

Echo, Texas

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Produced in the United States

Echo, Texas

A Short Play
in
One Act

Erik Wallbank

Novels by Erik Wallbank

The Ride

The Audit

If Only by Chance

Characters:

STRID

Thirty-five years old—a born and bred Texan

ACE HURD

Fifty-eight years old. Transplanted from California, but more than a decade earlier.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Thirty-eight years old.

ZIGGY HAHN

Fifty-two years old. Born and raised in one of New York's five boroughs.

JUSTIN

Twenty-eight years old.

Echo, Texas, deep in the heart of Texas, where only twelve persons live in the incorporated area. Coleman, the county seat, less than five miles away, is home for half the population of the county, a population that falls each year. A decade ago, there were 138 businesses in Coleman, but with the reduction in population, businesses go away—a few each year.

Early afternoon at H&S Motors, one of only two buildings in Echo besides the post office. The garage is ancient, the only masonry building left. Two steel-paneled doors, each large enough for a car or small truck to pass through, are hinged to a round steel post at the center of the doorway. During working hours the doors swing out towards the highway where they attach to hooks on a steel balustrade. Above the garage are two, one room apartments, accessed by open, steel stairways on either side of the building, up to covered doorways.

Inside, two men are working on opposite sides of the garage, which isn't much bigger than a large two-car garage. Each side has a lift—one of which doesn't work. Opposite walls are covered with grimy handprints on white pegboard, where tools are hanging. The older tools bear the name 'Snap-On'. The newer ones are of lesser brands.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

STRID

You been saying we'd get my lift fixed for months. I don't see how we can make it on the one lift?

ACE HURD

I don't see how we can make it with or without your lift. I don't know what to think? If the business goes away, I don't know where to go? I won't go back to the West Coast and there's no work around here.

STRID

You let the Lord in and you can forget all that. Let him do the heavy lifting. When the going gets tough, Jesus ain't gonna tap out.

ACE HURD

The way, the truth, and the light. Really Strid, is he all that? Or does he make it so you don't have to be accountable? Believe what you need to, but stop with the sermonizing and the righteousness. It's a good thing your bunch doesn't have a jihad option!

STRID

Strid remains above the fray—washed in the blood.

He's all those things my friend—those and more. And he's making a better place for us. One where meanness and injustice have no part.

ACE HURD

I mean what I say about using religion to be unaccountable—like men with talent who find no traction in life. They start seeing themselves as losers—even though it's only partly their fault (Ace sings a line that it's a hard world to get a break in). And unable to deal with it, they lean on an imaginary world

STRID

Come off it, Ace. Who are you to deny Christ? I mean, you have your own opinions about it—but an imaginary world? You know how many Christians there are in this world?

ACE HURD

I wouldn't bring it up, but you just can't stop. I don't know how many Christians there are, but I wouldn't be surprised if it isn't the same number who can't see any other way to go.

STRID

The truth of religion doesn't depend on some theory from psychology class.

ACE HURD

You'd prefer Revelations or Genesis, but think on this: people down here aren't getting ahead—they're losing ground. And I wasn't joking about talented losers. One guy I know had a band that played a lounge every Sunday for decades. Now it's a DJ. When somebody would buy his song on iTunes he got half a buck. Now it takes a thousand people streaming that song to get a bowl of soup.

STRID

That's exactly what I'm saying, Ace. This world has no justice—but there's a world that's being prepared for us...

Ace interrupts.

ACE HURD

plaintively...

Strid, it wasn't that long ago that there was some justice—a leg up for people in the middle—now it's all along the bottom. We're all poorer because somebody else has all the money. It's not about Jesus.

STRID

I promise you Ace, everything's about Jesus. Everything we love, the world around us, our friends—it's all because of Jesus.

ACE HURD

Let's get some lunch.

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

Next to H&S Motors is Connie's, a diner that at one time was a dining car on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Because planning and building departments exist in Echo mainly as rumor, no one is quite sure when the car moved in, or who it was named for. These past five years, it's been owned by Ziggy Hahn who lives in an

add-on out back. Both waitresses happen to be named Connie. Business at the diner is slow, so Ziggy has been trying to compensate by staying open late, for truckers. Today, he's working behind the warming passthrough, in the kitchen.

Ace and Strid take a booth, in view of the kitchen. There's six or seven patrons having lunch. Connie's is known for good fare. Sometimes there's one or two patrons from Echo, but usually they're from Coleman or taking the bypass. Connie the Younger is on shift. She's comely to look upon but she's hooked up with a problem named Justin—further evidence there's little justice in the world.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

What'll it be guys?

ACE HURD

What looks good to you, Con?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Today I'll be having the chicken skewer with the caesar as my shift.

ACE HURD

That works for me.

Connie looks at Strid with an assumption he'll be getting the usual. It's always the usual with Strid.

STRID

Directs a question to Ace

Ziggy Hahn—that's a Jewish name, right?

ACE HURD

C'mon. We've talked about this a hundred times. Ziggy doesn't identify with any religion, so why do you bring it up?

STRID

But it is Jewish, right? All I'm sayin.

ACE HURD

Something about Jews bothers you, Strid. Can't you have your faith and leave the rest be?

STRID

It's on account they killed Jesus.

ACE HURD

Ziggy didn't kill anybody, Strid. That's like saying white people owe for slavery. Most of our ancestors didn't even live here during the Civil War. You need to let this go before it makes you nuts.

STRID

How can I let go that they killed Jesus?

ACE HURD

All that talk about giving yourself over to Jesus. You're no more forgiving than anybody else. Besides, Jesus isn't dead—right?

STRID

You got that right. He's sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, judging the quick and the dead. Still, it was the Jews who killed him.

Ziggy comes up behind Strid and puts his hands on Strid's shoulders.

ZIGGY HAHN

I haven't had time for lunch—may I join you?

Strid quickly slides over to make room for Ziggy.

ZIGGY HAHN

I can easily slide up a chair?

Strid waves him off.

STRID

How's business, Zig?

Ace and Strid eat lunch at Connie's, at least six days a week. They each have kitchenettes in their studios, but to go upstairs for lunch would be an admission of defeat—a coming of the end. They are Americans—even better—Texans, who eat at the diner, everyday. Strid asks his question about the business that he asks everyday, while he waits on his french dip with mashed.

And Ziggy answers every day as if the question were imminent and fresh.

ZIGGY HAHN

Well, it's like I said before, but bringing things up to date, it's not particularly good. Without going into my savings, I can't afford to keep both Connie's on—but without both Connie's I can't keep the diner open. So I'm burning through my savings as slowly as possible because I don't see an end game or a plan B. Besides I'd rather be poor in Echo than anywhere else.

STRID

If you run out, Zig, you could get a loan on the diner. And you could raise prices—I mean, not all at once, but a little here, a little there.

ZIGGY HAHN

Think on that Strid? You guys own the garage, which means you own where you work and live. And taxes here aren't all that much. So no matter how bad things get, you'll be able to get by. But most folks around here are in serious debt, so raising prices on a menu that's already fair—I can't really do that. Like my Uncle Artie used to say: 'Adding five dollars speaks to profit—adding ten dollars speaks to character.'

Strid thinks Ziggy always says the right thing. Ziggy's always looking out for everybody. But Uncle Artie? Isn't Artie a Jewish name?

STRID

Do you speak Jewish, Zig?

Ace gives Strid a look.

ZIGGY HAHN

There's no Jewish, Strid. People who speak it are speaking Hebrew. If you're asking if I speak Hebrew, I didn't grow up Jewish, so no, I don't speak Hebrew.

STRID

You could marry one of the Connie's—two can live cheaper than one!

ZIGGY HAHN

No offense to anyone, Strid, but Connie the elder, bless her heart, is my age, with a bone structure that was never a bargain, and Connie the younger is too young—besides, she's taken.

STRID

I wasn't wishing the elder on you, Zig. There's worse things than being poor. I'm just saying, no matter that you're older—you're a prize next to Justin—and Connie probably thinks about it.

ZIGGY HAHN

Don't go making a life for Connie, Strid. She already has enough to deal with."

Connie has come up behind Strid with three plates, one on each palm and the third resting on her forearm. Strid ought never to sit where he can be approached from behind.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Am I hearing my name in discussion?

Three men sit mute—making Connie curious.

Will no one tell me?

STRID

We were just talking, Con. How business is off and Zig can't afford things, so he's using up his savings to keep it going. So I brought up how much better off you would be with him than that piece of crap, Justin.

Consternation abounds. Connie is flush in the cheeks as though she might bleed through. Ace looks away and Ziggy looks down at Ace's shoes under the table.

Connie retreats to the kitchen. Strid is abashed but undaunted.

STRID

Guess I did it again, Zig. I didn't mean to.

ZIGGY HAHN

You do make a habit of it, Strid. But, it's okay. Sometimes, things that need to be said, don't get said. Besides, what you said about Justin needs brought up.

The few who came in for lunch have cleared out and there won't be others until a dinner guests drift in. During mid-week, that's the extent of it. Maybe some business after Connie's closes at ten and the trucks are still rolling.

Connie comes out of the kitchen with her lunch and looks to one of the counter stools away from the kitchen where she won't have eye contact with Ziggy, but from where she unfortunately will have eye contact with Strid.

STRID

Hey Con, come back and sit with us. My big mouth shouldn't make it so you have to sit on a stool.

There's hesitation until Ace gets up, unexpectedly, and walks over to Connie.

ACE HURD

I work with him six days a week so I know how it feels. But, he's a good guy and a good friend. And I know he thinks the world of you. So, if you'll consent to join us with your lunch, I would be happy to slide over.

Connie, with a show of reluctance mixed with decorum, takes up her plate and water and moves toward the booth. Ace follows, with a reluctant glance at her lovely bottom. Connie slides in ahead of Ace so she's facing Strid, not Ziggy.

STRID

Sorry, Connie. Sometimes I go too far. It's just that I have my opinions about Justin and I can't hold back. Like I was saying to Ace before we came over, out here there's really only one thing for a young woman to do, and she best find someone to do it with who isn't boring or dangerous.

The booth erupts in silence.

ZIGGY HAHN

Enough, buddy. Toss that shovel before that hole you're digging collapses in on you. When you came out the first time, Connie, we were talking about the businesses and how it's getting harder to make it. I was telling the guys how I'm slowly working through my

savings to keep it going and how I would rather be poor here than someplace else. Strid was thinking on ways I could save money.

For a moment there's silence, then Connie smiles.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

to Strid

You were looking to marry me off to save a few bucks?

Everybody laughs.

ZIGGY HAHN

He was, but there's more to it than that.

Some tension returns.

Questions are best when they come from ourselves, but good friends are like unpaid therapists, who ask the questions we can't.

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

Justin comes through the door—a reminder that a small man with a bad disposition is a subject for comedy, while a large man, like Justin, with that same bad disposition, is no laughing matter.

Justin has no problem soaking up space and attention as he spends a full twenty seconds taking in the occupants of the booth. Ziggy avoids the time-lapse with a thought that a nadir is the opposite of

a zenith—a nadir being the low point—the lowest point. The look in Justin's eyes suggests the nadir is not upon them. Not yet.

JUSTIN

Connie, we need to talk.

There's no recognition of the others in the booth—no greeting. Connie pushes against Ace who scrambles out of her way. The air is thick. Justin and Connie step outside—not just outside but out of sight.

STRID

Like I was saying...

Ziggy cuts him off.

ZIGGY HAHN

There's no entering the dreaming mind of another, Strid. Justin's carrying a load you can't imagine.

STRID

How nice for Connie. But if he does anything to hurt her, he's gonna have to deal with me.

Both men look at Strid. He's courageous but he's no match for Justin.

The three sit in silence, in their own thoughts.

Connie comes back inside, but not the same Connie who went out with Justin. She's ashen—shaken.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

I have to make him some food. He's going to wait outside.

STRID

You tell him if he wants to eat he needs...

Ziggy stops Strid with a hand on his forearm. The three men say nothing while Connie rattles pans in the kitchen. Soon she emerges with food wrapped in paper towels, and goes outside.

STRID

Paper towels, not even cloth. This ain't gonna last.

Connie comes back in and stands by the door, with no commitment to rejoin the booth.

STRID

C'mon Con. Come and sit back down.

She stands there—like a hypnotized teenager having been told in a trance to doubt her friends.

Slowly, she heads back to the booth and slides in across from Ziggy.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

We're leaving, me and Justin, tonight. Justin says he's had enough of this nothing place. He wants to be somewhere with opportunities. He says that sometimes, when it's time to get out, you just

pick up and go. Today there was some kind of problem with the foreman out at the rig.

STRID

Did he say where you're going, Con? Or does he just expect you to follow him?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

He doesn't know, but he says anywhere is better than here.

ZIGGY HAHN

Just the lack of opportunity here, Connie? Anything else?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

That he has more experience than me. That he can see when people are trying to take advantage of me.

ZIGGY HAHN

Meaning us?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

hesitantly Yes, he says Strid's a blowhard who probably has weird designs on me. That Ace is really weird. If truth be told, he's probably running from the law.

Connie looks at Ziggy—full-faced.

But mostly it's you. He says you're clever—too clever for your own good. That sometime you'll pay big for it. That you hired me for one reason—to get me away from him with your big talk and

your money. But without your big talk you're nothing. You're less than nothing.

STRID

I gotta admit, Con—you got a great rear under that rayon...

Everyone breaks into laughter—like a sudden downpour on a fire.

ZIGGY HAHN

Justin sees a conspiracy, Connie? Strid, who conspires to say whatever pleases him—Ace who conspires quietly—and me, an aging Jew, so removed from the established narrative of his sub-cultural genetics that he can't conspire to keep open a diner on which he has no mortgage?

Strid looks at Ziggy in astonishment. Ziggy has admitted he's Jewish.

Does leaving tonight, Connie, after trouble in the oilfields, sound like a plan or like running away? Leaving your friends and your employer without notice, is that okay because of the kind of people we are? Might it be something different—anger, jealousy, a lack of self-worth? If it's that, what's going to change at the new place? Suppose you go to work for someone who actually is a threat to your relationship? Suppose Justin's problems follow him wherever he goes?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Tears have made their way down the inside of her cheeks into the corners of her mouth.

I don't know what to do? He's my husband—for better or worse. If he needs to go, what choice do I have?

STRID

No, Con, he has no choice. He comes in here and looks down on us. A regular guy would talk about what happened out in the fields and how he's feelin about it.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

You're not helping, Strid.

ZIGGY HAHN

Strid talks like a slap up the side of the head, but it doesn't take away from what he says. And when someone is as young as you...

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

I'm not that young, I'll be thirty-eight on my birthday.

All three men seem astonished.

STRID

I had you no more than 30. Wait a minute, how old is Justin?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Twenty-eight.

STRID

28, and already all that experience to know what everybody's up to.

ZIGGY HAHN

Age isn't as important as character, Connie, but there's plenty who never learn.

STRID

Justin won't live to see character.

ZIGGY HAHN

You ought not burn bridges you can't afford to fix, Strid.

STRID

Somebody's got to say it.

ZIGGY HAHN

Yeah, somebody's got to say it, but you're not the one who has to deal with it.

STRID

And if they're not dealing with it, somebody's got to say it.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

indignantly Really, Strid? You seem to know all about me, so why don't you tell me what to do?

STRID

Sorry, Connie. Maybe it's none of my business. It's just that I don't want you to go. Not like this. I worry for you if you go like this. I like you being here. I like knowing you're here. And it's not so much that you're going. It's that you're going like this.

ZIGGY HAHN

I think Strid's fears are about Justin—not about you—except for what might happen to you if you choose to leave like this.

Connie leans forward—her curiosity in front of her indignation.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

What is it you two think you see about Justin?

Strid and Ziggy look at each other. Strid gestures the question to Ziggy.

ZIGGY

It's the same for all of us, Connie. It's our self-worth. I call it that because self esteem and self assurance don't get at it. They sound too good. Self-worth suggests a scale that includes self-worthlessness. I'm no psychologist Connie, so I'm talking pretty much about what I see in myself and friends who were unable to deal with what life dealt them.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

But you were able to deal with it?

ZIGGY HAHN

I'm still dealing with it, Connie. Most of us come from troubled families and that trouble follows us. Even when we don't see it it's there shadowing us. And when things get bad, we do things we regret forever to shut down the pain.

Ziggy scans the faces. This is not where he wanted to go. These are things he thinks about, but it's not diner talk in the heart of Texas. He's taken it too far.

I am saying that if we could see up around the bend, we'd do it different. Prisons and graveyards are full of people who would have liked a chance to do it over.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

So, if the troubles are bigger than you, there's nothing you can do?

STRID

Connie's right, Zig, it sounds messed up.

ZIGGY HAHN

It's not easy but there's a way. You let the pain in—all the way to the bottom. And you don't run from things that can help—like having somebody there for you.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

But it's your pain, not theirs.

ZIGGY HAHN

It's a battle, Connie—sometimes about life and death. One where you need all the help you can get, because, if you can deal with the pain and the loneliness, you can catch a glimpse of who and what you really are, and who you might become.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

It's too complicated, Zig. I'm leaving here tonight with Justin, with no idea where I'm going and you want to talk therapy?

The air goes out of Ziggy and Connie sees it.

It's not you Ziggy—I can't think straight right now. For me it's more about the feelings.

Connie tries to change the tone...

"There's something I've wanted to ask you for months. What's with the name Ziggy? It's not like you're Ziggy Marley or Ziggy Stardust. It sounds like a Wall Street accountant. Is that really what they named you? Or, is it something even worse, like Ziegfeld? Did you get a middle name?"

STRID

His name is Ziggy, can't you just leave it at that?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Oh, really, Strid? When it's getting on lunchtime over at H&S, do you tell Ace you're hungry, or is it more like getting over to Connie's for another look at world Jewry?

Ziggy excuses himself and heads into the kitchen. When he returns he has the "Specials" chalkboard on which he's written: 'Closed. Sorry friends, no dinner tonight—family emergency.' He places it in the window next to the door and locks the door.

STRID

Why'd you do that, Zig?

ZIGGY HAHN

Because Connie might be getting ready to say what's on her mind.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Connie brushes aside whatever that might mean.

What about it Zig? You got another name?

ZIGGY HAHN

Yes I do. I have a middle name—but I don't care for it. It's Haven.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

"Haven—a refuge. A guy from a troubled family named Haven.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

And what about you, Connie? We have way too many Connie's around here. Do you have a middle name?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

I do, but it's not a good one like Haven—it's Becky.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

Is it Becky—or is it Rebecca?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER

Rebecca.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

A Jewish queen.

The first dinner guests have arrived. They read the sign. They don't knock or try to make contact with the four in the booth. People get family emergencies.

ACE HURD

Don't get me wrong—I like the new names. But before long, Connie's going to be gone. Probably for good.

STRID

I doubt it will be for anything good! Just tell him you're not going, Connie.

ACE HURD

The garage is open. I'm going to walk over and lock up.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Ace, I got a big night coming and I'd like you to be here. Please come back.

Ace leaves and Haven locks the door behind him.

Strid takes out his wallet and flips it open, mistaking it for his flip phone.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

I was in Archer City over the weekend—where Larry McMurtry lives. He wrote *Lonesome Dove*. It's all about beginnings and endings for Larry. He's in his 80's and now he's gone and married Ken Kesey's wife, Faye. From one great writer to another. Anyway, over the years, Larry's been a big buyer of used books when stores went out of business, but now, books are not bring read, so he's selling all of them—doesn't want to pass a headache to his family.

If you don't know, he also wrote, *The Last Picture Show*, my favorite book by a Texan, and one of my favorite movies—by anyone. This weekend, the movie house in Archer City was closing down, so they showed his movie, and the old lady selling tickets would only take cash, 30 cents. That's what they paid to see the last picture in the movie.

McMurtry couldn't get published now. He wrote about niggers and 'mixicans' and high school boys fucking heifers for something to do. Things were different back then.

STRID

Things were different then. It's better now, but mostly worse.

Ace is outside and Haven lets him in. He's changed to a short-sleeve dress shirt which shows a tattoo of a little guy peaking out from behind an 8 ball.

ACE HURD

What'd I miss?

STRID

I was getting ready to tell how you ran into Danica Patrick in Houston, trying to parallel park, and you had to do it for her.

ACE HURD

I never said I parked it for her, I watched her try three times before she saw me and drove off.

STRID

The air in the diner has become lighter. Even Strid's macabre humor is bringing smiles.

And this fire they had in London. If you live on the ninth floor you need a 100 foot climbing rope. And no way do you live on any 22nd floor. For me, I distrust everything done by man, including my work, so I stay close to the ground as possible. That includes airplanes. There aren't any terrorist attacks on rental cars.

They've been sitting in the booth for a long time. No one seems ready to leave. The dinner crowd (all seven of them) has come and gone, and there may not be anyone until the truckers. Not counting Justin.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Haven, what you were saying about the business—what do you think will happen?

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

That's a hard one. I'm hoping things don't fall apart as fast or as bad as I think they might. I'm hoping it holds together.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Are you thinking it will?

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

"No—it's just a matter of when. I'm thinking sooner rather than later. It either goes into a slow grind down or something happens—something that throws it into a nosedive. Two or three years ahead, life will never again be the same as tonight."

STRID

Zig, you ever think you might be one of those psycho-Semitics?

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

I got my hopes on you, Strid. No matter what happens, I'm counting on you to keep it fun.

STRID

Okay, let's talk about something else, then? Like I drove out with the flatbed on Monday to get Lois's Escalade. I saw this sign along the highway—serapes and moccasins for the whole family? Who the hell would want that?

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

At least it's something real. Last night, I came in here to two booths full of teenagers who rode out from Coleman for pie, and everybody was on their phones or iPads. Nobody was talking to each other. Made me wish we didn't have WIFI.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Those kid's wouldn't even come without WIFI.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

But they were just sitting there in some other world.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Do you have children, Haven?

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

I don't. At the time I was nowhere near ready.

STRID

Zig, weren't you fifty-two back at Christmas? How's that too old? Didn't I read somewhere that Charlie Russell had a kid when he was ninety?

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

That was Picasso, but for me it just didn't happen.

STRID

Justin gonna be coming back soon. Anybody not thinking about that? Isn't that why we're all still here?

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

Justin's headlights come across the lot. We hear the the door of his unseen vehicle slam shut and he comes to the locked door. Ziggy slips out of the booth and unlocks the door.

JUSTIN

To Ziggy Tell Connie I need to talk to her outside!

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

I'm not telling Connie anything. If you want to come in and ask her something, be my guest.

Justin comes in and stands at the end of the booth. The diner is closed and the four are sitting just as they were at lunch. It's more than he can abide.

JUSTIN

Seein you were working, Connie, I didn't go back to the field. I packed up everything so we're ready to go.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Where is it we're going, Justin?

JUSTIN

In the car, Connie—in the car. I'm not sharing my life with these people.

Menace is the special for the night. Dissent is not on the menu.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

Looking around the booth

Maybe I best go outside and talk to Justin.

STRID

Yeah, you walk outside and we never see you again.

JUSTIN

She's not your's to decide, Strid.

STRID

That right, Connie—he owns you—we got no say.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

Stay out of it, Strid.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

after a long moment

That chalkboard by the door, Justin, says the diner is closed because of a family emergency. I'm family to these guys who don't want to control me. They don't say: 'In the car, Connie.' But you do. And you know why, Justin? Because when it comes down to it you see me as something you own—like a dog.

STRID

And we wouldn't say: '*in the car, Connie*', because your name is Rebecca. We'd say: '*in the car, Rebecca*'."

The menace is palpable.

JUSTIN

There's a lot you don't know about men, Connie. And this lot is no different. If you didn't look like you do they wouldn't give you the time of day. They all want the same thing but they won't admit it.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

But they know that's not happening and they're still here because they care about me. And as much as I care for you, Justin, I'm not going anywhere with you, not tonight, or any night.

JUSTIN

If you know what's good for you, Connie, you get in the car.

ACE HURD

Slides out of the booth and faces down Justin. Ace is in his fifties, compact, strong, but diminutive next to the 200 pounds of violence that Justin brings.

You need to leave, Justin. And you need to leave now.

a stare-down until Justin spins on a boot heel and leaves in the twist of a hurricane. His engine roars, and without lights he sprays rocks out to the pavement.

ACT ONE

SCENE FIVE

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

Does Justin have a gun, Rebecca?

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

A rifle and a handgun.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

Locking the door.

If he comes back, nobody lets him in. We all go into the kitchen and we call the police.

STRID

He won't be back. What good would it do him? Connie's not going anywhere with him.

Soon, Justin's Ford screeches off the highway, heading for the diner. He hits the brakes and skids within five feet of the front door. In one motion he's out of the car, and from close range, shoots the glass out of the door, reaches through and unlocks it. The booth makes to scatter but Ace holds them back. He alone stands up.

JUSTIN

You really thought you were going to pull this off. Steal my wife and get away with it.

The handgun is a Ruger SP101, 357 magnum. with a short 2-1/8 inch barrel. It would be hard to hit anything past ten feet but whatever got hit would be destroyed. Justin stands just out of reach and waves the gun around like a ping-pong paddle. He points the gun at one of them, then on to another every few seconds. Rebecca is not spared.

ACE HURD

You're not shooting anybody, Justin. You're going to walk away and not come back. And if you can't do it, for the rest of your life you'll wish you did. Believe me, Justin, I know what I'm talking about. Never a day goes by..."

Total silence. The revolver is at the ready but not aimed at anyone. Justin is surrounded by a moment of everything that ever was and ever will be. Then, without a word, he walks out, opens a rear passenger door and throws a large tweed suitcase and a duffel onto the gravel. He gets in, starts the car, and rolls out of the lot at a deliberate pace.

For a moment nothing is said.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

One thing about terror—once it's past there's beauty abounds."

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

I should have done something—something.

ACE HURD

Women are always trying to make things better, Rebecca. But there's nothing you could have done. Justin is doing this to himself. With love, you don't get three steps away from it without taking that first step. I don't know when he took that first step, but tonight he took the last one.

CONNIE THE YOUNGER/REBECCA

What were you saying to him, Ace? It got into the middle of him.

ACE HURD

I don't know, but tonight is about you, Rebecca. You don't know how many futures you have, but they're not endless, and the saddest future is always what might have been.

STRID

Bill Parcels get it right, Ace: 'You're what your record says you are.'

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

from somewhere else

Ace—what's so real that it got Justin to walk away from murder?
And what have you been re-living every day of your life?

ACE HURD

Sits back down. He speaks without looking up.

"One night I woke to the police. Came to tell me my two sons had taken an old woman up on the Ortega Highway. Killed her, raped her, and buried her in a shallow grave."

Ace slowly gets up to leave.

STRID

Wait, Ace. I'm coming with you.

Ace and Strid step across a million pieces of shattered glass.

ZIGGY HAHN/HAVEN

Ace!

Ace turns back to the booth.

Is that all you're going to say?

ACE HURD

They caught one of my sons back up there the next morning. He'd dug up the body and cut out her heart. He told them it tasted like chicken.

Ace leaves, followed by Strid.

A long moment passes

Haven slides across from Rebecca. They sit for the longest time without saying anything or looking at each other.

HAVEN

"What do you say we drive into Coleman and get some dinner?"