sell little boys. They thought that was civilized compared to buying and selling little girls.

BELLA Where do we get your information from?

LENA Because little boys grow up to be men and get to buy and sell in their turn. It's less exploitative, you see. And little boys are just as beautiful.

BELLA I'll introduce you to more men, I promise. Hairy ones.

LENA Okay..

BELLA Come to my lecture this evening. You might meet someone.

LENA You're not going? Carrie's gone to get dessert. She makes wonderful desserts, and coffee..

BELLA Coffee.. I'm desperate for a cup of coffee.

(DAVID turns up his music and enters, dancing)

DAVID THAT'S POETRY... THAT'S POETRY.

BELLA He's another Damien.

DAVID *(Singing with the music)* 'I WANNA SHOOOOOOW YOU!'

BELLA I'm going to be late if I don't...

(DAVID blocks her way)

DAVID *(Continuing to sing)* 'I WANNA SHOOOW YOU!'

BELLA Lena, get him out of the way.

LENA What do you want, David? *(She has to shout above the music)* WHAT DO YOU WANT? *(Sings with him)* 'I WANNA SHOOOOOOW YOU'. *She dances with him; BELLA cannot get past them)*

BELLA You're leading him on.

LENA What do you want, David? What do you want, because maybe I want it too.

BELLA Lena, he's not old enough.

DAVID *(Singing with song)* OIL SPILL! GOTTAKILL!

LENA *(Sings on)* 'WHATATHRILL'.

DAVID THEY'RE THE WRONG WORDS. THE WRONG WORDS.

BELLA Don't make him worse, Lena!

(DAVID grabs knife from coffee table and lunges towards her)

BELLA *(Cont)* AHHH, he's going to kill me. Lena, Carrie, God!

LENA Stop frightening her, David.

BELLA Yes, don't frighten me. I have fits. I have fits. Truly...

DAVID Let's see it.

BELLA Oh, my God...

(She falls in a dead faint)

LENA Ah...

(She hurries over to BELLA. CARRIE bursts through door, carrying a rifle)

CARRIE STOP THIS? What have you done? Have you hurt her?

DAVID Yes... *(He waves knife tauntingly)*

CARRIE You're not allowed to have knives... give it to me!

DAVID Come and get it.

LENA What are you doing with that gun?

CARRIE GIVE ME THAT KNIFE.

DAVID No, it's my knife.

CARRIE I won't have you terrorizing my friends, give it to me.

(CARRIE points gun at DAVID)

LENA Carrie, what are you doing?

DAVID Put that down, it's dangerous.

CARRIE Don't you think I know that?

LENA Please...

CARRIE Give me that knife then.

DAVID No.

BELLA *(Wakes)* What's happening? Is that a real gun? *(SHE gets up quickly)*

CARRIE Yes... *(She waves it over them all, and they freeze)*

BELLA I don't believe this...

DAVID I'm leaving home after this.

CARRIE You will be, for the hospital...

DAVID I should never have taught you how to fire that gun.

CARRIE DO AS I SAY!

DAVID *(Still devilish, but getting more serious)*
Can you teach me how to throw knives, Lena?

LENA No...

DAVID But I want to know.

CARRIE Look at the things he wants to know, I taught him that...

DAVID I taught you how to use that gun.

CARRIE I taught you to want to know! But I can take that back. With this gun I have the power to do this, don't I, Lena?

LENA Hey ya nijo hey how...

CARRIE Can't I, Lena?

DAVID *(Afraid at last)* Never...

LENA Carrie, you wouldn't really...

CARRIE I would! And I wouldn't hurt more than him. For once in my life I wouldn't. He'd hurt more than me. *(She is almost in tears)*

LENA Look at you...

CARRIE I think he's right. We sit back and poetize like a lot of old women.

LENA What's wrong with that?

BELLA I'm leaving this house. Are you coming, Lena?

LENA Not right now... David, give me that knife. Hey ya, jijo, hey ya now, hey a nijo... *(She approaches DAVID and grabs hold of the knife. DAVID runs out)*

BELLA There's something wrong with the nuclear family. Why don't you get a divorce?

LENA She wants a job. We thought maybe you could help her Bella.

BELLA Maybe I can. Call me in the office and ask for an appointment. *(She exits, but then*

returns and takes her book out of her briefcase, which she puts on the table)
Your insurance will probably cover it.

(SHE exits)

CARRIE She sees me as a patient.

LENA What can I say? She's a hustler.

CARRIE Do you know how to fire a gun, Lena?

LENA No thanks.

CARRIE Aren't you afraid out there in the streets?

LENA I'm too busy.

CARRIE I'm afraid you don't have enough fear out there. You've got to have the proper fear of people. It's only polite. You can't go round thinking about how you feel, you've got to notice them, other people.

LENA Between being horny, angry and depressed, there's no time left.

CARRIE My father loves guns. When he was twelve, his father died. My grandfather. This was in Chicago not long after the Depression. I don't know how they'd been living, but there was no money. I suppose he'd been sick awhile. When they came to take the body, my father, who must have been about David's age, took his gun - his father's gun - and said, "You can't take him out this room unless you're going to bury him properly". The men went back down the stairs, and they collected enough money to bury my grandfather decently, in a Lithuanian cemetery. Where he is today.

(CARRIE puts down the gun)

CARRIE *(Cont)* I'd like to run away and join the army. Be all I can be.

LENA Sounds good. And see different countries.

CARRIE Not looking for a job with a degree in English.

LENA Some days I have to pretend I'm bigger than any of them. Taller than they are. Like Alice after she chewed the mushroom, or was it the table leg? Growing gigantic from eating in between meals: as you know I can do that. Become enormous. Great experience. Like suddenly finding yourself in Lilliput, a giant Gulliver looking down at the little people who crawl all over you like cockroaches. But you can stamp on them! Or go the other way, shrink, and grow little again, so small you can squeeze by without being noticed yet you can still see everything that's going on.

CARRIE I don't want to. I don't want to see what's going on with Jim. Things changing. I don't want to see any more.

LENA Yes you do. *(whispers)* It's so interesting! *(They embrace)* I'll call you after class this evening.

CARRIE Thanks Lena.

LENA Nada!

(CARRIE clears the table. DAVID enters)

CARRIE Behaving like a little shit!

DAVID And you tell me not to swear.

CARRIE Not till you're my age. I've earned it. What's your problem.

DAVID I couldn't write my paper with them, here.

CARRIE So what? All that to write your paper? Now what do you expect me to do, read it?

DAVID No, no...

CARRIE Good!

DAVID I couldn't write it. I did a project instead. But you probably don't want to see.

CARRIE See it? *(Making a big effort to be nurturing once more)* Yes of course I do.

(He exits and returns with model)

DAVID I melted down my toy soldiers.

CARRIE We wondered what the smell was.

DAVID *(Showing her)* They're caught in the blast.
I painted on blood but I don't know if
that's right. This one's trying to get
away, but can't. This one has no legs, this
one no face, this one has no bottom half.
What do you think?

CARRIE Appalling!

DAVID I can't wait to show Dad.

END OF PLAY