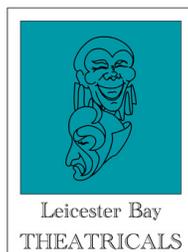


**PERUSAL SCRIPT**

**puzzles**  
a play by  
**J.D. Newman**



Newport, Maine

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## **PUZZLES**

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## PUZZLES

Puzzles was presented at the American Alliance for Theatre and Education 2000 Unpublished Play Readings in June at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. It was subsequently developed and presented at the 2001 Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis / Indiana Repertory Theatre Waldo M. and Grace C. Bonderman National Youth Playwriting Symposium.

Puzzles has also received workshops and staged readings through:

- The University of Texas at Austin
- Ground Zero Theatre Company in Dallas, Texas
- The Rocky Mountain Theatre Association in Cedar City, Utah
- The Provincetown Playhouse in New York City
- Wasatch Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, Utah

### Characters: (3 male, 2 female)

- HARPER:** An older child of 11/12, maybe even a young teen of 13, who has recently lost his father. (may be played by a slightly older actor)
- DEBORAH ANN:** Harper's mother, late thirties.
- MAMA DIDI:** Harper's grandmother, Deborah Ann's mother, early sixties.
- PAPA LEO:** Harper's grandfather, Deborah Ann's father, mid-sixties, recovering from a recent stroke.
- PICKY:** Harper's friend, two years older, who lives in the basement apartment.

### **Scenic Requirements**

Fragments of a living room and kitchen are seen simultaneously with free-standing doorways and arches around and between them. The front door to the living room is stage-right and the back door to the kitchen is stage-left. There is an open, free-standing archway that represents the division between the two rooms. There is an archway up-right-center that leads to the back of the house and a door up-left-center that leads to the basement. It is possible that these doors and archways could be mimed rather than physical.

In the living room, there is a large easy chair where Papa Leo spends most of his day. There is also a bookcase with a set of encyclopedias with large letters on their fronts and sides; the "D" volume is missing. There is also a large picture book, *Fairy Tale ABC's*. An old analog television faces upstage with an unattached digital adapter behind it. On top of the television rests a book of Shakespeare's plays.

In the kitchen, there is a plate of food on the table. There are two key rings hanging on hooks, perhaps on the basement door, with a single key on each; one with a large letter A and one with a large letter B. Somewhere in the kitchen, there is a cardboard box.

The most crucial sound effect is a doorbell, activated from both the front and back doors, which plays the Westminster chimes. When the front doorbell rings, the entire tune is played and when the back door rings, only the first half of the tune is heard.

### **Setting**

The living room and kitchen of Leo and Didi's home in Cedar City, Utah.

### **Time**

The present, inasmuch as the characters choose to exist in it.

## PUZZLES

**Scene 1** -- *It is early evening. As the lights go down, we hear a Westminster chimes doorbell. As lights come up on stage right, we hear the soft roar of television static and see four people gathered around the television in the living room. HARPER, a eleven-year-old boy with autism, stares intently at his grandfather who stares wonderingly at the screen. HARPER's mother, DEBORAH ANN looks at PAPA LEO from behind the boy with MAMA DIDI beside her. Suitcases have been dropped inside the front door.*

**HARPER:** Papa Leo? It's me. Harper.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You let Papa watch static?

**MAMA DIDI:** It calms him down. He'll watch it for hours.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You let him do that?

**MAMA DIDI:** He's trying to understand it.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You let my father watch static?!

**MAMA DIDI:** It's all that we can get out of that box, now that they've changed the signals. I got a translator but never installed it.

*(HARPER approaches his grandfather curiously.)*

**HARPER:** Papa Leo? Are you in there?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, he's not the man you remember.

**MAMA DIDI:** He's missing something, in his head.

**HARPER:** He's still got his beep-beep.

**DEBORAH ANN:** His what?

**HARPER:** The big wart on his forehead.

*(He touches PAPA LEO's forehead.)*

Beep-beep!

*(PAPA LEO seems to recognize something familiar.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, don't!

**HARPER:** Why not?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Your Papa Leo's changed.

**HARPER:** Is he going to die?

**DEBORAH ANN:** No, son. He's not going to die.

**MAMA DIDI:** He had a stroke.

**HARPER:** What struck him?

**DEBORAH ANN:** A stroke is something that happens in the brain. The blood vessels get blocked...

**HARPER:** There's blood in his brain?

**DEBORAH ANN:** It's complicated. You wouldn't understand.

**HARPER:** I'm trying to understand!

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**MAMA DIDI:** It's like a tornado tore through his mind and took things away.

**HARPER:** What?

**DEBORAH ANN:** He's lost his ability to use and understand language.

**HARPER:** I don't understand.

**MAMA DIDI:** He lost his alphabet.

**HARPER:** Oh.

*(Beat.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** He still has one word: wait.

**HARPER:** "Wait"?!

**MAMA DIDI:** It means stop, no, and just about anything else you can imagine.

**HARPER:** Then how do you understand him?

**MAMA DIDI:** How? I don't.

*(Beat.)*

**HARPER:** I want to be alone with him!

**DEBORAH ANN:** I don't think that...

**HARPER:** Let me talk to Papa Leo!

**DEBORAH ANN:** What part of no do you not understand?

**HARPER:** You didn't say no. You said...

**MAMA DIDI:** *(To DEBORAH ANN)* It's okay, honey.

**DEBORAH ANN:** No, it's not okay.

**MAMA DIDI:** Let him make choices. Didn't you tell me...

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Resigned)* I know, I know. He has to find his way.

*(She sighs.)*

All right, Harper. We'll be in the kitchen.

**HARPER:** Thanks, Mom.

**MAMA DIDI:** Let me get you something to eat.

*(DEBORAH ANN follows MAMA DIDI into the kitchen, on the other side of the stage. She carries her suitcases with her. There is a plate of food waiting on the table.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'm not hungry. We ate in the car.

**MAMA DIDI:** Oh, I'm sure you're hungry again.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Mama, I'm a big girl. I know when I'm hungry.

*(DEBORAH ANN glances at HARPER through the archway. HARPER turns off the static and stands in front of the television.)*

**HARPER:** Hi, Papa Leo. It's me... Harper!

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

**HARPER:** It's all right. We'll wait.

*(DEBORAH ANN steps away from the archway.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** How's Harper doing?

**DEBORAH ANN:** He's "finding his way."

**MAMA DIDI:** Someone his age should understand...

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**DEBORAH ANN:** He has autism. He's not like Martha's kids. He sees the world differently.

**MAMA DIDI:** So does your father. How are you doing?

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'm lost.

*(Beat.)*

Papa could tell me stories and made everything right. What do I do now?

*(HARPER opens the front door.)*

**HARPER:** Do you remember the doorbell?

*(The doorbell rings. DEBORAH ANN goes into the living room.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Son, don't play with that.

**MAMA DIDI:** It's okay, but I have to lock the front door.

*(MAMA DIDI does so and DEBORAH ANN follows her.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** You lock yourself in?

**MAMA DIDI:** I have to keep him safe.

*(To HARPER.)*

Harper, we need to keep the doors locked. We don't want Papa Leo to disappear.

**HARPER:** He can disappear?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Not exactly...

**MAMA DIDI:** Not if we're careful.

**HARPER:** I'll remember.

*(Beat.)*

I have to talk to Papa Leo... alone.

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Beat.)* All right. Call me if you need me.

**HARPER:** I need Papa Leo.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Right.

*(The women return to the kitchen, DEBORAH ANN glances in at HARPER.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Hurt.)* Must be nice to be needed.

**MAMA DIDI:** *(Also hurt.)* Must be.

*(MAMA DIDI continues to set the plate while HARPER hums the Westminster chimes.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Did you find a place to park out there?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Half a block away.

**MAMA DIDI:** The Shakespeare Festival gets bigger every summer.

**HARPER:** I'll help you find your alphabet. I lost something too.

*(HARPER produces a picture of his father; either a photograph or one he has created himself.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Do you think it's a good idea to leave those two together?

**MAMA DIDI:** Sometimes a boy needs a man.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Doesn't he need his mother?

**MAMA DIDI:** You're here. His father's not.

**HARPER:** This is my Dad. His name is David. He's coming back.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Mother, I said I'm not hungry!

**MAMA DIDI:** I know you, honey.

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**DEBORAH ANN:** What part of no...

*(She looks at the plate again, sighs, and takes a bite.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** I can put it in the fridge...

**DEBORAH ANN:** Leave it here...

*(DEBORAH ANN continues to eat, hungrily.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Your father gave you stories; I gave you food.

**HARPER:** He wasn't in Texas. Maybe he's here in Utah.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You'd think God would space these things out a little.

**HARPER:** Remember? His name is David. David!

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

**MAMA DIDI:** God didn't take your husband's life and he didn't take my husband's mind.

**DEBORAH ANN:** How else do you explain it?

**HARPER:** My dog could find him, but he disappeared.

**MAMA DIDI:** Things happen, and when they do, God helps us pick up the pieces.

**DEBORAH ANN:** But why can't he keep the pieces in place?!

**MAMA DIDI:** Because life is a puzzle, and it's our job to put it together.

**HARPER:** I make people disappear, but I won't let it happen to you.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You have such simple answers to such big questions.

**MAMA DIDI:** And you always make things so complicated.

**HARPER:** *(He beeps PAPA LEO's forehead.)* Beep-beep!

**DEBORAH ANN:** Well, you see the world your way and I'll see it mine.

**PAPA LEO:** *(He beeps HARPER's forehead)* Beeeeee!

**HARPER:** You found your B!

**HARPER AND PAPA LEO:** *(PAPA LEO and HARPER beep each other)* Beeeeee!

*Blackout.*

*End of scene.*

**Scene 2** -- *It is the next morning. We hear HARPER trying to play the Westminster chimes on a toy xylophone as the lights come up on him in the kitchen. Every time HARPER makes a mistake, he goes all the way back to the beginning of the song. The A and B keyrings are missing from their usual places on the kitchen keyrack. We see PAPA LEO in the living room weaving on a simple hand-held loom. MAMA DIDI is assisting PAPA LEO. DEBORAH ANN comes through the living room to the kitchen carrying empty suitcases. She sets them down by the basement door and approaches HARPER.*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Morning, Harper. Where did you find that?

**HARPER:** In my room.

**DEBORAH:** That used to be my room, before I got married. What are you doing?

**HARPER:** Playing the doorbell.

*(He makes another mistake and repeats.)*

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**DEBORAH ANN:** If you don't get it right, move on.

**HARPER:** Practice makes perfect!

**DEBORAH ANN:** Who taught you that?

**HARPER:** Daddy.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Oh.

*(Beat.)*

Harper, we both miss your father...

**HARPER:** Can I take xylophone lessons?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Son, listen to me. I know it's hard to accept but...

**HARPER:** We should've brought the piano.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, do you understand what happens when a person dies?

**HARPER:** They don't move, and everyone cries, and then they wake up. It happens all the time.

**DEBORAH ANN:** But it's not...

**HARPER:** Pinocchio, Sleeping Beauty, Baloo, E.T, R2D2...

**DEBORAH ANN:** If they wake up, then they weren't really dead.

**HARPER:** Tinkerbell died, but I believed in her.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Son...

**HARPER:** We clapped our hands and she wasn't dead anymore.

**DEBORAH ANN:** But in real life...

**HARPER:** *(Stubbornly)* I believe in Dad!

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper...

**HARPER:** Yessum?

*(Beat.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Play your xylophone.

*(DEBORAH ANN comes into the living room. She notices PAPA LEO and MAMA DIDI working with the loom. HARPER plays the alphabet song on the xylophone in the kitchen.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** What's that?

**MAMA DIDI:** Weaving. It's like static for the hands. It's part of his therapy. He didn't lose his fingers, just his words. Do you want to help?

**DEBORAH ANN:** I... don't think I can.

**MAMA DIDI:** There's nothing to it...

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'm... just not used to him being like this.

*(She looks forward, out an unseen downstage window.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** What are you staring at?

**DEBORAH ANN:** The D on the mountain. Papa used to tell me it stood for Deborah.

**MAMA DIDI:** It stands for Deseret High School.

**DEBORAH ANN:** In Texas, they don't put letters on mountains.

**MAMA DIDI:** In Texas, they don't have mountains.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Papa doesn't remember me. Does he even remember his letters?

*(Beat)*

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Can I stash our suitcases downstairs?

**MAMA DIDI:** Stuff them in the fruit room. I found another renter for the apartment. She goes to our church.

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(She heads into the kitchen and checks the basement door.)* It's locked.

**MAMA DIDI:** Look on the key-hooks. There's an A key and a B key. A is for attic, B is for basement.

*(DEBORAH ANN searches for the keys on the key rack in the kitchen.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** They've both disappeared.

**MAMA DIDI:** It's the one with the B.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I know my alphabet, Mama.

**MAMA DIDI:** I'll find it. Harper, come keep an eye on Papa Leo?

**HARPER:** Yessum.

*(HARPER goes into the living room with his xylophone. MAMA DIDI goes into the kitchen and searches for the key. She is surprised, and DEBORAH ANN is a bit amused, when she finds it missing.)*

Papa Leo, listen to my alphabet.

*(HARPER plays the alphabet song on his xylophone. PAPA LEO listens attentively.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** I told you it wasn't there. You treat me like a little girl!

**MAMA DIDI:** No I don't, child.

**DEBORAH ANN:** See?!

**MAMA DIDI:** I'm not going to argue with you today.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Do you have a box?

*(MAMA DIDI produces one from the kitchen.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** What do you need it for?

**DEBORAH ANN:** There's too much of my sister in that room.

**MAMA DIDI:** *(She withdraws the box.)* Leave her things alone. She comes back here sometimes.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You keep her room like a museum but you stuffed my things in the attic.

*(She seizes the box.)*

Admit it, Mama. You always liked Martha best.

**MAMA DIDI:** The things you say...

**DEBORAH ANN:** That's okay. I'm Papa's favorite.

**MAMA DIDI:** Oh, child...

**DEBORAH ANN:** And my sister is getting boxed!

**MAMA DIDI:** Wait!

*(DEBORAH ANN exits to the back of the house and MAMA DIDI follows after her. HARPER completes the song.)*

**HARPER:** I brought you some letters.

*(HARPER pulls the A and B keychains out of his pocket and hands them to PAPA LEO.)*

Here. A and B.

*(In the kitchen, we see PICKY, a couple of years older than HARPER, sneak in through the basement door with a nail file in his hand. He tries to watch HARPER and PAPA LEO through the arch without being noticed.)*

**PAPA LEO:** Beeeeee...

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**HARPER:** Right.

*(He sings.)*

A, B....

**PAPA LEO:** *(PAPA LEO holds up the B and makes the connection.)* B! B!

**HARPER:** Yes!

**PAPA LEO:** B!

**HARPER:** Wait! There's someone in the kitchen.

*(HARPER looks through the archway and sees PICKY, who was unable to escape before being seen. HARPER makes an audible response.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Offstage.)* Everything all right in there, Harper?

**HARPER:** I think so.

**MAMA DIDI:** *(Offstage.)* What's Papa Leo doing?

*(HARPER looks at PAPA LEO, who fondles the letter B intently.)*

**HARPER:** Reading a letter.

*(To PICKY)*

Hi.

**PICKY:** Hi.

**HARPER:** Are you a burglar?

**PICKY:** No. I live in the basement.

**HARPER:** Oh.

**PAPA LEO:** B!

**HARPER:** Does Mama Didi know?

**PICKY:** *(He laughs.)* Yeah!

**HARPER:** Then I guess it's okay. How did you get in here?

**PICKY:** Through basement the door.

**HARPER:** I locked it, and Papa Leo has the key!

**PICKY:** I make my own keys.

*(He shows the nail file and holds out his hand.)*

I'm Picky.

**HARPER:** I'm not. I eat everything on my plate.

**PICKY:** No, I mean, that's my name, or that's what they call me.

**HARPER:** Oh. I'm Harper.

*(Loudly.)*

Mama, there's a boy in here!

**PICKY:** Wait! I'm not supposed to be upstairs!

**PAPA LEO:** B!

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Offstage.)* Is there someone in there, Harper?

**HARPER:** Not really.

**PICKY:** Is that your grandpa?

**HARPER:** Don't touch him. I'm watching him.

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**PICKY:** Is he all there?

**HARPER:** Yep. That's all of him.

**PICKY:** I mean is he, you know, stupid?

**HARPER:** He's not stupid!

**PICKY:** Sorry...

**HARPER:** He lost his alphabet and I'm helping him find it!

*(Beat.)*

Does Mama Didi let you out sometimes?

**PICKY:** My Mom and I have our own door. Duh!

**HARPER:** She lives down there too?

**PICKY:** Yeah!

**HARPER:** Does Mama Didi know?

**PICKY:** My mom pays her rent, or she's supposed to. There's an apartment down there.

**HARPER:** What about your dad?

**PICKY:** He writes me postcards. See?

*(PICKY produces a postcard.)*

Mount Rushmore, you know, where they carved the faces on the rock?

**HARPER:** Oh yeah! I have a puzzle like that!

**PICKY:** We could put it together.

**HARPER:** It's back in Texas. Who are those guys?

**PICKY:** The Forefathers of Our Country.

**HARPER:** Yep. There's four of them.

**PICKY:** That's Washington, that's Lincoln, and that's Jefferson.

**HARPER:** Who's the fourth one?

**PICKY:** I don't know. I think he's the Unknown Forefather.

*(Beat.)*

Do you have a dad?

**HARPER:** He's coming back.

**PICKY:** That's what they all say.

*(PICKY picks up the book of Shakespeare's plays from the top of the television.)*

Hey look! Shakespeare's plays!

**HARPER:** What are they doing here?

**PICKY:** I never knew what this was.

**HARPER:** Papa Leo used to talk about Shakespeare. He'd visit me in Texas. He said Shakespeare tells really good stories.

**PICKY:** Stories for the stage. They act them out in that big outdoor theatre.

**HARPER:** Papa Leo said he'd take me there, if we ever came to Utah.

**PICKY:** *(He nods)* Now it's too late.

**HARPER:** It's not too late! He'll take me there, as soon as he finds his alphabet.

**PICKY:** You have to have tickets.

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**HARPER:** How do you get tickets?

**PICKY:** You have to have money. I think they just want to keep me out.

**HARPER:** Have you been in Shakespeare's theatre?

**PICKY:** *(He shows his nail file.)* They can't keep me out when I want to get in.

*(He picks up the book.)*

Can I borrow it?

*(PAPA LEO approaches the television, carrying the B key.)*

**PAPA LEO:** B! B! B! B!

**HARPER:** It's not yours! It's Papa Leo's!

**PICKY:** *(He hears DEBORAH ANN approaching and sets the book back on the television.)*

I've got to go!

**HARPER:** Wait!

*(PICKY disappears through the stairway door before DEBORAH ANN appears in the living room. She carries the box, now full of her sister's things.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, have you seen... oh.

*(DEBORAH ANN sees PAPA LEO with the A and B key rings and calls back to MAMA DIDI.)*

I found the keys, Mama. Papa took them.

**MAMA DIDI:** *(Entering the living room and trying to take the keys from PAPA LEO, who resists)* We'll have to hide them from him. He could have hidden them anywhere.

**HARPER:** But Papa Leo needs them to find his alphabet!

*(MAMA DIDI relents, goes to the kitchen, and starts to wash the table.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** We need to get started with the peaches.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, do you want to earn some money?

**HARPER:** I have to watch Papa Leo.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'll watch him. We need you to pick peaches.

**HARPER:** Okay.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Use the buckets on the back porch.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

*(He goes toward the kitchen and turns back.)*

Don't let Papa Leo disappear.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Yessum.

*(HARPER unlocks the back door with his key and heads outside.)*

Where do you want me to put my sister's things? In A or in the B?

**MAMA DIDI:** Put them anywhere you like.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I could throw them in the G.

**MAMA DIDI:** Don't take out your anger on your sister.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I could put it in the living room. She can pick it up her stuff when she comes back.

**MAMA DIDI:** It will be in the way.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Oh, not for long. She comes back all the time, doesn't she?

**MAMA DIDI:** You haven't been home since you've been married, and you didn't rush home when your father

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had his stroke.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I was planning to, when...

*(Beat.)*

I'm here now.

*(DEBORAH ANN sets the box down in the living room. HARPER rings the back doorbell and runs through the back door. He drops the bucket in the kitchen and runs to the living room to hum the last of the notes with PAPA LEO.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, what did I say about the doorbell?

**HARPER:** But Papa Leo likes it.

*(He heads back out the back door.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Papa, I need the keys.

*(PAPA LEO gives DEBORAH ANN the A and B keys and reaches out to touch her face.)*

**PAPA LEO:** Duh... duh... duh...

**DEBORAH ANN:** Deborah. Deborah Ann.

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

*(MAMA DIDI enters and takes the keys from DEBORAH ANN.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'll put my suitcases in the basement.

**MAMA DIDI:** I'll do it. You stay with your Papa.

**DEBORAH ANN:** But I don't know how to...

**MAMA DIDI:** Just be with him.

*(MAMA DIDI exits, unlocking the door to the basement with the B key and taking the suitcases through the door.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Hi, Papa. It's me. Deborah Ann.

*(Beat.)*

Your daughter.

*(She smiles.)*

Your favorite daughter.

*(Beat.)*

Papa, look at me as if you really saw me!

*(Beat.)*

I came home.

*(Beat.)*

Come back to me.

*(The back doorbell rings again and HARPER rushes in, drops off another bucket of peaches, and rushes into the living room to hum the notes with PAPA LEO.)*

Harper, I thought I told you...

*(HARPER hums the doorbell notes again.)*

What are you doing, son?

**HARPER:** I'm helping him remember things.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I don't think he remembers anything.

**HARPER:** The mail truck came. Can I get the mail?

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**DEBORAH ANN:** Lock the door behind you.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

*(HARPER goes out the front door, locking the door behind him. MAMA DIDI emerges from the basement with a box of bottling supplies. DEBORAH ANN joins her in the kitchen and takes the box.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Let me help you.

**MAMA DIDI:** I need some more peaches.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper brought in two buckets...

*(MAMA DIDI looks in the nearly empty buckets.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** A hundred more like these and we'll be in business.

*(The front doorbell rings and HARPER enters. He shuts the door behind him but doesn't lock it and hums the doorbell tune for PAPA LEO. He carries the letter into the kitchen.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Did you lock the door?

**HARPER:** *(Absorbed in the letter)* I think so.

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(She starts for the living room)* I'll check it.

**HARPER:** There's a letter.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Give it to your grandma.

**HARPER:** *(Reading the envelope.)* "Red Cliff Nursing Home..."

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(She stays in the kitchen, forgetting about the front door.)* Give it to me.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

**MAMA DIDI:** Bring it here, honey.

*(She grabs the letter and stashes it.)*

**HARPER:** Yessum. What's a nursing home?

**MAMA DIDI:** Nothing you need to worry about.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Why are you getting a letter from a nursing home?

**MAMA DIDI:** It's junk mail.

**DEBORAH ANN:** The address was handwritten.

**MAMA DIDI:** *(She hands an empty bucket to HARPER.)* Harper, do you think you could fill that up to the top?

**HARPER:** Yessum.

**DEBORAH ANN:** And don't ring the doorbell when you come in.

**HARPER:** *(With a sigh.)* Okay.

*(HARPER takes the bucket and goes out the back door. PAPA LEO continues to weave. MAMA DIDI hands DEBORAH ANN a knife.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Here. Start slicing.

*(DEBORAH ANN does so, with obvious irritation.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Are you sending Papa to a nursing home?!

**MAMA DIDI:** I'm looking at options...

**DEBORAH ANN:** That's not an option!

**MAMA DIDI:** It's an excellent facility, and it's only a few blocks away.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Why didn't you talk to me about this?

**MAMA DIDI:** I was waiting for the right moment.

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**DEBORAH ANN:** You didn't trust me. You're treating me like a child!

**MAMA DIDI:** Martha said she'd help with the cost...

**DEBORAH ANN:** My sister knew and I didn't?!

**MAMA DIDI:** She offered to help.

**DEBORAH ANN:** If she can't give her time, she can always give her money.

**MAMA DIDI:** She's a thousand miles away and has small children.

*(HARPER enters un-noticed through the back door with a bucket of a few peaches.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** You can't send Papa away!

**MAMA DIDI:** I can't keep caring for him here.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Why not? You've been doing it for months.

**MAMA DIDI:** He's not progressing. He might do better in a nursing home. If he could even talk...

**DEBORAH ANN:** I can help...

**MAMA DIDI:** You said you're not staying.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'm... looking at options.

**MAMA DIDI:** You've been through two major losses...

**DEBORAH ANN:** I can take care of myself, and I can take care of Papa!

**MAMA DIDI:** You don't even want to be in the same room with him. It's too painful.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I just need time, and so does he.

**HARPER:** Don't send Papa Leo away.

*(The women turn, embarrassed.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** You shouldn't sneak up on us like that.

**HARPER:** You told me not to ring the doorbell.

**MAMA DIDI:** Honey, this is a grown-up decision. We have to decide what's best for him.

**HARPER:** Does Papa Leo get to decide?

**DEBORAH ANN:** That's a good question, Mama. Does he?

**MAMA DIDI:** He can't make decisions now. I have to make them for him.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Shouldn't this be a family decision?

**HARPER:** He likes it here! I need him here!

**MAMA DIDI:** Harper, he's very confused.

**HARPER:** I'll keep him out of trouble. I promise.

**MAMA DIDI:** It's not that simple. Your mother can't take care of him when she's taking care of you.

**HARPER:** I could go back to Texas.

**DEBORAH ANN:** There's no one there to care for you.

**HARPER:** What if Dad comes back?

*(Beat.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Why don't I go pick?

*(MAMA DIDI goes out the back door with a bucket.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper, your father's not coming back.

**HARPER:** Where did he go?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Well, it's not a place really...

**HARPER:** Heaven?

**DEBORAH ANN:** That's what Mama Didi believes.

**HARPER:** What's it like?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Lots of clouds, I guess.

**HARPER:** Over the rainbow?

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(She laughs slightly.)* Something like that.

**HARPER:** Is Papa Leo going away?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Not if I can help it!

**HARPER:** Are you afraid of him?

**DEBORAH ANN:** No, of course not. I'm... a little uncomfortable. I don't know what to say...

**HARPER:** Here, I'll help you.

**DEBORAH ANN:** No, Harper, I didn't mean...

*(HARPER brings DEBORAH ANN in to PAPA LEO.)*

**HARPER:** Papa Leo, this is my mom. You call her Deborah Ann.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Hi, Papa. Can you hear me?

**HARPER:** Why don't you read him a story?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Oh, I don't know, son. He always used read to me...

**HARPER:** Then it's your turn.

**DEBORAH ANN:** But what would I read to him?

*(She picks up the book of Shakespeare.)*

He used to read me Shakespeare... when I was older... he used to do all the voices...

**HARPER:** *(Patiently)* I don't think he's ready for that yet. He needs pictures.

*(DEBORAH ANN sets the Shakespeare book on the television. HARPER hands her a copy of "The Fairy Tale Alphabet Book.")*

**HARPER:** Here. Show him this one.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I don't know if he'll understand it.

**HARPER:** A is for Alice, B is for Beauty, C is for...

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(She plays along)* Cinderella.

**HARPER:** And...

**DEBORAH ANN:** Cinderella was very beautiful.

**HARPER:** And...

**DEBORAH ANN:** Her father loved her very much.

**HARPER:** And she had an ugly sister!

**DEBORAH ANN:** Oh no, her sister was beautiful, but their mother liked her better, so they stuffed Cinderella in the attic.

**HARPER:** And then...

**DEBORAH ANN:** Her father went on a journey...

**HARPER:** And so Cinderella...

**DEBORAH ANN:** ...asked him to bring her a hazel branch.

**HARPER:** Because...

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**DEBORAH ANN:** Because it would keep growing.

**PAPA LEO:** Sssss.....

**DEBORAH ANN:** It's okay, Papa.

**HARPER:** He's trying to say "Cinderella."

**DEBORAH ANN:** You can do it, Papa. "Cinderella"

**PAPA LEO:** Wait! Sssss....

**HARPER:** He's trying to say C!

**PAPA LEO:** Sssss....

**DEBORAH ANN:** C!

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

**HARPER:** He has to do it by himself.

*(MAMA DIDI returns with a full bucket of peaches. She sets them on the table, notices the letter, opens it, and reads it.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Harper, you're going to have to pick the rest of them.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

*(HARPER goes into the kitchen while DEBORAH ANN stays with PAPA LEO. MAMA DIDI reads her letter on the counter, her back turned to HARPER.)*

**HARPER:** Does anybody live downstairs?

**MAMA DIDI:** Go fill the bucket.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

*(HARPER exits through the back door.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Honey, are you going to help me with the peaches?

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'm taking care of Papa.

**MAMA DIDI:** We need to get this done. I have an appointment this afternoon.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Alright. I'm coming.

*(To PAPA LEO.)*

Come back to me, Papa, and bring me a hazel branch.

*(She kisses him on the forehead.)*

**PAPA LEO:** Duh.... Duh...

**DEBORAH ANN:** Deborah.

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'll wait, but Didi might not.

*(She goes into the kitchen and starts cutting peaches into quarters)*

**MAMA DIDI:** I'll peel, you cut.

**PAPA LEO:** Sssss...

*(PAPA LEO tears the C page from the picture book and holds it against the C book of the encyclopedia, which he removes from the bookshelf. He notices that the next book, the D book is missing and begins removing volumes and placing them around the living room.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Where's Harper?

**MAMA DIDI:** Picking the rest of the peaches. I picked all the lower ones myself.

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Panicked.)* Have you got my son climbing that tree?!

**MAMA DIDI:** Boys are like monkeys. They never fall.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I don't want him to get hurt!

**MAMA DIDI:** Honey, what are you doing to my peaches?

**DEBORAH ANN:** I cut them up.

**MAMA DIDI:** You cut them in quarters.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I never cut them in halves.

**MAMA DIDI:** How's the cottage cheese supposed to stay in a quarter? It'll slip off like a landslide!

*(A rustle and a scream are heard from offstage.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Panicked.)* What was that?!

*(DEBORAH ANN opens the kitchen door HARPER bursts through it with a nosebleed. He is hysterical.)*

**HARPER:** I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die!

**DEBORAH ANN:** You're all right, Harper! You're okay!

**HARPER:** No, I'm not okay! I'm gonna die!

**DEBORAH ANN:** What have you done to yourself?!

**MAMA DIDI:** The child's got a simple nosebleed. Harper, you are not going to die. These things happen.

**DEBORAH ANN:** The boy is scared to death!

**MAMA DIDI:** He's going to be if you don't calm yourself down.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Would you let me take care of my own son?!

**MAMA DIDI:** Don't use my good dish towels! Use some paper towels.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Here, hand me some! Did you fall, Harper?!

**HARPER:** I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die!

**MAMA DIDI:** If he fell, he'd have broken a leg.

**HARPER:** I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die!

**MAMA DIDI:** Probably just slipped and bumped his nose.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Son, you're not going to die!

**MAMA DIDI:** It's just a little blood. There's a lot more where that came from.

**DEBORAH ANN:** You're okay, I mean, you're going to be!

**MAMA DIDI:** There's no reason to get all upset...

**DEBORAH ANN:** He's never had a nosebleed before!

**MAMA DIDI:** Then it's high time he had one.

*(HARPER starts to murmur "Daddy," which is muffled as DEBORAH ANN takes care of him.)*

**HARPER:** Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!

**MAMA DIDI:** Harper, you've already got one woman doting on you!

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Loudly.)* He's not calling for Didi! He's calling for his Daddy!

*(HARPER stops his lament.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** You're Daddy's not here, Harper. I wish he were.

*(To DEBORAH ANN.)*

Send him over here.

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

*(In the living room, PAPA LEO has surrounded himself with the encyclopedias and holds and stares at the C book, comparing it to the C page from the picture book.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** But he still might...

**MAMA DIDI:** You've got him cleaned up. I'll take him.

*(To HARPER)*

Put this between your lip and gum. The best thing you can do is relax. Just take a deep breath, breathe... don't touch it. Papa Leo's in the living room.

**HARPER:** Alright.

**MAMA DIDI:** And don't drip blood on my new carpet.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

*(HARPER runs in the arms of PAPA LEO, who is standing in the living room.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Now do you believe it was dangerous?

**MAMA DIDI:** He wasn't hurt!

*(Beat.)*

To see a grown woman making such a fuss over a little blood.

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Beat.)* You called me a grown woman.

**MAMA DIDI:** You always make so much of things...

**DEBORAH ANN:** No, under your roof, I'll always be your child.

*(Beat.)*

If we're staying in Utah, I'll need my own place.

**MAMA DIDI:** If Papa Leo's staying, I'll need you here.

**DEBORAH ANN:** That boy doesn't need two mothers fussing over him.

**MAMA DIDI:** No. He needs a father.

*(Beat.)*

You're holding on too tight.

**DEBORAH ANN:** But after all Harper's been through...

**MAMA DIDI:** I mean the peach! You're bruising it.

*(The peach slips out of DEBORAH ANN's hand.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** I'll go pick.

**MAMA DIDI:** I'll help you. Harper, we'll be right outside.

**HARPER:** Yessum.

**PAPA LEO:** *(Pointing at the C encyclopedia volume and the C page)* Wait! Wait!

**HARPER:** What?

*(HARPER sees the books around him.)*

Papa Leo! What have you done?!

*(PICKY bursts through the basement door and rushes into the living room.)*

**PICKY:** What's wrong? What did he do?

**HARPER:** He tore out a page and he took apart the alphabet books!

**PICKY:** The encyclopedias?

*(PICKY starts to pick up the books, HARPER heads for the kitchen and the back door.)*

**HARPER:** I'm going to tell Mama Didi!

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**PICKY:** (*Blocking HARPER*) You'll get him in trouble!

**HARPER:** (*Breaking away*) He deserves it!

**PICKY:** Your grandma's going to send him away.

**HARPER:** (*He stops. Beat.*) What?

**PICKY:** Your grandma wants to send him to a nursing home.

**HARPER:** How do you know?

**PICKY:** I heard her. She said she's going to send him there unless he can learn how to talk.

**HARPER:** I don't believe you.

*(HARPER heads for the kitchen window as PAPA LEO wanders out the front door, taking the C book and C page with him as if it were a map.)*

**PICKY:** (*He blocks HARPER again.*) That's what the letter said.

**HARPER:** I'm not listening!

**PICKY:** (*PICKY grabs the letter from the table.*) Here's the letter. Look!

**HARPER:** (*He covers his ears and sings to cover PICKY's voice.*) A, B, C, D, E, F, G (etc.)

**PICKY:** They say they have a place for him, but she has to decide by tomorrow.

*(He grabs HARPER and makes him look at the letter.)*

You can't make things not true by not believing!

*(Beat.)*

**HARPER:** We have to put the books back.

**PICKY:** It's easy. They're in alphabetical order.

*(HARPER and PICKY are so anxious in their efforts to re-shelf the books that they don't realize that PAPA LEO isn't in the room..)*

**HARPER:** A... B... I can't find C or D.

**PICKY:** Just move on. Here's E.

**HARPER:** F, G, H...

**PICKY:** I, J...

**HARPER:** I can't lose Papa Leo! He's the only grandpa I've ever had!

**PICKY:** Take it easy. We're getting it. We're getting it.

**HARPER:** I can't find C and D!

**PICKY:** Move on!

**HARPER:** It has to be perfect!

**PICKY:** All right, I'll go get the D from downstairs.

**HARPER:** You stole it?

**PICKY:** I borrowed it.

*(PICKY disappears down the basement stairs just before DEBORAH ANN enters.)*

**HARPER:** Wait!

*(HARPER runs into DEBORAH ANN.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** What's going on?

**HARPER:** I'm putting it back together! It's all my fault!

**DEBORAH ANN:** How's Papa Leo?

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**HARPER:** *(He gasps and rushes for the front door.)* Papa Leo.

*(DEBORAH ANN follows fast behind HARPER. MAMA DIDI comes in through the back door.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** You let him disappear?!

**HARPER:** I tried not to!

**MAMA DIDI:** What's wrong? Where's Leo?

**DEBORAH ANN:** He's gone!

**HARPER:** He's coming back!

**MAMA DIDI:** Why is the front door unlocked?!

**HARPER:** I forgot to lock it.

**DEBORAH ANN:** I forgot to check it.

**HARPER:** Sorry!

**MAMA DIDI:** Sorry don't feed the bulldog. I'll check the front yard, you check the bedrooms.

**HARPER:** I'll check the backyard.

*(A Westminster doorbell chime is heard.)*

**DEBORAH ANN:** Harper! No fooling around! Your grandpa's in real danger!

**HARPER:** Sorry.

*(HARPER uses his key to open the back door and leads PAPA LEO inside. PAPA LEO still clutches the C book and the C page.)*

**PAPA LEO:** Duh... duh...

**HARPER:** Where have you been? You're not supposed to go outside!

**PAPA LEO:** Duh... duh... duh...

**HARPER:** You've got to be good or you'll be sent away!

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

*(PAPA LEO points out the window to the letter D on the mesa and looks at the C book.)*

Duh...

**HARPER:** It's the letter that comes after C... A, B, C...

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

**HARPER:** All right. We'll wait.

*(PAPA LEO continues to stand and stare. HARPER hides the picture and stands beside him. DEBORAH ANN enters the living room just as MAMA DIDI comes through the front door.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Leo! Thank heavens!

**DEBORAH ANN:** Where was he?

**HARPER:** He came back.

**MAMA DIDI:** From where?

**DEBORAH ANN:** What are you doing?

**HARPER:** We're waiting.

**MAMA DIDI:** I wait, but nothing ever changes.

*(Beat.)*

What's he staring at? The tree? The mountain? The big letter...

**HARPER:** He'll get it if you wait.

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

**DEBORAH ANN:** It won't happen again.

**HARPER:** We have to keep the doors locked.

**DEBORAH ANN:** If he's going to stay here.

*(DEBORAH ANN takes out her key and carefully locks both doors.)*

**HARPER:** Is Papa Leo going away?

**MAMA DIDI:** We have to make some difficult decisions. We can talk in my room. Harper, can you stay with Papa Leo?

**HARPER:** Yessum.

**DEBORAH ANN:** Don't let him out of your sight.

*(MAMA DIDI and DEBORAH ANN exit to the back of the house.)*

**PAPA LEO:** *(with a gesture)* Duh! Duh! Duh!

**HARPER:** *(repeating the gesture and the sound)* Duh! Duh! DUH!

*(The two continue the sound and gesture as if drumming in a tribal ceremony.)*

**PAPA LEO AND HARPER:** Duh! Duh! DUH!

Duh! Duh! DUH!

Duh! Duh! DUH!

Duh! Duh! DUH!

**PAPA LEO:** Wait!

*(PAPA LEO stops and HARPER stops with him. HARPER plays the first four tones of the alphabet song on the xylophone. Something starts to spark in PAPA LEO's mind but it is still unclear. HARPER tries again and PAPA LEO gets closer. HARPER then sings the letters.)*

**HARPER:** A, B, C...

**PAPA LEO:** *(Triumphantly)* D!

**HARPER:** Yes!

**PAPA LEO:** *(Pointing to the mountain)* D!

**HARPER:** Yes!

**PAPA LEO:** Yes!

**HARPER:** You said yes!

**PAPA LEO:** Wait... *(singing)* A, B, C, D... D... D...

*(He points down the hall)*

Didi! Didi! Didi!

**HARPER:** Yes! Mama Didi! Mama Didi!

*(MAMA DIDI and DEBORTH ANN rush in.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** What's the matter, Harper?

**DEBORAH ANN:** Is Papa Leo okay?

**HARPER:** Wait! Listen!

*(HARPER points out the window)*

**PAPA LEO:** *(Triumphantly)* W!

*(He is crestfallen)*

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**MAMA DIDI:** W! A W doesn't look anything like a D.

**HARPER:** W starts with D.

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(entering)* What's the matter? Is Papa okay?

**MAMA DIDI:** He's still confused. Harper thought he learned something.

**PAPA LEO:** Wait! Wait! Wait!

**HARPER:** That's right, Papa Leo. Wait starts with W.

**PAPA LEO:** *(Rapidly, like a machine gun volley)* D,D,D,D,D,D,D... *(etc.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** Now you've got him all worked up.

**HARPER:** I'll help him calm down.

*(HARPER sits PAPA LEO in his chair and turns the old television to static. PAPA LEO quiets.)*

**MAMA DIDI:** He needs a nursing home.

**DEBORAH ANN:** He needs a home.

*(DEBORAH ANN exits down the hall and MAMA DIDI follows. PAPA LEO takes HARPER's hand and looks at him intensely.)*

**PAPA LEO:** *(Softly, almost poetically)* Damn.

*(The volume of the static goes up as the lights go down.)*

*Blackout.*

**End of scene.**

**Scene 3** -- *It is early the next morning. We hear the Westminster chimes as HARPER runs in through the front door waving a postcard excitedly. Finding no one in the living room or kitchen, HARPER calls to DEBORAH ANN down the hall.*

**HARPER:** Mama! Mama! Look what I got in the mail!

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Offstage)* Make sure you lock the front door.

*(HARPER locks the front door with his key.)*

**HARPER:** I locked it. I found something in the mailbox!

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Offstage)* Mail doesn't come till afternoon.

**HARPER:** But there was something in there this morning! It's a miracle!

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Offstage)* I'm not dressed yet. Show it to me later.

**HARPER:** But this is important!

**DEBORAH ANN:** *(Offstage)* Wait!

**HARPER:** *(With an impatient sigh.)* Yessum.

*(PICKY enters through the basement door.)*

**PICKY:** What's going on? I could hear you all the way downstairs.

**HARPER:** I got a postcard... from my dad!

**PICKY:** I told you he'd write. It would be terrible if he went away and never sent you anything.

**HARPER:** It's a postcard of Shakespeare's theatre! You told me to check the mailbox this morning and you were right!

**PUZZLES** by J.D. Newman

**PICKY:** Wow! What does he say?

**HARPER:** "Hi Harper, I'm sorry I had to go away. It's for a good reason, but it's secret. You know I wouldn't forget you. I love you. Dad. P.S. I'm sorry I didn't say goodbye."

**HARPER:** Wow! I've gotta go tell Mom!

**PICKY:** Wait! He said it was secret, didn't he?

**HARPER:** Can't I tell my mom and Mama Didi?

**PICKY:** He doesn't want you tell anyone.

**HARPER:** Then I shouldn't have told you.

**PICKY:** But I'm your friend!

**HARPER:** I've gotta find him, Picky!

**DEBORAH ANN** (*Offstage*) Who are you talking to, Harper?

**HARPER:** Myself.

(*To PICKY.*)

I've got to find him!

**PICKY:** But you don't know where he is.

**HARPER:** This is a clue to the puzzle.... I've got it! He's hiding in Shakespeare's theatre!

**PICKY:** What?!

**HARPER:** Where else would he get the postcard?

**PICKY:** Why would he hide in a theatre?

**HARPER:** He said he was an actor when he was in college.

**PICKY:** Look, maybe I should tell you...

**HARPER:** I'm going to go look for him.

**PICKY:** Wait!

**HARPER:** I've got to go now! I've got to find him! It's Papa Leo's only chance!

**PICKY:** What does Papa Leo have to do with this?

**HARPER:** Mama Didi will listen to my dad. He'll tell her to keep Papa Leo!

**PICKY:** Are you sure?

**HARPER:** I'm going!

**PICKY:** Okay, then I'm going with you.

**HARPER:** Let's go!

**PICKY:** But if we don't find him, promise you won't go over there again.

**HARPER:** I promise! Come on!

(*To DEBORAH ANN, offstage.*)

I'm going outside.

**DEBORAH ANN** (*Offstage*) Stay in the back yard and...

**HARPER:** (*He locks the basement door with the B key and unlocks the back door with his own key.*)

I know. I'll lock the door. Don't let Papa Leo disappear.

(*HARPER and PICKY exit through the back door.*)

*Blackout. End of Scene.*

(*SCENES 4, 5, & 6 fill up 16 additional pages*)