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6 Page Excerpt of...

Four Women, One Man

by

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CAST

(in order of appearance)

- MOTHER** a middle-aged survivor from an unnamed rural/small town area.
- DAUGHTER** about 18 years old, not skinny but with attractive features.
- MARY** Johnny's love interest, about 17 years old, pretty and extremely thin.
- OFF-STAGE VOICE**... an educated female voice, about 35 years old, on the surface, calm and controlled.
- JOHNNY** the son, about 20 years old, quite taciturn and sullen.

Time

- a mythical now -

Place

- a rural, small town, vaguely somewhere in Appalachia. (To quote a sourced article in Wikipedia: "Appalachia is a cultural region in the eastern United States that stretches from the Southern Tier of New York state to northern Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia.") -

The Mother is sewing a party dress either by hand, or preferably on an old foot pedal (manual) machine. The Daughter, attractive and neither thin nor heavy, stands against a wall. A very thin, somewhat younger girl sits on a folding chair downstage to the side. They speak with Appalachian-like accent, somewhat more pronounced than natural. It's "Grapes of Wrath" with hints of German Expressionism.

MOTHER

I'm doing my motherly duty, that's what I'm doing. While you're parading back and forth like a fool.

DAUGHTER

I'm not parading.

MOTHER

You're standing against that wall like a billboard.

DAUGHTER

Am not.

MOTHER

Yes, you are.

DAUGHTER

You're not even looking at me.

MOTHER

Why should I? You've been in the same spot for ten minutes. I can still remember what you look like. Are you saying your momma's losing her memory?

DAUGHTER

No.

MOTHER

Good.

DAUGHTER

I'm just saying, you should look at me.

MOTHER

Do you have anything new to say?

DAUGHTER

Maybe I should wear one of those signs the men wear downtown.

MOTHER

What signs?

DAUGHTER

You know, those sandwich boards they wear to sell somethin'.

MOTHER

You're not making sense, girl.

DAUGHTER

You read their signs, don't you? You look at them, don't you?

(The mother stops sewing. She turns and looks at her daughter.)

MOTHER

Well? I'm looking and I don't see nothin' new.

DAUGHTER

It just ain't fair.

MOTHER

(Turning back to her work.) Always the selfish girl. You're a billboard to selfishness. You're a sandwich board to selfishness. How am I ever going to get you married? How are you ever going to live with a husband if you are so jealous of your very own brother?

DAUGHTER

Johnny isn't going to be wearin' that dress.

MOTHER

If this dress will make that there girl look good, then you should be satisfied. If I was more than human then I would make one for the both of you. But I'm not. I'm just one mother. Your brother chose her against my wishes but she still has to look good at the town dance. Why would anybody admire Johnny if he can't bring a well-dressed girl to the dance? Don't get angry at me for not making your

MOTHER (cont'd)

dress like I promised. That girl is poor. And I will not let shame descend on this house. No one will ever know where she's from. She'll look like a princess.

DAUGHTER

But mommy I'll be tailing in behind her and Johnny, lookin' like her maid. No boy's gonna want to dance with me.

MOTHER

Part of being a sister is showing some understanding to your brother. Trust your momma, I'll find you a good man once I get your brother settled.

DAUGHTER

Momma, I can't wait. Besides, you'll fix me up with somebody too old.

MOTHER

An older man doesn't itch like a young one. I know. I made that mistake. Your father put me on fire and then burnt me up. I've fed and clothed you and your brother, by myself, for over 15 years, so trust me. Someone out of his prime will thank his stars to find you in his bed.

DAUGHTER

Instead of spreading my legs, I'll just be changing his bed pan.

MOTHER

Most men be worthless like your father, but don't under-guess how long they can last. (*Slight pause.*) Girl, you do have a handsome way about you, so don't worry. Knock off on those crackers and chips and the boys will look, no matter what you're wearing.

DAUGHTER

You always told me a man wants handles to hold.

MOTHER

Of course they do. But too much is too much. They've got to look first before they start holding.

DAUGHTER

That girl, she's too skinny. She's not good enough for Johnny.

MOTHER

I know, I know. Mary, why aren't you eating that bone like I told you. We have to fatten up your hips.

MARY

Yes ma'am.

(Mary reaches under her chair and picks up a large bone, devoid of meat, from a plate on the floor. She grips it between her teeth.)

MOTHER

You're a good girl, Mary; you do just like I say....The marrow will go straight to your hips. Makes your blood rich too. So you'll have a fertile womb....A woman's not a woman without a man on top of her, I always say. *(She chuckles.)*

DAUGHTER

Momma! That's your son you're talking about.

MARY

(Taking the bone out of her mouth) Yes ma'am. *(She puts the bone back in her mouth.)*

MOTHER

(To her daughter.) What's your problem girl? It's only women here. If I can't speak the truth in front of women, then when speak it?

DAUGHTER

(Going over to Mary.) Johnny won't even know she's under him. She's such a little nothing. *(Taking hold of her hair.)* And her hair's too thin. She's gonna go bald, momma.

MOTHER

We have to make her strong.

(A voice, unaccented, interrupts them. It is a woman in her mid-thirties, calm and controlled. Optimally, the voice comes from the back row, where a video came is set-up.)

OFF-STAGE VOICE

Excuse me, I want to let you know that the camera ran out of film.

(Mary takes the bone out of her mouth and returns it to the plate. Everyone seems to relax slightly, dropping their "characters". The other women still have their Appalachian accents, but they're subtle, softer.)

MOTHER

Too bad. It looked like you were about to get a good scene for your documentary. If you just went with digital instead of wanting that Dorothea Lange retro film-look, you wouldn't keep having this problem, Ma'am.

OFF-STAGE VOICE

Yes, it's the price to pay for authenticity.

DAUGHTER

There's no reason for me stay now, Momma, so I'm going out.

(The Daughter exits.)

MARY

Ma'am, me too. I'm going to use the toilet.

(Mary exits.)

OFF-STAGE VOICE

Mary seems like a very nice girl.

MOTHER

She is.

OFF-STAGE VOICE

Does your Virginia really dislike Mary?

MOTHER

Oh, yesterday she just loved her. Today, she hates her. That's the way women are. You know. You're out of film, why don't you save your questions.

OFF-STAGE VOICE

I'm using my tape recorder. Different kind of battery.

MOTHER

Ah, you want to use my answers for a voice-over then, huh?

OFF-STAGE VOICE

Possibly.

MOTHER

Well, like I said, Virginia's mad about this dress I promised to make her, but I only have two hands.

(Mary returns. She stands near the mother to both see her new dress and to be seen.)

MOTHER

She *is* a pretty thing. Maybe Johnny will marry her. He's been so depressed since he lost his job. Maybe this dance will cheer him up. If that Mary is the prettiest girl there...a man needs to be admired. Everyone will say, "Look at him, he's got something to have her."

(Johnny enters. Mary and the Mother turn to look at him. He smiles shyly at Mary.)

JOHNNY

Hello, momma.

(He turns and glares toward the audience.)

MOTHER

Don't worry, she's out of film.

(Johnny goes to his mother and hugs her. The mother holds his hand, tightly. She uses her other hand to preen him.)

MOTHER

Now, be polite Johnny.

JOHNNY

(Looking straight out, to the voice.) Hello.