

LOOKING FOR JOHNNY

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

THESIS

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By

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by

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Claude File and Michael Landman, two faculty members whose contributions to theatre resound in the hearts of the students they have touched.

"It's got to be the goin'  
Not the getting there that's good"  
-Harry Chapin, *Greyhound*

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is unquestioned that my parent's love and pursuit of theatre has inspired me to the same creative aspirations.

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### CHARACTERS

DALE, Early 50s, bartender

TOM, 56, the youngest brother

PAUL, 62, brother

ANNIE, 59, sister

JOHNNY, 65, oldest brother

### TIME

A late Fall day, 2000.

Act One begins at 11:15 a.m.

Act Two begins at 1:30 a.m. that night.

### PLACE

A small, dimly lit bar in Covington, Louisiana. It is detached from the revelry of the French Quarter, but is instilled with the regional flair of Southern Louisiana.

## ACT ONE

(The setting is a small, dimly lit bar in Covington, Louisiana. It is detached from the revelry of the French Quarter, but is instilled with the regional flair of Southern Louisiana. A long bar runs from downstage right to upstage center, rounding at the upstage end to a hinged bartop for staff members to pass behind the bar. Free-standing barstools are lined up against the downstage side of the bar. A few tables are arranged downstage left. A jukebox is located upstage left next to a tattered door which leads to the restrooms and beer storage. Beer signs adorn the walls illuminating pictures of local high school football teams and a single portrait of the bar's original owner, Tugy. The smallest amount of light enters from a glass door upstage, just left of center. The majority of the door is covered with Saints stickers and beer and happy hour advertisements. DALE enters through the stage left door carrying a case of beer. He crosses behind the bar and begins stocking a beer cooler. TOM enters through the glass door. We see from the light through the door that it is morning)

TOM

Say there, Dale. Don't you think you better turn the sign off outside? Your wife sees you wastin' electricity like that she's sure enough gonna run you up a flag pole.

DALE

Yeah, good thinkin'.

(He crosses to a light switch and flips it)

I'm glad you come in here this early some days, Tom. Otherwise I'm likely to leave that damn thing burnin' all day.

TOM

I'm just sayin' you shouldn't divert energy from that cooler there, workin' as hard as it is to keep that beer cold. And speakin' of cold beer. . .

DALE

(Popping a top before TOM can finish and handing the beer to him)

Say no more.

TOM

I don't know where those Folger's people get off callin' themselves the best part of wakin' up. You'd think Anheiser

TOM (Cont'd)

Busch would have long since brought that little argument into a courtroom.

DALE

Well, not everyone lives your lifestyle, Tom. Me ,for instance. I tried that beer diet of yours. I was stupid and asleep by three thirty in the afternoon. I had to go in back and take a nap till nearly 5:30.

TOM

You see. . . you wake up just in time for happy hour. You just gotta trust the program, Dale. Trust the program.

DALE

Now you can't be sleepin' this afternoon. You got big brother and sister comin' after you today, don't ya?

TOM

Yeah, Paul will be here just about noon. He's takin' a taxi from the airport. He wants to come in by himself. He says he wants to surprise me. I don't know what he's got up his sleeve, but I'm sure I'll hear the worst of it.

DALE

You gotta watch him, I know that much. And Annie's even worse.

TOM

Paul will probably be in town by the time Annie pulls in. We'll go together 'bout 3:30. Pick Annie up by. . . uh 4:15, I think it was.

DALE

You know, I don't know the last time I saw the three of you in here together.

TOM

It was five years ago, for Johnny's 60th.

DALE

Really, that long? It feels like last week.

TOM

Hell, Dale it wasn't till last week your ass finally healed from that whoopin' Annie gave you.

DALE

And if she plans on turnin' me over her knee again this year I don't know if I got much fight in me. You got you one



DALE (Cont'd)

cute sister there, Tom.

TOM

Cute? Them little 18 year old things walking out of the university, they are cute. Annie is turnin' 59 here in a few months.

DALE

Yeah, and she sure is cute.

TOM

Let Peter hear you say that and see if he don't tear into your ass as well.

DALE

Pete comin' this year?

TOM

No, no. He and the boys are goin' to do some huntin' up on their land. He likes to come to holidays and weddings, but he tells Annie he feels out of place at Johnny's birthday.

DALE

He's got a point. That is somethin' for you brothers and sisters.

TOM

Yeah, I guess.

(The door swings open and a man staggers in wearing a long coat. He has long curly blond hair. He keeps his face to the ground as he speaks)

MAN

You guys open, here?

DALE

Not just yet there, fella. We'll be openin' up about 11:30.

MAN

Okay, I'll just take a beer.

DALE

Come on back at 11:30 and I'll be happy to serve you one.

MAN

(Indicating TOM)

But he's got one?

DALE

Well, . . . he. . .

MAN

What if I was to tell you that I'm here with the Alcohol and Beverage Commission investigatin' early sales of alcoholic beverages.

(He raises his face to DALE, making sure that TOM cannot see. He flashes his wallet, as if to show a badge. DALE smirks then quickly throws on his poker face)

The law is clearly written. It clearly states that a.m. sales of alcoholic and intoxicating beverages shall be limited to the period of time delineated by midnight and 2 a.m.. All other a.m. sales shall be considered felonious and punishable by fines not to exceed \$5,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

TOM

(Nervous)

Now, you can't take him to prison for serving my beer.

MAN

Who said anything about takin' him to jail. Perhaps you're the one who needs a little time down in the first precinct. Just don't call your big brother to get you out.

(He raises his head and reveals his face to TOM)

TOM

(Leaping up, surprised)

Holy sheep shit. I didn't even recognize you. Where did you get that wig from?

PAUL

(He removes the wig to reveal a normal head of hair)  
What about that?

TOM

Holy shit. Dale, you remember I told you about this guy's head. What was that. . . a year ago? Not a hair on it.

DALE

Yeah, I remember you said that.

(To PAUL)

Tom said you had just started the chemo and there wasn't a hair on you. You through with all that, Paul.

PAUL

Total remission. And now, once again, I have more hair than my little brother.

(He pats TOM on the head)

TOM

You son of a bitch. That is incredible. You look great.

(They embrace)

When did you get in? You said you wouldn't be in till about noon. When did you land? Did you drive right in from the airport? Well. . . ?

PAUL

As I am a beer behind you, I think I better take care of that first.

DALE

(Handing him a beer)

Sure thing.

TOM

So, what are you doin' here so early?

PAUL

I found a flight in this morning and actually saved a little money by comin' in a little earlier.

TOM

That is great.

PAUL

Yeah, hey, Dale, you got change for a dollar. I just gotta make a quick call.

(He hands DALE a dollar)

DALE

Yeah, sure.

(He retrieves the change from the register and hands it to PAUL. PAUL crosses toward the stage left door. At the end of the bar he stops, dropping some of the change)

PAUL

Damn it. Dale, can you pick that up for me. I've been havin' a little trouble gettin' up and down lately.

DALE

(Crossing quickly)

Yeah, sure.

(DALE leans over to pick up the change. When he does,  
ANNIE burst through the door and smacks him on the ass)

DALE

Holy Christ.  
(All laugh)

ANNIE

I knew I recognized that ass from somewhere.

DALE

Why you. . .  
(They hug)  
Good to see you, Annie.  
(PAUL goes out the door and comes back in with luggage)

DALE

Let me keep that back here for you, Paul.  
(DALE takes the luggage and places it behind the bar)

TOM

(Crossing to ANNIE)  
Look at you. How's it goin', Annie.  
(They hug)

ANNIE

It's goin' pretty good there, lil' brother.

TOM

Now, wait, you weren't supposed to be in for another 5  
hours. First this guy comes in early and then you. What's  
up?

PAUL

It was all Annie's idea.

ANNIE

Now, that's not exactly true. Paul there wanted to come in  
on our own. He didn't want you drivin' out to that airport  
all by your lonesome so he called me up and I just offered a  
solution.

PAUL

That's right. She had nothing to do with any mischievous or  
underlying intentions. Your saintly sister here just went  
along with things because I threatened to tell dad on her.

ANNIE

Daddy's been dead for 24 years.

PAUL

All the more spooky isn't it?

ANNIE

No, I just took a red eye out to Dallas, had breakfast with Paul, and then we flew in on an early flight this morning.

PAUL

It's the only way to fly. . . free.

ANNIE

I tell both of you. My flight benefits are there for you. Just let me know and we'll go anywhere. But right now, I'm goin' over here. I'm gonna sit over here in front of this rosy-assed fella here and get me a beer.

(DALE places it on the bar. ANNIE and PAUL cross to bar. TOM holds for a brief moment)

TOM

I could have driven to the airport, you know.

PAUL

Sure you could have, killer. That's why we came in ourselves. Because you could have, but you didn't have to.

ANNIE

Yeah, Tom. Don't have a cow about it.  
(PAUL and ANNIE laugh)

DALE

What's so funny?

PAUL

Tom never told you?

DALE

Never told me what?

PAUL

About the last time he came to pick us up at the airport. Or tried to, at least. He didn't quite make it on time, did you, Tom?

TOM

(To DALE)

Nothing they are about to tell you can be substantiated by government records, Dale. They don't have a shred of evidence to convict.

PAUL

No, Dale, we have a freezer full of beef to submit as people's exhibit A. You see, on the way to the airport, it was about 1:00 a.m. We were comin' in on a red-eye flight. Tom is drivin' the back roads to avoid traffic. Like there is any traffic at 1 a.m. Anyway, Tom is going down farm-road 12 and he runs head on into two black Angus steers. They were just standing in the middle of the road. It was pitch black. He never saw them. He hits them dead center. The front end of his truck is bent so badly that he had to detach the radiator fan, but it still runs. And here is the greatest part. It was that old white Ford that he drove for years with the contractor's lift on the back of it, remember?

TOM

I never drove a Ford, you must be thinking of another guy.

DALE

Do you mean his Dodge?

TOM

And I called you my friend, Dale.

PAUL

Yeah, Dodge, Ford, whatever. Anyway, Tom here lowers that lift, backs up to those two steers, and picks them up like a dustpan and dumps them in the back of his truck. He then proceeds towards the airport. Now pretty soon the truck starts overheating because the fan is disconnected. Tom just pulls over and reattaches the fan. He pulls into the airport almost three hours late, the fan blade tapping out a rhythm on the casing, Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah, and there are two dead cows in the back of his truck. Annie here almost didn't get in the truck with him. I had to get in first and show her that it was all right. She gets in and we pull out Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah Bah-Dah, everyone on the curbside just lookin' at us.

DALE

What did you do with the steers?

ANNIE

Tom there just takes them home and hangs them from his deer table, bent it down worse than the front of his truck, and starts butchering them right there. He had one of them barbecue aprons that had the diagram of a cow and showed you where all the cuts came from, so there he was, cutting. . . then looking down at his apron for the next cut. He was out

ANNIE (Cont'd)

there cutting for about twelve hours. And then he still had another cow in his truck. Patty wouldn't let him in the house till he got butt naked in the yard and hosed off. But that's our Tom, never a dull moment.

PAUL

Never a sober moment would be more like it.

DALE

All right, now you two leave him alone. That's my top customer you are making fun of.

(To TOM)

You want another beer, chief.

TOM

Sure. But cut these guys off here pretty soon. I don't know if I can handle these pranksters for too long.

(Taking a beer from DALE)

You know it's easy enough to sit there being all high and mighty. These two aren't your definition of the flawless.

ANNIE .

And just what do you mean by that, you little runt.

TOM

Nothing, big sister. It's just that you and your brother there have hit your share of steers on the dark roads of life.

PAUL

That may be true, but to pick them up and carry them home with you?

TOM

Hell, Paul. Some of the women you brought home could best be described as steers.

(TOM and ANNIE laugh)

There was one girl, Dale. She had been in this bar for about eighteen hours one day, I mean this girl was tight. She couldn't tell Paul from a Moosehead advertisement.

PAUL

He won't tell you about the breakfast we had the next morning. Sure the girl was drunk the night before, but the next morning she served us a breakfast of champions. Tom there went back for thirds on the French toast. So maybe I wasn't looking for a companion that night but rather a good breakfast the next day.

TOM

All right, you got me there. She did cook one hell of a breakfast.

(They all laugh)

Well, here's to the three of us, and here's to Johnny on his 65th. Happy Birthday, Johnny.

TOM, ANNIE, PAUL

(Together)

Happy Birthday, Johnny!

(They all raise their beers, each in a different direction and then drink)

ANNIE

I don't know if Paul didn't win that one.

PAUL

You think so?

TOM

I was thinkin' you were probably more right.

DALE

More right? You kids lost me.

ANNIE

Oh, it's our toast. I thought we showed you that last time, for Johnny's 60<sup>th</sup>. Anyways, we all drink a toast to Johnny, but we point our drinks in different directions. Since we have no idea where he is, we figure this way we got good odds of one of us drinkin' in his direction.

PAUL

Actually, it's pretty easy. You noticed none of us pointed west. That's because we know that Johnny hates the West. Ever since that girl came down from Bakersfield. What was her name?

ANNIE

Peggy.

PAUL

Right. Peggy. She came from California all the way out to Wisconsin, thinking that Johnny was just gonna pack up his things and move to California.

ANNIE

She said, "That's how they do things in California. If you love someone, you pack up your things and you follow them."



TOM

That's right. I had totally forgotten about that part.

PAUL

So Johnny says "That's what you do if you're an idiot. That's what you do if you have no self-image. That's what you do if you are totally invested in another person." I don't think we had the phrase codependent back then, but that is what this girl was.

TOM

She was in tears before Johnny had the time to pick her up and carry her to the front door, drop her in the hallway and close the door behind her.

PAUL

But, anyway, that is why no one ever points their glass to the west because Johnny swore he would never step foot in California.

DALE

What about the rest of the West?

PAUL

All just the same. Hell, Johnny has hugged the Atlantic Coast ever since then.

DALE

So, how do you know who's won?

TOM

Actually, we don't. We pass on whatever information we've heard since the last time we were together and try to figure out where he might be. I heard that he was down in Pensacola so that is why I think Annie was right.

ANNIE

And Jan said he had come up to New York, so I thought that Paul was right.

DALE

But wait, if you thought he was in New York, and you thought that he was in Florida, why didn't you point North and you point South.

ANNIE

That would be too easy, sweetheart. No actually, I point somewhere different in hopes that someone else has more recent news.

TOM

And I thought I was pointing South. Guess I need more beer.

(He takes a swig)

DALE

Or somethin' a little stronger.

(He sets up beers for everyone)

Now don't any of you ever talk to Johnny?

TOM

No. We haven't actually spoken to Johnny in some time now. We usually just hear that he has checked into another Veteran's hospital. Most of the hospitals call Annie or me, but some of the Florida ones call Paul out in Dallas. They let us know that Johnny has checked in. Few days later we call and they say that he has checked himself out again. The only other person in the world who knows anything about Johnny's whereabouts is Trevor.

ANNIE

That's his name. . . Trevor. I couldn't remember that. He's been Johnny's roommate at just about every Veteran's hospital across the east coast. They check in and check out together now. Whenever one of them wants to move on, they both pack their bags and move on. Now Paul here spoke to Johnny a few years ago. When was that?

PAUL

Yeah, that was about two, maybe three years ago.

ANNIE

So we know. . .

PAUL

Course he didn't know who I was for the majority of the conversation. We spoke for a few minutes before I felt that he finally figured out who I was. His voice changed a little bit. "I gotta be goin' there, lil' brother" he said. Then he hung up the phone. You know he sounded pretty good until the end there. But we haven't been able to get him on the phone since then.

DALE

And today's his birthday?

TOM

Yep, 65. Today.

DALE

And if you're all three years apart.

(Playful)

Paul would be 62, that would make you. . .

ANNIE

You do any more math over there and I'm gonna leap across this bar and really tear into your ass.

(They all laugh)

DALE

All right, Annie. You just keep your seat there. I'd hate to have to carry you to the door, drop you and lock you out like Johnny there.

ANNIE

(Imitating Lloyd Bentsen)

I knew Johnny Kerr, and you sir are no Johnny Kerr.

DALE

(Laughing)

I guess not. Sounds like a guy I'd like to meet, though.

TOM

Oh, yeah, Dale. You and Johnny would hit it off real big.

PAUL

Course Johnny always had a thing for bartenders.

DALE

You mean he's. . .

ANNIE

Gay? No, he's not gay, he just played one on TV.

DALE

Really?

ANNIE

No, not really. He was an actor, though. He was a regular on a couple of the worst shows you had ever seen in the early '60s. He had done some work up in New York. A film shoot, wasn't it, Paul.

PAUL

Uh-huh, yeah. He had done *Finnegan's Wake*. It was an adaptation of the Joyce novel. It was some of the worst film ever exposed to light. I don't even know if you can find it anymore. That was in 58? Something like that.

PAUL (Cont'd)

Anyway. He got a couple of television roles out of it, so it wasn't a complete loss.

DALE

So he was an actor?

TOM

By trade I suppose. He was really just a drug-addict, 'bout everything from Bufferin to base. And he just happened to get high with actors and producers and ended up in a bunch of stuff. This was the late 50s, early 60s. There wasn't any of this "Just Say No" crap. There was "just say when."

PAUL

Yeah, I remember we were supposed to pick Johnny up at his apartment for something downtown. We had pulled into New York for a couple of days, Tom and I, and we had a car so we were going to drive Johnny around. We didn't realize that you don't need a car in New York, but anyway. We come by the apartment and the door is open. We peek our heads inside and the living room is empty. We walk inside and Johnny comes out of the bathroom. Not a stitch of clothing on. He looks at us and says, "I'll be just a minute." He goes into his room and we hear two or three girls laughing.

TOM

Yeah, it was three. I remember.

PAUL

Three girls. So. . .we wait for a few minutes thinking that he is just getting dressed. Then we realize that he is not getting dressed at all. We sit down to wait and there on the coffee table, in the middle of the room is a punch bowl full of marijuana. It looked like a pot salad. There were a few joints rolled on the top of the stack so we decided to burn one while we waited for Johnny. Tom and I waited for three hours on that couch, but we never even realized it. We were so stoned. We had smoked three or four of the joints from the salad bowl. When Johnny finally came out we didn't even care about the meeting.

TOM

Now we had missed it by about two and a half hours.

PAUL

That's about it. We just went down to this gyro shop and ate about four sandwiches each. We were so hungry, and we were too stoned to drive anywhere else.

DALE

So who were the three girls in the bedroom?

TOM

Just some girls who had seen him on TV.

PAUL

He came out of the bedroom, rattled off their names. They went to correct him and he just said, "Yeah, that's what I said" and pushed them out the front door.

TOM

Yeah, I don't think he got one of their names right. But, hey, that's Johnny. He could always get the girls. Not like they were distracted by me or Paul.

PAUL

Speak for yourself there, Quasimodo. I was beatin' em off with a stick.

DALE

(To ANNIE)

And where were you during all of this?

ANNIE

Me? I was working. Trying to make a living, which is more than I can say for my three brothers here.

PAUL

We were just trying to find ourselves that's all.

ANNIE

That why you moved to New Orleans?

TOM

No, we moved to New Orleans to get laid.

ANNIE

Oh, I see.

TOM

That was '62. What we didn't realize was that the few times that we got laid in New York were because we were Johnny's brothers, and we forgot to bring him with us to New Orleans.

PAUL

Yep, if I could replay any part of my life, we would definitely have brought Johnny with us.

DALE

Why didn't you?

PAUL

He was now doin' some soap opera. He had hooked one of the producers, supplyin' him a couple hundred dollars a day in dope. The producer gave Johnny a walk-on role on the show to give him enough extra income to stay in the area. Johnny would walk on camera about once a week, get a huge check from the screen actors guild or something and smoke most of it away with the producer.

ANNIE

Those last few times he was on the show he looked awful. The make-up ladies would tell me they couldn't stop him from sweating and no matter what they did to his hair he would just look terrible when he went on camera. That's about when he slipped.

DALE

Slipped?

ANNIE

That's when the whole thing started with Johnny. Schizophrenia, Auditory Hallucinations, fear of people. Hell, he locked himself in his apartment for more than two months once. Tom there had to break in through a window on the fire escape just to get some food in to him.

TOM

He looked awful when I found him. He was lying there, covered in his own sick and shit. I almost threw up. He was lyin' there perfectly still except for his eyes. They were going about a mile a minute.

DALE

Jesus.

TOM

We got him into a shower. His super and me. We cleaned him up and I took him out of there. I went to pay the super and he said that the rent had already been paid for the next year. It seems that Johnny's producer had paid the rent for him. It seemed such a waste to leave a New York apartment that was already paid for, but I knew that I had to get back to New Orleans soon, and there was no way in hell I was leaving Johnny there again. He stayed with me in New Orleans for no more than two nights. Then he was back on the road, headed back to New York.

DALE

I don't know that I can blame him. Can't imagine New Orleans was much better for him, even though it is "The Big Easy."

PAUL

The "Big Easy" is a lifestyle. Johnny ain't that easy, Dale.

ANNIE

That's right. We've all been through that before. We don't need to replay that again.

TOM

Dale, Johnny once came to live with me, Patty and the girls. He stayed longer this time. About fifteen years had passed. We hadn't seen much of Johnny for that long. I mean all of the '70s flew by and we didn't hear a thing.

ANNIE

He came to live with me and Pete for a while there, but that's about it.

TOM

We had all moved on with our lives. I was set up in New Orleans. I thought I could handle it. My family thought they could handle it. Four months later we were torn apart. Patty and I were at each other's throats all the time. The girls were frightened. Well, Mary was only five, but Kristen started skipping classes. . . in elementary school. He was more than we could handle. He would sit alone in his room. We had converted the den into his room. He would talk. . . no, yell to himself in the middle of the night and all day long. Patty told the girls that their uncle was an actor and that he was just rehearsing for his next big role. Luckily, they believed her. But he was always smoking pot, and I have no idea where he was getting it. He didn't know anybody in town, and he never left the house. One night, we were in bed and Patty heard something in the hallway. She went to the door and opened it. There was Johnny sitting outside the girls' bedroom door. Patty went through the roof. The next day I took Johnny up to Dallas to live with Paul. It's not that we don't want to help Johnny. We just can't.

PAUL

Don't get us wrong, we love Johnny. We just can't handle his disease. Schizophrenia is not a small character flaw, like leaving the mayonnaise out overnight. He's not the Johnny we once knew. He's different. He's a ghost.

TOM

Paul knows best. He put Johnny up for more than a year.

PAUL

It didn't seem like that long. Tom brought him up and we were remodeling.

(To ANNIE)

You remember that little basement apartment we had. We just changed the dart room into a bedroom for Johnny.

ANNIE

I remember that place. Laura. . .

(To DALE)

That was Paul's fiancé. She had called me up to ask me about it. She was scared to death to take that little place. I told her that she should take it. I told her you're only a block away from the Joint.

(To DALE)

That was the dart pub the boys were into then. Hell, you could walk home drunk and only stumble two or three times. It was that close.

DALE

Kinda like Tom and my place here.

TOM

That's what I look for in real estate deals, a nearby pub.

PAUL

A man's gotta have his priorities. And my priority right now is another of these here little fellas.

(He waves his empty beer at DALE who replaces it)

But the best was when Johnny stayed with Annie.

TOM

Yeah, it was the only honeymoon Johnny ever went on.

(ANNIE shakes a fist at TOM)

Dale, you'll never believe it, but Johnny came to their wedding in Atlanta. Then he stayed for two months.

ANNIE

He was never a problem.

TOM

You never saw him. Hell, your place is bigger than Tara. He was on one side and you and Pete were on the other. I swear whenever I get in a fight with Patty, I just threaten to go live in your guest house and she knows I'm serious.



ANNIE

(Indicating TOM)

You really listening to this one, Paul?

(To DALE)

We have a guest house on the back of our property. When the boys were in diapers, Pete was teaching them carpentry. They built a guest house, that's all. A nice little guest house. And when Johnny needed a place, sure. He's family. You give him the guest house.

DALE

But on your honeymoon?

ANNIE

We weren't lovesick teenagers, Dale. Hell we had two boys and a little girl already. And like Tom said, we never saw him. We were about to pack the boys away to a babysitter and in walks Johnny. I told Junior and Bryan that he was going to stay with them while we were gone. They were so excited. They started planning all the games they would play in their fort, as they called it. They always kept the guest house stocked like a fort. Pete had bought provisions for a nuclear holocaust or something. Our garage was full of canned goods, water, gasoline. They just moved some things out to the house with Johnny. Hell, the boys loved spending time with their uncle Johnny when they were younger. He was the one who introduced Junior to painting and now look at him, four Georgia duck stamps under his belt. And Bryan was always glad to have someone around bigger than his big brother so that he wasn't the only one getting picked on. You know how those two have always liked to wrestle and play grab-ass.

PAUL

They still do, as I recall. And Peter is what, 42 now.

ANNIE

Don't remind me. When your kids are in their 40s it starts to eat at you.

(To DALE)

But, Johnny stayed with me and he could stay with me again. I just wish we had some idea where he was.

TOM

Wherever he is I'm sure he's doin' all right. Johnny could always take care of himself.

PAUL

He's doing fine. Trust me.

ANNIE

You're probably right, Paul. I just wish that we could be certain.

PAUL

(Pause)

I'm certain. . . I'm certain because I know where Johnny is.

TOM

You what?

PAUL

I know where he is. I've known for some time now. I just didn't know how I was going to tell you all.

ANNIE

What do you mean, Paul? You know where Johnny is?

PAUL

Yes. I got a call a few weeks ago. The Veteran's Hospital in Pensacola, Florida was seeking Johnny's full committal. They were afraid that this traveling that he was doing was doing more harm than good. They asked me to sign. . . they needed a next of kin. I was listed.

TOM

Thank God they called you. Annie or I might not have been able to say no.

(PAUL is silent)

You did say No, didn't you? You didn't sign off on that. Paul, tell me you said No.

PAUL

I said Yes.

(Silence)

I knew it would be the one way that we could be sure that Johnny was being taken care of. It was the one way to know that somewhere, somebody knew what was best for Johnny, or at least could look after him.

TOM

We could. . .

PAUL

You and I can't do it anymore, Tom. We're too old. Or I'm too old.

TOM

We've always taken care of Johnny, Paul. We've never turned our back on him. . . I mean, except when we had to. Annie, tell him. We are not leaving our brother to some hospital.

ANNIE

(Without looking at TOM)

I think Paul is right. Maybe Pensacola is the place for Johnny. Maybe they can calm him down. And hey, if nothing else, he's nearby and we can always fly out to see him.

TOM

But, Annie. . .

ANNIE

Tom, Paul is right. We've passed Johnny around between us enough to know that none of us is fit to take care of Johnny for any long term.

(She crosses to PAUL and hugs him)

I don't know how you did it. That must have been an extremely difficult decision to make. Thank You.

PAUL

Hey, don't. . . I'm just sorry that I couldn't tell any of you till now. But what do you say when you've. . . . I think it is the best thing, and you're right. We can go and visit him any time we want. Be the perfect excuse for a Florida vacation, don't you think?

DALE

Sounds like a good excuse to me. But then again, I never need an excuse.

(PAUL, TOM and ANNIE all laugh and embrace)

How 'bout another toast?

(He raises a beer along with the others)

To Johnny Kerr.

(The bar door opens. A dark figure stands in the doorway)

ANNIE, PAUL & TOM

(Raising their glasses)

To Johnny Kerr.

FIGURE

(Holding his arm out, as if toasting)

To me.

BLACKOUT

## ACT TWO

(The scene is the same. It is now 1:30 a.m. DALE is busy picking up glasses for the end of the evening. PAUL sits alone at a table down left. TOM is leaning on the upstage wall, peering out the door through the advertisements. JOHNNY and ANNIE sit at the bar)

ANNIE

I'm sure he didn't mean it.

JOHNNY

I think he did.

ANNIE

Look, he's just taken by surprise. No one expected to see you today. We've wondered if we would ever see you again. This isn't easy for any of us.

JOHNNY

(Exploding)

And it's a walk in the park for me?

(Rising, crossing over to PAUL, trying to regain composure)

But let him tell me himself.

(To PAUL)

Tell me, Paul. Tell me what I want to hear. Tell me how you and Tom and Annie will always be my dear, loving and devoted family. Can you tell me that? Huh, can you?

PAUL

Dammit, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Tell me, Paul. Tell me when you say that you wished you would never see me again, that you didn't mean it. Tell me that that is just some Irish blessing that makes no fucking sense to anyone, but really shows devotion and caring.

PAUL

I don't have the time or the patience for this.

(PAUL gets up and begins to leave. JOHNNY grabs him by his arm)

Let go of my arm.

JOHNNY

I can't.

PAUL

Let go of my arm. . .NOW.

JOHNNY

No, little brother. I can't let you go. And I can't let you let me go. Don't you see, you're all I've got now.

PAUL

Bullshit. You haven't seen us in twenty years. What are you missing? You don't know me anymore. You don't know Annie. You don't know Tom. And we don't know you. You remember the phone call?

JOHNNY

The what?

PAUL

The phone call. A couple of years ago, I called and they let me talk to you. You didn't even recognize my voice for most of the conversation. When you did figure out who the hell was calling you, you hung up. Why's that? Huh? Cause you weren't the one calling, that's why. When you need us, we are supposed to bend over backwards, sacrifice everything. . . .Some of us gave up more than you can imagine for you. Why? Because you were our big brother. That was our job. You were in trouble and we were supposed to help you out. Well, we did, goddamn it. We helped you out, but no one was there to help us.

(He moves away. JOHNNY goes to grab his arm again)  
Hey, I'm just goin' to the head. You can stop the bullyin' tactics.

(PAUL exits to restroom)

TOM

(To ANNIE)

He'll be all right. Just give him a little time. You know Paul. He doesn't solve any problems in crowds.

ANNIE

Yeah, sure.

JOHNNY

I didn't know that I had been that much of a burden on him. I mean I stayed at his place once, but that was a long time ago.

ANNIE

Don't Johnny. Don't dredge it all up. Let it go.

JOHNNY

Is that what he's talking about? Is that where I hurt him?

TOM

Johnny, you'd better listen to Annie. I don't think you want to mess with this tonight.

JOHNNY

Mess with what?

TOM

You remember what happened when you stayed with Paul?

JOHNNY

Sure I remember staying with him. That was a great time. We really went crazy in Dallas there a few nights. There was that dart club, The Joint. Man we tied some on there.

TOM

You remember Laura? Paul's fiancé.

JOHNNY

Yeah, cute little thing. She could really fill out a dress. What ever happened to her?

TOM

Well. . .

(Pause)

She and Paul fought the whole time you were home. She didn't want to spend the rest of her life with the man she loved and his brother.

JOHNNY

No, I never saw them argue once.

TOM

Paul never let you see them argue. I only know about it because Laura and Patty were on the phone every night like sisters.

(Pause)

Laura left Paul, Johnny. Paul couldn't stop her. That is when you went to the hospital in Dallas.

JOHNNY

I remember that.

TOM

Paul called me up. Said that he would need a hand getting you there. I drove in from New Orleans. We got you good and drunk. You probably don't remember that, but we did. We poured you into the car and took you down to the VA. They admitted you and Paul told you that he loved you. We

TOM (Cont'd)  
went home and Paul got himself drunk. I think he was drunk  
for the next week.

JOHNNY  
I don't remember any of that.

ANNIE  
Johnny. . .

JOHNNY  
It's okay, Annie.

(PAUL comes out from the restroom. He crosses to the  
bar. He motions to DALE for a beer. DALE gives him  
one)

PAUL  
I think. . .I think I owe you an apology, Johnny. I said  
some things there that aren't right for me to say. Some of  
the things I said I never thought I would say. I guess they  
just built up inside for too long and they were gonna come  
out whether I wanted them to or not.

JOHNNY  
Hey, it's okay, lil' brother.

PAUL  
No, let me finish. I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am  
that the first time I see you in twenty years I go through  
the roof and rip your head off. But I'm tired. My body is  
still tired. . . the cancer.

JOHNNY  
I heard.

PAUL  
Yeah, well I gotta be honest with you. These last few  
months have been the greatest of my life. I have a new  
outlook on the life that I have left. You can't imagine  
what it's like to hear a doctor say six to nine months to  
you. Then twelve months later, that same doctor smiles at  
you. You are born again. The past is inconsequential. I'm  
finally shaking the past off of my back, Johnny. Can you  
imagine how that must feel? I don't hear Dad over my  
shoulder anymore when I am out in the woodshop. I don't  
wish Mom would come and save me anymore. I'm finally livin'  
for me. And here in the middle of this new world walks the  
old one.

(Pause. PAUL remains calm)

PAUL (Cont'd)

I've been angry with you, Johnny. For quite a long time, I just didn't know it. Not until tonight. I was angry at you for leaving like you did. You left, Momma died, and I was left to take care of the family. Dad wasn't gonna be any help. It was your job, Johnny. You were the oldest. You were supposed to be there. I was still growing up. I wasn't ready for all that. Mom was dead, I couldn't blame her. You were just gone.

(Pause)

I am glad to see you. You look good.

JOHNNY

You don't look so bad yourself, lil' brother.

PAUL

Can I buy my big brother a beer?

JOHNNY

That you can do.

(They cross to the bar. DALE gets a beer for JOHNNY.  
They all drink quietly for a moment)

JOHNNY

I knew you would all be here. I called Patty when I got in town this morning. She said that you had already gone, Tom. It wasn't rocket science figurin' out where you had gone.

DALE

I don't suppose that it was.

JOHNNY

(Quickly, as if prepared)

I need a place to stay.

(Everyone sits quietly, except for Johnny who continues in the same prepared manner)

I can't go back to the hospital. I won't last another day in that place. It's killing me. This is where I want to be. You guys are where I want to be. Right here, having a drink in Tugy's bar. Laughing it up. Living life. The way it was before.

TOM

Johnny, you've got. . .

JOHNNY

No, don't say it, Tom. I ain't going back to that place. I got nobody there anymore.



ANNIE

What about Trevor? The two of you were pretty close last I heard. Why he went so far as to send Christmas cards out for you last year. Don't you think he needs you there?

JOHNNY

He's dead.

(Silence)

ANNIE

Johnny, I'm so sorry. We know how much he meant to you.

JOHNNY

Really? Do you know what he liked to do on Sunday mornings? Do you know his favorite music? Do you even know what he looked like?

TOM

Well, no, Johnny. We. . .

JOHNNY

It's okay, baby brother.

(Pause)

Trevor and I were close. We found each other in the middle of nothingness. We helped each other out.

(Pause)

He died last week. Had a heart attack in his sleep, they say. Don't think he felt a thing. The last I saw him was dinner the night before. We had been talkin' about goin' to visit our families. That was the last thing we talked about. Then when he passed, they wouldn't let me go to the funeral. Dr. Fleming said that the new medication was still in transition. He worried that I would become too depressed and would try another attempt. They sedated me. Those assholes made me sleep right through the funeral of the only friend I had on this earth. When I finally came to, figured out what had happened, I knew that I would have to leave. The next day, we were visiting the doctor over in another building. I excused myself to go to the bathroom and walked right out the back door. I can't go back there. They're inhuman. They had no idea who Trevor was. If I went back there, I'm afraid I would be more inclined to homicide than suicide. That's why I came here.

(To TOM)

I figured I could stay with you, Tom. I could help you out around the house. You know you've never had time for that sort of stuff.

(Laughs)

I remember one time the grass in the yard at Tom's place was so high that you couldn't see the dogs in the back yard till

JOHNNY (Cont'd)

they came up to the fence. And those were some big dogs, Tom.

TOM

Johnny, I don't know that Patty would let you back in the house. She's pretty territorial that way. She's worked hard to make a home. She takes it all too personally. Hell, I leave a beer on the coffee table and I'm in the doghouse for a week.

JOHNNY

Hey, Tom. I'm a new man. . . with new medication.

TOM

So I've heard.

(Pause)

We'd love for you to visit. Hell, the gang is all over there tonight. I think Paul and Annie are gonna stay the weekend. You're more than welcome to stay with us, but I go back out on the road on Monday. . . convention in Burbank.

(Pause)

Don't think that I don't wanna help you, Johnny. I do. It's just that Patty has to come first. And that means. . . that means sayin' no. And you need a place that can look after you. We couldn't, Johnny. You understand?

JOHNNY

Sure, lil' brother. That Patty does run things around there, doesn't she? And Mary? She's gotta be in high school by now, huh?

TOM

College. She's down at Tulane. Her mother and I couldn't be more proud of her.

JOHNNY

Tulane, huh? Wow. That's impressive.

(Large Pause)

Annie, you know I was thinking of coming out to Atlanta. Seein' the boys. I could help Bryan clear out that back acre he has always been talkin' about clearin'.

ANNIE

Oh, he cleared that two summers ago. You should see it, Johnny. They put two more rabbit hutches out there. Then they cut a path down to the water. It looks like a picture postcard.

JOHNNY

Really. That sounds beautiful. Maybe I could come out, stay with you and Pete, and see Bryan's place.

ANNIE

Now Johnny, we're doin' the 4<sup>th</sup> of July again this year. They are gonna induct your little brother, Tom there, into the esteemed ranks of their fishing club.

JOHNNY

Yeah, that would be great. But I was thinking that I might head home with you after this weekend. I mean, you could still fly me out with you, right?

ANNIE

I've got Paul with me this time, Johnny. He and I are flying out to Dallas together. Then I am connecting to Atlanta. I can only take one family guest with me at a time.

JOHNNY

I could catch a bus out to Atlanta. Meet you there by Wednesday. I could. . .

ANNIE

Johnny, you don't wanna do that.

JOHNNY

Hell, I love buses. It'll be just like the old days. Traveling by bus, I mean. I'll just. . .

ANNIE

(Erupting)

Johnny, you don't want to do that. Hell, I don't want to go to Atlanta and I live there. Just trust me. You don't want to go there.

(To TOM and PAUL)

Hell, what is it with you guys? You act like my life in Atlanta is some utopia, like I have all the answers in my little slice of Georgia. You don't know anything about my life in Atlanta. All you see is your nice, little sister who comes to Thanksgiving and Christmas. You don't ever see the woman who dreads every March 22<sup>nd</sup> because it's like every November 22<sup>nd</sup>, which is like every September 4<sup>th</sup>. I don't live in Atlanta. I have yet to die in Atlanta, that's all. You know why Pete is not here right now. Because I told him that he couldn't come. I told him that three months ago so that we would have time to argue about it. I consciously brought it up that far back, knowing that he would be livid and argue. Last week he finally gave in and

ANNIE (Cont'd)

said okay. But this morning, on the way to the airport, he said that he didn't like it one bit. And I'm sure as hell gonna hear about it the minute I get back. I don't want to go home, and it would kill me if I had to take you back there with me, Johnny.

TOM

(After a pause)

We had no idea, Annie.

ANNIE

Course you didn't. I wasn't intending to ever give you the idea that my life in Atlanta was anything worse than Scarlett O'Hara's.

(Pause)

Listen, Pete and I have all the room in the world for you to visit, but you know Pete. You wouldn't want to spend more than a day with him. None of you ever opened a second bottle of Scotch with Pete. And I don't blame you. I couldn't either. We have some wonderful times together, but mostly I dread getting out of bed because that is the last rest I will get for a long time.

PAUL

Annie. . .

ANNIE

It's okay, Paul. I'm fine with it.

(Pause)

I see the kids each and every weekend. Colleen lives just down the street for Christ's sake. They keep me together. Bryan, Penny and the girls come down often. You know, when it comes to our kids, I'm as happy as I could ever be. And Pete, well, he needs me. He's pigheaded and stubborn, but he needs me. We've been married thirty-five years now, and I can't imagine what he would have turned into if he spent another day as a bachelor. You know he can't even cook anything without charcoal and lighter fluid.

PAUL

He does do that well.

ANNIE

Yeah, I guess he does. You really should come this 4<sup>th</sup>. We've got a lot of fish. Hell, Paul even went out this year.

PAUL

That's right, Johnny. Owen took me out with them this year. I learned from the best there. And his boat had the biggest beer cooler. You know you gotta have your standards.

JOHNNY

I guess you do, little brother.

DALE

You guys just about finished in here. We got time to finish these beers, that's about it.

TOM, ANNIE and PAUL

(Ad lib)

Sure, Dale. . . you bet. Will do. . .

(JOHNNY, obviously upset by the events, crosses away from the bar and begins to close himself off from the others. He falls into the repetitive task of taking out a small piece of paper and putting it back in his pocket over and over again, eventually becoming entranced. ANNIE notices JOHNNY's actions and appears quite distraught. TOM crosses to comfort her. PAUL sits quietly at the bar, staring at his beer)

ANNIE

Johnny? Are you okay?

(JOHNNY does not react)

Do you need your medication?

(ANNIE rises and begins to cross to JOHNNY. TOM stops her)

TOM

Annie, wait. He'll be all right.

(ANNIE stops. PAUL looks over at JOHNNY then calmly crosses to JOHNNY's coat, leafs through the pockets and removes a small, clear sandwich bag containing a few individual pills. He crosses to JOHNNY with the medication)

PAUL

(Caringly)

Which ones do you need, Johnny?

(JOHNNY does not respond. PAUL leans in closer, looking for eye contact)

Are they these blue ones?

(JOHNNY looks at PAUL, slightly disoriented at first,  
but slowly recognizes him)

JOHNNY

(Sweetly, as if from a deep sleep)  
Hey there, little brother.

PAUL

Hey there, Johnny. Which pills do you need?

JOHNNY

I didn't take the yellow one tonight.

PAUL

The yellow one?  
(To the bar)  
Dale, you got a glass of water back there?

DALE

Sure do.  
(He gets a glass of water and brings it to PAUL)

JOHNNY

It makes me sleepy. The yellow one.

(PAUL opens a bottle and hands JOHNNY a pill and the  
glass of water. JOHNNY takes the pill)

PAUL

(Lengthy pause, then quietly)  
You can stay with me.

JOHNNY

(As if he can't remember what they were talking about)  
What's that?

PAUL

You can stay with me. . . . if you want to. Just think  
about it.

(PAUL gets up and crosses to the bar. TOM and ANNIE  
cross to him)

ANNIE

(Quietly to PAUL)  
Is he going to be all right?

PAUL

(To ANNIE and TOM)  
He'll be fine. You remember his spells.

TOM

Well yeah, but I thought he was on medication.

PAUL

It's schizophrenia, Tom. It's not a common cold.

JOHNNY

(Suddenly remembers their earlier argument, rises and crosses to PAUL)

What makes you think I wanna stay with you?

PAUL

You said. . .

JOHNNY

I know what I said, but what makes you think that I want to stay with you? Maybe I've inconvenienced you enough.

PAUL

Johnny. . .

TOM

Paul, Johnny let's not get back into this.

PAUL

No, Tom, it's all right. I want my brother to know that whenever he needs me I am right here for him. He can take it or leave it for all I care, but I am going to look out for him.

TOM

So you're saying that I'm not looking out for my brother?

PAUL

I said no such thing. We all know that you could never take Johnny in. Patty would kill you.

(To ANNIE)

And we all know how much you would like to take care of Johnny, Annie, but perhaps you need to take care of yourself first. Me. . . I don't have any reason to be alone. I'm retired now, so I would be able to stay at home with Johnny.

JOHNNY

You're not staying home with anyone. I'm not going with you, Paul.

PAUL

Yes you are, Johnny.

JOHNNY

No I'm not. You were just fighting with me because I. . .

PAUL

(Interrupting, but calm)

Look I've fought my whole life cause I was tired of being the caretaker. . . or the care giver, as they now call it. But I just realized. Perhaps the reason that I am in the position that I am in is so that when you finally come home to us, something that we have waited for for more than twenty years, I would be here. Now all of you know that I am less than a religious man. Hell, none of us have seen a church since Annie and Pete's wedding day. But maybe, maybe, maybe there is a reason for things. Hmmm? Maybe we are not just rambling through this universe oblivious to everything around us. Cancer should have killed me. My body wanted to quit. But something made me go on. Something drove me to the hospitals for the chemotherapy. Something made me get up in the mornings when I knew that it would just be a painful day of running back and forth to the bathroom. Some untouchable thing pulled me or pushed me through that.

(To JOHNNY)

When you said you needed someplace to stay, I realized that maybe, just possibly, this was it. I'm in no way prepared to take care of you. I can't say that it will be pleasant or even tolerable, but it is what I want to do. Perhaps it's what I'm supposed to do.

(JOHNNY stands up slowly. He drinks the rest of the water silently, staring out the glass door. ANNIE crosses to TOM and the two sit quietly. Meanwhile, PAUL has not moved and also sits quietly for an awkward length of time)

JOHNNY

I'm going to the bathroom.

(He exits)

TOM

(To PAUL)

Are you sure this is what you want to do?

PAUL

Honestly. . .no. But I'll take good care of him.

ANNIE

We know you will, Paul. But do you think you have the strength to make it through?



PAUL

Once again a resounding no.

TOM

Well, maybe you should. . .

PAUL

Maybe I should what? Send him back to the hospital. You heard him, Tom. He can't go back there. Why would I send him back?

ANNIE

But what about his medication?

PAUL

I don't know. Do I look like I have all the answers? He's got a few pills in his bag there. We'll go see the doctors in Dallas on Monday and let them know that he'll be staying with me. We'll get him new prescriptions. Hell, anything. I don't know how we're gonna do it, but we'll do it.

ANNIE (simultaneously)

TOM

But don't you think that he might get difficult. You've got other things to think about. Maybe he should. . .

Look, Paul, all we are saying is that this may not be the time for you to get into something like this. . .

(JOHNNY returns from the men's room. Silence)

JOHNNY

(Returning, to PAUL, then as if the original question were still fresh in the air)  
I would like that.

PAUL

You would?

JOHNNY

At least for a little while. I mean nothing permanent or anything.

PAUL

Sure. . . sure. Just for now.

(PAUL and JOHNNY stare at one another for a long time before JOHNNY crosses to PAUL for an embrace)

ANNIE

(Happy that she is off the hook)  
And you can come out with Paul for the 4th of July weekend.

ANNIE (Cont'd)

Pete will be so glad to see you, not to mention Colleen and the boys.

TOM

And we always come to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. That is tradition.

DALE

(Interrupting from behind bar)

And speakin' of tradition, I traditionally close up shop this time of night.

PAUL

Right, yes sir. What do we owe ya?

DALE

Oh, Tom told me this was all going on his tab. It's no problem.

TOM

Yeah, I've got tonight.

DALE

Thanks to Tom's bar tab, I can now do some pretty upper-level math.

TOM

All right Dale, now we'll be in bright and early in the morning. And do a little more math.

(As ANNIE, JOHNNY and TOM start to leave. PAUL reaches behind the bar and grabs their suitcases. They all wave and thank DALE and start out the upstage door)

ANNIE

(To JOHNNY as they are leaving)

You know, Johnny, it wouldn't take much for me to get you on a flight to Dallas with Paul and I. I'll make a couple of calls tomorrow, see what I can do. You remember that flight that you and I took to see Tom when he was staying. . . .

(DALE stops PAUL, who is the last one out)

DALE

I think it's great what you're doin' for your brother there. I mean, taking a guy in like that. . .

PAUL

He's my big brother. He's Johnny. What else could I do?

DALE

I guess you're right. I guess you're right.

(PAUL exits. DALE locks the door behind him, grabs a broom and starts to sweep the floor)

BLACKOUT

On The Writing of  
*Looking for Johnny*

To begin, I would like to set forth the impetus for writing *Looking for Johnny*. At a family gathering (Thanksgiving 1999) I witnessed a poignant and emotionally charged moment between my father, Patrick, his brother, Tim, and their sister, Nancy. The rest of the extended family had left the dining room and were relaxing in the living room and den. I looked back into the dining room as my father and his siblings raised a glass, toasting to my absent uncle, Johnny. There was a mutual desire among them to see Johnny, and they borrowed from the Jewish prayer of Passover, saying "Next Year with Johnny." They hugged one another and then joined the extended family in the living room. It was there that I saw the humanity that I desired to flesh out in dramatic writing.

Returning to school, I discussed the idea with Dr. Fleming, my thesis chairperson. I told him the nature of Johnny's illness that kept him away from his family. I then began interviewing my father, aunt and uncle. I sought flavorful tales of Johnny along with the harsh reality of his condition. My father was able to show me medical documents which chronicled Johnny's condition and his ultimate committal to a psychiatric ward of the Veteran's

hospital in Pensacola, Florida. Here was the heart of the play, I had merely to add a skeletal, muscular and endocrine systems.

Working closely with *The Playwright's Process* by Buzz Mclaughlin, a book that would serve most closely the role of a textbook in my independent studies with Dr. John Fleming, I began the task of plotting out the story line and developing the characters. I had at this point skipped what Mclaughlin calls "the primary communication of a play," the dramatic premise. I knew what the major conflict would be. The characters, who were based on my actual relatives, were already coming to life in my head, but what I wanted to say was not as clear. During the exploration process I decided that the main conflict would surround Johnny's unexpected return, but I was still left with the question of which character would ultimately take care of Johnny. I wanted the audience to be involved and even wrapped up in the search for a caregiver for Johnny. But if I limited the dramatic question to something as simple as "Who would take care of Johnny?," I feared that the audience would not become emotionally involved with any of the characters due to an intense focus being placed on the trivial and superficial. I struggled to find the deeper question that my scenario was asking. In a conversation with Dr. Fleming the answer came. The question I was groping for was as

universal as I desired it to be. "How far would you go for a family member? How much would you sacrifice yourself for a family member?" And when do you say "No" to a family member?

With the dramatic premise in hand I began the arduous task of writing. Early on I found that the discipline of a writer is not something that I keep in my back pocket. I struggled to make my scheduled times to write, finding it easier to place other appointments over my writing times. I was envious of the writer locked in a cabin in the middle of the wilderness, free to spend his day as he pleases, but never able to escape too far from the typewriter.

In fact, I found that my usual technique of sitting down at the computer and simply "becoming the characters" was not even working. The improvisational edge of my writing was hindered and hampered by lack of focus and dedication. Dialogue was still something that came easy at the computer, but I was writing family members. I was writing people who talk just like me.

Another intriguing discovery about my writing style was hinted to in the writing of *South of Vicksburg, North of the Mind*, an independent project that I wrote a year prior. I have a tendency, particularly in first drafts, to merely write down what happens, step by step. Things occur suddenly, devoid of transition. Stories are not as fleshed

out as they would be in a casual conversation, rather a character seems to "blurt" out what they want to get across to another character, and then they move on. In rewriting *South of Vicksburg, North of the Mind*, I found that when I went back in, eventually making the characters take their time in relating to one another, the dialogue seemed more natural and more organic.

With *Looking for Johnny*, the first act is made up almost entirely of stories, as the three siblings get together and each tells a tale or two about life with Johnny. In rereading the text, I found that many of these tales are rushed and sudden and I began to rewrite them, to flesh them out more.

As the characters developed I found a great deal of difficulty writing characters based on family members. I was worried that they would read the play some day and would be upset about being misrepresented in the text. This was most apparent in the writing of Paul, a character based on my father, Patrick. I knew all along that Paul would be the central character in the piece and wanted to show him in the finest light. Apart from Paul, I was concerned that I was not presenting my aunt Nancy, the basis for the character of Annie, in a positive vein. I had changed her marital status at the time of giving birth to her three children and had introduced marital discontent into what reality shows me is

a blissful marriage. After struggling with the ethical question that I had posed myself, I realized that I was taking poetic license with my family and that I was entitled to do so. Short of outright slander, I could use these warm, loving individuals as models because I wasn't writing about them. I was writing about fictional characters loosely based on them.

Freed from the constraints of possible slander, I resumed writing. The stories that make up a great deal of the first act were a pleasure to write. Some of them come from actual incidents in John's life, others I adapted from sources ranging from friends to in-laws. As the stories were easily translated into the speech patterns and fun-loving attitudes of my relatives, they easily became part of the play.

The second act proved a more arduous mountain to scale. Where the first act had simply consisted of these characters discussing an absent Johnny, in the second act they are forced to confront him, or to be confronted by him. The greatest difficulty came in providing an answer to the question of who would care for Johnny. I knew that I wanted Paul to be presented as a natural care-giver, but weren't Tom and Annie equally as qualified to care for their older brother? I began to seek reasons and excuses why they would not be suitable aides to Johnny. In the search I came



across an interesting irony. While Tom is most financially able to shoulder the economic demands of taking Johnny in, and while Annie has the most physical space to offer her oldest brother, Paul, with his social security and his small basement apartment proves the best candidate.

As I neared the conclusion of the initial writing stage, I ran into the same barriers that had blocked my way in earlier scripts: transitions. Some very important, life-altering decisions were being made in the briefest of moments. In the first draft, when Paul finally decides to offer his home to Johnny, the elder brother accepted with little else said. During our weekly discussion of the script, Dr. Fleming and I discussed the possibility that initially Johnny refuses Paul's help. The following week I wrote such a refusal and found that it provided a wonderful dynamic to the scene and to the relationship between the two brothers. When Paul has to defend his offer to help Johnny, it shows the depth of his feelings for Johnny. When Johnny accepts after having argued the point, it shows the desperate nature of his position.

Within the period of time that Johnny takes to decide on Paul's offer is nestled a perfect opportunity for Tom and Annie to voice their concerns about Paul's decision. I removed Johnny to the restroom, as I had done earlier with Paul, in order that the characters remaining on stage might

speak more freely and truthfully. When Annie and Tom take the opportunity to subtextually get themselves off of the hook, Paul is left as the optimal choice for care-giver.

As Johnny returns and the bar closes, we see that the aging Johnny has returned to a family that cares for him, as much as they can. This leads us back to the dramatic premise: How much will you do for a family member? How far will you put yourself out? My hope as a playwright is that each member of the audience will identify and empathize with a singular character onstage and therefore utilize the viewing or reading of the play as a basis for self-examination. I pray that they will leave this play knowing that it is not financial security or real estate that provide the means for helping others, but rather helping others comes from an open and caring heart, regardless of monetary wealth and property.

Personal Response and Criticism  
January 22, 2001

These first ten pages provide a good deal of character exposition. I think that I may need to move the play from Southern Louisiana to South Texas. I truly do not have a great deal of knowledge about the lifestyle of Southern Louisiana. I think that I could provide a great deal of regional flair if the play were set in or around Austin.

As to the driving joke, I am becoming quite partial to the Angus steer scenario.

I believe that I have begun to show within the siblings a sense of doing for each other coupled with a tendency to not allow others to do for you. Paul and Annie won't let Tom come to the airport to pick them up. Annie has offered her flight benefits to the brothers numerous times, but neither will take her up on that. This will cause an interesting conflict when they are forced to refuse to help Johnny later in the second act.

Personal Response and Criticism  
February 5, 2001

I am learning a true appreciation for the writer who can work under a deadline. Moreover, I am truly in awe of the writer who has any sort of a life outside of writing. My schedule has begun to crumble around me like stones in an earthquake stricken building.

To date I have shown little discipline in the area of time management. This has hurt my output for the last two weeks. It is at this time that I must find and embrace the resolve necessary to complete this project on time and with some hint of reputable quality. I will be absent next week, as I will be in Chicago. For this reason, I am attempting to put aside a greater amount of time this week for writing. With a good amount of progress I will be able to return from Chicago with a grasp on my schedule and time frame.

The new pages are the introduction of Act Two. They may turn out to be the end of Act one, depending on a few factors. Johnny has arrived and the conflict is afoot. I am looking for the main reason for Paul's contempt for Johnny. The rape of Laura may seem a bit dramatic. I am working with it at the moment to flesh out the responses by Johnny, Tom and Annie.

Johnny is speaking coherently. This may be due to new medications, which might explain why he did not recognize Paul on the telephone a few years back. If he were in a medicinal transition, he could have been slightly incoherent for a few days, no fault of his own.

The telling of the rape story is very rushed at present. I simply wanted to get it on paper. I will rewrite it in order to provide Tom with the necessary amount of time to tell such a difficult story.

The play is coming to me. I just have no clue where it is going to take me, but maybe that's the right place to be.

Personal Response and Criticism  
February 26, 2001

This week's writing continues on a similar line to the last pages. I have removed the rape reference and replaced it with a simpler device. She just left due to too much competition for Paul's attention. This, in my opinion furthers the idea that Paul puts family before everything.

Along those lines, I want to build up the imagery of Paul's new post-cancer lifestyle. I think that Paul will end up being the one who takes Johnny home with him. It will be his acceptance of his role on this planet: that of a caregiver. Self-less to the end, Paul can then stand as an honorable character.

Technically, the transition from Paul's release into Johnny talking about needing to leave the hospital is not written. I have put in a single line from Dale. "So, what brings you here." If anything I have ever written sounds forcefully forced, that is it. But that is a transition that has not yet come to me.

I feel that I might flesh out Annie's monologue about Pete a little more. I might also add line readings for some of her diverting stuff about the 4th of July, etc. She knows that Johnny is asking her to put him up, she is just trying to avoid it or change the subject.

I may need to change TOM's wife's name from PAULA to PATTY or something. It seems too close to PAUL.

I still don't know what happens after the dialogue in Act One before Johnny comes in. Do they talk about taking care of Johnny before? Perhaps they give the "sun-shiny" version of his staying with them so that when the truth comes out in Act Two, there is a strong opposition of stories.

Personal Response and Criticism  
March 5, 2001

I have the play roughly sketched on the page. What I notice missing is the color and flavor of the three siblings who have gotten together here to drink to Johnny.

I will try to color their exchanges, perhaps adding references to what is going on in their lives at the moment. As is usually the case when people get together, they tend to "catch up" on things. I think this will provide a wonderful garnish around the dialogue about Johnny and the play may read less didactic and direct.

I am battling a few continuity problems. Early in the piece the siblings say that they do not know where Johnny is at that particular moment. Then Paul mentions that Johnny was committed. If he was committed then they should know where he is at all times. Perhaps this is a bit of information that Paul (As Caregiver) holds back from Annie and Tom who are hurt that they weren't kept informed. Perhaps Johnny was never fully committed. Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps.

The writing is becoming meticulous. I seem to spend hours on a single page of dialogue. It is not as free flowing as I have known it to be in the past. I am trying to look at the piece as a whole, in order to see the holes in plot structure and the need for revisions. I will continue to write, but I think that this Spring Break needs to come quickly. I have set up half-days with the people at my job so that I can write.

Why didn't I just do History and Criticism as an emphasis?

I know why...the question was rhetorical.

Personal Remarks and Criticism  
April 6, 2001

The best way for me to describe my writing this week is to make a comparison to trail horses. I worked for a period in the Marine Corps taking care of the stable horses and leading officer's and non-commissioned officer's children on horseback tours. The horses were beautiful creatures, but they had worked this stable for quite a long time. As a result, they had memorized the trails. They knew at each turn where the trail would lead. This is most important in regards to those trails that turned back towards the stable. If a rider turned down one of these trails, the horse would immediately pick up his or her pace, knowing that they were returning to the rest and relaxation of the stable. Some horses would return to the stable at a full gallop, regardless of any tugging of the reins or hollering of "Whoa!"

In regards to my play, I have turned to the stable. I am "heading for the barn" and the writing is shallow and overly hasty. I will endeavor to correct this in the coming week.

A few more minor changes earlier in the play. In Act One Paul says he is going to call home and tell the kids that he got in alright. Paul doesn't have children. I have amended the line.

Also Tom tells Johnny that Paul is staying the weekend, but Annie is staying also as the two of them are flying out earlier. I corrected the line to read that Paul and Annie were staying this weekend.

I am also beginning to prepare some of the additional writing materials (Vita, abstract and Title and Contents pages.)

I realize that deadlines are being adjusted for my project and am aware of the incredible amount of work left to complete.

Personal Remarks and Criticism  
April 18, 2001

Midnight revelation.

Act Two was missing one thing (if not many.) There is no physical sign that Paul is the right choice for caregiver. The addition of Johnny's episode provides it. It may be too sudden, however.

Also, it is clear to me that Tom is the wealthiest, Annie has the most physical room for Johnny, but Paul is the best candidate. I would like to look for earlier points in the script to hint at these attributes of the three.

Dale's call to close the bar reads like, "Okay, time for the curtain."

Also, I would like Johnny's "reawakening" to parallel the phone call. Perhaps I will use the same line, "Hello there, little brother."



## VITA

John Walter Kelley was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on February 28, 1969, the daughter of Patrick Joseph Kelley and Joan Louise Kelley. Following his work at Arlington High School in Arlington, Texas, John entered the United States Marine Corps, where he served four years, including service in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. Following his military service, John returned home and began performing at Six Flags over Texas, a position he would hold for eight years. John attended Tarrant County Junior College in Hurst, Texas, where he received an Associate of Arts degree. He continued his education at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, Texas, ultimately earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1998. In September 1999, John entered the Graduate School of Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas.

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