

# HOW THE DOG RUNS

by Dan O'Neil

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## HOW THE DOG RUNS

### CHARACTERS (3M, 3F)

UNCLE RAY, late 40's  
MICHAEL, late 20's  
SPARROW, mid 20's  
KAT, mid 40's  
JERRY, mid 40's  
RACHEL ABIGAIL, early 20's

### SETTING

The lay of yard between a lake and cabin somewhere in a place like Wisconsin.

### TIME

Close to now.

### SCENES

4 p.m.  
6 p.m.  
8 p.m.  
10 p.m.  
12 a.m.  
2 a.m.  
2:47 a.m.

**4 p.m.**

*A stretch of lawn, the corner of a cabin visible, and the lake behind it, flickering in the sun.*

*UNCLE RAY snaps branches and piles them in a fire pit and drinks cheap beer.*

*MICHAEL sits nearby and watches him.*

UNCLE RAY

And they say. They *say*. That reason itself knows no bounds. That reason must be infinite. A thing that stretches across, horizon to horizon. That we're united in *some* way by our capacity for reason and compromise. And. Well, you know. Compassion. Or, what's the word for that, there's a word that I'm forgetting.

MICHAEL

Empathy.

UNCLE RAY

That's *it*. Empathy! Undulating in its, you know, the capacity of a feeling. We must be united in something. Why do I drink so much. Why do I feel pain. What does this mean? Today marks the end of reason. Or it should. Because. None of it makes sense anymore. In the light of today. Death comes in and robs us of all reason.

If this is boring to you, feel free to wander off. Life is *short*. You could go fishing. I'm not sure if we have any rods. And, you know, you make these plans and you have *no idea* what even tomorrow holds for you. Check the boat for fishing rods. Or the canoe. You could take the canoe out. Just make sure you've got a life jacket in the boat. Old family rule. There was a drowning once. You don't have to *wear* it. Where was I, plans, empathy? You know, you can go down to where the big lake connects to the little lake. Look at other people's cabins. Look at other people's docks. Look at other people in their boats. Why? I don't know why. The lake gets pretty crowded on the holidays like this. There must be *some* reason for this. Go boating if you want.

MICHAEL

I'm not much of a water person.

UNCLE RAY

No?

MICHAEL

Where I grew up it was flat with no water.

UNCLE RAY

So what did you do?

MICHAEL

Went running. Biked straight down the highway, until I got a car.

UNCLE RAY

I don't think we got any bikes.

I should add that to the list!

Fix the roof on the cabin.

*And* the bathroom.

You notice? The flusher doesn't...

MICHAEL

No I didn't, I haven't-

UNCLE RAY

I mean why go in there if you can go out here, am I right?

MICHAEL

We just haven't *been* here that long-

UNCLE RAY

Fix the bathroom,

Get some bikes...

MICHAEL

You don't need to get any bikes, I've got a car.

UNCLE RAY

Right. You guys *drove*, right? Long drive?

*MICHAEL nods, distant.*

UNCLE RAY

What was I talking about before?

MICHAEL

Death coming in and robbing us of all reason.

*Little pause.*

UNCLE RAY

Need anything? Beer, or-

MICHAEL

Beer would be great if that's okay.

UNCLE RAY

Of course. Catch.

*MICHAEL catches a beer.*

*He cracks it open.*

*Little pause.*

UNCLE RAY

What do *you* make of all this, Michael?  
Outsider perspective...?

MICHAEL

The cabin is full of dogs.

UNCLE RAY

Full of *what*?

MICHAEL

Dogs. It's full of dogs. They're everywhere.

UNCLE RAY

Oh, dogs.  
Yeah, dogs.

MICHAEL

It's like everyone in your family has a dog, and then their *dogs* have dogs.

UNCLE RAY

That's actually true. Tiff's dog never got fixed. Her pup's the little black one.

MICHAEL

What about the biggest one? Looks like a pit-bull boxer mix?

UNCLE RAY

Sarama! We call her Sara. That's mom's dog. Used to be Rachel's, but she couldn't take care of her when she went away for school so mom - *temporarily* - looked after. That was three years ago? Stick around long enough and you'll inherit a dog.

MICHAEL

They're under foot in there. I felt like I was going to punt one, just out of...

UNCLE RAY

You don't like dogs?

MICHAEL

I guess I don't.

UNCLE RAY

Not everyone has to like dogs.

MICHAEL

Even in this family?

UNCLE RAY

There are no requirements, Michael. We are not united in our love of dogs.

MICHAEL

I had to get away from them so I came out here.  
I can go back in if you need me to.

UNCLE RAY

You didn't come out here for a smoke?

MICHAEL

I didn't know that was an option.

UNCLE RAY  
You wanna smoke?

MICHAEL  
Sure.

UNCLE RAY  
I got cigars.

MICHAEL  
That's okay.

UNCLE RAY  
They're Swisher's.

MICHAEL  
I mean, it's the Fourth of July.  
Might as well smoke *something*, right?

*They smoke cigars and drink.*

MICHAEL  
These are really terrible.

UNCLE RAY  
Punishment. For the desire to inhale smoke into my lungs, I reward myself with these vile things. It doesn't help at *all*.

MICHAEL  
You keep smoking them?

UNCLE RAY  
I keep smoking them.

*They smoke.*

MICHAEL  
Ray, I -  
I just want to say -  
I'm sorry about how this turned out.

UNCLE RAY

Call me Uncle Ray. You're almost part of the family now.

MICHAEL

Uncle Ray. Thanks.

UNCLE RAY

And hey, congratulations. That's funny, isn't it?

Sorry & Congrats.

As one comes in, another leaves.

You breath in, you breath out.

I don't know, that's life I guess. Until it isn't.

MICHAEL

Have you been inside recently?

UNCLE RAY

No.

No I haven't.

How is she?

MICHAEL

Breathing was pretty bad. Labored?

I was only in there for a minute.

UNCLE RAY

You couldn't take it?

MICHAEL

Well, the dogs. And, I don't like seeing people like that.

UNCLE RAY

You mean, dying?

MICHAEL

Sparrow and Tiff, sitting there, nothing to do but wait for her lungs to fill with fluid and holding her hand - it seems so... embarrassing.



UNCLE RAY

This was gonna be your celebration, right? This weekend, that was the idea?

MICHAEL

Not anymore, I guess.

UNCLE RAY

Meet the family. Reintroduce yourself as the new fiancée. That kind of thing, right? And then *this* happens - but you know? We're of stubborn stock. We said we'd go to the cabin so- Here we all are.

MICHAEL

It's a neat cabin.

UNCLE RAY

It is, yes. How is your fiancé holding up?

MICHAEL

Sparrow?

UNCLE RAY

Is there another one?

MICHAEL

No, I'm... That's the first time I've heard her called that.

UNCLE RAY

It's strange at first, isn't it.

MICHAEL

It's nice.

UNCLE RAY

You'll get used it. Just in time for them to change it to *wife*. I mean, unless you guys break up before then.

MICHAEL

Right. I suppose that's true. We'll try not to.

UNCLE RAY

Congratulations anyway.

MICHAEL

Sparrow - my fiancé - is doing okay, I think.  
She's holding down the fort with your sister in there.

UNCLE RAY

Yeah. Okay.

MICHAEL

Are you going to go in?

UNCLE RAY

I guess I should, huh?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

UNCLE RAY

I guess I should.

*Pause.*

UNCLE RAY

So what do you *do*, Michael?

MICHAEL

I'm a journalist.

UNCLE RAY

That's your job?

MICHAEL

It will be. I hope. I'm writing a book. But. Right now I'm working at a book store.  
I restock the shelves and answer questions. Mostly stupid questions.  
It's a terrible job, actually.

UNCLE RAY

What department do you work in?

MICHAEL

Fiction.

UNCLE RAY

Oh, well. There you go!  
You wanna try your hand at an obituary?

MICHAEL

What?

UNCLE RAY

I'm not kidding, someone's gotta write it. Might as well start now.  
Mom's in there dying.  
So. You wanna try?

MICHAEL

I don't know anything about her.

UNCLE RAY

So listen! Abigail Tillman was surrounded by her loving family who *got along* and *loved each other* as much as life itself. Loving son Ray - are you writing this down?

MICHAEL

I don't have anything to write it down with.

UNCLE RAY

So one of us has got to go in for paper.

MICHAEL

And a pen. Or, you know, a computer.

UNCLE RAY

Just try to remember it for now. Where was I - Ray, that's me, and loving older daughter Tiff. Loving -and here I use the word sarcastically but it won't look any different when you write it down, *that's* funny, isn't it? - "Loving" younger daughter Kat. Who is not even here yet. Or is she?

MICHAEL

She's not here yet but Sparrow talked to her on the phone. She's coming.

UNCLE RAY

Is she bringing Jerry the Mother-fucker?

MICHAEL

I'm... not sure.

UNCLE RAY

You know, pop, when he was alive, never let Jerry set a single toe inside that cabin. He called him the 'snake'. He made hissing sounds at Kat when she brought him up. It was pretty funny. Now Kat'll probably insist that Jerry's name go in the obit too, right next to hers. God Help Us. The fictional family gathers one last time.

MICHAEL

How about the nonfiction? There must be some nonfiction too.

*UNCLE RAY considers, drinks.*

UNCLE RAY

She will be survived by her dog.

MICHAEL (*laughs*)

Right. What's the dog's name again?

UNCLE RAY

Sarama. You wanna know what it stands for?

MICHAEL

Sure.

UNCLE RAY (*proud*)

The bitch of the Gods.

MICHAEL

Really.

UNCLE RAY

Oh yeah. Rachel named her. She was into Hindu mythology for a minute. It can also mean 'fair-footed' or 'quick.' I'm going to win Jeopardy with that some day. Your beer empty?

Yeah. MICHAEL (*shakes bottle*)

Have another.  
Have many others.  
Hey.  
Congratulations. UNCLE RAY

Thank you. MICHAEL

I'm going to go look for something. UNCLE RAY

Okay? MICHAEL

*UNCLE RAY exits.*

I'll just.. MICHAEL

*MICHAEL drinks.  
Inhales the cigar.  
Coughs hard.*

...stay here. MICHAEL

*SPARROW appears in the yard.*

Michael!  
*There you are.*  
Where did you go?  
Is that a cigar? SPARROW

It's, uh, Uncle Rays. MICHAEL

SPARROW

Where is Uncle Ray? You're calling him Uncle Ray now?

MICHAEL

He left. I don't know. He told me to.

SPARROW

So... Okay.

Are you guys having fun out here?

MICHAEL

Uh. Yeah?

Just talking, I guess.

He went that way, if you-

SPARROW

Michael.

First, don't smoke that when my mom gets here-

MICHAEL

What difference does it-

SPARROW

It *just does*, and...

Will you come inside? With me?

MICHAEL

Right now?

SPARROW

Please?

It would be appreciated. I think gram would appreciate it.

MICHAEL

I never even met her.

SPARROW

Now is your chance, Michael, she's right inside.

MICHAEL  
She's basically dead.

SPARROW  
Michael!

MICHAEL  
What do you want me to do?

*SPARROW crumples, starts to cry.*

MICHAEL  
I'm sorry, I'm just; why are you crying?

SPARROW  
Why am I *crying*?

*UNCLE RAY appears again, dragging something heavy behind him.*

UNCLE RAY  
Hey Sport.

SPARROW (*wiping tears, composing*)  
Oh my God, what a mess.

UNCLE RAY  
I found it.

SPARROW  
You found it?

UNCLE RAY  
I found it.

SPARROW (*yells toward the house*)  
UNCLE RAY FOUND IT!

MICHAEL  
Found what?

SPARROW

The cannon!

*UNCLE RAY completes his dragging mission.  
It is, indeed, a small gray metal cannon.  
More a tube on wheels, but a cannon none-the-less.*

UNCLE RAY

They buried it by the old wood shed.

SPARROW

How long has it been back there? Five years?

UNCLE RAY

More than that.

SPARROW

How old was I?

UNCLE RAY

Teenager at least,  
How old was Rachel?

SPARROW

She was... Was that when she got the burn?

UNCLE RAY (*to MICHAEL*)

Don't get too close to the cannon.

SPARROW

I think she was sixteen, so I'd have been eighteen.

UNCLE RAY

So that's eight years ago?  
Where's my stogie?  
Look at me, missing years and losing cigars, I must be getting old.

*MICHAEL offers UNCLE RAY the cigar.*



MICHAEL

Here.

UNCLE RAY

What? That one's yours.

MICHAEL

Oh. Right.

*SPARROW give MICHAEL an accusing smile.*

SPARROW

Eight years ago, Uncle Ray and Mattie - Mattie is Tiff's husband.

MICHAEL

Yeah I know I met him.

SPARROW

Well - Okay, you're just not very good with names - So, they built this cannon. On the fourth of July. Because the neighbors kept shooting off all these noisemakers and roman candles and they almost hit us, they were just, like, shooting over the trees and there were fireworks everywhere and-

UNCLE RAY

So we made a cannon. We loaded it up. And up and up.

SPARROW

You could have blown a mountain up with the amount of powder I bet.

UNCLE RAY

Well we didn't *know* that. At the time.

SPARROW

And just as it got dark, they ignited it.

UNCLE RAY

BOOM.

SPARROW

Oh my god.

UNCLE RAY

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

SPARROW

I peed in my pants.

UNCLE RAY

Did you? I didn't know that.

SPARROW

When it happened. Just a little bit.

UNCLE RAY

Rachel, of *course*, was too close. Got a flash of the residual powder up her leg. That girl has more scars than I do and she's a quarter my age. Like daughter like father. Your kids turn out like you. Remember that, Michael. Like little freaky funhouse mirrors. As punishment mom took the cannon away from us and told us she threw it in the lake! That tiny woman! She has always had a hold over us though. You're always a kid. You know? You're *always* a kid in their eyes.

MICHAEL

They didn't actually throw it in the lake?

UNCLE RAY

I *knew* where it was.

SPARROW

You did *not*. How?

UNCLE RAY

Pop told me.

SPARROW

He did?

When?

UNCLE RAY

Yeah, last year, right before he checked out for good.  
He whispered it in my ear at the VA hospital.  
“Wood shed.”  
Okay, dad.  
That’s the last thing he ever said to me.  
I said, Love you.  
He said, Wood shed.  
Then he died.

I’m going to find some rags and clean this baby up for tonight.  
We’re going to need it.

*UNCLE RAY grabs an entire six-pack of beers, still  
clinging to each other via the plastic binding, and  
trudges off downstage.*

SPARROW

Michael, my mom is coming soon. Like, imminently.  
So...

MICHAEL

Be ready?

SPARROW

Get it together. Yeah.

MICHAEL

What do you want me to do, exactly?

SPARROW

I don’t know. I’m *sorry*.  
This is too much! I know that.

MICHAEL

I can do it-

SPARROW

You don’t have to-

MICHAEL

I want to help-

SPARROW

I know you do.

It's... whether you *can*.

Could you mention the date again?

MICHAEL

Right. Like, our wedding date.

SPARROW

Yes. *That* date.

MICHAEL

What did she say when you first told her?

SPARROW

She didn't say anything. She changed the subject to herself.

MICHAEL

That's so *weird*.

SPARROW

No. Not for her. Totally normal.

MICHAEL

Is she bringing Jerry the Mother-fucker?

SPARROW

Oh are you calling him that now?

MICHAEL

Well, that's what Uncle Ray said, and I thought it was funny.

SPARROW

...Interesting.

MICHAEL

Is your mom bringing Jerry?

SPARROW

To the wedding or the cabin?

MICHAEL

The cabin.

SPARROW

The cabin, yes. The wedding, I don't know, it was not discussed.

MICHAEL

Sparrow?

SPARROW

Uh-huh?

MICHAEL

You said - you *said* - that you'd help me out this weekend.  
You know how I get around people.

SPARROW

I know. I know I said that. That was before.  
The situation has changed.  
I'm sorry.  
Are you coming in?

MICHAEL

In a minute.

SPARROW

You will come in?

MICHAEL

Why?

SPARROW

I know this isn't easy or what you signed up for exactly but better sooner than later I guess, right? These things happen and I want us to be helpful.

MICHAEL

*You* want to be helpful.

SPARROW

Uncle Ray will get drunk and my mom is a basket-case and it's not fair to Tiff to be the only sane one in there, so *yes*, I want to be helpful.

MICHAEL

Just...

SPARROW

Just what.

MICHAEL

Nothing.

SPARROW

Say what you're thinking.

MICHAEL

Don't *compete*.

SPARROW

Over what?

MICHAEL

Attention, or, I don't know, "look how compassionate I am being--"

SPARROW

My grandmother is dying!

MICHAEL

Yeah. I know.  
I know.

SPARROW

This is important.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

SPARROW

This is...

I don't know, I guess it's our first big shared life experience.

Right?

MICHAEL

What about California?

SPARROW

That was fun, for *fun*. A road trip, not this, this is... well, obviously, different.

I need to know you can back me up.

*MICHAEL nods slowly.*

MICHAEL

I'll be in when I finish this.

SPARROW

You don't even smoke.

*SPARROW goes back inside the cabin.*

*MICHAEL smokes, but finds his cigar has gone out.*

**6 p.m.**

*MICHAEL, alone by the fire pit, tries to light paper matches in order to start the fire. He burns his fingers.*

MICHAEL

Oh my God, *Ow*.

*MICHAEL gives up, opens the last beer onstage. He drinks.*

*SPARROW enters.*

MICHAEL

...Hey.

SPARROW

Two hours?

MICHAEL

No, it's not been-

SPARROW

It's six. You said you'd come in *two hours ago*.

MICHAEL

Well.

I'm working up to it.

What's, uh...

Happening?

SPARROW

My mom is crying. And Jerry is standing in the corner grinning and nobody is talking to him because he's a mother-fucker. And he, Michael, is going to come out here eventually, and if you are still here, he will talk to you, which I know that you do not enjoy.

MICHAEL

Yeah I don't know why he always tries to talk to me & not you.



SPARROW

Because you behave like an outsider. And also, because he knows I hate him.

MICHAEL

I hate him too.

SPARROW

Yeah but he doesn't know that.  
Did you drink *all* the beer?

MICHAEL

Uncle Ray went off to find some in a boat.  
He said there's a store.  
You can have a drink of mine.

SPARROW

The Little Store!

MICHAEL

Yeah?

SPARROW

We used to get penny candy. Jawbreakers. And those little... brown things.

MICHAEL

Tootsie Rolls.

SPARROW

No.

MICHAEL

Chocolate bars?

SPARROW

Yeah, I'll have a drink.

*She drinks MICHAEL's beer.*

SPARROW

Yecch. What *is* this?

MICHAEL

McGolden Lite.

It's really easy to drink though.

*SPARROW finishes MICHAEL's beer,  
hands it back to him.*

*He looks inside it, looks at her.*

*They share a tiny moment.*

SPARROW

Have you ever seen a dead person before?

MICHAEL

No. Have you?

SPARROW

No.

MICHAEL

Well, we're about to.

SPARROW

This is so shitty.

MICHAEL

*I know.*

SPARROW

I wanted this to be for us.

MICHAEL

I know.

SPARROW

It can't still be for us, can it?

*MICHAEL moves in behind SPARROW, kisses her neck.*

MICHAEL  
I don't think so.

SPARROW  
Kind of inappropriate.

*MICHAEL runs his hands over SPARROW from behind.*

MICHAEL  
Probably.

SPARROW  
I was so excited to show you off.

MICHAEL  
It's not like they haven't met me before.

SPARROW  
But not *here*, like this. At a family event.

*SPARROW tries to escape MICHAEL's embrace, MICHAEL holds on.*

MICHAEL  
You can still show me off.

SPARROW  
You're hiding out in the back yard. Like my dad used to do.

*MICHAEL stops touching SPARROW.*

MICHAEL  
Was it better? Being here, I mean? When your dad could still come?

SPARROW

Dad & Uncle Ray got along. Uncle Ray was the only one I think who didn't believe my mom when she... Well you know, the whole emotional abuse story to cover up that she was cheating with Jerry. It was different before they got divorced, if that's what you mean. I don't know about better.

*SPARROW slips out of MICHAEL's arms.*

SPARROW

So, get involved, Michael.

MICHAEL

I hardly think your family is too concerned with what I'm doing right now.

SPARROW

You'd be surprised, Michael, at what my family concerns itself with.

*UNCLE RAY enters with a fresh case of beer.*

MICHAEL

Oh, hey, do you want help with that?

UNCLE RAY

There's another one in the boat.

MICHAEL

I'll grab it.

*MICHAEL disappears in the direction of the lake.*

*UNCLE RAY wastes no time opening a can.*

SPARROW

Mom and Jerry just got here.

UNCLE RAY

Good, I was getting bored without all the drama.  
Is she in there crying?

SPARROW

Yeah. She elbowed Tiff out of the way so she could be the closest bedside.

UNCLE RAY

She's getting crazier, right? Or is it just me?

SPARROW

I can't imagine what you might be referring to.

UNCLE RAY

Does she know about your news? The engagement to the boy named Michael?

SPARROW

Do you like him? What do you think?

UNCLE RAY

About Michael? It doesn't matter too much, does it? You chose him, so-

SPARROW

I'm not my mother. It matters. Do you like him?

UNCLE RAY

He seems very nice. Little strange. He doesn't like *dogs*.

SPARROW

No, he doesn't like people. He's fine with dogs because he doesn't have to make small talk with them. But yeah, I did tell my mom about the engagement. On the phone. Not in person, yet.

UNCLE RAY

What did she say?

SPARROW

She didn't say anything. She paused. You know, the cold pause? The one that you can tell sucks the air out of everything, like, offense, she's offended? And then she said, "Well, I hope you're still going to make it up to the cabin for the Fourth." And I said, "Yes." And then she hung up. That was before grandma took the turn.

UNCLE RAY

Did she bring their stupid dog?

SPARROW

Jerry's dog?

UNCLE RAY

Mother-fucker Junior?

*SPARROW suddenly wraps UNCLE RAY in a hug. He receives it, a little surprised.*

SPARROW

Uncle Ray, I miss you! It's so nice to be up here with everyone. I wish it wasn't...

UNCLE RAY

Under these circumstances. Missed you too, Sport.

SPARROW

Of course she brought the dog.  
Is Rachel going to make it?

UNCLE RAY

I don't know. She's trying. Travel is tough right now.  
Mom's just got to hang on until...

*Pause. UNCLE RAY force-brightens.*

UNCLE RAY

Speaking of travel, you gonna tell the rest of us when the big day is?

SPARROW

Yes! We were thinking of March 15th.

UNCLE RAY

Spring wedding. Interesting!

SPARROW

At the Courtyard. At least for the dinner part. This is a point of argument between us right now, I want it to be really simple and so does he, but he wants it to be on a playground? He wants us to be on swings and be swinging and have the minister of the peace or judge or whoever to be standing between the two swings and have the ceremony like that and when he says, "You may now kiss the bride," he wants us to both jump off the swings and roll before we kiss.

SPARROW (cont'd)

Which is *crazy* because I'll have a wedding dress on, but he said, you don't *have* to, you can get married wearing anything.

UNCLE RAY

That's true.

SPARROW

I think the *whole* thing's going to be at the Courtyard.

UNCLE RAY

Sounds like quite the event.  
Are we going to be invited?

SPARROW

Of course!

UNCLE RAY

Well hey, that's great. I'm happy for you guys.

SPARROW

You really are?

UNCLE RAY

I really am.  
And how's your dad? You gonna see him on this trip?

SPARROW

We were supposed to but now, with gram-

*MICHAEL reappears, another case of beer in hand.*

MICHAEL

I saw a fish!

UNCLE RAY

Did you catch it?

MICHAEL

I had a case of beer in my hands.

UNCLE RAY

Did you offer it a beer?

*From inside, all the dogs start barking.*

SPARROW

Here they come.

*KAT & JERRY enter.*

KAT

She spoke to me!

UNCLE RAY

Hey little sis.

*KAT looks at UNCLE RAY distractedly, then continues.*

KAT

She told me. She told *me*. That everything is going to be all right and that's she's proud and honored to be here with us.

UNCLE RAY

She said all that?

SPARROW

Mom, she's in a coma.

KAT

She squeezed my hand! I know it. She squeezed my hand, didn't she, Jerry?

JERRY

Absolutely.

UNCLE RAY

Jerry.



JERRY

Ray.

*The two men shake hands.*

*MICHAEL does not make any effort to be part of the greeting ritual and JERRY & KAT make no effort to include him.*

*A dog howls plaintively from the cabin.*

KAT

Poor Sara, poor poor Sara. Has anyone explained to Sara what's going on?

SPARROW

Explained to the dog?

KAT

When we came in she looked at us, just so thankful, and she wagged her tail.

And then she walked over to where poor mother was, and sat down.

She just sat down.

Just like that.

And waited.

She put her paw up on the the bed and whined.

I went over and I took mom's hand and I petted the dog.

That's when she squeezed and she looked at me just like everything was normal, she saw me and I saw her.

So I know.

Sara is watching out for us. *Watch Sara.* Talk to her. Keep her in the loop.

Jerry, will you go tell Sara what's going on if none of you will?

JERRY

Aren't we going to-

KAT

Oh! Yes. We have news! I've already told mother. That's when she said she was proud and honored.

SPARROW

Through a hand squeeze?

KAT

I Know What I Know.

JERRY

She was just waiting for us to get here.

KAT

Sparrow?

Jerry and I... have decided.

That we're getting married.

*Pause.*

KAT

We're getting married!

*Pause.*

KAT

I mean I don't have a ring yet because Jerry didn't ask *formally*, it's just been something that we've been discussing and, well, we've decided! You're the first to hear! After mother, of course.

*SPARROW stands frozen.*

UNCLE RAY

Well.

Congratulations.

Beer?

JERRY

Oh no thanks, I don't drink that.

UNCLE RAY

Beer?

JERRY (*referencing the can*)

That.

KAT

So we called Bruce at the Courtyard and he checked his calendar and said we could have the wedding on March 1st, *this* March 1st, we don't want to wait, and so you must all hold the date, all right? It's just so good that mom was able to find out before she... before she...

*JERRY slithers over and comforts her.*

JERRY

It's been a very emotional couple of days.

KAT

Sparrow. Oh my beautiful daughter Sparrow. I want you to be a bridesmaid. Okay? We'll buy dresses together.

Sparrow?

Sparrow, won't that be-

*Snarls from inside the cabin.*

JERRY

The dogs are fighting.

KAT

*Explain to Sara what's going on.*

*JERRY runs back in the cabin.*

*MICHAEL slams his beer.*

*SPARROW stands, still frozen, as her mother attempts to embrace her.*

**8 p.m.**

*UNCLE RAY pisses into the woods.*

*MICHAEL stares at the can in his hand.*

*A bell from inside the cabin rings and rings.*

UNCLE RAY (*returning*)

Dinner bell.

MICHAEL

Is that what that is? I was hoping it didn't mean-

UNCLE RAY

I think it means dinner.

MICHAEL

More like Bell of Calamity.

Bell of Bullshit.

Bell of All that is Unholy.

UNCLE RAY

Nope, pretty sure it's a dinner bell.

Coming in?

MICHAEL

No.

UNCLE RAY

You're not?

MICHAEL

No.

UNCLE RAY

Why not?

*MICHAEL stares off into the woods.*

UNCLE RAY

It's a good time to be with the family I think.

MICHAEL

Probably.

UNCLE RAY

Last meal, biblical, spiritual, healing.

MICHAEL

You think that's possible?

*UNCLE RAY clears his throat.*

UNCLE RAY

Michael. Honestly? I don't know. But you gotta look after what's closest to you. You know?

*Pause.*

UNCLE RAY

Well, I'm doing it. I'm going in.

*UNCLE RAY collects three beers for the trip.*

UNCLE RAY

You want me to send you out some food? I think they got corn from the farmer's market down on 12, just harvested. So it's fresh. Corn is good.

MICHAEL

No, I'll-

Sure.

If it's no trouble.

UNCLE RAY

If you're staying out here, you could try cleaning off the cannon a little more. Or work on the obit. I'm going in now.

*UNCLE RAY exits towards the cabin.  
The bell stops ringing.*

*MICHAEL takes up a rag and starts to work on the cannon.*

*From the lake, RACHEL appears.*

*She is dripping wet and wears a vintage-looking two-piece swimsuit. She approaches an oblivious MICHAEL from behind and touches his shoulder.*

I'm not-  
MICHAEL

*He turns, sees RACHEL.*

Sorry, you're not-  
You're all wet - Are you okay?  
MICHAEL

I was just swimming.  
RACHEL

Swimming.  
MICHAEL

I'm Rachel.  
RACHEL

Oh Rachel. Oh, *Rachel*. Yeah. Okay. I'm Michael. I'm Sparrow's... other.  
MICHAEL

I'm Rachel Abigail.  
RACHEL

Okay. That's cool. Named after your grand-mom?  
MICHAEL

Sister.  
RACHEL

MICHAEL

I didn't know you had a sister, sorry. I really am bad with names. And people. You want a towel?

RACHEL

It's getting cold in there.

MICHAEL

In the water? Yeah. It hasn't been warm enough yet, cool spring I think.

RACHEL

Oh no, the water's fine.

MICHAEL

Here. Take my shirt. I don't have a towel, they're all inside.

*MICHAEL removes his shirt and wraps it around RACHEL.*

MICHAEL

You're shivering.

RACHEL

I'm just excited.

MICHAEL

*Oh-kay.* Maybe we should try to start the fire?

RACHEL

Who let it go out?

MICHAEL

Um, me, but I'm not sure I ever really got it started-

RACHEL

The fire-tender must never *ever* let the fire go out.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, I guess I didn't realize...  
Like a family rule, or-?

RACHEL

Or else you can't see through the cold and dark.

MICHAEL

Right, no, that makes - it gets very - after the sun goes, I mean - chilly.

*MICHAEL tries to light a match but a mosquito bites him and he slaps the mosquito instead.*

MICHAEL

Fucking mosquitos. You must be getting eaten up, swimming at this hour.

RACHEL

Not really.

MICHAEL

So - you're back from - where is it that you're going to college? You know, they're eating in there if you were hungry, I'm just out here because - I'm not the fire keeper or whatever, I'm just hiding. I thought you were Sparrow. She's gonna come out and yell at me pretty soon here.

RACHEL

Sparrow?

MICHAEL

Your cousin. First cousin, or, how does that work...? Well, we're getting married. So.

RACHEL

Why is she about to yell at you?

MICHAEL

They're having dinner and I'm out here.

RACHEL

Why are you out here?



MICHAEL

Well, um. We're still figuring out who each other is?  
And. I guess. I haven't seen her and her mom in the same place like this, and there are these familial traits? That I don't really notice back home but here, I'm just... *seeing things*.

RACHEL

Seeing things is nice.

MICHAEL

No, no, things-  
That I don't want to see.  
I don't want to go inside because I don't want to see *her*. Here. Or, with *them*.  
Does that make sense? You're not going to *tell* anybody-

RACHEL

No.

MICHAEL

Has anyone ever told you that you're really easy to talk to?

RACHEL

I'm a good listener.

MICHAEL

Yeah!

RACHEL

I've been told that.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

RACHEL

I listen a *lot*.

MICHAEL

Yeah?

RACHEL

I'm glad that you're outside.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Well. Me too I guess.

RACHEL

What do you think about people dying?

MICHAEL

Uh...?

RACHEL

What's your understanding of it? People dying.

MICHAEL

You mean like now, in there -

RACHEL

Yes, in there, or anywhere.

MICHAEL (*carefully*)

You want to know what I think?

Has someone-

Sparrow said something about me?

RACHEL

What would she say?

MICHAEL

Oh, well - Something about me being insensitive and over-intellectual, I don't attend to social cues well...? And you know, who knows anyway-

RACHEL

I care because you look thoughtful.

I know you want to talk.

You're sitting out here waiting for someone to listen to you talk, aren't you?

That's what you want.

I'm so good at listening.

Tell me what you think about people dying.

MICHAEL

I think it's stupid.

*RACHEL is amused.*

RACHEL

What about death do you find stupid?

MICHAEL (*getting warmed up*)

Everyone dies. Right? Everyone dies. Deal with it. That's an absolute, it's not a question at *all*, the only thing that we have any control over is the when. When will it happen. We don't know. So we have this *fear* but then when someone dies of old age, a stroke or heart attack or something -

RACHEL

Like her in there right now.

MICHAEL

Yeah! Everyone becomes so emotional and you're expected to *drop* everything as if it's the worst thing that's ever happened; it's the expectation. That's what pisses me off. And it does. It makes me upset. Angry upset.

RACHEL

Expectation of what happens? After death?

MICHAEL

No, no no, the way when someone is dying or sick you're expected to act a certain way and if you don't you're not being polite or proper but why should I feel bad about it? About people dying that I don't know! And it's not like it's about the dead person, they're *dead*. Right?

RACHEL

Maybe.

MICHAEL

And so people, these people who know someone who's died or dying, they feel so special and demand your attention and sympathy and it's so - just, it shouldn't be about *them*, right? People make it about themselves and it's *not*.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Should I say, "Oh that's so terrible, that's so *awful*, what *happened*?" It's NOT awful, it's routine, it happens to everyone! Maybe "I'm sorry for your loss." That's somewhat more appropriate.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL

I mean I have empathy I'm not a sociopath.

RACHEL

I think I meant, what do you think happens *after*.

MICHAEL

Oh.

*He slaps at another mosquito.*

MICHAEL

Yeah, they aren't really biting you at all, are they.

RACHEL

*After death.*

MICHAEL

You're asking me, is there a heaven?

RACHEL

Do I have a *soul*.

MICHAEL

Jeez, I don't know. How should I know?

RACHEL

What am I doing here?

MICHAEL

What are any of us doing here! That's the question!

RACHEL

What *are* you doing here?

MICHAEL

I'm trying. I am *trying* - I don't know.  
Do you want a beer? I'm going to have another beer.

*MICHAEL opens another beer, slaps a mosquito.*

RACHEL

Would you like your shirt back?

MICHAEL

Uhhh sure, if you're not cold anymore.

*RACHEL takes MICHAEL's shirt and gets up to him real close and slides the shirt back over his torso. They stand very close.*

MICHAEL

You're standing very close to me.

RACHEL

Just gathering information.  
What are you here for? What am I here for?

MICHAEL

Here, like "here?" or, the more general here?

RACHEL

Here. In this place. Right now. You and I.

MICHAEL

So the *specific* here.

RACHEL

Think of me like still water. Words are wind. Breath. Think. Speak.  
Make some waves, Michael.

MICHAEL

Okay. Waves? Okay! We're here... to experience all that we can experience - ah, that's pretty cheesy - you know, people say 'life is short,' I don't even know *what* that means, Life is Life, it's not short or long or anything, it lasts while it lasts and then it's *over*.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Maybe what they mean is that 'instances' are short; missed opportunities. What we could have done. What we should have done. Then it's too late. Which leads us to state, 'life is short,' when in fact-

*RACHEL kisses MICHAEL hard on the lips.*

MICHAEL

That's not exactly what I meant.

RACHEL

It wasn't?

MICHAEL

I'm engaged.

RACHEL

Neat.

MICHAEL

Actually I think right now you may be adding to my problems, Rachel.

RACHEL

*Rachel Abigail.*

You taste interesting, like copper.

Come swimming with me.

MICHAEL

Swimming? No!

RACHEL

Swimming is good for the soul.

MICHAEL

Is it?

RACHEL

Especially when everything is all churned up under the water.

You should see it. All the doors are opened up.

You should at least go fishing, you might catch something real interesting tonight.

MICHAEL

I don't think we have any rods.

RACHEL

Then come in the water with me.

MICHAEL

Right now? What about the fire?

RACHEL

The whole lake is on fire.  
See?

MICHAEL

The sun? It's setting, the reflection, very pretty, but-

RACHEL

Come in with me.

MICHAEL

I don't have a swimsuit.

RACHEL

We can be naked if you want, it doesn't really matter.

MICHAEL

You're my cousin-in-law! To be.

RACHEL

You don't like doing what is proper and expected.

MICHAEL

Yeah yeah okay but, I'm just not sure of the moral ramifications, you see, if it feels wrong it probably *is* wrong-

RACHEL

It feels right to not care about dead people?

MICHAEL

Well, no, not exactly, but that's a different example-

RACHEL

Experience all you can experience while you're here.

MICHAEL

Yep, that's what I said but-

RACHEL

Life can turn out to be *very* short.

MICHAEL

I *didn't* say that-

RACHEL

I'm saying that. I like you even though you're wrong about some things. I bet I can solve your problems if you let me. Don't worry about clothes or morals, they don't matter. Come into the water and tell me your soul.

*RACHEL unstraps her top, turns, removes it, and exits.*

*MICHAEL stares after her, then unbuckles his pants and starts to remove them.*

*UNCLE RAY enters from the cabin area with corn.*

UNCLE RAY

Brought you some corn.

MICHAEL

...Thank you.

UNCLE RAY

Pants giving you some trouble?

MICHAEL

Uh. Ants. I think. I think an ant got in.

UNCLE RAY

Did you find it?



MICHAEL

No. Nope. Might have just been imagining things. How is inside?

UNCLE RAY

I needed more beer.

*UNCLE RAY grabs another four beers out of the cooler.*

*Fireworks go off from across the lake.*

UNCLE RAY

Those fuckers! They can't even wait 'til it's dark out. No discipline what-so-ever. That's why we shot the cannon at them. Is it clean?

MICHAEL

Is what?

UNCLE RAY

The cannon!

MICHAEL

I'll keep working on it, sorry.

*UNCLE RAY turns to go, hesitates.  
Another little firework pops in the distance.*

UNCLE RAY

Mom's dog is in there lying under the table. Their breathing matched. It's getting pretty shallow, her breath. Terrible fucking sound. Death rattle? That's exactly right. But the dog is breathing with her. I thought, "Maybe they'll just die at the same time." Sara's a young dog. Ridiculous, right? I thought, maybe we should all just lie on the floor and breath. We should all lie down with the dogs. Wait for something to happen. Finally a state of being that makes sense to me. Then I *couldn't*. Breath, I mean. Jerry slapped me on the back. Gets all in my face, "You okay? You choking or something?" "FUCK you." I didn't say that. I should have said that. Someone should. He shouldn't be here. He doesn't belong.

MICHAEL

I shouldn't be here either.

UNCLE RAY

Well. But. We *like* you. It's different.

*Suddenly UNCLE RAY drops to his knees, breathless.*

MICHAEL

Jesus - you okay?

*UNCLE RAY cracks open one of the beers, drinks heavily, sucking at the can. Some of it spills down his front. Finally-*

UNCLE RAY

Just gotta keep breathing. You don't even have to think to breath. Isn't that something? But you can't drink and breath at the same time or else we'd be fish.

*More fireworks from across the lake.*

**10 p.m.**

*MICHAEL and SPARROW are in mid-argument.  
The campfire is lit, a small flame visible.  
SPARROW holds a smoking stick.*

SPARROW

You can leave the fire for ten minutes and come in.

MICHAEL

I'm the fire keeper.

SPARROW

Fire-tender and that's my job, or was, it's a kids game, Michael, it's not a real-  
Did Uncle Ray tell you-

MICHAEL

It might go out.

SPARROW

It won't!

MICHAEL

The fireworks are starting soon. The real ones, not these little private explosions all  
down the lake. They're out there with a barge. You said you were going to watch them  
with me.

SPARROW

Yes I know and - I *do* want to watch them with you. But.  
I have to be in there when she dies.

MICHAEL

Why? WHY!

SPARROW

This is what you do to prove yourself worthy. This is a chance, Michael. Look at it as  
an opportunity. You like opportunities.

MICHAEL

Worthy? Worthy of what?

SPARROW

This is kind of like a test for us. That sounds bad. Not like you can pass or fail. No, I guess what I mean by worthy is being someone who can deal with tough situations, you know? Someone I'd marry.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL

What are you-

SPARROW

Okay I'm going in.

MICHAEL

No, what did you mean by *that*.

SPARROW

Michael-

MICHAEL

I'm not someone you'd marry?

SPARROW

I'm exhausted. I just did all the dishes. For the dinner you didn't join us for. I mean, Michael, I'm *sorry* my grandmother is inconveniencing you but-

MICHAEL

No! You're not sorry. You, you're just-  
Not listening to me.

SPARROW

You're not saying anything-

MICHAEL

No I am this is it okay, *everybody dies*. Life, it ends. Yeah?

SPARROW

Ok.

MICHAEL

So but the baby, when a baby is born, it clears its lungs, it breathes, it cries, everyone is really happy, right? Cute, a baby.

SPARROW

How drunk *are* you right now?

MICHAEL

Pretty drunk but keep up, I've been working on this idea - Okay, so the lungs, they fill back up and that's death and that happens to everyone *also* but is not celebrated, in fact it's like anti-celebrated, everyone has to feel bad-

SPARROW

Except for you-

MICHAEL

No, no, my *point*, Sparrow, is that not everyone gets married.  
Okay? Not everyone gets married.  
And some who do, like your mom, get divorced.  
But my point is - marriage, and love, are not guaranteed life events.

SPARROW

You should stop now.

MICHAEL

A wedding, being a non-guaranteed life event, deserves to be prioritized. Death should not trump love! This was our weekend! We should be celebrating! You should celebrate with me! We are lovers. We will be married. This is NOT a TEST. Stay and watch the fireworks.

*SPARROW stares at MICHAEL for awhile.*

SPARROW

Like you said, marriage is not guaranteed.

MICHAEL

That's not a very nice thing to say.

I'm upset!

SPARROW

Stop being upset.

MICHAEL

*SPARROW turns to go in.*

What if I was dying? Would your priorities change then?

MICHAEL

What.

SPARROW

Do I have to be dead in order to deserve your attention right now?

MICHAEL

Yes. Yes Michael, Yes you do.

SPARROW

*SPARROW exits towards the cabin.*

Guess I'll just go NAKED SWIMMING WITH COUSIN RACHEL ABIGAIL THEN!

MICHAEL

*A long pause.  
Then SPARROW comes storming back.*

What did you just say?

SPARROW

Naked swimming with your cousin Rachel? I shouldn't have said that.

MICHAEL

You said Rachel Abigail.

SPARROW

Yeah.

MICHAEL

SPARROW

What is *wrong* with you?

MICHAEL

Why?

SPARROW

How do you even know about that?

MICHAEL

I'm talking about your cousin.

SPARROW

My cousin is Rachel Lea. Rachel Lea. She's not here because she's in Atlanta. She couldn't get someone to cover her work shifts. She might be here by tomorrow but Uncle Ray doesn't know. He's talking to her on the phone *right now*.

MICHAEL

Rachel's not here?

SPARROW

No she is not.

MICHAEL

Oh.

SPARROW

Rachel Abigail, on the other hand, was my grandmother's little sister who *drowned*.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL

In a lake?

SPARROW

Yes.

MICHAEL

In this lake?

SPARROW

Yes.

MICHAEL

Oh.

SPARROW

Who would even think to say such a terrible awful thing at a time like this?

*The fire has gone out.*

*MICHAEL notices.*

MICHAEL

The fire's gone out.

SPARROW

Why would you *say that*, Michael?

MICHAEL

Uh... I don't know. I just - the name - what happened to her, exactly?

SPARROW

She drowned.

MICHAEL

How *old* was she?

SPARROW

Is this really the time for-

MICHAEL

I'm sorry I just, it was a bad joke but I'm suddenly interested-

SPARROW

My grandmother, Abigail, was going out for a boat ride with the guy who would become my grandfather. And Rachel Abigail was trying to show off, or I don't know, she was jealous, she liked him first, so she swam after the boat. And no one noticed in time-



MICHAEL

No one cared.

SPARROW

*Noticed.* Until it was too late.

*MICHAEL nods slowly, then looks back at the fire.*

MICHAEL

I need to start the fire back up.

SPARROW

No you don't.

MICHAEL

It's *dead*. I need the lighter.

SPARROW

Oh my GOD - HERE.

*She hands MICHAEL her prodding stick and a lighter.*

SPARROW

Start it, and then.  
Come *with* me.

MICHAEL

Or what?

SPARROW

Or else, no more wedding. You fail.

*SPARROW looks a little shocked but holds her ground as MICHAEL digests this for a second.*

MICHAEL

You said this wasn't a test.

*SPARROW heads towards the cabin.*

MICHAEL (*cont'd*)

Wait. Sparrow. Sparrow, *wait*.

*JERRY comes outside and almost runs face first into SPARROW.*

JERRY

Oh hi guys. Hey, do you know where the batteries are kept? The hand set for the phone is almost dead.

SPARROW

Oh. They're in a drawer? Maybe in the kitchen area? Do you want me to go look?

JERRY

No need.

*JERRY turns to go back inside.*

JERRY

And uh...  
It happened. About three minutes ago.  
You should comfort your mother.

*JERRY goes inside.*

SPARROW

I missed it?

MICHAEL

Sparrow-

SPARROW

I FUCKING MISSED IT?

MICHAEL

Did you really mean-

SPARROW

You made me miss it.

MICHAEL

Why does it matter-

SPARROW

Have you ever been in the room when someone died? Have you? I haven't. I wanted to see it, okay? The body stopping. Shutting down. I wanted that. It would have helped me. One minute breath, the next not. One minute alive, the next dead.

MICHAEL

Like the fire.

SPARROW

Not like the fire at all!

MICHAEL (*drunken revelation*)

The breathing was like the smoke.

SPARROW

What?

MICHAEL

A person in a coma but still breathing is a lot like a smoldering fire.

SPARROW

You can blow on a fire! You can put little sticks on it! Keeping a fire alive is easy! You made me *miss* it! You FAIL SO MUCH.

*UNCLE RAY runs out of the cabin, weirdly gleeful and carrying a bag. KAT and JERRY follow close behind.*

KAT

Watch the door, you'll let all the dogs out! Ray! RAY.

JERRY

Kat, just let him do-

UNCLE RAY

Now is the time! Now is the time! THE TIME, IT IS NOW! Michael, the matches!

MICHAEL

I used them all.

UNCLE RAY

Someone get me matches!

*UNCLE RAY stuffs the bag into the cannon, grabs the stick from MICHAEL's hand to stuff it deeper.*

SPARROW

Michael has a lighter.

UNCLE RAY

Michael, the lighter!

*UNCLE RAY receives the lighter from MICHAEL.*

UNCLE RAY

Does anyone want to say any words?

*Pause.*

JERRY (*clearing his throat*)

I think that your mother was a very complicated woman and that really this night is about the survivors of her motherhood - Who are gathered here to remember the legacy of this woman who did not love them freely or equally. Now they are free. From influence. To love freely amongst themselves.

*JERRY takes KAT in his arms.*

JERRY

I know. I know. It's okay now. We're okay.

UNCLE RAY

Is that - Are you finished?

JERRY

Amen. There, now I am.

UNCLE RAY

This is for Mom.

*UNCLE RAY lights one end of the cannon.  
It **EXPLODES VERY LOUDLY** with a flash of  
light and the smell of sulfur, followed closely by:*

*The sound of something running away.*

KAT

Oh my god the dog! It's running! The dog! The dog! Sara! Come back Sara!

JERRY

What?

KAT

She got out! She ran! That way! Come on! We have to find her! Get the car.

JERRY

Won't she come back if we wait-

KAT

Get the *car* Jerry.

*JERRY scurries off.  
KAT looks threateningly at UNCLE RAY.*

UNCLE RAY

I didn't think that would happen.

KAT

Well you never do, do you?

UNCLE RAY

Kat - Jesus. We can pretend a little longer, can't we? For mom?

KAT

We're taking Sara. We're finding Sara and we're taking her with us.

UNCLE RAY

That's *Rachel's* dog.

KAT

Well she's not *here* is she, so, now it's our dog, Ray, which you almost *fucking* blew up.

UNCLE RAY

Kat!

KAT

*WHAT.*

UNCLE RAY

I'll just - go look. In this direction.

*UNCLE RAY exits.*

*A honk of a horn, KAT leaves in the direction of the car.*

KAT (*as she leaves*)

Sara! Sara! Sara! Come back honey! It's okay! It's just a loud noise. OH MY GOD THE DOG IS MISSING.

SPARROW

I'm going with her.

*SPARROW looks at MICHAEL.*

*MICHAEL looks at SPARROW.*

MICHAEL

Sparrow...

*SPARROW exits towards the car.*

*Above the lake, many many fireworks.*

*The good expensive commercial-grade kind.*

*They burst and explode with colorful splashes of lights.*

MICHAEL

Man, that dog ran *fast*.

*He picks up another beer.*

*Opens it. Watches the fireworks.*

**12 a.m.**

*JERRY has cornered MICHAEL near the  
fire-pit.*

JERRY

A suit should fit a man in the shoulders.

MICHAEL

Right but hold that thought, I'm just gonna go in I think-

JERRY

There's no one in there, Michael.

MICHAEL

But maybe Sparrow came back or-

JERRY

No, they're all still out looking.

Inside, there's just...

The *body*.

I'm glad we've managed to find this time to talk, Michael.

MICHAEL

Yeah, okay.

JERRY

We'll get you a suit too - I have a guy. My old boss? He told me - Get yourself a suit, son. A power suit. I learned how to tie my tie while driving. With one hand I could tie a tie. I was always in a hurry! The life of a salesman. I bet I could tell you a thing or two. Well, here's one thing that I'm passing on to you. Get yourself a good suit.

MICHAEL

I already have a suit.

JERRY

Yes but does it fit?

MICHAEL

Well *I* think so.

JERRY

Because we can buy you a suit. If we buy Sparrow a dress. It's only fair.

MICHAEL

Fair.

JERRY

We're very fair people, Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes.

JERRY

On Tuesday, we can go to my tailor and get you measured.

MICHAEL

I don't know if I'll be in town.

JERRY

Oh really? Because I thought that Sparrow was in town. And there'll be a funeral.

MICHAEL

Yeah I don't know. I have to get back. My job. Deadlines.

JERRY

Oh, did I tell you about my short story?

MICHAEL

No?

JERRY

It won \$20,000.

MICHAEL

Really.



JERRY

A lot of people got pissed off about *that* one, let me tell you. A lot of whispering. I know. *I* know. That just because I haven't been a writer my whole life - I mean, like *you*, Michael, you've been a writer and *you* know.

MICHAEL

What do I know?

JERRY

Well, you know.

MICHAEL

I don't usually go in for those contests.

JERRY

Oh, no, I'm not saying you do. But \$20,000! Talk about a pat on the back. Abigail, when we told her, was so proud. She told all her bridge friends, Kat says.

MICHAEL

Good for you.

JERRY

I got the idea? For the story. From Abigail's behavior last year towards us. I wrote it for Kat. As a gift. A present. I wrote a homecoming story, about this woman who comes back to her family after being lost and at first her family doesn't want her but then they do. In the end.

MICHAEL

Jerry?

JERRY

Yes?

MICHAEL

Usually you don't talk to me unless you want something.

*JERRY laughs.*

JERRY

You're a funny guy, Michael, always a sense of humor, I like that. This family needs some people with a better sense of humor.

MICHAEL

I'm serious.

JERRY

Well - since you bring it up - I *was* going to ask you - when you get back to the big city - if you're setting up meetings with publisher's anyway - I'll give you a commission if you sell my stories. I have a whole book of them! Not just the one. I'll give you seven percent.

MICHAEL

Okay well I don't know if I'll be in any meetings-

JERRY

Really? Because Kat told me all about how well you're doing.

MICHAEL

Oh. She did?

JERRY

She's really excited about what Sparrow and you are up to! And I would be too! You've got a full-length book? Someone *will* publish it.

MICHAEL

No, no, I work at a book *store*.

JERRY

You don't have a book?

MICHAEL

Well, no, I do. But it's not. I haven't had. *Meetings*.

JERRY

Yet.

MICHAEL

I mean, I could. I should.

JERRY

What's your book about?

MICHAEL

Uh - Dogs.

JERRY

This must be such a great research opportunity for you!

MICHAEL

About how we *project* onto dogs. Dogs don't think what we think they think. They're just animals. We turn them into whatever we want them to be, when in fact, they're not like us at all. They're not our *friends*. They're just...  
Animals.

*Pause.*

JERRY

You'll get seven percent commission on my story if you sell it. You know how much I want to ask for this right? I can get another eighteen thousand as an advance on the low end if you ask the right people.

MICHAEL

I'll keep it in mind-

JERRY

Seven percent, you know how that much is? Do the math, Michael, do the math.

MICHAEL

It's - um - ten percent is -

JERRY

No, *seven*.

MICHAEL

No, I - I - know that but it's easier to figure ten and then reduce it by - well you know. It's - like fourteen hundred dollars?

*A little pause in which JERRY tries to do the math and realizes he can't either.*

JERRY

Yeah, exactly.  
So should I email it to you?  
Let me take down your email address.

MICHAEL

You know, I don't have one?

*SPARROW and KAT re-enter, muddy.*

KAT

Oh, there you are!

JERRY

Did you find her?

KAT

I thought I saw her. We ran off into the woods. It was a raccoon.

*She giggles hysterically and SPARROW joins in.*

SPARROW

So Michael! Guess what color of dress mom wants to buy me? Blue! A *blue* dress!

KAT

You'll look so wonderful.

SPARROW

I can't catch my breath we were running so fast! I almost lost my shoe.

KAT

What a night! Can you imagine what Sara must be thinking? She must think we're chasing after her to punish her! If I were her, I'd just keep running. Just keep running until I got tired and then find some safe place and curl up and fall asleep. That's what I'd do but we have to find her because she could get hit by a car.

SPARROW

Or chased by a raccoon.

*They erupt into giggles again as KAT pulls at SPARROW's arm.*

KAT

Let's go! Let's go!

SPARROW

Mom. Can't we sit down for just a minute?

KAT

*The dog is missing.*

SPARROW

I want to go inside and say goodbye to gram before they come get her. You should wait here in case Sara comes back, ok? Uncle Ray is still out looking. We'll find her.

KAT

Dogs remember locations very distinctly.

SPARROW

That's right, so please stay here.

*MICHAEL stands.*

MICHAEL

Sparrow-

*SPARROW doesn't acknowledge him, exits towards the cabin.*

KAT

Jerry, are you *drinking*?

JERRY

I got thirsty.

KAT

In that case, I'll have one too.

*They sit around the fire in silence.*

MICHAEL (*pointedly*)

So congratulations I guess on your engagement.

KAT

Oh *yes* thank you Michael, you're a dear boy. Jerry, did you talk to him about the-

JERRY

Just the suit.

KAT

Jerry doesn't have a lot of people in the area and so we wanted you to be in the wedding as well. The best man.

MICHAEL

You know, there's a wedding that *we're* supposed to be planning too.

KAT

Well of *course* we'll be in it-

MICHAEL

I'm not asking you to be in it.

KAT

I don't understand, dear.

MICHAEL

You scheduled a wedding fourteen days *before* ours.

KAT

What? Oh! No.

MICHAEL

Well. Yes.

KAT

Now that you mention it, the timing will be just great, don't you think? This way, all the family can just stick around for a couple of weeks! Two weddings for the price of one.

MICHAEL

Yeah but you've already had one.

KAT

Oh, you mean the wrong one? That's what I call it, the wrong one.

MICHAEL

The dress. The people. Attendants. Attention. She hasn't had those things and you already have.

KAT

Who?

MICHAEL

Your daughter.

KAT

It'll be such a special month!

*SPARROW enters, stands frozen in the shadows as she listens.*

MICHAEL

You won't even congratulate her? Have you acknowledged that something big is happening in her life? Have you?

KAT

I'm her mother.

MICHAEL

Yes you are, that's my point exactly.

KAT

Well, she *knows*.

MICHAEL

No. I don't think she does. But you *do*. You know exactly what you're doing.

KAT

What are you *talking* about?

MICHAEL

You're just a jealous person. Just like your mom. And her sister. And, I don't know, maybe Sparrow I don't know yet, but you - Because of what? You can't handle not being the center of attention? What is it?

KAT

What?

MICHAEL

Is it just a game to you?

KAT

Is *what* a-

MICHAEL

Living. Parenting. Whatever. Maybe you got this from your mom, I don't know, but, so, fuck you. And if she did this to you, fuck her too. Sparrow deserved better.

KAT

WELL CERTAINLY BETTER THAN YOU-

JERRY

Watch it son-

MICHAEL

*Don't you dare call me son.*

KAT

I am telling her about this!

MICHAEL

Yeah well as of tonight, there will be no wedding for Sparrow and me. So there's one of your cards, gone. Discard pile. What else you got? What are you going to do when there's nothing left to leverage for attention?

KAT

Is this. How you Speak. To other People?



MICHAEL

This is how I speak to people who fuck up other people's lives!

*SPARROW finally unfreezes, rushes in, grabs  
MICHAEL by the elbow.*

SPARROW

Michael!

MICHAEL

I am *sorry* that your parents didn't spend enough time with you or teach you to love other people-

SPARROW

This is not her fault!

MICHAEL

I am sorry that you destroyed your marriage and your relationship with your daughter by cheating on them with this ass-hole right here-

JERRY

All right, that's *it*-

SPARROW

Michael, What Are You Doing?

MICHAEL

Scuttle away! Scuttle away like you always do! Cowards. No one wants you here!

JERRY

I'm going to have to hit you.

MICHAEL

Yeah? Yeah? Well?

*JERRY hits MICHAEL.  
MICHAEL hits JERRY back.  
They stand, breathing hard.  
KAT bursts into tears.*

JERRY

O.k. Well. The suit trip is off.  
Let's go, Kat.

KAT

What about a best man?

JERRY

I'll *find* one.

*JERRY almost runs into SPARROW.  
He makes a face as though he smells something  
distasteful.*

JERRY

Congratulations.

*JERRY exits.  
KAT, still crying, follows.*

*SPARROW stands frozen as headlights flash on,  
sending shadows of her profile across the stage.*

MICHAEL

He hit me.

SPARROW

Good. Someone needed to.

MICHAEL

I *fought* for you.

SPARROW

Was that for me?

MICHAEL

I thought it was.

SPARROW

I'm not so sure.



**2 a.m.**

*Post revel fireworks still pop in the distance intermittently, and a long way off, a dog howls.*

*RACHEL ABIGAIL stands in the fire-pit.*

*MICHAEL, surrounded by empty beer bottles, watches. One of his hands rests near the pit.*

RACHEL

You want to see?

MICHAEL (*blurry, drunk*)

Yeah.

RACHEL

This is how long I can hold my breath.

*She breathes in.*

This is how long I was alive under the water before I wasn't anymore.  
It's confusing. When the breathing stops, you can't be alive.  
But underwater if you breath you're dead.  
Count to forty, start to see stars.  
Thirty-eight. Thirty-nine.  
Watch your hand, I'm starting the fire back up.

MICHAEL

I - can't-

*RACHEL reaches down and moves MICHAEL's hand. Then she blows her breath out and smoke from the fire pit billows forth and starts to cover the stage.*

RACHEL

Why do you have to drink so much?

MICHAEL

Why are you still *here*.

RACHEL

I'm waiting for my sister. She's still out looking for her dog.

MICHAEL

So you're like a welcoming committee or something.

RACHEL

Soon the doors will all close again. When I say doors I really mean cracks in the universe. They're smooth, like sea glass. You can't cut yourself on them but sometimes they pull apart, like someone grabbed the whole fabric of things and *pulled*.

MICHAEL

Do you know everything?

RACHEL

I know what I knew then. Plus a few extra things.

MICHAEL

Do you know about dogs?

RACHEL

Dogs.

MICHAEL

What are they *thinking*.

RACHEL

I touched one once, in the water, after. Touching helps me understand better.

MICHAEL

Touch *me*.

*RACHEL kneels, places one hand on MICHAEL's face. MICHAEL stares up into her eyes.*

RACHEL

Here is what I know about dogs.

*Smoke from the fire covers the whole stage now,  
rises and hangs in the night air.*

The dog runs away so fast and the dead chase after the living chasing after a dog, How *Silly*. The dog doesn't care at *all*. Like Michael you pretend not to care but you are not as good as the dog, the dog doesn't know what you know and so you can never run away and think only: Speed, Moisture, Scent, Scent, The Smell Of - Fire, Smoke, Follow the Smoke Down to the Water, Swim! Swim! Bark! Other Scent of - Dog, Other Dog - Of - A girl in the water - A girl is in the water - Bark - The Girl is a Stranger - Keep swimming - Where is the end of the Swimming - Oh It is Here Now - Shake Off - Shake Off - Feels better - Mud - Cool - Dark - Less wet now - Cold - What is this? - Blood - Copper - Lick it - Lick it - Taste it - Tongue hurts - Hurt - Pain - a safe place - a dark place - a dry place to tuck myself away until the pain goes.

Of course the dog does not know these *words*. I am interpreting.

*As RACHEL speaks, two medical technicians enter and cross the stage pushing a cart, on top of which is an empty body-bag. Eventually they disappear into the cabin.*

MICHAEL

You say it like truth.  
Tell me about what I think when *I* run.

RACHEL

They won't chase after you like they chase the dog.

MICHAEL

Why?

RACHEL

The dog knows no better and you do.

MICHAEL

Why must I know better? Why can't I run? Tell me.  
*TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT ME.*

*RACHEL caresses MICHAEL's hair, holds him now by the back of his neck. They get close.*

RACHEL

I'll tell you if you come back into the water with me.

MICHAEL

Why?

RACHEL

You know.

MICHAEL

I don't.

RACHEL

I think you do.

MICHAEL

You're competing. Still in the game. Whole *fucking* family.

RACHEL

Maybe I want to take something. Back, with me. Like a pet.

MICHAEL

You want me to be your dog?

RACHEL

Companion.

Everyone else gets to have one.

MICHAEL

Simple. I can do that. Tell me now.

RACHEL

How Clever I am Running - Where Should I Go? - How sad she'll be when I'm not there - She'll miss me more than she lets on - I bet she'll look for me - No, she won't - She's a brat - It has to be about her doesn't it - Never about me - Never about *us* - She told me she'd take care of me but she doesn't even know what that means - Chest hurts from running - Breath more regularly - Suck it in - Hold it - Breath it out - Remember track -

RACHEL (cont'd)

God that was a long time ago - Remember Julie in her sports bra? - Yellow - I wonder where she is now - I should look her up - *Keep Breathing* - Run until you fall - No one follows.

No. MICHAEL

Yes. RACHEL

NO! MICHAEL

*The medical technicians come back out of the cabin, now with something heavy in the body-bag on the cart. The clatter of the wheels brings MICHAEL to different consciousness.*

RACHEL  
You belong with me in the water.

STOP! MICHAEL

*The technicians stop blankly.*

MICHAEL  
I wasn't talking to-  
But-  
Can I -  
I've never -  
Can I -  
Look?

*The technicians wheel the cart closer. MICHAEL stands, sways, steadies. They unzip a little bit of the body-bag so that MICHAEL can look in.*



*He stares for a long long time.*

*RACHEL comes up behind him to look over his shoulder. The technicians are like frozen objects - they do not comment on or acknowledge any action, they simply wait until they can finish their task.*

MICHAEL

Hi.

I'm Michael.

I was going to marry your granddaughter. I still hope to. It's a little up in the air.

It's nice to meet you. I would shake your hand but it's dead.

We going to ask you? For some money? For the wedding?

I'll ask now I guess even though - I *hope* you left her something good.

She doesn't have much.

Her mom - you did a number on her, huh?

I hope Sparrow's not like that when she gets older.

A cheat, I mean. Someone who cheats with other men named Jerry.

And then tries to *marry* them right before their own fucking daughter's wedding?

I don't see how this wasn't your fault in some way.

You're her *mother*. You must see things like truth, even if you pretended not to know.

People shouldn't behave like that. You shouldn't have allowed for that.

PEOPLE NEED TO BE CHASED AFTER.

They GET LOST in the DARK.

And you have no *fishing rods*.

*MICHAEL covers his face.*

*He breathes.*

*He uncovers his face again and looks, hard, searching, suddenly fearless.*

Sparrow loved you a lot. I hope you knew that.

I'm...sorry for your loss.

Of your life.

*MICHAEL nods at the technicians, who zip the bag back up and wheel the cart off-stage.*

RACHEL

Would you be sad if I was dead?

MICHAEL

You *are* dead!

RACHEL

Or would you celebrate it. Like the Indians did. A big dance and a bonfire. It's *cold* out here. The water's warm and ready.

MICHAEL

You drowned.

RACHEL

Yes?

MICHAEL

That's different I think. When someone dies before they're supposed to.

RACHEL

So you would be sad?

MICHAEL

If I had known you I guess.

RACHEL

That was nice, what you said to Abigail. Too bad she wasn't there to hear it.

MICHAEL

Who, Sparrow, or-

RACHEL

No, *Abigail*.

MICHAEL

Well, where is she?

RACHEL

She's looking for her dog, I told you that. You see how the water's steaming on the surface?

Yeah.

MICHAEL

It's like a blanket.

RACHEL

Yeah?

MICHAEL

Like a comforter. A dark safe place.

RACHEL

Sounds nice.

MICHAEL

It is nice.

RACHEL

You're nice.

MICHAEL

So are you.

RACHEL

I'm not engaged anymore.

MICHAEL

Come in the water with me.

RACHEL

Okay.  
But.  
What will - *actually* - happen?

MICHAEL

Does that matter?

RACHEL

MICHAEL

Yes.

RACHEL

Drunk, you stumbled down to the dock for unknown reasons, perhaps a better look at the fire in the sky? You tripped, hit your head on the edge of the boat lift. Darkness. Fireworks in your brain. You won't feel it except right at first. It'll burn a little. Come with me and I'll show you *everything*.

*RACHEL exits towards the water.*

*MICHAEL wraps his arms around himself and shivers. He doesn't know what to do, until: A dog barks, close. Then a SPLASH.*

MICHAEL

Oh. No. The dog. That's the dog.  
Sparrow, I found the dog it's in the-

I have to go in the water.  
I'm going in the water.

*MICHAEL pulls his shirt over his head as he moves down towards the water.*

MICHAEL

She's swimming away.

*He's crying now.*

MICHAEL

Sparrow, I'm sorry!  
COME BACK.  
I'm going in.  
I'm going in.

*UNCLE RAY stumbles on, burrs all over him.*

MICHAEL

Uncle Ray.

UNCLE RAY

You going for a swim?

MICHAEL

The dog! I saw the dog.

UNCLE RAY

Where? Where is she, Michael?

MICHAEL

Swimming in the water, I don't know, it's dark. She went that way.

UNCLE RAY

Towards the boat landing?

MICHAEL

That way. Yeah.

UNCLE RAY

I'm getting the truck, we'll wait for her there - it's the only place she can get out unless she turns around. Are you coming? Come on, follow me, I can use the extra arms.

*MICHAEL hesitates.*

MICHAEL

I should be here in case.  
If she turns around and comes back.  
The dog, I mean.

UNCLE RAY

Sparrow tells me you hit Jerry.

MICHAEL

Well. Yeah.

*UNCLE RAY slaps MICHAEL on the back.*

UNCLE RAY

Put your shirt on. The mosquitos are crazy bad.

**2:47 a.m.**

*MICHAEL, exactly as before.*

*It's as if maybe a single minute has passed between scenes and nothing is different -*

*Except: SPARROW stands with a package in her hand.*

SPARROW (*soft, then harder*)

Michael. *Michael.*

MICHAEL (*without turning*)

I found the dog. Uncle Ray's going to fish her out when she makes land fall.

SPARROW

You did? He is?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

SPARROW

She's okay? Alive? When you say fish out it sounds like-

MICHAEL

No, she's swimming now. Guess she got tired of running. She's a good swimmer.

*Pause.*

*They breath.*

SPARROW

Michael.

MICHAEL

Yeah?

SPARROW

I'm sorry I missed the fireworks.

*Pause.*

SPARROW

So. Look.  
I found some sparklers.

MICHAEL (*turns*)

You did?

SPARROW

Yeah. Where I said there were batteries there were sparklers.  
I was a little wrong.

MICHAEL

You weren't wrong.

SPARROW

About the batteries. And the sparklers. I couldn't find the batteries.  
Do you want a sparkler?

MICHAEL

Yes please.

SPARROW

Here you are.

*She gives MICHAEL a sparkler.  
She takes one for herself.*

MICHAEL

The fire went out again.

SPARROW

That's okay. We've got a lighter.  
You still have it, right?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL

So.  
Happy Fourth I guess.

SPARROW

Who dies on the *Fourth of July*?!

MICHAEL

Lots of people, probably.

SPARROW

Should I light them?

MICHAEL

Sparrow.

SPARROW

What?

MICHAEL

I should've done a lot better.

SPARROW

Yeah I know.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL

What will happen to these?

SPARROW

The sparklers?

MICHAEL

If we light them.

SPARROW

They'll sparkle.



MICHAEL

Yes.

SPARROW

Make a noise like hissing.

MICHAEL

Uh-huh.

SPARROW

The flame will burn so bright you can barely look at it.

MICHAEL

But you do anyway, because otherwise, what's the *point*.

SPARROW

When they go out all you can see for awhile is the after-image.

MICHAEL

They die. Extinguished. They're dead.

SPARROW

Yeah. But. You're not exactly sad.

Why is that?

You just drop them on the ground.

MICHAEL

Maybe it's not about the sparkler.

More the glow.

Images that you can draw on top of darkness.

Like you swirl it around in the air and the movement of it...

Hangs there. Just for a second.

Or maybe it's just heat and danger and how fleeting it is.

SPARROW

Yeah.

I think maybe you're right about that.

The heat and danger part, I mean.

So...  
What now?

MICHAEL

We light them.

SPARROW

*She lights both sparklers.*

Don't look away.

SPARROW

I won't.

MICHAEL

Don't look away or you'll miss it.

SPARROW

*They fizzle and spark until they go out and the stage is left in total darkness.*

***END of PLAY***