

Amends

by

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CHARACTERS: Kyle: Male, early 30s, lawyer, married to Madge
Sharon: Female, late 30s, having an affair with Kyle
Madge: Female, early 30s, married to Kyle
Mrs. Krebbs: Female, late 50s, Madge's mother
Louis: late 30s, friends with Will
Will, late 30s, friends with Louis
Loden: Male early 30s, waiter at C-Side Cafe, Taylor's brother
Taylor: Male, late 30s, farmer, Loden's brother

SETTING: The C-Side Cafe in Omaha Nebraska.

TIME: Midsummer, 1997 and a couple of weeks later.

At Rise: Kyle and Sharon at the C-Side Cafe, a diner in Omaha.

Kyle? I want to make amends. SHARON

Amends? To who? Me? KYLE

Yeah. SHARON

Amends for what? The coffee is actually quite robust Sharon-- KYLE

No. I want to make amends for this. SHARON

We're eating breakfast at the C-Side Cafe. KYLE

No. This. SHARON

Oh. KYLE

(Pause)
This.

Yes. SHARON

(pause)

I've dragged you down into something that you're too good for. It's my fault. And your wife. She deserves so much better! I like Madge. I really like her.

I do too. This isn't a...a...not liking of her. It's more a better liking of you. KYLE

Kyle. SHARON

KYLE

There's no negative here. Only two positives. I like Madge. That's good. I like you. That's good. Right now I'm choosing this good. Life is never, just like this clear cut: Good! Evil! Right! Wrong! It's basically just everything is good and everything is right! You just have to choose what's more good, and more right.

SHARON

I don't know what that means. I'm just sad.

KYLE

But we're happy.

SHARON

I know. We are happy. But I'm sad. I don't know how that is.

KYLE

Did you want something else to eat? I think you're just hungry. You know how you get when--

SHARON

Kyle, I'm the one who will get off scot free in this. I'm single. I'm not cheating. On anyone. You're the one who's cheating, and I don't want to put you in that position! You are going to destroy your marriage. But I'm not destroying anything. Except...

KYLE

Except what.

SHARON

My soul.

KYLE

You told me you didn't even have a soul!

SHARON

I know. But that was only after I met you. And I'm wondering now if there wasn't causation.

KYLE

I'd never met anyone who didn't have a soul. I mean, goldfish. They don't have souls. But it's not like you ever actually meet a goldfish. You look at them. You feel peaceful. But with you it's not peaceful. It's never been peaceful. You bring me no peace whatsoever! And that's exciting! Thrilling! Like a horror movie you never want to leave.

SHARON

That's sweet.

(Pause.)

Who's that waiter over there? Isn't that Loden? Loden Canter?

KYLE

Yeah I guess so. Can we get some more hamsteak over here? Make that the flaming hamsteak.

SHARON

He's Taylor's brother. Remember him? Taylor Canter? From our class? Isn't he living on a farm now?

KYLE

I don't know.

SHARON

Taylor Canter. Man oh man. Why do guys like that always leave town?

(KYLE turns back to kitchen.)

KYLE

That's right! Flaming. Thank you.

SHARON

You don't need to yell!

KYLE

I think it will make you feel better. It's good, hearty Omaha food. You just need to chew on some ham. That is steak. That is flaming.

SHARON

I believe in God you know.

KYLE

So do I. So do I. But God, what is God? I mean honestly. "Who can comprehend the mind..." etc etc.

SHARON

I believe in a God who gets angry at people. Who is distant and angry and rains fire down on people when they sin.

KYLE

Sharon, that is not healthy.

SHARON

I am having an affair! With a married man! Whose wife has dimples. And bracelets from Latin America that commemorate peasant massacres. And who doesn't wear makeup because of her natural-born beauty, and humility and Quaker-like simplicity. Who raises dirty chickens in her backyard and gives the eggs away to the Honduran children living ten to a bedroom down the street.

KYLE

Those kids aren't little angels, ya know. They have everyone fooled.

SHARON

It's 1997. People shouldn't be having affairs anymore! Even the president stopped having affairs. We have advanced beyond that! But I haven't. I want to be judged for this! *God doesn't judge you. God just loves you.* What a bunch of crap. *You are good just as you are!* I'm not! I want to be put on trial! I want to be held accountable! Where's that farmer. Where is Taylor. I bet he knows how to hold people accountable. Taylor Canter was always that one good thing that when you look at it you realize how crappy your own life is.

KYLE

Well, okay. Now that we're on the topic of being judged, now that you've opened up the barn door. What I think is that you should take stock of yourself, and give yourself some credit.

SHARON

For what?

KYLE

For doing what it takes to keep an affair going. Day in and day out. Whether you like it or not. It's amazing that we've been able to stick this baby out for so long.

SHARON

Really?

KYLE

Oh Sharon! This world is full of half-efforts. Take it or leave it who cares. No one makes a pledge and sticks with it! No one is committed. But we are! We're going the whole nine yards.

SHARON

You think so?

KYLE

Yes! We shouldn't bail out now. Just like all the rest. Easy come easy go.

SHARON

So, we're going all the way with this? You're saying to me that you're going to leave Madge and we're going to, you know--

(Pause.)

You brought this up before once.

KYLE

Thirty seven times.

SHARON

It would defeat the whole point. We would all of a sudden be rushing off to something else. When we haven't fully lived out this experience. This mysterious unnameable, --

KYLE

(Looking across room.)

Oh oh...oh...

What?

SHARON

She's here.

KYLE

Who?

SHARON

Her.

KYLE

Oh. Oh. Oh...

SHARON

With her mother.

KYLE

Her mother! I didn't know Madge was going to do it here!

SHARON

Do what?

KYLE

Her amends. What do we do?

SHARON

KYLE

We're just having breakfast. We're friends. She knows that. This is a friends' breakfast. Asexual.

SHARON

Right! We've known each other for years. I used to double date with you guys. We can have a friends' breakfast.

KYLE

Amends. Isn't that an alcoholic thing? Are you guys drunks?

SHARON

Kyle--

KYLE

This whole time, my wife has been a reeling drunk and I never knew it. No wonder I'm cheating on her. I couldn't take the stress!

SHARON

No! We're not drunks! We just...Oh, look. She doesn't even see us.

KYLE

You're right. She doesn't. Thank God. Get up. Quietly. We can sneak out of here.

(Pause.)

Oh no. They're bringing the hamsteak over. The flaming hamsteak. It's a huge goddam flame! It's a frickin' bonfire! Why did they have to make the fire so big! Take it back, take it back! Everyone's staring at us!

SHARON

There it is. The fiery judgement of God. I coulda seen it coming miles away. He wants my soul back.

KYLE

She's looking at us! Madge and her mother are staring right at us.

SHARON

I knew it. My fate is at hand. You play you pay.

(SHARON stands up.)

KYLE

SHARON!

SHARON

There's only one thing to do Kyle.

(SHARON gets up on chair, KYLE watching in horror.)

It's me Madge! Sharon. Hi! I'm having breakfast with your husband! We're having breakfast because I was with him last night. Because we're having an affair. He wasn't at a bowling league sleep over last night. A, he doesn't bowl. And B, why would a bowling league have a sleep over? Why are you pretending you don't know what you damn well know? Making us go through all this sneaking around. It's a lot of work to pull this kind of thing off! And why are you coming to a diner for breakfast anyway? You have all those perfect brown eggs at your--that's beside the point. I am here to make amends before you and your mom and Kylie and God, who is right now apparently a flaming hamsteak, that I am having an affair with your husband! I apologize. With all my heart. I repent. Everyone? Listen up. Okay, you're already listening. I beg your forgiveness. You do not deserve this Madge. I beg the mercy of the Lord on my soul. A soul which I may or may not have. God bless you all.

(Gets down off table, turns to KYLE.)

God that felt good. What a relief! Have you ever done fire yoga? Where they throw burning matches on you while you're doing the poses? But then it's over? And it feels SO GREAT? That's what this feels like. All right. I have to go. Looks like Madge wants to talk. I think that will be a really positive step for you. It's another good.

(SHARON exits.)

SCENE 2--Madge and her mom, Mrs. Krebbs, are having breakfast at the same time at another table in the diner.

	MADGE
Mom.	
	MRS. KREBBS
Yes Madge?	
	MADGE
I need to make amends. For something I did.	
	MRS. KREBBS
Oh. Is this what this is all about? Taking me to a lovely place like the C-Side Cafe? Look at the size of those eggs!	
	MADGE
Please. Those eggs are nothing.	
	MRS. KREBBS
They are not nothing. You don't see eggs like that but once in a —	
	MADGE
I got a house full of eggs more—Never mind! I'm here to make amends.	

MRS. KREBBS

Okay. Go ahead.

MADGE

So, my amends are, this entire year, about 25 or 30 times, I've tried to...liquidate you.

MRS. KREBBS

Liquidate me?

MADGE

Yes.

(Pause, as her mother takes this in.)

MRS. KREBBS

Kill me?

MADGE

Yes.

MRS. KREBBS

Oh.

MADGE

Yeah.

(Pause.)

MRS. KREBBS

Well, did you succeed?

MADGE

What?

MRS. KREBBS

Did you succeed in liquidating me?

MADGE

No.

MRS. KREBBS

Oh, right I'm still alive. I would have known if you'd killed me.

MADGE

Yeah. You would have. I could never quite do it. Poison, razor blades, hatchets. Spells. Incantations. Diphtheria. Rickets. I couldn't finish you off.

MRS. KREBBS

So you actually poisoned me, and cut me and bludgeoned and diseased me?

MADGE

No, I didn't. You probably would have noticed if I had.

MRS. KREBBS

Oh, of course.

MADGE

I was about to do all of those things, at different times. But I could never quite do it. And that's what I'm sorry for.

MRS. KREBBS

You're sorry for not being able to kill me?

MADGE

No, I said that wrong. I am sorry for trying to kill you.

MRS. KREBBS

Oh, okay. That makes more sense.

MADGE

Yeah.

MRS. KREBBS

Well, as long as you're sorry that's all that really matters. Do you want to go to Brandeis?

MADGE

Brandeis?

MRS. KREBBS

There is an Ocean Pacific shirt that I want to get for your brother. And I know you've been dying to try on that Alice In Chains tie dye blouse.

MADGE

Yeah. I have been looking at it.

MRS. KREBBS

Okay. Well, I'll get the check.

(Turns to back of restaurant.)

Excuse me! Could we have the check! Thank you.

(to MADGE)

Well, that was just delicious.

MADGE

Yeah. It was.

MRS. KREBBS

What a wonderful place. And right next to a church. You can just feel the sacredness coming right through.

MADGE

Yeah. You can.

(MRS. KREBBS looks around.)

MRS. KREBBS

They could put stained glass on these windows.

MADGE

Yeah. They could.

(Silence.)

So, you're not upset that I wanted to eliminate you?

MRS. KREBBS

Are you upset?

MADGE

Yes, I am!

MRS. KREBBS

Well, then I'm upset.

MADGE

You are?

MRS. KREBBS

Yes. Very upset.

MADGE

Well, that's a relief.

(Pause.)

But wait, what if I wasn't upset?

MRS. KREBBS
Then I wouldn't be upset.

MADGE
I don't know what to say to that.

MRS. KREBBS
I just want what makes you happy.

MADGE
Mom—

MRS. KREBBS
You leave the tip. That's how you can make up for this.

MADGE
A tip? You think that a twenty percent tip is going to—

MRS. KREBBS
I suggest 25. They were excellent. So, how are things with Kylie?

MADGE
They're fine, he is the best, he is loving and kind and hold on! This is a big deal! I've done something that I think you should be more alarmed by! But you're just sitting there!

MRS. KREBBS
Well, what else am I supposed to do? It's past. I can't change anything in the past.

MADGE
But you can be bothered. At least. Or want to know why I did it.

MRS. KREBBS
But you didn't do it. I'm still alive.

MADGE
But why I tried!

MRS. KREBBS
Okay. Why did you try?

MADGE
I don't know.

MRS. KREBBS
Well. That's a big help. Let's just go shopping. That usually takes care of a lot of problems.

MADGE

I mean, why does anyone kill their mother? They're probably just trying to kill something in themselves they don't like.

MRS. KREBBS

You don't like something about yourself? Honey. You're wonderful!

MADGE

I'm not. People think I'm so great. They think I care about refugees, and poultry and Latin American mass tragedies and revolutions. I don't know if I do! Sometimes I think I'm just going through the motions. And I get edgy. And then I start trying to—

MRS. KREBBS

Liquidate people?

MADGE

Yes. I mean sometimes I even look at Kyle. And I'm holding a fork. And I'm thinking will you wipe that shit-eating ambulance-chasing grin off your face. Picture with his law firm on the back cover of the phone book. He's embarrassing our family. He's so fake. He gets whatever he wants, but no one sees him like I see him. And I clench that fork. And I look at his pale little hand. And I start to lift up that fork. But he's so nice! He got me a locket from Borsheim's, with a squirrel in the shape of a heart. I don't know how they did that.

MRS. KREBBS

Well, if you did liquidate Kyle—

MADGE

I'm not going to! He's wonderful!

MRS. KREBBS

Well, if you did liquidate...someone...anyone...I would be there to defend you. I would stand up in a courtroom and say that's my daughter. She's a good girl.

MADGE

Thanks. But I don't know if my stress-reliever is a very good trait to have.

MRS. KREBBS

Well, there may be better ways to deal with stress than murder, but, you know. We're all just on our journey. Yes. You're on your journey and you're just following where your journey goes. Over hill and over dale and into homicide, but back out of it and it's your journey

MADGE

But what if my journey ended with a knife in your kidney!

MRS. KREBBS

Well, I would say my kidney is serving a real purpose. Maybe for the first time ever. I would be happy to extend a vital organ of mine to help you move along your path.

MADGE

And I go to jail?

MRS. KREBBS

And maybe you find yourself. Lots of people find themselves when they're in jail. And I'd be part of making that happen.

MADGE

You wouldn't mind being murdered by me...and me jailed...if it helped me...someday...maybe....find myself?

MRS. KREBBS

What makes you happy makes me happy.

MADGE

(moved)

You know, I never realized what a wonderful mother you are. You go along in life and you take your parents for granted and finally you grow up and realize your mom would willingly die for you by being killed by you to make you happy. That's true love. You're a great mom.

MRS. KREBBS

I'm just chugging along, you know. Down the old tracks. Now I think you and Kylie should go off and get away for a bit. Go out west! Just go for a long ride and let it all roll off your back. What is going on over there? Look at that fire! It's a burning hamsteak!

MADGE

Oh, wow. That is huge! It's like a pillar of fire. It's coming in to rescue me! To tell me I'm still a good person! That I'm not just a failed killer. That attempting matricide was just part of my path in life. A rough spot that I needed to overcome! And now I'm a flame of light for other people! That my life is only going to get better and better, happier and happier! That me and Kyle are entering an even higher love! Is that Sharon Luftwaffe getting on that chair? What is she saying?

Scene 3--C-Side Cafe same time. Louis and Will are having breakfast in another section.

LOUIS

Will, I want to make amends for something I did.

WILL

To me?

LOUIS

Yeah. Something I did to you. Something I really gotta make right.

WILL

Wow. Sounds pretty serious. But I only have a minute. I have to go home and be alone again.
What, uh, what did you do?

(Pause.)

You know. LOUIS

(Pause.)

I don't think I do. WILL

Let's get into what happened. LOUIS

Okay. WILL

You start. LOUIS

Start what? WILL

Willie! LOUIS

I don't even know what we're talking about. WILL

Everyone knows! LOUIS

So tell me! WILL

I need an intro. LOUIS

Me? WILL

Yes. LOUIS

WILL

Intro?

LOUIS

Yes.

WILL

I can't even--

LOUIS

Yes, you can.

WILL

But these are your amends.

LOUIS

There you go again. Putting it all back on me.

WILL

How can I be--

(LOUIS turns back toward kitchen.)

LOUIS

Can we get a hamsteak over here! Anyone? Do you people know what a hamsteak is?

WILL

Lower your voice!

LOUIS

Crispy brown on the edges. Yea thick. Just the right amount of juice.

WILL

Wait till they come over to order. You're making a big racket! Order me some eggs.

LOUIS

Eggs! Thank you!

(To Willie.)

What kind?

WILL

Soft boiled.

LOUIS

(To kitchen.)

Fried!

I said--

WILL

You don't want that.

LOUIS

(Pause.)

WILL

What did you do to me?

LOUIS

I love the C-Side Cafe. Very homey. Except it's not by the sea. Very misleading.

WILL

I think it's C as in the letter—

LOUIS

Don't make excuses for them. It's enabling.

WILL

Did you want to share what the thing was--

LOUIS

You ever see "Bless the Beasts and the Children?"

WILL

No. I'd really like to know what you did so I can get back to being by myself.

LOUIS

"Bless the Beasts and the Children" is the most depressing movie ever made in the history of cinema.

WILL

Look Louis, you've kind of got me on edge. I was wronged. And I don't know how.

LOUIS

Don't worry about it. So, there's these misfit kids who all get sent to this camp out west. Box Camp.

WILL

Don't worry about it?

LOUIS

No. Don't. So, one of these kids is a bedwetter and another is a child of divorce. Like they say back then. Like they might as well give him a t-shirt saying "Cinematic Juvenile Social Problem": Child of Divorce.

WILL
How can I not worry about it?

LOUIS
Pipe down willya!

WILL
Did you steal from me? Did you frame me?

LOUIS
Leave it behind Will. Move on.

WILL
This is awful! To not know what happened! It's worse than if you had done something to me.

LOUIS
But I have done something to you.

WILL
But I don't understand--

LOUIS
So, he's sitting there, our Child of Divorce in his mother's bedroom—

WILL
You're not going to tell me, are you?

LOUIS
Let's just hold off on definitive statements for the time being okay? So, he's watching his mom get ready to go out with someone. Painting her eyebrows. All that. All cinema verite. No music. Gloomy. Quiet.

WILL
(resigned)
Okay. Yeah. I'm seeing it.

LOUIS
So Cotton says--that's his name, Cotton--he says, "You're going to see *him*, aren't you?" He's asking about her date as if the guy is Ghengis Khan. She's single now, doesn't she have a right to paint the town? What gives this kid the right to judge her!

WILL
Good question.

LOUIS

And then another kid in the movie--his dad's a comedian, sort of borscht belt Jewish type. I mean really Jewish. They really laid it on thick in the 1970s to make sure everyone knew a character was Jewish. Very troublesome.

(Shouting across room.)

Are those eggs done?

WILL

It's been about forty seconds.

LOUIS

Well, if they want to keep their shingle up they need to start responding to their base. So, this comedian, the way he came into a room and started to talking, the sound of his voice, it made you want to stick your hand down your throat and tear out your--

WILL

Voices do it to you, you know.

LOUIS

You're telling me!

WILL

(brightening up)

And Cotton? Kid's name was Cotton?

LOUIS

Yes. Cotton! Can you imagine!

WILL

Like what's on top of medicine.

LOUIS

Exactly. Cotton.

WILL

No wonder he was a wreck. Associated with that: Pill bottles and sickness and disease.

LOUIS

You know what I'm sayin'?

WILL

And he's a child of divorce! He didn't stand a chance! I feel for him. I really do.

LOUIS

You feel for all these kids. Maladjusted kids. Abandoned Kids. Lost kids. Kids who grew up with inappropriately caricatured Jewish-comedian-dad voices. You see the theme here? Really distressed youth. Are you getting depressed yet?

WILL

As a matter of fact I kind of am. You're really laying a lot on me here. This is a very unique breakfast.

LOUIS

I mean, it wasn't just the Cinematic Juvenile Social Topics of Alienation and Family Dysfunction. It was their clothes and hair and faces. Their 1970s faces. People's faces were different back then. Sadder. Their hair hung like curtains down their foreheads and their cheeks and framed their glum faces.

WILL

I remember those 1970s faces. Sad and glum.

LOUIS

What is that racket over there? Sounds like a fight.

WILL

Omaha.

LOUIS

Omaha. Right. So, anyway, not far from the Box Camp and these sad kids is this ranch, where they have these buffaloes out in a fenced in pasture. And this is where they really heighten the stakes. Because guys in pickups pull up.

WILL

Oh no.

LOUIS

And get out of their pickups.

WILL

I don't like where this is going.

LOUIS

And take out their rifles. And kneel down at the edge of the pasture. And start shooting these buffaloes.

WILL

Oh my God!

LOUIS

I mean, how much more blatantly 1970s unsubtle and demoralizing social breakdown movie scenario can you get. Dysfunctional Children. Watching Evil Cowboys. Shoot helpless Buffaloes. And the buffaloes collapse to the--

WILL

Jesus. This is awful. Stop. Why are you telling me this?

LOUIS

I have to get this out Will. I need a sympathetic ear.

WILL

(quickly)

Then I'm here for you.

LOUIS

You're a good guy.

WILL

All I want to be is a good guy! No matter how painful it might be!

(LOUIS spies someone across the floor.)

LOUIS

Oh, look, Loden's back waiting tables. Loden Canter. Taylor's brother. They could've used someone like Taylor, those buffalo. They need good people in their lives.

(Shouting across the restaurant.)

Where's my hamsteak! How long does it take to get a hamsteak around here? There's a hamsteak. Wow, look at the flame on that thing. Damn! I didn't know they did hamsteak flambeau. That is one hell of a blaze on that sucker! So anyway, here is the kicker of it all. Cotton gets in a jeep and tries to run off the buffalo.

(Turning around in chair).

Will you quiet down! It's the people getting the flaming pig. They're going nuts. Wait a minute, who is that? That's Sharon. Holy cow. She's standing on the chair. She's the one making all that racket. She's supposed to be doing her amends too. Is she doing them now? At a diner?

WILL

Amends! Right! Let's go back to the amends!

LOUIS

So Cotton gets in the jeep and the cowboys see him and they try to just shoot out the tires--

WILL

No, for the love of God, let's do the amends so we can finish this. And what is it with everyone in the world making amends all of a sudden?

LOUIS

Well, there's this group I'm part of. It's secret. It's me, Madge Martel and Sharon Luftwaffe. That's Sharon right there. The three of us get together once a year and we all vow to wipe the slate clean with people we harmed. I got the idea when I saw a slate one day. Sharon, for instance, is having an affair. Wait a minute. Who's she talking to? Oh, I see, very clever, it's the wife of the guy she's sleeping with. Who is that--turn around, turn around. Holy crap! It's Madge! Oh my God! She's been cheating with *Madge's* husband? Sharon's been going behind Madge's back? That's 2/3rds of our group. This really disrupts the safe space we created.

WILL

This is even more disturbing than that movie.

LOUIS

Right. Back to the movie! So they aim for the tires, shoot Cotton, buffalo go free, so that's happy, Cotton's dead slumped down on the seat...

(Looking across the room.)

Whoah! Madge's mom is with her. That raises the stakes. Madge is probably making her amends too. She's been trying to kill her mom. This is all dynamic as hell.

WILL

Hell is not entirely off the mark.

LOUIS

Wow. I'm inspired. Thank you Sharon. You hang in there Madge! And Mrs. Krebbs! You're still alive! Yes!

(Pause.)

This cafe is filled with brave and loving amends. I guess I can do this. So. Here we go. My amends.

WILL

Okay at last! Give me a second. Let me mentally prepare.

LOUIS

I really can't believe what I did.

WILL

Well, just say it quick and it'll all be over and I can get back to where no one else is.

(Pause.)

LOUIS

You know what? Never mind. It's not that big a deal.

WILL

Excuse me?

LOUIS

Naw. It's not worth getting into. You go back home. That's what you wanted anyway, right?

WILL

You can't--

LOUIS

Tell you what. Why don't you get the check. That way you'll feel like you're a better person than me and we'll be even.

WILL

Louis.

LOUIS

I'm gonna go see how Madge and Sharon's amends went. I'll see you around.

WILL

Are you kidding me?

LOUIS

Will! Life just takes us by the horns, you know? Madge! Mrs. Krebs! This is all complicated but ultimately good stuff. We need to bathe in these moments.

(WILL sits there, stunned. Turns to back of restaurant.)

WILL

You guys got any buffalo steak?

(Lights down.)

Scene 4--A couple of days later. Loden Canter and his brother Taylor are sitting at a table at the same cafe.

LODEN

Whenever Cindi and I are about to have an argument, we notice it...

TAYLOR

Good for you Loden.

LODEN

...And we both stop, and we deliberately tighten our sphincters. We tighten our sphincters, and then we release them, and we start talking. When you tighten the muscles of your sphincter, and then untighten them, it is virtually impossible to be tense and stressed and angry. It all melts away and you can have a calm, reasonable discussion with someone.

(Pause.)

Now, I know that might sound a little weird Taylor. Tightening your sphincter before you argue. Maybe you don't hear this kind of thing out there on the farm. But we found that it really works. It made things so much smoother between us. And as my brother I think you can trust me on this.

(Pause.)

Anyway, so, before we get into this I suggest we both tighten our sphincters--

TAYLOR

What—

LODEN

--and then relax them. And then start talking.

TAYLOR

Loden...

LODEN

Just do it.

TAYLOR

What do we need to talk about anyway?

LODEN

So, I was on my morning shift here a couple days ago and, and across the floor everyone was talking about making amends to each other for stuff they did. Really weird. It was like some little guilty conscience party. And it got a little out of hand. There was some screaming, tears, fire, one lady grabbed a fork and almost plunged it into her husband's arm. The older lady with her told her to stab him if it would fulfill her soul. Meanwhile the husband started hitting on the waitress, and another guy comes over watching it all with the biggest grin on his face like he's at a Spin Doctors concert. Frankly it was a disaster. But it made me realize also that I have been keeping something from you, from my own brother, that I need to express remorse for. I have to tell you something hard. And I think you might get upset by it, like happened with these people, and then I might get upset because you're upset and on and on. You're kind of touchy. Not all the time. Just sometimes. I want this to be, not enjoyable, but relatively calm. Like the kind of calm that you get only after you compress the muscles of etc...

TAYLOR

(agitated)

I don't know if that's entirely true that I'm touchy. I'm not--

LODEN

Don't prove my hypothesis in the very act of denying it. I know you're smarter than that. Let me just say this and we can move on.

TAYLOR

Okay. Your remorse. Go ahead.

LODEN

If we could first do what I asked.

TAYLOR

Squeeze the....

LODEN

Yes.

TAYLOR

I'm not too comfortable with the idea of--

LODEN

This will really help. I don't think I can do this unless we both take these measures. First.

(Pause.)

Taylor.

TAYLOR

Okay.

(Long pause. They are presumably engaged in the act of tightening.)

LODEN

Are you doing it?

TAYLOR

Yes. Not perfectly. But I think so.

LODEN

It's like you have to go but you're holding it. That's how it should feel.

TAYLOR

Yeah, I think I got it.

LODEN

I'm doing it too.

TAYLOR

How long do we--

LODEN

Length of a glory be.

(Loden recites it slowly. Taylor getting agitated.)

Glory be to the father and to the son and to the holy spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

(Pause.)

Okay. Good. And let go.

(LODEN looks at him.)

How do you feel?

TAYLOR

Not bad. Not bad.

LODEN

Amazing isn't it. You can really feel it can't you? You relax the waste regulatory system of your body and the rest of you goes peaceful.

TAYLOR

I can see that. I think I'm ready for this.

LODEN

Okay. So. Deep breath Loden. So...a couple months ago, when you left for work that one day,

(Pause.)

Well, maybe it started earlier than that. In some kind of generalized way. Like the year before. Actually, let me just back up to our childhood—

TAYLOR

No. You can't do that. Just say what you did. What day that I left for work? You mean when you stayed with me on the farm a couple months ago?

LODEN

Yes. Then. So, after you were gone, well, long story short, I did not treat your dog...well.

TAYLOR

Tapper? You didn't treat him well? What does that mean? What did you do to him?

LODEN

I was physically unkind to him.

TAYLOR

What do you mean? Just say it plain. You hit him? You—

LODEN

Yes. And I want to express remorse for what I did.

TAYLOR

Are you serious?

LODEN

Yes.

TAYLOR

Why? What did he do that made you--

LODEN

He kept getting out of the yard and running over to the road where I was digging that thorn bush out.

TAYLOR

I never even asked you to do that.

LODEN

I wanted to help. I wanted to make things better out there.

TAYLOR

I don't need you to make things better for me.

LODEN

Yes you do. You're out there on that farm down by Kansas. You even talk like a farmer.

TAYLOR

I sure as cuss do not talk like a—

LODEN

Sorry. I just gotta get through this. He kept getting in the way, jumping all around me and yelping. And so I picked him up, and he tried to squirm out of my arms and I threw him to the ground--

TAYLOR

Jesus. Loden.

LODEN

--and I told him to heel and he didn't and finally I picked him up again and took him over to the fence and threw him into the yard--

TAYLOR

You threw him over the fence? Are you kidding me?

LODEN

And then he got out again--are you still relaxed?

(Taylor just stares at him, waiting for LODEN to go on.)

LODEN

And so I...are you sure you want to hear all the details? Maybe you should re-tighten / your sphincter

TAYLOR

Did you really do all this?

LODEN

I did.

TAYLOR

I can't believe it.

LODEN

I was so angry and the more he wouldn't obey the angrier I got. He got out again and I...well let's just say I don't know what got into me. I am sorry.

(Pause.)

TAYLOR

That is so horrible.

LODEN

Now, we're not going to argue, you're not going to get mad, because we've taken steps to head this off, right?

TAYLOR

You're right. I feel calm right now. I'm not getting tense. But are you some kind of monster? I mean, he's fine. There's nothing wrong with him. It's not like you did any damage I guess.

LODEN

I want to rectify this. I'm sorry. I really apologize. I feel so bad. He's a good little guy. I didn't need to do that. I can see that now. He wasn't trying to make me mad. He was just being a dog!

TAYLOR

Rectify things with the dog. Buy him a steak. Every day till you die.

LODEN

Now, see, we're not really arguing. You're just stating facts. You gave an order. Which is reasonable. Which is maybe what I should do--buy steaks or something.

TAYLOR

I can't seem to fly off the handle here. Which is kind of upsetting to me. But I can't even get upset about that. I can't get upset about the fact that I'm not upset.

LODEN

What can I do? To set things straight.

TAYLOR

You came to the farm from that retreat. That spiritual walking retreat.

LODEN

A pilgrimage.

TAYLOR

You were at the end of the walking thing and you hitchhiked to the farm after becoming completely spiritually radiant.

LODEN

I took off work from the C-Side. I needed time to myself. I wandered through the southwest saying the Jesus prayer--

TAYLOR

You wandered through the southwest saying the Jesus prayer.

LODEN

Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. All the madness of my life just washed away from me. I hitchhiked.

TAYLOR

You hitchhiked! You trusted that you would get picked up!

LODEN

I trusted! I took no money. I prayed and hitchhiked and people actually picked me up. One couple let me stay the night at their place and we talked about, like the amazing similarities between Eastern religions and Christianity. Except I guess with the Eastern thing they don't even call them religions because that's too suffocating.

TAYLOR

Everything is suffocating.

LODEN

Yeah. I don't know what that means. Why did you even leave Omaha and buy that farm?

TAYLOR

I wanted to get back to things. I don't fit here. I don't feel like I'm made for now.

TAYLOR

What are you even talking about? Everyone loves you. Do you even like farming? What do you know about wheat?

TAYLOR

I've eaten bread! My entire life. I'm learning to do this! We should do the the things we think we can't do. Eleanor Roosevelt said that.

LODEN

She was talking about the things you want to do but are afraid of. She's not saying, do the things you don't want to do.

TAYLOR

Okay, that's a good point. I can't say I've ever thought of that. Dammit. That is a really good observation.

LODEN

Then these Oriental religion people drove me to a Trappist monastery where there was fresh bread and soup in wooden bowls and I worked in a field with a monk who told these jokes, like, you know, what did Cindy Firefly say to Mindy Firefly? You glow girl! Hah! And he told me about this high spiritual state called the Dark Night of the Soul. and he felt I had entered it, and gotten through to the other side! He said that!

TAYLOR

It was amazing just hearing about it. It's like I wanted all that. But I had to work. I was discing the field and fixing fence while you were off getting enlightened and spiritual. I don't have enough money to become spiritual. I can't afford the Dark Night of the Soul.

LODEN

Well, sometimes you just have to do things! Just shake it all off and go! I left the monastery and met a woman in a small town who told me her goal in life is to walk backwards everywhere and that once she was dead and in the morgue and now she's alive and how she just lives this kind of peace, and I got peaceful and insightful from her. It was amazing! I felt like God had put each of these people in each of these places just to meet me.

TAYLOR

Just to meet you, huh? That's what this pilgrimage was about? Through the red rocks and the dust and the riversides and its all for you?

LODEN

Yeah. It was. And I went on and journaled and prayed and made a fire in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. I mean are you kidding me? There's actually mountains called that--Blood of Christ. And sitting out there next to my fire, I felt like the universe was all created for me.

TAYLOR

You know I'm not feeling so good hearing about this story. The more you're telling me this story the more angry I'm getting. Except I can't feel it inside me because my goddam sphincter is so relaxed. But I know mentally this is pissing me off.

LODEN

Hear me out! This is the good stuff of life! I sat by that fire and I felt so loved and cared for and I got this sense down in the marrow of my bones that I would always have this, like, hand guiding me. I felt so close to creation and all creatures. Like whatever split there was between us was completely artificial and had just melted away and all the things of this earth were in me and I was in them.

TAYLOR

Like even me discing? That was in you? Me being all alone out on the farm? Standing under a yard light looking at an empty road? That was in you?

LODEN

Well, no. But yes. Yes! Because all goodness is in me and God is all good and I was so peaceful and loving and close to God! I mean, really. Not just like the feeling of it, but actually geographically near the divine!

(Pause.)

And then your dog got out of the yard...

(Pause.)

And I just turned. Like that.

(Pause.)

TAYLOR

You turned. You turned into some kind of maniac? Is that it?

LODEN

How could I be close to the Creator and hurt his creation? I don't know what to make of that. But I want you to be okay with this. How is he? How is Tapper?

TAYLOR

What kind of person...

LODEN

I don't know. I'm just angry I guess. Having an epiphany doesn't change your nature. I love God. But I hated that Border Collie. Do you accept my amends?

TAYLOR

You have to give me a moment to take this in. Because it's like I'm talking to a different person now.

(Pause.)

But I can't get mad at you. This isn't right. You rigged the game. How could you do this to me? You just waltz in here and expect me to—

LODEN

I have to make amends. You have to accept them. So I can move on. I need to move on.

TAYLOR

Or what?

LODEN

Or I can't be peaceful. I need to be peaceful. Even more than just in my body. I need that deep peace or I'll die man. I can't take it. I want to go out on another pilgrimage. I want to go pray for my wife. I think she's caught up in a lot of materialism and I want to intercede for her.

TAYLOR

Yeah, I'm sure she is. Cindi's all about material things. Like food and rent.

LODEN

It's more than rent. It's a whole sick thing that we're all in. All of us! I'm not saying I'm better! Really! I'm just as bad as you and everyone. Look at what's going on out there. Everyone just wants what they want. They don't think about the bigger picture. There's a bigger picture! I don't know what the bigger picture is, but there is one. Something we're all missing. If we could just all get together and talk about the things we should talk about. I don't know what the things are we should talk about. But we need to just figure things out and take things to the next level. Not that I know what the next level is. And not that that's bad. Because if you don't know where you're going to you can never get lost trying to get there. I have no idea what I'm talking about. I just want to go out and change things. Because I mean, no one cares anymore! People say "who cares." Who cares? Well I care. I care and I'm going to let everyone know how much I care. And they're going to be really grateful to me for it. But first I have to get over this thing! I'm down and out here Taylor!

TAYLOR

Seems like you're doing okay to me. You have a job, you have a wife.

LODEN

It's not enough. If there's something heavy on your soul it outweighs everything else. I need serenity! I learned that from Sharon watching her make amends at this cafe. Sharon needed peace and serenity and so she—

TAYLOR

Sharon? Sharon who?

LODEN

Sharon Luftwaffe. She was the one making amends to this guy. She had to get it out and move on.

TAYLOR

Sharon Luftwaffe? From our neighborhood? What did she do?

LODEN

She was cheating. Or actually, from what I heard she wasn't really cheating since she wasn't married, but the guy she was sleeping with, he was cheating—hold on, that was Kyle. That was Kyle Martel she called out. Well, he deserved it. Picture on the back cover of the phone book. He was married so she was, what, accessory to the adultery.

TAYLOR

Sharon. Really? Her?

LODEN

Yes, Sharon.

TAYLOR

Sharon was an accessory to cheating with a married guy? But she had a pink basket on her bike. Girls who have pink baskets on their bikes don't grow up to be that kind of girl.

LODEN

Yeah. If you can just respond to my initial request.

TAYLOR

Sharon. She wore these, like, wading boots in high school. Even in dry weather. These sort of high rubber wading boots. It just killed me. Sharon Luftwaffe?

LODEN

Yeah, well, it appears she takes off the old boots occasionally. Look, I gotta know if--

TAYLOR

Sure, sure, I accept your remorse. I can't believe it.

LODEN

Oh, thanks. Wow. Thanks. I feel so much better.

TAYLOR

She tried out for the volleyball team in those wading boots. She was making some kind of statement. No one really knew what the statement was, but she did and to hell with all the rest. It was so righteous.

LODEN

Yeah, righteous..

(He pulls out pad and pencil.)

So, what's your order?

TAYLOR

What do you mean?

LODEN

What do you want to eat?

TAYLOR

Wait, what? You're my waiter?

LODEN

Yeah. I'm in the middle of my shift.

TAYLOR

So you've got tables out there? They've been waiting all this time?

LODEN

They'll be fine. They'd understand if they knew I was resolving this crisis in my life.

(Gets up to go.)

TAYLOR

So, I guess, she's not seeing Kyle anymore, huh?

LODEN

No. I don't think so.

Scene 5--A couple of weeks later. LOUIS and WILL at the C-Side.

LOUIS

You need to ask for my forgiveness.

WILL

What? Why?

LOUIS

I called you up to hang out, and you never called back.

WILL

You never told me what you did.

LOUIS

I had to call Madge. And she came over. Totally chaste! Nothing like that! I'm not interested in messing up her life any more than it is. I had to turn off my pheromones. I can control them, you know. But I realized, Madge is pretty listless these days. Gloomy. Come to think of it, maybe it had something to do with her marriage falling apart. Not sure. So I had to hang out with her and watch that depressing movie again—

WILL

Is someone making you watch that movie?

LOUIS

I have to watch it! Its deep for me. It's Plato, Will. Allegory of the cave.

WILL

Okay!

LOUIS

So we're watching this movie with nothing to say, wan smiles all around. Wan smiles, and I'm praying the movie will hurry up to the kid getting shot in the Jeep and the credits rolling all the while checking my goddam Diet Shasta to make sure she didn't put any arsenic in it, you know what I mean. In case she still had those initiatives in her mind. While at the same time hoping a little bit she'd poison my pop so I could die and end this godawful evening. So, I need *you* to ask forgiveness from *me* for forcing me into this situation.

WILL

So, I made you call Madge?

LOUIS

Who else could it be? Phone didn't dial by itself.

WILL

Oh. So in some way, I remotely dialed her up.

LOUIS

You're catching on Will.

WILL

Okay. I'm sorry Louis. I should have been there for you so you didn't have to undergo such a night. And I wasn't. I wasn't there for you. And I am asking your pardon.

LOUIS

Good. Okay. Now there can be a lessening of tensions between us. Our relations can thaw.

WILL

Well, I still feel kind of--

LOUIS

They're thawed now okay! It's a new day!

WILL

Okay. I'll take your word for it.

LOUIS

I need you in my life Will. I need you! I gotta lot of things to say about a lot of things.

WILL

Fine. I'll be there.

(Pause.)

I'll never know what you did, will I?

(LOUIS just looks at him. WILL gets up and wanders downstage.)

WILL

I kind of hate this cafe. There must be some strange ions that charge around in here getting everyone to apologize to each other every second. I don't want to apologize for anything. Why is that? Haven't I don't anything wrong? I'm not sure if I did anything wrong with the Madge situation just now. I'm the one that was wronged. But I don't know what happened.

(Pause.)

And now I have to keep hanging out with Louis. I should want to do that. I have to make myself want to do that. I have to be there for other people. Because nothing is more important than that. Deny yourself. I need to compress myself more and more. Just crush my ego down like a car in that thing that crushes cars. And then I'll really be able to help other people.

(Pause.)

I learned so much of this stuff from Madge's mom. She was our den mother for the Webelos. I'd sit in the front of the car and chat with her on the way to pack meetings. Because it seemed like she might feel lonely. Driving alone in the front and comparing herself with us kids having fun in the back and she'd feel bad. She'd notice how sad and lonely life was.

(Pause.)

Mrs. Krebbs and I really hit it off. She always wanted to play in the Shrine Bowl. "Strong legs run that weak legs may walk." She wanted to get hit by a down lineman in the backfield if it would

help one crippled kid grow stronger muscles. She told me “we should have been born crippled.” So we could go hang out with those little fellas—as one of them. No hierarchies. “If they were miserable we’d be miserable.” Maybe that’s why I go to see all these indie bands in town. Guys I know from school. Their music is so depressing. I want to kill myself after every concert. I go so they’ll see me out in the audience and feel supported. If they’re miserable I’ll be miserable.

(Pause.)

But the place is always packed. Do they really need my support? Can they even see me from the stage? Aren’t the lights in their eyes?

(WILL exits. LOUIS gets up and addresses the audience.)

LOUIS

Life! What a grand proposition. You gotta suck out the marrow. Drive life into a corner. Reduce it to its meanest element. God, what poetry I come up with!

(We hear the theme from “Bless the Beasts and the Children.”)

Some people only know that as Nadia’s Theme. And other people think its only from the “Young and the Restless.” It’s from “Bless the Beasts—oww!

(The music stops.)

Was that a wasp! Oh, no, it was just a thought I had I’m gonna die someday. Kill the thought! I need a haircut.

(Enter MRS. KREBBS.)

Oh, hi Mrs. Krebs. What are you doing here?

MRS. KREBBS

I’m meeting my daughter and her husband. Or her, whatever. I don’t know. Shouldn’t we all be forgiving? People doing bad things is just a chance for us to practice forgiveness! We should encourage people to do terrible things, so we can be merciful to them!

LOUIS

I always learned something from you. I was always a little jealous whenever Will sat up front on the way to Webelos. I never made it to Cub Scouts.

MRS. KREBBS

I advocated for you behind the scenes!

LOUIS

It was my choice. They had nothing to offer me. When’s Madge getting here? I want to at least have a moment of fun before she—

MRS. KREBBS

I'm not sure. She may come in with a pipe wrench to finish me off. I'm ready for it. I'm ready to go meet my maker. Coordinates all set. Flight gear on!

LOUIS

Well, that's good. Have to be prepared for any actuality.

MRS. KREBBS

You know, in case I do die, Louis. I have to make atonement.

LOUIS

With me?

MRS. KREBBS

Well, with the whole world. But I can use you as my megaphone.

LOUIS

Okay, what is it?

MRS. KREBBS

Well, I just realized I might make other people feel bad about themselves because I'm so...well, I don't know how to say this...but I'll just say it: Because I'm such a kind and loving person.

LOUIS

You are!

MRS. KREBBS

I am! Truly! I live my life for people who are not me! And I would hate to think that other people might feel bad comparing themselves to me.

LOUIS

Yeah. Like you're putting pressure on them to be as good as you and they can't take it.

MRS. KREBBS

It's awful. It keeps me awake at night.

LOUIS

Mrs. Krebs. On behalf of all people, who I think I can legitimately represent, I accept your atonement.

MRS. KREBBS

Oh, thank you! Although I still feel a bit out of whack by it.

(Pause.)

But wait. Isn't me saying that I'm so kind and loving, isn't that prideful? It is! There I go! I'm not perfect! I just displayed pride! I don't need to atone for being too good! I'm not too good! My pride is saving me from shaming other people! What a relief!

LOUIS

Good! I'm so happy for you!

MRS. KREBBS

I'm happy that you're happy for me.

LOUIS

Thank you for advocating for me for Cub Scouts. I appreciate it. I could have been a good Cub. Probably would have taken over and run the whole show. I'm gonna go edge my lawn. Oh look who's here!

(Enter MADGE followed by KYLE.)

MADGE

You think I'm coming back to you! Like that!

LOUIS

Hey, there's the spitfire! There's the Madge we don't get to see!

KYLE

No. I'm not presuming you'll just come back to me. I'm not presuming that at all.

LOUIS

Let 'em have it Madge.

MADGE

I have been trying to kill this woman, this woman right here, for 11 months. And you didn't even notice.

LOUIS

Something was at work in you Madge. You were trying to root out some deep bone in your body. Drive life into a corner. There were needs at play.

KYLE

Madge, I was wrong. I admit it.

MADGE

"A Course in Miracles." Are you kidding? It's done nothing for me. A course in hell. That's what it was. A course in how to live in the pits of hell and not even notice it. Flames licking at your thighs and thinking it's a sprinkler. It's easier to try and kill your nice mother than get rid of your slimeball husband, because you want kids! So you'll put up with anything.

LOUIS

Madge, this is you owning your anger. Man vs Man. Man vs self. Sophomore English. You are being fully self-expressed! Man vs. Nature! To Build a Fire! Jack London!

MADGE

(to Louis)
You have nothing to say here!

LOUIS

Clear declarations! I love it!

KYLE

I didn't know you wanted kids.

MADGE

I started weeping uncontrollably every time I saw a bassinet.

KYLE

That did not indicate to me that you desired to be around bassinets.

MRS. KREBBS

Madge honey, I don't know that I'm being helpful here. You're not handling this the way I was mentally planning you would. But that's okay. Let me go to Crossroads and pick something up for you. How about a nice Liz Phair halter top.

MADGE

Fine! Go!

MRS. KREBBS

What size are you?

MADGE

Six!

MRS. KREBBS

Really? I mean, if we want to live in fantasyland that's fine.

MADGE

I'm a six. Just go.

MRS. KREBBS

I'll get a six and an eight.

(SHE exits.)

MADGE

Don't get me an eight get me a six.

LOUIS

Madge, I think she's actually right.

MADGE

(To LOUIS)

Nothing!

LOUIS

Madge we're all just little fleas. Bouncing here and bouncing there. You know. Picture the flea. That's you! That's me! Is it Kyle? Not so sure.

MADGE

(To KYLE)

Kyle, just go. Find a new path. It's time to head out. You're done pal.

KYLE

Madge, you are a forgiving person. You're so wonderful and compassionate and forgiving. Maybe that helped me think I could get away with this. That's not the best phrase. That I could find a healthy way to negotiate these recent events of me being unfaithful. But hold on, aren't we all being unfaithful in one way or another? I mean, I think a lot of people are unfaithful, for instance, to the promise of this country. Is any of what I'm saying helpful? Maybe? I'm trying to be better than I am. I want to try to be better. Because I actually don't want to be better than I am. I *want* to want it though. I know it's a thing that I *should* want, even though I don't. I'm so truthful! Isn't that refreshing?

LOUIS

You're a flea Madge.

MADGE

SHUT UP!

LOUIS

I respect that.

MADGE

Kyle, when we met you were such a...good innocent person. You weren't this conniving, lying, cheating, shiftless—

LOUIS

Taking it to the extremes Madge. Argument by emotion. Stick with reason. That's your empowerment zone.

MADGE

(to LOUIS)

Fie!

(to KYLE)

When we met you weren't so...hold on. I was starting to say how good and innocent you were and what happened to you. But come to think of it, you never were a good guy! You were slimy back then too. I just couldn't see it, because I was blinded by the hand-tooled stitching on the gathered high-neck of my mermaid lace wedding gown. Exquisite tulle, shining silk, glittering sequins, spaghetti straps, illusion back, sweetheart neckline, all made in the gun shed of a Guatemalan rebel camp. A wedding dress doesn't get better than that! I just got on the wings of that dress and soared past any qualms or doubts about your marriageable character. Just go Kyle. I'm tired. I have chickens to feed. I think I'm going to kill one of them tonight. At least I'll have a sense of accomplishment.

(SHE exits. LOUIS looks at KYLE.)

LOUIS

There's a movie you might like Kyle. It really sort of sums up the conditions you seem to find yourself in I think. You're in a pen see. And these guys, well, in your case all these wives, pull up in their pickups. Anyway, you gotta see it. Come on over.

KYLE

So that didn't go well?

LOUIS

Not at all.

(THEY exit.)

Scene 6--The same time. Taylor and Sharon at a different table at the C-Side Cafe.

TAYLOR

Okay, Sharon, we gotta do this thing before we, uh, talk. I guess it's standard when ya have this kind of conversation. So. Do you have a sphincter? Of course you have a sphincter. Goddammit. Look, if you don't mind--Oh God--if you don't mind, just take a second, just a half second, and...clench...your...sphincter.

SHARON

What?

TAYLOR

(softly and quickly)

Tighten your sphincter.

SHARON

I didn't catch that.

(loudly and clearly)
Tighten your sphincter.

TAYLOR

SHARON
Oh. Oh, that's interesting. Okay. Like, clench the muscles of—

TAYLOR
Yes. Yes, just do it so we can get this over with. And not your abs, or your glutes, but your...

SHARON
Sphincter.

TAYLOR
That.

SHARON
Okay.

(Pause.)

TAYLOR
So, it's happening?

SHARON
Yes.

TAYLOR
Okay. I'm engaged too.

SHARON
Well, that's good.

TAYLOR
Yeah.

SHARON
What's the point of this?

TAYLOR
I don't know. Just do it. No, wait there is a point. It's so you won't freak out after I tell you this. By the way, you can stop.

SHARON
Oh, thank you.

TAYLOR

Yeah.

SHARON

I'm not sure I like the sound of this. Having to clutch my anus to keep from freaking out.

TAYLOR

Yeah, well I went through it too you know! So just...look, the point is,

SHARON

I was shocked you called me. It's been years. How's Loden? Doesn't he work here?

TAYLOR

He hates dogs

SHARON

What?

TAYLOR

I mean, that's not true. He's out walking somewhere really spiritual, real mystical now. Des Moines I think.

SHARON

So, I'm glad you wanted to, I mean, actually I had been thinking about—well, what did you want to talk about?

TAYLOR

I want to make amends. To you.

SHARON

For what? I can't imagine anything you'd do that could need amends.

TAYLOR

I've kind of..liked... you...for a long long time. And I never told you. And that's all. And I guess you got involved with Kyle Martel and I don't judge that or anything, but I blew it. I should have told you a long time ago. High school. The boots. Not because you'd have gone out with me and been happy with me because I doubt you would have.

SHARON

Well—

TAYLOR

But at least you'd know, when you were out there dating someone, some complete jackass let's say, you'd know that it could've been me you were going out with, due to me telling you I loved, I mean liked—

SHARON

Loved?

TAYLOR

No. I said liked first. And I'm sticking with that. I'm not good at transparency. Anyway, you'd realize it could've been me you were seeing because I told you that I liked you. And that therefore you would realize it could be a lot worse. Comparing being with this undesirable man and being with someone less desired, me. And then at least you'd be a little happier with the unsavory man. Or maybe less miserable or however you want to state that. And knowing you were less miserable would make me less miserable which would increase the lack of misery in the world meaning you would be even more less miserable. But you could never have that happen because I never asked you out so you'd reject me and have this unusual yet potent control factor for your future experiments in romance. So, that's my amends.

(Pause.)

Are you mad?

SHARON

I'm very calm.

TAYLOR

Me too. I kind of can't help it. It's from clenching--

SHARON

I know. But I think it's also because I'm sitting here.

TAYLOR

Yeah, it's a nice cafe.

SHARON

No, that's not why. You know, I know I'm not a good person. But I do think I had a sign from, well, this flame that ultimately it would be okay.

TAYLOR

I'm not here to judge you. I have a farm. I have animals. They do all kinds of bad stuff too, I don't judge them. Maybe that wasn't the best analogy. I'm trying to say that...I'm just trying to make amends. And I'm at least glad the procedure we undertook is making you calm and peaceful.

SHARON

That's not why I'm calm and peaceful.

TAYLOR

Oh, right, because you're at the wonderful C-Side Cafe and you had that flame or something.

SHARON

That's partly it. But not entirely.

TAYLOR

Well, why do you feel—

(SHE just looks at him, and smiles. HE looks at her, bewildered. Until he finally catches on.)

TAYLOR

You mean being with--

(She nods.)

Oh.

(Pause.)

Why would I make you feel that way?

SHARON

You just do.

TAYLOR

Oh.

(Long pause. HE looks across the room.)

What's all that yelling over there?

SHARON

I think I started something. Don't worry about it. It's just people trying to move on. They'll be fine. You stay here.

(After a pause, lights slowly down.)

End of Play

