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Headin' South

A Workin' Man's (Dark) Comedy of Life

by Joseph Sorrentino

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CAST:

LEE WALDINSKI; *A laid-off steelworker who hasn't had steady work in about 7 years. Lee is in his early 40's.*

POP; *Lee's father. A retired steelworker and shop steward in his early 70's.*

FRED; *Lee's friend, also a laid-off steelworker of about the same age.*

TAD; *Lee's son. A college graduate in his early 20's.*

SETTING:

Lee's house in a depressed steel town. Outside the house looms a water tower with "Grace Steel" painted across the front.

ETC:

Adult language.

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ACT I; SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Lights on a water tower looming outside the window of Lee's darkened living room. "Grace Steel" is visible on the side of the water tower. A door Stage Left leads to the kitchen; a door Stage Right to the front foyer. The room is messy; clothes, beer bottles, and newspapers are scattered about amid some half-dead house plants. A Nerf basketball rim hangs on one of the walls. The kitchen table as been moved to the center of the room. LEE, POP and FRED sit at a table. Pop smokes a cigar, LEE cigarettes and FRED keeps an unlit cigarette in his hand, occasionally placing it in his mouth. The Lights come up on the men playing their regular Thursday night poker game.)

POP

...ya couldn't get away from the steel in them days...the smell of them coke furnaces was everywhere...

FRED

I go three cent.

POP

...in the mornin', ya'd wake up, everythin' would be covered with that red dust...all you're your house, your car...everythin'...

LEE

I see ya.

POP

...and them blast furnaces...they'd be hummin'...goin' alla time...round the clock.

LEE

Pop, it's...

POP

(To LEE) I'd come home from work, find ya starin' at the steel...waitin' for me...you was always waitin' for me, Lee.

LEE

Pop, you wanna bet?

POP

Oh, it's my bet, huh?

LEE

No, it's my bet. I just figured since I'm broke you'd bet for me.

POP

Wait a second. (*Adjusts hearing aid*) It's your bet? I thought it was my bet.

LEE

It is your bet.

POP

Then why you say it was your bet?

LEE

Just put some money in, would ya?

POP

You always gotta fool around. (*Looks at cards*) Now let me see...

LEE

For Chrissake, can't you just bet?

POP

What's your rush? You got somewheres to go? (*To FRED*) Alla sudden, he's got somewheres to go.

FRED

Yeah, right.

POP

(*To LEE*) Relax. You ain't goin' nowhere. Now in the old days...

LEE

(*To FRED*) This is your fault.

FRED

Me? What'd I do?

POP

...we never rushed. We'd have two games every week.

LEE

(*Finishing sentences*) Damn right. Thursday...

POP

...and Friday nights. And we didn't have none of this penny-ante shit, neither. We'd have pots...

LEE

...real pots...

POP
 ...fifteen dollar...

LEE
 ...twenty dollar...

POP
 ...more sometimes. And cigars...real cigars, wise guy.

LEE
 And women?

POP
 I wish. Your mother, God rest her soul, she wouldn't stand for that.

LEE
 Man, those were some goddamn games.

POP
 You was the only kid they let in there. Know why?

LEE
 'Cause Ma made you take me.

POP
 'Cause you was my son. I always won big when you was around. Them assholes never figured out our system (*To FRED*) He'd go tiptoein' around, peekin' at their cards...Christ what a team we was.

LEE
 (*Raising beer*) To the good ol' days.

POP
 Everywhere I went, you was with me. (*To FRED*) Guys called him my little shadow.

FRED
 Still do.

LEE
 Bullshit. You're hearin' voices again.

FRED
 Am not. I never heard voices. Manic depressives don't hear voices. Now schizophrenics...

LEE
 Forget I mentioned it Fred.

(FRED rearranges coins.)

Would you stop foolin' with them?	LEE
I like to keep 'em neat is all.	FRED
And light that cigarette for Chrissake.	LEE
I ain't smokin' no more.	FRED
Then get rid of the goddamn thing.	LEE
I like the feel of it.	FRED
You like...? Christ. Now that's pretty fuckin' ...havin' an unlit cigarette in your mouth.	LEE
Well, the doc says...	FRED
The doc says...	LEE
Can we please finish this hand?	POP
It's your damn bet.	LEE
Oh...that's right...lemmee see...	POP
<i>(FRED's watch alarm goes off.)</i>	
Now what?	LEE
Time to take my pill. I gotta get some food. Want anythin'?	FRED
	LEE

Nah, I'm set...Hold it...get me another beer, would ya?

FRED

Mr. Waldinski?

POP

Just some water. I forgot to take my heart pills.

LEE

Your heart pills?

POP

For my heart.

LEE

I know what the fuck it's for. How the hell could you...Pop, you gotta take that shit on time.

POP

Stop goddamn lecturin' me.

FRED

You should do what I do. I'm takin' somethin' new...lithium...for depression...

POP

Why the hell should I take lithium? I ain't depressed.

FRED

That's not what I'm sayin'. I'm sayin' it's somethin' new so I set an alarm to remember to take it.

POP

I'd just forget what I set the alarm for.

(FRED starts to exit; stops; picks up cards.)

POP

Whaddy doin'?

FRED

Takin' my cards.

POP

You don't trust us?

FRED

I trust yas. I just don't wanna tempt yas. *(Exits)*

LEE

This'll take awhile.

POP

Yeah. (*Looking out the window*) Ya know, I still remember the day we finished that water tower. I'll remember that till the day I die...made ya proud of what ya did there...made things seem permanent. Made ya believe there'd always be a Grace Steel.

LEE

Well, there's the first fuckin' lie they tell ya.

POP

I ever tell ya I painted "Grace Steel" on it?

LEE

Only about two or three hundred times.

POP

See, back then we didn't have no union. The steel says, "Paint that water tower," ya did. Grace...now there was one son of a bitch...but I got even... I ever tell ya I painted "Waldinski" up there?

LEE

About as many times as ya told me ya painted "Grace" up there.

POP

Hell, it's as much my steel as his. (*Pause*) You hear from Tad?

LEE

No...things are a little tense right now.

POP

I was wonderin' if he got the money I sent.

LEE

Why the hell you sendin' him money? He got that scholarship

POP

Kid needs pizza and beer money. He can't use his scholarship for that. You should know that.

LEE

At least he got to use his fuckin' scholarship for somethin'.

POP

What were you gonna use your scholarship for? To play basketball? That ain't gonna do much for a family.

(*There is a noise coming from the kitchen.*)

LEE

Fred, what in the hell are you doin'?

FRED

(From kitchen) Lookin' for somethin' I can eat. I can't believe the shit you have in here.

LEE

I'll tell Dolores to clean it when she comes back.

POP

She ain't comin' back this time.

LEE

(Reacts) What?

FRED

(Walking in with bag of bread) How long you been makin' penicillin?

LEE

Would you quit fuckin' around? We're tryin' to finish this hand.

FRED

I gotta have somethin' to eat.

LEE

What about that casserole you brought over?

FRED

Loretta made that weeks ago. Man, I hope I don't find it. Oh, she'd like her pan back when you're done.

LEE

For Chrissake, just hurry up.

(FRED heads towards the kitchen once again then stops.)

FRED

Ya know, I felt a slight draft in there.

LEE

There ain't no draft.

FRED

All it takes is one small hole and before ya know it...

POP

Christ, tryin' to stick it to a friend.

FRED

I ain't tryin' to stick it to no one. I sell a quality storm window.

POP

I knew things were goin' bad, but...

FRED

Who says things are goin' bad? Things ain't goin' bad.

POP

Believe what you want Fred.

FRED

Every business has its ups and downs. You just gotta ride it out.

LEE

I don't know why you're even workin'. You ask me, that proves you're fucked up.

FRED

I ain't like you. I can't sit around all day waitin' for the steel to call. I gotta do somethin'.

LEE

You wanna do somethin'? Get your ass back in the kitchen, find somethin' to eat and get back here so we can finish this fuckin' hand. (*As FRED exits*) Jesus.

POP

He loves that shitty job, don't he?

LEE

Man, I'm tellin' ya, if the steel puts me in the nuthouse like that? I'd make 'em take care of me the rest of my life.

POP

I always said he was too soft to be a steelworker. Man's gotta be tough. Tough as nails.

LEE

That last round of layoffs...I didn't know if he was ever gonna get right again. When I finally found him...in his car, up by the water tower...just starin' at it...blubberin' away...Shit.

POP

It's too much for some guys. Remember that limey? What was his name...hung himself in the welfare office... 'bout the same time Fred went postal.

LEE

Collins?

POP

That's it. Johnny Collins. Figures a limey can't take it.

LEE

Shit, he hung himself Friday night, they didn't find him 'til Monday.

POP

Son of a bitch really stunk up the lunch room...couldn't eat there for a week. Fred's better off sellin' storm windows.

LEE

Least he's workin'.

POP

The steel's not callin'?

LEE

You know they're not. I hate that fuckin' labor pool but Christ knows I need the money.

POP

You don't gotta tell me. I'm startin' to feel like the Federal Reserve Bank here.

LEE

Hey, you don't wanna give me money...

POP

Since when have I ever said anythin' about you askin' for money? I never hesitate when you really need it. *(Pause)* I know it's been tough on ya...I know that...and now with Dolores leavin'...but it's gonna pick up soon. You just gotta be patient.

LEE

Patient? I'm laid off seven years now. Seven years I ain't had steady work.

POP

It goes in cycles, like everythin'. I'm tellin' ya, the steel's comin' back.

LEE

They said that about Lackawanna two years ago. They're all shut down now. So's Buffalo.

POP

What the hell is Buffalo compared to us? Nothin'.

LEE

That's what we're gonna be soon...nothin'.

POP

Bullshit. Mack Truck's callin' guys back. They're gonna need steel.

LEE

They been usin' Jap steel for years.

POP

Jap steel ain't no good.

LEE

Like they give a shit. It's cheaper.

POP

That's 'cause that goddamn Jap government's practically throwin' money at 'em. If them assholes in Washington did the same for us, we'd still be number one.

LEE

(Looking at cards) I ain't got shit.

POP

Christ...me neither.

LEE

Lemme see what you got. *(POP shows him)* Here...gimmee those two...take these.

POP

That's cheatin'.

LEE

It is?

POP

I don't cheat.

LEE

Since when?

POP

You're right.

(LEE and POP exchange cards.)

FRED

(From kitchen) Jesus H. Christ!

LEE

Now what the fuck is the problem?

FRED

(Comes to door with casserole) I think I found Jimmy Hoffa. Forget returnin' the pan. Loretta doesn't need it that bad.

LEE

Would you just siddown so we can finish this hand?

FRED

OK, OK. *(Hands POP water; LEE beer)* Here ya go, Mr. Waldinski.

POP

Thanks.

(POP drinks water but doesn't take the pill.)

LEE

(To FRED) Don't you ever take off that fuckin' tie?

FRED

You know what they say, "Look good, feel good."

LEE

Christ. Whose bet?

POP

Mine. I go four cent.

FRED

You got nothin' decent to eat in there...no fresh fruits, no vegetables. Now I gotta take my pill on an empty stomach.

LEE

I'm out.

FRED

And I don't know what that's gonna do. I hope it's all right. The Doc said... *(LEE stares.)* Whose bet?

LEE

Who the hell you think?

POP

It's four cent.

FRED
I'll see your four and there's three more.

POP
I'll see that and go four more.

FRED
Can't do that.

POP
Why not?

FRED
Four cent...it'll put you over the limit. Limit's ten cent.

LEE
High finances.

POP
OK, OK. I don't wanna break the bank here. (*Removes a penny*) That's three cent to you, Mr. Rockefeller.

FRED
I see ya. whaddya got?

POP
Aces and eights.

FRED
Shit. I knew I shouldn't have gone to the kitchen. Every time I do, I lose.

LEE
And?

FRED
I dunno...damn kitchen's a jinx or somethin'.

LEE
It ain't a jinx. You just suck at cards. Whose deal?

POP
Mine.

(*FRED's watch alarm goes off.*)

LEE
Now what?

Gotta go. FRED

Old lady's really got you by the balls now. LEE

Bullshit. FRED

Right. LEE

I got a job I gotta be at tomorrow. FRED

That ain't a job. It's a fuckin' joke. LEE

Better than nothin' FRED

POP
You guys always gotta have a pissin' contest? C'mon Fred. How rested do you have to be to sell storm windows for Chrissake?

FRED
(Takes out notebook) Lemme see...all right. I don't have any appointments tomorrow. Yet. But make it quick. *(Pause)* I'm tellin' ya Lee, I did feel a draft in that kitchen.

LEE
And I'm tellin' ya there ain't no draft in there.

FRED
I already measured the windows...they got that size in stock...I think. Or I can get 'em real quick. *(Stands, goes to window with instrument to measure heat loss)* You'd be amazed how much heat can be lost through...Whoa! Look at that! These are leakin' like crazy. Tell you what, I'll..

LEE
Fred?

FRED
Yeah?

LEE
I am not buyin' your goddamn storm windows.

FRED

Fine. It's just they got this new model...extra protection...double glass.

POP

Christ...double glass, huh?

FRED

Yeah. They practically pay for themselves in no time. Tell you what, I'll...

POP

Fred?

FRED

Yeah?

POP

I ain't buyin' your goddamn storm windows either.

FRED

Suit yourself but when storms come and...

LEE

How the hell do you get up every mornin' and go to that job?

FRED

Best job I ever had...clean...I ain't got grease under my nails no more...ain't spittin' out dust all day...better class of people...

LEE

Bunch of assholes hawkin' storm windows. That's real class.

FRED

Beats the shit outta the labor pool.

LEE

You got a point there.

POP

Oh, so now you wanna sell storm windows too.

LEE

Did I say that? I'm just sayin' the labor pool sucks and don't try and tell me it don't. Only time they call is when they got some shit job for ya to do. Cleanin' out the ovens one day,

LEE, *Continued*

flushin' the pipes the next...or...or it's somethin' dangerous. That guy who got killed in the soakin' pits? He was workin' the labor pool.

POP

Steel's always been dangerous. When I started...guys was always getting killed. Now...Christ, ya stub your toe, it makes the front pages. This one guy...Ol' Joe it was...he slices off two fingers this one time, he turns around, pisses on 'em, wraps 'em in a rag and goes back to work.

LEE

(To FRED)And he was workin' in a restaurant at the time.

POP

You missed your callin' ya know that? You shoulda been a goddamn comedian.

LEE

All I'm sayin' is there's nothin' here. Ya want a job...a real job...ya gotta move South.

POP

Jesus Christ. You're like a broken record, you know that?

LEE

Tell me what else there is. You want me flippin' burgers at Mickey D's for five bucks an hour?

POP

You wanna move, move. What the hell's stoppin' ya? But when you get there and find out them mills ain't hirin'...

LEE

They're hirin'.

POP

Who's feedin' you this bullshit?

LEE

It ain't bullshit. They got plenty of jobs there. Plenty.

POP

I hope to hell you know how to pick cotton 'cause that's all they got for jobs down there now.

LEE

How the hell you know so much about it?

POP

I make it my business to know what jobs are around.

LEE

Lotta good it did me.

POP

Why you ungrateful...who the hell got you that job in the first place, huh? Me. When they caught you knockin' the valve off the post-mill, who'd ya come cryin' to? Me. That woulda been your second ten-day drop.

LEE

I coulda used the time off.

POP

This ain't a joke no more, mister.

LEE

Coulda fooled me.

POP

When the hell you gonna grow up? You get another ten-day drop, it's over, understand? I can't bail you out.

LEE

I don't need you to bail me out.

POP

So alla sudden you're a big shot...don't need me no more. Fine. Go ahead...you know so much. Move South. But I'm tellin' ya, as far as I'm concerned that goddamn highway only runs one way. South. Understand? (*Finishes water in one gulp*) Goddamn it, I forgot to take my pill.

(*POP exits.*)

LEE

Fuckin' right I'm headin' South.

FRED

I don't think that's a good idea.

LEE

It's the only place that got any decent jobs anymore. There or Japan and I sure as hell ain't goin' to Japan. They could offer me the best fuckin' job in the world and I wouldn't go there...slanty eyed bastards. Did you know they eat raw fish? What the hell kind of people eat raw fish?

FRED

Must be somethin' to it, they're kickin' our asses. But you think Japs eat weird food? Down South, they eat catfish.

LEE

I'd rather eat catfish than raw fish.

FRED

Not me. Catfish...they ain't clean. They go around eatin' garbage.

LEE

Let 'em eat catfish all they want. They give me a job, they can eat dog for all I care.

FRED

Now that is one food source I have never even cared to consider.

(POP returns.)

LEE

Ready?

POP

What? No...no, I left my damn pills out here.

LEE

You got the right ones?

POP

Yeah. My heart pills. For my heart. *(Exits)*

LEE

And your water pill, too. He'll be in there awhile.

(LEE stands and tosses some laundry at the hoop.)

FRED

(Also standing) Where's your ball?

LEE

Dolores' dog chewed it up. Son of a bitch's goin' away present. That little shit always hated me. I bought her that goddamn dog. Maybe that's why it hates me. Well, get in line...I got Dolores...the dog...Tad...Now that don't make no goddamn sense. She leaves, he gets pissed at me.

FRED

Punchin' a hole in that wall.

LEE

I never touched her. I never did that. Ah...we'll be all right. It's the same as always...she gets a little pissed, she goes home to Mommy and Daddy. But she ain't goin' nowhere. Most of her shit's still here. We just need a break is all. All we're doin' now is arguin' and then somethin' always ends up getting smashed.

FRED

You have to find more appropriate ways of expressin' your anger. The doc says we have to identify the source and...

LEE

That's all I have to do? Identify the source? It's the steel. They're the goddamn source. Wait...I feel so much better. Thanks Fred.

FRED

That's not what I mean. An appropriate way would be...

LEE

I'll tell you appropriate...layin' off the goddamn president. That's appropriate. Or...or shootin' the son of a bitch, that'd be even more appropriate...pay 'em back for what they done to me.

FRED

Someone's always doin' somethin' to ya Lee.

LEE

When things were goin' good at the steel me and Dolores didn't have no problems. Long as I was bringin' home the bacon, we didn't have problems. Anythin' she wanted she got... "Want two weeks in the Poconos, dear? Make it three. New clothes? No problem... (*Pretends to count out money*) Here. Don't be silly. I don't care what it costs. And be sure to pick up somethin' for the kid." Oh they loved me then. When things started goin' bad at the steel, seems like things started goin' bad everywhere. Ya cut back on vacations...can't go out nowhere...ya start havin' to say no. I never hadda say that before. I hated it. Ya think they know how that felt, havin' to say no?

FRED

You ever tell them?

LEE

They wouldn't understand. But...but once I head South, things are gonna be good again.

FRED

Not if you don't have a job.

LEE

I been talkin' to O'Reilly.

FRED

O'Reilly? That rat bastard.

LEE

He's workin' at this mini-mill...Southern Steel.

FRED

You can't trust O'Reilly.

LEE
He got four guys I know of work. Four.

FRED
O'Reilly's getting' guys work?

LEE
Yep.

FRED
I'll be damned.

LEE
Man, you can't even get an application without knowin' someone and O'Reilly's getting' 'em jobs.

FRED
How much is it gonna cost?

LEE
Five hundred.

FRED
Jesus. You got it?

LEE
It's all I got. I just closed out my account...cleaned out everythin' me and Dolores put away. Now I gotta send it to that prick.

FRED
Man, when your old man hears about O'Reilly...

(POP enters, confused.)

LEE
What's the matter?

POP
My water pills. I gotta take my water pills.

LEE
Why don't ya write this shit down like I told ya?

POP
What the hell's the difference? I'd just forget to read it.

(POP exits.)

LEE

The water pills are the white ones. *(To FRED)* Jesus, he's getting old. I don't know what he's gonna do when I leave but I gotta leave. Man, they got everythin' down there...real jobs...cost of livin's cheap and it's like summer all the time, man. I been thinkin' maybe I'll do some coachin'. I always wanted to coach.

FRED

(Throws LEE some laundry) Hey! Heads up.

(LEE dunks the laundry through the Nerf hoop.)

LEE

Jesus, we were a team, weren't we?

FRED

County finals...five seconds to go...tie score...who drives the lane *(Acts out)* and we win by a bucket.

LEE

Get the fuck outta here. We come outta the time out and all you gotta do is get the ball to me like coach said.

FRED

You were covered.

LEE

So you take the shot and you blow it.

FRED

Hell I did.

LEE

You threw a brick up there for Chrissake.

FRED

That was a pass.

LEE

You were goddamn lucky I was there for the rebound. We had it all then, didn't we Fred? Didn't we have it all?

FRED

Sure as hell did.

LEE

Course we got our asses kicked in the states but for one night...damn...If I coulda taken that scholarship to Pitt...who knows what woulda happened?

(POP enters.)

POP

You wanna stop that boys' game and finish this hand? *(Checks pocket watch)* It's getting late and we don't want Fred to be too tired for work tomorrow. *(Pause)* This pocket watch...steel give it to me.

LEE

Really? I didn't know that.

POP

Give it to me when I retired, wise guy. Inscribed it special for me, too. *(Begins dealing)*

LEE

Yeah, it says "To Thaddeus Waldinski." They really must've agonized over that. I go two cent.

(POP and FRED put money in.)

POP

(To LEE) You ain't gonna get one of these. If it wasn't for the union, I wouldn't have one either. Union gave us security.

LEE

I'm feelin' real secure.

POP

When I joined the union...January 7, 1937..that was the day I joined...

LEE

I go three cent.

POP

We was still fightin' for representation. That strike in '41...that was about representation. The steel...them bastards...they got the local police out, they got the state police out...

FRED

I see ya...

POP

Them state police was all on horseback, carryin' these long goddamn night sticks. Musta been three feet long...lined up like Russian Cossacks they was...when I first saw them, they looked beautiful...Then they come chargin' at us, swingin' them sticks...hittin' everyone. They didn't look beautiful then. I'm tellin' ya, we took a hell of a beatin'. A hell of a beatin'.

LEE

Speakin' of takin' a hell of a beatin', you wanna bet?

POP
 What's the bet?

LEE
 Three cent.

POP
 Course if Charlie plants that bomb like he's supposed to...

LEE
 But he didn't Pop.

POP
 But if he did, who knows what woulda happened?

LEE
 You'd still be in jail, that's what.

POP
 Charlie Sandretsky, that was his name. He was a terrific dancer, that's how I remember him. Won a lotta dance contests.

LEE
 Pretty fuckin' clumsy for a dancer.

POP
 Yeah. Stupid son of a bitch...he volunteers to plant the bomb...a small bomb...we boost him over the fence...he trips not fifteen feet inside the fence. Blows his foot off.

LEE
 That shit's dangerous. When I worked construction a guy blew himself up settin' a charge.

POP
 It was a shame 'cause Charlie...he was a terrific dancer. Still danced but he never won no more contests. They caught him of course but he didn't squeal. That's when union meant somethin'.

LEE
 That's a hell of a story.

POP
 Ain't just a story. It's history. That's your problem. You got no sense of history.

LEE

Funny how history has a way of repeatin' itself. Goddamn steel won then and it's winnin' now.

POP

Least we stood up to 'em.

LEE

That just gave 'em a better target.

POP

We fought 'em goddamn it. You never hadda do that. We fought 'em for better benefits, better wages. When I started I was makin'...

LEE

Forty one and a half cents an hour.

POP

That's right. You...you come right outta school, alla sudden you're makin' the big bucks...I seen your eyes when you got that first paycheck. I knew you wasn't goin' nowhere. Alla sudden you gotta have this house, a big car...

LEE

I deserved it. I busted my ass at the steel. What'd you want me to do, tell 'em they were payin' me too much? Fuck that. Steel's got enough money. I don't see any of them drinkin' cheap beer.

POP

You don't understand, do you? It ain't about what you got. It's about what you did to get it. You gotta do somethin' to get what you want.

LEE

I did do somethin'. It just didn't turn out the way I planned. Them bastards got 24 years of my life and I got nothin' to show for it. Nothin'.

POP

Your problem is you got no ambition.

LEE

I had ambition but it wasn't to work for the fuckin' steel

POP

Wantin' to play basketball's not ambition enough.

LEE

That was my ticket to college. Christ knows you weren't gonna pay for it.

POP

When you gonna stop pissin' and moanin' about somethin' that happened twenty years ago?

LEE

Soon as you stop with your goddamn stories, I'll stop with mine. Shit...I need another beer.

(LEE starts to leave, then stops and takes his cards.)

FRED

What're you doin'? Don't you trust us?

LEE

I trust ya. I just don't wanna tempt ya. *(Exits)*

FRED

Can you believe that? Don't even trust his own father.

POP

Hell of a thing. Hell of a thing. He'll be all right. He just got a temper. Like his old man.

FRED

It's been rough. Real rough.

POP

It's about to get rougher. *(Takes letter from coat)* This come for him today. I was bringin' in his mail...I seen it was some lawyer. I figure maybe it's the bank...maybe the mortgage is late again. I'd take care of it.

FRED

You opened his mail?

POP

I didn't open it. It wasn't sealed. What the hell difference does it make? It's from Dolores...her lawyer. She's filin' for divorce.

FRED

Shit.

POP

He's still hopin' to work things out.

FRED

When you gonna give it to him?

POP

(Places letter on table) Let's finish this hand, then I'll give it to him.

FRED

(Looks at cards) Jesus...I ain't got shit.

POP
 Me neither.

FRED
 Lemmee see what ya got...here...take these two.

POP
 That's cheatin'.

FRED
 You'll win.

POP
 OK.

(FRED and POP exchange cards just as LEE returns, drinking a beer.)

LEE
(Sees letter) What's that?

POP
 Jesus, I forgot. I meant to give ya this.

LEE
 Goddamn it, I keep tellin' ya to leave my mail alone.

POP
 I got distracted is all. I was comin' over to patch that wall.

LEE
 You don't have to patch the wall.

POP
 Then I noticed the railin' was loose...

LEE
 I fixed it last week.

POP
 Well I hadda fix it again.

LEE
 You don't have to fix nothin' around here.

POP
 It was practically fallin' off.

LEE

Like hell. Look, this ain't your house no more.

POP

I'm just tryin' to help.

LEE

Well stop tryin'.

POP

You don't appreciate nothin' I do for you.

LEE

You don't have to do nothin' for me. If somethin's broke, I'll fix it.

POP

This place'll fall apart waitin' for you to get around to it. It wasn't like this when I gave it to ya.

LEE

You sold it to me.

POP

For five grand less than I coulda got, remember?

LEE

(Grabs letter) How the hell can I forget when you keep...It's open.

POP

That's the way it came.

LEE

What's it say?

POP

I didn't read it. *(LEE reacts)* I thought it was from...you better read it.

LEE

(Reads) She's filin' for divorce? How the fuck..? She still got her shit here.

POP

Maybe you can still work things out.

LEE

I think this means she don't wanna work things out.

POP

Talk to her...you can't get divorced.

LEE

Yes I can. Easiest thing in the world, divorce is.

POP

Me and your mother went through tough times, we didn't get divorced...strikes, layoffs...Hell, we all did back then and not one of us got divorced.

LEE

She's never been on her own. Let her see what it's like. It ain't so goddamn much fun. And I ain't takin' her back...not this time. Man, I hope she tries to get alimony outta me, I swear to Christ I do. She ain't getting a cent. I don't give a goddamn if they put me in jail. Hell, I hope they do. Let the fuckin' county take care of me for awhile. Ah, fuck it. Whose bet?

FRED

Lee, I'm here for you. I just want you to know that. If you need to talk...

LEE

I just wanna finish this hand.

FRED

Maybe you wanna see someone...you know, a professional...

LEE

I ain't talkin' to no professional. That goddamn women ain't gonna break me.

FRED

Lee, I sense a little anger here.

LEE

You're goddamn right you sense a little anger here. Have you fuckin' missed what's goin' on? I'm broke, I ain't got a job and now my wife's divorcin' me. All I really wanna do is drink beer and play cards but I can't 'cause you wanna get all touchy-feely with me. Well, I ain't interested, understand? Let's just finish this fuckin' hand, all right? Now whose bet?

FRED

I'm just tryin' to help...

LEE

Why they hell is it when someone says they wanna help, they don't do what you really want them to do?

FRED

Just tell me what it is you want...

LEE

I want you to tell me whose bet it is. Whose goddamn bet?

POP

(Quiet) We're all in. It's the last card...it's OK...let's just finish this hand.

LEE

Just fuckin' deal.

POP

Here we go...down and dirty. *(Deals)*

LEE

C'mon baby, daddy needs a new pair of shoes. I go four cent.

FRED

Too rich for my blood. I'm out.

POP

I'll see your four and raise ya three.

LEE

Yeah? Here's your three and three more.

FRED

You can't do that. Limit's ten cent.

LEE

Hell with that rule. Whaddya say Pop? Wanna play for some real money, like the old days? Whaddya say?

POP

You got somethin' or you bluffin' like always?

LEE

You gotta pay to find out.

POP

OK...hell with that rule. I go a dime.

LEE

A dime? A whole fuckin' dime? Whoa. Lemme check my pulse here...Jesus, the excitement *(Tosses dime in)* Here's a dime and I raise you *(Gets wallet)* a buck.

POP

A buck, huh? You better have somethin'...all right wise guy...there's your buck and one better.

LEE

I'll see it and there's...what the hell...here's a fiver.

POP

Yeah? Well here's your five and five more.

LEE

Your five and ten more. (*POP pauses*) What's the matter? Ain't got the balls to see me...old man?

POP

All right... (*Throws in ten*) And twenty more. (*LEE pauses*) What's the matter? Ain't got the balls to see me...boy?

LEE

Fuck it...there's your twenty...and I raise you...a hundred.

FRED

A hundred..? C'mon Lee.

LEE

Am I wrong or are you outta this hand?

FRED

Yeah, but...

LEE

Then this ain't your business, is it? (*To POP*) Well?

POP

I thought you was broke.

LEE

I always got a little somethin' stashed away in my kuffa...just in case an investment opportunity comes along.

POP

You shouldn't throw your money away like that.

LEE

I ain't throwin' it away.

FRED

C'mon, this is just a friendly game.

LEE

Still is. (*To POP*) Well?

FRED
 He must really have somethin', huh?

POP
 Hundred bucks...

LEE
(Reaching for pot) I guess it's mine...don't ya just hate losin' to your son?

POP
 Hold on. I see your hundred...and here's two hundred more. Well?

LEE
(Takes out \$100 bill) This is it. This is all I got.

POP
 Guess it's mine.

LEE
 Hold it... *(Takes off ring)* I'll bet this.

FRED
 Lee...

LEE
 Stay outta this. *(To POP)* Well? It's worth at least a hundred and a half...maybe two.

POP
 Don't do this. Your mother's been gone almost five years. I'm still wearin' my ring.

LEE
 There's a slight difference. Ma died. Dolores left me. She drops dead, I'll keep wearin' the ring.

POP
 Don't say that.

LEE
 I was gonna hock the goddamn thing anyway. You see me? *(Pause)* I guess you're foldin' then, ol' man.

POP
 All right, goddamn it. I'll see ya. *(Turns cards over)* Three sevens.

LEE
 Nothin'. I got absolutely nothin'.

POP

Never try and bluff me, Lee. I always know when you're bluffin'. Take your ring back...C'mon it's your weddin' ring.

LEE

I don't give a damn. It's yours. You won it. Do whatever you want with it.

POP

I'll hold onto it for now...That's it for me. Same time next week?

FRED

Sure...sure...Lee, you'll win the money back.

POP

Next Thursday, that's the fifteenth, ain't it?

LEE

Yeah.

POP

And your birthday, that's the sixteenth, right? Whaddya gonna be? No wait...lemmee see.

LEE

Forty three.

POP

Forty three? Cripes, where'd the time go?

LEE

Hell if I know.

POP

Tell ya what...let's have an all nighter...like the old days. Start 'er up Thursday, play right the hell through till Friday mornin'. Celebrate your birthday right. *(To FRED)* Can you get the day off?

FRED

Lemme check my schedule... *(Takes out book)* Well...I don't have any appointments. Yet.

POP

I'll drop by the union hall. I ain't been there in I don't know how long...get some of the fellas to come over.

LEE

I'm sure they'd love to come over. C'mon. I'll drive ya home.

POP

I don't need a ride. I can walk

LEE

I don't like ya walkin' home at night. It ain't safe no more.

POP

I can take care of myself.

LEE

You ain't as tough as you used to be.

POP

I can still take you. Old as I am, I can still take you and don't you forget it. I ain't afraid of some punk.

FRED

Couple punks robbed Mrs. Sipowitz last week...broad daylight it was, too. Week before, they tried to break into Sandusky's place. Just keeps getting' worse.

POP

Damn shame. It didn't used to be like this...we didn't have punks goin' 'round robbin' old ladies...hittin' 'em over the head for their grocery money. The South Side...we was like one big family. You had your difference of opinion, sure but everybody took care of everybody. There was your Slovaks, Hunkies, Dagos...I think there was one Irish family on the block. You looked out for each other. You had your clothes on the line and it started rainin', your neighbor comes down, pulls in the clothes, puts 'em on your porch...or in your house, even. Lock your doors? You never locked your doors. This is true. It ain't like that now. You ask me, it's 'cause of all them niggers and spics movin' in.

LEE

C'mon Pop it's getting late.

POP

You ain't drivin' me. You been drinkin'.

LEE

So what?

POP

They stop you again, they'll suspend your license.

LEE

Let 'em suspend it.

POP

When are you gonna grow up? You ain't a kid no more. How you gonna get to work if they suspend your license?

LEE

What work?

POP
Steel's gonna call again.

LEE
I ain't workin' there no more.

POP
You ain't got a choice.

LEE
Bullshit. I'm headin' South.

POP
Stop talkin' stupid. There ain't nothin' down there.

LEE
That's not what O'Reilly says.

POP
O'Reilly? Not the same son of a bitch...Don't tell me you're dumb enough to send him money.

LEE
We just been talkin'.

POP
O'Reilly would charge you for dialin' his number if he could. He tried the same shit up here...sellin' jobs. That's why I turned him in. Goddamn non-union shops lettin' scum like O'Reilly rip people off.

LEE
And your union never did nothin' wrong.

POP
Union benefited everyone, not just one guy.

LEE
I get a job, I don't give a goddamn who benefits.

POP
It ain't right.

LEE
You can't do it your way no more, Pop.

POP
Goddamn mini-mills...ain't bad enough they ain't union...they ain't even American for Chrissake. Goddamn things are all owned by foreigners...Japs and Limeys is all.

LEE

Like I give a shit who owns 'em.

POP

You better think long and hard before you move 'cause when you're down there and you screw up...and you're gonna screw up...I ain't gonna bail you out, understand? You're on your own. I won't lift a goddamn finger to help.

LEE

I don't need your help.

POP

And don't come beggin' me for money to come back.

LEE

I ain't comin' back.

POP

Oh, is that right? OK. Move. Don't worry 'bout me. I'll be fine. But when the good Lord finally calls me, I hope you have the decency to come back for my funeral.

LEE

For Crissake...

POP

I'll leave somethin' extra in my will...in case you change your mind about comin' back. I'm goin' home. I'm walkin' home 'Night Fred.

FRED

'Night, Mr. Waldinski.

(POP exits.)

LEE

Shit. I oughta just fuckin' pack up and move right now. Leave the old son of a bitch here by himself...come back for his funeral...Man, when O'Reilly calls, hell with Pop, the steel...hell with Dolores. I'm outta here. *(Pause)* Shit, I need a beer. Want one?

FRED

I can't drink with these meds. You got a Diet Coke?

(LEE exits to kitchen.)

LEE

Shit, I shoulda moved years ago. I didn't 'cause of him..."Stick it out, stick it out"...now I'm stuck. *(Returns with beer)* You think he appreciates what I do for him? I swear to Christ I

don't know why I stay anymore. I'd leave now except he took my last cent. I don't know how the fuck I'm gonna pay O'Reilly now.

FRED

(Pause) I can't man. I'm broke. *(Exits to get soda)*

LEE

Fuck it. I'll hock the rest of my shit if I hafta.

FRED

This is not a good idea. Maybe you should stick it out a little longer...work at the steel...get some money together...

LEE

I ain't workin' there no more.

FRED

Don't be stupid.

LEE

They canned me.

FRED

What?

LEE

They canned me. Sons of bitches...can you believe that? From the labor pool for Chrissake.

FRED

Man, nobody gets shit-canned from the labor pool.

LEE

I did. Fuck, it ain't even a real job.

FRED

What'd ya break this time?

LEE

Nothin'. Popped a fuckin' supervisor.

FRED

Yeah, that'd do it.

LEE

Bastard deserved it.

FRED

I bet.

LEE

I show up...bump into this prick...young fuck, ya know? I had a couple of beers, all right?

FRED

They don't let ya get away with nothin' no more.

LEE

No shit. Every time ya turn around they want ya to piss in a bottle. Son of a bitch says, "Go home and sleep it off." I tells him to kiss my ass, I ain't goin' nowhere. Hell, I need the money...Then he's like, "That's it. You got yourself a day off. You don't leave, you're getting' a ten day drop. And your old man ain't getting' you outta this one." I tell him to go fuck himself so he tries to get smart...says, "Go home and polish your fuckin' trophies." Next thing I know, guys are pullin' me offa him. Fuck it, I'm glad I did it.

FRED

Union gonna do anythin'?

LEE

You kiddin'? Bastards are getting more like management every day.

FRED

Your old man's still got connections.

LEE

Connections...he don't have connections... *(Starts tossin' laundry at Nerf ball hoop)* Fuck it. O'Reilly's got me a job. I'll find a way to pay him. Steel can go to hell. Bastards...how can they take my job away like that? It's just...alla sudden, twenty four years of marriage is wiped out...gone...just like that...twenty four years I been at the steel and now that's wiped out too. I don't get it man. I swear to Christ I don't. I done everythin' I was told to...marry Dolores...work at the steel. What the hell happened? *(Raises beer)* Here's to twenty four years of my goddamn life down the drain.

FRED

Here's to it.

(FRED and LEE drink.)

LEE

Tad... I guess he done the smart thing...I didn't want him to go away but that's the only way you're gonna succeed...get the hell outta this town.

FRED

Kid's gotta do what he wants.

LEE

Why? I couldn't. I hadda give up my scholarship and work at the steel.

FRED

Nobody forced ya.

LEE

Bullshit.

FRED

You still coulda gone.

LEE

How? They don't hold them sports scholarships unless you're a superstar. Without that scholarship, I wasn't goin' nowhere. I didn't have money for school. And with Dolores pregnant...Shit, it's like one day you're a kid comin' outta school, the next day you're a man comin' outta the steel...and now...fuck... now I don't know what I am. I keep tryin' to figure it out...Never can. No choice. Story of my life...no goddamn choice. *(Throws laundry at FRED)*

FRED

Cut it out, will ya?

LEE

Pop...all his stories...him and the union...him and the steel...like he's some big shot. And what was he? A shop steward. A fuckin' shop steward. *(Throws more laundry)*

FRED

You're startin' to piss me off here.

LEE

Stories about plantin' bombs...bullshit...him leadin' strikes...bullshit. All bullshit. I never believed it. I never believed any of it. Talkin' like he's some big shot. Shit, his claim to fame is paintin' that goddamn water tower. Now there's somethin' to brag about.

FRED

You're getting' all worked up here, man.

LEE

Goddamn steel...promisin' you're gonna be set. You ain't set. You're set up. Fuck, I wish that guy woulda planted that bomb...blow the whole goddamn place up.

FRED

When I was in the hospital...recoverin' and all...I used to think about getting' even with the steel alla time.

LEE

Hell, I wish he woulda planted a hundred bombs...

FRED

Get me a rifle...climb that water tower...

LEE

Woulda saved us all a lotta trouble.

FRED

(As if aiming rifle) Take the bastards out one by one.

LEE

Someday...I swear to Christ someday I'm gonna do somethin' to them bastards for what they done to me.

FRED

But...but the docs said they was just thoughts, they'd go away.

LEE

Man, if I had a bomb...

FRED

And they was right. When I got better, they went away...mostly.

LEE

All I need is one fuckin' bomb.

FRED

Well you ain't getting one so forget it.

LEE

I'll build the goddamn thing.

FRED

Just like that.

LEE

It ain't that difficult.

FRED

Yeah right.

LEE

You think I'm bullshittin' ya? When I was workin' construction...before them bastards laid me off too...I worked with the guy who set the explosives...he was retired military...set booby traps in 'Nam...Korea...did some real nasty shit...man. Loved talkin' about his work...said buildin' a bomb was easy...all it is, is makin' a circuit. All ya gotta do is hook it up, complete the circuit...boom.

FRED

So you're gonna ask him nice to build ya one.

LEE

Can't. Stupid son of a bitch blowed himself up clearin' some rock.

FRED

I thought you said buildin' a bomb was easy.

LEE

So he screwed up. I cleaned out his locker...kept his books...figured I earned it. All we need is some black powder...gun shops all got black powder...I got some of his blastin' caps... only other thing we need is some pipe...

FRED

You shouldn't talk like this...You're startin' to make me nervous here.

LEE

You don't hafta stay.

FRED

No...no...I can handle it now. I'm OK...but...these are just thoughts Lee.

LEE

These ain't just thoughts.

FRED

You're drunk is all.

LEE

I can get plenty of black powder...that's easy...So's the pipe...We can do this...it's a piece of cake. All we need is a target

FRED

We? Whaddya talkin' about?

LEE

You goin' deaf too? We're buildin' a fuckin' bomb.

FRED

No... "we're" not buildin' a bomb.

LEE

You're tellin' me you don't want to? After what they did to you?

FRED

It ain't their fault what happened.

LEE

No? All this time I thought it was the steel that put you in the nut house. Shit, tell me you don't wanna pay them bastards back.

FRED

I don't. Not no more.

LEE

Well I do.

FRED

You're just gonna blow yourself up like that dancer guy.

LEE

Bullshit. I know how to handle that shit. Makin' the bomb...that's easy...now what do we...
(*Turns, sees water tower*) Of course...

FRED

What?

LEE

(*Laughs*) The water tower. We'll blow up the fuckin' water tower.

FRED

Take it easy, man. You're the one's startin' to act crazy now.

LEE

We can do it. Where are them goddamn books? That fuckin' water tower....What are you standin' around for? Help me look.

FRED

You're not gonna find 'em tonight. You're too goddamn drunk.

LEE

I ain't too goddamn drunk. Where the fuck are they? Somebody's gotta pay 'em back for what they done...Somebody's gotta show them bastards...

FRED

You can't even see straight.

LEE

I'm seein' just fine. I find them books...

FRED

Calm down.

LEE

(*Starts tearing through things*) Goddamn it, where are they? (*Finds a book*) OK. Here's one...we can start buildin' the fucker tonight. I got the blastin' caps...

FRED

(*Grabs him*) You're not doin' anythin' tonight.

LEE

Lemme go. Goddamn it, lemme go.

FRED

(Pushes him against wall) Stop it! You ain't doin' nothin'. You gotta sleep this one off, hear me? Hear me?

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

ACT I; SCENE 2

(AT RISE: LEE'S house the following morning. LEE is playing a Nerf basketball game. His movements are uncertain because he's badly hungover.)

LEE

...Celtics are down by two...five seconds left...Waldinski brings the ball across mid-court...three seconds...Waldinski pumps once...twice...two seconds..one...he shoots...
(Misses; flatly) He misses...Wait...Waldinski was guarding on the play...what a brilliant

LEE, *Continued*

defensive play! He grabs the ball and goes coast to coast *(Dunks ball)* Celtics win! *(Starts dancing, then grabs head)* Oh shit... *(Sits; there's a knock on the door)* Yeah...c'mon in.

(FRED enters, carrying coffee and smoking a cigarette.)

LEE

Hey Fred. How are ya?

FRED

Here...drink this. *(Hands him coffee)* C'mon drink it.

LEE

OK, OK. Thanks. Whaddya..?

FRED

Anyone here?

LEE

No.

FRED

You sure?

LEE

Yeah I'm sure. *(FRED looks around)* Whaddya doin'?

FRED

Checkin'.

LEE
Checkin' what?

FRED
To see if anyone's here.

LEE
I just told ya there wasn't.

FRED
Wanted to make sure.

LEE
You sure now?

FRED
I guess.

LEE
You guess...Hey, whaddya doin' here anyway? I thought you was workin'.

FRED
Company closed.

LEE
What?

FRED
(*Yelling*) I said the company closed.

LEE
I heard ya...I heard ya...

FRED
I show up...on time...they take us all to a room...I know things have been bad but...tell us they couldn't hold on no more. Said they was sorry...sorry

LEE
Jesus man.

FRED
Shit. It's the steel. When they're slow, everythin's slow.

LEE
Whaddya gonna do?

FRED
I been thinkin'. Drink your coffee.

I am. LEE

I been thinkin' 'bout what you said last night. FRED

Jesus. I was pretty drunk. If I said somethin' stupid... LEE

I been thinkin' 'bout the thing. FRED

The thing? LEE

Yeah... 'bout buildin' the thing. FRED

Buildin' what thing? LEE

Goddamn it, you know. FRED

Goddamn it I don't. What the hell are you talkin' about? LEE

The thing you were talkin' about last night. FRED

Jesus...gimmee a hint or somethin'. LEE

(Pause) Boom. FRED

Boom? LEE

Yeah. Boom. FRED

I got no idea. LEE

FRED

The bomb goddamn it. You said you could build a bomb.

LEE

I said I could build a bomb?

FRED

Were you bullshittin' me?

LEE

No...No...I just...I never done it.

FRED

You said it ain't that difficult.

LEE

It ain't...at least that's what I been told.

FRED

(Pulls black powder from bag) Look man, I got the fuckin' powder right here.

LEE

Jesus Christ. Be careful. Watch your fuckin' cigarette.

FRED

Is this enough? I can get more.

LEE

Now wait a second...you can't go blowin' up your company.

FRED

I ain't talkin' about blowin' up that little shit company. It ain't them I'm after.

LEE

Oh. Then what the fuck are you talkin' about?

FRED

The steel goddamn it. It's them I want. It's their goddamn fault.

LEE

You can't do nothin' to the steel. They're too goddamn big.

FRED

I ain't talkin' the whole goddamn steel. I'd like to but no way we can get enough black powder for that...We'll take out the fuckin' water tower...like you said.

LEE

Water tower?

FRED

Yeah. You forget? That's what you was talkin' about last night.

LEE

But a bomb...

FRED

I'm not talkin' about the fuckin' atom bomb here. Just one bomb is all. A small bomb. *(Pause)* Then it's bullshit. It's bullshit just like everythin' else you talk about...You never had the balls to do anythin', did ya Lee?

LEE

And what the fuck have you ever done?

FRED

Nothin'. Not a goddamn thing. But at least I admit it. I don't go around bullshittin' about what I coulda done...pissin' and moanin' how everyone's screwed me...I coulda done this...I coulda done that. We got a chance to do somethin' to them for a change, understand? We can do this. And what are you gonna do? Same thing you always done. Nothin'. *(Pause)* You're scared.

LEE

I'm what?

FRED

You are. I finally figured you out. You're scared.

LEE

Back off Fred.

FRED

Your old man's right. You're all talk. You're a chicken shit.

LEE

You son of a bitch. *(Grabs him)* Who the hell you think you are?

FRED

That's it...that's right...get mad...but it ain't me you're mad it. It's them...it's the steel...they're the ones man. They're the ones that did it to us. Let's do somethin' to them...That water tower...Goddamn thing's been hangin' over us all our lives. Think about it...one mornin', Grace's son or grandson or whoever the fuck he is...fucker wakes up...his fuckin' water tower is gone...gone man! And we did it. We did it! That name won't be hangin' over us no more.

LEE

That name...that fuckin' name won't be hangin' over me no more. Let's do it. Let's fuckin' do it.

ACT I; SCENE 3

(AT RISE: Thursday afternoon; one week later. The living room is messier than ever before. Plants and several photographs that had been on the wall are gone, as are several chairs. It appears Dolores has been there and taken her belongings, leaving a note on the table. LEE had left some wire and pipe on the table but the rest of the material is in boxes beneath the table. LEE and FRED have gone out for groceries. THEY begin speaking from offstage.)

FRED

(Opening door) Man, you should lock this door.

LEE

What for? I got nothin' to steal.

FRED

(Entering with groceries) That ain't what I'm talkin' about. With the shit we got here...

LEE

I packed it away.

FRED

What if some Spic busts in and finds it? You know how wacko they are.

LEE

Yeah. We don't want some wacko Spic getting' his hands on this shit, do we? No tellin' what he might do. Me and you, couple red blooded Americans, all we're gonna do is blow up the water tower.

FRED

This ain't some random act of violence. Them bastards deserve it.

LEE

(Places bag on table; sees note) Fuck.

FRED

What?

LEE

Dolores was here.

FRED

Shit.

LEE

(Looks around) She moved her shit out.

FRED

You think she saw anythin'?

LEE

Son of a bitch. I patched that fuckin' wall yesterday. I shouldna wasted my time.

FRED

Lee, do you think she saw anythin'?

LEE

Lookit this...she took half the pictures...half the fuckin' chairs...Fuck it. Just as well. I can do what I want with the place now.

FRED

Hey—hell with this place. If she saw this shit...

LEE

She didn't see nothin'. All that's out here is some wire and pipe.

FRED

She ain't stupid...she puts two and two together, we're fucked.

LEE

She don't know nothin'.

FRED

I ain't as sure as you. She's gotta know somethin's up.

LEE

So?

FRED

So? So we gotta get movin'. We can't fuck around no more. We gotta get this thing done. We can't wait. You said the bomb's 'bout ready, right?

LEE

Yeah.

FRED

Let's plant it. Let's plant it right now.

LEE

We can't plant it in broad daylight.

FRED

Plant it tonight then.

LEE

We're playin' cards tonight, remember? It's my fuckin' birthday present...wait a second. That's it.

FRED

What?

LEE

Plant it during the game. It'd be the perfect birthday present.

FRED

How the hell we gonna plant it with your old man here? He's deaf. He ain't dumb.

LEE

We...we say we're goin' for a walk...or better, that we're takin' a piss. Yeah, that's it. We're takin' a piss. He'll never know we're gone.

FRED

And he ain't gonna think it's strange we gotta go piss together?

LEE

OK... only one of us goes. It only takes one guy to plant a bomb. The water tower's not five minutes from here. We do it right, he'll never know what's up.

FRED

You're right. Let's get a move on then. We ain't got much time. She about ready to go?

LEE

(Puts on gloves, takes boxes out) Yeah. Get the shit you bought yesterday.

FRED

(Pulls out bags) Here. *(Reaches in bag)* Here's your battery.

LEE

Hold it! Goddamn it, I keep tellin' ya we gotta be careful. You don't go touchin' nothin' without gloves on.

FRED

OK, OK.

LEE

You gotta start usin' your head.

FRED

Why you so uptight?

LEE

This ain't a game here.

FRED

I know that. Don't you think I know that? Now c'mon. We're wastin' time.

LEE

Just relax.

FRED

I am relaxed.

LEE

OK...it's almost all set. *(Holds up pipe bombs)* These babies are packed with black powder so don't fuck with 'em. Lemmee have the battery and clock.

(FRED removes a battery and a large alarm clock from the bag and hands them to LEE.)

FRED

Here.

LEE

Man, this thing is huge.

FRED

It's the biggest one they had. I figured...our first bomb...maybe we should have a big clock.

LEE

You're right. Give it here. Ya know, this might be just what the doctor ordered...these bells... *(FRED pulls second, identical clock from bag)* Why'd ya get two?

FRED

They was on sale. Two for one. I figured, might as well get 'em. We can set this one up here...keep track of the time.

(FRED sets the alarms on each of the clocks, synchronizing them.)

LEE

Whaddya doin'?

FRED

Synchronizin' them is all. *(Reaches in bag, takes out Nerf ball)* Here, I got this for ya...early birthday present.

LEE

Thanks, man.

FRED

Sure. *(Pause)* Want a beer?

(FRED pulls a beer from one of the grocery bags and offers it to LEE.)

LEE

Not when I'm foolin' with this shit. I thought you wasn't supposed to drink with them meds.

(LEE tightens the blasting caps on the pipe bomb.)

FRED

It's OK. I stopped takin' the meds. Somethin' the matter?

LEE

No...Caps need to be tightened just a touch more.

(FRED picks up the bomb and casually starts to tighten the caps.)

LEE

Put that down!

FRED

What?

LEE

You can't fuck with them things. She'll blow if ya tighten it too much. Put it down.

FRED

All right...all right.

LEE

And leave 'em the fuck alone.

FRED

Jesus.

LEE

This ain't a joke no more. Fuck up once and we're history.

FRED

Let's stop bullshittin' and finish it.

LEE

Don't play with nothin' here.

FRED

I won't...I promise. Now show me what ya got.

LEE

(Pause) Grab a chair. Man, I'll tell you what...*(Pulls out box from under the table)* there is some sick stuff here. I mean...some of these books...look at this, "Backyard Rocketry: Converting Model Rockets Into Explosive Missiles." Tad had model rockets for Chrissake. A kid gets his hands on this, no parent will be safe. And here's a personal favorite..."The Guide to Home and Recreational Use of Explosives."

FRED

Recreational use?

LEE

Yeah. Nothin' like spendin' a relaxin' weekend lobbin' mortars at your neighbors, is there? Christ, there's some scary people out there. Now there's a whole lotta fancy shit here but I figured we gotta go with somethin' simple, this bein' our first bomb and all.

FRED

Yeah. No sense getting' in over our heads.

LEE

Simple and straight forward.

FRED

We don't need nothin' fancy, it's just gotta be effective.

LEE

And that's why I used *(Holds up book)* "The Anarchist's Cookbook."

FRED

Lemme see.

(FRED takes the book. LEE takes it back, turns it to a marked page and hands it back to LEE.)

LEE

This is the easiest one... *(Shows FRED the page)* I got it all set up...all I gotta do is put the battery in... *(Takes battery)* Like this...wire it up *(Wraps it)* ...aluminum foil, please...

FRED

Here.

LEE

Wrap that around the bell...wire around the hammer here...run it to the other end of the blasting cap...and that's it. Now all we gotta do is set the alarm...when it goes off, this hammer hits this bell...aluminum foil is the contact...circuit's complete and...boom.

FRED

Damn. That's it?

LEE

Yep.

FRED

How come we never thought about doin' this before?

LEE

Probably 'cause we both had jobs before.

FRED

Everythin's been easy. Almost too easy.

LEE

That's 'cause we thought it all through. All ya hafta do is decide on your plan and then execute it. Plus you gotta pay attention. That's important, especially when you're buildin' a bomb. Payin' attention's the key.

FRED

You're right about that. One fuck up and—

(The alarm on the "extra" clock goes off, startling FRED and LEE.)

LEE

What the fuck..?

FRED

Well that one works. *(Shuts it off)* That's weird.

LEE

What?

LEE

I synchronized 'em. That one shoulda gone off too.

(LEE and FRED look at second clock which is in the bomb.)

LEE AND FRED, *Together*

Shit!

(THEY Lunge at the clock.)

LEE

Leggo! Leggo!

FRED

Shut it off! Shut it off!

Leggo! Stop grabbin' at it.

LEE

Goddamn it!

FRED

Leggo

LEE

Shit!

FRED

Gimmee!

LEE

(LEE grabs it away from FRED and rips off the attached wires. FRED collapses into a chair laughing.)

What's so funny? You think this is a fuckin' joke?

LEE

Man, you shoulda seen your face.

FRED

You idiot, you coulda killed us.

LEE

Who you callin' an idiot?

FRED

This ain't a fuckin' game.

LEE

I'm not an idiot.

FRED

OK, you're a fuckin' idiot.

LEE

I am not a fuckin' idiot. Take it back.

FRED

What?

LEE

You called me a fuckin' idiot. Take it back.

FRED

LEE

(Pause) All right. I'm sorry. But let's get one thing straight. This ain't some high school prank here. You better take this serious.

FRED

I am.

LEE

... 'cause one fuck up and we're either dead or in jail. Steel's done enough to me. I ain't killin' myself or goin' to jail for 'em, understand?

FRED

Yeah...sure. Calm down.

LEE

Them sons of bitches snatched everythin' away from me...my job...my family...I lost everythin'.

FRED

We all did.

LEE

But I'm the guy that's gonna pay 'em back. Me. They been fuckin' with me my whole life. Now it's my turn.

FRED

Hey, them bastards screwed me outta two jobs. Let's stop bullshittin' and get this done.

LEE

All right. We're takin' out the water tower, right?

FRED

Yep.

LEE

That goddamn water tower. All those years his name's been up there...starin' at me long's I can remember.

FRED

It ain't gonna be up there no more. (Pause) You sure we can take it down?

LEE

That old thing? We can practically push it over. All we gotta do is wrap the bundles around the legs...that fucker's goin' down.

FRED

Man, this is gonna be great.

LEE

We don't have a lotta time. If we're gonna do it tonight...

FRED

We gotta.

LEE

Then we gotta get our asses in gear. We gotta case the joint.

FRED

But we keep a low profile.

LEE

Nice and smooth.

FRED

Don't arouse no suspicions.

LEE

Exactly. Just make a few passes. Now we can both scout it out but only one of us plants it.

FRED

That's me.

LEE

You? Why you?

FRED

They screwed me outta two jobs.

LEE

I been fired.

FRED

You built the damn thing. Let me plant it. You keep your pop occupied. Argue with him or somethin'.

LEE

I dunno...

FRED

You afraid I can't handle this, Lee?

LEE

No...

FRED

Good 'cause I'm doin' it.

LEE

Let's draw for it. High card plants it.

(LEE goes for the cards.)

FRED

OK

(LEE and FRED each take a card.)

LEE

Seven.

FRED

Queen.

LEE

Shit.

FRED

Looks like the pleasure's all mine.

LEE

You sure you can do this?

FRED

Don't start.

LEE

I ain't startin' nothin'. You're a little edgy is all.

FRED

It's the meds. I only been off 'em a couple days. There's bound to be a reaction. Them damn docs kept me doped up real good but I'm seein' things clear now... real clear. They ain't the ones tellin' me what's real and what ain't. I'm the one decidin' what's real and this *(Holds up bomb)* is what's real now. I'm goin' in, plantin' this and sayin' so long to Mr. Grace's water tower. You just make sure that it's ready to go.

LEE

It is.

FRED

You sure?

LEE

Yep. Look at this. See, to make sure she's workin' right, all ya gotta do is take the bomb outta the loop and put in a light bulb... *(HE does)* ...hook it up the same way... *(HE*

does)...set the alarm... (HE does)...if it's all hooked up right, when the alarm goes off... (THEY wait a moment; the alarm goes off and the light goes on)... the light goes on.

FRED

Whoo-hoo!

LEE

Looks like she's workin'.

FRED

Whoo-hoo!

(LEE sets the alarm once again. FRED and LEE's faces glow in the light as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

END ACT I

ACT II; SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Thursday night. Other than the addition of the new clock, a "Happy Birthday" sign and balloons, the living room appears the same. POP, LEE and FRED sit at the table smoking cigars. LEE sits on a folding chair, Delores having taken half the chairs away. It is past 11:00 PM and the MEN have been playing cards for several hours. A new hand has just been dealt.)

POP

Believe you me, this is just like the old days. Just like 'em. Cigars ain't even half bad. I went to the union hall...tried to get some guys but I didn't know nobody. All young guys now.

LEE

Hell with 'em

FRED

We're gonna have a blast anyway, right Lee?

LEE

Sure.

POP

In the old days, they'd all be here...Jimmy Klatzco...the Stepinski brothers, Joe and Danny...all them guys...Wouldn't surprise me if they come walkin' in...'course they're all dead now...Say, who's bet is it anyhow? Lee?

LEE

What?

POP

Christ, I'm the guy with the hearing aid. Can't ya hear sittin' all the way down there?

LEE

I can hear fine.

POP

Can ya see all right there, Lee?

LEE

Just play, all right?

POP

Sure, sure...whose bet?

LEE

Fred's.

FRED

It ain't mine. I just bet. It's yours.

LEE

Mine?

POP

Listen, you figure it out. I gotta see a fella about a horse. You fellas need anythin'?

LEE

Get me a beer, would ya?

POP

Sure. What about you?

FRED

Absolutely.

POP

(Starts to exit, then stops) Now see, I ain't takin' my cards. Know why?

LEE

'Cause you got shit?

POP

It's 'cause I trust yas, that's why. I ain't like you young guys, don't trust nobody. I'm from the old school. *(Exits)*

LEE

(*To FRED*) Yeah, bullshit. It's 'cause he ain't got nothin'. (*Pause*) You sure you should have another beer?

FRED

It'll calm me down.

LEE

Nervous?

FRED

And you're not?

LEE

You still OK with doin' this?

FRED

Yeah...you?

LEE

Yeah. When you wanna plant it?

FRED

Right after this hand?

LEE

The sooner the better.

FRED

Get it done. No sense in waitin'. It's all set to go?

LEE

Yep. 12:01...it'll go off right inside of my new year. I don't want nothin' bad carryin' over. Things are gonna be different now.

FRED

(*Raises beer bottle to toast*) A new start.

LEE

(*Clicks beer bottle*) A clean break. (*THEY drink*) A new year, a new look for this town and a new job.

FRED

I still can't believe O'Reilly actually came through.

LEE

Like they say, "Money talks and bullshit walks." I hocked every last thing that Dolores didn't take. All I got now is enough gas money to get down there

FRED

I just hope he don't screw ya.

LEE

He won't. I told ya...he got four guys I know jobs. Four.

FRED

(Toasts again) Well...to O'Reilly, that rat bastard. A workin' man's best friend.

LEE

Here's to him.

FRED

When ya leavin'?

LEE

Any day now, I figure. I'm just waitin' for the letter from Southern tellin' me I start.

FRED

What about your old man?

LEE

I didn't tell him nothin' yet...didn't wanna upset him...he's all excited about this party.

FRED

He's gonna be pissed.

LEE

Won't be the first time. But this is a job...a real job. Man, it's been so long since I brought home a real paycheck. I figure I'll get me a small place and stash money away to get somethin' nicer...Once I settle in...I'm gonna talk with Dolores. I ain't signed them divorce papers yet. Things are gonna be different. All I wanna do is work, drink beer, shoot hoop...keep it simple. You oughta think about comin' down.

FRED

I ain't movin'.

LEE

You got nothin' here.

FRED

Loretta's got her job. That'll keep us for awhile. I been lookin'. I'll find somethin'. Sooner or later I'll find somethin'.

LEE

So...you sure you're OK with the thing?

FRED

What thing?

LEE

The thing...the thing you're gonna plant...the fuckin'...

FRED

Oh...the thing....yeah, yeah. Sure.

LEE

She's in my old gym bag, right by the door.

FRED

Which door?

LEE

The back door.

FRED

The back door.

LEE

You know, the one at the back of the house.

FRED

I know where the back door is, I just wanted to make sure I heard ya right.

LEE

Do it just like we planned. You got plenty of time. It'll only take ya seven minutes. That's what we clocked it at. You know where to hop the fence?

FRED

I better. We musta cased it a hundred times.

LEE

Never saw nobody down there. Shit, in the old days, that lot would be full. Now...not one goddamn soul.

FRED

Cops don't even go there for breaks no more.

LEE

Soon as you plant it, get your ass outta there.

FRED

Don't worry. I'll come flyin' back. Just keep your pop occupied.

LEE

I'll take care of him. Jesus...I can't believe we're really gonna do this...people are gonna be talkin' about this for years....years.

FRED

Here's to it. *(Raises beer; pauses; looks at cards)* I don't got shit.

LEE

Me neither. *(Looks at POP's cards then to FRED)* Lemmee see what ya got. *(FRED shows cards; LEE exchanges some)* This'll teach him to trust us.

FRED

Here he comes.

(POP enters with three beers.)

POP

Here ya are fellas. A toast to Lee.

LEE

What're you doin' Pop? Put that down. You know what the docs say.

POP

Hell with the docs. It's your birthday. No doctor's gonna tell me I can't drink on my son's birthday. Here's to ya. *(THEY click bottles and drink)* My God, but that's good. Believe you me, if I woulda known what old age was gonna be like I woulda gone when the good Lord called your mother, God rest her soul. You figure out whose bet it is? I feel lucky.

LEE

Mine. I got two cent.

POP

I see ya.

FRED

I'm in.

(POP deals.)

POP

It's still to you, Lee.

LEE

Three cent.

(POP and FRED put money in.)

POP

(Deals) Read 'em and weep, boys.

LEE

I'm out.

FRED

Me too.

LEE

(Softly to FRED) You should stay.

FRED

Yeah?

LEE

Yeah.

FRED

OK. Four cent.

POP

And three better.

FRED

I see ya.

POP

Two pair...sevens and queens.

FRED

(To LEE) Damn it, you told me to stay.

LEE

I never said you'd win.

POP

Yessir, I told ya I felt lucky. Just like the old days. Your deal Fred.

(FRED reaches for cards.)

LEE

Fred?

FRED

Huh? Oh...ya know, I gotta take a leak. You know what they say about beer, right? You don't buy it, you rent it. I ain't gonna be gone long...just a few minutes...somethin' like seven, eight minutes...about that.

LEE

Goin' to the bathroom Fred?

FRED
Yeah.

LEE
You hear that Pop? Fred's goin' to the bathroom.

POP
I heard him.

FRED
Only gonna be gone a few...

POP
What the hell is the matter with you two? You wanna go to the bathroom, go.

FRED
I was just sayin' ...

POP
Leave...go, for Chrissake.

FRED
Yeah... Yeah, I think I will.

(FRED starts to exit, pauses and gives slight smile to LEE then exits.)

POP
Christ...almost forgot... *(Takes pill with beer)*

LEE
What the hell are ya doin'? Goddamn it.

POP
It's just one beer.

LEE
For Chrissake Pop

POP
Relax, would ya? You're actin' like Fred. *(Picks up Nerf ball)* New ball?

LEE
Yeah. Fred gave it to me.

POP
Seems like he's doin' good, considerin'. Shame about his company.

LEE

Hit him hard. He loved that fuckin' job.

POP

He'll find somethin'. Fred's willin' to take anythin' if it pays.

LEE

If there is anythin', there'll be a hundred guys linin' up to apply. Every one of 'em a steelworker.

POP

Word at the union hall is the steel's gonna be callin' guys back soon.

LEE

Yeah, for the labor pool.

POP

Permanent too.

LEE

Bullshit. They been sayin' that for years.

POP

I'm just tellin' ya what I hear. (*Holds out ball*) Game?

LEE

I'd be takin' advantage.

POP

Whaddya mean?

LEE

I don't know how to tell you this Pop, but you never were any good.

POP

Why you little punk...I taught you everythin'...includin' that move in the championship game.

LEE

You got me confused with Fred. He's the one that tossed that brick up there.

POP

I'm talkin' 'bout offensive boards. I'm the one that taught you that and it paid off, didn't it? When you scored that basket...My God but I was proud of ya.

LEE

Didn't last too long, did it?

POP

What?

LEE

C'mon. Let's play.

POP

I'll take it out.

LEE

How come you always gotta take it out?

POP

'Cause I'm your father, that's why. Ready? *(Pause)* Hey, Fred's comin' back.

(LEE looks; POP drives to basket.)

LEE

Hey!

POP

One. My God, didn't I teach ya nothin'?

LEE

All right. If that's the way you wanna play...Let's go.

POP

I'll be a...the water tower...the light's off.

LEE

Bullshit. C'mon. No more foolin' around, old man.

POP

All right boy...think you can take me?

LEE

I know I can.

(POP attempts to drive past LEE but LEE blocks him.)

POP

Cut it out. No foulin'.

LEE

I ain't foulin'.

POP

The hell you ain't.

LEE

What's the matter, can't get past me?

POP

I ain't worryin' 'bout getting' past no one Lee.

(POP lowers his shoulder and drives past LEE and scores.)

LEE

Shit. Goddamn it.

POP

Guess I can still get past ya.

LEE

C'mon. I'm ready now. C'mon.

POP

He fakes left...he fakes right...

LEE

Try straight ahead. C'mon. Try it.

(POP attempts another drive. HE and LEE struggle. POP drops ball and LEE grabs the ball and scores. POP sits, unsteady.)

LEE, *Continued*

Lee Waldinski, coast to coast. Looks like I can get past ya, huh ol man. Pop? Pop, what's the matter?

POP

Nothin'...nothin'...I'm OK...winded is all. Get me some water, would ya?

LEE

Sure...sure...just relax.

(LEE quickly exits as POP continues to gasp for air. LEE comes back with a glass of water.)

LEE, *Continued*

You OK? Want your pills?

POP

No, I don't need 'em. Just gotta catch my breath.

LEE

You better take 'em.

(LEE picks up Pop's coat and reaches in the pocket. HE finds a letter.)

POP

Quit babyin' me for Chrissake. I said I'm winded is all...got a little excited. *(Laughs)* Maybe I ain't as tough as I used to be. *(Looks at LEE)* Oh...jeez...that letter. I forgot all about it. I'm sorry. You're right. I shouldn't take your mail...with my memory...who's it from?

LEE

You know goddamn well who it's from.

POP

I forgot I had it, honest...it's from Southern Steel, ain't it? That the one you're waitin' for?

LEE

Fuckin' A it is.

POP

I forgot I had it, is all.

LEE

For Chrissake Pop, don't bullshit me. For once, don't bullshit me.

POP

Don't you dare...

LEE

So what's it say?

POP

I didn't open it...look...see? It's still sealed. I was afraid. *(LEE is about to open it)* Wait, Lee...listen..I have a surprise for ya. For your birthday. When I went to the union hall today...no sense beatin' around the bush here. I know what happened.

LEE

I'm glad I popped him, the little prick.

POP

Asshole deserved it. No question.

LEE

Hell with 'em. I don't need them no more. *(Shakes letter)* I got this.

POP

I can get you your job back.

LEE

My job?

POP

On the labor pool.

LEE

Fuck the labor pool.

POP

You have any idea what I had to do to get you back on? That was your second ten day drop. You'd be canned if I didn't...

LEE

I ain't goin' back on the labor pool. No way. Waitin' around for them to call, tellin' ya "OK, you can work today. You can feel like a man again for a few days." No way. No goddamn way.

POP

I shoulda saved my money then.

LEE

And you say O'Reilly's scum for sellin' jobs.

POP

Don't you dare compare me to him.

LEE

Fuck it. I ain't waitin' no more.

POP

Wait. Lemmee talk to 'em again...them young guys...they was real nice. There's gotta be somethin'...

LEE

I don't need 'somethin' no more.

POP

Please...

(LEE opens the letter.)

POP, *Continued*

Well?

LEE

I got it.

POP

What?

I said I got it. LEE

You takin' it? POP

'Course I'm takin' it. LEE

But you'll lose your seniority. You got no security. No union. POP

Union didn't get me a job. O'Reilly did. LEE

I don't like that son of a bitch getting' paid. POP

Who cares what you like or don't like? O'Reilly came through. Not you, not your goddamn union. LEE

Lee, listen to me... POP

I'm through listenin' to you Pop. I been listenin' to you my whole life, doin' what you told me...where'd it get me, huh? I'm headin' South. LEE

Don't. POP

Fuck it. I'm gone. LEE

Tad's comin' in. POP

What? LEE

I wasn't supposed to tell ya. He's gonna be here tomorrow...for your birthday. POP

Tad? LEE

POP
Yeah, Tad, your son, Tad.

LEE
He never done that before.

POP
He's takin' a job...right here in town, can ya believe that? Soon as he finishes school, he starts. One of them computer companies...settin' up in the steel's old administration building.

LEE
He's movin' back here?

POP
It's where the jobs are.

LEE
Yeah, for him. Here I gotta move away, he's gotta move back.

POP
You don't hafta move.

LEE
Jesus, he didn't even tell me.

POP
He was gonna call...he musta got busy...but he's comin' in tomorrow. I mentioned to him what happened to ya...asked him to look into job openin's.

LEE
I ain't beggin' my son for a job.

POP
You're not beggin'.

LEE
Too late. I'm outta here.

POP
You can't leave your family.

LEE
What family? I got a wife that's divorcin' me and a son that won't talk to me.

POP
Stay. Things are gonna change. Listen to me...

LEE

No. I'm makin' my own decisions now. I don't need you findin' me work and I sure as hell don't need Tad.

POP

You do. You do need him. He's your son.

LEE

I lost him a long time ago.

POP

Then fight, goddamn it. Fight to get him back.

LEE

Yeah, sure. Maybe I'll drop him a postcard...we'll fight long distance.

POP

Why do you resent that kid so much?

LEE

I don't resent him.

POP

Bullshit. You do and he knows it. You're the one that knocked up Dolores but you blame everyone else.

LEE

If you woulda taken her in, I still coulda gone to Pitt.

POP

I never said I wouldn't take her in.

LEE

Maybe not straight out ya didn't, but in so many words ya did.

POP

Things were tight back then and another mouth to feed...two mouths to feed...

LEE

Ma said ya could.

POP

Your mother was a good woman, God rest her soul, but she wasn't the one workin' the overtime.

LEE

In so many words...just like I said.

POP

You're the only one that kept you from goin' to Pitt. I got you the job at the steel. You was supposed to save your money and go. Instead, you just pissed it away.

LEE

Pissed it away? You was the one always talkin' about how expensive a kid is.

POP

That's why I helped you out so much. But every time I turned around, you was broke again. Maybe I shouldn't have given you nothin'. You just pissed more away.

LEE

I was workin' my ass off. If I bought some shit, so what? I deserved it.

POP

I knew you wasn't goin' nowhere when you got that first paycheck. I knew you was hooked. You blame everyone else but yourself...me, Dolores...Tad, even. And he knows it, goddamn it. He knows it.

LEE

That kid never wanted for anythin'.

POP

He wanted a father and you was never around.

LEE

Where was I? Huh? At the steel. Workin' my ass off to support a family and for what? One day I turn around and I ain't got one.

POP

Quit blamin' the steel for Chrissake. I worked at that goddamn place longer than you and it was a hell of a lot worse.

LEE

Here we go again. Sure Pop, whatever...it was so much worse back then.

POP

It ain't the goddamn steel, Lee. It's you. Nobody forced you to stay. Nobody forced you to give up that scholarship. You made your own decisions but you wanna make like it's everyone else's fault. Take some goddamn responsibility. Tad ain't the one that made you stay.

LEE

No, I have you to thank for that.

POP

That's cause you never had anythin' else. I woulda told ya to leave if ya actually had somethin' else you could put your hands on but you never did. Just some goddamn pipe dream about a job somewheres else. Every goddamn time there was a lay-off you was ready to pack up and move. Maybe I shoulda told ya to move and watched ya fail. At least you woulda been done with it. But you never had nothin' else and I couldn't just let you go and fail...that was my fault. That's why I told ya to stick it out. What the hell else did you ever have Lee?

LEE

Nothin'. And now it's twenty four years later and I still got nothin'. So tell me, what the fuck is the difference? But you know what? *(Holds up envelope)* Now I got this. Now I got somethin'.

POP

You do this, you're on your own, understand? When you get there and find O'Reilly screwed ya, don't come cryin' to me. Don't be askin' me for money 'cause this well has dried up.

LEE

Thanks Pop. And hey...thanks for the birthday celebration, too. It's been great.

POP

(Pause) Look...let's forget this, all right? We been drinkin' is all.

LEE

Yeah.

POP

Things will be different tomorrow...You talk to Tad...try and patch things up. C'mon, it's almost your birthday, for Chrissake. We're supposed to be celebratin'. Hey...what the hell's takin' Fred?

LEE

How long has he been...? Jesus, somethin' musta happened.

POP

What coulda happened? He get stuck on the toilet?

LEE

I better go check.

POP

Whaddya worried about? He hadda take a leak. A long leak.

LEE

Nah, I better...

(SOUND of door opening. THEY can hear FRED's footsteps and then HE enters.)

POP
Christ, that was some leak.

LEE
(*Crossing to FRED*) Where the hell you been?

FRED
Just took a little longer.

LEE
Everythin' OK? Just tell me everythin's OK.

POP
You almost missed the celebration.

FRED
Wouldn't miss it for the world.

POP
Hey, it's almost midnight. I'll be right back. I gotta get somethin'.
(*POP exits to kitchen.*)

LEE
So everythin's OK?

FRED
Yeah...yeah. Everythin's fine.

LEE
What the hell took ya so long?

FRED
I dunno...nerves I guess.

LEE
But everythin's OK? You planted it...
(*POP returns with champagne.*)

POP
Happy birthday, Lee. Now we can't open it till midnight so we'll just set her here for now.
Whaddya say? One more hand before you're too old to see?

FRED
Yeah. Let's play.

POP

My deal. We'll make this quick and painless. Five card. *(Deals two cards each)* Bet's to you Fred.

FRED

Two cent. *(Pause)* Lee?

LEE

What?

FRED

You wanna bet?

LEE

I'll see ya.

POP

Me too.

(POP deals.)

LEE

Almost midnight.

POP

Don't worry. We won't miss your birthday. Your bet Fred.

FRED

Two cent. Lee?

LEE

OK, yeah...I'm in.

(POP puts money in then deals.)

LEE

You hear that?

POP

Hear what? *(Adjusts hearing aid)* This damn thing...

(POP deals again.)

LEE

(To FRED) You hear anythin'?

FRED

No.

LEE

I thought I heard somethin'.

POP

You wanna bet, Fred?

FRED

I got nothin'. I'm out.

POP

I go three cent. Lee? You in?

LEE

What is it? Three cent? Yeah...I'm in.

POP

Looks like it's just you and me, Lee. Time for a showdown.

(POP starts to deal.)

LEE

Hold on a second. I wanna check somethin'. I thought I heard somethin'.

(LEE exits.)

POP

He's getting' jumpier than you. Let's see what he's got...needs one more...

(POP winks at FRED and changes the order of cards in deck. LEE enters.)

LEE

It wasn't nothin'.

POP

Now if you're through hearin' things, we'll finish.

LEE

Sure...sure.

POP

How many cards?

LEE

One.

POP

Dealer takes two. Hey Lee, remember how ya lost to me last week? I still feel awful bad about that. Want a chance to win it back double?

LEE

Do I look that stupid?

POP

Whaddya mean?

LEE

Don't matter. I ain't got the money.

POP

I'll take your marker. If you lose, we'll square it up later, once you start workin' at...what's it called? Southern Steel?

FRED

You heard?

LEE

Yeah. The letter come...

POP

'Course he got it. He'll be startin'...when are ya startin' Lee?

LEE

Didn't say.

POP

Really? That's strange. Ya figure they woulda told ya.

LEE

I gotta call 'em is all.

POP

Guess they do things different down South.

LEE

Guess they do.

POP

Whaddya gonna do about the house?

LEE

I dunno...sell it I guess.

POP

Ya know, Tad's gonna need a place.

FRED

Tad?

POP

Yeah. Kid's got a job right here in town. Can ya believe that? Starts right after he graduates. He's with that new computer company that's movin' in.

FRED

No shit. I applied for a job there...custodial. Maybe he can put in a good word for me.

POP

Sure he will. Talk to him. He's comin' in tomorrow. He coulda got Lee a job there...had one all lined up, practically...kid's only 23 and already he's got pull. Just like me. But Lee, he don't need a job now. And he sure as hell ain't gonna be no custodian. He's gonna be a steelworker again, ain't ya.

LEE

Huh? Oh...yeah.

POP

Now c'mon...it's almost midnight. Let's finish this hand. Here (*Counts money*) Four hundred plus your ring.

LEE

I don't want that goddamn...

POP

That's the bet. You see it or not? You win, hock the damn thing for all I care.

LEE

What the hell. I'll see ya.

(*LEE writes marker and tosses it in.*)

POP

Whaddya got?

LEE

Three sevens.

POP

Beats me. I got nothin'.

LEE

Why'd ya stay in if ya got nothin'?

POP

Thought I'd try bluffin' like you always do.

LEE

(Takes ring, puts in pocket) Damn right I'll hock this son of a bitch. Might as well get somethin' for all the time I put into that goddamn marriage.

(LEE reaches for the money.)

POP

You're a hell of a poker player, Lee.

LEE

Wait a minute. *(Turns Pop's cards over)* You got a goddamn straight. Here. The money's yours. I ain't takin' it.

POP

But you won.

LEE

The hell I did. I ain't takin' it.

POP

Use it for the move.

LEE

I'm not takin' another cent from you. Jesus Christ, I gotta get outta here.

(The alarm on the new clock goes off.)

POP

Hey, it's your birthday.

LEE

It's midnight.

POP

(Opens champagne) Happy birthday Lee.

LEE

That's it? It's midnight? *(To FRED)* We did it? We really fuckin' did it? Holy shit, we did it.

(FRED shuts off the alarm.)

FRED

Lee, wait...

LEE

Wait? Wait? I don't hafta wait no more. We did it! I'm headin' South.

(LEE crosses to window and looks out.)

POP

Goin' to Southern...shit, that ain't even a real mill. It's a mini-mill...

LEE

(To FRED) It's...it's still there.

POP

Christ, we even rolled titanium...most dangerous thing ya can roll, titanium.

FRED

Maybe they're a little off.

POP

When the steel comes back, you'll be kickin' yourself, Lee.

LEE

They ain't off. I synchronized 'em. Goddamn it, I checked that thing out. It all checked out.

POP

... 'cause the steel's comin' back, just like I always said it would. It's comin' back.

LEE

(To FRED) What did you do?

FRED

Nothin'.

POP

I'm tellin' ya, it'll be just like the old days...town's gonna be jumpin' again...union's gonna be strong again.

LEE

Nothin'? Whaddy mean, nothin'?

POP

I ever sing that old union song for ya? It's a hell of a song.

(POP sings to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic", overlapping with dialog until the end of the song.)

POP, *Singing*

"When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run..."

LEE

Don't tell me you screwed up. Don't fuckin' tell me...

FRED

All right, I won't tell you.

POP, *Singing*

"There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun..."

LEE

What the hell does that mean?

POP, *Singing*

"Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one..."

FRED

You're so fuckin' smart, you figure it out.

LEE

Don't do this to me. Not now...

POP, *Singing*

"But the union makes us strong..."

FRED

What am I doin' to you? Somebody's always doin' somethin' to ya Lee.

POP, *Singing*

"Solidarity forever, solidarity forever..."

LEE

That thing goes off, I take off.

POP, *Singing*

"In our hands...In our hands..."

(POP stops singing, forgetting the next line.)

POP

Christ, what the hell was in our hands?

FRED

So what's keepin' ya? What the hell's keepin' ya?

POP

Anyway, it was a terrific song. Always stirred the people up. In a couple years when the union's strong again...

LEE

The union's nothin', understand? You're nothin'. You were just a shop steward, that's all. A goddamn shop steward. You got no connections...no power...

POP

What the hell's the matter with you? Don't you talk to me like that.

LEE

You're the reason I been stuck in this goddamn town but I ain't stuck no more. I'm getting' myself unstuck. Not you, not your goddamn union. I'm doin' it.

FRED

That's enough, Lee.

LEE

You stay the hell outta this. I don't know what you fucked up this time. I don't know why I thought you could actually do somethin' right for a change you goddamn loser.

POP

I was just tryin' to help.

LEE

Stop tryin', all right? Stop fuckin' tryin'. I don't need your help. I'll do it on my own. *(To FRED)* What'd you do? Goddamn it, what'd you do?

POP

I...I better go Lee...I'm tired...that's all...just tired...I was just tryin' to help. Look, we'll talk before you leave, all right? We'll talk... *(Starts to leave, stops)* Happy birthday, Lee. G'night Fred.

(POP exits without response from LEE who turns viciously towards FRED.)

LEE

(To FRED) Tell me what you did.

FRED

Don't you think you oughta take him home?

LEE

What the fuck did you do?

FRED

I didn't plant it.

LEE

What?

FRED

I didn't plant it.

LEE

You didn't...Jesus Christ.

(LEE drops into his chair.)

FRED

I couldn't. I just couldn't. I was all set. I swear to God I was gonna do it. I hate them bastards as much as you do. Then I get to that little hill, just up aways from the tower, I looked at that goddamn thing and all I was thinkin' was how good it was gonna feel to blow her up...finally show 'em...and I looked at it for a minute and realized they still had them lights on it, ya know, on the top...And Grace Steel was still shinin' up there and I'm thinkin' what a goddamn waste it is to keep that thing lit like that just so people can see your name all a time. And then it hit me how I'd seen that damn thing every day of my life...since I was a kid I seen it...how I'd see it goin' to work...comin' home...and then...I don't know, it was like alla sudden I couldn't imagine it not bein' there. I just couldn't...

LEE

Goddamn it. You still got the bomb?

FRED

Yeah. It's OK. I pulled the wires off.

LEE

Where is it? Where the hell is it?

FRED

By the back door. *(LEE starts to leave)* Where ya goin'?

LEE

I'm gonna plant it. I shoulda done it from the get-go.

FRED

No...wait...don't.

(FRED grabs LEE.)

LEE

Leggo of me.

FRED

This is crazy man. You don't hafta do this.

LEE

Yeah I do.

FRED

You're headin' south. Don't screw things up now.

LEE

Why not? Seems like I screwed up everthin' else in my life.

FRED

Listen to me. This bomb thing was crazy from the beginning. It wasn't gonna do nothin' to the steel, you know that. Knockin' down some water tower...what's that gonna do?

LEE

I just wanna pay 'em back.

FRED

Pay 'em back by takin' that job.

LEE

What job?

FRED

What job? That mini-mill...

(SOUND: the back door slamming. POP staggers in. HE has been robbed.)

LEE

Pop? What the hell?

POP

Goddamn punks...goddamn it...

(LEE and FRED rush to POP.)

FRED

What happened?

POP

I was robbed. What the hell you think happened? Goddamn punks.

LEE

C'mon. Sit him down.

(LEE and FRED guide POP to the couch.)

POP

Punks...that's all they are. If I was younger...I feel so goddamn stupid. Musta got turned around...got lost...can ya believe it? All them years I been livin' here, I get lost. They didn't get a damn thing from me.

LEE

You shoulda given 'em what they wanted.

POP

I give 'em what I wanted...but there was three of 'em...come up from behind... cowards. Said they had a gun...I don't believe that.

LEE

Goddamn Spics.

POP

No. They was white...Can ya believe that? My own kind. But it took three of 'em.

LEE

(*To FRED*) Get him some water, would ya? (*FRED exits*) Take it easy now.

POP

It never used to be like this...goddamn shame. It's getting bad. Real bad.

LEE

You get hit?

POP

One of 'em sucker punched me...got me here... (*Points to cheek*) ...barely connected. ...When they seen they wasn't getting nothin' without a fight they lit out... goddamn it. Didn't use to be like this...You're doin' the right thing. Get the hell outta here. There's nothin' for you here no more.

(*FRED returns with a glass of water.*)

FRED

Here.

LEE

Thanks. (*To POP*) Drink some. (*To FRED*) Can you get him some ice?

FRED

Sure.

(*FRED exits again.*)

POP

You gotta move. You gotta take this job.

LEE

We'll talk about it tomorrow.

POP

It's the best thing for ya.

LEE

I shoulda drove you home.

POP

Ain't your fault. Who knew? Things have changed. Things have really changed.

(FRED returns with ice wrapped in a towel.)

FRED

(To POP) Here, put this on.

POP

Quit babyin' me for Chrissake.

FRED

Maybe we should call an ambulance.

POP

I don't need no ambulance.

LEE

Yeah you do. *(FRED begins to exit to make phone call)* Call the cops, too.

POP

Goddamn punks.

LEE

Pop...I been thinkin' ...I don't like leavin' you here.

POP

I'll be fine.

LEE

I'll call Southern...tell 'em to wait.

POP

You kiddin'? You know how many guys are tryin' to get jobs? You gotta go.

LEE

I'm takin' it...just instead of startin' right away...

POP

You can't wait. You gotta go. This town...there's nothin' for you here. I got nothin' for ya. This is the right decision. The steel ain't comin' back. It's just... all that work we did, you hold out hope. But I know it's gone. I grown too soon old and too late smart. *(Takes out pocket watch)* Here...Happy Birthday, son. Go ahead, take it. Take it. I want ya to have it. I meant to give it to you before but...I want ya to have it, especially since you're leavin'. Go down to Southern. Be a steelworker again...show 'em how the Waldinskis do things. We've

had our differences, sure. What family don't? But you're my son. No matter what, you'll always be my son.

LEE

Ya know, I always thought I'd earn one of these damn things.

POP

You did earn it. You did. And one of these days you'll give it to Tad...you'll see. That'd be somethin'...wouldn't even have to change nothin' on it. Already got his name on it..."Thaddeus Waldinski" (*Pause, breathless.*) It ain't your fault what happened, Lee. Kids...they don't understand. But you getting' this job...it's gonna make all the difference. All the difference in the world.

LEE

I don't know.

POP

You head South. Make me proud of you again.

LEE

I don't wanna leave you alone.

POP

I won't be alone. Tad's comin' back.

LEE

(*Laughing nervously*) He can't put up with you like I can. I got all that experience.

POP

But your job...

LEE

This is family...Southern can wait.

POP

Lee, you can't...you'd really tell 'em...you'd really tell 'em to wait?

LEE

Like ya said, it's just a goddamn mini-mill. I guess the steel's still in my blood. Hell, you got me back on the labor pool, right? It ain't great but it's a job.

POP

Wait a minute...you didn't get that job, did ya?

LEE

Whaddya talkin' about? Of course I got...

POP

Goddamn it, Lee. (*Struggles to his feet*) Don't try and bluff me. Never try and bluff me. I knew you was gonna screw somethin' up. I knew it. Now you listen to me. I got you back on the labor pool... try not to screw that up too.

LEE

I am not goin' back on the labor pool.

POP

What choice do you have?

LEE

Pop...

POP

You do like I say and you'll be OK, hear me? You'll be...Lemmee siddown...feelin' dizzy...

(*POP collapses back onto the couch and lies down. LEE gets the gym bag as FRED enters.*)

FRED

Cops wanna know where your old man got jumped.

LEE

What the fuck you askin' me for? Ask him.

FRED

(*Approaching POP*) Mr. Waldinski, where'd ya get jumped? Mr. Waldinski? (*LEE stops*) Mr..? Hey, Lee...

LEE

(*Crossing to POP*) Pop? (*Shakes him*) Pop...hey Pop, c'mon... (*Sits*) Oh shit...Not now, Pop...not now.

(*BLACKOUT.*)

ACT II; SCENE 2

(*AT RISE: Lee's living room; a few days after Pop's funeral. LEE sits at the table all alone. The back door is heard. LEE does not respond. A few moments later, FRED enters.*)

FRED

Hey Lee. (*No response*) How are ya? Lee..?

LEE

How the fuck do you think I am Fred?

FRED

Pretty upset.

LEE

You really didn't have to answer that. It was one of them...whaddya call it...rhetorical questions.

FRED

I realize this is a difficult time for you...

LEE

Ya know, I liked you better when you quit takin' your meds. You didn't use as many clichés.

FRED

(Pause) You talk to Tad?

LEE

Oh yeah...Had a real heart to heart. Very touching. Only took about ten words to express all our deep emotions.

FRED

You uh...you gonna see him before he leaves?

LEE

No.

FRED

Gonna call him?

LEE

No.

FRED

You ever gonna call him?

LEE

What is it with you? You really think this is any of your business? You don't hafta answer that.

FRED

So...what are ya gonna do now?

LEE

Dunno. I swear to Christ I don't...not a goddamn thing keepin' me here no more...steel's not gonna take me back and now with Pop gone...I...uhm...I just...it's like I keep rememberin' the way he used to walk home from the steel... comin' down our street...I'd wait for him...watch him getting' bigger and bigger...growin' bigger than life almost. Sometimes it

feels like I'm still waitin' for him. I'll be goddamned if I know why...Fuck...I shoulda drove him home.

FRED

It ain't your fault. The docs say it was him drinkin' and takin' them meds that did it.

LEE

He wasn't as tough as he thought. Hell, he wasn't as tough as any of us thought.

FRED

All them old guys are dyin' off.

LEE

It's the end of an era.

FRED

Yeah. Hey, you hear about the water tower?

LEE

Somebody blow it up?

FRED

The steel's gonna take it down. They say it's gonna fall over if they don't.

LEE

No shit. Hell, we woulda been doin' them a favor. Think they'll give us another shot? I could use the money.

FRED

Me too. Here I can't imagine this town without that thing and the steel says it's gotta go.

LEE

Story of our lives, ain't it? What we want's got nothin' to do with what the steel does. You find any work yet?

FRED

Yeah. Looks like I'm gonna get that job...the custodial job I told ya about.

LEE

I guess it's somethin'.

FRED

You oughta apply.

LEE

No offense but I ain't cut out to be a fuckin' custodian. I'm a steelworker.

FRED

Never meant nothin' to ya before.

LEE

Well it means somethin' to me now, all right? It's like...I don't know...it's in my blood or somethin'. It's all I fuckin' know. It's just...remember that feelin' you had when you worked there? That you could do anythin'? All of us workin' at the steel, pourin' into the mills...them parkin' lots all full. That feelin' that we were it man. We were it. It's been so long since I felt like that. Shit.

FRED

Things change. You gotta change with 'em.

LEE

Not if it means being a custodian.

FRED

That's all there is right now.

LEE

Not for me. I'll head South. Take my chances there. Nothin' keepin' me here.

FRED

What about Tad?

LEE

Like he gives a shit if I stay or go.

FRED

You gotta get right with that kid.

LEE

What the hell makes you think you can tell me what I gotta do?

FRED

He's your son. You gotta think about him, too...

LEE

You sound like Pop for Chrissake.

FRED

So do you. You and Tad's like you and Pop all over again and you can't see it.

LEE

The hell it is.

FRED

OK...fine...you're right. Know what? Do what the hell you want.

LEE

Thanks...I will...and I'm doin' this for me now. All my life I been doin' things for other people...puttin' things off. No more. I figure, I show up in person at Southern I got a better chance of getting somethin'. Who knows what the fuck O'Reilly told 'em? Even if they got nothin', there's plenty of jobs down there. I'm bound to get somethin'. Like I said, ain't nothin' for me here.

(SOUND: The back door again. TAD enters.)

TAD

Hey, Dad...Fred.

LEE

What're you doin' here? Your mother kick you out?

TAD

You know what? Fuck this. *(Starts to leave)*

LEE

Don't you dare...come back here. Who the hell you think you are?

TAD

I came over to see if you're OK and you hit me with "Your mother kick you out?" What the hell is that?

LEE

Why you so concerned alla sudden?

TAD

That is so typical. That's all I ever get from you.

FRED

Maybe I should leave.

LEE

Stay where you are. What're you talkin' about? What is it you get from me?

TAD

Resentment. Nothing but resentment.

FRED

Kid's got a point.

LEE

Who the fuck asked you?

FRED

I'm just sayin'...

LEE

So now you're takin' his side?

FRED

I ain't takin' nobody's side. It won't hurt you to listen to him for a change.

LEE

I do listen.

TAD

Yeah, right.

LEE

What's that supposed to mean?

TAD

Nothin'...I...uh...Nothin'.

LEE

Well you're makin' a whole lotta fuss for someone that's got nothin' to say.

FRED

You're not creating a safe space for him to say what he really wants here, Lee.

LEE

I'm not creatin'...? You know, you're right. Maybe you'd better leave.

FRED

My thoughts exactly. See ya...

(FRED crosses to TAD and squeezes his shoulder. HE gives him a slight smile then exits.)

LEE

So is this it? This the big heart to heart you've been wantin' to have?

TAD

I don't want anything.

LEE

I thought maybe you wanted to...you know... *(Sarcastic)* ...talk about how we really feel.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes