

*(Darkness. **THE PRELUDE.** In the black, a voice sings – no words, but a strong and clear note. Other voices join in, weaving a tapestry of minor-key harmony. The voices are plaintive and perhaps mournful, reminiscent of a funeral mass or otherworldly plea. The voices get stronger in the darkness until the space rings with sound. Then abrupt silence.*

Lights up on JERRY, MRS. HARRIS, KATE and MIKE. They are in a strange tableau. JERRY and MRS. HARRIS are in one world, MIKE and KATE are in another. The two groups alternate taking focus during this exchange.)

MRS. HARRIS

Tell me about your uncle Carl.

JERRY

Okay.

(KATE and MIKE take focus. KATE is a devastated woman.)

KATE

I don't know what to say.

MIKE

I didn't say I'd do it. I just said, he asked me.

KATE

Did you tell him no?

(Back to JERRY.)

JERRY

He wasn't a perfect man. Sometimes when I think about him, I get angry. But he loved me. I know that.

KATE

Whose side are you on?

MIKE

I'm not on a side, there are no sides.

KATE

Yes, there are, Mike. There is my side, there is your son's side, and there is Jerry's side.

JERRY

When he died, I was real upset. But Mike was there.

KATE

Mike.

MIKE

It's not that easy. He's my brother.

KATE

He's your son.

MIKE

He's got nobody else in his life.

KATE

But you do. And if you stand by him, you'll be betraying us.

(The tableau dissolves, and the stage begins the transition into the next scene. JERRY ties on an apron.)

MRS. HARRIS

Why did they move in with you?

JERRY

Money problems. My brother doesn't like to discuss it.

(Lights fully shift as the transition completes. Time has fractured; now we are in the past. MIKE and KATE drink beer, and lounge on patio furniture. They are giddy and laughing. JERRY stands. He wears an apron, a chef's hat, and a potholder that looks like a lobster claw.)

JERRY

Who wants hot dogs?

MIKE

You're a dork. Take off the hat!

KATE

Keep the hat! I love the hat.

JERRY

A toast! To my stupid brother, his gorgeous wife –

(KATE cheers.)

JERRY (CONT.)

- and my beautiful nephew, who looks just like me.

MIKE

It's a tragedy. A tragedy.

KATE

(Calling.)

Andy! Dinner!

JERRY

To my long-lost brother, for finally moving back home where he belongs. I love you, and I'm thrilled to be living under the same roof again, even though I know I'll live to regret it.

KATE

Is that him across the street?

JERRY

I think he's upstairs.

(Kate rises and moves to exit.)

JERRY (CONT.)

Where are you going? I have hot dogs!

KATE

I am going to get my child and bring him down to dinner like the good mother that I am, and then I will pass out on the bed, like the good drunk that I am. Continue your bonding.

JERRY

No, stay! I'll get him.

KATE

No, no. Bond.

(Kate exits. Beat.)

MIKE

He adores you. I don't know why.

JERRY

I'm the fun uncle.

(Beat.)

JERRY (CONT.)

I have something for you.

MIKE

A gift?

JERRY

No. Just something.

(JERRY pulls out what looks like a scrapbook or a photo album.)

MIKE

Did you dig this up?

JERRY

I got them appraised.

MIKE

Why didn't you wait for me? We were supposed to do it together.

JERRY

You were gone. It was now or never. I cut down the tree.

MIKE

You cut down the tree? *(He whirls around, and stares off.)* Holy shit. Why did you do that?

JERRY

I like to spy on the neighbors. Don't be mad at me, Craig did it.

MIKE

My boss Craig?

JERRY

Something about a blight or something. Anyway, you should be happy. I dug everything up before he came.

MIKE

(Looking at his album.)

My baseball cards...Thanks.

JERRY

I got them appraised.

MIKE

You're kidding. How much? *(Beat.)* A thousand? Five thousand?

JERRY

Thirty-three fifty.

MIKE

Thirty-three dollars?

JERRY

And fifty cents.

MIKE

That's an outrage. They're worth way more than that.

JERRY

Nuh, uh.

MIKE

Sentimental value. Makes 'em worth millions.

JERRY

Yeah, that's why you buried them in the yard.

MIKE

For posterity! For the time capsule.

JERRY

Anyway. I got 'em all spruced up for ya.

MIKE

Wow. Thanks, man. What a gift. Wait 'til I show Andy.

JERRY

Is he a baseball fan?

MIKE

He doesn't understand the subtleties of the game like his old man.

JERRY

Old man.

MIKE

Shut up.

JERRY

You've changed.

MIKE

Naw. You think so?

JERRY

You're...nicer.

MIKE

I was always nice.

JERRY

Old man.

MIKE

That's it.

(They move to wrestle, but then shift into dancing as the music starts – a swingy, early jazz melody.)

*Lights shift. MIKE and JERRY sing **LOWER A BRANCH** – an up tempo song.)*

MIKE

**WHEN I LEFT HERE I THOUGHT I'D BEGUN
I TOOK MY LUGGAGE, GOT AWAY FROM EVERYONE
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT LIFE WAS SO HARD WON
I WAS FLOODED, I WAS FLOODED, I CRIED**

**LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME MY BROTHER
COME AND HELP ME OUT
AN AVALANCHE HAS HIT ME BROTHER**

MIKE (CONT.)

COME AND DIG ME OUT
NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ME LIKE MY BROTHER
LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME, LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME

JERRY

WHEN YOU LEFT HERE, I WAS ON MY OWN
I WAS HAPPY NOT TO HAVE A CHAPERONE
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT I WOULD FEEL SO ALONE
I WAS FLOODED, I WAS FLOODED, I CRIED

LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME MY BROTHER
I'M DROWNING OVER HERE
AN AVALANCHE HAS HIT ME BROTHER
I'M FIGHTING MY WAY CLEAR
NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ME LIKE MY BROTHER
LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME, LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME

MIKE AND JERRY

WE ARE DIFFERENT, WE ARE JUST THE SAME
WE'RE CONNECTED BY MORE THAN JUST A NAME

JERRY

IF YOU HURT YOURSELF

MIKE

YOU'LL FEEL MY PAIN

MIKE AND JERRY

IF YOU'RE FLOODED, IF I'M FLOODED I'LL CRY

LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME MY BROTHER
COME AND HELP ME OUT
AN AVALANCHE HAS HIT ME BROTHER
COME AND DIG ME OUT
NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ME LIKE MY BROTHER
LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME, LOWER A BRANCH FOR ME

(Lights. Time shift. MIKE and KATE.)

KATE

We never should have come here.

MIKE

Are you blaming me? Don't *blame* me, Kate. I refuse to be held responsible. I refuse to take responsibility for -

KATE

Yes, Mike, I know. You've said it.

*(Shift. The sound of soft calliope music. This music is **CLOWNY'S THEME**. JERRY is at home, at his computer.)*

JERRY

Go to web site. Enter chat room.

(CLOWNY appears. A gentle, friendly man, he is dressed mildly, in trousers and a cardigan. Only his red ball nose reveals that he is, in fact, a clown. He has brightly colored juggling balls, which he juggles when he feels like it.)

CLOWNY

Are you a cop?

JERRY

No.

CLOWNY

Are you a teenager?

JERRY

No.

CLOWNY

Are you a cop pretending to be a teenager? A teenager pretending to be a cop? A concerned parent? A watchdog?

JERRY

I'm just visiting.

CLOWNY

Kittens or puppies?

JERRY

I don't understand.

CLOWNY

Which do you prefer?

JERRY

Neither.

You're new. CLOWNY

(CLOWNY'S THEME ends.)

No, I'm not. JERRY

I can always tell. You're too nervous. CLOWNY

Maybe I am a cop. JERRY

You're too nervous to be a cop. I can spot a cop in thirty seconds. CLOWNY

Then why did you ask me, if you're so smart? JERRY

I like to razz the newbies. CLOWNY

This was a mistake. JERRY

Let me give you some advice. CLOWNY First off, never buy anything. Pictures, videos, all of that is hugely monitored by the cops. Plus, most of the good hard-core suppliers got busted in the early eighties. Not much on the marketplace worth the risk.

I'm not looking for porn. JERRY

You're much better off to trade items with other collectors. Or use your imagination. CLOWNY Buy some little girls' panties at a department store. There's no law against it. Just say they're for your niece, or your daughter. Seriously, kittens or puppies?

What? JERRY

CLOWNY

Girls or boys? Which do you want?

(Beat.)

JERRY

Boys.

CLOWNY

Check this out. Send file 'Cambodia pics.'

JERRY

What is that?

CLOWNY

Open it. It's not illegal.

JERRY

(Opens the file. It's shocking, and titillating.)

Oh...

CLOWNY

Can you believe those angels are sixteen? Not a hair on 'em, and completely stunted, growth-wise. They could easily pass for twelve. Maybe even eleven.

JERRY

Where did you get these?

CLOWNY

Cambodia. On my vacation. Totally legal. Amazing trip. Plus, I got in some golf. What's your name?

JERRY

Jerry.

CLOWNY

Don't use your real name. So, you like puppies, eh? I respect that. Personally, I'm a man who likes the girls. I like those little undershirts they wear. Who's the little boy keeping you up at night?

JERRY

I don't know what you're talking about.

CLOWNY

Is he cute? Is he young? Does he have a sister?