

Alternative Ending

by

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Cast of Characters

ETHAN:

50's

ALAN:

50's

Place

Conference room

Time

2AM

Setting: The play takes place inside a large conference room. Dozens of soft cushioned leather chairs surround the polished wooden conference table. The room is dim with the upstage wall window glittered with city building lights as a backdrop. There's a bar cart holding an assortment of various liquors at the head of the table.

At Rise: The play opens with Ethan and Alan sitting across from one another. Many folders, accounting books, ledgers, pens, calculators and papers mount the table.

ETHAN: We lent her...

ALAN: Twelve.

ETHAN: Twelve point two...exact figures Alan, please.

ALAN: Twelve point two.

ETHAN: What was the interest?

ALAN: Seventeen percent.

ETHAN: Seventeen?

ALAN: Yes.

ETHAN: Why so high?

ALAN: She went for it.

ETHAN: ...It isn't our duty to squeeze.

ALAN: She went for it.

ETHAN: Alan, it isn't a question as to whether or not she *went for it*...it's a matter of good taste.

ALAN: What would you have given?

ETHAN: Four percent.

ALAN: You can't be serious.

ETHAN: (deadpan stare)

ALAN: How do you expect us to make a return?

ETHAN: It's a four percent return.

ALAN: Yes, but you cannot expect us to grow substantially.

ETHAN: Growth is growth even by a penny.

ALAN: In such a manner it will take three more generations to reach our goals. We will be long gone.

ETHAN: That's because you lack vision. Always have I'm afraid.

ALAN: Vision? Don't you dare sit there on your throne insulting me by saying I lack vision. Mrs. Joyce is doing business with us on *my* account. In fact, most of the business we've received in the American south is on my account. How does that lack vision??

ETHAN: Perhaps you should take the remainder of the day off.

ALAN: I will not. I'm perfectly fine. It's you that winds me up.

ETHAN: Pour yourself a drink. Let me add up the rest of this...(to himself)...over a five-year period...

ALAN goes to the bar cart and pours himself a drink.

ALAN: Do you remember Blake?

ETHAN: What about him?

ALAN: Do you remember our brother..Blake?

ETHAN: ...Alan---

ALAN: You never mention him. Not once since he died and it's already coming on one full year...

ETHAN: I would like for you to meet with Mrs. Joyce and offer her a four percent interest rate. I've already reworked the numbers...here...have a look and follow my instructions precisely...she will be very happy.

ALAN takes paper from ETHAN and examines it.

ALAN sets it down on the table.

ALAN: Why?

ETHAN: Because it's long term business. You go straight in for the kill. That's not what father taught us. That's not where the real profit margins remain...surely, you must remember---

ALAN: Why don't you ever talk about Blake?

ETHAN: This meeting isn't about Blake.

ALAN: He loved you especially, but you never, you never cared to---

ETHAN: If you would like a meeting to discuss Blake we can arrange that, but right now we must go over the numbers.

ALAN: He worshipped the ground you walked on...why?

ALAN pours himself another drink.

ETHAN: Moving on to Ryan Fitz.

ALAN: Ryan, he's paid up in full, just last week. The account retired.

ETHAN: Did you hand it over to Morris?

ALAN: I didn't.

ETHAN: What's gotten into you?

ALAN: Fitz retired permanently.

ETHAN: There is no such thing as permanent--

ALAN: He's dead! The man died, Ethan. Do you expect Morris to dig him up from the Earth and extract further funds?

ETHAN: Yes.

ALAN: We've been taking things much too far. You've lost your moral boundary.

ETHAN: Since when did you grow morals?

ALAN: Since Blake left us!

ETHAN: Blake would want us to do exactly as we are doing.

ALAN: Are you certain of that?

ETHAN: I am.

ALAN: How certain?

ETHAN: However certain certain is.

ALAN: Did you know that the night before Blake died he told me that he wanted out?

ETHAN: How could I have known that?

ALAN: He said that our family had forgotten what it was like to struggle. That the long line of success had erased our memories...we had an extensive conversation and you know what I learned? He was right. Our little brother was smarter than us both.

ETHAN: I wouldn't be so sure about that.

ALAN: Of course not.

ETHAN: You always get this way toward the end of the final quarter.

ALAN: Do I?

ALAN pours himself a drink.

ETHAN: Easy with that.

ALAN: Bite me.

ETHAN: Each year you get depressed, your guilt for making loads of money comes back to haunt you, until the start of the new year, after you've had some time off, you begin to get that insurmountable itch. You know the one. It scratches at you until you can't stand it any longer...you venture out and won't stop feeding yourself even after you've grown full, until it aches all over, your heart, your mind, your morals, ah, but here you are, reaching your lowest low before your next highest high...a vicious cycle brother, but one that has made us the carriers of this burden. That's alright, we will finish, like our father's finished before us and our children after us and that will be that. That is who we are and that is our truth. Don't you bring Blake into this as part of your yearly digestion process. I warn you. He will destroy us both if you let him. I choose to think of our brother when I'm perched up in my chair, overlooking the lake from my home, in the quiet of my own good thoughts...not now, not like this, with you over some dated melancholy you wish to throw on me when we MUST GO OVER THE NUMBERS! (beat) I'm asking you nicely now, sit. Have a drink and think quietly. Let us finish our work, if it means burning in hell, then so be it.

ALAN: That's just it Ethan, I no longer wish to burn in hell.

ETHAN: Too late.

ALAN: For you to make such a statement justifies my thinking. All the work we do must be haunting you as well.

ETHAN: I said it as a figure of speech.

ALAN: Hell? Since when is using the phrase BURN IN HELL a figure of speech?

ETHAN: Since the moment I uttered it.

ALAN: NO. It's not. It means something. You said it and it means something or else you wouldn't have said it.

ETHAN: You are banned from drinking---

ALAN: Stop that! How do you feel? How does all this money make you feel?

ETHAN: ...Accomplished.

ALAN: And what's the down side?

ETHAN: Listening to you.

ALAN: You have no choice.

ETHAN: There's always a choice.

ALAN: Oh, really?

ETHAN: Put an end to it Al. You are taking everything I say literally and too personally...it's draining me. Put an end to it already.

ALAN: You're the one who keeps making brash statements.

ETHAN: Would you rather I not speak? Perhaps that's the only way things will ever get done this time of year.

ALAN: Why didn't you go to the funeral?

ETHAN: I was in Egypt.

ALAN: Why didn't you say goodbye to Blake?

ETHAN: Because I still haven't said goodbye to Blake. I'm never going to say goodbye. I can't...

ALAN: Do you mean that?

ETHAN: Don't question my feelings.

ALAN: He's gone, Ethan. You have to come to terms with it.

ETHAN: Don't take this too far, you are really close to the edge.

ALAN: It's healthy to talk about it.

ETHAN: Even if I were to open up, is that the phrase these days? Even if I were to do so, it wouldn't be with you.

ALAN: How do you do it?

ETHAN: What?

ALAN: How do you, keep it together?

ETHAN: Do you really think I keep it together?

ALAN: Well, don't you?

ETHAN: What choice do I have?

ALAN: Talk to me--

ETHAN: ENOUGH!

ETHAN stands.

ETHAN: You've crossed the line Al! If I'm telling you I've reached my limits, I've reached them!

ALAN: Would you come to my funeral?

ETHAN: Probably not.

ETHAN goes to the bar cart and fixes himself a drink. He stares out the window.

ALAN: When does all of this end, anyway?

ETHAN: You know how all this ends.

ALAN: ...Sadly I do. Was hoping you'd give me an alternative ending.

ETHAN: What would you like? A fairytale? An adventure story? A comedy, perhaps.

ALAN: A new reality.

ETHAN: Hmm.

ALAN: You ever wonder what our lives could have been had we not been brought into this?

ETHAN: It's getting awfully late.

ALAN: For fuck sake Ethan, we've been crunching numbers since six in the morning, it's almost a full twenty-four hours, we both stink of interest rates and booze, give me some real talk before I lose the plot.

ETHAN: I imagine our lives would have been like most people...

ALAN: You ever wish for it?

ETHAN: I've done things.

ALAN: You have? Tell me.

ETHAN: I've gone places.

ALAN: You have? Where?

ETHAN: Queens.

ALAN: Queens?

ETHAN: I've gone to Juniper Park once. Alone. I rented a car and took a drive...

ETHAN (cont'd): don't ask me how or why but I ended up at Juniper Park and I bought ice cream from a street vendor and I dressed real casual, spoke with the locals, ate fantastic pizza and it felt good.

ALAN: Nobody recognized you?

ETHAN: I went incognito. Disguised.

ALAN: Really? You did that?

ETHAN: Yes.

ALAN: What was it like?

ETHAN: Different. Felt things I never felt before...nothing was staged or planned, everything was free and in the moment...no expectations but I was given so much...this little town, little community of people. It felt good to be invisible.

ALAN: I ought to try that.

ETHAN: You should. (beat) (gestures to the table) Shall we continue?

ALAN: Do we have a choice?

ETHAN: We don't.

ALAN: Go on then.

END OF PLAY