

MEASURE of a MAN  
*(a drama in two acts.)*

by

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## PROLOGUE

*(Light comes up on bar. JOHN is seated alone, an empty pint and shot glass in front of him. He sits, staring. Offstage voices can be heard quietly, snatches of dialogue from later in the play. Voices speaking simultaneously, getting louder, laughing, talking until one voice can be heard above all others. It is PETER, "I never meant to hurt anyone, John." JOHN starts, looking around, pulled from his deep reverie. JOHN looks down the bar and nods his head, getting the bartender's attention. He passes his fingers over the empty glasses indicating he would like another beer and a shot. He sits alone, waiting, as light fades.)*

## ACT ONE

*(Tight spot comes up on WILLIAM.)*

## WILLIAM

I actually had to get a doctor's note for being out of work. What the fuck is that, I'm 46 years old and they asked for a doctor's note? I was only out for two days for Christ's sake...I felt like a little kid being called to the principal's office. I'm supposed to be a supervisor over there, but this bastard, that friggin' Brett Marks. Brett, what the hell kind of name is that, like a talk show host or soap opera actor...anyway, he's like twelve and they made him manager over me, only gave me the title supervisor. And Brett loves to hold that over my head. So when I go in he tells me I have too many absences and any future ones will have to be "accompanied by a doctor's written report." A fucking doctor's note. So I went to my nephew's, he's twenty-one, knows all about computers and shit...he got online, got a health care logo from my insurance company, copied, pasted, wrote up a great note. He had it all, address, telephone, fax number...actually looked up all the doctor's names at that facility, picked a Chinese name, thought it sounded more official that way...made a line for the doctor's signature, my nephew did a great "doctor scribble," I mean nobody can read what doctor's write anyway...and there's Brett, looking it over, looking up at me then back at the note. Like I was lying. Can you believe that shit? Little weasel. Who the hell is he? I can drink him under the table any day.

*(light widens to reveal JOHN, PETER and BEN seated at the bar. DEBBIE, who is standing behind the bar, is putting up four filled shot glasses.)*

## DEBBIE

Wouldn't it have been easier to just go to work, William?

## PETER

No see, you missed the point, Debbie, the word "work" is in that statement and everyone knows William doesn't want to work.

## WILLIAM

Fuck you, Peter. I work harder than any of you. Sitting around in your offices while I'm driving across the friggin' state.

## JOHN

Yeah, you work harder than anyone to get out of work.

## BEN

Maybe he should run his own business...tips on screwing the system.

JOHN

He's been doin' that since we've known him.

BEN

That's all he's been screwing.

WILLIAM

When was the last time you got laid, Ben?

DEBBIE

If this is where the conversation is going, gentlemen, much as I love your company, I have other customers.

*(DEBBIE exits.)*

BEN

Let's just say...it's a distant memory.

WILLIAM

Pam not putting out?

BEN

Is Katy?

WILLIAM

I do all right. She's good to me.

PETER

If she's so good, why do you jump every time your phone rings?

JOHN

Run outside to answer it, so she doesn't know where you are.

BEN

She knows where he is. I think she just likes to hear him make up a story on the spot.

WILLIAM

I tell her I'm on the road.

*(light rises on KATY.)*

KATY

You're lying William.

Doing a job. WILLIAM

You're not on the road. KATY

Making a delivery. WILLIAM

Must be hard making a delivery when your truck is parked outside the Last Call. KATY

Picking something up from another store. WILLIAM

I just drove by and there's your truck, sitting right in front, like they saved a spot just for you. KATY

She believes whatever I tell her. WILLIAM

You must really think I'm stupid. KATY

I don't have to explain myself to anyone. WILLIAM

I'm not putting up with this William. KATY

I can do whatever I want. WILLIAM

I want you home in half an hour. KATY

*(light fades on KATY.)*

As long as I keep bringing home the money, she doesn't say a word to me. WILLIAM

Bullshit. JOHN

BEN

We know who runs that house.

PETER

As soon as she calls, you down your beer and rush out of here.

BEN

Whipped.

WILLIAM

Me whipped, Ben? At least Pam doesn't make me sleep on the couch.

PETER

Or in John's basement room.

BEN

I'm only on the couch when I get home late, don't want to wake Pam up. Besides, I only had to use John's spare room once...

JOHN

Twice.

BEN

Because I was too tired to make it home.

PETER

Tired? Don't you mean drunk?

WILLIAM

Anyway Peter, I wouldn't talk. You seem to spend more time down there than anyone.

PETER

That's because I live the furthest. I can't be driving after I've had a few. Those days are over. Get caught now...

WILLIAM

Don't you mean, again?

PETER

How many DUI's you have?

WILLIAM

Two.

BEN

The stock answer. Two.

JOHN

*(JOHN stands and speaks in an exaggerated drunken slur as he pretends to stumble.)*

I swear to God, officer, I only had two...

PETER

I still tell Rachel I only had two when I go out.

WILLIAM

She doesn't believe that does she?

PETER

Of course not. Just kind of a joke between us.

JOHN

I bet she's not laughing when you stumble home.

PETER

By the time I get home, she's usually in bed.

BEN

Speaking of that, I should probably be going.

PETER

What?

JOHN

Why? Have another shot.

BEN

I can't Pam's been on my back, saying I've been drinking too much lately.

WILLIAM

Told you...whipped.

PETER

When did you ever not drink too much?

BEN

Every now and then she starts and I slow down, give the liver a rest...and I'll tell you boys, it feels good to stop once in a while.

JOHN

If I gave my liver a rest I think my body would go into shock.

WILLIAM

Bunch of pussies. I can drink any of you under the table.

JOHN

The measure of a man?

WILLIAM

What?

JOHN

Every time you get mad about something or mad at someone you say you can drink them under the table.

WILLIAM

So? I can.

PETER

But what does that have to do with anything? Like that Brett you're always complaining about. Every time he pisses you off...

BEN

Which is always...

PETER

You say you can drink him under the table.

WILLIAM

Yeah?

PETER

Yeah...and?

WILLIAM

I don't get your point.

PETER

You think just because you can drink someone under the table makes you better than them?

WILLIAM

Of course. I can out drink, out fuck and stay up longer than anyone I know.

JOHN

I'm not sure that's something you should be bragging about.

WILLIAM

Why not? It's a man's duty...to have fun.

*(phone rings.)*

WILLIAM

Shit.

*(WILLIAM falls all over himself to get the phone from his pocket and answer it quickly.)*

Hello.

JOHN

Run William, run...

PETER

He aint gonna be havin' fun no more...

*(light fades on bar as it rises on a love seat. BEN stands and crosses to love seat, joining PAM already seated.)*

PAM

You're home early.

BEN

Couldn't take any more of William's bullshit.

PAM

You look tired, Ben.

BEN

Where are the boys?

PAM

Out, never see them anymore. Running from one thing to another. Nobody's ever home anymore.

BEN

How was work?

PAM

Same. State-wide academic testing so the kids are a bit nervous, makes for a long day. You?

BEN

Getting too old for this.

PAM

You're only forty-eight.

BEN

1 | Measure of a Man  
1 |

Some days I feel like a hundred.

PAM

Want a drink?

BEN

You having one?

*(light comes up on bar.)*

WILLIAM

Basically there are four kinds of drinkers.

PAM

Does that matter?

WILLIAM

You got your regular drinkers. Have a few here and there...

BEN

Sometimes it does.

WILLIAM

Then you got your heavy drinkers, drink every day.

PAM

Well it shouldn't.

WILLIAM

Then there are your alcoholics, who need it.

PAM

I never told you what to do.

WILLIAM

On top of the alcoholics are the out and out drunks...

PAM

You make the drinks, I'll get us something to eat.

*(light fades on love seat as PAM exits. BEN crosses to bar.)*

WILLIAM

They're the ones going to be homeless or living in a shelter...maybe even dead from it.

JOHN

Where do you fall in that line up?

WILLIAM

Me? I'm a professional...can drink all day and night and it never affects me.

BEN

Are you shitting me? Never affects him, he says. What about your broken nose?

WILLIAM

That was years ago...

PETER

You didn't even remember getting into a fight you were so wasted.

WILLIAM

I've perfected my craft since then.

JOHN

If drinking was an Olympic sport, we'd all be gold medalists...

WILLIAM

Silver. I'd be gold.

PETER

Oh that's right, under the table.

WILLIAM

And don't you forget it.

BEN

So where do we fit in?

WILLIAM

We're heavy drinkers.

JOHN

Not alcoholics?

WILLIAM

Maybe Peter.

PETER

I'm not an alcoholic you asshole.

WILLIAM

I didn't say you were, I should have said incipient alcoholic, we all are, but of all of us, you probably need it the most.

JOHN

Incipient? Where'd you get that word?

BEN

Must be all those talk shows he watched while he was out of work.

PETER

Who are you to say anything anyway, you drink as much as any of us.

JOHN / BEN

More.

PETER

Under the table, remember?

WILLIAM

That's because I want to, Peter, you have to.

BEN

What about me, or John?

WILLIAM

Heavy drinkers.

GINA

John, come in here a minute if you're not busy.

*(light dims on bar as it rises on a small desk. GINA is seated at the desk, looking at a laptop. JOHN crosses to her, puts his hands on her shoulders and kisses the top of her head.)*

JOHN

What?

GINA

Don't get mad, I thought this might be fun.

JOHN

Not another bedroom quiz.

GINA

I think you'll find this one interesting.

JOHN

Why, what is it?

GINA

A drinking quiz.

JOHN

Jesus, Gina.

GINA

Don't be a baby.

JOHN

I hate these quizzes.

GINA

Too bad...Alcohol Screening...Am I an Alcoholic...

JOHN

Do we really have to do this?

GINA

It'll only take a minute. Do you sometimes drink beer, wine, or other alcoholic beverages?

*(she clicks and types as she goes along.)*

Yes. Age...48. Gender...Male. Zip Code...

JOHN

What the hell do they need that for?

GINA

Tracking purposes for data collection. Don't worry, they won't know it's you.

*(she types in zip code.)*

In the past month what is the largest number of drinks you have had in one day?

*(she clicks.)*

JOHN

Don't put that.

GINA

Why, is it more?

JOHN

No, but just put two...

GINA

Two my ass. Okay we'll compromise at four, but I know for a fact that one day you had at least...

JOHN

All right, four, but no more.

*(she clicks.)*

GINA

On average, how many days a week do you have an alcoholic drink. Ha, drink? Shouldn't that be plural?

*(she clicks.)*

JOHN

I don't drink every day.

*(she shoots him a "look," JOHN concedes.)*

All right, seven.

GINA

No point in lying. On a typical drinking day how many drinks do you have?

JOHN

Two.

GINA

Four.

*(she clicks.)*

Okay, wait for results...

JOHN

Oh shit.

GINA

Your drinking is likely harmful to your health based on the amount you say you consume. Ha, you say? You'd be a tee-totaler if I left the answers up to you...Only 10 % of the adult male population and 6 % of the general population drinks more than you do...

JOHN

Jesus, I don't know if that makes me want to quit drinking or mix one.

*(light fades on desk as it rises on bar. JOHN crosses back to join the others, PETER is obviously very drunk practically swaying on the bar stool.)*

WILLIAM

Like I was saying, we're heavy drinkers.

PETER

You're so full of shit, William.

WILLIAM

What? It's true, we all drink too much...ask Rachel, Peter, I bet she'd tell you.

JOHN

He's not wrong.

WILLIAM

And I'm not saying it's a bad thing, we could be doing other things, drugs...running around.

PETER

Both of which you do.

WILLIAM

So I smoke a little weed, that's not drugs. And as for running around, well...what do you call, "running around?" Not like I'm out there getting laid every night.

BEN

I know what Katy would call it.

PETER

If she ever finds out, you'll be a permanent guest in John's basement.

WILLIAM

Have to evict you first, Peter, make room for the rest of us.

PETER

You know William, you keep talking but you never have anything to say.

WILLIAM

Oh Jesus, he's in one of those moods.

*(PETER struggles to get to his feet.)*

PETER

I'll show you a mood...

WILLIAM

You better sit him down, John, before he falls down.

BEN

Come on guys, huh...we have to go through this again? Why can't you two get along?

WILLIAM

Because Peter always *thinks* he's right and I know I am.

PETER

Always shooting off his mouth. Fucking alcoholic my ass...

*(they all drink as light dims on bar. PETER rises and crosses the stage, swaying. He stops and falls to a sitting position. After a moment, he falls to the ground, passed out. Light rises on RACHEL, wearing a bath robe, dialing her phone. JOHN'S phone rings, he steps out of the dim light of the bar and into a spot of his own as he answers his phone.)*

JOHN

Hello.

RACHEL

John, it's Rachel. I'm sorry to call so late, but Peter's not home. Is he staying with you? Not that I care, I just want to know he's safe.

JOHN

No, Rachel, he's not. I would have called you.

RACHEL

Was he with you tonight, did you see him?

JOHN

Yeah, we were up The Last Call, but I left a while ago, he was still there...

RACHEL

I called up there but they must be closed. There was no answer.

JOHN

Maybe he stopped for a coffee or a sandwich, he likes that place in the square.

RACHEL

I called his phone but he's not answering.

JOHN

I'll go look for him.

RACHEL

Would you John...

JOHN

Of course. I'll take him back here.

RACHEL

How drunk was he?

JOHN

Don't worry Rachel, I'll call you when I find him.

RACHEL

Hopefully alive.

*(light fades on RACHEL. JOHN dials his phone. PETER'S phone rings. He starts, pulls himself into a sitting position and goes through his pockets looking for his phone. JOHN gives up and puts his phone in his pocket. He begins crossing stage, calling PETER'S name, low, not yelling into the night. JOHN spots PETER and quickly crosses to him.)*

JOHN

Jesus, Peter. What the hell are you doing?

PETER

I couldn't find my phone. It rang.

JOHN

Lucky nobody called the cops. Get up...

PETER

I should call Rachel. I wanted to but I couldn't find my phone.

JOHN

I'll call her when we get to my place. You'll be staying there tonight.

*(JOHN helps PETER to his feet and begins leading him off, as light rises on bar. WILLIAM and BEN are seated.)*

WILLIAM

It's tough being a guy these days. Everything seems to be against us.

BEN

We're in a good place. Do what we want.

WILLIAM

Do what we want? Fucking wives, bosses. We do what they want.

BEN

Listen to you.

WILLIAM

What?

BEN

What. You're the one always going on about how you don't have to explain yourself to anyone, can do what you like, come and go, drink everyone under the table.

WILLIAM

So what's your point?

BEN

The point is, we all have to answer to someone somewhere. It's part of life.

WILLIAM

The President.

BEN

What?

WILLIAM

The President, he doesn't have to answer to anyone.

BEN

No...you're absolutely right, William. The President doesn't have to answer to anyone except Congress, the Senate, the press, world leaders, the entire American population...and the First Lady.

WILLIAM

They don't count. I mean he can have a beer any time he wants. You think the First Lady is going to tell him, "No?"

BEN

So the President just gets it into his head that he wants to pop down to the corner for a beer and off he goes?

WILLIAM

Of course not. Don't be stupid. But there must be a bar in the White House.

BEN

And you think he's sitting around drinking Miller Lite?

WILLIAM

No but he gets all official and shit, tells the First Lady he has to sign some papers, and off he goes to his own private lounge, has a couple of shots. She's not going to bother him when he's says he's signing papers.

BEN

Is that the President's version of you saying you're on the road?

WILLIAM

Exactly.

BEN

He probably has less freedom than you.

WILLIAM

Then that's his problem. All I was saying is that I don't like answering to anyone.

BEN

What did you think was going to happen when you got married? I don't even know why you did, you had more women than anyone I know.

WILLIAM

I don't know. It seemed like the right thing to do at the time. I mean everyone else was married, you, John, Peter...it was different then, Katy didn't care what I did, now she's changed.

BEN

What are you talking about, Katy's changed?

WILLIAM

You know, now she says I stay out too late, drink too much...

BEN

She's always been like that. How many times you propose and she turn you down?

WILLIAM

A few.

BEN

And why was that?

WILLIAM

She said she wouldn't marry me until I started coming home nights.

BEN

How come she finally said, "Yes."

WILLIAM

I started coming home nights.

BEN

See.

WILLIAM

What?

BEN

She thought you changed so she said, "Yes." Then you went back to your old ways.

WILLIAM

Not all of them.

BEN

Well let's just say enough of them then.

WILLIAM

It certainly was different before we got married, we talked, we partied a little, had sex all the time. Now when I go home, she's bitching, complaining...money, me...everything's wrong in her eyes.

BEN

Because you made her think things were going to be different.

WILLIAM

Then that's her problem. She shouldn't have married me, I'm the same person I always was.

BEN

Exactly.

WILLIAM

I don't get your point.

BEN

Forget it, forget I said anything...

WILLIAM

You're as bad as Katy, that's what she always says.

BEN

Let's just drop it. So, what do you think the President drinks?

WILLIAM

Scotch.

BEN

Why scotch?

WILLIAM

A guy in his position, he's got class. He enjoys a good shot just like we do.

*(WILLIAM downs his shot and calls off.)*

Debbie, could we get a couple Sambuca shots here?

*(light fades on bar, rises on GINA. She is holding a brightly colored cocktail in a martini glass.)*

GINA

It's time to put the "Cosmo" down and pick up a real cocktail. And no, a real cocktail does not taste like sour apple or grape crush, leave those flavors to Jolly Roger candies. As for Grenadine, leave that to the Shirley Temple, a fine cocktail should not taste like a red lollipop. It's time to put down the "girl" drink and order a sophisticated, grown-up drink. A glass of wine is nice, sure, it's safe and easy, but there are times when a cocktail, a real, adult cocktail brands you as a sophisticate, a level-headed, urban, worldly woman. A gin and tonic, with its crisp taste and clean look, the bubbles of the tonic gliding over the slick, green rind of a fresh lime wedge, the ice rattling gently as you sip. Then there is the gimlet, also clean and crisp, not a party drink, no bright and garish colors. A drink that says you are serious, a drink that can be had straight up or on the rocks, and there are times when a straight up cocktail is called for. In the winter, try a Manhattan, again up or on the rocks, a classic drink, the color of new rust, finished with a cherry which must always be eaten. And scotch. There is nothing, in my eyes and mind anyway, nothing sexier or more sophisticated than a well-dressed woman sipping a scotch on the rocks. At the risk of sounding sexist, women should never drink alcohol "neat," it looks like she's pounding down shots at a local watering hole. But a glass of beer in the summer, women should never drink beer from a bottle, says she is confident, comfortable with the guys but always a lady. But a woman drinking scotch on the rocks, says power, that she is not afraid to face the world not only on the world's terms but on her own as well.

*(GINA sips and laughs as JOHN enters, takes away her girl drink and replaces it with a scotch on the rocks. She sips, tries to hide a grimace and continues, looking lovingly at JOHN as he exits.)*

At first I thought he was drunk, handsome but drunk and maybe a little pompous, I mean that's his pick up line? But I have to tell you, by the time he finished and asked me if I'd like a drink, I found myself saying, "I'll have a scotch on the rocks." I had never had scotch before in my life. That's when I knew I was in love with him and there was no looking back. I still drink scotch, on the rocks, a splash of soda, lemon twist.

*(GINA sips, no grimace and looks off.)*

So does John...all day sometimes. He just doesn't think I know how much.

*(light fades on GINA, comes up on bar. JOHN, PETER, BEN and WILLIAM are seated as they always are. PETER sits, looking straight ahead at nothing in particular. He sways a*

*bit on his chair but always manages to right himself. The others talk, oblivious to PETER'S condition.)*

WILLIAM

No, I'm serious. Think about it. I'd rather be a black woman than a white man. Think about who's getting everything.

BEN

What, welfare?

WILLIAM

No, not welfare, all the jobs and the perks.

JOHN

What perks? I'll bet there are more single, black mothers on welfare than anyone else. You call that a privilege?

WILLIAM

You're not listening. They're giving the blacks all these things, like jobs, opportunities, to make up for slavery, which I had nothing to do with but for which I'm being punished. Appease white guilt...

JOHN

Listen to you. Appease white guilt. Those talk shows have paid off.

WILLIAM

Laugh all you want but it's true, and who better to help than a black woman. Kill two birds with one stone that way. They're giving everything to the blacks and to women, because we're also supposed to feel guilty about women's rights, therefore, I'd rather be a black woman than a white man.

BEN

It's almost impossible to argue with that.

WILLIAM

Because I'm right.

BEN

Because it doesn't make any sense.

JOHN

You know Ben, he might be right?

BEN

Are you shitting me?

JOHN

For the first time, black and Latino births in this country have outnumbered white births...

BEN

There you go, William, now you're part of the minority. In a few years you can complain about being held down.

WILLIAM

No, sorry, Muslim is next. Mark my words.

BEN

What are you talking about now? How'd we get to the Muslims?

WILLIAM

Think about it. After we make it up to the blacks and the women by giving them everything, the Muslims will have to be next. Everyone's so afraid to insult them, because that might be considered "profiling." Either that or they're afraid they'll be put on a Mohammad Hit List if we don't offer prayer fountains and public places to pray. The Muslims aren't fools, they'll catch on and soon, they'll be lining up to take everything while they're blowing us up. I mean the Muslims don't even drink. That in itself is weird.

*(BEN and JOHN look at each other, shocked, amused, bewildered... WILLIAM continues.)*

I'm telling you, the white man is dead in this country.

*(PETER sways and nearly falls off the stool. JOHN and BEN catch him. DEBBIE rushes to them.)*

DEBBIE

Oh my God, is he all right?

*(JOHN and BEN get PETER seated upright. He snaps to, unaware of what is going on.)*

JOHN

Peter... come on, Peter...

BEN

Wake up.

WILLIAM

Get him some coffee.

PETER

No, no coffee. Orange juice, get some orange juice.

JOHN

Get him some juice.

*(DEBBIE exits.)*

PETER

Can I have a shot in it?

*(JOHN laughs and pushes his beer to PETER, who picks it up.)*

BEN

Jesus, John, what are you doing?

PETER

He earned it. Drink up, Peter, steady your nerves.

*(PETER and JOHN laugh as PETER drinks.)*

BEN

*(quietly, almost to himself as he sips slowly.)*

Yeah, steady your nerves.

*(light fades on bar, rises on RACHEL. JOHN crosses to her.)*

RACHEL

Peter's not well, John, I don't want you seeing him.

JOHN

Come on Rachel. What are you talking about?

RACHEL

He needs rest.

JOHN

Peter will want to see me.

RACHEL

I'm sorry but it's still early in his treatment. The sooner you cut ties the better.

JOHN

What do you mean, cut ties?

RACHEL

If Peter comes out of this sober, he won't be able to see you anymore.

JOHN

You can't make that call.

RACHEL

He could have died. Do you understand that, any of you? What if he was on the street when it happened? Like last time.

JOHN

But he wasn't.

RACHEL

How often am I supposed to call you to go out and find my husband?

JOHN

I was right there with him.

RACHEL

This time. What if it was winter and he passed out in the snow.

JOHN

I would never let anything happen to Peter.

RACHEL

What are you supposed to do when you're as drunk as he is?

JOHN

That's unfair, Rachel. How many times have I taken him back to my place?

RACHEL

If he had been home where he belonged, he wouldn't have to go back to your place. This isn't a joke, John. The drinking isn't charming anymore. I don't know why I put up with it for so long. But when Peter gets out of here, it stops.

JOHN

I left a message that I was coming.

RACHEL

I'll tell him you couldn't make it.

JOHN

That's not fair. To him. To me.

RACHEL

What about me? How is any of this fair to me?

*(they stand, battle lines drawn.)*

It stops now.

JOHN

Not letting him see me is not going to help.

RACHEL

I'll leave him this time if he starts up again. Think about that John. I'm sorry, but it has to stop.

*(light fades on JOHN and RACHEL as they exit. Light rises On WILLIAM and BEN at the bar.)*

WILLIAM

Jesus, poor bastard. I never saw anyone hit the sidewalk like that. He's lucky he didn't crack his skull open. I mean this was different than just falling off a bar stool. I mean, did you see him, lying there?

BEN

Of course I saw him, I helped pick him up.

WILLIAM

No but his face. See how white it was? I swear to God, his lips were turning blue.

BEN

They were not turning blue...why do you always have to exaggerate?

WILLIAM

It scared me.

BEN

You and me both.

WILLIAM

Have you talked to Rachel?

BEN

No, but Pam called her. You?

WILLIAM

Hell no. I texted her, you know, see what was going on, but I haven't heard back yet. I'm afraid to talk to her.

BEN

Why?

WILLIAM

I don't know. Maybe feel like it's our fault in a way.

BEN

Well we're certainly not helping the situation are we?

WILLIAM

You know, in the back of your mind, you know people can die from drinking. You ever know anyone who did?

BEN

No. You?

WILLIAM

No, but he looked awfully close.

*(light fades on bar, rises on KATY. She is pacing. WILLIAM crosses to her.)*

KATY

Don't tell me. You ran into Ben or John or Peter...

WILLIAM

Peter's in the hospital and you know it.

KATY

That's not the point, William.

WILLIAM

Then what is the point?

KATY

The point is, you're not nineteen anymore, and neither am I.

WILLIAM

Look, I stopped for a beer, that's it. I wanted to find out if anyone heard from Peter.

KATY

It must be great fun now.

WILLIAM

What?

KATY

To have this built in excuse... Oh, poor Peter's in the hospital, I better go and drink to his health...

*(in a flash, WILLIAM is on KATY, grabbing her roughly by the arm.)*

WILLIAM

You bitch...he could have died.

*(KATY pulls free, unafraid.)*

KATY

You ever...put your hands on me again...

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, it's just that...he's in a bad way.

KATY

So you keep drinking with him?

WILLIAM

Could you have a little sympathy?

KATY

This is nothing new. You all act like it's some big surprise. You're just lucky one of you isn't dead. And what do you do to deal with it? Go up the bar and drink some more.

WILLIAM

I already told you...I just stopped up there to see if anyone heard...besides, I wasn't drinking with him.

KATY

No, not this time, but it's always something or someone. Oh, I ran into John or Ben...or some old high school friend I haven't seen in fifteen years and stopped for a drink.

WILLIAM

So what if I do? What's wrong with it? I have friends, I have a life, what do you have?

KATY

I thought I had a husband.

*(light fades on WILLIAM and KATY as WILLIAM makes his way to the bar. Light rises on bar. JOHN and BEN are seated.)*

JOHN

Rachel won't let me see Peter, they won't let him have a phone. All part of the treatment, she says.

BEN

Pam said if he doesn't stop when he gets out, Rachel's going to leave him.

JOHN

How many times has she said that?

WILLIAM

How many times have all our wives have said that? Except Saint Gina of course...like something they hold over your head...I mean, what's so wrong with it. So, we drink. There are worse things we could do.

JOHN

I think you do enough.

WILLIAM

We do what we do.

BEN

Pam said it was alcohol poisoning.

*(light up on HEALTH AIDE, reading from a clipboard in her hand. PETER sits silently in a chair, listening to AIDE.)*

HEALTH AIDE

Confusion.

WILLIAM

I thought you could only get that from binge drinking, like the college kids.

HEALTH AIDE

Stupor.

JOHN

How many times have we woken up and didn't know how we got where we were?

HEALTH AIDE

Seizures.

JOHN

So he stumbled a bit. Who hasn't?

HEALTH AIDE

Slow breathing, less than eight breaths a minute.

WILLIAM

I was afraid he was going to stop breathing.

HEALTH AIDE

Blue-tinged or pale skin.

WILLIAM

Like I said, looked to me like his lips were turning blue.

HEALTH AIDE

Low body temperature, hypothermia.

JOHN

It wasn't exactly like rigor mortis set in. He had a few too many.

HEALTH AIDE

Unconsciousness, "passing out," and can't be roused.

WILLIAM

Should have taken him back to your place, John. Couple hours on that couch of yours cures everything. I mean, which one of us hasn't passed out down there?

HEALTH AIDE

It's not necessary for all of these symptoms to be present before you seek help.

WILLIAM

And we always came out of it.

HEALTH AIDE

A person who is unconscious or can't be roused is at risk of dying.

*(HEALTH AIDE unclips sheet of paper and hands it to PETER as light fades on them.)*

JOHN

I mean it's not like he was dying.

BEN

He was.

WILLIAM

What?

BEN

Pam said Rachel told her the doctor said he really could have died this time.

*(silence. They contemplate this as they very slowly raise their glasses to drink. They sip, not looking at each other and slowly lower their glasses. WILLIAM laughs and speaks.)*

WILLIAM

That's what they want you to believe. One more thing for them to hold over our heads.

BEN

These things do happen.

WILLIAM

Not to guys like us.

JOHN

William's right, I mean, look how we drink. And nothing bad has happened.

BEN

Yet.

*(light fades on bar comes up on PAM sitting on the sofa. BEN crosses to her.)*

PAM

I didn't expect you for at least another hour. This is getting to be a habit. I haven't even started dinner. Be just the two of us tonight.

BEN

Boys out?

PAM

I think Benji might have a girlfriend.

BEN

Another one?

PAM

This one must be serious. He showered last night before bed, then again this morning.

BEN

Cologne?

PAM

I'm surprised you can't still smell it the way he doused himself.

BEN

I was thinking we should take a vacation this summer. Just me and you. School year will be over soon.

PAM

A vacation? You?

BEN

Business is slow. People don't really need professional printers anymore. They can do it all at home, make their own business cards, wedding invitations even photo albums. All those years building up my own business and it's over with a few clicks of a mouse.

PAM

What about the boys?

BEN

They're old enough to stay home by themselves for a week or so.

PAM

What's the matter, Ben?

BEN

Where did all those years go? Benji's going to be eighteen next year, off to college. Ricky will be seventeen. Then what?

PAM

Let me get you a drink.

*(PAM rises.)*

BEN

No.

*(PAM sits again. BEN continues.)*

All that wasted time, listening to the same bullshit night after night. I thought I was doing the right thing, running a business, go up the bar for a few drinks after work, then home to be with my family. I feel like I don't even know my own boys.

PAM

You were working.

BEN

You work and you know them.

PAM

I was home after school with them, different thing. You had longer hours.

BEN

I know more about William's warped ideas than I do about my own family.

PAM

You've known him a long time.

BEN

Why do you put up with it?

PAM

You get used to it, it becomes the way things are.

BEN

They were making excuses...for Peter.

PAM

He'll be all right.

BEN

Will he?

*(PAM rises and starts off.)*

PAM

Now I need a drink.

*(she turns to BEN.)*

You sure?

BEN

Maybe just one.

*(PAM exits, BEN calls after her.)*

We've never been on a Caribbean cruise.

*(light fades on sofa as it rises on bar. JOHN is sitting alone, drinking. He is intoxicated.)*

JOHN

I love to drink. Guess that's no secret. Gina likes drinking too. Never gets on my back about it either. I know guys, their wives, girlfriends calling all the time telling them to get home. Not Gina. Katy doesn't drink...at all. Drives William crazy. She used to, drink, smoke a little pot. Gina never did drugs, not even a little coke when she was younger...Katy did though.

*(DEBBIE enters with a check list. She is taking inventory, absently listening to JOHN as she works, JOHN continues rambling.)*

But no more. Doesn't want William doing it either. Can't tell him anything though, thinks he's still twenty-five. Pam likes a drink, we've been out with Ben and Pam a few times...she likes a

drink. But sometimes gets on Ben's back about drinking too much. But not in a bad way. Guess she's right...

DEBBIE  
Sorry John, I'm listening.

JOHN  
How long you been here now?

DEBBIE  
Just coming up on four years.

JOHN  
Best bartender we ever had here.

*(light comes up on PETER, sitting in a simple folding chair. DEBBIE silently goes about her work, sometimes looking at JOHN and nodding or smiling politely.)*

PETER  
Of course I miss it.

JOHN  
Seen them come and go over the years.

PETER  
When I'm not drinking I think about it.

JOHN  
Done a lot of drinking in this bar.

PETER  
Talk about it.

JOHN  
Me and Peter have been coming here for God, twenty years.

PETER  
Me and my friend John.

JOHN  
I miss Peter.

PETER  
We go way back. I miss him.

JOHN

Met William here.

PETER

Believe it or not, we met working in a liquor store.

JOHN

William was arguing with someone over something stupid of course.

PETER

Both in college, not the same school...

JOHN

Got everyone in the bar involved, tried to prove his point.

PETER

Hit it off right away.

JOHN

Met Ben through Peter. Their wives are sisters.

PETER

And it wasn't because of the drinking.

JOHN

We all just got along.

PETER

Not just the drinking, though that played a part.

JOHN

Liked to drink together.

PETER

We got close, you know.

JOHN

Like brothers almost, the four of us. At least we argue like brothers.

PETER

He's like a brother.

JOHN

Had a lot of laughs over the years.

PETER

Wonder what they're doing now.

JOHN

It was fun.

PETER

Probably having a great time together, up the bar.

JOHN

A place to just hang out. You know what I mean?

PETER

We've been through a lot together.

JOHN

The only place left where men can be men. Don't have to worry about what you say, who you offend.

PETER

Especially me and John.

JOHN

William's right. Can't say anything anymore, can't even joke.

PETER

Bet they're having a great time up there.

JOHN

Get sued now you say the wrong thing...but up here, free.

PETER

No matter how bad I got...

JOHN

Glad you're not easily offended, Debbie...just one of the guys.

PETER

John was always there to pick me up.

JOHN

Where the hell is everyone tonight?

PETER

I don't know what I'll do if I can't see him anymore.

JOHN

I wish Peter was here.

*(light fades on PETER. DEBBIE, finished with her paperwork, turns to JOHN.)*

DEBBIE

Another one, John?

JOHN

Yeah...yeah, Debbie, thanks.

*(DEBBIE exits as light very slowly fades on JOHN. JOHN rises and crosses to where WILLIAM stands. They both take a nip out of their pockets, toast, unscrew the cap and down the nip. They put the empties in their pockets. They cross the stage, whispering and laughing. GINA appears, in a bathrobe.)*

GINA

John?

JOHN

It's me. William's with me, we're just going to head downstairs.

GINA

Is he staying over?

WILLIAM

No, no. I have to be getting home soon, have to work early. Drive all the way to Worcester to install a sink. How are you, Gina?

GINA

I'm fine, I'm fine, William. How's Katy?

WILLIAM

Oh, you know, working a lot. She's up at city hall now, treasury. Treasury, ha, she can't even balance her check book.

GINA

Tell her I said, "Hello." I'm going to bed now. John, you going to be long?

JOHN

No, just going to go downstairs and have a night cap. Crack open that new bottle of rye. Won't be late.

GINA

Goodnight, then...Don't be too loud. It's a school night. Kids are in bed. William, nice to see you. John...

*(GINA takes a step toward JOHN, but he and WILLIAM have already turned to go. They exit as GINA stands, alone. Light fades on GINA, comes up on sofa. JOHN and WILLIAM enter the spot and sit.)*

WILLIAM

She going to be mad?

JOHN

Nah, she's fine, going to bed anyway. Why shouldn't I have a drink if she's going to bed? I'm not ready for sleep yet. What about Katy, going to call her?

WILLIAM

Not a chance in hell. I don't want to listen to her bitching at me...again. You married the good one. I got the bad witch.

*(JOHN reaches behind the sofa and produces a bottle of rye. He holds it out ceremoniously to WILLIAM, as light comes up on BEN and PAM.)*

PAM

You seem restless.

JOHN

This is the stuff I told you about.

BEN

It's nothing.

WILLIAM

Where did you get this?

PAM

Have a drink.

JOHN

Buddy of mine at work.

BEN

That's not going to help.

JOHN

His wife doesn't like him drinking in the house, so...

PAM

Don't do it this way.

JOHN

See where Ben is.

*(WILLIAM takes his phone out and texts.)*

BEN

It's the only way...to just stop it altogether.

JOHN

Let him know what he's missing.

PAM

Why stop at all?

WILLIAM

Well, we know where Peter is, poor bastard.

BEN

I don't want to be like Peter.

WILLIAM

Let's see if Ben gets back to us.

PAM

You're not like Peter...

JOHN

What's wrong with Ben lately?

PAM

I've seen you have one, two then stop.

JOHN

Never comes around.

BEN

What if I get to the point where I can't stop?

JOHN

What happened to the four of us?

BEN

That scares me more than anything.

*(BEN'S phone beeps. He looks at it.)*

WILLIAM

I think he's just worried about his business.

BEN

Jesus Christ, I wish they'd just leave me alone.

WILLIAM

He said he hasn't been doing so well.

PAM

What is it?

WILLIAM

You going to open that?

BEN

William...

WILLIAM

Or are we just going to look at it all night?

*(BEN reads the text, as JOHN opens the bottle.)*

BEN

At John's. Will be up late. Come by.

JOHN

Believe me, it's worth the wait.

PAM

Are you going?

*(JOHN holds the bottle out to WILLIAM.)*

JOHN

You do the honors.

BEN

No.

*(WILLIAM drinks.)*

WILLIAM

Smooth.

*(WILLIAM passes the bottle to JOHN, who drinks.)*

PAM

Still early. Only 9:30.

WILLIAM

Hardly any burn at all.

BEN

What? You want me to be a drunk?

JOHN

I'm never wrong about these things.

PAM

You're not a drunk.

WILLIAM

I should probably get going.

PAM

I just want to know what you want to do.

WILLIAM

I was supposed to be home about an hour ago.

PAM

What you really want to do.

WILLIAM

That means another night sleeping alone.

BEN

I want to stop. I just don't want it anymore.

JOHN

Then you better have another swig for the road.

*(JOHN hands WILLIAM the bottle.)*

PAM

Then I'll help you.

*(light fades on BEN and PAM, as JOHN sits beside WILLIAM on the sofa, they pass the bottle back and forth. WILLIAM'S phone rings. He looks at it.)*

WILLIAM

Jesus Christ. Can't get a moment's fucking peace.

JOHN

Katy?

WILLIAM

Who else?

JOHN

Everything all right William? Between you two.

WILLIAM

Eh...same as everyone else I guess.

JOHN

She upset?

WILLIAM

Probably.

JOHN

About what?

WILLIAM

Same thing they all get mad about...except Gina. I've never seen her get mad at anything.

JOHN

Should have had kids...they deflect the attention away from you.

WILLIAM

You know Katy was pregnant when she finally agreed to marry me.

JOHN

You never told me that.

WILLIAM

I never told anybody.

JOHN

What happened?

WILLIAM

She lost it. Just before the wedding. But she never told anyone she was pregnant, it was still early on, so she didn't want to cancel the wedding, you know we already invited all those people.

*(WILLIAM takes a long drink from the bottle, the continues, slowly, as if piecing the story together for the first time.)*

That was such a strange day, pretending we were happy, but I knew she blamed me...for losing the baby. I...we had a fight a few weeks before the wedding, I don't remember what it was over and I...I never hit her, I just gave her a shove you know. But she lost her balance and fell into the table. I didn't push her hard it was just a...shove. I was drunk, maybe I pushed her harder than I thought, but a glass fell off the table and broke on the floor and I remember thinking, I hope she steps on it, serve her right. She didn't. A few days later she started bleeding, called her doctor. When we got there he told us the baby was gone. Katy didn't really react at first. She started asking all these questions like, could it have been because of a fall or by being pushed around too hard on a crowded subway, but I knew what she was really asking. He very calmly explained that these early miscarriages, especially in a first pregnancy are not uncommon and that the reason they happen are very difficult to pinpoint unless there is some medical reason like a uterus thing or something wrong with the mother. But definitely not from being jostled on a crowded subway...no reason except that I got drunk and pushed her. At least in her mind that's the reason and who's to say she's not right. She was never quite the same after that, I mean this goes back what, sixteen, seventeen years now? I just met you guys and was so excited to have you at my wedding. But then something like that happens. It's the not knowing exactly why it happened that bothers me. It changed everything. I don't think we had sex for like a year after that. Still, I see it in her eyes sometimes, when she starts blaming me for stupid stuff, little things...I know what she's really blaming me for.

JOHN

Jesus, William. I'm sorry.

*(in the darkness, a phone can be heard ringing. JOHN continues.)*

I always thought you and Katy were good.

*(light rises on KATY answering her phone.)*

KATY

Hello.

WILLIAM

I go around joking, laughing, pretending everything's fine.

KATY

No Brett, he's not here.

WILLIAM

But Katy can't let it go.

KATY

I don't know where he is.

4 |  
5 |

Measure of a Man

WILLIAM

Sometimes it gets so that I don't even want to go home anymore...

KATY

He didn't come home last night.

WILLIAM

And I'm starting to hate her for it.

KATY

I'll tell him, though I don't know if it will do any good.

*(light fades on KATY.)*

WILLIAM

Mind if I crash down here tonight?

JOHN

Of course not...that's what I built this room for.

WILLIAM

I should just go back to drinking only beer. I mean, that's not really drinking. It's the booze they get mad about.

*(WILLIAM and JOHN pass the bottle back and forth as light rises on PETER, bag at his feet, standing, waiting. HEALTH AIDE enters, clipboard in hand, as light slowly fades on WILLIAM and JOHN.)*

HEALTH AIDE

You have a ride?

PETER

My wife should be here any minute.

HEALTH AIDE

Not that you need one, but it can be a bit intimidating leaving here alone.

*(HEALTH AIDE unclips some papers from the board and hands them to PETER.)*

These are your discharge papers, I also gave you some information on meetings and people you can call.

PETER

Thank you.

## HEALTH AIDE

It's not going to be easy. You've been here quite a while. And though it seems like time doesn't move while you're in here, things change quickly out there. You're going to need help, don't be afraid to ask for it. You can do this if you really want to.

*(PETER picks up his bag from off the floor.)*

## PETER

Tell my wife I decided to take a cab.

*(PETER exits as light fades on HEALTH AIDE as it rises on bar. WILLIAM and JOHN are seated.)*

## WILLIAM

That little weasel gave me a verbal warning. I'll give him a warning. I've been there longer than he has. I mean, what right does he have to threaten me for missing a lousy day of work?

## JOHN

What did Katy have to say?

## WILLIAM

Oh man...I've never seen her like that. Ripped into me, told me everything that was wrong with me, starting of course with the drinking. I had no idea there was so much wrong with me, from the way I eat, the way I sleep, dress, speak, look...even tossed out my old porn collection. She must have really had to dig for that, I forgot I even had that stashed. Left out nothing. Even threw you, Peter and Ben in for good measure.

## JOHN

What did you say?

## WILLIAM

What could I say? In a way it was kind of funny, I mean, she was going off, screaming, pointing the finger...you'd think I was the one crucified Jesus instead of just staying out one night, the way she was carrying on. One night, one friggin' night...

## JOHN

This month...

## WILLIAM

That's not the point, the point is, I should have the freedom to do what I want.

## JOHN

But she has the right to expect certain...behaviors too.

## WILLIAM

Oh please, look who's talking. You got it made. Your wife never says anything to you.

JOHN

Yeah, and sometimes I wonder why.

WILLIAM

Wives...maybe Peter was right.

JOHN

About what?

WILLIAM

He gave up fucking for drinking a long time ago. One less thing to worry about.

*(PETER enters, ecstatic. He still carries his bag.)*

PETER

Heeeeeeeere's Johnny.

*(JOHN and WILLIAM turn to him and stand as PETER crosses to them. They shake hands, kiss on the cheek.)*

WILLIAM

Mother fucker, when they let you out?

PETER

They didn't. I escaped.

JOHN

Jesus, you look great...I never realized how handsome you are.

PETER

Healthy living boys, does a body wonders. Debbie!

*(PETER drops his bag and slaps the bar.)*

JOHN

Hey Peter, it's been a while, maybe you should take it slow.

PETER

Slow my ass...hey, where's Ben? He knew I was getting out today.

WILLIAM

We haven't seen him.

PETER

Jesus, go away for a month and the place falls apart.

WILLIAM

Doesn't call us back, doesn't answer texts...

PETER

Must be on one of his sabbaticals. Pam must be laying down the law.

JOHN

Speaking of sabbaticals, what did you tell them at work?

PETER

Told them I had a family emergency out of state...

WILLIAM

Well, I guess almost dying could be considered an emergency.

PETER

That's bullshit...I was never near death. Jesus William, you will believe anything you hear. Where the hell is Debbie? I've been good for too long.

WILLIAM

Debbie, three shots.

*(light rises on BEN, sitting in a simple folding chair.)*

PETER

Get Ben on the phone, time he busted out too.

*(WILLIAM takes out his phone and dials as BEN stands.)*

BEN

My name is Ben...

WILLIAM

Not picking up...I told you.

BEN

And I'm an alcoholic.

*(BEN remains standing, silently looking out.)*

PETER

I'll find him...where the hell is Debbie?

*(RACHEL enters.)*

4 |  
9 |

Measure of a Man

RACHEL

Peter...

*(they all turn toward her as stage goes black.)*

END ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

*(Light comes up on two suitcases. BEN enters, calling off.)*

BEN

Pam. Pam, come on. We should have been on the road an hour ago.

*(PAM enters slowly. She stops in front of BEN. He looks at her, knowing something is wrong.)*

Pam, what is it? Benji? Ricky?

PAM

No, the boys are fine.

BEN

What then?

PAM

It's Peter, Ben. He's dead.

*(light comes up on JOHN'S basement. JOHN is seated on the sofa, sipping from a bottle of whisky.)*

BEN

When?

PAM

They found him this morning.

BEN

How?

PAM

He...hanged himself.

BEN

Where?

PAM

In John's spare room, in the basement.

*(PAM exits, as BEN slowly sits on one of the suitcases. BEN begins to weep as light slowly fades on him. JOHN stands, drinks and yells.)*

JOHN

Fuck you! Fuck you, Peter. Fuck you.

*(JOHN falls to a crouching position and cries as RACHEL enters. JOHN looks up, sees her and jumps to his feet. He looks around and places the bottle on the floor by the sofa. He speaks, trying to recompose himself.)*

Rachel...

RACHEL

Did you ever have dreams, John?

JOHN

What?

RACHEL

Dreams, like when you were a child about what you wanted to be when you grew up. Or as a young adult thinking you could conquer the world.

JOHN

Why are you asking me this?

RACHEL

Peter had dreams. When I met him. When you met him. What did you want to do, John? What were your dreams?

JOHN

Rachel, I don't think...

RACHEL

Peter was a great engineer. Remember his internship, John? He was at the best architecture firm in Boston at the time. Had all these plans.

*(JOHN stands, dumbfounded. RACHEL continues, as PETER enters unnoticed by JOHN and RACHEL, he sits on the sofa, picks up the bottle on the floor and drinks. He speaks, to no one in particular.)*

PETER

Look at me, I actually get sick now if I don't have a drink.

RACHEL

What happened here, John?

PETER

Can't eat, my stomach is all tied in knots.

RACHEL

You said you'd never let anything happen to him.

PETER

What a mess I made of everything.

RACHEL

Where were you John?

PETER

She said she'd throw me out...

RACHEL

Where were you?

PETER

But I was desperate.

RACHEL

When he did that to himself?

PETER

I knew she'd go through with it...

RACHEL

His funeral is tomorrow.

PETER

...but I needed a drink so badly.

RACHEL

And I still don't know what happened, what really happened.

*(RACHEL exits. JOHN turns to PETER.)*

PETER

Couldn't face going home, Rachel watching me, embarrassed at having to be put away like that. The kids. All the people at work, everyone always knew, but nobody ever said anything. Believed all the stories I told...everybody knew there was no family emergency..

JOHN

You can stay here as long as you like, as long as you need to.

PETER

What did we do, John?

JOHN

Just went too far this time, that's all. Stay here, get it out of your system.

PETER

I can't get it out of my system. I got nothing left, except this.

JOHN

It's taken over that much? Maybe you should slow down for a few days.

PETER

Who the hell do you think you are?

JOHN

What?

PETER

Telling me to slow down? How long can you go without a drink? Have you ever even tried? When was the last day you didn't have a drink, a nip at breakfast in your coffee, a shot with lunch, beers after work, a whisky before bed. When was the last day alcohol didn't enter your body? I suffered through it for a month, thirty days and all I could think about was that drink I was going to have when I got out. It didn't matter to me what Rachel said, didn't matter what I promised...I knew I was going to drink as soon as I was released, that's what got me through it. What makes you think you're any better than me?

JOHN

I'm sorry Peter, I didn't mean anything...

PETER

No, I'm sorry John. Don't listen to anything I say when I'm like this. I don't want to fight with you. You're all I have left.

*(PETER remains on the sofa as light fades on JOHN and PETER. Light rises on bar, WILLIAM is seated talking to DEBBIE.)*

WILLIAM

How come we never hooked up?

DEBBIE

Because I know your wife. I don't do that.

WILLIAM

Fair enough, but if I wasn't married, would we?

DEBBIE

Am I going to have to shut you off?

WILLIAM

Everyone else has.

DEBBIE

Look, make it up to her. Go home, apologize.

WILLIAM

Apologize for what? A couple of drinks? I mean alcoholism's not even a disease anymore. Now it's all like, heroin and addiction, oxy. But alcohol? I didn't think it really counted.

DEBBIE

Don't drink for a couple of days. She'll come around. She knows you're not a bad guy.

WILLIAM

Then why am I in so much trouble? And Peter, he wasn't a bad guy, in fact he was a great guy, even if we did argue all the time...he was a great guy. And look how he ended up.

DEBBIE

I am so sorry about that. His poor wife.

WILLIAM

John's been going through hell too. He found him.

DEBBIE

Peter came in a few days before...you know, and he looked terrible, could barely speak. I couldn't serve him. I felt so bad for him...

WILLIAM

Do you ever feel guilty?

DEBBIE

About what?

WILLIAM

Guys like Peter, me, that maybe you're responsible in some way.

DEBBIE

No. I don't ask questions, I don't judge. I just do my job. I believe everyone is responsible for their own actions.

WILLIAM

You're lucky then, because I feel guilty every time I think about him. I mean, if we cared so much, how come we didn't stop him?

DEBBIE

It's a shame, that some people can't just have a few and enjoy it.

*(light fades on bar, rises on JOHN and PETER in the basement room, as it also rises on BEN, pacing, agitated. PETER is asleep on the sofa, JOHN sits on the floor, his back against the sofa, his eyes closed. An empty bottle is on the floor. PETER starts, sitting up quickly, looking around frantically. JOHN too opens his eyes.)*

PETER

Where's the bottle...I had the bottle.

JOHN

You drank the last drop about an hour ago...there's nothing left.

PETER

We could go to my house. I have a bottle in the basement.

JOHN

And have Rachel catch us, she'd kill us...

PETER

What are we gonna do?

JOHN

Sleep it off...wait till morning.

*(PAM enters and crosses to BEN.)*

PAM

Come to bed, Ben.

PETER

I won't make it through the night without something.

I can't sleep.	BEN
Stay with me.	PETER
With Peter gone it's even harder.	BEN
I'm here Peter.	JOHN
I don't think I can get through this without a drink.	BEN
I'm not going anywhere.	JOHN
You'll get through it.	PAM
I'm pathetic.	PETER
I never knew it would be like this.	BEN
I was driving around with my son in the car.	PETER
You're not alone.	PAM
Looking for an open liquor store.	PETER
You sure you can do this?	BEN
I could have killed him.	PETER
Yes, and so can you.	PAM

I mean, I could hardly walk. PETER

I hope you know what you're in for. BEN

And there I was, driving around. PETER

Peter gone like that. BEN

That was a long time ago Peter. JOHN

Can't go see any of my friends. BEN

Is he okay? My son? I didn't hurt him, did I? PETER

When I think about all the money I spent on booze. BEN

He's okay Peter, that was a long time ago. JOHN

Could have taken two luxury cruises. BEN

You have to help me John. PETER

I wanted this vacation for you. BEN

I never asked anyone for help in my life. PETER

Help bring us back together. BEN

But I'm asking now. PETER

PAM

I don't need a vacation to bring us back together.

PETER

Help me John.

PAM

As far as I'm concerned, we were never apart.

JOHN

Whatever you need Peter.

BEN

It's never going to let me go, is it?

JOHN

Whatever you need.

*(JOHN very tenderly covers PETER with a blanket as light fades on them.)*

PAM

Come to bed.

*(PAM leads BEN off as light rises on WILLIAM. at the bar. JOHN crosses to him.)*

WILLIAM

I mean I work, bring home all the money, don't go anywhere, don't buy anything and then she decides she's had enough. What's the point of it all?

JOHN

Where you staying?

WILLIAM

My sister's, but she's a pain in the ass too. Won't even let me drink in the house. Afraid I'll be like my father.

JOHN

Have you talked to Katy at all?

WILLIAM

No, every time I go to call her, I back down. I don't know what to say. I don't even know what it is she wants.

JOHN

What do you want?

WILLIAM

That's just it, I don't know that either. Never really thought about it. I mean you guys always seemed to have it figured out, me I just went along, taking things as they came. Even getting married, every time I asked, I was relieved when she said no.

JOHN

Then why keep asking?

WILLIAM

It's what guys are supposed to do. Then when she found out she was pregnant, I had to. Seemed like the right thing at the time.

JOHN

And now?

WILLIAM

I don't know, I never seem to know what the right thing to do is. Would you ever get married again? If you and Gina split up?

JOHN

I don't know, never thought about it. I could never have what I have with Gina with someone else.

WILLIAM

You never cheated on her?

JOHN

No. Not physically anyway. Oh once, a long time ago, we had a fight, stupid stuff, just had Emily, Brian was still in diapers, Gina wasn't working, I wasn't making very much then...just a lot of stress. I left the house went to a bar of all things, surprise, surprise...and there was this woman there, sexy, kind of a slut, you could tell. We started talking I was buying her drinks and she invited me back to her place. By this time I'm stumbling... we walked to her apartment. Once I got outside the bar I didn't know what to say, all my anger at Gina and the way my life seemed to be going disappeared, I got nervous. But, I was determined I was going to see it through, prove to myself that I still could, that I was a free man even though I was married. Stupid, right?

WILLIAM

No. I would have done the same thing.

JOHN

Anyway, we get back to her place we're talking and she's rubbing my shoulders, giving me this great massage and I could feel myself inside wanting to just take her, right there on the floor, I could feel myself stirring, you know but I wasn't really getting hard....

WILLIAM

Hell, we've all had that happen. Too much booze.

JOHN

No, it wasn't the booze, it was Gina and the kids. I knew I did not ever want to do that to her, never wanted to carry that kind of guilt around. It wasn't worth it. I have slept with only one woman all these years, and the thought of sleeping with someone else ...no.

WILLIAM

That's because you have a home. This is my only home now, right here.

JOHN

Talk to Katy, figure out one way or the other where things stand. Then figure out what you're going to do next.

WILLIAM

She has to take me back. I don't want to end up like Peter.

*(JOHN looks at WILLIAM, shocked. WILLIAM continues.)*

Oh Jesus, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that.

*(JOHN rests his hand on WILLIAM'S shoulder.)*

JOHN

Don't apologize. He's on all our minds. I talked to Ben this morning.

WILLIAM

Benny Twelve-Steps...how is he?

JOHN

He wants to see us.

WILLIAM

Where, a church basement? Fuck him, he threw us over.

*(WILLIAM knocks on the bar.)*

Debbie. Couple shots please...If Katy and I don't work out, I'm marrying Debbie.

*(light fades on bar, rises on GINA. JOHN crosses to her.)*

GINA

He can't stay here John. He needs help.

JOHN

I can help him.

GINA

He's sick, John.

JOHN

He needs his friends right now.

GINA

What friends? He stays down in that basement all day, never sees anyone, doesn't go out. He's getting worse. And if you were really his friend, you would see that.

JOHN

That man is like a brother to me. You think I like seeing him like that?

GINA

What about us?

JOHN

What about us?

GINA

You spend all your time down there with him. What about me or the kids?

JOHN

He needs someone right now.

GINA

He needs to go back to the hospital.

JOHN

Everyone else has kicked him to the curb, his kids won't even talk to him...

GINA

You're not God.

JOHN

I'm not trying to be.

GINA

Then why do you think you're the only one who can help him? I'm terrified...when I come home from work what I might find. You're not here, anything could happen. The kids know what's going on. What do you think this is doing to them? They're old enough to understand.

JOHN

Then they're also old enough to understand that I'm helping a friend.

GINA

They're not stupid. They know he's in trouble from drinking, they see you drink every day. It scares them. It scares me too.

JOHN

My drinking has never been a problem in this house. I never missed a day of work, was never late on one bill payment, went to every school event, soccer game...

GINA

What is it you're afraid of, John?

JOHN

I'm not afraid of anything, but I know what he's going through.

GINA

Afraid that if you can't control this, you'll have to admit what you are? Help him John.

*(GINA exits. Light comes up on PETER on the sofa.)*

PETER

Help me, John. Don't leave me here alone.

*(JOHN crosses to PETER.)*

JOHN

I'd never let anything happen to you, Peter.

*(RACHEL'S voice can be heard offstage.)*

RACHEL

One by one, his dreams disappeared, John.

PETER

Everyone dreams of dying happy.

RACHEL

Offers stopped coming.

PETER

Don't spoil the dream.

*(PETER lays back on the sofa, asleep, as RACHEL enters.)*

RACHEL

Overlooked for promotions. Slowly he was more and more marginalized. He knew it but never said anything, never complained even when people with less talent, less experience were made

supervisors and managers, directors...he just kept it all bottled up inside. He knew why. You could see it in his face, the disappointment. See him draw deeper into a shell.

JOHN

I never saw that.

RACHEL

You only drank with him, John. I lived with him.

JOHN

What did you come here for, Rachel? I haven't seen you since that morning. I've been calling, trying to get in touch. Now you come here the day before he's to be buried after having nothing to do with me for four days...what do you want?

RACHEL

Answers.

JOHN

Not to place blame?

RACHEL

I don't know yet.

*(RACHEL exits as light rises on BEN. He is holding a black suit jacket on a hanger. He sniffs it, and starts going through the pockets. Out of an inside pocket he pulls out a nip. He drapes the jacket over his arm and slowly holds the nip up, looking at it intently. He looks around nervously, uncaps the nip and goes to drink. He stops, looks around and pours the nip out as light fades on him and rises on WILLIAM, standing down, looking at his phone, checking messages frantically. Giving up, he dials. After a moment, he speaks.)*

WILLIAM

Katy, it's me...just wondering if you're going to show up. It's quarter past...

*(KATY comes running on as WILLIAM hangs up his phone.)*

KATY

I'm sorry I'm late. I was...

WILLIAM

I didn't think you were coming.

KATY

I'm only five minutes late...

WILLIAM

I've been standing here waiting.

KATY

Now you know how I felt all those nights waiting for you to come from the bar.

WILLIAM

If it's going to be like this.

KATY

You're the one who asked me to meet you.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry.

KATY

Thank you.

*(a strained silence as they begin to walk across downstage, unsure what to say to each other.)*

WILLIAM

How have you been?

KATY

Not well...I mean with everything going on...I'm sorry about Peter, I wanted to call you...

WILLIAM

Let me come home.

KATY

What?

WILLIAM

Let me come home.

KATY

Just like that? No talk, no discussion...

WILLIAM

I'm lonely, Katy.

KATY

You're lonely? How do you think I felt all those years...

WILLIAM

Let me come home. Please.

KATY

Home? What home? You spent more time with your friends up that damned bar than you did at home.

WILLIAM

It wasn't all the time.

KATY

Is this your way of apologizing?

WILLIAM

A couple of drinks here and there.

KATY

Two?

WILLIAM

What?

KATY

Two. Isn't that the answer? It's always two isn't it, when somebody asks? Doesn't matter that you started at noon and that it's maybe eight at night or ten or eleven...if anyone asks how many, you say two, even though you can barely speak or stand, and you laugh and all your friends laugh, and I'm expected to laugh with you. But I can't laugh anymore.

WILLIAM

I'll stop this time.

KATY

How many times have I heard that?

WILLIAM

No, I mean it, really.

KATY

For how long? Until John calls, or Ben...

WILLIAM

Ben doesn't drink anymore.

KATY

Lucky Pam. I can't do it anymore, William. I can't stand the smell, the bottles in the recycling bin. A reminder of what you're not doing because of what you do do. I don't see you. You come home, late, drunk, crawl up to bed, stinking of booze and I have to go to the guestroom. It got so I took to just sleeping in the guestroom...we haven't seen each other. I get up, go to work, you drag yourself out of bed pretending you feel fine. Even make the coffee, see me off to work. And

I say nothing, though I can see you're not really there...just going through the motions until I leave, then you jump in the shower, down some aspirin. Or I get a phone call from your boss, while I'm at work, saying you haven't shown up...

WILLIAM

I give you everything I make.

KATY

It's not the money, William. You just don't get it, do you?

WILLIAM

I need you.

KATY

For what?

WILLIAM

I love you.

KATY

Love me? Then why is it every chance you got you chose being with your friends over me.

WILLIAM

They're the only friends I have. Even they're not there anymore. Ben doesn't come around, Peter's gone...

KATY

And that leaves me. Sounds like you want a mother more than a wife, someone who will be there when you need them. I won't be that for you.

WILLIAM

So I can't come home?

KATY

I think it's best if you're on your own for a while, see how you manage without someone there to pick up the pieces.

WILLIAM

I'll show you, I can do it. Give me a chance.

KATY

Look, let's get through this funeral and maybe we can talk again after it's all over.

WILLIAM

Please, Katy.

KATY

I'm not making any promises, William, I'm sorry.

*(KATY exits. WILLIAM stands alone as light rises on bar, JOHN is seated. WILLIAM crosses and joins him.)*

WILLIAM

What time is Benny Twelve-Steps supposed to be here?

JOHN

He said around five.

WILLIAM

Around five, that could mean anywhere from 5:01 to 5:59, what are we supposed to wait on him now?

JOHN

Will you relax, please, William? He'll be here and see, no church basement, he suggested we meet here.

WILLIAM

To rub our noses in it?

JOHN

He's a friend.

WILLIAM

Some friend.

*(BEN enters. He approaches cautiously. JOHN rises to meet him. They shake hands almost timidly but end up embracing warmly.)*

JOHN

It's good to see you, Ben.

BEN

I missed you John. I never thought I'd be back in here.

*(BEN reaches out to shake WILLIAM'S hand.)*

BEN

William...how have you been?

*(WILLIAM extends his hand but continues facing out, not looking at BEN.)*

WILLIAM

Good, Ben, good.

JOHN

Sit down, Ben.

*(JOHN and BEN sit, BEN placing himself between WILLIAM and JOHN.)*

BEN

Never thought we'd all be sitting here without Peter

JOHN

Never thought we'd be sitting here with you again.

BEN

What's the matter, William, not speaking to me?

WILLIAM

What am I supposed to say? Hey Ben, thanks for disappearing on us like that, letting us wonder what we might have done.

BEN

I'm sorry about that, William. It's just that I didn't even know what I was doing.

WILLIAM

You could have said something, let us know somehow instead of leaving us hanging like that.

BEN

Told you what, that I was going to stop drinking?

WILLIAM

I don't know, something.

BEN

And if I did that, you would have laughed, somehow got me to have a beer...and then where would I be?

WILLIAM

Here with us.

JOHN

You look great, Ben.

WILLIAM

We called, we texted, tried to get in touch and nothing.

BEN

You too John.

WILLIAM

So how come you never let us know?

BEN

I didn't plan it...it just happened. After that last time Peter fell out on the sidewalk.

WILLIAM

Yeah, well, friends don't do that to friends.

JOHN

Was it tough?

BEN

Is. There are days I don't think I'll make it through and I think just one, just a sip...but I can't, don't trust myself.

WILLIAM

So what, like now you go to meetings and shit?

BEN

Talk a lot about this place, how much I miss it. You guys.

WILLIAM

What, putting us down?

BEN

Look, William, I didn't turn my back on you. I would never talk about you or put you down. I made a decision. It's just different now. A different life. You know that rare morning when you're not hung over, you realize how good you actually feel? It's like that every day now. Not waking up in the night to take a leak or take some aspirin, hoping to get a jump start on the morning's headache. Start thinking of things like exercise, going out to the park or a walk around the mall...Don't have to lie to yourself, pretend you feel fine when really you feel like shit but don't want anyone to know it because you don't want to hear it...

*(WILLIAM bows his head in mock prayer.)*

WILLIAM

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change...

BEN

Go ahead and laugh William, but it's the truth...

WILLIAM

Jerk.

BEN

What?

WILLIAM

I don't know. You're making me feel uncomfortable, sitting there, talking about your meetings...

BEN

Why should that bother you?

WILLIAM

Drinking in front of you. It's like fucking in front of the goddamned Pope.

JOHN

Even that wouldn't stop you.

WILLIAM

You're right, it would be his choice to look or not.

BEN

And it's your choice to drink or not. It doesn't bother me, it really doesn't. I made my choice. I'm not going to apologize for it, not going to change it. So if you don't want to see me anymore William...

WILLIAM

I never said that...

*(coming around, WILLIAM knocks on the bar, calling off.)*

Debbie, two shots and whatever it is people who don't drink drink.

BEN

How are you, John, really?

JOHN

Tired. Confused. Sad.

BEN

It must have been a shock, finding him like that. Have you talked to Rachel?

JOHN

Not since that morning. The police there, asking all those questions. My kids watching him being carried out.

BEN

Jesus. How is Rachel?

JOHN

I don't know. I think she blames me in some way.

BEN

What happened, John?

*(light fades on bar and rises on JOHN'S basement room. PETER is on the sofa. RACHEL is standing there. JOHN crosses to her.)*

RACHEL

What really happened here, John?

PETER

Everybody dreams of dying happy.

JOHN

He said he was tired.

PETER

So tired.

JOHN

I came home and found him lying, stretched out on the sofa, eyes staring at the ceiling.

PETER

I never heard you come in.

JOHN

He never heard me come in, just lay there, looking up. I asked him if he was okay. He didn't answer right away...

PETER

Just continued staring. At what I don't know.

JOHN

Then he talked.

PETER

For the first time in my life, I opened up. It was like a fog had lifted.

JOHN

There was nothing left to drink.

PETER

I was going crazy.

JOHN

I wouldn't get him more, no matter how much he begged.

PETER

I didn't know what to do...

JOHN

Eventually, he passed out.

PETER

When I woke up, I could think, and everything about my life was clear to me. At that moment, I felt better than I ever have before. I was actually able to speak, to say what I thought, how I felt. Not afraid. Not caring how it sounded or who might be hurt by it.

RACHEL

Did he say anything, about me?

JOHN

Yes, he talked about everything, everyone. How difficult it must have been for you marrying him knowing your own father was an alcoholic.

RACHEL

He said that?

*(PETER moves to RACHEL, speaking to her, though she remains unaware of his presence.)*

PETER

I always wondered why you and sister both married drinkers.

JOHN

He talked about my summer house and how jealous he was knowing that he would never be able to get one for you and the kids...

RACHEL

Why didn't he come to me?

JOHN

Shame. Fear.

RACHEL

Fear of me?

PETER

No, never you.

JOHN

He didn't want to hurt you more than he already had.

PETER

If silence was really golden, I'd be a rich man. But silence is not golden. It festers, like an open wound left untreated, until the sound of silence becomes deafening. I wanted to scream, to lash out, but never at you...I could never take it out on you.

*(PETER sits on the sofa, JOHN turns to look at him.)*

JOHN

Then he cried.

PETER

I cried.

JOHN

I don't know why, but I went over.

PETER

And he held me.

*(JOHN remains standing, PETER seated, but they never remove their eyes from each other.)*

JOHN

We sat like that for a long time.

PETER

Quiet.

JOHN

And I never felt closer to another human being in my life.

PETER

We just sat looking into each other's eyes.

JOHN

Like I was seeing him for the first time, really seeing him.

PETER

Like lovers waiting for the first kiss.

JOHN

There was something about the way he spoke, the way he looked.

PETER

I'll never feel this good again, John. Ever.

*(JOHN turns to RACHEL.)*

JOHN

And I knew.

*(PETER stands, crosses and claps JOHN comfortingly on the shoulder.)*

PETER

There was nothing you could have done. I was ready.

*(PETER reaches behind the sofa, gets a rope and begins fashioning a clumsy noose.)*

RACHEL

You knew?

JOHN

Had an idea.

RACHEL

Did you talk to him about it?

JOHN

No. I mean, I didn't know for sure, but...

*(PETER rises. A spot comes up on a wooden chair. PETER takes the noose and stands on the chair. JOHN crosses, positioning himself between PETER and RACHEL, looking from one to the other as JOHN continues.)*

I didn't want to let him go. I wanted to stay there forever, holding him, feeling all that warmth. All that courage. But I couldn't hold on. Funny, somewhere deep inside, I knew what he meant when he said he'd never feel that good again. But I wasn't worried or nervous. It seemed as natural as our holding each other. Something extraordinary and glorious.

PETER

I never meant to hurt anyone, John.

*(PETER places the noose over his head. He pulls it tight as spot goes out on chair. RACHEL begins crying softly.)*

RACHEL

You let him die.

JOHN

Later, I don't know how long it was, I sat and thought about what had taken place, how strange it all was, how peaceful. I went over to the door. I wanted to talk to him some more, to feel all that strength again. I listened. It was quiet. So quiet. I was going to knock but stopped myself. I put my hand on the doorknob but couldn't bring myself to open it.

RACHEL

If you had, you might have been able to save him.

JOHN

I didn't know if I wanted to save him. I didn't know if he had done it already or not, and I wasn't sure how I felt about that, but I didn't want to disturb him if he...

RACHEL

You didn't want to disturb him? What kind of a person are you? You could have stopped him maybe, got him the help he needed.

JOHN

What help?

RACHEL

What help? He was depressed, an alcoholic. He could have gotten through it, but now he's dead and you sit there and talk of courage and warmth and strength.

JOHN

You talk as if her were deranged, not thinking clearly.

RACHEL

Someone who does that is certainly not thinking clearly.

JOHN

No. You're wrong. He was clear-headed, rational when he made that decision. How many of us have the courage to see something like that through? He had something few of us will ever have. He had peace. A moment of absolute peace he didn't think he could ever recapture. How can you go on living in pain after that?

RACHEL

Peace. He had peace, but what about me? What about you?

JOHN

What about me?

RACHEL

How can you live with yourself after this? How can you face yourself knowing you let a man die? Almost as if you killed him.

JOHN

I was part of something. Something I can't explain. Something special, unique. He was certain, he was free and he did what he felt he had to do. It was his choice. How can that be wrong?

RACHEL

I have to go. I have to get out of here. Do you realize what you're telling me?

*(RACHEL starts to exit, JOHN blocks her way.)*

JOHN

Yes. I'm telling you I loved another person and he loved me, and for one, split second, we understood what it's all about. And I will never forget that.

RACHEL

Excuses. Excuses for being unable to help, for being afraid to face what you know was really the only right thing, the only decent thing you could have done. But you didn't. You did nothing. You stood by and let a man die. And for what? There's nothing courageous about what you've done. You're a coward and all the excuses in the world won't change that. I don't know what has to be done now, don't know what to think, but in my eyes, you're no better than a murderer.

*(RACHEL tries to push past JOHN. He grabs her by the wrist.)*

JOHN

Don't leave. Not yet. Not like this.

*(RACHEL shakes herself free of JOHN'S grip.)*

RACHEL

I don't understand you. There's no dignity in death. Not that kind of senseless death.

JOHN

You didn't understand him.

RACHEL

I was his wife.

JOHN

And you didn't know him at all.

RACHEL

Everyone's unhappy at some point, but not everyone...

JOHN

Yes, he was unhappy and he was in pain and he knew it would never end for him.

RACHEL

He could have checked himself back in...there are ways. Ben did it, he could have helped Peter, could have helped him stop.

JOHN

No, you don't understand...

RACHEL

Oh, I understand all right...

JOHN

No, you don't.

RACHEL

Don't you dare. Don't you dare try to explain my husband to me...

*(JOHN yells, stopping RACHEL in her tracks.)*

JOHN

Peter didn't want to stop.

*(JOHN continues, more calmly.)*

Peter didn't want to stop drinking. He knew he would spend the rest of his life in and out of rehab and hospitals, watching you suffer through each failure. He didn't want to stop, but he didn't want live as a drunk.

RACHEL

How could you of all people say something like that?

JOHN

He was a drunk and he knew it, and he saw no other way out because he didn't want to stop.

RACHEL

You don't know what you're talking about...you who were presumably so close to him...

JOHN

I do know, I know better than anybody. And I brought you closer to him than you ever could have been while he was alive. I let you see what he thought, how he felt, as he let me see it. Clearly and without reproach for anything that happened. He wasn't blaming anybody.

RACHEL

You talk of closeness, you act as if something noble took place. If you really felt close, then you would have wanted to keep him here with us.

JOHN

You don't know what real closeness is. But I do. There were no lies on the sofa that night. No bullshit. Just two people coming together and seeing each other for the first time. I didn't stop Peter because he didn't want me to. Understand him for who he was and what he did.

RACHEL

Nothing you say can ever convince me that what you did was noble.

JOHN

I don't look at what I did as noble.

RACHEL

I have to let go of him, and that means letting go of you. I'm sorry. I walk away knowing what I could have done, but you're left with your lies and talk of truth and courage. I hope that's enough for you. Peter drank to escape his pain. What do you drink for?

*(challenging JOHN, RACHEL looks directly in his eyes, daring him to prevent her from leaving.)*

Would you let me go please? Unlike you, I didn't have the chance to say goodbye and I'd like to now. Alone. I don't want you there tomorrow. I don't want you speaking on his behalf. I don't want you near him anymore.

*(RACHEL exits. JOHN stands as PETER enters.)*

PETER

Everyone dreams of dying happy. Don't spoil the dream.

*(light fades on them as "Amazing Grace," is heard being played on the bag pipes. Light slowly rises on WILLIAM and BEN, wearing black suits.)*

BEN

Jesus Christ. He's really gone.

WILLIAM

Rachel doesn't look good.

BEN

Do you know what happened? Between John and Rachel?

WILLIAM

John never said anything. I thought he was supposed to give the eulogy...

BEN

Rachel won't talk about him and he's not taking my calls.

WILLIAM

Maybe he just couldn't deal with it.

BEN

No, that's not like John. Besides if that was the case, Gina would have been here.

WILLIAM

What do you think happened?

BEN

Whatever it is has to do with what happened in the basement the night Peter died.

WILLIAM

Maybe John was right. Maybe Rachel blames us in some way. Pam say anything?

BEN

No. She was as surprised as we were.

WILLIAM

Maybe John will tell us someday.

BEN

Did you talk to Katy? I saw her sitting with Dave and Nancy.

WILLIAM

She wants to wait, until all of this is behind us.

BEN

Be a long time before we can put this behind us.

WILLIAM

I'm not holding out much hope for anything anymore.

BEN

You going back to the house?

WILLIAM

No, Rachel obviously wants nothing to do with me...wouldn't even hug me, shook my hand like I was a stranger.

BEN

She'll come around.

WILLIAM

Why should she? She doesn't owe me anything. I never really knew her, I think she just tolerated us...well, me.

BEN

How the hell did we end up here?

*(light fades on WILLIAM and BEN as it rises on bar. JOHN is seated, a pint and a shot in front of him. GINA enters. She has a full pint with her. She sits beside JOHN. He does not glance her way, just keeps staring straight ahead. She speaks, indicating his beer.)*

GINA

Go ahead.

JOHN

Why?

GINA

I want you to.

JOHN

To laugh at me?

GINA

I never laughed.

JOHN

Hold it over my head then?

GINA

No. And if I ever did, I'm sorry. I just want to watch.

JOHN

Why?

GINA

To understand.

JOHN

What's to understand?

GINA

I'm drinking too.

*(JOHN turns to her. She holds up her glass, lets the rim touch her lips and puts the glass down again. JOHN laughs.)*

That's not drinking. JOHN

Then show me. GINA

It's not something you can learn in an afternoon. JOHN

*(GINA fidgets uncomfortably, she looks around.)*

It's dark in here. GINA

It's better that way. JOHN

I've never been in here in the afternoon. GINA

Never? JOHN

No. Beautiful day. Maybe if they opened the door or pulled the curtains. GINA

Believe me, you don't want to see it in the light. It, or them. JOHN

What about you? GINA

What about me? JOHN

Aren't you one of them? I've seen you in the light. GINA

When was the last time? JOHN

The last time what? GINA

JOHN

You saw me in the light.

GINA

When you would leave for work in the morning.

*(JOHN laughs.)*

GINA

What?

JOHN

Nothing.

GINA

No what? Tell me.

JOHN

I thought you were going to say when I come up from the basement in the morning.

GINA

What happened, John?

JOHN

The million dollar question.

GINA

Is it me? Something I've done?

JOHN

No. No, no.

GINA

What then?

JOHN

You could never understand. Nobody can. I don't even understand it.

GINA

For a while after the funeral, I used to lie awake nights, wondering whether you were coming to bed or not. I don't anymore. It's kind of nice now. I'm getting used to sleeping by myself.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

GINA

I just wish I had an answer.

JOHN

There isn't one.

GINA

Give me one. Something. A reason to hate you, or to feel bad for you, anything so I can stop hating myself.

JOHN

I can't.

GINA

Then make one up. Give me that much.

JOHN

I wish I could.

GINA

Another woman, hitting me, anything would be easier to take. I could explain that. But this...

*(GINA indicates the drinks, the bar, JOHN turns away. Reflexively, he puts his hand around his pint glass but doesn't pick it up. GINA collects herself and sips from her beer, a real sip this time. She puts her glass down and continues.)*

I'm sorry, I wasn't going to do this.

JOHN

I would if it was you.

GINA

No you wouldn't.

JOHN

Nah. I'd probably join you.

GINA

Then join me now.

*(GINA holds up her beer.)*

JOHN

I can't, and believe me, I want to.

GINA  
What's different?

JOHN  
It was better when you didn't talk about it.

GINA  
I'm sorry. I tried not to say anything...

JOHN  
No. Don't be sorry. I'm surprised you didn't throw me out long ago.

GINA  
I still haven't.

JOHN  
What?

GINA  
Thrown you out.

JOHN  
You know I won't stop.

GINA  
Won't, or can't?

JOHN  
Won't is easier to face in the morning.

GINA  
That's not an answer.

JOHN  
Wasn't meant to be.

*(they look at each other. JOHN continues.)*

What do you want?

GINA  
To be with you.

JOHN  
Me? A lousy drunk. Why would anyone want to be with a man who can't pull himself together, who can't think of anyone but himself?

GINA

You must think very little of me to think that I could marry the man you describe.

JOHN

Why did you?

GINA

What?

JOHN

Marry me, of all people...

GINA

So many reasons.

JOHN

And none of them strong enough.

GINA

For what?

JOHN

Me.

GINA

I'm strong.

JOHN

You can't help me.

GINA

I don't want to help you, I want to love you.

JOHN

What are you a martyr, Mother Theresa or a masochist?

GINA

I don't deserve that.

JOHN

Then why didn't you ever try to stop me?

GINA

I didn't want you to stop. It was part of who you were. Scotch on the rocks, remember?

JOHN

I'm not dead.

GINA

What?

JOHN

You said part of who I was...but I'm still here.

GINA

This isn't you.

JOHN

Then maybe I don't exist anymore.

GINA

You can.

JOHN

No conditions? No ultimatums?

GINA

I spent the past 17 years looking after the kids, the house, you...and now I have to wonder, where did I go? I realize I held it together so long, accepting your drinking because I love you in spite of it. Maybe I was wrong for that, maybe I should have nagged and badgered, maybe I should have thrown you out, but I could never hurt you like that. But since this whole thing with Peter, I don't exist there anymore for you, and that hurts me. I'm not saying you can't drink...but drink less maybe, drink at home. At least be with us.

JOHN

Why did you come here?

GINA

To have a drink with my husband.

JOHN

Fine. You want to drink with me...

*(JOHN picks up his pint glass and downs the contents, some of the beer running out of his mouth. When he is finished, he takes a deep breath and downs the shot. When this is finished, he throws his head back and lets out a sigh of relief, like a junkie finally getting a fix. When he is able, he looks at GINA, who reaches out to touch him. He recoils, turning from her, almost sobbing.)*

Don't touch me.

*(there is a pause. GINA speaks quietly, almost a whisper.)*

GINA

What do I tell the kids?

JOHN

This is who I am now.

GINA

Becoming Peter won't bring him back.

*(GINA gently pushes her glass to JOHN. Quietly, she gathers her jacket and purse and stands. GINA exits. When she is out of sight, JOHN greedily guzzles her beer. When he is finished, he puts the glass down. He stands and steps from behind the bar. Light fades on bar as JOHN speaks, as if addressing an audience.)*

JOHN

What is the measure of a man? Is he worth his weight in gold? Is his worth measured by the good he leaves behind? In Peter's case he would have to be measured in ounces, fluid ounces. Peter drank. He never made a secret of it, never lied about it or apologized for it. It's who he was... And as we look at his family, who have suffered the loss of a wonderful man, a man I called brother, we can only wonder what was going through Peter's mind... So let's raise a proverbial glass as we toast the man who meant so much to all of us...

*(JOHN'S voice trails off as light dimly rises on bar. WILLIAM, BEN and PETER are standing, in their black suits, laughing and talking silently as JOHN makes his way to the bar taking his seat among his friends who remain standing.)*

PETER

Basically, there are four kinds of drinkers. You got your regular drinkers. Have a few here and there...

*(BEN approaches JOHN and claps him on the shoulder, JOHN does not respond.)*

BEN

Every now and then she starts, and I give the liver a rest.

*(BEN exits.)*

PETER

Then you got your heavy drinkers, drink every day.

*(WILLIAM approaches JOHN and claps him on the shoulder. JOHN does not respond.)*

WILLIAM

I can drink anyone under the table any day.

*(WILLIAM exits.)*

PETER

Then there are your alcoholics, who need it.

JOHN

Where do we fit in that line up?

PETER

On top of the alcoholics are the out and out drunks...

*(JOHN starts, turning to PETER. PETER looks at him and speaks sincerely.)*

I never meant to hurt anybody, John.

*(JOHN watches as PETER exits. JOHN turns to face out.)*

JOHN

Nobody ever means to. We just do.

*(JOHN looks down the bar and nods his head, getting the bartender's attention. He passes his fingers over the empty glasses indicating he would like another beer and a shot. He sits alone, waiting, as light fades.)*

END OF PLAY