

*Orig.  
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ABUSED?

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## SYNOPSIS

### ABUSED?

Should the government step in when a 30 year old woman, with the mind of an eight year old, wants to have sex? With another woman?

Two social workers investigate a charge of abuse.

Cast of Characters

<u>Fran Johnson</u>	woman; 45-65; semi-retired physician
<u>Matie Arnold</u>	woman; 25-35; social worker
<u>Lorna Mullins</u>	woman; 30-50; social worker
<u>Samantha Southgate</u>	woman; 35-45; teacher
<u>Tracy Kingdon</u>	woman; 25-45; neighbor of the Johnsons
<u>Sue Johnson</u>	woman; 22-30; Fran's daughter

Scene

The front porch of the Johnson's home.

Time

The present.

SETTING:

The Johnsons live in rural Maryland. The front porch is furnished with a sofa and/or a few modest chairs.

AT RISE

It is early afternoon; a pleasant summer day. FRAN is sitting on the sofa, reading the Bible, as MATTIE and LORNA enter from SL.

ABUSED?

MATTIE

Good afternoon. You're Ms. Johnson?

FRAN

That depends. Who are you?

MATTIE

I'm Mattie Arnold and this is Ms. Mullins. We're with the county's social services department.

FRAN

That right? Does that mean you've come to socialize?

LORNA

No, Ms. Johnson; we've come because we've received a complaint---ah, that is---we have a report that your daughter is being abused.

(FRAN remains calm; continues to play the "just folks" role)

FRAN

Well, I can make a guess as to who made the report. But I can tell you that it's a lie. I can put my hand on the good book and say to you---it---is---a---lie.

MATTIE

That's very impressive, Ms. Johnson, but I'm afraid that we have pretty specific information which leads us to believe that the report is true.

LORNA

Yes; very specific information.

(She opens a file and reads)

"Fran Johnson is the sole legal guardian of Sue Johnson, her daughter. Sue Johnson is 30 years old but has the mental capacity of a child of eight. It is common knowledge in the county that Fran Johnson functions as her daughter's procurer and encourages women of questionable morals to visit with Sue Johnson and engage in activities of a lesbian nature."

MATTIE

There are serious charges, Ms. Johnson.

FRAN

That they are, Ms. Arnold; that they are. Say, you folks want anything? A Coke? Pepsi? Some lemonade? I made it fresh this morning?

LORNA

No, Ms. Johnson. We do not want any refreshment. We are here, as you agree, on serious business. Now, what response do you have to these charges?

FRAN

What was that word you used---procure? Just tell me how you figure that word fits this situation and maybe I can help you out.

MATTIE

Well, as I suspect you do know, procuring---in this sense---means that you find, locate, and transport women for the specific purpose of having sex with your daughter.

FRAN

Well, then, I can tell you for certain that I don't do any "procuring."

LORNA

Ms. Johnson, we'll get back to that in a moment. Now, the balance of the charge states....

(SAMANTHA enters the porch from the front door of the house. She's neatly dressed in a suit, dress shirt and tie. She calls back into the house)

SAMANTHA

So long, sweetheart. See you in a couple of days.

FRAN

Samantha, I'd like you to meet some people from the county. Ms. Mullins, this is Samantha Southgate. And, this other woman is Mattie Arnold. These folks are here to ask about Sue.

SAMANTHA

Why, that's wonderful. Be nice if the government could do something to help you out a bit. Well, gotta run. Nice meeting you folks. So long, Fran.

FRAN

See you later. Tuesday about noon would be good.

(SAMANTHA exits SL)

MATTIE

Who was that?

FRAN

Oh, Sam was Sue's high school English teacher---when Sue was a senior. She's just a real good friend now.

Friend of yours? Or of Sue's? MATTIE

Why, of both. FRAN

And she was in the house this whole time? Alone with your daughter? LORNA

Yeah. You sure I can't get you something? Maybe a beer? FRAN

NO THANK YOU, Ms. Johnson. Now, just what was this "Sam" doing alone---alone with your daughter? LORNA

Why, I expect they was havin' a good time. She comes over couple times a week, shows Sue a good time. FRAN

Wait a minute! Wait a god-damn-minute! What do you mean by "shows her a good time"? MATTIE

How old are you, Mattie? FRAN

I'm 33 but what's that got to do with it? MATTIE

Well, then, I reckon you're old enough to know what havin' "a good time" means. FRAN

What? What are you saying? That that---that person who just walked out of this house---was having sex with your daughter? LORNA

I can't be rightly sure but, yes, I suspect that's what happened. FRAN

Then you admit the charges? That your daughter is being abused? LORNA

I admit no such thing. FRAN

But---you just said that that person had sexual relations with Sue. MATTIE

FRAN

You're sure you're 33?

LORNA

Ms. Johnson! Do not play games with us. If that person had sexual relations with Sue, that IS abuse.

FRAN

I asked Mattie how old she is; that was probably rude. So, I won't ask you but, as a guess, you're a might past 30 yourself. And I suspect that it's a safe bet that you have "sexual relations" now and then. Do you call that abuse?

LORNA

No, of course not. Don't be ridiculous. But, I'm a grown woman.

FRAN

Well, my Sue is a grown woman....

MATTIE

With the I Q of a child!

FRAN

That's what they tell me. All those specialists---telling me my Sue is just a baby.

(Enter TRACY, SL. She is casually dressed, in contrast to SAMANTHA)

TRACY

Hi, Fran. How's it goin'?

FRAN

Oh, I've had better days, truth to tell.

TRACY

Anything I can do? These folks bothering you?

LORNA

Ma'm; we're with the county....

TRACY

Then I know you're bothering these people. What's this about, anyway?

MATTIE

Look, lady, this is none of your concern. We're here on official busines...

TRACY

Is that right, "lady"? I bet it's about Sue, isn't it? Can't you leave these poor people in peace? What in hell do you want?

MATTIE

Not that it's any of your concern, but there have been reports that Ms. Johnson's daughter is being abused---sexually abused.

TRACY

Why, that's a bunch of crap. She's never been abused---never. I see her two, three times a week. She'd have said something to me.

LORNA

You---see her? Two or three times a week? What, exactly, do you mean by that?

TRACY

I don't see that it's any of your never-mind, lady. Sue and me are friends---that's all.

MATTIE

Friends? Just friends?

TRACY

Oh, I guess you could say that we're special friends. The girl does love to be loved, so we do some of that, too. Nothing like a little love making in the middle of the day.

LORNA

Did you hear that, Mattie? This person admits to having sexual relations with Sue Johnson. That's all I need to hear; we've got an open and shut case here. Now, Ms. Johnson, will you go get your daughter so that we can place her in a suitable environment? Or do you want us to get a court order and have the sheriff come and get her?

FRAN

You know, I don't much like either of those alternatives. Sue's happy; I'm happy that she's happy. That's all that matters.

MATTIE

No, Ms. Johnson. You may think that Sue is happy but she's only able to think at the level of an eight year old.

LORNA

Come on, Mattie. It's clear that Ms. Johnson isn't going to cooperate with us so we'll just have to do this the hard way. Goodbye, Ms. Johnson; you'll be hearing from the sheriff in a few days.

FRAN

(Pulls a large pistol from behind a pillow on the sofa. From now on, she no longer uses the hay-seed diction)



Sorry, miss. You're not going anywhere for just a bit.

MATTIE

Now---don't do anything foolish! This won't solve anything!

FRAN

Tracy, mighty nice of you to drop by. Why don't you come back in a day or two?

TRACY

Fran, are you sure you want me to go?

FRAN

Yes, I think it best. Say "hello" to your mother for me.

TRACY

Well, if that's the way you want it....

(TRACY exits SL)

FRAN

All right, you two. Just sit down and we'll talk a bit more. No sudden moves, please. And just for your record, I'm a physician so you may call me Doctor Johnson.

(MATTIE and LORNA sit)

LORNA

Oh, please, please don't hurt us! We're just doing our jobs.

FRAN

You know, that has a certain ring. "Just doing our jobs." Isn't that what the Nazis said---after they surrendered? But that's beside the point, isn't it?

MATTIE

OK, doctor. You tell us. What is the point? I take it that you're not going to kill us. That wouldn't solve anything---and sure wouldn't help Sue.

FRAN

Oh, don't think I wouldn't kill you---if you leave me no other choice. But, right now, all I want to do is talk to you as one reasonable person to another.

MATTIE

We don't have a lot of options here. Just what do you want to talk about?

FRAN

I want to tell you about a little girl---a little girl who grew up to be a big girl. A woman. A woman---you probably have this in your records---who liked women. Or, liked one other woman. Now, I won't tell you it was easy for her dad and me---when she told us. When she introduced us to Renee.

Her partner. But it was clear that Renee made her happier than any of the boys she used to date. If Sue was happy, her dad and I were happy for her.

LORNA

Yes, Dr. Johnson; we know all about Renee. It's in the file.

FRAN

Excuse me, Miss, but all you have is some dry, boilerplate verbiage that your department churns out. Oh, I know---I've seen enough of that in the reports I got. DimCap, that's what they call my darling daughter. DimCap, those bastards call her. "Diminished capacity" my rosy red---now, I don't want to get vulgar here. What I'm

doing---what I'm attempting to do---is give you some idea of what a vibrant, passionate woman Sue was. That Sue is. She and Renee paired off when they were both 18. You never saw a couple more in love than they were. I know it's trite, but they could hardly keep their hands off each other.

(Lights dim on set. We hear, off stage, SUE---laughing)

Renee! Renny! Now, you just sit down and eat your lunch. We made love this morning and we'll make love tonight. But, don't you think that---that it's a bit---a bit much---to want---to make love in the middle of the afternoon? Ah, so you don't---don't think---it's a bit---much....

(Lights come up)

FRAN

...could hardly keep their hands off each other. God, that does sound like the National Enquirer, doesn't it?

MATIE

Yeah, a little.

FRAN

Well, triteness and analogies aside, the two were in love---deeply in love. And in lust. I could see it, everyone could. She told me that they made love at least once every single day.

LORNA

And this went on for how long?

FRAN

Twelve years. Right up to the day of the accident. The day when that god-damn, ~~my~~ his soul rot in hell, mother-coupling bastard of a drunk drove down the wrong side of the road and thru the red light and hit Renee's car broadside. Killed Renee; killed my husband. And made Sue into what she is today---a woman whose head was severely injured, whose brain was damaged, who now has the IQ of an eight year old. But who is a woman. Do---you---understand?

LORNA

Yes.

FRAN

Sue was in the hospital for five months. When it became clear that there was nothing more to be done for her, I brought her home. And we set up a pattern. She gets us breakfast each morning; cereal mostly. And she watches a lot of TV. I do thank the All-mighty for cable. And she reads, you know, kids' books. So it was OK for a while. She missed her daddy. A lot. And she missed Renee.

MATTIE

I can imagine.

FRAN

Yes, she sure did miss Renee.

(Stage lights dim; a baby spot comes up on SUE. She is dressed in a house-coat and wears a patch over one eye. One hand stays in the housecoat pocket, as she covers another souvenir of the accident. She speaks in slightly sing-song cadences)

SUE

Renee? Where are you, girl? Don't you go playin' hide and seek with me. Renny? Come on home, honey. Renee---don't play this game any more. I don't like this game any more. Come home, Renny, come home. Come to bed, Renee. RENEE, where are you?! Oh, I'm scared. Renny, I miss you--- I want you---I love you...

(Baby spot goes out; stage lights come up)

FRAN

She'd ask me, over and over, "Mommy, is Renee coming home soon?" Once I got her to understand that Renee was gone--- that she was never going to walk thru our door again---she cried for a week. Then, gradually, she started to ask about other women---women she'd known before she partnered with Renee.

(Stage lights out again; baby spot comes up on SUE)

SUE

Mommy; can I see Samantha? Why doesn't Sam or Tracy come and visit me? Doesn't anybody like me any more, Mommy? Am I ugly now? Is that why nobody comes to see me?

(Baby spot goes out; stage lights come up\_

FRAN

I tell you, it broke my heart.

LORNA

That is really sad.

FRAN

Then she got more explicit.

(Stage lights out; baby spot comes up on SUE)

SUE

Mommy; I'd really like to see Samantha. Or Tracy. I want to hold somebody. I want somebody to hold me! I miss Renny so much. I miss how we used to make love. I need somebody to kiss me---to tell me that I'm still pretty. Oh, Mommy....

(Baby spot goes out; stage lights come up)

FRAN

Well, what could I do? What would you do? I love that girl---that woman---more than life. I want her to be happy. I'd do anything to make her happy. She's thirty years old! Isn't she entitled to decide what will make her happy? Is the government going to force a thirty year old woman to go thru life as a celibate?

MATTIE

Hum-m-m-m....

FRAN

Yeah; that's how I felt, too.

LORNA

So, you didn't just let this happen? This sexual activity? You took steps to make it happen?

FRAN

Of course, I "took steps." I love my daughter.

MATTIE

So what did you do?

FRAN

This next part was pretty hard. I mean, talking to other women. But, I spoke to Sam and Tracy who had known Sue---before. And I told them the facts: that Sue was never going to be more than eight years old in her head---that she had a grown woman's needs---and that I'd take it as a personal favor if they'd come to see her now and then.

MATTIE

That must have been pretty hard---talking about your own daughter's sexual needs.

FRAN

Yes; it was hard. But, a mother does what a mother must. You asked, when you first got here, if I "procured". I'm not sure what you can call it; I just did what I had to do to help Sue find a little happiness.

LORNA

So, these women---they come and have sex with Sue?

FRAN

You know, I'm not sure; I suspect there's some of that. How a woman pleases another---I've never really asked. But, I do know they hold my baby and show their love for her. And that Sue is content---her thirty year old body---her eight year old mind---happy. I was sort of pulling your chain, earlier, when I was so explicit about what they do.

MATTIE

I grew up in a small town. I expect you had more than one guy stop by---wanting to get in on the fun.

FRAN

Oh, you got that right. I had to run off some of the local bad boys. And I'm sure that the "report" you mentioned earlier came from some no-good I'd not let near my Sue.

LORNA

You seem to have thought of everything.

FRAN

Well, you're wrong about that. I haven't thought of a way to get my husband back---and Renee back---and Sue, get her back to what she was. But, you know how it goes: you can only play the hand you're dealt. God, now I'm sounding like Johnny Cash.

MATTIE

Dr. Johnson, thank you for your time. Lorna, do you have any questions for Dr. Johnson?

LORNA

No, none that I can think of. Of course, we'll have to turn in a report but I can't see any sexual abuse here, can you?

MATTIE

No; what I see is a mother who is trying her very best to make her little girl happy.

BLACKOUT