



**BATTLE
FIELD**

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Norman Maine Publishing

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BattleField

DRAMA. On the surface, Terry's family appears quite ordinary, but underneath the small talk lies a fierce battle for control. Suffering from schizophrenia, Terry has been committed to a mental hospital, leaving her husband, Joey, to care for their two children. Joey has restricted Terry's family from visiting her at the hospital. But fearful that family secrets may be exposed, Terry's mother and brothers contact Terry by telephone to try to convince her to come home. Terry, torn between her family and her husband, soon finds herself on the verge of being swallowed whole by the dark secrets of her past.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

Characters

(4 m, 2 w, 1 boy)

TERRY: 30s, in a mental hospital.

MUMMA: Imposing figure, speaks with studied, reasonable demeanor, but gives way to sudden displays of anger.

JIMMY: 30s, a man whose conciliatory, childlike behavior is undercut by the evasive way he avoids looking at others directly, as if he is uncertain of his own stability and fearful he might betray this uncertainty.

WARREN: 40s, small, determinedly unemotional; gives off a sense of the contained viciousness of a rodent.

FATHER: Non-speaking; passive drunk, relegated to a corner, where he sits drinking beer and building a beer-can pyramid with the empty cans.

JOEY: Energetic, yet overwhelmed by the circumstances of his wife's hospitalization.

TONY: 5, Joey and Terry's eldest son.

Set

The stage is divided to reflect Mumma's living room SR, Terry's hospital room center rear, and Joey and Terry's home SL.

Mumma's living room. It is strung with a tangled web of overhead ropes/cables/wires, which hang down threateningly above the actors' heads. The room is furnished with old furniture (not antiques) including stiff wooden chairs, a rigid couch, and a coffee table. The living room has a cold, sterile feeling.

Terry's room at a mental institution. There is a cot-like bed with a pay phone booth beside it. This is where Terry lies, in darkness, while the scene is being played elsewhere. There is a black circle to make it look like there is a black hole beneath the bed. The black circle slowly spreads as the play advances.

Joey and Terry's home. There is a combination living room/kitchen. The living room is a mess, with toys, toy bins, and books laying about. There is only a beanbag chair and a crib for furniture.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Mumma's living room.

Scene 2: Joey and Terry's home.

Scene 3: Terry's room at a mental institution.

Scene 4: Mumma's living room.

Scene 5: Terry's room at a mental hospital.

Scene 6: Joey and Terry's home.

Props

2 Phones	Children's books
Knitting needles	Popcorn
Telephone headset	Magazines
Yarn	Sewing
Ropes	Empty beer cans
Baby doll	Cooler
Cordless phone	Several life preservers
Assorted toys	Podium

Sound Effects

Baby crying
Phone beep
Recording of phone operator

Author's Note

Although the conversations are all via telephone, after the initial setup, they can be played with minimal reference to actually holding a phone.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Father is in the corner drinking beer. Mumma sits on the couch between her sons, Warren and Jimmy. Mumma is talking on the phone to Terry. Warren and Jimmy rise and begin to string guide ropes along the back wall of the room. She puts down the phone and presses the speaker button.)

MUMMA: I'm sorry, dear, this is awful on my sciatica. I have to put you on speaker. Now, as I was saying...your poor brother, Warren, he's suffering so much. We have to go up to Maine, your pa and I, to help take care of his children. That's such a long drive for us...over four hours in that cramped little car your father bought. I get so stiff. Your dear old ma is getting old, I guess, and you're so far away, dear.

TERRY: *(Voiceover, from speakerphone.)* It's not my fault, the doctor said...

MUMMA: Shush! *(Mumma angles the speakerphone toward her, then picks up her knitting and begins to knit.)* Poor, poor Warren is suffering so much, it's hard for him to care for his own children. Oh, if you would bother for just one second to try to understand how he must feel...not being allowed in to see you when he spent all that money to fly down there. And I'm not talking about myself. *(Shift in tone, still polite, but a slight undercurrent of menace becoming increasingly obvious.)* About the... *(Pause.)* Outrageous...not allowing a mother to see her own daughter. But that's neither here nor there...I'm talking about your poor brother Warren. And while I'm at it, let me assure you, we won't let him get away with treating your brother like that. There'll be time to deal with him, don't you worry about that. Who does he think he is...thinking he can get in the way of our family? Just because he married you doesn't mean he's the one who owns you now. Oh, he may think he's got the upper hand, but when we get through with him, we'll see if he can take it as well as dish it. *(Quick shift back to a jovial, yet oddly unemotional tone.)* But

that's—that's for later. For now, your dear old ma just wants you to get better, dear. I've told you about the agony I've been having with my gums, I believe. But don't you worry. You just go ahead and get well and remember how much we all love you. (*Slight pause while Terry apparently begins to speak.*) Sssh. I'm not finished yet...as I was saying, it's such a shame this had to happen now, just when everything was going so well, too. Do you realize how inconvenient this is for all of us—not that I'm complaining, mind you. It's not your fault that he—I won't call him your husband—made you sick. But the timing is most inconvenient. Did you forget that I told you I've been appointed to guide a workshop on peace and community for the regional Quaker meeting? Let me tell you, you can't believe how difficult that is, trying to get that done while having to worry about how to deal with your little problem. Not that I mind, of course... And then there's poor Warren...poor, poor Warren. (*Warren pauses, gloats, then shoves his father out of the way with his hip so he can go on stringing more ropes.*) He's in the middle of getting ready to leave the hospital to set up his own family practice. He works so hard, and do you think anyone appreciates him? Do you have any idea how much stress he's already under? Can you even begin to imagine how he's suffering because of this? No need to say anything, dear...of course you can't. Maybe it doesn't mean much to you, but it breaks my heart to see anyone hurt him so. Oh, Terry, we are all suffering. It's not just you. I feel just like Mary at the foot of the cross—and you can bet your boots if a woman wrote the Gospel we wouldn't have so much drivel about his crucifixion; we'd have a more accurate evaluation of what she had to put up with. But it doesn't matter. I know you agree with me. Just remember, we are right here. We aren't going away. We'll never leave our dear little girl. We'll do everything we can to get you back to being the good little Terry we all know. (*Pause while a beep sounds on the line and an operator asks for more money.*) Put some more change in, will you, dear? I don't feel like you're done talking yet. It is so good to hear your voice, isn't it?

(Lights fade to blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Lights fade in on SL. There is popcorn scattered about on the floor. Joey is settling a baby into a crib at the rear of the room. He is wearing a telephone headset and talking to Terry, his wife. Tony sits on the beanbag chair, desultorily playing with a toy. Joey puts away scattered toys in various bins. He looks harried, and tries to talk without letting Tony know what he's saying. But as Joey speaks, Tony starts to tear his toy apart.)

JOEY: *(Into phone.)* Is there anything I can bring, or...? *(Pause.)* Books, umm, photos... *(Pause.)* Yeah, yeah, around 6:15, 6:30... *(Pause.)* I know, I know, but Bruce couldn't get here any earlier. Yeah, I know, me too. But it's nice of him—lifelong bachelor—to offer. Should be a Mr. Mom scene. He's never taken care of kids before. He says to me, “You know, Joey, I really don't know if I can change a diaper.” Ha-ha... *(Pause.)* Yeah, no, I mean, I feel fine with it. It'll only be for two hours. And the kids like him. He's a guy. They like guys, you know that, they always have. But they're doing, they're doing... *(He looks at his children and is visibly moved. He touches Tony's hair. The boy flinches away and bangs his toy on the floor.)* ...they're doing okay. They're really good. I mean, of course, it's tough, but... *(Pause.)* Tony is being such a good— *(Pause.)* You know what Tony did for me the other day? He picked up his toys all by himself and got his own pajamas on. He's such a big help with Michael, playing with him and stuff. *(To son.)* Huh, Tony? *(He touches Tony's head. This time the boy allows himself to be pulled against his father's leg. In fact, he wraps his arms around Joey's leg, so that Joey can't move. Joey takes a few doddering steps, then peels the boy off and ruffles his hair.)* Yesterday, when I came back from the hospital, Denise and Paul were having a popcorn fight with them. *(Laughs.)* Yeah, yeah, of course, of course, it's all vacuumed up. *(He starts picking popcorn off the floor and looks around for somewhere to throw it. Tony lifts the beanbag and Joey throws it under there. Tony stoops down and starts picking up popcorn and tossing it at his father, laughing. Joey motions*

for him not to, then smiles, and gestures to Tony to wait a minute until he is off the phone. Joey puts a finger to his lips for silence. Tony keeps throwing the popcorn.) No, I'm not. I haven't. Not a word to no one. *(Pause.)* Of course not, especially not to them. I'm telling them exactly what you and the doctors told me to tell them—nothing. Just that you're...sick... *(Pause.)* That's right. I'm waiting for you to tell me what to say. It's your call, Terry. *(Pause as Joey listens for a long time. His face turns to anguish. Tony notices Joey's change in mood and stops throwing popcorn. Tony moves off to stand by the baby's crib, and stares at Joey. Joey motions for Tony to leave and go to his bedroom. Tony exits. Joey flops onto the beanbag chair and takes a deep breath.)* Huh-honey, I've gotta go. The kids...supper. I've gotta... *(Pause.)* I'll bring you some pants... *(Pause.)* Yes, I'm sure they'll let you wear pants... *(Pause.)* Yeah, the mother wore them in mine, too. Well, actually, my father did. My mother—she was traditional—had to wait for the pantsuit breakthrough. *(Pause.)* Polyester... *(Pause.)* Yeah, right. Okay. Okay...look, is there anything else you want? I'll see... *(Pause.)* Maybe, you know, all this, maybe you should tell that to your doctor. She might, she could....I mean... *(Pause.)* Yes, I want to hear...I can listen but...I mean, that's what they're there for. You need to tell them what you're thinking. They need to know... *(Pause.)* No, no, no. So they can help... *(Pause.)* I haven't. I haven't seen them or talked to them since you went in. There's no... *(Pause.)* No, we're not planning. The only plan is to get you better and bring you home. Terry...I love you. *(Pause.)* Believe me. There's no plan. Trust me... *(Pause.)* Honey? *(He presses one hand to his eyes to keep from crying.)* Let me go, honey, so I can get there soon. I've gotta, I've gotta...

(He rises, settles back, rises again. Lights fade to blackout.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Mental hospital. Terry sits on the bed seeming to talk to various invisible people who move from side to side around her. She sounds reasonable at times, but her voice grows increasingly agitated. When she recalls discussions, she acts out both roles with the bed as her stage.)

TERRY: There was a reason. There was a reason. There was. Isn't it funny how common words sometimes all of a sudden become strange. "Was." Sometimes you'll be saying them and they'll sound like words from a foreign language. "Was." Say it. "Was. Wasssss. Wasssssss. Reeeezunnnn. They-errr. Wuz. A A A A A A A." One time, in the second grade, when I got an A on an arithmetic test, I took it home to show Mumma and she said, "How many other people in the class got an A?" You see? If there were others, it didn't matter. It wasn't good enough. I was—wuuzzzzzzz-int. Ent. Unt. No. *(She laughs, then straddles the bed frame at the foot of the bed, almost a sexual gesture, and looks fearfully around the floor, tracing the rim of the black hole. She pulls her front foot up quickly, as if fearful of being absorbed. Her breath slows, and then she sits bolt upright and looks around the room. She speaks softly at first, then as she grows more agitated, she starts to pace around the bed, staying close enough to touch it.)* I killed my baby. My first baby. I killed my baby when he was 3 years old. Warren helped me. *(She acts out both roles, giving birth, then catching the baby and strangling it. Pause.)* They lived behind us. They had a swimming pool and people hated them for that—nuns having a swimming pool. We watched them swim. We saw their skin. Did you ever see a nun's skin? Did you ever touch it? I never did. I watched. We watched lots of things. But not in the nun's house. That's why I got sick, in first grade, when I went to St. Andrew's. They could see my thoughts, marching in my head, and they knew. And I knew they knew everything. And Mumma would be so angry if I told, but... *(Screaming.)* It wasn't me, Mumma! It wasn't me. I didn't tell anyone! *(Settles back onto*

the bed.) Do you know? Do you know? Or are you...? Do you know what his name was...my first baby? Jimmy. Jimmy. The same name as my brother. It was the same. Jimmy. The baby I killed was my first baby; it was Jimmy, my brother Jimmy. He was my baby, and I killed him... I was supposed to take care of him...my mother told me I was supposed to take care of him...but I killed him when I was...when I wuuuzzz...when. When. When. When-when-when-when-when. I was three years old. Wuuzzzzzz. I never wuuuzzzz.

(Lights fade to blackout.)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: Lights open SR. Jimmy is talking on the telephone to Terry, pacing in a half-circle before the couch like a dog tethered to his mother. Father is still in the corner drinking, and Mumma sits with her chin up, rigid, staring at Jimmy. As the scene progresses, she gets up occasionally to find a magazine, some sewing, rub Warren's shoulder approvingly, listen in on Jimmy's conversation, take a beer can away from her husband, who just opens a cooler and pops the flip-top on another one. Warren is now building ladders that extend to the tangled ropes overhead.)

JIMMY: *(Into phone.)* I just got back from Paris. I had a great time. I had a free hotel suite for three days—you remember I told you about the time I stayed in Brussels at the Holiday Inn that had the bed bugs... *(Pause.)* Of course you remember. I told you. You have to remember. They gave us—me—a choice of staying free at any hotel in Europe, and I chose Paris because it was the most expensive. It would've been \$250 a night if I had to pay for it. Anyways—we—I had this gorgeous suite overlooking this park where lovers go to meet. *(Moves as far away from Mumma as he can. Speaks in a conspiratorial whisper. As he speaks, he rubs his stomach with one hand, which, unconsciously, slips toward the front of his pants.)* There was...we saw this couple in their 50s and they were making out. People were walking by on their way to work, and he was feeling her up, right there. Her leather jacket was open and his hand was under her sweater squeezing and rubbing her. It was so...they were...wild. *(He accidentally turns to face his mother, who stops her knitting and holds her needle pointed at him. He spins away, pulling his hand away and staring at it, as if it has betrayed him.)* I've been thinking a lot about you. I wish there was some way I could help you. I mean, my life is going so great. I mean, here I am in Europe, and the government is paying for my school, plus housing, and a stipend. Do you know what it's like to have someone pay for you...someone pay for all your needs? *(Pause.)* I know. Even where you are, what you're going through, you're my sister. You love me. You must appreciate that. You would

never do anything to hurt me. I remember how you helped when I had my breakdown. You and Warren and Mumma came down to let the doctors know just what a great family we have. I remember...and now here I am, all better, and I know you would never say anything... *(A strand of rope falls, and he puts the phone down so he can wrap the strand around his neck. He gives it a tug, pulls it taut, and leans back at an angle, his weight against it. It doesn't slacken. He smiles back at the Mumma, who nods approvingly, then he unwraps the rope and picks up the phone.)* I know what I went through. The advice I can give you now is this...the important thing is to help the sick person stay healthy. You should not be thinking about your husband's needs or your children's needs. Your husband and children don't matter. You should focus only on...you know, everybody back home here. We're the ones who love you. *(Pause while Terry talks. Mumma comes over, takes the phone away to listen, shakes her head disgustedly, then returns the phone to Jimmy. Mumma walks to the back of the room to rub Warren's shoulders.)* Mumma is really upset because we don't know what Joey said to make them put these restrictions on us. We know it had to be his fault. You know, we've had trouble with him, the way he treats us, and you, like, asking you, pushing questions on you, and wanting answers, and we know you must feel that torture. But we can help. We're your family. We know you better than anyone. Between the four of us, we know you better than you know yourself. Don't let people who don't know anything tell you what to believe. We are the ones who can help. We are the only ones who can advise you on your treatment. *(Pause. Sudden anger.)* You better listen to what I'm telling you. *(Boyish laugh, speaking in a fake calm voice again.)* Do you remember when you helped me? When Warren and Mumma reminded me of how good they were and helped me get out of that place. You have to listen to me. You don't want Mumma to feel like she can't trust you. Because then none of us can trust you, and you don't want to be all alone. Mumma wants me to let you know that Warren's calling the doctor tomorrow...and the social worker. Mumma has spoken with her and told her all about how

Joey...abuses you... *(Pause.)* Of course you remember. You just have to think about it. Anyways...anyways...Mumma wants you to know we are still in the picture. We're not giving up. The empire strikes back. Ha-ha.

(Lights fade out to blackout.)

Scene 5

(AT RISE: Terry's room in the mental hospital. Lights fade up center. As Terry speaks to herself, she becomes increasingly distraught.)

TERRY: I don't know if I should go to Cathy or Norris. I think Cathy should be my therapist. But she's a nun and Mumma's a Quaker—she used to be a Catholic, and she made my father convert, and you know, he, of all of us, was the most serious. But just before he was to take his first communion, yes! Just before he was to take that flesh and blood into his mouth, just before it was his turn, my mother made us quit the church because she wanted to find a place where she...was more respected. But then she sent me to St. Andrew's anyway for first grade. I got sick...sick, sick-uh, sick, Sikh, suck. I threw up and cried...every day. I lost 18 pounds in three weeks. It was the nuns. They scared me. They knew. They could see it on my face. There was a mark on my face that told them what had happened—I know because I could see it—I could I see it in the mirror. The mirror in my bed. The mirror Warren brought so he could see it better. *(She pulls the cover down and speaks to the center of her bed, moving her head as if examining all aspects of her reflection.)* I was so afraid because I knew someone would get in trouble because of me, and I kept trying to lie, to say something so they wouldn't know, but every time I opened my mouth, I threw up, and you know what was in there? Words. Words. Words came out like white snakes all coiled and writhing around themselves. Like white little worms. Like my brothers' little white worms— but then they got to be big snakes when they were in high school...and Mumma...and Mumma...she had a right, too...God damned it!... and I kept crying because I was afraid they were going to form phrases and then sentences and someone would get in trouble because of me, and I couldn't stop them from dripping out of my mouth. I tried to swallow them, I really did, but... *(She gags, throws up.)* ... I didn't want to ever get anyone in trouble because then I would be

in trouble...like the time I got Mumma in trouble when I was five. *(Terry flinches and moves to the floor on the other side of the bed.)* We were in a shoe store and I asked her if we could really afford to buy me shoes, and she took me out of the store onto the sidewalk and slapped me across the face. Whack! Whack! And she said, "Don't you ever embarrass me again." Then she told me what my purpose was in life: "Don't you ever get anybody in trouble again." And that was good...it was a relief to know what my purpose in life would be. *(She gives a sob like she's about to cry, but her attention is drawn to some imaginary person crossing the room.)* I think I'm supposed to go to Cathy because I saw—I know you will say this is crazy, but it's true—I saw a vision that night I came in. It was the Virgin Mary. She was the size of a playing card, and she was in the radio and she told me I have another...a special purpose. She was going to use me, too, like everybody else in my family. Only my purpose for her was to make everybody better. Because sometimes when I did my other purpose, they didn't feel good about themselves. They got angry at me. And what was I doing? I was just doing what they wanted me to do. What Mumma wanted me to do. "Quit crying and just keep the peace in this God-damned house." And you know what? What. What. Wut. Wut-wut-wut. Since. Snnnn-ssuh. Since I've been on this ward, sinnnnnccce then, everyone is getting better! And today, I was in Tammy's room, and she was there but then she disappeared, and I saw a quarter on her desk, and I knew I was supposed to use it to call a therapist, only I didn't know who. Cathy or Norris? So I came out to the payphone in the hallway, and when I put my hand in my pocket, it was the fifth quarter! It was the fifth quarter! It was the fifth quarter! Don't you see? *(She looks around, astonished, and then cowers against some imaginary threat. She resumes speaking in a hushed voice.)* So when I put it in the phone and dialed Cathy's number, the line was busy, and then I looked up and a nun peeked into the ward, and she went like this with her hand... *(Makes a cryptic gesture.)* ...and I knew that was the sign! She was from Cathy! I didn't have to call Cathy because she was the

messenger, and she knew. She was an angel. You're an angel, too. You really are, Joey. You're an angel. I know that. But you know what that means? *(Starts to cry.)* It means you're already dead. *(Cries. To imaginary person.)* I need more change. Can you help me? I need all the change you can give me.

(Lights fade to blackout.)

[End of Freeview]