

# GAME NIGHT

by Indiana Jones

2016 IUSB English Department Award Winner Honorable Mention

Everyone is there. Nicky is there, with his girlfriend Denise who hates everyone, so they are both stirring their drinks and messing with their iPhones in the living room and not talking to anyone but each other. Devin and Suzy are there, although they'd said they wouldn't be. They're talking with Wayne, who has just arrived, who is telling them a story in his typically animated, highly gestured manner. Margot is there, busying herself in Amber's kitchen because she didn't bring anyone with her and everyone there so far is mostly couples. Carlos is there, occupied with the table of cookies and crackers and cheese cubes and the little cupcakes Linda brought, of which by Linda's count he's already had six. Abby and Jenna and Penelope are there, although not one of them RSPV'd one way or the other. Tanner is there with a woman none of them has met before, who has introduced herself as "Alicia with four syllables." All of the men quickly decide she is the most attractive woman there and commence treating her accordingly. Ellie is there, but when Tanner arrives she slips out onto the back patio to smoke a cigarette, returning sporadically only freshen her drink. Luke shows up, finally, in a pair of basketball shorts and a shirt with the sleeves cut off, smelling like a good game, and he and Amber argue briefly in the hall about whether or not he needs a shower. ("It's a party, for God's sake," he says to her, and she says, a lilt in her eyebrows, "Exactly," before walking away from him.) Mark is late because Claudia, his wife, died in a car accident seven months ago and he has trouble finding a sitter for their two-year-old daughter, Sofia, especially on the weekends. Whenever Mark is not in a room everyone mentions how strong he is, how bravely he carries on in the face of "such a tragedy," but no one mentions how keenly they feel Claudia's absence. Blaine is not there because he was in love with Claudia, too, which everyone knows, and he feels as if everyone has failed to acknowledge the true extent of his own grief—as if because he was not Claudia's husband he is not entitled to as much sadness over her loss—which everyone also knows, although none of them quite knows how to handle it. Roger is there but Kelly is in Italy for a conference so Roger spends most of the first part of the evening "helping" Margot in the kitchen. At the party's halfway point Roger and Margot are by far the drunkest. A guy in a bright yellow shirt shows up and says Nicky

and Denise invited him, a fact the couple verify, and then the threesome sequesters themselves on the couch and talk to one another very quietly but with much laughter and many knowing looks. Mark has gone out onto the patio, partially to keep Ellie company but mostly to escape Jenna's tendency to treat him with a motherly delicateness, which Abby has talked to her about, but Jenna doesn't listen to anybody. Luke is freshly showered and has traded his gym shorts for blue jeans and his ripped tee for a striped button down Amber put out for him. Penelope is trying to talk to Nicky, Denise, and the guy in the yellow shirt, because she and Nicky used to be very close but they've grown apart and Penelope credits this mostly to Denise's antisocial nature. Nicky and Denise have been together less than a year but it seems very serious. For the last three months Penelope has been nearly single-minded in her mission to get Denise to open up. So far, her attempts have been unsuccessful, and tonight appears to be moving in a similar direction: the guy in the yellow shirt is saying something but his body language suggests it is not for Penny's ears, and Denise and Nicky have given him their full attention. Wayne has taken over Amber's iPod, declared her catalog unsatisfactory, and linked his phone to Amber's stereo via Bluetooth, which she didn't even know was possible. Wayne's music choices encourage Alicia with four syllables to lure Tanner to the open space between the living room and the open-plan dining room, where she dances sexily against him and he looks at everyone like he's accomplished something in life, finally. Ellie comes in during this, to use the restroom, the door of which she slams so forcefully behind her that a framed picture falls off the hallway wall and crashes on the floor. Everybody looks. Amber rushes over with a dustpan and a broom; Abby comes to assist, kneeling with Amber at the site of the destruction, Amber instructing her to mind her bare knees on the broken glass. Abby says to Amber in a low voice, "I told you: one or the other." The music is still playing and Alicia is still gyrating against Tanner, but Tanner is distracted by Abby and Amber and the scene Ellie has caused. Alicia says, "Who was that?" loud enough for everyone to hear her over the music. Mark has come inside and is standing near the patio doors with his arms crossed over his chest and his fingers stuck in his armpits. Nicky and Denise and the guy in the bright yellow shirt look over at the commotion and then back at each other and then they all stand up at once, just as Amber is coming back across the room with the broom and the dustpan full of broken glass and broken pieces of the picture frame. Nicky says, "Well, we gotta be goin'," and everyone starts embracing Nicky and Denise and shaking the hand of the guy in the bright yellow shirt and telling him it was nice to meet him, though no one really did. The guy in the bright yellow shirt is short with scraggly blond hair and two gray eyes set

too close together. The combination of these characteristics has the effect of highlighting, for Jenna, as she is politely shaking his hot wet hand, something dodgy and collusive about him, and after they are gone she says to everyone, "Well that guy was total sketch, huh," and Margot says, "Tinder's finest," and, laughing loudly, knocks over her glass of wine. Penelope says, "What do you know," and Margot says, "Please, they're totally all going to fuck. Sorry, hon," she says to Amber, who is wiping up the spilled wine and wishing she hadn't invited Margot. Penelope leaves shortly after that, taking Jenna with her. Abby stays. Roger offers to freshen Margot's glass and Margot thanks him in a voice that sounds like a child's voice, then Wayne, Luke, Carlos, Roger, and Margot all go out onto the patio to share a joint. Devin started to go with them but had been discouraged by the look Suzy shot him. Ellie has still not emerged from the restroom but Alicia has to pee so Amber shows her to the bathroom in the master bed. When Amber comes back to join the others Tanner is saying to Linda, Mark, Devin, and Suzy, "Like, it's been a fucking year," and Suzy says, "Been longer than that, hasn't it," because Suzy has never liked Ellie. "I just wish she'd get over it already," Tanner says, and Suzy says, "Seriously," and Amber says, "Keep your voices down," because she knows her walls act like microphones. Linda says to Tanner, "You guys dated?" and Suzy snorts and Devin chuckles and Tanner says, "Oh yeah." Abby is in the kitchen trying to break apart a mass of bagged ice. She's drops it on the floor a few times, shaking the house. Amber is wishing she had gone outside to partake in the joint smoking. Linda is checking her text messages and saying she can't stay much longer, she's opening in the morning, and Marks says he's only got the sitter till eleven-thirty. Suzy is scooping M&Ms out of a bowl and palming them into her mouth. The music has stopped. When Alicia comes back, she whispers something in Tanner's ear. Suzy compliments Alicia's dress, which is sleek and black and backless with a neckline that scoops very low in front, but she doesn't mean it. Alicia thanks her but she doesn't mean it either. Alicia looks at Tanner and says, "Is she still in there?" and Tanner rolls his eyes and tells everyone it's probably best if they get going. Amber notices that it is not even eleven o'clock and her heart sinks but she doesn't say so. They haven't played a single board game; the games are all stacked on the coffee table in the living room, a pile of bad jokes. Tanner and Alicia with four syllables leave through the back so they can say goodbye to everyone outside. Suzy hollers down the hall, "They're gone, El, come out, come out," and Amber says, "Would you stop that." Everyone outside comes inside, red-eyed, heavy with the dense, sweet smell of marijuana. Amber thinks that Roger and Margot are standing too close together and she blames Margot because everyone knows Roger is disgusting and can't help

himself—then again, she thinks, Kelly puts up with it, so what business is it of hers? In a moment when none of them is saying anything the toilet flushes and the sink runs and the bathroom door opens and Ellie comes out, straightening her top, looking at all of them sheepishly, sitting down at an open seat at the table, next to Suzy. Carlos leaves, then Linda, followed by Mark. When Margot says, “I am *drunk*,” Suzy looks at Amber and says, “She can’t drive,” and Roger says, “I’ll give her a ride, I can give her a ride,” is reminded by Amber that he lives on the west side and Margot is in the opposite direction. “She’s on our way,” Devin says, after Suzy nudges his arm. “It’s really okay,” says Roger, a gob of spit slopping out of his mouth, which he attempts to casually wipe off the table top with his shirtsleeve—but Devin insists, and when they leave Margot goes with them. Roger leaves at the same time and then it is just Amber, Ellie, Luke, Wayne, and Abby. They are all sitting around the dining room table. Wayne taps at his cell phone and the music flares up. The sound of a saxophone jives about them, a metallic, dusty high-hat and hollow kick drum kicking out an unpredictable beat. Ellie says, “Coltrane?” and Wayne nods. Ellie looks at Amber and says, “Sorry about earlier.” Amber reaches out and squeezes Ellie’s arm. Luke says, “We should all do a shot,” and goes into the kitchen, returning with a bottle of Jameson and five shot glasses. He pours one for each of them and they all lift their glasses and clink them together above the center of the table and take the shots down, toasting to nothing. Amber asks if anyone wants to play a game and Ellie says sadly, “Aren’t we?” but doesn’t elaborate. No one seems interested in playing. Ellie leaves; Abby goes with her because she came with Penelope and Jenna. Amber, Luke, and Wayne sit around the dining room table. Luke and Wayne are next to each other on one side and Amber is across from them. When the music sounds especially mournful, Amber says, “It was supposed to be game night,” and Wayne says, “I’d be down to play something.” But now Amber doesn’t feel like it. She asks if there’s any more pot but Carlos brought the pot and took it with him when he left. When Wayne leaves he shakes Luke’s hand and gives Amber a big hug and makes a big deal about what a great time he had, but his sincerity is betrayed by his effusiveness and she suspects he’s trying to make her feel better, which is only embarrassing.