

Cavalier

a two-act play

by
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Cavalier

Characters

- Medora** Owner of Medora's Diner; mid forties.
- Luther** Retired doctor; early sixties.
- Billy** Farm boy who works at diner; seventeen.
- Stick** Young man with too much time on his hands; seventeen.
- Jack** Football and wrestling coach; mid thirties.
- Diane** Jack's wife; mid thirties.
- Becky** Cheerleader; seventeen.
- Pete** Billy's father; early forties.

Setting

- Place** Medora's Diner – an old-fashioned diner/bowling alley. The diner is located one-and-a-half miles from Cavalier, a small town on the plains of North Dakota.
- Time** Act I: February, 1980 – Valentine's Day.
Act II: Late Summer, six months after the close of Act I.

ACT I

(Lights up.

Setting: Medora's Diner – an old-fashioned diner/bowling alley. The diner is located one-and-a-half miles from Cavalier, a small, rural town on the plains of North Dakota. Some of the décor should suggest the year the play is set – 1980. Perhaps a large calendar is visible, or a sports banner that reads "Go, Class of 1980!"

Time: 6:00 p.m. Valentine's Day.

Scenic Design: Diner has a counter with five stools. Along the perimeter are three tables (or booths). Sign says "Lanes closed for repairs." Secondary playing area is a back room that has a cot. Curtains can be drawn to close off this area. A sign with arrow that says "Restrooms" hangs on one wall. Arrow points to a hallway that leads off stage. Cash register is set on counter. A ledge separates the kitchen from the counter area. A warming coil hangs over the ledge. An order wheel and bell rest on ledge. Diner windows are frosted and give the appearance of extreme cold weather.

At rise: Medora can be seen in the grill/kitchen area preparing for dinner. [She sings "Old Black Magic."]

Luther enters. Takes off his heavy winter coat. Hangs on coat rack. Crosses to counter. Sits on stool. Opens the old doctors bag he carries and removes a heart-shaped box of chocolates. He also removes a box of valentine cards. Medora turns and sees Luther at the counter.)

MEDORA

Luther!

LUTHER

Medora...

MEDORA

How long have you been sitting there?

LUTHER

Since the second refrain.

MEDORA

Jesus. And my voice didn't scare you back out into the cold?

LUTHER

It was music to my ears.

(Luther presents the box of chocolates.)

MEDORA

What's that?

LUTHER

Happy Valentine's Day.

MEDORA

For me?

LUTHER

Don't see anyone else here.

MEDORA

You're too sweet, Luther. (Opens chocolates.) I shouldn't.

LUTHER

Nonsense

(She eats one.)

Heard from Sam?

MEDORA

Called last night from Billings. I'm counting on my own little Valentine's Day surprise tonight.

LUTHER

Oh...

MEDORA

What'll it be, Luther?

LUTHER

We'll start off with coffee and then we'll take it from there. I got nowhere to go.

That's the thing about retirement. No running around like a chicken with your head chopped off.

MEDORA

Miss your practice?

LUTHER

You need a lot of energy to be the only doctor in a town... even a town the size of Cavalier. It was kind of a relief when I closed the clinic. Now I can see everyone in town when they're happy and healthy.

MEDORA

I only see people when they're owlie from hunger and itchin to fill their bellies.

LUTHER

I've never heard anyone complain.

(Looks off stage in direction of bowling lanes.)

You going to open those lanes again soon?

MEDORA

Ball return needs to be rebuilt.

LUTHER

Sounds expensive.

MEDORA

Damn thing is forty years old. What can you expect?

LUTHER

Hurt business?

MEDORA

A little, but people still need to eat. And it sure as hell cuts down on the noise.

LUTHER

That's true.

MEDORA

Besides, you know how much fun it is to disinfect all those shoes once a week?
Lord!

LUTHER

See the ice crystals?

MEDORA

God knows it's cold enough.

LUTHER

Twenty-five below at noon.

(They cross to window.)

MEDORA

Like the whole town is in one of those shake-em-up globes. Grain elevator, church steeples, homes...

LUTHER

(Looking at Medora:) Beautiful. When's Sam due home?

MEDORA

Around nine or so.

LUTHER

If the weather holds.

(Sound of snowmobile engine. Medora looks out window.)

MEDORA

Billy... on his snowmobile. Bad sign.

LUTHER

Pete?

MEDORA

Kid can't even use the car to go to school.

LUTHER

Pete taking his medication?

MEDORA

Delores says he is, but I guess it only does so much. Last time Sam was home I had him go over to the farm while Pete was in town and empty the gun cabinet.

(Engine stops. Door opens. Billy enters wearing heavy winter coat, gloves, helmet. He carries a gym bag. He hangs coat on coat rack. Luther scribbles on Valentine card.)

Billy!

BILLY

Sorry I'm late, Ma'am. Wrestling practice went a little late and I had trouble starting my machine.

MEDORA

Too cold?

BILLY

Look at my hair. I didn't have time to dry it before I put on my helmet and it's frozen stiff! I swear there's no place on earth colder than that stretch between here and town.

LUTHER

Hello, Billy.

BILLY

Dr. Skaarsgard.

(Luther presents card to Billy.)

LUTHER

For you.

BILLY

What is it? Oh... a Valentine... Kind of like that birthday card you send to me every year.

LUTHER

I never forget any child I bring into this world.

BILLY

Thanks.

LUTHER

Got your college applications in?

BILLY

Only one... the U. I got accepted.

LUTHER

Of course! A smart, talented boy like you... Congratulations. How's wrestling going?

BILLY

Not as good as football, but Coach says we'd have a shot at regionals if we could fill all the weight categories. I gotta get dressed.

MEDORA

I've got it covered, Billy.

(Billy crosses to back room. Places gym bag next to cot. Takes shirt off. There is a large bruise on his back. Puts on soda jerk uniform.)

LUTHER

Most exciting thing I ever saw was that touchdown pass Billy threw at the state finals last year. Thirty yards right on the numbers.

MEDORA

Never cheered so hard in my life.

LUTHER

We may only have a post office, a few churches, a bar, school, and grocery store... our downtown may be only two blocks long, and the most exciting thing all day is the coal train that tears through town at 1:15. But it just proves that Cavalier has something to be proud of... our kids.

(Billy crosses to Luther.)

BILLY

What can I get for you, Dr. Skaarsgard?

LUTHER

Haven't decided yet. In the meantime you can refill my coffee.

BILLY

Right on it.

(Stick enters. He takes coat off and hangs it on the rack.)

STICK

Jesus Christ! Cold as shit out there!

LUTHER

Stick!

STICK

Big surprise seeing you here, Dr. Skaarsgard. Hey Medora, it's me, your old friend Stick come to flirt with you while Sam's gone. Where do I get in line?

MEDORA

Must be pretty hard-up to go after an old married woman like me, Stick.

STICK

Everybody wants a little bit of the old Stick. Right, Billy Boy? Weatherman says we're in for a big one!

LUTHER

Ice crystals can only mean one thing.

STICK

What you got there, Dr. Skaarsgade?

LUTHER

Valentines.

STICK

That today?

LUTHER

All 24 hours of it.

STICK

Shit! Billy Boy, I saw your freak of a father at the hardware store today.

MEDORA

He wasn't at the gun counter was he?

STICK

Naw. He was buying those blocks of wood he uses to carve those stupid ducks of his.

LUTHER

He does a fine job crafting those decoys.

STICK

Yah, well he threw a shit fit at the register and stormed out like he had a red-hot poker up his ass. Got in his truck and tore outta town. Ten to one you get your ass tanned tonight, Billy Boy... but I forget, you probably like that.

LUTHER

You looking forward to graduating this spring, Stick?

STICK

No.

LUTHER

Why not?

STICK

Cause I'm a junior, that's why.

LUTHER

I could swear you were two months older than Billy.

BILLY

He was held back in the fifth grade.

STICK

I don't read good. Okay? So now you know. (Loud voice:) Class of 81 rules!

LUTHER

You got plenty of time ahead of you, son. Don't worry about that none. Coffee's kicking in. Curse of old age.

(Luther exits doorway with restroom sign. Stick crosses to Luther's valentines and takes one. He returns to the stool and scribbles on card. He notices that Billy has been watching him.)

STICK

What are you looking at? You think you're such hot shit, Billy Boy. But what no one remembers is that I was number 35. Number 35 caught that deep, last minute pass you threw wide at State Class B Finals. Everyone forgets that it was me who scored that winning touchdown.

BILLY

What can I do for you, Stick?

STICK

You can suck my dick, Billy.

BILLY

What do you want, Stick?

STICK

I wanna know why Becky told me to come here this evening. She said she had something important to say. What do you suppose that could mean?

BILLY

I don't know.

STICK

You haven't been seeing my girl behind my back, have you?

BILLY

Stick...

STICK

Is that what this is all about? Luring me here so she can tell me she's cutting me loose and taking up with your fairy ass?

BILLY

Stick...

STICK

Doing it in a nice public place so I won't beat the living shit out of you... because I could, you know... I don't need any of that wrestling crap to beat the shit out of you.

BILLY

I don't know why she wants to meet with us.

STICK

I saw you and her talking in the cafeteria yesterday. Looked real cozy.

BILLY

She borrowed my physics notes.

STICK

You're fucking lying to me.

BILLY

We're just friends, Stick.

STICK

That's what *you* think, but what does *she* think? I know about guys like you. You want it both ways. I may be stupid, Billy Boy, but I do have a memory. Back in junior high... remember?

BILLY

Yah. We used to be friends.

STICK

Yah. And then what happened?

(Stick fakes a punch to Billy's face. Billy flinches.)

Yah. You remember. You got to liking me a little too much. That's what. Boy Scout camp. 4H. After school when no one was around. Those hiking trips in the Pembina Hills we'd take... Nothing wrong with a guy helping another guy out... we all gotta get our nut once in a while... everyone does it... it don't mean shit. Except for you, Billy Boy. You liked getting the sticky end of the deal. You liked it a little too much. That's the reason I beat the shit out of you that last time you took it in the face. And that's the reason I won't join your goddammed wrestling team either. Rolling around and getting sticky on a mat with you, Billy Boy. You'd like it just a little too much.

BILLY

You're full of shit, Stick.

STICK

You need a decoy so everyone thinks you're a regular guy. All I'm saying is it aint gonna be my Becky. Or me and my buddies will give you just what you're looking for. And you won't like it. Got it?

(Luther re-enters. Medora crosses to Stick.)

MEDORA

Stick, honey. You wouldn't be giving my friend Billy a rough time, would you?

STICK

No, Medora. We're just talking.

MEDORA

You got a funny way of talking, Stick. From back in the kitchen it looked more like bullying than talking.

STICK

Just trying to be persuasive. That's all. Learned all about it in speech class.

MEDORA

I appreciate it if you take that kind of homework elsewhere. Friends don't talk like that in my diner.

(Medora crosses back to kitchen.)

LUTHER

Well. Let's see now. I think I'm ready for my appetizer. What do you recommend, Billy?

BILLY

Appetizer? How about French fries?

LUTHER

Sounds delicious.

(Billy crosses by Stick. Places order on wheel and rings bell.)

STICK

(To Billy:) I mean it.

(Diane and Jack enter the diner. She carries a photo album.)

LUTHER

Diane! Jack!

DIANE

Hey, Luther!

LUTHER

Snowing?

JACK

Just started as we were driving out from town.

LUTHER

Know when it's going to hit?

JACK

Radio says later tonight.

LUTHER

What brings you out on such a cold evening?

DIANE

It's a special day...

JACK

...Valentines... We'd thought we'd celebrate.

(Luther scribbles on a Valentine from his stack. Diane and Jack take coats off. Hang them on the rack. Luther gives Diane a Valentine.)

DIANE

Oh, Luther. Isn't that sweet.

(She pecks Luther on the cheek.)

JACK

Stick.

STICK

Coach.

DIANE

Medora, I finally got those pictures from our trip developed. I got them right here in this scrapbook I've been working on.

MEDORA

Can't wait. Never been to Yellowstone, you know, and Billy's been filling me with all sorts of stories.

JACK

What's cooking tonight, Medora?

MEDORA

Everything on the menu, plus a lover's special.

JACK

What might that be?

MEDORA

Chicken fried calves liver for two.

LUTHER

Sounds delicious, Medora. How 'bout you and I split that?

MEDORA

Lord no, Luther. Haven't touched a thing all day and I'm not about to start till after Sam drives his rig up to my front door. I know it's foolish to think a day of fasting can take a few pounds off my winter coat, but every little bit helps when it comes to vanity.

JACK

You look fine, Medora.

LUTHER

Yes, indeed.

MEDORA

Luther, I tell you what. I'll make a special special just for you.

LUTHER

Can't say no to that.

(Diane and Jack cross to a booth. Billy follows.)

DIANE

Billy.

BILLY

Diane. Coach.

(Billy puts a Valentine on the table.)

DIANE

For me?

BILLY

Um... yeah...

DIANE

How sweet. You make this yourself?

BILLY

From a postcard I got on the trip.

JACK

Gee, Billy. Is there something I need to be worried about?

(Jack gently punches Billy on the arm. He blushes.)

DIANE

Let me give you a kiss.

(She kisses him on the cheek.)

JACK

Sweetheart special, Diane?

DIANE

Sounds delicious.

BILLY

I'll get the coffee.

(Billy puts order up on the wheel and rings bell. Phone rings.)

MEDORA

Medora's diner. Hi, Delores. How's it going? You getting a lot of snow out there yet?

Uh huh. He's here. Yah, he's doing okay. Nope. Heard he was at the hardware store earlier though. Now, Delores, don't worry. There's a cot in the back. He'll be warm and snug and he can shower tomorrow at school. You at your sister's? Good. I know, honey. We all know. It's okay. We'll look out for him. Take care.

(Hangs up phone.)

Billy, your mom wants you to stay here tonight. She's worried about... the weather. You can sleep on the cot in the back room. Okay?

BILLY

Okay.

STICK

Weather my ass. It's about your loony father, Billy. And the rotten fruit don't fall too far from the tree, you ask me.

MEDORA

Billy, you go get Luther's appetizer out of the fry-o-lator. Mr. Stick, I need to talk to you.

STICK

What? Everyone knows old Pete goes off his rocker this time of year.

MEDORA

Where were you last Sunday evening?

STICK

I don't know. Why?

MEDORA

You wouldn't by chance happened to have been in the field quarter of a mile back toward town. The field right behind my house?

STICK

Now, Medora, what would I be doing there?

MEDORA

You'd be in your four-wheel drive pickup tearing across the hard pack snow.

STICK

Why would I do that?

MEDORA

Because I put hay out every cold spell we get. Because deer – poor starving things – can't get at their food because of the snow cover and they come and eat the hay I put out. Because the deer run real pretty when a pickup takes after them. Because a certain boy with too much time on his hands likes to stand in the back of his pickup while his friends drive up alongside these running deer. And because this boy likes to jump on the deer and bring em down, kinda like a football player makes a tackle. Breaks the deer's neck and then leaves the poor thing to suffer and die in the snow.

STICK

I didn't do it.

MEDORA

You know there's a law against that sort of thing in the state of North Dakota. I called up the Highway Patrol. They came and got the deer. They told me anytime I was ready, I could come in and give my statement about who done what.

STICK

I didn't do it.

MEDORA

Black pickup?

STICK

Plenty of black pickups in this part of the state. Could have been anyone.

MEDORA

The boy in the back... the one doing the tackling... was wearing a Cavalier High football helmet.

STICK

Could be 30 other guys on the team.

MEDORA

Number 35 stenciled on the side clear as day. Who could ever forget that number? On the front page of every newspaper in the state when you caught that ball at finals.

STICK

I... I didn't do... it...

MEDORA

Now what am I going to tell your father? It would just break the Reverend's heart, wouldn't it? What would his congregation think?

STICK

Don't. I won't do it again. I promise.

MEDORA

You can take the limit during hunting season, but stay the hell away from my deer any other time of year. You hear me?

STICK

Yes, Ma-am.

MEDORA

You're going to do something for me, Mr. Stick.

STICK

Yes, Ma-am.

MEDORA

How much you weigh?

STICK

What? Um... 165 pounds.

MEDORA

Coach, you have an opening for a wrestler 165 pound weight class?

JACK

Sure do.

MEDORA

Mr. Stick here wants to join up.

STICK

Ah, Jesus...

JACK

Great. Give Billy someone near his weight to spar with.

STICK

Ah... Ffff... .

JACK

3:15 tomorrow, Stick. We'll suit you up.

MEDORA

You help get those boys into regionals and I'll forget what I saw.

STICK

Yes, Ma-am.

MEDORA

Give us something to be proud of.

STICK

Yes, Ma-am.

MEDORA

Billy, I got you a new teammate. Now, Stick, I want you to be nice to Billy. You two used to be best friends, for Christ sake. Shake hands. Stick.

STICK

Oh. All right.

(They shake hands.)

(To Billy:) You gonna take my order or not? I'll have a burger with fries and a Coke.

(Billy places order on wheel and rings the bell. Luther crosses to Diane and Jack's table.)

LUTHER

Rumor I been hearing true?

JACK

...What...?

DIANE

...Oh gee...

LUTHER

You have some news for us?

JACK

Word travels fast.

DIANE

Why we're here tonight.

JACK

A little celebration.

LUTHER

When are you due?

MEDORA

What? What's this I'm hearing?

DIANE

End of September.

MEDORA

Oh, god. Congratulations.

DIANE

Thanks, Medora.

LUTHER

You been going to the doctor regular?

DIANE

To that new regional hospital in Langdon. Place is so big and confusing. Doctors and nurses everywhere.

LUTHER

Long way to drive

JACK

Diane is going to stay with her cousins the last two months. They live right across from the hospital.

LUTHER

Sounds like you two have thought of everything. Well, I'll let you get back to your romantic dinner. You need me for anything... baby related... just call me up. I have plenty of time on my hands these days.

DIANE

Thanks, Luther.

(Luther returns to the counter.)

BILLY

Coffee.

DIANE

Everything okay, Billy?

JACK

You were two thousand miles away at practice today. Even Peewee could have pinned you.

BILLY

I've had a lot on my mind I guess.

DIANE

Your father's a good man, Billy. Is he on his medication?

BILLY

It doesn't help.

DIANE

If Delores has to take him to the State Hospital like last summer. Or if you get tired of sleeping on that cot in the back room, you can always come and stay with us again. Can't he, Jack?

JACK

Now, Diane... we shouldn't interfere with...

DIANE

... When he acts that way, he's not mad at you. You know that, right? Some of us just don't have it so easy, that's all. I know your father, Billy. And I know for a fact... that man... he cares for you. With all his heart and soul.

JACK

Things are going to be okay, Billy.

MEDORA

Order up.

BILLY

Gotta go.

(Billy takes a plate of food from the warming ledge and hands it to Luther.)

LUTHER

Looks delicious, Medora.

(Jack exits through doorway to the restrooms.)

MEDORA

(To Billy:) Be a hon and flip Stick's burger.

(Medora crosses to Jack and Diane's table.)

Let's see this photo album I've been hearing so much about.

DIANE

We'll start at the beginning. Here's a picture of Jack and Billy loading up the car. Here they are at the Geographic Center of North America. This is the first cabin we stayed at in Glendive Montana.

MEDORA

Like all those little houses in Monopoly.

DIANE

Here's Bear Tooth Pass. See the sheep? And it snowed! Early part of August and it snowed. There's Jack and Billy whipping snowballs at each other. Here's Jack carrying me across the threshold of our cabin in Yellowstone. Billy took that one.

Isn't it funny? Here the boys are chasing a bear away from the cabin. My knights in shining armor.

MEDORA

Snow in August...

DIANE

Look at all of these, Medora... Yellowstone is the most peculiar place on earth. The mountains. This huge waterfall. They have all these geysers and something they call paint pots and strange mineral... things. Every time you turn around steam is shooting out of the earth in an eerie, almost frightening kind of way.

MEDORA

What's this here?

DIANE

This was a hot spring not too far from the cabin. I wouldn't get near it. But the boys sure had fun.

(Jack re-enters. Medora thumbs through some of the other pages.)

MEDORA

Hmmm... There's a lot of clippings... Look at this one... Football... and more pictures... of Billy. There are a lot of pictures of Billy.

DIANE

He's special, Medora.

MEDORA

Billy? He's a good kid.

DIANE

Can't you see it?

MEDORA

What do you mean, Diane?

DIANE

I knew right away. I could see it. First day he came into the library. You don't get many students like that, Medora. With something special. Deep down inside. Something pure and good. And beautiful.

MEDORA

He's a good kid.

DIANE

He's special, Medora. And if we don't take care of him...

(Billy enters from the kitchen with two plates of food. Jack takes the album from Medora. She's taken aback.)

JACK

Dinner's here.

(Awkward pause.)

MEDORA

Thanks for showing me the album, Diane. Maybe if I ask real nice, Sam'll take me on vacation someday. Lord knows I haven't taken one since I bought the diner.

BILLY

Sweetheart special for two.

(Becky enters, takes off her coat and hangs it on the rack. She wears a cheerleading outfit.)

BECKY

Hey everybody! I'm here!

MEDORA

Oh, Lord.

LUTHER

Rebecca.

BECKY

Give me a B... E... C... K... Y... BECKY!

STICK

Hoot! Hoot! Hoot!

BECKY

Have you seen it outside? Almost a total white out. Thought we'd slide right off the road coming out here from town.

(Luther scribbles on a Valentine. Becky crosses to window and waves.)

Hope the girls make it back okay. Hey, Coach. Hey, Diane. Medora.

MEDORA

Don't you ever get a little tired of wearing that cheerleader outfit, Rebecca?

BECKY

Of course, Medora. But you know, it's my duty. Instills school spirit and pep, advertises the importance of extra-curricular events, and provides an important role model for impressionable younger girls... gives em something to look up to and idolize.

MEDORA

But wouldn't you much rather be on the sports teams?

BECKY

Now, Medora. You know my two sports are basketball and track and those are in the Fall and Spring. Believe me, I don't relish having to perform the daily obligation of being a Cavalier Cavalry Girl – looking and acting just so – it's a burden I just have to bear for the betterment of the school and community as a whole.

(Luther hands card to Becky.)

For me? A Valentine! Oh, Dr. Skaarsgard, how sweet! Let me give you a kiss on the cheek.

LUTHER

Been a long time I've been kissed by a girl as pretty as you, Becky.

BECKY

Dr. Skaarsgard, why didn't you ever get married?

LUTHER

Too busy I guess. But it's never too late.

BECKY

What? At your age?

LUTHER

How are your plans for college going, Becky?

BECKY

All seven schools I've applied for have accepted me under early submission. I was hoping I could get them into a bidding war with financial aid and scholarships, but I guess they don't do that sort of thing. Shame. What exactly is that on your plate, Dr. Skaarsgard?

LUTHER

Chicken friend calves liver – Sweetheart's special.

BECKY

How romantic. Oh, that reminds me. Medora, I found a few recipes in *Epicurean* magazine... I subscribe to *Epicurean* magazine... I found a few recipes that I think you should try out for the diner.

(Becky takes clipping out of her book bag.)

People just aren't eating all that meat and potato stuff you've kept on serving year after year. Too starchy and too fatty. Don't worry. These new recipes are real easy. Anyone could do them.

MEDORA

Gee, thanks, Becky.

BECKY

I got the school cafeteria to change too. When you think about it, it's not a whole lot harder to whip up a nice chicken rouennaise with risotto instead of American chop suey. I came up with a whole new dietary schedule. They're going to try it out for a month and see how it goes. Hello, boys.

(Stick gives Becky the Valentine he took from Luther. He smiles proudly.)

For me? What do you know. It's the same as the one Dr. Skaarsgard gave me.

STICK

Coincidence.

BECKY

What else could it be?

STICK

Don't I get a kiss?

BECKY

On the cheek.

(Billy places hamburger and fries in front of Stick.)

Hi, Billy.

BILLY

Hi, Becky. Can I get you something?

BECKY

Just a salad. Pop singers performed at Valley Manor tonight and they fed us tater-tott hotdish. Thanks for talking with me yesterday. You answered a lot of my questions.

STICK

Yeah. Physics questions, I bet.

(Billy places order on wheel and rings the bell.)

BECKY

He's so sweet.

STICK

Like sugar. Are you going to sit next to me or not?

BECKY

I don't know, Stick.

STICK

What are you afraid of?

BECKY

Maybe I'm afraid that the second I put my head down to start grazing on some of the chow Medora lays out for me some stupid jock in the middle of a testosterone-fueled rage will jump on top of me, break my neck, and leave me for dead. That's what I'm afraid of, Stick.

STICK

Ah now, Becky. Where'd you hear that?

BECKY

Stick, you bragged about killing that deer to practically everyone in school.

STICK

Don't believe everything you hear, Becky.

BECKY

Well either you were lying to them then or you're lying to me now. Either way you come out looking like a jack ass.

STICK

All right. All right. I did it. That why you haven't returned any of my calls? Why you've been avoiding me in the halls?

BECKY

As president of the student council, vice president of the debate club, first chair clarinet in the band, captain of the girls basketball team and editor of the *Cavalarian*, like it or not I'm a public figure in this town, Stick. Everything I do bares intense public scrutiny. I've sacrificed my privacy for the good of the community. If I were to be seen fraternizing with you, it would be like I was condoning what you'd done. Geez, Stick. People would be saying stuff like, why is that perky blonde girl hanging out with such a hoodlum? She obviously has self-esteem issues. Well, I don't, dammit! Christ Almighty, Stick, we were having lots of fun, you and me. I thought we had something real special. Then you go and blow it with a stupid stunt like that.

STICK

Ah, Becky...

BECKY

Well, what're we going to do?

STICK

I'm sorry. I did a dumb thing. A really dumb thing. I promise not to do anything like that again. I promise. Give me a second chance, please?

BECKY

Well, that's not the first time I've heard that.

STICK

What do you mean?

BECKY

Billy told me I should give you a second chance too.

STICK

He did?

BECKY

That's what we were talking about in the cafeteria yesterday. By the way, wasn't the fettuccini alfredo delicious?

STICK

What did he say?

BECKY

He said those other boys, the ones driving your truck, must have put you up to it, called you a preacher's boy and a goody-two-shoes, if you didn't.

STICK

He said that?

BECKY

He told me what a great guy you are and how when you were growing up you'd go camping together and go on hikes and how much you truly appreciated nature.

STICK

Yeah?

BECKY

He talked about how happy you both were when you caught that pass to win the big game and how no matter what, he'd always consider you his best friend.

STICK

Yes. I'm sorry, Becky. I let you down.

BECKY

You let yourself down.

STICK

What are we going to do?

BECKY

Well, that's why I called you both here tonight.

STICK

What?

BECKY

We've got to do something to rehabilitate your image. Something visible, so everyone can see the real Stick and understand why I'm your girl.

STICK

Like what?

BECKY

Next month is the North Dakota State High School Theater Contest.

STICK

I don't like the sound of this.

BECKY

Hold on now. Cavalier hasn't competed in years and it's a real shame. So I signed us up.

STICK

Us?

BECKY

Billy's in on it too.

STICK

What?

BECKY

Billy come on over. (To everyone in the diner:) Everyone, I have an announcement to make. Billy, Stick, and I will be representing Cavalier in the North Dakota State High School Theater Contest.

MEDORA

Sounds great.

BECKY

Don't worry, Coach. It won't interfere with practice. I already promised Billy.

STICK

But I can't act, Becky!

BECKY

Nonsense... that persuasive speech you gave in class about school spirit was dynamite.

STICK

That speech was different. I didn't have to read anything. I just got up and said what I had to say.

LUTHER

What play are you doing?

BECKY

At first I thought we'd do a play called "Bus Stop" with me playing Cheri and Stick playing the Cowboy. But it's set on the plains and I thought it may as well be in my own backyard and what's the challenge of that? Then I thought maybe "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." I'd make one heckuva Maggie the Cat and Stick would be a great aging

alcoholic jock. But I never could figure out why the other guy, the jock's friend dies before the play even starts. Why didn't the playwright kill him off on stage? What could be more dramatic? Huge structural flaw, if you ask me.

LUTHER

What play did you choose, Becky?

BECKY

Some old French play no-one's ever heard of called "Cyrano De Bergerac."

DIANE

Why'd you choose that one?

BECKY

The scene we're doing needs a balcony and the high school already has one from the production of "Romeo and Juliet" we did a few years back. You always have to think about production values, you know.

LUTHER

Sounds smart.

BECKY

The play used to be real popular back in France. But it's completely unperformable, so we're only doing one scene.

MEDORA

What's so tough about it?

BECKY

It's five acts long... longer than most miniseries, and it takes five huge sets and at least 30 actors, which accounts for why no one ever does it. According to *American Theater* magazine... I subscribe to *American Theater* magazine... according to them no play with more than one set or eight actors has a snowball's chance in hell of being produced now-a-days. Evidently things were different a hundred years ago in France.

DIANE

What's it about, Becky?

BECKY

This beautiful woman, named Roxane, who is a real hot ticket. Although I'm not sure exactly why. She doesn't really ever do anything. She's nice and everything and she goes to church real regular, but extra-curriculars?

MEDORA

What roles do the boys play?

BECKY

This is where it gets interesting. They're both in love with me, but only one dares to declare his love.

DIANE

Sounds complicated.

BECKY

Stick is going to play the role of Christian, a big sweet lovable lug of a soldier. He's madly in love with me, but doesn't know how to show it. You see Roxane is a poetry freak and demands to be made love to with words... one of those French things, I guess. But Christian wouldn't know a heroic couplet if it blew up in his face. Billy's character, named Cyrano, has the soul of a poet. Only he has a nose that's bigger than a... oh, he goes on and on about it in one tedious scene, but we're not doing that one. Anyway, his nose is so huge it's practically disfiguring. It makes him so self-conscious that he thinks he doesn't deserve Roxane's love and it makes him over-compensate by being obnoxious and picking fights and stuff. Poetry fights that get rowdy in a weird way. All because of a huge nose. I guess looks counted back then too. Christian and Cyrano are best friends, believe it or not. You have to believe it, I forget why, though. But anyway, Cyrano decides to help Christian win Roxane's love by feeding him the right lines. I guess he figures he can make love to Roxane through Christian – kinda perverse if you ask me, but we're dealing with real self-esteem issues here. And then they go off to war and she brings them barbequed chicken and Christian is killed... and I don't know what happens then. I had to stop and study for a physics test.

STICK

Becky, I can't...

BECKY

Nonsense. I've got three copies of the script and we're going to rehearse here right now.

(Becky removes three scripts from her book bag.)

STICK

Becky, you know why I can't do this. Why I can't *read* the script now.

BECKY

Honey, don't worry. I picked this scene because you spend most of it repeating what Billy says. Now, Billy, Cyrano is the kind of guy...

BILLY

I know the play, Becky.

BECKY

You do?

BILLY

I read it last summer.

BECKY

For fun?

(He nods.)

Oh. Well, just remember. You've got a huge honking nose, okay?

DIANE

This is so exciting. Isn't it, Jack?

JACK

Yep.

BECKY

Ok. I'm not in the scene yet. You two enter.

BILLY

What's all this handwriting?

BECKY

I improved the script a little to make it more comfortable to the contemporary ear.

BILLY

(Reading from the script:) *Christian, here I am. It's me, Cyrano. Remember? We were supposed to meet here next to Roxane's house so I can tell you what to say to her so that she'll love you.*

BECKY

I added all that so that it'd make more sense to the audience.

STICK

(Awkwardly, hesitantly:) *No, Cyrano! I'm tired of borrowing my speeches, of always playing a part and...*

BILLY

Trembling.

STICK

... trembling least...

BILLY

lest.

STICK

... lest I forget my... Becky, I can't do this.

BECKY

Just try.

STICK

I can't.

BECKY

If you do, I'll try to... (obviously speaking in "code" to Stick:)... fit you into my schedule more often.

STICK

You will? How much more often?

BECKY

Twice a week?

STICK

Every other day?

(She nods.)

You promise?

(She nods.)

Would you seal the agreement with a handshake?

BECKY

Okay.

STICK

A sticky handshake?

BECKY

We'll see.

STICK

Or how 'bout a kiss... a sticky kiss?

BECKY

We'll negotiate this agreement later, when you drive me home tonight. Okay?

STICK

Okay. *I'm grateful for your help, Cyrano, but now that I feel... I can't.*

BILLY

Relax, Stick. Remember how I'd help you figure out the playbook after practice?

STICK

Yeah.

BILLY

This is a playbook too. Only it tells you how to move *and* what to say.

STICK

That's what I'm worried about.

BILLY

We'll take it in pieces. Remember? "Dogleg Left" was five steps forward, then turn to the left.

STICK

Yeah.

BILLY

Follow my finger.

STICK

I'm going to speak for myself.

BILLY

Do you think that's a good idea? Now string the words together.

STICK

What makes you think I can't do it, Cyrano? After all, I'm not stupid.

BILLY

Good.

STICK

Your lessons haven't been wasted on me, my friend. I'm sure I can speak without your...

BILLY

Guidance.

STICK

Guidance. Wait, Becky. Why doesn't Cyrano just tell her he loves her and forget this Christian guy?

BECKY

He's terrified of rejection.

STICK

Why?

BECKY

Because of his nose, he's a freak.

BILLY

If he tells her, she'll find his love revolting and that would destroy him.

STICK

But why does he help the other guy?

BECKY

He wants her to be happy.

STICK

Ask me, it's kinda sick.

BECKY

So anyway... this is where Cyrano throws pebbles at the window to get me to come back out on the balcony.

BILLY

Hark! Through yonder window a light breaks!

BECKY

I took that from another play. It's such a pretty line.

STICK

It must be the beautiful Roxane.

BECKY

This is where I come out on the balcony dressed in that gown I wore for homecoming last year.

(Becky climbs up on the counter.)

Christian... Ah, it's you. Speak to me of love.

STICK

I love you. I'd... I'd be happy if you loved me! Tell me that you do, Roxane!

BECKY

You're giving me water when I expected cream! You no longer love me! I can tell!

Goodbye! Billy, this is where you come to the rescue and whisper the lines to Stick.

(He whispers the lines into Stick's ear.)

STICK

Impossible! I could no more stop loving you... than I could stop... the rising of the sun!

BECKY

Ah! That's better!

STICK

My cruel love... has never ceased to grow... since the day when it was born.

BECKY

Very good! But why do you speak so haltingly? Has your imagination gone lame?

Now, Billy, this is where you take over.

BILLY

Because of the darkness, they must grope their way to your ears.

BECKY

I'll come down to you!

BILLY

No! I want to talk to you without us seeing each other.

BECKY

Why?

(Billy reads the lines very convincingly. He is a good actor.)

BILLY

Because in the protecting darkness I dare at last to be myself. It's new to me to be sincere... without fear of being laughed at...

BECKY

Oh, Christian!

BILLY

I love you, I'm overwhelmed, I love you to the point of madness! Your name is in my heart like a bell shaken by my constant trembling, ringing day and night: Roxane, Roxane, Roxane!

(Pete enters the diner. Everyone is startled. Becky gets off the counter.)

LUTHER

Pete!

STICK

Look, Billy. It's your loony father.

BECKY

Stick!

STICK

What?

MEDORA

Hey, Pete. Come on in out of the cold.

JACK

Hey, Pete.

(Pete crosses to the counter. Puts jacket, gloves on one stool. Sits on the stool beside it. Medora pours him coffee.)

MEDORA

You look like you could use some coffee. Sam's coming home tonight. I'm sure he'd like it if you stopped by sometime tomorrow.

BECKY

Hello, Mr. Gunderson. I saw one of your ducks down at Brick & Bracks and I said to myself, I'm just going to have to buy that for my daddy for father's day... that is... if someone hasn't bought it already... by then.

(Phone rings.)

MEDORA

Medora's Diner. (Changes to intimate tone of voice:) Yes, I do. It's all laid out and waiting for you. Of course. Anyway you want it.

STICK

Go on, Medora!

BECKY

Stick.

MEDORA

How's the weather? And what are they saying? I'll let everyone know. I'll be there... Yes, I'll be wearing it.

BECKY

Geez.

MEDORA

Love you too.

(She hangs up.)

STICK

Looks like there's going to be a whole lotta love spreading around tonight.

BECKY

Stick.

MEDORA

Sam says a nasty Alberta Clipper has been dogging him all the way from Minot. Looks like we're in for a bad one. Probably within the hour.

JACK

Road shouldn't be too bad between here and town.

LUTHER

That shelter belt they planted twenty years ago comes in real handy.

MEDORA

But it's a long way to the farm on a night like tonight, Pete.

(Billy places a salad in front of her. She decides not to notice it.)

BECKY

We better get going, Stick.

STICK

Here's three bucks, Billy. Keep the change.

BECKY

Now, Billy. Start memorizing your lines right away. We only have two months to pull this whole thing off. And don't worry about the nose. I've been doing a lot of reading about prosthetic makeup and I know just what to do. Which reminds me...

(Becky removes a few magazines from her book bag.)

Diane, I found this article in *Modern Motherhood* magazine... I subscribe to *Modern Motherhood* Magazine... an article I thought you should have. It's all about how to have a child. Nowadays, you really don't have to get all fat and bloated anymore. They have all sorts of exercised and vitamins. I thought of you immediately.

DIANE

How did you know?

BECKY

Oh, please... Nancy Neigard's mother's next-door neighbor is Alice Madison, whose son works at the filling station next to the clinic at Langdon. When he saw you pull out of the parking lot, the next person in line was Mary Lou McCarthy – county RN in charge of visiting obstetrics.

DIANE

I'm still not sure how you would have known...

(Medora thumbs through magazine.)

MEDORA

Becky, for such a busy girl, you sure read a lot of magazines.

BECKY

Well...

STICK

She gets at least twenty a month.

BECKY

Stick...

STICK

Remember that magazine subscription drive they had for the school band uniforms last fall?

BECKY

Stick...

STICK

Becky sold twenty to herself so she'd beat Emilia Johnson out of the top prize.

BECKY

Stick!

MEDORA

Emilia... she that pretty little girl who was elected homecoming queen last fall?

STICK

Yep and I was king.

MEDORA

Such a sweet girl.

BECKY

I know for a fact, she sold just as many to herself if not more. It's a fact. Stick.

STICK

What?

BECKY

Get me my coat.

JACK

Don't forget... wrestling practice... tomorrow at 3:15, Stick.

STICK

I won't, Coach. Looks like everybody just has to get a piece of the old Stick.

BILLY

See you at practice, tomorrow, Stick.

STICK

Your lucky day, Billy boy.

BILLY

Can I get you some more coffee, Dad?

PETE

Everyone thinks you got the world by the balls, don't they, Billy?

(Everyone in the diner stops and stares at Pete.)

State champion quarterback... picture in the paper... wrestler... Boy's State... you got the world by the balls, don't you, son? And now he thinks he's going to college. Gonna be one of those smart-assed frat boys at the U. over in Grand Forks. You must be proud of that Billy boy of yours, Pete. Smart. Handsome. Talented boy like that. Must be the apple of his poppa's eye.

MEDORA

Pete.

PETE

So well-behaved. So courteous. Such a hard-working boy. You must be so very proud, Pete. Am I proud, son? Go on. Am I proud of my Billy boy? Go on ask me.

LUTHER

Pete.

PETE

This is between me and my son, Luther. (To Billy:) Ask me if I'm proud of my Billy boy.

BILLY

Are you proud of me, dad?

PETE

Are you proud of yourself, Billy?

(Billy looks down.)

Fuck no. Because all that football hero shit ... wrestler shit ... honor roll shit ... all that suck up to the teachers ... get accepted to college shit ... is just that. A worthless pile of shit. Run around all you want. Win your little titles and trophies, get your straight A's, help Old Mrs. Olson cross the street like a good little Boy Scout, go

away to college and earn your fancy degree. Go on. Get married. Have kids and everyone will think you got the world by the balls. Wake up one day and you'll be no better than your bum of a father... breaking your back over some meaningless job just to put food on the table. Married to a wife who can barely bring herself to talk to you because after thirty years what's there to say? Raising kids who are so ashamed of you they can't wait to clear out without so much as turning around to say goodbye. Enjoy it now, Billy boy. All the fun and glory. You can fool yourself now... but I know what you really are. As worthless a piece of shit as your old man.

BILLY

Dad.

PETE

You break your back for forty years and where does it get you?

BILLY

Dad.

PETE

An empty house in the middle of a god-forsaken, windblown field of snow. And there's nothing you can do about it.

BILLY

Dad, please.

PETE

Like being buried alive under an icy blanket of snow. You know what happens before a man freezes to death, Billy? Either his mind plays a trick on him, or some merciful spirit comes down from the heavens and makes him feel all warm inside. And right before he dies, he falls asleep... all nice and warm... and snug... without a worry in the world. I'm so tired... Come home. Come home with me. You don't know what it's like, son. Alone in that windblown field. All alone and freezing to death. Alone and cold. Please, come home, Billy. I'm so tired. Please, Billy. Come home.

LUTHER

Why don't you come stay with me tonight, Pete? Plenty of room at the old clinic.

PETE

I'm not going to be locked up in another hospital, Luther.

LUTHER

I didn't mean it that way.

MEDORA

You can stay with us, Pete.

PETE

I want my family back, goddamn it! How long am I supposed to suffer? How long am I supposed to pay?

LUTHER

Pete, have you been taking your pills?

PETE

They don't do any good, Luther. They're supposed to make me feel better, but they just make me go numb. The pain is still there, I just can't feel it. Billy, please. Please.

(Billy doesn't move.)

Get your coat. Get it now! I said get it now, you goddamned little bastard. I tell you to jump and you ask how high.

(Pete reaches across the counter and grabs Billy.)

I'll fucking tan your fucking hide! I'll give you three seconds to get your little fairy ass to my truck or I'll tan your hide... whip you into tomorrow afternoon.

(Pete slaps Billy hard on the face. Jack crosses to the counter and pries Pete off Billy and holds his hands behind his back.)

MEDORA

Pete, he's staying here tonight. You go back home now before it gets any worse. Sam and I'll bring Billy out tomorrow and we'll see how things go. We'll take it from there.

PETE

I'll tan his fucking ass with my belt.

MEDORA

I don't have to go and get Sam, now, do I? That what you want me to do? Go get Sam?

(Pete calms down. Shakes his head "no." Jack lets him go.)

Okay. You get back into your truck and hurry home now. Before that storm hits. I'll take care of Billy.

PETE

I want my family back. That's all, Medora. Only thing I have.

MEDORA

I'll bring Billy by tomorrow. Go home now, Pete.

(Pete crosses to door.)

PETE

Like one of them shake-em-up globes out there.

(Pete exits without coat, gloves, and stocking cap.)

STICK

Wow! That was better than in the hardware store!

BECKY

Come on, Stick. We better get back home before it gets worse.

MEDORA

Drive safe, Stick. And go directly home, you hear me? No side trips on a night like tonight. That can wait for another night. You have all the time in the world for that. You get what I'm saying, Mr. Stick?

STICK

I hear ya, Medora. Gees.

BECKY

Night everyone!

LUTHER

Night Becky.

(Becky and Stick exit.)

MEDORA

Now if that ain't one hulluva couple, I don't know what is.

LUTHER

They're just kids, Medora.

DIANE

Poor Billy.

JACK

You okay, Billy?

BILLY

Yah, Coach. I'm okay.

JACK

Winter can be mean on a man like your father. He's a good man. Just not a whole helluva lot to do when the fields are fallow. And he needs something... anything to keep him preoccupied.

BILLY

More than wooden ducks.

JACK

I guess so.

DIANE

He cares for you, Billy. He just doesn't know how to show it. That's all. Sometimes it's hard... for a man. He just doesn't know how.

JACK

That's enough, Diane. We better head out.

DIANE

Billy... ?

BILLY

I'm okay.

JACK

Let's go.

(Jack puts money down on table. Diane touches Billy's cheek.)

DIANE

Happy Valentines Day, Billy.

MEDORA

You two drive careful now.

LUTHER

Call if you need anything, okay?

JACK

Thanks, Luther.

(Jack and Diane put their coats on.)

LUTHER

Chosen any names? For the baby?

DIANE

Well...

JACK

We're still discussing that.

DIANE

We've chosen one if it's a...

JACK

(To Billy:) Practice... tomorrow... Think you can whip Stick's ass?

BILLY

Pin him in thirty seconds flat.

JACK

That's what I want to hear! Come on, Diane.

DIANE

Goodbye, Billy.

(Diane and Jack exit. Diane has left the scrapbook behind.)

MEDORA

Look at the time. Lord, if I don't hurry, I won't beat Sam to the house, let alone slip into that new frilly negligee he bought for my birthday.

LUTHER

Hmmmm.

MEDORA

Billy, hon, can you close up for me?

BILLY

Sure, Medora.

MEDORA

You going to be okay on the cot for one night?

BILLY

Yah.

(Medora puts on her coat.)

MEDORA

You sure?

BILLY

I'm fine.

MEDORA

Things'll be better tomorrow. Sam and I will go out to the farm and fix everything up.
Okay?

(Medora touches Billy under the chin.)

Everything is going to be fine. Right, Luther?

LUTHER

We won't let you down, Billy.

MEDORA

Trust us, okay?

BILLY

Okay.

MEDORA

I'm off. Drive careful, Luther. It looks bad out there.

LUTHER

Happy Valentine's Day, Medora.

(Medora opens the door.)

MEDORA

Lord, what a wind!

(She exits.)

LUTHER

Prettiest, liveliest girl ever to grow up in Cavalier. May not have been the most beautiful by classical standards, but no one could come close to the pure joy for life that girl had. All she'd have to do was walk into a room and the whole place would light up. Every time she'd come into my office, even when she was a little girl and I was just starting out, she'd light up the whole place. Everyone in town knew Medora... loved her. Could have had her pick of any boy in school... heard tell it was the same when she was at the U. Decided to come back. Take care of her mother. Would bring her in to the clinic all the time. Got to know her real well... as a woman

this time... Mother died and I didn't see her as much... Too busy I guess... Running from patient to patient. Inoculations, x-rays, physicals, hospital visits. Besides, I was afraid she'd laugh and say I was too old. Then she met Sam, bought the diner and... Now she's by herself most days of the week. Waiting for a man who drives all over kingdom come. Lonely. Don't let things... the things you love slip between your fingers, Billy. You got to be fearless... be brave... Don't worry about looking the fool. Grab what you love when you get the chance. Before it's too late.

(Luther opens the box of chocolates Medora left behind.)

Chocolate?

BILLY

Thanks.

(Luther puts money down on the counter. He crosses to the rack and puts his coat on.)

LUTHER

Take care, Billy... Don't let it slip between your fingers. Hold on tight. Cling to it with all your might.

(He exits. Billy gathers the money from the counter and the table. He rings it into register. He gathers up all the dishes. Takes them back to the kitchen. He comes back out and sweeps the floor. As he sweeps, the snow outside the windows becomes heavy. The wind begins to howl. He looks out the window for a moment. Then resumes sweeping. As he passes Diane and Jack's table, he sees the photo album. He smiles as he looks at the pictures. He turns off the lights. Walks to the back room. Takes off his shirt and jeans. He turns down the covers of the cot. Sits on the edge of the bed. Opens his gym bag. Removes athletic shirt. Shirt says "Coach" on the back. He holds the shirt to his face and inhales. He holds it to his chest and closes his eyes. He smiles. He crawls under the covers with the shirt.

Pause.

Door opens. Snow blows in. A man enters and closes the door. He stands just inside. Billy hears the door and sits up. He listens for a second before he gets up and puts his pants on quickly. He slips on his t-shirt and crosses out to dining room in his bare feet.)

BILLY

Dad?

(He turns on the light.)

Coach.

(Pause.)

JACK

Diane sent me back. To make sure... you were okay.

(Pause.)

Can I come in?

(Billy nods. Jack stomps the snow off his boots.)

Barely made it back. May as well shut the whole town down tomorrow. Gonna take a few days to dig out.

(He hangs his coat on the rack. Billy stands and stares at him.

Pause.)

BILLY

Coffee?

JACK

No. (Rethinking:) Yeah. Yeah... thad be nice.

(Billy crosses back into the kitchen. Jack crosses to the booth where he was sitting before and waits.)

BILLY

Little old.

JACK

What?

BILLY

Coffee.

JACK

I'm used to Medora's coffee, Billy. Had it once a day for the last 15 years.

(Billy brings the cup of coffee to Jack and stands next to the table. Jack sips the coffee and squints.)

Why don't you... sit down. Go ahead.

(Billy sits at the table.

Pause.)

You okay, Billy?

(He nods.)

Sure?

BILLY

Used to it.

JACK

Something you shouldn't have to get used to.

(Pause.

Jack takes another gulp of coffee. He squints again.)

When she brew this? 8:00 this morning?

BILLY

Not many people came in today.

(Awkward pause.

Jack sits up like he's thinking of leaving.)

JACK

Well... If you're okay... I suppose...

BILLY

...Think we have a chance this year... wrestling... regionals...?

JACK

You get back on track... Yeah... I think we have a shot.

BILLY

A lot on my mind.

JACK

Your dad?

BILLY

And other stuff.

(Pause.)

JACK

Part of being a man is being able to block... certain stuff out... Keep going after what's important. Can't let things get you down.

BILLY

Yeah?

JACK

Yeah.

(Pause.)

BILLY

I got some... I saved up some money. From work. Not much... but I was thinking...
If it got real bad... I got enough to... you know... maybe start out on my own...

JACK

Can't do that, Billy.

BILLY

I can always get my GED later, Coach. I'm not much of a wrestler... You know that...
Not like I'm going to win any state titles or anything.

JACK

The U?

BILLY

Lots of places out there. Whole wide world.

JACK

End up in some gutter somewhere.

BILLY

No, I won't.

JACK

Yeah?

BILLY

Not if. If... You find someone who... can cover your back. Ever think about... just
taking off, Coach?

(Jack smiles.)

JACK

Yeah. I did that once.

BILLY

You did?

(Jack reaches out and jostles the back of Billy's head. He enjoys it.)

JACK

Ended up right back here.

(Jack reaches out again for Billy. He changes it into a playful punch to Billy's arm. Billy smiles.

Pause.

Billy opens the scrapbook that Diane left on the table.)

BILLY

You see this, Coach?

JACK

Yeah, Billy.

BILLY

She sure took a lot of pictures.

JACK

A lot of you.

BILLY

I... I don't know if I... I can't thank you and Diane enough for taking me out there and... It was the best time I've ever... Maybe we could... we could go back... you and me...

JACK

Billy...

(Pause. Billy turns a few pages.)

BILLY

Remember the grizzly.

JACK

Black bear, Billy.

BILLY

Naw... it was a grizzly

(Jack smiles.)

JACK

We wouldn't be looking at that picture right now if it were a grizzly.

(Billy laughs. Jack slides over next to him to get a better look at the album. They thumb through a few pages. They both enjoy sitting next to each other. But they are still quite tense.)

BILLY

How's it do that? Just shoots up? All that steam?

JACK

Like a giant volcano, Billy. Whole park.

BILLY

That lake was cold.

JACK

Till you got used to it. Couldn't get you out.

BILLY

How you learn to hold your breath so long?

JACK

I'll show you sometime.

(Billy laughs.)

BILLY

Okay...you're on.

(One of the photos stops Billy. Jack seems to be affected by it too.)

BILLY

The hot spring. Remember?

(Jack doesn't answer.)

After Diane went to bed. You couldn't sleep... heard you get up... I found you...

JACK

...Followed me...

BILLY

Didn't think you could hear me...

JACK

(Indian war whoop:) Whooooo... whooo... weeeee!

BILLY

You chased me all the way down the trail to the hot spring.

JACK

You run fast, boy. Even in bare feet...

BILLY

Full moon... and we could hear the wild animals deep in the woods. The songs of the wolves and owls. See the eyes of a hundred different animals reflected in the light of the moon. The water. Remember what it felt like? The warm, sparkling water... running over us. Our entire bodies. I never... Have you ever felt anything like that before, Coach? Have you?

(Jack can't answer. Billy starts to tremble.)

JACK

You cold?

BILLY

It was like something wild had come over us. And made us strong... and brave... and invincible. We couldn't be stopped... not by anyone...

(Jack reaches out and touches Billy tenderly.)

Whenever I need to feel that... like before that pass during the big game... Or when things get bad... get bad for me... at home... I think of that night... that wild night with you... in that hot spring. And I'm strong. And brave. And invincible.

(Jack holds Billy's face gently. He closes his eyes and slowly kisses him. They kiss again. Billy kisses Jack back with passion. Jack keeps his eyes closed tight as they continue to kiss passionately. Billy takes off his shirt. And kisses Jack more. He kisses Jack's neck and unbuttons Jack's shirt and kisses his chest. Jack throws his head back and moans with pleasure, but keeps his eyes shut tight. Billy gets down on his knees and sucks Jack's nipple as he unbuttons Jack's belt. He kisses Jack's stomach as he frantically unbuttons Jack's fly. Jack inhales sharply as Billy reaches into his pants and fishes him out. Billy goes down on Jack. Jack moans as Billy continues to suck him. Jack's moans get louder as Billy picks up the pace. Jack is about to cum, when he opens his eyes and sees what Billy is doing. He abruptly pushes Billy off. Billy falls back on the floor. Jack stands and tucks himself back into his pants. Billy stares at Jack from where he has landed on the floor. Jack turns away from Billy. He can't look at him.)

BILLY

Coach?

(Jack doesn't answer.)

Coach?

JACK

That didn't happen, Billy. None of it. Not at the lake... not the hot spring... and not now.

BILLY

Coach...

JACK

It didn't happen. Say it, Billy. Say it now.

BILLY

...It's nothing to be ashamed of...

JACK

Say it, Billy.

BILLY

Because... I... It can't be wrong... Because... If you knew... the way I feel... It's not bad... it's... it's wonderful...

JACK

You want to get me fired?

BILLY

Why would I want to hurt you?

(Jack's panic and anger is escalating.)

JACK

This didn't happen. None of it.

BILLY

We just got to figure out a way... of... we just got to... we can figure it out... She won't mind...

JACK

Like hell!

BILLY

She probably already knows, Jack. How could she not?

JACK

Yeah... this whole town will understand... Is that what you're saying?

(Billy crosses to Jack and embraces him from behind. This upsets Jack. He turns. Billy forces him to kiss him. Jack pushes him away. Billy returns to kiss Jack again. Jack pushes him away. They pause and look at each other. Jack is very angry.)

JACK

It didn't happen. Say it, Billy. Say it now!

BILLY

I can't say it.

(Jack's face hardens. Billy rushes Jack and tries to tackle him. Jack is much bigger and more solid. He reverses the tackle and they end up falling on the floor with Jack on top. Billy pauses for a second. Then he tries to turn over and embrace Jack. Jack uses a wrestling hold to force Billy down.)

BILLY

You don't understand. You don't... Jack!

(The wrestling gets more violent. Billy escapes, crosses away and turns to face Jack. He then rushes Jack again. Jack punches Billy in the face. Billy falls to the floor. His lip bleeding.)

JACK

It didn't happen.

(Billy starts to cry. But then stops and looks at Jack. Jack is breathing heavily. Billy stands and yells a war whoop as he rushes at Jack again. This time they both fight with their fists. They trade blows. Billy is losing. He has a black eye and his face is bleeding. He finally gives up and lies on the floor. Jack looks at him lying on the floor, his face bleeding, crying.)

JACK

(In anguish:) It didn't happen!

(Jack begins to cry too. Jack crosses quickly to the coat rack, pulls his coat on and opens the door. The snow blows in. He looks one last time at Billy before he exits, slamming the door behind him. Billy sits up, wipes his face and stares after him. The sound of the blizzard builds.

Lights slowly fade.

End of Act I.)

ACT II

(Lights up.

Setting: Medora's Diner.

Time: Labor Day – seven months after the close of Act I.

At Rise: Becky, wearing a crisp, new dinette uniform, is standing on the top of the counter. She is changing the menu to read "Labor Day Weekend Specials – Cock au Vin: \$4.32; Boeuf Bourguignonne: \$5.45; Bouillabaisse – \$1.99/cup, \$2.99/bowl." Etc. Becky sings "That Old Black Magic." The sound of pins being struck by a bowling ball is heard. Stick, dressed in jeans and a well-worn football jersey with "Cavalier" and "35" printed on it enters from the bowling alley.)

STICK

Woo whoooo! That's three strikes in a row. Becky, hear that? Three in a row.

BECKY

That's nice, Stick.

STICK

What're you doing up there?

BECKY

Changing the menu for Labor Day.

STICK

But those words... They don't make sense. Do they?

BECKY

Don't worry, Stick. They're French. That's why you can't read them.

STICK

I can read "cock."

BECKY

It's not what you think. It's French for chicken. As in "Cock-a-doodle-doo."

STICK

Oh. Do you think anyone's going to eat all that... stuff?

BECKY

I've been working for the last two days on this menu, Stick.

STICK

Don't you think you gotta have at least one thing people know?

BECKY

Like what?

STICK

Like a hamburger with fries and a coke.

BECKY

Stick...

STICK

You can call it something fancy.

BECKY

Like what?

STICK

Like the Number 35 Special. Named after me: Number 35 himself.

BECKY

Time for you to get out of that smelly old football jersey and put on that soda jerk uniform I pressed so nice for you. Gotta look official our first day on the job.

(Stick takes off his shirt. He looks down at his bare torso. He likes what he sees. He starts to pose.)

STICK

Becky. Hey...

BECKY

The shirt's over there, Stick.

STICK

Hey...

(She turns to look at Stick and his bare torso.)

BECKY

Look at you...

STICK

Just can't get enough of the old Stick, can you, Becky? Can you? Can't get enough of this...

BECKY

Oh...

(Becky jumps off the counter and runs to Stick. She jumps into his arms and straddles him with her legs. They kiss.)

STICK

Woo whoooo!

(They kiss again.)

BECKY

The things you do to me, Stick. I swear, sometimes it scares me!

STICK

Boo!

(They kiss. Door opens. Luther enters. Becky jumps off Stick. Straightens her hair and uniform. Stick puts his uniform on.)

BECKY

Dr. Skaarsgard!

LUTHER

I'm not too late am I?

STICK

Nope. Hasn't come yet.

LUTHER

Good. Medora around?

BECKY

She's still packing for her big trip.

(Becky crosses to the kitchen.)

STICK

What you got there, Dr. Skaarsgard?

LUTHER

Oh, just a little package. Nice of you two to think of doing this.

BECKY

Special day, we got to do something to celebrate.

STICK

What can I get for you, Dr. Skaarsgard?

LUTHER

Just a little lunch. How bout a...

(Luther sees the new menu and stops dead in his tracks.)

STICK

(Whispering:) Becky's been working real hard on this new menu, Dr. Skaarsgard.

LUTHER

Oh... Got anything that's not so fancy?

(Stick fills out his pad, places the order on the wheel and rings bell.)

STICK

Number 35 Special, Becky!

BECKY

What?

STICK

Told ya.

LUTHER

See the big hullabaloo in town today, Stick?

STICK

'Bout what?

LUTHER

The grain elevator.

STICK

Yeah?

LUTHER

Know that big smiley face painted on the side?

STICK

Yeah.

LUTHER

Seems someone with a little too much time on their hands managed to paint a big red tongue sticking out of the face. Probably in the dead of night when no one was around. Now who would do such a thing?

STICK

I didn't do it.

LUTHER

Caused a big stink.

STICK

Anyone coulda done it. All you need is some rope and a little paint.

LUTHER

Yeah?

STICK

Coulda been anyone.

LUTHER

Seen you and Billy hanging around together quite a bit lately.

STICK

Have to. He's been living with us.

LUTHER

Nice of the Reverend to take him in after all that last winter. Heard you two boys went camping in the Turtle Mountains.

STICK

Got back last week.

LUTHER

Nice to see Billy's got such a good friend.

STICK

He's not bad... for a fruit.

BECKY

Stick!

STICK

What?

BECKY

How many times I have to tell you?

LUTHER

You two been really good for that boy. He needed friends like you.

(Becky points to bag of buns stacked high on a shelf.)

BECKY

Stick, could you reach me those hamburger buns up there? Thought I'd seen the last of those.

(Stick retrieves the bag for Becky. As he reaches, a big blotch of red paint is visible on the back of his arm. Luther sees the paint and laughs. Becky returns to the back of the kitchen with the buns.)

STICK

What's so funny, Dr. Skaarsgard?

LUTHER

Come here, son.

STICK

What?

(Luther points to the paint splotch on Stick's arm.)

LUTHER

Red paint.

STICK

I didn't do it!

LUTHER

Same shade of red as that big tongue on the grain elevator.

STICK

Just a coincidence.

LUTHER

What're we going to do with you, Stick?

STICK

Ah, Dr. Skaarsgard....

LUTHER

What is your father, the Reverend Stevenson, going to say about this. Break his heart.

STICK

Don't tell anyone. Please.

LUTHER

Stick.

STICK

I did it alone. Just me. No one else was there. Don't tell. Please?

LUTHER

Big ugly tongue giving the whole town the raspberry. Can't have that. What are we going to do, Stick.

STICK

I don't know.

LUTHER

You're going to repaint that smiley face, that's what.

STICK

But then they'll know who done it.

LUTHER

I'll tell everyone you're doing it out of respect for the community. That's all.

STICK

I'll need someone to hold the rope.

LUTHER

Really?

STICK

Yeah ... impossible to do it without...

LUTHER

Thought you said you did it all alone.

STICK

Oh ... Now, Dr. Skaarsgard.

LUTHER

Who helped you?

STICK

Can't tell you that. It'd ruin everything we had planned today. I'll do it. I'll repaint it. I just need help, that's all.

LUTHER

I'll hold the rope for you, son.

STICK

Thanks, Dr. Skaarsgard.

(Billy enters. He carries two suitcases. He looks much happier and healthier than in Act I.)

BECKY

Billy!

BILLY

Hey, everybody.

LUTHER

Big day, today.

BILLY

Sure is.

LUTHER

How's your mother?

BILLY

Fine. She just dropped me off.

LUTHER

She didn't want to stop in and see you off?

BILLY

She's taking it pretty hard. I guess she didn't want everyone to see her crying.

LUTHER

She's going to miss you.

(Billy crosses to Stick and they go through a complicated hand-shaking ritual.)

STICK & BILLY

Hoff... hoff... hoff....

STICK

See? Got your old job, buddy!

BILLY

Shirt fits you nice, Stick.

STICK

Let's do a few frames before you have to go. For old time's sake!

BECKY

Stick!

STICK

Only be a minute, Becky. Gees!

(Billy and Stick exit in direction of the bowling alley.)

LUTHER

Becky, tell me again why you're not going to the U this fall.

BECKY

I decided to take a year off first.

LUTHER

What are you going to do with yourself?

BECKY

Help Medora out when she needs me. Keep an eye on Stick. And, of course, start my new theater.

LUTHER

New theater?

BECKY

I read in *American Theater* magazine — I have a subscription to *American Theater* magazine — that you can forget all those big cities. Regional theater is the real hotbed for drama in this country. Cavalier is in a region, so I figured what the heck, why not try it here in Cavalier.

LUTHER

A theater in Cavalier?

BECKY

The Reverend Stevenson is letting us use the church basement. Isn't that sweet? My first production is going to be in October after football season.

LUTHER

What're you going to perform?

BECKY

Something I whipped up called, "Ill-fated Lovers Through the Centuries." Bits and pieces of famous plays all strung together. They're so old you don't have to pay to perform them. You have to think about those things, you know. Stick is going to act in it with me.

LUTHER

That should be something.

BECKY

Yes.

(Sound of pins being knocked over by bowling ball.)

LUTHER

Sound of those pins is music to my ears. That broken ball return was starting to hurt Medora's business.

BECKY

Sure was nice of you to fix it.

LUTHER

Wasn't as tough as you'd think. Once I had all the parts only took a few weeks of tinkering.

(Stick and Billy re-enter.)

STICK

We can't get our balls back! Hey, Billy! Get it? We can't get our BALLS back!

BILLY

Dr. Skaarsgard, I think that return belt is slipping again.

LUTHER

I'll see what I can do. Stick, why don't you come see how it's done so you can fix it yourself next time.

STICK

I'll be right there, Dr. Skaarsguard.

(Luther exits to the bowling alley.)

BILLY

So you didn't tell him?

STICK

Naw. He thinks it was just me.

BILLY

Thanks, Stick. All my fault. It was a stupid idea. I don't know why I...

STICK

What? It was a great idea, buddy. Everyone all over town is talking about it. If only we had painted it to say "Cavalier – a good place to leave!"

BILLY

But it isn't, Stick. That's why. It's a good place to be from, but it's a hard place to leave.

STICK

Only take a day or two to paint over it. No big deal. Not really.

BILLY

Thanks, Stick.

STICK

So. I thought... Since I done you one favor. You could do me one.

BILLY

Like what?

STICK

You gotta talk to Becky.

BILLY

About what?

STICK

Well... well... it's about...

BILLY

What?

STICK

Becky. I can't get her to... she doesn't want to...

BILLY

What?

STICK

You know how when we were boys and you... in junior high how we'd be messing around and you would... you know...

BILLY

No.

STICK

How you'd get the old stick... wet... with your mouth... You know.

BILLY

I don't want to talk about this...

STICK

She won't do it, Billy.

BILLY

Stick...

STICK

And I need it... bad.

BILLY

Stick...

STICK

I'm just asking you to talk to her. Tell her it's not so bad. Hell, you always really enjoyed it. And you were good at it too. Just give her a few pointers.

BILLY

Stick. I'm not going to...

STICK

Please? I need it, Billy. I'm tired of the same old dry hand stuff.

BILLY

No.

STICK

You owe me, Billy. I'll go help Luther with the belt. You go talk to her.

BILLY

What am I supposed to say to her?

STICK

You'll think of something. You owe me!

(Stick exits to bowling alley.)

BILLY

Becky?

BECKY

You excited about starting school?

BILLY

More afraid than anything. Becky, about Stick.

BECKY

What about him?

BILLY

You like him a lot don't you?

BECKY

Yes.

BILLY

Well, then it's only natural that... one way to show your love is... one thing you can do is... It's not gross because it's part of him... and you love him... and you want to be as close as...

BECKY

He asked you to talk to me about this, didn't he?

BILLY

What?

BECKY

Dammit, Stick. He's been hounding me to "get sticky with him"—as he so vulgarly calls it – for months now.

BILLY

It's no big deal... you just gotta close your eyes and pretend it's a big...

BECKY

I can't believe he brought you into this. Won't be the first time.

BILLY

What do you mean?

BECKY

"What's all the fuss, Becky? Billy used to do it, and he liked it a lot. He didn't freak out, or gag, or choke."

BILLY

What?

BECKY

But you're a boy, Billy. You got one. You know just what to do for it. Ask me, it's just not fair. Not fair for a girl at all. Shouldn't be any kind of comparison, you ask me. You're a hard act to follow, Billy Boy.

BILLY

He told you...?

BECKY

Lots of people. Anyone in school who would listen.

BILLY

About... about...?

BECKY

Don't worry, Billy. I explained how it could either be a phase or it could be just who you are. Either way it really doesn't matter. You're the same Billy you always were. You're not some kind of strange freak. You see... adolescent boys often go through an extended phase of sexual experimentation. Some boys experiment with other boys – which explains you. Others are just confused – which explains Stick. Of course, you don't ever really have to make up your mind. Some people don't. Kinda like how I can play sports and cheerlead. The important thing is that you follow your heart. I got all that from *Psychology Today* magazine – I subscribe to *Psychology Today* magazine. They devoted a whole issue to "All-American Adolescence: Male Sexual Identity and Its Manifestations." Which reminds me... I got a few subscriptions for you. Help raise money for the school choir robes. Some magazines that might help you understand yourself a little better. I've signed you up for a few free samples that will be delivered right to your dorm room.

BILLY

Becky!

BECKY

Don't worry they'll be wrapped in opaque plastic. Look at them. If you like 'em, call, and I'll sign you up. It's for a good cause, after all. Oh... and here are a few organizations on campus that might come in handy. I called this one up and the nicest man chatted with me on the phone. Seemed real anxious to meet you. He promised to look you up soon as you get on campus.

BILLY

Becky!

BECKY

You know, I was lucky that I found Stick. True love doesn't always happen in a town the size of Cavalier, you know. It was luck. Just plain old dumb luck. But it's different in a big place. You get a lot more options to help you decide what you like.

BILLY

Becky.

BECKY

Something tells me at school you're going to find just what you're looking for. But to do that you got to make friends, Billy. That's what you gotta do. Promise me you'll make friends.

BILLY

I'll try.

BECKY

You have to. I'm counting on you to get in there and make a name for yourself. Get to know good people. So that when Stick and I get there next year, we won't have to start from scratch. I wish I could be there to help you out, but we both know that if someone isn't here to keep him on the straight and narrow, Stick doesn't stand a snowball's chance in hell of living through the year, let alone getting through school and passing his entrance exams. Just a sacrifice I'll have to make... in the name of love. Oh, Billy, I wish you could be here to see our show in October...

(Medora enters.)

MEDORA

Hey, everyone. I'm here!

BECKY

(To Billy:) Take these numbers. You may need them. Medora! We can start now!

BILLY

Start what?

BECKY

Billy, go get Luther and Stick.

(Billy exits to bowling alley.)

Where's Sam?

MEDORA

He's packing the semi. Can you believe it? I got a perfectly good car to take on vacation, but that man refuses to drive anything but that huge truck of his. I guess old habits die hard. Whoah! What's with the menu, Becky?

BECKY

Surprise! Isn't it exciting? It's like Medora's Diner has been air-dropped on some little provincial village in the south of France.

MEDORA

Lord help us.

BECKY

Just for the long weekend. Until you get back.

(Billy, Luther, and Stick re-enter.)

Ready, Stick? One, two, three!

(Becky and Stick unravel a banner and hang it over the counter. It reads "Good Luck, Billy!")

LUTHER

Surprise!

STICK, BECKY, MEDORA

Good Luck, Billy!

BECKY

Go, Billy! Go!

MEDORA

We decided to have a little get together before you blasted off into the great unknown!

BECKY

Before we get to the presentation ceremony, Stick and I would like to do a little performance from our next play in honor of Billy. Ready, Stick? It's from the play Stick, Billy, and I performed at the State Finals. "Cyrano de Bergerac." In this part of the play, Christian has died 14 years before, but Roxane still carries the torch and doesn't know that it's been Billy, I mean Cyrano, who did all the talking before. Cyrano's just been hit on the head and he's come to see Roxane, who's living in a

convent, but she isn't really a nun, which I don't get... but anyway, this time, Stick is going to play Cyrano. Here we go... WAIT! I forgot. He's got this bandage around his head. But I'm not sure exactly what I'm going to wear yet. Okay? *Cyrano, your head!*

(Stick and Becky take their places. They both perform the scene with considerable skill.)

STICK

It's only my old wound from Arras. You know, where Christian died.

BECKY

I added that. But you're bleeding! From your head! And it looks serious!

STICK

It's nothing, really.

BECKY

Each of us has his wound. Mine is old but still unhealed, here . . .

(Becky removes a letter from the bodice of her dinette uniform.)

STICK

His letter!

BECKY

Read it.

(She hands it to Stick. Stick "reads" the letter flawlessly.)

STICK

"Farewell, Roxane! Death is near. I believe this will be my last day, my beloved. My soul is still heavy with unexpressed love, and I must die! Never again will my eyes delight..."

BECKY

How well you read his letter

STICK

"... will my eyes delight in kissing each of your graceful gestures. I remember one of them, a way of putting your hand to your forehead, and I want to cry out..."

BECKY

You read it... in a voice that...

STICK

"... my love!"

BECKY

... I'm not hearing for the first time!

STICK

"My heart has never left you for a moment, and in the next world my love for you will still be a boundless, as..."

BECKY

How can you read it now? It's dark. This is where she finally gets it. It was you.

STICK

No, Roxane, no!

BECKY

I should have guessed it each time I heard you say my name!

STICK

No! It wasn't...

BECKY

The voice in the night... It was you.

STICK

I swear it wasn't!

BECKY

The soul... It was yours!

STICK

It was Christian!

BECKY

You loved me!

STICK

No!

BECKY

You already deny it less strongly!

STICK

No, no, my love, I didn't love you!

BECKY

Ah, how many things have died, and how many have now been born! Why were you silent for fourteen years, knowing that he hadn't written that letter, and that the tears on it were yours? Why have you let that sublime silence be broken this evening?

STICK

My life has been that of a man who provides words and ideas for others. Remember the evening when Christian spoke to you below your balcony? That evening was the essence of my life while I remained below, in the shadows, others climbed up to receive the kiss of glory.

BECKY

I love you!

STICK

In the fairy tale, when Beauty said, "I love you" to the prince, his ugliness melted away like snow in the warmth of the sun, but as you can see, those words have no such magic effect on me. I love you, Roxanne

(Stick collapses into Becky's lap and "dies.")

BECKY

I've loved only one man, and I've lost him twice! And that's the end!

(Everyone applauds.)

BILLY

Bravo! Bravo!

MEDORA

That was real nice, Becky!

LUTHER

Stick, fine job! I didn't think you had it in you!

STICK

Billy rehearsed me and told me what to say and do.

BECKY

Time for our awards ceremony! Everybody ready? Luther, you go first.

LUTHER

I'm happy to tell you that this year is the inaugural year of a new scholarship I've created for promising young scholars from Cavalier who're on their way to fame,

fortune, and a college career. It pleases me even more to announce that Billy Gunderson is this year's recipient of the \$5,000.00 prize.

(Luther hands Billy a check and a certificate.)

BILLY

Thanks, Luther. I don't know what to say.

LUTHER

You deserve it, son.

BILLY

Thanks for... for all your help last February. Those times you came in here to fix the lanes and we'd just talk. That meant a lot to me.

LUTHER

Me too, Billy.

BECKY

My turn. In honor of you being... Billy, I've decided to bestow upon you the first place trophy that I... we... won at this year's North Dakota State High School Theater Contest! It's yours, Billy! Congratulations.

BILLY

Thanks, Becky! But it really should go to Stick. He worked the hardest of us three.

STICK

Aw... Take it!

BECKY

Make sure you put it in a place in your dorm room where everyone can see it.

STICK

Hey! Wait a minute. Can't leave without getting something from the old Stick. Here! My jersey.

(Stick tosses his jersey to Billy.)

BECKY

Oh, Stick. That old stinky thing?

STICK

Wear it when you go to class and let people know who it belongs to. Tell them to keep their heads up because Old Number 35 is on his way. Might have been held up one year, but he's on his way! Promise, Billy?

BILLY

I promise, Stick.

LUTHER

How about you promise to come back to watch Stick catch another winning pass at state finals?

STICK

Don't forget wrestling... This year we won't have to cancel the season like last...

(The door opens and Jack and a very pregnant Diane enter. Diane has her scrapbook. Everyone stops and stares at them.)

MEDORA

Jesus Lord...

LUTHER

Diane. Jack.

JACK

Hello, Luther. Medora.

MEDORA

What are you doing here, Jack?

DIANE

We heard that you were having a special... party for...

JACK

Lunch. Here for lunch. Anything wrong with that, Medora?

MEDORA

Heard you moved to the Twin Cities.

DIANE

We close next week.

JACK

Took a while to find someone to buy the house. Had to take a big loss. Did you hear that too, Medora?

LUTHER

Find work, Jack?

DIANE

A construction company.

JACK

Breaking my back digging ditches, Luther. Happy, Medora?

DIANE

It's a start. A new start. For us. Far enough away... so all that... nonsense from last Winter...

JACK

That's enough, Diane. Lunch. We're here for lunch, Medora. One last time. Then you'll never have to see our faces again.

LUTHER

Jack....

JACK

Go on, Diane. Get it over with.

(Diane crosses to Billy. Jack sits at a table and pretends to read a menu.)

DIANE

Billy, I have something for you for you to take... away... for you to have at... school. It's not much. A scrap book. Our trip to Yellowstone and all the things I've been collecting... newspaper clippings... little souvenirs that remind me of you. I've been working on it for quite a while now... Because... I thought...

JACK

Diane...

DIANE

I thought some day you'd want it. So we've decided to give it to you. Here.

(Diane gives Billy the book.)

I'm sorry, Billy. I'm sorry... He didn't mean to hurt you... He didn't...

JACK

Diane...

(Diane sits at Jack's table. She is upset. Jack can't look up from the menu. Billy looks down at the scrap book. He is speechless.

Pete enters the diner. They all stare at him.)

STICK

Hot damn... this outta be good!

BECKY

Stick!

STICK

What?

LUTHER

Hey, Pete.

BECKY

Hello, Mr. Gunderson. It's so nice of you to come. Can I show you to a table or would you like to sit at the counter. See, Stick. That's how I want you to do it. Just like we rehearsed.

(Pete sits on a stool at the counter.)

Okay. We have a number of specials today...

PETE

Coffee.

BECKY

Okay.

LUTHER

Haven't seen much of you since you got back, Pete. How're the hands?

(Luther examines Pete's hands.)

Frostbite can really do a number on you. You're a lucky man, Pete.

(Pete scoffs.)

That snowplow finding your car in time last February...

PETE

Yeah. Lucky.

(Becky pours coffee into Pete's cup.)

Redecorating, Medora?

MEDORA

Becky just changed the menu for the holiday. That's all.

PETE

(Reading Banner:) "Good Luck, Billy!" Maybe you could tell me what that's all about. Since I'm not allowed to talk to my son and ask him myself.

MEDORA

We're having a little celebration, Pete. Billy's leaving for college today.

PETE

That so? Important day in a boy's life. Wouldn't you say, Medora?

MEDORA

Yes.

PETE

A day you'd want to share with the special people in your life.

LUTHER

Pete...

PETE

The people who mean the most to you.

MEDORA

You know why we couldn't...

PETE

Shouldn't have to hear about it second hand... from your best friend.

MEDORA

Sam told you?

PETE

Loading up the semi, Medora. Guess you're taking a little trip too.

MEDORA

Yes.

PETE

Man shouldn't have to find out something so important about his son from his best friend. Should he, Medora?

MEDORA

Pete...

PETE

Who's to blame for that, do you suppose, Medora?

MEDORA

You know why...

PETE

A man losing his wife and son... Who's to blame, Medora?

LUTHER

Pete...

PETE

... for the living hell you put me through?

MEDORA

Want me to call the sheriff's office, Pete?

LUTHER

You're upsetting Billy, Pete.

PETE

Am I Luther? Is that what I'm doing?

LUTHER

You don't want him to remember you this way when he's at school, do you?

PETE

How's he going to remember me, Luther? It'd be so much better if I'd never come home... if they'd just kept me locked up in that loony bin... if I'd just frozen to death in that field. It would have saved you all that trouble, Medora. You wouldn't have had to stick your nose into everyone's business. But I didn't. I didn't die, Medora. And you know why? Because during that big blow last winter... during the height of that blizzard... a few hours after I hit that drift head on... car stalled... battery dead and the drifts so high they were covering the windows. Snow flying through the cracks. No jacket or gloves. Cold as hell. I thought I'd never see them again. Delores and Billy. I thought maybe that would be for the best. After all I'd said and done. They'd be better off without me. But I didn't die, Medora. Because it occurred to me how lucky I was to have them in my life. And I wanted to see them again... if only to say I'm sorry, beg for forgiveness, and try like hell to make everything better. Then when I woke up in the hospital... It was a second chance. And I wasn't going to screw it up. I'd take my medication even if it didn't do one goddamned bit of good. I decided to suck it up and feel the pain. Just keep it to myself and do everything in my power not to take it out on others. I was going to be a stronger man, Luther. Stronger than I'd ever been before. And then I came back and you know what happened? Everything

was taken away from me. The goddamned “good people” of this community stole my family from me. The only thing I had. And now I can’t come closer to them than 500 feet. You’ve ripped them away from me and that’s what you’ve given me, Medora. 500 feet of nothing but loneliness and despair. All I needed was a second chance. A second chance, Medora!

MEDORA

You know why we can’t, Pete!

PETE

Give me a goddamned second chance!

(Luther tries to stop Pete from threatening Medora. He pushes Luther away. Jack crosses to Pete and tries to restrain him. Pete turns on Jack.)

You... I know what happened. You think you can lie... tell everyone it was me... that night... That I came back here and beat the hell out of my son.

JACK

It wasn’t me.

PETE

Like hell! I was buried under ten feet of snow... I nearly lost my hands...

JACK

It didn’t happen! None of it!

MEDORA

Sam saw you, Jack. When he drove by the diner that night. You were here. You came back... alone. He saw you getting out of the car.

JACK

It didn’t happen! All lies! I lost my job... my home... over a pack of lies!

MEDORA

How could you do that to Billy? Making him testify like that... why didn’t you stand up like a man and tell the truth?

PETE

You fucking pervert! Trying to turn my son into a... You goddamned son of a bitch!

(Pete punches Jack and knocks him to the ground. He tries to jump on top of Jack, but Stick and Luther stop him.)

JACK

I didn't do it. It didn't happen! None of it. Lies! All of it, lies!

PETE

Stay away from my son! 500 feet! You hear me? Stay away from my son!

(Luther and Stick push Pete away from Jack. Jack sits on the floor with his head in his hands. Diane holds him.)

LUTHER

You said you were going to have to be strong, Pete. Prove to us that you can do it. You can start right now. Do you understand?

PETE

I just wanted to see him, Luther. Before it was too late. To tell him... to tell him I... I just wanted to see him.

LUTHER

Billy?

(Billy nods.)

Okay. You have your chance. You can talk to him... but only for a minute.

PETE

Billy, I... I...

(He can't go on.)

BILLY

Dad...

(Pete removes a small carved wooden decoy from his pocket and hands it to Billy. Pete tries to say something. Tears stream down his face. He gestures to hold Billy's face in his hands, but Billy automatically flinches and pulls away. Pete looks down at his hands. He gives up and crosses to the door.)

PETE

It's too late...

(He exits.)

STICK

Wow! Didn't know Pete had such a good right hook!

BECKY

You okay, Billy?

BILLY

It's one of his decoys, Becky. See?

BECKY

It's pretty, Billy. Really pretty.

MEDORA

You going to be okay, Billy?

(Billy nods his head.)

LUTHER

How's the eye, Jack?

JACK

Fine, Luther. We're going to be fine. Just fine.

(Sound of semi truck horn.)

MEDORA

That's Sam. We got to shake a leg, Billy. He's not much for waiting. We'll talk on the way. Okay?

(Luther leads Medora away from the rest of the group.)

LUTHER

Medora, can I talk with you for a second.

MEDORA

Can't wait for this day to be over. What's up, Luther?

LUTHER

Real nice of you to drop Billy off at school.

MEDORA

Least we could do. Grand Forks is just a little out of our way.

LUTHER

Medora, before you go, I've got something to tell you. Something I've wanted to tell you for a long time.

MEDORA

Yes, Luther.

(Horn is heard again.)

Damn that Sam. Always so impatient, but you gotta love him.

LUTHER

Yep.

MEDORA

What d'you want to say, Luther. Go ahead...

LUTHER

You're a special person, Medora. Always have been.

MEDORA

We've spent quite a few years together in this diner, haven't we? You've helped me get through all those lonely spells when Sam was on the road. Wouldn't have traded those years for the world, Luther.

LUTHER

Neither would I... neither would I.

MEDORA

I can't thank you enough for that.

(Luther can't speak.)

You keep track of all the goings on and update me when I get back. I'm counting on you, my friend... my good friend.

(Luther puts gift behind his back.)

LUTHER

You and Sam drive safe now, you hear. Got to get back here in one piece so you can cook me something I can eat instead of all this fancy stuff.

MEDORA

Let me give you a kiss, Luther.

(Medora gives Luther a peck on the cheek.)

You take care now. So long everyone. Come on, Billy. We gotta run before Sam puts it into gear!

(Medora exits. Billy crosses to Becky and hugs her.)

BECKY

Remember us, Billy!

BILLY

How could I forget you, Becky?

(Billy crosses to Stick. They do their handshake ritual.)

STICK & BILLY

Hoff... hoff... hoff...

(At the end of the handshake they stop for a moment. Then hug each other tenderly. Billy shakes Luther's hand.)

BILLY

Good-bye, Luther.

LUTHER

(Looking at gift in his hands:) Don't wait, Billy. Dive in head first. Grab everything in your reach. Don't be timid, don't worry about looking the fool... or before you know it, it'll be too late. Too late.

BILLY

Good-bye, everyone...

(Billy picks up bag and crosses to the door. He pauses to think. Then crosses to Jack.)

It happened, Coach. No matter what you say. It happened. All of it. And do you know why? If you could be honest with yourself maybe you'd know. It's really easy to understand. I did it for you... Because... I loved you. And I'm not ashamed of that anymore.

(Billy picks up the suitcase and exits. Jack is shocked. Stick is about to say something...)

BECKY

Stick!

STICK

What?!

BECKY

Give me a B. Give me an I. Give me an L... L... Y! What does it spell? BILLY!

STICK

Whoo who!

BECKY

Good Luck Billy!

DIANE

Billy. Beautiful Billy.

LUTHER

Diane. Your baby. What are you going to name the baby?

JACK

Billy. We're going to name him Billy.

(Black out.

The end.)