



REVELATORPRESS

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BETWEEN THE WATER AND THE AIR

ANDREW J. HUNGERFORD





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Book design: B. Kelley

Between the Water and the Air was first produced at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe on August 6, 2005 with the following cast:

KEN	Matt Purdy
SARAH/ABBIE	Sara Vaught
MICHAEL/STEVE	Andrew Hungerford
SCENIC DESIGN	Michael Minahan
LIGHTING DESIGN	Chad Bonaker
MUSIC	Sarah Niblack (viola) Steve Whipple (bass)
SOUND DESIGN AND STAGE DIRECTION	Andrew Hungerford

The first American production took place at the Cincinnati Fringe Festival on June 4, 2006 with the following cast:

KEN	Dan Davidson
SARAH/ABBIE	Sara Vaught
MICHAEL/STEVE	Andrew Hungerford
LIGHTING DESIGN	Andrew Hungerford
LIVE MUSIC	Steve Whipple (bass)

THE FAMILY

KEN	A man in his mid to late twenties
SARAH	Ken's sister, early to mid twenties
MICHAEL	Ken's brother, early thirties

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

WOLFGANG STEVE	A man in his late twenties
ABBIE	A woman in her mid to late twenties

A NOTE ON CHARACTER

This play is written to be performed by a cast of three, with the actress playing SARAH also performing all other women's roles and the actor playing MICHAEL also performing the role of STEVE. Complete transformations of appearance are neither required nor desired; simple, emblematic costume pieces and changes of mannerism should be enough to denote the different characters.

A NOTE ON TIME AND SETTING

Time in this play is as fluid as memory. Our present tense for the majority of the show is the Winter, but we move into and through the year leading up to this time. The stage design, then, should reflect the shifting nature, as well as the qualities of the season. Bare trees, the skeletal timbers of houses under construction, and the wide open space of a lake not yet frozen are all useful elements to consider.

In the original production, the set was minimal, using stools and one five gallon bucket to form all furniture arrangements. A surrounding structure was constructed through the course of the show, providing an activity for KEN during monologues.





(It is winter. Lights up on KEN. He is isolated, seated on an ice fishing bucket. It is a plastic five-gallon bucket capped with a wooden lid.)

KEN I worked as a mechanic for two years. Have I told you this? I needed to do something with my hands. I thought it might help. I was thrown off for a while. I felt like I was slipping and couldn't find traction.

There's only so much time you can spend with books, with thinking too much. After a while nothing seems real. Or things you've been reading seem more defined than the people around you.

Sometimes I need context. And when you're covered in grease, under the hood of a '76 Subaru that someone just will not give up on . . . well, there's context.

My dad used to contextualize things in terms of architecture. Not grand scale architecture, nothing like that, but house frames. The skeleton of a subdivision as it grew, the relationship between the rafters and space, the way they gave the space meaning. The air had a purpose when it was waiting to be covered.

I'm waiting now, too. Waiting for ice. Whatever they say about watching a pot boil is even more true of watching a lake freeze. Waiting for it to turn to slush, to solidify.

Here's the thing. Dad always told me that there was something magic

about the ice. When everyone can walk on water, it's like we're all closer to . . . not God, necessarily. I don't know about God. But it brings us closer to that mystery. The thing that we can't name. And it puts us in context. It makes us think that, if we're a part of all this, out where the lake and the sky seem to be the same thing, then maybe it's okay to be alone. Maybe he didn't say all that in so many words, but I think that's what he meant. I think it was. But I don't know. I never asked him.

(The lights shift. MICHAEL and SARAH are seated in individual chairs, also waiting. MICHAEL is in his early thirties, SARAH her early twenties. They are in a hospital's waiting room. There is a table with magazines. It is as though they have been in an uncomfortable silence for some time.)

MICHAEL I'm sorry I missed your graduation.

SARAH It's okay.

MICHAEL No, things were so busy, and I couldn't—Yeah. I wanted to drive up for it.

SARAH It really is okay.

MICHAEL I know what a big deal it was for you, and for Dad, since Ken is . . . also late with that—

SARAH Michael. Shut up! For God's sake, it's all right! It was fine. You didn't need to sit through another of those things. I understand that you're busy.

MICHAEL Oh. Okay then.

(Pause.)

I'm glad that Dad was able to make it at least. He was very proud of you.

SARAH Michael stop. . . .

MICHAEL I mean, is proud of you. He still is proud of you, of course.
As are we all. Jesus, where is Ken?

(KEN enters disheveled.)

SARAH As if if on cue.

KEN Hi. Sorry. How is he?

MICHAEL We've been waiting for the all clear to see him. Where were you?

KEN I was . . . thinking.

MICHAEL Thinking. I see. About what?

KEN Well, I—

MICHAEL It's just that we were here, also thinking. Here together, in fact, at this time that might be perceived as pretty traumatic. What one might call family time. A time when admittedly I was looking to see our little brother here with—

SARAH *(Under her breath, overlapping with MICHAEL's line.)* God I hate that.

MICHAEL What was that?

SARAH Nothing.

MICHAEL No. What did you say?

SARAH I said I hate that.

MICHAEL What? Hate what?

SARAH The way you start talking like a goddamn novel when you're mad. Like you always need to be so clever. This is what I hate.

MICHAEL What, you hate that I can actually express myself when angry, instead of becoming passive-aggressive like you?

SARAH Michael, you're such an ass.

MICHAEL Maybe that's what happens when one's kid sister is a sarcastic little bitch.

SARAH Screw you.

(SARAH crosses to the opposite corner of the room, grabs a magazine.)

KEN What the hell is going on? Guys, this is ridiculous. . . .

MICHAEL No, Ken. This is just family time. Feel free to join in.

SARAH Michael. . . .

MICHAEL Or do you need to go fix some cars? Or go hang out at the bar with Steve? Or maybe go sit in a corner and stare at the wall? I don't know what it is you do with your days.

KEN Actually, I've been back at school. Do you pay any attention to other people at all?

MICHAEL Right. Back at school. You keep on pretending you'll be able to get through.

KEN You don't know anything about me.

MICHAEL I know that you could have been taking care of Dad. What else do you have going on?

KEN God you're presumptuous. Back me up on this, Sarah.

(SARAH puts down her magazine.)

KEN Sarah.

SARAH I don't know, Ken. I guess you could have been there this summer.

KEN But you were the one pressuring me to go back. . . .

SARAH That was before . . . all this.

KEN This is stupid. First, I don't think there's anything I could have done. Dad always takes care of himself. Second, how dare you plan my life out for me? You think you're such a great judge of what I can and cannot do?

MICHAEL Ken, you quit school from a full scholarship to fix cars. How does that look?

KEN It was my choice. I needed some time off. It was my choice.

MICHAEL Right. So why don't you ever make a decision and stick with it?

SARAH Michael, stop it. Leave him alone.

KEN So just because I didn't decide when I was nine that I wanted an MBA I'm a big slacker? Not everyone carries a brief case to elementary school. Some people like to use their imaginations. Some people don't want to be the boring dark suited guy.

SARAH I'm going to check on Dad.

(SARAH exits.)

KEN You're a suit Michael. I would say that you're an empty suit, but clichés have too much truth in them to be you. You're a suit full of animatronics that could have been a real boy.

MICHAEL Well. Maybe so. But then what are you?

KEN I'm. . . .

MICHAEL Are you trying to disappear?

KEN Dammit, I. . . .

(KEN trails off as SARAH reenters.)

SARAH It's time to see him.

(They look expectantly at KEN.)

MICHAEL Well?

KEN I'll be right back. I just need a minute. A minute to think.

MICHAEL There's no sense in waiting. He'll move when he's ready.

(MICHAEL and SARAH exit.)



(The lights shift to isolate KEN who is once again seated. He is turning an ice fishing rod over in his hands.)

KEN A lot of people have trouble accepting ice fishing as a sport. When the whole point is to not move for a long time, it causes some difficulties in classification. At its most basic level, the simplicity of it is appealing. Something to sit on, a stick, a line, some bait, a hole. And ice.

That's the way things used to be with me and my dad when I was little. Michael was already too old to want to go. He was busy with other things. But Dad and I would go out and sit.

So there's me, Dad, and this hole in the ice. Actually, there's just ice at first. You have to drill your own way through. Which is pretty cool, especially to a five year old who doesn't have to do any of the work. We would always use a hand auger: a big, blue drill.

You put the tip of the blade down and start turning, and you slowly puncture the thing you're standing on. From a floor that looks like green translucent marble, you start churning up piles of snow. It takes some time, but you break through.

I remember there always being a sound in that moment. Some sort of slushy splash. It's a strange thing that marks that victory.

And so you sit on the bucket, with your line dropped down the hole,

using these ridiculously short fishing rods and you wait. Sometimes you talk and sometimes you don't. We would usually talk, my dad and I. We would talk a lot. Sometimes what we said would be lost in the wind.

And sometimes the wind is so cold that you have to get up and move around, even if it's only to make sure that you still can. You're always able to. The body is usually very good about remembering the way it's supposed to work, the way you're supposed to get back on the ride from the past to the future. The way you need to take another step from time to time.

Is there a difference between standing still and settling down? When I worked at the shop, I thought I could find out. That was before the rest of this happened, before Dad got sick.

(Lights shift. STEVE enters carrying a peculiar piece of machinery, brings it to KEN.)

KEN What the hell is that, Steve?

STEVE I don't know dude. But we've got to fix it.

KEN Really?

STEVE Oh, yeah, man. My dad said so. I just pulled it out of a Saab, but I don't know shit about this part. I've got to make some calls, so you'll need to figure it out.

KEN Well. Let me take a look.

(KEN flips it over a few times, examining it. STEVE exits, dialing a cell phone. SARAH enters.)

SARAH Hey, stranger. What're you up to?

KEN I'm trying to figure out how to fix this.

SARAH What's wrong with it?

KEN I have no idea.

SARAH Huh. What's it supposed to do?

KEN I have no clue.

SARAH That makes it a bit tricky, I guess.

KEN Yeah. One of the many challenges of this job.

SARAH You're liking it here then?

KEN It's been good for me.

SARAH You like it better than school?

KEN I think . . . hey, shouldn't you be up at school right now?

SARAH Well, I . . .

KEN It's not like you to be skipping classes.

SARAH I don't have classes this week. Spring Break.

KEN Right. . . .

SARAH Besides, I wanted to come home and get some clothes, so I thought I'd stop by and see what my slightly bigger brother has been up to.

KEN Ah. That was nice of you.

SARAH It's been months since we had a chance to talk. I wanted to make sure you're okay.

KEN I'm doing well.

SARAH Michael says "hi," by the way.

KEN Oh really. How is he?

SARAH Oh, you know. Same old. Whoring the family name with his business. Nothing too earth shattering.

KEN This is why I don't feel the need to talk to him. I always know exactly what he's doing.

SARAH Right. You, on the other hand. You're full of surprises.

KEN I suppose.

SARAH And verbose as always.

(Pause.)

You're really thinking that you'll be here for a while?

KEN I like it a lot. Taking stuff apart, putting it back together. It's surprising how relaxing it is.

SARAH I'm glad that you're happy. I've been worried about why you left.

KEN Leaving school was something I needed to do.

(Pause.)

Wolfgang, Wolf senior, has asked me to stay. Maybe take over when he retires.

SARAH You can't be serious.

KEN Honestly. He and I get along really well. I can talk to him.

SARAH (*Leaning in, somewhat conspiratorially.*) What about Steve?

(*STEVE enters, hanging up phone.*)

STEVE Sweet! You guys will not believe this.

(*STEVE looks SARAH up and down casually, but does not pause.*)

Hey, Sarah. You look hot.

(*STEVE turns back to KEN.*)

I just bought something awesome.

KEN Yeah?

STEVE Oh, yeah man. Picture this: a new Suzuki snowmobile. 150 horsepower. It is blazing fast. Black with chrome. It is the Wolfman's perfect ride. Pretty soon old Steve-o's gonna be blazing across the ice on Lake St. Clair. Like silver lightning, dude.

KEN Isn't the ice getting a little thin? It's March, Steve.

STEVE Yeah, that's why it was such a great deal. Close out! And, hey, thin ice doesn't matter. This baby can go 150 yards over open water. Man, I'll be across the bay and to the Raft Bar for a beer and burger in like five minutes. Larry will shit himself when he hears this.

(*STEVE saunters off stage.*)

SARAH I think I might understand why Wolf asked you.

KEN Steve's cool. I mean, he's great to be around.

SARAH Really?

KEN There's an art to his bullshit. It's like comfort food. But not

food. Forget that analogy.

SARAH You two really get along?

KEN Yeah we do. I like working with real people. Not like things at school. Sorority girls, frat boys, who aren't anything beyond their clothes, professors who are so worried about tenure that they'll screw any student over. Who needs that?

SARAH It's so strange.

KEN What?

SARAH How differently you feel now. When you were at the university, I had the impression that you loved it.

KEN It had its moments, I guess. I've moved on. I opened my eyes.

SARAH I figured you would probably go back at some point.

KEN What makes you say that?

SARAH Look at yourself, Ken. You're covered in grease, you're all scraped up.

KEN There's nothing wrong with getting dirty, is there?

SARAH But you're coming into work eight hours a day and going home. That's all you do. You're like an automaton or something.

KEN I'm not like a robot at all. I work on different puzzles all day. It's very creative.

SARAH Yeah?

KEN You'd be surprised. And I get to do a lot of thinking.

SARAH But you're not doing anything with those thoughts.

KEN I'm thinking them. Isn't that what they're for? Look at me.
Do I look tired to you?

SARAH No.

KEN This is the first time since high school that I haven't been
tired all the time. I come in, I do my job, and then I get to go home.
What could be wrong with that?

SARAH You always used to say that you liked being tired all the
time. That it meant you were keeping busy.

KEN That's what I said before I was ever well rested.

SARAH So you want to be Steve?

KEN No, I don't want to be Steve. I like him. I like hanging out
with him, but I want to do something better with this place than he
would. Something that means more.

SARAH That's what I'm saying. Does this really mean anything?

KEN Wait. Did Michael put you up to this?

SARAH No, of course not. Why would you say that?

KEN You sound exactly like him. He had to have said some-
thing to you.

SARAH He did not, Ken. I do think for myself.

KEN Right. Sorry.

SARAH I'm actually concerned about you. I'm worried that you're
never going to do anything.

KEN I am doing something, even if I stay here. And it looks like
Steve is leaving town soon. He says that he's got a job offer in DC. He

wouldn't even be around. It would be great to have something to put my hands on, to have something that's actually my own.

SARAH It's a repair shop.

KEN So what?

SARAH You're too smart for this.

KEN Dad built houses, I'm repairing cars. I don't see the problem.

SARAH Is that what this is about?

KEN What?

SARAH For one, dad built things, he didn't just fix them.

KEN Sometimes they're closer than you think.

SARAH Okay. Fine. What does dad have to say about this?

KEN I haven't talked to him about it yet.

SARAH Why not?

KEN He's up north. Fishing.

SARAH When was the last time you saw him?

KEN Two months ago.

SARAH Good grief. And you two supposedly live in the same house.

KEN We've just been . . . like ships in the night.

(Pause.)

SARAH I can understand the idea of wanting to get away from academia. But it doesn't seem like you.

KEN I don't need you watching over my shoulder all the time.

SARAH Hey, I thought. . . .

KEN I like it here. I'm happy.

(STEVE enters.)

STEVE One hundred and fifty yards, man! It's gonna be awesome.

SARAH If this is what you really want. I'll leave you to it. See you later.

STEVE Later! Give me a call if you want. We can get drinks.

(KEN shoots STEVE a look.)

The three of us man. It'd be awesome.

KEN What the hell's the deal with this part, Steve?

STEVE You're still messing with that? Shit. I was just fucking with you. I pulled that out of the coffee machine.

(STEVE exits.)



(Lights shift as KEN crosses to his bucket.)

KEN Winters in Detroit can be damn cold. It's kind of the point. It's part of what breeds hardy people in the northern midwest. Like a crucible in reverse. You can usually say definitively that the lake will be frozen around Christmas time, early January at the latest. But every year since I was little, it's been getting later. The snow has been falling a bit lighter, the ice less sound. People still complain about the cold, because that's how we cope. But I think everyone feels something slipping away. It's a problem, and not just for me. A lot of people define themselves by their absolute opposition to the cold. Each winter that goes up a couple of degrees, they lose a little bit more of who they are.

My dad taught us to embrace the cold out there, sitting on those buckets. To immerse ourselves in the air that hurts when it fills your lungs, that reminds you this is what it means to breathe, to live.

And nothing I could do came close to the way we would speak when we were surrounded that air. I don't know why it always seems to be the cold that brings out the truth. But each year we're losing a little more of it.

(Lights transition to the suggestion of a bar. STEVE enters beer in hand, sits across from KEN.)

KEN You're really heading out to DC?

STEVE It's almost a done deal.

KEN How's your dad feel about that?

STEVE I'm having another beer. Do you want another beer?

KEN I'm fine.

STEVE I'm ordering you one too.

KEN All right. All right.

(STEVE makes an exaggerated gesture to the unseen bartender.)

STEVE You know, one time back when I was in high school, some guy brought in an old ass Volkswagon Vanagon. Pretty solid exterior, but underneath, man, it was dead. It looked like there was no hope. But me and dad rebuilt the engine, lived in that thing for two weeks. On the last day, man, we made that pile of junk hum. We don't get to do much shit like that any more. I don't know why.

KEN Too much reliance on computers?

STEVE I guess.

(STEVE takes a swig of beer.)

But rebuilding those cars, man. It was a hell of a way to meet girls.

KEN If you say so, Steve.

STEVE Hey, the Wolfman knows his shit. The Wolfman knows.

(Pause.)

You know, you should come with me to pick up chicks sometime. It'd be like a golden opportunity.

KEN I'm just not looking right now.

STEVE No, no we can do the team work thing. We're like a balanced duo, you've got all the school, I've got the tech. Cause this is where all the smart chicks in Detroit hang out, the engineers, the computer programmers. Dude, they are hot.

KEN Maybe sometime.

STEVE You have to get over this ex of yours, man. You let go. That's why she's an ex.

KEN I don't want to talk about it.

STEVE Just trying to help you out.

KEN Is your dad okay with the DC thing? Things all right between you?

STEVE Things are fine with me and Wolf Sr. Why wouldn't they be?

KEN Larry mentioned he heard some yelling from the office today.

STEVE Larry doesn't know shit about what's up with me and my dad. We're fine.

KEN Okay, I was just curious.

STEVE How are you and your dad?

KEN We're fine, Steve. We are fine.

STEVE Right. Well. I just wanted you to know how it felt to be asked. I've gotta race like a piss horse.

(STEVE exits.)



(Lights shift.)

KEN People have started to blend together for me. When I'm at school, I'll see faces I've known from home for years, but then they'll turn a corner and be gone. Or at home I'll see people from Freshman Calculus, from Comparative Lit., and each time I know it can't be the person I think it is. But a couple of days later there they are again, in the corner of my eye, faces bleeding into the background crowd.

For a while I thought that it was because there are only so many basic types of people in the world. A dozen was my initial idea, but after a while I expanded it to twenty basic types. Sure, DNA can provide a fair number of differences in iterations, but with six billion or so people on this planet, aren't the chances getting pretty decent that there's a repeat of you somewhere? And if we take into account just the traits that are relatively noticeable, it doesn't seem so far fetched.

This idea worked for me. It led me to some interesting thoughts. But I've since begun to speculate that the repetition is entirely in my head. It has to be. Why would nature conspire to put copies of my brother everywhere I look? In everyone? My sister somehow bleeds through in every woman and it gives me a strange familiarity that cripples me. I don't even know who my real family is any more, because I judge them by the actions of all these doppelgangers. Of course, I won't rule out that I might be incapable of seeing things as they really are.

(Lights shift. We are in the bar. ABBIE is seated with a drink. KEN approaches. He is grungy from work.)

KEN Excuse me . . . Abbie?

ABBIE I'm sorry? Do I . . . ?

KEN Yeah, I know it's been a while, but...

ABBIE Ken? Wow. You look so. . . .

KEN Handsome?

ABBIE I was going to say "dirty," but, well. I always was a fan, so that works too. Wow.

KEN I saw you here, thought I'd say "hello." Maybe catch up. How have you been?

ABBIE Very well, actually. Thank you for asking.

KEN Did graduate school work out for you?

ABBIE Yes, I'm in the second year of a masters program. I'm still thinking about the PhD, but that's a little intimidating at the moment.

KEN Right. I can understand that.

ABBIE And you? How are you?

KEN I'm good. Working, thinking, getting by.

ABBIE And what are you doing? Greasing pigs?

KEN No. Well, almost. I'm working as a mechanic, actually.

ABBIE Really? Huh. From classics to automotive in two short years. Amazing.

KEN Not the most intuitive career move, I know, but there's a subtle logic to it.

ABBIE How's your sister?

KEN She's . . . she's well too. It'll be her final year of school starting this fall.

ABBIE That's right. Huh. How does it feel to be passed by your younger sibling?

KEN Oh, it's no big deal. I'm fine with it.

ABBIE You don't feel like you're falling behind?

KEN No. No, not really. Well, I mean. Sometimes I feel like I'm on track. Other times I'm not so sure.

ABBIE You used to be pretty sure where you were going. Do you remember that?

KEN Not really. It seems like things have always been confused.

(Pause.)

ABBIE I'm sorry, I'm a little flustered. It's surprising to see you again.

KEN I'm sorry that I didn't really keep in touch. I meant to.

ABBIE It's been two years, Ken. You just disappeared on me. That seems a little more than simply forgetting to call.

KEN Right, I . . .

ABBIE We never even broke up, really. Did we?

KEN I guess not.

ABBIE I think I yelled a bit. You were stoic, as I recall. And then gone.

KEN I'm sorry about that.

ABBIE I would still be mad, but I'm too surprised. What the hell happened with you?

KEN Things just got complicated.

ABBIE Complicated. You're right about that. We had been dating for a year when you left. Didn't that carry some weight?

KEN I thought you said you weren't mad anymore.

ABBIE It's coming back to me. Your disappearance right before my final semester was a little tough to deal with, Ken.

KEN I know.

ABBIE Would it really have been too much for you to tell me why you left?

KEN It wasn't you at all. . . .

ABBIE Right, it was you. I didn't flatter myself that it was me. Because if it was, I think you would have cared enough to at least say something.

KEN Abbie, I did care. I do care about you, I. . . .

ABBIE I mean, I should have guessed something was wrong. I just figured you were stressed out with your finals, that journal article you were researching.

KEN It was a busy time.

ABBIE And you had some meeting with the Dean. Lots of stuff

going on. I guess I was wrong in thinking that I'd at least be worth a goodbye.

KEN I'm so sorry.

ABBIE But you know, that's okay. I'm over us.

KEN Right.

ABBIE And I've got a new boyfriend. Just so you know.

KEN Ah. I figured you might. What's he like?

ABBIE He is . . . a little more stable. He doesn't seem to be the kind to fall off the edge and disappear.

KEN Well. That's good. That's good for you.

ABBIE Yes, I think it is.

KEN Well. That's . . . great. Your family is?

ABBIE They're all fine. How about your dad?

KEN He's the same. Showing his age a little more. Totally grey now.

ABBIE Well. That suits him.

KEN It caught me by surprise.

ABBIE It's good to know some things stay the same. Are you going to go back to school anytime soon?

KEN No, I don't think I. . .

ABBIE Really? You don't seem the type to be a drop out. Though I guess your actions would say otherwise.

KEN Well. I might go back. Or. Actually, I have no idea what I'm doing.

ABBIE I'm sure you'll figure it out one of these days. If you think about it enough.

KEN We'll see.

(Pause.)

ABBIE It was great to see you again. Really great. I should get going, though. . . .

KEN Yeah, my friend Steve is probably wondering where I've gone.

ABBIE Take care of yourself. And if you want to call sometime in the next two years, I'd like to hear from you. You know?

KEN Right. I'm glad I ran into you.

ABBIE Likewise. Bye.

KEN Bye.

(ABBIE exits.)

I miss you.



(Lights shift.)

KEN There are times when I've taken definitive steps. Life is a series of breaking points, you make the choice and then go. Right?

But lately every time I think I'm headed in the right direction . . . it's like there's a pressure crack that appears in the ice overnight. Suddenly there's a jagged wall in front of me with freezing water just underneath, and I think, "Oops. Wrong move." I can't figure out how it happens, but the result of each successive action has been harder to deal with. And so more and more I'm defined not by my actions, but by the things I've failed to do.

(Lights shift. We are at the mechanic's shop. STEVE enters.)

STEVE Hey, man, how goes it?

KEN End of another day. Where've you been?

STEVE Here and there. Out and about, man.

KEN That sounds good.

STEVE Yeah. Hey, me and Wolf Sr. have been talking. He says that you're sticking around for a while.

KEN He did ask me to think about it.

STEVE That's awesome, man! We'll be partners!

KEN Wait—what do you mean?

STEVE Yeah, dad let me know the retirement plan; he's probably gone after next year, and then it's you and me running the business. It'll be fantastic! We can even change the name, if you want. We could be Wolf SK Motors. Man, that would be sweet.

KEN Wolf SK?

STEVE Yeah. Wolfman Steve and Kenneth. Wolf SK. It sounds very contemporary. I think that it would open whole new doors for us.

KEN But I thought you were moving to DC?

STEVE DC, right. . . . Well, me and dad had a heart to heart, and he made a better offer. So I'm here to stay, dude. Me and you.

KEN Wow. The DC thing had sounded really great. I was sure you were going.

STEVE Of course it would've been awesome. Did I tell you the best part about the whole thing? Me and some buddies were at this bar in Texas. . . .

KEN Steve, I can't be your partner.

STEVE What? Dude. Why not?

KEN I'm going back to school.

STEVE Woah, woah, woah. . . . Where's this shit coming from? When did you decide this?

KEN Very, very recently.

STEVE No, no. This is not good, man. Dad's not gonna retire unless you're here too. He's counting on us. He needs there to be two people here. He needs you, dude. You're like another son to him. An adopted son, but, you know. Still close.

KEN I'm sorry. I've . . . I've been thinking. There's more that I want to do before I can settle in here.

STEVE No, you gotta stay.

KEN I can't. I need to move. Make sure I still can.

STEVE Man this sucks. This is a real bummer. I was counting on you being here. Like, I'd be your mentor, and show you the ropes. We'd be like two peas in a thing, you know?

KEN I'm sorry, Steve. That would've been . . . great.

STEVE Fuck!

KEN Calm down, Steve.

STEVE This week can kiss my ass. First my snowmobile goes under. . . .

KEN Your snowmobile?

STEVE Yeah. On the bottom of lake St. Clair. Not enough ice, you know? Too much open water. I was barreling across the lake at full throttle, skimming just above the water, and, man, it gave out. All I could do was ride it down, like the captain on his ship. Fuck, that water was cold.

KEN How much distance were you short?

STEVE Only a couple of feet . . . well, a couple dozen feet. But still. I was so damn close.

KEN I'm sorry Steve. I don't know what to say.

STEVE Whatever. I can get another, I guess. But, shit, man you can't just leave me like this. You're not leaving.

KEN No, Steve, I really am.

STEVE Dammit. Fuck.

(Pause.)

Well, if it's something you need. You do what you've got to do.

KEN Thanks.

STEVE But you've gotta tell Dad.

KEN Can't you let him know?

STEVE No, dude. You've gotta give your two weeks notice yourself.

KEN I don't know what to say.

STEVE You'll think of something. You're all about those words and shit. You've just got to tell him.

(STEVE exits.)



(Lights shift.)

KEN I think that I'm impaired somehow. I never seem to be able to predict how people will react to the things I do. I try to do the right thing, then I expect to hear a slushy splashing sound and it doesn't happen.

I guess what it all comes down to is that I don't really know anyone well enough to judge. With my brother and my sister, I have a general sense of how they began when we all were little, but no real notion of where these new people I see came from.

I pretend that I know my father, because he's the only one I have to hold on to. I know him when I sit in our house, the house that he built, and I can feel him in the hidden rafters, in the way the door doesn't close quite right. He's always there, someplace I can't quite reach.

And maybe that's better than actually reaching the rest of my family.

Even now they don't really understand what I'm doing. They're trying, and I do appreciate the effort. That seems genuine, even from Michael. They call, they ask how the house is, how I'm holding up, what my plans are. I generally tell them that I don't know. And then they'll say something like, "what are you doing today?" I'll say that I'm going to check on the lake. And then I do. I think it surprises them every time.

(KEN exits as MICHAEL and SARAH enter in shifting light. They sit at a table, drinking coffee.)

MICHAEL I didn't think he had it in him.

SARAH You do tend to underestimate people, Michael.

MICHAEL I don't. I've always known that I can do whatever I set my mind to.

SARAH Ah. Right. I meant other people.

MICHAEL Oh.

(Pause.)

The thing is he's normally so predictable in his inability to accomplish anything.

SARAH See, there you go again. I knew he would go back. Ken's accomplished a lot. He really has. Better SAT scores than you, as I recall.

MICHAEL Yeah, but that's part of the problem. He's all potential and no execution. When is he actually going to make something of himself?

SARAH That's what he's trying. That's why he's gone back.

MICHAEL Really. Or is it that he couldn't cut it at the blue collar life either. Did he get fired?

SARAH He did not get fired, Michael. I think he just realized that it wasn't what he wanted to do.

MICHAEL Well, I'm sorry it took him so long. I think his best years are behind him, intellectually speaking. Burned too brightly, perhaps.

Like a disappointing firework, there and then gone.

SARAH I see. While you. . . .

MICHAEL Right. I've always been able to pace myself. I'm in it for the long haul, and that's why I'm winning.

SARAH And where am I?

MICHAEL You are the middle distance runner. You know what you want and you'll get there. A good job. It won't be spectacular, but you're not looking for anything else.

SARAH Jeez. You've got us all figured out, huh?

MICHAEL I'm right aren't I? It's all pretty simple if you look at people.

SARAH Then where do you see dad?

MICHAEL Ah. Well, Dad's in a different kind of race. He's actually not racing at all. He walks along side watching all the other people run. I'm not sure how he can live like that, really.

SARAH But why can't Ken be taking that side path like Dad?

MICHAEL Because we're living in a different era. The artisan is dead, Sarah. At least in this country. There's no place for people like Dad any more. They're all being replaced by middle management and robots.

SARAH People like you then.

MICHAEL No. Not at all. I'm not middle management, by any means. You should know a leader when you see one. Someone like Dad, well . . . he could have led if he'd had any idea where he was going.

SARAH I hope you haven't told Dad all this.

MICHAEL No, of course I haven't. But I think he knows his breed is dying.

SARAH Michael!

MICHAEL I'm just saying . . . now that he's retired, I don't think there's anyone quite like him still working in the area.

SARAH Except maybe Ken. Have you actually talked to him?

MICHAEL No . . . just the call from Dad. I couldn't tell if he was happy or not. I get the feeling he hasn't been seeing Ken much, but he didn't say it outright. You know how Dad is.

SARAH Maybe Ken's been putting in extra hours at the shop, putting in extra work before he leaves.

MICHAEL Speaking of work . . . shit . . . I need to go.

SARAH But we haven't even ordered yet.

MICHAEL I know. I'm really sorry. I have a thing. But I'll have more time for lunch next month. I promise. Enjoy your homework. Just think, next fall you'll be the one in front of the class. I bet you'll get an apple every day.

(MICHAEL waves and exits.)

SARAH Right. Right.

(SARAH takes a moment alone with her coffee.)



(Lights shift onto KEN at his bucket.)

KEN There's got to be a way to balance these things. Or at least to find the place where the water becomes solid. I don't know how long it took my dad to get there, but he had it as long as I can remember. It might be because he never went to college, just learned things along the way. I was looking for that, working for Wolfgang. He's got that same air of being completely in control. I learned a lot about cars, about people in context.

But I couldn't stay. Not the way things turned out.

And lately I've been wondering if grounding is something inherent to a person, part of their actual makeup. If so, I'm screwed. I got my dad's temperament, interests, sense of humor, but my mom's lack of world view.

I assume that it's hers. We haven't talked to her in years. I think she has another family now, a set of step children. I don't know. She left when I was seven. I have vague memories of her always being overwhelmed. Sarah doesn't really remember her. That's what she says.

It had to have upset my father unbelievably, but it didn't show. He simply kept going. He was always good at moving on. So was she, I guess.

(The lights shift. KEN stands, crosses SL. For the next section he speaks on a cellular or cordless phone.)

KEN Yes, Dad. I know it's good ice. Six inches is substantial.

(Pause.)

It would be a lot of fun, it's just that I've got other things going on.

(Pause.)

Well, homework for one.

(Pause.)

No need for sarcasm. I am trying to be a good student.

(Pause.)

You know I would much rather go fishing.

(Pause.)

Dad, there will be plenty of other weekends. Next year my schedule might not be so bad. We'll be able to go all the time. It'll be great. This is not the last time that the ice will be good, after all. Right. Okay. I need to go. I'll call you soon.

(KEN hangs up. To audience.)

You should know that I've lied when it matters.

(The lights shift, lower on KEN, rise on SARAH. She is in her dorm room, preparing for a date, adjusting clothes, makeup, etc. There is a table, the suggestion of a bed, and a chair. There is a knock at her door.)

SARAH One second!

(SARAH adjusts her shirt and twirls around in a sexy pose.)

Come on in!

(KEN enters carrying a brown shopping bag.)

KEN Um. Hey . . . Sarah. Nice shirt.

SARAH *(Covering up.)* Ken! What the hell?

KEN *(Lifting the bag.)* I brought you some munchies and stuff.
Happy graduation.

SARAH I can't believe you!

KEN What? I told you I was coming.

SARAH Yes, but you're early.

KEN Oh. Sorry about that.

SARAH Ken, you're a day early!

KEN I figured that I didn't have anything to do tonight, I might
as well come down to see you.

SARAH Didn't it occur to you that I might have something to do tonight?

KEN No. Not really, actually.

SARAH Dammit, Ken. You need to think sometimes.

KEN Look, I'm sorry. It's only an hour trip. I'll go home and drive
back tomorrow.

SARAH I don't want you to drive back, I just want you to think about
these things in the future.

KEN I will. But if it's a problem. . . .

SARAH It's not a problem. You're here and he's not. I'll call him and reschedule.

KEN Sorry to ruin your plans.

SARAH Stop being so apologetic. You're my brother. You never have to mean you're sorry.

KEN So. As I was saying. Congratulations.

(KEN pulls a bottle of exceptionally cheap champagne and two plastic flutes out of the bag. Places them on the table. Then he pulls out a very large stuffed animal that had been folded in the bottom of the bag. It is fuzzy, but not necessarily cute. In fact, it's the kind of stuffed animal that would give a small child nightmares.)

SARAH *(Laughing.)* Thank you. You're ridiculous.

KEN And it's almost without trying. We can have this later. I need to take you out to dinner first.

SARAH So gallant. Where has this brother been hiding all these years?

KEN *(Pointing to his head.)* Somewhere up here. So, shall we?

(KEN gestures grandly towards the door.)

SARAH Yeah . . . Yeah, in just a minute. We should talk first, though. Catch up a little.

KEN Sure. I can do that.

(KEN sits on the bed, SARAH on her chair.)

What's up?

SARAH Have you talked to Dad lately?

KEN No. I've been meaning to. I haven't talked to him since . . .
since about February, actually. He called me. It was weird. He asked
me to go ice fishing and I couldn't go. I can't believe I haven't talked
to him since then.

SARAH You haven't called him at all?

KEN No, I've . . . been busy. And you know how it is. You'll call
him, he'll talk about the weather for a couple minutes, and before
you can think of anything meaningful to say you both fall into an un-
comfortable silence. You sit there on the phone just breathing until
one of you makes an excuse to hang up and move on.

SARAH Is it like that?

KEN Well, yeah. Isn't it? Whatever. I'll see him at your gradua-
tion. That's in two weeks.

SARAH Yes, but. . . .

KEN What's wrong?

SARAH Ken, he's not well.

KEN Does he have bronchitis again?

SARAH No, Ken. He's really not well.

KEN What is it?

SARAH We're not sure, but—Dammit, I'm not ready to talk about
this today.

KEN What's wrong?

SARAH The doctors can't really say for sure. I know he's not that old, but it's kind of like things are shutting down.

KEN How long have you known?

SARAH Only a few weeks. He didn't want to tell me and "ruin" my graduation. I only know because Michael can't keep his mouth shut. Thank goodness.

KEN How long has dad known? How can someone like Dad not know if that's happening to their body?

SARAH I'm not sure. He's known a few months maybe.

KEN I bet he's known since February. Son of a bitch.

SARAH Ken.

KEN Why does he always have to do this? He'll just go out, wander around, go for a three hour walk and not tell us a damn thing. Doesn't it occur to him that maybe we can't deal with it by ourselves?

SARAH Ken, I'm sorry, calm down.

KEN No, I don't think I can. This is going to cause me just a little bit of trouble. Maybe I need him to talk to us about things once in a while. Things that matter.

SARAH Ken, if you had called our father once in the past three months, maybe you'd already know. Why do people always have to come to you? Why do I always have to tell you these things? You act like people are keeping things from you, but you're just as bad as he is, with your silence, your own private codes.

KEN Sarah, I—

SARAH And you don't think we're having trouble dealing with it too? I know Michael puts on a pretty good face, but he's torn up. I can tell. I usually worry about you Ken. A lot. But right now Dad gets all of my worry; I don't have any to spare on whatever is going on inside your head.

KEN I'm sorry Sarah. I really am.

(Pause.)

I have to go. I need to go now.

SARAH And I need to talk to someone. Damn it, Ken, don't go.

KEN I'm sorry.

SARAH Will you please just stay here?

KEN *(He crosses to exit, then stops and turns back.)* Congratulations.



(The lights shift in quality, fading out of the scene and into another monologue moment as KEN crosses downstage.)

KEN I went through a phase in my early teens where I sat around wondering why my mother left, why the disconnect was so complete. I suppose that Dad must have done something really awful, but I can't quite conceive of that. It's true that he was distant at times. Maybe we were a constant reminder to him about how far he was separated from his youth. Maybe mom couldn't bear to watch him grow old.

It doesn't make much sense that she'd leave my sister like that, but she shacked up with a hotshot young lawyer, much closer to her age than my dad, and they just left town. Went to Chicago.

I think Michael's told her about dad, but I'm not positive. I guess I should call her.

I don't think she would have liked me working as a mechanic. She would always give me books to read. Dad would tell me stories instead. He would take me into the attic to see how the joists fit together. This is when I was very small, of course.

He never really said what he thought of me working in the shop. We didn't talk a whole lot those months. It was too warm. Too confined. And I was always waiting for the perfect moment. It should have been so easy to say . . . something. But then he walked out again.

(The lights transition again, leaving KEN in silhouette as he stands, circles the stage and then rejoins SARAH at a table center.)

SARAH How could he go camping? He is ill, he's supposed to have a check up with the doctor on Monday.

KEN He left me a message on my voice mail. He said that "bad news can wait, but the fishing up north can't."

SARAH I can't believe this. Do you know he was chopping wood all last week?

KEN I didn't. But I'm not surprised.

SARAH He needs to rest. He shouldn't be exerting himself like this, it's ridiculous.

KEN I'm glad he's doing the things he wants to do. I think it means he's getting better. Maybe.

SARAH He isn't going to get better unless he has treatment. You know this.

KEN No, I don't know very much at all.

SARAH You're exasperating too.

(Pause.)

KEN Are you still with that guy, that guy that didn't show up? What was his name?

SARAH No, no. I . . . we broke up. He's going to Hawaii for graduate school. It wouldn't have worked.

KEN I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—

SARAH No, it's fine. We made it to eight months, which was a big deal for me. It's not like he was punctual. Or considerate. Neither are you of course, but we choose our boyfriends, not our brothers.

KEN Eight months. That is good for you. So why didn't I know his name?

SARAH Ken, you didn't know his name because you disappear for weeks, sometimes months at a time. No one sees you, no one hears from you. At least I don't. And I'm pretty sure Michael doesn't, because you hate him.

KEN I don't hate him. And I don't disappear, I'm talking to you now.

SARAH Because we happened to be in the same coffee shop. This is a chance meeting, Ken, this is not familial contact. You didn't even tell me you were going to be in town. Jeez.

KEN It's good to see you too.

SARAH No, Ken, it is good to see you.

(Pause.)

KEN I expect you miss him then.

SARAH Who?

KEN Robert.

SARAH You said you didn't know his name.

KEN I guess I did.

SARAH I can't believe you sometimes.

(Pause.)

I do miss him. He hadn't mentioned the possibility of grad school. At all. I shouldn't miss him. He's clearly a jerk, and good riddance, but . . . God dammit. How do you do this. You don't talk to me for ages, then you look at me and you can say exactly what's going on? How can you be so obtuse and so like this all at once.

KEN It's my superpower.

(Pause.)

SARAH What about you? Have you been seeing anyone?

KEN No. No, not since Abbie and I broke up.

SARAH That was three years ago.

KEN I know, I just . . . I've needed some time.

SARAH I liked her. You never told me what happened.

KEN Things got weird. Like you say, it wouldn't have worked.

SARAH Okay. Someday we'll talk about it. How are you now?

(Pause.)

KEN I'm worried.

SARAH I know. I am too.

(Pause.)

Do you remember the time we went camping in Canada, at the Bay of Fundy?

KEN Yeah. Highest tides in the world.

SARAH You probably remember it better than I do. Still, it's the first

thing that's clear for me . . . after Mom left. Such a typical response. Mother's gone? Pack up the kids and go camping. Clearly the best solution.

KEN It was to him.

SARAH The second day we were there, I was down on the beach, drawing pictures in the sand. I think that I was pretending to teach a classroom full of . . . rocks, actually. I had them all lined up in rows, thirty of them or so. I was standing there and I didn't have anything to talk about. I was looking around, trying to figure out what I could say about the cliffs, the trees, all these huge things that were beyond me. Dad picked me up and carried me over to the tidal pools. He showed me the barnacles, the mussels, everything that was happening in each tiny bowl of water. And then he stood with me in front of the rocks and helped me to draw pictures of them with my stick. He put his hand on mine to help guide each line.

(Pause.)

I don't know what you were doing.

KEN I was making lines in the sand on the edge of the water. I wanted to see how long it would take for the waves to erase each one.

SARAH Ah. I should have guessed.

KEN My favorite part was when the three of us sat on top of the cliff, waiting for the tide to come in. Sitting there in the misting rain, watching the beach disappear under all that water.

SARAH That was . . .

KEN . . . amazing.

SARAH Yeah. Where was Michael for that?

KEN He was playing with the carnivorous plants.

(Pause.)

I haven't talked to Dad.

SARAH What? Why not? Ken, just call him. Just call. He leaves you messages, but he doesn't even call me. I haven't seen him since graduation. I talk to him when I can, but I don't know if it helps. Maybe he talks to Michael; I have no idea. He needs someone else.

KEN I can't call him if he's not home. He's never there, Sarah. He's always out in the woods, out on the river, out building something. How am I supposed to get a hold of him?

SARAH You could find a way. Of the three of us, you're the closest to him.

KEN Really? I don't think that's true.

SARAH Sometimes you can't see anything. Please talk to Dad.

KEN I'm trying. I just need to remember how.



(Lights shift and KEN turns to the audience.)

KEN I'm having trouble figuring out what I really remember, and what's only in my head because I want it to be true. Certain stories about my dad's life, like how he used to take the train to Chicago on weekends, stay at the YMCA and do some carpentry work. Or the times he went canoeing up in Canada, north of the Boundary waters, when he slept out under the stars every night, exhausted, listening to coyotes.

Did he actually do that, or did I just see it on TV?

I might not ever know. My brother's memory, my sister's, I'm sure they're as bad as mine. Why wouldn't they be?

On the other hand, sometimes I tell a story the way I want it to be so many times, that the version I tell, the story itself, becomes reality for me. When I left college the first time it was my choice. They didn't ask me to leave.

I am a willing participant in my own reeducation, and as a revisionist, I have certain mantras that I try to say just often enough: I'm doing well. Things are good with me. I'm not worried about living aimlessly. I'll be back at school soon. I will talk with my father again. The lake will freeze. There are some things that death cannot touch. I'm doing well.

(Lights up on the mechanic's shop. STEVE is seated, going through paperwork.)

KEN You're working late.

STEVE Yeah, I'm trying to get some stuff done for Dad. We've been short handed this week. Larry took some time off. Didn't bother to tell us, of course, just failed to show up.

KEN Gotcha. Well, if you're looking for somebody to pick up some slack. . . .

STEVE Yeah. Thanks dude. I'll keep it in mind. I don't know if it'll fly.

KEN Is Wolf still mad?

STEVE Oh, I don't know. . . .

KEN Steve. Tell me.

STEVE Honestly, it fucking broke his heart when you quit. Seriously, man. There was a lot of swearing in the mother tongue around here for while.

KEN Shit.

STEVE He'll get over it though. He knows your old man's in rough shape. Just give him a little time, he'll come round.

KEN Right.

STEVE How is your old man?

KEN He's . . . he has good days and bad days. More bad days lately.

STEVE I'm sorry. That sucks.

KEN Yeah. It really does.

STEVE The fam holding up?

KEN More or less. You know how they are.

STEVE I guess so. I've never met your brother though. That seems weird.

KEN No, I can't really see you two guys getting along.

STEVE Huh. But you and I get along fine.

KEN Yeah . . . he's just. . . . He can be such a jerk.

STEVE We've all been there.

KEN Right.

(Pause.)

STEVE You liking things back up at school?

KEN Sure. I guess. I'm not at the same university. It's pretty different from here.

STEVE I thought about going to school. Did I tell you this?

KEN No. I had no idea.

STEVE Yeah. I mean . . . I goofed off in high school. I was here mostly, so my grades were what you might call piss poor. But, yeah, I thought about mechanical engineering, something like that. Take what my dad does a little further. I had some classes at the community college. Know what I found out? Mechanical engineers don't get

to do shit with their hands. They sit at their desks all day doing stuff on computers, or whatever. They don't ever get to see the way it really works. So I figured, you know, fuck it.

(Pause.)

Plus the math was a pain in the ass.

KEN That's why I went into Literature.

STEVE I guess that's the way to go. So it's summer. You're still reading books and stuff for class?

KEN I'm taking summer classes. Trying to make up for lost time.

STEVE What are you doing back around here?

KEN Actually, my car needs some work. . . .

STEVE Cool. We'll take a look at it. It's been too quiet around here without you. Larry is no damn good to talk to, even when he is here.

KEN Like talking to a brick.

STEVE Exactly.

(Pause.)

You been to see your dad tonight?

KEN Yeah . . . I tried. He wasn't home. I don't know where he is. Maybe he's out by the lake.

STEVE The lake, yeah. His best stories come from the lake. Did he ever tell you the one about the time he took Wolf Sr. ice fishing with him?

KEN No. . . . When was this?

STEVE Before you were born. I was like three or something. Yeah, my dad tells the story every so often.

KEN What happened?

STEVE So, they were like out on the ice, right? Sitting there, freezing their asses off. It starts snowing, but the fishing is good, so they figure they'll just hang out for a while. Pretty soon it's a fucking blizzard. And they're like, "well shit." So they start to walk back toward shore, but they can't see where the hell it is. It's like the blind leading the blind. And so they're walking in the direction they think they should go, and they see like the hint of a figure in the distance, and they call out to him, see if maybe he knows where he's going, right? But they yell to him, and it's lost in the wind. It's like they can't even say a thing. So my dad wants to turn and go off toward where they saw the guy walking, but your dad says, no, he's got a feeling he knows where shore is. So they walk straight ahead, they go off on an angle every so often. And to Wolf Sr. this is like voodoo, he has no idea if your dad knows where he's going. But after twenty minutes, sure enough, there's the shore, and there's your old man's truck straight ahead. As they're sitting in the truck warming the hell up, they pull out a map of the lake, try to figure out where they would have gone if they had turned. Turns out it would have been straight to the shipping channel. Fucking open water, man. And then they would have been screwed. Somehow your old man just knew the right way to go.

KEN Yeah. That sounds like him.

STEVE I think maybe you got that from him too. Like you know where you're headed.

KEN I wish that were true.

STEVE Take it from me. The Wolfman knows. You just gotta take that step, and trust the ice will be solid. It's what your old man would do.

KEN Right.

STEVE He's gonna pull through this, dude. You'll see.



(Lights shift.)

KEN I've been spending evenings sitting on a hill by the lake. Thinking that maybe by proximity I can convince the weather to behave. Still, I've been sitting in short sleeves. It's January, and it's been like spring time for the past week. What the hell's going on? It's like a big "fuck you" from the season. A little toast for the New Year.

No matter how many times I go through all of this in my head, I always end up right back here. Stalled. Like a car that couldn't quite make it to the shop.

I talk about my dad a lot now, in these days that are full of waiting. I talk about him because I can't talk to him. Not until there's decent ice.

(Shift. We are in the hospital room from the top of the show. MICHAEL has been waiting. KEN sits.)

KEN How is he?

MICHAEL He's asleep now. He asked about you.

KEN What did you say?

MICHAEL That you went for a walk by yourself. That made him smile, at least.

(Pause.)

We don't know how much longer he's going to be able to hang on.

KEN I know this. You think I don't?

MICHAEL I thought it was worth pointing out. You are awfully good at appearing oblivious to these things.

KEN I can't believe you're calling me oblivious. Look at yourself.

MICHAEL I take things in, I assess situations. If you'd actually talk to me sometimes, you might see that. What kind of person doesn't call their brother?

KEN You don't call me. You don't respond to letters. You're just there.

MICHAEL Well, yes. But I'm very busy. I'm getting things done. What are you doing?

KEN This is why I don't talk to you. It's like being on trial every time.

MICHAEL I'm not putting you on trial. I'm saying that perhaps—

KEN For God's sake Michael, our father is dying.

MICHAEL It would help Dad to know that you're doing something.

KEN I don't want to talk about this now.

MICHAEL And I don't want to see you go to waste.

KEN Please give it a rest.

MICHAEL Ken, I'm not attacking you. But I do think you have a problem with follow through. You can do anything you set your mind to if you'd just stick with it. You could be huge.

KEN Why do I have to be “huge”?

MICHAEL Because you have so much potential. Look, I’ve used my potential and I’ve gone far.

KEN I should be just like you then? You’re the good son. Screw you, Mike. I’m going to get some coffee.

MICHAEL I’m not saying I’m better. I’m saying I cause a hell of a lot less worry for Dad.

KEN Well, yeah. We can just look at your charts for the next ten years and know exactly where you’ll be.

MICHAEL Hey, you don’t need to be just like me. You are different. And you’re smarter than me, I admit that. But you owe it to our father to do something better.

KEN Do I? Dad seemed awfully happy with the life he chose. He made an impact in his own way, with every house he built.

MICHAEL I don’t know. Seems to me you’re looking to justify an average life.

KEN There’s nothing wrong with being average.

MICHAEL That’s a matter of opinion.

KEN If I can affect one person. . . .

MICHAEL You’re not even doing that. You need to move Ken.

KEN Believe me, I’d like to move right now.

MICHAEL Stop it. You know what I mean. You can’t make a difference by standing still.

KEN Yes you can.

MICHAEL Not the way you manage it. You're not some immovable object. You're just stuck in idle, about to stall.

KEN That's not true.

MICHAEL Bullshit. You've been stalling for years. Ever since you decided to drop out of school.

KEN But now I've decided to go back.

MICHAEL Right. After you gave up your scholarship.

KEN I still. . . .

MICHAEL It was irresponsible Kenneth. And it was offensive. Offensive to me, that you threw away what was so casually granted to you. And they gave it to you based on what, some test you took? I had to work all through school, all through college to earn what I received. I didn't have it handed to me because they thought I was so damn smart.

KEN Michael, it wasn't like that.

MICHAEL For you it was disposable. What if there's a family working their collective ass off to make enough money to pay for a kid's education because you got the full ride instead?

KEN Things are always so simple for you. Always clean lines. How do you do that?

MICHAEL It's the way life is if you just step back and have some perspective. Find some context. Start talking with other people for a change, instead of just at them.

KEN Do you ever take your own advice, or does it only apply to other people?

MICHAEL Hey, I am who I am. I accept that. But you're a different person than you used to be.

KEN Obviously.

MICHAEL No, I saw you growing up and you were basically a good kid. A little unfocused, but that was all right. Not everyone has the same kind of drive. But I think something has broken in you since then. That kid never would have thrown away opportunity.

KEN Damn it, Michael, I do not throw away opportunity.

MICHAEL You do every fucking time it's in front of you. It makes me sick.

KEN That's it. I'm going outside.

MICHAEL Right. Every time something challenges you, go ahead and hide. You hide from Dad's illness, you hide from me, you hide from our sister. College is actually hard, so you just run and hide. You piece of shit.

KEN They asked me to leave.

MICHAEL What?

KEN Officials at the university asked me to leave. I did not throw it away by choice. They asked me to leave school.

MICHAEL What did you do?

KEN Nothing! I swear, nothing. I was accused of plagiarizing a journal article.

MICHAEL When was this?

KEN My last semester. I was doing research for my professor, for

one of his articles. A piece on Jacobean revenge drama. He . . . lifted whole passages from the research I gave him, and he got caught. And then he shifted the blame to me.

MICHAEL Why didn't you say anything? We could have done something about that.

KEN It was easier for the university to simply ask me to take time off than become involved in some sort of student disciplinary hearings.

MICHAEL Ken, If you hadn't done anything wrong why didn't you fight it?

KEN There was nothing I could do. I was so insignificant, sitting in the dean's office, staring at that desk. Here's a piece of furniture that means so much more than any of the people around it.

There's a line that's crossed when you take hit after hit and eventually you say, "okay . . . I guess it wasn't meant to be." When simply living, accepting, becomes a hell of a lot easier than trying. And you tell yourself that it's what you wanted all along.

(Pause.)

MICHAEL Just before mom left, the weeks before, she and dad had arguments. Many arguments. Do you remember these?

KEN No. Not at all. I must have been too little.

MICHAEL They weren't at raised volume, necessarily. They were in whispers over the kitchen table. I remember straining to hear them through the heater vent in my room. Dad spent weeks reasoning with her, pleading with her. I don't remember the actual words so much as the tone. He gave her as many reasons as he could think of for her to stay and be happy. But on that last night there came a point

when he leaned back and said, “Well, if that’s how you feel, then you should go.” And she did. And he went on living however he could. I’ve never understood that.

KEN Maybe you’re just wired differently.

MICHAEL It’s very important that I know where I’m headed, that I be able to anticipate what’s coming next. That I be moving forward. That’s why I hate ice fishing. There’s nothing you can do to make the fish bite more quickly. All you can do is wait and stare at the ice. I need to be proactive. I need to make things better.

KEN It’s not your fault that Dad is sick.

MICHAEL It seems like it should be. At least then there would be something that I could do. I just wish that there was something that I could do.

KEN I know, Michael. So do I.

MICHAEL And I wish that I had liked fishing.

(Lights shift. MICHAEL exits.)



(KEN crosses downstage to his bucket.)

KEN There's something appropriate about taking leave in the fall, going out as summer does the equivalent of a supernova: a burst of color before a slow cold lingering. And better to go out with the promise of good ice than to wallow as this winter has: too warm for the lake to freeze, but too cold to be outside for long.

Still, I have Dad's gear. I have his bucket, I have his rods, I have his boots and mittens, I have his old stocking cap that looks like it should be worn by a homeless man. I have all of this equipment piled at the door, and I am ready to head out. I don't know what will happen when I get there, but I am ready to meet him on the ice and say what I had been working up to for all those months.

But I need the winter to get cold. I'm running out of time. It's the third week of February, and the Lake, the big Lake, is barely slush. It shouldn't be hard; the earth tilts on its axis, the weather is supposed to get cold. Just give me my winter. Give me the expected. Give me the status quo. I can't take any more surprises.

(KEN looks up.)

Do you hear me?

(A WOMAN enters from up stage, behind KEN.)

No more surprises.

WOMAN I should leave then.

(KEN turns.)

KEN Yes, you . . . wait . . . Mom?

WOMAN I'm sorry.

(Blackout, transition.)



(SARAH stands downstage and speaks while KEN pantomimes the action she describes upstage.)

SARAH About five months after our father died, my brother Ken gathered all of the gear he and Dad used to take with them to go ice fishing on Lake St. Clair, and drove out to the lake. It was the first week of March, and he was tired of waiting. And he knew that if there was ever going to be ice in that winter of record high temperatures, it would be then. After that, Detroit would be too deep into spring, and the only ice fishermen would be the crazies who got stranded or fell in by mistakenly thinking that there was enough between the water and the air to keep them safe.

Ken parked Dad's truck in the lot at the public access point and walked down to the sheltered harbor. He was wearing overalls, hat, gloves, and dragging a bucket on a sled in the just below freezing weather. It had snowed the night before, but not much. Maybe half an inch. Enough to make it look like winter.

To his left there were a few trees, still bare and skeletal, Ken would probably say denuded. But the snow barely covered the hint of blossoms just starting to poke through.

As he came over the hill of the parking lot, he saw them. All of the fishermen, packed together on the fragile ice. Fathers and little boys, grizzled old men, men in camouflage overalls, men in jeans and thick sweaters. They were as close as the seats in a theatre and there

were so many holes in the ice that it seemed there was more water than surface.

Ken picked his way through them, sliding past, holding his bucket above their heads, and he walked out to the edge of the harbor, facing the lake itself. He went beyond the crowd, and there it was in front of him. He says that it was smooth, like marble, but defined by a border of failing ice. Still, open water. I'm not really sure what happened next. I believe that he took a step.

(KEN puts his foot forward, across the "edge" of the ice and tests his weight. He looks around, then up and forward. Takes a tentative step. He nods to himself and strides forward, exiting the stage.)

He took a step. And somehow found a way to walk. That's what I believe.

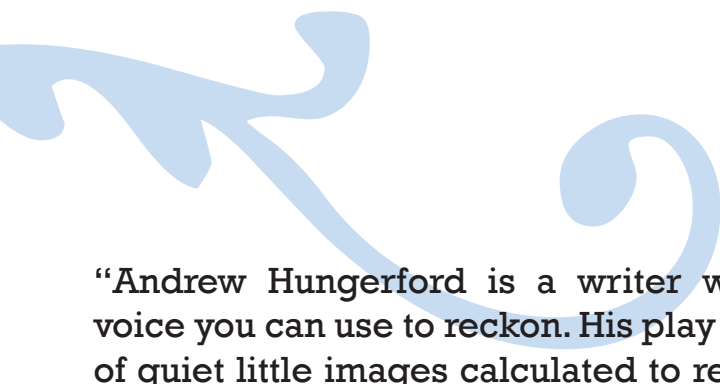
But I don't know. He's never told me.

(Blackout.)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew J. Hungerford is originally from the suburbs of Detroit. He earned degrees in Theatre and Astrophysics from Michigan State University and holds a Master's of Fine Arts in Lighting Design from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He is currently an itinerant freelance lighting designer. He can be contacted at andrew.j.hungerford@gmail.com.



“Andrew Hungerford is a writer with a voice you can use to reckon. His play is full of quiet little images calculated to remind you who you were when you were you.”

Michael Burnham, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music

By turns wistful and compelling, **BETWEEN THE WATER AND THE AIR** is the story of a father and a son, a brother and a sister, a girl, and a mechanic. Ken, a former scholarship student with a habit of running away from responsibility, is forced by his father's declining health and increasingly insistent family to confront his sense of displacement within his own life.

BETWEEN THE WATER AND THE AIR debuted at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2005, and was performed at the Cincinnati Fringe Festival the following year.

