

# **A House by the Side of the Road**

## **Seven Short Plays About a Family**

By

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### **PRODUCTION NOTE:**

These plays can be done separately or as a full-length production. If they are presented all at once, they should be done in the order listed above as they are in chronological order. Also, it is feasible that the same actors play the same roles through the series.

# **A House by the Side of the Road**

## **CHARACTERS:**

ANNOUNCER: Baseball play-by-play on the radio.

CLYDE: Late thirties.

STEVE: His son, fourteen.

DAN: His son, twelve.

## **PLACE and TIME:**

The back yard and back porch of a suburban home in northwest Ohio. A summer evening not too long ago.

## **PRODUCTION NOTE:**

The voice of ANNOUNCER over the radio in this play is based on that of Ernie Harwell, the legendary play-by-play announcer for the Detroit Tigers. There are recordings of Mr. Harwell through sources such as YouTube and should be used as reference material for the actual voice in the play.

*The scene is the back yard and back porch of a house in northwest Ohio. There is a fence along the back wall with shrubs along it and trees off stage indicated by lighting and shadow. Stage Left is the back porch of the house with comfortable patio furniture on it with a table and a radio.*

*At rise, it is evening; twilight is settling in over the yard, but it is not dark. There are sounds of summer insects – crickets, cicadas, katydids – in the background. There are blinks of light from the lightning bugs in the shrubs. The radio is on and we hear the voice of the play-by-play ANNOUNCER for the Detroit Tigers coming from the radio. CLYDE, a man in his late thirties in shorts and a t-shirt, is sitting in one of the chairs, drinking a beer and listening to the game.*

ANNOUNCER: Bottom of the eighth, Tigers with a one-run lead, one man on, two out, and the count to Kaline is three and two. The pitcher kicks and deals....

*(Sound of a bat hitting a ball and the crowd cheers.)*

ANNOUNCER: And that one is looooooong gone! Al Kaline with a two-run homer and the Tigers take the lead three to one!

CLYDE: Yes! Go Tigers!

*(STEVE, followed by DAN, enter Stage Right. STEVE is fourteen, tall, well-built for his age, wearing a Detroit Tigers cap and t-shirt over shorts and sneakers. He is carrying a baseball bat and much-used baseball mitt with a ball in it. DAN is twelve, thin, not athletic, also wearing a Tigers cap but wearing just a plain t-shirt over jeans and sneakers. He is carrying a baseball mitt that looks comparatively new.)*

CLYDE: So, how'd it go?

STEVE: We won by a run.

CLYDE: That's good. A win's a win.

*(The boys come up to the porch. STEVE sits in a chair, DAN sits on the porch steps, takes off his cap, slouches.)*

CLYDE (*cont'd*): How'd you boys do?

STEVE: Three hits. One steal.

CLYDE: That's great. Dan?

DAN: Two walks.

STEVE: And he struck out three times.

*(DAN turns and glares at STEVE, who smirks back.)*

CLYDE: Well, at least you tried.

STEVE: He didn't even swing half the time. He stood there like a house by the side of the road.

DAN: Well, thank you, Ernie Harwell. (*Beat.*) They looked like balls to me.

STEVE: They were in the zone.

DAN: Oh, now you're the umpire?

STEVE: They were called strikes!

CLYDE: Boys, simmer down.

*(CLYDE goes over to DAN, playfully tousles his hair, which DAN barely tolerates.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: At least you still won. And you had fun, right?

DAN: Yeah, I guess.

STEVE: Dad, I've been telling you, he can't hit the ball. He just –

CLYDE: So, let's help him. Give him some practice. C'mon, let's go. It's still light out.

*(CLYDE goes out into the yard. The boys don't move.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Aw, c'mon, guys. Steve, toss me the ball.

*(STEVE tosses the ball to CLYDE, then reluctantly gets out of the chair and goes out to the yard. DAN doesn't move.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Dan....?

*(DAN gets up from the porch and joins CLYDE and STEVE.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Good. Okay, Dan, take the bat. Let's see your stance.

*(DAN assumes a batting stance, somewhat tentatively, but gets it right. CLYDE nods his approval.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Good. Okay, Steve, you be the catcher and I'll be Sandy Koufax.

STEVE: Dad!

CLYDE: Okay, Denny McClain.

STEVE: At least.

*(CLYDE moves far enough away to be able to throw the ball underhand and give DAN a chance to swing at it. STEVE takes up his position as catcher.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Good. *(Imitating the play-by-play announcer.)* McClain kicks and deals...

*(CLYDE pitches underhand; the ball sails past DAN who watches it go by. STEVE catches it.)*

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Okay, good eye, good eye; that one was low and away. Don't swing at every pitch.

*(STEVE snorts derisively, DAN glares at him. STEVE tosses the ball back to CLYDE.)*

CLYDE: Okay, let's try it again. Get the bat off your shoulder; lean into the pitch.

STEVE: Yeah, if he hits you at least you get on base for once.

DAN: Shut up.

CLYDE: C'mon, guys. Okay, here we go. (*Announcer voice.*) The count is one and oh. McClain checks the sign... the wind-up... the pitch....

(*CLYDE pitches again. This time the ball goes past DAN in the strike zone, but DAN does not move.*)

STEVE: Steee-rike! That one was right in there, Dad.

(*STEVE tosses the ball back to CLYDE.*)

CLYDE (*getting frustrated but trying not to show it*): All right, Dan, just one more.

(*CLYDE pitches, and DAN swings at it, but misses. STEVE catches it.*)

STEVE: See, I told you, Dad. He's no good at it.

DAN: I can do it!

STEVE: Three strikes 'n' yer out!

DAN: The first one was a ball!

STEVE (*mocking*): The first one was a ball!

DAN (*furious*): Oh, fu... Bite me!

STEVE: You'd like that, wouldn't you? Wuss.

DAN: Hey, at least I'm not sitting on my ass in summer school taking Algebra One for the third time.

STEVE: Oh, yeah?

DAN: Great comeback. What's the square root of fourteen?

STEVE: Who gives a shit?

DAN: Thought so.

CLYDE: Both of you! Knock it off.

(*CLYDE goes back up to the porch, the boys following, resuming their previous positions. CLYDE takes a sip from his beer. He turns up the radio.*)

ANNOUNCER: ... The wind-up... the pitch... (*Sound of bat on ball.*) Killebrew pops it foul into the stands. That one was caught by a man from Walled Lake.

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**

## **Blind No. 7**

### **CHARACTERS:**

CLYDE: A man in his mid-forties.

DAN: His son, aged fifteen.

STEVE: His son, aged seventeen

### **PLACE and TIME:**

A duck blind in Erie Marsh on the western shore of Lake Erie. An early morning in October, not too long ago.

### **PRODUCTION NOTE:**

While the characters are described as carrying and holding shotguns for duck hunting, for the safety of the audience and the actors it is strongly advised that real shotguns not be used. The guns will not be discharged during the action of the play.

*The scene is a duck blind in Erie Marsh on the western shore of Lake Erie, a few miles north of the Ohio/Michigan border in Michigan. The blind can be depicted by a simple wooden bench in the center of the stage. The background is the sky.*

*At rise, it is an early morning in mid-October. It is cool but not freezing. Seated in the blind are CLYDE, DAN, and STEVE. CLYDE is a man in his mid-forties, average build. DAN, his son, is fifteen, slight of build, wearing wire-rimmed glasses. STEVE, his brother, is seventeen, with an athletic build, wearing sunglasses. They are all wearing hunting gear: tan coats and pants, heavy calf-length boots, and tan hunting caps. CLYDE is holding a 12-gauge double-barrel shotgun. STEVE is holding a 410 single-shot shotgun. Under the bench is a picnic cooler and Thermos.*

CLYDE: Okay, I got another one.

*(The boys groan slightly.)*

CLYDE (*cont'd*): What do you call an owl that makes fun of a margarita?

DAN: A margarita like the drinks at Loma Linda?

CLYDE: Yeah, like that. What do you call an owl that makes fun of a margarita?

STEVE (*barely tolerant*): I don't know, Dad. What do you call an owl that makes fun of a margarita?

CLYDE (*pausing for effect*): Tequila Mockingbird!

*(CLYDE chuckles and the boys groan loudly.)*

CLYDE (*cont'd*): Aw, c'mon, that's funny.

STEVE (*grudgingly*): Yeah, okay.

DAN: You make that up yourself?

CLYDE: As a matter of fact, no.

DAN: Would have been better if you had. Then no one else could take credit for it.

STEVE: Or blame.

CLYDE: Thanks a lot.

*(They settle back and survey the sky.)*

STEVE: So, where are they?

CLYDE: Well, sometimes they come in waves. On a nice day like this maybe they're sleeping in.

STEVE: Lucky ducks.

CLYDE: I know getting up at four-thirty isn't your thing, Mr. Star Quarterback. But you can sleep in tonight. It's Saturday.

STEVE: I have a date.

DAN: Peggy Tucker?

STEVE: Uh huh.

DAN (*teasingly*): The head cheerleader.

STEVE: That's right.

DAN: Yeah, and we know what kind of head...

STEVE: Shut up!

DAN: She was jumping all over you after the game last night. Thought you were Joe Namath.

STEVE: Yeah, well.

DAN (*sing-song*): Peggy Tucker, Peggy Tucker, tries to get a boy to...

CLYDE: Stop it, both of you. Enough.

(*They all settle down again, STEVE glaring at DAN. Beat.*)

STEVE: Place smells like someone cut the world's biggest fart.

DAN: It's a swamp. It's supposed to smell like that. Rotting vegetation.

STEVE: More like your underwear.

DAN: Ha ha.

CLYDE: Steve, knock it off. You're a senior in high school and you sound like a sixth-grader.

STEVE: Well, he... (*Thinks better of it and subsides.*)

(*Beat.*)

DAN: So, tell me again how killing ducks is somehow good for them.

CLYDE: Well, it's all about wildlife conservation. There are a lot of ducks, but not a lot of places for them to live and raise their young in the wild, so if we cut down on the number of ducks, then there's more room for them to... grow. Too many ducks in too few places like this marsh.

DAN: What's happened to the marshes?

CLYDE: Towns and cities are getting bigger, more spread out, taking over their natural habitat.

DAN: So, maybe they oughta stop the towns and cities from doing that.

CLYDE: Well, it's not that simple.

STEVE (*with a tinge of sarcasm*): Maybe they oughta give the ducks birth control pills.

CLYDE (*chuckling*): Yeah.

STEVE: Or make 'em use condoms. Then they could be rubber duckies!

(*They all laugh.*)

DAN (*singing*): Rubber ducky, you're the one...

STEVE (*joining in*): You make bath-time lotsa fun!

CLYDE: That's a good one. Maybe I'll use it.

STEVE: Instead of Tequila Mockingbird?

CLYDE: Sure!

STEVE: Yeah, okay.

(*CLYDE suddenly stiffens and looks in the sky. He pulls out a duck call.*)

CLYDE: Hold it, boys, looks like we've got some incoming.

(*They hunker down. CLYDE uses the duck call. After a moment he sits up, disappointed.*)

CLYDE: Heading down towards Number 12.

STEVE (*loudly*): Here, ducks! C'mon, ducky-ducky! (*Normal voice.*) Maybe they know that one and aren't falling for it.

CLYDE: Well, maybe we should get out the coffee. Used to be that every time I put down my gun and got out the coffee, they'd flock in. Here, hand me the Thermos.

(*He pours out a cupful in the Thermos cap, takes a sip and passes it to the boys, who take sips and pass it back.*)

DAN: Did you do this with Granddad?

CLYDE: Yes. This very blind. Number 7. Started when I was ten or so. We'd be out here opening day, coming out in the punt boat, watching the fog rise off the water, listening to the water up against the reeds. Then we'd set out the decoys just like we did this morning and sit and wait. Curly would sit over there, all ready to fetch 'em when we knocked 'em down. He was a good dog.

DAN: Like Tuffy.

CLYDE: Yep, like Tuffy. He was a good dog, too.

DAN: I miss him.

CLYDE: Me too.

STEVE: How come you didn't get another dog?

CLYDE: Oh, I don't know. Don't have the time to train him and...

DAN: I have to pee.

CLYDE: Okay, go over there by that tree. Is that all?

DAN: Yeah, just pee.

CLYDE: I brought a biffy roll just in case.

DAN: Dad...

*(DAN gets up and squeezes by CLYDE, then steps out into the marsh, the water coming up over his ankles.)*

CLYDE: Be careful; watch out for holes.

DAN: I will.

STEVE: And Gaboon vipers!

DAN *(moving off, sloggng through the wetlands)*: Ha ha.

*(DAN exits.)*

CLYDE: Gaboon vipers?

STEVE: Oh, we saw something on TV a long time ago about wildlife in Africa. They had this thing on Gaboon vipers, "the most hated of all beasts." We thought it was funny, and... *(Shrugs.)* You know.

CLYDE *(chuckling)*: If you say so. So, what's with the Roy Orbison look?

STEVE: Huh?

CLYDE: The shades. It's barely seven o'clock in the morning and you're worried about the sun in your eyes?

STEVE: Nothing. I just –

CLYDE: There's not some reason I shouldn't be looking at your eyes, is there? Like your pupils might be...

STEVE: No, Dad. My pupils are fine.

CLYDE: Then what?

*(STEVE looks at CLYDE for a long beat. Then he takes off the sunglasses. He has a very impressive shiner under his left eye.)*

CLYDE: Whoa. Nice shiner. How'd you get that?

STEVE: In the game last night. When I got sacked in the third quarter. An elbow.

CLYDE: Through the face mask?

STEVE: Yeah.

CLYDE: Right. Bet it hurts.

STEVE: It does.

CLYDE (*nodding*): Yeah, okay. (*Beat.*) Except I was there. I saw the whole game. You never got sacked. In fact, in the third quarter the offensive line kept the other team from getting near you. (*Beat.*) What really happened?

STEVE: Nothing.

CLYDE: Steve, it's not nothing. And don't hand me that line about walking into a door. You may be a muscle-bound goof but you're not that clumsy. C'mon.

(*STEVE looks around to be sure they're still alone.*)

STEVE: It was Dan.

CLYDE: Dan gave you that?

STEVE: No, it was because of Dan.

CLYDE: I'm not following. You got a black eye because of your brother?

STEVE: No, it was Stan Tasker.

CLYDE: Okay, now you've really lost me. What does Stan Tasker have to do with Dan and you getting punched in the face? Stan's not even in Dan's class.

STEVE: It's because of "Picnic."

CLYDE: What picnic?

STEVE: The play, "Picnic." The school's doing it and Dan is in it.

CLYDE: Oh, right. What does Stan Tasker have to do with it? He's not in it, is he? He can't act; he can barely walk upright. I think he was twelve before he learned to wave bye-bye.

STEVE (*chuckling hollowly*): I know. He's a real asshole.

CLYDE: So...?

STEVE: So, last night after the game we're all in the locker room, horsing around after we won, and taking showers and stuff, and somehow Stan gets talking about all the guys who don't play and how they all like to do pussy stuff like "thee-ate-er" and what a bunch of fruits they are, and then comes right out and says that Dan must be a real faggot if he'd rather be in some stupid play

than do manly things like play football. So, I told him to shut the fuck up and he said make me, and so I did. (*Shrugs.*) And he hit me back.

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**

# **And the Wisdom to Know the Difference**

## **CHARACTERS:**

DAN: Mid-thirties.

CLYDE: His father. Mid-sixties.

## **PLACE and TIME:**

A meeting room in an alcohol treatment center. A Sunday afternoon not too long ago.

*The setting is a meeting room in an alcohol treatment center. It is unadorned except for perhaps a motivational poster (“Hang in There, Baby”) and a list of the Twelve Steps on the wall. There are ten or so folding chairs set up in a circle with a small table and a box of Kleenex in the middle. In a corner is a coffee set-up with an urn, a variety of coffee mugs, and fixings on a table. Stage Left is a picture window looking out over an open area with trees in the background. Stage Right is the door into the room.*

*At rise, it is early Sunday afternoon. DAN, a man in his mid-thirties, is standing by the window looking out over the open space. He is wearing jeans and a sweater. He is in good shape, but he looks tired, and when he moves it is evident that he’s a bit sleep-deprived. He goes to the coffee urn and fills a mug. He takes a sip, makes a face, perhaps says “Yuck,” and puts the cup down. He goes back and stares out the window.*

*The door opens and CLYDE enters. He is in his mid-sixties, wearing slacks, a sweater, and a light jacket.*

CLYDE: Here you are. *(He turns and looks back out the door, calling.)* Found him. Thank you.

DAN *(still looking out the window)*: Hi, Dad.

CLYDE: The nurse said you might be outside.

DAN: Attendant.

CLYDE: What?

DAN: Luke’s not a nurse. He’s an attendant.

CLYDE: You’re right. I never saw a nurse with biceps like that.

*(Beat. DAN is still looking out the window.)*

CLYDE *(cont’d)*: So. How are you?

DAN *(finally turning)*: I’m okay. Where’s Mom?

CLYDE: Oh, she’s... She’ll come next week.

DAN: Right. The Lions are playing the Packers today.

CLYDE: Where’s Adam?

DAN: He has to work. He’ll come later, maybe tonight. *(Turns back to looking out the window.)*

CLYDE: All right. What are you looking at?

DAN: Huh? Oh, they’ve got a couple of feeders out there. Brings in the birds. Chickadees, nuthatches, the occasional downy woodpecker.

*(They watch the birds for a moment.)*

CLYDE: How are you?

DAN: Like I said, I'm okay.

CLYDE: They treating you alright?

DAN (*wry chuckle*): Yeah, Dad. It's not like I'm in prison.

CLYDE: I didn't mean that. I just wanted to know if you're....

DAN: If I'm getting better.

CLYDE: Well, yes.

DAN: I'm not falling down drunk today. I'm not trying to take my pants off over my head today. I'm not waking up on the couch in the living room today. So, on those scores, yeah, I'm getting better.

CLYDE (*softly, a bit taken aback*): Okay.

DAN: I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't mean to sound like a smart-ass. It's just that I've been here a week and you can't expect instant results. It's not like I have the flu.

CLYDE: I know. So... can I ask... what are you doing to...?

DAN (*indicates chairs*): We do group meetings in here. I have a counselor. We talk.

CLYDE: What about?

DAN: I can't talk about it with you.

CLYDE: Oh, right, I get it. Anonymous. Forget I asked.

DAN: Yeah, okay.

(*CLYDE looks at the coffee urn.*)

CLYDE: That coffee for anyone?

DAN: Yeah, but I don't recommend it. Not exactly Starbucks.

CLYDE: I've had worse.

(*CLYDE goes to the coffee urn, fills a mug, takes a sip, makes a face, but then manfully grins.*)

CLYDE (*cont'd*): Yeah, I've had worse. But not much.

(*They chuckle softly.*)

DAN: We go through gallons of it every day, it seems. Trading one addiction for another. That and smoking.

CLYDE: Are you smoking again?

DAN: No, I leave that to Adam. He'll never quit.

CLYDE: Maybe there's a twelve-step program for that.

DAN: One for every occasion. (*Beat.*) Thanks for coming, Dad.

CLYDE: Well, sure. I just wanted to see you, see how you're doing, can I do anything for you...?

DAN: Um... thanks. Not really. I mean, not now.

CLYDE: Not now?

DAN: What I mean is, you could have. But I'm getting over it. Past it. And it wouldn't have made any difference anyway.

CLYDE (*confused*): What? What could I have done?

DAN: Nothing, Dad. Forget it.

CLYDE: No, you meant it. What could I have done?

DAN: Nothing. Which is –

CLYDE: You mean stop you from drinking?

DAN: Yes. And no.

CLYDE: I don't get it. (*Looks at the circle of chairs.*) Is that what you do in here? Look for people to blame for your drinking?

DAN: Yeah, pretty much.

CLYDE: Well, it's not me. I didn't even know you had a problem.

DAN: You knew. You just didn't seem to think it was that big a deal, I guess. Just another one of my little quirks. Besides, you and Mom were pretty much keeping up with me. Kinda hard to stop someone else when you're holding two glasses of Scotch rocks.

CLYDE: Now wait –

DAN: It's all right, Dad. Calm down.

CLYDE: Calm down? You just told me that I'm the reason you're a drunk.

DAN: Well, in a way... I was born with it.

CLYDE: You're telling me it's hereditary?

DAN: There's a lot of science that shows that it is.

CLYDE: Well, then, that makes it an easy out for you, doesn't it? "It's not my fault; I was born this way." I suppose you're going to blame the rest of your life's problems on me and your mother.

DAN: I'm not blaming you. I'm simply telling you what it is.

CLYDE: And being gay. That's my fault, too? Somehow, I failed you? Jesus Christ.

DAN: I don't see being gay as a failing. Adam certainly doesn't. It's nobody's fault. It's just me. It's how I was hard-wired at the factory, like having [insert actor's eye color] eyes or being right [or left] handed.

CLYDE: So, how did you end up here?

DAN: I'm still trying to figure it out. All I know is that I spent the last couple of years getting shitfaced after work or on weekends when Adam was at work, or making excuses for missing deadlines at work, or trying not to let people see me when my eyes looked like two piss-holes in the snow and my breath was like sticking your head under a buzzard's wing. Adam did a great job of acting like it was no big deal when I couldn't get it up or when I slept until noon. But then... One Friday night after a very trying day at work, I came home, poured myself a glass of Jack Daniel's, and...the next thing I know I'm here and getting my blood drawn by a very well-built and rather attractive young man in green scrubs who said his name was Luke and did I know what day it was. (*Beat.*) Adam said it's gonna cost a couple hundred bucks to clean the shit out of the couch cushions.

(*DAN goes over to the window and stares out.*)

DAN (*cont'd*): What I do know is that I have a lot to do to get better.

CLYDE: Those twelve steps.

DAN: That works for some people.

CLYDE: But not you.

DAN: I don't know.

CLYDE: There's some other way?

DAN: That's just it; I don't know. Do you remember when you were teaching me how to drive a stick shift? The one in the Mustang? How I kept mis-timing the clutch and the gas and how I almost took out the light pole in the parking lot at Kroger's? Or how I kept stalling the engine and you kept getting madder and yelling at me to just feather it out slowly and ... Oh, you were so pissed. You swore I'd never learn.

CLYDE: I could smell that clutch for days after.

DAN: But I learned. I kept working at it. I was bound and determined that I would do it. I may not have been able to throw a spiral or hit a fastball, but by god I was gonna drive that fucking car. I could have given up and driven Mom's Country Squire, but I made it my personal mission in life to figure out how to drive that goddam Mustang. And then finally one day I got in the car, put in the clutch, turned the key, backed out of the driveway, and drove off without so much as a skip, stall, or shudder. And to this day, I still drive a stick. I never could get used to an automatic.

CLYDE: I remember. But what has that got to do with...? (*He gestures at the chairs.*)

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**

# A Moment of Clarity

## CHARACTERS:

CLYDE: A man in his eighties. Dressed casually in slacks and a sweater, wearing a light winter coat.

DAN: His son, in his sixties. Similarly dressed.

## PLACE and TIME:

The waiting area at a pharmacy inside a supermarket. Two chairs. The present.

**A Moment of Clarity** was first produced by Still Got It Players South at Magic Curtain Productions in Orlando, Florida, as a part of the Short Attention Span Play Festival on December 7, 2016. It was directed by Debbie DeCeco Lannen with the following cast:

CLYDE.....Harry Stafford  
DAN.....David Clayton West

*The setting is the waiting area at a pharmacy inside a supermarket. There are two chairs center stage. At rise, CLYDE is sitting in one of the chairs. A cane rests on his lap. After a moment, DAN enters. He sits next to CLYDE.*

DAN: The pharmacist says it'll take about ten minutes. She'll let us know when it's ready.

CLYDE: Good. *(Reaches for his wallet.)*

DAN: It's okay, Dad, I got this. The insurance will cover the rest of it.

CLYDE: You sure?

DAN: Yes.

CLYDE: Okay. Where's your mother?

DAN: She's down there in the produce section looking over the honeydews.

CLYDE: The honeydews?

DAN: Yeah, Dad, you like those.

CLYDE: What about the cantaloupes?

DAN: They're not very good this time of year.

CLYDE: Oh. What day is today?

DAN: It's Monday.

CLYDE: July?

DAN: No, it's December, Dad. Christmas was three days ago.

CLYDE: Oh, that's right. *(Pause.)* Thank you for coming.

DAN: Forget it. Happy to do it. I like driving Mom's car. Not too many people in their eighties have a Mustang GT convertible.

CLYDE: No, I mean coming here for Christmas. It's a long way from... Where are you now?

DAN: Miami.

CLYDE: That's right. How do you like it there?

DAN: Oh, it's okay. Weather's nice. Gets a little humid in the summer, kinda like here.

CLYDE: And your job? What are you doing now?

DAN: Still doing financial work. You know; numbers and all that.

CLYDE: Good, good. *(Pause, then looks off to the pharmacy counter.)* Wonder what's taking so long?

DAN: Well, they probably have to check to make sure the new meds don't mess up what you're taking now.

CLYDE: I take so many now it's hard to keep up. Blood thinner, pain, cholesterol. Kind of a miracle I don't rattle when I walk. When I can walk at all.

DAN: I'm sure they're checking.

CLYDE: All right.

*(Beat.)*

DAN: You know what this reminds me of? Sitting here next to you, waiting.

CLYDE: What does it remind you of?

DAN: Erie Marsh. Duck blind number seven. Early morning in October, the first day of duck season, just as the sun's coming up, putting out the decoys, shivering, waiting for the ducks to come in. I was twelve. You showed me how to shoot a four-ten single shot. It wasn't much next to your twelve-gauge, but...

CLYDE: I remember.

DAN: And you with your silly duck call.

*(Mimes holding a duck call to his mouth, imitates the call.)*

CLYDE: But it worked.

DAN: Yes, it did. *(Takes the cane, shoulders it like a shotgun.)*: Look, here come some now! Pow! Pow! Look, I got one!

CLYDE: Great shot, Dan. Go on, Tuffy! Fetch! Good dog!

*(They both chuckle at the memory.)*

DAN: Those were good times.

CLYDE: They were, weren't they?

DAN: Hard to believe that was fifty years ago.

CLYDE: I guess so. I'm glad you were there.

DAN: Me too.

CLYDE: You don't do that anymore, do you?

DAN: Hunting? No. I only did it with you.

CLYDE: How come?

DAN: Well, I'm not much for that kind of thing. I don't own a gun.

CLYDE: You were good at it. You knocked down two teal on your first time out.

DAN: Beginner's luck.

CLYDE: Whatever happened to your four-ten?

DAN: That was yours. You sold it. You remember. When you moved here.

CLYDE: I guess.

DAN: You did. Along with... a lot of other things.

CLYDE: All right.

*(Beat. DAN looks at his watch.)*

CLYDE: I know what's happening to me.

DAN: What?

CLYDE: I know what's happening. I know I'm losing my memory, that I'm starting to slip away. But every now and then, I have these moments where the fog lifts and I can remember where I am and what's going on and I can see.... I'm having one now. We're sitting in the pharmacy section of the Kroger in Cincinnati, a mile or so from the place where your mother and I now live and we're all settled in to that "life-enriching community."

DAN: Dad, that's...

CLYDE: I want to tell you something.

DAN: What?

CLYDE: There were times when I didn't understand you. I couldn't figure out what was going on with you, with your... what do you call it... coming out... And your moving around the country, trying to "find yourself," whatever that meant.

DAN: Well, Dad, it was...

CLYDE: I was worried you would never settle down. Find a place. Find someone.

DAN: Sometimes it takes a while. I was in my own fog for a while. But I did. And now I'm...

CLYDE (*cutting him off*): Where's Adam?

DAN: Adam?

CLYDE: Your ... partner. Boyfriend. Where is he?

DAN: Dad, we broke up years ago.

CLYDE: I know. I remember. But where is he?

DAN: In Chicago. He works for an ad agency.

CLYDE: Do you keep in touch with him?

DAN: Sure, every now and then we talk on the phone.

CLYDE: How's he doing?

DAN: Good.

CLYDE: What happened?

DAN: What do you mean?

CLYDE: Between you and Adam.

DAN: We just... It didn't work out.

CLYDE: But you were together for...

DAN: Twenty years.

CLYDE: Twenty years. You know how long your mother and I have been married?

DAN: Sixty-five years next June.

CLYDE: That's right. Sixty-five years.

DAN: Some people are lucky like that, Dad.

CLYDE: It wasn't luck. I don't know what it was, but...Any chance you and he will get back together?

DAN: No, Dad. He's met someone. They're getting married soon.

CLYDE: Oh. Well, good. (*Beat.*) Are you seeing anyone?

DAN: Well, no.

CLYDE: I hope you find someone. I want to know that you're happy.

DAN: I am, Dad.

CLYDE: That's what I wanted to tell you. I love you, I'm proud of you, and all I ever wanted for you was to be happy. You know that, don't you?

DAN: Yes, Dad. I'm happy.

CLYDE: You're sure?

DAN: Yes. Very sure. I'm fine. Dad, it's time for me to tell you something.

CLYDE: What? I already know you're gay. What else is there?

DAN: You know all those mornings we got up in the dark and drove out to Erie Marsh and sat in that damned Number 7 duck blind and drank that horrible coffee and waited for those stupid ducks to come in?

CLYDE: Yes, I do remember that.

DAN: Well, Dad, I hated it.

CLYDE: You hated it?

DAN: Every damn minute of it. I hated being out in the cold, I hated the smell of the marsh, I hated shooting a duck, seeing it explode in midair and fall into the water. I even hated eating them just to prove that it wasn't for the sick sport of shooting a bird.

CLYDE: Then why the hell did you go? I could have taken your brother. Steve would have at least enjoyed it. Why didn't you say something back then?

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**

# Favorite Son

## **CHARACTERS:**

DAN: Mid-sixties.

STEVE: Dan's older brother.

## **PLACE and TIME:**

The waiting room at a hospice center. Present day.

*The scene is a waiting room at a hospice center. It has a comfortable couch, side chairs, a coffee table with magazines, maybe a nice small flower arrangement on the table, and a standing lamp for light. There is a door Stage Left into the private room. It is closed. A door Stage Right is open. The walls are papered in soothing colors and there's a print or two of serene landscapes. The overall impression is that of a place of comfort and waiting.*

*At rise, it is late morning with light coming in the SR door. DAN, a man in his mid-sixties, is sitting on the couch. He is in slacks and a sweater. He is leafing through a magazine, not really reading it. After a few pages he puts it back on the table then looks at the closed Stage Left door.*

*A moment or two later STEVE enters. He is a few years older than DAN. He's in good shape and wearing a business suit: gray or dark blue with a blue shirt, a tie, and polished shoes. He's carrying a briefcase. DAN sees him, goes to him and gives him a brotherly hug.*

DAN: Good to see you.

STEVE: You too. When'd you get in?

DAN: Last night. Where're you staying?

STEVE: Holiday Inn Express. I've got a lot of points, need to use them up. You?

DAN: The Hampton. Across the street from you. Got a discount for... I dunno, something. So, how are you?

STEVE: Okay. Tired. Long drive.

DAN: How's Meg?

STEVE (*trying to be upbeat*): Good. First round of chemo was last week, she took it well. So she says.

DAN: Good, good.

STEVE: So, have you seen him this morning?

DAN: Yeah, I went in with Mom. She's in there now.

*(STEVE starts to go to the Stage Left door.)*

DAN (*cont'd*): Mom said to wait out here. She wants to be with him by herself. She'll come get us.

STEVE: Oh, okay.

*(They sit on the couch. Beat.)*

STEVE: So, how's retirement treating you?

DAN: Semi-retirement. I'm working a few days a week part-time.

STEVE: Just to keep busy.

DAN: Just to keep solvent. The pension isn't all it's cracked up to be, and... well, yeah, keeping busy. I can't believe you're still working.

STEVE: Well, yeah, I like what I'm doing, and full Social Security kicks in when I hit seventy, so... and then there's the health insurance. For Meg.

DAN: Yeah, I get it.

STEVE: Yeah. (*Beat.*) So, how is he?

DAN: When was the last time you saw him?

STEVE: Christmas.

DAN: Well, he's lost a lot of weight. It actually looks – well, not good, but better on him. And he's comfortable.

STEVE: How about his... (*He indicates his head.*)

DAN: He knows who I am. He knows who Mom is. He seems to know where he is. I mean, he knows he's not on the back porch listening to the Tigers, but he's got a window and I set up a bird feeder and got him a book to look them up. Not that he can track them, but it's something familiar.

STEVE: Well, that's good.

(*STEVE puts his briefcase on the table and opens it. He takes out a folder.*)

STEVE (*cont'd*): Everything's all set.

DAN: Good.

STEVE: All the paperwork, the insurance, the “arrangements,” getting Mom settled in the new place...

DAN: All settled.

STEVE (*handing DAN a piece of paper*): Mom asked me to give you this. She wants you to come up with the obit.

DAN: Okay. (*He looks at the paper, reading it, whispering the words as he goes, then nods.*) All very neatly summed up. Names, dates, and ....

STEVE: You can add whatever you want.

DAN: Okay. Thanks. (*Beat.*) Thanks for doing this.

STEVE: I'm the executor. Part of the job.

DAN: I couldn't do it.

STEVE: Yeah, well, this sort of thing... It's just a matter of being organized.

DAN: No, I know that. I just... I couldn't do it. I couldn't look at all those papers and documents and statements and try to get it all together without losing it. I'd be a wreck. But like you said, it's just a matter of being organized.

STEVE: It's not easy for me, either. It wasn't my idea to be the executor, but Mom –

DAN: It's okay. You were the favorite, so it makes sense. I get it. Smart move on their part.

STEVE: Don't say that.

DAN: Say what?

STEVE: I'm the favorite.

DAN: It's true.

STEVE: It is not.

DAN: Oh, come on. First born, natural athlete, good-looking, honor roll. Well, most of the time honor roll. Algebra Two being the...

STEVE: And you weren't? They always looked out for you, let you do your ... whatever it was that you did with your imaginary friends and hobbits and –

DAN: That's because I didn't have any real friends.

STEVE: Well, whose fault is that? Not mine, for damn sure.

DAN: No, you just let your friends pick on me, too. Sissy, fruit, faggot.

STEVE: We were twelve! No one even knew what it meant.

DAN: Yeah, right.

STEVE: How the hell could you expect me to stand up for you if you wouldn't stand up for yourself? I had too many other things to worry about.

DAN: Oh, really? Like what?

STEVE: Like being the first born, the natural athlete. You don't know what kind of pressure that puts on you.

DAN: Well, of course not. How could I?

STEVE: I had... There were expectations.

DAN: From who?

STEVE: Everybody! Coaches, teachers, friends... Dad. Made the varsity squad as back-up quarterback; great, why not first-string? Get a three-point-five GPA; very good, but why not four-point-oh? Get into Princeton; go Tigers, but why not Yale? Land a decent job at a good firm;

congratulations; next time make it a Fortune 500. Even Meg didn't seem to measure up... She's from Cleveland, like that's some kind of demerit.

DAN: He told you all that?

STEVE: No.

DAN: Then...?

STEVE: It would have been better if he had. But I could tell. I knew I disappointed him.

DAN: Jesus, I had no idea.

STEVE: Of course not. They didn't care if you read all those books, did all that fantasy stuff, went to college to major in drama.

DAN: Theatre Arts.

STEVE: Okay, theatre. They weren't expecting you to be the jock, the tycoon. They already had one, and they were too busy wondering when he'd get on the stick and produce a rightful heir. It never let up.

DAN: I don't remember any of that.

STEVE: They never said it out loud. But it was there. Always there.

DAN: So, is that why you took off for a year after college to live in a yurt in the desert outside Santa Fe, chanting and doing your fair share of peyote buttons?

STEVE: I needed that time to get a perspective.

DAN: Oh. We all thought you were saying "fuck you." No one heard from you for almost a year, and when you came back you looked like one of those guys who sat outside the airport terminal and chanted "Hare Krishna, spare change."

STEVE: But I came back.

DAN: And went right back to doing what they all expected you to do. Interesting how that new perspective was just a round trip.

STEVE: You have no idea what I was going through. The pressure to be –

DAN: You're right, I don't. So why did you come back?

STEVE: Because I realized I wasn't gonna find the meaning of life while freezing my ass off in tent covered with animal skins and roasting chiles over a Coleman lantern while you went on to grad school and got a job. You had your life all figured out, so I figured it was my turn.

DAN: Yet I was the one who ended up in rehab. Go figure.

STEVE: Oh, okay, so that's my fault, too, I suppose.

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**

# I'll Be Here

## **CHARACTERS:**

DAN: Mid-sixties.

CLYDE: His father. A spirit.

## **PLACE and TIME:**

An open space in a forest. A summer afternoon.

*The setting is an open space in a forest made up of oaks, maples, and other Midwestern flora. This can be suggested by lighting. It is midday summer.*

*DAN enters. He is in his mid-sixties, in decent shape. He is wearing a workshirt, jeans, and work boots, and is carrying a knapsack. He goes center stage, looks around, and decides that this is the place for what he has to do. He puts down the knapsack and pulls out a trowel. He starts digging into the soil, making a hole. He digs for a few moments, occasionally stopping to wipe the sweat off his forehead, piling the dirt up beside the hole. After he has dug for a while he reaches in the knapsack and pulls out a bottle of Wild Turkey Kentucky Bourbon. He visually measures the bottle against the hole he's dug, then digs some more. Then he reaches into the knapsack and pulls out a pewter urn about the size of a jelly jar and sets it next to the bottle of Wild Turkey.*

*CLYDE enters. He is in his mid-nineties but looks healthy and he doesn't move as if he's as old as he is. He too is wearing a workshirt, jeans, and boots. He looks around and nods his approval.*

CLYDE: So, this is it, huh?

*(DAN stops digging and looks at CLYDE.)*

DAN: Yep.

*(DAN resumes digging.)*

CLYDE: Why here?

DAN *(as he digs)*: Well, two reasons. This is where you and I used to come birdwatching. I saw my first red-headed woodpecker in these trees. And in the winter, we used to come in here and spot the cardinals and the chickadees. I heard my first barred owl standing over there. So, I figured this would be as good a place as any.

CLYDE: The second reason?

DAN: I didn't want you sitting on the mantel or the bookshelf like some knick-knack that I'd have to dust every two weeks. It wasn't right.

CLYDE: Good. Where's the rest?

DAN: Steve got some. Mom has the rest.

CLYDE: Sounds fair. *(He looks around again.)* Yeah, I always liked these woods. And the best part is that nothing's going to happen here. The Nature Conservancy made sure of that. This property will be left as it is in perpetuity.

DAN: That's right. Good planning.

CLYDE: In perpetuity. Sounds like a long time even just saying it.

DAN: It is.

CLYDE: So. How are you?

DAN: I'm fine, Dad.

CLYDE (*chuckling*): Not weeping, rending your garments, carrying on?

DAN: Well, I wasn't dancing in the streets. But I think we were... relieved.

CLYDE: I suppose.

DAN: You were already gone. Your body just didn't know it. We hated seeing you like that. It was tearing Mom apart. Finally, she stopped coming to see you.

CLYDE: Yeah. That was ... hard for her. I knew it would happen. I don't remember it.

(*DAN puts down the trowel, stands up.*)

DAN: What do you remember?

CLYDE: Clearly? Bits and pieces. That's the problem when you start to lose it. Nothing really sticks. Faces are floating there. Sounds are distant, like when you turn down the volume on the TV and you see mouths moving but nothing comes out. Time is... gone. And memories... they're like an album of photographs: faded and two-dimensional. (*CLYDE spots the bottle of Wild Turkey.*) What's that for? If you're gonna drink to my health, it's a little late.

DAN: I found it in the back of the liquor cabinet. It hasn't been touched in years.

CLYDE: You know why, don't you?

DAN: No.

CLYDE: Because I don't drink it. I'm – or I was – a single-malt Scotch man.

DAN: Don't you remember?

(*CLYDE ponders for a moment, then smiles and nods.*)

CLYDE: Derby Day, which happened to coincide with your fifteenth birthday. I bought that to make mint juleps and I made you your first drink. I seem to remember that you enjoyed it.

DAN: My first drink. The first of many. Way too many.

CLYDE: You could have stopped at any time.

DAN: But I didn't.

CLYDE: Well, you're not going to say I had anything to do with it. A little late for that.

DAN: No, Dad. Not anymore.

CLYDE: Damn right.

DAN: Not that I didn't at first.

CLYDE: Here we go.

DAN: No, not "here we go." I got through it. I got sober. Not before I lost two jobs and several boyfriends in the process, but I got...

CLYDE: How many meetings did you stand up and say, "Hi, I'm Dan and I'm an alcoholic and it's my dad's fault."

DAN: Never.

CLYDE: But you thought it.

DAN: No, I really didn't. Sure, we grew up in a family swimming in booze: cocktails each night, wine with dinner, a cold beer after working in the yard, listening to a baseball game, a nightcap before bed, mimosas at brunch, ceaseless rounds of parties for whatever occasion. But I never blamed you. Personally.

CLYDE: Good. Because I did.

DAN: You?

CLYDE: I saw what was happening. Some people can handle it, some can fake it. You were never very good at either of them.

DAN: I was weak.

CLYDE: Bullshit. We were the weak ones. We were the ones who couldn't handle it without taking you along with us. We were the ones who handed you the bottle.

DAN: And I was weak for taking it.

CLYDE: You were human. Which is more than what I can say for myself right now in my present state. And now you're strong. You're sober. And I know it's too late to tell you, but I wish I had your strength. Fat lot of good it does me.

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**

# Good Grief

## **CHARACTERS:**

DAN: Mid-sixties.

CLYDE: His father. A spirit.

GRIEF

## **PLACE and TIME:**

An open space in a forest. Autumn.

*The setting is an open space in a forest made up of oaks, maples, and other Midwestern flora. This can be suggested by lighting. It is midday autumn. The leaves are turning and there's a carpet of fallen leaves on the ground. In the middle of the space is a mint plant that has grown up to perhaps two feet tall out of a mound of dirt.*

*DAN enters Stage Right. He is a man in his mid-sixties, in decent shape, wearing jeans, boots, a flannel shirt, and a jacket. He looks around the forest, then goes to the mint plant and the mound.*

DAN: Well, Dad, it's been six months. How's it going down there? I mean, not really "down there," like in Hell. I mean... wherever you are.

*(He gets no reply, and he chuckles to himself as if he's a little embarrassed to be talking to himself.)*

DAN *(cont'd)*: Yeah, I didn't think I'd hear back from you.

*(He toes the mound of dirt, maybe kicking some of the leaves away.)*

DAN *(cont'd)*: Just thought I'd stop by. Came up to help Mom move into assisted living. It's been a little rough on her, though you really couldn't tell by talking to her. She's still as... Mom as ever.

*(DAN turns to walk away, but CLYDE enters Stage Left. He is a handsome man in his mid-thirties, wearing a similar outfit to DAN.)*

CLYDE: Nice of you to stop by.

*(DAN turns and sees CLYDE. He does a slight double-take, recognizing him.)*

DAN: Wow, Dad. You look –

CLYDE: Not like the last time you saw me, right?

DAN: No. Like a lot younger. I mean, like in your thirties.

CLYDE *(big grin)*: That's your doing. And it's a lot better than I was with all those tubes and whatever running in and out, and those hovering nurses and that... *(Wrinkles nose.)* smell. There's something about a place like that; they all smell the same; a mix of rubbing alcohol and old age. Anyway, this is how you're choosing to remember me, so here I am. It's October. Duck season starts in a few days.

DAN: Well, I...

CLYDE: I know. You hated all that. Getting up at four in the morning, sitting in the middle of the marsh, waiting to shoot them down like incoming enemy aircraft.

DAN: But I liked being with you.

CLYDE: Me too. *(Beat.)* So, how are you doing?

DAN (*shrug*): I'm good. Working, keeping busy, keeping an eye and an ear on Mom from a distance. Still dealing with your paperwork like the insurance and death benefits and stuff, but Steve's got a good handle on it, so...

CLYDE: Yeah, that's not what I meant.

(*Beat.*)

DAN: Shit. How'd you know?

CLYDE: Comes with the... Well, I know.

DAN: I haven't slipped.

CLYDE: But you've thought about it.

DAN: We're allowed to think about it. Nothing in the twelve steps that says you can't.

CLYDE: I wouldn't know about that.

DAN (*with a tinge of an edge*): Yeah, I know.

CLYDE: Oh, spare me the guilt subtext. Save that for your next meeting. But I'm glad you didn't slip, or whatever you call it.

DAN: Thank you. It's been... not easy. Or harder than I thought. Comes and goes.

CLYDE: Yeah, I remember from when my dad died. Took a while to go on. Never really did, actually. And I was a lot younger than you when he checked out.

DAN: Doesn't get any easier, does it?

CLYDE: Well, you know, it does if you face it head on. That's what I did.

DAN: Good.

CLYDE: Maybe I can help. Let me introduce you to someone.

(*CLYDE beckons to someone off Stage Left. GRIEF enters. He is a handsome, well-built young man in his twenties, wearing a polo shirt, jeans, sneakers, and a dazzling smile. He stands next to CLYDE.*)

CLYDE: Dan, this is Grief. Grief, this is my son Dan.

GRIEF: We've met.

DAN (*whispering*): Yeah... we have.

CLYDE: But not face to face.

GRIEF: No, he's been avoiding me.

CLYDE: I'm sorry to hear that.

GRIEF: Oh, that's okay. It's normal. I'm used to it. In fact, it's hardly ever that anyone actually says Hi, thanks for stopping by. Usually they run away or even deny my very existence. I do my best to try and look presentable, or at least... not repellant.

DAN (*still a bit stunned*): No, you look... fine.

GRIEF (*grinning*): I was going for hot. I mean, nice build, tight jeans, y'know... Something you might at least take a look at.

DAN: Well...

CLYDE: Hey, I'm no expert, but he is good-looking, right?

DAN: Yeah, Dad. He is. But...

GRIEF: Dan, you and I are going to be together for a long time, okay? I know you've been through all the prelims...

DAN: Yeah, the whole five stages –

GRIEF: Oh, shit, not the Kubler Ross crap. They've even got a website, "grief.com." I should sue them for copyright infringement. Yeah, it works for some people, but I'm not some coffee table you get from IKEA and have to follow the steps to put me together, with or without the meatballs. Everyone does Grief in their own way. You, f'r instance. You knew Clyde was gonna die for a long time. It was just a matter of when, and when it finally happened, you accepted it. You were even glad.

DAN: I was not! Dad, I wasn't.

CLYDE: Why not? I would have been, seeing me all doped up, organs failing left and right, my mind shot to hell. I would have plugged the plug if I could have, and... it felt good to let go.

GRIEF: So, when I showed up, you were already out of that five stages bullshit.

DAN: So, why are you here?

GRIEF: Because I'm your new boyfriend.

DAN: I don't get it.

GRIEF: Look, Grief gets a really bad rap. A lot of people use me as a weapon, a deflector, and treat me like I'm this evil force, determined to drag you into the depths of depression and show up at the worst possible time, paralyzing you and basically making you miserable for the rest of your life. I've even become part of the vernacular: I'm gonna give him so much Grief that he'll be sorry, and stuff like that. But that's not my job.

DAN: What is your job?

GRIEF: You've heard of "Good Grief"?

DAN: Uh, yeah. From "Peanuts." Charlie Brown says it a lot.

GRIEF: I think he meant it as an oxymoron; y’know, two contradictory words, like “cruel kindness” or “German jazz.”

DAN: Yeah, I’m familiar with the concept.

GRIEF: Well, I’m good Grief.

**The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at [pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com](mailto:pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com).**