

A Place in the Woods

A full-length play written by Erik Gernand

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"A Place in the Woods"

By

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Setting:

August. The present.

Shaun's childhood home in rural Hunter, Indiana.

The play takes place in the kitchen/dining room area of an old farmhouse. A hallway leads back to bedrooms and a den. There is an exterior door off the kitchen. The home is in disrepair. There is a great deal of clutter scattered about when the play begins.

Characters:

Shaun - male, 40s, gay, a documentary filmmaker

Alex - male, 16, Shaun's son

Linda - female, 70s, Shaun's mother, early stages of dementia

Brady - male, 40s, Shaun's older brother by a year

Cherry - female, 40s, Shaun's former schoolmate, a police officer

SCENE 1

Middle of the night, Tuesday morning. Rural Indiana. Late summer. The present.

Shaun's childhood home. A kitchen/dining room in an older farmhouse in disrepair. The place is a mess: trash and things scattered about.

Shaun, 40s, has just arrived. His son Alex, 16, makes hot tea. Alex goes back and forth to the sink to fiddle with a broken faucet that sprays water. Cherry, 40s, wears a police uniform.

Linda, 70s, is seated in a chair. Shaun tries to get her attention.

SHAUN

Mom. Mom. Mom!

LINDA

Goddamnit, I hear you.

SHAUN

You did it again. Are you OK?

LINDA

Yes. I'm ignoring you.

SHAUN

Alex is making you a cup of tea.

LINDA

I don't want any.

SHAUN

Please.

LINDA

I want to talk to Brady.

SHAUN

He could be passed out in numerous ditches.

LINDA

Be nice to your brother.

SHAUN

Then he should answer his phone.

ALEX

It's almost ready.

LINDA

Put it away.

CHERRY

You need to drink, Mrs. McAllister.

LINDA

Then be a lamb and pour me a tall scotch.

CHERRY

(innocently)

Oh, no. You can't...you shouldn't...you can't have any alcohol.

LINDA

Then keep your damn pie hole shut.

SHAUN

(to Linda)

Be nice.

CHERRY

(sincerely)

It's my fault. I should have been more clear when I said *drink*.

SHAUN

Mrs. McAllister knows exactly what you meant.

LINDA

Do not speak of me in the third person.

SHAUN

(to Linda)

You know what Cherry meant.

ALEX

Milk and honey, right Grandma?

LINDA

A drink means alcohol.

SHAUN

A drink means liquid hydration.

LINDA

And in the middle of the night that *liquid hydration* is presumably of the alcoholic nature.

CHERRY

She's technically right, for some people.

LINDA

Even the mailman agrees.

CHERRY

(gently correcting)

Police chief.

SHAUN

Perhaps that's what it means in a bar.

LINDA

And that's what it means in my kitchen.

SHAUN

I'm not arguing with you about this.

LINDA

I think you already have.

ALEX

Here you go, Grandma. You're out of milk, and the honey is kind of crusty, but I think it's OK. It'll make you feel better.

SHAUN

He's right. Just have a few sips.

LINDA

(to Alex)

Your brother is driving me crazy.

ALEX

That's my dad. I'm Alex.

LINDA

I know who you are.

Alex holds the cup. She doesn't take it.

LINDA

You're a good boy.

ALEX

Thank you.

LINDA

But I don't want your goddamn tea.

ALEX

Please.

SHAUN

She's not going to do anything she doesn't want. Especially if I want her to.

LINDA

Pour it down the sink.

Alex sets the cup down next to her.

ALEX

It's chamomile. When I used to come stay with you it's what you'd make at night. Hot chocolate for me and chamomile for you. One time I told you I wanted hot chocolate all year because it tasted like snow days. So you told me you only wanted chamomile because it tasted like summer: like somebody mowed the yard and added hot water.

Beat.

She finally relents and picks up the cup.
She takes a sip.

CHERRY

Mmmm. Just like heaven in a cup!

Linda spits the tea back into the cup.

Beat.

SHAUN

Where were you going at two o'clock in the morning?

LINDA

Out.

SHAUN

Out where?

LINDA

Out for a walk.

SHAUN

Out for a walk where?

LINDA

Why can't I die in peace?

SHAUN

You're not dying.

LINDA

Aren't I allowed to leave my home without the Cub Scouts showing up?

CHERRY

Police.

LINDA

Getting arrested?

SHAUN

No one arrested you.

LINDA

I was forced against my will. I don't know what you call that.

CHERRY

You were walking down the road in your bedroom slippers.

LINDA

Is that a crime?

CHERRY

No, ma'am.

SHAUN

We're just trying to figure out what's wrong.

LINDA

What's wrong is that you're a little shit.

SHAUN

Is that what I am?

LINDA

At least you're good at it.

SHAUN

I can try harder.

ALEX

He just wants to help, Grandma.

LINDA

(to Alex)

And you're a shit, too.

SHAUN

Be nice to your grandson while he still likes you.

CHERRY

Everyone just stay calm.

LINDA

And Captain Crunch is a shit!

SHAUN

This *woman* saved your life. Alex and I got up in the middle of the night and drove four hours to be with you. So you might consider being a little nicer. To everyone.

Beat.

LINDA

(feigning sincerity)

My apologies. Please know that I say it with all the respect and sincerity I can muster when I call you all *shits*.

ALEX

I know, Grandma.

LINDA

Good. Night.

Linda exits to her bedroom. Shaun waits until he's sure she's gone.

SHAUN

(discreetly to Alex)

Make sure she gets in bed OK.

ALEX

All right.

LINDA (O.S.)

I'm not a goddamn cripple!

Alex exits.

Beat.

CHERRY

Well, at least she has her hearing. That's a blessing.

SHAUN

I'm sorry about that. About her. Everything.

CHERRY

Quite a night, huh?

SHAUN

You could say that.

CHERRY

(attempt at a joke)

Or just another day at the office for me.

SHAUN
(doesn't get it)

Sorry?

CHERRY
Oh. I just meant...it's not really an office, I just meant this is kind of what my job is like every day. You never know what you're going to get.

SHAUN
Thank you for staying, Cherry. It's a long drive from Chicago. You didn't have to wait.

CHERRY
Back in fourth grade--it must have been your birthday--your mom made these beautiful cupcakes with faces on them: green ones, purple ones, orange ones. But I was a fat kid. And every time Brian Duncan or John Stinson saw me eat they'd make elephant noises. So I didn't go up and get one. But your mom must have seen me sitting by myself, and she walked to the back of the room and handed me a cupcake. "Pretty girls need treats, too," she said.

I took it home, and I didn't even eat it. I liked it too much. I sat it next to my bed until it got so hard and crusty and covered in dog hair that my mom finally threw it out one day.

I was so sad.

SHAUN
Brian Duncan is a dick.

CHERRY
Oh, he grew out of it. I arrested him a few years ago and he was really sweet.

SHAUN
You look great, by the way.

CHERRY
(blushes)
Gosh, I don't know.

SHAUN
Brian Duncan would be so lucky.

CHERRY

You pray for something hard enough, sometimes God's all like: Shut up already!

(slight beat)

I had a bowel obstruction.

Beat.

SHAUN

I should check on my son.

CHERRY

Is your wife...is she coming, too?

SHAUN

What? No. I'm not...I'm not married.

CHERRY

Oh gosh. You wouldn't believe who's all divorced from school. Ethan and Annette Caldwell. Cindy and Kevin Stein. Matt Pickering and his wife from Ohio who everyone always thought was *promiscuous* but turns out that was just a side effect of her anxiety medication.

SHAUN

We're not divorced.

CHERRY

(mortified)

Is she with Jesus?

SHAUN

She's in Skokie. It's...it's a long story.

CHERRY

We all have one.

Slight beat.

SHAUN

My mom can be a real handful. I should probably...

CHERRY

No one's seen you in like forever.

SHAUN

We don't get back very often.

CHERRY

You've missed every reunion. I'm on the Hunter High committee. You didn't even like our Facebook page. Or any of our pictures. Or respond to our invitation.

SHAUN

I'm sorry, Cherry.

CHERRY
(laughs)

I'm just kidding! I mean...I suppose you could have liked our Facebook page. Just click a teeny-tiny little button. *Boop.*

SHAUN

Please tell everyone I'm alive and well.

CHERRY

Tell them yourself. A bunch of us from school play Euchre every Saturday night at The Legion.

SHAUN

Alex and I are heading back to Chicago tomorrow. I'm actually leaving the country next week.

CHERRY

But what about your mom?

SHAUN

We just came home to make sure she's OK.

CHERRY

She's not.

Slight beat.

SHAUN

What do you mean?

CHERRY

It's just...this is the worst I've seen her.

SHAUN

Worse than what?

CHERRY

The other times.

SHAUN

What other times?

CHERRY

Oh. I thought...I thought your brother told you.

SHAUN

We don't...no.

CHERRY

I shouldn't get in your family business.

SHAUN

What happened, Cherry?

CHERRY

We have these questions we're supposed to ask when we find somebody like that: What's the next holiday? What did you have for dinner? What day is it? She didn't know. She just kept talking about going to the woods.

SHAUN

Oh my God.

CHERRY

My granddad, when he started slipping, he would all the time talk about this black woman in the kitchen making him a cake: young, short-cropped hair, a blue sun dress.

After he died, we went through all of his things. He kept a lot. Postcards. Old pictures. Letters. Turns out he had a girlfriend during the war. Mae, a young African-American woman. Short hair.

My mom said she wished she could find that recipe. Must have been a really good cake for him to still think about it all those years later.

I don't think he cared about the cake.

Beat.

SHAUN

I'm sorry about your grandfather.

CHERRY

I start my next shift at three, I should probably get some shut-eye. I'm glad you're home, even if it had to be for this.

SHAUN

Thank you, Cherry.

CHERRY

I almost didn't stick around Hunter either, you know. I was pretty miserable back then. Most of those mean kids though...they grew up. Come by the Legion Saturday. Everybody would love to see you.

SHAUN

Goodnight.

Cherry exits.

Finally alone, Shaun looks around his messy childhood home. He notices piles of mail sitting on the counter. Trash everywhere. A bucket beneath a leak in the ceiling.

He goes to the fridge and opens it. It's practically empty. He scowls at the smell.

He searches for a clean drinking glass and finally finds one that looks halfway clean. He goes to the sink to pour water.

The faucet sprays out all over the place.

SHAUN

Damn it!

End of scene.

SCENE 2

Later Tuesday morning.

*Brady, 40s, makes breakfast.
There are newly bought bags of
groceries on the counter.*

*Alex bops his head along to
80s music on headphones
attached to a cassette
Walkman. He digs through a box
of keepsakes: pictures,
yearbooks, cards...*

BRADY

(getting his attention)

So I was watching one of your dad's documentaries...

ALEX

(taking off the headphones)

Huh?

BRADY

I said, I was watching one of your dad's documentaries...that one about the Aborigines people. Aboriginals, right? You know, they're like Indians but they live in Australia. *Down under, kimosabe.* Anyway the movie was like about all the bad stuff that happened to them. Really terrible. Kind of like the Indians.

ALEX

Native Americans.

BRADY

Yeah, right. It was crazy depressing and I fell asleep. Talk about nightmares. Anyway, when I woke up there was this cooking show where they were making Death by Bacon. So I thought we'd try it.

ALEX

I'm vegan now.

BRADY

Shut the front door.

ALEX

It's not a big deal. I mean, it is a big deal, but you don't have to make anything different for me. I'll find something to eat.

BRADY

You rather have turkey bacon?

ALEX

No.

BRADY

I don't blame you, kid. Stuff tastes like roof shingles.

ALEX

You guys should cook and eat whatever you want.

BRADY

You want eggs?

ALEX

My dad usually makes oatmeal.

BRADY

I'll put that on the shopping list.

Shaun enters. Their noise woke him.

SHAUN

Hey.

BRADY

(genuinely excited)

Dude! The prodigal son has returned! Welcome home. Breakfast is on its way. I'd give you a hug but my hands are kind of covered in nasty.

SHAUN

(less enthusiastic)

That's all right.

BRADY

You look good, man.

SHAUN

Thank you.

BRADY

I was just telling Alex here how much I liked your movie. I ran into Danny Johnson at the Tool & Die a couple weeks ago, remember him?

(to Alex)

He was this kid from school everybody called Tonto, because he had this ponytail like a Native Indian.

(to Shaun)

Anyway, I told Tonto that you went and made a movie about his Australian cousins. He thought that was hilarious. Oh man.

SHAUN

When did you get home?

BRADY

Huh?

SHAUN

You were out. All night.

BRADY

Not all night.

SHAUN

Nobody could reach you.

BRADY

I got all those messages early this morning. I came home as soon as I heard.

SHAUN

Weren't you worried?

BRADY

(trying for a joke)

I'm always worried, man.

SHAUN

This is kind of serious.

BRADY

I wasn't out partying, OK?

SHAUN

I don't care what you were doing.

BRADY

Let's not fight, man. You just got here.

SHAUN

That was the deal: You get a free place to live and Mom gets you here to help. But you have to actually be here for this to work.

ALEX

(changing the subject)

Uncle Brady made coffee. You want some?

Beat.

SHAUN

(backing down)

Sure.

BRADY

There's fresh milk in the fridge. I'll go check on Mom.

Brady exits.

SHAUN

(with irony)

Welcome home.

(makes himself a cup of coffee)

I need to stick around a few days. Make sure some things are taken care of before we go home. We'll make it fast though.

ALEX

It's fine.

SHAUN

If you want to go back to Chicago earlier though I can put you on a bus. You could stay with your Mom, or at Tyler's.

ALEX

It's cool here.

SHAUN

Compared to what?

ALEX

I like retro. And I don't really hang out with Tyler any more anyway.

SHAUN

Since when?

ALEX

(shrugs)

I don't know.

SHAUN

I just don't want you to regret spending your final days of summer stuck in ButtCrack, Indiana.

ALEX

This is educational. I'm learning about my history.

Shaun sees the box Alex is digging through.

SHAUN

What's that?

ALEX

It's all your high school stuff. Classic.

SHAUN

Put those back.

ALEX

Finders keepers.

SHAUN

Only in kindergarten.

Shaun reaches for the box. Alex picks it up and playfully maneuvers away from his dad.

ALEX

I found it in the attic. Grandma said I could have anything I want.

SHAUN

Yes, and Grandma tries to send email from her microwave.

ALEX

So?

SHAUN

So, Grandma is crazy and those are mine. I don't dig through your life.

ALEX

That's because you live my life with me. You never talk about when you were my age. I bet the eighties were pretty crazy, huh?

SHAUN

Not that I recall.

Alex pulls out a cassette tape, just as Shaun takes the box from him.

ALEX

(genuinely impressed)

Holy crap! Holy effing crapzilla. *This* is amaze-balls: a genuine, honest-to-god mix tape!

SHAUN

That's definitely not yours.

ALEX

(reads)

"Rock on - JT." Who's JT?

SHAUN

A friend. Uncle Brady's friend. Officer Cherry's cousin.

ALEX

Really?

SHAUN

Hunter has 5,000 people. Everyone is somebody's cousin. Give it.

ALEX

You guys could probably sell this. It's like an antique.

SHAUN

Thank you.

Shaun takes the tape and puts it back in the box. He closes it up. Linda and Brady enter.

LINDA

I need some tea.

SHAUN

And good morning to you.

LINDA

Good morning.

ALEX

I can make it for you.

LINDA

I can make my own cup of tea. Thank you.

SHAUN

Your faucet's broken. I'll get somebody out here to fix it.

BRADY

Don't worry about it.

SHAUN

I'm not worried. I'd just like the sink to work properly.

LINDA

You just have to know how to use it.

Linda uses the sink. It doesn't spray her.

SHAUN

How do you feel?

LINDA

(emphatic)

Fine.

SHAUN

I noticed a few other things that need fixed.

LINDA

I'm sure you did.

SHAUN

I'll make a list.

LINDA

I'm sure you will.

ALEX

He's just trying to help, Grandma.

LINDA

Shouldn't you be in school?

ALEX

We don't start until next week. Same day Dad leaves for Afghanistan.

LINDA

So I've heard.

ALEX

He's working in this village for six months where everybody hates Americans.

SHAUN

They don't all hate Americans.

LINDA

Sounds dangerous.

ALEX

I'm not saying I blame them for hating us, but I told Dad the same thing.

LINDA

Then why are you going?

SHAUN

Because it's my job, but I'd rather talk about what's going on with you.

LINDA

I'm sure there are poor, miserable saps you could make movies about closer to home. You should check Tennessee.

SHAUN

When did the house get like this?

LINDA

Like what?

Shaun looks around at the mess everywhere.

SHAUN

Is that meant to be rhetorical?

LINDA

You're rhetorical.

SHAUN

That makes no sense.

LINDA

You make no sense.

BRADY

It's not that bad, man.

SHAUN

The refrigerator smells like someone made a smoothie out of onions and feet!

LINDA

Somehow I missed the part of the morning where anyone asked for your goddamn opinion!

BRADY

(really trying)

We haven't all been together in forever, can we please talk about something happy and fun?!

A silence.

With his father distracted, Alex has opened the box back up and pulls out a picture.

ALEX

Wocka-wocka. Who's the hot guy?

SHAUN

Put that away.

ALEX

Where does someone even get cheekbones like that? Yowza.
He's a looker, huh, Uncle Brady?

BRADY
(shrugs)

I never thought about it.

ALEX

It's not a gay thing. I'm not like gay or anything. I mean,
I wish I were sometimes, like instead of just another
straight, white, American, cis-gender male in a hetero-
normative dominated culture.

SHAUN

You're scaring the Hoosiers.

ALEX

I thought we were trying to all talk about something *happy*
and fun. This box of old stuff qualifies as both. So, who's
the hottie?

SHAUN

It's JT.

ALEX

From the mixtape?

A pause.

SHAUN
(reluctantly)

Yes.

ALEX

Hold up! Mix tape, plus smokin' hot guy, plus awkward
silence...

(it clicks)

Oh my God!

SHAUN

Alex.

ALEX

JT was your boo in high school!!

SHAUN

We weren't...it's a long story.

ALEX

Why am I just hearing about this?!

Linda gets up.

LINDA

I need orange juice.

SHAUN

It was a long time ago.

ALEX

This is mammoth.

SHAUN

Can we not talk about this right now?

LINDA

Did you buy any juice?

BRADY

Look in the fridge.

ALEX

I thought you weren't out in high school.

SHAUN

I wasn't. The only thing I knew about being gay in 1985 was an after school special called "What's Wrong with Carl?"

ALEX

What was wrong with him?

SHAUN

He was living in 1985.

LINDA

I don't see it.

SHAUN

(to Linda)

I'll help you look.

LINDA

We can't have breakfast without juice.

BRADY

Then I'll buy some next time I'm out.

ALEX

So JT was like your secret boyfriend then?

SHAUN

Yes. Sure. We were secret boyfriends. We carried decoder rings and wrote notes with invisible ink.

LINDA

I feel vitamin deficient.

BRADY

If you're light-headed you should sit down, Mom.

LINDA

I'll drive into town and pick some up.

ALEX

This is mantabulous.

SHAUN

We don't need juice, Mom.

LINDA

I'll be quick.

SHAUN

(to Brady)

Will you stop her?

BRADY

(to Linda)

We could probably use some butter, too.

ALEX

(taunting/chanting)

Go, Dad. Hottie boyfriend. Go, Dad. Smokin' boyfriend...

(repeat until stopped, improvise)

LINDA

(over Alex)

I just need my car keys.

SHAUN

(over Alex)

Let's all sit back down.

LINDA

Where are they?

BRADY

Beats me.

SHAUN

We don't need juice.

LINDA

But I need my keys.

SHAUN

(finally snaps)

I took your keys!!

Everyone is suddenly silent.

Beat.

BRADY

Oh. Shit.

LINDA

Then give them back.

SHAUN

Let's talk about this after breakfast.

LINDA

There's nothing to talk about.

ALEX

I can drive you. I have my permit.

SHAUN

I will drive her.

LINDA

I don't need to be driven.

ALEX

(to Shaun)

I'm a good driver.

LINDA

So am I.

SHAUN

You clearly shouldn't be driving any more, Mom.

LINDA

Fuck you.

SHAUN

Whoa there, sailor.

LINDA

I'll walk.

SHAUN

You can't walk to town. It's three miles.

LINDA

Watch me, asshole.

Linda exits out the front door. Alex goes to the door and watches her walk away.

ALEX

Dad.

SHAUN

She won't go anywhere.

ALEX

I think she is.

BRADY

She definitely is.

SHAUN

Come back to the table.

ALEX

But Grandma's at the road trying to hitchhike.

SHAUN

She's just showing off.

BRADY

That woman will walk her ass all the way into town, buy some OJ, then walk her ass back home and drink the whole thing in front of you just to piss you off.

ALEX

Now she's turning left.

SHAUN

Just sit.

ALEX

And she's walking away.

BRADY

I'm telling you.

ALEX

And she's gone. I now have no grandparents.

Silence.

Finally...

SHAUN

Shit!

BRADY

Good luck.

Shaun exits after her.

SHAUN (O.S.)
(yelling to her)

Mom. Mom! Damn it.

Alex reaches back for the box and digs around.

BRADY

You should probably leave that alone. It's your dad's stuff.

ALEX

Sure.

BRADY

Unless your dad's OK with it.

ALEX

I'll ask him later. After he catches Grandma.

BRADY

Welcome to my life.

End of scene.

SCENE 3

Tuesday early evening.

Alex and Shaun have just begun cleaning and sorting. Alex finds a strange, plastic contraption.

ALEX

(calling off to Linda)

Keep or toss?

SHAUN

(discreetly to Alex)

Don't keep asking, just toss it.

ALEX

I can't do that.

SHAUN

Grow some balls, son.

ALEX

(scolding)

Rude.

Linda enters.

LINDA

I can hear you.

SHAUN

Yet somehow you never listen.

LINDA

Keep. It's for making S'mores.

SHAUN

How often do you make S'mores, Mom?

LINDA

Now that I've found that, any goddamn time I want.

SHAUN

I think the correct answer is: never.

LINDA

Ruth McKinley from church has one and she loves it.

SHAUN

Would she like another?

LINDA

You're making me anxious.

SHAUN

It's called cleaning.

ALEX

So is that a keep?

LINDA

Yes.

SHAUN

No.

ALEX

I'll start a maybe pile.

SHAUN

If you want us to ever actually leave you'll help us make the house not look like you're auditioning for a reality show.

Slight pause.

LINDA

Toss.

SHAUN

Thank you.

LINDA

But don't throw anything out I haven't seen.

SHAUN

Yes, ma'am.

Linda exits to the hall.

Beat.

ALEX

We need to find you a lover.

SHAUN
(disgusted)

Alex.

ALEX

What?

SHAUN

That word.

ALEX

Fine. We'll call it whatever you want.

SHAUN

I don't want *us* to call it anything.

ALEX

Partner, significant other, *husband*.

SHAUN

At all! Where is this coming from?

ALEX

Last night I saw my future in this kitchen. You end up alone, and crazy, and I have to come home and change your diaper in like twenty years.

SHAUN

Forty years. Maybe thirty.

ALEX

I don't like thinking about you being lonely.

SHAUN

Then, sweetheart, don't think about it.

ALEX

I can't help it.

SHAUN

I don't have time to be lonely. I have you constantly telling me what to do; what to eat; where to buy fair-trade underwear.

ALEX

But I'll be in college in another year. And then I'll graduate. And some day I'll find my own *lover*. What are you going to do then?

SHAUN

Be miserable.

ALEX

You don't have to be.

SHAUN

But I'm so good at it.

Linda enters.

LINDA

(a little lost)

I can't find anything.

SHAUN

Nothing is irreplaceable.

LINDA

Not to you.

ALEX

What do you think, Grandma? I was telling Dad he needs a lover.

SHAUN

(to Alex)

Please stop instigating.

ALEX

It's a perfectly normal adult conversation.

SHAUN

And you are neither of those things.

Linda pulls an object from the toss box.

LINDA

My Banana Saver.

SHAUN

Yes. Now you can sleep at night.

ALEX

What is that?

LINDA

Sometimes I can't eat a whole banana.

ALEX

That's a good idea.

SHAUN

How about I pay for any excess banana you waste without it.
Can we please toss that?

LINDA

(going to another place)

It makes me think of Miss Pugsley. She gave it to me.

ALEX

Oh. Then you should totally keep it.

SHAUN

You don't need the thing to have the memory.

LINDA

If I get rid of the thing, I'll forget I ever had it and
then I won't have the thing, or the memory of the thing,
and I won't know something is even missing.

(beat)

I wonder if she'd like it back?

SHAUN

Very doubtful. Aside from the fact that it serves no
purpose whatsoever, Miss Pugsley died. Two years ago. You
were at her funeral.

LINDA

Yes.

SHAUN

Her autopsy said something about only eating half bananas.
Not enough potassium.

ALEX

You're being a jerk.

SHAUN

I'm kidding! She was like a hundred and seven and died in her sleep. We should all be so lucky.

ALEX

You should totally keep it.

LINDA

(to Alex)

She was always kind to you and Brady.

ALEX

I'm Alex.

SHAUN

(quickly, doesn't notice)

Yes she was, but you still don't need most of this stuff.

LINDA

You can't just throw all of my things out like they're garbage!!

SHAUN

They're not going to the garbage, Mom. They're going to your church. You should be happy that other people get what you don't need and you get to have a clean house. Everyone wins.

Slight beat.

Linda looks out a window. Shaun tosses the Banana Saver in the discard box.

SHAUN (CONT'D)

If you end up ever actually needing a Banana Saver, I will ship you an entire case of them. Deal?

LINDA

(in another place)

I have to tell Brady.

ALEX

Tell him what?

LINDA

They're in the woods again.

ALEX

What are you talking about?

SHAUN

There's no one in the woods.

LINDA

I watched them.

ALEX

I don't see anything.

SHAUN

No one is in the woods, Mom.

LINDA

They shouldn't be there.

ALEX

Grandma?

LINDA

Go get them.

ALEX

(to Shaun)

I don't know what to do.

LINDA

Go get them!!

Slight beat.

SHAUN

It's just a field. We cut the woods down twenty years ago.
No one is out there.

Shaun watches her, the gravity of the
situation sinking in.

End of scene.

SCENE 4

Wednesday evening.

*Shaun cleans as he paces
nervously. He looks at his
watch. Brady patiently waits.*

SHAUN
(yells off)

Let's go!

LINDA (O.S.)

I'm coming.

SHAUN
(yells off)

It's after seven.

LINDA (O.S.)

You can't keep rushing me.

SHAUN
(yells off)

Brady is waiting.

LINDA (O.S.)

If he's in such a hurry, he can go to the goddamn church by himself.

BRADY
(yells off)

I'm not in a hurry. We'll get there when we get there.

Slight beat.

SHAUN
Evening service started ten minutes ago.

BRADY
(a joke)

You should come with us. You only have to sit through half of it now.

(a silence)

No pressure, man. Just asking.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)
(slight beat)

You look tired.

SHAUN

Thank you.

BRADY

Sorry.

SHAUN

I am tired.

BRADY

You don't have to clean everything. You're a guest, Shaun.
You can relax a little.

SHAUN

The house won't clean itself.

Linda enters.

LINDA

Keep your pants on. I'm ready.

SHAUN

Finally.

LINDA

Shit! No, I'm not.

SHAUN

Where are you going now?

LINDA

I forgot my lipstick.

SHAUN

You don't need it.

LINDA

Have you seen my face?

Linda exits.

SHAUN

Lipstick won't help.

LINDA (O.S.)

I heard that.

Beat.

BRADY

We have this new organist at church. He's, uh, you know...gay.

SHAUN

As opposed to what kind of organist?

BRADY

Our church is pretty, um...open. I mean not everybody, you know. But our senior pastor, Rev. Mike, he's really cool with...everything.

SHAUN

Cool with the gays.

BRADY

For a long time everybody thought his daughter was a lesbian, but turns out she just liked her hair that way.

SHAUN

This is starting to sound like pressure.

BRADY

Just talking.

Linda enters.

LINDA

There. I'm ready.

SHAUN

You look beautiful. Now go.

LINDA

I look like an old woman.

BRADY

You look good, Mom.

LINDA

Thank you, sweetheart.

SHAUN

And tell Miss Ruth "hi" from me.

LINDA

You tell her.

BRADY

He's not coming.

LINDA

But you've been talking about church all day.

SHAUN

I've been talking about *you* going to church.

LINDA

Why?

SHAUN

I apologize for any miscommunication, but I'm staying here. You're running very late. Now go.

Beat.

LINDA

I don't trust you.

SHAUN

(laughs)

Why?

LINDA

A mother always knows when a boy is lying.

SHAUN

Do you think I'll steal your Deluxe Taco Warmer?

LINDA

I think you've been acting strange.

SHAUN

And I think you're incredibly late. So, please go.

LINDA

I forgot something.

Linda exits toward the hallway.

SHAUN

What did you forget, Mom? Mom?

(to Brady)

Jesus! How do you ever leave the house?

BRADY

I think Mom was just hoping we could all maybe go together.
You know, like a, like a family thing.

SHAUN

Whose mom are you talking about?

BRADY

I think it would be nice.

Linda enters.

LINDA

There's a man in my yard.

SHAUN

(making a joke)

He probably just wants you to go to church.

BRADY

(looking out window)

Yeah, dude. She's right. There's a guy out there. Actually
looks like Eddie Dixon from school.

LINDA

Why is Special Ed in my yard?

SHAUN

Eddie is dyslexic. That is incredibly reductive and cruel.

LINDA

I didn't name him.

SHAUN

He's a friend.

LINDA

You don't have friends. You said everyone in Hunter looks
like an extra from *Norma Rae*.

SHAUN

That was a joke. And I actually said *Silkwood*.

LINDA

Well Tina Strauss didn't think it was funny.

SHAUN

Well Tina Strauss looks and talks like she was in *Nell*!

BRADY

Ed's like a real estate agent, right?

LINDA

What's he doing in my yard?

SHAUN

Mom...

LINDA

I'm getting my gun.

SHAUN

What...why do you have a gun?

LINDA

For times like this.

SHAUN

Are you going to shoot Special Ed?

LINDA

If I have to.

SHAUN

I invited him over, OK?

LINDA

Why?

SHAUN

(hesitates)

I...we need to get some estimates...about the market...property values.

LINDA

So you can sell my house.

SHAUN

We're just talking.

LINDA

MY house.

SHAUN

It's something to consider. We should have options. Do you really have a gun?

BRADY

You should've talked to me about this, man.

LINDA

No, you should have talked to me.

Linda opens the door and yells across the yard.

LINDA (CONT'D)

(yells)

Eddie, sweetheart, I'm going to get my gun now. I'll start with warning shots, but I have to tell you, I'm practically blind without my glasses and I'd rather not have to go find them. And please send my best to your mother.

She closes the door.

Uncomfortable silence. Brady tries to break it.

BRADY

Did you hear about the dyslexic atheist? They don't believe in dogs.

SHAUN

We have to deal with this.

BRADY

Lighten up, man. Let's just go to church and do this later.

SHAUN

There isn't a later. Either we deal with this now, or I get a call in a couple of weeks that you're back in jail and Mom's shot some Girl Scout selling cookies and I won't be able to fix that when I'm in another country.

LINDA

I'm not your problem to fix.

SHAUN

But you both are.

LINDA

I want you to leave.

SHAUN

Are you throwing Alex out, too?

LINDA

If that's what it takes to get rid of you. Leave my house and my things alone!

Linda exits to her bedroom.

Beat.

SHAUN

If we fix it up, if we make the place look decent again, she can get some money for it.

BRADY

Mom took out a mortgage on the house.

SHAUN

Fine. We'll pay it off.

BRADY

About ten years ago. And then she had those hospital bills. It was her shoulder. And then her bladder. And then the car broke down.

SHAUN

OK?

BRADY

And at some point she stopped paying the mortgage.

SHAUN

When?

BRADY

A while ago.

SHAUN

Jesus, Brady.

BRADY

I didn't know.

SHAUN

How could you not know that?

BRADY

She's an adult.

SHAUN

Ok...I'll call somebody. I know a lawyer back home.

BRADY

We have to be out next month.

SHAUN

Fuck.

(long beat)

Where did all her money go?

BRADY

I told you, man.

SHAUN

She had money. Dad took care of us.

BRADY

What do you want me to say?

SHAUN

The truth.

BRADY

She helped me out when I needed it. So now I'm going to help her.

SHAUN

I believe the first part.

BRADY

I'll make this right.

SHAUN

I don't think that's possible any more.

BRADY

I get it, dude. You're allowed to hate me.

SHAUN

You want me to relax. Have meals together. Go to church. You want us to all be a family. And somehow you're surprised when that never happens. This is why, Brady. Every time I come into this house I have to deal with everything you've both fucked up.

Beat.

BRADY

The other night...when I wasn't here...I was with Kylie. We haven't told the girls yet, but I'm going to move back in. Mom can come with me.

SHAUN

Where will you put her? The girls already share a bedroom.

BRADY

We'll figure something out. I'm praying about it.

SHAUN

Clearly that's working.

BRADY

I pray for you.

SHAUN

Why don't you spend that time actually doing something?

BRADY

You have to trust me.

SHAUN

But I don't trust you, Brady. At all. That's why I'm still here.

Shaun exits.

End of scene.

SCENE 5

Middle of the night, Thursday morning. The house is dark.

Someone fumbles with the lock on the front door. Eventually, Brady stumbles in. He's been drinking. He carries a tool box.

He goes to the sink. He turns it on and water sprays out. He quickly turns it off.

BRADY

Shit.

Brady gets his tools out and clumsily tries to repair the faucet.

Alex enters.

ALEX

What are you doing?

BRADY

Hey, kid.

ALEX

It's like three o'clock in the morning.

BRADY

I couldn't sleep.

ALEX

Do you need help?

BRADY

Got it covered.

ALEX

It looks like you need help.

BRADY

I can take care of a leaky fucking sink. Pardon my French.

ALEX

It's OK. That's not really French.

Beat.

BRADY

Why aren't you in bed?

ALEX

I can't sleep either. Too many noises.

BRADY

Ghosts.

ALEX

I don't believe in ghosts.

BRADY

They don't care what you believe.

ALEX

Have you seen one?

BRADY

I've felt them. I know they're around.

ALEX

Has anybody died in the house?

BRADY

You don't have to die somewhere to be a ghost. It's energy. Remnants. It's like...the ground we live on, everywhere we go...those places collect us. Our souls. We leave something behind. It's like skin. It flakes off. The more time you spend somewhere, the bigger the pile of skin.

ALEX

Yuck.

BRADY

My grandma, your great-grandma, she died in the house. She was born here, too. Full circle.

ALEX

Where did she die?

BRADY

Your bedroom.

ALEX

For real?

BRADY

Hell, probably that same bed even. I wouldn't be surprised if we haven't changed the sheets.

ALEX

I'm not afraid of dirty linens.

Brady laughs; he stumbles and drops something. It's loud.

ALEX

Are you OK?

BRADY

You bet.

ALEX

I should get my dad.

BRADY
(snaps)

I'm not drunk!

Beat.

ALEX
(uncomfortable)

I didn't say that.

BRADY

But you judge me.

ALEX

I'm not.

BRADY

Just like your dad. You both fucking judge me.

ALEX

That's not true.

BRADY

Bull shit!

ALEX

My dad doesn't even talk about anything from here.

BRADY

Too many ghosts.

Linda enters from the bedrooms.

LINDA

What are you doing up still?

BRADY

I'm chatting with your grandson about our family fucking history.

LINDA

Leave the boy alone.

BRADY

What did your dad tell you about JT?

ALEX

Nothing.

LINDA

You're drunk. Leave Shaun alone.

ALEX

I'm Alex.

BRADY

Alex? Shaun? Who gives a shit?

ALEX

What about JT?

LINDA

Why are you doing this?

BRADY

Josh Thompson. My best friend. We played baseball together.

LINDA

Leave the boy alone!

BRADY

But I have to say this!! So you can either stay and listen, or you can pretend like it didn't happen.

A beat. Upset, Linda exits to the hallway.

ALEX

I want to know.

Beat.

BRADY

It's Sunday morning and me and Mom are at church, just like every other Sunday, but Shaun says he's sick and he stays home. And I'm sitting in that boring-ass sanctuary wondering why the little shit got out of church and I didn't.

But Mom thinks she left the iron turned on. So I gladly volunteer to go back home and check. And as I get close to the house, I see Josh's truck on the street, which is strange because Josh doesn't live anywhere near us.

And I walk inside and I hear music. From Shaun's bedroom. Right there. So I know he's not in bed sick and sleeping, like he told Mom. And I'm actually going to go in there and congratulate the little shit for getting out of church. Job well done. Right?

But I open the door...and there's Shaun. With Josh. Together.

ALEX

What did you do?

BRADY

I push Shaun off him, then I beat the shit out of Josh. In that bedroom right there. I tear him up. Really bad. Bloody. Broken.

Shaun enters, followed by Linda.

SHAUN

Leave my son alone.

BRADY

He should know the truth.

SHAUN

That's my decision.

BRADY

I was the man of the house. You were my responsibility.

ALEX

So you beat up his boyfriend?

SHAUN

It's not worth it.

ALEX

He didn't know how to be a decent human being?

BRADY

I'd never seen two guys like that.

SHAUN

We don't have to talk about this right now.

ALEX

We never talk about anything.

SHAUN

It's OK, Alex.

ALEX

It's not OK. None of this is OK.

BRADY

He's right. None of this is OK. Because Josh went home and he fucking killed himself!

Beat.

SHAUN

I can't do this right now.

ALEX

I didn't know.

SHAUN

And you didn't need to.

BRADY

I'm sorry.

SHAUN

But I don't want to hear it!

Beat.

LINDA

I have to go to the woods.

SHAUN

What?

LINDA

I have to go to the woods!

SHAUN

There's no one in the goddamn woods, Mom! Go to bed. All of you.

(beat - to Brady)

And leave my son alone. Stay out of our lives.

End of scene.

SCENE 6

Thursday afternoon.

Shaun pores over a mound of paperwork at the dining room table.

Alex enters. To Shaun's chagrin, Alex stands idly and watches him.

SHAUN

Do you need something?

ALEX

No.

(silence - he hem-haws)

Do you want to, you know, talk about...

SHAUN

(cuts him off - he knows)

I don't want to talk about Josh. I appreciate your concern. I do. But I need to go through all of this paperwork from the bank.

ALEX

OK.

Silence. Alex continues staring.

SHAUN

So I'd appreciate if you not give me that look of pity.

ALEX

How am I looking?

SHAUN

Like you just shot Old Yeller.

ALEX

What?

SHAUN

Like that movie you loved. Except that's how it really ends.

ALEX
(scoffs)

No, it doesn't.

SHAUN
The kid blows his beloved dog's brains out. Roll credits.

ALEX
I remember how it ends. We watched that like a hundred times when I was a kid.

SHAUN
And I never let you watch more than forty-five minutes of any Disney trauma.

ALEX
I don't believe you.

SHAUN
You lost your shit during *The Lion King*.

ALEX
Old Yeller saves the boy.

SHAUN
Fine. Go watch it.

ALEX
I will.

SHAUN
Watch them all: Bambi's mom is slaughtered; Dumbo goes on an acid trip; The Little Mermaid gets gonorrhoea.

ALEX
Why do you have to always make jokes?

SHAUN
(coy)
Maybe they're not jokes.

Beat.

A knock at the door. Alex looks out the window.

ALEX

It's your girlfriend.

SHAUN

What?

Alex opens the door. Cherry stands there holding a small package.

ALEX

Hi.

CHERRY

Heeeeeey!

SHAUN

Oh. Heeeeeey. Cherry.

CHERRY

I was in the neighborhood, so I just thought, you know, I thought I'd stop in and check on your mom.

SHAUN

Oh. OK.

CHERRY

This is a bad time.

SHAUN

What? No. It's fine.

CHERRY

I should have called. I'm horrible.

SHAUN

You're not...

ALEX

That's very kind of you. Thank you for coming.

CHERRY

I baked!

SHAUN

(feigns excited)

Oh my God!

CHERRY

Cupcakes. Like your mom used to make. Except hers were prettier.

ALEX

Cupcakes are awesome.

CHERRY

Hands off!!

(laughs, joke fails)

I'm kidding. I made enough for you guys, too. Really. It's just, I thought I'd give them to her first. You can have one.

SHAUN

I'm sure they're great.

CHERRY

I was going to make faces on them, you know, like your mom used to, but it's not that easy. I tried a few. They all ended up looking like they'd just been told really bad news. So I started over and just made an icing dot. But then my brother Jeff, he married Theresa Lyons, the homecoming queen at Central who left him after three years...anyway Jeff said they looked like boobs.

She opens the box for Shaun to look.

SHAUN

They...they don't.

ALEX

Far as I know.

CHERRY

Good. I just hope she's not offended.

ALEX

It would take a lot to offend Grandma.

SHAUN

You should go give them to her. She loves visitors.

CHERRY

Are you sure?

SHAUN

She's in the den. Second door. Go right in.

CHERRY

I'll just drop them off. Be right back.

Cherry exits.

ALEX

I can't believe you lied about Old Yeller.

SHAUN

It was a partial truth.

ALEX

Same thing.

SHAUN

It was for your own good. I saved kindergarten you from years of heartache.

ALEX

You don't have to protect me from everything, you know?

SHAUN

Except that's kind of my job.

ALEX

They're kids movies.

SHAUN

Seriously fucked up kids movies.

ALEX

You're impossible.

SHAUN

You turned out fine, better than fine. I must have done something right.

ALEX

You got lucky.

SHAUN

I don't have luck.

ALEX
(annoyed)

Whatever.

Alex exits.

Cherry returns with two cupcakes.

CHERRY
I'm back!

SHAUN
I bet she loved them.

CHERRY
She pretended she was asleep.

SHAUN
That's my mom.

CHERRY
She's a sweet lady.

SHAUN
Compared to whom?

CHERRY
She still comes by the cemetery every year. She leaves flowers on Josh's grave. Really pretty ones. Even after Uncle Dean moved away. And she doesn't say anything. No card. She just does it because she's kind.

SHAUN
I didn't know that.

CHERRY
I know you guys were all good friends back in school. It means a lot to my family.

SHAUN
Good.

CHERRY
How's she doing?

SHAUN

OK. Um...she drifts off sometimes. Mostly at night. Then other times she's completely fine, she's her lovely self.

CHERRY

When people get like that, it's like their mind is firing all this information, but they can't sort it out. Like, things that happened this morning or forty years ago all seem the same. It's wild. Seeing things not work right, it makes you appreciate the miracle when it does.

(slight beat)

I snagged you a cupcake.

Cherry hands one to Shaun.

SHAUN

Thank you. It looks delicious. I'll save it for dessert.

CHERRY

Or you can just set it next to your bed until it gets all crusty and hard and covered in dog hair.

Cherry laughs at her own joke.

SHAUN

Sorry? Oh! Right. Yes. Dog hair. Cupcakes.

CHERRY

It's funny how you remember something like that from thirty years ago.

SHAUN

The mind is strange.

Awkward beat.

CHERRY

Confession! I actually didn't come by just to see your Mom.

SHAUN

Oh?

CHERRY

Guilty as charged!

SHAUN

I, um...ok.

CHERRY

I spilled the proverbial beans! I told everybody you're back in Hunter. And boy are they excited. They can't wait to see you at Euchre Saturday.

SHAUN

Oh.

CHERRY

Janice Kaplan--complete sourpuss Janice--even she was excited. I haven't seen her that worked up since she caught some raccoons making love in her attic.

SHAUN

I'm honored, really, I just can't...

CHERRY

(cuts him off)

Stopping you right there, mister! I told them I'd only take yes for an answer.

SHAUN

But, I'm trying to help my mom get...

CHERRY

(interrupts)

That doesn't sound like yes.

SHAUN

I know, Cherry. It's just that...

Cherry makes a buzzer sound.

Shaun attempts to speak.

Another buzzer sound.

Beat.

SHAUN

(OK?)

Sure.

CHERRY

Mission accomplished! Then I shall leave you on that note, good sir. Saturday night. Darts. The Legion. See you then.

Cherry exits.

Alex enters. He picks up a cupcake and eats it.

ALEX

She's sweet.

SHAUN

Lots of people seem sweet. They're usually serial killers. You should watch more TV.

ALEX

Does she even know you're into dudes?

SHAUN

Were you spying?

ALEX

You need to tell her.

SHAUN

It's complicated.

ALEX

How?

SHAUN

Cherry and I have history.

ALEX

What does that even mean?

SHAUN

History.

ALEX

(confused)

Like...

SHAUN

Like, you know... (*suggestive*) *history.*

ALEX

(realizes - chokes)

Oh my God you have carnal knowledge of Officer Cherry!!

SHAUN

Shhhhhhh!

ALEX

What were you thinking?!

SHAUN

We went to senior prom together. I wanted to be normal. I thought that's what people did after prom.

ALEX

Oh my God. The idea of you having sex with that sweet woman is revolting!

SHAUN

Thank you.

ALEX

How many others are out there?

SHAUN

Don't be a freak, Alex! It was your mom and Cherry. And Cherry hardly counts, it was one time in the parking lot at Pizza Hut.

ALEX

(disgusted)

Who are you?

SHAUN

I thought you wanted me to have a lover.

ALEX

That's right, Dad, a present-tense dude-lover. With a penis. You plus lady-sex equals totally unnatural.

SHAUN

Well, now you know: It's complicated. That's why I haven't exactly told her.

ALEX

Everybody knows back home.

SHAUN

In case you didn't notice, sweetheart, we're not back home. And I'm not going to spend the time or energy to share something very personal with someone who, for all I know, is some giant Christian freak bigot.

ALEX

That's exactly why you should man up and tell her.

Slight beat.

SHAUN

(fed up)

I think it's great, Alex, I'm so very glad, that you live in a utopia where none of this matters. Your entire life is *A Small World After All*. You have black teachers, and Korean classmates, and a goddamn lesbian principal who speaks Spanish as her first language and most likely practices Wicca with a coven of handicapped midgets.

ALEX

Differently-abled little people.

SHAUN

But you live in a bubble. That's not how the rest of this country operates.

ALEX

I know how things operate.

SHAUN

Did you read about it online?

ALEX

Why can't we talk about this like adults?

SHAUN

Because we're not. You have no idea what the world can be like, and unfortunately it's pretty ugly.

ALEX

I don't know what you think my life is like, but you obviously have no clue.

SHAUN

You're in a great city. An amazing school.

ALEX

But it's not some "utopia" where kids don't still get terrorized. Or maybe...maybe you think it's easy having to explain my family to people. That I'm some kind of mistake.

SHAUN

You're not a mistake.

ALEX

I live in a city where people cross the street to avoid my black guy friends. Where one of my classmates was wearing a burka on the El, and some asshole kept harassing her and calling her a terrorist. And nobody did anything.

And do you even know why I don't hang out with Tyler Nichols any more? My *best friend*? I overheard his mom talking on the phone. About us. Turns out she's one of those *Christian freak bigots*, too.

SHAUN

You should have told me.

ALEX

But my life is so perfect.

SHAUN

I'm sorry.

ALEX

The world is shitty. I know that. It's full of shitty people. I might not be as old and bitter as you, but I can see that for myself.

Alex exits.

SHAUN

(calling after him)

Alex. Alex.

Brady enters. He sees Shaun's cupcake.

BRADY

(laughs)

It's a boob.

End of scene.

SCENE 7

Friday.

*Linda sits at the table
perfectly still. Her eyes are
closed. She's in some pain.*

SHAUN (O.S.)

Mom.

LINDA
(without stirring)

I'm coming.

SHAUN (O.S.)

Where are you?

LINDA
(still no movement)
I'll be right there.

Shaun enters.

SHAUN
You OK?

LINDA
Fine.

SHAUN
Don't get up. It's all right.

LINDA
I just need to sit for a minute.

Beat.

SHAUN
I was in your bedroom.

LINDA
You don't need to go in there.

SHAUN
I was looking for things to clean.

LINDA

I can take care of my own room.

SHAUN

Is this yours?

Shaun reveals a plastic bag with pot in it.

LINDA

Give me that.

SHAUN

I'm just asking.

LINDA

It's none of your business.

SHAUN

There are other people in this house I could believe were hiding pot.

LINDA

Joanne McKinley recommended it. She said it was good for her husband before he passed.

SHAUN

Does it work?

LINDA

It doesn't hurt.

SHAUN

I'm not judging.

LINDA

It helps me.

SHAUN

Good. Then you should keep using it.

LINDA

I will.

SHAUN

Do you need more? I can help you get some.

LINDA

Your brother is well versed in finding illegal substances.
Let's leave something for him.

SHAUN

Agreed.

Beat.

Shaun opens the bag and takes out two
papers.

LINDA

What are you doing?

SHAUN

Let's have one.

LINDA

Are you serious?

SHAUN

Why not? When else are you and I going to sit down over a
joint?

LINDA

(incredulous)

You smoke pot?

SHAUN

I went to private college. I live in the city. I work in
the arts.

Shaun fumbles through trying to roll a
joint. He clearly has no clue what he's
doing.

LINDA

Oh good God! You've never done this before.

Linda snags the paper from him and rolls a
joint easily.

SHAUN

(meekly)

I would have figured it out.

LINDA

Joanne showed me after church one day.

SHAUN

Maybe I should go back to church.

LINDA

I would've been surprised if you'd known how. You were always obsessed with being perfect. You almost died when you got that C+ in chemistry. You were inconsolable. As if the world had ended.

SHAUN

Ninth grade was very hard.

Linda pushes a joint over to Shaun. They share it back and forth.

LINDA

This'll make it all better.

SHAUN

I'll let you know.

Beat.

LINDA

I can't recall if I thanked you and Alex for being here.

SHAUN

(ponders - playfully)

Hmmmm. Let's see...no, I don't think you did.

LINDA

I meant to.

A silence.

SHAUN

Well, you're welcome.

LINDA

Then we're good.

Beat.

SHAUN

Where's your gun?

LINDA

Is that what you were snooping for?

SHAUN

There aren't any more real estate agents coming.

LINDA

You're taking everything else, can't I keep that?

SHAUN

I'm trying to work something out with my lawyer, but there's a good chance we're going to lose the house.

LINDA

I'm not an idiot.

SHAUN

I don't think you are.

(slight beat)

Cherry told me about the Montclairs, up on River Road. Mrs. Montclair had a stroke. So then Mr. Montclair took care of her, until he found out he had lung cancer and he wouldn't be around much longer. So he took care of them both. Enough sleeping pills to kill a small barnyard.

LINDA

What kind of person do you think I am?

SHAUN

I think you're a person who's hurting very badly.

LINDA

You don't know what this is like.

SHAUN

Then tell me.

LINDA

I hope you never do.

SHAUN

But I might. And Alex might. And maybe even worse things. But we do what we have to.

LINDA

I know how this ends.

SHAUN

You don't.

LINDA

I do. I know. I saw it with my mother. I watched her for eight very long years. That's how it starts. Spells. Getting lost. And it gets worse. So goddamn worse.

SHAUN

I know this is hard.

LINDA

You don't know.

SHAUN

We'll get through this.

LINDA

You will get through this. Mine doesn't have a happy ending.

Beat.

SHAUN

I'll return your stash.

LINDA

And stay out of my room.

SHAUN

(a joke)

Or maybe I'll smoke it all up.

LINDA

(scoffs)

How? You can't even roll a goddamn joint.

SHAUN

This is why I have self-esteem issues.

LINDA

Don't worry all the time, sweetheart. I'm not going to do anything stupid.

SHAUN

I don't know if I should believe you.

LINDA

I don't know that you have a choice.

End of scene.

SCENE 8

Late Friday.

Shaun works diligently on his laptop. He continues to type while Alex talks.

Alex enters in a huff carrying some cans/bottles he's collected in the house.

ALEX

Where's my recycling?

SHAUN

(distracted)

I don't know, Alex.

ALEX

I had a big pile. It was right here next to the trash.

SHAUN

Maybe it got recycled.

ALEX

Did the recycling genie swoop in and pick it up?

SHAUN

When did you get sarcastic?

ALEX

I wonder.

SHAUN

It probably looked like trash.

ALEX

Can no one in this house act like a responsible adult?

SHAUN

I have to finish this email, Alex. I'm going to a war zone next week and I promise you the world will not stop spinning because a handful of plastic bottles were mistakenly discarded!

Alex shuts Shaun's laptop on him as he's working.

SHAUN

What is your problem?

ALEX
(upset)

You're a liar.

SHAUN

What did I do now?

ALEX
I found his obituary. Joshua Alexander Thompson. Did you name me after him?

A hesitation.

SHAUN

Yes.

ALEX
Were you ever going to tell me that?

SHAUN

Yes.

ALEX
But, what, it hadn't come up? In sixteen years?

SHAUN

I wanted to tell you.

ALEX

I even asked you.

SHAUN

I know.

ALEX
Because Amy Kimbrough told our whole fifth grade class that she was named after her grandmother who was a nurse in World War II. And she told us all these stories about her.

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)

And I thought how awesome that was, that Amy had this thing, like she was just a kid but she already had this whole past. This history. And I wanted that, too. So I asked you and Mom...

SHAUN

Your mother didn't know about Josh. I never told her.

ALEX

And you just said that you liked the name.

SHAUN

I do like your name.

ALEX

But it meant something! And you never told me. Because you never tell me anything.

SHAUN

That's not true.

ALEX

Why can't we talk about real things?

SHAUN

We do.

ALEX

No. Real things. Hard things.

SHAUN

That's not easy for me.

ALEX

Why don't you trust me?

SHAUN

I do trust you, Alex. More than anyone.

ALEX

You act like Grandma drives you crazy, like you're so different. But maybe we're not different. Maybe that's how you and I end up. We see each other once a year at Christmas to fight and see who can be more sarcastic.

And now you're going to leave for half a year.

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)

Go off to some foreign country to tell someone else's story, but you won't even tell me my own.

Long beat.

SHAUN

It was the end of summer, 1985. Josh and Brady were starting their junior year; I was going to be a sophomore. I worked at Dairy Queen and Brady and his very cute friends would come in every night after baseball practice. And the cutest friend of all was Josh. He always ordered a Buster Bar. Butterscotch. And he smelled like Drakkar Noir if you leaned in when you handed him back his change.

Is that what you want?

ALEX

It's a start.

SHAUN

He would be nicer to me than Brady's other friends. Or just smile at me. Even act kind of nervous. But I didn't know if it was all in my head.

So this one Saturday night I'm home alone watching a movie; Mom's in bed and Brady is out at some party like always. There's a knock on the door and it's Josh. He says he's looking for Brady. So I invite him inside to wait.

He sits on the couch next to me. And our arms touch, just slightly, but I can feel his skin against mine. And neither of us flinch. But I don't know if it means something, or if it's just wishful thinking. And we watch the whole movie like that. Touching.

But then Brady comes home. And the moment Josh hears the door he jumps up and says he has to go. He's just gone, like nothing happened.

Brady is completely wasted, and he comes in and asks what Josh was doing at our house. And I'm pissy, of course. Brady has just interrupted the only almost-romantic moment of my entire life. So as I storm away I yell back, "Josh was looking for you."

(MORE)

SHAUN (cont'd)

And Brady just gives me this look like *What the hell are you talking about?* And he says, "Josh knew exactly where I was. He ditched me at the party."

(beat)

And that's when I finally knew it wasn't in my head.

ALEX

That's totally beautiful.

SHAUN

Yeah. It was.

SHAUN (CONT'D)

I threw out your recycling.

ALEX

Obviously.

SHAUN

(big - for everything)

I'm sorry.

ALEX

Thank you.

Beat.

SHAUN

We're not going to turn into your Grandma and me. I won't let that happen. You mean more to me than that, Alex. You mean more to me than anything.

ALEX

Then act like it.

End of scene.

SCENE 9

Saturday afternoon.

Shaun carries a packed box from the kitchen into the back bedrooms. He returns.

Shaun hears something outside and peeks out. Brady enters through the front door.

BRADY

Just me.

SHAUN

Thank God.

BRADY

And thank you for the warm reception.

SHAUN

I'm hiding from Cherry.

BRADY

Oh. You in trouble with the law?

SHAUN

When I don't show up for Euchre tonight, that's very likely.

BRADY

You should go. Might be nice to see everybody.

SHAUN

I don't know.

BRADY

Or not.

SHAUN

I'm not exactly in the mood. I talked to my lawyer this morning. The house is gone.

Beat.

BRADY

I'll make this right, man.

SHAUN

Mom can come live with us in Chicago.

BRADY

No.

SHAUN

There's another director from our production group who wants to go to Afghanistan. She's probably a better fit than me anyway.

BRADY

Mom won't do it.

SHAUN

There's not a choice. She doesn't have a home any more. You and Kylie don't have space.

BRADY

Then what do we do?

SHAUN

I don't know.

Beat.

BRADY

I joined AA. About eight months ago.

SHAUN

Good for you.

BRADY

I know I slipped up the other night. But it's helping me figure things out. It's intense. The things we're supposed to talk about. It's hard. Like, really hard. But it helps. I swear to God. It really does. So now I'm making things right. Trying to. It's going to take a long time though. With Kylie and the girls. Mom. With you.

SHAUN

We're fine, Brady.

Beat.

BRADY

We used to go fishing. The two of us. When we were kids. Little kids. We'd ride our bikes down the county road by the cemetery. There's a little bridge over the creek and we'd sit underneath. Mom would make a doughball. And it smelled sweet. Her own secret ingredient. She said it was guaranteed to catch something. And there were two fish - probably carp or mudfish, I don't think we knew - and they swam up and down the creek. Under the bridge. Our two fishing poles in the water. But we never caught them. They never even bit. I guess they didn't like the dough. It all went to waste. But we still went back. All summer.

SHAUN

Cinnamon.

BRADY

Huh?

SHAUN

Cinnamon. It wasn't a secret ingredient. That's what she put in the doughball. That made it smell sweet. Because she knew we would eat it, too.

BRADY

We did it eat it.

SHAUN

So it didn't go to waste.

Beat.

BRADY

I know I keep saying it, but when you get back from your trip I'm gonna come up to Chicago and visit one of these days.

SHAUN

Sure.

BRADY

I've wanted to come see you guys. For a long time now. But something always came up, you know. The girls. And Kylie.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

Now Mom. And then I guess I wasn't really sure if you wanted to see me.

Beat.

BRADY (CONT'D)

I fucked up.

SHAUN

Everybody does.

BRADY

Not like me.

SHAUN

They do. I do.

BRADY

I messed you up. Really bad.

SHAUN

I'm OK.

BRADY

This group, they're helping me figure that out. I own it now. I can admit what I did.

SHAUN

You don't have to do this.

BRADY

I don't blame you. I would've stayed the hell away if I could, too.

SHAUN

Just worry about now.

BRADY

Now...everything we are today, in this moment, is because of who we were and what we've done. Everything that's happened.

SHAUN

You can't change that.

BRADY

But I can make it right. I can fix it.

SHAUN

You didn't kill him.

Beat.

BRADY

But it's my fault.

SHAUN

Josh was in a bad place already.

BRADY

And I pushed him. I have to own that.

SHAUN

I moved on. A long time ago.

BRADY

No, you haven't. That's why you still hate me.

SHAUN

I don't.

BRADY

I don't blame you. I would, too.

SHAUN

I don't hate you, Brady!

I hate that I still come back to this place and feel like that same kid. I hate that I look at you and can't see anything except that day.

But Josh didn't kill himself because of you. He was scared, he was confused, and nobody did anything about it. Not his parents. Not you. Not me.

BRADY

I know what I did. And now I have to make it right.

Beat.

SHAUN

Josh told his parents that night. They freaked out. He came back over. He said he loved me. It was the first time he ever said that. And I told him we were both sick. That we needed help. I told him to leave.

So he went back home, he found his dad's gun, and he put it in his mouth.

It's not you I hate, Brady.

Beat.

BRADY

Let me make this right.

SHAUN

You don't have to do anything else.

BRADY

I want to.

SHAUN

It's my turn.

BRADY

I won't fuck this up.

SHAUN

That's not...

BRADY

I've talked it over with Kylie. I'm going to take care of Mom. I can do this, Shaun.

A pause.

SHAUN

I know. Thank you.

End of scene.

SCENE 10

Sunday morning.

The house, while not completely empty, looks considerably different than when Shaun and Alex arrived. The messes are mostly cleaned.

Shaun meanders through the kitchen, giving the place a final look.

Alex enters.

SHAUN

Make sure you don't forget anything. I saw some clothes on the bathroom floor.

ALEX

I already checked.

SHAUN

(a joke)

Anything you leave here will be gone. Drowned in the abyss forever and ever.

ALEX

That must be weird, it would be weird for me at least, to think you'll never see your home again.

SHAUN

Yeah. But it's just a house.

ALEX

But it's *your* house.

SHAUN

Not any more.

ALEX

I still have a few days before class starts. I just mean, if you want me to stick around. And help Grandma and Brady get moved out.

SHAUN

That's not your job.

ALEX

I wouldn't mind.

SHAUN

Your job is to be a student.

ALEX

It's not about a job, I just meant, if that's what you need. So you could leave on your shoot and not worry about things.

SHAUN

Your Uncle Brady is a capable adult. He and Grandma will be fine.

Brady and Linda enter.

LINDA

Who will be fine?

SHAUN

We all shall be fine.

LINDA

That's rather optimistic.

BRADY

Seems like you boys just got here and now you're leaving us already.

SHAUN

We'll be back.

ALEX

I talked to my mom last night, and I'm going to come for Thanksgiving, even if Dad's not back home yet.

BRADY

Good. Give us something to look forward to.

ALEX

I'll call you, Grandma.

LINDA

Thank you, sweetheart.

SHAUN

You need anything, Mom?

LINDA

No.

SHAUN

You sure? Last chance.

LINDA

I don't need anything.

SHAUN

(to Brady)

How about you?

BRADY

Don't worry about everything, dude. Like you said, we'll be fine. I swear.

(to Alex)

Good luck at school.

ALEX

Thanks. Bye, Grandma.

LINDA

Goodbye.

SHAUN

Give Kylie a hug from me.

A hesitation, then Shaun gives Brady a hug.

SHAUN (CONT'D)

(to Linda - somewhat a joke)

And be good to Kylie. She's a saint for taking you in. Don't give her grief. And watch your mouth in front of the girls. Kylie has enough on her plate.

LINDA

I'm not a child.

SHAUN

No one said you were. Just don't drive her crazy.

LINDA

How could I? We're not living with Kylie.

Beat.

SHAUN

(scoffs)

Of course you are.

BRADY

Don't worry about it, man.

SHAUN

What's she talking about?

BRADY

Just go.

SHAUN

Mom?

LINDA

We're getting our own place.

SHAUN

Why?

BRADY

It's fine, dude.

SHAUN

Where will you live?

LINDA

Kylie didn't want me living with them. So, we're not.

SHAUN

You said...

BRADY

I said I would make things right. I rented a place over near Muncie for the two of us.

SHAUN
(to Brady)

Is that what you want?

BRADY

It's what we have to do.

SHAUN
You're allowed to be happy. To take care of yourself. Have your own life.

BRADY

This is my life.

LINDA

It's Brady's decision.

BRADY

It's fine. Just go. It's taken care of.

Beat.

ALEX

Are you ready, Dad?

SHAUN
(conflicted)

Yeah. Sure.

BRADY

Be safe.

ALEX

Bye.

Alex exits.

Shaun, increasingly conflicted, finally follows.

Brady and Linda are alone in the kitchen.

After a few moments, Shaun returns.

SHAUN

(to Linda)

Why do you feel so guilty about Josh?

LINDA

I don't.

SHAUN

Because all week I can't stop thinking about that. It keeps nagging at me, but I didn't ask. I didn't want to hear the truth.

BRADY

What are you talking about?

SHAUN

Why do you go to his grave? Leave him flowers? There was a time when you couldn't even say Josh's name.

LINDA

Can't I mourn him, too?

BRADY

What are you doing, man?

SHAUN

We can't live like this any more.

LINDA

How are we supposed to live?

SHAUN

You knew about Josh and me. You used to see us go out in the woods. And you knew exactly what we were doing out there.

LINDA

Get out of my house.

SHAUN

Weeks before he died, Josh and I were in the woods. Messing around. And we walked back up to the house holding hands. I thought we were alone, but there you were on the porch. Watching.

LINDA

You don't know anything.

SHAUN

I saw your face. You couldn't even look at me. You hated me.

LINDA

That wasn't hate.

SHAUN

It wasn't love.

LINDA

It was fear! I was afraid for you.

BRADY

She didn't do anything.

SHAUN

Everything that happened--in this house, to all of us--it's not your fault, Brady. Don't let that screw you up. Don't let her do that to you.

BRADY

Why are you doing this?

LINDA

I did the best I could.

SHAUN

Then why do you feel so guilty? I need to hear you say it. You owe us that much.

LINDA

I don't owe you anything.

SHAUN

Tell Brady what you did.

BRADY

Leave her alone.

SHAUN

You knew Josh and I were together.

BRADY

She didn't know, man.

SHAUN

You knew and you sent Brady home from church to catch us!

LINDA

I thought I was helping you!!

Beat. Brady is shaken.

BRADY

(devastated)

That's not true.

A silence.

LINDA

(an admission)

Yes.

BRADY

(distracted)

Jesus.

LINDA

They were dying. All of them. Boys just like you. Lesions all over their skin. Skin and bones. I saw the pictures in the magazines. They got sick so quickly. Then they were gone. And Pastor Samuels said it was from God. That God sent it. I didn't know what else to do. That's what a mother does. She protects!

(to Brady)

I just wanted...I needed you to stop them. I knew you would stop them.

BRADY

Why didn't you tell me the truth?

LINDA

I never wanted them to get hurt.

BRADY

We were just kids.

LINDA

I didn't know.

BRADY

We were fucking kids!!

Brady leaves.

Long beat.

SHAUN

You'll move to Chicago with Alex and me.

LINDA

I can't.

SHAUN

We'll figure it out.

LINDA

You don't want me.

SHAUN

This is what we have to do.

LINDA

I won't.

SHAUN

You will do it, Mom! You will let Brady go. Let him get on with his life for once. You owe him that. And I know it won't be easy. For any of us. Believe me. But that's what's going to happen. Things are going to be different now.

And you'll start by giving me your gun.

A silence.

She finally nods in agreement.

End of scene.

SCENE 11

A month later. The house is empty. A crisp day in the fall. Shaun and Alex have returned from Chicago.

Alex does a final check through the bare cabinets. Cherry enters through the open door. Alex's back is to her.

CHERRY

(another failed joke)

Put your hands up!

Alex screams. Cherry laughs.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Oh, gosh. I'm teasing. I saw you guys' car out front. The door was open, so I just thought...

(slight beat)

I don't get to say that very often.

ALEX

(a little freaked out)

How often?

CHERRY

Never.

ALEX

We hear that like once a month out our apartment window in Chicago.

CHERRY

Little secret: Most days, being a cop isn't really like *Law & Order*. But Cordy Pelham, he runs the Village Pantry in town, he says him I remind him of Detective Benson.

ALEX

Definitely.

CHERRY

How's school going?

ALEX

Good. The movers came this morning. We're taking Grandma back to Chicago tomorrow.

CHERRY

I've been thinking about you guys these last few weeks.

ALEX

My dad's out in the barnyard. He'll be right back.

CHERRY

He probably thinks I'm crazy, huh?

ALEX

What?

CHERRY

Last time you guys were here, I was all like: "Come play Euchre!" And: "Look at my cupcakes!" You guys obviously have better things to do.

ALEX

That's not...no.

CHERRY

I just get fixated on things sometimes.

ALEX

So do I.

CHERRY

Like a few weeks ago, there was this funeral at church, and I couldn't stop giving Karleen McIntosh the stink-eye just because she was eating Bagel Bites.

ALEX

During the service.

CHERRY

We have a little toaster oven in the Fellowship Hall.

(slight beat)

So I understand if your dad thinks I'm a little cuckoo. And I get why he never showed up at The Legion. I don't know if he told you about that.

ALEX

I may have overheard.

Shaun enters.

SHAUN
(warmly)

We have visitors!

CHERRY
(embarrassed)

Oh, gosh. I should probably let you guys finish.

SHAUN

We are finished.

CHERRY
You guys are super busy. I shouldn't just stop by unannounced. My mom keeps telling me that.

Cherry heads to the door.

SHAUN

Where are you going?

CHERRY
I just wanted to apologize, for...before...you know. Ahhh.

SHAUN

It's Saturday, isn't it?

CHERRY

What?

SHAUN

Euchre night.

CHERRY
Well, technically...I guess.

SHAUN

I know. That's why I picked tonight to come back to Hunter.

Slight beat.

CHERRY
(touched)

Really?

SHAUN
I was going to stop by The Legion and surprise you.

CHERRY
(clearly emotional)

Really?

SHAUN
You're not going to cry, are you?

CHERRY
(totally crying)

No.

Cherry gives Shaun a gigantic hug.

Beat.

ALEX
(awkwardly)

I should...I'll, uh...

Alex exits to the bedrooms.

CHERRY
Wow.

SHAUN
Surprise.

They release. A slight beat.

CHERRY
So, how's your mom?

SHAUN
She's managing. We finally got her room ready back home,
so...big transition.

CHERRY
My parents send their love.

SHAUN

Thank you.

CHERRY

Shelley Jensen will be excited you're here. She was just asking about you.

SHAUN

Oh yeah?

CHERRY

Real sweet girl. Red hair. Smelled like wet Saltines, but that was just her glands.

SHAUN

I remember Smelly.

CHERRY

She smells like peaches now. Anyway, she has this cousin visiting from Indianapolis, a personal trainer, who's moving to Chicago and doesn't know anybody there at all. So I told Shelley that you'd lived there practically forever, and that you were single, and she thought, well, maybe you two should, you know...meet.

SHAUN

That's very sweet. Really. But, I...I date guys actually. *Would* date guys. If I dated.

CHERRY

She said he's really cute.

Beat.

SHAUN

How cute?

CHERRY

See for yourself. He'll be with Shelley at The Legion.

SHAUN

I haven't dated anyone in like...forever.

CHERRY

It's not a date. It's cards. With friends.

SHAUN

I don't know.

ALEX (O.S.)

He'd love to!

Slight beat.

SHAUN

You know what? Sure. Maybe I could...maybe I could give him a few Chicago tips. Why not? And you and I can catch up over a beer. About everything.

CHERRY

Good. And wear something cute.

She starts to leave. She stops.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

After senior prom, and when you never called again...I always wondered, if maybe you were...you know.

I just didn't know for sure. I didn't want to pry.

SHAUN

I should've told you.

CHERRY

(back tracks, rambles/embarrassed)

And I don't mean that I thought you were gay because you didn't want to be with me. Like the only way you could resist my feminine wiles was to be gay or something. I didn't mean that. I knew you always just thought of me as a friend.

SHAUN

I would have been lucky to have you as my girlfriend.

Slight beat.

CHERRY

Me, too.

Cherry gives Shaun a quick kiss on the cheek. She exits.

Shaun gives a final look through the kitchen.

Alex enters with a box.

ALEX

I checked every room. It's all empty.

SHAUN

Good.

ALEX

Aunt Kylie called. She said dinner's almost ready and Grandma's getting crabby.

SHAUN

She's *getting* crabby?

ALEX

Can I drive back to Chicago?

SHAUN

No.

ALEX

Why? I'm a good driver.

SHAUN

It's not you I'm worried about. It's the other idiots on the road.

ALEX

I need the practice.

SHAUN

I'll think about it.

Beat.

ALEX

Can I keep this? It's all your school stuff. It was in the closet still in your old room. Like pictures and yearbooks and things. Some tapes. Letters. I didn't read any of them. I wouldn't do that.

SHAUN

It's OK.

ALEX

I'd understand if you wanted me to throw it out though.

SHAUN

Keep it. I left it there for you.

ALEX

(a big deal)

Thanks.

Shaun gives the place one final look.

Beat.

The broken faucet sprays out water. Alex goes to turn it off.

SHAUN

Leave it.

ALEX

Why?

SHAUN

Let's go.

ALEX

Are you serious?

SHAUN

Yes. C'mon.

ALEX

What about the water?

SHAUN

Grandma's waiting.

ALEX

But what about the mess?

SHAUN

You can drive.

Shaun exits. Alex stands there, uncertain
what to do.

ALEX
(calls out to him)

Are you for real?

SHAUN (O.S.)

C'mon!

ALEX
(yells to him)

But, Dad.

Dad.

Dad!

Beat.

Alex hesitates, then finally walks out
after his dad. He closes the front door
behind him.

Water sprays out into the empty house.

End of play.