The Man from Rhonda’s

A 10-minute play

by

David K. Farkas

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## Setting

The fishing village of Sheffield, somewhere in New England, in the year 1940.

## Characters

Major characters appear in boldface type.

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| **Tina:** A waitress in Sheffield, in her 20s. | Messenger: A messenger who bursts into the church. |
| **Greg Laswell:** Her boyfriend, a mechanic in town, in his 20s. | Bartender: The bartender who leads the celebration at the Tugboat. Should be physically imposing. |
| **Tim Baker:** New in town, an engineer with the Department of Highways and Bridges. In his 20s, not physically imposing. | Man in Bar. Should be physically imposing. |
| **Father Patrick:** Parrish Priest at Our Lady of Fair Winds Catholic Church. | Narrator |
| **Lookout:** Stationed with binoculars at a window high up in the church to report on returning fishing boats. | Optionally: Non-speaking roles for people attending the church service and celebrating at the Tugboat. Several audience members can be recruited just before the performance and brief on their reactions to speeches. |

## Suggested minimal casting:

Tim

Tina

Greg/Messenger

Narrator/Father Patrick/Bartender
Lookout/Man in Bar

# Scene 1

(Lights.)

(The NARRATOR enters.)

NARRATOR: The fishing village of Sheffield, somewhere on the New England coast, in the year 1940.

(NARRATOR exits.)

(TIM is eating alone at a table in a small café. He is reading a newspaper. TINA enters.)

TINA: Here’s your check.

TIM: Thank you.

TINA: You seem to be eating here every day, breakfast and dinners as well as lunch.

TIM: I’m Tim. Tim Baker. Right now, I’m staying at the Sunset Motel, out on Highway 12. But I’ve rented a place—the upstairs of Mrs. Wagner’s house. You probably know it. But it will be a few days before I can move in, so I’m eating out, and this is place is pretty much it when I want to eat in the village.

TINA: That’s right. Two bars and one restaurant. So, you’re moving here?

TIM: Yes, I’ll be working for a Department of Highways and Bridges, the district office in Sheridan. But I didn’t want to live in Sheridan. I like the idea of living on the ocean. I’m a city boy, but living here will suit me fine.

TINA: Well, welcome to Sheffield. I hope you like it here. I hope you stay.

(Blackout.)

# Scene 2

(Lights.)

TINA: Here’s your check, Tim.

TIM: Thanks, Tina.

TINA: Pretty good haddock, huh.

TIM: Yes.

TINA: Sam buys it right off the dock. You get fresh fish in Sheffield.

TIM: Well, it was good. . . I’m not a bad cook, but I’m not very motivated to cook just for myself. So, it’s nice to come in here a once or twice a week for a good meal . . . for fish right off the dock. Besides, I like the company.

TINA: Well, if you mean me, that’s not much in the way of company. For “company,” you’ll need to try the Tugboat or Rhonda’s. For a single guy, an educated guy, I’d recommend the Tugboat. Rhonda’s draws a rougher crowd. Pay some attention if you go drinking at Rhonda’s.

TIM: Thanks for the tip. Would *you* join me at the Tugboat? (Gestures toward her left hand.) Doesn’t seem that you’re married.

TINA: Well, No. That’s not gonna work. I’m not married. I’m not even engaged. But I do keep steady company with Greg . . . Laswell. You’ll run into him sooner or later. He works at Chesky’s Sunoco. You’ll see him pumping gas once in a while, but he’s probably the best mechanic in town.

(GREG enters.)

TINA: Well, speak of the devil. . .

(GREG walks to TIM’S table. He has a rough manner.)

GREG: Hey, Babe.

TINA: Hey, Greg.

GREG: There’s no one in this place. Tell Sam to close up, and we can go for a drive.

TINA: Sam’s not gonna do that. This is Tim Baker. He just moved into Elaine Wagner’s house, the upstairs. He works for Roads and Bridges down in Sheridan. Looks like the population of Sheffield has gone up by one.

GREG: Didn’t know we needed any more people.

(Turns brusquely from the table and begins to exit.)

(Blackout.)

# Scene 3

(No set. TINA and GREG are talking.)

(Lights.)

GREG: Tim Baker pretty much lives in the restaurant. And I see you talking to him in town. You and him are getting chummy, and I don’t like it.

TINA: You’re being silly, Greg. I’m just being friendly to someone who’s new in town.

GREG: You’re saying you *don’t* like him?

TINA: I *like* him. I *like* lots of people. But it’s just being civil, civilized. That how people are supposed to behave.

GREG: Civil to the civil engineer.

TINA: (Annoyed.) That’s right, civil to the civil engineer.

GREG: You know he brought his car into the garage for some work. (With some disdain.) It’s a Plymouth with a 4-cylinder engine.

TINA: I don’t care what kind of engine is in his car, Tim.

GREG: I guess he makes about twice my salary. Those guys in the District office just sit at their desks staring at blueprints all day. All the *real* work gets contracted out.

TINA: I’m not thinking about what he earns or where he works or anything else. I’m dating you. I’m “yours.” But I can sure be friendly to Tim or any other guy in town. And, that will be true if we get engaged . . . and married—when you get around to that. When you start spending less time at Rhonda’s and acting just a little more like someone who’s ready to settle down, not like a not a wild-and-free boyfriend.

(Blackout.)

# Scene 4

(No set. TIM and TINA are talking.)

TIM: Maybe it’s because you read a lot . . . Think about things. Maybe it’s just who you were from the beginning. But you and I both know that Greg isn’t right for you. You see beyond this town. He doesn’t. You’ve . . . outgrown . . . Greg. I know you’re loyal to him. I know you love him . . . in a way. But you also know that long term it won’t work out. Tina . . . look at me.

(TINA looks at TIM, ashamed but accepting his argument.)

(Blackout.)

# Scene 5

(Lights.)

(TIM walks through the door into the restaurant. He turns to TINA.)

TIM: Quite a storm!

TINA: We’re closing up. I’ll get you a sandwich. I got egg salad. On the house. You can take it home. But I’m closing. Sam left already. I need to be out of here in 2 minutes.

TIM: Closing at lunchtime? What’s going on? The storm isn’t that bad. I drove into town just fine. No lines are down. No one’s power is out.

TINA: We’re all going to the Catholic church. Father Patrick will lead a service.

TIM: Everyone is a Catholic? You’re a Catholic? You’re closing the restaurant for a service?

TINA: (Sharply.) Some of our men are out there in small boats. We’re all Catholics today.

(TIM pauses, thinking hard.)

TIM: I guess I’ll go too. May I go with *you*? I don’t need any sandwich. Which church is the *Catholic* church? I haven’t looked at any of the churches too closely.

TINA: It’s the one on Front Street. “Our Lady of Fair Winds.”

TIM: (Repeating slowly and carefully.) “Our Lady of Fair Winds”—does that have something to do with why everyone is going there?

TINA: Yes, that’s where we all go when we have men out at sea in a storm. Before Father Patrick, it was Father Boulay.

(Blackout.)

# Scene 6

(Lights.)

(Inside the church FATHER PATRICK, standing behind the altar, is conducting a service. There is a LOOKOUT with binoculars on some kind of platform peering intently out of a window that is high above the altar.)

FATHER PATRICK: Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind. He said to the sea, “Peace. . . Be still.” Jesus is still looking out over the sea. He is watching every boat. I know our fishermen, Catholics and Protestants, are praying right now. They may be coaxing more power out of the engine. They may be at the pumps. But while they are takin’ care of business, while they’re working to get back to all of you, they are praying as well. And Jesus is listening. Jesus . . .

(FATHER PATRICK resumes in pantomime.)

TIM: (Talking softly to TINA.) At moments like these you must be grateful that Greg works in town.

TINA: (Nodding.) Yes.

TIM: I’m glad too. But, that doesn’t mean he’s the man for you. He’s not. Tina you need to . . .

LOOKOUT: (Setting down the binoculars and speaking loudly and emphatically to everyone.) There’s a boat!

(Everyone attends.)

LOOKOUT: I see . . . the Sunflower. She’s turned Sheffield Point. She’ll be OK.

 (There is a stir of thankfulness. Then a long pause ensues.)

FATHER PATRICK: Jesus asks only for your trust, your faith. Faith will always defeat fear . . .

LOOKOUT: I see another boat.

(Another pause.)

 LOOKOUT: It’s . . . the Mary Anne!

(There is intense interest and another pause.)

LOOKOUT: She’s making good headway. Going strong. . . We got four boats in the harbor. . . so that leaves the Princess. Nothing’s gonna stop Zeno. His boat can handle anything.

FATHER PATRICK: Let us give our thanks to God for the safe return of the Sunflower. And let us have good hope for the Mary Anne and the Princess. Truly, God’s spirit hovers over the waters.

(There is a palpable satisfaction throughout the church. FATHER PATRICK resumes.)

FATHER PATRICK: Everyone in Sheffield stands united in love and faith. We all . . .

(A MESSENGER bursts through the doors of the church and speaks loudly to the assembled company. FATHER PATRICK listens with the rest.)

MESSENGER: There’s a wreck at the Crossbows. It’s the Coastal Trader, out of Gloucester. Storm drove her right onto the rocks. She must have been making for the harbor. There’s a big tear in the hull, and she’s turned pretty far over.

LOOKOUT: (To MESSENGER and assembled company.) Did they use the Lyle gun?

MESSENGER: They tried, but she’s too far out. The Surfmen are going out.

(There is general consternation.)

TIM: What’s the Lyle gun? What’s going on?

TINA: The Lyle gun can throw a grappling hook out to a ship. Then, they set a cable, and bring everyone to shore in a kind of . . . chair . . . one by one. Been doing that here that for 100 years. But if the Lyle gun can’t do it, the Surfmen row the cable out to the ship. Greg is one of the Surfmen. It’s dangerous, real dangerous. The surf is much rougher than the open ocean.

TIM: Oh my God. I’m sorry.

(FATHER PATRICK and the MESSENGER approach TINA.)

LOOKOUT: Those guys are good, Tina, real good. They drill regularly.

FATHER PATRICK: We will pray for our Surfmen.

(Blackout.)

# Scene 7

(Lights.)

(It is evening at the Tugboat. The church altar has become the bar, with whiskey bottles, shot glasses, and bottles of beer. There may be a graphic of a tugboat over the bar to indicate that this is the Tugboat. The BARTENDER stands behind the bar. The MAN IN BAR stands right in front of the bar. The patrons all have drinks hoisted, including audience members who may be recruited to serve as patrons of the Tugboat. TINA and TIM are in the crowd.)

BARTENDER: Let’s hear it for our Surfmen. They did a hell of a job today.

(Universal approbation and applause, especially demonstrated by the MAN IN BAR.)

MAN IN BAR: They got everyone off the Coastal Trader. That’s the captain and six crewman. Everyone knows we run the best rescue station on the East Coast. Anyone who doesn’t know it will know it tomorrow!

(GREG swaggers in, clearly intoxicated.)

BARTENDER: And look who just walked in—one of our Surfmen, Greg Laswell. By the look of him, fresh from Rhonda’s. Come up here, Greg. Have another!

(GREG steps up to the bar and turns and toward the imagined crowd. He basks in loud applause. After a few moments, he looks for TINA and spots her. He sees TIM standing near her.)

GREG: (Bellowing.) So, where’s my girl? Where’s my *wom*an?!

(TIM steps a little away from TINA, but GREG notices him. TINA waves cheerfully, but does not join GREG.)

GREG: (To everyone.) I don’t have a ring. But tonight is . . . special. So here’s a big announcement. Tina and I are . . . engaged to be married!

(The BARTENDER and the MAN in BAR applaud. GREG acknowledges applause from unseen patrons in the bar. Eyes now turn to TINA, who is distressed.)

TINA: Well, maybe we’re getting a little . . . ahead of ourselves. (Attempting a turn toward levity.) Maybe . . . a girl wants to hear a proposal from a man when he’s sober! The whole town will know . . . when . . .

(GREG understands what TINA is doing and, enraged, rushes toward TINA and TIM. Everyone nervously watches the confrontation that follows.)

GREG: So, Tina. It’s your little buddy here who you *really* want. I’ve been seein’ that. It’s been coming.

TINA: Greg . . .

GREG: So, Tina, whose the *real* man here? Me or him?

TINA: Greg. You did great. I’m proud of you. The whole town is proud.

(The BARTENDER senses impending trouble and calls out jovially.)

BARTENDER: Come back up here, Greg, for another whiskey.

GREG: (To TIM.) You little piece of shit, you probably sat on your ass all day thinking about some new traffic light. Jerry, Jesus, Kerry, and me went out in that surf. Tina, you know the Sheffield Surfmen’s motto?

TINA: Of course I do. I was raised here.

GREG: Then say it. . . (Roars.) I said, say it!

TINA: “Yeh always go out. The Ocean and the Devil decide whether you’re coming back.”

GREG: That’s right, Tina!

TIM: I think that’s enough.

GREG: You . . . (Throttles TIM, then holds him in a hammer lock and again roars.) Maybe you need a little introduction to the Sheffield surf tonight.

TINA: Stop it. Stop!

GREG: Maybe you and me need to take a little walk into the ocean.

(As TIM struggles to get free, GREG begins punching him hard in the stomach. The BARTENDER, with a baseball bat, leaves the bar counter and steps directly into GREG’s field of vision.)

BARTENDER: (Wielding the bat like he’s done this before.) Don’t make me do this, Greg! (To MAN IN BAR.) Help me.

(The BARTENDER and the MAN IN BAR try to subdue GREG. Then, TINA joins them, more gently but still using her strength. With TINA in the fray, GREG stops resisting and calms down. TIM gradually recovers from the beating, with some help from the MAN IN BAR.)

TINA: Go back to Rhonda’s. That’s where you belong. That’s who you are—a Rhonda’s guy. Just a big, mean storm blowing in from Rhonda’s.

GREG: Two years, and now you say that?

TINA: Like you said, it’s been coming.

BARTENDER: (To GREG.) Time to go home.

(The full picture comes into focus in GREG’s mind, and his anger turns into sadness, resignation, and self-awareness. The MAN IN BAR backs away.)

TINA: I’m sorry, Greg. I didn’t mean what I said about you. But . . . my future is with Tim. It just *is*.

GREG: OK. I screwed up tonight. . . And maybe Tim *is* the right man for you. Maybe you need to raise some kids and drive around in that Old Lady Plymouth of his. I love you, Tina, but maybe I’m just a Rhonda’s type of guy.

TINA: You’re *more* than a “Rhonda’s type of guy.” You’re a Sheffield Surfman. You’re the best mechanic in town. You’re an honest man who says what he’s thinking. And you’re someone I’ll always love. But, that’s not enough.

BARTENDER: You need to get home, Greg. It’s been a long day for you.

(The BARTENDER backs away.)

TIM: Tina and I will drive you—in my Old Lady Plymouth.

GREG: No. Thanks, but no. I got a few more hours in me, and I’ll spend them with Kerry . . . at Rhonda’s! But for me, it won’t exactly be a celebration. Maybe I should be drinking rum with the Devil tonight, somewhere on the ocean floor out beyond the Crossbows.

TINA: I’m sorry, Greg.

 (GREG looks long at TINA and exits.)

TIM: Well, it’s done. It had to happen somehow.

TINA: It shouldn’t have happened this way, but . . . yes . . . it’s done.

(Blackout.)