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A Thicker Kind of Water

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A THICKER KIND OF WATER

By

Chad R. Dobson

THESIS

Submitted to
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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

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ABSTRACT

A THICKER KIND OF WATER

By

Chad R. Dobson

This play depicts struggles within the self and the family. My characters, like those of Eugene O'Neill, experience conflicts between love and hate, life and death, and alcoholism and temperance. The deceased brother, Alan, is both loved and hated by his mother, Marie. Ellis, the father, can only accept his daughter, Brooke, in the same role as his dead son, depriving her of individuality. Larry, the uncle, is torn between his loyalty to Ellis and his belief that Ellis is wrong. These conflicts threaten the stability of the family as a whole and the well-being of each individual character.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the *MLA Style Manual* and the Department of English.

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to map an idea for a play and adhere to it without diverging from the initial plan. The play that I envisioned writing is not the play that I have written. In my prospectus, I described a play based on a big idea—a synthesis of the life and death binary. As I started to write, I found that the more I tried to fit my characters into that rubric, the less believable they became. They were nothing more than placeholders for abstract ideas, and I found it difficult to connect with them on the level that I needed to. When I continued writing, free from my original intent, my characters became real. My interest in them and my concern for them increased.

I began to focus on specific conflicts within my characters, and their conflicts with others. By attempting to write something emotionally accurate about how a family copes with the death of a loved one, I allowed my characters to embody the themes I wanted to write about.

Because I strayed from the path I described in my prospectus, I also strayed from some of the authors who I thought would influence me. Bertolt Brecht, Wallace Stevens, and Walt Whitman factored less as I began to focus on psychologically motivated characters rather than ideas.

Other authors became more important than I originally expected. For example, O'Neill and his obsession with struggle within the self and the family is reflected in my play. My characters, in the spirit of O'Neill's, experience conflicts between love and hate, life and death, and alcoholism and temperance. The deceased brother, Alan, is both loved and hated by his mother, Marie. Ellis, the father, can only accept his daughter,

Brooke, in the same role as his dead son, depriving her of individuality. Larry, the uncle, is torn between his loyalty to Ellis and his belief that Ellis is wrong. Brooke is suicidal, but she refuses to kill herself outright because she does not want to cause her parents the same pain that Alan did when he died. Instead, she indirectly threatens her own life by abusing alcohol and pills.

In addition, as I had originally envisioned, O'Neill's theatre helped to determine my approach to setting and staging this play. For example, O'Neill staged his plays on very simple sets. He relied on the strength of his dialogue and stage directions to take the place of elaborate sets. In fact, my play, like many of his, can easily be staged in a black box theater, on a simple, unadorned stage, with only a few props. This minimal approach to staging puts more emphasis on performance than on set.

Another aspect of O'Neill's theatre that has influenced me is his use of lighting. In the final scene of "Long Day's Journey into Night," for example, Edmund, Jamie, Tyrone, and Marie sit at a table. As Marie speaks, the lights go down slowly, until only a small circle of light surrounds the table. Gradually, the light dwindles and disappears, until the stage is completely dark. The encroaching darkness creates a sense of foreboding and discomfort and foreshadows an uncertain future for the subjects of the play.

Like O'Neill, I use lighting for the staging of this play to create tension and help move the action forward. For example, In Act One, Scenes 3 and 4 and in Act Two Scene 2, I use lighting to show the passing of time rather than beginning a new scene. Scene changes, in these cases, would slow the forward movement of the play's action. The three scenes in which I do this are similar in that they all "end" with Brooke asleep on the

couch. The first time this occurs, Brooke wakes up as usual. In the second instance, Brooke does not wake up the next morning and is taken to the hospital. In the third instance, perhaps the most important one, she wakes up normally. By repeating this motif, I hope to create suspense in my dramatic action. I would like the audience to experience a sense of *déjà vu* and consider the possibility that Brooke may have overdosed again—perhaps fatally.

The influence of Anton Chekhov is also evident in the dialogue of some of my characters. In “The Cherry Orchard,” for example, characters are so involved in themselves that they ignore what others say. They are disconnected and uncommitted to meaningful conversation with anyone. This occurs in Ellis’s dialogue. He subconsciously avoids speaking to his wife, uncle, and daughter about his son’s death by diverting the conversation to his obsession with killing animals at camp. Repeated attempts by his family members to enter into a serious conversation with him occur only after prodding. This persistence angers Ellis, and, though he eventually speaks about Alan, the conversations are too volatile to be productive.

Though influenced by the theatre of O’Neill and Chekhov, I had to grapple with the ordering of scenes in my play on my own. For example, I chose to begin the play with Alan’s death because the audience needs to know that Alan did not commit suicide. This information, unknown to the other characters until the end of the first act, underscores the conflicts in the play as the audience wonders if the family will ever know that Alan did not intentionally kill himself. Once the coroner confirms that Alan did not commit suicide, a great weight is lifted from their shoulders, and the family is restored to

temporary wholeness. This sense of well-being, however, is disrupted by Brooke's accidental overdose at the end of the first act.

The second act begins in a hospital waiting room, where the audience discovers that Brooke has had a coma followed by a heart attack, after mixing alcohol with narcotic pain medication. The next day, when Brooke returns home from the hospital, the family reverts to its previous state of discord. The play concludes when Marie asks Ellis to leave their home, so Brooke can recover from her addictions free from his negative influence.

The conflicts change when the family discovers that Alan's suicide was an accident. This revelation has the potential to provide the family with resolution and closure. At first, it seems possible, but then it becomes obvious that the true conflict the family members experience is not Alan's suicide. Ellis refuses to prohibit Brooke from drinking (despite the dangers it poses) because drinking is his only link to her. Marie wants Ellis to leave while simultaneously wanting to keep the family together. Brooke still walks the line between her desire to live and her desire to die, but she seems to be leaning toward death. Selfishness, guilt, and fear threaten the wholeness of the family.

In my prospectus, I planned on having Brooke remain in a coma. After several months, her parents would be forced to decide whether they should allow her to live in a vegetative state, or to die by "pulling the plug." I chose not to do this, however, because there is more at stake for the family, especially for Ellis, if Brooke can survive and live a normal life.

These are the ways in which O'Neill and Chekhov have influenced the writing and staging of my play, and the ways in which I had to rely on my own resources as a

student of the theatre. Their focus, like mine, on psychological reality and minimal set enabled me to write a more psychologically sound play than I had originally planned.

Cast of Characters

Alan Ragland:	Alan is the deceased son of Ellis and Marie and the deceased brother of Brooke. At the time of his death, he was 21 years old.
Brooke Ragland:	Brooke is the daughter of Ellis and Marie. She is 18 years old.
Ellis Ragland:	Ellis is the father. He is 45 years old.
Marie Ragland:	Marie is the mother. She is 43 years old.
Larry Ragland:	Ellis's Uncle. Brooke's great uncle. He is 60 years old.
Dr. Powers:	A medical doctor.
Ms. Smith:	A receptionist.

Scene

A small town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula during late March. The majority of the action takes place in the living room of the family home.

Time

The Present.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING:

The basement of the Ragland home.

AT RISE:

ALAN can be seen in silhouette. He is sitting on a chair. Light filters through a single, clouded window. He is holding a rifle between his knees, so the muzzle touches his head. He shakes almost uncontrollably. He has difficulty holding the rifle in place. After it seems he has steadied himself enough to pull the trigger, he abruptly stands and yells, "No." As he stands, the rifle falls from between his legs, the bottom of the rifle crashes to the floor. The rifle fires and kills him instantly. He drops to his knees and falls backward. The rifle falls in the same direction and rests lengthwise against his body.

ACT I

SCENE 2

SETTING:

The living room of the Ragland home. At rear center, is the FRONT DOOR. To the left of the door, is a tall, rolling mirror, cracked down the center. To the right of the door, halfway to the wall, is a television atop a television stand. A reclining chair, at the front right corner, faces the television. Along the wall, on the left, is a couch. There are two doors along the same wall. The first leads into ELLIS and MARIE'S BEDROOM. The second door leads UPSTAIRS to BROOKE'S bedroom. An exit at the front of stage right leads to the KITCHEN.

AT RISE:

ELLIS is sitting before the television. A .22 caliber rifle lays across his lap, his index finger wrapping around the trigger. MARIE enters through the FRONT DOOR.

MARIE

Back from work already, El?

(She hangs her coat over the mirror and sits down on the couch.)

ELLIS

Yeah. . . .

(He looks at the mirror.)

Goddamn it. Brooke forgot to take that mirror to the curb again.

MARIE

She did bring it out. I brought it back in! I hate to throw it away . . . it was a gift from somebody. I can't remember who.

ELLIS

Well, look at it. It's cracked right down the middle, and a cracked mirror ain't good for shit anymore. Throw it away.

MARIE

Brooke broke it right before Alan died.

ELLIS

Christ, Marie. Let her throw it away. I told her to.

(He sighs.)

Anyway, I gave myself a half-day for being such a top-notch employee.

MARIE

(Laughing but slightly uncomfortably.)

It's good to be foreman, especially when your own wife won't listen to you.

ELLIS

Sometimes, but more often than not, I *need* time off for having to put up with all those jokers at the waterworks.

(He sighs.)

What's your deal? Why are you back so early?

MARIE

My deal is that the new nurses' aide, Diana, had to come in three hours early for her shift.

ELLIS

She comes in from Big Bay right? Wanted to beat the snow, I bet.

MARIE

Mmhmm . . . and she said she'd rather work than sit in the nurses' lounge and watch Jerry Springer re-runs.

ELLIS

Yep. Snow's coming.

MARIE

Are you happy I'm home?

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

(MARIE notices that ELLIS is holding a gun, and she is suddenly startled.)

What are you doing with that?

(MARIE stands and walks over to ELLIS, blocking his view of the television.)

I thought the police took it away after. . . .

ELLIS

Will you get the hell out of the way? You'd make a better door than a window.

MARIE

Nevermind the TV. Talk to me!

(ELLIS stands and slings the rifle over his shoulder.)

ELLIS

Goddamn it, Marie! It isn't *that* rifle.

(He walks toward the FRONT DOOR and turns around.)

But I am going to get it back, you know. I know all the cops and I told them if they didn't let me have it the second the coroner releases it, I'll blow all their heads off. It's mine. Until they give it back to me, I'm using this one.

MARIE

For what? How could you possibly want to touch that, or any other gun, *now*?

ELLIS

I'm going out to camp to take care of those damned red squirrels. They're gonna be nesting in there and everywhere else, chewing up the wiring and insulation if I don't do something about it.

MARIE

You never listen to me. I told you I never wanted to see a gun ever again!

ELLIS

(He unslings the rifle and holds it up in
the air.)

Too god damn bad! Look! If I don't take care of those damn squirrels, nobody else will. They ain't gonna kill themselves, you know.

MARIE

Oh, I know I'm not gonna get through to you. There's a venison roast in the slow cooker . . . Listen, I don't want you to leave.

ELLIS

(He slings the rifle.)

Yeah, but it's a neck roast right? Too tough. I don't care. I'm going, Mar.

MARIE

(Quietly.)

You always go.

ELLIS

I'll be back tonight, or tomorrow morning. I don't know. I think a bear's been scratching at the door, too. They're hungry as hell now, you know? Just come out of their dens. I might have to stay overnight to kill that son-of-a-bitch.

MARIE

Of course.

ELLIS

He's gone nocturnal, I bet. Goddamn coyotes out there too and wolves. I'll kill every single one of them fuckin' wolves. I don't care if they have radio collars. I already shot one of them in the foot last deer season.

MARIE

That's so cruel, Ellis.

ELLIS

I already told Larry that we wouldn't have as many of those fuckers if he'd of killed those pups he found instead of video-taping them! I'll have to talk to him about that again next time I see him.

MARIE

What if we need to talk about what's going on here, now, with our family?

ELLIS

Well, I got to make it out to camp before dark. I'll scare everything away before I get a chance to make any kills.

MARIE

Maybe you're killing me. Listen to me. You never listen to me!
(She places her hand over her stomach
and looks at ELLIS.)

I'm not too old. What if we could have another one?

ELLIS

You gotta stop thinking about another baby. Even if you could have one . . . it ain't gonna happen.

MARIE

(Pleadingly.)

It's what I want, Ellis.

ELLIS

You had a son. . . .

MARIE

Let's not start this again.

ELLIS

And you fucked him up.

MARIE

Me?

ELLIS

Yeah, you!

MARIE

When you could never let down your protective shield to tell Alan that you loved him?

ELLIS

I did my best to *show* him! I made sure he had boots on his feet . . . a warm coat. I taught him everything I knew about how to survive in the woods.

MARIE

Not enough! Not enough!

ELLIS

You're wrong! God damn it!

MARIE

Every little hateful or spiteful statement you've made over the the last 21 years worked its way into Alan's head. He became like you . . . so much that whenever I tried to say I loved him, he turned away embarrassed or awkward.

ELLIS

I'm not in the mood for this, Marie.

MARIE

The local conservation officers know exactly how you feel about them, but your own son didn't!

(Pause.)

And so did . . . what's her name, that woman you were screwing last year.

ELLIS

I'm going, Marie.

MARIE

I know you blame me . . . go ahead, but I'm the one who did all the trying. I saw Alan's dark side . . . you ignored it, thought you were doing good by teaching him how to gut a deer or cast a fly-rod, and all the while banging some floozy in plain view of the whole town!

ELLIS

Stop . . . leave it be! You know damn well I ended it with her.

MARIE

Do you know how he yelled and cursed at me . . . how many times he looked me in the eye and said, "I hate you?"

ELLIS

Marie. . . .

MARIE

And I was doing nothing but trying to keep him from turning out like you! I was doing what any mother would do, while you took pride in the fact that he could hold his beer. You looked past his unemployment, drug-abuse. *I* tried to send him in a good direction, and that made me his enemy! So blame me . . . he hated me because I reminded him too often that he hated himself.

ELLIS

He did not hate himself!

MARIE

For the love of God, can't you understand? He took his own life because he was ashamed of betraying his best friend, the same way you betrayed me!

ELLIS

Nobody knows for sure why he did it!

MARIE

Regardless, he hated himself . . . and the world.

ELLIS

That's how you remember it, Marie.

(Pause.)

Not me. I'll tell you how I remember him . . . how he really was . . . out there . . . He loved it out there!

(ELLIS points outside in the general direction of of the family land.)

On our land, every fall . . . walking with me on those maple ridges looking for deer and grouse.

(ELLIS suddenly seems to step outside of the present, placing himself in the time and place he is describing. When he speaks, he looks down and to the left as if he can see ALAN there next to him. MARIE accommodates this, but looks at him sadly throughout.)

Alright, Alan, when you're up in these hardwoods, everything looks the same, but head north. Use that compass I got you.

(MORE)

ELLIS (CONT'D)

(ELLIS pantomimes holding a compass.)

Just stay north.

ELLIS

(ELLIS points out his landmarks and directions as if he can actually see them.)

Once you hit that patch of poplars, you'll be home free . . . just have to follow it around to the main trail and then straight to camp.

(ELLIS turns to his left and looks down.)

If you ever get caught out here without that compass . . . just choose a direction and walk. You gotta keep that direction. Pick a point in front of you, 'bout fifty yards ahead, go to it then find another one. You'll hit the main trail, or else you'll run into Buckeye swamp. You can follow it all the way to the creek. Then you'll know where you're at.

(ELLIS puts his head down and laughs sadly.)

He'd still always get lost.

MARIE

That was him, Ellis. Lost. He was lost.

ELLIS

I didn't mean it like that. Don't you twist my words against me!

MARIE

He got lost around the time you started taking him out to the woods with you . . . that led to one thing after another. Being around your brothers and uncles at camp, smoking, drinking . . . killing anything within rifle range.

(Pause.)

But before that . . . before all of that, he was a sweet little boy. He listened to me. He'd run to me after getting off the school bus, jump into my arms, and we'd laugh all the way home. He was so, so sweet then.

ELLIS

I know . . . I remember that too.

MARIE

That isn't yours to remember!

ELLIS

(ELLIS gets up to leave. MARIE stands
and blocks him.)

Let me leave!

MARIE

So you can see *her*? Are you really going to camp or are you back with *her*?

ELLIS

If you'd just leave it alone that would fix everything, but you keep trying to drive me crazy.

(ELLIS pushes MARIE aside and exits
out the FRONT DOOR.)

MARIE

No, Ellis! Don't go! Please don't go! I'm sorry!

(MARIE crosses to the couch and sits.
BROOKE enters from UPSTAIRS
carrying a glass of water.)

BROOKE

What's all the racket?

MARIE

Can I have a, "Good morning, Mom?"

BROOKE

Whatever. I know you're not having a good morning . . . arguing with Dad again. Where'd he go anyway?

(She sits on the recliner and reclines all
the way back.)

MARIE

You ask me that? You're his drinking buddy. Didn't he tell you he was going to run off to camp again today? I heard you two crash in at some ungodly hour. I heard you throwing up in the sink, too.

BROOKE

What's your point? I took care of the mess.

MARIE

You're so thoughtful.

(BROOKE reaches into her pocket, takes out a pill, and swallows it down with a sip of water.)

MARIE

What'd you just take?

BROOKE

It was an aspirin. I have a headache.

MARIE

I know it wasn't just an aspirin . . . it's too early for a drink so pop a pill.

BROOKE

Why are you always accusing me?

MARIE

Please, Brooke! Do you think I'm making it up? I saw you!

BROOKE

I told you it was an aspirin. As far as the drinking . . . I have to drink to get along with either of you. It's not my fault if you don't want to join us.

MARIE

I don't want to drink.

BROOKE

Oh . . . you don't want to drink. Maybe you should. We're all drunks now. If you were too, you'd know more about what's going on.

MARIE

I don't want to argue with you. This morning's been too much for me, already. Let's talk about something else . . . are you doing okay?

BROOKE

That's a stupid question. Of course, I'm not okay! I gave up trying to be okay. It's easier just to give in and. . . .

(She laughs cynically.)

And just try to embrace all the pain.

MARIE

You're torturing yourself, and you're making it worse by taking all those *aspirin*!

BROOKE

(She stands.)

Yeah. Maybe I am making it worse. It doesn't matter.

(She walks up to the FRONT DOOR.)

MARIE

Where are you going?

BROOKE

To have a cigarette. Then, I'll come back in and change and get the hell out of here.

MARIE

Can't you stay for a while? If you leave, the silence will be too much for me. I'm feeling. . . .

BROOKE

I can't be here, Mom . . . not any longer than I have to be.

MARIE

But I feel so. . . .

BROOKE

I was sitting right there when I told Alan to kill himself. I wasn't serious. . . . I didn't mean it.

MARIE

You knew he would do it! You did it on purpose!

BROOKE

How can you say that, Mom? Stop!

MARIE

I won't stop! I have to fix this mess you and your father have made . . . my only son.

BROOKE

(BROOKE sits. She looks at MARIE,
removes another pill from her pocket,
and swallows it down with her water.)

If I could fix it by killing myself, I would. It wouldn't help anything.

MARIE

(Slightly withdrawn.)

I could have another child, but I don't know if I can anymore and your father won't even consider it. And you, well, you're killing yourself.

MARIE

(She stands, walks across the room, rolls
the mirror over to BROOKE, and sits
down next to her. She throws her coat,
which had been covering the mirror,
onto the end of the couch.)

Look at what those pills and liquor are doing. You used to be so pretty. You're eyes, your skin . . . are all pale. Your lips are chapped and cracked.

BROOKE

Get that thing away from me!

(She kicks the mirror back so it slams
against the wall. She stands and walks
back to the FRONT DOOR and faces
MARIE.)

I'm not killing myself! I told you that I can't . . . I can't make you and Dad . . . and everyone else, go through that again.

MARIE

You don't care what I'm going through. Go get drunk with your father and your uncles. That's what you've always done, even before Alan died.

BROOKE

That's not true.

MARIE

You're either sleeping or drunk . . . or strung out on painkillers. I have to watch this with nothing to make me feel better even for a little while.

BROOKE

Whatever. You make yourself feel better by blaming me and Dad. But we both know you're the reason Alan's dead.

MARIE

I won't listen to this. . . .

BROOKE

Maybe I was the trigger for it, but you set him up for it over the last five years.

MARIE

What are you talking about?

BROOKE

Giving him shit about not going to college, getting a job, drinking. He was waiting for a trigger.

MARIE

Don't say things like that!

BROOKE

Do you really think you're innocent in all of this?

MARIE

(She gets up from the couch and walks
over to BROOKE.)

Maybe not, but I can't take you both ganging up on me and leaving me alone. I just want some life in this house. I want to cry with my husband and daughter. I want some comfort! God! God, I want my son back. I want him back!

(MARIE tries to take her BROOKE'S
hands.)

Please. . . .

BROOKE

(She throws MARIE's hands off hers.)

Don't touch me! Leave me alone!

MARIE

Please . . . I just want another chance.

BROOKE

We all do . . . with a lot of things.

MARIE

I just want us all to be together. Why can't we do that for once?

BROOKE

Because, Mom. We all blame one another, and we see him in each other and it hurts.

MARIE

If we're together, it'll hurt less.

BROOKE

No. When we're together, it's like he should be here with us. If we're apart, I feel like maybe . . . maybe he could still be down at Ft. Bragg, but he can't get to the phone because he's got field-duty or he's . . . on some secret assignment that we can't know about, but he'll be coming back any day, and we'll find out it's all just fake and didn't really happen.

MARIE

Oh, it happened. I don't have the luxury of believing it didn't. I found him.

BROOKE

I know . . . I know.

MARIE

A fucking rose! It was the ugliest thing I've ever seen, and you put a rose there. And *you* want to die.

BROOKE

No . . . I don't. But I don't want to live like this.

MARIE

I don't either, but I feel like. . . .

(The sound of footsteps. BROOKE and
MARIE quickly gather their emotions)

(and try to act normal. They sit together on the couch. Seconds later, ELLIS enters through the FRONT DOOR. His coat is covered in snow.)

BROOKE

Hey, Dad. I thought you went to camp. Back already?

ELLIS

Yeah. . . . forgot something.

MARIE

(Looking at BROOKE pleadingly.)

We were just going to have an early dinner, Ellis. Weren't we, Brooke?

(BROOKE looks back at MARIE sympathetically.)

BROOKE

Yeah. That roast is starting to smell good. Think you can eat . . . slam a brewski, before you head back out?

ELLIS

I wasn't even a second out of the truck to unlock the cable when I realized I didn't have enough ammo. No, I'm not gonna stay for dinner. It's late as it is. It's gonna take me a whole day to kill. . .

MARIE

To kill what? Squirrels, deer, wolves, badgers, 'coons? What?

ELLIS

(He eyes MARIE contemptuously.)

I'm gonna get what I need and get the hell outta here. That wind is picking up . . . snow's coming down pretty good. I might get stuck out there tonight.

MARIE

Wouldn't that be convenient for you . . . and her?

BROOKE

Mom . . . enough. Dad, just stay, come on.

(ELLIS ignores BROOKE and exits into the BEDROOM. He returns a moment later with a small box of ammo. He walks to the FRONT DOOR without looking at BROOKE or MARIE.)

ELLIS

(As he walks out the FRONT DOOR.)

Can't, I'll be back . . . eventually.

MARIE

(She stands.)

Ellis . . . wait.

BROOKE

Let him go, Mom.

(MARIE sits down next to BROOKE as the lights go down.)

ACT I

SCENE 3

SETTING: The living room.

AT RISE: It is early in the morning, three or four hours before sunrise. The television is on, displaying only static. The sound of laughter precedes ELLIS, BROOKE, and LARRY crashing in through the FRONT DOOR. BROOKE carries a duffel bag full of cans of beer.

BROOKE

(She and ELLIS stumble forward into the room.)

Shit! You tripped me, Dad!

ELLIS

(His speech is slurred.)

Me trip you? You tripped me!

LARRY

(Laughing.)

Nobody tripped anybody! Brooke tripped on that busted mirror and, El, you clumsy bastard, you tripped on your own damn feet.

ELLIS

Bullshit, Lar. You alright, Brooke?

BROOKE

(She opens the duffel bag and peers inside.)

Yes, and the beer is okay too. No casualties.

ELLIS

Thank God!

LARRY

Yeah, El. God saved the beer because he doesn't think we're drunk enough yet.

BROOKE

He's a just and merciful Lord!

ELLIS

Marie must be in bed . . . left the damn TV on. Interesting program, too.

(BROOKE laughs.)

Shh . . . don't wake her up. That's all we need, another lecture on the evils of drinking.

BROOKE

(Imitating MARIE.)

"Oh, I won't ever drink! I am so innocent and righteous!"

LARRY

(Slightly annoyed.)

She's looking out for you. You should be happy somebody is. I should head out. I'm all in.

BROOKE

Stick around for one more. You're not drunk enough to drive home.

LARRY

It's almost four in the morning.

ELLIS

(He blocks the door.)

Sit down over there. Have one more. Then, you can go.

(BROOKE reaches into her duffel bag,
grabs a beer, and stumbles toward
LARRY.)

BROOKE

(Loudly.)

Drink, Uncle. Drink!

(LARRY takes the beer from BROOKE.
BROOKE stumbles and trips over the
mirror. She falls to the floor.)

Son of a bitch! That's twice now that thing tripped me! Why is it even here?

ELLIS

God damn it, Brooke. Quiet!

(ELLIS laughs. BROOKE crawls over and sits down on the couch. ELLIS sits next to her. LARRY sits on the chair. As ELLIS and LARRY talk, BROOKE becomes more and more tired. She passes out soon after.)

It's a party. Why does Marie have to be sleeping?

LARRY

(He has yet to open his beer.)

She's gotta get to work in a couple hours, don't she? Don't you, too?

ELLIS

I'm calling in sick in a couple hours, Lar, if it's any of your goddamn business. Now, for Christ's sake, open that beer.

LARRY

(Cracking open his beer and taking a big gulp.)

That was some wreck you was in tonight, El. You're lucky you didn't kill yourself.

ELLIS

Eh, it wasn't too bad. Three of us hit that same damn tree this year, and nobody got hurt yet. I'm gonna get a new truck out of it, just like you did.

LARRY

You gonna watch that corner from now on . . . now that it happened to you?

ELLIS

What? You think I learned a lesson or something? Keep drinking that beer, maybe it'll wise you up some. I ain't afraid of any goddamn corner.

LARRY

Yeah, I guess you wouldn't be. You think that corner's gonna straighten out every time it sees you coming?

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

(ELLIS scoffs. BROOKE begins snoring loudly.)

She's down for the count!

ELLIS

No match for us . . . always keeps up with our drinking pretty good though.

(BROOKE continues snoring. Her snoring seems to be answered by MARIE's coming from the BEDROOM.)

LARRY

Ain't that somethin'? I don't think I ever heard two women snoring at the same time.

ELLIS

(Mischievously.)

I have.

(They both laugh.)

LARRY

Oh, El. Before I pass out, I wanted to tell you about something. I was on the clear-cut snowshoeing last week. . . .

ELLIS

Snow's still pretty deep out there, hey?

LARRY

Yeah, and I decided to visit Alan's old bow-blind that's up in that big hemlock, right along the property line.

ELLIS

Yep, I know the place.

LARRY

It looks so different back there since we got our first big snow. I couldn't find it.

ELLIS

You'd get lost in your own backyard.

LARRY

(Laughing but growing impatient.)

Then, I saw something shining through some alders about fifty yards away. I walked toward it and there was the blind. It still looks brand new . . . you could climb up and sit in it if you wanted to.

ELLIS

Oh yeah? What was the shiny thing?

LARRY

A soda can stuck on one of the branches, not too long ago either. It's still bright silver.

ELLIS

Probably one of those damn kids . . . litter bugs. Did you get rid of it?

LARRY

No, I left it there.

ELLIS

Why? It's a piece of garbage.

LARRY

I know, but there were five or six sets of deer tracks that went right up to it. They were sniffing at it or something.

ELLIS

They could smell the sugar, hey?

LARRY

(He takes another sip of beer.)

That's what I was thinking. I left it there . . . felt like it stood for something.

ELLIS

It stands for how you couldn't find an injun in a casino. I'll throw it away next time I'm in there.

LARRY

Damn it, El. Are you gonna act like you got your shit together? I know I don't, and it wasn't even my son that died. I had a nice experience out there. Maybe you could find something good about it, too.

ELLIS

I already told you that it ain't any of your business what I do or feel . . . about anything.

LARRY

The thing is . . . there's been a few us that have been waiting for the right time to *make* it our business . . . to have a talk with you about. . . .

ELLIS

About what?

LARRY

You called in three times last week. Yesterday, you left work after the boss told you not to.

ELLIS

Told *me* not to?

LARRY

Yeah, told you not to. He can do that. I know you don't want to admit that . . . that anyone can tell you what to do.

ELLIS

I've been working there for almost thirty years. That asshole's been there five. That son-of-a-bitch talks to me all day, and I don't hear a god damn word he says.

LARRY

Take it easy, El. You're getting loud.

ELLIS

(He stands and walks over to LARRY.
He rips the beer out his hand, guzzles
down whatever remains, and throws
the can across the room.)

LARRY

(Stands.)

Christ, El. None of that stuff, now. Tell me what you're doing when you're not running the shop. You're truck's never outside the house.

ELLIS

I'm . . . working out at camp.

LARRY

Working on what?

ELLIS

All kinds of. . . .

(Clenching his fists.)

What the hell? Do I have to report to you?

(Becoming angrier.)

Are you driving by my house?

LARRY

It's on my way home, for Christ's sake.

ELLIS

Did Marie put you up to any of this?

LARRY

What? Cool it. I don't ever talk to her, and I don't know what's going on with the two of you.

ELLIS

Then you know enough.

LARRY

But do you ever think about how she feels when you run off to camp to . . . *work* and ignore her, or what that's doing to her?

ELLIS

She's fine.

LARRY

I know you're not going to answer my question, but I wish you'd stew on it for a while.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

(ELLIS nods. There is an unconvincing expression on his face, but it's obvious that his tension has eased.)

And why are we still standing up? I'll have one more beer . . . since you stole half of mine.

(ELLIS sits. LARRY walks over to the duffel bag and takes two more beers. He hands one to ELLIS and sits down on the couch, careful not to sit on BROOKE's feet.)

ELLIS

(Opening his beer.)

This one'll be the old K.O.

(He yawns.)

You ain't going nowhere tonight, Lar. After I drag my ass into bed, you're gonna pass out on this chair, the floor, or up in Brooke's bed. It don't matter.

LARRY

No danger of me driving tonight. Nope, I don't think I could make it to the door right now . . . much less my truck.

(He sips from his beer.)

I'm going to pass out sitting up, right where I'm at . . . wake up tomorrow afternoon with this beer still in my hand, not a drop spilled.

(He smiles proudly.)

Then, I'll pick up where I left off.

(He raises his beer above his head.)

Here's to that.

ELLIS

(Laughing and answering LARRY'S toast.)

I never knew you to waste a beer. I think I'll have to waste one tonight. I'm beat.

LARRY

Get to bed then, lightweight. I'll be sawing logs before too long, myself. Good night.

ELLIS

(Facetiously.)

To hell with you, Uncle.

(ELLIS exits to the BEDROOM. The lights fade to black. When the lights come back up, BROOKE is still sleeping on the couch. LARRY is sleeping in an upright position. His beer has spilled all over his lap. MARIE enters from the BEDROOM. She hums quietly until she notices that she is not alone.)

MARIE

Larry! Brooke! Wake up! I'm turning on the TV.

(She walks over to LARRY and shakes his shoulders.)

MARIE

Wake up! I think you're sitting on the remote.

LARRY

(Waking up slowly.)

Okay, nix the yelling. I'm up already.

(He searches between the cushions and finds the remote.)

Here you go.

MARIE

(She takes the remote and turns on the television.)

Thanks, I always watch the news before I leave the house. I don't like being surprised by anything.

LARRY

(Rubbing his temples)

I'm not going to be surprised to have a splitting head-ache when I sober up in a few hours. I hope I can sleep through most of it.

(He laughs.)

You don't feel sorry for me do you?

MARIE

(Laughing.)

No, but it's not because I don't like you, Larry.

(She thinks for a minute, then speaks contemptuously.)

I'm not always impressed with you. You are one of the reasons my daughter is an alcoholic . . . and my husband, too. I guess part of me is always going to hate you.

LARRY

Marie . . . I just woke up.

MARIE

(Kindly.)

Nevermind me . . . I know where your heart is.

(Contemptuously again.)

But I wonder where your brain is . . . letting Brooke drink with the two of you when you know she's probably an alcoholic.

LARRY

(Rubbing his temples.)

Do we have to go on about this now? She's an adult.

MARIE

So are you. . . . A more experienced one who should have better judgment. That's the problem with your family . . . you set everyone up early in life to be just like you! No wonder they all end up stuck in this town. Pregnant, drunk . . . or dead!

(Apologetically.)

I didn't mean that.

LARRY

I know you didn't, but I'd better get going.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

(He stands.)

I'll try to get Brooke up first . . . she should head up to bed.

(MARIE exits to the BEDROOM as
LARRY tries to shake BROOKE
awake.)

LARRY

Come on, Brooke. Wake up.

(BROOKE reluctantly wakes, stretches,
and yawns.)

BROOKE

Damn, I think I'm still drunk.

(She stands unsteadily.)

Yep. What about you?

LARRY

Yeah. Once my hands start shakin', I know the medicine's wearing off.

(He laughs.)

They're not shakin', yet.

BROOKE

You're weird.

LARRY

Get to bed, youngun. That's what I'm going to do. I'll be back tonight to check up on all of you.

BROOKE

I'll probably still be sleeping.

LARRY

(Laughs.)

Good. Rest up for the next all-nighter. I'll see you later.

(LARRY and BROOKE hug and say
goodbye.)

(Immediately after BROOKE exits
UPSTAIRS, MARIE enters from the
BEDROOM.)

Still here? MARIE

I was just about to go. LARRY

Oh, enough of that. You can stick around for a few minutes. MARIE

Only if you get me some coffee. LARRY

Deal. I didn't expect that you would've been here last night. I didn't even expect Ellis for at least a whole day. MARIE

(MARIE exits to the KITCHEN.)

I never expect anything out of Ellis. LARRY
(Yelling offstage to MARIE.)
(He laughs.)
I guess he hasn't had a chance to mention that he totaled his truck last night.

Wonderful. MARIE
(From offstage.)
(She enters from the KITCHEN, holding
two cups of coffee. She hands one to
LARRY. They drink as they speak.)

We just bought it a few months ago!

(She sighs.)

LARRY

It was a nice truck, too.

MARIE

Let me guess. He hit *the* tree.

LARRY

Bingo! You win a prize.

MARIE

Why don't you guys go and cut that thing down? One of you is going to hit it again and not be so lucky.

LARRY

We can't timber that tree . . . it's a family legend. It's been trying to kill us and wreck our pick-ups for almost twenty years now!

MARIE

Of course . . . to me it's just a reminder of how . . .

(Pause.)

Oh, nevermind.

LARRY

(Laughing.)

I know. It's a reminder of how we're a bunch of irresponsible drunks.

MARIE

Just remember. You said it, not me. Seriously though, can you and I talk for a minute?

LARRY

(Reluctantly.)

I ain't got nowhere to be. What's on your mind?

MARIE

Alan is.

LARRY

Yeah. He's been on my mind, too. No doubt about it.

MARIE

Sometimes I remember things . . . you'd think it'd be a good thing, but I remember too much about him too clearly. Like . . . sometimes, I make things up about him, and believe them with such hope and vigor that they become real to me.

LARRY

What the hell are you talking about?

MARIE

I mean that I can't help but wonder how I would feel about Alan if he would have just died instead of . . . you know. Would I feel differently?

LARRY

What?

MARIE

(Coldly.)

I make things up to hate him . . . to make myself feel better about his death.

LARRY

We both know that's not true.

MARIE

It is true. But it's not only bad. I think I've made up some good memories, too.

LARRY

What if the bad memories are fake and the good memories are real?

MARIE

How do I know any of them are real? There's nobody that I can sit down with and share memories. I'm so scared that I've become deluded by my own convictions about Alan and his death . . . about who is to blame.

LARRY

Marie, you know how we are. We've never been the kind of people to come out and talk about this sort of thing.

MARIE

You're talking to me now.

LARRY

I know. Maybe, I'm more sensitive than I wanna admit.

MARIE

That's why you're still here. Ellis would've changed the subject before the conversation even started.

LARRY

Ellis loves you . . . no matter what's happened, what he's done. He loves you.

MARIE

I guess so.

LARRY

If you think it would help. . . . I can listen to you and you can listen to me . . . about Alan. I've wanted to talk about him. I get the same shit you do when I bring him up to Ellis.

MARIE

Talking with no resistance. Without blame. Just memories, real ones. That would. . . .

LARRY

Clear up that crazy head of yours, wouldn't it?

MARIE

(Nodding her head and trying to laugh.)

I'd better get going to work.

(She smiles.)

Thank you, Larry.

LARRY

No problem. Let me know when you want to have a beer . . . or a cup of joe, and talk a little.

(LARRY hugs MARIE.)

MARIE

I will. Bye now.

LARRY

Bye, Mar.

(MARIE exits through the FRONT DOOR. LARRY remains for a moment to tidy up the room. He picks up a few beer cans and stacks them on top of the television. Then, he stands back to admire his work. As he exits, he notices the mirror and brings it with him out the FRONT DOOR.)

ACT I

SCENE 4

SETTING:

The living room

AT RISE:

It is the evening of the same day. ELLIS is sitting on the chair watching television. He has his rifle across his lap. MARIE enters, returning home from work. She carries the mirror with her, leaving it next to the door. She is obviously harried by something.

MARIE

Is Brooke home?

ELLIS

(He points at the ceiling.)

Upstairs . . . why?

(Turning his attention to the mirror.)

Why'd you bring that thing back in here?

MARIE

I told you before I didn't want it thrown away! It was out on the curb again.

(MARIE runs over to the door leading

UPSTAIRS.)

Brooke! Come down here right now! I have to tell you something very important.

ELLIS

What is it?

MARIE

Wait! Brooke needs to hear this too.

ELLIS

(Yelling offstage to BROOKE.)

Goddamn it, Brooke. Get your ass down here. Now!

MARIE

I spoke with the coroner today. My god. I can't get it out of my head . . . and to make it worse, today was my double shift.

ELLIS

You couldn't have called?

MARIE

No, not for something like this. I wish she'd hurry.

(MARIE sits, then stands, then paces in front of the couch. BROOKE enters, yawning.)

BROOKE

What's going on?

MARIE

Sit down, Brooke. I have to tell you both something. I don't even know how to put it to you, or what it will mean to us.

(There is a knock at the FRONT DOOR. LARRY enters without waiting for an answer.)

LARRY

Hi, guys. Family meeting? What'd I barge in on here?

MARIE

You came at just the right time.

ELLIS

The woman is keeping us in stitches.

(He frowns.)

You got your audience now, Marie. Spit it out . . . my show's on.

MARIE

Larry, take a seat.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

(LARRY sits on the couch next to
BROOKE. MARIE centers herself in
front of the family.)

Well, I was at work today. The coroner came in to my office and said that he needed to talk to me .
. . . that he had some new information about Alan's death.

BROOKE

I don't want to hear anymore about that.

MARIE

It's okay, honey. Listen. . . .

(She takes a deep breath.)

I'm just going to come right out and say it. Alan didn't kill himself. It's all in this letter. The
coroner was looking at the rifle and he determined. . . .

(MARIE takes a piece of paper out of
her pocket and unfolds it.)

that the rifle did not fire under the control of the . . . of Alan. It discharged due to shock, after
being dropped on the floor. It is more likely that . . . Alan stood up suddenly and dropped the rifle
on its back plate, causing it to fire accidentally.

BROOKE

So that means. . . .

ELLIS

He didn't kill himself.

MARIE

He couldn't. He thought about it . . . almost did it, but couldn't. Whatever he was thinking then . . .
that his life was bad . . . that he had nothing to live for. I don't know, but he stopped thinking it.
He thought about us.

BROOKE

He wanted to live.

MARIE

Doesn't that make you . . . I feel like I've been freed from something very heavy and that something
I did for him . . . was right. Do you think he knew that we loved him?

(There is silence. ELLIS is staring at the wall.)

LARRY

I do. That's the only thing that would have kept him from killing himself.

ELLIS

(Suddenly enraged, he stands up with his rifle and crosses to the corner of the room. He faces the wall.)

Goddamn these . . . things! Didn't I teach him? I remember telling him that could happen.

LARRY

(He stands.)

Ellis . . . calm down. This is good news.

ELLIS

Goddamn every one of them.

LARRY

(Urgently, to ELLIS.)

Is that loaded?

(ELLIS screams, points the rifle at the ceiling, and fires.)

ELLIS

Not anymore!

(The family is shocked into a momentary silence.)

BROOKE

Dad! Are you insane?

(ELLIS holds the rifle like a baseball bat. He slams it onto the floor, breaking it into pieces. He falls to his knees, picking up the pieces and letting them fall through his fingers.)

MARIE

Oh, Ellis . . . my God!

(She goes to him and leads him back to the couch. They embrace. MARIE pulls BROOKE into them, and they remain that way for some time.)

LARRY

I'll clean this up . . .

(MARIE, BROOKE and ELLIS untangle themselves, but remain together on the couch. After a moment of silence, ELLIS begins to laugh. BROOKE, MARIE, and LARRY follow with their laughter.)

ELLIS

I . . . shot a hole . . . in the ceiling.

LARRY

(To ELLIS.)

Yeah . . . quit acting like you've never done it before.

(They laugh.)

MARIE

Larry?

LARRY

You're ready for a beer *now* aren't you, Marie?

(BROOKE and ELLIS look at each other, amazed. MARIE nods. LARRY exits through the FRONT DOOR and returns with a twelve-pack of beer.)

LARRY

I always keep a few with me.

(He laughs and passes out beer to everyone.)

You never know when you'll need one.

BROOKE

(As she exits UPSTAIRS.)

I'm getting my camera!

ELLIS

(Yelling offstage to BROOKE.)

Good idea, Brooke. She won't be able to deny drinking later if we catch her on film.

BROOKE

(Yelling back down.)

Don't you dare take a sip yet, Mom! I need to get the exact moment on film.

ELLIS

Jesus Christ, I never thought I'd see the day.

LARRY

It only took you shooting a hole in the ceiling for it to happen.

(She cracks open her beer with obvious anticipation.)

LARRY

Not yet, Marie.

(BROOKE enters from UPSTAIRS with her camera. She is laughing hysterically. She positions herself in front of MARIE and snaps a picture at the precise moment the can touches her lips.)

ELLIS

Well? Do you like it?

BROOKE

Look! She's already drunk!

MARIE

(She continues to drink, with each sip
getting larger.)

I don't really like the taste very much, no. But I want to celebrate!

BROOKE

She's drunk, hey?

LARRY

(Laughing.)

She is isn't she, El?

ELLIS

She drank it pretty fast.

LARRY

Want another?

MARIE

I think I've had enough.

BROOKE

That was a big step, Mom.

MARIE

(Giggling.)

It was fun.

ELLIS

(As he exits into the BEDROOM.)

I'll be right back. I'm going to call the cops and tell them it was me that shot, and everything is okay.

LARRY

Good idea. The last time there was a shot right in town was when. . . .

(MARIE snatches LARRY'S beer from his hands as he is looking away to talk to ELLIS.)

LARRY

Hey!

(BROOKE and MARIE laugh, and make an impromptu toast over LARRY'S lap.)

BROOKE

I think you created a monster, Larry.

LARRY

I think so . . . and a beer thief!

(To MARIE)

You coulda had a full one, you know!

(ELLIS enters from the BEDROOM.)

MARIE

I will . . . as soon as I finish yours.

ELLIS

(He enters from the BEDROOM. He nudges LARRY aside and sits next to MARIE. LARRY stands and crosses over to sit in the chair. ELLIS puts his arm around MARIE and smiles.)

I told them I shot a squirrel!

MARIE

I bet you gave them the whole, "They'll get in the fascia" story, didn't you?

ELLIS

(Only half serious.)

Watch it now, Marie!

LARRY

Yeah, he'll take your beer away if you don't behave.

ELLIS

That's right, I will. Ain't that something? Twenty five years after I give that woman my last name, she's finally living up to it!

MARIE

(Playfully.)

Enough! This is my first and last time drinking.

BROOKE

Not if I have anything to do with it!

MARIE

We'll see, Brooke! Tonight is so important to all of us. Look. We are all together. I mean . . . this is what I've wanted. All of us together.

ELLIS

With no bickering.

LARRY

And only one shot fired.

(LARRY attempts to backtrack, but in the overwhelming mood of joy and optimism present in the room, he is the only one who realizes the gravity of his statement.)

Well, I meant to say that. . . .

BROOKE

It's almost like we're a real family again.

ELLIS

Jesus Christ, Brooke.

BROOKE

What?

MARIE

(Smiling at ELLIS.)

You know how he is. You have to let him ease into all of this emotion.

ELLIS

Yeah, please. If I wanted to hear that shit, I'd flip the TV to the lifetime channel.

(He yawns.)

Well, I'd like to stay up and shoot the shit, but I think I am going to go back to work tomorrow.

LARRY

Well, I'll be damned. Ellis is going to work!

ELLIS

(To LARRY.)

Wise guy.

MARIE

I'm a little tired too. I think I'll join you, El.

(MARIE grins and looks at ELLIS knowingly. ELLIS smiles back, slightly embarrassed.)

LARRY

Good night, lovebirds.

BROOKE

Gross, Uncle Larry.

(ELLIS and MARIE say good night and exit into the BEDROOM. As they approach the door, ELLIS takes MARIE'S hand and draws her close to him.)

BROOKE

It looks like it's down to you and me.

LARRY

(He stands and gets them each another beer, cracking them both open and handing one to BROOKE.)

I couldn't ask for better company . . . well, except for a nice woman like your mama.

(They laugh together. The lights go down. As the lights come up, LARRY can be seen passed out on the couch in the same position as the previous night. His beer is spilled again. BROOKE lays on her back with her head on the arm of the couch. MARIE and ELLIS enter from the BEDROOM. They are getting ready for work.)

MARIE

(Happily.)

Oh, dear. Look who passed out on the couch again!

ELLIS

(With unusual exuberance.)

Brooke looks like she got hit by a train in her sleep.

MARIE

Yeah.

ELLIS

(He turns on the television to a news station and turns the volume up.)

Wake up, Brooke! Get your ass up, Larry. It's check-out time.

MARIE

(Goes to BROOKE and tickles her.)

Wakey, wakey!

(BROOKE does not respond, even as she shakes her shoulders with more and more vigor.)

Ellis . . . come here. Something's wrong.

ELLIS

(He goes to MARIE.)

What do you mean?

MARIE

Brooke won't wake up. . . .

ELLIS

She's probably still drunk.

MARIE

(Frantically.)

I saw her taking pills yesterday, with all that beer.

ELLIS

She was taking aspirin.

MARIE

No, Ellis. She's not sleeping . . . she's comatose. I'm calling an ambulance.

ELLIS

(MARIE exits to the BEDROOM.

ELLIS goes to BROOKE and
continues his attempt to wake her.

LARRY wakes up amidst all the action.)

LARRY

What's goin' on, Ellis?

ELLIS

Brooke . . . something's wrong with Brooke.

(Curtain.)

ACT II

SCENE 1

SETTING:

A hospital waiting room. There is a receptionist window at the rear right of the stage. At rear center, there is a door that leads into the examination rooms. There are several chairs, separated by coffee tables, along the left wall.

AT RISE:

LARRY, ELLIS and MARIE enter from the right. They rush to the receptionist window.

MARIE

(To MS SMITH)

Excuse me. My daughter was taken here by ambulance.

MS SMITH

Yes, of course. Brooke? A doctor will be with you soon.

MARIE

(Frantically.)

I want to talk to a doctor now!

MS SMITH

Please calm down, Ma'am. The doctor will be with you shortly.

(MS SMITH looks over MARIE's shoulder as DR POWERS enters from the left.)

Aha . . . there he is.

(To DR POWERS.)

Dr. Powers, this is Brooke's family.

DR POWERS

Yes. I gathered that much. Thank you, Ms. Smith.

(He approaches MARIE. She is openly upset, crying quietly. ELLIS puts his arm around MARIE.)

I'm Dr. Powers.

(MORE)

DR POWERS (CONT'D)

(He shakes their hands.)

Brooke has been under my care and observation since she arrived at the hospital. She's okay now, but she's very lucky.

ELLIS

What's the matter with her?

DR POWERS

I have a pretty good idea, but I'm waiting on some tests. In the meantime, I was hoping you could fill me in on some things.

MARIE

Anything. Just help her, please!

DR POWERS

It would really help if you could tell me if she's been on any medication, prescription . . . or otherwise.

ELLIS

No. She ain't taking anything, Doctor.

MARIE

(She pulls away from ELLIS and glares at him.)

What? Are you serious, Ellis?

(To DR POWERS.)

She's been taking painkillers. Often. I don't know what kind. She always says they're aspirin . . . for hangovers.

ELLIS

Just a few aspirin, Doc. Nothing serious.

DR POWERS

(Ignoring ELLIS.)

Now, Mrs. Ragland. How often does she take these pills? How often does she drink?

MARIE

(Looking coldly at ELLIS.)

Every day. Both every day. No matter what I say to her.

DR POWERS

I'm sure you did your best. And I'm only asking to confirm my suspicion.

(He sighs.)

I think your daughter was in a coma induced by ingesting alcohol with excessive narcotic pain medication.

ELLIS

Cut the bullshit, and tell us if she's going to be okay, Doc.

DR POWERS

Mr. Ragland, please be patient. Brooke's heart stopped en route to the hospital.

MARIE

Oh, my God!

DR POWERS

Thankfully, she was quickly resuscitated and stabilized.

MARIE

Brooke died?

DR POWERS

Yes, but the EMT's brought her back. They saved her life.

MARIE

What does that mean?

DR POWERS

As far as we can tell, she hasn't suffered any permanent physical damage, but it's likely she'll exhibit some psychological symptoms.

ELLIS

Like?

DR POWERS

Well, everyone's different, but you can expect things such as depression, insomnia, lack of appetite.
...

MARIE

That will go away, right? She'll get better?

DR POWERS

With the proper care and attention, yes, she can recover from those symptoms. There's something else. . . .

(To LARRY.)

Excuse us. Please.

(He urges MARIE and ELLIS aside to speak to them privately. LARRY sits and flips through a magazine.)

Mr. and Mrs. Ragland, this didn't happen to your daughter overnight. It's been happening, probably every time she mixes alcohol with her pills . . . maybe you don't always, or ever, notice it, but it happens. This morning, it *really* happened.

MARIE

It was horrible see her like that.

DR POWERS

It was a sign. You needed this to happen.

ELLIS

I don't need any signs to tell me anything.

MARIE

Come on, El. Let him talk. A sign of what, Doctor?

DR POWERS

A sign that Brooke has a serious problem that can no longer be ignored. She died . . . only for a few seconds, but I'm quite amazed that she survived.

(ELLIS scowls and begins to say something, but MARIE places a hand on his shoulder, urging him to remain silent.)

MARIE

My, God.

(She pulls ELLIS close to her. He allows it begrudgingly.)

DR POWERS

I apologize for being harsh, but I can't allow Brooke to check out until I make it clear to you both that it's a miracle she's alive. You're going to have to make a sincere effort to keep her from abusing narcotics, or she won't be so lucky next time.

MARIE

(She looks at ELLIS.)

What about alcohol?

DR POWERS

Alcohol, too.

(ELLIS moves away from MARIE.)

DR POWERS

You recently lost a son, is that correct?

ELLIS

What's that got to do with anything?

DR POWERS

Only you and your family can answer that, Mr. Ragland.

(MARIE nods as ELLIS looks at DR POWERS disdainfully.)

Would you like to see her now?

ELLIS

Yeah.

DR POWERS

Ms. Smith will escort you to Brooke's room.

MARIE

Thank you, Dr. Powers.

DR POWERS

(He shakes ELLIS's hand. Then, he
takes MARIE'S hand for a moment.)

Anytime. I have to go now. If you need me, ask Ms. Smith to page me.

(ELLIS and MARIE nod and say good
bye. DR POWERS exits to the rear,
turning around for a moment before
disappearing through the door.)

DR POWERS

She should be able to go home in a day or two. When she does get home, take care of her . . . she
needs you.

MARIE

We will.

(Looking at ELLIS.)

Won't we?

ELLIS

Yeah.

MARIE

So that means you have to stop encouraging her to drink so much.

(Then, to LARRY.)

You too, Larry. The two of you spell trouble.

LARRY

(He stands and joins ELLIS and
MARIE.)

She won't have a drop around me, Mar. I promise.

ELLIS

It wasn't the liquor that did it.

MARIE

What was it then?

(MS SMITH comes into the waiting room from behind the receptionist window. She stands a few feet away from the Raglands, waiting for an opportunity to attract their attention.)

ELLIS

I don't know. But I don't trust that doctor, or any other doctor, in this goddamn hospital. I want a second opinion. We'll take her to Marshfield or something.

LARRY

I believe him, El. You should, too.

ELLIS

Nobody can prove she was taking drugs, Lar!

MARIE

I saw her!

ELLIS

She told you it was aspirin. Why can't you believe her?

LARRY

Ellis, you know you're full of shit?

MS SMITH

Mr. Ragland?

ELLIS

(Ignoring MS SMITH.)

Watch it, Larry. I'll fix you.

LARRY

Those tests are gonna come back and show she was taking something.

MARIE

Stop talking, now, Ellis. My, God. You're against anything anyone says!

ELLIS
For Christ's sake, Marie.

MS SMITH
Mr. Ragland?

ELLIS
(Spinning around toward MS SMITH.)
What do you want?

MARIE
Ellis!
(To MS SMITH.)
I'm sorry. I think we're ready.
(To ELLIS and LARRY.)
Aren't we?

LARRY
Yeah. Let's go see Brooke.

MS SMITH
Right this way.

(LARRY, MARIE and ELLIS exit to the rear, following MS SMITH.)

ACT II

SCENE 2

SETTING: The living room.

AT RISE: The lights slowly come up to reveal LARRY and ELLIS in their usual places watching television. They are drinking beer and sharing a bottle of whiskey.

ELLIS

(Pointing at the television.)

That buck ain't nothing.

LARRY

It's about to be breakfast sausage, once that guy shoots it.

ELLIS

Yeah. Remember that deer-drive at the Johnson farm back when Uncle Rusty was alive?

LARRY

(Laughing.)

The one when he shit in his pants?

ELLIS

(Nodding.)

That was a *real* buck. To his dying day, Rusty swore that thing smiled at him . . . like it knew what it made him do.

LARRY

I believe it. What else could make a grown man shit in his pants?

ELLIS

Not much, but that buck right there . . .

(He points to the television again.)

Is nothing.

LARRY

Why didn't you shit your pants then? You saw him too.

ELLIS

(Laughing.)

I would have, but I pinched one out next to that big hemlock ten minutes before the drive!

LARRY

Why the hell didn't you shoot him?

ELLIS

(With an artificial air of seriousness.)

That damn buck put me in a trance . . . fingers froze up, and I couldn't pull the trigger.

(They laugh together.)

LARRY

For Christ's sake, El. You're a joker.

(Footsteps. ELLIS looks toward the
FRONT DOOR.)

ELLIS

Someone's here.

LARRY

Yep, must be the girls. Wonder how the movie was.

(BROOKE and MARIE enter. They are
laughing.)

ELLIS

Jesus Christ! What's so funny?

(Laughing along.)

You two are a couple of hyenas.

MARIE

It was a good movie! Wasn't it, Brooke?

BROOKE

Yeah. I can't stop laughing, Mom.

ELLIS

What was it about?

BROOKE

No, Mom. Please, don't talk about it anymore. I'll start laughing all over again.

LARRY

(Joking, pointing at BROOKE.)

Look, El, she pissed herself.

ELLIS

Yep, looks like she busted a seal laughing so hard.

BROOKE

Shut-up, you two! I didn't pee myself!

MARIE

Leave her alone, gentlemen.

LARRY

Well, ain't that a wisecrack, El. She called us, "gentlemen."

BROOKE

Yeah, that's a laugh.

ELLIS

(To MARIE.)

I ain't been a gentleman since our first date.

MARIE

And it was all down hill from there. . . .

LARRY

The ol' bait and switch!

MARIE

(Smiling at ELLIS.)

For the better . . . he knows I'm lying. I'd take a backwards country boy over a stuck-up gentleman any day.

ELLIS

You're full of shit, Marie . . . but I

(Pause.)

I need another swig of that whiskey, Lar. Hand it over.

(LARRY tosses the bottle over to
ELLIS. ELLIS takes a drink and
shakes the bottle at BROOKE.)

MARIE

(Suddenly furious.)

God damn you, Ellis. If you tempt her like that one more time, I swear, it'll be the last thing you do!

LARRY

He didn't mean it, Marie.

ELLIS

I wasn't thinking. It won't happen again. I promise.

BROOKE

It's not a big deal, Mom.

MARIE

It is, Brooke. You've been sober for two nights now.

LARRY

(Facetiously.)

Why don't you two go cook, or clean, or something? Leave the men in peace.

BROOKE

Very funny. You know what, I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

MARIE

I will, too. . . before these two cavemen drive me crazy.

LARRY

Good night then, Marie. I'll talk to ya later.

ELLIS

Yeah, Marie. Good night. I'll be in soon.

MARIE

Yeah, sure.

BROOKE

Good night, All.

(BROOKE exits UPSTAIRS. MARIE
exits into the BEDROOM.)

LARRY

How many times we ended up like this?

ELLIS

Just you and me . . . drinking it up as always.

LARRY

Yep.

ELLIS

It should never change, far as I'm concerned.

(LARRY nods unconvincingly as the
lights go down. As the lights come
back up, ELLIS is alone, sleeping
upright on the couch. The minimal
amount of light suggests that it is still a
few hours before sunrise. BROOKE
enters from UPSTAIRS and sits next
to ELLIS. She pries the bottle of
whiskey, which ELLIS has managed to
hold onto during sleep, from his hand.)

ELLIS

(Without opening his eyes.)

What are you doing up?

BROOKE

(Guiltily.)

I can't sleep . . . I thought maybe a little drink would help.

ELLIS

I got no gripe against you having a drink now and then.

BROOKE

The doctor said. . . .

ELLIS

He's full of shit.

(BROOKE drinks from the bottle. Then,
ELLIS swipes the bottle from
BROOKE.)

And you're not going to drink alone.

(He looks around the room.)

Looks like your uncle flew the coop.

(He takes a big drink and passes the
bottle back to BROOKE.)

BROOKE

Don't tell Mom, okay?

ELLIS

("Zips" his lips clumsily.)

Mum's the word.

(BROOKE passes the bottle back to
ELLIS. ELLIS takes a quick gulp and
passes the bottle back to BROOKE.
They continue to do this as they talk.)

ELLIS

So was the movie that funny, or are you two women just screwballs?

BROOKE

It really was funny. I had fun . . . do you believe it? With *Mom*. I didn't think it was possible.

ELLIS

Me and your mom used to have good times. She drank a little back then, you know? She was thin, had this pretty, long, red hair. Damn, I remember her like that.

(Grinning from ear to ear.)

And that chest. . . .

BROOKE

Cool it, Dad! There are some things your daughter doesn't want to. . . .

ELLIS

I getcha. But she was different then. Having two kids, twenty-some years of *marital bliss*, losing our only son. . . .

(He laughs.)

Put fat on her ass and acid on her tongue.

BROOKE

Let's not talk about that. I've spent the last two nights jonesing to tie one on. I want to enjoy it.

ELLIS

We'll avoid sore topics . . . keep right here in the present until we can see straight to the bottom of that bottle.

BROOKE

Then we'll both be in the past . . . passed out.

(They laugh.)

ELLIS

Oh, yeah. I've been meaning to ask you if you could help me with something.

BROOKE

Anything, Dad. What's up?

ELLIS

You gotta give me a hand with that goddamn Internet.

BROOKE

Remember? I told you you'd have to use it someday!

ELLIS

Aww, you didn't tell me anything.

BROOKE

Whatever, Dad. Admit it.

ELLIS

So, the boss got set it up so we have to use computers at work now.

BROOKE

That's how it is these days.

ELLIS

You have to use the Internet to enter all the information.

BROOKE

You couldn't avoid it forever.

ELLIS

Yeah, well. I did my best. So, you gonna help me or not?

BROOKE

Sure. I'll show you the ropes. It's simple. Just don't get into any trouble. The Internet's got more than your waterworks program on it.

ELLIS

(Laughing.)

Yeah, that's what Larry told me. He's always looking at those lesbians.

BROOKE

What a pervert!

ELLIS

(His words becoming increasingly
slurred.)

He says that when those lesbians *do it*, it's so *beautiful*.

BROOKE

Yeah, I bet. I'll be sure to ask him about that.

ELLIS

He says that he's a lesbian trapped in a man's body.

BROOKE

(Laughing.)

Oh, my God. Does he know you gossip about him like this?

ELLIS

(Angry.)

You'd better keep your trap shut!

(Calming down.)

No, he don't know. He'll be pissed!

BROOKE

My lips are sealed.

(They laugh together.)

ELLIS

I wish your mom could see you now. You're fine. Whatever happened to you was a fluke, some kinda hormone imbalance or something.

BROOKE

Sure, Dad. I bet that's what it is. That's the first thing men say when a woman gets sick . . . hormones.

ELLIS

See. You know what's going on. That's why I like you. Goddamn doctors here don't know anything. Your cousin Jimmy would still be alive now if they'd have driven him to Green Bay instead of the goddamn butcher shop here.

BROOKE

Remember? Keep it in the now, Pops.

ELLIS

Right, but I get tired of all this bullshit about how you're gonna die if you don't stop drinking, and your mom telling me that you're slowly killing yourself.

BROOKE

Enough!

ELLIS

I'm just speaking my mind, Brooke!

BROOKE

Well don't, or I'll start to speak my mind. I know you won't want to hear it.

ELLIS

Ha! What the hell do you have to say? You're still a pup, wet behind the ears.

BROOKE

I'm not a pup.

ELLIS

Hell, yeah, you are. Wait until you're pushing fifty.

BROOKE

I won't make it that long.

ELLIS

(He scoffs.)

So Marie was right then? You do have a death wish?

MARIE

I didn't then, but maybe I do now.

ELLIS

Liar!

BROOKE

I'm not lying, Dad. I think I remember it, being dead. There wasn't a light or anything. I didn't see Alan. I saw nothing and felt nothing, and that's what I've wanted for so long.

ELLIS

You don't know what you're saying. You're drunk!

BROOKE

Yeah. You let me get drunk, Dad.

ELLIS

So what? That's not why you got sick!

BROOKE

That's what you want to think, isn't it? You're wrong though, and you know it.

ELLIS

What's that supposed to mean?

BROOKE

When I opened my eyes, feeling my body jerk back to life under those electric paddles, everything that I hated came back all at once. Yelling, screaming, pain, confusion. The EMT's kept saying, "Stay with us, Brooke." Ha. If that tube wasn't down my throat, I would have told them I'd never come back . . . if I had a choice.

ELLIS

Brooke!

BROOKE

I didn't want to go back home and deal with you and Mom screaming at each other. I didn't want to deal with how I helped Alan die. . . .

ELLIS

But he didn't kill himself. We know that, Brooke.

BROOKE

He wanted to! Oh, I know we all jumped for joy when the coroner told us it was an accident, but if he didn't do it then, he would have some other time!

ELLIS

That's not true!

BROOKE

Yes, it is! And the saddest part of it is that the doctor told you that I'd die if I kept drinking. You let me drink anyway!

ELLIS

He's a quack!

BROOKE

No, he's not. It's common sense, Dad. You believe what you want to believe. Anything else is a lie. You'd let me die before you'd admit that it's bad for me to drink now.

ELLIS

It isn't. . . .

BROOKE

I can't quit, Dad. I haven't been sober for two nights. I haven't even been sober for two hours!

ELLIS

But . . . you haven't seemed drunk.

BROOKE

How many drunks do you know that don't always *seem* drunk?

ELLIS

Where do you get it? Marie's been watchin' you like a hawk since you've been back! What could you be drinking?

BROOKE

Cold meds or . . . I can huff rubbing alcohol. A swig of mouthwash has held me over more than once over the last couple days. I don't need a bottle to get high . . . just an innocent trip to the bathroom

ELLIS

I would have known!

BROOKE

Would you have cared? You gave that whiskey to me without question tonight!

ELLIS

It doesn't matter. I told you. Beer and booze didn't make you sick.

BROOKE

Fine, Dad. Let's drink up then. I'm only happy when I'm drunk or high . . . or dead.

(MORE)

BROOKE (CONT'D)

(She takes a long drink and passes the
bottle to ELLIS.)

Ahhhh . . . that hit the spot.

ELLIS

It's empty.

BROOKE

(Breathing heavily.)

I'm trashed all of a sudden.

(She giggles.)

Got another bottle, Daddy? Baby's still thirsty.

ELLIS

Shut your mouth!

BROOKE

Daughter wants to die again, Dad.

(She laughs and quickly covers her
mouth, terrified of her own words.)

No . . . I'm so tired. I didn't mean that.

(She leans, like a slowly falling tree, onto
ELLIS's lap and falls asleep.)

ELLIS

I got you, Baby. Daddy's got you.

(He looks at the whiskey bottle in his
hand, sets it on the floor, and strokes
BROOKE's hair, watching her sleep as
the lights go down.)

ACT II

SCENE 3

SETTING: The living room.

AT RISE: BROOKE is sleeping on ELLIS's lap. ELLIS is awake, utterly withdrawn. MARIE enters from the BEDROOM, shocked to see

BROOKE on the couch with ELLIS and the empty bottle on the floor.

MARIE

What? You let her drink?

(ELLIS lowers his head in shame.)

ELLIS

Yeah, I did.

MARIE

You son of a bitch.

ELLIS

As soon as it was over, when she passed out on my lap . . . I knew I was wrong.

MARIE

It's too late for that, Ellis.

ELLIS

It's not too late. I know now.

MARIE

She could have died!

ELLIS

I know.

MARIE

Why, Ellis?

(ELLIS attempts to speak, but MARIE stops him.)

You're a danger to her. You're an ignorant, selfish fool!

ELLIS

I'm no danger to her.

BROOKE

(Slowly waking up.)

A danger to who?

MARIE

Go upstairs, Brooke.

BROOKE

Christ, I feel like shit.

(BROOKE yawns and holds her head, barely able to move.)

ELLIS

Listen to your Ma, Brooke.

(ELLIS helps BROOKE to her feet.)

Now get on up to bed. Hurry it up.

BROOKE

Oh, my head.

(BROOKE sluggishly exits UPSTAIRS.)

MARIE

(Offstage, angrily to BROOKE.)

I'll talk to you later, Darling.

ELLIS

It'll be alright, Mar.

MARIE

Are you delusional? Can't you see what you did?

ELLIS

Yeah. I guess that's what it took to wake me up.

MARIE

Wake you up from what? I want to know. Because you've been sleeping for a hell of a long time!

ELLIS

I'm stubborn.

MARIE

That's no secret.

ELLIS

I'm. . . .

MARIE

You're what . . . a complete lunatic?

ELLIS

Don't punish me, Marie. Please, I'm trying to. . . .

MARIE

I know what you're trying to do . . . something you haven't been able to bring yourself to do since Alan died, or since he was born, for that matter. You think if you pour your heart out to me, admit that you've made a huge mistake, that everything will be fine.

ELLIS

Yeah, that's what I'm hoping.

MARIE

Yeah? Keep hoping, Ellis.

ELLIS

I needed something else. Another mistake. I didn't know. I do now.

MARIE

What would have happened if this mistake cost Brooke her life?

ELLIS

It didn't. That's why I think it was supposed to happen.

MARIE

Oh, you think so, hey?

ELLIS

I do.

MARIE

What else is supposed to happen . . . after this?

ELLIS

I don't know. I never thought about it. I always just wanted to keep things like they were . . . when Alan was alive. They were so alike. . . .

MARIE

Alan and Brooke. Yes, they were.

ELLIS

The more you try to change things about her, the less like Alan she gets. That scares me, Marie.

(Pause.)

It scares me to death to think of Brooke any other way than how she is.

(Pause.)

If she stops drinking, I'll never see her. It's all we have. It's all I've ever had with anyone in my family!

(Struggling to speak over his emotions.)

Part of me wants her to sober up and get the hell out of here so I can't hurt her anymore, but I want her to stay the same too.

MARIE

(Sadly.)

You should leave, Ellis. She'll never get better if you're here.

ELLIS

I can't!

MARIE

Not forever . . . just until I get Brooke straightened out.

ELLIS

It's my house!

MARIE

That's why I am *asking* you to leave . . . and not . . . taking *other* measures.

ELLIS

What? Are you going to have social services kick me out or something?

MARIE

If I have to . . . I will.

(She sighs.)

Listen, Ellis. You just admitted that you were a bad influence.

ELLIS

But do you have to kick me out?

MARIE

You had your chance. You failed. Now, I want my chance . . . without you sabotaging my efforts.

(She moves close to ELLIS and takes his hand.)

I know you love her, and you didn't mean to hurt her.

ELLIS

I didn't.

MARIE

Ellis, please. Take a few things now. I'll send Larry out to the camp with whatever else you need.

(BROOKE enters from UPSTAIRS.

MARIE and ELLIS look at her sadly as she approaches them.)

BROOKE

Mom! You can't make him!

ELLIS

Didn't I tell you to go to sleep?

BROOKE

You woke me up!

MARIE

It won't be for long.

ELLIS

I'm gonna spend a few days out at camp, Brooke.

(He looks at MARIE.)

I got some time off I need to take.

BROOKE

(She runs to ELLIS and hugs him.)

Don't go!

MARIE

Brooke, go back to bed. We'll talk later.

ELLIS

Listen to your mother, Brooke. If I don't take care of things out there, everything'll fall apart.

(He sighs.)

The foundation's been cracking. Some water musta seeped in there over the winter and froze.

(He gently releases BROOKE, and exits into the BEDROOM. BROOKE and MARIE stand silently. ELLIS quickly returns with a duffel bag.)

There's a couple of shingles knocked off, too. Got to make sure the roof ain't leaking.

(He looks at MARIE, then BROOKE.)

It's going to take some time, but I think I can fix everything up in a week or two.

MARIE

(Lovingly.)

I think so too, Ellis.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

(BROOKE crosses to MARIE and takes her hand. ELLIS turns to go, looking back one more time. Then, he exits through the FRONT DOOR as the curtain falls.)

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