

Tucumcari Tonite!

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

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CHARACTERS:

TONY: Mob accountant under witness protection. Mid-thirties, pudgy.

ALEX: Bail bondsman. Mid-thirties, athletic build.

PLACE AND TIME: The shoulder of the frontage road that runs parallel to Interstate 40 in eastern New Mexico. Mid-July.

PRODUCTION NOTE: A handgun is displayed briefly. It is a prop and is never discharged.

Tucumcari Tonight! was first presented in a reading at the Valdez Theatre Conference, Valdez, Alaska, on June 14, 2022. It was directed by Cody Goulder with the following cast:

TONY.....	Ian McEwen
ALEX.....	Skyler Ray Benson Davis
Stage Directions.....	Tamar Shai Bolkvadze

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Tucumcari Tonite!

The scene is the shoulder of frontage road that runs parallel to Interstate 40 in eastern New Mexico. Clumps of sagebrush and rocks cover the ground, and a decrepit barbed-wire fence strung between old iron posts runs along the back from Stage Right to Stage Left. Litter, papers, and tumbleweeds are scattered along the fence-line. There are four large stumps of telephone poles that run in a straight line from Upstage Left to Downstage Right. They are about two feet high and sawed-off raggedly that make them available for sitting, but not too comfortably. In the background, the sky is clear with a distant ridge of dark mountains far off in the distance.

At rise, the stage is nearly dark except for the first indications of dawn approaching from Stage Left. The sky does not lighten quickly; the first few moments of the play are played in near darkness, and the rest of the play is done with the lights slowly brightening. Crickets and other insect sounds are audible, as is the occasional hum of distant tires on the interstate. In the center of the stage between the posts are two sleeping bags lying close to each other. They are occupied, but there is no movement. After a few moments, the occupant of the downstage bag moves and starts to emerge from the bag, but he seems to be restrained. He mutters a curse, kicks off the bag, and prods the other sleeping bag with his foot.

TONY
(groggily)

Hey.

(TONY gets no response. Prods again, a little harder. Still no response. This time he gives the bag a full-fledged kick.)

TONY
(cont'd)

Hey, wake up!

(Movement and mumbling from the other bag, and a head emerges.)

ALEX

What the fuck?

TONY

Wake up.

ALEX

What time is it?

TONY

Pull your arm out.

ALEX

Why?

TONY

I gotta take a piss! Come on, man, unlock these things, willya?

(ALEX pushes off the sleeping bag, revealing the fact that he and TONY are handcuffed together. ALEX struggles for a moment, apparently digging in his pants pocket for the key, with TONY getting more and more impatient.)

TONY

Hurry up, man.

ALEX

(finding the key)

Don't piss yourself. If you hadn't been chugging all those Cokes yesterday you could make it through the night.

TONY

We're driving through the goddam desert in the middle of July in a car with no goddam air conditioning.

TONY

Drink water, then. Coke's nothing but sugar, caffeine, and a bunch of cancer-causing initials. No wonder you gotta piss every ten minutes.

(ALEX unlocks the handcuffs. TONY kicks off the sleeping bag, struggles to his feet, and trots off Stage Left. ALEX gets up. He is in his thirties, lean, and wearing scruffy jeans and a T-shirt. He unlocks the handcuffs from his own wrist and shoves them in his pocket, then pulls out cowboy boots from his sleeping bag. He inverts each one and shakes it before putting them on, then stands up and starts to put away the sleeping bag. TONY, in his stocking feet, limps back on stage, cursing as he does. He is about the same age as ALEX, but stockier and less equipped to deal with the outdoors. He is wearing rumpled slacks and a button-down shirt that was once neat but now looks decidedly dirty and wrinkled.)

TONY

Ow, ow, ow, shit.

(He sits on one of the stumps and picks burrs out of his feet.)

ALEX

I warned you about those.

TONY

Yeah, yeah, well, I really had to go. I ain't gonna pull on my shoes just to go, y'know? *(Pulls a burr out of his sock and examines it.)* Whaddaya call these little bastards?

Goat-heads. ALEX

They hurt like a motherfucker. TONY

They're everywhere. ALEX

(TONY plucks the last one, then gingerly goes over to his sleeping bag and finds his shoes. He starts to put them on.)

Hold it. Shake them out. ALEX

Huh? TONY

(ALEX takes one of the shoes and turns it over and shakes it. Something falls out and ALEX kicks it away.)

What the hell was that? TONY

Scorpion. They crawl in shoes at night sometimes. That's why I told you to keep them in your sleeping bag. ALEX

I thought you were kidding! Holy shit! TONY

I told you, the desert is a dangerous place. ALEX

(TONY picks up the other shoe and pounds it mercilessly before slowly pulling it on.)

Goddam. This place is trying to kill me. And it's cold! I'm freezing! Yesterday it was a hundred and ten, now my teeth are chattering. TONY

I told you it got cool at night. ALEX

TONY

I thought you meant cool like, y'know, indoors with air conditioning. Like a nice cool room in a nice hotel somewhere with a nice bed and maybe a nice bathroom with a shower and towels and a sit-down toilet.

ALEX

We've been through all that. We can't. How many times do I have to tell you that?

TONY

Aw, c'mon. We passed a hundred Motel Sixes last night. I counted five in.... whaddaya call it...

ALEX

Albuquerque.

TONY: Yeah, there. Al – buh – qwirky.

ALEX

Shut up and roll up your sleeping bag. Sun'll be up soon and we should get going.

(ALEX has rolled his bag into a neat bundle, and he carries it off Stage Right. Sound of car door opening. TONY tries to roll up his bag, struggles with it, gets frustrated, and finally wrestles it into a wad and sits on it. ALEX re-enters with a knapsack. With a sigh of exasperation, he drops the knapsack, pushes TONY off the sleeping bag, shakes it out, quickly rolls it into a neat bundle, ties it up, and hands it to TONY.)

ALEX

Let me guess, you were never in the Boy Scouts.

TONY

Fuck no.

ALEX

Never went camping as a kid?

TONY

I grew up in Brooklyn. Wasn't until I was twelve years old that I found out that trees didn't grow up without those iron fences around them.

ALEX

Too bad.

TONY

Were you a Boy Scout?

ALEX

Sure.

TONY
No kiddin'.

ALEX
Yup.

TONY
The whole thing? Building fires, camping out, helping little old ladies across the street?

ALEX
Yeah, the whole thing.

TONY
Did you get to...whatchacallit...Eagle?

ALEX
Eagle Scout? Not quite.

TONY
How come?

ALEX
Ah...just didn't. Lost interest. (*Opens knapsack.*) You want something to eat?

TONY
Whaddaya got?

ALEX
Couple of granola bars. There's a couple of Diet Dr. Peppers still in the cooler.

TONY
How about two eggs over easy, bacon, rye toast lightly buttered and a coffee regular?

ALEX
Yeah right. Chow down.

(*ALEX tosses TONY a granola bar. TONY unwraps the bar, takes a bite, makes a face. ALEX eats his quietly.*)

TONY
Can't we stop like at a Seven-Eleven and get something real? Hell, I'd settle for a day-old Danish and weak coffee.

ALEX
No. You know we can't.

TONY

Goddam, if I knew that this was the kinda shit I was gonna get into, I'd have kept my goddam mouth shut.

ALEX

Damn right. And you'd also be dead.

TONY

Yeah, I keep hearing that. But who knows? The guy ain't that smart. I mean, if he was, he wouldn't be under indictment, now would he?

ALEX

I don't know. I don't care. I don't even know the guy.

TONY

But you've heard of him.

ALEX

Yeah, big deal.

TONY

So, you know he's not Mr. Clean.

ALEX

Who is?

TONY

And he's got friends.

ALEX

That's nice.

TONY

Friends who would like to see their friend stay out of trouble.

ALEX

You blew the whistle on a pyramid scheme. The guy screwed a bunch of little old ladies out of a hundred grand each. You make it sound like something out of The Godfather.

TONY

A hundred grand is a lot of money!

ALEX

Sure, for a guy who drives a ten-year-old Cadillac. It barely got the attention of the Feds, and if it hadn't been the fact that the scheme crossed state lines, it wouldn't even have gotten that.

TONY

I still got protection.

ALEX

Oh, shit, don't flatter yourself! Look at us. We're driving across country in an old Pontiac station wagon, eating granola bars and sleeping on an old billboard site. You are not the top dog in the federal witness protection program, Don Corleone. This is two guys on the lam.

TONY

So, what the hell are you doing here? And what's with the handcuffs?

ALEX

I got a friend who works for your bail bond guy who's hooked up with the U.S. marshals. He calls up and says, "Hey, you want to make a little extra dough? Drop this snitch off in Kansas." I got an ex-wife and kid who still collects child support. Do the math. And the cuffs are my insurance that you won't skip out and leave me holding the bag and out my fee.

(Off Stage Right we hear a car approaching on the frontage road. TONY tenses up and motions to ALEX to be quiet while he looks around for a place to hide. Before they can move, the car passes, the sound fading. TONY lets out a sigh of relief.)

TONY

Are you carrying?

ALEX

What do you think?

TONY

What is it?

ALEX

(Captain Obvious)

A gun.

TONY

Yeah, I got that. What kind?

ALEX

The kind that shoots bullets.

TONY

Glock? Smith and Wesson?

ALEX

Something like that

TONY
Where is it?

ALEX
None of your fuckin' business.

TONY
Are you a good shot?

ALEX
Keep asking me these questions and you'll find out.

TONY
Okay, okay. I just wanna know in case we run into... y'know –

ALEX
Listen, if your ex-boss's goons track you down here in the middle of fuckin' nowhere, they're smarter than you think.

(Beat.)

TONY
Kansas.

ALEX
That's right. Kansas.

TONY
Never been there.

ALEX
It's flat.

TONY
Whatta they got there, in Kansas?

ALEX
Cows. Farms. Judging by their license plates, wheat.

TONY
Wheat?

ALEX
A lot of wheat.

TONY

Fuck, I'm screwed. I don't know from wheat.

ALEX

Who says you gotta know anything about wheat? (*ALEX pulls a paper out of the knapsack and reads it.*) Here's your new life. Says you're going to be a night auditor at a hotel.

TONY

I know, I know.

ALEX

Yeah? So, let's hear it.

TONY

What?

ALEX

Your life. Tell me who you are now.

TONY

Fuck that.

ALEX

Hey, you're supposed to know this shit by heart. You gotta be able to rattle this shit off without even thinking about it. C'mon, tell me who you really are now.

TONY

Why do you give a shit?

ALEX

Because if they find you, they'll come after me. And until your boss is behind bars permanently, my ass is as much on the line as yours. So, tell me.

TONY

(after some grumbling hesitation)

My name is Lloyd Neederhouse. Born in Toledo, Ohio. Thirty-five years old. Son of Vernon and Lorraine Neederhouse. Grew up in Toledo. Went to Whitmer High School. Got my first job as a night clerk at the Toledo Turnpike Motel on Reynolds Road. Met a girl from Kansas, got married, and moved there ten years ago. Divorced two years. Belong to the Rotary Club and the Methodist church. Do I have to be a Methodist?

ALEX

That's what it says here.

TONY

Never been there. I stopped going to Mass when I was in high school.

ALEX

It's the same thing...sit and listen. Okay. Tell me about your dad.

TONY

He ran a metal shop out on Long Island. He and Mom bought a place near Delray Beach a couple of years ago.

ALEX

Not your real dad, you idiot. Vernon!

TONY

Oh, shit. Okay. Born in Fremont, Ohio. Served in Vietnam, belonged to the American Legion and the VFW. He worked at the Jeep plant. Died of a stroke last summer.

ALEX

And your mom?

TONY

She's real busted up about it.

ALEX

Yeah, I figured. What about her?

TONY

(straining to remember)

Ah...born in Woe-see-on, Ohio. Worked as a secretary at the Jeep plant. That's how she met my dad.

ALEX

It's Wauseon.

TONY

Huh?

ALEX

It's pronounced "Wah-see-on," not "WOE-see-on."

TONY

Big deal.

ALEX

It is if you're from Wauseon. What's your Social Security number?

TONY

Two-seven-eight...something. It's in my wallet.

ALEX
All right.

TONY
So, how'd I do?

ALEX
Huh. You look about as much like a Lloyd Neederhouse from Toledo as Tony Soprano looks like Elon Musk. What's your new address?

TONY
Fifteen-oh-three Laurel Avenue, Independence, Kansas, six-seven-three-oh-one.

ALEX
And your job?

TONY
Night clerk at the Apple Tree Inn. (*Buries his face in his hands.*) Oh, God, this is going to be a dismal life.

ALEX
It ain't Vegas, that's for sure.

TONY
So, where are we?

ALEX
About eighty miles east of Albuquerque.
(*TONY looks off Stage Left.*)

TONY
Tucumcari tonight.

ALEX
Yeah, very good, you can read a billboard.

TONY
Did I pronounce it right? Too-cum-carry?

ALEX
I guess. Sounds right.

TONY
I thought you were from around here.

Hell, no. ALEX

Where are you from? TONY

Why do you care? ALEX

Just curious. Is it some deep dark secret? TONY

Nah. Grew up in Miami. ALEX

Born and raised? TONY

Yeah. ALEX

I never met anyone who was from there. Retired there, moved there, yeah, but a native? Wow. So, how'd you end up in Vegas? TONY

I was a backup singer for Lola Falana. ALEX

Come on. TONY

I dunno, just did. I was in the Army, and after my hitch I ended up there working security for one of those little casinos off the strip. Place went broke and I ended up working for Eddie at Vegas Bail Bonds. ALEX

How does a casino go broke? TONY

Shit happens. Ask Trump. They tore it down and put up a Marriott. ALEX

The Carousel? TONY

ALEX

Yeah. You know it?

TONY

Little mom-and-pop shop. Ten slots, no waiting.

ALEX

That's it. It was owned by the family of an Army buddy. Nothing fancy, and when the big boys came along and waved a shitload of money under their nose, they took it and lit out for some trailer park south of Tucson.

TONY

But you stuck around.

ALEX

No place to go.

TONY

You got family there.

ALEX

Who says I do?

TONY

You did. You said something about a wife.

ALEX

Ex-wife.

TONY

Okay, ex-wife.

ALEX

Why do you give a shit?

TONY

Hey, if I'm gonna go halfway across the country chained to a guy, I like to know who's on the other end. Kinda like that movie with Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier where they're escaped cons shackled together and have to get along in order to survive.

ALEX

Never saw it. And you're no Sidney Poitier.

TONY

Hey, you're no Tony Curtis, either.

ALEX

You some kind of movie nut?

TONY

Yeah, there was a movie house down the block from where I grew up and they showed a lot of the old classics. Spent a lot of Saturday afternoons there. And Turner Classic Movies was free on the cable system. Hope it still is in... Independence. Assuming they have cable. Assuming they have TV. *(Beat.)* So, you have a kid.

ALEX

Who says I do?

TONY

You did. Before. When I asked about your family. Why are you so defensive?

ALEX

I'm not!

TONY

Yeah, okay, it's not like I'm gonna do something with knowing the deep dark secrets of your life that you only share with the U.S. Census Bureau. Sheesh. C'mon. Boy or girl?

(ALEX scowls, kicks a clod of dirt. He wanders over to the fence.)

ALEX

A son.

TONY

That's nice. What's his name? How old is he?

ALEX

Justin. Sixteen.

TONY

Okay, so now was that so hard? Spend much time with him?

ALEX

Every other weekend and some school vacation time. Look, what's the big deal? So, I got a son. C'mon, we gotta get going.

TONY

Yeah, okay, although I'm in no big rush. Not like they're gonna move the town on me. Are we gonna stop in... what is it, Tucumcari?

ALEX

For gas, maybe. Why?

TONY

The billboard says they got twelve hundred motel rooms.

ALEX

So what? We're not stopping. Who checks into a motel in the middle of the morning?

TONY

Jesus, how long did you live in Vegas? They got places there with hourly rates.

ALEX

Well, we're not stopping for more than gas. Maybe a candy bar. C'mon, get a move on.

(ALEX picks up knapsack, exits Right, followed by TONY. Silence for a moment.)

ALEX

(off)

FUCK!

(More silence for another moment.)

ALEX

(off)

Oh, FUCK!

(ALEX re-enters with the knapsack, pulls out his phone, sits on one of the stumps. Looks at the phone.)

ALEX

And no signal. Fuck me to tears.

(TONY re-enters holding his phone.)

TONY

I got a signal.

ALEX

You're supposed to have turned that off.

TONY

Big deal.

ALEX: They can track you with your GPS.

TONY

Those dopes couldn't track an elephant through the subway. Look, I got the Triple A app on my phone. You want me to call them?

ALEX

No, because Lloyd Neederhouse of Independence, Kansas does not have a Triple A membership from Las Vegas.

TONY

Oh, like the tow truck driver in Buttfuck, New Mexico is gonna be a button man for the mob. C'mon, let me call them.

ALEX

Gimme your phone. I'll call them and use my membership.

TONY

(handing ALEX the phone)

Okay. And tell 'em to bring some air for the spare, too. Who drives around with a flat spare?

ALEX

What do you want from me? I paid like nine hundred bucks for it at Señor Crédito "WE FINANCE" Used Cars. It runs.

TONY

Not too well with a flat spare.

ALEX

Shut up.

(ALEX starts to exit Right.)

TONY

Where're you going?

ALEX

My Triple A card's in the glove compartment. Play with the scorpions.

TONY

Ha ha.

(ALEX exits Right. TONY sits on a stump, then furtively looks around at his feet. Kicks some dirt and stomps.)

TONY

Stay away from me, you little fuckers. *(Looks around and shudders.)* "The Great Outdoors." Feh. Who needs it?

ALEX
(off)

Who're you talking to?

TONY

No one. Myself.

ALEX
(off)

Good company.

(Off Left a coyote barks in the near distance; far enough away to indicate it is not close, but close enough to be heard above the other sounds. TONY reacts.)

TONY

What the fuck was that?

ALEX
(entering from Right carrying the phone and a small cooler)

What was what?

TONY

Over there. It sounded like a dog. Or a wolf.

ALEX

You ever heard a wolf?

TONY

Well, no, but....

ALEX

Probably a coyote.

TONY

A coyote? Are they dangerous?

ALEX

Only if you're a roadrunner and the coyote is carrying a big box from Acme.

TONY

Funny. No, seriously, do they attack people?

ALEX

Only people who rat out their mob boss. No, they don't attack. Hell, they're probably more afraid of you than you are of them.

TONY

Well, that one must be scared shitless.

ALEX

I'm sure. (*Hands TONY the phone.*) Here. Guy said he'd be here in an hour or so.

TONY

An hour.

ALEX

Or so. Look, we're out in the middle of nowhere.

TONY

Yeah, tell me something I don't know. So, what do we do?

ALEX

We wait, Einstein.

TONY

It's getting hot.

ALEX: Yeah, it's the desert. It's July. (*Prods the cooler with his foot.*) C'mon, be a Pepper. You drank up all the Cokes. They're still sorta cool.

(*TONY opens the cooler, extracts a can of Diet Dr. Pepper.*)

TONY

Feels lukewarm.

ALEX

Oh, well, then call the waiter and send it back. Whatta want from me?

TONY

All right already. (*Pops the top, takes a sip, makes a face.*) Be a lot better with some rum.

ALEX

Who the fuck mixes perfectly good rum with Diet Dr. Pepper?

TONY

Hey, you drink what you drink, I'll drink what I drink. What do you drink? I'll bet you're Scotch guy.

ALEX

Wrong.

Gin?
TONY
Wrong again, dog breath.
ALEX
What, then? Bourbon? Jack? You don't exactly look like a beer guy; you don't have the gut.
TONY

Just... leave it alone, willya?
ALEX

Sorry. Most guys, y'know, you can usually figure it out.
TONY

If you must know, it's La Croix¹.
ALEX

La Croix? What is that, some fancy liqueur?
TONY

It's dihydrogen monoxide. H-2-Oh. Water.
ALEX

Oh. That's it? That's all you drink?
TONY

Yeah! Can we just leave it alone?
ALEX

Sure, sure. To each his own, I guess.
TONY

Thank you.
ALEX

(They sit in silence. TONY sips his soda, looks around.)

Coyotes, huh?
TONY

(More silence. Finally, ALEX gets up and paces Right, looking for the tow truck. TONY watches him.)

¹ Pronounced "La Croy."

ALEX

It was vodka.

TONY

That was my next guess.

ALEX

Well, then, you win. *(Like a game show host.)* Vanna White, tell him what he's won.

TONY

Jesus, do you have to be such a fuckin' grouch? I'm just tryin' to make polite conversation. You must be a real charmer on a date.

(Long beat as ALEX glares at TONY. Then he finally shrugs.)

ALEX

Okay, so if you must know, the reason I drink La Croix is that as of two years ago last Thursday, I've been sober. I did the whole thing, the Twelve Steps, the Serenity prayer, all of it. So now all I drink is water, okay? And I'll have you know that I've become quite the connoisseur, too. I've tried 'em all: San Pelegrino, Perrier, DaSani, Evian, Crystal Springs, even plain old tap from the Brita filter jug. But La Croix's the one and that's all I drink. Well, y'know, when I'm out on the town I'll try the house water, but if I have a choice, it's the one. It's clear, it pours well, and unlike some of your plain old generic supermarket brands, it doesn't taste like it came out of the garden hose from behind the garage. And you know what the best part is? No more having a hangover and my tongue tasting like the entire Cuban army marched over it in their stocking feet. No more waking up in my own puke. No more blackouts or trying to take my pants off over my head. Yeah, water may be odorless, tasteless, and colorless, but at least it saved my life.

(ALEX sits on the stump next to TONY. A long beat.)

TONY

Okay, I get it.

ALEX

Well, yeah. I wish I had done it about twelve years ago. Would have saved Susan and Justin ten years of my shit and I wouldn't be living in a one-bedroom over a Rite-Aid.

TONY

You were a mean drunk, huh?

ALEX

Nah, just a drunk. That was enough. Good thing Eddie was also in the program or I'd be panhandling on the Strip. When the Carousel went tits up, he basically pulled me outta the gutter.

TONY

So, what do you do with your kid?

ALEX

What?

TONY

I mean, when you and Justin are together. What do you do? Hang out? Have dinner? Play video games? Go to a ball game or what?

ALEX

Some or all of the above. He's sixteen. What did you do when you were sixteen with your dad?

TONY

Nothing. He was dead.

ALEX

I thought you said he and your mom lived in Delray.

TONY

That's my stepdad. My real dad died when I was two and Mom married Joe. I don't remember my real dad. All I got is just a couple of pictures. And his name.

ALEX

Oh, sorry. So, what did you do with Joe when you were sixteen?

TONY

Not much. I spent most of my teens at the movies or in my room. Joe's not a real... outgoing kinda guy anyway. Didn't spend a lot of time with him.

(TONY looks on his phone, taps a few keys.)

TONY

Holy shit.

ALEX

What?

TONY

Well, whaddaya know.

ALEX

What, what?

TONY

Independence, Kansas is the birthplace of William Inge.²

² Rhymes with "hinge."

ALEX
(*mock surprise*)

Are you kidding? That's amazing!

TONY

I know, right? I had no idea.

ALEX

Me neither! Who the fuck is William Inge?

TONY

Only one of the greatest American playwrights ever.

ALEX

Okay, now you're sounding like a teenage girl going all Justin Bieber on me and it's kinda creeping me out.

TONY

He wrote *Picnic*, *Come Back, Little Sheba*, *Bus Stop*, and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. He won the Pulitzer for *Picnic*.

ALEX

Yeah, never heard of them, but then we don't get a lot of theatre in a place where Liberace was considered to be a classical musician.

TONY

Bus Stop was made into a movie with Marilyn Monroe.

ALEX

Now her I've heard of.

TONY

(*looking at phone*)

It says he's buried there. He committed suicide in 1973.

ALEX

Sorry to hear that.

TONY

He was an alcoholic.

ALEX

So, we have something in common, except I'm still very much alive, and I can't write.

TONY

And he was gay.

ALEX

Well, one out of two, then.

TONY

Yeah, I figured that out. (*Back to phone.*) Oh, they have a festival in his honor every year. The William Inge Theatre Festival, held every year since 1983.

ALEX

Then you have something to look forward to.

(*ALEX gets up and paces off Right. TONY continues to scroll through his phone.*)

TONY

Did you know that he won the Oscar for Best Screenplay? *Splendor in the Grass*. 1961.

ALEX

(*off*)

Congratulations. (*Re-enters.*) Damn, this is taking forever.

TONY

You called them like ten minutes ago. You said it would be an hour. What's your hurry?

ALEX

I just wanna get this over with. Get you there, dump you off, sign off on your papers or whatever, and go home.

TONY

To what? You got a hot date or something?

ALEX

No, just....

TONY

Are you seeing anyone?

ALEX

What?

TONY

Are you dating anyone?

ALEX

None of your business.

TONY

I'll take that as a no.

ALEX
Look, I'm not gonna tell you even if I was.

TONY
Okay, then. Gonna see your kid?

ALEX
He's away for the summer.

TONY
Oh, nice. Visiting relatives?

ALEX
No, his grandparents sent him off to a camp in Colorado for the summer. Hiking, riding horses, mountain climbing, that sorta crap.

TONY
Sounds... like fun, I guess. If you like that sorta crap.

ALEX
Oh, he does. Kid's a real...

TONY
Eagle Scout?

ALEX
Jock. Six foot two, hundred and eighty pounds, muscles all over the place. Built like a brick shithouse.

TONY
Oh. Well, that's good.

ALEX
I suppose.

TONY
What, you gotta problem with that? Most guys I know with kids are kinda relieved if their kid's, y'know, an athlete or good at sports. Unless he's a bully or an asshole about it.

ALEX
Oh, no, he's not like that. Not at all.

TONY
So, what's the problem? Not that I know anything about raising a kid or anything, but...

ALEX

Yeah, I know, I read your file. Never married, no kids. Probably makes it easy to ship you off to the middle of nowhere.

TONY

But I know about families, though. I mean, real families, not like....

ALEX

It's just that...

(Beat.)

TONY

Just what?

ALEX

I don't know how to talk to him now.

TONY

What, he ignores you? He's embarrassed to be around you? Aren't all teenagers like that?

ALEX

Not him. He talks to me all the time. Never holds anything back.

TONY

Okay, now I'm confused.

(ALEX looks at TONY for a long beat.)

ALEX

Oh, what the hell. In twenty-four hours, you're gonna be Lloyd Neederhouse of Independence, Kansas, and I'll never see you again.

TONY

Look, if you're gonna tell me some deep dark secret that's gonna end up getting me whacked, just keep it to yourself.

ALEX

No, f'r Chrissake, nothing like that.

TONY

Then what?

ALEX

(deep breath)

Okay. Shit, I don't know why I'm telling you this.

TONY

Well, shit or get off the pot, willya?

ALEX

The night before he left for camp, I took him out to dinner to this really nice rib joint. We were having a great time, and I asked him if he was looking forward to spending eight weeks in the Rockies and shit, and he says, yeah, he is, except he's gonna miss his friend. And I said, well, yeah, that's natural, but you'll make friends there, too, and when you get back in August your friends will still be here. And he says, yeah, I know, but I'm gonna miss my friend. My boyfriend.

(ALEX looks at TONY awaiting his reaction. TONY nods.)

TONY

Okay.

ALEX

That's all you got? Okay? My kid's gay.

TONY

Yeah, I got that. What did you say?

ALEX

Huh?

TONY

What did you say back to him?

ALEX

I don't remember.

TONY

Well, it wasn't something stupid like "Holy shit!" or "What the fuck," was it?

ALEX

No! I probably said something like, "Okay..."

TONY

You didn't make a scene, did you?

ALEX

Hell no! It was... I mean, I was stunned, I guess.

TONY

Yeah, I can imagine.

ALEX
My sixteen-year-old son tells me he's gay.

TONY
That's great.

ALEX
What?

TONY
It's great. How many kids do you know would tell their own dad they're gay? Trust him enough to know that he's not gonna go ballistic or beat the crap outta him? Most kids would rather dive headfirst into their own shit than tell a parent about something like that. I know I would have.

ALEX
Would have what?

TONY
There's no way I was gonna tell my mom and stepdad when I was sixteen.

ALEX
You're gay.

TONY
Yeah, I know.

ALEX
You're shitting me.

TONY
What, you couldn't figure it out? Single, never married, no kids, likes old movies, knows who William Inge was? You couldn't piece it together? How many more fuckin' cultural stereotypes do you need? Jesus, you need to take your gaydar in for a tune-up, especially now that you know your sixteen-year-old hunk of a son is a friend of Dorothy.

ALEX
Don't call him that.

TONY
What, a "friend of Dorothy"?

ALEX
No. A hunk.

TONY
Oh, sorry.

ALEX

Don't think of him like that. Like some kinda ... sex object.

TONY

Hey, I don't, but don't think the world doesn't work that way. Gay or straight, it's all about the outside, and when you told me your kid is six-foot-two and built like a brick shithouse, the old gay lizard brain thinks hunk, not nerd. No offense; I would never go near a kid that age.

ALEX

Yeah, okay. Who's Dorothy?

TONY

Oh, sorry. Obscure cultural reference. Judy Garland. Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She was a major gay icon back in the old days. That's how men used to tell each other... before it was okay to be out and....

(ALEX looks at TONY long enough for him to get uncomfortable.)

TONY

(cont'd)

Look, I'm sorry, about the hunk thing.

ALEX

Huh? No, it's not that. Not that I wouldn't beat the snot outta any guy that hit on him without him wanting it. No, I was just thinking.... How do I talk to him?

TONY

Why're you asking me? The last time I talked to a sixteen-year-old boy was at the supermarket when I told him not to put the eggs on top of the bread in the shopping bag. Didn't you give Justin The Talk when he was twelve or whenever it was that he started to sprout hair in strange places?

ALEX

Oh, hell no, they learn all that in school, and I don't mean jokes in the locker room. They have videos and Power Points and seminars. He came home knowing more about sex than I did after four years in the Army.

TONY

(snorting)

Yeah, especially the Power Points.

ALEX

Knock it off.

TONY

Yeah, okay, I'm sorry. What do you think you're supposed to talk to him about now that you know he's gay?

ALEX

Well, I don't know. Life. What it's like out there. Out here. Being out. I have no idea what to say to him.

TONY

Who the fuck does? It doesn't matter if he's straight or gay. Life's gonna come at you like a fuckin' train either way. You of all people should know that.

ALEX

Yeah, well...

TONY

Why'd you go into the Army?

ALEX

What's that gotta do with...?

TONY

Just answer the question.

ALEX

I dunno... Seemed like a good idea at the time.

TONY

How old were you when you went in?

ALEX

Seventeen, eighteen, something like that.

TONY

So, did the Army talk to you about life?

ALEX

No, it just... Why are you getting all philosophical?

TONY

Hey, you brought it up with worrying about talking about life with your son.

ALEX

I meant things like use a condom and don't respond to e-mails from Nigerian widows. Not... heavy shit.

TONY

It's those little details like wearing condoms and deleting spam that make up life and the heavy shit.

ALEX
(*sarcastic*)

Oh, that's very deep.

TONY

It is! Wrapping your dick means you're being careful so you don't get a disease or find yourself on the business end of a paternity suit. And anyone who replies to spam deserves to lose their money 'cause they're not smart enough to have it in the first place.

ALEX

Yeah, well.

TONY

Yeah, well what? Don't tell me you sent a thousand bucks to some scammer in Lagos?

ALEX

No. The other thing.

TONY

You mean...?

(*ALEX nods wordlessly.*)

TONY

Well, okay then. Well, look, something good came out of it, right? You got yourself a great kid, right? Yeah, okay, so chances are you're not gonna end up in the grandpa business, but hey... These things happen. At least you took responsibility for it. Didn't you?

ALEX

We were already married. We talked about having kids but we were like twenty-one, barely able to take care of ourselves, still living like kids ourselves in a treehouse, she clerking at a 7-11, me working the nightshift and throwing out the drunks. Then wham, there's this little baloney loaf of a kid staring up at me, and... Next thing I know, I'm the drunk being tossed out on the street, and here I am, at the ripe old age of thirty-eight, driving cross-country with....

TONY

With a loser like me.

ALEX

Wasn't gonna say that.

TONY

Might as well. Look, I'm the last guy to lecture your kid on life. You think I wanted to end up keeping books for some third-rate con artist? That was not my plan.

ALEX

What was it?

TONY

I was always good at math, so I thought I'd get a degree, maybe an MBA, become a CPA and spend my life counting other peoples' money and make some while I was at it. I was doin' okay, y'know, had a little storefront place in Queens and did the books for the locals, helped with income taxes, some estate planning. It was nice.

ALEX

So, how'd you end up in Vegas working the con?

TONY

Same way you ended up with a baloney loaf. Sorta.

ALEX

Wait a minute. You knocked up some girl?

TONY

No, I've never batted from that side of the plate. Okay, here's what happened. I had just gotten started. I was about twenty-five, and believe it or not, I was not bad-looking. I went to the gym, I ate right, didn't smoke or do hard drugs. Okay, so I was no Brad Pitt, but...

ALEX

Yeah, I get the idea.

TONY

So, one day I'm at the gym, and there's this guy, and he's kinda hot. We started talking, and pretty soon he's sending me signals like, you know what I mean?

ALEX

Yeah, I get it. You hooked up.

TONY

Yeah, okay, so we became buddies. Come to find out he's got a linen supply company for bars and restaurants, and he asks if I wanna start doing his bookkeeping. I say sure, why not, and pretty soon he's my biggest client. I'm rollin' in it. Then, in the middle of one of the worst snowstorms in the history of the city, he calls me up and says, 'Hey, let's blow this town. I got a pal in Vegas who can set us up out there. We get a place together, and we'll be in paradise. Whaddaya say?' I look around at my cramped little shop wedged in between a deli and a nail salon and three feet of snow outside and old people slippin' and slidin', and I say fuck yeah. Not to mention the idea of actually living with a good-looking guy who's got a ...

ALEX

Yeah, I got it. So, you're out in Vegas, livin' the dream.

TONY

Except that dream comes with strings, and the guy who hired us has a side hustle selling non-existing condos to rich widows on the shore of Lake Mead, and if I want to keep my job, my boyfriend, and my pulse, I'll shut up and learn the fine art of creative bookkeeping. So, I do. I shut up and do what they tell me to do.

ALEX

What made you suddenly grow a conscience? I mean, that took guts.

TONY

You're giving me too much credit, pally. I went back to New York to visit my mom for a week, and when I came back, everything was gone.

ALEX

Whaddaya mean, gone?

TONY

Like, gone. Vanished. My car, everything in the apartment, my boyfriend, and when I went to the office, it was sealed up with that yellow crime scene tape and this detective that looks like a linebacker for the Jets is standing in the middle of a great big empty. Next thing I know I'm in a holding cell next to a couple of hookers from the Strip. 'What're you in for, baby?' one asks me. I'm in no mood to chit-chat, so I told her I killed my pimp and left him out in the desert like Joe Pesci in *Casino*. She left me alone after that.

ALEX

Yeah, I'd guess so. So, what then, the D.A. comes to you and says spill your guts and you walk?

TONY

Hell, no. He's got a boner – figuratively speaking – to toss me in the joint along with the rest of the gang. He says they have everything, I got nothing to bargain with. But I saw *The Shawshank Redemption* like five times and I tell him, well, you think you got everything, but I kept some insurance, and if you want it, all you gotta do is get me the fuck outta town free and clear. So, he goes for it, we make a deal, and here I am: thirty-five years old, lost my CPA, and halfway to Kansas in the middle of the fuckin' desert with coyotes, scorpions, and goat-heads. And now I'm gonna be Lloyd Neederhouse from fuckin' Toledo, Ohio, making twenty grand a year and working nights in Independence, Kansas. It's gonna take me a year just to learn to talk like them.

ALEX

Maybe longer. So, what happened to your boyfriend?

TONY

Hell if I know. He's probably in witness protection, too. With my luck, he's in Maui. Look, if I was gonna give Justin any advice, other than keep your dick in your pants, I'd tell him that you can't learn about life from some fortune cookie. It's... life is what happens when you're making other plans.

ALEX
(impressed)

That's pretty profound.

TONY

Yeah, well, it should be. It's from John Lennon.

ALEX

Oh. I was more into the Stones.

TONY

Okay, then. Mick Jagger: you can't always get what you want.

ALEX

But you might just find you get what you need.

TONY

Ain't that the fuckin' truth.

(Silence while TONY and ALEX sit for a moment. Then ALEX gets up and looks off Left at the billboard.)

ALEX

Tucumcari tonight.

TONY

It's what the sign says.

ALEX

Y'know, I kinda doubt that there's some hit man lurking around some greasy spoon in Tucumcari, New Mexico, waiting for you to come by.

TONY

Yeah, I guess not.

ALEX

And if there are twelve hundred motel rooms, what're the odds that they'd find the one where we'd be staying, y'know, just to rest up for the rest of the trip?

TONY

Not too good. I mean, for them.

ALEX

Yeah, and if they're separate rooms, even better for us.

TONY
What, no cuffs?

ALEX
Where the fuck are ya gonna go?

TONY
Where the fuck was I gonna go last night?

ALEX
I didn't know you then.

TONY
Aw, thanks.

ALEX
I didn't know that you couldn't run twenty yards without tripping over your own feet or being spooked by a coyote.

TONY
Thanks a lot.

ALEX
Look, all I'm sayin' is that... if we're gonna be stuck together for the next, what, five hundred miles, we might as well... make it easy on ourselves.

(TONY taps the screen on his phone, shows it to ALEX.)

TONY
Five hundred and fifty-eight point three miles from Tucumcari to Independence. Told you I was good with numbers.

ALEX
That's Google Maps, Copernicus. Anyway, as soon as we get on the road, we can think about grabbing a bite and maybe check in to a motel.

TONY
(grinning)
Best offer I've had in a long time.

ALEX
Don't get your hopes up. Like I said, separate rooms.

TONY
Don't flatter yourself, fella. Besides, I've pretty much given up any hope of meeting Mr. Right where I'm going.

ALEX

Oh, you never know. Independence could be the gay playground of Kansas.

TONY

Yeah, I saw *Deliverance*. No thanks.

ALEX

Well, give it a chance. If they do a theatre festival it doesn't sound like a cultural wasteland. Hey, maybe I'll bring Justin to it sometime.

TONY

I'll reserve you some rooms at the Apple Tree Inn. Is he into theatre?

ALEX

Well, he's gay, so...

TONY

Oh, c'mon. Enough of the stereotypes.

ALEX

I'm kidding. But he was in a play last year.

TONY

Which one?

ALEX

The pirates of something.

TONY

The Pirates of Penzance?

ALEX

Yeah, that's it.

TONY

That's not a play, it's an operetta. Gilbert and Sullivan. 'I am the very model of a modern major general.' What part did he play?

ALEX

One of the pirates. Fred, I think.

TONY

Frederick? That's the lead. So, he can sing?

ALEX

Yeah, pretty good, too.

TONY

That's great.

ALEX

I think he wants to do it in college. Study theatre.

TONY

So, let him.

ALEX

What kind of future is there in that?

TONY

What kind of future is there in anything? Neither of us are shining examples of career advancement. Let him follow his dream.

ALEX

What if he craters it?

TONY

What if he doesn't? He's gotta at least give it a shot. All you gotta do is be there for him no matter what. That's fuckin' life, Alex.

ALEX

I love my son, Tony.

TONY

Probably just as much as he loves you.

(Long beat, then TONY goes to ALEX and gingerly offers him a hug. ALEX, a bit surprised, returns it, then breaks it off.)

ALEX

All right, all right, no need to get all mushy.

TONY

Oh, I wouldn't dream of it.

(Off Right we hear a vehicle pull up and stop, gravel scattering, the engine idling. A powerful searchlight beam cuts across the stage, first hitting Stage Right.)

ALEX

Hit the dirt!

(ALEX dives for the knapsack, doing a combat roll (if possible) and ducking behind one of the stumps. TONY does not move. Then the searchlight moves towards the stumps and TONY scuttles

behind one. The light stops on the stump where TONY is hiding. Pause, then TONY pokes his head up cautiously, shading his eyes as he looks at the source of the light. ALEX furtively looks out from behind his stump, a gun in his right hand. Then TONY chuckles and points.)

TONY

It's the Triple A guy, Quick Draw. *(To the Triple A guy.)* Hey! Over here!

ALEX

(relieved and a tad embarrassed)

Oh, well, it's about fuckin' time.

(ALEX stands up, stuffs the gun in the knapsack and waves at the Triple A guy.)

ALEX

C'mon, let's get our shit together and get the fuck outta here.

(ALEX picks up the cooler, starts to exit.)

TONY

Follow the yellow brick road.

ALEX

Do what?

TONY

Never mind. Right behind you.

They exit Right. Off Left the coyote barks, then howls.

END OF PLAY.