

P e l o p o n n e s u s

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by Tim J. Lord

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Cast of Characters

Jared	the younger brother, late-20s
Tom	the elder brother, and an Army veteran, early 30s
Rachel	an only child, late-20s
The Chorus	A chorus of men. A chorus of women. They resemble the people of the small towns of Southern Illinois. They resemble the ghosts of the people of the small towns of Southern Illinois. They resemble a flock of crows.

Casting notes

- All the characters, except for Tom, Jared and Rachel are played by the Chorus.
- The Chorus is divided into four parts: Man 1, Woman 1, Man 2 & Woman 2.
- Man 1 & Woman 1 are probably older than Man 2 & Woman 2—just how old or young they are is entirely open to interpretation. In the moments where they speak as a chorus their parts are designated thus:

Man 1: M1	Woman 1: W1
Man 2: M2	Woman 2: W2

- The towns of New Athens and Sparta are real places in Southern Illinois. Their populations are pretty homogenous; but this is a heightened world set in a contemporary America, so directors are strongly encouraged to cast outside of “traditional” racial lines.

Scene

The towns of New Athens [pronounced AY-thens] and Sparta, Illinois. The set is simple, sparse. It could all take place in Jared’s bar. Hardwood planks. Wood furniture. Empty doorframes. Something to represent the bar. And a feeling of stretching on forever.

Time

Just yesterday, last year or so.

Some things about this play

The characters in this play speak simply—a sort of generic, rural accent; but they’re most certainly not caricatures and they’re not simpletons.

The world of the play is heightened but should always remain firmly grounded. It is very much inspired by sound and music. Along the righthand sides of the pages you will see bracketed text: these are suggestions for songs that might be playing during the scenes inside which they are found. They are, at the very least, the songs playing when I wrote the scenes. Any music used should always sound as if it’s coming from an old jukebox or mono AM radio, whether or not these objects are actually present.

The choral parts of the play have been orchestrated between the 4 parts of the chorus. This is merely one way of performing these. Directors should feel free to redistribute these choruses as they see fit.

*raise the stone and you shall find Me
split the wood and I am there.*

(fall.)

September 22, sunset.

The sound of crows scavenging the harvested fields.

Jared:

It should begin with a song... But I'm no singer. Can't play a guitar. So I'll begin with the river, the Kaskaskia, flowing across Central and Southern Illinois to join the Mississippi. Our dad would take us on float trips in an old, aluminum canoe. My brother and me had shoes reserved for these trips, old beat-up sneakers to protect our feet from the rocks.

We would strap on life vests and float through the rapids.

The Kaskaskia made this a place where farming was the natural choice, and that's what my family did from when our great-grandparents first came here.

But we weren't farmers my brother and me. And this isn't a story of what was. This is Illinois. It's a story about singin' and lovin' and workin' and dyin'. A story of what came to be.

[scud mountain boys, "silo"]

Car lights flash, revealing TOM, standing in front of a long-abandoned house, an Army duffle slung over his shoulder. The lights go out and a car door is heard to open and shut.

Jared (approaching):

Tom?

Tom:

You found me, Jared.

Jared:

Come home.

Tom:

I am.

Jared:

You know what I mean—

Tom:

Yeah. I know.

Jared:

When'd you get in—?

Tom:

How...? You never said.

Jared:

...Car wreck. She was in Dad's old truck. It stalled...at a crossroads. Some lunatic came barreling into her.

Tom:

Christ... fuckers

(silence)

Jared:

Come home, Tom. Have a drink with me.

Tom:

I needed to see the old house. I think about it...a lot these days. Look at it there.

Jared:

What were you doing in Kansas City?

Tom:

No one's lived here since we left?

Jared:

No... What—?

Tom:

I always thought I'd live out my days in this house and you'd be the one coming to visit me.

Jared:

Come home.

Tom:

I am.

Jared:

Then come to the bar and let me get you a drink.

Tom:

Now...you're talkin'.

Jared:

You've already had a few, haven't you?

Tom:

In St. Louis.

Jared:

Shit. Are you bleeding?

Tom:

Just a little cut.

Jared:

We'll get a drink, get this cleaned up.

Tom:

I was in Kansas City because I wanted to look west and not have anything get in the way.

Jared:

...I know.

Tom:

Fuck... Mom.

Jared:

I know.

You're not in any—

There isn't gonna be any trouble, is there?

Because of your comin' back?

Tom:

Jared—

Jared:

Your forehead...

(silence)

Tom:

Just get me to the bar, Jared.

I need another drink.

TOM exits.

JARED lingers a bit before following.

September 23, morning—Equinox.

The Chorus in the fields. A chorus of fall.

During the chorus, TOM & JARED at the graveyard. No one else but the priest there to lay their mother into the ground. Black coats and ties, a clumsy bandage on Tom's forehead. The priest has an umbrella to protect him from the rain, but JARED & TOM go without. Throughout the service, TOM looks up into the sky, like it's been a while since he felt rain falling on his head.

The Chorus:

M1: The rest of the crops to harvest.
W1: Close the windows
M2: Leaves're turnin'
W2: Leaves're fallin'
M1: The fields to plow under.
W1: Seal up the house
W2: Leaves're turnin'
M2: Leaves're fallin'
M1: Collect the wood.
W1: Katie bar the door
M1: Chop it up. M2: It's pretty
W2: They're brown
M2: They're brown
M1: Burn it.
W1: Winter's comin'
W2: It's pretty
W1: Collect the stores
M1: Burn it.
M2, W2: Wind howls
W1: Get out the blankets
M2: Everythin's
W2: Blowin' everywhere
W1: Gone cold
M1: Summer's gone
W1: Summer's done
M2, W2: Summer's over
W1: Rake the leaves
M1: Burn the leaves.
M2: Watch the leaves
W2: Fuckin' leaves

The Chorus (cont'd):

M1: Lay your dead under the ground when
M1, W1: they're done.
W1: Let them give
back to the earth.

M2: Don't say,
W2: Don't think
M2: An early grave
W2: Lead me into
M2: No such thing as
W2: An early grave

M1: Ashes to
W1: Ashes to
M2: Dust to
W2: Dust.
ALL: *(exhale.)*

Priest:

Ashes to ashes...

Tom:

Dust to dust.

The priest exits. TOM & JARED motionless.

Tom:
Can I... I didn't...

Jared:
Yeah. Sure.

JARED moves away.
TOM kneels down; it's a hard thing to do.

Tom:
Bless me, Mother, for I have sinned.
It's been...
 a long time.
But I haven't done anything wrong... No more'n most.
 An' maybe less'n some.
I'm tired, Mom, and this life is wear'n me down.

W2:
He's questioning all his promises.

Tom:
I know I promised, Mom...

M1:
Just needs a little sunshine

W1:
Not that it'll do any good.

M2:
It is what it is.

The CHORUS looks up at the sky and the sun comes out on TOM.

The Chorus are audible again, repeating the beginning of their fall chorus, but it's less chaotic; we can hear the individual voices.

The Chorus:
M1: The rest of the crops to harvest.
W1: Close the windows
M2: Leaves're turnin'
W2: Leaves're fallin'
M1: The fields to plow under.

W1: Seal up the house
W2: Leaves're turnin'
M2: Leaves're fallin'

September 23, afternoon.

JARED & TOM in the bar, still in funeral clothes. A sign that reads, "Closed." JARED is setting up chairs from off the tabletops, wiping them down. He is smoking and has a glass of beer which follows him around the room. TOM at the bar, drinking.

[marty robbins, "el paso"]

Tom:

—Kansas City, man. The air is cooler. People are younger. The Beer flows more freely.

Spent some time in St. Louis too, the "Gateway to the West," but it's a lie—the town is an endpoint. And Chicago—

Jared:

Fuck Chicago!

Tom:

Fuck Chicago! But KC is the real deal. Things begin there. Things can change and grow.

The city, see, is built on hills, like Rome. And to the West, the land opens up—the Great Plains. It's mostly farmland, like here, but there's space—everything isn't right on top of you...

—What is it about your "home"? It's fuckin' stupid whatever it is—this shithole town...

JARED drops his glass; it shatters.

Jared:

shit

JARED goes to get something to clean up.

TOM goes to pick up the pieces.

JARED starts to cry.

TOM cuts himself on the glass but just watches the blood pour out of his hand. JARED comes back to the mess, watches the blood for a while before kneeling down next to TOM. He cups his hands below the streaming blood.

They look at each other eye-to-eye.

Jared:

Jesus Christ, you're a fuckin' mess.

(silence)

(They start to laugh heartily.)

September 23, afternoon.

Rachel's house. She is setting out a simple lunch and cleaning up. DAN enters, dirty from working outside. He is carrying the mail.

Dan:

Hey, babe.

Rachel:

Just in time.

Dan:

Awesome. You workin' today?

Rachel:

Heading in as soon as I get cleaned up.

DAN opens a letter. Eats and reads.

Rachel:

This Sunday... got someplace I wanna take you. Found a real forest. The river breaks up the land just enough so it's no good for farming and the trees can grow. They're old, Dan. Hard to believe that Illinois used to be just covered by them.

Stopped there the other day, climbed on top of this big rock—weird to see a boulder like that in Illinois too. Rain had cleared and there was just enough sky for the sun to come out for a last peak—and the wind was blowing its last summer breath. You could feel it.

And the crows are back. You could hear 'em out in the fields, fighting over the corn the harvesters missed. Digging in for the long winter.

So we should go—

Dan:

Son of a bitch.

Rachel:

What's up?

Dan:

You know how I keep finding them Indian things on the hills off the southwest paddock?

Rachel:

(nods)

Dan:

I heard the university would pay for stuff like that and for the rights to excavate, so I sent some up and they want to get started in spring.

Rachel:

What's wrong with that?

Dan:

The money they pay sucks! And I didn't hear nothin' all season, so I was making plans to clear it out, start leveling it so I could plant a bigger crop next year. Fuck!

Rachel:

So tell 'em, no—

Dan:

They're sayin' I can't. Bullshit Antiquities Act gives them a "reasonable amount of time" to suck money offa me—

Rachel:

So...not this spring, but next—

Dan:

We need that money now, Rach. Unless soy suddenly goes up. Shoulda never switched out from corn. They're payin' bank for corn these days...

God dammit!

Rachel:

We'll make it up. I can pick up more shifts—

Dan:

You're workin' too many as it is. That drive to Ste. Genevieve is killin' us on gas.

Rachel:

That's where the job is—

Dan:

And when are we gonna start havin' kids?

Rachel:

How are we gonna afford 'em if I'm not working and the University isn't payin' what you thought—?

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way. We'll figure it all out.

DAN grabs a beer out of the fridge.

Rachel:

I thought you were quittin'.

Dan:

It's just beer. Just need to... It's all cool. I'll work it all out.

Rachel:

Ok.

I gotta go.

Dan:

Yeah. See ya.

Rachel:

Love you.

Dan:

(nods)

September 23, evening.

TOM is sitting outside the bar. On his forehead and hand are clumsy bandages. The sound of crows in the distance.

[wilco, “dash 7”]

Time, here, as the sun goes down.

RACHEL enters.

Rachel:

You were on the bus yesterday.

Tom:

Yeah. So were you.

Rachel:

And I'll bet you're Tom.

Tom:

Right again.

Rachel:

So why'd you get off the bus in Sparta?

Tom:

I was asleep.

Rachel:

Oh.

Tom:

No. That's a lie. I was drunk

Rachel:

Oh?

Tom:

Well, yeah. But that's not why I stayed on the bus.

Rachel:

You were following me.

Tom:

Yeah.

Rachel:

I'm spoken for.

Tom:

But here you are...
Oh. You work here, don't ya?
Kind of dangerous, isn't it? With the old town rivalry?
And they don't much take to drinkin' over in Sparta

Rachel:

They talk a lot more than do anythin' about it.

Tom:

You should still have someone to escort you. Just in case.

Rachel:

I can take care of myself.

Tom:

Yeah.

Rachel:

So, you're gonna be a good boy, right?

Tom:

I forgot about the sunsets here.

Rachel:

Huh?

Tom:

And the rain too. At the graveyard this morning. The rain was...

Rachel:

Wet.

Tom:

So very wet.

Rachel:

...Your brother will—

Tom:

There's no one here right now. Just us two.

Rachel:

I'm supposed to be on the clock.

She starts to enter the bar.

Tom:

Could you get me a beer then?

Rachel:

We'll see.

She is gone.

The CHORUS is a chorus of ghosts.

Tom:

I should go back to Kansas City.

Chorus:

His father lost the farm, the house too, burnt the machinery
the tractor,
the thresher,
the plow.

Lots did.

But his father — *Joseph Sutton* —

He killed the banker that came to take it away.

Left his wife to deal with the mess, left his boys fatherless

Left the wife of the man he killed a widow,

Left the widow to raise a child alone

Killin' ain't nothin' new of course,

wasn't the first to shed blood in these parts.

Wasn't the first, won't be the last.

The killin' keeps comin', keeps at ya.

Better to take it all down, stop the flow.

September 24-October 4.

TOM & RACHEL in the bar. Music playing on the jukebox. The Chorus is present as townspeople in the bar. They get in the way of Tom & Rachel's flirtation

[Ieroy van dyke, "walk on by"]

Tom:

Who is he?

Rachel:

My husband. I go home to him at night.

Tom:

What's his name?

Rachel:

I go home to him at night.

Tom:
That's his name? He oughta take your name.

Rachel:
It's Dan.
Excuse me.

September 26

Tom:
Daniel and Goliath.

Rachel:
It's *David* and Goliath

Tom:
Never was much good at Sunday school.

September 29

Rachel:
I go home to him at night.

Tom:
But you're thinkin' about me

Rachel:
(laughs)

Tom:
He's not much is he?

Rachel:
Played for Sparta's football team.

Tom:
So his best days are behind him—

Rachel:
He hates New Athens. I have to lie to him about what town I work in.

Tom:
And he's a teetotaller.

Rachel:
How'd you—?

Tom:
(shrugs)

Rachel:
Well, he is in theory. Doesn't practice much that he preaches though.

October 1

Tom:
You ever been to Kansas City?

Rachel:
If you keep botherin' me like this I might just take a trip there.

Tom:
I could show you around.

Rachel:
I'd rather you show me someplace else.

October 4

*TOM steals a kiss from RACHEL outside the bar.
MAN 2 & WOMAN 2 spying from around the
corner.*

Tom:
I don't even know your last name.

Rachel:
Why would you wanna know somethin' like that?

Tom:
I barely know anything about you.

Rachel:
You don't wanna know that much.

Tom:
Tell me. Come on.

Rachel:
Everett. Rachel Everett.

*TOM squeezes her ass. She slaps him and walks
away.*

October 5, afternoon.

JARED is hauling cords of wood.

TOM is chopping the logs.

Beers and cigarettes. An old radio playing tinny on an AM station. TOM is laughing as he chops, JARED too. They speak between bursts of laughter.

[eddy arnold, “make the world go away”]

Jared:

And then you leaned out the window and said, “Hey, Mr, Train Robber! I’ve got lots of money! Come over here!”

Tom:

That poor guy...

Jared:

Came right up to you, all ready to take your souvenir bag of fool’s gold—

Tom:

That poor guy. Some actor tryin’ to make the kids happy, and I shot him in the face with a cap gun.

(More laughter.)

Jared:

It’s amazing they didn’t put up Wanted posters for us around the park. He wasn’t the only guy we “shot.”

Tom:

God, what a trip...

Diminishing laughter...

Silence, except for the chopping and dropping of wood.

[merle haggard, “okie from muskogee”]

Jared:

You been here two weeks.

Tom:

Is it two?

Jared:

I’m gonna have to hire you on at the bar.

Tom:

I'm earnin' my keep.

Jared:

That's not what I—

Tom:

Then what? What?

Jared:

When are you leaving?

Tom:

When do you want me to go?

Jared:

I don't, I just—

Tom:

I never meant to abandon you, Jared.

Jared:

I know.

Tom:

I never meant to leave you here.

Jared:

I know.

Tom:

I didn't leave because of you.

Jared:

I know.

Tom:

Good.

Jared:

It's just—

Tom:

I'm sorry you got left here with them. I'm sorry I got out and you got left here with them—

Jared:

I don't give a god damn about that.

Tom:
Yes, you do!

Jared:
Fuck you! Wha'doyou know?

Tom:
I know.

Jared:
Good for you.

Silence, except for the chopping and dropping of wood.

Jared:
You've been seein' a lot of Rachel—

Tom:
Yep.

Jared:
You meet her guy yet?
Dan?

Tom:
You're out of line!

Jared:
You don't know shit.

Tom:
I can still take you.

Jared:
Like Dan 'ld take you?

Tom:
I can take care a myself.

Jared:
Yeah.

Tom:
And she's not why I'm stayin'.

Jared:
You're stayin'?

Tom:

.....

Jared:

.....

Tom:

Yeah. If you'll...

Jared:

Of course I will. It's just...

I mean you just, one day, you just—

Tom:

I enlisted.

Jared:

And you were gone.

Tom:

It's what happens when there's a war on.

And they re-upped on me

Jared:

Still, you been out a few years.

Tom:

Not that long—

Jared:

They told us you were coming home.

Tom:

And I did. But that didn't mean back here.

Jared:

Eleven years, Tom.

That's how long it's been since I seen you.

Tom:

No.

Jared:

Tom.

Tom:

What?

Jared:
Do the math.

Tom:
 (he does the math)
Yeah. Ok.
I guess it has been.

Jared:
What happened? Why didn't you...?

Tom:
Couldn't stay over there anymore.
Couldn't come home.

Jared:
But...where? Were you in KC the whole time?

Tom:
I was around, all over.
Only been in Kansas City a little while,
maybe a month or two before I sent you the postcard.
I don't want to talk about the...time between.

Jared:
Ok.

Tom:
But I do want to stay.

Jared:
Ok.

Tom:
And it's not just her—Rachel. It's this place. I missed this place, fuckin' shithole, I missed it.
It's you too. It's...all of it together.

Jared:
I knew ya did. I wanted you to stay.

Tom:
Yeah. Shithead.

Jared:
Fuckface.

Tom:
Penis wrinkle.

Jared:
Cum bubble.

Tom:
Dumb—
You fucker, get us a couple of beers.

Jared:
...Tom.....

Tom:
Yeah?

Jared:
...Nevermind.

JARED exits.

TOM looks after JARED a while.

Silence, except for the chopping and dropping of wood.

October 6, Sunday morning.

The Chorus in town, in church. An appeal to God, Almighty Father.

(The voices speak the following text, each at their own pace, with their own emphases, like the voices of Babel rising up to a God about to destroy the Tower.)

The Chorus:

Man 1 & Woman 2

No god
Not out here
Left long ago
Couldn't stand
The loneliness
Doesn't get it
Doesn't stay
Sun goes down
Nights get longer
No heat
Dead cold
We come here
We call
Call him down to us
But I know better
He's not there
He's long gone
Won't come back
Nothing to make him stay
He came
He created
He departed
Left us to toil
Toil and suffer
Toil and suffer

Woman 1 & Man 2

Come Christ
Come God
We are your kin
Your kin are sinners
Don't turn your back
Thank you for the crops
Thank you for your bounty
Take our plight to heart
Cruel winter nights come]
We beg, we plead, we pray
All for your glory
We are bad
We repent, are never worthy
Your patience
Your providence
Is all the bread
All the blood
We need
Take my blood
My blood for your blood
Your blood for my blood
Complete us
We suffer and toil
Suffer and toil
Suffer and toil

JARED in town.

The Chorus grow silent. JARED comes out of the market with some groceries. Music playing from inside the store.

[the beach boys, "sloop john b"]

There is a YOUNG BOY in the middle of the street. JARED sees the boy and stops.

Eventually...

Jared:

You okay there, little man?

Lose your mom? ... Your dad?

Maybe you shouldn't stand in the road. ... I realize there's no cars out right now... But you never...

What's your name? I'm Jared. ... What's your name?

Don't you like talking?

Another long silence.

JARED takes a step towards YOUNG BOY,

YOUNG BOY takes a step back.

JARED repeats, same result.

[rachel's, "with more air than words"]

Jared:

It's okay. Really. I just want to—

YOUNG BOY picks up a stone.

Jared:

—to help..

YOUNG BOY throws the stone at JARED. It hits him in the chest and falls to the ground.

Jared:

Hey!— *(another stone)*

Hey now!— *(another stone)*

Stop it!

A flurry of stones now. At first, JARED makes to try and stop him, but soon a stone hits him in the forehead and he stumbles. When JARED looks up again, the boy is gone.

[tarnation, "game of broken hearts"
into "halfway to madness"]

October 13, Sunday night.

JARED at the bar. TOM at a table, drinking.

RACHEL at a window.

Only the sound of the rain for a while.

Rachel:

It's wet out there.

Tom:

Yep.

Rachel:

Quit starin' at me, will ya?

Tom:

Do I have to?

Rachel:

Won't do you any good.

Tom:

It feels all right.

Rachel:

What do you want from me?

Tom:

I just want you. Wanna treat you the way you deserve—

Rachel:

Stop saying that already.

Tom:

I don't really get you.

Rachel:

No shit.

Tom:

It oughta be simple enough.

Rachel:

Nothin's simple.

Tom:

You don't love him.

Rachel:

Is that supposed to mean somethin'?

Tom:

Does the truth hafta "mean somethin'?"

Rachel (low, so only Tom can hear):

Stealin' kisses when I'm drunk ain't love.

Tom:

You gotta start somewhere.

Rachel:

Well you reap what you sow.

Tom:

I wasn't here for planting, don't wanna miss the harvest too.

The door opens and a CUSTOMER walks in and up to the bar. TOM & RACHEL pay him no mind.

Jared:

What can I get ya?

Customer:

What's good here?

Jared:

Everything's about the same.

Customer:

Bud then.

Tom:

Miss that view from Quality Hill.
Kansas City looks out over the whole world.

Rachel:

Go back then.

Tom:

Well sure—

Rachel:

By yourself.

Customer:

You're Jared, yeah?

Jared:

Yeah...Do I know—

Man:

Nuh-uh.

(silence.)

Rachel:

...fuck me!

Tom:

Huh?

Rachel:

What do you think's gonna happen here between us?

Tom:

Love story?

Rachel:

Where're we gonna go? What're we gonna do?

Customer:

She's a looker, ain't she?

Jared:

Huh?

Customer:

That Rachel—

Jared:

Who are you?

Customer:

I'm a messenger.

Jared:

You're a little peculiar is what you are. What's the message?

Messenger (formerly "Customer:"):

No good can come of this. And it'll only get worse.

Rachel:

I like bein' with you, I like the way you treat me.
But that don't mean shit.
Dan was the exact same when we first got together.

Tom:

How does that change how things turn out between us?

Jared:

What're you talking about?

Rachel:

That's not what I mean.

Tom:

Don't matter.

Messenger:

Don't matter.

Jared:

What don't matter!

Tom:

Jared? Are you mindin' other people's business?

Jared:

No, I'm—

Tom:

Can we talk about this...outside?

Rachel:

...Yeah.

They exit.

Messenger:

You're not doing a very good job of it.

Jared:

You're going to have to pretend like I don't know what's going on.

Messenger:

Take a whiff. Can't you smell it?

Jared:

Talk plain, Mister.

Messenger (sniffing):

Smells like war.

Jared:
What do you want here?

Messenger:
Just deliverin' that message.

*A pause as the MESSENGER looks at JARED,
waiting, expecting something.*

Jared:
So I guess I'm supposed to tip you now—

Messenger:
It's your message to do with as you please.
Or, maybe...maybe you're not meant to do anything, just to know.
Don't worry. You'll get it eventually.
You will. You'll get it.

Jared:
You finish that drink up then find yourself someplace else.

TOM re-enters alone, walks to the bar.

Tom:
Gimme a beer, will ya.

Jared:
Sure, Tom.

Messenger:
He's lookin' poorly.

Tom:
You pourin' beers for ghosts?

Jared:
Huh?

Tom:
You got two beers here, half full.

Jared:
No...those...

MESSENGER shakes his head, no.

Jared:

I changed the keg. I was just clearing the line.

Tom:

Oh. ... Thanks, brother.

Fuckin' women, huh?

TOM walks away, sits alone.

Messenger:

He's steeling himself for battle.

Jared:

Tom?

Tom:

Yeah?

Jared:

We're all alone, yeah?

Tom:

Yeah, Rachel said she was going home. Why? You all right? You're lookin' a little pale.

Jared:

Bit of a chill is all.

Messenger:

Drink up, friend. That'll make you feel better. Come on raise your glass for a toast.

What was it your grandad used to say?

Jared:

Let us eat and...?

"Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die."

Messenger:

That's the one.

MESSENGER clinks Jared's glass.

End of fall.