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In the original production, the characters of YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE moved together on the outside edges of the stage. Through the use of lighting, they move in and out of focus, reacting to each other and reacting the dialogue going on between FATHER and WILLIE.

FATHER and WILLIE can see YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE - they are scenarios that WILLIE is sharing. YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE do not interact with FATHER and WILLIE until the scene on the pier toward the end of the play when FATHER calls to YOUNG WILLIE.

WELCOME

Once FATHER sits at the beginning, he stays there until the end of the play. WILLIE wanders around the room throughout.

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FATHER and WILLIE can see YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE - they are memories that WILLIE is sharing. YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE do not interact with FATHER and WILLIE until the scene on the pier toward the end of the play when FATHER calls to YOUNG WILLIE.

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The lights are out. John Coltrane's Welcome begins to play in the darkness. Let it play for about a minute.

The lights go up to a silhouette of YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE on a bed, playing cards. WILLIE bursts in and begins to pace. The music fades. The room consists of the bed, two chairs, a television, and a mirror facing the audience. WILLIE looks in the mirror a few times, moving on quickly, until he finally stops and stares directly into it.

WILLIE:

Hold your kids, tight. When you let them go, let them know why.

FATHER:

(Offstage) What the hell are you going to do with your life? Sit around all day listening to that fat idiot on the radio?

(Comes onstage, fade lights up)

What are you doing up here?

WILLIE:

Reflecting.

FATHER:

Are you that good looking?

(No answer)

You're acting like a little kid, Willie, running up here, slamming the door. I just don't understand, that's all I said. You say you want to write, why don't you write?

WILLIE:

You wouldn't want to read what I write.

FATHER:

I'd love to. I've been waiting to.

(Pulls up chair to center stage and sits)

WILLIE:

(Pauses) When I was about four years old, I used to look in the mirror every morning, practicing saying hello to my stepmother.

(Steps away from the mirror)

YOUNG WILLIE:

(Gets up and looks in the mirror)

Hello Mama Jo. Hello, Mama Jo. Hello, Mama Jo.

STEPMOTHER:

(Offstage)

Get ready to go to your mother's.

YOUNG WILLIE:

Hello, Mama Jo.

WILLIE:

I remember you walking me up the stairs to Mom's apartment in Old Town. I threw myself back down and ran to your car and locked myself in. I was looking out at you, through my tears, shaking my head no.

I didn't want to leave you, Dad.

FATHER:

You didn't know what you wanted. I'd take you to your mother's, and you didn't want to go. Then, I'd come back Sunday and you didn't want to leave.

WILLIE:

Then there was the time I thought you were coming to take me back...

YOUNG WILLIE:

I don't wanna go.

WILLIE:

...but you weren't. You were coming to say goodbye. Ruthie and I were moving to California with Mom...and Larry.

LARRY:

(Offstage, and scary) Yeah, Willie, you remember, we're all movin' to San Francisco. You're real into it.

YOUNG WILLIE:

I don't wanna go.

WILLIE:

Great, huh?

FATHER:

Hey, I never knew about him.

WILLIE:

Well, let me tell you about Larry, Dad. Mom felt he had "supernatural powers". They "communicated" with their minds. He had complete control over her life. It was his idea that we move West, and you let us go.

FATHER:

Oh no. I fought like hell for you. Even if I didn't know about this Larry guy, I told your mother it was wrong to take you to California. I fired my lawyer on the spot because he was making deals with your mother's lawyer. You give me this case, I'll give you the next one. Nobody cared about the kids.

I told the judge he was making a big mistake. He said, "Now wait a minute Mr. Shaw, you're out of order." What order? I had no control.

WILLIE:

When we got to California, we settled on a houseboat in Sausalito. You know what it was like, a late 60's hippie community.

Even though he was gone half the time, Larry continued to dominate our lives.

YOUNG WILLIE:

Can I go out and play?

WILLIE:

Ruthie and I had to sit around the boat and share Mom's depression while she nursed the bruises Larry left behind; and still she wondered where he was.

YOUNG WILLIE:

I have to go to the bathroom.

(Moves across stage and exits as WILLIE talks)

WILLIE:

I'd excuse myself to go to the bathroom, in the back of the boat, and I'd climb out the window and escape. Ruthie'd always give me enough of a head start before she'd scream...

RUTHIE:

That little brat's climbing out the window again!

WILLIE:

Mom'd run after me. Ruthie'd stew, jealous, but glad one of us could escape.

I'd wander around from boat to boat, making friends. A lot of people were doing a lot of drugs in those days, Dad.

I once saw a guy sitting on a rock after he'd been stabbed seventeen times. I touched him.

FATHER:

Was he dead?

WILLIE:

No. He survived. He came back.

I saw two people on acid making love in the mud at low tide. See, the boats had no plumbing, so whatever went in the toilets went to the bottom of the bay. The mud was made of shit - and those two humped in it like it was a waterbed. Ruthie saw them.

RUTHIE:

You are the grossest pigs I've ever seen in my life.

WILLIE:

I used to fall off the docks a lot. That's about the only thing that used to make Ruthie smile - her clumsy little brother returning from his daring escape soaking wet.

YOUNG WILLIE:

(Enters toward RUTHIE)

Full of shit.

RUTHIE:

(Backs away from the smell of YOUNG WILLIE)

FATHER:

(Amused)

Full of shit?

WILLIE:

(Not amused)

Yeah, full of shit.

When I'd come home, Mom'd never remember I was gone. She had a lot on her mind.

The one time she did realize I was gone and went out to look for me, she was picked up by the police, for being confused. That's when they put her away. Ruthie and I were on our own. She was thirteen and I was eight. No mother. No father.

I used to wander around the foster home in a daze. Ruthie'd have to yell at me, which was about the only thing that made me feel better. The time the foster mother pulled my pants down and spanked me for being late, Ruthie backed her up against the wall...

RUTHIE:

You touch my little brother again, and I'll fucking kill you.

WILLIE:

Ruthie said the father was a pervert.

FATHER:

If I had known...

WILLIE:

You could've found out.

FATHER:

Nobody would tell me where you were. Even if I had come out there, I still couldn't have seen you. You were wards of the state. Bullshit. You were my kids. I called, but Ruthie wouldn't let me talk to you.

WILLIE:

She was mad.

FATHER:

She was scared, Willie.

WILLIE:

She was mad, Dad.

When we went home, and Mom was at the front door, we could tell right away she was more confused than when they took her away. Before, she wouldn't leave the house. Now, she wouldn't leave her room. I had to stay at home. No escapes. She couldn't take the worry.

(Lights dim on FATHER and WILLIE, then come up on YOUNG WILLIE and RUTHIE sitting upstage center playing cards in front of the television, which faces downstage and is not on. FATHER and WILLIE observe the scene in front of them)

YOUNG WILLIE:

People loved him.

RUTHIE:

People hated him.

YOUNG WILLIE:

Why did they shoot him?

RUTHIE:

He wanted them to change.

YOUNG WILLIE:

They call me honky, say they're gonna beat my butt. They beat Jilly Lester's butt real bad.

RUTHIE:

I know, Willie.

YOUNG WILLIE:

There was another bomb threat today. Did you have a bomb threat?

RUTHIE:

Not today.

YOUNG WILLIE:

We walked up the hill behind the school, standing in line, looking down, waiting for it to blow.

Who wants to bomb the school?

RUTHIE:

I don't know. Blacks want a black principal. Whites want no changes.

(Turns on television)

NEWSCASTER:

In local news, the man calling himself the Zodiac killer, claiming to have murdered at least thirteen people in the San Francisco area, has sent a message in the form of a greeting card to our station. The front of the card, as you can see, says, "Sorry I haven't written," and on the inside, "but I've been busy." On the card he details his next "feat", as he calls it. It says, and I quote, "I'm going to crouch down in the bushes alongside the road, and when a school bus drives by I'm going to shoot the tires out, and then pluck off all the little kiddies as they bounce off the bus. School officials have responded..."

(RUTHIE turns off the television and walks away distressed, YOUNG WILLIE follows to comfort her. Lights dim on them)

(Lights come up on WILLIE and FATHER)

WILLIE:

Police cars followed each school bus, except ours. Ours was followed by a guy named Bill, this janitor, in his pick-up, with a rifle in the gun rack.

WILLIE:

That's when I wrote you and asked if I could come back.

FATHER:

And JoAnn and I came to California.

WILLIE:

Yeah, to talk about it.

You and I went off together and were alone on the pier. You asked me why I wanted to come back.

FATHER:

And all you could do was cry.

WILLIE:

And all you could do was ask me why I was crying.

I was fucking scared, Dad.

(Pause)

Later, when we were all together, JoAnn said if I came back alone, I'd screw everything up. Ruthie had to come, too.

STEPMOTHER:

(Offstage)

I don't see why you would want to stay with a mother who would bring her kids up in a place like this.

RUTHIE:

It's better than being your fucking slave. (To YOUNG WILLIE) Come on, let's go.

(Pulls YOUNG WILLIE away toward offstage)

WILLIE:

Dad, Mom would've died if Ruthie had left.

FATHER:

(To YOUNG WILLIE)

Willie!

YOUNG WILLIE:

(Pulls away from RUTHIE, stares at FATHER)

FATHER:

You're still my son.

YOUNG WILLIE:

(To RUTHIE) He says I'm still his son.

RUTHIE:

He doesn't want you.

YOUNG WILLIE:

He says I'm still his son!

RUTHIE:

I want you. That's all I can give you. Who cares if he doesn't want you? Let's go.

(RUTHIE and YOUNG WILLIE exit)

FATHER:

(Turns to WILLIE)

Wait a minute. I took you back. And I knew if I did, my marriage was through.

WILLIE:

All the following years of screaming by her, and drinking by you, I kept remembering that day in the car when she said if I came back, I'd screw everything up.

FATHER:

It wasn't your fault.

WILLIE:

And at night, when you thought I was asleep, I would stare at the ceiling and listen while she tried to convince you to send me away to boarding school.

FATHER:

But I stuck by you, through all of it.

Listen, Willie. Write this down.

I never relaxed once for fifteen years. I'd be driving home from work on Lake Shore Drive and it would hit me. My kids were 2,000 miles away, in a foster home, or on a houseboat with their mother who'd just gotten out of an institution. What kind of a father was I? I'd have to pull my car over to the side. I'd sit there for a long time, a grown man in a suit with his head on the steering wheel, crying.

WILLIE:

Crying?

FATHER:

Yeah, crying.

Believe me, Willie, I understand. You weren't the only one who was scared, but we've got to move on. You have to start building a life.

WILLIE:

I want to.

FATHER:

All I'm asking is that you try.

WILLIE:

(Pauses for a long moment)

I need help.

(FATHER gets up from chair and moves toward WILLIE as the lights fade to black. Welcome begins to play again)

