

Acting Edition

Sordid Lives

A Comedy in Four Chapters

by Del Shores

Song “Sordid Lives” by Margot Rose & Beverly Nero

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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SORDID LIVES was originally produced by Del Shores in association with Jeff Murray and Nicolette Chaffey for Theatre/Theater in Hollywood, California, May 11, 1996. It was directed by Del Shores; the set was by Newell Alexander; the lights were by Evan Bartoletti; the sound was by Scott Watson; hair, wigs and make-up design were by Simón Schwarz; and costumes were by Jim Eckerd. Associate producers were John Hagen and Philece Sampler; the production stage manager was John Hagen; the assistant stage managers were Diana Garrett, Chris Garrett, Tyler Hansen and Steve Thomas. The song “Sordid Lives” was written by Margot Rose and Beverly Nero. The cast in order of appearance, was as follows:

BITSY MAE HARLING.....	Margot Rose
TY WILLIAMSON.....	Kirk Geiger
SISSY HICKEY.....	Beth Grant
NOLETA NETHERCOTT.....	Patrika Darbo
LATRELLE WILLIAMSON.....	Mary-Margaret Lewis
LAVONDA DUPREE.....	Ann Walker
G.W. NETHERCOTT.....	Mitch Carter
WARDELL “BUBBA” OWENS.....	Newell Alexander
ODELL OWENS.....	Earl Bullock
DR. EVE BOLINGER.....	Rosemary Alexander
EARL “BROTHER BOY” INGRAM.....	Leslie Jordan
REV. BARNES.....	Earl Bullock

Also appearing in the year-long run were:

Jane George, Beverly Nero, Judy Quay (Bitsy); Robert Lewis Stephenson (Ty); Brenda Hillhouse, Ann Walker, Sharon Madden, Sandra Lafferty (Sissy); Loma Scott, Beth Grant (Noleta); Rosemary Alexander (Latreille); Philece Sampler, Dale Dickey (LaVonda); Terry Brannon, Del Shores (Wardell); Philece Sampler (Dr. Eve); Del Shores, Tyler Hansen, Charlie Dell (Brother Boy).

All hymns public domain. (“Uncloudy Day”, “Coming Home”, “In The Sweet By and By” and “Just As I Am”)

THE CAST

- BITSY MAE HARLING—the guitar playing ex-con singer.
- TY WILLIAMSON—27, a beautiful gay man on a journey.
- SISSY HICKEY—mid 50's, the caretaker who picked the wrong day to quit smoking.
- NOLETA NETHERCOTT—early 40's the angry overweight betrayed housewife.
- LATRELLE WILLIAMSON—early 50's, Ty's uptight, proper mother.
- LA VONDA DUPREE—late 40's, Latrelle's liberal-minded worldly sister.
- G.W. NETERCOTT—late 40's, the distraught legless Vietnam Vet.
- WARDELL "BUBBA" OWENS—late 40's, the former gay-bashing remorseful bartender.
- ODELL OWENS—mid 40's, Wardell's worthless story-telling brother.
- DR. EVE BOLINGER—late 40's, the over-sexed pill-popping, alcoholic therapist.
- EARL "BROTHER BOY" INGRAM—late 40's, the Tammy Wynette obsessed transvestite.
- REV. BARNES—the Southern Baptist preacher. (Author's suggestion is to double cast with the actor who plays ODELL.)

THE SETTINGS

CHAPTER ONE—**Nicotine Fit**—Sissy’s living room, Winters, TX.

CHAPTER TWO—**Two Wooden Legs**—The local bar, Winters, TX.

CHAPTER THREE—**The Dehomosexualization of Brother Boy**—

A therapist’s office, Mental Institution, Big Spring, TX.

CHAPTER FOUR—**All Laid Out (In a Mink Stole)**—Southside Baptist Church, Winters, TX.

All Chapters begin with Ty’s therapy sessions, New York, NY

THE TIME

July 24th & 25th, 1998

AUTHOR’S NOTE: These people are real. Don’t play them as cartoons, please. Each chapter may be pulled out and produced as a One Act (but you still have to pay royalties!).

FOR

*Newell & Rosemary
Rebecca & Caroline*

For their unconditional love and acceptance

CHAPTER ONE

Nicotine Fit

(In the darkness, we hear a guitar strum. A spot hits BITSY MAE HARLING, who is standing downstage left in front of a mike. She gives the audience a look, then sings.)

BITSY. *(Slow country rhythm.)*

“Who’s to judge who’s a saint and who’s a sinner?
Lord it’s tough enuf to trudge from brunch to dinner.
We seek the light of truth between our white lies.
And sleep away our youth under tattle-tale skies.

(Picks up tempo.)

Who’s to say who’s a sinner who’s a saint?
Who’s to say who you can love and who you can’t?
It’s easy for the pot to call the kettle black
They’re just jealous of the hot’n lusty sordid lives
they lack.

Ain’t it a bitch sortin’ out our sordid lives?
It’s a bitch when you come to realize,
When you crack yerself a box of Cracker Jack
You could get a really shitty prize!

It's a bitch sortin' out our sordid lives!

We will struggle comin' down the shoot to take our first breath. Then we struggle for acceptance from birth to death.

But the Lord's too busy tryin' to keep the world on it's feet. He ain't got time to give a shit about what goes on between the sheets.

Ain't it a bitch sortin' out our sordid lives?

It's a bitch when you come to realize,

When you crack yerself a box of Cracker Jack

You could get a really shitty prize!

It's a bitch sortin' out our sorry little sordid lives!"

(Blackout.)

(In the darkness, BITSY moves the mike and exits.

Dim lights come up only on TY, late 20's, movie star good looks, sitting on a chair downstage center. He talks to his therapist [the audience].)

TY. You're my twenty-seventh therapist in three years. *(Searching.)* Where to start...? I'm from the South. Texas actually. I was raised rigid Southern Baptist. I'm an actor. And I'm gay. Now you know why I've needed twenty-seven therapists in the past three years. *(Pause.)* I always hate... okay... let's see. Oh! I had a dream last night. I know you guys love dreams. It was about Ruth Buzzi. From "Laugh-In." When I was a little boy, I was never allowed to watch "Laugh-In." "Too vulgar and risqué" my Mama used to say. But one summer, I spent three weeks with my Aunt LaVonda and she let me watch it three Mondays in a row. I felt so

sneaky and evil. I liked that feeling. *(Thinks.)* I still do. Aunt LaVonda was so cool she swore me to secrecy. “What ya Mama don’t know won’t hurt her, but if ya Mama did know, she hurt us both!” I love that woman. She used to cuss in front of me. In fact, the first time I heard the word “fuck”, it came out of her mouth. She’s great. Now I watch it all the time. On cable...“Laugh In”... re-runs. It did not date well. So anyway, Ruth Buzzi was playing that old prude on the park bench, you know, in my dream. And Artie Johnson was there. And she got all offended and started hitting him on the head with her purse. Then, it went all weird. Ruth’s wig fell off and she was a man. Then she stopped beating on Artie and they looked at each other. Longingly. Then they started kissing and ripping at each other’s clothes. And Ruth had falsies on and Artie just tore ‘em off. And she was this man! With a beautiful body—incredible pecs and a ripped stomach...great ass. Kinda looked like Antonio Sabato, Jr.—with Ruth Buzzi’s face. And the most beautiful cock you have ever seen. Ruth was hung like a horse. Artie looked awful though. He was all flabby and pasty, and he had this little bitty thumb dick. But you know, Ruth didn’t seem to mind. They just started going at it on that park bench a mile a minute. I woke up with a hard on, totally turned on by Ruth Buzzi’s old prude woman as a man. *(Pause.)* What do you think that means?

(Lights fade to black.)

SISSY. *(In blackout.)* Well, I tell you one thang. I sure as hell woundn’ta quit smoking if I’da known Sister was gonna die.

(Full lights come up and we are in the tackily decorated living room/dining area of SISSY HICKEY’S house. TY’s chair has

moved and is now part of the decor which includes a couch, downstage, "TY's" chair next to it, left of the couch. Center stage, left, a telephone table sits. A dining room table is further upstage, right. SISSY, mid 50's, is talking on the phone while cleaning up. She has one of those long telephone cords that she expertly tosses and pulls around as she scurries about. The dining table is full of covered dishes, all shapes and sizes.)

SISSY. Three days now and I'm just about to die myself. Hold on. *(She pulls on a rubber band that she's wearing on her arm and pops herself with it.)* Ouch! *(Listens.)* Oh nothing. *(Pause.)* Well, if you must know, it's a little quit smokin' therapy that Roger over at the Beehive shared with me while he was backcombing my hair. He paid two thousand dollars at this clinic over in Snyder and they give him a rubber band. Told him to pop his arm with it ever' time he wanted a cigarette. Sat there for a week with a buncha other smokers, just talkin' about any ol' thang and watchin' the television while poppin' their arms. It's called Behavior Modifi... somethin' or 'nother. Roger can tell you the exact wordage. Anyway, it ain't workin'! *(Listens.)* Chorus girl kicks, huh?! This month's issue? Well, I've got it here somewhere. *(There is a knock at the door.)* Vera, I gotta go. Somebody else is at the door. *(Looks out window.)* Oh, Lord, it's Noleta Nethercott. I'll call you back. *(She hangs up and goes to the door.)* Woohoo.

NOLETA. *(O.S.)* Woohoo.

SISSY. Woohoo. *(Opens door.)* Hello, Noleta. Come on in.

(NOLETA NETHERCOTT, pretty, overweight and distraught, hands SISSY a tuna casserole as she enters.)

NOLETA. (*On the verge of tears.*) Hello, Sissy. I brung this. It's my mama's tuna casserole. You know, the one I always make with the Lays Potato Chips and the cream of mushroom soup.

SISSY. Well, thank you, Noleta. That was mighty nice of you given the circumstances and all. Are you all right?

NOLETA. I'm fine.

(*NOLETA then bursts into tears.*)

SISSY. Oh hon!

(*SISSY hugs NOLETA.*)

NOLETA. (*Between sobs.*) I just can't believe it. Ever'body's laughing at me, Sissy. G.W. has made a complete fool outta me. Can I bum a cigarette, please?

SISSY. Oh, Lord, hon. I quit. Three days ago. Threw 'em all away. Why don't you set down and I'll get you a nice glass of ice tea. Would you like a Valium?

NOLETA. Uh-huh.

(*SISSY exits for the tea as NOLETA moves to the food table and begins fixing herself a plate.*)

NOLETA. I mean, this has to be awkward for you, Sissy. My husband killed your sister with his, um... (*Crying.*) I threw him out. I threw his sorry ass out, Sissy. Threw all his stuff out on the front lawn. If he don't git it by tonight, I'm gonna have a yard sale! But what am I gonna do now?

SISSY. Aw, hon.

(SISSY hands her the tea and moves to the telephone table to find the Valium in her purse.)

NOLETA. I mean, I have no skills. I'm just a mama and a wife. What the hell am I suppose to do now!?

SISSY. Awwwww.

(NOLETA continues to wail as SISSY finds the pills and pulls off a couple of Kleenex.)

SISSY. *(For NOLETA's benefit.)* Awwwww. *(Mutters.)* Shit.

(SISSY hands NOLETA the pills and Kleenex and sits.)

NOLETA. Thank you. I'm sorry. I shouldn't be telling you this seein's that your Sister died on account of my husband's...should I take one or two of these?

SISSY. I'd take two if I was you.

NOLETA. Okay.

(NOLETA downs the pills.)

SISSY. You'll feel a lot better when those kick in. *(Leans in.)* And you can tell me anythang you want, Noleta. I feel for you. I do. This whole thang is just one big... *(SISSY takes a Valium herself and chases it with tea.)*... unfortunate mess. Now don't get me wrong, I loved my sister dearly, but you and me are friends bottom line, and I'm here for you right now. You hear me talkin' to you? I mean it.

NOLETA. Thank you, Sissy. Where's LaVonda? I'm just so scared this is gonna affect our friendship. You know how close we are.

SISSY. I know. LaVonda and Latrelle went over to the funeral home to make all the arrangements. Latrelle is just beside herself. She is so high-strung. But don't you worry. You know LaVonda. She loves you like a sister. That ain't gonna change one iota. I'm gonna get you a re-fill.

(She takes NOLETA's plate and moves to the food table, filling it.)

NOLETA. Thank you. Today I was at the Shamrock, fillin' up. I just needed one more full tank for a complete set of them Dallas Cowboy mugs. And you know that trashy thang, Lynnette Walters, was talkin' to her friend that Gloria, other piece of trash, old man Holmes' youngest girl, the one with them two illegitimate mulatto kids. And they was staring at me, pointin', talkin' all hush-hush. Those two. All skinny in their tube-tops and short-shorts. Like I was some kind of circus freak or somethin'. Those two, Sissy. Of all people. Like they was better than me.

SISSY. Well, they're not.

NOLETA. I just went over to her window, threw down a twenty, didn't wait for my change or my Dallas Cowboy mug and left.

SISSY. Good.

NOLETA. Drove down Highway 84, sobbin'to high heaven, goin' nowhere. I finally had to pull over 'cause I couldn't see the road no more.

SISSY. Oh, hon.

NOLETA. I'm sorry. I shouldn't be troublin' you. You've got enough on your mind.

(NOLETA gets up and takes some chicken and a couple of biscuits from her plate, wrapping them in her napkin.)

NOLETA. I gotta go, Sissy. The kids get outta school at three and I gotta explain about G. W. I'm so sorry about Peggy. She was a good woman, in spite of— *(She starts crying again.)* Tell LaVonda to call me.

SISSY. I will. Those Valium oughta kick in any minute.

(SISSY runs and gets the bottle of pills and hands them to NOLETA.)

SISSY. Here! Take these with ya. I've got another bottle.

NOLETA. Thank you.

(NOLETA exits.)

SISSY. *(Calling after her.)* Bye, bye, hon. Thanks for the casserole. And you hold your head up, high, hear?!

NOLETA. *(O.S. between sobs.)* I'll try.

SISSY. *(False sincerity.)* I mean it. *(Closes door.)* Shit.

(She pops her arm. The phone rings. She runs for it and answers it.)

SISSY. Hello. Oh, hello Vera. No, I hadn't read it yet. Noleta just left. Well, we had a little talk. She's real upset. Who could blame her? *(Listens.)* I know it. I know it. I know it. I give her some Valium. Bless `er heart. So Cosmo says that chorus girl kicks will distract you from a nicotine fit and it'll go away? Well, I don't know. I just don't think I could do 'em worth a flyin' flit, and if I did, I cringe just to think about somebody walkin' in on me and thinkin' I'm crazy. *(Listens, very serious.)* Huh-uh. Oh no. I don't think Brother Boy's mentally stable enough to come to the funeral. Last time I visited him, he thought he was Tammy Wynette. Had on a real pretty wig and a sequined pantsuit, though. And if you'd

squint your eyes and kept a good distance away, he looked just like Tammy. In the early years. (*Listens.*) I know it, I know it. I know it. Tammy's gone now. Clotted lung or somethin'. She's sangin' with the angels now and they're lucky to have her. Bless 'er heart. Had more troubles than Christ on the cross. Honey when it came to life threatenin' illnesses, ol' Tammy was sorta the Elizabeth Taylor of country music.

(*We hear a car drive up. SISSY runs for the door and looks out its window.*)

SISSY. (*cont.*) I gotta git! That's Latrelle. Oooh. She does not look happy! Her and LaVonda've been at it all morning long. They never could git along and I refuse to referee any more. (*Listens.*) Well, thank you, hon. I need those prayers. Prayers mean so much. I'll see ya at the funeral. Bye bye. (*She hangs up, pops herself with the rubberband.*) Ouch!

(*LATRELLE WILLIAMSON, early 50's, very proper, SISSY's niece, but only three years younger, bursts in the door.*)

LATRELLE. (*Pissed.*) Well, you're just never gonna believe what she's done now! You just won't!

SISSY. (*Overlap.*) Well, what did—?

LATRELLE. (*Plowing on.*) LaVonda wants to bury Mama in that ugly ol' mink stole with the head still on it!

SISSY. (*Overlap.*) Well—

LATRELLE. I know that Mama loved that stole, but good Lord, Sissy, it's a hundred and eight degrees out and no person livin' or dead should be caught wearin' a mink stole in the middle of summer. It's not appropriate, it's not right and I will not have it! And I hope you will support me on this!

SISSY. Well I—

LATRELLE. I will not have her making a mockery of my Mama at her one and only funeral! It's just not gonna happen! Lord it's hot! Your air conditioner working?

SISSY. Yeah, but when it gets like this, it don't seem to help a lick.

LATRELLE. Probably needs Freon.

SISSY. (*Goes and fiddles with the thermostat.*) I never did like Sister's mink stole no ways. Gave me the heebie-geebies with them glass eyes staring out at ya. 'Course she was awful partial to it.

LATRELLE. I know it. But it's summer, Sissy! Hot, hot summer! (*Rushes over and hugs Sissy.*) Oh, thank you, thank you! I knew you'd back me on this, I did.

SISSY. Well—

LATRELLE. But you know how she is. But she won't listen to me. I gotta go tittle.

SISSY. I—

LATRELLE. (*Rushes out of the room; O.S.*) Thank you.

SISSY. (*Stares after her.*) Shit! Damn! Shit! (*Then pops the rubberband.*) Ouch!

LATRELLE. (*O.S.*) Did you say somethin'?

SISSY. (*Calling.*) No. You want some ice tea? I just made a fresh batch!

LATRELLE. (*O.S.*) That'd be heaven. I'm parched.

(*SISSY stares at the two glasses of tea on the coffee table, considers, then refills NOLETA's from her own. Then she walks over to the dining table.*)

SISSY. There's enough food in here to feed Cox's army. Folks been droppin' by all mornin'.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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