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**Dramatic
Publishing**

Evil Little Thoughts

(Revised Manuscript)

By

MARK D. KAUFMANN



Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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The world premiere production of *Evil Little Thoughts* opened at the Denver Center Theatre Company on May 20, 1992, as part of the 1992 U.S. WEST Theatrefest.

Cast:

Douglas Jensen.....John Hutton
Anna Jensen Wendy Radford
Laney Harold Patricia Jones
Lloyd Price..... Randolph Mantooth
Herbert Toomey Ron Headlee
Bo Riverton..... James Micheal Connor
Rusty Riverton William M. Whitehead

Production Staff:

Director Israel Hicks
Set Designer Bill Curley
Lighting Designer Robert A. Keosheyen
Costume Designer..... Nancy Bassett
Sound Designer Jim Kaiser
Stage Manager Paul Jefferson

Evil Little Thoughts

CHARACTERS

DOUGLAS JENSEN: A businessman.

ANNA JENSEN: His wife.

LANEY HAROLD: His secretary.

LLOYD PRICE: A businessman.

RUSTY RIVERTON: A hit man.

BO RIVERTON: Rusty's foster brother.

HERBERT TOOMEY: A policeman.

SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: A theatre lobby.

Scene 2: Two months later. Tuesday. An office supply room.

Scene 3: Wednesday. The solarium in the Jensen's penthouse apartment.

Scene 4: Thursday. Rusty's living room.

Scene 5: Friday. An office supply room.

ACT II

Scene 1: Saturday. The dressing area/lounge of the Jensen's penthouse apartment.

Scene 2: The same; 15 minutes later.

The play takes place in the present.

Evil Little Thoughts

ACT I

SCENE 1

(The last part of the “Hoedown” movement of Copland’s “Rodeo,” or something similar, rises to full volume.

The curtain rises on the lobby of a concert hall. Actually, the lobby is only indicated by two pools of light on either side of the stage. Posters announce the schedule of future concerts. L there is one aging pay phone and a sign indicating the way to the restrooms.

The music ends and is followed by the sound of applause offstage. It is the concert’s intermission. The low buzz of chat rises as if the lobby [i.e. stage] were being filled with the audience emptying from the auditorium.

ANNA JENSEN and DOUGLAS JENSEN enter from R, both smartly dressed and in agreeable moods. DOUGLAS particularly seems to have limitless inspiration and positive energy. ANNA looks through her program.)

ANNA. Copland had such ... an insight into the American spirit.

DOUGLAS. You think he did?

ANNA. You don’t?

DOUGLAS *(scanning the lobby)*. I don’t see anyone we know; not even photographers.

ANNA. For a change, thank God. I can wear this dress again.

DOUGLAS. Good, I like it.

ANNA. You do? I wasn’t sure the neck wasn’t cut too ... something.

DOUGLAS *(almost agreeing)*. Hm.

(LANEY HAROLD, a practical, canny, off-center woman in her 30s enters. She carries several papers and a cellphone.)

LANEY. Mr. Jensen: the Nelson proposal was faxed through, but it doesn’t have any of those percentage things you told me to look for.

(She hands a sheet to DOUGLAS, who quickly scans it, then tears it in half lengthwise and hands the halves back.)

DOUGLAS. Fax these back. Separately.

LANEY. And I have Mr. Conner on the phone.

(DOUGLAS takes the phone.)

DOUGLAS. What am I hearing about Takashima?

(LLOYD PRICE enters L, a drink in his hand.)

ANNA. Hello, Laney.

LANEY. Hi, Mrs. Jensen. Oh, that's a pretty dress.

ANNA. Thank you. I like it, too.

LANEY. Shows off your whole neck.

DOUGLAS *(on phone)*. Peter, I want to bring Marco in on this ...

(DOUGLAS catches sight of LLOYD across the lobby.)

DOUGLAS *(cont'd)*. Peter, hold a second—Laney, go over there and get me the number of that pay phone.

(LANEY sees where DOUGLAS is pointing.)

LANEY. Pay phone? Weird.

(DOUGLAS nods her toward it. She crosses to it.)

DOUGLAS. Go ahead, Peter ...

(LLOYD is leaning against the phone, in the way.)

LANEY. Excuse me?

LLOYD. Hm? Oh, sure, sorry.

(LLOYD moves back, and LANEY leans in, studying the phone's number. LLOYD puts his program under his arm and unwraps a stick of chewing gum. He becomes aware of LANEY just staring at the phone, not making a call. She gets the number in her head and goes back to DOUGLAS. LLOYD glances after her and then looks at the phone, not quite able to figure out what that was about. He lifts the receiver: yes, there's a dial tone.)

DOUGLAS. Hm ... Takashima could solidify everything. Look, the concert breaks at 10:47. Call then.

(DOUGLAS ends the call. LANEY arrives at his side.)

LANEY. 212-333-2333.

(DOUGLAS dials.)

DOUGLAS. Go to the office and dig up whatever you can on Takashima. Email what you find to Mr. Conner, he's waiting for it.

(LANEY nods to DOUGLAS and smiles at ANNA.)

LANEY *(to ANNA)*. See you later.

(LANEY exits. The pay phone next to LLOYD begins to ring. LLOYD looks at it. He looks around to see if anyone is expecting a call; he doesn't see DOUGLAS and ANNA. The phone continues to ring. LLOYD tries to decide what to do.)

ANNA. What are you doing?

DOUGLAS. Impromptu business meeting.

ANNA. Who with?

DOUGLAS. Him. He doesn't seem familiar with the device.

ANNA. Douglas, how many people do you know who would pick up a ringing public phone? Why don't you go over and talk to him?

DOUGLAS. That's no fun.

(LLOYD goes for the phone. He picks up the receiver just as LANEY comes back in with a policeman, HERBERT TOOMEY. He holds a pen and parking ticket book in his hand.)

LANEY. Mr. Jensen, this policeman was about to ticket your car. I told him it was the wrong idea.

LLOYD. Hello?

(DOUGLAS hesitates a moment, hearing LLOYD's voice, and turns to see he's picked up the phone. DOUGLAS switches the phone off, turning back to HERBERT.)

DOUGLAS. You were about to what?

LANEY. You're parked in a no parking zone.

DOUGLAS. Thank you, Laney, I'll take care of it.

(LANEY exits.)

LLOYD. Hello ... ?

(LLOYD hangs up.)

HERBERT. So, there's no parking.

DOUGLAS. Why?

HERBERT. Why? Well, I ... it's because ... I really don't know, I just go by the signs.

DOUGLAS. In other words, you're so low on the totem pole that your sense of equitable justice is dwarfed by a ten foot parking sign.

ANNA. What my husband is trying to say is that there's a very good reason the car is parked there, and when you hear it you'll probably laugh. And if you don't, you'll wish you had.

HERBERT. Look, it's only sixty-eight dollars ...

DOUGLAS. Where will that money go?

HERBERT. Road department.

DOUGLAS. You mean it'll go into the pocket of a paper pusher who is undoubtedly the nephew or niece of someone who won the confidence of the voting electorate by kissing babies and eating ethnic foods for three months, and hasn't gone near either since.

HERBERT. I don't think that's what I meant.

DOUGLAS. Officer ... ?

HERBERT. Toomey.

DOUGLAS. An automobile is classified as a modern convenience. That is, it is a device made to facilitate one's movement, which otherwise would be restricted by its lack. Therefore, if I am required to park in a lot a block away, and at the conclusion of the concert find myself jammed in with dozens of other cars, it ceases to facilitate my movement, at which point I might as well be in fourteen-ought-seven, dressed in chain mail and dragging an ox behind me.

HERBERT. Sir, I have a life ...

ANNA. Allow me to interpret?

(DOUGLAS smiles.)

ANNA *(cont'd)*. The point, my husband is making is that it's not only to his own benefit that he parks in front of the concert hall, but to, actually, everyone's—and even yours—in a tangential kind of way.

HERBERT. How's that?

ANNA. The business he generates extends into almost every area of commerce ...

DOUGLAS. Nearly every.

ANNA. Isn't almost the same?

DOUGLAS. A shade of difference of degree.

ANNA. Really? That's interesting: almost and nearly ... Nearly every area of commerce and governmental service. Which sooner or later trickles down to you.

HERBERT. OK. Let's just say I made a mistake.

DOUGLAS. No, you wouldn't be doing your job: write the ticket.

(DOUGLAS pulls out his wallet and shows HERBERT his driver's license.)

HERBERT. I already made my quota—it doesn't matter, believe me ...

(HERBERT takes the license and reads the name.)

HERBERT *(cont'd)*. Douglas Jensen? Oh, you're him?

DOUGLAS. Who I am, or meeting a quota, should have no bearing on your sworn duty as a law officer. Write the ticket. I'm sure it's less than the parking lot rate, anyway. And I'll hold you in much higher esteem.

HERBERT. You'll hold me in esteem for writing you a parking ticket?

(DOUGLAS puts his arm around ANNA.)

DOUGLAS. We both will. This is my wife, Anna.

ANNA. Very nice to meet you.

HERBERT. My pleasure.

(HERBERT starts scribbling up the ticket.)

ANNA. This is probably the first time you've been charmed into giving the ticket.

HERBERT. Without a doubt.

ANNA. My husband has a knack for making people feel privileged to be with him. Even if they get the bad end of the bargain.

HERBERT. Is that what I'm doing?

ANNA. No ... actually, you seem to be coming out on top all the way around: you go one better than your quota, and you're wearing a big smile. *(To DOUGLAS.)* Am I missing something, or are you taking a bath on this?

DOUGLAS. Foolish whim.

(DOUGLAS turns to keep an eye on LLOYD.)

ANNA. I bring out the best in him, officer. Are you married?

HERBERT. Oh, sure. She'd be thrilled I met you: too bad she'll never know about it.

ANNA. Oh, you're ... separated?

HERBERT. Oh, no. It's just never my turn to talk. If I do get the chance, she'll pump me for every detail. She'll ask me what you were like, what you wore ...

ANNA. Definitely a "wife" question.

HERBERT. That is a beautiful dress. Really shows you off.

ANNA. Thank you.

HERBERT. I have a lot of respect for women who don't have that surgery.

DOUGLAS. I'll tell you, Officer Toomey, it isn't every man who finds his life as enriched by the woman he marries as I have.

ANNA. Thank you, Douglas. And ... excuse me a minute. I need to make a trip before intermission's over.

(DOUGLAS looks back to see LLOYD still by the pay phone.)

DOUGLAS. Yes. And I need to make a call.

HERBERT. Oh, please.

(DOUGLAS punches numbers on his phone; ANNA crosses the stage. The pay phone next to LLOYD begins to ring as ANNA nears him.)

ANNA turns back to see that it is, indeed, DOUGLAS calling again. Slowing only for an instant, she passes LLOYD, going off to the restroom. LLOYD looks at the phone again. He looks around—no one else is responding. He picks up the receiver.)

LLOYD. Hello ... ?

DOUGLAS. Mr. Price, this might not be the most orthodox of situations to discuss business, but opportunities shouldn't be wasted. Now, it would be helpful if you were at least open to discussion on ...

LLOYD. Wait a minute—wait a minute. Who—who is this? How do you know it's—that I was here ... ?

DOUGLAS. Douglas Jensen. And it's in my interest to keep abreast of my competitors' activities.

LLOYD. You've had me followed?!

DOUGLAS. Mr. Price, I think you've seen too many movies. I don't own a cloak or a dagg—Well, as a matter of fact I do own a dagger, but it's beside the point ...

LLOYD. When will you comprehend no means "no"? My company is not for sale—to you or anyone. I've heard about the kind of tactics you use—I know a few people who've been on the wrong side of you. If I have to, I'll get a restraining order slapped on you ...

DOUGLAS. Mr. Price, calm down. Paranoia isn't helpful. I wasn't tracking you down, I merely happened upon you. And after all, this is just business.

LLOYD. No it's not! This is a concert hall! And I came here to enjoy the music, and get away from my business and that entire world. I came in here for civilization!

(Pause.)

DOUGLAS. You've found it.

(DOUGLAS clicks the phone off.)

LLOYD. Hello? Jensen ... ?

(The phone is dead. LLOYD hangs up, stunned.)

HERBERT rips the ticket out of the book and hands it, along with DOUGLAS' license, back to him.)

HERBERT. Here you go. You'll have it fixed tomorrow, right?

DOUGLAS. Goes without saying.

(DOUGLAS reaches into his coat pocket.)

DOUGLAS *(cont'd)*. And in return for your ticket, please take mine for the second half of the concert.

There are some things, it occurs to me, I should take care of.

HERBERT. Oh, I can't ...

DOUGLAS. You'd be doing me a favor.

HERBERT. Well, when you put it like that ... Thank you.

DOUGLAS. It's a pleasure. Please explain to my wife.

(DOUGLAS exits.)

HERBERT. Absolutely—don't worry about a thing.

(LLOYD looks around and notices HERBERT, who, in turn, catches sight of him. They eye each other warily for a moment.)

ANNA comes out of the restroom with a brightly flowered silk scarf wrapped around her neck and covering her chest. She stops, seeing LLOYD. She makes a move toward him.)

ANNA. Um ... excuse me, but ... you look ... Are you all right?

(LLOYD doesn't quite focus on ANNA.)

LLOYD. Hm?

(LLOYD sees ANNA and recognizes her. The intermission warning chime sounds.)

LLOYD *(cont'd)*. Excuse me.

(LLOYD goes back into the auditorium. ANNA looks after him a moment, then crosses back to HERBERT.)

ANNA. What ... happened to my husband?

HERBERT. Not to worry. He had to go do something very important, and asked me to escort you back for the second half.

(ANNA turns toward the lobby doors, looking for DOUGLAS.)

ANNA. He did.

HERBERT. Yes. But you are completely safe in my custody, and I'll be sure you get home in comfort.

ANNA. Is that right? I see.

HERBERT. I have to tell you, Mrs. Jensen. This kind of thing doesn't happen to me. Not that I ask things of life. The less you ask, the more delightful the surprise will be when something comes along. This is a very special night.

(HERBERT looks down at the ticket DOUGLAS gave him.)

Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(Two months later. Tuesday.)

An office building basement supply room. There are shelves of papers, pencils and various desk supplies. Some cushions have been thrown over boxes of Xerox paper.

LANEY is pulling on her dress next to a man in his mid- to late-20s, BO RIVERTON. BO, who has little to offer besides his looks, is still lying in his underwear on the cushions, spent.)

BO. You know, when you asked me if I minded that you made love to other men, and I said I didn't, I meant it.

LANEY. I hope so.

BO. You gotta let someone do what's in their heart if you love them enough. Even if it breaks your heart to see them do it.

(LANEY looks at BO, questioning.)

BO *(cont'd)*. I don't mean you're breaking my heart; it was only an example. Another example would be the needless punishment of orphan children. Beating them, starving them. Locking them in a wet basement. Telling them that Santa Claus will bring the one toy they've had their hearts set on—seeing the joy in their faces—then on Christmas morning, when there's nothing under the tree, telling them Santa's changed his mind because their parents are dead. *(Pause.)* If you love someone enough, you let them do those things. But I know, no matter who else you're with, we'll end up together.

LANEY. I think we will, too.

BO. It's because of my eyes, isn't it? You said I have the nicest eyes you'd ever seen.

LANEY. You do, Bo. Sometimes I want to just pour your eyes into a glass and drink 'em down so they'll be inside me.

BO. I love to hear you say those things. What else?

LANEY. Well, when I look in 'em it's like I can see who you are, and where you've come from.

BO. You mean Pittsburgh?

(As LANEY goes on, she pulls her phone out of her purse, nearby.)

LANEY. No. I mean like your past lives. Like when you were a slave in ancient Rome, and you had to build these huge buildings all made of these great big stones, and you'd strain your muscles till you thought you'd just die. But you didn't because you knew someday somebody'd come to your rescue.

(Impulsively, BO grabs LANEY's hands.)

BO. What happened?

LANEY. Ouch! My typing fingers!!

BO. Oh—sorry. So, did I get rescued?

(LANEY writes text messages as she continues. BO moves behind her, massaging her shoulders.)

LANEY. Well, one day along came a real rich Roman lady, and it was on her mind to find a handsome young slave who would fulfill all of her various physical needs, because her husband was an old stiff. And the lady refused to go to orgies, although she had lots of invitations, being the looker she was,

because she liked to know who she was getting “involved” with, and most of the people who show up at those things, you don’t know where they’ve been. If you know what I mean.

(BO is completely lost.)

BO. No, I don’t.

(Getting into the story, LANEY stops texting.)

LANEY. Anyway, she saw you holding up this two-ton hunk of marble, with beads of sweat shining on your chest and arms through this little torn T-shirt thing you were wearing, and she said, “Well, you’re just the man I want to buy.” And she went over to your master, and pulled a hundred dollars out of her purse, and bought you right on the spot.

BO. And I went home and made her happy?

LANEY. Until her husband found out. She told him you were a new landscape architect, but that wasn’t a very good choice since they lived in a third floor apartment. And sooner or later he got suspicious, and one day caught you fooling around with more than just the philodendron.

BO. What did he do?

LANEY. He threw a fit, and he killed you.

BO. No! How?

(LANEY writes one more quick text.)

LANEY. He poisoned you. He put it in her favorite drink. Both of you had some just before the next time you made love, and you died in each other’s arms. With these little half-smile/half-grimaces on your faces, because the moment was a mixture of pleasure and pain all at the same time.

(Pause.)

BO. I don’t remember any of this.

LANEY. And her spirit floated around for years and years and finally ended up in another woman’s body. But when you find her she’ll already be dead this time. Your lives are fated for tragedy.

BO. You see all this in my eyes?

LANEY. With a little imagination.

BO. Oh, I always wanted an imagination. I usually can’t think of anything.

LANEY. That’s what I love about you! You have nothing going on in your head at all. It’s impossible for you to be bad to anybody. I bet you’ve never had a single mean thought in your life.

BO. That’s true. I’d never be mean to anybody.

LANEY. You really like me to tell you stories?

BO. Oh, boy, yes.

LANEY. You see, that’s why I have to sleep with all these different men. You need fuel from different experiences to tell stories, and if you’re only ever with one man, you don’t learn about life. And I have this terrible thirst for knowledge ...

BO. Well, drink up!

LANEY. That’s just the way I want you to look at it.

BO. I told you before—whatever you like is fine with me.

LANEY. You think it’ll be like this when we’re married?

(BO looks at the storage shelves.)

BO. Maybe not so many pencils.

LANEY. My boss has an odd marriage. His wife dresses badly, but she's sweet. If we're at all lucky, our marriage will be just like theirs. But I'll look better.

BO. Remember when you said I've never had a mean thought in my head, a couple minutes ago? Well, I have a broth ... a friend who's going to murder somebody, and I'm helping him out.

(Pause. LANEY looks up.)

BO *(cont'd)*. I hope that doesn't count.

LANEY. You're going to kill someone?

BO. Not me. I'm just helping out.

LANEY. I don't think so, Bo.

BO. No, it's true.

LANEY. You're not grasping this. I have one rule about relationships: at the first sign of trouble, get out. We're dangerously close to that rule right now.

BO. It's not really a mean thought; I'm doing it to be helpful, not mean.

LANEY. I understand that. I'm concerned that it's not a healthy, positive activity for you to participate in.

BO. But I already gave my word! If I tell him "no" now, what kind of a person would I be? Is that the man you want? A liar?

(A pause while LANEY considers.)

LANEY. Is this person you're helping to kill evil and horrible at least?

BO. I don't know. I'm doing it more because I like the guy who's doing the killing, not so much that I hate the guy who's getting killed.

LANEY. There is the possibility you'll get caught. What if you end up in jail? What kind of life am I going to have for myself? When I want to have sex with you, we'll have to do it through the bars of your cell with a bunch of criminals watching. *(Pause.)* Not that under the right circumstances that couldn't be kind of fun. But it's no way of life.

BO. Laney, I promise nothing's going to happen to me. If I thought it could mess up our lives I wouldn't do it.

LANEY. You mean that?

BO. Cross my heart.

(BO crosses his heart with his finger.)

LANEY. Cross mine, too.

(BO runs his finger over LANEY's chest, crossing her heart.)

LANEY *(cont'd)*. That feels nice.

BO. Please don't mind me helping out with the murder.

LANEY. Well ... I guess it's sort of like you said: if you love someone enough, you have to let them do what's in their heart. Even if it's a heinous crime. It's just another example.

BO. That's just right. I sure do love you.

LANEY. I think you love me more than anyone else does.

BO. You know, Laney, being with you is about the only good times I have.

LANEY. If this was the only good time I had, I'd kill myself.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(Wednesday.)

The solarium of DOUGLAS and ANNA's penthouse. Two chaises are the only furniture. ANNA reclines on one, jotting in a blank book diary.

After a moment, DOUGLAS enters. He brings with him a cellphone on which he frequently sends texts. ANNA sees him get to his work. She reads back what she has written in the diary.)

ANNA. "I tread along the wide path
My feet matching the steps
Of so many before me.
I cannot see, nor feel what lies
In place; in foot.
Glare hits my eye.
And the soft taffy adheres to my hard palate.
A lone wolf cries.
And the cheep of a bird.
Which is pleasant.
My thoughts race from one to the other.
And race back again.
Racing, racing.
What a race!
Even to the tiny splinter in my toe.
But that is as close as I will come
To the life of those
Who raced along
So many lives ago."

(ANNA looks up from her work, thinking. DOUGLAS punches a button on his phone and speaks into it.)

DOUGLAS. It's a disaster, start from scratch.

(ANNA looks at DOUGLAS—was that remark meant for her? DOUGLAS hangs up the call and shuffles through the paperwork.)

ANNA. I wish you'd given me more notice about Saturday night. The caterer we usually use was booked up; I had to hire a new one.

(Pause.)

ANNA *(cont'd)*. I don't know if I trust him. He wants to draw little faces on all the food: the hors d'oeuvres, the soup, the meat. I can't think anyone wants dinner staring back at them. The man said, "We're making a statement." I said, "What is the statement?" He said, "NASCAR rules."