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Cardboard Sea, Paper Moon

A PLAY BY
SEAN DAVID BENNETT

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CARDBOARD SEA, PAPER MOON

Is dedicated to

Drew and Kathryn

with love and gratitude

and to

Wendy G., Fran M., and Sue M.

The three lovely pillars of the law

‘The why of why we are here is an intrigue for adolescents;
The how is what must command the living.’

- Lorraine Hansberry

The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window
Cardboard Sea, Paper Moon
by Sean David Bennett

SETTING
The play takes place at the Safe Harbour half-way house in Kenwood Manor, a small town on eastern Long Island, New York.

TIME
The time is the present.

CHARACTERS
DIANA HARWOOD, a resident – Late 60s, possibly older
HATTIE O’NIELL, a resident – Early 50s, Black
SCOTT BURKE, lead counsellor – Mid-to-late thirties
TRAVIS MORETTI, a resident – Early thirties
BEN GOLD, a resident – Mid sixties
GEORGE LEDWITH, a resident – Late thirties
MIKE HOGAN – a counsellor - Thirty
BOYCE CHALMERS, Safe Harbour’s founder & CEO – Early 50’s
HOLLY WEBER, a resident of the women’s shelter – Late teens

SCENES
ACT ONE
Scene One: A Tuesday morning in late October
Scene Two: The next evening

ACT TWO
Scene One: Several hours later
Scene Two: Thursday afternoon

The half-way house in which the play takes place is one of several recovery facilities for the dually-addicted operated by Safe Harbour, Inc., in North Kenwood, a small town in eastern Long Island, New York. Once the prized possession of a New England textile manufacturer, the house was abandoned, shortly after the end of the Second World War, when the owner, and the industry itself, moved to the non-union South in search of cheaper labour costs. The house, actually a small mansion, had been put up for sale several times but proved too large, too old and in need of too many repairs to interest any of the modest citizens of North Kenwood. With its first floor doors and windows boarded up and its second floor windows broken, it remained not just an eyesore, but a reminder to the town of the prosperity that had long ago vanished. In the 1990s, it was purchased, with a generous helping of state funds, by Safe Harbour’s CEO, Boyce Chalmers. The former ballroom was converted into a residents’ lounge and the wall separating it from the sun porch was removed to provide space for a small office area, from which counsellors could observe the comings and goings in the residents’ lounge. A desk, a couple of chairs, a few filing cabinets and bookcases crowd the office area, which is upstage right of the resident’s lounge. The lounge itself is downstage centre and left. It comprises a worn leather sofa and rocker, a few card tables and chairs, and scattered book cases containing old magazines and paperbacks. Upstage left, a staircase leads to the bedrooms. Upstage centre, an open hallway leads to the kitchen-dining area, left, and to the building’s main entrance, right. Downstage right of the office, a locked door opens on to the homeless shelter. A large sign proclaims ‘Shelter Door to be locked at all Times.’ Further downstage, a ‘Client’s Rights’ notice is displayed, alongside a notice board.
ACT ONE: SCENE ONE

(AT RISE: Safe Harbour half-way house; a late October evening. SCOTT is seated at the desk making notations in a resident’s file. He is thirty-four years old, wearing an open dress shirt and slacks. At the centre downstage table, TRAVIS, 29, is playing chess with BEN, who is in his mid-sixties. DIANA, an impeccably groomed woman of Ben’s age, is playing cards with HATTIE, a black woman in her fifties who claims to be younger. All four are residents.)

DIANA
(To HATTIE) What the hell do you think you’re doing?

HATTIE
What the hell does it look like, Snow White? I’m freezing the deck.

Where’d you get that joker from?

DIANA
Oh, for Christ’s sake, Diana. Anyone could see it was right there in my hand.

After you pulled it out of your ass.

HATTIE
Do I look like a person who’d cheat an old lady with false teeth and sagging titties?

DIANA
Who you kidding, Black Beauty? You take me for a fool?

HATTIE
Most of the time – What’s that got to do with this card game?

DIANA
You may know the basics of Canasta, thanks to my patient teaching, Aunt Jemima, but we both know if that joker had been in your hand you would have played it. The one thing you haven’t learned yet is when to hold back.

TRAVIS
And that’s not just in cards, is it, Diana?

BEN
Travis, maybe you should pay more attention to the chess board. Say goodbye to your bishop.
Son of a bitch –

HATTIE
You think I don’t know when to hold back? If I didn’t, you’d be sitting there right now with a split lip, Cinderella. I don’t let anyone call me a cheat.

DIANA
Then why were your hands moving back and forth over that old goody box of yours so many times? You have crabs again?

Diana, knock it off.

TRAVIS
I know how to settle this. If you’re so sure Hattie pulled that card out from between her legs, Diana, bring it over here and let Ben sniff it.

SCOTT
What happened to the house meeting you’re supposed to be having?

HATTIE
We’re taking a break. (To DIANA) You want to finish the game or not?

DIANA
Go ahead—pick up the deck, but don’t think you’re playing with an old fool. I’ve been playing cards since before you looked in the mirror and saw what colour you were. I’ve played and won this game against some of the sharpest minds in the world.

HATTIE
When was this? Back when you were a waitress on a cruise ship?

DIANA
I was never a waitress. I was a ship’s hostess. Every cruise line in the world fought for my services. I was the highest paid woman in the industry.

HATTIE
We both did the same thing for a living, dearie – only you did it upright – occasionally.

DIANA
You might want to tell that to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor if they were still alive. They sailed with me four times.

TRAVIS
Which one did you sleep with?
DIANA
Unlike the two of you, in my career I was paid for my intelligence and my personality.

HATTIE
What career you talking about? You were a glorified baby-sitter for a bunch of rich, old biddies—all dolled up in rhinestones and fake fur, swilling gin and looking for an officer to bed them.

BEN
I’ll bet they didn’t have to look far—just sit there and wave their check books.

DIANA
(Laughing) I could tell you stories you wouldn’t believe.

TRAVIS
What about the Duchess of Windsor? Was she a man-chaser?

DIANA
Not the Duchess. She had what she wanted. At least she thought she did. The last time I sailed with them, they were both so old and wrinkled, I couldn’t tell one from the other.

TRAVIS
Personally, I wouldn’t have been able to do what you did. All that whining and complaining: ‘Did you see my cigarettes, Diana?’ ‘Would you freshen my drink, Diana?’

HATTIE
A bunch of cattle farting their way around the world, and you sitting in the middle of it—

DIANA
Hattie, at times you can be extremely vulgar—even for a black woman.

HATTIE
No shit? Maybe that’s because I’d rather be vulgar than pretentious any day. The truth is you were just as much a maid as my sisters, Marion and Kitty.

DIANA
I most certainly was not. I dined at the captain’s table every night aboard the finest, most elegant ships in the world. The most exquisite china and crystal—the finest wines—

TRAVIS
The most magnificent hangovers—

DIANA
Make fun all you want, Travis, but I saw more of the world in those twenty-seven years than you’ll see if you live to be a hundred. Rio de Janeiro; the Taj Mahal, Corfu— and, oh dear, such lovely shipboard parties—dancing under the stars until the sun came up,
HATTIE
Until one day the Cruise Director came along, saw how you’d single-handedly depleted the liquor stores and tossed you overboard.

DIANA
I was never, ever asked to leave my position. They wouldn’t have dared. I resigned.

BEN
Strange thing to do, wasn’t it? If you were all that happy –

DIANA
I was happy. Then, just before the world cruise, I was told the line wanted to explore ways to improve passenger relations. I knew what they were really saying: they wanted someone younger. Of course they never said that. The cruise director simply told me that, with such a full ship, he’d decided to hire an assistant for me. I protested that I could handle twice as many passengers, but he insisted. I went to my usual place at the captain’s table and there she was: young, sparkling eyes, beautiful smile and perfect fucking dimples – sitting in my seat.

TRAVIS
What did you do?

DIANA
What could I do? I had been moved to the Chief Purser’s table, but no one had bothered to tell me. I stood there flustered for a moment and then the Maître d’ came and showed me to my new table. When I saw how all those rich, old biddies took to her as if she were a long-lost daughter, I wanted to rip those dimples right off her cheeks. The company even gave her a clothing allowance. All those years and I had to pay for every stitch I wore. It was so unfair. I came off that ship without a dime to my name. I received letters from a few passengers, over the years, but I never responded. How much can one say about living in a furnished room and working part-time in a bakery?

SCOTT
Hey – swap sob stories on your own time, you two. Get back to your house meeting.

HATTIE
As soon as we finish this hand—if Diana can see it with those cheap glasses she’s wearing. Where’d you lift them from: Walgreen’s or Stop’n’Shop?

DIANA
These glasses are not from the drugstore. They’re prescription.

HATTIE
Are you sure? They look so cheap. I’ll bet five dollars the frames say ‘Made in China.’
DIANA
These frames are twice as American as you are, Billie Holiday.

HATTIE
Let me see them. *(Taking them from her to examine)* What the did I tell you? Shee-it.

SCOTT
Hey – What did I just say to the two of you?

DIANA
What?

TRAVIS
Scott wants all the Safe Harbour ho’s to watch their language—including the white ones.

SCOTT
That’s exactly what I’m talking about. How many times do I have to remind everybody? Mr. Chalmers is on his way over here to talk to you after the house meeting.

HATTIE
What about? What does he want from us?

SCOTT
How should I know? He’ll tell you when he gets here.

TRAVIS
My guess is he’s coming to talk to us about money, again.

BEN
With Boyce Chalmers, it’s always about money.

HATTIE
That man can find coins on a street that hasn’t even been paved yet.

BEN
Maybe he just wants to tell us about Scott’s transfer.

SCOTT
What transfer?

TRAVIS
Chalmers is about finished renovating those two mansions across the street, isn’t he? Someone has to run them.
SCOTT
I know nothing about it. If you’re saying he’s offered me the manager’s position, than you know more than I do.

TRAVIS
That’s a given. Show me a resident who doesn’t know more than a counsellor.

SCOTT
All I know is they’re being refurbished for a new programme the state wants us to run. Can you guys just concentrate on what we’re here for?

HATTIE
Huh. You saying you don’t know anything about those two places? That’s fine, but I do—and I can tell you, sure as I’m sitting here, Chalmers has no plans to use them as halfway-houses.

What makes you say that?

HATTIE
I look out the windows once in a while. I saw the furniture he’s putting in over there. A lot nicer than what we have here – and different. Cribs and bassinets – What do you suppose they’re for?

TRAVIS
Maybe they lowered the drinking age across the street—

HATTIE
Why you shucking us, Scott? The state doesn’t have funding to open any more half-way houses.

How do you know?

HATTIE
What’s-her-name was talking about it on PBS a couple of nights ago. That whiny black bitch who’s twice as big as Oprah. Oscar Carraway from the governor’s office was her guest.

Who is Oscar Carraway?

TRAVIS
He runs the Special Olympics every year. Talks like a used-car salesman. Used to be very tall—

What do you mean—used to be.
BEN
He lost both his legs in a bowling alley fire. Tripped over one of the pins and got trapped under the stacking machine. The schmuck was trying to save his bowling ball.

DIANA
Oh, I remember him now. That was just awful.

BEN
He’s done all right for himself—found a flaw in the state’s licensing regulations and won a seven-figure settlement. Then got himself appointed to the Health and Human Services Commission.

SCOTT
What did he have to say about addiction funding, Hattie?

DIANA
Don’t you want us to get on with the house meeting?

SCOTT
Fine. I’ll look it up on the internet.

HATTIE
He called substance abuse funding a waste—said the money should go to the handicapped.

TRAVIS
What’s he looking for now—a chauffeur-driven wheel-chair?

BEN
Don’t underestimate him. He’s a smart man. Carraway has managed to squeeze more money out of the state than even Boyce Chalmers has. His wife sits on the planning committee. There’s not a damned thing goes on in the Capitol he doesn’t know about.

DIANA
Wouldn’t Chalmers have heard if they were cutting the mental health budget, Scott?

SCOTT
Not necessarily. The budget doesn’t come out until June. Could be he wants something else.

BEN
I hear he’s thinking about making a run for the governorship.

TRAVIS
How’s he going to do that without legs?

SCOTT
Where’d you hear that?
BEN
I have my sources. So, when does Chalmers want you to start across the street? And no bullshit – If you don’t know, neither does he.

SCOTT
What have I told all of you about your language?

DIANA
I remember: you want us to act polite and refined. Ben, you shouldn’t have said bullshit.

TRAVIS
Couldn’t you have said bull waste? Where’s your manners?

BEN
Pardon me. I stand corrected. Bovine defecation. Is that better?

HATTIE
That means the same thing as bull shit?

BEN
It does?

HATTIE
Doesn’t grab me—sounds too polite and refined.

TRAVIS
I agree. I prefer the way you say it, Hattie. ‘Bull-SHE-it’ A person not only hears it, they can see it.

DIANA
Black people always swallow their consonants. The word has a ‘T’ at the end. Bull-she-it-tuh.’

HATTIE
Can I say something to all of you?

BEN
Go right ahead. What would you like to say?

HATTIE
Screw all of you.

SCOTT
Okay, that’s it. (Looking at his watch) Finish up your meeting. And where the hell is George?
TRAVIS
Where he is every morning—upstairs in his room.

SCOTT
Ben, tell him to get down here.

BEN
(Yells) Hey, cowboy, get your ass down here – on the double.

SCOTT
I could have done that. Travis, let me see the shopping list.

TRAVIS
(Pulls the list from his pocket and hands it to SCOTT) It’s all done. I already asked George last night if he wants anything from Stop-n-Shop and he said no.

SCOTT
He still needs to be here. (Calling) Hey, George – You’re late for the house meeting again.

BEN
I could have done that.

GEORGE (Off)
I’m getting dressed. I didn’t hear my alarm.

HATTIE
That’s such bullshit.

DIANA
Don’t swallow your consonants.

GEORGE
(Coming downstairs) Morning, everybody. (Grins) Boy, you ladies got some mouths on you—

HATTIE
Who asked you?

GEORGE
Back home in Montana, Pastor Picard would have told us all to shun you ladies—like outcasts.

DIANA
That would suit us just fine, don’t you agree, Hattie?
HATTIE
I stopped listening to that bullshit – excuse me – bull-she-i-tuh back before I lost my cherry.

TRAVIS
You actually had one?

BEN
I can’t even picture it.

GEORGE
I ain’t had breakfast yet. Any coffee left?

BEN
You know how to find the kitchen?

GEORGE
Course I know.

BEN
Then go look, Lard-ass.

GEORGE
Don’t you have anything nice to say to a fella first thing in the morning?

SCOTT
Eleven o’clock isn’t the first thing in the morning, George.

GEORGE
I told you. I didn’t hear my alarm this morning.

SCOTT
Did you even bother to set it?

GEORGE
It’s state-of-the-art. *(Exits into kitchen)*

TRAVIS
What does that mean—it sets itself?

GEORGE *(Off)*
State-of-the-art means state-of-the-art. We got any of those donuts left?

SCOTT
Just get back in here for the meeting, George.
GEORGE

*(Enters, peeling a banana)* What meeting?

BEN

The Potsdam Conference –

GEORGE

*(Entering)* The which?

SCOTT

Forget it. Sit down and take the cotton out of your ears.

GEORGE

I don’t have any cotton in my ears. Why would anyone put cotton in their ears?

TRAVIS

It prevents brain matter from leaking out.

HATTIE

Come sit by us, George. You can ask Diana to take off her glasses and show them to you. They’re very special – all the way from China.

DIANA

It’s not something I do for everybody, but seeing how your morning got off to such a bad start.

GEORGE

What’s so special about eye glasses? I always had to fetch them for my mama once she started drinking. Always left them in the john or on the bar with her hairpiece and her false teeth.

HATTIE

She took her teeth out to drink? What did she have against Polygrip?

GEORGE

Says it spoils the taste. Mama likes to roll her bourbon back and forth across her gums.

TRAVIS

She ever get too drunk to hook you back up to all those machines when she put you to bed?

GEORGE

What machines?

TRAVIS

The ones Dr. Frankenstein left behind after he got her pregnant.
GEORGE
Ha-ha—I get it. You’re teasing me, aren’t you?

SCOTT
Yes, George, they’re teasing you—and if it happens again I want you to tell me.

DIANA
How’s he gonna know?

SCOTT
That’s exactly what I’m talking about. Just because a person has—because he’s—

TRAVIS
Because he’s what, Scott?

SCOTT
You know what I mean. Focus on your own shortcomings, not other peoples. What’s AA’s slogan?

HATTIE
(Pointing at GEORGE) ‘There, but for the grace of God?’

SCOTT
Very funny. What about ‘Live and let live’?

HATTIE
We already tried that one—didn’t we, George?

GEORGE
Gee, Hattie—How many times I gotta say I’m sorry?

SCOTT
Sorry for what?

GEORGE
Nothing. I just made a mistake, that’s all.

TRAVIS
What kind of mistake?

GEORGE
First morning I was here, I came down to breakfast and said something I shouldn’t have.

TRAVIS
What?
GEORGE
What do you care? I thought she was someone else. That’s all.

HATTIE
I can tell you his exact words: ‘Oh, miss – I’d like a cup of black coffee and could you fix me two eggs, sunny side up with some white toast?’

GEORGE
But I was polite, wasn’t I? Didn’t I say, ‘When you have a chance?’

SCOTT
You thought Hattie was a maid?

GEORGE
I didn’t know. A guy in detox told me this place was a mansion—he said there were tennis courts and an Olympic sized swimming pool.

BEN
What would a lazy bum like you do with an Olympic-sized swimming pool?

HATTIE
Probably pee in it –

DIANA
Hate to say it, Hattie, but I’m out. Game’s over

HATTIE
Where the hell do you keep getting concealed hands from?

DIANA
Same place you keep finding wild cards. *(Rising)* I gotta go upstairs. Cramps again—

HATTIE
You want me come up and massage your back?

DIANA
Would you mind?

BEN
I thought you got cramps in your legs.

DIANA
I get them wherever Hattie says I get them.
SCOTT
Sit back down, you two, and skip all the lame excuses so we can finish. *(Looking at shopping list)* Travis, what’s with this Kellogg’s Raisin Bran?

TRAVIS
Ben asked for it. He asks for Kellogg’s every week.

SCOTT
You know the rules, and so does Ben. House brands only—

TRAVIS
I know. I don’t buy it. I just write it down to keep him happy.

BEN
What do you mean you don’t buy it? I requested it, didn’t I?

SCOTT
C’mon, Ben—Kellogg’s is too expensive. You know that.

BEN
Who says? I been ordering Kellogg’s every week since I moved in here.

SCOTT
Tell me the truth, Travis. Have you been buying Kellogg’s for him without my permission?

TRAVIS
No—I write it down like I’m gonna buy it and I bring back what I’m supposed to. He doesn’t care.

BEN
What do you mean, I don’t care?

TRAVIS
You don’t. You come downstairs every morning, grab your box of cereal, pour it in a bowl, add a gallon of milk and a ton of sugar and spill half of it walking from the counter to the table. The kitchen looks like a Tsunami hit it when you’re done. Ask Hattie.

HATTIE
Why ask me? Didn’t I just finish telling George I’m not the maid? What I mind is when he turns on Fox News first thing in the morning. Just once I’d like to wake up, put on my robe and go down the hall for a pee before I have to listen to Ann Coulter calling Hillary Clinton a slut or Sean Hannity saying the Obama kids are terrorists. When I hear that damned TV go on, I just say to myself, ‘Well, I guess Ben’s made it through another night.’

BEN
I like to hear a little conversation when I get up in the morning.
HATTIE
If that’s what you want, why don’t you knock on my door and ask to speak to one of my voices?

SCOTT
Can we have some focus here? Travis, are you saying you put down Kellogg’s to keep Ben quiet?

TRAVIS
I didn’t tell you, Ben, because I didn’t want to disappoint you. Are we okay?

BEN
No, we’re not okay. Shame on you for trying to make a fool of me. You think I didn’t notice? I just thought you forgot because you were stupid.

GEORGE
Glad somebody agrees with me.

BEN
I take it back. I would never agree with you. I will offer Travis my congratulations instead. A good soldier always obeys an officer. You should consider becoming a counsellor.

SCOTT
What the hell is that supposed to mean?

DIANA
Ben, let it go. It’s just a box of cereal.

BEN
It is not just a box of cereal. Kellogg’s has more raisins than Stop’n’Shop.

SCOTT
I don’t care if it has ten times as many. You’ve read the house rules, so stop asking for something outside the food budget.

BEN
Anybody hear me asking for steak – or lobster? Or was it a simple box of Kellogg’s raisin bran? So, maybe you’ll tell me how much extra does Kellogg’s cost? Ten cents? A quarter? (Reaching into his pocket as he approaches Scott’s desk) Here – Here’s a dollar. Buy a big box.

SCOTT
Put your money back in your pocket and forget about Kellogg’s. We don’t buy it. Is that clear?
BEN
Perfectly—and I’ll tell you what’s also clear. Those house rules aren’t there for anyone’s benefit but your own, and to save Safe Harbour money. So what if Diana likes Half-n-Half with her coffee? Let her drink it with milk, like the rest of us. So what if we ask for Pepsi or Coke? Just bring back that same cheap piss you buy at Wal-mart every week. Anything is good enough for us.

GEORGE
Come on, will ya? Let us get this meeting over with.

DIANA
Ben, if it really matters that much, maybe you should ask Scott if he’d make an exception. None of us is going to mind if Travis buys you your Kellogg’s. Would that be okay with you, Scott?

SCOTT
I’m not going to do that, Diana. I’m not going around Safe Harbour policies for anyone. The same rules go for Ben as for the rest of you.

BEN
And yet, these are such small things to ask for—such inconsequential requests—A container of Half-n-Half, a Pepsi. Such tiny reminders of our humanity, our individuality. No matter. One size fits all and nobody gets to be Cinderella or Peter Pan.

SCOTT
Like it or not, all that stuff adds up. If you think Safe Harbour has piles of money sitting around or can just run to the state whenever we need more, you’re dead wrong.

BEN
Who are you kidding? Safe Harbour doesn’t pay for our food. It comes out of our monthly checks from the government. I hand you a check for six hundred, twenty-three dollars and you give me back twenty-three dollars spending money. Do any of us look like we eat six hundred dollars’ worth of food each month?

SCOTT
I’m not going to have this conversation with you, Ben. If you have questions about Safe Harbour’s finances, take them up with Mr. Chalmers.

BEN
I’ll do that. We have a right to know where our money goes and whose pockets it’s ending up in.

SCOTT
I don’t know where you get your ideas from, Ben, but if you go on with this after you’ve been asked not to, I’m gonna have to consider writing you up.
HATTIE
Ben, you’re going too far. You’ve been here ten months. Another couple of weeks and you can put your name on the list for your own apartment. Don’t go blowing it for yourself.

BEN
Oh, right—the carrot and stick. Management’s last resort when all else fails. How’d they put it to you, George? ‘Stay sober a year, get to meetings, and we’ll place you in one of our apartments?’

GEORGE
None of your goddam business. What the hell do you want, anyway? — One of those mansions across the street?

BEN
What I want is for Safe Harbour to act like any other organization with the power to make or break people’s lives.

SCOTT
Ben, I’m giving you your last warning. You’ve had too much to say already.

BEN
Is that fair to George? Doesn’t he deserve to know why we never complain at these stupid meetings; why we never argue or even dare to look at you the wrong way? He should be told that that’s the sort of behavior gets a person busted from an apartment, or a room in a halfway house, even a bed in the shelter. And all his service plan will say is he couldn’t adapt. Safe Harbour had no alternative. Of course, if you know the right psychiatrist or social worker — a friend of the Safe Harbour family, so to speak — then you can have an apartment without having to go through a program or attend meetings. Am I right, Scott?

SCOTT
That’s enough, Ben. Do you hear me? You can ask Mr. Chalmers all the questions you want when he gets here. He’ll be more than happy to explain those parts of the programme you don’t seem to understand. He’ll tell you, himself, Safe Harbour may not be the right programme for everyone. Perhaps you came here too soon after your stay at The Cottages.

BEN
Don’t threaten me, Scott. We both know I’ve got too much sobriety to go back to The Cottages.

SCOTT
Who said otherwise? Nevertheless, you have to understand the obligation we’re under to our residents. For example, moving into an apartment isn’t always a good idea for some people. Either they find they don’t like living alone — or that they can’t. We need to be certain a person can follow the rules over there. Same as we expect over here. If you can’t it’s nothing to be ashamed of. It happens to a lot of people after a certain age.
BEN
Am I really worth that much money that you’d try to keep me here? Moving to an apartment has nothing to do with rules – or with age. It’s about how many rehab hours you stand to lose.

SCOTT
I haven’t a clue what you’re talking about.

BEN
Sure you do. If you move me into an apartment, you give up the rehab hours the state pays you to teach me how to sweep a floor or take out the garbage. Sixteen hours a week at a hundred and seventy dollars an hour is a lot of dough to risk losing in case the next resident the state sends you only has five or six rehab hours. That would make a considerable dent in Safe Harbour’s bottom line, wouldn’t it?

SCOTT
That’s it, Ben. I’m writing you up.

BEN
Yeah? You know what I say about that, Scott? Screw you and your fucked up program. *(Rises, and starts to exit through the hall)* I’m out of here.

SCOTT
*(Calling after him)* Ben Gold, get your ass back in here. *(No response)* Ben – oh, fuck it.

GEORGE
Sounds to me like somebody didn’t take his meds this morning.

TRAVIS
Of course he took them, you asshole – just maybe not his happy pills.

DIANA
Scott, I just want to say, I never complained about having milk with my coffee. I never asked for Half-n-Half—only once.

HATTIE
You serious about speaking to Mr. Chalmers? I know he gets like this every so often, but none of us pays any attention.

SCOTT
Mr. Chalmers has to be told when a resident accuses Safe Harbour of financial impropriety. He’ll decide whether to address the issue with Ben or take some other action.

GEORGE
Ya gotta make an example of somebody. If you ask me, that big-mouthed old fool was probably just looking for an excuse to go off and get drunk.
DIANA
Ben’s too smart to do that. You’ll have a drink in your hand long before he ever does. All he ever talks about is having his own place so his sister can visit him. It’s not my place to interfere, Scott, but I probably ought to mention that yesterday was the anniversary of his son’s death.

GEORGE
He was married? Ben has a family?

DIANA
Had—His son was shot in a convenience store robbery when he was fifteen. Ben’s wife—

HATTIE
George doesn’t need to know about any of that. Ben doesn’t like to be asked questions about it.

GEORGE
Hey, I know when to keep my mouth shut, but how did his son get killed—shot by the police?

TRAVIS
Ben’s son wasn’t a thief. He was buying a soda when some junkie ran in and started shooting up the place. His son took fifteen bullets, three of them in the face. Ben had to identify him.

GEORGE
So that’s his excuse for drinking?

TRAVIS
Screw you. What if it is? What’s yours?

GEORGE
I’m not anything like that old guy. I still got my family. I’m here because I wanna be.

TRAVIS
You don’t fool me, jerk-off. You’re just hanging around killing time. I give you two weeks at most.

GEORGE
I told you why I’m here. I got a wife. And three kids.

TRAVIS
And a girlfriend you’re asking to send you a bus ticket back to Nevada.

GEORGE
Montana—and you know nothing about it.
TRAVIS
I heard you talking to her last night, on the phone.

GEORGE
You heard me talking to my wife.

TRAVIS
I heard you asking for a bus ticket to Winnemucca. That’s in Nevada, George, not Montana –

GEORGE
It’s none of your goddamned business, so shut the hell up.

TRAVIS
I forgot when your girlfriend said her baby was due. Was it Christmas? That’s what – ten weeks away? You’ll be long gone from here by then.

HATTIE
Was you lying to me last night, George? You didn’t say nothing about having a girlfriend. It’s not nice to lie to someone, Georgie – especially when you’re trying to get in her pants.

GEORGE
Who are you calling a liar? You think I’d ever—

HATTIE
Honey, I know you would.

GEORGE
Screw you, you fucking black cunt.

HATTIE
You got that right. Biggest, bestest black cunt you ever saw, but you’re just going to have to take my word for it: I ain’t lettin’ you near it.

SCOTT
That’s enough, Hattie – What’s gotten into all of you today? For the last time, knock off that talk.

DIANA
So whose egg did you impregnate—Miss Nevada’s or Mrs. Montana’s?

GEORGE
Both of them, dammit. Melody and Harmony are sisters. Harmony shot her husband by accident on their honeymoon. When she got out of prison she had no place to go so Melody said she could live with us. That’s how come it happened. I told Melody not to bring her sister to live with us.
TRAVIS
I see. It’s your wife’s fault. She the one who got her sister pregnant.

GEORGE
Go to hell, you wop fairy—

*(TRAVIS takes a step toward GEORGE as MIKE enters from hall, coming between them.)*

SCOTT
That’s enough, damn it.

MIKE
What am I missing?

SCOTT
Relieving me on time—that’s what you’re missing.

MIKE
Sorry, I had to stop for gas. The guy at the Shell Station said to give you this. *(Hands SCOTT a credit card)* You ought to be more careful with your visa card, Buddy.

TRAVIS
I’ve been looking for that all morning. I thought I put it in the wash this morning with my shirts.

SCOTT
You thought you left my visa card in your shirt pocket? Why would you even have it?

TRAVIS
You gave it to me, remember? You asked me to get the oil changed in the van.

SCOTT
That was three days ago. You had it all this time and you didn’t tell me?

I wanted to find it first.

SCOTT
Did you use it for anything else besides buying oil for the van?

TRAVIS
I didn’t use it at all. I let the Shell Station change the oil because the guy said there was other work needed to be done. Something with the radiator – and a hose was leaking.
SCOTT
They always say a hose is leaking, you dummy. Did they say how much it was all going to cost?

TRAVIS
Relax, Scott. I know the guys at that station. They never charge more than the value of the vehicle. The guy’s a hundred percent honest—I know him from way back

HATTIE
Way back when? When you was dealing or hustling?

(TRAVIS shrugs.)

SCOTT
Oh, great. My van is being worked on by some former john of yours who is now a mechanic?

TRAVIS
I thought I was doing the right thing, Scott. They told me it couldn’t be driven the way it was.

SCOTT
This is so fucked. If it couldn’t be driven, how did you get it from here to the Shell Station? You and I are going to have a little talk when I get back.

MIKE
Why are you coming back tonight?

SCOTT
Kendrick called in sick again. I’m working another double.

MIKE
Anything going on here I need to know about?

SCOTT
Not really – Except Ben stormed out of the house meeting ten minutes ago.

MIKE
What about this time?

SCOTT
What is it always about? Safe Harbour isn’t giving him all the love and attention he needs. This time, Chalmers can handle him.

TRAVIS
(By the window) Speaking of whom – Guess who must have bought himself a new BMW, and guess who he has riding in it with him. Hattie, Diana – get ready for a big surprise.
DIANA
What are you going on about now? Who’s with him?

HATTIE
(Goes to window) You see the way they’re smiling at one another? I’ll bet he’s banging her.

(BOYCE CHALMERS and HOLLY appear in the doorway. CHALMERS is dressed in the expensive, but plain clothing of a small-town business man. HOLLY appears to be seventeen, with a prettiness that at first distracts from her other, shop-worn qualities)

CHALMERS
Hello, everybody. May we come in?

TRAVIS
Hi, Mr. Chalmers.

CHALMERS
You remember Holly, don’t you?

HOLLY
Hello, everyone –

CHALMERS
Hello, George. How are you getting on? Got everything you need?

GEORGE
Doing just fine, Mr. Chalmers –

CHALMERS
And how are the rest of you? I don’t see the family patriarch.

TRAVIS
Ben’s just gone to a meeting with his sponsor at the library.

CHALMERS
Glad to hear it. Smart as a fox, that Ben. You only have to suggest a thing once to him. What a great power of example he must be to the rest of you.

HATTIE
Huh.

CHALMERS
Did you want to say something, Hattie? Anything wrong?

HATTIE
(Shuffling the playing cards) If there is, nobody told me.
DIANA
Are we still having our meeting, Scott? The reason I’m asking is because I thought outsiders weren’t allowed to be at them.

CHALMERS
If you mean Holly, she’s not an outsider. As a matter of fact, she’s the reason I came. Holly, why don’t you go and get your bags out of the car?

HOLLY
Yes, certainly, Mr. Chalmers. (Exits)

DIANA
Her bags? She’s not moving back here, is she?

CHALMERS
Not exactly. Technically, Holly is still part of our shelter programme, but that’s about to change.

HATTIE
Change? How?

CHALMERS
When Scott took Holly back into the shelter last week, he asked me to allow her to store a few things over at the office, where they’d be safe. She came over the next day, just as our board meeting was starting. I introduced her, and asked her to say a few words about why she was there. She made such a great impression, Harry Bingham – the hardware store fella – stood up and said, ‘We ought to make Holly our first resident in the new programme.’ It was a done deal before I could even open my mouth. Tell you the truth, everybody. I think it’s going to be a perfect fit.

HATTIE
Diana, I told you those two places weren’t gonna become half-way houses.

CHALMERS
You’re right, Hattie. The state has asked us to oversee a brand-new programme for homeless mothers with small children. We’re going to call it, ‘Family Matters.’ We’ll be doing pretty much the same kinds of things we do here—providing a structural basis for these families so they can move back into society. Of course, as you can imagine, this new programme will be much more strictly supervised by the state. That’s why I’ve come to ask you all for a small favor on Holly’s behalf. In order for Holly to get her baby back from the Department of Social Services, she has to go through a rigorous home environment interview. My concern is that Social Services may come snooping around before the interview, in which case it would be better for Holly to be living here instead of over at the shelter. She can stay in an empty bedroom on the third floor. It will only be a few days. The workmen at the Clyde will be finished Monday. I’d consider it a great personal favor. As far as Holly’s last stay here, I’d
appreciate it if you two ladies could agree to let bygones be bygones. Hattie, you look like you want to say something.

HATTIE

No. Nothing.

CHALMER

Are you sure? Now’s the time to tell me if you have any misgivings

DIANA

I don’t want to seem difficult, Mr. Chalmers, but after all the problems we had with her – stealing Hattie’s leather jacket and taking money out of my purse –

CHALMERS

I understand. But, Diana, we did reimburse both of you. And it was never really proven how those two incidents actually occurred.

HATTIE

Who else could it have been? She was alone in the house while we were all at a meeting. When we came back, our stuff was gone and so was she.

CHALMERS

Hattie, when Holly first came to us she was hardly more than a little girl—just another clueless kid who couldn’t keep herself from getting into trouble.

HATTIE

If you ask me, I’d say she’s still clueless.

CHALMERS

A couple of months ago, I would have agreed with you, but people change all the time. You – Diana – Ben – That’s what Safe Harbour is all about. Besides, what mother would ever want to be separated from her new-born child? Certainly not Holly: She’s told Scott and I both that her one goal is to make a home for little Jeremy and I believe her. You will, too, if you give her a chance. (Crossing to hallway) Holly, would you come back in here please? (As she enters) Please tell Diana and Hattie what you told me you wanted to say to them.

HOLLY

I’m clean, Diana. I’ve been clean since Jeremy was born – almost. I’m sorry about what I did. I was scared – and stupid. I really want you and Hattie and me – what I mean is – I’m going to need friends when I move across the street. And I want my baby to know you – both of you. I’m hoping you’ll be like – well, like grandmothers. My own mother –

DIANA

What about her? Why isn’t she coming up here to help you?
HOLLY
Jobs are real hard to find in Ocala. She’s afraid, if she takes time off Wal-mart might let her go.

CHALMERS
Holly, the truth is painful, even embarrassing, but you can tell Diana and Holly the real reason.

HOLLY
Yes, Mr. Chalmers. The fact is, she doesn’t want to come.

HATTIE
Shit – pardon me – Her own grandchild? It’s her first, isn’t it?

CHALMERS
I probably spoke too fast when I said just now that no mother wants to be separated from her child. Holly’s mother is an unfortunate exception. She’s gone back and forth with Holly about coming up here, then finally told her last week that she just wasn’t interested—not in Holly nor in her baby.

HOLLY
My social worker told me to send her pictures of the baby, but it didn’t do any good. All she loves is her two dogs. One of them is blind and the other one is almost as old as I am. The only time I’ve ever seen my mother smile was when she was playing with them. Last year, for my birthday, she put a bus ticket in my hand and said, ‘That’s it, kid. We’re done. Have a good time in New York.’

DIANA
I don’t know what you’re expecting from me, Holly. How’s this going to work?

HOLLY
I don’t know—could we maybe try to like each other? Everything I have is in these two bags—Jremy’s birth certificate, his diapers for when I get him back. I don’t think I can do this alone. It’s like I’ve come to the last house on the block and don’t know how to get in.

HATTIE
I don’t mind making a new beginning, Holly, but the first time you cross me –

CHALMERS
Thank you both for not saying ‘no’ right off the bat. How many times have I said that here, in Safe Harbour, we’re all one big, happy family? This is the proof. Well, now that the easy part of my day is done, I’ll head back over to the office and read my messages. You coming, Scott?
SCOTT
Kendrick didn’t show up over at the shelter today, so I’m going to run over there and give Tess a hand for a couple of hours. But if you’ll be in your office this afternoon, I’ll stop by. There are a couple of things I need to speak with you about.

CHALMERS
Give me a call when you’re coming. (Exits)

SCOTT
Glad you were all committed to having such a productive house meeting this morning. Maybe next week we can try a little harder to curse our way through the shopping list? I’m going over to the shelter, Michael. (Exits)

HOLLY
Mike, is it okay if I bring my bags upstairs?

MIKE
I’ve got to have a look in them first – (Crosses over and opens her bags)

HOLLY
Of course.

BEN
(Entering from hallway, to HOLLY) I hate entering in the middle of a movie. So, what did I miss? Is this the scene where you come to stay or where you get thrown out again?

HOLLY
Hello, Ben. It’s so nice to see you.

BEN
Play your cards right, Holly, and someday maybe someone will say that to you. So, where are you hiding the baby—in one of those bags?

GEORGE
That’s not funny, man

BEN
Up yours. What would you know about funny?

HATTIE
What were you doing—hiding behind a bush until Chalmers left?

BEN
Oh, was he here? I’m so sorry I missed him. I was going to ask him for new bedroom curtains.
MIKE
Okay, Holly. These look fine. You can take them upstairs.

GEORGE
Here. Let me help you with those. I’m George—

HOLLY
Yes, I know: You just moved in here from someplace out west.

GEORGE
That’s right – Montana. Left there three months ago to work on a potato farm in Boise, Idaho.

HOLLY
The west always looks so beautiful on television. Is it really like that?

GEORGE
Some places –

HOLLY
What’s Boise like?

GEORGE
(As he picks up her bags) Damned if I know – Never got there. Night before I left Basin, mama threw a wing-ding of a farewell party for me. It was still going on the next morning, so she had to drive me to the bus station in her truck. Sixty-five miles at a hundred miles an hour and we still missed the bus by three hours cuz naturally we had to say goodbye to everybody all over again and have a farewell drink with them. Sat at the bus terminal for six hours until Mama thought she heard them calling the bus to Boise. She got me on my feet and dragged me down to the gate just as the doors were closing – only it wasn’t the bus to Boise. It was the bus to Boston. Didn’t find that out until we pulled into Chicago the next morning. All I could say was ‘Fuck it –Must be God’s will.’

(GEORGE carries both bags up the staircase, followed by HOLLY.)

DIANA
Anybody else see that? Why is it the only game some men know how to play is being a victim?

BEN
Five minutes and she’ll be tired of him. Longer than that and she’d have to go back using drugs –

HATTIE
She’s gonna do that, anyway – Trust me, one day they’ll find her and the baby in a dumpster.
TRAVIS
Give her the benefit of the doubt. She may be ready this time – what with the baby and everything.

BEN
Listen to Travis, Hattie. Maybe she has changed. People do learn from their mistakes, you know.

HATTIE
Is that a fact?

BEN
Yes – it is.

HATTIE
Then why the hell haven’t you? Why couldn’t you keep your big mouth shut this morning instead of pissing Scott off? Now you’ve got him gunning for you.

BEN
Scott’s just an idiot.

HATTIE
Maybe, but he’s an idiot with power. You had only a couple months to go before you could have your own place. Once you’re in the apartments, they practically forget all about you.

BEN
Believe me, he’s a putz who likes to throw his weight around. That’s all.

TRAVIS
Ben, listen to Hattie, will you? Go over to the shelter and apologize to Scott before it’s too late.

BEN
I’m not apologizing to him. For one thing, you’re forgetting how obsessive Chalmers is about this one, big, happy family idea of his. What did he call me this morning – the family patriarch? He’s not going to listen to Scott and banish me. Chalmers knows I’m not King Lear.

HATTIE
Damn right you’re not King Lear. We all know that. You’re just his Fool.

(BLACK OUT. END OF SCENE ONE.)
ACT ONE: SCENE TWO

(AT RISE: Late the same evening. BEN and TRAVIS are again playing chess. MIKE is behind the desk.)

BEN
So, you’re staying in a motel in Lindenhurst, dealing drugs. Everything is hunky-dory when suddenly, for no reason at all, he comes at you with a knife?

TRAVIS
Didn’t I just say that? What don’t you understand?

BEN
You’re sitting there, minding your own business – not egging him on –

TRAVIS
I was watching television.

BEN
What were you watching?

TRAVIS
What difference does that make?

BEN
To a guy who’s strung out? If you were watching one of those religious programs, with all that jumping up and down and speaking in tongues – or some all-night infomercials on curing hair loss – I could see him turning into Hannibal Lector and wanting to tear out your heart and eat it – with or without fava beans.

TRAVIS
Why would I be watching a program on hair loss? Look at me. What’s that on top of my head?

BEN
What time of day was it?

TRAVIS
I don’t know. I was just lying on the bed, eating a slice of pizza and watching cartoons.

MIKE
(Looking up from his paperwork) Out of the blue – this guy comes at you with a knife –

TRAVIS
Why am I telling you guys all this? Haven’t you been listening?
MIKE
I’m trying to get this paperwork done so I can go home.

BEN
It wasn’t some guy, Mike. It was Travis’ brother.

MIKE
And for no reason, he pulled a knife on you?

(HATTIE enters from dining room, carrying a basket of folded laundry.)

HATTIE
When was this – Last night?

TRAVIS
No, not last night—it happened when I was fifteen years old.

HATTIE
I was gonna say – because you were sitting next to me last night at the meeting. They start pulling knives in A.A., that’s when I stop going.

MIKE
As if you needed an excuse –

HATTIE
Well, I don’t want to be killed because I took an extra cookie. So, who was this, Travis – one of your Johns catch you going through his wallet?

TRAVIS
No, it wasn’t one of my Johns – it was my brother, Jamie.

HATTIE
That sounds like my family—only I bet your brother didn’t want the same thing from you my brother wanted from me. Or did he?

BEN
Will you shut up? You’re missing the point. Braveheart, here, wants us to believe he just sat on his bed in this motel room, let his brother come at him with the knife and wasn’t scared.

HATTIE
That’s bullshit. Anybody’d be scared, specially you, Travis. The moths in this sweater have bigger balls than you.

TRAVIS
Believe it or not, it’s the truth. I wasn’t scared.
BEN
How long were you staying at this motel?

TRAVIS
Two weeks, maybe—

BEN
Where’d you eat?

TRAVIS
In the room. We ordered take-out. What the hell has that got to do with anything?

BEN
Why didn’t you say that before? Now it makes sense that you would sit there and not be afraid. Who in their right mind would be afraid of a man coming at them with a plastic knife?

TRAVIS
It was a Swiss Army knife. Jamie always carried it with him.

BEN
Travis, if I promise not to laugh, will you tell me truthfully why you weren’t afraid?

TRAVIS
I wasn’t afraid because I heard this voice – inside me, like – telling me not to be scared.

HATTIE
(Happily) A voice? – You mean, like my voices?

TRAVIS
No, not the kind you hear.

HATTIE
A voice is a voice, Travis. Was it a man or a woman?

TRAVIS
How the fuck would I know? It was whispering – you know – real soft like – from inside me?

HATTIE
Where do you think my voices come from—most of them, anyway? And mine talk nice to me, too – especially when they’re telling me to do shit so they can have a good laugh.

BEN
You’re saying you believed this voice? It didn’t occur to you the voice could have been wrong?
TRAVIS
Of course it did. I even asked it, ‘Why should I trust you?’

MIKE
What did it say?

BEN
What do you think it said? ‘Travis, old buddy—you got any other choices?’

TRAVIS
Don’t you understand? It wasn’t trying to scare me. It was on my side. In fact, it was the only voice in the room making sense.

BEN
That I can believe.

HATTIE
I believe you, too, honey—and I’m an expert. What else did it tell you?

TRAVIS
I asked, ‘How do you know the knife won’t hit a bone? Or that he won’t stick the blade in me and twist it up through my rib cage – like in the movies?’

BEN
Good questions. What was the answer?

TRAVIS
It told me to stop being stupid. ‘He won’t hit a bone—this isn’t a movie, asshole.’

MIKE
Didn’t take the voice long to get to know you, did it?

BEN
If it really called you an asshole, I’d say you could trust it.

TRAVIS
Damn it, Ben. You asked me if I ever had a spiritual experience before I came into AA. I’m trying to explain about the one time it—

SCOTT
(Entering from front hallway) Okay, folks. Who’s going with me to the meeting tonight?

TRAVIS
Not me, I went this afternoon.
Hattie?

Do I have any choice?

Gotta do whatever’s in your service plan.

You know what I think? Someone should write a service plan for counsellors.

I told you to come with me this afternoon and get it over with.

Where’s Diana and George?

Diana went with me this afternoon. George is upstairs in his room.

(Calling) Hey, George – Time for the meeting.

I hope this one is only an hour.

Where’s Holly? She needs to go to the meeting, too.

She went out a couple of hours ago—said you gave her permission.

She didn’t say anything to me.

Put a note in her file, then, and ask her about it when she gets back.

She starting in with her shit already?

I doubt it. She’s got too much at stake. She just likes to test us. I’ll wait for you in the van.

(SCOTT exits as GEORGE is heard entering from upstairs.)
HATTIE
(Seeing GEORGE) I call the front seat. Don’t even try for it, George. Sitting in back with those guys from the shelter is like being the only woman in the gym’s hot tub.

MIKE
How would you know—when did you take out a membership?

BEN
We go together. We signed up for their family plan.

MIKE
Seriously?

HATTIE
No, not seriously. You think we’d look like this if we worked out? See you later. (They exit.)

(MIKE continues his notes. TRAVIS walks to the bookcase, picks ISP [Individual Service Plan] binder, walks over to the sofa and begins to read. The room is silent for a moment until TRAVIS looks up.)

TRAVIS
You think Scott is really going to ask Chalmers to transfer Ben?

MIKE
(Not looking up) I don’t know. Why do you ask?

TRAVIS
He put a note in Ben’s service plan.

MIKE
Put Ben’s binder back where you got it. Where do you come off reading privileged information? Why do you think they’re called an individual service plan?

TRAVIS
What’s the big deal? We all read each other’s ISP’s. How do you expect us to get to know one another?

MIKE
Not by prying through personal and confidential materials. What’s wrong with just saying hello?

TRAVIS
Didn’t your mother ever tell you not to talk to strangers? What if I went up to some new person here and said, ‘Hi. My name is Travis and I’m an alcoholic’? What if he answers, ‘Hello, my name is Son of Sam and I’m a serial killer’?
MIKE
Safe Harbour doesn’t accept serial killers, so just put Ben’s ISP away. By the way, you didn’t finish telling me what the outcome was between you and your brother in that motel. What did you do to piss him off – steal his stash or take his money?

TRAVIS
Both – I was meeting this guy from Northport – you know the kind – money, and then more money. I wanted to buy some clothes so I would look good. He was a really nice person.

If you were fifteen, how old was he?

TRAVIS
Thirty, maybe a little older, but nice. Not one of those pervs. Kept wanting me to finish school—

MIKE
While he helped you remove your clothes —?

TRAVIS
He wasn’t like that. He wanted to see me make something of myself. A lot of people did.

But, of course, with your vast experience of the world, you decided not to listen –

TRAVIS
Yeah—not until I was a lot older and the people who wanted to help me weren’t around anymore.

Sucks to be old at thirty, doesn’t it?

TRAVIS
Thirty? Try twenty-six. You think you know what you’re doing when you’re young and out there partying. But then it changes. Life looks at you and say, ‘This is what is – Take it or leave it.’ I lived in Brooklyn Heights once, with this girl Cathy. We weren’t sleeping together—nothing like that. We just did sort of the same things to make money; I was eighteen and she was twenty-six. Cat told me what would happen to me and she was right. It happen to her. She’d sit all night on a barstool in this club we went to. Younger girls kept taking off and coming back, but nobody wanted Cathy until closing time—when they knew she’d drop her price rather than go home with nothing. Only twenty-seven – but you could see she was used.

MIKE
What about your brother? How did he know you’d stolen his stash?
TRAVIS
He saw me. He was lying there, fully clothed, in the other bed. I thought he had passed out, but he was watching me all the time. That’s how smart Jamie was.

MIKE
Was?

TRAVIS
Yeah, he died.

MIKE
I’m sorry. When was this?

TRAVIS
That night. When he was standing over me with the knife.

MIKE
Jesus Christ, Travis –

TRAVIS
What?

MIKE
You killed him?

TRAVIS
Why would I kill him? Jamie wasn’t just my brother – he was my best friend. I would never kill him. What put that idea into your head?

MIKE
He’s coming at you with a Swiss Army knife—that’s not a good enough reason? What am I not getting here? You gonna tell me next that he changed his mind and kill himself?

TRAVIS
He didn’t kill himself. He died, that’s all. Jeez, Mike.

MIKE
Fine. You didn’t kill him and he didn’t kill himself. So how did he wind up dead?

TRAVIS
Over-dosed. He got to where I was and he started shaking and making these gurgling noises. The knife fell out of his hands. Then he was on the floor, with blood coming out of his mouth.

MIKE
Was he dead?
TRAVIS
I didn’t know. I shook him, but he didn’t move. I remember I yelled, ‘You’re not funny, Jamie. Get the hell up.’ But he didn’t. I turned him over and looked into his eyes. They were open but they weren’t moving. So I hollered louder, ‘Get the fuck up, Jamie. Stop it. Don’t pull a mama on me.’

MIKE
‘Don’t pull a mama?’ What the hell did that mean?

TRAVIS
My parents got into a fight one night, when we were still living at home. They were always fighting, but this time my father was punching and kicking her. She hit her head against the wall and fell. He kept kicking her and yelling at her to get up. Only she couldn’t. Jamie and my other brothers managed to get him away from her. The EMT’s came and took her away in an ambulance. I thought Jamie was playing a joke on me—pretending to be like my mother. So I kicked him. Not hard, like my father did to my mom. Just to make him move. That’s when I knew and started crying. The tears made his blood turn pink, so I covered him with a sheet. I stayed with him until morning.

MIKE
Didn’t you try and get someone to help you?

TRAVIS
Who gonna get involved in a thing like that? When I saw the sun coming up, I dialed 9-1-1 and left. I went to his funeral Mass. Only a few people were there. My mom and her sister were sitting in a pew all by themselves. I went and sat next to them, but my mom wouldn’t look at me. She knew I was involved somehow. All the way to the cemetery, she didn’t speak to me. (Beat) What am I going to do, Mike?

What do you mean?

TRAVIS
What do I do if I’m nothing to my mother? I was always her favourite. What if I mean nothing to her now? What do I do?

MIKE
Travis, I –

TRAVIS
No, Mike – don’t. I’ve listened to a thousand counsellors, but it’s no use. It’s a thing I have to figure out for myself. What if I’m living in a halfway house because I’m only a halfway person? Maybe I don’t ever find the light at the end of the tunnel because I’m too dumb to look for it.
MIKE
That’s not what your records indicate. You’re a pretty smart guy. At least as smart as George—

TRAVIS
Don’t try to make me laugh. You know what they do with peoples’ bodies when they die in the street, or like my brother did? They’re kept on a slab at the morgue until a relative comes to identify them. My mother’s had to do that twice. I don’t want her to have to do it again account of me. Most of all, I don’t want her looking down at me in a place like that—seeing what I become.

(TRAVIS looks at MIKE and then turns away. MIKE watches him a moment before speaking.)

MIKE
Hey—you know what I just realized? I haven’t eaten since lunch. Are you hungry?

TRAVIS
I can always eat. But there’s only some of that Shepherd’s pie left over.

MIKE
No, thanks. How about I walk down to Papa John’s and get us a pepperoni pizza.

TRAVIS
With mushrooms. You want me to go pick it up?

MIKE
No, I need to stretch my legs. You just stay here and don’t answer the phone, in case it’s Chalmers. What do you want to drink?

TRAVIS
Heinekens or Lowenbrau – No, make it Miller light. Just kidding. I’ll take a Mountain Dew.

(MIKE rises and exits the front door. TRAVIS goes to the bookshelf, removes Ben’s binder and begins to read it at Mike’s desk. He does not notice DIANA, who comes downstairs with a portable CD player, from which we hear the last notes of a Sinatra recording.)

TRAVIS
(Looking up) I recognize that guy’s voice. He’s from way back in your time, right?

DIANA
Travis, this is still my time, you arrogant, little brat.

TRAVIS
I mean, he was a big movie star, too. I know it’s not Elvis Presley—
DIANA

(Acidly) Close, dear – very close. Go more toward Rudy Vallee –

TRAVIS

Where’s that?

DIANA

You really don’t recognize Frank Sinatra?

TRAVIS

I do now: His sister was a singer, too—like Donny and Marie, right?

DIANA

I don’t think so.

TRAVIS

You don’t remember (Sings) ‘These boots are made for walking —?’

DIANA

I suppose you’d prefer something else (Looking through her CD’s) but I don’t seem to have brought anything loud and offensive (Putting on a tango CD) Here’s something else you won’t like.

TRAVIS

I do like it. You can almost dance to it.

DIANA

You can dance to it. It’s the tango.

(DIANA begins to move to the music – not necessarily a tango – just graceful movements causing the years to vanish from her. After a moment, she stops.)

TRAVIS

Why did you stop? I liked watching you.

DIANA

I used to love to dance. Aboard ship, we had such lovely parties. In warm weather, they’d be held out on deck, under a sky full of stars – ladies in long dresses; gentlemen in white dinner jackets; the officers in their dress uniforms. On one of the ships, there was a nightclub that never opened before midnight and only served champagne – Le Club Etoile. We would dance and sip champagne until the sun came up. It was such a wonderful life.

TRAVIS

You’re eyes are smiling—as if something good were about to happen.
DIANA
Back in those days, I was always expecting something good to happen. *(Bitterly)* Life aboard ship was such a fool’s paradise. An Eden for romantics – Then came the fall. How sad.

TRAVIS
Sad—how?

DIANA
To live in this world, and to look to another for happiness—

TRAVIS
Was it really all that happy, or was it just like this one – one moment at a time, showing up unannounced and bringing with it whatever it chooses? Was it always as you described it?

DIANA
When I was living through it? Probably not—but only a fool remembers everything. Of course there were bad times. But in those days, I had the ability to encase them in – in dreams. There was music all around me to drown out ugly words, a midnight caress to banish the loneliness – back in those increasingly ancient times – I was nothing like the vulnerable old woman I have become.

TRAVIS
Have you ever thought what it might mean for someone my age to hear that the music has stopped and the dance is over? If that’s true, what’s the point in my trying to change? A moment came to you, just now, Diana – filled with joy – it lit up your whole face. Wouldn’t you rather share it than run from it?

DIANA
Oh, Travis, I’m so sorry for passing on to you my own disillusionment. I was smiling at myself, for having held on for so long to so little—

TRAVEL
I don’t believe that. You’re not just sitting here, day after day, waiting for a happiness you don’t believe will ever come. Every day, I see you facing down your demons and becoming a mirror for all of us – Keeping Ben in line, teaching Hattie card games, telling me stories from your past—

DIANA
I believe in the past, Travis. If nothing else, I did manage to live through it. As for the present, one moment at a time or one day – it’s all the same to me. The road has merely narrowed, that’s all, so I look down to keep from stumbling and falling upon the sword of my reality.

*(With her arms outstretched, DIANA begins to take short, graceful steps. She spins around and faces Travis.)*
DIANA, Continued

But perhaps you’re right. I agree—I still have moments when I hear music telling me not to look down, but to raise my head and look for a new dancing partner. Come dance with me.

TRAVIS

You’re kidding – right?

DIANA

(Turning away) Yes – Of course I am.

TRAVIS

Diana, it’s the steps – I don’t know how to move –

DIANA

I understand.

TRAVIS

When I was little, my mother would ask me to dance with her. I think of those times when I watch an old movie – how warm her body felt – her eyes sparkling, like yours just now – even when they were holding back tears. Diana, I – (A look of grief comes upon his face) Aw, crap—

DIANA

Such an ominous sigh has the sound of happiness slipping away. Or is it fear? Are you afraid?

(TRAVIS rises, goes to her and takes DIANA in his arms, smiling, as she clasps his arms. They begin to dance, and he places his arm around her waist, leading her between the tables.)

HATTIE

(Entering through the front hall, followed by BEN) Shee-it! Will you get a load of these two? You rehearsing for ‘Dancing with the Stars’?

DIANA

They’d never hire us. We’re too good.

TRAVIS

You are, for sure.

BEN

(Cutting in) Let me show you how it’s done. (They dance a few bars before the music ends.) See, my boy? Time a song properly and you never get winded.

(The next song begins: Ella Fitzgerald singing ‘It was only a Paper Moon’.)
DIANA
Oh, I love this – (Grabbing Ben’s arm, she sings.)

...a paper moon,
Sailing over a cardboard sea
But it wouldn’t be make-believe
If you believed in me.

(DIANA gives Ben’s arm a tug, as they sing and dance together.)

BEN and DIANA, Singing

Yes, it’s only a canvas sky
Hanging over a muslin tree
But it wouldn’t be make-believe
If you believed in me.

(HATTIE taps TRAVIS on the shoulder. They dance together as the others sing.)

BEN and DIANA, Singing

Without your love,
It’s a honky-tonk parade.
Without your love,
It’s a melody played in a penny arcade
It’s a Barnum and Bailey world
Just as phony as it—

GEORGE
(Entering and interrupting) Hey, what’s going on—having a party?

(The dancers break apart. DIANA goes over to the CD player and turns it off.)

GEORGE
You don’t have to stop. Stay awhile. I’m a pretty good dancer myself, you know.

TRAVIS
Who taught you – your wife or your girlfriend? (As MIKE enters) About time you got back. Where’s the pizza?

GEORGE
You ordered pizza?

MIKE
(Crossing to the desk) I forgot my wallet. How about a rain-check, Travis? Or better yet: My shift is over in a few minutes, come with me. We can finish our talk at the restaurant.
TRAVIS
I would but, tell you the truth, I’m really not all that hungry for pizza. I’m thinking of doing something else this evening. Something you do before pizza.

MIKE
Gotcha. Play safe, then. You all behave yourselves. Kendrick called in sick again, so Scott’s going to split his time between here and the shelter. Have a good night.

BEN
Diana, can I interest you in some conversation, a little Scotch, and a chance to put your back out?

DIANA
You darn fool. Just go to bed and dream of someone younger and prettier.

BEN
What would I do with such a person? *(Starts up the stairs)*

GEORGE
*(To TRAVIS)* Say, he doesn’t really have a bottle of Scotch up in his room, does he?

TRAVIS
Hasn’t Ben shown you his liquor cabinet? The wine cellar in the basement is his, too.

GEORGE
I haven’t been down there yet.

TRAVIS
You can’t miss it. It’s right next to the Olympic-sized swimming pool. *(To DIANA)* Are you staying up a while?

DIANA
I’m going to see Hattie. A few minutes of girl-talk and I’ll be ready for sleep. *(Kissing TRAVIS on the cheek)* You’re a fine dancer, Travis. Good night, both of you.

GEORGE
Well, I guess that leaves just the two of us. You wanna watch something on TV?

TRAVIS
You go ahead. I’m going to take a walk downtown and listen to some music.

GEORGE
You want some company?

TRAVIS
Nothing personal, George, but I don’t think you’d like the place I have in mind.
GEORGE
Why not? (As TRAVIS stares at him without responding) Oh.

TRAVIS
See you in the morning.

(TRAVIS exits through the hallway. GEORGE sits on sofa, takes out his iPhone and begins to play a game. After a moment he snaps it shut.)

GEORGE
Shit, I can’t win—even when I’m only playing against myself.

(GEORGE rises and exits into the kitchen. A moment or so later, SCOTT enters from the street. He glances first to the office area then cross to the staircase. GEORGE enters and startles him.)

GEORGE
Hi, Scott.

SCOTT
George. How come you’re still up?

GEORGE
Having trouble sleeping, I guess. We never go to bed this early back home – Especially alone.

SCOTT
Can’t help you there. I’m booked for later this evening.

GEORGE
Just as well: counsellor or not, I’d punch you out if you offered.

SCOTT
Got a suggestion, though. You’re hands clean?

GEORGE
Just washed them.

(SCOTT grinning) Then use one of them.

GEORGE
Huh? Oh, I already did that.

SCOTT
Well, I don’t know what else to tell you, other than keep an eye on the clock. You come downstairs late again tomorrow and I might have to consider putting you back on curfew.
GEORGE
You wouldn’t do that to a friend—

SCOTT
Friend? Where’d you get the idea we were friends?

GEORGE
I know counsellors and residents can’t be buddies, Scott, but I can talk to you. You don’t treat me the way everybody else does—like I’m from another planet.

SCOTT
Ever think you might be?

GEORGE
Hell – not you, too.

SCOTT
Just trying to be a friend, George. (As GEORGE stares at him) Go get some sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.

GEORGE
Okay. Good night, Scott. (Exits)

(SCOTT watches him go then crosses to the shelter entrance and unlocks it.)

SCOTT
(To HOLLY, off) Damn it, Holly, get your dumb ass in here—now. I don’t have all night.

HOLLY
(Entering) Hold your horses, sweetie. (He pulls away) What’s put you in a bad mood all of a sudden? You really want to go back to that zoo full of drunks next-door?

SCOTT
Knock it off. Do you realize how lucky you are that nobody is here? Hattie and Diana are watching you like a hawk, waiting for you to screw up so they can run to Chalmers and tell him.

HOLLY
That’s never going to happen, baby, and you know it. There’s not a damned thing those two old bags can do to me. Chalmers will never get rid of me. I’m worth a fortune to him. What can Diana do to me? Nothing. She’s in the same boat as Ben. And in case you hadn’t noticed, Hattie is black.
SCOTT
Listen, you little dope – I’m telling you to get a change of attitude and get it fast. We’re taking a big risk with you, and Chalmers knows it. He also knows when to cut his losses, so watch your step with those two.

HOLLY
Who are you kidding? He has no interest in them. Didn’t you hear Chalmers lay down the law to those two bitches yesterday? They don’t have enough rehab hours. Jeremy and I have twenty-five hours apiece. You know how much money that works out to? You think I don’t know about the big PR campaign he’s planning for the new programme? You forget what he’s calling it? ‘Family Matters:’ That’s me and Jeremy. As for Hattie and Diana, all they have to do is look at me the wrong way and see what happens to them.

SCOTT
Jesus, you haven’t changed at all, have you?

HOLLY
Not when it comes to those two. Just be glad your name isn’t on my list. Not yet, anyway.

SCOTT
Keep talking like that and I swear I’ll pick up the phone and call Chalmers.

HOLLY
That would get you on the list, for sure. Relax, sweetie. How many times do I have to tell you? Chalmers is stuck with both of us.

SCOTT
The hell he is. Chalmers is a lot smarter than you think.

HOLLY
He’s let you run things, hasn’t he—how smart is that? Now stop arguing. It’s all going to fall in place. You’ll see. Want me to show you what I bought Jeremy?

SCOTT
No, I want to talk to you about Friday’s meeting with Social Services

HOLLY
That’s in the bag. Chalmers has been coaching me all week on what to say.

SCOTT
There’s a slight problem that’s come up. Your mother has filed a petition for guardianship.

HOLLY
She can’t. She has no right. She doesn’t even live in this state. Why are you trying to scare me?
SCOTT
Keep your voice down. I’m not trying to scare you. It’s true. She found some state senator who was willing to represent her. He filed a petition this morning, but Chalmers is pretty sure he can get it thrown out. He’s already made a few phone calls to people –

HOLLY
(Shaking him) No-o-o. She can’t do this. She’s not coming here, is she?

SCOTT
No. As of now, it’s all pro forma. She’d only have to appear if the court decided to hear her. Chalmers is certain his lawyers can get it thrown out. He thinks she just wants to cause you a hard time, see if she can set you off. You know yourself she doesn’t want either of you living with her. Chalmers just wants you to be prepared in case your social worker – or somebody else gets wind of it – and starts asking questions. If that happens, you’re to say nothing and refer them to him.

HOLLY
I need to think – I gotta plan what I’m going to do.

SCOTT
Not now, honey. First, you need to calm down. Show me the stuff for the kid.

HOLLY
What’s the use? She always pulls shit like this – (Pulling a baby outfit from her bag) I had so much fun buying these things today – and now I’ll never get to see him wear them.

SCOTT
(Taking her in his arms) That’s not true. Didn’t I just say —?

HOLLY
You don’t know her. She’s evil. Evil. I know evil when I see it – I’m her daughter. I see evil every time I look in the mirror.

SCOTT
Holly, you’re not anything like her. Here, I’ve got a little something for you. (Removes a cigarette pack from his shirt, opens it and hands her a joint) Here – something to cheer you up – but smoke it out on the porch.

HOLLY
(Bursts into laughter) Oh, this is so funny.

SCOTT
Pipe down, will you? Tell me what’s so funny?
HOLLY
We are. You and me – *(Picking up one of the outfits, she removes a small plastic bag and a glass pipe)* – I got you a present, too.

SCOTT *(A mixture of alarm and excitement)* What is that? That’s not coke—

HOLLY
No, silly. It’s Tina –

SCOTT
Christ, when did you start doing crystal meth? And where did you get the money?

HOLLY
Ask me no questions, I’ll tell you no lies –

SCOTT *(Grabbing her)* You took forty dollars from me to go downtown. Where’d you get the rest?

HOLLY
Maybe I didn’t need your money after all. Maybe I found a way to get my own.

SCOTT *(Maintaining his hold)* How much of this shit have you taken and where did you get the money? Tell me before I call Chalmers.

HOLLY
Do I look high to you? Well, I’m not, so get your hands off me and don’t even think about calling Chalmers unless you’re prepared to take a piss test, pot-head.

SCOTT
You think I don’t know how to beat a piss test? *(Twisting her and forcing her down on sofa)* You think your mother is trouble, try fucking with me. The only test that will interest Chalmers is the one I offer to take with Jeremy. Try getting your kid back then.

HOLLY
Go ahead – do it – they’ll put you away until you’re older than Ben. I’m jailbait, remember?

SCOTT
Only while you’re alive and breathing.

HOLLY
If anything happens to me –

SCOTT
Then it happens – and nobody will give a damn. Where’d you get the money for that crap?
HOLLY
Okay. Cool down. I left you and took the bus downtown. I sat next to an old lady who was
talking on her cell phone and looking out the window. She left her purse just sitting there,
between us.

SCOTT
You lifted her wallet?

HOLLY
(Laughs) Would I do a thing like that? Steal a wallet sitting on top of a lady’s handbag? I
simply jiggled the seat a little and it fell on the floor. I know I should have mentioned the fact
to her but, by the time I thought of it, she’d already gotten off the bus. (Waving the plastic
bag) Want some?

SCOTT
(Reaching for the bag) Give me that—

HOLLY
Back off.

SCOTT
Holly, that’s serious, serious shit. Give it to me. Let me hold on to it until you get past what’s
ahead of you. Once you’re living across the street, you may feel differently. You may not
even want to do it. It’s not like taking a toke from someone’s joint.

HOLLY
No way. I give it to you, I might never see it again. I got this for us, not for you and someone
else.

SCOTT
You can’t keep it here. It’s too risky.

HOLLY
Stop telling me what to do. (Sound off) What was that?

SCOTT
What?

HOLLY
Someone is coming. You’d better go back to the shelter.

SCOTT
Not without that bag—

HOLLY
(Calling) Hello – Who’s up there? Is that you, Travis? Come keep me company.
SCOTT
This isn’t over Holly. I’ll be back later and I’m coming up to your room. You’d better have changed your mind by then. Understand me?

(SCOTT exits through shelter door as HOLLY watches him leave. Her hands begin to shake and she pounds them against her forehead, speaking in a frightened voice.)

HOLLY
Stop it. Stop it. Please, stop it.

GEORGE
(Coming downstairs) So, you finally come home, little lady? Where you been?

HOLLY
What business is that of yours? Why are you still up?

GEORGE
Can’t sleep in that damn room. I came down to see what’s on TV. What’s that in your hand?

HOLLY
Nothing—

GEORGE
Don’t try and kid me. I know what that shit is. We used to smoke it all the time back in Montana. But you gotta go easy or it’ll knock the crap out of you. How often you do it?

HOLLY
First time. It was a present for someone, only now I changed my mind. I’m keeping it.

GEORGE
Listen to me: Give it to whoever you bought it for. You don’t want to mess with that shit – especially if you haven’t done it before. It can really fuck you up.

HOLLY
How? How can it fuck me up more than I already am? Want some?

GEORGE
Not me. I ain’t ever gonna smoke that shit again.

HOLLY
You sure about that? (Uses a lighter to heat the glass bowl) More for me then, I guess.

GEORGE
Shit, little lady – (She inhales) – this is fucked.
HOLLY
(Exhaling) Maybe—but it’s go-oo-od. M-m-m. (Inhales again) Real good. (Beat)
Ooh, whew. (Unbuttoning the top button of her blouse) You know what I feel like doing now?

GEORGE
(As he crosses the room slowly towards her) No, what?

HOLLY
(Taking another hit) Guess.

GEORGE
I can’t.

HOLLY
Sure you can, Georgie.

GEORGE
This isn’t a good idea, Holly. One of us could—

HOLLY
(Putting her hand on his leg) That’s right, Georgie. One of us could get something he’d really like—

GEORGE
I don’t know. I kinda—

HOLLY
You kinda what? Kinda want me to keep my hand here— (Rubbing his leg) Like this?

(HOLLY hands the pipe to GEORGE. He holds it at a distance for a moment, then inhales.)

HOLLY
(Laughs) Maybe both of us could get something we really like.

(HOLLY takes the pipe from GEORGE, inhales and hands it back to him.)

HOLLY
(Sitting and patting the cushion next to her) Wouldn’t that be nice, George? Having a little fun together? You know that’s all we’re doing. Having a little fun – cause that’s what we are – fun addicts. (She takes the pipe from him, inhales and hands it back to him.) It’s not like we’re sitting here poking needles in our arm. We’re not like that. Just a couple of simple fun addicts – Admit it Georgie. You and me – we’re addicted to fun. We’re addicts – and this is what we do.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT. END OF ACT ONE.)
ACT TWO

(AT RISE: Later that evening. MIKE is seated in a chair reading a paperback. His feet are on the coffee table. He yawns, stretches and turns when he hears a noise coming from the staircase. HATTIE comes downstairs in her nightgown and robe.)

MIKE
What are you doing up, Hattie?

HATTIE
Are you busy?

MIKE
No—just reading and trying to keep awake. Kendrick didn’t show up again tonight, so I’m covering his shift. What do you need?

HATTIE
Nothing—I just wanted to talk to you about something.

MIKE
Come and have a seat. Something that couldn’t wait until morning?

HATTIE
I’d rather talk about it when nobody else is around. You see Holly come in tonight?

MIKE
No. She’s not officially a resident here, so I don’t need to keep track of her. Scott does that over at the shelter. You didn’t come down here to talk to me about Holly, did you?

HATTIE
Hardly. I’ve seen too many Holly’s in my time to have much interest in any of them.

MIKE
Why do you and Diana dislike her so much?

HATTIE
Aside from her robbing us, you mean? Aside from her pulling the wool over everybody’s eyes—playing all her games and none of you smart enough to catch her at them?

MIKE
I don’t know that’s what she’s doing, Hattie.

HATTIE
You can’t see past a pretty face, that’s why. Those girls are all alike. Holly’s just a little younger, that’s all. She still gets to choose which cars she’ll get into and which ones she won’t.
MIKE
Do you know for a fact that’s what she does?

HATTIE
You know for a fact it isn’t? There’s Holly’s walking up and down Fourth Street every hour of the day and night, getting into cars with men they don’t know, coming back with black eyes and loose teeth—laughing about it with the other girls, worrying only about what colour nail polish to buy at the drugstore. Some of ‘em can’t even read or write – quit school so they could walk around in an open blouse and a mini-skirt on the coldest nights of the year – looking for the fun and laughs their Baptist ministers wouldn’t let them have back home. Give Holly a couple more years and she’ll be opening her legs for any old garlic-and-piss-smelling drunk with a couple of twenties in his hand. Those girls are just lucky God is so merciful.

MIKE
Merciful—How?

HATTIE
Letting them die young.

MIKE
That isn’t God’s response, Hattie. It’s ours.

HATTIE
Believe me, Michael, those girls are mighty happy when they see death coming towards them – just little girls – too dumb to know when to come in out of the cold.

MIKE
You didn’t let it happen to you. You came in out of the cold.

HATTIE
That’s different. The elevator I was riding stopped going up, same as theirs, only instead of getting stuck, it plunged right down to the basement. Doors opened and I was staring right into the devil’s face—not some red-eyed ghoul with horns and a pitchfork. The face I saw was mine—all covered with wine sores, hair matted with blood from a fall I musta had in a blackout—shaking like a leaf and dry-heaving into a bucket. My arms were in chains, like I was some kind of animal on a leash. Didn’t even know what kind I was – only a wild animal smells that bad – and I was convinced that was what I was. An animal called Hattie. I remember thinking, ‘Hattie – that’s a funny name for an animal. What kind am I?’ Couldn’t ask anybody. They were speaking some animal language I couldn’t understand. I looked down at my body – all bruised and scratched. I must have been in a fight with another animal. Then I saw I had breasts. I was a bitch – some kind of wild bitch – and that’s what they were calling me. Hattie the Bitch – Hattie the Whore—names I knew because I’d heard them before. I started coming to – I was handcuffed to a wheelchair in the psych ward at St. Joseph’s and my face was staring back at me from a window. I said, ‘Dear God, that can’t be me. Please, don’t let that be me. I was all alone and I cried for hours, begging Him to let me
see another me. I was desperate – and then I remembered my grandma telling me when I was a little girl how she came to leave Georgia for New York, during the depression. ‘We was desperate, child’, she told me, ‘But desperation is energy. Energy – and energy can move things. Change yourself, Hattie.’

MIKE
Thank you for telling me, Hattie. I mean it.

HATTIE
That’s why I’m asking you to help me.

MIKE
Anything you need, Hattie. But why come to me? I’m the smallest cog in the machinery.

HATTIE
First of all, you know how Diana and I are always talking together – not vicious, of course. We’d never do that. But we do talk about people – especially the weird crowd coming in and out of here.

MIKE
And I assume I’m a part of this so-called weird crowd you two gossip about?

HATTIE
It isn’t gossip. How can it be gossip, Michael, if you don’t know what you’re talking about?

MIKE
What do you call it, then? Take your time. I have another five hours left to my shift

HATTIE
We were just wondering – and I didn’t bring it up, Diana did – but I told her straight off I didn’t know, and furthermore, I didn’t care – But then I asked her what did she think – and she said she didn’t know, either, which was the reason she was asking me in the first place.

MIKE
Didn’t know what?

HATTIE
If maybe you have a little sugar in you. You know – like Travis. Are you gay?

MIKE
You know counsellors aren’t supposed to discuss their private lives with residents—

HATTIE
Then you are –
MIKE

No, I’m not.

HATTIE

Not even a little bit?

MIKE

Not unless they’ve changed the definition. You mind telling me what this is all about?

HATTIE

You’re different from the other counsellors, that’s all—so, naturally, we were curious.

MIKE

Different in what way? How am I any different from Kendrick or Hannah or Tess?

HATTIE

You care about us in a way the other counsellors don’t. They’re nice, and they care, too, but not the same way. If push came to shove, and you thought you could help somebody, you wouldn’t think twice about it and you wouldn’t let any house rules or boundaries stop you.

MIKE

That’s a terrible thing to suggest. I’d lose my job if I were to cross boundaries.

HATTIE

I’m not saying you ever did. I’m saying you would—In an emergency, like.

MIKE

Come to the point, Hattie. What’s bothering you? Tell me.

HATTIE

What Oscar Carraway and that black chick on PBS said about cutting off funding—See, I don’t got a lot of rehab hours. I only got eight. Everyone has more than me, even George. If they cut the budget, I might not be able to live here anymore.

MIKE

Nobody takes Carraway seriously, he’s a politician. If he really wanted to cut costs, he’d take some of his family off the state payroll. Relax—Another few months you’ll be over in one of the apartments.

HATTIE

I’m telling what I know: Carraway means to cut our funding.

MIKE

How do you know that?
HATTIE
Never mind. I just know. And why the hell wouldn’t he? Any time the choice is between the mentally ill and a bunch of cute, little babies, where do you think the axe is gonna fall? All we have in common with those little kids is we’re both missing teeth. And another thing – if it came down to a choice between me and Diana –

MIKE
I’d choose Diana –

HATTIE
That’s not funny, you little prick. You don’t have a clue what I’m talking about, do you?

MIKE
You mean your colour? Forget it, Hattie. That doesn’t happen these days – or hardly ever. The colour barrier is almost gone, nowadays.

HATTIE
This is not about who people sleep with. I’m telling you I need you to help me stay here.

MIKE
Like how?

HATTIE
Like putting a note in my service plan that I’m definitely getting worse and need to be re-evaluated. You could say you saw me talking to one of the models in Vogue Magazine or to the two guys on Ben and Jerry’s ice cream.

MIKE
Sorry, kid, but that’s not gonna happen. (She turns away from him, silently moving her lips.) For one thing, it isn’t true. You’re doing really well. Okay? (As she remains silent) Hattie, did you hear me?

HATTIE
(Turning to him) Excuse me. Were you talking to me?

MIKE
Of course I was. Who did you think I was talking to?

HATTIE
I’m sorry. I didn’t hear what you said. I was listening to somebody else.

MIKE
What? Who?

HATTIE
You don’t know her. Would you like me to introduce you?
MIKE
You’re having a conversation with one of your voices? Right now?

HATTIE
S-h-h, Michael, I can’t listen to both of you at the same time. (Turning away from him) Now, what were you saying, Claudette? Where should I start the fire? Uh-huh –

MIKE
What fire? What are you talking about?

HATTIE
Oh, I could never do that, Claudette. I could never say Michael told me to do it. He’s my friend.

MIKE
That’s not funny. Are you putting me on?

HATTIE
Maybe – and maybe not. You’ll just have to wait and see if that sofa catches fire tomorrow –

MIKE
Stop talking about such stuff.

HATTIE
Of course, if it does, and there’s no note in my file that I warned you—

MIKE
You could get thrown out just for saying such a thing. (As she turns away again) Are you listening?

HATTIE
(As before) Just a minute, darling. Michael is saying something. (Turning to him) You ready to finish our conversation?

MIKE
Which one of us are you talking to?

HATTIE
You, dummy. There’s nobody else here. (Beat) Unless you’ve been hearing voices –

MIKE
I’m not hearing voices – except yours, of course –
HATTIE
Are you sure it was mine? Did it sound white or black? Would you like some of my medication? Nobody has to know. I’ll just run upstairs and get them. Oh, but Claudette wants me to sing ‘Danny Boy’ first – (Rising and beginning to sing) ‘Oh, Danny boy –‘

MIKE
Sit down and stop this nonsense, or I will put a note in your file – with a red marking pen – saying you’re out of your mind.

HATTIE
That’s a start—then I could stay on here instead of having to move to an apartment.

MIKE
What’s wrong with moving to an apartment?

HATTIE
I don’t like living by myself.

MIKE
You wouldn’t be by yourself. You’d have neighbours across the hall, next door –

HATTIE
When I closed the door, I’d be by myself. I don’t want to live alone. I forget to do stuff – cook dinner, do my laundry. Here I got people to talk to—besides the ones in my head. Real people who don’t hurt me like the ones I hear when I’m alone. When I came here, I thought it was just going to be temporary, like all the other places I’d been to. But Travis started cracking jokes, and Diana taught me to play canasta, people came up to me at meetings and asked me to sit with them. And so I said to myself, Hattie, you get down to Fourth Street and get that shopping cart of yours outta the alley way. Bring it here and put it in the basement. Maybe you’re not going to need it for a while.’

MIKE
Seriously? You keep a shopping cart in the basement?

HATTIE
A girl’s gotta have wheels, Michael. Never know where you might be headed tomorrow – but I like it here. I’m a part of things. I don’t want to move. I got everything I need right here: clean sheets, People Magazine, hot showers, apples and oranges and bananas—and one of these days I’m gonna beat old Snow White at canasta, even if I do have to pull a wild card out of my behind. What?

MIKE
You do know there’s more to life than hot showers and clean sheets?

HATTIE
I know. But this is home. It’s been such a long time since I thought of any place as home.
MIKE
But it’s not. It’s a half-way house. It’s not reality. It’s only the bridge back to reality.

HATTIE
I don’t care. I’m here and I want to stay here. Beats the hell out of standing in line for a bowl of soup from the Franciscans. I hate those stingy bastards. How do they get so fat if they eat the same shit they serve us? The only soup kitchen in this town with decent food is those born-again’s down on Solomon Avenue. They serve a proper meal – pork chops or hamburgers, two vegetables, a glass of juice. You can smell the food a block away. Trouble is, it’s always cold. That minister don’t know when to stop praying, ‘Praise Jesus for this,’ ‘Praise Jesus for that.’ The way he goes on you’d think it was Jesus who made the salad.

(A noise is heard above them. They look up to the staircase.)

BEN
What are you doing down here? Who you talking to, Hattie?

HATTIE
Go back to bed. What are you doing up, anyway?

BEN
I got up to pee and you weren’t in the bed –

HATTIE
Shush – Do you have to tell everyone your business?

BEN
I was worried, so I came to look for you.

HATTIE
She-it. You big mouth –

BEN
Who are you talking to?

MIKE
It’s me – Michael. I –uh – work here.

HATTIE
You won’t say anything –

MIKE
What makes you think I could find someone to believe me?

BEN
Why not?
HATTIE
(To BEN) Oh, hush up and go back to bed. (To MIKE) Take that look off your face. Don’t you
know anytime you get a bunch of drunks together the odds are going to be good? It’s just the
goods that are going to be odd. Good night, Michael.

MIKE
Good night, Hattie – And don’t listen to Oscar Carraway anymore, or your friend, Claudette.

HATTIE
Who? Claudette? Honey, she’s a figment of your imagination, not mine. (Exits)

(MIKE watches her go, closes his book, rises and crosses to the shelter door. He unlocks it
and exits through it. After a moment a scuffle is heard coming from the front porch.)

HOLLY (Off)
Give it back to me –

GEORGE (Off)
You’re all fucked up. You’ve done too much of that shit.

HOLLY (Off)
Look who’s talking.

GEORGE (Off)
You looking to get caught? Cool it.

(GEORGE enters through the hallway, followed by HOLLY.)

HOLLY
Don’t tell me what to do. Give me back my pipe.

GEORGE
Keep your voice down, will you? I’m just trying to look out for you, honey.

HOLLY
Don’t you call me honey. I’m not your honey, you asshole. Give me my shit.

GEORGE
Enough is enough. Save some for tomorrow.

TRAVIS
(From the staircase) George’s right, Holly. I’d listen to him if I were you. I could hear you on
the porch, you were talking so loud. You don’t want Hattie or Diana to catch you like this.

HOLLY
Screw them. Those two old bitches can go to hell, for all I care.
GEORGE
Shut up, can’t you? (To TRAVIS) What are you going to do, faggot? Call somebody?

TRAVIS
I’m not calling anyone, dick-head. Holly and me – We look after one another – and so does everyone else who lives here. I knew you weren’t back, Holly, so I waited, in case—you know?

HOLLY
Thank you, Travis. I appreciate you doing that, but it’s okay. You can go back to bed.

GEORGE
You aren’t going to tell on us?

TRAVIS
I said I wouldn’t. If you get caught, it will be your own fault.

HOLLY
Who’s working tonight?

TRAVIS
Mike, but he just went over to check on the shelter. He’ll probably be coming back in a minute.

GEORGE
What did I tell you? Now’s our chance to get upstairs.

TRAVIS
Do it quick. You look like you’re stoned out of your gourds. What have you been taking?

HOLLY
(Pulling out a small bag of crystal and waving it) Oh, a little addict candy.

TRAVIS
Is that what I think it is? Jesus, Holly, you don’t want to be caught with that in here.

GEORGE
You tell her—she won’t listen. Holly, put that crap away.

HOLLY
Relax, cowboy. Travis and I are friends from way back. Aren’t we, sweetie? Want some?

TRAVIS
No thanks, Holly. Just put it away. Let George and me get you up to your room.
HOLLY
I just want to do one more little hit.

*(HOLLY crosses to one of the tables, opens the bag and, taking a knife from her purse, begins to chop the pieces of crystal.)*

HOLLY
You going to give me back my pipe, Cowboy?

GEORGE
Guess not. You can have it in the morning.

HOLLY
*(Advancing towards him, knife in hand)* I want it now. *(A savage whisper)* Now!

GEORGE
I said no.

HOLLY
Hand it to me or you’ll be sorry.

GEORGE
You couldn’t hurt a fly with that thing. Put it away, you dumb bitch.

HOLLY
*(Raising the knife)* What did you call me?

TRAVIS
*(As he moves behind her)* Holly, that isn’t cool. Put it away.

GEORGE
You worthless piece of—

*(TRAVIS grabs her arm away from GEORGE. She spins around.)*

HOLLY, *Continued*
Are you crazy? What are you doing— Let go of my hand, you son of a— *(Rises knife)*

TRAVIS
Jamie, Jamie – It’s me, Travis. I’m your—

*(HOLLY stabs at TRAVIS who starts to sink to the floor.)*

HOLLY
*(As she stabs him)* I told you. Didn’t I? I – Oh, my God –
(As TRAVIS sinks to the floor, MIKE enters from the shelter, pushes HOLLY away and kneels by TRAVIS.)

MIKE
Jesus Christ – What’s happened here? Someone call 9-1-1.

HOLLY
(Dropping the knife) Oh, my God. Travis – Travis –

(MIKE attempts to cradle Travis.)

MIKE
Travis, can you hear me?

TRAVIS
Jamie? – Tell mama – (He dies.)

HOLLY
(Grabbing GEORGE, shaking him) Why is he lying there? (Running to MIKE) Who did that to him?

(Backing up, she takes a step towards GEORGE, then stops.)

HOLLY
Who did this? What happened to him? Who did this?

(BLACKOUT. END ACT TWO; SCENE ONE.)

ACT TWO; SCENE TWO

(AT RISE: Afternoon, two days later. MIKE enters, followed by DIANA and HATTIE. The women each carry a small, wheeled luggage carrier. The furniture has been rearranged to cover the place where TRAVIS died.)

HATTIE
Where’s all the tape?

MIKE
What?

HATTIE
The yellow tape—and why has the furniture been moved?
MIKE
Mr. Chalmers spoke with the mayor after he heard Holly had been taken into custody. They agreed the sooner we got back to normal, the better.

DIANA
Are you all right, Michael?

MIKE
I’m a little tired. I hurt – you know? I can’t push it away. Something’s gone from me.

DIANA
He was such a kind young man. Just yesterday, he told me—

HATTIE
Travis was our love. That’s what Holly stole from us this time.

MIKE
You’d better both go upstairs and get what you’ll need for the next few days.

DIANA
How long do you think we’ll be staying at the Clyde House?

MIKE
Until this place can be made ready again.

HATTIE
Made ready for what?

MIKE
Redone – Done over. You know. Mr. Chalmers is giving a briefing for all the staff and residents over at the apartments in a half hour. Don’t worry about towels and stuff. The Clyde has all that.

DIANA
I just need my shampoo and my face cream.

HATTIE
(Holding up her shopping bag) I got everything I need right here.

MIKE
Jesus, Hattie, did you leave anything for the Marriott’s other guests?

DIANA
I had to stand in front of her to block her from taking the maid’s cart.
HATTIE
Don’t be making up stories, Diana. Michael already knows I got my own cart in the basement.

DIANA
Where’s Ben – Why didn’t he ride back with us?

MIKE
Still downtown, I guess. He said he wanted to walk around a while. Under the circumstances, I didn’t feel I could refuse him. He have anything to say to you, Hattie?

HATTIE
Why would he say anything to me?

MIKE
I thought – never mind. Please just go and get what you need from your rooms.

(DIANA and HATTIE exit upstairs. MIKE crosses over to the desk as SCOTT enters.)

SCOTT
Haven’t they finished here, yet?

MIKE
Boy, am I glad to see you. I must have hit every red light on Kelleher Avenue. We just got back.

SCOTT
Likewise. The three of them have any concerns I should know about?

MIKE
There’s only Hattie and Diana. Ben didn’t come back with us. Where’s George?

Gone.

SCOTT
Gone where?

MIKE

SCOTT
Took off. At least that’s what it looks like. I drove him to the Marriott after he was questioned. We got to our room and he turned on the TV while I went to take a shower. When I came out, he was gone. Left his keys on the dresser and just took off. Probably getting good and soused somewhere.

MIKE
He have any money on him?
SCOTT
You don’t need money to get drunk, Mike.

MIKE
You think he might have gone back to Montana?

Could be. What does it matter?

SCOTT
Shit. He’s a material witness –

MIKE
His testimony isn’t important at this point. Everyone knows what happened.

But didn’t the cops say for him not to leave town?

SCOTT
You think George is gonna listen to the cops? He’ll do whatever comes into his head, just like any other junkie. They’re all like that – they can’t think for themselves and they won’t listen to people who can. They wouldn’t be in halfway houses if they used their brains. What the hell did Travis think he could do for Holly by coming downstairs last night? Sneak her up to her room – high as a kite – and nobody would find out about it?

MIKE
He was trying to protect her.

SCOTT
How? By getting himself killed—or by her being booked on a first degree murder charge?

MIKE
Nobody could have expected Holly to go off the way she did.

SCOTT
Why’s that – Because she and Travis were living here and going to AA meetings? What good is A.A. anyway? These people don’t want to stop drinking. All AA does is keep them in a holding pattern so they don’t crash into one another while they’re planning their next drunk.

MIKE
Damn it, Scott. Travis went to his meetings. He was making new friends. He came downstairs to help Holly. It was wrong, it was stupid, but it wasn’t because he wanted to get himself killed.
SCOTT
How do you know? Maybe he got tired of listening to his own bullshit and finally realized his life was going nowhere. What urgent reason did he have for going on living?

MIKE
Man, you need to back off from saying such shit. He’s dead, Scott. Travis is dead. For God’s sake –

SCOTT
For whose sake? God’s? God is somewhere down on Fourth Street, drunk out of his mind and lighting up with his angels. That’s why we’re stuck here cleaning up his mess for him. You don’t believe me? Read the Bible: ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ That’s why he’s turned his back on these people. The only time these moochers help themselves is when our backs are turned.

MIKE
A terrible thing happened here last night. You don’t need to make it worse. Why do you even work here if you feel that way?

SCOTT
It’s a job. It pays well. It doesn’t require me to be a hero, or somebody’s rescuer, like Travis was trying to be last night. Look, Mike – What happened last night goes on here all the time. Three years ago, the woman we chose to be poster-girl for our annual fund-raising campaign decided to go off her meds. Without telling anyone, of course. She decompensates, goes into the bathroom and slits her wrists. Her boyfriend finds her body and six months later does the same thing. A year before that, some pyromaniac nineteen-year-old set himself on fire in the basement.

MIKE
I never heard about any of this.

SCOTT
You bet you didn’t. There’s a lot you haven’t heard about. How do you think Safe Harbour has survived all these years? If you want a career working in this field, you better start learning who the people are you can trust and who’s going to protect your back. First thing Chalmers told me when I came here was, no matter what happens here, it’s your fault – Never the client’s. It’s never his fault he relapses, staggers out into the street and gets hit by a bus – Or takes last hit from a crack pipe and OD’s behind the shelter. Ever bother to read that sign up there on the wall?

MIKE
Which one?
SCOTT
‘Client’s rights.’ They’ve got all of them and we’ve got none. You know why that is? It’s because we have degrees. That’s how the state protects itself, by making sure everyone who works here has a bachelor’s degree, so we can prove we’re smarter than the junkies. Doesn’t matter what the degree is in, either – It so happens mine’s in Botany. I came to work here part-time while I was going for my Masters. I never took a course in any of this shit until after I was hired. I didn’t even know what a twelve-step program was. But I got a degree in something and that makes me smart.

MIKE
Maybe your truth doesn’t have to be mine. At least, I hope it doesn’t.

SCOTT
My truth is the only truth. Who do you think Chalmers has his eye on to take over here when I move across the street to head up the new programme? – Provided, of course, he thinks you can be trusted. This whole system would collapse if doctors couldn’t trust case workers, or if case workers didn’t protect psychiatrists. This is a small community. When someone tells you to do something, you don’t question it. You do it – just like in the army. You show your support for the person by trusting him and backing him up. What happened last night could have been a big problem for a lot of people, especially if some bubble-gum politician like Carraway got hold of it. You know why Chalmers is so respected in this community? It’s because he knows the law and the state regs—backwards and forwards. He also knows how to drive a Sherman Tank right down the middle of them. People come to him for advice all the time – Chalmers knows how to make problems go away. Six months from now, you say the words ‘Travis Moretti’ to Hattie or Diana and they’ll swear they don’t know who you’re talking about.

MIKE
What has any of this to do with what happened here last night?

SCOTT
Nothing – nothing at all –Simply do your job and do it by the book. You don’t ever want to forget that Chalmers is the man who wrote it.

DIANA
(Coming downstairs) Oh, Scott. I’m so glad you’re here. Hattie wanted me to ask you if someone will be able to take us to the service for Travis tomorrow night.

SCOTT
There isn’t going to be any. His mother wants a private funeral.

DIANA
But the paper said there would was to be a Funeral Mass –

SCOTT
There is, but it’s for family only.
DIANA
I didn’t know Travis had any family besides his mother. Does the office have her address?

SCOTT
What do you want that for?

DIANA
If there isn’t going to be a service, then I’d like to send her a card.

SCOTT
I don’t know that we’re allowed to give out that information.

DIANA
Please—?

SCOTT
I’ll see what I can do.

MIKE
I’m sorry, Diana. This is the first I heard about the plans being changed.

HATTIE
(Entering) What plans have been changed? Aren’t we going across the street?

MIKE
Travis’ mother has requested a private service.

DIANA
I guess she doesn’t want people like us showing up.

HATTIE
That’s not right. We were his real family. She’s just his people.

SCOTT
That may be, Hattie, but we have to respect her wishes.

HATTIE
And what about Travis’ wishes? He’ll be there tomorrow night and he’ll be waiting for us to say goodbye to him.

SCOTT
His family will do that. That’s what his mother wants.

HATTIE
His people don’t know how to do that. They only know how to mourn his life. We’re the ones who care about him enough to mourn his death.
SCOTT
Regardless, it’s his mother’s right to do as she wishes. If you don’t understand that, talk to Mr. Chalmers. But I’m telling you, he’s not going to be pleased if Travis’ mother complains. Now can you please get a move on? The briefing is in half an hour.

HATTIE
You got everything, Diana?

DIANA
If not, I can certainly borrow from you.

(HATTIE and DIANA exit.)

SCOTT
See what I mean? Such fucking arrogance. Each of them thinks she’s the chief mourner. That’s why Chalmers didn’t want either of them at the service.

MIKE
It was his decision?

SCOTT
What did I just finish telling you? Chalmers knows how to manage these things. It’s not very likely the media will cover Travis’ funeral, but who knows how either of those two ghouls would behave if they did see a camera, or a reporter? Why chance it?

MIKE
For Christ’s sake, Scott. They’re human beings. Why do you talk as if their wishes have no value?

SCOTT
Assuming they have feelings, they can get them out in private.

CHALMERS
(As he enters) Ah, here you are. Thank you both for all you’ve done today. I’m especially grateful to you, Michael, for being such a help to Scott and me.

MIKE
Thank you. I still find it all pretty hard to believe.

CHALMERS
As do I. It’s a great shock to the system to lose two members of our little family members so tragically. How are the others doing?

SCOTT
Hattie and Diana are acting as if they never heard that ‘shit happens.’ But they’ll come around in a few days, providing nobody indulges them.
MIKE
Do you mean me?

CHALMERS
I’m sure Scott is referring to the three of us. After all, excessive mourning can only lead to self-pity, don’t you agree? There’s a great difference between respecting a mother’s loss, and pulling her down into the pit of despair with you, as Hattie and Diana are trying to do.

MIKE
I don’t know. I’ve never gone through this before. The truth is, I’m finding it hard not to blame myself. If I hadn’t left and gone over to the shelter –

CHALMERS
Well, yes. There is that. Of course, I never questioned where you had gone, or why.

MIKE
Thank you.

CHALMERS
But I did have a problem getting the detectives to understand why you weren’t here.

MIKE
They didn’t believe me?

CHALMERS
They always have a lot of questions, Mike. You watch TV, you know how they work. The detectives I spoke to wanted to know, for instance, if I thought you’d taken off someplace and how long I thought you might have been gone. Naturally, I couldn’t say for certain, but I told them I believed you to be a totally honest person.

MIKE
I appreciate that.

CHALMERS
Trouble is, unfortunately, that you weren’t here to back up what George told them. Nobody knows much about George. That’s another problem. They did check with the Montana state police and found a felony theft conviction, plus a few arrests for assault and battery. That wouldn’t necessarily be a reason for George to lie, of course, but it doesn’t mean he was telling the whole truth, either. The police are mainly bothered because there was no sign of a struggle. The furniture wasn’t moved, nothing was broken. There were just three people in the room. The first kills the second and the third is a convicted felon who, as far as anyone knows, has apparently disappeared—and whose story can’t be corroborated. Obviously, Holly didn’t simply come into the house, walk up to Travis and stab him. While it may very well have happened the way George said, the detectives seem to believe there could be another possibility. You see, Travis and George were both residents, so neither of them would have
had any hold over Holly. But if someone else was present – someone with a measure of authority –

MIKE
You mean me? I told them the truth, Mr. Chalmers. Are they suggesting I lied?

CHALMERS
Michael, I’m simply telling you what they questioned me about this morning. The police are obligated to do as thorough a job as possible. They can’t overlook any possibilities. George’s disappearance knocks out his story and also weakens yours. That’s all I can tell you for the moment. I’m sorry, Mike.

MIKE
I wasn’t here when it happened. I was next door. I swear.

CHALMERS
Scott and I both believe you. By the way, did you put a note in the log book what time you left?

MIKE
I don’t remember.

CHALMERS
It’s easy enough to check. Where is it, then?

MIKE
The log book?

CHALMERS
Scott looked earlier and wasn’t able to find it. Perhaps you misplaced it. After all, you have been under considerable stress.

SCOTT
What if they ask about it?

CHALMERS
If they haven’t asked for it by now, they may not even know we keep a log book.

MIKE
Shouldn’t we mention it to them?

CHALMERS
As far as I’m concerned, cooperating with the police doesn’t mean doing their job for them. It you didn’t make an entry in the book, it will only make your position look worse.
MIKE
Worse? —How worse? Is there something they suspect I’m holding back?

CHALMERS
I’m not privy to their thinking, Michael, but I suspect they may want to question you again—or any of us, for that matter. They don’t seem satisfied that everything played out the way you and George say it did. However, if they do come back and question you, I want you to know Safe Harbour and I will stand behind you—as far as we are capable.

MIKE
Thank you. I’m grateful to have your support, but I—

CHALMERS
I’d like to continue this conversation with you, Michael, but it’s getting late and I still have that briefing to do—and you have to get the people from this house settled in across the street. Scott and I can finish up here and then we’ll join you. Try not to worry. These things never turn out to be as serious as they first appear.

MIKE
I hope you’re right.

CHALMERS
I’m pretty sure I am.

(MIKE exits.)

SCOTT
The poor bastard. You’ve just scared twenty-five years off his life.

CHALMERS
He deserves to lose every minute. What the hell made him go over to the shelter last night when he knew two residents were still not back in the house?

SCOTT
He didn’t know.

CHALMERS
You didn’t tell him during shift change?

SCOTT
I guess not.

CHALMERS
Nonsense. You knew Holly was out. Why didn’t you tell him?
SCOTT
I just told you. I must have forgotten.

CHALMERS
I’m not buying that – not for a minute. How could you have forgotten? When you first suggested bringing Holly into the programme, I warned you she could prove to be a real wild card and I specifically said not to let her out of your sight. How can you stand there and say you forgot to tell Michael she was out of the house?

SCOTT
Okay, okay. The truth is, Holly came to me and complained about having taken more than enough attitude from Hattie and Diana. She asked if I would mind her getting away for just an hour or two. She wanted to go shopping for baby clothes. I told her okay because I figured it was a better choice than having her stay and get into an argument with them.

CHALMERS
What about George? You knew he was gone, too, didn’t you?

SCOTT
Not at first. At the end of my shift, I went upstairs to do a room check. That’s when I knew. It never occurred to me that he might be with Holly. He’s not the kind of guy she’s attracted to.

CHALMERS
Apparently he is, though. How many times do I have to tell you? With this crow, attraction and desire have no chance against compulsion and obsession?

SCOTT
I just thought maybe he’d gone back out—

CHALMERS
Drinking, you mean?

SCOTT
You said yourself you didn’t expect him to make it. Neither did I. The residents despised him, especially Travis. They were always setting each other off. I’m surprised it wasn’t George who killed him. Jesus – do you think maybe it was?

CHALMERS
Who cares which of them killed Travis? Forget the ‘what if’s,’ Scott. The police have their suspect and that’s what matters. They may still have a question or two but nothing to keep the case from going to the District Attorney. The quicker that happens, the better it will be for Safe Harbour.

SCOTT
Do you still want me to contact Holly’s mother?
CHALMERS
No. The police will notify her of the arrest and the court will advise her when a public
defender is appointed. Of course, since Holly’s still a minor, her mother will still need to sign
any paperwork sent by Social Services.

SCOTT
Where does Social Services come into this? Even if Holly’s a minor, she still gets tried as an
adult.

CHALMERS
It’s to do with the child.

SCOTT
Her mother doesn’t want Holly’s baby. She only brought that suit to try and set Holly off.

CHALMERS
Well, she succeeded, didn’t she? But I agree with you. The court will throw the case out. That
isn’t the problem. It’s that, given the time Holly can expect to spend behind bars, she’s better
off giving the baby up for adoption. Unless, of course, you want him.

SCOTT
Me? Why would I want him?

CHALMERS
Don’t look so nervous, fella. Maybe he’ll grow up to look like his mother.

SCOTT
Boyce, that really isn’t funny.

CHALMERS
No, it isn’t. You and I are going to have to sit down and have a good long talk about this, one
of these days. In the meantime, where do things stand with the other residents?

SCOTT
No problems with any of them. George nearly jumped for joy when I told him I was taking
him to the bus station instead of to the Marriott. He was ready to crawl back to Montana. He
only had a couple of bucks on him, so I gave him another fifty to keep him good and drunk
until he’s back in Montana. Hattie and Diana are making noises about attending the funeral. I
told them his mother had requested a private service.

CHALMERS
Good. Has anyone heard from her?

SCOTT
Not to my knowledge. Hattie and Diana may still want to go, so you may need to put a scare
into them when you see them tonight.
CHALMERS
Well, we know how to do that, don’t we? What about Ben?

SCOTT
Mike said he was spending the day with his sponsor.

CHALMERS
That doesn’t surprise me. He and Travis were close, weren’t they? Considering everything that’s happened, maybe we should wait a while before sending him back to The Cottages.

BEN
(As he comes downstairs) That would be a good idea.

SCOTT
What the hell are you doing here? Why aren’t you with your sponsor?

BEN
He went to the ball game. I didn’t know he was a Red Sox fan or I would never have asked him to be my sponsor. What use is a man who roots for losers? Good afternoon Mr. Chalmers.

CHALMERS
Good afternoon, Ben. May I ask why you’re here?

BEN
I'm still trying to absorb what happened last night—and why. I find I can't really do that on my own. I thought it might help for the three of us to have a little chat.

CHALMERS
I understand. Travis’s death must be a great blow to you. I'm truly sorry.

BEN
Thank you. Before we go any further, I'd like to ask a favour. Do you mind if I call you Boyce, or would you rather call me Mr. Gold?

CHALMERS
However you prefer –

BEN
Ben and Boyce, then. Gold and Chalmers sounds like a television series. How are you keeping?

CHALMERS
I’m sure you understand—I feel Travis’ death as keenly as any of you.

BEN
Yes. Unfortunately, such things are to be expected in the lives of patriarchs.
CHALMERS

I don’t quite understand—

BEN

The last time you were here, you referred to me as the family patriarch.

CHALMERS

Did I? Then I guess we both are.

BEN

Yes – each in his own way. Like the two elderly men who came to sit Shiva with my wife and I when my son was murdered. My father was only seventy-three and in good health, but my wife’s father was in his nineties and partially blind. His hands shook from Parkinson’s. Only once that entire day did he speak to us. Softly, he whispered three words I now say to you. ‘I am diminished.’

SCOTT

I hate to break in, but we don’t have time for this right now. Mr. Chalmers is addressing the staff and the other residents in less than a half hour. What can we do for you, Ben?

BEN

Mr. Chalmers’ audience won’t mind if he’s a few minutes late.

SCOTT

For what? Can't this wait until later?

BEN

Patience, sonny, patience. Please. Speaking of which, did I ever tell either of you the story of Abie Cohen’s toothache?

SCOTT

What?

BEN

I guess I didn’t. It’s a wonderful lesson in patience. Would you like me to share it with you?

CHALMERS

(Motioning SCOTT to silence) Please do, if it isn’t too long – and you think it necessary.

BEN

Oh, it is – I assure you. The story goes like this: One day, Abie wakes up with a terrible toothache. The dentist tells him he has a mouth full of cavities and all his teeth must come out. Abie panics. ‘How much is it going to hurt?’ he asks. ‘Not at all,’ the dentist tells him. ‘Last month, your neighbor Louie Trinka had the same problem. I had to remove all his teeth
and replace them with a full set of uppers and lowers. He didn’t complain one bit. Ask him, if you don’t believe me’

Boyce, he’s playing with us.

Do you want to hear the rest of this or not?

I’m sure Ben has a point to make. Go right ahead, Ben.

Thank you. So Abie calls Louie. ‘Did it hurt?’ he asks. 'Let me tell you. First I come home and Bernice starts yelling, ‘ You spent how much—five thousand dollars for a mouth like yours? In that case, you can take me to Florida.’ You see where this is going, Mr. C?

Not exactly, but please continue.

‘So,’ says Louie, ‘Those new teeth cost me two first class tickets to Miami and a suite at the Fontainebleau Hotel. Finally, Bernice is happy. All day she lays on the beach, covered in sunscreen.’ Abie is ready to explode, ‘What about the teeth? Did they hurt?’ ‘I’m coming to that,’ says Louie. 'Three days later, I meet Harry Jacobs. We decide to rent a boat and go fishing.’ ‘Fuck the fish,’ Abie yells, ‘What about the teeth?’ ‘I’m coming to that. So, the next day, we’re out in the ocean, fishing for barracuda. Harry drops a line, I drop a line. Two minutes later, I get a pull on my line. I pull back. The barracuda pulls again. I pull back. Suddenly, the barracuda gives a mighty yank and pulls me right to the edge of the boat. My balls get caught in the oarlocks. Was the first time those goddamn teeth didn’t hurt.’

That’s a very funny story, Ben.

So why aren’t you laughing? Maybe I didn’t tell it right. Years ago, that story was good for three or four pints in any bar on Fourth Street.

If you’re finished with this horse shit, can I ask what the hell you’re doing here?

I’m packing.
CHALMERS
Are you leaving us, Ben?

BEN
Why would I do that?

SCOTT
Then what the hell are you doing? Where are you going?

BEN
Definitely not back to The Cottages, if that’s what you were hoping. Been there, done that. I would like to go someplace new. I thought I might enjoy moving into one of the apartments – but only if it has a view of the park – Otherwise, I can wait until you move someone out.

SCOTT
You expect us to throw someone out, just like that, so you can take their apartment?

BEN
Why not? You’ve done it before. Nothing fancy – just a place for me and my little dog.

CHALMERS
Sorry to disappoint you, Ben, but even if an apartment was available, we don’t allow pets.

BEN
So? You’ll make an exception –

SCOTT
Why the hell are we standing here, listening to this, Boyce?

CHALMERS
I believe Ben has something on his mind that has nothing to do with an apartment. Please continue.

BEN
Exercise – That's what I have on my mind, and that's why you’ll allow me to have a little dog. You see, although the furnishings are pretty drab, the apartments are well-suited for a younger man who only wants to play video games and get laid. A person my age requires a less aggressive – shall we say more compassionate? – form of exercise. Walking a little puppy through the park a couple of times a day, who knows? One day, even I might be able to indulge in more strenuous activities. (His tone changes) Of course, I wouldn’t need a dog at all if the cardio-vascular machines that were in last year’s budget had shown up in the rec room like they were supposed to. There’s no doubt the machines were purchased. They just never showed up, that’s all. Nor were they reported stolen.

CHALMERS
Are you making an accusation of some sort, Ben?
BEN
Not exactly. They were probably just delivered to another address. At least, that’s what Oscar Carraway thinks.

SCOTT
Oscar Carraway? You know him?

BEN
We do lunch occasionally. Mr. Carraway has a keen interest in Safe Harbour’s programmes, which he’s often expressed to me on occasion.

SCOTT
Since when – how long have you been meeting with him?

CHALMERS
If Oscar Carraway is all that interested in what we do here, I’m surprised he’s never felt the need to pick up the phone and speak to me directly. No reflection on you, Ben, but I’m certain I’d be equally interesting as a luncheon partner.

BEN
Oscar’s a cautious man when it comes to socializing with people who do business with the state.

CHALMERS
Would you care to be more specific, Ben?

BEN
I don’t mind at all. Oscar is of the opinion that one can’t be too friendly with those he might be called to testify against.

SCOTT
You make it sound as if Safe Harbour were under investigation. Just what have you told him?

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