

Kalispell

A Play in Two Acts

by Kim E. Ruyle

Copyright © 2018 – 2019 by Kim E. Ruyle

## Kalispell

## Cast of Characters

<u>BUD HAMILTON</u>	70s, hard-working, and bigoted. He's tough, opinionated, intolerant, and protective. Has run the Bud Hamilton Logging Company for many years.
<u>CORA HAMILTON</u>	70s, the family matriarch; blindly loyal to Bud; dotes on her children.
<u>CLEVE HAMILTON</u>	40s-50s, oldest son; alcoholic; seeks approval of others but can't maintain relationships; a disappointment to everyone, especially Bud.
<u>BRUCE HAMILTON</u>	40s-50s, 2nd son; successful plastic surgeon living in Seattle; not gay, but maybe hard to tell – he's an articulate metro-sexual who is experiencing a bit of mid-life crisis.
<u>JEFFREY HAMILTON</u>	40s-50s, 3rd son; successful fashion designer living in New York City; like Bruce, a metro-sexual, but married with kids.
<u>CLIFFORD HAMILTON</u>	40s-50s; 4th son; former car salesman turned church pastor in Missoula and televangelist host of religious sportsmen's show.
<u>CLAIRE HAMILTON</u>	40s-50s, attractive, confident, feminine but tough; CEO of a successful construction company she founded in Great Falls, an avid sportswoman, and occasional lounge singer.
<u>DRAGOS IBANESCU</u>	30s, Romanian immigrant and proprietor of the Sit-a-Spell Cafe'.
<u>TULLIA IBANESCU</u>	30s, wife and partner in café business with Dragos.
<u>TIFFANY</u>	30s, attractive tart; director of <i>God, Geese, and Grizzlies</i> .
<i>Note:</i>	<i>Tullia and Tiffany are to be played by the same actor.</i>

Time: The present

Place: Western Montana, near Kalispell, a small city of about 20,000.

## Synopsis

Bud Hamilton has run a small logging operation in Kalispell, Montana, for many years. He's always hoped that one or more of his four boys would succeed him in the business and reflect his traditional values, but his sons have repeatedly disappointed him. Three of his sons have pursued careers and adopted values that, in Bud's view, range from pointless to abominable. The only one of his sons to work with him in the business is an incompetent alcoholic. Unlike Bud's sons, his daughter does share Bud's business interests and many of his skills. Unfortunately, Bud is completely blinded to those things because of her gender. Now Bud's business is in serious financial trouble threatening to destroy everything built over a lifetime of toil. A Thanksgiving holiday brings this dysfunctional family together and forces them to confront their biases, broken relationships, and a series of crises that careen between tragic and hilarious.

## Special Instructions

1. There are several instances of Romanian slang used by Tullia:
  - “Bulanguiu,” roughly translated as “jackass;” pronounced, “bu-lan-gwee.”
  - “Iubi” is a term of endearment pronounced, “eeyou-bee.”
  - “Dormi cu” is slang for love-making.
2. An original song, Never Got Into My Heart, is played in Act II, and a recording (.mp3) of the song performance is provided for that purpose.
3. Sets.

Sit-a-Spell Café	Partial interior of a rustic café located in Kalispell, Montana, consisting of a dining table with place settings and four chairs. An upright stuffed bear greets customers as they come through the main entrance. Rather than a full-size bear, a large stuffed teddy bear set on a counter can be used.
Bud's living room	The living area of a modern log cabin located on the outskirts of Kalispell, Montana. A small living room set with couch, chairs, and a coffee table strewn with <i>Guns &amp; Ammo</i> , <i>Outdoor Life</i> , and other such magazines. A counter top has a wide assortment of liquor bottles. The kitchen is off-stage right. An antlered deer head is mounted on a wall. A staircase leading to bedrooms rises upstage of the living/dining area.
Television studio	Desk, chair, backdrop (wildlife photos surrounding Jesus on the cross), single TV camera and studio lighting. To one side of the studio is a small room for makeup and to serve as a green room.
Woods	Backdrop of evergreens, a boulder, and well-marked electric fence.

ACT I  
Scene One

SETTING: Interior of Sit-a-Spell Café.

TIME: About 8 a.m. on Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving.

AT RISE: BRUCE slowly steps into a tight spot downstage right. He breaks the fourth wall.

BRUCE

Kalispell, Montana. It's not a bad place to grow up. I didn't stick around, though. Left more than thirty years ago and moved to Seattle. Medical school then private practice. By standard measures, I'm successful. Can't say I'm really happy, though, and maybe it's because, in my line of work, I'm basically peddling happiness, constantly assessing it in my patients since my time is mostly spent carving people up in discretionary procedures that are designed to make them happy. But I do many procedures that I know only delay the inevitable aging process and, for the patient, not likely to bring lasting happiness. I think that kind of happiness only comes from meaningful relationships with family, with friends, with a significant other, with someone who truly loves them and supports them. That's the take-away from my work, that without meaningful relationships, life can't really be happy.

(Lights up slightly on center stage to dimly reveal a dining table where BUD and CORA sit like mannequins. DRAGOS, also motionless and barely visible, stands by with a pot of coffee.)

Since leaving all those years ago, I've dutifully traveled home to Kalispell to spend Thanksgiving with my family.

(Lights up on café as spot fades.)

My family...

(BRUCE exits.)

BUD

No, no, no! Don't call it football. Football's a real sport. Soccer's just a kid's game.

(BRUCE stealthily enters. Hides behind stuffed bear.)

DRAGOS

Bud, have you ever watch ESPN? Have you ever go to Europe? Have you ever go out of Montana?

BUD

Why the hell would I wanna leave Montana?

DRAGOS

Montana big. But world bigger. Bud, I tell you something. Football – you call soccer – is biggest sport in world.

BUD

Ha! Biggest sport in Budapest, maybe.

DRAGOS

Bucharesht. I come from Bucharesht, not Budapesht.

CORA

Bud, you know that. Dragos is from Romania, not Poland.

DRAGOS

No, no. That Hungary. Budapesht is Hungary.

(DRAGOS exits to kitchen shaking head.)

CORA

I'm confused. I thought he was from Romania. Did he mean he's from Hungary?

BUD

All the same to me.

(BRUCE springs from behind the bear.)

BRUCE

Grrrrrrrr!

(BUD pulls pistol from vest as he spins and fires wildly. BRUCE hits floor as the bear's nose explodes. BUD jumps to his feet, covers Bruce with pistol while holding arm up, a protective gesture for Cora. BRUCE slowly raises his head to see if it's safe.)

BRUCE

Pa? Ma? It's me, Bruce. Happy Thanksgiving.

(BUD holsters his gun and begins waving his arms and sputtering profanities.)

CORA

(Leaping to feet and clutching chest.)

Brucie! Oh! My boy! Oh, my boy!

(DRAGOS and TULLIA burst from kitchen.)

DRAGOS

Bud! Bud! Tell me you not shoot again a Dragos customer!

BUD

Hell no. Just one of my goddamn kids trying to scare the bejesus out of us. Uh, I might have nicked your bear. Nothin' that can't be patched up.

(BUD plops in his chair, nonchalantly sips coffee. DRAGOS helps BRUCE to his feet while TULLIA gathers up fur from the floor. BRUCE and CORA embrace. Bruce, looks for a hug from his pa.)

BRUCE

Happy Thanksgiving, Pa. Thanks for not shooting me.

BUD

(Ignoring Bruce's outstretched arms.)

Christ! The hell you mean comin' in here like that? Screamin' like a damn immigrant gonna terrorize the place.

BRUCE

Sorry, Pa. I was trying to have some fun.

BUD

Real fun. Thought you weren't comin' til tomorrow.

BRUCE

I came early to surprise you.

BUD

Surprised us all right. About gave your ma a heart attack.

CORA

(Embraces Bruce again.)

Oh, it's a wonderful surprise. And, Bruce, I'm so glad you weren't hit by your father's hollow point.

BUD

I pulled up when I recognized him, Cora.

BRUCE

Thanks for that, Pa. I'm sorry to startle you.

(Turning to Dragos.)

And very sorry about the bear.

DRAGOS

Not first time Bud shoot gun in my store. Right here, Bud shoot hat off head of Mexican.

(BRUCE turns to look at Bud in horror.)

BUD

Don't look at me that way. Guy was an illegal immigrant and a menace.

(Turning to Dragos.)

Someday you'll thank me for watchin' out for ya. That little Mexican was probably comin' in to rob and shoot up the place. He was pullin' a pistol from his coat.

TULLIA

*Bulangu!* No, no! Not pistol! Salsa! Man only come to sell salsa! But he illegal and don't press charge on Bud.

(TULLIA glares at Bud. DRAGOS grabs Bruce's hand.)

DRAGOS

Hello. I am Dragos Ibanescu and I come from –

BRUCE

Bucharest, Romania.

DRAGOS

Yes! How you know?

BRUCE

I was hiding behind the bear before Pa drew down on me and opened fire. Good to meet you, Dragos. I'm Bruce Hamilton.

DRAGOS

This my wife, Tullia.

(TULLIA places bone fragments and fur in apron before shaking Bruce's hands.)

BRUCE

A pleasure to meet you, Tullia.

(BRUCE discreetly wipes hand on handkerchief.)

DRAGOS

You say Bruce? Is boy you tell about? That make living from woman titties?

BUD

Yeah, he's the one.

TULLIA

(Marching indignantly to kitchen.)

Men! Like pigs for titties.

CORA

Bud! Don't be so crude. You've offended Tullia.

DRAGOS

No, no. It OK. Tullia very much know how I like the titties.

(CORA, exasperated, drops to chair.)

BRUCE

Never mind, Ma. I've grown accustomed to Pa casting aspersions.

BUD

Fuckin' fruitcake can't even speak English.

CORA

Bud!

DRAGOS

I tell you, I think you have very good job. I get for you breakfast, then you tell about the titties for me.

CORA

Dragos!

DRAGOS

What you want for eat? Eggs? Ham?

BRUCE

Fresh fruit and yogurt would be great. Thanks.

BUD

Fruit. See what I mean?

DRAGOS

Fruit? Uh, yes. OK, I get the fruit.

CORA

Bud?

(BUD ignores CORA and exchanges glares with BRUCE while DRAGOS scurries away.)

BRUCE

Don't you get it, Ma? Pa's told Dragos that I make a living by sculpting breasts. Now he's implying that I'm a fruit.



Fruit?

CORA

Yes, a fruit. That I'm gay.

BRUCE

Oh, Bud! How could you?

CORA

Still deny it?

BUD

Deny it? You know, Pa, I'm a professional living in Seattle. Not that you'd understand, but it's a large, progressive city. And there wouldn't be a lot of stigma if I came out of the closet. In fact, it might even help my practice. Maybe I could become plastic surgeon to the gay community.

BRUCE

Yeah? Then why don't you?

BUD

Because I'm not gay. Really, I'm not.

BRUCE

Never been married.

BUD

True.

BRUCE

Dress like a fag.

BUD

Sometimes, I guess. True.

BRUCE  
(Glances at his pink shirt and blazer.)

Don't like sports.

BUD

Well, I don't like NASCAR or cage fighting. True.

BRUCE

Never hunted when you were a kid. Always reading or playing that goddamn cello.

BUD

CORA

Bud! I loved it when Brucie played.

BUD

Kid played cello like nobody's business but never learned to shoot a gun. Tell me, Cora, what kind of boy in Montana picks a cello over a Winchester? Goddamned sissies, that's who.

BRUCE

Hey, I'll tell you what, Pa. Why don't you give me some shooting lessons, and I'll join you in the Thanksgiving hunt tomorrow? I've still got time to get an out-of-state license. Maybe we can do some father-son bonding in the woods. What do you think?

BUD

Oh, Christ. You hear that, Cora? Numskull wants to go huntin' with me. Must a asked him a hunnerd times he was a kid did he wanna go huntin'. Never did. Not one damned time.

CORA

Oh, Bud...

BUD

You really think I'm gonna go in the woods with someone who doesn't know the first thing about firearm safety and risk gettin' my head blown off?

(BRUCE and CORA steal a glance at the defaced bear.)

BRUCE

OK, Pa. Maybe next year.

(TULLIA enters with meal for Bruce, sits next to Cora. BRUCE nibbles and BUD sips coffee as TULLIA and CORA make plans.)

TULLIA

(Addressing Cora but glaring at Bud.)

Maybe next time Bud not shoot bear and not shoot hat of the little Mexican. Maybe he shoot person for real. Maybe tomorrow we must have funeral and not the Thanksgiving.

CORA

Oh, no Dear, of course we'll have Thanksgiving. All the children will be home, and you and Dragos must come and join us. It's my very favorite holiday.

TULLIA

Yes, nice to have dinner with the childrens. But Dragos and me must be here early for the breakfast. Hunters eat many pancakes and sausages before going out to shoot the deers.

CORA

Well, you come when you can, Dear. We never sit down to eat until everyone's back from hunting, probably about five.

TULLIA

I bring stuffed cabbages and special *savarina* for dessert.

(BUD groans, makes a face.)

CORA

Oh, that will be wonderful, Dear. And we'll have turkey, all the trimmings, and pumpkin pie.

BUD

Now you're talkin'.

TULLIA

I say you are brave lady, Cora Hamilton.

(TULLIA exits as CLEVE enters. He's got a two-day stubble, wears coveralls, and sports greasy hands. BRUCE rises to embrace but restrains himself to avoid the grease; instead, shake hands.)

CLEVE

Bro! Good to see you!

BRUCE

Cleve! Good to see you, too!

(Pulling back.)

Whoa. What's that I smell on your breath so early in the morning?

(Discreetly wipes his hand.)

BUD

Smell on Cleve? The fuck you think you smell? Sure as hell ain't Old Spice.

CORA

Bud! Your mouth!

CLEVE

Don't smell nothin' 'cept gunpowder. Pa playing villa-janty again?

BRUCE

You mean vigilante?

(Nods toward the bear.)

I think he was just warming up for the Thanksgiving hunt.

CLEVE

Oh, no shit.

BUD

This is the earliest you been up in a month. Or did you even make it to bed last night?

(CLEVE takes seat. TULLIA appears, pours coffee, quickly exits.)

CLEVE

No, Pa. I've been workin'. Workin' hard. Up late in the office workin' on our business plan and up early this mornin' gettin' the skidder runnin'.

BUD

Business plan? What business plan? Christ, Cleve! What the hell you cookin' up now?

CLEVE

Pa, we need a plan for the bank. How long you think that skidder's gonna keep runnin'? We can't move logs without a skidder, and the bank's not gonna give us money for a skidder without a plan.

BUD

Now you listen to me, Boy. We don't need another goddamn bank loan. It's my company, and dealin' with the bank's my responsibility. They're not gonna deal with you.

CLEVE

Pa, I'm just trying to –

BUD

And we don't need a new skidder! That skidder's got plenty a life left in her. And long as we're talkin' 'bout the skidder, you got no goddamn business turnin' wrenches when you been drinking. That's the problem with the skidder. The mechanic and operator is a goddamn drunk.

CORA

Oh, Bud.

CLEVE

Forget it, Ma. A little nip in my coffee on a cold mornin' and it must mean I'm a drunk.

BRUCE

(Trying to break the tension.)

Wow! You still running the same skidder? That's impressive. Must be, what, ten years old now?

CLEVE

Fifteen. Comin' up on fifty thousand hours. Can you believe that? All that poundin' in the woods. Don't remember how many times I changed cable, rebuilt the winch. Hell, how many times I rebuilt the engine. Pa loves that piece a crap, but I'm sick a workin' on it.

BUD

Love's got nothin' to do with it. Still got plenty a life in her.

CLEVE

Yeah, well you should a got rid of it this spring when it –

BUD

(Slams fist on the table.)

That's enough, boy! Let's go, Cora.

(BUD stands, reloads pistol, throws bills on table. Takes Cora's coat from rack and, with surprising tenderness, helps her into it.)

CORA

(Turns to touch Bud's arm.)

Let me just have a moment with the boys, Dear.

(BUD hesitates, then turns to exit without saying a goodbye.)

CLEVE

(Standing and asserting himself.)

Pa! Before you leave, Mr. Strong over to the bank called and wants to meet. Said it's important. I told him meet us here at the café at ten this mornin'. I know I'm wastin' my breath, but I can handle this you just give me a chance. I can, Pa. Anyway, I'm gonna be here at ten o'clock.

(BUD storms out. CLEVE slumps back in chair, shakes his head.)

CORA

Be patient with your father, boys. He's worked so hard and he's worn out. He's not as calm as he used to be.

BRUCE

(Embracing Cora.)

OK, Ma. I guess I'll see you at the cabin.

CORA

I love you, Brucie.

(CORA exits.)

BRUCE

Sounds like the business is in trouble. How serious?

CLEVE

Tough time to be in the logging business, Bro. Pa has no idea. Not like it used to be. Housing's depressed. Damn government a total pain in the ass.

BRUCE

How long do you think he's going to hang on, you know, to keep control?

CLEVE

Until he's in the grave or his hand is forced. Or he's thrown in jail for shootin' an immigrant. I tell you, Bro, he's losin' it.

BRUCE

Born in the wrong century. Might have fit in the Wild West.

CLEVE

Yeah, when a man got credit for shootin' immigrants.

BRUCE

Credit? You mean for shooting Indians? Cleve, in the Wild West, we were the immigrants. But still, a hundred and fifty years ago, I think Pa would have fit right in.

CLEVE

Or maybe however long ago it was people lived in caves. You know, when men drug women around by the hair.

BRUCE

I don't know. Pa's traditional, but he's a protector of women. Part of the tradition, I guess. So why are you meeting with Mr. Strong here instead of the bank?

CLEVE

My idea. I figured he'd be easier on Pa in here and maybe Pa would do a better job controllin' his self.

BRUCE

Well if the control he exercised in here this morning is any indication, you might be disappointed.

CLEVE

We're in deep shit, Bro. Never heard Mr. Strong so serious. Kinda like when the teacher in junior high would lean down and whisper, "You're wanted in the principal's office."

BRUCE

Actually, don't remember ever being called to the office.

CLEVE

Oh, course not. You and Jeffrey ever got called to the office, it was probably to get some kinda ass-kissin' award. Me? I got called to the office, it was for an ass-whippin', and it didn't come with any kinda award 'cept lotsa bruises. God, I can't believe how they used to beat my ass with those wooden hack boards.

BRUCE

So, you're in deep shit with the bank?

CLEVE

Pa wanted to keep it from you and Jeffrey, but you'll find out sooner or later.

BRUCE

What?

CLEVE

We had a skidder roll-over this spring. Rolled over and pinned the operator in a creek. Guy woulda been OK 'cept he couldn't keep his head above water.

BRUCE

What? He drowned?

CLEVE

Drowned. Yeah. And now there's a big law suit and it ain't lookin' good. We weren't carrying enough insurance. You know Pa. Hell, we were 'bout bankrupt before the law suit. Now, I don't think we got a choice.

BRUCE

Oh, my God! Why didn't anyone say anything?

CLEVE

Pa's in denial. Thinks that we'll be able to work our way outta this and his two city sons won't have to find out.

BRUCE

But why?

CLEVE

Respect.

BRUCE

Respect? I'm not following.

CLEVE

All Pa ever wanted from you was respect. He thinks you and Jeffrey don't respect him. You know, goin' to college and movin' away to big cities. Like a couple a big shots thinkin' his life ain't as important as yours.

BRUCE

Oh, my God! Do you know how ridiculous that is? Pa's never shown me an ounce of respect. No acknowledgement for anything I've achieved. Talk about lack of respect.

CLEVE

Yeah, well, I'm just tellin' how I see it. Maybe you should ask yourself do you really respect him. Anyway, I need to get goin', get ready for the meeting with the banker.

BRUCE

Wait a minute, Cleve. How are you? Really. How are you?

CLEVE

Oh, you know. Never better.

BRUCE

And the drinking?

CLEVE

OK. Yeah, but look, I've got to get cleaned up for the banker. I'll catch you later at the house.

(BRUCE and CLEVE shake hands. CLEVE exits. BRUCE resumes seat. DRAGOS enters, takes a seat, and stares at the bear for a moment before speaking.)

DRAGOS

Your father is, uh...

BRUCE

Crazy?

DRAGOS

Yes, maybe little crazy. And sometimes he very smart.

BRUCE

He's got some hard edges, Dragos.

DRAGOS

Yes, but more. How you say? A riggle.

BRUCE

A riggle?

DRAGOS

Yes. Mystery.

BRUCE

Oh, a riddle.



DRAGOS

Yes, yes! A riddle. Every day he come in store and drink coffee and talk bad about immigrants. Say bad to everyone about Mexicans. Say immigrants ruin country. But he every day drink my immigrant coffee and he every day very nice to me. A riggle. No, no! A riddle.

BRUCE

You're a smart man, Dragos.

DRAGOS

Yes. I must always learn much to keep a smart man. So now you tell me how you fix the woman titties.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I  
Scene Two

SCENE: Living room in home of Bud and Cora.

TIME: About 9 a.m. on Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving.

AT RISE: CORA steps into a tight spot downstage left. She breaks the fourth wall.

CORA

Some of you out there are mothers, and I wonder if any of you have a hard time, like I do during the holidays. My friends don't seem to have problems. I ask them what they're doing to make things special for the holidays, and I never hear anything new. I never hear anything that I can't do, anything that I don't do. I try. I really do.

(Dabs eyes with handkerchief.)

Is it too much for a mother to ask for peace during the holidays? Is it too much to ask the children to get along? More than anything, I just want them to be happy and to love each other. I pray to God that I'll see that day before I die, that we'll have one holiday when we're all together and there's happiness instead of hurt.

(Stage lights up. BRUCE, on sofa flips through magazine.  
JEFFREY enters with suitcase. BRUCE rises to embrace him.)

JEFFREY

I know, I know. I'm late.

BRUCE

Jeffrey, what happened? I got a voicemail about a delay but thought you'd still make it to the café this morning.

JEFFREY

I'm sorry. Holiday travel's a nightmare.

BRUCE

Flight canceled?

JEFFREY

Not exactly. I got held up at the studio, missed my flight, and had to fly into Missoula.

BRUCE

Missoula?

JEFFREY

Got in late and decided to drive up this morning. Not early enough, I guess. Sorry to leave you hanging.

BRUCE

Well, you're here now, and it's good to see you. Coffee?

JEFFREY

Sure. And, Bruce, it's good to see you, too.

(BRUCE exits. JEFFREY sits on sofa.)

JEFFREY

(Projecting toward kitchen.)

Anyway, I drove straight to the café hoping to be in on the surprise but must have just missed you. They said all the Hamiltons had just left.

BRUCE

(Returns and pours coffee.)

Ah, yes, the surprise. Pa was in rare form. You missed the... Well, let's just say, you missed the excitement.

JEFFREY

So, they had no idea we were coming in a day early?

BRUCE

Well, otherwise there's no good way to explain the gunfire.

JEFFREY

Pa?

BRUCE

A wild shot, fortunately. But I'll tell you, he cleared his holster like Wyatt Earp.

JEFFREY

Please tell me no one got hurt.

BRUCE

There's a stuffed bear that'll never be the same. Such a disturbing image. I can't get it out of my mind.

JEFFREY

Ahh, the mutilated bruin! Couldn't miss it. My first thought – call it a really strong hunch – was that Pa was involved. What an arse.

(Beat.)

So where is everyone?

BRUCE

Pa's meeting with a banker, and Ma's doing some last-minute shopping for Thanksgiving.

JEFFREY

How is Ma?

BRUCE

Older. Ma is Ma.

JEFFREY

Cora the Lion Heart. Defender of Bud the Brute, the dreaded Ruler of the Hamilton Kingdom.

BRUCE

A paragon of fortitude and courage. Loyal to the core.

JEFFREY

And Cleve? Have you seen him, yet?

BRUCE

He and Pa got into a tiff at the café.

JEFFREY

Did they exchange gunfire or was it just a simple bare-knuckle brawl?

BRUCE

I think Cleve's really trying, but it's a lost cause.

JEFFREY

A chip off the Old Man's block.

BRUCE

Not exactly. Unfortunately, he's inherited many of Pa's flaws but few of his redeeming qualities.

JEFFREY

Redeeming qualities? You must mean skills. Pa's got skills. He can size up a stand of timber with a glance. He can sharpen a saw faster than he can brush his teeth. But, Bruce, those aren't redeeming qualities, they're skills.

BRUCE

Skills, sure. But Pa's got more.

JEFFREY

More? Hmmm, let's see. Attitude! Of course! Pa's got attitude, by God. Intimidating bastard can stare-down a cougar. That's attitude. So, yes, skills and attitude. But I challenge you to describe one redeeming quality.

BRUCE

OK, here's one. Pa has one hell of a work ethic. You have to give him that, right? And in that regard, you and I are a lot like him.

JEFFREY

Back off. I'm nothing like him.

BRUCE

I know it's hard to hear, but we do take after him, at least in that way. We both work our asses off, just like he does. And I think work ethic's a redeeming quality.

JEFFREY

Yeah, maybe so.

BRUCE

Cleve, on the other hand, is a different story. Work drives him into a spasmodic fit, and the only way he can stop shaking is to take a slug of alcohol.

JEFFREY

OK. But you said Pa has redeeming qualities. You really think he has more than one?

BRUCE

At least one other, but I'm not sure what to call it. Maybe street smarts.

JEFFREY

Street smarts? You get street smarts by dealing with con artists and predators on city streets, navigating the ghetto, avoiding panhandlers and muggers, cutting deals with sidewalk vendors. Stuff like that. Pa's been driving his pickup through the woods on dirt roads his whole life. What does he know about street smarts?

BRUCE

OK, then, call it business sense. I mean, the man started a company and managed it for fifty years. Managed finances, a fleet of equipment, customers, suppliers. Dealt with government bureaucrats. He hired and managed employees.

JEFFREY

God help them. Can you imagine working for that arse?

BRUCE

No, I can't. And that's another difference between Pa and Cleve. Cleve's worked for Pa his whole life. Pa would never work for someone like himself. He'd put a boot up a foreman's ass before he'd let himself be abused.

JEFFREY

No, I do see the difference between Pa and Cleve. But you haven't convinced me Pa has more than one redeeming quality.

BRUCE

Maybe you're right.

(Beat.)

BRUCE (Cont.)

So how are things in the Big Apple? How's Carol? The kids?

JEFFREY

Everyone's fine. Spending Thanksgiving in Connecticut with the in-laws.

BRUCE

You should be so lucky.

JEFFREY

What? And miss the Thanksgiving hunt?

BRUCE

You know, I asked Pa if I could go along this year.

JEFFREY

On the hunt?! Are you serious?

BRUCE

Cleve isn't the only one who's trying. I'm trying, too. Trying to connect with Pa. I've been thinking about it a lot. But if we ever do connect, I guess it won't be during a hunt. Pa said he wouldn't feel safe with me in the woods.

JEFFREY

My God, Bruce, you'd be the one in jeopardy! The deer are safer in the woods than you when Pa's on the loose.

BRUCE

If Clifford and Claire can hunt with Pa, why can't we?

JEFFREY

Pa's used to hunting with them. He sees us differently. Pa sees Clifford and Claire as hunting buddies. Well, the term "buddies" might be too strong. I'm not saying he likes them. But at least he tolerates them. He doesn't even tolerate us, let alone like us. Hell. I don't know, maybe he even hates us. And I guess I feel pretty much the same way about him.

BRUCE

Wow! Talk about a strong term. You actually hate him? You really think he hates us?

JEFFREY

At best, he's ashamed of us. At worst, he sees us as devils with forked tails and horns.

(Points to deer mounted over mantle.)

Maybe not antlers, but horns nonetheless, and Pa would see either one of us as fair game. No, Bruce, don't go into the woods with that arse when he's carrying a loaded gun.

BRUCE

Well, I think you're wrong. But don't worry. We'll stay in by the fire, drink brandy, and play chess. Maybe Scrabble.

JEFFREY

Ready to get your butt kicked?

BRUCE

Dream on, Brother.

(Beat.)

So, how's the fashion design business? Won any more awards lately?

JEFFREY

I'd totally love my work if it wasn't for the customers. Want to guess what made me late for my flight? A Broadway diva demanding last-minute alterations. She's hosting some charity event this weekend and didn't like the way her ass looked in her gown.

BRUCE

Oh, I know exactly what you mean. I hear it all the time.

(Beat. Affecting female voice.)

"Dr. Hamilton, what can you do to lift my ass? Can you tighten my ass? Take the dimples out of my ass? Make my ass smaller?"

JEFFREY

Yeah, but how many women want their ass to look bigger?

BRUCE

What they say and what they mean are often different things.

JEFFREY

No, I kid you not. Her exact words were,

(Beat. Affecting voice of diva.)

"I love the gown but it doesn't do enough to highlight my booty."

(Beat.)

She actually wanted the gown to make her ass to look bigger.

BRUCE

See, that's a perfect example of what I mean. She didn't say bigger, did she? She said highlight her booty. Plastic surgeons call that buttocks augmentation, and it's a lot more complicated than just making the ass bigger. It's making it bigger in the right places, getting the right shape, getting the right relationship to the rest of her body. Sculpting the perfect ass is tricky business.

JEFFREY

So, you do this procedure? You augment asses?

BRUCE

Well, it's not my specialty, but I've been thinking about focusing on it. Everyone does breast augmentation. Butt augmentation is the cosmetic surgery du jour. Right now, I'm behind the curve.

JEFFREY

So, you need to get ahead of the curve.

(Excited, stands to gesture.)

Your tagline! Ahead of the curve! Apply for the trademark as soon as you get back to Seattle. Billboards all over the city. Dr. Bruce Hamilton's Ahead of the Curve Ass Clinic. See Dr. Hamilton when your booty needs boosting. Or, Dr. Bruce for bodacious buttocks.

BRUCE

Think you're pretty good with alliteration, don't you? OK, let me try.

(A pause, then flat delivery.)

Looking for junk in the trunk, see Dr. Hamilton.

JEFFREY

Junk in the trunk? You call that alliteration? And the message is unclear. Look, I wouldn't know if you run a salvage yard selling used car parts or you're a tree surgeon that cures tree rot. Junk in the trunk...

BRUCE

OK, I can do better. Let's see. Dr. Bruce Hamilton...

(Exaggerating first syllables.)

Always Available for Ass...

(A moment to search for word.)

Amplification! That's it! Always available for ass amplification!

JEFFREY

Better, but might be interpreted as louder farts.

BRUCE

Damn, you're right.

JEFFREY

And you know you're going to owe me a royalty for providing the idea.

BRUCE

No way! I didn't say I'd never done ass work.

JEFFREY

Then, you have?

BRUCE

Sure. Once I even worked on a college kid who fell into an ice cream maker.



JEFFREY

What the hell?

BRUCE

Engineering students at a fraternity built this huge mechanical churn. They said it was for ice cream but I suspect it was for frozen daiquiris or margaritas. Kid went in ass-first. Don't know how exactly. He was drunk, but I don't know if he fell or was horsing around and got pushed.

JEFFREY

Jesus.

BRUCE

A paddle blade on this huge churn came around and took a banana-shaped bite out of his skinny little ass. No kidding. I had to fill a crater in an ass cheek with a silicone banana.

JEFFREY

So, let me understand. The machine clipped the guy ... and an ass-banana fell into the ice cream?

BRUCE

I guess. We didn't recover it, if that's what you're asking.

JEFFREY

I hope the frat brothers weren't drunk enough to make an ass-banana split.

(CLAIRE enters front door. BRUCE and JEFFREY leap up for greetings, hugs.)

JEFFREY

Claire! How are you? Love the coat. Serviceable for winter but very, very chic.

CLAIRE

Well, thank you, Jeffrey. You're not the only one in the family with a flair for fashion, you know.

(Turning to hug Bruce.)

And look at you, Bruce! You're looking pretty spiffy, too.

BRUCE

God, it's great to see you. How are you?

CLAIRE

Healthy, happy, and busy. Couldn't be better, really, unless I could find a way to see my two favorite brothers more often. I'm so glad you both came this year.

(CLAIRE hangs coat on a rack, takes a seat with JEFFREY.  
BRUCE gets coffee.)

JEFFREY

Ready for the big hunt tomorrow?

CLAIRE

Locked and loaded, as they say. Clifford's getting ready, too. Saw him at Mac's Hunting Supply praying over his ammo.

(BRUCE returns with coffee.)

JEFFREY

Seeking divine guidance for bullet selection or asking a blessing for a quick kill?

CLAIRE

Neither. I think it was all just for the camera.

BRUCE

What do you mean? Posing for store security?

CLAIRE

Don't tell me you haven't heard about Clifford's newest venture! He's going on cable TV. He had a small crew in the gun shop filming a segment for his new show.

JEFFREY

My God, his dream of televangelism finally comes true!

CLAIRE

To get a deal he got pretty creative. His concept is to combine a sermon with an outdoor sports show.

BRUCE

So instead of watching shows like "Hunting with Big John" or "Doug's Fishing Clinic," the devout sportsman can tune into the "Hunting and Praying with Pastor Clifford Show."

JEFFREY

You know these shows?

BRUCE

Using my imagination.

CLAIRE

Well, you're pretty much on target. The show's called *God, Geese, and Grizzlies*.

JEFFREY

No shit!? You're not kidding are you!?

CLAIRE

First show airs Saturday. Clifford's really pumped.

JEFFREY

He's got sponsors?

CLAIRE

Some regional sponsors. Sport shops in Kalispell and Great Falls. I don't think Nike or Coca Cola have signed, yet.

BRUCE

Are they filming the Thanksgiving hunt tomorrow?

CLAIRE

Are you kidding? One shot of Pa would sink the show before it gets off the ground.

JEFFREY

(Framing scenes like a director.)

The possibilities! Look how adorably Pa flips off the camera! Or, oh, catch a glimpse of Pa in the background defecating behind a tree! Or, God forbid, Pa confronts a party of Mexican hunters!

BRUCE

An overnight cult classic! Thanksgiving Day Massacre, Part 2.

JEFFREY

Bruce was thinking about joining you tomorrow in the quest for venison.

(CLAIRE gasps, gives a horrified look.)

BRUCE

It was a thought.

CLAIRE

Well, if you really want to go hunting, Bruce, I can get you set up. But it's best if you and I hunt together and let Pa and Clifford go their own way.

BRUCE

Thanks, Claire. You're such a sweetheart. But my objective was to do some bonding with Pa, and he's not up for that.

CLAIRE

Bonding with Pa? Wait a minute. Let me try to get my head around that concept.

JEFFREY

Bruce is in midlife crisis and looking for a challenge. I'm encouraging him, for his own safety, to pursue something safer than bonding with Pa.

JEFFREY (Cont.)

(Turning to Bruce.)  
How about chainsaw juggling?

BRUCE

I know it won't be easy.

CLAIRE

You've got a good heart, Bruce.

JEFFREY

A feeble and disturbed mind, but a good heart.

BRUCE

Doesn't anyone else think ahead, try to imagine Pa's funeral and life without him?

JEFFREY

No.

CLAIRE

Of course, I do. But I think about losing Ma a lot more.

JEFFREY

God, this is getting maudlin. Can we change the subject?

BRUCE

OK. New topic. Cleve said the business is facing bankruptcy.

CLAIRE

He did? He told you? Did he tell you everything?

(CLIFFORD enters. ALL ad lib hellos.)

BRUCE

Clifford! We were just talking about you.

JEFFREY

Our very own TV star! Talent runs so deep in this family.

CLIFFORD

The credit's not mine. It's all by the grace of God.

JEFFREY

Oooh, a TV star and modest, too.

CLIFFORD

OK, Jeffrey. I haven't even got my coat off, but let the mocking begin.

JEFFREY

You're right. You know I'm just kidding around, Clifford. I'm proud of you. Here, let me take your coat.

(JEFFREY hangs coat. ALL have a seat.)

CLIFFORD

Please don't patronize me, Jeffrey.

JEFFREY

I said I'm sorry. You know I was just joking around.

CLIFFORD

Don't. We haven't seen each other for a couple of years, and we can't even get through hello before you start mocking. When you mock me, you mock my Calling and mock God Himself.

JEFFREY

God, Himself?!

BRUCE

Hey, let's just start over. Clifford, how are you?

CLIFFORD

I'm fine, Bruce. Thanks for asking. And, how are you?

BRUCE

I'm fine, too. Thanks for asking.

JEFFREY

Well, now we're on a roll. Let's see, you're fine, Bruce is fine, I'm fine, and Claire's fine, too. Now that we're all caught up, let's do this again in a couple of years.

CLAIRE

Dear, God.

JEFFREY

I'm sorry, but doesn't anyone else abhor the pretense?

CLIFFORD

I do abhor pretense, Jeffrey. but you immediately went on the attack. So why don't you drop the pretense? The truth is, you think I'm a phony. You always have.

JEFFREY

You want truth. OK. The truth is –

BRUCE

Wait! Let's just back this up a bit and take the focus off the two of you for a minute.

JEFFREY

Well?

BRUCE

OK. I'll start. First, I love you all and I'm really glad to see you.

JEFFREY

Ouch! Oh, the brutal truth. Enough! I can't take any more.

CLAIRE

Let him talk, Jeffrey.

JEFFREY

You're right. Continue. Let the chips fall where they may.

BRUCE

I don't know. Maybe I am going through a mid-life crisis. Lately, I've been taking stock and thinking a lot about the relationships in my life.

CLAIRE

I didn't know you were in a relationship, Bruce. Is it serious?

BRUCE

No. Not that kind of relationship. I mean with my family, in particular, with Pa.

JEFFREY

You can't have a relationship with an arse.

CLIFFORD

God is working in your heart, Bruce. You need a relationship with Him first. Then you can work on your other relationships.

BRUCE

So, you think Pa loves and respects you because of your relationship with God?

CLIFFORD

Yes, I do.

JEFFREY

I don't.

CLIFFORD

You don't what? You don't think Pa loves and respects me? Or you don't think my relationship with God is significant?

JEFFREY

I'm not going to criticize your relationship with God, Clifford, if it makes you happy. But Pa's respect and affection for his children is only an indication of the degree to which he considers us to be like him.

BRUCE

So, he has five kids and he wants five Bud clones?

CLAIRE

That doesn't bode well for me, then.

BRUCE

Doesn't bode too well for any of us. Least of all for Jeffrey and me. We don't live in Montana. We have professions Pa thinks are contemptuous. He thinks I'm homosexual, for God's sake.

CLIFFORD

Please don't use God's name in vain. And Bruce, God can heal sexual deviation.

BRUCE

Oh, my God! You, too!

CLIFFORD

Bruce, the Lord's name.

CLAIRE

Jeffrey designs clothing. Does he think Jeffrey's gay, too?

BRUCE

I don't think so. He's got a wife and kids. But I shouldn't have to get married to prove I'm heterosexual.

CLAIRE

Well only Jeffrey and Clifford are married with kids, and I doubt Pa thinks that Cleve's gay or that I'm a lesbian.

BRUCE

I'm sure you're probably right, but that doesn't mean Pa has even one ounce of respect for Cleve.

JEFFREY

What about Claire?

BRUCE

I'm not sure what Pa thinks about Claire.

JEFFREY

Shouldn't be hard to figure out. He's more transparent than glass. If he's got a thought, it shines through plain as day.

CLAIRE

So, I guess what you're saying is that Pa doesn't even give me a second thought.

JEFFREY

The rest of us should be so lucky.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)



ACT I  
Scene Three

SCENE: Living room, home of Bud and Cora.

TIME: 1 p.m. on Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving.

AT RISE: DRAGOS steps into a tight spot downstage left. He breaks the fourth wall.

DRAGOS

America is greatest country! You know that? I hope you do know that, but I think many Americans not understand how great is their country. Tullia and me very much love Romania, but very hard to live there. We have dream. What you call American dream. Many years we wait. And finally, we get our chance! We come to America and work very hard every day and save our money to buy store. I cannot believe it! America have so much opportunity! So much freedom! We come to America, only three years, and now we have our store and cook for people! Our family in Romania also not believe it. Now our family want to move here, too. Sometime I think about that. I think about how different is life in America. And I think about how to understand the Americans. Tullia say I think too much, but still, I think. Why more Americans not buy store? Very easy here. In Romania, very hard to get jobs and save money and buy store. That why many people in Romania dream it, what you call American Dream. It strange to me that American Dream is not dream for so many Americans. But people in Romania and Korea and Mexico and other places in all of world have that dream. I think about that and how America is greatest country.

(Stage lights up. BRUCE and JEFFREY play chess, CLIFFORD reads a pocket New Testament, and CLAIRE plucks a guitar.)

JEFFREY

(Confidently advancing a knight.)

And the noose tightens. Check!

BRUCE

The unwitting fashion designer, no match for his superior opponent, falls into a trap that's been set with surgical precision.

(Moves bishop with a flourish.)

And bishop takes knight.

JEFFREY

Oh, shit.

(CLIFFORD gives Jeffrey a look of annoyance. JEFFREY tips his king over.)

JEFFREY

OK, you got lucky.

BRUCE

No, you blundered. Maybe you'd do better at Scrabble.

JEFFREY

No way! I'm taking you down. Two out of three. Let's go.

BRUCE

Ah, the inferior player displays unfounded confidence and sets himself up for agonizing disappointment. You're on!

(As they reset the chessboard, CLAIRE stops playing the guitar.)

CLAIRE

How about I take on the winner?

BRUCE

(Hesitates, surprised.)

Sure, Claire, if you want to.

CLAIRE

Why the hesitation?

JEFFREY

I don't think Bruce wants to risk losing to his sister. Do you find it emasculating to lose to a woman?

BRUCE

Don't be ridiculous.

JEFFREY

Well, get prepared, Claire, because you'll be playing me as soon as I dispose of this chump. And I have no problem taking on a woman.

CLAIRE

Why are you bringing up my gender? I expect gender bias from Pa and Cleve and –  
(Glances at Clifford and clips speech.)

But not from you two. Playing chess isn't about masculinity or femininity. It's all about skill.

BRUCE

Sounds like Claire has some sensitivity to stereotyping in addition to chess skill we didn't know she had.

JEFFREY

Well bring on your skill. And you can even apply your crafty feminine wiles – or not. The choice is yours. Man, woman, or hermaphrodite makes no difference to me. My confidence is unshakeable.

BRUCE

And overconfidence will be your undoing.  
(Moving a pawn.)  
Pawn to queen four. Your move.

CLIFFORD

Is it confidence or pride?

JEFFREY

What? Are you asking a rhetorical question?

CLIFFORD

No, not rhetorical. Just making a point – confidence based on faith is a good thing. Confidence based on ego is pride.

JEFFREY

And you've got something against pride?

CLIFFORD

God does.

JEFFREY

Oh, God.

CLIFFORD

Yes, God. He's pretty clear about it. You can read all about it right here, Jeffrey.

JEFFREY

I'll get right on it, Clifford, as soon as I finish crushing and totally humiliating my brother and sister on the chessboard.

CLAIRE

I love it.

JEFFREY

It's OK, Claire. We're just being brothers.

CLAIRE

Oh, I know. It's what I love about the holidays. All of us getting together, loving each other, sharing memories and family secrets, creating memories.

BRUCE

Jeffrey and Clifford do love each other. They just have a different way of showing it.

CLAIRE

No, Bruce, I get that. I wasn't trying to be sarcastic. I really do enjoy our family dynamic.

JEFFREY

OK, now you're just being weird.

BRUCE

Some brothers are lower than others in emotional intelligence. They express love in unexpected ways. And for Pa it's even more difficult. And more unexpected.

JEFFREY

Oh, that's way beyond weird. Let's see, when Pa welcomed you with his forty-five blazing this morning, was he showing his love in an unexpected way?

BRUCE

Of course not. He didn't know it was me. It was my fault for jumping out and growling. He was startled and thought he was being attacked. That wasn't Pa loving, it was Pa defending.

JEFFREY

Defending what? His Denver omelet and hash browns from a ravenous bear?

BRUCE

Defending Ma. Defending property. Defending himself and his honor.

JEFFREY

What's with you? You want to excuse Pa for everything. Let's face it. He's old and senile. He used to be a cantankerous troublemaker. Now he's a treacherous terrorist. And regarding emotional intelligence, he's retarded.

BRUCE

Pa's old but not senile. And, yes, he's always had trouble showing affection for his kids, just like you and Clifford have trouble showing affection for each other.

JEFFREY

You're way out of line when you compare us to Pa.

(CLAIRE smiles and softly plays her guitar. CLEVE, inebriated and holding a sheaf of papers, enters and surveys the scene.)

CLEVE

Well, whaddya know? The whole gang.

(CLEVE throws coat in corner and hugs his siblings.)

JEFFREY

Cleve, my God. Did you meet Jack Daniels for lunch?

CLEVE

Good to see you, too, Bro.

CLAIRE

Are you OK? Do you need some food?

CLEVE

No, Sis. I'm fine.

(Looking her over lecherously.)

And you're lookin' mighty fine.

CLIFFORD

How about a cup of coffee?

CLEVE

No, no. I'm tellin' ya, I'm fine.

(EVERYONE returns to their seat; CLEVE unsteadily sits.)

CLEVE

You don't hafta stop playin' just cuz I'm here.

(BRUCE and JEFFREY look up from chess.)

No, I mean Claire. Don't stop. You play so good.

CLAIRE

Thanks, Cleve. Maybe I'll play some a little later.

CLEVE

Did ya know your little sis sings in bars on the weekend? Tell 'em, Sis.

JEFFREY

Yes, do tell us, Sis. Do we have more than one entertainer in the family?

CLIFFORD

Entertainer? You're implying that I'm an entertainer?

JEFFREY

Let me rephrase. More than one performer?

CLIFFORD

And the difference between –

CLAIRE

What Cleve means is that I sometimes do some lounge singing on the weekend. Don't look so amazed. It's not like I'm the next Reba McEntire. It's just for fun.

BRUCE

Really? That's great!

CLEVE  
Got a CD and everything.

BRUCE  
What?! You've got a CD?

CLAIRE  
Don't listen to Cleve. It's just a demo. A few songs for review purposes.

JEFFREY  
But still, you must be pretty serious about it.

CLAIRE  
No, no I'm not. My construction business is about all I can handle. Singing is therapy.

BRUCE  
Can I get a copy of the CD? I'd be glad to pay for it.

JEFFREY  
I'd love one, too.

CLAIRE  
Sure, you can have one, and don't be silly. You don't have to pay for it. My gift as long as you agree to not expect too much – just six tracks, all different genres. It helps me to line up gigs.

CLEVE  
And I bet it helps to pick up guys.

CLIFFORD  
Don't be so crass.

CLEVE  
I dint mean nothin'. It's not like she needs help pickin' up guys.

CLAIRE  
Cleve, you've had a bit too much to drink.

CLEVE  
I'm just sayin', I wish I could sing.

JEFFREY  
So you, too, could pick up guys?

CLEVE  
Damn straight!

JEFFREY

You want to pick up guys who are straight?

CLEVE

(Puzzled, then a goofy drunken laugh.)

Oh, hell no. Not guys. You know what I mean.

BRUCE

Well, I'm impressed. Even if I had the talent, I couldn't find the time for a second job.

CLAIRE

It's not a job, Bruce. Like I said, it's therapeutic.

JEFFREY

Even so, it probably brings in some extra income.

CLAIRE

I guess.

BRUCE

Well, I think it's amazing. Good for you.

JEFFREY

Yes. Very cool. What type of music do you play?

CLAIRE

I've got a pretty large play list so I can handle requests. Lots of pop love ballads, some soft rock, jazz, R&B, but my favorite genre to sing is country.

JEFFREY

Now why'd you go and spoil it by telling me your favorite?

CLAIRE

Why? Are you close-minded, Jeffrey?

JEFFREY

No, but I've got standards.

CLAIRE

Well, that's unexpected and somewhat disappointing.

JEFFREY

Disappointing that I have standards?

CLAIRE

I just always figured you for the most open-minded and adventurous of all of us. But I guess that doesn't extend to music. And that's OK. I'm just surprised.

JEFFREY

Well, you've succeeded in making me feel bad enough to promise to reassess the country genre. I'll download some Patsy Cline and Merle Haggard as soon as I return to New York and will listen with an open mind.

CLAIRE

You could do a lot worse than Patsy Cline and Merle Haggard.

CLEVE

And she races sleds.

JEFFREY

You race snowmobiles? What? You race competitively?

CLAIRE

Why? Is there some reason I shouldn't?

JEFFREY

Jesus, Claire.

CLIFFORD

Jeffrey, please!

JEFFREY

Oh, right. Jeepers, Claire!

CLAIRE

What's the big deal? Construction's slow in the dead of winter so I joined a snowmobile club. They sponsor group outings, a cross-country race, a hill climb, even a drag race on Seeley Lake. It's fun and keeps me active, so I don't see the big deal.

JEFFREY

It's just not how I think of you. Growing up, I always thought you'd settle down, be a homemaker, have kids. Maybe be a teacher or librarian.

CLAIRE

Why, Jeffrey, you think just like Pa.

JEFFREY

Oh. Ouch. I can't believe I'm being compared to Pa, again. I guess I deserved it this time.



CLAIRE

Yes, you did.

BRUCE

Speaking of Pa, how'd it go with the banker?

CLEVE

Could have gone better, but least Pa kept his pistol in the holster.

BRUCE

Want to tell us about it?

CLEVE

Sure. Pa slugged me and walked out. Oh, and the bank's gonna shut us down and Pa and Ma are gonna lose the house.

(ALL ad-lib, shouting questions at the same time. What do you mean shut us down? The house?! What's going on?)

CLAIRE

(Asserting herself, taking charge.)

OK, Cleve. Take it slow and take it from the top. What did Mr. Strong say?

CLEVE

Ain't got enough assets. We lose the lawsuit, won't be enough to cover damages.

CLAIRE

But the business is incorporated and has liability insurance. Unless Pa's named separately from the company in the lawsuit, no one can touch his personal assets.

CLEVE

Not what Mr. Strong said, cuz Pa signed somethin' to guarantee the bank.

CLAIRE

Yes, but if he doesn't default on any bank loans, there shouldn't be a problem.

CLEVE

Bank's not gonna wait. They're demanding payment, and unless the loan's paid in the next few days, they're gonna take our equipment. They can have it far as I'm concerned...busted up junk.

CLAIRE

How much is the loan?

(CLEVE holds out sheaf of papers. CLAIRE retrieves and begins to study, mostly ignoring ensuing conversation between brothers.)

CLEVE

I always liked Mr. Strong. But I think Pa was right. That banker's an asshole.

CLIFFORD

Where is Pa now?

CLEVE

The hell do I know? I hope he's out in the woods choppin' down trees or wrestlin' a grizzly. Man's got frustrations to work out, and I don't know how much longer I can stand him usin' me for a punchin' bag.

JEFFREY

(Thumb to his mouth, simulates taking a drink.)

I guess we all have our own way of dealing with frustration, don't we, Cleve.

CLEVE

Yeah, I guess we do.

CLIFFORD

Drinking's not going to solve anything. You need to seek the Lord's help and guidance.

CLEVE

Well, didn't the Lord turn water into wine? Like Jeffrey said –

BRUCE

There must be something we can do!

CLEVE

You can pay off the bank loan, you want to.

BRUCE

How much is it?

CLEVE

Ask Claire.

CLAIRE

It's not as simple as paying off the bank loan.

BRUCE

How much?

CLAIRE

It's only about ninety kay.

JEFFREY

Ninety thousand?!

BRUCE

Are you saying ninety thousand isn't that much?!

CLAIRE

No, it's really not. The balance sheet doesn't look bad. Pa owns lots of tools and equipment, and almost everything's old enough to be fully depreciated.

BRUCE

So how much does he need? Ninety thousand dollars?

CLAIRE

Not unless I'm missing something. The bank should loan 80% of the value of his assets. Even if scrapped, all the equipment Pa's got should cover the note. And he's got a couple of trucks and a crawler that are well above scrap value. I can't understand why the bank would ask for a personal guarantee. I can't understand why Pa would agree to it.

JEFFREY

I told you he's getting senile.

CLIFFORD

What about the house?

CLAIRE

It's listed as collateral with Pa's personal guarantee of the loan. But if he declares bankruptcy, no can touch the house and up to one acre of property.

CLIFFORD

But Pa owns, what, at least a couple hundred acres of timber.

CLAIRE

Not sure how that would be treated in bankruptcy. He could lose the timber. I think there are exemptions for farmland, so maybe he gets around it if it's considered a tree farm. I'm not sure.

BRUCE

So, what do we do?

CLAIRE

First thing is to get Pa released from the personal guarantee with the bank. We need to meet with the banker and get an attorney involved. Let's deal with the bank first. We'll deal with the lawsuit when and if we need to.

CLIFFORD

We?

BRUCE

Yes, we. Pa and Ma need help. It's time for us to step up.

CLEVE

(Applauding slowly.)

Give it up for Bruce. It's about time someone else tries to step up. And good luck. Hell, I been steppin' up long as I can remember. Tryin' to, anyway. But Pa's the only one can make the decisions. I've worked for him more than thirty years, but I still need his OK to take a piss.

(CORA enters carrying a purse. BRUCE and JEFFREY jump up.)

BRUCE

Hi Ma. You have groceries to carry in?

(CORA grabs JEFFREY in a big hug.)

CORA

Oh, Jeffrey.

JEFFREY

How are you, Ma? Can we help with anything?

CORA

Oh, thank you, boys. But you know your pa. He won't let me carry anything. And he doesn't like to be helped, so no. Just sit and I'll fix us some lunch.

(BUD, tightly wound, enters with arms full of groceries. He stops when he sees JEFFREY and just stares without seeing, without emotion.)

CLEVE

I don't know about lunch, Ma, but I'm ready for a drink.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I  
Scene Four

SCENE: Interior of Sit-a-Spell Café.

TIME: About 5 a.m. on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day.

AT RISE: TULLIA steps into a tight spot downstage left. She breaks the fourth wall.

TULLIA

All men are stupid! You know is true, yes? In Romania, all men stupid but have same kind of stupid. America have more kind of stupid. You ask, what means more kind of stupid? And I tell you. Like stupid man who come every day into our store and eat our food and sit on ass every day and complain he have no money and how bad is America. And I think, why you sit in our store and eat our food and complain? Why you not stop eating and get off ass? But worse kind of stupid is man who shoot gun in our store. You know! You saw man who shoot our bear and shoot hat of little Mexican. That man very worse kind of stupid!

(Pausing to regain composure.)

Dragos, my husband, I call him Iubi. But even my Iubi, my sweet, is stupid, too. Yes, my husband stupid, but Dragos not worse kind of stupid. You ask, what make Dragos stupid? And I tell you. Dragos is stupid for what he say. Dragos say that having many kind of stupid is what make America great country. Is stupid thing to say, no?

(Spot fades. Lights up on stage. TULLIA exits. BUD sits at table.  
DRAGOS enters, fills Bud's coffee cup.)

DRAGOS

Bud, you hunt alone today?

(Beat as BUD Studies menu.)

You wait for children? You want I come back?

BUD

(Without looking up, listless.)

I'll have a short stack and side of bacon.

DRAGOS

Yes, OK. Pancakes. Bacon.

(DRAGOS exits. BUD sits, trancelike. CLIFFORD and CLAIRE  
enter, take seats.)

CLIFFORD

(Showing deep care throughout scene.)

Pa, why'd you leave without us?

CLAIRE

We love you, Pa. You know that, don't you?

CLIFFORD

I can understand what you're going through?

BUD

(Comes to life, slams fist on table.)

You understand what? That the world's gone to hell?

CLIFFORD

I understand that we live in troubled times. The Lord –

BUD

Quit it! Just quit. Lord's got nothin' to do with anything.

(Aside.)

I'm surrounded by idiots and fruitcakes. That's the problem.

(TULLIA enters, roughly serves Bud.)

TULLIA

Pancakes and bacon for Bud. And what you like to eat?

CLAIRE

Just coffee, please.

TULLIA

Humph. Just the coffee. And you? Just the coffee?

CLIFFORD

I'll have some coffee and you can bring me pancakes and bacon, too. Same as Pa. Thank you.

(TULLIA exits. BUD stares, not eating.)

CLAIRE

We'll have to go higher than usual to get into the snow.

CLIFFORD

What do you think, Pa? Want to get up into the snow?

(Beat. BUD, trance-like, ignores.)

Maybe we should take our usual stands. If the elk are moving, we'll have a good chance.

CLAIRE

Pa, you're not eating and looking kind of pale. If you're not up to hunting today, we've got the rest of the weekend before the season closes. We don't have to go out today.

BUD

My kids turn against me. You expect me to feel like eating?

CLIFFORD

No one's turned against you, Pa. The Lord tests us all.

BUD

Fifty years I run a business. Where's the respect?

CLIFFORD

We all respect you, Pa.

BUD

All these years, no one takes an interest in the business except Cleve, a drunken idiot. Now the fuckin' bank and the lawyers and the government wanna take it all. Bruce and Jeffrey are fruitcakes. They're no help, and I'll never understand 'em.

(Turning to Clifford, pointing finger.)

But you, you coulda showed an interest before now. You could be runnin' the business now you showed any interest.

CLIFFORD

God had a different plan for me, Pa.

BUD

Don't give me that shit. You're just lazy. Would rather –

CLAIRE

I'm interested, Pa.

BUD

Oh, Christ. I'll never understand you, either.

CLAIRE

That's OK. We're family. We don't have to understand each other.

(Beat.)

You don't have to do business with your bank. I've got good relationships with several banks. They have branches in Kalispell or we can deal in Missoula or Great Falls.

BUD

What do you know about dealing with bankers?

CLAIRE

I might surprise you, Pa.

BUD

Mark these words. I'll die before I declare bankruptcy.

CLAIRE

I know, Pa. But bankruptcy's going to hinge on the lawsuit.

BUD

Fuckin' lawyers.

CLAIRE

Are you named personally in the lawsuit or is it just against Bud Hamilton Logging?

(BUD just looks confused.)

That's OK. We'll get this sorted out.

BUD

I can't take this shit. My sons are drunk or lazy or sissies. My daughter's the only one showing any balls.

(Standing to leave.)

I can't take it. I'm huntin' by myself today.

(BUD throws bills on table and exits.)

CLIFFORD

He shouldn't be out in the woods alone.

CLAIRE

Didn't look good, did he?

CLIFFORD

No, he didn't.

CLAIRE

Shall I go after him?

CLIFFORD

With his spirit so troubled, I don't think he'll listen.

(Taking Claire's hand.)

But we can pray for him.

CLIFFORD

(Closing eyes and praying forcefully.)

Heavenly Father! Hear our prayer. Please send your angels to watch over Pa! Keep him safe, oh, Lord. Calm his troubled spirit and work in his heart.

(DRAGOS enters with food, awkwardly waits.)

Lord, we pray you'd intercede in the financial affairs of the business according to your will! We thank you for your love and care for our family and pray a special blessing over this weekend! Amen.



(CLAIRE looks up quickly, CLIFFORD more slowly. They turn to look at Dragos.)

Where Bud go?

DRAGOS

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I  
Scene Five

SCENE: In the woods, outside of Kalispell.

TIME: About 9 a.m. on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day.

AT RISE: CLEVE slowly steps into a tight spot downstage right. He breaks the fourth wall.

CLEVE

Pa likes to say a man makes his own luck. That's not what you wanna hear you're a loser. A loser like me, you depend on luck. Not that you ever have any, but least you can use it, bad luck, I mean, to explain away your problems. It helps to be able to say you had a run of bad luck. Takes away some of the sting. Just don't say that to Pa, that you had some bad luck. He'll tell ya right out you're an idiot, that you only get in life what you deserve. All his sons know better than to tell Pa we had some bad luck because we know he wouldn't hesitate to knock some sense into us for being so stupid. But now, with all this trouble he's havin', I wonder if Pa believes he's getting' what he deserves. I doubt it, and ain't no way he'd ever admit it did he feel that way. What I think is, he's just looking to pin the blame for his problems on someone else. It ain't bad luck. It's the skidder driver. And the banker. And the insurance company. And the government. And the goddamn lawyers. And me. I asked my brother, Bruce, what he thought, and you ain't gonna believe what he told me. Remember now, he's a pretty smart guy, been to medical school and everything. So, what did my smart doctor brother say? He said what was happenin' to Pa was some bad luck! Can you believe that? So, I asked him, just to make sure, did he really believe in luck. And that's when he lost me. He said: "Technically, I believe in probability." And then he tried to 'splain it. But no matter what he said about probability, it sounded to me like he was talking about luck.

(Stage lights up. CLIFFORD and CLAIRE enter, lean rifles against boulder, and sit with the boulder as a backrest.)

CLIFFORD

Whew! That was a workout.

CLAIRE

Yeah. I'm pooped.

CLIFFORD

One clean shot and you dropped him like a rock.

CLAIRE

Pa always said high on the neck if you can get the shot.

CLIFFORD

Really a nice bull. Eight hundred pounds if an ounce.

CLAIRE

The herd's moving. A little rest and then I say we cross to the other side of the ridge and give you another chance.

CLIFFORD

It's a long hike. We'll have to skirt this fenced off range. If we drop one, it's going to be a lot to pack out.

CLAIRE

Might be a mile or two. Even if we quarter it, we'll need a couple of trips on steep ground. I'm up for it if you are.

(CLAIRE gets sandwiches from a pack and hands one to Clifford.)

CLIFFORD

Oh, thanks. I guess I am hungry already.

(CLAIRE takes a bite immediately, but CLIFFORD bows his head.  
CLAIRE notices and stops chewing until he looks up.)

CLIFFORD

I'm going to need to get in better shape. Can't be huffing and puffing when I'm doing this kind of stuff on camera.

CLAIRE

You must be so excited. Are you ready for the first show?

CLIFFORD

Oh, yeah. We've scripted and filmed several video segments, and I'll be in the studio Saturday morning to film the intro and narration. God willing, our first episode will air Sunday afternoon.

CLAIRE

I'll bet Julie and the kids will be excited to see you on television. What time are they coming this afternoon? Seems like I haven't seen them forever.

CLIFFORD

Uh, they're not going to make it this year.

CLAIRE

What?! Why not? Is someone sick?

CLIFFORD

No. Julie's just been stressed out a lot lately. And with Pa and Cleve and Bruce and Jeffrey all in the same house...

CLAIRE

Does Ma know? I thought she's planning on everyone. She even invited Dragos and Tullia.

CLIFFORD

Going to be upset, isn't she? I should have told her.

CLAIRE

Is everything OK? Between you and Julie, I mean?

CLIFFORD

Oh, yeah, things are fine, I guess. You know, sometimes I guess it's not easy to be a pastor's wife. I think maybe sometimes Julie wishes I was still in sales.

CLAIRE

Must be lots of pressure. Well, I can't believe I won't see a single niece or nephew this Thanksgiving.

(CLEVE enters staggering and swinging a rifle from side to side.  
He stops and when his siblings are in his sights.)

CLIFFORD

(Cowering for cover.)

Cleve! What are you doing?

(CLEVE lowers his rifle, tries to focus, then laughs uncontrollably.  
CLAIRE and CLIFFORD rush to him as he raises and drains a  
flask. CLIFFORD grabs the rifle, and CLAIRE grabs the flask.)

CLEVE

I'm sorry. Did I give you a start?

CLIFFORD

(Checking the rifle chamber.)

It's not loaded.

CLAIRE

(Turning flask upside down.)

No, but he is.

(CLIFFORD and CLAIRE guide CLEVE to sit between them.)

CLIFFORD

What are you doing out here?

CLEVE

Lookin' for you. Everyone left without me this mornin'.

CLAIRE

You know better than to be mixing guns and alcohol.

CLEVE

(Laughs uncontrollably.)

Guns and alcohol...

(Suddenly serious, grabs Claire's arm.)

I couldn't find my bullets.

CLIFFORD

Thank you, Lord.

CLAIRE

(Pouring coffee from a thermos.)

Here you go. Drink this.

(CLEVE unsteadily takes cup.)

What are we going to do with you, Cleve?

CLEVE

Take me huntin'. I ain't shot nothin' in years. Pa never lets me go with him. Where is Pa, anyway, the old bastard.

CLIFFORD

Cleve, please show some respect.

CLEVE

Respect? Ha!

CLIFFORD

Yes, respect. The Scripture says to honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long.

CLEVE

What makes you think I want long days, Bro?

(Goofy laugh.)

You got anything for longer nights?

CLIFFORD

It's sad when you bring shame to the family, Cleve, but more than that. Your bad behavior can impact God's work.

(CLEVE goes from goofy to sad drunk.)

CLIFFORD

Don't you see, Cleve? That's what Satan's trying to do.

(CLEVE hands coffee to CLAIRE, releases an agonizing groan.  
CLAIRE sets coffee aside as CLEVE appears to be losing it.)

CLIFFORD

Satan could use you to get to me, to cause a scandal that will prevent my TV show from reaching lost souls.

CLEVE

(Begins sobbing uncontrollably.)

I'm so sorry, Clifford. Please don't hate me.

CLAIRE

Hey, hey. Nobody hates you, Cleve. And it's not about Satan. It's about you. You're hurting yourself, and if you don't get some help, you're going to end up hurting someone else.

CLEVE

(Still crying.)

I can't stop drinkin'. I keep tryin', but I can't stop.

CLIFFORD

(Softens approach.)

God can help you stop.

CLEVE

Really? Can He get me a new job? Can He help me find a woman? Can he really help me stop drinkin'? Tomorrow?

CLIFFORD

He's God, Cleve. He created the universe. Of course, He can help you.

CLAIRE

I'm sure God can help, and if you're really ready to make changes, I'm sure God will want you to get treatment.

CLEVE

Like what? You mean detox?

CLAIRE

When you're really ready to stop drinking, you need to do whatever it takes.

CLEVE

(Staggers to feet, shuffles away.)

Ooooh. Gotta puke.

(CLAIRE moves to hold him up. CLEVE gags a few times before straightening up and giving Claire a goofy grin.)

CLEVE (Cont.)

False alarm. Better now.

(CLAIRE helps Cleve return. CLEVE wipes nose on sleeve.)

Let me ask ya somethin', Bro. You got anyone in your church could give me a job? I can't keep workin' for Pa.

CLIFFORD

I can help you find God. And He can help you find a job.

CLAIRE

There's work out there if you're sober, Cleve.

(Again, handing him the coffee.)

And that's the first thing. If you get sober, you'll be able to work through your other problems.

CLEVE

And find a woman?

CLAIRE

Sure.

CLEVE

I had a woman, you know.

CLAIRE

Did you?

CLEVE

Pretty, too. Young and pretty.

CLAIRE

I didn't know.

(CLIFFORD impatient, rises, paces.)

CLEVE

Don't remember her name.

CLAIRE

It'll come back to you.

CLEVE

Drivin' to Whitefish, picked her up.

CLIFFORD

Picked her up?

CLEVE

Hitchin' a ride, and she was wearin', you know, the real short pants that showed off her butt.

CLIFFORD

We don't need to hear the details, Cleve.

CLEVE

(Knowing grin to Claire.)

Boobies comin' outta her halter top.

CLAIRE

(Affectionately.)

Sounds like a winner.

CLEVE

What I thought! Offered her a ride, and we ended up back at my trailer.

CLIFFORD

OK, Cleve.

CLEVE

She stayed a week.

CLAIRE

Really? Then what happened?

CLEVE

Amber! Her name was Amber!

CLAIRE

Pretty name.

CLEVE

Sex was great.

CLIFFORD

OK, Cleve. Finish the coffee so we can get going.

CLEVE

She really got inside my head, you know?

CLAIRE

Yes.



CLEVE

(Pounding chest with his fist.)

But she never got in here.

CLIFFORD

She wasn't part of God's plan for you.

CLEVE

Yeah. I guess. I didn't know until she left. Cleaned out my checking account and stole my underwear.

CLAIRE

Your underwear?!

CLEVE

Liked to sleep in my boxers.

CLIFFORD

Are you done with that coffee, yet?

(CLAIRE begins to gathers stuff.)

CLEVE

You go on ahead. I gotta take a piss.

CLAIRE

Are you going to be OK?

CLEVE

(Straightens himself, looks resolute.)

You're a good sister.

CLAIRE

(Giving a quick embrace.)

I love you, Cleve. Are you going to be OK?

CLEVE

Yeah, fine. Go on ahead.

CLAIRE

You can't drive, you know? Did you park your truck by ours?

CLEVE

(Unsure, unconvincing.)

Yeah, I think so.

(CLAIRE turns and exits with Clifford. CLEVE fumbles with clothes and zipper.)

CLEVE

Oh, oh, oooh! I gotta piss!

(CLEVE turns his back and moves up to fence adjacent to sign that prominently indicates the fence is electrified. We hear the sound of him relieving himself.)

CLEVE

Aaaaah...

(A bright flash and sparks from the fence. All lights immediately go dark as CLEVE screams in agony.)

Eeeaaaayyy!

(CURTAIN)

(END OF ACT I)

ACT II  
Scene One

SCENE: Living room, home of Bud and Cora.

TIME: About 3 p.m. on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day.

AT RISE: BUD slowly steps into a tight spot downstage right. He breaks the fourth wall, surveys audience, shakes his head.

BUD

For every person who shows a lick of common sense, there must be a hunnerd who are just plain stupid. I'm talkin' really goddamn stupid. And most stupid people have no idea how goddamn stupid they really are. Oh, you want an example? OK. Anyone who is patient is stupid! That's right. Patience is not a virtue. Patience is stupidity! Now, it might be disguised as laziness – as in some lazy bastard who uses patience as an excuse to procrastinate and not get off his fat ass and do somethin'. Or, it might reveal itself as fear – as in some chickenshit standin' in the buffet line using patience as an excuse to not speak up and tell the asshole who's holdin' up the line to make a goddamn decision, to stop staring at the food, contemplatin', for God's sake. Just stick a fork in somethin', throw it on your plate, and move on! What I'm sayin', patience is stupidity but often served up as a value meal with a large side of laziness or chickenshitness. At its root, though, patience is just stupidity. Listen, all progress in his world is due to impatient people. Smart people know that. It's the impatient people who don't tolerate the status quo who actually improve things. But all the goddamn stupid people wanna drive in the left lane and slow down the smarter impatient people who are trying to get shit done. And then those same stupid slow-driving patient fuckers look at you like you're the stupid one when you blow by them on the right side flippin' 'em off. Stupid people think they're being noble by being patient. Goddamn stupidity. I could give you lots more examples. Don't get me started. It's a shitty world we live in with all the stupid people, and the one thing that can keep a man goin' is knowin' that at least his kids aren't stupid, too. Knowin' that you passed along some of your common sense to your kids, that's a good feelin'. But if you've got stupid kids... you just wanna shoot yourself.

(BUD exits as stage lights up. BRUCE and JEFFREY play  
Scrabble, brandy snifters nearby.)

JEFFREY

You think I should go with Clifford?

BRUCE

Go where?

JEFFREY

Watch the filming of his TV show on Saturday. He invited me.

BRUCE

Sure. Why wouldn't you go?

JEFFREY

I've got to drive to Missoula Saturday evening and I don't want to spend my last day in Kalispell with Clifford. He drives me nuts.

BRUCE

I think it's a good sign he invited you. He's reaching out.

JEFFREY

Oh, yeah, he's always reaching out. And when I see him on camera making a plea for donations, reaching out to take viewers' money, I'll probably say something I'll regret.

BRUCE

I don't think it'll be like that. The way he described it, it's more of an outdoors show than typical televangelism.

JEFFREY

You're such a peacemaker, Bruce. Why don't you go along, too? You can help keep me in line.

BRUCE

No, he didn't invite me. Besides, Saturday might be the best day for me to spend time with Pa.

JEFFREY

Oh, my God, spending time with Pa. That is definitely not an option for me. We really do have limited choices when we come home to Kalispell, don't we?

BRUCE

I don't mind coming back. It'll always be home.

JEFFREY

Oh, please. Other than drinking brandy and playing board games with you, it's holiday hell. Let's see, what are my other options? Of course, there's always the option of hunting with my family, risking my life to strengthen our kinship while we're out massacring local wildlife.

BRUCE

You're so dramatic about everything.

JEFFREY

And you're so conciliatory.

BRUCE

Why did you come home if not to spend time with family?

JEFFREY

I guess I keep hoping that one of these times I'll come home and things will be different.

BRUCE

So, what do you hope will be different?

JEFFREY

Well, let's see. I think it would be just swell if Pa didn't greet us with gunfire and actually showed a little tolerance. And wouldn't it be great if Ma was able to express an independent thought? And it would be so peachy if Cleve's breath didn't singe my nose hairs. And, boy, wouldn't it just complete the picture if Clifford would take a big dump to expel that spiritual stick he's got up his arse?

BRUCE

So, you don't really want to change things, you want to change people. And how would you change me?

JEFFREY

I'd increase your verbal skills so you could play Scrabble competitively.

BRUCE

That's it?

JEFFREY

Well, yeah, Bruce. Maybe then you'd even be able to use alliteration effectively to create your new ad campaign.

(CORA enters from the kitchen.)

CORA

Any sign of Pa and the other kids? They're usually back by now.

BRUCE

Haven't heard them pull in, Ma.

JEFFREY

Is that a good sign for them or for the local fauna?

CORA

What do you mean, Honey?

JEFFREY

Do you think they're later than usual because they're still hunting or do you think it's because they're still removing guts from carcasses?

CORA

Well, Honey, I guess I don't know. What can I bring you boys to eat?

JEFFREY

I'm still full from lunch, Ma.

CORA

You hardly ate a thing. How about a piece of pie to hold you until dinner?

JEFFREY

Thanks, Ma, but I think I'll wait until later this evening for the pie.

CORA

(Crestfallen, turns to Bruce.)

Bruce? Can I get you a piece of pie?

Bruce

Uh, sure, Ma, I guess, if you make it a real small piece.

(CORA, delighted, scurries toward kitchen as there's a knock.)

CORA

Oh! They must be home!

(CORA rushes, admits TULLIA and DRAGOS. They bear dishes.)

CORA

Tullia! Dragos! Please come in. You can bring those dishes right to the kitchen.

(TULLIA and DRAGOS follow Cora nodding greetings as they pass. DRAGOS quickly reappears, hangs coats on coatrack.)

BRUCE

Would you like to join us in a game of Scrabble, Dragos?

JEFFREY

(Rising to pour brandy.)

Bruce, where are your manners? It's impolite to offer Scrabble before liquor.

(Handing brandy to Dragos.)

Here you are, sir. Enjoy.

DRAGOS

Very kind. Thank you.

(As ALL ad lib cheers, CLIFFORD and CLAIRE enter assisting CLEVE who hobbles awkwardly hunched over, holding his crotch, and moaning.)

BRUCE

Cleve, what's wrong?

(Awkward pause as CLIFFORD and CLAIRE exchange looks.)

Well?

CLAIRE

He wouldn't let us see.

BRUCE

See what? Come on! Someone tell me what happened!

CLEVE

I fried my wiener!

BRUCE

You what?!

CLEVE

It really hurts, Bro.

BRUCE

OK. Let's get you upstairs.

(BRUCE helps CLEVE up stairs to exit.)

JEFFREY

Jesus. What happened?

CLIFFORD

Praying for an answer or using the Lord's name in vain?

JEFFREY

Oh, no, not that... Claire?

CLAIRE

I think he peed on an electric fence.

JEFFREY

(Shock turns to amusement, giggling.)

Are you shitting me? He pissed on an electric fence?

JEFFREY

Are you following any of this?

DRAGOS

Maybe Cleve drink too much and get hurt on the pută.

JEFFREY

Pută?!

(JEFFREY guffaws. DRAGOS and CLAIRE chuckle but sober up when BRUCE appears at the top of the stairs.)

Well, what's the diagnosis?

BRUCE

He's got a nasty burn. I can dress the wound –

JEFFREY

Happy Thanksgiving, Bruce, and welcome home! Now, go dress your brother's pută!

BRUCE

(Grabs brandy and turns to head back up the stairs.)

I'll watch him tonight and get him into a urologist tomorrow. I doubt they'd do much more than dress the wound if we took him into the ER on Thanksgiving.

JEFFREY

Is that for you or for Cleve?

(BRUCE exits. The phone rings. JEFFREY answers chuckling.)

JEFFREY

Hello. You've reached the Hamilton residence.

(Chokes, stops giggling.)

Yes, this is his son, Jeffrey... Yes. I understand. We'll be right there. Thank you.

(JEFFREY hangs up as CORA and TULLIA enter.)

CORA

Sounds like everyone is having a good time. Who was that on the phone, Dear?

(JEFFREY hesitates, looks around somberly, and settles on Cora.)

JEFFREY

That was the sheriff's office. Pa was found in the woods and has been taken to the hospital.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)



ACT II  
Scene Two

SCENE: Living room, home of Bud and Cora.

TIME: About midnight on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day.

AT RISE: CLAIRE steps into a tight spot downstage left. She breaks the fourth wall.

CLAIRE

Every child must daydream about becoming invisible. Who hasn't, as a kid, wished for invisibility while sneaking into the parlor to listen in on adult conversation? To snap a finger and instantly disappear to avoid embarrassment? And hasn't every pimple-faced adolescent boy fantasized about secretly slipping into the girls' locker room for a peek? When I was a kid, I also wished for invisibility, but it went much deeper than whimsical daydreams or carnal curiosity. My longing for invisibility was deep and persistent and driven by a need to escape. To escape my parent's unfair expectations. To escape their overbearing scrutiny. To escape their unreasonable goddamn standards that only applied to me and to none of my dear spineless brothers. If I was invisible, maybe instead of washing dishes I could tag along with Pa when he went fishing or hunting. Maybe I could escape the laundry to sneak a ride with him in the cab of a truck hauling logs to the mill. I might be able to shadow him in the woods as he supervised the logging crew that brought those tall Douglas firs crashing to earth. That's where I wanted to be, giving orders in the woods with Pa, not in the kitchen serving time with Ma. Yeah, I knew what I wanted. And by God, I got it. I run my own business. By God, I run it! But it's been a high price to pay. Yeah. Being invisible to my family is one high fucking price to pay.

(Stage lights up. TULLIA dozing on sofa is startled by sound of slamming car doors. She jumps, looks at watch, exits to kitchen, and quickly returns to set plate of sandwiches on coffee table. CLAIRE and JEFFREY somberly enter, hang coats, and, without a word of greeting, find seats.)

TULLIA

And Bud? How is he?

CLAIRE

Well, he's still alive.

TULLIA

Good, good! Alive.

(Beat.)

Turkey sandwiches. And coffee brewing in kitchen.

JEFFREY

Thanks. A turkey sandwich sounds pretty good. You hungry?

(CLAIRE shrugs. Neither take sandwich.)

TULLIA

You need anything more before I am going home?

CLAIRE

Oh, no thank you, Tullia. You've been a dear.

TULLIA

Food is put away in kitchen, and Dragos hang elk meat from your shooting in shed.

CLAIRE

You're so kind. Please thank Dragos for us.

TULLIA

(Donning coat.)

Call if you need anything when others are coming home.

CLAIRE

We will.

(CLAIRE rises, hugs TULLIA, who then exits. CLAIRE paces.)

JEFFREY

Some Thanksgiving.

CLAIRE

Why did we have to leave? We should have stayed.

JEFFREY

Stayed? And slept where?

CLAIRE

How can you think about sleeping?

JEFFREY

How can you not? I'm still on East Coast time.

CLAIRE

I wish Bruce was here.

JEFFREY

He should be back soon, but what's he going to do?

CLAIRE

He's a doctor. Maybe, I don't know, maybe –

JEFFREY

Come on, Claire. Treating stroke victims isn't exactly Bruce's specialty. He'd be just the man if we were talking about a rhinoplasty procedure gone awry or a derailed dermabrasion treatment. But stroke?

CLAIRE

He knows more about stroke than the rest of us put together. Maybe they didn't tell us everything at the hospital. You know, to go easy on Ma. Maybe Bruce can tell us more.

JEFFREY

Maybe. Uh... my return flight's scheduled for Sunday.

CLAIRE

What are you saying? You're going to leave? Really? What if there's no change? He could still be in a coma!

JEFFREY

He could be. I know. And if that's the case, I don't see any reason to stick around.

CLAIRE

But he could come out of the coma!

JEFFREY

Even better, but I can't stay in Kalispell waiting on Pa to come out of his coma or to, well, you know.

CLAIRE

Oh, my God, Jeffrey. I never figured you to be so heartless.

JEFFREY

I'm not heartless, just pragmatic. We have to face the fact that Pa's probably never going to recover. Even if he does regain consciousness, he's probably going to be unable to speak, be at least partially paralyzed. If test results –

CLAIRE

Please! At least we can count on Clifford to be here for us.

JEFFREY

Clifford?! Clifford's nothing but a used car salesman in the guise of a clergyman. Oh, yeah, real dependable.

CLAIRE

He's there right now with Ma, isn't he? Holding her hand. Praying with her. Being a son.

JEFFREY

Claire, I'm not trying to be a prick. I just really don't know what I can do.

CLAIRE

You can start by acting like you care.

JEFFREY

OK. Maybe's there something I can do to help out with Pa's business situation.

CLAIRE

God, you just don't get it, do you, Jeffrey? I can handle the business situation. That's the easy stuff.

JEFFREY

Easy? Really?

(BRUCE enters followed by CLEVE who shuffles slowly. BRUCE hangs coats.)

CLAIRE

Oh, God! You're back! Is there any new information?

CLEVE

It's bandaged. Makes a nice bulge in my pants but still hurts like hell.

CLAIRE

No, I mean with Pa. Bruce?

BRUCE

Ma was asleep on a cot in Pa's room. I checked in on them after Cleve had his... after his examination.

CLAIRE

What about Pa?

BRUCE

Clifford tried to convince the staff to put a cot in the room for him. They said he had to stay in the waiting room.

CLAIRE

What about Pa?!

BRUCE

Pa's the same. We'll know more tomorrow.

CLAIRE

What the doctor said about –

BRUCE

Claire. We need to help Ma prepare for the worst. We don't know how long his brain was starved for blood. I don't think Pa would want to be kept alive artificially.

CLAIRE

Oh, God.

BRUCE

Clifford's already weighed in on the subject, doesn't want to remove life support under any circumstances.

CLAIRE

What?! You're already talking about removing life support?

BRUCE

We probably should talk about it before Jeffrey and I leave.

CLAIRE

Oh, my God. You're planning to leave, too?

JEFFREY

See? It's not just me.

BRUCE

Claire, I'll be here as long as it makes sense – as long as I'm needed – and we're going to know lots more tomorrow. Let's wait for test results and see what the doctor says.

CLEVE

What I think, when Pa does wake up and sees that immigrant doctor been takin' care a him, his head's jes gonna splode anyway. Might as well pull the plug now, save him the pain.

JEFFREY

You don't know he's an immigrant.

CLEVE

Like hell! You sayin' doctor Habeeeeeb ain't an A-rab? Christ, just look around that hospital it's easy to see what's happenin'. Americans gettin' squeezed in the middle. Nurses, mostly in the middle. Ones on the bottom and ones at the top are foreigners.

JEFFREY

Jesus, Cleve.

CLEVE

On the bottom, it's Mexicans moppin' the floors. Or, go in the cafeteria and just see who's ringin' up your burger and fries. Mexicans. Ones at the top are the Asians and A-rabs. Mosta the doctors. One who bandaged my dick had slanty eyes.

JEFFREY

Slanty eyes? Oh, shit! What if he got it crooked? What if your dick's misaligned?!

CLEVE

Dick alignment ain't nothin' to joke about!

BRUCE

I'll see an attorney tomorrow to get joint power of attorney with Ma to take care of the business.

CLAIRE

Like hell you will!

(Beat, then calmer but very firm.)

Look, I'm just worried about Ma, that her sons aren't going to be here for her.

(Goes on the attack while CLEVE pours another drink.)

You should hear her go on about her sons. You boys mean the world to her. She's going to need you for moral support, no matter what happens with Pa. As far as the business goes, god damn it, just let me take care of things! I'm the one should have power of attorney.

(BRUCE and JEFFREY shrink from unfamiliar aggression.)

(CLEVE slams drink and stiffens his back.)

I'm sorry. You know I love you, but the fact is, you don't know shit about running a logging business.

CLEVE

Yeah? Well what about me? I'm the only one who actually works in the business.

(An awkward silence with no response. CLEVE wags head, pours another drink.)

BRUCE

Hold on, Cleve. You can't be mixing alcohol with your pain medication.

(CLEVE flips him off, slams drink, takes a moment to focus.)

CLEVE

I see what's goin' on. You think a guy with a burnt wiener can't handle the business side a things. Shiiit.

(CLEVE shuffles unsteadily to couch, sits heavily, closes eyes.)

JEFFREY

Jesus.

BRUCE

He'll be OK. Look. About the business, Claire you might be right. But I think it's got to be a family decision. We need Clifford here. I'll do whatever's best for Ma and Pa.

CLAIRE

(Choking up, biting her lip.)

I know.

JEFFREY

I don't have an opinion other than to keep...

(Nods to Cleve.)

And Clifford from handling the money.

CLAIRE

What money?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II  
Scene Three

SCENE: TV Studio.

TIME: About 9 a.m. on Saturday, Thanksgiving Weekend.

AT RISE: JEFFREY slowly steps into a tight spot downstage right. He breaks the fourth wall.

JEFFREY

I love living in New York City. I love the theater and all the other arts. I love the architecture and the park and even the subways. I love the energy of the place! Most of all, I love the diversity, that a person can be himself without standing out. In some places, that's not so easy. I remember standing on a platform in Asia waiting on a train. Thinking about it, I can still feel all the eyes on me. Not that anyone was being rude or overtly staring. But still, I felt so conspicuous. That's how I feel in Kalispell – conspicuous. And the thing is, I don't even know if the feeling is justified. Are people really looking at me? And even if they are, why should it bother me? Shouldn't a man be secure enough in who he is that he's not concerned about what others are thinking? I can't imagine that Pa would ever care what others are thinking. You know, he's never really been anywhere outside of Western Montana, but if he was to travel, I somehow think he'd not give a second thought about feeling conspicuous. He'd go to Asia and stand there on the train platform in his boots, wearing his cowboy hat, and chewing his tobacco and not give a rat's ass about what others were thinking. Hell, I think he'd actually relish the moment because rather than feeling conspicuous, he'd somehow feel superior. And that drives me crazy because as much as I want to feel as comfortable in my own skin as he feels comfortable in his, I don't want to be an arse. It's a fine line to walk, isn't it? Veer one direction and you lack self-assurance and become nervous and timid. Veer the other direction and you become a self-righteous, arrogant arse. That might even be justified if the world was really black and white. But it's not. It's ill-defined. It's messy. It's gray. Exactly how I feel – ill-defined, messy, and gray. How does a gray man define himself in a gray world?

(Stage lights up on TV studio as JEFFREY exits spot. TIFFANY sits at desk arranging notes. CLIFFORD enters followed by JEFFREY and CLEVE, who walks gingerly and occasionally cringes and touches his crotch. As the brothers enter, TIFFANY jumps up to greet them. CLIFFORD ad libs introductions.)

TIFFANY

(Fawning over Clifford.)

This is, like, so exciting. Are you ready for make-up?

CLIFFORD

Uh, sure.



(TIFFANY leads CLIFFORD by hand to the green room. She turns before entering.)

TIFFANY

Can you boys give us a few minutes? The script is on the desk there if you'd like to read it over.

(TIFFANY and CLIFFORD enter the green room. Green room goes dark. CLEVE takes a seat at the desk and begins preening for an imaginary broadcast.)

CLEVE

Hey, Bro, pretend you're the cameraman and I'll read.

JEFFREY

Yeah, OK. Break a leg, Bro. And action!

CLEVE

Welcome to the inaug... inaug... shiiit.

(Momentarily studies script, composes himself.)

Welcome to the inaugural edition of God, Geese, and Grizzlies, the show that brings the wonder of God's handiwork to sportsmen of Montana. I'm your host, Pastor -

(Pausing to give camera a jaunty look.)

I'm your host, Cleve, The Lightning Rod, Hamilton. Let's kick off our first show with a nostalgic look back at outdoor sporting traditions in Montana, one of the most beautiful places in all of God's glorious creation.

(Lights up in green room as studio goes dark. CLIFFORD is seated, wearing a tissue bib, and looking into TIFFANY'S eyes as she fusses with make-up.)

TIFFANY

You don't really need much. You have, like, such a beautiful complexion.

CLIFFORD

Really?

TIFFANY

Oh, yeah. It's a complexion to, like, die for.

CLIFFORD

You're very sweet.

TIFFANY

(Cradling his face in her hands.)

I think you're the one who's sweet, Mr. Hamilton.

CLIFFORD

Call me Pastor Clifford.

TIFFANY

It's, like, such a privilege to work with you, Pastor Clifford.

CLIFFORD

(Looking into her eyes, husky voice.)

I, uh, I like working with you, too, Tiffany.

(CLIFFORD and TIFFANY stare at each other as green room goes dark and lights go up in studio.)

CLEVE

In future editions of God, Geese, and Grizzlies we'll be learning tips for hunting, angling, and trapping all types of fish and game that abound here in Montana. In our next two shows we'll pay tribute to the title of our program: God, Geese, and Grizzlies.

(CLEVE fumbles, drops script. He groans and tenderly touches his crotch as he bends over to retrieve.)

CLEVE

Next week we'll get up close and personal with majestic, migrating Canadian geese. For the goose hunters out there, we'll demonstrate methods for setting decoys, calling, and fundamental techniques for bringing down the mighty fowl. And then, two weeks from now, we'll have a very special show.

(Studies script, grows big smile, and loses anchorman persona.)

This is awesome!

(Checks himself, regains persona.)

I'll be placing great trust in the Lord as I travel to grizzly country and we see firsthand those magnificent and most dangerous of all North American animals.

(Lights down on studio, up in green room. TIFFANY straddles CLIFFORD; they embrace, grope, and kiss passionately. TIFFANY moves hips, dry-humping.)

TIFFANY

(Interrupting kiss, looks down.)

Ooooh, Pastor Clifford! I can tell you're, like, so happy to work with me! I've always wanted to make it with, like, a TV star!

(CLIFFORD moans as lights go down on green room and up in studio. CLEVE paces. JEFFREY sits at desk.)

CLEVE

You guys about ready in there? Come on! When we gonna start filmin'?

(CLIFFORD and TIFFANY emerge, looking sheepish and avoiding eye contact.)

CLEVE

What's with the make-up? You 'sposed to be wearing lipstick?

(TIFFANY wipes CLIFFORD'S mouth with a tissue. He quickly takes a seat behind desk. CLEVE and JEFFREY move to side out of the camera's field of view.)

TIFFANY

(Addressing Cleve and Jeffrey.)

OK. You can stay here in the studio as long as you're absolutely quiet during the filming.

(Addressing Clifford.)

Are you ready?

(CLIFFORD nods, composes himself. TIFFANY takes position at the camera.)

TIFFANY

OK, Pastor Clifford. Action.

CLIFFORD

(Looks up and smiles into the camera.)

Welcome to the inaugural edition of God, Geese, and Grizzlies, the show that brings the wonder of God's handiwork to the sportsmen of Montana. I'm your host, Pastor Clifford Hamilton.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II  
Scene Four

SCENE: Living room, home of Bud and Cora.

TIME: About 8 p.m. on Saturday, Thanksgiving Weekend.

AT RISE: BUD hobbles with a cane into tight spot downstage left. He's hunch over but speaks clearly as he breaks the fourth wall.

BUD

Everyone thinks you're gone. But you're not. Everyone thinks you can't hear. That you can't see. That you can't feel. But they're all full of shit. If living is hearing, seeing, and feeling, then I was never more alive than when I was there in that hospital bed, eyes closed and still as a corpse, tubes snakin' in and outta me, and everyone standin' around thinkin' I was gone. But hell no, I wasn't gone. I was there! I heard everything. I saw everything. And, by God, I felt everything. My whole life I spent trying to build something, something more than a business or a fortune or even some kinda legacy. That's what everyone thinks, that when you're workin' out in the woods before dark every day of your life, bustin' your ass, that you must really be driven to make some money. But that's all bullshit. What I busted my ass to build was a reputation. If a man's got a good reputation, he's got everything. What I mean by that is that people look up to you, give you your due. That people know you by your principles. Know you're not some kinda goddamn pussy can't make up his mind what's right or wrong. That's the kinda reputation I worked for. And what I learned there in that hospital bed is that I'd done better than I'd thought. I learned I had my kids' respect, and it surprised me. Know what really surprised me? It didn't mean as much as I thought, havin' the kids' respect. Wasn't enough. I had their respect, but I didn't have... Shit, not so easy to say this. What I didn't have was their love. And that's what hit me there in that hospital bed with my kids standin' around lookin' at me with that goddamn pity in their eyes. I had their respect but I didn't have their love. And, by God, that hurt like hell.

(Lights up on empty living room. CLEVE enters front door and looks around, peers into kitchen, yells to upstairs.)

CLEVE

Anyone home? ...Shit.

(CLEVE pours a drink, slams it, pours another. CORA enters carrying a valise. She gives startled gasp when she sees Cleve.)

CORA

Oh, my, you startled me.

CLEVE

Sorry, Ma. I was jes lookin' for ya.

CORA

I just came home to get a few things and I need to get right back to the hospital. Your brothers and sister were getting ready to leave, and I don't want Pa left alone.

CLEVE

(Slams second drink. Pours another.)

Has he said anything?

CORA

The doctor said it could take a few days, but he spoke to me with his eyes and squeezed my hand.

CLEVE

That's real good, Ma. Least he's awake.

CORA

It's a miracle. What we've been praying for.

(She weeps softly, puts suitcase down, and hugs CLEVE.)

He's a good man, Cleve.

CLEVE

Tough. He's tough.

(CORA heads upstairs with suitcase.)

CLEVE

Ma, I was wondering could we talk before you head back to the hospital.

CORA

What do you need, Dear?

CLEVE

(Slams third drink.)

What the others are sayin', is it true?

CORA

What are they saying, Dear?

CLEVE

'Bout Claire takin' over the business.

CORA

I don't know. That will be Pa's decision.

Cleve

God damn it, Ma! They can't do that to me.

CORA

Oh, Cleve.

(She attempts another hug but is shunned.)

Maybe our prayers about the business are being answered. I had no idea Claire's business had grown so big, that she'd accomplished so much. None of us did.

CLEVE

Construction ain't the same as loggin'.

CORA

It's not? Oh, well, I guess I don't know. But maybe you'll find it easier to work for Claire than for Pa.

(CORA embraces CLEVE. He reluctantly allows it. CORA heads upstairs.)

CLEVE

(Pours another drink, sits, looks around, exhales in resignation.)

Well fuck it. Just fuck it.

(CLAIRE, BRUCE, and JEFFREY enter in good spirits, hang coats, and find seats. CLEVE shows signs of alcohol.)

BRUCE

Hey, have you seen Pa today? You know he's awake?

CLEVE

Said anything, yet?

JEFFREY

I'll give it to you, Cleve. First and only words out of his mouth were, "Fuckin' A-rab." He didn't much like that doctor. You called it.

CLEVE

(Trying to focus.)

Guess he's gonna be OK, then. Hey, where's Clifford? Toll me I could go out with the film crew.

(Drunken laugh.)

Goddamn geese and grizzlies.

CLAIRE

Cleve, did you know Clifford and Julie were having problems?

CLEVE

What problems?

CLAIRE

Julie left him this afternoon. She took the kids and moved in with her parents.

CLEVE

(Slams fourth drink.)

No shit? Hmmph.

JEFFREY

That's it? Your brother's splitting up with his wife, and it's just "no shit?"

CLEVE

Don't remember anybody sheddin' tears when Amber left me.

JEFFREY

Who's Amber?

CLAIRE

That reminds me. While I was waiting at the hospital, I wrote a song about you and Amber. It's written for your voice, but I sang and recorded it to my phone.

CLEVE

No shit?

JEFFREY

Who's Amber?

CLEVE

Sing it for me.

CORA

(Entering from bedroom with valise.)

Oh, you're back so soon. Is Clifford still there with Pa?

CLEVE

(Amused and slurring.)

Hey, Ma, didcha know 'bout Julie 'n' Clifford?

CORA

What's that, Dear?

CLAIRE

Pa's started to speak.

CORA

(Staggers, drops valise, sobs of joy.)

Speak?! Oh, he's speaking!

BRUCE

It's still early, Ma, and difficult for him, but, yes, he was able to say a couple of words before we left.

CORA

Oh, did he ask for me? What did he say?

JEFFREY

Uh, he only managed a few words, Ma. He mentioned something about the doctor.

CORA

Oh, I should have been there. Did he ask for me?

JEFFREY

Uh, yeah, Ma, he was asking for you.

CORA

(Picks up valise, bustles to door.)

I'm going to get back right away.

JEFFREY

Give me a hug before you leave, Ma. I've got to get going.

(CORA drops valise to embrace JEFFREY.)

CORA

It meant so much to have you here, Jeffrey. I wish you didn't have to leave so soon.

JEFFREY

I know.

CORA

Please give our love to Carol and the children.

JEFFREY

I will, Ma. You take good care of Pa.

(CORA bites lip, nods, exits.)

JEFFREY

Well, gang, I've got an early flight out of Missoula.

CLEVE

Damn it, Bro, you can't leave before you hear Claire's song.



CLAIRE

That's OK, Cleve. It's not really ready for prime time.

CLEVE

(Drunken laugh.)

Prime time.

JEFFREY

No, that's OK. I can stay for the song.

CLAIRE

(With a shrug, retrieves phone and plugs into speakers.)

OK. Here it is – *Never Got Into My Heart* – in the words of Cleve Hamilton.

(CLAIRE hits play. CLEVE rocks side to side with hand gestures.)

Verse 1

Tuesday, it was rainin'  
I was down on my luck  
Slow rollin' to Whitefish  
In that old Chevy truck  
Lookin' for some action  
God, I needed a drink  
She posed with her thumb out  
Leavin' no time to think

(CLEVE'S more animated. Mouths lyrics a beat behind.)

Chorus

She got into my truck, got into my head  
Broke down my defenses, got into my bed  
She rode me so hard, that I thought I was dead  
But she never, no she never got into my heart

(CLEVE rises, dances, a mix of disco and line dancing.)

Verse 2

She leaned 'gainst a signpost  
And the sign said to yield  
Didn't see I was set up  
Devil lookin' to deal  
I whipped it on over  
And threw open the door  
"Whatcha needin, sweet babe?"  
"More," she whispered, "just more."  
Repeat chorus

(CLEVE recruits brothers. BRUCE and JEFFREY mix it up with dance moves and over-the-top hamming.)

Verse 3

More, yeah, that's what she got  
 More than I had to give  
 She drank my Budweiser  
 Somethin' I cain't forgive  
 Insult and injury  
 No, I ain't got no prayer  
 She left with no warnin'  
 Takin' my underwear  
 Repeat chorus

(CLEVE collapses on the floor laughing. BRUCE and JEFFREY, also laughing, help him to the sofa. CLIFFORD enters, distraught.)

CLAIRE

Clifford! Are you OK?

(CLIFFORD returns blank stare. CLARE rises to embrace, pulls back suddenly.)

CLAIRE

You've been drinking!

CLIFFORD

Maybe. Just a little.

CLEVE

Way to go, Bro! Let's party!

(BRUCE leads CLIFFORD to sofa.)

BRUCE

I know you're hurting. Can I get you some coffee?

(CLIFFORD declines and begins sobbing.)

CLIFFORD

I've brought shame on my family, and God is punishing me.

CLEVE

(Giggling.)

What'd ya do, Bro? You were kissin' on her weren't ya?

CLIFFORD  
You knew?

CLEVE  
Oh, hell yeah. Here's a tip: ya can't hide a boner when you're wearin' polyester pants.

BRUCE  
What's he talking about?

CLIFFORD  
(Wailing.)  
I kissed another woman.

CLAIRE  
You what?

CLIFFORD  
I kissed another woman.

BRUCE  
Who?

CLAIRE  
OK, but you still love Julie, right? Is that why she left?

CLIFFORD  
I told her.

JEFFREY  
Told her!? You told Julie? But why? Jesus Christ! What ever happened to "don't ask, don't tell?"

(CLEVE giggles uncontrollably.)

CLIFFORD  
I had to. I had to confess.

CLAIRE  
And so, she left.

CLIFFORD  
(Continuing to sob.)  
The last straw. All my fault. I neglected my family. I neglected her. She was so unhappy. And just I ignored it. I sinned. All I ever wanted was to bring people together. My church. My family. Our family. But I sinned and now I've lost everything. I've lost my family. I've lost my wife.

JEFFREY

(Tenderly, wrapping an arm around CLIFFORD.)  
No one's perfect, Clifford. And people can forgive. Julie will forgive you. She'll come back.

CLIFFORD

Really? She will?

JEFFREY

Sure, she will.

(CLIFFORD leans into Jeffrey sobbing. JEFFREY embraces, consoles him. BRUCE and CLAIRE share a look of amazement.)

CLEVE

God damn! I ain't the only fuck up!  
(Stumbling around, thumbs on chest.)  
I ain't the only fuck up!

BRUCE

(Shakes Cleve by the shoulders.)  
That's enough! God damn it, Cleve. Are you ever going to sober up?

(For CLEVE, it's a dagger to the heart. He sinks to sofa and sobs.)

BRUCE

(Looking to Claire.)  
Jesus. What's with this family?

(BRUCE and CLAIRE sit on each side of CLEVE, arms around him. CLIFFORD continues sobbing, leaning on JEFFREY.)

BRUCE

(Over Cleve's head to Claire.)  
What do we do?

CLAIRE

I think we're doing it.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II  
Scene Five

SCENE: Interior of Sit-a-Spell Café.

TIME: Mid-morning on the Wednesday following Thanksgiving.

AT RISE: CLEVE slowly steps into tight spot downstage right. He grabs his crotch, winces as he adjusts. He breaks the fourth wall.

CLEVE

Nothin' like a fried wiener to sober a guy up. No, I kid you not. Unless you've been there, you can't imagine what it's like. What it's like to be a drunk, I mean, not the fried wiener part. Ever been close to drownin'? Knowin' that you don't get a breath of air, you're dead? That was me. I couldn't get a drink, I felt like I was gonna die. No. No way you can understand. But that's OK. I think it's behind me now. My sister. What an angel. Checked me into detox where I stayed for 72 hours, Claire holding my hand, hours at a time, then running over to the hospital to hold Pa's hand. Takin' turns nursin' us both back. I give Claire lots of credit. Bruce, too. He gave it to me straight. Really got me thinkin'. But, 'tween you and me, it was fryin' my wiener that did the trick. I think the pain meds helped with the withdrawal, and then, when I did feel those needles of pain, they kept reminding me that booze was to blame for the burn. Anyways, I'm feelin' better. And the old man's better, too. Speakin' now. Slurring his words a bit, but his insults to the nurses and doctors are pretty clear. Tol' Dr. Habeeeb, "keep your camel jockey ass outta my sight." So now he's got a lady doctor. For Pa, a woman doctor's 'bout as bad as an A-rab, but lady's young and pretty and from Montana no less. Pa might grumble 'bout it, but I think the lady doctor's restorin' his blood flow, ya know what I mean. And I'm even feelin' good about Claire takin' over the business. I'm gonna work for her, ya know, and that's gonna make it lots easier to stay sober. And Cliff's gonna let me help him out on his show, you know, carry equipment for filmin' out in the woods and stuff. I tol' you before that I was a loser. Never had any luck. And you're thinkin', yeah, electrocutin' your wiener seems like a pretty bad turn a luck. But I tell ya, now I'm not sure it's the worst thing coulda happened.

(CLEVE exits. Stage lights up. CORA and CLAIRE sit at table.)

CORA

He loves us. He's always taken care of us. Protected us. That's who he is. He's always been true to himself. That's important. Important for a man to be true to himself.

CLAIRE

(Gives Cora's hand a squeeze.)

Important for all of us, Ma.

CORA

Yes. I guess you do understand that.

Yes.

CLAIRE

I never did. Not really. A person's got to be who they are. You are true to yourself, too, aren't you?

CORA

I think so. I try to be.

CLAIRE

Does it make you happy?

CORA

Being true to myself?

CLAIRE

Your career.

CORA

What I do, I'm good at it. I like it. I love it. And, yes, it makes me happy.

CLAIRE

You've never found a man.

CORA

Oh, I've found a few, just none I want to keep. Not yet.

CLAIRE

But you will.

CORA

Maybe. It doesn't matter.

CLAIRE

Oh, but it does matter. A person needs love in their life, someone to care for.

CORA

Yes. Well, I love my family, and there's plenty of opportunity for me to care for them.

CLAIRE

That's not what I mean.

CORA

I know.

CLAIRE

CORA

A man.

CLAIRE

Well, Cleve can be the man in my life for a while. God knows he needs some love and care.

(TULLIA enters, pours coffee, stands listening, waiting for invitation as CORA and CLAIRE focus on each other.)

CORA

It's not the same.

CLAIRE

Ma, stop worrying.

(CORA and CLAIRE notice TULLIA. Awkward pause.)

TULLIA

I get you anything else? Everything OK?

CORA

We're fine, Dear.

(TULLIA sets coffee down, takes seat.)

CLAIRE

Ma's worried about me. Thinks I need to find a man.

TULLIA

Have muscles. Some things only men can do.

CLAIRE

I've got tools and machines that take the place of muscles, Tullia. Ma's thinking about companionship.

CORA

Yes. Don't you want companionship, Dear?

TULLIA

Marcy, you know from beauty shop, come in for coffee and talk about men. You know Marcy? Big glasses, big hair, and the big titties? Marcy, she say men only good for, how she say, men only good for "shits and giggles."

CLAIRE

Sounds like companionship to me.

(DRAGOS enters, looks around, goes to table for coffee pot.)

DRAGOS

Hello, ladies. I get you something more?

TULLIA

(Jumping up to squeeze his bicep.)

I like the muscle, Iubi. Claire want shits and giggles.

(CLAIRE and TULLIA share a laugh. TULLIA gives DRAGOS a passionate kiss. He looks confused before exiting, a smile growing on his face.)

TULLIA

Now Dragos has big muscle. Good tonight for *dormi cu!*

CLAIRE

You've got a good thing, you and Dragos.

TULLIA

Why you sad, Cora Hamilton? Bud doing better, yes?

(CORA just nods.)

CLAIRE

I mean it, Ma. Stop worrying about me. And don't worry about the business. Everything's working out.

CORA

I know.

(Beat, adopting an accusing tone.)

You never let me baby you.

CLAIRE

What?

CORA

I never really had a baby girl.

CLAIRE

What a terrible thing to say.

CORA

You never liked what little girls are supposed to like.



God. CLAIRE

Cooking. Sewing. Homemaking. CORA

Not true, Ma. You taught me well. CLAIRE

You never liked it. CORA

Jeffrey did. Brucie, too. But Jeffrey... CORA

(Café door bursts open, and BRUCE strides to the table, out of breath, distraught. CORA clutches her chest.)

What is it? CLAIRE

It's bad. There's been another incident. We need to get back to the hospital. BRUCE

Bud!? CORA

Nurse had him up walking in the hallway past the cafeteria. A couple of teenagers were in there raising a ruckus, and when the nurse asked them to quiet down, they started to give her some grief. BRUCE

And Pa couldn't stay out of it. CLAIRE

Well, one of the kids gave her a push. Too much for Pa. He just said two words: "punk ass!" And he swung his walker around, nailed one of the kids, really flattened him. Then he started after the other one. BRUCE

(CORA begins low wailing.)

Is he...? CLAIRE

BRUCE

Collapsed. Back in intensive care. I think he's going to be OK. But the kid's in rough shape. Pa just about killed him.

(Beat.)

And now the police are there.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT II  
Scene Six

SCENE: Living room, home of Bud and Cora.

TIME: Late Saturday morning, two weeks after Thanksgiving weekend.

AT RISE: Tight spot downstage right slowly fades in to reveal CLIFFORD in black suit and tie. He slowly surveys that audience as he breaks the fourth wall.

CLIFFORD

(Dramatically, as from pulpit.)

Well, in case you're wondering, let me be absolutely clear – I did find forgiveness. And all I had to do was to ask. What a relief. What release. Absolute sweet redemption! You know, I've often preached about instantaneous healing, about salvation that can be found in just a moment when one surrenders, about deliverance that can be found in the twinkling of an eye. But to experience forgiveness and restoration like I did – and within just a matter of days of that cathartic Thanksgiving Weekend – well, I can tell you, I'll never again be the same. And so here we are, just two short weeks after that eventful Thanksgiving Weekend. The family back together. This time, for a funeral. A sad day we all knew had to come, eventually, but for which none of us was fully prepared. As a pastor, I've conducted dozens of funerals. I've counseled many families as they deal with their grief, and it's never easy. This funeral, though, has been without a doubt my most difficult. The finality of death never before struck so close to home. But overshadowing everything, overshadowing even death itself, is the blessed healing God has sent to us. God has answered my prayers to bring my family together. God has used tragedy to heal my family. To unite my family.

(Beat.)

My family...

(CLIFFORD exits. Stage lights up. CLAIRE, CORA, and TULLIA, all dressed in black, sit somberly on sofa.)

CLAIRE

He had a good life, Ma.

CORA

Did he? I wonder, was he happy?

CLAIRE

I think so.

CORA

I mean really. Was he really happy?

CLAIRE

It didn't always show, but he was true to himself. You know, like you said.

CORA

Yes. It's important for a man to be true to himself.

TULLIA

Funeral very nice. Claire, your singing very good.

CLAIRE

That's sweet, Tullia. Thank you.

(BRUCE enters front door pushing CLEVE in a wheelchair. A blanket covers Cleve's legs. His face is bandaged like a mummy leaving gaps for him to breathe and speak but only slits that make it very difficult to see. JEFFREY and DRAGOS follow them in.)

BRUCE

Julie and the kids went to her folks, so it's just going to be us. Where is he?

CORA

(Rising and heading toward kitchen.)

Upstairs. I'll set out the cake and coffee.

JEFFREY

I'm still stuffed from breakfast, Ma.

CORA

(Painfully choking back tears.)

A piece of cake.

(Losing composure.)

Will it hurt you to eat a god damn piece of cake –

(Abruptly catching herself.)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you.

(Sobs, rushes to embrace Jeffrey.)

JEFFREY

It's OK, Ma. Yeah, I'll have a small piece.

(CORA nods, bustles off followed by CLAIRE and TULLIA.)

BRUCE

Taking it hard.

CLEVE

How am I supposed to eat cake?

JEFFREY

We'll liquefy it and give it to you through a straw.

CLEVE

Fuck you. And fuck every god damn goose in the world.

BRUCE

Lousy way to go. That's for sure.

CLEVE

Mean fuckers gave us no warnin'. Was like that scene in Home Alone when the bad guys get swarmed at the end by the pigeons. But those fuckin' geese are monsters. Honkin', hissin', and shittin' monsters.

BRUCE

Poor Clifford didn't even make it through his second show. Jesus.

JEFFREY

(Softly, sincerely.)

Bruce. The Lord's name. Show some respect for our brother.

BRUCE

Right. Sorry.

CLEVE

Camera man got away scot-free. Didn't even try to help. Geese attacked, and he kept right on filmin', but second one a those honkers headed his direction, pussy dropped the camera and ran for the truck.

(Moving head side to side.)

Damn it. Can't see a thing. They went for my eyes.

JEFFREY

Why'd it have to be geese? I mean, at least that crocodile hunter got killed by a stingray, something dignified. Where's the dignity in getting mauled and shit on by a flock of deranged geese?

(BUD appears at top of stairs, slowly descends, aided by a cane.)

BRUCE

Jesus, now who's being disrespectful? Keep it to yourself. You want Ma to hear you?

(JEFFREY sees BUD, jumps up to assist.)

BUD

(With difficulty, some slurring.)

Want Ma to hear what?

(With surprising tenderness, JEFFREY helps BUD down the stairs.)

JEFFREY

Oh, nothing, Pa. We're just talking about how we already miss Clifford and don't want to make Ma any sadder than she is.

BUD

(Sits between BRUCE and JEFFREY.)

I miss him, too. Always thought he was a loser. Lazy. I was wrong. You see all the people from his church? They loved him. I didn't know. So much I didn't know.

CLEVE

(Turning to DRAGOS, aside.)

Get me outta here.

(DRAGOS wheels CLEVE to kitchen. As they exit, spot tightens on the sofa leaving rest of set dark.)

JEFFREY

(Places hand on Bud's shoulder, getting emotional, almost crying.)

Me, too. Pa, I treated him like shit. You and I saw him from different angles, but I guess both of us got it wrong.

(BUD and JEFFREY embrace. BRUCE looks on awkwardly, makes awkward attempt to join in the hug but has second thoughts. Spot changes focus to CLAIRE and CLEVE, stage right, leaving rest of set dark. CLAIRE sits in chair next to wheelchair, leans in for intimate conversation.)

CLEVE

I loved the song.

CLAIRE

It's not easy to sing at your brother's funeral.

CLEVE

No, I mean the one 'bout me 'n' Amber.

CLAIRE

Oh, did you?

CLEVE

You sang good at the funeral, too. Hard to see with this bandage. But you sounded nice.

(CLAIRE pats his blanketed knee.)

Tried to brush my teeth this mornin' but couldn't see into the medicine chest. Put Preparation H on my toothbrush.

CLAIRE

Cleve!

CLEVE

No worries. Spit it out before had a chance to shrink up my tongue.

CLAIRE

That's disgusting.

CLEVE

You think I leave it in my mouth, my tongue does shrink up? Ends up sittin' in my mouth, size of an oyster in a shell?

(CLAIRE gives slight chuckle.)

You think I'm funny, Sis?

CLAIRE

You're sweet, but that was kind of gross. And I think you're a goofball.

CLEVE

"You're - a - goofball." Three a the worst words a man can hear.

CLAIRE

No, I didn't mean it as a criticism, Cleve.

CLEVE

Oh, I know. I've heard lots worse. Wanna know the three worst words a man can hear?

CLAIRE

I can imagine. But, OK. Sure.

CLEVE

Is - it - in?

CLAIRE

(Gives a good chuckle this time.)

OK. That was funny.

CLEVE

(Appreciates the approval and tries to smile wide.)

Oh, ow! Can't smile with this damn bandage.

(Suddenly somber.)

You think Pa will ever take me seriously?

CLAIRE

You know, the stroke, and now Clifford. He's different. Just focus on staying sober. Pa will be OK.

CLEVE

He told me I was dependable as a fart in skillet.

CLAIRE

I don't know what that means.

CLEVE

Well, I'm pretty sure it wasn't a compliment.

(Spot changes focus to BUD and CORA sitting close on the sofa leaving rest of set dark.)

BUD

How you holding up?

CORA

So sad. Clifford was such a sweet boy, and I worry about his little ones.

BUD

They'll be OK. Julie's a good mom, and kids are tough.

CORA

I'm so relieved the police dropped the charges.

BUD

Had to. Punk has a record. Nothing I could do. When that little shit attacked the nurse, I had to react.

CORA

(Leans closer and BUD pulls her in as she chokes up.)

Our family's never had to worry with you to protect us. I wish you'd been there for Clifford.

BUD

Yeah. Me, too.

(Chokes a bit.)

And for Claire.

CORA

What?

BUD

For Claire. What she's become. I wasn't there for her.



CORA

But you were there. You were her model. Your life. You just didn't know it. She followed you. In your steps. Your life. She chose it. And it chose her. And it's because of you. She's true to herself because of you.

(Spot changes focus to BRUCE and CLAIRE standing downstage right leaving rest of set dark.)

BRUCE

They were hugging. Pa and Jeffrey. Actually hugging.

CLAIRE

That's beautiful. Touching, really.

BRUCE

Yes. It's just...

CLAIRE

He'll come around to you, too. I'm sure of it.

BRUCE

I guess.

CLAIRE

Bigger question, will he ever come around to me?

BRUCE

I love you, Sis.

(BRUCE and CLAIRE embrace. Spot changes focus to BUD, CORA, DRAGOS, and TULLIA near front door, the latter two wearing coats. Wordlessly and choking back tears, they embrace. First CORA and TULLIA. Then CORA and DRAGOS, briefly but sincerely. Then BUD and DRAGOS shake hands which transitions to embrace. Finally, BUD and TULLIA, after briefly exchanging looks, lock in a tight, lengthy embrace. While they're still engaged in the embrace, the spot fades and slowly comes up to focus downstage left. DRAGOS and TULLIA step into repositioned spot.)

DRAGOS

Very sad day for Hamiltons.

TULLIA

Yes. And sad for me and you.

DRAGOS

Hamiltons very different now.

TULLIA

Bud squeeze me very much.

DRAGOS

Yes, even Bud different.

TULLIA

Different good, but maybe not real. Cora say man must be true to self. Is true self for Bud when shooting hat of little Mexican and shooting bear in store? Or is true when Bud squeeze me and choke on tears?

DRAGOS

Did hug feel real?

TULLIA

Yes. I could feel it very real.

DRAGOS

Maybe real self of man not what is. Real self is what can be.

TULLIA

(Reaching to touch his cheek, affectionately.)

Oh, Iubi. You not so very stupid.

DRAGOS

Bruce say I am smart man.

TULLIA

Yes, Iubi. You smart man.

(Gives him a wicked smile.)

Smart man who like the titties.

(DRAGOS and TULLIA face each other, holding both hands, smiling. Spot slowly fades.)

(CURTAIN)

(END OF ACT II)