

How Heaven Works

By Dennis Fisher

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CHARACTER NAME	DESCRIPTION
Larry	45. Injured leg. Worked for Rick before injury.
Rick	45. Owns small business for running network cabling.
Junior	45. Born again Christian. Works for Rick.
Bobby	40. Truck Driver. Larry's brother.
Mom	Mother of Larry and Bobby. She is dying and is heavily medicated in a hospice. She is hard of hearing.
Siri/News Announcer	Female, ageless.

The hour of departure has arrived and we go our ways; I to die, and you to live. Which is better? Only God knows.

- Socrates

SCENE ONE

Evening. We are in a hospice room. Elderly woman lies in hospital reclining chair. Her eyes are closed. She is hooked to oxygen and is heavily medicated. She is hard of hearing. St. Louis Cardinal baseball game is on TV on wall. Her son LARRY sits in chair. His left leg is in a brace. He has a cane. He stares into space occasionally looking at his mother.

LARRY

(to himself) Joe. Joe!

LARRY breaks down and begins sobbing. Suddenly we hear muffled cheer from TV. Mother stirs, makes guttural noises. LARRY looks up. Composes himself.

LARRY

I'll be darned. (loudly) Hey mom, Yadier Molina hit a home run.

MOM

(She stirs) What? Who's there?

LARRY

It's Larry.

MOM

Who?

LARRY

It's Larry.

MOM

Larry?

LARRY

Your son mom. Yadi just hit a home run.

MOM

Yadi. Bless his heart.

LARRY

He's your favorite.

MOM

You're my favorite.

LARRY

Mom you just made my day.

MOM

I was just talkin' to your brother Joe.

LARRY

(hesitantly) Uh. That's good.

MOM

And I talked to grandpa.

LARRY

You did?

MOM

They see everything. Everything. Bring me my purse.

LARRY

Uh, not right now mom. Let's watch the game.

MOM

It's a game?

LARRY

It is.

She closes her eyes. LARRY looks at her and sighs.

LARRY

It sure is.

LIGHTS FADE - END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

Morning. We are in a small town gas station coffee shop. RICK is sitting at a table looking at a smart phone. JUNIOR is looking over his shoulder and has a bandaged hand. LARRY enters, using a cane. His leg is in a brace. He sits. He does not speak.

RICK

Larry! Check this picture out.

Shows image on phone to Larry. Larry does not respond. He is in a daze.

RICK

Found it on the web. She killed her three kids and ran off to Florida with her sixteen year old lesbian lover. She's hot, huh? I'd boof her in a heartbeat.

LARRY does not respond.

RICK

Would you boof her?

LARRY

My blood testified against me.

RICK

Say what?

LARRY

My blood testified against me.

JUNIOR

What does that mean?

LARRY

Because of the accident.

RICK

It wasn't an accident. That jerk ran a stop sign.

LARRY

I had pot in my blood.

RICK

You don't smoke pot.

LARRY

I did a one hitter with that woman at the bar the night before the accident. She was flirtin' with me.

RICK

The woman that left with that other guy?

LARRY

Thanks for the reminder.

RICK

You should've asked her to dance. He asked her to dance.

LARRY

My heart wasn't in it.

JUNIOR

I don't get it. How can your blood testify against you?

LARRY

After a fatal accident they draw blood. I had pot in my blood.

RICK

You did it the day before. No way you were messed up.

LARRY

I just came from the public defender's office. By law I was impaired even though I wasn't. Since Joe died Tom Carmody is chargin' me with vehicular manslaughter.

RICK

No way! It wasn't your fault! It's just because he's up for reelection. Carmody can't get a heroin addict to show off to voters so he's usin' you to hang on to his paycheck and his pension and his health care. He's got one of the best payin' jobs in the county and he's usin' you to keep it!

JUNIOR

The law can't work this way. You're an innocent bystander. I smoked pot all the time with Carmody in high school.

LARRY

You smoked pot with Carmody? Unbelievable. Now he's a States Attorney and puts people in jail for pot. The war on drugs. I'm just collateral damage.

RICK

This is insane. Your lawyer'll get you off.

LARRY

The public defender's just barely a lawyer. He gets paid even if I go to jail. That's how the system works. For lawyers.

RICK

A jury ain't gonna convict you.

LARRY

There won't be a jury. The defender's been talkin' to Carmody. He says a plea deal gives me a chance the judge'll go easy on me. State's Attorney gets a conviction. I sidestep twenty years in jail. I gotta try it. Anyway everybody knows that Carmody and Judge Hubbard are pals. They hunt together. Carmody'll be a judge one day too. Just watch.

RICK

You need a better lawyer Larry. Why would you plead guilty?

LARRY

It don't matter who caused the accident. I had pot in my system. Look it up on your goofball Google if you don't believe me.

RICK

Well it's a dumb law.

LARRY

You're preachin' to the choir.

JUNIOR

What's the worst case with a plea deal?

LARRY

Six years in prison.

RICK

Screw that! I will kick your butt if you agree to a plea.

LARRY

That won't be hard to do. My leg is killin' me.

RICK

I'm serious Larry. I ain't lettin' this happen.

LARRY

(Gets in Rick's face) Dammit Rick! You think I want to do this? I can get twenty years without a plea! Don't you get it? I'm freaking out. Six years I think I can do. Twenty? No way. (pause) It's my fault Joe is gone I killed Joe!

RICK

No you didn't dammit! That's BS. The guy that ran the stop sign did it. Screw Carmody, the hypocrite. And screw that bone-headed public defender. Get a better lawyer and try the jury.

LARRY

I ain't got any money for a lawyer. I can't work. You know that.

JUNIOR

We can figure out how to come up with some money.

LARRY

Time to change the subject.

RICK

Try a jury.

LARRY

Stop. Now!

RICK

Aw. Did I tell you about when I was called for jury duty?

LARRY

(Methodically) The jury room was tiny, it was quiet, nobody was talkin', a juror went to the bathroom wedged in the corner of the room, you could all hear him takin' a dump, he sounded like a hyena givin' a breech birth, and he came out smiling and small talkin' and everybody else bonded over it and they called him The Hyena behind his back the rest of the trial.

RICK

I guess I did tell you.

JUNIOR

More than once.

LARRY notices, for the first time, that JUNIOR's hand is wrapped in a dirty bandage.

LARRY

Hey. What happened to your hand Junior?

JUNIOR

Aw. My tail pipe fell off. Burnt my hand picking it up. Had to wait for the muffler to cool down and then I had to run down some bailin' wire to strap it back on.

RICK

You really need to get rid of that piece of junk and get another truck.

JUNIOR

Sure. If you loan me your magic wand I'll generate some money and get a new Cadillac. And while I'm at it, I'll use the wand to get a rich, good lookin' wife. I need to refill my coffee.

He gets up to refill coffee.

LARRY

How many refill's is that today Junior?

JUNIOR

I don't know. They're free. Five or six?

LARRY

You might want to slow down.

JUNIOR

OK. Sure. How's your mom Larry?

LARRY

Last night she wasn't doin' so good. She was talkin' about Joe and grandpa like they were still alive. It's almost like she knows Joe's gone.

JUNIOR

Aw. I'm sorry. Anything I can do to help?

LARRY

You could kidnap brother Bobby and keep him away from the hospice before I throttle him.

JUNIOR

Well, I ain't gonna do that. But I'll say a prayer for her.

LARRY

Thanks, man.

RICK

Is Bobby still doin' the "zombie" pills?

LARRY

It looks like it.

JUNIOR

I'm so sorry you gotta go through this Larry.

LARRY

(Big sigh) I should not have done the one hitter with that woman. I never smoke pot.

RICK

And you didn't even get lucky.

LARRY

Thanks Rick. Maybe you could go outside with a bullhorn and tell people in the street that I can't get a woman.

JUNIOR

Shakers get lucky more often than us.

RICK

What's a Shaker?

JUNIOR

Shakers are a religious group that decided to never have sex.

LARRY

That's weird. How do you know that?

JUNIOR

I been readin' a lot about religion since I gave my life to God.

RICK

So we get lucky less than people that totally gave up sex.

JUNIOR

I was jokin', but yeh.

RICK

That sounds about right. You guys wanna look at that picture again?

LARRY

Rick, you need a real woman in your life before you end up on a some list with the FBI.

JUNIOR

He'd scare a real woman off.

RICK

(Holds up smart phone) She's smokin'.

JUNIOR

She killed her kids.

RICK

That don't make her unhot. I'd boof her.

JUNIOR

What does that even mean?

RICK

Boof. Boink. Boff. A carnal episode.

LARRY

It's an image on a screen. It's not a real woman. It's an illusion. She's a fantasy. This is what modern man has come to. It's creepy and pathetic Rick. I'm about to go to prison and this is what you're focusin' on? I got big decisions to make.

RICK

Sorry. I can help you there. The plea deal is insane. Don't do it.

LARRY

My lawyer says do it.

RICK

Your lawyer is a public defender in a town without a traffic light. He'd be an ambulance chaser if we had an ambulance.

LARRY

Oh God.

RICK

I got it! Let's ask Siri what you should do.

LARRY

Ask a phone the most important question of my life. That makes sense. To an idiot.

RICK

Siri has the combined knowledge of the entire world.

JUNIOR

And you use it to look at pictures of hot killers.

RICK

Siri, should Larry ask for a jury trial?

VOICE OF SIRI

Interesting question, Rick. Perhaps you should seek counsel from a specialist.

LARRY

I think it's tellin' me to ignore you.

RICK

We need yes and no answers. Do you think there's a Magic Eight Ball app for the phone? One that would just answer yes or no?

LARRY

I was worried I wasn't gettin' good legal advice. But with you providin' me with the expert legal help of the Magic Eight Ball I'm sure to walk free.

JUNIOR

Just put yourself in God's hands Larry. He brought me back from the edge. Back when I was drinkin' and then when I was smokin' meth, I shoulda been dead, but God saved me.

LARRY

It was awful when you disappeared into that cabin. One of the worst days of my life was when we went down there and drug you out.

JUNIOR

I was lost. I got faith in God now.

RICK

I got faith in Siri. She's got the best programmers.

JUNIOR

There's only one programmer worth listenin' to.

RICK

I think I'll go with Siri's logic instead of supernatural mumbo jumbo.

JUNIOR

Did logic lead you to the hot child murderer pictures?

LARRY

Fellas! Stop! I don't need you guys fightin' over who has the best imaginary friend. I got real problems. (Looks at watch) I gotta go see mom. That'll sure help me relax. See you boys tomorrow, same time, same place.

JUNIOR

God willin'.

RICK

I'll try to have a Magic Eight Ball app by then. We'll ask what you should do. It'll be more, ah, decisive than Siri.

LARRY

I feel like I should mock the both of you but it's hard to mock people that are concerned about you.

RICK

We expect it of you.

JUNIOR

We got your back Larry.

LARRY

If it wasn't for you guys I think I'd drive into a pole.

RICK

Drive into a Swede.

LARRY

Huh?

RICK

Bad joke.

LARRY

It is isn't it? That it is.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

Back in hospice. TV plays silently on wall. Elderly woman lies in reclining chair. Her eyes are closed. She is hooked to oxygen and is heavily medicated. Her son LARRY sits in chair next to her. His cane leans against chair. His left leg is in a brace. Mom is hard of hearing and visitors must speak loudly.

LARRY

Mom. Mom. Can you hear me?

MOM

(She opens her eyes). What?

LARRY

(Louder) Can you hear me?

MOM

They put me in jail. I was drunk for the first time. I saw grandpa naked.

LARRY

What are you talking about?

MOM

I was in jail. They treated me real nice. They took my bottle. Hand me my purse.

LARRY

You weren't in jail. You never had a drink in your life. You were dreaming.

MOM

Give me my purse.

LARRY

You don't need your purse.

MOM

I'm going home. I need my purse.

LARRY

Mom, you're not going home until you get your strength back.

MOM

Is Joe coming?

LARRY

... Sure. Later. Are you hungry?

MOM

(begins to cry) Why don't you want me to go home?

LARRY

Mom, if you stay here for a while you'll build your strength. Everything's going to be fine. Just build your strength.

MOM

The church in the woods is so beautiful. (She stops crying)

LARRY

What church?

MOM

In the woods. In the picture.

She is looking at painting of a forest on the hospice wall. Larry squints, looks at picture. There is no church.

LARRY

That's a pretty church mom.

MOM

That's my church. What's wrong with your leg? You haven't been on that motorcycle have you? I hate that motorcycle.

LARRY

My leg is fine. I sold the motorcycle.

MOM

Oh thank heavens. My boys are so wonderful. Three wonderful boys. But don't you start a revolution. That would upset me too much.

LARRY

I'm not going to start a revolution mom. I promise.

MOM

Thank goodness.

Bobby enters room. He is under the influence of pain killers. He slumps into chair. He ignores Larry.

BOBBY

(Loudly) How's your head mom?

MOM

Isn't the church in the woods beautiful?

She looks at painting on wall. BOBBY stares.

BOBBY

(Loudly) There ain't no church in that picture.

LARRY

Sure there is. There in the clearing. You just don't see it.

BOBBY

What? What are you doin'?

MOM

Bobby can you get me my purse?

BOBBY

Sure mom. (he starts to get up)

LARRY

(softly so mom doesn't hear) Don't get it.

BOBBY

(softly) Why not?

LARRY

(whispers) She thinks once she gets the purse she can go home. Pretend you see a church.

BOBBY

(softly) That don't make sense.

LARRY

(softly) If you're lookin' for sense in this room you're gonna be disappointed.

BOBBY

(softly) If she wants the purse I'm gettin' it.

LARRY

(softly) No you're not.

BOBBY

(Stands up) (softly) You don't control me.

LARRY

(softly but firmly) Bobby, this ain't about me and you buttin' heads, this is about mom. She ain't goin' home. This is it. That damn purse makes her think she's goin' home. She's askin' about Joe and that ain't helpin'. We're gonna make her comfortable here with the time she has left.

BOBBY

(softly) She's goin' home. Don't say she's not goin' home.

LARRY

(softly) It took staples to stitch her scalp together. Another fall and that's it. We gotta keep her from thinkin' about home. Home ain't happenin'.

MOM

What are you boys talking about?

LARRY

(louder) Bobby asked me if you slept ok last night.

MOM

I was up all night. I want to go home.

LARRY

The nurse told me you slept real good mom.

MOM

The nurses pluck their eyebrows and dye their hair and put on makeup. It's not fair to get old and fall to pieces all at once. When I was in the jail I had ...

BOBBY

You was in jail?

MOM

I got drunk for the first time. In a car. Did you get here in a car?

BOBBY

I drove my truck. Jail?

LARRY

(softly) So while you're wobblin' like this you drove your truck over here Bobby?

BOBBY

(softly but angrily) Well I ain't crashed into anything lately Larry. How 'bout you?

MOM

What are you boys talkin' about? Is it about those teenage girls? I'm tired of teenage girls. They pressure boys to smoke. They don't listen to me.

LARRY

We're talkin' about how Bobby is feelin' a little unsteady lately mom.

BOBBY

(Whispers angrily to LARRY) I think I'll go get some Camels. I saw your bike outside. Your handlebars still aren't straight. And she's gonna get better and she's gonna go home.

Bobby leaves the room unsteadily.

MOM

Where did Bobby go?

LARRY

(louder) He went to the bathroom mom. He'll be back. On the way out he said he loves you.

MOM

I love you boys too. Me and sis were playin' out back and we went inside and grandpa left the door open and we saw him lookin' for his overalls. He was naked as the day he was born. (Cries) Larry. I'm afraid.

LARRY

There's no need to be afraid. What are you afraid of?

MOM

Everything (she cries)

LARRY

Mom, it's all gonna be ok. I promise.

MOM

I guess I can trust you.

LARRY

Of course you can trust me. I'm your son.

MOM

Do you know how heaven works? I do.

LARRY

You do? You've got to explain that to me.

MOM

Grandpa told me important things.

LARRY

What did he say?

MOM

He said God's tellin' a big joke. He said you got to laugh for heaven to work.

LARRY

(Chuckles) That's beautiful mom.

MOM

Like your beautiful poem.

LARRY

I don't remember writin' a poem.

MOM

Last year. In Junior High. It was wonderful. I was so proud.

LARRY

I really made you proud?

MOM

You did. Of course I love you boys so much that if you smeared poop on the wall I would of stood back and called it a masterpiece. (she laughs)

LARRY

Aww mom.

MOM

Now... Get me my purse.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

Morning. Back in a small town gas station coffee shop. LARRY and RICK are at a table. RICK is staring at smart phone.

LARRY

Prison. Pris - un. How is this real? How does something like this become real? In school I could have been voted least likely to be a criminal. My god. It seems like an illusion. You ever imagine what life should be like instead of how it is?

RICK

Whaddya mean?

LARRY

My life is a mess. Not just a mess but I got absolutely no joy to speak of. I thought life was supposed to include joy. Forget the mess I'm in, where's the joy?

RICK

I ain't seen much joy either.

LARRY

When I was a kid my mom was nuts about Elvis movies, she just loved "em. In every movie they'd be sittin' around a malt shop or somethin' and Elvis would start strummin' his guitar and singin' and all of a sudden you could hear a whole big band playin' and everybody would start dancin' around, all of 'em dancin' together perfectly and laughin' and huggin' and kissin'. That's joy Rick. Did you see any of those movies?

RICK

I think so.

LARRY

Don't laugh, but I always thought that was how life should be. Dancin' and singin' and smilin', all synced up, vibratin' together. In real life everybody is vibratin' on their own. The girls dancin' in the movie looked so cool, so exciting. Elvis looked like a million bucks. We sit in a gas station and inhale gas fumes and look at cell phones. Life is so damned dull around here. Wouldn't it be awesome if in real life we could just jump up right now and start dancin' all together and laughin' and singin' and huggin'?

RICK

I guess it kinda would. Not sure about the huggin'.

LARRY

The girls always wanted to dance in high school and we never took the risk.

RICK

I was too self conscious.

LARRY

Me too. But I always wondered if I just would've danced I might have been luckier in love.

RICK

Maybe so.

LARRY

It looked like fun, that dancin' stuff.

RICK

It did.

LARRY

(pause) When I was a little kid I put on mom's lipstick once.

RICK

I, ah, well.

LARRY

I just wanted to see what it was like. I was a curious kid. It don't mean nothin' does it?

RICK

Uh. Did you ever do it again, like when you were an adult?

LARRY

No. Forget I said that.

RICK

Ok. So, uh, you wish life was like an Elvis movie?

LARRY

Yeh.

They pause and stare at the ceiling.

RICK

Well, those movies happened a long time ago. Check out this article I found on the web. (Holds up smart phone) It's about all of the celebrities that died from autoerotic asphyxiation. It's worth notin' how many famous people croaked beatin' off and stranglin' themselves.

LARRY

How'd we get from dancin' in the malt shop to this? Jesus.

RICK

These people are rich and lead interestin' lives and then they accidentally kill themselves doing weird sex stuff. It's a window into the human psyche. It's why they call it Hollyweird.

LARRY

This is why you haven't had a girl friend since high school.

RICK

I didn't have a girlfriend in high school.

LARRY

Hard to imagine. Put the phone away.

RICK

This smart phone gives me access to all human knowledge.

LARRY

Put it away.

RICK

It's like havin' another brain in your pocket.

LARRY

A brain that specializes in skin crawlin' creepy shit.

RICK

You can be mean sometimes Larry.

JUNIOR walks in and has bandage on his head in addition to the bandage already on his hand.

LARRY

Damn Junior, what now?

JUNIOR

Aw, the muffler broke loose again and I was underneath the truck tryin' to reconnect it and it fell on my head.

RICK

The truck fell on your head?

JUNIOR

No Rick. The muffler fell on my head. Geez.

RICK

Junior, I worry about you. You able to work for me pullin' wire tomorrow?

JUNIOR

I need to take a break. Got a concussion I think. The room's spinnin' a little bit. God'll take care of it though. You just have to have Faith. Everything works out if you just have Faith.

LARRY

Is god gonna cut you a check for the rent? You're gonna be back in your mom's basement like me.

JUNIOR

I moved back in with mom last night. So you're right. I gotta get another refill on this coffee. I've only had four or five cups today.

He steps to counter and refills cup.

RICK

Shoot. Since you guys are outa action I'll have to hire the Bunjamin brothers to help me run cable on that job up in Alton. Those goofs would screw up a one horse parade. What a couple of losers.

JUNIOR

Ben Bunjamin ate boogers in 3rd grade. I remember it like it was yesterday.

LARRY

We were there Junior.

RICK

He's 45 years old and everybody still calls him Booger. Booger Bunjamin. Could you imagine?

LARRY

Stop! Damn. Sometimes I feel like I'm in the slow class with you guys.

RICK

I got the Magic Eight Ball app if you want to try it.

LARRY

Case in point.

JUNIOR

You told him yet Rick?

RICK

I been waitin' for you.

LARRY

Told me what?

JUNIOR

Rick's got a plan. But I ain't sure about it.

LARRY

A plan for what?

RICK

A plan to keep you out of prison. You ever been to the gamblin' boat in Alton?

LARRY

Nope. That's for risk takers. That ain't me.

RICK

It's a way to make money, quick and easy.

JUNIOR

Or a way to lose money, quick and easy.

RICK

My aunt used to go there all of the time.

LARRY

Didn't your aunt lose her house?

RICK

She just decided to downsize.

JUNIOR

After she lost all of her money on the boat.

RICK

I think that's just a rumor.

LARRY

It could be a rumor because it actually happened.

JUNIOR

Is that your aunt that's bowlegged or the other one?

RICK

The bow legged one.

JUNIOR

(thoughtfully) Do you know if you're bow legged? I mean you can't look at yourself like other people do. Imagine bein' real bowlegged and not knowin' it. You could think you're real snappy lookin' and people could be gigglin' at you behind your back.

LARRY

Junior if you hadn't just had a muffler drop on your head I'd think somethin' was seriously wrong with you. Focus! Rick, tell us how this could work.

RICK

I did some research on my phone and there's a big time lawyer in Alton that specializes in vehicular manslaughter. He gets people off. We need to get like ten thousand bucks so we can hire him to get the charges dropped.

LARRY

Might as well be a billion.

RICK

You guys got any savings at all?

JUNIOR

I got about hundred and fifty bucks stashed away.

RICK

That's it?

JUNIOR

I helped mom buy new false teeth. Her jaw was killin' her. She was havin' trouble eatin'. Got 'em at Costco.

LARRY

You're a good son Junior. I got two hundred bucks left. It's stashed in my socks drawer. I obviously ain't worked for you since the accident.

RICK

Dang.

JUNIOR

What you got Rick?

RICK

I got a little over eight hundred dollars saved.

LARRY

You're kiddin'? How'd you do that?

RICK

I been savin' for a trip to the Phillipines.

LARRY

Why would you want to go to the Phillipines?

RICK

Not important. *This* is important. We got to do some more research, practice some gamblin' technique, take our money down to the boat in Alton and turn it into ten grand. We can get Larry off.

JUNIOR

Wait. Why are you goin' to the Phillipines?

RICK

A topic for another day Junior. Like Larry said, we got to focus. We can win enough money to help Larry.

JUNIOR

Or we could lose all of our money. I'm going to have to draw a line in the sand here Rick.

RICK

I thought you said you just have to believe, to have faith? I've got faith we can do this. Larry's our best friend. We got to help him.

JUNIOR

I do always say to have Faith. You got me there.

RICK

This is a way to make it happen. We ain't gonna let you down Larry. And maybe we can make a little extra money for ourselves. For our dreams.

JUNIOR

Say we get on the gamblin' boat. It's kinda fancy ain't it?

RICK

The TV commercials make the boats look glamorous. I noticed that the dollar store has some new dress shirts for eight bucks. You gotta spend money to make money. We don't want to stand out.

JUNIOR

Makes sense.

RICK

In the meantime we've got to study blackjack. We got to practice. How hard can it be? Let's go over to mom's trailer and get at it. She made some brownies I been wantin' to dig into.

LARRY

Wait. Let's see what the Magic Eight Ball has to say. I might as well go all in.

RICK brings up app on his phone.

RICK

Magic Eight Ball, will we be able to win ten thousand dollars at the gamblin' boat?

He looks intently at the phone app.

"Signs point to yes"

LARRY

Whoa! I was listenin' to K,S,H,E radio not fifteen minutes ago and the song Owner of a Lonely Heart came on. By the Yes. By the band Yes! I haven't heard that song in twenty years. That's the sign! Signs point to Yes! I'm just as nutty as you guys now!

RICK

And proud of it I hope!

LARRY

Rick, I've been kind of paralyzed by this whole thing. I really appreciate you takin' the initiative. I gotta snap out of it and get assertive. This is a good start. I like the Faith and gamblin' thing. It's nuts, but lots of great success stories seemed nutty at the start. I think we can do this. Blackjack is a pretty simple game. It's just math.

JUNIOR

I got a C plus in math. That's better than average.

RICK

That's one of the weaker attempts at braggin' I've heard lately.

JUNIOR

I just hope Jesus will forgive me.

LARRY

You're thinkin' your imaginary friend has a problem with gamblin'?

JUNIOR

Larry you just made a giant decision based on the Magic Eight Ball and now you're makin' fun of my Faith?

LARRY

Fair enough. But Jesus' main thing is forgiveness. So I think you'll get a pass on this one.

JUNIOR

Good point. I bet you're right.

LARRY

See. You've started bettin' already. (chuckles) It's all comin' together.

JUNIOR

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

LARRY

It's all a mystery for sure. Rick, bring your car around. Fellas, let's go practice to kick some gamblin' boat butt!

RICK

Damn straight!

JUNIOR

Hallelujah! See you guys at the trailer.

They shake hands. JUNIOR and LARRY head for the exit. LARRY starts humming the song LET YOURSELF GO and dances a kind of crippled Elvis dance move on the way out. RICK pauses as they leave and looks at his phone.

RICK

(Quietly) Magic Eight Ball. If I ever get to the Philippines am I gonna find somebody to love?

He looks at screen and reads.

"Don't bet on it".

His shoulders sag, he sighs and exits the gas station.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIVE

Evening. Back at hospice. MOM is asleep in reclining chair, senses dulled by morphine. Larry settles into chair, still holding on to his cane.

LARRY

(Loudly) Mom. Mom. How are you doin? It's Larry.

MOM

(Eyes still closed. Mumbles) Get me my purse.

LARRY

No mom. You don't need your purse.

MOM

Get me my purse!

LARRY

I'm sorry. No.

MOM

I can't believe how mean you are. The nurses are all against me. They paint their lips but they don't paint mine. Everybody is so mean to me.

LARRY

We love you mom. We would never be mean to you.

MOM

Have you seen Joe? He's not mean to me.

LARRY

Not today.

MOM

He's didn't visit me last night. I think he might've been kidnapped by those men down at the river.

LARRY

Mom. You got quite an imagination.

MOM

He'd be here if he wasn't kidnapped. Those gangsters hide out down by the river. In a cabin. Their heads are shaped weird. `They say they're huntin' but they're takin' drugs. People used to use those cabins to hunt. Not anymore. Can you check the river?

LARRY

Good heavens mom. I'd be surprised if gangsters with weird heads are takin' drugs at the river but I'll check it out OK? Joe could just be workin'. He'll visit when he's done at work.

MOM closes eyes and nods off. Bobby staggers into room and plops in chair.

LARRY

(whispers) Bobby we gotta talk.

BOBBY

(whispers) You mean you gotta talk and I gotta listen. Like always.

LARRY

(softly) I talked to the nurse before I came in here. They doubled the dose of morphine. The cancer is spreadin' everywhere. She's not her good natured self anymore.

BOBBY

(softly) They gotta do more chemo.

LARRY

(softly) Their ain't gonna be no more chemo. That's why she's in the hospice.

BOBBY

(starts to get up) (softly) I'm gonna go raise some hell with the nurses. They can't give up.

LARRY

(softly) Bobby they're just tryin' to control the pain now. They ain't gonna do no more chemo.

Mom stirs.

Who's that?
MOM

BOBBY
(loudly) Hi mom. It's Bobby.

MOM
(Mumbles with eyes closed) Get me my purse Bobby.

BOBBY
Ok.

He stands up to get the purse.

LARRY
(whispers) I told you not to get the purse. She can't think she's goin' home. It'll upset her.

BOBBY
(whispers) I'm the new sheriff in town. She wants it. She gets it.

He moves to table with purse. LARRY stands up, gets between BOBBY and the table.

LARRY
(whispers) No.

MOM
What are you boys doin'?

LARRY
(loudly) We're decidin' what channel to put the TV on mom. Why don't you try to get some sleep?

MOM
Turn Yadi on.

MOM closes eyes and nods off.

BOBBY

(softly) Get out of my way.

LARRY

(softly) No.

BOBBY

(softly) You can barely walk Larry. Don't make me kick your ass.

LARRY

(softly) You're so high on vicodin you're havin' trouble standin' up. I'll take my chances.

BOBBY

(Angry) Out of my way.

LARRY

(softly) You gonna start a fight in front of MOM? Nice judgment Bobby.

BOBBY looks at MOM, who is sound asleep.

BOBBY

(softly) She wants her purse. I'm gonna make her happy.

BOBBY tries to push by LARRY, who grabs BOBBY and they begin to struggle and get each other in a bear hug.

BOBBY

Goddamn you Larry!

They teeter next to MOM's chair, almost toppling on to her. BOBBY tries to punch LARRY, misses, and the momentum of the punch pulls them both to the floor with a crash, landing next to their mother.

LARRY

(In pain) Oh shit.

BOBBY stands up unsteadily, goes to table, grabs purse, puts it on MOM's lap. He heads for the door.

LARRY

Bobby.

MOM opens eyes, sees the purse, tries to get up, but doesn't have the strength.

MOM

I'm going home. Bobby, take me home.

LARRY

(In pain, whispers) Bobby. Can you take me to the emergency room in Alton? I think we re-broke my leg.

BOBBY

(quietly) Aw no. You don't have insurance do ya?

LARRY

(grimaces) Of course not. But I still gotta go.

MOM

Larry, why are you on the floor?

LARRY

(loudly) I tripped on the carpet and fell mom. I'm OK.

MOM

Can you take me home? I've got my purse.

BOBBY

(whispers) I'll bring the truck around to the entrance. I'll be right back.

BOBBY exits.

MOM

Where'd Bobby go?

LARRY

He had to go to the bathroom. He said he loves you more than anything.

MOM

That's sweet. Why don't you get up?

LARRY

(Loudly) I'm kind of tired mom. I'm gonna take a nap here on the floor. Why don't you take a nap too?

MOM

Can we go home when we wake up?

LARRY

We'll talk about it after we rest, OK?

MOM

OK. Do you think grandpa might visit?

LARRY

If you go to sleep he just might.

MOM

I love you honey.

LARRY

I love you too mom.

MOM closes eyes, LARRY continues to lie on the floor, looking up at the painting of a forest on the wall. BOBBY returns, LARRY puts his finger to his lips. BOBBY helps LARRY stand and unsteadily supports him as they stagger out of the room, with LARRY hopping on his good leg. As lights go down MOM clutches purse, asleep, with smile on her face.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIX

Morning. We are in a small town gas station coffee shop. LARRY sits at table, his leg is in a cast. Junior paces around table. RICK enters and has a foam support around his neck. He sits at the table.

LARRY

That neck thing is a new development Rick. Or is it just for fashion?

RICK

Aw, I threw my neck out running cable through a ceiling. Damn it hurts. Larry, you couldn't give me one of your leg pain killers could you?

LARRY

Rick, I got a prescription. You don't.

RICK

My neck is killin' me.

LARRY

Last time I got careless with a drug I ended up in trouble with the law.

RICK

I'm your oldest buddy, I ain't gonna tell nobody. My neck is tight as hell.

LARRY

I'm sorry.

JUNIOR

God'll take care of it Rick.

RICK

That god BS is gettin' a little old. God has sure helped you lead a life of privilege and prosperity.

JUNIOR

You forget that a short time ago I was visitin' drug houses. Darn. I need a refill on this coffee.

RICK

How many cups is that today Junior?

JUNIOR

Five or six?

RICK

Doesn't that seem a tad excessive?

JUNIOR

Your point?

RICK

You just switched one habit for another.

JUNIOR

That ain't fair.

LARRY

Enough fellas. Rick, apologize.

RICK

Sorry. I'm cranky. My neck hurts.

LARRY

I sure wish I could believe in that God stuff Junior. Logic sure ain't workin' for me. And now I'm so foggy from pain killers for my leg logic ain't an option anyways.

JUNIOR

Just take a leap buddy.

LARRY

You know me. I need proof. And if I leap I'll fall on my butt.

RICK

They say gamblin' is a way of seein' if god favors you today. If we win the money it could be a way to prove god exists. But there's another way I think.

LARRY

Rick is thinkin' Junior. Hold on to your hat.

RICK

Let's ask Siri if God exists. That should count for somethin'.

LARRY

So either gamblin' or Siri might give me proof of God, the proof I need to let me be at peace with my lot in life? With that kind of precision thinking it's no wonder we're all so successful in life.

RICK

Come on. It can't hurt. Let's ask Siri.

JUNIOR

(Chuckles) It might be the first time that phone was any use.

JUNIOR gets up to refill coffee.

LARRY

Amuse yourself Rick.

RICK

Siri. Do you think God is alive?

VOICE OF SIRI

It's all a mystery to me.

Laughter.

LARRY

Great. The only uncertain computer in the world.

RICK

Let me try another way. Siri. Does. God. Exist?

VOICE OF SIRI

I would ask that you address your spiritual questions to someone more qualified. Ideally a human.

Laughter.

JUNIOR

Larry. I'm a human. God exists. And God is the answer when you're gettin' slapped around by life.

LARRY

I could use some answers.

JUNIOR

God don't give you actual answers though. He gives you strength.

LARRY

I could use some of that too. I could use some ... encouragement. I wish I had an imaginary friend like you do Junior.

JUNIOR

He's not imaginary Larry. And He helped me back from the brink. Two years ago I was down by the river in a meth house, half dead. I got baptized in the same river. Now I'm saved.

RICK

The stuff that goes on in those cabins.

JUNIOR

They're in the middle of nowhere. Aside from dope heads, ain't nobody out there but hunters and they're only out there in season. I could talk to my minister about gettin' you baptized down there Larry.

LARRY

I was baptized Lutheran as a kid. Sprinkled drops of water on my forehead.

JUNIOR

You need full immersion. In the river, like me. Like in the bible.

LARRY

Full immersion in that filthy river? I'm not quite ready for somethin' that rash Junior. I'd hate to have my soul saved and get a fatal disease. Might break the irony meter. But the way things are going it ain't out of the question. So today's the day huh?

RICK

Today is the day we empty the gamblin' boat of it's ill gotten gains, all for the greater good. We will have a brighter future when we get home tonight.

LARRY

After all our practicing I feel like I got some blackjack expertise. I got Faith in this plan. I got Faith in Rick's math skills in countin' cards. We will win at blackjack and I will not go to prison and I'll have enough extra to pay for the emergency room visit. If you can imagine it, it can happen.

RICK

That's good. Did you make that up?

LARRY

Saw it on a fortune cookie once. Get me to Rick's car fellas. Let's do it.

JUNIOR

I'll meet you guys there. I wanna have my truck if I run out outa money quick. I don't want to hang around and mess you guys up. Hey. We're either gonna be rich or broke by sunset. But we'll have redemption either way.

RICK

I just want to redeem some chips at the end of the day and get Larry out of this mess. I been practicin' on web sites and I can't lose.

LARRY

Come on and ride with us Junior.

JUNIOR

Nah. I want my wheels with me.

RICK

We're a team. Come with us.

JUNIOR

We'll still be a team if I follow you to the parkin' lot.

LARRY

I guess so . . . I don't know what I'd do without you guys havin' my back.

JUNIOR

You'd do the same for us.

RICK

Sure you would.

LARRY

I would. But I'd give you a hard time along the way. You're both too nice.

JUNIOR

It ain't possible to be too nice.

LARRY

Seems like nice people get beat up on in this world. Mean people seem to get ahead. It bothers me sometimes.

RICK

Girls say they want nice guys then they go out with dangerous guys.

JUNIOR

I've noticed that.

RICK

I may start actin' dangerous around women.

LARRY

If you'd act dangerous they'd just laugh. Come on. Let's get to the boat. It's showtime. If we win a bunch of money it won't matter if you're mean or nice. A lot of women like men with a really big ... wallet.

Laughter. They help LARRY up and exit.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SEVEN

At hospice. MOM is asleep in reclining chair, in and out of consciousness, senses dulled by morphine. BOBBY enters and sits in chair.

BOBBY

Mom, mom. Can your hear me?

MOM moans in pain. Her eyes remain closed.

The nurse told me that sometimes you can understand even when you're out. I've got some things I need to say and you need to hear.

MOM moans.

I did somethin' terrible. I accidentally broke Larry's leg. I re-broke it. It caused me to take a hard look at my life. Since I hurt my back I been on pain pills. Pain ain't as bad as being a zombie. I ain't taken any pills since he re-broke his leg. I ache all over but I'm clear headed for the first time in ages.

MOM moans again.

BOBBY

Larry's been protecting you from everything that's going on. He loves you so much and he's so worried about you that he forgot that you're the strongest person we know.

Another moan.

BOBBY

You need to know the truth. You can handle the truth. Oh god. Joe is dead mom.

A moan.

BOBBY

He got killed in Larry's motorcycle accident. You're goin' to die too mom. The nurse told me it won't be long now. You and Joe can be in heaven together.

And me and Larry will be there someday too. That's how heaven works. So it's not all bad, huh?

Moan.

BOBBY

For some crazy reason Tom Carmody, the state's attorney, he's trying to put Larry in jail even though the accident wasn't Larry's fault. I think Carmody's just tryin' to get reelected. I'm tryin' to figure out how to help Larry but I can't. My brother needs me. I gotta figure out a way.

Moan.

BOBBY

I lost Joe and I'm losin' you. If I lose Larry to prison I'll go out of my mind. That's why I gotta stay off of pills and get Larry out of trouble ... I know where Carmody's huntin' cabin is down by the river. Maybe I'll go talk to him about Larry this weekend. It's all I got to work with.

Moan.

BOBBY

This is stuff we should have been tellin' you but we love you too much mom. Because you're sick we forgot how strong you are inside.

MOM

(Loud scream)

BOBBY is startled, fearful. MOM opens her eyes, tries to raise up from reclining chair, but she can't. She reaches for BOBBY. He grabs her hand.

BOBBY

Oh mom. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have told you this stuff. I'm an idiot.

MOM

(Whispers in pain) Faith.

She closes her eyes and lapses back to unconsciousness. BOBBY is shaken.

He looks at the painting of the forest on the wall.
He cocks his head. Something is different.

BOBBY

(To himself) I could have sworn there was no church in that paintin'.

He stands up and looks more closely at painting.

BOBBY

But there it is.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF SCENE

SCENE EIGHT

Next morning. At gas station coffee shop. RICK is pacing. LARRY is seated.

RICK

I'm sorry.

LARRY

Don't beat yourself up.

RICK

How did it come to this? What was I thinkin'?

LARRY

You were thinkin' about helpin a friend.

RICK

I'm a screw up. I don't know nothin' about gamblin'. I lost us all our money.

LARRY

The whole faith thing is kind of dangerous, huh? It would be funny if we weren't completely broke. So much for God's favorin' us. It's so absurd I could laugh. Or cry. No rich guy lawyer for me.

RICK

I understand if you hate me.

LARRY

You're my pal Rick. I could never hate you. We'll survive somehow. Man. I thought that the gambling boat would be glamorous. There was mainly a bunch of old people with oxygen tanks and walkers. They were like zombies. I thought we'd stick out. I swear I could have dropped my pants and taken a dump in the aisle and no one would have looked up from their slot machine. It was the most depressin' place I've ever seen.

LARRY AND RICK look out window, puzzled.

RICK

Why is Junior on a bicycle?

That's odd.

LARRY

JUNIOR enters.

RICK

Junior, why are you on a bicycle? It's so old it looks dangerous.

JUNIOR

I need some exercise.

LARRY

Where's your truck?

JUNIOR

Aw.

RICK

Aw what?

JUNIOR fights a sob.

JUNIOR

I went back to the boat after you guys left. I found a wallet earlier on the floor of a bathroom stall. I used a credit card in it to try to make the money to get you out of trouble Larry.

LARRY

Aw Junior. That's so against the law. What were you thinkin'?

JUNIOR

I got excited by the machines. I got the rush I used to get from meth. I went crazy. I let you down, I let God down, I let myself down. I been so focused on not usin' drugs or booze that I never thought about gamblin' gettin' a hold on me. It did.

RICK

Where's your truck?

JUNIOR

I lost a thousand bucks of somebody else's money. I was out of control. They caught me real easy. Mom borrowed money to bail me out of jail. I sold my truck this morning to Booger Bunjamin for 300 bucks to pay mom back. (he sobs) I got a court hearing next week. I'm in deep trouble fellas.

LARRY

Damn Junior. We got you into this. We'll get you out of it.

RICK

Instead of gettin' one guy out of going to jail we just made another guy go to jail. It was my plan guys. I'm sorry as can be. I'm the biggest fool around.

RICK's cell phone rings, he answers.

Hi mom . . . Who? No. Oh boy They're there right now? They said what? (long pause as he listens. He visibly begins to shake). Really Oh no. Calm down mom. Calm down. I'm on my way.

Hangs up phone. He continues to shake.

LARRY

What is it Rick?

RICK

(Softly) The state's attorney's internet crime investigator is at mom's house. I gotta go.

LARRY

What? What the hell? What's goin' on?

RICK

Please don't judge me fellas. I been sendin' money to a woman in the Phillipines. We text a lot. She flirts. She's been havin' people send me money and I send it to her. It turns out she's a man. And she's a crook. And I'm an accessory to a crime.

LARRY

Rick! Why would you do that! That didn't seem shady to you?!

RICK

All of a sudden it does. I gotta go with the investigator to post bond.

LARRY

I knew that damn phone was gonna get you in trouble. What do you say we all go down to the river and drown ourselves?

RICK

You serious?

LARRY

No Rick, I'm not serious. I just made a bad attempt at humor.

RICK

Mom is scared to death. I am too. I'm shakin'.

LARRY

Fellas, as I look at our lives at this moment, I think I can safely say that there are three guys somewhere scratchin' winnin' lottery tickets, each with a gorgeous woman on their arm, and each with a bluebird outside their window singin' a beautiful melody. If those three lucky guys didn't exist to balance things, our lives are so pitiful it would make the world spin out of control and veer into the sun, killin' everybody on earth. You could bet on it.

JUNIOR

That's horrible.

LARRY

I'm kiddin' again Junior. Laughin' to keep from cryin'.

BOBBY enters hobbling. He walks to LARRY.

BOBBY

I'm sorry Larry.

LARRY

About what baby brother?

BOBBY

About what I'm about to tell you. I quit takin' pills after I hurt you. It was hard but I'm clear headed for the first time in ages.

LARRY

That's good. That's nothing to be sorry about.

BOBBY

But the guy I bought my pain pills from for the past year got arrested. He gave me up. I just made bond. I'm screwed.

LARRY

Am I dreamin' this?

RICK

Nope. We're all goin' to jail.

LARRY

No. No. No. I can't believe this. This is like a horror movie. I hate horror movies. That is not the movie I want to be in. (Pause) I reject this reality. This is not what I want to imagine. It is not what I want to make real. If I gotta be in a movie I want to be in an Elvis movie. The time has come to be in an Elvis movie before it's too late. Feel free to laugh at me fellas.

LARRY begins to hum the melody to the song LET YOURSELF GO. He begins to dance. It is clumsy and difficult since he has a leg in a cast. The others look at him incredulously, like he's lost his mind. He slowly begins to appear graceful. The others all begin to laugh, as does LARRY. BOBBY with a bad back, JUNIOR, bandage on head and arm, begin to join him. They are clumsy at first, but begin to move with grace. Finally RICK, his neck stiff from work injury, begins to dance and all of them move in unison, clumsily dancing to LARRY's singing. They laugh uproariously. The laughter turns to tears and they come together in center of the gas station and cling to each other. Light slowly fade along with music.

END OF SCENE

SCENE NINE

We are in the hospice. MOM is in reclining chair, eyes closed. She is heavily medicated. TV is on with sound on. LARRY enters and turns sound down. MOM occasionally shifts in chair from her pain.

LARRY

Mom. Can you hear me?

MOM

Is that you Larry?

LARRY

It is.

MOM

I love you.

LARRY

I love you too.

MOM

When you leave don't forget to turn the volume back up on the TV, it helps me sleep. Is the Cardinals game on tonight?

LARRY

I think so.

MOM

I hope Yadi is playin'. But I can't understand why he got that tattoo on his neck. He was so handsome.

LARRY

He'll play. I'm sure.

MOM

I hope he hits a home run.

LARRY

Mom you sound better than you've sounded in a long time.

MOM

It's a shame about that Tom Carmody's head.

LARRY

Why would you up bring Tom Carmody's head?

MOM

I went to school with his mom. She should never have married Joe's dad. He was a drinker. And he had a funny shaped head. It was distracting. That's how the boy got his head. When Tom had hair you didn't notice it. But now that he's bald, well, it's not attractive. Life is hard enough without a misshapen head.

LARRY

Mom, you're freakin' me out. What about my head? My head isn't ugly is it? Is that why I'm alone?

MOM

When you lost your hair I was worried, but you have a perfectly shaped head. You're still handsome without hair.

LARRY

Well thank god for that. I never thought about my head shape before. But why would you bring up ... oh, never mind. We gotta talk.

MOM

Have you seen Joe?

LARRY

Uh, no. Listen, I've been doin' a lot of thinkin'. I think maybe I need to try to tell you some stuff. You always listened to me when I had troubles. Well I'm havin' big troubles.

MOM

I love talkin' to you. I love hearin' what you're thinkin'. My baby.

LARRY

But you're sick mom. I'm afraid my troubles might be too much for you. But I sure could use a good cry on your shoulder.

MOM

Honey you can always tell me your troubles. You can always cry on my shoulder.

LARRY

Oh boy . . . Mom, when I had my motorcycle accident, we didn't tell you. Joe . . . I'm sorry mom. (stifles a sob) Joe was killed.

MOM

I know.

LARRY

You know?

MOM

Bobby told me. But I pretty much knew anyway. Joe visits me from heaven every night. He tells me about grandpa.

LARRY

You know? You're all right?

MOM

It makes me sad but I know how heaven works so it will all be OK. You believe in heaven don't you Larry?

LARRY

I don't really understand it mom.

MOM

Someday you'll understand.

LARRY

I hope so. I'm scared mom. I'm afraid I'm gonna go to prison because of the accident.

MOM

I know.

LARRY

Bobby told you that too?

MOM

He did.

LARRY

Wow. Mom, I can't believe how clear headed you are.

MOM

You need me today.

LARRY

We tried to win money at the gambling boat to get me a high priced lawyer but instead we lost all our money. Now all of us are in trouble with the law. I'm gonna go to prison.

MOM

You are not going to prison. I'm certain. As certain as I am that heaven is real.

LARRY

How can you be so sure?

MOM

Faith.

LARRY

Aw mom. I love you so much. I wish I had your faith.

MOM

You will. It will all be fine. When you get to the end it all gets clear. You'll see. Joe told me that lawyers go down to the river and takes drugs. So they can't judge *you*. That would be wrong.

LARRY

They're judgin' me mom. When did Joe tell you this?

MOM

When he visited me. From heaven. He sees pretty much everything. Just like we all will some day.

LARRY

I wish I could see Joe. Did he tell you anything else?

MOM

He did. He said grandpa was lookin' through the trash for his overalls.

LARRY

Grandpa lost his overalls?

MOM

He was naked. He was lookin' for them.

LARRY

Oh mom.

MOM

Do you have anything else you want to tell me? Joe said you might.

LARRY

He did? ... Mom, somethin' has been on my mind for a long time and I never told anybody. Nobody. Have you ever wondered why I never got married? Why I never had a girlfriend for more than a few dates?

MOM

I know why.

LARRY

You do?

MOM

Of course honey. A mother knows her sons.

LARRY

This is weird. You know about my struggles?

MOM

You've always been a beautiful, wonderful boy. I know you.

LARRY

Well I don't think you know this. I think . . . I think I might be gay mom. I dream about dancin' and singin'. I like musicals. It never works out with women, maybe for a reason. I been afraid you won't love me if you thought I was gay.

MOM

You're just frustrated. You're doubtin' everything right now. You're not gay though honey. It's hard to find a girl in a little town like this. But if you were gay I'd still love you exactly the same. Frank Tompkins that used to own the jewelry store was gay and he was the sweetest man you'd ever meet. You are you. I love you no matter what. You are you.

LARRY

I used your makeup once when I was a kid.

MOM

You've always been curious. It doesn't mean anything.

LAR

Everybody's supposed to be the same here. Their's no culture, no people of color, no promise, no jobs, no nothin' but a bunch of sad, poor, lonely white people like us. I hear folks droppin' the N- word all of the time. It ain't right. There's no one on earth poor whites got more in common with than poor black people. Other places have all kinds of people and things. In big cities being gay is normal. In a small town like this it makes you a freak.

MOM

That's not true. This is our home. But you're not gay anyway. Be patient.

LARRY

Patient? Come on mom. I got nothin' but troubles.

MOM

We got each other which is how it is for people everywhere. That's the secret to life, havin' each other. Honey, when you dream of dancin' is it with a girl or a boy?

LARRY

A girl I guess.

MOM

There you go.

LARRY

Junior's a big Christian. What if I am and he doesn't like me anymore?

MOM

You dream of dancin' with a girl. Junior is your friend. You stood by him when he was a doped up mess. It will be fine. God will take care of you. You're not gay. But I'm pretty sure Rick is.

LARRY

What!

MOM

He tries a little too hard to prove he likes girls. But I could be wrong. He's an odd one that Rick. (She flinches from a jolt of pain) Your heart is so good. With a heart that good you'll find a girl. Quit tryin' to be what you think a man should be. Just be you. And you aren't goin' to prison.

LARRY

Mom you're a saint.

MOM

No I ain't. And that's part of your problem honey. You put women on a pedestal. That ain't realistic. I'm not close to perfect and neither are other women. Just be you and let them be themselves. It puts a lot a pressure on a girl if she thinks she has to be saintly. I wish you boys would have had a sister so you'd see women as people instead of mysterious, perfect creatures. That ain't healthy for nobody involved.

LARRY

You might not be a saint but you sure are wise.

MOM

I don't know about that either. Get me my purse.

LARRY

Mom. You ain't goin' home.

MOM

I know that. (She flinches with pain) That's kind of obvious. Give me my purse.

LARRY gives her the purse. She grimaces when she moves. She opens it and takes out lipstick, a compact, then a thick envelope.

MOM

Take this.

LARRY

What is it?

MOM

When grandpa died all his money got taken by this place. He left this world as broke as the day he was born. That's the way it is for most people that come here. The last thing rich people do when workin' people are dyin' is take all of our money. I was thinkin' clear one day before I ended up in this room and I took all my savings from the bank, twelve thousand dollars, and put it in my purse. I didn't want them to get everything. It was gonna be a nice surprise for you boys when I'm gone. I can't think of anything better to use it for than gettin' my babies out of trouble.

LARRY

You left twelve thousand dollars in your purse? Somebody could have taken it from the room.

MOM

Everybody workin' here is nice. It's the people that own the place that are thieves.

LAR

Wow. You're awful trustin' mom. But I can't take your money.

MOM

Honey, I can't use it where I'm goin' and you're gonna get it anyway.

LARRY

Good point.

MOM

Grandpa and Joe said it was for the best.

LARRY

I guess they'd know.

MOM

How old are you Larry?

LARRY

You know how old I am. I'm 45.

MOM

You're 45. (She gazes intently at him) I guess you're old enough to take care of yourself. (She pauses, waves hand in front of his face) I release you. You're free. (she laughs)

LARRY

Aw mom. (He tears up).

MOM

Everything is goin' to be alright honey. We're just gonna die. Instead of somethin' bad, think of it as kind of a participation award for a job well done. Could you ask the nurse if she could come and put some lipstick on me? I want to look beautiful.

LARRY

You look beautiful already.

MOM

I want to look beautiful with lipstick on in case I get a chance to go dancin' tonight. Joe told me they dance in heaven all the time. My only regret on earth is that I should have danced more. Laughin' and dancin' and bein' with the people you love are a big part of how heaven works.

LARRY

Heaven sounds like heaven mom. I'll tell the nurse.

MOM

I'm tired.

She closes her eyes and falls asleep. LARRY puts envelope in his pocket, gets up to turn up volume on TV. He leans over and kisses his mom. He exits the room.

TV NEWS ANNOUNCER

... and in a story we first reported last night, two bodies were found in a hunting cabin in Pike County along the Illinois River, north of St. Louis. The county spokesperson has not responded to requests for information. In other news, for the second week in a row a man was found naked and rummaging through trash bins in St Louis county. He told police he was looking for his overalls. The man has been released from police custody with an order to attend substance counseling. Now for the weather

END OF SCENE

SCENE TEN

Back at gas station coffee shop. LARRY, RICK, BOBBY and JUNIOR are at table. All are drinking coffee.

RICK

This is unbelievable. I've been wallowin' in despair.

LARRY

We got enough money to get us all off.

RICK

But it's you and Bobby's money.

LARRY

Junior and you lost all your money tryin' to save me. Bobby and me talked and we want to see if the lawyer will do a package deal to get us all off. Money ain't gonna do us any good if we're in jail.

RICK

Do lawyers do package deals?

BOBBY

Lawyers will do any deal if there's enough money in it for them.

LARRY

I'm tryin' to think positively. The good news is that money dropped out of the sky to end this mess.

JUNIOR

I'm overwhelmed. It's truly the work of God.

BOBBY

It's the work of our mom. She saved a little bit at every job she ever had. She could have taken a vacation or bought somethin' nice, but she saved it for us. She's a saint.

RICK

She's the best.

LARRY

She's a wise woman.

BOBBY fights a sob.

LARRY

Forgive me for developin' a little bit of suspiciousness, but every time I've see a light at the end of the tunnel of this nightmare it's been a train. You sure this lawyer really knows his stuff?

RICK

I checked out all his ratings on the web. Almost all of the ratings are really good.

BOBBY

Any bad ones?

RICK

A few.

BOBBY

What do they say?

RICK

Some people just don't like lawyers.

BOBBY

I'm one of 'em. What do the bad ones say?

RICK

That he's mean and vulgar and charges too much.

LARRY

We're not hirin' him to be a Sunday school teacher. Does he get people off?

RICK

He does.

LARRY

How much research did you do on lawyers?

RICK

Six or eight hours worth.

LARRY

How much of that time was spent lookin' up hot ax murderin' Hollywood actresses?

RICK

Not a minute on anything but lawyers.

LARRY

That's a breakthrough for you Rick. You're makin' progress. But the guy is mean and vulgar and charges too much?

JUNIOR

Fellas, all lawyers have critics. Rick has done his homework. We just got to have Faith.

LARRY

Junior, we been buddies since Kindergarten. I'd want you next to me in a foxhole. But Rick did a lot of research on blackjack and it didn't go well. So the last time you told me to have Faith we all lost our money and you got arrested.

JUNIOR

Faith ain't perfect.

BOBBY

That don't build a lot of confidence.

JUNIOR

Faith ain't perfect but it's all we got. Faith in each other, faith that this world is about love instead of hate. If we don't think that then what's the point of gettin' out of bed in the mornin'? We can't choose what life throws at us but we can choose how we're gonna react to it. That's Faith fellas.

LARRY

Junior, every once in a while you surprise me by sayin' somethin' beautiful and true. I'm gonna bet on faith one more time because I believe in you. Let's set up a meetin' with the guy. We'll all go check him out. Everybody in?

RICK

I'm in.

BOBBY

I guess so.

JUNIOR

Me too. Say your prayers tonight guys.

LARRY holds up coffee cup.

LARRY

Fellas, a toast: If Faith is so powerful that it can turn meanness, vulgarity, and greed into redemption, we're in business.

Chuckles as they bump paper coffee cups together.

BOBBY

You know you got problems when your destiny depends on a lawyer.

LARRY

Ain't that the truth. And another toast to our wonderful mom, whose sacrifice has given us a little bit of hope in the middle of this nightmare. If it wasn't for her I might of walked into the river for real.

JUNIOR

Amen.

RICK, LARRY, BOBBY

Amen.

They bump cups together again and look on somberly.

END OF SCENE

SCENE ELEVEN

At hospice. MOM is asleep, restless. Her mouth is open and she occasionally moans. She holds her purse in her lap. TV is on with sound turned off. LARRY is in chair, with crutches next to him. BOBBY enters, walking gingerly, favoring his back. He sits in chair.

LARRY

Hey Bobby. The way she bounced back yesterday, she was so clearheaded, now she doesn't even know we're in the room. The nurse told me she's been in so much pain that the doctor gave 'em permission to double the morphine again.

BOBBY

That ain't good.

LARRY

No. Yesterday me we were talkin' almost like we used to. She said she sees Joe every night.

BOBBY

I wish I could see Joe every night.

LARRY

Me too. God I miss him. It's all my fault. (he fights a sob)

BOBBY

That ain't true. It ain't true. I miss him Joe much I'm sick. We butted heads but he was a great brother.

LARRY

Bobby, you pretty much butt heads with everybody.

BOBBY

I been workin' on that.

LARRY

That's good.

BOBBY

Every time she's been alert the past few days she tells me about dancin' in heaven.

LARRY

That morphine sure works on her imagination.

BOBBY

Do you think she's really talkin' to people in heaven or is it the morphine? Talkin' to people in heaven sure seems nuts.

LARRY

She came up with some money somehow. Seems like justice became more of a possibility when she started tellin' us about how heaven works. The world seems rigged against us, but maybe heaven ain't.

BOBBY

She was sayin' that lawyers are gangsters and shouldn't be judgin' people. That they can't judge people in heaven. She was goin' on about Carmody and Judge Hubbard.

LARRY

They *are* lawyers.

BOBBY

She's about to die and those bastards'll live forever.

LARRY

Life sure ain't fair.

BOBBY

The nurse painted a really grim picture for me Larry. She said it's normal that they bounce back for a day. It makes you think they're gonna get better. Then they go south real quick after the rally.

LARRY

Readin' between the lines, the nurse seemed to be hintin' that there was stuff they could do to end her sufferin'.

BOBBY

You got that feelin' too, huh?

LARRY

I know that they can't say nothin' out loud, but I got the feelin' they might help things along, if you know what I mean.

BOBBY

I'm afraid I know what you mean. A week ago I would have thought it was awful for them to think that way. Watchin' mom sufferin' makes me think that a little extra morphine might be the righteous thing to do.

LARRY

I know. Her sufferin's gone on long enough. This ain't livin'.

BOBBY

(Looks at watch) I gotta go to work. I guess I'll see you this afternoon for the meetin' with the lawyer.

LARRY

Three o'clock at the building east of the courthouse. I hate to burn through mom's life savings because we got in trouble. I feel real guilty.

BOBBY

When me and Judy got divorced the first thing our lawyers did was size up how much money we had to squeeze out. You could almost see 'em winkin' at each other. I'm still broke after that bullshit. Do not let this guy know how much money we have. A workin' person gets a little money and somehow it ends up in a lawyer's pocket. Like magic. Rich guy magic.

LARRY

Seems like an operatin' principle of the universe. The rich have suffered enough. (chuckles) Well, thank god mom hid a little money from the man 'cause at least now we got a chance of not goin' to jail.

BOBBY

We get a little money and it's about to disappear. Presto chango. Rich guy magic. I'll see you at three big brother.

BOBBY kisses mom and gingerly exits. LARRY stares at MOM, turns up sound on TV.

TV NEWS ANNOUNCER

... As we've been reporting all morning, Jersey County officials announced at a late night news conference that the bodies found in a Pike County hunting cabin were those of Jersey County states attorney Thomas Carmody and judge Kenneth Hubbard. Preliminary reports are that the men died of cocaine and heroin overdoses. An anonymous source said that one of the men's heads had been partially eaten by raccoons.

LARRY looks up, listens in shock and amazement.

TV NEWS ANNOUNCER

Sources at the courthouse told NBC news that Carmody and Hubbard were close friends who often spent weekends hunting at a remote cabin in Pike County. The courthouse is closed as officials try to decide how to proceed with cases the two men were involved in. In other news, the man who neighbors have taken to calling the Naked Garbage Man was found

LARRY turns off the TV. He is in shock. He looks around the room, looks at this mother, looks at the picture of the forest on the wall. He goes closer to picture and stares intently.

LARRY

How did I not see that before?

He kisses MOM on cheek and exits room as quickly as his damaged leg will allow him.

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWELVE

In gas station coffee shop. LARRY is at table.
BOBBY and JUNIOR quickly enter.

LARRY

I'm about to have a heart attack. Rick will be back any minute with the news.
Our guy met is meetin' with the assistant states attorney.

BOBBY

What's this meetin' costin' us?

LARRY

Two thousand bucks minimum.

BOBBY

Two thousand bucks to shuffle a few papers. Lawyers. It's no wonder a few
people are rich and most people are poor.

JUNIOR

He's probably gettin' eight thousand bucks or so an hour on this deal.

BOBBY

I got one of the better jobs in town and I make fifteen bucks an hour. How
many hours would I have to work to make what that lawyer is makin' Junior?

JUNIOR gets a napkin then gets a pen from the
cash register. He works out the math.

JUNIOR

You'd have to work over five hundred hours.

BOBBY

So the sweat of his brow is five hundred times more important than mine. I
might lead a revolution against these rich bastards some day.

LARRY

Sure. You against the entire legal system. You got a real chance at winnin' that
battle. Anyway, I promised mom we wouldn't start any revolutions.

BOBBY

Huh?

LARRY

Nothin'. If anything was ever worth eight thousand bucks an hour this is it. We might dodge jail.

BOBBY

(Angry) The states attorney and judge were junkies that died of overdoses while they were prosecutin' us for silly stuff a million times less awful than what they were doin'. We better get off.

LARRY

If we get off it will be a miracle. I'm so tense my head is about to explode. How much can a guy take before he snaps?

JUNIOR

We showed a little Faith and God will come through for us. And it will be a miracle.

BOBBY

Is it a miracle to get run through hell for nothin'? Run through hell by hypocritical bastards gettin' fried out in a cabin? Run through hell by a judge, sworn to uphold the law, doin' coke and heroin? They're tryin' to destroy us with the law and they were junkies. You can't make it up.

JUNIOR

I was a dope fiend and I never tried heroin. Heroin scared me to death.

BOBBY

They made a mockery of the whole system. We should sue the bastards.

LARRY

They're dead Bobby.

BOBBY

Sue their estates then.

JUNIOR

Their families are goin' through a lot.

LARRY

Anybody can get addicted. And somebody had to get 'em started. Who got 'em started?

JUNIOR

I'd hate to be that person.

LARRY

Imagine the shame for their family.

JUNIOR

Imagine the heartache.

BOBBY

Listen to you guys. You're too willin' to forgive the bastards that tried to destroy you. This is why we're doormats in life.

LARRY

Bobby if we don't go to jail we got to forgive and forget.

JUNIOR

Forgivin' is what Jesus taught Bobby.

BOBBY

The motto of a doormat. They got what they deserved. Good riddance. We lost Joe you know. We lost Joe! We've suffered a million times more than them.

LARRY

I wanna lay on the floor and cry over losin' Joe. It's gonna haunt me forever. We've suffered for sure. But it's time to let go of the sufferin'. I gotta let go for my sanity.

BOBBY

I went down to their cabin in Pike County. Nobody answered the door. I was plannin' to convince Carmody to let you go Larry.

JUNIOR

They might have been dead in the cabin right then.

BOBBY

Oh man. That didn't occur to me.

LARRY

Bobby what were you thinkin' goin' down there? Tryin' to talk to a prosecutor could have been against the law.

BOBBY

You mean like usin' coke and heroin? Jesus. It could have been me that found their bodies.

LARRY

That would have been awful.

JUNIOR

Could've scarred you for life. They're sayin' half of Carmody's head was eaten by raccoons. It's horrible.

LARRY

It is horrible. But you still gotta let go Bobby. Mom has faith. She's dyin' and she's still the most contented person I know. Think of that.

JUNIOR

He's right Bobby.

BOBBY

Faith is nice but it ain't gonna keep me from bein' pissed off for a long time. Like forever.

LARRY

You're allowed brother. But don't let it taint your life. Those guys ain't worth it. If you spit at heaven it don't land on nobody but you. ... you know I'm tryin' to convince myself as much as I am you.

RICK enters breathlessly. He pauses for dramatic affect.

RICK

They dropped the charges on all of us.

They almost collapse in relief. They shake hands, cheer, hug, fight off tears. Larry sinks to the floor, sobbing.

JUNIOR

Praise God! You OK Larry?

LARRY

I've held it in for so long.

BOBBY puts his hands on Larry's shoulders.

BOBBY

It's OK now brother.

RICK

The lawyer said that they knew that no jury would convict anyone a heroin addict brought up for charges. It took five minutes.

BOBBY

Five minutes. Two thousand dollars. I think that's forty thousand dollars an hour. A billion times more than I make. Lawyers.

LARRY

I'd like to kiss this lawyer. Best money I ever spent. It feels like a vise has been taken off of my head. Time to let go Bobby. Time to let go. I feel like celebratin'. What do you say we splurge on some Yoohoo and powdered donuts?

RICK

Don't you think beer would be a better choice?

LARRY

Outa respect for Junior let's go with Yoohoo.

LARRY stands back up.

JUNIOR

Thanks Larry.

LARRY

Anyway I like the idea of a Yoohoo to celebrate freedom. My treat.

RICK

It's a plan.

BOBBY

What the hell. Yoohoo does sound a little bit like freedom.

LARRY gets Yoohoos from glass case. He grabs some powder donuts from a shelf. They open the drinks and donut package and feast, getting powder from the donuts all over their faces, laughing as they eat and drink.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THIRTEEN

We are in hospice room. LARRY sits in a chair watching MOM, his leg in a cast. The TV is on a Cardinals game with the volume turned down low. MOM, eyes closed, sits in her reclining chair and occasionally moans in pain. Her breathing is labored. A guitar is next to the chair. LARRY's eyes get heavy and he nods out. He awakes. He pick up guitar. He brings it to a playing position. He strums a chord. We hear an entire band begin to play. LARRY stands and begins to dance in place to the rhythm. He puts the guitar down and music continues. He begins to sing. He is dancing and singing beautifully in spite of his injury. The song is LET YOURSELF GO.

LARRY

Let's learn - what life is all about tonight
Remind ourselves it's gonna be alright
People have done this since time began
In the final moments you understand
All you gotta do is let yourself go

LARRY moves gracefully to the bed. MOM looks up and takes LARRY's hand. She has perfect lipstick on her lips. She stiffly gets out of bed, but as she gets up she begins to move with grace and beauty. As LARRY sings they begin to dance in perfect unison, like Astaire and Rogers.

LARRY

Don't be afraid, relax and take it slow
Don't be scared, let your spirit show
It's time - to give up the fight
The other side of the river - is in sight
All you gotta do is let yourself go.

They dance through the duration of the song with Larry singing lyrics that speak of gracefully letting go of life. Great joy is visible on their faces. Their dance is beautiful and artistic and graceful.

LARRY

Take a deep breath, embrace the sublime
Look down the tunnel - to the other side
It's time - to break on through
And dance dance, dance, to the head of the que.
All you gotta do is let yourself go.
All you gotta do is let yourself go.

At the end of the song the music fades and LARRY helps MOM gently get back into the reclining chair. She closes her eyes, a great smile on her face. She clutches her purse to her chest. Larry sits in chair. He closes his eyes, also smiling. MOM's breathing is more labored. BOBBY enters, and as he and LARRY kneel by MOM, her breathing speeds up, she gasps, she lets go, and she's gone. Her sons lean on her body in grief, kiss her, and embrace each other, softly crying. As they embrace, the lights in the room dim and a soft light appears on the picture on the wall.

END OF PLAY