

Tab 1

The Graves

A play by Tom Flannery

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ACT I

Setting:

A hotel suite in Cincinnati, on the final night of the band's farewell tour. The suite is a shell of luxury—polished but impersonal, like every other city they've passed through. Things ain't what they used to be.

Mark Tate sits in an armchair, drinking coffee. Papers and guitars litter the room. He's got Ibuds in his ears, so initially he doesn't hear the knocking at the door. As it gets louder, he finally does hear it and gets up to get it...singing along to the song "Right Down the Line" in his ear buds..."woman...right down the line..."

He has the quiet desperation of a man recently sober. Disheveled, but hanging on to respectability. His band is called "The Graves" and have been together for 30 years. He is their leader and songwriter.

*(MARK opens the door for **Sam Edmunds**...a music reporter for the local paper. SAM is polite, a bit guarded, but not intimidated to be in the company of rock and roll royalty. He carries a small bag over his shoulder.)*

MARK: *(grunts a hello...he's done this a million times..)*

SAM: I expected a bit of a harder time being led up here...

MARK: I guess my security is still sleeping. Sit wherever...

SAM: *(lightly)* Maybe being frisked or something

MARK: Things are so sedate now the Holiday Inn is begging for the band to come back there. Our ban has been rescinded.

SAM: That's not very rock and roll of them, is it?

MARK: My thought exactly. Bad PR for the band.

MARK: *(turning his back to sit down...realizes that papers and things are everywhere...Sam needs to find an open space)* Anything you can find you can have. Elvis used to tell his manager to throw away everything except checks and phone numbers from broads. *(pause)* You're Edmunds?

SAM: Yea. Sam. *(they shake hands)*

(SAM settles into a couch.....pulls out a notepad and a phone, where he hits the record button and lays it on the table...)

MARK: *(motioning to the recorder)* It used to be that guys would paraphrase what I said and make me sound smarter.

SAM: You mind this?

MARK: *(motions that he doesn't mind)* There was something powerful about watching guys from Rolling Stone trying to keep up with my bloviating by hand....

SAM: Ah, the good ol' days

MARK: Yea...

SAM: Eh...It's easier now to just let you bury yourself.

(long beat here....MARK wasn't expecting this...and maybe SAM wasn't either)

MARK: I guess the days of being misquoted are over, eh?

SAM: Well, there's always alternative facts.

MARK: Is that a thing in rock and roll?

SAM: I don't know. You tell me?

MARK: The key is to say the wrong things at the right time

SAM: You mean when nobody is paying attention?

MARK: Where have you been? Nobody has been paying attention for 20 fucking years.

SAM: *(dismissive)* Rock and roll has been dying since 1958

MARK: When's the last time you heard a guitar on the radio?

SAM: *(laughs)* About 20 years ago. Does that bother you?

MARK: What, the lack of guitars?

SAM: No, the lack of rock and roll

MARK: Well, you can't have one without the other. Does AI bother you?

SAM: You comparing today's radio with AI?

MARK: What would you compare it to?

SAM: What makes you think I listen to the radio?

MARK: Pretty hard to do your job without it

SAM: Good stuff used to come at you so fast it was like swatting flies. Now you gotta go looking for it. The LAST place I'm gonna look is the radio

MARK: Well that's good for me I guess since The Graves haven't been on the radio since you were in high school. I heard a song the other day and looked it up. Found out it had 11 songwriters.

SAM: What do you think about that?

MARK: It needed a 12th

(SAM laughs at this)

SAM: You ever consider co-writing?

MARK: When I'm no longer able to dress myself, I'll ask for help writing songs.

SAM: What was the song you heard?

MARK: I have no idea. They sound the same. Just like all these new country guys with the cowboys hats look the same. Everybody is named Zach or Brad. If you're looking for thoughts on today's music scene, you've come to the wrong place. I was just listening to Gerry Rafferty songs when you came in...

SAM: The Graves doing a version of "Baker Street" would be interesting

MARK: It would be criminal. That song is sacred. The AI comparison is not me being facetious. It's valid. It can write you a song in seconds. What's on the horizon? "And the Grammy goes to.....CHAT GPT!" But that sax line? Elon Musk ain't gonna come up with that no matter how many engineers he locks in a room. But I'm not sure it matters anymore. Nobody gives a shit.

SAM: You were once asked what you were a fan of and you said "anything currently recognized as being liked"

MARK: Is that a direct quote? Or just somebody trying to make me sound smarter?

SAM: I saw it on the internet so it must be true

MARK: I must have been drinking then. I'd say it's the exact opposite now. I like kids who make a racket. I don't want this American Idol shit. I want the kid driving the neighbors crazy bashing away in his garage

SAM: That was you

MARK: That's STILL me

SAM: I've annoyed my neighbors plenty playing your songs..

MARK: All I could do was make a noise. I could never come up with something as good as "Baker Street", and that still pisses me off. So I'd just turn the guitar up louder.

SAM: Rafferty could never come up with anything as good as "Baker Street" AFTER "Baker Street" either. Why is that?

MARK: I don't know man. That's like asking Arthur Miller to write "Death of a Salesman II". Chuck Berry wrote the 20 greatest rock and roll songs in history in a few years, and never wrote a good song ever again. Sometimes you got 1 in you. Sometimes you got 20 in you.

SAM: How many you got?

MARK: Negotiable. (*looks around*) I asked for a piano. Prince always asked that a piano be in his suite.

SAM: (*old rock and roll joke*) Did you tell them to remove the brown M&Ms too?

MARK: They told me the service elevator was broken so they couldn't get it up here. You think the service elevator would be broken if *Prince* was here?

SAM: Prince doesn't need a service elevator. He can levitate.

MARK: The question is...did I ask for the piano because I wanted one, or because I heard that Prince asked for a piano?

SAM: They probably gave him a purple one.

MARK: Part of me is gonna miss this shit.

SAM: Which part?

MARK: I don't know man. ALL of it. Even this (*meaning the interview*).

SAM: Well...lots of folks are gonna miss you too

MARK: In the old days you guys would help me out. You'd start shit if things got stale. One time a guy from Rolling Stone said I was breaking up the band because the rest of them weren't as smart as I was.

SAM: Did you actually say that?

MARK: No, I just said they were all assholes. He interpolated the rest.

SAM: Now too many old rock stars are using words like "interpolated" these days. Maybe he was onto something.

MARK: Amazing what a guy who can't read music is capable of, isn't it?

SAM: Yea, you done alright. Paul McCartney can't read music either.

MARK: I bet Gerry Rafferty can. I wish I could. That whole rock and roll punk mystique saying guys couldn't play. The Pistols. Ramones. The Clash. Steve Jones...Johnny Ramone...Mick Jones...those guys could play their asses off. Maybe they dumbbed themselves down, but each one of those guys was a better guitar player than I'll ever be. You can't make memorable rock and roll unless you can play. It's a good story though...makes everybody feel like the playing field is level.

SAM: Is it?

MARK: Criss-cross the nation in a van for 10 years. Play every single night. You know what came before "Meet the Beatles"? A thousand fucking nights in beer cellars.

(Beat.....they take a breath. Sam decides it's time to get down to business. Checks to make sure the phone is still recording)

SAM: So....why here and why now?

MARK: Jesus....don't you want to do a little more warming up first? Do the "test 1-2-3" thing maybe?

SAM: I don't know. *(looks around as if he fears he'll be escorted out by someone any second)* I figure I've only got so much time so...

MARK: You're my last one of the day actually...we got time. Soundcheck at 5:30. How old are you, kid?

SAM: *(laughs)* Kid? I'm close to your age.

MARK: Nobody's MY age.

SAM: Well I'm getting there.

MARK: If I was a bluesman or a jazz player I'd be in my prime. In rock and roll you're a boring old fart by 30. It's like being an NFL running back.

SAM: Doesn't pay as well.

MARK: It used to before Spotify fucking stole all my money.

SAM: Is that why you're still out here?

MARK: James McMurtry is from Texas. He's one of the best songwriters in the world. But he lives out of a fucking van. He says "we tour to make records and we make records so we can tour". It's my job, that's why. It's all I've ever done.

SAM: But not many guys reach the point of a piano in the suite.

MARK: And fewer still actually GET one.

SAM: Do you still need the money?

MARK: That's kinda rude, isn't it?

SAM: So are your ticket prices

MARK: Ah...the old "elastic ticket pricing". About the only thing we have in common with Taylor Swift. I used to buy tickets at the fucking mall. I have no idea what they're even charging this go around. People are crazy. I wouldn't spend more than 50 bucks to see a fucking reincarnated Elvis.

SAM: You didn't answer the question.

MARK: There's 100 people involved in this tour. *They* need the money. How's that? I can work 2 hours every other night for them. I'll get over the piano snub somehow.

SAM: So you're doing it for the crew?

MARK: Ain't I wonderful?

SAM: There's worse reasons to come to Cincinnati

(uneasy laughter.....then a silence)

SAM: You get tired of the same questions all the time?

MARK: Not really. I just always give a different answer. *(shifts in his seat)* I ever talk with you before? Maybe the last time we were through here?

(beat here...)

SAM: *(shifting uncomfortably)* No...

MARK: Well good. I don't need to keep my lies straight then.

SAM: How does it feel? Being back here I mean?

MARK: You're from here, right?

SAM: Yea. The Enquirer.

MARK: Well how do you feel about us being back here?

SAM: I'm not the story

MARK: This is rock and roll Sam. You surely are the fucking story. Otherwise we're just jerking off in front of 15 thousand empty chairs

(MARK gets up and walks to the window. He looks out over the city...)

MARK: From here it doesn't look any different than anyplace else.

(long beat...)

SAM: Yea well it's a different view for me.

MARK: You wanna take a look? Tell me what you see?

(SAM gets up to the window)

SAM: I see the theater where I met my wife. I see the bar I had my first drink in. I see the diner I ate breakfast in this morning. I

see the newspaper...right there. (pause...long) And I see the arena. I see where....*(he lets this hang...drops it)*

MARK: You know the rock and roll cliché of the lead singer yelling "Hello CLEVELAND!" to a crowd in Iowa hits a little too close to home sometimes. Steven Tyler of Aerosmith got pissed off when he watched the movie "Spinal Tap" because he thought it was real.

SAM: Yea well Steven Tyler has done more drugs than the Medellin cartel...so I'm not sure he should be watching "Spinal Tap" to begin with. Cleveland is Cleveland. This is Cincinnati. Both places have their own ghosts

(long pause here. They both know what this means)

MARK: *(after a long pause)* It's your home, but it just makes me miss my own.

SAM: It's the life you've chosen. Confusing Iowa with Cleveland is one of its perks. I'm not allowed to do that...

MARK: I don't know about that. What the hell else am I good for? Jagger said he'd never sing "Satisfaction" past the age of 30, and he's fucking 80 now. Dylan is still out there in some shitty bus somewhere...playing the kind of places that have fucking scaffolding all over them. It's a simple job. You create songs and then you cut 'em loose. I could sing 'em in my front parlor all day long, but nobody's gonna hear 'em. So here I am.

SAM: But that's the thing, isn't it? The songs are *already* out there. Jagger doesn't NEED to be out there. Dylan doesn't need to be singing "Desolation Row" in Minor League Ballparks

MARK: We gonna get to me now?

SAM: Why do it? If you miss home so much, then stay home.

MARK: If I did that, where would that leave guys like you? You sound jaded as hell. How long you been at this?

SAM: *(wearily)* Long enough

MARK: You know what I got at home? I got a guitar. I got a piano. I get that out here. Well, a guitar at least. I don't golf like Alice Cooper or paint like Ron Wood or plant a fucking garden like Elton John. Guy was pissed off all day long at LIVE AID because the helicopter that took him to Wembley Stadium flew too close to his

front yard petunias and ripped them all up. Geldolf was trying to feed starving Africans and Elton was having a shit fit over his flowers. Imagine juggling that type of thing? Keith Richards sits around his house in Connecticut and smokes, drinks, and plays guitar all day. What else am I gonna do? Get a job at a Dairy Queen?

SAM: There's always the memoir business.

MARK: Fuck. That could be one page. "Kid gets picked on in school for being awkward as fuck. Buys a guitar through the Paper Shop. Meets 3 other delinquents. Gets banned from the Holiday Inn Hotel chain for drummer driving a car into the pool. Sells his soul to the devil. The end"

SAM: To get published you'd probably have to flesh it out some. Maybe some more Elton John stories.

MARK: What the world does NOT need is another rock memoir. Keith Richards' is like 500 pages and it all got boiled down to in the press was the once sentence when he said Mick had a small dick.

SAM: Yea well that was more interesting than 499 pages of Keith on heroin. We have space constraints and deadlines...

MARK: They should give rock stars those...

SAM: What about regrets?

MARK: (*sharply*)What about them?

SAM: Do you have them too?

MARK: You have the nerve to ask me that *here*?

SAM: You had the nerve to come back so I better have the nerve to ask

MARK: What did Eugene O'Neill say?

SAM: He said "it's a late day for regrets"

MARK: Is it more surprising that a rock star knows O'Neill, or a rock critic can quote him?

SAM: Is this kinda like the punk thing? Pretending we don't know how to play?

MARK: You are more perceptive than the usual rock writer

SAM: Well if that's not damning with false praise...

(long beat)

MARK: What's your favorite record of ours?

SAM: *(smirking)* "The one currently recognized as being liked"

MARK: You like that one, eh?

SAM: Probably the first one.

MARK: That's a boring answer

SAM: My brother and I *(pauses here...shifts in his chair)*, I remember hearing "If I Only Knew" on the radio and thinking it was someone else

MARK: Who'd you think it was?

SAM: No idea....just not some band from Scranton, PA. It was like some unreleased Kinks song or something. I just assumed you were British

MARK: You ever been?

SAM: England?

MARK: *(laughs)* No, Scranton

SAM: I just know if from "The Office" on TV

MARK: There are signs all over the place there. "Home of Dunder Mifflin"

SAM: Better PR than "Home of The Graves"

MARK: *(laughs)* It's got a ring to it. I should talk to the Mayor. We never even got the keys to the fucking city. Scranton is hard to impress. People will *go out of their way* to not give a shit that I'm in a room. That's what I love about it. We had a famous Pulitzer Prize winning playwright and actor.....and when he died they actually commissioned a bust of his head like he was a Civil War general or something. At the ceremony a pigeon shit on it. Maybe the most Scranton moment ever. It's impossible to explain its charms to outsiders. To them it's a giant mental institution heated with coal.

SAM: Sounds charming. It may be time for a road trip

MARK: Whatever you do, don't drop my fucking name

SAM: Do you feel like you OWE your hometown?

MARK: They just raised my property taxes 33% I don't own them shit

SAM: You know what I mean

MARK: No I don't know what you mean. Owe them what? Another hit record? Less dead band members? What do you owe this place?

SAM: Answers. I owe this place answers.

MARK: The problem with having a hit record is that people start thinking you HAVE answers. People in Scranton see me being proclaimed as some sort of post-grunge mystic, and they're like....(*incredulous*) "That guy? I know his MOM. That kid can't parallel park his fucking car.....and all of a sudden *he's* the voice of a generation?"

(getting back to the matter at hand)

SAM: You get tired of hearing that "voice of a generation" stuff?

MARK: It's better than being called an asshole.

SAM: It felt like you were in my head when I heard that first record. You must get that a lot.

MARK: I do. I wish I got it more. I was desperate when I was writing those songs. Absolutely fucking desperate. You don't get multiple chances anymore. You get one. Some of those early shows, it felt like you were in MY head. I've been chasing that ever since. Never quite got it back.

SAM: Maybe you need to find it by moving someplace else.

MARK: What do you mean?

SAM: Why do you still live there?

MARK: You mean Scranton? Gotta live somewhere. Why do you live *here*?

SAM: It's home.

MARK: Well, there you go (*looks out the window again....*)

SAM: It's just that it's not the most exotic locale for a rock star...

MARK: (*snaps back towards him*) Oh that's where you're wrong. Scranton is the *perfect* place for a rock star...in the same way that Cincinnati is the perfect place for a rock show. Like I said nobody gives a shit about me there...and when I come here suddenly EVERYBODY gives a shit about me. It's like the circus coming to town. In the winter all the fucking sword swallowers and lion tamers live in Florida and wear sweatpants and crocs and wander through the produce aisles at the supermarket. Nobody knows who they are. But under the big top in Cinci they are stars.

SAM: That's the first time I ever heard somebody compare Scranton to Florida

MARK: You bring places with you. So why not just save a step and stay where you're at?

SAM: What about this place? Do you think about what happened every day? Is it something like that? Or is it something that needs to be triggered?

MARK: You ever start paying attention to your eyes blinking? I mean....how often it happens? And then you try to keep them open as long as you can....but you can only manage a few seconds. Suddenly you're conscious of nothing else *but* your eyes blinking. Well that's this city for me.

SAM: So when you think about it, you can't think of anything else?

MARK: (*long long pause*) Yea.

SAM: But you CAN put it away.....

MARK: If I couldn't, I don't think I could ever walk onto a stage again.

SAM: Lots of stages since then...

MARK: One more stage to go...

SAM: What if what happened in 98 happened *there*? What if it happened in Scranton?

MARK: (*brushes it aside...shifts in his chair...maybe instinctively looks for the glass that is no longer there*) That was a long time ago...

(*long beat here to recover....doesn't press it*)

SAM: Your first record is older now than Meet the Beatles was then

MARK: (*groans*) I never heard it quite put that way before. Thanks a fucking lot

SAM: Well you asked

(*they settle in....maybe a bit guarded all of a sudden*)

SAM: Well....you look good.....

MARK: And?

SAM: What do you mean?

MARK: "I look good for...." (*he waits for the but...*)

SAM: I don't know man. A guy 65 years old...

MARK: And a member of a band dragging 2 dead members around...

SAM: Well that too....

MARK: Have you read about the shows so far?

SAM: A little...I mean....there's no surprises anymore.

MARK: (*weary...tossed off*) With us either...Everybody knows what to expect going in. The setlist. The onstage banter. The Doc Marten boots I'm wearing...

SAM: But nobody expected 98....

MARK: (*can't help himself*) It was before the internet....so it was more of an above ground thing. 6 o'clock news and all that....it was more mainstream. Cronkite. Cover of Rolling Stone. And by the next night the forgetting had already started

SAM: (*sharply*) It didn't start here..

(*MARK glares at him...but continues*)

MARK: The internet was like Chuck Berry. It was the big bang. Chuck was the first, and the internet and social media was the second. In the beginning nobody could see any downside. In theory you didn't need any record company anymore. I could cut a song in my studio and some kid in Australia would be listening to it 7 minutes later. Nobody fucking knew that that kid in Australia was gonna be a

psychopath....and was gonna make sure that I never made another fucking penny on songwriting again. I fell off the stage in Cleveland and 8 seconds later it's on fucking YouTube....and everybody is saying "oh he's drinking again"....

SAM: Were you?

MARK: Fuck yea I was drinking again. I feel off the fucking *STAGE*. But now instead of a few thousand people knowing about it, millions do. My wife does. My kids do. Everytime I walk out the door some kid is pointing a cell phone camera at me. What happened in '98 was *rejuvenated* by the internet. It was like blowing up a flat tire. It's probably how you learned about it.

(long pause. SAM shifts....says quietly)

SAM: No...it's not

(MARK misses the the subtext of this, plowing on regardless)

MARK: Everything was telling me to stop. My wife. My kids. My health. But I pushed it. There's not one God, you know. There's LOTS of them. Rock and Roll has its own. And he's vengeful as fuck. If you don't do what he says, you're gonna pay for it. Look at The Graves now. The dead guys brought back to life on the big overhead screen....gets the loudest roar of the night. Costs a fortune to drag that fucking thing around....then you gotta sync up the visuals with the music.....this from a band not always known for playing in perfect time.

SAM: Yea well it's a nice tribute.

MARK: Yea well, either that or completely fucking shameless. Springsteen started it I think. When Clarence Clemons died. And then he lost his organ player too. So we're tied. 2 band members each
(this hangs in the air for a bit. SAM doesn't want to pursue...)

SAM: This is it, right? I mean....you've said "farewell tour" before....

MARK: I'm almost deaf. Every night I come off the stage with the finger tip nearly sheared off. Blood all over the guitar. Our roadies are running around chasing girls and I've got my hand in a bucket of ice. I need a new knee. I'm newly sober...so sitting in rooms like this gives me the creeps. You know what's in that mug there? Fucking coffee. What kind of a rock and roll star drinks fucking Maxwell House?

SAM: 65 year old rock stars I guess. You can't lob televisions out of hotel room windows forever.

MARK: Yea but it's nice work if you can get it. I was good at lobbing televisions out windows. There was a certain...what's the word....*rhythm*...to the decadence. All that's gone now. If I'm trying to sleep and somebody is fucking in the next room I'm banging on the walls and calling the front desk. I've capitulated to normalcy. My songs are being used in cop shows and to sell insurance now. I'm about as threatening as room service.

SAM: (*laughs*) Does it feel.....I don't know.....somehow *fraudulent* to actually behave yourself?

MARK: Well, it saves money. So there's that. You gotta remember that this is a business created FOR adolescents. You either grow up, or you die. There's not a whole lot of options.

SAM: You don't hear about a "27 Club" for bank tellers or accountants. What makes you guys so special?

MARK: Look at the guys in there. Jim Morrison. Brian Jones. Hendrix. Cobain. Can you imagine walking into a fucking bank and seeing Janis Joplin in the teller window? Rock and roll is the island of misfit toys. These guys were all like 100 years old in bank teller years. They died of old age. Not sure what the big deal is. You expected Amy Winehouse to be a grandmother? Please...

SAM: How old are you in bank teller years?

MARK: I grew up. I didn't want to end up dead in the bathtub, not able to fit into my leather pants anymore. I have found the fountain of youth.

SAM: If it's for kids, how come so many guys your age are still doing it?

MARK: I have a very limited skill-set

SAM: I suspect there won't be many adolescents in the audience tonight either. If that's who this was created for, where the fuck are they?

MARK: I would hope they are in some dive bar somewhere, catching some new band. That's where they belong.

SAM: That leads me to my next question. Why no new record?

MARK: Who the hell is clamoring for a new record from "The Graves"? We've been playing the same setlist for 30 years. It's literally engraved on the side of the drums.

SAM: So it's just nostalgia then?

MARK: It's nostalgia turned up to 11. Parents grew up with these songs. Now they are bringing their kids to the shows. Give 'em a quick 2 hour burst of the 90s....and hopefully they grab an insanely priced t-shirt on the way out the door. I got yacht payments to make, son. I'm not gonna risk missing a payment because I'm playing new songs and everybody is scurrying off to take a piss. I'll play the hits all night long as long as the checks clear.

SAM: Does that bother you?

MARK: Does it bother Pearl Jam? I'm a better songwriter and a better guitarist right now than I ever was. What bothers me is that that *doesn't matter*. (he grabs his Ipod) Look at this fucking thing. My record collection used to fill up 2 rooms in my house. Now it's in my hand. Even if we put out another record who the fuck is gonna go searching for it? It's like planting one of those Arbor Day trees in Sequoia National Park. Rock and roll is just too stubborn to realize that there's no such thing anymore. "Don't bore us get to the chorus" is what Tom Petty said one time....which when you think of it is much more badass and real than "it's better to burn out than to fade away". The Graves didn't have any fucking choruses. Our stuff was like opening a vein and letting the blood gush all over the floor. But who's got the time for that anymore? There's no liner notes anymore. There's no lyric sheets. Kids don't read the back of the cereal box at breakfast anymore either. If it ain't 2 or 3 clicks away it may as well only exist on fucking Mars.

SAM: To be fair....if I go see Tom Petty and he doesn't play "American Girl" and "Breakdown" I'm gonna be pissed. I don't know that nostalgia is all bad. If you want me to stick around and not head to the toilet during newer songs, write better ones. You say you can, but where are they?

MARK: See...this is the part where I'd normally take a drink (laughs)

SAM: Maybe you're not giving the audience enough credit. I mean....it's easy to just hang your hat on the old stuff. But when that first album hit.....I remember my brother coming into my room with it....he had almost a wild look in his eye. It was like he was spreading good dope on the counter. It was completely new, and it blew our minds.

(pauses...looks down at his own hands) So maybe I'm as interested in what you have to say now in what you had to say then.

MARK: Everybody at the show tonight ain't gonna be like you and your brother. They remember that god awful video, or "If I Only Knew" reminds them of rubbing up against some girl in a bar when they were 22 years old. It's a fucking night out. It's a minor league hockey game. Half the people don't know the fucking rules to hockey. They want blood on the ice and \$13 beers. Ask them in the parking lot who the other team was and they don't know.

SAM: How can you spot somebody like me or....my brother in the crowd?

MARK: Well, for one thing, you're not holding a fucking phone in the air.

SAM: After what happened here in '98.....

MARK: *(cuts him off)* I don't look for anybody anymore. I used to. Now I just play. In a way I don't want that connection anymore. It hurts too much. Have a good time and get home safely. That's all I ask. You coming to the show?

SAM: Management gave me tickets so....

MARK: Scalp 'em. Make some money.

SAM: It's part of the job. I gotta be there.

MARK: Now you sound like me.

SAM: It'll be my first show.

MARK: Really?

SAM: Yea...I don't like crowds all that much anymore.

MARK: Neither do I

(long pause here...)

SAM: What's it like being sober?

MARK: It's boring. It sucks. But it beats the alternative

SAM: Which is?

MARK: I could be dead like the drummer. I could be dead like the bass player. They had loads of fun right up to the minute they stopped breathing. Both of them died in hotel rooms just like this one. Alone I might add. Choking and desperate and so scared they both pissed themselves. These were guys I've known since we were 17. This wasn't pre-ordained. (MARK exhales, rubbing his hands together—stalling, almost like he's debating whether to say it.) I did this to them. My songs....this band....my insane desire for rock and roll relevance. If they'd never met me maybe they'd be fucking bank tellers or something....but at least they'd still be alive.

SAM: You really believe that?

MARK: Here's what I believe. Yea, rock and roll caters to misfits, but so do a lot of other things. You ever talk to a fucking plumber? Daytime bartenders? It's a nice romantic notion to suggest that guys are fucked up before they pick up the drums or the guitar. But it's being cursed with ability is what sends them over the edge. Keith was normal the day I met him. After he joined the band he went crazy....because he realized that he could take my songs and turn them into 3 minute hand grenades. Rock and roll has all of these expectations. I didn't make the rules, so I shouldn't blame myself. But I knew what they were. You're encouraged to drink on the job. If you're not doing drugs people assume you're either on parole or a Scientologist. Saying I'm not responsible is like saying the drug dealer isn't responsible.

SAM: Do you think you had a choice? I mean....if you lined up 100 drummers against the wall Keith is the one you'd pick....because he was the best drummer...

MARK: No no. He wasn't. Technically he was a shit drummer. I kept fucking time in this band. But my songs needed Keith. Even now, when all our drummer has to do is re-produce what Keith already did....he's too polished to do it. It sounds fine....but it doesn't sound like Keith. He KNEW nobody could replace him. That confidence was all he ever needed. One night he took elephant tranquilizers before a gig because somebody dared him to. He nearly died. We ended up asking somebody from the audience to play drums for the rest of the show, and the guy ends up rupturing his achilles and suing the band for his medical expenses. I mean....I'm a grown ass adult and *THESE* are the stories I get to tell my wife after saying "hey honey, I'm home!" It's like an insane asylum. All my wife could say was "well at least Keith doesn't live next door..."

SAM: It's not like you were a choirboy yourself..

MARK: I could drink a bottle of Courvoisier onstage. Just to get up and play I needed to knock back huge beakers. But I never missed a show. Ever. One night I swung my arm around and the whammy bar went right through my hand. Like Jesus on the cross. Wrapped it up and finished the gig.

SAM: You sound like Bono now. What's the difference between God and Bono? God doesn't walk through the streets of Dublin thinking he's Bono...

(they both laugh)

MARK: *(suddenly)* You had a drink before you came up here...

SAM: *(taken aback)* What? What do you mean?

MARK: I can smell it on you. Probably knocked back a few pints in the bar? Maybe some chasers with 'em?

SAM: Well I was a little early. Does that bother you?

MARK: If I had roped you into this band in the early days you'd probably be dead now too. When I look at the wreckage....the sheer wreckage of what this band has left behind, it almost seems criminal that I'm allowed to get up there and play these songs again tonight.

SAM: When you say "wreckage...."

MARK: You know exactly what I mean

SAM: Why *did* it take so long?

(MARK takes a sip of coffee...stares into the cup)

MARK: It's like a crime scene, isn't it?

SAM: Well the band was never held responsible so...no it's not.

MARK: Do you think the band was responsible?

SAM: You're sitting here telling me you're responsible for the death of two of your bandmates....not sure what I'm supposed to think...Somebody has to be, right? Either that or we blame your rock and roll god.

MARK: Keith and John did what they thought I wanted them to do. Always. They had wives. Kids. But they'd put all of them on hold the

second I called. I'd have some crazy idea for a record, or some one-off show.....and then I'd drag them all over America in a bus....and when they'd see me trashing a hotel room, they'd go back and trash their own hotel rooms. When they'd see me with a needle jammed in my arm, they'd roll up their own sleeves. After a while the dynamic flipped. All I'd want to do after a show is go to my room and read....and they'd be banging on the door with girls on both arms....like they were room service. It was like Frankenstein's monster after a while. I'd have to hide from them to get any sleep at all.

SAM: But Roger was never that way...

MARK: That's why Roger is still alive. To him this is a JOB. It's not some sort of fucking spiritual thing. He's the lead singer of The Graves in the same way you are the music writer for The Cincinnati Enquirer. He needs me because I write the songs. I need him because he sings them. Other than that, we really haven't had anything to talk about for 30 years. Keith and John were amusing to him.....like a couple of circus clowns. He'd laugh at their jokes and then go home after a tour and not talk to anybody for 2 years. He's probably on the other side of this wall....I have no idea. I see him onstage...and if he has anything to say about the band I read it in the papers.

SAM: Who made the decision to come back here? Was it you or Roger?

MARK: Well it takes two, doesn't it? You know....it was the IDEA of being in a band that appealed to me. The gang aspect of it. The sense of belonging that you get....surrounded by other misfits just as damaged as you are. We could shit all over each other, but woe to anybody from the outside who tried to get an inside seat. Never in a million years would The Graves be FRIENDS. We have absolutely nothing in common except the band. The day to day aspects of being in a band are horrifying. You want to share a 15 hour ride in a van with Keith tossing lit cherry bombs out the window? The last time I saw Roger outside of touring was at Keith's fucking funeral. To us that's (makes air quotes) "socializing". There's a line in that John Prine song...."How the hell can a person go to work in the morning and come home in the evening and have nothing to say". It's a great line....but Prine didn't spend 30 years in this fucking band. If he did he'd know how.

SAM: Does Roger feel the Same way that you do?

MARK: You'd have to ask him. Other than me suggesting what we might do for the encore tonight, I haven't asked him a serious question in decades. I was in school when we met. We were kids. He had dropped

out. He had a kid already. Married. He was already working. And I mean real *work*. Like standing on the asphalt with a fucking jackhammer stuff. I've never done an honest day's work in my life. If I was in danger of actually graduating I'd pick another degree. And he treats me accordingly. But he can only do what he does because of me. He can't write these songs. All he can do is take off his shirt and look gorgeous. But that's enough. Without him standing in front of me, I'm just some weedy singer-songwriter moaning about 100,000 pounds of bananas...or being invisible in the high school hallways.

SAM: You say it's been decades. That could mean 1998....

MARK: (*long pause. Looks away*) It's the only time I've seen Roger cry.

SAM: Did you cry?

MARK: No

SAM: Did you two talk about it?

MARK: You mean other than to decide that the show would go on? No

SAM: Even now?

MARK: We're here aren't we? That's about as verbose as we're gonna get.

SAM: It's not the elephant in the room here. It's the WHOLE fucking room. Even now you seem unwilling to....

MARK: (*cuts him off sharply*) I've been talking about it all day!

SAM: Not to me you haven't

MARK: (*pissed*) Well who the fuck are you?

SAM: (*quietly*) I was there....

MARK: (*stunned*) What?

SAM: Do you know the names of the people who died?

MARK: (*voice suddenly quivering*) No I don't know the names...

(*SAM goes through his bag and pulls out a newspaper from that day*)

SAM: Go ahead and read them.

MARK: I'm not gonna fucking read them.

(SAM just stares and waits.....)

MARK: I said I'm not gonna read them

SAM: *(rips the paper from his hands...reads one name)* "Jeff Edmunds. Tinley Park. Age 22" You sent flowers to the funeral. And a note. Do you remember what it said?

(MARK is stunned...)

SAM: Because I don't remember what it said. Isn't that weird? You'd think I would remember what a famous rock star said to us. But I don't. I never asked my Mom if she saved the note or not. *(trying to remember that night)* All I remember is how cold it was that night. December. I didn't have gloves. And that I went down. And Jeff pulled me up. I lost a shoe. I couldn't breathe. And all of a sudden I was drenched in sweat. There was steam coming off the top of everyone. Everybody went from happy...to scared and then mean. I knew I was going to die. He tried to lift me up...to get my head about the wave so I could get some air. I was panicking. For a moment the absurdity of it all hit me...and I needed to reach into my jacket to check for my ticket. The last thing he said to me was "I got you".....and then he was gone. Your feet weren't on the ground anymore. You had no control. Forward. Backwards. Left. Right. He just went down. Behind me everybody was yelling "push...push" and then I heard the door windows shattering...and the next thing I remember is waking up in the ambulance...I kept asking for Jeff but these guys didn't know anything about my brother. I was just....what?.....*(searingly...directly at him)* what do you see these days when you look from the stage? Another set of shoulders to crowd surf?

MARK: That's not fair.

SAM: Eleven dead. You can see where it happened from the fucking window. So this place shouldn't look like any other place to you. I need to know. My brother died before the show even started. Outside. In the freezing cold. "Asphyxiated" is the word the coroner used. Sounds more regal than getting crushed to death. I need to know if you knew he was dead when you went and played that show...I need to know if you knew he was dead before you decided to play the next night in Buffalo. And the night after that in Philly. Before you just moved the Big Top to another town.

*(MARK's phone rings. He picks it up and listens to the other end.
"Coming" he says..)*

MARK: It's time for soundcheck. *(sheepish)* You want to ride over with me?

SAM: *(savagely)* I'll wait here...

MARK: *(horrificed)* What do you mean? You can't stay here!

SAM: I fucking can. I'll see you after the show. I promise I'll give you a good review. We all know what you're gonna play anyway....

(LIGHTS)

ACT II -

(The air in the hotel suite is thick—unspoken tension settling in like dust. Same room. Same furniture. Nothing has changed, except the bottle sitting on the table, already open. A glass, half-full, waiting. Sam sits in his chair, one leg crossed over the other, fingers curled around the rim of his drink, swirling it absently. The ice shifts, clinking softly.)

(Then—footsteps. Slow, uneven. A pause outside the door. Then—Mark enters after a prolonged struggle with his key card. He's unsteady. Obviously drunk. Dressed in his stage clothes. Doc Martens. A dark blazer over a t-shirt. A red bandana tied around his neck. Tosses his phone over a chair. Sees Sam. Not at all surprised that he's still here...)

MARK: *(grandly)* The prodigal son has returned! What a way to go out, eh?

SAM: *(shows him his cell phone by waving it in the air)* Already read all about it. Video too.

MARK: You had to be there. *(sizes himself up in a mirror)* Video adds 10 pounds you know.

SAM: You put on quite a show

MARK: Muscle memory. You know I was looking for you in the crowd

SAM: You said you don't look for anybody anymore

MARK: Well I made an exception this one last time. They told me where your seat was. Almost right at my feet.

SAM: It was probably the only empty one there...What were you gonna do? Blow fucking kisses at me?

MARK: I don't know. I was just hoping you'd be there is all. Something familiar always calms my nerves

SAM: I can see that

MARK: Yea well I figured I'd go out in style

SAM: Nice touch inviting the family members to the show. I guess *somebody* remembered their names. The sacrament of absolution, live on stage. I'm just glad you didnt fall on anybody. Pity my Mom couldn't come though...I trust you opened all the doors this time?

(MARK ignores this. MARK notices the bottle on the table. And an empty glass next to it)

MARK: You expecting someone?

SAM: Room service. I put it on your tab.

MARK: *(motions to the bottle)* Dented it pretty good without me

SAM: Lots of practice *(picks up the glass....hands it off to MARK)* What shall we drink to?

MARK: I'd rather not be so formal

SAM: Fair enough. You have your reasons, and I have mine.

(They drink)

SAM: So which show was better?

MARK: What?

SAM: How does this one compare? I mean.....other than the lack of dead bodies outside

MARK: Don't you have a fucking deadline or something?

SAM: Deadline? The Graves are dead and buried. I got all the time in the world. You think they're holding the presses waiting on me to tell them what you played for a fucking encore?

MARK: We played "Slippin' and Slidin'"

SAM: I see you sang it. Roger never came back out.

MARK: He was bitching about the pot smoke. Said his voice was gone.

SAM: You sure that's the reason?

MARK: He doesn't need a reason....but at least that one puts the blame on somebody else. What you see onstage is not reality. There's bits in the show.....like when we sit down together on the drum riser and sing together on "Valley Train".....like some fucking Everly Brothers skit. The Everly Brothers hated each other too. They sang into each other's eyes and then punched each other out backstage. So there we are, rock and roll brothers in arms...John and Paul, Mick and Keith, Mark and Roger, and it's all horseshit. Half the time the crowd thinks he's whispering sweet nothings in my ear, and he's really saying "turn down, motherfucker". Part of me wishes we had the kind of relationship that people think we have. It might have made things easier.

SAM: Easier how?

MARK: I'd have one more friend in the world. I don't fucking know. I'm an only child. I wanted what you had. I thought I might get that in the band. I made Roger a star.

SAM: (*spitting it out*) What the fuck were you doing before you met him? Playing Madison Square Garden?

MARK: That's fair. It's probably why we hate each other. Too much need. Not enough want. Anyway...fuck him. I needed that encore. Too many nights we walk off-stage arm and arm and turn the corner and he belts me in the mouth. I wanted the last word for once. And besides, I always played better drunk...and I sing better too. Less self-conscious.

SAM: Not sure tonight's crowd would agree, but whatever

MARK: Well, it's a learning curve...in rock and roll it's my job to defy expectations. Right to the end.

SAM: (*sarcastic*) You done good then. If the expectation was not to suck.

MARK: (*dismissive*) You're just not drunk enough. Blame is all on Little Richard! It started with him, so why not end with him. The

King AND Queen of rock and roll! We haven't played that song in 40 years.

SAM: *(brutally)* Sounded like it.

(MARK knocks the drink back...they are like 2 wary fighters in the later rounds of a prize fight, stalking each other)

MARK: You've got some experience in this *(points to the drink)*

SAM: Can you tell?

MARK: I can

SAM: I could just be fucking with you to get answers

MARK: I've never known a room service bottle to arrive half empty

SAM: You'll need to sell a few extra t-shirts to pay for this

MARK: I'll send your paper a bill

SAM: How long's it been for you?

MARK: None of your fucking business. How long's it been for you?

SAM: *(snaps)* About 10 fucking minutes. *(mockingly)* Alas, my sobriety is not discussed in the pages of Rolling Stone

MARK: Well I suspect mine will be yet again. Or at least the Cincinnati Enquirer

SAM: You're good at drawing attention to yourself. *(getting into it now)* You think you play better drunk? I used to think that way. I was in a band with my brother.

MARK: Wait. You were in a band?

SAM: Does that surprise you?

MARK: I don't know. Maybe. You don't seem crazy...

SAM: We were the rare brothers in a band who actually got along. The anti-Gallaghers. I wasn't old enough to be drinking in the bars we were playing in. We were like the Ramones in reverse. We called ourselves "The Gospels" and took Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as our stage names.

MARK: That's fucking brilliant

SAM: It was our second choice. Our first was The Popes...and we were just gonna be like Benedict and John Paul 1, 2 and 3.....but Shane MaGowan's new band was called the Popes so we had to think fast before the drugs wore off.

MARK: (*raises his glass*) Here's hoping they never do

SAM: Where did "The Graves" come from?

MARK: Originally we were "The Drunken Monkey's" but that scared the bars that offered free drinks to the bands. So we changed it to "Free Beer", which kinda sold itself. You know...."tonight! "Free Beer"" That was causing all sorts of problems in a town that took beer as serious as the church took the Sacraments. I wanted "The Bedspins" but Roger said he didn't want to be named after something that made people sick. So Keith said "well what about after they are sick?" and came up with "The Graves".

SAM: The Sacraments. Now that's a good one.

MARK: It is actually. Never thought of that.

SAM: Or "The Last Rites". That would have been fitting.

MARK: Jesus, you're *Catholic* too?

SAM: Reformed, actually. I asked the questions but never got the answers.

MARK: No wonder you joined a band. That was my church too.

SAM: Everybody on the scene knew 3 chords but Jeff knew 4, so it was like we were the fucking Beatles or something. If you could play an F# minor you'd get an extra \$25 a guy. We did punk stuff. Stones. The Who. The Kinks. Jeff had some originals that we'd mix in. We did "If I Only Knew". Jeff sometimes wore his Graves t-shirt onstage. We never got as far as a van.....we borrowed my Dad's car. He'd mimic your moves onstage. One night I was getting hassled by some guys and Jeff broke his Fender Squier over a guy's head. That was serious business. A "Tate move" is what Jeff called it. A new Squier was \$200. You had to weigh the casual violence and what we were spending on beer against us crawling on the floor of the car looking for enough change for the McDonald's drive thru. But still, you do something rock and roll like that and word gets out. From then on I was like the Pope driving through the Vatican in the pope-mobile. I could get away with

anything. We were mini-legends, and I took to the local rock star life like a moth to a flame. Coolers of beer backstage. Coolers of beer ONSTAGE. After a while we didn't have to buy them. They'd just throw full cans up to us. Jeff always sang with one eye on me. He knew I was enjoying myself a little bit too much, especially considering that we are making \$75 a guy and the bar was 2 miles from where our Mom was home watching TV. I think we played one gig outside of the city. Somewhere in Kentucky. It felt like we were going on tour. We were gonna book a hotel just for the prestige of it, but realized that a Holiday Inn costs more than what the band was gonna make. I think 8 people showed up, and got pissed off because they couldn't hear college football on the TV. The entire thing was ridiculous. The band eventually broke up because the drummer got an abscessed tooth and had to sell his kit to pay for the fucking dentist.

MARK: Jesus, you think *I* should write a memoir? I want to read yours.

SAM: Fuck off. Anyway...Jeff was the star. I was the drunken side-show. He was good enough for a van. I had the taste but not the talent. I figured if I couldn't do it, the next best thing would be to pass judgement on those who *could*. But to get inside your head, I had to stay out of mine. So I stayed drunk. You know what a critic is? It's somebody who comes by after the battle is fought and shoots all the wounded. (*silence.....stares at him*) I don't know why the fuck I'm telling you all this.

MARK: Did your brother give it up too?

SAM: He never stopped playing. He never stopped writing songs. He was making demos on a little 4 track recorder. They are incredible. He didn't need assholes like us. He could do it all by himself. He was gonna start playing solo shows around the neighborhood...that's what he used to say all the time, "Samuel", he'd say. "I don't want to change the world. I just want to help the neighborhood.."....and then your fucking band came to town.

(*long pause*)

My first wife.....she met me during the days of The Gospels. She fell in love with the whole scene. People ADORED you up on that stage. And then they'd take you home and say, "hey wait a minute, you mean you're still gonna be an asshole HERE?" Everybody wanted to fuck Elvis except Pricilla.

MARK: What's your second wife's excuse?

SAM: She thought I was gonna be the next Lester Bangs.

MARK: *(rolling his eyes)* Oh Christ

SAM: Yea...

MARK: May I? *(meaning have another)*

SAM: You paid for it. *(he pours him another drink. MARK wanders towards the window)* May I? *(he points to his phone and starts reading online reviews out loud...)* The reviews are pouring in...

"I think Tate was on another fucking planet tonight"

"Dude didn't fall off the wagon, he did a fucking header into the pavement"

"FUCK YEA! That was rock and roll. I thought Roger was gonna hit him. Some old school GRAVES tonight. Keith would have been proud"

"There were times when I didn't think Tate and the band were playing the same song"

"They just shit on the entire city of Cincinnati. AGAIN."

(MARK is still at the window....not reacting to this)

What do you see now?

MARK: I'm going home tomorrow. I'm visualizing my escape route

SAM: I figured you'd just use the same one you used in 1998

(You can almost see MARK stiffen at this. SAM is getting more sarcastic as the booze flows. His bitterness is palpable)

Would you still do the show tomorrow night?

MARK: *(almost talking to himself)* You want to know when I knew Covid was gonna be serious? When they cancelled the fucking circus.

SAM: 11 dead wasn't enough. It took a million.

(long pause here....the two men seem to be back in '98 now...speaking as if to themselves. Perhaps something could be done with the lighting here...)

MARK: Some of the trucks were already on their way to Buffalo. They left early to beat the snow. December is brutal here. We should have known better.

SAM: No matter how warm you dress here...it's never warm enough. We all had our band gear on. It's like your Mom forcing you to wear a coat over your Halloween costume.

MARK: It was the best show of the tour. You can find it. The audio I mean. It's on Youtube

SAM: We left as soon as I got home from school. Jeff knew downtown. He knew a good place to park. We'd be able to get out quick when it was over. I had school the next day. Jeff had work. The escape route...

MARK: There was a bookstore attached to the hotel. I think there was a ramp that crossed the street. One of those skywalks. I bought a few books the day of the show. There was a coffee shop. Nobody recognized me. It felt like I was back home.

SAM: Walking up the concourse...we couldn't believe how many people had gotten there before us. We could have gotten seats...but this was my first Graves show. I wanted to be up front. I slept on the roof of a parking garage to get the tickets from Ticketmaster....so I felt battle-ready. I had your picture on my fucking wall...

MARK: Roger was in the coffee shop. We talked about Christmas presents for the kids. But that was it. Small talk. The kind you might make with a stranger on an elevator.

SAM: My brother had a "Graves" winter cap on. It was so cold that night. The wind really whips off the river around here. There was a picture in Rolling Stone magazine. When all the bodies had been removed guys with push brooms came and swept everything into a large pile. Shoes. Jackets. Ripped shirts. Bottles and cans. Scarves. Gloves. I remember looking for his cap in that picture. It had to be in there somewhere. It was pretty distinctive. But the picture was in black and white. So it was hard to tell one thing from another. I don't know what made me think of this...but since we were talking about John Prine before...he sang that in black and white...blood looks like...(long pause) shadows.

MARK: The lawyers had our manager on the phone....I remember that...

SAM: Our Mom wouldn't let me back in the house without my brother. She was at the front door....screaming. I had to go back and find him. That's what she said. For years afterwards she wouldn't touch his old room. Left it exactly the way he left it. Except for one thing. You know what she did? She tore down the "Graves" poster on his wall. The edges of it hung there like sentinels.

MARK: Security was there....to stop any subpoenas from being shoved in our hands...

SAM: My Dad never needed an excuse to drink, but at least now he had one. Drinking on a broken heart is like drinking on an empty stomach. The results are explosive. A parent is not supposed to bury their child. He was dead in a year...

MARK: The shows were sold out. You could get another few thousand people in there by just opening everything up. We were doing a 90/10 split then. It's the first time we made real money, Pittsburgh the night before. Buffalo was sold out. Philly the night after too...

SAM: There was a ghost in the house

MARK: I remember Roger....all that next night. "PLEASE everybody take a step back...if anybody needs help just raise your hand...PLEASE take a step back..."

SAM: It didn't change a fucking thing. Two years later 9 were dead at a Pearl Jam show...

MARK: I told Eddie Vedder...whatever you do, don't leave town. You'll regret it for the rest of your life.

SAM: The ambulances drove right up on the concourse. There must have been 50 of them. It looked like a MASH unit. Somebody was shining one of these pen-lights into my eyes. You know what I remember? The band was *playing*. I could hear it clearly. The glass doors had shattered. There was nothing to stop the music from getting out to where we were. I was thinking....."what song is that?".....at the same time I'm crying out "where is my brother"

MARK: (*suddenly aware*) What song was it?

SAM: I think it was "Rescue Me"

MARK: (*quick calculation*) That's the middle of the set

SAM: See we didn't know that kind of thing then. In my head you were waiting for them to clear everybody out before you started. You were waiting for my brother to die. "Rescue Me" was your set opener...and you chose it on purpose.

MARK *(turns towards him...)* You know that's bullshit

(they are staring at each other again, both back in the present...perhaps the dimmed lights are back up again)

SAM: I went back there.....I never found his cap. I go back there still. Just to remember. But I've never been to a concert since

MARK: You gonna judge me tonight without even *being there*?

SAM: I judge everybody without being there. I can't walk over my brother's dead body. Rock and roll broke my heart. The Graves broke my heart. My Mom doesn't remember anymore. She doesn't know me. She doesn't remember Jeff. She just sits in the only room the insurance will cover...with our pictures on the dresser, probably thinking they are the ones that came with the fucking frames. I got 2 ex-wives....3 kids. It's easier waking up alone. It's easier flailing away in an empty bed. I can't hurt anybody this way. I have my hand on Jeff's coat as he fell....and I can *feel* it give way. Like that moment you lean too far back in a kitchen chair. I have this dream over and over again. You drink to forget and all it does is turn the black and white blood into color.

MARK: What do you mean you've never been to a concert since. You're the entertainment writer for your newspaper. You *review* shows...

SAM: Yea....I just don't attend any. I pretend. I had the review for tonight finished before you stumbled back in here. Took me...what....20 minutes? You know what I noticed? I'm looking at it now. Your finger....you didn't cut yourself tonight. You didn't even care enough to bleed.

MARK: I've bled enough for your enjoyment.

SAM: You know what the first thing they did to my brother? They checked to see if he had any drugs in his system. That was *already* the narrative. Bad trips in the crowd. Drunken hooligans. Just a bunch of animals crawling over each other to see a rock show. And it was 11 "kids". I remember even Roger saying that. "Kids". My brother wasn't a fucking kid. There were Mothers who died. So you have these shows with festival seating....no seats....first come first served...you

justify it by saying you want us close.....right under your fucking noses....so you can get that adoration fix....and you don't know any of us. Just a wall of fucking credit cards. I hope the kids had a good time watching your drunk ass on the stage tonight...

MARK: *(quietly)* Roger found out that one was as old as his own daughter.

SAM: *(bitterly)* How often do they check her for drugs?

(they both reach for the bottle at the same time. Mark gives way and lets Sam pour)

SAM: What was her name? Do you even know?

MARK: I don't

SAM: You've written....what....150 songs? You play 2 hours....you remember every word. Every chord. But 11 names escape you? The paper was reluctant to send my name over to your management. They figured they'd put 2 and 2 together. I told them they were greatly overestimating your sense of fucking guilt.

MARK: You want to talk about guilt?

SAM: *(holds up his glass)* I got all night

MARK: Keith came to me.....and he said he needed help. The '98 tour was already booked. John died 2 years earlier. They didn't have each other to hold each other up anymore. He was calling me every single night....just to tell me he loved me. He'd be crying on the phone. His wife was gone. She took their daughter. He was all alone in this crazy big house that was shaped like a pyramid. He had more cars than bedrooms. He needed to stop. He knew if he didn't that he would die. The Graves should have ended right there. Or even when John died. Even Zeppelin had the sense to do that. I should have cancelled the tour....Keith would have been brilliant on one of those reality Dr Drew shows....but I raged at him instead. Called him a fucking pussy. Said the band was going on with or without him. He stopped calling me at night. He never told me he loved me again. He stayed sober for the first few dates.....with me swigging bottles in his face....almost daring him to join the party. "Take a drink or get off my fucking stage" is what I said to him.

SAM: You had the power of life or death, huh? Is that what you're saying?

MARK: That's what rock and roll gives you. That's what this band gives you. Look at the fucking Stones. Anybody who ever got close to that band....dead. Wives. Girl friends. Anybody who coveted that second guitar slot. Dead. They took all that hippie Woodstock bullshit and killed it a few months later at Altamont. Their crowd would get naked and walk into a line of Hell's Angels pool cues. That's how devoted they were.

SAM: Is that what you wanted?

MARK: It's what I already HAD. I knew Keith would do whatever I told him to do. I knew I might kill him. But the band mattered more than he did....which is how drunken arseholes think, because without Keith this isn't the fucking Graves. We're a good tribute band....but the Graves died when he did.

SAM: And the band mattered more than my brother....

MARK: Keith was taking this medication to ease his withdrawals. After the third show of the tour he goes back to his room and takes the whole bottle. But not before leaving a note on the nightstand. "FUCK YOU TATE" is what it said. I just put it in my pocket. No sense this detail ending up in Rolling Stone magazine. Story went out. Accidental overdose. Fuck that. He killed himself. But that's not rock and roll. Choking on a ham sandwich is rock and roll. Being found in the bathtub or at the bottom of the pool is rock and roll. In two days we had another drummer. We only had to postpone one show. So yea, at the time the band meant more than your fucking brother.

(SAM makes a dive for MARK's throat. MARK sidesteps and SAM falls to the floor)

MARK: It meant more than my wife. It meant more than my kids. For me and Keith, the band was who we were. With Roger it was just a job, and I've never been able to forgive him for feeling that way.

(Suddenly SAM starts laughing....slowly at first....then maniacally. He's still on the floor)

SAM: Never meet your idols....*(gets to his feet and lurches for another drink)* FUCK YOU TATE....I like that. Very succinct. Did you send flowers to that funeral too? You should have seen the stories in the papers around here about that. Every funeral...they sent a photographer to get pictures of the arrangement. Usually they'd run it next to the one of the Band fleeing the hotel through the service elevator. Lucky for you it worked back in '98, eh? The world seemed more concerned

about how this might affect YOU than how it was affecting us. It was like my brother and the others damaged the fucking BRAND. And 25 years later you and your old ass and bum knees grace us with your presence at...what is it your 3rd farewell tour? I can't keep track. And you think it's a good time to get wasted...like you're in the Grateful fucking Dead? Fuck you. I want the Watergate question answered. What did you know and when did you know it? Why were 8000 people left outside in the freezing cold? The crowd didn't misbehave. The crowd wasn't selfish. The ones in the back didn't know what was going on up front. People were pleading for the doors to be opened. We could see the staff inside...walking around on walkie-talkies as people were going down. Faces were pressed up against the doors. You know how many they opened? Two. Two fucking doors. Out of TWENTY. What the fuck were you doing while all this was happening? Shoving coke up your nose? How fucking disassociated do you have to be to not notice people dying?

MARK: Jesus, do you want me to count the ways?

SAM: Yes...

MARK: *(quietly)* We knew

SAM: What did you say?

MARK: Before we went on. We knew what happened. We didn't know the exact number...but we knew people were dead outside

SAM: *(shocked)* You always insisted that you didn't know. You always claimed that you weren't told until after the show.

MARK: Yea, that was the lawyers.

SAM: You said it was the best show of the tour

MARK: It was

SAM: What kind of fucking monster are you?

MARK: You want to know what kind of monster I am? There was a part of me...there still IS a part of me...that was like "look what it MEANT to them!" MY music. People were DYING over it. People were crawling over fucking DEAD BODIES to get to ME. Not Elvis. Not Dylan. What are their bodycounts? Mine is 11, motherfucker.

SAM: *(silently)* Jesus Christ...

MARK: What are you *doing* here?

(SAM pulls out his iPhone, sets it on the table between them. The screen is lit, the recording app still running. He presses stop. The faint click echoes in the silence.)

SAM: Never meet your idols

(they stare at each other like 2 fighters at the start of the 15th round)

MARK: So what happens now?

SAM: This is where you tell me why my brother had to die.

MARK: Can we have one more drink first?

(they pour)

MARK: All night long I've been thinking of him.

SAM: You couldn't do it sober?

MARK: No...I couldn't. I wanted to go out this way. I *needed* to go out this way. In a blaze of brandy and shame....in front of 18,000 fucking iPhones. (pauses...) Well...18,001

MARK: Remember I told you about bands. How it's that feeling of being in a gang? In the beginning it was everybody in the van. We had one roadie. He drove. He doubled as security. He'd count everybody coming in with this clicker....to make sure we weren't being screwed at the end of the night. It sounds crazy to say....but in the beginning we controlled EVERYTHING. Because we had to do everything. We booked the shows. Drove to the shows. Set up our own gear. Threatened to beat the shit out of the bar owner if the envelope was light. Shared hotel rooms and fucking chef boyardee everynight from a hotplate....and if there wasn't any rooms we'd take turns sleeping on top of the amps in the back. We paid for the first record. The labels come swooping in after the legwork is fucking done. Each successive step....you lose a little bit of control. A few more people enter the orbit. And then a few more. The catering budget for our first video was more than what we spent making the entire album. They brought in some director eager to get in on the MTV thing...I think he was one of the guys from the show "Friends" or something. Never directed anything before in his life. I remember standing on a sound stage for 13 hours miming "If I Only Knew" and the guy saying "could you just do that again" so many times that finally Keith threatened to disembowel him. There was a

part of me that couldn't live without Keith. Whatever I didn't have the balls to do, Keith *would* do. People were drawn to The Graves because of Keith....his mania. I fed that as much as I could, because then they'd remember that I was the guy who wrote the songs. I became the resident "genius" of the group.....the lanky oddball in the boiler suit playing the blood-stained guitar. All the guitar magazines wanted to know why I switched from the Tele to the dark red Gibson SG, and I made up geek shit instead of saying I looked like a ghoul at the end of every show.

SAM: That's the answer?

MARK: By '98 everybody was gone. John was gone. Keith was gone. It was just me and Roger....waiting around for somebody to tell us when we needed to be in the fucking lobby. We were due to go on at....8 or so. It's rock and roll so you gotta be fashionably late. I don't remember anybody giving a shit about festival seating back then. It was everywhere. I don't remember any Ebееezer Scrooge moment... (*miming this*) rubbing my hands together over the candle flame thinking of the extra receipts....I just didn't give a shit. Yea...whatever. It was like the elastic pricing of its day. It was easier to just let other people handle it. And that's what happens. There's no more room in the van anymore. At our early shows in Scranton I'd know the first names of everybody there. By '98, we were at our peak....and half the band was already gone. Our manager pulled me aside and told me what was happening.....that people were dead outside. It was all private security firms. We didn't know anything about how many doors were opened. But suddenly the place was filled. I mean...the crowd didn't know. WE knew. I could have went out there and made an announcement. That's what I should have done. It's what Roger wanted to do. The lawyers were already on the phone....worrying about 18,000 worked up kids (*realizes the word....*) sorry....suddenly told to...what?.....turn around and go home and...by the way....watch that you don't step on the fucking bodies on the way out? It was ME who made the decision to play. Nobody else. I don't think Roger ever forgave me. But at the same time, he sang his ass off that night. It was fierce. I get goose bumps thinking of that show. I kept turning around and expecting to see Keith there...

SAM: You get fucking goose bumps? You want it both ways. You're just the isolated rock star in his gilded cage....waiting to be summoned....but then admit that you're still the ringmaster.

MARK: Rock and roll *allows* you to have it both ways. The Graves would never have allowed all those mistakes. Keith lived in a house shaped like a pyramid and had 11 cars even though he didn't have a

license...but if the bus drove past a horse-trailer on the highway he'd start to cry thinking how scared the horse was. He'd order 500 pizzas and have them delivered to kids waiting in line for tickets. He used to open the window in our dressing room so kids who couldn't afford tickets could climb in. In the beginning, your brother was our friend. My sin was allowing him to become a stranger. But I get to blame it all on rock and roll.

SAM: Well you don't get to blame it on rock and roll anymore. I talked to Roger. I've been corresponding with Roger for years, actually. He told me everything. The first thing I asked him was the names of the 11...and they were on the tip of his tongue. Shall I bang on the wall and bring him over here?

MARK: What did he tell you?

SAM: He told me everything. He told me he was going to go to the press and expose the fake narrative....that the band didn't know until the show was over. He told me the band was all he had....and that you threatened to break it up if he talked. All your bullshit about The Graves being "just a job" to Roger.....it might have been a vehicle for you but for him it's his whole world. You knew he couldn't live without it, in the same way that Keith couldn't live without it.

MARK: It would have been the end of the band.

SAM: And that note?

MARK: What note?

SAM: "FUCK YOU TATE" He saw that too. He knew it was you the entire time.

(MARK buries his head in his hands....murmurs..."my god...". SAM does something on his phone...)

SAM: He figures now's the time. I don't suspect there's gonna be a 4th "farewell tour" after all of this...

(there's a knock on the door...)

SAM: Go on. Open it. I think you know who it is...

LIGHTS

END OF PLAY