

BECOMING

___STR___AN___G___E___R___S

___By George Freek

HY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...It's the rare full-length play that appears in these digital pages, but this is one of them. I'm not a stickler for word counts, nor do I believe a play or screenplay can be constrained to a particular template or font, so let's just agree that a script is as long as it needs to be, and that Becoming Strangers by George Freek nails it. It's stranger than strange. Shepard-esque. Also, it's hysterical. This Freeky romp gives us a married couple, Howard and Jane, escaping from the city toil at an unusual "resort" in the back woods where cellphone service doesn't exist and the peace and quiet is punctuated with gun shots and squealing pigs. But there's much much more. Take Duke and Betsy, our salt of the earth hosts - simple folks who hearken back from another era who say and do the darndest things. Duke is especially smitten by Howard's wife:*

DUKE

Like t' feel what it's like. Puttin' yer log in a woman like that.

Then there's the cagey old man, Pa, dressed in a Civil War uniform who steals fishing bait because he's off his rocker. Howard and Jane are straight arrows, but they can't help but be drawn into the magic and the mystery of this godforsaken place. Maybe all those clocks on the wall aren't so junky after all. I promise you will gasp and may even shit yourself, but Becoming Strangers is well worth it.

JANE

I think I'm going to love it here. You know what I mean?

HOWARD

I do. There's something about it....

JANE

It's so....real.

HOWARD

A place where we can escape from all the bullshit. (He looks at DUKE) Maybe that's too strong a word.

DUKE

I heard it before.

Five Stars

BECOMING STRANGERS

(A PLAY IN TWO ACTS)

by

GEORGE FREEK

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THE CHARACTERS

HOWARD, In his 30s

JANE, His wife, perhaps a few years younger

DUKE, Of similar age, but looks older

BETSY, Of similar age, but looks older

PA, Of indeterminate age, but looks very old

THE PLACE

A CABIN

SOMEWHERE IN THE HILLS

THE TIME

LATE SUMMER

RECENTLY

1, i

(A cabin in the hills; two cots; a window, rear, a table in front of it, littered with old, broken clocks; on one wall, a photo of a man in a Civil War uniform; Lights up, BETSY sits in a rocking-chair, smoking a corncob pipe, holding a rusty revolver; After a moment, PA enters. He is in the Civil War uniform, but he is barefoot)

PA

(Looks at BETSY) They're out there.

BETSY

What you talking about?

PA

They're comin' after me.

BETSY

Ain't nothing out there.

PA

They want me.

BETSY

I doubt that.

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PA

I won't let 'em get me. (He takes the revolver from her, exits).

(The sound of a car door, voices; BETSY gets up, looks out, exits as DUKE, HOWARD, JANE enter)

DUKE

This's it. (He goes to one of the cots, pushes on it) I'll tell ya, they don't make beds like this no more.

JANE

(Smiles) It's just what we were looking for, isn't it, honey?

HOWARD

(He looks around in amazement) My god. I love it! (Puts suitcase on a cot) I'm sorry we're so late. I'm afraid we got a little lost. We stopped at a service station to call. There must be something wrong with your phone, huh?

DUKE

Nothing wrong with it.

HOWARD

I couldn't get through.

DUKE

Ain't got one. (Before HOWARD can react) We got a mirror. Some place roundabouts. (He looks, finds a mirror under a cot and hangs it on a wall) Goes there.

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JANE

I think I'm going to love it here. You know what I mean?

HOWARD

I do. There's something about it....

JANE

It's so... real.

HOWARD

A place where we can escape from all the bullshit. (He looks at DUKE)
Maybe that's too strong a word.

DUKE

I heard it before.

HOWARD

I think what we are trying to say is that it's really good to get back to some honest, fundamental reality. Isn't that right, Honey?

JANE

Yes.

HOWARD

I mean the air. Just smell that air. (He takes a deep breath).

DUKE

Yeh. We got lots've air.

JANE

(Takes a deep breath, coughs) Oh god. Somebody's been smoking in here.

HOWARD

Nonsense. That's simply good clean air.

JANE

No. No. I smell smoke. (She tries to open the window. It's stuck) My god, Howard, I'm choking!

HOWARD

Okay, what are you up to? Is this another one of your allergy games?

JANE

Howard, for god's sake! (She rushes out the door).

HOWARD

(To DUKE) She has these allergies. That's one of the reasons we decided to escape from the city for awhile. I think her problem is she hasn't gotten the city out of her system yet.

DUKE

My wife, Betsy, she might a been smoking in here.

HOWARD

No. It's okay. Really. What it is, I don't think she's used to breathing good, clean air. That's all. (Pause)

BLACKOUT

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(HOWARD unpacks, looking at some fishing tackle, while JANE is looking at the clocks)

JANE

Howard, what do you make of these clocks?

HOWARD

They must be antiques.

JANE

Most of them look like junk.

HOWARD

Well, maybe they have some sentimental value.

JANE

I have to go to the bathroom. (Pause) Where is it?

(DUKE suddenly comes in, looks at them)

HOWARD

(Pause, friendly) Uh, anything we can do for you?

DUKE

Nope. Just came t' see if you was getting along okay. (Pause) You getting along okay?

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HOWARD

Oh yeah. Just great. Thanks very much.

JANE

(About the clocks) These are rather... unusual.

DUKE

Those're mine. Got a whole collection. Those're clocks.

JANE

It's a very... interesting collection.

DUKE

They're all the same. (They look at the clocks again, then back at DUKE) They're all busted. Picked 'em up for practically nothing. Now I got myself a whole collection.

JANE

A broken clock collection. (Pause, smiling) That's rather unusual.

HOWARD

(Holds up a fishing lure) We thought we'd do some fishing.

DUKE

You come to the right place.

HOWARD

(Pleased) We thought we had. You see my dad was quite a fisherman.

DUKE

He come here fishing?

HOWARD

No. I don't believe he actually ever came here.

DUKE

Some do. Must be something to it. They come back, year after year. Then they move here, so they can do it all the time. Spend night 'n' day in a boat. Never see 'em again. Anybody asks where they are, just gotta say, 'Gone fishing.' They call that fishing fever.

JANE

(Pause) And they enjoy that? (To HOWARD) You never said anything about fishing. Do they ever catch any fish?

HOWARD

Don't be silly. You heard the man.

JANE

(To DUKE) Do they?

DUKE

Sometimes.

HOWARD

Man. I can't wait.

DUKE

'Course once in a while, somebody falls overboard.

HOWARD

Yeah sure. Accidents will happen.

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DUKE

Yeh. In the dark sometimes, somebody falls overboard. So dark, they can't find him again. Gotta just let 'im go.

JANE

My goodness!

DUKE

I just come t' see if you was okay before you turn in.

HOWARD

We're fine. Just fine. Aren't we, honey?

JANE

The conveniences. The, uh, modern conveniences.

DUKE

Ain't got none.

HOWARD

None? Wow, that's perfect!

JANE

So where do I, um, go to the bathroom?

DUKE

Jest go out back. Anywhere'll do.

JANE

Out back? (Pause) Well then... I'll be back in a minute. (She exits).

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HOWARD

I want to tell you. This is just what we wanted. It's so quiet. See, my wife is sort of allergic to noises, so maybe you can understand what all this peace and quiet means to us.

DUKE

We got lots a quiet here. Yeh. We got some noises, too.

HOWARD

Back home, you know? This commuter train goes past our apartment. It can drive you insane. (Pause) I sell insurance, by the way. Dad did it before me. Dad's the one who loved fishing. Boy, did he have the gear! Mom used to say he loved that more than he loved her. A joke, of course! But we used to polish that gear every week. We'd go into the basement. Spend all night down there. Mom never knew what to make of it. They were married forty years. (Pause) Dad was a great fisherman. I mean salesman. He made the millionaire's club every year. I made it myself a few times. (Smiles) Am I babbling?

(DUKE looks at him, as JANE then returns)

JANE

Boy, You know what. I'm suddenly exhausted. (Sits on a cot, lays back)

HOWARD

We've had quite a day.

DUKE

(Pause) There's birds.

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JANE

I'm sorry? Birds?

DUKE

Bird noises. Owls mostly. Well, you folks need anything? Bite t' eat?

HOWARD

You know what? A bite to eat does sound pretty good.

DUKE

Got some fat back, you want something.

HOWARD

My god! Fat back! How about that!

JANE

(Yawns) I'm sorry, but suddenly I am so sleepy. I don't think I can keep my eyes open any longer. Really, I... (She seems suddenly to be asleep).

DUKE

Must be tired.

HOWARD

God, I'm sorry! She's not usually so rude.

DUKE

Guess I'll turn in myself. (He starts out).

HOWARD

Wait! You know I'm wide awake myself.

DUKE

Yeh? (He exits).

HOWARD

I thought maybe we could... (DUKE is gone).

(HOWARD looks at the photo on the wall. Then, suddenly a gunshot, off. JANE sits upright, but HOWARD does not seem to have noticed it)

JANE

My God! Howard, what was that?

HOWARD

What was what?

JANE

That noise!

HOWARD

I didn't hear anything. It must have been an owl.

JANE

Howard, it sounded to me like a gunshot.

HOWARD

Yeah. That'd be an owl. Hey, come look at this photo. What character!

BLACKOUT

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(Morning; HOWARD is polishing his tackle,
He wears a fishing hat; JANE is stretching)

JANE

I have to admit I slept beautifully. How about you?

HOWARD

I'm too excited to sleep. I'm getting this tackle all ready to go.

JANE

Howard, listen, do you think it's alright to go fishing? I mean those stories were rather strange.

HOWARD

Nonsense. Haven't you ever heard of fishermen's stories?

JANE

Alright. But what about our car? It simply stopped. Dead!

HOWARD

We'll take care of that. But at the moment, my main concern is getting out on that lake. Let's try to have some fun, alright?

JANE

Okay, I guess that sounds like a good idea. You know what. I think I'll go for a walk.

HOWARD

A walk? But we're going fishing in a couple of minutes!

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(JANE exits; a moment later, DUKE enters)

HOWARD

(He smiles, as DUKE simply looks at him) Morning. Let me tell you, I slept like a rock last night.

DUKE

Sorry we didn't bring ya no breakfast.

HOWARD

We never missed it.

DUKE

My wife don't feel so good.

HOWARD

No? I certainly hope it's nothing serious.

DUKE

Nope. She just couldn't sleep last night.

HOWARD

Oh. Why couldn't she sleep?

DUKE

She never said. We'll try and get ya some lunch.

HOWARD

Don't worry about it. Tell me. What do you think of my tackle?

DUKE

Never go fishing.

HOWARD

I spent all night polishing it.

DUKE

All night?

HOWARD

Yeah. Um, that is when I wasn't sleeping like a rock. You know, coming from here, I'm surprised you don't do any fishing.

DUKE

Lots do. Some of 'em get killed.

HOWARD

Yeah. Those accidents. You know I remember once dad and I were in the basement, polishing the old tackle. And mom was yelling for us to come upstairs. Dad pretty much ignored her. I mean that basement was our man's world, you know. So we popped a couple of beers....

DUKE

You a drinking man?

HOWARD

(Uneasy) Well, you know, when you're fishing with the guys, a beer or two—

DUKE

Can't live hereabouts without a drink now and again.

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HOWARD

(Pleased) You don't say.

DUKE

You want a drink?

HOWARD

Now? At nine in the morning! (Pause) Sure, why not?

DUKE

Can't live round here without a drink. (He exits)

HOWARD

My god! This is heaven!

DUKE

(Returns, carrying a jug) Gotta keep this handy for when the wind stops blowin'. Wind stops, ya can't hear nothing. Ya get scared. Run round sayin' things nobody can understand, then everyone gets scared of YOU. Won't have nothing t' do with ya. So ya jest crawl down t' the lake and sorta slip in. (He holds out the jug) Want a drink a this or not?

HOWARD

Oh yeah. I sure do. (He takes a sip. Decides it's good, but as he starts to take a hearty hit, DUKE reaches over and takes it from him, and some spills) Oh god. I'm sorry. I don't want to waste any of that.

DUKE

I got plenty. (DUKE drinks, HOWARD waits for DUKE to hand back the jug, but DUKE places it beside himself on the floor).

HOWARD

Let me tell you. That's excellent whisky. Did you make it yourself?

DUKE

'Gainst the law to do that.

HOWARD

Oh yes. I guess it would be.

DUKE

(Matter-of-fact) Got a cousin does it, though.

HOWARD

Oh. I see. Your cousin. (HOWARD laughs, DUKE stares at him).

DUKE

Yeh. Got lots a cousins. (Drinks, hands HOWARD the jug).

HOWARD

(Drinks heartily) Listen, you remember I was telling you how dad and I were polishing his tackle? Well, it must have been four in the morning when we finally quit, but mom was still up. She was in the kitchen, pulling down the wallpaper. Sort of clawing it off, I guess you'd say. That was what she'd be yelling to dad. How she wanted new wallpaper in the kitchen. (Drinks, hands the jug to DUKE).

DUKE

(Drinks) Ya get it for her?

HOWARD

No. I'm afraid not.

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DUKE

Too bad. (Drinks, puts the jug back on the floor).

HOWARD

No. We couldn't, because dad died a few days after that. (Pause)

DUKE

(Drinks, hands the jug to HOWARD) You like sleeping in them beds?

HOWARD

The cots? I'm telling you, I slept like a rock.

DUKE

You 'n' yer wife sleep in one of 'em together, do ya?

HOWARD

Do we... Uh, look, do you mind if I have another swig of that whisky?

DUKE

Hep y'sef.

HOWARD

(Drinks, hands the jug back to DUKE)) So like I was saying, we couldn't get that wallpaper because dad died a few days later. It's strange, because, you see, he fell out of a boat and drowned.

DUKE

Yeh. Lots do that.

HOWARD

There was this man, standing on shore who happened to see it. And he said dad was standing in the boat and then he just sort of... fell overboard.

DUKE

(Takes a drink) What kind a wallpaper?

HOWARD

I'm sorry?

DUKE

That wallpaper. What kind did yer ma want?

HOWARD

Oh. Something yellow, I think it was. With flowers on it. (He reaches for the jug, but DUKE takes a drink himself).

DUKE

My ma liked fish. (He hands the jug to HOWARD). T' eat.

HOWARD

(Drinks, returns jug) Well, there's nothing like a batch of fresh fried fish.

DUKE

My ma liked 'em raw.

HOWARD

Is that so?

DUKE

Yeh. I jest told ya it was so. (Drinks, hands the jug to HOWARD).

HOWARD

I've never tried bass raw.

DUKE

No one else has neither. But that's how ma liked 'em, so that's how she ate 'em.

HOWARD

Drinks) You know, that's something else I admire about you people down here. Your independence. You know what you want and you do it, and to hell with what the rest of the world thinks about it!
(He is about to take another drink, as DUKE takes the jug from him).

DUKE

'Course most people like fish cooked. (He drinks).

(Then JANE suddenly returns to the room)

JANE

Howard, something strange just happened to me.

HOWARD

Hey. Where the heck have you been?

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JANE

I went for a walk. Down by the lake—

HOWARD

The lake! Why didn't you wait for me?

JANE

Howard, will you please listen to me? I met this man and he kept telling me about the wind—

HOWARD

The wind! A poet! My god, you've already met a local poet!

JANE

He kept telling me how the wind was stuck in the trees and we had to climb up there and get it unstuck. I think he was insane!

HOWARD

Whoa. What? Are we so contaminated we can't appreciate a little poetry any longer? (To DUKE) You explain it to her, would you?

DUKE

Might a met somebody off his rocker. That's what we call it. Man sits on his porch, rocking away, listening to the same sounds til one day he can't hear nothing, not even the wind. Then he gets up outa his rocker and runs around sayin' things no one can understand. Round here we call that going off his rocker. (Pause).

HOWARD

(To JANE) Well, I still say you met a bona fide poet.

DUKE

Might a been my pa.

HOWARD

His father! Are you trying to insult these people?

JANE

No, of course not. I'm sorry. I don't know what to think.

DUKE

(Points to the photo) That's my pa.

HOWARD

That's your father? Wow. We were admiring that photo just last night, weren't we, honey?

JANE

Isn't that a Civil War uniform?

DUKE

Yeh. Pa wears it round lots. Been in the family a long time. (Pause)
Since the Civil War.

HOWARD

It must have quite a history behind it.

DUKE

You folks Yankees?

HOWARD

Well by birth. But, you know, we always sympathized with the South.

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JANE

(About the photo) He looks very austere, almost aristocratic.

DUKE

Goes barefoot. Don't have no boots t' go with the uniform.

JANE

Did you say he was a poet?

DUKE

He's off his rocker.

JANE

(To HOWARD) There! (To DUKE) You mean he's crazy?

HOWARD

Good god, Jane! He never said that!

DUKE

Might say he's crazy. Nobody knows what he's sayin'.

HOWARD

Of course saying things people don't understand doesn't necessarily mean a person is crazy.

JANE

(Uncertain) No... I guess he might be a genius.

DUKE

When he got off his rocker, he lost a can a worms. Spent near twenty years lookin' fer them worms.

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HOWARD

Twenty years! Now that is remarkable persistence!

DUKE

But he never lost no can a worms, though. He buried it. I seen him: on a dark night, no moon shining. He got afraid. So he buried them worms. Never lost nothing. Just went off his rocker.

HOWARD

(Pause) Well... I guess these things happen.

JANE

They do! You know I once lost an egg. While I was baking a cake. I laid out four eggs. Then I went to answer the phone and when I came back there were only three eggs. Somehow I had lost an egg!

HOWARD

You went to answer the phone? Who called?

JANE

The Avon lady. The thing is, see, I didn't want to talk to her at all. And then when I got back to the kitchen and discovered I'd lost an egg, I got very upset. I almost broke down and cried.

HOWARD

(To DUKE) This Avon lady can be pretty scary. She has these scars—

JANE

Anyway, I guess what I am trying to say is I understand how traumatic it can be to lose something.

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DUKE

We'll see 'bout getting you lunch. Depends on my wife, Betsy.

JANE

Your wife? Oh, I'm very much looking forward to meeting her.

DUKE

Sometimes ya got to give her a kick in the rear end.

(Suddenly, BETSY now enters, they look at her)

DUKE

This's her.

JANE

(Smiles) How do you do? I'm really happy to meet you.

BETSY

(To DUKE) Who's this?

HOWARD

My god, honest, decent, hard-working people! (He smiles at BETSY)
It's a real pleasure to meet you.

DUKE

(To BETSY) Ya got something to eat?

BETSY

They hungry?

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JANE

Of course we don't want to put you to any trouble.

DUKE

Ain't no trouble.

BETSY

(To DUKE) Easy fer you t' say.

DUKE

(To HOWARD) What you want?

HOWARD

Well, anything would be just fine.

DUKE

(To BETSY) Get 'em something t' eat, they wanna go fishing.

BETSY

Fishing! Everybody wants ta go fishing. Everybody but me. (To JANE and HOWARD) You know what I want a do?

DUKE

'Course they don't! Git!

JANE

(As BETSY is about to exit) I'd like to know... Really I would.

BETSY

Don't know. Don't know what I'd like ta do.

DUKE

(Snorts) That's jest what I figured.

BETSY

'Cept maybe buy a new dress. I might like ta do that. (She looks at DUKE as if to say 'So there' and exits).

JANE

(Pause) Oh, I like her. I really do.

DUKE

I known her all my life.

HOWARD

Really? Now that is truly beautiful.

JANE

Well, I hope to get to know her much better.

HOWARD

(Takes a deep breath) Hey! What is that I smell? Is that good old-fashioned home-cooking I smell?

DUKE

Might be pigs. Got pigs out back.

JANE

Out back?

HOWARD

They are your own pigs? Honey, isn't that something?

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JANE

(Dubious) Yes. Yes, it is.

DUKE

Slaughter 'em ourselves. Hang 'em up, let the blood run. Make blood sausage out a that. Live for a long time on one ol' pig.

JANE

(Pause) You know I really hope your wife and I can become good friends.

DUKE

Got some perfume? She might like that. (He looks at her)

JANE

Alright. But do you mind if I give it to her myself?

HOWARD

(Chuckles) Women! They always have to get in on the act.

DUKE

I'll see she gets it okay.

HOWARD

Why don't you give him a bottle, honey?

JANE

What I am saying, Howard, is that I would really like to give it to her myself. Personally. You know what I mean? (HOWARD beams at her)

BLACKOUT

30

(JANE is looking at the clocks; BETSY then
Enters the room, carrying a stack of pancakes)

JANE

(Smiles) Oh, hello, there! I was just looking at the clocks.

BETSY

Got some pancakes for ya.

JANE

That's really kind of you. I'm afraid Howard has gone off to dig up
some worms.

BETSY

I'll tell ya, them clocks is all junk.

JANE

Yes. I've noticed that. That, I guess, is what makes them interesting.

BETSY

Here's some pancakes, you want 'em. (She deposits the pancakes and
starts to exit)

JANE

Wait. Please. (BETSY looks at her) Look. There's something I'd like to
ask you, if you don't mind.

(HOWARD then returns with a can of worms)

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HOWARD

Honey, Duke was right. This place is crawling with worms.

JANE

But did you have to bring them in here?

HOWARD

We're going to catch a mess of bass and have a big fish dinner.

BETSY

(To JANE) What you want a ask me.

(DUKE now enters, carrying a toolbox)

DUKE

I'm gonna take a look at yer car.

JANE

That's wonderful. Are you a mechanic?

BETSY

He don't know nothing about cars.

DUKE

I know more 'n' you do.

JANE

Well, just in case you can't repair it, is there a mechanic somewhere... nearby?

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HOWARD

Look, we can worry about that when the time comes. Right now... (He notices the pancakes)... Hey! Pancakes! Will you look at that!

BETSY

Want some lard for ‘em?

HOWARD

Homemade lard! Now that is the way to eat pancakes!

JANE

Actually, I think I would prefer syrup.

BETSY

Ain’t got no syrup.

HOWARD

(Smugly, to JANE) What did I tell you?

BETSY

Used it up this morning’. Them pancakes is leftovers.

HOWARD

Well, they look fantastic to me.

JANE

Actually, I’m not very hungry. (To BETSY) I’m sorry. They really do look very appetitizing.

BETSY

You don’t want ‘em, just throw ‘em out back to the pigs. (Starts off)

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JANE

Wait. Please. (She looks in her bag) You know I'm afraid I forgot to pack any extra fragrance, Mrs, um...

DUKE

Just call her Betsy.

HOWARD

You know that is a beautiful name. What does it mean?

BETSY

(Stares at him) Means Betsy.

JANE

Listen, Betsy, I wonder if you would accept this as a personal gift from me. (She takes an expensive dress and hands it to BETSY)

(BETSY takes the dress, exits with a shrug)

DUKE

I think she appreciated that.

JANE

It really wasn't very much.

HOWARD

You know, I really think this place is going to bring out the best in us!

BLACKOUT

(Dim lights; HOWARD and JANE asleep; PA enters in the uniform, looks around; He sees HOWARD's can of worms, picks it up, takes The revolver from his belt and puts it where the worms had been. He then leans over and peers At HOWARD, then at JANE, He then runs out of the room, seemingly very agitated)

JANE

(Suddenly pops upright and looks around for a moment) Howard? Howard? I heard something.

HOWARD

(Rousing, sleepily) Huh? Probably another owl.

JANE

No. I think somebody was in our room.

HOWARD

That is ridiculous. You had a dream.

JANE

No. I don't think so, Howard. It wasn't a dream. I really think someone came into our room. Are you sure you didn't hear anything? (Pause) Howard? (Pause) Howard, are you listening to what I am saying? Howard? (Pause; HOWARD is heard snoring).

BLACKOUT

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(JANE is asleep in her cot; HOWARD polishes his tackle, as DUKE then enters; he's carrying A small pail, stands silently for a moment)

HOWARD

(Finally notices DUKE) Oh. Hello, there. I'm polishing my tackle.

DUKE

Yeh. I figured that's what you was doing. I been slopping pigs.

HOWARD

(Interested) Have you?

DUKE

(Holds up the pail) Yeh.

HOWARD

You know, that sounds very interesting. (DUKE stares at him) See, in the city you don't get much chance to slop pigs.

DUKE

Ain't much to it.

HOWARD

Listen. Would you mind if I helped you some time?

DUKE

Didn't have t' give 'em much today. They ate a stack a pancakes.

HOWARD

(Guilty) They did?

DUKE

Yeh. Pigs'll eat most anything.

HOWARD

Well now, that's interesting.

DUKE

Your wife. She like sleeping in them beds.

HOWARD

The cots? Oh yes, she sure does. Listen, can I tell you something? I mean if I can't discuss this with a man of your caliber, then who can I discuss it with? What I am getting to, is when we first arrived here, I was pretty depressed. I was even thinking about... Well, anyway, now I realize that was simply from living in the city. You know? I guess you could say I was in a terrible rut—

DUKE

(Perks up) Rut? You mean you 'n' yer wife?

HOWARD

I guess so. I mean that commuter is always hot and noisy. Every morning I had to listen to all these noises. People opening newspapers, people coughing, people belching. There was no escape. That's one of the reasons we decided to come here: for the peace and quiet. But what I am trying to say is, since coming here, I have truly been happy. And I would like to thank you for bringing me back to life again.

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DUKE

You want ta thank me?

HOWARD

I only wish there was some way I could show my appreciation.

DUKE

Yer wife. She's a nice woman.

HOWARD

Thank you. Thank you very much.

DUKE

You like ta sleep with her?

HOWARD

I'm not sure what... Look, we are legally married. I assure you. I know down here you folks have a pretty strict moral code, but I can promise you. Jane and I are legally married.

DUKE

Sometime I'd like t' sleep with somebody like her.

HOWARD

You... (unnerved)...Well, thanks. Thank you... for the compliment....

DUKE

Jest wonder what it'd be like.

HOWARD

I see! You're putting me on. You're kidding me! Okay. I get it!

38

DUKE

She's got real nice skin.

HOWARD

(Continuing on the assumption that this is still some kind of put-on)
Nice skin, huh? Yeah, right.

DUKE

Folks round here got hard skin. Like mine.

HOWARD

(Confused again) Well, skin. It's only... what? Skin deep....

DUKE

You got nice skin, too.

HOWARD

You're still putting me on. Right?

DUKE

I like yer wife's better, though. Like t' touch her skin sometime.

HOWARD

Yes? (Utterly at a loss, he picks up the jug, takes a drink) Well, I don't think she would mind that. No. I mean it's a compliment really....

DUKE

Me 'n' Betsy don't sleep t'gether no more. Don't like t' touch each other. Got skin like sandpaper, haven't slept t'gether in more'n twenty years.

HOWARD

Twenty years? My god, that IS a strict moral code. Good, decent folks. It's a shame you don't have any children.

DUKE

(Sharply) What're you talking about?

HOWARD

I meant the things you could give them, the values. Look, did I say something wrong? I'm sorry.

DUKE

We had a kid.

HOWARD

Oh. Did you?

DUKE

He died.

HOWARD

Oh god. I'm terribly sorry.

DUKE

Something happened to him.

HOWARD

I'm really very sorry.

DUKE

Not your fault. I gotta go clean my slop bucket now.

40

HOWARD

Please let me say once again how sorry I am. I hope you'll accept my apology. Look, if there is anything I can do....

DUKE

You kin tell yer wife.

HOWARD

Of course. (Pause) Um... tell her what?

DUKE

About me touchin' her skin.

HOWARD

Oh. I'm sure she will feel flattered.

DUKE

She's real pretty. I'd like ta fuck somebody like her.

HOWARD

(Pause) This... naivete. This good old American honesty. I find it very, very... touching.

DUKE

Like t' feel what it's like. Puttin' yer log in a woman like that.

HOWARD

American honesty. I find it very... moving...

DUKE

You ask her, okay? 'Bout that skin.

HOWARD

Yes. I will. Yes. And will you tell your wife something for me. (DUKE looks at him) Tell her how much I enjoyed those pancakes.

DUKE

I got a go clean my slop bucket now.

HOWARD

Just a minute. Listen, next time, you know, you slop the pigs... Would you mind if I joined you?

DUKE

(Stares at him) Ya wanna slop pigs?

HOWARD

If you wouldn't mind me coming along, I would consider it an honor. Oh, and one more thing. (HOWARD goes to his closet and removes a nice-looking suit of dark cloth) I wonder if you would please accept this. As a token of my appreciation: for what you have done for us. I mean for both of us. Please.

DUKE

(Takes the suit, looks it over, then looks in the closet) I like that one better.

HOWARD

You mean the pin-striped? (He takes out another suit).

DUKE

Nope. (He points) That one.

HOWARD

Of course. Of course. (He gives DUKE the suit he wants).

DUKE

Like this one better.

HOWARD

It's yours. My god, what refreshing honesty!

DUKE

I got to go clean my bucket now.

HOWARD

I want you to know that I feel privileged. I really feel a part of something extremely beautiful that is going on here. Thank you for it. (DUKE exits, HOWARD picks up the jug, takes a drink).

(JANE suddenly rouses and looks about)

JANE

Howard? I just had an odd dream. We were in this room and we were very happy. But it suddenly became dark. So dark we couldn't even see each other any longer. We were walking around in the dark, trying to find each other. Look, don't you think it's time to go? Hm? Howard?

THE END OF ACT ONE

43

ACT TWO

11, i

(HOWARD is polishing his fishing tackle,
when JANE suddenly notices the revolver)

JANE

Howard! What is this?

HOWARD

My god! Let me see that....

JANE

That's what I'm thinking.

HOWARD

This is really something. It looks like Civil War era.

JANE

Howard, someone has been in our room with a gun!

HOWARD

Come on, this thing is as harmless as a rubber duck.

JANE

That's not the point. Aren't you upset someone might have been in here?
(As HOWARD aims the gun around the room) Would you please put
that down?

44

HOWARD

Alright. Anyway, I'm ready to go fishing.

JANE

Don't you think we should see about our car first?

HOWARD

Duke is going to take care of that.

JANE

His wife said he doesn't know the first thing about repairing cars.

HOWARD

That was probably modesty. I'll bet the man is a genius with cars.

JANE

I hope you're right.

HOWARD

You wait and see. Now, how about some fishing?

JANE

Tell me. Do you really want to go fishing?

HOWARD

(Irked) Now what the hell do you mean by that?

JANE

Well, we have been here for three days and all you have actually done is polish that tackle.

HOWARD

And I'm ready now! So hand me those worms and let's get going.

JANE

(Looks around) What worms? There aren't any worms.

HOWARD

That is not funny. What did you do with my worms?

JANE

I haven't seen any worms.

HOWARD

Don't give me that. Where are they?

(DUKE again enters, carrying his toolbox)

DUKE

About your car...

HOWARD

(Smiles at JANE) What did I tell you?

DUKE

Can't do nothing' with it.

HOWARD

Oh no? Well, don't worry, we'll see to it.

46

DUKE

Don't know shit from shinola 'bout cars.

JANE

Darling, I think we'd better get a hold of someone soon. Alright?

HOWARD

Yes, okay. But first, goddam it, we are going fishing. Except... (To DUKE)...by the way, have you seen a can of worms somewhere?

DUKE

You lost a can a worms?

JANE

Listen, while we're on this, I hate to say it, but we're afraid someone might have been in our room.

HOWARD

Now just a minute, honey! That is one hell of an accusation!

JANE

I know. And I'm sorry. But we found this gun in here, and we're thinking somebody might have been in here.

HOWARD

Will you stop saying that!

DUKE

Might a been my pa. He might a come in here and taken your worms out 'n' buried 'em.

JANE

Your father?

HOWARD

(To JANE) Now didn't I tell you there was a simple explanation?

DUKE

I got a go. (To HOWARD) You ask her?

HOWARD

Uh, no. It slipped my mind. I'm sorry.

DUKE

I'd be obliged you ask her. (He exits).

JANE

(Pause) Ask me what?

HOWARD

It's not important.

JANE

Well then what UNIMPORTANT thing did he want you to ask me?

HOWARD

Nothing, really. It can wait.

JANE

Howard! What did he want you to ask me?

HOWARD

I said it can wait, because right now I want to say something important. At the moment I am only interested in getting out to that lake and catching a mess of bass, okay?

JANE

Doesn't it bother you his father was in here last night with that gun?

HOWARD

I'll tell you. I certainly wish I'd been awake.

JANE

I would hope so.

HOWARD

I would very much like to meet that father of his.

DUKE

(Re-enters, takes the pistol) I'll take this.

JANE

Yes. Please do. It frightens me.

HOWARD

Don't be silly, honey. Why, that is simply an antique.

DUKE

Proibly loaded. Might go off. Don't want nobody hurt. (He exits).

BLACKOUT

49

(JANE is making her cot, when BETSY enters)

JANE

(Slowly becomes aware of BETSY looking at her) Oh sorry. I didn't hear you come in.

BETSY

You want some lunch?

JANE

No. Not at the moment. Thanks. I think I should telephone for someone to look at our car.

BETSY

(Emotionless) You leaving?

JANE

Not yet, but I'll feel a lot better when the car is repaired.

BETSY

You like it here?

JANE

You know what. I honestly do. There are things I like very much.

BETSY

What you like?

50

JANE

Well, mostly I like the peace and quiet. It's so quiet.

BETSY

It's quiet here. It sure is that.

JANE

You know I have to admit this place seems almost like a dream to me. It hardly seems real.

BETSY

Seems real t' me.

JANE

In that, I think you are very lucky. What I mean is in the city we see things that seem strange, things that ought to seem unreal, and yet we see these things so often, after a while nothing surprises you. For instance, last week I saw a man sitting on a street corner and there was a monkey sitting beside him and they were smoking this cigar. Together. Now that should seem pretty strange, and yet people continually walked past them and hardly anyone even noticed.

BETSY

Some day I'm going t' the city and I'm gonna see me something like that.

JANE

I'll tell you. You're better off here. With all this peace and quiet.

(Suddenly, the sound of a gunshot, offstage)

51

JANE

My god! What was that?

BETSY

Must be shootin' rats.

JANE

What? You mean Howard and, um, your husband are shooting rats?

BETSY

Them rats eat the pig slop. Hundreds of 'em. So ya got to shoot 'em. Don't do no good, but you got to try.

JANE

The rats eat the pig's food?

BETSY

Eat the chickens, too.

JANE

My god! The rats eat the chickens!

BETSY

Jest the babies. And the rabbits, too.

JANE

Goodness. They sound a little bit... gluttonous.

BETSY

Yeh. And sometimes people round here get drunk, too. They do that.

JANE

You mean the men? I know. They all do that. Why do they do it?

BETSY

Git drunk, then they start t' yelling and screaming, then they go off in the dark a night t' shoot rats. 'N when they killed a mess of 'em, they pile 'em up and start 'em on fire.

JANE

You know what. At bottom, I think they're all still children.

BETSY

Well, I'm gonna cook some fish. You want some?

JANE

At the moment, I really think I should contact someone to look at our car.

BETSY

You got a nice car.

JANE

Well, it's a few years old now. But thank you.

BETSY

We got a pickup truck. It don't run. Pigs sleep in it out back.

JANE

Really? Do the pigs like sleeping in a pickup truck?

BETSY

They don't complain.

(There is another gunshot, off, JANE jumps)

JANE

Oh! They must be shooting a lot of them!

BETSY

Don't do no good. They jest like t' shoot 'em. (She walks over and looks in JANE's cosmetic bag, removing some items).

JANE

(Nervously) Howard says he wants to go fishing. But I'm not really sure.

BETSY

(Looking through the bag) Sure about what?

JANE

About whether he really wants to go. I think he actually hates fishing, but he won't admit it because of his father. Do you think that makes any sense?

BETSY

(Absorbed in the cosmetics) Ya got a lot a stuff here.

JANE

Of course I don't use it all. I've had some of that for years.

BETSY

Lipstick, cream, blush on... I used t' have some a that stuff. Ran out. Never got no more. (She goes over to JANE, feels her hair) How you get hair like that?

JANE

(Uneasy) Like what?

BETSY

How you make it soft like that? My hair's like straw.

JANE

(Relieved to get into a 'woman's conversation') Why, that's silly. You have beautiful hair. It's so... natural. I mean mine just lays there. Really, I have tired hair.

BETSY

You put something on it?

JANE

Well, I do use this conditioner. (BETSY takes it from her, examines it) Look... why don't you take that?

BETSY

You don't want it no more?

JANE

Actually no. I don't. You know what. Suddenly, all this seems so phony to me. Look, why don't you just take all of it.

55

BETSY

Ya don't want none of it? (She takes the entire bag)

JANE

Really, you're doing ME the favor. Thank you.

BETSY

Yer welcome. (Goes to the closet, begins examining JANE's wardrobe)
You got a lot a clothes.

JANE

Those are just a few things I brought along.

BETSY

Never knew nobody t' have so many clothes.

JANE

You know something. You're absolutely right. Look. Would you mind taking some of them off my hands?

BETSY

(Amazed) Ya don't want 'em?

JANE

Those are really too many clothes for one person.

BETSY

(Grabs an armful) Ya want the rest of 'em?

JANE

Well... would you mind taking them all?

56

BETSY

(Takes the clothes) I can do that. Sure ya don't want no fish?

JANE

I have to admit something to you, I'm allergic to fish.

BETSY

Ya don't say.

JANE

(Another gunshot, off) And I'm sorry about your rat problem, too.

BETSY

People jest like t' kill 'em. Nothing else t' do round here.

JANE

Nothing? But this is a resort. A lot of people must come here.

BETSY

Nobody comes here. (Exits with the clothing).

JANE

Nobody? But... this is a resort. Isn't it?

(JANE looks confused, drifts back and begins messing with the clocks; HOWARD enters; He is drunk and is carrying a large hammer; He also seems to be hiding something behind his back)

57

HOWARD

I never realized you liked those clocks so much.

JANE

Howard! Listen, I have to ask you something. Can you tell me what is going on here?

HOWARD

Wait a minute, honey. I've got something to show you.

JANE

Do you know that I just gave away all my clothes?

HOWARD

You did what?

JANE

Yes. That's right. I just gave Betsy all my clothing.

HOWARD

My god! Boy, am I proud of you!

JANE

Howard, are you drunk?

HOWARD

Honey, look at this! I just bagged this sucker all by myself! (He pulls a large dead rat from behind his back; JANE recoils) Hey, he can't hurt you! Not any longer.

JANE

That is disgusting.

HOWARD

Listen, I don't think you understand how hard it is to pick off one of these babies!

JANE

What in god's name have you been doing out there?

HOWARD

That's what I'm trying to tell you. You take out some pig slop, then you hide, and in a few minutes, the place is swarming with rats. Then you take turns shooting. I'm going to have this big guy stuffed!

JANE

A rat! Howard, do you know what you are saying?

HOWARD

And then, you know, after you shoot a few, they start running around. And that is where this baby comes in. (He swings the hammer).

JANE

(Aghast) You... club them with that hammer?

HOWARD

Yeah. And let me tell you. There is nothing easy about it!

JANE

(Nervously humoring him) Alright, alright. But Howard, will you please get rid of that thing?

59

HOWARD

Maybe you'd feel differently if you'd been there! (Irrked, he throws the rat out the window and picks up the whiskey jug, drinks) Man oh man, what a fantastic day!

JANE

Howard can tell me something? Exactly where are we?

HOWARD

(Has another drink) Oh by the way, do you mind if Duke touches your skin?

JANE

What!

HOWARD

Yeah. That's what he wanted me to ask you. I said you wouldn't mind.

JANE

Touch my skin! What does that mean?

HOWARD

Look, it's very simple. They have this thing about skin. It's their way of being friendly. If you think about it, it's kind of touching.

JANE

I don't want him to touch my skin.

HOWARD

Listen, I hate to say this, but you have really turned into a snob!

60

(BETSY suddenly enters with a platter of fish)

HOWARD

Hey! Fresh fish! That is very kind of you, Betsy.

BETSY

Ain't all that fresh. (She puts the platter down, exits).

HOWARD

Now that is my idea of genuine hospitality!

JANE

Maybe so, but... they don't smell very fresh.

HOWARD

Do you know I've never eaten fresh fish? I mean fresh caught.

JANE

What about all those fish you say your father caught?

HOWARD

He never kept them.

JANE

Why in the world not?

HOWARD

Mom was allergic to them. She used to break out in spots and sort of go temporarily blind. (He circles the fish) Well, let's dig in!

61

JANE

I'm sorry, Howard, I can't. They smell like pig fat. They're making me nauseous!

HOWARD

Cut that out! You're being neurotic. That is just the smell of fresh fish.

JANE

No. It's disgusting! I can't stand it! (She grabs the platter, throws the fish out the window).

HOWARD

Now why the heck did you do that!

JANE

Howard, they smelled terrible. I just couldn't stand it another second.

HOWARD

Listen, I want to ask you something. Exactly what in the hell do you think you are doing?

(BETSY suddenly re-enters and looks around)

BETSY

(She spies the cosmetic bag and picks it up) Forgot this. (She exits).

BLACKOUT

62

(HOWARD is again polishing the tackle, when
DUKE enters with the revolver and the uniform)

HOWARD

Hello there. Listen, I really want to thank you for this afternoon. I haven't enjoyed myself like that for a long time. (He takes a drink of the whisky) Hey, you want a hit of this stuff? It's terrific.

DUKE

(Takes the jug, drinks) It's mine.

HOWARD

Oh yes. Sorry.

DUKE

You like it. You keep the jug. I got plenty.

HOWARD

Keep it! Well, that is extremely generous of you. Thanks a lot.

DUKE

I'll jest put it on yer bill.

HOWARD

Oh yes. Naturally.

DUKE

Your wife here?

63

HOWARD

No, um... She's gone to find a phone.

DUKE

What fer?

HOWARD

Oh, you know what worry warts women are. She just can't seem to relax until she knows the car is repaired.

DUKE

You ask her yet?

HOWARD

Um yes, yes I did. And... she was flattered.

DUKE

She don't mind?

HOWARD

Absolutely not! She understood it was a compliment.

DUKE

When she comin' back?

HOWARD

I'm afraid I can't say. (Pause) By the way, isn't that your father's Civil War uniform?

DUKE

Yeh. This's it.

HOWARD

But I thought you said your father always wore that.

DUKE

Yeh. Pa's gone.

HOWARD

Gone? My god! Do you mean...

DUKE

Yeh. I mean gone.

HOWARD

Well, look, I... I am terribly sorry.

DUKE

His number come up.

HOWARD

I understand. And I think that is a very philosophical way to look at it.

DUKE

Round here, ya get a number when yer born.

HOWARD

Yes. I guess we all do. Still, I want you to know I'm very, very sorry.

DUKE

Yer number comes up, it's yer turn. Jest crawl down t' the lake and slip in. Pa's number come up. Jest left his uniform by the lake.

HOWARD

So you are saying he, um... is in the lake?

DUKE

Anyways, he was off his rocker. Most people hereabouts is off their rockers when their number comes up.

HOWARD

Well, I have to say that... that is a fine uniform.

DUKE

Gonna use it fer the Sittin'.

HOWARD

The Sitting? What is that?

DUKE

Sit up all night.

HOWARD

Oh. I see. Like a wake. You sit up with the the body.

DUKE

Ain't got no body. Gonna use the uniform. Need this room fer it.

HOWARD

Of course. I understand. Well... Jane and I will find somewhere else for the night.

DUKE

Don't hafta go nowheres.

66

HOWARD

You mean you are inviting us to join you? My god, I am honored.

DUKE

Jest drink a little. Play some pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey. You ever done that before?

HOWARD

Well... not for some time.

DUKE

Do it lots round here.

HOWARD

And why not?

DUKE

Use a real donkey sometimes.

HOWARD

(Laughs) That's good. (DUKE stares at him, then exits).

(HOWARD takes a long drink, as JANE enters)

JANE

Howard, listen to me....

HOWARD

Just a minute, honey! Listen Duke has invited us to a Sitting.

67

JANE

A what?

HOWARD

A Sitting. It's like a wake. You see, his father is gone.

JANE

Oh my. His father died?

HOWARD

Yes. And we have been asked to the Sitting.

JANE

Listen, Howard, I don't want to be rude, but I'd feel rather uneasy sitting all night with the body of a man I never even met.

HOWARD

No body. Just his uniform. The body is in the lake.

JANE

(Pause) They put the bodies in the lake?

HOWARD

And I hope you can grasp the mythic beauty of that. Can you understand how totally in tune with nature these people are?

JANE

Perhaps. But I find it rather strange.

HOWARD

Listen, I think you're denying yourself a chance to learn something here.

68

JANE

Listen, Howard, I think we have come to the wrong place?

HOWARD

How can you say that? I know it's a bit run-down—

JANE

No. You don't understand. This place is not a resort at all.

HOWARD

Not a resort?

JANE

That's right.

HOWARD

And they took us in anyway! My god, what generosity!

JANE

But Howard! We have come to the wrong place.

HOWARD

What luck we found it!

JANE

No. No. This is not where we should be!

HOWARD

You know what. I see the hand of fate behind this. (He takes a drink).

BLACKOUT

69

(The Sitting. The uniform is on a chair in the middle of the room; HOWARD drinks, as DUKE pins a large image of a donkey on the wall; JANE looks on, not knowing what to think)

DUKE

Do this lots round here. Called Pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey.

HOWARD

Sounds like fun, doesn't it, honey?

JANE

Howard, we have heard of it. (To DUKE) And we are both terribly sorry to hear about your father.

DUKE

His number come up. Round here you get a number when you're born.

JANE

(Looks at him) I'm sorry. What?

HOWARD

(Quickly) Hey, where's Betsy?

DUKE

Lookin' for something t' eat.

HOWARD

Great. I'll tell you. I could eat a bear.

70

DUKE

Ain't got no bear. Might have some muskrat, though.

HOWARD

Really? That sounds interesting. Doesn't it, honey?

JANE

I'm not very hungry. (She walks over and looks out the window) My, it gets very dark here, doesn't it?

DUKE

So dark ya can't see nothing. Scare the pants off a dead man.

(BETSY now enters with a platter of food)

HOWARD

Oh boy. That looks great. What is it?

DUKE

Looks like fat back. (To BETSY) That fat back?

HOWARD

That's fine. We love fat back, don't we, honey?

JANE

We've never had it.

DUKE

We like pork chops. Had some earlier.

71

BETSY

Ain't got none left. We ate 'em all.

HOWARD

Well, look, if we're going to try some of the pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, let's get to it. How about it, honey?

JANE

I don't feel like it.

HOWARD

Now just a minute, honey. We are doing this in a man's honor.

JANE

(To DUKE and BETSY) I really don't feel up to it. I'm sorry. I hope you're not offended.

DUKE

(To BETSY) Where's that tail?

BETSY

You had it.

DUKE

You put it somewheres. Where'd ya put it?

BETSY

I put it in yer hand. That's where it oughta be.

DUKE

(Looks in his hand) Here it is. (To HOWARD) Know how t' do this?

72

HOWARD

Well, look. Why don't you go first and I'll watch. (He drinks)

DUKE

Ain't hard. Jest pin the tail on that donkey. (He does so).

HOWARD

That's it? You just pin the tail on the donkey? I thought you were, you know, blindfolded or something.

DUKE

Why'd ya be blindfolded? Then ya couldn't do it. You wanna try?

HOWARD

Okay. Sure. (He does it) Hey, it's more fun than you'd think! (Drinks)
Your turn again?

DUKE

Only git one turn.

HOWARD

Oh. Well, you know something, I'm having a wonderful time...(Drinks).

JANE

Howard, haven't you had enough to drink?

HOWARD

Listen, honey, I think you should try this.

DUKE

Your wife. You ask her?

HOWARD

Yes. Yes I did. And she was flattered. Weren't you, honey?

JANE

Howard, I don't know what you are talking about!

BETSY

(Lights up her pipe) That happens lots a times around here.

DUKE

(To HOWARD) Then she don't mind?

HOWARD

No. It's a compliment. Isn't that right, honey?

JANE

(As DUKE suddenly moves towards her) Howard!

DUKE

You sure she don't mind?

JANE

Listen, that smoke. Someone is smoking. I can't... I can't breathe...
(She suddenly faints).

HOWARD

Alright, cut that out, okay? Just stop it! What are you doing? (To DUKE and BETSY) Listen, I'm sorry! I'm really very sorry about this!

BLACKOUT

74

(JANE tosses on her cot, suddenly wakens, sits up)

JANE

(Dazed) Howard! Howard! Where are you?

(BETSY enters. She is wearing JANE's dress)

JANE

Yes? Can I help you?

BETSY

Jest come fur my pipe.

JANE

Oh. Listen, I didn't mean to sound rude. It's just that I was napping and I'm a little groggy. I wonder, by chance, have you seen my husband?

BETSY

Nope. (Finds her pipe) Here it is.

JANE

I'm a little upset really. I mean it's time we got the car repaired. We have to be going soon.

BETSY

You wanna leave?

75

JANE

Yes. I mean no. But our vacation is nearly over. We have to get home.

BETSY

I jest come fur my pipe. It's hand-carved.

JANE

Is it? It's very nice. Did you carve it yourself?

BETSY

My son carved it.

JANE

You have a son? I haven't seen him around.

BETSY

Had a son. He died.

JANE

Oh. I'm so sorry. Really very sorry.

BETSY

He got a disease.

JANE

I'm terribly sorry. But I suppose you'd rather not discuss it.

BETSY

(Genuinely sorrowful) All his hair fell out.

JANE

That's horrible. I can't imagine. But I don't suppose you want to discuss it with a stranger.

BETSY

His hair fell out. Then his teeth. Then his skin got hard and wrinkled. He was nine, looked ninety. Sometimes that happens round here.

JANE

My god. There is nothing I can say.

BETSY

(Mournfully shakes her head) He crawled down 'n' slipped in the lake. Jest like my pa.

JANE

Your father, too?

(Suddenly, there is a loud squeal from outside)

JANE

My god! What was that?

BETSY

Pig.

JANE

It's a rather ghastly sound, isn't it? But I'm sorry, you were telling me about your father.

77

BETSY

(She points at the photograph on the wall) That's him there. That's my pa.

JANE

That's YOUR father? I'm sorry. I was under the impression that was your husband's father.

BETSY

Yeh. Had the same pa.

JANE

Oh. You mean... Oh...

BETSY

Same pa. Different mas.

JANE

(Unnerved, she goes to the clocks) I... see. Um, listen, do you mind if I say something? These clocks... They seem out of order to me. You know what I mean? I mean they just don't seem arranged properly. Before I leave here, you know... I'd really like to get them in order.

(There is a loud yelp outside, then HOWARD enters; He is bloody, drinking from the jug)

HOWARD

(Bellows) Yee-Ha! Honey, you'll never guess what I did!

78

JANE

(Prayerfully) Got the car repaired?

HOWARD

I just killed a pig!

JANE

Howard, please. When are we getting the car fixed? (She notices he is barefoot) For god's sake, what happened to your shoes?

HOWARD

Forget the shoes. I just told you I killed a pig. And I am going to butcher him, too! All by myself!

JANE

Howard, what has come over you!

HOWARD

Happiness! I'm smothered in it. Hi there, Betsy. I like your dress.

JANE

MY dress!

BETSY

You want it back?

JANE

No. No. I'm sorry. I meant it was mine.

HOWARD

And Betsy, thanks for the fish. They were absolutely marvelous!

79

JANE

We never ate them.

HOWARD

What you talking about? I ate 'em and they was great! Yee-ha! (Drinks).

JANE

Howard, stop it! I have no idea what you are talking about!

BETSY

That happens lots round here. (She starts out, then turns back and hands her pipe to JANE) Here. You take this. (She exits).

HOWARD

She gave you her pipe! My god, what generosity!

JANE

Fine, but you know I don't smoke.

HOWARD

You can learn. Anyway, forget that. Honey, do I have a surprise for you!

JANE

The car? Oh please, Howard, just tell me the car is ready!

HOWARD

That's my surprise, honey!

JANE

Oh thank god! Thank god! Then we can go home?

80

HOWARD

Home! We don't have t' go anywhere.

JANE

What are you saying? Of course we do. We have to go home.

HOWARD

Are you ready fer this? We ARE home! That's right. That's my surprise! This's our home now! I just traded Duke! This is all ours! (He takes a drink) Yee-Ha!

JANE

No. No. It can't be true.

HOWARD

It does seem to good t' be true, don't it?

JANE

No. No. This is nonsense. Our home... our car...

HOWARD

(Laughing, takes another hearty swig from the jug) Yup! Those're all Duke's headaches now!

JANE

(She stares at him, disbelieving) No. No. You're not serious about this. I don't believe you. (She stares at HOWARD, as He smiles at her and takes another drink).

BLACKOUT

81

(JANE is packing her suitcase, still looking like she's in shock; HOWARD enters, in the uniform)

HOWARD

It's all there.

JANE

What is all there?

HOWARD

The woods, the field, the pasture. Everything. It's a farm. We c'n live off the land.

JANE

Howard, for the last time. Nothing is growing out there!

HOWARD

Well, of course ya got to plant it. Why are you being so negative? (He sees she is packing) What're ya doing with that suitcase?

JANE

Listen, that deal is not legally binding. We can leave here.

HOWARD

Leave!

JANE

Yes. For god's sake, think about it. Our home, our life...

HOWARD

Are you trying t' tell me you want to go back to that? The stockpiles of garbage, the noises, the stink, the crime, the pollution! Listen to me. I have discovered exactly who I am in this place. It would all be a waste if I went back to that.

JANE

Think about what you are saying. What you're doing. Please.

HOWARD

That's all I have thought about.

JANE

And you honestly intend to stay here.

HOWARD

Of course I can't make you stay.

JANE

So you are going to let me go alone?

(DUKE and BETSY enter; DUKE is wearing HOWARD's suit; it's a poor fit; BETSY wears JANE's dress; she looks a cliché prostitute)

DUKE

We're goin' now.

83

HOWARD

Already? Why not stick around a while, as our guests?

DUKE

Been here long enough.

JANE

But our car... it doesn't run.

DUKE

Found out it jest needed a battery. Took the battery from the pickup.

JANE

So then it's running? That's fine then. Good.

HOWARD

I'll tell ya what. Why not stick around and do some fishing? I was just gonna dig up another mess a worms.

DUKE

Don't like t' fish. (To BETSY, who is carrying two suitcases) Git yer butt in gear. (They start out the door).

JANE

Wait! Just a minute! (They look at her) Listen, since the car is running and you are leaving...

DUKE

Somethin' ya want?

JANE

(Pause, They all look at her. She hangs her head) No. No, I guess not.

BETSY

Left some fat back in the kitchen.

HOWARD

How 'bout that? They left us some fat back.

JANE

(Shell-shocked) Yes... thank you.

BETSY

Had some bacon 'n' eggs. But we et that fer breakfast.

DUKE

Don't much like fat back. (To BETSY) Come on, move yer tail.

HOWARD

Just a minute. About the corn. I wanted to ask you. When do we plant it?

DUKE

Any time.

HOWARD

Anytime? Well, that's great. I'll get right to it.

DUKE

Yeh. Anytime. Don't make much difference. (They exit).

HOWARD

(As they hear the car start and drive away) There go two of the finest people god ever created! And let me tell you, honey, when we get things organized, you'll love it here just as much as I do.

JANE

I just couldn't leave you. I couldn't leave all by myself.

HOWARD

You'll see. Now what we got to do, we got to get organized. We'll each pick out certain projects we want to accomplish. First thing, I'm gonna get everything ready t' go fishing. (He picks up a fishing lure and starts to polish it) Then I'm gonna plant that corn. And you need a project, too.

JANE

You know these clocks disturb me. They just don't seem to be... in their proper order. (She goes to the clocks, starts moving them around).

HOWARD

Yeah. Okay. That can be your project! Getting those clocks in order. So, you see what I mean. Everything is gonna be just great. It's only a matter of getting everything in its proper place. That's all it is. (As HOWARD continues to polish the fishing lure and JANE moves the clocks around on the table, the lights very slowly fade to a blackout, and...)

THE PLAY IS OVER

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS... *The theme is fairly obvious (I hope). I realize that the problems of living in Cities these days are mounting, but I felt this "retreat to nature" was an extreme reaction. Nature was where we came from a few thousand years ago! So with a little humor and a lot of poetic license, I came up with this play. I'd say any influence was probably Harold Pinter. His brand of surrealistic humor seemed appropriate for this piece. You never know if he (or BECOMING...) is serious or tongue-in-cheek. Let the audience decide for*

themselves.

AUTHOR BIO: George Freek has spent playwrighting residencies at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre; Southern Methodist University; Southern Illinois University; and Eastern Illinois University. His plays have been published by Playscripts, Inc.; Lazy Bee Scripts; Blue Moon Plays; and Off The Wall Scripts.

