North Woods

A Short Play by

Margaret O'Donnell

Run Time: 10 minutes

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NORTH WOODS

By Margaret O'Donnell

Tom, underdog youngest brother
Lenny, alpha oldest brother
Chuck, easy-going middle brother

A fishing cabin on a lake in the north woods in late summer. Forty-something brothers Tom, Lenny, and Chuck are gutting fish after a day on the lake. They are nearing the end of their annual fishing trip. They sit at the gutting table outside their family's long-time vacation cabin, battling constant swarms of flies as they gut. It's hot. Tom tries to keep up with cleaning. Lenny lets the guts land where they may. Lenny drinks beer from a can, quite heavily, and gets tipsy as they gut; Chuck and Tom abstain.

CHUCK

(*wiping sweat from his brow with his forearm*) What a life, huh bros? Don't we got it good! (*he looks around at the scene, appreciatively*) The Doug fir, the giant cypress – and old granddaddy over there (*points with his head*) good old Sequoia Sam. Pop said it was how old? Like a hundred, right? back when he was a kid comin' up here with *his* granddad.

LENNY

Yeah, well, take a good look, Chucky, a real good look. These Doug firs aren't long for this world. Heat stress. Drought. And why?

TOM

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We *know*, Lenny, we *know*. Climate crisis. (*he flings guts to emphasize each word*) Selfish. Short-sighted. Greedy. Careless. Human-caused. Climate change!

LENNY

Right! When was the last time we caught a twenty-pounder in this stream, huh? So long ago I can't remember. We used to catch the limit every day, forty-pounders! And now/

TOM

Jeez, Lenny! Will you lighten up? This is our *vacation*. Our honest-to-God, once-a-year *retreat* from wives – I mean spouses (*nodding to Chuck*) - and kids and jobs and cleaning out the garage! Our time to enjoy the few years we got left before we can't hike in anymore/

LENNY

You know, Tom, it's people like you, turning a blind eye, the 'let somebody else take care of it' *bozos/*

CHUCK

(*jumping up and pointing to the stream, off stage*) Oh. My. God!

Lenny and Tom both jump up, and look.

LENNY

What?

TOM

What's happening?

CHUCK

A *huge* coho!! (*running towards off-stage, and peering down to a stream*) Man, that was awesome! He musta jumped three feet out of the water! (*returning to the table to keep gutting*) Betcha he's got a whole bunch of cousins coming this way tomorrow. Good day's fishin' in store, bros.

LENNY

You did not.

CHUCK

What?

LENNY

You can't see the stream from here. Not even three feet over the stream. You just wanted to stop an important climate disaster discussion that I was *winning.* And I'm always going to win, because I have the *facts*. Tom don't read, so he has NO facts. All he knows is what's comfortable and convenient for him/

TOM

Ya know, big bro, you are a giant pain in the ass. This year it's climate change. Last year it was…let me think…taxes, right? And before that, it was immigrants overrunning the country, and then it was criminals goin' scot-free/

LENNY

Yeah, 'cause I'm the only one in this whole family researchin' the facts! The rest of you don't care if our kids have to live in chaos/

CHUCK

Whoa. I'm cookin' tonight, right? As as cook, I think I can justly say that I'll spit in the fish batter unless we change the topic, now. Agreed?

Grunts, then silence for a few beats as the brothers keep gutting.

TOM

(*agitated, swatting flies, throwing a bucket of water over the table*) *This* is what happens when you don't cover up the guts and you don't keep sluicing the table.

LENNY

Aw, man up, Tom. Flies is always part of gutting. Nuttin' wrong with flies.

TOM

(muttering) Sloppy.

LENNY

I admit it. I'm a sloppy guy. Good thing I got you to clean up after me.

TOM

(throws down his knife and standing) Forget it! I'm going in. You finish.

CHUCK

Don't be mad, Tommy. I'll clean and you gut.

TOM

(*grumbling, but sitting again*) All right. But no gut tossing! (*he glares at Lenny*)

They work in silence for a few beats.

TOM

I hate flies.

LENNY

Part of the fun. Think of the stories we can tell. The time flies carried off a whole coho head/

TOM

Disgusting.

LENNY

(*Clearing his throat, setting down his knife*) Bros, the time may have come to move our annual reunions to a more…comfortable environment, even, shall we say, a more luxurious environment. We're all getting older.

TOM

(*muttering)* No shit, Sherlock.

LENNY

(*ignoring Tom*) Leave the old family cabin to the younger generation. Rest our creaky bones in actual beds instead of slats. Have some electricity, for cryin' out loud! Toilets. Running water. And just in time, I found a deal for us - a sweet little mountain cabin in Colorado, outside of Grand Junction. Hiking, no fishing. All the amenities. Fully furnished. Incredible price.

TOM

No.

LENNY

No? No? That's all you've got to say? This deal won't last forever/