

# **A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT**

**And Other Plays About Allen**

By

Philip Middleton Williams

# A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

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A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

*These plays were inspired by the life and my times with my partner,  
Allen J. Pfannenstiel (1964-2018).*

*They are dedicated to his memory.*

# A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

## **The Plays**

### **A Tree Grows in Longmont**

**Allen's Big Adventure** – the monologue that inspired **A Tree Grows in Longmont**.

**Last Exit** – the play-within-the-play in **A Tree Grows in Longmont**.

### **Going for a Walk with Sam**

### **Another Park, Another Sunday**

The plays are meant to be stand-alone pieces, but if the spirit and time moves you, **A Tree Grows in Longmont**, **Going for a Walk with Sam**, and **Another Park, Another Sunday** can be presented in that order as a full production.

# A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT

## CHARACTERS:

ALLEN: Male, late twenties.

PHILIP: Male, mid-sixties.

## PLACE and TIME:

A park in Longmont, Colorado. June 8, 2019.

## PRODUCTION NOTES:

**A Tree Grows in Longmont** was first presented on May 3, 2020, by Silver Tongued Stages of Miami, Florida as a part of the Six Feet Apart series of virtual play readings presented on YouTube. The production was directed by Ricky J. Martinez with stage management and stage directions by Sam Menseses. The cast was as follows:

Allen.....Tan Prace Collier  
Philip.....Kent Chambers-Wilson

**A Tree Grows in Longmont** was presented on June 11, 2023, at the Valdez Theatre Conference in Valdez, Alaska. It was directed by Dick Reichman. The cast was as follows:

Allen.....Shawn Eby  
Philip.....Jamie Nelson  
Stage Instructions.....Kenly Long

# A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT

*The lights come up on the empty stage. There is a newly-planted evergreen tree center stage and a wooden bench nearby. There are cards and family pictures hanging on the tree branches like Christmas decorations. There is a small placard on a stake in front of the tree.*

*ALLEN enters. He is an attractive man in his late twenties with an athletic build, nicely dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a short-sleeved shirt. He is wearing sunglasses, but after he enters, he takes them off and replaces them with his regular glasses; 1980's style aviators. He sits on the bench and waits patiently, perhaps looking around. A moment later, PHILIP enters. He is older than Allen, probably in his mid-sixties. He is wearing a blue polo shirt and jeans. Allen stands up.*

**ALLEN.** You finally made it. (*Philip looks at Allen, not quite sure he's believing what he's seeing.*) Yes, it really is me. Well, not the real skin-and-bones me. I was cremated and... Well, you know. Ashes to ashes.

**PHILIP.** (*Still not sure.*) How long will you be here?

**ALLEN.** You mean like this?

**PHILIP.** Yeah.

**ALLEN.** I don't know. I'm not really sure I know what "this" is. But I guess as long as I need to be here. (*Looks at the tree.*) Oh, but look at this. The family got together and planted it for me. (*Reading the placard.*) In memory of Allen. September 7, 1964 to June 8, 2018.

**PHILIP.** It's beautiful.

**ALLEN.** I guess. But dogs will pee on it. Bugs will eat the bark. In the winter the snow will pile up around it and no one will remember to take care of it. And even if it makes it through the winter and keeps growing, at some point it's gonna die.

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**PHILIP.** They all do. That's life. Besides, it's an evergreen. (*He touches the needles.*) And the needles are sharp. You always did like a stiff prick.

**ALLEN.** (*Laughing.*) Oh, good one! (*Beat.*) Well, I'm glad you could make it. Even now, a year later.

**PHILIP.** I tried to get here before you were gone. I spent an hour on the phone with the airline trying to get a flight to Denver, but by the time we got it all worked out, it would have been too late.

**ALLEN.** Yeah, well, I didn't want you to see me anyway. I looked like hell, I couldn't talk, and with all those tubes... (*He looks at himself.*) This is how I wanted you to remember me.

**PHILIP.** You look good.

**ALLEN.** Well, I should. This is how you remember me, isn't it?

**PHILIP.** Yeah, pretty much.

**ALLEN.** And that's how I remember you. Except you were younger and more muscular.

**PHILIP.** This is both our memories, so I'll give you that. But this is what I was wearing when we first met.

**ALLEN.** That's right. (*Looks at his own outfit.*) But I don't think I was wearing this.

**PHILIP.** I don't remember what you were wearing.

**ALLEN.** To be honest, neither do I. But I remember the night and the music.

**PHILIP.** April twenty-first, 1984. At the University of Colorado Gay/Lesbian Alliance Spring Dance. You asked me to dance.

**ALLEN.** I danced. You...

**PHILIP.** Twitched. Never said I was Fred Astaire.

**ALLEN.** Yeah. (*Both smile at the memory.*)

**PHILIP.** Fifteen years.

**ALLEN.** Twelve years.

**PHILIP.** No, fifteen years. April 1984 to June 1999.

**ALLEN.** I meant twelve years' difference. I was nineteen, you were thirty-one.

**PHILIP.** Oh, yeah, that.

**ALLEN.** Did it bother you?

A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**PHILIP.** Me? No. Not really. I mean, I got some razzing from my friends when they found out, but no, it really didn't.... You?

**ALLEN.** Hell no. I'd been dating older guys long before I met you.

**PHILIP.** So, when you told your family you were going out with a thirty-one-year-old grad student from an upper middle-class background from Ohio, they were relieved?

**ALLEN.** (*Hooting laugh.*) No!

**PHILIP.** What did you tell them?

**ALLEN.** Nothing! Not all at once. I let them get used to you.

**PHILIP.** Like we had to get used to each other. Gotta admit it took some time, right? I mean, you smoked...

**ALLEN.** You'll be happy to know I've given that up.

**PHILIP.** Uh, yeah...

**ALLEN.** Kinda redundant.

**PHILIP.** I'd say so.

**ALLEN.** And the drinking.

**PHILIP.** We both quit that. But it took me a while to notice that it was a problem.

**ALLEN.** Are you going to go back over all of the bad things? 'Cause if you are, I have other places I'd rather be, okay?

**PHILIP.** No! I'm remembering the good times. Our room together in David's house in Boulder; your birthday when I got you the unicorn music box that played "Let Me Call You Sweetheart,"

**ALLEN.** (*Singing.*) "I'm in love with you..."

**PHILIP.** I love you, too, but you sing like I dance.

**ALLEN.** Fair enough. But it's a memory.

**PHILIP.** Our first apartment...

**ALLEN.** Our first house, the one on Bross Street, with the big yard and the garage...

**PHILIP.** Where I broke my ankle...

**ALLEN.** And our fifth anniversary present.

**PHILIP.** Sam. Ten ounces of Cairn Terrier, nine weeks old. He fit in the palm of your hand.

**ALLEN.** Sammy-dog. Spud-doggie. Baby doggies.



## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**PHILIP.** He was with us from then on. To Michigan and New Mexico. And you let me keep him after...

**ALLEN.** You took him to Miami. And then... Were you there?

**PHILIP.** There?

**ALLEN.** When they had to put him to sleep.

**PHILIP.** No. I...

**ALLEN.** I know. You don't do death well. (*For a moment Philip cannot speak. Allen stands by, waiting.*)

**PHILIP.** Is he there?

**ALLEN.** Is he where?

**PHILIP.** With you. Where you are.

**ALLEN.** Right now, I'm in your head. So, if Sam's in there, he's with me. Along with all the other stuff. All the memories.

**PHILIP.** All the adventures.

**ALLEN.** Montserrat and the black sand beaches. Snorkeling with the barracudas. Wandering through Paris and Italy. Family reunions in Kansas and Michigan. (*A long pause. Philip looks at the tree. Allen senses something.*)

**ALLEN.** What? What's wrong?

**PHILIP.** I didn't come here – and neither did you – to just remember the good times and the “adventures.” We have to remember the bad along with the good and the promises we made – or at least the ones I did – if we're going to really be honest and make this mean something.

**ALLEN.** I had to fall in love with a writer.

**PHILIP.** Yeah, you did. So, let's go back.

**ALLEN.** To when.

**PHILIP.** You know when.

**ALLEN.** The Lost Weekend.

**PHILIP.** October second, 1992. Petoskey, Michigan. It was a Friday. You tried to kill yourself by driving into a tree at a hundred miles an hour. Fortunately, the engine of a 1963 Mercury Meteor gave out before you did. I tried to get you into the rehab center that night.

**ALLEN.** But they don't do intakes on weekends.

**PHILIP.** I got you up to bed where you spent the next forty-eight hours, and on Monday morning I bundled you into the station wagon. I drove

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

you the seventy miles to Traverse City<sup>1</sup>, checked you in to the Munson Alcohol and Drug Treatment Center, and spent the rest of the day searching the house from top to bottom for any remaining booze. Three huge trash bags of those little pint bottles of cheap vodka you picked up at the drug store. I lost count after fifty. That night I went to my first Al Anon meeting, and when I listened to the other people bare their souls, I realized that alcoholism is contagious and not only was I your enabler and codependent and all the other words that make up the wonderful world of addiction, but in my own way, I was just as much an alcoholic as you were. I just didn't drink as much.

**ALLEN and PHILIP.** (*In unison.*) God, grant me the serenity...

**PHILIP.** Thirty days later...

**ALLEN.** Twenty-eight...

**PHILIP.** Twenty-eight days, just in time for Halloween, you came home clean and sober.

**ALLEN.** I still smoked.

**PHILIP.** Yeah, well, you can't have everything.

**ALLEN.** You really haven't had a drink since then?

**PHILIP.** That's right.

**ALLEN.** I'm ... happy for you.

**PHILIP.** And you? (*Allen starts to speak but Philip stops him.*) No. Don't tell me. I don't have the right. Not now, at least.

**ALLEN.** I can tell you now...

**PHILIP.** Don't.

**ALLEN.** All right.

**PHILIP.** So, our lives went on. Three more years in Michigan, then...

**ALLEN.** Ole! The Land of Enchantment.

**PHILIP.** I got a new job in Albuquerque, and we went from the land of permanent gray skies and the three seasons – winter, July, and August – to blue skies, sunshine, and chile. You got a great job in Santa Fe...

**ALLEN.** Fifty miles away.

**PHILIP.** Yes.

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<sup>1</sup> "Traverse" is pronounced "Travers."

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**ALLEN.** But it was a job. And we bought our first house. And we made a garden. We planted a palm tree. We bought real furniture. We took trips.

**PHILIP.** I thought we had everything we wanted.

**ALLEN.** At least you did.

**PHILIP.** And you didn't.

**ALLEN.** One thing I learned in rehab and after is that when you're an active alcoholic, the maturing process stops. When you go into recovery, it starts up again. So basically, you were married to a fifteen-year-old for the first seven years.

**PHILIP.** So, after another eight years, you made up for lost time. All that exploring you missed out on as an adolescent came bursting forth. And so, we had Lost Weekend 2.0. Saturday, June 5, 1999.

**ALLEN.** I met someone else. Mike.

**PHILIP.** I never knew his last name.

**ALLEN.** I don't remember it either.

**PHILIP.** (*Calmly.*) Well, if that's what you really wanted.

**ALLEN.** I thought it was.

**PHILIP.** Yeah. And I...

**ALLEN.** You carried on like your home was in a tree.

**PHILIP.** For about an hour. But I knew how stubborn you were, and besides, I got to keep Sam. So yeah, I had a good cry, I inflicted the old guilt trips, and then... we got on with it. Besides, I knew that if I waited long enough... (*Philip gives Allen a smug grin.*)

**ALLEN.** That I'd come back?

**PHILIP.** Well, yeah. Maybe not the same way, not as the way we were before.

**ALLEN.** You did not.

**PHILIP.** Well, to quote myself, hope is my greatest weakness.

**ALLEN.** What's that from?

**PHILIP.** The novel I started writing in 1995.

**ALLEN.** Oh, yeah. How'd it turn out?

**PHILIP.** I'll let you know.

**ALLEN.** You're shitting me. You still haven't finished it?

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**PHILIP.** Some stories just keep going on. But you did come back, almost exactly a year later.

**ALLEN.** Mike was cheating on me. (*Beat.*) Karma's a bitch.

**PHILIP.** So, you moved back into our house, into the guest room. It wasn't like before, though.

**ALLEN.** No, it wasn't.

**PHILIP.** You know, I actually liked you better now that we were just friends. None of that...

**ALLEN.** Goopy lovey-dovey stuff.

**PHILIP.** Right.

**ALLEN.** We were over that.

**PHILIP.** Yeah. We had a good run. Fifteen years.

**ALLEN.** Three states.

**PHILIP.** Too many jobs to mention.

**ALLEN.** A lot of pictures.

**PHILIP.** And records.

**ALLEN.** Then you got the job you wanted. Teaching theatre in Florida.

**PHILIP.** I thought so, but –

**ALLEN.** Warm climate, decent pay... Maybe you'd get the chance to do more playwriting.

**PHILIP.** As a matter of fact, I did. Almost twenty new plays between 2001 and 2019. One even went off-off-Broadway.

**ALLEN.** (*Jokingly.*) So, do I show up in any of them?

**PHILIP.** As a matter of fact, you do.

**ALLEN.** Really? How many of them?

**PHILIP.** A lot of them. Not by name, but you're there.

**ALLEN.** Really? Sweet! Wish I could see one.

**PHILIP.** (*Mulling it over.*) Okay.

**ALLEN.** You mean...?

**PHILIP.** Yeah, sure. You and me.

**ALLEN.** Right here?

**PHILIP.** Why not? You didn't get to see it when it was first done, so...

**ALLEN.** Um, okay. What's it called?

**PHILIP.** *Last Exit.*

**ALLEN.** Sounds scary.

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**PHILIP.** It's not.

**ALLEN.** Okay, then. It'll be fun. Where's the script? (*Philip pulls a Zip Loc bag with papers out of his back pocket.*)

**ALLEN.** You just happened to have it with you?

**PHILIP.** I was going to leave a copy here. With the rest of the memories. (*Philip opens the bag, takes out the pages, hands them to Allen.*)

**PHILIP.** I'll play Malcolm; you'll play Arnold. (*Philip turns to the audience.*) Last Exit, a play by Philip Middleton Williams. Characters: Malcolm, mid-forties. Arnold, ten years younger. Scene: An almost-empty living room of a home in New Mexico. There are some moving boxes on the floor; some sealed, some open. Time: Present day, a late afternoon in July. At rise, Malcolm is standing in the middle of the room. He is in his mid-forties, dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. He's a little dirty and sweaty from packing. He has just finished a cell-phone call and is putting the phone in his pocket when Arnold enters. He is ten years younger than Malcolm. He enters quickly and a little out of breath. (*Philip points to Allen as if to cue him. Allen gets it, enters as Arnold.*)

**ARNOLD.** I'm sorry I'm late; I'm on my dinner break so I don't have a lot of time. I'm glad you waited.

**MALCOLM.** Yeah, I was just trying to call you. That's okay. I've got a little time. The van just left with all the big stuff; the rest will go in the car with the plants and the computer.

**ARNOLD.** (*Looking around.*) Where's Sam?

**MALCOLM.** Oh, he's out front having a last sniff and pee in the yard. You want me to call him?

**ARNOLD.** No, that's okay... it'll only confuse him. You have his travel water dish and everything?

**MALCOLM.** All set. Got his leash and his red toy and his ... everything.

**ARNOLD.** Just don't give him any Diet Coke. Remember what happened that time when we were going to your folks' place and he had a sip?

**MALCOLM.** Yeah, it took me a lot of Resolve to get that mess cleaned up. No, I've got some good clean water for him. He'll be all right. (*Arnold looks around the room for a moment.*)

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**ARNOLD.** I'll move my stuff back in tomorrow. It shouldn't take too long.

**MALCOLM.** Mike's gone?

**ARNOLD.** (*Tersely.*) Yep. Back to St. Louis...or wherever he came from. Glad that's over. (*He pauses as if he expects Malcolm to say something, but he just nods.*) Go ahead, you can say it.

**MALCOLM.** No. I'm not going to say anything.

**ARNOLD.** No "I told you so?" Hey, c'mon, you've earned yourself a good gloat. Free of charge. All yours. I can take it.

**MALCOLM.** No. Not a word. I'm over it. (*Changing the subject.*) Oh, I left you those pages out of the photo album you wanted, and the slides, too.

**ARNOLD.** The ones from Europe?

**MALCOLM.** Yeah, including that day we went to Notre Dame and you bought those rosary beads for your mom.

**ARNOLD.** Then we were all out of cash and we couldn't cash the Traveler's Checks, so we had to walk all the way from the Louvre to the hotel up by the Arc de Triomphe.

**MALCOLM.** Paris may be lovely in the spring, but it's a frozen wasteland in December.

**ARNOLD.** (*Chuckling.*) And then riding on the train to Italy with nothing to eat for eight hours?

**MALCOLM.** And going to the Vatican to get those damn beads blessed at the papal audience and missing getting in to see the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel?

**ARNOLD.** So, we climbed all the way up to the top of St. Peter's dome...

**MALCOLM.** ...So we could look down on the roof of the Sistine Chapel! (*They both laugh.*)

**MALCOLM.** I left you the pictures from Jamaica, too, the ones from Dunn's River Falls, and going snorkeling

**ARNOLD.** Off the reef at Runaway Bay.

**MALCOLM.** And that blurry one of the barracuda.

**ARNOLD.** Yeah... What about the ones from Trinidad?

**MALCOLM.** I left you some of those, too.

**ARNOLD.** Did you keep any?

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**MALCOLM.** Oh, yeah, the ones of us skiing with my family and sailing in Michigan. I figured you didn't really want them. And I have copies of everything, anyway.

**ARNOLD.** Of course you do.

**MALCOLM.** (*Indicating a box on the floor.*) That one is full of your records and tapes. I kept all of mine, and besides, I didn't think you'd want my Beatles and Beach Boys collection. I left you all of yours.

**ARNOLD.** Including my Joe Jacksons? Thanks.

**MALCOLM.** Well, he's not exactly my style.

**ARNOLD.** I know. Thanks for storing them for me. There was just no room in that tiny little place we had.

**MALCOLM.** Yeah, I figured. You barely had room for a bed.

**ARNOLD.** We managed.

**MALCOLM.** I'm sure you did.

**ARNOLD.** You should have come by sometime.

**MALCOLM.** (*After a beat or two.*) No. That wasn't gonna happen.

**ARNOLD.** Yeah, I guess not.

**MALCOLM.** Well... (*Turns to go.*)

**ARNOLD.** Wait....

**MALCOLM.** What? (*Arnold goes to the record box and pulls out a cassette tape.*)

**ARNOLD.** I want you to have this.

**MALCOLM.** What is it?

**ARNOLD.** Read it.

**MALCOLM.** (*Reading the label.*) "Turning Japanese" by The Vapors.

**ARNOLD.** You remember that?

**MALCOLM.** Should I?

**ARNOLD.** It was the first song we ever danced to. "Turning Japanese, I think I'm turning Japanese, I really think so."

**MALCOLM.** Oh, right.

**ARNOLD.** You remember. The University of Colorado Gay-Lesbian Spring Fling at the Eldorado Ranch. I saw you across the room, all big and muscly in your polo shirt, and I said, "Wow, who is that?" So I worked up the nerve to ask you to dance. This was the song they were playing.

A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**MALCOLM.** I remember all that...dancing with you... I just don't remember the song. Sorry.

**ARNOLD.** And we exchanged phone numbers and you called and...

**MALCOLM.** And you brought flowers.

**ARNOLD.** And we went to dinner at the organic restaurant in Boulder and I was so nervous that I barely ate a bite.

**MALCOLM.** It was the flowers that did it, though. *(Beat.)* Fifteen years.

**ARNOLD.** Yeah. Fifteen years. *(Beat.)*

**MALCOLM.** I left you all of your kitchen stuff; pots, pans, all those things you cook with. I took the microwave.

**ARNOLD.** That's good; you'd starve without it.

**MALCOLM.** Well, I did take the china set I gave you for that first Christmas.

**ARNOLD.** Yeah, we agreed to that. Just leave me the good cooking stuff.

**MALCOLM.** I did. Oh, and I left your coffee mug.

**ARNOLD.** Which one?

**MALCOLM.** The one from the rehab center. The one that cost us ten thousand dollars. You know, the one with the Serenity Prayer on it.

**ARNOLD.** "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can..."

**MALCOLM.** "And the wisdom to know the difference."

**ARNOLD.** Yep.

**MALCOLM.** For what it's worth, I was really proud of you. *(They look at each other for a moment, then look away, glancing around the room, fighting back emotions.)*

**MALCOLM.** Well... *(Turns to go.)*

**ARNOLD.** Wait....

**MALCOLM.** What?

**ARNOLD.** So, how far are you going to go tonight?

**MALCOLM.** I'm going to try to get as far as Roswell, maybe even into Texas before we stop for the night. But it's almost six-thirty now, so we'll stop at midnight no matter where we are.

**ARNOLD.** How long will it take you to get there?



## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**MALCOLM.** Miami is fourteen hundred miles, according to MapQuest. Getting across Texas should take a whole day itself, then down the panhandle. Day after tomorrow, I guess.

**ARNOLD.** That's a long drive by yourself.

**MALCOLM.** (*Lightly.*) You're welcome to come along.

**ARNOLD.** Yeah, sure.

**MALCOLM.** Yeah. Well... (*Turns to go.*)

**ARNOLD.** Wait....

**MALCOLM.** What?

**ARNOLD.** You got all the paperwork done?

**MALCOLM.** For the realtor? Yeah. Kathy's going to stop by tomorrow to pick up the listing. You've signed off on the title, so when it sells, I'll get the proceeds, which should make up for the years' worth of mortgage payments you owe me. (*Beat.*) Our first and last house.

**ARNOLD.** How much do you think you'll get for it?

**MALCOLM.** I don't know. The market is stuck, so I'll be lucky to break even.

**ARNOLD.** Well, now that I've got a job and Mike is gone, I'll be able to pay you my share until this place sells.

**MALCOLM.** Then what will you do?

**ARNOLD.** Don't know. Get a new place, go back to Colorado, find something. Don't worry; I always land on my feet.

**MALCOLM.** That you do. It's what I loved about you. One of the things.

**ARNOLD.** And you. You've landed a great job in Miami, doing what you love.

**MALCOLM.** Yeah, well, I'm not sure if I'm ready to go back to teaching. I'm a little rusty.

**ARNOLD.** They'll get used to you. You'll figure it out.

**MALCOLM.** It's been almost ten years. Going from selling windows back to teaching is quite a jump.

**ARNOLD.** You'll be fine.

**MALCOLM.** If you say so.

**ARNOLD.** I do.

A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**MALCOLM.** Okay, well.... *(They look at each other, then they embrace in a last hug.)*

**ARNOLD.** *(Choking up.)* Drive carefully. Call me when you get there.

**MALCOLM.** I will. *(Malcolm turns to go. He is almost gone, but Arnold stops him.)*

**ARNOLD.** Wait....

**MALCOLM.** What?

**ARNOLD.** Just... Why didn't you stop me?

**MALCOLM.** What?

**ARNOLD.** Stop me.

**MALCOLM.** Stop you from what?

**ARNOLD.** From leaving. From moving in with Mike.

**MALCOLM.** Would it have made any difference?

**ARNOLD.** Maybe.

**MALCOLM.** Maybe? That's not a lot to go on, Arnold. Besides, you'd already slept with him, he'd already gotten the apartment, and you had pretty much made up your mind that we were done. What did you want me to do?

**ARNOLD.** You could have said something.

**MALCOLM.** I did! Oh, Jesus, we are not going to do a Lifetime Movie for Television here. *(Sighs deeply.)* Look, I asked you what had happened. What had I done after all those years to make you suddenly decide to bail out on me and take up with that...? I don't even know what to call him.

**ARNOLD.** Jerk, asshole, prick.... Look, I know. I was an idiot. I get that. I really know how to pick 'em, including a guy who owes seventy thousand dollars on back child support, spends all his off-time cruising gay chat rooms, and when he's not doing that, he's on the phone to the Ex-Gay Men's Ministries because he's not really sure he's gay in the first place.

**MALCOLM.** You didn't know that going in?

**ARNOLD.** I knew he was...questioning. But....

**MALCOLM.** You were bored here with me. Despite the fact that I did everything I could to try to make it work for us. I saved your goddamned life by getting you into rehab, you know.

**ARNOLD.** No, you can't put that on me.

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**MALCOLM.** Well, whether you like it or not, I did. All I wanted was for you to be happy. And alive. And I worked my ass off to keep us together.

**ARNOLD.** But you shouldn't have had to! If you have to work at it, it's not working! And then... you just let me go.

**MALCOLM.** I thought that's what you wanted.

**ARNOLD.** I wanted you to....

**MALCOLM.** Prove it to you?

**ARNOLD.** Yes.

**MALCOLM.** Every day I proved it to you. You just didn't know it.

**ARNOLD.** I just didn't see it.

**MALCOLM.** Well, that's ... our loss. Look, it's ... I gotta get going. If I don't start driving, I'll be out of gas in the middle of the night at the last exit in New Mexico, and I don't want to leave here in the middle of ....

**ARNOLD.** I have to get back to work. Working the night shift at a call center is what I always dreamed of doing anyway.

**MALCOLM.** Um...

**ARNOLD.** What?

**MALCOLM.** You know... you could always come with me. The apartment I've rented is small, but it has two bedrooms. I'm sure you could find some kind of job in Miami doing something. You've always landed on your feet.

**ARNOLD.** Well....

**MALCOLM.** Forget it. Crazy idea. We can't just leave this house empty. The realtor would go nuts if there wasn't someone here to....

**ARNOLD.** Yeah. Crazy idea. Go.

**MALCOLM.** Yeah, sure. Crazy idea. So....

**ARNOLD.** Yeah. So.... *(They embrace again, this time tightly, each sobbing, until finally Malcolm breaks free, wipes his eyes, and tries to laugh.)*

**MALCOLM.** Okay. So... See ya. Take good care of the place. And yourself.

**ARNOLD.** You too. *(Malcolm takes one last look around the room, then at Arnold, grins bravely, waves, and exits.)*

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**MALCOLM.** (*Off-stage.*) Hey, Sam, ready to go for a ride in the car? C'mon, let's go! (*A beat as Arnold looks around the room, then looks off-stage.*)

**ARNOLD.** (*Desperately, a wail.*) WAIT! (*Long pause.*)

**PHILIP.** (*Reentering.*) Lights out, end of play. (*Beat.*) Well? How'd you like it?

**ALLEN.** (*Snort.*) You come off pretty damn well.

**PHILIP.** I think I was pretty even-handed.

**ALLEN.** Oh, sure.

**PHILIP.** What did I get wrong?

**ALLEN.** Nothing. Except... Everything! I'm the bad guy. I run out on you, I come crawling back, and when you leave, I'm crying after you, like that kid in the movie, "COME BACK SHANE!" Of all the times we had together, that's the one memory you decided to share with the world?

**PHILIP.** Yes.

**ALLEN.** Why?

**PHILIP.** Because in the six thousand, nine hundred and forty-three days between the day you walked out until the day you died, you never told me why. It was my way of trying to figure it out.

**ALLEN.** You counted the days?

**PHILIP.** Every day. Today is the twelve-thousandth, eight-hundred and thirty-first day since you brought me flowers. Thirty-five years, one month, and eighteen days. You're damn right I counted them. And in all of that time – then and now – you never told me what happened. What went wrong. (*Allen looks at him but no response.*) It's a simple question, really. (*Again, no response. Allen does not move.*) I've been thinking about something, though. That in the five thousand, five hundred and twenty-three days that we were together, we never fought. We never argued. I can't think of anything that came between us, that made either of us angry enough to raise our voices, certainly not enough to raise a hand. Why? Don't all couples fight? Call each other stupid names? Slam doors and lose their shit? (*Beat. Continued non-response from Allen.*) But it never happened with us. Why? Did we get along that well, or were we too afraid that if we did fight, even if it was about something as stupid as me hating sweet potatoes or not liking the music you played, or you hating

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

*Star Trek* or the radio stations on the pre-set in the Pontiac, that that would be the end of it? You never said a word. And then WHAM! You were gone. It was like you had saved up everything that we could have fought over for fifteen years until that Saturday afternoon. And even then. It was just “I’m leaving you.” (*Long pause as Philip looks at Allen, who still has no response. He doesn’t even move.*) Y’know, I had plenty of chances to fool around, pick up a guy, get my beans ground. At the gym, at theatre conferences. I got hit on by some very well-known – and very attractive – other men. But I never did. I’m not saying it to sound all morally superior or sorry for myself and that sorta crap. I’m saying it because I didn’t need to find someone else, and besides, on the third anniversary of our first date when we stood in front of the fireplace and exchanged rings, I meant what I said: I will always call you sweetheart. I made a promise, and so did you. And even with all the hell we went through: moving across the country three times, counting the pennies in the tip jar, subsisting on Top Ramen and Cheerios, and of course the Big One: God grant me the serenity... I was happy. With you. With us. Why weren’t you? Why weren’t you happy? (*Beat.*) Why won’t you answer me? Answer me, goddammit! (*Long pause, then Philip finally gets it.*) You can’t because you’re not really here. I might as well be talking to the tree. At least it’s real. (*Turns to address the tree.*) Well? (*The tree just stands there. Philip chuckles.*) Yeah, I didn’t think so. (*Philip goes and sits on the bench.*) In memory of. You’re in my subconscious. You are neurons, engrams, bits of whatever floating around in my head, reacting to stimuli, sense-memory recollections prompted by sights, sounds, and aromas. That’s what’s making you real here now to me.

**ALLEN.** Like the holodeck on the Starship Enterprise, except I’m not photons.

**PHILIP.** I thought you hated *Star Trek*.

**ALLEN.** No, I hated *Star Wars*. (*Mimicking the breathing of Darth Vader.*) “Luke, I am your father.” Sheesh.

**PHILIP.** Yeah, all that *Oedipus Rex* subtext.

**ALLEN.** Yeah, there you go again with your doctor-of-theatre crap. (*Beat.*) I need to get going.

**PHILIP.** Really? Why?

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

**ALLEN.** I just do. (*Beat.*) But first, I think you need to realize something. You know why.

**PHILIP.** No, I really don't –

**ALLEN.** (*Cutting him off.*) You had your turn. It's mine now.

**PHILIP.** All right.

**ALLEN.** You do know why. You may not know it now. But someday, you'll figure it out. It's floating around in those neurons, those engrams, and then you'll see it. You'll put the clues together. They're everywhere. More than just the memories, the pictures, the traces. And then you'll see what happened to me. To you. To us. It wasn't any one thing. It never is. When you figure it out – and you will – maybe you'll deal with it in the way you always have. The way you dealt with everything: brave front, stoic, trying to be like Spock because you're afraid that if anyone really saw what you really felt you'd... (*Beat.*)

**PHILIP.** I'd what?

**ALLEN.** Let them see the real you. The one who's not afraid to write about himself but scared to show who he is in real life. That's why you wrote that play we just did. That's why you're gonna write more just like that: the ones about the man who is just trying to get through life without bumping into the furniture. The man I knew I loved the moment I saw him trying to dance. (*Allen takes off his regular glasses and puts on his sunglasses.*)

**PHILIP.** Will you be back?

**ALLEN.** I never left. Remember that time about six months ago when you were sitting in the living room doing a crossword puzzle, all alone in the house. But then you heard the cuckoo clock that's on the wall in your study: "cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!" You went into your study, and there it was ticking away. It hadn't run for years, but there it was.

**PHILIP.** That was you.

**ALLEN.** I loved that old clock. Well, anyway... (*Allen turns to go.*)

**PHILIP.** They never told me what happened to you. Why you were sick that winter.

**ALLEN.** They didn't know what it was, either. But by May I couldn't swallow, and they had to put in a feeding tube and I couldn't talk so all

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

you could do was text. By June, it was pretty clear that I was on the way out.

**PHILIP.** I tried to get there.

**ALLEN.** I know. And you did say goodbye.

**PHILIP.** A lousy voice text to your brother's phone.

**ALLEN.** But I heard it. Go on. Read it out loud,

**PHILIP.** *(Pulls his phone out of his pocket, reads off the screen.)* "I love you. You made my life complete and I will always call you sweetheart. I hold you forever in my heart. Go gently in peace and know that you will always be with us."

**ALLEN.** Love you too. *(He looks around the stage, then at the tree.)* In memory of. Hey, this little tree isn't so bad after all. *(Allen exits. The lights stay up as Philip watches him go, then he turns to the tree.)*

**PHILIP.** Well, Allen, you finally did it. You're off on the biggest adventure of all; so big that it's taken me a year to put my thoughts together and say them out loud. But life with you has always been an adventure. *(Beat.)* I don't believe in the superstitions of Heaven and Hell or Life Eternal; those are things the mind has concocted because it is incapable of comprehending its own mortality. But I do believe in the spirituality of everlasting life because as long as I and your family and your friends and the people who knew you remember you, you're not really gone. You're just in the next room, even if it's just that little pewter urn next to your high school picture. Your number is still on my phone. Your letters are still in my drawer. I can still hear your laugh. *(Beat.)* So, when you set off on your last adventure on that quiet night in the house you grew up in, I knew in my heart that I was losing a part of me in one way, but keeping it with me forever. Grief does not care about time or distance, and while I may not be widowed, I am very sure that what I feel, what I miss, what stops me in mid-sentence, is every bit as real as it gets. And, to quote you, it sucks. But it also shows me how much I truly loved you. I know that you went in peace and on your own terms, and I know that you were ready to go. Because, as Tinker Bell says to Peter Pan, to die is an awfully big adventure.

A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

*PHILIP folds up the pages of the play, puts them in the Zip Loc and hangs it on the tree. He takes one last look at the tree, then exits. The lights hold, then slowly dim, leaving just a spot on the tree. Somewhere a music box plays “Let Me Call You Sweetheart.”*

**END OF PLAY**



# ALLEN'S BIG ADVENTURE

A Monologue

**CHARACTERS:**

PHILIP: Allen's former partner, in his forties, any ethnicity

**PLACE and TIME:**

A park in Longmont, Colorado. Mid-July, present day.

# ALLEN'S BIG ADVENTURE

*The space is empty except for a sapling center stage. Since this is a memory piece, the sapling does not have to be real. The trunk can be represented by a stick, the branches as well, and the leaves can be made of cloth or paper or whatever will work to give the illusion of young sprouting leaves. The back of the stage is a blank wall. PHILIP enters. He looks around, then speaks to the sapling, which was planted in memory of Allen.*

**PHILIP.** Well, Allen, you finally did it. You're off on the biggest adventure of all; so big that it's taken me a year to put my thoughts together and say them out loud. But life with you has always been an adventure, from the moment we met on that spring evening at the dance at Eldorado Springs outside Boulder and our first date the next night – you had me with the flowers you bought from the street vendor on the way to my house – and for the next fifteen years. Sometimes it was scary and harsh, but no matter what, we were together, and so many times, whether it was snorkeling on the reef with the barracuda, or skiing the double-black diamond runs at Snowmass, or sailing on the waves of Lake Michigan, or wandering the streets of Paris in December in jeans that didn't fit because your luggage was lost on the missed flight, or climbing the steps of Notre Dame to pet the gargoyles, or standing in the Vatican to see the pope bless your mom's rosary, or climbing to the top of St. Peter's to see the roof of the Sistine Chapel, or the tower of Pisa, or driving through the night from Colorado to Michigan to surprise my dad for his birthday, or riding in the bunk of a semi to go to Kansas for your family reunion and being swept up in your family's loving arms and you in mine, or renting the house in Longmont, or the house in Petoskey, or owning our own home in Albuquerque and planting a garden in each one of them, or showing up at the gym with Sam cupped in your hands and making him our companion for the rest of his life, or buying me that 1959 Buick for \$150, or

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

wandering through the Painted Desert and the canyons of New Mexico, or going to Montserrat and Jamaica and Tobago and wandering the beaches, or the many, many other things we did, including the weekend in October of 1992 when we began our journey together to sobriety. For every one of those times, you always said, “C’mon, it’ll be fun!”

I look around my house in Miami and still see you here. The chairs and table we bought at Sears for the house in Albuquerque. The O’Keeffe prints from Santa Fe. The Gandalf candle in the bookcase. The fish mobile made of palm fronds from Jamaica that hangs over the sink in the kitchen. The shirts in the closet that still fit both of us. The Pontiac in the garage that once had both our names on the title. Our rings in the little carved box that also holds the slip of paper with your phone number on it. The dedication in my book to the man who showed that wisdom is not measured by degrees. The character who shows up in my writing again and again. The hundreds of pictures, mementos, and kitchen utensils: traces, as the old song goes, of love.

We were never married in the cold and unfeeling eyes of the state or in the thrall of a church, but even if it was unwritten or un-vowed, we were married in every other way, and despite the mere fact that we separated for reasons I never truly grasped, we never let go of each other. You were always going to be a part of me, and when we talked on the phone, each call ended with “I love you,” and “I love you too.” And while we went our separate ways and found new lives in different places and with new friends, our time together was and will always be the best time of my life. I don’t believe in the superstitions of Heaven and Hell or Life Eternal; those are things the mind has concocted because it is incapable of comprehending its own mortality. But I do believe in the spirituality of everlasting life because as long as I and your family and your friends and the people who knew you remember you, you’re not really gone. You’re just in the next room, even if it’s just that little pewter urn next to your high school picture. Your number is still on my phone. Your letters are still in my drawer. I can still hear your laugh.

## A TREE GROWS IN LONGMONT AND OTHER PLAYS ABOUT ALLEN

So, when you set off on your last adventure on that quiet night in the house you grew up in, I knew in my heart that I was losing a part of me in one way, but keeping it with me forever. Grief does not care about time or distance, and while I may not be widowed, I am very sure that what I feel, what I miss, what stops me in mid-sentence, is every bit as real as it gets. And, to quote you, it sucks. But it also shows me how much I truly loved you.

I know that you went in peace and on your own terms, and I know that you were ready to go. Because, as Tinker Bell says to Peter Pan, to die is an awfully big adventure.

*Philip takes one last look at the sapling, then exits.*

**END OF MONOLOGUE**

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