

***NEW TRUCK FOR
PAULIE***

A play
By

SEAN O'CONNOR

Winner of the
Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre's
**"BEST NEW
PLAY COMPETITION"**

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

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NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

For my Three Musketeers, Pam, Sophie and Juliet.
Love always.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE was originally produced by the Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre in Mars Hill, NC (James W. Thomas, Artistic Director) and opened on June 29, 1994. The production was directed by William Gregg and Stage Managed by Kenny Gannon. The Design team was comprised of John Bald (Scenic), Alan Williams (Costumes), Louis Gagliano (Lighting), and David Hartley (Sound).
The opening night cast was as follows.

Gus Parcels-----	Tony Medlin
Julie Sanders-----	Julie Royal
Jeannie Parcels-----	Pem Price Medlin
Nicky Parcels-----	Lynn Nihart
Paulie Parcels-----	Randy Noojin
Frankie Mandell-----	Shannon Peery
David Herbert-----	Kenny Gannon

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ACT 1

SCENE 1

A song from the sixties, something innocent and filled with joy, the Rascals, Tommy James, the Beach Boys, Spoonful, whatever, rises from the speakers. A beat after the song begins, the lights rise on the set, revealing the modest interior of the Parcels family home. A couch and a coffee table sit slightly left of center stage facing a large TV, stage right. The back wall has three doors. One, center stage, leads off into the bedroom of Gus and Jeannie Parcels. Another, stage right, leads off into what used to be the bedroom of their son, Paul. And at the extreme left of the backstage wall is a swinging door that leads off into the kitchen. Opening off the adjacent wall, stage left, is their son, Nick's bedroom. The front door to the house opens off a short wall, stage right. All of the home that is seen, though, is the playing area, in which sits the couch and the TV. A couple of pictures adorn the surrounding walls. And green, healthy shrubbery rests slightly outside the environs of the set, stage left and right, suggesting a modest yet well tended stretch of lawn surrounding the house. The time is early Friday evening in the late Autumn of 1969. A week or so past Thanksgiving. The place is suburban New Jersey. A town called Sommerfield. GUS PARCELLS, in his early forties and dressed in his working clothes, sits dead asleep on the couch. Snoring occasionally. A couple of magazines from the period, "Life", "Look", maybe a "Sports Illustrated" also lay scattered around. Resting on the couch next to Gus is a high school football jacket on the back of which we see the lettering "Sommerfield" and right beneath it, the number '70. The song fades into the sounds of Gus's snoring. The light from the TV, whose sound is turned down, flickers across his face. A few beats pass then the stage right door, the front door to the house, shoots open. There stands their next door neighbor, Julie Sanders, seventeen years old, very pretty and dressed in a collarless shirt, a skirt

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and tights. She holds some pom-poms in one hand and a collage in the other. She is not wearing any shoes.

JULIE. Who stole my go-go boots? *(Pause.)* Who stole my...?

JEANNIE. *(From the kitchen.)* They're in my closet.

JULIE. They're in...? What?

JEANNIE. *(O.S.)* They're in my closet. *(JEANNIE, forty-one years old, her hair bundled up on her head, steps into the room holding a dish and a dishrag.)* Hi sweetie.

JULIE. Hi Jeannie.

JEANNIE. Your mom was over here before cleaning 'em. She left 'em so I put 'em in my closet.

JULIE. My mother is so mental! *(Exits into Jeannie and Gus's bedroom. Jeannie laughs and exits back into the kitchen. NICK, seventeen, well built, a crew cut, comes racing out of his room.)*

NICK. Dad, you seen my football shirt? *(Gus snores. Nick grabs his arm.)* Dad, you seen my football shirt? I gotta wear it for the pep rally. Dad? Dad...

JEANNIE. *(Offstage.)* It's on the line.

NICK. What? It's...?

JEANNIE. *(Offstage.)* It's on the line.

NICK. Oh. Okay. Thanks, Ma. *(He looks down at his sleeping father one more time. Leans close.)* Dad. I keep havin' this dream that...Beaver's all dressed up in June's clothing. And he's havin' this hot affair with Lassie. Then Lassie gives birth to Flipper... *(Gus stirs.)*

GUS. Whaa... ?

NICK. Oh, uh, nothin', Dad. Just, uh, Just kiddin'. *(Gus's eyes close and he resumes snoring. Nick crosses to the stage right door. Exits. Julie steps out of Gus and Jeannie's bedroom in her go-go boots. She puts the pom-poms and the collage on the couch. Speaks to GUS.)*

JULIE. I hate go-go boots. All the cheerleaders have to wear go-go boots. I feel like...I'm trapped for eternity inside the Mickey Mouse club. You should see it, Gussie, the whole gym's nothin' but banners. Banners on the ceiling, banners on the baskets, banners on the stage, just banners, banners, banners. *(Pause.)* And pom-poms. Can't forget pom-poms. Oh

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no. Pom-poms are very important these days. (*GUS just snores.*) Hey, you. Mr. Van Winkle. (*Kicks his leg.*)

NICK. (*Offstage*) Dad?

JEANNIE. (*Offstage.*) Gus?

JULIE. Hey, Rip? Hey, Rip? Mr. Rip Van? (*Nick re-enters in his football shirt.*)

NICK. Dad? (*Jeannie enters from the kitchen.*)

JEANNIE. Gus? (*Gus keeps on snoring. Julie turns up the sound on the TV. It's the old "Ring around the collar" ad where the TV voice sings "Ring around the collar! Ring around the collar!" After hearing it once, Nick and Julie lean into Gus and sing it in his face. He opens his eyes. Screams.*)

GUS. Aaahhh! Jesus Christ! Whyn't you just stick needles in my eyes?

JEANNIE. Help me clean. (*She returns to kitchen. Gus stands.*)

GUS. Anyway, I'm down in the sewer trenches and one a' the pipes breaks. There's shit n' piss all over me like a pack a' bees... (*Jeannie sticks her head out through the kitchen door.*)

JEANNIE. Helllooo?

GUS. Yeah, tres bien, merci and how are you? (*Continues. She disappears.*) Anyway, I look up and there's the sewer inspector, Tommy Muldoon. Got this red nose, filled with warts. I got shit n' piss all over me, I'm seem' nothin' but warts. (*Disappears into the kitchen. Julie begins getting her things together.*)

JULIE. I told Nancy to pick us up here, Nicky. We still got a lotta decoratin' to do by the time you guys get outta chalk-talk. That's about nine, right? Nick? That's about...? (*Nick, behind her, places his hands on her hips and sneaks a kiss on the back of her neck.*) Nicky...

NICK. Know what's gonna get me goin' more n' anything else?

JULIE. Nick..,

NICK. Thinkin' 'bout you in your little cheerleadin' outfit. The way your little skirt flops up...

JULIE. Nicky...

NICK. Mmm, mmm, mmm. Jewels?

JULIE. Yeah? You dirty boy?

NICK. Are you really goin' to college?

JULIE. Nicky. I got accepted at Vassar. We talked about this.

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NICK. But Nancy? Barbara? They're not goin'. Nancy's got that job at Hamrah's...

JULIE. Nick...

NICK. Barb's workin' at the jewelry shop. *(Picks up her collage.)*
What's this?

JULIE. Somethin' I been workin' on in Art class.

NICK. Oh, you mean that fag-factory.

JULIE. Nicky, it's not a fag-factory. *(Takes the collage.)*

NICK. *(Pause.)* Why'nt you just stay around? Everybody's...

JULIE. But I don't wanna just stay around.

NICK. But this is your home, Julie.

JULIE. I know it's my home. But...there's more, you know, Nicky? I mean...I look around here, the streets, the trees, the faces. It's all I've known my whole life. We're in this tiny, little bubble here. Floatin' through the universe but...not connected to it, you know?

NICK. But...is there somethin' wrong with that?

JULIE. No, no, it's great, it's just that...everytime I pick up a book or a magazine I can see the universe out there, just knockin' at this bubble. And I just wanna step on out, you know? See what the rest a' the world is like.

NICK. Julie. Listen. Just imagine, you n' I, we get a house, alright? Our own home, just like our parents did. We fix it up real nice. Every week-end, a barbecue in the back. Susie n' Marge comin' by. Nancy n' Skip. And then one day, a bit later...the sunlight that fills that backyard's dancin' with the sounds of our kids, the laughin', the singin', chasin' each other around all day long, same way we did as kids. Doesn't that sound nice?

JULIE. It sounds real nice, Nicky. I'm just...I'm confused.

NICK. I know but...this all can happen. Soon I'll be workin' for Dad. I'll take over the landscapin'. Alls I need is a truck but...I'm sure he's gonna get me one. Then when I get outta the Marines we can... *(She pulls away.)* What?

JULIE. You know what.

NICK. Listen...

JULIE. It's a stupid war!

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NICK. Shh. *(Doesn't want his parents to hear.)* It's not a stupid war and it's somethin' I have to do! As a man! You know what my dad would think a' me if I didn't go?

JULIE. So what, Nicky, you're gonna go to Vietnam and kill people for nothin' and never come back! Like Paulie, huh? Is that what you want? *(She's upset.)*

NICK. Shh. Jewels. Dad's gonna hear.

JULIE. Paulie said the same things to me. The same plans, right before he left.

NICK. Julie, Paulie's not comin' back. *(Pause.)* You still...think about him in that way, don't you?

JULIE. Oh, Nicky. It still hurts.

NICK. It hurts me too. Paulie's...not makin' it back, It hurts a lot of us. But listen. I got a surprise for you, okay? I'm not gonna tell you now but... *(The kitchen door opens. Gus steps out. Looks around.)*

GUS. What're you sayin'? *(Pause.)* You mentioned Paulie. *(Jeannie steps out. Concerned.)*

JEANNIE. Don't you guys have to get ready?

JULIE. Yeah. I left my pocketbook. I'll be back in a second. *(Exits out of the house.)*

GUS. *(To Nick.)* What were you sayin'?

JEANNIE. Gussie...

GUS. *(Waves his hand.)* Hold on. Nick...

NICK. I was just tellin' her about the tree fort. When Paulie n' I...

GUS. *(Smiles.)* When you built the tree fort. I remember tellin' Petey n' some a' the guys at work about that the other day.

NICK. Yeah?

GUS. Yeah. I was puttin' in skylights over at the Anderson place, and I come home early and the two a' you were in the back and... *(Laughs.)* You were so scared, Nicky...

NICK. Well, I was eleven years old...

GUS. And Paulie was thirteen. But you wouldn't go up on the beam. You were so scared. But Paulie...he didn't fear nothin'. *(Remembers.)* Up there by himself. Hammerin' down the floorboards. And I remember goin' up there to help him. Just me n' Paulie all day long. Our shirts off. Workin' together like men. The way men are supposed to work. *(Pause.)*

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And the sweat. It clung to him like it was pearls. Like the sun washed up on his skin. And left nothin' but pearls. Even then...even then, he had a man's build on him. *(Pause.)* We finished the whole frame a' the tree fort that day. The entire frame. *(Pause.)* Pretty soon he'll be back. And we'll be workin' together like we planned. Just like we planned. *(Exits outside.)*

JEANNIE. You see, Nicky? You see what I'm dealin' with?

NICK. Mom, it's been a year since the knock on the door.

JEANNIE. His boy missing in action.

NICK. And the State Department told us, it's positive...

JEANNIE. That eyewitnesses saw the Cong...cut Paulie down. And your father still believes that one day his boy'll walk up that driveway just as proud n' strong as ever. You know what I found out recently?

NICK. What?

JEANNIE. He's been goin' down to McCaffrey's Truck Dealers. He's down there every week. Talkin' to Billy n' his brothers about the new truck he's gonna buy for Paulie. The new truck that'll be waitin' in the driveway when Paulie finally gets back from the war. And besides, the only extra cash we got is that college money a' Grandpa's, if you ever wanna go.

NICK. Mom... it's crazy.

JEANNIE. I know it's crazy.

NICK. And you know what he was sayin' about the fort? About me being scared n' not goin' up?

JEANNIE. Yeah.

NICK. Well, he keeps forgettin' what happened the next day. When Paulie fell and hurt his wrist. He wouldn't go up there no more. And I took over. I got up the nerve and I finished that whole fort in three days.

JEANNIE. I remember that, Nicky. I was so proud a' you.

NICK. But do you remember when I bought him back there? I was so excited and I brought Dad back to see it. And the only thing he said was...the shutters were outta line.

JEANNIE. Nicky...

NICK. Ma, he didn't say a thing about it. Never. Just that... *(Gus re-enters.)*

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GUS. *(Pause.)* Well, what's this? The annual meeting of the Rocky and Bullwinkle Fan Club? *(They laugh.)* Your mom had a big crush on Bullwinkle, Nick, I ever tell you that?

JEANNIE. Nicky...

GUS. Somethin' 'bout his antlers, I think. How...pointy they were.

NICK. Yeah?

GUS. I'd come home. House was dark. *(Does the hula.)* Your mom'd be doin' the hula in front a' the television. Rubbin' herself up against Bullwinkle's antlers.

JEANNIE. Your father has deep psychological problems.

GUS. One day, I figured what the hell? Went out and bought me some antlers. I wore 'em on my head for about a month. That was the best month we ever had, heh, Jeannie? *(Jeannie laughs and tosses the dish towel at Gus.)*

JEANNIE. Excuse me, boys. *(Back into kitchen.)*

NICK. What were you smokin' out there, Dad? *(Gus boxes with him playfully. Quickly.)*

GUS. Get outta here. Hey, I was just speakin' to the father a' that black family that moved in down the block. What's his name?

NICK. Mr. Parker.

GUS. That's right. He's a nice man, it's a nice family. How they gettin' along at school?

NICK. Well, some kids are sayin' some things.

GUS. Well, don't you be a part a' that.

NICK. I wouldn't be a part a' that.

GUS. Everybody puts this country down but it's the only place that accepts everybody, no matter who you are. I want you to respect that, Nick.

NICK. I do, Dad. They're nice kids.

GUS. That they are. *(Takes a beer from the plastic.)* So, little Nicky's championship game, heh?

NICK. Were gonna win, Dad. I can feel it.

GUS. I remember my...final game. My senior year.

NICK. What was that, back in 1752?

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GUS. Nineteen forty-four. Although we played in the old McDermott field, right across the street from where you guys play now. Wasn't as fancy, But it was good football.

NICK. I bet it was.

GUS. Your mom...on the sidelines. Her hair all full a' curls.

NICK. And Julie's father played with you, right?

GUS. Ol' Jake played right alongside me. I was right guard, he was right tackle. They called us the "Sommerfield Bombers". Heh? That was World War II. Yeah. The "Sommerfield Bombers."

NICK. We got this new play, Dad. It was designed just for me,

GUS. Yeah? Just for you, heh?

NICK. Yeah. It's a half-back option. Takes advantage of my passing.

GUS. You always had a good arm. (*Forceful.*) I used to tell you, you should be quarterback, right? Heh? Am I right? Heh? Now, if you listened to me...

NICK. Yeah, but it's...I mean, it's workin' out pretty good at halfback.

GUS. Yeah, well, no, I mean... (*Softens.*) You're doin' fine, Nicky. You're doin' real fine. You should be proud.

NICK. 'Member two weeks ago against Hills? 'Member how much I got?

GUS. Against Hills? Yeah, you had a good game up there.

NICK. A hundred-seven.

GUS. You had...?

NICK. I got a hundred-seven that day. That's the most anybody's got all year.

GUS. (*Remembers.*) You broke a hundred. That's right.

NICK. Yeah. I got the game ball.

GUS. And Paulie. On his Thanksgiving game. Senior year.

NICK. He got one fifty-three.

GUS. No, it was more than that.

NICK. Dad, it was one fifty-three.

GUS. No. It was up in the 80s. It was one eighty-seven.

NICK. Dad. They got the ball in the plaque at school. It was...

GUS. You've done very well. But don't try n' shortchange what your brother did.

NICK. (*Pleading.*) I'm not short-changin' him.

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GUS. You always respect your family members. I've told you this your whole life, right? You always...

NICK. I do, Dad. You know...

GUS. There's three things. There's your family. There's your country. And there's what you believe is right.

NICK. Dad. I know this.

GUS. You always stand by your family.

NICK. *(Very upset.)* Dad. I always did. Remember with Tommy Coyle? About three years ago?

GUS. *(Pause.)* Tommy...?

NICK. When Tommy ratted on his brother, Steve? For stealin' the basketballs from the school? Steve never made the team. So that summer, he stole a couple a' balls from the school. Worked out with 'em all summer long. Come September, Tommy told the coach. From then on, Steve was never even allowed to try out for the team.

GUS. And the other kids were scared but you...

NICK. I stood up. I was the one, amongst everybody else, who stood up against what Tommy did. I let him know, like you always said, if it's your family, you back him up. You don't rat on your family.

GUS. And Tommy came after you?

NICK. Tommy wailed on me for three hours. I came home that day, all black and blue, but I didn't back down. I stood up for what you always said.

GUS. That you stand by your family. That's the most sacred thing God's given us. I remember that, Nicky. You showed a lotta guts that day.

NICK. Yeah. Well. You taught me. *(Pause.)* I also...I wanted to ask you somethin'.

GUS. Yeah?

NICK. Well. You know, me n' Richie were doin' that landscapin' last summer...

GUS. Yeah. You done a good job, you two.

NICK. Yeah. But...we wanna do it again. Startin' this Spring. But we wanna...we wanna get a real good company goin'...

GUS. That's a good idea, Nick.

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NICK. And I'll show you. I know we can do it. And one day...you know, like you said, maybe...some time down the road I can take over part a' the business from you...

GUS. Well, that's what I want, that's what I been workin' my whole life for.

NICK. I know. But, you know, if we... See, all we got is Richie's station wagon. But if we could have a truck...

GUS. Well, I don't...

NICK. It'd triple the business...

GUS. No, I'm...

NICK. Then I could really prove to you, Dad...

GUS. No, I know, Nicky. But...see, alls I got is my truck...

NICK. But...

GUS. ...and, you know, things are pretty tight...

NICK. But Mom...Mom said...

GUS. Well, I can imagine what your Mom said...

NICK. But...she said that...

GUS. Nicky. For now, the station wagon's fine. And anyway, come summer, you do your time for your country. You got no qualms with that now, do you?

NICK. No, of course I...

GUS. Good. Cause for you right now, this is the most precious moment for you as a man. I don't care what the hippies are sayin' out in California...

NICK. It's all that flower power stuff.

GUS. Yeah, well, flower power my heinie. It's a just war. Cause we're tryin' to preserve freedom and democracy. Communism is spreadin' all over the place...

NICK. But you can't live free under Communism. Look at Russia.

GUS. And that's exactly my point. Now I had my time in the South Pacific. Your grandfather, God rest his soul, had his time in World War I. My dream is that you n' Paulie are gonna come back decorated with honor. Which is the utmost achievement any man could wish for.

NICK. I'll get it, Dad.

GUS. I can see Paulie... Pickin' him up at the airport. Medals gleamin' across his chest...

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NICK. *(Unable to contain himself.)* Dad...

GUS. That'll be a day. Heh? Nicky? Won't that be a day?

NICK. Dad. Paulie...Paulie's not comin' back. Don't you see... *(Pause. Gus stares ahead.)* He's gone, Dad. They...

GUS. He is not gone! He's fightin' in a war

NICK. Well, if he's not gone, what is he, is he a deserter, is he...

GUS. *(Stunned.)* Oh Nicky.

NICK. No, wait. Dad...

GUS. How can you say that?

NICK. Listen... I didn't...

GUS. Desertion! Your brother...?!

NICK. Dad. I didn't mean that. I'm just...

GUS. A man who deserts his country should be shot!

NICK. Wait. Will you listen to me?

GUS. How dare you destroy the name of your brother! How dare you...

NICK. Dad, I didn't mean it, alright?! I'm not tryin' to destroy Paulie's name! Are you kiddin' me? You know how much I loved Paulie! But you gotta...you gotta see that he's not comin' back...

GUS. Nicky! Please! I will...

NICK. Dad! They told us Paulie got... *(Julie, timidly, re-enters.)*

GUS. Nicky! I will not sit here and have you denigrate...!

NICK. Dad! Please! You gotta face the truth!

GUS. I WILL NOT LISTEN TO THIS!!! *(Pause. Jeannie steps out of the kitchen.)*

NICK. Dad...

JEANNIE. Nicky. *(She motions him to stop. A car honks outside.)*

JULIE. That's Nancy, Nick. C'mon, help me with this stuff. *(She and Nick grab the pom-poms and the collage.)*

JEANNIE. Have a good time tonight.

JULIE. We will. And Gussie, what do you say we play some horse shoes this weekend?

GUS. *(Still upset.)* Play...?

JULIE. Yeah. You me n' Dad. Loser takes the winner to Dairy Queen.

GUS. Okay, sweetie. You're on. *(Car honks again.)*

JULIE. C'mon, Nick. *(To Gus and Jeannie.)* See you later. *(She moves to the door. Nick stands in front of his father.)*

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NICK. Dad? Tomorrow, you wanna...you wanna have breakfast before the game? Like we used to?

GUS. *(Pause.)* Of course I do, Nicky. That sounds great, kid. Have a good time tonight. *(Nick races to the door.)*

NICK. See you later, Mom.

JEANNIE. Okay, kids. *(They exit.)*

GUS. She's a sweetheart. You know, Jeannie?

JEANNIE. She's a bright girl.

GUS. Oh yeah.

JEANNIE. Gonna be interesting to see what Julie does with her life.

GUS. With that big heart she's got. She's gonna make a great mother one day.

JEANNIE. She might be more than that, Gus. *(Pause.)* I get the feeling something might be brewing between Julie and Nick.

GUS. Julie and Nicky? Nah, they're just friends, that's all.

JEANNIE. It's a little more n' that, Gus.

GUS. No, she's Paulie's girl. She's close to Nicky cause she's waitin' on Paulie. For when Paulie comes back. *(Pause.)* And besides, Nicky'll be signin' up pretty soon...

JEANNIE. I don't want Nicky signin' up.

GUS. *(Pause.)* Jeannie...?

JEANNIE. I want my boy to live, Gussie. *(Pause.)* Listen. I don't wanna talk about it now. I gotta take off. I gotta...

GUS. Where you goin'?

JEANNIE. Gussie, I got my class. It's Friday night. You know I...

GUS. I mean, Jeannie...there's stuff all around. There's dishes out here, there's...

JEANNIE. That's right. And maybe, while I'm at my class, you can climb outta your coffin here and do some of 'em.

GUS. But... You know, I miss you while you're gone, honey.

JEANNIE. Gussie...

GUS. Why you takin' this photography? Why you...?

JEANNIE. Because I like it. Because its fun, cause it's...

GUS. What is this, Art? Is that what you're doin'?

JEANNIE. **GUS.**, I'm not gonna...

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GUS. I mean, why you need Art? You got life. I gave you a life. What's wrong with life?

JEANNIE. Gussie, it's just a hobby, alright? It's puttin' a little meanin' into my life, it's fun and who knows? Maybe one day...

GUS. What? Maybe what?

JEANNIE. Maybe, if I get good enough, I don't know, I... I could teach it, maybe. Down at the Center.

GUS. And make money doin' it?

JEANNIE. Well, yeah, I mean, we're gonna need some extra...

GUS. I'm bringin' in the money! I know it's a tough time...

JEANNIE. Gussie, it's not...just money, it's more...

GUS. What, is it...emotions? Emotional stuff?

JEANNIE. It's all my life it's been the kids, everything for the kids.

Now the kids are grown and I got Julie tellin' me women should go back to school. The magazines sayin' women should go outside the home and have a career. It's just... I'm just tryin', Gussie. And you treatin' it like I threw a skunk at you...

GUS. I'm sorry, honey. It's... it's good. It's just...a guy builds his life, you know? He hammers at it like a rock, he keeps hammerin' and hammerin' till one day he's finally got it so it fits...right into the world. But then the world changes.

JEANNIE. Honey? I'll be back In a few hours. *(Gets her keys.)* Do some a' the dishes. Okay? And tomorrow's gonna be a special day.

GUS. Watchin' Nicky out there. The crowd? Feelin'...it tremble like a leaf, you know? At his every move.

JEANNIE. It's gonna be special, Gussie.

GUS. Remember...Paulie's Thanksgiving game? That final run in the fourth quarter, a 68 yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter that clinched it for 'em?

JEANNIE. Yeah. I remember. *(She sits near him.)*

GUS. There was a roar that come from the crowd. And it wasn't voices. It was somethin'...deeper. It was thunder. 'Member that?

JEANNIE. That was a special day.

GUS. He had a hundred eighty-seven yards that day. A hundred eighty-seven yards.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

JEANNIE. Okay, honey. *(Gets up.)* Want me to turn on the television for you, Gussie? Would you...

GUS. Yeah. *(She turns it on.)*

JEANNIE. I'll see you soon.

GUS. Okay, baby. I love ya, heh?

JEANNIE. I love you too.

GUS. See you soon. *(She exits. The lights slowly fall as the sound on the TV grows louder. We hear a newscaster's voice. "United States investigators have been dispatched to the town of My Lai, located in the South Viet Nam province of Quang Nai, to search out any truth to the reports of atrocities committed by American soldiers. No word has yet emerged from the investigation..." As the voice trails off, music rises from the speakers.)*

SCENE 2

The following evening, Saturday night. After the game. It's about midnight. The stage is dark. The door opens. Nick and Julie enter. In high spirits. A little drunk.

NICK. *(Singing.)* "George, George, George of the Jungle..."

JULIE. *(Laughing.)* Nicky...

NICK. "...Friend of you and me."

JULIE. Shh!

NICK. "Watch out for that tree." *(Julie flicks on the lights. Nicky, drunk, with a bottle in his hand, is leaping around the room like a gorilla.)*

JULIE. Nicky! Your parents! *(She tries to restrain him. He stands up straight and begins marching around like a toy soldier.)*

NICK. "Roger Ramjet, he's our man, the hero of our nation..."

JULIE. Nicky! Your parents...

NICK. They're at the McGregor's, playin' cards. *(Puts his arm through hers and swings her round and round.)* "Roger wears a pretty dress, with flowers on his collar, when all the boys want a big, wet kiss, they just give Rog a hollar." *(Stops. He stands in front of her. Her back to the wall.)*

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

JULIE. What? Nicky...

NICK. I kept...watchin' you. Throughout the whole game.

JULIE. You're drunk.

NICK. Didja see me? Didja see me watchin' you?

JULIE. Yeah, I saw those little bug-eyes. Poppin' outta your helmet.

NICK. *(Excited.)* Julie! Goddamn! I got a hundred sixty-seven yards! Do you know how much that is?

JULIE. Nicky, you were fabulous today.

NICK. It's the school record! We're the League champs! On top a' that, I ran for a hundred sixty-seven yards! I beat Paulie's record! I mean... didja know that? Jewels? Didja...?

JULIE. Yeah. I knew it.

NICK. *(Pause.)* How 'bout Dad? Were you watchin' Mom n' Dad at all?

JULIE. Are you kiddin' me? Nicky, on that first big run you got, in the first...?

NICK. The touchdown run?

JULIE. Yeah. And when you got in the clear, I turned around to watch your Dad. Nicky...he was up on his feet, spillin' beer all over everybody, his eyes all lit up like pumpkins, but...you shoulda seen his face! Nicky, he was so proud a' you!

NICK. Really?

JULIE. Nicky. He loves you. *(Nick is overcome.)* What's up?

NICK. There was one moment in the fourth quarter. Where I burst through the line and I looked up...and the only thing between me n' the goalpost was a soft stream a' sunlight. And I heard the crowd explode, it came right from their throats like...like thunder. But then, all a' sudden... I saw Paulie.

JULIE. Oh Nicky.

NICK. No, it was...it was like we was kids again. He was ahead a' me, cross the goal line, in the sunlight. And he was wavin' me on. All the way to the goal line, Paulie was wavin' me on. *(Pause.)* And that was the run that broke his record. *(Pause.)* You stay here. Stay here for a second. *(He backs away.)*

JULIE. But Nancy and Skip are comin' by...

NICK. Remember I told you I had somethin' for you? Yesterday, I...

JULIE. Nicky. I don't need anything. *(Moves towards him.)*

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

NICK. (*Determined.*) No. You stay...you stay right here. Alright? Now don't move. okay? (*Exits into his room. A beat passes. Then the front door opens. In steps Jeannie. A little drunk.*)

JEANNIE. Where is he? Yoo-hoo? Mr. Hero? (*To Julie.*) Whole town's talkin' 'bout him, you should see. (*In steps Gus, also a little drunk.*)

GUS. Where is he? Where are you, Hero, heh? (*To Julie.*) The whole town's on fire. They're thinkin' a' namin' a laundromat after him. (*Cracks up.*) A laundromat named after my son! I'm famous. (*Cracks up again. Nicky steps out of his room. Holding something in his hand.*) There you are. Monsieur Laundromat, himself.

JEANNIE. The whole town's talkin' about you, kiddo. The McGregors gave us some champagne. Gonna do a toast.

GUS. Bullwinkle? Heh? They ever name a laundromat after Bullwinkle the Moose? No, they did not.

JEANNIE. (*To Gus.*) Come n' help me, fatso.

GUS. You hear that? If I had antlers outta my head like Bullwinkle, think she'd be callin' me fatso? No she would not. She'd be doin' the hula all around me... (*Gus does the hula.*)

JEANNIE. (*Laughs.*) If you had antlers outta your head, I'd put you in a booth on the street and finally make a little money outta you! (*Gussie, laughing, growls at her. She growls back and exits into the kitchen.*)

GUS. So this'll be the first time you teenagers ever experimented with alcohol, right?

NICK. Well, Dad. Imbibing spirits is illegal at our age.

JULIE. And we would never break the law, Gus.

GUS. (*Cracks up.*) You hear that, Jeannie? Jeannie, you...?

JEANNIE. (*From the kitchen.*) I heard it, Chubs. C'mon in and help me.

GUS. (*Laughing.*) Oh my Jesus, my testicles are swellin' up! (*Exits into kitchen. Nicky moves to Julie.*)

JULIE. What is it? What you got? (*He opens his palm. It's an ID bracelet.*)

NICK. I had it made last week. See. (*Points to his name.*) Nicholas. That's me.

JULIE. Oh Nicky.

NICK. It's better than the one Dickie gave to Sandy. See the gold trimming.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

JULIE. It's beautiful.

NICK. And maybe soon...when you're ready...

JULIE. Nicky...

NICK. I'm not pushin'. But whenever you're ready...we'll get some champagne. Go out to the reservoir. And for the first time...we'll do the whole thing. Go all the way. *(Smiles.)* Like a couple a' dogs.

JULIE. *(Laughs.)* A couple a' dogs? *(Nicky begins barking. Then laughs.)*

NICK. I'm kiddin', I'm kiddin'. So whaddaya say? Do you want the bracelet?

JULIE. Of course, Nicky. Of course I want it. It's just...

NICK. Because of Paulie? It's...it's difficult?

JULIE. It... I don't know, it...it's confusing. But...oh yeah, Nicky. *(They hug.)* Thank you. It's so beautiful.

NICK. Do me a favor. Don't tell Mom n' Dad yet.

JULIE. I won't.

NICK. It's just...it's too early... *(The kitchen door shoots open. Gus holds the Champagne, Jeannie, the glasses.)*

GUS. To the Bronco Nagurski of Sommerfield High! *(Shoots the cork. Nicky runs around the room, pretending he's dodging blockers. Everybody cheers.)*

JEANNIE. And tomorrow night we got some more celebratin'.

JULIE. That's when Nicky becomes a wrinkled up ol' man.

GUS. Old Monsieur Laundromat turns eighteen. Jesus. Alright, pardonez-moi your glasses. *(They fill the glasses as Julie toasts.)*

JULIE. To the holder of the rushing record at Sommerfield High. *(Jeannie cheers.)*

GUS. Well, that's not...exactly true.

NICK. *(Pause.)* What do you...what do you mean that's not true?

JEANNIE. Wait. Hold on. Gussie...

GUS. Nicky. You had a good game...

NICK. I had a great game, Dad.

GUS. You had a good game. Alright?

NICK. *(Raising his voice.)* Why're you sayin' this? Why're you...?!

GUS. Nicky! Please!

NICK. I had the best game that damn school's ever seen!

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

GUS. Do not raise your voice to me! (*Jeannie and Julie plead with them to stop.*)

NICK. I got a hundred sixty-seven! Paulie got a hundred fifty-three!

GUS. Your brother got a hundred eighty-seven!

NICK. Dad! God...!

GUS. Have respect for your brother!

NICK. Dammit, Dad! What do I have to do?! (*Behind them, unnoticed, the stage right door opens. In steps Paulie dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans. A filled duffel bag over his shoulder. His hair longish and unkempt. A three day beard on his face.*)

GUS. It was a hundred eighty-seven! I saw it! It was one hundred eighty-seven!

PAULIE. No, it wasn't. (*They turn.*) It was one fifty-three. Nicky beat me. (*Freeze for a beat. The lights shoot to black.*)

SCENE 3

About twenty minutes later. Paulie is seated. Jeannie and Gus whirl about him. Pouring more champagne for everybody. Nick and Julie stand on opposite sides of the stage. Each caught in a space between joy and the awareness of an approaching conflict.

GUS. (*Pouring champagne.*) I told everybody, nobody'd listen.

NICK. Dad knew, Paulie.

JEANNIE. He knew all the time, sweetie.

GUS. He'll be back. That's what I said.

JEANNIE. The whole time, he kept...

GUS. Not my Paulie, that's what I kept...

JEANNIE. Ever since the man came...

GUS. ...I kept tellin' people...

JEANNIE. It was us who were...

GUS. (*Explodes.*) Will you let me talk? Please! Heh?! Will you let me...

PAULIE. Hey. Dad. Jesus, c'mon, alright? (*Pause.*) Please.

GUS. (*Pause.*) I'm...I'm sorry. I'm sorry, honey. It's just...the excitement.

NICK. (*Pause.*) Paulie, go on.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

PAULIE. I was in Hanoi. This thing a' me gettin' shot, I don't know where it came from. We got captured and they put us in the Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi.

GUS. And how many a' you escaped?

PAULIE. It was me and this other guy. Right when the food truck was leavin', he grabbed the guy's gun and hammered him from the back. And we just jumped in and we were gone.

GUS. You hammered him from the back, heh? You...

PAULIE. No. No, Dad, *he* hammered him from the back. I didn't touch him. *(Pause.)* And then we drove for days. We went through... Well, we went through a lotta hell but we finally made it through Burma and into India. And Pan Am did the rest. *(Jeannie embraces him.)*

JEANNIE. Oh baby. Oh my God, I thought a' you so much. I thought a' you so much.

PAULIE. Not as much as I thought about you, Mom. *(His eyes fall on Julie.)* Not as much as I thought about all a' you.

GUS. Well... I mean, this deserves decoration.

PAULIE. *(Laughs.)* Wait, Dad.

GUS. No, this is the type a' thing they give the Congressional Medal of Honor for.

PAULIE. Dad. I just escaped. I was a POW.

GUS. Well, we'll see. No use thinkin' about it now. But down the line, we'll contact the necessary sources, heh? *(Pause.)* My hero. Paulie.

(Breaks down and embraces him.) Oh God. I was so...I was so scared, Paulie.

PAULIE. Oh Dad. I'm alright. I was scared too. But I'm alright.

GUS. Well, we'll get this hair cut off you, alright? *(Laughs.)* Look at him, he looks like a girl. Tomorrow, I'll tie you to the lawn and run the lawn mower over your head. Make you look like Uncle Fester! *(Cracks up.)*

PAULIE. Can't wait, Dad.

JULIE. *(Pause.)* I like it.

GUS. Yeah, but...he looks like a hippie. What's that rock group? The... Gorillas or some...

JULIE. The Monkees.

GUS. Yeah. You look like a monkey, Paulie.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

NICK. You look like Ringo, Paulie.

GUS. That's it. You look like Ringo. *(Sings.)* "She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah." I want to hold your kneecap." *(Cracks up and slaps Paulie on the back.)* Get it? Kneecap?

PAULIE. That's funny, Dad. *(Outside a car honks a few times.)*

JULIE. That's Nancy and Skip. Uh, I'll be back in a minute. *(Julie exits outside.)*

GUS. Anyway, we'll get you cleaned up and we'll start you workin'.

PAULIE. Well, Dad...

GUS. Soon as you're ready.

PAULIE. I don't wanna...

GUS. *(Quickly.)* You don't wanna? What do you mean you don't...

JEANNIE. Gussie. He doesn't have to do anything right now.

GUS. I'm not sayin'...

JEANNIE. All he's gotta do is be back with the ones who love him. That's...

GUS. *(Explodes.)* I'm not sayin' he's gotta do anything!

PAULIE. Dad! C'mon! Please. I just got back. Alright?

GUS. *(Pause.)* Alright.

NICK. It's okay, Dad.

GUS. I...I don't want to push you. It's just...hopefully we got some work ahead. With the sewers. Might be an extension on the Henderson house...

PAULIE. We'll see. Dad, I...

GUS. I don't want to push. *(Pause.)* Excuse me. *(Exits into his bedroom.)*

JEANNIE. Let me talk to your father. He's... His nerves, Paulie...

PAULIE. I know, Ma. *(Jeannie exits into the bedroom. Nick and Paulie beam at each other.)* You little punk.

NICK. Fuck you. I'm not a punk, you're the punk.

PAULIE. You broke my rushing record.

NICK. I didn't break it. I demolished it. *(He cracks up maniacally.)*

PAULIE. I can still take you, sucker. *(Grabs his arms.)* You know that, right? *(Gets him in a headlock. Gives him "noogies" as Nick cracks up.)* I'm still the noogie monster, you got me? The big, bad... *(Nick spins Paulie around. Gets him in a choke hold from behind.)*

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

NICK. So you can take me, huh?

PAULIE. Jesus, you got stronger.

NICK. Say uncle.

PAULIE. Aunt.

NICK. I'll give you a noogie! *(Gives him a noogie.)*

PAULIE. Hey!

NICK. Say uncle. *(Nick keeps giving him noogies as Paulie struggles.)*

PAULIE. Cousin, aunt, brother, nephew...

NICK. Uncle! I wanna hear uncle!

PAULIE. Mom! Dad! Nicky's pickin' on me! Help! *(Paulie breaks free. They slap fight for a beat then burst out laughing. Pause. They fall into each other's arms for a long, silent embrace. They pull apart. A little embarrassed.)*

NICK. So you saw the whole game?

PAULIE. You had a great game, Nicky.

NICK. Where were you sittin'?

PAULIE. I was on the visitors side.

NICK. On the visitors side? What were you doin'...?

PAULIE. I didn't want any commotion.

NICK. Commotion? Paulie? The crowd woulda gone crazy. It wasn't commotion...

PAULIE. I know...

NICK. This is your home! It's where you belong! What're you talkin' 'bout commotion? That doesn't make any...

PAULIE. Nicky. *(Pause.)* It's not easy bein' back. That's why I didn't come here before the game. I took the cab from the airport and I spent the whole day, before the game, after, just...wanderin'. It's gonna...it's gonna take a little time. *(Pours himself some more champagne.)*

NICK. *(Pause.)* I get my draft card tomorrow.

PAULIE. That's right. Dennis the Menace turns eighteen.

NICK. And I'm signin' up right after graduation. *(Salutes.)* Private First Class Nick Parcels. United States Marine Corps, sir!

PAULIE. Nicky. *(Pause.)* You might wanna think...more seriously than you have... about joinin' up.

NICK. *(Astonished.)* Paulie? What're you... What're you sayin'?

PAULIE. I'm sayin' that it's not a good war, Nicky.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

NICK. What do you...

PAULIE. It's not what the government's tellin' you.

NICK. Paulie? You know what Dad would do if he heard you talkin' like this?

PAULIE. Nicky...

NICK. Huh? Do you know what Dad would do?

PAULIE. I don't care what Dad would do. I'm tryin' to talk some sense to you, Nicky! Have you heard about My Lai?

NICK. My Lai? What're you talkin' 'bout, My Lai?

PAULIE. My Lai, Nicky! It's in all the papers.

NICK. Oh, well that. So there was an accident.

PAULIE. An accident?! They're talkin' maybe a few hundred civilians killed!

NICK. So what're you sayin', Paulie?

PAULIE. What am I sayin'?!

NICK. Yeah! Tell me what you're sayin'! C'mon! Tell me... *(Gus and Jeannie appear in the bedroom doorway.)*

PAULIE. I'm sayin' it's a sick war! I'm sayin' My Lai is no accident!

NICK. I can't believe you're sayin' this! I can't...

PAULIE. We're killin' civilians, Nicky! Look at me! Mothers, babies, we're slaughterin' 'em by the thousands! And for no goddamn reason! America's the enemy over there! Can't... *(Gus lets out a loud cough. Silencing the room. Slowly, he crosses to the center.)*

GUS. Well. I...think it's about time we all hit the sack. Hey? *(Rubs Paulie's hair.)* Whaddaya say, heh? It's been a long day. Been a long day for everybody.

JEANNIE. Yeah, I think with...all the excitement...

GUS. *(To Paulie)* Young man? If your grandfather, God rest his soul, ever heard...

JEANNIE. Gus...

PAULIE. Dad...

GUS. *(Explodes.)* MAY YOU ROT IN HELL IF YOU EVER SPEAK THOSE WORDS AGAIN IN MY HOUSE! *(Pause. Silence. He then collects himself. Reaches over and tousles Paulie's hair.)* I'm sorry, Jeannie. Paulie, uh...I'm sorry. Let's, uh...let's go to sleep. Heh? Let's all go to sleep. It's good to have you back. *(He turns and exits into his bed-*

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

room. Jeannie kisses Paulie and motions Nicky to bed. They exit as the lights dim, leaving Paulie alone at the couch, bathed in a soft light. A beat passes. Julie appears behind him at the door. Then, hesitantly, without him seeing, she approaches the couch. From behind, she reaches her hand down his shoulder and rests it on his chest. He turns.)

PAULIE. Julie! *(Embraces her.)* Oh man, I missed you!

JULIE. I missed you too! I missed you so much! I thought you were dead!

PAULIE. Look at me. *(Holds her face.)* God, you're so beautiful! I kept picturin' your face, every day, every second, I... *(Sees the ID bracelet.)* What...? Jewels, what's this?

JULIE. It's Nicky's. *(The door to Nicky's room opens. He steps out.)*

NICK. We should go to bed. *(Julie, awkwardly, moves away.)*

JULIE. Yeah. okay, goodnight, guys. I'm...I'm pretty tired. I'll see you tomorrow. okay? *(Exits. The two brothers stare straight into each other's eyes for a long, full beat. The lights slowly fall. Leaving them in darkness. Blackout.)*

SCENE 4

The next day, early Sunday evening, about seven o'clock. The table is set in the living room, ready for Nicky's birthday dinner. The house is dark, except for the flickering light of the TV. The sound turned down. Gus sits on the couch. A beer between his legs. An empty one on the table beside him. He stares into the tube and laughs to himself. The door opens.

GUS. Paulie, is that...? *(Jeannie enters.)*

JEANNIE. Whaddaya got a funeral goin' on here? *(Turns on the lights.)*

GUS. Where you been?

JEANNIE. *(Pause.)* I was at the library.

GUS. It's Nicky's birthday.

JEANNIE. I know it's Nicky's birthday. I got everything ready. It's just Eunice wanted us to hang up the photos in the library today. The exhibit opens Wednesday night. You're gonna come, aren't you, Gussie? Cause I'm gonna be real nervous. I got three pictures hung up. Two a' the pond and that one a' St. Joe's that you like.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

GUS. Of course, honey. Of course I'm gonna come. And I do like that one a' St. Joe's. It's...it's real pretty, it's just...I'm used to havin' you back here, you know? Just to bullshit at the end of the day. And when you weren't here...

JEANNIE. Gussie. I'm here. I was here all day gettin' things ready. Casper the Ghost did not do that table, I'm here right now.

GUS. (*Moves to her.*) Alright, I'm...I'm sorry. I love ya, sweetie.

JEANNIE. I love you too. Big lunk. (*She exits into the kitchen. Brings some more stuff out for the table.*) Julie went to get the cake.

GUS. Paulie didn't come down.

JEANNIE. Paulie...?

GUS. To the job. You heard him this mornin', I was gonna show him how to lay the new pipe. The guys wanted to see him. Johnny, Greg...

JEANNIE. Gussie, he just got back.

GUS. I know...

JEANNIE. I mean, it's like a miracle but you can't expect him to just jump back into life.

GUS. No, Jeannie, I mean, you're right, it's a beautiful thing, it's a blessing. In fact...I got a surprise for him cause I felt bad about the arguin' last night. So I got somethin' just to show him our love.

JEANNIE. Well, what is it?

GUS. You'll see, you'll see. (*Pause.*) But...you do notice that he's...that he's different? I mean...

JEANNIE. Gussie...

GUS. In his eyes, there's a whole different look.

JEANNIE. He was held prisoner, the things he's seen...

GUS. Well, that's war. You see things there...

JEANNIE. It's a different kinda war, Gussie. And you know why, cause it's a wrong war, it shouldn't...

GUS. Jeannie...

JEANNIE. ...be happenin' and that's why I don't want Nicky goin'!

GUS. Jeannie! Stop it! Dammit! Nicky's a man! It's come his time to serve his country and he'll serve willingly! Like his brother, like his father and like his grandfather before him! (*She stares. Then turns to exit.*) Come here. (*He grabs her. She struggles.*) Where you goin'?

JEANNIE. I'm goin' out to the garden.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

GUS. The garden? For what?

JEANNIE. To get some parsley, I'm... *(He pulls her close, kisses her violently.)* Gussie! Gussie, stop it! *(She pushes him away. Pause.)* I don't know what's gotten into you, Gus Parcels.

GUS. What's gotten into me? What do you think...

JEANNIE. I don't know. I really... *(The door opens slightly. It's Paulie. He watches as Gussie moves to her again.)*

GUS. A man wants his woman, that's what's gotten into me. It's a natural...

JEANNIE. *(Pushes him away.)* But a man should want his woman with tenderness, Gussie. *(Pause.)* You used to have such a tenderness about you. But lately...it's been force. It hasn't been love, what we've done. Because that tenderness you used to have...it's slippin' away. *(She turns and exits out to the garden.)*

GUS. Jeannie! Jeannie, come... *(Sees Paulie.)*

PAULIE. What's a' matter, Dad?

GUS. *(Confused.)* I gotta...I gotta wash up.

PAULIE. Where is Nicky? I was lookin' for him.

GUS. He's out, uh, gettin' his draft card. Uh.. You didn't make it down, huh? I guess, seein' the old friends, what'd you stop by the school, heh? See Coach Noonan?

PAULIE. No, I, I just kinda walked. Seein' some a' the old haunts.

GUS. Yeah. No, I...I know what... Well, lemme just wash up, heh? Your ol' man'll take a shower, get this stink off him. The work stink, heh? *(Laughs.)* Yeah. *(Squeezes his shoulder. Then exits into his room. The stage right door opens. It's Julie, holding Nicky's birthday cake. She stops. Nervous.)*

JULIE. It's...it's Nicky's cake. *(She moves to the kitchen. Puts it in fridge.)*

PAULIE. Oh. Hey, it looks nice. Where'd you get it, DeLanzo's?

JULIE. Yeah. *(Comes back out.)* I dropped by. This morning.

PAULIE. Yeah, I didn't fall out till about five. Sleepin's...not as easy as it used to be.

JULIE. Yeah.

PAULIE. *(Nervous.)* Jewels, I wanted...to talk to you this morning.

JULIE. Yeah?

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

PAULIE. The only thing...that got me through my stay...was takin' your picture outta my wallet...

JULIE. Oh Paulie...

PAULIE. And just starin' real hard, pretendin' it was you in the flesh and I'd press it to me...

JULIE. (*Torn.*) Paulie, we thought you were gone. Don't you see?

PAULIE. No, I do. I do. I do see that. Now...are you...are you seein' Nicky?

JULIE. A little bit. In some ways cause...it was like bein' with you again.

PAULIE. You got his ID.

JULIE. He gave it to me last night. Right before you came. I felt confused but... things were so happy but...I didn't expect this.

PAULIE. Oh man, this is tough. (*Pause.*) I went walkin' today. I sat down at Memorial, beneath the willows there? I spent half the day just lyin' there, feelin' the wind sweep right through me and fillin' up the willows. Like there was nothin' else nowhere in the world, no pain, no murder, just the wind curlin' through me and bringin' the willows to life. But...I got this horrible feeling...that it wasn't real, know what I mean?

JULIE. I think so.

PAULIE. As a kid it was the only thing real. But now, it's almost phony. And then... Oh man, this was so weird.

JULIE. What? What happened?

PAULIE. Around mid-afternoon, when the thunder came I was beneath the willows. And I'd almost convinced myself that I was home. That I could let...what I'd seen slip away. But when I heard that thunder...God, I'm checkin' the sky for anything comin' in! I'm checkin' my legs to make sure they weren't blown away! And then I just got the hell outta there. And you know where I ran to?

JULIE. Where?

PAULIE. To Ebbets Hill. Remember?

JULIE. Yeah. Oh God.

PAULIE. The last night before I went overseas. I just sat on that hill. And I thought about you.

JULIE. That was the only time for me, Paulie.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

PAULIE. I thought about...how the moonlight...poured itself down on your flesh like it was honey.

JULIE. Paulie, you were so sweet. You were so tender that night. *(The front door, stage right, opens slightly. It's Nick. He stops. Watches.)*

PAULIE. Jewels. The story...I told everybody last night? About bein' taken prisoner?

JULIE. Paulie. I don't care what happened. I'm just so happy you're alive and I'm so happy you're back. *(They fall into a deep kiss. Nick closes the door, then opens it loudly and slowly to announce his entrance. Paulie and Julie split apart.)*

PAULIE. I was lookin' for you, Nick.

NICK. *(Quick. Uncomfortable.)* Got my draft card.

PAULIE. I went by the courts, I thought...

NICK. Mom wants to see you outside, Paulie.

PAULIE. Oh? She...

NICK. She wants you to help her or somethin'. I don't know.

PAULIE. Oh. Okay. She's...

NICK. Yeah. She's...in the garden. *(Paulie exits out through the kitchen door. Nick stares at Julie. She slips off her ID. Holds it out to Nicky nervously.)*

JULIE. Nicky? I can't. You understand, right? Please, Nicky? I didn't expect any a' this. You understand, right? Nicky... *(Nicky grabs the ID from her hand. Stares. Gus enters holding a wooden box.)*

GUS. Where is he? There you are. Didja get it? Huh?

NICK. *(Torn.)* Did I get it? Oh. Yeah. Here it is. *(Pulls out draft card.)*

GUS. Well, will you look at that? *(Takes the card. Jeannie enters from kitchen.)*

JEANNIE. Alright, birthday boy! Let's go! Everybody to the table! *(Gives Nicky a kiss.)* You sit at the head a' the table, my little man. *(Paulie walks in with a bowl of parsley.)*

GUS. *(Holds up card.)* Paulie, you like it? Today, Nicky becomes a man, huh? *(They seat themselves.)* And I got somethin' else here.

JEANNIE. Gus...

GUS. *(Overly excited.)* For my soldiers, heh?

JEANNIE. Why don't we...?

GUS. For my two little soldiers. Yeah...

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

JEANNIE. Why don't we say a prayer?

GUS. (*Explodes.*) HOLD ON! ONE SECOND, IF YOU WILL!

PAULIE. (*Tense pause.*) Dad, you...you don't have to yell.

GUS. I'm...I'm sorry. I'm sorry, sweetie. I'm all excited.

JULIE. I think everybody's excited.

GUS. Yeah. But this is...this is for you, Nicky. (*Opens a small box. Gives him a war medal.*) That's your grandfather's. God rest his soul. Not that you won't be gettin' your own collection. Cause one a' you boys... I mean, Christ, once they hear 'bout Paulie bustin' outta that prison...

PAULIE. Dad, I'm not gettin' a Medal of Honor. I mean, it's not even worth talkin' about.

GUS. (*Hurt.*) Well...you never know. But this one's for you, Paulie. You remember this? Your ol' man's Bronze Star. (*Puts it on him. Then with genuine emotion.*) This is...to welcome you back, huh? To welcome...my Paulie back. And...congratulations to my Nicky on becomin' a man.

JULIE. Here, here.

JEANNIE. Here, here. (*They raise their glasses and toast.*) Okay. Prayer time. Paulie? You wanna lead?

PAULIE. (*Pause.*) Yeah. Uh. Thank you, Lord...for...helping me...make it home. Home with the ones...the ones that...I'll love forever. Amen. (*All say amen.*)

GUS. Here, here.

JULIE. So, did anyone read the papers today?

GUS. The papers? Well, yeah, I read the comics.

JULIE. The investigator's dug up the gravesite at My Lai. They found a couple a' hundred bodies.

GUS. Hey. Kids. This is...all part a' war.

PAULIE. It's not...part a' war, Dad. That's the problem.

GUS. Hey! It's a tragic thing but the enemy has to be killed.

JEANNIE. It wasn't the enemy, Gus.

JULIE. It was women and children they dug up, Gussie. Civilians. They're gonna bring the lieutenant to trial.

JEANNIE. It's a sick war.

GUS. Jeannie...

JEANNIE. I'm sorry, it's a sick war!

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

JULIE. There's gonna be a demonstration down at Memorial Field.

NICK. Oh Christ. Not this stuff again.

PAULIE. Nicky?

GUS. You wanna hear my belief, heh? My belief is you love it or you leave it.

PAULIE. How about if you love it...

GUS. Love it or leave it!

PAULIE. That's insane, Dad!

NICK. Paulie!

PAULIE. How about if you love it and you wanna change it?!

NICK. Paulie!

PAULIE. What?

NICK. Don't talk to Dad like that!

JEANNIE. Alright! Boys!

PAULIE. Well, I'm gonna go to this demonstration.

GUS. (*Shocked.*) Paulie? What're you sayin'?

JULIE. I'm gonna go too.

NICK. Oh please.

GUS. Paulie? What're you...?

JEANNIE. Alright! Enough!

GUS. I know you're confused...

JEANNIE. Gussie!

GUS. But this is nonsense! This...

JEANNIE. Gussie! Stop it. No more politics, This is Nicky's birthday, We got Paulie here who's back after we thought we lost him! We got lotsa reasons to celebrate! Now let's settle down!

JULIE. I agree.

GUS. Your mother's right. (*Jeannie gives Gus a bewildered expression.*) What?

JEANNIE. (*Laughs.*) First time that popped outta your mouth in about twenty years.

GUS. No, it's...

JEANNIE. Feel like I witnessed a miracle. Like Jesus just showed up with a pizza.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

GUS. Hardy-har-har-har and feathers on top. Alright. We got lotsa presents for Nicky. And there might even be one for Paulie too. Heh? Whaddaya say, Pal?

PAULIE. A present for me?

GUS. Yeah. Well, you know, I was figurin', pretty soon, you might want to...get back to a little work, right? Come by the job...

JEANNIE. Gussie, he just got back. He doesn't have to start thinkin'...

GUS. I'm not sayin' he's gotta do it right now! But we all know Paulie. Mr. Serious Minded. I mean he's gonna have to start thinkin' 'bout a career...

PAULIE. Dad. I appreciate it. But right now, I just wanna relax for a bit, you know? And then, I'm not sure what I'm gonna do.

GUS. Well, I got somethin' for you that might help you decide.

PAULIE. Well, I mean, I don't even know if I'm gonna be stayin' around.

GUS. You're not...? You're not gonna stay around? Paulie...?

JEANNIE. Let him finish, Gussie.

PAULIE. Well, I was thinkin' a' maybe travelin' a bit.

GUS. But...

PAULIE. Then, maybe, goin' to college. Maybe Law School eventually.

JEANNIE. Well, I'm happy to hear that.

GUS. But Paulie...

JEANNIE. We got Grandpa's money. We can finally put it to good use.

GUS. Paulie, there's three generations a' Parcels in this town...

PAULIE. I know that, Dad.

GUS. The plan was that you'd take over. You and then Nicky.

PAULIE. Dad, I know. It's just...

GUS. I took over from your grandfather. A man builds something, all those years of sweat n' toil...

JEANNIE. Gussie...

GUS. ...he does not want to see it go to waste like a rake left out in the rain!

JEANNIE. Gussie! Stop it! Let's not...

GUS. (*Explodes.*) HOLD ON! ONE SECOND PLEASE! Let me just finish here. (*To Paulie.*) All I'm sayin' is, the seventies, it's gonna be blue collar money. The Parcels, we are not white collar...

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

JEANNIE. If Paulie wants to go to college...

GUS. (*Focused on Paulie.*) We are of the earth, you understand that?

JEANNIE. If he wants to go to college...

GUS. We are hard working, real people of the soil!

PAULIE. Alright, Dad! I understand that!

GUS. Come here. (*Gus gets up. Goes to the window.*) Come here, Paulie, come here.

JEANNIE. Gussie...

GUS. Hold on, Jeannie. Please. (*Paulie gets up. Goes to window.*) What do you see?

PAULIE. What do I...

GUS. Out there, next to the shed, what do you see there?

PAULIE. It's a truck. (*Nick and Jeannie go to window.*)

GUS. Yeah. It's a new truck. And you see what's written on the side there?

PAULIE. (*Reads.*) Paul Parcels, General Contractor.

GUS. A brand new, shiny, red truck. Just like the fire trucks when you were kids, you n' Nicky...

NICK. (*Shocked.*) Dad...

GUS. Remember that? July fourth? They'd let you n' Nicky ride in the fire trucks? You guys'd be wavin' the flag, heh? And the lessons I told you, always respect the flag. Why? Because the flag...Nicky! Listen up! Because the flag represents the sweat and toil...and most importantly, the love...of your grandparents and your parents to give you the best life possible. Always...respect the flag.

NICK. Dad, I asked you...

GUS. Hold on, Nicky. (*To Paulie*) I had Billy McCaffrey drop off the truck a few minutes ago. So whenever you're ready, Paulie, whenever you're ready to work, it's yours.

NICK. Dad? You told me...

GUS. Nicky, please.

NICK. ...you didn't have enough...

GUS. Nicky! Dammit! (*Pause.*) I'm sorry, Nick. One second. (*To Paulie.*) This Wednesday, just come on down. Do me a favor. Take the truck. Come on down. The guys'd love to see you.

PAULIE. (*Pause.*) Okay, Dad. I'll see.

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

GUS. That's my Paulie. *(Puts his arm around him. Leads him back to table.)* It'll be good for you. Get some a' this nonsense outta your head.

JEANNIE. How much did it cost?

GUS. Jeannie? Don't...

JEANNIE. How much did the truck cost?

GUS. It cost six grand, alright? Damn truck...

JEANNIE. Six...? That was Grandpa Mike's money!

GUS. I know it...

JEANNIE. That was their college money! If one a' the boys wanted...

GUS. Jeannie! Goddammit! It's an investment!

PAULIE. Dad! Take it easy!

GUS. Don't tell me what...

PAULIE. *(Peacemaker.)* Listen. Why don't... Mom, why don't you and Julie... *(Motions into kitchen, referring to the birthday cake.)* Everything's alright. Don't worry, we'll take care a' the whole thing. Why don't you guys... *(Motions into kitchen.)* Alright?

JULIE. Yeah. C'mon, Jeannie. *(Pause. Jeannie hesitates. Then exits into kitchen, followed by Julie.)*

PAULIE. Alright, guys. C'mon. Let's just relax. It's Nicky's birthday. Let's just relax and sit here and watch Nicky enter puberty. *(Sits.)* Go ahead, Nick. Enter puberty. *(Pause.)* Grow new, kinky hair. Purchase adult magazines. Feel shy at dances. Whatever you want.

NICK. *(To Gus.)* You said you didn't have enough money.

GUS. Nicky...

NICK. For me, you didn't...

GUS. Dammit, Nicky! Your brother just got back! Why all the squabblin'? *(Nicky races into his room.)* Oh Christ. *(Nicky comes out with two sets of boxing gloves. Tosses one to Paulie.)*

NICK. Get up.

GUS. There you go!

NICK. Get up.

PAULIE. Nicky. I don't want to fight you.

GUS. Paulie! C'mon! It's like the old days! *(Paulie, hesitantly, puts on the gloves.)* There you go. But you go easy on him, you hear me? Cause Nicky...he ain't got the frame you got. You got your grandfather's frame. My frame. Nicky, he's more like your mother. *(They start fighting.)*

NEW TRUCK FOR PAULIE

Paulie throws a few soft punches. Nicky, very contained, very serious, blocks them.)

PAULIE. Whoaa. Little quicker than you used to be.

GUS. Keep your guard up. That's right. You go easy on him, Paulie. *(Paulie fakes left. Scores with a soft right to Nicky's chin.)* There you go. That's my Paulie. *(Paulie lands a soft jab.)* There you are. It's like the old days, kid. *(Nicky connects with a stirring left jab. Paulie is shaken.)* Hey! Nicky! Take it easy! *(Nicky connects with another jab. Paulie's knees are wobbly. Nicky connects again, then starts pummeling Paulie. Gus leaps up.)* Hey, Nicky! Are you crazy?! What're you doin'?! *(We hear from within the kitchen, Jeannie and Julie singing "Happy Birthday." Nicky goes after Paulie again.)* Hey! What're you doin'?! *(Gus grabs Nicky just as Jeannie and Julie enter from the kitchen on the line, "Happy Birthday, Dear Nicky", holding the lit cake. He slaps him hard twice in the face as the singing stops.)* Who do you think you are?! *(Nicky's face, registering the shock of being slapped by his father, collapses. He hurls off the gloves and storms out of the house. Gus runs to the door.)*

GUS. Hey, Nicky! Nicky! *(The lights shoot to black.)*

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