

Act 2

"The Giving Tree"

At rise, a few hours have passed. The storm has thickened, with the sound of thunder and hail becoming more of an ever-ringing din than an interruption. David is asleep in the bedroom. Michael, alone in the dining room, clutches an almost finished bottle of whiskey. He sits on the floor.

MICHAEL

(drunkenly singing to himself)
Broken windows and empty hallways,
A pale, dead moon in a sky streaked with gray.
Human kindness is overflowing,
And I think it's gonna rain today.
Scarecrows dressed in the latest styles...

(An especially violent clap of thunder cuts him off. Kieren appears from the hallway. He begins to pour himself a glass of water.)

KIEREN

(feebly responding to it)
Just for once could you stop screaming at me and let me sleep.

MICHAEL

So you're still letting it bully you around?

KIEREN

You're still here?

MICHAEL

And you're having trouble sleeping. Glad everyone is up to speed.

(He resumes singing)

KIEREN

It's nearly two in the morning, have the decency to go to sleep like the rest of us.

MICHAEL

I can do what I want. I'm not one of your messes to clean up.

KIEREN

(a moment of sincere worry)
Are you going to be okay? Michael?

(He doesn't respond.)

Okay. Good night.

(He exits, heading into the bedroom and falling back in bed.)

MICHAEL

Yeah, go on. Go on. Leave me alone to drink and piss and think. I can manage it. I SAID I CAN MANAGE IT! Nothing. No one hears anyone or anything during a storm. God, what I'd give to sleep. But there won't be any sleep, will there? Of course not. No sleep for the black sheep. It's our duty to take guard as the Sheppard falls into one of his usual naps... Jesus I'm wasted.

(He begins to sway and sing.)

*Lonely, lonely.
Tin can at my feet,
I think I'll kick it down the street.
That's the way to treat a friend.*

*(Suddenly, the song is playing in the background. He dances to it for a while.
Eventually, he raises his glass for a toast.)*

*Bright before me the signs implore me:
Help the needy and show them the way.
Human kindness is overflowing,
And I think it's going to rain today.*

How's this for Drunken Charades, Josie? How's this?

(He drinks. Josie appears behind him. He does not notice her.)

It's all a big charade, huh, Josie?

JOSIE

How's that?

(The music stops instantly.)

MICHAEL

Jesus Christ, you scared me!

JOSIE

Sorry. I wanted to get some fresh air, but seeing how the hail has gotten so thick, I decided it'd be better if I just switched rooms. You look tired. You look hot. You're very drunk.

MICHAEL

And you're not... very drunk, of course. You're tired, well, we're all tired. And hot, apparently. You, not me. I'm not very hot right now. Why aren't you very drunk?

JOSIE

I figured only one of us should have some fun. Besides, I like being alert during a storm.

MICHAEL

This isn't fun.

JOSIE

It never really is; we just convince ourselves it is. But it's all over once your head is buried in a toilet.

MICHAEL

I take it you couldn't sleep either?

JOSIE

I did, for a little while. But then the heat became unbearable. I turned it off, but it didn't do much good. There's no fucking air in this house, is there?

MICHAEL

None, whatsoever.

JOSIE

Would you mind if I opened a window?

MICHAEL

You can crack it. Just be sure not to let any of the storm in.

JOSIE

That's impossible. Storms always find their way back in.

(She opens a window, then goes and sits next to Michael.)

MICHAEL

Is that any better?

JOSIE

Give it a moment, I'm sure it'll cool down.

MICHAEL

Perhaps you're right.

JOSIE

You know, you got awfully crazy tonight.

MICHAEL

No crazier than my usual self, surely.

JOSIE

Are you sure? Because what I saw tonight differs from what I've seen before. You're much less of an asshole, normally.

MICHAEL

Am I really that bad?

JOSIE

You *were* really that bad. Perhaps not so much anymore. You're more simple when you're out for blood, more carnal and vicious.

MICHAEL

I guess my intentions weren't as pure as I'd like to think.

JOSIE

Maybe they were. Maybe, perhaps, you want for everyone to deal with the hate you have for yourself.

MICHAEL

Since when did you get a degree in psychology?

JOSIE

The same time you became an expert at pissing people the fuck off.

MICHAEL

(realizing she is right)

Perhaps I can't make up my mind.

JOSIE

Hey, it's okay. You don't have to explain yourself to me. Your intentions were mixed. They were spiked both with medicine and with venom, like all family arguments.

MICHAEL

You've been around us far too long.

JOSIE

No I haven't.

MICHAEL

Yes, yes. You have. You're even starting to think like us.

JOSIE

If I think like you, it's only because I'm close enough to being one of you.

(They share a look. Michael bursts into laughter.)

MICHAEL

You don't want to be part of this family.

JOSIE

I used to; and deep down, there are still parts of me that want to be part of something, even if that something is nothing more than an unstable volcano of a family unit. It would be nice to belong somewhere again.

MICHAEL

I didn't know you felt that way.

JOSIE

Is it really a surprise?

MICHAEL

No, just a hard pill to swallow. Are you okay? We don't ask you that enough.

JOSIE

Oh, I'm fine. Well, I mean I'm not. I'm falling apart; I'm dying on the inside, but that's okay. Everything is okay.

MICHAEL

No it's not.

JOSIE

That's what I mean when I say it's all okay.

MICHAEL

(strongly concerned)

Why are you here? This place is no good for you.

JOSIE

Sometimes the place that's worst for you is where you have to be.

MICHAEL

(very rattled)

Jesus Christ, Josie.