

# **LEAVING IOWA**

by

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Lights up - a family driving at night

*DON and SIS are sleeping in back seat and MOM is sleeping in front seat. DAD is driving, tired, doing all the things one does to stay awake, but his head nods into his chest once, pops up, again, and pops up. On the third nod his head stays down, fully asleep. After a beat:*

*SFX: Loud truck horn blast. DAD's head snaps up as the FAMILY is startled awake.*

DAD & FAMILY

**AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!**

*Everyone is disoriented.*

MOM

**Oh goodness, honey, what was that?**

DAD

**Nothing, nothing. Just some truck out of control. Probably nodding off at the wheel.**

SIS

**Mom?**

DAD

**Go back to sleep, sweetpea.**

DON

**Dad?**

DAD

**Close your eyes, big guy. Back to sleep, everyone.  
(To MOM) Just some trucker nodding off a bit.**

MOM

**What was it?**

DAD

**Just some crazy sleepy trucker, close your eyes, honey.**

MOM

**Oh my goodness, how long have I been out?**

DAD

**Not long, sweetheart. We're OK. Just close your eyes... and go back to sleep.**

MOM

**Where are we?**

DAD  
Almost there. Close your –

MOM  
Honey, where are we?

SIS  
Dad, where are we?

MOM  
Shouldn't we be home by now? *(Pause)* Honey, are we –

DAD  
No, we are not lost.

DON  
Dad?

DAD  
Close your eyes, big guy.

MOM  
What road is this?

DON  
What's going on?

SIS  
I think he's lost.

DAD  
Close your eyes, sweetie.

SIS  
What time is it?

MOM  
It's 3:30.

MOM & SIS & DON  
3:30!

MOM (CONT'D)  
Honey...

DAD  
Little mix-up.

SIS  
Dad!

MOM  
Do we have a mile marker?

DAD  
No.

MOM  
So we are lost.

DAD  
No, we are not.

MOM  
Then why aren't we home?

DAD  
A little out of our way maybe –

*MOM is looking for mile markers.*  
– but not lost. We're getting there.

SIS  
Getting where?

DAD  
Calm down, honey.

SIS  
Where are we getting? *(Beat)* Where are we?  
*(Beat)* Why isn't anyone answering me?

DAD  
Because it's time to go to sleep. Everyone back to sleep.

MOM  
Help me look for a mile marker.

DON  
Mom, I'm thirsty.

MOM  
In a minute, Don.

*SIS punches DON in shoulder. Together they hunch around DAD.*

DON  
Daaaaaad!

SISTER  
Daaaaaad!

DAD  
I said back to sleep.

MOM  
Is everybody looking? A mile marker would really help.

*They hunch over MOM.*

SISTER  
Mooooooooom?

DON  
Mooooooooom?

MOM  
Everyone, I'm looking for a mile marker. We need a mile marker. Can we all just look for a mile marker?!?!?!?

DAD  
(Snatches map from MOM) Here, let's take a look.

MOM  
Honey, not while you're driving.

DAD  
I got it, got it. I got it.

*DAD has veered into other lane.*

MOM  
Sweetheart?

DAD  
I got it.

*SFX: Lights flare with loud honk.*

*MOM and KIDS look up into the grill of a large semi.*

MOM  
Honeyyyyyyyyyy!!!!!!!!!!

DON & SIS  
DA-A-A-A-A-D!!!!!!!!!!

\*

*Truck passes - a close call.*

MOM (CONT'D)  
(Snatches map back) Give me that! What in heaven's name are you thinking!? (Smacks DAD hard with map)

DAD  
I think I've got it now.

MOM  
(Has had enough) Honey, we need a mile marker! Kids, we need a mile marker!! Can we all just look for a mile marker?!?!?

SIS  
(Unraveling) Mom, this is not fair. This is not fair.

DAD  
Let's all settle down.

SIS  
Mom, it's not fair. It's not fair. (*Stuttering*)  
It's-it's-it's-it's like we're hostages!!!!

DAD  
Stop it or I will pull over. I swear I will.

*While SIS continues, MOM, DAD and DON repeat their lines in a crescendo of chaos until DAD announces that he is pulling over.*

SIS  
Why do we need a family vote if the promise isn't going to matter?

DAD  
Who's not sleeping?

SIS  
Why do we vote if it's not going to matter?

MOM  
Honey, not now!

DAD  
Who's not sleeping?!

\*

DON  
Mo-o-om-

MOM  
Looking for a mile marker ... (*Repeat and build with others to end*)

SIS  
If it's not going to matter then why do we vote? Right, Mom?

DON  
Mo-o-o-om-

MOM  
Need a mile marker.

DAD  
I'm warning you!

SIS  
Right, Mom?

DON  
Mo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-om-

DAD  
I'm warning you. (*Barely controlled*) I am warning you.

SISTER  
(*Adamantly*) Why do we even vote if it's not fair? It's unfair, it's unfair, it's unfair, it's unfair, and I'M NEVER VOTING AGAAAAIIIIINN!

DON  
Mo-o-o-o-o-o-o-om!

DAD  
(*At the end of his rope*) OK, that's it, that is it! That's it! That is it! That is it; I am pulling over!!!!

*DAD pulls over. KIDS' heads snap up and they retreat quickly to the back seat. SFX: Car on gravel. There is silence while DAD collects himself.*

MOM  
We still need a mile marker.

DAD  
Everyone, we are not lost. We've uhhh... just gotten a little off track.

SIS  
Mom?

DON Shh! MOM Shh!

MOM (CONT'D)  
(*To DAD with great concern*) Honey?

DAD  
OK, OK, OK, look. (*Takes off glasses or hat, clearly under much duress*) Look, here's the deal, here's the deal...

*SFX: Airplane with pic of plane. DAD exits as SIS and MOM stay on.*

DON  
Here's the deal. This is a story I promised my Mom I would never tell anyone...

OLDER MOM  
Donald, why so busy, busy, busy?

DON

Which is something you should never do if you write a newspaper column because you almost always end up doing the opposite.

OLDER SIS

Don, we don't have time for this!

DON

(*To SIS*) Wait. (*To aud*) So I fly in from Boston to my home town of Winterset, Iowa, to ask my mom a favor...

OLDER MOM

I'll look for it but I'm not happy about it.

OLDER SIS

We don't have time!

*OLDER MOM and OLDER SIS exit.*

DON

Which led to this. A story I tend to think of as more of an adventure than a story.

*SFX: Boxes dropping and falling.*

OLDER MOM

Good heavens!

OLDER SIS

We can't find it.

DON

A story that started with a not-so-simple request to take a short drive with my father to his childhood home, and ended up at a hog farm somewhere in Kansas.

*Enter BOB and JUDY. They hand DON a card. He signs and hands it back. The dialogue continues over the action.*

That's right, a hog farm, signing a postcard for my new friends Bob and Judy.

JUDY

Mighty nice.

BOB

Yes sir.

DON

And guess what, Bob only had one hand –

BOB  
 Yep!

*Bob holds up the stump hand.*

DON  
 And proud of it, too.

BOB  
 Clipped off by a bailer -

JUDY  
 Bob.

BOB  
 - and tell you what, didn't hurt one bit.

JUDY  
 Bob!

BOB  
 Not one bit.

JUDY  
 Bob!

BOB  
 She's right.

JUDY  
 Let the man tell his story.

*BOB and JUDY exit, talking.*

BOB  
 When you're right, you're right - and she's right.

*OLDER SIS reenters, dusty and furious.*

OLDER SIS  
 Don, we can't find it. Why would you do this?

DON  
 I didn't think you'd understand.

OLDER SIS  
 What, too complex?

DON  
 Please.

OLDER SIS  
 What, too much for us non-writers to figure out?

DON  
Oh c'mon! Please not this  
tired tune again.

OLDER SIS  
No, you c'mon, and go  
down there and tell her  
to stop!

*The argument crescendoes. Suddenly  
OLDER MOM appears and out of respect  
they stop.*

DON (CONT'D)  
Hey, Mom.

OLDER SIS (CONT'D)  
(trailing)  
Tell her to – Hey, Mom.

*OLDER MOM's breathing is a little  
heavy, holding a box. Very stern.*

OLDER MOM  
Donald, we thought you were coming home for the  
dinner and for Joey's birthday, not this, not  
now. Well, I hope you're happy, but –

*Sets the box down.*  
I have a dinner to prepare.

*SIS goes to the box and blows off dust  
as MOM begins to exit.*

DON  
Mom –

OLDER SIS  
Wait –

*MOM stops as OLDER SIS takes an urn out  
of the box.*  
– you found him?

*They move in, then are still.*

DON  
My father passed away three years ago, and  
well, we'd yet to honor a fairly simple  
request.

OLDER MOM  
Good heavens.

DON  
But not without good reason. See, Dad left us  
the week after Joey was born. Four days to be  
exact.

OLDER MOM  
This is all my fault, all my fault.

DON

So Joey came in when Dad went out, and, well,  
*(Beat)* we left him in the basement.

OLDER MOM

I just left him down there.

DON

Mom, we all did.

OLDER SIS

No, Mom, you were helping \*  
 with Joey.

OLDER MOM

No, no, I know, but for three years! I could be  
 arrested for something like this.

OLDER SIS

Mom, you can not be arrested.

OLDER MOM

Well, then humiliated, which is worse. But why  
 he wanted to be in this thing in that way I'll  
 never know. *(Upset near tears)*

OLDER SIS & DON

Well... it was cheaper.

*They start to laugh.*

OLDER MOM

Oh, for heaven's sake.

DON

Or at least unpredictable.

OLDER MOM

Now stop it.

*Laughter.*

DON

So, where was he?

OLDER MOM

Oh well, I'd rather...

DON

Oh c'mon.

OLDER SIS

It's fine, just tell us.

OLDER MOM

On top of the fuse box.

OLDER SIS

Really?

DON

Perfect.

OLDER MOM

Well, behind the peaches, on a shelf, on top of the fuse box.

DON

He spent most of his time down there anyway.

OLDER SIS

He loved your peaches.

OLDER MOM

OK, that's it.

*Light laughter again.*

OLDER SIS

You know what, Mom, he's right.

DON

I'm right? What? Not possible.

OLDER SIS

Yeah, well, I said it, so let's go do this.

*Starts to walk towards the back yard.*

DON

Whoa, whoa, whoa, where are you going?

OLDER SIS

Well, I thought, maybe we could go -

DON

To Grandma and Grandpa's. Right?

OLDER SIS

What?

DON

Well, that's what he wanted, we all know that.

OLDER MOM

Donald?

DON

I'm sorry, Mom, but I'm not just going out back and sling Dad into the neighbor's yard.

OLDER MOM

Oh, for heaven's sake.

OLDER SIS  
But Don, Mount Union is -

DON  
Yes, two hours. Plenty of time to get back for the dinner.

OLDER SIS  
Hold on. Do we even know who lives there now?

DON  
Mom?

OLDER MOM  
I don't think so.

OLDER SIS  
So, what, Don? What are you going to do, knock on the door of some stranger and say, excuse me, I'm here to fertilize the lawn?

DON  
Oh, that's nice.

OLDER MOM  
Oh, for heaven's sake!

OLDER SIS  
I mean really, how long has it been?

OLDER MOM  
Well, OK, let me think now. We took a drive up that way a few years ago... I remember we could not believe that anyone would paint a beautiful house like that -

<u>DON &amp; OLDER SIS</u>	<u>OLDER MOM</u>
Yellow - why, I'll never know.	yellow - why, I'll never know.

OLDER MOM (CONT'D)  
Oh, you two. Now look, I should do this. I'm the one who left him down there.

DON  
No, Mom, you have company coming.

<u>OLDER SIS</u>	<u>DON (CONT'D)</u>
Look, I'll get a baby sitter and go with you.	No no no, please. Mom needs you.

*Following dual dialogue lines overlap, to a crescendo. Ad lib in context as necessary to fill until DON silences.*

OLDER SIS (CONT'D)  
 Look, I'll get a baby  
 sitter and that's that.  
 Mom has company coming  
 and you have an early  
 flight tomorrow. And  
 you're right about this.

OLDER MOM  
 No, no, this is my  
 problem. You are right  
 Don. It's time. Don't  
 fight me on this. It's my  
 fault. I'll go. You  
 should rest.

DON  
 No, no, no, please, please, please STOP!!! (*All  
 quiet*) Now none of us are any good at saying  
 what we feel. I mean, we're from Iowa. Look,  
 we've all been busy, maybe too busy, but  
 c'mon, if not now, when? Let's do this.

*Beat.*

OLDER MOM  
 (*Excited*) OK, I'll get the keys.

DON  
 Now that's the Browning spirit.

OLDER MOM  
 (*Very excited*) Oh, and something for you to  
 snack on.

OLDER SIS  
 Mooom?! He's fine.

DON  
 I'm fine.

\*

OLDER MOM  
 (*Fading and frantic*) Don't tell me what I  
 already know...

*MOM exits. SIS is back at box.*

OLDER SIS  
 You did it. You started The Unstoppable Helping  
 Machine.

DON  
 Hey, that's good. (*Takes out pad to record*)

OLDER SIS  
 Give it a break, Don.

DON  
 I'm a writer, that's what I do. You're an  
 irritator, that's what you do.

OLDER SIS  
 Well, OK then, look what else I found down there.

DON  
Noooo! Noooo! **My arrowhead!**

OLDER SIS  
No, **MY** arrowhead.

DON  
You thief! I **knew** it!

OLDER SIS  
(Feigning innocence) **What?**

DON  
Which trip was this?

OLDER SIS  
Hell.

DON  
Or someplace **close**.

*Mom enters with energy carrying a snack bag, traveler's guide, coat, steering wheel and a ball cap.*

OLDER MOM  
OK, OK, OK, OK, **here we go**.

DON  
Mom, it's official, she's a liar, a crook, and a thief.

OLDER MOM  
(Focused elsewhere) **That's great, sweetie. OK, now here's some Krispie Treats and a snack.**

*Don is getting in the car.*

DON  
**A Krispie Treat and a snack?**

OLDER SIS  
**Krispie Treats are not snacks?**

OLDER MOM  
**No, they're a treat.**

*MOM hands him the hat, guide, and jacket (which can cover the steering wheel). DON tosses the bag of treats and his jacket back to SIS without MOM seeing. He keeps the hat and guide and steering wheel.*

OLDER MOM

Oh, you hush. Here's a jacket, just in case.  
Oh, and I found one of your old hats, and look  
what else - *(Pause)* one of your father's  
traveler guides.

DON

Mom, this thing's a hundred years old.

OLDER MOM

Well, your father would want you to have it.

DON

Well, OK then.

OLDER MOM

Now, remember, if it rains, you gotta pump it -  
one, two, three, and off. It's been acting up  
lately. So it's one, two, three, and -

OLDER SIS

And off! He's got it. Get going.

OLDER MOM

She's right, your Uncle Phil and Aunt Phyllis  
are stopping by.

OLDER SIS

What?

OLDER MOM

Stop it. Well, you know how they love to talk.

OLDER SIS

Not as much as they love to drink.

OLDER MOM

Now be nice, your Aunt Phyllis' bursitis

OLDER MOM (CONT'D)  
is acting up something  
awful.

OLDER SIS & DON  
is acting up something  
awful, we know.

OLDER MOM (CONT'D)

I said be nice.

OLDER SIS

Save yourself, get going.

*SFX: Car Starts. MOM and SIS move back  
to the side of the stage as they call  
after him to create distance.*

*Much overlap and energy as DON pulls out and they are calling after him. DON is waving as he calls back.*

OLDER MOM

**Now don't forget, one, two, three and**

OLDER SIS & DON

**Off!**

*Doorbell rings.*

DON (CONT'D)

**Yep, I'm off!**

*Puts car in drive and screeches out.*

OLDER SIS

**I can't believe it!**

OLDER MOM

**Be nice. Call when you get there? (Quick kiss)**

OLDER SIS

**He'll call. Don't be late.**

DON

**I'll call.**

*Don waves.*

OLDER MOM

*(Calling out)* **Remember it's one, two, three, one, two -**

*Offstage we hear Uncle Phil.*

UNCLE PHIL

**Hey there! Ding ding ding in the back. Anybody home?**

*Enter PHIL and PHYLLIS.*

OLDER MOM

**Hello Phyll -**

OLDER SIS

**Hi Uncle Ph -**

\*

*MOM and SIS attempt to respond but are steam-rolled by PHIL and PHYLLIS. They open their mouths to talk, but PHIL and PHYLLIS cannot be stopped. PHYLLIS repeatedly reveals her bursitis pain as she talks (Bam, oh boy, etc.)*

UNCLE PHIL

**Don't worry, not staying, dropping by.**

AUNT PHYLLIS

Coming in, going out. Need to pick up a compress.

UNCLE PHIL

Say, where's Donny?

AUNT PHYLLIS

*(Imitating)* Where's Donny? Where's Donny? Where's Donny? Like a broken record, drive me to the coo-coo hut. *(Winces and waves hand)* Bam. OK, ignore that, I'm great, damn bursitis. So where's Donny?

UNCLE PHIL

Nope, nope, nope, not staying, don't worry, here you go, you know what to do with 'em. *(Hands dish over)*

AUNT PHYLLIS

They're beans, for Pete's sake, she oughta know.

UNCLE PHIL

They're beer battered.

AUNT PHYLLIS

She knows they're beans, for crying out loud. *(Winces)* Bam, oh boy, long day. I'm good.

UNCLE PHIL

So, where's our birthday boy? *(Calling out)* OK, READY OR NOT, HERE WE COME! Wait 'til you see! Where is he?

AUNT PHYLLIS

Where do you think? School, Ding Ding.

OLDER SIS

Well, it's Saturday.

UNCLE PHIL

OK, let's do this.

OLDER SIS

He's three.

*Uncle Phil heads off for a short second.*

UNCLE PHIL

*(As he leaves, offstage, etc.)* Close your eyes. Close 'em. Close 'em.

AUNT PHYLLIS

Do it. Close 'em. You are lucky your Aunt P was there or little Joey would have had a pellet gun. What's a five-year-old going to do with a pellet gun?

OLDER SIS

He's three.

*Uncle Phil brings in a unicycle with a big red bow.*

UNCLE PHIL

Hey, I had one. OK, open up! One, two, three.

OLDER MOM

Oh my...

OLDER SIS

A Unicycle.

AUNT PHYLLIS

Now, this he can have fun with, Uncle Ding Ding.

UNCLE PHIL

She's the captain, I'm the cook. Where should we put it?

AUNT PHYLLIS

This will keep him going. How old?

UNCLE PHIL

Four, Ding Ding, but who's counting?

OLDER SIS

Nobody.

UNCLE PHIL

I cannot wait to see him on this.

OLDER SIS

Me, too.

*PHYLLIS tries to move the unicycle.*

AUNT PHYLLIS

Where should we put it?  
(Winces at bursitis pain)  
OK, bang, (Winces) there  
it is. Phil, take it,  
take it, take it, take  
it, take it.

UNCLE PHIL

Got it, got it, got it.

UNCLE PHIL (CONT'D)

Guess who needs a compress?

OLDER MOM

I think we have one.

AUNT PHYLLIS

Nope, nope, nope, not staying. I'm fine. Phil, get me a drink.

UNCLE PHIL

Got it – guess we're staying. Say, where's Donny?

*MOM, PHIL and PHYLLIS exit into the house with SIS trailing, looking back towards where DON drove away.*

OLDER SIS

If he's late, I swear I'll kill him.

*SFX: Music is established. Lights change. DON is driving, adjusts mirror, stretches, tries on his old cap. He glances at the urn. DAD enters, takes in the scene. DON picks up the traveler's guide as he is obviously thinking of his father, DAD strolls into the car, leaning against the back seat.*

DON

OK, mirrors, check, check, seat adjust, aaaand, yep...

*Checks odometer.*

*(To urn)* OK, Dad, it looks like, uuuhh, 146 miles to go here. Not too bad.

*DAD shrugs.*

Hey, I apologize for you having to ride a little shotgun here, but I suppose anything's better than a fuse box. Sorry about that. Oh and hey, let's get something straight here, just in case you're thinking I'm doing this little drive out of some kind of guilt, well, you're right. Yep, mark it down – guilt, trip. Guilt-trip. Funny. Funny, yet metaphorical. Yep, I'm a writer – *(Stops abruptly)* Whoa, new stoplights, very nice, very nice. *(Turning)* OK, and here it is – Wells Little League Park, still looking good. *(Points)* Right there, ka-bang, first home run. Yep, remember that? *(Pause)* Right there, left field, ka-BANG, my last home run. Right there.

*Picks up the traveler's guide.*

Dad, boy, if I had known that was it, the last one – oh well, that's the deal, right?