

(Printed with an unregistered version of Fade In)

Dead Rock Stars

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First Draft

Contact information

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The front seat of a family car in the early 1980s. JILL (age 16) and her mother LINDA (age 36) are in the front seat). The radio is playing Jim Croce's "Bad, Bad, Leroy Brown"

LINDA

(singing)

"... he's the baddest man in the whole damned down. Badder than ol' King Ko-ong. Meaner than a junkyard dog..." (nudges her daughter) Jilly-bean, why aren't you singing.

JILL ignores her mother, reclining her seat and turning her head away.

LINDA responds by turning the music up louder.

JILL

Do you have to do that?

LINDA

Do what? Sing? It's a good song. You used to like it, when you were little.

JILL

Yeah, well, I'm not little anymore. I'm sixteen. I'm the only one in my class who isn't driving yet. I'm the only one in my class who still wears glasses that look like safety goggles. I'm the only one in my class who still has a mother who does what you do.

LINDA

(confused)

What is it that I do?

JILL

You know.

LINDA

No, sweetie, I really don't.

JILL

Yes, you do. You do it all the time. Every time there's some dead-rock-star song on the radio, you do it.

LINDA

(growing exasperated)

Jill, I honestly have no idea what you're talking about.

JILL

JILL returns her seat to its upright position in as passive-aggressive a manner as is possible.

You... were just doing it in the car, and you did it in the grocery store. You... you bop around and act cute, like you want people to see you, and it's horribly embarrassing and you do it on purpose!

LINDA

'Bop around and act cute?'

JILL

Yeah, you know... dancing to the radio while driving. Dancing to the music in the store. But never the good music. Like this station... seriously... dead rock stars is all they play...

LINDA

SCENE TWO

A suburban grocery store, a few days later. LINDA is scanning the aisles, and JILL, pushing the cart, is trying to dissociate herself from her mother. "California Dreamin'" is playing over the sound system.

LINDA

(singing)

"All the leaves are brown (all the leaves are brown) and the sky is gray (and the sky is gray) I've been for a walk (I've been for a walk) on a winter's day (on a winter's day)..."

JILL

Mom... do you have to.

LINDA
(ignoring her)
"California dreamin...(California dreamin...)" Do we need
mayonnaise?

JILL
Seriously? Now you're singing the *grocery list*? Are you sure
I'm your daughter? Are you sure I wasn't switched at birth
with some other kid?

LINDA
Sorry kiddo, I'm the only mother you've ever had.

JILL
(muttering)
I wish I were an orphan.

LINDA
(stricken)
You don't mean that.

JILL
Maybe I do. Maybe, just once, I wish you could be a normal
mother who doesn't sing a long with every stupid dead singer
she hears. God, Mom, don't you ever listen to anyone alive?

LINDA
Yes, but only late at night after you're asleep. Get peanut
butter, and I'll meet you in the cereal aisle.

SCENE THREE

*A suburban living room,
spring, 1984. LINDA is sitting
on the couch drinking a glass
of wine. Marvin Gaye's "How
Sweet it Is" is playing. It's
a record. Vinyl. The lights
are dim. JILL enters, coming
home from school.*

JILL
Mom? Is everything okay? Why is it so dark in here?

LINDA
(distracted)
Oh, hey, honey. School over already?

JILL
We had a half-day. Mom... are you okay? You're listening
to... (she listens to the music for a moment then half-
smiles) You used to sing this to me, when I was a baby.

LINDA

Yes. I did. Your father and I danced to this song at our wedding.

JILL

Really?

LINDA

Really.

JILL

I miss him. Dad, I mean. I have no idea who the singer is.

LINDA

(chuckling softly)

Your Dad would probably get along with you better than I do. He was always into whatever was hip and trendy. He knew the latest bands, the coolest clubs, the best movies... I just... I plod along and get things done.

JILL

You're not that bad, Mom... really. It's just...

LINDA

Oh, do tell me...

JILL

You're so confident. And I'm so awkward. I don't even know how to do anything with my hair except stick it in a ponytail. And... maybe other girls learn this from their girlfriends, but I don't even know how to make friends with other girls. I always say the wrong thing.

LINDA

And so you lash out at the one person who could help.

JILL

You overshadow me. Like when you pick me up at school. The boys don't even know my name, but they know you're the hot mom who boogies in the parking lot.

LINDA

Oh, sweetie.

JILL

It's horrible.

LINDA

I'm sorry. I really didn't realize.

JILL

I hate school.

LINDA

I did, too, when I was your age. For a lot of the same reasons. I felt like I was so much older than the other kids. Like I was ready to be in the real world and they were still playing games.

JILL

So why all the singing and dancing?

LINDA

Why not? Life's pretty dull if you don't enjoy it, kiddo.

JILL

I guess. (beat) Why are all the lights off, Mom?

LINDA

Oh. You'll just give me a hard time. The music we're listening to?

JILL

Yeah?

LINDA

He died today. Marvin Gaye. And his music was such a part of my young life that I guess... I felt like I needed to sit with the loss for a while.

JILL

He wrote a lot of songs, right?

LINDA

He did.

JILL

I recognize his voice. You used to sing that other one with me, when I was afraid.

The record has stopped by now, so it's easy for Jill to turn the lights up and stand in front of the cold fireplace in their living room. Tentatively, she sings the song she half-remembers from when she was a very little girl.

JILL

(singing)

"Listen baby, ain't no mountain high, ain't no valley low, ain't no river wide enough baby..."

LINDA sets down her wine glass and gets off the couch. Stepping toward

her daughter, she picks up the
song...

LINDA

(Singing)

"If you need me, call me, no matter where you are, no matter
how far... "

TOGETHER

(singing)

"...don't worry baby... I'll be there in a hurry, you don't
have to worry..."

As mother and daughter consider to
sing the original Marvin and Tammy
version of the duet fades in from
off-stage and eventually drowns
them out. LINDA and JILL continue
to dance in the living room,
singing, until the lights fade out.

CURTAIN.