

# LITTLE FISHES

A dark comedy

By  
Steven Haworth

# LITTLE FISHES

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LITTLE FISHES

*For Ruth*

## LITTLE FISHES

### CHARACTERS

**BRAD** – A white man in his mid-twenties.

**PIPE** – A Chippewa Native American, 19.

**NELS** – A 100-year-old man of Norwegian heritage.

**CORPSE** – Was in his late eighties, now dead.

### PLACE

A Minneapolis nursing home in the dead of winter.

### TIME

1975

### SET NOTE

There are two beds with their heads against upstage wall and a nightstand between them. Door, stage left, leads out of the room. Another, stage right, leads to bathroom. There is a window that runs the width of the upstage wall. We see a vista of rolling snow-covered hills with a few lonely trees through the window. The sky reflects the time of day. At rise it is just before dawn. A wheelchair and walker are in center of room.

### ACTORS NOTE

Brad, as Nels says, is a very disturbing young man. But his tender love for Nels should never be in doubt. Pipe, as Brad says, is very intelligent. But his mind is blasted by a way of life lost, its memory mostly destroyed, so he must try to build his life from scratch with the help of peyote. Nels, while 100-years-old, is perhaps the most vital character of the play. His life began as a Norwegian immigrant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and now is facing the “big fish”, attended by two stoned lost souls in 1975. Together they search for grace.

## LITTLE FISHES

*Little Fishes* was produced off-Broadway in 2001 by Abingdon Theatre Company at the Hudson Guild in New York City. The production was directed by Kim T. Sharp; Costume Design, Melissa Richards; Scenic Design, Elizabeth Chaney; Lighting Design, David Castaneda; Fight Choreography, Rick Sordelet; and featuring the following cast:

Nels.....Paul Barry  
Brad.....Nicolas Piper  
Pipe.....John Tardibuono  
Corpse.....Frank J. O'Donnell

Special thanks to Jan Buttram, Pamela Paul, Kim Sharp, the late Paul Barry, Nicholas Piper, John Tardibuono, Mark Engelhardt, Doug Howe, Cody Nickell, Pablo Schreiber, Jed Harris, the late James Hatch, and Rick Long.

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## SCENE 1

*Room in nursing home. There are two beds with their heads against upstage wall and a night stand between them. Door, stage left, leading out of room. Another, stage right, leading to bathroom. In SL bed lies CORPSE covered by a sheet. In SR bed we hear NELS snoring lightly. There is a wide window the entire width of upstage wall. We see a winter vista through the window, the sky is faint, just before dawn. A wheelchair and walker are in center of room. In a chair between Corpse's bed and SL wall sits BRAD, white, mid- twenties, dressed in white, smoking a cigarette which he ashes in Corpse's left hand that reaches out from beneath the sheet.*

**BRAD.** You got something you wanna say to me? (*Drags on cigarette, ashes again.*) No time like the present. (*Door opens. PIPE enters. Native American, 19, dressed in white. He stares at Corpse. Brad uncovers Corpse's face and tucks the sheet under his chin. We see the bald head of a man in his 80's. Brad looks at Pipe. Pause. Pipe's speech and manner is very hushed and still at first, as if afraid of disturbing the air.*)

**BRAD.** Well, what do you think?

**PIPE.** Incredible.

**BRAD.** Yep. He's dead.

**PIPE.** He's really dead.

**BRAD.** So what do you think?

**PIPE.** Incredible.... What happened?

**BRAD.** Fluid in the lungs. Died in his sleep.

**PIPE.** God. Finally.

**BRAD.** Yeah, it's a great day. Cold outside?

**PIPE.** Freezing. Twenty below. No sun yet.

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**BRAD.** I just walked in to check on him about three, turned on the light, there he was: mouth open, eyes glassy and fogging up, body sunk in the bed like a stone. I just missed it.

**PIPE.** What?

**BRAD.** His dying. I just missed it. I hate that.

**PIPE.** How do you know?

**BRAD.** I know. It keeps happening. Missing it. I hate that.

**PIPE.** You could hide the body and still know there was a death in here. You could slide him under the bed, I walk in I would still know.

**BRAD.** What do you mean?

**PIPE.** I'd know.

**BRAD.** How?

**PIPE.** The air is purple.

**BRAD.** Yeah?

**PIPE.** The air is purple, especially around the lights.

**BRAD.** Purple air, huh.

**PIPE.** The color is significant.

**BRAD.** Yeah, it signifies you're stoned.

**PIPE.** Suzy sent me in here.

**BRAD.** So?

**PIPE.** To help with the body. For the move.

**BRAD.** Good. He's going to the morgue. Picking him up at eight.

**PIPE.** I can't do it.

**BRAD.** Because you're stoned.

**PIPE.** When with peyote it is unclean to touch dead things.

**BRAD.** That's convenient.

**PIPE.** Peyote is too holy to soil with such contact.

**BRAD.** Have a seat, Pipe.

**PIPE.** What?

**BRAD.** See the *chair*? Have a *seat*. (*Pipe has trouble moving at first but finally crosses past Corpse and sits in wheelchair on other side of bed. Brad ashes again in Corpse's hand. Pipe stares.*)

**PIPE.** Um, you want an ashtray?

**BRAD.** No thanks.

**PIPE.** You're not supposed to smoke in here, man.

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**BRAD.** I don't think they recommend showing up stoned on hallucinogens either, buddy. *(Brad has reached the end of his cigarette and wants to extinguish it. Looks at the hand, considers. Pipe leans forward. Brad looks at Pipe. Pause. Brad drops the cigarette, stomps it out on the floor and kicks it under the bed. Pause.)*

**PIPE.** I've never cleaned a stiff before.

**BRAD.** I'll teach ya.

**PIPE.** I can't!

**BRAD.** Look, give me a break with this Great Spirit horseshit, we gotta serve breakfast soon, we don't have time to fuck around here.

**PIPE.** Please, man ...

**BRAD.** I'm not doing this alone, Pipe.

**PIPE.** I'll owe ya one!

**BRAD.** How long you been stoned?

**PIPE.** All night.

**BRAD.** Good. On the way down. Now listen, I understand you're not looking forward to this, I can imagine preparing a corpse for the morgue is a little daunting stoned on peyote, I know, I *understand*. But it's a two-man job, buddy. There is rolling and lifting and thumping and all manner of painstaking operations and these guys are heavy when the spirit leaves them so here's the deal: I'm gonna do you a favor.

**PIPE.** What?

**BRAD.** We'll smoke my last joint.

**PIPE.** No no no no . . .

**BRAD.** Yeah yeah yeah, it's the perfect solution. High on pot instead of God juice. Bring you right down. *(Brad lights the joint.)*

**PIPE.** What if Suzy comes in?

**BRAD.** Suzy won't come in here she hates dead people. Take the joint, Geronimo.

**PIPE.** I ain't no goddamn Apache. *(Pipe takes the joint. During the following exchange, they continue to pass the joint across the body, sitting on opposite sides of the bed. Brad makes less and less of an effort to pass it over course of conversation.)*

**PIPE.** Does Nels know? *(They look at Nels sleeping in other bed.)*

**BRAD.** Nope. Slept through everything.

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**PIPE.** He'll be happy.

**BRAD.** Not as happy as Joe.

**PIPE.** What do you mean?

**BRAD.** Joe prefers it this way.

**PIPE.** How do you know?

**BRAD.** Take my word for it.

**PIPE.** He was crazy.

**BRAD.** Scaring Nels half to death . . .

**PIPE.** Those sounds!

**BRAD.** Like a one-man cock fight. Awwwwk! Awwwwwk! (*Pipe reacts to the noise and struggles for composure against an apparent momentary hallucination, then:*)

**PIPE.** How many is that for Nels?

**BRAD.** Nels has survived five roommates.

**PIPE.** He ain't never gonna die.

**BRAD.** Nels is the iron man! Norwegian blood! Nordic spirit!

**PIPE.** 100 years old. Chippewa used to live that long. Happened all the time.

**BRAD.** Well, you ain't gonna live that long I can tell ya that right now.

**PIPE.** You wanna make an effort? (*Pipe has to reach across to get the joint.*)

**BRAD.** So, you like being an aborigine?

**PIPE.** What?

**BRAD.** One of the indigenous or aboriginal peoples of the North American continent? You like that?

**PIPE.** No.

**BRAD.** Oh. Aren't you supposed to?

**PIPE.** Maybe. I don't.

**BRAD.** Oh.

**PIPE.** You can get great peyote, though. It's a religious thing.

**BRAD.** Yeah?

**PIPE.** My grandfather would take it. He was a shaman. A holy man.

**BRAD.** Yes, you're very pious, Pipe. You sure you take it in the proper spirit?

**PIPE.** You saying I ain't a good Injun, honkey? (*Pause.*)

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**BRAD.** Relax. I'm not a good Lutheran. *(Pause. They smile.)*

**PIPE.** We had them on the reservation. Missionaries. God's frozen people.

**BRAD.** What?

**PIPE.** That's what we called them. The Lutherans. "God's frozen people".

**BRAD.** *(Laughs.)* Oh, my God! That's great. That's fuckin' great!  
*(Brad continues to laugh.)*

**PIPE.** Take the joint, man. C'mon, Brad! Jesus. *(Pipe leans over the Corpse to hand the joint to Brad. Brad brings his elbow down hard into the abdomen of Corpse. Corpse sits up and doubles over with an eerie, prolonged exhale of air then, like a deflating balloon, collapses back on the bed in a disheveled position. Pipe, totally freaked out, jumps up screaming.)*

**PIPE.** JESUS CHRIST! Holy shit! I don't believe you did that you sick bastard! You sick fucking sick motherfucker! Sick sick sick sick....

**BRAD.** *(Laughing.)* Wait! Wait, man you dropped the ... where's the joint...?

**PIPE.** This is shit, man! This is shit. This is shit. This is shit.

**BRAD.** Where's the joint?! It's gonna burn the sheets! We're gonna end up cremating this bastard!

**PIPE.** You're an asshole, man! I hope you know that!

**BRAD.** Shut up! You're gonna have Suzy in here. You shoulda seen you're face, it was ... where's the damn joint?

**NELS.** *(Asleep.)* Oh, my ... oh my goodness ... hee hee ...

**PIPE.** It's on the floor! It's on the floor over there!

**BRAD.** Oh. Okay. Just keep it down.

**NELS.** Stop it now ... hee hee ... stop it little fishes ...

**BRAD.** Shshshshsh. Listen. Pipe.

**NELS.** Oh no ... hee hee ... stop it now ... tickles ... oh little fishes ... oh you little fishes ... little fishes ... hee hee hee little fishes. *(Brad and Pipe look at each other. They walk over to opposite sides of Nels' bed. Brad is SL. They lean over Nels, listening. Nels continues talking in his sleep.)*

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**NELS.** Oh! Oooh fishes ... stop it now little fishes ... come on now ... tickles oh ... oh my goodness ... little their so little these little fishes heee heee ... heee heee.

**PIPE.** Dreaming.

**BRAD.** Yup.

**PIPE.** What do you think he's dreaming?

**NELS.** Stop it now you little fishes oh, oh, itsy bitsy, itsy bitsy fishes!

**BRAD.** Fishes? Little fishes?

**NELS.** Heee heee tickle like stupid stupid little mouth mouth.

**PIPE.** Well yeah, Brad, I mean, obviously fishes. But what, you know, what's happening here?

**NELS.** Rainbows, little rainbows . . .

**BRAD.** Say something.

**PIPE.** What?

**BRAD.** Anything. Just say somethin'. In his ear.

**PIPE.** Why?

**BRAD.** See what happens. *(Beat.)*

**PIPE.** Okay.

**NELS.** Oh, heavens to Betsy stop it now stupid little itsy bitsy --

**PIPE.** Purple. *(Long pause. Suddenly NELS sits up screaming.)*

**NELS.** AAAAAAAUUUGH! AAAAAUUUUGH!! *(Nels jerks awake, looks around dazed, sees Brad leaning over him.) AAAAAUUUUGH! (Nels stares at Brad breathing heavily. Pipe exits to bathroom. Brad stands between two beds, blocking Nels' view of Corpse. Brad and Nels regard one another. Pipe enters from bathroom with a glass of water.)*

**PIPE.** Here, Nels.

**NELS.** *(Not taking his eyes off Brad.)* Thanks. *(Drinks.)* That's better. My goodness gracious. What a nightmare.

**BRAD.** It's all over now, Nels. Just a dream.

**NELS.** I meant waking up to you, nimrod!

**BRAD.** *(Laughing.)* Oh, thanks Nels. That's wonderful.

**PIPE.** What were you dreaming, Nels?

**NELS.** Huh?

**BRAD.** He wants to know what you were dreaming, Nels.

**NELS.** Is that so.

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**BRAD.** Yeah. So do I. (*Nels looks them over slyly. Then:*)

**NELS.** It was strange! I'm sitting in this brook. Like a swimming hole in a brook, and I'm a little kid sitting there and all this silt has kicked up from the bottom of the stream but then the water clears and I can see all these little minnows nibbling all over me; the silt has collected on me and all these little fishes, baby rainbow trout are nibbling and tickling me so I looked like I was wearing a rainbow snow suit. And then, all of a sudden, the water turns purple! Outta nowhere! Well, you know how dreams are.

**BRAD.** Yeah, we know, Nels.

**PIPE.** Oh, man.

**NELS.** Then the water gets darker. Something grabs my foot and pulls me under, down, down! I'm underwater and this huge fish swims up and starts screaming at me! He's just enormous and he's screaming in the purple water: AWWWWWK! AWWWWWK!

**BRAD.** That fish sounds kinda like Joe.

**NELS.** Yeah, you're right! Then this black eel with red eyes and razor teeth comes swimmin' out of the fish's mouth and I scream and wake up!

**PIPE.** Strange.

**BRAD.** Cool.

**NELS.** What day is it? Where's my Morning Prayer Book?!

**BRAD.** Where it always is, Nels. Under your pillow.

**NELS.** Oh yeah. (*He reaches under pillow and pulls out a paper bound pamphlet with a religious illustration on the cover.*)

C'mon, what day is it?!

**BRAD.** The fourteenth.

**NELS.** I have these dreams and sometimes my Morning Prayer Book talks about my dream.

**BRAD.** That's horsedung, Nels.

**NELS.** It is not! Okay, listen to this: "Today's scripture is Isaiah, Chapter 66, verse 9. 'Shall I bring to the birth and not bring forth? Saith the Lord: shall I bring forth and not open the womb?'" Now what could that have to do with my dream? And not open the womb. (*They all reflect.*)

**BRAD.** I just keep seeing an eel swimming out of a fish's mouth.

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**NELS.** (*Stares at Brad a moment.*) Why do you boys always bother me? You're pests. You're like puppies that won't stay off the bed.

**BRAD.** We love ya, Nels.

**PIPE.** Yeah, Nels.

**NELS.** (*To Pipe.*) Oh, you love me. Great. (*To Brad.*) You hear this, Brad? He loves me.

**BRAD.** Yeah, Nels.

**NELS.** Who is this guy, anyway?

**BRAD.** That's Pipe, Nels. You know Pipe.

**NELS.** I know it's Pipe! But who is he? You know -- what's his deal?

**BRAD.** His deal?

**NELS.** Yeah! His deal! What's his deal?! Hey, Pipe. What's your deal?

**PIPE.** My deal?

**NELS.** Oh, for God's sake.

**PIPE.** I'm learning.

**NELS.** Learning. Learning what?

**PIPE.** My job.

**NELS.** Your job! Okay. Good. Now we're getting somewhere. And what is that exactly?

**PIPE.** My job?

**NELS.** Yes, yes, your job! Jesus Christ! What the hell do you do?!

**PIPE.** Well ... that's what I'm learning. (*Nels turns to Brad. Pause.*)

**BRAD.** He's actually really smart, Nels.

**NELS.** Oh, yeah?

**BRAD.** Yeah, very intelligent. You just can't tell 'cause he's stoned out of his mind half the time.

**PIPE.** I'm learning to take care of people, Nels.

**NELS.** Great. Who's teachin' ya?

**BRAD.** Me, for one.

**NELS.** Oh, my God.

**BRAD.** What?

**NELS.** Just never you mind.

**BRAD.** You got a problem, Nels? (*Nels waves his arm dismissively, looks front, grumpily. Brad glances at Corpse, then back to Nels.*)

**BRAD.** Hey, Nels, guess what?

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**NELS.** What?

**BRAD.** We have a surprise for ya.

**NELS.** A surprise? For me?

**BRAD.** Yep. You're gonna love it.

**NELS.** Really? A present? Hot diggedy.

**BRAD.** Sort of. Look. (*Brad steps aside revealing Corpse sprawling twisted on the bed.*)

**NELS.** AAAAUUUUUUGH!! AAAAAUUUUUGH! (*Nels stares at Corpse, breathing heavily. Pipe goes to bathroom. Pipe returns with more water. Nels drinks the water, recovers. All look at Corpse.*) So. You finally did it.

**BRAD.** What?

**NELS.** You finally killed him. You said it. You did it.

**BRAD.** What are you talking about?

**NELS.** You said you were gonna kill him and now he's dead.

**BRAD.** I never said I was going to kill him.

**NELS.** If I heard it once, I heard it a thousand times!

**BRAD.** Well, I didn't mean it. You said you were gonna kill him too.

**NELS.** Don't be stupid! I'm weaker than a kitten! I couldn't kill a bug!

**BRAD.** I didn't kill him, Nels. He died in his sleep.

**NELS.** Died in his sleep?! Look at him! You don't look like that when you die in your sleep!

**BRAD.** Well, that's what happened.

**NELS.** I've seen plenty die in their sleep, Bradstreet!

**BRAD.** What do they look like, Nels?

**NELS.** They don't look like they were thrown from a fast-moving car!

**PIPE.** Brad didn't kill him, Nels.

**NELS.** How do you know? You don't get here 'til morning.

**PIPE.** That's true. Okay, maybe Brad did kill him. But that's not why Joe looks like that.

**NELS.** Oh?

**PIPE.** See, we were smoking a joint, passing it over Joe, back and forth, and I have to keep like leaning over the body to give Brad the joint. See Brad was pretending to not pay attention, Nels, it was a big set up, very clever. So *then* while *I'm right over the body* Brad hits Joe in the

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stomach and Joe sits up and goes: WHOOOOOOOOAAASHSHSH!  
Oh, man. Talk about creepy, Nels. Anyway, so then Joe falls back and lands in this twisted and bizarre position and here we are. (*Pause, Nels is staring at him.*) Nels? Of course, Joe got tossed around some more while Brad was looking for the joint I dropped in the sheets because, you know, we wouldn't want to start a fire.

**BRAD.** (*Enjoying this.*) We were only smoking the joint because Pipe was high on peyote and needed to come down. He was scared of the corpse, you see, Nels? Only natural if you're high on peyote. I was doing him a favor.

**PIPE.** I'm not high now, boy. That sobered me right up.

**BRAD.** So, you see, Nels - in a strange way - it worked! (*Pause.*) Say something, Nels.

**NELS.** I'm gettin' the hell out of here! Out of my way! I'm getting out right now!

**BRAD.** What's the matter, Nels?

**NELS.** Get my robe! I'm sick of you two! Goddamn creeps. Bring my walker over here! Where's my robe?!

**PIPE.** (*Proffering robe.*) Here ya go.

**NELS.** Jesus Christ, you're like a pair of gargoyles come to life! Help me up! (*They get him on his feet. Nels grabs the walker and starts inching his way furiously across the room with quick tiny steps.*)

**NELS.** What's the matter with you boys, anyway? I wasn't like you when I was your age. My goodness, the things you do. They never would have even occurred to me at your age!

**BRAD.** What about now?

**NELS.** You're a sicko!

**BRAD.** Well okay but I didn't kill Joe is the point of the story, Nels.

**NELS.** Can't wait to see what you do to me when I cack off! Probably take me outside and use me as a toboggan!

**BRAD.** Oh, Nels, lighten up.

**NELS.** I'm high tailin' it out of here. Pests. Always around. Twin buzzards that's what they are. Give me the willies.

**BRAD.** We'll bring your breakfast to the dayroom. Okay, Nels?

**NELS.** Great! Breakfast served by Bluebeard!

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**BRAD.** Oh, pipe down. We wouldn't hurt ya.

**PIPE.** Yeah! We love ya, Nels! ... Well, there he goes. I think we upset him. *(Brad and Pipe watch Nels furiously inch across the floor.)*

**BRAD.** Leaving us in a cloud of dust. *(Pause.)* He'll be alright.

**PIPE.** Yeah?

**BRAD.** Yeah, this is nothin'. I've freaked him out worse than this. He'll be fine.

**PIPE.** Oh, okay.

**BRAD.** Yep. He's fine. *(Pause.)* Good 'ol Nels. *(Nels is still inching across the floor as the lights fade.)*

## SCENE 2

*We hear Nels in darkness.*

**NELS.** AAAAUUUUUUGH!! AAAAUUUUGH! *(Lights up. We see Nels, standing between the two beds, supported by the walker. He is reacting in horror to something only he sees in the empty SL bed. He screams again.)* AAAAUUUUUUGH! AAAAUUUUGH! *(Nels stares at bed, frozen in terror. Pipe dashes into the room.)*

**PIPE.** What's the matter, Nels?!

**NELS.** Huh?

**PIPE.** What is it?! Why are you yelling?!

**NELS.** What? ... uh ... oh, nothing. I ... I'm just ... I don't know.

**PIPE.** Were you dreaming again?

**NELS.** No, no, I just . . . let my mind wander there for a minute.

**PIPE.** Where did it go?

**NELS.** What? Never mind. Just never you mind!

**PIPE.** Well, is it back?

**NELS.** Yes, yes, I'm all right, now! Go away!

**PIPE.** Did you eat your breakfast? Sometimes you get weird when you don't eat.

**NELS.** I ate breakfast and I'm not weird! Get lost!

**PIPE.** I'm here, Nels. You can tell me. You looked pretty scared.

**NELS.** Forget it! You'll tell that Brad person.

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**PIPE.** No I won't.

**NELS.** HA!

**PIPE.** I won't tell, I promise.

**NELS.** Here, let me look at ya. (*Nels squints at Pipe then dismisses him with a wave of his hand.*) You wouldn't stand a chance. He can smell a secret a mile off!

**PIPE.** I thought you liked Brad.

**NELS.** I used to.

**PIPE.** Well, he likes you, Nels.

**NELS.** Listen, Pipe. Steer clear. He's evil.

**PIPE.** He gets bad, but he ain't evil, Nels. I've seen evil.

**NELS.** He's nuts! He's bananas!

**PIPE.** I've seen worse.

**NELS.** He's unravelled! He's got a leak in the brainpan!

**PIPE.** He's not so bad.

**NELS.** He would do anything!

**PIPE.** Why were you screaming, Nels?

**NELS.** You want me to tell ya?!

**PIPE.** Yeah!

**NELS.** Swear on the life of your father!

**PIPE.** He's dead.

**NELS.** Oh. Swear on the life of your mother!

**PIPE.** She's dead.

**NELS.** Oh. That's sad. Any kids?

**PIPE.** No, I don't have any kids! Please, Nels. I wanna help ya. (*Pause. Nels agonizes. Then:*)

**NELS.** (*Sotto.*) He kills people.

**PIPE.** What?! Brad?!

**NELS.** Yeah!

**PIPE.** Like who?

**NELS.** (*Sotto.*) Old people.

**PIPE.** Like who?!

**NELS.** Shshsh! (*Sotto.*) Like Joe.

**PIPE.** No no no, we told you.

**NELS.** Yeah! I saw him!

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**PIPE.** You saw what?

**NELS.** (*Sotto.*) Brad kill Joe.

**PIPE.** Last night?

**NELS.** No! Just now!

**PIPE.** Just now. You were screaming 'cause you saw Brad kill Joe?

**NELS.** Keep it under your hat.

**PIPE.** You sure you ate breakfast?

**NELS.** Blood thirsty hyena!!!

**PIPE.** Nels! Please --

**NELS.** I'm tellin' ya! He could do anything!

**PIPE.** He's just weird.

**NELS.** He's bonkers.

**PIPE.** He wants to be there.

**NELS.** Where?

**PIPE.** When they die. He wants to be there.

**NELS.** No!

**PIPE.** He complains about it.

**NELS.** Yeah?

**PIPE.** Missing the moment when people die. It pisses him off.

**NELS.** Sonofabitch! I knew it! He wants me dead!

**PIPE.** No, he doesn't.

**NELS.** He comes in at night. He watches me. I wake up and there he is, leaning over me like some vampire in need of a hot drink.

**PIPE.** He doesn't want you dead.

**NELS.** Then what's he doin'?

**PIPE.** I dunno. He's just watching.

**NELS.** Like he was watching Joe!

**PIPE.** He didn't kill Joe. He missed when he died. He was bitching about it.

**NELS.** And you believed him?!

**PIPE.** Yeah!

**NELS.** Covering his tracks! You betcha! Oh, he's very clever. Very shrewd!

**PIPE.** C'mon, Nels. Brad wouldn't kill --

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**NELS.** No, he just watched! He just watched him die and didn't do shit! It was a vision! A warning from God! (*Goes to bedstand and opens top drawer.*) Brad let it happen! God damn angel of mercy! Vampire!

Vulture! Hyena! HEY!

**PIPE.** What?!

**NELS.** Hey!

**PIPE.** WHAT?!

**NELS.** Where's my Morning Prayer Book?!

**PIPE.** Oh, man.

**NELS.** Someone stole it! Was it you?!

**PIPE.** Nels! It's under your pillow! You don't keep it in the bed stand no more. (*Pipe pulls the pamphlet from under the pillow and shows Nels.*)

**NELS.** Oh, yeah. I wanna check on my vision. It's a message from God.

**PIPE.** (*Spent.*) Okay. Just don't yell no more, okay?

**NELS.** Say, you look kinda peaked.

**PIPE.** I'm just tired. I don't like cleaning stiffs, Nels. Something bad happened.

**NELS.** Now what?

**PIPE.** Nothing, Nels.

**NELS.** C'mon!

**PIPE.** I don't think I better tell ya.

**NELS.** You can tell me, Pipe. It's all right. (*Brad enters.*)

**BRAD.** Hey, Nels. How was breakfast?

**NELS.** Snake! Vampire! Hyena!

**BRAD.** Oh, that's a fine greeting, Nels.

**NELS.** What happened?! You tell me what happened!

**BRAD.** What are you babbling about?

**NELS.** Spit it out you buzzard!

**BRAD.** STOP YELLING AT ME! GOD ALL FUCKING MIGHTY DO I NEED THIS SHIT?! GET OFF MY BACK! (*Nels cowers.*)

*Pause.*)

**NELS.** Christ on a bike. You look worse than Pipe. What happened?

**BRAD.** What?

**NELS.** With Joe? What happened?

**BRAD.** Joe? Nothing, Nels. He went to the morgue.

## LITTLE FISHES

**NELS.** God dammit don't rile me, Bradstreet!

**BRAD.** You want to have a stroke? Lie back, century man.

**NELS.** What happened cleaning Joe?!

**BRAD.** Oh, way to go, Pipe.

**PIPE.** I didn't say nothin'.

**BRAD.** Bullshit.

**PIPE.** I just said I felt bad.

**BRAD.** So much for the inscrutable red man.

**PIPE.** Kiss my ass, honkey.

**BRAD.** Honkey. That's twice today, Pipe.

**NELS.** What happened?!

**BRAD.** You wanna know what happened?

**NELS.** Yeah!

**BRAD.** Well I ain't gonna tell ya. You've had enough entertainment for one day.

**NELS.** Then get out! Skedaddle! Take a hike!

**BRAD.** Can't do that, Nels, Suzy's on a rampage out there. Very ugly. Could be dangerous.

**NELS.** Oh, she'll never find ya in here! No, you never spend any time in here! Goddamn pest.

**BRAD.** They pay me to take care of you, Nels, and that's what I'm doin'.

**NELS.** Like you took care of Joe, right?

**BRAD.** I took fine care of Joe. Against formidable odds, I might add.

**NELS.** Hah!

**BRAD.** Spit it out, Nels.

**NELS.** Leave me alone.

**BRAD.** You know what he's talking about, Pipe?

**PIPE.** Nope.

**BRAD.** What are you doing in here?

**PIPE.** Nothin'.

**BRAD.** There are other patients, you know. Suzy's not after your ass.

**PIPE.** I know. Nels screamed.

**NELS.** Shut up!

**BRAD.** Screamed, huh?

**PIPE.** Sorry, Nels.

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Were you being mugged in here, Nels?

**PIPE.** His mind wandered.

**NELS.** Pipe!

**BRAD.** Where did it go, Nels?

**NELS.** I saw a bug!

**BRAD.** Must've been a pretty big bug.

**NELS.** It *was* a big bug. *Huge*, if you wanna know!

**BRAD.** Well, we better keep an eye out. In the meantime, Pipe here better get back to work before somebody dies out there by mistake.

**PIPE.** Shit.

**BRAD.** And you call me a honkey again I'll kick your ass.

**PIPE.** Yeah, sure you will, honkey.

**NELS.** What's a honkey?

**BRAD.** What's a honkey?

**NELS.** You heard me. What's a honkey?

**BRAD.** Good question, Nels. What do you mean, Pipe?

**PIPE.** What do I mean?

**BRAD.** Yeah, Pipe. You keep calling me a honkey.

**PIPE.** You're white!

**BRAD.** My God, what do you mean?

**PIPE.** I mean you're a *white* guy and more and more of an *asshole* white guy and that makes you a honkey!

**NELS.** Kid's got a point.

**BRAD.** Excuse me, Nels?

**NELS.** You're a honkey. It's time somebody told ya.

**BRAD.** Oh, my God.

**NELS.** You're a honkey! Admit it!

**BRAD.** (*To Pipe.*) Now look what you've done!

**PIPE.** I'm outta here.

**BRAD.** Gone and turned Nels into a racist, hope you're happy.

(*Brad is blocking Pipe's way.*)

**PIPE.** Get out of my way, man.

**BRAD.** (*Continuing to block Pipe.*) You know, I suppose I'm willing to admit I'm a *honkey*. Maybe even an *asshole*. But I don't see why you

## LITTLE FISHES

should just assume I'm a *white guy*. Maybe I'm a Chippewa guy who's just suffering from some terrible disease.

**PIPE.** Oh yeah?

**BRAD.** Yeah, some nightmare dermatological condition.

**PIPE.** Uh huh.

**BRAD.** Some catastrophic affliction of the epidermis.

**PIPE.** Like what?

**BRAD.** Like say - melanin evaporation syndrome.

**PIPE.** What colossal bullshit, man.

**BRAD.** You've never heard of melanin evaporation syndrome?! What do they teach you on that reservation? Rain dancing and archery and that's it? Everybody's heard of melanin evaporation syndrome.

**PIPE.** Have you, Nels?

**NELS.** New one on me.

**BRAD.** He's a hundred years old, what does he know? I'm tellin' ya Pipe, you gotta get with the program. Wandering down here off the reservation like some refugee from the fourth world ain't gonna cut it. You're in Minneapolis. The big city. Read Time Magazine or something!

**PIPE.** You're really startin' to piss me off, man!

**BRAD.** Yeah, well, calling me a honkey pisses me off!

**NELS.** Ya always bait the boy, now you call *him* a bastard! That's some nerve!

**BRAD.** Shut the fuck up, Nels!

**PIPE.** Hey! Don't talk to him like that! He's old!

**NELS.** Yeah!

**PIPE.** True colors, man! True colors! Sooner or later they always come out! You bastards are gonna get yours, man. You will! If there's a God!

**BRAD.** What the fuck does God have to do with it?

**PIPE.** If there is one, you're gonna get it! Asshole Lutheran honkey motherfucker!

**BRAD.** I'm not a Lutheran. Don't call me a Lutheran, Pipe.

**PIPE.** You said you were a Lutheran!

**BRAD.** I'm not a Lutheran. Don't call me a Lutheran.

**PIPE.** Kiss my ass, Lu . . . !

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** You call me a Lutheran again I'm gonna chop your head off and sell it to a Mongolian restaurant.

**PIPE.** Whoa!

**NELS.** Alright, that's enough!

**PIPE.** If there's a God, man!

**BRAD.** Well, there isn't! You're gonna have to do it all by yourself! Think you can do that, Pipe?! C'mon, Pipe. It's not them. Some big white them. No, Pipe. It's me! (*Pushes Pipe.*) Look at me! Every reservation famine, crying mother, alcoholic brother, every time you are thwarted, it's me. If you were to kill me the world would be right again. The earth would ride on balance. Oh, Pipe, the rivers would run clean! The sky would be a clear electric blue! C'mon, Pipe! Do something! Kill Satan! You can be the Chippewa Messiah! What are you some useless sack of shit with a feather on top?! C'mon, Crazy Horse! Do something! (*Pipe looks at Brad, shocked and sickened. Little pause. Pipe runs into bathroom. Brad stands still. Pause.*)

**BRAD.** Ah, fuck. (*Brad paces the room, agitated,*) Little Chief Rain in the Pants. (*Sees Nels staring at him.*) What are you looking at? (*Brad pulls out a joint and goes to light it.*)

**NELS.** You can't do that. It's daytime.

**BRAD.** What? Oh, yeah.

**NELS.** You should be ashamed.

**BRAD.** I did him a favor.

**NELS.** What happened?

**BRAD.** When?

**NELS.** With Joe. Preparing his body.

**BRAD.** You don't want to hear, Nels. Take my word for it.

**NELS.** You tell me, Bradstreet, or I'll never say another word to you.

**BRAD.** You couldn't hold out, Nels. Not with me.

**NELS.** Oh! Things are different! How long would I have to hold out, after all.

**BRAD.** You're not going to die, Nels. You're the iron man.

**NELS.** Tell me!

**BRAD.** I'm gonna find Suzy, see if I still have a job. (*Brad starts to go.*)

**NELS.** I'm gonna consult my Morning Prayer Book about you!

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** What?

**NELS.** I saw you, Brad. I saw what you did!

**BRAD.** See you later, Nels. (*Brad exits. Pipe enters from bathroom and sits on SL bed.*)

**PIPE.** Where's Brad?

**NELS.** He left.

**PIPE.** I gotta tell him thanks.

**NELS.** What?!

**PIPE.** I almost forgot that thing I can't forget. Brad reminded me. I gotta thank him.

**NELS.** Are you loony?

**PIPE.** You can catch the disease. People treat you like shit. Every day. You can catch their disease. End up like them. That's the scariest thing. Scariest than the bastards. Ending up like them.

**NELS.** Brad is a bastard.

**PIPE.** He made me remember.

**NELS.** He's losin' it, Pipe.

**PIPE.** He made me remember.

**NELS.** Remember what?

**PIPE.** My grandfather told me one thing I never forgot. Almost never. He said: (*Pipe does his impression of his ancient grandfather.*) Treat people good. Even when they treat you bad. Most people will hurt when they are hurt, do bad when treated bad. But one in a million is strong enough to give good for bad. And those people are what keeps the world from falling totally into evil. So be one of them. Especially around white people! They will be so surprised it will make you laugh. Except don't laugh because they hate that and they might kill you. (*Pipe chuckles as his grandfather, then returns to normal.*) I almost forgot that. (*Pause. Nels is staring at Pipe.*) Okay. See ya. (*Pipe starts off.*)

**NELS.** PIPE! (*Pipe returns to NELS.*)

**PIPE.** What, Nels?

**NELS.** Pipe, I'm so sorry.

**PIPE.** Why, Nels?

**NELS.** You're somethin', Pipe.

**PIPE.** I am?

## LITTLE FISHES

**NELS.** Yep. I mean it.

**PIPE.** Thanks, Nels.

**NELS.** You're a good kid. You're somethin' else!

**PIPE.** Wow. Thanks, Nels. That's really nice.

**NELS.** I'm sorry I didn't know that. I'm so sorry, Pipe. I didn't know that until now. Until just now this very minute! *(Pause. Nels looks down, remorseful. Pipe comforts him, pats Nels on the shoulder.)*

**PIPE.** That's okay, Nels. I didn't know it either. *(Nels looks at Pipe. Lights fade.)*

### SCENE 3

*Night. Soft blue light coming in from window. Nels in bed asleep.*

**NELS.** Oh now ... stop it now ... hee hee ... hee hee. *(Brad enters.)*

**NELS.** Oh aren't you the dickens you little fishes ... hee hee.

**BRAD.** Oh, for Christ sake. *(Brad wheels the wheelchair next to the bed.)*

**NELS.** Ooooooh hee hee you silly ... oh you little buggers that tickles now ... *(Brad leans over Nels, listens. Silence. Brad sees Nels' pillow is on the floor. He picks it up and stands over Nels a moment holding the pillow. He then carefully slips it behind Nels' head without disturbing his sleep, sits in the wheelchair and reflects. He then leans toward Nels and speaks with genuine tenderness.)*

**BRAD.** If I believed in an interventionist god you know what I would do, Nels? I would pray. I would pray that you live many years. If I believed in an interventionist god, I would ask God to make sure your death (if you ever die) will be silent, peaceful, in your sleep, during a beautiful dream. *(Nels giggles.)* I would ask him to light your path to his waiting arms so he could clasp you to his bosom like a lost toddler.

**NELS.** Little fishes....

**BRAD.** That's what I would do.

**NELS.** Stop that, that tickles now, you stupid, you're so stupid. Hee hee. *(Brad smiles. He leans forward to speak in Nels' ear.)*

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Marilyn Monroe ... (*Imitates her.*) This is Marilyn Monroe and I want you, Nels. I want you bad.

**NELS.** (*Beat.*) Little fishes ... all the little fishy wishies ...

**BRAD.** Damn. Jean Harlow? ... No. Mae West. (*Imitates.*) Say, you big hunk of Viking barbarian you. Why don't you come upstairs and we can play hide the herring on the hideaway couch? Whatta ya say?

**NELS.** (*Beat.*) Stop it now you itsy bitsy you stupid little fishy wishies.

**BRAD.** Lillian Gishshshsh. (*Brad imitates a silent film actor in crisis.*)

**NELS.** Oh ... oh yes, oh my yes, mm hmm, oh my that's it that's ... oh my goodness, oh yeah, that's it ... (*Brad laughs.*)

**BRAD.** We never forget our first love, eh Nels? (*Brad goes to SL bed, gets in and pulls the sheet over his head.*)

**NELS.** Oh yes ... oh ... oh my little gumdrop ... oh my little rutabaga ... that's ... that's ... that is ... very good ... that is ... oh yeah ... oh yeah! ..

oh my gracious! ... OH! I'm flying! (*Pause. Suddenly Nels sits up, but stares wide-eyed in a continuous vision.*) What? Oh! Oh, what vistas!

What valleys! Green lush expanses! Turquoise rivers knifing through jungles, emerald birds flying beside me ... Wait! What was....

How did I...? There was a woman! Yes! A woman! Oh. The face!

Damn, I can't see the face I ... DAMN! (*Nels squints, now sees the room and finally the body in SL bed.*) Swinging Judas! How did you get

in here?! Is that you Joe? ... You lost? You escape? (*Nels gets up, very shaky, gets walker and moves to SL bed. Slowly uncovers face.*) Why

that's ... it's Bradstreet! Dead! There must be an avenging angel on the prowl, preying on old sadists and young psychos alike. I better notify the proper authorities....

**BRAD.** Will you keep it down?

**NELS.** AH! Oh God! (*Nels is so startled he lets go of the walker. He loses his balance ...*)

**BRAD.** I'm trying to sleep here - WHOA WHOA JESUS!

**NELS.** Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! (*Nels is falling backward. Brad leaps up and moves behind Nels catching him just as he falls.*)

**NELS.** Oh my god oh my god oh my god . . .

**BRAD.** Steady now ...

**NELS.** Oh boy ...

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Steady old timer I got ya. I'll get you in bed.

**NELS.** Am I okay?! Am I in pieces?!

**BRAD.** I got ya. You're okay.

**NELS.** My bones are like twigs, ya know! Snap if you look at 'em!

**BRAD.** Come on. Up you go. (*Brad, very tenderly, puts Nels back in his bed.*)

**NELS.** Oh Lordy! My heart's thumpin' like a steam engine! Can you hear that?! What a din! What a racket! I CAN BARELY HEAR MYSELF SPEAK!

**BRAD.** Shshsh! I'll get some water.

**NELS.** What the hell were you doin'?! I thought you were dead! Why do you do that?!

**BRAD.** What, Nels?

**NELS.** Scare the bejesus out of me like that!

**BRAD.** Just taking a nap, Nels.

**NELS.** With a sheet over your head?!

**BRAD.** That's how I sleep, Nels.

**NELS.** You're trying to scare me into a heart attack!

**BRAD.** That's how I sleep, Nels. Keeps out unwanted light and prevents dust particles from collecting on my brain.

**NELS.** You expect me to buy that?

**BRAD.** Only way I can sleep.

**NELS.** You need a new job, Bradstreet.

**BRAD.** Naw. I like it here.

**NELS.** They'll fix ya they catch you sleepin'. You're not supposed to be sleepin'. You're supposed to be keeping an eye out.

**BRAD.** For what?

**NELS.** Attacks in the night. Wandering minds. Ticklers that don't tick.

**BRAD.** There's nothing going on out there.

**NELS.** Nothing going on out there. There's always something going on out there! Not a moment goes by without someone being struck by calamity!

**BRAD.** That so.

**NELS.** Damn straight! Ya think I don't know? Ya think I don't see?! Nothing gets by me, buster. I got your ticket!

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Jesus Christ! What's that?!

**NELS.** What?!

**BRAD.** Under the sheets! My God! What is that?! (*Nels looks under his sheet.*)

**NELS.** Holy moly! How the hell did that happen?!

**BRAD.** What?! Are you being attacked?!

**NELS.** I haven't seen one of them in years! How do ya like that?! A woody! A stiffy! After all these years.

**BRAD.** Well! That must be very encouraging, Nels.

**NELS.** The dream! That was it. There was a woman.

**BRAD.** You don't say.

**NELS.** But I can't remember. Her face is all ripply like a face in a lake after a boat goes by.

**BRAD.** That's too bad. Musta been a good dream.

**NELS.** Well, I should say. Just look at that!

**BRAD.** Hey, Nels. Ever see Birth of a Nation?

**NELS.** Birth of a Nation?

**BRAD.** D.W. Griffith. It's a movie.

**NELS.** Ooooooh, yeah! I remember. Everybody saw that when that came out.

**BRAD.** When was that?

**NELS.** What?

**BRAD.** When did Birth of A Nation come out? What year?

**NELS.** Beats me.

**BRAD.** 1915?

**NELS.** Sounds about right.

**BRAD.** So you would have been how old?

**NELS.** Ah geez ...

**BRAD.** Forty?

**NELS.** I guess.

**BRAD.** Go alone?

**NELS.** Alone? Why would I do that? Went with my wife.

**BRAD.** Right! Your wife.

**NELS.** Olga.

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Olga. Yeah. You and Olga. In the theatre. Watching Birth of A Nation. 1915.

**NELS.** Yeah. (*And Nels is off, transported, in the theatre, watching the movie with his Olga. Brad sees this, smiles.*)

**BRAD.** Lillian Gish was in that, wasn't she?

**NELS.** Huh?

**BRAD.** In the movie you're watching. Lillian Gish was in that, right?

**NELS.** Lillian Gish? ... Oh, my yes. She was a honey. Sweetest thing you ever.... (*It dawns.*) Lillian Gish! Lillian Gish! Jesus Christ on the rooftop! My dream! That's who it was! Oh my Christ! You shoulda seen her, Brad. Her skin! She was all shimmering, all silver and shimmering, bathed in moonbeams! She was walking six inches above the ground with white shiny feet like fishes and that smile, oh ... (*It dawns.*) Wait just a cotton pickin' minute! How did you know who it was?! How did you do that?!

**BRAD.** Do what?

**NELS.** You're just diabolical, you know that?! You give me the creeps!

**BRAD.** Just a lucky guess, Nels.

**NELS.** I've got you wandering around in my mind like some goddamn night stalker, now!

**BRAD.** Oh, Nels.

**NELS.** I'll thank you to stop creeping around my brainpan depositing sexual fantasies!

**BRAD.** Okay, Nels.

**NELS.** The last thing I need at this stage is a lot of false hopes!

**BRAD.** Okay, Nels.

**NELS.** Damn thing's standing up and staring at me like some little one-eyed monster!

**BRAD.** I could leave the two of you alone...

**NELS.** Don't you move! What a suggestion. You're a very disturbing young man, Bradstreet.

**BRAD.** Just trying to bring a little light into your life in my own modest way, Nels.

**NELS.** God, I'm tired of this crap. I better check my Morning Prayer Book about this dream.

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Oh, Jesus ...

**NELS.** (*Looks under pillow, finds nothing.*) Where is it? Where the hell's my Morning Prayer Book?!

**BRAD.** It's not there?

**NELS.** No! Look! (*Throws pillows off the bed.*) Where is it?!

**BRAD.** I dunno, Nels. (*Brad looks in bedstand, under bed, shrugs.*) I dunno, buddy. Looks like it's missing.

**NELS.** Missing?! Stolen! My God!

**BRAD.** Pipe down. It'll turn up.

**NELS.** Who would do such a thing?! He'd have to have a soul like a cesspool! (*Nels glares at Brad.*)

**BRAD.** Oh, Christ. I didn't steal your prayer book, Nels.

**NELS.** Liar! Scum!

**BRAD.** Nels, this is me. What would I want with a prayer book?

**NELS.** You're tryin' to send me over the edge!

**BRAD.** That's the last thing I would want, Nels.

**NELS.** You give it back or I'll have you arrested! I'll have you thrown in the hoosegow!

**BRAD.** The hoosegow? Oh, no, Nels, not the hoosegow!

**NELS.** Give it back! I'm not foolin'!

**BRAD.** Nels, I didn't take your fuckin' prayer book but I'll try to get you a new one, okay?

**NELS.** You're a lying thief bastard! And another thing! Stop trying to scare me to death!

**BRAD.** Nels --

**NELS.** You're not dealing with Joe this time, mister. I've got my eyes, I've got my brains and they're locked on you like a heat seeking missile!

**BRAD.** What are you talking about?

**NELS.** You know very well!

**BRAD.** No.

**NELS.** Liar!

**BRAD.** Jesus.

**NELS.** Liar liar pants on fire!

**BRAD.** Oh, well, that's it. This is how it happens. Out of nowhere. One day the brain starts to rot and that's it.

## LITTLE FISHES

**NELS.** Fat chance!

**BRAD.** Few weeks it'll be like talking to a summer squash!

**NELS.** Shut up!

**BRAD.** You're starting to go, Nels - You're SENILE!

**NELS.** (*Gasps!*) I am not!

**BRAD.** You'll be down to rubbing two brain cells together, trying to get a spark!

**NELS.** I am not senile!

**BRAD.** Then spit it out!

**NELS.** I saw what you did!

**BRAD.** Yeah?!

**NELS.** Yeah!

**BRAD.** Do what?!

**NELS.** Kill him!

**BRAD.** Kill who?!

**NELS.** Joe! "Kill who." Very funny. Very clever. What a comedian!

**BRAD.** We explained this, Nels! His body looked like that because of a joke! It was a joke on Pipe! Remember?!

**NELS.** He was choking. He was gasping. You just sat there and watched!

**BRAD.** And when was this?

**NELS.** After breakfast.

**BRAD.** After breakfast?!

**NELS.** You're darn tootin'!

**BRAD.** Nels! After breakfast Joe was in the morgue. He died last night while you were asleep. How could you see me kill someone who was already dead and gone from the room?!

**NELS.** In My Mind's Eye!

**BRAD.** In your what?

**NELS.** In My Mind's Eye!

**BRAD.** What the hell is that supposed to mean?!

**NELS.** It rose up like a mountain out of the earth! It crashed in like a train through a wall!

**BRAD.** Nels!

**NELS.** It came to me, goddamnit!

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** You had a vision?! Like, the truth revealed?!

**NELS.** Bingo!

**BRAD.** You hallucinated, Nels! Some paranoid hallucination! Listen to yourself. You see something that's *not* there, *not* actually happening, and *because* it's not there you take this as a god damn sign of the truth? Is that it?

**NELS.** More or less.

**BRAD.** And this in no way indicates slippage as far as you're concerned?

**NELS.** It came to me!

**BRAD.** Nels, don't do this.

**NELS.** Too late!

**BRAD.** This can't be happening. Not the iron man.

**NELS.** I'm gonna settle your hash.

**BRAD.** You can't lose your mind, Nels, I won't let ya!

**NELS.** Try and stop me!

**BRAD.** He died in his sleep!

**NELS.** A worm on a hook.

**BRAD.** If I'm a mercy killer why tell me about it? I might do *you* in! You ever think a' that?!

**NELS.** You mean like scare me to death?! *(Pause. Nels smiles at Brad a ghastly, triumphant smile.)*

**BRAD.** One person I can talk to around here his brain turns into a bowl of pea soup. *(Brad takes out a joint and lights it.)*

**NELS.** Put that out. I hate that! It stinks.

**BRAD.** Leave me alone. I'm trying to reconcile myself.

**NELS.** I suppose you think you're doin' people a favor.

**BRAD.** I don't even know what just happened.

**NELS.** Mustn't let the brain spoil in the scull.

**BRAD.** You bust your ass and for what.

**NELS.** Yeah, a regular angel of mercy, that's you.

**BRAD.** I hated Joe, it's true but ...

**NELS.** Angel of death is more like it. Spreading your black shiny wings over the room ...

**BRAD.** Unravelling before my eyes ...

## LITTLE FISHES

**NELS.** Perched like a vulture on a lamp shade ...

**BRAD.** I always took good care of you, Nels.

**NELS.** You don't want to keep people going. You want to see them go!

**BRAD.** Nels --

**NELS.** Lookin' for the big fish!

**BRAD.** You want to know what happened cleaning Joe?

**NELS.** What?

**BRAD.** I'll tell ya.

**NELS.** Uh... Okay.

**BRAD.** This really happened. Not some waking nightmare. This is real!

**NELS.** Yeah.

**BRAD.** This is a nightmare of the flesh! You wanna hear?!

**NELS.** I guess.

**BRAD.** All right. We're cleaning Joe. The corpse. Pipe and I. We get to a point in the procedure that I won't describe in detail.

**NELS.** Good.

**BRAD.** Okay, we were evacuating his bowels.

**NELS.** Jesus Christ!

**BRAD.** Suffice it to say, Joe is in a rather compromising position.

**NELS.** Stop! I don't wanna hear this!

**BRAD.** Then I hear a click of the door behind me, I turn, and there, standing in the doorway ... is Joe's daughter!

**NELS.** Oh, my God.

**BRAD.** Nobody moves. She is seeing him dead for the first time, stripped naked with his ass in the air and.... She falls out of the room. I chase after her. I say what I can. She can't speak. I tell her we didn't know she was here, there can't be locks on the doors blah blah blah. I'm sputtering my guts out. She walks away. But, Nels! Her face! Her face ... it was gone! Standing in the doorway, looking at her father ... her face fell off! I saw it happen. I don't mean she looked shocked. Like her everyday mask slipped. I mean the whole face slid off her head and plopped on the floor! She saw what she saw and she ceased to exist! Her face fell off! I'm telling you, Nels ... her friends won't recognize her.

**NELS.** God. That's terrible.

**BRAD.** Yeah. I'd give anything for that to happen to me.

## LITTLE FISHES

**NELS.** WHAT?!

**BRAD.** To forget myself like that.

**NELS.** Oh.

**BRAD.** It was snowing when she left. I see her driving home, looking at a windshield made opaque by her memory, windshield wipers trying to wipe it all away. She's lucky she didn't have an accident.

**NELS.** Maybe she did.

**BRAD.** She got home, called Suzy. Suzy put me on probation.

**NELS.** You need a new job, Bradstreet.

**BRAD.** She was just gone. She forgot she was living. Her brain filled with nothing but him. And what she saw was impossible. Why can't that happen to me, Nels? Huh? Why can't that happen to me?

**NELS.** I don't know!

**BRAD.** I don't care how horrible it is. Maybe something would get in my head besides this constant argument I keep having with someone who's not even fucking there! You know what I mean, Nels?!

**NELS.** Brad? I want you to leave me alone. I'm tired. I'm a hundred years old! I wanna go to sleep. Okay? Jesus.

**BRAD.** Oh. Okay, Nels. Sorry. Go ahead. *(Pause. Brad doesn't move. They regard one another.)*

**NELS.** I know who you are, Bradstreet. You're always waiting, waiting. You want to be there when the moment comes. You want to see the light slowly dim in the eyes. You wanna hear the famous last words, smell the last exhale of air. You wanna be there. That's why you're here. Lookin' for clues! Lookin' for the other side! That's why you always hang around me. Buzzard! It ain't gonna happen. Just forget it. Go spread your wings over somebody else's bed. I got someone else to watch over me. And he watches good! So just piss off! *(Pause. Brad has taken a final toke of the joint and blows a cloud of smoke in Nels' face. Nels coughs.)*

**BRAD.** You're supposed to hold it, Nels.

**NELS.** Cut it out!

**BRAD.** Who's going to watch you?

**NELS.** Piss off!

**BRAD.** Jesus?

**NELS.** You're going to die choking on your own sputum and bile.

## LITTLE FISHES

**BRAD.** Are you referring to our Native American friend? You don't mean Pipe, do you Nels?

**NELS.** Maybe.

**BRAD.** The young man is not to be depended on, Nels.

**NELS.** Listen to *him*.

**BRAD.** Our young Indian friend has a cantaloupe for a brain ...

**NELS.** You said he was smart.

**BRAD.** He's stoned all the time.

**NELS.** So are you.

**BRAD.** Yes, Nels. But my drug is the mildest kind of hallucinogen while his turns the air purple. His makes the walls breathe.

**NELS.** He's a good kid.

**BRAD.** He doesn't know what he's doing.

**NELS.** I don't care!

**BRAD.** But I do, Nels. I don't believe he is capable of providing the proper care and attention let alone the seasoned instinct for anticipating medical crisis that one can only develop through experience which I have and have imparted to you with unmatched dedication for the last three years.

**NELS.** Blow it out your ass!

**BRAD.** I see. Well, I am going to have to think very hard about taking steps. In the meantime, I think we should get some rest.

**NELS.** We? What's this "we," honkey? *(Brad turns off light, gets in SL bed and pulls sheet over his head.)*

**NELS.** You can't do that. I can't sleep with you in here!

**BRAD.** Oh, Lillian. Oh, yes. Oh, Lillian. My little Lillian Gish. I love you so. *(Nels looks front. Sighs. Lights fade.)*

*THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –  
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