

JOGGERS
(Excerpt)

In blackout, the sound of joggers running in a blizzard – feet crunching snow, panting, wind whistling. Sound fades. Lights rise. BECKY BLACKWELL is alone, staring out the window. An emotionally young fifteen, she wears a pleated skirt, pigtails, and bows. She dangles her doll, Betsy, from one hand. Silence. She looks at Betsy.

DANIEL: *(off, pounding on the door)* Let me in!

BECKY: Betsy, he's here!

DANIEL: *(off, pounding)* Open up!

BECKY: *(calling through door)* Are you my tutor?

DANIEL: *(off)* No. Please help me!

BECKY: *(calling through door)* Mommy says not to let strange men in the house.

DANIEL: *(off)* It's an emergency!

BECKY: *(calling through door)* I'm not supposed to talk to them either. *(to doll)* He's weird.

DANIEL: *(off, pounding)* You've got to help me!!

BECKY: *(calling through door)* Only if you're my tutor.

DANIEL: *(off)* Okay, whatever you say.

BECKY: *(calling through door)* Say 'I'm your tutor.'

DANIEL: *(off)* I'm your tutor. Now let me in!

BECKY: *(to doll)* Told you he was my tutor.

DANIEL: *(off, pounding)* I'm your tutor! I'm your tutor!

ROBERT: *(entering)* Coming! Coming!

BECKY: *(as she takes chain-lock off door, to ROBERT)* It's my tutor!

ROBERT: You go to your room.

DANIEL: *(off, pounding)* Let me in!!

ROBERT: *(calling out)* Don't break the door down! I'm coming! *(to BECKY)* I thought I told you to go to your room.

BECKY: But it's my tutor!

ROBERT: No 'buts'. Now move it. *(slaps her bottom toward exit)*

BECKY: Aww. *(exits with doll)*

DANIEL: *(off)* Hurry! Please hurry!

ROBERT: Yes, yes, just a second. *(ROBERT turns the lock and opens the door. DANIEL LOWELL, a young man in a ski-jacket, bursts in, knocking ROBERT back a few steps. ROBERT, middle-aged, pleasant and controlled, regains his footing as DANIEL, wild-eyed, slams the door and presses his back against it.)*

DANIEL: *(extends hand)* Daniel Lowell. I'm in danger.

ROBERT: *(cautiously shaking it)* Robert Grey. I live here.

DANIEL: Thank God.

ROBERT: *(beat)* Uh -- what seems to be the problem?

DANIEL: *(breath not fully recovered from running)* Problem. Yes. There's these men in scarves. They've been chasing me.

ROBERT: Chasing you?

DANIEL: Ever since I crashed my car.

ROBERT: What?

DANIEL: Two, three miles back. Into a snowbank. And I don't know where they came from or why they're doing it but they've been chasing me and --

ROBERT: *(going to phone)* We'd better call Hank.

DANIEL: Hank?

ROBERT: Chief of police 'round here. Nice man. *(touchtones)* Not to worry. Hank looks after everything.

DANIEL: Look, I can't thank you enough. You don't know how good it feels to be inside a house. To be safe.

ROBERT: Don't mention it. Glad to help. *(into phone)* Hello Shirley? Shirley, it's Robert Grey here. Can you get Hank on the line? ... I know it's poker but this is an emergency ... Thanks. *(to DANIEL)* He's out back playing poker. Hank loves his poker. Makes a killing.

DANIEL: I'm no good at it.

ROBERT: Me neither. But Hank -- woah.

DANIEL: *(smiles awkwardly)* May I sit down?

ROBERT: By all means.

DANIEL: *(going to chair)* It's just that I've been running and --

ROBERT: Excuse me, would you mind removing your overshoes? The carpet.

DANIEL: *(taking them off)* Sorry. Look I'm really sorry. I'm afraid I'm not thinking too clearly.

ROBERT: Not at all. *(into phone)* Hank? Robert Grey here ... Well as a matter of fact it is important. There's a young man just arrived on the doorstep and it seems there's these men chasing him ... *(to DANIEL)* Are they outside?

DANIEL: *(looks out window)* I don't see them.

ROBERT: *(into phone)* He doesn't see them. How soon can you get out here? ... I see. Well get here as soon as you can...Thanks. *(hangs up)* He'll get here as soon as he can.

DANIEL: How soon will that be?

ROBERT: After his hand.

DANIEL: He's still playing cards??

ROBERT: I'm afraid the Blackwell estate lacks credibility with Hank. I've called before but it's always turned out to be over nothing. 'The boy who cried wolf.' Not to worry. The important thing is he's coming and whoever was chasing you is probably lost in this blizzard.

(VANESSA BLACKWELL enters. In her late forties, she is wealthy, well-bred, and ripe -- the life of the party and the height of small-town society.)

VANESSA: Robert, what was that banging and -- *(sees DANIEL)* Who are you?

DANIEL: Daniel Lowell.

VANESSA: Vanessa Blackwell.

ROBERT: It seems there's these men in scarves. They chased him here.

VANESSA: Men in scarves?

DANIEL: I was on my way back to Toronto, driving down the shortcut to Highway Twenty-one, and I came to that curve by the old boarded-up Dairy Queen and there was this man running in the middle of the road --

VANESSA: In the middle of the road?

DANIEL: Yeah and I swerved to avoid him, hit an ice patch and smashed into a snowbank.

VANESSA: Were you hurt?

DANIEL: No. But when I got out of the car there were all these -- these faceless men in dark scarves -- and I said, 'I've had an accident. Can you help me?' And they didn't say

anything. Just started moving toward me. And I stepped backwards. And they just kept coming. And the next thing I knew they were running and I was running and they were after me. And I ran and I ran and I saw this light and I ran and I'm here.

VANESSA: Poor dear, you must have been terrified.

DANIEL: Yes, because I thought they wanted to kill me and --

ROBERT: *(peeking through curtains)* They're here.

DANIEL: What??

ROBERT: Outside.

(VANESSA rushes to the window and joins ROBERT, peeking through the curtains.)

DANIEL: Oh no.

ROBERT: Three by the maple, one -- no, two by the hedge --

VANESSA: Six by the jockey, four by --

DANIEL: What are we going to do??

VANESSA: Have a brandy.

DANIEL: But they're going to kill me!!

VANESSA: Them? Don't be silly. They come by often.

DANIEL: You know them?

VANESSA: Just by sight. I think they're joggers, though in these temperatures they must be mad.

DANIEL: *(beat)* Joggers?

VANESSA: Joggers.

DANIEL: Joggers??

VANESSA: They jog by, catch their breath and jog on. Appalling exercise -- hard on the knees. Robert, fetch our friend a brandy, would you dear?

(ROBERT pours brandies at the sideboard.)

VANESSA: Running through that blizzard -- no wonder you're in such a state. Wouldn't you be happier out of that coat?

DANIEL: I guess.

VANESSA: *(helping DANIEL out of his coat)* The thermostat's up full. Keep it on and when you go out into the wind and snow you'll catch your death of pneumonia. Just ask my late brother. *(hangs his coat)* He stayed bundled in his parka all through Mission Band one day and sure enough when he stepped out into the wind and snow that's exactly what happened to him. Mind you he was never a well child. There. Now you just sit tight and when the storm settles we'll call the Motor League.

DANIEL: You're too kind.

VANESSA: Not at all.

(ROBERT turns with brandies for the three of them.)

ROBERT: Here we are.

VANESSA: Ah, just what the doctor ordered. George, my third husband, loved his brandy. Said it was good for the complexion. He -- is something wrong?

DANIEL: *(looking through curtains)* Wrong? No. The joggers ... they've jogged on.

VANESSA: Always do.

DANIEL: I feel so silly.

VANESSA: Nonsense. you're not used to the Bruce. The snow ... it's enough to drive one mad.

DANIEL: *(rueful)* Joggers. *(hand to head)* Hank!!

VANESSA: Hank?

DANIEL: Hank, the police, we called him to come.

VANESSA: *(bitting her head with her hand as if to say 'of course')* Robert, quick. He's had enough false alarms from this house.

(ROBERT touchtones.)

DANIEL: And he was in the middle of a hand and boy do I ever feel stupid! Please believe me, I'm not normally like this.

VANESSA: I understand.

ROBERT: *(into phone)* Shirley? Robert Grey here. Is Hank still there? ... Good. Put him on the line, would you? *(to DANIEL and VANESSA)* Good luck. He just finished warming the engine.

(DANIEL and VANESSA relax, an internal 'whew'. Pause.)

ROBERT: *(into phone)* Hank? Look, about that call, you can forget it. All's well ... *(ROBERT holds the receiver away from his head as though he's being blasted. Into phone.)* Well do you think I like making crank calls? *(holds it away again; to DANIEL)* Look will you talk to him? He threw in a flush so he could get here and --

DANIEL: Sure. *(goes to phone)*

ROBERT: *(into phone)* Hank -- Hank here's the man you want to speak to. *(as DANIEL takes phone, to VANESSA)* He's really mad.

VANESSA: I'm not surprised.

DANIEL: *(into phone)* Uh. Hank? I'm the guy Robert told you about ... No he didn't make it up. I thought there were these men who wanted to kill me. I thought they were chasing me but it turns out they were just joggers ... *(sheepishly)* That's right. People who run. So I'm fine, we're all fine, everyone's fine ... You're not fine ... Yes I know you threw in your flush ... Pete won with two pair? ... I see. Ninety bucks in the kitty. I'm sorry, I'm afraid I was a bit stupid ... I was probably that, too ... Look, just go back to your game and good luck. *(hangs up, red with nervous embarrassment)* He's really mad.

VANESSA: He had a flush. *(VANESSA laughs. DANIEL and ROBERT join in. They have the giggles.)*

DANIEL: Ninety bucks in the kitty. Pete won with two pair. *(giggles)*

VANESSA: Some more brandy, Robert.

(ROBERT gets brandies.)

DANIEL: *(giggling)* A good thing I don't live here. He'd never leave a card game for me again if my life depended on it.

VANESSA: *(joins laugh)* Never again.

DANIEL: Ninety bucks in the kitty!

VANESSA: Pete won with two pair! *(They laugh.)* Oh my oh my. You're twenty-five?

DANIEL: *(not following her line of thought, but not caring either)* Two years ago.

VANESSA: Who cares, you have lovely brown eyes.

DANIEL: *(giggles)* Thank you.

VANESSA: *(joins his giggle)* I like you.

DANIEL: I like you too. *(tinier giggle)*

VANESSA: Do you like my daughter?

DANIEL: We haven't really met.

VANESSA: You will. Her teachers at Leslie Frost Secondary think she's disturbed, the know-nothings. After all, what would *you* be if you were a sensitive little girl standing waist-deep in snow at seven AM to catch a school bus full of filthy dirty children?

DANIEL: Well I, uh --

VANESSA: She's a girl with hidden qualities. Oh my yes. I've wanted a tutor for her since last October and I do believe you're ideal.

DANIEL: (*giggling uncertainly*) I'm ideal?

VANESSA: You start tomorrow.

DANIEL: Start what?

VANESSA: Tutoring my daughter.

DANIEL: Pardon?

VANESSA: Tutoring my daughter.

DANIEL: (*beat*) I don't think I get the joke.

VANESSA: No joke.

DANIEL: Have I missed something?

VANESSA: You'll have room and board and whatever perks your heart desires. I'm a generous employer.

DANIEL: I'm afraid there's been a misunderstanding.

VANESSA: My daughter needs you.

DANIEL: But I'm not a teacher. I don't know the first thing about teaching.

VANESSA: You'll learn.

(*ROBERT turns with the brandies.*)

ROBERT: Brandy?

DANIEL: (*quietly*) I'll pass, thank you. As a matter of fact I really should be going. So if you don't mind -- it's been nice meeting you both and if I could just get my coat I'll be on my way. (*backs to closet*)

VANESSA: Suit yourself but they won't be pleased.

DANIEL: Who?

VANESSA: The joggers.

DANIEL: *(beat; quietly)* Oh my God.

VANESSA: Classes will be from one to six. You can have mornings to prepare for lessons.

DANIEL: You had them chase me here! You control them!

VANESSA: *(laughing)* Well if you think that, you can always call Hank.

(ROBERT joins the laugh. The phone rings. DANIEL races for it.)

DANIEL: *(into phone)* SAVE ME SAVE ME SAVE ME I'M AT -- *(replaces receiver, stunned)*

VANESSA: What's the matter?

DANIEL: They hung up.

ROBERT: You don't have the best phone manner.

(the sound of a car driving up the lane)

DANIEL: *(races to the front door)* HELP ME! *(runs out the front door)* HEEEELLLLLP!

(DANIEL races back on, slams door, and presses his back to it.)

VANESSA: Welcome home.

DANIEL: They're driving my car.

ROBERT: Don't worry. They're very careful.

(The phone rings.)

VANESSA: They'll park it back in the barn.

ROBERT: With all the others.

(The phone rings again.)

VANESSA: *(into phone)* Hello? ... Why Doris what a surprise ... 'Save me save me save me'? Not to worry, it was probably a Holy Roller ... By Friday? I'll see what I can do. Bye-bye. *(VANESSA hangs up and unplugs the phone from its jack. As she gives phone to ROBERT, to DANIEL)* That was Doris. The I.O.D.E. is having a charity raffle this Friday. As Past President I have fifty tickets to unload. Might I interest you in a book of five? *(DANIEL sinks to his knees with a whimper.)* I take it that's a 'no'?

ROBERT: Would you care for a sedative?

(DANIEL shakes his head.)

VANESSA: *(to ROBERT)* Get the little one, would you dear?

(ROBERT exits with the phone. It will not be seen again.)

DANIEL: Why is this happening to me?

VANESSA: They thought I'd like you and they were right. They usually are.

DANIEL: They?

VANESSA: With the scarves?

DANIEL: They're going to kill me, aren't they?

VANESSA: Heavens no. Robert thought the same thing when he came. But you're safe now.

DANIEL: Robert?

VANESSA: He's safe too. They won't hurt you. I won't let them. *(ROBERT re-enters with BECKY and her doll.)* Ahh. Becky I'd like you to meet your tutor, Mr. Lowell. Mr. Lowell, this is my daughter Becky Blackwell.

BECKY: Hi sir. *(presenting doll)* This is Betsy. We sing songs ... What's the matter sir? Is something wrong?

(VANESSA beams, ROBERT looks on, as DANIEL stares in shock at the little adolescent pigtails and bows. Blackout. The sound of joggers -- feet crunch snow, panting.)