

SMALL FAVORS

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By
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CHARACTERS

SETH	23, Mike’s younger brother
MIKE	27, Seth’s older brother
PETE	27, one of Mike’s best friend
DENNY	25, a poker-playing friend of Mike
RICK	27, poker-playing friend of Mike
CRAIG	19, Seth’s best friend

Time:

Current, except the first scene which takes place one hour before the second scene and Scenes 5 and 7 which take place four plus years earlier.

Place:

Pete’s Apartment, except the first scene which takes place in Mike’s apartment and Scenes 5 and 7 which take place in a park or wooded area.

Set:

The set is a living room / dining room of a spacious suburban NJ apartment. The dining table, center stage, for tonight turned into a poker table with chips and cards stacked upon it. To Stage Left is a lounge chair and credenza with two bowls upon it against the wall, to Stage Right, a credenza leading to the kitchen, holding a portable phone set-up, answering machine, extra chips and a box that acts as the bank.

Movement is essential. The play by its nature is stationary, poker players at a table, so move them. To the snack bar, beers, all is vital in order to move the play from stationary to progressive. The flow between scenes should be as fluid as possible, especially in the second act.

The phone ringing, which starts off faintly heard offstage, should grow in volume through the play, eventually becoming loud, even threatening in the end.

A word on pauses: an ellipsis is equal to the word “(pause)” it merely is placed in the body of a statement. But then in descending length is the dash, the period, the colon, then the lowly comma. Remember: acting is in the pauses. Make more of them and make them longer.

ACT I, SCENE 1

(MIKE's apartment, empty of appurtenances save for a single chair and a phone. We hear the shower running, a front buzzer rings. We hear it once....then once again)

SETH

(offstage)

Mike?....Hello Mike?!

(SETH enters carrying an overnight bag. Throughout he keeps his jacket on and moves about lugubriously)

Mike?

MIKE

Seth is that you?! I'm in the shower! You hear me?!

SETH

Yeah.

MIKE

Seth?!

SETH

I hear you!

MIKE

Okay! Talk louder. I'll be out in a minute, make yourself at home.

(SETH shrugs "where")

Grab a beer out of the fridge.

SETH

No that's okay, I'm not supposed to be drink.

MIKE

Get me one too!

SETH

I'm not having one!

(the water goes off)

MIKE

I'll have the Heineken, get whatever you want....How was the bus, you find me okay?
Sorry I didn't pick you up, but it's really better. This way we saved the most time.

SETH

At least you did.

MIKE

What's that?

SETH

(a hair dryer whines)

Never mind!

MIKE

What?

SETH

I said never mind!

MIKE

(the hair dryer turns off)

Any cute babes on the bus? I ever tell you about the girl I picked up coming from school?

SETH

Yes.

(the hairdryer begins again)

MIKE

I got some off a complete stranger. And she was cute too! I'd've taken her out if she hadn't let me finger her right there on the 33 bus. I mean *some* class is expected.

(the hair dryer stops)

Though it did add special meaning to their slogan: New Jersey Transit—*pleasure on every ride*....Still man, that is some feat. So d'you have any luck?

SETH

No. I only had this drunk fifty-year-old harridan sitting next to me.

(the hairdryer again, so more to himself)

She smelled like rotting seaweed and kept talking on me with her breath. She finally fell asleep on my shoulder around Totowa so I just leaned away and tried not to smell her.

MIKE

Yeah, sometimes it's always that way.

(the hairdryer goes off. MIKE enters wearing only a towel, brushing his chest hair. He walks to SETH. An awkward handshake ends in a long awkward moment)

MIKE

Look at you! All spiffy and clean.

SETH

Hey Mike.

MIKE

Where's your beer?

SETH

I can't drink.

MIKE

Oh right, the new medicine. Still got the shits?....Then where's my beer?

(MIKE winks, then heads towards the kitchen)

The new place, like how little I've done with it? Mom drive you to the bus?

SETH

No, Dad did.

MIKE

Dad took off work? Boy they must be scared.

SETH

He's not that bad.

MIKE

(comes on stage with a beer)

He hasn't taken off since you broke your leg and even then he didn't come home till 2:30.

SETH

It bled a lot, but it wasn't serious.

MIKE

It was a compound fracture! He could've at least gone to St Barnabas, it took two hours of surgery. *Christ Seth*, why do you always let them off the hook!

SETH

I'm not. I'm just saying—it wasn't that big a deal.

MIKE

(pause, softening slowly)

He should've gone there immediately....I'm glad he took some time today.

(the phone rings)

Get that.

(MIKE goes off. SETH, in time, finds the phone on the floor)

SETH

Hello....*I'm* sorry....No it's Seth....Hey, yeah I just got in....The whole weekend.

MIKE

Who is it?

SETH

Hold on....It's Pete.

MIKE

Tell 'im to hold on. Better yet, tell 'im we've got our coats on and we're leaving.

SETH

Mike says we've got our coats on and we're leaving....No, he hasn't put a shirt on yet.

(to MIKE)

He says to get your ass moving!

(MIKE comes on with his pants open tucking in his shirt)

MIKE

I'm wearing my shirt, don't tell him that. He's always riding my ass, the prick.

SETH

He said you're always riding his ass. Then he called you a prick.

(pause, listening and nodding, then to MIKE)

Fuck you.

MIKE

Yeah-yeah-yeah sweet mouth. Tell him we're bringing beers, that'll shut him up.

SETH

Would you please talk—

MIKE

(going off)

Tell 'im.

SETH

He says....Uh huh, good....Yeah, see ya.

MIKE

What'd he say?

SETH

He said you're a goitrous cyst.

MIKE

Ha! Pisser. Pete's great with that shit. Three months pre-med at Rutgers and all he got were all these disgusting Medical phrases.

SETH

Doesn't he work on Wall Street?

(MIKE comes onstage with rolled-up sleeves, rubbing some unguent into his forearms and face)

MIKE

He does! He failed all his science midterms and was Econ before nightfall. He only wanted to become a doctor because of some crazy Nurse *nookie* dreams. Now it's puss-infected cysts, sebaceous chancres, I can't even say half. *Goitrous?* What the hell's that?

SETH

A goiter is a cyst on someone's neck from an enlarged thyroid. Goitrous is the adjective.

MIKE

Really?—I always thought it was another word for pussy.

(MIKE winks with puckish smile. pause)

SETH

I thought it'd only be us tonight Mike.

MIKE

Yeah yeah I know but you haven't had any fun since you got back, so I figured we'd—

SETH

I got out!....I didn't get back, I got out.—You make it seem like I went on Spring Break.

MIKE

(pause)

So I figured we'd have a little guy fun.

SETH

I'm not really feeling up to going girl hunting.

MIKE

No I know, that's why we're not going out *girl hunting*.—Didn't I tell you?

(SETH shakes his head, MIKE breaks in a big smile)

I got up a poker game, it's at Pete's in Hoboken. The old gang, Denny and Rick too. It'll be a blast. Cigs, beers and bullshit, we'll have a ball.

SETH

I was hoping we'd have a chance talk.

MIKE

We will. I've gotcha the whole weekend, there's no rush. I promise, whatever you want. But first, get ready to have money separated from you, okay? I'll give you fifty to start.

(MIKE pushes him playfully and exits. He is evasive in the next dialogue which SETH knows)

SETH

The entire gang coming?

MIKE

Yeah I think.

SETH

How're things with Billy?

MIKE

They're all right. It's never the same after college. You make new friends, see new things. Come home going in different directions, you separate some more.

SETH

I wouldn't've thought college could've effected you two like that.

MIKE

(comes on, combing his hair again)

Yeah well, I went away, he didn't. I guess we've been drifting since then. But we're okay you know, no biggie. It's still all shits and giggles when we get together.

SETH

Craig and I knew we'd always be friends, like you two. He wouldn't have it otherwise.

(MIKE stops briefly, then begins again, pause)

Remember how Chief got his nickname?

MIKE

On Ellis cul-de-sac. Those leaves stuck to the back of his head. *Billy* led 'im into that pile.

SETH

Shoved him in is more like it.

MIKE

Yeah. Some brother shit, payback for rattin' to Mr. Finnetti. They're always combative.

SETH

More than we were.

MIKE

(pause)

He *did* look like an Indian Chief. Especially when that cry came out of 'im.

SETH

(imitating)

Ahooo, ahooo. Ahooo! Ahooo!

MIKE

Yes. *Yes!* It was fuckin' funny....We made it seem *cool* so he wouldn't run home crying. "You're a chief Craig, you're an Indian Chief!"...He bought it *too!* He stopped crying.

SETH

I remember....Was it you or Billy who started calling him Chief?

MIKE

Billy.

(finished combing, MIKE throws the brush into the bathroom. He turns to SETH and they stare uncomfortably)

Pass me my shoes.

SETH

(does as bidden)

I don't think I'm up to cards.

MIKE

You gotta go, we need a fifth.

(MIKE moves to the chair, puts on his shoes)

Anyway Mom says all you do is sit around reading. That's not healthy. You gotta get up, get back out.

SETH

They didn't let me read there. Four years without a book or a magazine. You lose touch, you lose the capacity to engage....The simple basic links to everything you are.

MIKE

Yeah, I know, but it's too much.

SETH

Besides, all your friends are your age, I'll feel uncomfortable with them.

MIKE

Denny's not, he's only a couple years older than you. You feel that way because the only people you're hanging around are Mom and Dad. Christ that'll keep *anyone* fucked up.

(he stops stiffly at his solecism)

I didn't mean....I made them send you here for a couple days to get you away. Mom's looks alone'll get you. No words, just....They avoid the topic so much you'll *never* forget.

SETH

And what are we doing?

MIKE

(finishing with his shoes and slowly standing)

We're having some fun tonight. I was talking to Mom this morning and we—

(the phone rings)

Fuck, don't answer it. It's Pete calling back again.

SETH

Five minutes later?

MIKE

(putting on his coat)

Yeah, that's their way of getting me out the door. Fuck 'em, they can't start without us.

They probably want me to pick up something on the way. Let's get outta here.

SETH

Are we gonna grab the beers?

MIKE

Fuck no, I'm not paying for those hosebags to drink. They fuckin' *pound* beers when they ain't paying. Though remind me, we gotta pick up my lucky cigs on the way.

(MIKE sees how apprehensive SETH is. He moves closer a moment, then smiles wide and chucks SETH on the shoulder)

We're gonna have a great time tonight. Real fun, you'll see.

(SETH nods and grins unconvincingly)

SCENE 2

(RICK and DENNY stand Stage Front looking down at two hands of stud on the table)

RICK

Now he's got two pair, possible full with the fuckin' Kings. I got an inside straight draw or at the outside, straight flush.

DENNY

With the ten and eight of clubs.

RICK

Not with the clubs, with the six nine here. This is my hand. *Fuckin'* pay attention.

DENNY

I'm *paying* attention, I just get confused. So you raise him 'cause you've got the flush.

RICK

Out head *ass!* He's got pairs, I got dick. He draws a third, he's House, then I *gotta* straight flush.

DENNY

Oh right-right.

RICK

So he checks 'cause he's a pussy. Prolly coulda big stacked me out if he dropped heavy. But the Turn flips eight red. Shit to him but another heart to me. Fuck ya.

DENNY

Yeah, I bet.

(PETE enters, carrying chips to the credenza left and pours them in bowls stationed there)

RICK

Now his pairs ain't so strong. I've already taken *five C* off 'im, this guy's no high-dime produce. He's pretty much sitting there in only his boxers with cute little hearts on 'em.

PETE

Which you were hoping to win off him so you could *charm* his one-eyed snake.

RICK

Yeah right, in your wet sloppy dreams. By the way your Mom wants you home for Sunday dinner. She told me yesterday when I was over *banging* her.

PETE

I would but I'll be too full from munching your Mom's hair pie.

RICK

Hey! That's not fair man, you know my Mom's dead.

PETE

I know. The decomposing thighs—ya can't beat pussy *ash* at any price.

(he rubs his palms together and sniffs)

RICK

You're a sick fuck Pete.

DENNY

Did your Mom really die Rick?

RICK

Don't be stupid. I told you just last month she was on my case about my Vegas trip.

(PETE turns off the telephone answering machine ringer)

PETE

Mothers don't die Denny, they just *ascend* to a higher plane of guilt delivery.

RICK

Where the fuck’s everybody? Mikey’s never on time but Billy could fuckin’ fall here.

PETE

Billy’s not coming.

RICK

Why’s he not coming’? It fuckin’ sucks when there’s only four. Man I hate that.

PETE

There’s five coming—

RICK

You can’t really bluff. You don’t make side bets, the pots don’t get to shit—

PETE

Did you *fuckin’* hear me, there’s gonna be five!

RICK

Who? Not some Wall Street fuckfriend of yours with his ties and fuckin’ Jimmy Choo’s—

PETE

Shut up asshole, it’s Seth okay!....Mikey’s bringing Seth, is that all right with you?

*(a long pause as PETE finishes with the phone equipment
and moves to count the stack of chips)*

DENNY

Is that why Billy’s not coming?

PETE

No all right, no! Billy’s got something better to do and he hasn’t got time to take you fuckin’ losers’s money! Okay?! *Fuck me!*

(an awkward pause)

RICK

Wouldn't be taking my money. I took 'im for fitty last time.

PETE

You took him for *fifteen* last time. And the time before he took you for forty.

RICK

It was *fifty*! And he didn't take forty, he took me for *thirty-five*.

(DENNY and PETE react)

There's a difference!—And anyway I let him take it.

PETE

Yeah that was it.

RICK

I did! He was feeling shitty 'bout everything, I figured a couple wins might raise 'im....Seth hunh—he okay?

PETE

Yeah, he's fine, he's good. Mikey says he's really coming out.

DENNY

Is he recovered?

PETE

Denny man, what's your fuckin' problem? It's Seth all right? Little fuckin' Sethy who we played attack football with every summer. Remember beating our *asses* off on Oval Park?

RICK

Yes I do.

PETE

And he was our little fuckin' drink getter through a few dozen of these nights.

RICK

Yes he was.

DENNY

(dejectedly)

He also was the one snowplowed Miss Troy’s car.—Nearly blew it up with all the gas pouring out....And he was there that night with Craig.

PETE

(long pause)

It’s just Seth. Get that fucking clear.

RICK

I don’t give a crap as long as he plays. I can’t stand when there’s only four.

PETE

Well there’s five, so you two chuggers blow each other and cut out any shit about Seth.

DENNY

Not from me, I always liked him.

RICK

You always wanted to fuck him.

DENNY

Fuck you Rick.

RICK

Ooohh Denny, such language. Not *godly* Denny. Remember: *He’s* always watching.

PETE

Good. I don’t want him feeling—

(MIKE bursts in. SETH moves in quietly behind)

MIKE

I WANT YOUR MONEY! GIVE ME YOUR MONEEEEEEY!

PETE

There he is!

RICK

Fuckin' finally.

MIKE

Here I am! Beatings will now commence! I *am* the Alpha male, I must mark my territory!

(he moves to the lounge, unzips his fly. PETE grabs a knife)

PETE

You do and I'll cut both inches off.

MIKE

And take my wand of perfection! Your Mom'll be heartbroken.

PETE

Then she'll just have to be satisfied with me.

(PETE hip-thrusts and everyone groans)

MIKE

You're a sick fuck Pete.

PETE

Heh-heh, that's a common opinion. Sethy! How'd'ya put up with this prick of a brother?

SETH

Oh well, you know, you get used to anything.

MIKE

Fuck that. He's lucky to have me.

PETE

You look good man. It's great to see you.

(PETE hugs SETH. MIKE shakes hands with the other guys)

MIKE

So many losers abound. Seth, you remember the Red Hot Lovers, Romy and Michelle.

SETH

Yeah. Hey Denny, hey Rick.

DENNY

Heey Seth, how're you doing?

(RICK slaps the back of his head)

Ouch! What, I'm just asking?

SETH

It's okay Denny. I'm doing fine, thank you.

PETE

Of course it's okay. Sethy's come to lose his money to me and that's always all right.

DENNY

I'm gonna be the big winner tonight.

RICK

We should all live long enough see that.

DENNY

Like the bible says "The first shall be last and the last shall be first."

MIKE

Well *it's* never wrong with predictions. Go down to Atlantic City this week Rick?

RICK

Yeah, two days. *Intensive.*

PETE

Good. When you go to one of those *intensive* A.C. confabs, you're always the big loser the next time we play. You learn just enough to be easy money for us. Praise the Lord!

MIKE

Hallelujah brother!

DENNY

Hey guys, come on.

PETE

Sorry Denny, but God won't mind. He hates Rick too.

RICK

Hey, that's not funny, don't fuckin' say that.

DENNY

“Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor extortioners shall inherit the Kingdom of God.”

RICK

Shut the fuck up Denny.

SETH

I think you're safe tonight Rick.—I'm not much of a poker player.

RICK

You know what they say. After five hands if you can't tell the patsy at the table—*get* up...

ALL

'CAUSE IT'S YOU!

PETE

Heh-heh yes sir. Don't you worry Sethy, Denny's usually the one carrying home the big loss. And you're a fuck lot smarter than these knuckleheads. Especially this dimwit here.

(he bear hugs MIKE from behind, wrestles with him)

MIKE

Like you would know. With your SAT scores I'm amazed you got a job.

PETE

You don't need brains on Wall Street baby, just brass balls and those I got.

MIKE

I know, I can feel them pressing on my ass.

PETE

(pushing him away)

Yeah, you wished you were my taste.

RICK

Would you two homos quit your shit so we can get down to cards?

MIKE

Yeah, of course, Ricky's ready.

(as he picks up and puts on a 1930's newsman's hat)

And here she is, waiting for my head....The French Connection lives. Now we can begin.

PETE

Who needs a beer? Denny, another? Rick, Sethy?

SETH

Not for me.

PETE

It's okay Seth, we don't proof here. It's time you drank with the big—

SETH

No I can't....I'm not really in the mood just yet.

PETE

(pause)

No problem. I was only hoping to get you drunk so you'd be easy money. Sadly you're gonna have to hear to Denny's *God* bullshit sober. Hell-fire damnation Denny, I know.

DENNY

Oh it's much worse than that Pete.

PETE

How bad can a red-hot poker in the ass be?

(to SETH with a wink)

Coke, water? Coke?

(SETH nods)

Dirty water for you Popeye?

MIKE

Aye aye.

(PETE moves off. MIKE moves to the table)

I want this seat next to Denny so I can steal his good cards all night.

DENNY

Thanks, I need all the help I can get. I'll deal first.

RICK

I'm dealing first.

MIKE

Let 'im deal, he never wins a pot.

(RICK reluctantly hands DENNY the cards)

SETH

So where's Billy? I thought he'd be here by now.

MIKE

He couldn't make it tonight. He had some things to do at the station.

SETH

He's not coming?

MIKE

Yeah, no, he couldn't get free. He's taking over now, you should see how responsible he is. Mr. Finnetti's slowing so Billy's running the show. They're changing tanks tonight.

(PETE returns carrying beers and a Coke which he places in the middle of the table. Everybody moves for something)

PETE

Refreshments and libations, pick your poison. Watch out Rick, there's something wrong with the top of that one.

RICK

Just like my women—broken and paid for by the house.

PETE

Count your chips. Everybody starts at fifty: A ten, four fives, the rest ones.

SETH

It's just that I was hoping to see him tonight.

PETE

Who's that?

DENNY

Billy.

PETE

I think he's in the city.

MIKE

No he's at the station. They're changing out the tanks tonight.

PETE

Yeah, that's it, right. With Mr. Finnetti cutting back, it's a fuckload of work now.

MIKE

That's what he says.

SETH

(pause)

I haven't seen him in a while.—I mean I saw him, he *saw* me...but we didn't talk.

PETE

You know how Billy is. Just like your brother, late to get anything done.

MIKE

I was on time tonight!

RICK

The fuck you were, you were a half-hour late.

MIKE

Like I said, right on time.

PETE

Right on *Mike* time, thirty-minute delay.

MIKE

I had to get Seth, he was at the train station!

RICK

You're fuckin' late to everything Mike. We're lucky it was only a half hour.

DENNY

Thank heaven for small favors.

MIKE

Oh fuck that, you guys'll be early to your own funerals.

RICK

And you'll be late to yours!

MIKE

Good! I hope so!

SETH

Everybody's early and late to their own funeral—when you think about it. You're dead, so you're there before anyone ever gets there, in the chapel, in the casket.—There wouldn't be a funeral without your being there already....By the same token, you're always late for your own funeral. The late So-and-So, like in newspaper articles. The late John Lennon, the late Kurt Cobain....The late Craig Finnetti....So you're always both early and late.

(a long pause in which no one moves)

RICK

Give me those fuckin' cards!

(RICK snatches the cards from DENNY who winces, deals)

Ante up, straight stud to start. Nothing's wild, nothing's weird, except Denny.

DENNY

Fuck you Rick.

RICK

Full beats a flush, flush a straight, straight beats three, and so on till Denny's beats his pud.

DENNY

Fuck you Rick.

RICK

Play the hand, play the damns, but don't take a stand if you can't pay the man.

(a distant phone rings and no one reacts)

SCENE 3

(everyone is at the table, candy cigarettes in their mouths, which at various times they chew. All have just received their cards and are studying them intently. MIKE is dealing)

Who's bet?
RICK

Mine. Buck.
PETE

Two.
DENNY

Gone.
MIKE

I'm out too.
SETH

RICK
The family who dumps together, humps together. Two to you Pete?

(SETH moves from the table as they play)

PETE
Going for a straight Denny boy?....Don't show it, you're always showing it. I'll take two.

One.
DENNY

I'm taking three.
RICK

MIKE

The odds of a straight are huge Denny, when you think about it.—Seth, think about it.

SETH

Ten possible first cards per suit, 40 of 52, seventy-two percent. Then each card in sequence, four in fifteen chance, 27 percent. That times four.—About 375 to one.

PETE

Two dollars.

DENNY

Two more

RICK

See ya.

MIKE

No balls.

RICK

Says the dink dealing for others.

PETE

You and me this time Dennis. I'll take one.

DENNY

Same.

MIKE

Four oh oh to one Denny. Probably one straight all night. You really think it'll be you?

(MIKE deals. PETE doesn't pick up, he just stares at DENNY, who doesn't meet his eye)

DENNY

Pick up your card Pete.

MIKE

Oh here we go again.

RICK

Pick up the *fuckin'* card.

PETE

Shut the fuck up!....Look me in the eyes Denny.—Look at me.

(DENNY does. PETE smirks slyly, hums, picks up the card)

DENNY

You didn't see anything....You didn't, you didn't see shit.

PETE

Up ten dollars.

MIKE

Ho Peter!

RICK

Call 'im Denny, he's fuckin' bluffin' you.

DENNY

Hold a sec. How much is in the pot?

PETE

Ten dollars Dennis.

MIKE

Twenty-eight if you call. Don't be a pussy Denny match 'im!

(DENNY rises excitedly)

DENNY

All right, ten bucks I call! I got it, I got the straight! Five to nine. What'd'ya got?

(PETE only stares at him)

C'mon Pete, *what?!*

PETE

What sound does the toilet make?

MIKE & RICK

Flushshshshshsh.

PETE

(as he turns the cards)

A spade is a spade is a spade. And so on....

MIKE

Oh no!

DENNY

Fuck.

RICK

That was well fuckin' played.

SETH

Sorry Denny.

DENNY

I thought you were bluffing.

PETE

The eyes, dear boy, they see all. Come to Papa! Chiefum need new patch for wigwam.

MIKE

Nice psyche out Marty Feldman. Grab your winnings and deal the next hand.

RICK

Not a graceful fuckin’ winner.

PETE

Jealousy my boys, the green-eyed monster. A deadly sin Denny, tell ‘em.

DENNY

Number two. Behind Pride, before Gluttony. Four before my favorite, *sloth*.

MIKE

Denny how do you reconcile your *new-found, deep* religious beliefs with your sick spoobag-buying ways? How many d’you score this week?

DENNY

(ashamed)

A pack of four.

SETH

You collect condoms?

PETE

Yes Seth, question our fair young comrade of the Christian guard about his pride and joy. Denny here’s buying every weird kind of cumcatcher he can find. He’s a freak about it.

DENNY

No I’m not.

PETE

Rick?

RICK

Fuckin’ freak.

MIKE

Denny hasn’t gotten laid in like his *entire* life, yet every week he buys more. He’s like Kevin Costner in Field of Dreams. He thinks if he buys them, *he* will cum.

DENNY

My mind wanders from the Testament.—I want to be prepared.

PETE

Gay Cub Scout masters aren't that prepared.

DENNY

That's not funny. I was a Weeblow.

PETE

Either way boyo, it's not sanctioned by the Religious order, let alone your own mumsie.

DENNY

It's my set-up. Every great character in the bible had a wicked life before their redemption. Saul before Paul in Damascus, Jonah's rousting before the whale. Job stricken with poverty and sores. You ain't shit in the bible if you weren't a *shit* before.

MIKE

So this's your *trials*, losing at poker and buying condoms you'll never use?

DENNY

Exactly.

PETE

Then your transformation's gonna come and you'll be put on the path of the righteous. The greater your redemption, the greater your prestige.

DENNY

If it's Jesus's will, yes. “I came not to call the righteous but the *sinners* to repentance.” I'm not getting rich soon. So first the degradation of man, then salvation of the spirit.

SETH

Did you ever think that your wanting to be famous for being redeemed is a sin?

DENNY

How'd'ya mean?

SETH

Fame and renown are merely a variations of greed, lust and self-love.—Deadly sins.

RICK

Since when is lust a Deadly sin?

SETH

And your desire to be celebrated, that vanity-filled aggrandizement, even if it's Christian recognition in some modern-day biblical tale, it's certainly something contrary to Gospel.

DENNY

“Behold not the want of righteous things unlawfully.” Luke 16:7.

RICK

I'm finding a new fuckin' religion.

SETH

Envy, pride, cupidity. Maybe that's the new parable for today. A cautionary tale for all the Holy Rollers parading their piety across the land. The overly righteous, *greedy* for redemption, never get redeemed by God on account of that avarice.

MIKE

An antichrist for the 21st Century!

DENNY

And I can be reviled and accursed by who come to know His greatness. The Wanting beast without God.—That's *fuckin'* awesome!

PETE

Denny, ya fuckin' abscess, that way you never get redeemed!

DENNY

But I'll be famous!—Any asshole can get redeemed these days, look at Nixon!—But *not* being redeemed for want of redemption, that's “New Church” thinking!

MIKE

You're fucked up Denny.

DENNY

Thank you!

SETH

Hopefully God isn't so picky about who He's letting into heaven.—Hopefully he's lenient.

RICK

Enough religion, huh? We all know God doesn't play poker—he rolls dice.

MIKE

How're you doing on money Seth? Let me know if you need me to lend you more.

SETH

Thanks I will. Inching my way towards zero, I don't want to get into debt here. I haven't been exactly *earning* lately. To be absolutely frank I haven't earned anything for years. But I guess you all know that....Money, *filthy lucre*—root of all evil isn't Denny? The incarnation, *la instrumenta del Diavalo*.

(SETH's levity fails. MIKE signals to PETE furtively)

PETE

I'm getting a beer, anybody want one?

RICK

Ho.

MIKE

Yeah, get me one.—And don't lick it first, I know how you love tonguing my things.

PETE

And disappoint the bottle?

(MIKE moves to SETH as PETE goes in the kitchen)

MIKE

What’s up with you, you all right?

SETH

Yeah I’m fine, I’m just....we’re all thinking about it. *They’re* all thinking....

MIKE

What’re you talking about?

SETH

I wish they would just *say* something. *Mention* what’s in their mind—

MIKE

Nobody’s thinking anything.

SETH

Aw c’mon Mike, where’s Billy? He’s never missed one of these shitty little, penny-ante—

MIKE

What, he’s not here? He had something to do.

SETH

“Seth get me chips, Seth get me a Michelob.” He can even be more of an asshole than Rick at games....He can’t see me. He can’t talk to me, he can’t stand to be in my presence.

MIKE

That’s not true, that’s in your head. Outside Hasler’s, he saw you, he told me you talked.

SETH

It was for two minutes and he couldn’t get away from me fast enough. Talking to me like I’m some embarrassing one-night stand he’s run into....It’s been four years, isn’t that enough? Cause if it’s not, if it’s never gonna be enough—

MIKE

If he’s got a problem, that’s his—

SETH

If I have to keep it in *forever*, if I can't ever explain—

MIKE

You gotta expect that.

SETH

Ever get out what's inside, what I *know*. What I *see* every time I close my eyes.

MIKE

You've gotta *allow* him that.

SETH

I'll allow him that!—I allow him all, I'll allow him *everything*, just can he come talk to me....Can he let me explain—let me tell him what happened that night with Craig.

MIKE

He *will*.

SETH

When?

(no response, long pause)

Giving me money, why say it out loud like that? It only brings out why I haven't got any.

MIKE

I didn't want you to feel short if you needed more.

PETE

(returning)

Beers!

MIKE

All right, we're coming.

SETH

We rake leaves and we weave baskets but they don't pay us for it. That's *therapy*. They don't pay you for the *digging into* you they do. Dealing with thoughts and consequences, the knowledge, *visions* in your mind that never leave your scope and focus—

MIKE

Hey hey, it's okay, it's okay! They're not, nobody's thinking anything....It's not present for them, not like it is for us. It's been too long, they've moved on....It wasn't close enough to them to last this long....It's only that close enough to us.

SETH

And Billy....I shouldn't be here Mike. I shouldn't....

MIKE

Of course you should, you're doing fine.

SETH

Let's get outta here. Please, let's go back to your apartment. There's some things we've—

MIKE

No, *no!*—You're fine, you're *doing* fine....That's why we're here tonight. You know everybody, everybody's cool, everybody's on your side.

RICK

You guys playing or what?

MIKE

Keep your fuckin' shirt on!

RICK

All right, Jesus.—Shut the fuck up Denny, I don't want to hear it.

DENNY

The Lord will be evident for you some day Rick.

SETH

This’s why I don’t go out. People are outside, they aren’t *inside* where I am.—I’m inside and I’m alone and there’s no confusion of roles and sides ‘cause they’re all my roles and it’s a one-sided equation.—And I’m never left wishing for different outcomes.

MIKE

You’ve gotta fight that. You can’t be this way forever.

SETH

(pause)

Are you on my side Mike?

MIKE

Me?—What’d’you mean? Of course I am, why would you ask me that?

SETH

(pause, struggling)

All this talk of sides. You said everybody’s on my side—does that include you?....It’s a poker game. Rick’ll tell you, it’s every man for himself.

MIKE

Fuck him, he’s an asshole. I’m down twelve, I’m not letting fuckin’ Rick win tonight. Look at me: you’re okay, it’s fine. Let’s have some fun.

(MIKE moves back to the table. SETH stays behind at first, then moves apprehensively to the table)

MIKE

Are we dealt yet? Hunh, who’s deal is it?

DENNY

I dealt.

RICK

Shouldn’t let the cards sit too long. First thing you know, someone’s stacked the draw.

PETE

Nobody's lining up cards here asshole.

MIKE

What're we playing? Who's dealing, I am. Let's go, give me the cards.

RICK

It's not your deal.

MIKE

I don't give a shit, I'm dealing.

RICK

They're *already dealt*.

MIKE

D'you *fuckin'* hear what I said?

(MIKE scrapes the cards together, staring at RICK. The phone rings distantly. Nobody moves or appears to hear it)

DENNY

I dealt those.

PETE

And it was a masterful job. Now go get a Cheeto.

SETH

Actually it's my deal after Denny.

MIKE

Okay then you deal.

(MIKE hands the cards SETH who begins to shuffle)

Yeah, re-shuffle 'em just in case. We don't want to run afoul of any Atlantic City powers.

SETH

Pete, I think your phone's ringing.

PETE

Yeah I know.

SETH

(pause)

Are you gonna—

RICK

We don't answer phones while we're playing!

PETE

Easy.

MIKE

It's a rule we've set up that we've been able to keep.

PETE

I turned off the ringer in here. You're hearing the one in the bedroom.

DENNY

And everybody's gotta leave their cell phone in their cars.

SETH

I don't have a cell phone.

(everybody turns in disbelief. the phone stops ringing)

I'll get one tomorrow.

RICK

Speaking of A.C., when I was down this week, David Henning was there at Caesar's. I seen this guy on ESPN a month ago. He's a fat fuck—but a balls-out fuckin' player.

PETE

So's your Mom.

RICK

He’s playing this cornhole Texican hack who’s playing tight, low in the hole on calls, never going all in. Henning’s just a fuckin’ hosin’ machine when it comes to that.

MIKE

So’s your Mom.

RICK

Pot runs to fifty-two G’s and he’s just teasing this cracker, settin’ ‘im up. The Dink *thinks* he’s got somethin’ so he’s raising, pushing more. *Ten* Gs, Henning shakes and frets, wipes sweat of his brow. *Twenty* Gs, Henning shakes and frets, wipes *more* sweat off his brow.

PETE

It’s a sweaty fuckin’ brow.

MIKE

Like the landing scene in “Airplane.”

RICK

Then this Texas fuck reaches into his pocket, a real fuckin’ rounder *never* does that. So Henning starts turning his cards. Bam! Queen. Bam! Ace. You can actually *see* this Dink staggering. *Jack! SueKing!* it was *fuckin’* unreal man....To be there, to see Henning pull that shit in person....‘sa *fuckin’* dream!—He’s mowed hunderds a guys with that move.

PETE & MIKE

So has your Mom!

RICK

Goddamn it, stop with that shit!

MIKE

Ho-ho, Ricky wakes from his *own* little world.

PETE

Will wonders never cease.

RICK

Deal the *fuckin'* cards already!

MIKE

Who the fuck're you talking to!

RICK

He's been shuffling forever!

MIKE

I don't give a shit! You'll get your fuckin' cards when he deals them!

SETH

It's all right Mike.

MIKE

It's not all right! It's a friendly fuckin' game here, not your fuckin' A.C. dickheads!

RICK

I'm just sayin' he doesn't have to shuffle 'em like a thousand fuckin' times.

MIKE

He'll shuffle as much as he wants to! You got that?!

SETH

I'm done shuffling.

MIKE

What?

(a long pause)

Then deal the fuckin' cards.

(slowly, in silence, SETH deals. The phone rings again)

SCENE 4

(same as previous scene, later in the night. PETE stands, collecting his winnings. MIKE and RICK are at the table)

PETE

Heh-heh Daddy need new pair shoe!.... So I'm making fun of her, asking if she put on a few pounds, freshman fifteen. And she's like, "Peter, there's nothing wrong with the way I look," all snotty and shit like I don't know she blew Gressel in the Franco bleachers during senior photo. Then she did that hair flip she does, you know the whole swirl around thing.

RICK

Oh god yes.

MIKE

Heel boy.

DENNY

This is my sister.

PETE

So you know the hair flip.—And I say, "Amy, five or six pounds too many I'm thinking." She turns to Rick who's fuckin' trashed, holding up the Ringside's wall and says "Richard do I look fat?"—Just like that, all seductively pouty. And I *swear-to-God* as this fucker's stuttering to respond "Aim Aim Aim"—his knees buckle out and he drops to the floor!

MIKE

Get the fuck outta here!

PETE

I swear to God! Is it true?

(RICK just shrugs defense)

He's at her feet, arms all akimbo. She looks at me like she's just proved some fuckin' impossible physics theorem, flips her hair again, and walks off searching for a cancer stick.

RICK

I don't remember it exactly like that.

PETE

Oh fuck that! Billy was there. Call 'im. Call 'im right now, ask 'im, he'll tell ya.

RICK

It was a weak moment.

PETE

Yeah, I'd say.

RICK

Fuck you, you and Billy weren't doing any better.

PETE

That's right we weren't. But at least we were striking out on that *snatch* with our pride.

DENNY

This isn't right.

SETH

Mike—

MIKE

Rick was always freaked by Amy.

RICK

I wasn't *that* bad.—I just beat off to her a bit.

MIKE

You beat off to *Pete* a bit. Amy got you enshrined in the *Spankin'* Hall of Fame. Each time she'd breeze by the Armory anywhere *near* your—

SETH

Mike.

MIKE

What, what is it?!

SETH

(pause)

The medicine—what we talked about....

MIKE

Oh, right, yeah....Pete, Seth's gotta pinch a loaf in your can.

PETE

Huh?....Yeah, no, sure go ahead. Bombs away.

SETH

I'm sorry.

PETE

Nah, no problem kid, go ahead. My throne is yours. I'm ready for a break.

MIKE

Good idea.

RICK

We've only been playing an hour!

PETE

Shut the fuck up.—It's in the back there through the bedroom. There might not be any rag so shout out and I'll get you some.

SETH

I'm sorry. This medication I'm taking—

MIKE

It's okay Seth, just go.

(SETH leaves as the phone rings. His expression is all that records its tintinnabulation. Everybody rises from the table)

PETE

(to RICK)

The way you're losing money, it'll make the night go longer.

RICK

I'm only setting you guys up.

DENNY

Yeah sure you are.

RICK

Fuck you Denny, at least I'm ahead of you asshole.

DENNY

I don't pretend to be much of a poker player.

RICK

You don't *pretend* to be much of anything.

PETE

Everything good Seth?!.....*Seth?*

SETH

(far offstage)

Yeah. Fine.

MIKE

(to PETE)

It's one of the things the doctors have him taking.

PETE

He really looks good man.

MIKE

Yeah, he does. It's been a while since I could say that.

DENNY

How long was he in there?

PETE

Denny?

MIKE

(pause)

Altogether about four years. After the inquest, maybe three and a half.

RICK

That's a long fuckin' time.

MIKE

He'd come home from time to time, for a weekend or the holidays.

PETE

Why didn't you tell me, I'd've come over to see him?

MIKE

Our neighborhood, the whole town had been so—with the findings. It's still whispered about on our street. These condemning looks, or even worse heads turning away as we drive up Orton when they're watering the lawn or putting the trash to the street....My parents decided not to tell anyone, swore me to secrecy.—I guess we all just wanted him to ourselves. In a small way we're a whole family again—like we used to be.

DENNY

(pause)

I had her. You guys didn't, she came after you left. Ms. Troy. A mean-ass witch. Trigonometry tests you couldn't ace if you tried. *Which* nobody did, this was high school.

RICK

Who uses that shit ever? “To buy sneakers, I take the cosign of the tangent of *fuck you!*”

DENNY

But she took it seriously, like she was friggin’ Einstein. On her tests, highest grade’d be in the fifties, passing be like *twenty-two*!

PETE

That’s not a curve, that’s a fucking U-turn.

MIKE

He had A’s all the way through his *whole life*. You could tell it when he was a kid, fucking amazing. I could never keep up. I was always just hoping he wouldn’t lap me.

DENNY

And then that day, the day of the blow-up—

MIKE

We all know the story Denny.

DENNY

I know but I talked to Vinnie DeMarco last month, Tommy’s brother, he was in the class. He said she was gunning for Seth from the start. Each test Seth’s in the eighties, rest of the class is in the forties. But on that last test she says “No curve. All scores absolute.”

PETE

Bitch.

DENNY

So Seth starts giving her shit. He’s like “Nobody else passed! Either it’s a bad test or it’s a bad teacher. Either way it’s a bad teacher!”

RICK

He always had a smart mouth.

DENNY

Vinnie said she just starting like freaking out. “Get out! Get out of my class!” And Seth’s there, “Steal a little more salary! Why don’t you earn you living *teaching* for a change?” Then she *totally* lost it. She was like—

MIKE

We know the *fuckin'* story!

(a long pause as a few look towards the room offstage)

DENNY

I was just, I thought....I only spoke to him a couple of weeks ago.

RICK

That's fucked up.

MIKE

You can't provoke him like that! He's not built like that. If it doesn't make sense in his mind.—If he thinks he's being treated unfairly, he doesn't comprehend how that happens.

RICK

Yeah but you don't take a *fuckin'* snowplow to her Civic for it!

PETE

(whispered intensely)

Lower your *fuckin'* voice!

MIKE

(pause)

He needed every A he could get coming out of our crappy school.

PETE

It'd've pissed *anybody* off.

RICK

Wouldn't've bothered me.

PETE

You only got one *B* in all of high school dickwad and that was in Metal shop.

RICK

Still.

DENNY

They shouldn't even've been trying anything anyway. The Lord said "To me alone belongeth vengeance and recompense."

(pause, no response)

PETE

They made a perfect pair, each filling what the other lacked. Seth'd get Craig his grades, Craig'd get Seth his dates. Don't think neither cared for anybody company but their own.

MIKE

It started when we were young. They were always together, like Billy and me used to be.

RICK

Living in the past tense.

MIKE

You got something you wanna say Rick.

RICK

I'm sorry man, but it's fuckin' life. Him or me, me or him. We all know this shit's gonna happen to somebody. And "used-to-be's" like sevens in poker, ain't good for shit.

PETE

That's a pretty cold outlook asshole.

RICK

You all don't like to think about it, but that's a front. That time it was Craig, soon it'll be another one of us. Car crash, cancer, suicide bomb. So many ways to cash it. You never know yet you always fuckin' know. Shit prolly be me if Denny's right. No sense whining.

MIKE

Don't worry, nobody will when it's you.

PETE

But Billy working the Citgo ‘cause Mr. Finnetti can’t get his shit together since.—Sure seems like he’s paying twice.

DENNY

It isn’t truly Christian giving till you part with something that really matters to you. *That* makes it giving—‘cause it’s giving something up you want.

MIKE

Don’t you think everybody’s given enough?

PETE

(pause)

Remember our “Night of Wreckage?”

RICK

In Denny’s *Performance* Dart. More perform *and* wince.

DENNY

You guys always made me drive so you could drink.

PETE

We only brought you along at all so we could drink.

RICK

And hear nudie stories about your sister.

MIKE

All the shit we didn’t have the balls to do in high school. Cruising track, firing the dump.

ALL

Pissing on the Plaque!

RICK

Fuck me, that was the funniest fuckin’ night.

PETE

Fuckin’ Billy never had a single moment of athletic coordination his whole entire life, but that night whatever he aimed at, he hit. Couldn’t fuckin’ miss.

DENNY

Especially behind Creston Estates. Remember, we went back behind there.

(a long uncomfortable pause at the mention of this)

PETE

I hadn’t ever been back there before that night. Not ever.

RICK

It was dark as shit man, locked down *tight*.

DENNY

Even with my headlights on I *still* fell and cut the crap out of my knee.

MIKE

It’s amazing the cops didn’t come with all the banging and busting shit we’re doing.

PETE

It was fuckin’ *Billy* with that stalk or whatever, spear chuckin’ it at everything.

RICK

It was the metal tubing of a gear shaft.

DENNY

He wouldn’t stop.

PETE

We’re lucky he didn’t fuckin’ *impale* one of us.

MIKE

When we were back there, after you guys’d gone off to pry open that Caddy or whatever.

RICK

It was a Lincoln Zephyr. They last produced those in 1942. What was that doing there?

MIKE

(pause)

Billy and I were drinking by the dumpster, looking up at this one lone light coming from a room on the top floor. It was this cold, like *sapphire* blue light, coming from a t.v. I guess.—Saddest looking thing—but really so cool against the black night.... And I remember Billy telling me that more than anything else in the whole wide world, he wanted to get a rock and smash the fuckin’ shit out of it. *Pfff*....he *was* drunk as fuck.

PETE

My whole life growing up nearby, I was always scared of that place. Afraid to walk the lawn, afraid to be *on the sidewalk*. I always crossed to the Runnymede side when I was walking by. You don’t know, you guys were from the *rich* parts of town.

RICK

You make it sound like your streets were the projects of Newark.

PETE

Compared with *yours!*....The big white columns, and those gables snapping out my bedroom window during a storm. Shadows forecasting onto the walls. I *swear* I heard *howling* or whatever it was....That place was always the monster hiding around the corner.

DENNY

‘Cause of all those stories we’d heard when we were young.

RICK

The things everybody said they did in there.

MIKE

It’s not like that.

RICK

Tying down the crazies, torturing ‘em.

DENNY

Electric shock.

RICK

Lobotomies.

MIKE

It's not like that!....It's nothing like that inside there.

RICK

Yeah I'm sure. *Now.*

MIKE

It was never like that, those're just fuckin' stories.

PETE

Well I'm older now and I know the bogeyman I saw and heard was just my imagination and shit, but still, when we first went back behind there—I was scared.

DENNY

Me too.

RICK

Yeah.

MIKE

(pause)

You get a feeling when you enter it, like something from that old time, with the bars on the windows, those big belted double doors out front. I don't know, anxious, fear I guess. Chills, the sweats, not wanting to touch anything, to look at or ever catch anybody's eyes.

RICK

That's *so* how I fuckin' pictured it.

MIKE

But that’s just the feeling you have before you walk in, or for the first few minutes because of those stories. Once you’re inside, it’s nice in there. Besides everything.

(SETH enters, stopping at the doorway. No one notices him)

I’d go visit Seth and after awhile I wasn’t so freaked. *Took* me a while, but eventually it was just a place where my brother was you know—where he was getting better.

PETE

Of course it was.

MIKE

(pause)

The hallways are decorated with these shiny happy prints, sunshine and sunsets all swirling down them. And you wonder who in the hell picked those, because like, didn’t they know, didn’t they understand how so fuckin’ out of place they are....But you realize after awhile it’s okay ‘cause they put you in a mood, they put you somewhere, set it straight....And those bars, I don’t know why they’ve got them, nobody’s real dangerous there. They’re all like Seth, recovering from something, *dealing*....They’re just there, I don’t know.

SETH

(almost inert at the start)

They’re there ‘cause even us passive patients are a violence risk certain times.—You learn that after awhile. You learn it pretty quick the first time one of the more docile ones, or what you thought was a more docile one, punches you in the throat for bumping his food tray. One minute you’re there savoring your pureed pees with the plastic *spork* they’ve entrusted you with, the next you’re gasping for breath like you’ll never fully inhale again.—We all look and act submissive during visiting hours ‘cause we’re so drugged we can’t even think, let alone do anything destructive. *Thank* heaven for small favors. They think if they drug us long enough and enough time passes, we’ll *actually forget* what it was we did that got us into this *institution* in the first place. What you *can’t* forget no matter how much time and however many drugs....It’s a constant struggle ‘cause we’re always angling that way anyway, them drugging us to forget, us skipping to remember. Them drugging, us skipping.—But you see it soon as someone goes without their meds either out of forgetfulness of the staff or devices of the patients ‘cause *wow*, let me tell you *then* the fun begins. Then all the shit, all us patients in those moments, when we’re left with the truth. When the *mindblindners*, that’s what we called the narcotics in my ward, when

SETH - cont'd

they'd wear off, suddenly it's Joe Friday in your head. The truth comes clear, it comes hurtling at you like sonar pulses. Talk about *too much* information, too much *reality*. Truth *drilling!*...And when the facts've fought through like worms wending their way to the apple core, digging and dredging, and the thoughts, the judgments fill up the recesses the worms left...I have all these fucked up memories from when I was medicated, when I was really gone, phasing in and out with the Percaset and the Lithium and the Seconal—but I always woke up and still remembered how Craig died...Each doctor has his own favorite, whichever drug company's sales rep's blown 'im this year to some great trip to the Slopes so he'll push their new drug on his Insties, the *institutionalized* patients, the long-termers. On my ward if you're only there for a quick-fix three month stint, they don't even bother to get to know your name. You're just your physical description for the first two months anyway. “The *tall* baldy,” “the *fat* Latina.” If you're lucky, down the road to wellness, you become your affliction. “Mild paranoid schizophrenic with fallacy overtones.” “Extreme delusional psychotic with a patricidal death wish.”—I was the “Non-communicative adolescent with atypical depression” till one day I slit my wrists and smeared my name all down those hallways.—I'd just gotten so tired of it, the dehumanizing shame. Inconsequence, the inability to change things.—It's a good thing I'm named Seth 'cause if I was Benjamin or Sebastian I'd be dead for sure...It should've hurt like fuck but the mindblindners did their job, I didn't feel a thing.—Nobody forgot my name after that.—You couldn't read it anyway. When the blood slid down the walls, it became this hieroglyphic mess of letters and symbols like a cartouche. You couldn't make out it was blood if you didn't see me sitting underneath it like Travis Bickle, passing out with my shirt all matted and my limbs all covered in it. And I—

(the phone rings again. Only Seth makes any notice of it)

You're poplar tonight Pete.—Maybe it's a horny girl. Maybe your girl, what's her name?

PETE

Kathy.

MIKE

It's nobody.

SETH

Maybe you should get it. It might be important.

PETE

The service gets it.

SETH

Maybe it's Billy and he wants to come over to join the game.

MIKE

It's not Billy.

SETH

Maybe he finally wants to talk to me, but he's afraid I won't be able to take it.

MIKE

That's not it.

SETH

Seeing him, talking to him. Discussing things, explaining—

MIKE

Did you hear what I said?!

SETH

Explaining, *illuminating*. Telling him the truth, telling him exactly how his brother—

MIKE

*It's not Billy!....*That's just something in your head!

SETH

(pause)

Is that all it is?....Shit Mike, there's so much in there.

(the ringing stops. Only SETH turns to the vanished sound)

END OF ACT 1

ACT II, SCENE 5

SETH & CRAIG are sitting in a wooded park. This scene is four years earlier. Throughout the scene, they pass back and forth a bottle of Hiram Walker's Blackberry brandy.

CRAIG

She was really in tears!

SETH

I know! I was literally dying from laughter watching her.

CRAIG

I didn't know what the hell to do! I could see your head bobbing up and down. She's looking at me, I'm looking at you and you're looking down at your textbook. Your shoulders are fucking convulsing and she's staring at me, *crying*, waiting for an answer.

SETH

What the fuck was I supposed to do?! I look up and she's gonna explode all over me.

CRAIG

Yes! It've taken the heat off me. You're the one who pissed her off. "Anyone but Seth."

SETH

But you didn't have to repeat me *exactly*. Raising your hand, saying the *exact* same thing! Of course she went ballistic! Oh but fuck her, she shouldn't've brought it up if she didn't know the answer to the questions she could get back.

CRAIG

That's not the point. You hosed me there.

SETH

Hey man, it's every man for himself. I love you Craig but c'mon....

CRAIG

Fine fucking friend you are. After all the times I saved you.

SETH

Saved me? Saved me!—Screwed with a pike is more like it.

CRAIG

Get the fuck outta here!

SETH

Oh *please*. If I had a dollar for every time I had to talk our way out of a few *hundred*—

CRAIG

Ungrateful little bastard!

SETH

A few *thousand* stupid things you've done.

*(CRAIG jumps on SETH and they wrestle through the next.
Eventually CRAIG pins SETH to the ground)*

CRAIG

Take it back!

SETH

Ow! One mess after another. Each one dumberer than the one before. You're Jim Carrey!

CRAIG

Fuck that, take it back!

SETH

And each time your mouth, *ow!* Or your *brain* farts out something brilliant—

CRAIG

This's gonna hurt you more than me.

SETH

And there’s no thanks, no appreciation—OW!

CRAIG

Say it. *Say it!*

SETH

For my quick thinking, for my handiwork—

CRAIG

Okay *more*.

SETH

My adroit legerdemain which *saves* our asses, *OOOOWWW!* Okay! Okay! Ow!

(CRAIG lets go of him. They untangle and sit laughing and out-of-breath. Eventually they slap hands. Long pause)

CRAIG

She can scream at me all she wants, ain’t gonna phase me. Wasn’t getting nothing but a C.

SETH

That’s because you don’t try.

CRAIG

I try! I do, when I’m there, I do try. I just, you know—I don’t get it like you do.

SETH

You will....I’ll help you.

(they stare at each other momentarily, then chuckle again. CRAIG gets the bottle where he left it before wrestling)

CRAIG

I don’t know why you bother. It’s not like I’m gonna need this shit when I grow up. I don’t why you made me take this class. Just to see if you could get me through it I guess.

CRAIG - cont'd

The ultimate challenge for you, your trained monkey boy. It isn't whether you can do it, it's can you get *me* to do it....But where I'm going, higher math functions aren't required.

SETH

You don't know that. You don't know what's going to happen in the future.

CRAIG

Yes I do, I know exactly my future, Sethy. It's okay man, I'm okay with it. It's life you know. We ain't the same Sethy. I don't know why it bothers you, it don't bother me.

SETH

It should.

CRAIG

Nah, crap, that's just your snobbery. You think you're you, and everybody can be you. But that ain't shit....I'm gonna work for my father Sethy. Billy and me will and we'll take over after my father dies and we'll be partners for the next 50 years, fighting and wrestling all the way through it. It's the way we do our best communicating. Maybe we'll expand, add a few new stations. Open 'em up with repairs and service, that's where the money is nowadays. Can't get by on just gas sales anymore. Fucking oil companies keep the prices high so they squeeze out the station owners. Arabs too, fucking sand niggers.

SETH

Craig.

CRAIG

Yeah yeah, sorry. My father talking....It'll be a good enough life. Not too much hassle or sweating bricks. Get some cute thin wife, watch her grow fat over the years. But not as fat as I'm gonna get. Yeah man, pushing 300 LB's when I go. Shit I'm almost looking forward to the heart attack already. Like this wicked fucking event looming out there for me. Like my father when his came, that tightrope he'd been living all those years. Will he go one barbecued T-bone too many? Will he make it to the ICU, will the bypass get done in time? Too much food and drink, too much exhaust, and not enough sense to not soak it all in. All of it ending in a contest between his hatred of doctors and his hatred of himself. It's a proud family legacy: A long life of self abuse, god willing.

SETH

Sounds like a plan to me. Far be it from me to dissuade from it.

CRAIG

Shit yeah man. On the contrary, I expect you to support it.

SETH

I am. I picked age 62 in your heart attack raffle.

CRAIG

Now you're talking.

SETH

You're a man of destiny, who am I to stand in fate's way. Inexorably drawn, manifestly driven to the land of acid reflux, obesity and coronary infarction. God speed John Glenn!

(they laugh together but it fades into something darker)

CRAIG

A man of destiny.

(walking around, he spits angrily)

That's what bothers me still. That *cunt*, how the fuck can she do that?

SETH

Chief.

CRAIG

But you *are* man of destiny man, you *are* going places! Further than she will. Further than *she's* ever going. Small fucking town. Malls and gas stations and diners, fucking guinea heaven. How can she fuckin' do that?! I can't *stand* that!

(he moves around angrily kicking at something)

SETH

Easy, we need that to piss in.

CRAIG

Remember my idea, remember what I said we should do? We can do it, I've got it all thought out.

SETH

Did you not hear my previous commentary on your dumb ideas?

CRAIG

She's a high school Math teacher! Was that what she dreamt as a little *fat* girl in pigtails and braces?!—Teaching the community college bound?! Teaching *me*?! Fucking teaching me so I can add up gallons. So I can calculate taxes and top off tanks so I won't fucking—

MIKE

(offstage)

Seth!....Seth you out here! Hey?!

SETH

Yeah!

MIKE

(coming onstage)

Look at you two tools, having your little circle jerk in Wilson woods. Hey there Chief.

(he moves towards CRAIG and they hug warmly)

CRAIG

Hey Mikey.

MIKE

Shit, look at you, you're gonna be bigger than Billy any day now.

CRAIG

I already am. He just doesn't want to admit it. His ego's too big for that.

MIKE

Yeah, that's true. But don't let him hear you say it. You may be bigger, but I bet he can still deliver a beating you won't forget soon. Hey little brother.

(MIKE moves to SETH and they hug)

SETH

When'd you get home?

MIKE

About two hours ago. I ran over to see Vicki first. She misses me when I go away for the semester, and sure does like showing me how much when I come back.

SETH

Don't let Mom know you saw another woman first. You'll hear about it all summer long.

MIKE

No shit. She'll bring it up every time I leave the house.

CRAIG

How'd this semester go Mikey?

MIKE

Pretty much the same. Your third year, you start worrying about important things. Getting more naps, topping all your drink records, banging all the girls you can.

SETH

(to Craig)

How can you *not* want to go to college?

MIKE

What're you kids working tonight? Another wild one packing beers here in the woods?

CRAIG

Pretty much. Speaking of which Mikey, make a beer run for us?

MIKE

Who me? No way. Beg strangers outside Packard Liquors like we always had to.

SETH

Where'd you say you went when you first hit town?

MIKE

(pause, to CRAIG)

You see that?

CRAIG

He's a killer.

MIKE

Cut your heart out if you don't watch him.

SETH

We're not asking you to pay for them.

MIKE

Cause you know I wouldn't.—What'd you want?

CRAIG

Genny. Or Rolling Rock if they don't got that. And a twelve-pack! We got some work to do later.

(SETH & CRAIG share a meaningful look)

MIKE

Yeah, what's her name? That Mary *De*-something with the Italian nose and great breasts?

CRAIG

DeFillipo, yeah. Not so much on the breasts-ay. They're a little more *bra* than wonder.

SETH

Mikey, you know....we *are* a little strapped.

MIKE

(to CRAIG)

You've got your job at the station? I'm just getting off the semester, where's *your* cash?

CRAIG

I got expenses man, many bills. And you know what my father pays me.

MIKE

Not my problem.

SETH

Mikey, are you sure you can't....

MIKE

You asking me or threatening me?

SETH

(pause, then smiling)

I am beseeching your munificence and intrinsic eleemosynary character.

MIKE

(pause)

What the hell does that mean?

(to CRAIG)

Is he making fun of me?—Nevermind, don't explain it. I'm not gonna win this battle ever. I'll take it from the twenty Mom'll slip me. Consider it a graduation present. And don't fucking dare let it get back to me from Mom or Dad. Or yours too!

CRAIG

We won't, I promise. What're you up to tonight?

MIKE

Meeting your brother and Pete. We're heading to the CG Tavern. There's always some underage girls in there drunk and friendly. Your brother love his easy conquests.

CRAIG

Runs in the family.

MIKE

I don't doubt it. Alright I'm heading. Be on the backside of DeMills in 30 minutes. If you ain't there and I mean *waiting*—we're driving off with the beers and you're shit outta luck.

CRAIG

We'll be there.

(MIKE looks down at SETH who slowly rises to him)

MIKE

Be smart, don't drink too much. You don't like getting sick.—And you don't want to be grounded for graduation, you're the star of the show.

(SETH nods and MIKE clutches his shoulder affectionately)

And you too Chief. Nothing too wild, wild man. Okay?

CRAIG

Yeah man, don't you worry.

(MIKE exists. Now alone, their last exchange lingers as they stare at each other)

SCENE 6

(later in the night. All are at the table. RICK, standing, shuffles the cards momentarily then deals expertly)

RICK

New game, it's called Sabotage. It's a *rat's* game Denny, it's perfect for you.

DENNY

Fuck you Rick.

RICK

Just what a fuckin' *rat* would say.

MIKE

Tell us how to play the *fuckin'* game!

RICK

You take your shit you don't want and pass it to the guy on the right. We do it three times. First time ya pass three cards, then ya pass two, then one.

DENNY

What if you don't want to give up any of your cards?

RICK

That's the game. It's called Sabotage 'cause it fucks up yours *and* the next guy's hand when you have to pass. Everyone understand?

MIKE

Deal.

PETE

Go.

(SETH nods and everyone turns to DENNY)

DENNY

I'll figure it out as we go.

RICK

We bet after each round before we pass.

(RICK finishes the deal. Everybody grabs their cards)

SETH

Geneticists say the difference in DNA between a rat and a human being is only 3%.
Change three percent of the average human being's code—you get your common lab rat.

MIKE

I imagine with some people it's even less than that.

RICK

Is that a reference to me?

PETE

Careful, he's vulnerable tonight.

SETH

Seems so unimpressive to me. How'd Nature figure out that if you change only this little bit, there would be such variation? Change this, it's an ape, change that, it's an aardvark.

MIKE

Change this, it's Rick's Mom.

PETE

Change that, it's Rick's Mom's labial eczema.

RICK

Who's bet?! Denny?

DENNY

Check.

MIKE

Two.

PETE

Three.

RICK

Call, three. Pony if you're staying. Then pass three cards to the right.

(all ante up and pass. The phone rings)

SETH

Is it arbitrary? It seems accidental, so much diversity with only three percent altered.

DENNY

It's God's design.

MIKE

Always Denny's answer.

PETE

He's an abrasion of consistency.

SETH

Not particularly industrious was he?

DENNY

How do you mean?

SETH

It takes very little effort to make an aardvark out of an ape.

RICK

Bet.

Out. SETH

Two. MIKE

No. DENNY

And two more. Four to you Pete. RICK

I can add colostomy bag.—Call. PETE

Now pass two. RICK

(the remaining players do. The phone stops ringing)

SETH
It all seems very illegitimate, without much forethought or grand design. Like a spilled beaker in a laboratory, where a splash of this, lands there, and produces that.

DENNY
That’s His perfection, the mark of it. So little effort, so great his dominion.

PETE
Two bucks.

MIKE
Another two on top.

RICK
Fuck it. Gone.

PETE

Looks like you and me faggot. Your dream come true.

SETH

I take little consolation in His efficiency. It's an empty feeling teleologically.

RICK

Pass one card.

SETH

Limited alterations in the constructs. A token deployment of His powers.—If each time the model airplane was overhauled, that would help me believe in a grand design. This only seems like someone changing decals.

MIKE

Two bucks.

PETE

Call. Three aces. What'd'ya got?

MIKE

Fuck me! Three jacks.

(MIKE slams his card down as PETE rises to sweep the pot)

PETE

Heh-heh, no thanks sweetie. Gonna be a hot time in the fuck palace tonight.

MIKE

I knew I should not've passed the *fuckin'* ace.

SETH

I want the world to've been very difficult to accomplish. Very long, very arduous work.

MIKE

Seth, what *the fuck* with this shit?!

SETH

I—I don’t—I’m sorry.

MIKE

Don’t be sorry, just let it go.

RICK

For passing me shit, *that* you can be sorry for.

PETE

You passed me the second Ace rectum.

DENNY

What you’re missing Seth is the beauty in God’s creation. Each little bit is so full of His immanence, His divine organization and planning. It’s God’s will that it appears to us as a mystery. We must accept it on faith. What makes *me* question His wisdom is Pete here.

PETE

And why’s that Denny boy?

DENNY

You’re a heathen yet you’ve won ten hands. God shouldn’t reward nonbelievers that much.

PETE

Hah! Very sound reasoning.

MIKE

Don’t bitch about Pete, you should thank him for *expanding* your poverty *Job*.

DENNY

Yeah but how can I sin without money? *Lord, let me win and I’ll show you some real sin!*

RICK

I can’t take this shit!

PETE

Yeah seriously, the shit we talk about at a poker game. Anymore religion and I'm telling my nun fuckin' fantasy. Denny'll never talk to me again after that.

SETH

Can I be redeemed Denny?

DENNY

What's that?

SETH

Any asshole can be redeemed today, you said so yourself.

MIKE

Seth it isn't—

SETH

It's a fair question Mike, you know it is.

PETE

You've got nothing to be redeemed for.

SETH

Don't you think so Pete?—Doesn't Billy think so? Don't you think he does? *Daily*.

DENNY

“And it shall come to pass that whosoever calls on the Lord shall be saved.”

SETH

Can it be that easy? Should it be allowed to be that for me?

MIKE

There's nothing you were responsible for. Nothing you could've done.

SETH

Don't lie to me Mike. You're not bright enough.

MIKE

I've got nothing to lie about.

SETH

Let's not say there's nothing. It was too much, *Craig* was too much to say that.

DENNY

Do you feel sorry for what happened Seth?

SETH

Every day Denny, every single day.

DENNY

Do you take responsibility for your actions?

SETH

I do Denny. I do so very much.

DENNY

Then you can be redeemed Seth.

SETH

(pause)

Imagine that.—As near at hand as common words pronounced aloud. Easily uttered, reflexively put forward these *abject* days as to be almost involuntarily on call.—Wish it were that memories were as surmountable. But forgetting, *not remembering constantly*—*that* is an act of omnipotence. Lethe, oblivion, *the void*—that is a construct of the Gods.

PETE

There you go, everybody gets redeemed. Even Rick.

SETH

But there are all kinds of redemption.—The absolution of God, clemency of brothers and fathers....forgiveness of friends and compatriots. Am I to be redeemed by all?

PETE

No one has to forgive you for anything Seth.

SETH

Except Billy? Right? He's not here partaking of the blessed Sacraments of poker night. Throwing down his chips, enjoying cigs, beers and bullshit, even *shitting* on Denny.

DENNY

I don't think *that's* part—

PETE

Shsh Denny.

SETH

Is it because I'm here Mike?

MIKE

I've already answered that question.

SETH

Not to my satisfaction.

DENNY

Not like Mike's wearing the hat—

PETE

Shut up Denny.

MIKE

He had something to do.

SETH

What was that? What could it possibly be?

MIKE

It doesn't matter.

SETH

Maybe he’s in church saying a prayer for Craig’s redemption.

DENNY

Not like the candy cigarettes.

ALL (*except SETH*)

SHUT UP DENNY!

DENNY

(*meekly*)

I guess it *is* a part.

SETH

Maybe Billy’s praying for something to happen to me. Praying not for redemption but for equivalence, for recompense for his loss. Wasting one of his hard-earned split seconds when God *actually listens* to what we say. And not only listens but also hears and understands and *responds!* When God *acts* or lets *acts happen* by his inaction.

PETE

We don’t need to get into all that—

SETH

Without Billy it’s not the same. I’m a bad replacement I know, who could replace him? Who could replace *Craig*? Billy knew I’d be here tonight and what he thinks, what *he knows*, suddenly he’s busy. Suddenly it’s other things, tanks and taxes and late nights but it’s been *four* years! Four years, four months and twelve days exactly, I calculate it everyday. It’s the first thing I do when I wake. I never told the Doctors, they wouldn’t’ve thought I was making progress. Not making progress is something they can’t live with. Not me, I live with it fine, I prefer it. But the *Doctors*, they’re big on redemption Denny, you’d love them. It’s their own affirmation as its core but at least it’s of value to someone.

(*the phone rings. PETE starts to move*)

PETE

I'll get it.

MIKE

NO! Seth, goddamn it—

SETH

It's Billy, we all know it is, but why?! *To talk to me?* It can't be 'cause I've been calling. I call their house but they don't answer, all you get is their answering machine. They must've had the same recording for four years because they're *happy* on it!

MIKE

No one wants to know—

SETH

“Hi, you reached the Finnetti's. We're not home right now. You know what to do after the beep.” It's definitely from before their son died. Before he was *smote* down.

MIKE

Seth it's enough!

SETH

Before he and I together that night, before God in his *infiniteness!* decided that Craig—

MIKE

*Goddamn it Seth, STOP!....*What do you want me to say? Billy can't see you?—He can't!—He knows you're here, he knew you're coming, he didn't want to *be* here! He can't stand to be in your presence! He'd rather die!....When he sees you he hates himself. He hates you and Craig and me and everything that was and everything that we all ever were....*We bought you that beer! That night, Billy and I did!....*So he can't stand the sight of you. Do you hear it? He told me himself. Is that what you want to hear?

SETH

(long pause)

It's part of it.

MIKE

We came to play cards. You said you wanted to.

PETE

Yeah let's all sit down, okay? It's okay, we'll play some more. Denny, come on. It's my deal. Rick, everybody, ante up. Come on.

(everybody moves except SETH who seems inert)

RICK

What're we playing?

PETE

Seven card stud, jacks or better. Here we go. Dealing seven, pick your best five.

DENNY

I'll try not to be worthy of being shit on.

PETE

Yeah that's a good goal, try that. Everybody ante who's in.

MIKE

Seth come on.

(the phone stops ringing)

PETE

I'm dealing now, *pay attention!*—Here we go. It's all coming.

(PETE keeps dealing yet SETH remains apart from the table)

SCENE 7

(SETH and CRAIG are in the park, later in the evening. They are both holding beers now. CRAIG walks around excitedly while SETH sits calmly. Both are more drunk)

CRAIG

Well why the fuck can't we?!

SETH

Cause we just fucking can't okay?! Let it go.

CRAIG

No I'm not, I won't let it go. That bitch should pay for that. I'm not talking about hurting her, I'm not talking about something stupid like that, smashing her shit again. Not that I wouldn't mind. But this way we embarrass her, we embarrass the shit out of her.

SETH

Man, it's taken me six months but I have. Now you have to.

CRAIG

No wait, listen to me. It's just this thing you know, just this thing we do. Nobody'll know, nobody'll fucking guess. Oh fuck that, who'm I kidding, everybody'll fucking know. But I don't give a shit. What're they gonna do, they're not gonna *not* graduate us. You're still the valedick, they ain't gonna take that. You'll make your speech, they all want to hear you do it. So proud of themselves cause of you, their one genius student, like they had a fucking hand in making you. Like that *fucking* bitch was one scrap of what made you—

SETH

Man, it's gotta stop!....Yeah she fucked me. Yeah all right, I'm pissed, I'm real fucking pissed! She's gonna grade me? I've got mad math skills, I've got abilities she can only dream about. She knows it. She knows I know it. I can sense her fear when I'm there paying attention. Her beady eyes darting to me then away when they catch mine. She's praying I don't speak. She's praying I don't question her, pleading with me to let her keep her little delusion of teacher power. Fuck!....But Chief man, what's it gonna do?

CRAIG

It'll fucking *teach* her a lesson! It's gonna teach her, teacher. It'll fucking teacher her.

SETH

Dude, now your speaking in tongues. Drink up.

CRAIG

I will not let it go! To take that thing from us, to cheat us, I will not let it go!

SETH

Good, then don't! Just don't include me in it!....I want another fucking beer.

(SETH moves to six-pack on the ground, opens beer, pause)

CRAIG

You see Billy when he handed over the beer. It's funny, he always gets that way. Mike's protective, Mikey cares, but Billy's *extreme*.

SETH

He knows what you're like when you're *lit*.

CRAIG

It's a six pack a piece, what the hell's that?

SETH

They know I don't drink that much. They know you won't leave anything over.

CRAIG

I am Donna Summer brother, I work very fucking hard for my money....Your whole life you're never gonna work as I will. Never serve some piss-ant or take orders. You'll sit in a cushy office, flick some switch and your smoking hot secretary'll bring your *decaf latte*.

SETH

(sarcastic)

Yeah that's it, that's what I want.

CRAIG

I can see it. A sparkly black micro-mini on the babe.

SETH

I'm not talking about the secretary, you bet your ass I'm having that. But why'm I drinking decaf? No way man, I need my jolt dude.

CRAIG

Don't worry, she'll give you all the jolt you need.

(long pause)

Sethy, I see your future man. I do, I see it. The things you're gonna do, the wide world man, the whole wide world won't be enough. Places and peoples and things. They'll be naming schools after you. Goalposts, bleachers, speed bumps. The *Chemistry* wing!

SETH

God forbid.

CRAIG

And don't you worry, I'm there too man. I'm gonna be there with you all the way.

SETH

Even more God forbid.

CRAIG

(smiles, then drifts into serious, pause)

The gap—you won't mind. You won't let it separate us. It's not going to be that way. It ain't ever gonna be that way with us.

SETH

I know.

CRAIG

No, *I* know....And when there's someone holding you back or causing harm, I'll be there. To fucking *wreck* their world—to let them *know*....Like this fucking bitch teacher.

SETH

Craig man seriously.

CRAIG

What’s your problem?! Where’s your backbone? You didn’t feel that back in January.

SETH

It was different then.

CRAIG

It wasn’t fucking different then! You were pissed then! You were ready to fucking kill!

SETH

And what did it get me?! Huh? I owe my father ten grand for her Sentra. I’ve got the whole town talking shit about me. And I’ve got a permanent note on my record....And it didn’t change a fucking thing....She still gave me a B. It still isn’t enough.

CRAIG

That’s why we gotta do this thing. ‘Cause she’s fucking won man and we can’t have that. We can’t let her win, I’m not letting that happen. I’ve got the whole thing figured out.

SETH

Chief....

CRAIG

Listen, this’s great. This’s, it’s fucking awesome. We run by the station, we run, Old Mr. Norman’s working overnight and we run by and pickup everything we need.

SETH

You’re out of your mind.

CRAIG

The gas, the ignition chain, the starter. It’s all there, my father carries ‘em, he keeps them in the back closet. I know where. I’ve been eyeing them for months now.

SETH

This's ridiculous!

CRAIG

Then we cruise by the Target on Route 46. It's open till midnight and we score all the rest, the clothes, the stuffing, a hat, whatever. We build the thing, we put it together, we spray paint her name on it, give it her shit brown hair and her muffin-stuffed corduroy skirt.

SETH

Would you stop?

CRAIG

Everybody'll talk about this forever man. But in a good way. Billy and Mikey'll laugh their asses off. Even they'll have to give us our props. We'll burn her shit and everyone'll see. The whole school'll come in the morning and bamn, it'll be fucking awesome!

SETH

You are out of your fucking mind!

CRAIG

YES I AM!

(pause, exhaling heavily)

And we're fucking doing this. Just as I said it, just as I planned, we're doing this. I'm not letting this happen.

SETH

Craig—

CRAIG

I'm not man, I can't. I can't let this happen.

SETH

Craig come on, we're not—

CRAIG

I'M NOT LETTING THIS HAPPEN TO ME!

CRAIG - cont'd

(pause, growing maudlin through next)

Goddamn it Seth, we're doing this, do you hear me?—I need this, I *need* to do this....What have I got? My life man, my life's gonna—ya know?...It'll be great, it'll be something everybody'll remember. That you and I, *together*....when we're old and we're fat and we go to our like fifty year anniversary reunion and everybody's like “man that was awesome, that was fucking awesome! That time you guys did that thing, with the fire and the burning, yeah man that was *fucking awesome!*”....I can hear them, I can already hear them down the years—and I can see us, me and you. Me and you there smiling. We're fucking smiling. And they're there telling us about shit we did, telling it better, telling it more than it ever was, more than it ever could be. Guys we don't talk to now, guys we won't want to talk to then. But we're there listening to them. We're listening cause they're telling us about that thing we did tonight. This thing, this amazing, amazing fucking....

(he loses his words so lost in the thought)

And we're smiling. We're there smiling. *I'm* smiling....I'm fucking smiling.

(they look to each other and stare without words)

SCENE 8

(later in the night, moving tensely towards the end of it. All are seated at the table. SETH is the dealer)

MIKE

(to RICK)

Stop fuckin' rushin' me!....Every time I'm thinking like a nagging bitch....Five dollars.

DENNY

And two dollars more.

RICK

Another five on that.

SETH

I'm out.

PETE

Hold it. Twelve to me?

RICK

Every one of it.

PETE

Nah fuck it, not me.

(PETE drops his cards, gets up and moves to the food)

SETH

Call?

(everybody antes what is needed)

How many?

MIKE

Two.

DENNY

Three.

RICK

One.

(SETH deals and all pick up over the following)

PETE

What's in the pot?

RICK

Fuck difference it make to you?

PETE

Shut the fuck up asshole. Denny?

DENNY

Forty-seven.—He wants to *know!*

RICK

Kiss ass.

PETE

That's all right Denny, don't let 'im rattle ya.

RICK

Bet's *still* to you Mike.

MIKE

(dead-calm serious)

I swear: You rush me again, I'm gonna bash your fuckin' face in. Got me?....Two bucks.

DENNY

Five more.

RICK

And five more after that.

PETE

That’s what I’m talkin’ bout!—The end is nigh when play gets to a stupid *fevered* pitch.

MIKE

Ten....Ah hell, why not. Call.

DENNY

Call.

PETE

The lure, the siren song. Correct a whole night of mistakes with one *big* hand at the end.

RICK

Shut the fuck up, will ya?

SETH

We done?

MIKE

I am.

(DENNY only nods)

PETE

The stakes raise, the risks expand—

MIKE

Pete, fuckin’ really, *okay?!*

PETE
Heh-heh, yeah-yeah-yeah.

SETH
Who shows?—Mike?

MIKE
Trip ladies.

DENNY
Full house, sixes and tens.

MIKE
Fuck!

PETE
A last dragon to slay Denny boy.

DENNY
What is it Rick?

RICK
Full....fours and eights.

DENNY
Yes!

PETE
Denny Boy! Den—eee—boy!

DENNY
Yes!—Yes! Yes!

RICK
Don't *fuckin'* gloat dickhead.

MIKE

Let ‘im be, it’s his first big hand of the night.

PETE

Yes, go ahead Denny. Live it up kid.

SETH

I’m happy for you Denny.

DENNY

Thanks Seth. I never win those.

RICK

No, you don’t.

PETE

Fuck you, ya sore loser. The poor schnook deserves one, he’s been eating our shit all night. Look at Mikey, he’s taking it well.

MIKE

I’ve been playing Denny’s money for the last hour, what do I care?

PETE

Christian charity in its truest form!

MIKE

And I never wanted to fuck Denny’s sister. I wanted her to blow me, I don’t fuck trash.

DENNY

Jesus.

MIKE

Shut up and rub your money.

DENNY

Hm mm, yeah. I want beer! Gimme a beer!

MIKE

No way, sit there. Let's go, I'm getting my money back. Who's deal?

PETE

My deal! Chingua! Chingua, chingua baby! Seven cards, ante ten. Let's go.

RICK

(to SETH flatly)

Did you stack 'em?

PETE

Everybody, ten on the table to start. And stand up! Up! C'mon everybody up!

(everyone away from the table returns. PETE grabs the cards, shuffles quickly and deals)

RICK

Did you stack the cards?

SETH

What?

PETE

Measly little know nothing, do nothing two's are wild.

RICK

Before the last round, before the last deal you brought the cards under the table.

PETE

No strategy, just lay 'em out and turn 'em when I tell ya. All nicey in a row like see.

SETH

I did?

RICK

And then Denny got a full house after taking three.

PETE

No brains games or lames, just bet or wet.

MIKE

Enough with the barker shit!

RICK

I'm just asking.

SETH

I'm not, I don't....

RICK

You brought the cards underneath the table.—I'm just asking.

MIKE

What's this?

SETH

I don't know that means?

RICK

It's nothing, forget it.

SETH

What do you think I did?

MIKE

Seth?

RICK

He took the cards under the table and Denny got three.

PETE

So what?

DENNY

I got another six and a pair of tens.

RICK

You never bring the cards under the table.

SETH

I took the cards under the table and did what, I fixed them?

MIKE

Rick, what the fuck?

RICK

Listen, *I'm sorry*. Let's just forget—

SETH

So Denny would get a full house?!

RICK

I don't know? Ya never bring the cards—

SETH

Not for my brother, not for Mike who *also lost*. But for Denny I cheated?!

PETE

What the *fuck's* the matter with you?

RICK

I said I'm sorry *all right?! Let's just....*

(SETH bursts away from the table)

MIKE

Seth?

(to RICK, threatening)

I'm not done with you.

RICK

I said I'm sor—

PETE

Shut up!

RICK

What?

PETE

Shut your fuckin' mouth!

MIKE

You all right?

SETH

What's the point of that?! What's the fucking point?!

MIKE

He's an asshole, you know that.

SETH

It's just money!

MIKE

So don't let it get to you.

SETH

Why would anyone do that for something so unimportant?!

MIKE

He’s a fuckin’ asshole!

SETH

He accuses me because of Craig.

MIKE

No he doesn’t—

SETH

Because of what happened. Because of what he thinks I did.

MIKE

No he doesn’t, that’s got nothing—

SETH

He thinks I’m cheating, he thinks I’m *capable* of cheating! Because if I’m capable of *that*, what aren’t I capable of?! Right Rick? Isn’t that it?

MIKE

Of course not!

(SETH moves around unpredictably)

SETH

Everybody sees me, everybody thinks “Look at him! Look at him, he’s the one!” As if I’ve taken with leprosy, as if I’m Frankenstein’s monster!

MIKE

No one thinks you—

SETH

Things happen, things occur! Not everything’s controllable, not everything’s prearranged. Events beyond our thoughts. Incidents occur and transpire as if there’s no reason at all! As if there’s no plan, no design, as if there is no...*I DIDN’T KILL CRAIG! I DIDN’T KILL CRAIG!* We were there! We’re doing shit, he and I! Stupid shit! *Kid shit!*

MIKE

I know.

SETH

Hundreds of times before. *Hundreds* of thousands of stupid *fucking*....But you don't think. Nobody ever thinks. In the moment, at that instant, when you're *there* doing it. When it's fun and it's *cool* and you're invincible.

MIKE

It's all right. It doesn't matter.

SETH

And it could've ended up the other way. Many times, many things, the other way. With me where he is now and he here with you all. *A thousand times* the other way!

MIKE

I know Seth, everybody knows—

SETH

You don't, you don't know!....And more you don't believe me. You don't—and it's—

MIKE

What're you talking about?

SETH

It's all I can take not to have you believe me.

MIKE

What're you *talking* about, that's not true? Of course I believe you.

SETH

I know you don't Mike.

MIKE

That's *fucking* totally not—

SETH

How long did it take you to come there?

MIKE

What do you mean, where? To the center?

SETH

How long did it take you to come Mike?

MIKE

To the center, to Creston?

SETH

To come see your brother.

MIKE

I was there.

SETH

Who killed your best friend's brother.—

MIKE

I was there, I was there immediately.

SETH

Who killed his *own best friend!*

MIKE

I was there! I WAS THERE!

SETH

(long pause, calm)

You were there. Immediately after, you were. You came and you cried, and I remember that, I remember it clearly before the drugs fogged everything out....Then you didn't come and I remember that too. After the inquest, after it became clear....I have all these fucked-up recollections of that time....but none of you.

MIKE

You don't remember. I was there.

SETH

It must be so difficult for you. How does Billy say it when you discuss it?—*Killed*. Contributed to his death, was there at his end? Is he that romantic?

MIKE

We don't talk about it.

SETH

You *don't*?—You just....

MIKE

What is there to say?

SETH

It doesn't come up! It doesn't come readily to mind—

MIKE

No it doesn't.—

SETH

Rushing to the fore! That's great. That, it's....

MIKE

What do you want me to say?—

SETH

How convenient. *Expedient* even!

MIKE

What do you want?!

SETH

Your respect!

MIKE

It was because of you!...That night, with Craig, wasn't it? Your future, your grade!—What do you expect me to say to Billy?—His brother is dead!...How do I look him in the face? How are we to smile and laugh and fuck around...How do we do that?

SETH

(pause)

It was because of me.

MIKE

(pause)

Then there's nothing to say.

SETH

Again that word.

PETE

Of course there isn't Seth, it was an accident. A terrible, horrible one, we all understand.

SETH

Is that what you think, accidental? A random occurrence...I want you to know I'm sorry Mike, I'm so sorry. And not for what happened to Craig 'cause my God—the sorrow, if I knew the words, if the words even ever existed. But for what it must've done to you. You Billy and Pete, the Three Amigos, we always looked up to you. We always tried to tag along, always imitating, even at our own shitty little poker games. We were inseparable too. You know that, you all know.—I'm so sorry Mike for what I've done to you.

MIKE

It's okay, it doesn't matter now.

SETH

And you're right Mike, you're right. It is all in my head. But all the drugs have worn off and the worms are wending their way in.

MIKE

Seth there's nothing there.

SETH

I remember it all now. I see what happened and *I know!* I can't escape it, and I can't escape myself in it.

MIKE

It's all right Seth, stay with me. I talked to Mom and Dad, I told them.

SETH

Escaping reality and its bonds—

MIKE

I want you to move in with me.

SETH

Outcomes and results are merely clasps. Adhesives that cling us to ourselves so that our pasts are *not* disengagable!

MIKE

I want you to come stay with me!

SETH

Not if you plan to live in this world, not if you want to take part, to *be* a part of it. You carry them with you everywhere, it's a wonder we move at all under the weight.

MIKE

We'll work through this. We'll work together.

SETH

Is there salvation Denny? Is there redemption for me?

DENNY

There is Seth! Ask for it! Pray for it!

MIKE

I'll help you. We'll help each other!

SETH

I'm not asking for heaven, I'm not asking, that's too much. But stop, to have people stop.

DENNY

Pray Seth!

SETH

Can Billy sit with me?! Can we talk, can I tell him how Craig and I were just fucking around that night. Just playing a prank, something for everyone to laugh at, not really meaning any harm.—But somehow it lit. It did, it lit, we didn't expect that. Not there, not then. Not like that! Then Craig did, he did, *he lit on fire* and I couldn't do *anything!* It was like a flash! It happened so quick, so *fast*, and, and I couldn't find any water. I couldn't find a hose or a puddle, a blanket, *anything*. There was nothing there and he was burning. *He was burning!* And I couldn't *think!* He was moving, he was flailing and screaming, he was begging me to help him but *I couldn't*, I couldn't do anything! I had to think, I had to move! *But my mind had nothing. Nothing! AND I WATCHED HIM BURN!*

MIKE

That doesn't matter now!

SETH

The conception of that!

MIKE

No Seth, listen to me.

SETH

Indiscriminate *chance!* That it would happen, that it could!

MIKE

Don't think about it.

SETH

Arbitrary luck it isn't good or bad, it isn't *anything!* That's mere perspective.

MIKE

Don't think about that!

SETH

Relative and relational. How things could be, how they *should've* been!

MIKE

Seth *listen* to me!

SETH

From your vantage, from your own perspective! How many straights, what's in the pot, *who's the big winner?!*

MIKE

It doesn't matter!

SETH

Why I'm alive? Why I'm here, why I survived?!

MIKE

That doesn't matter!

SETH

DOES NOTHING MATTER?!—CRAIG IS DEAD!...If nothing else that has to matter....I have to have it so.

DENNY

Pray to God Seth, He will save you!

SETH

Will He Denny?

DENNY

He will Seth!

SETH

Why Denny, why will He save me?

DENNY

He saves everyone!

SETH

Why Denny?

DENNY

That’s what He does! He saves everyone!

SETH

Then why didn’t He save Craig? Denny why didn’t He save him?

(no answer. SETH pounds the table sending chips flying)

WHY DIDN’T HE SAVE CRAIG! WHY DIDN’T GOD SAVE CRAIG?!

(no response, just searching down-turned faces. long pause)

If I could ask God for one small favor, I’d ask him for that. Not to raise the dead, that’s was a one-time deal I know. But why? I’d ask him for an answer to “why?”All the things I know, so many facts and data and calculations—it didn’t save Craig, and it can’t bring him back....I’ve gotta go back.—I’ve, I’ve gotta go back. I’ve got to go back there.

MIKE

It’s okay Seth, it’s all right.

SETH

This world, I’m not fit, I’m not fit for—

MIKE

You’re all right, it’ll be all right!

DENNY

Ask Him Seth, ask God!

SETH

Make them take me back Mike. *Please*, I need to go back.

MIKE

I'll take care of you, I'll make it right! It'll be okay!

DENNY

Ask God Seth, *He* will save you!

SETH

Let me go back! *You must let me go!*

MIKE

You can stay with me! *It will be all right!*

SETH

LET ME GO!

(the phone rings. SETH crumples to the floor)

OH GOD!

MIKE

Listen to me Seth! Listen to me! I'll make it right.

DENNY

Ask Him Seth! “He alone is my rock and my salvation!”

MIKE

I'll make it right! I'll make it, you'll see!

SETH

GOD! GOD! GOD!

DENNY

“He is my fortress, I will never be shaken!”

MIKE

Seth?!

(after a thought-crazed pause, MIKE moves to attack RICK. PETE rushes to intercept him before he can reach RICK who backs away from the onslaught as they struggle)

MIKE

I'm gonna *fuckin'* kill you!

PETE

NO! NO!

MIKE

I'M GONNA KILL YOU!

RICK

I didn't know! I'm sorry!

MIKE

YOU'RE FUCKIN' DEAD!

RICK

I didn't know!

PETE

He didn't know! He didn't know!

MIKE

YOU'RE FUCKIN' DEAD!

RICK

I'm sorry! I didn't know!

PETE

NO! NO! He didn't know! He didn't mean this!

(MIKE stops his assault finally hearing PETE)

Not this, not this!—He didn't mean this.

(MIKE turns to SETH, weeping, mumbling on the ground)

MIKE

Seth....

DENNY

Pray Seth, pray to God!

SETH

God. God. God.

DENNY

Pray for His mercy, pray for His forgiveness!

SETH

God. God. God.

DENNY

Pray for redemption, pray for His love!

(only the sound of SETH weeping and the phone ringing)

MIKE

Seth....

(the phone continues ringing....then stops)

End Of Play