

# **COOLER NEAR THE LAKE**

By

Philip Middleton Williams

## COOLER NEAR THE LAKE

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## COOLER NEAR THE LAKE

*For the real Gary and Pete.*

*Thanks to my friends at the Midwest Dramatists Conference of Olathe, Kansas, who stayed up late on September 27, 2019, to do an impromptu reading of the first draft of this play. Your voices and insight made a huge difference, and I am grateful for your guidance.*

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## COOLER NEAR THE LAKE

### **CHARACTERS**

SAM WEAVER: mid-thirties.

FRANK WEAVER: mid-fifties. Sam's father.

KENNY BARNHILL: late twenties. Muscular. Local kid.

GARY ANDERSON: mid-thirties. Athletic, childhood friend of Sam.

JANEY ANDERSON: mid-fifties. Gary's mother.

PETE O'ROURKE: mid-thirties. Sam's former lover.

GREG ANDERSON: mid-fifties. Gary's father.

### **PLACE and TIME**

A summer home on the shores of Grand Traverse Bay in Michigan.  
("Traverse" is pronounced "Travers.")

A day in early June, present time. The action of the play takes place over one 24-hour period.

**COOLER NEAR THE LAKE** was a finalist in the American Association of Community Theatres NewPlayFest 2024.

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## SCENE 1

*The setting is the living room of a summer home on the shores of Grand Traverse Bay in northern lower Michigan. (“Traverse” is pronounced “Travers.”) It is a log home built in the early twentieth century with exposed varnished logs making up the side walls and a polished cedar floor with area rugs. The furniture – a couch, side chairs, standing lamp, and coffee table – is rustic with colorful patterns on the couch cushions and chairs. Stage Left is a large field stone fireplace with a fire screen and mantel. Stage Right wall includes a built-in bookshelf filled with a variety of books, old and new. The upstage wall is a large picture window that overlooks a back deck. The skyline is cedar trees and an open sky. There is a half-light door in the back wall leading out to the deck. In front of the window is a small dining table with room for four. Upstage Left is an exit to the kitchen and the back of the house. Upstage Right is an exit to other rooms on the first floor. Downstage Left is the front door to the house. At rise it is late morning on a Saturday in early June. Sunlight is streaming in through the back wall and the sky is clear. The front door is open, with the screen door closed. SAM WEAVER, a man in his thirties, is standing by the bookshelf. He is an attractive man in good shape, wearing a shirt and tie and khakis; his sports coat is draped on one of the chairs. He takes a book down from the shelf, opens it, leafs through it, puts it back, then takes down another, and looks at it.*

**SAM.** *(In the direction of the kitchen door.)* Hey, Dad, what’re you going to do with the books?

**FRANK.** *(Offstage.)* What?

**SAM.** All the books. Are you going to keep them, take them back home, or leave them with the house?

**FRANK.** *(Offstage.):* Haven’t thought about them. Why?

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**SAM.** Some of them are pretty old. Some are first editions. Might be worth something. (*FRANK WEAVER enters from the kitchen. He is a good-looking man in his mid-fifties. He too is wearing a shirt, tie, and khakis. He is Sam's father.*)

**FRANK.** Most of them have been here since the place was built; they were your grandmother's. I've never really looked at them much.

**SAM.** (*Takes another book, opens it.*) Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransome. First edition 1929.

**FRANK.** Oh, no; those were mine. I wondered where they'd got to.

**SAM.** (*Looks at the other books.*) I remember reading them when I was a kid.

**FRANK.** Mom must have brought them up. They belonged to my dad when he was a boy.

**SAM.** Yeah, all about sailing and adventures on a lake in the north of England, back before the war. I guess Mom thought they'd be a better fit up here than in the attic at home.

**FRANK.** Everything I taught you about sailing came from those books.

**SAM.** Ready about, hard a-lee. Avast, me hearties. Sounded kinda funny on a Sunfish.

**FRANK.** Yep. Maybe I'll hang on to those.

**SAM.** Yeah, or I'll take them. What about the rest?

**FRANK.** Find an appraiser; sell 'em on E-bay. I still haven't decided if I'm even going to sell the place. The more important question is what are we going to do with all this food? We must have five different bowls of potato salad, not to mention the casseroles stuffed into the fridge, and there's even more in the one out in the garage. Enough to feed an army. You're the shrink; explain why people bring food for a funeral? Hell, it wasn't even a funeral. It was just a memorial service and interment.

**SAM.** It's a way of showing sympathy, I guess. Filling in at a time of need.

**FRANK.** Well, that's very nice, but meanwhile, I've got a virtual Golden Corral buffet going on in there.

**SAM.** Maybe we can take them to the reception tonight.

**FRANK.** No, I've already paid Betsy for the snacks and the booze. It'd be an insult to her for us to show up with a car full of more food. Besides,

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most of the people who sent this will be there; it would be like re-gifting. I guess you and I are going to be stuffed with northern Michigan comfort food for the rest of the weekend.

**SAM.** I don't know why we're doing all this. The service was nice and short; Mom would have liked that. But all the rest...

**FRANK.** She planned it out. Said she wanted a party. Besides, people expect it. She said it's their way of having "closure."

**SAM.** Sounds like her.

**FRANK.** Closure. I hate that word. I never know what to say when people come up to me, and I get the strong impression that they don't either. "I'm sorry for your loss." That's what the cops say on TV when they break the news to a murder victim's family. Am I supposed to nod and smile politely and say thank you? Then what? How about them Cardinals? I'm no good at small talk anyway.

**SAM.** Just let them say whatever they want, Dad.

**FRANK.** Mary Whitmer came up to me after the service, took my hand, and with those big cow eyes of hers said, "Ruth is in a better place." I wanted to say, well, seeing as how her ashes are stuffed in a fifteen-hundred-dollar brass urn sealed in the wall behind the chapel, I hope you're right. But I just smiled and nodded and said thank you.

**SAM.** Dad, why is she here? How come she's not in St. Louis?

**FRANK.** She wanted to be here. It was her idea. We bought two slots in the wall; one for her, one for me. That's how they sell them. If you like, I can see if I can get you one along with your brother or whoever you end up with.

**SAM.** Uh, no thanks.

**FRANK.** Well, let me know if you change your mind.

**SAM.** So even if you sell the house she'll be here?

**FRANK.** She loved it here. Until she got sick our plan was to move up here after I retired.

**SAM.** Permanently?

**FRANK.** Yep. Live here year-round. Nothing but us and the woods and the lake.

**SAM.** You're kidding. This place isn't fit for winter living, Dad. Remember when Pete and I tried it ten years ago? The windows are as

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drafty as a tree, the furnace is from the Roosevelt era, and I mean Teddy. The plumbing is just as ancient, the wiring is a firetrap, and the roads are almost impassable when they get a snowstorm, which is all the time from Christmas to May.

**FRANK.** We would have done some upgrades. Oh, your mother was pissed when she got the diagnosis and it looked like we weren't going to do it. "Dammit, Frank, I wanted to live up there for the rest of my life."

**SAM.** So why are you selling?

**FRANK.** Thinking of selling. It wouldn't be the same without her. Besides, for what I can probably get for the place, I could retire now and live comfortably where I want.

**SAM.** Stay in St. Louis?

**FRANK.** Hell no. The only reason we lived there was for the job and your mother's family. I'd much rather be ... somewhere else. So, what are we going to do with all this food?

**SAM.** Invite some people over. The Lockharts and Harpers are here for the summer.

**FRANK.** I saw them this morning. Sally Lockhart will talk politics and Lucy Harper will talk religion, and Ben and Jack will drink the good stuff and tell me how the liberals ruined the country. No, thanks.

**SAM.** Greg and Janey Anderson are here.

**FRANK.** Oh, really? I didn't see them at the service.

**SAM.** Well, I saw a car in their driveway with Illinois plates; I assume it was them.

**FRANK.** Huh.

**SAM.** Well, anyway, what you and I don't eat we can feed to the fish. I'll be here until Tuesday, but I can stay longer if you want. I'm not teaching this session.

**FRANK.** Is Gary here?

**SAM.** Gary?

**FRANK.** You said Greg and Janey are here. Did Gary come with them?

**SAM.** I don't know. All I saw was a car. I can't tell who was in it from the license plates.

**FRANK.** How long has it been since you've seen him?



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**SAM.** Gary? (*Shrugging.*) I dunno, eight years, I guess. He and Cathy come up in August after the boys get back from camp. I'm back at school by then.

**FRANK.** They're divorced, you know.

**SAM.** Who?

**FRANK.** Gary and Cathy.

**SAM.** Didn't know that. How'd you hear?

**FRANK.** Well, nobody actually told me, but I figured it out.

**SAM.** How?

**FRANK.** From their Christmas card.

**SAM.** What, they put it in their holiday letter? "Merry Christmas from the Andersons; oh, by the way, Gary and Cathy are split up. Season's Greetings"?

**FRANK.** No, from the picture. You know how they always have a picture of the family gathered around the crackling fireplace looking all jolly? Well, this last year it was Greg and Janey, Sally and her husband Keith, Gary and his boys, but no Cathy.

**SAM.** Well, that's not exactly proof.

**FRANK.** In this crowd, the Christmas card is like the lineup of the dignitaries at the May Day parade in Moscow. If you're not in it, you're either dead or might as well be.

**SAM.** Huh. I wonder what happened.

**FRANK.** Ah, you never know.

**SAM.** Yeah, but it's still a surprise. I mean, they seemed to be fine.

**FRANK.** You don't still keep in touch with him?

**SAM.** No. It's been years.

**FRANK.** If he's there tonight, you can ask him.

**SAM.** No, I can't.

**FRANK.** Why not? When you guys were kids you were really close. Maybe he'll level with you.

**SAM.** That was twenty years ago. And honestly, I don't really care. I mean, I do, but.... (*Frank laughs softly.*) What?

**FRANK.** (*Chuckling.*) Nothing.

**SAM.** What!?

**FRANK.** You never told him, did you?

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**SAM.** Told him what?

**FRANK.** Sam, you are so transparent. You've had a crush on Gary Anderson since you were twelve. And now, twenty-plus years later, you're still...

**SAM.** Oh, Jesus, Dad.

**FRANK.** Oh, Jesus what? For four weeks every summer you two were inseparable. Swimming, sailing, playing golf, going to the beach parties, staying up all hours out on the deck talking, drinking...

**SAM.** Just beer.

**FRANK.** And over the winter, all those phone calls, letters, e-mails, Christmas cards. But you never told him, did you? Unless he's really dumb, he knew, though. He knew you were in love with him.

**SAM.** No. We were really good friends, Dad. Yeah, I ... envied him for his looks, his ...

**FRANK.** It's all right. I get it.

**SAM.** But I was not in love with him.

**FRANK.** Not like you were with Pete.

**SAM.** No.

**FRANK.** I invited him. Pete, that is.

**SAM.** You hear back from him?

**FRANK.** He said he would try to make it.

**SAM.** Well, he wasn't at the service, so I guess he couldn't.

**FRANK.** Your mom would have loved to have him be there.

**SAM.** I know.

**FRANK.** I think it really broke her heart when you separated.

**SAM.** Yeah, it wasn't like we were gonna kill each other. It was....

**FRANK.** Amicable.

**SAM.** Yeah, okay.

**FRANK.** You do keep in touch?

**SAM.** We talk on the phone every so often. E-mail. Facebook. Zoom.

**FRANK.** You ever see him in person?

**SAM.** Well, he's in Orlando and I'm in Denver, so no, we don't get together that often.

**FRANK.** Orlando?

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**SAM.** He got a job at a hotel at one of the theme parks; Universal, I think. The place with the Harry Potter experience. He sent me a coffee mug. Has a place in Winter Park. It's a suburb.

**FRANK.** Didn't know that. I mean, he's got the same e-mail address so who knows. What's he doing there?

**SAM.** Assistant lodging manager.

**FRANK.** That's great. Great...

**SAM.** Dad...

**FRANK.** What?

**SAM.** *(Chuckling.)* C'mon.

**FRANK.** What?

**SAM.** Look, I appreciate you trying to ... you're trying to be Mom and you're not very good at it.

**FRANK.** What the hell are you talking about?

**SAM.** You're trying to get me and Pete back together. It's not gonna happen.

**FRANK.** He was on the list.

**SAM.** What list?

**FRANK.** The list your mother wrote out about who to invite to the party. He was on it.

**SAM.** Oh, Mom. Even from beyond the grave.

**FRANK.** She did it because she liked him. They were close, even after you two split up. It's not always about you.

**SAM.** Well, he didn't make it, so, sorry, Mom. *(A knock on the front door.)*

**FRANK.** Come in, unless you're bringing another tuna casserole.

*(KENNY BARNHILL enters. He is a solidly-built and strong young man in his mid-twenties. He's wearing a sleeveless olive-drab t-shirt with ARMY across the chest, camouflage pants, and work boots. He is a local boy with a nice smile and a cheerful attitude.)*

**KENNY.** Good morning, Mr. Weaver. I got it running; all it needed was new plugs and a battery. Changed the oil, too, and topped off the anti-freeze. *(Spots Sam.)* Hey, Sam, wow, great to see you. *(He strides across the room and grips Sam's hand in a powerful handshake.)* What's it been, ten years? Good to see you.

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**SAM.** (*A bit taken aback.*) Uh, yeah, that's right. Kenny, right?

**KENNY.** That's right.

**SAM.** So, you still working at the lumberyard?

**KENNY.** Nah, I'm just the handyman for the cottage owners' association.

**FRANK.** You're being too modest. (*To Sam.*) He takes care of the lawns, fixes broken windows, thaws out pipes, plows the roads, and he's a trained auto mechanic, too. He's a wizard when it comes to getting the cottage cars going in the summer. A real jack-of-all-trades serviceman.

**KENNY.** (*Modestly.*) Well, I was in the service. Thanks, Mr. Weaver.

**FRANK.** You're welcome. How's your mom doing?

**KENNY.** Oh, much better, thanks. Doc says she should be able to go back to work in a couple of weeks.

**SAM.** What happened?

**KENNY.** Slipped on the ice in the driveway and broke her ankle back in April. Needed surgery to put it back together. She just got out of the cast last week.

**FRANK.** Well, she was lucky you were there to take care of her.

**KENNY.** Oh, she would have managed, but yeah. One of the good things about still living at home.

**FRANK.** Well, give her my best. So, what do I owe you for getting the wagon going?

**KENNY.** Oh, sh—shoot, I left the bill in the car. Be right back.

*(Kenny exits.)*

**SAM.** Wow. So that's Kenny Barnhill. He was a scrawny little kid when we lived here. He was the yard boy in the lumberyard.

**FRANK.** Scrawny kids grow up.

**SAM.** I'll say.

**FRANK.** He did two tours overseas in the Army. Joined up right out of high school.

**SAM.** Really?

**FRANK.** Yeah, well, not everyone goes to college.

**SAM.** I know, but he used to talk about going. He used to ask me all sorts of questions about what college was like, what classes I took, that sort of thing. He even had me coach him on the SAT's.

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**FRANK.** Maybe the Army was a better fit. He learned a lot there; that's how he became a mechanic.

**KENNY.** *(Re-entering, hands bill to Frank.)* Here you go, Mr. Weaver.

**FRANK.** I'll write you a check. *(Frank exits to one of the back rooms.)*

**KENNY.** I was real sorry to hear about your mom. She was a great lady.

**SAM.** Thank you.

**KENNY.** Yeah, she was a good friend, too. We'd always talk when I was over, y'know, to like fix something. She always treated me like, y'know, I belonged here, not like a servant or something.

**SAM.** She was like that.

**KENNY.** So, yeah, and she told me about you and Pete splittin' up. Sorry to hear about that, too.

**SAM.** *(A little nonplussed.)* Oh, well, thanks.

**KENNY.** Yeah, I liked it when you guys lived here. And the folks at the hotel liked him too. You still in touch with him or...?

**SAM.** Oh, yeah, we're still friends. He's in Orlando now, so if you ever get down there...

**KENNY.** Sure, I'll look him up.

**SAM.** Yeah, do that. *(Beat.)* So, you knew about us.

**KENNY.** Sure. No big deal. Hell, live and let live, y'know. Long as you're happy.

**SAM.** *(At a loss for words.)* Um, thanks.

**KENNY.** And it's not like you're the first up here or anything. I mean, this may be the middle of nowhere compared to like Detroit or St. Louis, but... *(He grins knowingly. Frank re-enters with a check in hand.)*

**FRANK.** Here you go, Kenny. Say, do you need a ride back to the garage?

**KENNY.** Sure, that'd be great, thanks. *(Kenny gives Sam another handshake and holds on.)* Really good to see you, Sam. Maybe we can get together while you're here and talk about, y'know, old times at the lumberyard.

**SAM.** Sure, I'd like that.

**KENNY.** Great. Say, Mr. Weaver, I noticed the tires on the wagon are gettin' up there in age. I can get you a great deal from Eddie in town if you want.

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**FRANK.** Great, let's go see him. *(To Sam.)* Back in a while.  
*(Frank and Kenny exit. Sam follows them to the front door and looks out after them.)*

**SAM.** *(To himself.)* Wow. Kenny Barnhill. Little Kenny Barnhill.  
*(A moment as Sam is lost in thought. Then he snaps to, turns, and heads for the bedrooms, pulling off his tie. He is gone and the stage is empty. Then we see people cross the deck and knock on the door.)*

**GARY.** Hello, anyone home?

**SAM.** *(Offstage.)* Come on in; be with you in a sec!  
*(GARY ANDERSON enters. He is in his mid-thirties, well-built, casually dressed in slacks and a golf shirt. He is carrying a covered Tupperware bowl. He is followed by JANEY ANDERSON, his mother. She is dressed in casual but high-end summer attire: a blouse and skirt and flats.)*

**GARY.** *(Calling off.)* Hey, Sam, it's Gary.

**JANEY.** *(Calling off.)* And Janey.

**SAM.** *(Offstage.)* Oh! Hey, be right with you.

**GARY.** No prob, buddy. *(Gary sets the bowl on the table. Janey looks around the room as if she's casually inspecting it, looking at the books, the furniture, the knick-knacks on the mantel, then smiles to herself.)*

**JANEY.** Such a lovely old place. Ruth never touched it.

**GARY.** How so?

**JANEY.** She left it just as her grandparents built it. The old furniture, the old books. *(She goes to the kitchen door and looks in.)* Even the appliances. Straight out of the General Electric exhibit at the New York World's Fair. The one in 1939, that is. *(She goes to the back door and looks out onto the deck.)* You should think about it.

**GARY.** Mom, I can't spend a whole summer up here.

**JANEY.** As an investment. Rent it out during the season, save a couple of weeks for yourself and the boys. Tommy and Mikey love it here; nearly broke the boys' hearts when they moved out west.

**GARY.** I don't know...

**JANEY.** The association has the right of first refusal on any property sales here. You could be first in line.

**GARY.** *(Scowling.)* Geez, Mom, that is so....

**JANEY.** It's perfectly legal.

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**GARY.** I know, but it's....

**JANEY.** Oh, spare me the liberal guilt trip. Plenty of homeowners' associations have covenants like that. It's nothing nefarious. Besides, it's not like this is the kind of place that would be of interest to those....

**GARY.** Mom, c'mon.

**JANEY.** What I was going to say was, those people who haven't invested in a family history here. This isn't like a time-share in Sarasota. There's a core of families who've been coming here for generations. Your great-grandfather was one of the founders here. I would think you'd like to carry on at least that part of the family tradition, even if—

**GARY.** Yeah, I get it.

**JANEY.** All I'm saying is to think about it. Just you and the boys, sailing, going swimming, spending time with their friends, growing up. *(She looks around the room again.)* I wouldn't mind living here myself.

**GARY.** What's wrong with our house?

**JANEY.** Nothing at all. I mean for you. It's time you had a place of your own. *(Sam enters. He's changed into jeans and a polo shirt.)*

**SAM.** *(Cheerfully.)* Good morning!

**GARY.** Hey, buddy! *(Gary goes to Sam to embrace him, then thinks better of it and offers a firm handshake, all smiles.)* Great to see you.

**SAM.** You too.

**JANEY.** Sam, dear. *(Janey goes to Sam, offers him an air-hug and kiss on the cheek.)* So good to see you.

**SAM.** Thank you. You too.

**JANEY.** Is Frank here?

**SAM.** He and Kenny took the car into town to see about new tires. He'll be back in little while.

**JANEY.** Oh, that's nice. So, how have you been?

**SAM.** Oh, good, thanks.

**JANEY.** I'm sure it's been devastating. I know after my mother passed it was.... Well, I'm sure you know.

**SAM.** Oh. Yes, thank you.

**JANEY.** If there's anything... Anything at all.

**SAM.** Thank you so much.

**JANEY.** I'm so sorry we missed the service this morning, but....

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**SAM.** Oh, that's all right.

**JANEY.** I'm sure it was lovely. Just lovely.

**SAM.** It was. And you're coming to the celebration tonight at the clubhouse.

**JANEY.** Wouldn't dream of missing it. (*Glances at her watch.*) Well, we need to be getting back. So good to see you, Sam, dear.

**SAM.** Thanks, you too. (*Janey goes to the back door.*)

**GARY.** I'll be along in a bit, Mom.

**JANEY.** All right. Not too long; I'm making your lunch. (*Janey exits through the back door and across the deck. Gary watches her go, then turns and grins at Sam.*)

**GARY.** Well, there you are. You look great.

**SAM.** So do you. (*Gary squeezes Sam's biceps.*)

**GARY.** Yeah, you're getting buff. Nice guns. You must be killing it at the gym.

**SAM.** Yeah, when I can. Couple of times a week. You're not so bad yourself.

**GARY.** Oh, well, y'know. Tough to do when you're chained to a desk ten hours a day. Insurance doesn't sell itself. You're still teaching, right?

**SAM.** Yeah, a little college outside of Denver.

**GARY.** Great, great. Philosophy?

**SAM.** Psychology.

**GARY.** Oh, right. Keeps you busy?

**SAM.** I have a little practice on the side as well.

**GARY.** Well, that's great. (*Beat.*) So, how long has it been?

**SAM.** I dunno, eight, ten years, something like that. Whenever it was that your kids started going to camp and you started coming up in August.

**GARY.** Well, Tom's about to start his senior year, so yeah, at least eight years.

**SAM.** Wow, Tom's a senior? Last time I saw him he was...little.

**GARY.** Oh, you oughta see him now. Six foot four and full of muscles, just like in the song.

**SAM.** Well, like father, like son.



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**GARY.** Oh, yeah, I wish I was that big when I was seventeen. He's doing really well, though. So is Mike. Gonna be a freshman in high school and already thinking about college.

**SAM.** Princeton, huh? Like father, like son?

**GARY.** We'll see. I'll try to keep an eye on him when I can. The boys are in Seattle now. With their mom.

**SAM.** Yeah, I was sorry to hear about you and Cathy.

**GARY.** Thanks. It was...

**SAM.** Amicable?

**GARY.** Yeah. Not like we were fighting over every stick of furniture. The boys took it... well. So... You know.

**SAM.** Yeah, sorta.

**GARY.** Oh, and I'm so sorry about your mom.

**SAM.** Thank you.

**GARY.** Sorry I missed the service this morning, but I'm sure it was really nice.

**SAM.** Yeah, it was. They sang her favorite songs and Dad read some Emily Dickinson, which Mom loved, so...

**GARY.** Oh, great. *(Indicates Tupperware dish.)* Oh, we brought over some chocolate chip cookies. Mom baked them herself. You're probably ass-deep in food, but these are for dessert.

**SAM.** Thanks. Yeah, Dad said we could feed the whole place with just the stuff in the fridge. *(Gary nods, wanders around the room looking at the furniture, the mantel, the fireplace, then goes and sits on the couch.)*

**GARY.** It's been a while since I've been in your place.

**SAM.** Yeah, it has been.

**GARY.** I hear your dad's gonna sell it.

**SAM.** He's thinking about it.

**GARY.** He should get top dollar for it.

**SAM.** Well, it needs some work.

**GARY.** Not too much unless he's planning on living in it year-round.

**SAM.** Yeah, he's thinking about that, too.

**GARY.** Oh yeah? Didn't you and ... um...

**SAM.** Pete.

**GARY.** Yeah. Pete. Didn't you and he live here over one winter?

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**SAM.** Ten years ago. I worked at the lumberyard, he worked at the Stratford Hotel in town.

**GARY.** Right. So, did he come up with you?

**SAM.** No, we split up five years ago.

**GARY.** Oh. Sorry about that.

**SAM.** Yeah, thanks. (*Awkward silence.*)

**GARY.** So anyway, yeah, it's been a while since I was here. Place looks just like it did back then.

**SAM.** The All-Star game.

**GARY.** Hmm?

**SAM.** The All-Star game. That was the last time you were here, at least when I was here. Summer before senior year. We sat here on the couch watching the game. I got us a couple of beers and we watched the game on that TV. It was kinda chilly that night, so we had a little fire going in the fireplace, and it was really nice. By the seventh inning I got us another beer and you started talking about the girl you were dating. You were a senior; she was a junior. Her name was Betty or Becky or something. You were telling me how you were sure that she was the one, that it was destiny, and you were sure that she was gonna be the one you were finally gonna "do the deed" with. (*Chuckles at the memory.*) And you and I sat there on the couch, and we talked about... life. We had it all figured out, didn't we?

**GARY.** Yeah.

**SAM.** That was quite a night.

**GARY.** Oh, yeah. It was a hell of a game.

**SAM.** Uh, yeah. It was a hell of a game even though it really didn't mean anything. I mean, it was just for show, right?

**GARY.** Well, yeah, that's what it is, just keep the fans revved up for the rest of the season.

**SAM.** Right. Kinda hoping that it would be more like the real thing.

**GARY.** Yeah, no kidding. (*Gary and Sam look at each other for a moment.*) Her name was Becky.

**SAM.** What?

**GARY.** That girl I was going with. Her name was Becky.

**SAM.** Oh, right. What happened?

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**GARY.** Her dad got a new job in Oregon. Then I met Cathy. We hit it off, she and I.

**SAM.** Did the deed?

**GARY.** Uh, yeah. And then some.

**SAM.** That's right. You and she went to Princeton together. Got married the next summer. I missed the wedding.

**GARY.** It was a small affair. Just the family.

**SAM.** That's okay. I'll come to the next one.

**GARY.** *(Getting up.)* Sure thing. Listen, I gotta get back. I just wanted to, y'know... It's good to see you, Sam.

**SAM.** You too. *(Gary goes toward the door, then turns.)*

**GARY.** Yeah, it's really good to see you. You're gonna be around for a few days?

**SAM.** A few. You?

**GARY.** Yeah. We'll see each other, I'm sure.

**SAM.** Well, you're coming to the reception at the clubhouse tonight.

**GARY.** Wouldn't miss it. *(As Gary starts to exit, Frank enters.)*

**FRANK.** Well, hello, Gary.

**GARY.** Hello, Mr. Weaver.

**FRANK.** C'mon, Gary, after all these years? Call me Frank. Mr. Weaver is my dad, and he's long dead.

**GARY.** Sure... Frank.

**FRANK.** Now that wasn't so hard, was it? Good to see you.

**GARY.** You too. Sorry about Mrs.... about Ruth. We brought some cookies.

**FRANK.** I'm sure she'd appreciate that.

**GARY.** I'm sure she would.

**FRANK.** We're going to have some lunch in a little while. You're welcome to stay; we've got plenty. More than enough, in fact.

**GARY.** Oh, thanks, but Mom's getting it ready now. Maybe some other time?

**FRANK.** Sure. See you at the reception tonight?

**GARY.** Wouldn't miss it.

**FRANK.** Great. Sam, I'm going to heat up some of that fried chicken. *(Frank exits to the kitchen.)*

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**GARY.** See you later, I hope.

**SAM.** Okay. Thanks for stopping by. *(As Gary starts to leave out the back door, there is knock on the front door.)*

**PETE.** *(Off stage.)* Hello? *(PETE enters. He is Sam's age, attractive, dressed in a dark suit and tie, a bit out of place in the casual summer atmosphere. Sam offers a handshake, but Pete pulls him to him in a friendly embrace for a moment, then stands back and grins.)*

**PETE.** Sorry I'm late. My flight last night was delayed getting out, then stuck in Chicago for hours, it seems, and finally got here about twenty minutes ago. I missed the service, didn't I?

**SAM.** Yeah, but the reception is tonight, so...

**PETE.** Great. *(Sees Gary.)* Well, hello.

**SAM.** Oh, sorry. Pete, this is Gary Anderson.

**PETE.** Hi. Pete O'Rourke. I'm Sam's... I'm an old friend of Sam and Frank.

**GARY.** Yeah, nice to meet you. *(Gary and Pete shake hands, genially size each other up.)*

**PETE.** You too. I've heard a lot about you.

**GARY.** Oh. All good, I hope.

**PETE.** Oh, yeah. *(Sam is watching this exchange nervously, ready to steer it away from dangerous shoals.)* You up for the summer?

**GARY.** Oh, no, just for a long weekend with my folks.

**SAM.** Pete, how long are you gonna stay?

**PETE.** I go back Tuesday.

**SAM.** Oh, great.

**PETE.** I remember Sam showing me your house when we lived here that winter. Nice place.

**GARY.** Thanks. *(Beat. Cheesy grin.)* Well, Mom's getting lunch ready.

**SAM.** Okay, well, see you tonight.

**GARY.** You got it. *(Gary exits through the back door and across the deck. Sam and Pete watch him go, then Pete smirks at Sam.)*

**SAM.** Shut up.

**PETE.** *(Innocently.)* What did I say? Did my lips move?

**SAM.** I know you. I know what you were thinking.

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**PETE.** What, that this was the guy you had the major-league aching-boner crush on when you were twelve? Seriously? Him?

**SAM.** Well, yeah.

**PETE.** So, I finally got to see what I was up against for all those years.

**SAM.** You were never “up against him.” It wasn’t like that.

**PETE.** Oh, really? The way you used to talk about him, he was Junior Mr. America and a Rhodes Scholar all wrapped up in an ad for Calvin Klein underwear.

**SAM.** Oh, come on. You had nothing to worry about. Me and him...

**PETE.** Just a teenage summer fling.

**SAM.** Not even that. We never... flinged.

**PETE.** You’re sure?

**SAM.** (*Firmly.*) Yeah, I’m sure. We were just good friends. There’s a hell of a difference between a crush at twelve and being in love at twenty-two.

**PETE.** Good thing. I’d have never stood a chance. (*Beat as Pete looks around.*) Wow, it hasn’t changed a bit. Still the same old place.

**SAM.** Pretty much.

**PETE.** And you look great.

**SAM.** So I’ve been told. Thanks.

**PETE.** (*At the bookshelves.*) Same old books. (*He takes one down, opens it, puts it back.*) Yeah, I remember reading that one. So, how are you doing?

**SAM.** Good. I’m... (*Frank enters.*)

**FRANK.** Pete! So glad you could make it. (*He crosses to Pete, shakes his hand warmly, genuinely glad to see him.*)

**PETE.** Thanks, Frank, good to see you. I’m so sorry about Ruth. I really loved her.

**FRANK.** She knew that. And thanks for the card.

**PETE.** I’m sorry I’m late, but like I was telling Sam, travelling was a nightmare.

**FRANK.** I understand completely. Where are you staying? You’re welcome here, as always. Got plenty of room.

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**PETE.** Oh, thanks, but I'm in town at the Stratford. It's like old home week for me there; still a lot of the same people as when I worked there. Don't go to any trouble.

**FRANK.** Well, if you change your mind, let us know.

**PETE.** I will, thanks.

**SAM.** We're about to have lunch so if you want to have a bite, we've got plenty of that, too. I guess.

**FRANK.** Actually, I'm gonna run down to the clubhouse and check on the setup for tonight, maybe grab a burger while I'm there.

**SAM.** Really, Dad?

**FRANK.** *(Heading for the door.)* Good to see you, Pete. Thanks for coming. Back in a while. *(Frank exits. Sam looks after him, sighs, and grins wanly at Pete.)*

**SAM.** He puts the "B" in "subtle."

**PETE.** Well, maybe he's not into watching re-runs.

**SAM.** Yeah, that's not going to happen.

**PETE.** Good to know. For what's it's worth, I almost didn't come.

**SAM.** What changed your mind?

**PETE.** Your dad called me last week.

**SAM.** He still thinks there's hope for us.

**PETE.** I know. I tried to tell him.

**SAM.** Me too. Made it sound like it was Mom's dying wish.

**PETE.** Ah, book a heavy guilt trip.

**SAM.** Well, it worked on you.

**PETE.** No, I was going to come anyway. I missed the funeral last fall.

**SAM.** Didn't miss much. The usual mumbo-jumbo about ashes to ashes and all that religious crap. Mom wanted to save the good stuff for here.

**PETE.** It was awfully sudden, wasn't it?

**SAM.** Ten weeks from diagnosis to... the end. But she was ready.

**PETE.** I felt like I owed it to her. I mean, she did make a point of putting me on the invitation list.

**SAM.** She was so hopped up on painkillers that I'm surprised she didn't invite Barack and Michelle Obama.

**PETE.** That would have been a first: black people at the Harbor Grove chapel.

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**SAM.** All things considered, I'm... we're glad you came.

**PETE.** It was a last-minute thing. Believe it or not, June is a really busy time for us, and even though it's hot and humid, some people actually like wandering around a theme park as long as they can duck into some place with air conditioning and buy a twenty-dollar bottle of Coke.

**SAM.** Yeah. Air conditioning.

**PETE.** What about it?

**SAM.** Well, if it wasn't for AC – or the lack of it – this place; this house, or “cottage” if you like, and the Harbor Grove Cottage Owners Association, wouldn't exist.

**PETE.** Oh, because...?

**SAM.** Rich people couldn't stand the heat and humidity of summers in places like Chicago, St. Louis, and Detroit, so they built these houses up here where it was twenty degrees cooler near the lake and far away from the hustle and bustle of the city. In keeping with the upper-crustacean tradition, they formed an exclusive association with a restricted country club and a gate on the road to keep out the riffraff. My great-granddad spent a lot of money to build this place so he could spend one month every summer up here.

**PETE.** And you loved every day you spent up here since you were five.

**SAM.** I did. I still do. I don't know if I'll be able to afford it, though. Neither does Dad. That's why he's thinking about selling. The upkeep alone costs a fortune. Oh, and speaking of upkeep, guess who was over today.

**PETE.** Who?

**SAM.** Kenny Barnhill.

**PETE.** Kenny Barnhill?

**SAM.** Yeah, you remember him.

**PETE.** That skinny little high school kid? The one who followed you around like a puppy?

**SAM.** Not so little anymore. He's bulked up really nicely.

**PETE.** I remember him. So, he's still here. I thought he was gonna go off to college or something. Move to the big city like Mount Pleasant or Saginaw.

**SAM.** Well, he's a vet now.

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**PETE.** Dogs and cats, or horses and cows?

**SAM.** No, vet as in Army veteran. He's working for the association now. He got the Pontiac running.

**PETE.** That old Pontiac. Well, it's really good to see you. In person. You look better than your profile picture, and Zoom doesn't do you justice.

**SAM.** So do you. So, how's it going? *(Beat.)*

**PETE.** By "it" you mean my recovery.

**SAM.** Well, yeah.

**PETE.** Got my five-year chip. *(Reaches in his pocket, pulls out an AA chip.)* So far so good. One day at a time and all that.

**SAM.** I'm very proud of you.

**PETE.** Well, in a way, I owe some of it to you.

**SAM.** *(Shrugging.)* If you say so.

**PETE.** I do. Kicking me out.

**SAM.** I didn't kick you out.

**PETE.** Yeah, you did. "Get sober or get out." Your words. I heard you. Everyone here heard you. I'll bet they still talk about it when they're on their second martini. Sounds of a summer night.

**SAM.** So, you got out.

**PETE.** Well, you never really gave me a chance.

**SAM.** The hell I didn't... *(Beat.)* You know what? I'm not gonna go through it all again. It was five years ago. You left. We split up. You went your way, I went mine. We're both better off.

**PETE.** Are we? Are you seeing someone?

**SAM.** Are you?

**PETE.** No! I haven't been on a date for so long I don't even remember how to do it.

**SAM.** *(Drily.)* The procedure's pretty much the same as it's always been.

**PETE.** Well, there's one small problem.

**SAM.** They have pills for that now.

**PETE.** I still love you. That never stopped.

**SAM.** And I love you. But... Please don't tell me you came here just to tell me that you want us to try again.



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**PETE.** No, I know. You're in Colorado, I'm in Florida, I'm not quitting my job, you're not quitting yours, we've moved on, we'll always be friends, et cetera, et cetera... I know the routine. I've seen all the movies with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan where they break up and get back together, usually in some sugar-soaked rom-com montage. We're not that.

**SAM.** No. We're not.

**PETE.** So, what are we?

**SAM.** Like you said. Just good friends.

**PETE.** Status quo.

**SAM.** Yes, pretty much.

**PETE.** Frozen in time.

**SAM.** Whatever you want to call it.

**PETE.** So, there's no chance of us starting up, starting over, picking up where we left off.

**SAM.** I just said...

**PETE.** Okay, okay, just checking. But don't you think...

**SAM.** Oh, Christ.

**PETE.** Oh, Christ what? Even "just good friends" evolve, Sam. Look, we were together for ten years. We lived in five different places, had I-don't-know-how-many jobs, we spent a whole year here freezing our asses off because you couldn't find a real job, and we still stuck together.

**SAM.** In more ways than one.

**PETE.** Yeah, that too. And it was pretty good, wasn't it?

**SAM.** There's more to a relationship than that.

**PETE.** Yeah, eating chocolate ice cream in the dark after.

**SAM.** I'm serious.

**PETE.** So am I. Look, we never really figured us out, did we? We fell in love because of a mutual carnal attraction and took it from there. But we never really talked about what made us, us. We just fell into it. We made it up as we went along.

**SAM.** So do most people. I mean, look at my parents, or yours. Or my brother.

**PETE.** Those are straight people, Sam. The road is paved for them; ours is more like...

**SAM.** A dirt road with bumps and ruts?

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**PETE.** Yeah, okay. But even then, despite the tortured metaphor, we had to make our own way. Renting an apartment. Buying a car. Getting a job. We just did it. But we never really planned anything out as far as being together. Where we were gonna go.

**SAM.** Who does that? Life's not some package tour with pre-planned stops. It just is. And people who do set it all out down to the number of kids and cars and pets and places to summer and winter and what school or college or camp to send their kids are usually in for a hell of a shock. Like they say, you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. You're gonna tell me that you decided twenty years ago that your life's ambition was to be a glorified desk clerk with a drinking problem?

**PETE.** Wow. Don't mince words, Sam. Let it all out.

**SAM.** The same goes for me, Pete. You think I wanted to end up as a junior professor of psychology at a community college who got the job by answering an ad on-line? The only reason I didn't end up with you at an AA meeting is because I have a pathological fear of throwing up.

**PETE.** What did you really want?

**SAM.** You know.

**PETE.** No, I really don't. What; to be an astronaut? Fireman? Piano player in a strip club? You never really told me what you wanted to be. All those years in college and grad school, you were just marking time, waiting to see what came along. Hell, I think you majored in psychology because the TA in your adolescent development seminar was hot.

**SAM.** Oh, yeah.

**PETE.** Well, he was. But what?

**SAM.** Why do you think I wanted to spend a year up here in the woods away from all of the noise and distractions of ... down there?

**PETE.** Not much of a living in being a hermit. Besides, the idea of being a hermit is to live alone. I came with you, remember? You even made sure I wanted to come.

**SAM.** Because I wanted to have time to think and to...

**PETE.** Oh, my God. The great American novel. Now I do remember.

**SAM.** Yes. Just us, the woods, the quiet nights, no distractions like traffic or friends dropping in. I'd get a job to make ends meet, but nothing that

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required a lot of energy; just bring in enough so that I could spend nights and weekends writing.

**PETE.** Yeah. But you never did it.

**SAM.** Oh, I did. I started. Remember? I set up my little office in the back bedroom with the desk and the computer and the printer and the view over the lake and I wrote like mad for six weeks.

**PETE.** So why did you stop?

**SAM.** Because I suck at it.

**PETE.** No.

**SAM.** Yes. I'm a really terrible writer. My characters are dull, the plots are episodic, there's no depth of feeling to the narration, it's all crap. I can't even write decent porn, and believe me, I've tried. No one wants to read it.

**PETE.** How do you know unless you put it out there?

**SAM.** I did! Where do you think I heard about the dull characters and the episodic plots, not to mention the depthless narration? I sent off a sample chapter to a bunch of editors and friends from college who majored in English, including that assistant professor who gave me an A because he saw me taking a shower in the gym. Well, anyway, they all hated it. I mean, they didn't actually use the word "hate" but I could read between the lines, which is more than I can say about my own writing.

**PETE.** You never showed it to me. I didn't even know you were sending it out.

**SAM.** Well, if I had, you would have either said you liked it just to make me happy, or if you didn't, you would have said you liked it anyway.

**PETE.** Oh, come on, give me a little credit for being brutally honest.

**SAM.** I slept with you for ten years, Pete. I knew the difference between when you really liked something and didn't, okay?

**PETE.** Hey, we all have our off moments.

**SAM.** Well, this is permanent.

**PETE.** So, you stopped. Never tried writing again.

**SAM.** Oh, no, I write a lot: scholarly papers, peer reviews, research articles. My biggest hit was "The Role of the Idealized Male Image in the Development of Adolescent Self-Identification."

**PETE.** Huh?

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**SAM.** Exactly. It was about how adolescent boys see themselves when they compare themselves to the images of the perfect man, whether it's in ads, like the Abercrombie and Fitch men, or superheroes on TV, or even other guys in their own world. You know, like the star quarterback in high school, or a big brother. My point is that no one can be expected to live up to these impossibly high standards.

**PETE.** Wow, that sounds ... You said it was your biggest hit?

**SAM.** Yeah, the editor changed the title to "Boots, Jeans, T-Shirts and Biceps," added some pictures of hot guys in the aforementioned outfits, and it went viral among the psychology crowd. I had no idea so many supposedly strait-laced headshrinkers took a purely academic interest in a guy with tight Levi's and eighteen-inch guns.

**PETE.** Hell, I'd read it just for that. So, how'd you do the research?

**SAM.** There've been some studies on self-image that I went through, did some controlled interviews and questionnaires, read up on advertising theory.

**PETE.** No primary research? Like hanging out at the local gym?

**SAM.** No, that's strictly off-limits.

**PETE.** Besides, you had your own history with the idealized male.

**SAM.** Oh, honey, you're very handsome, but...

**PETE.** I don't mean me. I'm talking about Gary.

**SAM.** Okay, nice try. He never entered into the picture.

**PETE.** (*Snorting.*) Seriously?

**SAM.** Look, I never even thought about him. Well, I mean, sure, I admired him, but I didn't want to become him. Or even look like him.

**PETE.** Yeah, because that was never gonna happen.

**SAM.** That's right. And it's not because I can't bench three hundred pounds. It's because I don't want my life planned out to the last minute. Tell me that's what you really want.

**PETE.** No, it's not.

**SAM.** Good.

**PETE.** I already know what I want. Known it all along.

**SAM.** Well, good. What is it?

**PETE.** You, you big goof. (*Pete grabs Sam and kisses him firmly on the lips and then wraps him in his arms, still kissing. Sam is utterly stunned*)

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*but does not resist, and then he embraces Pete, kissing him back. Finally, Sam breaks free and walks away, ending up at the fireplace, staring down at the area rug.)*

**SAM.** Oh, shit.

**PETE.** Yeah, I know. Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, right? Look, you asked...

**SAM.** I know. And I should have seen that coming a mile down the road.

**PETE.** I'm sorry.

**SAM.** No, it's my fault. I somehow gave you the impression that I...

**PETE.** Oh, don't flatter yourself. Like I said, I still love you. Five years of being apart and moving a thousand miles away didn't change that.

**SAM.** I know. And you still kiss very nicely.

**PETE.** Okay, here you go again, leading me on.

**SAM.** No, I'm not.

**PETE.** I'm kidding. But I do think we've taken a big leap in the evolution of being "just good friends."

**SAM.** *(Glancing down at his crotch.)* Yeah, well, someone else is taking a big leap, too.

**PETE.** *(Laughing.)* Nice to know I've still got someone's attention. You know whose fault this is, don't you?

**SAM.** Not me.

**PETE.** No. Your mother. If Ruth hadn't died, I wouldn't be here.

**SAM.** Way to go, Mom. Even from inside that little fifteen-hundred-dollar brass urn buried in the wall, you're still in control. *(Sighs.)* Well, for what it's worth, I'm glad she thought of you.

**PETE.** Thought of us. *(Pete moves to Sam to embrace him again, but Sam moves away.)*

**SAM.** That last one was for old time's sake, but that's it, okay?

**PETE.** For now.

**SAM.** No, not for now. *(Beat. Pete and Sam face each other, then Pete raises his hands in surrender.)*

**PETE.** Okay. *(They move apart, Sam by the fireplace, Pete by the bookcase. A long pause, then Sam starts to say something, but he is interrupted by Frank coming in the front door.)*

**FRANK.** Well, boys, you have a chance to catch up?

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### SCENE 2

*A few hours later. The stage is empty. The back door to the deck is open, as is the front door. Pete's suitcoat and tie are on one of the chairs. A knock on the front door.*

**KENNY** (*Off.*) Hello? Anyone home? (*Pete enters from the backdoor. He's holding a magazine; "The New Yorker" perhaps.*)

**PETE.** Uh, yeah, come in. (*Kenny enters, dressed as before. He sees Pete and grins broadly.*)

**KENNY.** Hey, Pete! I didn't hear you were coming.

**PETE.** (*Somewhat awestruck.*) Kenny?

**KENNY.** Yeah, it's me. (*They shake hands warmly, then Pete looks Kenny over admiringly.*)

**PETE.** Wow, I hardly recognized you. You've really... wow.

**KENNY.** Yeah, it happened kinda fast, but like they say, the Army will make a man out of you.

**PETE.** I'll say. Really good to see you.

**KENNY.** Thanks, you too. But I thought Sam said you couldn't make it.

**PETE.** Kind of a last-minute thing, and I got delayed; I had to spend last night in Chicago. I missed the service this morning.

**KENNY.** It's really nice of you to come.

**PETE.** Yeah, even if it's only for a couple of days.

**KENNY.** Well, it's good to see you.

**PETE.** Good to see you, too.

**KENNY.** Thanks. Is Mr. Weaver around? I brought back the wagon; got the new tires on it.

**PETE.** No, he and Sam left a little while ago. The lady from the clubhouse called and told them to bring in all the food they got from friends here, so that's where they are. Should be back in a while.

**KENNY.** Okay.

**PETE.** Say, can I get you something? Water? Soda? Beer? I'm sure they've got some.

**KENNY.** Oh, no thanks, I'm good.

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**PETE.** So, the Army, huh? I thought you were planning to go to college. That's what you talked about when we lived here.

**KENNY.** Yeah, but then my dad got sick and that ate up a lot of money, and then he died. And college still costs a lot, even if I got a scholarship; y'know, books, a place to live, that sorta thing. But the Army paid for all that, and now that I'm out, they'll help pay for school when I go back.

**PETE.** So, you're planning on going?

**KENNY.** Yeah, maybe this fall or next winter. Save up a little from what I make here, then maybe take a couple of classes.

**PETE.** Well, that's great. I really can't get over how much you've grown up.

**KENNY.** Thanks. So, I heard you're down in Orlando running a hotel.

**PETE.** I'd hardly call it running. I'm the assistant lodging manager.

**KENNY.** Sounds important.

**PETE.** I'm a glorified desk clerk, or so I've been told.

**KENNY.** Well, still. I went to Orlando once when I was a kid. We went on spring break, did all the parks and stuff. It was fun.

**PETE.** Oh, great. You should come back sometime. I'll give you the behind-the-scenes tour.

**KENNY.** I'd like that. So, you're staying out here with the Weavers?

**PETE.** No, I'm at the Stratford. I'm just hanging out here until my room's ready. They said they'd call.

**KENNY.** I was thinking about applying for a job there.

**PETE.** Why didn't you?

**KENNY.** Well, this job came up and they really needed a mechanic, and the pay's pretty good. But I was thinking about taking a course in hospitality and leisure management. They have them at the college, y'know, because of all the summer people and places that need people with that kinda training.

**PETE.** It's a tough job, Kenny. Not a lot of time off; it's hospitality and leisure for everyone except the people who work in it.

**KENNY.** I know. But I'd still like to do it.

**PETE.** Let me know if you do. I'll put in a word for you. (*Lightly.*) Hey, like I said, if you ever make it down to Orlando...

**KENNY.** Thanks, that'd be great.

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**PETE.** Anytime.

**KENNY.** Say, I was real sorry to hear about you and Sam.

**PETE.** Thanks.

**KENNY.** I mean, you guys... You were more than just fudgies.

**PETE.** (*Laughing.*): Wow, fudgies. I haven't heard that word in a long time.

**KENNY.** You know what I mean.

**PETE.** Yeah, the tourists who flock to buy all the famous fudge at the candy stores. I had to carefully explain that to all my friends who thought I was talking about... you know.

**KENNY.** Oh, yeah, I know, but not that. But you guys... it was great when you were here. I learned an awful lot from you two.

**PETE.** Sure. Like what?

**KENNY.** Well, even though you're summer people, you still know how to do a hard day's work.

**PETE.** Yeah, but that's because in order to be summer people, you gotta do hard work. Just someplace else. Not everybody got it handed to them.

**KENNY.** Yeah, but you also didn't treat me like I was...

**PETE.** The Help?

**KENNY.** You guys – you and Sam – you were the only guys who treated me like I was, y'know, a normal guy. At the yard Sam talked to me like we were equals even though I was seventeen and going to high school. That was really cool. You guys didn't make me feel like you thought you were better than us, that's all.

**PETE.** That's because we're not. My folks are not much different than yours, y'know. Dad's a cop, my mom works for the public schools. And even Sam's family; hell, they inherited this place from his mother's family. Frank's talking about selling.

**KENNY.** Yeah, I heard. That'd be too bad. (*Beat.*) And I also learned what it's like for two guys... Well, you know. (*Kenny looks at Pete, grinning slightly. He grins back.*)

**PETE.** Uh, yeah. (*Beat.*) I still can't get over how big you've gotten. I'd kill for arms like yours. I pay fifty bucks a month to go to the gym three times a week and still have very little to show for it.

**KENNY.** Oh, c'mon, I wouldn't say that. You look good.



## COOLER NEAR THE LAKE

**PETE.** You're way too kind.

**KENNY.** Nah, I mean it. *(Kenny comes over to Pete. As he mentions the various body parts, he touches them.)* Your shoulders look good, you're not too big in the waist, you're getting some size on your pecs. You just need a little more definition and you'll be in great shape. *(Kenny squeezes Pete's biceps and leaves his hand there for a moment. They lock eyes, then he lets go.)* Yeah, you're getting some guns there.

**PETE.** You are too. *(Beat.)* You sound like you know what you're talking about.

**KENNY.** I really got into it when I was in the service. You gotta, y'know, know how to take care of yourself. Some of the other guys think they can toss you around if they think they can. First month I was in I put on about twenty pounds. It was hard work, especially eating Army chow, but worth it.

**PETE.** I actually thought about enlisting. Back when I was in high school. Like you did.

**KENNY.** Yeah? How come you didn't?

**PETE.** I got a college scholarship, full ride. Also, back then, there was the little matter of "don't ask, don't tell."

**KENNY.** They're over that sh—stuff now.

**PETE.** You can say "shit" in front of me, Kenny.

**KENNY.** Yeah, force of habit, I guess. Rule Number One: Be polite around the summer people.

**PETE.** I'm not summer people anymore, so I think I've earned the right to hear you swear.

**KENNY.** That means a lot coming from you.

**PETE.** Thank you. You've become a hell of a man, Kenny. *(His cell phone rings.)* Damn. *(He answers it.)* Hello? Oh, hi, Grace. Fine, thanks. Oh, okay. Yeah, got it. See you in a little while. *(Ends call.)*

Well, that was Grace over at the hotel. My room's ready; two-twelve. I always liked that one; it has a balcony and a view of the lake.

**KENNY.** Sounds real nice.

**PETE.** Funny thing is, I worked there for a whole year but never spent the night there.

**KENNY.** First time for everything, huh?

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**PETE.** Yep. (*Footsteps on the porch, then Frank and Sam enter.*)

**SAM.** Wow, twice in one day, Kenny. To what do we owe the pleasure?

**KENNY.** Brought the station wagon back. Got the new tires on it.

**FRANK.** Oh, great, thanks. Did Eddie send along a bill?

**KENNY.** Yeah, it's in the car. He said you can pay him whenever.

**FRANK.** Thanks.

**SAM.** So, you guys catching up?

**PETE.** Kenny was telling me about his college plans.

**SAM.** Really? That's great. What do you want to study?

**KENNY.** Thinking about hospitality and leisure management. Y'know, like working in a hotel or a resort or someplace like that.

**PETE.** I told him he could come work for me in Orlando. We've got three pools and a fitness center.

**KENNY.** (*Chuckling.*): That's for the guests. Actually, I thought about maybe working here, like at the Stratford. Close to home.

**SAM.** Sounds like a great idea. Say, Kenny, can I offer you something? We've got water, soft drinks, maybe a beer if that's okay?

**KENNY.** Oh, no thanks. I gotta be getting back.

**PETE.** And my room's ready at the hotel. Can I give you a lift?

**KENNY.** Thanks, but I got my bike in the back of the wagon. Brought it just in case nobody was here when I dropped off the car. (*Kenny nods at Sam and Frank, then goes over and shakes hands with Pete.*) Good to see you again. Really nice talking to you.

**PETE.** You too.

**FRANK.** You'll be at the reception tonight?

**KENNY.** Wouldn't miss it. Well, see ya. (*Kenny exits.*)

**PETE.** Wow. That kid's really grown up.

**SAM.** Yeah, in more ways than one.

**PETE.** You too?

**SAM.** Uh huh.

**FRANK.** What are you talking about?

**SAM.** Nothing, Dad.

**PETE.** Not nothing. He was cruising me.

**SAM.** More like you were cruising him.

**PETE.** He started it.

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**FRANK.** You think he was hitting on you?

**SAM.** More likely Pete was hitting on him.

**PETE.** I was not. Okay, I told him that he'd really grown up since I'd last seen him, okay? It wasn't like I was... It's perfectly okay to admire another guy's build. (*To Sam.*) You sure as hell checked him out, head to foot and everywhere in between.

**SAM.** (*After glancing at Frank.*) Well, yeah, okay. But he's...

**FRANK.** He's an adult, y'know. Twenty-seven or whatever. Not like you're hitting on a teenager. So what if he's...

**SAM.** I didn't say he was.

**FRANK.** Was what?

**SAM.** (*Sotto voce.*) Gay.

**FRANK.** (*Cupping his ear.*) What?

**SAM.** Gay, all right? C'mon, Dad. We're talking about Kenny. Nice kid. Local boy. Lives with his mom. Probably still wears his high school letter jacket.

**PETE.** Not with those arms and shoulders.

**SAM.** All right already!

**FRANK.** So what if he is? What, you think you guys are the only gay people up here? Are you kidding?

**PETE.** Frank, it's okay. Cruising is just a part of the hard-wiring we get at the factory along with our sense of fashion and witty repartee. We check out other guys. Doesn't matter if they're straight or not, we just do it. And it's no different than straight married guys checking out women.

**FRANK.** You don't have to defend yourself to me. I know all about the art of cruising.

**SAM.** (*Agape.*) What?

**FRANK.** Well, not that I've actively pursued another man. But I've been cruised. And I kinda like it.

**PETE.** (*Chuckling.*) You dog.

**SAM.** When?

**FRANK.** Lots of times. At the gym, at the pool. Well, not so much now that I'm in my fifties and widowed, but hey.

**PETE.** I've seen pictures of you when you were young, Frank. You were hot.

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**FRANK.** Like to think I still am, but thanks.

**PETE.** There's lots of guys in your situation out there looking. I can show you some websites...

**SAM.** Will you stop?

**FRANK.** It's okay. Not to worry, Sam; I respect and admire your team, but I don't think I could play.

**PETE.** Well, it's not like we have a membership committee.

**SAM.** Okay, you guys, knock it off. Dad, if Kenny's gay, that's his business. It's not like anything's gonna happen...

**PETE.** Oh, I don't know. He squeezed my biceps.

**SAM.** As long as he didn't grope your junk.

**PETE.** Jealous?

**SAM.** That's enough. Stop it.

**PETE.** Look, Kenny told me that he knew we were gay when we lived here. Didn't bother him; he actually said he knew what it was like for us.

**SAM.** He said pretty much the same thing to me.

**PETE.** So there.

**SAM.** So what there? Just means he's ... accepting. Not like he was hitting on me. Or you, for that matter.

**PETE.** You want me to get him back here so he can squeeze your biceps?

**SAM.** You'd like that, wouldn't you?

**FRANK.** (*Laughing.*) Okay you guys, this has been a lot of fun, but we have a lot to do before tonight, not the least of which is make sure there's enough ice, and since we'll probably have company after, Sam, why don't you check the liquor inventory and then head to town to restock. Take the Pontiac. I'm gonna take a shower and get changed into something appropriate for a wake. I have no idea what that would be up here.

**PETE.** Got a basic black golf shirt?

**FRANK.** Dark gray. It's perfect: it will match Ruth's ashes. (*Frank exits to the bedroom SR.*)

**PETE.** And I need to check in to the hotel. I'm in room two-twelve, if you're interested.

**SAM.** No, but did you share that with Kenny?

**PETE.** I think he heard me.

**SAM.** Maybe you should stay here.

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**PETE.** You'd like that, wouldn't you?

**SAM.** Go and check in, you goof. *(Pete comes over to Sam, gives him a peck on the cheek, then feels Sam's biceps.)*

**PETE.** Oh, Kenny doesn't know what he's missing.

**SAM.** Go already.

**PETE.** *(Going to the door.)* See ya! *(Pete picks up his suitcoat and tie off the chair and exits. Sam follows to the door, gazes out after him.)*

**SAM.** Room two-twelve, huh?

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