

PREDICTION ADDICTION

Act I

Scene opens in a sterile room. Beige walls and white tile floors. A group of eight men sit in a circle, some are laughing and loudly talking, others are looking at the floor or rubbing their faces in a worried haze.

It is a gathering of the local Gambler's Anonymous. The leader of the group is Matthew "Coach," McConnell. A middle-aged man, seemingly young in the crowd of older gentlemen. He is neatly dressed and every aspect of his clothing has been taken into consideration. Pants have sharp creases, shirt is perfectly starched. His shoes are free of scuffs and every button is clasped.

He looks intelligent, but at the same time has quirks of an anxiety-ridden man. He constantly taps his foot, shakes his leg, and glances from person to person. Occasionally, he runs a finger through his hair and sighs deeply. He appears even more uptight in the midst of the lackadaisical crowd.

While some are genuinely concerned about their future and getting rid of their addiction, the rest are there for free food and to appease their families. These individuals are non-attentive in class and not supportive of their group friends. Their sarcasm and apathy make a very unstable group and Coach is a nervous wreck from trying to accomplish the impossible.

COACH:

"Okay, group. How did we do this week?"

LLOYD:

"I was tempted, but I didn't gamble once this week!"

His excitement over his accomplishment is evident. He smiles at Coach, and sits up in his chair. The older man has graying hair at the temples, with a tight sweater-vest around a red and gold plaid shirt. His kakhi pants are as neatly pressed as Coach's.

HAM:

"Ha!"

He laughs in the middle of the serious group. Another older man with a large stomach hanging over gray wool pants. He wears a blue shirt and the top buttons are undone. Several thick gold chains are around his neck. The red-complected man slaps his knee as he watches Edgar.

EDGAR:
“Damn!”

Edgar looks around, startled that his voice went so loud.

COACH:
“If there is something you need to say, wait your turn!”
Casts aggravated glances at both men. Returns a concerned look to Lloyd.
“Go ahead, Lloyd.”

LLOYD:
“I passed both the track and the Lotto station without a second thought.”

COACH:
“I am so proud of you, Lloyd. It means so much—”

Ham interrupts.
HAM:
“Betcha five dollars he can’t do it another week.”

EDGAR:
“You’re on. It’s a bet you’ll lose.”

COACH:
Stands with fury.
“No, no, no, no! You are coming here to stop this addiction, not to further it. Damn it, you can’t bet during the meetings! We’ve been doing this ten weeks and haven’t improved at all. What will it take to make you stop? Is this something I can ever accomplish?”

Throws hands up in a exaggerated manner, Coach storms off to side to cool down.

HAM:
“How much you want to bet he can’t accomplish it?”

EDGAR:
“I bet fifty.”

HAM:
“Well, high roller tonight, huh?”

EDGAR:
“You better believe it.”

HAM:
“Anyone else?”

FLOYD:
“Hell, yea. Fifty here.”

The men all pull their wallets out and examine the contents. Lloyd shakes his head at the bunch and a silent member named Jake rolls his eyes.

COACH:
“I’m sorry I lost my head. Who else wants to talk?”

HAM:
“Can I bet that no one wants to say anything?”

COACH:
“Dear Lord. What the hell is wrong with you? You’re at a Gambler’s Anonymous meeting, man. Can’t you get that through your head? Why do you want to be here? If you can’t help yourself, you don’t belong here.”

HAM:
“But, Coach. It’s free food. Since Wilma left me, I can’t keep food, it spoils.”

COACH:
“Do you know why she left you, Ham?”

HAM:
“Because the pool boy graduated law school and promised her the moon?”

COACH:
“Because you lost your ass in debt. Can’t you see that?”

HAM:
“Ten dollars says I can’t.”

COACH:
“That’s it, I can’t take it anymore.”

HAM:

“Why, Coach? What’s your problem?”

COACH:

“Don’t you see? I was just like you. Broke, penniless, my spouse left me, I was fired, everything. I want to help you all before you lose it all.”

HAM:

“You lost it all to gambling?”

The change in Coach makes Ham speak more slowly. He studies the younger man and smiles as Coach paces again.

COACH:

“I lost it all.”

HAM:

“What did you ever gamble with?”

COACH:

“The State Lottery. I became obsessed, entire paychecks went to tickets.”

HAM:

“How far in debt did you go for gambling?”

COACH:

“Debt? I never went in debt for gambling, yet all my money went to it. That made everything else fall behind.”

Ham and Edgar both snicker at his open chatter. He looks at them, curious and afraid of what they will say.

HAM:

“Hell, you never once went into debt? We were over fifty thousand in the hole. You ever have a pissed off loan shark after you? Their worse than the damn FBI, I’m tellin’ you, don’t ever borrow money from a man named ‘The Hook,’ who hangs out at the track. Almost lost a finger over a hundred dollars.”

Ham sits back, watching Coach to see how his words affect him. Coach thinks for a moment and Ham adds:

HAM:

“Oh! Wait until you lose a house to it. Man, that’s when the shit hits the fan.”

COACH:

“But, my wife told me....”

Coach seems slightly aghast at the levels of addiction Ham speaks about. He looks concerned, then confused. He tries to speak again:

COACH:

“But, my wife told me that she couldn’t love a man who was such an addict.”

HAM:

“Your wife was looking for an excuse to leave. You don’t got any kids, why wasn’t she doing something if it was so terrible? She could’ve got a job and put you in therapy.”

Lightly admonished Coach for being naive. His confident air seems to place him as the authoritative figure in the room.

COACH:

“That wasn’t her responsibility.”

HAM:

“Bullshit, she was your wife.”

Coach stops talking for a moment. He carefully considers what Ham told him. Suddenly, it made so much sense. He stands up again to walk off and have some down time. The group all shuffles in their seat, a few of the quiet participants get coffee and pastry. Ham and Edgar discuss the gambling issues.

HAM:

“How much you want to bet Coach will go back to his wife?”

EDGAR:

“Not a chance. He learned his lesson.”

HAM:

“Chicken? He’s whiny enough to do it.”

EDGAR:

“Fine, twenty dollars that they aren’t together within the year.”

HAM:
“You got it.”

Act II

Scene opens with group once again amassed together. Coach is silent for a second longer and stands.

COACH:
“Ham, I considered what you said. But, it doesn’t make sense. Why would my wife have left if not for gambling?”

HAM:
“Is she with someone?”

COACH:
“What’s that got to do with—”

HAM:
“I said is she with someone?”

Ham brazenly interrupts Coach in the mid-sentence. Coach is trying to make the blame fall on himself. His self-induced guilt is evident, even to the quiet members of the meeting. All men in the room are attentive towards Coach, the tension is in the air and has them drawn to the circumstances.

COACH:
“Yes, but that has nothing—”

HAM:
“Bull again. Are you blind? How long was she away from you before getting with him?”

COACH:
“I don’t remember. Maybe a day....”

Coach drifts off into heavy concentration. Ham casts him a look of disbelief and pity.

HAM:
“You are a fool, Coach. She was seeing him before that.”

COACH:
“Well, it was my fault. I was addicted.”

HAM:

“There is nothing more pathetic than a man who makes excuses for his unfaithful wife. It’s as bad as a woman who does the same. You think you actually have something to feel guilty over? One time I lost a cousin of mine in a poker game. My aunt hasn’t spoke to me since. Then, there’s the time I stole my mamma’s prize-winning fried chicken recipe and bet it in a roulette game. You know KFC has thrived since.”

COACH:

“No, I put her under much stress....”

He is suddenly hit by what Ham just said.

“You bet a recipe? A relative? Kentucky Fried Chicken? My God, man. How old are you?”

HAM:

“Yep. We was poor. It was always pennies, rocks, and recipes when I was a child. Anyway, you put too much trust in your wife. How many times did she suggest therapy?”

Ham ignores Coach’s remark about age and goes on to more interesting topics.

COACH:

“None. I-”

Stricken again and brought out of his thoughts by Ham.

“You’ve been gambling since you were a child?”

HAM:

“I was born with a poker chip in my mouth.”
Grins slyly.

HAM:

“What about counseling? Marriage support groups?”

COACH:

“Well, none. But, I-”

HAM:

“Didn’t want to be a fool. I know, too late.”

COACH:

“But, this means it wasn’t my fault.”

HAM:
“Yep.”

COACH:
“That, perhaps, I’m not to blame for her suffering.”

HAM:
“Yep.”

COACH:
“All this time I’ve carried so much baggage.”

Coach runs a hand through his hair. Already, he looks haggard and careworn. His clothes appear more wrinkled, his eyes are wild and crazed.

COACH:
“Dear God, this really means I wasn’t such a terrible person.”

HAM:
“Well, Darwin. Care to make any more observations?”

COACH:
“All this time... I swore off gambling, just for her.”

HAM:
“Coach, can I ask you a question?”

COACH:
“Certainly.”

HAM:
“Did you drive here from your house?”

COACH:
“Yes.”

HAM:
“You already gambled with your life. Do you pick your own cars out from the lot?”

COACH:
“Yes, but I don’t see—”

HAM:

“Why that could be considered gambling.”

COACH:

“I think you’re right.”

HAM:

“I didn’t live to be eighty on stupidity. I know I’m right.”

LLOYD:

“Ten dollars says Coach will finally lighten up.”

COACH:

“How dare you, that’s just....”

HAM:

“I bet thirty he stays the way he is. Worried, fearful, terrified of life, giving in to false dreams about his wife’s torture while he worked. I’ll bet he lives the rest of his lonesome days feeling racked with guilt for nothing. He’ll walk around with his tail between his legs and his face permanently affixed to the floor. No, he won’t change. If he didn’t enjoy being the way he is, he wouldn’t be that way.”

Coach refuses to speak as the rest of the group come alive in conversation.

FLOYD:

“I’ll bet fifty that Lloyd dies before the evening is through.”

LLOYD:

“I’ll kill you, you sick jerk. I’m your brother.”

FLOYD:

“And you’re older than me.”

HAM:

“I’ll bet ninety that Floyd has had enough and is ready to gamble.”

EDGAR:

“Oh, hell. He bought a Lotto ticket yesterday. I was behind him in line.”

COACH:

“Lloyd, why did you lie?”

LLOYD:

“Damn it, you found out. There goes my money.”

Lloyd hands a wad of cash to Edgar.

HAM:

“Oh! Twenty dollars says it rains tomorrow.”

EDGAR:

“Oh, no. I watched the weather report.”

HAM:

“Ah, you don’t like playing against the odds?”

EDGAR:

“I noticed the clouds already forming, you snake in the grass.”

Ham grins again.

HAM:

“Okay, yall. Who wants to bet the pastries are a day old?”

JAKE:

“I will, I just had a bear claw, I think I swallowed four teeth.”

Group is surprised by Jake’s sudden interest and all welcome him to the slacking group. Atmosphere of sterility and tranquility has given way to chaos and confusion. However, none of the participants object to the excitement.

HAM:

“Uh-huh. You have cheated. That’s considered a handicap and I’m not playing with that. Besides, they look like they came off the Mayflower.”

FLOYD:

“Who wants to bet Coach’s pants are grey next week?”

EDGAR:

“How much?”

FLOYD:

“Ten.”

EDGAR:

“I’ll match it, double if they’re wool.”

FLOYD:

“You got it!:

HAM:

“I think our gambling is going great, we all made it, I mean we had gas money.”

EDGAR:

“True. No problem here.”

HAM:

“I bet you ten dollars the meeting will end within ten minutes.”

EDGAR:

“You’re on.”

HAM:

“Okay, Coach. Shall we go to the track?”

Coach had been silent the entire time as the group became more chaotic. He finally stands and motions towards the door. He has a very wrathful expression, yet is touched with humor at the situation. Pulls out his wallet and smiles.

HAM:

“Well, my luck is sour. Damn it, I lost.”

Hands ten dollars back to Edgar.

COACH:

“Let’s go to the track.”

Lights dim as group exits door.