

Ditch
A collection of plays

When we win it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not want to be bent by us.

Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Man Watching"

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Deer Play
A ten-minute play

Deer Play

Characters:

MICHELLE		50s	Female
EMMY	Her sister	50s	Female
REAL DEER	A bartender		Any

A table with no chairs.

*Saloon doors mark the entrance to an old bar
with deer heads on the wall.*

MICHELLE

It's easy to like old places because they remind you of somewhere else. Last week I helped settle my daughter into her new house with some pretty dishes to put up top the cabinets, and a vase or two, knickknacks – but she didn't want them. She said Mom, young people like things plain. Sink, countertops, coffee table, no clutter on them. And that's okay.

*Emmy, in a dress,
enters through the saloon doors.*

When I was a kid, my sister and I used to go to a bar that felt like a ranch. Big buck heads poke out through the wall, cowboy relics make it smell like dust. The doors in front make a cage keeping the animals inside.

EMMY

Do you like it?

MICHELLE

Damn, if I had your body, I'd wear that dress too.

EMMY

Thank you.

MICHELLE

If I had your body, I would wear that dress with no shoes and no bra and scale down the side of your apartment screaming that I am you.

EMMY

Mom liked it too.

MICHELLE

I wish I didn't have your body.

EMMY

Don't you like it?

MICHELLE

It doesn't matter – I need to plan your funeral.

EMMY

Tonight?

MICHELLE

There's only so much time before my head gets light and everything comes back.
How else are we going to discuss this funeral?

EMMY

That's no fun.

MICHELLE

But it *could* be with some planning.

EMMY

Can't we get a drink first? I hate when you put me in these situations.

MICHELLE

What kind of casket? I want to make you so happy.

EMMY

What difference does it make right now? Have a drink with me.

MICHELLE

Please. Do this with me before I remember everything.

Real Deer enters, running the bar.

EMMY

Hallelujah! There's the bartender, a real deer.

MICHELLE

Not like the dead ones on the wall.

EMMY

Much realer.

MICHELLE

It's so much handsomer than the other dead deer.

EMMY

It's always bartenders with you. (*To Real Deer*) Hi, could we get two glasses of alcohol please?

Real Deer makes them drinks.

MICHELLE

What kind of casket would you like for your body?

EMMY

I don't like thinking about it... Makes we want to fill by lungs so big they push my ribs out. (*She stretches.*) How am I supposed to know?

MICHELLE

Well, you can start with open or closed.

EMMY

Eyes??

MICHELLE

No, casket.

EMMY

Closed makes me nervous. How can people be sure it's me?

MICHELLE

I will tell them.

EMMY

What if they forget?

MICHELLE

We'll do open then.

EMMY

But why would I let people see me when I can't see them?

MICHELLE

It can be fun, I do it all the time.

Real Deer hands them two drinks.

EMMY

Wait, this isn't what I ordered.

Real Deer exits.

MICHELLE

What is it?

EMMY

It gave me the wrong drink.

MICHELLE

There's no time for another drink, we're planning the funeral of your dreams!

EMMY

I want my drink.

MICHELLE

My head is getting LIGHTER.

A pause.

EMMY

I'm sorry. What can I do for you?

MICHELLE

No I'm doing this for *you*.

EMMY

Okay, but please walk for a second. Get some air.

Michelle paces around the bar,

holding her head.

She pauses, becoming distracted

by the deer heads on the wall.

MICHELLE

Why do people stuff these things for walls when there are paintings, and dishes?
They're so cold and ugly. It makes me sick.

EMMY

I like them. Can't you just imagine the rest of the body walking through dry leaves in
the morning, or in front of your car?

Michelle stares at the deer heads.

EMMY (cont'd)

Now you can't stop seeing it.

MICHELLE

The eyes aren't real –

EMMY

They're made of glass.

MICHELLE

I think you should lay on this table. Pretend you're dead.

EMMY

Alright.

Emmy lies across the table.

MICHELLE

Make some kind of sound so I know you're dead.

EMMY

You mean like animals in the woods at night?

MICHELLE

Yes, like that.

Emmy makes the sound.

Good. You must feel very dead. Now, right this moment, tell me what kind of music you feel like hearing.

EMMY

For my funeral?

MICHELLE

Yes. What does your soul sound like?

Emmy lies there and listens.

EMMY

I think it sounds like Christmas songs. But just the ones about snow.

MICHELLE

That is unoriginal.

EMMY

I didn't know it was supposed to be original, I thought it was just my soul sounds!

MICHELLE

How are people supposed to enjoy this funeral if it's just like any other Christmas funeral? I want them to come to this funeral and leave saying, That was so Emmy. You can tell she put a lot into this.

You're right. It is your music, so it's up to you. Just listen and see if you hear anything else.

Real Deer returns to the bar.

EMMY

The real deer! Michelle, ask him if he'll give me a new drink.

MICHELLE

We have to focus, Emmy! What if I remember? What happens to you?

EMMY

Ask him ask him.

Michelle approaches the Real Deer.

MICHELLE

Hi, you made my sister the wrong drink. Would you please get her another one so she will listen to me?

The Real Deer stares.

EMMY

He's a deer, Michelle, he only understands alcohol words.

MICHELLE

Oh, sorry. Drink?

The Real Deer listens.

Alcohol? Ice?

Orange juice?

EMMY

Try cranberry juice.

MICHELLE

Cranberry juice? Juice? Everything is brighter.

EMMY

Maybe he knows you're afraid.

MICHELLE

Cranberry juice cranberry juice cranberry juice cranberry cranberry –

The Real Deer smashes a glass on the floor.

Michelle screams.

Wait!

EMMY

When I die, here are your options.

MICHELLE

Cranberry? Cranberry? Juice??

Michelle tries to sweep up

the glass on the floor with her hands.

EMMY

I don't like a casket because it's too much like a house.

MICHELLE

There's too much all over this floor. You don't have to leave?

The Real Deer tips over the bar.

EMMY

If you had my body you'd wear this dress.

MICHELLE

But there's so much stuff all over this room. I didn't get to listen.

The Real Deer exits.

What happens when you leave? It's hard to do this over.

EMMY

Grief is clutter.

MICHELLE

All over the floor. The chest gets smashed through and poked with shards of itself.

EMMY

Relics everywhere from somewhere else.

MICHELLE

When you close in the clutter.

EMMY

Do you remember now?

Michelle scoops up the broken glass,

holds it in her hands.

MICHELLE

Ribs are not cages but doors swinging in place.

Emmy exits through the saloon doors.

Michelle sits, alone.

End of play.

Uppercut

A ten-minute play

Characters:

DEB		Early 30s	Female
JESSE	Her husband	Early 30s	Male
Andres	Jesse's Roommate	20s	Male

Author's Note:

This play is intended to be performed without scene breaks.

Scene 1.

Yellow lights turn up on a kitchen table and a living room couch.

A few unpacked boxes, glimmering with masking tape, lie against the kitchen wall. In the living room, blue tarp covers the floor to the left of the couch.

Above the boxes in the kitchen, a large Mary Cassatt-like painting of a woman hangs on the wall. The woman has no teeth.

Deb enters, holding her face. She stumbles to the couch and collapses onto it.

Jesse follows. He digs into the mostly empty fridge. He finds a bag of frozen peas and gives it to her.

She holds it to her eye.

DEB

Can you drink with aspirin? Or is that only bad for prescriptions?

JESSE

Uh, I think you're supposed to pick one or the other.

DEB

Oh. Well then, I will take... *(in a cowboy voice)* some'm strong.

He looks at her.

He opens one of the boxes, searching for aspirin.

DEB (cont'd)

You don't know how it hurts.

JESSE

I know.

DEB

You don't. I can tell you about getting punched in the face, but can you really know what it's like until you've... been punched in the face?

JESSE

Pretty sure I can imagine what it feels like.

DEB

Can you though?

He finds aspirin and gives it to her.

DEB (cont'd)

If I describe the color red, but you've never *seen* red... You got locked up in a snow prison, where it's all icy white and there's no red anywhere, but they give you all the books about red. Red is heat, it's strawberries sprouting in the ditch, bloody... Would you recognize it?

JESSE

Red is Santa.

DEB

Red is Santa. Would you recognize Santa?

JESSE

I've been punched in the gut. Can't I transfer that feeling... to my face?

DEB

We're just talking about *my* face.

JESSE

Of course.

DEB

I'm giving you the books about my face.

JESSE

Yes.

DEB

And how you didn't stop it.

JESSE

Now that's unfair.

DEB

I'll say what I want, my face hurts.

JESSE

What was I supposed to do? You want me fight a teenage girl? with, what, jingly charm bracelets?

DEB

You used to fight your roommate for no reason at all.

JESSE

It's not my fault you're rude.

DEB

I was not rude, I only said *you're being dramatic*, meaning, *stop being so dramatic* – Mom's too soft on her to say that. And then she hit me. Which, I mean *really*, proved my point.

Jesse notices the painting of the toothless woman.

JESSE

Oh my god. Did you do this?

DEB

Do what?

JESSE

Your painting – what happened to her teeth?

*Deb climbs up on the couch.
She stares.*

DEB

Oh. I did not do that.

JESSE

You didn't?

DEB

No.

JESSE

You're saying somebody snuck in here with a paintbrush and... and blacked out her teeth while we were gone?

He pauses. He sprints into the next room.

He returns, pacing.

JESSE (cont'd)

TV's still there. Your ring.

DEB

It's probably a sign you should punch my sister.

JESSE

What? You're the one who said the rudeness. Like you don't have time to phrase anything nice.

DEB

The truth is very short.

She mimes a punch to the mouth.

JESSE

I don't know why you even like those nineteenth-century-whatever pictures, the old-timey frilly dresses –

DEB

I kind of like the teeth gone. It's historical. People used to lose their teeth for ridiculous reasons.

DEB

Historical means something *happened*.

JESSE

Just because something's old doesn't make it valuable.

DEB

I am *injured*.

JESSE

Sorry.

A pause.

DEB

Can you know what it's like to have no teeth unless you've –

JESSE

I get it.

Another pause.

DEB

Way to start the morning. (*Beat.*) Morning.

JESSE

Good morning.

A pause.

DEB

Sometimes, I say *Morning*, and people think I'm implying a "good" first, but in my head, I'm actually addressing the morning and not them. Like, apostrophizing to Morning.

JESSE

This is what I'm saying. Rudeness.

Your “good morning” isn’t even addressed to me?

DEB

(Apostrophizing) Morning! Here you are, come back to me...

She waits for a reaction.

...Piercing the night.

Scene 2.

A memory. Andres enters.

The lights turn red.

Jesse rises to meet him. Deb puts down the peas.

Andres and Jesse are in the middle of an argument.

DEB

(To Jesse) I used to think, *I don’t know how to handle you.* I could see Andres shopping like a functioning person... but you? I don’t see how you managed to live together.

ANDRES

You know... you’re not as strong as you think.

DEB

Which was basically saying you’re fat.

JESSE

(To Andres) Are you calling me fat?

DEB

And you used to work out obsessively.

ANDRES

I’m just saying... you think you’re strong. You’re not that strong.

JESSE

Okay, punch me. See how strong.

ANDRES

What? No.

JESSE

Punch me. Do it.

DEB

Obsessively.

ANDRES

I don't want to punch you man.

JESSE

Punch me, *please* punch me do it. Please please punch me.

He pushes Andres hard.

Please do it punch me please. Please please punch please –

He pushes Andres again.

Andres punches Jesse in the gut.

It throws him to the wall.

He clenches his stomach.

Silence.

JESSE

Why did you fucking punch me??

Scene 3.

Andres exits. Back to present.

The lights return to yellow.

Deb holds the frozen peas to her eye.

DEB

All this to say – if you get offended at *stupid* things, you should at least get offended for me.

JESSE

Okay, I'm offended.

DEB

I just want you to punch my sister back. Or, cut her down – either way.

With his finger, Jesse tests the painting.

JESSE

It's dry. How long has it been like this?

DEB

I don't know. I didn't notice. I didn't paint it.

JESSE

Really you didn't?

DEB

I didn't.

JESSE

What's the movie where the painting turns ugly and uglier, and it's the heart of the killer, rotting?

DEB

I think you're thinking of *Dorian Gray*... it's a pretty famous book?

JESSE

Can't be that famous if I've never heard of it.

DEB

I don't see how we live together.

JESSE

Well if you didn't do this, then which one of us the killer?

DEB

What do you think?

He kisses her.

JESSE

I'm an angel.

DEB

A wrestling angel.

It's a test of strength.

Scene 4.

A memory, on the sidewalk.

The lights turn blue.

Deb walks in Jesse's trail, which travels in front of the couch.

She hurries forward to tug his sleeve.

He turns around – she's surprised.

DEB

Oh! You're not who I thought you were.

He hesitates.

JESSE

Who did you think I was?

DEB

Uh, someone I know... Sorry.

And I tried to walk slower, so we wouldn't feel that awkward closeness – strangers walking side by side – but then you walked slower, too, kind of quiet.

And you tilted your head, said something vaguely insulting –

JESSE

Did he break your heart?

DEB

– that made me mad in a way I liked.

She tilts her head, examines him.

DEB (cont'd)

No I don't have a heart.

He smiles.

Scene 5.

The lights return to yellow.

Back to the present.

Jesse pulls the painting off the wall.

Deb follows him into the kitchen.

She sits at the kitchen table, watching him.

JESSE

I'm getting rid of it.

DEB

Why?

JESSE

Because it's ugliness. I don't want to stare at those... gumlines.

DEB

Maybe those were just baby teeth and the big ones will grow in.

JESSE

The guy in the movie stabs the painting and dies.

If I dump it, am I going to turn into garbage?

DEB

You could punch a real person and we wouldn't have this problem.

JESSE

Please.

DEB

Once you punched someone for me. Remember?

JESSE

Nope.

DEB

Yes you do.

JESSE

No I don't want to.

DEB

Why can't it be like that?

JESSE

Because this has to go.

He fidgets with the painting's frame,

trying to pull the canvas out of it.

She observes him.

DEB

You're so fidgety. But, you know what to do with your hands.

You pretend you don't.

He looks at her.

He raises his fist to the canvas.

He hovers over it.

He drops his fist.

JESSE

It has to go.

DEB

Why?

JESSE

I'm afraid to watch it get worse.

Silence.

DEB

You know, goodbye used to be "God be with you" –

JESSE

Did it?

DEB

– but then we cut it down to "goodbye," or even just "bye."

Now God isn't with anybody.

He considers this.

*He lays the painting, face down,
on the floor. He sits at the table.*

JESSE

They used to tell me in school that the golden gates aren't golden... You look, and the railing's all rainbows, but with colors you've never seen, could never imagine.

Can you imagine a color you can't even imagine?

They close their eyes.

They try.

For a long while, they sit in silence.

DEB

I see one!

JESSE

Really?

DEB

Yes! Really, I do.

JESSE

What's it like?

DEB

It's like... it's almost like a liquid, but with scraps of metal and gas. Almost like the end of fall, as in, burnt leaves getting cold and dying. Gravity is probably this color. Angels are probably this color. If a person were this color they would have to be very fat, because there's a lot to this color. The only adjective I can think of for it is late. It's maybe like dropping a call in a tunnel, or an elevator. Like losing your breath.

They remain, for a moment, with their eyes closed.

Jesse opens his eyes first.

He tugs her sleeve.

She opens her eyes, looks at him.

JESSE

I can't see it.

DEB

Close your eyes.

I'll paint it.

He closes his eyes.

*With her fingertips like brush tips,
she mimes painting his eyelids.*

DEB (cont'd)

If you could go to the past or the future, which would you do?

He keeps his eyes closed.

The lights turn red.

He thinks.

JESSE

Future. I know enough about the past.

DEB

You're not curious what people lived through?

A pause.

JESSE

I want to see cars fly.

The lights turn blue.

DEB

I think we picked already. Long ago. Right now we're living over.

You picked the future, I picked the past, and that's how I live with you.

*She pulls her hands slowly from his face,
as if admiring a work of art from a distance.*

End of play.

Ditch
A one-act play

Characters:

HOLLY	A high-school student	17	Female
CARL	Holly's father	17	Male
JUNIOR	Carl's brother, Holly's uncle	19	Male

Setting:

A nursing home room, with a muddy tire sitting at the center.

Scene One

A nursing home room. A bed with a cheerful comforter, and a couch diagonally downstage of it. The room is trying not to be a nursing home room, but a room divider curtain beside the bed shows it's not succeeding

Downstage of the couch and bed, a muddy tire sits upright on the floor.

Suddenly, a light changes the divider curtain into a shower curtain.

Behind it, the shadow of Carl bathing Junior, who holds onto a baby doll.

Holly sits on the bed.

She addresses the audience.

HOLLY

My uncle lost his mind, years back, and three times a week, my father bathes him.

My father will sit him in the shower with a baby doll, a little boy, which my uncle talks to like it's real.

As Holly speaks, Junior can be heard comforting the baby doll

Or, because its real.

in sotto voce.

We call my uncle Junior, which makes it a little funny. Junior's baby doll.

At night, he hears it crying.

It's a particular sound, frustration in the dark.

Junior's mumbling stops.

The shower turns off.

Carl dries him with a towel, puts him in fresh clothes.

HOLLY (cont'd)

At my age, they were brothers.

Their own father lost his mind first, years ago which is why I want to know the true story of the night my father wrecked the truck.

His big brother Junior's high school truck.

CARL (*in unison*)

He describes the sound of an engine steaming when thumping into a telephone pole

The sound of an engine steaming when thumping into a telephone pole

– Another sound I can't hear.

(*Wryly*) Each time he tells it, the car's worse off.

HOLLY (cont'd)

(*To Carl*) Why do you keep telling this story?

I think I'm missing the joke.

I'm... in the dark. It's frustrating.

The sound of an engine faltering.

Carl exits with Junior, out from behind the curtain.

This isn't movie memory, by the way.

Movies make the consciousness seem to come unbuckled. Fly out the window, then go back in its seat.

In real life, memory goes for good.

Carl reenters, in sight.

A true story, for example, might be forgotten.

And when it's gone –

The sound of wheels skidding.

They wince, as though experiencing the skid.

My uncle lost his mind.

Memories are runaways we don't wait up for.

Carl approaches the tire. He examines it.

Holly addresses the audience.

HOLLY (cont'd)

If this were 1976, there would be mud outside Louisville, and my father would fit in a ruined truck. On the radio, there would be songwriters we wouldn't want singing anymore. Today, we want to hear better-looking singers than these with their bushy eyebrows and crooked faces. But for now, they sing their guitar songs. Oh there's moon out over Louisville tonight. We drive along.

The sound of a radio tuning.

Version one.

CARL

You ever changed a tire?

HOLLY

You taught me once, but I don't remember.

CARL

A lot of women's proud telling you they can change a tire, but hanging off the side of the road, most wouldn't have a clue. You're not gonna be a lot of women, are you?

HOLLY

I've heard this one.

CARL

Because it's true.

HOLLY

No, it just wasn't important until now.

CARL

Steals my date and now, and now – a ditch!

HOLLY

Junior did?

CARL

The tire.

HOLLY

What about the tire?

CARL

(Examining the tire) It's all tore up here and here, and he already used the spare. We got to get back on the road before they come along trying to save me.

HOLLY

Junior?

CARL

They'll be leaving that party soon, her and Junior. I should've caught it – he's always been better at this.

HOLLY

You don't want him to help you?

A silence.

HOLLY (cont'd)

Where do you want me?

CARL

Inside.

Holly gets inside the truck.

The couch is its driver's seat.

CARL (cont'd)

Turn left.

The sound of tires grinding slowly.

HOLLY

You're going to have to get help.

CARL

It's what I got coming, I guess.

HOLLY

No it is not.

CARL

(With amusement) One time I stopped by a wreck on the side of the road. I asked the girl if I could help – she asked me to call her parents, gave me the number.

(A punchline) I got home, didn't realize until late that night that I forgot to call.

HOLLY

You never called?

CARL

She sat there waiting.

HOLLY

By the road?

CARL

I don't *know* that she did, I have no idea what happened to her. Or maybe I don't remember.

HOLLY

Memories are like housekeys, they have to be around somewhere.

Didn't you tell me that?

CARL

I'm cold.

HOLLY

You've never been cold.

CARL

See if we can push it.

Together, they try to push the muddy tire.

Nothing happens.

CARL

It's wedged in like a puzzle.

HOLLY

What do we do?

They lean against the tire.

HOLLY

I can't remember when the other car comes in. If it's here?

Version two.

End of scene.

Scene Two

The ditch.

Carl knocks the tire down sideways, opening face-up.

Holly addresses the audience.

HOLLY

If it were 1976, it would be so wet the mud begs you to miss your turn. When you land sideways in a ditch, the dent in your door says, Harder, I dare you.

CARL

(To Holly) I'd rather hitchhike than have him see this.

HOLLY

No.

CARL

I'd rather I died in the ditch.

HOLLY

No you don't. What about me?

CARL

Well.

HOLLY

And what am I supposed to do if you're in a ditch?

CARL

(Dryly) It's easier that way. No funeral for me! Just roll me off somewhere and let the dogs get me.

HOLLY

Dad please.

CARL

Just roll me off!

They laugh.

A moment.

HOLLY

Are you going to call from somewhere?

CARL

Too far to walk. (*Listens*) Is that somebody coming?

They listen.

It isn't.

(*Dryly*) Shame it wasn't a... *near-death* experience.

HOLLY

You don't think that. Near death?

CARL

Sure I do.

HOLLY

Who'd want to be near-dead?

CARL

At least that way I got a good story. Look at me, wrecking a truck and got nothing out of it!

HOLLY

Maybe you did.

CARL

I got you with mud on your shoes.

HOLLY

Why do we want people to tell us about being dead, when no one remembers being born?

A pause.

Headlights rise over their faces.

HOLLY (cont'd)

Is that her?

The sound of tires slowing.

They wait.

Junior enters.

JUNIOR

Carl. You hurt?

CARL

No.

A pause.

JUNIOR

You wrecked the truck.

Another pause.

Are you... alright?

CARL

I'm fine.

Shit.

JUNIOR

I'll find a house.

I'll call Dad. Wait here.

HOLLY

Is she not getting out of the car?

CARL

(To Junior) I don't need you to call. I'll find somebody to call.

HOLLY

Are we not getting in the car?

CARL

I'm not getting in that car.

HOLLY

I kind of want to get in that car.

CARL

No don't.

HOLLY

The woods... isn't it haunted at night?

The headlights disappear.

A silence.

CARL

Some people say they can hear voices.

But what if it's only trees?

They listen.

The haunting sound of trees.

HOLLY

I heard once that people become ghosts when there's something keeping them from moving on. They're obsessed with their houses, can't let go.

Something terrible happened and they're stuck in the violence.

They cloud up the air with themselves – can't leave it.

CARL

Can't leave the terrible.

A pause.

HOLLY

Everyone wants to know about being dead, but no one remembers being born.

The inbetween looks just as... cloudy.

Does that make us life ghosts?

CARL

It makes you a pill.

They sit in the silence of night.

CARL (cont'd)

Do you believe in haunted places?

HOLLY

I believe in ghosts.

CARL

Which kind?

HOLLY

The kind that float in the woods.

A pause.

CARL

What about life ghosts?

Am I a ghost?

HOLLY

You're alive.

The sound of tires rolling away.

End of scene.

Scene Three

Carl, now older, teaches his daughter.

Holly stands on a chair, above Carl and the tire.

They load imaginary logs into an imaginary truck.

The sound of wood hitting metal.

HOLLY

(To the audience) If this were today, I would maybe listen.

CARL

(To Holly) I've never been afraid of the first scratch on a new truck. Lot of men put money in truck bed linings, they don't want scratches.

But they forget what a truck's for – to grizzle up with logs and chains.

I pitch a necklace of metal chains in a truck, and I feel nothing.

HOLLY

Did you drive Mom in a truck?

CARL

What?

HOLLY

I said, what did you use to drive Mom in?

CARL

Oh. Ha! My brother's truck.

He lights a cigarette.

HOLLY

You're the only one who holds your smokes like that. With your thumb and two fingers.

CARL

How else would I hold it?

HOLLY

Like a peace sign. How they do in movies.

She mimics smoking a peace sign.

CARL

Don't think about smoking.

HOLLY

I'm not, I just don't think it's... gross. Like other people do.

Carl stares at her.

I think it makes you look cool.

Not that smoking is cool. It's not.

CARL

It's not.

HOLLY

Right. Smoking is *uncool*.

When I think of smokes, though, I think of right now. The driveway and trees.

Why do you still go outside to smoke when Mom isn't around to make you?

A pause.

CARL

It still feels like her kitchen.

Old habits, I guess.

HOLLY

Old habits what?

CARL

They go and go and go.

End of scene.

Scene Four

The ditch.

HOLLY

(To the audience) Let's take a smoke break.

A popping sound.

The tire bounces.

Fumes, real or imaginary, erupt from the hood.

Carl climbs out of the truck.

Holly sits by the side of the road.

HOLLY (cont'd)

Version three.

(To Carl) Why would you hide from your brother?

CARL

I'm not hiding, I'm finding help.

HOLLY

But they're coming back for you. Sit with me. It's too dark.

Headlights rise over them.

Junior gets out of the truck.

JUNIOR

Dad's on his way.

CARL

That was low, man. That was very low low, man.

HOLLY

He did you a favor! He's probably spitting mad.

JUNIOR

(To Carl) I should be spiting on you!

CARL

She came with *me* tonight, I should spit!

JUNIOR

She don't belong to you.

HOLLY

Relax, *Dad*. There's other girls, *Dad*.

CARL

Junior is named after Dad, did you know? I'm not jealous, I'm just stating facts.

HOLLY

I don't have a brother. What do brothers talk about?

CARL

We don't talk, we're supposed to *know* things.

He called her *baby*. Christ! She ain't your *baby*.

JUNIOR

She ain't yours either, baby. Can we talk about the truck, please?

CARL

Hell with your truck, I wrecked it on purpose.

JUNIOR

You don't have to *despair*. The car's what it is now, it's over. It ain't getting no better. It's only gonna get worse.

CARL

Can't get no worse than what it is.

JUNIOR

Can too. We'll take it to a junkyard.

Yeah that's right.

We'll take it on a forklift to the junkyard and dump it in the crusher.

Carl swings at Junior.

They start to fight.

It is hard to distinguish who's who in the headlights.

Holly sits by the tire, watching.

As they fight, Junior continues to shout.

JUNIOR

We'll put it in the crusher and we'll stab it through the doors with the forklift like a soft carrot, like a fucking glazed carrot, and we'll stick it right there on the prongs till the weight goes down, and we'll hold it there for the weight to go slowly slowly down,

and the doors bend and the body caves in and the windows shatter and tires go sideways and collapse until it's all scrunched up like a wrinkly face, and all the air sucks out like a collapsed lung or a trash bag, and you see all that space it took to make up that car, all that empty space and that means it wasn't no bullet, it was a shell, you had no idea it was a shell the whole time, hollowed out like a ditch and you can drive along and run over somebody with a moving shell and it don't matter what's happening inside not at all if it's a bullet or empty or what because somebody's on the road dying.

Carl hurts his hip.

He gives up.

They both collapse on the ground, out of breath.

CARL

When's Dad coming?

JUNIOR

Who knows.

CARL

I need some air.

End of scene.

Scene Five

The nursing home room.

*Carl sits on the bed next to Junior,
who holds his doll and sleeps.*

Holly sits in a chair.

Carl teaches his daughter.

CARL

Despair is the other side of hope.
Doubt is the gas pedal of despair.
Without doubt, you'd never despair,
and I guessed wrong on the weather this morning.

Not to say that an umbrella's my hope.
It's just that I parked too far away, and if
I brought one, I would hold it over you and me, and you
would stand real close to me, and we would jump
over mud puddles, and lights would color the pavement.
Come here.
You need to afford medical insurance.
However you do that.
I haven't been to the doctor in years – I'm afraid
they might find something wrong with me.

Do you know my whole day till lunch
goes straight to insurance? You didn't. I didn't tell.
Half my day belongs to somebody else.
And who knows what happens next year.
Okay?

Holly frowns.

End of scene.

Scene Six

Carl flips the tire sideways, violently.

He lies on the floor beside it.

Holly addresses the audience.

HOLLY

The last version.

No one would feel prepared for the rain, or anything else that summer. It involves hanging from a seatbelt upside down, and a kicked-in window.

It once, years ago in this town, involved caskets rising up from their plots of dirt and floating along like boats. But this summer would not overflow, and no caskets would be floating up.

Only the tires would float up because the roof is planted down, and they would ascend to heaven. Which is not sentimental because this is not my truck.

CARL

Can't get out.

HOLLY

What about the window? Can you break it?

CARL

Can't get out.

HOLLY

Yes you can.

CARL

Can't. It's blocked with dirt on the other side.

HOLLY

I can help...

She tries to reach him.

She tries harder.

She can't.

He lies there on the floor.

HOLLY

This isn't the same story at all.

I don't like it.

Where's your brother?

CARL

Don't matter.

HOLLY

I'll get help –

CARL

No don't.

HOLLY

You need help!

CARL

You'll go on your way and you'll forget to call!

HOLLY

How could I forget to call?

CARL

I did.

A pause.

I want you to stay please.

A pause.

She sits beside him.

HOLLY

Waiting in the haunted woods.

Do you believe in ghosts?

CARL

...I don't know.

HOLLY

What about the souls that can't go?

He considers this.

CARL

Probably.

I could leave anything.

HOLLY

Could you?

A pause.

The sound of the radio tuning.

CARL (cont'd)

Do you want to hear a story?

HOLLY

What kind?

CARL

A scary one.

HOLLY

Okay.

CARL

This one is called Bloody Lane.

She laughs.

HOLLY

(Recognizing it) Bloody Laaaane!

CARL

It was a dark night, and two lovers drove down Bloody Lane. Things was getting, uh, hot and heavy, when suddenly. The radio turned on... It wasn't on before, it just turned on, suddenly. A voice on the radio. The voice says, GO HOME NOW. A deranged killer from the local insane asylum is on the loose!

HOLLY

The LoCaL iNsAnE aSyLuM.

CARL

He's lost his mind!

HOLLY

Is this the one with the hook hand?

CARL

He's got a hook for a hand! And the kids are both scared, and the girl says, Take me home, and then... what happens next? The scratchy car?

HOLLY

The scratchy car.

CARL

They hear something scratchy on the roof of the car, and that's weird. So he says okay and takes her home.

And then they get stabbed with a hook. The end.

HOLLY

But - the bloody hook! You forgot.

CARL

That's what I said.

HOLLY

No, they're in her driveway, and she opens the door, and there's the bloody hook hanging on the door handle.

I don't think they get stabbed at all. That's much darker.

He nods.

She waits for him to respond to that.

He's not going to.

A pause.

HOLLY

If anything was going to make you haunt the woods forever, what would it be?

Silence.

CARL

I'm attached to... ice cream.

Is that what you mean?

HOLLY

No.

Yes no. Sort of.

CARL

You mean people? things?

HOLLY

Maybe not.

CARL

Well what are *you* attached to?

HOLLY

I don't know.

I love driving.

And songs in the truck.

CARL

I do too.

A pause.

(A joke) Just not today.

HOLLY

Yes.

They stare down the road.

The sound of the radio tuning.

HOLLY

The truck is inescapable, in this version. A glass cage of dirt and metal. In this version, there's no mention of rescue. Instead, there's the frustration, and the dark.

But I say they're coming back.

It's a cool night, cool enough to feel the water overflow, and your brother and father – they're driving back.

They're mad at you for being stupid.

(Dryly) Of course, they'll forget eventually.

A pause.

I hope you got the joke.

Carl, still lying on the floor, pulls out a pack of cigarettes.

He smokes.

The one detail you never mention, though, and there are a lot of useless details, is – what were you doing on the wait?

How do you wait for something to happen?

You used to smoke out the window on car trips, and this is how I think of you driving, your elbow cocked, a whisper of ash. The window sipping smoke through a little crack of air.

HOLLY (cont'd)

My mother used to bury her nose
in her sweater, said it would kill us.

CARL (*in unison*)
It would kill us.

HOLLY

Me, though. When no one was looking, I'd lean over your hot ashtrays, breathing in the smell.

The sound of tires approaching. Light fills their faces.

There's always somewhere the smell comes back to haunt me. The sidewalk, a gas station, an old parking lot.

I walk in a trail of someone's smoke, and I think I'm on a ride.

Junior enters, behind Holly.

For a moment, he and Carl exchange a look as if Holly is not even there.

Blackout.

End of play.