

CLAIMS

Characters

LOU WEBSTER, forty-six
an insurance claims adjuster

SARA YAMADA, twenty-seven
his girlfriend

JOSH WEBSTER, fourteen
his son

CHRISTINE PETERSON, thirty-nine
his ex-wife

ANDRÉ DURAND, thirty-two
Christine's fiancé

Place

In and around Columbus, Ohio.

Time

The final months of 2014.

CLAIMS

ACT I

*Two non-folding metal chairs, centerstage, face each other.
About four feet apart.*

*LOU WEBSTER, 46, sits in one of the chairs, motionless. He
looks off, past the chair opposite him, for a long time.*

*When he moves, it's to turn toward us. LOU stares ahead, then
closes his eyes. But then he opens his eyes wide, looking around,
embarrassed. He hates himself for this.*

*LOU stands and walks off, away from the other chair. He is now
eager to leave this place.*

* * *

A checkout line in a warehouse club chain store.

*LOU stands at the handle of a mostly empty shopping cart.
SARA YAMADA, 27, is beside him. She has been picking up
items from the cart to look at them and currently holds a 24-
count box of microwave popcorn.*

LOU: God, I hate it here. (pause) I really do. (pause) Don't you?

SARA (*examining the popcorn*): No. How about we get the “Light Butter” version?

LOU takes the popcorn from her and replaces it in the cart.

LOU: Josh likes the movie theater butter kind.

SARA: Josh isn’t forty-six years old and taking blood thinners.

LOU: Don’t nag. It’s corn. It’s a vegetable.

SARA looks into the cart.

SARA: There’s nothing in here to make a meal. What about a couple of nice chicken breasts?

LOU: Sure. But, y’know, I’m working late most nights this week. Better wait until I need them so they don’t spoil.

A moment as LOU looks around.

SARA taps LOU and points in front of them. LOU pushes the cart forward a few feet and stops.

SARA: Then what about some *actual* vegetables, Lou? I could make you guys a plate of carrot and celery sticks. Some cherry tomatoes.

LOU: With dip?

SARA (*hesitating*): Yeah. Sure. Dip. But you also have to eat the vegetables.

LOU: How else—

SARA: —I *saw* you last week. Ignored the celery, stuck your fingers in the dip and licked them clean.

LOU: You make really great dip. You’re such a good cook.

SARA: Stay here with the cart — this is taking forever — and I’ll get what I need. It won’t take more than a minute or—

LOU: —Sara ...

SARA: Don't worry, Lou. My treat.

She starts off.

LOU: Sara?!

She walks back to him.

SARA: Yes?

LOU: Don't bother. He won't eat it.

SARA: He might.

LOU: He's fourteen.

SARA: I ate vegetables when *I* was fourteen.

LOU: Yeah, but you're a hippy freak. (*reaching for her*) My sexy little hippy freak.

SARA: Don't change the subject. If *you* snack on vegetables, he will too.

LOU: At the movies?

SARA: You won't *be* at the movies.

LOU: No, but that's the idea. Like we're at the movies. But at home. That's what he likes to do. With popcorn and soda and sometimes hot dogs or nachos. What's the big deal?

SARA: All right. I just thought you might want to munch on something crunchy.

LOU: Popcorn's crunchy.

She gives up. They wait.

Then SARA reaches into the cart and pulls out a boxed set of DVDs. She stares at it.

LOU: It's all twelve "Friday the 13th" films. In one boxed set.

SARA: He likes these?

LOU: Sure. They're cool. Twelve movies for thirty bucks.

SARA: I hope you have a great time.

LOU: C'mon, be a sport! I'll keep my hands over your eyes.

SARA: No you won't. I'll be back over Sunday morning.

LOU: I thought you were gonna spend the weekend.

SARA: I need to spend some time at *my* place. There's laundry, and dishes in the sink. Need to do—

LOU: —You have laundry in the sink?

SARA (*ignoring him*): Need to do some vacuuming. Dead plants everywhere. The cat box stinks. It'll give you guys some time alone.

LOU: That's silly. He *likes* you. It's more fun when you're there. And what if I get a hankerin' for carrot sticks at two AM?

SARA: We both know your two AM hankerin's aren't for carrots. What'd you do for sex before old Mrs. Keller croaked and I snatched up her apartment?

LOU: Let's just say she was a very accommodating neighbor and leave it at that. You can watch TV in my bedroom. Or read. You're always saying you never get a chance to read anymore.

SARA: Then I might as well be at my own place.

LOU (*making his case*): Except ... *Except* ... Saturday night, when Josh falls asleep on the couch, we'll be together. (*wiggling his eyebrows*) You know?

SARA: Sneak out and come over. Three knocks so I'll know it's you. Enrique, the pool boy, knocks twice.

LOU: Then three knocks it is. Mr. Whiskers finally choke to death on a hairball?

SARA: Stop! Don't even joke. (*baby talk*) Little sweetum Mr. Whiskers ...

LOU: I hate that cat.

SARA: Don't blame *my* cat for *your* allergies. (*no response*) I'll stay Friday night, then come back over Sunday after Josh goes home. (*catches herself*) Goes to his mom's.

A long moment between them.

SARA: And if I'm not there Saturday night, Josh doesn't have to sleep on the sofa bed.

LOU: What do you mean?

SARA: He can sleep on your bed.

LOU: With me?

SARA: Why not?

LOU: I don't think he'd be comfortable with that.

SARA: He'd be a lot more comfortable than sleeping on that horrible mattress on the sofa bed.

LOU: It's not horrible. I've slept on it. (*a moment*) Under the covers?

SARA: Jesus, Lou! He's your *son*! And it's a king-size bed! Don't worry, you'll never touch him.

LOU (*in an urgent whisper*): Will you keep your voice down?! It's not about that! I just don't know how comfortable Josh would be sleeping on the same bed with me. I snore. Might keep him awake.

SARA (*teasing*) No! Impossible!

LOU: If he wants to, of course it's fine. There's nothing weird about it. But let him bring it up. If you suggest it, he'll feel like if he doesn't, he'll hurt my feelings. (*remembering*) I don't think I would have been comfortable sleeping on the same bed with *my* dad.

SARA: I suppose not.

LOU: I bought that sofa bed special for Josh.

SARA: I know. That was very nice of you.

LOU: I wish I had two bedrooms. He says he doesn't mind.

SARA: I'm sure he doesn't.

LOU: I'll look into replacing the mattress.

SARA: It's not that bad.

They stand together, unmoving, for a long time.

LOU: God, I hate this place.

* * *

Friday afternoon, two days later.

The living room of LOU'S darkened apartment. A sofa bed, small mismatched tables and a few lamps represent the furnishings. The loud floral pattern of the sofa is partially covered by a loose-fitting slipcover and a few throw pillows.

LOU enters carrying a school backpack. He sets the backpack on the floor beside the sofa and begins turning on lamps.

LOU (*overly jovial*): Whoa, it's really dark in here, huh? Never enough windows. Allow me to shed some light on the subject.

JOSH WEBSTER, 14, enters slowly, carrying a small gym bag.

He stops well before entering the living area.

LOU: Got a great surprise for you, Josh. For later. You'll be stoked.

Lamps on, LOU notices JOSH is still standing in the shadows.

LOU: C'mon in, buddy. Take a load off.

JOSH (*looking around*): Sara here?

LOU: Not yet. After work. She gets off in ... about an hour.
(*nodding toward the gym bag*) Let me take that.

JOSH: I got it.

LOU crosses to JOSH and takes the gym bag.

LOU: You can put this stuff away later, huh? Nice bag. 'sit new?

JOSH: Yeah.

LOU (*setting the bag next to the backpack*): Grab a seat. Let's catch up before Sara starts jabbering on and on about her day. You know how women are.

LOU sits in the middle of the sofa. JOSH walks over slowly but doesn't sit.

JOSH: You got anything to eat?

LOU: Sure. Sara'll make dinner when she gets here. How do burgers sound?

JOSH: Okay. You got anything *now* to eat?

LOU: Uh, not really. I got stuff for later, though.

JOSH: Can we eat it now?

LOU: No. It's for after dinner. Tonight.

JOSH: But I'm hungry now.

LOU thinks a moment, then stands and walks off.

LOU: Okay, let me see what I've got. I know it's not much. We went shopping Wednesday but Sara didn't let me buy anything good. She's stopping after work to pick up the food that *you'll* eat.

LOU disappears offstage.

JOSH now sits on the end of the sofa near his belongings. He looks around. Not spotting anything of interest, JOSH digs a cell phone from his pants pocket. He speed dials.

JOSH (*into the phone*): ... Hey ... Yeah ... Lame ... No ...

LOU (*from the kitchen*): Hey, buddy, you want a soda? I got a couple o' sodas.

JOSH (*to LOU*): What kind?

LOU: I don't know. Sara bought 'em. JOSH

(*"sure, if she bought them"*): Okay.

LOU: Oh, they kinda suck. Raspberry Cream. Zero calories, zero carbs, zero caffeine and zero sodium.

JOSH: No thanks. (*into the phone*) Man, what a loser.

LOU: She's trying to get me to change my diet.

JOSH (*to LOU*): 'sokay. (*into the phone, softer*) Sunday morning. Early. I told him my mom's taking me to church ... Fuck, no!

LOU enters with an open box of Fiddle Faddle.

LOU: I forgot I hid this in the back of the pantry. You like Fiddle Faddle? When I was your age, I—

JOSH looks at LOU to show that he is on his phone.

LOU: Oh! Sorry.

LOU sits on the opposite end of the sofa from JOSH. He concentrates on his Fiddle Faddle.

JOSH (*into the phone*): ... Uh-huh ... Yeah ... (*staring at LOU*) ... No ... Nuh-uh ... That's gay ...

LOU doesn't notice JOSH staring at him. He remains focused on his snack.

JOSH: ... Yeah ... (to LOU) Dad?

LOU: Uh-huh.

JOSH: I'll be off the phone in a minute, okay?

LOU: Sure.

LOU holds the Fiddle Faddle box out to JOSH, who shakes his head. LOU scoops out a handful.

JOSH (*into the phone*): Uh-uh ... 'cause you couldn't! ... Fuck you ...

LOU and JOSH both look at each other.

JOSH (*into the phone*): Dude, I gotta go ... Cool ... Later.

JOSH ends the call and puts the cell phone back in his pocket.

JOSH: That all you got?

LOU: Yeah, I think so. It's good, though. You won't tell Sara, right?

JOSH: I guess not.

LOU: Who was that?

JOSH: Riley.

LOU: Riley a girl?

JOSH (*"as if"*) No.

LOU: How's the phone working out?

JOSH: Okay. Be cool if it had unlimited data.

LOU: Maybe your birthday. (*shaking the Fiddle Faddle box*) No more.

A long silence between them.

LOU: How's school?

JOSH: Same.

LOU: That mean you're still failing Algebra?

JOSH looks at LOU to say something, but then says something different.

JOSH: Yeah.

LOU: Do you know why?

JOSH: 'cause it's useless. And I suck.

LOU: Yeah, so did I. Can you graduate?

JOSH: If I take Geometry and pass.

LOU: You think you can?

JOSH: Yeah. Riley's in it. Says it's way easier.

A long moment.

JOSH: I might get an F.

LOU: In Algebra? You'll survive.

JOSH: Mom'll shit.

Silence.

JOSH: What's the surprise?

LOU: Can't tell you. Have to wait.

JOSH: Dad, I'm not a little kid.

LOU: 'sgot nothing to do with it. It's for later.

JOSH: You rent a video or something?

LOU: Better than that.

JOSH: *Two* videos? Or is it something online?