

IN A CLEARING  
A full-length drama

By Karen Saari

225 Harding St.  
Madison, WI 53714

(608) 577-9795  
kmsaari26@hotmail.com

IN A CLEARING  
CHARACTERS  
*2M, 2W*

Mark	30s male, smart but not scholarly, newly recovering alcoholic, has recently started growing a beard.
Pam	Same age as Mark, female, she is Mark's childhood friend. Smart, educated, witty and grieving.
Lori	Mark's mother, female in her 50s but appears older. World-weary, has probably never left Wisconsin.
Roger	Early 30s male, small town alcoholic. Mark's friend and former drinking buddy and Pam's cousin.

Roger and Lori have pronounced northern Wisconsin or "Yooper" (Upper Peninsula of Michigan) dialects.

## SETTING

A recent fall in Carp Lake, a small town in northern Wisconsin

*This play can be performed with or without an intermission.*

## SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT ONE-Scene One: Mark's apartment, an October night

ACT ONE-Scene Two: Mark's apartment, the next day

ACT ONE-Scene Three: Mark's apartment, that evening

ACT ONE-Scene Four: Mark's apartment, the following day

ACT ONE-Scene Five: Mark's apartment, a week later

ACT TWO-Scene One: Mark's apartment, a week later

ACT TWO-Scene Two: An A.A. meeting, a few days later

ACT TWO-Scene Three: Mark's apartment, the next day

ACT TWO-Scene Four: Wedding reception, the following night

ACT TWO-Scene Five: Mark's apartment, late that night

ACT TWO-Scene Six: Mark's apartment, the next morning

ACT TWO-Scene Seven: The bank of a local creek, that afternoon

ACT ONE  
Scene One

*(Lights up on an efficiency apartment. PAM and MARK are sitting on Mark's bed. Pam reads from a stack of trivia cards. The apartment is small and sparse.)*

*(We should get a sense of ease and comfort in the exchanges between these two. They are old friends from a small northern Wisconsin town. There is great affection and history here.)*

PAM

Okay, this one is easy. Which New Deal president was able to successfully hide from the public the after-effects of a severe bout with polio?

MARK

Um.

PAM

You're kidding, right?

MARK

It's right on the tip of my tongue.

PAM

Liar.

MARK

I'm serious. I just can't remember his name ... Polio. New Deal guy. Which one was he?

PAM

Which one? Alright now you're just embarrassing yourself ... F. D. R. You do know what the R stands for, right, dummy?

MARK

Duh. Roosevelt, right?

PAM

Yeah. Roosevelt. Dude. Take a class.

MARK

Yeah, yeah. Your turn, smarty. Which 1920s athlete, primarily a teacher, is credited as the first professional golfer?

PAM

What? Another golf question? So unfair

MARK

What's your answer? Tick-tock.

PAM

Don't you tick-tock me. Golfers. Hm. When in doubt...Jack Nicklaus.

MARK

Wrong. Walter Hagen.

PAM

Walter Hagen! Who knows that?

MARK

Probably the same people who know Jack Nicklaus wasn't even born in the 20s.

PAM

Oh, like you know!

MARK

He was all over TV and Sears catalogs when we were kids. At least you didn't say Arnold Palmer. That would be embarrassing.

PAM

Oh, *that's* embarrassing. Your turn, Shecky. Alright ... (*reading the card*) oh, if you miss this one, I swear ... Which 1960 Pulitzer winning novel about a small-town lawyer who faces down Southern bigotry was adapted to a film starring Gregory Peck?

MARK

Hmm ...

PAM

NO! You don't know this? Are you serious? How do you ... no. No. I can't do this anymore. It's actually making me angry.

*(Mark chuckles.)*

I'm sorry. I don't want to sound like a snob, but ... wow. How did you graduate high school?

MARK

Auto class.

PAM

Auto class.

MARK

Do you know how to rebuild an engine?

PAM

Do you know who said “Speak softly and carry a big stick”?

MARK

Your mom? You know how to replace an exhaust system? Y’know, I pay for all this luxury on my own. Where is it you’re staying again?

PAM

Alright, alright. Touche’. I need a drink. Shit! Sorry.

MARK

Don’t be. I could use one too.

PAM

Mark, I’m sorry. I am thirsty though. What do you have?

MARK

Water. Milk. That’s about it. I don’t keep soda around. I don’t wanna trade one addiction for another.

PAM

Smart. God, it’s almost midnight. Water, it is. (*Pours herself a glass.*)

MARK

You called me smart.

PAM

You have glimmers. I should go. My mom will be wondering where I am.

MARK

Where does she think you are?

PAM

At a concert with some old college friends.

MARK

Who does Marliss think you’re seeing in concert?

PAM

I told her it was a Jay-Z concert.

MARK

(*Laughing*) Jay-Z? In the north woods?

PAM

Green Bay. I don't know why I said it. I'm so bad at lying. She's already freaked out that I'll be in a stadium full of "city people..."

MARK

Will some of them be ... brown?

PAM

That's pretty much what she means by "city people."

MARK

She probably doesn't even know who Jay-Z is.

PAM

Oh, yes she does! She reads People Magazine! She asked me if Beyonce was going to be there.

MARK

Your mom is secretly into hip-hop.

PAM

You mean rap-crap. (*Imitating*) 'I don't know how people can stand to listen to that rap-crap. It ain't even music.' I told her it would be funnier if she called it C-rap, but she didn't get it.

MARK

Or it's just not that funny.

PAM

Nobody understands me. Why did I come back here?

*(Pam pauses a moment.)*

Oh, right.

MARK

*(After a moment.)* So. Once you sleep off the Jay-Z concert, what are you doing tomorrow?

PAM

Prepping. I'm going to sub at the grade school for a couple weeks while Carrie Baker recovers from surgery. Fifth grade. God, what am I going to do with a room full of fifth graders? I haven't subbed in ages.

MARK

Two weeks. That's not a bad gig.

PAM

I'll take it. Might as well earn some money while I'm here. I'd love to be freelancing, but my boss doesn't look kindly on it. He's been pretty generous about my time away so I need to respect that.

MARK

How long do you think you're going to stay?

PAM

I don't know. Until leaving feels right.

MARK

Hey, are you going to your cousin Walter's wedding?

PAM

Oh, right. That's coming up...

MARK

Are you going?

PAM

Yeah. I want to represent. I don't know if my parents will make it. A big celebration might not be ideal right now.

MARK

Do you want to go? With me? As friends. Of course.

PAM

Aw, Mark. I don't know if that's a good idea.

MARK

I mean, it wouldn't be a date. Even if I wanted it to be ... which I don't ... but in the program, I can't date, not till I have a year in.

PAM

I know. It's just ... timing. This. Has been good. Really nice. But your past is not that far in the past. I don't want to add worry to my parents' load. And they would worry. Plus, do you really want to crank up the Carp Lake Gossip Mill?

MARK

No, I know. I just thought it might be nice to actually hang out in public. And I'm not sure if I'm gonna go alone.

PAM

Right. Have you been around people drinking yet?



MARK

Not much. The day I quit, I knew I had to get out of my mom's house ... way too many triggers there, between my dad and brother. Your cousin Roger always stopping by ...

PAM

Three months now?

MARK

Almost.

PAM

How do you feel?

MARK

Good. Shitty. Both. It depends on the day. Lately it's more good than shitty. The first week I just slept. Ate, worked, slept and didn't talk to anyone. I was almost like a machine, just focused on not drinking. I started going to A.A. at a church up in Crivitz. A half hour drive but I was afraid of seeing people I knew. Second week I was up all night most nights talking myself out of going to find a drink. One day I realized it feels pretty good to wake up sober. I had forgotten the difference between real sleep and passed-out sleep. People even started to tell me I looked good. But it's hard. You do stuff to your body long enough...and, man there's things you don't wanna know. Drinking still crosses my mind every day.

PAM

Three months. You should be proud.

MARK

I'll never be proud. I still have days where all I'm doing is waiting for the day to be over so I can sleep and not think about how bad I want a cold beer. On bad days it doesn't let up. But I haven't caved yet. And when I wake up sober after a bad day, I feel ... really good, like I accomplished something, y'know?

PAM

You ever have dreams? Like nightmares, I mean.

MARK

No. Why?

PAM

I've just heard that's a thing. Recovering alcoholics will have terrible dreams.

MARK

Where'd you hear that?

PAM

I've heard it from people. My dad. I read an article about the most surprising things that

(*cont'd*) happen when you quit drinking on cracked-dot-com.

MARK

Well, if cracked-dot-com says it...

PAM

Shut up. They have good articles. I remember you always had a stash of Cracked and Mad magazines when we were kids. I loved coming to your house. Anyway, if you ever need to talk, I'm here.

MARK

Thanks. My sponsor's pretty decent. Good guy. He's been there. Says he was a real degenerate when he was on the sauce too.

PAM

You are not a degenerate...

MARK

You haven't lived around here for a long time, Pam.

PAM

I know, but ...

MARK

Just take my word for it.

PAM

I heard things. But it's not like I've been coming here thinking you're a choir boy. I mean ... you never were, even though you looked like one. Damn you.

MARK

You liked me, huh?

PAM

I shudder to recall it now, but in fifth through seventh grade, I was obsessed with you. I lost five pounds for you.

MARK

Wow. *Spamela* Turi liked me.

PAM

Oh, now you're looking for a fight.

MARK

What's the matter, Spam? Never got over me, huh? Do you still smell like potted meat?

PAM

*(Mock anger.)* Asshole. That's it. I'm leaving.

MARK

Yeah, yeah. Go home. Marliss'll want details on the concert, I bet.

PAM

I'll tell her Beyonce' didn't show up and Jay-Z dedicated all his angry songs to her.

MARK

Maybe *you* should work for People Magazine.

PAM

I'll see you again. *(Looking around)* Soon. Hey, would you be interested in some home ... stuff?

MARK

What kind of ... stuff?

PAM

I don't know, rugs, an end table and chair, odds and ends. There are some things at my parents' house that were ... intended for my brother's dorm room, but now they're just sitting there. I want to find a home for them. I helped him pick stuff out before ... everything.

MARK

That'd be great. I've got some long days coming up. If I'm not here, just come on in.

PAM

Okay. I'll drop by with it soon.

MARK

Hey! You got a copy of "To Kill a Mockingbird" you could throw in?

PAM

*(Delighted)* I'll check. Asshole.

*PAM exits.*

ACT ONE  
Scene Two

*(Next morning. Mark is packing his lunch, ready for work.)*

*(SOUND: Country music fades out, followed by the DJ who speaks with a strong northern accent.)*

D.J.

Hey, Mike Thompson back with you here on WCPL-Carp Lake Country. Stick around a while for today's community calendar, brought to you by our friends at Lax Taxidermy. At 30 minutes after the hour, we'll have today's obituaries. And remember to stop at Tom's IGA in Belford to get your bingo cards and chips for the return of radio bingo ...

*(There is a knock at the door. Mark turns down the radio and goes to answer it. It is his friend ROGER. Roger is still a little drunk from the night before. He is chewing tobacco and uses a beer can as a spittoon.)*

MARK

*(Letting him in)* Hey, Rog.

ROGER

Hey, buddy. How's it goin'?

MARK

Not bad. Getting ready for work here so I have to go pretty soon. Senior discount day. I'll be doing oil changes on every Olds Cutlass in the county till seven tonight.

ROGER

Yah, I gotta get to work too. Melvin'll put me in the warehouse if I'm late. I hate the fuckin' warehouse.

MARK

So what's goin' on? You want some coffee?

ROGER

Yah, maybe.

MARK

You should have some. *(Mark pours Roger some coffee.)*

ROGER

Yah, I was out at Kallio's Bar for the meat raffle last night. Morning came quick.

MARK

I bet. How is Kallio?

ROGER

I don't know. His nephew, that fucker, is running it while Kallio gets his hip replaced.

MARK

The one from Milwaukee?

ROGER

Nah. The one from his ass. Yah, that fucker.

MARK

Get used to him. Kallio always says he's gonna leave him the place.

ROGER

I'll take my business elsewhere in that case. Hey, speaking of business. Think you could take a look at my four-wheeler sometime? It's making a rattle-y sound. Only had it a year, fuckin' thing.

MARK

Told you not to buy a Kawasaki. But yeah, I'll take a look. Bring it by whenever.

ROGER

I'll bring you some venison. Got a freezer full of it. And a case of beer.

MARK

Not for me. I'm still on the wagon.

ROGER

You really are, eh? That's a long-ass time. What, six months?

MARK

Three.

ROGER

Shit. It's the end of an era.

MARK

It's the end of something.

ROGER

Shit. What do you do?

MARK

What do I do?

ROGER

Yah. I mean...I come home and have a twelver after work. Wind down from the day and shit.

(*cont'd*) Been doin' that so long, I can't think what else I'd do.

MARK

You could spend time with your kid.

ROGER

Fuck you. You could spend time with your kid too.

MARK

I'm working on it.

ROGER

Where'd Gina take her to? Green Bay?

MARK

A suburb, but yeah. I want six months behind me and I'm gonna go see Karlyn. She stopped talking to me over a year ago. I got a lot to make up.

ROGER

Why you waiting?

MARK

I just feel like the longer I'm off the bottle, it'll just be better. For her. To know I'm really done.

ROGER

Six months like a magic number or something?

MARK

It ain't a magic number. I quit for a month once, a long time ago. I wanna show her I can really do it ... half a year seems like a good start. When you bringing that piece of shit Kawasaki by?

ROGER

Tomorrow sometime. You gonna charge me?

MARK

Depends on the problem. Fifty, no more than 75. Friend rate.

ROGER

I didn't make you replace my couch, asshole. Could we call it a wash?

MARK

Oh, Jesus. The couch. Right.

ROGER

Living room in my trailer smelled like piss for a week. That fuckin' couch sat on the curb for a month. My buddy at the township finally sent a garbage truck my way.

MARK

I'm sorry about your couch, Rog. Come on. We're both gonna be late.

ROGER

Yah. You off tomorrow?

MARK

Half day. If I'm not here, just come in. Put the keys on the counter.

ROGER

Right, bro. Thanks for the coffee, buddy. Hey, I saw my cousin's car here last night.

MARK

Yeah, she stopped by to see if I wanted some of ... some furniture and stuff.

ROGER

*(He makes a sexual gesture.)* You and her ...?

MARK

Jesus Christ. We played trivia and talked about old times and shit. Let's just go.

ROGER

Alright, alright. Don't wanna piss off Melvin.

*(Mark nudges Roger out the door as they both exit.)*

Could I pay you in venison?

*(Lights out.)*

ACT ONE  
Scene Three

*(Later that evening in Mark's apartment. He is sound asleep on his sofa, still in his work clothes, with a glass of milk and half-eaten sandwich on the coffee table. The TV is on but at a low volume. Mark stirs increasingly through the following.)*

*(SOUND: Suddenly and very loudly, we hear what might be the sound of a car, country music broken up by radio static, a drunken voice ... maybe Mark's ... singing, whooping, the sound of tires on gravel, sounds melding together and overlapping and culminating in a loud THUNK, like the sound of something hitting a car.)*

*(Silence.)*

*(Mark bolts awake, very confused.)*



ACT ONE  
Scene Four

*(Next day. Pam busies herself in Mark's apartment. She has brought by the items she mentioned. She reaches into a box and pulls out a Green Bay Packers stadium blanket. She smells it.)*

*(Roger enters carrying keys and a roll of sausage.)*

ROGER

Pam?

PAM

*(Startled)* Roger. You scared the shit out of me. Hey.

ROGER

You do all this?

PAM

Yeah. I stopped here a few days ago and saw this place was pretty bare. I asked Mark if he could use a few things and he said yes. I figured I'd bring them by.

ROGER

Hm. Why not just drop 'em off?

PAM

Why not do something nice for a childhood friend?

ROGER

M-hm. Was this Jerry's?

PAM

It was going to be for his dorm room at Tech. It's been sitting there in his bedroom. My mom's been afraid to go in. Seeing all these things just makes it harder.

ROGER

How's your dad?

PAM

He's in another world. I mean, he's here, he's just lost. He has good days, but then he gets really angry sometimes. Gets an idea in his head about what happened and won't let go. He stays up all night drinking coffee and smoking. It's gonna take a long time.

ROGER

'Bout six, no three months already? *(Pam nods.)* I miss that little shit.

PAM

Me too.

ROGER

Still no idea what happened, eh?

PAM

For a while we would hear a new theory every day, but the police don't know. Was he run off the road? Was it an animal? That stretch between Pine Lake Road and the turnoff for Mackey Junction is so barren and dark at night. Nobody reported driving by and seeing anything. The latest idea is he veered onto the shoulder too fast and got thrown off his bike. All theory.

ROGER

Me and Walt shoulda gave him a ride.

PAM

Yeah, I'm sure he would have been a lot safer with Walt's and your drunk asses at the wheel. Then you'd all be dead in a clearing the next day.

ROGER

Watch it there. He was like a little brother to me.

PAM

Well, he *was* a little brother to me.

ROGER

You haven't even lived around here since you went away to college. He was what, five, six? I saw him pert-near every day all his fuckin' life. I was more ...

PAM

What, Roger? What were you?

ROGER

Nah, I ... ain't gonna say.

PAM

I know what you were gonna say.

ROGER

Well, if you see Mark, tell him I stopped by to bring him the keys for my four-wheeler. Brought him some venison sausage too. That's for him. Don't eat it.

PAM

Fine. Oh, this is stupid. Why are we fighting?

ROGER

We're family. Families fight.

PAM

Just because I moved away doesn't mean I don't care. I just wanted to do things in my life that ... I can't do here.

ROGER

You, like, draw on computers and stuff, right?

PAM

Something like that. I'm a graphic designer.

ROGER

Jerry was good at them computers. He woulda been a good teacher. I used to always go to him when I got a new phone. He'd show me what to do, program it and stuff. And he wasn't shitty about it, like I was stupid. Smart kid wasn't he?. Liked to party when his homework was done though. Tech's a party school so he woulda loved it there.

PAM

Yeah.

ROGER

What are you doing lately...besides Mark?

PAM

Oh, come on...

ROGER

Oh, come on, bullshit. I seen your car here the other night. You're putting a lady's touch on his house. I'm not a complete asshole.

PAM

Well, keep working at it. You're about 80 percent of the way there.

*(They laugh. Pam hands Roger the blanket.)*

I got this for Jerry for Christmas last year. You should have it. You're still a Packers fan, right?

ROGER

Sure shittin' I am. Sorry, cuz.

PAM

Yeah, yeah. Me too. Hey, you mind keeping your ... suspicions to yourself, not that I'm

*(cont'd)* saying you're right? It's just ... if my parents caught wind I was spending time with Mark ... we just don't need the drama.

ROGER

Yah, I won't say nothin'. I gotta go. Goin' out to Kallio's tonight for smelt fry. Tell Mark the keys are on the counter there.

PAM

Okay.

ROGER

*(Nearing the door)* Mark still not drinking, eh? That's good, I guess. Still weird. Never woulda thunk. Later, cuz.

*(Roger leaves. Roger has left the blanket. Pam folds it and hugs it.)*

ACT ONE  
Scene Five

*(One week later. Mark and Pam are eating pizza in Mark's apartment.  
Mark is tired and irritable from lack of sleep.)*

PAM

Never. Really? Ever? Are you sure?

MARK

Yes! I'm sure!

PAM

Not even a crappy gas station vending machine one?

MARK

I'm proud to say...again...not one. Ever.

PAM

I can't believe you've never had a cappuccino.

MARK

Believe it.

PAM

Why?

MARK

What do you mean, why? It's not like I've never eaten, I don't know, broccoli.

PAM

I'm just curious. So you've heard of cappuccinos. Right?

MARK

Fancy-ass coffee. Yes.

PAM

And it's become enough of a thing in our culture that you can even find cappuccino right here in Carp Lake. I stopped at Hoover's Gas Station the other morning and there was old 70 something Clyde Stanger coffee klatsching and ordering what? A cappuccino.

MARK

What's your point?

PAM

My point is...you enjoy coffee. But you've never been curious? To at least try a new way of

(*cont'd*) drinking it?

MARK

No.

PAM

Fascinating.

MARK

Do you want me to try a cappuccino? Fine.

PAM

You know I'm not even that big a fan, myself. I prefer just a good strong cup of black coffee.

MARK

Pam!

PAM

Okay. Sorry. I'll drop it. (*Watching Mark.*) It's hard not being able to sleep. I know. I went through a long bout of insomnia for months before I left Chet.

MARK

Divorce sucks.

PAM

Mine was final two years ago. Seems like another person when I look back.

MARK

Why'd you leave?

PAM

When things were good, Chet was great. When life got stressful, he was the opposite of great.

MARK

Did he hit you?

PAM

Oh, no. Which he was always very quick to remind me. Emotional abusers set a pretty mediocre bar for themselves.

MARK

I think I met him at your reception. Roger sure wasn't a fan.

PAM

I have to take a little responsibility too. Why did I marry him? I did love him, at first. But I also wanted someone who proved by marrying me I wasn't freaky little Spameela Turi anymore.

MARK

*(Taking her hand.)* To me ... you will always be freaky little Spamela Turi.

PAM

Nice. Anyway, as I got older and a little wiser, I got miserable and I left. We're both happier now.

MARK

Gina just got fed up with being married to a drunk. She was still in high school when I got her pregnant. God. I used to accuse her of trapping me. I was joking but not really joking, y'know? I don't know if it was love, really. We got married because she was pregnant and that's what you do.

PAM

Must be even harder with a kid.

MARK

I don't really remember. When she left, I moved back into my parents' house. I didn't have to pay rent, no more wife and kid to report to ... I just partied. All the time.

PAM

The night I left, I slept like a baby. That's how I knew it was the right decision. Anyway, I'm sorry. Have you tried anything to help you sleep?

MARK

I don't wanna get dependent.

PAM

There are some natural remedies. There's Valerian Root, melatonin.

MARK

Getting to sleep isn't the problem.

PAM

You're having nightmares aren't you?

MARK

How did you know?

PAM

You dozed off when we were watching TV the other night and you woke up sweating and gasping. I reached for you but you kind of swatted me away so I left you alone.

*(Her awareness unsettles him but he tries to joke.)*

MARK

You know what this means.

PAM

What's that?

MARK

Cracked-dot-com was right.

*(They are interrupted by a knock at the door.)*

Oh, shit. Right.

PAM

What? Is it Roger?

MARK

No. My mom said she was coming by with some mail and stuff for me.

PAM

Oh God. Your mom. Well. It's not like we're naked. We're two fully-clothed adults sharing a pizza. Let her in. I should get going anyway. I'm helping my mom sort out some of Jerry's stuff today.

MARK

That sounds ... hard.

PAM

Yeah. Well, it's gotta be done though, right?

*(Another knock at the door.)*

MARK

Be right there!

PAM

The longer it takes, the more suspicious this gets. I'll see you.

*(Mark walks her to the door.)*

MARK

Thanks for lunch.

PAM

This won't be awkward at all.



*(Mark opens the door. His mother Lori enters. Lori is in her 50s but could pass for much older.)*

Oh. Pam.

LORI

PAM

Hi, Lori. Mark and I were just catching up and...eating.

LORI

How's your mom doin'?

PAM

A day at a time. You know.

LORI

They still don't know what happened, eh?

PAM

They don't seem to.

LORI

Well, you tell her I said hi. We go way back, me and your mom.

PAM

I will. Bye, Lori. Bye, Mark.

*(Pam leaves. Mark closes the door. Lori brings in a bag of vegetables and a bundle of mail.)*

MARK

Hey, Ma. Want some coffee?

LORI

Yah. Brought you some stuff from the garden. There's some cauliflower and garlic. Havin' some pizza, eh?

MARK

Yup. Eating pizza.

LORI

Were youse on a date? Everyone knows, Mark.

MARK

*(Pouring coffee)* That me and Pam shared a pizza? Now that is exciting stuff.

LORI

I brought you some mail. Sorry I didn't bring some of this sooner. You probably got late bills now.

MARK

It's fine, Ma. I do everything online.

LORI

I don't know how you trust that internet. Scares me. Everybody's doin' everything on the internet now. I keep hearing about this facebook thing and twitting.

MARK

Tweeting.

LORI

Well. Greek to me. I could never learn that kinda stuff.

MARK

Aunt Shirley does it. She's on facebook all the time.

LORI

She got a head for that stuff. I don't. You look tired.

MARK

I'm having some trouble sleeping. I'll be fine.

LORI

I never you see you no more. Still not drinking, eh?

MARK

Just about three months.

LORI

That's real good, Mark. You look good. Tired, sure, but real good. You look real nice with a beard. Your eyes are, I don't know, nice and clear. Can ya work on your brother and dad too?

MARK

We'll see, Ma.

LORI

So. What's Pamela up to?

MARK

I don't know. Helping Marliss and Frank out. She started subbing at the grade school. Making some money as long as she's here.

LORI

Yah, I heard. You guys goin' together then?

MARK

We're just old friends, Ma.

LORI

Her car's here a lot lately. Or is she your decorator?

MARK

Jesus. This town. See someone's car in a driveway and there's gotta be story to it.

LORI

Looks nice in here. I never know what to do with that Pam. She's...different.

MARK

Yeah.

LORI

Could always tell she wasn't gonna be one to stay around here.

MARK

She's smart.

LORI

Well, so are you. Maybe now's a good time to go back to school.

MARK

Nah. I don't wanna be the old guy in all those classes.

LORI

If your uncle Hank can go back for welding at 52, you can go finish your auto tech degree.

MARK

We'll see.

LORI

You know Pam ain't gonna stay here long.

MARK

Yeah. I know.

LORI

Hey, I went to Shopko and got some birthday presents for Karlyn. Should I put your name on one? There's a cute dress I got...

MARK

Shit! (*Checks calendar*) No, wait. Her birthday's not for another three weeks, Ma. Geez. I thought I forgot it.

LORI

You gonna get her something yourself?

MARK

Yeah. I might need to get Gina's address from you. I got the phone number, lost the address.

LORI

(*Carefully*) You call Karlyn lately?

MARK

No.

LORI

She's growin' up fast.

MARK

I know, Ma.

LORI

Seventh grade already.

MARK

Ma. I know. Just, not yet.

LORI

You see this yet?

(*She opens her wallet and shows him a photo. He looks. It's not easy.*)

MARK

Ma, what? Is she wearing make-up?

LORI

Yah. She says, "Grandma, Mom just lets me wear pink lipstick and a little mascara. Why can't I wear more?" I tell her she needs to enjoy that baby skin while she can.

MARK

Lipstick.

LORI

Don't miss these years, Mark.

MARK

Not yet, Ma. I can't. A few more months.

LORI

I'm just sayin'...

MARK

Ma! I make her cry when I talk to her. Every single time.

LORI

Well, you were drunk every time. I'd hear you, repeating the same things over and over. Teasing her. That one time you passed out on the phone ...

MARK

Ma, I know! I just ... I have to show her I mean it this time.

LORI

You afraid you might start up again?

MARK

I have to be. Can we just stop talking about it?

*(There is a long pause. Lori drinks her coffee. Mark begins looking through the stack of mail. He sorts it through the following.)*

LORI

Dad's gotta go to the V.A. again tomorrow. Cholesterol check.

MARK

Hm. Bet he's thrilled.

LORI

I stopped buyin' his potato chips. Bought those baked ones. He threw 'em at my head.

MARK

Did you ask him if he wants another heart attack?

LORI

Oh, you know. Nothing he does is bad. The doctors just wanna make him miserable.

MARK

Stubborn bastard.

LORI

He started drinkin' light beer now so that's gonna solve all his problems.

*(Mark reads a piece of mail, puzzled.)*

What's-a-matter?

MARK

What the hell is this?

LORI

What?

MARK

This bill from Pete's Auto Body over in Waagosh? Ninety days past due, pay immediately? What is this for? I've never taken my truck to him.

LORI

Well, it must be for that deer ya hit.

MARK

What deer?

LORI

Oh, geez. Your dad was supposed to tell you ...

MARK

Tell me what?

LORI

That last night you were out drinkin', you hit a deer, banged up your truck a little.

MARK

What? This is news to me!

LORI

I was takin' care of Grandma Hope after her stroke. Your dad was supposed to tell you. That forgetful S.O.B. ...

MARK

Front passenger side fender damage?

*(Sound: Mark hears the sounds he's been hearing in his nightmares.)*

LORI

You okay?

MARK

I hit something ... that night?

LORI

Well. We figured it was a deer you hit. It was July. You were drunk and they're all over the road that time of year.

MARK

... the night Jerry died?

LORI

...right before you quit drinking. You came in just after one. Then you were passed out in your room for two days after. Your dad saw the damage and took it to Pete's for you.

MARK

Why?

LORI

Well, you're supposed to call the DNR when you hit a deer! You know that. Drunk driving. And the cops would have found out you let your insurance lapse to boot. Figured we'd save you a trip to jail/

MARK

/Three months ...

LORI

You boys. No wonder I got ulcers.

MARK

How could you forget to tell me?

LORI

Like I said, I had my hands full with Grandma. Your dad must've forgot. We got it fixed but we sure weren't payin' for it. Pete got it buffed out in a day. It was in and out while you were sleepin' it off.

MARK

Did Pete think it looked like a deer hit?

LORI

Well, he ain't Sherlock Holmes of the highway, but you hit something on the road in July. What else...? Mark? Mark!

MARK

Oh my god.

LORI

Mark, what are you thinkin'?

MARK

One a.m.? I would've been right around Mackey Junction...oh, God/

LORI

/Oh, Mark. No.

MARK

Was there another reason Dad was in such a hurry to get my truck fixed?

LORI

I told you why! We didn't want you to lose your job and go to jail. Gina'd never let you see Karlyn again. No insurance. Hittin' a deer and drivin' off. Drunk drivin'! So stupid!

MARK

Ma, what if it ... oh, God ...

LORI

I know what you're thinkin' here. But you don't know! And no matter how drunk you were, you'd know! I gotta believe that!/  
/You can't know!

MARK

/You can't know!

LORI

/They don't know what happened to that boy.

MARK

What do I do? Do I call the cops?

LORI

Call the cops? Why on earth...?

MARK

Ma, I keep having this dream or a flashback, I don't know what it is. I don't really see anything. A haze, like looking at a dirty windshield. It's the sound. It's so real. I hear a car, music, a voice and then I see something but I can't tell if it's a person, it's so fast and there's this sound, this thump. And I wake up.

LORI

It's just a nightmare. You must've been outta your mind drunk.

MARK

I was. Oh, God ...

LORI

It's was just a deer!



MARK

What if it's not?

LORI

No one knows what happened.

MARK

I wrote myself a note that night. I woke up at some point, still drunk. I had puked on my shirt. I had a piece of paper on my chest but I couldn't read my own writing.

LORI

You were drunk. It don't matter. That was the last time.

MARK

But what happened?

LORI

You're sober since then. You're cleanin' up. You might have something good here with Pam.

MARK

Pam. What do I do?

LORI

Nothing.

MARK

Ma, it's her brother. What if I...

LORI

Don't you say it. Not to me, not anyone. Why stir up more questions for that poor family? There ain't no answer here, Mark. You want to put them through more questions and theories that don't go nowhere? Because you're having dreams? There's no way to prove it or know. They'll get no peace, just anger. Pam too. And just when you're fixin' up your own life. What do you want your daughter to think? 'Cause even if nothing can be proved, you put that thought out there, around here, you're guilty. Clearin' your conscience without no proof, that's just selfish. Besides, you'd know. I know you would. It was just a deer.

MARK

*(Uncertain)* Maybe. Yeah. It was just a deer.

*(Lights out.)*

*(End of Act One.)*

ACT TWO  
Scene One

*(Lights up on Mark's apartment one week later. Pam is asleep on Mark's couch. He watches her for a few moments. He covers her up with the Packers blanket from earlier. Mark falls back against the couch, trying to watch TV. Pam stirs. She sits up, pulling the blanket around her.)*

PAM

Hey. How long was I sleeping?

MARK

About an hour. Sorry if the TV woke you up.

PAM

Nah, it's okay. I should be going soon anyway. What are you watching?

MARK

Not really sure. Some old movie on PBS.

PAM

Oh! It's On the Waterfront. I love this movie.

MARK

Of course you do.

PAM

It's a classic.

MARK

It's a Jeopardy question.

PAM

Grumpy. *(She looks at him a moment.)* Have you been able to get any sleep lately?

MARK

Here and there.

PAM

When was the last time you had a full night's sleep?

MARK

I'll be fine! Like my dad says, "I'll sleep when I'm dead."

PAM

Yeah. Marcus Petty Senior, the great prophet.

MARK

Hey, I don't make fun of your family!

PAM

Yes, you do! We make fun of each other's families all the time. That's 80 percent of our conversations.

MARK

Fine. I'm sorry. I'm just ...

PAM

Exhausted. I'll change the subject then.

MARK

Sorry.

PAM

Hey, since you're already crabby, can I ask you something?

MARK

I am not crabby.

PAM

Really. Well, then, since you're feeling so pleasant ... I saw your mom at the post office today. She was mailing out a package and it had birthday stickers all over it. I could see it was for Karlyn. *(Mark gets up and walks into the kitchen.)* I'm sorry. I guess it's not my business. It just got me thinking. We've gotten so ... close, and you never talk about her. *(She follows him into the kitchen.)* I'm not trying to be nosy. I don't know what you're going through, have gone through ... I just wanted to say/

MARK

*(Looking absently in his cupboards.)* /You were right. It's not your business.

PAM

I shouldn't have brought it up. But if you did want to talk ...

MARK

I don't.

PAM

You must miss her. It has to be so hard.

MARK

I don't want to talk about it.

PAM

Yeah. God forbid we have a meaningful conversation.

MARK

Meaningful? We were kids together, Pam. We grow up, barely see each other for fifteen years and then we're suddenly, I don't know. What are we? Tell me what this means ... I've been a drunk asshole so long, I don't know how not to be. I look at other people and myself sometimes and I think, Christ ... I'm bored. Sometimes ... I really want to say "fuck it all and just give in." And you ask about my kid? I'm not even sure *I* wanna know me. Here you are killing time to get away from your family while you slum it around here with us ... us...bumpkins. *(Pause)* I'm sorry.

PAM

Feel better?

MARK

No.

PAM

I wasn't judging you, Mark.

MARK

I didn't mean it. It's not you.

PAM

That first night I came here, after my brother's funeral ... I'd heard enough to know it wasn't a great idea to follow you here, knock on your door. I'd heard you were trying to quit drinking. So you were one of the only people there who wasn't going to use Jerry's funeral as an excuse to get wasted. Roger's not the only drunk in my family. I was terrified my dad was going to start again. So I came here. And maybe I did need to kill time then. But that's not why I keep coming back. And, yes ... sometimes I get so cramped in that house. Our loss. You can just feel it in the air.

MARK

You want some tea?

PAM

Okay.

*(Mark starts two cups of tea.)*

The reason I brought up your daughter was to tell you something you already know. It goes fast. I know what it's like to love someone, take care of them, then lose something special you have because of, I don't know, selfishness or a need to break away. Not many people know this but before my brother was born, my parents were miserable. They fought all the time. And I was such a weird kid anyway. It just made me more lonely and in my own

*(cont'd)* head all the time, thinking about how bad I had it, feeling sorry for myself. Then my mom got pregnant with Jerry. It's not that everything turned rosy, but it got better. And I wasn't sure how I felt. I mean, for starters I was thirteen. It had been just me for so long. Then I held him, fed him, played with him, adored him. It was the first time I actually put real thought into someone besides me. Just as he was becoming a little boy, I started growing up, worried more about what party to go to and what to wear than wanting to sit and play trucks in the sand with some little kid.

*(Mark goes to her, putting his hands on her shoulders. He lets her cry.)*

MARK

My daughter looks like me when I was a kid. Crazy. Same face. My ma would show me pictures of me when I was the same age as Karlyn, and you'd swear she was me wearing a dress. She was a sweet little kid. When she was about five, she learned the song "You Are My Sunshine." She'd always want to sing it with me. She had this squeaky little voice. She'd make me play one of her music toys, a kazoo or whatever. If we played it once, we'd have to play it a hundred times. That song would just be stuck in my head all the time. So I started avoiding it. And when I came home wasted, which was most nights, she'd ask to sing it and I'd put it off, then pass out. One night she kept asking me and I barked at her, said, "Shut up! Don't ask me again!" And she didn't.

PAM

What a pair we are.

MARK

Yeah.

PAM

So. Since when do you drink tea?

MARK

Since yesterday. I miss having something to drink at night.

PAM

There was something else I wanted to ask you. Hopefully this question won't end in tears.

MARK

What's that?

PAM

A few weeks back you asked if I wanted to go to my cousin Walter's wedding with you and I said no. Is it too late to change my mind?

MARK

No.

*(They kiss, tentative yet compelled.)*

PAM

Good. I've never gone on a date with real live "bumpkin" before.

*(Lights out.)*

ACT TWO  
Scene Two

*(A week later. Lights up on Mark, seated in a metal folding chair.)*

MARK

Hi, I'm Mark. I'm an alcoholic. Three months here. *(Holds up his chip.)* It's um...good, I know. But I wanted to know if something is normal. I've been having this dream, a nightmare I guess. It's not so much what I see, but what I hear. I keep having it. Sometimes if I'm really tired, I hear the sounds of the dream when I'm awake. I don't know if it's a dream or if I'm remembering something, like a flashback. I heard sometimes you can have bad dreams. Is that right? *(Looks around)* Yeah? Well, I hope it stops. I can't sleep, or I fall asleep and I have the dream and then I'm afraid to sleep again. I'm just tired all the time, biting people's heads off. Things remind me now of shitty things I did then, mean things that hurt people, my kid ... and I never cared. I know it's a day at a time, but when I think about later, when I get to step eight, making amends ... I gotta tell you guys, I don't know where to start.

And there's this girl, woman now, I guess. We were kids together. I ... like her a lot. We've been, well, spending time together. I wanna tell her about this dream or whatever it is. I made a choice not to because ... I don't know if it makes a difference. I'm afraid I'm gonna hurt her too. Or maybe I'm just a coward. I'm sober but I'm not really thinking straight. I don't know what to do with myself.

Being so tired makes me think about wanting a drink. Then I think about her. I think about being a better dad to my kid. And then I think just a few more hours until I can sleep. But sleep is not my friend these days. Remembering things I did makes me want to drink and keeps me from drinking all at the same time. I can't shut my mind off. My nerves are shot.

This is just part of the whole...the whole deal...right?

ACT TWO  
Scene Three

*(Lights up on Mark's apartment. Mark has just gotten home from work. An empty grocery bag sits on the counter. The radio plays as he changes out of his work clothes.)*

DJ

You're listening to Carp Lake Country, Carp Lake's only country station. Well, who we kiddin'? We're Carp Lake's only radio station. Hope you had a good day here in God's country. See those fall colors out there? Almost makes the white stuff around the corner worth it. According to the Weather Bureau, there'll be frost on the pumpkins tomorrow. I'm outta here at seven so Bucky Hoppala can bring you the Thirsty Thursday hour. Coming up next here on WCPL-Carp Country.

*(Mark turns the radio off. He finds a pen and removes a bright pink greeting card from the grocery bag. He sits down on the couch with a glass of milk. He studies the card, thinking of what to write. He leans back on his couch, gets comfortable and dozes off on Jerry's Packers blanket. Lights out briefly.)*

*(Minutes later. Lights up on a sleeping Mark. We hear the dream sound effect again. Mark bolts awake, spilling his milk all over the blanket.)*

MARK

Shit! Shit, shit, shit!

*(He loses it. He looks around and suddenly sees Jerry's possessions around him. He picks up the blanket and tosses it toward the garbage can.)*

*(He yells out. Head in hands, he sits on his bed.)*

*(There is a knock at the door. He doesn't answer.)*

PAM

*(Offstage)* Mark? Hey, are you okay in there? I thought I heard you yell ... Mark?

MARK

Yeah!

*(Pam enters. Mark remains on the bed.)*

PAM

Did you stub your toe or something? Are you okay?

MARK

*(Composing himself.)* Yeah. I, uh, dozed off.



PAM

*(Taking her coat off.)* I hope it's okay I'm here. I had a rotten day. I'm too mad to go home.

MARK

Me too.

*(Pam has noticed the strewn items. She looks around quietly.)*

Once I clean this up, I'm making a sandwich. You want something?

PAM

*(Shakes her head.)* No.

MARK

Pam? You okay?

PAM

Why are my brother's things all over?

MARK

Right. I ... uh, moved them. I had a bad day too, and/

PAM

/Where's the blanket?

*(Pam sees the wet blanket by the trash and picks it up.)*

You moved them?

MARK

Um ... like I said, I just kind of lost it for a minute and started throwing/

PAM

/If you didn't want them, you should have told me.

MARK

Pam. I did. I do. I'm sorry.

PAM

I helped him pick out that chair. I took him to Target.

MARK

Pam ...

PAM

This stupid Packers blanket was my last Christmas present to him. It still smelled like Dial Soap and cigarette smoke. And you threw it away.

MARK

I'm so sorry ...

PAM

No! I don't want to hear one more person say they're sorry! And then ask me immediately how my parents are doing. I understand they lost their child. I understand that staying here was my choice and is the right thing. But my brother is gone. I loved him too.

MARK

I know ...

PAM

Do you? You haven't once asked me about it.

MARK

I figured you maybe didn't want to be asked.

PAM

You know what I found today? A Care Bear I gave him for his first birthday. Funshine Bear. He called it "Fumfine." He loved that thing and kept it, even after he was way too old for it. I went to donate some of his clothes today. I got there and opened one of the boxes and there was Fumfine. My mom was going to just give it away. This special thing that I gave him. It's like it doesn't matter.

MARK

Pam.

PAM

What? Are you sorry?

MARK

Yes. I shouldn't have had a fit like that. I just/

PAM

/I know. You lost it. Do you know what I'm so tired of hearing? How great it is that I'm helping my parents through their loss. People talk to me as if I didn't know my own brother. I know he was smart. I know he was funny. I know he sometimes partied too hard. Who do they think pestered him about college until he finally gave in? I asked him, "You wanna end up like Roger? Go somewhere. Come back later if you want, but go." I feel like I'm in some sad movie. Like Robert Stack is narrating Jerry's life and I'm just some bystander they interview, you know? As if I don't cry myself to sleep some nights wondering if he was in pain ... wondering what his last thoughts were ... that I don't pray hard that whenever it happened, I hope it was fast.

MARK

Pam. I need to tell you something.

PAM

No. Not now. It's too late.

MARK

Pam, please ...

PAM

*(Holding the blanket.)* I have to go, Mark. I have to wash this blanket. It's not going to smell like him anymore.

MARK

Pam. I need to tell you /

PAM

/Stop! I'm leaving you alone now. It's what you seem to want anyway.

MARK

*(Stopping her.)* Pam, please. I'm so sorry. Please don't leave before I tell you ...

PAM

What?

MARK

*(At a loss.)* My dreams. The nightmares. I ... Did you know I quit drinking two days after ... your brother died? We were at the same party at Walt's house.

PAM

I did the math. Why are you/

MARK

I drove home, shitfaced. I don't know ... I don't remember anything. But these dreams ... memories, I don't know ... I hit something. My mom says I hit a deer, but ...

PAM

What?

MARK

It's why I can't sleep. I'm afraid I ... that I hit Jerry.

PAM

Mark, stop! Please stop ...

MARK

I don't know for sure what happened. Just these nightmares. God, Pam ...

PAM

Stop! Just stop! Mark, please ... *(She is crying.)*

MARK

*(At a loss.)* What can I do?

PAM

I need to leave.

MARK

I will do anything. I'll talk to the police. I'll ...

PAM

Mark, don't. Just don't. *(Exiting.)* Leave me alone!

MARK

I'm so sorry.

*(Lights out.)*

ACT TWO  
Scene Four

*(Lights up on a corner of the stage where we see Roger. We hear a wedding reception crowd. Roger fiddles with his phone.)*

ROGER

No! Shit. Fuckin' autocorrect.

*(Pam enters.)*

PAM

Easy there.

ROGER

It won't let me spell my buddy's last name, but then it lets me say I drive a pink up trunk.

*(Pam watches him, amused. Roger gets frustrated.)*

Cripes! I'm done.

*(Pam laughs as he puts his phone away.)*

What's so funny?

PAM

*(Still laughing)* You drop f-bombs left and right, then you say, "Cripes!"

ROGER

I try not to say the other thing. Lord's name in vain, y'know.

PAM

When was the last time you went to church?

ROGER

Shut up. *(Roger puts chewing tobacco in his mouth.)*

PAM

That was funny. I needed that.

ROGER

Ha ha. What are you doin' out here? When is Mark coming?

PAM

I'm avoiding the bouquet toss. Mark isn't coming.

ROGER

He ain't coming? You guys have a fight or somethin'?

PAM

It's complicated. I need to go see him.

ROGER

*(Teasing)* "It's complicated. I need to go see him." Yah, good thing you guys don't have anything goin' on.

PAM

Not funny, cuz.

ROGER

Sorry. Think he'll drink again?

PAM

I hope not. He's come this far. The man bought tea so he'd have something new to drink at night.

ROGER

*(Baffled)* Tea?

PAM

You ever think about quitting?

ROGER

No. Why? So I can sit around the house and drink tea?

PAM

I saw Wesley in there earlier. I hardly recognized him.

ROGER

Little shit called Bryce "Dad" right in front of me. I'm staying out here till they leave.

PAM

Sorry I brought it up.

ROGER

It is what it is. It ain't what it ain't.

PAM

Poetic. You should write that down.

ROGER

Yah. Make it a t-shirt. So, you pissed at Mark?

PAM

Yes. For starters, I got there yesterday and found all of Jerry's things I gave him thrown all over the apartment. He just ... lost it. It was the wrong day for me to see that.

ROGER

Jeez.

PAM

He told me something ... I didn't know what to do so I ran.

ROGER

How much longer you stayin' with your ma and dad?

PAM

Not long. I used savings to cover my rent back in Steven's Point the last couple months. My bosses let me take sabbatical. For a while, it crossed my mind to just try and stay.

ROGER

What would you do here? Besides Mark.

PAM

Very funny. Well, subbing for fifth graders taught me something.

ROGER

What's that?

PAM

Fifth graders suck. Good lord. Now I know why teachers deserve more money. I also miss my work. My own place.

ROGER

So you and Mark?

PAM

Who knows? He's not supposed to date his first year in A.A. anyway.

ROGER

That don't sound good. Tea. No sex. They should call it fuckin' A.A.

PAM

Jesus, Roger. He's figuring out how to just be Mark. He has things to deal with. So do I.

ROGER

Well, he's supposed to call me about fishin' tomorrow. I told him about this new spot I found over by Koski's Creek.

PAM

Can you leave the beer at home?

ROGER

No. It's not like I'm gonna make him drink it.

PAM

Roger! Please? Can you think about how hard that must be for him?

ROGER

Okay, okay. I'll just bring a sixer for me. Then it ain't like there's all this beer lookin' at us.

PAM

Well, I guess that's something. Alright, Roger. I'm going home.

ROGER

Yah. See ya.

*(Pam exits. Roger spits and turns his attention back to his phone.)*

*(Amused)* Fuckin' A.A.



ACT TWO  
Scene Five

*(Later that night, Mark is listening to music, reading from the "Big Book," and drinking tea. There is a knock on the door. He answers it.)*

ROGER

*(Entering, drunk and carrying a wadded up trash bag)* Hey buddy!

MARK

*(Disappointed.)* Rog. Did you drive here?

ROGER

Shit yeah. I'm a better driver when I'm drunk. Like I gotta be more ... whatsa word ...

MARK

Careful?

ROGER

Yah. I'm a better driver when I'm drunk. More careful.

MARK

How about some food, Rog? What do you got there?

ROGER

No food, man. I'm thirsty. C'mon.

*(Roger unfolds the trash bag. He presents a two-liter of Coke and a full bottle of booze.)*

I swiped these from the wedding bar. It's your ol' pal Jack.

*(Roger puts the booze bottle in Mark's hands. Mark looks at it.)*

*(Singing)* Reunited and it feels so good ...

MARK

*(Still holding bottle)* Rog...

ROGER

... Reunited. Something ... understood ...

MARK

Roger! *(Tries to hand Roger the bottle)* No.

ROGER

Shit. I swiped that for you. C'mon! Have one. Just one. Old time sake.

MARK

I said no.

*(Mark thrusts the bottle into Roger's hands. Roger, pouting, takes it.)*

ROGER

Geez. *(Disappointed.)* Just wanted to hang out.

MARK

Fine. Hang out. Let me get you a drink. How about some water? Or some coffee. You shouldn't be driving.

ROGER

I'm a better driver when I'm drunk. I'm serious.

MARK

Yeah, you said. C'mon. Drink some water. Sleep it off here if you want.

ROGER

Sleep what off? Shit.

MARK

Want a sandwich or something?

ROGER

Nah. Hey. You remember that time we were partying at the sandpits? Walt fell in the mud and then you went to help him and you fell in.

MARK

Yeah, I remember.

ROGER

Then I fell in too. Walt said, "Let's mudwrestle, bitches!" That's funny shit.

MARK

Yeah, funny shit.

ROGER

*(Notices the teacup)* Aw, it's true.

MARK

What is?

ROGER

It's really true. Fuckin' ... Pam said you drink tea. Fuckin' tea. (*Laughing*) Your pinky stick out when you drink it? Geez. You wanna start hanging out with my grandma, make some...some doilies and cozies and shit ... over tea?

MARK

I'll feel better than you will tomorrow. C'mon. Hydrate.

ROGER

Hydrate this.

MARK

(*Handing him water*) Drink this. How was the wedding?

ROGER

Boring. At least it was quick. Then we had to wait two hours for the reception. I went to Kallio's. That asshole nephew of his is still there.

MARK

You see Pam?

ROGER

Yah. You guys had a big fight, eh?

MARK

What'd she tell you?

ROGER

Just something about you're struggling and you threw Jerry's stuff all over.

MARK

I just ... I've been stressed. I hit my limit and I lost it for a minute.

ROGER

At least you didn't piss on her couch. No, wait. Just mine.

MARK

You gonna pass out here and return the favor?

ROGER

Y'know ... you were more fun before.

MARK

Yeah, Roger, you look like you're having a great time.

ROGER

We had fun times. Now Walt's married. You're on the wagon. All my work buddies say they got other shit going on. Nobody'll even come out for happy hour.

MARK

Rog, I'd go to happy hour with you.

ROGER

It ain't the same. Now you're all judging me and shit.

MARK

I don't really have room to judge. You know that better than anyone.

ROGER

Yah. Y'know ... I bought some booze for that Jim Johnson's kid last night. A bunch of high schoolers had a bash out at Maloneys' camp. Ended up buyin' for a bunch of 'em. I stayed to party and they all just acted weird. I realized I was Brendan Thompson.

MARK

What?

ROGER

Brendan Thompson. Remember him? When I was in high school, he was that old guy who'd buy for us all and then hang out at the party. I'm Brendan Thompson. Shit. I'm that old guy at parties now.

MARK

Y'know, maybe you should stop buying booze for these kids. You're gonna wind up with your ass in jail.

ROGER

Got it all figured out, eh?

MARK

Just see things different lately.

ROGER

Yah. You got it all figured out. Don't wanna hang out with your own dad and brother either. Too good for us all, eh? You and your fuckin' Celestial Seasons.

MARK

What would you know?

ROGER

I sat by 'em at the reception. Your old man's like, "Fuckin' Mark ... sittin' in his ivory sober fuckin' tower screwin' Pam Turi and actin' like he's king shit on the turdpile."

MARK

Watch it/

ROGER

/Chaddo 'n' me got a real kick outta that one. That's you all over. King Shit on the turdpile. Too good for anybody anymore. Pam. Your own kid ...

MARK

Watch your goddamn mouth, Roger! Like you should talk!

ROGER

It ain't the same/

MARK

Bullshit it ain't the same! Karlyn's with her mom, where she wants to be! Wesley lives ten miles from here! And he used to worship the ground you fuckin' walked on. Ten miles away. Is that too far from Kallio's bar stool or your shitty-ass trailer for you to make an effort? The one good thing you ever did is right there and you don't even give a shit, do you?

ROGER

Why should I care? He don't want me around! Just like his mother and her uppity family.

MARK

Jesus, it's everybody's fault but yours, isn't it?

ROGER

Who the hell are you? I don't see you takin' no road trips to see your kid. When's the last time you talked to her?

MARK

I told you this!

ROGER

Oh yah. You wanna get your six months in. Your six holier-than-fuckin-thou months. You know what's gonna happen at six months?

MARK

Enlighten me.

ROGER

Fuck off, enlighten me. You know what's gonna happen? Six months comes, you're still sober? You're gonna pussy out. Then you'll want it to be a year. Then another year. Then when she's sixteen. Then pretty soon, it'll be so late, you'll be too chickenshit to ever do it. And your ma'll tell you all about Karlyn's wedding and the fucker who walked your daughter down the aisle. I just hope she makes it outta high school before she gets knocked up by some asshole.

*(Mark hits Roger hard. Roger loses his balance and falls.)*

*(A long moment passes.)*

ROGER

Aw, cripes. Fucker. I just wanted to hang out.

MARK

Shit. Get up.

*(Mark extends a hand to Roger. Roger considers it. He takes Mark's hand.)*

ROGER

*(Pulling Mark down.)* Let's mudwrestle, bitches!

*(Mark falls by Roger. They both start to laugh.)*

That shit hurt. Your tea give you super powers or somethin'?

MARK

Yeah, that's it.

ROGER

Now you're down here with me.

MARK

What, do you want me to kiss you?

ROGER

Fuck no.

*(They sit there a moment.)*

I saw him tonight.

MARK

Wesley?

ROGER

He's so big. He saw me but acted like he didn't. Made a big point of goin' to talk to his stepdad. I didn't know what to do there. I just stared at him like a dumbass. That shit ... yah, that one stung.

MARK

*(Gets up)* C'mon. Get home. We're fishing tomorrow. If you're not too hungover.

ROGER

Yah. Let's go down by Koski's Creek. There's a good brook trout spot.

MARK

How 'bout I drive you home? C'mon.

ROGER

Yah. I s'pose. I got the spins. I could eat. Hey. You bring me home. I'll cook you some venison. I got a freezer full. Heh. It's your venison anyways.

MARK

What are you talking about?

ROGER

Nice. C'mon. It ain't like I'm gonna call the DNR. Not when I got a freezer full of it.

MARK

Why would you call the DNR?

ROGER

You don't remember, eh? Yah. You were wasted. That night...the party...the night my cousin Jerry, y'know. Me and Walt left just a couple minutes after you. We were pretty sure we saw your one tail light up ahead. Y'know that stretch is all straight and pitch black. We saw you hit your brake light and swerve. We were like, jeez, Mark's shitfaced. Then you kept going. We got to that spot and sure shittin' there's a deer on the side of the road. Still warm. Me and Walt put it in his truck quick and brought it home. Got it quartered and cured next day. Walt didn't want to tell no one. DNR can get you for that too.

MARK

I hit a deer. You're sure.

ROGER

Unless there was another pickup with a burned out tail light swerving all over Pine Lake Road that night. My buddy works for Pete's in Waagosh. He's the one buffed it out. Didn't ya wonder what happened?

MARK

It's true. It's really true. Shit.

ROGER

You takin' me home still?

MARK

Yeah. Let's get you home, buddy. Fix me a venison steak.

ROGER

You got the PMS now, too? Fuckin' tea. Cripes.

*(They leave.)*

*(Lights out.)*



ACT TWO  
Scene Six

*(It is the next afternoon. Mark and Lori are seated at his kitchen table. They are eating cake and drinking coffee.)*

MARK

Good cake, Ma.

LORI

Mm. Glad you like it. Thought I'd try somethin' new. Saw this recipe in the paper and figured I'd try it.

MARK

M-hm.

LORI

Your dad and brother wouldn't touch it. God forbid. It's a ginger cake. You'd think it was made outta liver.

MARK

Well, thanks.

LORI

I was surprised to see you home. Day off today?

MARK

Yeah. Stanley told me to take the day off. He hasn't sent me home since I was still drinking.

LORI

He likes you, that Stanley. He's a good boss.

MARK

Yeah. He's working short. I've been putting in a lot of twelve hour days. I don't really mind. Fills the time, y'know?

LORI

How you been sleepin'? You look tired.

MARK

I am. Roger came by drunk last night after the reception. I took him home and didn't get to sleep until three.

LORI

Y'know, maybe you should go and talk to ... someone.

MARK

What, like a shrink?

LORI

Well, yah. Don't tell no one, but your aunt Shirley does, ever since your uncle Bern died. She says it really helped her.

MARK

Wow. Dad would have a field day with that.

LORI

Who cares what he thinks?

MARK

I don't know. I just ... it'll be fine.

LORI

Fine. You look like the walking dead.

MARK

Ma. I might start sleeping better now.

LORI

Why's that?

MARK

So I guess Roger was driving way back behind me...that night. You were right. I hit a deer. Him and Walt took it home and didn't say anything. Walt didn't want to deal with the DNR. You want some venison sausage, Ma? I got a bunch in the freezer.

LORI

Yah, I told you. They're all over that time of year.

MARK

Did you give Dad shit about forgetting to tell me?

LORI

Yah, I gave him what-for. Forgetful S.O.B. Can't believe that Roger, picking up a deer off the road like that.

MARK

People do it all the time, Ma. Early hunting season.

LORI

Real hunting season's around the corner. You gonna hunt this year? You got the beard for it.

MARK

Not sure. I don't think I ever did it sober.

LORI

You oughta try a hobby of some kind. All you do is work and sit around here watchin' TV or playin' video games.

MARK

Yeah, I know. I just don't know what. I might go fishing with Roger later. I'm letting him sleep it off before I call him.

LORI

Oh, that Roger. He's nothing but trouble. Pickin' up dead deer. Showin' up here drunk.

MARK

I'm no prize either, Ma.

LORI

You shouldn't talk like that. You're doing good. I wanted to tell you I got a nice thank you from Karlyn for her birthday present. She said she's gonna be coming up to visit with Gina's family for Thanksgiving.

MARK

Thanksgiving. That's ... soon.

LORI

I only say it because, I know you had it stuck in your head you wanted six months off the bottle. I don't agree, but it's what you want. I thought I ought to tell you.

MARK

You got a thank you?

LORI

Yah. Cute card too. She made it herself. She rubber stamped hearts on the front. She has nice penmanship. Did you send her something then?

MARK

Yeah. I got her a bunch of gift cards. I didn't know which I should get so I bought a bunch of 'em. She can buy what she wants that way. I found their address online. I hope she got it.

LORI

Y'know ... I think you'll feel better when you see her, that she's doin' just fine. It ain't too late to be a dad. Show her you changed, you care.

MARK

I just don't want to let her down again, Ma.

LORI

Fine. It ain't my business so I won't bring it up again. I do gotta ask you something.

MARK

What's that?

LORI

You still spending time with Pam?

MARK

I don't know.

LORI

You don't know?

MARK

I've just been working and tired and not up for...socializing.

LORI

Is that what you kids call it now?

MARK

Ma. Geez. I just haven't felt like seeing anyone, even Pam.

LORI

Youse two got awful close there, I thought.

MARK

Yeah, well. She's gonna leave anyway, right?

LORI

Probably. Steven's Point is nice.

MARK

What would I do there?

LORI

They have cars to fix there too.

MARK

Trying to get rid of me?

LORI

I just ... y'know I was thinkin' about those dreams of yours.

MARK

And?

LORI

I got to thinking you're regretting the things you used to drink away. You're thinking about things you did. Your mind played tricks on you 'cause you got guilt, lots of it.

MARK

Yeah. But guilt is wrong.

LORI

Yah, they say that. I was reading about the twelve steps and I know there's a rule about not feeling guilty. They say guilt is selfish.

MARK

It is. My sponsor says it's self-indulgent.

LORI

Well if it's two years from now and you're sitting around moping, sure then. But for now, I say you go ahead and feel guilty. You acted like a real...*shit* sometimes. Just feel something! I ain't a counselor or anything but I say go ahead and feel the bad stuff. When you're sick of it, stop.

MARK

Just like that, huh?

LORI

You stopped drinking. Never thought you'd do that. Did you?

MARK

No.

LORI

Do you think you'll ever start again?

MARK

I can't say. I still want to sometimes.

LORI

From what I hear, you will for a long time.

MARK

You were reading about the twelve steps?

LORI

I just wanted to know more. And I felt guilty too.

MARK

Why?

LORI

I felt guilty about your drinking. Your dad's drinking. Like I should've done more, kept you from seeing him like that. Maybe, protected you. You grew up thinking that's how men are. I should've known better. I ended up with two grown sons living at home like big kids. Least now I'm down to just one.

MARK

You didn't make me a drunk, Ma.

LORI

No, I didn't. But I didn't help. It's why I pester you about Karlyn. I'm trying to be a better grandma than I was at the other stuff. You ain't ever gonna be perfect. But you can try your best. She'll know one day you did that much. Anyway. I should go home. You eat that cake up. Get some rest.

MARK

I'll try.

LORI

Save some for Pam. I think she really cares about you.

MARK

Yeah. Hey, Mom.

LORI

Yah?

MARK

*(Pause.)* You did your best.

LORI

*(Smiling, moved)* Yah. Catch some fish now, eh?

ACT TWO  
Scene Seven

*(Late afternoon, same day. Mark is seated downstage, bundled up. He's fishing. His gear and a travel mug are beside him.)*

*(Pam enters.)*

Mark. PAM

Pam. I'm glad to see you. MARK

Heard you might be here. So you fish? PAM

If you wanna call it that. It used to be drinking by the lake with a stick in my hand. Now it's just *sitting* by the lake with a stick in my hand. MARK

No luck, huh? PAM

No. Gonna try again though. You wanna join me? MARK

Fishing? I haven't since I was a kid. PAM

How about sitting by the lake with a stick in your hand? Could you handle that? MARK

Maybe. PAM

Hey. I gotta say something. MARK

I do too. PAM

I don't know where to start. MARK

PAM

But I do. Let me start.

MARK

Okay.

PAM

Mark. You didn't hit Jerry. No one did. He was drunk, veered off the road and fell off his bike. No one wants to admit it was his own fault.

MARK

Yeah. I found out last night it was a deer I hit. Sorry to put you through that.

PAM

I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I was just so overwhelmed and blown away that you've been carrying this with you.

MARK

I'm so sorry. About the way my place was that day too.

PAM

/You don't have to explain ...

MARK

But I should. I wasn't thinking straight. I didn't know what to do. Another part of it is ... I don't really know what to do with myself. Y'know, in movies, someone stops drinking and everything's great after that. It's not like that.

PAM

I know. There were times after my dad quit when I almost wished he'd start again. Obviously, I'm glad he never did.

MARK

I start remembering things I did. Embarrassing things, mean things.

PAM

People will forget.

MARK

Nah. I don't know if they will.

PAM

The people who ... the ones you love ... will forget.

MARK

They might. I can't. This one time a few years ago I was out on a bender, two days of



(*cont'd*) nonstop partying. I think I drove home. I was still pretty drunk. My ma started in on me when I walked in and I threw a garbage can at her. Garbage all over the kitchen. I told her to fuck off. My dad socked me one and I deserved it.

PAM

That's not you anymore.

MARK

I showed up to Karlyn's school play once, late, shitfaced. They kicked me out. She was embarrassed. She cried so hard.

PAM

Keep going. You're not alone.

MARK

Y'know, Stanley's short-staffed right now. I've been taking extra hours but not even for the extra cash. I feel like he gave me so many chances. He's a good man. I owe him the time. And it fills the day. So yesterday, I'm working and he walks up to me, out of the blue, slaps my back and says, "Stop workin' so hard. Go do somethin' fun tomorrow. I'm proud of you." Maybe it's 'cause I've been so tired and stressed, but man, I almost cried.

PAM

I won't tell.

MARK

Some of the stories I hear at A.A. ... if they can do it, I'm gonna keep trying.

PAM

I hope you can sleep now.

MARK

Time will tell. I'm hoping all this fresh air will help. I forgot how much I like being outside. I might give sober deer hunting a try next.

PAM

Good.

MARK

Roger was supposed to come, but I'm betting he was in rough shape. He hasn't picked up his phone once today. If he doesn't pick up next time I call, I might go check on him.

PAM

He was well on his way when I saw him last night.

MARK

I missed you.

PAM

Mark, these last few months, I don't know what I would have done without you. I can't even imagine.

MARK

We had some good times.

PAM

I'm going back to Steven's Point. I think I've helped my parents as much as I can for now. I'm going to run out of savings to keep my apartment there. It's move here or go back now.

MARK

So you're going back now.

PAM

I'm sorry if this is hard. It's hard for me too.

MARK

It's okay. You shouldn't stay around here. You got a life going there.

PAM

I want you to know if I stayed here, it would be because...

MARK

You'd never be happy around here. Not after a while. You gotta be where you can do your job, where your friends are. Where you can get a decent cappuccino.

PAM

As much as I gripe, as much of a pain in the ass as this town can be, I will always have a spot for it in my heart. *(He looks at her.)* And you, Mark. You're a good man too. I hope you find something that makes you happy.

MARK

I did.

PAM

Mark, I literally ran to you after my brother's funeral. I've been so focused on my parents ... and you, I haven't really grieved, myself. Now you're facing your past. I think all this has been a really lovely distraction for us both.

*(Long pause.)*

MARK

Well. I hope I'll still get to kick your ass in trivia.

PAM

I'll be home for Christmas. So get ready. I'm bringing my best game.

MARK

Likely story.

PAM

Watch it, Roosevelt.

*(They smile. Pam hugs him and they stay this way for a moment. She kisses him one last time.)*

*(Words would be nice, but neither of them can quite muster the right thing to say.)*

Bye, Mark. *(She exits.)*

*(Mark sits and thinks a moment.. He looks in his gear for something.)*

*(He takes out his phone, checks the reception and dials.)*

*(We see a brief surge of emotion before finally...*

MARK

Karlyn? It's Dad. How's my girl?

*(Lights fade out as we hear "You Are My Sunshine" start to play.)*

*(End.)*