

Between the Houses

By

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A forty-two year old curling icemaker tries to put his life back together after a divorce and heavy drinking cause him to lose his job and threatens to destroy his personal relationships.

INT. MACHINE ROOM. EARLY MORNING.

1

PAUL STEVENS (42) lies on a green lawnchair in the corner of a curling club machine room. Around him, machinery runs loudly.

Stevens is dressed in a black polo shirt that is half un-tucked from a pair of faded jeans. He is wearing scuffed white running shoes.

Lying beside the chair is an empty bottle of scotch. A small trickle of scotch runs towards the drain in the floor.

Slowly Stevens opens his eyes. Turning over in the chair, he groans and climbs to his feet.

He picks up the scotch bottle and gives it a shake. He holds it up to the light before tossing it onto the lawnchair.

Staggering across the room towards the sink, Stevens pulls his shirt off over his head and throws it on the ground.

Hands shaking slightly, Stevens grips the edge of the sink before turning on the faucet.

Stevens splashes water onto his face, cups water into his hand and drinks, and then stares down at the gold wedding band on his hand.

Stevens stands over the sink for another moment, breathing heavily, his chin pressed to his chest and his eyes staring downwards, unfocused.

Gripping the edge of the sink, Stevens vomits loudly into the sink.

He picks up his shirt and wipes the water from his face then he makes his way for the door.

INT. CURLING CLUB. EARLY MORNING.

2

Stevens stands in the lobby holding a mug of coffee.

Swirling the coffee slowly, he stares out the window across the parking lot.

The sun is barely peeking over the trees as club staff walk from their cars with warm winter coats pulled over uniforms.

Before they reach the doors, Stevens leaves the lobby.

INT. ICE SURFACE. DAY.

3

Stevens walks behind a scraper as it travels down the ice. Snow slowly forms on the blade as he goes.

Rock music can be heard playing from a set of speakers on the side of the four-sheet rink.

Stevens hums along with the music, head bobbing slightly as he scrapes.

INT. MACHINE ROOM. NIGHT.

4

Small beads of water trickle down Stevens' arm from his pebblecan (a tank of water worn as a backpack with a single hose that is used to spray a fine spray of water over the ice to create the pebble that is necessary for curling ice) as the door shuts behind him.

He sets the pebble can on the counter, begins to adjust the straps, and change pebbleheads.

AARON SULLIVAN (21), follows Stevens into the room. Sullivan peels off his grey curling gloves and puts them in his locker.

AARON SULLIVAN

That's it for the night?

Stevens looks up from the pebble can.

PAUL STEVENS

Yeah, that's it.

AARON SULLIVAN

Perfect. I'll see you on Thursday then.

Sullivan grabs his black winter coat.

PAUL STEVENS

Yeah, see you Thursday.

Sullivan exits the room.

Stevens looks out the small door window to the ice surface while peeling off his brown windbreaker.

Players are sliding across the ice, warming up for their games.

Satisfied, Stevens turns the deadbolt lock closed.

He opens one of the lockers and rifles around among a pile of clothes and emerges with a full bottle of rye.

He grabs a plastic cup out of the locker and slams the door shut.

He pours a generous amount of whiskey, swills it around in the cup, then downs it. He pours and downs another.

He opens his laptop on the tool counter. The desktop picture is a photo of him and a BRUNETTE WOMAN in her late thirties.

Stevens looks away from the computer screen and bites his lip.

He quickly shuts the computer down and packs it and the bottle of rye into a black shoulder bag emblazoned with a logo for the Canadian Curling Tour.

EXT. APARTMENT PARKING LOT. MORNING.

5

The parking lot is empty except for a few cars scattered about the lot.

Stevens walks up to a light blue four-door half-ton truck with a Tunneau cover stretched over the bed.

A faded green duffel bag is slung over his shoulder.

He opens the rear door on the driver's side and tosses the bag into the truck.

Shutting the door, Stevens walks back to the rear of the truck and looks inside then gives the scraper blades and spray boom in the back a little shake to ensure that they are safely secured and slams the tailgate shut, satisfied.

Climbing into the cab, he fires up the ignition and an eighties rock station blares over the radio.

INT. TRUCK. AFTERNOON.

6

Stevens drives down a two-lane highway tapping his fingers to the music.

The road is flanked by tall pine trees with snow-laden branches nestled atop outcroppings of Canadian Shield.

The truck is littered with gas receipts and fast food wrappers and a half-empty bottle of sports drink rolls around on the floorboards.

The zero in 140km/h on the speedometer is obscured by a small photo of the same brunette woman that was in Stevens' desktop photo.

INT. TRUCK. NIGHT.

7

The clock in the truck's dash shows 11:53pm as it passes a sign saying "Sault Ste. Marie. Next Exit."

Stevens drives through a commercial area and looks out the window to his left at the passing buildings.

He slows the truck to take a right-hand turn, not bothering to stop completely for the red light.

He pulls the truck into a multi-story commercial hotel.

INT. ICE SURFACE. EARLY MORNING.

8

Stevens shuffles backwards down the ice.

A fine spray of water flies over a logo in the ice that reads "Safeway Sault Ste. Marie Open" as he pebbles.

Counting his pace silently, his pants make a gentle swish as he shuffles.

He gets to the end of the sheet and then turns to come back down the next sheet.

JOHN BRUCE (56), tall, with greying, balding hair walks out to the ice surface. Bruce is wearing dress shoes, khakis, and a burgundy dress shirt underneath a white and black Canadian Curling Tour jacket.

Bruce waves to Stevens and then walks over to shake his hand firmly.

JOHN BRUCE

Hey Paul, glad you could make it.

Stevens tucks the pebblehead underneath the pebble can's shoulder strap and his thumbs into his belt loops.

PAUL STEVENS

Glad to be here. It was a long drive yesterday, but you gotta go where the money is, right?

JOHN BRUCE
(matter-of-factly)
Right.

Bruce runs his fingers through his hair.

JOHN BRUCE (CONT'D)
How was the hotel? I hope that
worked out okay.

PAUL STEVENS
Got in at midnight. Pretty much
conked out as soon as I checked in.

JOHN BRUCE
Well, that's good.
(beat)
How's everything going at
home? How's the new apartment?

PAUL STEVENS
Everything's going well. Both clubs
are running smoothly.

Stevens looks away from Bruce momentarily and down at his
hands.

Bruce notices Stevens wedding ring.

JOHN BRUCE (CONT'D)
Are you sure you're doing okay? If
you need some time off, we can get
someone else to work the spiel...

Stevens quickly stuffs his hands into his pockets.

PAUL STEVENS
(defensively)
No, no, I'm okay. I'm here and
ready to work.

JOHN BRUCE
(resigned)
If you need anything, and I mean
anything, you know where to find
me.

Stevens untucks the pebblehead and gets ready to go down
another sheet.

PAUL STEVENS
Yeah, see you later.

Stevens pebbles another sheet keeping his head down as Bruce watches him.

Sighing, Bruce turns to leave the playing area. He gives one last wave to Stevens.

INT. ARENA MACHINE ROOM. LATE MORNING.

9

Stevens drops the pebble can to the makeshift work station that has been set up in the back of the arena.

He runs his hands through his hair. Then bringing his hands down in front of his face, he focuses on his gold band.

Taking the ring off of his finger, he turns it over in his hands.

He reaches inside his bag, pulls out a bottle of whiskey, and takes a large swig.

He cracks open a can of Coca-Cola, takes a large drink, then tops up the can with a generous pour of whiskey.

INT. ICE SURFACE. EARLY AFTERNOON.

10

A bagpipe plays a long opening note.

The piper leads the curling teams into the playing area.

The players wave at the fans, who are clapping along in time with the music.

Wearing navy blue jackets with sponsors on the breast and sleeves, Team Jones break away from the line of teams and head down the middle of the arena between the sheets of ice.

Stevens leans up against the arena boards. He is wearing a black Canadian Curling Tour jacket and is holding the can of Coca-Cola in his left hand.

TED GREEN (53), wearing a green volunteer jacket with the logo of the bonspiel joins Stevens against the boards.

TED GREEN

Here it is, the moment of truth.

Stevens looks up at Green.

PAUL STEVENS

What do you mean?

TED GREEN

First draw. Time to see if the ice
will hold up.

PAUL STEVENS

(slightly annoyed)
The ice will hold up.

He takes a sip from his pop and looks away.

An ANNOUNCER (54) dressed in an expensive suit holds up a
microphone.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to
the first draw of the 47th annual
Safeway Sault Ste. Marie Open. We
are happy to welcome some of the
top teams in the world here to
Sault Ste. Marie.

Green claps along with the crowd, but Stevens' face remains
impassive.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Each draw we honour one of the
competing teams. In this opening
draw we honour, from the High Park
Curling Club in Toronto, Ontario,
wearing blue, Team Jack Jones...

Green and the rest of the fans burst into applause as the
members of Team Jones turn and wave.

As the applause dies down, Green turns back to Stevens.

TED GREEN

(curious)
Why aren't you clapping?

Stevens looks up at Green slowly.

PAUL STEVENS

When you've seen enough of these
things, they all start to look and
sound the same.

TED GREEN

How long have you been doing this
then?

PAUL STEVENS
(tired)
Twenty years or so.

Green's eyes widen.

TED GREEN
Must have started when you were
what, 22 or 23?

PAUL STEVENS
Something like that.

He takes another sip from his can as another round of
applause is heard from the fans.

TED GREEN
Well, my name's Ted.

Green extends his hand to Stevens. Stevens shakes it.

TED GREEN (CONT'D)
I make ice at my local club, but I
can never seem to get my ice
anywhere near what you get out
here. I'd love to pick your brain
sometime.

Stevens turns fully towards Green.

PAUL STEVENS
Yeah, sure. Just give me a call
anytime.

TED GREEN
A bunch of us volunteers are going
for a beer after tonight's draw at
the Ale House. You're welcome to
join us.

PAUL STEVENS
Maybe I will....Have a good one.

TED GREEN
You too.

Stevens and Green shake hands again and Green turns away.

Another round of applause dies down.

ANNOUNCER
Before we begin, I'd ask you to
stand and remove your hats for the
(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (cont'd)
signing of our national anthem,
which will be sung by Sault Ste.
Marie's very own Alexandra
Campbell.

The fans all stand as ALEXANDRA CAMPBELL (21) takes the microphone to sing the anthem. She is dressed in a long, flowing dress and heels.

Stevens listens to the first few notes of the anthem before leaving.

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

11

Stevens turns a corner and appears on Division Street.

He pauses briefly at the edge of the sidewalk and looks in both directions, leaning on a lamppost for support.

To his left is a brightly lit commercial district.

To his right are a few restaurants, but the lights quickly fade into a residential area.

From the inside of his coat he produces a small flask, which he opens, and takes a drink.

Making up his mind, he steps off of the sidewalk and into the street, stumbling slightly.

He crosses through the middle of the intersection quickly before stepping onto the sidewalk on the other side.

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

12

Stevens approaches the Ale House Pub. The pub is a small establishment overshadowed by taller buildings to either side.

As he approaches he pauses to look at the sign over the door.

He enters the pub.

INT. ALE HOUSE PUB. NIGHT.

13

Stevens makes his way through the bar, passing tables and booths.

The light in the bar is dim. The furnishings are made of wood and the walls are covered in sports memorabilia.

At the far end of the room is a small stage lit by a spotlight.

On the stage is a singer playing an acoustic guitar. A few patrons have gathered around the foot of the stage.

Stevens approaches the bar and leans against the rail, his eyes vaguely locked on the musician. His fingers tap along with the music.

A female BARTENDER (23) comes over to take his order.

BARTENDER #1

What can I get you?

He turns his head away from the stage.

PAUL STEVENS

Scotch on the rocks.

The bartender nods her head and begins to make the drink.

PAUL STEVENS (CONT'D)

On second thought, make it a double.

BARTENDER #1

You got it.

The bartender slides the drink across the bar to Stevens.

BARTENDER #1 (CONT'D)

That will be \$6.50 please.

Stevens pulls out his wallet and passes the bartender a \$10 bill.

PAUL STEVENS

Keep the change.

He picks the drink up off the bar and looks around.

TED GREEN (O.S.)

Hey, Paul! Over here!

He looks to his left to see Green sitting at a small table with a couple of others.

All four men are looking over at Stevens. One man is still wearing a volunteer jacket from the bonspiel.

Green is waving at Stevens.

Stevens makes his way over to Green's table.

He pulls up a chair from an adjacent table and sits down.

INT. HOTEL ROOM. MORNING.

14

A cell phone rings repeatedly on the bedside stand, buzzing angrily as it vibrates.

Wrapped up in one of the bedsheets, Stevens lies face-down on the bed. Other sheets and the comforter are strewn about the rest of the bed and the floor.

He groans and then reaches over to the phone which shows the same picture of the brunette as before. Above the picture is the name "Valerie".

Not looking at the screen, he hits the "Ignore" button on the phone.

He drops the phone back on the stand and rolls over onto his back.

A crack of light shines into the room as he opens his eyes.

Throwing off the sheet, he sits up in the bed and rubs his eyes.

He sits on the side of the bed for a few moments.

Walking to the window wearing nothing but his underwear, he pulls the curtains back to let in the full sunlight.

Turning around, he surveys the hotel room. His clothes are half hung over the room's desk chair and half lying on the floor.

A two-thirds empty whiskey bottle sits on the desk along with a couple empty beer bottles. Beside them are his wallet, some change, and his keys.

He then walks into the bathroom and the sound of running water can be heard for a few moments.

He emerges from the bathroom with a cup of water in hand, sits down on the edge of the bed, and picks up his phone.

He scrolls to the voicemail and puts his phone on speaker.

VALERIE (O.S.)
Paul, it's Valerie.

Stevens' shoulders perk up slightly.

VALERIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I got your message from last night
when I woke up this morning.

He closes his eyes and lets his upper body fall back onto the bed.

VALERIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's not going to work this time,
just like it didn't last time. You
can't fix everything with a drunken
voicemail message.
(annoyed)
You need to stop this childish
behaviour and get on with your
life..like I have.
(frustrated)
I'm tired of waking up to messages
from you.
(beat)
Just stop calling me.

The phone message ends and he drops the phone to the bed, covering his face with his hands.

PAUL STEVENS
Fuck.

He lies on the bed for a few moments longer before his phone starts ringing again.

PAUL STEVENS (cont'd)
Hello.

JOHN BRUCE (O.S.)
(firmly)
Paul, where are you? The next draw
is scheduled to start in an
hour. We need you here.

Stevens glances over at the clock on the bedside stand. It reads 9:07am.

PAUL STEVENS

Umm, I'm on my way.

JOHN BRUCE (O.S.)

Get here as soon as you can.

The phone line goes dead.

Stevens sighs and tosses the phone aside again.

He grabs the cup of water and drains it completely before getting up from the bed.

Moving toward the bathroom, he picks up the pair of jeans from the night before from the floor and pulls them on quickly.

He emerges from the bathroom with a bottle of mouthwash in his hand, taking a swig from it then rifles through his travel bag for a clean shirt.

Tucking the shirt into his jeans, he grabs his keys, wallet, and the change from the desk and leaves the hotel room.

INT. ARENA BAR. EARLY AFTERNOON.

15

Stevens walks into the arena bar. There are bags under his eyes and the eyes themselves seem less than fully open. He immediately walks over to the bar.

A BARTENDER (32) comes over to serve him.

PAUL STEVENS

Could I get a Canadian please?

BARTENDER

Sure thing. That'll be \$4.50.

The bartender reaches into the refrigerator and pulls out a Canadian. He pops off the top and slides it across the bar.

Stevens rifles around in his pocket for some money. He pulls out a handful of coins and picks a few out.

PAUL STEVENS

Thanks, here you go. Cheers.

BARTENDER

Cheers.

Stevens grabs the beer and turns away from the bar. He scans the room.

The awkwardly-placed tables are sparsely populated with people eating homemade lunches and drinking a round.

A number of televisions line the walls and all of them are showing the action out on the ice. A roar of the fans can be heard over the television as one of the players makes a shot.

Stevens sits down at an empty table with his beer. There is a bowl with trail mix and beer nuts in the middle and he pours some of them out on a napkin.

John Bruce comes up behind him and places a hand on his shoulder. Stevens jumps slightly.

JOHN BRUCE

Paul.

PAUL STEVENS

Have a seat.

Stevens gestures at one of the empty chairs.

Bruce sits looks across at Paul.

JOHN BRUCE

That's an interesting choice of lunch...

Stevens doesn't say anything, but takes a sip from his beer.

JOHN BRUCE (CONT'D)

That was good work to get the ice ready in less than an hour.

PAUL STEVENS

(dismissively)

It's not the first time that I've had to make ice quickly...

JOHN BRUCE

Still, I was worried.

(beat)

And I am still worried...I mean, you look like shit right now...

Stevens takes a long pull on his beer and glares at Bruce over the top of the bottle.

PAUL STEVENS

I just didn't sleep well last night. Must not be used to the hotel bed. And then I missed my alarm this morning.

Bruce sighs. He looks at Stevens for a moment and then to either side at the adjacent tables. He then leans over the table towards Stevens.

JOHN BRUCE

(frankly)

Paul, I'm not stupid. Something is going on with you. I don't know if it's the whole Valerie thing, but I'm worried.

PAUL STEVENS

Don't be.

JOHN BRUCE

(urgently)

And I'm not the only one. The Board is worried too, they can see that something's up.

(beat)

I'm trying to fight for you, but this morning didn't help...

Stevens stares away from Bruce.

PAUL STEVENS

Just tell them I'm fine. Tell them that I slept through my alarm.

Bruce leans back in his chair and looks at Stevens for a few moments.

Stevens tosses a handful of snacks into his mouth, his eyes still averted.

JOHN BRUCE

(sighing)

Okay Paul, but if you don't pull it together I don't know how long I can keep them from doing anything.

PAUL STEVENS

(tired)

I'll be fine.

Bruce pushes back his chair and stands up.

JOHN BRUCE

Just don't screw this up for yourself, Paul.

(beat)

I'll talk to you later.

PAUL STEVENS

Yeah, later.

Bruce leaves the table and exits the bar area.

Stevens drains his beer then starts to pick at the label.

The sound of cheering and clapping can be heard from the televisions which show the replay of a triple-takeout being made.

The TELEVISION ANNOUNCER speaks as the broadcast heads for a commercial break.

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

It's going to be a long way back
for Jones now.

INT. HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

16

Stevens is laying on the bed in his hotel room fully clothed holding a plastic cup filled with whiskey.

The window curtains are open and flashes of lights from passing vehicles play on the walls of the room.

One bright flash illuminates the desk which is home to two whiskey bottles, one empty and one nearly full.

Stevens' phone is beside him playing the last bits of Valerie's message.

The message gets to the end and Stevens sits up to take a large sip from his cup of whiskey then another.

Stevens then gets up, grabs the whiskey bottle from the desk, and refills his cup.

Turning back to the bed, he picks up his phone, scrolls down the screen, and hits "Replay Message."