

(AUSTIN turns violently toward LEE, takes a swing at him, misses and crashes to the floor again, LEE stays standing)

AUSTIN. I don't want him out here! I've had it with him! I went all the way out there! I went out of my way. I gave him money and all he did was play Al Jolson records and spit at me! I gave him money!

(Pause)

LEE. Just help me a little with the characters, all right? You know how to do it, Austin.

AUSTIN. (On floor, laughs) The characters!

LEE. Yeah. You know. The way they talk and stuff. I can hear it in my head but I can't get it down on paper.

AUSTIN. What characters?

LEE. The guys. The guys in the story.

AUSTIN. Those aren't characters.

LEE. Whatever you call 'em then. I need to write somethin' out.

AUSTIN. Those are illusions of characters.

LEE. I don't give a damn what ya' call 'em! You know what I'm talkin' about!

AUSTIN. Those are fantasies of a long lost boyhood.

LEE. I gotta' write somethin' out on paper!!

(Pause)

AUSTIN. What for? Saul's gonna' get you a fancy screenwriter isn't he?

LEE. I wanna' do it myself!

AUSTIN. Then do it! Yer on your own now old buddy. You bulldogged yer way into contention. Now you gotta' carry it through.

LEE. I will but I need some advice. Just a couple a' things. Come on, Austin. Just help me get 'em talkin' right. It won't take much.

AUSTIN. Oh, now you're having a little doubt huh? What happened? The pressure's on, boy. This is it. You gotta' come up with it now. You don't come up

with a winner on your first time out they just cut your head off. They don't give you a second chance ya' know.

LEE. I got a good story! I know it's a good story. I just need a little help is all.

AUSTIN. Not from me. Not from yer little old brother. I'm retired.

LEE. You could save this thing for me, Austin. I'd give ya' half the money. I would. I only need half anyway. With this kinda' money I could be a long time down the road. I'd never bother ya' again. I promise. You'd never even see me again.

AUSTIN. (Still on floor) You'd disappear?

LEE. I would for sure.

AUSTIN. Where would you disappear to?

LEE. That don't matter. I got plenty a' places.

AUSTIN. Nobody can disappear. The old man tried that. Look where it got him. He lost his teeth.

LEE. He never had any money.

AUSTIN. I don't mean that. I mean his teeth! His real teeth. First he lost his real teeth, then he lost his false teeth. You never knew that did ya'? He never confided in you.

LEE. Nah, I never knew that.

AUSTIN. You wanna' drink?

(AUSTIN offers bottle to LEE, LEE takes it, sits down on kitchen floor with AUSTIN, they share the bottle) Yeah, he lost his real teeth one at a time. Woke up every morning with another tooth lying on the mattress. Finally, he decides he's gotta' get 'em all pulled out but he doesn't have any money. Middle of Arizona with no money and no insurance and every morning another tooth is lying on the mattress. (Takes a drink) So what does he do?

LEE. I dunno'. I never knew about that.

AUSTIN. He begs the government. G.I. Bill or some damn thing. Some pension plan he remembers in the back of his head. And they send him out the money.

LEE. They did?

*(They keep trading the bottle between them, taking drinks)*

AUSTIN. Yeah. They send him the money but it's not enough money. Costs a lot to have all yer teeth yanked. They charge by the individual tooth, ya' know. I mean one tooth isn't equal to another tooth. Some are more expensive. Like the big ones in the back—

LEE. So what happened?

AUSTIN. So he locates a Mexican dentist in Juarez who'll do the whole thing for a song. And he takes off hitchhiking to the border.

LEE. Hitchhiking?

AUSTIN. Yeah. So how long you think it takes him to get to the border? A man his age.

LEE. I dunno.

AUSTIN. Eight days it takes him. Eight days in the rain and the sun and every day he's droppin' teeth on the blacktop and nobody'll pick him up 'cause his month's full a' blood.

*(Pause, they drink)*

So finally he stumbles into the dentist. Dentist takes all his money and all his teeth. And there he is, in Mexico, with his gums sewed up and his pockets empty.

*(Long silence, AUSTIN drinks)*

LEE. That's it?

AUSTIN. Then I go out to see him, see. I go out there and I take him out for a nice Chinese dinner. But he doesn't eat. All he wants to do is drink Martinis outa' plastic cups. And he takes his teeth out and lays 'em on the table 'cause he can't stand the feel of 'em. And we ask the waitress for one a' those doggie bags to take the Chop Suey home in. So he drops his teeth in the

doggie bag along with the Chop Suey. And then we go out to hit all the bars up and down the highway. Says he wants to introduce me to all his buddies. And in one a' those bars, in one a' those bars up and down the highway, he left that doggie bag with his teeth laying in the Chop Suey.

LEE. You never found it?

AUSTIN. We went back but we never did find it. *(Pause)* Now that's a true story. True to life.

*(They drink as lights fade to black)*

—END SCENE 7—

SCENE 8: *very early morning, between night and day, no crickets, coyotes yapping feverishly in distance before light comes up, a small fire blazes up in the dark from alcove area, sound of LEE smashing typewriter with a golf club, lights coming up, LEE seen smashing typewriter methodically then dropping pages of his script into a burning bowl set on the floor of alcove, flames leap up, AUSTIN has a whole bunch of stolen toasters lined up on the sink counter along with LEE's stolen T.V., the toasters are of a wide variety of models, mostly chrome, AUSTIN goes up and down the line of toasters, breathing on them and polishing them with a dish towel, both men are drunk, empty whiskey bottles and beer cans litter floor of kitchen, they share a half empty bottle on one of the chairs in the alcove, LEE keeps periodically taking deliberate ax-chops at the typewriter using a nine-iron as AUSTIN speaks, all of their mother's house plants are dead and drooping*

AUSTIN. *(Polishing toasters)* There's gonna' be a general lack of toast in the neighborhood this morning. Many, many unhappy, bewildered breakfast faces. I