

# **A Tree Grows in Longmont**

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

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**CHARACTERS:**

ALLEN: Male, late twenties.

PHILIP: Male, early forties.

**PLACE and TIME:**

A park in Longmont, Colorado. Mid-July, present day.

**PRODUCTION NOTES:**

The space is empty except for a sapling center stage. Since this is a memory play, the sapling does not have to be real. The trunk can be represented by a stick, the branches as well, and the leaves can be made of cloth or paper or whatever will work to give the illusion of young sprouting leaves. The back of the stage is a blank wall. There are no props, and the only effects in the play will be light and sound cues.

**A Tree Grows in Longmont** was first presented on May 3, 2020 by Silver Tongued Stages of Miami, Florida as a part of the Six Feet Apart series of virtual play readings presented on YouTube. The production was directed by Ricky J. Martinez with stage management and stage directions by Sam Menseses. The cast was as follows:

Allen.....Tanner Prace Collier  
Philip.....Kent Chambers-Wilson

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## A Tree Grows in Longmont

*The lights come up on the empty stage. There is a sapling center stage. It is supported by wires to keep it upright since it has just been planted and there is a mound of dirt piled around the base, covering the roots. There are leaves on the young branches. There is a small placard on a stake in front of the sapling.*

*ALLEN enters. He is an attractive man in his late twenties with an athletic build, nicely dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a short-sleeved shirt. He is wearing sunglasses, but after he enters, he takes them off and replaces them with his regular glasses; 1980's style aviators.*

ALLEN (*to the audience*): Hi, I'm Allen. Thanks for coming. Philip will be out in a few. Just so you know, I'm dead and this is all a memory on both our parts, so it's gonna take a little imagination on your part to make it happen for things like props and other people and stuff, okay? F'r instance, we're in a park in Longmont, Colorado, and this is a tree that was planted in my honor. Got that? Good. Hope you enjoy the show. (*To the light booth.*) Okay, let's go.

*(Lights change to make the stage a bright summer afternoon. ALLEN surveys the space, then looks at the sapling. He walks around it, then goes and reads the placard.)*

ALLEN (*reading*): "In loving memory of..." What the hell? A year later and that's all I get? A lousy tree? Dogs will pee on it. Bugs will eat the leaves. In the winter the snow will pile up around it and no one will remember to take care of it. And even if it makes it through the winter and keeps growing, at some point it's gonna die. They all do.

*(PHILIP enters. He is older than ALLEN, probably in his mid-forties. He is wearing a blue polo shirt and jeans.)*

PHILIP: What did you expect, a statue? A stone monument? They didn't put you in the cemetery with your mom and dad, so this is... something.

ALLEN: Something. Huh. Well, I'm glad you could make it. Even now, a year later.

PHILIP: I tried to get here before you were gone. I spent an hour on the phone with the airline trying to get a flight to Denver, but by the time we got it all worked out, it would have been too late.

ALLEN: Yeah, well, I didn't want you to see me anyway. I looked like hell, I couldn't talk, and with all those tubes... (*He looks at himself.*) This is how I wanted you to remember me.

PHILIP: You look good.

ALLEN: Well, I should. This is how you remember me, isn't it?

PHILIP: Yeah, pretty much.

ALLEN: And that's how I remember you. Except you were younger and more muscular.

PHILIP: This is both our memories, so I'll give you that. But this is what I was wearing when we first met.

ALLEN: That's right. (*Looks at his own outfit.*) But I don't think I was wearing this.

PHILIP: I don't remember what you were wearing.

ALLEN: To be honest, neither do I. But I remember the night and the music.

PHILIP: April twenty-first, 1984. The Spring Dance put on by the University of Colorado Gay/Lesbian alliance. I was working security.

ALLEN: The bouncer. How butch.

PHILIP: You asked me to dance.

ALLEN: You remember the song?

PHILIP: Yeah.

*(Lights change to suggest a disco-like dance hall and an underscore of thrumming new wave music of the 1980's reminiscent of The Vapors' "Turning Japanese." ALLEN approaches PHILIP, who is standing off to the side, keeping an eye on the crowd.)*

ALLEN (*loudly, as if over the music*): Hi.

PHILIP (*nods, smiles, looks at the crowd*): Hi.

ALLEN: Wanna dance?

PHILIP (*after looking around, sure everything's okay*): Uh, sure.

*(They start to dance. It is clear from the start that PHILIP does not know how to dance to the beat of the music. ALLEN watches and tries to hide his grin. Mercifully the music ends and they stop.)*

ALLEN: Thanks.

PHILIP: Sure.

*(Music starts up with another song.)*

ALLEN (*over music*): I'm Allen!

PHILIP: I'm Philip!

*(They shake hands, then PHILIP indicates he has to go back to work. ALLEN goes over to the other side of the stage. They trade glances, smiles, and then the lights come up. The party is over. ALLEN approaches PHILIP.)*

ALLEN: It was nice to meet you.

PHILIP: You too.

ALLEN: You wanna go get a cup of coffee or something?

PHILIP: Sure, that'd be great.

ALLEN: Okay, let's go. The Perkins on 28<sup>th</sup> Street?

PHILIP: Meet you there.

ALLEN: Hold it.

PHILIP: What?

ALLEN: That's not how it happened.

PHILIP: Sure it is.

ALLEN: No, just because you're writing the play doesn't mean you get to re-write what actually happened.

PHILIP: It's called "dramatic license."

ALLEN: C'mon, you goof. Tell it like it really happened.

PHILIP: What, you mean like the part where we went out to the parking lot, you with your straight friend Jim, who I thought was your boyfriend...

ALLEN: Oh, ick.

PHILIP (*continuing*): And I followed you in my Jeep Wagoneer, and you thought you were following me, and it wasn't until we got to the stoplight that you figured it out and then you hollered out the window "PERKINS on 28<sup>th</sup>!" and I followed you there.

ALLEN: And you spent the whole time talking to Jim.

PHILIP: That was only because you were too nervous to talk to me.

ALLEN: And you were too nervous to talk to me, too.

PHILIP: It was three o'clock in the morning...

ALLEN: Easter Sunday morning...

PHILIP: And I got your phone number and wrote it down on a slip of paper that I still have, and you went home to Longmont.

ALLEN: And you called me the next afternoon.

(*PHILIP mimes dialing a desk phone. He waits while the phone rings, then ALLEN mimes picking up a wall-mounted phone. Offstage we hear the sounds of people having dinner: silverware clinking, indistinguishable conversation.*)

ALLEN: Hello?

PHILIP: Hi, is, uh, is this Allen?

ALLEN: Yeah, hi!

PHILIP: Hi, uh, it's Philip. From last night. Or actually, this morning.

ALLEN: Hi.

PHILIP: Yeah, hi. How are you?

ALLEN: Good.

PHILIP (*hearing background noise*): Sounds like you've got company. Am I calling at a bad time?

ALLEN: No, it's okay. Just the family. Easter dinner.

PHILIP: Oh, I'm sorry. I can call back later.

ALLEN: No, it's okay. (*He moves away and the background sounds fade to almost inaudible.*) I'm glad you called.

PHILIP: Okay. Uh, listen, um, you wanna get together later, maybe, uh, come over?

ALLEN: Sure, I'd like that. What time?

PHILIP: Uh, what time's good for you?

ALLEN (*looks off stage for a second*): Any time.

PHILIP: Say around seven?

ALLEN: Okay!

PHILIP: Uh, great. See you at seven.

ALLEN: Okay.

PHILIP: Okay.

ALLEN: Wait!

PHILIP: What?

ALLEN: What's the address?

PHILIP: Oh yeah! 4484 Hamilton Court. That's in Boulder. Martin Acres. Off Baseline.

ALLEN: I'll find it.

PHILIP: Okay. Um, goodbye. (*Hangs up.*)

ALLEN: Goodbye. (*Does a little happy dance.*) Yes, I did a little happy dance.

PHILIP: So, what did you tell your family?

ALLEN: That I had a date. "Thanks for the great dinner, Mom. See ya!"

PHILIP: Ah, the direct approach. Very sneaky. And on the way you stopped...

ALLEN: A guy was selling flowers on the median of 28<sup>th</sup> Street. The light was red and I bought them. Five bucks.

PHILIP: And there you are. You had me with the flowers.

ALLEN: And there we were.

PHILIP: And that night...

ALLEN: Yuppers. The first of many.

*(Both smile at the memory.)*

PHILIP: Fifteen years.

ALLEN: Twelve years.

PHILIP: No, fifteen years. April 1984 to June 1999.

ALLEN: I meant twelve years' difference. I was nineteen, you were thirty-one.

PHILIP: Oh, yeah, that.

ALLEN: Did it bother you?

PHILIP: Me? No. Not really. I mean, I got some razzing from my friends when they found out, but no, it really didn't.... You?

ALLEN: Hell no. I'd been dating older guys long before I met you. Even lived with them. Moved to Phoenix and everything.

PHILIP: Oh, yeah, the guy who beat you up a lot.

ALLEN: Not a lot.

PHILIP: Didn't you tell me that he once hung you out a second-story window?

ALLEN: He was drunk.

PHILIP: Yeah, that's an excuse.

ALLEN: Hey, I dumped him, didn't I?

PHILIP: Yeah, you did. So, when you told your family you were going out with a thirty-one-year-old grad student from an upper middle-class background from Ohio, they were relieved?

ALLEN *(hooting laugh)*: No!

PHILIP: What did you tell them?

ALLEN: Nothing! Not all at once. I let them get used to you.

PHILIP: Like we had to get used to each other. Gotta admit it took some time, right? I mean, you smoked...

ALLEN: You'll be happy to know I've given that up.

PHILIP: Uh, yeah...

ALLEN: Kinda redundant.

PHILIP: I'd say so.

ALLEN: And the drinking.

PHILIP: We both quit that. But it took me a while to notice that it was a problem.

ALLEN: Are you going to go back over all of the bad things? 'Cause if you are, I have other places I'd rather be, okay?

PHILIP: No! I'm remembering the good times. Our room together in David's house in Boulder; your birthday when I got you the unicorn music box that played "Let Me Call You Sweetheart,"

ALLEN (*singing*): "I'm in love with you..."

PHILIP: I love you, too, but you sing like I dance.

ALLEN: Fair enough. But it's a memory.

PHILIP: Our first apartment...

ALLEN: The trips to Michigan, to Snowmass...

PHILIP: Jamaica with Kris and Jean.

ALLEN: Tobago with my brother and his wife...

PHILIP: France and Italy...

ALLEN: Our first house, the one on Bross Street, with the big yard and the garage...

PHILIP: Where I broke my ankle...

(*ALLEN cups his hands as if he's holding something delicate in them.*)

ALLEN: And our fifth anniversary present.

(*Lights change to indicate they are indoors at a gym. Sounds of exercise machines, weights clanking, indistinct chatter, pop music on the radio. ALLEN goes to PHILIP and shows him what he's carrying.*)

PHILIP (*instantly smitten*): Oh my god. He's adorable. It's a he, right?

ALLEN: Yeah.

PHILIP: Where did you get him?

ALLEN: My sister picked him up on one of their trips through Oklahoma. They can't keep him in the truck, so she said we could have him.

*(PHILIP takes the puppy and holds him up.)*

PHILIP: He's... What's his name?

ALLEN: They've been calling him "Poochy."

PHILIP: What kind of name is that? Has he had all his shots and everything? How old is he?

ALLEN: They think he's nine weeks old, he needs to go to the vet and get his shots and get wormed, and you know my sister; she named her cat "Dumbass." Don't worry; I know a vet, and we'll call him something else. Like "Fuzzbutt."

PHILIP: I think we can do better than that.

*(PHILIP gently sets the puppy down. Lights change back to as before and the sound fades away. He and ALLEN watch him.)*

PHILIP: How about Sam?

ALLEN: What's that from? Wait, let me guess. "The Lord of the Rings."

PHILIP: Yeah, how'd you know?

ALLEN: Faithful companion to ... whasisname.

PHILIP: Frodo.

ALLEN: 'Cause you're Gandalf. The wizard.

PHILIP: You *did* read it.

ALLEN: Just the first half of the first book. And I skipped the movies. "Rocky Horror" it wasn't. Sure, Sam's fine. Sammy-dog. Spud-doggie. Baby doggies.

PHILIP: He was with us from then on. To Michigan and New Mexico. And you let me keep him after...

ALLEN: You took him to Miami. And then... Were you there?

PHILIP: There?

ALLEN: When they had to put him to sleep.

PHILIP: No. I...

ALLEN: I know. You don't do death well.

*(For a moment PHILIP cannot speak. ALLEN stands by, waiting.)*

PHILIP: Is he there?

ALLEN: Is he where?

PHILIP: With you. Where you are.

ALLEN: Right now, I'm in your head. So, if Sam's in there, he's with me. Along with all the other stuff. All the memories.

PHILIP: All the adventures.

ALLEN: It'll be fun! Montserrat and the black sand beaches. Snorkeling with the barracudas. Wandering through Paris and Italy. Family reunions.

*(Lights change to suggest cold weather outside, perhaps a fireplace off to one side; the background music is Christmas carols. PHILIP turns to face his parents.)*

PHILIP: Merry Christmas, Mom and Dad. This is Allen.

*(ALLEN steps forward, shakes hands with PHILIP's parents.)*

ALLEN: Hello, Mr. and Mrs.... Okay; Nancy; Phil. *(Looks around.)* You have a beautiful home.

PHILIP: And that's my sister Lucy and her husband Jerry and their kids, and my brother Chris and his wife, Deb.

*(ALLEN nods and smiles and shakes hands.)*

ALLEN: Nice to meet you.

PHILIP: We're gonna go unload the car. It's been a long drive from Colorado.

ALLEN: Thanks for inviting me.

PHILIP: We'll be back for cocktails.

*(Lights back to as before, music fades out.)*

ALLEN: They all look so... normal.

PHILIP: Please. They repress it so much it's like waiting for Mount St. Helens to blow. Anything to avoid making a scene. "Here, have another double scotch rocks." At least in your family they let it out.

ALLEN: Oh, yeah, the yelling was just our way of saying "I love you, dammit!."

PHILIP: At least they're honest about it. It was a refreshing change from all the fake sincerity.

*(Lights change to warm yellow interior depicting a meeting hall. Faint sound of country music in the background.)*

ALLEN: Mom, Dad. This is Philip.

*(ALLEN looks at PHILIP expectantly. PHILIP hesitates, then steps forward and shakes hands with ALLEN's parents.)*

PHILIP: It's very nice to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Pfannenstiel [pronounced 'Fan'n'steel']... Um, yes, I'm at the university. Grad school. Theatre. Well, actually, playwriting. That's right. Uh, Ohio. Little town called Perrysburg... Two brothers, one sister... Well, right now I'm working in the food service. No, no, I don't cook. Office work... Well, I hope so... A professor. We'll see... Oh, yes, thanks, that sounds like fun. I haven't played Bingo in years.

*(Lights back to normal. Music fades out.)*

PHILIP: You remember what we did the night after I passed my doctoral defense?

ALLEN: Remind me.

PHILIP: We played Bingo at the VFW in Longmont. And when I graduated, your parents came to the commencement.

ALLEN: And your parents didn't.

PHILIP: They paid for the party.

ALLEN: Your family should have been there.

PHILIP: They were.

ALLEN: Aw... Hallmark moment! We had a lot of those.

PHILIP: Yeah, we did.

ALLEN *(turning to the audience)*: Well, that about wraps it up. Thanks for coming, folks, you've been a lovely audience. Drive carefully.

*(House lights start to come up.)*

PHILIP: Hold it!

*(House lights stop coming up.)*

PHILIP: We're not done here.

ALLEN: We're not?

PHILIP: No. *(To the light booth.)* Bring the house lights back down, please.

ALLEN: Come on.

PHILIP: I mean it. *(To the light booth.)* Do it, please. Take out the house lights. Bring up the work lights.

*(House lights go back out; the stage lights go out and the harsh work lights snap on.)*

PHILIP: I may not have known in the beginning. Or I may have and just denied it, not willing to believe it. But I didn't come here – and neither did you – to just remember the good times and the “adventures.” We have to remember the bad along with the good and the promises we made – or at least the ones I did – if we're going to really tell the story.

ALLEN: I had to fall in love with a writer.

PHILIP: Yeah, you did. So, let's go back.

ALLEN: To when.

PHILIP: You know when.

ALLEN: The Lost Weekend.

PHILIP: The first one. October second, 1992. Petoskey. A Friday night.

*(The work lights go out and slowly the lights come up with a single light next to the tree making a spot on the floor. PHILIP walks over to the edge of the stage, out of the light. ALLEN goes to the light spot, sinks to his knees, then curls up in the fetal position. A sob is heard. PHILIP enters the light.)*

PHILIP: Hey, where's your car? It's not in the driveway. Did it break down again? *(Sees ALLEN.)* What's wrong? *(ALLEN doesn't move.)* Are you okay? *(ALLEN shakes his head.)* What happened?

ALLEN *(a soft, but almost primal cry)*: I wrecked it.

PHILIP: What? Where is it? Is it totaled? Are you all right?

ALLEN: It's being towed in.

PHILIP: What happened?

ALLEN: I blew the engine.

PHILIP: How?

ALLEN: I was trying to kill myself.

*(PHILIP kneels down and pulls ALLEN to his feet. They embrace, ALLEN sobbing uncontrollably, PHILIP stunned.)*

PHILIP: Why?

ALLEN: I can't stop.

PHILIP: Can't stop... Can't stop what?

ALLEN: Drinking! It's ... I can't stop. I need...

*(ALLEN cannot stop crying, clinging to PHILIP.)*

PHILIP: We'll get help.

ALLEN: How?

PHILIP: I don't know. There's gotta be something...

ALLEN: I've tried!

PHILIP: Where?

ALLEN: The treatment center. They can't... I can't... we can't afford it. I'll get fired.

PHILIP: We'll call them. They have to take you. And I'll talk to your boss. We'll work something out.

*(ALLEN sinks back down to the floor, curls up, sobbing. PHILIP mimes making a phone call.)*

PHILIP: Hello, is this Munson Alcohol and Drug Treatment...? Okay, listen, my, uh, friend, he's in really bad shape; he tried to kill himself and he really needs to... I'm sorry? Say that again? You don't do intakes on the weekend? Um, look, it's not like he's coming in for a manicure; he's just tried to commit suicide in a 1963 Mercury. No, he's not injured, he blew out the engine, but he needs help now. I see. So, what do you recommend I do until Monday? Uh, yeah, I think there is at the local church, but... you're telling me to take him to an A.A. meeting? That's it? *(Sighs.)* Okay. All right. Yes. I understand. Sorry to have bothered you. *(Hangs up.)*

ALLEN: What did they say?

PHILIP: They don't do intakes on weekends. We have to wait until Monday. But if the local theatre company is gonna do a production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," I have the perfect candidate to play Nurse Ratched.

ALLEN: So, we wait.

PHILIP: I'll call the hotel and tell them you can't come in to work. I'll talk to your boss and see if you can get some... leave.

ALLEN: So, we wait.

PHILIP: Yeah, we wait. So, we did. I got you up to bed and you spent Saturday up there while I spent the day downstairs watching TV, and the next day we traded places, and on Monday morning I bundled you into the station wagon. I took you to Munson, checked you in, drove home, and spent the rest of the day searching the house from top to bottom for any remaining booze. Three huge trash bags of those little pint bottles of cheap vodka you picked up at the drug store. I lost count after fifty. That night I went to my first Al Anon meeting, and when I listened to the other people bare their souls, I realized that alcoholism is contagious and not only was I your enabler and codependent and all the other words that make up the wonderful world of addiction, but in my own way, I was just as much an alcoholic as you were. I just didn't drink as much.

ALLEN and PHILIP *(in unison)*: God, grant me the serenity...

PHILIP: Thirty days later...

ALLEN: Twenty-eight...

PHILIP: Twenty-eight days, just in time for Halloween, you came home clean and sober.

ALLEN: I still smoked.

PHILIP: Yeah, well, you can't have everything.

ALLEN: You really haven't had a drink since then?

PHILIP: That's right.

ALLEN: I'm ... happy for you.

PHILIP: And you? (*ALLEN starts to speak but PHILIP stops him.*) No. Don't tell me. I don't have the right. Not now, at least.

ALLEN: I can tell you now...

PHILIP: Don't.

ALLEN: All right.

PHILIP: So, our lives went on. Three more years in Michigan, then...

ALLEN: Ole! The Land of Enchantment.

*(The lights change to brilliant bright sunshine. The background music is New Mexico mariachi.)*

PHILIP: I got a new job and we went from the land of permanent gray skies and the three seasons – winter, July, and August – to blue skies, sunshine, and chile. You got a great job in Santa Fe...

ALLEN: Fifty miles away.

PHILIP: Yes.

ALLEN: But it was a job. And we bought our first house. And we made a garden. We planted a palm tree. We bought real furniture. We took trips.

PHILIP: I thought we had everything we wanted.

ALLEN: At least you did.

PHILIP: And you didn't.

ALLEN: One thing I learned in rehab and after is that when you're an active alcoholic, the maturing process stops. When you go into recovery, it starts up again. So basically, you were married to a fifteen-year-old for the first seven years.

PHILIP: So, after another eight years, you made up for lost time. All that exploring you missed out on as an adolescent came bursting forth. And so, we had Lost Weekend 2.0.

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