

PAUL DWAIN

16

Jim Holt

(NORA speed dials her son.)

NORA. Hey! I didn't know if... Oh. Right, I forgot. How are your parents? Oh. I'm sorry. Are you at the restaurant now? No, no, no. I'll get them seat you. No, go ahead. Call me later if you have a chance. Okay. Go, go...and merry...

(No connection.)

(She lowers the phone.)

NORA. ...fucking Christmas.

Scene 3

(Much later, in the early morning hours. PAUL enters in a pair of pajama bottoms. He carries a glass of milk and a pill bottle. He removes the pill and swallows it. He sits on the sofa and thumps through his stack of books.)

(After a moment, he touches the corner of Dwain's notebook, spins it into a reading position. He uses the tip of his finger to tap the cover and begins to read the first page.)

(DWAIN enters from the hallway. He is fully dressed in a raincoat and heavy coat. He carries a battered field pack and wears the new pair of hiking boots.)

DWAIN. Oh. I didn't know you was up.

PAUL. Won't be for long. Just took a sleeping pill. Are you going to sleep?

DWAIN. Yeah. I need to get back to my camp.

PAUL. I thought you were going to stay a while.

DWAIN. I get nervous sometimes, sleepin' indoors.

PAUL. Oh. Well it's really cold out tonight.

DWAIN. That don't bother me. My sleeping bag goes to the tent below. You know what I mean?

PAUL. Yeah, I guess so.

DWAIN. I'm gonna need my book.

PAUL. Oh, yeah, of course. I was just looking at it. This is an interesting sentence. "I was born on the back side of the pasture." Is that true?

DWAIN. Yeah. It's all true. My momma was let out of the tent. Granddaddy was real mad when she got pregnant.

PAUL. Your grandparents kicked her out of the house?

DWAIN. It was just my granddaddy. He let her come and fix the food and all but he didn't want her in the house no more so we lived out there in a tent.

PAUL. I see. *(He reads more of the first page).* That must have been hard.

DWAIN. It was okay, I liked it out there.

PAUL. Really?

DWAIN. It's the best way to live.

PAUL. Outside? On a night like this?

DWAIN. This ain't nothin'.

(PAUL is reading.)

DWAIN. Thanks for dinner, it was real good.

PAUL. Oh, you're welcome. Anytime.

DWAIN. Please tell Miss Nora I said goodbye and thanks for taking care of that cat and all.

PAUL. *(Still reading:)* Right, yeah, Pauline. Okay.

(DWAIN holds out his hand for the notebook.)

PAUL. Oh, yeah. Are you sure you want to go out in this weather?

DWAIN. Yeah. I don't always sleep too good on the inside. Sometimes it's the noises or sometimes it just don't smell right.

PAUL. Our house smells?

DWAIN. No, it's okay. It's just me. The way I am. You know what I mean?

PAUL. Yeah. Well look, do you want me to look at your book?

DWAIN. I don't know. Do you want to?

PAUL. Yeah, sure. I don't mind. I could look it over. Maybe give you some pointers.

DWAIN. You mean about writin' and all?

PAUL. Yeah. Maybe. Are you sure you want to leave?

DWAIN. Yeah. I got to check my camp. But I could stop back on Sunday.

PAUL. Well, that would be good. We cook a big meal on Sunday. Nichole will probably be here. You want to come back then?

DWAIN. I guess I could.

(DWAIN looks at his book on the table.)

PAUL. I'll be careful with your book. I'll look it over, maybe make a few notes for you.

DWAIN. All right.

(DWAIN hefts his pack and moves to the door. PAUL stands and follows him. DWAIN opens the door and PAUL gathers his things around his chest.)

PAUL. Whoa! Be careful out there.

DWAIN. Oh, I will, I'm always careful. See you Sunday.

*(One last glance at his notebook then he leaves and PAUL moves back to the sofa. He suppresses a yawn and turns the next page.)
Lights fade.)*

Scene 4

(Six hours later. Early morning sunshine through the window. The coffee table is covered with empty cans of Red Bull and an empty pot of coffee. PAUL sits on the floor scribbling feverishly on a notepad. DWAIN's book lies open next to him. NORA enters wearing a robe and slippers.)

NORA. What are you doing?

PAUL. Writing a review.

NORA. Have you been up all night?

(He thrusts the coffee pot in her direction.)

PAUL. Yes. Could you make more coffee?

NORA. What are you reviewing?

PAUL. The book.

NORA. What book?

PAUL. This book.

NORA. Dwain's journal?

PAUL. It's not a journal. It's a real book.

NORA. And you're reviewing it? It isn't even published. Why are you reviewing it?

PAUL. I want to get this all down.

NORA. Why?