
**Don't You Ever
Call Me Anything
But Mother**

John O'Keefe

Don't You Ever Call Me Anything But Mother was first presented at the Padua Hills Playwrights' Festival in Claremont, California, on July 15, 1983, with the following cast:

DORIS

Tina Preston

Directed by John O'Keefe

Set Design by John O'Keefe and Jen-Ann Kirchmeier

Stage Manager, Kelly Stewart

The play was later performed at Factory Place Theater and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and at the Blake Street Hawkeyes Theater in Berkeley with the same cast.

CHARACTERS

DORIS, an elderly alcoholic (between 65 and 70). "John E" is her son, taken from her many years ago. All of the other people she refers to are dead.

SET

A small four-room apartment. There is a kitchen, a bathroom, a bedroom, and a living room. Only the living room is totally visible.

The bathroom opens out onto the living room. The outer lip of the toilet can be seen. Although the bedroom is referred to, it need not be a part of the set.

Dividing the bathroom and the kitchen is a short hallway.

The kitchen also is not visible. There is a window in the kitchen. Its light can be seen in the hallway. There is also a refrigerator and, when the window shade is pulled, its light also can be seen. In fact, part of the refrigerator door can be seen when it is pulled all the way open.

Hanging in the center of the living room is a bare light bulb and pull chain. The light is on at the beginning of the play.

TIME

A weekday morning.

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Don't You Ever Call Me Anything But Mother

John O'Keefe

DORIS speaks in the darkness.

John E, you should get yourself together for school. I'm not kidding, honey, you're going to be late. Just you wait and see, you'll meet all of those rough boys who hang around the streets until the last minute. Late, John E. That's when it gets dangerous. That's when the perverts come out.

The lights slowly begin to rise. They continue to rise as she speaks. She is unseen, stage right in the bedroom.

The earlier you get to school the better the crowd.

She passes from the bedroom into the kitchen. We see just a flicker of her as she crosses through the hallway.

You ought to see these clothes, they look so white. It's Cheer, that's what it is, cold water Cheer. I always wash your clothes in cold water Cheer. It makes them smell just like they came out of the fresh air. And the air, you know, is good for you.

A bunch of dirty clothes fly out into the hall.

These things, though, these things have got to be cleaned. I don't know where they come from. Just when I think I've got them all, up pop these . . . these things, just like they came up out of some sewage pipe. Well, I've got today's anyway.

More clothes fly out.

Oh, look at this. This looks terrible. Oh my!

A bunch of movie magazines fly out.

I don't know where people get such filth. You should see them. Why look at this.

An old pot flies out along with a few very old, dirty utensils.

Oh well, we can probably use them. Can't get crazy about such things. Got good hot water and soap. The soap's Ivory, John E. And that's why your mother's hands are so white and beautiful.

Suddenly she runs from the kitchen to the bedroom. Just a glimpse of her is seen.

Oh, is that the telephone? (*Unseen, into the telephone*): Hello? Hello? Oh darn it! Why didn't you tell me the telephone was ringing? You know I don't hear that well all the time. Sometimes my mind is on other things. That's your job, you know. To take care of your mother. Oh, well, it's probably just more of those bill collectors after your father. Oh, I'm so tired. I could just lie down and sleep the whole day away. John E, why don't you make this bed. I can't always be responsible for it. Make it nice, so it's soft and comfy. You know, these sheets smell so good, just like the air. And the air's clean, you know. All of the dust, all of the dust around you fell out of the air, right out of the sky, John E, and you know, that's wonderful because that's how the air gets clean. It just drops the dust right out of the sky, just like a cat, John E, just like a cat. (*The bed is finished.*) Now I'm going to open the window and let the air in and the sun. The sun, John E, you should be getting it. The sun is good for you. It makes you shine. You haven't been getting enough of it either. You should be out playing ball against the house.

(*Straining to get the window open, still unseen*): Oh, this window won't budge. Can you imagine that? It won't budge. (*Still straining to get the window open*): Oh, John E, you've just got to help me. I get so mad at this window I could break it. (*Almost weeping*): We need some air in this room. We need some air in here. Oh God, John E don't let me get all worked up. I don't want to have a blackout. Oh well, there's just nothing to be done in here. Aren't you glad you have a mother who takes care of the house cleaning? You know, there are some mothers who just lie around and look at movie magazines. That's something that I don't do. I don't let my son do it either. You're not that kind of boy are you? You don't like that stuff do you? It has nothing to do with real life, you know. It doesn't. It comes from the Catholics, however. Well, I don't think that this is going to do at all. The lamp is on the floor. Did you do that? Oh, it's just awful here. It stinks like vomit. Excuse my language, but it does. It stinks just like vomit. Have you been throwing up in here? Well, you should clean up after yourself if you are. This is terrible, just terrible. What are these? Are these your underwear? Well, you certainly don't clean up after yourself. You should wipe yourself after going number two. There should be no stains at all in your underwear after you go "go-go." You should toss them into the clothes hamper as soon as there are any stains at all. I'll wash them in bleach and they'll be spanking clean.

The pairs of underwear are tossed into the hall.

Now, John E, your mother is done. Do you have any coffee for me? Watch out for it now, don't want to burn yourself with it. Here I come, honey.

She crosses to the door. Her hand is just visible from the hall.

Oh look, there's Faith at the window!

She crosses into the kitchen. Again we just see a flash of her as she crosses between the doors. She is delighted to see the cat.

Come on, let me let you in. That's my kitty. Just hold on. Oh, John E, come here! You should just see her, she's just beautiful. Oh, isn't that cute, she's scratching at my finger through the glass.

(Suddenly very angry that John E isn't coming): John E, get in here! *(Struggling with the window):* Oh, I can't get this one open either.

She continues struggling, becoming frantic.

Oh, I just can't get this window open! I'm going to break it, that's what I'm going to do! I'm going to break it! Then I suppose I'll get evicted. They'll send that house manager up here again. And I can never get him when I need something. *(Screaming):* Especially when I can't open the windows! *(Starts to cry.)* Look at the kitty, I can't even touch her. *(To the cat, still crying):* Oh, go away then, go away, I can't pet you. Shoo. *(Whining):* She won't go away. She thinks she can get in. But she can't, John E, she can't. You come in here and help me.

(Silence. Then, recovered, wiping her tears): There she goes. There she goes. Oh, just look at her jump. Goodbye . . . goodbye. You know, John E, I think I'm going to be better now. I haven't been having those blackouts so often. They're just terrible. I hope you don't ever have to have them, though it passes through the family, you know. Your uncle Chuck, he has them and he's a landscaper, gets plenty of fresh air and exercise and that wife of his, even if she is a fish-eating pagan, she fixes him good, hearty food.

We hear her light a cigarette. The smoke drifts out through the doorway.

You know, John E, it's not enough to believe in God, you've got to stay in love with him.

We see her hand holding the cigarette in the hallway.

I'm still in love with Red. Do you remember when he brought that salmon back from the greenhouse? Those Norwegians, Red Ericson. Belonged to the Masons. Do you know what that means, John E, to belong to the Masons? When you get old enough you're going to join the Demolays. Get one nod from the Masons and you're in. It's the Masons helped me get you out of that orphanage in Lincoln. I sued the whole goddamned Catholic charities. And I beat them. I got you back. And the lawyer was a Mason. Yes, John E, your mother knows a lot of powerful people.

She smokes and weeps quietly, still just out of sight.

Why do the good ones die, John E? Why didn't your father die instead of Red? God knows, he deserves to, drinking the way he does and beating me up. Yes, John E, he beat me up. He beat me up at least once a week. I had black and blue marks all over my body.

She has a coughing fit. She opens the refrigerator door. The refrigerator light spills into the hallway. She opens a can of beer and pours it in a glass, unseen.

You know, I'm going to have to calm myself down.

DORIS enters. She is dressed in a faded yellow and blue terry cloth bathrobe. She wears a pink shower cap. She has fluffy white slippers on and they are not so fluffy and not so white. She is a woman in her mid to late sixties. She is very thin. Her face is freckled and wrinkled and bony. She has no teeth. Her lower jaw juts out and her mouth looks like a little shrunken trunk. She has a can of beer in one hand and a glass in the other. A cigarette sticks out of her mouth like a nail.

Where did I put my cigarettes, John E? You know I'm always misplacing them. Sign of genius, you know. I always was smart in school. Your uncle and me, we were the only ones to graduate out of nine children. And Chuck, John E, he went to junior college, became a landscaper. Now that's what you're going to do, you're going to go to college. You like plants and all that stuff. I've seen you with plants. They like you too. And you know your directions in the woods. You could become a forest ranger, did you know that? That would be very good for you.

You could earn a lot of money and then you could take care of your mother like you should.

She finds the pack of Pall Malls under some newspapers.

Here they are.

She clears a place for herself in the chair, throwing rags and skirts and papers on the floor. Her movements are not stiff. There is a certain grace and agility and then sometimes there is a sudden frailty and stooping and totteriness. The tottery side takes over as she sits herself down on the chair.

I wonder what is going to be on television today? I don't know if I'm going to watch those soap operas. They make me feel so stupid afterwards, like I was watching people go to the bathroom. Maybe "Perry Mason." He'll be on at three. But that music they play with it, at the beginning and at the end, it makes me feel so lonely-sweet.

She blows through her lips as if expelling some nasty substance. Smoke flies out.

I don't know about "Gilligan's Island," either. I like that little boy but the people he's with, that rich dope and his fluzzy wife, they aren't Masons, that's for sure. I like the Skipper though. And the Scientist, he's cute, and those girls, I think they are kind of pretty. *(She giggles.)* But you shouldn't hear your mother say things like that. *(Suddenly stern, her eyes glowing with threat):* You should take care of yourself that way. Keep your hands out of your pockets.

She broods and drinks.

You're not doing any of that stuff are you? I don't want to hear about you doing any of that . . . that doctor stuff. You keep that thing where it's supposed to be.

She downs the rest of the beer in her glass and is immediately up on her feet walking toward the kitchen. She speaks with her back to us as she crosses up to the kitchen.

Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm not going to have any of that kind of stuff in my apartment.

She disappears into the kitchen. She opens the refrigerator and pops another beer, pours it into her glass, and closes the refrigerator. She reappears, shuffling along.

Where are you, anyway? I hope you're not doing that hiding bullshit again. Why don't you do your schoolwork? You're not getting very good grades in school, you know.

She drinks and crosses to the chair. Sits.

Lord knows, you're still shitting in your pants. Why don't you go fall asleep in a movie? Don't you know better than that at your age? Falling asleep in a movie. I just met that man. I told him how wonderful my little boy was. And then to see you screaming and hollering and pounding on the lobby door. "Mommie, Mommie, I be scared of the dark. Get me out of here." Snot coming out of your nose. Your big, fat egg-face, "Waa, waa!" Do you know what that made me look like? It made me look like a bad mother. That man never talked to me again. I take care of you. I take care of you good. You get a lot of love in this house, a lot more than we got . . . (*Shouting at the hallway*): And there were nine of us!

She turns back. Speaks through pained eyes.

You stinking, snot-nosed little brat. Do you know what E-X-I-T spells? Exit! To go out. Why didn't you just get up and go out, instead of shitting in your pants and bawling? (*Starts to cry.*) I'm sorry, John E, I'm sorry. They're right, I'm not a good mother. I know I shouldn't have left you in the movie so long, but I get lonely, John E, I get so lonely. Sometimes I have to have company.

(*She stops crying, looks out between her fingers, totally changed, suddenly angry, growling*): Where are you? I said, where are you?

She raises her head up strangely, like a short-necked giraffe. She looks around the room.

Have you gone to school already? Have you left me here to talk to myself? You know that's not fair. It's scary to be left here all alone with myself. (*Suddenly leaning forward, whispering in her chair, talking to the air in front of her*): You know, John E, your father was afraid to be by himself? He said that it scared him, like being alone with a ghost. Isn't that frightening? Your father was a frightening man.

She gets up and crosses toward the kitchen after another beer.

He was a bad drinker, that man.

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Stops at the edge of the hallway and looks at the picture of a child. She talks to the picture, touching it gently.

But handsome, handsome like you, with curly hair and long, white fingers. You're going to be a piano player, that's what you've just got to be. *(She leans against the wall near the picture, gazing into the hall as she speaks.)* But you're not going to be the kind of man your father was. You're going to be a good, gentle man and you're never going to hit women.

She drinks, then crosses into the kitchen. Speaks, unseen, from the kitchen.

John E, do you remember that time we hitchhiked across the country? 1952. Same night that big fat slob in Moline started knocking me around. *(She cackles.)* I got her back, didn't I, John E? You saw her. She was bleeding like an animal, the whore. You know what she called me? She called me a "cunt." And then do you remember what that whore said? She said that I took her old man's money. I never called your father my "Old Man"! *(Suddenly poking her head around the door of the kitchen into the hallway, shouting):* And don't you ever call me anything but Mother!

(She fairly leaps into the hallway, shouting): Do you hear me? Don't you ever call me anything but Mother!

She goes back into the kitchen.

Never, John E.

The can pops. She re-enters the living room.

Yes, your father was a very strong and handsome man. You know, he killed his own father, don't you? Your grandfather. He kicked him right down the stairs and he kept on kicking all the way, all the way down each and every one of them. And your uncle Paul, the doctor, the one that brought you into the world? He got your father out of it. His family is very strong, not that the Calhouns aren't either, but he's got Waterloo money, County Coroner and hospital doctor, got them coming and going. And he's rich, filthy rich.

She has sat down by now. She leans over and turns on the television. It chatters in the background. She speaks about the television programming.

Oh, I don't like this stuff. It makes me feel like a housewife.

She flicks the set off in disgust. She crosses to the record player. She turns on a small lamp near it.

Sometimes I don't think you can love past twenty-three, John E.

She puts on a record. It is country-western music. The first cut is "I'm Sending You a Big Bouquet of Roses."

Where are my cigarettes?

She crosses downstage very delicately and ladylike to her beer and pours the rest of the can into the glass. She crosses stage center beneath the overhead light and takes the end of the pull chain as if it were a precious gem, looks at it, then pulls on it and the overhead light goes out.

Miller's, John E, the best. That pretty girl sitting on the moon waving her leg up and down. That's me. You should know those country nights, John E.

Crosses to the kitchen, speaking as she moves.

We'll get back there again someday. There is too much light in here. Good God, you'd think there was something interesting going on out there.

She draws the kitchen window shade down and the room goes dark except for the light coming from the refrigerator as she opens it to get another beer. She pours herself a can by refrigerator light. She closes the door and crosses through the hall into the bedroom.

Oh look at this place, John E. It looks like a casket. I shouldn't see the bedroom in the daylight.

She draws the window shade down and the room goes dark. She turns on the night-light.

Oh, it looks so much better now, like the '30s. The '30s should only be seen at night, John E, at night when it's black and gold. That's when I had such red hair it'd burn your heart out. And I did, John E, I burned a lot of hearts with my hair. You can still see parts of the red in my hair. They glisten and glow. *(Suddenly enthusiastic):* Let me doll up for you, John E! Let your mother doll up for you and show you her stuff.

A light clicks on just behind the bathroom door. The record continues with "I'm Sending You a Big Bouquet of Roses."

Let me see here now. (*We hear bottles clanking as she rummages through the cabinet.*) Oops.

She drops a bottle. It breaks.

I just haven't done this in such a long time I get slippery fingers. You should help me, John E, you should help me clean this up. Oh, all right, I'll just do it later. I keep this house up, don't you thnk? That's more than I can say for your grandmother, my mother. Did you know she couldn't even cook pancakes? Stab a fork into them and goo would run out of the center. She never made the beds. Even when your grandfather was alive. She didn't do a thing, but she always looked busy. And she didn't take care of herself either. Oh, she smelled! I mean, sometimes she smelled like she had been lying in bed with a man all of her life. You know what I mean, don't you? She smelled "that way." Stay away from women that smell "that way." They're dangerous. Oh, darn this hair. It's always had a mind of its own. But that's why it's so beautiful, John E, that's why it's like wave-water. There we are. Now just a little on my face and I'm through.

The record has ended and the needle swishes in eerie syncopation on the tail-out groove of the record. The bathroom door slowly opens and brilliant white light breaks from the bathroom. Gradually the figure of DORIS emerges as she slowly pushes the door open. She is bathed in bright light. Her old face is painted with white powder. Her cheeks are covered with bright red rouge. Lipstick is smeared over her lipless, toothless mouth. Dark green eye shadow and long, false eyelashes make her face look as if she had two black eyes. Her frail, thin body is covered with a wrinkled, stained nightgown. She speaks in a soft, shy voice.

Hello, John E, this is your mother. Do you like me? I can still draw an eye or two. Do you remember what I looked like with those shoulder pads and the Scottish plaid? I'm Irish, you know, but I look good in things like that with my hair all piled up like on a Coca-Cola sign out of the '40s. I had slim legs and a lithe body and champagne breasts and my skin was creamy white with warm little freckles on it. John E, look at me. I'm going to tell you something you should know about. Look at this body. Do you know what this body is for? It is for the lust of God to have his way with me. All . . . the . . . way, John, all the way. To plant a baby inside of me. To plant a baby in me.



PHOTO: JEN-ANN KIRCHMEIER

That's where you were. You were up inside of me. (*She cups her hands between her legs.*) Up here. Haven't I ever told you about that stuff? Let me tell you, my darling son. A man, John E, a man put his thing in me. And it made him feel terribly good. That thing, that big thing of his. It made him want to come. Do you know what "want to come" means? It means that he can't stand the pleasure of it so much that he dies in me. He dies in me. He dies in me, John E. and when he does his whole body gets hard and starts to shudder and he starts pumping and pumping and he makes these strange cries like a baby wanting his mother and his face gets red like a poor sweet thing and he begins to weep and then, John E, then he comes. (*Mysteriously*): He comes inside of my body and I hold him and I say, "Yes, yes, my sweet darling," and I rock him and caress him and he gets all soft and cuddly and he just curls up and goes to sleep. But I don't sleep, John E, no, I don't sleep. I lie there in the dark and feel his come go sticky, feel it up inside of me, sending its magic into me, red and wanting and hurting for the magic that will wear your eyes and dress in your skin. (*She smiles knowingly, almost winking.*) Someday you'll come, John E. You'll know when you come. You'll know it for sure.

She hears the needle in the tail-out groove.

Listen to that thing. It sounds like a cat, don't you think? It

sounds like a cat licking the corner of a window.

She crosses to the record player and takes the needle from the record. Her mood changes. Her voice is low and pensive.

But you didn't come out that way, John E. They had to cut you out of me like some ugly sliver. (*Calling to him*): John E! John E! I'm going to get you back. I'll get you back even if I have to come out of the ground to do it.

She stands by the record player. Her head drops. She looks around for her beer. Can't find one. Goes into the kitchen for another.

You know why your father liked me? He liked me because I could hold my beer. I could drink with the best of them, and I could, still can. I'm going to put some beans on for when you get back from school. What is this? John E, you should put the old beans back into the refrigerator. Whew, they smell awful. Why here's another pot left out. Where are all of these beans coming from? Have you been playing around in the kitchen? (*Opens refrigerator.*) Why look at this. The refrigerator is full of beans! Well, these are certainly not very fresh.

She crosses back into the bedroom to the bathroom and dumps a pot of spoiled beans into the stool. She turns the bathroom light off, then goes back into the kitchen and dumps a big bag of beans into a tin pot.

We'll just have to make some fresh ones. You tell me, John E, what's it all mean? Don't they teach you anything in school besides how to get bored? Have they ever told you what to do after all get up and go? I'll bet they told you all the old people go to Pasadena to the garden of Eden with Mickey Mouse. Where's my beer?

She re-enters the living room and finds the one she left.

I don't like the light in here.

She clicks the small lamp near the record player off. The living room becomes dark. She crosses back into the kitchen.

Oh, God, I hate this light.

She opens the refrigerator door.

Good God, I'm almost out of beer. Have you been getting into

my beer? I told you never to get into my beer. It's my medicine, for my heart.

She closes the refrigerator door. The stage is in darkness.

Oh, my God, it's so dark! I can't see. John E! I can't see!

She opens the refrigerator door and attempts to keep it open so that she can get to the living room by its light.

John E, help me. Oh God, he isn't going to help me. Oh, if I can just get to the television before this door closes.

She enters the living room. She runs her fingers along the side of the wall. She crosses toward the television. The refrigerator door begins to close and there is a "flunk" as the door closes. DORIS makes a frightened, apprehensive sound and then bashes into the table.

Oh, no!

She falls to the floor and begins crawling on her hands and knees, whimpering.

I'm having a blackout, John E! I'm having a blackout in the dark!

She makes a series of strange "woops," then goes silent. She crawls to the TV in the darkness, turns it on. We see her face appear, illuminated by its light.

I think I'm going to throw up, John E! Get me a pan! Get me a pan! (She screams at the top of her voice): Where are you, you snot-nosed little brat!!

She begins crawling toward the bathroom. She gets to the bathroom and throws up in the toilet. She flushes the stool. She lies down on the bathroom floor, breathing heavily.

Oh, my heart, my heart.

Gradually her heavy breathing subsides. She speaks, still lying on her back.

Get me a towel. (Screaming): Get me a towel! Oh, it's no use.

She struggles to her knees, reaches up, and turns on the bathroom light. She gets a towel and wipes her face off. She drops the towel and staggers to her feet. She is dead drunk. She staggers wildly out of the bathroom into the living room.

Where is my beer?

She searches around on the floor, staggering to one knee near where she left the can of beer before she fell. She finds it.

Here it is. You little bsatard, where have you been hiding all of my beers? I'm going to have to go out and get some more.

She crosses, staggering to the chair, and falls to the floor next to it. The apartment is dark except for the light in the bathroom and the TV. She looks into the TV.

Is it dark where you are now? Is it so dark you can't see your mother? Can you hear me? John E, can you hear me? *(She looks up at the light bulb.)* You left me.

She struggles drunkenly to her feet.

You were standing over me. You had a light bulb in your hand. *(She starts to swing the light bulb. As she swings it, the light goes on and off.)* You had a light bulb in your hand. "I'm going to smash this light bulb in your face, you dirty whore." To me. You said that to me, to your mother, John E.

She sinks to the floor, still holding the chain on the light bulb. As she sinks, she pulls the cord, turning it off.

But the worst thing is, John E, the worst thing is that you left and you didn't come back.

She stares at the television in silence. She starts to doze off, then suddenly she starts and is awake.

Is that the telephone? Is that the telephone?

She starts for the phone, crawling towards the bathroom on her hands and knees.

Don't hang up, John E. Don't hang up, I'm coming. I'm coming.

She stops just short of the bathroom. Listens. Then falls back against the wall, knocking a small book shelf over.

You hung up.

She crawls back to the chair and climbs into it. she stares at the TV.

I hate this garbage, "Dialing for Dollars," he ought to stick

to the weather. God knows, he can't even do that very well.
What a wimp. Don't you ever be a wimp, John E.

*She looks sourly at the TV. She drinks. She sits and stares,
blank-faced, then her eyelids start to droop.*

Going to have to get some more beer.

She starts to drift off to sleep.

Wish you . . . could get it for me.

*Half asleep, she speaks a combination of dream-talk and
memory.*

Wish you could get me to the bus Daddy's car is on the blink
used to kiss my mother so sweetly. Now he's dead. How could
he kill himself, John E? He was my father. Didn't you know
that I loved him?

She suddenly snaps awake.

John E, I be scared!

*She realizes that she has just shouted. She looks down at the
beer in her hand. She starts to lift it to her lips, pauses mid-
way, looks out with longing, remembering.*

There was . . . this little church we used to go to in the spring.
Mother would gossip while we played in the cemetery and one
day there was a rainbow. It made everything fresh and clean.
I could feel my skin so young . . .

*She stares out in silence, then reaches down and turns the
TV off. She looks about the dark room. She picks up the beer
and finishes it.*

I know I left a half-empty around here some place.

*She starts searching the living room. She can't find it. She
is on her hands and knees.*

I know, I know, I left it in the bedroom.

*She crawls on her hands and knees to the bathroom. She
speaks, unseen from the bathroom.*

Yes, here it is. I'm tired already and it's not even "Perry
Mason" time yet. I'm going to wake up in the middle of the
night and not be able to go back to sleep. Why don't you call
me then, John E? I'll be awake.

to the weather. God knows, he can't even do that very well. What a wimp. Don't you ever be a wimp, John E.

She looks sourly at the TV. She drinks. She sits and stares, blank-faced, then her eyelids start to droop.

Going to have to get some more beer.

She starts to drift off to sleep.

Wish you . . . could get it for me.

Half asleep, she speaks a combination of dream-talk and memory.

Wish you could get me to the bus Daddy's car is on the blink used to kiss my mother so sweetly. Now he's dead. How could he kill himself, John E? He was my father. Didn't you know that I loved him?

She suddenly snaps awake.

John E, I be scared!

She realizes that she has just shouted. She looks down at the beer in her hand. She starts to lift it to her lips, pauses midway, looks out with longing, remembering.

There was . . . this little church we used to go to in the spring. Mother would gossip while we played in the cemetery and one day there was a rainbow. It made everything fresh and clean. I could feel my skin so young . . .

She stares out in silence, then reaches down and turns the TV off. She looks about the dark room. She picks up the beer and finishes it.

I know I left a half-empty around here some place.

She starts searching the living room. She can't find it. She is on her hands and knees.

I know, I know, I left it in the bedroom.

She crawls on her hands and knees to the bathroom. She speaks, unseen from the bathroom.

Yes, here it is. I'm tired already and it's not even "Perry Mason" time yet. I'm going to wake up in the middle of the night and not be able to go back to sleep. Why don't you call me then, John E? I'll be awake.

The bathroom door closes. The bathroom light is still shining into the living room.

Good night, John E, good night.

The light in the bathroom fades to black.