

BROTHER BY BROTHER

Inspired by true events.

By
David Jensen

BROTHER BY BROTHER

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BROTHER BY BROTHER

CAST: 3 Men.

CRAIG	50, Male, Steve's Brother
STEVE	40, Male, Craig's Brother
FATHER	70 – 80, Male, Steve and Craig's father

TIME: September 2015

PLACE: Golden, Colorado

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ACT I
SCENE 1

The play opens with old 8mm movie footage from 1979 playing of CRAIG, age 14 and STEVE, age 4. They are the only two people in most of the film clips. The footage is of seemingly happy times: the first film clip is of a summer vacation at an outdoor motel pool. Craig is showing Steve how to dive off the diving board. Next clip, Craig is showing young Steve how to shovel snow outside their childhood home. Then another clip, Steve throwing snowballs at Craig as he builds a snowman. Next clip, summertime with little Steve showering Craig with water from the garden hose. Another clip: Steve and Craig, both in matching cowboy outfits, on vacation at Boot Hill in Dodge City, Kansas. More footage, inside their childhood home at Christmastime, of both brothers tearing into holiday presents. The last film footage is of Steve alone in his childhood room, taking a nap on his childhood twin bed, clenching his teddy bear. (Lights Shift.)

September 2015. Golden, Colorado. It's morning inside Craig and Steve's childhood ranch home, built in the 1960's. Inside the house, it looks like someone is either moving in or possibly moving out. The living room is nearly empty, except for some moving boxes. There are three bedrooms down the hallway from the living room. The first is Steve's childhood room, looking more like a shrine. In his room: an old made-up twin bed and a chest of drawers; on top sits his childhood teddy bear. There is an old, orange Schwinn Varsity ten-speed bicycle in the room. A few empty moving boxes in Steve's old room and some others that are packed and labeled. (Lights up.) Craig, now 50, stands in Steve's room, facing the chest of drawers. He picks up Steve's old teddy bear, examines it, and then hugs it. Craig walks out of the room with the bear. A moment later, Craig re-enters Steve's room and places the teddy bear back on the chest of drawers. Craig then exits Steve's old room and walks to his old room, the one next to Steve's, refurbished into a home office. He walks to the desk and pulls the desk chair to the center of the room. He then grabs a nearby plastic storage crate and stacks it on top of the chair. Craig steadies the crate. Next, he walks over to the office door, kneels next to a backpack, opens it, and takes out some heavy-duty rope... A few moments as Craig mentally prepares, then makes a noose, walks back to the chair, climbs up on it, straddles the crate, and then throws the rope up and over a single wooden ceiling beam... (Black Out.)

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SCENE 2

A few moments in the darkness and then lights up. It's two days ago. Steve, now in his 40's, enters his old bedroom with an Urn. He places the Urn on his childhood chest of drawers next to his childhood teddy bear. Steve plops on the bed, staring at the Urn. Craig, now 50's, stands in the doorway with a backpack. Steve sees him, takes his brother in.

STEVE. Fuckin' old bed. Don't know how I ever slept on this. Guess I didn't, much.

CRAIG. I don't want the ashes.

STEVE. Why not?

CRAIG. Just don't.

STEVE. Maybe I'll bury them.

CRAIG. I don't know if you can do that.

STEVE. Can you?

CRAIG. I don't know.

STEVE. I'd think you would.

CRAIG. Well, I don't. *(Steve gets off the bed, walks to the Urn, picks it up.)*

STEVE. So, how much of her is actually in here?

CRAIG. Huh?

STEVE. 50%?

CRAIG. I said, I don't know.

STEVE. 75%?

CRAIG. You're sick...

STEVE. 80%. Tops.

CRAIG. Maybe.

STEVE. Maybe? Come on, doctor.

CRAIG. Dentist.

STEVE. Among other things. No more than... 85%.

CRAIG. What's the game here?

STEVE. We both know it's gotta' be greater than 50% or there would be lawsuits.

CRAIG. Stop.

STEVE. If someone I lov—knew, died and I got a container half full of them I'd be pretty pissed.

CRAIG. Why are we talking about this?

STEVE. We can do the *weather thing*.

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CRAIG. I don't know, Steven. 90%, maybe. It really depends...

STEVE. Well, how about based on your extensive scientific knowledge?

CRAIG. I told you. 90%.

STEVE. What about the other 10%? The leftovers.

CRAIG. Why does everything have to be so difficult with you?

STEVE. I just want to know. It's important, don't you think?

CRAIG. Cremation isn't really a science. Some of the person before, less from the one before that one, and on and on, backwards, down the line. It's virtually impossible to get all the ashes of one *client* cleaned out after they've been cremated. (*Steve is amused.*) You cleaned out the fireplace as a kid. There are always extra ashes left behind.

STEVE. Client? I doubt the *cremate-tee* would really label themselves that way.

CRAIG. I'm being respectful. Can we stop?

STEVE. Ever tell their families?

CRAIG. No. I'm telling you because you're my brother.

STEVE. Could have fooled me.

CRAIG. Huh?

STEVE. Brother.

CRAIG. I've never thought of you any differently despite what you have in your head.

STEVE. Don't believe you.

CRAIG. Whatever.

STEVE. You only give a shit about yourself. All about a transaction or a bet. I get the ashes, and you get what for 'em? How are you gonna' use these *leftovers* to screw me this time?

CRAIG. I agreed to sell the house.

STEVE. Oh. Two chips on the table now.

CRAIG. The word twisting. I don't get half what comes out of your mouth. Never have.

STEVE. Why's that? Because there's depth to it?

CRAIG. Depth? You speak in riddles.

STEVE. I speak the truth.

CRAIG. You talk circles around your riddles.

STEVE. Fuck you. What's the riddle there?

CRAIG. I've made my peace.

STEVE. Like hell you have.

CRAIG. I'm not drowning in anger like you.

STEVE. I'm not angry. Fuck you!

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CRAIG. That doesn't sound the least bit angry.

STEVE. That was a joke "fuck you." What rock did you grow up under?

CRAIG. Boy, your mouth sure hasn't changed.

STEVE. You act more like a jacked-up parent, than a brother.

CRAIG. No wonder.

STEVE. *No wonder*, what?

CRAIG. Never mind. (*Steve chuckles.*) What's so funny?

STEVE. Nothing.

CRAIG. I'm not going to fight with you.

STEVE. Must take a lot of energy to be *so* in control all the time.

CRAIG. I'm an adult, Steven.

STEVE. Saying my name like daddy doesn't make you an adult. You pretend to be an adult.

CRAIG. I'm not doing this right now.

STEVE. That's right, we're here to put it all to rest, so to speak, right? Clean out the house. You go on with your great lavish life, just move on.

CRAIG. Probably for the best.

STEVE. All right, big brother, let's shallow the conversation down. Keep it light and insignificant, and safe. How's my old room lookin'?

CRAIG. You had the best room in the house.

STEVE. No, I didn't.

CRAIG. Bigger than mine and more windows.

STEVE. More windows? That makes it better? Creeps me out how she left it.

CRAIG. A shrine to her estranged son.

STEVE. I'm throwing most of this shit away.

CRAIG. You may want some of it, some day.

STEVE. (*Steve touches the Schwinn bike.*) Materialistic bribes. Never gonna' want any of it.

CRAIG. You never know.

STEVE. I do know.

CRAIG. Just saying.

STEVE. You're so much like her.

CRAIG. Am I? How so?

STEVE. You hold on to things and the fantasies attached to them.

CRAIG. And you... all that bitterness. Maybe you were adopted.

STEVE. Never thought that joke was funny.

CRAIG. Jesus, lighten up.

STEVE. Most of my relationships are way beyond the weather and

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sarcasm these days.

CRAIG. I'm working on my stuff.

STEVE. Since when? What *stuff*?

CRAIG. My stuff.

STEVE. Why start now?

CRAIG. Is that sarcasm?

STEVE. Birds of a feather. That phony exterior, it's gonna' crack, some day. It's inevitable.

CRAIG. And you're hell-bent on helping that process along, are you?

STEVE. Happy to be of service.

CRAIG. Maybe this wasn't a good idea, being here at the same time.

STEVE. Why? All the re-bonding getting to you?

CRAIG. That what this is?

STEVE. You're here because you want something from me. Manipulate me one more time.

CRAIG. I haven't found it yet.

STEVE. Scoured every crevice already? You never change.

CRAIG. I agreed to unload the house. That's what you wanted.

STEVE. Heard you the first time. What you're hoping is that she cut me out completely.

CRAIG. Right.

STEVE. I know you.

CRAIG. No will. Her office is a mess.

STEVE. How many hours did you spend looking before I got here? Is that the last thing you said to her when she took that final dying breath, "Mom, I can't find the will, I know you're struggling to breathe but where is the will, I just can't seem to find it. And your office is a mess."

CRAIG. What a piece of work.

STEVE. Getting a tinge angry?

CRAIG. At least I was there when she—

STEVE. Maybe all the manipulation took her out.

CRAIG. Where were you?

STEVE. I said my goodbye.

CRAIG. Then why do you need the ashes?

STEVE. Because you don't want 'em. You said so.

CRAIG. Not what I meant.

STEVE. You're fuckin' nuts. You said you didn't want the ashes.

CRAIG. I know what I meant.

STEVE. You're an idiot. You fuckin' shallow piece of shit.

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CRAIG. Sickness changes people.

STEVE. Wow. That was brilliant, Mr. Dentist. *Sickness changes people.*

CRAIG. You know what I mean.

STEVE. Sickness makes people change... Or it doesn't.

CRAIG. Never mind. It's not that important.

STEVE. *(Chuckles)* Anything to increase your net worth *not* important?

CRAIG. And yours?

STEVE. *What's your net worth, Steve?*

CRAIG. Carefree, angry, resentful, and always rebellious.

STEVE. As are you.

CRAIG. Touche' Continually living in the past never served anyone.

STEVE. I'm living very much in the present these days, believe me. I've come face to face with the demons bestowed upon this house.

CRAIG. No such thing as a perfect family.

STEVE. Diluting it all gracefully serves your denial.

CRAIG. What do you want, Mr. Victim? We both know that you got it worse.

STEVE. Sure about that factoid?

CRAIG. I am.

STEVE. Denial can be a powerful drug.

CRAIG. More word salad?

STEVE. That was good, Craig. An attempt at creativity.

CRAIG. I forgot, what is your degree in...?

STEVE. Well, like you, a double major with a sarcasm minor. I have a *life* degree.

CRAIG. So, the theater degree... that, who paid for—?

STEVE. I fuckin' paid for it.

CRAIG. You did? Oh right, you paid mom back for the dorm refrigerator.

STEVE. I'm not the crazy one.

CRAIG. "Denial is a drug?" Okay.

STEVE. You're so fucking literal.

CRAIG. Life is literal.

STEVE. Hmmm. That was decent. *(A moment.)* What if she didn't have a will?

CRAIG. She had one.

STEVE. Quick response. And you're sure of that?

CRAIG. 100%

STEVE. *(Steve looks at the Urn.)* Maybe she took it with her, you know, before they...

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CRAIG. You're sick.

STEVE. Did you know she kept the tumor?

CRAIG. What the--?

STEVE. She buried it.

CRAIG. Bullshit.

STEVE. Guess you don't know everything about the medical world.

CRAIG. I don't believe you.

STEVE. It's true. People can do it.

CRAIG. No, they can't.

STEVE. *Google* it, Doctor.

CRAIG. She told me you never came to visit.

STEVE. Family secrets.

CRAIG. You visited her in the hospital?

STEVE. Not in the beginning. I wanted to make sure it wasn't an act again.

CRAIG. She never told me.

STEVE. Fuck, Craig. When did you marry her? I knew you were extra close, but she was your mother.

CRAIG. Sick.

STEVE. Welcome to the family, brother.

CRAIG. Where were you when dad left? I took care of her.

STEVE. You fed the sickness—

CRAIG. Shut up.

STEVE. She sure took good care of us.

CRAIG. She was your mother. You blew her off.

STEVE. I got out. I got healthy.

CRAIG. This is healthy?

STEVE. Yeah, sure as fuck it is.

CRAIG. (*Laughing*) You're an alcoholic and drug addict.

STEVE. Five years clean and sober, *asswipe*.

CRAIG. Well, maybe you need a drink to kill the anger.

STEVE. (*Steve lunges at Craig and stops short of a punch.*) I'm proud of my anger. Buried it way too long.

CRAIG. Well, Congratulations. – You really hurt her.

STEVE. I hurt her?

CRAIG. She told me.

STEVE. The narcissist victim told you what exactly...? How I cut her off. How I ignored her. – Someone's gotta' move away from the sickness in this family and if there's more casualties along the way, so be it. It's for

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the betterment of the species.

CRAIG. Selfish son-of-a-bitch.

STEVE. Damn right. Takin' back a life that was stolen from me for the first time. I could give a shit about a will.

CRAIG. So..., you came here to clean out your room and grab... (*Craig motions to the teddy bear.*) What is his name? Professor—?

STEVE. Professor Clarke.

CRAIG. What kind of kid names a stuffed bear, Professor Clarke?

STEVE. A kid that had to grow up way too fuckin' early.

CRAIG. Wait, wasn't his name longer?

STEVE. Professor Theodore H. Clarke.

CRAIG. Right, that's it. Well, at least you had a form of *Teddy* buried in the name. (*They share a chuckle.*) What was with the "H.?" What'd that stand for?

STEVE. (*Knowing.*) I don't remember. – Well, at least I have a room to clean out. She wasn't stupid.

CRAIG. What are you saying?

STEVE. She knew, Craig.

CRAIG. Knew what?

STEVE. She knew exactly what dad was doing.

CRAIG. This is a very entertaining conversation, Steve. Look, we're selling the house, just like you wanted.

STEVE. Third time. Heard you the first two. You're not doing me any favors here.

CRAIG. I'm not?

STEVE. Your avoidance is *so* automatic.

CRAIG. He was a drunk. Everyone knew it. Such a...

STEVE. Prick?

CRAIG. Yeah. (*Craig takes a cigarette from his pocket.*)

STEVE. Smoking?

CRAIG. It's a byproduct of the work I'm doing.

STEVE. Craig, you're fuckin' retired. Not to mention... a dentist smoking seems weird. Yellows your teeth, doesn't it?

CRAIG. I brush my teeth.

STEVE. What *work* are you doing?

CRAIG. I told you; I'm working on my stuff.

STEVE. *Stuff.* Yeah.

CRAIG. Believe whatever you want.

STEVE. Maybe I'm trying to piss you off so you leave and then I can get

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some of my shit and just go. Why are you really here?

CRAIG. Why are you really here?

STEVE. Stop copying me.

CRAIG. Stop copying me.

STEVE. Stop it.

CRAIG. Stop it.

STEVE. Stop! —

CRAIG. (*Overlapping.*) Stop! (*Both laugh.*)

STEVE. I used to love doing this as kids. Now it's irritating as fuck.

CRAIG. (*A beat.*) Simple pleasures.

STEVE. Simple pleasures. (*A moment between brothers. A connection?*)

CRAIG. I don't know. Maybe, I thought coming here—

STEVE. Yeah, me too. (*Craig puts the unlit cigarette back into his shirt pocket.*)

CRAIG. I wonder how many doctors smoke.

STEVE. All of them. The ones that do, I mean.

CRAIG. What? (*A smile.*)

STEVE. (*Smiles.*) I guess this is what I miss.

CRAIG. What?

STEVE. What we never shared.

CRAIG. Could have been worse.

STEVE. Don't think so. It's amazing how painful...

CRAIG. Painful-- what?

STEVE. This... right now, trying to connect, laughing, being real, talking. You don't get it, do you?

CRAIG. Steven, we're brothers. It's a biological fact.

STEVE. And you go and do that again.

CRAIG. What?

STEVE. My name is Steve.

CRAIG. That's what I said?

STEVE. You're so patterned.

CRAIG. What the hell does that mean?

STEVE. You will never get it. Let's just be two bodies here cleaning out the house of a dead woman?

CRAIG. I wish you would talk like a normal person.

STEVE. This is normal. My normal.

CRAIG. You never said shit like this growing up.

STEVE. My new normal. Look, it sucks to be real with you because you can't go there for more than a second.

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CRAIG. Go where? I'm right here. What do you want?

STEVE. I want a real brother, not a fuckin' programmed droid.

CRAIG. This is pointless.

STEVE. See?

CRAIG. What?

STEVE. Diverting. Discounting.

CRAIG. Okay, do you want to be real? I never got you. I still don't.

STEVE. Our house growing up was a fuckin' nightmare! Hello!!!

CRAIG. That's why I worked my ass off to be something. Someone.

STEVE. As have I.

CRAIG. Really? You don't have shit.

STEVE. I'm working on getting my life back on track. I want to write a novel.

CRAIG. An author now? Let's see, it was a professional soccer player, an actor, what else? Oh yeah, a veterinarian? And what else...?

STEVE. Jesus! I was a kid.

CRAIG. So, mister author... what is this novel going to be about?

STEVE. That's why I'm going to Kansas.

CRAIG. What the hell are you going to Kansas for?

STEVE. I'm going there to write.

CRAIG. To write? In Kansas?

STEVE. To relax and write.

CRAIG. To relax? You mean to mooch.

STEVE. God. Fuck you! It's my new project.

CRAIG. Your entire life has been about new projects, that's what I'm saying. And, I'm being real here, Steven.

STEVE. If you call me Steven, one more fuckin' time.

CRAIG. Okay, Calm down. I caught it that time.

STEVE. No, you didn't because you said it. You're such an asshole.

CRAIG. How much of this novel have you written?

STEVE. I'm outlining it... in my head.

CRAIG. "In your head?" I'm not trying to be mean.

STEVE. I'm doing this for myself, all right? Never mind. *(A beat. Steve walks over to an old wooden storage chest and opens it.)*

CRAIG. What are you going to pull out of there?

STEVE. Best thing about a hoarder mother.

CRAIG. She did save pretty much everything, of yours. *(Steve rumbles through some papers, pulls out one specific piece of paper.)*

STEVE. The poems I used to write.

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CRAIG. I don't get it. Those stupid poems you used to write makes you a novelist.

STEVE. Stupid?

CRAIG. Okay, juvenile. They were something you did as a kid. You always blew your allowance on candy and other crap and didn't have money for Christmas gifts.

STEVE. I wrote them and gave them to people because they were about as far away from givin' store-bought fruit cakes and shit gifts.

CRAIG. I liked 'em, okay?

STEVE. They all taste like shit.

CRAIG. Your poems. I liked your poems.

STEVE. You never said that when we were kids.

CRAIG. We were kids. I wanted real stuff. Material Shit.

STEVE. They were about as real as you could—

CRAIG. You know what I mean.

STEVE. You liked my poems?

CRAIG. Yeah.

STEVE. I used to make them up for people at work.

CRAIG. Like how? Like for co-workers?

STEVE. Like on the spot. In the moment.

CRAIG. Really? Just like that?

STEVE. Yeah. I'd ask someone to say something, anything, whatever, in the moment, and I'd make up a spontaneous poem about it.

CRAIG. Serious?

STEVE. Try me.

CRAIG. Say anything?

STEVE. Anything?

CRAIG. Anything at all?

STEVE. You've never been spontaneous, Craig.

CRAIG. Is this something you learned in recovery?

STEVE. You can't think of anything? *(Craig looks around the room, and finally up to the ceiling.)*

CRAIG. Yeah, I can. Okay... *Light.*

STEVE. **Light...** When I was but a wee tiny boy. I made a super simple little toy. It was a telescope constructed from an old toilet paper role. I would take it outside and peer through its round tiny hole. I pointed it up at the stars shining in the night's sky. Couldn't get it to focus because I had a weak right eye. Anyway, what I made wasn't a real star gazing device. And my unique invention's one I tried only twice. Defeated, I quit making

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telescopes and gave up the fight. Stars in the sky are impossible to see next to a blinding streetlight.

CRAIG. That's cute.

STEVE. Cute?

CRAIG. I like it. I liked them. I told you.

STEVE. Not easy to come up with on the spot.

CRAIG. I couldn't do what you just did.

STEVE. I wrote tons of poems like this growing up and mom saved every single one of 'em.

CRAIG. My memory chest was full of science tests, math papers and that stupid clay ash tray we all had to make in art class when we were little.

STEVE. Well..., now that you're smoking.

CRAIG. Could put it to use. *(Steve pulls out his ugly clay ash tray from the chest.)*

STEVE. Mine looks like a clay blob.

CRAIG. Good thing, you stuck with the poems. Looks like a glob of intestines.

STEVE. I expected you to say a glob of gums.

CRAIG. A wad of gum? *(Steve pulls down his lower lip, referring to his gumline.)*

STEVE. Gums. *(Both laugh.)* I guess things weren't horrible all the time.

CRAIG. Not all the time.

STEVE. Just most of the time.

CRAIG. So, back to the novel, what's it about?

STEVE. Tossing some ideas around.

CRAIG. Like?

STEVE. I don't know, maybe about our life... here.

CRAIG. Writing about our family?

STEVE. Maybe.

CRAIG. Maybe not.

STEVE. It's an outlet.

CRAIG. An outlet. To put out in the world for everyone to see while you milk off Uncle Erik and Aunt Janelle, for how long?

STEVE. Wow. That's a reaction. And they invited me.

CRAIG. People don't read shit like that. Plus, it's not that interesting.

STEVE. I wouldn't use real names. Fiction, inspired by a fucked-up childhood.

CRAIG. Novels take years to write.

STEVE. Says the dentist.

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CRAIG. Steve, what're you going to do for work?

STEVE. Just because my life doesn't match your plan for what you think my life should be doesn't make my choices wrong.

CRAIG. I'm just saying that someday—

STEVE. *I need to get a real job.* I have a real job.

CRAIG. Putting on a trail run once a year? That's hardly a job.

STEVE. It gets me by for most of the year.

CRAIG. Come on, you don't make any money--

STEVE. How the fuck do you seem to think you know so much about my life?

CRAIG. I know you borrowed money from mom. And you never paid her back. Is that why you started talking to her again? Well run dry?

STEVE. Yeah. She gave me some money.

CRAIG. You said *gave*; she used the term *loaned*.

STEVE. She cosigned on your fuckin' dental practice.

CRAIG. I paid back every cent. With interest.

STEVE. Seems like your interests reach wide and far. And I'm sure she gave you a hell of a lot more money than she gave me.

CRAIG. Loaned. She loaned me the money, and I paid her back. And loan or not, 10K is quite a chunk you got.

STEVE. You have your fuckin' nose so deep in everyone else's business but your own.

CRAIG. I know a lot more than you think.

STEVE. It's none of your business what went on between mom and me before she died.

CRAIG. I should deduct that ten thousand from the house proceeds.

STEVE. You're such a dick.

CRAIG. You're broke. I know. We could have made some real money off this house in a few years.

STEVE. Deal is done. Someone else's nightmare now.

CRAIG. I caved. You need the money. End of story.

STEVE. And you don't need the money.

CRAIG. You'll blow it, I'm sure. And then what? Someday you've got to focus on the future.

STEVE. Life's not all about the almighty dollar.

CRAIG. Nor is it about using people.

STEVE. Listen to this shit comin' out of your mouth. You're really ugly Craig when you, sink into this, this... parental mode.

CRAIG. Living with Uncle Erik while you write your novel, do you think

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it's fair to them? He's 78. On social security. That's irresponsible.

STEVE. It's something I've wanted to do for a long time, asshole. And full fuckin' self-disclosure, I was too afraid to let the truth out about our family in any form until now. Uncle Erik and Aunt Janelle saved my ass growin' up.

CRAIG. That's your problem, little brother.

STEVE. What's my problem?

CRAIG. Get your head out of the clouds and face reality.

STEVE. I honestly can't believe you. You know what? You're actually worse than I remember.

CRAIG. Erik's not young anymore and we're not kids. You think he likes playing daddy to you?

STEVE. He was more family to me than you, mom and asshole put together.

CRAIG. What happens after you write your little novel?

STEVE. You have such a way of minimizing my life and dreams. After I'm done writing it, my *little novel* gets published.

CRAIG. Oh, forgive me. It's that easy. You know, not that you ever cared, but I had some medical papers published. Studies. It wasn't easy.

STEVE. This isn't about you, you narcissistic ass. It's not a fuckin' medical study and no, it's not easy to get a novel published. God, I don't need to justify my life to you.

CRAIG. Good, we're on the same page. I just want you to face reality.

STEVE. We've never been on the same page. And as far as facing reality, how about trying to be the one other fuckin' human to face the real shit that happened in this house? Anyone? Anyone?

CRAIG. Dad was an asshole, so move on.

STEVE. (*Revelation.*) You're jealous.

CRAIG. What?

STEVE. You're jealous that you couldn't take care of me as a kid. That's why you picked on me like asshole did. The father's role never got filled, and you wanted the job and now that I'm doing it for myself, you feel guilty and it's coming out sideways. Like right now, how you're trying to reparent me.

CRAIG. You're absolutely nuts.

STEVE. Am I?

CRAIG. You're a crazy person.

STEVE. No, I'm not. Not at all. People assume the roles in families when there's a void, even if they can't do it or aren't qualified. You sure stepped

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in with mom.

CRAIG. What the hell are you talking about?

STEVE. I'm sorry, Craig. This is way over your head.

CRAIG. I'm not jealous. I just think you should think about the undue pressure you'd be putting on our aunt and uncle. Both retired. Fixed incomes.

STEVE. They said it's okay.

CRAIG. Uncle Erik has his own guilt. Losing a child does things to people.

STEVE. This has nothing to do with what happened.

CRAIG. Their son, *Stephen*, dies the summer you're born. Of course they would want to be closer to you.

STEVE. I'm not letting you guilt me out of finally living my life.

CRAIG. I know they love you. Just think about what you may be doing to them. That's all I'm saying.

STEVE. When did he kill your dreams?

CRAIG. This isn't a pissing match.

STEVE. I'm asking. When did asshole kill your dreams?

CRAIG. I went after what I wanted.

STEVE. We did grow up under the same roof.

CRAIG. Such deep insight you have, Steve.

STEVE. I know he did it to you, too.

CRAIG. I was a great dentist.

STEVE. Loved it so much that you retired early?

CRAIG. I don't know one person who wouldn't want the life I have now. Golfing three days a week, no money worries. Two homes in Arizona. It's not such a rough life.

STEVE. Thank you for the personal asset summation. How did he kill your dreams?

CRAIG. I'm telling you, he didn't... Every kid has a fantasy that will never happen.

STEVE. Normalizing it?

CRAIG. Oh, who are you now? A novelist and a therapist?

STEVE. Subtext.

CRAIG. Crazy people talk in riddles you know that?

STEVE. It's subtext. Mr. Dentist.

CRAIG. Didn't you *also* want to be a fireman when you were in fifth grade?

STEVE. And a cop, when I was in *sixth* grade. Now I know why.

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CRAIG. Why? Because some Dutch psychiatrist named *van der Kolk* says all trauma-based kids want to be heroes.?

STEVE. I'm impressed. How did dad make you wake up?

CRAIG. Where are we going with this? I thought I just impressed you with my knowledge of Dutch psychiatry.

STEVE. Deflecting. Denial.

CRAIG. Way too much therapy. They've processed the life out of you.

STEVE. Life back *into* me, big brother. You had a drum set growing up. You told me when I was little.

CRAIG. I see where this is going.

STEVE. You told me you had it before I came along.

CRAIG. Yeah, Steve. I had a drum set.

STEVE. And?

CRAIG. And you had a trumpet.

STEVE. Not about me.

CRAIG. And it went away.

STEVE. Why?

CRAIG. Whoever cracks wins?

STEVE. I'm curious as to what happened to your drum set. What happened to your drum set, Craig? Simple question.

CRAIG. The year after you were born. I was eleven.

STEVE. I don't remember.

CRAIG. Of course you wouldn't.

STEVE. I can't picture you playing drums.

CRAIG. *Ludwig.* Great set of drums. He got them used.

STEVE. You look different, just talking about 'em.

CRAIG. It was a stupid drum set, okay? I don't know why I'm telling you this.

STEVE. Because I want to know who you are.

CRAIG. (*A beat.*) I had this wig. I used to hide it. Whenever I went downstairs and I was alone, I'd put the wig on, and pretended I was John Bonham.

STEVE. You in a wig? (*Chuckles.*)

CRAIG. I'd pound the crap out of my drums and act totally crazy, like a rock star. Pretending to be the drummer from one of the greatest rock bands of all times...

STEVE. Zeppelin.

CRAIG. Led *Fucking* Zeppelin... Dad came downstairs one day. I didn't hear him. I was rocking out, beating the crap out of my snare, picturing

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myself on stage and when I finally looked up, he was sitting in his worn out, piece-of-crap brown recliner staring at me, shaking his head in disgust. Looking really pissed off.

STEVE. Why?

CRAIG. He said, “Take that goddamned wig off, Craig. You look like a little faggot.” I took it off. He said, “The only reason you have that drum set is because your mom threatened to leave me if I didn’t buy you something. You’re a fucking loser kid, and nothing will change that fact.” He got up, went behind the bar, grabbed an empty glass, and filled it with Cutty Sark. It was a big glass. Sucked it down in seconds, then went upstairs. Two days later, I came home from school, and my drums were gone.

STEVE. Drums and hangovers don’t mix.

CRAIG. “Work you ass off, do something worthwhile. Be a man.” I hated when he said, “Be a man.”

STEVE. Encouraging words from someone in rehab multiple times and canned from how many jobs.

CRAIG. I believed all that crap he told me. I mean, well, you do have to work your ass off to get ahead in the world. It’s true.

STEVE. I’m not so sure I believe that today.

CRAIG. I believed everything he said as a kid.

STEVE. Yeah.

CRAIG. Well, it’s in the past.

STEVE. Sucks that he took your drums away.

CRAIG. It was a long time ago.

STEVE. But you’re talking about it now, the memory. The wig, that’s great. You really loved it.

CRAIG. I was a kid.

STEVE. Maybe this is what being here together is all about?

CRAIG. “This,” meaning?

STEVE. This... Nothing.

CRAIG. Shit happens, Steve. I don’t buy the saying, “Everything happens for a reason.” B.S.

STEVE. Well, we’re it, you and me. The last of the line. Things change or they remain the same.

CRAIG. It was a drum set. I had a good career.

STEVE. I hate putting on stupid trail runs. I don’t want to do shit like that for the rest of my life.

CRAIG. “Runs.” You mean *run*, right? It’s one.

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STEVE. And it's a lot of fuckin' work and a quality event.

CRAIG. One run.

STEVE. I think being a complete asshole is something else he gifted you with. It's seeped into your DNA.

CRAIG. I corrected you. You said, "Runs."

STEVE. I know what the fuck I said.

CRAIG. I hope you find what you're looking for someday.

STEVE. Wow. That sounds about as sincere as any other cliché' you puke out.

CRAIG. *(Craig takes the cigarette out of his shirt pocket.)* I need some air. *(Craig starts to exit.)*

STEVE. You know what the Surgeon General says about those?

CRAIG. No. I have no idea. I'm just a dentist. *(Craig goes to leave again, turns back.)* You might want to write that novel standing if you ever get to it. Sitting can be worse for your health than smoking these days. Some medical professionals say, "Sitting is the new smoking." *(Craig exits.)*

STEVE. Thanks for the tip. Dick. *(A moment and lights fade.)*

SCENE 3

Same day, an hour later. Steve sits in his childhood room. His mother's Urn is on the dresser. He moves a few medium sized moving boxes, turns one around. On the side of the box, written in Sharpie is the word, BULLSHIT.

STEVE. What a dick. *(Steve picks up the box, takes it over and dumps the contents on the bed. Bibles of all shapes and sizes fall out. Books about spirituality and God also fall from the box. A small wooden cross is one of the last items to fall out. It lands on the floor. He throws the box back on the floor. Steve picks up the cross and walks to the dresser.)* I don't know where you got this cross, Mom, Mommy, Mother... Bitch. I think you referenced it as Grandma's a long time ago. An old piece of wood, as far as my belief system is concerned. *(Studies the cross.)* You forced your religious crap on us. How the hell can a kid choose what to believe when you have something forced down your throat? Shoved down your throat, more like it. Nice image, huh? – When is anyone in this jacked up family gonna' escape, be free? You instilled a false sense of whatever is beyond this miserable life into the cells of my being. Maybe there's nothing.

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Nothing after this. Tell that to the collection plate. All those Sunday mornings in church with you and asshole. Making me stand up there, an altar boy pretending to be something I wasn't. Believing something I never will. Hey, remember that day I fainted during church? Upstaged all of you that day. Monsignor Thomas... what a narcissist, pontificating his ass off, up on the pulpit, servicing his minions. Craig and me, falling to our knees every time he approached us, to receive some jerked blessing... Did you ever tell the monsignor what was goin' on in our house? A direct link to the almighty and you couldn't even tell him the truth. But you let us go fishing with him. The fish... abundance, life... *fertility*. You know how much I hated fishing? Whose life was I living anyway? Why is it that parents try to correct their own fucked up lives by making their children into what they never could be? Dumping all their unresolved shit on 'em. I fuckin' hate you for that. – Honor thy parents... yeah, that one sure got lived out in our home, didn't it? Two hypocrites forcing me to go to church. So, the day I took a digger up there on God's stage, inhaling that nasty ass incense. It was my subconscious F. U. You know what I really believe? I believe the lords name should be taken in vain, people should cheat on each other, lie and steal... you know why --? Because it's reality. "God hates you and wants you dead." This ear (*Steve grabs his right ear.*) this one where I get terrible earaches. That's what asshole used to tell me right after church. "God hates you, Steven. He wants you dead." His words tattooed into every cell, reminding me that I was a worthless piece of shit. Where the fuck was God, then? Nowhere to be found. You, mother dear, allowed him to kill me little by little every single day of my childhood. "Oh, I'm gonna' leave your father, I just don't like how he treats you, Steven." The famous catch phrase. You finally did it... when I was fifteen. I was completely dead inside by then. Congratulations and thank you for imprinting on my soul that life's horrors need to be endured for an eternity. The final blow, the night we left, 10 years too late, you two fighting upstairs. I run up there because the yelling, shoving and crashing glasses sounded like eminent death on the horizon. My job to protect you. Child protects the parent, right? Now, that's a formula for lifelong relationship disaster. What the fuck? You, woman are an accomplice to the worst crime ever to be committed. Guilty! An accomplice to the repeated murder of your child's heart, soul and spirit. No recovery. The damage stays with you for the remainder of life no matter how much therapy you get. Your next husband, he became the punching bag for all the bitterness, anger and rage you never released from hubby number one. And it didn't stop at him... anyone you ever had a conflict with... Blam! It's them, always them, they

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need to look at themselves. Why? Because you could never admit how fucked up you were. You spent the remainder of your life controlling and taking out your unprocessed shit on innocent and loving people. And, always guilted me to get over it. “Everyone has a rough childhood, Steven. Get over it. It’s puberty.” WTF?! My therapist says, “Steve, you are the truth teller in your family.” You know what that buys me? A life filled with loss, because when you speak the truth, people leave. It scares this shit out of ‘em. Why? Because the weather is a safe topic. When you stay the victim, never speak up and play it safe around unsafe people you get rewarded by the expanding wound inside that will never heal. You get to stay connected to the unhealthiest people on the planet. You never learn what it’s like to leave because you are forever bonded and you learn that it’s love. Love? *(Steve looks at the cross.)* And God lets it all happen... Horrible shit happens to innocent little children. But he died for me and my sins and pain is necessary to grow. Be afraid of God, be very afraid. I’m learning... Learning that I can leave unhealthy shit. Learning that love, unconditional love is earned and not automatically given to anyone and everyone, because there are *bad motherfuckers* out there in the world and some of them just happen to be blood relations. Mothers and fathers and brothers. Little children need to be loved *unconditionally* and *nurtured* and not have the shit beaten out of them when they cry and always being told, “Obey thy father and mother.” And especially when the parents are doing other fucked up shit to their kids. Because those kids carry it around and die a little bit each day after it happens trying to make sense of it all. And so, when other ugly shit in life happens, it’s a reminder—trigger. A trigger and you try to crush it, with; drugs, alcohol, sex, or any other addiction, so you can slam that fuckin’ door shut forever. But the door’s jacked. Doesn’t fit the frame and never closes. You collapse and want to die... But you decide to work on it one more time because you lost another job, and there are layers to that shit, and it comes back, and you think you’ve finally beaten it... and then you find there’s a layer below that one and then another and another and another. Then, you have no idea where to turn, your therapist’s fallin’ asleep again during your session, because they’re done with it too. So... you try a stranger, and they *laugh* in your face. What then? You end up... alone. And then, you find this cross, and you think maybe God can handle it, but you realize one more time that God allowed all that bad shit to happen in the first place. So, you... you just give up. *(Steve sits on the bed, holding the cross. A moment. Overwhelming emotions. Steve stands and hurls the cross into the wall. It breaks. Steve sits back down and breaks down. A moment and Craig*

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appears in the doorway with two boxes of Kentucky Fried Chicken.)

CRAIG. Hungry? *(Steve looks up, tries to compose himself.)*

STEVE. I'm remodeling.

CRAIG. Peace offering.

STEVE. This right here, right now, I don't know how long you've been standing there, wasn't about you.

CRAIG. Three-piece, white meat, slaw, mashed potatoes, roll and... honey, right? *(Craig hands one box to Steve.)*

STEVE. Comfort food. Good timing.

CRAIG. You can't go wrong with the Colonel. I'm still partial t—

STEVE. Three drumsticks, two mash potatoes, roll, extra butter... no honey... because it's "bee vomit." *(They share a much-needed laugh.)*

Mine's a better bang for the buck.

CRAIG. Mom hated when the Colonel opened so close to our house.

STEVE. Fast food's always been better than liver and onions.

CRAIG. It's all the extra salt.

STEVE. I think it's marketing. You know how many fast-food restaurants have red in their logo?

CRAIG. I never noticed.

STEVE. Check it out, sometime. Yellow and red are the most popular restaurant colors.

CRAIG. That's random. *(Both sit and eat.)*

STEVE. It's gonna' be a relief to let go of this place.

CRAIG. *(Craig eyes the box with the writing.)* So, what's up with the "Bullshit" box?

STEVE. On a quest. Searching.

CRAIG. For what?

STEVE. Something that makes sense to me. Something bigger. Something...

CRAIG. We were good little altar boys, weren't we? Nothing better.

STEVE. You're being sarcastic.

CRAIG. Toned down a bit, I don't want lightning to strike the house.

STEVE. You still go?

CRAIG. I'm going for Susan.

STEVE. Not for yourself?

CRAIG. She thinks it helps. I go for her.

STEVE. You go for her?

CRAIG. Yeah. Eat your chicken.

STEVE. I think God is full of shit.

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CRAIG. If there even is one.

STEVE. Wow. We have something in common.

CRAIG. Maybe.

STEVE. What about an original thought on the issue?

CRAIG. I don't have one.

STEVE. What do you think about priests having sex with children?

CRAIG. Steve.

STEVE. What the hell does it take to get you to wake up?

CRAIG. What are you talking about?

STEVE. Fired up? Does anything get you angry?

CRAIG. Yeah. You want to know what gets me really mad?

STEVE. I would.

CRAIG. People that don't work.

STEVE. Unemployed folks piss you off?

CRAIG. People that expect a handout.

STEVE. What about people that aren't able to work?

CRAIG. Everyone can do something. I'm talking about able-bodied people that expect something for nothing.

STEVE. Like whom?

CRAIG. Like the guy on the street corner feigning complete poverty, the one you give a buck or two, then he runs into the liquor store around the corner, buys some booze and then goes and does the same thing to the next well meaning, hardworking citizen. It pisses me off.

STEVE. What? You give homeless people money and then follow them?

CRAIG. I told you what gets me mad. Everyone can do something for a living.

STEVE. Maybe that dude's having a really rough time.

CRAIG. Maybe he's playing people.

STEVE. Using people for one's personal gain isn't right. Asking for help isn't wrong?

CRAIG. He bought a six pack.

STEVE. Maybe that's what he needed at the time.

CRAIG. I answered your question. Stop twisting it around.

STEVE. I think you're generalizing that all people on the street are drunks.

CRAIG. Lots of them are on drugs, drunks and don't get me started about the ones with pets. Dragging an animal around when you can't even take care of yourself.

STEVE. Maybe the animal is homeless.

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CRAIG. Obviously.

STEVE. You know what I mean.

CRAIG. I would think you feel the same way... now.

STEVE. Now, meaning what?

CRAIG. When you, you know?

STEVE. When I was homeless and struggling? Just fuckin' say it, Craig.

CRAIG. You say you're better now.

STEVE. I am better now.

CRAIG. So, stop playing the victim.

STEVE. I know for a fact that some homeless people are pretty much like me and you.

CRAIG. Like you, not me.

STEVE. You're such a dick.

CRAIG. Some honesty here?

STEVE. Go.

CRAIG. And I'm not trying to fight. I think you still like to play the victim card.

STEVE. (*A moment.*) Bold statement coming from my estranged brother.

CRAIG. The blaming. Mom. Dad. God.

STEVE. Don't forget you, too.

CRAIG. See. Can't forget to blame your own brother.

STEVE. No one did a thing.

CRAIG. Dad was an alcoholic. Shit happens.

STEVE. Did we live in the same home? He was a monster.

CRAIG. What do you want from me, Steven?

STEVE. There you go again, parenting.

CRAIG. My bad.

STEVE. Was that some form of an apology?

CRAIG. We're talking about you still being a victim.

STEVE. Why can't you admit the truth?

CRAIG. About Dad? I did.

STEVE. So, why *didn't* you protect me when I was a kid?

CRAIG. That's the same thing you said to mom. She told me. She left him, okay? Maybe not when you preferred it to happen. Kids are expensive. She wasn't working.

STEVE. So... money over the welfare of the children? He didn't make that much money. He lied about everything and the money he did make; he drank away. Why didn't you protect me?

CRAIG. I was a kid, too.

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STEVE. Craig, you're fucking 10 years older than me.

CRAIG. Ten and a half—

STEVE. So, fucking literal. Ten years equals a mistake.

CRAIG. See?

STEVE. What?

CRAIG. You're victiming.

STEVE. *Victiming?* That's not a word.

CRAIG. You weren't a mistake.

STEVE. How the fuck would you know, Einstein?

CRAIG. You're crazy, *Steve*.

STEVE. I wasn't wanted. I know it. I think part of me has always known.

CRAIG. Whatever.

STEVE. Stop discounting me. You fuckin' sound like asshole.

CRAIG. How long are you going to blame crap on other people? Get on with your life!

STEVE. It's the truth.

CRAIG. It's not true. You got a fucking ten speed bike when you were eight years old. I didn't until I was twelve. 12!

STEVE. This isn't about that piece-of-shit Schwinn bike.

CRAIG. I wasn't there. I was in South America when it came down.

STEVE. He looked me right in the eyes and said, "It's all your fault, you little prick."

CRAIG. You know it wasn't, Steve.

STEVE. Not when you're a little kid. He was God.

CRAIG. Wow.

STEVE. *Wow?* That's all you can say?

CRAIG. I'm not you. What do you want me to say?

STEVE. That you believe me, that it happened to you, that shit was beyond fucked up. I don't know exactly. Anything but, *Wow*.

CRAIG. Dad was no God. He was a loser alcoholic.

STEVE. But I believed it. All of it.

CRAIG. Then, stop believing in it. You're a grown ass adult now. Get on with your life.

STEVE. That's what I'm trying to do. That's why the fuck I'm here.

CRAIG. I'm not your answer, Steve.

STEVE. I guess the fuck not. (*Steve walks away, picks up some boxes.*)

CRAIG. Where are you going?

STEVE. Taking these to the garage. Is that okay with you?

CRAIG. I'm not your protector.

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STEVE. You've made that very clear. *(Steve exits. A moment and then Craig walks out of the room.)*

SCENE 4

A few hours later, Steve lies on the bed in his childhood room. A moment passes and then he sits up, hops off the bed, starts picking up the bibles scattered around the room and puts them in the BULLSHIT box. In the doorway stands his FATHER.

STEVE. *(A moment.)* What the fuck?

FATHER. You look surprised?

STEVE. What are you doing here?

FATHER. This is my house. I paid for it.

STEVE. Are you fuckin' kidding?

FATHER. Watch your mouth, Steven.

STEVE. Don't *even* think of trying to parent me now.

FATHER. I wanted to talk to you, alone.

STEVE. Craig's here.

FATHER. Not right now. He left for a bit.

STEVE. I'm not afraid of you anymore.

FATHER. That's good.

STEVE. I'm not afraid of you.

FATHER. I got your letter a while back.

STEVE. You have the nerve to show up here, unannounced, after she's dead.

FATHER. I really thought I'd be the one—

STEVE. Well, she beat you.

FATHER. I came to pay my respects.

STEVE. You have no right—

FATHER. I have every right. I'm still your father.

STEVE. Like hell you are.

FATHER. Every family has their problems, Steven—

STEVE. You had the problem.

FATHER. You've never been a father. Kids can be very challenging.

STEVE. You make me sick.

FATHER. Craig, now he listened to me. You never did. Never did. Look at the life he has now.

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STEVE. Materialism makes a man, huh?

FATHER. You got everything you ever wanted as a kid. I gave you everything. The bike—

STEVE. Fuck the bike. I even got a little extra too, didn't I?

FATHER. *(Father steps closer.)* I know what you are.

STEVE. What exactly?

FATHER. A drunk and a druggie, just like your ol' man.

STEVE. Like father, like son.

FATHER. You ruined a decent marriage.

STEVE. That's complete bullshit.

FATHER. You're shaking, Steven.

STEVE. No, I'm not.

FATHER. The fear I instilled in you will last a lifetime.

STEVE. Like hell it will.

FATHER. No matter how hard you work to make it go away... I'm in you Stevie boy, forever.

STEVE. Not like you used to be.

FATHER. You will never make anything of yourself. You are driven by the past. It haunts you every single day. Every decision, every choice, every action you make is driven by fear and playing the victim. Now, your brother Craig was right about that one.

STEVE. Fuck you. *(Steve takes the bravest step forward he's ever taken.)* I could end you... right here, right now.

FATHER. That wouldn't change anything. Long after I am dead and gone. It will still haunt you.

STEVE. You have no power over me anymore. *(Steve grabs his father by the neck.)* I could rip your throat out with my bare hands.

FATHER. Lot of rage in you, boy. *(Steve places his free hand around his father's neck.)* You don't have it in you.

STEVE. Don't tempt me old man.

FATHER. Do it then. *(Steve tightens his grip.)*

STEVE. Do you know how many times I've thought about this moment? Even as a little kid, I wanted to kill you for what you did to me.

FATHER. You were a willing participant.

STEVE. You're fuckin' insane. You are no God.

FATHER. *Honor thy father.* Remember the commandments. You don't have it in you. *(Steve spits in his father's face. A moment. He releases his hands from his father's neck.)*

STEVE. Fuck you! You will live a long and lonely life.

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FATHER. Let's turn this around. *(Father grabs Steve around the neck, speaks into his right ear.)* If you ever tell a soul what went on in this house I will kill you. You will take every ounce of it to your god-damned grave. Do you understand me, you little prick? *(Steve, shallow breathing, frozen in fear.)* That's the good little boy I know and love. Mommy is not coming. She's dead. You're brother, Craig won't either. *(Steve tries to take control of his breathing, gasping into a full breath as he breaks his father's grip.)*

STEVE. NO! This stops right here, right now. *(Steve shoves his father into the wall. Father drops onto the ground. A beat. Steve kneels down, slowly checks his father's carotid pulse.)* Fuck. No. *(Craig appears in the doorway.)* No. You can't die that easily.

CRAIG. What the hell? *(Steve bursts into tears, wrapping himself around his father's motionless body.)*

BLACKOUT.

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