

# JASPER

A play by Terry Milner

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## CHARACTERS

Fairleigh (Lee) Sherman, mid 20's, male, white.

Melinda Byrnes, late 20's/early 30's, Lee's partner and co-worker. Multiracial.

Dean Sherman, late 60's, Lee's father, white.

Becky Greene, 40's, Lee's sister, white.

Harold (Harry) Hawes, late 40's, a potter. Originally from the UK, any ethnicity.

## SETTING

The play takes place in Lee's condo in the upscale urban center of a large southern city, a small town outside that city, and places in between.

The time is the present. The first act takes place in late September, the second in mid-December.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT:

A / indicates where the next line begins or the next action should commence.

Ellipses denote an incomplete thought or line.

An em dash (–) denotes an interrupted thought or line.

An extra "hard return" within a speech *suggests* a brief pause or micro-beat.

## NOTE ON THE MUSIC:

The author has not secured permissions to use the songs referenced herein in performance. If necessary, other music may be substituted.

SCENE ONE

September. A high-rise condo located in the upscale urban center of a large Southern city. A city view through a big window, a nice kitchen open to the living/dining room. One exit leads to two offstage bedrooms and a bathroom; another leads to the front door.

On the dining table, a half-frosted red velvet cake sits on a platter. On the sofa, a DOG lies motionless. He's a boxer, gray around the muzzle but otherwise a rich faun color. His tail is docked but his ears are natural, not clipped or pointy.

MELINDA BYRNES stands between the kitchen and the sofa, gazing down at the dog. She wears an apron and still holds the spatula she has been using to frost the cake.

MELINDA

Are you sure, Jazz?  
Jazzy?  
Jasper!

But the dog doesn't move. From offstage, the sound of the front door opening.

LEE

(offstage)

It's just me.

MELINDA

Oh God. Bear, wait...

LEE SHERMAN enters, rolling a suitcase and carrying a shoulder bag.

LEE

What's wrong?

MELINDA

I'm so sorry, Baby Bear. I am so, so sorry.

LEE

What for?

Lee follows her eyes to the sofa, sees Jasper. He drops his bag, goes to him.

LEE

Hey Jazz?

Jazzy.

Jasper!?

Oh no. Oh fuck. Fuck.

What are you doing? Why aren't you / doing anything?

MELINDA

What am I / supposed to—?

LEE

Did you call anyone? Oh Jazzy, oh my sweet baby boy...

Lee breaks into heaving sobs. Melinda sets the spatula down, sits on the sofa.

MELINDA

Bear...

LEE

What happened?

MELINDA

I don't know, he was just / lying there and...

LEE

Oh no... oh, Jazzy... oh mister dog... Daddy's home.

MELINDA

He was asleep, but then he sort of... he had like a seizure. And then he just laid his head down and went quiet.

LEE

He's still warm.

MELINDA

It just happened.

Lee takes a paw in his hand and holds it.

LEE

His paws are cold.

MELINDA

Yeah. The extremities.... I guess they get cold first.

Lee strokes the dog's flank.

LEE

Oh, buddy... I'm so sorry I wasn't here.

MELINDA

It's okay.

LEE

What?

MELINDA

Oh. Nothing...

LEE

Are you stoned?

MELINDA

No, you want some?

LEE

Seriously?

MELINDA

What?

LEE

That's not what I was asking you.

MELINDA

Lee..

LEE

It's just, if you had been stoned when it happened...

MELINDA

It just happened, Bear.

LEE

That's all I meant. I'm not like / angry or –

MELINDA

I know, I'm sorry.

LEE

Stop apologizing, Kitty. It's not your fault.

MELINDA

He was fine all week. I mean he didn't eat for the first two days, you know he never does when you / go away—

LEE

You gave him all his meds, right?

MELINDA

What? Yeah, of course.

LEE

His mexilitine, and the glucosamine, right?

MELINDA

Right. Yeah.

I was about to call you or text you but I knew you were driving, and texting and driving is bad and I didn't want to kill you, too...  
Or, I mean, you know, at all...

LEE

I know.

MELINDA

Calling is safer. You don't have to look down.

LEE

I should've just come through town. That way I would've been here.  
Oh, Jazz. Oh buddy.

Lee lays his hand on the dog's side, and starts gently shaking him.

MELINDA

Lee...

Lee shakes him a little more.

LEE

Jazz? Jazzy? Mister?

Lee stops shaking him.

LEE

I'm sorry I wasn't here. You've been my dog for a long time. Isn't that right, mister? He pooped a little I think. We should get him off the couch. Can you help me?

MELINDA

Okay.

Lee gets his arms underneath the dog's front end, while Melinda tries to position herself to lift his behind but it's really awkward.

LEE

Have you got him?

MELINDA

I think so. Wait. No just... move the... can you move the coffee table out a little?

LEE

Yeah.

Lee slides the coffee table out of the way a bit.

LEE

Wait. Here.

*(Lee pulls a flat sheet out from under a sofa cushion.)*

Let's try to get this under him.

With a little difficulty they get the sheet under him.

MELINDA

Wait. Okay.

They lift the dog off the sofa like a heavy sack of flour; he weighs about seventy pounds so it's not easy. The dog's head flops out of the sheet.

LEE

Shit. Hurry.

MELINDA

I'm trying.

They set him down on the floor as gently as they can, in front of the coffee table, center stage. Lee kneels down beside the dog, uncovers his head and buries his face in the dog's neck, inhaling deeply.

Melinda sits back down and picks up her laptop. It's decorated with lots of fun stickers: Manga characters, Dr. Who aliens, and a large, luscious slice of chocolate cake.

LEE  
What are you doing?

MELINDA  
Looking up options.

LEE  
Looking up options?  
Okay.

MELINDA  
Animal control's the cheapest.

LEE  
Do they come get him?

MELINDA  
No. We have to take him there.

LEE  
Where? To the dump? Like in a garbage bag?

MELINDA  
Yeah. Pretty much. So that's one option.

LEE  
No it's not.

MELINDA  
Okay.

LEE  
That's not an option.

I know / it's just the –  
MELINDA

Then why even read it to me?  
LEE

It's the first thing that came up.  
I'm sorry I'm just / trying to –  
MELINDA

I know. I know. It's okay. What else?  
LEE

Midtown Vet Hospital has a cremation service.  
MELINDA

Do I get him back?  
LEE

It doesn't say.  
MELINDA

I want his ashes back.  
LEE

Okay...  
MELINDA

He was my dog for a long time, Mel. You think I'm just gonna throw him in the goddamn trash?  
LEE

No, no, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I was just...  
MELINDA

I know.  
LEE

They're open twenty-four hours.  
MELINDA

Okay.  
LEE

Melinda picks up her phone and makes the call. While she dials, Lee goes to the kitchen and opens a drawer. He pulls out several bottles of medication, one at a time, looking them over. Something about this worries Mel.

MELINDA

(on phone)

Hi, um, yes, our dog just died and...

Oh. Thank you.

Thank you.

Um, Melinda Byrnes, B-Y-R-N-E-S.

It's the Gaelic spelling.

The Gaelic?

Yeah, well a quarter anyway.

Irish.

No, my Dad. My mom's from here. Anyway...

Lee comes over and takes the phone from her.

MELINDA

Lee, let me –

LEE

It's okay. Hello? Yeah, this is Lee Sherman.

Yeah, no, that was my uh... anyway Jazz was my dog, so...

Yeah, sorry. Jasper. Jazz is his –

He didn't have a last name.

I told you, Sherman. Lee Sherman.

Uh huh, 1175 Wisteria Boulevard Northeast, Unit 804.

That's right, this number.

I don't care.

That's fine.

We do get him back, right?

Sure... uh... just the basic box I guess?

Right.

Is that the earliest?

Yes, sure. That's fine. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Louis. We are, too.

*(he hangs up)*

All set. They'll come get him in the morning. They said he'd be fine til then.

Lee goes back over to Jasper, lies down next to him on the floor. He starts to cry again. Hard.

MELINDA

Hey.  
Hey, come here, Cuddle Bear.

She pulls him up off the floor and over to the sofa.

LEE

Cuddle Bear needs Mama Kitty.

MELINDA

Give me those.

Melinda pulls off Lee's shoes. He curls up in her arms, weeping. She rocks him like a baby.

MELINDA

I'm so sorry, Baby Bear. Sorry about your mom. Sorry about Jazz. It's a lot, huh?  
Oh, Bear. You're hard.

He pulls away from her, almost shamefully.

LEE

I'm sorry.

MELINDA

It's okay. You wanna sleep in Kitty's room tonight?

LEE

No. I'll be okay.

MELINDA

We'll have cake for breakfast.  
Sound good?

Lee nods. After a moment, he gets up and exits toward his bedroom. Once we hear his door shut, Melinda goes to the kitchen table and starts frosting the cake again. After a few dabs, she stops, crosses to the drawer Lee looked through earlier and starts pulling out pill bottles. She's nervous, unsure what she's doing, but decides on two bottles, pulls them out and puts the rest back in the drawer. One of the bottles has a BIG BLACK X on the label, otherwise both look the same. She shakes it, there are several pills inside. Relieved, she puts it back in the drawer.

Then she opens the other prescription bottle, counts out five tiny pills, tosses them in the trash, shakes it around to make sure they disappear, then re-caps the bottle and puts it back in the drawer.

Then she exits toward the back and closes the door to the bathroom.

Lights fade.

SCENE TWO

The Condo, two days later.

Jasper's body is gone. On the floor where once it lay now rests what looks like a large, hard-sided suitcase, in decent shape but obviously old, dating from the 1930's or '40's. It has what looks like a leather finish and is very similar to Jasper in color, a kind of buff brown.

LEE stands to one side of the thing, staring at it, studying it. He's wearing boxers and a t-shirt, probably what he slept in. DEAN SHERMAN, Lee's father, stands on the other side of the object, staring at Lee. He waits a few seconds for Lee to say something, but Lee is clearly at a loss.

DEAN

You have no idea, do you.

LEE

It's not a suitcase.

DEAN

Nope, I told you.

LEE

How old is it?

DEAN

Maybe sixty, seventy? Old as me at least.

LEE

Is it some kind of carrying case? Like for a travelling / salesman or –

DEAN

You're getting warmer. But no.

LEE

I give up, Daddy.

DEAN

No, come on, now. Don't do that. Keep trying, you'll get it.

LEE

I appreciate you coming all this way, and I'm sure it's / awesome but...

DEAN

You can have it for free if you guess what it is.

Lee tries to pick the thing up, just to test its weight.

LEE

Jesus. How'd you get this thing in the building?

DEAN

I'm stronger than you. Now come on. Guess again.

LEE

It's like ... it's not a suitcase. Is it like ... like a piece of equipment?

DEAN

Damn, son, you are so close!

LEE

Then tell me.

DEAN

It's a Recordio.

LEE

I don't know what that is.

DEAN

Don't the name of the thing tell you all you need to know?

LEE

This is so stupid.

Lee goes to open it up.

DEAN

No, now, wait just a minute. Think about it. All you got to do is guess and it's yours for free.

LEE

What if I can't guess?

DEAN

Then you have to pay me for it.

LEE

But what if I don't want it?

DEAN

What?

LEE

Just because I guess right doesn't mean I'll want the thing.

DEAN

Then you should only guess things you do want.

LEE

Did you miss a dose or something?

DEAN

Come on, son. It's the mystery that makes life interesting. The chance that something great will happen. If you're just willing to take that risk, and make a wish, what you get might just change your whole life.

LEE

There's only one thing I'm wishing for right now and he's not in that box.

Melinda peeks into the room, still sleepy, just out of bed and still in her pajamas, which should have an obvious animal/animation theme, like "Hello Kitty" or something similar.

MELINDA

Coffee ready yet?

LEE

Almost.

MELINDA

Hey, Mr. Sherman.

DEAN

Hey there, what's happening, Kitty Cat?

MELINDA

Oh, you know... been kinda sad around here the past couple days. How you holding up?

DEAN

Me? Oh, yeah. I'm okay I reckon.

MELINDA

*(to Lee:)*

Are you coming to work?

LEE

I don't think so.

MELINDA

The Medpharm meeting's today.

LEE

Tracey said I didn't have to be there.

MELINDA

No, you don't have to, but...

DEAN

What's wrong, are you sick?

MELINDA

Bear they want to talk about the / site map revision-

LEE

I don't feel like going back to work yet, okay?

MELINDA

Yeah, no, it's fine.

Melinda exits the way she came.

DEAN

You been sick?

LEE

I'm working from home. Some. It's been hard, Daddy, / harder than I-

DEAN

You're telling me?

LEE  
I wasn't talking about Mama.  
I'm sorry. I didn't–

DEAN  
That's a sweet girl you got there.

LEE  
Of course I know it's been–

DEAN  
Pretty girl, too.

LEE  
Yeah.  
She was with him, you know.

DEAN  
With who?

LEE  
Jasper.

DEAN  
Oh, right.

LEE  
I was on my way back from Austin / when he–

DEAN  
When were you in Austin?

LEE  
Last week.

DEAN  
Your uncle L.C. lives in Waco you know.

LEE  
This was for work. It's this big festival they have every year.

DEAN  
A computer festival?

LEE

Not just computers, but yeah. Kinda ridiculous. It used to be fun but...  
What is this / thing, Dad?

DEAN

Don't you do computer work?

LEE

Sorta. I'm a digital marketing consultant.

DEAN

They got festivals for that?

LEE

Yeah.

DEAN

What's that like?

LEE

We go there to network with our targets in the SEO and social media analytics space.

A pause. Dean has no idea what Lee just said.

DEAN

How old was that dog?

LEE

He was a year when we got him, right?

DEAN

Yeah, that's what the fella said.

LEE

So he was at least fourteen.

DEAN

I guess he was. Old for a dog that big.

LEE

It was probably his heart. You remember he had to wear that monitor?

DEAN

Yeah. Man, I thought I'd seen everything...

LEE

Just like the one they made you wear.

DEAN

I know, I just never saw one on a dog before.

LEE

Well I never / thought I'd –

DEAN

How much that cost you?

LEE

What?

DEAN

That monitor and all.

LEE

I don't remember. Like fifteen hundred, two thousand, maybe, with meds and all?

Dean looks away, shakes his head.

LEE

Well what would you have done?

DEAN

Lee, son, I grew up in the country.

LEE

I know. You didn't / let the dogs –

DEAN

We didn't sleep with them. We didn't even let them in / the house.

LEE

Well, we think about them differently.

DEAN

We? Who's this "we?"

LEE

What? I don't know. My friends, my people, people / like me...?

DEAN

I thought we were your people. Your family / is your–

LEE

That's not what / I meant.

DEAN

Well what does it mean then?

LEE

Jesus, Daddy, I don't know what it means. I'm just saying it's different for us. Our dogs are like family.

DEAN

You lock your family in a box all day?

LEE

Dogs are den animals / they actually prefer–

DEAN

I'm just saying at least they get to be dogs in the country. They get to run around, chase squirrels / and rabbits instead of –

LEE

Yeah and if occasionally one runs out in front of a log truck, well that's just the price they pay for their freedom?

DEAN

All I'm saying is we didn't set around in our underwear for two days after / one of 'em died.

LEE

I'm not sitting around in my...

Lee realizes he is, in fact, in his underwear. He finds a pair of jeans and pulls them on.

DEAN

My mama and daddy didn't treat their dogs like they was their kids.

LEE

No. They just treated their kids like dogs.

Pause. Maybe Dean sits.

LEE

I'm sorry Daddy.

DEAN

I'm worried about you, Fairleigh. Say, when are you two... *you know*...?

Dean gestures toward the back hallway, toward Melinda.

LEE

We're happy like we are.

DEAN

Well is she your girlfriend / or what?

LEE

I'm not gonna discuss this with you.

DEAN

I mean you could do a lot worse.

LEE

Daddy stop it, just stop talking about it.

DEAN

Fine, fine. Never mind.

Dean goes to lift the mystery case as if to leave with it.

LEE

You're gonna hurt your back.

DEAN

I carried it in here.

LEE

Wait, now, just wait a minute.  
What did you say it was called?

DEAN

Look. See right here? It says "Wilcox Gay Recordio." The name tells you everything.

LEE

It's a gay recordio?

DEAN

Come on.

Lee stares at the thing, trying to guess again.

LEE

Give me a hint?

DEAN

It was in the attic at the old house. Becky's got it on the market you know. She's out yonder getting it ready right now, cleaning it out. Gonna have a big sale. She's calling it an "estate sale," but I ain't dead.

LEE

Maybe she thinks ... you know, because Mama died / and you're not—

DEAN

Yeah, and that's all that matters, isn't it. Your Mama's gone so I may as well be dead too.

LEE

No, Daddy. Not to me.

DEAN

Anyhow she's having this sale but I saved this in the nick of time. For you. Bobby's coming out to help move stuff around. He's moving back home you know.

LEE

Yeah, I saw pictures. He's so fat.

DEAN

Yeah. Got a girlfriend though. Pretty girl. I think she's Mexican. But yeah he's a big boy.

LEE

Becky's not that big.

DEAN

No, but his daddy sure is. That's where he gets it. Anyway he's coming to help.

LEE

What all is she selling?

DEAN

Every damn thing I own, pretty much. Come on, now, I gotta get on the road. I was gonna sell this for three-fifty but you can have it for three hundred.

LEE

But I still don't know what it is!

DEAN

Listen to me, son. Would I ever try to sell you anything you didn't want?

LEE

Well...

DEAN

Or didn't need?

LEE

No sir.

DEAN

I'm the one always telling you to be careful when you buy anything. That Volkswagen you bought without me, remember how that horn used to / stick when it got –

LEE

Lots of people bought that car.

DEAN

“Your” people?

LEE

I should've done more research I know.

DEAN

Consumer Reports. Don't buy anything without checking Consumer Reports.

LEE

Well I doubt / they'd have –

DEAN

Or checking with me.

LEE

I doubt there's a review of the Wilcox Gay Recordio in this month's issue.

DEAN

That's why I'm telling you – you will not be disappointed.

LEE

You really expect me to give you three hundred dollars for this without knowing what it is?

DEAN

That's the fun part, man! Take a chance!

LEE

But you just said don't take a chance without –

DEAN

That was for cars, not Recordios! You missed the whole point.

Lee goes looking for his checkbook.

LEE

Okay Daddy. Fine. Check okay?

DEAN

I reckon so.

Or you and me could just walk down to the corner. There a cash machine in that 7-Eleven?

LEE

You're going to the boat! That's why you hauled this thing all the way up here. You're on your way to the goddamn boat.

DEAN

Now there ain't no need for taking the / Lord's name in vain.

Melinda comes back in, heads to the kitchen and starts pouring their coffees.

LEE

You're selling your possessions to your only son for three hundred dollars so you can go gambling?

MELINDA

Mr. Sherman!

DEAN

No, sir. No no. I was going gambling regardless. But see, this way your sister don't know how much I spend. Listen, son, this thing is worth twice that much. If you don't want it you can sell it on e-Bay, probably make a profit.

MELINDA

How do you like your coffee?

DEAN

Black and hot, honey. Just like—

A look from Lee cuts him off.

DEAN

I mean, just like it comes.  
Trust me, okay? I just don't want Becky to worry. She checks that balance three or four times a day. Got this thing on her phone...

LEE

I wonder why.

DEAN

Tell you what: if I win big enough I'll buy it back from you.

LEE

Wait. You said if I guessed what it was I'd get it for free. What would you have done then?

DEAN

Lee. I knew you'd never guess.  
Promise you'll help me out.

LEE

I'm not giving you a dime until you tell me what it is.

DEAN

All right, all right.

(he gets down on the floor and opens up the case)

This thing is cool, man. It was your granddaddy's. You can make your own records with it, see? Look here, there's a built-in radio so you can record things right off the air. Or you can use this...

(he pulls out a shiny, old-fashioned desk-top style microphone)

...and record whatever you want. Live and in-person. It presses it right onto these blank disks, see?

Lee drops to his knees beside his father.

LEE

Oh my God, I remember this thing. I made a record with Mama didn't I?

DEAN

Yeah, we used to play with it some when you was little. 'Course she got to where she didn't want to sing anymore.

LEE

Does it still work?

DEAN

Do you care?

Lee loves the thing.

DEAN

I think it works. There's still some discs in here... see there?

(speaking into the microphone)

“Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. America, from border to border, coast to coast and all the ships at sea...” That's ol'... well, shoot, I can't 'call his name...

MELINDA

Winchell?

DEAN

Walter Winchell! Yep. Mama and Daddy used to listen to that ol' fella. What do you say?

LEE

Sold.

DEAN

See there. Didn't I tell you you'd love it?

LEE

Yeah, yeah. Come on.

MELINDA

Here, take these with you.

Melinda hands them both coffee mugs.

DEAN

Thanks kitty cat.

What did you call her?

LEE

Kitty cat?  
On account of her pajamas?

DEAN

Oh. Right.

LEE

(to Lee)  
Duh! What's wrong with you?

MELINDA

I'll be back soon.

LEE

Take your time. Stay away from the free liquor, Mr. Sherman. You know that's how they get you.

MELINDA

I know that's right.

DEAN

Melinda exits down the hallway.

We said three-fifty, right?

DEAN

Three hundred.

LEE

Well see now there's a bunch of blank disks in there that are real hard to find. I figure they'd be worth fifty on their own...

DEAN

Offstage, the SOUND OF A SHOWER being turned on and music playing on a radio. Dean pauses a moment.

Listen to that, son.

DEAN

What?

LEE

DEAN

That's the sound of a woman taking a shower.

They listen. The music plays - sweet female vocals - as the shower runs. Then Melinda shuts the bathroom door offstage, and the sounds of water and music are muffled.

DEAN

Reckon you get to hear that all the time, huh?

Dean stands still, listening, straining to hear.

LEE

Okay, Daddy. Three-fifty. Come on.

Dean and Lee leave through the front door.

Lights fade.

SCENE THREE

Jasper, thirty miles north of the city.

BECKY GREEN sits on the back deck of a modest 1950's ranch house, taking various items from boxes – picture frames, knick-knacks and various other household artifacts – and placing price tags on them. She has a sort of rhythm going: pick it up, look it over, write down a price and stick it on.

Dean stands at the sliding glass door, looking in anxiously. The sound of furniture being dragged across hardwood floors comes from inside the house.

DEAN

(calling inside)

Don't drag it!  
Tell him to stop handling that stuff so rough.

BECKY

Daddy come sit down.

DEAN

(calling inside)

Bobby, hang on, now! You're getting it all mixed up.

BECKY

He's sorting it just like I told him. What's that on / your pants?

DEAN

He's getting it all mixed in with the stuff we're keeping. I don't / want to–

BECKY

He is not. Now come here a minute.

DEAN

What?

BECKY

Turn around.

DEAN

Why?

BECKY

Turn around I said.

He turns around, she looks at the seat of his khakis. She sees a wet spot, probably not visible to the audience.

DEAN

I don't care about all this out here / but he ain't –

BECKY

You need to change your Depends.

DEAN

What? Oh, I don't either.

Becky's phone vibrates, she looks at it, sends a text.

Dean picks through a box, pulls out a ceramic statue of a horse rearing up on its back legs and looking fierce. He looks at the price sticker.

DEAN

Fifty cents.

BECKY

That's right.

DEAN

Everything's fifty cents?

BECKY

No. We've got four price points. Twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five and a dollar. Except for the lawn mower and the fishing poles and stuff. That stuff's higher.

Dean shakes his head, sets the horse down. He looks through a collection of souvenir coffee mugs and picks out the only one that isn't tacky: a beautiful, hand-made piece of pottery.

DEAN

This too?

BECKY

Everything in that box is fifty cents. I know you're not trying to tell me how to do retail – I got twenty years experience.

DEAN

And you ain't made manager yet.

BECKY

Assistant Manager.

He holds up the mug.

BECKY

What?

DEAN

This mug and that horse should not be the same price.

BECKY

You want me to raise the price on the horse?

DEAN

No, I want you to raise the price on this mug.

BECKY

The horse is bigger.

DEAN

Your brother give this to me for my birthday. Said he bought it from that fella out on 54.

BECKY

That hippie guy?

DEAN

Your mama said Lee paid twenty-five dollars for it. For a coffee mug.

BECKY

Mugs are fifty cents.

DEAN

This was a gift from my only son.

BECKY

Fine then. Seventy-five.

DEAN

Naw. I'm keeping it.

BECKY

No you're not. I'm not gonna go through all that again.

DEAN

A dollar then. Put a dollar on it.

BECKY

I can't sell that for a dollar.

Fine. Give it here.

Dean hands her the mug, looks through the other items.

DEAN

Some of these were wedding presents if you can believe it. Look at this.

What an ugly time to get married. Your mother liked it, so that's all that mattered.

BECKY

You'd be surprised what's popular these days. Something goes out of style, just wait a few years / and it'll be back.

DEAN

Ticky-tacky ticky-tacky ticky-tacky crap. But all that furniture in yonder was my mother's.

Solid wood. Solid state! Go in there and just smell it. You can smell it you know.

Nothing smells anymore.

BECKY

I can smell you. Go on home and / change.

DEAN

You're just trying to get rid of me.

Dean heads back toward the door.

BECKY

Daddy come here. I'm serious, you've got a wet spot big as my fist.

Dean looks behind him, pulls his khakis around so he can see what she means.

DEAN

Well, shit.

BECKY

Go home and change.

Dean heads toward his car.

BECKY

Hey. Wait just a minute.  
Did you take that old record player outta here?

DEAN

What old record player?

BECKY

(reading from a printed list)

One portable antique record player and radio combination, valued at one hundred dollars.  
Bobby says he can't find it.

Dean does not look at her.

BECKY

Daddy it's on the inventory already.

DEAN

We'll take it off the inventory then.

BECKY

The dealers are coming to pick all that / big stuff up tonight –

DEAN

Junk dealers. Just say junk dealers cause that's who they are.

BECKY

Okay, Daddy. It's junk.

DEAN

No, it ain't. Not all of it. All this out here is, maybe. All this crap is stuff your mama /  
bought in the ...

BECKY

I mean it, stop / talking about her stuff like that.

DEAN

...but not what's in the house. Those are my family's things.

BECKY

And we got a good price for it all. Now where's that record player? Is it in the car?

DEAN

I took it to your brother's.

BECKY

When?

DEAN

Yesterday.  
His dog died, you know. I don't know / if you –

BECKY

Yes, I know. What does that have to do with anything?

DEAN

Well he's pretty tore up about it.

BECKY

About the dog.

DEAN

Yeah.

Pause. Becky goes quiet, busies herself with the price tags  
and such for a few seconds.

BECKY

What do you think about that?

DEAN

About what?

BECKY

About Lee being such a mess over a dog. Did you see the pictures he posted? The poems?

DEAN

He's real sensitive. He had that dog a long time you know.

BECKY

Did you see what he posted the day our mother died?

DEAN

I don't look at / that mess...

BECKY

"Twenty reasons to vote Democratic." Then not six weeks later, when his dog dies, he goes all to pieces. And you give him an antique record player.

DEAN

I didn't really give it to him.

BECKY

Is it in your car?

DEAN

No.

BECKY

Is it at the camper then?

DEAN

Those fellas never even opened the thing up to see what it was.

BECKY

It's on the list so it's gotta be here when they come.

DEAN

Take off a hundred dollars, then. That's fine / with me.

BECKY

It's getting late now, come on.

DEAN

It ain't at the trailer.

BECKY

Where is it?

DEAN

Like I told you. Lee's got it.

BECKY

You said you didn't give it to him.

DEAN

I didn't. I sold it to him.

BECKY

Sympathy has it's price I guess.

DEAN

Just take a hundred dollars off the bill when the junk man comes.

BECKY

Fine. Where's the money?

DEAN

What?

BECKY

What did you do with the hundred dollars?

DEAN

What do you mean "do with it?"

BECKY

You said you sold the thing to Lee for a hundred dollars. What did you do with the money?

DEAN

Nothing.

BECKY

Well then give it here so I can put it in the bank.

DEAN

Your brother's got real good taste. I sure did think he was gay / didn't you?

BECKY

Daddy...

DEAN

Come on. Didn't you?

BECKY

No. He's got a ... he's got Melinda.

DEAN

Who?

BECKY

Melinda.

DEAN

Oh. Yeah, I reckon. They don't act like it, though.  
Seems like he'd have told us by now if he was.

BECKY

Honestly I don't think Lee's one way or the other.

DEAN

What's that mean? You think he's *bi*?

BECKY

What has gotten into you?

DEAN

Do you? Maybe that's it.

BECKY

That's not what I meant. I meant I don't think he's anything.

DEAN

Well that's a shame.

BECKY

Huh. Nothing is better than the other thing if you ask me.

DEAN

Maybe. But ain't nobody just nothing. Not til they get old. And / even then—

BECKY

Hush talking about it.

Dean pulls an old picture frame out of a box. It's just a frame, nothing inside. Dean holds it up to his face, peers through it for a moment, as if his was the picture it once held.

DEAN

Think this is worth a dollar at least?

BECKY

Nope.

He keeps looking at her through the frame.

DEAN

Not even a dollar?

BECKY

Hmmm. Maybe. Give it here.

Dean hands her the frame, stands up and stretches his back. He looks back in the door to the house. Sounds of more furniture being moved around.

Becky sees the wet spot on his pants getting bigger.

BECKY

You need to go home and change. Seriously.

Lights fade.

SCENE FOUR

A Walmart parking lot.

Lee and Becky sit on a bench. A sign on a tall metal post just behind them reads DESIGNATED SMOKING AREA. There is a cigarette butt receptacle. Music plays, as if from the speakers in the Garden Center.

Becky types out a text message on her phone. She is dressed in her Walmart uniform: black pants, a white polo shirt and a name tag.

Lee eats chips from a Chipotle bag. Becky eats a sandwich out of a Chik-fil-A bag.

Lee offers Becky a blue corn chip.

BECKY  
(without looking up)

No thanks.

LEE

You sure?

BECKY  
Yeah, I don't care for the blue ones. Want a waffle fry?

LEE  
No thanks. Sure smells good though.

BECKY  
(offering her sandwich)

Have a bite?

LEE  
No, it's okay.

BECKY  
Oh... right. I forgot.

LEE  
It's not that. I'm just off meat right now.

Off meat? Okay...  
BECKY

Lee eats a blue corn chip. Becky eats a golden waffle fry.

Becky laughs at whatever text she just received. She taps out a reply, waits a few seconds for a response, then takes a sip from her big plastic to-go cup. When a reply doesn't come, she puts her phone down and eats, still amused by the messages she was receiving.

Oh, me...  
BECKY  
(laughing a little)

What?  
LEE

Nothing. Just Jerry.  
BECKY

How's he doing?  
LEE

He's fine.  
BECKY

It's nice out here.  
LEE

This cigarette thing stinks.  
BECKY

Hey that's a good sign, huh?  
LEE

Yeah, I guess.  
BECKY

You want to sit over here?  
LEE

No, that's all right. Then you'd have to smell it.  
Thanks for driving out here.  
BECKY

LEE

It's okay. I was coming out this way anyway.

BECKY

Oh. Well glad you didn't have to make a special trip.

LEE

Becky...

BECKY

I know you hate coming out here.

LEE

I don't understand why we have to eat in the Walmart parking lot.

BECKY

I only get thirty minutes for lunch.

LEE

You should meet me in town sometime. I'll take you somewhere nice. You and Jerry.

BECKY

I'm still digging the glass out of my floor mats from the last time you took me somewhere nice. No, this is as close as I get to the city if I can help it.

The text reply Becky was waiting for comes, and she laughs.

LEE

What?

BECKY

Nothing. So what else dragged you back out to the country?

LEE

I guess Daddy told you what happened.

BECKY

Yeah, that's why I called.

LEE

Oh. So I had him cremated / and I need—

BECKY

Who?

LEE

Jazz.

BECKY

Jazz...?

LEE

Jasper. He died.

BECKY

Oh... Jasper. Your dog...

Becky laughs a little.

LEE

Yeah. Who did you think...?

BECKY

(still laughing)

I thought you meant you had Daddy cremated.

LEE

No. He's still alive.

That's why I came out here. I'm looking for something nice to put his ashes in. You know / that place out on—

BECKY

You saved the ashes.

LEE

Yeah. Didn't Daddy tell you? He came by / the other day—

BECKY

Oh, I know he did. You gave him some money.

LEE

I bought something from him.

BECKY

He told me. A hundred dollars for a broken down old record player.

LEE

A hundred?

BECKY

You knew what he was gonna do / with that money —

LEE

Three hundred. Three fifty, actually...

BECKY

Oh my God. Lee...

LEE

What?

BECKY

He told me you only gave him a hundred. See he's lying now.

LEE

So?

BECKY

So you know what he did with the rest.

LEE

Yeah, I know.

BECKY

He's sick, Lee.

LEE

I don't think / it's that bad.

BECKY

Gambling is a sickness.

LEE

He's just having fun.

BECKY

Honey...

LEE

What?

BECKY

He had a house, a nice car, and an RV. Now all he's got is the RV.  
Parked in my front yard.

LEE

Selling the house was your idea.

BECKY

What choice was there? He's gonna lose it if he keeps on like he's going. It's a sin. Aside from everything else / gambling is a sin.

LEE

Please don't use words like / that.

BECKY

I know you don't like to hear it but it's the truth.

LEE

You just said it was a sickness. It can't be a both a sin and / a sickness...

BECKY

It can too. It can most certainly be both.

LEE

So you think God punishes people for being sick?

BECKY

Daddy doesn't even try to fight it.

LEE

We don't know what he tries to fight.

BECKY

He never used to do this before Mama got sick.

LEE

Which time?

BECKY

The last time. The skin cancer.

LEE

Well she was sick way before that.

BECKY

I know she was, you don't have to keep reminding me.

LEE

Just because you moved out / when it got–

BECKY

I'm just saying she's not around to stop him anymore.

LEE

But you are.

BECKY

Who else is there?

LEE

What if you just... I mean...

BECKY

What?

LEE

Don't you think he deserves to enjoy himself just a little bit?

BECKY

Now that she's gone you mean?

LEE

I mean, really, Beck, didn't you feel, after she died, like just the smallest little bit of... relief?

BECKY

No, I didn't.

LEE

I mean for his sake if not for yours, or even for her sake.  
I think Daddy does.

BECKY

Does what?

LEE

Feel relieved.

BECKY

She was our mother. How can you say that?

LEE

We don't have to pretend anymore.

BECKY

Pretend what?

LEE

I don't know. To be better than we really are. Happier.  
Like we always had to when she was alive.

Becky shakes her head, goes back to her phone, back to  
him, off and on, throughout the following.

LEE

What?

BECKY

Nothing.  
You haven't said two words about Mama in six weeks. Not two words.  
Maybe you had to pretend to be happy. I never did. This is who I am.  
Maybe *you* had to pretend.

LEE

Jesus. I'm just saying Daddy's got a few years left to be himself again and you / want to  
stop him from–

BECKY

You still believe everything he tells you. All that crap about Muscle Shoals and how if it  
hadn't / been for her...

LEE

He could've made it, Beck.

BECKY

As what?

LEE

Uncle Sharp told me about it. He was there when Daddy played with Jim Ed / on that radio  
show in–

BECKY

Uncle Sharp is a bigger liar than Daddy is.

A beat. Lee stands and throws his drink cup into the trash  
bin. Becky scrolls down her phone screen.

LEE

Don't call him that.

BECKY

Three hundred dollars for a useless old record player.

LEE

It's not useless. It plays *and* records.

BECKY

(re: her phone)

So does this. So what?

LEE

It's not the same. This thing makes records, Becky. On vinyl. It cuts grooves on / vinyl disks and they –

BECKY

I remember vinyl records. Don't talk about 'em like they're the Dead Sea Scrolls.

LEE

You remember those too.

BECKY

Shut up. I'm not that old...

LEE

You used to have some good ones. You had *Thriller* and oh, oh shit, what was the Sting album you had?

BECKY

*Dream of the Blue Turtles.*

LEE

I knew every word to every song on that album because of you. What happened to all those records?

BECKY

They all got warped. I left them in the attic one summer.

LEE

That's too bad.

BECKY

Yeah. Well. Who has a turntable anymore anyway.

LEE

I do.

BECKY

I guess you do now.

LEE

They smell so good. Why do they smell like that?

BECKY

I don't know. Vinyl smells.

Becky's phone vibrates. She picks it up, smiles and starts typing a reply, paying little attention to Lee.

LEE

They're just... I don't know.

BECKY

(still tapping on her phone)

Yeah.

LEE

They're different. Something vibrates, a voice or an instrument, then those vibrations hit something else, and that thing vibrates something else that vibrates... in sympathy. He knew I'd love it.

Becky stops typing on her phone, looks up.

BECKY

Sorry what?

LEE

Nothing.

BECKY

I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

LEE

Daddy knew I'd love the Recordio.

BECKY

Then why didn't he just give it to you?

LEE

Because he doesn't give gifts. He doesn't / believe in it.

BECKY

Believe in it, I know.

LEE

So I wish you wouldn't make it sound like he doesn't care about me just / because he didn't –

BECKY

Did I say that?

LEE

At least he came to see me.

BECKY

Well sorry sorry. I was busy cleaning all the junk out of the house he can't afford anymore because he can't stop gambling.

LEE

Did you stop to think I might want to look through some of that stuff?

BECKY

No because you always say how tacky it all is.

LEE

Not all of it.

Her phone vibrates. She looks at it, doesn't respond.

LEE

He was trying to make me feel better.

BECKY

You tell yourself that all you want to.

LEE

He heard about Jazz and he drove all the way into town just to give me something that he / knew I'd love.

BECKY

Sell you something you mean.

LEE

Whatever, at least he was thinking about me.

BECKY

He was an addict hustling you for money so he could go / get his fix.

LEE

He's not a junkie. He's had a hard fucking time / and so have I.

BECKY

I don't like that word.

LEE

I'm sorry.

Becky picks out a waffle fry, drops it back in the bag.

BECKY

Well these are cold now.

LEE

Here.

He hands her a napkin. She takes it, wipes her fingers.

BECKY

Thanks.

LEE

Well, let me go see if I can find an urn.

BECKY

Yeah, I gotta get back, too. You want to look in Home Goods? We might have something.

LEE

No thanks. Oh, Daddy told me Bobby has a girlfriend.

BECKY

Yeah. I guess.

You sure? You can use my discount.

LEE

It's okay.

BECKY

Do not give him any more cash, you hear me?

LEE

Yes, ma'am.

BECKY

And nothing easily sold for cash. No gifts of any value whatsoever.

LEE

Jesus, Beck...

BECKY

If he loses that camper he's not living in my house. You hear me?

LEE

Yeah.

She walks away a few steps, then turns back.

BECKY

You sure? Ain't no Walmarts downtown.

LEE

I'm sure. You and Jerry come over for dinner sometime.

BECKY

(skeptical)

Mmm...

LEE

What?

BECKY

Nothing. That's fine.  
Say hey to Melinda.

She exits. Lee picks up his things and exits. Lights fade.

SCENE FIVE

Harold Hawes Pottery.

It is a space unlike any other we've seen: a tin-walled shed lined with rough-hewn shelves, various totemic objects of diverse origins: Native American, African, Celtic, Christian. A few items of handmade pottery are on the shelves: mugs, jars, one or two very large items, beautifully glazed in muted earth tones. Each possesses both artistic merit as well as obvious practical use.

A very low roar can just be heard; perhaps a dim red glow emanates from somewhere.

DOGS BARK offstage. BELLS JINGLE as from a shop door opening. Lee enters, looks around.

LEE

Hello?  
Hello?

The warm, red glow and low roaring sound intensify for a moment, then quickly fade as if a door has been opened, then shut.

HAROLD HAWES enters.

LEE

Sorry, are you open?

HAROLD

No.

LEE

Your website didn't have your hours but I used the email link / and was hoping–

HAROLD

I don't really check that.

LEE

Oh. Okay.  
So you're not open?

HAROLD

No but I am quite busy so...

LEE

Sorry, I guess I should have called first.

HAROLD

I wouldn't have answered.

LEE

I'd like to come back, if I could. When are / you open?

HAROLD

December twenty-first.

LEE

December? Like three months from now?

HAROLD

Yeah. December twenty-first. Also March twentieth and...

(checks a little pocket calendar)

...June twenty-first.

LEE

Okay... I um... okay. I guess I'll check back then.

HAROLD

(ushering him out)

Fine. Three months. December twenty-first.

LEE

I didn't see a way to order anything on your website.

HAROLD

That's because you can't. Look, mate, I'm at peak temperature out there so if you don't mind...

LEE

Peak temperature. Twelve hundred degrees centigrade.

Beat.

HAROLD

How did you know that?

LEE

Is that right? Twelve hundred degrees? Three times hotter than the surface of Venus?

Harry grabs Lee's hand, looks it over.

HAROLD

You're not a potter. How did you...?

LEE

You told me. I took a tour of your place once when I was in the sixth grade. Our school's art teacher brought us here.

HAROLD

Yeah they don't do that anymore.

LEE

No more tours?

HAROLD

No more art.

LEE

That's too bad. It was really memorable.

HAROLD

So you grew up out here?

LEE

Yeah. In Jasper. Well, just outside. I live in town now. My dad and my sister still live out here, though.

HAROLD

And your mother?

LEE

What?

HAROLD

You mentioned a father and a sister, but no mother. Is she dead?

LEE

She passed away just recently.

HAROLD

Did she now? I'm Harry Hawes.

LEE

I know. I'm Lee. Lee Sherman. And sorry again for... I just, I like your work a lot.

HAROLD

Is that right. A collector then?

LEE

Well no, not really a collector, but I do, you know, own a piece or two.

HAROLD

What do you own?

LEE

A coffee mug...?

HAROLD

One coffee mug?

LEE

Actually I got my dad one, too. So I've bought two but I... I only own the one. I love it, though. I love how you do the uh...

HAROLD

Glaze?

LEE

Yeah. It's salt, right? The glaze is salt?

HAROLD

I use ash too. Ash and salt.

LEE

Ash...

HAROLD

Yeah. Not at the same time, mind you. I learned it in Japan. Bit tricky, timing it just right. Get it wrong and you can fuck up your wares pretty bad.

LEE

On the tour you showed us how you turn the clay on the wheel. I remember my teacher tried to make you put your shirt on.

HAROLD

Gets hot out back.

LEE

But you weren't ... I mean the kiln wasn't on or fired or whatever when we came.

HAROLD

Oh, no. Too dangerous.

LEE

Is it?

HAROLD

When it's up to peak temperature. Like now.

LEE

Twelve hundred degrees.

HAROLD

You load in your pots, see, then you get it up to temperature. Takes days. Then you add the salt or the ash to it and *woosh!* It just vaporizes instantly.

*(holding up a piece of pottery)*

It coats the outside of the pots and forms a glaze that runs down the sides, see that? It also reacts with the various other chemicals and elements coming off the clay to create a toxic cloud of gaseous hydrochloric acid.

LEE

Jesus.

HAROLD

They won't let us do this in town.

LEE

No.

HAROLD

That's why we're way out here in the sticks. Well, one of the reasons.

LEE

The place has changed a lot since I was a kid.

HAROLD

The place hasn't changed, but the people have.

LEE

My sister calls you an old hippie.

HAROLD

I'm not old.

LEE

No. Sorry.

HAROLD

I wish I was old. Maybe I will be someday.  
From Jasper you said? I get my clay from a place just outside.

LEE

I remember that.

HAROLD

A lot of clay in those hills.

LEE

I know.

HAROLD

Something the Japanese taught me: always use the clay that's underneath your feet.

LEE

What if there isn't any?

HAROLD

Then you keep walking.

LEE

Unless it's raining, then you can't walk. It sucks your feet down so deep. I got so stuck in it once my sister had to come pull me out.

HAROLD

Lucky she was there to save you.

LEE

Oh, I don't think it was deep enough to be dangerous.

But Harry knows different.

HAROLD

Why did you stick your foot in it?

LEE

I guess because it felt good. It feels good on your skin.

HAROLD

You think I don't know?

LEE

But I didn't know it was the kind of clay you could make things out of. Not til we took that tour. All I knew was what my dad said about what happens when you build a house on it. They built all those new houses on it, you know, and all the foundations cracked.

HAROLD

Yeah, I know.

LEE

My dad never gets tired of telling us how he built his house on solid ground because he knew better.

HAROLD

Smart man, your dad.

LEE

All those huge new subdivision houses, they just like split in two within five years, but not his. You know where Ross's Woods is?

HAROLD

Of course I know it.

LEE

It's just that this place feels like it's a million miles from Jasper.

HAROLD

It's not. It's just down the road.

Lee picks up a coffee mug.

LEE

Mine looks like this. I got my dad one, too. I bought it in town, this little shop...?

HAROLD

Janelle's.

LEE

Yeah.

HAROLD

I don't sell my stuff there anymore.

LEE

How come?

HAROLD

We had a falling out. Janelle and I.

Lee looks at a larger piece, sees the price tag.

LEE

Wow that's expensive.

HAROLD

Is it?

LEE

I do love my mug though. It's my work mug. I use it at work. God, you must think I'm horrible.

HAROLD

You don't put pencils or paper clips in it do you?

LEE

No, but I don't / treat it like...

HAROLD

Then why would I think you were horrible?

LEE

I mean I just drink coffee from it.

HAROLD

That's what it's for.

LEE

But it's chipped. It got chipped.

HAROLD

You didn't throw it out did you?

LEE

No, of course not, it wasn't me that chipped it.

Harold puts a small pot in Lee's hands and holds onto it, pressing Lee's hands into the pottery with his own.

HAROLD

Feel that? These things are meant to be touched.

Lee takes a moment, feels the pottery. Harry keeps holding Lee's hands against the pot for an intense few seconds.

LEE

I need a funeral urn.

HAROLD

For your mom?

LEE

For my dog.

HAROLD

Your dog. Oh.

*(he lets go of Lee's hands, takes the pot from him)*

You said your mother died so I just assumed...

LEE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to insult you.

HAROLD

I'm not insulted.

LEE

You thought I was talking about my mother. Obviously, that would make sense, much more sense than going to all this trouble for just a dog, right?

HAROLD

It's not about the dog, mate.

LEE

My mother died two months ago. And she would never have been cremated. She said to me once it wasn't Biblical. I actually went through the Bible as a kid when she told me that to see if it said anything about it.

HAROLD

Did it?

LEE

Yeah. Definitely frowned upon. For humans, anyway. Apparently it's fine for dogs. But I get it if you think it's too weird... if I'm too weird for wanting to put my dog into one of your, well, what are / clearly works of art...

HAROLD

It's not that, it's not. I just don't do funeral urns.

LEE

It is a little weird.

HAROLD

It's not that weird. No, taxidermy...

LEE

What?

HAROLD

Taxidermy. For pets.

LEE

Oh. Huh...

HAROLD

That's fucking weird.

LEE

Yeah.  
Although I guess I can sort / of see...

HAROLD

Listen, I want people to use what I make. I want them to drink and eat and put flowers in what I make. I just feel like if you put ashes in one of these pots, seal it up, stick it on a shelf... it's like you're killing the piece itself.

LEE

I understand.  
Well, thanks. It was nice to meet you, Harry.

HAROLD

Lee...

LEE

I love my mug.

HAROLD

I don't have anything / made that would...

LEE

No, it's okay. Thank you though, I really–

HAROLD

Lee!

LEE

What?

Beat.

HAROLD

Did you bring him?

Lee holds up the tote bag he's been carrying. Harry considers it for a moment.

HAROLD

Leave him with me. Maybe I can find something that's suitable around but it / may take me–

LEE

Oh, that's okay. I wouldn't want you to compromise your...

HAROLD

Come on...

LEE

My sister has her employee discount at Walmart / so maybe I'll just–

HAROLD

Oh for fuck's sake. Really? Now I'm insulted.

LEE

Sorry.

HAROLD

You really appreciate my work? As an artist?

LEE

Yeah.

HAROLD

And you clearly loved your dog.

LEE

Of course.

HAROLD

Then leave him with me.  
Lee? Leave him with me.

Lee gives the bag to Harry.

LEE

His name was Jasper.

HAROLD

Jasper from Jasper.

LEE

Yeah. My dad named him. He does that. Names stuff. Kind of his thing.

HAROLD

I'm almost up to peak temperature. Look...

Harold opens the back door. A red-hot light and the loud roar of the huge kiln floods the room once again. Harold looks at a gauge on the wall just outside the door. He calls back to Lee, over the roaring.

HAROLD

I have to pour in the salt now. You should probably go.

LEE

Could I watch?

HAROLD

Fine, if you like, but stay back!

Harold picks up a long narrow tray, four or five feet long, loaded with huge crystals of salt. He carries it out the back door.

Offstage the roar grows suddenly louder. The light shining on Lee's face changes from red to orange.

Then the sound of the salt sliding down a chute: a whooshing sound followed by a loud, ominous hissing. As Lee watches, the light reflected off his face slowly changes from orange to yellow to white hot.

LEE

Oh my God.

Lights grow brighter and brighter.

SCENE SIX

The Condo. Later that evening.

Melinda is in the process of emptying the kitchen trash. She pulls the bag out, starts to tie it off. Offstage, the door to the apartment opens and shuts.

MELINDA

Hello?

Mel quickly finishes tying up the bag as Lee enters.

LEE

Hey, man. Don't close that up yet.

MELINDA

I already tied it.

LEE

That's okay. Just leave it there.

She sets it down by the dining table. Lee goes to the kitchen, gets a drink from the fridge.

MELINDA

How was Becky? Did you eat in the parking lot again?

LEE

Yep.

MELINDA

So weird.

LEE

Yep. God, every time I leave the house I still rush back here to walk Jazzy. Crazy, huh?

MELINDA

It's just a habit.

LEE

Just a habit, Cabbit.

MELINDA  
Want some Cabbit cake?

LEE  
Sure, is there still some left?

Melinda uncovers the remains of the now partially-eaten red velvet cake.

LEE  
Nom nom nom.

Melinda cuts two slices for them. They sit and eat.

MELINDA  
You seem better.

LEE  
I guess, yeah. I met Harry the Potter.

MELINDA  
Who?

LEE  
Harold Hawes. The pottery guy? His studio's in Jasper County.

MELINDA  
Oh, oh right. Didn't we do his website?

LEE  
God, no. His website sucks. And he's only open like four times a year.

MELINDA  
You should go after him, he's a pretty big deal you know.

LEE  
I doubt he'd see the need. Seems to like things the way they are.  
I left Jazz's ashes with him.

MELINDA  
Really? So he's gonna make you an urn?

LEE  
I'm not really sure. He's gonna do something with them, he wouldn't say what.

MELINDA

But you trust him?

LEE

Yeah. Yeah, I do. I don't know why. Something about him. Not your typical Jasper County resident that's for sure.

MELINDA

Speaking of... what did Becky want?

LEE

To chew me out basically. She thinks Daddy's a compulsive gambler and I'm enabling him.

MELINDA

I don't think she's wrong, Bear.

LEE

When we walked to the Seven-Eleven the other day? It was like, like we were just walking and talking. Just like a couple of regular dudes going to the store. Oh, and I meant to tell you. When I walked the rest of the way home?

MELINDA

Yeah?

LEE

I was suddenly by myself and I realized, I don't have a dog with me. Have you had this yet? We always took him with us when we walked down to the store, right? And it was so strange, seeing other people with their dogs and not to be all like, is it friendly? Will Jazz go after it? And they're all like... like you know the terrier who lives on six?

MELINDA

The one who looks like Hayate in *Full Metal Alchemist*?

LEE

More like Akamaru.

MELINDA

“Oooh, Tadakichi-san!”

LEE

“Oooh, Tadakichi-san!”

They giggle like little Japanese anime girls.

LEE

That one, yeah. They were out walking and even he was like, like even more cartoony than he usually is. Like he didn't seem real... he was more than real, like an alien, like some kind of alien dog with a secret, leading his human somewhere scary and awful.

Lee finishes his cake, goes to the kitchen, opens a drawer and starts pulling out all of Jasper's pill bottles and other medications.

MELINDA

What are you doing, Bear?

LEE

I'm ready to get rid of some stuff.

Lee takes all the bottles of medication over to the dining table, pulls the trash bag over, opens it and sorts through them.

MELINDA

Oh. Okay...

LEE

Thought I'd donate these. Most of them are almost empty though.

Lee unties the trash bag, then begins the process of going through each pill bottle to see if there are any pills inside. He tosses the near-empties into the trash, saves others.

Then he finds a bottle with several pills inside.

LEE

Ooh, I've been looking for these.

You wanna?

MELINDA

Yeah, sure. What are they?

LEE

Mom's leftover Xanax.

He sets aside another empty bottle, then picks up another and shakes it. There are several pills left in this bottle. It's the one with the X on the label.

Melinda downs a Xanax with whatever she's drinking,  
then passes her glass to Lee.

MELINDA  
(handing him the water)

Here.

LEE

Oh. Thanks.

He downs the Xanax, then opens the bottle with the X on  
the label, pours the pills onto the table and counts them.

MELINDA

Bear, what are you doing?

LEE

I told you...  
Wait.

He re-counts the pills - something's not right.

MELINDA

Tracy wants to know when you're coming back to work.

LEE  
(trying not to lose count)

Kitty, please.

MELINDA

Medpharm wants their new site map / delivered by next-

LEE

Yeah, Tracey emailed me. Did you not give Jazz his mexilitine?

MELINDA

Are you counting the pills?

LEE

Yeah, because there's too many left over. Did you give Jasper his mexilitine or not?

MELINDA

What? Yeah.  
I mean... wait. Which one is the mexilitine?

LEE

(holding up the bottle with the X)

The one that says mexilitine. This one.

MELINDA

You said don't give him the one with the X on the label.

LEE

No, I said *do* give him the one with the X on the label.

MELINDA

That makes no sense. Why would an X mean that?

LEE

You didn't give Jasper his heart meds, Mel?

MELINDA

I only missed a couple days.  
It wasn't enough to kill him.

LEE

This was the only one you were supposed to give him. The mexilitine. These (*he holds up the almost-empty bottle she dumped the other pills out of earlier*) are the ones that make him worse. The ones they told me to stop giving him because they might kill him.

MELINDA

Then why did you save them?

LEE

What?

MELINDA

Wait ... wait, no, I didn't give him those. I gave him the right ones. The "X" ones.

LEE

Then there should be more of these left. There were like ten of them in the bottle and now there's only three. You gave him these instead of those.

MELINDA

No, that's not ... okay I gave him like maybe three of the mexili-things but then I thought they were the wrong ones, but by then I didn't want you to know I didn't give the others to him so I threw some of them out / but I don't-

LEE

Wait, what?

Lee grabs the trash bag, opens it up and starts looking through the garbage inside.

MELINDA

Jesus, Bear, I'm sorry. I just got them / mixed up and...

LEE

It was the only thing I asked you to do. One little thing you had to do for him, / once a day.

MELINDA

I did it, I just got them mixed up, that's all.

LEE

I marked it really plainly.

MELINDA

With an X.

LEE

Plus I told you the name of the medication.

MELINDA

Which I forgot / and I'm so—

LEE

Which you forgot?

The trashbag is still in Lee's hand. He is gesturing with it, somewhat threateningly. Some garbage has started to spill out.

MELINDA

Okay, please / stop now, Lee.

LEE

Did you stay high the whole goddamn time I / was gone?

MELINDA

No, I did not stay high the / whole time—

LEE

How much weed is left?

Lee has begun slinging the trash bag around, coming closer and closer to her, maybe throwing bits of trash at her, nothing physically painful but certainly humiliating.

MELINDA

Stop it.

LEE

Were you popping my dead mother's pills too?

MELINDA

You just took one! Do not start judging me Lee / because you–

LEE

You killed my motherfucking dog, Mel!

MELINDA

You get high too!

LEE

If you didn't want to take care of him you should have just told me.

MELINDA

He was fifteen years old.

LEE

Fourteen.

MELINDA

Still that's really old / for a Boxer.

LEE

He might've lived longer, you / don't know.

MELINDA

He pissed all over everything all the time. He had / cataracts...

LEE

Did you hate him all this time? Is that why you never / bothered to learn how to...

MELINDA

No. Listen to me.

I didn't do it on purpose!

On that line, Melinda yanks the trash bag out of his hands.

Maybe just a little, though?

LEE

Little beat.

Maybe.  
Aren't you *relieved*?

MELINDA

Huge beat.

It wasn't your call.

LEE

I didn't make any calls, Bear. I just made a mistake.

MELINDA

You did? You think?

LEE

Melinda drops the trash bag and goes to him. She takes his face in her hands but he pulls away.

I'm sorry!

MELINDA

She runs to the back of the apartment, slamming her door.

Lights fade.

SCENE SEVEN

The Condo - Three Months Later

It's December. A cold, crystal clear blue sky is visible through the window. The Recordio has been set up on a side-table, displayed nicely but not looking like it's been used. Some super-kitschy Christmas decorations.

Lee is curled up on the sofa, looking at his iPad. He wears a hoodie with brown and white patches and puppy dog ears on the hood. A matching pair of flannel drawstring pants maybe.

His PHONE RINGS. He looks at the number then answers it.

LEE

Hey.

Um ... sure ... I haven't cleaned in awhile but...

Okay. Yeah. I'll buzz you in.

No, no. Remember? Just push on the door when you... yeah hang... hang on.

Lee pushes and holds a number on his phone, then puts his phone in his pocket. He cleans up a little, takes some laundry to his bedroom, comes back out. The door buzzer sounds and he exits to the front hall to answer the door.

Just before he disappears he remembers to yank the hood down off his head.

Voices offstage:

LEE

Hey.

DEAN

What's going on.

LEE

Come on in.

Dean enters, followed by Lee. Dean has a white envelope sticking out of his shirt-front pocket.

DEAN

How in the world does that work anyway?

LEE

When you push the button downstairs it calls me on my cellphone. Can I program you to do that maybe? Call me on my cellphone before you come all the way into town / without any warning?

DEAN

Now, I hadn't exactly planned on coming.

LEE

You never used to come here and now you're here all the time.

DEAN

I wanted to see how you was doing.

LEE

He died three months ago, Daddy.

DEAN

Who died? Oh, the dog. No that ain't what I meant. But I come to see you back then, too.

LEE

That's not why you came but yeah, okay.

DEAN

And you know this is sorta on my way back from Choctaw anyhow...

LEE

I was supposed to have a talk with you about that.

DEAN

Well is that right? A talk, huh? Well I come to have a talk with you, too.

LEE

Becky's been on me for months about it but I keep putting her off.

DEAN

How long since you been out of the house?

LEE

She says you've been going to the boat a lot, staying out all hours.

DEAN

Where's that pretty gal you–

LEE

She thinks you've got a problem.

DEAN

I do.

LEE

I keep putting her off 'cause I / think you're –

DEAN

I said I do have a problem.

LEE

You do?

DEAN

I got forty-five thousand five hundred and seventy five problems just a' burning a hole in my pocket.

Dean takes the envelope from his shirt pocket and hands it to Lee, who opens it up and finds a check inside.

LEE

Huh.

DEAN

Now get dressed and let me buy you lunch. We got to celebrate!

LEE

I am dressed...

DEAN

Don't you tell your sister about this, you hear me?

LEE

Forty-five thousand five hundred / and seventy five dollars?

DEAN

And seventy-five dollars. I know! Ain't that awesome?

LEE

Where did you get this?

DEAN

I won it! See there? Says Choctaw Nation Gaming Corporation, Inc. That's the Injuns that own the / boat, see...

LEE

Dad please / don't say –

DEAN

I didn't win that at no nickel slot machine, neither. I made that wad shooting craps! Ain't just anybody can do that you know. Learned it in the service.

LEE

You're not supposed to go to the casino anymore.

DEAN

Don't worry. I won't.

LEE

You won't?

DEAN

Nope. No way. I'm old but I ain't stupid. I know to quit when I'm ahead. Your sister don't think I do, but I do. But now I mean it, son, you got to help me. Put this in the bank for me and don't tell nobody about it til I figure out what I'm gonna do.

LEE

Daddy, you have to tell Becky about this.

DEAN

Why?

LEE

Because she / needs to–

DEAN

I don't have to do a fucking thing I don't want to do...

LEE

Daddy.

DEAN

That's right. I used the F word. You use it all the time I bet, don't you.

LEE

Yes but it doesn't sound right coming / out of your –

DEAN

You'll get used to it. Listen: fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck.

LEE

Daddy...

DEAN

Fuck old age. Fuck death. Fuck your fucking / busy body sister.

LEE

Stop it, now...

DEAN

Oooh, she hates that word, Becky does. I probably wouldn't say it in front of her. But I can be myself with you.

Can't I?

LEE

Yes, sir.

DEAN

I can even have a drink with you if I want to.

LEE

You mean another drink? What time is it?

DEAN

It ain't noon yet.

LEE

Um... I'm not sure what we've got / in the house.

DEAN

No, no, that's okay. I brought my own. See, look here.

*(he pulls out a hip-flask)*

I bought this in the little shopping mall they got on the boat. It's / solid silver...

LEE

Dad, I was kidding. It's eleven in the –

DEAN

*(shutting him up)*

Agh! Uh uh.

He unstops the flask, takes a long pull.

LEE

Daddy, you don't even...

DEAN

Shut up. Here.

He offers it to Lee, who sniffs it, takes a little sip and hands it back to Dean, smiling, almost laughing maybe.

DEAN

What?

LEE

Sorry, Daddy, it's fine. Drink all the Amaretto you want.

DEAN

I'm pretty drunk already, you know.

He's not, not really.

LEE

I see that.

DEAN

You got anything to mix this with?

LEE

Like...

DEAN

7-Up?

LEE

I think so.

Lee goes to get a can of soda from the fridge.

Dean pulls out his old Harry Hawes pottery mug from a deep coat pocket.

DEAN

Put me some ice in this?

LEE

Sure. Hey, look at that.

DEAN

I saved it from the jaws of defeat.

LEE

I gave you that.

DEAN

That's why I saved it.

Lee looks at the price tag still on the bottom.

LEE

A dollar?

DEAN

Don't get me started.

Dean peels the price tag off the mug.

LEE

So were you there all night?

DEAN

Where?

LEE

The boat.

DEAN

Yep! Took me all night long to win that much. Then I come straight here to tell you. Say, where's that cute little black girl?

LEE

Do you not remember her name?

DEAN

Well... it ain't exactly that I forgot it.

LEE

Well she's not here anyway.

DEAN

Where'd she go?

LEE

Nowhere. She's at her mother's.

DEAN

Oh. Oh.  
She married?

LEE

Who?

DEAN

Her mama.

LEE

Yeah. Happily.

DEAN

Oh.  
To be perfectly honest I never knew it to begin with.

LEE

What?

DEAN

Her name. No, now it ain't 'cause she's black. And it ain't cause I'm old either. I've always had this thing ... see, I can admit stuff like this, now I've got all this money. I've always had this problem with names. It ain't that I forget. But I look at a person, and I can't help but decide when I see their face what their name should be. I see somebody that looks like a Loretta or a Barney, well that's what I'm always gonna think their name is. Usually that doesn't turn out to be their actual name.

Lee brings Dean a glass of ice and the soda can, already opened.

LEE

No. Really?

DEAN

(making his drink)

But I can't help it.

And once my brain comes up with the name I think they should have, it kinda crowds out any subsequent information I might receive about, say, what their real name is.

LEE

What name did your brain come up with?

DEAN

Kitty Cat!

LEE

I don't want you calling her that.

DEAN

How come? It suits her. I'm real good at naming people. That's why I was the one got to choose names for you and your sister.

LEE

And for Jasper.

DEAN

Well...

LEE

So I looked like a "Fairleigh" to you?

DEAN

Yep. You did. And I turned out to be right! You were fairly smart, fairly complected... fairly straight.

LEE

Where'd you get the name Rebecca?

DEAN

Some old movie, maybe? No, no. It was the Bible. Even as a baby you'd look at her and you just knew she'd turn out to be real religious.

LEE

I'd say you pegged both of us pretty well. But try to use Melinda's real name / if you don't-

DEAN

Who's Melinda? Oh, yeah. Your girlfriend. Where is she, anyway?

LEE

She's not here I told you.

DEAN

But she is your girlfriend.

LEE

You have to tell Becky about this money. You owe her / that much at –

DEAN

I don't owe her nothing.

LEE

She's letting you park your camper in her yard.

DEAN

That don't cost her nothing.

LEE

You use her water and her electricity.

DEAN

So? She used mine for eighteen years. But look here. I do owe you something, son. I kept this much out in cash.

Dean pulls out a wad of cash and counts out four bills.

DEAN

There's four hundred dollars. Keep the change.

Dean sets the money on the coffee table, walks over to the Recordio, picks up the microphone and starts to put it inside and close the thing up.

LEE

Hey, hey, what are you doing?

DEAN

I'm buying this back.

LEE

Stop. Put that down.

Lee takes the microphone from him and shuts the case. He picks up the money and presses it back into Dean's hands.

DEAN

What's wrong? I told you I'd buy it back when I won big, and I won big so I'm buying it back. I'm buying everything back.

LEE

It's not for sale.

DEAN

You ain't made a single record.

LEE

Keep your cash and your check and leave my Recordio alone.

DEAN

Not the check, now. Becky'll / make me give her—

LEE

Go to the bank and open another account then. You can do / that without me.

DEAN

But she's got a power of attorney.

LEE

I'll talk to her.

DEAN

If she finds out about it she'll take it away.

LEE

She won't. I'll go out there and talk to her this afternoon.

DEAN

You will? Oh, thank you, son.

LEE

What do you want to spend it on?

DEAN

I want to buy all my stuff back. All my family heirlooms.

LEE

You got a bunch of heirlooms do you?

DEAN

I did. They're all gone now. She sold 'em to a junk man.

*(re: the Recordio)*

Everything but that. Please let me have it back, son...

LEE

No way.

You can come over here and play with it any time you like. Okay?

DEAN

You don't even know how to work it.

LEE

It can't be that hard.

DEAN

You had it three months and you ain't even plugged it in.

LEE

Well, let's do it.

DEAN

Now?

LEE

Yep. Here...

Lee opens the case back up. There's a record on the turntable which Lee picks up.

DEAN

What you got there?

LEE

I wonder.

DEAN

Let me see.

Hold it by the edges now...

LEE

It's blank on this side.

Lee turns the disc over, still holding it with his palms against the edges. The flip side is perfectly clean and preserved. Shiny, black and heavily grooved.

DEAN  
This side ain't blank.  
Oh, I remember this.

LEE  
Let's play it.

DEAN  
No, now I don't...

Lee gently sets the record on the turntable, finds the cord, plugs it in, flips some switches and it starts spinning. He lowers the needle.

Some popping and hissing, but not too much. Then a fiddle and a guitar start to play the intro to an old-time Gospel song. A YOUNG WOMAN's voice, clear and unadorned, sings the verse...

WOMAN'S VOICE

(on Recordio)

*Life is like a mountain railroad,  
With an engineer that's brave.  
We must make the run successful,  
From the cradle to the grave.*

DEAN  
You know who that is?

LEE  
I don't want to hear this.

DEAN  
Come on now, just listen.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(on Recordio)

*Watch the curves, the fills, the tunnels,  
Never falter, never fail.  
Keep your hand upon the throttle,  
And your eye upon the rail.*

The fiddle and guitar play through another verse, without vocals. Lee looks like he's about to leave the room.

DEAN

Just listen to her, son. She had such a pretty voice.

When they get to the chorus, Dean sings along softly.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(on Recordio)

*Blessed savior, Thou wilt guide us,  
Til we reach that blissful shore.  
Where the angels wait to join us...*

DEAN

*Blessed savior, Thou wilt guide us,  
Til we reach that blissful shore.  
Where the angels wait to join us...*

Dean's voice trails off, his eyes shut.

DEAN

She wasn't so bad, then. Not when I first married her.

Lights and music fade.

SCENE EIGHT

The Walmart parking lot. A few hours later.

Becky sits on the bench as before, but it's cold now, so she wears a jacket over her uniform. She is texting on her phone with one hand and smoking a cigarette with the other. Whatever she is texting about, she's not happy.

Lee enters with two paper cups of coffee from Starbucks, goes to hand one to Becky.

BECKY

Hang on.

*(She keeps texting but is now getting frustrated.)*

Sausage fingers.

*(Exasperated, she gives up and puts her phone down. She takes a coffee from Lee, holds it in both hands.)*

Oh, that feels good.

LEE

Why don't we go inside? It's freezing.

BECKY

I wanna finish this first.

Lee sits.

LEE

You're smoking again.

BECKY

No. Not really.

Becky straightens her knee out, flexes her foot, relaxes it and repeats the motion.

LEE

Still bothering you?

BECKY

It's the weather. That and twenty years in retail. There's no cartilage left, so it just grinds away in there, bone on bone.

LEE

Can't you get it fixed?

BECKY

I will soon as I can take six weeks off work, which is never.

Her phone vibrates steadily. Someone is calling her, not texting.

LEE

Get that if you need to.

BECKY

No. It's just Bobby again. He thinks he's gonna move into Daddy's camper. Him and Marisol. Jerry told 'em no way, said he don't care if she is pregnant, that wasn't his idea...

LEE

She's pregnant?

BECKY

Well of course she is. She didn't waste a second, boy.

LEE

Listen, Beck, I / want to –

BECKY

I told Jerry to calm down, she's only six weeks on. She could still lose it. They shouldn't be telling people yet anyway, but they're too young to know any better. Of course she's illegal on top of everything else.

Becky stubs her cigarette out in the butt receptacle.

LEE

They want Daddy's trailer?

BECKY

Yeah but Jerry ain't gonna let them and I don't blame him.

LEE

Why does Jerry get to have / a say in it?

BECKY

Look, if they can haul it off and set it up somewhere else they're welcome to it. Course I have no idea where Daddy's planning on living, unless it's with you.

LEE

He hasn't said that...?

BECKY

He don't hardly talk to me anymore! He just comes and goes as he pleases, all hours of the night. And you know where he's going. We were this close to calling the highway patrol the other night. I'm serious, Lee, I think he's starting to lose it.

LEE

He is not losing it.

BECKY

How's that gonna work, him living with you and Melinda?

LEE

He's not living with us.

BECKY

Well where is he now?

LEE

He's at my house. We had a late night...

BECKY

I'll just bet you did. Well until he quits gambling he better stay / right where he –

LEE

He has quit.

BECKY

Course you probably go with him / every night.

LEE

He has quit gambling, Becky.  
He says he's done.

BECKY

And you believe him?

LEE

Yeah.

BECKY

Well he better be. He's got camper payments to make. And he owes me for utilities.

LEE

That's not why he quit.

BECKY

What did you say to him? He wouldn't listen to me.

LEE

I didn't say a word.

BECKY

Then why did he quit?

LEE

Because he won.

BECKY

He what?

LEE

That's what I came out here to tell you. He won. Big time. Not BIG big, but you know... enough.

BECKY

Enough to what?

LEE

Make his house payments for one.

BECKY

We're selling that house.

LEE

Nobody's gonna buy that house, Becky.

BECKY

I've got power of attorney.

LEE

He's revoking it.

BECKY

He's what?

LEE

He's trying to buy back the furniture, too. I think he found some of it for sale at Beggars and Choosers.

BECKY

Where's he gonna put all of it?

LEE

Right back where it was I guess.

BECKY

All of it?

LEE

Except for the Recordio. I wouldn't sell that. He was so mad...

BECKY

You helped him do all this?

LEE

No but I'm going to.

BECKY

You know he's gonna die too, one day. Just like you're gonna have to start acting like a grown man.

LEE

He's got plenty of time left.

BECKY

Nobody has got plenty of time! And the two of y'all acting like a couple of little boys ain't gonna stop the clock for either one of you. I'm sick of it.

LEE

Sick of what?

BECKY

You coming out here and looking down on me 'cause I work here. Turning up your nose at my life, at my family when I'm working til my bones are literally worn out. I don't know maybe its cause you were a oops baby but y'all wouldn't even be doing this if Mama was alive.

LEE

I know. Thank God he outlived her.

BECKY

You... *shit*. You act like you're glad she's dead. Both of you / act just like –

LEE

Oh Jesus, Becky it's been / almost six–

BECKY

You cried more for that damn dog than you did for your / own mother.

LEE

Jazz loved me.

BECKY

He was an animal, she was your mother.

LEE

No, not really.

You were more of a mother to me than she ever was. Then you left.

BECKY

I got married.

LEE

You got out.

BECKY

What was I supposed to do, honey? Take you with me?

LEE

Oh, I wanted you to. I wanted you to so much.

BECKY

She couldn't help what she was.

LEE

So with her it was all sickness and no sin, / but Daddy–

BECKY

We're all sinners.

LEE

So we're just supposed to keep pretending she didn't hurt us? I can't do that. And I wish you wouldn't.

BECKY

I'm not.

LEE

When I hear you talking about your own son the way you just did...

BECKY

Lee be / careful...

LEE

...a kid who clearly needs you and has needed you for a long time but you can't seem to summon / a shred of sympathy...

BECKY

Don't talk about / my son.

LEE

...when you speak I hear her voice. Her anger, her awful certainty. But you aren't like her, you're not sick. It's just... when you try to run Daddy's life and judge what he does all the time, him and me too, it's like you're trying to be her. How could anyone want to be her? I can't be sad she's gone. I just can't.

She was *horrible*.

Becky SLAPS him hard.

A green light from the top of a mall security patrol flashes across their faces. Snow starts to fall.

SCENE NINE

Harry Hawes Pottery

The flashing green light changes to a steady glowing red as the snow swirls around Lee and the scene shifts to Harry's place.

This time we are out back, behind the little showroom, where a sort of open-air tent shelters a huge Japanese Anagama kiln. It looks like an elongated brick and plaster-covered dome. There is the suggestion that some of it extends underground. Orange/red firelight shines bright through an open hatch at the mouth of the kiln and through various stoke-holes along the sides.

The red light intensifies, revealing Harry, crouched by the hatch stoking the fire with a long pole. He's dressed only in khaki shorts, or maybe just some kind of loincloth. A layer of reddish-brown clay is smeared all over his face and body, from the top of his head to his toes.

Lee seems dazed and a bit unsteady as he enters the place. The bridge of his nose is cut.

LEE

Harry? Harry!

HAROLD

Who's that?

LEE

Harry it's me.

HAROLD

This isn't a good time.

LEE

I had an accident.

Harold comes closer, gets a good look.

HAROLD

Jesus, it's Lee, isn't it? Lee Sherman.

LEE

I hit some black ice I think.  
I drove into a tree.

HAROLD

Christ, you're bleeding. Sit down.

Harry gets a cloth, dabs at Lee's nose. Lee holds the cloth  
in place.

LEE

I tried to call a tow truck but they said it would be tomorrow if the roads are even open  
then.

HAROLD

Where's your car?

LEE

On the highway. I was on my way home but the Interstate's closed so I took 54. I've been  
meaning to come by here anyway. I left you a lot of messages.

HAROLD

Yeah, I know.

LEE

I want my dog back. I want Jazzy's ashes.

HAROLD

Look, I'm firing some new stuff tonight and we're almost at peak temperature.

LEE

I don't care. I don't...

Lee kind of zones out.

HAROLD

Lee? Should I call someone for you?

LEE

It was a one car accident. One car, one tree.  
What did you say?

HAROLD

Should I call someone? Didn't you say you had a sister...?

LEE

My sister! My sister hit me.

HAROLD

She hit you? In your car?

LEE

No, in my face.

HAROLD

Jesus. Why?

LEE

Because our mother died.

Beat.

HAROLD

Your dad, maybe? You said he lives out–

LEE

My dad's at my place with Melinda.

HAROLD

Melinda? Who's that?

LEE

She's my asexual furry life partner.

A beat. The wind blows. Pellets of freezing rain can be heard hitting the tin roof.

HAROLD

I don't think you're going anywhere tonight.

LEE

I called Triple-A but they said / the roads were...

HAROLD

Shhh. No worries. You can stay here. I'll be up all night with this anyway. We're at a critical stage.

LEE

Yeah, you said. Harry, what is all that on your...?

HAROLD

That's a hundred percent pure Jasper County red clay, don't you recognize it?

LEE

Is it ... what ... some kind of ritual or...?

HAROLD

Maybe. Don't freak out.

LEE

I'm not. Just... you look like...

HAROLD

Hephaestus? Oromë ? Lucifer?

LEE

No.

HAROLD

Oh. Who then?

LEE

Me. Like me.

I used to do that. I used to smear the clay all over myself. This one time? I forget when but it was raining. A hot rain like you get here in summer. Tonight the rain's frozen.

HAROLD

Not under here, we're at peak temperature! Here, give me that.

Harold helps Lee off with his coat.

LEE

Thanks. Yeah, I can feel it, it's hot. That why you...?

HAROLD

I guess so. Also the clay helps protect my skin from the horribly caustic chemicals I'm producing in there.

LEE

Jesus.

HAROLD

Hazmat suits get so bloody hot you see.

LEE

Oh, right, because of the salt and the...

HAROLD

No salt this time. This firing we use ash.

LEE

What kind of ash?

HAROLD

Various kinds. Wood ashes. Bone ash.

LEE

Did you say bone? Like human bone?

HAROLD

People do.  
But usually it's animal bone.

LEE

Animal bone?  
Wait, where the fuck are Jazzy's ashes?

HAROLD

Lee...

LEE

I've called and called...

HAROLD

Yeah, I'm sorry, but if you can just wait a few more / days I promise—

LEE

Just give him back to me, Harry.

HAROLD

Sit down, mate. You're heads a bit / funny isn't it?

LEE

I don't care I just want his / ashes back.

HAROLD

I know. And I'm telling you I've got it all / in hand.

LEE

All I wanted was a jar or something, with a lid, and you put the ashes in and seal it up and we're done.

HAROLD

I know. I'm sorry. But I couldn't find anything here, and Georgio isn't / speaking to me...

LEE

I don't care / I just–

HAROLD

But then I thought: hang on, why seal him away in one jar, when he could be in all of them?

LEE

All of them?

HAROLD

Yes.

Harold pulls out the long tray from before, sets it on a table. Then he pulls out the tote bag with Jasper's ashes and removes them, still in their cardboard box.

LEE

I wanted to put him inside your beautiful pottery but / you said you–

HAROLD

And that's exactly where he'll go. Well, not so much in it... as on it.

Lee opens the box, peers inside. Hesitates.

HAROLD

We're at peak temperature.

LEE

Peak temperature... right. How is it done?

HAROLD

The bone ash goes in at peak temperature. It flies around in there, becomes molten, and settles onto all the pots in the kiln. All two thousand of them. When they cool? Ahh, lovely.

LEE

Just pour them into the kiln?

HAROLD

That's right. But it's really dangerous.  
Lee?

But Lee is already pouring the ashes into the tray.

LEE

Maybe that's why I'm here. Maybe this is how it's supposed to happen.

HAROLD

I don't think that's...

Lee turns to him, pleading.

HAROLD

Fine. But you'll have to be careful.

LEE

(pointing at the clay covering Harry's body)

Do I get some of that?

Harold laughs a pleasantly maniacal laugh and nods.

HAROLD

Take your shirt off.

LEE

Yeah?

HAROLD

Do it.

As Lee takes his shirt off, Harold puts a bucket of thick, red clay slurry on the table in front of him.

HAROLD

Now. Take some of this.

Lee reaches into the bucket and brings up a handful of wet clay, like thin red mud.

HAROLD

That's it.

Lee smears some of it on his bare arm. His chest. He keeps smearing it on. Harry grabs a handful and smears it on Lee's back as they talk.

LEE

These people don't appreciate you.

HAROLD

Who are you talking about?

LEE

Fucking Jasper County people. My people.

HAROLD

I like to think the land appreciates me. People are temporary. Others came before, more will come after. I'm not the first to make lovely pottery out of Jasper County clay. I pray I won't be the last.

LOUD CRACKING SOUNDS can be heard outside.

HAROLD

The trees. They're starting to snap from the weight of the ice.

Another LOUD CRACK. Lee looks down at the mud Harry has smeared on his body, fascinated.

HAROLD

There. That what you looked like?

LEE

I used to put it all over.

Lee strips down to his underwear; Harold smears mud over the rest of his body.

HAROLD

You used to do this when you were a kid?

LEE

I did it once. Just once.

HAROLD

Tell me.

LEE

The Indians made this old sunken road, maybe half a mile from where we lived, back in Ross's Woods. The old roads they made were... still are... more like... like a deep ditch with high banks, you know? And the banks were all made of this. They sloped away from the path, four or five feet high in some places. In the summer the rain washes down the sides. Jazz was just a puppy. I took him out there with me and we ran, down that old road, following it deeper and deeper into the woods. It started to rain. And I don't know what made me think to do it... but it was a hot rain and... and so I stripped down, like totally stripped. And I laid my front down flat against the bank. I reached up and grabbed the tree roots sticking out of the ground above my head. I dug my toes into that red mud, red like blood. I just laid there and... and the water and the mud washed down over me and oh, it felt so good. I was covered – my face, too.

Harold smears some clay on Lee's face.

LEE

I went running through the woods, pretending I was an Indian. Or a bear. Or a wolf. That time I was a wolf. I pulled out Jazz's loose fur and stuck it to myself. I found moss hanging from a tree and I stuck that on too. Onto the wet clay. The wolf was my favorite. He was so fast and so fucking fearless! I loved myself as him! I looked like a whole other animal. We ran all the way home. I even howled. Jazz howled. When the rain stopped the clay hardened and cracked in the heat.

HAROLD

It does that.

LEE

I wanted to see myself.

Lee pauses, remembering.

HAROLD

Lee?

LEE

Oh, Jesus. I ran home to look in the mirror. There was no one else to see me but I wanted to see. Nobody else was there. My sister Becky was gone, she married her boyfriend Jerry and they had a baby named Bobby. Mama was working then so no one was home. So I went inside and walked down the hall to the bathroom. I tracked dry red mud on the snow white carpet. I went into the bathroom where there was a big mirror. I looked and looked. Then I heard Jasper barking outside. I heard my mother's car in the carport.

Heard her open the door. She was supposed to be at work. I tried to hide but she followed my footprints in the carpet. She found me. My mother was a very clean woman.

HAROLD

What did she do?

LEE

She dragged me outside. Tore off a switch from this little tree we used to have with these red berries on it. She stripped the leaves but there were still some berries, must have been because there was red on my...

Jazz started freaking out and growling, barking like he was gonna come after her, so Mama locked him in the garage and then she turned on the hose and she hosed me down outside. In the front yard. A couple of neighbor kids were on the street playing and they saw it happen and ran home. Then she took me back inside and put me in the tub and poured bleach on me, turned the shower on hot, used a scrub brush, anything she could get her hands on to get me clean. It burned me. It burned me...

LEE

She left me in the tub and shut the door. I guess somebody called my Dad. He came home and found us like that. He found me in the tub, rinsed me off, wrapped me in a towel and put me in my room. Then he turned on... I just remembered this. He turned on the Recordio. Loud. It was her singing on the record, but I heard her crying too, him yelling and her crying. Then he was on the phone. My sister came to stay with me. She didn't ask any questions though. She never did.

He put her in the hospital. And Jazz... for some reason Jazz had to go to the vet. I asked Daddy what happened to him but he wouldn't talk about it. He still won't.

Lee is now covered in red clay. He looks amazing. If he's crying, tears wash tracks in the clay on his face. Harold finds a pair of gloves, hands them to Lee.

Lee puts on the gloves, picks up the tray and walks over to the kiln. A ladder leads up to a small hatch above his head.

LEE

Where?

HAROLD

Up there.

Lee takes the tray and climbs up the ladder to the small opening high up on the side of the kiln.

LEE  
Here?

HAROLD  
Yeah, open it up.

He opens the damper and a red-hot roaring wind blows outward. He turns back to Harry.

LEE  
It's too hot!

HAROLD  
Keep your face back from it!  
Good. Good. Okay. Carefully now, just let it all go.

Lee lifts the tray to the opening.

HAROLD  
Lee. Just let it go. Let it all go!

Lee slides the tray into the kiln. Snapping, popping sounds come from inside, sparks fly out, a loud roar begins.

HAROLD  
Now close the door!

But Lee just stares dangerously into the kiln.

HAROLD  
Now shut it and get down!  
Lee!!

A shower of sparks and a blast of hot air send Lee tumbling down off the ladder and into Harry's arms.

HAROLD  
He's in all of them now.

LEE  
I want him back.

HAROLD  
I know.

LEE

My dad gave him to me. My dad gave him his name.

Lights fade.

SCENE TEN

The Condo, later that night.

The power is off in the apartment, so there are no other lights or appliances on. Sleet can be heard tapping against the glass when the wind picks up. Outside the window the sky is a heavy, dark grey.

Melinda enters from her bedroom, carrying a battery-powered lamp or camp flashlight. She absently flips a light switch, but nothing happens.

MELINDA

Ugh. Stupid.

She hangs the lamp up somewhere in the kitchen, then starts lighting candles. As the light grows around her, we see Melinda is all bundled up. She wears layers of pajamas, and a knit hat with big fuzzy ears that suggest a rabbit's, or maybe a cat's.

A shadowy figure is discernible on the sofa. It is Dean, lying there motionless, his arms and legs stretched out, the same position as Jasper was in Scene One.

Also, HE WEARS A DOG SUIT. The suit is brown and white, with big furry paws and feet, but no head.

MELINDA

Oh my God.

She sets the candle on the coffee table amid a messy collection of glasses, Dean's coffee mug and a mostly-empty bottle of amaretto.

MELINDA

Mr. Sherman?

(no response)

Dean?

Dean stirs, sits up.

DEAN

Hm? What time is it?

MELINDA  
It's late.

She lights another candle.

DEAN  
What's going on?

MELINDA  
The power's out.

DEAN  
(focusing, seeing her now)  
Kitty cat!

MELINDA  
Why are you still out here? You fall asleep on the couch?

DEAN  
Yeah. Fairleigh home yet?

MELINDA  
No. He called, though. I think he's staying put for the night.  
Mr. Sherman? I'm not sure listening to all those old records over and over is such a good idea.

DEAN  
I was listening to the new one he and me made the other night.

MELINDA  
Oh. How'd it sound?

DEAN  
Fairleigh sure sings like his mama.

Dean gets up, pads over to the window and looks out.

DEAN  
It's still coming down.

MELINDA  
It's freezing in here. Why don't you go sleep in Lee's room?

DEAN  
I don't mind sleeping out here.

MELINDA

Weren't you cold?

DEAN

I was til I put these on. I found 'em in the closet there. I thought they was pajamas but they're kinda big in the feet.  
Men my age like to wear pajamas.

MELINDA

Come on. Lee's bed has a quilt on it.

DEAN

No, I don't want to mess it up.

MELINDA

Come on now. Til Lee gets home you should stay in there.

Melinda starts picking up after Dean. She finds his khakis draped over a dining chair.

DEAN

I don't want to mess it up I said.

MELINDA

Come on, now. And let me get you something else to / sleep in.

DEAN

No, now I'm fine in this.

MELINDA

But there's no reason why you should sleep out here when...

Melinda realizes the trousers in her hands are damp and a little stinky.

DEAN

I peed in my pants.  
That's why I put this on. I peed in it a little too, I think. But it's good and thick so I don't think any got on the couch.

MELINDA

Jazz peed on that couch a hundred times. I'm sure you didn't hurt it.

DEAN

I'll get the dog suit cleaned. If we live.  
This belongs to Lee, right?

Melinda nods.

DEAN

How come Fairleigh to have a dog suit?

MELINDA

Umm... no reason. Just, you know.  
It's a hobby.

DEAN

You got one too?

MELINDA

No...

DEAN

You sure? Come on...

MELINDA

I don't have a dog suit.

DEAN

Oh. What do you have then?

MELINDA

It's... a Cabbit? Like a cat... but also a little like a rabbit.  
Sort of a cat - rabbit hybrid.

Small beat.

DEAN

Can I see it?

MELINDA

No, I don't / think I want to—

DEAN

Okay, okay, I was just asking.  
This hobby... it's nothing weird, is it?

MELINDA

What? No. Not really.

DEAN

Oh.  
Why not?

MELINDA

What do you mean why not?

DEAN

I mean how come you and Fairleigh don't ever *get weird*? You want to, don't you?

MELINDA

No. No...

But she's not convincing. She sits on the sofa, opens the amaretto, pours herself a shot and takes it.

DEAN

Oh, pretty girl...

Melinda pours Dean a shot, too. He sits next to her. She takes out a vaping pen, hits it.

MELINDA

I don't feel pretty.  
I don't. So I decorate myself. Sometimes I guess I disguise myself.  
I put on a fur-suit. I assume a fur-sona. And it changes me. And it doesn't matter. I'm beautiful and wise and soft, but I also have claws and teeth and I'm dangerous, too. My coat is sleek and black and my eyes are deep and full of rabbit knowledge. As her, I move with grace and authority. Others regard me, they see me and respect me. And then... then we play. We have fun. We cavort. And he looks at me with his giant brown eyes.....

DEAN

Fairleigh...?

MELINDA

He's a dog named Bear, and I'm a Cabbit named Bunny Kitty.  
We go to parties. There are conventions, too. We go to those.  
But then we come / home and-

DEAN

You both dress up?

MELINDA

Yeah. But we don't get weird. Because it's better that way.  
No, instead we eat cake, because you know what they say...

DEAN

No, what?

MELINDA

Good cake is better than—

DEAN

Bullshit.  
So this whole dog business is more / than just —

MELINDA

He thinks I killed him.

DEAN

Killed who?

MELINDA

Jasper. Lee thinks I killed him and he's never gonna forgive me.

DEAN

I see. Did you?

MELINDA

Not on purpose.

Beat. He takes the vaping pen from her, hits it, coughs a little.

DEAN

His mama tried to kill him once.

MELINDA

Lee?

DEAN

No. The dog.  
Jasper.

MELINDA

She did?

DEAN

He never told you?

MELINDA

No.

DEAN

Well, I ain't surprised. He may not even remember.

MELINDA

Lee's mom tried to kill Jazz?

DEAN

Yeah. Only she definitely did it on purpose. Locked him in the garage, cranked the car up and let it run til the barking stopped. I come home, opened the door and that little dog was just laid out on the concrete, breathing real hard. I went inside and Fairleigh was... well, it was a bad day all around. We don't talk about it much. He never told you?

She shakes her head "no."

DEAN

I shoulda left her after that. Hell, I never shoulda married her in the first place.

MELINDA

That's like wishing Lee had never been born.

DEAN

No, now I –

MELINDA

Or Becky.

DEAN

Well...

*(They laugh a little.)*

Some people think there ain't no such thing as accidents. I ain't saying you meant to kill Jasper. Hell, that dog was way past its expiration anyhow. But you meant for something to change. Didn't you?

Listen to me. You think you're young? You're not. Blink your eyes and see. Blink and you're forty, and you're still with him. Blink again and you're fifty. Are you still with him then?

*(Dean gets up, unzips the dog suit as he walks toward Lee's room.)*

This thing is hot. Reckon I better find something else. Where'd you say...?

MELINDA

Look in his dresser. Second or third drawer I think.

Dean? I'll put some towels down out here.

DEAN

Thank you.

You're a pretty girl, Melinda.

Dean exits. Melinda finds her phone, turns it on. While it powers up...

DEAN

(offstage)

Top drawer you said?

MELINDA

No, try the third. In the big dresser.

Melinda goes into the hall and brings back some towels and a quilt, which she lays out carefully on the sofa. As she does this, her phone dings a text alert. She picks up the phone, reads the text, taps out a brief reply, then finishes laying out the towels.

Dean enters in one of Lee's nerdiest t-shirts, with a screenprinted anime creature – a dog probably – and flannel lounge pants.

MELINDA

Better?

DEAN

They don't match.

*(Dean pulls back the blanket, sees the towels.)*

Mmm. That oughtta work.

He lies down and snuggles into the blankets. Melinda tucks him in, blows out the candles and exits.

SCENE ELEVEN

The Condo. Morning, a few days later.

Brilliant sunshine slowly illuminates the room as the sun comes up. Suddenly the power comes back on and everything starts whirring back to life.

The Recordio also comes back on. The record it was playing when the power went out quickly comes back up to speed. It plays a guitar intro to “You Are My Sunshine” with Dean and Lee talking over it.

DEAN’S VOICE

(on the Recordio)

Come on, now. One more.

LEE’S VOICE

(on the Recordio)

Daddy these are all sad old / timey songs—

DEAN’S VOICE

One more.

LEE’S VOICE

Okay, okay.

DEAN’S VOICE

*The other night dear,  
As I lay sleeping,  
I dreamed I held you in my arms.  
But when I woke, dear,  
I was mistaken,  
So I hung my head and I cried.*

As the chorus plays, Becky enters from the front door carrying some Walmart grocery bags, which she sets down on the dining table.

LEE AND DEAN

*You are my sunshine,  
My only sunshine.  
You make me happy,  
When skies are grey.  
You'll never know dear,  
How much I love you.  
Please don't take–*

Becky takes the needle off the record, abruptly ending the song in the middle of the chorus.

Lee enters behind her. He looks clean, shiny and well-rested, a white bandage on the bridge of his nose. He has a cardboard box in his arms which he sets down on the dining table.

LEE

We've got power?

BECKY

It just came on I think. Where is everybody?

LEE

I don't know.  
*(Calling out:)*  
Mel? Daddy?

Lee exits toward the bedrooms. We hear him knock, then open a door, then he and Melinda TALK OFFSTAGE for a bit:

LEE

Mel?

MELINDA

*(sleepy)*  
Bear? Oh my God, when did you get here?

LEE

Just now. Hey.

MELINDA

Are you okay?

Sound of Lee closing her bedroom door.  
Dean enters from Lee's bedroom.

DEAN

Well well well!

BECKY

What in this world are you wearing?

DEAN

These are Fairleigh's pajamas. I wanna get me some like these. Where you reckon he got 'em?

BECKY

Nowhere you can afford.  
I heard you got caught in the storm.

DEAN

Yeah the other day I stopped here on my way home / from the–

BECKY

From the boat. I know.

DEAN

Now, don't start in on that mess, Becky.

BECKY

I'm not. I'm glad you made it home okay.

DEAN

I didn't make it home, I just made it here. That was... I don't know how many days ago now.

BECKY

I figured you'd move in here eventually.

DEAN

I ain't moving in.

BECKY

Well you don't want to live with us anymore.

DEAN

No, I don't. I don't have to.

BECKY

Lee told me. I don't know why you wanna go back and live in that empty old house.

DEAN

It ain't gonna be empty. Bobby and Marisol and the baby'll be there.

Pause.

BECKY

Is that right? Bobby and Marisol...

DEAN

Sure. I mean, unless Jerry changed his mind and y'all / want 'em to –

BECKY

No, no.

DEAN

Camper ain't no place to raise a baby anyhow. Is it?

BECKY

No, I reckon not.

Lee enters.

LEE

Hey!

DEAN

Hey there, boy.

LEE

Must've been some party here the past few days.

DEAN

Man, you know it.

Melinda enters from the bedroom.

MELINDA

Did the power just come on?

BECKY

Seems like it.

Hey Melinda.

MELINDA

Hi. Wow. How are you, Becky?

BECKY

Fine. I brought your roommate home. Good thing somebody around here's got four wheel drive.

LEE

I'm in the market.

MELINDA

You are not.

BECKY

He totalled his car and cut his nose. Near about broke it. You know what that crazy old hippie put on it? Mud. Red clay mud. It's a wonder it didn't get infected.

LEE

Becky fixed me up this morning. See?

DEAN

Nice job.

MELINDA

What's in the box?

LEE

Oh, some beautiful things. Look.

He pulls a variety of pottery items and a big jug out of the box.

DEAN

That all ol' Harry's stuff?

LEE

You know his name?

DEAN

Sometimes I remember it. Suits him I guess. Harry the Potter.

LEE

Yeah, he loves that. Here, Daddy.

Lee hands him a mug.

DEAN

Hah! Look what Fairleigh got me, Becky!  
Heh heh heh.

LEE

This is for Miss Rebecca...

Lee hands her a lovely vase.

BECKY

I didn't know you got me that.

LEE

And for you, my lady...

MELINDA

For me?

LEE

A chalice!

MELINDA

Oooh. Awesome!

LEE

And... more mugs!

DEAN

Here... hang on.

Dean gets the amaretto, pours a little in each of their  
respective mugs.

BECKY

Hey where's mine?

DEAN

(surprised she wants some)

Well excuse me!

He pours her one.

LEE

Amaretto in the morning! Yay!

They drink.

DEAN

Mmm. Y'all 'scuse me a minute. Sorry.

Dean exits toward the bathroom.

LEE

So you two made it okay by yourselves?

MELINDA

Uh, yeah, we did. We had a good time.

LEE

Without me?

DEAN

(from the bathroom)

It was bliss!

BECKY

Shut the door!

MELINDA

You made a record.

LEE

What? Oh, yeah.

MELINDA

Dean played it for me. You sound good.

LEE

I was drunk.

MELINDA

Yeah. Your dad said you sound just like...

LEE

What?

MELINDA

Just like him.

LEE

I sound better than him.

DEAN

(offstage)

You do not!

MELINDA

I was gonna bake a cake but the power went out.

LEE

Oh. Well, that's okay.  
I'm kinda over cake. Actually.

MELINDA

You are?

LEE

Yeah.

Becky goes to the grocery bags, pulls out milk and cereal,  
other items.

MELINDA

What does that mean, Bear?

BECKY

Are y'all hungry? We brought some things.

MELINDA

Lee?

Lee turns away, moves toward the Recordio.  
Dean comes back in.

DEAN

False alarm.

BECKY

Daddy you want some cereal?

DEAN

Yeah. You get Cheerios?

BECKY

Yes.

DEAN

You get peanuts too?

BECKY  
Yes, sir.

She pulls out peanuts.

DEAN  
All the milk went bad.

BECKY  
We got you milk.

MELINDA  
Thank you.

DEAN  
It's still cold in here. You turn the heat up, Melinda?

MELINDA  
It's on eighty.

Dean crosses back to the couch and snuggles under a blanket.

DEAN  
Don't feel like it. Hey, son, how 'bout some music?

LEE  
Okay.

Lee crosses to the Recordio, thumbs through the other records in the stack.

DEAN  
Play one with your mama singing.

BECKY  
It's a wonder y'all didn't starve.

DEAN  
We ate all the freezer stuff first, then Kitty Cat made us PB&J sandwiches, and tuna sandwiches...  
She got me high you know.

BECKY  
She did what? Daddy, you are kidding me.

Aaggh!

DEAN

Lee finds a record, stares at it for a long moment before he puts it on the turntable. He starts the Recordio and drops the needle. Becky brings Dean a bowl of cereal and the peanuts.

You want coffee, too, I guess?

BECKY

Yes ma'am.

DEAN

Dean sprinkles the peanuts on his cereal. Melinda crosses toward Lee as a GUITAR INTRO begins to play.

Bear...?

MELINDA

Ignoring her, Lee stands over the Recordio as the record begins to play. A young boy and a woman sing in harmony:

WOMAN AND BOY

(on record:)

*When I was a lad,  
And Old Shep was a pup,  
O'er hills and meadows we'd stray.  
Just a boy and his dog, we both full of fun,  
We grew up together that way.*

*I remember the time at the old swimmin' hole,  
When I would have drowned beyond—*

Lee rips the needle off the record. He pulls the record off the turntable, stares at it, puts it back in its sleeve.

Lee?

MELINDA

Lee turns to Melinda for a moment, then he turns back to the Recordio. He tucks the record into the Recordio's storage compartment.

He then picks up the shiny microphone, wraps its cord around it neatly, and stows it in the case. He unplugs the Recordio, coils up the cord and packs it away. Then he closes the case, snaps the latches shut, and sets it down on the floor, in front of Dean.

Dean stands, pulls out his wallet, counts out four bills and hands them to Lee. Lee puts them in his pocket.

Lights fade.

END OF PLAY.