

WOMAN.

Kids!! ... and their father gave their mother a vacuum cleaner. Because, he said, she was so good at cleaning up their crap. No one laughed but the mother, who pretended it was just what she'd hoped for! An Electrolux! Thank you —

MINISTER.

And the grandmother said:

“Oh, those are the best vacuums. I still have the one I found in the trash room. It was just missing a belt, and your father fixed it ... ”

MAN.

And they all replenished their drinks.
And then the father handed out one box
To each of his children:

(The Rebecca puppet opens her box.)

REBECCA.

Rebecca got a leather diary. She smiled bravely.
And thanked her parents. Who had already turned
Their attention to their drinks; her mother watched Stephen;
Her father watched Claire
And Rebecca went unnoticed.

Piss. She thought. By tomorrow night Stephen and Claire
will have broken the lock and read everything I've written.

(The other puppets wrestle the diary away and read it.)

And what do I have to write in my boring life?

“Dear Diary: Today is Friday. What happened today?”

Nothing.

Dear Diary. It's Saturday. Nothing happened today. Dear
Diary:

It's Christmas! And what happened today?”

(Two stagehands enter and deftly kick a soccer ball across the stage.)

STEPHEN.

And Stephen unwrapped his gift:
it was a soccer ball. For a boy who could barely run;
Who was never chosen for teams, who only watched
The red-faced boys kick and run down the field and
parking lots. He would give the ball to his sisters and
Watch them play.

(The Stephen puppet bows.)

“Thank you, Father”

WOMAN.

And then the father gave a small box
Wrapped in silver to his youngest child.
The other two pressed to see Claire unwrap it.

MINISTER.

Yesterday in the jewelry store, when he bought
Silver earrings for Sheila; silver rings, too:
A silver bracelet, thick for her tapered wrist:
As he ran towards the counter, in a frenzy
Thinking of the silver against her skin:

WOMAN.

And he thought:

MAN.

Screw!

WOMAN.

The rent for January.

MAN.

Screw!

WOMAN.

The grocery bill.

MAN.

Screw!

WOMAN.

The money for braces.

MAN.

Screw!

WOMAN.

The milkman, the doctor, the broken washing machine:
The payment on the car, the savings for the house:

MAN.

Screw! Wearing a tie and smiling for assholes
and the hour commute:

WOMAN.

He would buy the turquoise pendant too. Screw it all.

MAN.

But he saw in the counter case
A glint of gold.
It was a delicate strand, almost gossamer:
A bracelet for a child with three tiny charms:
A little lock with a tiny key, a little house, and a little cowboy
gun.

WOMAN.

There went the electric bill.

MAN.

He would give it to Claire.

CLAIRE.

And Claire, who had been eyeing the soccer ball,
Suddenly stopped when she saw the desire
On her sister's face.

She saw the desire on her mother's face.

She saw a softness on her brother's face.

And they all breathed a soft:

ALL.

Ohhh.

MINISTER.

It was beautiful. It was gold.

WOMAN.

And the father knelt by his golden girl

And said:

MAN.

Each Christmas that we are together

I will give you one golden charm.

(The Claire puppet bows.)

CLAIRE.

And Claire gave her father a kiss.

MINISTER.

And the adults retreated into the dining room

And replenished their drinks.

WOMAN.

Grandfather sharpened his carving knife;
the women set the table with crystal and silver.

And the children played on their own.

MAN.

And somehow the men started talking

WOMAN.

Always a bad idea.

MAN.

And the talk ran to money, and how hard it was

To put food on the table for a family of five

MINISTER.

And the grandfather snorted, and talked about

Discipline. And saving. And tightening one's belt.

WOMAN.

And the grandmother tried to change the subject.

MAN.

And the talk ran to work, and salaries

And how much more the father earned

MINISTER.

Than the grandfather would see in a year

And where did the money go?

If the grandfather had his son-in-law's wages

He would have a mortgage

A house of his own

And the father said:

MAN.

Three children!

And the grandfather said:

MINISTER.

You shouldn't have more children

Than you can take care of —

MAN.

And the father laughed, a strangled laugh:

What's done cannot be undone

WOMAN.

And the mother tried to get her husband to help her.

STEPHEN.

And Stephen said to his sister:

"Let me wear the bracelet. For a moment."

(The two puppets start to struggle.)

CLAIRE.

And suddenly Claire wanted that bracelet

Around her wrist.

Play with your ball, she said.

WOMAN.

And the children didn't hear the voices

Change in the dining room

Nor a sudden silence of the women in the kitchen.

REBECCA.

And Rebecca said

"Oh let him wear it for a second."

WOMAN.

And suddenly there was a hush to the anger

in the men's voices:

MAN.

"I don't need you telling me how to run my own —"

MINISTER.

"What good is telling you anything?!"

MAN.

"We're paying back the money you loaned us —"

MINISTER.

"Damn right. You just throw money away —"

CLAIRE.

And Stephen grabbed Claire's wrist

STEPHEN.

Stephen did not grab Claire's wrist.

When Stephen touched the bracelet, Claire twisted away —

WOMAN.

And Claire said

CLAIRE.

"Get off —"

And Rebecca said

REBECCA.

"You little toad"

And Stephen said

STEPHEN.

"Just for a second"

WOMAN.

And they tugged and they turned.

And the fragile links of the golden bracelet twisted

And turned, stretched and strained

And the thin golden strand

Broke.

(A single metallic pluck of the samisen.)

For a moment the children stood still.

They had never broken anything golden before.

CLAIRE.

And Claire started crying.

STEPHEN.

And Stephen trembled where he stood.

REBECCA.

And Claire flew to her father.

CLAIRE.

"Daddy! Can you fix this?"

WOMAN.

The two men stopped their soft hissing.

The father drew his lips tight together:

And very very softly said: