

MAMA. I thought Dawson told you not to go up those stairs.

JESSIE. (*Going up.*) He did.

MAMA. I don't like the idea of a gun, Jess.

JESSIE. (*Calling down from the attic.*) Which shoebox, do you remember?

MAMA. Black.

JESSIE. The box was black?

MAMA. The shoes were black.

JESSIE. That doesn't help much, Mother.

MAMA. I'm not trying to help, sugar. (*No answer.*) We don't have anything anybody'd want, Jessie. I mean, I don't even want what we got, Jessie.

JESSIE. Neither do I. Wash your hands. (*Mama gets up now and crosses to stand under the ladder.*)

MAMA. You come down from there before you have a fit. I can't come up and get you, you know.

JESSIE. I know.

MAMA. We'll just hand it over to 'em when they come, how's that? Whatever they want, the criminals.

JESSIE. That's a good idea, Mama.

MAMA. Ricky will grow out of this and be a real fine boy, Jess. But I have to tell you, I wouldn't want Ricky to know we had a gun in the house.

JESSIE. Here it is. I found it.

MAMA. It's just something Ricky's going through. Maybe he's in with some bad people. He just needs some time, sugar. He'll get back in school or get a job or one day you'll get a call and he'll say he's sorry for all the trouble he's caused and invite you out for supper someplace dressup.

JESSIE. (*Coming back down the stairs now.*) Don't worry. It's not for him, it's for me.

MAMA. I didn't think you would shoot your own boy, Jessie. I know you've felt like it, well, we've all felt like shooting somebody, but we don't do it. I just don't think we need . . .

JESSIE. (*Interrupting.*) Your hands aren't washed. Do you want a manicure or not?

MAMA. Yes I do, but . . .

JESSIE. (*Crossing to the chair.*) Then wash your hands and don't talk to me any more about Ricky. Those two rings he took were the last valuable things I had so now he's started in on other people, door to door. I hope they put him away sometime. I'd turn him in, myself, if I knew where he was.

MAMA. You don't mean that.

JESSIE. Every word. Wash your hands and that's the last time I'm telling you. (*Jessie sits down with the gun and starts cleaning it, pushing the cylinder out, checking to see that the chambers and barrel are empty, then putting some oil on a small patch of cloth and pushing it through the barrel with the push rod that was in the box. Mama goes to the kitchen and washes her hands, as instructed, trying not to show her concern about the gun.*)

MAMA. I shoulda got you to bring down that milk can. Agnes Fletcher sold hers to somebody with a flea market for forty dollars apiece.

JESSIE. I'll go back and get it in a minute. There's a wagon wheel up there too. There's even a churn. I'll get it all if you want.

Start

MAMA. (*Coming over now, taking over now.*) What are you doing?

JESSIE. The barrel has to be clean, Mama. Old powder, dust gets in it . . .

MAMA. What for?

JESSIE. I told you.

MAMA. (*Reaching for the gun.*) And I told you, we don't get criminals out here.

JESSIE. (*Quickly pulling it to her.*) And I told you . . . (*Then trying to be calm.*) The gun is for me.

MAMA. Well you can have it if you want. When I die, you'll get it all anyway.

JESSIE. I'm going to kill myself, Mama.

MAMA. (*Returning to the sofa.*) Very funny. Very funny.
JESSIE. I am.
MAMA. (*Quickly, irritated.*) You are not! Don't even say such a thing, Jessie.
JESSIE. How would you know if I didn't say it? You want it to be a surprise? You're lying there in your bed or maybe you're just brushing your teeth and you hear this . . . noise down the hall?
MAMA. Kill yourself.
JESSIE. Shoot myself. In a couple of hours.
MAMA. It must be time for your medicine.
JESSIE. Took it already.
MAMA. Then what's the matter with you?
JESSIE. Not a thing. Feel fine.
MAMA. You feel fine. You're just going to kill yourself.
JESSIE. Waited until I felt good enough, in fact.
MAMA. Don't make jokes, Jessie. I'm too old for jokes.
JESSIE. It's not a joke, Mama. (*Mama watches for a moment in silence.*)
MAMA. That gun's no good, you know. He broke it right before he died. He dropped it in the mud one day.
JESSIE. Seems O.K. (*Jessie spins the chamber, cocks the pistol and pulls the trigger. The gun is not yet loaded, so all we hear is the click, but it will definitely work. It's also obvious that Jessie knows her way around a gun. Mama cannot speak.*) I had Cecil's all ready in there, just in case I couldn't find this one, but I'd rather use Daddy's.
MAMA. Those bullets are at least 15 years old.
JESSIE. (*Pulls out another box.*) These are from last week.
MAMA. Where did you get those?
JESSIE. Feed store Dawson told me about.
MAMA. Dawson!
JESSIE. I told him I was worried about prowlers. He said he thought it was a good idea. He told me what kind to ask for.
MAMA. If he had any idea . . .
JESSIE. He took it as a compliment. He thought I might be

taking an interest in things. He got through telling me all about the bullets and then he said we ought to talk like this more often.
MAMA. And where was I while this was going on?
JESSIE. On the phone with Agnes. About the milk can, I guess. Anyway, I asked Dawson if he thought they'd send me some bullets and he said he's just call for me, because he *knew* they'd send them if he told them to. And he was absolutely right. Here they are.
MAMA. How could he do that?
JESSIE. Just trying to help, Mama.
MAMA. And then I told you where the gun was.
JESSIE. (*Smiling, enjoying this joke.*) See? Everybody's doing what they can.
MAMA. You told me it was for protection!
JESSIE. It *is*! I'm still doing your nails, though. Want to try that new Chinaberry color?
MAMA. Well, I'm calling Dawson right now. We'll just see what he has to say about this little stunt.
JESSIE. Dawson doesn't have any more to do with this.
MAMA. He's your brother.
JESSIE. And that's all.
MAMA. (*Stands up, moves toward the phone.*) Dawson will put a stop to this. Yes he will. He'll take the gun away.
JESSIE. If you call him, I'll just have to do it before he gets here. Soon as you hang up the phone, I'll just walk in the bedroom and lock the door.
MAMA. You will not! This is crazy talk, Jessie!
JESSIE. Dawson will get here just in time to help you clean up. Go ahead, call him. Then call the police. Then call the funeral home. Then call Loretta and see if *she'll* do your nails. (*Mama goes directly to the telephone and starts to dial, but Jessie is fast, coming up behind her and taking the receiver out of her hand, putting it back down. Jessie, firm and quiet.*) I said No. This is private. Dawson is not invited.
MAMA. Just me.

JESSIE. I don't want anybody else over here. Just you and me. If Dawson comes over it'll make me feel stupid for not doing it ten years ago.

MAMA. I think we better call the doctor. Or how about the ambulance. You like that one driver, I know. What's his name, Timmy? Get you somebody to talk to.

JESSIE. (*Going back to her chair.*) I'm through talking, Mama. You're it. No more.

MAMA. We're just going to sit around like every other night in the world and then you're going to kill yourself? (*Jessie doesn't answer.*) You'll miss. (*Again, there is no response.*) You'll just wind up a vegetable. How would you like that? Shoot your ear off? You know what the doctor said about getting excited. You'll cock the pistol and have a fit.

JESSIE. I think I can kill myself, Mama.

MAMA. You're not going to kill yourself, Jessie. You're not even upset! (*And Jessie smiles, or laughs quietly, and Mama tries a different approach.*) People don't really kill themselves, Jessie. No, Mam, doesn't make sense, unless you're retarded or deranged and you're as normal as they come, Jessie, for the most part. We're all *afraid* to die.

JESSIE. I'm not, Mama. I'm cold all the time anyway.

MAMA. That's ridiculous.

JESSIE. It's exactly what I want. It's dark and quiet.

MAMA. So is the back yard, Jessie! Close your eyes. Stuff cotton in your ears. Take a nap! It's quiet in your room. I'll leave the TV off all night.

JESSIE. So quiet I don't know it's quiet. So nobody can get me.

MAMA. You don't know what dead is like. It might not be quiet at all. What if it's like an alarm clock and you can't wake up so you can't shut it off. Ever.

JESSIE. Dead is everybody and everything I ever knew, gone. Dead is dead quiet.

MAMA. It's a sin. You'll go to hell.

JESSIE. Uh-huh.

MAMA. You will!

JESSIE. Jesus was a suicide, if you ask me.

MAMA. You'll go to hell just for saying that. Jessie!

JESSIE. (*Genuine surprise.*) I didn't know I thought that.

MAMA. Jessie! (*Jessie doesn't answer. She puts the now loaded gun back in the box and crosses to the kitchen. But Mama is afraid she is headed for the bedroom. Mama, in panic.*) You can't use my towels! They're my towels. I've had them for a long time. I like my towels.

JESSIE. I asked you if you wanted that swimming towel and you said you didn't.

MAMA. And you can't use your father's gun either. It's mine now too. And you can't do it in my house.

JESSIE. Oh come on.

MAMA. No. You can't do it. I won't let you. The house is in my name.

JESSIE. I have to go in the bedroom and lock the door behind me so they won't arrest you for killing me. They'll probably test your hands for gunpowder anyway, but you'll pass.

MAMA. Not in my house!

JESSIE. If I'd known you were going to act like this, I wouldn't have told you.

MAMA. How am I supposed to act? Tell you to go ahead? O.K. by me, sugar. Might try it myself. What took you so long?

JESSIE. There's just no point in fighting me over it, that's all. Want some coffee?

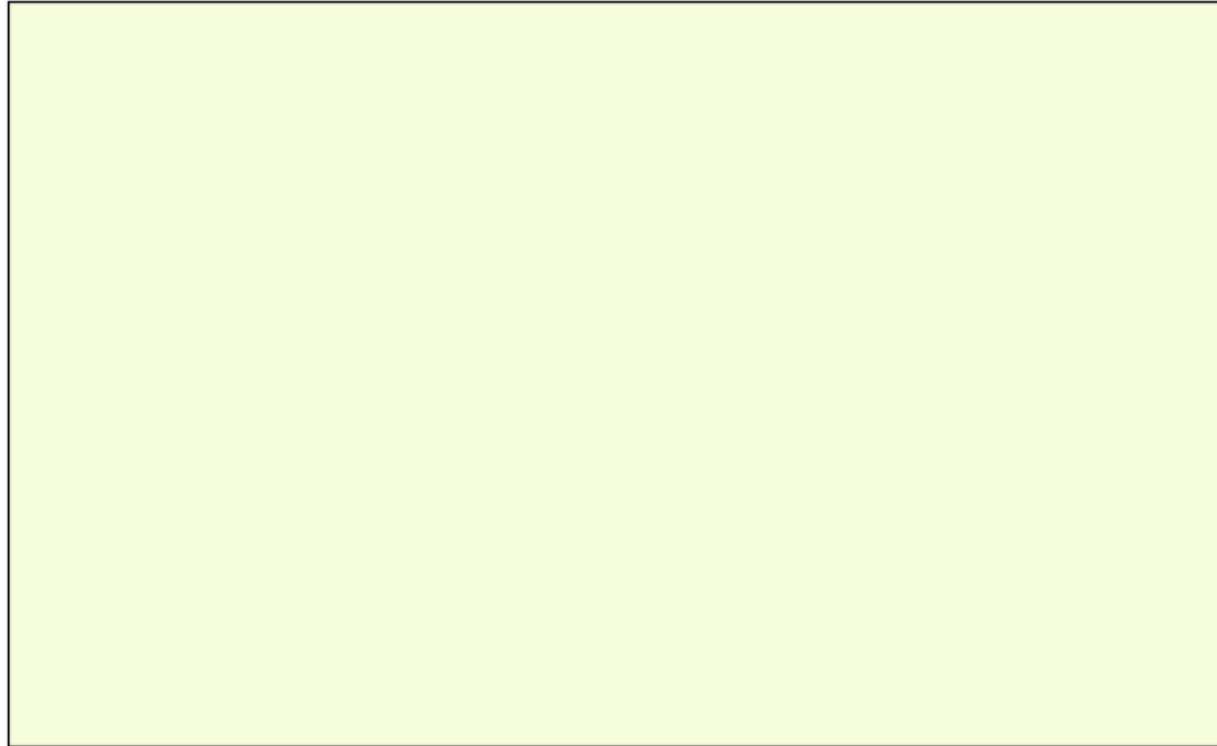
MAMA. Your birthday's coming up, Jessie. Don't you want to know what we got you?

JESSIE. You got me dusting powder, Loretta got me a new housecoat, pink probably and Dawson got me new slippers, too small, but they go with the robe, he'll say. (*Mama cannot speak.*) Right? (*Apparently Jessie is right.*) Be back in a minute. (*Jessie takes the gun box, puts it on top of the stack of towels and garbage bags and takes them into her bedroom.*

Set / Furniture Plan

Draw, below, the "set" you plan to use for your scene.

SR



SL

Downstage