

Kansas

By

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KANSAS

The Characters:

Brandon 41, White, progressive political operator based in San Francisco, gay
Christopher 36, White, tech engineer, based in Los Angeles
Matt 25, White, railroad engineer, lives in a rural town outside Kansas City
Lawrence 68, White, CPA

Time: Time Period A: Late summer of 2018
Time Period B: November 2018

Place: Mercata (pronounced Mur-KAY-tuh), Kansas, a college town, once thriving, in decline for decades

Notes: Dialogue shown in brackets [like this] indicates characters speaking over one another.

On casting: While this is the story of a white family in a small town in Kansas, during the Trump presidency, the actors may identify as any race or gender.

Scene 1

Time Period A. Mercata. Townhouse condo. Late summer 2018. The night of the funeral. The house is quiet. The others have left or gone to bed. The condo is extravagantly decorated in a hyper-feminine style, not gaudy, but lots of pink. The three brothers gather around the dining room table. The elder two are dressed in (stylish) dark suits, the younger in Army dress uniform. MATT holds an American flag folded into a triangle.

MATT

I'm not exactly sure what you're supposed to do with this, but I think – I think you're supposed to display it, right? Maybe in that glass – what do you call it? – Mom's got?

BRANDON

Hutch.

CHRISTOPHER

You should keep it.

MATT

Me? It's Mom's. They gave it to—

BRANDON

I'm not sure she—

MATT

They gave it to her. She's the wife. They give it to the widow!

CHRISTOPHER

Okay. Alright.

BRANDON

I'm just saying...

MATT

She doesn't want it. It doesn't mean anything to her.

BRANDON

It means *too* much to her.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt, it's okay. We'll keep it here with Mom for now. I just think it might be something you'll value having in the long run. You're both military guys, for one.

MATT

And I'm the only one who liked him, you mean. The only one who loved him, in the end. Maybe if...

BRANDON

Don't even. Don't even start.

MATT

Maybe if the two of you *and* Mom...

CHRISTOPHER

Matt, we can't go there. It's nobody's fault.

MATT

It's *somebody's* fault! It's gotta be.

BRANDON

Remember the minister today? Don't torture yourself. We'll never know.

MATT

You mean that lady preacher? What a joke! We couldn't even get a real pastor?

BRANDON

She *is* the pastor!

MATT

Dad's old church. A lady pastor! He wouldn't have stood for it.

CHRISTOPHER

It was a beautiful service, Matt. The color guard was awesome. It was really... (*chokes up*) moving.

He looks at BRANDON, "Say something!"

BRANDON

It was. Thank you for organizing that, Matt.

MATT

It's what he would have wanted. It's what any soldier would want.

Right.
BRANDON

MATT
(Beat. Taking in the room)
So what's with all this girly shit?

CHRISTOPHER
What?

MATT
The stuff on the walls, all this... crap.

BRANDON
The *decor*?

MATT
Our house never looked like this. You don't see one thing of Dad in here.

BRANDON
He didn't live here.

CHRISTOPHER
You've never been to the condo before?

MATT
Why would I? It's not our house.

BRANDON
See Mom? Stop by and say hello?

MATT
Like you do, Brandon? Just because I live nearby, why does that make it my duty to take care of Mom? She sure as shit wasn't takin care of Dad.

CHRISTOPHER
More bourbon?

BRANDON
(Changing the subject)
Christopher, the bourbon. Doesn't this make you think of Grandpa Howard?

CHRISTOPHER
Sneaking a drink in his workshop. Pretending Grandma didn't know.

MATT

Yeah, good times. You guys used to go do shots with him and leave me with Grandma and the women.

BRANDON

You were just a kid. And we were...

CHRISTOPHER

Teenagers!

The elder brothers laugh.

CHRISTOPHER

You know Grandpa Howard taught me how to smoke, too.

BRANDON

Oh, my God, those stinking cigars!

CHRISTOPHER

Used to make Grandma mad as hell. Howard! Howard! If you don't put that out right now! I know what y'all are doin' in there!

BRANDON

(Picking up the imitation)

You know what the doctor says!

More laughter from the elder two.

MATT

I never got to do any of that shit.

BRANDON

You were just a—

CHRISTOPHER

Just a kid. Just a baby, Baby Bro!

BRANDON/CHRISTOPHER

(Improvised with baby, sucking, kissing sounds)

Baby bro! Baby bro! Baby bro!

MATT

Shut the fuck up! Both of you!

CHRISTOPHER

Matt.

MATT

I don't give a damn what the preacher says. I wanna know.

End of scene

Scene 2

Time Period B. November, four months after the funeral. Mesa. A tiny hamlet outside Mercata. Economics and tornadoes have rendered it a virtual ghost town. A cemetery. November. Bleak. A cold wind blows. CHRISTOPHER stands alone. He is dressed in a parka or hunting jacket. He sees BRANDON and waves.

CHRISTOPHER

B! It's over here! Brandon!

BRANDON

(From off)

Goddamn! We couldn't find something a little closer to the drive?

CHRISTOPHER

WHAT?

BRANDON

(Still off)

A LITTLE CLOSER??

CHRISTOPHER

IT'S WHAT DAD WANTED! BY THE TREE!

BRANDON enters. He is dressed in a suit.

BRANDON

Hey.

CHRISTOPHER

Hey.

They embrace.

BRANDON

Fuck! It's freezing out here!

CHRISTOPHER

How was your flight?

BRANDON

Fine.

CHRISTOPHER

Why are you wearing a suit?

BRANDON

I don't know. What are you supposed to wear?

CHRISTOPHER

Something warm!

BRANDON

Ha, ha.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not a funeral.

BRANDON

Kinda. It is.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not like a funeral.

BRANDON

How do you know?

CHRISTOPHER

It's been a whole year. It's just us. It's not like there's a service or anything.

BRANDON

I didn't know! Goddamn, it's cold!

CHRISTOPHER

Why didn't you wear an overcoat?

BRANDON

I don't have one. California?

CHRISTOPHER

It gets cold in San Francisco.

BRANDON

Not this cold. Where's Mom?

CHRISTOPHER

On her way. Aunt Lee Ann's driving her.

BRANDON

Ah, geez. They're gonna be an hour late, then. Half hour anyway. I'm gonna freeze to death! *(Beat.)* Where's Matt?

CHRISTOPHER

Haven't heard.

BRANDON

He's coming, though, right?

CHRISTOPHER

I guess. I mean, yeah, of course.

BRANDON

Did he tell you that he was coming?

CHRISTOPHER

He texted yesterday. Wanted to check on the time.

BRANDON

Is he bringing Amber?

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know. I don't think so. She and Mom...

BRANDON

No. So, it's just us?

CHRISTOPHER

I think so, yeah. And Uncle Lawrence, maybe.

BRANDON

That's alright, I guess.

CHRISTOPHER

And Aunt Lee Ann. But she'll probably stay in the car. I mean, she and Dad...?

BRANDON

No love lost there. So really just us. No preacher, no...?

CHRISTOPHER

Nope. None of that.

BRANDON

And... what? We just plunk him in the ground?

CHRISTOPHER

They've dug the hole.

BRANDON

It's not very deep.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not like there's a casket.

BRANDON

So, really, what do we do? We just stick him in there?

CHRISTOPHER

The cemetery people put the urn with ashes in that... metal box down there. When we're ready.

BRANDON

I see.

CHRISTOPHER

Why? Do you want to say something?

BRANDON

I don't know. It just seems...

CHRISTOPHER

You're going to church these days. Do you want to pray, or...?

BRANDON

(Outburst)

I don't know! I've never done this before!

CHRISTOPHER

Neither have I!

BRANDON

And then. The cemetery people...

CHRISTOPHER

Fill it in. Put the marker on. They walked me through all of this on the phone.

BRANDON
And Mom's got that with her?

CHRISTOPHER
The marker? Yeah.

BRANDON
What does it say?

CHRISTOPHER
What do you mean?

BRANDON
What we agreed on, or...?

CHRISTOPHER
Yeah, I think so. I mean, I was there with Mom when she placed the order.

BRANDON
And does it have a space for her, or just him?

CHRISTOPHER
Both of 'em.

BRANDON
Okay. Well, that's good.

CHRISTOPHER
You're skeptical.

BRANDON
Matt. I thought he might have...

CHRISTOPHER
Yeah. Well, Mom would have seen it before Matt will.

BRANDON
That's true. *(Beat.)* Why is he not here?

CHRISTOPHER
He'll be here. He wouldn't skip it.

BRANDON
But where is he? We were supposed to start, like... now, right? Why don't you text him?

CHRISTOPHER

There's no service out here.

BRANDON

(Fed up with this place)

Uhhhhhg!! I'm going to sit in the car until they get here. I can't take this cold!

CHRISTOPHER

There he is. *(Referring to his truck)* When did he get *that* sucker? That's gotta be the biggest pickup I've seen in my life!

BRANDON

The tires look like they came off a semi.

CHRISTOPHER

Probably did. *(Shouts to MATT)* Baby Bro!

BRANDON

He hates that.

CHRISTOPHER

I know. Baby Bro! We're over here!

MATT enters.

MATT

Don't call me that.

CHRISTOPHER

Just glad to see my baby bro! How ya doin', man?

Tries to thump MATT on the back, no go.

MATT

Where's Mom?

BRANDON

Not here yet. Nice to see you, too.

MATT

Thought they were supposed to be here like half an hour ago.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, then, that means you're late, kiddo.

BRANDON

LeeAnn's driving. You know Aunt LeeAnn.

MATT

I don't think she's comin'. Fuck!

CHRISTOPHER

What do you mean she's not coming?

BRANDON

Why wouldn't she be coming?

MATT

We had a fight.

CHRISTOPHER

What else is new?

MATT

Goddamn it! I bet she ain't comin'! Fuck! How can she do that? It's not like she owns him!

BRANDON

What are you talking about?

MATT

She don't get to decide this shit! It's not her decision!

BRANDON

Yes, it is. She's his wife.

MATT

Only because he died before the divorce went through!

CHRISTOPHER

Whoa, whoa, whoa! Calm down! What exactly did you and Mom fight about?

BRANDON

Do they need a reason?

MATT

This! The fucking burial.

BRANDON

Interment.

MATT

What-the-fuck-ever!

CHRISTOPHER

Okay. And...?

BRANDON

She doesn't want him buried here, does she?

MATT

How do you know that?

BRANDON

She wants him in Mercata. So they can be together, when she goes. Why be buried in their own little hometowns when they built their whole lives together in Mercata?

MATT

Whose idea was that?

BRANDON

Mine. Or my husband's, actually.

MATT

What the fucking hell? This is what *Dad* wanted! *His* hometown. By *his* farm! It's *Dad's* fucking decision! Not your boyfriend's! And not Mom's!

BRANDON

Husband.

MATT

She's the reason Dad's dead in the first place!

CHRISTOPHER

Okay, okay, okay! We'll get this sorted out. Let's all just... go home. We'll talk to Mom and we'll get it figured out.

MATT

Oh, quit with the fucking peace-maker routine, for Christ's sake! You're acting like a bigger pansy-assed faggot than he is!

BRANDON

That's it! I'm out of here.

CHRISTOPHER

Unacceptable, man!

MATT

A couple of fucking snowflakes, both of you!

BRANDON

Make America great again, Baby Bro! Where all gonna get sick of all the [greatness, right, kiddo?]

CHRISTOPHER

[Don't start! Don't even start!]

BRANDON

[So fucking great!] Getting tired of all this greatness, Baby Bro???

CHRISTOPHER

Knock it off!

BRANDON

It's so, so fucking great... that Dad's *dead!*

MATT whirls and comes after BRANDON.

CHRISTOPHER intervenes. They tussle.

CHRISTOPHER

Stand down, man! Knock it off!!

MATT

Animals! You're a bunch of animals! You two, Mom, all of you! You just want Dad...
(*chokes*) You want his memory just erased!

BRANDON

Whoa! Are those tears! Are those tears, Baby Bro! Who's the snowflake now, Baby Bro??

CHRISTOPHER

B! Get in your car! Matt, get in your truck! I don't want to see you at Mom's, you hear me?

MATT

Or what?

CHRISTOPHER

Try me.

MATT

The last fucking thing Dad wanted. I'm gonna make sure he gets it.

CHRISTOPHER

Go on! Go!

End of scene.

Scene 3

Time Period A. A week after the funeral. The exterior and interior of Jack's work shed. Inside the walls are lined with boxes of auto parts. There are workshelves and tables, tools. Photos of auto races on the wall. There is a red 1968 Chevy Camaro in pristine condition. BRANDON and CHRISTOPHER stand outside, trying unsuccessfully to unlock the door.

CHRISTOPHER

(To lock)

Come on baby. Come on, open up! *(He tries, pulls, pushes, jiggles. Nothing.)* Goddamn!

BRANDON

Let me try.

CHRISTOPHER

You already did try.

BRANDON

Maybe it's the wrong key.

CHRISTOPHER

It's marked right here, "SHED".

BRANDON

I don't know... A locksmith?

CHRISTOPHER gives him a disparaging look.

BRANDON

WD40? He's gotta have some WD40.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah. In the shed. Well, guess we're going to Walmart.

BRANDON

(New topic)

Goddamn, it's hot!

CHRISTOPHER

Kansas in July. Did you forget?

BRANDON

I always come back around the holidays, I guess. Oh, here comes Matt. Maybe he can get it.

CHRISTOPHER

That's not Matt.

LAWRENCE

(From offstage)

Morning, boys!

CHRISTOPHER

Hey Uncle Lawrence. Got any WD40?

LAWRENCE enters carrying a six-pack of beer.

LAWRENCE

Your Mom told me you all'd be down here.

CHRISTOPHER

Gotta clean out the shed before we go. And we can't get the lock to work. You got any WD40 in your truck?

LAWRENCE

Don't think so. Here, let me try.

He does. No success.

LAWRENCE

Y'all need to go to Walmart. Don't envy you your job today, clearing this place out. Jack's gotta lotta shit in there. Some of it goes way back.

CHRISTOPHER

And the Camaro.

LAWRENCE

Right where he left it. Well, I'll let you boys straighten all that out. Where's Matt? I figured he'd be down here too.

BRANDON

Late. As always.

LAWRENCE

Wanna beer?

BRANDON

It's kind of early.

LAWRENCE

10:30? Nah. Here, Brandon. Christopher. How 'bout a toast. Before you boys head back to California.

BRANDON

Uh, no thanks.

CHRISTOPHER

Just a sip. It won't kill you.

BRANDON takes the beer.

LAWRENCE

To your Dad.

They drink.

LAWRENCE

Oh, hey, here's Matt. Matt, hurry up! You missed the toast!

MATT enters.

MATT

What toast?

LAWRENCE

To your Dad. We'll do it again.

MATT

I don't feel like—

LAWRENCE

(Handing MATT a beer)

Here you go. Gotta honor his memory.

BRANDON

(Under his breath, to CHRISTOPHER)

With PBR.

LAWRENCE

Come on boys. Lift up your beers. To James Thomas Dylan! Best and only brother I had.

They drink.

CHRISTOPHER

Where you been, Matt?

MATT

Had to drive Madison to daycare. What are you guys doin standin out here?

BRANDON

Can't open the fucking door. You got some WD40?

MATT

I don't need that shit. Here.

MATT goes to door. It opens immediately.

CHRISTOPHER

What the...

MATT

There's a little trick. You gotta know it.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, alrightee. Should we get started?

LAWRENCE

Hold on a second. I want to have a word with you boys.

MATT

OK, but let's go inside. We got work to do. I gotta pick Madison up by three.

LAWRENCE

I ain't goin in there.

MATT

What's the problem?

BRANDON

(Quietly to MATT)

He found Dad in there.

CHRISTOPHER

Alright, Uncle Lawrence, we can stay out here. What's going on?

LAWRENCE

Wondering what you boys have been thinkin about the farm.

BRANDON

What about it?

LAWRENCE

What to do with it. Your Dad left it to all of five us: Your mom, you boys, and me. Thought we should discuss it before y'all had back.

MATT

I ain't goin nowhere.

LAWRENCE

These two. Whadya say?

CHRISTOPHER

Can't say I've given it much thought. How 'bout you, B?

BRANDON

It's rented, right? That seems fine to me.

LAWRENCE

They don't want to stay, the tenants. Told me they plan to move out after the harvest.

CHRISTOPHER

How come?

LAWRENCE

Can't make a go of it.

BRANDON

Well, we'll find somebody else.

LAWRENCE

Nobody can. None of them farms is makin money anymore. Especially if you gotta pay rent on top of it.

BRANDON

We don't charge much more than the taxes, right?

LAWRENCE

Don't matter. Still can't make money.

MATT

All them farms out there? You're tellin me none of 'em are makin money?
That can't be true. How come there still there then?

LAWRENCE

Some of 'em ain't still there. And the rest, ain't makin shit. I know. I do their books.

BRANDON

This whole town's just blowing away. Main Street, my God, it looks like a ghost town.

MATT

It's not that bad. Look at that new bar that opened up. Why do you have to trash it? Your hometown.

BRANDON

Open your eyes, Little Bro. The only thing doing business in this town is Walmart and the pawn shop.

MATT

If you don't like, go back to San Francisco!

BRANDON

I am. Tomorrow!

LAWRENCE

OK, boys! The question is — what are we doin about the farm? Whatever it is, four out of the five us have to agree. That's what the will says.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know, Uncle Lawrence. That's a lot to throw at us, you know? We got to talk to Mom.

LAWRENCE

Sure, sure. Of course you do.

CHRISTOPHER

If we sold it, what would we get?

LAWRENCE

I don't know. Not much, would be my guess.

MATT

I don't want to sell it.

LAWRENCE

At least we wouldn't have to keep findin new tenants, and your mom wouldn't have to worry about filing the taxes. Which we all have to pay now.

MATT

I don't want to sell it.

BRANDON

I don't either.

MATT

Why would you care?

LAWRENCE

Well, look. Y'all talk to your mom. We don't have to make a decision right now. Just think about, OK? (*Finishes his beer.*) Good luck with all that shit in there!

LAWRENCE exits.

MATT

We ain't sellin the farm.

CHRISTOPHER

Let's not worry about it right now. We got a lotta work to do.

MATT heads inside the shed. BRANDON starts to go in, then hesitates.

CHRISTOPHER

You okay, B?

BRANDON

Yeah. I'm fine.

CHRISTOPHER

You don't have to do this.

BRANDON

I'm good.

They go inside.

CHRISTOPHER

Wow, it hasn't changed a bit.

MATT

When was the last time you were in here?

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know. Years. How 'bout you, B? You been in here recently?

BRANDON

Nope. There wasn't any reason, really.

MATT

The car? We'd take it out every week, Dad and me. You got to if you're gonna keep the engine in shape.

BRANDON

Would Mom go?

MATT

Nah. We'd drive up to Mesa to look at the farm. Maybe test the engine on the turnpike. We could hit a hundred, felt like thirty. Smooth as silk.

CHRISTOPHER

Dad didn't mind?

MATT

Not if I was drivin.

BRANDON

You could have killed someone.

MATT

Don't be a pussy.

CHRISTOPHER

So. What we are gonna do with all this stuff? All of Dad's inventory.

BRANDON

Sell it.

MATT

Piece by piece? What we need to do is get someone to buy the business.

BRANDON

Good luck.

MATT

What does that mean?

CHRISTOPHER

Dad was trying to sell the business, right? The past couple of years.

BRANDON

Ever since he retired. Who'd want it?

MATT

Why do you have to keep putting him down!

BRANDON

I'm not putting him down. I'm just saying. Did *you* want it? Did Christopher want it? I didn't want it. If his own sons—

MATT

Someone's gonna want it!

BRANDON

Why?

CHRISTOPHER

OKAY! Let's just—

BRANDON

No, really, why? When you can get all this stuff online now – direct from the manufacturers – why would anyone pay good money for the privilege of driving around Kansas and half of Oklahoma trying to peddle what anybody could get – cheaper – on their iPad? I tried to tell Dad—

MATT

What? You tried to tell Dad what? To give up?

BRANDON

To use a computer! To set up a website, for Christ sake! I mean, maybe if he'd—

MATT

That's not the way he did business.

BRANDON

I *know* it's not the—

MATT

Face to face. Talkin to folks. That's how Dad did business. Not through the fuckin Internet!

BRANDON

That's right, cuz, you know, if you get connected to that Inter Webby thing, the Deep State's gonna get all your shit. Little gremlins come popping out of your computer screen, right into your file cabinets, and you're toast!

CHRISTOPHER

Alright, alright!

BRANDON

He actually said that, you know. He actually said that to me!

MATT

You hated him so much, why did you even come back?

BRANDON

I didn't hate—

CHRISTOPHER

Alright! Can we get back to business? This stuff, all these parts, what are we going to do with them? They're still worth something. The business aside, these parts have value. So let's figure out how to sell them.

MATT

(To BRANDON)

You never respected what Dad did. The business he built from scratch! You never respected him at all!

BRANDON

I respected it! I went on trips with him as a kid, in the summer, all around the state.

MATT

So did I!

BRANDON

I just – I just wanted him to move into the fucking 21st century!

CHRISTOPHER

Guys! Focus! Mom wants us to organize all of Dad's stuff. So, what are we going to do with all this inventory?

BRANDON
Put it on E-Bay. Craigslist.

MATT
Can we return it to the manufacturers?

CHRISTOPHER
Yeah, maybe.

MATT
Some of it's pretty old.

BRANDON
Craigslist.

CHRISTOPHER
Are you going to sit here and dole these out, one by one, to folks on Craigslist?

MATT
Let's try to return 'em.

Beat. They can't avoid it.

CHRISTOPHER
And then there's the—

MATT
We're not selling the car!

BRANDON
It's got to be worth something. Look at the shape it's in.

MATT
We're not selling!

BRANDON
It's a classic.

MATT
We're not—

CHRISTOPHER
Heard you! What does the will say?

Brandon
Mom gets it.

Matt
How do you know?

Brandon
Ask her.

Matt
Why would *she* want it? She got the flag, right?

Brandon
Doesn't matter—

Christopher
It's kind of how they met. Dad rolling up in this bright red Camaro... It's got, you know, romantic memories for her.

Matt
Now? Still?

Brandon
Either way, it's her decision. That's what the will says.

Christopher
Why? Do you want it, Matt?

Matt
Well... it's not like you guys are gonna use it, out there in California, right?

Brandon
Right, we don't have cars in California, so no.

Matt
Okay! Yeah. I want it!

Brandon
It's worth some money, I imagine.

Matt
You're worried about the money?

Brandon
I'm just saying it's Mom's car, it's her decision. It's got real value.

MATT

How many races has this car been in? How many races has it won? That's real value, too.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt, I think it's hard for Mom now, you know? It might be better if we—

MATT

Like it's not hard for all of us? I mean, the idea that Dad was sittin right there. The engine runnin. The radio playin. The radio was playin. Did you guys know that?

BRANDON

Then why do you want it?

MATT

To remember him.

CHRISTOPHER

Look, we can get Mom to let you have it, I'm sure. Right, B?

BRANDON

(Says nothing.)

CHRISTOPHER

Where are you going to keep it?

MATT

I don't know. Here. For now.

CHRISTOPHER

Here? You can't keep it here, under Mom's nose.

MATT

She already moved out, right? Isn't she trying to sell the place?

CHRISTOPHER

Of course she is, but it could take a while.

BRANDON

People are kind of superstitious about houses where people died.

MATT

It was in the shed.

BRANDON

That's right! Right here! He was right here, in that car, the radio playing, the engine running, a can of beer in his hand, until the whole place filled up with carbon monoxide. Why would you want it?!

CHRISTOPHER

Take it somewhere else, Matt, okay?

MATT

(Choosing to ignore BRANDON)

I've only got a carport. Something like this needs real protection, you know?

CHRISTOPHER

We'll find a place.

Beat. They all look at the car and remember.

CHRISTOPHER

B, you alright?

BRANDON

I think it's getting to me. *(To MATT)* I don't know how you could possibly sit in the same seat where Dad...

MATT

Man, the difference between you and me? You just want to forget. I don't want to forget.

BRANDON

I want to remember him alive. Not how he killed himself!

CHRISTOPHER

Okay, alright!

MATT

I'm trying to preserve Dad's memory. In the proper way. I don't know why Mom can't make up her mind about the burial. It's not right just having Dad in the house. It's weird! He deserves to be laid to rest with dignity. Not sitting on the mantel like another fucking nic-nac. We gotta get Dad buried, in Mesa. With the rest of the family.

CHRISTOPHER

I get it. I really do. But it's for Mom to decide.

MATT

She didn't want him when he was alive, why does she want him now?

BRANDON

Because she's grieving, you twerp! You fucking little asshole. I can't believe you! You have no compassion!

MATT

Me? Do you think it was fucking compassionate when Mom sent over the divorce papers for Dad to sign – on their fucking anniversary?!

CHRISTOPHER

That wasn't intentional.

MATT

That's what *she* says. All I know is the look on his face that day when those papers arrived. Bet you never saw Dad cry. I did! He refused to sign. And that's the only reason they're not divorced. So why in the fuck is Mom in charge?

BRANDON collapses onto himself, slumps on the floor.

CHRISTOPHER

Alright! We'll get this worked out. We'll work it out.

MATT

Whatever. Whatever you say, Big Bro.

MATT starts to leave.

CHRISTOPHER

Where are *you* going?

MATT

I'm gonna get these damn parts sold.

MATT exits. CHRISTOPHER turns to BRANDON who is slumped in a heap. He weeps.

CHRISTOPHER

(Kneels beside him, touches him gently)

B? B, are you alright?

BRANDON

(Through tears)

Dad was right here. Right here! Why does he want to remember that? Why?

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know.

BRANDON

Why would he want to hold onto that? To that?

CHRISTOPHER

Come on, B. Let's get out of here. Can you get up? Let's go back to Mom's place.

CHRISTOPHER lifts BRANDON up, steadies him.

CHRISTOPHER

There you go. Just lean on me. I've got you.

End of scene.

Scene 4

Time Period B. Mercata. Later that evening. SHARON's townhome. The condo is even more dolled up than last time. The effect is like a jam-packed boutique of pot-pouri and chintz. BRANDON sits beside two bourbons. CHRISTOPHER enters.

BRANDON

Hey, there you are! Have a—

BRANDON tries to offer CHRISTOPHER a bourbon.

CHRISTOPHER

Not cool, B, not cool!

BRANDON

Shhh!! Mom's sleeping!

CHRISTOPHER
(Harsh whisper)

Not cool at all!

BRANDON

Matt?

CHRISTOPHER

You! What the hell was that MAGA shit?

BRANDON

It's true.

CHRISTOPHER

It doesn't help to set him off like that. The guy's about to lose it.

BRANDON

He's already lost it.

CHRISTOPHER

All the more reason! Act like the adult!

BRANDON

Why do you always give Matt a pass? You heard what he said to me.

CHRISTOPHER

He didn't mean it. He's upset. You know he [loves you.]

BRANDON

[He *did*] mean it! The guy's a bigot, a homophobe, and it gets worse every time I come back. I don't have to put up with it!

CHRISTOPHER

For Mom. Just... He's torn up. He's hurting.

BRANDON

We all are.

They sit with their bourbon, gaze in thought.

BRANDON

Do you think there's something weird about this room?

CHRISTOPHER

What do you mean?

BRANDON

Kind of a lot going on in here?

CHRISTOPHER

What are you talking about?

BRANDON

All this... fru-fru.

CHRISTOPHER

Mom likes it. I don't know. It's a girl thing. I just find it's better not to ask too many questions.

BRANDON

But come on. It was a lot the last time we were here. Now it's like...

CHRISTOPHER

Over the top?

BRANDON

Unstable?

CHRISTOPHER

She's grieving. She's bored. She's trying to fill her life with—

BRANDON

Chachka.

CHRISTOPHER

Where *was* Mom, anyway? What was with the no-show?

BRANDON

I don't know. She was asleep when I got home.

CHRISTOPHER

It's weird.

BRANDON

What, that she sleeps so much, or that she didn't show?

CHRISTOPHER

Both.

BRANDON

I guess she changed her mind.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt said they had a fight.

BRANDON

Because she changed her mind. That's what I'd bet.

CHRISTOPHER

Then why would Matt go to the cemetery?

BRANDON

You know, I don't really care where Dad's buried, I just want it to be Mom's decision.

CHRISTOPHER

What about Dad's wishes? Matt's got a point.

BRANDON

Dad's gone. Mom's the one who's got to live with it.

CHRISTOPHER

Literally. She's got his ashes hidden in her bedroom.

BRANDON

Hidden?

CHRISTOPHER

Why do you think?

BRANDON

What a fucked up family.

CHRISTOPHER

So, why do you suppose she wants to be buried next to him now?

BRANDON

I don't know. You're the one who's been here the past few days. Did she say anything?

CHRISTOPHER

Not really. I mean, she said a lot of stuff, but it didn't seem like she changed her mind.

BRANDON

Maybe it's good. Maybe she's reconciling.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt thinks it's out of spite that she's even thinking about it. Keep Dad from getting the last thing he wanted.

BRANDON

That's fucked.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, that's what he thinks.

BRANDON

When did Matt go off the rails?

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know. He's been sort of slowly derailing for a while now, I think.

BRANDON

He wasn't always like this.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, he kinda was. How many times was he arrested in high school?

BRANDON

That was kids' stuff. *(Has proof)* You know he voted for Obama.

CHRISTOPHER

Why do you have to make everything about politics?

BRANDON

It's my job.

CHRISTOPHER

We're not your clients, OK? Let it go sometimes.

BRANDON

It really bothers me she sleeps so much.

CHRISTOPHER

I got an idea. Let's wake her up. Take her to dinner. How 'bout Cottonwood Falls?

BRANDON

Dad's favorite?

CHRISTOPHER

Mom loves it too. Come on. She hasn't even said hello to you yet. My treat.

BRANDON

Alright, you got me. I could use a nice Kansas filet.

The two exit. LIGHTS down, then up. Two hours have passed. BRANDON and CHRISTOPHER enter from hall.

BRANDON

Night, Mom. That was fun.

CHRISTOPHER

Can I pour you...?

BRANDON

You bet.

*CHRISTOPHER pours two glasses of bourbon.
BRANDON settles into the sofa.*

BRANDON

You know, you really can't get steak like that in California.

CHRISTOPHER

Prairie grown, man.

MATT appears from the kitchen.

MATT

Where is it?

CHRISTOPHER

What the hell are you doing here?

MATT

Where is it, man? Where is she hiding him?

BRANDON

You mean Dad's *ashes*?

CHRISTOPHER

This isn't the time, man. Go home, Matt.

MATT

They need to be buried, man.

BRANDON

What were you planning to do, Little Bro? Steal them?

MATT

Dad's ashes deserve a proper—

BRANDON

What, are you in high school? You gonna swipe 'em? We gonna to have to bail you out again?

MATT

Shut the fuck up!

CHRISTOPHER

Can it, Brandon! Come on, Matthew. I'm serious. Go home. You are not welcome in this house. Not tonight.

MATT

Who says?

CHRISTOPHER
(Yelling now)

I say. Go! Right now!

MATT

Those ashes ought to be mine! I deserve them! I'm the only one—

CHRISTOPHER

(Louder)

Get out! Get out of here!

BRANDON

I'm calling the police.

BRANDON calls 911.

MATT

Pussy!

BRANDON

Tell that to the cops. I'm sure they haven't forgotten you.

CHRISTOPHER

Go on, Matthew! Go!

BRANDON

(Into phone)

Hi, yeah, I need to report an active burglary.

MATT

(Shouting as he exits)

Pussies! Both of you!

MATT exits.

BRANDON

(Into phone)

Uh... He just left. I think we've got it under control. Thank you.

(To CHRISTOPHER)

What the fuck.

CHRISTOPHER

And I thought she was just being paranoid.

BRANDON

Where's she got him?

CHRISTOPHER

Dad's ashes? Buried in her lingerie. Mom figured Matt would never dig through that.

BRANDON
(Chuckles)

I think that's right.

SOUND of a large vehicle screeching away.

CHRISTOPHER

Good God!

BRANDON

You know what they say... Big truck, little—

CHRISTOPHER
(Amused)

Shut up.

BRANDON

And I repeat: When did Matt go off the rails? High school, maybe?

SOUND of another vehicle leaving swiftly.

CHRISTOPHER

What the hell...?

BRANDON

Mom?

CHRISTOPHER looks out window.

CHRISTOPHER

It's the Nissan.

BRANDON

Where the hell is she going?

CHRISTOPHER

Do you think she heard? She must have heard.

BRANDON

I'm calling. *(Beat.)* She won't pick up.

CHRISTOPHER

Should we go after her?

BRANDON
Wait. There's a text.

CHRISTOPHER
And...?

BRANDON
She says she's going to Aunt Lee Ann's. Now?

CHRISTOPHER
Well. It's only 7:30.

BRANDON
Doesn't that seem weird?

CHRISTOPHER
Yes. But. I don't know. She's a grown woman. She can go to her sister's house if she wants to, I guess.

BRANDON
I guess. *(Beat.)* It's weird.

CHRISTOPHER
It is. *(Beat.)* I can't just sit here.

BRANDON
So...?

CHRISTOPHER
Let's go over to Lee Ann's. Make sure everything's OK.

BRANDON takes a deep gulp of his whiskey.

CHRISTOPHER
Give me a slug.

Drinks.

BRANDON
Hold on. It's Lee Ann. *(Beat as he reads.)* She says she's meeting Mom at Matt's house.

CHRISTOPHER
Fuck.

That's—

BRANDON

Not good. Let's go.

CHRISTOPHER

End of scene.

Scene 5

Time Period B. Something approximating a hipster bar in downtown Mercata. MATT sits with a beer at a bar table. CHRISTOPHER approaches with a red ale.

CHRISTOPHER

This place has come up a bit since the last time I was here.

MATT

What's that?

CHRISTOPHER

What's what?

MATT

What you're drinkin.

CHRISTOPHER

Something local. Flint Hills Red Ale. You tried it?

MATT

What's wrong with Coors?

CHRISTOPHER

It tastes like piss?

MATT

That's what Dad drank.

CHRISTOPHER

Dad hardly ever drank, so he didn't know better.

MATT

But you do.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt. Can it.

MATT

This place has got coastalized.

CHRISTOPHER

It's pretty cool. 14 beers on tap? I can hardly tell if I'm in Kansas or California.

MATT

Was that a joke?

CHRISTOPHER

It was a complement. I'm not Brandon, OK? I'm not trying to pick a fight.

MATT

Try the IPA.

CHRISTOPHER

What?

MATT

The Flint Hills IPA. It's pretty decent.

CHRISTOPHER

Alrightee. Next round. *(Beat.)* How's Amber?

MATT

Why do you ask?

CHRISTOPHER

She's your wife? I thought I'd inquire?

MATT

She's alright. How's Stacy?

CHRISTOPHER

Fine. She's busy. Work. I haven't seen Amber.

MATT

She's busy. Work.

CHRISTOPHER

She still doing massage?

MATT

No, man. She's got this job with these lawyers now, a law office? I don't know exactly.

CHRISTOPHER

I heard she lost the custody suit.

MATT

Where'd ya hear that?

CHRISTOPHER

Mom. They couldn't help, the lawyers? (*MATT shakes his head.*) That's gotta be tough. I'm sorry.

MATT

Yeah, well, they're not *my* kids. And she's still got David.

CHRISTOPHER

How's Madison?

MATT

(*As in, "What's with the interrogation?"*)

Chris!

CHRISTOPHER

She's my niece!

MATT

(*Relents*)

She's good. She's three. (*As in, "What's to say?"*)

CHRISTOPHER

How'd you come up with that name anyway?

MATT

Amber liked it. Said it was one of the most popular in 2015, so...

CHRISTOPHER

Haven't seen her.

MATT

(*Getting angry and defensive*)

If this is about...

CHRISTOPHER

It *is* about.

MATT gets up to leave.

CHRISTOPHER

Sit down.

MATT

You give a lot of orders.

CHRISTOPHER

Please. Mathew.

MATT sits.

MATT

I'm not going to change my mind. It's a court order now, so.

CHRISTOPHER

A temporary order.

MATT

So, it's not just up to me.

CHRISTOPHER

You mean you and Amber. It was her idea, wasn't it. Law office?

MATT stands again. He's going.

CHRISTOPHER

It's killing Mom.

MATT

Good.

CHRISTOPHER

You don't mean that. She's sorry, Matt.

MATT

She can say that to the judge.

CHRISTOPHER

She had a UTI for Christ's sake! And she was on medication. It made her crazy!

MATT

She ain't coming back to my house. She's not getting near me, or Amber, or Madison!
There's a restraining order!

CHRISTOPHER

You're her baby, Matt. Like Madison.

MATT

I'm gonna protect my daughter.

CHRISTOPHER

From her grandmother.

MATT

From her crazy shit. Yeah. Yeah, I am. Is this all you want to say? Cuz I'm gonna go.

CHRISTOPHER

Mom didn't kill Dad.

MATT

She might as well have.

CHRISTOPHER

No. That's not—

MATT

She's the reason! She's why he did it.

CHRISTOPHER

No. It's right in the medical record.

MATT

You weren't here. You didn't know.

CHRISTOPHER

It's what the doctor knew. It's there in the record.

MATT

The doctor. What fucking—

CHRISTOPHER

The psychiatrist. [At the VA.]

MATT

[Don't know shit!] He don't know shit. He wasn't there. I was there! I was there the night Dad stuck a pistol in his mouth. A pistol! Like it was a joke. Except it wasn't a joke.

CHRISTOPHER

When was this?

MATT

One night, on the porch, with Uncle Lawrence. Coors, by the way. Dad was going on about how broke up he was about Mom moving out. That she wanted a divorce. After all these years. How many? Like fifty?

CHRISTOPHER

Not fifty. Forty... I don't know... six? Forty-six.

MATT

Whatever-fucking-years. And she was leaving. Like it was all nothing. Like it was all some kind of a bad dream. *We* were some kind of a bad dream. And he couldn't take it. Dad said he just couldn't take it any more, and he put the gun in his mouth. One of his pistols. Lawrence was like, "Jack, cut it out." And I was like, "Dad, stop. That's the stupidest thing you've ever done." Dad goes, "Come on. It's just a joke!" But it wasn't a joke. It wasn't a joke. (*Chokes up*) It wasn't a joke, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

Okay, okay. [That's...]

MATT

[It's Mom's fault.] He said so. So don't tell me about some fucking VA shrink. He wasn't there. *You* weren't there. *Brandon* wasn't there. *I* was there. And he said it himself.

CHRISTOPHER

Okay, so Matt. So, that's pretty awful. Okay? But that doesn't mean the doctor's wrong. Listen to me.

MATT

Are you listening to *me*? You ain't listening to a goddamn thing I'm saying!

CHRISTOPHER

Matt.

MATT

(*Very measured as he stands to leave*)

Fuck you, Christopher.. Really. Fuck you.

End of scene.

Scene 6

Time Period B. *Sharon's living room.*
CHRISTOPHER and BRANDON.
More bourbon.

CHRISTOPHER

Had you ever heard that story?

BRANDON

It doesn't prove anything.

CHRISTOPHER

No, but it says *something*. He said it himself!

BRANDON

It wasn't Mom's fault. She did not *kill* Dad!

CHRISTOPHER

Shhhhhh! She's sleeping [in the—]

BRANDON

(Whispers ferociously)

[So that's] what Dad said. So what? The man was just out of the fucking psych ward, for God's sake.

CHRISTOPHER

I know that.

BRANDON

So why are we even taking it into account? Dad killed himself because, A: He had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – never resolved, never treated – PTSD from Vietnam, and B: Like a lot of other guys out here – white guys – he sees his whole life, everything he knew about the world, turned upside-down, slipping away. Starts blaming the Mexicans. Latches onto Trump. He's constantly getting pumped up by Fox News: "Alert! Alert! Alert!" You know his doctor told him to stop watching that shit. His blood pressure was through the roof.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not all political, B.

BRANDON

Some of it is. Really. No shit. Since Dad died, I've been reading the Mercata Gazette online. Did you know how many times a week you see an obituary for a guy between 25 and Dad's age who "died at home"? What's with that shit?

CHRISTOPHER

That's not all suicides. There's overdoses, alcoholism.

BRANDON

Same thing pretty much. Why are they covering it up? It's like an epidemic. Just tell the truth. Man, if I were running the campaigns here...

CHRISTOPHER

You'd get slaughtered. The paper's just trying to protect the family, like with Dad.

BRANDON

But it's crazy, Christopher. It's like an epidemic. And no one's talking about it. So, yeah, it's political. Part of it, anyway.

CHRISTOPHER

I think Mom moving out really did upset him.

BRANDON

Of course it did. Because finally he couldn't control her.

CHRISTOPHER

That's not [the only—]

BRANDON

[You know] he even told her how to vote. Mom, just told me this. All those years, on Election Day, Dad would hand her a sheet of paper telling her exactly how to vote.

CHRISTOPHER

B.

BRANDON

And then she'd go and vote the opposite way. Every time. She told him, too. Just before she moved out.

CHRISTOPHER

I think it was a lot of stuff. Dad loved Mom, you know.

BRANDON

Did he? Did he love anybody? Really?

CHRISTOPHER

B... I know you and Dad [had issues.]

BRANDON

[Had issues.] Yeah. Yeah, we did.

CHRISTOPHER

The main thing right now is Mom.

BRANDON

Fucking Matt. She doesn't want to live any more. Have you heard her?

CHRISTOPHER

I've heard.

BRANDON

I can't take another, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't think Mom's [going to—]

BRANDON

[I don't know] that. All she had to live for was being a grandmother.

CHRISTOPHER

That's not true.

BRANDON

That's what she says.

CHRISTOPHER

She's got us.

BRANDON

It's not enough. I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER

Why won't she see her shrink?

BRANDON

Because she's Mom. All she wants to do is watch TV and play with her iPad.

CHRISTOPHER

And sleep.

BRANDON

And sleep. If that's all you've got, why would anyone want to live? I mean, I know.

CHRISTOPHER

B...

BRANDON

I'm just saying I know what that feels like.

CHRISTOPHER

I know you do.

BRANDON

You saved me, Christopher. If you hadn't picked up your phone...

CHRISTOPHER

You'd have called 911.

BRANDON

No, I was too ashamed. I would have just...

CHRISTOPHER

B.

BRANDON

I'm sorry you had to see me like that.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, it was kind of a mess. But we got you bandaged up and into an ambulance, and it's all OK.

BRANDON

(Pulls instinctively on his sleeves)

I really don't remember much about it. There was just this enormous blackness.

CHRISTOPHER

And some booze.

BRANDON

And over what? Because some guy dumped me? Karl. We were only going together for half a year. But it's like I worshiped him. I couldn't picture my life without him.

CHRISTOPHER

You were just 23.

BRANDON

You were 18! I look back now and it's like, I can't believe it. It seems so crazy. For *him*?

CHRISTOPHER

I don't think it matters why, exactly.

BRANDON

Except you've got to have something that matters more than the pain. And with Mom, I think it's Madison. It's being a grandma. And now she can't. I'm serious, Christopher, I'm worried about her.

CHRISTOPHER

She could come to California, live near Stace and me.

BRANDON

Mom does not want to live in California.

CHRISTOPHER

She would if she had a grandkid there.

BRANDON

Wait. What? Is there news?

CHRISTOPHER

Not yet, but you know...

BRANDON

I thought Stacy wasn't ready. Her new job and all.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, she better get ready! We aren't getting younger. I'm just saying, *if* we had a kid, or two, Mom could be a grandma like she wants, and get away from all this shit.

BRANDON

She's always going to miss Madison. It's not like she's going to just forget about her cuz you've got kids.

CHRISTOPHER

Of course not, but at least she wouldn't have it right in her face all the time, with Madison just half an hour away, but she can't see her.

BRANDON

I don't know. I just think Mom belongs in Mercata. Her whole life is here.

CHRISTOPHER

What life? Really, honestly. Aunt Lee Ann? Grandma and Grandpa Howard are gone. She can't visit Madison. Matt won't talk to her. She hardly leaves the house anymore. Really, what life?

BRANDON

I know, I just...

CHRISTOPHER

Why are you fighting me on this? I could use your support here.

BRANDON

(Takes a swig of bourbon, then sincerely)

I support you. *(Lighter tone)* But you better get to work on having a kid. I can only do so much. In the meantime, can we get back to figuring out how we get Matt to lift the restraining order so Mom can see the one grandchild she's got and have a reason to get up in the morning, and we can both go back to California, and you... can get busy.

End of scene.

Scene 7

Time Period B. Muckrunners. CHRISTOPHER and LAWRENCE sit at a table.

LAWRENCE

Best damn burger in Mercata. Honest to God.

CHRISTOPHER

You don't mind this place?

LAWRENCE

Mind it?

CHRISTOPHER

Too "coastalized?" That's what Matt thinks.

LAWRENCE

Matt's never been further than St. Louis. How would he know?

CHRISTOPHER

He did his basic training in Alabama.

LAWRENCE

That ain't exactly coastal. Nah, I like this place. All the beers on tap, brings in the mountain bikers – though how you can "mountain bike" in Kansas, don't ask me. The Flint Hills ain't exactly the Rockies. Anyway, this place brings business to town, so good. And they've got fifty plus whiskies. No lie. I haven't even got through half yet.

BRANDON enters with drinks and a burger on a tray, like a waiter.

LAWRENCE

What, d'ya work here now?

BRANDON

Ha, ha. Your burger. And I got you a flight of bourbon.

He sets down food for LAWRENCE and drinks all around.

LAWRENCE

Awesome. What are they?

BRANDON

(Looks carefully, he's forgotten)

Ah, shit.

LAWRENCE

You didn't write it down? Don't matter.

He drinks happily.

CHRISTOPHER

Thanks for coming, Uncle Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

You offer me a burger and bourbon, I'll prob'ly show up. You know, we gotta figure out what to do with that farm. Haven't had a tenant in nearly a year now. And the taxes keep comin due, renters or not.

BRANDON

We can't find anyone to—?

LAWRENCE

I've tried, boys, believe me I've tried. Nobody wants to farm no more. Not if they can help it.

BRANDON

Then what?

LAWRENCE

Sell it.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, but what are we going to get if we can't even rent it?

LAWRENCE

At least we wouldn't have to pay the taxes.

BRANDON

Oh, my God! You Republicans!

CHRISTOPHER

B!

BRANDON

Taxes, taxes, taxes! That's all you think about! Doesn't the land mean something to you? You grew up on that farm, too, Uncle Lawrence. Right alongside Dad.

LAWRENCE

Yeah, it means somethin to me. It means five thousand in taxes we don't get to spend on somethin else!

BRANDON

AAARGHHH!!

CHRISTOPHER

Anyhoo...! That's not why we asked you here.

LAWRENCE

Didn't think so. But we still gotta figure out what to do. Four out of five to make a decision. Anyway. How can I help you boys?

BRANDON

Matt.

LAWRENCE

That's what I thought.

CHRISTOPHER

This restraining order is killing Mom.

LAWRENCE

Literally?

CHRISTOPHER

Well...

LAWRENCE

Well, then.

BRANDON

I don't want another Dad.

LAWRENCE

Your mom's not your dad.

BRANDON

So, you're on Matt's side?

LAWRENCE

Two people split up, like your mom and dad, they got their reasons. But after forty years – or more – of marriage... I don't know. It's sort of... What's the point? But your mom moved out. Fine. That's her right. But Jack... he couldn't let it go. It was eatin him up.

BRANDON

And you think that's why.

LAWRENCE

I know that's why. That's what he said.

BRANDON

When? It's not like he left a note.

LAWRENCE

He didn't need a note. It was obvious. Look, I'm not bein hard on your mother. She had a right. But I'm just sayin, that's what *he* said.

CHRISTOPHER

That night on the porch, with the pistol.

LAWRENCE

Matt told you? Yeah, then. And other times.

CHRISTOPHER

The VA says he had PTSD. And that can lead—

LAWRENCE

Your dad didn't have no PTSD.

CHRISTOPHER

Why not? That's what the doctor said.

LAWRENCE

He just didn't. The Vietnam War was a long time ago.

CHRISTOPHER

It comes back. Dad was hospitalized. Twice. Put in the psych ward. That wasn't just because Mom—

LAWRENCE

What do you boys want from me, exactly? We're not gonna prove anything here arguin about why your father did what he did. Fact is, he's dead.

BRANDON

Tell Matt to drop the restraining order.

LAWRENCE

And you think he'll listen to me?

BRANDON

Who else?

LAWRENCE

Tell you what, I'll think about it. The whole thing's kinda stupid anyway, to tell ya the truth. Matt's a grown man. He can't protect himself from an old lady? But you boys gotta promise me somethin.

CHRISTOPHER

Okay...

LAWRENCE

You tell your mother to give Jack's ashes to me.

BRANDON

You?

LAWRENCE

I'm his brother.

BRANDON

She's his wife.

LAWRENCE

Very nearly *ex*-wife. I should have them.

CHRISTOPHER

And then what?

LAWRENCE

I'll lay him to rest in Mesa, like he wanted. With all the rest of the family. I got an idea Matt's gonna feel more like droppin that restrainin order if he's secure about what's happenin with his dad.

BRANDON

Is this some sort of bargain?

CHRISTOPHER

You and Matt already worked this out, didn't you?

LAWRENCE

We talk, yeah. That's why you wanted to meet with me, right? Cuz you all sure ain't talkin to each other. It's a simple swap: I get the ashes and your mom gets to see Madison. You know, you boys should patch things up with your brother. It would make things a lot simpler. And we still gotta decide what to do with the farm. Well, thanks for the burger, boys. And the bourbon. Just thirty-something more to go.

LAWRENCE pushes off, exits.

BRANDON

We're not giving him the ashes, right?

CHRISTOPHER

What's more important? Dad's ashes or Mom seeing her granddaughter.

BRANDON

What about to you and me? I don't want Uncle Lawrence – or Matt – calling the shots.

CHRISTOPHER

I just want Mom to find some peace. And then I want to go back to Los Angeles. And get busy. Finish your drink. Let's get back to Mom's.

End of scene.

Scene 8

*Time Period A. Sharon's condo. Living room. Evening.
CHRISTOPHER and BRANDON look through old photos
and drink bourbon.*

CHRISTOPHER

Here's a good one, B. You and Dad. You must be at a baseball game.

Hands him photo.

BRANDON

Oh, yeah... In St. Louis. Cardinals game. I think I must have been — eight?

CHRISTOPHER

Where was I?

BRANDON

Probably at the motel with Mom. Super 8. Not even a pool!

CHRISTOPHER

Nice road trip!

BRANDON

Just like their honeymoon. Soon as the service was over, Dad hightails them off to St. Louis for a ball game.

CHRISTOPHER

Romantic.

MATT enters.

BRANDON

He had his priorities.

MATT

Well, I did it. *(Notices the box of photos.)* What's all that?

CHRISTOPHER

Box of old photos Mom pulled out of the closet.

MATT

Where *is* Mom?

CHRISTOPHER

Asleep.

MATT

She sure sleeps a lot.

BRANDON

She's grieving. Like I told you.

MATT

So I did it. I got a buyer for all the parts in the shed. You wanna thank me now, or call me an asshole again.

CHRISTOPHER

Who's the buyer?

MATT

Tommy Simpson, the guy who runs O'Reilly's.

BRANDON

The auto-parts store.

MATT

Yeah. He's gonna sorta sell 'em on the sly, out the back.

BRANDON

Undercutting his own employer.

MATT

Whatever works.

BRANDON

So, Dad's inventory winds up as contraband.

CHRISTOPHER

Not contraband.

MATT

At least I got that shit sold!

CHRISTOPHER

Good job. Thank you, Matthew. Brandon?

BRANDON
Appreciate it.

MATT
Whatever. So, what are you guys drinkin'?

CHRISTOPHER
Bourbon. Have a glass.

MATT
I'm gonna talk to Mom about the ashes.

BRANDON
Matt!

CHRISTOPHER
That's fine. You're his son, you've got a right to an opinion. So does Lawrence. It's fine. Just be... kind to her. Would you?

BRANDON
Just let her be, Matt!

BRANDON furiously shuffles through the photos, almost like playing cards. In his anger he picks up a handful and sprays them around the room.

CHRISTOPHER
What the fuck! Careful, Brandon. You're acting like a brat.

BRANDON
(Sarcastically)
So sorry. Let me pick them up.

BRANDON starts to collect the photos, MATT picks one up.

MATT
Who's this?

BRANDON
Grandad.

MATT
Dad's dad?

BRANDON

Well, it's not Grandpa Howard! You don't recognize Grandad?

MATT

He was a lot older when I knew him. And he died when I was like, six?

CHRISTOPHER

I guess that's right. You never really did know him, did you?

BRANDON

Gotta say, he was quite a looker back then.

MATT

I guess. Man, why are you even noticing that shit? He's your grandad!

CHRISTOPHER

Here's one of Grandma Esther. About the same time.

BRANDON

Wowee. They were quite a pair. Bet they really turned some heads in this town. You know, I always thought Grandad must have been gay.

MATT

What!

BRANDON

I mean look at him.

MATT

That's just fucked.

BRANDON

Alright. I'm just saying.

MATT

Why would you. Say that.

BRANDON

You know his story?

CHRISTOPHER

Come on, B. Let's just keep this a pleasant stroll down Memory Lane.

BRANDON

No really. Did you know that Grandad wanted to move to California?

MATT

When was this?

BRANDON

When he was young, maybe twenty. He wanted to move to Los Angeles. And play tennis. *Tennis.*

MATT

Maybe he was good at it.

BRANDON

I'm sure he was. But his parents wouldn't let him.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt you never heard all this?

MATT

Where are you getting this from?

BRANDON

Grandma Esther.

MATT

Playin tennis don't make you gay, man. I mean, it's not football, but...

BRANDON

No. No. Fair enough. But he couldn't go to California. His older brother — he contracted some terrible fever and it kind of just, fried his brain — he was mentally disabled after that — and Granddad's parents said somebody had to stay and tend the farm and look after his brother. So he never went to LA. Granddad stayed on the farm, but he also got a job working for the railroad, second job here in town. And he could ride the trains for free. He'd head up to Kansas City on the weekends. Regularly. Up to Kansas City. On the weekends.

MATT

So?

BRANDON

So, even after he married Grandma Esther, at least once a month, he'd go up to KC, on his own. No one knew where he stayed, who he saw, what he did. But he went. Once a month. For years.

MATT

Maybe he liked to gamble. Maybe he had a girlfriend. Who knows?

BRANDON

Maybe. Or maybe he was gay. Tennis. LA. Gay bars in KC...

CHRISTOPHER

Hey, I live in LA. I'm not gay.

MATT

My grandad was not a fuckin faggot, OK?

CHRISTOPHER

Matt.

BRANDON

Well, they say it's hereditary. I must have gotten it from somewhere.

CHRISTOPHER

Alright. Maybe we should put the pictures away. We've both got flights in the morning.

BRANDON

You know how they met, right? Grandma Esther and Grandad? At the Granada. Grandma was working the box office, selling movie tickets, and Grandad came up one night, all suave and handsome — like some Kansas City slicker — bought his ticket, and asked her on a date. Right there at the box office window. Two months later she was pregnant and they were headed down the aisle. Squashed both of their dreams. Grandma had a scholarship to the Normal College. She was going to be a teacher. First person in the family to go to college. That wasn't going to happen now. And Grandad sure as shit was never gonna get to LA. Done. At age 30, for him. She was 19.

MATT

And Grandma Esther told you all of this shit, too?

BRANDON

And Mom. Grandma Esther and Grandad both wanted to get out of this town, and neither one of them could.

MATT

Maybe that's because they didn't really want to.

BRANDON

And maybe they lived their whole lives being frustrated and unhappy. And maybe that's why Grandad was such a bastard. Maybe that's why he beat Dad when he was young, beat him. And Grandma Esther too. The whole thing was fucked up. Maybe that's why Grandma Esther and Dad couldn't stop fighting in the end. The whole family was so dysfunctional.

MATT

Now you're a psychiatrist?

BRANDON

Just putting two and two together.

CHRISTOPHER

We don't know. We'll never really know.

MATT

But we do know neither one of them just run off.

CHRISTOPHER

"Run off?" What are you, Grandma?

BRANDON

You mean like Christopher and me?

MATT

Why couldn't you guys just stay here? You're both so smart. We're not good enough for you?

CHRISTOPHER

We're not better than you. We just want — something different.

MATT

Better.

CHRISTOPHER

Different. *(Beat.)* So, what are your plans now, Matt? The Reserves aren't a full-time job.

MATT

I got somethin lined up.

CHRISTOPHER

You didn't tell me.

MATT

You didn't ask.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I'm asking.

Railroads. MATT

Railroads? BRANDON

Uncle Lawrence knew somebody. MATT

Yeah? That's great. So what are you doing? CHRISTOPHER

Line switcher. MATT

Where's this? CHRISTOPHER

KC. Freight yards. Me and Amber are looking at a place in Eudora. MATT

Eudora? BRANDON
(*Where??*)

That's like, what, 30 minutes? CHRISTOPHER

Yup. MATT

Railroads. There's the future. BRANDON

B. CHRISTOPHER

Why don't you come to California, get a job in construction — we're building all kinds of shit all over the place, and it pays like, God knows, a hundred bucks an hour. *There's a future.* BRANDON

You think you're so much goddamned smarter than everyone else! MATT

BRANDON

I'm just saying — *railroads?*

CHRISTOPHER

Alright, alright, alright. Who wants another bourbon?

MATT

It's good pay and benefits. I got a family to support. Unlike you, Brandon.

CHRISTOPHER

It sounds great, Matthew. When do you start?

MATT

Coupla weeks.

CHRISTOPHER

Let's drink to your new job. Last time we'll be together for who knows how long.

MATT

You're not comin back for the burial?

BRANDON

Internment.

MATT

Whatever.

CHRISTOPHER

Whenever *Mom* decides. I'm gonna try. You, B?

BRANDON

Yeah, of course.

MATT

Even if it's in Mesa?

CHRISTOPHER

Don't start again. Here's to Matt's new job.

BRANDON

And. To Dad.

They drink the toast.

End of scene.

Scene 9

Time Period B. Muckrunners. LAWRENCE and CHRISTOPHER at a table with two flights of bourbon.

LAWRENCE

You like bourbon.

CHRISTOPHER

I do. Good thing, too. This is quite a line-up.

LAWRENCE

All clearly marked this time so you know what you're drinkin.

CHRISTOPHER

Very organized.

LAWRENCE

I'm a CPA and I like things organized. Take a swig.

(They drink.)

LAWRENCE

Now, that's some whiskey!

CHRISTOPHER

So, what are we doing here?

LAWRENCE

Wind turbines.

CHRISTOPHER

Wind turbines?

LAWRENCE

You know. Wind power.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm familiar with the concept. I'm a thermal engineer, Uncle Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

I know you are! Good thing you dropped that pottery thing. Lots more money as an engineer.

CHRISTOPHER

I've still got a kiln in my garage.

LAWRENCE

Did you know they want to build one of them goddamned wind farms right outside Mesa? Right by the old farm.

CHRISTOPHER

Who does?

LAWRENCE

NewEra. They're the ones that built that mother of a complex out there by Wichita.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, I saw it on the way from the airport. Biggest I've ever seen.

LAWRENCE

Well, they're looking at Mesa area, too.

CHRISTOPHER

That's cool. Nothing else happening in that place. You know, Kansas is like perfect for wind power. Second only to Texas.

LAWRENCE

I tried to tell that to your dad but he wasn't gonna budge.

CHRISTOPHER

About what?

LAWRENCE

They're lookin to lease the farm. For the turbines. I kept tryin to convince your father, but he wouldn't even think about it.

CHRISTOPHER

Why not? That farm hasn't made money for years. Can't hardly keep a tenant on it.

LAWRENCE

That's what I was tryin to tell him! And these guys at NewEra, they pay good money too, just for the lease, we're not even talkin about the share of the earnings you get once it starts crankin electricity.

CHRISTOPHER

So, what was Dad's argument? I don't get it.

LAWRENCE

I don't know. He didn't like the *look* of them or somethin. "They mar the vista," he said. Like the man was a goddamned landscape painter or some such, Jesus! Anyway, yeah, they want to include the farm in a huge ol' project they got planned for west of town.

CHRISTOPHER

Mom didn't say anything.

LAWRENCE

I don't think she's been lookin at her mail carefully. Make sure she's payin her bills. They sent out some information a couple days ago. And I been talkin to some of the guys from the company.

CHRISTOPHER

I bet you have.

LAWRENCE

This is gonna be good for all of us. These suckers, these turbines, they just churn out money. Like oil wells, only it's wind. Who'd a thought somethin as free and God-given as wind could make you rich? Well, maybe not rich, but way better off than we are right now. And we keep the farm. NewEra's gonna pay way more than any ol' tenant. Whadya think?

CHRISTOPHER

Renewables are the future, man.

LAWRENCE

That's what I tried to tell your dad! All this oil's gonna git played out. And this frackin shit — like jammin an enema into Mother Earth just to see what comes out — just creatin earthquakes. No shit! It's as bad as California out here now. But wind and sun, we got plenty of that. It's all free! And we make money!

CHRISTOPHER

Ok, so... Why are you telling me? I mean, it's a great idea and all, but you bought me the bourbon for a reason.

LAWRENCE

Christopher! What do you make of me? Why can't I buy my nephew a round of drinks?

CHRISTOPHER

You can. You just never do.

LAWRENCE

Alright, here's the thing. Your dad gave the farm to all five of us. And as you know, four outta five of us have gotta sign onto a thing this big or no deal. Four outta five. That's what the will says.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I'm good. What else are we gonna do with that farm? This way we get to keep it, and... Besides, clean energy and all? All good.

LAWRENCE

Right!

CHRISTOPHER

I don't think Mom's gonna object. She just doesn't want to have to worry about it.

LAWRENCE

And there's no worries. Once them babies are in the ground, they just run and run and run. Plus, your mom wouldn't mind the money, I expect.

CHRISTOPHER

She's doing alright financially, but sure.

LAWRENCE

It's not your mom though I'm worried about.

CHRISTOPHER

Who then? I'm sure Brandon would be all for it. Progressives love it, renewables.

LAWRENCE

Matt.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt? What would he have against it?

LAWRENCE

He's got some cock-a-mamey idea about what the farm used to be and keepin your dad's — legacy — alive.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt never had anything good to say about the farm, except to ride his dirt bike through it. He certainly never liked farming.

LAWRENCE

He thinks he loves the damn place now. Talk to him. Maybe we can straighten this whole thing out.

CHRISTOPHER

What “whole thing?”

LAWRENCE

This whole damn mess. Your dad’s ashes, the restrainin order, the farm. All of it. You want your mom to see her granddaughter again, don’t you?

CHRISTOPHER

You’re more clever than me, Uncle Lawrence. Tell me how they’re all connected.

LAWRENCE

Let me get you another flight.

End of scene.

Scene 10

Time Period B. Sharon's living room.
CHRISTOPHER and BRANDON.

CHRISTOPHER

What do you mean “no way?”

BRANDON

Dad was right. They're ugly as sin. Plus, you know they kill like millions of birds a year in those goddamned blades.

CHRISTOPHER

Not millions.

BRANDON

All told? Everywhere around the country? I bet it's millions.

CHRISTOPHER

It's clean energy. It makes money. And what else are we gonna do with the farm?

BRANDON

Farm it?

CHRISTOPHER

You are.

BRANDON

We could lease it. Like we've been doing for years. And who knows, maybe some day...

CHRISTOPHER

Some day what? You're gonna come back? You and your hubby are gonna set up as Kansas dirt farmers? Cattlemen?

BRANDON

Why couldn't we?

CHRISTOPHER

You could. I'm just surprised.

BRANDON

I'm just saying, Dad was right — God, did I just say that?

CHRISTOPHER

Twice, actually.

BRANDON

Those gigantic wind turbines, they *do* mar the landscape. Be honest. That's not how I want to remember the farm, do you?

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know that I'm gonna be headed out there all that often. When was the last time you were there?

BRANDON

I always visit the farm when I'm here. I drove out a couple days ago.

CHRISTOPHER

When was this?

BRANDON

You were off with Mom somewhere. I just wanted to be there alone. You know Dad taught me how to drive out there, no traffic so he thought it was safe. In the Camaro.

CHRISTOPHER

The Camaro!

BRANDON

Very slowly.

CHRISTOPHER

Where was I?

BRANDON

At home. Dad wasn't about to have you in the back seat tormenting us both while I was—

CHRISTOPHER

Tormenting?

BRANDON

You were nothing but a total [torment—]

CHRISTOPHER

[I don't know] what you're talking about.

Does some physical prank...

BRANDON

That's what I'm talking about!

CHRISTOPHER

What??

BRANDON

Anyway... I was out there, standing on that gravel road, with the old tracks of the Santa Fe Trail running right beside it, east to west, straight as an arrow. I always thought it was so cool, to follow those ruts clear across the farm. Our people came down that trail. Grandad farmed that land, even though he wanted to be in California. His father farmed that land, which he had gotten from his father, after he left the coal mines in Wales—

CHRISTOPHER

You always were the genealogist.

BRANDON

Great-Great Grandad came down that trail. And stopped, right there. He got the land from the federal Land Office for almost no money down, you know that, right? Just a promise to homestead it, to keep tilling the soil. He kept that promise and we've all kept that promise. We might have rented it out, but the land was farmed. Like we promised.

CHRISTOPHER

You know those homesteads were land they stole from the Indians. The Osage, the Kickapoo, the Kaw. All of them, the federal government, the fucking Army, pushed them all off, or just—

BRANDON

Killed them. I know. I know that.

CHRISTOPHER

And then gave the land to us. It's all kind of fucked up, B.

BRANDON

Great-Great-Grandad did not kill anyone. He just got the land.

CHRISTOPHER

From folks who had killed people, innocent people. History's a complicated, fucked up mess, B. You gotta let some of it go. A lot of it.

BRANDON

Is that why it's so easy for you? Leave all this behind. Take Mom with you. Put fucking wind turbines on the land we've been farming for a hundred and fifty years. Whatever. It doesn't matter. Cuz history's fucked.

CHRISTOPHER

You live in California, too. I'm not the only one who "run off."

BRANDON

I had to.

CHRISTOPHER

So did I.

BRANDON

It's different. I'd have stayed here if I could.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, come one. You're so full of shit. There's no way.

BRANDON

Yes! Yes, I would have. If this place weren't so damned homophobic, I think I would have.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know, B. I have a hard time seeing you picking up the love of your life at Muckrunners.

BRANDON

Cowboy, take me away!

CHRISTOPHER

What about Kansas City? Seriously. You could have stayed there, right? Pretty open-minded. Lots of gay stuff. You'd have been close by, and all. But you didn't.

BRANDON

Honestly? Dad. Even KC was too close. I could just feel him, breathing down my neck, watching, judging everything I was doing.

CHRISTOPHER

I had that too. Not the gay thing, but, you know, there was no pleasing the man.

BRANDON

What are you talking about? You were totally the apple of his eye. Handy with the car. Good at baseball. The star shortstop. I couldn't even catch the damn ball. The coach stuck me out in right field where I'd do the least damage. Dad never came to even one of my games.

CHRISTOPHER

He was traveling.

BRANDON

He went to yours.

CHRISTOPHER

It was a different time. He wasn't on the road as much.

BRANDON

Maybe. Fact is, he went to yours. He even got into your ceramics.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, that was weird, huh? Dad, art. Who knew?

BRANDON

After you won that award, he liked your art. I couldn't do anything that pleased him. Even when I was voted president of the FBLA—

CHRISTOPHER

The what?

BRANDON

Future Business Leaders of America. I thought that would impress Dad, business and all. You know what he called it? Future Butt Lickers of America.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, he was odd that way. Total Republican, but really hated the corporations. Except Chevy. But you know, for him it was all about small business, small towns. The history of the place.

BRANDON

Right, which was the one thing we had in common. The one thing. Those summers I worked in the library, he thought it was so wussy, until I came home with all these facts about our family, and the town, and the stories of how it all got established, more than a hundred years ago, and that's when he paid attention. For the first time. He actually listened to what I was talking about. You on the other hand...

CHRISTOPHER

For a while maybe, but once I told him I had no interest in the business, something switched. And, really, what else was I going to do in Mercata? There's no future here. And you're right, the history thing, it just doesn't interest me that much. *(Beat)* Anyway, we are way off topic. Wind turbines. Clean energy. There's the future! A fortune for the whole family!

BRANDON

Very funny. *(Beat.)* So, what did Mom say about it?

CHRISTOPHER

I haven't told her yet. I don't think she's going to care one way or the other, do you?

BRANDON

That farm never meant anything to her. I think she's going to want whatever you and I want.

CHRISTOPHER

And we don't agree. I mean the other option is to sell. Not that we'd get much for it. With the wind farm we'd be able to keep the land in the family at least. And who knows, in a hundred years we can probably take the turbines down cuz we'll all be getting all our power from solar by then. And with global warming, we could turn the farm into — an orange grove. Who knows?

BRANDON

Ha, ha.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm kinda half serious. About the solar part.

BRANDON

Well, I'm totally serious. It may sound silly but I want to see the farm in my mind's eye and know it's still a farm. Like it has been for a hundred and fifty years. I want to drive out there next time I'm back and see the Flint Hills in the distance, not a field of gigantic wind turbines.

CHRISTOPHER

Alright, I'll grant you, the turbines do not contribute to the aesthetics of the property.

BRANDON

Do we really need the money that badly? I don't think so.

CHRISTOPHER

Uncle Lawrence has an idea, a scheme, really.

BRANDON

This doesn't sound good.

CHRISTOPHER

So Mom can see Madison again.

BRANDON

What does that have to do with—

CHRISTOPHER

He says he'll convince Matt to lift the restraining order.

BRANDON

How?

CHRISTOPHER

As part of a deal.

BRANDON

Of course.

CHRISTOPHER

Lawrence will talk to Matt. Tell him he can get Dad's ashes. Do whatever he wants with them, bury them in Mesa, like Dad wanted. *If* he lets Mom see Madison.

BRANDON

So Mom has to give up the ashes. She doesn't want to be buried in Mesa!

CHRISTOPHER

She gets to see her granddaughter. What's more important?

BRANDON

That Mom's happy.

CHRISTOPHER

That's what we both want. I still think she should come to California.

BRANDON

And Lawrence? Back to the topic. What does he get?

CHRISTOPHER

He gets Matt to agree to lease the farm to the power company.

BRANDON

Because...

CHRISTOPHER

Because Lawrence tells Matt, that's part of the deal. Matt gets Dad's ashes. Mom gets to see Madison. And the farm—

BRANDON

Is chalk-full of turbines.

CHRISTOPHER

Matt makes money too! We all do. Look, Matt wants the ashes more than anything. It's about Dad's memory or legacy or something. And Mom just wants to see Madison. That's what Lawrence thinks.

BRANDON

You guys got this all worked out.

CHRISTOPHER

I know it seems...

BRANDON

Conniving?

CHRISTOPHER

But it really does work out best all the way around.

BRANDON

I can't believe you.

CHRISTOPHER

What?

BRANDON

It's not right! We shouldn't need a *deal* so Mom can see her granddaughter. And if Mom wants to be buried next to Dad, here in Mercata, where they lived their entire lives together, that's her right. And the farm should just stay a fucking farm. I'm sorry. We don't need a twisted deal from Uncle Lawrence to work this out!

BRANDON starts to leave.

CHRISTOPHER

Where are you going?

BRANDON

To see a man about a farm.

End of scene.

Scene 11

Time Period A. Sharon's living room. Scene picks up later the same evening as Scene 8. CHRISTOPHER, BRANDON and MATT. The three brothers are now a little drunk.

MATT

How come there's none of me in here?

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, for Christ's sake, you're in here. Don't be such a baby. Here.

Produces a photo. All look.

CHRISTOPHER

Nice "do" there, Baby Bro. You look like a freaking porcupine.

MATT

I was just a kid.

CHRISTOPHER

And what was with you, B? You look like Annie Lennox, but not so butch.

BRANDON

Shut up. That was my blond period. I'd just moved up to KC and I was very, you know, into the scene. Hmnn... Looks like I've still got some glitter on my face.

MATT

Glitter?

CHRISTOPHER

Raves.

BRANDON

And that's just my face. The rest... you don't want to know.

MATT

Gross!

BRANDON

But look, Baby Bro, I drove you to the Dairy Queen, see? Got your favorite. Chocolate dip with sparkly sprinkles.

MATT

I did like the sprinkles. They were crunchy.

CHRISTOPHER

Glitter... sparkly sprinkles... Like two peas in a pod, you two.

MATT

(Good-naturedly)

Shut up.

BRANDON

And where was Christopher, you might ask? I think I see that mop top in the back seat there.

CHRISTOPHER

Where?

BRANDON

And what are you holding, Christopher? What is that?

CHRISTOPHER

What?

BRANDON

Oh, look, it's an entire soft swirl parfait about to be launched at your unsuspecting Baby Bro!

CHRISTOPHER

(Feigning amnesia)

I don't know what you're talking about.

MATT

I remember that! That strawberry shit in my hair, my face, dripping all over Mom's new Buick.

BRANDON

You got in a heap of trouble for that. Almost as bad as when you lit the backyard on fire.

CHRISTOPHER

[I did not!}]

MATT

[When was that?]

BRANDON

You were in diapers, and I was supposed to be baby-sitting you both.

CHRISTOPHER

You never baby-sat me.

BRANDON

What do you call it then?

CHRISTOPHER

Being bullied by a big brother, know-it-all, goody-two-shoes!

BRANDON

So, yeah, he caught the whole back corner on fire. Big pile of leaves. A little lighter fluid and... Poof! Flames shooting everywhere. The elm tree is catching on fire. Then the fence, and the neighbor's shed starts to go.

CHRISTOPHER

You are so full of shit.

BRANDON

(Reveling as the tale becomes more fantastical)

I'm calling 911 and little Matt here is crawling right towards the flames. You've pooped your diapers, but can't worry about that now, gotta save you from immolating your baby self. I'm screaming, Chris, Chris! Get your baby bro! But no! All he can do is hoot and dance around like he's Bozo in the Big Top.

As BRANDON goes on, CHRISTOPHER and MATT exchange looks.

BRANDON

So I go tearing out of the house to save my Baby Bro — ripped the phone off the wall because I forgot to hang up, and I've almost got your dirty ass when—

CHRISTOPHER and MATT simultaneously throw their drinks in BRANDON's face. He sputters. Then throws his drink at MATT. Vigorous horseplay follows until MATT picks up the bottle of bourbon to douse the whole thing over BRANDON's head when CHRISTOPHER stops him, crying out...

CHRISTOPHER

Not the Makers Mark!

End of scene.

Scene 12

*Time Period B. The farm.
Fields tilled for the winter. November bleak.
The bright red Camaro gleams in the cold sunlight.
MATT waits beside it. BRANDON approaches.*

BRANDON
Hey.

MATT
I guess you got my text.

BRANDON
I sent you a reply. You didn't get it?

MATT
Not out here.

BRANDON
Oh, right. God!

MATT
I kinda like it. No texts. No calls.

BRANDON
I suppose. I guess it's part of the charm.

MATT
"Charm?"

BRANDON
The quiet, I guess. *(Beat.)* So... the Camaro!

MATT
Yep. You gotta take it out sometimes. You know. For the engine.

BRANDON
It's in good shape.

MATT
Yep. *(Beat.)* So, Uncle Lawrence came by.

BRANDON

Yeah, I know.

MATT

It's bullshit. Dad would never have stood for it! He told Lawrence no way. This is way back. When they first started poppin up, these motherfuckers. Dad was like, "No way. Not on my land. I'm never lettin those goddamned Obama monstrosities – that's what he'd call 'em – on my land. No, sir!" It's fucked up. I s'pose you want to talk me into it. Well, no way.

BRANDON

I'm with you.

MATT

What?

BRANDON

I agree. I hate the damn things. I mean, they're good. Clean energy and all that...

MATT

(Bemused not hostile)

You are such a snowflake.

BRANDON

But I'm with you. Not here. Not this place.

MATT

Okay, well, that's cool. I guess.

(Beat.)

Is that what you wanted to talk about?

BRANDON

Partly. And Ange—

MATT

I ain't [liftin the—]

BRANDON

And Dad's ashes.

MATT

What about 'em?

BRANDON

The ashes. You can have them.

MATT

Mom said that?

BRANDON

I can get Mom to say that. *If* you lift the restraining order.

MATT

No way. Not goin to happen!

BRANDON

Well, then we're stuck. Mom's miserable – but at least she gets to be buried next to Dad. In Mercata. I think she's talking about a mausoleum.

MATT

Fuck you.

BRANDON

You can't get everything, Baby Bro. You want Dad's ashes. For the legacy or whatever.

MATT

For his memory!

BRANDON

And you can have them! Keep Dad's memory. Bury him wherever you want. Just let Mom see her granddaughter!

Silence.

MATT

She tried to kidnap her.

BRANDON

What are you talking about?

MATT

Mom. She tried to take Madison. That day we were supposed to bury Dad. She came to my place, like out of her mind—

BRANDON

We told you, she had a UTI!

MATT

I don't even know what that is!

BRANDON

Urinary tract infection. It can make you crazy. Till you're treated.

MATT

Well she was definitely fucking crazy. Started screamin all sorts of crazy shit at Amber. Me too but I'm used to—

BRANDON

Matt, she was chemically unbalanced, that's what happens when you have—

MATT

She wanted the guns. She wanted to take the guns out of my house—

BRANDON

You have a three year old. It's not safe!

MATT

So I went to go secure the guns, and Mom, I guess, she grabs Madison, carries her out of the house – Amber's screamin – so I run out, and Mom had her in the back seat of the car. She was tryin to fuckin kidnap her. That's why there's a fuckin restrainin order, you idiot.

BRANDON

I don't believe you.

MATT

You don't have to.

BRANDON

Aunt Lee Ann never said anything about Mom grabbing Madison. She said there was a fight, yeah, but—

MATT

Aunt Lee Ann was in the house, with Amber. Mom was in the car with Madison – about to drive off – when I caught her. Lee Ann never saw it.

BRANDON

Mom would never do something like that. I don't care how crazy she was.

MATT

I was right there! I had to physically grab Madison out of the backseat and take her inside to Amber. So I'm not liftin the restrainin order. No way!

BRANDON

This is all bullshit.

MATT

Just like it was bullshit what Dad said to me and Lawrence that night when he stuck the pistol in his mouth.

BRANDON

Dad was just out of the psych ward for Christ's sake! He had PTSD!

MATT

"Sharon's run off. I might as well just kill myself." And then he did.

BRANDON

He might [have just—]

MATT

"Sharon's run off. Just like Brandon and Christopher."

BRANDON

He did not.

MATT

That's what he said. "My boys done run off. My wife run off. I might just as well kill myself."

BRANDON

You never said anything about Christopher and me.

MATT

I'm not shittin you.

BRANDON

You're making this shit up.

MATT

I was there. I was right there. "My boys done run off." I'm right there. He keeps sayin that. "My boys run off." Like he didn't see me. "Brandon's gone. San Francisco! Christopher. Always thought he'd take over the business. Handy. A good mechanic. He's gone. California. Workin on goddamned computers or some such. And now Sharon? I mean, goddamn! What the hell. There's nothin left." I'm sittin right there, Brandon. Right in front of him.

BRANDON

He didn't know what he was saying. Really.

MATT

I went to Mercata High. Like him. I joined the Reserves. Like him. I got a job with the railroad. Like Grandad. I stayed here. Like him. I stayed. And I'm sittin right there. And he couldn't see me.

BRANDON

Matt...

MATT

I wasn't enough. I wasn't enough, I guess. I was tryin. I was tryin, really. I had a kid! But... I wasn't enough to... to...

BRANDON

Matt. Man. It's not your fault!

MATT

Why couldn't I make him see me? I mean, maybe, maybe... if I coulda... I don't know. I did everything! Why? I mean he saw *you*. He didn't always like it.

BRANDON

That's for sure.

MATT

But he *saw* you. He respected you. And Christopher. And I'm sittin right there. Like I'm just... nothin.

BRANDON

It's not your fault, Matt.

MATT

It's gotta be somebody's fault!

BRANDON

I don't know. I don't know. Maybe it was *his* fault.

*MATT is suddenly enraged.
Like a small child he whirls to lash out.
He lands a hard blow on BRANDON.
BRANDON finds something in him that he hasn't felt
since childhood and swings back, hard, without thinking
and without restraint. The two continue fighting like
wild children. Exhausted, the two wind up in each
other's arms. MATT weeps like a young boy.*

Why couldn't he see me? MATT

He loved you, Matt. BRANDON

Why couldn't see me? MATT

I don't know. BRANDON

I did everything he wanted. MATT

I know. BRANDON

I stayed. MATT

I don't know. I thought... I thought it was because I'm gay. I thought... He did it... BRANDON

That's crazy, man. MATT

Because I'm gay. BRANDON

Who cares? MATT

He did. BRANDON

Well, that's fucked. MATT

Silence.

This is your farm, Matt. You should take it. Move into the farmhouse. We'll get the renters moved out. It belongs to you. BRANDON

MATT
No it doesn't. Not all of it.

BRANDON
You should live out here.

MATT
(Considers this)
I ain't payin rent.

BRANDON
I don't think anyone wants rent. Well. Uncle Lawrence maybe.

MATT
Fuck Uncle Lawrence!

BRANDON begins to laugh.

BRANDON
(With exaggerated bravado)
Fuck him! YEAH!

MATT
(Matches his macho tone)
FUCK! YEAH! FUCK, YEAH!

BRANDON
FUCK YEAH!

TOGETHER
FUCK YEAH! FUCK YEAH! FUCK YEAR! FUCK!

*The two dissolve into a fit of laughter. Once again
rolling in each other's arms.*

End of scene.

Scene 13

*Time Period B. Later that day. Evening. Sharon's condo.
CHRISTOPHER sits sipping a bourbon.
BRANDON enters. He sports a black-eye.*

CHRISTOPHER

Where've you been?

BRANDON

Having a couple beers with Matt.

CHRISTOPHER

(Noticing black eye)

Whoa! What happened to you?

BRANDON

Uh... dumb accident.

CHRISTOPHER

You really shouldn't be hanging out in those roughneck dive bars downtown.

BRANDON

Yeah. Muckrunners.

CHRISTOPHER

So, really, you were having a beer with Matt? Want to elaborate?

BRANDON

Yeah, but I need to self-medicate first. Where's the bourbon?

*CHRISTOPHER points. BRANDON pours himself
a glass.*

CHRISTOPHER

Well, *I've* got news. Talked to Stacy. She agrees it's time.

BRANDON

Time?

CHRISTOPHER

To start trying. She's ready.

BRANDON

Whoa! What changed her mind?

CHRISTOPHER

Well, you know, the clock is ticking.

BRANDON

Yeah, but that's been true for a while.

CHRISTOPHER

And, she agrees it would be a great thing if Mom came out to LA to be the doting grandma. Help with the kids, babysit. That can really make having a baby easier, you know, especially when both parents are working. There've been studies on this. How when you expand the parenting pool beyond just the biological mother and the father the outcomes for the kids—for the whole family—are way improved. There's some amazing statistics, I could pull it up on my phone—

BRANDON

Christopher. I get it.

CHRISTOPHER

So, anyhoo, yeah. Stacy's up for it. I think the idea of having Mom around to help really made a difference. And it'll be good for Mom too. To be away from all of this mess, obsessing over Madison and Matt all the time.

BRANDON is quiet, thinking.

CHRISTOPHER

B? A congratulations, or, oh, cool, or something? I thought you'd be happy for me.

BRANDON

Yeah. It's cool. It's great.

CHRISTOPHER

What?

BRANDON

I just got Matt to agree to lift the restraining order.

CHRISTOPHER

What? How?

BRANDON

Wind turbines. I told Matt I'd back him on the turbines. No wind turbines – *if* he lifts the restraining order. And he gets the ashes.

CHRISTOPHER

And he agreed? Just like that?

BRANDON

Well, we had to fight it out a bit. Literally.

CHRISTOPHER

I see. Nice shiner he gave you. What'd you give him?

BRANDON

I think Matt's more practiced.

CHRISTOPHER

What, you and the hubby don't just put on the gloves, duke it out sometimes? Settle the score?

BRANDON

Ha, ha.

CHRISTOPHER

So, seriously, Matt said he'd let Mom see Madison.

BRANDON

Yep. And I told him he could have the house.

CHRISTOPHER

What house?

BRANDON

The farmhouse.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not yours to give away, B. We all own it.

BRANDON

Let him live there anyway. I told him he and Amber and Madison should get out of Eudora and move there. Why, you've got a problem with that idea?

CHRISTOPHER

Well—I—no. I guess not. No. I don't care. Sure. It's fine. It's just...

BRANDON

What?

CHRISTOPHER

I...

BRANDON

Okay, now is when *I* get to say, “I thought you’d be happy.” Mom gets to see Madison?

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, of course. No, that’s great. It’s awesome. Good job.

BRANDON

What?

CHRISTOPHER

Mom’s not going to come to California now.

BRANDON

You don’t know that.

CHRISTOPHER

She won’t. Everything’s OK here now. Well—as much as it can be. So. Great job.

BRANDON

Why are you mad at me? The wind turbines?

CHRISTOPHER

Fuck the wind turbines. Who cares?

BRANDON

Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

No really, it’s great. You did a great job, B. It’s just—that was kind of the closing argument with Stacy. Mom in California. To help with the kids. Stacy wouldn’t have to quit her job or get a leave of absence. She could keep her career, right? Full steam ahead. Travel. Whatever she needs to do. I can be Mr. Mom, work from home. Stacy never had a problem with that. Never threatened her or anything. And Mom would be there to help out. I think for Stace that swung the deal. So. Fuck.

Silence.

BRANDON

I’m sorry, Christopher. I didn’t mean to—

CHRISTOPHER

Fuck me. Fuck me! I’ll never be a dad.

BRANDON

You will.

CHRISTOPHER

You knew what I was thinking! You knew what I was trying to do, and still—

BRANDON

I was thinking about Mom, what *she* wants.

CHRISTOPHER

What about me, Brandon? What about me? I've always got your back. Always!

BRANDON

I know.

CHRISTOPHER

And the one time I need *you* to do something for *me*...!

BRANDON

I just wanted Mom to see her grandchild again. To be happy.

CHRISTOPHER

What about my kid? Maybe Mom would want to see *my* kid! If I had one. Maybe *that* would make her happy. If I actually had one. Think about that? Fuck.

BRANDON

Christopher, I — I don't know what to say. I thought I was doing the right thing. For Mom.

CHRISTOPHER

It's fucked up, you know? People like Granddad, never wanted to have kids. They do. People like Amber, pumping 'em out like gumballs. Five kids from three husbands. I don't think it means a damn thing to her. And then there's...me. It's just fucked.

BRANDON

You'd make a great dad, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

I know.

BRANDON

(*Holds bourbon*)

You need some more?

CHRISTOPHER

Definitely.

BRANDON pours.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm sorry for what I said about Amber. That wasn't fair. She loves her kids, I guess.

BRANDON

I get it.

CHRISTOPHER

This is good for Mom, B. It is. It needed to happen. Whether I have kids or not, it needed to happen.

BRANDON

You're gonna have kids, Christopher. You're gonna be a great dad.

CHRISTOPHER

I just gotta keep working on Stacy, I guess. We'll see.

End of scene.

Scene 14

*Time Period B. The farm. A day or two later.
Once again the Camaro gleams.
The three brothers. BRANDON holds an urn.
MATT holds a post hole digger.*

BRANDON

So, it's OK to do this?

CHRISTOPHER

What?

BRANDON

Just. Right here in the field like this? It's not illegal or something?

MATT

Not now, man. America's great again!

BRANDON
(Amused)

Shut up.

CHRISTOPHER

Of course it's OK.

BRANDON

Shouldn't we wait for Mom?

CHRISTOPHER

I think she and Madison are having fun just catching up. She said she'd bring the flowers when we're done.

MATT

Do you think it's deep enough? I mean, it's just a --- whadya call it?

CHRISTOPHER

An urn.

MATT

An urn, right?

BRANDON

It's Dad.

CHRISTOPHER

It's fine. It's plenty deep. B, do you want to say something?

BRANDON

Me?

CHRISTOPHER

You're the oldest.

BRANDON

Um. I don't know. *(Thinks.)* I was thinking about Grandad.

MATT

He wasn't gay.

BRANDON

He might have been.

MATT

I don't really care.

BRANDON

I was thinking, what he if he *had* left? We wouldn't have the farm. I mean, Grandad didn't get his dream but—

CHRISTOPHER

He was probably a lousy tennis player anyway.

BRANDON

But we got the farm.

MATT

Somebody's gotta stay.

CHRISTOPHER

Better you than me, Baby Bro.

BRANDON

(Begins an improvised ceremony)

OK, well here we go. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

MATT

Uh, oh. Is he prayin'?

CHRISTOPHER
He's been going to church.

MATT
He's queer!

CHRISTOPHER
Shhh.

BRANDON
From dust you are made, and to dust you shall return.

MATT
Amen?

They lower the urn into the earth. BRANDON tosses into the hole a handful of dirt. The others follow suit.

MATT
What are we doing?

CHRISTOPHER
It's just. It's what you do.

They toss handfuls of dirt. And then shovel in more to fill the hole with earth. Silence.

BRANDON
Is there a plaque?

CHRISTOPHER produces a granite plaque. BRANDON inspects it.

BRANDON
It's the same one...

CHRISTOPHER
Yeah. With a space for Mom. She said it's what she wanted.

BRANDON
How did you swing that, anyway?

CHRISTOPHER

Turns out Mom's main objection to the cemetery in Mesa is that she'd wind up spending eternity with all of Dad's side of the family. Here on the farm... it's just the two of 'em.

MATT

I might be here myself, one day.

BRANDON

Me too. What about you, Christopher?

CHRISTOPHER

You mean when I'm gone? That's way too far off to think about. I'm still working on having kids.

CHRISTOPHER places the plaque on top the filled in hole.

CHRISTOPHER

There we go.

MATT

Looks nice.

Silence.

MATT

Now what?

CHRISTOPHER

Have a bourbon? Seems appropriate.

BRANDON

You know what I'd like to do? Take a ride in the Camaro. Can we take a ride in the Camaro?

MATT

Now?

BRANDON

Why not? All of us. Let's go ride in the Camaro.

CHRISTOPHER

We'll never fit!

BRANDON

If we squeeze. You, me, Christopher, Mom, Madison. Let's get in the Camaro. All of us.
And ride.

End of scene.

End of play.