



# Toronto, Mississippi

*Joan MacLeod*

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## **Toronto, Mississippi** Joan MacLeod

Jhana, is a beautiful eighteen-year-old who lives with her mother Maddie and their boarder Bill, a sometime poet. Jhana's father, King, shows up partway through the first act and it is his presence for the first time in a long time in this unusual family that really galvanizes all four of the characters into action.

King is an Elvis impersonator, getting sick and tired of doing the same old song and dance. Jhana is mentally handicapped and working at her first "job" in a workshop for disabled people where she puts four screws in a bag and then another four screws in another bag and so on. In her mind she is on stage at Maple Leaf Gardens singing and strutting her stuff, just like her father does. Maddie is trying to keep it together while working full time as a teacher and as a mother, too busy to admit to her own loneliness. Bill is harbouring all sorts of feelings for Maddie that he is afraid to act on.

While this is a play about the power of family and love, it is finally a play about self-destruction and creation. At its heart is Jhana, whose character begs the question whether the other characters, in their own ways, are any less handicapped. She's good company—funny, driven, passionate and yearning for the same things those around her yearn for—if they can get over their preconceptions about the mentally handicapped and give her the space to achieve her dreams.

The play came out of the author's decade-long involvement working with mentally handicapped adults and children as a life skills instructor. Re-released in a revised and updated edition, it is Joan MacLeod's first full-length play, receiving more than twenty international productions over the past two decades.

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