

BAD SEED

ACT I

SCENE 1

The one set is the apartment of Colonel and Mrs. Penmark, in a small town in a southern state. We see a tastefully furnished room with colonial pieces and reproductions, expensive but not too gaudy. At R. is an arch door surrounded by bookcases with cupboards at the bottom of each side. A mirror is above one of the shelves of the D. S. bookcase. This door leads off to an inner hall and the bedrooms. At R. rear is the door to the kitchen which is partially visible. The stove can be seen. A large bay window with a window seat is at C. rear. Heavy drapes which cover the window area are open and the room is flooded with early morning light. A small toy dog is L. on the seat. There is a platform extending from the U. L. corner to the D. L. corner of the set giving a sunken living room effect. The door to the den, containing a piano, is at L. rear on this platform as is the front door at L. There is a small table with a drawer, D. R. under the bookcases. Rhoda Penmark, their daughter, keeps her "treasures" in the drawer and it is generally understood that this is her table. An asbtray is on the table. The U. S. cupboard under the bookcase contains Rhoda's things too—shoes, skates, etc. There is a large armchair D. R. with a small table above and L. of it. A spice cabinet hangs on the wall R. of the kitchen door. A chest of drawers to the L. of the kitchen door with a lamp on it. A dining table is up in the bay window with matching dining chairs R. and L. A sofa at L. with a coffee table below it and a stool to the R. On the coffee table are an asbtray and matches. Another armchair is down L. of the sofa. Kenneth's hat is on it. Between the

front and den doors on the platform is a desk, with a lamp and telephone, and a desk chair. A small radio is on a shelf above the desk and a waste basket is D. S. of the desk. There is a large chandelier hanging from the ceiling in the C. of the room and a smaller one hanging near the front door which serve as general lighting at night.

Rhoda Penmark, a neat, quaint and pretty little girl of eight, sits seriously reading a book on the chair R. She wears a red and white dotted Swiss dress and red shoes with metal pieces on the heels. She turns a page carefully, absorbed in the story. Colonel Kenneth Penmark, a good looking officer of thirty-five or so, comes in from R., carrying two fairly new suitcases.

KENNETH. (Entering.) Why, 'morning, Rhoda!

RHODA. 'Morning, Daddy.

KENNETH. (L. of chair.) Up and dressed and ready for the day!

Wearing your best perfume?

RHODA. (Marking her place.) Yes, I am, Daddy.

KENNETH. (Crossing R. to door.) That's right, this is the day of the picnic. I hope there's a breeze off the water. (He sets bags on floor D. S. of front door.)

RHODA. Miss Fern says there always is.

KENNETH. (Crossing to Rhoda, examining plane ticket which he takes from breast pocket.) She says it never rains on the first of June, too. Don't count on it.

RHODA. Are you leaving today, Daddy?

KENNETH. (Stops L. of Rhoda.) My plane goes in an hour. Back to Washington and the Pentagon and a climate that coddles eggs.

RHODA. I like coddled eggs.

KENNETH. You like everything. You're just too good to be true. (He pulls her braids, and she smiles up at him.)

RHODA. How long will you be gone? (Puts her book on chair.)

KENNETH. (Turns away from Rhoda, looking at watch.) Sealed orders, darling. All I know is I'll be home as soon as I can. (He turns and kneels and holds out his arms to Rhoda.) Now what will you give me if I give you a basket of kisses?

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RHODA. (Rises.) I'll give you a basket of hugs. (Rhoda jumps into father's arms and hugs him.)

KENNETH. (He stands holding her in his arms.) I like your hugs. RHODA. I like your kisses. Daddikins! You're so big and strong! KENNETH. I'll miss you. The general doesn't have one pretty girl on his whole staff!

RHODA. I wish he didn't have my daddy! I'll miss you every day! KENNETH. Will you write to me? (Puts her down.)

RHODA. Do you want me to?

KENNETH. Of course I want you to.

RHODA. Then I'll write to you every day.

KENNETH. Every time I write to Mother I'll put in a note for you!

RHODA. Will you really?

KENNETH. Really and truly. And every time the general tells a good joke I'll send you an official report!

RHODA. Oh, Daddy, that won't be very often! You'd better send me the bad ones too!

KENNETH. (Kisses top of her head.) Sweetheart, I will! (Mrs. Penmark comes in from the den U. L. She is somewhat under thirty, a very pretty, gentle and gracious woman, quite obviously dedicated to her husband and child. The kind of woman whose life is given meaning by the affection she gives and receives. Kenneth kisses Christine, his wife, who has brought his briefcase and she goes into his arms without a word. They have said good-bye previously, but she can't let him go without another embrace.) I shall write daily to both my sweethearts, unless somebody makes a mistake and starts a shooting war and we all have to go underground.

RHODA. (Seated in chair R.) Would you go underground if there was a war?

KENNETH. (Jo Rhoda.) Yes, I would, and, by gum, I'd go fast! RHODA. You said "by gum" because I was here.

KENNETH. That's right, I did.

CHRISTINE. (Jo Kenneth.) Darling, take care.

KENNETH. (Jo Christine.) I will. Every minute I'm away. I'll wire you the minute we're on the ground. Take care of each other, you two.

CHRISTINE. We will. (The doorbell L. rings a delicate little

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cbine.) That's Monica and Emory. They wanted to say a last good-bye to you.

KENNETH. Oh, sure. (He crosses above Christine to the front door and puts briefcase on chair D. L. Meanwhile Christine crosses behind chair R., looks at Rhoda's hair and as she touches her braid Rhoda draws away.)

RHODA. Is it all right?

CHRISTINE. It's perfect, darling, braids and all. (Turns to welcome Monica and Emory.)

KENNETH. (At the front door L.) Come in, Monica. Come in, Emory. (Mrs. Monica Breedlove is a widow of forty-five or so, plump, intelligent, voluble and perhaps over-friendly. She carries sunglasses with a case and a locket in her hand. Her brother, Emory Wages, is a few years younger than she, also plump and friendly, but in contrast almost taciturn.)

MONICA. (Crosses behind sofa to Christine.) Just the effusive neighbors from upstairs, darlings! Have to be in on everything. No lives of their own, so they live other people's. I speak for my brother as well as myself, because he never gets a chance to speak when I'm around. (Turns to Kenneth.) There, I've talked enough. Say something, Colonel.

KENNETH. (Behind sofa.) I guess it will have to be good-bye, because the taxi's here and I don't want to rush through traffic.

EMORY. (At door.) Don't worry about your two pretty girls, Ken. We'll keep an eye on them, and if one of them begins to look peaked, we'll send up smoke signals.

KENNETH. I'm counting on you, Emory. (He gives Monica his hand.) And on Monica.

MONICA. Good-bye, Kenneth.

KENNETH. (Crosses to Christine.) Well, sweetheart, this is it. (To Rhoda.) Good-bye, big eyes!

RHODA. (Seated chair R.) Good-bye, Daddy.

CHRISTINE. (They cross hand in hand below coffee table to front door.) I promised myself I wouldn't come down, but —

KENNETH. Don't, sweet. It's just another empty month or two. We'll get through them somehow. (He picks up his hat and briefcase.)

EMORY. I'll take those. (He precedes Kenneth out of front door with both of the bags. Kenneth and Christine embrace.)

KENNETH. Good-bye. (He exits L.)

MONICA. Poor boy. He hates to go. And you hate to let him go. (Christine is still looking out the door.)

CHRISTINE. I'm—not very self-sufficient. (She shuts door.)

MONICA. Well, I am, and it's not so good. You're in love, both of you, you lucky characters. I wish I were. (Looks toward Rhoda, then back to Christine.) Oh, by the way, nobody has to take Rhoda to the bus, because I made some cupcakes for Miss Fern, and she's coming by to pick them up.

CHRISTINE. Oh, good. (Crosses to sofa.)

MONICA. (To Rhoda, crossing D. C.) But before she comes I have two little presents for you, my darling.

RHODA. (Rises, crosses C. to Monica. Christine sits L. end sofa.) Presents!

MONICA. The first is from Emory. It's a pair of dark glasses with rhinestone decorations, and he said to tell you they're intended to keep the sun out of those pretty blue eyes. (She produces the glasses, and Rhoda goes toward her with an eager expression which her mother knows as Rhoda's "acquisitive look.") I'll try them on you. (Rhoda stands obediently while Monica adjusts the glasses.) Now who is this glamorous Hollywood actress? Can it really be little Rhoda Penmark who lives with her delightful parents on the first floor of my apartment house?

RHODA. (Crosses to mirror on D. S. shelf bookcase and looks at her reflection in the glass.) I like them. (Crosses back to Monica.) Where's the case?

MONICA. Here it is. (Hands case to Rhoda.) And now for the second present, which is from me. (She holds up a little gold heart with a chain attached.) This was given to me when I was eight years old, (To Christine.) it's a little young for me now, (To Rhoda.) but it's still just right for an eight-year-old. However, it has a garnet set in it, and we'll have to change that for a turquoise since turquoise is your birthstone. So I'll have it changed and cleaned, and then it's yours.

RHODA. (To Monica.) Could I have both stones? The garnet, too?

CHRISTINE. Rhoda! Rhoda! What a —

MONICA. (Laughing turns to Christine.) But of course, she may! Why, certainly! How wonderful to meet such a natural little girl! She knows what she wants and she asks for it—not like these

over-civilized little pets that have to go through analysis before they can choose an ice cream soda! (Rhoda goes to her, puts her arms around her waist and hugs her with an intensity which gives Monica great delight.)

RHODA. (Purring.) Aunt Monica! Dear, sweet Aunt Monica! (Monica is completely captivated, but Christine looks on with a slightly skeptical and concerned attitude. She knows that Rhoda is not really affectionate, that she is acting. She rises, crosses to desk and sits writing on pad.)

MONICA. I know I'm behind the times, but I thought children wore coveralls and play-suits to picnics. Now you, my love, look like a princess in that red and white dotted Swiss. Tell me, aren't you afraid you'll get it dirty? Or you'll fall and scuff those new shoes? (Rhoda shakes her head slowly "Uh, uh.")

CHRISTINE. (Looking toward Monica and Rhoda.) She won't soil the dress and she won't scuff the shoes. Rhoda never gets anything dirty, though how she manages it, I don't know.

RHODA. I don't like coveralls. They're not— (She hesitates.)

MONICA. You mean coveralls aren't quite ladylike, don't you, my darling? (She embraces the tolerant Rhoda again.) Oh, you old-fashioned little dear!

RHODA. (Looking at the locket.) Am I to keep this now?

MONICA. You're to keep it till I find out where I can get the stone changed.

RHODA. Then I'll put it in my box. (She goes to her table, opens the drawer and a box which once held Swiss chocolates and places the locket carefully inside. A voice says "Leroy" as the front door L. swings open. The house-man, or janitor, stands in the doorway. He carries a pail, sponge and equipment for washing windows.)

LEROY. (The janitor crossing R. behind sofa.) Leroy. Guess I'm pretty early, Mrs. Penmark, but it's my day for doing the windows on this side.

CHRISTINE. Oh, yes, you can begin in the bedroom, Leroy. (He crosses C. and rather than going around Monica comes behind her.)

LEROY. (To Monica.) Excuse me, ma'am. (Monica is startled, exchanges a look with Christine as she crosses and sits R. end of the sofa. To Rhoda.) Mornin'. (Crosses through the inner hall with pail and paraphernalia. Rhoda skips across room and sits on stool.)

RHODA. I like garnets, but I like turquoise better.

MONICA. (To Rhoda.) You sound like Fred Astaire, tap-tapping across the room. What have you got on your shoes?

RHODA. (Shows bottom of shoe to Monica.) I run over my heels, and Mother had these iron pieces put on so they'd last longer.

CHRISTINE. (At desk.) I'm afraid I can't take any credit. It was Rhoda's idea entirely.

RHODA. I think they're very nice. They save money.

MONICA. Oh, you penurious little sweetheart! But I'll tell you one thing, Rhoda, I think you worry too much when you're not the very best at everything. That's one reason Emory and I thought you should have some presents today. You wanted that penmanship medal very much, didn't you?

RHODA. It's the only gold medal Miss Fern gives. And it was really mine. Everybody knew I wrote the best hand and I should have had it. (Leroy comes from off R. toward the kitchen with his pail and sponge.)

LEROY. 'Scuse me, just gettin' some water. (He goes to the kitchen.)

RHODA. I just don't see why Claude Daigle got the medal.

CHRISTINE. (Rises, crosses behind sofa to Rhoda.) Rhoda, these things happen to us all the time, and when they do we simply accept them. I've told you to forget the whole thing. (She puts an arm around Rhoda, trying to soften her. Rhoda rises, pulls away impatiently.) I'm sorry. I know you don't like people pawing over you.

RHODA. (She stamps away to chair R.) It was mine! The medal was mine!

CHRISTINE. (Christine follows, trying to soothe her.) Rhoda, forget it. Put it out of your mind.

RHODA. (She stamps away again to her table.) I won't. I won't. I won't. (Leroy comes out of the kitchen with the pail, passes near Rhoda, and squeezing his sponge, spills water on her new shoes.)

MONICA. (Rises.) Leroy! Have you completely lost your senses? You spilled water on Rhoda's shoes!

LEROY. (Crosses toward Christine.) I'm sorry, ma'am. I guess I was just trying to hurry. (He turns and deliberately drops his sponge on Christine's dress. She crosses to stool and sits.)

MONICA. Leroy!

LEROY. (L. of chair.) I'm sorry, Mis' Breedlove. (Kneels, facing upstage.)

MONICA. Leroy, I own this apartment house! I employ you! (Crosses to Leroy, standing over him.) I've tried to give you the benefit of every doubt because you have a family! I've thought of you as emotionally immature, torn by irrational rages, a bit on the psychopathic side. But after this demonstration I think my diagnosis was entirely too mild. You're definitely a schizophrenic with paranoid overtones. (He turns downstage.) I've had quite enough of your discourtesy and surliness—and so have the tenants in the building! (Crosses to Christine.) My brother Emory has wanted to discharge you! I've been on your side, though with misgivings! I shall protect you no longer!

CHRISTINE. (Touching Monica's arm.) He didn't mean it, Monica. It was an accident. I'm sure it was.

RHODA. (Crosses to Leroy—stares into his face.) He meant to do it. I know Leroy well.

MONICA. It was no accident, Christine! It was deliberate—the spiteful act of a neurotic child.

RHODA. (Crosses to Leroy.) He meant to do it. (To Leroy.) You made up your mind to do it when you went through the room.

CHRISTINE. (Trying to avoid embarrassing Leroy.) Rhoda!

RHODA. I was looking at you when you made up your mind to wet us.

LEROY. Oh, I never, I never, I'm just clumsy. (He takes sponge and wipes Rhoda's shoes.)

CHRISTINE. (Stands impatiently, crosses to sofa.) Oh, Leroy, please, please! (Rhoda draws away.)

MONICA. My patience is at an end, and you may as well know it. (Leroy gets up.) Go about your work.

LEROY. Yes, ma'am. (He exits into hall, taking pail and sponge with him.)

MONICA. (As Leroy disappears.) He has the mind of an eight-year-old, but he has managed to produce a family so I keep him on. (The doorbell chimes.) That'll be Miss Fern. (Crosses to R. end sofa.)

CHRISTINE. (Crosses below sofa to front door.) Yes. Come in, Miss Fern. We're nearly ready, I think.

MISS FERN. (At front door.) I'm a bit ahead of time, as usual.

(She comes in primly, coming down R. of L. chair. As the head of the most aristocratic school in the state, she has achieved a certain *savoir faire*, though she is in herself a timid and undistinguished little old maid, making the most of the remains of once quite remarkable beauty.)

MONICA. (Back to sofa.) Oh, Miss Fern, the old scatterbrain left her two dozen cupcakes upstairs. Rhoda, will you help me carry them down?

RHODA. (Crossing to C.) Yes, of course I will.

MONICA. (Crossing to front door and waits at door for Rhoda.) They're all packed.

RHODA. (At C. stage, she curtsies to Miss Fern.) Good morning, Miss Fern.

MISS FERN. (Crosses below sofa to R. end of sofa.) That's a perfect curtsy, Rhoda.

RHODA. Thank you, Miss Fern. (She crosses below coffee table and exits with Monica through front door.)

CHRISTINE. She does such things well? (Closes door, crosses to sofa.)

MISS FERN. She does everything well. As you must know better than I.

CHRISTINE. And, as a person, does she fit in well—at the school?

MISS FERN. Let me think—(She sits R. end of sofa.) in what way, Mrs. Penmark?

CHRISTINE. (At L. end of sofa.) Well, Rhoda has been—I don't quite know how to say it. There's a mature quality about her that's disturbing in a child. My husband and I thought that a school like yours, where you believe in discipline and the old-fashioned virtues—might perhaps teach her to be a bit more of a child.

MISS FERN. Yes—yes, I know what you mean. In some ways, in many ways, Rhoda is the most satisfactory pupil the school has ever had. She's never been absent. She's never been tardy. She's the only child in the history of the school who has made a hundred in deportment each month in every class, and a hundred in self-reliance and conservation on the playground each month for a full school year. If you had dealt with as many children as I have you'd realize what a remarkable record that is. And she's the neatest little girl I've ever encountered.