

We're Not All Picassos

a play in two acts

Synopsis:

Chuck Riser has had some recent success as an author. His debut novel, *Please Don't Break My Fall*, hit #4 on the NY Times best seller list, four years ago. His sophomore follow up, *Just Kidding, Please Catch Me*, peaked at #35 two years later.

Now, Chuck is depressed, stressed, and struggling to complete his third book. Under pressure after earning a lucrative book deal from one of New York's top publishers, feeling detached in his marriage, and with his best friend and editor unexpectedly coming down with serious health issues, can art and love help him out of the same rut they got him into?

We're Not All Picassos tackles what it means to be an artist, why we create, and how it can help shape and mold our lives.

Dedicated To:

*All the Artists and Munjaros out there.
We're not all Picassos.*

Time: Late Winter

Setting: Manhattan, NY

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INTERMISSION

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Characters

Charles "Chuck" Riser - a published, semi-successful author, 30s or 40s
Delilah DeRosa-Riser - Chuck's wife, a freelance painter and activist, 30s or 40s
Lon Pockets - Chuck's only editor and one of his best friends, 50s or 60s
Monty Reynolds - Chuck's financial advisor and college friend, British, 30s or 40s
Claudia Reynolds - Monty's wife, a librarian and poet, 40s or 50s
Don Pockets - Lon's identical twin brother, 50s or 60s
Katrice Pockets - Lon's daughter, 20s or 30s
Waiter - cafe server, teens/20s
Bartender - bartender, teens/20s

Act One, Scene One

Time: Saturday, 9:47 am.

Setting: Chuck and Delilah's living room of their New York City apartment.

At Rise: *The room is empty. Delilah enters in her pajamas, slowly searching for something small. She finally finds a pack of cigarettes in the couch, takes one out, lights it. She smokes a moment, then sits on the couch, thinking and staring out into the abyss. A long Pause. Chuck enters, tired, also in his pajamas, rubbing his eyes.*

DELILAH:
You really shouldn't do that Charles, it's bad for your eyes.

Chuck stares blankly back at Delilah. Long Pause.

DELILAH:
What?

CHUCK:
You have to go... I'm sorry, it's just... Just for a little bit... I'm sorry.

DELILAH:
I have to go? *(Chuck nods his head.)* Go where?

CHUCK:
Anywhere, it doesn't matter! I just need like - a little time to myself to write... Just a couple hours, that's it.

DELILAH:
... Are you messing with me right now?

CHUCK:
What? No.

DELILAH:
Why can't you write in the spare bedroom?

CHUCK:
I can, I just would like a little space to myself for a while.

DELILAH:
So, you're trying to kick me out of my apartment?

CHUCK:

Our apartment, babe! And I'm not kicking you out, I'm just asking for a couple hours, that's it.

DELILAH:

It's always about you, isn't it? Do you even know how much time, and love, and energy I put into this place? Do you?

CHUCK:

I do, but I also don't see how that's relevant to the conversation we're having.

DELILAH:

You're trying to kick me out like a dog! Kicking me out on the streets.

CHUCK:

I'm not kicking you out! I'm asking for a little space.

Delilah starts to gather a few things, frustrated.

CHUCK:

Look, I'm just asking for like two hours, that's it... I would really appreciate it.

Pause.

DELILAH:

You write all the time with me here, I just don't understand?

CHUCK:

Yes, but I don't write anything *good!* I want to write something *good*, and I haven't felt proud of anything I've written in like a year... I've always written the best stuff when I'm alone, I don't know why.

DELILAH:

Fine.

Pause. Delilah stares and Chuck and smokes the rest of her cigarette. Chuck stands and watches her, patiently.

DELILAH:

You could have asked in a nicer way is all.

CHUCK:

I'm sorry... I should have asked in a nicer way, you're right, that was wrong of me, and I apologize.

Pause.

DELILAH:
It's fine...

CHUCK:
Hey, I love you!

DELILAH:
I love you too...

Delilah walks over and kisses Chuck. She puts out her cigarette.

DELILAH:
Why don't you go to like a coffee shop or something? Or the library? ... Or a bar? Oh, you could go to a bowling alley! You love bowling!

CHUCK:
A bowling alley to write?

DELILAH:
Hey, I'm just trying to be helpful, you don't have to get defensive.

CHUCK:
I'm not getting defensive, but bowling alleys are loud as hell... And every time I go out in public to a coffee shop or something now, somebody recognizes me and comes up to me, it's very distracting... Especially when you're trying to focus and write.

DELILAH:
Babe, you're really not that famous... Like, no offense.

CHUCK:
No, none taken! I know I'm not that famous, but I do get approached a lot... Okay, maybe like 50% of the time, but still... I don't want to take those odds, I have to meet Lon at noon and need to get some quality writing done before then... We should move to the Bronx or like Yonkers or something... I'm blessed to have had even a little bit of success, and I know that more than anyone, but it is pretty rude and distracting.

DELILAH:
Babe, literally none of my friends knew who you were before we started dating.

CHUCK:
I can't help that your friends are not cultured.

DELILAH:

Whoa! What the hell does that mean?

CHUCK:

I'm just saying... And I know I'm not that famous outside of New York and a very small, yet dedicated international fanbase... Plus a decent fanbase back home I guess... But streets are gonna be packed today, even more than usual, it's Sunday... Back home, it wouldn't really be an issue, but Manhattan is not an ideal place to live if you want to go out in public in private as a celebrity.

DELILAH:

I don't know if I would classify you as a "celebrity", per se...

CHUCK:

Burn.

DELILAH:

Charles, the last time I remember someone recognizing you was like six months ago on that boat in Lima.

CHUCK:

Ohhh yeah, that was fun... I guess people think I'm more approachable alone, I'm not sure... *(Pause)* I also get approached a lot around lunch time for some reason.

DELILAH:

Around lunch time?

CHUCK:

Yeah.

DELILAH:

That is so specific.

CHUCK:

I guess that's when most people are out and about? ... I don't know why I've always written my best stuff completely alone, maybe I'm cursed that way... It sounds depressing, you know, and I warned you before we got married... I warned you that all great artists struggle... You show me a content artist, and I'll show you a fraud.

DELILAH:

So, you're saying an artist can never be happy and content?

CHUCK:

Not 100%, no... You have to always be striving for something... Otherwise you will fizzle out.

DELILAH:

So, you're not 100% happy and content?

CHUCK:

Not 100%, no... And I doubt anyone truly is, to be honest, artist or not.

DELILAH:

Are you 100% happy and content with me?

CHUCK:

Of course! I'm the happiest and most content I've been in my whole life, and it's because of you! ... But overall, in general, I am not 100% happy and content, and I don't think I ever will be... I hope I reach nirvana when I die, but I don't want to before then... Cuz then what? You peaked... I believe in karma and that if you live with the best intentions, you will reach nirvana when you die, before you pass on to the other side... See, if I were ever truly happy and content, I wouldn't have anything left to write, the passion would be gone.

Pause.

DELILAH:

Is that what you're going to write about?

CHUCK:

Hey maybe, who know? ... Do you think being happy and content are different?

DELILAH:

Well... I guess I think of happiness as more long term, deeper... And content is more like here and now, short term. You know?

Chuck nods.

CHUCK:

You should write that down.

DELILAH:

Ha... And you should paint me a picture.

CHUCK:

I might... I am content with this cup of coffee right now, for example... But does it bring me happiness? I guess so... I believe they're one in the same... Being content is a form of happiness, it's like fruit and watermelon... Happiness is fruit, and watermelon is contentness.

DELILAH:

Right... And an apple is joy.

CHUCK:

An orange is smitten.

DELILAH:

A banana is warmth when you're cold.

CHUCK:

And grapes are coolness when you're hot.

DELILAH:

What is blueberries?

CHUCK:

Blueberries are just blueberries... They are a form of happiness in and of itself.

DELILAH:

True.

Beat.

DELILAH:

Well, I don't think all artists *have* to struggle, as you say... I think that artists choose to struggle... Because they're emotional and sensitive, and usually a little anxious and depressed... Or very anxious and depressed... Anyone can do art, happy and content, or not.

CHUCK:

Yes, but not everyone is an artist... Like, everyone can sing, but not everyone is a singer.

DELILAH:

But by limiting who can and can not be artists based on their happiness and contentness is excluding and discriminating, and that's not very art-like... A true artist would say anyone can be an artist because art is freedom of expression... Free of all constraints.

CHUCK:

Are you saying I'm not an artist?

DELILAH:

No, I'm just saying you're wrong. :)

CHUCK:

Ah... Agree to disagree...

DELILAH:

Agreed... That I disagree.

Slight Pause.

CHUCK:

Is a poem still a poem if it's never read or heard?

DELILAH:

Yes. Trees grow all the time deep in forests, and nobody ever sees it, but it's still there, and it's still a tree... The same can be said of certain life forms in the deep ocean, certain Nick Cage movies, and on and on.

Pause.

CHUCK:

Alright babe, I really need to get some writing done before I meet Lon.

DELILAH:

Oohh-ho-hoooo! So now you want to stop the debate, huh?

CHUCK:

It wasn't a debate.

DELILAH:

That was a debate... And now this is also a debate.

CHUCK:

Not everything is a debate! We were just talking, having a conversation.

DELILAH:

'Twas too a debate, and I won! :) You trew in dat towel so fast, I woon! 2-0, Delilah!

CHUCK:

Wasn't a debate... Do you mind if I have some space to write before I meet Lon?

DELILAH:

Well, can we hang out later?

CHUCK:

Of course!

DELILAH:

Okay... And what about Bernard?

CHUCK:

What about him?

DELILAH:

He'll miss me!

CHUCK:
D, he's a dog!

DELILAH:
But we only get two full days together per week, he'll be sad and depressed!

CHUCK:
You see him literally every day! Plus, I'll be here for the next few hours.

DELILAH:
You know he's sensitive...

CHUCK:
Yeah, yeah, we're all sensitive... Artists, dogs, ants, everybody's sensitive.

Delilah walks around and gathers a couple more items, her keys last.

DELILAH:
What do you think Bernard is doing right now?

CHUCK:
I don't know, love... Probably sleeping.

DELILAH:
You think so?

CHUCK:
I'm 90% sure he's sleeping... That or sniffing around for food.

DELILAH:
What do you think he dreams about?

CHUCK:
I don't know, D... You, me, food... Going outside, going to the park... Bones, walks, I don't know, D, dog stuff... Other dogs' butts, dog treats? ... Well - I guess dog treats would fall under food... I don't know, but I would like to work on some writing soon.

DELILAH:
Ew, are you going to masturbate? Is that why you're asking me to leave?

CHUCK:
What, no!

DELILAH:
You know you can masturbate with me here, right? Like, you don't have to do it in the shower? You can masturbate in front of me any time, it turns me on.

CHUCK:

D, stop! Why would I masturbate right now? I'm trying to get some writing done, I've been pretty clear about that this whole time.

DELILAH:

Where are you meeting Lon?

CHUCK:

Cafe at the Plaza.

DELILAH:

Can I come?

CHUCK:

No. Sorry.

DELILAH:

Do you know when the next book is gonna get published?

CHUCK:

I don't know, D... Probably in a few months... I'm gonna try to extend the deadline again, I'm not happy with what I have so far.

Delilah puts on a sweatshirt and shoes. She walks to Chuck, kisses him, then kisses her fingers and places them on his lips.

DELILAH:

Charles...

Charles looks at Delilah.

DELILAH:

We are in this together, okay? Always...

CHUCK:

Yeah, I know. Always.

DELILAH:

You and me, always... For life... Okay?

Chuck nods.

DELILAH:

Okay?

CHUCK:
I said okay!

DELILAH:
You nodded...

CHUCK:
Okay! (*Kisses Delilah on the cheek.*) Sorry, I just have a lot on my mind right now and I wanna work on some writing.

DELILAH:
I know, but it's just temporary stress, just a temporary funk... You will get out of it soon.

CHUCK:
I know.

DELILAH:
We all get in funks, it's okay. (*Kisses Chuck.*) Everything will be alright love, I promise.

Delilah walks to the door and stops just before exiting.

DELILAH:
I'm gonna go to the spa then do some shopping... Might see a movie after, depending on what's playing, and may grab a few drinks with the girls, we'll see...

CHUCK:
Okay, just keep me posted. I love you.

DELILAH:
Love you too, I'll see you later tonight, yeah?

CHUCK:
Of course... Thank you for understanding, I love you so much.

DELILAH:
I love you too... Even though you hate me.

Chuck chuckles.

CHUCK:
You know I don't hate you...

DELILAH:

I know... But you hate me more than writing... Five years together, and writing gets to stay, I have to go... I see how it is, I understand the situation.

CHUCK:

D, c'mon, you know you will always be my number one! Over everything else in the world, you know that.

DELILAH:

I know...

Delilah kisses her fingers and waves goodbye.

DELILAH:

See you soon, get some good writing done.

CHUCK:

See you soon, I love you!

*Chuck kisses his fingers and waves goodbye. Delilah waves and **exits**. Chuck sighs, rubs his face, then takes a long pause. He looks around the audience, looks up to the sky, then points up.*

CHUCK:

Whatever's up there... Please help me.

Lights fade, music rises.

End of Scene.

Act One, Scene Two

Time: Three hours later.

Setting: Cafe at the Plaza.

At Rise: *Lon Pockets is reading a manuscript at a backroom table by himself, jotting down notes occassionally as he reads. There is a water and a coffee on the table. He is an elderly man, late 50s or 60, balding, a beard, glasses, dressed in a suit coat and corduroy pants. He continues reading for a moment then chuckles. Waiter enters with a pot of coffee.*

WAITER:
More coffee, sir?

LON:
... I'm sorry?

WAITER:
More coffee?

LON:
Oh! ... Yes, please! Thank you so much.

WAITER:
Hey, you got it.

Waiter pours more coffee.

LON:
That's good, that's good... Thank you.

WAITER:
At your service, sir!

Waiter smiles, salutes, nods, then exits. Lon smiles, a bit confused at the Waiter's behavior. He continues to read for another moment before Chuck enters.

CHUCK:
There he is, there he is! ... Mr. Lon Pockets, in the flesh! Greatest editor in the fuckin world!

Lon holds up a finger while still reading.

LON:

Shhhhh, you made me wait here twenty minutes, I'm finishing this chapter.

CHUCK:

Dude... I'm sorry.

Lon holds up a finger and continues reading. Chuck sits down, looks around the room, then looks down at the menu. He skims through it quickly, then closes it and tosses it on the table.

CHUCK:

You get a coffee?

Lon nods.

CHUCK:

Black?

Lon nods.

CHUCK:

Any good?

Lon nods, still reading. Chuck starts to bounce his knee, growing a little more impatient.

CHUCK:

Alright c'mon Lon, I said I'm sorry! ... We're just gonna sit here in silence? Delilah made me late, I texted you, you know how clingy she can be.

LON:

(Still reading): I'm almost finished with this chapter, just hold on... It definitely won't take me 20 minutes.

CHUCK:

Look, I'm sorry, but we're both here now, so... Can we just talk?

LON:

You made me wait here over twenty minutes, you can wait two.

CHUCK:

You're so petty man! D was holding me up, I texted you!

LON:

I don't mind waiting, as long as you don't, Chuck... Treat others the way you want to be treated.

Lon continues reading. Long Pause. The Waiter enters.

WAITER:

(To Chuck): Heyyy, welcome to Cafe at the Plaza! My name is Zach, and I'll be your server today! Can I start you off with something to drink besides water?

CHUCK:

Um... Just a coffee and water, thanks.

WAITER:

Just coffee and water?

CHUCK:

Yeah... Just a coffee and water, that's what I said...

WAITER:

Sure, you got it, no problem! Be right back with those, sirs. (To Lon): Are you still good sir, can I get you anything else? More coffee?

LON:

No, no, I'm good, thanks...

WAITER:

Hey, you got it sirs! Be right back with that coffee and water.

CHUCK:

Thank you.

The Waiter smiles, salutes, nods, then exits. Long pause. Lon continues reading, as Chuck again starts to bounce his knee and now also tap the table. He looks around the room, growing more impatient.

CHUCK:

Nice room they got us back here...

Lon nods. The Waiter enters with a coffee for Chuck.

WAITER:

Aaaand, here you go sir, one hot coffee... Can I get you two sirs anything else at the moment?

CHUCK:

Uhhh yeah, a water?

WAITER:

Sure! I'll be right back with that, sir. Would you like ice?

CHUCK:

Um, sure.

The Waiter smiles, salutes, nods, and Chuck cuts him off.

CHUCK:

You know, you don't have to do that every time.

WAITER:

Do what?

CHUCK:

That... The whole smiling, and nodding, and saluting, and bowing shit, please stop doing that.

WAITER:

I'm sorry sir, it's part of our training... We have to do it in the private rooms.

CHUCK:

That is so weird...

WAITER:

Sorry if it makes you uncomfortable sir, I can ask my manager if I can stop?

CHUCK:

No, no, I mean it's fine, I don't want to get your manager involved here.

WAITER:

Okay no worries, I'll be right back with that water.

Waiter exits. Chuck looks at Lon, confused.

CHUCK:

What the fuck?

LON:

(Still reading): What?

CHUCK:

Did I not ask for a coffee and a water?

LON:

I wasn't listening, I'm reading.

Pause. The Waiter enters again with a water for Chuck.

WAITER:

Aaaand, one water for you, sir! ... Can I get you two sirs anything else at the moment?

CHUCK:

Nope we're good, thank you! That's all for now.

WAITER:

No worries! I'll just be out in the front room if you guys need anything else, just holler.

CHUCK:

Great, thank you.

WAITER:

No problem, sirs.

Waiter smiles, salutes, nods, then exits. Lon finishes reading the chapter, closes the manuscript, and sets it down on the table. He finally looks over at Chuck.

LON:

Chuck! How you doing?

CHUCK:

I'm good man, how was the chapter? Real page turner?

LON:

Cecil B. Hayes.

CHUCK:

What about him?

LON:

That's who I'm reading.

CHUCK:

Wait, you're editing Cecil B. Hayes' newest book?

LON:

Draft, not book... I'm editing his newest draft.

CHUCK:

Whaaat, that's fuckin awesome, Lon! ... Damn, proud of you man, that's huge! He's like the biggest writer in the world right now.

LON:

I know, thank you... Don't act so surprised, you do know who I am, don't you?

CHUCK:

Yeah man, Lon Fuckin Pockets!

LON:

And don't you forget it.

CHUCK:

Wow... That's a fuckin huge grab, Lon, congrats man, seriously... Steve Regal's not editing him any more?

LON:

Nope... Cecil has used a few different editors throughout his career, likes to switch it up... I'm not the first, and I won't be the last... Apparently, he liked my work on Tuscon Swan and Lisa Finch's last book... His manager messaged me on LinkedIn, and the rest was history.

CHUCK:

Wait, Cecil B. Hayes read my book?

LON:

Yeah... He said he "actually kinda liked it" too!

CHUCK:

Shut the fuck up! What did he say??

LON:

Just that... "I actually kinda liked it." ... That was it, then we started talking about something else.

CHUCK:

Wooooow, get the fuck outta here man, that's insane! He's like the best writer in the world right now, that is huge!

LON:

He is the highest *paid* writer right now, I don't know about the best... Especially not after reading the first few chapters of this draft... Hoping it sells just as well though.

CHUCK:

Really? Damn... That's crazy, Cecil B. Hayes likes my book!

LON:

Kinda.

CHUCK:

That's a huge endorsement!

LON:

It's not an endorsement Chuck, don't get ahead of yourself.

CHUCK:

What do you mean, it's an endorsement!

LON:

It's not an endorsement, he's not holding a press conference or doing a speech or organizing a rally endorsing his own competition, hell, he'll never even comment on it in public, I guarantee that... Old successful writers are bitter and competitive, it's a tight book market out there now with all the movies, shows, and streaming options... You got podcasts now too, any music you want at your fingertips, not as many people are reading books anymore.

CHUCK:

Well fuck, man... It would be nice if he could put in a good word on a podcast or radio show or something... Can we get an interviewer to ask him about it? How does that work?

LON:

It doesn't... The interviewers are going to ask what they want to ask and what they've been approved to ask.

CHUCK:

Well, I'm glad he "kinda" likes my book, that's huge for me personally, even if it will never be known publicly.

LON:

It would help sales of your new book if we could get him to say something positive about your last one in public... I just don't see that happening, unfortunately.

CHUCK:

I don't care about sales, Lon, you know that, I'm not in it for the money... Although money does make everything a hell of a lot easier.

LON:

Money might make things easier, but it doesn't necessarily make them *better*... Imagine if you just thought about ejaculating, and then you ejaculated! You would be so easy, but you would never enjoy the pleasures of intercourse!

CHUCK:

Lon, nobody under the age of 70 says "intercourse".

LON:

I'm just saying, there is something rewarding about having to work hard at something and actually earning it... There is satisfaction in that, and too much money can take parts of that satisfaction away, when everything is so easy.

CHUCK:

Lon, I don't know what the fuck you're talking about, but I do know that money makes most things a hell of a lot easier... I grew up poor, now I'm rich, and life is much easier for me.

LON:

But is it better just because it's easier? You don't really seem to be doing much better, personally Chuck, if I'm being honest... You're drinking too much, and you're depressed.

CHUCK:

I'm not depressed Lon, that's not true... And I've cut back on my drinking a lot.

LON:

You've cut back, yes, but it's still way too much... I know it's a process, and I'm proud of you for the strides you've made, but it's not enough, you need to keep fighting.

CHUCK:

I'm fine, Lon! Honestly, I'm good, so just fuckin drop it.

Beat.

LON:

You don't have to lie, Chuck, I can tell when you're lying, and I can tell when something's up... Just be honest, you know you can talk to me about anything, I'm never going to judge anything you say.

CHUCK:

What are you, my fuckin therapist? I said I'm fine, Lon! I'm good, really. Just fuckin drop it, let's talk about the book.

LON:

I've known you how long now? You've been in a funk for a while now, longer than usual, and I'm worried man. We're all worried!

CHUCK:

I'm fine, Lon! I don't like the manuscript I brought today, but what else is new?

LON:

Oh, who cares if you don't like the manuscript, you have to take care of your health first and foremost... The work will follow.

CHUCK:

I care, Lon! I care about publishing something I'm actually passionate about, something I actually like, something I can feel proud of! You say you want me to take care of my health, but that will help my health! What's not helping my health is publishing shitty novels to sell to the ignorant masses because of some fucking piece of paper I signed! ... And everybody just ignores me and thinks that I'm selfish for wanting to publish something I'm proud of? "You should be thankful for your success", "So many writers never get published", blah, blah, blah! How is it supposed to make me feel better when nobody supports me and everyone just calls me selfish?

LON:

We are supporting you Chuck, everyone is supporting you! But at the same time, we have a legal contract with these people, and we have to hold up our half of the agreement... We're artists, but we're also professionals here man, this is not amateur hour... So, no, I don't care if you like the manuscript or not, you never do, and you will always be able to write more! I have no sympathy for that, do your passion projects whenever the fuck you want to!

CHUCK:

Just let me submit the shit I *want* to submit! Is that too much to ask??

LON:

Yes! It is! Chuck, as your editor, as your advisor, and most importantly, as your friend... I know what these guys will do if we don't hold up our half of the agreement. And it won't be pretty! 30 years in this industry, you learn a thing or two... You start to notice trends, how people react, how establishments act... And if we wait around until you write something you're proud of, we'll be waiting around for years! A deal is a deal, and I'm sorry, but you signed it... We promised three books within a certain time, so we're going to give them three books in that time... This is not a debate, and I don't really give a shit if you like it or not, to be honest with you... Do your little passion projects on your own time, a deal is a deal.

Pause.

CHUCK:

Can we just push the deadline back a little more? Please? Like two weeks?

LON:

Chuck, no! I've pushed them back too many times already, they want something now.

CHUCK:

Lon, c'mon man! I got a reputation to uphold here! I got a career to worry about! I don't wanna publish some shitty ass book just for the sake of publishing it! How's that gonna reflect on my legacy? That's not fair to me, that's not fair to you as my editor, and it's not fair to my fans!

LON:

Life's not fair, Chuck! ... Look, nothing in the contract says you have to like what they publish... These guys are pissed, and I need to give them something today or the deal is off... I've stalled for us as long as I could... We need to give them something today, and if we want to make some changes later, we can make some changes later.

CHUCK:

Oh hell no, I've heard that before, it never pans out! Sure, I could make a couple tweaks here and there, but nothing major... I'm not just trying to make a few tweaks here and there, I'm trying to give them something completely different and new! And better!

LON:

I know what you're trying to do, but it's too fucking late! For Christ's sake, Chuck, it's too late! (*Beat.*) I'm sorry... I don't know what else to tell you... Either you give me something today, or the deal is off... I'm sorry.

CHUCK:

Can you just ask for two more weeks? Please?

LON:

Chuck, for the last time man, this isn't the fucking mafia! This is not our legal system, there is no negotiating, there is no more pushing back... They will take us to court, and we all know how that ends... Is that what you want?

CHUCK:

Bullshit, I'll self-publish!

LON:

Chuck... First of all, you don't have the funds to self-publish... And second of all, you're really not that famous.

CHUCK:

Anyone can self-publish, Lon! With social media and the internet now, it's easy!

LON:

Yeah, how many followers do you have on Facebook? You're not even on Instagram or Twitter.

CHUCK:

I could still self-publish, and you could help me!

LON:

Chuck, I'm not wasting my time with that... Millions of people try to self-publish every day, and 99% of them fail... You know why? Because it's really fucking hard! I love you like a brother, and you're probably my best friend, but -

CHUCK:

Whoa, "probably" your best friend? That's messed up, Lon! You are *definitely* my best friend... And you are *definitely* my best editor too, no probables about it.

LON:

Chuck, I'm your only editor... Look, the point is, I'll be fine without this deal, really... But I can't say the same for you... You need this, financially, professionally, and personally.

Pause.

CHUCK:

You know it's funny, Lon... You seem so dedicated to this contract, and for what? To make some rich, old white bastards richer? And older, and more bastardly?

LON:

I don't give a fuck about those old rich white bastards, but it's something I agreed to do... And I am a man of my word. Why can't you understand that?

CHUCK:

Where is your passion, man? Selling out for Cecil B. Hayes, who are you?

LON:

You were just congratulating me on that... ?

CHUCK:

You were supposed to be *my* editor, dude! You were supposed to have *my* back! What the hell happened to Lon Pockets, my friend? The guy who supported me no matter what I wanted to write, no matter what I wanted to do?

LON:

Chuck, we have a legal, contractual agreement here, with the largest publisher in the nation... If you break this contract, they will take you to court, and they will win... And you *will* be bankrupt... Now, I know you're a little drunk, but let's not get ridiculous here.

CHUCK:

... I'm not drunk, Lon... I'm not.

LON:

Okay.

CHUCK:

I'm not! I haven't had a single drop of alcohol all day... I haven't smoked anything either.

LON:

Look, Chuck... I've supported you on everything you've ever wanted to do, and I always will! And I'm supporting you on writing your passion projects, but a contract is a contract... I don't want you to lose your house or career, so stop being so fucking difficult, please... They will sue, they don't care, believe me, I've seen it. (*Pause*) So are you gonna give me a draft what?

Long Pause.

CHUCK:

Well... I guess you don't leave me much of a choice...

LON:

Thank you. Jesus.

CHUCK:

The only thing I ask of you, Lon Pockets, is that you tell them I have something better - *much*, *much* better! - that I can have ready in like, a week... Two weeks tops.

LON:

Okay. I'll tell them.

CHUCK:

I'm serious!

LON:

Me too, I'll them!

CHUCK:

Will you?

LON:

Yes!

CHUCK:

... You promise? (*Extends his hand for a shake.*)

LON:

Yes, fuck! (*Shakes Chuck's hand.*) You're like a fucking gnat today, you know that?

CHUCK:

Well... Just for the record, I'm not proud of this draft.

Chuck finally takes out the manuscript and plops it onto the table.

LON:

Yeah, I kinda got that already.

CHUCK:

Hell, I haven't been proud of anything recently, that's the problem! ...The only things I'm even proud of right now are you and Delilah... Fucking editing Cecil B. Hayes, you dog! ... I mean, fuck that guy, but like... It's cool he likes my book, but... Ya know fuck that guy... Stealing my editor, that shit's not cool! ... Saying my book sucks in public, but it's great in private? What is that?

LON:

He never said it was great, not even in private... Look, I know it sucks handing something in that you're not proud of, I get it. But there are other variables in place here, we all have to do things we don't want to... All we can do is move on... That's all we can do, just keep moving.

Chuck sighs.

Long Pause.

CHUCK:

I don't know, Lon... I just know I can do better, you know?

LON:

Of course you do! We all think that, always! Shit, show me an artist who's satisfied with their entire career, and I'll show you a fraud... *(Pause.)* What's the page count?

CHUCK:

52... Double sided.

LON:

Wow... Why is it so short? *(Opens and skims the manuscript.)* Holy shit... Is this poetry?

CHUCK:

Yeah.

LON:

You wrote a poetry book?

CHUCK:

Yeah... Something new I'm trying.

LON:

Uhm.... And when were you gonna tell?

CHUCK:

I just told you.

LON:

No you did tell me, I found out by looking at it... Is the other piece you're working on poetry too?

CHUCK:

Yeah.

LON:

Well... We'll see, I don't know.

CHUCK:
We'll see what?

LON:
We'll see what they say! We'll see how much help I'll be, I don't really edit poetry man... Have you ever known me to edit a poetry book, in all the years you've known me?

CHUCK:
Well I've never written a poetry book in all the years you've known me, but why can't we try?

Beat.

LON:
I mean, we'll see if they even want to publish this... They have published poetry before, but it's not really their forte... Plus, you've never published poetry before, Chuck, you're not really known as a poet.

CHUCK:
Fuck you dude, I am too a poet!

LON:
I'm not saying you're not a poet, I'm saying you've never published poetry before.

CHUCK:
Why can't I start now? I'm a fuckin good poet, dude, trust me.

LON:
You can, and I do trust you.

CHUCK:
The other manuscript is better, I'm telling you.

LON:
I'm excited to read this one... And what specifically don't you like about it?

CHUCK:
Well... For one, the plot.

LON:
The plot?

CHUCK:
Yeah, the plot.

LON:
There's no plot in poetry.

CHUCK:

There are too plots! ... I also don't like the characters either.

LON:

Alright, so shitty plot, shitty characters... What else? How is the dialogue?

CHUCK:

Well, the dialogue is alright, I guess... But it's poetry dialogue, ya know.

LON:

Poetry dialogue, right... What do you mean by "poetry dialogue"?

CHUCK:

Poetry dialogue, you know, like... Short.

LON:

Short, ah-huh.

CHUCK:

Like haikus n' shit, ya know.

LON:

Right.

CHUCK:

Like -

LON:

Like line breaks.

CHUCK:

Right.

LON:

Broken up short lines.

CHUCK:

Right! Exactly.

LON:

Hm.

Pause. Chuck sighs loudly.

CHUCK:

I should self-publish.

LON:

Easier said than done, my friend. If it were that easy, everyone would be doing it.

CHUCK:

Fuck Barnes and Noble, ya know, fuck Borders... They're like the Appleby's and Chili's of bookstores... Shitty, corporate, bland, American-ass chains... No character, no culture, no care for their employees, none of that!

LON:

Well... I wish we could all do the things we love for the *reasons* we love them, that would be the dream... And not just because other people say that we should or that we have to... We should not be creating art so that a huge corporation can get a little bit richer, I'm 100% with you on that.

Pause.

CHUCK:

I just want to write for myself.

LON:

That sounds kind of selfish, no? Just doing something for yourself?

CHUCK:

I guess a little bit, yeah... Is it selfish to want to be happy?

LON:

What about writing for your loved ones, for you family, your friends, your fans? What about all of them?

CHUCK:

Well apparently I don't have as many fans anymore as I thought I did.

LON:

Don't you want to write for others to experience it? Don't you want to write to help others, inspire others, make others think? Perhaps make this world a slightly better place in the process?

CHUCK:

Eh... I guess.

LON:

Is that not why you signed that contract? To share your writing with the world?

CHUCK:

I guess...

LON:

You guess... You know, my dad once told me that the best way to do good for others is by first doing good for yourself... So, of course you have to do good for yourself *first*... Of course you have to get your mind right, get your body right... But once you do good for yourself, you're then in the best position to do good for others... Which is what it's all about.

CHUCK:

Wise man...

LON:

Wise indeed.

The Waiter enters, realizing he's interrupting a moment.

Awkward pause.

WAITER:

Oh, umm... Sorry sirs, I can come back?

LON:

No, you're good.

WAITER:

Sorry to interrupt that nice little moment you two were just having, but can I get you anything else besides just the check?

LON:?

Just the check is fine, thanks... Chuck, you want anything else?

CHUCK:

No, I'm good, thank you though... Just the check, yeah, that will be great, thank you so much.

WAITER:

Hey yeah, you got it! Be right back with that, sirs.

The Waiter smiles, nods, then exits. Lon and Chuck sip their coffee in silence. Long Pause.

LON:

Are we good?

Chuck nods.

LON:

I gotta hear it, are we good?

CHUCK:
We're good! I just said yes.

LON:
You nodded... It was non-verbal.

CHUCK:
Again with the non-verbal!

LON:
It's dismissable in court!

CHUCK:
So is someone's word!

LON:
But you know what's not? A written and signed contract.

CHUCK:
You old Jewish bastard... I love you man.

LON:
I love you too, Chuck.

They hug. Pause. Lon picks up Chuck's manuscript and flips through it.

LON:
I know you hate handing in stuff you don't like, or aren't proud of, I get it... So, thank you. Really. It means a lot to me.

CHUCK:
You're welcome...

LON:
You'll get back there Chuck, you'll start writing stuff you're proud of again... I know it.

CHUCK:
Thanks, Lon... Hey, can I ask you a question?

LON:
Sure.

CHUCK:
When is the last time you wrote anything original?

LON:

Chuck... You know I don't write anymore.

CHUCK:

I mean, what, it's been like 20 years?

LON:

Dude... You know why I don't write anymore... Why do you always try to make things personal?

CHUCK:

I don't always try to make things personal... Are you still not writing because of the whole Nancy thing? She died like 20 years ago!

LON:

Chuck, that's a dick move, man... *(Stands up and puts on his coat.)* I'm getting outta here.

CHUCK:

Look, Lon, I'm sorry... I'm not trying to make things personal, I'm just asking honestly... I'm sorry... You just haven't written anything in like 20 years, so how would you know how it feels, how would you get it? ... This isn't 2001, and this isn't the fuckin local Oregon monthly Poetry Review here.

LON:

Fuck you, Chuck... Man, you really let that teeny tiny little bit of fame get to your head, huh?

CHUCK:

How would you even know about the creative process anymore? You're not a creative! You've never been a creative, you're a fucking grammar nerd! A grammar nerd who has been riding the coattails of better writers for the past 20 years!

LON:

You know how I know you're not a creative? Because you use the fucking term "a creative"...

CHUCK:

Where is your passion, man? Where is your passion for art? And when did you start doing this shit just for the money? Like it's just any other business, huh?

LON:

Why the fuck would I edit books if I didn't have a passion for it, Chuck? I never lost my passion, you just lost your way, my friend... Nancy was my muse, then she died, so the inspiration just - stopped... I've told you this before, is that what you wanted to hear? What else do you want from me man?

CHUCK:

Nothing... I'm sorry I brought it up.

LON:

You don't think I wish something would pop into my head and *stay* in my head? But it just doesn't man! ... Some other-worldly being, some force outside of myself, it never comes anymore! Instead, it goes to assholes like you who don't know what to do with is except bitch and complain all day every day and drink yourself into a terrible depression... How I just *wish* something would rain down over me like it used to! But it doesn't, Chuck! Is that what you wanted to hear? ... So now what? Now I'm stuck editing for cheap hacks and wannabe writers like yourself... I'm gettin the fuck outta here, and don't call or text me... I don't need all this fucking negativity.

CHUCK:

I'm trying to create art for art's sake here, man! Not just for some fucking publishing monsters! And what are you doing? You're basically a fucking proofreader, Lon, you're not an artist! I can have a computer do what you do for me! But not vice versa!

Lon picks up his coffee, finishes it, then slams the mug down on the table.

LON:

Without these "publishing monsters" as you call them, you would still be a poor, homeless, sad excuse for a writer, living on couches and in vans... Smoking weed all day, being too lazy to ever actually put the fucking work in! ... Without these publishing monsters, without these production houses, without these studios and theaters, none of our art would be seen! It would all be tucked away in basements and attics, collecting dust, lost or forgotten in corners and alleys and tiny drawers, buried under car parts in garages, blown away with leaves at bus stops... And nobody would ever experience it! ... All of our art would just be random sketches and scribbles and notes where nobody ever looked... Poems on napkins and crumpled paintings collecting dust under beds, held from the public eye... *(Pause)* Is art art if nobody experiences it?

Pause. Lon throws some cash down on the table then exits.

Chuck looks around the room, pauses, then drops his head and sighs. He stands up, slowly begins pacing. He stops for a second to take a sip of coffee, then puts the mug back down slowly, looking back in the direction where Lon left. He shakes his head and rubs his face and head with his hands. He sits back down and starts writing something in a pocket notebook.

Lights fade, music rises.

End of Scene.

Act One, Scene Three

Time: Friday night, 9:12 p.m.

Setting: The Reynolds' dining room.

At Rise: *Chuck's friend and financial advisor, Monty Reynolds, is hosting a dinner party with his wife Claudia. At the table sit Chuck, Delilah, Lon, and Claudia. Monty, already finished with his meal, is standing at the head of the table in mid-speech. The others are finishing up the last of their food and drinks.*

MONTY:

- And this thing is just like lookin up at me, like - and I mean, like I fucking kid you not, it has *really, really* fierce lookin eyes, mate, just like - *extremely*, extremely fierce eyes, right, like scary lookin eyes, you know what I mean? ... You know what I mean, Chuck?

CHUCK:

(Looking at the ground, barely paying attention.) Fierce eyes! Got it, Monty!

MONTY:

Super fierce, just like - I'm talkin like really fierce, mate... So it's eyes are like completely bonkers, just popping out of it's skull like that *(Re-enacting it.)* It was bloody terrifying, mate, it really was!

CHUCK:

Mmhmm?? ... And.... ?

Awkward pause. Monty takes a sip of his drink.

MONTY:

... And yeah, so anyway... My dog just keeps barking and barking, and this fuckin possum is just screamin at me, screeching and squealing, and I'm holding my ground, mate, you know, like, I'm just starin right back at him, ya know? Not flinching, not moving, nothing... Then I start yellin back at him, mate, like fuck it... And then we're both just screaming at each other, this possum and me, and we're screaming bloody murder at each other, and my dog's barking as loud as he can, and this was all going on for what felt like an eternity... *(Pause)* It was probably only like ten to fifteen seconds in real time, but it felt like forever... And I'm not sure if this thing's gonna jump out at me and attack, if it had rabies, if it was starving, or what the situation was...

CHUCK:

Definitely had rabies.

MONTY:

Chuck, can I finish my story? Or you going to keep interrupting, mate? *(Chuck makes a face at Monty, then looks back down at the ground.)* ... So I'm yelling at this possum in my garbage can,

and it smells like shit... My dog is barking... Then this fuckin possum... *Reaches* down... In to the pile of garbage he had been living and shitting in for like a week, it scoops up a handful of it's own *shit!* - I kid you not! Picks up it's own shit with it's little gimp and injured paw... Then fuckin throws it - right in my face!!

The whole room bursts into laughter except Chuck, who continues to stare at the floor, distant..

MONTY:

I swear to God, I kid you not!! This little fucker picked up it's own shit... Then threw it in my face... And it was definitely mixed in with like other garbage chunks and shit, I'm sure... And then! After I'm distracted and wiping my eyes and face, the fucker *jumps* out of the garbage bin, limp jogs down the alley, turns the corner, never to be seen from again.

Everyone is laughing and having a great time except Chuck, who has not smiled the whole scene. Monty laughs, takes another sip of his drink, then sighs.

DELILAH:

Wow... Monty, that was... That was a great story, that was hilarious.

MONTY:

Yeah... It was pretty crazy.

DELILAH:

Seriously, you're a great story teller, that was so funny!

MONTY:

Why thank you, thank you, not so bad yaself...

Beat.

LON:

I can't believe that actually happened to you too.

MONTY:

Actually happened! True story.

DELILAH:

Wow.

MONTY:

Yeah.

LON:

Wow.

MONTY:

Yeah... I was like, did that really just happen? ... Did that possum really just stay a week in my garbage bin, rent free, free food included, then throw it's own feces in my face and book it? ... In my *face??*

LON:

Yeah, that's crazy.

CHUCK:

That's nuts, Monty! That's fuckin nuts man, you're soooo crazy! Wow, so interesting, dude!! Such a cool guy, so chill, so interesting, so mysterious! You're so amazing, Monty, and you don't even know it... Such a great fuckin storyteller dude, proud a' ya!

Pause.

CLAUDIA:

I've heard it so many times, but it is a good story...

MONTY:

We all know you've heard it a lot... Welp! Whose ready for dessert?? We got chocolate cheesecake *and* blueberry tart.

CHUCK:

Ooh, I'll have some! Me! Me! *MEEEEEE!!!! (Raises his hand, waving it frantically.)*

MONTY:

Atta boy! You're always down, Chuck, my man... You want both? (*Chuck nods.*) Cool, so two for Chuck, two for me, two sides of vanilla ice cream, Chuck, you want vanilla ice cream, right?

CHUCK:

Uh... Does chocolate syrup make everything better? ... Is that even a question?

MONTY:

Well that answers it... Anyone else? (*Slight Pause*) Aw c'mon, don't be shy! Lon, you want some dessert?

LON:

I'm good, Monty... Thanks though.

MONTY:

Delilah? (*Delilah shakes her head.*) ... Claudia? (*Claudia shakes her head.*) C'mon, I got plenty to share! I made sure to get two desserts just for sharing.

CLAUDIA:

I'm good right now, thank you though babe.

MONTY:

Alright, alright, alright... But you're all missin out, I'm tellin ya! ... Lon, I got vanilla ice cream, I know you love that shit, you old Jew bastard! (*Chuckles.*) ... No? Tough crowd!

LON:

I'm gonna go make some coffee.

MONTY:

Am I the only Jew who gets the vanilla ice cream after Shabbat, is that not a everybody thing? (*Lon shakes his head and shrugs.*) C'mon, have some dessert with Chuck and I, just one!

LON:

You guys eat so much fucking dessert, it's weird...

MONTY:

Weird? (*Shrugs*) I don't see what's that weird about it.

LON:

I'm good... Thank you though... You guys enjoy.

MONTY:

Alright! I'll be right back then.

Monty claps his hands and exits.

Pause.

CLAUDIA:

So! ... Where would you say this new book ranks among your others, Chuck?

CHUCK:

I don't know...

CLAUDIA:

Well... Like, compared to your other ones, do you think it's better or worse?

CHUCK:

Well... I don't know Claudia, probably the worst? I'm not satisfied with it, at all. Is that what you want me to say? Is that what you want to hear? Lon basically made me submit something I didn't want to because of our "contractual agreement", but I think it's a shitty book... Probably my worst one yet... I don't know, I just hate it.

Slight Pause.

CLAUDIA:

Oh... Well... I'm sure it's not so bad!

CHUCK:
Oh, it's bad!

CLAUDIA:
All of your books have been really good so far, Chuck! I think so, and I've read them all.

DELILAH:
Chuck is just being modest, the new one is amazing too... it's poetry.

CHUCK:
I'm not being modest, I don't like it. Like at all.

LON:
Would you stop saying that you don't like it? It's finished, it's getting published, and we have to promote it now, so would you stop saying stuff like that?

CHUCK:
So you want me to lie?

DELILAH:
He doesn't want you to lie, but you have to prep for interviews and signings and events, and nobody's gonna be interested if you keep talking about how terrible it is! Which it's not, it's really good!

CHUCK:
Delilah... That's how I feel, Lon... I'm not going to say one thing in private, and then turn around and say the complete opposite thing in public, what kind of person would I be then?

LON:
Look, Chuck... If you keep going around, telling everyone how much the book sucks, then why would anyone want to read it!

CHUCK:
Good! Don't buy it! I don't want anyone to buy it nor read it! I don't want people thinking this is the writer I am now, cuz it's not!

LON:
I told you you're not a fucking poet, Chuck, but you went ahead and submitted it anyway... I hate to break it you pal, but you're not a poet... Anybody can write one good book, have one successful hit... Hell, it happens all the time, just look at me! ... The real measure of being a great writer, a legend, is longevity - volume, a career arc, a collection of work.

Pause.

CHUCK:

Lon, c'mon man, what are you talking about? ... You know I'm not going to say anything negative about the book in public, you know me better than that.

LON:

Well... These days, I don't know if I do, Chuck.

CHUCK:

What is that supposed to mean? ... For Christ sake, if I can't speak my mind here, with my closest people, then where can I? Where the hell can I be honest with anyone in this world?

DELILAH:

You guys, stop bickering! The book is going to sell just fine, don't worry about that... It's a great book, and you are a poet, and you already have a fanbase you can count on who will buy it just based on your name alone.

CLAUDIA:

I think it's a fantastic book, too, honestly...

CHUCK:

You read it?

CLAUDIA:

Well yeah! I was curious what you thought about it though... Compared to your other works.

CHUCK:

Well... My other books are novels... This is poetry... So they're completely different.

CLAUDIA:

Either way, I think it's great... It's shorter, which is good, people have short attention spans now... Ya know, from the phones and internet and tv and all.

CHUCK:

Right, no, I get it.

DELILAH:

I really liked it too... Chuck just hates all of his writing... Which is so unfair.

CHUCK:

How is that unfair?

DELILAH:

If I could write that well, I would be so thankful and blessed, and appreciate it... And you just piss it off like it's shit, when clearly it's not... You're a more successful writer than anyone I've ever met, and you're my husband, and I love you very much, and your new poetry book is amazing.

Delilah kisses Chuck.

CHUCK:

Thank you, I love you too... You always say you love everything I write though.

DELILAH:

Because it's all good.

CHUCK:

No matter what I write, you always say it's great!

DELILAH:

What's wrong with that?

CHUCK:

How can I trust your honest critique of something I write when all you say is that you love everything I write equally? And clearly they're not all written equally.

DELILAH:

I'm just being supportive Chuck, relax!

CHUCK:

What the hell do you even know about poetry? You never read poetry, neither of you! Lon at least reads poetry!

DELILAH:

Well, I can't help it if I don't read poetry, how was I supposed to know you were writing a poetry book? You never tell me anything! And you never let me read anything you're working on!

CHUCK:

But how can I take any of your criticism seriously when the feedback is always the fucking same? Regardless of what I write!

CLAUDIA:

Chuck, please lower your tone... We're all just trying to be supportive here, that's all. Just calm down, breathe...

CHUCK:

Well of course I appreciate all the support, but sometimes I don't need just blind support, sometimes I just need some fucking honesty! Ya know? ... It seems like everyone is afraid of telling me how they really feel or something, like everyone is afraid of upsetting me or something... Because what, I wrote a shitty book a couple years ago and got lucky? All this ass kissing is making me sick to my fucking stomach.

Monty enters with two plates of dessert. He sets one in front of Chuck and the other at his spot.

MONTY:

Well, well, well, here we are! I hope you're not too sick to your fucking stomach, cuz we got dessert! Bon appetite!

LON:

I'm gonna go start that coffee and have a smoke... (*Stands up and puts his jacket on.*) What the hell do you guys need three desserts for anyway, huh? You're both gonna die of diabetes eating all that shit.

MONTY:

It's just two desserts, Lon...

LON:

It's three.

MONTY:

Well it's... Two, with a side of ice cream.

LON:

That's three... Ice cream is a dessert pal, it's not a fucking condiment.

MONTY:

Just go smoke your cigarettes alright? Let us have our cake and eat it too, would ya? Why do you always have to be such a mungjaro?

LON:

Me a mungjaro?

MONTY:

Yes, you a mungjaro! Just go out and smoke your carcinogens and chemicals, then come back in here and finish lecturing me about health.

LON:

Right... Anybody else want coffee?

DELILAH:

I'll take some, thanks!

Delilah stands up and gathers a few dishes.

CLAUDIA:

I'll join you.

Lon goes back to the table and to help gather a few dishes too, a cigarette hanging from his mouth. Lon, Claudia, and Delilah each start to exit with dishes.

LON:

Well... I'll make a whole pot then... Thanks again for dinner guys, everything was very delicious.

DELILAH:

So delicious, seriously... Thank you guys so much.

CLAUDIA:

Of course, we had to celebrate the new book!

LON:

But of course! ... Enjoy the desserts, boys! *(Makes kissing sound towards them.)*

Claudia, Delilah, and Lon exit. Chuck and Monty look at each other, then down at their desserts. Pause.

MONTY:

Well, the ice cream is melting, we should probably start eating... *(Hands Chuck a fork.)* Bon appetite.

They clink their forks together.

CHUCK:

Bon appetite, Monty.

MONTY:

Cheers, mate!

CHUCK:

Cheers. Mate.

Both dig in, eating in silence for a bit, enjoying their desserts. They occasionally smile and nod. We hear just clinking, chewing, throat clearing, coughing, and face wiping for a solid minute. Monty puts his silverware down then leans back, chewing.

MONTY:

Ahh... That blueberry tart though, am I right?

CHUCK:

(Nods.) You're right.

MONTY:

It's fantastic...

CHUCK:

Where's it from?

MONTY:
Solly's.

CHUCK:
The one on Delancey?

MONTY:
No, there's one in Kips Bay now.

CHUCK:
... Where's Kips Bay?

MONTY:
Mate, you know where Kips Bay is, like just north of East Village... I tell you this every time. This one's open on Sundays, too... Best desserts in the city, in my opinion... Cakes, pies, cookies, muffins... Breads, donuts, crossaints, you fuckin name it, mate... Macaroons, everything.

CHUCK:
Is it a French bakery?

MONTY:
I mean... You could say that... Although, I consider macaroons in the same category as churros... They're kind of like an adopted American food... Like tacos, or pizza, nachos, brats... Like most foods here, I suppose... I mean what's truly American and didn't come from some other country? Hamburgers, I suppose... That might be the one true American food... Even apple pie existed in other cultures, for centuries... Some type of bread and apple baked good for dessert... Typically, it was with a bit of a thicker crust, you know... And less sugar, but... Idea was the same.

Long Pause.

MONTY:
So how you doing man? How've you been?

CHUCK:
Me? Oh, I've been fine... New book's coming out soon.

MONTY:
Yeah? You excited?

CHUCK:
Eh, kinda... Little nervous... It's poetry.

MONTY:
Oh, cool... Well I hope it's another success, I'm sure it will be.

CHUCK:

We'll see... Or it'll flop, I don't know.

MONTY:

Nahh, I'm sure it'll be fine.

CHUCK:

Maybe my fans will leave me for another writer.

MONTY:

Nahh, that - pretty sure that's not how fans operate, really... They can be fans of multiple writers. I know I am.

CHUCK:

I know, you're a fan of a many things, Monty.

Beat. They both eat more dessert in silence.

MONTY:

So listen, Chuck, I, uh... *(Clears his throat.)* I was running all your returns from last year... Your ROIs, W2s, AGIs, everything... And, uh... It's not lookin too good right now... Actually lookin pretty bad, to be quite honest... I think you need to start making some serious lifestyle changes, like tomorrow... Not just for your own health, but for your finances too... As your best friend and your financial advisor, I am hoping and praying that this next book just crushes it out of the park, but you know that is far from guaranteed... I can't advise you to continue your spending habits at the pace you are with no guaranteed income coming in to replace it... Does that make sense?

CHUCK:

Hm... *(Still eating and chewing.)* How bad are my funds?

MONTY:

To put it blunt, mate, it's bad... You're really in the red now, worse than before... I mean, you're making a little back from the scattering of appearances, the signings, the residuals from your old books... And you should be fine if your next book sells well... Which it's expected to do, but like you said, it's poetry, it's new territory for you... Your readers don't know you as a poet.

CHUCK:

Then they'll get to know me as a poet.

MONTY:

Well, regardless of that... You have to alter your lifestyle... We have to promote the hell out of this book over the next month or two, can I count on you to put 100% towards pushing this thing for us? ... And for your own health?

CHUCK:

Sure.

Chuck shrugs, mostly indifferent, still focused on the desserts, slowing down, getting full. Pause.

MONTY:

You're having like no reaction to this, you don't seem worried or surprised even the slightest.

CHUCK:

I don't know, Monty... I knew I was in the red, but... This new book will help.

MONTY:

Right, like I said, you *should* be fine... If your new book sells even half as much as the last one did, you'll be fine, but it won't last forever... You need to start making some lifestyle changes... Delilah has expressed some concerns, and I'm concerned too... As your friend... Have you thought about a *true* savings account? I know you have one now, but you keep spending money from it... Maybe like something you don't have access to?

CHUCK:

Why would I open a savings account that I can't access?

MONTY:

So you can actually save it! I know you have a savings account, but you don't actually save the money that's in it... Which defeats the purpose of even having a savings account.

CHUCK:

I'll see.

MONTY:

Well regardless of what happens with this book, you can't afford to keep living this life; physically, mentally, emotionally, nor financially... You just have to be smarter with your money, that's all... It's not my money to spend or save, but you pay me to be your financial advisor, so I feel obligated to have this talk with you, friend or not...

Slight Pause.

CHUCK:

That blueberry cheesecake though.

MONTY:

Right... That blueberry cheesecake... Are you even listening to me mate, this is serious! (*Monty stares at Chuck, worried.*) ... Is everything alright, mate? You've seemed out of it for a while now.

Chuck looks over at Monty, slightly confused.

CHUCK:

What do you mean?

MONTY:

Like... Are you doing okay? Mentally, physically? You're worrying us, Chuck.

CHUCK:

Who's us?

MONTY:

Everyone! Me, Delilah, Lon, Claudia, everyone! The drinking, the drugs, the depression... It's been going on longer than usual, and we're all worried because we love you dude.

CHUCK:

I love you too, Monty... You've always been there for me... Ever since college man.

MONTY:

And I always will. But I just told you that you're deeply in debt, and you had like no reaction at all... Lon said you were trying to break your contract with the publisher the other day, what's going on mate? ... You can't afford to break it off, you would get sued in court and lose everything.

Chuck shrugs. Pause.

CHUCK:

I feel fine, honestly... I'm fine.

MONTY:

You know you can tell me anything, right?

CHUCK:

I know that, Monty, thank you.

MONTY:

If you ever need anything, just let me know, alright? I'm here... We're all here.

CHUCK:

I'm fine! Honestly, I'm just in a funk, but I'll get out of it... We all get in funks, right?

MONTY:

Right... I'm just asking, that's all... Because I care about you, we all care about you, and I'm just trying to help. *(Raises his glass.)* Pestroviah! To your best-selling book yet!

Chuck looks at him blankly. He grabs his drink, raises it slowly, then clinks it with Monty's.

CHUCK:

Pestroviah.

They both drink. Long Pause.

MONTY:

Ahh... So! Book release party, where we thinkin?

CHUCK:

I don't know... I don't really want to do one.

MONTY:

Chuck, we have to sell this book! You *need* to sell a lot of copies... Where would you prefer to have it?

CHUCK:

(Shrugs) I really don't care, Monty... Maybe Downtown Books again? I really don't care, just pick a place... It's not like these events are going to decide the fate of this book, it's all online now.

MONTY:

That's not true, word of mouth mate, it's a powerful thing! Connections, relationship building, networking, it's all part of it! You know this... I'll call Downtown Books tomorrow morning.

CHUCK:

Great... Do we really need to have a release party?

MONTY:

Chuck, c'mon, don't be like this!

CHUCK:

Don't be like what?

MONTY:

Like that! It'll be fun, mate. We'll have open bar, free food, the whole nine.

CHUCK:

Is that a good idea?

MONTY:

Is what a good idea?

CHUCK:

Open bar and all that. The whole nine.

MONTY:

Why wouldn't it be?

CHUCK:

I mean, if I'm in the red and all.

MONTY:

Oh, it'll be fine! Like I said mate, once this book hits the shelves, once it starts flying off the shelves, you should be good... But we gotta sell! We have to actively sell.

CHUCK:

Yeah, I get it, I get it... I just really hate doing these things, you know that.

MONTY:

I know, I know... Just two hours, that's all we ask. *(Takes out his phone and checks something.)*
I'm thinkin maybe the 26th? That's a Saturday, that work for you?

CHUCK:

Sure.

MONTY:

You got a preference for time?

CHUCK:

Not really.

MONTY:

Alright, I'll call tomorrow and book it for 7 or 8. *(Puts phone away.)*

CHUCK:

Great.

Pause. Monty stands up.

MONTY:

Well... I'm gonna go grab another drink, you wanna come?

Chuck stares at him blankly..

CHUCK:

Ya know, I've been thinkin, Monty...

MONTY:

About? *(Sits back down.)*

CHUCK:

What if death was like... not the end? You know?

MONTY:

Mm, no. I don't know.

CHUCK:

Like, what if death was just the beginning of another new chapter? ... What if we're all just waiting around to be born again, you know? And what if when we die, we actually go home, being born into our new life?

Monty nods and thinks for a moment. Pause.

MONTY:

Well... That's a beautiful thought, and I guess you could be right... No one really knows, and that's the beauty and the fear of it all, right?

CHUCK:

Right... So we should just try to enjoy this chapter as much as possible, right? ... Cuz it's a transitional period, right? Until we're born again.

MONTY:

Maybe. *(Monty puts his arm around Chuck.)* I think you might be right, old friend... Let's go grab another drink, huh?

Monty stands up.

CHUCK:

Sure... *(Stands up.)*

MONTY:

Hell, we gotta book to celebrate here, right! Fuckin A.

MONTY:

Fuckin A... Got a book to celebrate here.

Monty slaps Chuck on the back. Both exit with their drinks, leaving their dishes behind.

Lights fade, music rises.

End of Scene.

Act One, Scene Four

Time: 8:00pm on Saturday, the 26th.

Setting: Downtown Books, a bookstore, downtown.

At Rise: *Chuck is schmoozing with a few fans and investors of the publisher. He talks it up with a small group of people, then chuckles for a few moments. Delilah enters, slightly rushed and upset. She pauses on the opposite side of the stage of Chuck, trying to make eye contact with him through a small puddle of people.*

DELILAH:
Charles! (*Waving*) Charles!

Chuck looks over at Delilah, then gestures to his fans that he'll be right back. He calmly walks over to Delilah on the other side of the stage, leaving the small group to talk amongst themselves. Delilah hits him in the arm multiple times in the arm as he approaches.

CHUCK:
Ow, what the hell!

DELILAH:
You what the hell!

CHUCK:
Look, take it easy, D! We're in public..

DELILAH:
I don't care! Where the hell were you?? Where did you go?

CHUCK:
Where the hell was *I*? Where were you?? I waited for you for almost a half hour, the party started an hour ago!

DELILAH:
You told me *eight*, Chuck!

CHUCK:
I told you *seven*!

DELILAH:
You told me *eight*.

CHUCK:

I told you *seven*, D! Seven to nine, that's what I said, I said I might *leave* by 8:00pm, depending on how it goes with the turnout.

DELILAH:

You told me *eight*! And then you left me alone at the hotel! Again! This is twice in a row now, Chuck, twice in two months!

CHUCK:

Listen, D... I know you're frustrated, I get it, but we're in public here, some of my fans are here... Please lower your voice and just hear me out for one second... A, I told you it started at *seven*... And B -

DELILAH:

You told me eight.

CHUCK:

And B! I called and texted you when the Uber pulled up, and you never answered!

DELILAH:

I was in the shower! You expect me to answer my phone when I'm in the shower? I don't jack off to porn videos on my phone when I'm in the shower like you do, I'm sorry.

CHUCK:

What? Look, this is my job, D! I have to be here on time, with or without you... Plus, I paid for your Uber here, what else do you want from me?

DELILAH:

An apology!

Beat.

CHUCK:

Look, I'm sorry... You weren't ready, and the event was starting, so I had to leave... And for that, I'm sorry... But I can not be late for my own book release party, you know that.

DELILAH:

I just really, *really* don't appreciate that, Charles, and this is twice in two months now... You're just so selfish sometimes, and you don't even realize it.

Pause.

CHUCK:

Love, this is my job. Okay? This is my career... It's not like we're going out to eat here, or going out to a movie... I left without you because this is my *job*, and because I had to be on time... Of

course I wanted to come here with you, but you weren't ready, so I had to go, and that's just the way it is... That's all, nothing more, nothing less... I'm sorry, you're sorry, let's just move on.

Pause.

DELILAH:

Fine... But I'm still mad at you.

CHUCK:

Fine... But I'm still madly in love with you.

DELILAH:

Oh, stop.

CHUCK:

Stop what?

DELILAH:

That! You're trying to charm me, and it's not gonna work.

CHUCK:

I don't know what you're talking about.

DELILAH:

I'm mad at you, stop...

CHUCK:

Good, I'm mad at you too.

DELILAH:

For what?? Not fair, I didn't do anything!

CHUCK:

You did too, you weren't ready on time! ... And I told you seven.

DELILAH:

Oh my God, are you serious right now? You told me eight!

CHUCK:

We're not doing this again... I walked in here with Lon Pockets and Monty Reynolds, lookin like a fuckin shmuck, when I could have been walking in here with the most beautiful woman in the world... Walkin in lookin like a poorer, uglier version of Grumpier Old Men.

Chuck takes a swig from his flask. Monty enters. His is dressed very formally, grinning from ear to ear with excitement, holding two shots.

MONTY:

Alright, alright, there he is!! Man of the hour, Chuck Riser! You sneaky son of a bitch, where have you been mate? (*Laughs and nods to Delilah.*) I see you two are having some real private time, I'll just... (*Starts to walk backwards, then stops.*) I'll just be on my way out... When you're ready for this shot, Chuck, come holler.

Monty walks over to the small group of people on the other side of the stage, offers a shot to a young woman, cheers with her, and they both drink and mingle.

CHUCK:

Alright, I should really get back out there... (*Kisses Delilah.*) I'm sorry again that I had to leave.

DELILAH:

(*Shrugs.*) It's fine.

CHUCK:

Well... You look phenomenal... And I love you... See you out there?

DELILAH:

See you out there... I'm just gonna call my mom back real quick, she called while I was in the car doing my makeup.

CHUCK:

Alright... I'll see you soon, I love you!

DELILAH:

Love you too.

Chuck kisses Delilah, then walks over to the group of people.

CHUCK:

Alright, alright, who wants to see the painting?? (*Everyone cheers.*) To the bar room we go!

Chuck leads everyone offstage, leaving Delilah alone. She pulls out a flask and takes a drink.. She then takes out some lipstick and relayers. She makes a kissy face at a pocket mirror, then closes it and puts it back. She takes another sip from the flask.

DELILAH:

Ahhh, men...

Monty enters. He walks over to Delilah and silently, passionately starts making out with her. She doesn't resist, and they continue to make out for a while before they hear a noise. They stop and turn towards the door, still in each other's arms. Pause.

MONTY:

I think we're good.

They start making out again, Monty getting friskier, putting his hands all over Delilah.

DELILAH:

Alright, alright, stop, stop!!

Delilah backs off and pushes Monty away.

DELILAH:

Stop, we're in public... Someone could see us.

MONTY:

Oh c'mon, D, everyone's looking at his shitty painting!

DELILAH:

Monty...

MONTY:

Alright, alright, you're right... I'm sorry.

Beat.

DELILAH:

Is it still pretty dead out there?

MONTY:

Yeah... Where were you?

DELILAH:

Ah, I don't wanna talk about it.

MONTY:

Well... Turnout's alright... You know, we could just lock the door and be quiet?

DELILAH:

Monty! Are you insane? We're at my husband's book release party, just stop it... We are not locking the door, and you will not even touch me any more tonight, do you understand?

MONTY:

Of course.

DELILAH:

Do not even *touch* me while we are at this event, do you understand? Not even a hug.

MONTY:

Won't that be a little suspicious if I don't even hug you goodbye?

DELILAH:

Fine, you can hug me goodbye, but that's it! Just very normal, limited touching...

MONTY:

Got it. *(Pause)* So, Chuck didn't seem too upset, did he buy it?

DELILAH:

... Buy what?

MONTY:

What you told him about us?

DELILAH:

I didn't tell him anything about us... What would I tell him about us?

MONTY:

Oh, I just thought you were gonna tell him about Saturday... That we went shopping for new shoes or whatever.

DELILAH:

Listen, Monty, I don't want you to get the wrong idea here... You're sweet, and I appreciate what we have had, but I already have a husband, okay? *(Monty nods.)* I'm not looking for another husband, okay?

MONTY:

Okay... Is it because he makes more money than me?

DELILAH:

What? God, no, stop it.

MONTY:

But you're unhappy, right? Why stay in an unhappy relationship, it doesn't make any sense! It doesn't do either of you any good, really...

DELILAH:

It's a mutually beneficial relationship, Monty... And I really believe that, I always have, and I always will... I love Charles more than anything in this world, it's just... You get bored, ya know? ... I mean, he's always traveling, always putting his work before me, before everything! ... Everything has always been secondary to his work, and I know that, I've always known that... I knew that getting into it, but it's just... It's taking it's toll on me, ya know? After a while.

MONTY:
Yeah, I get it.

DELILAH:
... And of course people change, but some things don't ever change, really... *(Pause.)* Our outside layers may change, but our inside layers will always stay the same... Like earth.

MONTY:
Oh God, you're starting to sound like Chuck...

DELILAH:
No really though! Earth's outside layers are always changing, but the inside layers stay the same.. Our inner core is thick and strong, like lava and rock, but our outside layers are thin and penetrable, like rivers and trees.

Long Pause. Lon Pockets enters, holding a drink and an envelope.

LON:
Hey hey, sorry to interrupt, but have you guys seen Chuck around? ... I can't find him anywhere.

DELILAH:
He was just here a few minutes ago, he's not out on the floor? He was going to show some fans his painting.

LON:
Oh God, that thing... No, he's not out there, I just checked... I was hoping he was in here with you.

MONTY:
Damn... You check outside?

LON:
Yeah, I checked outside, I checked the bathroom, checked his car, can't find him anywhere.

MONTY:
Shit... Well, I'll help you find him.

LON:
Alright thanks Monty. We only got one hour left, I can't believe this guy.

DELILAH:
It'll be okay Lon, we'll find him... Just relax, take a deep breath.

LON:
If he's not back soon, we're fucked here! I can only say he was shitting for so long, ya know?

MONTY:

Right... He's got IBS, everyone knows that... I'll find him.

Monty exits, somewhat urgently. Long Pause.

LON:

Well... Pretty good turn out, right?

DELILAH:

Yeah, good turn out...

LON:

I just can't believe he fuckin left!

DELILAH:

He'll be back, Lon, I promise.

LON:

Well... I know he hates these things, it's no secret... And I do too, I just don't go around bitching about it to the whole world, ya know?

DELILAH:

... Can you not say bitching?

LON:

What?

DELILAH:

Can you please not say bitching?

LON:

... Why not?

DELILAH:

Because it's degrading to women.

LON:

How is it degrading to women, I'm talking about Chuck!

DELILAH:

I know, but... The term bitchy is sexist.

LON:

How is it sexist if I'm talking about a man? If someone is being bitchy or bitching about something, I don't give a shit if it's a guy or a girl! It is not exclusive to women. If someone is being a dick, I'll call them a dick, man or woman.

Beat.

DELILAH:

Well, I just think it's sexist...

LON:

It's not, but okay... I just I hope this book sells, I really do... He said he hates it, but he hates everything he writes.

DELILAH:

He's never satisfied, you know that... The life of an artist, or so he says.

LON:

Right... You know, I tried talking to him about it... His depression, his drinking, the drugs, all of it...

Slight Pause.

DELILAH:

Yeah, and?

LON:

And, I mean, you're right... It does seem to be going on for longer than usual, and it seems worse than usual.

DELILAH:

Well, no shit Lon! But what did he say when you brought it up?

LON:

I mean, nothing really... Just that he was fine, of course... Told me he thinks death is just a rebirth or something... Said he thinks that when you die, you are reborn and go into a new home, a new beginning... It was nice to hear some positive shit from him, actually.

DELILAH:

Uhhhm, sounds like he's just justifying death, which is not okay... I'm really worried he's contemplating suicide, Lon.

LON:

Delilah, I highly doubt he's contemplating suicide... Even though he's still in denial about his drinking, he did seem happier overall... And no offense, but I have known him much longer than you, I think I would know if he was seriously contemplating suicide.

DELILAH:

You may have known him *longer*, but I know him *better*, Lon... Look, you're a nice man, Lon Pockets... And I have nothing but respect for you, honestly... Ask anyone, I always speak highly of you... But if you really don't think Chuck is suicidal, you need to re-assess your relationship

with him and how real it actually is ... He's been talking about writing something he's passionate about for years! Literally years... I worry he'll never achieve it because he'll never be fully satisfied with anything he writes or does! ... And he chooses to live his life this way, which is part of the problem! He chooses to be unhappy, I swear to God! ... Even if he *did* write something he was actually proud, he wouldn't admit it! And he would find something else to be unhappy about, don't you see? (*Long Pause.*) Look, I've had these same conversations with him over and over, countless times over the years, hundreds of times... You know how many struggling writers would just *kill* for even the little bit of success that Charles has had?

LON:

So he wants to publish something he's proud of, who gives a shit?? We all do! Never being satisfied keeps an artist hungry, it keeps them striving, it keeps them fresh and relevant, not suicidal! Trust me, I'm right.

Chuck and Claudia enter. They both have a drink in hand and are laughing.

CLAUDIA:

Oh my God, Chuck, that was hilarious!

CHUCK:

(*To Delilah and Lon*): Right about what?

DELILAH:

What?

CHUCK:

Lon just said, "Trust me, I'm right"... Right about what?

LON:

The game last night... Where the fuck have you been, Chuck? I was looking all over for you.

CHUCK:

The Knicks game?

LON:

Yeah... She said the Knicks won last night against Utah, and they actually lost... It was 112 - 98, I watched the whole thing.

Slight Pause.

CHUCK:

Hm... Yeah, their defense was terrible last night.

LON:

Right... Anyway, where the hell have you been man?? I couldn't find you anywhere.

CHUCK:

I was just outside smoking, it's all good.

LON:

Smoking where? I checked outside!

CHUCK:

Claudia and I were smoking a J in her car, chill out Lon.

Chuck opens a cabinet door and grabs an unmarked bottle of whiskey. He pours four shot glasses.

LON:

Oh no no, I'm good.

CHUCK:

Aww, c'mon Lon! Gather round everyone, gather round! *(Pause)* I want the four of us to all take a shot together... And I just want to say thank you to everybody in this room specifically...

DELILAH:

Aww, Monty should be here too.

CHUCK:

Nahh, fuck Monty... Thank *you* all for coming, thank *you* all for always being so supportive, I really appreciate it... Even when I'm crabby and pooty, you guys, and nobody else, have always been the most important people in my life... So cheers! *(Holds up his shot glass.)*

DELILAH:

Awww, we should go get Monty!

CHUCK:

Oh, fuck Monty! ... I would literally do anything for anyone in this room right now, so let's drink...

Chuck passes the shots around, then holds his up again.

CHUCK:

Cheers! To the three most important people in my life!

They all clink.

CLAUDIA:

Cheers!

DELILAH:

Cheers!

LON:
Ah, fuck it... Cheers.

CHUCK:
Ayyy!

They all clink and drink. Some wince and groan, to Chuck, it's like water.

CHUCK:
Seriously, thank you all for being here tonight... It really means a lot to me.

CLAUDIA:
Aw Chuck, we wouldn't miss it for the world!

LON:
You shmuck, have I missed any of these? Like ever?

CHUCK:
I love you, guys though, seriously... I'm so happy right now. *(Kisses Delilah.)*

DELILAH:
Awww, we love you too, bub.

CHUCK:
I love everyone in this room... It's just humbling, ya know... To have such awesome support group... It's an awesome feeling, you know? I'm just very grateful... Never forget that... Words could not possibly describe the feelings that you guys give me when you support what I love doing the most, so... So thank you so much.

Chuck waves everyone in for a group hug and begins to tear up.

CHUCK:
Aw damn, I promised myself I wouldn't cry!

They all embrace for a group hug, pause, then break apart.

CLAUDIA:
Ahh, that was lovely... Thanks for the shot, it was delicious.

CHUCK:
Absolutely, 20 years aged!

LON:
I thought it tasted like dog shit.

CHUCK:

Ahh, fuck you, Lon! You've eaten dog shit?

LON:

Well I've had your homemade breakfast burritos, so, yeah.

CHUCK:

Oh fuck you! That's just because all your tastebuds died years ago, you old geezer.

Chuck puts Lon in a headlock and gives him a noogie.

DELILAH:

Chuck!

CHUCK:

What? I'm just fuckin around, c'mon, Lon knows that...

LON:

Hey D, I may be old, but at least I'm a satisfied, content man. Ooohhhh!!

CHUCK:

Wow... *(Beat.)* Burn dude... Really gettin to the heart of it, huh.

LON:

I mean I'm just sayin... You're fucking awesome, and I just wish you could see that and appreciate your own worth, that's all... You're a phenomenal writer, Chuck, a once in a generational talent... I just wish you could see that.

CHUCK:

Well... I appreciate that, thank you...

LON:

You got it... And I've read a lot of great writers, I should know... Now - shall we go sell the hell out of this book or what??

CHUCK:

Let's do it! Everybody ready?? *(Everyone nods.)* Let's Vamos! *(Claps.)* Woooo, team Chuck!!

Chuck leads everyone offstage except Lon, who stays back. He pauses, turns to the audience, looks around, then nods. He pauses one more time, then exits.

Lights face, music rises.

END OF ACT ONE.

INTERMISSION

Act Two, Scene One

Time: 4:45pm on a Friday.

Setting: Chuck and Delilah's living room.

At Rise: *Monty and Delilah are making out on the couch. Delilah takes Monty's shirt off, then starts to take off his pants. Monty reaches into his pocket, pulls out a condom, then bites it open, throwing the little top piece of wrapper on to the floor. Delilah pulls his pants down to his ankles as he slowly unravels the condom. Delilah's phone dings, and she jumps up startled to check it.*

DELILAH:

Shit, it's Chuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!! I gotta open the garage door for him, fuck, fuck!!

MONTY:

(Whispering): Shhh, chill! Go quickly, but be quiet! I'll stay in here and just read.

Delilah wipes her mouth and rushes out. Monty quickly puts his pants, belt, and shirt back on. He frantically spins around looking for a place to hide the condom, finally placing it in the bottom drawer of an end table next to the couch. He hops back onto the couch, trying to act normal. He takes out his phone, and starts scrolling, looking back at the entrance. Pause. Delilah and Chuck enter. Chuck is super sad and distraught, red eyes and sunken demeanor. Delilah has her arm around him, consoling him.

CHUCK:

I just... I don't even know what to say, ya know?

DELILAH:

My God, I'm so sorry Chuck... He'll push through though, I know he will.

MONTY:

Wait, what? Who will push through, what happened?

DELILAH:

Lon...

MONTY:

What about him? What happened?

CHUCK:

He had a brain aneurysm, Monty... He's currently in the ER over at St. Joe's in critical condition.

MONTY:

Holy shit... *(Monty stands up and hugs Chuck tightly, not letting go for a while.)* Chuck, I'm so sorry mate... Oh my God... What did the doctors say?

CHUCK:

Not much really... Just that he's in the ICU, and that he may not make it... But there is a chance he will... That's about it... I asked what is the percentage that he makes it...

Chuck sits down.

MONTY:

And?

CHUCK:

And they said not great... Wouldn't give me a percentage, so it's hard to say.

MONTY:

Fuck.

CHUCK:

Yeah...

They all sit in silence. After a while, Delilah checks her phone, then puts it back. Long Pause. Chuck gets up and starts to pace back and forth.

DELILAH:

Does his family know, Chuck?

CHUCK:

Yeah... I called his brother and he's telling their mom... I'm sure his whole family probably knows by now... Good and bad news spreads fast.

MONTY:

Fuck mate...

CHUCK:

I know... *(Sighs.)* Well... This sucks.

MONTY:

Big time.

DELILAH:

So sad... I'm gonna go get some water, you guys want anything?

MONTY:

I'm good, thanks.

CHUCK:

I'll take a beer, please... Strongest one we have.

MONTY:

Actually yeah, I'll do the same, please... Thanks, D.

DELILAH:

Of course... I'll be right back.

Delilah exits. Chuck sits down and rubs his head and face. He looks down at the ground, sighs heavily, and takes a pause.

MONTY:

Man, I'm sorry, mate... So sudden.

CHUCK:

Yeah... Thanks, Monty... Sorry, I'm just... It's hard man, I don't know what to do... I feel so helpless too, ya know.

MONTY:

No, you're good mate... Not much any of us can do at this point, he's in the best place he can be right now.

CHUCK:

I don't know man... St. Joe's isn't exactly the best hospital around... It doesn't have a great track record... But Lon's a fighter, he'll fight through this, right? ...

MONTY:

Of course mate! He's a fighter, and he's a fucking brilliant man, he'll fight through it... He's a strong mate, lotta willpower that guy... One of the strongest, most brilliant people I've ever met.

Pause.

Delilah enters with three beers and some water. She opens the beers, hands one to Chuck and Monty, then holds hers up.

DELILAH:

Cheers, boys... To Lon Pockets! And to him fighting through this.

MONTY:

(Holds his beer up.) To Lon mother fuckin' Pockets!

CHUCK:

(Holds his beer up.) To Lon!

They all clink and drink.

Long Pause.

CHUCK:

I'm gonna go back there in a bit. If anyone wants to join... He might not be awake, but... I don't know, might be your last chance to see him...

MONTY:

Fuck...

CHUCK:

I mean, you don't have to come if you don't want to... I know it's a difficult situation.

DELILAH:

I'm definitely coming.

MONTY:

Oh I'm definitely coming too, one hundred percent.

CHUCK:

You guys don't have to, really... I know it's hard to see loved ones like this.

DELILAH:

Chuck, don't be ridiculous, it's part of life... We're both coming with you... And the doctors said there is a chance he'll pull through, so let's try to stay positive here... He's gonna pull through.

MONTY:

Yeah mate, we're here for you... Shit, let's finish these beers and head over... I'll buy some whiskey on the way.

DELILAH:

I don't think Lon will be in any state to drink whiskey.

MONTY:

Oh it ain't for Lon, dear.

CHUCK:

Just a heads up, not sure he'll be conscious or alive when we get there... He wasn't responding when I was there earlier...

DELILAH:

Charles, we're coming... We know the situation, but thank you for the heads up... You don't have to worry about us.

CHUCK:

Okay sorry, this is just... It's all kinda new to me.

DELILAH:

I know love, I know...

Pause. They all sip their beers, nobody knowing what to say.

MONTY:

Well... It'll still be good to see him... I haven't seen him since the book release... He seemed totally fine... (*Monty almost cracks into tears before covering it up with a forced grunt/laugh/sigh.*) Gahh... Man... Fuck.

CHUCK:

He's the only editor I've ever had, I don't think I could publish anything without him.

DELILAH:

Honey, of course you could, but let's not think about that right now... We'll cross that bridge if we need to, one thing at a time, love... I'm sure he's going to pull through.

CHUCK:

I don't know, D... They said it wasn't likely... But there is a small chance.

Delilah kisses Chuck then holds him in her arms, rocking him gently.

CHUCK:

They said he's, uhm... Like, not getting worse? ... But if he *does* get worse - which very well could happen... He would, uhm... Most likely not make it... That's what they said.

DELILAH:

Man...

CHUCK:

Also they said his status could stay the same and he could still not make it... He basically has to improve, and quickly, otherwise it's not looking good.

MONTY:

Fuck... It's crazy how there can be literally no signs of anything wrong at all... And then one day something like this happens...

CHUCK:

Life man...

MONTY:

Life...

DELILAH:

Crazy.

Long Pause.

CHUCK:

Well on the bright side... If he doesn't make it, he'll be reunited again with Donna! ... I'm sure they'd both be stoked about that.

MONTY:

Oh definitely, those two together were the best! They were made for each other.

DELILAH:

Always a silver lining.

Chuck takes Delilah's hand, kisses it, squeezes it, then holds it with both of his hands.

CHUCK:

At least they'll be together...

DELILAH:

Absolutely.

Pause. Chuck sighs.

CHUCK:

Man... I don't know what I'm gonna do, I can't publish without Lon... I might have to retire.

DELILAH:

Babe, let's just focus our thoughts and energy on Lon right now, okay? He needs as much positive energy as we can give.

CHUCK:

You're right love, I'm sorry... I'm not thinking clearly, this is just... Kind of a lot, you know, really fast... *(Beat)* Hey Monty, can you do me a favor, mate?

MONTY:

Of course, whatever you need.

CHUCK:

Can you just - run to the liquor store across the street and get some whiskey? *(Takes out a credit card.)* Here, I'll buy... Get something really good, something top shelf.

MONTY:

Nah, mate... I'm buyin, put your wallet away... Any preference? Or just something top shelf?

CHUCK:

Nah, just something good... You call it.

MONTY:
Sure mate... You guys want anything else while I'm out?

CHUCK:
Just the whiskey for me, thanks.

DELILAH:
I'm good, thanks Monty.

MONTY:
Of course... Hey let's head to the hospital when I get back, yeah? I wanna see Lon asap.

CHUCK:
For sure.

Monty finishes his beer, nods, then exits.

Long Pause.

CHUCK:
I told the doctor to call me if anything changes... No call yet... So that's good.

DELILAH:
Yeah, that is good... Hey I'm gonna go take a real quick shower, but I'll be ready by the time Monty's back, just need like five minutes. (*Kisses him.*) See you soon.

CHUCK:
Alright love, please hurry.

DELILAH:
I will!

Delilah starts to exits but then stops right before leaving the room. She pauses, then turns around slowly.

DELILAH:
Oh hey, Chuck?

CHUCK:
Yeah love?

DELILAH:
Could you... Please put the dishes away before we go? They're all clean.

CHUCK:
... Right now?

DELILAH:
Just before we go. Please?

CHUCK:
We're going in five minutes, you want me to put them all away right now?

DELILAH:
You know what, just forget it... Sorry I asked.

CHUCK:
I'll put them away later, fuck... Of all times to ask.

DELILAH:
No it's fine, I just thought... It would be good for you to have a little distraction is all, no biggie... I love you.

CHUCK:
Love you too... Please hustle.

DELILAH:
Alright, I'll be quick!

Delilah exits.

Chuck finishes his beer, sighs, then leans back. Delilah peeks her head around the corner, Chuck is not moving. He leans his head back and closes his eyes. Delilah disappears again towards the bathroom, and the sound of a running shower is heard.

After a moment of silence, Delilah's phone dings on the coffee table. Chuck opens his eyes, leans forward, and glances down at the phone. The phone dings again. He picks it up and looks at it, slightly confused. He reads a few messages on the phone, sets it back down where it was, then walks over to one of the end tables next to the couch. He quietly tiptoes towards the bathroom, leans, then holds his hand up to his ear in that direction. He looks around the room, then quickly goes back over to the same end table.

He surveys the room one more time to see if anyone is coming. He opens the bottom drawer of the end table and searches it, trying to limit noise as much as possible. He finally finds something and slowly pulls it out of the drawer, holding it up into the air. An unwrapped condom. He looks at it, disgusted and confused. We hear the shower stop, then he quickly puts it back where it was. He sits back down on the couch and looks down at the ground, confused, shaking his head, disgusted and hurt.

Long Pause.

Chuck looks towards the bathroom, closes his eyes, then takes a long, deep breath.

DELILAH (*offstage*):
Hey, Charles?

CHUCK:
... Yeah?

DELILAH:
Can you please bring me some toilet paper?

CHUCK:
Uh, sure...

Chuck gets some toilet paper from a closet and exits towards the bathroom with it. He re-enters shortly after, sitting back down on the couch, and burying his face in his hands.

Monty enters with the whiskey.

MONTY:
Hey, hey look what I got!

Chuck looks at him in disgust and doesn't say anything.

MONTY:
What's up mate?

CHUCK:
Nothing... Thanks for getting the whiskey.

MONTY:
Of course mate, no worries... Where's D?

CHUCK:
She's... Freshening up upstairs... Since when have you called her D?

MONTY:
Oh, I don't know, for a while now I guess.

CHUCK:
You know that's my nickname for her... Always has been.

MONTY:
I thought your nickname for her was love mate?

CHUCK:
It's not love mate, it's D...

MONTY:

Okay... Well, do you not want me to call her that? Seems kind of silly.

CHUCK:

Is it? Is it silly?

MONTY:

I mean... Kind of, but I get it... All good, I won't call her D, sorry.

Long Pause.

Delilah enters in a new outfit. She grabs a few things in silence as both Monty and Chuck look at her. She stops moving and looks at both of them.

DELILAH:

I'm ready.

CHUCK:

Alright... Then... Let's go see Lon, I guess... The three of us, together.

*They all walk towards the door, putting on shoes, jacket, etc. They **exit** in silence.*

MONTY (*offstage*):

Shit! Forgot my phone, sorry.

Monty enters and hurriedly grabs the condom out of the end table, stuffing it in his pocket. Chuck enters right after Monty closes the drawer. Chuck grabs a sweater on the couch and looks at Monty suspiciously.

CHUCK:

You find your phone?

MONTY:

Yup! Got it. (*Takes his phone and shows it to Chuck.*) Let's do it.

*Monty **exits** quickly. Chuck stays behind a moment and looks down at the couch, shaking his head. He looks around the room, looks up to the sky, drops his head, then **exits**.*

Lights slowly fade, music rises.

End of Scene.

Act Two, Scene Two

Time: Friday, 10:45am.

Setting: Lon Pockets' funeral in Wisconsin.

At Rise: *A sad song plays as Don Pockets stands at a podium center stage, holding a piece of paper. He is the identical twin brother of Lon. There are two rows of people sitting down. Everyone is dressed in black or dark gray, some crying, some silent. In attendance are Chuck, Delilah, Monty, Claudia, Lon's daughter Katrice, Lon's lover Hank, and a Preacher.*

DON:

Well... What can I say about Lon Pockets that hasn't already been said? ... *(Pause)* For those of you who haven't had the pleasure, do not be alarmed... Lon has not risen from the dead, he is not Jesus Christ... I am his older, and better looking, identical twin brother, Don... I don't think I've met some of you here today, so I'm sorry if I scared any of you... I've been living in Utah for twelve years now, and I don't come back that often... *(Pause)* Why do I live and he dies? I don't understand that... Everyone loved Lon, and everyone hates me... Life ain't fair sometimes, is it? ... Life ain't fuckin' fair.

Pause.

KATRICE:

Not everyone loved Lon...

Everyone turns back to Katrice, who is seated in the far back corner by herself.

DON:

Oh, of course you loved him, he's your father! ... Was your father.

KATRICE:

I loved him as much as I had to, and not a hug more... I loved him like people "love" their jobs... Like Ukraine "loves" Russia.

DON:

Okay, you're just saying that because he was an absent father to you, that doesn't count.

MONTY:

Well this is going great so far.

KATRICE:

(To Don): How does that not count, I'm his daughter!

DON:

Well everyone else loved him... Alright? Everyone besides Katrice, apparently.

KATRICE:

He planted a seed that helped birth me because he was horny and drunk, that's it... And also, not everyone hates you, Uncle Don... I don't.

DELILAH:

Such a rebel.

CHUCK:

Well I hate you, Uncle Don... And most people I know, actually... You're right, life's not fair... It should have been you.

DON:

Oh fuck you, Chuck! You're a hack of a writer, always have been, and you know it! Wouldn't be anything without my brother's help.

CHUCK:

Fuck you, Don.

DON:

You wanna start this already kid?

CHUCK:

Kid? I'm a grown man, you old fuck.

MONTY:

Alright, alright, let's just... Can we just continue with the eulogy, please? For Lon?

Pause. Don looks down at his notes and clears his throat.

DON:

Alright, where was I... Lon, right... *(Clears throat.)* Don't take my word for it because what the hell do I know? Take a look at the dead shmuck yourself if you don't believe me... Look again one more time before you leave, you'll see I'm better looking... Always have been... I have no idea what women saw in him.

CHUCK:

Dude, c'mon! Are you just gonna stand up there and bash Lon the whole time? You're a piece of shit.

DELILAH:

Babe, just let him finish.

CHUCK:

Let him finish? He's bashing Lon at his own funeral!

DON:

And I'm about to bash you if you don't shut up and let me finish! I'm the only blood here besides Katrice, now just calm the fuck down... All you wannabe writers are too damn sensitive... That's why I moved to Utah... Women aren't attractive to guys that are too sensitive, show some confidence in yourself, man up.

CHUCK:

Man up? Who the fuck cares what women want right now, Don! Do you even have anything written on that paper? Or are you just shooting from the hip? Like you do when you shoot people in bars?

DON:

This paper? (*Holds up the paper.*)

CHUCK:

Yes, that paper!

DON:

You wanna read it? Or are you gonna let me finish? ... Plus that guy in the bar was asking for it, I didn't kill him or anything, I just shot him in the leg... He's fine.

CHUCK:

Will you just finish the fucking eulogy already? You're wasting all of our time.

DELILAH:

Charles, please...

DON:

Listen to your wife, Chuck, for once in your life... You know, we're not all wannabe writers like you, Chuck, but I can write a eulogy, alright? And I would like to finish it... So listen to your wife, she's a smart lady.

Pause.

CHUCK:

Fucking finish then!

DON:

Alright, alright.

Don looks at his notes closely again, then looks back up at the room. Pause.

DON:

Lon was a good man... He was a man of many words... Most of which stayed in his head... Wasn't the loudest guy in the room... Nor was he the most talkative, nay... But you know what? Lon Pockets was a man of many words... He was a very quiet, stoic man, but a man of many

words and ideas... Lon had a vocabulary deeper than his pockets, and he was rich... The only reason Chuck Riser, who is sitting here today, ever had any success at all is because of Lon... (*Chuck shakes his head and bites his tongue.*) All of Chuck's success can be accredited to Lon, among Lon's many other successes.

CHUCK:

Fuck you, Don! What's a matter with you?

DON:

You fuck, my brother was a good man! You know it, I know it, we all know it! ... Fuck.

DELILAH:

Alright, let's just... Let's just try to finish here.

Beat.

DON:

Sorry... And I'm sorry, Chuck... But your books would've sucked without Lon, that's all I'm saying.

CHUCK:

Don, shut the fuck up! You wonder why everyone hates you?? This is Lon's fucking funeral service, and you can't stop talking shit about me because you are jealous of me and want to be me, and you don't know how else to deal with that! ... Show some fucking respect for once.

DON:

Wow... First of all, don't call me dude. Alright? ... We're not that close... And second of all, my brother died... Third of all, we're at his funeral service, for Christ's sake... Can you try to act like an adult for once in your life?

CHUCK:

Dude, you're the one up there talking about what women want like you're fucking Mel Gibson!

DON:

Too soon Chuck... We all know he is racist, and Jewish, and this is a Christian church.

CHUCK:

You keep going off script, just finish!

HANK:

Alright, both of you just chill the *hell* out! ... Please.

Pause.

DON:

Who is this dude?

HANK:

I'm Hank... I was a... Good friend of your brother Lon's... *(Pause)* He confided in me in his final years, so to speak...

DON:

... He confided in you?

HANK:

Yes.

DON:

Like...

HANK:

Confided... In me.

DON:

Oh... Well... Nice to meet you, Hank... Sorry, he never told me about you.

HANK:

Ditto. Now, please, honey, the eulogy. We're all hungry, I'm trying to eat some donut holes.

DON:

Right... *(Looking back at his notes.)* Lon Pockets was a shitty brother, but a great man... He was a shitty father, but a great editor... He loved his work more than anything else in this world... And maybe he never had a bad word to say about anyone... *(Looks up at the ceiling, holding back tears, real or forced?)* Love you, brother! ... See you on the other side some day, we'll get a cold one... *(Looks back out to the room.)* Cheers everyone, this now concludes today's service... Let us go in peace, to love and to serve the Lord, in sickness and in health, and in the good memory of Lon Pockets... In the name of the father, son, holy spirit... *(Beat.)* I mean, unless anyone else wanted to say anything? ... Chuck's shitty poetry excluded.

CHUCK:

(Muttering): Better than your shitty songs...

DON:

I don't write songs anymore, dipshit.

CHUCK:

Good! By the way, that was the worst fucking eulogy I ever heard in my entire life, hands down... I'm honestly embarrassed for you.

DON:

And I'm embarrassed for you! You're drunk at my brother's funeral! A man that was so loyal to you, who saved your career, and you show up to his memorial service drunk... Fuck you.

CHUCK:

A tremendous disservice, that eulogy was... So awful, so disrespectful, I'm going to plan another service and invite everyone here except you...

MONTY:

Chuck, c'mon mate...

CHUCK:

A service that will show him the proper respect he deserves! Not this fucking mockery.

MONTY:

Alright, let's just take it easy, alright?

CHUCK:

Oh shut the fuck up, Monty! Nobody gives a shit what you think! Do you hear me? You're irrelevant to me!

DELILAH:

Charles!

CHUCK:

What! Oh, you're taking his side? What, because you're fucking him? Is that it?

Pause.

DELILAH:

What did you say?

CHUCK:

Are you taking his side now because you are fucking him?

MONTY:

Chuck... You're being ridiculous, mate.

CHUCK:

Don't call me mate, man!

MONTY:

Look... You're not thinking straight, you're being irrational... You're in mourning, grieving, as we all are, it's okay, mate... Of course we're not fucking, are you kidding me? Chuck, I would never.

CHUCK:

Don't fuckin do that!

MONTY:

Do what?

CHUCK:

Act like I'm crazy, gaslight me! I'm not crazy, maybe everyone else is fucking crazy, huh?? You guys ever think about that?

Pause.

MONTY:

It's alright, mate... It's alright.

CHUCK:

No, it's not alright! It's just... I swear to God, man...

MONTY:

Hell, I would be irrational too if my career was over... I mean, Don's right, Chuck... And everyone here knows it... Lon carried your career, you're nothing without him.

Beat.

CHUCK:

... What?

MONTY:

You're nothing without your Lon, Chuck! Nothing!

DON:

Yeah, you're *nothing* without Lon!!

DELILAH:

Nothing without Lon, Chuck! Nothing!!

CLAUDIA:

Nothing! Without Lon, you're nothing, Chuck! *Nothing* without Lon!

DON:

Nothing, Chuck!

KATRICE:

Nothing!

HANK:

Nothing!!

EVERYONE: (*except Chuck*)

NOTHING!!!!

Everyone starts to laugh manically, all pointing and howling at Chuck. The volume builds and builds as the group encircles tighter and tighter around Chuck. He starts to panic.

CHUCK:

No... NOOOOOOO!!!!

Chuck throws his hands up and screams as everyone pulls him down to the ground, plucking, plodding, jabbing, poking, and laughing hysterically.

Black out.

Silence.

Long Pause.

Lights slowly rise on the same scene as before - Don at the podium and everyone else seated, except now Chuck is now standing off by himself in the back corner, staring off into the distance. When Don continues talking, Chuck snaps out of it and turns to listen to him.

DON:

Anyway... Lon was a good man and a great brother... He was a shitty father, but he was a great editor... He loved his work more than anything else in the world, and he never had a bad word to say about anyone... *(Looks up to the ceiling, holding back tears, real or forced.)* I love you brother! ... See you on the other side, we'll grab a beer... Thanks, everyone... Love you all.

Don nods, bows, pauses, then makes his way back to his seat in silence. We hear a few snuffles, then The Preacher walks to the podium and lifts his hands up and out towards the audience.

PREACHER:

This now concludes our service... In loving memory of Lon Pockets, I'd like to thank everybody for coming out today, I can just feel the love, I can feel the energy that Lon has infected you all with... Before we part ways today, always remember that Lon is still with us... You will still see him, hear him, smell him, still feel him... I promise you that... *(Pause)* Final thank you to Boone and Crockett for sponsoring this year's pig roast, coming up soon here in late October, down in the bingo hall... We'd love to see you all there if you can make it, gonna be a great one this year... Also, if anyone wants to chat and mingle after this, maybe share some stories of Lon, I'll be downstairs enjoying the free juice, coffee, and donut holes... We'd love to see you there as well... *(Beat)* In the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit... Let us go in peace, to love and to serve the Lord... Go Pack go, and fuck the Bears. Amen.

ALL:

Amen.

Music plays as people slowly get up and start to shuffle out. Everyone exits except Don and Katrice, who stay back and chat in the corner, The Preacher, reading something behind the podium, and Chuck, who slowly approaches him.

CHUCK:

... Going downstairs, father?

PREACHER:

Of course! Just reviewing tomorrow's schedule, then I gotta lock up here, but I'll be down.

CHUCK:

Gotcha... *(Slight Pause.)* Hey, father? Can I call you father?

PREACHER:

Of course, you can call me whatever you'd like... Just don't call me late for donut holes!

CHUCK:

Ha, thanks...

Pause.

PREACHER:

What's up, Chuck?

CHUCK:

Oh, nothing... I was just gonna ask how do priests learn everyone's names so quickly?

PREACHER:

It's part of our Jedi training.

CHUCK:

Really?

PREACHER:

(Chuckles) No... Not really... What did you really want to ask me?

CHUCK:

Oh, nothing... Just stopped to say hi, I guess... And to thank you for a great service.

PREACHER:

You're welcome! The least I could do for Lon, really... Such a nice man.

CHUCK:

Yeah...

Chuck looks over at Don and Katrice chatting on the other side of the stage.

CHUCK:

Can you believe that guy, father?

PREACHER:

Who, Brother Pockets?

CHUCK:

"Brother Pockets"... C'mon, we both know he ain't no "brother"... He ain't even made peace with the Lord! Did you know that?

PREACHER:

I'm sorry?

CHUCK:

He's hasn't even made peace with the Lord.

PREACHER:

Well... All living creatures are brothers and sisters of the Lord, that's just my opinion.

CHUCK:

Maybe so... But he ain't peaceful with the Lord.

PREACHER:

What do you mean by that?

CHUCK:

I mean, they ain't at peace... He's probably not going to heaven.

PREACHER:

You believe in heaven?

CHUCK:

I mean... Don't you?

PREACHER:

(Shrugs.) I don't know.

CHUCK:

Don't you like... kind of have to? Isn't that part of the Jedi training?

PREACHER:

Not all priests believe in heaven.

CHUCK:

Well... Either way, Don Pockets is not a "brother" of ours, nor of the Lord's... He's rude, racist, sexist, homophobic, creepy, and closed minded as fuck.

PREACHER:

People have their preferences, Chuck... That doesn't make them any less loved by God.

CHUCK:

"People have their preferences"? What the hell kind of Catholic bullshit is that? ... Sorry, sorry for cursing.

PREACHER:

It's fine.

CHUCK:

But like seriously... Does that help you justify all the pedophiles in the Catholic church? Because "people have their preferences"?

PREACHER:

Of course not. I just mean that people have their preferences, that's all... In the end, God forgives all.

Slight Pause.

CHUCK:

What if my preference is murdering people? Or sexually assaulting little kids?

PREACHER:

Then, that's your preference... Doesn't make it right.

CHUCK:

Just my preference.

PREACHER:

Right...

Pause.

CHUCK:

Can I ask you a question, father?

PREACHER:

Of course.

CHUCK:

And you'll give me your most honest answer?

PREACHER:

Absolutely... That's the only way I know how to answer questions.

CHUCK:

... You don't know how to lie?

PREACHER:

Well... I'd be lying if I said I didn't, but... What's your question?

CHUCK:

Can we keep this 100% private?

PREACHER:

100%. Won't tell a soul, you have my word.

Chuck looks around the room before leaning in to the Preacher.

CHUCK:

Could you ever forgive your wife if she was... Ya know, unfaithful to you? ... Or would you leave her? ... If you're wife was cheating on you, hypothetically of course, what would you do?

PREACHER:

Well...

CHUCK:

I'm asking for a friend, by the way...

PREACHER:

Right... Well, we're taught at an early age to forgive all, even your worst enemy... "To err is human, to forgive, divine."

CHUCK:

So... You're saying I should forgive her? ... My friend, I mean... In this hypothetical situation.

PREACHER:

That is something your friend will have to ask himself.

CHUCK:

Well... He doesn't know what to do, that's why he asked me to ask you.

PREACHER:

Your friend will have to form his own path is what I'm saying... As we all do.

CHUCK:

He's trying! But he's torn.

Pause.

PREACHER:

Look, Chuck, I can not speak towards what other people should or should not do... It's not my place, nor my life, to call or judge... And I can not speak from personal experience regarding this matter either, as I have never been married.

CHUCK:

Well, I'm just curious what you *would* do...

PREACHER:

I can't say for sure.

CHUCK:

Well, what would you *probably* do?

PREACHER:

I would probably... Forgive her. As that is what I believe in, forgiveness... On all accounts.

CHUCK:

Hm. Thanks.

PREACHER:

You're welcome.

Pause.

CHUCK:

Father, do you ever worry you're going to die alone?

PREACHER:

Eh, not really... God is always with me.

CHUCK:

Right.

Slight Pause.

PREACHER:

I think your friend here, in this hypothetical situation of course, should tell his wife he knows what happened... I think he should be open and honest with his wife, and they should discuss the issue together... Then decide how to proceed forward after that communication.

CHUCK:

I thought you weren't in the business of telling people what to do?

PREACHER:

... Touche.

Beat.

CHUCK:

Random question, but why do you dedicate your life to something you can't prove is real?

PREACHER:

... Can you prove that love is real?

CHUCK:

Sure.

PREACHER:

How?

CHUCK:

Well... I don't know, you just feel it.

PREACHER:

Same with God... You just feel it. It's a faith, a belief - like love.

CHUCK:

Hm. Makes sense, I guess. *(Pause.)* So, you're saying my friend should forgive his wife then?

PREACHER:

Again, only your friend can answer that question... But if he truly loves her, I think they should talk about it first. Open communication is the key to any successful relationship... Or so I've been told.

CHUCK:

And, what if she was cheating on him with his best friend? Does that make it better or worse?

PREACHER:

That's like asking me what tastes better, space wine or space beer.... I've never had either because I've never been to space, so I can't really say for sure.

CHUCK:

(Sighs) All you religious people are the same. So vague about everything.

PREACHER:

Well, I would talk to her, see what she says, then take it from there... That's probably what I would do... But again, I've never had this experience... So, your friend has to decide what he wants to do based on how he feels... Like love or God... Now, I should really get downstairs, people are waiting for me... Unless there is something else you wanted to talk about?

CHUCK:

Oh, don't be cocky, father, you're not that famous.

PREACHER:

I never said I was famous, just want to see everyone downstairs is all... Are you coming? We have coffee, juice, donut holes...

CHUCK:

Yeah yeah, I'll be down.

PREACHER:

Great. (*Puts one hand on Chuck's shoulder, extends his other hand for a shake.*) It was nice chatting, Chuck... I'm sorry again about Lon.

They shake hands. Preacher starts to walk out, but stops just before exiting, then turns around.

PREACHER:

Hey Chuck?

Chuck looks over at the Preacher.

PREACHER:

It'll work itself out... Don't overthink it.

Preacher exits.

Don and Katrice are wrapping up their chat on the other side as lights shift focus to them.

DON:

Alright, well... I'm gonna go grab some coffee, see you down there?

KATRICE:

Yup! I'll be down there in a minute.

DON:

Cool... It's good to see you, Katrice.

KATRICE:

It's good to see you too, Uncle Don.

Don nods, then exits.

Katrice and Chuck notice each other from across the stage then slowly come together.

CHUCK:

Hey.

KATRICE:

Hey you...

CHUCK:

How are you doing?

KATRICE:

Eh, I'm alright... You know we weren't that close, so it's kinda weird... Like I feel like I should be sadder or something? I don't know... Anyway, how are you doing? You guys were super close, I remember.

CHUCK:

Yeah... Well, ya know, my father and I never really got along either... Kinda like you and your dad... So, your dad really became like a father figure to me... Especially over these last few years... He really became my best friend too, so... Yeah, I'm gonna miss him a lot.

Chuck sighs heavily, then tries to compose himself from crying.

KATRICE:

Oh, Chuck... *(Hugs Chuck tightly.)* I know, bud... I know.

CHUCK:

Just sucks, ya know... Everything seems to be going wrong for me all at the same time.

KATRICE:

I know it feels that way some times, doesn't it?

They hug for a while, then finally release.

CHUCK:

Hey, if you ever need anything, you know, just like - anything at all - I'm available...

KATRICE:

Thanks, Chuck.... I appreciate that.

CHUCK:

I mean, if you need anything, really... Financially, emotionally, physically, whatever... You need a hug, just wanna cuddle, whatever, just lemme know... I'll always make myself available for you, and I'm usually down for whatever, so...

KATRICE:

Thanks.... I will keep that in mind.

CHUCK:

Also, I know Lon never said it much, but he really did love you more than anything in the world... He told me that all the time, he was so proud of you... The way he talked about you, it was inspiring... It made me want to have kids some day, ya know?

KATRICE:

Yeah, well... Never said it to me.

CHUCK:

I know. He always said he wished he was around more for you growing up.

KATRICE:

Ah, I doubt that, but thanks for trying, Chuck. You don't have to lie for him.

CHUCK:

I'm not lying, I swear to God!

KATRICE:

Just weird, ya know, he always seemed to talk *about* me, but never talked *to* me... Like, everyone always tells me how much he loved me, but he never said it directly to me.

CHUCK:

Well... I know he loved you more than anything... More than his job, more than literature - everything.

Pause. Katrice shakes her head and shrugs.

CHUCK:

Just so unexpected, ya know.... Tragic.

KATRICE:

I know... Didn't he just get a physical too, like a month ago?

CHUCK:

Yeah, nothing wrong at the time.

KATRICE:

And they still don't know what happened?

CHUCK:

They're pretty sure it was a brain aneurysm, but... They're still trying to rule a few things out. Your dad was just too smart for his own good, that's what it was... Brain fuckin exploded.

KATRICE:

Ew, gross.

CHUCK:

Sorry... You know, about 40% of people with brain aneurysms don't make it, and the other 60% almost all have permanent brain damage.

KATRICE:

Really?

CHUCK:

Yeah. I think I'd rather die than have permanent brain damage.

KATRICE:

Well... Let's hope we never have to make that choice.

CHUCK:

Right. *(Pause.)* Hey Katrice, can I ask your opinion on something?

KATRICE:

Um, sure.

CHUCK:

Why is it easier for some people to find the beauty in life, but for others it's very difficult?

KATRICE:

I don't know... I guess we're all just wired differently, I suppose.

CHUCK:

It's not fair though...

KATRICE:

Well, life's not fair.

CHUCK:

Like your dad... He found the beauty and joy in everything! But other people, like myself, like your Uncle Don, we struggle to find it.

KATRICE:

Like myself too...

CHUCK:

Yeah?

KATRICE:

Yeah, but everyone struggles, Chuck. Some people are just better at hiding it.

CHUCK:

Well that may be true... Your dad was actually very depressed earlier in his life, suicidal even... He wasn't always so jolly, ya know.

KATRICE:

Really? (*Chuck nods.*) When?

CHUCK:

Like, a little after you were born.

KATRICE:

Hm... I didn't know that.

CHUCK:

Yeah, he never talked about it much, but he was depressed for a long time... Like 10 years.

KATRICE:

Wow... You know, it's weird, but that actually makes me feel a little better, in some weird, fucked up kinda way.

CHUCK:

No, I get it, it's not fucked up... It's comforting knowing you're not alone... It's comforting in a weird way knowing that even the happiest of people struggle and are going through some shit... It feel like it's not just you, I get it.

KATRICE:

Right... Thanks for understanding.

CHUCK:

Of course.

They hug and embrace for a moment.

CHUCK:

Should we go downstairs?

KATRICE:

Sure... They have coffee and donut holes.

CHUCK:

So I've heard... Should be a "great time", as the preacher's poster said.

KATRICE:

(*Chuckles.*) I saw those.

CHUCK:

I mean, who the hell uses the words "great time" for a funeral poster?

KATRICE:

Apparently, Father Tom.

CHUCK:

... Is that his name?

KATRICE:

Chuck! *(Playfully smacks him on the arm.)* Yes, that's his name.

CHUCK:

I didn't know, I didn't know!

KATRICE:

Oh my God, you were talking to him for like ten minutes!

CHUCK:

It was like five, but still.

KATRICE:

Still, he gave the sermon at Lon's funeral, I can't believe you didn't know his name!

CHUCK:

Alright, alright, Father Tom, I got it, Father Tom.

Chuck starts to walk downstairs.

KATRICE:

Hey wait... Before we go downstairs...

Chuck stops and turns back around.

CHUCK:

Yeah, what's up?

KATRICE:

I just really hope you keep writing books without my dad as your editor... I really love your stuff.

CHUCK:

Oh... Yeah, I haven't really thought about that yet, let's go downstairs. *(Waves her over.)*

KATRICE:

Seriously, you're a great writer!

CHUCK:
Thank you.

KATRICE:
It's true! ... You know, I always wanted to be an editor myself.

CHUCK:
Oh yeah? I did not know that.

KATRICE:
Maybe... Maybe I could be your next editor?

CHUCK:
Katrice, it's... Just all very recent, ya know, I don't think now is an appropriate time to be talking about this sort of thing... Let's go downstairs, we can talk about that later.

KATRICE:
Okay... I've already edited a few books, actually.

CHUCK:
Great... That's great, let's go downstairs.

KATRICE:
Three so far...

CHUCK:
Katrice, let's just... Can we go downstairs? We can talk about this later.

KATRICE:
I'm really good, and I have my father's genes, obviously.

CHUCK:
Right... Can we go shmooze now?

KATRICE:
Okay. Sorry.

*They start to walk out together, Chuck rubs Katrice's back. She grabs his hand and holds onto it. They look at each other and smile. Katrice stares at Chuck, smitten, then kisses him on the lips. She looks around, then **exits**. Chuck looks around, smiles, shakes his head, then **exits**.*

Lights fade, music rises.

End of Scene.

Act Two, Scene Three

Setting: *The bar.*

Time: *Later that night.*

At Rise: *Everyone is drinking at the bar - Chuck, Delilah, Monty, Claudia, Don, and Katrice. The Bartender stands behind the bar, a rag over his shoulder. Everyone is looking at Monty, who is looking at a piece of paper. He takes a sip of his drink and clears his throat.*

MONTY:
"Funeral Blues". By W.H. Auden...

Pause.

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Pause.

CLAUDIA:
That was beautiful, Monty, thank you...

DELILAH:
Yes, very touching Monty, that was lovely.

DON:

Lon would have liked that, thanks Monty.

MONTY:

For sure... To Lon!

Monty raises his glass.

ALL:

To Lon!

They all clink and drink.

CHUCK:

Fuckin A... Shit sucks... Shit sucks major balls, no sugar coating, no beating that bush.

MONTY:

Suck *major* balls...

DELILAH:

The biggest balls.

Pause.

CHUCK:

You know, sometimes I think sadness is a good thing, you know? ... Like it's good to feel sad some times, to help you appreciate the happy times more... Right? Like how having shitty beer makes you appreciate the good beers.

KATRICE:

Right! I agree, Chuck... One hundred percent.

DELILAH:

You would agree with him one hundred percent, you leech.

CHUCK:

Whoa!

DELILAH:

(To Katrice): Why the hell are you even here?

KATRICE:

I'm sorry?

DELILAH:

You should be!

KATRICE:

I should be sorry? For what?

DELILAH:

Uh... For flirting with my husband and trying to get in his pants! How about that? Or for trying to become his new editor while your daddy ain't even cold yet, how about that?

KATRICE:

Flirting? (*Laughs*) That's funny... Chuck is not even my type, like at all... No offense, Chuck.

CHUCK:

No, none taken. And I didn't think you were flirting with me, for the record.

DELILAH:

Oh don't be so naive, Chuck! Of course she's flirting with you! She's trying to get in your pants so that you hire her to be your next editor! And that's fucked up!

KATRICE:

Look, Delilah, I'm sorry if you misinterpreted me talking to Chuck as flirtations, but I will not apologize for false accusations. I am definitely not trying to get in your husband's pants.

DELILAH:

Well, I think you're a lying little whore who doesn't even care about Lon Pockets, so why are you here??

Slight Pause.

CHUCK:

D, just chill! ... I'm sorry everyone, she's drunk.

DELILAH:

I am not, fuck you Chuck!

MONTY:

Hey, hey, hey... Let's everyone just chill, alright?

CHUCK:

Oh, you gotta be kidding me! You? Why are you always trying to play peacekeeper? News flash Monty, you're not fucking saint, mate!!

MONTY:

Of course I'm not a saint, mate, but c'mon, this is Lon's funeral here! Let's all try to be a little more civil and respectful, shall we? At least for tonight? Can we all do that, for one night?

Pause. Everyone looks ashamed and drunk. Chuck clears his throat, then raises a glass.

CHUCK:
Hey, to Lon!

ALL:
To Lon!

They all clink and drink.

CHUCK:
Greatest friend, editor, and mate that a guy could ever ask for. Irreplaceable, on all accounts.

MONTY:
Here here.

Pause.

DON:
Hey, I brought a poem too... One of Lon's, actually.

CLAUDIA:
Oh nice, let's hear it!

DON:
(Takes out a paper and unfolds it.) Well, as you all know, Lon loved poetry... Wrote a lot of it, and he continued to until he croaked... But he kept most of it private, hidden away in boxes, tucked inside drawers, things of that nature... Anyway, while rummaging through his shit the other day, I found some old notebooks in a box... Decades worth of shit... Most of them weren't labeled or dated, so I'm not really sure when this one is from, but... Anyway, here it goes...
(Clears throat.) Now remember, I'm not much of a public speaker nor performer, so just imagine Lon reading it... Shouldn't be too hard to do... This poem is called *Ode To This Moment*, by Lon Pockets.

Pause.

You never get the same spot,
twice in a row,
in Inman Square,
on Cambridge St.,
in Cambridge, Mass.

You never get the same spot
twice in a row.
What are the odds?

There I was, sitting,
focused on page.

Focused on written word.
But why.
Who knows?
Why do we focus
on anything?

Mix nature and nurture,
mix music and pens!
Mix treks and hikes,
mix trials and tribs,
mix smidges and scorn!

Chunky pigeons stay grounded
squinting up at the sun,
rinsing squeegees,
pounding pavement,
howling at suns.

You never get the same spot,
twice in a row,
in Inman Square,
on Cambridge St.,
in Cambridge, Mass.

Pause.

CHUCK:
Wow, very cool... Thanks for sharing, Don, that was awesome... I didn't know Lon still wrote.

MONTY:
Very cool, thanks Don... That was fantastic.

KATRICE:
Thanks, Uncle Don.

CLAUDIA:
Lovely poem.

DELILAH:
Thanks, Don... I'm sure Lon would have loved that.

CHUCK:
Not "would have loved it", still loves it! He's still here, his energy has just been transferred, that's all... Like Father said, we can still see him, still hear him, still feel him... He loved that reading, Don. Thank you.

BARTENDER:

That's deep, Chuck - you need another beer?

CHUCK:

Yeah, I'll take another, thanks.

Bartender grabs another beer, opens it, then slides it to Chuck.

CHUCK:

Thank you.

BARTENDER:

No problem... And just a heads up everybody, kitchen's about to close in 10, so if you want anything... Order soon.

CLAUDIA:

Oooh, can I get mozz stix??

BARTENDER:

Sure, one mozz stix... You want any sauce?

CLAUDIA:

Umm yeah, doesn't it come with sauce?

BARTENDER:

Well, it comes with tomato chunks, but do you want like cheese sauce or something with it too?

CLAUDIA:

... Tomato chunks?

BARTENDER:

Yes, tomato chunks.

CLAUDIA:

Cheese sauce for my deep fried cheese sticks?

BARTENDER:

Or like whatever.

DELILAH:

It is Wisconsin...

BARTENDER:

You can add cheese sauce to anything, it's just nacho cheese we put into a little cup...

CLAUDIA:

Hm... I think I'll just stick with the mozz sticks and tomato chunks, please. Oh and a water, please.

BARTENDER:

You got it. *(To the group):* Anything else before the kitchen closes?

MONTY:

Yeah, let me get, uh... *(Headcounts the group.)* Six, seven shots of your finest whiskey, please. And by finest whiskey, I mean Tullamore Dew.

KATRICE:

Oh thanks Monty, but I can't take a shot of that.

MONTY:

Aww, c'mon it was your dad's favorite!

CHUCK:

IS his favorite!

KATRICE:

I know, I just can't.

MONTY:

C'mon, don't be the only party pooper, even the bartender is taking one with us! In honor of Lon!

KATRICE:

(Sighs) Ugh, fine.

BARTENDER:

So... Seven shots of tully and an order of mozz sticks without cheese sauce?

MONTY:

Yes, please and thank you.

BARTENDER:

You got it, let me put that mozz sticks order in, then I'll get the shots.

Bartender exits. Pause.

DON:

I feel like I've met that guy before...

Bartender enters with a bottle of Tullamore Dew and starts to pour the shots.

BARTENDER:

You know, I haven't had a shot of Tully since I was in high school.

Slight Pause.

DON:

Did you go to Pulaski High School?

BARTENDER:

Umm, no. I went to Dominican.

DON:

Oh. You look like someone I know, sorry.

BARTENDER:

Unless I am someone you know... ?

DON:

Could be... How old are you?

BARTENDER:

25. When did you graduate?

DON:

What, high school? 1975.

BARTENDER:

Oh... Yeah, I don't think we ran in the same circles.

Don shrugs. Monty holds up his shot.

MONTY:

In honor of the legendary, the mystical, the man, the legend... Mr. Lon Pockets!

ALL:

To Lon!!

They all clink and drink. Some take the whole shot, some sip it, some fake sip it and set it down - everyone is already pretty drunk. Claudia nearly throws up, holds her hand in front of her mouth, then runs offstage.

MONTY:

Oofda... That did not look good.

CHUCK:

No it didn't, maybe you should go check on her? I mean, she is your wife after all.

MONTY:

Fuck you, Chuck... Why are you always trying to tell me what to do and how to act, mate? I'm not your fuckin son.

CHUCK:

Monty, I'm really not in the fuckin mood, man... Seriously. Especially not with you.

MONTY:

Not in the mood, man? ... You're never in the fuckin mood, man! C'mon, when's the last time we had a good ol' fashioned drunk wrestling match?

DELILAH:

Both of you guys, just stop! Please.

CHUCK:

Or what, D? Or what?? ... Or you'll leave us both?

BARTENDER:

So... Should I still put in an order for those mozz sticks?

DELILAH:

I think she's good, thanks though... I think we've all had enough, we should probably all just head home.

CHUCK:

Yes, we've all clearly had enough... All of us had clearly had enough, especially you, D...
(*Chuckles.*) Hey, you guys wanna hear something funny? (*Laughs drunkenly.*)

DON:

Well? What is it?

CHUCK:

Oh, you'll love this, Don! You'll fuckin love this, right up your creepy alley!

Pause. Chuck stares down at the ground, contemplating.

DON:

Well, c'mon, spit it out! I mean, I knew you were a terrible writer, but you're an even worse story teller.

Chuck looks at Monty, then over Delilah. Pause.

KATRICE:

Yeah c'mon Chuck, what is it? You can't just leave us hanging like that.

MONTY:
Yeah mate, what is it?

All look at Chuck and wait. He looks around the room, down again, then covers his mouth as if he is going to puke as well.

CHUCK:
I think I'm gonna throw up...

Chuck runs offstage.

MONTY:
Jesus, dropping like flies over here... Am I the only one that can still hold my liquor?

DON:
Wow, Chuck is like the worst storyteller... I mean, his books aren't great, but his in-person stories are even worse.

KATRICE:
Hey, I like his books... And his stories.

DELILAH:
You would...

KATRICE:
Jesus, would you just drop it? It's getting old... Like you.

DELILAH:
News flash, we're all getting old, "Katrice"! You're no exception!

KATRICE:
Not as old as you...

MONTY:
Alright c'mon, we're here to celebrate Lon, not bicker over petty shit.

Delilah gets into Katrice's face.

DELILAH:
You better back the fuck off Chuck, you hear me?? ... Back the fuck off of my man!!

Delilah cocks a fist back like she is going to punch Katrice, Katrice flinches.

MONTY:
Whoa, whoa, chill!! Chill!

DELILAH:
(Laughs.) Wow... You're even more scared than you look.

KATRICE:
Why are you acting like such a bitch to me? Is it because your husband thinks I'm more attractive than you and doesn't want to fuck you anymore?

MONTY:
Look, everything is cool here, nothing is fucked, everything is cool... *(To Bartender):* I'm sorry for their behavior, really... We're all just a little drunk and emotional after the funeral and all.

BARTENDER:
Child please, last night a guy in here straight up ate dog food, then threw up on the bar... Then his drunk ass had the nerve to ask me for a Long Island Iced Tea with no ice... *(Shakes head.)* I hate people some times.

DELILAH:
Monty, A) I am more than a "little" drunk, okay, and B) everything here is *not* cool! Stop fucking apologizing and speaking for me! I'm not even talking to you anymore, it's over, so... Bye! *(Puts a hand in Monty's face.)*

Claudia enters, looking drunk and tired.

CLAUDIA:
I am going to bed... Goodnight!

Claudia bows and turns to exit.

MONTY:
Whoa, no, babe! No, we're going home, we're not sleeping here at the bar... I'll call us an Uber, just wait one second... *(Gently pulls Claudia back in and kisses her.)* Ew, your breath smells like pinxos and vomit and wine. *(Takes out his cell phone.)* Hey Bartender, name of this place again? Skeeze Dee's?

BARTENDER:
Sneaky Dee's.

MONTY:
Skeeze Dee's?

BARTENDER:
Sneaky Dee's... Not Skeezeze.

MONTY:

Not Skeezezy, *Sneaky Dee's*, got it... Like, to *sneak* around. (*Makes a small sneaking gesture.*)

BARTENDER:

Right, just - exactly like that.

MONTY:

Awesome... Alright, three minutes!

Monty walks over to where Chuck exited and knocks on the door.

MONTY:

Chuck, we're heading out! ... (*No answer. He looks back at the group and shrugs.*) Chuck! ... Hey, Claudia had too much mate, our Uber's two minutes away... (*No answer. He looks at the group, then back at the door.*) Alright buddy, talk to you soon, alright?! ... Get some rest, love you brother!

CLAUDIA:

I need to lay down.

MONTY:

We're going, we're going, Uber's on it's way! ... Look, Katrice... Before we head out, I just wanted to let you know that -

KATRICE:

I know, I know... Even though my father was never around for me growing up, and he never called, and he never came home for Christmas', he really did love me though and was very proud of me... Thanks, Monty.

MONTY:

Right... Well, Claudia's clearly fucked up. I love you all, and to all - a good night!

Monty blows a kiss to everyone and puts his arm around Claudia. They both exit.

Long Pause.

DON:

Welp... I love a good cat fight as much as the next guy, but I think I'm gonna get outta here too... (*Puts his coat on.*) It's late, I'm old, and I'm drunk... Good to see you both.

Don hugs Katrice.

KATRICE:

Good to see you, Uncle Lon... Love you.

DON:
Love you too.

Don hugs Delilah.

DELILAH:
Bye, Lon... You're not driving, are you?

DON:
Yeah, yeah, I'll be fine though... Promise.

DELILAH:
Are you sure?

DON:
Yeah... Lon was the only brother I ever had, and I'm gonna miss him a lot... Love you both.

DELILAH:
Love you too, get home safely.

DON:
Will do.

Don waves and exits. Long Pause. Chuck enters.

KATRICE:
There you are, are you okay?

CHUCK:
I'm fine... Hey Bartender, can I close out please?

BARTENDER:
You got it! All on yours?

CHUCK:
Yeah, that's fine, thanks.

BARTENDER:
You got it.

CHUCK:
(To Delilah): I think we should head home.

Bartender slides Chuck the receipt and pen. Chuck looks at the total and is slightly taken aback.

CHUCK:
Wow... Okay.

Chuck sighs, writes the tip and total, signs it, then slides it back.

BARTENDER:
Thank you sir, I appreciate it! You all get home safe tonight.

CHUCK:
Thank you, will do. You get home safe too, appreciate the hospitality.

BARTENDER:
Any time, and my condolences again for your loss.

CHUCK:
Thank you.

BARTENDER:
Gonna go clean up a little in the back, but holler if you need anything. Otherwise, you all have a great night, and come back soon!

DELILAH:
Thank you.

KATRICE:
Thanks!

Bartender bows, then exits.

CHUCK:
Well. You ladies ready?

DELILAH:
"Ladies"? Oh hell no she is not coming with us!

CHUCK:
Yeah she is, I told her she could stay at our place tonight.

DELILAH:
Oh hell no! Absolutely not. If she is staying at our place tonight, I will not be.

CHUCK:
C'mon, D, don't be ridiculous... It's two in the morning, I'm not making her get a hotel right now.

KATRICE:
It's okay, Chuck, really... I'll figure something out.

CHUCK:
No, it's fine.

DELILAH:
No it's not fine, I do not want her staying at my place.

CHUCK:
It's not your place, it's *our* place! And I pay all the fucking rent!

DELILAH:
Chuck, seriously?!

CHUCK:
She has nowhere to sleep!! I already told her she could stay with us, it's final!

DELILAH:
And you weren't going to ever tell me?

KATRICE:
Chuck, it's fine, really.

CHUCK:
No, you're staying at our place, and that's final... Sorry about Delilah.

DELILAH:
Don't fucking apologize for me! Are you planning on fucking this skank or what, is that why you're bringing her back?

CHUCK:
No, D, I'm not like you... If I were ever going to fuck someone else, I would at least wait until we broke up.

DELILAH:
... What is that supposed to mean?

CHUCK:
It means I'm not like you... I wouldn't cheat on you, and especially not with one of your best friends.

DELILAH:
I have no idea what the fuck you are talking about right now.

CHUCK:
No idea, huh? ... I'm talking about you and Monty fucking behind my back, and constantly lying about it! *That's* what I'm fucking talking about!!

Pause.

DELILAH:
Charles, I don't know where this is coming from.

CHUCK:
Stop it!

DELILAH:
Really, honestly!

CHUCK:
Please - just stop denying it for once!!

DELILAH:
Charles, you're drunk, you're not thinking straight...

CHUCK:
Stop trying to gaslight me!

DELILAH:
I'm not sleeping with Monty, I swear.

CHUCK:
(Chuckles.) You're a piece of work, you know that? Still denying it... I caught you guys, D! When I stopped home after Lon was hospitalized... I came back, and the two of you were being really awkward, and then while you were showering and Monty was out getting whiskey, I found a fucking used condom in one of the end tables!! Now how do you explain that? ... You're fucking pathetic, I want a divorce... Immediately.

DELILAH:
Charles, what are you talking about? I don't know what the hell Monty does in our living room when noone is around, but we weren't fucking, I swear to God!

CHUCK:
You're a sad, pathetic, pathological liar, and I want a fucking divorce... Let's go. *(Puts his coat on.)* Katrice, you can have front.. D, until you can own up to it and admit what you've done, I don't even want to look at you to be honest.

DELILAH:
I'll just... I'll take an Uber... And I'll stay in a hotel tonight.

CHUCK:
Good! You know, the cheating stings, like a lot, but the lying about it just makes it that much worse... Like, you can't even own up to it, even though I caught you guys.

DELILAH:

I never fucked Monty, Charles! I will not admit to something I never did!

KATRICE:

Hmm, sounds familiar.

Delilah, on the verge of tears, grabs her coat, slaps Chuck, then exits.

CHUCK:

Wow... Don't really think I deserved that.

KATRICE:

Definitely did not deserve that... Let's go back to your place, I'll help you forget all about Delilah, I promise.

Katrice grabs her coat and extends her hand out to Chuck. Chuck looks down at Katrice's hand then pauses. He looks up at the sky, sighs, then grabs Katrice's hand. They exit.

Lights fade, no music.

End of Scene.

Act Two, Scene Four

Setting: Chuck's living room, at his new house out in the country.

Time: A few weeks later.

At Rise: *Charles is sitting in a chair in the middle of his living room, drunk, holding a half-drunken bottle of whiskey. Long Pause. There is a knock at the door.*

CHUCK:
Who is it?

MONTY:
(Offstage): It's Monty mate, open up!

Pause. Chuck looks at the door, then down at the bottle. He takes a swig.

CHUCK:
It's open.

Monty enters with a briefcase, wiping off his boots upon entrance.

MONTY:
Goddamn, it's cold as balls out! ... What's up mate?

Monty takes his hat and gloves off. Chuck just stares at him blankly.

MONTY:
What's up mate, you alright?

CHUCK:
(Shrugs.) I'm fine.

MONTY:
Alright, good.

Monty slowly takes a seat, a little hesitant.

MONTY:
What time did you start drinking today?

CHUCK:
Same time I always start drinking... Right when I woke up.

MONTY:

Jesus... Chuck, you gotta stop doing this to yourself man.

CHUCK:

It doesn't matter, Monty... It's always five o'clock somewhere, right? That's the beauty of this world, I found it... It's always five o'clock somewhere.

MONTY:

Look, I can just email you everything, you don't seem well, and it really doesn't make sense to talk numbers with you when you're this drunk.

CHUCK:

I don't wanna talk numbers, Monty.

MONTY:

I thought... You said you wanted to go over finances?

CHUCK:

I don't give a fuck about finances, man... Who gives a fuck about finances besides shady fucking finance people like you?

MONTY:

Look, Chuck, I think I'm just gonna go mate.

CHUCK:

Fine, fine, fine, tell me Monty Boy, tell me the numbers! ... Tell me how much debt I have, tell me how I can't afford this new house, this new peaceful life out in the country, tell me again how poorly my shitty attempt at poetry is doing, tell me again how all my funds are dwindling...
(Pause.) You know what? Everyone thinks I'm so fucking lucky, you know? ... Like, you should be thankful you've even had the little amount of success that you've had, any writer would kill to make the New York Times best seller list! And why is that? Why do people say that I'm so lucky? ... Have they ever met me? ... Do they even know who I am, Monty?

Pause.

MONTY:

Well... I guess because most writers don't ever even have one book on the New York Times best seller list, much less two, including one that hit number four.

CHUCK:

Oh *fuck* most people, man! Fuck most people... You know how much happiness I got from those books? ... Like - a month? Maybe two months of happiness? ... I had a beautiful, loving wife, a successful career as a writer, I had everything I ever wanted... And now what do I have? I have a lonely life in the country where I spend my days waking up and drinking until I pass out, just to wake up the next day and do it all over again... Is that what happiness and luck look like?

MONTY:

Look, you still have Delilah, you still have me, you have great friends, you have a great life, Chuck... You're much luckier than most people.

CHUCK:

I don't feel lucky, Monty... I feel depressed, suicidal, and vengeful.

MONTY:

Mate, I'm sorry, but I'm gonna head out... I think this was a mistake coming here.

Monty stands up.

CHUCK:

Wait!

MONTY:

... What?

CHUCK:

You know... You have always been like a brother to me, ever since college... And I will always appreciate the relationship we had... So... I got you a little gift.

Chuck stands up and exits.

MONTY:

Chuck, I gotta go mate!

Chuck enters with a large wooden cigar box. He sits down with the cigar box in his lap, staring at Monty.

MONTY:

You got me cigars?

CHUCK:

Yeah, ya know, just a couple Cubans to bury the hatchet, ya know... What do you say, you wanna smoke one?

MONTY:

Um... Sure? If it'll make you feel better.

CHUCK:

Cubans, Monty... And yes, it will make me feel better, I hope... You have a lighter?

MONTY:

Yeah, I have one in my briefcase.

Monty leans down to get a lighter from his briefcase. As he does, Chuck opens the cigar box, takes out a gun, and points it at Monty, the bottle still in his other hand. Monty looks up.

CHUCK:

Lock the door now, or I'll shoot you in the fucking back.

MONTY:

Whoa, mate!! What the fuck?? ... Just chill, put the gun down!

CHUCK:

I said lock the fucking door Monty, or I will shoot you and say it was breaking and entering.

MONTY:

Dude, what the fuck?? Seriously? Put the gun down mate, please!

CHUCK:

Lock the *fucking* door!!

MONTY:

Alright, alright, I'm locking the door, I'm locking it! (*Stands up and locks the door.*) ... There, it's locked!

Monty holds his hands up and stands near the door. Chuck gestures with the gun for him to sit back down.

CHUCK:

Sit down, relax.

Monty slowly sits down, keeping his hands raised and his eyes on Chuck.

MONTY:

Chuck dude, seriously, you're freaking me out, please put the gun down...

CHUCK:

Oh, I'm freaking *you* out? (*Monty nods.*) I'm freaking *you* out??

MONTY:

Yes mate, please! Please put the gun down... At least stop pointing it at me, please.

CHUCK:

Shut the *fuck* up, Monty Boy!! (*Pause*) Now listen, "mate"... I don't want to draw this out any longer than it has to be... Because I love you like a brother... And when you love like brothers, you fight like brothers...

MONTY:

Mate, what are you talking about?

CHUCK:
Shut the *fuck* up!

MONTY:
Look, just take it easy! Can we just talk here, please?

CHUCK:
Oh now you wanna talk? Sure, let's talk! Let's talk about how you've been fucking my wife and secretly stealing my money, let's talk about that!!

MONTY:
... What?

CHUCK:
Let's talk about it! What position do you guys usually do? I know she says she likes missionary, but now I'm thinking maybe she only says that because she knows I like it, ya know, I don't know anymore! Let's talk about how much you stole from me and how often it's been happening... Was it every week, every month, once a year? At the end of the year, during tax season? When was it, Monty Boy??

MONTY:
Chuck, I didn't have sex with Delilah, and I have never stole any money from you, I swear to God... You've been paying me for my services, and that is it mate, nothing more, nothing less... Please, put the gun down... You can ask Delilah, we never slept together, I swear to God mate!

CHUCK:
Call me mate one more fucking time, Monty!! Just one more time!

MONTY:
Chuck, listen, where is Delilah now? Let's all talk about this together, to clear the air.

CHUCK:
Don't put my wife's name in your mouth ever again, you understand? If I hear you utter her name one more fucking time, I swear to God, I will kill you... You understand me?

MONTY:
Chuck... Let's just talk about this, okay? ... Just calm down a minute, just breathe... Put the gun away for a second, let's just talk... Where is Delilah?

CHUCK:
She's not here... (*Pause*) You know Monty, you're right... In the end, we're not all Picassos, are we? ... Now get the fuck out of my house and never speak to my wife again, do you hear me? All I wanted from you was a confession, but it seems that you and her are going to take this to the grave, so... Just go.

MONTY:
Chuck, can we just talk?

CHUCK:
There's nothing to talk about... I caught you two, and you are both denying it! Now go before I change my mind and do something I'll regret later... I'm serious.

MONTY:
Look, I just want us to be cool, that's all... Can we just talk a second before I go?

CHUCK:
I'm done talking, Monty! I'm done... No more talking.

Chuck points the gun at Monty.

MONTY:
Dude, put the gun down.

CHUCK:
I'm not fucking around man, get the *fuck* out of my house!

Chuck cocks the gun back and aims it at Monty.

MONTY:
Dude!

CHUCK:
Get the fuck out of here dude, *now*!!

Slight Pause. Monty looks around quickly, panics, then lunges toward Chuck and the gun. In a brief scuffle, the gun goes off, and Monty crumples to the floor.

MONTY:
(*Gripping his stomach*): GAAAHHHHH!!!! ... You shot me!

CHUCK:
Sorry, Monty...

MONTY:
You fucking shot me!!

CHUCK:
You lunged at me!

MONTY:
Call 911, please!

CHUCK:

I can't...

MONTY:

Call 911, please, what are you doing?? (*Gasping for breath.*) Dude, please!!

CHUCK:

You know, Monty... You could've just said no... That's all you had to do, just say no.

MONTY:

Dude, please call 911! I'm gonna die... (*Gasping.*) Call 911!

CHUCK:

Nahh, I think I'll just let it be... Let fate take over, ya know?

Monty is fading quickly, seriously wounded and losing blood.

MONTY:

Chuck, I can't... I can't breathe... Call... 9... 1...

CHUCK:

Wish I could, Monty! ... No cell service out here though... One perk of moving out to the middle of nowhere, ya know, no disturbances.

MONTY:

Chuck... Please...

CHUCK:

All you had to do was say no, Monty! ... Just like Lon, all he had to do was say no... But neither of you could do that, could you? ... It's alright though... At least now you'll be together.

Monty slowly closes his eyes, gurgles a little, then stops breathing. His limbs go numb, no longer clutching his stomach. Chuck stares at him emotionless, pauses, then shrugs.

CHUCK:

Well... Maybe now Delilah will take me back?

BLACK OUT.

END OF PLAY.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *We're Not All Picassos* was inspired by the artist's internal struggle; whether a writer, painter, musician, filmmaker, sculptor, etc. It explores issues and themes of what it means to be an artist and why we continue to create against all outside

distractions and forces. Stylistic interests include David Mamet, Suzan-Lori Parks, Neil Simon, Clifford Odets, August Wilson, Martin McDonagh, and more. The play has not been performed live yet.

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Watt Burns is a poet and playwright from Milwaukee, WI, living in New York City. He has been published in Return to the Gathering Place of the Waters, Edify Fiction, Crux Magazine, In Layman's Terms, Cream City Review, and more. He holds a BA in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and he once saved a kitten from a busy highway in Atlanta.*