

Between Panic and Desire

by

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CHARACTERS

MARK: Male, mid-thirties.
CARIDAD: Female, late thirties.
ESPERANZA: Female, late twenties.
DR. GREENE: Male, early thirties.

SETTING

The sitting room of an older house in Indiana, Pennsylvania.

TIME

February 2 of the present year.

SCENE ONE

Setting: A comfortable sitting room with a sofa, chair, coffee table, side table, and lamp. Hooks for coats are along a wall beside the front door of the house. Winter light streams in from windows at the sides and unseen windows downstage. A dining chair facing upstage sits at the edge of darkness behind the sofa. A deck of cards, pencil, notepad, and can of mixed nuts are on the coffee table. A landline telephone is on the side table.

At rise: MARK is speaking to someone on the telephone. He alternately stands and sits restively, although getting up is difficult due to a bad knee. He uses a cane while standing and walking around.

MARK

(sharply, but not loudly)

I said I would hold. ... What do you think I've been doing for the last ten fucking minutes and most of the last forty fucking minutes?

(CARIDAD enters from the rear.)

I'm sure you don't want me to use expletives but I find them perfectly valid when speaking to incompetent people giving me the run around.

(softly, to CARIDAD)

Do you need the phone?

CARIDAD

No.

MARK

It's not a question of me calming down. I already told you. I am calling because you cut off my disability benefits by mistake and my disabilities include psychological trauma triggered by people who have jobs and treat me like shit, because I am unemployable and I don't treat people like shit unless I am shat upon.

(to CARIDAD)

It is 'shat', right?

CARIDAD

(shrugging)

How would I know?

MARK

Why can't you just call me back when you have an answer instead of wasting my time staying on hold?

(voice rising, barely under control)

Really? ... You could have done that forty fucking minutes ago and didn't tell me? ... Goddammit! Why the hell didn't you tell me? ... Oh, for Christ's sake! ... Fine, but I expect to hear back by noon or I'm gonna rip some office jockey a new orifice.

(MARK ends the call.)

CARIDAD

(sitting on the sofa)

Mark, why are you getting so worked up over losing your benefits?

MARK

(still agitated)

Why shouldn't I?

CARIDAD

For starters, you inherited over a million dollars from your father. An estranged father at that.

MARK

(calming down)

We weren't estranged. He just never thought about contacting me after he started drinking again.

CARIDAD

He never came back to see you or Momma even while he was sober. That's estranged in my book.

MARK

(becoming annoyed)

Yes, Cari. You're right. How can I forget my father was kicked out of here when I was eight and never once came back to see his only child?

CARIDAD

(trying to be empathetic)

My father did the same thing, you know.

MARK

But your father never married Momma.

CARIDAD

Breeding bastards is no excuse for being an absent parent.

MARK

(calming down again)

You're right. Neither one of us had caring fathers.

CARIDAD

At least your father cared enough to leave everything to you.

MARK

Dying intestate is not an act of love.

(MARK sits in the chair and grabs the pencil and notepad from the table to write down what he just said.)

CARIDAD

Hoarding another gem for future use?

MARK

If I don't, I'll forget.

CARIDAD

Are all writers sponges like that, soaking up proverbs and platitudes wherever and whenever they find them?

MARK

You'll have to ask all writers to get an answer. Or at least enough until one says 'No'. This writer does. They make great writing prompts when I get stuck.

(After setting down the pad and pencil, MARK leans back in the chair, looking far more relaxed.)

Anyway, getting Dad's money isn't an intentional act on his part. Like all good alcoholics and addicts, he just procrastinated and never got around to drawing up a will.

CARIDAD

Does that mean bad alcoholics and addicts are better at looking after their affairs?

MARK

Yes, smartass, as a matter of fact they are.

CARIDAD

I see. Which category are you?

MARK

I always went above and beyond to make sure no one could complain about my drinking and drugging.

CARIDAD

Didn't anyone find out?

MARK

If they did, they never confronted me about it. In the Army, they only care that you follow orders and get the job done.

CARIDAD

I remember Momma calling me when you went into rehab. She was in shock her decorated veteran son needed treatment.

MARK

I wish she had shown as much surprise when I came back from my second tour with my mental problems.

CARIDAD

Come on! She was always concerned her children were going to have psychological issues.

MARK

I don't know why.

CARIDAD

I always assumed it had something to do with our fathers.

MARK

The only thing I know is that we've never been allowed to talk about them.

CARIDAD

Aunt Shirley and Aunt Janet have said some things...

MARK

Really?

CARIDAD

Do you ever tell anyone that Aunt Shirley's boys may be your half-brothers?

MARK

And make it sound as though we come from some backwoods holler? No way. Besides, the court established they were your dad's kids.

CARIDAD

Only because Dad didn't contest the paternity suit. To be honest, I think he'd take credit for every baby born in town if he could. I lost count how many half-siblings I have.

MARK

I never have been comfortable with the half-sister thing. Makes it sound like you're half a person.

CARIDAD

That's very sweet of you.

MARK

I *have* wanted to pretend Ranza isn't related at all, ever since her father went nuts.

CARIDAD

Which leads us back to your rant with the person on the phone.

MARK

I can't help it. When I'm triggered, I lose control. The medications at least limit how long the anger lasts.

CARIDAD

I get that. What I still don't understand is why you're so concerned about your benefit checks being stopped when you know you will be getting so much money from your father.

MARK

Money I won't see for another year according to the letter I got. In the meantime, what am I supposed to do?

CARIDAD

We can sort something out. It's only temporary.

MARK

No. It's one of those things. I was contributing to my upkeep through that benefit check. Now, I have nothing.

CARIDAD

You have a mortgage free house and two sisters who don't mind helping you out.

MARK

I'll be dependent on you.

CARIDAD

Why is that a problem?

MARK

I just said. It's one of those things.

CARIDAD

You could ask the executor about giving you an early distribution of some of your inheritance.

MARK

That'll make it seem like I'm greedily waiting for the estate to be settled.

CARIDAD

No, it will show that you have a justifiable, immediate need.

MARK

A need I wouldn't have except for some idiot's mistake in stopping my benefits.

(becoming agitated again)

I shouldn't have to be in this position. I shouldn't have to take charity from you. I shouldn't have to ask the executor for an early disbursement.

CARIDAD

(exhausted and caring)

Shouldn't, shouldn't, shouldn't. Yes. You shouldn't have to do anything. In fact, you don't have to do anything. But that still leaves you with the same need to be filled.

MARK

Which should be filled by them continuing my benefits. I have a valid reason for getting them. I earned them after having my knee shattered and my psyche scrambled.

CARIDAD

And now you have an equally valid reason for asking the executor.

MARK

Except, it's not. It's based on someone's mistake that should be corrected.

CARIDAD

So, let Ranza and me cover your expenses while you fix this mistake.

MARK

(calming down again)

You've got moving expenses and you're already picking up the difference on Momma's rent. Besides, Ranza's not of sound mind to agree.

CARIDAD

No one has determined that Ranza is no longer competent.

MARK

Deliberately wrapping your car around a tree just to have that experience doesn't strike me or anyone I know as the act of a sane person.

CARIDAD

Anyone you know? Who have you talked with?

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

(MARK is downstage looking out as though through a window. CARIDAD is sitting on the sofa playing solitaire.)

MARK

I thought you were going to pick up Ranza.

CARIDAD

I am in a little while.

MARK

I'm glad you're moving back. I won't have to rely on Mother if I can't drive. He was a saint taking care of me when I had my wisdom teeth removed when Momma was away.

CARIDAD

How is the old Mother Hen?

MARK

He's fine. He still advises the LGBT student group at IUP even though he retired.

CARIDAD

That group was one of the best things about going there for college.

MARK

(moving away from the 'window')

Yep. I'll never forget when I walked in as a freshman all set to meet other gay guys. Instead I found my older sister.

CARIDAD

That was classic. Of course, Mother forewarned me that he had received an email from a Mark Hogsdon asking about the location of the meeting. I had to laugh you were using Momma's maiden name. If you had used your real surname, he never would have known I was your sister.

MARK

And you said nothing and just waited for me to show up.

CARIDAD

Are you kidding? I'd do anything to get around having to come out to you, or anyone for that matter, by saying 'Look at me! I'm a lesbian!'

MARK

(standing behind CARIDAD)

You know, that's some of the best advice anyone ever gave me. Just be myself and let other people figure out which bus I'm riding. I found out in the Army that the guys who could care less about my sexual orientation knew pretty quickly.

CARIDAD

And the ones who were prejudiced?

MARK

Nothing. They were too ignorant to put two and two together to make three.

(pointing to the cards)

Speaking of which, two of hearts under the three of clubs.

CARIDAD

What about the people in your group therapy?

MARK

(idling around with his cane)

We have enough issues going on that being narrow minded about anything isn't healthy.

CARIDAD

I still can't believe you went to a bunch of vets with PTSD, addictions, and other assorted disorders to discuss your sister's sanity.

MARK

Are you kidding? Go with the experts, right?

CARIDAD

That's nuts.

MARK

Oh, that reminds me. We're almost out of mixed nuts.

CARIDAD

In this house?

MARK

(smirking)

Yeah, hard to believe. And that's another thing. Without my benefit check I can't afford the pistachio blend.

CARIDAD

Is 'pistachio blend' crazy code for something?

MARK

No, smartass. It's a special kind of mixed nuts that Ranza bought for me.

CARIDAD

Aside from containing pistachios, what makes it so special?

MARK

It doesn't have Brazil nuts.

(eagerly)

Did you know Brazil is named for Brazil nuts?

CARIDAD

How do you know the nuts weren't named for the country?

MARK

Because the nuts were named first.

CARIDAD

How do you know?

MARK

Because I was there!

CARIDAD

No, you weren't.

MARK

(sitting down in the chair)

I certainly was. Right after the first chicken hatched from the first chicken egg, someone said 'we ought to call these here black-shelled, claw-like nuts Brazil nuts'.

CARIDAD

Immediately after?

MARK

No, first we oohed and aahed over the chick.

CARIDAD

(sarcastically)

How cute!

MARK

Anyway, Brazil nuts are in deluxe mixed nuts, which is much better than regular mixed nuts. Regular mixed nuts is ... are? ... is half peanuts.

CARIDAD

A lot of people like peanuts.

MARK

That's not the point. Peanuts don't deserve to be mingled with nuts. They are legumes like beans and peas.

CARIDAD

(sitting back from the card game)

Okay, I remember now. It's another one of those things. Did you ever hear back from the Planters people asking them to stop calling peanuts nuts?

MARK

Yep. They sent me a lousy two-dollar off coupon for the purchase of three of their products.

CARIDAD

That doesn't sound so lousy if their pistachio blend is pricey.

(CARIDAD goes back to the card game.)

MARK

That coupon did put me over the two thousand dollar mark in apology stuff I received last year.

CARIDAD

Two thousand? That's a lot of coupons.

MARK

It wasn't just coupons. The total includes a free oil change, a fresh turkey, and some other, bigger items.

CARIDAD

Bigger than a turkey?

MARK

Bigger in terms of value.

CARIDAD

I'm surprised anyone responds to your rantings. Doesn't paying off a complaining customer only encourage more complaints?

MARK

I'm sure someone at Wharton or whatever did a study and discovered it's worthwhile to be beneficent to those of us who carp to the point complaints are escalated.

CARIDAD

It sounds like bribery to me.

MARK

There's no quid pro quo. They're just handing me a lollipop to keep me quiet. I'm not agreeing to hold back on criticizing them.

(CARIDAD ends the card game and places the cards exactly where she found them.)

CARIDAD

Except you do, don't you? Once you're bought off with a coupon or gift card, you stop complaining.

MARK

About that particular incident, sure. But it's not going to stop me from complaining later on if they don't fix the issue or a different issue arises. I'm always getting credits on my bills for cable and cell phone. They can't get anything right.

CARIDAD

(standing)

And they never wonder if you're just scamming them?

MARK

I always offer ways for them to change what they do so that no one has to complain in the future. They've taken my advice a couple of times.

CARIDAD

I'd go nuts if I complained about every little error companies make.

MARK

That's why it helps to be a nut already.

CARIDAD

I thought you were a legume.

(MARK cautiously moves to the sofa.)

MARK

That would be you, the family lez-bean.

CARIDAD

(ignoring the remark)

Anyway, I meant the futility of complaining. You're trying to change the world one error at a time.

MARK

It's my nature to fix things. I would much rather have a better customer service experience and not have to complain than to get all those gift cards, credits, and coupons.

CARIDAD

And here I thought you were just chasing after a Nobel Peace Prize.

MARK

I gave up on that dream a long time ago. It went with all the others.

CARIDAD

Went with all the others. Don't start with the poor me's. I have to pick up groceries. Then I'll pick up Esperanza. Dr. Greene told her he would stop by once she's home.

(MARK stretches out on the sofa.)

MARK

Who's Dr. Greene?

CARIDAD

The new psychiatrist on staff at Regional, apparently. I'm surprised someone like him would choose to live in the wilderness of Indiana County PA.

MARK

A-ha! So, he's good looking.

CARIDAD

How would I know? I haven't met him yet.

MARK

Then what did you mean by 'someone like him'?

CARIDAD

A young professional who I gather is unmarried. Hey, did you watch the show from Punxy this morning. Did Phil see his shadow?

MARK

I recorded it. We can watch together once Ranza is home.

CARIDAD

Sounds good.

MARK

Until then, spring will be in a quantum state of being six weeks away and not at the same time.

(MARK grabs the notebook and pencil.)

CARIDAD

Saving that one for posterity, too?

MARK

Yep.

CARIDAD

Okay. See you in a couple hours.

(The telephone rings as CARIDAD exits upstage into the darkness. MARK answers the telephone.)

MARK

Hello? ... Yep, this is Mark Forrester. ... December twenty-seventh, nineteen eighty-three. ... Six-zero-seven-eight. ... What happened? ... Are you serious? ... Why would you let her do that? ... Yes, she's my mother, but I'm not a child. ... For Christ's sake, I revoked the power of attorney. ... Do you realize where she is? ... Why would you allow her to do that without checking with me? ... Great. ... Look, I was already furious that you stopped the benefits. Now I am beyond furious. I need to speak to a supervisor right now. ... Yep, I'll hold.

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

(MARK is sprawled on the sofa napping. He mutters. He punches a pillow, then kicks. His body shudders. He wakes up with a start. He doesn't immediately sit up. He cautiously turns his head to evaluate where he is. As he sits up, he continues to look around to orient himself. He leans back into the sofa and looks up, mouth open.)

MARK

Damn!

(ESPERANZA enters from upstage.)

ESPERANZA

Hello, Big Brother. I'm home.

(ESPERANZA stands behind MARK. She looks down into his face.)

MARK

Damn!

ESPERANZA

Uh-oh. Did you just wake up from one of those dreams, Big Brother?

MARK

No. I'm trying to catch snowflakes.

ESPERANZA

Silly! It doesn't snow indoors. At least, not since the roof was patched where the meteor hit the house. Do you remember that, Big Brother? That rock from space tore a big hole in our roof even though the rock wasn't all that big. The fire chief thought the meteor exploded on impact.

(ESPERANZA begins to wander around the room looking at things aimlessly and checking now and again to see if MARK is paying attention. MARK remains on the sofa, face looking up, eyes open.)

ESPERANZA (Cont.)

We looked all over trying to find fragments in the yard. Never found a thing. Do you remember? The homeowner's insurance said a meteor was an Act of God and they weren't responsible for anything God did. When the preacher heard that he told Momma the congregation would accept responsibility for God throwing a rock at our house. Then folks at the church had a bake sale and donated money to help us pay for the new roof. Of course, the preacher couldn't explain why God would throw a rock at our house and damage the roof in the middle of winter. That's when Momma stopped going to church. She was grateful for the assistance the congregation provided us in our time of need. But Momma didn't see much point in worshiping a God who put a hole in our roof in the middle of winter.

(ESPERANZA peers down into MARK's face.)

Of course, she would have been pissed off with a God who did that in the summer, too, I think.

(ESPERANZA looks up trying to see what MARK sees.)

Anyway, Momma stopped going to church. You must have been twelve. We were never baptized on account of that meteor, you know.

(ESPERANZA leans down and kisses MARK on the forehead.)

Stopping going to church was the sanest thing Momma ever did other than throwing my Daddy out. Do you remember, Big Brother?

(MARK slowly lowers his head, swivels on the sofa, and looks up at his sister.)

MARK

What the hell are you talking about? Are you still drugged up from the hospital?

ESPERANZA

Well, yeah, probably. But that's no way to welcome me home.

MARK

How am I supposed to welcome you when you walk in, loom over me when I'm still half asleep, and start rambling on about rocks and God and Momma and roofs?

ESPERANZA

(sitting down)

Roofs! That's funny the way you say it. Say it again.

MARK

No.

(MARK stands with difficulty using his cane.)

ESPERANZA

Come on. Just for me! Say 'roofs'!

MARK

I said, no.

ESPERANZA

Meanie!

(MARK walks downstage to the 'window' and looks out.)

MARK

Stop it! Besides, what are you doing here? Where's Caridad?

ESPERANZA

Cari dropped me off. And what do you mean, what am I doing here? I'm living here. Doctor Greene said I'm not allowed to live by myself for a while. I need supervision.

MARK

And who's going to supervise you here?

ESPERANZA

You and Caridad, silly.

(MARK turns and walks back to the sofa.)

MARK

You're joking! I'm not fit to supervise a goldfish. And I don't know any Doctor Greene. He never asked me if I wanted to supervise you.

ESPERANZA

Why would he have to ask? You're supposed to look after me. That's what Big Brothers do.

(MARK sits on the sofa.)

MARK

Then I've been doing a lousy job of it. What brother lets his sister do what you did?

ESPERANZA

(almost leaping from the chair)

Lets?! Lets?! Come on! I acted intentionally and willfully for good reason.

MARK

Good reason? Really?

ESPERANZA

Good enough for me. I certainly didn't need your permission or Cari's or even Momma's to make a decision like that.

MARK

Then what do you suppose is the rationale for placing you under my and Caridad's supervision?

ESPERANZA

That's my point. I was in no need of supervision until after I landed with my car splashed against a tree. Seconds before that anyone would have said I was perfectly sane and required no supervision whatsoever. Out popped the air bag. Bang! I must be crazy. Now someone has to watch me, as though I'm going to do something like that twice. Such nonsense. Who's silly enough to believe that? Especially once that air bag bashed me. Do you know those things hurt? My worst injury was a bruised jaw thanks to that sack of gas. It felt like a satin fish smacked against my face.

MARK

(reaching for the pad and pencil)

Can I use that satin fish line sometime?

(ESPERANZA stands and walks behind the sofa.)

ESPERANZA

Sure, sweetie. Anything I say cannot be used against me in a court of law, but it can wind up in anything you write with my blessing since everyone will believe it is pure fiction.

MARK

Speaking of fiction, Dear Sister, they didn't keep you in the hospital for eleven days of observation for a bruised jaw.

ESPERANZA

Of course not!

(She leans down into his face.)

Everyone thought I was bat-shit crazy for driving off the road and hitting a tree because I wanted to have that experience.

(ESPERANZA straightens up and walks to the 'window'.)

MARK

Are you saying that's not crazy?

ESPERANZA

Not for a second.

MARK

And for denying that, you were hospitalized, sanitized, and rationalized.

ESPERANZA

I was certainly not rationalized. I gave them one good reason I did what I did.

MARK

Which was?

ESPERANZA

I told them it wasn't any different than if I paid someone to take me up in an airplane so I could jump out believing a little sack of silk like that air bag was going to save me from slamming into the ground, like the parachuting you did in the Army.

MARK

That was your defense for what you did?

ESPERANZA

Didn't I just say so?

MARK

And they said 'okay, she's not crazy' based on that?

ESPERANZA

They had to. The logic is perfect. If I had gone skydiving instead of driving, no one would think nothing of it.

MARK

Anything.

ESPERANZA
(turning to face MARK)

What?

MARK
No one would think anything of it.

ESPERANZA
Oh. I just said nothing that way to make me sound innocent and vulnerable.

MARK
Is that how you talked your way out of the hospital?

ESPERANZA
(sitting in the chair again)
I didn't need to talk my way out of the hospital. I gave them the one good reason they asked for. I used logic to counter their arguments. I behaved every day. I followed all protocols and procedures. And, most importantly, I told them I was not going to make a habit out of wrecking vehicles while driving them.

MARK
Leaving the door open for you to wreck parked vehicles? Or should I say *more* parked vehicles?

ESPERANZA
How do you know about that?

BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR

(ESPERANZA is using the landline telephone. MARK is pacing with the use of his cane.)

ESPERANZA

Yes, I'll hold. ... After deliberately running my car off the road, I have nothing better to do than sit here listening to music someone thinks is relaxing.

MARK

Why'd you tell them that?

ESPERANZA

I didn't. You know the drill. They put you on hold before you can respond to them asking if you mind being put on hold.

MARK

Then why continue talking? People are going to think you're crazy.

ESPERANZA

People in this house?

MARK

Not *us* people.

(pointing out the 'window')

Those people.

ESPERANZA

(leaning forward and squinting to look where MARK is pointing)

What do I care about those people? They aren't real.

MARK

How can you be sure?

ESPERANZA

Nothing outside my ken is real. If I can't see it, smell it, smack it, or suck it, it isn't there, doesn't exist. And never trust anything you hear. You never know if those are actual people talking or voice- Hello? Hello?

(ESPERANZA hangs up.)

They did it again. How is it possible to lose a call every time you transfer it to a coworker?

(ESPERANZA stands as MARK sits down on the sofa. She paces around the room.)

MARK

Incompetence. Apparently the only people allowed to have steady jobs any longer are those who don't know what the hell they're doing.

ESPERANZA

Oh, not that again, Big Brother. We all know how frustrating it has been for you. I warned you that butting heads with your superiors was going to lead to disaster. There's no use holding onto that resentment.

MARK

Easy for you, Dear Sister. You aren't saddled with being unemployable thanks to standing up to no good managers trying to twist the last drops of blood from turnips. Every single time I encounter someone who is doing a lousy job just reopens the wound and inflames all of the tissue.

ESPERANZA

That doesn't mean you have to tell them what they are doing wrong or how to do a better job.

MARK

Why not? Someone has to tell them or they're going to continue to do a bad job.

ESPERANZA

Isn't that up to their supervisors?

MARK

Who I usually wind up speaking with.

ESPERANZA

You just have to get past that anger.

MARK

How am I supposed to get past it when it's thrown in my face almost every day that people who can't do their jobs go home with paychecks and I can't even get a gig cleaning toilets?

ESPERANZA

Certainly not by dwelling on it, Big Brother. It's been three years. Time to let go.

MARK

Let go of what, the wheel like you did?

ESPERANZA

Why not?

MARK

You're one hour out of the monkey house and already trying to convert others to your holy cause of flipping out and giving in to the voices. Explain again how the hell they decided to release you.

ESPERANZA

Well for starters, I didn't tell them voices told me to do it, that's for sure. I didn't tell them I planned on leading a crusade against sanity as soon as I was free either.

MARK

I've got to give you credit for that.

ESPERANZA

(sitting on the arm of the chair)

I don't deserve credit for using common sense. After you've been 302'd, you have to get it switched from involuntary to voluntary admission ASAP, right? You do that by admitting you acted just a little bit psychotic, because if you admit you're insane they know you aren't. You participate in all group stuff and cooperate with all directives. But, when someone opens the door and says 'go frolic', you do not leap and tumble into the wide world. It may only be a test. No, you solemnly step into the sunlight, breathe deeply, and graciously bid the jailor adieu. Only after he has closed the door and you hear the keys jangling as he walks away do you jump for joy and somersault as rapidly as possible to the nearest refuge for those who are no longer deemed insane enough to keep imprisoned. Usually, that refuge is your family home.

MARK

That refuge is the incubator for your insanity.

ESPERANZA

True. It's familiar and therefore easier for us to relax, loosen the restraints of convention a bit, and maybe even howl at the new moon on a pitch dark night. But this place isn't the reason we go bonkers. It could be the place we find serenity and contentment. It's just a matter of-

(The telephone rings. ESPERANZA jumps to answer it.)

Yes, this is she. ... Thank you, but I'd be happier if the connection didn't drop than to receive your apology. ... Yes, I need my prescriptions. ... Sure.

MARK

Hold again?

ESPERANZA

Uh-huh.

MARK

Bastards. Calling you back because of their mistake and then they put you on hold. Whatever happened to courtesy?

ESPERANZA

Video games.

MARK

What?

ESPERANZA

You know. Pow-pow! Blam-blam! Blow up her! Cut him in half! All those video games Momma never allowed us to play have destroyed civilization. Everyone is too focused on what they need, what they are doing. People don't know how to react to others and they don't have consequences if how they act is poorly received.

MARK

That's a lot of baggage to place on one cultural phenomenon.

ESPERANZA

One cultural phenomenon that has been thoroughly pervasive. Think again, Big Bro—Oh! Yes! I'm still here. ... What? ... No. ... Fine.

(She hangs up the phone.)

All that and the only thing they can say is 'wait until you see Dr. Greene'.

(ESPERANZA begins pacing again.)

MARK

When is that?

ESPERANZA

(reading from the palm of her hand)

My next appointment is February fifth at ten o'clock a.m.

MARK

Can you last three days?

ESPERANZA

I guess I'll have to.

MARK

You'd think those people at Regional would know enough to give patients their medications or the scripts for them when they're discharged.

ESPERANZA

Now that I think about it, they didn't even know who was picking me up or what time.

MARK

Cari was supposed to make the arrangements late yesterday. Idiots!

(suddenly remembering)

Hey, you never said where Caridad headed off to.

ESPERANZA

She wanted to get the grocery shopping done.

MARK

She said she was going to do that before she picked you up.

ESPERANZA

I guess she didn't.

MARK

Why would she say she was going to the grocery store before picking you up and not go to the grocery store?

ESPERANZA

(unconcerned)

How would I know? Maybe she had some other errand to run.

MARK

And not tell me?

ESPERANZA

I didn't know you were her scheduling secretary.

MARK

No. It's just... Never mind.

ESPERANZA

What is it?

MARK

(anxiously)

I like to know where she is... Just in case, you know.

ESPERANZA

Does she know you want to know where she is all the time?

MARK

We talked about it when she decided to move back home from Texas.

ESPERANZA

Something must have distracted her or got in the way of getting the groceries first.

MARK

She could have called to tell me her plans changed. She knows it's important to me.

ESPERANZA

(sympathetically)

I know, sweetie.

MARK

Not that it would happen, but...

ESPERANZA

Well, Big Brother, no worries. I'm here.

MARK

Yeah, I know. But with you just out of the hospital and, and... I don't know. Aren't I supposed to be supervising you?

ESPERANZA

Hang tight. You'll be okay. We'll supervise each other.

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE

(MARK is on the sofa with his head in his hands. ESPERANZA is circling the room.)

MARK

I really hate this.

ESPERANZA

Hate is a pretty strong word.

MARK

Yeah, I know. It's just ... never mind.

ESPERANZA

What is it? I'm not that fragile. In fact, I feel pretty clear-headed right now.

MARK

(sarcastically)

Do you now?

ESPERANZA

Maybe it's breathing air that hasn't been recycled over and over. That's probably it. I feel oxygenated!

MARK

Good for you, Dear Sister.

ESPERANZA

Hey! I know sarcasm when I hear it. What's really eating you?

MARK

(looking up to her)

Why did you lie to me?

ESPERANZA

What? I didn't-

(MARK shifts awkwardly to the chair.)

MARK

You lied to me. Caridad told me Doctor Greene would be coming by here today to see you after you got out. You said you won't see him until Thursday, the fifth. So, which is it? Is he stopping here today or not?

ESPERANZA

Big Brother, would I have spent all that time on the phone trying to get my meds straightened out if I knew Doctor Greene was coming here today? I wouldn't do that, would I? You know how frustrating it is to talk to hospitals and doctors' offices and insurance companies.

MARK

Well, I guess. I thought you were gas lighting me. But why would Caridad say you told her he would be coming here? She wouldn't be pulling something on me.

ESPERANZA

Oh, but you thought I would?

(ESPERANZA begins pacing behind the sofa.)

MARK

Come on, Ranza, that's not fair. Who am I supposed to trust more, the sister who takes care of me or the sister who returns to town after a vacation and almost immediately drives off the road on purpose?

ESPERANZA

You said you could see yourself doing the same thing.

MARK

Yeah, but I'm already certified. What were you doing? Trying to horn in on my territory?

ESPERANZA

Big Brother, you don't hold a monopoly on doing crazy shit. Not in this family. Our fathers beat you to that a long time ago.

(stopping)

Why Momma had such a hankering for fruitcake, I don't know.

MARK

Maybe I shouldn't have believed your story.

ESPERANZA

It's not a story. It's exactly what happened.

MARK

Don't give me that. You make stories up all the time.

ESPERANZA

I do not.

MARK

Then how do you know Caridad's dad was nutty? He was long gone before I was born. Momma never said anything to me. Never said anything about my father either. The only one we ever knew anything about was your dad and that's only because he never fooled around on Momma and lasted a lot longer. She won't speak a word about my dad or Caridad's after what they did.

ESPERANZA

Do you blame her?

MARK

We ain't talking about Momma. We're talking about you.

ESPERANZA

We'll just have to wait until Cari is back. She'll tell you.

(ESPERANZA moves toward the door as MARK speaks.)

MARK

Tell me what? That Momma had three babies by three daddies, each man crazier than the last? She ain't never heard that from Momma and she certainly don't know it from personal experience. Caridad only knows her daddy refused to marry Momma and probably fathered two kids with Aunt Shirley. And she was too young to remember anything about my daddy before Momma divorced him. I had to listen to Aunt Shirley every Wednesday evening after choir practice tell Momma how put out she was all those years cuz Momma wasn't keen on seeing our fathers straying from home to swing with their sisters-in-law, like they was common property for all the Hogsdon sisters. Aunt Shirley made a point of complaining Momma always found the best husbands for herself when she and Aunt Janet couldn't find half as good where they was lookin'. Didn't help none that our daddies were more than eager to oblige them.

ESPERANZA

(turning to face MARK)

What are you doing?

MARK

What am I doing what?

ESPERANZA

All of a sudden you were talking like you just walked out of a backwoods holler or something.

MARK

How am I supposed to talk?

ESPERANZA

I don't know how you're supposed to talk. I'm just saying you started sounding like a stereotypical hillbilly.

MARK

It's just one of those things.

ESPERANZA

Yeah, that's what Momma would say. One of those things. Anyway, when did Cari say she'd be back?

MARK

That's the point. Remember?

BLACKOUT

SCENE SIX

(ESPERANZA is sitting behind the sofa facing upstage. MARK is lying on the sofa. CARIDAD enters from upstage.)

CARIDAD

What's going on with you two?

MARK

I'm practicing how to lie still in a pine box and Ranza is waiting for a bus now that her driver's permit has been confiscated.

ESPERANZA

It wasn't confiscated. I surrendered it voluntarily.

CARIDAD

Yes, that was a smart thing to do. Turning in your license went a long way to convincing the doctors you're healthy.

MARK

Why is it that performing like dogs fearing a rolled up newspaper across the snout goes farther in establishing sanity than asserting one's independence and resolve?

ESPERANZA

(turning around)

Are you saying that when I go along with treatment recommendations, I'm not making an independent decision?

MARK

What do you think?

(ESPERANZA stands and moves directly behind the sofa.)

CARIDAD

Don't play his games. Agreeing with people who are more knowledgeable than you on a subject is not a sign of dependence or weakness.

ESPERANZA

(leaning down to MARK's face)

You're not playing a game, Big Brother, are you?

MARK

Not one bit, Dear Sister.

(MARK sits up. ESPERANZA kneels behind him and rests her chin on the sofa back near his head.)

I was merely pointing out that going along with others typically involves a degree of submission. Submission to the will of others is hardly a characteristic of a mature, independent person.

CARIDAD

Mark, you are applying an awfully broad concept to circumstances that have many other variables at play. Agreeing with someone is not always a sign of wimping out.

MARK

It seems to be every time you're home and we order pizza and decide the toppings.

(CARIDAD walks to the chair and sits.)

CARIDAD

Accepting that I do not like sausage on pizza does not qualify as forcing you to bend to my will. I have offered to order a pizza with sausage on one half or ordering two pizzas.

MARK

You know very well those alleged compromises leave me looking like a glutton, since either way I end up with four slices or a whole pie all to myself.

ESPERANZA

I would never think of you as gluttonous, Big Brother.

(ESPERANZA lies down behind the sofa.)

MARK

Thank you.

ESPERANZA

Although now that I think about it, I bet some other of the seven cardinal sins might apply.

CARIDAD

Taking an inventory of someone else's character defects is never a good use of time.

(MARK kneels on the sofa to look down on ESPERANZA behind the sofa.)

MARK

Except now I'm curious what Ranza thinks I'm guilty of. Come on, Dear Sister, what mortal sins should I be praying to be forgiven for?

ESPERANZA

(rising back on her knees so she is face to face with MARK)

Well, I would knock out pride right off the bat.

MARK

That has me disheartened.

CARIDAD

Mark, you know quite well you are never satisfied with your accomplishments and never boast about anything.

ESPERANZA

(still looking directly into his eyes)

On the other hand, lust is probably your most outstanding quality.

CARIDAD

Really? I would say anger.

ESPERANZA

(standing)

That is big. But he spends more time thinking about who he wants than who he resents.

MARK

Since when did you become a mind reader?

(MARK lies back again on the sofa.)

CARIDAD

One doesn't have to be telepathic to recognize when someone has a sexual interest in someone else. When we're out in public, especially around the campus or on Philly Street, your head can move three hundred sixty degrees.

ESPERANZA

I bet all the eye candy provided by IUP students is one of the foremost reasons you came back to live here.

MARK

It's an added perk, but no, I live in Indiana PA due to my disabilities and not being able to earn a living after those bastards harassed me out of my job.

CARIDAD

Which means anger tops lust. What about the other deadly sins?

ESPERANZA

(straddling the sofa back and counting with her fingers)

Let's see. We did pride, gluttony, anger, and lust. There's greed, envy, and, and... What's the other one?

CARIDAD

Sloth.

ESPERANZA

Ooh! That's a tough one.

MARK

Does that mean you are ruling out greed and envy?

ESPERANZA

Of course, Big Brother! You have never been covetous of other people's money or possessions.

CARIDAD

Look at how upset you have been about your benefits being cut prematurely due to your inheritance. That demonstrates depths of character.

MARK

Well, depths of something.

ESPERANZA

See? That's why we took pride off the table right away. You are modest to a fault, as they say, Big Brother.

CARIDAD

Ever wonder why they say that?

MARK

Not at all.

ESPERANZA

Too much modesty leads people to think one has low self-esteem. Just look how bad Mark feels when he receives a compliment. Isn't that right, Big Brother?

MARK

I don't feel bad. I just don't like attention placed on me by others for any reason, whether it's criticism or praise.

ESPERANZA

(standing again)

Except you don't mind when your sisters discuss your faults.

MARK

I do so. Just go ahead and say I'm a lazy sonofabitch and we're done.

CARIDAD

Tempting as it is to agree with you given your supine position, I can't see sloth being one of your bad qualities.

ESPERANZA

I agree, Big Sister. Our brother has proven far too productive in his lifetime to warrant being labelled lazy.

MARK

(propping his head up with one arm)

Labelled? I'm not a can of soup.

ESPERANZA

What would you call it?

CARIDAD

Identified works.

MARK

Botanists identify plants.

CARIDAD

I think they classify plants. How about branded?

MARK

(flattening back down again)

That's worse than labelled. I'll stick with identified.

ESPERANZA

Now that's settled, we can begin work on removing the two character defects you have in abundance.

MARK

Who agreed to have them removed?

ESPERANZA

(looking down into his face again)

Why would you want to keep them?

MARK

(sitting up again)

It isn't a matter of wanting or not.

CARIDAD

It probably is, but what makes you think not?

MARK

There's no sense trying to stop me from getting angry. The medications I'm on tamp down the nastier responses, but I don't have any control over getting upset when I'm triggered.

ESPERANZA

I guess so.

CARIDAD

It is something you acquired. I don't recall you ever raising your voice before you came back from Iraq.

MARK

Regardless, it's not something I can un-acquire.

ESPERANZA

Sure, but between the meds and therapy..

CARIDAD

Not to mention venting frustrations by complaining to the appropriate people when you have a bad experience.

MARK

Okay, okay. So, I can do something about my anger. But the only way I'm going to stop being filled with lust is when they stop producing bodies for me to lust after.

ESPERANZA

You did inherit Momma's desire for every man able to stand up straight before lying down.

CARIDAD

I doubt evaluating everyone you see by how much they arouse you is genetic.

MARK

You're right. It's probably a learned behavior.

CARIDAD

And you had a master teacher.

ESPERANZA

I bet Momma's already run through all of the men at that senior living place.

MARK

She's only been there two weeks.

ESPERANZA

(laughing)

Of course, these days, she'll probably forget she knew them and seduce them over and over.

MARK

Ranza!

BLACKOUT

SCENE SEVEN

(MARK is lying on the sofa. CARIDAD is looking out the 'window'. ESPERANZA is playing with the men's winter coat hanging by the door.)

ESPERANZA

I didn't mean to upset you, Big Brother.

MARK

It's okay.

CARIDAD

I said it's a waste of time to look at other people's defects of character.

MARK

I'd hardly call having a strong libido a defect of character.

(MARK grabs the pencil and notepad and writes.)

CARIDAD

Decided that one was worth using in one of your novels?

MARK

Given what I write, sure.

ESPERANZA

On a related topic, Mark claims you can't possibly know that your daddy and his daddy were almost as crazy as my daddy.

CARIDAD

I only know that from inference and from what Aunt Shirley told me.

MARK

Before or after dementia hit her?

CARIDAD

Both. Even now, Aunt Shirley is never more lucid than when she talks about her brothers-in-law.

MARK

Since her two children were fathered by one of them she has a lot to talk about.

(ESPERANZA moves to the 'window'. CARIDAD sits in the chair.)

CARIDAD

It's a wonder Aunt Janet didn't have kids with my father or yours, too. Mark and I are lucky to have been born after they used up so much of their energy before going home to Momma every night.

MARK

Momma sure was famous for being able to squeeze two cups more cider from a basket of apples than any other woman around.

ESPERANZA

(turning back to the others)

I always took that literally.

MARK

You just might. Anyway, I shouldn't be talking about Momma like that.

CARIDAD

I doubt she would complain. She probably wouldn't discuss it with her son, but she almost likes being talked about as some kind of slut. She sees that as a positive reflection on her looks and liberal nature, not a negative expression of her morals.

(ESPERANZA moves to the door and fiddles with the coat again.)

ESPERANZA

Momma once told me that if women want to have a choice about what is done with their bodies when it comes to pregnancy they have to own the choices they make about their bodies that lead to pregnancy, too. No sense complaining about being knocked up if you had any consensual role in getting there.

CARIDAD

Which explains why she had no problem having me without marrying my father or with kicking him out of our lives.

ESPERANZA

Given the timing, I'd say Mark's father coming into the picture precipitated your father getting the boot.

MARK

All well and good, Dear Sister, but you still haven't proven that Cari's daddy or mine was crazy like yours. The pharmacist routinely gives me a lecture on how important it is to take my medications as prescribed, citing the example of my first stepfather. As though one day off the happy pills will make me want to streak naked down Philly Street and masturbate in front of the Jimmy Stewart statue.

ESPERANZA

For one thing, if you were to do something that nutty, you would find something original.

MARK

Hell, even drunken IUP students find more interesting things to do.

CARIDAD

I'm surprised you think IUP students are the least bit interesting.

ESPERANZA

I bet it depends on how he defines 'interesting'.

MARK

For starters, interested in my advances.

ESPERANZA

See!

CARIDAD

What do you expect? We all went there. It's not a bad education, but it's akin to doing four more years of high school with more free time to get laid.

ESPERANZA

(turning suddenly from playing with her coat)
Did Cari just say 'get laid'? Where is this earthy side of you been hiding?

CARIDAD

Ranza, when it comes to that aspect of human life, I choose to generally remain silent. I don't link my self-esteem to knowing others are in awe of my sexual activities.

ESPERANZA

And I do, Big Sister?

MARK

I think she meant me.

(ESPERANZA moves to the sofa and indicates she wants to sit where MARK is. He moves over and she sits.)

ESPERANZA

You do take after Momma in that respect, Big Brother. I may not be as jealous as Aunt Shirley or Aunt Janet about the men you seem to find so easily, but there have been times I wished one of them would notice my charms on the way in or out of your life.

CARIDAD

Regardless, we already established that Mark has no interest in being known for his ability to attract men or any other quality he possesses.

ESPERANZA

What's left then?

MARK

Does it matter? The point is that I don't want to be known period.

CARIDAD

That sounds odd coming from a writer. Don't you want to build an audience?

MARK

That's different. I want my books and stuff to be read. But the focus is on my work, not me.

ESPERANZA

Aren't they the same thing?

CARIDAD

I would think you'd want people to say, 'Look, a new novel by Mark Forrester!'

MARK

Name recognition is okay. But there's no benefit to me the person being the focus of attention. Being noticed can lead to becoming a target. It's the predator who lurks in the shadows, not the prey.

(CARIDAD leans in closer to MARK.)

CARIDAD

Is that what you are, Mark, a predator?

(ESPERANZA shifts closer to MARK.)

ESPERANZA

No, he's more like a flower attracting pollinators. You may not like it, but you can't help yourself.

CARIDAD

Ranza's onto something there, sweetie. Being attractive to others is effortless for you.

ESPERANZA

I think it's nice you don't let that go to your head, but as you just said you do use it to fulfill your cravings. You need to look the way you do even though you take no special pride in it.

MARK

Need to look this way?

CARIDAD

(leaning back into the chair)

We would never have found you wanting to drive straight into a tree until airbags were perfected. You would fear the impact might damage your features and ruin future opportunities to writhe and coil with whomever you fancied that day.

MARK

There are many more reasons for me not to drive off the road into a tree than concern about my facial features. Chief among them is I would not want to appear nuttier than I already am, followed by I would not want the attention such an act would draw.

CARIDAD

That reminds me. Did you save the papers with the articles about the accident?

MARK

(to ESPERANZA)

You might want to start a memory book to document your slide into the abyss. I think she's upset I never started one.

(ESPERANZA shifts away from MARK on the sofa.)

ESPERANZA

I'm not sliding into any abyss. That was a one off affair.

CARIDAD

You aren't exactly in an abyss either, Mark. Why would you think I wanted you to keep memorabilia related to your condition?

MARK

Don't you want records of events in our lives saved for future review and posterity?

ESPERANZA

Personally, I rather like the idea of removing all traces of my existence as they happen.

CARIDAD

Can you imagine the storage space required if everyone kept track of everything the way presidents and famous writers do?

ESPERANZA

For one thing, just think of the hubris involved in making a decision to hold onto so much.

MARK

You don't need to hold onto stuff for posterity if you do it right. Take one look at the Gospels and see how little the difference would make if they had a presidential library full of material on Jesus.

ESPERANZA

Maybe we ought to rethink whether Big Brother is guilty of sinful pride if he's comparing himself to Jesus.

CARIDAD

I wouldn't go that far. He does act the martyr though.

MARK

Hey! Since when do I act like a martyr?

CARIDAD

Where to begin?

MARK

I have diagnosed physical and mental conditions that limit my functioning here and in society. I don't make a big deal of them. I don't whine and complain that it's not fair that I am burdened with these problems.

CARIDAD

True, you are a model of behavior when it comes to not fussing.

MARK

What else is there, then?

ESPERANZA

I think that's Cari's point, Big Brother.

MARK

What are you talking about?

ESPERANZA

It's not what you say. It's how you perceive yourself and the world.

MARK

I try to perceive myself and my world honestly and objectively. This is my reality.

CARIDAD

Okay, Mark, then be honest. When was the last time you thought of yourself as being anything but disabled?

BLACKOUT

SCENE EIGHT

(MARK is on the sofa looking out. CARIDAD and ESPERANZA are standing behind the sofa looking at him.)

MARK

I can't believe you think I don't look at my abilities or make use of them.

CARIDAD

Not really.

(MARK rises unsteadily, reaching for his cane too late. He sits back down.)

MARK

Who has been cooking supper lo these many months? Who has been writing the great American novel for the last three years while also churning out eight romances to try to earn money? For that matter, who has been hooking up with men left and right ever since he got back from Afghanistan? I'm quite active given my limits.

(ESPERANZA and CARIDAD gradually begin to move away from the sofa, but continue to face MARK.)

ESPERANZA

What happened to modesty?

MARK

If you're going to talk about my looks as you have and then slander me for not making use of the talents God has bestowed on me, I might as well point out that my Grindr profile has been overwhelmingly effective.

CARIDAD

That might explain your views on current IUP students.

ESPERANZA

Actually, I was referring to the big, literary novel you've been working on.

CARIDAD

Which, by the way, you haven't mentioned for, what was it? Lo these many months.

MARK

I've run out of inspiration for the moment. That's all.

CARIDAD

That's been obvious.

ESPERANZA

You really haven't worked on any other projects recently either.

CARIDAD

You just write down quips and aphorisms when they come to you.

ESPERANZA

Your notepad must contain some gems that inspire you by now.

CARIDAD

Nothing has taken the place of the hours you spent writing except cooking supper.

ESPERANZA

We all could starve when your creative juices are flowing. Instead, we're all gaining weight.

MARK

It's nothing. I hit an impasse. I needed a break. Do you have any idea how difficult it is to stare at a partially-completed book and not know how to bring it back on track? That requires a good knock upside the head to start rolling again.

ESPERANZA

That sounds a lot worse than just losing inspiration, Big Brother.

MARK

You wouldn't understand.

CARIDAD

There's that double standard. When you're writing, you can't wait to describe your experience. When you aren't writing, you tell us we can't understand what that's like.

MARK

Because you can't. You don't know what it's like to be creatively dry.

ESPERANZA

Oh, really? I've got news for you. Everyone runs up against losing faith in their ability or finding the road to further success blocked.

MARK

You mean blocked by a tree you decided to slam into.

CARIDAD

Why do creative people think they're the only ones who suffer when failing to accomplish what they're inspired to accomplish?

ESPERANZA

They think it's a higher calling.

CARIDAD

Or there's more at stake with their egos.

MARK

Is this some theory you're developing on the fly or something you read online?

CARIDAD

Does it matter? If it rings true, does it need outside approval?

(DR. GREENE appears upstage. CARIDAD and ESPERANZA are nearing the edges of the room.)

MARK

It needs to have the underlying premise verified. Since when do creative people think they are the only ones who suffer when failing to accomplish what they are inspired to accomplish?

DR. GREENE

For starters, when they choose to run off the road into a tree just to have the experience and without thinking of the consequences.

MARK

What?

DR. GREENE

You heard me.

MARK

But, I never did that.

DR. GREENE

You certainly did. Why do you think you were in the hospital until this morning?

MARK

I wasn't in the hospital. Ranza was!

ESPERANZA

No, Mark. You were in the hospital.

CARIDAD

You're just experiencing short term memory loss. Dr. Greene told you to expect this.

MARK

Dr. Greene? He's the new psychiatrist at Regional. I haven't met him yet.

(DR. GREENE now stands behind the sofa.)

DR. GREENE

You've been under my care for the last eleven days, Mark, ever since the paramedics took you to Regional after the crash.

MARK

That's impossible. I've been right here at home.

ESPERANZA

Mark, you have been denying you drove the car off the road as often as you have been admitting it.

MARK

I don't remember.

DR. GREENE

Okay. Let me explain, Mark. You were released from the hospital this morning. Eleven days ago you turned off Route 119 heading toward the towns of Desire and Panic just north of Punxsutawney. You told a friend you were finally going to go up there and take pictures of the signs to post on Facebook for your Army buddies. You drove your car into a tree on the road between Desire and Panic. You told the paramedics you did it on purpose just to have the experience, but planned it so you wouldn't get hurt. Aside from some bruises from the airbags, you were fine. But we had to hospitalize you because this was a psychotic episode. You assured us you would never do anything like it again.

MARK

No, no. It was Ranza. I didn't drive off the road. I don't remember driving off the road.

CARIDAD

It's a normal psychological defense to block the memory of an act someone is ashamed of.

MARK

How can I be ashamed of something I never did?

DR. GREENE

That's the point, Mark. By blocking the memory, you believe you never did it and therefore you don't carry the guilt for what occurred during the psychotic episode.

MARK

Then why did Ranza say she was the one who ran her car into the tree?

ESPERANZA

That's another defense mechanism.

(ESPERANZA backs out of the light and exits.)

DR. GREENE

We discussed Esperanza yesterday. Remember?

MARK

She's my younger sister. She was just here.

DR. GREENE

Nobody has been here except you and me.

MARK

No! Ranza's here! So is Caridad! I was just talking to them!

DR. GREENE

I know.

CARIDAD

I'm just a part of you that takes care of things.

(CARIDAD backs out of the light and exits.)

MARK

No, no, no! They're my sisters. I was just talking with them!

DR. GREENE

Mark, you were talking to yourself. You don't have any siblings.

MARK

I don't understand. Why would I lie about having two sisters?

DR. GREENE

You aren't lying. In this moment, you believe you have two sisters. They are manifestations of the qualities you associate most strongly with your mother. They are your way of coping with your mother's dementia, her inability to take care of you any longer, her sudden absence.

MARK

It isn't sudden. We planned it for several months. She wanted to go to Wilkes-Barre where her sisters already were in a senior living facility. I knew that. I helped her.

DR. GREENE

Yes, of course. Understandably, that has been a traumatic experience for you. Someone with pre-existing psychological trauma like you have from your tours of duty can have difficulty accepting further trauma. You responded, in part, to your mother's departure by creating these sisters who are going to help you. They only exist in your mind.

MARK

They were just here. We were talking. They were here!

DR. GREENE

I know, Mark. I was concerned when you told me yesterday your sisters would take care of you when you got home from the hospital. We hadn't heard from any sisters and you said your mother was your only family when you were admitted. That's why I told you I would stop by to see you. I have an obligation to make sure you are safe after you have been discharged. Now, I have a better grasp of what is happening. I think we can start making more progress in your treatment. We have some work to do. Do you want to start now?

MARK

I don't know. I guess.

(DR. GREENE sits down.)

DR. GREENE

Good. We'll start with the core issue. When was the last time you thought of yourself as being anything other than disabled?

BLACKOUT

SCENE NINE

(ESPERANZA is on the sofa.
CARIDAD is standing, speaking
on the telephone. They are
wearing different clothes than
before.)

CARIDAD

That's right. ... I am calling about my brother ... Mark Forrester ... My name? ... Caridad Hogsdon ... No, Hogsdon ... No, we have different surnames because he's my half-brother. ... Why does this matter? I could be Indira Gandhi for all you know. ... No, Indira Gandhi is not a singer. She was the prime minister of India and I was making a little joke and I really don't need to be explaining this—what? ... Really? ... Two hours ago? ... Do you know who picked him up? ... Okay, thanks.

(CARIDAD hangs up the telephone.)

ESPERANZA

What happened?

CARIDAD

They say he was picked up this morning by his mother.

ESPERANZA

Should we check whether Momma is still where she's supposed to be?

CARIDAD

What do you think?

ESPERANZA

Seems kinda farfetched.

CARIDAD

I know. But what in this family isn't?

ESPERANZA

Do you think Mark's playing a game?

CARIDAD

That's the likeliest scenario. Although...

ESPERANZA

What?

CARIDAD

Did Mark know when you were coming back from vacation?

ESPERANZA

I don't think so.

CARIDAD

But he knew you were going away.

ESPERANZA

Of course.

CARIDAD

And I told him I would be in sometime this week depending on the weather.

ESPERANZA

When was that?

CARIDAD

We talked the day before the accident.

ESPERANZA

The day I left on vacation.

CARIDAD

I just wonder...

(CARIDAD pulls out her cell phone and places a call.)

ESPERANZA

Who are you calling?

CARIDAD

Augie.

ESPERANZA

Oh, I see. Mother as in Mother Hen.

CARIDAD

No answer... I think Augie only has a landline like Mark.

(CARIDAD hangs up and puts the phone away.)

I bet Mother picked up Mark from the hospital this morning. Knowing them, they went to Home for breakfast or went to get pie at that place down near the power plant.

ESPERANZA

Sounds plausible. But why didn't you pick him up?

CARIDAD

The nurse on duty yesterday told me Mark didn't have any sisters, so I couldn't visit him or get any information. The psych unit is pretty careful about access and this nurse didn't seem too interested in explanations. I told her that Mark always jokes he's an only child.

(CARIDAD sits on the sofa and picks up the cards on the table. She plays solitaire while ESPERANZA wanders around the room examining little things.)

ESPERANZA

He is, after a fashion. Near as I know, his daddy didn't have any other kids. Otherwise Mark wouldn't be inheriting the entire estate.

CARIDAD

I rather doubt my father will be leaving me much more than a twentieth of next to nothing.

ESPERANZA

Twentieth?

CARIDAD

It could be. Pop is a breeder, pure and simple. He didn't contest that Aunt Shirley's two boys were his. By last count, Pop had ten more children by four other mothers. That was twelve years ago or so.

ESPERANZA

Do you know if he's still alive?

CARIDAD

To the extent that the Internet is up-to-date with obituaries and he didn't die on some street with no identification.

ESPERANZA

That's a morbid way of thinking.

CARIDAD

Speaking of which, do we know how Mark found out about his father's death.

ESPERANZA

Letter from a lawyer assigned to handle the estate. It arrived the same day we took Momma to Wilkes-Barre.

CARIDAD

That, too! I can see how all of these changes would push Mark over the edge. He didn't even mention it to me.

ESPERANZA

How'd you find out then?

CARIDAD

From Momma. All she said was Mark's dad passed and Mark was inheriting over a million dollars.

ESPERANZA

She mentioned to me she was glad that Mark would have money to take care of him and wouldn't be dependent on his disability benefits and all.

CARIDAD

I guess. Maybe it will curb his enthusiasm for complaining to companies about mistakes they make.

ESPERANZA

How so?

CARIDAD

Getting coupons and rebates for stuff from those companies is probably his second biggest source of income.

ESPERANZA

It can't be more than the royalties from his novels.

CARIDAD

I don't know. He always pooh-poohs the income generated by his writing. And he really is obsessed about correcting corporate errors.

ESPERANZA

At least it's a harmless obsession, unlike...

CARIDAD

Well, apparently the doctor at Regional thinks he won't be harmful or they wouldn't be discharging him.

ESPERANZA

Unlike my daddy.

CARIDAD

Oh, yes. That's very sad. Do you visit him?

ESPERANZA

Every Father's Day. But to him, I'm just some nice girl he just met. After I leave, he doesn't have a daughter.

CARIDAD

That's a shame.

ESPERANZA

I don't know. He's comfortable and otherwise healthy. I can almost get to the point where I envy him. He has no cares or concerns. He just exists, every day astonishingly new.

CARIDAD

Makes you wonder, doesn't it? We can have a lifetime of experiences and when our brains decide to stop remembering we're suddenly in a new reality, as though the whole world has changed.

ESPERANZA

The whole world does from that one perspective.

CARIDAD

It's the only perspective we have.

ESPERANZA

He still has episodes when some awful experience sweeps through his mind and triggers him to do the things that got him institutionalized. He's never violent, just, just... What's the word? ... Ecstatic.

CARIDAD

Your father certainly provided fodder for stories. Whenever friends would start offering embarrassing parent moments, I would trump them all by saying my stepfather—well, one of my stepfathers—tore off his clothes, ran through town, and started masturbating in front of the Jimmy Stewart statue.

ESPERANZA

I would tell that story, too, except it's my own father.

(CARIDAD stops playing cards and settles back in the sofa. ESPERANZA sits in the chair.)

CARIDAD

You know, nowadays, people don't know who Jimmy Stewart is or don't get why Indiana Pennsylvania has a statue honoring him.

ESPERANZA

I've always had enough trouble convincing people that Indiana is a small city in PA as well as a Midwestern state.

CARIDAD

I tell them it's just like having Washington the city and Washington the state.

ESPERANZA

I gave up. Now, I just tell people I grew up outside of Pittsburgh, like Pittsburgh is some big building.

CARIDAD

Are you kidding? In Texas, they don't even know where Pittsburgh is unless they moved there from PA or Ohio. They don't distinguish one state from another if it's above the Mason-Dixon Line.

ESPERANZA

Are you glad you're moving back?

CARIDAD

Not for the reasons I'm moving back, but yeah. I miss spring and fall. I even miss winter somewhat.

ESPERANZA

Speaking of which, did Phil see his shadow this morning?

CARIDAD

I don't know. I promised Mark I would watch the show with him.

ESPERANZA

It's a little bit late for that.

CARIDAD

No, he told me he recorded it.

ESPERANZA

How could he if he's been hospitalized for eleven days?

CARIDAD

Knowing our brother, he sets shows up to record a month in advance.

ESPERANZA

I'd forgotten about that obsession.

(lifting the notepad from the table)

I see he still writes notes to himself about phrases he wants to use in his writing.

(laughing)

This one's good-smacked in the face by a satin fish.

CARIDAD

I guess if he had a character who wears silk gloves that would work.

ESPERANZA

(placing the notepad exactly where it was)

I can see it now. Incensed, Gloria walked up to Dustin and struck his cheek. Whack!

(She smacks the chair with her open palm.)

He felt as though he had been smacked in the face by a satin fish.

CARIDAD

Aside from the fact he's certifiable, why does our gay brother write over-the-top romance novels for straight women?

ESPERANZA

(waving her arm wildly)

I know! I know! Gay romance novels are all written by middle-aged women in Iowa or Alberta or some other mind-sucking monoculture.

CARIDAD

Really?

ESPERANZA

They get a thrill out of having a secret identity as purveyors of homosexual man lust.

CARIDAD

Where on earth did you get that idea?

ESPERANZA

It was on The View or something. They had a bunch of women on with their faces blurred so members of their churches wouldn't recognize them. They all said how empowering and invigorating it was to describe male-male romances.

CARIDAD

But they don't write lesbian romances?

ESPERANZA

Are you kidding? Everyone knows lesbians only read bad poetry and how-to manuals.

CARIDAD

That's not funny.

ESPERANZA

Sorry.

CARIDAD

You're forgiven. Anyway, none of that explains why Mark writes trashy novels for women.

(MARK enters from the back.)

MARK

It isn't trash. If it was I would sell more copies. And I write them because I understand what excites a woman about a man.

(ESPERANZA jumps up and hugs MARK.)

ESPERANZA

Where have you been? We've been waiting and waiting.

MARK

What are you talking about? I've been around all morning.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TEN

(MARK and CARIDAD are sitting.
ESPERANZA is still standing.)

MARK

After Doctor Greene left, I went for a walk.

CARIDAD

Who's Doctor Greene?

ESPERANZA

The new psychiatrist at Regional.

CARIDAD

The doctor made a house call?

MARK

Yep.

CARIDAD

But you were just released from the hospital this morning.

MARK

Well...

CARIDAD

Does this have anything to do with the staff at the hospital claiming you have no sisters?

MARK

When did they do that?

CARIDAD

Yesterday, after lunch. I stopped by to see if you had made arrangements for your discharge. The nurse refused to let me see you.

ESPERANZA

What have you been up to, Mark?

MARK

Nothing.

ESPERANZA

Come on. You can tell us!

MARK

You won't like it.

CARIDAD

Mark, have we ever judged you?

MARK

Are you kidding me? When have you not? You always did moral check-ups on me every Sunday after church to make sure I wasn't destined to burn in hell. Well, every Sunday until the meteor.

ESPERANZA

Good grief! Those were just games!

CARIDAD

I had forgotten about the meteor.

MARK

Analyzing your insane brother's shortcomings isn't a game.

CARIDAD

You aren't insane now and you definitely were not insane back then.

ESPERANZA

Besides, we don't believe in hell anymore.

MARK

I do.

ESPERANZA

You do not.

MARK

Addiction recovery means the Gates of Hell have been opened.

CARIDAD

Not going to write that one down on your notepad?

MARK

No, it's not original enough. Every AA and NA member knows that saying.

ESPERANZA

Hey! Isn't doing a personal inventory using the seven cardinal sins one of the steps?

MARK

You don't have to use the seven deadlies, but it's recommended as a starting point. And yes, I had a good head start thanks to you two trying to get me routed to purgatory at the least.

CARIDAD

Mark, you know I think doing an inventory of someone else is a waste of time.

MARK

Oh, right, Miss Caridad Venezia Hogsdon who looks down on the world from above does not judge others. Please.

ESPERANZA

He might have you there, Cari.

CARIDAD

I am not having this discussion. It's just another way of analyzing me.

MARK

But it's okay to analyze me?

CARIDAD

I didn't drive a vehicle into a tree eleven days ago. I didn't tell people I did it just to have the experience. I wasn't just discharged from a psych unit this morning.

MARK

But since I have, it's fair to pick on me?

CARIDAD

We aren't picking on you. We just want to know why you told the hospital you didn't have any sisters.

ESPERANZA

Yeah, I don't want to be a figment of your imagination.

CARIDAD

Did you deny you have family again?

ESPERANZA

Don't you think figment is a weird word?

MARK

I didn't deny anything.

ESPERANZA

Do you think they make fig-flavored mints?

CARIDAD

Then why would the nurse refuse to let me see you?

ESPERANZA

I'm not even sure I could identify fig flavor.

MARK

I just didn't respond to the part about family other than to say Momma is in a senior living facility in Wilkes-Barre with her sisters.

ESPERANZA

And are fig leaves really big enough to cover an adult's genitals?

MARK and CARIDAD

(looking up at ESPERANZA)

What?

ESPERANZA

Never mind. I bet Mark was just too dazed by the crash and all the attention to think clearly.

(MARK stands and approaches the 'window'.)

MARK

That and they ask a lot of questions all at once when you're admitted to a hospital. It gets confusing.

CARIDAD

Nice save. Wouldn't they have looked into it? After all, why would they release you to go home if there was no one at home to care for you?

(MARK continues to look out rather than back at his sisters.)

MARK

That's easy enough. I told them my sisters were coming in to stay and look after me until we decided what would be the best living arrangement.

ESPERANZA

Then why was Caridad told you don't have any sisters?

MARK

I don't know. Probably the nurse you spoke with didn't know what my discharge plans were. That wasn't settled until the evening shift last night.

CARIDAD

And you got Augie to agree to pick you up?

MARK

How'd you know that?

CARIDAD

The hospital told me you were picked up by your mother.

ESPERANZA

Which we knew was farfetched.

MARK

Meaning you thought it was possible.

CARIDAD

That still leaves the question of your doctor-

MARK

Doctor Greene.

CARIDAD

Doctor Greene making a house call.

(MARK moves near the door.)

MARK

That one's actually kind of funny. He saw I was being discharged to the care of my sisters and thought I was making you two up just to go home.

ESPERANZA

By any chance is Doctor Greene good-looking?

MARK

Yep.

CARIDAD

Did you tell him you didn't have any sisters just so he would come to the house to see if you are delusional?

MARK

I never said I don't have any sisters to Doctor Greene or anyone else. They just assumed that.

CARIDAD

That's my point. Why would they assume that?

MARK

I told you, other than giving them Momma's contact information to allow her to call and find out what was going on with me, I didn't say nothing about my family.

CARIDAD

Anything.

MARK

What?

CARIDAD

You didn't say anything about your family. You said nothing.

MARK

(confused)

Yes, I said nothing. Or wait. No, I didn't say anything. ... I don't know.

CARIDAD

Either way, you gave Doctor Greene the impression you were going home to two sisters he had no knowledge of from what you had said previously.

ESPERANZA

Or didn't say.

MARK

The omission was not intentional.

CARIDAD

Did he tell you he was going to make a house call?

MARK

He might have. I'm having short term memory issues, which he said are normal.

CARIDAD

Good thing you remember that.

MARK

Remember what?

CARIDAD

Don't be a smartass.

ESPERANZA

Anyway, he came. He saw you. What happened?

MARK

It was confusing. He told me I didn't have any sisters. He said I was rationalizing why I could be home even though Momma is gone. That freaked me out. We started talking about my perceptions, how I knew if something was real. It took me a few minutes to figure out how to explain it really was just miscommunication without sounding crazy.

ESPERANZA

Er.

MARK

Thanks. Crazier.

CARIDAD

I take it he believed you when you explained you really have two sisters.

MARK

Not at first. Uh, when he came in I guess I was talking to you two.

ESPERANZA

That's scary.

MARK

I know. He said we'll have to work out whether I was just mindlessly talking out loud, dreaming, or hallucinating.

CARIDAD

I can see why that just reinforced in his mind that you don't have any sisters.

MARK

Yep. I finally had to show him pictures and email messages.

CARIDAD

And that satisfied him?

MARK

Not completely. So, I told him to come back after lunch and he could see for himself.

CARIDAD

He's coming back? Just how good looking is he?

You'll see.

MARK

You dog!

ESPERANZA

BLACKOUT

SCENE ELEVEN

(Doctor Greene is sitting on the sofa talking on the phone and playing with the notepad.)

DR. GREENE

Right. ... No. ... No, no, that won't work. ... I don't think I'll be much longer. ... It was just an odd miscommunication, so I had to come back here. ... Who? ... The next time she calls tell her that her son has been discharged and is at home with her two daughters. ... I don't care if you can't find the HIPAA form. The patient said he filled one out. ... What would you want if it was your memory-impaired mother calling about you? ... Right. ... No. ... Right. ... Okay.

(DR. GREENE hangs up the telephone. He looks more closely at the notepad, intrigued. MARK enters from the rear.)

MARK

All done, doctor?

DR. GREENE

Yep. Thanks for the use of your phone. I'm always forgetting to charge my cell phone. Not a good thing for someone on call all the time.

MARK

I've never bothered with a cell phone. Not worth adding to my budget. Besides, I already have enough voices in my head. No need to add to them.

DR. GREENE

Voices? You denied hearing voices.

MARK

I'm joking. Sorry.

DR. GREENE

No worries. You know, one of the nice things about texting is you can use emojis to clarify intent. Sometimes they're better signals than live facial expressions. My mother uses them a lot. I think she's more adept using her smartphone than I am.

MARK

Which one of you has more time to play with it?

DR. GREENE

True enough.

(MARK sits in the chair.)

MARK

Speaking of mothers, I wasn't eavesdropping or anything, but did I hear you say something about someone's mother to the person on the phone?

DR. GREENE

Oh, yes. Your mother called the hospital. I guess you haven't had a chance to tell her you've been discharged. I told them that if she calls back to let her know.

MARK

Yep. She'll be worried. At least until she forgets she called.

DR. GREENE

Maybe you should call her now.

MARK

First, I have to get over finding out that she called Social Security to tell them I'm a millionaire and don't need to receive benefits any longer.

DR. GREENE

You know she didn't do it maliciously. She was happy for you.

MARK

I suppose. It's still a mess I have to deal with.

DR. GREENE

Mark, you allow the frustrations of handling problems with people you see as incompetent to control you. My suggestion is to stop trying to fix problems when you start feeling triggered. Do something else. Cook. Take a walk.

MARK

I'd just as soon not have the problems.

DR. GREENE

We all would. At least your half-sisters are here to help you take care of some of the problems.

MARK

Um, doctor, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't refer to them as half-sisters. Makes them sound like they're cut in half or rank below full sisters.

DR. GREENE

Of course. I apologize.

MARK

Oh, no worries.

DR. GREENE

Does your mother know your sisters are helping you out?

MARK

Cari called Momma to talk about moving up here from Texas. But she had planned that move as soon as we started looking for a facility for Momma. She wanted to be able to visit her more often and was kinda over living in Texas.

DR. GREENE

Fortuitously, she can help you, too.

MARK

Of course. She never said she was moving here to keep an eye on me. Everything was managed pretty well. But I get the impression she was concerned about me living alone.

DR. GREENE

I can't say for certain that concern was justified before the accident.

MARK

And now you think it's good I'll have some supervision?

DR. GREENE

Now that I know your sisters are real, yes.

MARK

You know that was a one-off thing.

DR. GREENE

I accept your rationale and your commitment not to do something like that again. I wouldn't have agreed to you being discharged otherwise.

MARK

But there's the matter now of the hallucinations and dreams. Those threw me for a loop.

DR. GREENE

As they should. You had the perfect storm of coming home to finding out your disability benefits had been stopped by your mother, her recent move to a memory care unit, your guilt about the accident, your concerns about how your sisters were going to deal with the accident, your father's death, and the news about your inheritance. That's a lot to put on the shoulders of someone who already suffers from PTSD and depression, is four or five years into addiction recovery, and has writer's block.

MARK

Are you telling me writer's block is a psychological disorder?

DR. GREENE

What do you think?

(MARK reaches for the notepad and pencil.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWELVE

(MARK is on the sofa. DR. GREENE is looking out the 'window'.)

DR. GREENE

I know I'm going to be opening a can of worms by asking, but the hospital told me you were picked up this morning by your mother. My understanding is she is in Wilkes-Barre. Is that another example of your mind providing a different reality than what actually happened?

MARK

(laughing)

No, doc. There's this Canadian guy, Augie, in his sixties, who taught English at IUP before he retired. He lives down in Johnstown. Augie used to shepherd younger gay guys to the bars in Pittsburgh. We started calling him Mother because he was like a Mother Hen to us.

DR. GREENE

And he picked you up this morning?

MARK

Yep.

DR. GREENE

(walking around the room)

Wow! This is one for the books. Non-existent sisters and real sisters, two mothers, one of each sex, one real and the other just a nickname. What else?

MARK

Doctor, why do you keep calling some people real and others not? They're real to me.

DR. GREENE

Because objectively some are the thing defined and some are not.

MARK

Doesn't that presuppose we agree on what the categories we use objectively mean? What makes you more real than my hallucinations and dreams this morning?

(CARIDAD and ESPERANZA enter from the rear.)

CARIDAD

Doctor, are you still here?

DR. GREENE

Actually, we were just about to find out.

MARK

Cari, how do you know something is real?

CARIDAD

As opposed to fake?

MARK

No, smartass. As opposed to illusion.

CARIDAD

I don't really ever think about it.

DR. GREENE

That's the answer you are going to get from ninety-nine point ninety-nine percent of the people you ask. People generally do not question existence.

ESPERANZA

Why would they? Like I've told you, nothing outside my ken is real. If I can't see it, smell it, smack it, or suck it, it isn't there, doesn't exist. And never trust anything you hear. You never know if those are actual people talking or voices in your head or just an air conditioner.

MARK

A what?

ESPERANZA

An air conditioner, silly. Haven't you ever noticed that a room air conditioner heard from another room sounds like people talking.

MARK

That must be one of those things.

DR. GREENE

Things?

CARIDAD

Members of our family are not just certifiable, doctor. We all have our peculiar ideas of what is odd or notable. Momma always said they were one of those things.

ESPERANZA

Speaking of certifiable, doctor, you ought to look up my Pop's medical records. They're a hoot!

MARK

If you do, just remember I am not related to him by blood.

DR. GREENE

I'm glad this family is so comfortable with psychological conditions.

ESPERANZA

We kind of have to. Mark once had an idea for an app that would report the mental conditions of everyone in our twisted family tree so we would know whether to visit or stay away.

MARK

No, I didn't.

ESPERANZA

Somebody did.

CARIDAD

Sounds more like something Momma would come up with.

MARK

I don't even have a cell phone.

ESPERANZA

I don't blame you. Cell phones are the number one source of voices in your head.

MARK

I don't have voices in my head either.

CARIDAD

No need to get defensive, Mark.

ESPERANZA

Yeah. You don't want to add paranoia to the list of things you have. Right, doc?

MARK

Definitely not after just telling me I can include writer's block in the list.

ESPERANZA

Really? Congratulations on your new disorder!

DR. GREENE

That reminds me. Mark, you wrote on this pad about spring being in a quantum state of having six more weeks or not until you know whether Phil sees his shadow. That's a very perceptive observation.

MARK

Hey, we never watched the ceremony!

BLACKOUT

SCENE THIRTEEN

(MARK is on the sofa using a TV remote. He sets the remote down.)

MARK

It's odd. They declare me crazy, but a few miles north folks make such a big fuss about a rodent forecasting the weather, an animal they'd shoot on sight if it was rummaging in their vegetable gardens. ... I guess when a lot of people agree to believe something, it makes it real.

(looking at the empty chair)

Cari, did you take that psych class at IUP where they talked about perception and reality? ... Yep. ... I thought the people out there might be interested.

(MARK nods toward the audience.)

I told you about the people out there. ... Oh, that's right. I told Ranza. ... Okay. Here's an example. I place a two-dollar bill on the table and leave.

(MARK places a bill on the table.)

Ranza, you come in. The two-dollar bill catches your attention as you pass through the room.

(glancing up behind the sofa as if someone is standing there)

Right. That's why it needs to be a two-dollar bill. Anyway, Cari comes in later and takes the money.

(MARK removes the bill from the table.)

Well, you are the hardened criminal in the family, aren't you? Now, Ranza comes back. She sees the money is gone. She places another two-dollar bill on the table.

(MARK places a new bill on the table.)

Mind you, she doesn't know Cari took the first one. She doesn't know what happened to it at all.

(MARK straightens himself up and cocks his head)

I come home. I see the two dollar bill is still there. In my mind, the two-dollar bill was always on the table. In Ranza's mind, there are two two-dollar bills, the one she saw initially and the one she placed on the table. And when Cari comes home, she can't understand how the two-dollar bill can still be there. In her mind, it's been in her wallet. So, she looks in her wallet—

(MARK produces the other bill.)

and finds the original two-dollar bill. She has no idea where the second two-dollar bill came from or how someone knew to put it in the exact same spot. ... Yep. No one has all of the information to definitively say what happened. We each have our own perception of reality. Ranza is right.

MARK (Cont.)

Reality is only that which is currently within my ken. And I ought never to trust what I hear.

(The telephone rings. MARK answers it.)

Hello ... Oh, hello, Doctor Greene. Thanks for returning my call. ... Yep. ... Great.

(MARK picks up the notepad and pen.)

Okay ... February fifth ... ten o'clock. ... Yep. ... I'm sure Mother can drive me. ... Thanks, doc. ... I look forward to finally meeting you. Welcome to Indiana PA!

BLACKOUT

END