

VORTEX

A Play

by

Al Schnupp

SYNOPSIS: A group of young adults react to the shooting death of their friend, Trevor. Although their reactions vary - from destructive behavior to brutal honesty to political activism - they support each other with acts of kindness and courage.

196 Luneta Drive, San Luis Obispo, CA 93405
aschnupp@calpoly.edu
805-215-6462
www.playsanddesigns.com

Cast of Characters

- Seth: 19, son of a wealthy father, reckless, lost, jobless, kind-hearted, loyal. Spells out words from time to time.
- Em: 20, lesbian, slam poet, community college student, majoring in Ethnic and Gender Studies, consumed by her failures.
- Jazz: 18, works at a greenhouse on weekends where she is secretly allowed to grow cannabis, plays ukulele.
- Max: 19, graffiti artist on a mission to ban assault weapons, works part-time at a hardware store.
- Red: 20, music fanatic, Facebook and Instagram junkie, sickly, works three nights a week at Sunny Manor, a nursing home
- Grace: 47, volunteer Bible study tutor at prison, co-owner of a miniature and doll house shop, mother to Em. Plays the role of Iris, as well.
- Iris: 52, homemaker, master quilter, aunt/guardian to Red.
- Aaron: 56, newspaper editor, father to Max. Plays the role of Caleb, as well.
- Caleb: 49, pharmacist, father to Jazz.

Scene

Several locations in the fictional town of Teflon, Nebraska, population 14,000. Just outside of town there is a railroad hub.

Time

Late spring to early fall, 2019

ACT IScene 1

SETTING: Side parking lot at APEX PIT
STOP, a small convenience store.
Picnic table. Dumpster.

AT RISE: JAZZ is sitting on the curb, on
her phone, surfing the internet.
EM is writing in her journal.
SETH enters, holding up two
straps with buckles.

SETH
Anyone want to turn these into some kind of craft project?
Or a sex harness?

EM
A strap for your ukulele, Jazz? Wait. Are those?

SETH
Yeah. Seat belts.
(drops straps on ground)

EM
Where'd you get them?

SETH
They're mine.

JAZZ
Sure. Now.

SETH
I didn't steal them!

EM
They're from your car?

SETH
Fuck seat belts.

EM
You cut the seat belts out of your own car?!

SETH
Fuck fire alarms.

EM
Why?

SETH
Fuck traffic lights.

JAZZ
You just ripped the seat belts out of your fucking car?

SETH
Cut. With the kitchen shears. The kind for cutting up chicken and shit. Slices right through bones . . . and seat belts.

EM
Your Dad is gonna flip!

SETH
Dad's cool.

JAZZ
That's a fricking new car!

SETH
He don't care.

JAZZ
But he paid for it! Didn't he pay for it?

SETH
So. How's he gonna know?

EM
Isn't that, like, against the law?

JAZZ
Is your car even gonna start?

EM
Won't there be, like, this constant, dinging alarm?

SETH

I disconnected it. Anyone want to go for a ride in my new, hot, refurbished A. U. T. O.?

RED

(enters)

Hey.

JAZZ

What's up, Red?

RED

People are assholes.

EM

Allergies?

RED

Are my eyes red?

JAZZ

They have drugs for that sorta thing.

RED

(Seeing the seatbelts)

You did it! I thought it was an empty threat.

EM

Has your aunt sworn off nicotine again?

RED

Do you guys know Mr. Spaulding?

JAZZ

Director of Sunny Manor. Yeah.

RED

There is nothing sunny about that place. And, no way is it a manor.

JAZZ

Old fart Spaulding is a regular at Dad's pharmacy.

EM

Someone needs to tell him shoe polish is not a happy choice for hair dye.

RED

Why can't he, like, show a little compassion?

JAZZ

Adults don't do compassion.

RED

I have this idea Sunny Manor should adopt a dog. Some poor mutt from the shelter. To be a companion to the patients.

EM

Isn't that your job? To be their pet?

SETH

Want me to scratch behind your ears, Red?

RED

Whenever I bring up the dog thing, Mr. Spaulding throws out all these dumbass, lame excuses for keeping the place pet free. "There's gonna be a flea epidemic. The wheelchairs are gonna track dog shit up and down the halls. Nobody on staff has time to walk a goddamn dog. You think Medicare will pay for Kibbles and Bits?"

MAX

(enters)

Hey, guys. Not a good scene.

RED

Max, what's up?

MAX

From across the street . . . you all look like trouble. Cop bait.

RED

Us? Trouble? You're the one with all the misdemeanors.

MAX

That's 'cause Seth knows how not to get caught.

EM

That's 'cause Seth has a Dad with a fat, flexible wallet.

JAZZ

Well, so much for my appointment.

SETH

Hey. I said I'd take you!

MAX

Appointment?

JAZZ

I'm not going anywhere! Not in a car without seat belts.

RED

What appointment?

SETH

Sit in the back. It has belts.

MAX

A. A.?

JAZZ

Max, don't be an ass. I'll cancel. No big deal.

SETH

I'm taking you! I promised.

RED

The clinic? That has no name?

SETH

Red, your D. I. C. K. is showing.

EM

She's supposed to see this guy in Odessa.

RED

A cyber hookup?

MAX

What app did you use?

RED

Can we see his profile?

JAZZ

Jerks. The guy's pushing fifty. Has a wife and two kids, most likely. Is overweight. Probably balding.

RED

Okay then. Don't know you as well as I thought I did.

JAZZ

(Said with force and a touch
of menace)

And he's a really good sculptor!

RED

Oh.

(There is a long pause. Everyone
in the group comprehends the
subtext)

Sorry. That was shitty of me.

EM

Jazz, don't you think you're taking this all a little too .
. . ?

JAZZ

I just want to see the guy's work. Is that a problem?

MAX

I'm with Em. It's a really sweet gesture, Jazz, but it's sorta eating you up. And, honestly, don't you think the whole concept is pretty, like, impractical?

JAZZ

Thanks, Max. I'm going to pretend Jeremy didn't hear that.

SETH

I'll drive you. Anytime.

RED

Anybody want a Crunch Bar?

(the group ignores his attempt
at a peace offering)

MAX

Can we hear what you're working on, Em?

EM

It's not ready.

RED

You should publish your shit. You're, like, a real writer. People relate.

MAX

Would you ever write a poem about us?

JAZZ

That would be soooo awesome.

RED

Do it!

MAX

An epic testimonial about all your friends...and how we, like, integrate with your life.

RED

We could post it on-line.

MAX

Watch it go viral.

RED

And get, like, a million likes.

EM

Sorry. Not gonna happen.

RED

You ever write about your Grandma?

MAX

That's lame. Writing about old people.

RED

Gertie would love if you wrote a poem about her.

EM

I hate you.

RED

Ever since Gertie found out I know Em, she can't stop talking about her. Every shift, it's like, "Tell Emma to come see me. Why won't she visit? Am I poison to her? Does she think I give a crap that she's lesbian."

MAX

Really? Your Grandma Gertie is just down the road, at Sunny Manor, and you won't visit her? Why?

EM

Give it a rest, guys.

JAZZ

I'll take that Crunch Bar.
(SETH exits)

MAX

This guy who does sculptures. Are you thinking he'd make a sculpture of Trevor?

JAZZ

Why would anybody want a sculpture of Trevor? That's spooky.

MAX

Oh. Okay.

EM

Trevor had the most beautiful hands. Anybody ever notice the pinky on his left hand was bent outward at the knuckle. What's the story there?

JAZZ

I'm not sure what I imagine. Nothing literal. But it still says Trevor.

RED

Trevor had a funky finger?
(a long silence)

SETH

(enters with Crunch Bars)

I convinced Barney I gave him a twenty when I really gave him a T. E. N.

RED

Barney's slow.

MAX

So, you buy Crunch Bars and actually make money?!

SETH

Ching. Ching.

(awkward silence. RED, EM and
MAX exchange subtle, disapproving
looks)

Are we doing this, Jazz?

JAZZ

Another time.

RED

Hey, check this out.

(hands ear bud to EM, who
puts it in her ear)

Isn't that rad?

EM

(listens for a moment, then
removes the bud)

What are they saying?

RED

(quoting the lyrics)

"We're brittle things, born with broken wings. It's a
fucking mystery . . . that anybody sings."

EM

Who is that!?

RED

They're trending.

JAZZ

It's this new group. Sligo.

EM

You think that's rad!?

RED

Well, yeah.

EM

Geeze!

RED

You don't think that's, like, on point?

EM

If I ever write something so up-my-ass, shoot me! Just saying.

RED

(taking a moment to recover
from EM's diatribe)

Jazz, you can go in my car. Seth can drive. And if it's okay, I wouldn't mind tagging along.

JAZZ

Sure. Your car. Everybody. Let's go together.

RED

It's just, I have to check the oil. It runs low. I might have to buy a quart.

SETH

(The group prepares to leave.
JAZZ makes a small gesture - the
sign of the cross - on the surface
of her phone, then turns it off.
SETH hands RED a twenty-dollar
Bill.)

Here, let me pay for it.

MAX

Why do you always do that?

JAZZ

What?

MAX

That little doot-do-do with your phone?

JAZZ

It was just a thing Trevor used to do.

MAX

Oh.

1-1-11

SETH

Keep the change. Or give it to Barney.

EM

Crunch Bars suck.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

SETTING: Two separate interior locations.
The scenes occur simultaneously.
GRACE and EM. AARON and MAX.
Action and movement may be
superimposed, but neither pair
acknowledges the other pair.

AT RISE: GRACE is decorating a sheet cake.
AARON is working on a crossword
puzzle.

GRACE
Aren't you friends with Seth?

EM
We talk.

AARON
I understand you're friends with Seth?

MAX
I see him around.

GRACE
Are you close?

EM
Like, in sexually close?

GRACE
Oh, Em, people raised in the church don't talk in such open
terms.

AARON
How is Seth doing?

MAX
Great, far as I know.

GRACE
What is Seth up to these days?

AARON

Has he ever mentioned college? Or talked about joining the military?

MAX

Geeze, Dad. I don't know. Is this an interview?

GRACE

Seth isn't gay, is he?

AARON

No job. No responsibilities so far as I can tell. What does he do with all that free time?

MAX

Seth doesn't really need a job, Dad.

AARON

I guess not. Not when your dad is Mr. Conway.

MAX

Money isn't something my friends and I talk about.

EM

He's not gay!

GRACE

Well, something's not right there.

EM

What are you saying, Mom?

GRACE

Well, nothing, really. I've just been hearing things.

AARON

I heard somebody shot out a bunch of windows at the old power station.

EM

Hearing things? Where, Mom? Wednesday night prayer meetings?

GRACE

How's college? You still like it? You're not thinking of dropping out, are you?

EM

Why do you say that?

AARON

Mr. Harding claims someone jimmed open an irrigation valve and flooded his field of soybeans.

MAX

Sounds like one of his field workers forgot to shut off the valve.

EM

I'm a quitter. Is that how you see me?

AARON

Mr. Harding's trustworthy. He says it was jimmed.

GRACE

You do have a pattern of leaving off . . . midway.

MAX

I can't imagine anyone messing with Harding's equipment. Everybody knows he's trigger-happy.

EM

What's with the bowls of colored frosting?

GRACE

It's for the church social. I'm hoping, by the time I'm done, the cake will look like a flag. June fourteen. Flag day.

EM

Saving souls isn't enough for the tribe? Now they're gonna take up politics?

GRACE

Em, I wish you'd be more respectful.

EM

Let's just say you and I have completely different opinions about Reverend Wilson. Anytime he smiles, I get spooked.

GRACE

I thought I'd offer any leftovers to the staff at the penitentiary.

AARON

Another line of boxcars at the railyard were painted with graffiti. Who would do such a thing, Max? Any idea?

GRACE

Seth is the kind of boy I look at and say, "Felon." If I had it in my power, I'd take him to the penitentiary and show him around the compound. Maybe one of the staffers could have him try solitary confinement for an hour - just to get a feel for it. As deterrent, you know.

AARON

Mrs. Crane claims someone deliberately propped open her barnyard gate all the cattle got out.

EM

What kind of *look* do I have, Mother?

GRACE

Oh, honey, I didn't mean anything negative by it. We all have a look.

EM

Yeah. I can imagine.

GRACE

It's nothing to worry about. You have a perfectly harmless look.

EM

"Harmless." Nice word.

GRACE

You're right. I shouldn't judge. It can't be easy for Seth. First there was his mother. Then Trevor. Everybody said how close they were. I suppose it would be a lot for anybody . . . to face all those hardships, one right after the other.

EM

Can we not talk about Seth?

GRACE

All I'm saying . . . I find him a bit . . . disturbing. Don't you find him disturbing?

EM

No. I think he's a decent guy . . . with a lot on his mind.

GRACE

The way I see it . . . a lot of his problems could be solved by going to church.

AARON

There's this general feeling out there. Someone should talk to Seth's father.

SETH

Seth is not an inmate who's gonna sign up for one of your Bible study sessions, Mom. Drop it.

AARON

Thing is . . . it's touchy for anyone to confront Mr. Conway. He won't hear any criticism about his son.

MAX

I feel like you're insinuating all this crap about Seth and his Dad, without any proof.

AARON

Son, I'm not going around, broadcasting my suspicions, but I have a right to them, don't I?

GRACE

I considered having a sit down with Mr. Conway. Just to testify in the ways of our Lord. And see if there's anything we can do for Seth.

MAX

I always liked Mr. Conway. He's not from Teflon. He sees things differently.

GRACE

Mr. Conway and his family came here as strangers, but everyone seems to like him well enough. He's certainly been a help to us.

1-2-17

AARON

When it comes to figuring taxes and overseeing business deals or drawing up court petitions, Mr. Conway has a magic touch. Who is going to challenge someone like that? Someone who plays point guard?

MAX

What are you saying?

EM

What are you talking about?

GRACE

With Mr. Conway's help, we saved thousands of dollars over the years. How do you think we pay for your college tuition, honey?

AARON

Without his expertise, I suspect the newspaper would have folded.

EM

Thanks, Mom. Way to kill the day.

AARON

If Seth is behind any of these incidents, don't you think his father should know?

MAX

Are you asking me to spy on Seth? To verify your crazy ass stories?

AARON

These incidents might just be pranks. But, sooner or later, someone's gonna get hurt. Or killed. Or worse.

MAX

What's worse than getting killed?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 3

SETTING: The side parking lot of APEX PIT STOP.

AT RISE: EM is recounting to MAX an event that happened earlier that day.

EM

So I'm in my American History class and the professor starts talking about white privilege. And there's this woman in the back, in her early thirties, I'm guessing, and from what I understand she's had a pretty hard life - single mother with a special needs kid and all. And she's painting her nails. Everything's fine, the professor is cool, and suddenly this woman screams, "I am so sick of hearing about white privilege!" And she starts listing all these bad things that happened to her. And she can't see, like, her shitty life is just about sucky karma and all these unfortunate events that don't have anything to do with race or culture or history. She can't distinguish bad personal luck from white privilege. And so the professor lets her go on. He's real nice about giving her her time. And when she runs out of things to say, the professor says, quietly, "So, if you could choose, would you rather be black or white?" And she gets these big, buggy eyes, like she's been hit by a rocket and everybody can see she's thinking, "No way in hell do I want to be black." Instead of admitting her bias, she gives this little flip of the wrist, like, you know, a tame version of flipping off someone, and she knocks over her nail polish and it goes flying across the floor. Man, it was priceless.

JAZZ

(enters with a box containing
cans of spray paint)

Our neighbor had a garage sale. I was about to pay him with coins I keep in an old patchouli jar when he said, "Forget it." I suspect the cans are mostly empty, with clogged nozzles. Enjoy.

(hands box to MAX)

1-3-19

MAX

Thanks. So, is there a rumor out there that Seth is the one tagging the railcars?

JAZZ

That would be great for you, wouldn't it?

MAX

My Dad's been implying some nasty shit. If you hear anything, I'd like to know.

JAZZ

You hide the paint, right?

MAX

When Mom was pretending to be Martha Stewart she built a chicken hatch. That lasted about a month. Then it was Katie Hacker and beads. Anyway, I keep my paint in the hatch.

EM

Can I come with you, some night, when you spray it out?

MAX

I sorta think it's best if I work alone.

EM

Trevor had guns.

JAZZ

Wasn't his family, like, real gun-show people?

MAX

So.

EM

So . . . being anti-gun is not exactly honoring who Trevor was, is it?

MAX

Trevor getting shot. Didn't that change anything for you?!

EM

Of course.

JAZZ

We all look at things differently now.

MAX

So, who's to say things didn't change for Trevor, too?

JAZZ

You make it sound like he's still alive.

MAX

To me, he is.

(The conversation is suspended.)

EM

Well, it sorta seems you're speaking for Trevor, when it's impossible to know if he'd agree.

RED

(enters)

Hey, guys. What's up? Did you hear they found dinosaur bones on Mr. Parson's ranch?

JAZZ

No way. Dinosaurs.

RED

When I told Gertie she laughed. "Well, if anyone wants to see *living* dinosaurs," she said, "just tell them to visit Sunny Manor." Gertie says, "Hi," Em.

MAX

I think after we all kill each other, in a couple zillion years, dinosaurs will make a reappearance.

EM

If you're on this mission to somehow change me, Red, forget it.

RED

I found this great dog at the shelter.

JAZZ

Mr. Spaulding changed his mind?

RED

It's a collie mix. Small. Short hair. Real friendly.

1-3-21

MAX

So, what's the plan? You're gonna sneak the dog into Sunny Manor, let it stay there and hope it wins over Mr. Spaulding?

RED

It could work.

JAZZ

What if Spaulding says, "No." You have a backup plan? Are you gonna keep the dog? Or take it back to the shelter?

EM

Sounds like exploitation.

RED

I'll work something out. Trouble is, I hate the dog's name. It isn't right for him.

EM

You're not gonna float a gender-bias name, now, are you?

RED

Buster. Isn't that lame? He's anything but a Buster.

JAZZ

Rename it. You're allowed.

RED

I could actually do that?

MAX

Sure. Why not?

RED

Won't it confuse the dog?

EM

I go by another name when I read my poetry. You have name in mind?

RED

(after a long pause)

I don't know. Maybe.

1-3-22

JAZZ

If you're thinking what I think you're thinking, don't go there.

MAX

Yeah. That would just be too weird.

RED

Geeze. What do you take me for? I was thinking "Fixer."

EM

That could work. "Buster." "Fixer." It could be confusing. Sorta requires a mind reset.

SETH

(enters)

What's up, bitches?

EM

Can you, like, come up with a different tagline, Seth?

JAZZ

Em's got a lot of hot buttons, so be careful.

SETH

What's up, bros?

EM

Doesn't work.

SETH

(not offended by EM or her comments. Sits on curb)

Everything is so fucked.

(The group instantly senses something is deeply wrong with SETH; they nonchalantly give him their attention.)

RED

Yeah, you can say that.

SETH

No, not fucked.
(pause)
Fucked!

JAZZ

(Echoing SETH'S vibe)

Fucked.

SETH

Two weeks ago Dad says I should tell Claire - she's our cleaning lady - that she can go through Mom's closet and pick out anything she wants.

MAX

Bummer.

SETH

I wasn't gonna say a word to Claire. But for some reason, today I mention it. She calls two of her friends and they come over. Like, instantly. And they run upstairs - well, maybe not run, but it seems like it. And for the next two hours, the three of them are sorting through Mom's stuff. I wasn't there, so I don't really know what's going on, but I assume they were trying on dresses and holding up purses, and shit like that. Claire comes back downstairs, wearing one of Mom's dresses, and asks if I could go find some boxes for them. Like, moving boxes, I'm thinking? And I smell Mom's perfume, you know, from the dress. And all I can do is run outside and vomit.

EM

That's brutal.

RED

Sorry, Seth.

SETH

A couple of hours later, I went upstairs and saw Mom's closet was completely empty. No scarfs. No coats. No jeans. Not O. N. E. pair of shoes.

JAZZ

Jesus!

MAX

I can't imagine. I mean, sometimes at Sunny Manor, when one of the patients die, we have to pack up their belongings. But this is different.

EM

I loved your mom.

(SETH breaks down, hiding his head in his arms.)

RED

Adults suck.

MAX

This town sucks.

JAZZ

Nebraska sucks.

EM

America sucks.

SETH

I'm okay.

JAZZ

What I don't get is why didn't your Dad talk to Claire? Why you?

MAX

Don't you hate it when people do the handoff dance?

SETH

I don't blame him.

JAZZ

I learned yesterday where Dad keeps the keys to his gun cabinet.

MAX

Random.

JAZZ

Not at all.

RED

You wanna move out, Seth? I could ask my aunt and uncle about you staying in the basement. Or maybe we could get a place together.

SETH

No, Dad's cool.

JAZZ

I'm not sure I can say I love my Mom, but I'd sure miss all her crap if she were gone.

SETH

I try talking to Mom, but it doesn't really help.
(Very long pause)

EM

Do any of you talk to Trevor?

MAX

Yeah.

RED

Sometimes.

SETH

All the time.

JAZZ

Every day.

EM

Me, too.

RED

What do you say?

SETH

"Why the fuck didn't you stay in the bathroom?"

EM

"I miss you."

MAX

"Why did you have to come out of the john when there's a guy at the register, pointing a gun at Barney?"

RED

"Nobody was going to get hurt. Barney was about to hand over the money and that would have been it. Just one minute longer."

JAZZ

I say, "I'd trade places with you," but I'm not sure I believe myself.

EM

"Not a whole lot has changed."

JAZZ

"Everything has changed."

RED

"What's it like? Not being here?"

EM

"Where are you?"

MAX

"Can I at least see you in my dreams?"

EM

"Do we all look like bunch of crazed assholes? These mindless little puppets, dancing the boogie-woogie?"
(pause)

RED

Do you think dead people see us?

EM

I can't buy that shit. I mean, it's sweet and comforting and all, but no.

SETH

Trevor sees me. I know it.

1-3-27

EM

Who decides when he's looking? Is he around all the time, everywhere? Does he watch people do the nasty? Or does he come and go according to somebody's whim,

(snaps fingers)

"Hey, Trevor, got a minute? Check this out," which is like saying, "I control the dead," and I just don't think we have that much power. Sorry, Seth.

SETH

It's my call. He's there when I need him. He gives me a choice.

EM

(sensing SETH'S vulnerability,
hugs him)

Love you, baby.

JAZZ

Do you ever think, like, we are way more advanced than our parents?

MAX

Definitely.

RED

Nah. Same shit. Different suit and tie.

EM

I think my Mother is having an affair.

MAX

Really?

SETH

You have P. R. O. O. F.?

EM

No. It's just something I feel.

JAZZ

She's way too into Jesus to have an affair.

SETH

Jesus people fuck around. They just have a better cover.

RED

My Aunt should have an affair.

EM

That is something I don't want to picture.

RED

I doubt if my Uncle would even notice.

EM

Your Aunt's sweet, and all, but she's a middle age woman who's got the grandmother vibe.

JAZZ

Yeah, nothing about her says vagina.

RED

Maybe I was thinking she just needs someone to pay her a little attention.

JAZZ

I think your Uncle's sorta hot, for a man his age.

MAX

He keeps in shape.

SETH

All that time in the gym pays off.

RED

You think my Uncle's hot!?

JAZZ

Hey, relax. I'm just stating the obvious.

RED

I think he's a jerk.

(to SETH.)

And I think your Dad's a jerk for forking off his shit on you.

SETH

Nah. Forget it.

JAZZ

If my father pulled that shit, I'd...

1-3-29

SETH

I figure he's been operating on "overload" since Mom died. The anniversary is coming up. July 21, it will be two years.

RED

Em, can I ask you something?

EM

I'm not gonna read any of my poems!

RED

Why didn't you go to Trevor's funeral?

EM

I had my reasons.

SETH

Your absence was pretty loud.

EM

Listen, I wasn't in the greatest space at the time. I'd appreciate if you drop it.

MAX

Tell them the story about that nut in your History class.

EM

I gotta go.
(gathers together her belongings)

RED

Oh, now, don't be mad.

EM

You guys have a real nice day.

SETH

(in fun)
Can you come up with a different, gender-neutral term, Em?
(EM exits, giving the group
the bird on her way out.)

JAZZ

What story?

1-3-30

MAX

I can't describe it like Em does. She has to tell it.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 4

SETTING: Home of guardians (AUNT IRIS and UNCLE RAY) of RED.

AT RISE: IRIS has news for her nephew.

IRIS

Red, I've been in contact with your mother the past two weeks.

RED

I don't want to hear about it.

IRIS

Look, I know it's been sixteen years.

RED

I'm not counting.

IRIS

She's living in Nipples, Florida.

RED

Naples.

IRIS

Isn't that what I said?

RED

Great! Husband seven? Eight?

IRIS

She's no longer married.

RED

Well, tell her to restack her boobs, throw on another pound of mascara, and she'll be back on the market, turning heads.

IRIS

My sister had a rough time growing up. I'm not sure you appreciate that.

RED

I appreciate she thought high school was an excuse to do drugs. I appreciate having me fucked up her life. And I really appreciate she forgot to keep tabs on whether her kid was getting his vaccinations.

IRIS

You're right. There are no excuses for her behavior.

RED

Yet, here we are, talking about her, you taking her side.

IRIS

Your mother would like to come here for a few weeks. I said I'd have to run the idea by you.

RED

Fine. But I'll be staying with friends.

IRIS

I can't say I blame you.

RED

Thanks.

IRIS

There's more.

RED

(running through a list of
excuses he is used to hearing)
She's been evicted. She's out of money. She's sorry for not calling. There's nobody to turn to but her sister.

IRIS

That's Rose. I guess we're used to it.

RED

Same old crap.

IRIS

She's sick, Red.

RED

Sorry.

IRIS

And the doctor's think, with a bone marrow transplant, she might recover.

RED

Uh-huh.

IRIS

She's asking if you'll consider having a bone marrow test.

RED

She has no idea, does she? How she treats people?

IRIS

I don't think so.

RED

Sorry. No. She's on her own.

IRIS

Think about it, at least, Red.

RED

No, no, no!

IRIS

Whatever you decide, I support you.

RED

Thanks.

(a long pause)

Can I ask you a question?

IRIS

Anything.

RED

Did I put a strain on your marriage?

IRIS

Why would you ask that!

RED

Just curious. I mean, I could have just as easily gone to a foster home . . .

IRIS

You were . . . you are . . . always welcome here. I hope you know that.

RED

Why didn't you have kids of your own?

IRIS

It just didn't work out, Red.

RED

Couldn't you?

IRIS

Of course, I could.

RED

You didn't want any?

IRIS

You'll have to talk to your uncle about that.

RED

And he'll tell the truth? I can count on that?
(decides to not complete
his thought)

IRIS

Maybe it'll be easier for him with you than me.

RED

I appreciate all you've done for me.

IRIS

Red, you're a good kid.

RED

I want you to know - even though you never mentioned it - all the food, the clothes, all the times I was in the hospital, I know mom never sent you a dime.

IRIS

You can't let that affect your decision.

I'm not that good.

RED

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 5

SETTING: Small rest area on street in
downtown Teflon.

AT RISE: SETH and EM are having a heart-
to-heart.

EM
You think something's going on with your Dad?

SETH
What do you mean?

EM
Not to get weird on you, but . . .

SETH
He might be leaning a little hard on the prescriptions.
But I don't blame him.

EM
Wow! Oh, no. I wasn't going there, but, wow . . .

SETH
Where were you going?

EM
What kind of drugs? Do you know?

SETH
Prozac. Zoloft. Who knows? He's tried a lot.

EM
Have you?

SETH
Sure. But it's not really my thing. You want some?

EM
No, no! Hell, no. Sorry. Maybe that came off a little
judgmental.

SETH

If you're ever wanting to, you know, score. . . just A. S. K.

EM

I might be open to it.

SETH

You know who I think could, maybe, benefit . . . ?

EM

Red.

SETH

Yeah. We talked about it, but he's pretty down on doctors.

EM

Can you blame him?

SETH

No. That's the thing.

EM

Sometimes I get this sense . . . that . . . if I want to be good, if I want to succeed . . . as a writer . . . I should step up to the edge a little more.

SETH

Are you talking hard core stuff?

EM

It's what writers do.

SETH

Gee. I don't know.

EM

Sometimes I think I'm, you know, sorta closed.

SETH

Really?

EM

And I could use a little...help...

SETH

Right.

EM

To open up.

SETH

I guess you won't know until you try.

EM

Even in the romance department. Not that I can't make a move . . . I've had my share of hookups . . . but I haven't be able to keep anything going . . .

SETH

Did you know Trevor had a thing for you?

EM

Totally.

SETH

He couldn't figure it out on his own.

EM

Damn. His not having a clue about some things. So adorable.

(long pause)

Seth, have you been, like, going around, fucking with shit?

SETH

All the T. I. M. E.

EM

I'm being serious. I'm talking about things that could get you arrested.

SETH

Why are you asking? Have you heard something?

EM

Maybe.

SETH

What?

EM

You know, if something goes down, you're an easy target.
So, be careful.

SETH

Sometimes there's just no winning, is there? What have you heard?

EM

I don't know. Messed up property. Broken shit and stuff.
There're people . . . pointing their fingers, blaming you.

SETH

So what if I shoot up an old sign or fuck with a windmill?
It's just stuff. Why are you looking at me like that?

EM

(quietly)

It's not gonna bring him back.

SETH

You think I fucking don't know that?

EM

Well, I just don't want another casualty. One victim is enough.

SETH

The thing is . . . Trevor . . . more than anybody . . . got it when Mom was killed. Even more than Dad. Trevor, without even trying, always said or did the right thing.

EM

He's our boy.

SETH

God, I fucking miss him.

EM

Yeah. It sucks. Big time.

SETH

I don't say this to make you or anybody else feel bad, but Trevor was the only one of my friends who came to her funeral. He really didn't know my mom. But that's not why he showed up. He showed up for me.

EM

(after a long pause)

Do you think your Dad has a thing for my Mom?

SETH

Whoa! Where did that come from?

EM

Forget it. I just need to put the brakes on my imagination.

SETH

Why? What did Dad do?

EM

It's not anything your Dad did. It's what he didn't do. Mom, too.

SETH

I am so lost.

EM

Mom and I were downtown, at Donovan's, waiting to pick up Grandma's medication and I wanted to get a night light because, lately . . . Well, anyway, we ran into your Dad. They tried so hard to act not familiar. Avoiding eye contact. Your Dad, doing that thing he does sometimes, pinching his left thumb nail. Mom, fidgeting with the clasp on her purse, like it was gonna pop open and something spectacular would jump out. And trying way too hard to include me in the conversation.

SETH

Would that be a problem, if they were, like, fucking?

EM

Well, yeah! Duh!

SETH

I guess I just don't care. I want my Dad to be happy.

EM

Fine! But he's single. Mom's got this thing called a wedding ring.

SETH

The whole romance thing. Two people, claiming to be soul mates, walking into the sunset, that's just another fucking blowjob. I don't buy it.

EM

Well, aren't you the cynical dude?

SETH

A whole lot of bubbles got burst when Trevor died.

EM

Well, if they're having sex, and I'm not saying they are, doesn't that make it weird for us?

SETH

Not for me.

(taking a moment to
Collect his thoughts.)

I thought your Mom was a super Jesus disciple. Not that that means anything, other than she can quote Bible verses like nobody's business.

EM

I don't know if you've heard. Apparently she's hooked up with Leonard. He wants Mom to give him lessons in the Bible.

SETH

Thee Leonard?

EM

Thee Leonard.

SETH

The guy who shot Trevor?

EM

The one.

SETH

I thought he was in some prison in Omaha.

EM

Oh, hell no, he was transferred. You didn't know?

SETH

If that asshole thinks by quoting the Bible he can get some kind of leniency from some Jesus-loving judge . . . !

EM

I know. It sucks.

SETH

Jesus! Just thinking about it burns me.

EM

Well, it's not gonna happen.

SETH

Man, oh man.

EM

We're gonna prevent it from happening.

(long pause)

Does your Dad take Xanax?

SETH

Isn't that for, like, anxiety and panic attacks?

EM

Yeah.

SETH

I think Dad's thing is, more, depression. But I can check.

EM

It sorta pisses me off . . . that you fail to show any kind of empathy for my Dad. I mean, what if my Dad finds out Mom is cheating on him with your Dad!?

SETH

Sorry.

EM

Sorry?

SETH

I guess I just don't give a fuck about who is fucking who.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 6

SETTING: The side parking lot of APEX PIT STOP.

AT RISE: JAZZ has a crate and is setting a birthday cake on it. She lays out paper plates, napkins and plastic forks.

EM

(enters)

Hey, Jazz. Was I supposed to bring anything?

JAZZ

No, it's covered.

(They hold hands and look at the cake.)

EM

You did a nice job.

JAZZ

Thanks.

EM

Today's one of those days I wish I didn't believe what I believe.

JAZZ

What's that?

EM

That we are not seen.

JAZZ

Oh, Trevor sees us. I'm with Seth.

EM

(kisses JAZZ on the cheek)

Okay. For today. I believe.

JAZZ

You need a girlfriend. To soften you up.

MAX

(enters with RED)

Nice getup.

RED

(eyeing the cake)

Was Trevor a chocolate or vanilla guy?

JAZZ

Chocolate.

EM

Definitely chocolate.

JAZZ

I thought today would be a good day to show you some of my designs. But we have to wait for Seth.

RED

Why is that guy always late?

MAX

It's not like he can say, "I got held up at work."

EM

Guess what, homies.

MAX

You dropped out of college.

EM

(truly astonished)

How did you know!

MAX

Just a guess. Well, maybe not completely. I sorta saw it coming.

RED

He did. He said, "I wouldn't be surprised if Em drops out of college." Swear.

SETH

(enters)
Sorry. I got held up at work.
(The foursome looks at SETH and
roll their eyes)

MAX

Em dropped out of college.

SETH

I thought you were digging it.

EM

An Ethnic and Gender Studies program composed of all white
men? What's that?

MAX

Well, we are in Nebraska.

EM

I had it. No offense, my Anglo tribe, but I want a black
friend. I want a Muslim girlfriend. I want to hang with a
Mexican poetess and give birth to a Japanese atheist.
(The group is stunned by her
declaration.)

JAZZ

This is all going to happen in Teflon, Nebraska?

SETH

Let's get this party S. T. A. R. T. E. D.

JAZZ

First, I think we should all read the last text Trevor sent
us.

(Except for EM, they pull out
their phones.)

EM

Mine got deleted. By accident!

JAZZ

Mine says, "See you at the Pit."

RED

"Hope you're feeling better."

MAX

"Do you think I stand a chance with Loni?"

SETH

It's an emoji. A hand. Waving.

EM

I am not . . . not . . . not . . . going to cry.

(They help themselves to cake.)

Jazz brought her designs.

JAZZ

They've been scaled back.

MAX

Have you shown them to the sculptor?

JAZZ

The guy in Odessa?

EM

He's not making the sculpture.

MAX

I guess I'm confused.

EM

Jazz decided, instead of someone else making the sculpture, this guy's going to loan her some tools and show her how to carve stone.

JAZZ

(opens a folder, extracts
three drawings)

This is the simplest. It's an abstract flame, well, more like a flower of flames. And it has a cavity. Inside, there is a large crystal teardrop.

SETH

That could work.

EM

Nice.

JAZZ

The fire has six points.

EM

Nice.

JAZZ

One for Trevor. Well, they're all for Trevor. But one for Trevor...

RED

And five...

(looks around, as if to say,
"For us, the group")

JAZZ

Is the crystal too much?

EM

It might be a little retro.

MAX

Em!

JAZZ

No. That's okay.

(second sketch)

This one feels like the beginning of something. It's not fully developed.

SETH

Let us decide.

JAZZ

It's a square column of solid granite - five feet, eleven inches - the height of Trevor. About two-thirds of the way up, the stone is cut away to make an open room with columns on each corner. The top is solid, again.

RED

I like the first one better.

JAZZ

If you squat down . . . and look up . . . the room has this pyramid roof. And hidden inside, you can see a broken geode, full of purple crystals.

RED

Okay. I might be changing my mind.

EM

I like the crystals here.

SETH

Jazz, you put a lot of thought into this.
(The compliment hits JAZZ hard.
She places her hand over her
mouth. She seems about to cry.)
Can we do both?

JAZZ

(third sketch)

The last one is more aggressive. And it gets political.
So it might be a little off.

SETH

Stop that! Stop apologizing. Let us decide.

JAZZ

Again, it's a column of granite - or marble. Part way up,
about eye level, sculpted into the stone, we see this
cutaway lock, with a key in it. Most locks, I learned,
have seven chambers.

MAX

I sell locks and cut keys all the time at the hardware
store and didn't know that.

JAZZ

Six chambers have the regular driver and pin that fit into
the cuts on the key. But the seventh chamber contains a
bullet, which has pierced the key.

MAX

So the lock can't be opened . . . or the key removed.

SETH

And the key has Trevor's name on it.

JAZZ

Nice. I'm glad. You got it.

1-6-49

RED

How much do you think it will cost? To buy the stone? And pay for lessons?

SETH

Don't worry about that.

RED

And where would we put it?

JAZZ

Here.

EM

Here.

JAZZ

Where he died.

MAX

Who owns THE PIT?

JAZZ

I have no idea.

RED

Max, your Dad should know. It was in the paper, wasn't it?

SETH

Let me ask Dad to look into it.

EM

Jazz. Trevor would be so proud.

RED

Can you make copies for us? I'd love to show Gertie!

EM

You gotta stop this thing you have, Red, about forcing Grandma and me to have this little tea party with pretty cups and sugar cookies and all.

RED

Did I even bring you into this?

EM

I see what you're doing. And it fucking feels manipulative.

SETH

So, everybody, I just sent a P. H. O. T. O. on Instagram.
(They all grab their
phones and take a look.)
Thought I'd share a few works of art . . . from the Max
Gallery.

MAX

You didn't!

EM

Max! Is that yours!

MAX

Who else?

SETH

I went to the railyard and took the photos since Max won't show us himself. There's more.

JAZZ

I've been meaning to check out your shit.

RED

Wow! This is frickin' awesome.

EM

The detail is amazing. And you do all that with spray paint?

SETH

It's like a fricking gun shop museum down there. All these guns - different makes and models . . . with a red slash . . . painted on boxcars. And the NRA logo . . . shredded with holes, like it's been shot up by an AK-15

MAX

You gotta delete this photo!

JAZZ

This is soooo coool. And the best part, these trains go all over the country. It's like they're on an internet that's got a completely different way of communicating.

MAX

If somebody investigates . . . or goes surfing online and finds these photos they can trace them to me in an instant.

EM

Max, I am so behind this.

MAX

Take it down, man. This could ruin everything.

SETH

Sorry. Doing it now. No more photos. No shares.

MAX

Thanks!

JAZZ

So I have a question. Hypothetical.

(a long pause as the group waits)

If I posted online that I was gonna go on a shooting rampage, what would you guys do?

MAX

Well, for starters. You just don't post that kinda crap. Not if you're in your right mind.

JAZZ

But if you opened up Facebook, and there it was: "Teflon High School. In my crosshairs. Noon. Today. This ain't target practice." What would you do?

RED

Well, I wouldn't call the police, because I know you're not serious.

JAZZ

I'm not?

EM

I'd text you directly. But I'd keep it real light. Something, like "What's up, Jazz?"

MAX

Am I the only one who'd alert the authorities?

EM

Friends don't do that!

MAX

Actually, that's the precise things friends do do! And it pisses me off you say that. Especially given that Trevor was killed by some nut.

EM

Jazz is not a nut!

MAX

Who's to say? We all have shit we're hiding. Forget it.

JAZZ

No, what?

MAX

We all have it in us. Don't you think? Any of us could lose it . . . or am I just shooting in the dark here?

SETH

No, I'm with Max. It's in me.

EM

It? What's that? It?

SETH

I dunno. Rage.

MAX

How can you not have it?

SETH

All my life I've been fed this shit. Everything happens for a reason. Justice prevails. Good triumphs. It's all a frickin' lie.

EM

You're spooking me out, Seth.

SETH

Come on, Red, you gotta back me up here. You have the rage. All that stuff that went down with your Mom. Don't tell us it's left you, like, this happy little marshmallow who wants to light a camp fire and sing *Kumbaya*.

JAZZ

Okay, we get it.

SETH

And we all know Max tagging freight cars isn't coming out of a happy place.

EM

Gee. I feel like I'm looking at you for the first time.

SETH

Oh, don't makes us out to be, like, these freaks, Em. It's normal. It's human.

EM

Not in my house. Not with me.

MAX

Fine, say that. But I think you're lying. Why did you drop out of college, unless something hit your piss button pretty hard!?

(There is a change in tone
and spirit.)

EM

Sure, I'm majorly pissed at lots of stuff, but not on your level, Seth. And I'm sure not gonna propose shooting up a school.

(The party is over and
everyone knows it.)

SETH

Can I talk to you Red? Alone? Do you all mind?

(MAX, EM and JAZZ gather their
things.)

Thanks.

(The trio exits.)

SETH

You gotta do it, Red. You gotta do it.

RED

No, I don't.

SETH

Otherwise...regrets. And I know about regrets. They eat you.

RED

Our situations are in no way similar.

SETH

Aren't you being hypocritical? There you are, telling Em she should meet up with her Grandma. And you're blackballing your own Mom.

RED

You have no idea. No idea!

SETH

Don't be too sure.

RED

Your Mom's dead. But at least you had one. For sixteen years you had one!

SETH

(Goes to RED, pulls him into himself and gives him a hug. As the lights fade SETH still holds RED in his embrace).

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 7

SETTING: Home of MAX and his family.

AT RISE: AARON has news for his son, MAX.

AARON

I got a call from a newspaper in Omaha. The Independent Review. They'll be calling you.

MAX

The Independent? What's up?

AARON

From the sound of it . . . they want to send someone out to interview you.

MAX

Why me?

AARON

I thought you, of all people, would know. Leonard Halifax entered a plea today: "Not Guilty."

MAX

Not guilty?

AARON

That's the claim.

MAX

He's right there. On the surveillance camera. This dude, clear as day, firing the gun. Barney identified him.

AARON

This could go a lot of ways. Trevor isn't in the video, so who knows what the lawyers will argue. Maybe they'll portray Trevor as the aggressor and say Leonard acted in self-defense. Maybe they plan on breaking down Barney, saying he misidentified the shooter. Barney is pretty susceptible.

MAX

Unbelievable! I still don't get why they want to interview me.

AARON

That was a pretty strong letter you wrote to the editor. A lot of people took offense.

MAX

They should talk to Seth. Or Jazz.

AARON

I hope you decline the interview.

MAX

And why's that . . . ?

AARON

The Independent is biased

MAX

I'll be careful.

AARON

You'll say one thing and it'll come out another.

MAX

I'm pretty clear on what I'd say, Dad.

AARON

Still, they'll put their spin on it.

MAX

They're not gonna, like, misquote me.

AARON

I'd feel much more comfortable if it were The Herald.

MAX

The Herald! Talk about bias. They're total fanatics. Anything I say, they'll come at me with the Second Amendment. "Stand your ground." "Don't tread on me." "My guns, my rights."

1-7-57

AARON

They'll just be echoing what everyone around here believes.
So, can you blame them?

MAX

I believe in the right to bear arms, but not in the way
those nuts do! Fuck.

AARON

It's not like Trevor was shot with an AR-15.

MAX

Jesus, Dad! Is Teflon as far as you can see!?

AARON

I'd hate for the newspaper to use you as their mascot.

MAX

Thanks for being my wing man. Thanks a lot.

AARON

Hey, now!

MAX

I'm some spineless punk who doesn't know shit. That's what
it sounds like.

AARON

You're being unfair.

MAX

When you were eighteen, what was the landscape?

(makes the sound of gunfire,
while pantomiming shooting
a gun)

How many schools got shot up? Anybody ever walk into a
Church and let loose? Ever have a friend die on you?
Bullet to the heart?

AARON

I didn't lose any friends, like you. I admit.

MAX

So back off!

AARON

Listen, you never met the suspect. What are you going to say to the reporter? It's not like you know this Leonard guy.

MAX

Nor do I want to. Is that supposed to keep me from speaking up?

AARON

Well, this whole interview idea seems like a trap to me. Don't say I didn't warn you.

(prepares to exit, pauses,
turns back)

Your mother says your shirts sometimes have stains on one of the sleeves, and it looks to be blood. Is she right?

MAX

You're kidding me.

AARON

Where're the stains coming from? She isn't making it up.

MAX

It could be anything.

AARON

Do you mind rolling up your sleeve and showing me?

MAX

Am I on trial here?

AARON

Just doing my fatherly duty.

MAX

(begins to roll up right
sleeve)

There's nothing to see.

AARON

Not the right one, son.

1-7-59

MAX

You'd think I'm a twelve-year old kid.
(rolls up the left sleeve)

AARON

What's that?

MAX

What does it look like? A tattoo.

AARON

Tattoo?

MAX

That I made myself.

AARON

Looks more like somebody's been digging into his skin with
a pocketknife.

MAX

It's pretty nearly healed.

AARON

What's it supposed to mean?

MAX

It's just some letters.

AARON

Looks like dots to me.

MAX

Braille.

AARON

Braille. I don't know braille. What does it spell?

MAX

Nothing.

AARON

Trevor. It spells Trevor. Am I right? Did I guess good?

1-7-60

MAX

Maybe.

AARON

This isn't like one of those hearts somebody carves in a tree for his girlfriend?

MAX

No.

AARON

Well, it has that smell.

MAX

I'm not gay.

AARON

I sure hope not.

MAX

Trevor wasn't my boyfriend.

AARON

That's an awful peculiar way to mark yourself for someone who's just a friend.

MAX

So, I just learn the guy who killed my friend has plead not guilty. "I didn't do it." Holy fuck. What the hell does that mean? That he might get off free? That nobody might answer for Trevor's death? And you can't say one . . . nice . . . word about Trevor. Not one! Go to hell!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 8

SETTING: Two interior locations transposed on top of one another, or played out on opposite sides of the stage. EM and her mother, GRACE. JAZZ and her father, CALEB.

AT RISE: EM is buried in her laptop. JAZZ strums on her ukulele from time to time.

GRACE
I'm a little jealous.

EM
Sorry?

GRACE
You've been on that computer over an hour, and not a word to your mother.

EM
It's important.

JAZZ
Dad, I'm curious.

CALEB
Oh.

JAZZ
Do women do target practice?

CALEB
Sure. Lots. Why?

JAZZ
Would you take me?

1-8-62

CALEB
To target practice?

JAZZ
Yeah.

CALEB
Have you shot a gun?

JAZZ
No. I need your help. That's why I'm asking.

EM
It's just, I'm checking out these slam poets on line.
These are, like, the biggies.

GRACE
You know, sometime, I'd love to hear you read your poetry.
Your Dad, too. We'd love to be invited to one of your
shows. Could you do that?

EM
It's more of a young thing, Mom. I'd hate for you to feel
out of place.

GRACE
Isn't that up to me?

EM
What?

GRACE
To feel out of place?

EM
I'll let you know.

GRACE
So, who are some of the popular poets?

EM
You're gonna, like, go online and watch them?

GRACE
That was the idea.

CALEB

We'd have to start small.

JAZZ

No problem.

CALEB

A Glock 19 9mm compact. That's a good beginner's gun.

JAZZ

Would that be a pistol . . . or rifle?

CALEB

We call them handguns.

JAZZ

Gee. I guess there's a lot to learn.

GRACE

I told you I've been counseling Leonard.

EM

Yeah.

GRACE

I told him I have a daughter who was friends with the young man he shot.

EM

Killed.

(Slams down the computer top)

Why the hell did you tell him about me?! Christ almighty. The fucker has no business knowing anything about any of us!

GRACE

He's not at all like you might picture him. He's not a monster.

EM

The guy's a murderer!

GRACE

There are extenuating circumstances. You might want to consider his side of the story.

1-8-64

JAZZ

I'm not sure how my ukulele feels about guns.

CALEB

I suspect after a little practice, you'll relax into it. Like with the ukulele, no?

GRACE

His actions certainly weren't premeditated.

CALEB

Some women at the range think having a gun is sexy. Shooting gets them all charged up.

JAZZ

Dad!

CALEB

It's not locker room talk. I hear it myself!

GRACE

Maybe if you were to visit him, you'd change your mind.

EM

Change my mind about what? That I'd find him innocent?

GRACE

He really is undergoing a transformation. He claims the Lord Jesus as his savior.

EM

If this is some kind of church move for me to meet up with the sicko and forgive him, no way! That's a cheap shot. I swear I know what he's going for. If people forgive him, he can use it as some warped, twisted excuse to forgive himself.

GRACE

Em, I don't know what's going on, but lately, it seems like you've been so angry. You used to be such a caring, compassionate person. I'm sorry Trevor was killed, I truly am, but I hate to see you like this.

EM

It didn't start with Trevor.

1-8-65

GRACE

Well, what could it have been? I don't understand.

CALEB

(after a pause)

You know I'm real proud of you taking that job at the greenhouse but, I'm about to say something I suspect most fathers never say to their children.

JAZZ

(a deliberate pun)

Loaded gun.

CALEB

I'd be real happy if you'd quit.

JAZZ

Dad, that's, like, my only income! And Mr. Bower's been real good to me.

CALEB

But here's the thing. I hear the Feds have their eye on his business. This isn't Colorado.

EM

Why did you move Grandma to Sunny Manor?

JAZZ

(blindsided, speechless)

Mr. Bower is under surveillance?

(Calmly. She knows the answer.
Does her Dad?)

Why?

GRACE

Dear, you saw what she was like.

EM

It was Dad, wasn't it?

GRACE

She wasn't able to do much on her own. And we couldn't leave her alone, not in her condition.

EM

Dad got tired of dealing with her?

1-8-66

GRACE

My mother and your father. They always were oil and vinegar. From before we married.

EM

Grandma hated the idea of going to Sunny Manor. Why didn't you stand up to Papa?

GRACE

Your father is a suspicious man, who can be quite difficult.

EM

But she's your mother. Why did you give in?

GRACE

(pause)

Our marriage was falling apart. I did it to save our marriage.

EM

Is there something you're not telling me?

GRACE

I told you all you need to know.

EM

Besides Grandma, there was nothing else that might have upset Dad?

GRACE

Your father and I are doing fine. Any differences we had, with the help of the Lord, have been resolved.

CALEB

You could work at the Pharmacy.

GRACE

How's college?

JAZZ

Dad, no offense, but really? Work for you?

EM

Great.

1-8-67

JAZZ

And I say that with love, Dad.

EM

Although I've been thinking of moving to Omaha.

GRACE

That's the first I heard of that.

EM

It's nothing to do with you guys, or Teflon, or anything .
. .

CALEB

Did you hear Red's mother is moving to Teflon from Naples?

JAZZ

Geeze. Word gets around.

CALEB

Well, her pharmacy in Florida forwarded me her prescriptions.

JAZZ

Isn't that, like, client - patient privilege?

CALEB

I figured I wasn't telling you anything new. Will she be staying with her sister?

JAZZ

Sorry, Dad, I haven't been part of that discussion.

CALEB

How's Red taking it? Any idea?

JAZZ

We keep it pretty low key - Red and I.

GRACE

Well, I think about getting supper started. Did you ever hear that poem "Easy" by Roland Flint?

EM

No.

1-8-68

GRACE

"While she starts the water and measures the pasta, He sets the table and peels the garlic." It's real pretty.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

1-9-69

ACT I

Scene 9

SETTING: The APEX PIT STOP side parking lot.

AT RISE: MAX is nursing a slushy. JAZZ is eating Red Vines. EM, SETH and RED are kicking around a hacky sack.

EM
Straws are environmentally vile. Haven't you heard?

MAX
No.

EM
Pay attention.

MAX
How am I supposed to drink my slushy?

EM
Like coffee.

MAX
It's thick.

EM
A spoon, then!
(pause)
Get this. Mom has a new convert: Leonard. They're, like Bible study pals now.

JAZZ
Your Mom is kicking with Trevor's killer?! Fuck!

RED
What's he like?

EM
I think Mom feels bad for him.

1-9-70

RED

What does she say?

EM

"He's not the killer type." Whatever that is! What the hell is a "killer type?" Volcano demon eyes? People who shaved off their fingerprints?

SETH

Your Mom's nuts.

EM

I guess she thinks the shooting . . . was more, like, an accident.

MAX

The guy was robbing a store. With a gun! Is she forgetting that?

SETH

Is she, like, wanting you to see Leonard?

EM

Oh, it's coming.

SETH

You're not gonna see Leonard. No way!

EM

Relax. No.

RED

I'd consider it.

MAX

Meeting the guy who killed our friend?!

SETH

Why? What's the point?

MAX

Yeah, I really can't see the point.

RED

There's this whole thing, I saw on TV, about confronting people who did you wrong . . . and forgiving them.

1-9-71

SETH

Not gonna happen.

JAZZ

I could never forgive the dude. Sorry.

RED

You're right. Bad idea.

JAZZ

So, news alert. I'm no longer working at the nursery.

MAX

You got fired?

JAZZ

No, Max. That's insulting. I quit.

RED

What are you gonna do about weed?

JAZZ

That's why God made Colorado. Road trip.

EM

The best lesbians are from Colorado.

JAZZ

(pause)

That hacky sack would make a great target.

EM

Yeah?

JAZZ

So if Em throws it twenty feet in the air, who thinks I could hit it?

MAX

What are you talking about?

JAZZ

Who thinks I could hit the pouch with my handgun?

1-9-72

RED

You have a gun?

MAX

You're kidding.

JAZZ

Anybody want to place a bet?

SETH

You're kidding, right?

JAZZ

Right here. Barely two weeks old. In my purse.

SETH

You have a permit?

JAZZ

You, with the no-seatbelt-car are asking me that!

MAX

You don't need a permit in Nebraska to buy or possess a gun, only to conceal and carry it.

SETH

Anybody see a gun?

JAZZ

I have a permit.

EM

Jazz. Really? You?

JAZZ

This is the one time I figured I should play by the rules.

EM

You are the last person I'd pick to own a gun.

JAZZ

Yeah, well, it surprises me, too.

MAX

What's happening, Jazz?

JAZZ

I'm getting pretty good.

MAX

I considered you hard-core anti-gun.

JAZZ

I still am. That's what's weird about it.

SETH

(grabs the hacky sack)

This is not taking a bullet.

(stuffs hacky sack in back pocket)

MAX

(pause)

So, Jazz, are you going to get another job?

JAZZ

The shooting range has a snack shop. They're looking for a part-time clerk, and I applied.

RED

(after a long pause)

So, anybody going to the trial?

SETH

No way.

EM

Really. I thought you would be in the front row.

SETH

Not a chance.

MAX

Maybe I'll go on the day Leonard testifies. If he testifies.

EM

Why's that?

1-9-74

MAX

I never heard him speak. I've seen plenty of pictures.
But I have no idea what he sounds like.

JAZZ

And that would, like, somehow, change things . . . ?

MAX

No. It would just be...helpful . . . to get a bigger
picture.

RED

I get it.

SETH

Sorry. You guys are sounding like traitors. The guy shot
our friend. Nothing more to know. Hang him!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 10

SETTING: SETH and RED are on opposite
 sides of the stage

AT RISE: SETH and RED are speaking to each
 other on their phones.

 RED
Hey, Seth, it's Red.

 SETH
What's up?

 RED
I want to make a deal.

 SETH
Shoot.

 RED
But not, like, "Sure, sure, bud, whatever you say". If you
promise, you gotta follow through.

 SETH
Come on! Who do you think I am!

 RED
I promise I'll have the bone marrow test if you promise to
install new seat belts in your car.

 SETH
 (without pausing to think
 about it)
Done.

 RED
Really?

 SETH
It's a deal.

1-10-76

RED

Really. I thought you'd give me pushback. Man, that's a relief.

SETH

Hey, man, are you crying?

RED

No. Hell no.

SETH

Give me a week.

RED

It's just, if something happened, I don't think I could lose another friend.

SETH

I'm on it, but just so you know . . . my Mom was wearing a seat belt and that didn't stop anything.

RED

I get it. But that thinking is sorta lame. Just think if she hadn't been wearing one. Wouldn't that have been worse?

SETH

I don't know, buddy. I guess I never thought about it that way.

RED

So a week.

SETH

And you?

RED

Today.

SETH

You bugger! You conned me. You were gonna have that test, no matter what I said.

(pause)

Am I right?

1-10-77

Maybe.

RED

Fucker.

SETH

(hangs up)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 11

SETTING: The side parking lot at APEX PIT STOP.

AT RISE: JAZZ is alone, seated on the curb, deeply distraught. She has pulled her knees into her chest. Her head is buried in her knees and she is rocking back and forth. She stops momentarily, then begins to sway side to side. She alternates between stroking her lower legs and forearms.

SETH

(enters, takes a moment to take in the scene. Sits next to JAZZ. Wraps his arms around her)

Easy. Take it easy now.

JAZZ

I'm afraid, Seth.

SETH

Shhhh. I'm here.

JAZZ

I feel like I'm lost . . . in this real dark place . . . and nothing makes sense anymore.

SETH

Hey, it happens.

JAZZ

(after a long pause, looks up)

The worst part . . . I have these urges . . .

SETH

I know. I know.

1-11-79

JAZZ

I have theses urges to hurt myself . . . or someone.

(reconsiders)

Well, maybe not hurt hurt anybody . . . but to prove, by pulling a fucking trigger, I can manufacture some kind of . . . change.

SETH

I get it. I get it.

JAZZ

(relaxing a bit, she reaches out to SETH and takes hold of his forearm)

This past year I've felt so powerless and then I pick up a gun, and Dad teaches me how to shoot it and, suddenly, I feel like I've been handed power. And it's fucking freaking me out.

SETH

Do you have a gun now?

JAZZ

It's in the dumpster.

SETH

Good girl.

JAZZ

I'm so afraid I'm going to do something crazy.

SETH

Well, you got me. So nothing bad is going to happen.

JAZZ

Thanks. Thanks for coming.

SETH

Anytime.

JAZZ

Could you drive me to Saint Joseph's? I want to commit myself.

SETH

Sure. I can do that.

JAZZ

Thanks.

SETH

You gotta know you're gonna be okay.

(He places his hand under her chin and turns her head toward him. He waits for an okay signal in her eyes, then leans in and kisses her on the lips. He is about to break away, but she pulls him in closer. A few seconds pass; they break apart. He stands and goes to the dumpster and retrieves the gun.

He sticks it in his back pocket.)

I think that's a real wise decision, Jazz.

JAZZ

I'm not being weak?

SETH

Hell, no.

JAZZ

Wow. That was a killer kiss.

SETH

There's something I've been meaning to tell you. I'm not sure about the timing, but it has a happy ending. And that's good. And you could use some good.

JAZZ

Sure.

SETH

Mr. Patterson, who owns the APEX, won't allow us to put your memorial here. He says, "It would suggest THE PIT is a dangerous place to shop and scare people away."

JAZZ

(The words don't surprise her, but she smiles for the first time.)

I'm waiting for the good.

1-11-81

SETH

My Dad said we can install it in that little rest area between the Pharmacy and Ida's Gift Shop. He owns both buildings and the land between.

JAZZ

It doesn't seem right, does it?

SETH

It's gonna be seen by a whole lot more people there.

JAZZ

But he died here. Trevor died here.

SETH

We gotta see this as a win, Jazz.

JAZZ

(stands)

Thanks, Seth. I'm ready. Let's go.

SETH

I hope it was okay. To bring up Trevor's memorial just now.

JAZZ

No. It was fine. It was good.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 12

SETTING: A park bench outside the county jail.

AT RISE: SETH is sitting on the bench. He is flipping a pocket knife, trying to get it to land upright, so the tip of the blade is embedded in the wooden seat.

EM

(enters)

Well, that was a first - getting a call, saying meet me at the county jail. You look alright. I hope everything's alright. Are you alright?

SETH

Relax. I'm fine, although I suppose if I were black or gay or somehow un-American looking, we'd be talking through a set of bars.

EM

You know me well.

SETH

All those Ethnic Studies classes you took rubbed off.

EM

(an attempt to lighten
the mood)

If it's a matter of civil rights, I'm for hire.

SETH

I have a favor to ask. Take a seat.

EM

So why am I here, Seth?

1-12-83

SETH

Well, for starters, they impounded my car.

(Smiles. Nods.)

Seat belts.

(pause)

Maybe I should back up. I dropped off Jazz at Saint Joseph's last night.

EM

Oh, my god, what happened?

SETH

She checked herself in. Trevor getting killed . . . and Jazz trying to make sense of something that's doesn't make sense - we've all been feeling it - just got to her.

(pause)

It's perfectly fine for you and Max and Red to know, in fact, she wants you to know, but she'd kinda like us to keep this to ourselves for the time being.

EM

Sure, sure.

SETH

Em? Are you here?

EM

She didn't, like, cut herself or anything?

SETH

No. She's just angry and alone and feeling lost.

EM

How can she be alone?!

SETH

It's not people alone, Em.

EM

Okay, okay.

1-12-84

SETH

So, I dropped her off. And I felt myself slipping. It's the same old shit with me. I drove out to Cottonwood Park. Who's gonna be there at 9 pm on a weekday night? I'm pacing around the park and I come across this baseball bat. And I start wrecking up the place. Urinals. Drinking fountain. Playground shit. And the whole time, there's this cop in his cruiser, watching me, as he gets a blow job in the back seat.

(gestures swinging bat, breaking
Items)

I'm being charged with two counts of vandalism.

EM

You spent the night in jail?

SETH

Piece of cake.

EM

Don't worry. No contest. An officer having sex while on duty? Case dismissed. Charges dropped.

SETH

His getting a blow job - I made that up. But it seems real. Otherwise why didn't he come running the minute I started smashing up the joint? He waited until he got his rocks off, pushed his trick out the door, then came running. That's my theory.

EM

Seth, you are insane!

SETH

The whole time. I couldn't stop thinking of Trevor.

EM

It's a fucked up world.

SETH

Dad shows up and posts bail. He wanted me to come home, but I begged off. Said I wanted to meet up with a few friends first.

(stands)

Let's go see Jazz. You're driving.

EM

Just so you know, I'm doing this for Jazz.
(gets her keys)

SETH

(Grabs the keys from EM.
Suddenly SETH is clear-eyed
and deadly serious.)
I wanna know why you didn't go to Trevor's funeral!

EM

Oh, no you don't!

SETH

You owe Trevor and his friends an explanation.

EM

Fuck off.

SETH

You're not getting out of this one.

EM

His Mom called me. Okay? Two days before the memorial, she calls and asks me to write a poem about Trevor and read it at the service. I said sure. I mean, what do you say to a mother whose son - who is your friend - has just been killed! Sure. I'd be happy to. That's actually what I said. Happy! What a fucking stupid word. And I, like, froze up. Literally brain paralyzed. I couldn't compose a single line. What was I supposed to do? Show up and say, "I have nothing. I have nothing to say about Trevor!" So, on the day of, Mom called and said I was running a fever - some exaggerated number, like one hundred and four. And thank God, Trevor's mom had the grace to not ask if she send someone over to pick up the poem and have it read by somebody else.

SETH

Everybody says stupid things. Seems a little extreme to choke on one word.

EM

Maybe to you. You're not a writer.

SETH

Sorry.

EM

I am not a villain, Seth. I kept my word. I wrote a poem. A few days later I wrote it and gave it to Trevor's mom.

SETH

I guess I'm having a hard time understanding why you couldn't tell us.

EM

"No big deal," is that what you're thinking, "Just spit it out." Admit I failed? Let everybody, including his mother, down? Don't you get that?

(pause)

"A little extreme"? You're one to talk . . . you with the baseball bat.

SETH

(stares at EM as he tosses
the key back and forth between
his hands, thinking)

Is that what keeps you from seeing your Grandma? In some way you failed her?

EM

I know I did.

SETH

I seriously doubt she sees it that way.

EM

Why are you doing this?

SETH

I'm your friend. S. E. T. H.

EM

But I did. I failed her. I promised to not let my parents put her in a home. But I couldn't stop them. Nothing I said changed their minds.

(pause)

I promised.

1-12-87

SETH

Your Grandma knows that was just sweet talk, don't you think? She knows you couldn't deliver. Otherwise, why is she always asking to see you?

EM

(crying)

I don't know. I don't know.

SETH

(puts his arm around EM)

Well, let's find out. On our way to see Jazz, we'll stop at Sunny Manor and find out.

EM

(nods)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

1-13-88

ACT I

Scene 13

SETTING: Stage of a coffee house.

AT RISE: EM stands before a microphone and
reads an original poem.

EM

Sometimes when the rug slips sideways
 (lights begin to dim)
And the floor falls away
We hover, briefly, in the still air
Then fall through the cracks in the boards.
Into the darkness below.

Sometimes when the tethers of the parachute break
A word . . . a song . . . a voice
Swoops in to intercept our fall
And catch us in her arms.

Sometimes when "goodbye" marks the end
 (spoken in the darkness)
The pages turn
And farewell returns in refashioned glory
In the kiss of a soft "hello."

(END OF PLAY)