

BECOMING STRANGERS

BY

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BECOMING STRANGERS

By George Freek

THE CHARACTERS

HOWARD	IN HIS 30s
JANE	HIS WIFE, SAME AGE
DUKE	SAME AGE, LOOKS MUCH OLDER
BETSY	SAME AGE, LOOKS LIKE DUKE
PA	INDETERMINATE AGE, LOOKS VERY OLD

THE PLACE

A CABIN

SOMEWHERE IN THE HILLS

THE TIME

LATE SUMMER

RECENTLY

ACT ONE

1, i

(A cabin in the hills; two cots; a window, rear, a table in front of it, littered with old, broken clocks; on one wall, a photo of a man in a Civil War uniform; Lights up, BETSY sits in a rocking-chair, smoking a corncob pipe, holding a rusty revolver; After a moment, PA enters. He is in the Civil War uniform, but he is barefoot)

PA
(Looks at BETSY) They're out there.

BETSY
What you talking about?

PA
They're comin' after me.

BETSY
Ain't nothing out there.

PA
They want me.

BETSY
I doubt that.

PA
I won't let 'em get me. (He takes the revolver from her, exits).

(The sound of a car door, voices; BETSY gets up,
looks out, exits as DUKE, HOWARD, JANE enter)

DUKE
This's it. (He goes to one of the cots, pushes on it) I'll tell ya, they don't make beds like
this no more.

JANE
(Smiles) It's just what we were looking for, isn't it, honey?

HOWARD
(He looks around in amazement) My god. I love it! (Puts suitcase on a cot) I'm sorry
we're so late. I'm afraid we got a little lost. We stopped at a service station to call.
There must be something wrong with your phone, huh?

DUKE
Nothing wrong with it.

HOWARD
I couldn't get through.

DUKE

Ain't got one. (Before HOWARD can react) We got a mirror. Someplace roundabouts. (He looks, finds a mirror under a cot and hangs it on a wall) Goes there.

JANE

I think I'm going to love it here. You know what I mean?

HOWARD

I do. There's something about it.....

JANE

It's so....real.

HOWARD

A place where we can escape from all the bullshit. (He looks at DUKE) Maybe that's too strong a word.

DUKE

I heard it before.

HOWARD

I think what we are trying to say is that it's really good to get back to some honest, fundamental reality. Isn't that right, Honey?

JANE

Yes.

HOWARD

I mean the air. Just smell that air. (He takes a deep breath).

DUKE

Yeh. We got lots've air.

JANE

(Takes a deep breath, coughs) Oh god. Somebody's been smoking in here.

HOWARD

Nonsense. That's simply good clean air.

JANE

No. No. I smell smoke. (She tries to open the window, it's stuck) My god, Howard, I'm choking!

HOWARD

Okay, what are you up to? Is this another one of your allergy games?

JANE

Howard, for god's sake! (She rushes out the door).

HOWARD

(to DUKE) She has these allergies. That's one of the reasons we decided to escape from the city for awhile. I think her problem is she hasn't gotten the city out of her system yet.

DUKE

My wife, Betsy, she might a been smoking in here.

HOWARD

No. It's okay. Really. What it is, I don't think she's used to breathing good, clean air. That's all. (Pause)

BLACKOUT

1, ii

(HOWARD unpacks, looking at some fishing tackle, while JANE is looking at the clocks)

JANE

Howard, what do you make of these clocks?

HOWARD

They must be antiques.

JANE

Most of them look like junk.

HOWARD

Well, maybe they have some sentimental value.

JANE

I have to go to the bathroom. (Pause) Where is it?

(DUKE suddenly comes in, looks at them)

HOWARD

(Pause, friendly) Uh, anything we can do for you?

DUKE

Nope. Just came t' see if you was getting along okay. (Pause) You getting along okay?

HOWARD

Oh yeah. Just great. Thanks very much.

JANE

(About the clocks) These are rather....unusual.

DUKE

Those're mine. Got a whole collection. Those're clocks.

JANE

It's a....very interesting collection.

DUKE

They're all the same. (They look at the clocks again, then back at DUKE) They're all busted. Picked 'em up for practically nothing. Now I got myself a whole collection.

JANE

A broken clock collection. (Pause) That's....interesting.

HOWARD

(Holds up a fishing lure) We thought we'd do some fishing.

DUKE

You come to the right place.

HOWARD

(Pleased) We thought we had. You see, my dad was quite a fisherman.

DUKE

He come here fishing?

HOWARD

No. I don't believe he actually ever came here.

DUKE

Some do. Must be something to it. They come back, year after year. Then they move here, so they can do it all the time. Spend night 'n' day in a boat. Never see 'em again. Anybody asks where they are, just gotta say, 'Gone fishing.' They call that fishing fever.

JANE

(Pause) And they enjoy that? (To HOWARD) You never said anything about fishing. Do they ever catch any fish?

HOWARD

Don't be silly. You heard the man.

JANE

(to DUKE) Do they?

DUKE

Now and then.

HOWARD

Man. I can't wait.

DUKE

'Course once in a while, somebody falls overboard.

HOWARD

Yeah sure. Accidents will happen.

DUKE

Yeh. In the dark sometimes, somebody falls overboard. So dark, they can't find him again. Gotta just let 'im go.

JANE

My goodness.

DUKE

I just come t' see if you was okay before you turn in.

HOWARD

We're fine. Just fine. Aren't we, honey?

JANE

The conveniences. The, uh, modern conveniences.

DUKE

Ain't got none.

HOWARD

None? That's perfect!

JANE

So where do I....go to the bathroom?

DUKE

Jest go out back. Anywhere'll do.

JANE

Out back? (Pause) Well, I'll be back in a minute. (She exits).

HOWARD

I want to tell you. This is perfect. What we wanted. It's so quiet. See, my wife is sort of allergic to noises, so maybe you can understand what all this peace and quiet means to her. To us, really.

DUKE

We got lots a quiet here. Yeh. We got some noises, too.

HOWARD

Back home, you know? This commuter train goes past our apartment. It can drive you insane. (Pause) I sell insurance, by the way. Dad did it before me. Dad, the one who loved fishing? Boy, did he have the gear! Mom used to say he loved that more than he loved her. A joke, of course. But we used to polish that gear every week. We'd go into the basement. A man's world, right? Spend all night down there. Mom never knew what to make of it. They were married forty years. (Pause) Dad was a great fisherman. I mean salesman. He made the millionaire's club every year. Every one. I've made it myself a few times.

(DUKE looks at him, as JANE then returns)

JANE

Boy, You know what. I'm suddenly exhausted. (Sits on a cot, lays back)

HOWARD

We've had quite a day.

DUKE

There's birds.

JANE

I'm sorry? Birds?

DUKE

Bird noises? Owls mostly. Well, you folks need anything? Bite t' eat?

HOWARD

You know what? A bite to eat does sound pretty good.

DUKE

Got some fat back, you want something.

HOWARD

My god! Fat back! How about that?

JANE

(Yawns) I'm sorry, but suddenly I am so sleepy. I don't think I can keep my eyes open any longer. Really, I... (She seems suddenly to be asleep).

DUKE

Must be tired.

HOWARD

God. I'm sorry. She's not usually so rude.

DUKE

Guess I'll turn in myself. (He starts out).

HOWARD

Wait. You know, I'm wide awake myself.

DUKE

Yeh? (He exits).

HOWARD

I thought maybe we could....(DUKE is gone).

(HOWARD looks at the photo on the wall. Then, suddenly a gunshot, off. JANE sits upright, but HOWARD does not seem to have noticed it)

JANE
My God, Howard, what was that?

HOWARD
What was what?

JANE
That noise!

HOWARD
I didn't hear anything. It must have been an owl.

JANE
Howard, it sounded to me like a gunshot.

HOWARD
Yeah. That'd be an owl. Hey, come look at this photo. What character!

BLACKOUT

1, iii

(Morning; HOWARD is polishing his tackle,
He wears a fishing hat; JANE is stretching)

JANE
I have to admit, I slept beautifully. How about you?

HOWARD
I'm too excited to sleep. I'm getting this tackle all ready to go.

JANE
Howard, listen. Do you think it's alright to go fishing? I mean those stories were rather strange.

HOWARD
Nonsense. Haven't you ever heard of fishermen's stories?

JANE
Alright. But what about our car? It simply stopped. Dead.

HOWARD

We'll take care of that. But at the moment, my main concern is getting out on that lake. Let's try to have some fun, alright?

JANE

Alright. That sounds like a good idea. You know what. I think I'll go for a walk.

HOWARD

A walk? We're going fishing in a couple of minutes.

(JANE exits; a moment later, DUKE enters)

HOWARD

(He smiles, as DUKE simply looks at him) Morning. Let me tell you, I slept like a rock last night.

DUKE

Sorry we didn't bring ya no breakfast.

HOWARD

We never missed it.

DUKE

My wife don't feel so good.

HOWARD

I hope it's nothing serious.

DUKE

Nope. She just couldn't sleep last night.

HOWARD

Oh. Why couldn't she sleep.

DUKE

She never said. We'll try and get ya some lunch.

HOWARD

Don't worry about it. Tell me. What do you think of my tackle?

DUKE
Never go fishing.

HOWARD
I spent all night polishing it.

DUKE
All night?

HOWARD
Yeah. That is when I wasn't sleeping like a rock. You know, coming from here, I'm surprised you don't do any fishing.

DUKE
Lots do. Some of 'em get killed.

HOWARD
Yeah. Those accidents. You know, I remember once dad and I were in the basement, polishing the old tackle. And mom was yelling for us to come upstairs. Dad pretty much ignored her. I mean that basement was our world, you know. So we popped a couple of beers....

DUKE
You a drinking man?

HOWARD
(Uneasy) Well, you know, when you're fishing with the guys, a beer or two maybe....

DUKE
Can't live hereabouts without a drink now and again.

HOWARD
You don't say.

DUKE
You want a drink?

HOWARD
Now? At nine in the morning? (Pause) Sure. Why not?

DUKE

Can't live round here without a drink. (He exits)

HOWARD

My god. This is heaven!

DUKE

(Returns, carrying a jug) Gotta keep this handy for when the wind stops blowin'. Wind stops, ya can't hear nothing. Ya get scared. Run round sayin' things nobody can understand, then everyone gets cared of YOU. Won't have nothing t' do with ya. So ya jest crawl down t' the lake and sorta slip in. (He holds out the jug) Want a drink a this or not?

HOWARD

Oh yeah. I sure do. (He takes a sip. Decides it's good, but as he starts to take a hearty hit, DUKE reaches over and takes it from him, and some spills) Oh god. I'm sorry. I don't want to waste any of that.

DUKE

I got plenty. (DUKE drinks, HOWARD waits for DUKE to hand back the jug, but DUKE places it beside himself on the floor).

HOWARD

Let me tell you. That's excellent whisky. Did you make it yourself?

DUKE

'Gainst the law to do that.

HOWARD

Yes. I guess it would be.

DUKE

(Matter-of-fact) Got a cousin does it, though.

HOWARD

Oh. I see. Your cousin. (HOWARD laughs, DUKE stares at him).

DUKE

Yeh. Got lots a cousins. (Drinks, hands HOWARD the jug).

HOWARD

(Drinks heartily) Listen, you remember I was telling you how dad and I were polishing his tackle? Well, it must have been four in the morning when we finally quit, but mom was still up. She was in the kitchen, pulling down the wallpaper. Sort of clawing it off, I guess you'd say. That was what she'd be yelling to dad. How she wanted new wallpaper in the kitchen. (Drinks, hands the jug to DUKE).

DUKE

(Drinks) Ya get it for her?

HOWARD

No. I'm afraid not.

DUKE

Too bad. (Drinks, puts the jug back on the floor).

HOWARD

No. We couldn't. Because dad died a few days after that. (Pause)

DUKE

(Drinks, hands the jug to HOWARD) You like sleeping in them beds?

HOWARD

The cots? I'm telling you, I slept like a rock.

DUKE

You 'n' yer wife sleep in one of 'em together, do ya?

HOWARD

Do we?....Uh, look, do you mind if I have another swig of that whisky?

DUKE

Hep y'sef.

HOWARD

(Drinks, hands the jug back to DUKE) So like I was saying, we couldn't get that wallpaper because dad died a few days later. It's strange, because, you see, he fell out of a boat and drowned.

DUKE

Yeh. Lots do that.

HOWARD

There was this man, standing on shore who happened to see it. And he said dad was standing in the boat and then he just sort of....fell overboard. Of course that hit me and mom pretty hard. (Pause)

DUKE

(Takes a drink) What kind a wallpaper?

HOWARD

I'm sorry?

DUKE

That wallpaper. What kind did yer ma want?

HOWARD

Oh. Something yellow, I think it was. With flowers on it. (He reaches for the jug, but DUKE takes a drink himself).

DUKE

My ma liked fish. (He hands the jug to HOWARD). T' eat.

HOWARD

(Drinks, returns jug) Well, there's nothing like a batch of fresh fried fish.

DUKE

My ma liked 'em raw.

HOWARD

Is that so?

DUKE

Yeh. I jest told ya it was so. (Drinks, hands the jug to HOWARD).

HOWARD

I've never tried bass raw.

DUKE

No one else has neither. But that's how ma liked 'em, so that's how she ate 'em.

HOWARD

Drinks) You know, that's something else I admire about you people down here. Your independence. I mean you know what you want and you do it, and to hell with what the rest of the world thinks about it! (He is about to take another drink, as DUKE takes the jug from him).

DUKE

'Course most people like fish cooked. (He drinks).

(Then JANE suddenly returns to the room)

JANE

Howard, something strange just happened to me.

HOWARD

Hey. Where the heck have you been?

JANE

I went for a walk. Down by the lake....

HOWARD

The lake! Why didn't you wait for me?

JANE

Howard, will you please listen to me? I met this man and he kept telling me about the wind....

HOWARD

A poet! My god, you've already met the local poet!

JANE

He kept telling me how the wind was stuck in the trees and we had to climb up there and get it unstuck. I think he was insane.

HOWARD

Whoa. What? Are we so contaminated we can't appreciate a little poetry any longer? (To DUKE) You explain it to her, would you?

DUKE

Might a met somebody off his rocker. That's what we call it. Man sits on his porch, rocking away, day in, day out. Listens to the same sounds til one day he can't hear

DUKE (Cont.)

nothing, not even the wind. Then he gets up outa his rocker and runs around sayin' things no one can understand. Round here we call that going off his rocker. (Pause).

HOWARD

(to JANE) Well, I still say you met a bona fide poet.

DUKE

Might a been my pa.

HOWARD

His father! Are you trying to insult these people?

JANE

No. Of course not. I'm sorry. I don't know what to think.

DUKE

(Points to the photo) That's my pa.

HOWARD

That's your father? Wow. We were admiring that photo just last night, weren't we, honey?

JANE

Isn't that a Civil War uniform?

DUKE

Yeh. Pa wears it round lots. Been in the family a long time. (Pause) Since about the Civil War.

HOWARD

It must have quite a history behind it.

DUKE

You folks Yankees?

HOWARD

Well by birth. But, you know, we always sympathized with the South.

JANE

(About the photo) He looks very austere, almost aristocratic.

DUKE

Goes barefoot. Don't have no boots t' go with the uniform.

JANE

Did you say he was a poet?

DUKE

He's off his rocker.

JANE

You mean he's crazy?

HOWARD

Good god, Jane, he never said that!

DUKE

Might say he's crazy. Nobody knows what he's sayin'.

JANE

Of course saying things people don't understand doesn't necessarily mean a person is crazy.

HOWARD

No. He might be a genius.

DUKE

When he got off his rocker, he lost a can a worms. Spent near twenty years lookin' fer them worms.

HOWARD

That is remarkable persistence.

DUKE

He never lost no can a worms, though. He buried it. I seen him. On a dark night, no moon shining. He got afraid. So he buried them worms. Never lost nothing. Just went off his rocker.

HOWARD

(Pause) I guess these things happen.

JANE

You know, I once lost an egg. While I was baking a cake. I laid out four eggs. Then I went to answer the phone and when I came back there were only three eggs. Somehow I had lost an egg.

HOWARD

You went to answer the phone? Who called?

JANE

The Avon woman. The thing is, I didn't want to talk to her at all. And then when I got back to the kitchen and discovered I'd lost an egg, I got very upset. I almost broke down and cried.

HOWARD

(to DUKE) This Avon woman can be pretty scary. She has these scars...

JANE

Anyway, I guess what I am trying to say is I understand how traumatic it can be to lose something.

DUKE

We'll see 'bout getting you lunch. Depends on my wife, Betsy.

JANE

Your wife? I'm looking forward to meeting her.

DUKE

Sometimes ya got to give her a kick in the rear end.

(Suddenly, BETSY now enters, they look at her)

DUKE

This's her.

JANE

(Smiles) How do you do? I'm really happy to meet you.

BETSY

(to DUKE) Who's this?

HOWARD

My god. Honest, decent, hard-working people. (He smiles at BETSY) It's a real pleasure to meet you.

DUKE

(to BETSY) Ya got something to eat?

BETSY

They hungry?

JANE

Of course we don't want to put you to any trouble.

DUKE

Ain't no trouble.

BETSY

(to DUKE) Easy fer you t' say.

DUKE

(to HOWARD) What you want?

HOWARD

Well, anything would be just fine.

DUKE

(to BETSY) Get 'em something t' eat, they wanna go fishing.

BETSY

Fishing. Everybody wants ta go fishing. Everybody but me. (To JANE and HOWARD) You know what I want a do?

DUKE

'Course they don't. Git!

JANE

(As BETSY is about to exit) No. I'd like to know. Really.

BETSY

Don't know. Don't know what I'd like ta do.

DUKE

(Snorts) That's jest what I figured.

BETSY

'Cept maybe buy a new dress. I might like ta do that. (She looks at DUKE as if to say 'So there' and exits).

JANE

(Pause) I like her. I really do.

DUKE

I known her all my life.

HOWARD

Really? Now that is truly beautiful.

JANE

Well, I hope to get to know her much better.

HOWARD

(Takes a deep breath) Hey! What is that I smell? Is that good old-fashion home-cooking I smell?

DUKE

Might be pigs. Got pigs out back.

JANE

Out back?

HOWARD

Your own pigs? Honey, isn't that something?

JANE

(Dubious) Yes. Yes, it is.

DUKE

Slaughter 'em ourselves. Hang 'em up, let the blood run. Make blood sausage out a that. Live for a long time on one pig.

JANE

(Pause) You know, I really hope your wife and I can become good friends.

DUKE

Got some perfume? She might like that. (He looks at her)

JANE

Alright. But do you mind if I give it to her. Myself.

HOWARD

(Chuckles) Women! They always have to get in on the act.

DUKE

I'll see she gets it okay.

HOWARD

Why don't you give him a bottle, honey.

JANE

What I am saying, Howard, is that I would really like to give it to her myself. Personally. You know what I mean? (HOWARD beams at her)

BLACKOUT

1, iv

(JANE is looking at the clocks; BETSY then
Enters the room, carrying a stack of pancakes)

JANE

(Smiles) Hello, there. I was just looking at the clocks.

BETSY

Got some pancakes for ya.

JANE

That's really kind of you. I'm afraid Howard has gone off to dig up some worms.

BETSY

I'll tell ya, them clocks is all junk.

JANE

Yes. I've noticed that. That, I guess, is what makes them interesting.

BETSY

Here's some pancakes, you want 'em. (She deposits the pancakes and starts to exit)

JANE

Wait. Please. (BETSY looks at her) Look. There's something I'd like to ask you, if you don't mind.

(HOWARD then returns with a can of worms)

HOWARD

Honey, Duke was right. This place is crawling with worms.

JANE

Did you have to bring them in here?

HOWARD

We're going to catch a mess of bass and have a big fish dinner.

BETSY

(to JANE) What you want a ask me.

(DUKE now enters, carrying a toolbox)

DUKE

I'm gonna take a look at yer car.

JANE

That's wonderful. Are you a mechanic?

BETSY

He don't know nothing about cars.

DUKE

I know more 'n' you do.

JANE

Well, just in case you can't repair it, is there a mechanic somewhere... nearby?

HOWARD

Look, we can worry about that when the time comes. Right now....(He notices the pancakes)....Hey! Are those pancakes? Will you look at that!

BETSY

Want some lard for 'em?

HOWARD

Homemade lard! Now that is the way to eat pancakes.

JANE

Actually, I think I would prefer syrup.

BETSY

Ain't got no syrup.

HOWARD

(Smugly, to JANE) What did I tell you?

BETSY

Used it up this morning'. Them pancakes is leftover.

HOWARD

Well, they look fantastic to me.

JANE

Actually, I'm not very hungry. (To BETSY) I'm sorry. They really do look very appetizing.

BETSY

You don't want 'em, just throw 'em out back to the pigs. (Starts off)

JANE

Wait. Please. (She looks in her bag) You know I'm afraid I forgot to pack any extra fragrance, Mrs....uh....

DUKE

Just call her Betsy.

HOWARD

You know that is a beautiful name. What does it mean?

BETSY

(Stares at him) Means Betsy.

JANE

Listen, Betsy, I wonder if you would accept this as a personal gift from me. (She takes an expensive dress and hands it to BETSY)

(BETSY takes the dress, exits with a shrug)

DUKE

I think she appreciated that.

JANE

It really wasn't very much.

HOWARD

You know, I think this place is going to bring out the best in us.

BLACKOUT

1, v

(Dim lights; HOWARD and JANE asleep; PA enters in the uniform, looks around; He sees HOWARD's can of worms, picks it up, takes The revolver from his belt and puts it where the worms had been. He then leans over and peers At HOWARD, then at JANE, He then runs out of the room, seemingly very agitated)

JANE

(Suddenly pops upright and looks around for a moment) Howard? Howard? I heard something.

HOWARD

(Rousing, sleepily) Huh? Probably another owl.

JANE

No. I think somebody was in our room.

HOWARD

That is ridiculous. You had a dream.

JANE

No. I don't think so, Howard. It wasn't a dream. I really think someone came into our room. Are you sure you didn't hear anything? (Pause) Howard? (Pause) Howard, are you listening to what I am saying? Howard? (Pause; HOWARD is heard snoring).

BLACKOUT

1, vi

(JANE is asleep in her cot; HOWARD polishes his tackle, as DUKE then enters; he's carrying A small pail, stands silently for a moment)

HOWARD

(Finally notices DUKE) Oh. Hello, there. I'm polishing my tackle.

DUKE

Yeh. I figured that's what you was doing. I been slopping pigs.

HOWARD

(Interested) Have you?

DUKE

(Holds up the pail) Yeh.

HOWARD

You know, that sounds very interesting. (DUKE stares at him) See, in the city you don't get much chance to slop pigs.

DUKE

Not much to it.

HOWARD

Listen. Would you mind if I helped you some time?

DUKE

Didn't have t' give 'em much today. They ate a stack a pancakes.

HOWARD

They did?

DUKE

Yeh. Pigs'll eat most anything.

HOWARD

Well, what do you know about that.

DUKE

Your wife. She like sleeping in them beds.

HOWARD

The cots? Yes. Yes, she sure does. Listen, can I tell you something? Of course. I mean if I can't discuss this with a man of your caliber, then who can I discuss it with? What I am getting to, is when we first arrived here, I was pretty depressed. I was even thinking about....Well, anyway, now I realize that was simply from living in the city. You know? I guess you could say I was in a rut....

DUKE

(Perks up) Rut? You mean you 'n' yer wife?

HOWARD

I guess so. I mean that commuter train is always hot and noisy. Every morning I had to listen to all these noises. People opening newspapers, people coughing, people belching. There was no escape. That was one of the reasons we decided to come here. The peace and quiet. But what I am trying to say is, since coming here, I've been happy. And I would like to thank you. For bringing me back to life again.

DUKE

You want ta thank me?

HOWARD

I wish there was some way I could show my appreciation.

DUKE

Yer wife. She's a nice woman.

HOWARD

Thank you. Thank you very much.

DUKE

You like ta sleep with her?

HOWARD

I'm not sure what....Look, we are legally married, I assure you. I heard down here you folks have a pretty strict moral code. But I can promise you, Jane and I are legally married.

DUKE

Sometimes I'd like t' sleep with somebody like her.

HOWARD

You...(unnerved)...Well, thanks. For the compliment....

DUKE

Jest wonder what it'd be like.

HOWARD

Wait. You're putting me on. You're kidding me. Okay. I get it!

DUKE

She's got real nice skin.

HOWARD

(Continuing on the assumption that this is still some kind of put-on) Nice skin, huh? Right.

DUKE

Folks round here got hard skin. Like mine.

HOWARD

(Confused again) Well, skin. It's only....what? Skin deep....

DUKE

You got nice skin, too.

HOWARD

You're still putting me on. Right?

DUKE

I like yer wife's better, though. Like t' touch her skin sometime.

HOWARD

Yes? (Utterly at a loss, he picks up the jug, takes a drink) Well, I don't think she would mind that. No. I mean it's a compliment really....

DUKE

Me 'n' Betsy don't sleep t'gether no more. Don't like t' touch each other. Got skin like sandpaper, haven't slept t'gether in more'n twenty years.

HOWARD

Twenty years? My god, that is a strict moral code. Good, decent folks. It's a shame you don't have any children.

DUKE

(Sharply) What're you talking about?

HOWARD

I meant the things you could give them, the values. Look, did I say something wrong? I'm sorry.

DUKE

We had a kid.

HOWARD

Oh. Did you?

DUKE

He died.

HOWARD

Oh god. I'm terribly sorry.

DUKE

Something happened to him.

HOWARD

I'm really very sorry.

DUKE

Not your fault. I gotta go clean my slop bucket.

HOWARD

Please let me say once again how sorry I am. I have to learn to keep my big mouth shut. I hope you'll accept my apology. Look, if there is anything I can do....

DUKE

You kin tell yer wife.

HOWARD

Of course. (Pause) Tell her what?

DUKE

About my touchin' her skin.

HOWARD

I'm sure she will feel flattered.

DUKE

She's real pretty. I'd like ta fuck somebody like her.

HOWARD

(Pause) This....naivete. This good old American honesty. I find it very, very touching....

DUKE

Like t' feel what it's like. Puttin' yer log in a woman like that.

HOWARD

American honesty. I find it very....moving....

DUKE

You ask her, okay? 'Bout that skin.

HOWARD

Yes. I will. Yes. And will you tell your wife something for me. (DUKE looks at him) Tell her how much I enjoyed those pancakes.

DUKE

I got a go clean my slop bucket now.

HOWARD

Just a minute. I was wondering. Next time, you know, you slop the pigs. Would you mind if I joined you?

DUKE

(Stares at him) Ya wanna slop pigs?

HOWARD

If you wouldn't mind me coming along, I would consider it an honor. Oh, and one more thing. (HOWARD goes to his closet and removes a nice-looking suit of dark cloth) I wonder if you would please accept this. As a token of my appreciation for what you have done for us. For both of us. Please. I insist.

DUKE

(Takes the suit, looks it over, then looks in the closet) I like that one better.

HOWARD

You mean the pin-striped? (He takes out another suit).

DUKE

Nope. (He points) That one.

HOWARD

Of course. Of course. (He gives DUKE the suit he wants).

DUKE

Like this one better.

HOWARD

It's yours. My god. What refreshing honesty.

DUKE

I got to go clean my bucket now.

HOWARD

I want you to know that I feel privileged. I really feel a part of something extremely beautiful that is going on here. Thank you for it. (DUKE exits, HOWARD picks up the jug, takes a drink).

(JANE suddenly rouses and looks about)

JANE

Howard? I just had an odd dream. We were in this room and we were very happy. But it suddenly became dark. So dark we couldn't even see each other any longer. We were walking around in the dark, trying to find each other. Look, don't you think it's time to go? Hm? Howard?

THE END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

11, i

(HOWARD is polishing his fishing tackle,
when JANE suddenly notices the revolver)

JANE

Howard! What is this?

HOWARD

My god! Let me see that...

JANE

That's what I'm thinking.

HOWARD

This is really something. It looks like Civil War era.

JANE

Howard, someone has been in our room with a gun!

HOWARD

Come on, this thing is as harmless as a rubber duck.

JANE

That's not the point. Aren't you upset someone might have been in here. (As HOWARD aims the gun around the room) Would you please put that down.

HOWARD

Alright. Anyway, I'm ready to go fishing.