

GIVING

A New Play

By Tom Attea

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THE CHARACTERS

DAN AMBROSE, Bob's brother; a poet

RITA AMBROSE, Dan's wife; a maker of craft jewelry

AMBROSE, Investor and philanthropist

SALLY AMBROSE, Bob's wife and a foundation partner

ED AMBROSE, Bob's father; a physician

MARTHA AMBROSE, Bob's mother; a librarian

MAYOR JOHN GRAHAM, mayor

JACK HARMON, childhood friend of Bob's and union leader

Time: The present

Place: A town in southwestern Pennsylvania that has known better times.

Settings: The Ambrose living room and Dan's studio

ACT I

Scene 1

Ambrose living room. Dan is lying on the couch, reading a book.
Rita is leafing through a craft magazine.

RITA

Maybe we should have gone to the groundbreaking.

DAN

What for? To see the entire town prostrate itself before him?

Sound at door.

RITA

They're back.

DAN

So what?

(Bob opens the door. Martha, Sally, and Ed enter. Bob follows,
closing the door)

MARTHA

(to Dan and Rita)

You two should have been there.

(to Dan)

You would've been so proud of your brother. The mayor said the nicest things about him.

ED

It's not in his nature. He's too busy avoiding gainful employment.

BOB

One day he'll change.

MARTHA

(To Bob)

He could accomplish so much.

ED

I have no evidence. He is his willfully insignificant self.

RITA

Can you please stop picking on him? His head is just in a different place.

ED

You got that right. In a land where they still haven't invented money.

MARTHA

(to Sally)

The poor dear. I always say, if it was raining dollar bills, he'd have an umbrella.

DAN

Thanks. Nothing like parental encouragement.

RITA

Why can't you just respect our choices?

ED

What does that mean, Rita? Giving up on you?

(to Sally)

I don't know what went wrong. The night Martha and I made him, I sent out my usual genetically first-rate two-hundred-and-fifty-million sperm.

MARTHA

Please, Ed, you know I don't like when you talk that way.

ED

If even a physician can't talk about human reproduction, who can? I tell you, Sally, the sperm that reached the dock where her egg happened to be there waiting was every bit as princely as the one we made Bob with. And Martha's eggs, why they were always first-rate, too! Month after month, as good as ova get.

MARTHA

Are you done now, Ed?

ED

Yes, I am. I merely wanted to exonerate us.

(to Sally)

See how it is? A man can get in trouble the minute he talks about anything other than the weather.

DAN

Consider yourself fortunate. I get into trouble even when I don't talk.

ED

You're a bump on a log, that's what. Someday I'm gonna throw you in the river when it's nice and muddy, so no one can fish you out.

DAN

You've been telling me that since I was old enough to understand the absurdity of the threat.

ED

Yeah, well, next time it rains --

RITA

-- can we all just cool it?

MARTHA

I agree. I'm going to have a cup of tea. Would anybody else like one?

SALLY

Yes, thank you.

MARTHA

Bob, dear?

BOB

Got any Diet Snapple?

MARTHA

I bought some yesterday, just for you. What would you like, Ed?

ED

I'll have a glass of wine.

MARTHA

It's a little early, isn't it?

ED

Some days it gets late much earlier.

(to Sally)

There are days when you wait for the sun to go down below the yardarm and days when you raise the yardarm.

MARTHA

You deserve whatever you want, sweetheart. It's Saturday.

She heads for the exit to the kitchen. Ed follows.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I'll get everything.

ED

I'd rather not wait till your water boils.

MARTHA

Then you can bring Bob his Snapple, too?

ED

(to Dan and Rita)

You two want anything?

SALLY

I'm OK.

DAN

I could use a glass of wine myself.

ED

I thought you might. The only thing that might save him is he does know how to savor the good things in life. He just hasn't figured out how to afford them, yet.

Martha and Ed exit.

BOB

(to Dan)

Up to your ass in alligators, huh?

DAN

I have no ass left. This is your day, Bob. Enjoy it.

BOB

Thanks.

(means to include Sally)

We are, immensely.

SALLY

It's wonderful to see how much we've been able to help the town.

RITA

We're happy about what you're doing. This burg needs all the help it can get.

BOB

It has since before I was born.

(to Dan)

BOB (CONT'D)

Speaking about needing help.

DAN

Don't go there, please, Bob.

BOB

Not you. Me. I really could use --

DAN

-- me. Sorry, I'm not available.

SALLY

(to Bob)

Relax, sweetheart. He's not going to listen.

BOB

(to Sally)

Ya never know, dear. Sometimes all it takes is one more knock to open a door.

DAN

You're an optimistic fool.

BOB

Am I? What I am is brilliant enough to see through the obstacles that get in most people's way. How many books have been written about you? Do you know how many have been written about me? I am Trader Bob. Try not to forget that.

DAN

I'm still waiting for the unlikely moment when I might be given the opportunity.

BOB

Oh, come on, I'm hardly ever back home. Excuse me for saying so, but the one thing I notice about you every time I am is you're always in the same place. No growth, no growth at all.

DAN

How do you measure that, Bob -- on the stock market?

BOB

Actually, it's a sequence. The market goes up, the funds in the foundation go up. So Sally and I can accomplish more. If you'd get off your ass and join us --

DAN

(rises)

-- I am off my ass. See. Now, look, Bob, I love ya. Honest to God, I do. Despite your untold billions, you're a wonderful and an honorable man. As far as billionaires go, no doubt among the best on the planet. But hear me out for just one second. I happen to like the road I'm on. In fact, I've dedicated my life to it. And I've done it knowing full well how unlikely significant monetary rewards are.

(raises voice)

Do you by some chance hear what I'm saying?

BOB

I can even hear you when you don't shout. It's just that --

DAN

-- What the hell do you want me to do, Bob? Walk out on the life I believe in with all my heart and soul to enslave myself to your conspicuously noble philanthropic endeavors?

BOB

Enslave yourself? Hey, kid, I'm offering you the opportunity to help manage me manage it.

DAN

Thank you. I know. It's hardly the first time. But don't you get it? Doing that would wither my soul -- and the soul of any other poet.

BOB

Really? What about James Merrill? If I remember correctly, his father co-founded Merrill Lynch. Wealth didn't seem to get in the way of his dedication to poetry.

DAN

Notice, however, that he did not follow in his father's footsteps, despite, I'm sure, being repeatedly badgered to do so.

BOB

What? You can't multitask?

(to Rita)

What do you think about all this?

RITA

I think you should back off.

SALLY

Of course, you do. You love him.

RITA

The way he is.

DAN

Thank you.

RITA

You're welcome.

(to SALLY)

I'm lucky I can get him to help me set up at the flea market.

DAN

(to Sally)

She always expects me to drop whatever I'm doing the instant she needs me. I'm supposed to be a goddam jack-in-the-box. She pushes the button; I pop up.

RITA

That's not true.

DAN

Oh, no?

(to Sally)

I could be in the middle of writing the greatest poem of my life, and she expects me to stop the instant she calls me.

(to Rita)

Well, children think that way. They stand in the crib and cry for their milk. Adults learn to give each other a few seconds to heat up the bottle.

RITA

If I grew up, you'd be bored to death.

(to Rita)

He likes my remaining childlike characteristics.

DAN

Not true at all. I like when you're the great lady you are.

(to Sally)

She has anxiety of separation about her childhood. Still has every doll she ever owned.

RITA

What's wrong with that?

(to Sally)

I think they're lovely. You should see the little dresses I made for them.

SALLY

I'm sure they're lovely, Rita.

(to Dan)

She demands very little, and you know it.

DAN

And what do I demand?

SALLY

But most women –

DAN

-- I don't care about most women. As soon as you talk about "most," "generally speaking," or any other such indiscriminate categorization, you're talking about people I usually find less than enthralling.

(to Rita)

Come on, Rita, what else do you need?

(refers to Sally)

Conspicuously costly material things draped all over you?

BOB

Hey, Dan, cool it, OK?

RITA

When have I ever asked for --

DAN

-- OK, sorry. I'm just a bit overwrought. It isn't every day that I have to defend my calling on multiple fronts. What do we have here anyway, but words in the air? So can we all just cool it?

RITA

I'm for that. Just give me a little credit, will you?

DAN

Fine. Give me a little, too.

SALLY

She does more than that. She puts up with you.

DAN

Thanks. Is that what you do, Rita? Put up with me?

RITA

Will you stop it already?

DAN

Just kidding. You know I love you.

RITA

(to Sally)

What can I say? I have the same problem. I love him, too.

SALLY

You must. But don't you ever miss having really nice things?

DAN

What do you mean? The kind of designer dreck you wear?

BOB

Hey, kid, calm down. You can criticize me, but Sally is off bounds.

DAN

Sorry, but I reject all luxuries.

BOB

How do you reject what you can't afford?

SALLY

It's so wonderfully noble of you.

DAN

I prefer a life where I have time for traveling in ...

(points to head; quotes Keats)

... "the realms of gold." I am, however, also capable of a generous sentiment. So let me say to both of you that, in your own ways, you have extraordinary redeeming merits.

BOB

Hey, thanks, that makes me feel really splendid.

SALLY

I'm overwhelmed myself.

DAN

Just grant me my humble life, will you?

(to Sally)

Don't be too angry with me. Anybody who helps my egomaniacal brother is a friend of mine.

BOB

If I'm an egomaniac, what's that make you?

DAN

Your brother. Your pain-in-the-ass, proud-to-be-poverty-stricken brother. OK?

SALLY

Maybe we'll just steal Rita.

(to Rita)

I could use your help. The foundation has so many global initiatives now.

RITA

Thanks, Sally, but I like where I'm at, too. I know you're used to much more expensive jewelry, but look at this piece.

(holds out arm with steel and turquoise bracelet)

Beautiful, isn't it?

SALLY

Yes, it is.

RITA

Thanks. It's my latest design.

DAN

She can let you have it for a discount.

Sally doesn't know how to react.

BOB

Thanks. So that's it, huh? You two are content spending half your lives meditating in New Mexico and the other half hustling trinkets like that at flea markets?

RITA

Thanks for the compliment.

DAN

Don't criticize what you evidently don't understand.

BOB

What's hard to understand? You both tuned out in when you were in college and still haven't gotten past it. You're trapped in a past that has disabled you from accomplishing the great things you could in the rough and tumble of the real world.

DAN

What's wrong with living at peace with yourself and the earth, instead of chasing megabucks and overcoming your guilt by giving piles of it away?

BOB

Money gains its value by how you use it. I'm inviting you to help me alleviate hunger and disease, help overcome ignorance and the ravages it inflicts on human potential, fund scientific research and, yes, art institutions I admire, while you prefer to devote yourself exclusively to --

DAN

-- Trying to contribute something of value my own way.

RITA

Actually, he probably works as hard as you do.

BOB

"Contribute" is certainly the operative word. What do you have to show for all the years you've been writing poetry? Wornout pants?

DAN

My work has been published in some of the finest literary magazines in the country.

BOB

I've read your poetry. It's very damn personal.

DAN

What else would make it honest?

BOB

I'll tell you, in my own humble opinion. You would break out of the hall of mirrors you inhabit and be the great soul who expresses the uncertain inner lives and fragile hopes we all harbor, so we'd know we're not alone. Isn't that what all the mass media in the world can't do? It's all just information. Information that's so prevalent we all have to keep ducking around it to have our own thoughts.

DAN

Very well expressed, for a goddam stockbroker. But you can only get to that kind of material through your own inner life.

(quotes Philip Sidney)

"Fool, look into thy heart and write!"

BOB

Sorry to transgress on your domain.

DAN

Then don't do it anymore.

BOB

OK. I'll talk about what I do know. I'm currently attempting to conduct a distinguished self-funded philanthropic organization in fourteen countries, and it's gotten impossible for the two of us to manage it properly.

SALLY

We hardly have time to catch our breaths. And we don't like that, do we, dear?

BOB

No, we don't.

(to Dan)

Believe it or not, we still have the ability to kick back and experience joy. Don't snort. It's part of the reward for the billions I've earned and the good work we do. It's not as easy as you think to give away money intelligently.

DAN

Excuse me. I can't identify with the problem.

BOB

But you could, if you didn't just see it as money. It's an instrument for good. And when you give it away with vision, you improve countless lives – and the rewards are –

DAN

-- Yours, not mine. Do you know what you are, Bob? A wily rascal, always bent on getting your own way. Been that way since we were kids. But I tell you, the irony is just too big. I mean, is the world upside down or what? I'm the one who opted for the ideals – peace, love, joy, one planet and one life. All the really important stuff. And you headed straight for Wall Street! And now you're the one –

BOB

-- with the resources to make great things happen in the real world. When will you get it, Dan? No money, no power. Like it or not, that's the way it is. It's called the economic basis of society. I don't care how glorious your mind is, without money, you're treated like a bum on the street. That even applied to people like Mother Theresa. If you don't have money, you can't even have the Sisters of Charity.

DAN

You know what your trouble is, Bob? You have the same shortcoming as Napoleon. You're like a condottiere. You don't want to trust anybody except your own brother, no matter how unsuited he is for the position. Look around your worldwide foundation. Or right in your hugely successful investment company. No doubt you're passing over some deserving General Ney for your unqualified brother. Most important of all, let me get on with the life I've chosen – chosen and much prefer. Do you hear that?

BOB

You mean, the life you're crucified to, crucified to by your own hands. Why decide to come down when you can just keep nailing yourself to it? Why not? Sacrifice is glory. Grow up, will you? It's time to pull the nails out, land on your feet, and start to accomplish the amazing things I know you're capable of.

DAN

As if you're not crucified to your money. The only thing you have over me is your nails are made of gold.

BOB

Ed enters with two glasses of wine and a bottle of Diet Snapple.

ED

All right, all right. Enough contention. Time for the nectar of the gods.

(hands Bob Diet Snapple and hands Dan glass of wine; to Dan)

Here.

(to Bob)

Be like me, Bob. Write him off.

(toasts Bob)

Here's to your new-found discretion.

(picks up notebook)

Now, I have to work the numbers.

BOB

Sure, Dad.

(refers to notebook)

... I still don't understand how you do that.

ED

I thought you were a mathematical genius.

BOB

Some people have called me one. But I admit your technique is beyond me.

ED

As long as you've shown an interest, I'll give you the top line.

(opens notebook)

Here's the number that hit yesterday. Now, I take the first numeral in the series, "three," and I count down from it – four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, zero, one, two. Got it?

BOB

Go on.

ED

Then I do the same with the next digit, which is six, and so on, till I have a column based on the number that hit today.

BOB

I can count. So?

ED

You still don't get it? Look. Now, I can see how the winning number moved. Yesterday the first numeral was a seven. It moved to three. That's down four. The second was a five, which moved to an eight. Up a distance of three.

BOB

So? How does that relate to reality?

ED

(to Sally)

That's all he can say?

(to Bob)

I average the way the numerals in the series move over time. And that's how I pick the next number to bet on.

BOB

I see. I'm glad you don't invest much on the outcome.

ED

I don't. I also admit it's not an exact science. So I fudge a little. I block the number. Then, no matter what order the sequence of numerals I bet on hits, I win. And, to cover myself even more, I bet on eight to ten numbers a day. A nickel on this one, a dime on that one, sometimes a dollar. But the payoff is big.

BOB

When was the last time you won?

ED

Last week. I bet a quarter and made a hundred and twenty-seven dollars.

BOB

Really?

ED

Yeah. And, if you want to know, the boys have sent someone over to my office more than once to find out how I win so often. I told him I guess I'm just lucky. Ha! Luck has nothing to do with it! It's my system.

(Martha enters with tea)

BOB

Maybe I should give up the stock market for this.

MARTHA

Let the poor dear alone. At least, it keeps him busy.

ED

The humble recreation of a man who can't stand television.

(starts to cry)

Why, why did it have to happen to Mary Jo?

MARTHA

Poor Mary Jo. I know she's in heaven.

BOB

You're right, Mom. If anybody is, she is.

(to Ed)

You can't keep doing this to yourself, Dad. It's not good for you.

RITA

He cries every day.

BOB

Come on, Dad.

(raises Snapple)

You still have a couple of great sons, you know?

ED

Don't overcount.

(raises glass)

Salute. Salute to wine, women, my one and maybe two sons, a good day at the office, and hitting the number!

BOB

(toasts back)

Salute! There's only one of you, Dad.

BOB (CONT'D)

(to Martha)
And there's only one of you, Mom.

MARTHA

Thank you.
(to Sally)
Here's your tea, dear.

SALLY

Thank you.

MARTHA

I heard what was happening from the kitchen.
(to Dan)
You should take your brother up on his offer. Soon he'll be gone and –

DAN

-- Mom, if I don't catch a break soon, I'm going to freak out.

MARTHA

Oh, don't be so sensitive. We just want what's best for you.

DAN

I'd rather kill myself. Which is what I'd be doing anyway.

MARTHA

Don't kid that way.

ED

Don't worry, Martha. He loves himself too much for that.
(to Dan)
Besides, what would Rita do without you? She'd have to go to the flea market by herself.
(to Rita)
Can't you think of something more distinguished to do with your life? The example might help reform him.

DAN

She's not trying to, because she happens to like what she does. We both do.

BOB

Right. Poetry you hardly ever get paid for. And homemade jewelry. How much do you charge for that stuff?

SALLY

Bob, I think she makes very attractive jewelry.

DAN

How wonderfully condescending of you.

ED

(looks up from his notebook)

You wouldn't be caught dead wearing it. Look at yourself. What a fashionable beauty you are!

SALLY

Thank you. I do like lovely things, but I'm not obsessed with them.

(to Rita)

There are only two ways to go beyond material things – to have everything or nothing. Anything in between is fraught with temptation.

RITA

I'm perfectly content with --

ED

-- What? Tin and mineral rocks. You're not between, kid. You're without.

MARTHA

Please, Ed. Be nice.

ED

I have no further comment.

DAN

I wish.

RITA

(to Sally)

I don't understand. How can you indulge in all sorts of luxuries when you're acutely aware that millions of people all over the world –

BOB

-- Better us than some totally self-interested creeps.

DAN

That's the excuse?

BOB

Somebody in this world should be happy or why does the sun even come up, as a cruel joke?

DAN

Happy with what?

BOB

With who we are, smartass.

SALLY

Besides, somebody has to support the people who make luxuries. And we volunteer, don't we, dear?

DAN

How touching. You give away money to excuse yourselves from pigging out.
(takes sip of wine and savors it)

BOB

I do find it comforting to have a conscience. I agree with dad, though. I can tell by how you savor that wine that enjoy the good things in life.

ED

One day it may save his butt. But I'm not holding my breath.

DAN

You don't have to be rolling in money to have good taste.

MARTHA

Dears, can we just enjoy our beverages?

SALLY

I agree.

(sips her tea)

Delicious. Thanks again.

ED

(holds up wine)

What you girls need is your daily supply of resveratrol. Two of my favorite conclusions of recent medical research are, one, that red wine is good for your heart, and, two, so is dark chocolate.

MARTHA

Maybe I'll have some later, dear.

(to Bob)

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Everyone in Cokeville is so grateful for what you're doing.

ED

They sure are, son. This town needs new industry like breath itself, and the perfect choice is making solar panels. As the mayor said at the dedication, it's a big step toward taking the area from dependence on fossil fuels to the era of renewable energy.

(raises glass to Bob)

It was especially big of you to overcome your reluctance.

BOB

Thanks, Dad. Getting there isn't what I'd call a cakewalk.

MARTHA

(to Sally)

There was hardly a day when one foolish child or another didn't make fun of him or beat him up, just because he liked to read. He was an early bloomer.

SALLY

He shared all that with me.

MARTHA

I used to tell him it's just because the other kids knew they'd never be able to afford to go to college, unless they were lucky enough to get a football scholarship.

(to Dan)

Danny didn't have the same problem. When he was in high school, he was crazy about basketball.

ED

And drag racing. My patients told me. They knew the family car.

MARTHA

He was a late bloomer.

DAN

(refers to Bob)

You mean I was hipper than goody two-shoes here. And remember, Mom, I helped you with your master's thesis in library science when I was just eighteen. I did it during summer vacation between my freshman and sophomore years.

MARTHA

I asked him to, because he has a much better way with words than I do. I had done all my research and had it on a big pile of index cards. He took them and made the paper flow so well

MARTHA (CONT'D)

the professor gave us an A. He loved the simile Danny came up with that books are like links in a chain that connect us with the past.

BOB

Good thought, Dan!

DAN

Thanks. And, remember, I did take one piano lesson when I was about twelve.

(to Sally)

When I left, I crept along the sides of buildings, so no one would see me.

SALLY

Why did you do that?

DAN

Because back then, if you took piano lessons in this town and you were a guy, the other kids did the same thing they did to Bob for reading.

RITA

Dan told me he didn't realize you could read without getting beaten up until he got to college.

DAN

(to Sally)

In my freshman year, I used to come home from basketball practice, exhausted. My roommate was a highly admired straight-A student. He would already have all his homework done. I realized it was time to give up round ball if I wanted to become the person I thought I could be.

ED

What? A poet?

DAN

Yeah. I knew I had a lot of catching up to do.

ED

You still do.

(toasts Bob)

You're my hero, son.

BOB

Thanks. I tell you, it's so damn rewarding to give away money with care and insight it's almost selfish.

DAN

Then why don't you give it all away?

BOB

I made a living will to do just that. Joined Warren Buffet and Bill Gates in that pledge. Just reserved enough for Sally to live comfortably if nature taps me on the shoulder first and says game over.

SALLY

Will you please stop talking that way?

(to Martha)

I worry that he's ten years older than I am.

BOB

It's not just age, Sally. It's a man's usual lot, at least before women became more prevalent in the workplace. Dealing with the hard edge of necessity every day slices off a certain number of years.

DAN

Especially when you find it necessary to earn gazillions. My poetry costs nothing to write or get published.

BOB

You've always been looking for sanctuary, Dan, sanctuary from the real world.

DAN

How else could I find the space to do my work – running from one dreary meeting to the next like you?

ED

Did you say work?

DAN

Thanks, Dad.

(to Bob)

I'll never come to terms with capitalism, even if you put wrapping paper and a ribbon on it.

BOB

It's just another name for individual freedom, kid. And, like freedom, it's often misused. You should know from the experience of the Soviet Union – the minute the government owns your meal ticket, you're a slave. And the people with original thoughts are the first to be silenced. If you think about it, even nature is a capitalist.

DAN

Sure, it is. And no doubt so is Santa Claus.

BOB

OK. What if nature functioned like a communist and decided that the earth has all the water and the moon has none. So it sends some there. And what about Mars? Before you know it, there'd be an equal amount of water everywhere, but not enough to support life anywhere.

DAN

Yeah, and how about the atmosphere? It's free for everyone. No charge. No profit.

BOB

Sure, so let's ship half of it off to the moon!

DAN

Actually, one of the redeeming merits I've noticed about human beings is that they seem to need to justify their actions to themselves. Unfortunately, it's often just a way for people to undermine their conscience. No doubt the knuckleheads who set fire to the great library at Alexandria decided they were doing the right thing, too.

BOB

No doubt. But you would hardly have found me among them. I was a big reader before you even cracked your first book.

DAN

It's common knowledge that mathematical minds are often precocious.

BOB

Yes, that's frequently the case. But I'm still a big reader. And I've built more libraries in underdeveloped countries than you've graced with your presence in America.

DAN

I know that, and I commend you for it. But can't you just live and let live? Look at nature my way. No two people or anything else is exactly alike. And what does that signify? Nature loves diversity. So get off my case, will you?

RITA

I could use a joint.

DAN

So could I.

(holds up glass)

But I think I'll enjoy some more nectar of the gods.

ED

Why not, as long as it's free? There's half a bottle left.

(to Rita, as he holds up glass)

Why not upgrade? Then you wouldn't have to step outside and stink up the neighborhood.

(to Sally)

Imagine – millions of areolae in the lungs, one cell thick, and every minute all the blood in your body rushes through there, giving up carbon dioxide, grabbing oxygen, and rushing to the far corners of your body, taking the poison with it.

(to Rita)

You know how vascular your breasts are? And how much garbage is getting dumped there? One day your tits are gonna fall off, right into your lap.

MARTHA

Ed, let the poor girl alone.

RITA

Don't worry, Mom. I'm used to it by now.

(to Ed)

As a physician, I thought you might also have heard – cannabis has real medical benefits.

ED

Yes, it does have certain medicinal effects. But it's better to avoid it if you're of a child-bearing age.

(to Martha)

Big mammary glands like that and doesn't even want to produce one grandchild.

RITA

There are enough humans in the world already. It's overrun with them.

ED

What if your parents had said that?

(to Sally)

And what about you? Too damn busy to slow down long enough to get pregnant.

SALLY

We're working on it.

ED

(to Bob)

What's the problem, bad aim? Go to a fertility clinic. I'm getting too old to wait any longer. Be dead and gone before my first grandchild is born.

MARTHA

I'm not getting any younger, either, girls.

DAN

Sometimes I think, with the way most kids act today, people should stop having them until the ungrateful little bastards wise up.

RITA

But keep the faith. Ya never know.

ED

What do you mean?

RITA

Tell him.

DAN

You tell him.

RITA

We have begun to wonder that maybe it would be all right to have maybe one child.

ED

Good. How about two? That's the replacement ratio. Or who's gonna inherit the world? More people who won't have the sense to take care of it. Then the health of this whole glorious island of life in the known universe will be downgraded to barely habitable.

(to Dan)

What do you say, son? Get to work.

DAN

Well, Dad, you never know when a particularly resourceful sperm may reach the finish line.

RITA

Thanks, Dan. That's so romantic.

MARTHA

You are your father's son.

ED

Sometimes, I question that.

DAN

It's a two-way street, Dad.

BOB

(looks at watch; to Sally)
We have to go soon. The jet will be ready in about an hour.

SALLY

You're right, dear.

DAN

Time flies when you're having fun.

ED

At my age, it flies even when you're not.

BOB

Come on, Dad, you're still in ace shape.

ED

Not the way I used to be, before your sister was killed.

(holds out hand; it shakes)

Early Parkinson's. From the trauma.

(starts to cry)

MARTHA

Please, Ed, don't.

ED

Killed in a goddam car accident at the age of sixteen! Why did it have to happen to her?

BOB

We all think about it, Dad. I remember when I walked downstairs the next morning and saw you and Mom, sitting on the couch with a guy I didn't know between you. He had a white three-ring binder on his lap. When I asked what was going on, you told me you were picking out a tombstone. That's how I found out.

(to Dan)

I was eleven.

DAN

I was six.

ED

Her boyfriend was an Eagle Scout. He should have known not to move her. Then all she might have had is a broken rib, instead of a pierced lung. The worst part is being a physician and knowing, if the hospital she was taken to that night had even one halfway-decent surgeon on

ED (CONT'D)

duty, he could have stopped the bleeding and she'd still be alive.

DAN

Come on, Dad. It's not good for you.

MARTHA

It's so sad. Sometimes I want to lock myself in my room again and never come out.

BOB

A year of that was more than enough, Mom. We need you in our lives.

MARTHA

But Mary Jo was so special. The Valedictorian of her class. The head cheerleader, too. And she played the piano so beautifully.

(to Sally)

She used to play the Grand Polonaise by Chopin or other pieces for her class functions.

ED

Her playmates would come marching in, and there she'd be, sitting at the school piano, like an angel.

BOB

She was the best one of us all.

DAN

No doubt about it.

MARTHA

When I die, I know I'll be with her again.

ED

If anybody's going to heaven, Martha, it's you.

(to Sally)

I told her, she's such a good Catholic the pope should fly in to confess to her. Me?

(raises glass)

I'm bribing my way in. I figured out there are no grapevines in the clouds. So from time to time I offer the heavenly host a sip.

MARTHA

Please, Ed.

(to Sally)

I pray every day that he'll get into heaven, too.

ED

I'm on the right track. You know from the Last Supper that they like wine up there.

MARTHA

If you don't mind, I'll keep praying for you.

BOB

Just take good care of each other. We need you, Mom.

(to Ed)

That goes for you, too, big guy.

ED

Thanks. But I'm not the man I used to be.

(to Bob)

Remember when I could put a penny on the rug, do a one-hand pushup and pick it up with my teeth? Well, I can't do it anymore.

BOB

Don't sweat it. I never could do it.

DAN

That makes two of us.

BOB

Look, Dan, before I head out, let me make an offer that doesn't require you to uproot your life. How about you keep an eye on the factory for me?

DAN

How am I supposed to do that? I'm not a businessman.

ED

There's an understatement.

BOB

(to Dan)

I have people in place to keep track of the numbers. All I'm asking you to do is keep tabs on it and make sure everything seems to be going smoothly. I'll pay you more than you can imagine to do it.

DAN

You really know how to tempt a guy, don't you? You don't need me to look in on the factory, anymore than you need me to do backward somersaults. You're just trying to ease me into where you want me to end up. So enthralled with the joys of money that I lose my independence. Well, no

DAN (CONT'D)

thanks. I may be broke, but I'm good as long as I have Rita and time for what I've dedicated my life to. In sum, love and lit'.

ED

And my wine.

SALLY

That's all well and good, Dan. But I think you should reconsider Bob's offer. I was a happy camper, too, as an account manager at Citibank. Then I got to know Bob and saw how much good you can do with money. And here I am – happier than ever and madly in love.

BOB

Me, too, dear.

DAN

Very touching. Money meets money and lives happily ever after.

ED

It's better than moron flees from money.

SALLY

I don't understand why you can't write poetry in your free time.

DAN

Just find a little place to slip it in – and forget I've compromised my ideals?

BOB

If I remember correctly from my lit courses, the poet Wallace Stevens worked in an insurance company. And wasn't William Carlos Williams a doctor?

DAN

Now, you're a poetry expert, too.

ED

You're not the only one with a college education. I paid for two. And one learned something useful.

BOB

Has it ever occurred to you that, if you didn't have to worry about finances, you'd be able to write poetry with complete peace of mind?

DAN

You will never understand, Bob.

BOB

I'm running short on time. So let me get to the bottom line. You have no money and you prefer it that way? The lack of it and the inevitable stresses have not robbed you of the goodness you need to give works of value to the world?

DAN

I have enough.

BOB

I agree. More than enough.

ED

Break the news to the idiot.

DAN

What news?

BOB

Check your checking account.

DAN

I know about what's in there.

ED

Sure, you do. It never changes.
(makes a zero with his fingers)
Zero today. Zero tomorrow.

BOB

Until yesterday.

DAN

(anxiously)
What's up here?

BOB

Your current balance. I was hoping to change your mind first, but it's now somewhat larger than usual.

DAN

Oh, it is, huh? May I ask by how much?

BOB

How about ten million dollars?

DAN

You son of a bitch.

(takes out his smartphone; starts searching)

MARTHA

Most people would be grateful, Dan.

DAN

Because he's trying to buy me out of my life?

(clicks on screen; holds up phone)

How could you do this to me?

RITA

(looks)

My God, is that funny or what?

DAN

What is funny, Rita?

RITA

You with ten million dollars. In what life did you expect that to happen?

DAN

Please, Rita. I can't be bought.

ED

(to Dan)

Sure, you can't. Put that thought in your hash pipe and let it go up in smoke.

BOB

Here's the worst news of all, kid. You can do whatever you want with it.

DAN

Can I shove it up your ass? Who gave him my account number?

ED

I did. I've made enough donations to know it by heart.

DAN

Oh, great. Even my own father –

SALLY

-- Why not just accept it, Dan?

ED

Most people would fall on their knees to have such a thing to accept. Come on, son. Strain your brain and think of something useful to do with it.

SALLY

What about those Indian tribes in New Mexico you two talk about? I'm sure they could use some assistance. What do you think, Rita?

RITA

I hear ya. But frankly this is all way too much for me to wrap my head around right now. Just too, too much.

BOB

Sally just mentioned a great idea. Why not go for it?

DAN

Yeah, right. Walt Whitman becomes Andrew Carnegie. I cannot fucking believe this!

(dials on smartphone)

Dial this. Dial that. A computerized voice. Another wonderful achievement of modern man. It's so impersonal it withers my soul. Ah, at last. Hello. I'd like to know how to return a deposit. It was a mistake. Account number 67506842. What was the name of my first pet? Roscoe. Thanks... I know it's an unusually large amount. I'll be there tomorrow.

(hangs up; to Bob)

Thanks to you, I have to go there in person.

ED

Look on the bright side. He could have given you twenty million.

DAN

I'm writing you a check right now.

(stands)

For the full amount. I'll be right back

(starts to leave)

How many goddam zeros does it take to make ten million dollars?

BOB

(crosses arms)

Doesn't matter. It's all yours. The foundation has recorded it as a donation to an exceptionally promising artist.

MARTHA

Danny, stop behaving like a child.

SALLY

You really are being quite silly about it.

ED

Think of Rita. Maybe even take her shopping and buy her a decent dress.

RITA

I really don't need one.

ED

I know. No runs in your stockings, either. Because you don't even own a pair.

MARTHA

It wouldn't be so bad to have at least one nice new dress, Rita.

ED

And underwear without holes.

MARTHA

Ed!

ED

Hey, I've seen them. That's the price of living here six months out of the year. Everybody gets to see the laundry.

DAN

I will write the check and you will take it!

BOB

(closes arms)

No thanks. You know why? Because I love you.

DAN

You mean you love to get your way.

BOB

Actually, I do.

(stands)

We have to leave for the airport.

DAN

Do not leave without a check. I'll be right back.

MARTHA

But, Danny, just think. Now, you can spend the rest of your life writing poetry, without a financial worry in the world.

ED

Maybe even move out and write it in a home of your own.

BOB

Whatever you and Rita want. That's the real point. Not what I want. What you want.

DAN

Bullshit.

BOB

(to Ed and Martha)

I did a little something for you, too.

MARTHA

Thank you, son. You've already given us more than enough.

ED

He certainly has. You'd think I didn't have a busy practice to support us.

BOB

You know what I'm hoping for, Dad. Sure I can't talk you and Mom into moving to New York to enjoy the high life yet?

SALLY

We'd love to have you there.

ED

I already told you. What would I do? My patients are here.

BOB

Well, in time you may decide to retire and --

ED

-- As long as I can go to the office and come home to Martha, I have all I need. And what would your mother do without volunteering at the library and her Wednesday night bridge game? Also, the track in Wheeling.

(to Sally)

Did I tell you she likes to feed the horses? Got the disease from her brother, who by now has fed them everything he owns except an old gray Dodge that's about ready to give up the ghost.

MARTHA

I never bet more than two dollars on a race.

ED

She leaves the rest up to her brother. Trifectas. Perfectas. Whatever the hell you call them. Excuse my French, but it's all horseshit. In her case, the recreational donation of pocket change. Whatever makes her happy.

BOB

You should at least visit us more often. I can send the jet to pick you up any time.

MARTHA

Thank you, Bob. We don't mind a week. But when you and Sally are at work, we're stuck in the apartment and don't know how to get around.

ED

And don't want to learn. Humble as it is, Cokeville is our home.

BOB

Call if you need anything.

(hugs them)

Bye, Mom. Bye, Dad. Love you both.

SALLY

(saying goodbye to both of them)

Bye. Bye.

MARTHA

We'll miss you.

ED

You get things done, Bob, unlike somebody else I know.

BOB

Thanks, Dad. I learned it all from you.

ED

And don't stay away too long this time. You see me once a year for the rest of my life, you know how many more times you're gonna see me before I check into the crematorium. Remember that. I don't want my molecules locked up in a casket for eternity. Spread them out over a pasture. In the spring, I'll be grass. The cows will eat it, and before you know it, I'll be back in circulation.

DAN

What? As milk?

ED

As molecules, free to roam the surface of the earth forever.

BOB

Come on, Dad, you'll probably outlive us all.

ED

Maybe before. But not anymore.

BOB

OK. Keep us posted.

(to Dan and Rita)

Can you give me a hug without trying to stuff a check in my pocket?

DAN

All right. I'll take care of it tomorrow.

(holds out his arms)

Come on. I still love ya.

RITA

We both do.

BOB

Good to know.

(hugs them)

Love you both too.

SALLY

(hugs them)

Love you, too. Take care.

Bob and Sally head for the exit. Martha and Ed accompany them.

MARTHA

Let us know when you land.

BOB

Will do, Mom.

(calls)

And, Dan, if you can, keep an eye on the factory for me.

Bob and Sally exit, and Ed closes the door.

ED

What a remarkable son we have.

(to Dan)

And what a remarkable brother you've got. I know it's a terrible thing to face. You're not broke anymore.

DAN

You want the money, you can have it.

ED

All I need is more wine. Why don't you do what he asked you to?

DAN

Sorry, it's beyond my capacities.

ED

Even with ten million as an inspiration?

MARTHA

Wait for me. I want another cup of tea.

(Ed and Martha head for the exit)

DAN

Is this repellent or what? I'm heading for the bank first thing in the morning. I've got to get the lousy money out of our lives.

RITA

I don't know, Dan. Maybe the best way out is to do something good with it.

DAN

That's the life you want? I'm not supposed to give "grants." I'm supposed to get them.

RITA

Some successful artists establish foundations.

DAN

I'm not successful enough to justify something like that. It would be absurd.

RITA

Sally's Indian idea wasn't bad. God knows they could use help.

DAN

Yeah, until they get casino gambling.

RITA

Don't be so cynical. Hey, what if we set up a foundation for the Pueblos?

DAN

You set it up.

RITA

What do I know about it?

DAN

Maybe that's a clue.

RITA

We could hire a lawyer to help.

DAN

That's just what I need to find myself doing. Damn my brother!

RITA

OK. What if you write a check to him but we just keep a little for ourselves?

DAN

Of course, you're joking. Do you want our lives to become entirely unhinged, like those hapless people who win the lottery. Suddenly, you're a court jester, tossing money around.

RITA

But we could use some things.

DAN

We don't need shit.

RITA

Well, I could use some new clothes. And look at your corduroys. You've almost worn a hole in the rear.

DAN

Who's looking at my ass?

RITA

Well, I for one have no choice. And your mother is right. You could devote your entire life to poetry.

DAN

What are you talking about? Me, supported by my brother, like Van Gogh, so I, too, can have such a crisis of self-esteem that one day I lop off my ear. And what about your art? Would you really feel authentic selling your handmade jewelry at the flea market when you've got millions in the bank?

RITA

Not millions. Maybe a million. Or perhaps two.

DAN

Rita, we're better than that, aren't we? It's settled. I'm getting the money out of our lives and back to him.

RITA

What's he need it for? Come on, lighten up. Let's at least do the Indian thing.

DAN

OK, but every cent! Do you hear me? And we donate it anonymously, so it doesn't taint our lives when we're out there.

RITA

Whatever.

DAN

What? Now, you long for money.

RITA

I didn't say that.

DAN

I'll tell you what. Agree and we'll buy you a new dress.

RITA

You don't have to do that.

DAN

I think we can manage it.

RITA

Only if you get a new pair of pants. And maybe a new shirt, too.

DAN

Sure. That much I can manage. But that's it!

RITA

We're going to make a lot of Indians very damn happy!

DAN

Better than us miserable.

RITA

I guess.

DAN

You guess?

RITA

All right, for sure!

DAN

Good, Rita. You know, I still love you as much as that day we went skinny-dipping in Dunbar creek and made love on that big boulder, right out there in the sun.

(kisses her)

RITA

Yeah, we were wild, weren't we?

DAN

Yeah. And we still are. And we're gonna stay that way. Very broke on the outside but very good on the inside. And happy, too. What could be more exciting than that?

RITA

Yes, dear.

DAN

Money! Don't you just hate it!

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

The living room. Rita is wearing a new dress and Dan is wearing a new pair of pants and a new shirt.

DAN

(on phone)

We'll get the check out to you today.... My pleasure. See you when you the snow flies.

(hangs up)

Done. Chief Jonathan is one happy Pueblo.

(looks at list)

Soon we'll have this minor inconvenience behind us.

RITA

Excellent. You have to admit, though, it's kind of fun to give away the big bucks.

DAN

It has its perverse awards. Next, we delight the Apaches.

RITA

OK. But come on, Dan. Face your darker side. Don't tell me keeping some still hasn't crossed your mind.

DAN

So what? It's being able to think of the alternatives that lets you make ethical choices. And we define our lives by the choices we make.

RITA

Oh, stop with existentialism 101. It's only normal to make room for a little human weakness.

DAN

I have considered the possible merits.

RITA

Oh, good. What have you flirted with as the responsible use of a bit of it?

DAN

I could finally have a writing studio here.

RITA

And?

DAN

I could buy enough bookcases to organize my library and get a ton of books out of plastic storage containers.

RITA

Anything else?

DAN

Maybe we could upgrade our digs in Taos. If our home was any smaller, I'd be afraid to get an erection in it.

RITA

Listen to macho man.

DAN

So what are you thinking?

RITA

Well, I could have a studio jere, too, with room for a nice big table to work on. I need lots of space to do my best work.

DAN

And?

RITA

I'd like to have plenty of supplies, so I always have what I need on hand. And a nice, convenient way to organize them.

DAN

And?

RITA

I'd like to us to have a nicer home in Taos, too.

DAN

And? Come on, anything else?

RITA

Oh, I'd be so happy if we could both have those things.

DAN

That's the operative noun, isn't it? Things! Material things!

RITA

What's wrong with halfway decent basics – food, clothing, and shelter. A little weed and booze, too. I bet if Mozart and Beethoven had a chance to take the financial pressure off themselves they would have leaped at the opportunity. You think it helped Mozart write better music to have to beg money from his friends? Or how do you think Beethoven felt, begging for Rhine wine and counting out his coffee beans each morning? Besides, haven't you noticed?

DAN

What?

RITA

Once we fell asleep last night, we both slept pretty soundly. Maybe for once we felt a little free of financial worries.

DAN

Maybe. I wonder how long it would take for me to start waking up, worrying about my character.

RITA

If you ask me, you're too hard on yourself. You have a social conscience that patrols your behavior like cop with a billy stick. The first thing a shrink would do is try to pry open some space between the two. Come on, my love, why don't we give it a shot? If we're miserable with the result, we can always give away whatever million or two we decide to keep.

DAN

Million or two? What are you, anyway, Eve with an apple?

RITA

I didn't pick it. It was handed to me by a man. How about it? We could keep one to live on and one just in case.

DAN

What kind of emergency takes a million dollars to solve?

RITA

Does that mean we can keep at least one million?

DAN

What can I say? My background hasn't prepared me to deal with the question.

RITA

Oh, come on, Dan. You're making me feel like one of those women in a commercial, smiling with lust because her husband just made a decision that means she'll be rich after he's dead.

DAN

OK, I'm sorry.

RITA

Thank you. Either we take a bite out of the apple together or forget it. Now, let's be logical and consider the future we might have.

DAN

Before or after we compromise our souls?

RITA

I mean if we make the relatively modest purchases we discussed, put the rest in savings, and then just live modestly off the interest?

DAN

Selling out is selling out.

RITA

Is living for the same goals we've always had selling out? Actually, I think we should celebrate.

DAN

Celebrate what? My brother, Bob, the conqueror?

RITA

No, dummy. Don't you get it? We're rich.

DAN

Oh, "where is the life that late I led"? I'm willing to give keeping a million or two a trial run on one condition.

RITA

Great. What is it?

DAN

We must to be especially intelligent about how we use the funds. Good Christ, I'm already starting to sound like my brother.

RITA

You are not. Nor have I known you, on the rare occasions when we could afford such an extravagance, to object to a delicious dinner out and a bottle of champagne?

DAN

You're right. Actually, my favorite dialogue of Plato's is *The Symposium*, where the subject is

DAN (CONT'D)

the various forms of love and the discussion takes place over dinner and wine. Very freely flowing wine while the conversation rises to such high ideals as love of the good.

RITA

How bad is that? Maybe, just maybe, your brother is partly right. Maybe the problem isn't money but doing thoughtless things with it.

Ed enters.

ED

Speaking of money, have you given it all away yet? As I remember, you were eagerly giving away half of it when I gave up and took a breather.

DAN

We were successful. And soon we'll be even more –

ED

-- Of course. What else? Poverty is ethical. Wealth is, by definition, reprehensible.

DAN

That's what you know. We have also been discussing the matter and have, in fact, just decided to conduct an experiment.

ED

What? Lighting the rest on fire?

DAN

No. We ... we ... have decided to see if it's possible to remain ethical while we ... while we retain ...

RITA

The last two million.

ED

Really? What hidden aptitude provoked that commonsensical decision?

DAN

Weakness of character, simple as that.

RITA

That's not true, Dan. We made a prudent decision to use it wisely to support the creative habit.

ED

Oh. Well, however you got there, I congratulate you. But let me ask – does supporting the creative habit include buying a house in the neighborhood you can call your own?

DAN

Why would we do that, Dad? We're only here during the summer.

ED

Many people do own a summer house.

DAN

We were thinking of building a craft studio for her and a writer's studio for me.

ED

Where? In Taos?

DAN

Taos is a different problem. We were thinking of here.

ED

Oh. Attached to the house? How about separate from it? It's a big lawn.

DAN

I'm OK with that.

RITA

Me, too.

ED

Excellent! I know you'll both be eager to spend a lot of time in them.

DAN

Then it's OK?

ED

I'll even help you build them. I only have one condition.

DAN

What?

ED

Make them adjoining to at least enable the remote possibility of a grandchild.

RITA

I think we can manage that.

Martha enters.

MARTHA

Ed, you seem quite pleased. What happened?

ED

The unexpected emergence of maturity. They've decided to keep two million for themselves.

MARTHA

Oh, I'm so happy for you. We were terribly upset thinking of you giving it all away.

ED

They want to build studios for themselves. I said they could do it on our property.

MARTHA

Where else would they build them, Ed?

RITA

Then you're all right with the idea?

MARTHA

Of course, I am.

(to Rita)

I like your new dress.

RITA

Thank you.

ED

New underwear, too, I hope?

MARTHA

Ed, will you please get your mind out of the laundry room?

RITA

Yes, as a matter of fact.

MARTHA

(to Dan)

I like your new shirt and pants, too. You're such a handsome son, when you want to be.

RITA

He is, isn't he?

DAN

Thanks, Mother. But what does handsome have to do with it? I'm not a movie star. I'm a poet.

MARTHA

I know, son. But from my years as a librarian I can tell you that, if you look good on the dust jacket, it helps, especially with female readers.

DAN

Oh, man – "Horseman, ride by!" Into what sinkhole have I been swallowed?

ED

Oh, come on, son. You've been married for three years now. You should know by now that participation in endearing trivia is one of the inescapable rewards of domestic felicity.

MARTHA

Wait till Bob hears you kept two million. He'll be so happy.

DAN

Regrettably.

MARTHA

Oh, Danny, stop being so ungrateful. Your brother loves you and he did a wonderfully generous thing for you and Rita. And you haven't done a thing in return. Why not call him and tell him yourself?

DAN

I don't report to him. I'll tell him the next time he calls.

ED

Ah, yes. Life is filled with difficult challenges. Yours seems to be telling your brother thanks. Come on, you're bigger than that, Dan. Any other person would do it lickety-split. Look at it this way. If you've got the heart to be the poet you think you are, certainly you manage the magnanimity to say thank for making you a millionaire.

DAN

You really know how to get to a guy, don't you? All right. I forgive him for making me one.

ED

What a prince!

DAN

OK, OK, I'll thank him.
(takes out cellphone)

RITA

I want to say thank you to him and Sally, too.

DAN

Of course. "Blow, blow, thou winter wind. Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude."

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

Lights come up on living room. Ed is working the number, with a glass of wine on the end table. Martha is sitting in a chair, fretting.

ED

I can't believe I didn't hit the number today.

MARTHA

How can you think about such silliness now?

ED

What good does it do to worry, Martha?

MARTHA

None. But I can't stop. Hardly more than a year after the wonderful dedication ceremony and the workers call a strike. The mayor better get here soon.

(looks at watch)

Bob will be calling any minute.

ED

John will be here. One of his redeeming merits is he's punctual.

MARTHA

Maybe Bob should just give them what they want.

ED

He's too disappointed. I can't say I blame him.

MARTHA

Why did they have to bite the hand that feeds them?

ED

You need look no farther than our ne'er-do-well son for the answer. Ingratitude, plain and simple

(looks down at notebook)

I was certain the three would go to five, not two.

MARTHA

Can you please stop that and talk to me?

ED

I came home early from the office to be here for the call. What else do you want?

Doorbell rings.

MARTHA

Oh, good. He's here.

(rises and heads for door)

Please, Ed. Put your notebook away. You don't want him to see you doing that. It's illegal.

ED

All right, all right.

(slides notebook into drawer of end-table; takes a sip of wine
and gets up)

(Martha opens door)

MARTHA

Good afternoon, Mayor Graham.

MAYOR

Good afternoon, Martha.

MARTHA

Please, come in.

Mayor enters.

MAYOR

Thank you.

Martha closes door.

MAYOR

(sees Ed)

Hi, there, Ed.

ED

Hello, John.

(half rises)

They shake hands.

MAYOR

I just had another go at the union.

ED

Any progress?

MAYOR

Unfortunately, no. But I went there with empty hands. I'm hoping Bob can give a little at his end.

ED

Good luck with that. As you know, he's quite offended by the strike.

(Landline rings)

MARTHA

I'm sure that's him now. I told him to call the landline to make sure you two had a good connection.

MAYOR

Good idea. Troublesome when the wireless gremlins cut in.

ED

I'll get it.

(heads for phone)

He's calling from the World Financial Summit at Davos.

Martha and Mayor follow.

MAYOR

Bob sure has made himself a place in this world.

ED

Yes, he has.

(picks up phone)

Hi, Bob... Yeah, I came home early. How are things going there?... Good.... Yeah, he just got here.... I'll let him update you.

(to Mayor)

Here ya go, John. .

MAYOR

Thanks.

(takes phone)

Hi, there, Bob. Mayor Graham.... I'm doin' fine. How about you?... Good, Bob, good.... No, I'm sorry to report.... Hold on, Bob. Remember, I only stepped in as an intermediary.... I know it's still in the red... But this strike's already causin' a lot of hardship....

(to Ed)

He wants to ask you something.... It's times like this when I ask myself, why did I give up the bowling ally to run for office?

ED

(takes phone)

Yes, Bob?... Where else? Out in his new studio.

(to Martha)

Sweetheart, can you get Dan?

MARTHA

Yes, dear.

She exits.

ED

Your mother went to get him.... Yeah, happiest I've seen him in years. It's an investment you can be proud of. How's Sally? Great. You two are an absolutely wonderful team.

MAYOR

(signaling Ed to muffle phone)

What can Dan do? He's not a negotiator.

ED

(hand over phone)

No kidding.

MAYOR

I'm afraid he'll make things worse.

ED

(hand over phone)

Even he can't do that.

Dan enters, upset, followed by Martha.

DAN

Oh, come on, Mom, as a librarian, you should know better. Remember Coleridge started to write Kubla Khan when his maid interrupted him.

(angry)

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea...

DAN (CONT'D)

(to Martha)

Result: the beginning flows along with magical smoothness but from then on the metrics hit the rock-strewn rapids. Is that what you want for me? My greatest work, subverted?

(to Mayor)

Hello.

MAYOR

Hello, Dan.

DAN

(to Ed)

What does Bob want me for?

ED

No doubt something you've been unable to give.

(on phone)

Here's Dan now.

(hands him phone)

DAN

(on phone)

Hi, Bob. How are you? Glad to hear it.... Yeah, I love it.... In fact, I fall on my knees every day and thank you.... Me? What can I do?... No, no. You fly in like an ancient God and settle the strike yourself.... Switzerland?... Oh, how long?... Me? No way, Jose'!

ED

(to Mayor)

That's how he says no in his New Mexico dialect.

DAN

(back on phone)

You know why. It's just not my cup of tea. Yeah, he's here.

(holds out phone to Mayor)

He wants to speak with you.

MAYOR

(takes phone)

Hi, Bob.... Oh, come on, now, my friend. You don't really mean that.

(hand over phone; to Ed)

He says if they don't end the strike, he'll shut down the plant.

MARTHA

Please, Dan. Your brother needs your help.

ED

It's the least you owe him.

RITA

Maybe you should give it a shot. You are his brother. So maybe the workers will listen to you.

DAN

What a guilt trip!

(on phone)

OK, Bob. You win again. Just tell me what you want me to say?... Permanently? That's not cool, man.... I thought you donated the factory. How can you take it back?...

(to Ed)

He says the factory is an investment, not a donation.

(on phone)

Why can't it be a donation?... Oh.

(to Mayor)

The charter of his foundation doesn't include donating a factory in his hometown.

(back on phone)

OK, OK, I'll tell them.... I'll let you know....

(angrily)

I said I'd do it, didn't I?

ED

Ah, the very milk of human kindness.

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4

The living room. Ed and Martha, welcoming Bob and Sally.

ED

Great to have you home again, Bob.

BOB

Thanks, Dad. Where is he?

ED

Rita went to get him.

MARTHA

Don't be too hard on him. He just doesn't have a good head for business.

Dan and Rita enter.

DAN

Hi, Bob.

BOB

Hi, my ass.

(holds up newspaper)

Is this how you represent me?

DAN

I didn't know the paper was there, taking photos.

BOB

How did you go from the explicit instructions I gave you to joining the strike?

DAN

I did what I felt was right.

BOB

I told you what was right.

DAN

I'm your brother, Bob, not your obedient servant. I listened to them, as you requested, and made a decision.

BOB

(smacks newspaper)

Who asked you to decide anything? How damn ungrateful can you be?

SALLY

There's no excuse for what you did, Dan.

DAN

You two think you know everything. You know what you're like? Two lions – you know, with big mouths and small ears. Your roar prevents you from hearing anything else. Every once in a while, you should try to be more like a mouse, with a small mouth and big ears.

BOB

You mean, like a rat. The rat you were to do what you did. I told you, I did what I did for Cokeville the only way I could – as an investment. An investment no one has been willing to make in this town since the steel ovens in Pittsburgh switched from burning coke to natural gas and the economy collapsed. No one, that is, except me ... me and Sally.

DAN

Fine, an investment. Not a donation. But why does it always have to be your way or the highway? You built the factory. Everybody fawned all over you for it. But they can't kiss your ass forever.

BOB

I don't need that. But I also don't need them to bite me in the ass.

(holds up paper)

I tell you what's going on with you. Passive-aggressive behavior. You were getting back at me, no doubt to distinguish your fragile ego at my expense. Do you need that, Dan? Do you really need that?

DAN

Not at all. I did it because I understood their position, but I don't understand yours. For Christ's sake, you've got enough money to meet their needs without even noticing the difference in your finances. Do you really have to make money on every investment?

BOB

My goal is far more modest. I'm trying to control how much I lose on it.

SALLY

We agreed to support the factory until it's successful. Then we want to expand it into making wind turbines, too. Giving raises and improving benefits now will only delay that. We were even considering establishing a children's museum here.

DAN

Really? That's a remarkable idea.

BOB

No, it's totally selfish. I'd like to teach the children what they can achieve if they do things like read. But forget it. Right now, all we see is red ink.

ED

Maybe you can find some kind of middle ground.

RITA

Sounds good to me.

DAN

What do you say?

BOB

My bottom line is, if the strike keeps up, I'll pull the plug.

DAN

Oh, come off it. You're not that much of a hard ass.

SALLY

He always weighs things very carefully. Then he makes a decision.

DAN

(to Bob)

My brother, the lord high executioner. Sorry, the role doesn't suit you.

BOB

Wanna bet?

Doorbell rings.

ED

That should be John and the union rep.

BOB

Jack? Fine childhood friend he turned out to be.

MARTHA

I'll get it.

(heads for door)

DAN

Take it easy on them, will you?

BOB

I think I've had enough help from you, Danny boy.

MARTHA

(opens door)

Come right in Mayor Graham. Oh, hello, Jack. Bob was just asking about you.

Mayor enters with Jack.

MAYOR

Thank you, Martha.

JACK

Thanks, Ma'am.

MAYOR

(to Bob, Sally, Dan and Rita)

Hi, all.

(shakes hands)

Good to see you again, Bob.

BOB

Thanks, John.

(to Jack)

Glad you came, Jack.

JACK

It's my job, isn't it? Good to see you again, pal.

MARTHA

Would anybody like tea or coffee?

MAYOR

No, thanks, Martha.

JACK

No, no, that's OK.

MARTHA

Then I'll be on my way. I've got some paperwork to do.

RITA

I have some work to do myself. Come on, Dan.

DAN

You go ahead. I'll stay for a while.

Martha and Rita exit.

MAYOR

I hope we can make some progress.

BOB

What about you, Jack?

JACK

Wouldn't be here if I didn't.

BOB

Good. So, tell me, Jack, how long have we known each other?

JACK

Since kindergarten. But this is business.

BOB

I was never a great fan of people who can completely separate their business and personal lives. But I like you, Jack, despite some of your childhood antics.

JACK

Thanks.

BOB

(to Jack)

Have a seat.

(motions to chairs)

John.

MAYOR

Thanks.

All sit.

BOB

When we dedicated the factory, didn't you tell me you were out of work for two years?

JACK

I was. But now I've been workin' at the factory for over a year.

BOB

When I agreed to build it, I didn't expect the payback to be a strike

MAYOR

Everybody's still real grateful for what you did.

BOB

How about you, Jack?

JACK

Sure, I am. But I'm here to represent the union.

BOB

It's fine to have a union, but you also have to have the sense to know we're all in this together.

JACK

I think we do, Bob. I also think our demands are quite reasonable.

BOB

Demands? I like that.

MAYOR

Take it easy, Bob. It's not his fault the workers decided to unionize.

BOB

(to Jack)

How did you get to be the union representative?

JACK

I was elected.

BOB

No doubt because you voiced your reluctance to unionize.

JACK

I was elected because the membership decided I'm qualified. Now, let's get down to brass tacks.

BOB

Go right ahead.

JACK

The management team you put in place has been stonewalling us. It's obvious that they're taking their direction from you. So, tell me, what can we do about it?

BOB

I'm here, aren't I?

ED

He flew in especially for the meeting.

JACK

Then let's talk grievances.

BOB

You have grievances?

JACK

Yeah.

BOB

I thought you had more of them before Sally and I put in the factory. But go on.

JACK

I'll cut to the chase. The factory's makin' money now.

BOB

Depends on how you look at it, Jack. The last quarter we made a two percent profit.

MAYOR

That's a good sign, isn't it?

BOB

Yes, it is. But when you balance it out against the first three quarters, we're still significantly in the red. Do you know how much in the red? I'll tell you – twenty-three million and change.

JACK

But we have turned the corner.

BOB

Maybe. The quarterly result is a positive sign.

JACK

How much of a payback do you need before you give some back?

BOB

Believe it or not, I'm not looking for a payback. I don't need one. Look, when I donate to a cause, I don't expect a financial return. But when I invest in a startup, I expect to go through a period where I investment spend and then to start to recoup my losses. What I don't expect is for the people I'm investing in to help me lose my ass.

JACK

You'll make plenty on the factory in time, and you know it.

BOB

Let's hope you're right, Jack. In the meantime, your job and all the other jobs at the factory are result of a special deal Sally and I did – a sweetheart of a deal -- for a town nobody else has invested in since Morgan and Frick were here investing in coal and coke.

MAYOR

Trust me, Bob. The people here appreciate the special effort your made for them. And we're proud of all your other achievements.

JACK

But things are finally lookin' up at the factory and it's time for the slavery to end.

BOB

Slavery? I've turned you into slaves? I thought I turned you into workers.

JACK

You know what the average worker is makin' – fifteen dollars an hour. That's well below the average wage of a factory worker. It's more like what people get for flippin' burgers. How can you support a family on that kind of income?

BOB

I know it's tough, Jack. It's not a Mexican hayride to be down millions, either. I'm starting to feel the way I did when I invested in a few of the former Sovit block countries. Here I was, daring to take the risks that would help the people there get on their feet and often considered, not a benefactor, but an opportunist! I tried to understand why, and figured it was their years under communism. You know what's wrong with the whole Marxist agenda? I'll tell ya. Workers don't create jobs. They take jobs. Businessmen create jobs, entrepreneurs, or, if you will, capitalists, who can envision a new business and take the risks of funding it. It's how we earn a living. It's not excess value. It's our well-earned reward. Well, I pulled out of those countries, because I'm not a big fan of ingratitude, and by God I'll pull out of here.

SALLY

We like to do things for people who appreciate what we're doing for them.

MAYOR

Maybe we should arrange a meeting with more than just Jack here.

BOB

I'd like to settle this whole thing right here and now and fly out of here. I've got a lot more to think about than what I've attempted to do here.

(to Jack)

Take a message back. The day I see the millions it's taken to remodel the abandoned building the plant is, fit it with high-tech manufacturing equipment, order supplies, train the workers, and build a market for our solar panels, I will proactively raise the wages and increase the benefits. But not a day sooner.

JACK

That's very nice of you, Bob. But that could be a long way off.

BOB

Let's hope not. But, if it is, I'll still be here for you, if you're still here for me.

JACK

What about our present demands? I can't just go back empty handed.

DAN

Come on, Bob, give the guy a break.

ED

I believe I did give you something, Jack. Didn't you hear me? As soon as we're in the black or even close to it, I'll voluntarily implement raises and increase benefits.

SALLY

I suggest you consider what he said carefully. You could all be back at work tomorrow.

JACK

I know that. I also know he's the same way he was when we were kids. He always had to get his way.

DAN

Oh, you noticed the same thing, huh?

BOB

What I noticed is my way often had to do with just letting me be a good student without ridiculing me or beating me up. Believe it or not, Jack, I still remember the day I was walking down the hall in school with my books under my arm when you came up behind me and slapped my back. I thought it was a friendly gesture, till I noticed everybody was laughing at me.

BOB (CONT'D)

Remember what you did to me, Jack?

JACK

Oh, come on, Bob. That was a long time ago, and we were just kids.

BOB

I get that.

(to Ed and Dan)

Either of you remember what he did?

ED

Sorry, son, I don't.

DAN

Nope.

BOB

(to Sally)

Excuse me while I relive a unfond boyhood memory.

(to Ed and Dan)

He had tucked an unrolled condom in my belt. Yeah, an unrolled condom, which was hanging down behind me.

(to Jack)

It's one of the many uninviting memories I had to get over to do what I did here.

SALLY

Jack, how could you do something like that?

JACK

All I can say is, kids are kids.

BOB

Yeah, and adults are adults. So let's put that treasured memory aside and get back to business. I will sweeten my offer. I will set aside my need to break even before I respond to your demands. How about this? If the factory makes money the next two quarters, and regardless of how small the profit is, I'll call it a trend and deliver the increases.

MAYOR

That's something, Jack.

JACK

Yeah, six more months of hangin' on, with no guarantees.

BOB

Guarantees? There are no guarantees in this life, Jack. For all we know, the earth could crack in half tomorrow and we'll all go spinning out into space. Fortunately, however, there are likely probabilities that enable us to make plans.

JACK

We need some kind of increase now.

BOB

No can do, Jack. It's time for you and the union to give a little.

JACK

(stands)

I made a mistake even comin' here.

MAYOR

Jack, please, sit down.

JACK

Like hell!!

(throws a punch at Bob; it lands)

I can't tell you how long I've been wantin' to do that, you spoiled bastard.

DAN

(gets up and shoves Jack away)

Hey, man, what are you doing? That's my brother – and your benefactor.

SALLY

Of all the ungrateful things!

(to Bob)

Sweetheart, are you all right?

ED

Shame on you, Jack.

(to Bob)

Let me look at that.

(examines his face)

MAYOR

How could you do that, Jack? It's inexcusable.

BOB

I'm fine, Dad.

BOB (CONT'D)

(stands)

He just fell back into the habit of treating me the way a lot of my childhood friends did.

(to Jack)

I suggest you leave, you ungrateful twerp. Get out! Go on! Get out!

MAYOR

Jack, apologize to him.

JACK

Sorry, don't have it in me.

(to Bob)

Go ahead and do what you want. This town got by a long time without your goddam money and, by God, we can live a long time more without it.

MAYOR

Stop it, Jack. It's time for a little damage control.

JACK

No, it ain't. It's time for him to think about something besides his high-flyin' ways. You wanna meet on equal terms, the union is ready. Otherwise, at least, speakin' for myself, I'd rather starve.

.

He exits, slamming door.

MAYOR

I'm sorry, Bob, just so terribly sorry.

SALLY

There's no excuse for what he did.

ED

None.

DAN

(quotes Gray)

Ah, "the rude forefathers of the hamlet."

MAYOR

(to Bob)

You know he was always a hothead. Remember when he took a swing at the ref during a little league baseball game?

BOB

No, I don't. Sorry, John. I'll wait a few days to hear of any developments. Then I'll let you know what our decision is.

MAYOR

But the other workers would never have wanted him to –

BOB

-- What is he, self-appointed?

Martha and Rita enter.

MARTHA

What happened?

ED

Jack lost his temper and took a punch a Bob.

MARTHA

Dear me.

RITA

Jesus.

MARTHA

Are you all right, Son?

BOB

I'm fine. I just wish I had had a nice big book to take a swing at him with. That's used to be my principal mode of defense.

MAYOR

I promise you, no one else in this whole town would condone what he did. You've got a lot of good and grateful people here.

BOB

Good for what? And grateful, my ass!

SALLY

I assure you, no one is sorrier about how things have turned out than we are.

ED

You better head out now, John. No much you can accomplish by stayin'. Come on, I'll walk you to the door.

MAYOR

I suppose so.

(to Bob)

I'll try to get back to you with some encouragin' news. Please, don't do anything too drastic until I have a chance to see what I can do with the concessions you made. Two more profitable quarters and you grant the raises and increase the benefits?

BOB

I'm not so sure now, John. Sorry.

ED

(to John)

Come with me, friend.

(leads him to the door and opens it)

Thank you for coming over and let us know how you do.

(closes door and returns)

Dammit! Jack, should've known better.

BOB

I knew it when I committed to the venture. It was a mistake. But, hey, I've been there before and learned the only lesson I prefer to take from it. If you never want to experience ingratitude, never do anything generous. I've elected not to be that person. But in the case of Cokeville, I may make an exception.

MARTHA

Don't say such a thing. Dear me, everyone had such high hopes.

ED

Consider what you do carefully, Son. This is our town. We have to live here.

DAN

Come on Bob. You're bigger than you're acting now.

BOB

Don't say a word, Dan. You're partly to blame – parading around, waving that dumb-ass “On Strike” sign.

DAN

I told you I'm not a negotiator.

SALLY

No kidding.

DAN

You know, Bob, you're a remarkable human being. But you're like the lead character in a Greek tragedy. You have a fatal weakness. An Achilles' heel.

BOB

Just shut up, will you?

DAN

No, no, you've got the most noble fault of all. You need gratitude, need it more than breath itself. You come flying in here on your private jet and expect the populace of this broken-down town to lick your boots.

SALLY

What is wrong with expecting a normal amount of gratitude?

BOB

(rubs jaw)

I just experienced it as a punch in the face.

(to Dan)

And don't you, of all people, lecture me about gratitude – you self-absorbed little shit. The fact is, most of the people our foundation benefits are far more grateful than even we, self-indulgent souls that we may be, expect them or need them to be.

SALLY

Yes, they are. Thankfully, we can pick and choose what we support.

DAN

Money always does have its prerogatives, doesn't it? These people back here, just give them time to grow. Hell, what do they have without your help except a bunch of burned-out old coal mines, smoking up out of the red, ash-covered ground like hell itself is underneath it, and row after row of defunct coke ovens, lined up along the hillsides, like the yellowed teeth in a skull, grinning down at the town like a sad reminder of the boomtown it used to be?

RITA

What happened here is so sad. Dan told me all about it and showed me the rusty tracks in the main railroad yard – twelve across. It's hard to imagine that once it was the coke capital of the world, shipping semi-burned coal off to the steel ovens in Pittsburgh, with more millionaires per capita than any other city in the nation.

BOB

In case you forgot, I grew up here, too. Much as I regret to say it, I've decided my investment days here are history.

(to Sally)

BOB (CONT'D)

Come on, dear. Time for the Gods to take flight.

(to Ed and Martha)

I'm sorry, Mom and Dad. I wish it had worked out as we planned.

ED

What happened isn't good for anybody.

SALLY

No one wanted it to turn out this way, least of all us.

BOB

I know.

DAN

What about the mayor? At least, wait to see what he comes back with.

BOB

No, thanks, Dan. I've made my decision. It's game over.

Bob and Sally start to leave.

DAN

Oh, come on, Bob. Don't do it, not to these people.

BOB

You didn't do anything to help matters, kid. So just shut the hell up.

(to Ed and Sally)

I think you know I have a long fuse, but when it gets to the dynamite –

DAN

-- What? You lose it like Jack? That's the level we're talking about.

BOB

We do not punch people. We simply remove ourselves.

SALLY

We do have that prerogative.

Bob and Sally turn to leave again.

DAN

Hold it. I'll make you a deal.

BOB

What, as the great negotiator you are?

DAN

No. As a beaten man.

BOB

What do you mean?

DAN

Meet their demands now, today – every last one of them, and --

BOB

-- and what?

DAN

I'll grant you your favorite wish.

BOB

What's that, dickhead?

DAN

I'll go to work for you. I mean I'll go to work for your goddam foundation – providing, of course, that I still have some time to write poetry.

BOB

You're kidding?

ED

Better take him up on it before he changes his mind.

BOB

I might be persuaded to accept your offer.

DAN

(to Rita)

Do you believe this guy? "He might be persuaded?"

BOB

I need to know you won't be doing it with animus. The negative energy would detract from the positive environment at the foundation. I want you to discover that even you can participate with pride and come to understand that it's a great and rare privilege to be able to see a worthy need and solve it with money.

DAN

I will do my level best, providing you do what I ask. Come on, take the offer. I'm ready to help you give your money away. Take it before I also insist you put in the children's museum.

RITA

Are you sure you can handle it?

DAN

Hell no! But I will give it my best shot.

(to Rita)

You might want to pitch in.

RITA

What do I know about philanthropy?

DAN

Every bit as much as I do.

SALLY

I could use an assistant, Rita, and I can teach you all you have to know.

RITA

Wow, thanks. But I need a moment to try to wrap my mind around this whole thing.

(to Dan)

Are you certain you're in? I don't want you to put me through a lot of changes for nothing.

(to Sally)

Sorry. Teaching elementary school burned me out. I need a low-stress life.

DAN

I'm in, if Bobalouie here is in.

RITA

Well, I don't see myself just waving good-bye to you every morning.

BOB

What do you think, Sally? Should we accept his offer?

SALLY

It's up to you, dear.

BOB

Actually, I would've built the whole damn factory just to have things turn out this way. Welcome to the foundation. You're gonna love working there!

DAN

(accepts handshake tenuously)
Thanks. Let's hope so.

ED

What can I say? I had to wait a lifetime to see it. Not only brotherly love, but brotherly cooperation.

MARTHA

Will wonders never cease?

BOB

Who would've thought? Together, at last.

DAN

Don't get carried away. Just call your management at the factory and tell them what we agreed to do.

ED

How about I crack a bottle of wine?

MARTHA

I'll have a glass myself.

BOB

Will do, Dan.

(takes out cellphone)
See. For once you got your way?

DAN

I got my way? I'm going to work for you and you can say that? You finally got me, didn't you?

BOB

You bet I did, kid. Don't worry. I won't rub it in too much.

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

Dan is in his study, sitting with his eyes closed. He seems to be desperately sad. Suddenly, he opens eyes with an inspiration, gets up, grabs notepad and starts to write. Gets disgusted and throws it aside.

Lights come up on the living room. Ed is working the numbers, wine at hand. Martha is playing solitaire.

Doorbell rings.

ED

They're here.

MARTHA

Thank goodness.

They both get up and cross to the door. Ed opens it.

ED

Great you could come.

MARTHA

I'm so relieved. Welcome.

Bob and Sally enter.

BOB

Good to see you, Mom. Dad. We flew in as soon as we could. Where is he?

MARTHA

In his studio. He's hardly been out of it since he got back.

ED

Except to eat. He still remembers how to do that.

MARTHA

He's just not himself, Bob. I've never seen him so depressed.

ED

We're both worried about him.

SALLY

This is the last thing we wanted. How's Rita?

MARTHA

I think she'll be all right, but –

ED

-- She's upset by it all and concerned as can be about Dan.

SALLY

Where is she?

MARTHA

In her studio, too. He did try, Bob. They both did.

BOB

I know. I thought he'd gut it out. I didn't know he was miserable. Or I would've sent him home.

ED

You've got your mind on other things, Son. You're a big-picture person.

MARTHA

Don't be too upset with yourself. Sometimes Ed is the same way.

ED

Yes, and I have a name for it. I call it eyes on the stars, foot in a manhole.

MARTHA

Why don't you go see him?

ED

Go easy. He's kind of fragile right now.

BOB

Not to worry. I love the kid. You know that.
(crosses toward exit)

MARTHA

Would you like to speak with Rita?

SALLY

Thank you. Yes, I would.

Martha and Sally head for the exit. Lights go down on living room and come up on Dan's studio. He's at his desk, with his head down and his face in his arms.

Knock at the door. He doesn't respond. Another knock.

DAN

Rita?

BOB

It's me, Bob.

DAN

Is there no mercy? In my life, the quality of it is definitely "strained."

BOB

I flew in from New York. The least you can do is talk.

DAN

Why?

BOB

Come on, I'm here to cheer you up.

DAN

You're the wrong man for the job.

BOB

Oh, come on, Dan, will ya? You left. But I'm still supporting the factory. Want me to stop?

DAN

OK, man. OK!

(goes to door and opens it)

I told you, I couldn't do it anymore.

(Bob enters)

BOB

I remember.

DAN

Look, Bob, I did the best I could.

BOB

It was good enough for me.

DAN

Oh, come on, I was lousy at it. Don't you get it? I'm just no good at your life! You might as well stand me up against a wall and shoot me.

BOB

You were helping us do a lot of good, especially in the arts. You should be proud of that.

DAN

I'm glad I could accomplish something. But I was dying inside. Remember when we were meeting with the nascent literary organization in the Congo, and I'm was questioning the founders about their support for poetry, and the head guy says to me, "Excuse me, sir, but what does a wealthy businessman know about poetry?" I could've died – died on the spot.

BOB

I'm sorry, Dan. I knew that comment hit you like a ton of bricks. But these people aren't at the level you are. They just trying to get something going.

DAN

I think that's admirable. And it's ineffably commendable that you want to help them. But, for God's sake, be a little charitable toward me. You're the philanthropist, not me.

BOB

Am I? I just donate money to causes I consider worthy. You donated your life to one.

DAN

No, I didn't. I listen to my inner voice, which tells me what I ought to be doing with my life. I knew I wanted to be a writer since I was fourteen years old, which is when I wrote my first short story.

BOB

You certainly hid it well.

DAN

Who wouldn't back then? I didn't want to get beaten up and abused like you. But I couldn't hide it completely. My sophomore English teacher told me, as the saying goes, I have a way with words.

BOB

I remember.

DAN

Do you also remember that she told mom I should be a writer?

BOB

You reminded me a number of times.

DAN

Then, for once in your life, listen to me. I'm proud of you, Bob. You go make as much money as you can and give it away. It's a noble calling, and it's what pumps your self-esteem. You're a saint – if there can be such a thing, a goddam money saint. Meanwhile, let me go my own humble way. I need to listen to my inspirations and do my best to express them. And not just deeply personal expressions I know I can get published.

BOB

Really? What else?

DAN

I can hardly talk about it. But, if you want to know, I'm always asking myself, is there a way to write a new kind of poetry, one that's based on all the knowledge we've gained. To express an appreciation of life as the biological and cosmological wonder we've learned it is. So we might commit to it and nourish it back to health before we destroy it.

BOB

Interesting.

DAN

That's all you can say? Here's what I think. What else would whatever's behind it all call a religion?

BOB

Oh. I see. That's big.

DAN

"Oh, I see. That's big," he says. You think I don't have my work cut out for me?

BOB

Anything I can read?

DAN

No, not yet. So far all I have is one rhyme. It's not even a couplet.

BOB

A rhyme? That doesn't sound like you. I thought you were into prose poems.

DAN

I am. But now I'm wondering if new content can refresh old forms.

BOB

So what's the rhyme?

DAN

"Revere the biosphere."

BOB

Nice. That's it?

DAN

Thanks. I'm lucky that much dropped off the shelf of my unconscious mind, considering how jumbled up my life has been. But listening to it is my calling. I can't compromise it, anymore than you could stop doing what you're doing to write poetry.

BOB

No, math is what I do. Math and investment bets based on macroeconomic projections.

DAN

Wonderful! Good for you! Look, Bob, I tried. And kept trying till I was in a frenzy of despair. My spirit was dying inside and, actually, I'm glad. It's voice is too strong to let me betray it and be happy while it's dying. Now it's your turn to come my way a little. Can't we finally be like two healthy trees in a forest, growing side by side, instead of one with a vine wrapped around it, strangling the life out of it?

BOB

I'm a vine wrapped around you? I'm a giant redwood, that's what I am.

DAN

Yes, you are. And I'm just a seedling, trying to take root and grow as tall as I can. And I need you to back off and let me. You know, giving isn't just about money. It's also about giving your brother a chance to be himself. A struggling poet – it's who I am. It is, if you'll allow me to bestow an accolade on myself, my noble calling.

BOB

OK, I understand.

DAN

You do?

BOB

Yeah. So, as a result, you're fired.

DAN

I appreciate that. You really mean it?

BOB

Yeah. Go ahead. Dedicate your life to poetry – and may you achieve the remarkable goal you've set for yourself.

DAN

And may you give away your money till your pockets are inside out.

BOB

Obviously, neither one of us has a choice.

DAN

Just be glad we both have an inner voice we value. Sometimes, when I feel meaninglessness yawn under me, I ask myself, do I feel this way because I'm sensitive or because I'm being insensitive? Is life the raw material we each have to give meaning to by doing the best we can with it?

BOB

I've already made up my mind about that.

DAN

Yeah, I guess you have. So what am I doing, just playing catch up?

BOB

Yeah, but you can write about it.

DAN

I hope so. Who among the ancients knew you could make microchips out of the sand they were walking on? What we've learned is as deep, bright and beautiful a revelation as we discovered the universe to be.

BOB

I love you, Dan. I mean, look at you. Life on the line for what you believe.

DAN

Yeah, and what about you? You not only know how to make money; you know how to give it away. And who told you to do it? Hey, man, you're another Andrew Carnegie. And you're my brother! Wow, that's something, huh?

BOB

You're quite an item yourself, Dan.

DAN

Look, I know I copped out on you. But just assure me of one thing, so I can go skipping down the sunlit path of my own life.

BOB

What's that?

DAN

You'll keep supporting the factory the way you have.

BOB

Sure, on one condition.

DAN

I knew it. I frickin' knew it. What?

BOB

I don't want you to waste any more of your time even thinking about money. If you ever need –

DAN

-- Are you helplessly yourself or what? Thanks to you, I have enough money to last me ten lifetimes. So you screw around with my account one more time, and, swear to God, I'll do something truly vile, like, remember this?

(reaches for the back of his hair and grabs a tuft)

One up or two down?

BOB

All right, all right. Let's not redo our childhood pranks. You win.

DAN

I do?

(lets go of his hair)

BOB

Why not? Brothers forever, right?

DAN

You got that right.

(They embrace)

DAN (CONT'D)

I do love ya, Bob. You know that.

BOB

Of course, I do. Love ya, too, buddy! Hey, Sally and I are planning to take Mom and Dad out for dinner. Why don't you join us?

DAN

I can manage that. Let me talk with Rita.

BOB

Great. Sally went to talk with her. What do you say we go share the big news? Might help Rita get over what we've put her through. Sound like a plan, Dan?

DAN

Yeh. But what do you say you leave the occasional rhyme to me?

BOB

No problem whatsoever! But I have to say, right now I feel like the luckiest guy in the world. You only think of yourself, you only end up with yourself. You think of other people, you end up like me. Got you and Rita. Got Sally, Mom and Dad. Got all the people who work for me. And got people all over the world. Got them all in my life. I tell you, am I'm the luckiest guy in the world? You bet I am. The luckiest guy in the whole world! And guess what?

DAN

What?

BOB

You have the distinction of being the second luckiest guy!

END OF THE PLAY