

(PURPLE HEARTS)

(A play by)

(Jake Cline)

Jake Cline  
1217 SW 15th Terrace  
Miami, FL 33145  
954-471-9408  
jakecline@yahoo.com

## CHARACTERS

TOM	Big man; wearing a black suit and tie that are old but have rarely been worn; speaks with an Old Florida accent	50s
CARL	Tom's younger brother by two years; wearing a black suit that is old and out of fashion but not comically so; shares his brother's accent	50s
LAURA	Tom's daughter; wearing a stylish black dress	30s
TIMOTHY	Laura's younger brother; wearing a new black suit without a tie	30s
NICHOLAS	Tom and Carl's half-brother; wearing a newish but boring suit	20s
ASHLEY	Carl's daughter; wearing a black maternity dress	20s

**ACT ONE**

**SCENE 1**

Mid-morning in South Florida, 2010. A living room with a dark interior. The room is tidy but looks lived-in. Lights come up on TOM, CARL, LAURA and TIMOTHY watching a flat-screen television. TOM and CARL are sitting in armchairs -- one dark green, the other dark gray -- on opposite sides of the TV. LAURA and TIMOTHY are sitting between them on a beige sofa large enough to seat four people, with LAURA on the side closest to TOM. An end table and lamp sit on LAURA's side of the sofa. A floor lamp stands next to CARL's chair.

CARL

You hear about the tornadoes?

(TOM, eyes on the TV, doesn't respond.)

(CARL leans forward in his chair.)

CARL

Did you hear about the tornadoes?

(Annoyed, TOM takes a deep breath and exhales. CARL glances at TIMOTHY and LAURA and scoots forward on the chair so that he's nearly sitting on the edge of it.)

CARL

I'm sure you heard about the --

TOM

Tornadoes? The ones that have been all over the news? That killed all those people? Destroyed those homes? Left every place they touched down looking like Nagasaki? The ones that everyone but our father knows about? Those tornadoes? Are those the ones you mean?

(CARL looks to TIMOTHY and LAURA for help. LAURA shrugs. TIMOTHY grins. TOM resumes watching the TV. CARL settles back in his chair, defeated.)

CARL, TIMOTHY and LAURA turn  
back to the TV. Long pause.)

TOM

God, who watches this shit? Look at those people. You ever see anyone who looks like that? No one looks like that. With that hair. And those faces. I bet they're not even saying anything interesting. It's probably a blessing that we can't hear them. Idiots. (to TIMOTHY) Get up and change the channel, will you?

TIMOTHY

You change it. You're sitting right there.

TOM

(grouchily) This TV looks new.

TIMOTHY

So?

TOM

So I don't see any buttons on the damn thing. Do you see any buttons on this set?

TIMOTHY

Who still calls a TV a "set"?

TOM

I do. I just did.

LAURA

They're probably on the side of the TV.

TOM

Not over here they're not. (to CARL) You see any buttons on your side?

(CARL leans to his right and squints at the television. He walks over to the set and runs one hand up the side of it.)

CARL

None here.

(CARL walks over to inspect the side of the TV facing TOM.)

CARL

None here, either.

TOM

(gruffly) I can see that. That's why I said it.

(CARL shrugs and returns to his chair.)

TOM

(to TIMOTHY) I told you it was new.

TIMOTHY

Look at you experiencing new things at your age. Good for you, Dad. What's next? The personal computer?

TOM

Funny. (to LAURA) Your brother's funny.

LAURA

(to TOM) Do you want me to get up and ask Brenda for the remote?

CARL

Why did she take it with her, I wonder.

LAURA

(to TOM) Or maybe you want to ask her for it yourself?

TOM

I just want to turn this crap off, put on something else. Maybe even turn up the volume. I don't know how much longer I can sit here just listening to you breathe (*motions to TIMOTHY*) and him fidget (*points at CARL*). I've never wanted to get to a funeral so bad in my life.

TIMOTHY

(annoyed) Christ. I'll go ask her.

(TIMOTHY pushes himself up from the couch. As he's reaching his full height, a woman offstage lets out a long, sad moan.)

TIMOTHY

(sitting back down) Or not.

(The moaning escalates into a howl and then descends into sobbing. There's a pause, and the woman begins to moan again. The family tries to concentrate on the television. From his chair, TOM begins to look around the room.)

TIMOTHY

Why don't you just ask her where it is?

TOM

I thought it was clear that I wasn't gonna get up and ask her. You were gonna ask her before you turned chicken.

TIMOTHY

I don't mean the remote.

TOM

What then?

TIMOTHY

You know what.

TOM

(playing dumb) I don't.

TIMOTHY

(flatly) You do.

TOM

You think I'm going to ask her for that? I'm not going to ask her for anything.

LAURA

What about Uncle Carl?

TOM

What about him?

(CARL looks from TOM to LAURA  
and back to TOM.)

LAURA

Maybe he wants it.

TOM

No, he doesn't. (to CARL) Do you want it?

CARL

Well, I --

TOM

See. I told you. He doesn't want it.

LAURA

What if she won't give it to you?

TOM

She will. She won't have a choice.

LAURA

What the hell does that mean?

TOM

Nothing. Don't worry about it.

(The offstage moaning resumes.  
It's louder than before.)

TOM

Good God.

CARL

Should someone --

TOM

No!

(TOM shoots a warning look at  
LAURA and TIMOTHY. He doesn't  
want them to check on the  
woman, either.)

TOM

(looking at the TV) I wish we could hear this goddamn TV. Why would anyone make a TV without buttons? What's the point in that? How is that better? You know what the problem is? No one can ever leave well enough alone. We're always trying to fix what doesn't need to be fixed, just to make stupid, lazy people even more stupid and lazy. I'm tired of it. Just leave shit alone. (beat) Leave it alone.

(CARL moves forward in his  
chair as if he's about to say  
something. He opens his mouth,  
reconsiders and leans back.  
After a moment, he leans  
forward again.)

CARL

(to LAURA and TIMOTHY) Is Nicholas coming?

TIMOTHY

Brenda said he was.

CARL

Here?

TIMOTHY

That's what she said.

CARL

But here, right, not to the church?

TOM  
 (coldly) He said that she said that, didn't he?

CARL  
 Yeah, I just wanted --

TOM  
 You just wanted to hear yourself talk.

(pause)

CARL  
 (to LAURA and TIMOTHY) Brenda said Ashley is coming.

TOM  
 (flippantly) I can't wait to see that reunion. I'm sure it's gonna warm the heart.

LAURA  
 Dad, did you eat before you came here?

TOM  
 I had a little something.

LAURA  
 Enough to carry you through the service? It could be a long one.

TOM  
 If I get hungry, I'll leave.

LAURA  
 You can't leave.

TOM  
 I can do what I want.

LAURA  
 Yes, you can do what you want. But that doesn't mean you should.

CARL  
 (hopefully) Maybe Brenda will offer us something to eat. Did you see all those dishes covered in tinfoil there in the kitchen? People probably brought her all kinds of food. You know how they do when someone dies? Maybe there's a casserole.

(CARL glances to stage right and then back to the group. He leans toward LAURA and TIMOTHY and lowers his voice.)



CARL

Perhaps we can find something in the fridge. She's been in her room for quite a while. She'll probably be in there for a while still.

TIMOTHY

(comically raises his voice) Are you hungry, Uncle Carl?

(CARL flinches and looks offstage, in the direction of the moaning. He looks again at TIMOTHY.)

CARL

I can eat.

TOM

(sternly) No one's going through that refrigerator.

(LAURA stands.)

LAURA

How about I go put on some coffee? Would anyone like some coffee?

TOM

No. Sit down.

LAURA

(smiling) Oh, are you speaking for everyone?

TOM

I am.

TIMOTHY

He's not speaking for me. (brightly) I'd like some coffee.

TOM

You don't drink coffee.

TIMOTHY

Sure I do.

TOM

Since when?

TIMOTHY

Since forever.

TOM

Since bullshit.

LAURA

Uncle Carl, want some coffee?

CARL

Yeah, that --

TOM

Stay here. You're not going in that kitchen.

LAURA

And you're not telling me what to do.

TOM

You always were your mother's daughter.

LAURA

Thank God for that. I had to get my brains and good looks from someone.

(TOM reaches for LAURA's hand, which she gives him. After a moment, LAURA squeezes TOM's hand and lets it go. CARL fidgets in his chair.)

LAURA

I'll be in the kitchen.

(LAURA motions for TIMOTHY to follow her into the kitchen, but like TOM and CARL, he has returned to watching the TV and is oblivious to his sister's signals. LAURA, looking frustrated, continues her attempt to get TIMOTHY to notice her. Finally, he looks up and sees her, and with understanding dawning on his face, he rises from the sofa.)

TIMOTHY

I think I'll go with you. I'm sure these two have some catching up to do.

(TOM glares at TIMOTHY. CARL perks up and looks at his brother. LAURA and TIMOTHY cross the stage and enter the kitchen.)

(The moaning and crying offstage start afresh.)

## SCENE 2

TIMOTHY is sitting at the kitchen table. LAURA is at the counter scooping ground coffee into a coffeemaker.

TIMOTHY  
Seriously, do you think one of us should go check on her?

LAURA  
No, let her put on her show. She knows we can hear her.

TIMOTHY  
She does seem pretty sad.

LAURA  
Oh, she's grieving. But come on, we all know that she can be a bit over-the-top. You know how many times she called to tell me, "This is it. Your Granddad probably won't last another day, so you better get up here as soon as possible to tell him goodbye"?

TIMOTHY  
They weren't exactly false alarms. He was sick. And he *is* dead.

LAURA  
Twice I got here only to find out that he had a cold, and I'm pretty sure one of those times it was just the sniffles. Another time, all he had was a minor case of diarrhea. I should have charged her mileage for that trip.

TIMOTHY  
He had cancer.

LAURA  
On his tongue!

TIMOTHY  
It was still cancer. And it still killed him.

LAURA  
(sighing) The stroke killed him. The cancer only kept him from pretending to speak in tongues or whatever it is they do at Brenda's church.

TIMOTHY  
Remember how she was always trying to get us to go to Mass with her?

LAURA  
They don't call it Mass. That's the Catholics.

TIMOTHY

What do they call it then?

LAURA

I don't know. "Service"?

TIMOTHY

Were you there that time she told me about all the pretty girls at her church, and how any one of them would treat me better than the girls I was used to dating?

LAURA

(smiling) Yeah, I was there. But you know, she wasn't wrong.

TIMOTHY

Oh, I don't know. I got treated pretty well back then.

LAURA

You're disgusting.

TIMOTHY

I still can't understand why she wanted us to meet here before the funeral. Especially if all she planned to do was hide out in her room.

LAURA

I told you. Granddad wanted us to spend the day together. He really wanted to unite the family. It was his dying wish.

TIMOTHY

How do you know that? You weren't here when he died.

LAURA

I was closer to here than you were. But OK, maybe it wasn't his *dying* wish, but he told me it was what he wanted on my last visit with him before the stroke. We talked a lot that day. About his life, his work, his time in the war, (beat) family.

TIMOTHY

Family? Really? He shared his thoughts on family with you? On *this* family?

LAURA

Yeah, to some extent. I mean, he didn't apologize for anything, but I could tell that he wanted to.

TIMOTHY

Like that man was capable of apologizing.

LAURA

Oh, and you are?

TIMOTHY

Hey, I'm always apologizing for something.

LAURA

No, you're always trying to talk your way out of something.

TIMOTHY

Same difference.

LAURA

Look, I think he felt bad that he wasn't more of a grandfather to us when we were little. You know, he always asked about you. What you were doing, what you were like, if you were happy.

TIMOTHY

He could have asked me himself. He could have picked up a phone.

LAURA

He wasn't like that. Reaching out wasn't his thing. And you're one to talk. You never pick up your phone. Do you know how hard it is to get in touch with you? It's like you don't even exist sometimes. You don't have an email address. You don't do Facebook. You don't text. The Amish are easier to reach than you are.

TIMOTHY

(defensively) I text. I texted you the other day.

LAURA

From Dad's phone!

TIMOTHY

It still counts. It was still a text.

LAURA

Yeah, and do you remember what you texted me? "Call me on Dad's phone."

TIMOTHY

Right!

LAURA

Whatever. Listen, my point is that you could have called Granddad if you'd wanted to. You could have come down here and visited him.

TIMOTHY

It wasn't my job to show him how to be a grandfather. And I'm here now.

(pause)

TIMOTHY

This funeral is going to be weird.

LAURA

All funerals are weird.

TIMOTHY

I guess. It just feels strange, all of us being together again in the same house. In this house.

LAURA

Like I said, it's what Granddad wanted.

TIMOTHY

He wanted a lot for a guy who was dying. I think this was just his idea of a joke. He knew what he was doing. The old man's ghost is probably hovering over this house right now and laughing his dead white ass off.

LAURA

I think the problem is that you only remember him one way.

TIMOTHY

I remember him being a drunk and a hothead. And a cheapskate. Remember the presents he and Brenda gave us that Christmas, the one and only Christmas they ever gave us anything? Do you remember how lame those gifts were?

LAURA

(laughing) Yeah, I got a box of crayons when I was, like, 13.

TIMOTHY

And I got the coloring book that went with it, a book about butterflies. What did I want with a book about butterflies? They may as well have not given us anything for all the thought they put into those gifts. Hell, I would have rather they'd given me actual butterflies. At least that would have suggested some effort on their part.

(LAURA smiles.)

TIMOTHY

What's so funny?

LAURA

I'm trying to picture Granddad out in a field catching butterflies.

TIMOTHY

Like what, with a net?

LAURA

Yeah.

TIMOTHY

He wouldn't use a net. He'd use a shotgun.

LAURA

Yeah, well, anyway. Their gifts sucked, for sure, but I'm guessing Brenda bought them. Granddad never went into any store that didn't have the word "hardware" attached to it.

TIMOTHY

Or "liquor."

LAURA

That was before.

TIMOTHY

I just hope he didn't totally cheap out on his casket and opt to be buried in a cardboard box or something.

LAURA

That wouldn't be good. It's supposed to rain today.

(The coffee is ready, and LAURA pulls two mugs down from the cupboard and pours coffee for herself and TIMOTHY. She carries the mugs to the table and places one in front of TIMOTHY and the other in front of the chair opposite him. She sits.)

(In the living room, TOM can be seen whispering a request to CARL, who nods in agreement. The men stand and begin to walk across the room in opposite directions. CARL stops in front of a table covered with framed pictures and stacked with paperbacks. He picks the frames up one by one and turns them over and around. TOM moves toward a bookcase and begins removing books from the shelves. He flips through them and shakes them open. All the while, the men keep looking over their shoulders toward the kitchen and toward BRENDA's room. LAURA and TIMOTHY continue talking, oblivious to the goings-on in the living room.)

TIMOTHY

What do you want done with your body after you die? Do you want to be buried or cremated?

LAURA

Die? Oh, I don't plan to die. I'm going to live forever. Why would I want to give up all this happiness?

TIMOTHY

Well, you don't really have a say in the matter, do you?

LAURA

We'll see.

TIMOTHY

You know what I want?

LAURA

I'm afraid to ask.

TIMOTHY

Have you ever heard of a Viking funeral?

LAURA

A Viking funeral? Please tell me that's not some vile thing you saw on the internet.

TIMOTHY

That's funny. A minute ago, you were all but accusing me of never having been online, and now you think I watch Norwegian porn. No, a Viking funeral is where they lay your body on a boat, set it on fire and send it out to sea.

LAURA

(sarcastically) Fun.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, except I don't want mine to be on a boat. I want to be on a surfboard.

LAURA

Oh, dear God.

TIMOTHY

What? You won't do that for me? Your own little brother?

LAURA

Put you on a surfboard and light it on fire in the ocean?

TIMOTHY

You can strap me onto the board with the leash. The fire will stay lit if the water is calm and you don't splash around too much.



LAURA

How about I just feed you to some sharks? Would that make you happy?

TIMOTHY

It would, actually, but only if there's anything left of me after the Viking funeral.

(TOM crouches down and opens the bookcase's bottom doors. He begins pulling out books and flipping through them. CARL is opening and closing the drawers of an armoire.)

LAURA

Are you dying?

TIMOTHY

No, I'm not dying. At least I don't think I am.

LAURA

Good. Then let's worry about getting through today's family funeral before we start planning your Big Kahuna sendoff, OK?

TIMOTHY

Fine, but if I go, you'd better do this for me.

LAURA

Draw up a will, and we'll see. Just don't leave me any of your shit, please. I'm trying to lighten my load.

(In the living room, we see TOM return books to the bookcase. He closes the door a bit too hard. LAURA looks toward the direction of the sound and waits to hear if it will be repeated. She turns back to TIMOTHY, and their conversation resumes.)

TIMOTHY

Should we bring the two princes some coffee?

LAURA

We should, but they can wait. Let's leave them out there to chat for a while longer.

TIMOTHY

"Chat"?

LAURA

I was kidding.

(pause)

TIMOTHY

Do you think Granddad kept any photos of our grandmother? Or of Marjorie? Do you think Brenda would even have let him?

LAURA

Of our grandmother, not a chance. Of Marjorie, probably not. They weren't married but a few years. Besides, she was kind of hard to look at.

TIMOTHY

Damn, sis.

LAURA

That came out wrong. I don't mean that she was ugly. I guess she was all-right-looking. She was just so kind of ... not there. Nonexistent.

TIMOTHY

You don't know that. She died before we were born.

LAURA

Mom told me.

TIMOTHY

Mom said all that about her? That doesn't sound like Mom. Mom liked everyone.

LAURA

Mom said she was boring.

TIMOTHY

Boring? I thought she was an alcoholic like Granddad.

LAURA

She was, though Mom said she was more of a quiet drunk.

TIMOTHY

Which Granddad wasn't.

LAURA

Which Granddad certainly was not.

(TOM looks at CARL and points to the sofa. CARL nods, approaches the sofa and begins lifting the cushions and looking under them.)

TIMOTHY

All I really know about Marjorie is the way she died.

LAURA

Kind of funny, right?

TIMOTHY

Maybe to us. I'm sure it wasn't funny to her, dying in the middle of a Waffle House, of all places. And Granddad thinking she was choking on some food, not looking up from his plate and telling her to put her arms above her head, which she does even though she knows she's not choking and is probably having a heart attack.

(TIMOTHY pantomimes choking. He raises both arms above his head and then drops his right hand over his heart, leaving his left arm in the air. He raises his right arm over his head again and then drops his hand back to his heart, repeating the action several times, and faster each time.)

TIMOTHY

And then, she dies, right there in the booth and creates a vacancy in the family.

LAURA

(laughing) Are we bad people?

TIMOTHY

(shrugging) Yeah. Sometimes.

(CARL lowers the final cushion to the sofa, looks at TOM and shakes his head.)

TIMOTHY

Did he ever talk about our grandmother?

LAURA

Who, Granddad?

TIMOTHY

Yeah. Did he ever mention her to you?

LAURA

No, but I brought her up when we were talking that day. I tried to get him to talk about her running off to Alabama with Uncle Carl and leaving Dad behind. I wanted to know what really happened. Why she left. Why Dad stayed. Why Granddad didn't go to Alabama and bring her and Carl back.

I think I pushed him a little too hard, because he just got real quiet and waited for me to change the subject.

TIMOTHY

That must have been some shit, his wife leaving like that.

LAURA

(shrugs) I think she did what she had to do. Or what she thought she had to do.

TIMOTHY

She didn't have to leave Dad behind. Why didn't she take him with her?

LAURA

I have no idea, and she's not around to answer that question, is she?

TIMOTHY

And now neither is Granddad.

LAURA

No. But you know, I think he really regretted all that, what happened, what kind of father he'd been to Dad and Uncle Carl. I think it really tore him up inside. You could tell.

TIMOTHY

I couldn't tell.

LAURA

You weren't around. I was. I really do believe he changed into a different person, or at least hoped he had. I don't think those two would be sitting out there in his living room right now if he hadn't showed some evolution, some sense of remorse.

TIMOTHY

I wouldn't be so sure about that. They haven't even forgiven each other. You think they forgive him?

LAURA

I think they want to forgive him.

TIMOTHY

That's not the same thing.

(TOM moves toward stage left and asks CARL to follow him with a wave of his hand. CARL refuses, and the two begin to quietly argue. CARL returns to his armchair. TOM, fuming, exits the stage.)

The audience hears the sound of a bedroom door creaking open. CARL, worried, turns in his chair and faces the kitchen and then BRENDA's room. He gets up and scurries to the armoire. He opens a drawer and removes a small blue object and quickly shoves it in a pocket of his jacket. He hurries back to his chair and sits. LAURA and TIMOTHY look toward the living room. After a moment, they continue their conversation.)

TIMOTHY

What was Brenda like when you would come up here to see Granddad? [*cocks his head toward her room*] Like this?

LAURA

She's a drama queen, that's for sure. But no, not like this. I don't know. She was all right. Mostly. But she carried on as if she took Granddad's illness as some kind of personal insult. Like, "How could he do this to me?" She asked me that several times. [*imitates Brenda's voice*] "How could he do this to me? After all I've done for him?"

TIMOTHY

She did get him sober, started him on that evolution you mentioned.

LAURA

She did do that. I have to give her credit. It couldn't have been easy getting him to give up alcohol after a lifetime of soaking in it.

TIMOTHY

What do you think Granddad saw in her? She's the same age as Dad, for Chrissakes.

(LAURA gives TIMOTHY a pitying look.)

TIMOTHY

Right. Stupid question.

LAURA

It wasn't just that, although it may be what initially attracted him to her. Who knows? He was a man, after all. But he did love her, you know. A lot, I think.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, I guess.

LAURA

No, he did. He was always very gentle with her, respectful, deferential. It made him happy just to talk about her. And Nicholas --

TIMOTHY

(smirking) Uncle Nicholas.

LAURA

I've never called him that. And Granddad never referred to him as our uncle, even though he technically is.

TIMOTHY

God, remember how weird it was when we were little to have an uncle who is younger than us? I used to tell people that he was my cousin. It was so embarrassing.

LAURA

Why was it embarrassing?

TIMOTHY

I don't know. It just was. You know the kind of stupid shit that bugs you when you're a kid. At least we didn't go to the same school. That would have been awful.

LAURA

What was Granddad supposed to do? I'm assuming Brenda wanted kids, a family. Granddad loved her, so he gave her what she wanted. I'm sure it's what he wanted, too. At least he got it right this time and didn't screw the guy up like he did with those two out there.

TIMOTHY

No?

LAURA

No, he didn't. Nicholas turned out all right, even better than all right.

TIMOTHY

I remember liking him. He was quiet, but we got along pretty well. I haven't seen him in forever, though.

LAURA

You haven't seen any of us in forever. But you'll still like him. He married a woman who already had a little boy. He dotes on that kid something fierce.

TIMOTHY

Is she older than him?

LAURA

His wife? They're about the same age.

TIMOTHY

What's he do? Did he grow up and become a landscaper like the rest of the men in this family?

LAURA

(shaking her head) Boy, when you moved away, you really moved away, huh? You'd think the Outer Banks were on the moon for all the distance you put between yourself and this family. What the hell was keeping you up there, anyway?

TIMOTHY

The beaches. The surfing. A girl. And another girl.

LAURA

(with sarcasm) I'm so happy to see you making the most of your life.

(TIMOTHY shrugs and drinks his coffee.)

TIMOTHY

Do you think Mom would be disappointed in me?

LAURA

(feeling bad about her previous remark) No. Mom wouldn't be disappointed in you. (beat) I'm not either.

(TIMOTHY nods and attempts a smile. Meanwhile, TOM returns to the living room empty-handed. He says something to CARL, who answers with a shake of his head. TOM stands behind the sofa with his hands on his hips and looks around the room for something he might have missed.)

TIMOTHY

How are you holding up?

LAURA

I'm fine. It's not like we didn't see this coming.

TIMOTHY

I don't mean about Granddad. I mean about you and Daryl.

LAURA

Oh, that. Right now, there is no me and Daryl. I'm not sure if there ever will be again.

TIMOTHY

It's that bad.

LAURA

It's that over. At least I think it is. Know any good lawyers?

TIMOTHY

(grinning) I know a few. I don't know that I'd call them good, though.

LAURA

I've been thinking about moving. Not just because of what's going on between Daryl and me. I've gotten tired of living in the Keys. It can get pretty boring down there if you don't fish or do drugs.

TIMOTHY

It sounds like paradise.

LAURA

You're not still --

TIMOTHY

Nah. I gave all that up. Most of it, anyway.

(pause)

TIMOTHY

She's stopped crying.

LAURA

She'll start up again.

TIMOTHY

God, if she carries on like this for just the four of us, how do you think she's going to act during the funeral?

LAURA

Like she's roasting her ass on a funeral pyre.

TIMOTHY

(worriedly) They don't do that at her church, do they?

(LAURA spits out her coffee and laughs.)

LAURA

(wiping her chin) No, they don't burn dead husbands and their widows at Brenda's church. That's funny. You should have seen your face.

(TOM crosses the living room and enters the kitchen.)

TOM

Don't mind me.



LAURA

Have we ever?

TOM

Once upon a time you did. When you were little. Or maybe I just dreamed that I had nice, respectful kids.

LAURA

The coffee's ready if you want some.

TOM

I'm good.

LAURA

Suit yourself.

(TOM opens a cupboard above the kitchen counter and begins pushing things aside. He closes the cupboard door and opens the one next to it.)

LAURA

What are you doing?

TOM

I told you not to mind me.

LAURA

It's a little hard to ignore you right now.

(TOM moves on to the next cupboard door.)

LAURA

Unbelievable.

TOM

You're minding me.

(LAURA and TIMOTHY watch as TOM searches the cupboards, the area beneath the sink and, finally, the refrigerator.)

LAURA

Do you really think she hid it in the refrigerator?

TOM

I don't know where she hid it. If I did, I'd have gone right to it, wouldn't I?

TIMOTHY

So you're just going to turn her house upside-down?

TOM

This used to be my house.

LAURA

This was Granddad's house. And now it's Brenda's.

TOM

It's mine as much as hers. I spent the first 18 years of my life sleeping and shitting in this house.

LAURA

Thank you for that image.

TIMOTHY

What is Uncle Carl doing?

TOM

How should I know? You think I can see through walls?

TIMOTHY

And to think this day is just beginning.

LAURA

Has Brenda left her room?

TOM

No. She's still in there snuggling with that remote control.

LAURA

Do you want to sit down with us? Have some coffee?

TOM

I told you, I'm good.

(TOM exits.)

TIMOTHY

God, he can be so weird sometimes.

LAURA

Ah, you know Dad. He's never been good in situations like this. He operates best when he only has one emotion to deal with. You know, when he's angry, he's angry. When he's sad, he's sad. But when he's angry *and* sad?

TIMOTHY

He's toxic.

(pause)

LAURA

We should go out there and survey the damage. I don't want Brenda to come out of her room and find Dad going through her stuff.

(Just as they stand up from the table, a key turns in the door that leads from the kitchen to the outside walkway. The door opens and NICHOLAS enters.)

NICHOLAS  
Hello, Laura. Timothy.

TIMOTHY  
Hey, man. How ya doing?

NICHOLAS  
I'm OK. You?

LAURA  
Hi, Nicholas.

(LAURA crosses the kitchen and hugs NICHOLAS.)

NICHOLAS  
Is your dad here?

TIMOTHY  
He's in the living room with Uncle Carl. They're having a cold-shoulder contest.

(NICHOLAS gives TIMOTHY a puzzled look.)

LAURA  
They're fine. Timothy's just making a joke.

TIMOTHY  
Not really.

NICHOLAS  
(to LAURA) Where's my mom?

LAURA  
She's in her bedroom. She's been in there for a long time. You may want to --

NICHOLAS  
Oh. Still?

LAURA  
I'm afraid so.

NICHOLAS  
Is that coffee fresh?

TIMOTHY

It sure is.

(TIMOTHY opens the cupboard,  
removes a mug and pours a cup  
for NICHOLAS.)

NICHOLAS

Thank you.

LAURA

How's Emily?

NICHOLAS

She's OK. At home with Jonathan. He's got a bug, something he  
picked up at school. You know how that is, with little kids.

TIMOTHY

Schools are fucking germ factories.

NICHOLAS

(blanching at the profanity) They can be.

LAURA

So we won't be seeing them today?

NICHOLAS

Unfortunately, no. It's probably for the best. We don't think  
Jonathan's old enough for a funeral. The idea of death and  
all that.

TIMOTHY

How old is he?

NICHOLAS

He's 6.

TIMOTHY

He's never lost a pet? A hamster or anything?

NICHOLAS

He had a goldfish we won at the church carnival. It didn't  
live long, maybe about a month. He caught Emily dropping it  
into the toilet, and cried about it for a week.

TIMOTHY

It's a good thing he's not coming today. Poor kid would have  
spent the whole day worrying that we were going to flush  
Granddad.

(LAURA laughs and shakes her  
head. NICHOLAS looks  
uncomfortable.)

NICHOLAS

I guess I should go say hello to your dad and Carl.

TIMOTHY

I wouldn't rush in there. How long has it been since you've seen them?

NICHOLAS

I saw Tom last month. Carl, I don't remember. It's been a good while.

LAURA

(incredulous) Hold on. You saw my dad last month?

NICHOLAS

Yeah, Tom. Your dad.

LAURA

Where?

NICHOLAS

Here at the house. He came over to talk to Mom and Dad about something.

LAURA

What about?

NICHOLAS

I don't know. They wouldn't tell me. It was a Saturday morning, and I stopped in to check on Dad. Mom had called me the night before to tell me that he'd been throwing up. But when I got here, Tom was taking off in his truck. He wouldn't even look at me.

TIMOTHY

There's a surprise.

NICHOLAS

When I got inside, Mom was standing at the sink washing dishes and not saying anything. Dad was just sitting at the table worrying his fingers with his thumb. You know how he always did?

(NICHOLAS holds his right hand up to LAURA and TIMOTHY and rubs his thumb along the underside of his index and middle fingers.)

LAURA

Shit. [to TIMOTHY] So he did ask them for it.

NICHOLAS

(looking worried) Ask them for what? What happened? Do you know why they were arguing? They wouldn't tell me.

(LAURA stands and walks toward the counter. She sets her mug in the sink and faces NICHOLAS.)

LAURA

It was about the Purple Heart. It had to have been.

NICHOLAS

The Purple Heart?

LAURA

Granddad's Purple Heart. The one he got in the war, after he got shot on that ridge in Korea. You know, the one he kept out there in the living room.

NICHOLAS

Yeah, of course I know it. I grew up looking at that medal.

LAURA

Dad wants it. He's obsessed with it. It's all he's been talking about. He must not have believed Granddad would leave it to him in his will.

NICHOLAS

There's no will that I know of.

LAURA

I'm not surprised. Granddad never had much use for lawyers. (beat) I guess when Dad asked him for the medal, he didn't ask nicely.

TIMOTHY

I know what happened.

LAURA

You do? How do you know about it?

TIMOTHY

Dad told me about it the other day. He said that he asked Granddad for the medal, but before the old man -- [to NICHOLAS] sorry, your father, Granddad -- before Granddad could answer, your mom got upset and told Dad that she couldn't believe he had the nerve to ask Granddad for the Purple Heart while the man was still drawing breath right there in front of him.

(TOM enters the kitchen from the entryway on stage left.)

TOM

(loudly) I sure as hell didn't see any point in waiting until after he died to ask him for it. I guess I was right about that. I guess I was wrong, too, when you think about it.

(NICHOLAS, TIMOTHY and LAURA stare at TOM as he moves farther into the kitchen and stops just to stage left of LAURA. NICHOLAS makes to approach TOM and offer him his hand.)

NICHOLAS

Tom --

TOM

(ignoring the hand) Where's the medal, Nicholas? It ain't out there in the display case where it's always been. You move it?

NICHOLAS

I ... I don't ... I don't --

TOM

You don't what? Know where she hid it? Is it here in the kitchen? I looked through these cupboards already, but maybe I should look again. I'm sure you and your mother put a lot of thought into where you should hide it.

(TOM opens a cupboard door and begins moving around boxes of food.)

LAURA

(sharply) Dad.

(TOM holds his left index finger in the air to silence LAURA but doesn't look at her. He moves to stage right and opens the next cupboard.)

TOM

Where'd she hide it, boy?

TIMOTHY

(reproachfully) Dad. He's your brother. Same as Uncle Carl.

(TOM slams shut the cupboard door.)

TOM

Not the same! Not even close. Not even in the same country.  
Not even in the same goddamn universe.

TIMOTHY

Oh, so you and Uncle Carl are feeling like brothers again?

(TOM sneers at TIMOTHY.)

LAURA

Dad. Come on. Remember why we're here.

TOM

Remember? [louder] Remember? How could I not remember?

NICHOLAS

(to LAURA and TIMOTHY) I'm going to go check on my mom.

TOM

Tell her I enjoyed the show. She should get an award for that performance.

(NICHOLAS looks at TOM, starts to say something, thinks better of it and exits.)

LAURA

Maybe you should go outside, walk around, get some fresh air.

TOM

Yeah, maybe in a minute.

(CARL enters from stage left. He seems oblivious to the tension in the room. He walks past TOM, LAURA and TIMOTHY and stops at the coffeemaker. He lifts the pot, sees that it's empty, sighs and sets it down again. He runs his left hand through his hair and faces the group. None of them looks ashamed for not saving him any coffee.)

(Long pause.)

(CARL looks out the kitchen window.)



CARL

Ashley just pulled up.

(In a moment, there's a knock at the front door. LAURA goes to answer it, and she can be heard exchanging hellos with ASHLEY. CARL can be seen nervously waiting in the kitchen. LAURA and ASHLEY enter.)

TIMOTHY

Hi, cousin.

TOM

Hey, little girl. Look at you all blowed up.

ASHLEY

Hello, Timothy. Uncle Tommy. How are ya?

(TIMOTHY and TOM take turns hugging ASHLEY. TIMOTHY steps back and takes in ASHLEY's pregnant belly.)

TIMOTHY

Wow. All right. How far along?

ASHLEY

Seven months.

LAURA

Congratulations. Are you feeling good? You look good.

ASHLEY

I'm fine. I've been here before.

LAURA

Do you know what you're having?

ASHLEY

I don't know. I figured I'd allow myself a surprise for a change. My husband wants to know, it being his first and all, but I didn't let the doctor tell him. He's not too good at keeping secrets. [shrugs] Still, it can only be one or the other, right?

TIMOTHY

In this family, you should be hoping for a girl.

LAURA

I'm sure she's just hoping for a healthy baby.

(CARL, who has been hanging back, crosses the kitchen and stops in front of ASHLEY. They don't hug.)

ASHLEY

(flatly) Carl.

CARL

So you're married again? When did that happen?

ASHLEY

(with obvious insincerity) Oh, did you not get your invitation to my wedding? I must have forgotten to put a stamp on the envelope. I hate when I do that. I'm so sorry.

CARL

Where is he?

ASHLEY

Who?

CARL

This new husband of yours.

ASHLEY

He ain't that new.

CARL

He's new to me.

ASHLEY

He ain't nothing to you.

(CARL, looking mildly insulted, says nothing.)

ASHLEY

(mostly to LAURA and TIMOTHY) He had to work. His boss at the shop -- Kevin's a mechanic -- told him if he took the day off he wouldn't get paid, and we can't afford that right now. (shrugs) It's all right. It's not his grandfather who died. He couldn't hardly understand why I was coming here, either, seeing as I didn't really know the man. I don't think I've ever even been in this house.

CARL

You were here when you were a baby. Your mom and I brought you to see him not long after you were born.

Yeah?

ASHLEY

Yeah. And you screamed your head off the whole time. You sounded like a demon. He wouldn't hold you. Shit, he barely even looked at you.

CARL

Mom said he was hard.

ASHLEY

He was an asshole.

CARL

She said that, too.

ASHLEY

(beat)

CARL

Where are the others?

ASHLEY

Others?

CARL

The kids. Where are your kids?

ASHLEY

So you want to see them all of a sudden?

CARL

I'm just askin', is all.

(ASHLEY studies CARL as if considering her answer. Finally, she shrugs.)

ASHLEY

They're at home with Mom.

CARL

Your mom, she's good?

ASHLEY

She's Mom.

CARL

You'll tell her I said hello?

ASHLEY

I won't.

CARL  
 (dejectedly) OK.

TOM  
 (to TIMOTHY and LAURA) I told you this would be good.

LAURA  
 Shh.

TOM  
 Don't you shush me.

LAURA  
 Normally, I wouldn't have to. You usually just shush yourself.

TOM  
 Ha, ha.

(awkward pause)

CARL  
 Are you taking care of yourself? (the question should be uttered in a way to suggest that ASHLEY has a history of self-abuse or unhealthy living)

ASHLEY  
 You care?

CARL  
 I do if you're pregnant with my grandchild.

ASHLEY  
 Ha. Your grandchild. That's funny.

CARL  
 Funny? Why's it funny?

ASHLEY  
 You don't even know how many you have.

CARL  
 How many I have of what?

ASHLEY  
 Grandchildren.

CARL  
 I do so know how many grandkids I have.

(ASHLEY folds her arms and waits for CARL to say a number.)

CARL

(thinking) Three. [points to ASHLEY's belly] Four if you include this one.

ASHLEY

"If"? Jesus Christ. And you're wrong.

CARL

Shit.

ASHLEY

I have four kids. You have four grandchildren. Five including this one.

TIMOTHY

You have five kids?

ASHLEY

Four. Plus this one. Two are twins.

TIMOTHY

Wow. Are you even 30? Wait, no, you can't be 30.

ASHLEY

I'm 29.

TIMOTHY

Holy fuck!

(LAURA slaps TIMOTHY in the arm.)

TIMOTHY

(rubbing arm) Ow. Why'd you do that?

LAURA

(ignoring TIMOTHY) I wish Aunt Beth could have made it. It would have been so good to see her. It's been forever.

ASHLEY

Yeah, I know. She wanted to see you guys, but I couldn't get a sitter, so she had to watch my kids. [to CARL, counting off] My one! Two! Three! Four! Kids!

CARL

(looking chastened) I'm gonna go back in the living room. Maybe I'll figure out how to turn up the volume on that TV.

TOM

I'll go with you. I think I might have figured it out.

LAURA

Oh, look who's getting along. How sweet.

TOM

I wouldn't go that far.

TIMOTHY

It's not out there, Dad. She's not stupid.

TOM

We'll see.

(TOM and CARL exit.)

LAURA

So what's Kevin like?

ASHLEY

Oh, he's all right. He likes me. He likes my kids. He seems happy to be having one of his own. His job's OK. He works hard.

LAURA

Good for you. I'm happy for you.

ASHLEY

He's trying to become a rapper.

TIMOTHY

He's what?

ASHLEY

He started listening to a lot of old Eminem, so now he thinks he can rap. All he does when he's home is come up with rhymes. He raps in the shower. He raps on the toilet. He raps during ...

TIMOTHY

Whoa! Whoa!

ASHLEY

I was gonna say dinner.

LAURA

Does he have a rap name?

ASHLEY

Danja.

TIMOTHY

How's that?

ASHLEY

Danja. Like, you know, Danger.

TIMOTHY

Oh, I have to meet this guy. When are we going to meet this guy?

LAURA

(shooting TIMOTHY a look) Everyone needs a creative outlet. I'm glad your husband found his.

ASHLEY

Where's your man?

LAURA

There's no man. Not anymore. My selection process leaves something to be desired, too.

(In the living room, TOM directs CARL to stand at one end of the sofa while he takes the other. CARL vigorously shakes his head "no" and points to his back. TOM angrily waves his arms, imploring CARL to do what he asks. CARL finally relents, and the men squat down and place their hands under the sofa. TOM mouths, "One, two, three," and they lift. The sofa doesn't budge and they both fall to the ground in pain. They each cry out, but worried that they will be heard, they stifle their voices. LAURA, TIMOTHY and ASHLEY look toward the living room, and LAURA shakes her head. TOM and CARL crawl to their respective armchairs and pull themselves into them with obvious difficulty.)

LAURA

Those two are going to be a problem today.

ASHLEY

My dad -- Carl -- he really don't look too good. He's, like, shaky.

LAURA

Isn't he always?

ASHLEY

I don't know. I haven't seen him in a while. The last time must have been at the hospital when Jessie, my second, was being born. Mom thought he should be there, so she called him. He was like he is now, only drunker. He threw up in the bathroom in my room. Never did hold the baby. Mom wouldn't let him. Not that he asked to.

LAURA

Our fathers are special people.

ASHLEY

You had your mom. She could make up for anything.

LAURA

Yeah, she could.

ASHLEY

Is Uncle Nicholas here?

(TIMOTHY and LAURA exchange  
smiles.)

TIMOTHY

He's looking after his mother in her room. Brenda's been acting pretty, uh --

LAURA

Brenda is taking today really hard.

ASHLEY

Oh. Should I go say hello to them?

LAURA

I'd let them be right now.

TIMOTHY

We should go into the living room before Dad destroys everything looking for that medal.

ASHLEY

Medal?

LAURA

You'll find out soon enough.



**SCENE 3**

TOM and CARL are in their armchairs. TIMOTHY and ASHLEY are sitting on opposite ends of the couch with LAURA between them. The television has been turned off.

LAURA

(to TOM) Did you find what you were looking for?

CARL

We unplugged it.

LAURA

Here we go again. I don't mean the remote control. (to TOM) Dad, did you find it?

TOM

I decided not to look for it.

LAURA

Oh, please. Don't lie. You pushed around all those picture frames and books. You even moved that lamp. I can tell because you and your accomplice here didn't bother to move anything back.

CARL

(defiantly) I'm not his accomplice.

TOM

(to LAURA) I don't care if she sees.

LAURA

You should.

TOM

Why?

LAURA

Because if you don't get on her good side, you're never going to see that medal again.

TOM

What good side? I ain't never seen her good side.

LAURA

I'm just saying.

TOM

Well, keep saying. I'll get it. You'll see.

(CARL looks stage right in the direction of BRENDA's room.)

CARL

You think she's ever coming out of that room?

LAURA

I see the door to Granddad's study is open. Did you and Uncle Carl go poking around in there?

CARL

I didn't go in there.

TOM

(coolly) That used to be my bedroom.

LAURA

Yes, it did -- 40 years ago. Did you move everything around in there, too?

TOM

I didn't do anything. (beat) It ain't in there.

LAURA

If you want me to, I'll go knock on Brenda's door right now and ask her and Nicholas where it is.

TOM

(flatly) Leave it be.

LAURA

Like you're leaving it be?

TOM

Just leave me alone right now, will you?

LAURA

Sure. Whatever you want. Just try not to ruin this day for everyone.

TOM

Oh, because it's supposed to be a happy occasion? Forgive me. I forgot my place.

ASHLEY

This is about a medal?

TIMOTHY

Granddad's Purple Heart.

CARL

(looking stage right) I don't think she's coming out of there.

ASHLEY

What's that? Like a pacemaker?

(Everyone save CARL looks at  
ASHLEY.)

TIMOTHY

It's a medal. He got it during the Korean War.

ASHLEY

What did he get it for?

CARL

I really don't believe she is.

TOM

For doing about the only worthwhile thing in his life.

LAURA

(sternly) Dad.

ASHLEY

And what was that?

(TOM gives ASHLEY a hard look,  
but she seems oblivious to  
it.)

TOM

He served his country. He crossed an ocean and went to war to fight against communism and to preserve your right to have 17 kids.

TIMOTHY

(eager to change the course of the conversation) Dad, how long was he in the Army before he went to Korea?

TOM

Less than a year, six months maybe. He was 18.

CARL

Maybe she's waiting for us to leave. Maybe we should get going.

TIMOTHY

Tell Ashley what happened. Tell her what Granddad did.

TOM

Haven't you heard this story enough? Haven't you always made fun of me for telling it too many times?

TIMOTHY

Yeah, sure, but you should tell it today, of all days. It may make you feel better.

TOM

I feel fine.

TIMOTHY

Yes, you look it. But maybe you should tell it so she can hear it. (to ASHLEY) Have you ever heard the story?

ASHLEY

(still smarting over TOM's childbirth comment) No.

TOM

(looking at CARL) Well, that figures. (beat) But all right. I'll tell it. (clears throat) Papa was with the Second Infantry, fighting the Chinese and North Koreans alongside the French at Heartbreak Ridge.

ASHLEY

At what?

TOM

Heartbreak Ridge. It was a battle in Korea. You know about the Korean War?

ASHLEY

Uh, sure, yeah. It was in the '60s.

TOM

It was the '50s.

ASHLEY

Yeah, right, of course.

CARL

Uh-huh. You knew that.

LAURA

Be nice.

CARL

You be nice.

TOM

Papa was there for the entire battle, from the middle of September to the middle of October, 1951. We made a lot of mistakes early on in that one, lost a lot of men, but we ultimately prevailed. Some people, historians and others, don't think that battle was worth fighting, but I don't agree. I'm sure Papa didn't, either. Near the end, on the second to last day, we had 'em on the ropes -- the North Koreans and the Chinese. But almost over isn't over, and our boys were still taking fire. At some point that night, Papa said he had to piss worse than ever. I'm sure you know how that is. When you have to go so bad it hurts, and it's all you can think about?

Papa said he could have just gone in his pants like he'd done throughout the battle, but he said he was close to a tree and thought he'd act civilized. So he was standing there, against the tree, doing his thing, when he felt something bite his arm. His right arm. The shot knocked him into the tree, and with his thing hanging out, he hit the ground and rolled around toward the backside of the tree. Blood was spurting from his arm, but he kept his cool. He tucked himself back in his pants with his left hand -- Papa was right-handed -- and then reached around the tree for his rifle. As he was doing so, he spotted a Chinese peeking back at him from behind another tree about 90 yards away. The man fired at Papa, but Papa didn't move. He waited for the guy to stick his head out again and shot him right in the throat. One shot. With his left hand. Just like that.

(pause)

ASHLEY

Did he live?

TOM

Who?

ASHLEY

Granddad? Did he live?

(LAURA snorts. TIMOTHY looks at  
ASHLEY with disbelief.)

TOM

Girl, whose funeral do you think you're attending today?

ASHLEY

Ah, yeah, right. I forgot.

TOM

You forgot. [to CARL] Way to go with this one, Carl.

CARL

Apparently, she ain't got nothing to do with me.

ASHLEY

(brightly) Hey! I know what he got that medal for. He got it for gettin' shot. The Purple Heart. Yeah, I saw something about that on TV, some show Kevin watches. (beat) It's kind of a weird thing, though, if you ask me.

TOM

What is? What's weird?

ASHLEY

Gettin' an award for gettin' shot. Ain't the whole point of fightin' not to get shot?

TOM

(angrily) Carl.

CARL

I told you, she don't want nothin' to do --

ASHLEY

Uncle Tommy, why do you want that medal so bad? Did someone shoot you while you were taking a piss, too?

TIMOTHY

Nice!

TOM

I just want it.

ASHLEY

But why?

LAURA

Ashley. It's good. It's enough.

(TOM stands up.)

LAURA

Dad--

TOM

I don't have to explain myself to you. I don't have to explain myself to any of you.

LAURA

Let's go for a walk, outside. Come on.

(LAURA stands.)

TOM

I never should have come back here.

CARL

You couldn't have stayed away. I couldn't neither.

TOM

Why's that?

CARL

We both needed to see for ourselves that Papa is dead.

TOM

Well, I haven't seen any proof of that yet. All I've heard is talk. And crying.

ASHLEY

(said as if she is still trying to get back at TOM for the earlier dig) You didn't answer my question about the medal.

TOM

You want an answer? Fine. I'll give you a goddamn answer. That medal is the only evidence I have that Papa ever cared about something other than himself. It's the only thing. When he told me about Heartbreak Ridge, he told me that battle was like Hell on Earth. And if you can survive Hell on Earth, he said, you can survive anything. Well, I survived something. I survived him.

(TOM stares at ASHLEY, waiting for her to say something else. ASHLEY stares back at him, but remains quiet.)

LAURA

Can we go now? Let's go, OK? Everyone? We'll see Brenda and Nicholas at the church.

CARL

That's what I've been saying, what I've been trying to get us to do.

TOM

I'm ready. We've waited for her long enough.

CARL

I don't think she's ever gonna leave that room.

(Everyone exits stage left. After a moment, we hear the front door open and close as they leave the house.)

#### SCENE 4

NICHOLAS is standing outside the door of BRENDA's bedroom at stage right. He is lightly tapping on the door with his knuckles and repeating the word "Mom," the impatience and worry in his voice rising with each utterance.

NICHOLAS

Mom.

(pause)

NICHOLAS

Mom.

NICHOLAS

Mom. Come on, open up.

(NICHOLAS hears movement inside  
the room, and his voice  
becomes calm.)

NICHOLAS

Mom, what did you do with the book? Is it in there with you?

(pause)

NICHOLAS

Did you throw it away like I asked you to? Did you get rid of  
it?

(pause)

NICHOLAS

It's really important that you got rid of that book, OK? You  
can't let them see it. OK? Mom? Mom? [to himself] I should  
have gotten rid of it myself. I shouldn't have let her keep  
it. [to BRENDA] Mom, please, please tell me you threw it away  
or hid it, put it somewhere safe. Can you tell me you did  
that?

(pause)

NICHOLAS

Please open the door. I'm not mad. Just open the door so we  
can talk. If you have the book, it's fine. I won't take it  
from you. (beat) Mom. (beat) Mom.

(We hear more movement inside  
the bedroom. The door opens  
inward, and NICHOLAS enters  
the darkness.)

(Lights fade.)



**ACT TWO****SCENE 1**

A viewing room in a church. A closed casket sits on a draped bier, which is flanked by extravagant floral displays and large photographic portraits of GRANDDAD, BRENDA and NICHOLAS on easels. One was taken when NICHOLAS was a toddler. The child is sitting on his mother's knee, while GRANDDAD stands behind them. The other photo is more recent, taken when NICHOLAS was in his late teens. This time, both BRENDA and GRANDDAD are sitting, while NICHOLAS stands to the left of GRANDDAD, a hand resting on the old man's shoulder. Upstage, a row of framed photo collages, also on easels, include photos from throughout GRANDDAD's life, though most of them were taken during his marriage to BRENDA. There are none of TIMOTHY and LAURA, and only one with TOM and CARL, taken when the brothers were children. It's in black-and-white and shows TOM and CARL flanking a little brown-haired girl, their arms around one another's shoulders. Each child is smiling. Another display includes a portrait of GRANDDAD in his Army uniform at 18.

Four rows of chairs face the casket. TIMOTHY, LAURA and ASHLEY sit in the third row, in the chairs closest to downstage.

TIMOTHY

The sign out there said the viewing is for two hours. I don't think I can take two hours of this.

LAURA

With the service, we'll probably be here for three or four.

TIMOTHY

I may have to fake a thing.

LAURA

A thing?

TIMOTHY

You know -- a thing. Like a stomach thing. An intestinal thing.

LAURA

Like you have to go to the bathroom?

TIMOTHY

That. Or something worse.

ASHLEY

That's gross.

LAURA

You can always just pretend to be sad. Or, you know, you could actually *be* sad.

TIMOTHY

Please. It'll be much easier to fake appendicitis. And more fun.

(pause)

TIMOTHY

Will you cover for me?

LAURA

No.

TIMOTHY

Why not?

LAURA

It's our grandfather's funeral.

TIMOTHY

So? [glances at casket] He won't care.

LAURA

You are not leaving me here alone with Dad and Uncle Carl.

TIMOTHY

I have news for you. If you're anywhere with Dad and Uncle Carl, you are alone.

LAURA

That's hardly news.

(pause)

ASHLEY

Why is the casket closed? Aren't they usually open?

LAURA

Usually.

ASHLEY

I was kind of hoping to see him. I don't really know what he looks like.

TIMOTHY

He probably looks a lot like he does in those photos. Only dead.

LAURA

Granddad was a good-looking man. He was handsome, right up until the end.

TIMOTHY

I bet Brenda wanted the lid closed. Or Nicholas did. If it were open, she'd probably crawl inside it with him.

LAURA

In that case, one of us should go over there and open it. (beat) Sorry, that was mean. Do you think that was mean?

TIMOTHY

Maybe just a little.

(pause)

TIMOTHY

What's with all the flowers? I can't imagine too many of Granddad's friends are still alive. Did he even have friends?

LAURA

I'm sure he has -- had -- friends. He and Brenda probably had lots of friends. They were always at this church. They had their little community.

TIMOTHY

Yeah? Where are all those friends? I don't see anyone here but us.

LAURA

It's early. I'm sure they'll be here. You saw the sign outside the door. The viewing doesn't officially begin until 1.

TIMOTHY

I bet you no one shows up.

LAURA

That's wrong.

TIMOTHY

Come on. Bet me.

LAURA

(laughing) Stop.

TIMOTHY

Seriously. Let's make it interesting. Say, the loser has to ride down to Miami with Dad.

LAURA

And the winner? What does the winner get?

TIMOTHY

Duh. The winner gets to not share a car with Dad for a couple of hours.

LAURA

I'm not taking that bet. The reward does not outweigh the risk.

TIMOTHY

Come on. You know I'm right. No one's showing up to this thing. It's just us. That's why you won't take the bet.

LAURA

You're just looking for a way to get out of riding down there with Dad.

ASHLEY

What's in Miami?

LAURA

The burial. Granddad has a family plot down there.

ASHLEY

He does?

LAURA

Yeah, his parents are buried there, and his sister, the one who died as a child.

TIMOTHY

What was his sister's name?

LAURA

Arlene.

TIMOTHY

And Granddad was Arlen.

LAURA

Yes.

TIMOTHY

I love this family.

ASHLEY

Do we have graves there, too?

TIMOTHY

No. Granddad's getting the last one. After him, there will be no room at the Irvings' Underground Inn.

LAURA

I'm thinking I may skip that part of today's festivities.

TIMOTHY

You are? Why?

LAURA

I don't need to be there for that. It's going to be hard to watch. Besides, I'm not too keen on going south right now, even if it's only as far as Miami. I got work to give me the week off, and I'm thinking I'll drive up to Cocoa tomorrow, hang out on the beach, maybe rent a surfboard and pretend to be you. It's not like I'm in any hurry to deal with what I have to deal with back home.

TIMOTHY

With Daryl.

LAURA

Yes, with Daryl.

ASHLEY

Who's Daryl?

LAURA

My husband. My ex-husband. My soon-to-be-ex-husband.

ASHLEY

You don't sound so sure.

LAURA

Oh, trust me. I'm sure.

ASHLEY

You catch him cheating on you?

LAURA

No, I wasn't that lucky.

ASHLEY

What happened?

LAURA

Well, one morning, I woke up and realized I'd been acting more like his mother than his wife, and that was the way he wanted it.

(glancing at TIMOTHY) I decided I've done more than enough mothering in my life for someone who doesn't have kids, and so I packed my bags and left.

ASHLEY

What are you gonna do?

LAURA

I'm going to start my life finally. My own life.

TIMOTHY

Can you start mine, too?

LAURA

I tried that already, remember? But then, I turned around one day and you'd disappeared. And now, here you are, right when I'm thinking about doing the same.

TIMOTHY

Hey, I didn't have to come back. When Grandad died, you told me you needed me here. Was that a lie?

LAURA

Not at all. But I don't need you here for me, as much as I have missed your ugly face and bad jokes. I need you here for Dad.

TIMOTHY

Why? He's been fine without me.

LAURA

He hasn't, actually. And he's going to be a lot worse if I decide to take off.

TIMOTHY

When are you going to make that decision?

LAURA

Soon, probably. But you're right. I do need you here for me. I need you here so I don't have to be. At least for a little while.

TIMOTHY

Hey, man, the road's only out there to be traveled on.

LAURA

(smiling) That's so deep.

TIMOTHY

I've read a book or two.

LAURA

Two. I think you've read two.

(TIMOTHY and LAURA smile.  
ASHLEY looks confused.)

ASHLEY

Are you guys always like this?

TIMOTHY

Not always. Sometimes, we're bitter and sarcastic.

(pause)

LAURA

Where are Dad and Uncle Carl? [to ASHLEY] Where's your dad?

ASHLEY

I don't know. I'm not here to watch him.

TIMOTHY

Dad said he was going to the bathroom. Uncle Carl mumbled something about checking out the church. I suppose neither of them is in a rush to come in here.

LAURA

What do you make of those photos? They're so big.

TIMOTHY

They're very Chairman Mao. After the funeral, I hear they're going to hang them on the side of a building downtown.

(TOM enters the stage and stops just stage left of the last row of chairs. He looks past LAURA, TIMOTHY and ASHLEY to the casket. He holds that stare for a long moment and then takes a seat in the farthest upstage chair in the fourth row. He resumes staring at the casket.)

(CARL enters at stage left and surveys the room. He has a can of beer in his right hand. He raises it to his mouth and takes a long drink. He walks across the stage and sits in the second row.)

(LAURA and TIMOTHY exchange looks and lean forward to address CARL.)

LAURA

Where did you get that beer?

(Instead of answering, CARL  
tilts back the can and takes  
another drink.)

LAURA

Did you walk to a gas station or something?

CARL

I did not. This is a church, isn't it?

LAURA

Yeah. So?

CARL

Well, churches have kitchens. Kitchens have refrigerators.  
Refrigerators have beer. Even in a church. Because there  
ain't nothing in the Bible saying a man can't drink in a  
house of worship. Catholics do it every Sunday.

LAURA

That's wine. And they drink it during communion, not happy  
hour.

CARL

To thine own self be true.

(CARL takes another drink and  
empties the can, which he sets  
under his chair.)

(ASHLEY groans.)

TIMOTHY

Are there any beers left in that refrigerator?

CARL

Not anymore there aren't.

LAURA

Jesus Christ.

CARL

Oh, not me. If you're looking for a martyr, he's sitting over  
there in that chair [motions to TOM].

(Everyone looks at TOM, who  
remains focused on the  
casket.)



TIMOTHY

(addresses CARL while raising chin toward the casket) Are you going to pay your respects?

CARL

I'm here, aren't I?

(Everyone looks at the casket.  
Long pause.)

CARL

(clears throat) You know, he could have got me back if he'd wanted. He could have come looking for me, for us. Mama didn't really hide us there in Alabama. We were easy to find. I think she wanted to be found, wanted him to come get her, talk her into going back to Florida with him. I think she would have, too. I'm pretty sure he knew where we were. But he didn't come. He didn't even file for divorce. Neither did she. Not for a long time. They just kept on living. Like it was nothing. Well, it was something to me.

(CARL reaches into his jacket  
and pulls out another can of  
beer. He opens it and pours  
half the liquid down his  
throat.)

I fucking hated Alabama. You think we're redneck? Shit. Not like them. Mama put me in the school there, with them boys. Inbreds, every damn one of 'em. Mean as snakes and not even half as smart. The girls, too. English class? That was a riot. Even the teacher couldn't say, "Moby-Dick" without giggling. That school. Jesus. That town.

So what did Mama go and do? Mama went and got herself a boyfriend. Roy. Good man. Better than she deserved. Better than Alabama deserved. That relationship didn't help me very much, though, did it? Word got around that Mama was seeing a black man, because those bumblehead rednecks don't have anything better to do than talk stupid, and who do you think bore the brunt of it, their anger, their ignorance? Who do you think found nasty things, racial things, written on his school locker? Who do you think got his head rammed into that same locker, over and over and over again? Who do you think got chased into a pasture by a truckload of dimwits, gang-tackled and had his face shoved into a pile of cow shit so deep it went up his nose, into his mouth and out his ears?

Oh, you don't want to guess? Ah, all right. Four years of that. I got four years of that. From 11 to 15. A boy. I was a boy. Mama thought she had done me a favor by taking me to Alabama. Ha. And when she finally realized that wasn't working, she thought she'd do me another favor by running away again, only this time without me.

She left while I was in school getting the snot beat out of me. I came home to an empty apartment, a hundred-dollar bill and a note: "Go home to Florida. Look after your brother. Mama loves you always."

Yeah, that was it. At least I got a note. She didn't tell Roy anything. She just left. Not even so much as a "see ya" for that man. And when they sent me home? To him? [gestures to the casket] And he let me back in his house? It was like I wasn't there. Like I was still gone. Like I was still buried in cow shit.

Pay my respects? He lost the privilege of my respect a long time ago.

(CARL stands and exits the row.)

CARL  
(to LAURA) Did you say there is a gas station nearby?

(LAURA shakes her head.)

CARL  
Well, I'm gonna go outside for a bit. I need air.

(CARL exits.)

ASHLEY  
(softly) Wow.

LAURA  
Have you heard any of that before?

ASHLEY  
Are you kidding? I've never heard so many words fall from his mouth like that in my life.

TIMOTHY  
I don't think I've ever heard him talk about our grandmother.

ASHLEY  
Has Uncle Tommy ever talked about her?

TIMOTHY  
Not really. Here and there. And never for long.

ASHLEY  
Do you know what happened to her?

LAURA  
No one does. Even her own brothers never heard from her after she left your dad alone in Alabama.

ASHLEY  
My mom thinks she's dead.

LAURA  
Our mom did, too.

ASHLEY  
What do you think happened to her?

(pause)

LAURA  
I think she hated her life, and decided to do something about it.

(NICHOLAS enters the room and approaches the group.)

NICHOLAS  
Hey.

TIMOTHY  
Hey.

LAURA  
How's your mom?

NICHOLAS  
Not so good. She's not acting herself.

TIMOTHY  
Where is she?

NICHOLAS  
She's not coming.

TIMOTHY  
Really?

NICHOLAS  
It's too much for her. She took a couple of sedatives. I'm hoping she'll sleep clear into tomorrow.

TIMOTHY  
So all that back at the house, it was for --

LAURA  
(sternly) Timothy --

NICHOLAS  
No, it's OK. I get it. But yes, all that crying was for real. Have you ever known my mom to be good at faking anything, at lying?

TIMOTHY

I don't really know your mom. I mean, not all that well.

NICHOLAS

That's a shame. She's a good person. Maybe you can try to get to know her now.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, maybe.

LAURA

What about you? Are you all right?

NICHOLAS

I'm OK. You know what it's like. You've lost a parent.

LAURA

Some days, it feels as if I've lost two.

## SCENE 2

DAD and CARL are wandering around the room, impatiently looking at the photos and watching the door for mourners. LAURA and TIMOTHY are standing in front of a large photo. ASHLEY is in a chair, languidly flipping through a photo album. She looks bored.

TIMOTHY

Look at her freckles.

LAURA

And her hair. It's so straight and long.

(pause)

LAURA

Have you seen this photo before?

TIMOTHY

Never. (beat) Do you think Dad's seen it?

LAURA

I'm sure he has. Should we ask him about it?

(CARL walks up and stands next to TIMOTHY. He looks at the picture and begins to nod.)

CARL

Uh-huh. I remember that day.

TIMOTHY

Tell us about it.

(CARL glances at TOM.)

CARL

Maybe later.

TIMOTHY

Come on. Tell us now. Please.

CARL

Are you sure?

TIMOTHY

Yeah, of course. Look at it. Why wouldn't we want to hear about it?

(Long pause as CARL considers what to say.)

CARL

I remember Mama wanted us to pose for family photos in the back yard. She'd gotten a camera, and she was pretty excited about it. She'd never had one before. But Papa didn't care. He couldn't see the need for one, though he'd never hesitate to pull out photos of himself and others that had been taken during the war. He and Mama fought, of course, but he gave in, and we all went out back and stood for photos. She took a lot of pictures that day. I'm surprised he kept even one.

LAURA

It's the only photo here of you and Dad.

CARL

Brenda never could stand it. His life with us before her, such as it was. I don't know why it mattered to her. It's not like it was much of a life.

TIMOTHY

Is that the story of the photo? That's it?

CARL

No, that's not it. What happened was Mama called Sandy over from her house to get in a photo with us -- me, your Dad and Papa. Papa said, "Nope. I've stood for enough photos today. You all do what you want. I got work to do." And that was that. He just disappeared into his nursery as usual. They probably got in a big fight later on, Papa and Mama, but I don't recall hearing it. If I did, I just shut it out like so many of the rest. Your Dad and I went over to your mother's house and played inside for a while, if I remember right. Probably cards or hide and go seek. A board game, maybe. We spent a lot of time at her house.

Her parents always kept it so clean. And food? Like us, Sandy's family didn't have anything, but they always had food. They were good people, your mother's parents.

(The three stare at the photo in silence.)

LAURA

God, even then she was beautiful.

CARL

How long has it been? Ten years?

LAURA

Sixteen.

CARL

My. [pause] You don't get over losing a woman like that.

(LAURA and TIMOTHY stare at CARL.)

CARL

You know what I mean. Your dad was only ever right when he was with her. Now look at him. Hell, look at me. Sixteen years? May as well have been yesterday. She was about the only pure light I've seen in this world. Without her, there [indicates the photo] and later, I don't know if I'd be standing here today. Your father, either. [pause] To be honest, when Mama was taking me to Alabama, when I cried, all those hours in that car, it wasn't because I didn't want to leave home, leave Tom, Papa. It was because I didn't want to leave Sandy. When I returned, I went right to her. Yeah. Right to her house. I knocked on her door before I knocked on mine. She and your dad were, you know, on their way by then. I was happy for them. I was. Like I said, she was pure light. She shined on everything.

LAURA

You really loved her, didn't you, Uncle Carl?

CARL

Everyone loved your mom.

(TOM approaches and stands behind them. He studies the photo for a moment and then addresses CARL.)

TOM

(sharply) We need to talk.

CARL

We do.

TOM

I've been thinking.

CARL

We could tell. You ain't hardly moved from that chair since you got here.

TOM

I think I know where the medal is. (beat) I think you have it.

CARL

What?

TOM

You heard me. You have the Purple Heart. You took it. Or she gave it to you. I haven't figured that part out yet, but I'm sure it's in your possession.

CARL

I don't have it, but I am curious as to why you think I do.

TOM

Because you know I want it. You got to the house today before the rest of us. You wanted to make sure you could talk to her about it, butter her up. She don't feel about you the way she feels about me. So maybe you asked her to give the medal to you instead of to me, and she did.

CARL

First of all, I don't know why you think she likes me any better than she likes you. She don't like neither of us.

TOM

I know how she is. She didn't call any of us until the old man started to take ill. She acted like she wanted us to know he was on his way out, but really she was just gloating, showing us how in charge she was, telling us we needed to do this and do that before it was too late. It was always too late. But I know she called you, and I know you went running over there.

CARL

(defiantly) I didn't run anywhere.

TOM

No? Laura told me she found you at their house during one of her visits.

CARL

That's right. We saw each other there. Didn't we, Laura?

LAURA

We did.

CARL

Do you remember why I was there?

LAURA

Not really. Something about Granddad's truck, I think.

CARL

Yep. That's right. His truck. I was there to buy his truck.

TOM

His truck?

CARL

Yes, his truck. The Ford. The blue one.

TOM

I know it.

CARL

Well, when Brenda called me after Papa had his stroke, she mentioned that he wouldn't be able to drive anymore and that she would probably have to sell the truck, and I said that I might be interested in taking it off her hands.

TOM

Why doesn't she just keep it? Or give it to her kid?

CARL

Nicholas don't need it. He just bought a new truck about a year ago. Papa's truck is 12 years old.

TOM

What's wrong with your truck?

CARL

I lost it.

TOM

You lost it?

CARL

Yeah. It wasn't the first time I'd lost a vehicle.

TOM

How the hell do you lose a truck?

CARL

Well, you wake up somewhere not remembering where you were the night before, you lose a truck. I mean, I've lost trucks that way before, and cars. I always found 'em before too long, but this one, I looked everywhere I thought I might have been and still couldn't find it. I don't know what happened to it.



TIMOTHY

Did you call the police? Maybe someone stole it. Or maybe it just got towed.

CARL

I never like to get the police involved in my affairs. They're not much for listening to reason. But I did call around to all the towing companies. None of 'em had it.

TOM

How are you gonna pay for Papa's truck? You don't have any money.

CARL

I have a bit, but never you mind about that. Besides, it don't matter. She refused to sell it to me. At least she said I had to sober up before she'd even consider letting me buy it. She invited me to meet with one of her prayer groups here at the church. She said it would help.

TIMOTHY

And what did you say to that?

CARL

I said I'd think about it.

TIMOTHY

And how long did you think about it?

CARL

For about as long as it took for me to tell her I would.

TOM

You know what I've been trying to figure out since we got here?

CARL

What's that?

TOM

(looks at casket) Why that box is closed. And how come we can't see him. Part of me thinks this is all for show. Like all that crying back at the house. All the flowers here. And those goddamn ridiculous pictures. Maybe he isn't even in that box. Maybe he's off somewhere having a good laugh at our expense.

CARL

He ain't anywhere but in that casket. And soon, he's gonna be in the ground, where he's gonna stay.

TOM

Why is the lid closed then? Don't people usually want to see their dead? Like when we saw Grandma Ella when we were kids.

Remember that? Or do Brenda and her church people not believe in that kind of thing?

CARL  
(to LAURA and TIMOTHY) Can you give us a minute?

TIMOTHY  
Why? What's up?

CARL  
I need to talk to your Dad.

TIMOTHY  
We won't interrupt.

CARL  
I need to talk to him alone. It's important.

TIMOTHY  
How important?

CARL  
(sharply) Important.

TIMOTHY  
On a scale of one to --

LAURA  
Come on, let's go. Let's let them talk. We can go into the lobby and wait for the mourners you think don't exist to arrive.

TIMOTHY  
You know, one of the reasons I left this family and moved away was because I got tired of being left out of the really good conversations. Everyone always treated me like I was little kid, like I couldn't handle anything.

LAURA  
I wonder why.

(LAURA and TIMOTHY exit. CARL  
fixes his eyes on TOM.)

CARL  
You know why that lid is down.

TOM  
No I don't.

CARL  
You don't?

TOM  
I just said I don't, didn't I?

CARL  
She didn't tell you?

TOM  
Who?

CARL  
Brenda.

TOM  
Brenda? When would she tell me anything? And tell me what?

CARL  
What he did. I thought she might have gone and told you. I asked her not to, but I figured she would, anyway.

TOM  
Carl, what in the goddamn hell are you talking about?

CARL  
That stroke didn't kill Papa.

TOM  
What do you mean it didn't kill him? Sure it did.

CARL  
It didn't. It was something else. Something I didn't want to have to tell you.

TOM  
Was it the cancer? I thought they took care of that with the chemo.

CARL  
It wasn't the cancer.

TOM  
If it wasn't the stroke, and it wasn't the cancer, what the hell was it, then? Was it murder? Did Brenda kill him?

CARL  
(with frustration) She didn't kill him.

TOM  
Well, what did? Quit farting around and tell me.

CARL  
I found him, Tom. In his garage. She called me and asked me to come over after she heard the blast. She didn't want to go in there herself. She knew what he'd done, said she'd had a feeling it would happen that way.

TOM

Carl --

CARL

He did it himself, Tom.

TOM

But the obituary ... in the paper ... it said he died of natural causes. I read it. A couple of times. Why would it say that if --

CARL

I asked them to put that in there. It seemed the right thing to do. What was there to be gained by telling everyone? Besides, the guy at the paper told me they don't publicize ... that they don't like to say that people ... They have a rule, Tom.

TOM

Did he write a note? Is there a note?

CARL

No. No note.

(pause)

TOM

That son of a bitch. That coward. That goddamn coward.

CARL

No, he wasn't a coward. I think he wanted to spare her whatever was coming next.

TOM

And us? What did he spare us?

CARL

Not much.

TOM

He just had to leave us with that image to consider. And you -  
- you saw him? My God.

CARL

I did.

TOM

You know why he did it? Because he didn't want to give us the opportunity to tell him that we knew all about this [spreads his arms wide and looks around the room]. That we could see it and we could smell it. His new beginning. His new family. His new bullshit. All of it. Twenty-five years on, and it's all just a big, fat lie. Suckers. He took us for suckers. His own children. His sons. [pause] And Brenda.

You think she fell for it? I don't. I think she was in on it from the get-go. Yeah, he wanted us to think he'd changed, that he was no longer the man he once was, the man we knew, the man we lived with in that house. She wanted us to think that, too. Oh, but she knew. You don't even try to tell me that she didn't know. Every night, when she slipped into that bed beside him, before she closed her eyes to sleep, she thought about it, how she knew. I bet it didn't even keep her awake for a second.

CARL

I think you're wrong, Tom. If he fooled anyone, he fooled her.

TOM

How can you say that? How can you give her that?

CARL

People, they can only change so much. They can change how they talk, how they act, how they walk around, go through life. And they can do it for a very long time, some of 'em. But in the end, when they're tired and worn out and their strength is for shit, it comes back up. They can't hold it down anymore. Nature is patient, Tom. You can turn against it, but it knows it's gonna win.

TOM

Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you call me when you found him?

CARL

Because I wanted to spare you, too.

TOM

Why? Why would you want to spare me anything?

CARL

You're my brother.

TOM

"Brother." Please. You're drunk.

CARL

Nah. You've seen me drunk. This ain't me drunk. I'm clear on this right now, what I'm saying.

TOM

I --

CARL

No, stop talking and listen. We ain't done any talking in recent years, and we certainly haven't done any listening in many more. I've wanted to say this to you for a long, long time. So please. Please.

TOM

Go ahead.

CARL

Now, the way you've been to me, for close to 40 years, I get it. I do. You think Mama chose me and not you. I don't know what Papa told you about it, if he told you anything at all, but that wasn't the way it went. Mama didn't sneak off that night. Papa knew she was leaving. And she wanted to take you with us, but he wouldn't let her. He refused to let you go. Me? He was fine with my leaving with her. He didn't even try to stop her from taking me. You didn't know that, did you? I tried to tell you when I got back, but you wouldn't listen. You wouldn't even hardly talk to me. You probably figured you would never talk to me again. And there were times I thought you never would.

But Mama didn't think the separation would be permanent, even though she was the one who left and the one who refused to return. She thought he was either gonna come get us or that he was gonna ease up and send you to Alabama. She never thought he'd keep you here, just the two of you.

And I know you blame me, think I got off easy. I could tell you I didn't, and that would be the truth, but it don't matter. No one knows your pain better than you do. You don't know mine. I don't know yours. I can try to know it, and I have, but I can't, really. As messed up as Mama was, I know he was worse.

TOM

(softly) Why didn't she send for me? Why didn't she call or write?

CARL

(kindly) I don't know, Tom. She was stubborn, and tough. Boy, was she tough. But he scared her. He really scared her. After a while, I think she became afraid of you, too.

TOM

Afraid of me? Why would she have been afraid of me?

CARL

After so much time had passed, she probably figured you'd never understand, that you'd never forgive her.

TOM

Have you forgiven her?

CARL

I ask myself that question every day. I don't know the answer. (beat) Some days, I do.

TOM

Did you ever hear from her again, after she disappeared?

CARL

No. I'm guessing you didn't, either.

TOM

The last words I heard from her were "good night." And the next morning, well, you know.

CARL

I'm sorry, Tom.

TOM

Yeah.

(LAURA and TIMOTHY approach.  
LAURA hands a photo album to  
TOM.)

LAURA

I think you should look at this.

TOM

What is it?

LAURA

Just look.

(TOM flips through the pages,  
slowly and then faster until  
he reaches the last page.)

TOM

What the hell is this?

LAURA

It was over there with the other photo albums.

(TOM stomps across the room  
toward NICHOLAS, who is  
sitting in a chair in front of  
the casket. TOM taps him on  
the back of the head with the  
photo album.)

TOM

Nicholas, what is this? Is this for real?

(NICHOLAS, rubbing his head,  
stands up and reaches for the  
album. TOM lets him take it.)

NICHOLAS

Yes. Unfortunately, this is for real.

(TOM grabs the album from  
NICHOLAS's hands, opens it and  
begins to read.)

TOM

"Cherry-wood rocking chair: \$225

(flips page)

"Maple dresser: \$350

(flips page)

"Metal tackle box with worms and lures: \$30

(flips page)

"Cowboy hat: \$45

(flips page)

"Ford F-150, 83,000 miles, no accidents: \$4,500

(flips page; long pause as  
Tom's expression betrays shock  
and anger)

(angrily) "Purple Heart: \$10,000."

Tell me this is someone's sick idea of a joke.

NICHOLAS

I wish I could. I really wish I could. I'm so sorry, Tom.

TIMOTHY

What is this about, Nicholas? Did your mother do this?

NICHOLAS

She showed it to me after Dad died. I told her to get rid of  
it, that no one should ever see it.

TOM

Well, I've seen it. Ten thousand dollars? Ten thousand  
dollars!

LAURA

(trying but failing to remain calm) She can't really expect  
us to buy Granddad's possessions from her. His Purple Heart,  
for God's sake? What the hell is wrong with her? How could  
she do this?



(TOM balls his hands into fists  
and moves closer to NICHOLAS  
so that their faces are almost  
touching.)

LAURA

Dad! Not here, and not now.

TOM

Yes here, and yes now. (to Nicholas) Are you all hurting for money? Is that was this is about?

NICHOLAS

No. We're fine. Mom is fine. She doesn't want your money. She doesn't want anyone's money.

TOM

(tapping the album with his fingers) This is telling me a different story.

NICHOLAS

And I'm telling you the truth. Look at the handwriting, Tom. It's not hers.

TOM

I don't know your mother's goddamn handwriting. I don't know yours, either. You do this? Was this you?

NICHOLAS

No. Of course not. Look at it again.

(As TOM reopens the photo album  
and begins to read, CARL walks  
up, glances at it and looks at  
NICHOLAS.)

CARL

How did that get here?

NICHOLAS

I don't know. I'm hoping it was a mistake, that it just got mixed up with the other photo books.

TIMOTHY

(to CARL) You know about this?

CARL

I'm the one who found it. In the garage. It was on the floor at his feet.

LAURA

Whose feet?

CARL

Papa's.

LAURA

Uncle Carl, what are you talking about?

(TOM collapses into the nearest chair. He sets the album on his lap, the pages open. He looks at CARL, down at the album, and back up at CARL.)

TOM

What was inside that man that could make him do something like this? Make him do any of it? Did he enjoy being mean? Was he born mean? Did we make him mean, just by existing? Did the war do that to him? They didn't all end up that mean. Remember Uncle Will, Mama's brother? He fought in World War II, in Germany. He was nice. Remember how he was with us? How kind he was? He wasn't like Papa. There were others, other men who fought, who lived in this town. Were they all like Papa? They couldn't have been, right? There were normal families around here, ones that stayed together. We saw them. Look at Sandy. She had that. That was a family. They were good to each other and to everyone else, including us. We weren't good to anyone, least of all ourselves.

(TOM falls silent and stares at the photo album in his lap.)

CARL

Tom. (pause) Tom.

LAURA

Dad, are you all right? Let me have the book. You've seen enough. Come on, give it to me. Let it go.

TOM

(softly) She wants me to buy the Purple Heart.

CARL

Tom, Papa wrote all that. It was him, not her.

TOM

She kept it. She let us see it. Which means --

CARL

Which means what, Tom?

TOM

Which means if I went back to the house right now and gave her the money, she'd take it.

CARL

I don't know, Tom. I think she'd --

TOM

Give me the medal, Nicholas. I know you know where it is. She must have told you. You don't need it. It doesn't belong to you. It's mine, and I want it. You hear me: I want the medal.

NICHOLAS

(weeping) I don't have it, Tom. I swear I would give it to you if I did. Listen, I don't know what you went through, you and Carl, with Dad when you were younger. When Dad was younger. I've heard some of the stories. He told me that he was different back then, but I can't ever see him like that. I believe you and Carl, the things I've heard you say. But that wasn't my Dad, not the Dad I knew. You have to believe me, too. I don't know where that medal is. I wish I did. I wish I could give it to you.

(NICHOLAS wipes tears from his eyes. TOM taps the photo album.)

TOM

He was one man, not two. And he did this. (looking up at NICHOLAS) He did this, right?

CARL

We don't know why he did it, Tom.

TOM

I do.

CARL

No, you don't. It's not a thing we'll ever know, and we're going to have to be all right with that, you hear me?

(LAURA extends her hand to TOM for the album.)

LAURA

Dad.

CARL

Give it to her, Tom.

(TOM looks up at CARL, his expression a swirl of pain and confusion.)

CARL

Come on. We can destroy it together if you like. Rip those pages out one by one and light 'em on fire. We'll make a night of it. I'll bring the beer.

TOM

I wish he'd given me the medal.

CARL

I know you do. I do, too.

NICHOLAS

Tom, if I ever find it, if it ever turns up, it's yours. It's yours.

TIMOTHY

Dad, give Laura the book.

(Without looking at anyone, TOM  
hands the photo album to  
LAURA.)

LAURA

(looking out the window) Look, people are starting to arrive. Do we want to stay? I don't think we need to stay for the service. Are you all OK if we leave? Uncle Carl?

CARL

I think leaving is a great idea.

TIMOTHY

Me, too. Let's get the hell out of here.

LAURA

Dad? Is it all right if we leave? Maybe we can find a restaurant nearby, get something to eat. Does that sound good?

TOM

(softly) Yeah, OK. I'm ready.

CARL

(looks over to where ASHLEY is sitting) Ashley, we're leaving.

ASHLEY

We are? [shrugs] OK. I was kind of looking forward to hearing some preaching.

TIMOTHY

You're welcome to stick around, but I think we've gotten enough religion for one day.

NICHOLAS

I have to stay, but do you mind if I walk out with you?

(TOM studies NICHOLAS for a  
moment, and finally nods.)

TOM

Come on.

(Everyone is about to exit the room when CARL notices the empty beer cans he left under his chair and returns to pick them up.)

CARL

I'll meet you all out in the lobby.

(Everyone but CARL exits the stage. CARL waits to make sure they're gone and then walks over to the casket. He looks over his shoulder. Seeing that he is still alone in the room, he places his hands on the lid of the casket, takes a deep breath and opens it.)

(Lights fade.)

### SCENE 3

LAURA, TIMOTHY and NICHOLAS stand together in the church's foyer. TOM is standing by himself at stage right. ASHLEY stands apart from the others at stage left. After a moment, LAURA approaches ASHLEY.

LAURA

Where's your father? It's been 10 minutes. What is he up to?

ASHLEY

(shrugs) How should I know? Maybe he's talking to one of those old people who just got here. Maybe he's looking for more beer.

(LAURA crosses the stage to rejoin the others.)

NICHOLAS

I assume you won't be at the house later, for the reception.

LAURA

I don't think so. It probably wouldn't be the best thing, you know, for Dad and Uncle Carl.

NICHOLAS

I get it. I understand. But can we get together soon? Maybe for dinner or something?

LAURA

I'd like that.

(LAURA looks at TIMOTHY,  
awaiting his response. He says  
nothing.)

LAURA

(impatiently, to TIMOTHY) We'd like that, right?

TIMOTHY

Yeah, sure. What the hell? Why not? I'll be around.

(NICHOLAS extends his hand to  
TIMOTHY, who hesitates but  
takes it. LAURA and NICHOLAS  
hug. NICHOLAS exits.)

LAURA

Five more minutes and we're leaving without Uncle Carl.

TIMOTHY

We can't leave without him. How will he get home?

LAURA

I don't know. Maybe he'll take a taxi like he did to  
Granddad's house this morning.

TOM

(loudly) We're not leaving him.

TIMOTHY

I guess we're not leaving him.

(pause)

(CARL enters from stage right.)

LAURA

Where have you been? We're starving.

(CARL stops in front of TOM.)

CARL

Hold out your hand.

TOM

Why?

CARL

Just do it.

(TOM holds out his hand and  
CARL drops something into it.)

TOM looks at the object in disbelief.)

CARL

What? Isn't that it? Isn't that what you wanted?

TOM

Where did you get it? Did you have it all this time?

CARL

No, of course not. I had an idea about where it might be, and I was right.

TOM

Where was it?

CARL

Don't worry about that. It's not important.

TOM

You don't want it?

CARL

If I wanted it, you wouldn't be holding it.

TOM

I--

CARL

No. Don't say anything. It's yours. It doesn't hold anything for me. It never has, to be honest.

TOM

It's so light.

CARL

I thought it would be heavier, too. Ain't that funny?

TOM

It's beautiful. After all these years, it's still so beautiful. You see how it shines?

CARL

Keep it good, Tom. Keep it good.

(TOM looks at CARL, and nods with understanding. After a moment, CARL places a hand on TOM's shoulder and faces the group.)

CARL

All right, then, everyone. I know you're all hungry, and so am I.

But before we eat (reaches into his jacket and pulls out a blue keychain holding a single key), I'd like to go and get my new truck.

LIGHTS FADE. THE END.