

The Aliens

*With original music and lyrics by Michael Chernus,
Patch Darragh and Erin Gann*

Production History

The Aliens was developed, in part, with assistance from the Orchard Project, a program of The Exchange (www.exchangenyc.org). *The Aliens* received its world premiere by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater in New York City (David Van Asselt, Artistic Director) on April 22, 2010. The production was directed by Sam Gold with original music and lyrics by Michael Chernus, Patch Darragh and Erin Gann. The set design was by Andrew Lieberman, the costume design was by Bobby Frederick Tilley II, the lighting design was by Tyler Micoleau, the sound design was by Bart Fasbender, the prop design was by Eugenia Furneaux-Arends and the production stage manager was Nicole Bouclier. It was performed by:

JASPER
KJ
EVAN

Erin Gann
Michael Chernus
Dane DeHaan

Characters

JASPER, thirty-one
KJ, thirty
EVAN, seventeen

About the Pauses and the Silences

At least a third—if not half—of this play is silence. Pauses should be at least three seconds long. Silences should last from five to ten seconds. Long pauses and long silences should, of course, be even longer.

An intermission is necessary for about ten different reasons. Each act should run around fifty to fifty-five minutes.

Two More Things

“Andrea” is pronounced “Ahn-DREY-a.”

A slash (/) indicates where the next speech begins.

Act One

Scene One

The desolate back patio of a coffee shop in Vermont. A recycling bin. A trash bin. A PLEASE USE THE FRONT ENTRANCE sign.

Jasper and KJ are sitting in the sun at a lone picnic table, their feet up on plastic chairs. KJ has a beard and long hair pulled into a messy bun. Jasper has shorter hair and simmers with quiet rage. He wears sweatpants and sandals.

Jasper is smoking. KJ is drinking a to-go cup of tea.

A long silence.

Eventually KJ starts singing to himself.

KJ

I WON'T
WASTE AWAY
WONDERING WHY
I WON'T GO DOWN LIKE THAT
IF I DIE
TIME MACHINES WERE MADE FOR ME
I BELIEVE
IMPOSSIBILITIES

ARE WHAT YOU PERCEIVE
 TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR
 TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR
 TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR

Jasper smokes. A pause.

KJ
 I'M A MARTIAN MASTERPIECE
 FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION
 TIME AND SPACE WEREN'T MEANT FOR ME.
 NO I'M NOT DOWN WITH THAT.
 TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR
 TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR
 TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR

Jasper smokes. A long silence. KJ drinks his tea. Then:

KJ
 Remember Orion?

Jasper nods.

KJ
 He started a wind farm.
 Near Marshfield.

Jasper exhales.

JASPER
 What does that mean he started a wind farm?

KJ
 He started a wind farm. He lives on a wind farm.

JASPER
 Wind farm like the big / white—

KJ
 The big white spinny things.
 (*pause*)
 With like the—on top of a mountain or something.

JASPER
 Aren't those owned by the government?

KJ
 I don't know. He lives on one.

JASPER
 Yeah, but it's not . . . it's just like a bunch of wheels by the side
 of the road.

KJ
 Yeah.

Pause.

JASPER
 So how does he live on one?

KJ
 He just does.

JASPER
 Who told you that?

KJ
 . . . Eli.

*Jasper sighs and stubs out his cigarette. KJ watches him, worried.
 Another long silence.*

KJ
 Hey. Uh. Do you wanna talk about it? Or would you rather just,
 uh . . .

KJ trails off.

JASPER

Andrea?

KJ nods.

JASPER

Not really.

KJ nods again. A pause.

JASPER

She's crazy, man.

KJ nods again. A pause.

JASPER

It's sad. I mean, it's really fucking sad.

A pause.

JASPER

There's actually something wrong with her.

KJ

Like—

JASPER

Like borderline paranoia or something. Some kind of psychological issue.

KJ nods.

JASPER

So it's actually kind of a relief. It feels like a relief.

KJ

Cool.

JASPER

And ah . . . I don't know. She played games, you know? She was into that shit. She was into Power. And like . . . part of me found it attractive but it was also really / uh—

KJ

That's not good, man.

JASPER

And uh . . . you know, her thing was like . . . that she didn't have a personality anymore? That she'd like "lost her personality." In the shadow of my . . .

But the hilarious thing is that she was the one who like fucking glued herself to my hip. I didn't need that, man. Necessarily. But she made us that. While like still attempting to fuck with my head the whole time and make feel like shit.

A pause. KJ nods again, at a loss. Jasper lights another cigarette.

KJ

I'm sorry.

JASPER

Don't say you're sorry. It's a good thing.

(pause)

I don't need to talk about it.

(pause)

I actually feel bad for her.

KJ watches Jasper, who smokes and refuses to look at KJ. After a while KJ starts squinting up at the sun and opening his mouth a little.

JASPER

What're you doing?

KJ

(still squinting)

. . . Trying to sneeze.

JASPER

What is that / supposed to—

KJ

It helps you sneeze.

Looking at the sun helps you sneeze.

Jasper watches KJ try to sneeze for a while. KJ is unsuccessful. Eventually he goes back to sipping his tea.

A long silence.

Jasper suddenly kicks a chair over. It makes a terrible noise.

KJ

Whoa.

Five seconds later, the back door to the coffee shop opens. Evan peeks his head out the door, sees them, then steps outside, in his white apron. Evan is seventeen and in a constant state of humiliation.

EVAN

Hey.

Um . . .

Jasper and KJ regard him coldly.

EVAN

Hey.

We're not allowed to, uh . . .

(pause)

Did you guys just kick that chair over?

Jasper and KJ do not respond. Evan waits, in agony, then:

EVAN

Um. So. We're not allowed to . . . people aren't actually supposed to sit out here.

It's uh, it's like a staff area. You're supposed to sit at the tables out front.

JASPER

Who are you?

EVAN

Um. I'm Evan.

JASPER

You new here?

EVAN

Uh . . . yeah.

KJ

We know Rahna.

EVAN

. . . Okay . . .

Pause.

KJ

Rahna lets us sit out here.

EVAN

Um. Okay. Uh.

Because I was told that we should not, um . . . that under no / condition—

JASPER

What's your last name?

EVAN

Shelmerdine.

KJ

Shelmerdine?

JASPER

. . . Cause you look like this girl I know. You look like you could be her younger brother.

Evan doesn't know what to say.

JASPER

Emily.

EVAN

Okay. Cool. Yeah, I don't have a sister named Emily.

JASPER

Her last name is Spencer.

Pause.

EVAN

Um . . . would it be okay with you guys to move out front? Cause it's my second day working here, and I really don't want to get in, um, trouble.

They both look at him and do not move. Evan stands there for a while. Like ten seconds. Everyone is very still. Finally Evan turns around and walks back inside. After a while:

KJ

Does it feel hot to you?
Like especially hot?

Jasper doesn't respond.

KJ

Is it supposed to be this hot in June?

JASPER

It's July.

KJ

Oh yeah?

JASPER

July 2nd.

Pause.

KJ

He was like *twelve*. That kid.

Pause.

KJ

July 2nd. That makes sense.

Cause the other night I heard like . . . preparations or whatever. People were like setting off fireworks in their backyard.

(pause)

Have you noticed that? That everybody always starts practicing like the week before the Fourth of July? Why do they need to practice?

(pause)

Don't they just *light* it?

Jasper doesn't answer. He touches the pack of cigarettes in his pocket. He drums his fingers on the table. After a while, he gets up, rights the chair he kicked over, and sits back down.

KJ basks in the sun.

Blackout.

Scene Two

The next day. KJ is sitting by himself at the table. He has another to-go cup of tea. He removes his tea bag from his cup, opens it, pours out a little bit of the tea onto the plastic table, removes a tiny packet from his pocket, and refills the tea bag with the contents of the tiny

packet. Somewhere during this careful operation, Evan comes out the back door in his apron, beleaguered, dragging a huge garbage bag behind him.

He sees KJ, tries to figure out whether or not to say anything, then lifts up the lid of the garbage bin and dumps the garbage bag in.

KJ turns around, sees him, waves cheerfully, and then goes back to his teabag surgery.

Evan, for lack of a better response, waves back. Then he wipes his hands on his apron and watches KJ. After a while:

EVAN

Don't you mind the smell back here?

KJ

(not looking up)

Can't smell a thing, my brother.

Pause.

EVAN

... So Rahna doesn't actually work here anymore.

No response. KJ twists the new tea bag together and puts it back in his cup. Then he takes a small wooden stirrer out of his pocket and starts stirring.

Evan looks at the mess on the table.

EVAN

What are you doing?

KJ

Concocting.

KJ blows on the tea, then tastes it. He smiles.

KJ

Taste it.

Evan looks dubious, then walks forward, takes the cup, and takes a tiny sip. He nods and hands it back. A pause.

KJ

You go to SHS?

EVAN

Yes. I mean. I have one more year left.

KJ

Is Mr. Amato still around?

EVAN

(nervously glancing back toward the door)

Yeah. Um. I had him for World Civ this past year. He's cool.

KJ

I hate that guy.

Evan doesn't know how to respond.

KJ

He's still there?!

Evan nods.

KJ

Oh fuck. Someone needs to fucking *kill* that guy.

That guy ruined my life.

Shit. Just thinking about him makes me wanna like strangle a fucking animal.

Oh man!

That guy is such a *bitch*!

KJ sips his tea and tries to calm down. Evan hovers for a moment, not sure what to do, and then goes back inside. The door shuts behind him.

KJ sits by himself for a while. He drinks his tea.

Then KJ takes out his cell phone and dials.

KJ

(after a pause)

Where are you.

(pause)

Ah yes.

(pause)

You are on fire, my friend.

He listens while we hear Jasper's voice, quiet at first, get louder and louder as he approaches the patio from a distance and then arrives, scaling any fences/shrubs in his way.

JASPER

. . . and then I realized that he goes to California. And he drives up the coast. And he's got like five bucks to his name but back then that was like fifty bucks. And he drives, right, he drives up the coast and he sees the ocean for the first time in his life. And then he drives to Big Sur. Which is where . . . that's where Henry Miller lived.

Jasper has now reached KJ. They see each other and snap their cell phones shut.

JASPER

So Miller's gonna be a character.

KJ

No shit.

JASPER

Very minor. But he makes an appearance.

Jasper hauls off his backpack and sits down. He looks at the mess on the table.

JASPER

Shroom tea?

KJ

Myfriendmyfriend.

*Jasper sits down and takes out his cigarettes. He lights one. He seems wound up.**They sit there.**Eventually KJ starts singing.*

KJ

TWO FIXED POINTS IS A CONSTANT
TWO FOCAL POINTS ARE THE SAME POINT
ECCENTRICITY IS IDENTICAL
THE X-AXIS IS PERPENDICULAR
THE GRAPH DRAWN
IS LATERAL
THE EQUATION
IS LITERAL
WRITE THE EQUATION IN INTERCEPT FORM
RATIO IS SYMMETRY
IS CONSTANT
IS SYMMETRY
THE TURNING POINT IS ALSO
THE AXIS
OF SYMMETRY
EQUIDISTANT FROM THE FOCUS
AN ELLIPSE
IS THE LOCUS
THE ECCENTRICITY OF THE ELLIPSE
IS BLOSSOMED LOTUS

Jasper smokes agitatedly and stares off into the distance. After a while KJ gets out of his chair, lies down on the ground on his back, and elevates his legs on a plastic chair.

KJ

. . . Back problems.

JASPER

Oh yeah?

KJ

I slept on it weird.

A long pause. Jasper smokes. Suddenly:

JASPER

Did you know that Andrea started dating that guy? You did, didn't you? You don't have to hide it from me or anything. I'm actually happy about it.

Pause.

KJ

Wait, what?!

JASPER

She's dating that guy. Sprocket.
She's dating a guy named Sprocket.

KJ

I had no idea.

JASPER

It's cool if you did, man.

KJ

I had No Fucking Idea. I swear to god.

Pause.

KJ

Who's Sprocket?!

JASPER

The tall guy? With the hair? At Noah's party?

Pause.

JASPER

He makes his own pants?

KJ

Oh god.

JASPER

He takes like that fucking Chinese kimono cloth and sews his own pants or something and everybody makes a big fucking deal about it?

KJ

Oh man.

Pause.

KJ

Sprocket.

Jasper stubs out his cigarette.

JASPER

His real name is probably like *Barnaby* or something.

KJ

Ha.
Yes.

JASPER

So you didn't know.

KJ

. . . I did not know.

JASPER

She called me to tell me. Last night.
"In case I saw them together."

(short pause)

I'm telling you, it ended up being one of the best nights of my life. I was just doing nothing, fucking staring out the window, and

then I get this phone call, and she has this like haughty tone, and she's like telling me that . . .
Hold on.

Jasper suddenly leans forward, rests his elbow on his knees, and bows his head. KJ, who is still lying on his back, lifts his head up a little and peers over.

KJ

Are you okay?

JASPER

Yeah. I just had to, like, breathe.

KJ

Whoa.

JASPER

I feel fantastic, though.

KJ, his head still raised, continues to peer over at Jasper, but after a little while his neck gets tired and he puts his head back down. Jasper takes a deep breath and collects himself.

JASPER

Wow. That was like a crazy head rush slash heart attack.
Okay.

So she calls me and delivers The Big News or whatever in the most condescending freakish manner possible, and I call her a cunt, which, if you recall, was like the big no-no word in our relationship, and she says "you promised never to call me that again" and I say ARE YOU ACTUALLY LISTENING TO YOUR-SELF and I hang up.

And then for like five minutes I'm like . . .

Worst five minutes of my life.

Actually. No. Not the worst five minutes of my life.

Bad, though.

KJ

What were the worst five minutes of your life?

JASPER

(ignoring him)

BUT THEN.

I remember something Your. Fucking. Mother. Told me. Over dinner.

KJ

Sandy Jano?!

JASPER

I remember something Sandy Jano told me. She said it like three years ago. When I crashed on your couch.

KJ

Oh yeah.

JASPER

I was like talking to her about how I was always like getting kicked out of places and like sleeping on floors or whatever and she was like: this, uh, this in-between state, this being unstable or whatever, if you accept / it—

KJ

Oh man. Was she talking about her Gender stuff?

JASPER

No. No. She was like: the state of just having lost something is like the most enlightened state in the world.

KJ is silent.

JASPER

And I thought of that last night, and all of a sudden I felt like incredible. I was simultaneously like being stabbed in the heart over and over again with this like devil knife but I also felt *euphoric*. And then I sat down and I wrote like twenty pages.

KJ

In one night?

JASPER

And they were like . . . the book just . . . it just switched in a totally different direction. He leaves Iowa City! The whole thing was supposed to take place in Iowa City and he leaves! He's goin' to California!

Pause.

KJ

Awesome.

KJ lifts his legs off the chair and tries to bring his knees down to his chest with some difficulty.

Jasper, trying to hide his disappointment at KJ's lack of a response, takes out another cigarette and lights it.

Evan comes out the back door with a final bag of trash, no apron on, crippled under the weight of a huge L.L.Bean backpack.

JASPER

Shelmerdine!

Evan nods, trying to look dignified, and throws the bag into the dumpster.

JASPER

How are you today, Shelmerdine?

EVAN

Um. I'm good.
Takin' off.

JASPER

You done already?

EVAN

Um. Yeah. Eight to three.

JASPER

. . . You smoke?

EVAN

Um.
Occasionally.
I don't know.

JASPER

Want one?

EVAN

(after glancing behind him at the door)

Uh . . . sure.

Jasper offers him a cigarette. Evan takes it and holds it between two slightly trembling fingers. Jasper holds out a lighter. After a half second of confusion, Evan remembers what to do, leans forward, inhales, lights it, and then steps back.

He smokes passably, taking tiny hits, still wearing his backpack.

Jasper smokes.

KJ is still lying on his back.

After a while:

KJ

Will someone please pass the psilocybin tea?

Jasper ignores him.

KJ

Will someone please pass the psilocybin tea?

Jasper takes KJ's cup of tea and carefully pours it out onto the ground.

EVAN

What's psilocybum?

JASPER

He's obsessed with incorporating shrooms into every food group.

KJ

Shroom karaoke.

KJ laughs. No one else does.

EVAN

Wait. That tea has mushrooms in it? Psychedelic mushrooms?

Jasper nods.

EVAN

He gave me some. He made me drink some!

JASPER

How much?

EVAN

Like a whole sip.

JASPER

You're fine.

EVAN

Shit!

JASPER

You're fine.

EVAN

Do I seem weird?

JASPER

Do you feel weird?

A pause while Evan tries to gauge if he feels weird.

EVAN

No. I don't know.

JASPER

You're fine.

Pause.

EVAN

My friend grew up in Medfield? Massachusetts? And he said there was this guy at his school who like ate a bunch of shrooms and then tied his own hands to a radiator.

(pause)

And then they melted off.

KJ

(still on his back)

Urban myth.

Evan throws his cigarette on the ground and stubs it out with his sneaker, with some difficulty.

EVAN

Uh. I should probably head home.

(pause)

Um. What are your names? If you don't mind me asking.

JASPER

I'm Jasper.

They both look over at KJ. His eyes are closed.

JASPER

And that's KJ.

EVAN

Cool.

Um.

Cool. Yeah.

Um. If you guys like . . . if like my manager like comes in later and sees you guys and gets mad, don't tell him I saw you. I mean, I didn't know about it.

JASPER

All right.

EVAN
Cool,

JASPER
You just working here at The Green Sheep all summer, Shelmerdine?

EVAN
Uh. Yeah. Pretty much. I'm gone next week. But then I'm back.

JASPER
Where you goin'?

EVAN
Uh . . .
I'm a . . . I'm working as a CIT?

JASPER
A what?

EVAN
Counselor-in-training? It's just like a week-long-thing.

JASPER
At a camp?

EVAN
Uh . . . yeah.

JASPER
What kind of camp?

This is the question Evan has been dreading.

EVAN
Uh . . . it's a, uh . . .
It's a Jewish music camp?
Um—

JASPER
Jewish *music* camp?

EVAN
. . . Yeah.
Um.
I like teach little kids how to play piano and guitar and stuff.

JASPER
Little Jewish kids,

EVAN
. . . Yeah. Um. My mom is Jewish.
Jasper thinks about this, then nods.

EVAN
I went there when I was a little kid.

KJ
You play guitar?

EVAN
No. Not . . . kinda. Not that well. Um. More piano.

KJ
Jasper plays guitar.
Jasper rolls his eyes.

EVAN
Oh yeah?

JASPER
I taught myself from, like, a book once.

KJ
We had a band!

JASPER
KJ thinks we had a band.
I'm actually a novelist now. I'm writing a novel.

Oh. Cool.

EVAN

We had a band!

KJ

What was the name of the band?

EVAN

Oh fuck. Don't get him started.

JASPER

KJ finally sits up.

KJ

We had many names. Many phases. Many incarnations.

JASPER

We could never agree on a name. We had like fifty different band names.

KJ

The New Humans!

JASPER

Yeah. He really pushed for that one.

KJ

Hieronymous Blast.

JASPER

Oh god.

KJ

Pillowface.
Frog Men.
Electric Hookah.
The Limp Handshakes.
Joseph Yoseph.

JASPER

Cause his great-grandfather was named Josef and mine was named Joseph.

KJ

The JK/KJ Experience.

JASPER

Because he's Kevin Jano and I'm Jasper Kopatch.

KJ

The JK/KJ *Experiment*.

Jasper shakes his head.

KJ

Killer Jamball and the Jolly Kangaroo!
Dharma Machine!
Nefarious Hookah!

JASPER

I wanted us to be called The Aliens.

KJ

No. Boring.

JASPER

After the Bukowski poem. You like Bukowski?

EVAN

Um . . . I don't know him. I don't know his stuff.

JASPER

You ever write poetry?

EVAN

Um. No. I don't know. Not really. In my journal? Sometimes?
No.

JASPER

You gotta read Bukowski.

EVAN
Okay.

JASPER
He cuts away all the bullshit.

EVAN
Cool.
Evan nods, and keeps nodding.

EVAN
... Bukowski.

JASPER
What are you doin' tomorrow night, Shelmerdine?

EVAN
Ah—

JASPER
You goin' to the fireworks?

EVAN
Uh. I don't know. Maybe. I might just stay home.
(a short pause)
Sometimes the Fourth, like, depresses me.

JASPER
Oh yeah?

EVAN
Yeah. You know. I don't know. It's like all these families spread out on the football field? With the glowsticks? And they have that crappy local marching band. I don't know. It's like anticlimactic I guess? Like afterwards everyone seems a little disappointed. And I don't know: it's like, kind of random. Like we explode stuff in the sky and we look at it in like a group?

(pause)
And like, I kind of hate America. So I don't feel this like urgent need to celebrate it or anything.

A pause. Jasper nods thoughtfully.

EVAN
Not that there's like . . . not like it's a bad thing . . . or like . . .
Evan trails off.

JASPER
KJ and I are thinking of having a small shindig tomorrow night.

KJ
A hootenanny.

JASPER
We might read shit out loud. Sing a few songs.
Although drumming circles are strictly forbidden.

KJ
Drumming of any kind.

EVAN
Oh. Cool.

JASPER
You could join us.

A pause.
EVAN

Um . . .
Yeah! Okay. Thanks.
Yeah.
Awesome.

JASPER
We'll see you then. Nine o'clock-ish.

EVAN
Um . . . where? Sorry. Where is the party?

JASPER
Here.

EVAN

Oh. Um.
We're really not supposed to . . .
You can't have a party back here.

Jasper stares at him.

EVAN

It's like a loitering thing.

JASPER

I thought you guys were closed tomorrow.

EVAN

Yeah. We are. But it's. We're not supposed to. Be here. Loiter here.

JASPER

Fine.
Don't come.
It's not a big deal.

A pause while Evan stands there, at a loss. KJ lies back down.

JASPER

No need to fret, little man.

EVAN

I just don't know if I can do it.

JASPER

It's cool.

EVAN

Yeah. Um . . .

Jasper has gone cold. Evan sighs, re-shoulders his backpack and starts to walk away.

KJ

(sincerely)
Have fun at band camp!

EVAN

Uh.
. . . Thanks.

Evan hesitates again, then exits. Silence for a while. KJ is still lying on his back. He starts humming. Finally:

JASPER

KJ.

KJ

Yes.

Pause.

JASPER

Are you freaking out?

KJ

What?!
No!

JASPER

You have to tell me if you start feeling weird again, man.

KJ

No way.

A pause.

KJ

You know what Sandy Jano would say you're doing?

JASPER

What?

KJ

Projecting, man. You're projecting.

Jasper nods bleakly and stares off into the distance. After a while he reaches for his cigarettes. Blackout.

Scene Three

The next evening. The Fourth of July. Twilight. The sky turns dark as the scene progresses. There is a guitar case lying inconspicuously in the corner. Jasper is perched on top of the recycling bin, reading aloud from a wrinkled sheaf of paper. KJ is sitting in one of the plastic chairs, wearing sunglasses, listening. He is rapt. Jasper is in the middle of a sentence.

JASPER

—and her bedroom smelled faintly of stale piss and those porcelain bowls of dried rose petals his mother used to put on the back of the toilet, before she died on his fifteenth birthday.

Candace walked over to the window, took a long white plastic rod between her fingers, and twisted it. Sunlight flooded the dusty little room.

“What?” she said, grinning at him. “I got nothing to be ashamed of.” He noticed for the first time that her front tooth was chipped, just a little. The right one. Something about that tooth stirred him, made his gut ache.

She had the reddest hair he’d ever seen. It was a dangerous red. It told you to stop and it told you to go at the same time.

She turned around and faced him while he squinted in the sunlight. She stared at him for a while, her eyes moving up and down his face. Then she slowly started rolling her T-shirt up. Her stomach was round and soft, so pale it was almost translucent, with a cluster of tiny hairs below the bellybutton. He surprised himself in that moment by wishing for Allison, for her skinny, childish body, her watery brown eyes, and the way she would sleep with her head pressed so hard against his chest that he’d wake up with bruises in the morning.

But here was Candace, right in front of him, ample and ready, with her flaming torch hair and her ironic smile. She pulled the T-shirt up all the way over her head and revealed two large, pendulous white breasts. Her nipples were big and pink and undefined, like they’d been painted on with watercolors.

“Do you like me?” she asked. “Do you like the way I look?”

“I do,” he said, “I do,” and he moved towards her / and—

KJ

Holy shit, man. Your novel is turning me on.

Jasper puts down the paper and sighs.

KJ

I mean, it’s amazing. It’s great literature. It’s just giving me a tiny bit of a boner.

Please. Continue.

Jasper gives him a stern look, then goes back to the piece of paper.

JASPER

“I do,” he said, “I do,” and he moved towards her and grasped her hair with his hand, pulling her head back so her mouth opened a little. She let / out a—

KJ

Oh wait. One thing.

Sorry.

Can I say one thing?

JASPER

Yes.

KJ

The thing about the fifteenth birthday?

I feel like . . . I feel like maybe it’s like too much of a coincidence? That his mom died on his fifteenth birthday. It feels like . . . I’m supposed to be like: whoa: or something.

JASPER

My mom died on my fifteenth birthday.

Pause.

KJ

She did?

JASPER

Yes. You knew that.

KJ

Whoa. No.
I knew that you were . . . I knew that you were fifteen, man.
I didn't know it was on your birthday.

JASPER

It was on my birthday.

KJ

Jesus.
Oh man. That's horrible.
Wow.
Never mind.

A weird pause.

KJ

I'm sorry I didn't know you back then.

JASPER

You should be thankful you didn't know me back then.

KJ

(shaking his head)
Jesus. On your birthday.

JASPER

I would've kicked your ass.

KJ looks slightly wounded. He takes off his sunglasses and puts them in his lap.

JASPER

Okay. I'm gonna skip ahead.

KJ

No!

JASPER

Yes.

Jasper flips through the pages.

JASPER

This next part is what I wrote the other night.
After Andrea called.

(a short pause)

By the way, she's left me like five messages since then and I haven't returned any of them.

(another short pause)

Okay.

Jasper starts reading again.

JASPER

He was seeing America for the first time. In a way he'd been thinking about this drive since he was a kid, this drive across America. What did Arizona look like? he used to wonder. Utah? Wyoming? Oklahoma? Illinois? He had imagined, somehow, that each state had a different set of plants and animals, a slightly different color blue in the sky.

But as he drove, as his little Hudson Hornet cranked and moaned across the long flat highways, and he flashed by farm after farm, cornfield after cornfield, desolate truck stop after desolate truck stop with the red flashing lights and the toothless man behind the counter and the occasional lonely woman with crinkled eyes desperately trying to catch his attention, as he crossed state line after state line, he realized that most of America looked like . . . most of America.

At this point Evan quietly and nervously enters, over the fence or through the shrubs, wearing his backpack. Jasper doesn't pause or seem to notice him. Evan stands near the edge of the patio, listening.

JASPER

It was beautiful, sure, it moved him, but it repeated itself. You could find the same thing there that you could find here.

And so as he approached California, his dream of California started to fade. He thought of what Miller had told him about the

jutting cliffs in Big Sur, the mystical fog, the amethyst waves. But what if it was a lie? Or worse, some kind of delusion? What if Miller was actually living in a cornfield, sleeping on a billboard, writing underneath the glow of another drive-in movie theater?

He not only started to doubt America, but he started to doubt himself. He started doubting the gift that Allison claimed he was born with.

She had first whispered that word a year and half ago, that strange, sacred word, she had whispered it into his ear one morning, and it had sent thrill and terror down his spine.

Genius.

She had breathed the word out, like a sigh, tickling his hair.

And immediately he knew she was right, he'd known it since he was a boy, that word had lived in him before he even knew how to say it or spell it, but after Allison had confronted him with it, made it live in the air, he started to feel a constant, pressing weight on his shoulders and his back.

The loneliness of it.

The loneliness of it could kill him.

He wasn't sure if he believed in a God, but if there was one, He was waiting up there in the sky impatiently, He was putting his finger on his watch and raising his eyebrows and saying:

When's the new painting gonna be finished, son?

When you gonna stop fucking around?

Jasper puts the sheaf of papers down. Everyone is very still.

JASPER

Anyway.

I don't want to like bore you guys or anything.

Hello, Shelmerdine.

KJ leaps to his feet with an uncharacteristic amount of energy.

KJ

WHAT THE FUCK?!

Jasper tries not to beam.

KJ

Whatthefuckwhatthefuckwhatthefuck. Oh my god.

KJ does a little prayer jog around the recycling bin.

KJ

Ohmygodohmygodohmygodohmygod.

Ohmygodohmygodohmygodohmygod.

EVAN

. . . That was really cool.

JASPER

Aw, come on, Shelmerdine.

EVAN

That was really really cool.

Pause.

EVAN

What's, um, what's the main character's name?

JASPER

He doesn't have one.

EVAN

Oh. Cool.

Pause.

EVAN

And uh . . . what's the title?

JASPER

Little Tigers Everywhere.

EVAN

Little Tigers Everywhere. Cool.

JASPER

It's from a Bukowski poem. It's the one that starts out "Sam the whorehouse man / has squeaky shoes"?

Pause.

EVAN

Yeah. I don't know, um. I don't know. I mean, I'm gonna get him out from the library.

Pause. Evan hauls his backpack off and puts it down on the ground. It is somehow an important gesture. Maybe because it is the first time he is asserting himself as here.

KJ

Yes!

Welcome to the Fourth of July!

JASPER

Lookit that. Shelmerdine showed up.

(to KJ)

Are you surprised?

KJ

Fuck no. Fuck no.

EVAN

Is anyone else coming?

KJ and Jasper suddenly look self-conscious.

JASPER

Uh . . . no.

Eli is being an asshole tonight and going out with—no.

KJ

What's Noah doing?

JASPER

. . . Being an asshole.

Pause.

EVAN

Um. I brought some stuff.

Evan kneels down and unzips his backpack.

EVAN

Uh.

He removes some Tupperware.

EVAN

Brownies. Um. My mom made like three batches of brownies yesterday for some reason.

Uh.

. . . And this was the only thing I could steal. We don't really have a, um, liquor cabinet. Um.

He takes a bottle out of his backpack.

EVAN

Peppermint Schnapps?

KJ

Ooh. Peppermint.

Jasper snatches the bottle out of Evan's hand.

JASPER

I'll take that.

Jasper shoves the bottle into his pocket.

KJ

Aw come on. Are you serious?

JASPER

Yes.

KJ

It's the Fourth of fucking July! I can drink Peppermint Schnapps!

JASPER

No you can't.

Evan has no idea what's going on.

EVAN

Um. Sorry. I thought that you guys were gonna . . . I thought you guys were gonna drink.

KJ

(to Jasper)

Are you kidding?

Jasper doesn't respond.

KJ

JESUS.

I'm . . . this is unbelievable.

You're treating me like a child.

Jasper does not budge. KJ walks over to the recycling bin and kicks it.

KJ

FUCK!

(a short pause)

This is so fucking pointless. I could just march over to the liquor store and buy whatever the fuck I want. I'm thirty fucking years old!

JASPER

Do it.

I'll just go home.

KJ

You wouldn't fucking *know!*

JASPER

Oh yes I would, my friend. Yes I would.

A pause.

JASPER

Last time KJ started drinking he went off his meds and starting doing *this* to random people on the street.

He walks over to Evan.

KJ

Don't do it, you asshole.

Jasper makes a little beak with his fingers and zaps Evan with it on his arm. Evan is startled.

JASPER

Zhoop. Zhoop. Zhoop. Zhoop.

KJ

. . . Fuck you.

Jasper takes out his cigarettes and lights one.

JASPER

What else you got, Shelmerdine?

EVAN

Um.

Evan reaches into his backpack.

EVAN

This is kind of dumb. But I thought I'd just . . . I brought sparklers?

Evan takes out a box of sparklers.

EVAN

I mean, they're old. They're from like two years ago.

JASPER

SHPAHKLAHS!

Evan isn't sure how to respond to this.

JASPER

I'm sorry. That sounded like I was imitating a Jewish person or something.

"SHPAHKLAHS!"

. . . I have no problems with Jews, though.

EVAN

Um. Okay.

JASPER

KJ might be like one-eighth Jewish or something, right, KJ?

KJ, standing near the recycling bin, shakes his head sullenly.

JASPER

Or was that just a Sandy Jano theory.

Mm.

(to Evan)

Sandy Jano is KJ's fantastic mother, with whom he still lives. She's a little, ah, how shall we say it, New-Agey? She's into the New Age? And she like became obsessed with tracing their ancestry back and proving they were Jewish or something. It didn't really work, though, did it KJ?

No response.

JASPER

They're like Lutherans.

Pause.

JASPER

I'm one-sixteenth Cherokee.

EVAN

No way.

JASPER

. . . And KJ here has dreams that he's black.

Evan isn't sure whether he's supposed to find this funny or not. He looks at KJ, whose face is inscrutable.

JASPER

Tell him.

KJ doesn't respond.

JASPER

Tell him about the dream.

KJ continues to give no response.

JASPER

Like two months ago KJ had this dream that he was like . . . that he was black. He comes to me and he tells me this. And I was like: wait. How'd you know in the dream that you were black? Did you like look in a mirror or something? And he was like: no. I was just hanging out with a bunch of black people and we were like all having a really good time together and laughing and I felt really, um, accepted—

KJ, despite himself, cracks a smile.

JASPER

—and they all really liked me and then I realized that I was black. That I was one of them.

KJ

And I was really happy.

JASPER

. . . And he was really happy.

Pause. KJ and Jasper giggle.

EVAN

Um. That's kinda weird.

The sound of a distant, muffled explosion. The sky is significantly darker at this point.

EVAN

(forgetting to be cool)

Oh wow.

A pause.

EVAN

I like forgot it was the Fourth of July for a second.

Another pause. Jasper looks at his watch.

JASPER

They won't happen for at least another ten minutes.

No one knows what to say.

KJ

Music!

JASPER

Already?

KJ

Frogmen.

KJ runs over to the corner and unbuckles the guitar case. He removes an acoustic guitar.

JASPER

Lemme eat a brownie first.

Jasper grabs a brownie out of Evan's Tupperware, stuffs it in his mouth, and swallows it.

JASPER

Okay.

KJ hands him the guitar and sits down next to him in a chair.

JASPER

(to KJ)

Do you want to give some kind of introduction? Explanation?

KJ shakes his head. Jasper nods and starts playing the opening chords to the song. He underscores the following monologue/dialogue with the opening chords. He speaks in that rhythmic way people speak over guitar chords. It opens him up a little.

JASPER

(to Evan)

This is a very old song. Actually our oldest song.

Vintage Kevin Jano.

So.

When was this.

Shortly after we met.

KJ was a recent UVM dropout

and I never graduated from high school.

EVAN

Did you go to SHS, too?

JASPER

Fuck no. I grew up in Alstead. You know where that is?

Evan shakes his head.

JASPER

New Hampshire. It's a shithole.
 There's nothing. There's a fucking war memorial and a soda
 fountain and that's it. Trailer trash.
 I am a living piece of trailer trash.
 Anyway
 Moving on
 KJ's a college dropout, I'm a street urchin, and:
 we meet.
 in Vermont.
 in this town.
 and two weeks later
 KJ writes this song
 and comes to me
 and says:
 you make up the music.
 you make up the chords.
 (after a pause, to KJ)
 you want to sing this alone?

KJ

Frogmen sing together.

Jasper nods, plays the opening chords a few more times, and then they sing. During the song the sun sets completely, and by the end they are in the dark, lit only by the moon and perhaps a dim outdoor light on the patio.

JASPER AND KJ

FROM SAGAMORE TO OGDEN
 COME THE SLIMY FROGMEN
 THEY JIGGLE AND JANGLE THROUGH THE ANGLE
 FROM THE BRIDGE TO THE RIDGE AND UNDER THE
 FRIDGE
 THE FROGMEN COME WITH BOTTLES OF RUM

KJ

(MMM RUM)

JASPER AND KJ

MACHO COMACHO THREW THE FIRST SHINDIG
 WHERE THE FAT LADY ATE ALL THE RING DINGS
 THE YOUNG ONES ATE LIKE RABBITS
 AND DREAMT OF LAKE PLACID
 (THE FROGMEN ATE FROG STICKS FROG CAKE AND
 FROG ACID)
 FROM UNDER A LANDING CAME BUTCH AND HIS
 BANDMATES
 THEY PLAYED MULTIPLE SETS OF
 BENNY AND THE JETS
 AND WE ALL PLACED BETS
 YEAH
 WITH PURPLE CIGARETTES
 AND THE PARTY WAS FINE TILL QUARTER PAST NINE
 FROM UP IN MAINE TO DOWN IN SPAIN
 THE FROGMEN CREW BLEW THEIR BRAINS
 FROM FRICK TO FRACK
 I FLICK MY ASH
 FROM DUST TO DUST
 I EAT YOUR CRUST
 FROGMEN, FROGMEN
 NO MATTER WHERE THEY GO
 THEY LEAVE TIME FOR THE WILDLIFE
 FROGMEN, FROGMEN
 THEY MARCH TO AND FRO TO THE DRUM AND THE FIFE
 YEAH
 FROM SAGAMORE TO OGDEN—

The fireworks interrupt them. The noise is powerful, despite the fact that it's coming from a distance. They all sit and listen, in silence. The explosions build over the next minute or so the way that fireworks do, rising to some sort of climax, then fizzling out, then rising again, then working up to a series of short and manic bursts. At some point, probably about twenty seconds in, KJ gets up and starts dancing. He dances in weird little circles around the patio. Jasper and Evan watch him. The fireworks continue.

JASPER

You got any friends at SHS, Shelmerdine?

Evan shakes his head peacefully.

EVAN

No.

They watch KJ dance to the fireworks. After a while:

KJ

(still dancing)

I NEED A SPARKLER!

Evan gets a sparkler out of the box. Jasper lights it and hands it to KJ. They flinch and move back as it rains down light.

KJ dances with the sparkler.

They watch him.

After a little while, quietly:

JASPER

Don't forget to come back from band camp, Shelmerdine.

EVAN

Um. It's not technically band camp.

The fireworks reach their climax.

KJ

(referring to the sparkler)

It's going out it's going out it's going out!

The sparkler goes out.

Darkness.

End of Act One.

Act Two

Scene One

The same set. KJ is sitting by himself, with a cup of tea.

He sits by himself, thinking.

He sits by himself for a long time.

This should be at least twenty seconds.

Finally he says:

KJ

If P then Q.

More silence. More sitting by himself. Then Evan comes out the back door, radiant.

EVAN

Hey!

KJ

... Hey!

Pause.

KJ

Welcome back from band camp!

EVAN

Thanks.
Yeah.

Another pause that goes on a little too long.

KJ

Did you have a good time?

EVAN

Yeah. Actually.
It was pretty cool. I, like, I don't know. It was cool. The kids were cute or whatever. And I like—yeah. The other CITs were cool.

(pause)

I met a girl, actually.

KJ

Excellent.

EVAN

Yeah. I mean, whatever. It was just like a week. But she was pretty cool.

(pause)

Nicole.

KJ

Nicole.

EVAN

Yeah. She's like a violist.
I don't know.
She lives in Boston.
So if I wanted to visit her I'd have to like drive three hours. So
I don't know.
It was cool, though.
(pause)

I mean, it's kind of humiliating that it's taken me this long, but . . .
It's kind of humiliating.

KJ

No. That's beautiful, man.
(pause)
Did you finger her pussy?

Evan blanches a little.

KJ

Oh. Sorry. Is that inappropriate?

EVAN

No. Um. I mean. Yeah. I did.
Yeah.

KJ

. . . Great!

EVAN

Seventeen is like kind of pathetic, though, right? I mean, that it's happening for the first time, like, now?

KJ

There are no rules, man.

EVAN

Yeah.
I mean.
When was your first . . . whatever? Kiss. / Or—

KJ

Ah . . . let's see. My first kiss I was, like, fourteen?

Evan nods.

KJ

It was with this like sixteen-year-old chick at an Allman Brothers show. And I was totally tweaked out just to like kiss her but then

she tried to give me a blow job in a Porto Potty and my like little hairless dick like didn't respond and I was totally humiliated.

EVAN

Oh man.

KJ

And then I dated this like younger girl when I was in high school, she was like a freshman and I was a senior and I think I kind of fucked with her head. We had sex and like now looking back I'm not sure that she was like totally ready, you know? Then I fuckin' cheated on her with this girl at a Chess Championship and we like had mindblowing sex or whatever, me and the Chess girl, and then I made the mistake of like coming back home and like TELLING her or whatever to like get it off my chest and right after I told her she like crumpled in this little like . . .

(he makes a vague gesture and waits for the word to come)
 . . . *heap* on the ground and she like cried and cried but she stayed with me and then I broke up with her anyway right before I went off to UVM.
 So yeah.

EVAN

Wow.

KJ

Bleak, man. It was bleak.

EVAN

When did you have your like first serious girlfriend?

KJ

Ah . . .

KJ shrugs uncomfortably.

EVAN

At UVM?

KJ

Well. Sophomore year I fucked this girl in my interdisciplinary seminar but then I dropped out at the beginning of junior year.

A weird pause.

KJ

Yeah. I'm not really interested in, like, . . . I don't know. Serious shit or whatever.

Another weird pause.

EVAN

Um. Cool. Well. I should probably go inside. I'm workin' the three to ten.

KJ

Awesome.

EVAN

Maybe I'll see you guys tomorrow.

KJ

Wanna hear a song?

Evan looks at his watch.

EVAN

Um. Sure. Yeah. I should go inside in like, a / minute, but—

KJ starts singing.

KJ

DRAWING ON THE STRENGTH OF THE COMMUNITY
 A PERIOD OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY
 ANGO
 A JAPANESE WORD
 THAT LITERALLY MEANS
 A PEACEFUL DWELLING
 INCREASING IN VIGOR AND CLARITY

UNFOLDING NEW SECTIONS
 OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD
 AMONG A SMALL BAND OF STUDENTS
 COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT
 TO REALIZATION
 RELAXATION
 TRANSLATING INTO STIMULATION
 PRACTICING ZAZEN IN OUR ZENDO
 UPON AN ALTAR IN MY DOJO
 I AM A SENSEI
 I AM A SENSEI

EVAN

(edging toward the door)

That's awesome.

KJ

It's not over.

IN OUR CITY OF HARMONY
 THIS INCREDIBLE NATION
 CIRCLED OVER THE WORLD AROUND US
 RETURNS HOME WITH US
 THE FIRST TIME I ASKED THE INCENSE
 SUSTAIN THE ONGOING DELUSION
 SOCIAL STATUS QUO
 INTUITIVE ENERGY FLOW
 I AM A SENSEI.

A pause.

EVAN

Cool.

KJ

Thanks.

EVAN

Are you, like, a Buddhist?

KJ

You could say that.

You could say that.

Pause.

EVAN

Um. See ya later, KJ.

Evan exits into the coffee shop.

KJ sits by himself. He thinks hard about something, and then, upon realizing something else, smiles. Then he goes back to thinking again. Blackout.

Scene Two

KJ is standing next to the back door, leaning up against the wall. He is humming quietly to himself. It looks a little like he's waiting to surprise someone.

After a while, Evan comes out through the back door in his white apron, lugging a full garbage bag. He starts when he sees KJ.

EVAN

Oh. Wow!

KJ giggles.

EVAN

You scared me. Kind of.

They stand there for a second, and then Evan walks over to the garbage bin, opens it, and throws the garbage bag in. Then he tries leaning casually against the garbage bin, but it's too uncomfortable. He stands up straight, stuffs his hands in his pockets, and stands there while KJ gazes at him, smiling.

EVAN

I have a five-minute break.

KJ claps his hands.

KJ

Yay!!!

EVAN

Where's Jasper?

KJ

He's sick.

EVAN

Oh man. That sucks.

KJ

Yeah.

EVAN

Does he have like a cold? Or / like—

KJ

Yup.

A long pause. They are both at a loss. Evan decides to try sitting in one of the plastic chairs. KJ stays by the door. Silence for a while.

KJ

(with exaggerated excitement)
So are you gonna go to college?!

EVAN

Um. Yeah. Next year? Yeah. I think so.

KJ

Where?

EVAN

Um. I don't know. I mean, wherever I get in I guess? I don't know. I'm kind of interested in Bates?

KJ

Never heard of it.

EVAN

Yeah. It's kind of small. It's in Maine.

Pause.

EVAN

You dropped out, right?

KJ nods.

EVAN

Why? Um. If it's not rude to ask.

KJ

I had a breakdown. I don't know. I wouldn't really call it a breakdown.

A pause.

EVAN

Okay. Cool.

KJ

College is bullshit, though.

If you're like . . . I mean, if you've like . . . if you're the real thing, or if you've got like . . . college is just like pointless.

Evan nods.

KJ

Jasper didn't go to college.

EVAN

Yeah.

Pause.

EVAN

Did you have like a major?

KJ

Double Major. Math and Philosophy.

EVAN

Oh cool! Philosophy is cool. I mean, I don't know anything about it.

KJ

Ever heard of propositional calculus?

EVAN

No. I mean. I haven't—I'm taking pre-calc next year.

KJ

Propositional calculus is different from regular calculus, my little friend. It's Logic.

Evan nods, confused.

KJ

I was gonna write my thesis on it.
You woulda loved it.

EVAN

What was it . . . what is it, / like—

KJ

You know about truth tables?

Evan shakes his head.

KJ

No? Okay. Well.

KJ scratches his beard thoughtfully.

KJ

It's like: If P then Q, then, you know, Truth.

Or it's like: If P then *not* Q.

Or it's like: P and Q. Or P *or* Q.

But when it gets interesting is when you try to figure out what can be a P and Q in the first place.

A pause.

KJ

So okay. Let's say P is: "I'm a wizard." And Q is: "The wizard is yellow." Then, uh . . .

You have to figure out if there's even such thing as a . . .

KJ trying to think. A long pause. Evan is starting to feel uncomfortable.

EVAN

Um—

KJ

Or:

Let's say you're feeling sad, right? You're feeling sad.

EVAN

Okay.

KJ

And you like look at your own sadness. From like above. And that's how you're able to say, you know: "I feel sad."

EVAN

Okay.

KJ

But like: what do you—which of your senses like—how do you *do* that?

Pause.

KJ

Or like: or: or:
J, right? Picture the letter J. As in Jasper.

EVAN

. . . Okay.

KJ

And then picture another J. Sitting next to it.

Evan nods.

KJ

And I say to you: J is the same thing as J.

EVAN

Okay.

KJ

But *how do you prove that?*

A pause.

EVAN

Um.

(a short pause)

Because they look like each other?

KJ

EXACTLY!

That was my point.

That was the gist of my thesis.

Pause.

EVAN

Um. I should probably go back inside.

Evan starts to head back inside.

KJ

I love you, Shelmerdine.

Evan stops in his tracks, terrified. Is he supposed to say it back? A long pause while KJ gazes at him. Finally:

EVAN

Um. I love you too.

KJ

Just kidding.

Another pause.

KJ

Just kidding!

EVAN

Yeah. Um. Me too.

Evan hesitates, then goes back inside the coffee shop. KJ doesn't move. Blackout.

Scene Three

The same day. Evening.

KJ has not left. He is lying across two plastic chairs, sleeping.

There are a couple of tiny liquor bottles at his feet.

Evan comes out with his backpack on. He is closing up the coffee shop.

EVAN

Oh shit.

Evan stands there looking at KJ for a while. He approaches him and tries poking him very lightly. Nothing happens. He tries poking him harder. After a few seconds, KJ opens his eyes but does not move.

Was I snoring? KJ

No. EVAN

A pause.

Is. Um. Is everything okay? EVAN

Do you like Jasper more than me? KJ

Um. EVAN

No.

No!

Every time I see you you want to know if Jasper's here. KJ

That's because Jasper is usually / here. EVAN

He's sick! KJ

I know. I'm sorry. EVAN

Pause.

I wanna kill myself. KJ

Oh shit. EVAN

Evan sits down near KJ on a chair, takes out his cell phone and dials.

Mom. EVAN

I'm gonna be late for dinner.
(a short pause)

Um . . . this guy I work with is upset.
(a short pause)

He broke up with his girlfriend.
(pause)

Please don't ask me that. Please don't ask me that. Please don't ask me that.
(a short pause)

Please don't ask me that.

I don't care.

I don't care.

Okay.

Evan hangs up. KJ is still lying across the chairs.

I hate her. EVAN

Whoa. KJ

She like—she does this thing? She does this thing where she like asks what kind of—like if I want cauliflower or carrots with dinner and then if I like tell her carrots she's like well your father doesn't—and it's just like whatever I say she like contradicts me and I'm just like—
Never mind. It's stupid.

KJ nods understandingly.

Yeah. KJ
This one time . . .

This one time I couldn't stop saying this one word? I was like obsessed with this word. I would just walk around whispering it to myself.

I was a little kid. I was like five.

I would walk around all day saying:

(he whispers softly)

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

EVAN

Ladder? Like what you climb on?

KJ *nods.*

KJ

I couldn't stop saying it. I started like whispering it to myself at night and I wouldn't be able to fall asleep. And finally one night my mom got into my bed with me and she was like: you can say it for as long and as loud as you want and I'll hold your hand the whole time.

And I was like: okay.

And I just went:

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

(he has begun to cry by this point)

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

(a pause)

... And then I stopped.

Pause. Evan is frozen in place.

EVAN

Um.

A long pause.

KJ

He died.

Evan looks at him uncomprehendingly. Pause.

KJ

Jasper died.

Pause.

EVAN

... No he didn't.

KJ

He died a week ago.

Pause.

EVAN

No.

KJ nods.

EVAN

Come on. Stop it.

A pause.

EVAN

No he didn't.

Silence.

EVAN

Why are you . . . stop fucking with me.

(pause)

You just said he was sick!

KJ

I'm sorry.

I'm really really sorry.

EVAN

Why are you saying that?!

KJ shrugs. Silence.

KJ

Isn't that weird?

That he died?

I just think it's so weird.

Evan walks over to the big recycling bin and tries to knock it over. But this is hard to do. The recycling bin is very, very heavy. It takes Evan a long time. For a while, it seems like he's not going to be able to do it. Then, finally, he tips it over. The sound of glass bottles falling. Maybe a few roll out onto the ground.

Evan walks inside.

KJ is alone.

After a long time Evan walks out again. He is holding an oatmeal raisin cookie.

EVAN

What did he die of.

KJ

He died.

EVAN

What did he die of?!

(pause)

Are you fucking with me? You can't . . . you have to tell me if you're fucking with me!

KJ

He died in his sleep. I think. He died in his room. He was shooting up. He died.

EVAN

He was *what*?

KJ

He wasn't like . . . he'd only done it a couple of times before. He was just . . . it was an accident.

EVAN

Were you *there*?

KJ shakes his head.

EVAN

That doesn't make any sense!

Pause.

KJ

It's okay if you can't cry.

Evan begins to cry.

EVAN

Oh my god.

I have to go home.

I have to go home.

KJ

Okay.

EVAN

I have to go home. I'm sorry. I don't know why I have this cookie.
I have to go home.

Evan puts his cookie down on the table and leaves.

KJ is alone.

Eventually he starts singing, softly and slowly.

KJ

ZANE
SITS
BY A BROOK
A LITTLE STREAM
IN A NOOK
IN A CRANNY WITH HIS KRAMMY
HE SITS BY A BROOK
AND HE LOOOOKS
IN THE WATER
THAT FALLS DOWN THE ROCKS—

KJ notices the fallen recycling bin. He stops singing and walks over to it. He tries to right it. It takes a very long time, but he succeeds. He stares at it for a while, then lays his hand on top of it. Blackout.

Scene Four

The next day.

Evan is standing outside by himself, on a break. He wears his white apron. He looks around furtively, and then takes a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. He tries tapping the pack of cigarettes against his palm, a little unsure of what direction to tap it in. Then he unwraps it, with some difficulty. Then he takes out a cigarette. Then he takes out a book of matches from his pocket. He lights the cigarette. This is the first time in his life he has ever bought a pack of cigarettes and this is the first time in his life that he has ever smoked a cigarette by himself.

There is a certain bittersweet joy in it.

While he smokes, he gazes around, looking for KJ.

After a little while, Evan takes out his cell phone and dials. He waits, then:

EVAN

Hey.

It's Evan.

How are you.

Um.

I'm smoking a cigarette.

(pause)

I'm calling because I want to know how your recital thing went and if they gave you the first part for Pachelbel's or if you had to play the other part.

I bet you were good. Either way.

Um.

(pause)

I'm also calling because my friend died? Um. I know that sounds really dramatic but um. My friend died. I don't know. Um. He was like a genius and like a novelist and he died of a drug overdose. He was like one of my best friends.

I'm um . . .

I'd like to come visit you in Boston.

He's the only person I um . . .

My grandparents died when I was a baby.

Okay. Sorry this message is ramble-y.

Blackout.

Evan hangs up.

He stubs out his cigarette.

He waits for KJ, in vain.

A minute passes.

Blackout.

Blackout.

Scene Five

The set is empty.

After a few seconds KJ enters, with Jasper's guitar case on his back. It's a bit startling to see him enter because we have only seen him attached to the picnic table and plastic chairs up until this point.

KJ puts his guitar case down and sits in one of the plastic chairs. He is wearing shorts and sneakers and sunglasses. He sits there for a while, in the sunlight, and then he bends down and unlaces his shoe. He turns his shoe upside down.

A pebble falls out onto the ground and makes a small noise.

KJ doesn't put his shoe back on.

He takes a paperback book out of his bag. He flips through it and opens to a page and starts reading it.

Evan appears at the back door, peeks out, and sees KJ. He opens the door and walks out. He is wearing his white apron. KJ keeps reading. Evan doesn't know what to do. He takes out his pack of cigarettes and lights one. He is much better at smoking by this point. Evan smokes while KJ reads.

Eventually:

EVAN

Hey.

KJ

Hey.

EVAN

I haven't seen you for a few days.

KJ

Yeah.

(pause)

I might be moving.

EVAN

Oh. Wow. Um. Really?

KJ

I might be. I'm thinking about it.

EVAN

Where?

KJ

I have a list of places.

I'm trying to decide.

(a short pause)

Wanna hear?

EVAN

Yeah.

KJ wrenches a small, wrinkled, soggy piece of paper out of his pocket.

KJ

These are just some ideas.

Okay.

(he reads:)

Austin Texas.

EVAN

Oh cool. It's supposed to be cool down there.

KJ

It's high on the list.

Iowa City.

Olympia Washington.

Taos. I don't know if I said that right.

Amherst Massachusetts.

Orion's wind farm.

Seattle.

EVAN

What's Orion's wind farm?

KJ

Oh. Uh. This guy? Jasper's old weed dealer? He lives on like a wind farm in Marshfield.

EVAN

What's a wind farm?

KJ

It's like . . . it's like the white windmill things by the side of the road. The big uh . . . like the / spinny—

EVAN

Oh yeah.

KJ

(going back to the paper:)
Eureka California.

EVAN

How does he *live* there?

KJ

(ignoring him)
Eureka California.
Asheville. Question mark.
Commune in Virginia where they make hammocks find out name.
. . . Can't read my own handwriting. Resnick? Redding?
This one's a stretch: Winnipeg?

EVAN

Where's that?

KJ

It's in the Canadian province of Manitoba? I believe.

Pause.

KJ

That's it.

EVAN

Those all sound cool.

KJ

Yeah.

I'm thinkin' about it. I don't know. Sandy Jano is against the idea.
But.

Evan stubs out his cigarette on the ground.

KJ

. . . Smoker.

EVAN

Yeah. I guess. I mean, hopefully. Not.

Pause.

EVAN

Um. I'm sorry I um. Ran away. Or whatever. On Wednesday.

KJ nods.

EVAN

Is there gonna be a funeral? Cause I'd really / like—

KJ

It was last week.

Evan nods. A long pause.

EVAN

He was so. um. cool.

A self-conscious pause.

EVAN

I kind of feel like a completely different . . .

*Evan shakes his head tearily and can't finish his sentence.
KJ looks at him for a little while.*

KJ

Come here.

Evan walks over to him.

KJ

Kneel down.

Evan tentatively kneels down.

KJ

I'm going to bless you. I'm going to remove your toxins.

KJ puts his fingers together and touches Evan's cheek.

KJ

(quietly)

Zhoop.

(a pause)

That's it.

You can stand up again.

Evan stands up again.

EVAN

Um. KJ? I should / tell you—

KJ

I'm sending his novel out. It was almost finished so I thought they could publish it as like. You know. An unfinished thing.

EVAN

Oh. Cool.

KJ

Yeah. I'm just like looking in the like book jackets of all my mom's books and I'm like: all right. Farrar Stroose and Geeroosh. Union Square. I'll send it to you.

EVAN

Don't you like need an agent or something?

KJ shrugs and lifts up the book in his lap. It is Bukowski's The Last Night of the Earth.

KJ

Did Bukowski have an agent?

EVAN

Yeah. I don't know.

*(a short pause)*I'm reading some of his . . . I took out um . . . I'm reading *Ham on Rye*? And um—yeah. *Love Is a Dog from Hell*.

KJ

You like it?

EVAN

Yeah. Yeah. He like. It's um. It's great. He says "cunt" a lot.

KJ

Yeah!

EVAN

. . . Yeah.

Pause.

EVAN

Um.

KJ?

KJ

Yes.

EVAN

Rahna came back yesterday.
I guess she was on vacation?

KJ

Uh-huh.

EVAN

And she said you guys, um . . . she said that you can't be back here. And she was really, um, mad. And I explained to her about um . . . about what, um, happened while I was gone—

KJ slowly starts putting his shoe back on.

EVAN

—but she was really pissed at me and she told the manager which was really stupid of her but she told him and he said that um: that you guys, that um, you, can't be here anymore. I mean, nobody's supposed to be back here except for staff.

KJ nods.

EVAN

. . . And I got really mad and I like argued with him and I was like: he's not *doing* anything, but um they found um those liquor bottles I guess and apparently Jasper once um *peed* out here or something so they um . . .

His voice fades out. KJ nods.

EVAN

He's coming back tomorrow and he's gonna be check / ing all the—

KJ

It's cool.

EVAN

You can start coming inside if you want.
I can make you free tea.

KJ

Yeah. I don't know. They always play that Ani DiFranco shit inside.

EVAN

. . . Yeah.

KJ

Uh.

EVAN

You can stay as late as you want today! I mean. Nobody's gonna check.

(pause)

I should probably go back inside in a minute.

KJ

Yeah.

A pause.

KJ

I have a present for you.

KJ points to the guitar case.

KJ

I don't know how to play, so.
It's his guitar.

EVAN

I can't take that.

KJ

It's for you. His roommates didn't want it.

EVAN

. . . I don't know.

KJ

Do you already have one?

EVAN

Um. No. I mean, my mom has a really crappy one and I play that sometimes.

KJ

Take it. It's pretty good. He stole it from some yuppie asshole in Burlington.

Evan looks at it. He bends down and unbuckles the case. He takes out the guitar. He looks at it. He holds it.

KJ

Try it.

EVAN

I'm not very good.

Evan plays a few halting chords.

KJ

Yeah!!

Yes.

Evan smiles a little.

EVAN

I feel weird taking it.

Pause.

EVAN

Okay. I mean. Thank you.

KJ

Thank Joseph Yoseph. Thank the Limp Handshakes.

EVAN

Okay.

KJ

Thank The Aliens.

EVAN

Okay.

KJ

Play something!

EVAN

I should go back inside.

KJ

Play something first!

EVAN

Um.

Evan thinks.

KJ

Don't think!

EVAN

Um.

Evan hesitates, and then messily starts playing the first few chords of "If I Had a Hammer."

EVAN

(singing softly)

If I had a hammer, I'd hammer / in—

KJ

No covers!

Evan stops playing.

EVAN

Oh. Um. Sorry.
I don't know any, um . . . I don't have any, like, originals. I don't
write music.

KJ

Why not?

EVAN

Um. I don't know. I don't think I'm good enough. I don't know.
I'm not like a genius musically or anything.

KJ

How do you know?

Evan shrugs.

KJ

I'm a genius. Jasper was a genius.

EVAN

Yeah.

KJ

Maybe you're a genius too!

Pause.

EVAN

Yeah.

Pause.

EVAN

Um. I should probably go back inside.

KJ

Play The Hammer Song.

Pause.

KJ

Play The Hammer Song!

EVAN

Really?

KJ

Play it.

*Evan looks anxiously toward the back door, and then starts playing
"If I Had a Hammer." He's not great. He strums haltingly and
botches the chords a couple of times, but gets better as he goes on.
He has a thin, slightly out-of-tune voice.*

EVAN

IF I HAD A HAMMER, I'D HAMMER IN THE MORNING
I'D HAMMER IN THE EVENING, ALL OVER THIS LAND
I'D HAMMER OUT DANGER, I'D HAMMER OUT
WARNING
I'D HAMMER OUT LOVE BETWEEN MY BROTHERS
AND MY SISTERS
ALL OVER THIS LAND.

Evan takes in a long, shaky breath.

EVAN

IF I HAD A BELL, I'D RING IT IN THE MORNING
I'D RING IT IN THE EVENING, ALL OVER THIS LAND
I'D RING OUT DANGER, I'D RING OUT WARNING
I'D RING OUT LOVE BETWEEN MY BROTHERS AND
MY SISTERS
ALL OVER THIS LAND.

IF I HAD A SONG, I'D SING IT IN THE MORNING
I'D SING IT IN THE EVENING, ALL OVER THIS LAND

Annie Baker

I'D SING OUT DANGER, I'D SING OUT WARNING
I'D SING OUT LOVE BETWEEN MY BROTHERS AND
MY SISTERS
ALL OVER THIS LAND.

A pause. Evan puts down the guitar, crimson-faced.

EVAN

Um. Yeah.
It's kind of a stupid song. I don't even know what it means.

KJ

... That was awesome.

EVAN

I kind of fucked it up.

KJ

You're gonna go far, man.

EVAN

Come on.

KJ

I'm not kidding.
You're gonna go far.

EVAN

... Yeah?

KJ

Yeah.

*Evan tries not to smile. But then he does.
They stand there.
Blackout.*

END OF PLAY

Circle Mirror Transformation
