

Stragglers

A Full-Length play by Jeremy Johnson

3 Males, 2 Females

2 Hours

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STRAGGLERS

ACT 1

SCENE 1- HOTEL LOBBY

JEN, late teens, stands behind the service desk. She takes a stack of papers from the printer and begins shuffling through them contently. KATIE, 20's, enters and puts a broom away.

KATIE

Oo! New reviews?

JEN

Oh, you know it.

KATIE

Awesome, let's do this-ew.

JEN

There's something sticky on this desk. Is this your blood or trucker blood?

JEN

It's not blood! I think one of the guests was eating a BP&J. It's jelly.

KATIE

No, I work in the hotel industry, I know what blood looks like.

JEN

Um, I too work in the hotel industry, but that's jelly.

KATIE

You need to find out who was bleeding so we can clean their room first. If we don't get the enzyme lift on it early, we'll get another Room 47.

JEN

Katie, oh my God, it was a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich, please unflip your shit.

JEN swipes a finger across the counter and licks it.

JEN

See? Jelly.

KATIE

Awesome. You have hepatitis. As of now, you have hepatitis A through Z.

JEN

Weird how hepatitis tastes like strawberry jelly.

KATIE swipes her finger across the desk and licks it.

KATIE

You bitch, that's totally blood! What's wrong with you? You want me going down with you is that it? Well, just know if my hospital bed is next to yours, I'm pissing in your IV.

JEN

Hoe, I'll straight up unplug your ass!

JEN gets a spray bottle and rag out from behind the counter and cleans the sticky spot.

KATIE

...I'm trying to think of a way to call you an ass plug.

JEN

Like, "Unplugging asses is pretty uncharacteristic for an ass plug!"

KATIE

Yeah, I guess I'll take that.

JEN

Good one. Start us off.

JEN hands KATIE the stack of papers. JEN hops up onto the

counter to sit.

KATIE

Uncle_Porksteak_69 Two Stars.

JEN

Prick.

KATIE

"Scratchy comforters, outdated bathrooms, desk made of poor quality wood," this guy has some fine taste for a name like Uncle Porksteak.

JEN

Porksteak's got some standards.

KATIE

"Room reeked of urine and masking spray," that must have been before we started mixing in the fabric softener.

JEN

And before we stopped peeing on the rugs.

KATIE laughs.

KATIE

Oh, here we go, "Front desk service was A plus-plus. Katie was a gem. Wish I wasn't just... passing through, should've taken her with me!" Winky face. Gross.

JEN

Aw. You pulled on Uncle Porksteak's heart strings.

KATIE

You mean perv strings.

JEN

You made him your little perv string puppet.

KATIE

Like a marionette?

JEN

A perv-ionette.

The tragic cry of PHIL belts from
offstage, KATIE and JEN ignore it.

KATIE

Your turn.

KATIE hands JEN the stack of
papers. JEN shuffles through.

KATIE

I think I'm going to write one of these reviews sometime,
and you'll have to guess which one was me.

JEN

Pshh. Don't work too hard on it. I know your mind Katers-
Potaters, more than you do probably. Here's a goodie.

JOSH, a traveler with a backpack
and a notepad enters.

JEN

TornadoChaser99 Five stars!

KATIE and JEN high-five.

JEN

"Almost NO bloodstains! Hair covering the pillowcase was
probably shampooed, judging by fresh scent. Speaking of
fresh, episode of Fresh Prince on TV, hilarious! Will and
Carlton stranded on camping trip! Oh, Carlton! Friendly
roaches, customer service probably not axe murderers!"

KATIE

That's the sweetest thing anyone's ever said about me.

JEN

Well, they obviously don't know you very well.

JOSH

Wow.

KATIE

Shit! Hi! Hello. Uh. Okay. Whatever. I mean... Name please?

JOSH

Uh, Josh Powell. I don't have a reservation.

KATIE

Oh. Are you taking over another reservation?

JOSH

What?

JEN

From another trucker.

JOSH

Oh, I'm not a trucker, so no.

KATIE

Oh. Passing through on the way to Colorado? Denver and the Rockies and.. all that?

JEN

And legal weed.

JOSH

Uh, nope, here's where I want to be for now.

JEN

..Are you hear to see your grandpa?

JOSH

What?

JEN

At the Veteran's memorial?

JOSH

Oh, nope. No, I.. I'm just kind of wandering around and I ended up here.

JEN

..Why? Why are you here?

KATIE

Jen, stop interrogating. But seriously, Big Springs is your destination? You know this is Big Springs right?

JOSH

Yeah. I'm on a uh...

JEN

Are you Uncle Porksteak?

KATIE

Shit. I'm calling the cops.

JOSH

No! What? No, I'm on a quest. Like a journey okay? I'm just driving around trying to figure things out and I ended up here. I don't know for how long or what for, but here is where I am, so here is where I'm going to be.

JEN

That's stupid.

KATIE

Jen! We have a room for you. Josh, right?

JOSH

Thank you.

KATIE

Sorry for threatening to call the cops.

JOSH

Don't worry about it. It's a weird situation.

JEN

Our pool's broken.

JOSH

That's okay.

JEN

Our internet needs to be reset every three minutes.

JOSH

I won't be using it.

KATIE

The only room we have doesn't have a TV or a microwave.

JOSH

Fine with me.

JEN

...What are you going to do?

JOSH

I don't know. Where is there to eat?

PHIL

(From OS) My HEART! She pissed on my heart!

KATIE

Grandma Max's Deerwood Bar and Grill or Sam Bass Saloon.
Ignore the emotional man in the bathroom.

JOSH

Okay. Sounds very... local. Who's Sam Bass.

JEN

Train robber. He held up a train here when Big Springs was
just a train station.

JOSH

So they named a restaurant after him? Sounds like a case of
Stockholm Syndrome to me.

JEN

Hey, screw you, man!

KATIE

Jen! Calm down, you don't know what that is.

PHIL enters from behind the desk.
He's been crying for hours.

PHIL

Katie! Katie. I'd like my phone back please.

KATIE

Why's that, Phil?

PHIL

I need to... see what time it is.

KATIE

There's a clock right there.

PHIL

I need to... check movie times.

KATIE

They're playing Heaven is For Real at 7:00.

PHIL

Well, hell is for real too, and I'm there and I need. To make. A phone call.

KATIE

To whom?

PHIL

Katie, I am your boss, and that is my phone, and I demand that you return it to me!

KATIE

Are you going to call Megan?

PHIL

...Fine you'd better hang onto it.

JEN

Phil, this is Josh. Josh, this is Phil, the hotel owner and manager.

PHIL

How are ya?

JOSH

Hi.

PHIL

Did you tell him about the pool? And the internet and the washing machines.

JOSH

The washing machines?

KATIE

We didn't tell him about the washing machines. They're broken.

JOSH

Ah.

PHIL

But there's a matt down the road and to the left, or of course, you could just use the trucking facilities.

JEN

He's not a trucker.

PHIL
Visiting old grand-dad then?

KATIE
Josh is an adventurer.

PHIL
A what?

JOSH
That's a pretty intense word for what I'm doing.

PHIL
What are you doing?

JOSH
Just looking around.

PHIL
You should see the lake! It's a little cold down there for a dip, but there's water in the ground anyhow. Did the girls tell you about Sam Bass Saloon?

JOSH
They did, it's pretty good then?

PHIL
Oh it's the greatest grub at gunpoint in the region!

JOSH
Hm. Is there anywhere I don't have to eat at gunpoint?

JEN
Deerwood Grill or Grandma Max's. They're both whatever.

PHIL
Oh, there's a Subway in Ogallala!

KATIE
Phil?

PHIL
That's where I met Megan.

KATIE
Phil, tell Josh about the gulch!

JEN

Oh yeah! We have a gulch!

KATIE

Are you into topography?

JOSH

What the fuck is a gulch?

PHIL

She had black curls that hung over the visor.

KATIE

Come back, Phil, don't do this.

PHIL

I asked for a club sandwich without bologna. She said she didn't know which one the bologna was. I yelled baloney! We laughed for hours. Oh Christ!

PHIL weeps.

KATIE

Phil's going through a breakup.

JOSH

I'm sorry man. How long were you together?

PHIL

Do I look sad to you?

JEN

Phil, you can't ask strangers if you look sad. It scares them.

PHIL

Oh. Do I scare you?

KATIE

Can't ask strangers if you scare them, Phil.

JOSH

It's okay, you do look sad, but I'm not scared of you.

PHIL

I look sad?

JOSH

Yeah.

PHIL

I am sad.

KATIE

So you're in Room 19, here's your key.

PHIL picks up the stack of papers
from the desk.

PHIL

What is this?

JEN

Uh, I'll help you with your bag, Josh.

JOSH

That's okay, I-

JEN rips JOSH's backpack off.

PHIL

Hey, Jen, wait. Did you think any more about leaving? For college or anything because I need to know.

JEN

I still don't know, I don't think I can handle the backlash.

KATIE

Good. Because we're supposed to be together forever.

JEN

I'm not worried about you, creeper. My parents would sooner chain me to a pipe in their basement than let me leave town.

PHIL

Well, they got the right idea.

JEN

What?

JOSH

Yeah what?

PHIL

I mean there's plenty for you here!

JEN

That remains to be seen. This way, sir.

JEN and JOSH exit.

PHIL

I thought I told you never to read these!

KATIE

I'm sorry. We think they're funny. Plus they're not all bad.

PHIL

These internet people never have anything good to say about anything! Never! Not from my experience. God Katie, they're depressing! How could you find joy out of any of this... this... bullcrap?

KATIE

Because it's bullcrap. It's funny to me, to hear other people talk about my job and my life. They look at it in a way that's impossible for me to see, and it's... I don't know, it's funny. Plus all this is with a huge grain of salt, Phil. I mean these could be all lies for all we know.

PHIL

Why would people lie?

KATIE

Okay, I'll just read them at home.

PHIL

Could you please?

KATIE

Absolutely.

PHIL

I'm proud of this place, Katie.

KATIE

I know.

PHIL

I worked really hard on this place. Making everyone comfortable. It's hard being hospitable. You know?

KATIE

I know.

PHIL

I'm hospitable right?

KATIE

Totally. Phil the Hospitable.

PHIL

I've poured all of who I am into this place. I need to be helpful, Katie. It's just who I am. If someone calls on me, anyone, you or Jen, a guest or a stranger, anyone calls on me, I'll be right there without hesitation, ready to help. Do you believe me?

KATIE

Phil no one has ever questioned your willingness to respond to a call for help.

PHIL

Exactly, which is why I need my phone back.

KATIE

That was sneaky. Give me three days off.

PHIL

Ehh, one day off, next month.

KATIE

One for me and one for Jen.

PHIL

Frickety fine.

KATIE

And I get to read the reviews at work.

PHIL

UGH. It hurts me when I read these slanderous remarks by these yahoos.

KATIE

It's not all slanderous, and again, it's not all true.

PHIL

So you say. ...Oh, actually, here's a good review! What do you know! Huh. Five stars from TornadoChaser99-

KATIE rips the stack away from
PHIL.

KATIE

Time to reset the wifi!

KATIE exits.

PHIL

Baloney.

SCENE 2- SAM BASS SALOON

As Scene 2 is set up, FOSSIL, an old bartender, enters pushing a saloon bar out onto center stage, facing the audience. He stands behind the bar and addresses them.

FOSSIL

How do ya do? Yeah this is one of them shows where the gruff, but folksy bartender talks to the audience, but I'll save you some guess work. I ain't a prophet, I ain't gonna summarize shit you just seen, and I ain't derivin' life lessons from nothin'. But I do have some stories. See I can be folksy, but this ain't fuckin' Mahoney. The name's Fossil, probably on account of I'm real hard to get at.

Welcome to Sam Bass! You are a wild bunch of critters ain't you! I know wild when I see it. I reckon ya'll took I80 straight west until you ran out of gas the fourth or fifth time and decided to pull into Big Springs instead risking Ogallala and running out of gas. Don't blame ya! A lot of bad can happen in that little stretch in between here and there.

You see residuals of bad all over the road, wherever ya go. Retread in tatters, a black stain leading from the asphalt into the grass, a shoe and half a sock... little roadside memorials of the various tragedies that do occur out on the Great Black River.

I know a guy who comes through here a couple times a month on a route. Sauce Packet we call him. Common folk'll tell ya it's because he saves all of his unused sauce packets from the road, but the real reason has to do with a lady he intended to bed in the parking lot of a Taco Bell. I'll let him tell you that one.

But I will tell ya this one. One night, Sauce Packet was on his last hour of drive time heading into Denver, when this yahoo a lane over starts to get rowdy. College kid and his buddies, probably headin' back to Boulder. They was tryin' to see how close they could get to his passenger side tire. Sauce Packet wasn't havin' it. He rolls down his window and tosses out his Styrofoam cup of tobacco spit. It's a direct hit onto the windshield, but they weren't lettin' up. Then as retaliation, the punk threw a beer bottle out the window at Sauce Packet's tire. The tire, which had been retreaded to hell and back, exploded causing the little car to spin off the road into the dirt.

Sauce Packet pulled to the side and ran back, to finish the job, he would tell ya. But Sauce Packet's got a heart of gold, anybody else would tell ya that. Couple of guys were standin' over their buddy, the driver who was twistin' about in the dirt, squirmin' like a squirrel fightin' a fish. He couldn't breathe under the chunk of retread which had somehow fused itself onto the kid's face in the explosion, right over his nose and mouth. Sauce Packet bent down, took a hold of the rubber, and pulled with all his might!

Don't worry. Most of the bastard's face remained intact. Sauce Packet saved him from suffocatin' to death that night, but his breath will smell like burnt rubber until the day he dies.

Welp! Thanks for stoppin' by! Feel free to try out Deerwood and Grandma Max's, but I got a feelin' we'll be seein' ya back real soon!

FOSSIL starts wiping down the bar,
JOSH is sitting with a half-empty
glass and a completely empty
notebook in front of him. KATIE
enters.

KATIE

How's it going, Fossil.

FOSSIL

Katie.

KATIE

Is Jen working tonight?

FOSSIL

No, she's with you working housekeeping tonight as we speak. At least that's what she told me.

KATIE

She asked Phil if she could be off by three because she had an early shift here.

FOSSIL

She's a strange one, but nothin' good ever came from sneakin' around. You should look into it.

KATIE

If she wants me to know what's up, she'll tell me. It's probably about college anyway. You have any of that wheat stuff left?

FOSSIL pours KATIE a wheat beer.

FOSSIL

She might be waiting for someone to ask.

KATIE

She's not. I've known her for twenty years, Fossil. If she wants me to know something, she'll tell me. If I so much as ask her how she's doing, she'll clam up even tighter. Jen's fine. She's being weird, but she's fine.

FOSSIL

If this is fine, then what does not fine look like?

KATIE

(To JOSH) Josh, right?

JOSH

Yep. How was uh... how was work?

KATIE

You were there for the highlights. You should write an article on our buddy Fossil here. An editorial thing, call it "Rural decay"...

FOSSIL

I pour your beer. You watch it.

JOSH

No, I mean yeah maybe. I'm kind of stuck.

KATIE

You're a writer though?

JOSH

I don't know what I am.

FOSSIL

Katie, you wrote something once, didn't you?

KATIE

Nope!

FOSSIL

I believe you have, as a matter of fact, what have we here?

KATIE

Please? Fossil?

FOSSIL

"A poem for the Sam Bass Saloon Circa 1997: If you are feeling malnourished/ Your stomach feels empty and squirrelish/ For grub with class/ head on down to Sam Bass/ And let the yummy times flourish!

JOSH applauds and toasts.

JOSH

Well-done, Katie! Very inspired.

KATIE

My mom forced me to write Fossil a poem for his birthday one year.

FOSSIL

No one's ever written me no poem before. Probably the best present I've ever got.

KATIE

And here we have an insight to what sad, sad people we Big Springers are.

FOSSIL

I mean it! I've kept it right here in the bar for all those years. I look at it every day.

KATIE

(Sincerely) You're welcome. Josh, where are you from?

JOSH

Omaha.

KATIE

Mhmm. What did you do in Omaha?

JOSH

I was a cook for an organic restaurant downtown.

KATIE

And that wasn't it?

JOSH

Wasn't it.

FOSSIL

You know what the problem is with your generation?

KATIE

Fossil, you are about to say the oldest thing I have ever heard. Proceed.

FOSSIL

Besides the fact that you're all assholes. Your generation can't just be anywhere. You're always running around, trying to figure out where you're supposed to be and you never find it. You get stuck or you get tired and then you get sad and disappointed that you never completed your vision quest or whatever the hell. You all gotta have a vision quest anymore!

KATIE

A vision quest. Do continue.

FOSSIL

I'm serious! Me? I like steak and beer so I got me a job at a steakhouse. Your dad likes trains, so he's doing rail work. Your mom and my wife liked school. School teachers, both of them, and you know what? We're all perfectly happy here, ain't we Katie? We didn't have no damned vision quest. (To Josh) No offence, partner.

JOSH

You're good.

FOSSIL

Even Jen, ya know. She's runnin' around like a lizard in a beehive tryin' to find what's what.

KATIE

You think she should go to college?

FOSSIL

College used to be a place for people who wanted to get real good at something real hard. Now it's just a place kids go when they don't know what they like. And guess what? They're all goin'.

KATIE

But I'm asking you, should Jen go, would she like it?

FOSSIL

At this point... couldn't hurt. You go to college, Josh?

JOSH

For a bit. I didn't like it.

FOSSIL

(Grumbling) Didn't like it.

KATIE

Are you grumbling?

FOSSIL

Yeah! I'm grumbling! Let me tell you something Josh! You didn't like it because you were never there, just like Big Springs, you're not here either!

JOSH

Where am I?

FOSSIL

Son, you're in your own gol-darn head! You're in that notebook right there. And they're both empty. You can't fill a page unless you got something to fill it with, and you ain't gonna have nothin' to fill it with until you've been somewhere. Ya get me?

KATIE

Fossil here used to write Western novellas.

FOSSIL

Novellas? Excuse me?

KATIE

Sorry, what would you call them?

FOSSIL

Fuckin' books!

KATIE

Sure. Fossil here used to write Western fucking books.

FOSSIL

Dammit, what part of "I pour your beer" ain't ya understandin'?

JOSH

The thing is, it's all so mundane. I think I'll forget about it if I don't write anything now.

FOSSIL

If you don't remember it, it's not worth writin', but you gotta start by shuttin' that book. You'll never know what's worth puttin' down, until you get out of that empty book and shut it. Throw it out'd be even better. Keep the pen though, 'cause ya never know when you'll need a pen.

JOSH does not shut the book. He taps his pen on the page a few times.

JOSH

What can you tell me about this Sam Bass guy? He was a train robber, right?

FOSSIL

Yeah. Then he founded a family style saloon in Big Springs, Nebraska. Enjoy your vision quest, Omaha. I'll be moppin' the back.

FOSSIL exits.

KATIE

Wry, old fella, isn't he?

JOSH

He's a sweet guy. So how long have you been chained to the front desk?

KATIE

Few years. It's a slow racket, but it has its moments. Lots of weirdoes to gawk at.

JOSH

Do you get propositioned like a dozen times a day?

KATIE

Dude.

JOSH

These truckers drive for weeks on end some of them, then they see you, and you rent them a bed... almost all the work is done for them...

KATIE

Are you propositioning me, Josh?

JOSH

No, no, no, no...

KATIE

You think I'm some sort of Prairie whore?

JOSH

I'm just asking, sorry. Inappropriate, got it.

KATIE

I'm just fucking with you. But seriously, pretty skeezy question, dude.

JOSH

Does it have a skeezy answer?

KATIE

A couple times a month maybe. Jen more than me, believe it or not. You should hang out at the truck stop. You'd think they'd just be a bunch of dirty loners, but most of them are pretty sociable. They might have some stories for you. And if they don't, there's a Rambo arcade game loaded with freeplays. And they keep the showers cleaner than we do, truth be told.

JOSH

Do they have internet?

KATIE

They do. I thought you weren't doing the internet thing.

JOSH

I don't know what I'm doing. (Gesturing to the empty chair across from his empty notebook) Would you like to join me? Help me figure it out?

KATIE

I'm just about to leave actually. I just came here to ask Jen something, but since she's not here...

KATIE chugs her beer.

KATIE

I best be gettin'.

KATIE moves toward the exit.

KATIE

You know, Josh. There are a lot of people out there who find that whole lost, wandering, searching soul shtick very poetic.

JOSH

You do have an eye for poetry. Do you think I'm poetic?

KATIE

I like simple people, who know what they want. I happen to think you're repulsive.

KATIE winks and exits.

JOSH closes the notebook and waits.

SCENE 3- TRAIN STATION- EXT.

JEN stands under a special. She looks all around her to make sure she's alone. She gets out a 100 dollar bill.

JEN

I couldn't find any gold, but I got a hundred dollar bill. I'd been saving up my tips. Look, this is kind of an expensive deal for me, so you'd better show up. As much as I could get from online, this is what I have to do. I talked to a witch on a message board. I really need your help. So here I go.

JEN cuts herself with a small knife. She lets the blood drip down onto the bill.

JEN

As payment for your wisdom, a tribute to your spirit, with this I summon you.

A train can be heard rumbling into the station. JEN looks around to find no train. SAM BASS, a train robber in his 20's, enters.

SAM

Aw dammit!

SAM swipes the bill from JEN, who's horrified.

SAM

Ya ruined it!

Beat.

SAM

AHHHAHAHA! I'm just yankin' yer chain, darlin'! Look at ya! Whew! You can actually have that back, the devil don't take big bills, just a shit ton of little ones. Sam Bass at yer service.

JEN

It worked?

SAM

Well, yeah, it seems to've.

JEN

I brought you back from the dead?

SAM

Hell no, kid. I ain't no messiah. Just a damned fine lookin' ghost. Would ya look at this place? Hasn't changed much, truth be told. Goddamn, it was the best day of my life, last time I was here. They still talk about me?

JEN

Here they do. \$600,000 worth of gold. No one's robbed that much from the U.P. before or since.

SAM

I still hold the record? Hot damn!

JEN

We named a saloon after you. It's where I work.

SAM

Hell's bells, is that right?

JEN

Swear to God.

SAM

Hot tamale, don't that beat all? Ya know, I did some other jobs too. Nickels and dimes compared to this though. This was my first one, and it was all for shit from here. What did you say your name was?

JEN

Jen Gartner.

SAM

Yes, Ms. Jen, this is was my claim to eternal fame. Mhmm. Then a year later, I died from a ranger bullet in a prison cell. Shame. It was my birthday too.

JEN

How old were you?

SAM

27 years old. Like Kurt Cobain.

JEN

You know Cobain?

SAM

Hell of course, that 27 shit. Who knows, maybe if I started a couple years earlier, I would've hit another big one before they got me. Lord knows I wasn't no good at shit else. So why'd you bring me here, buttercup?

JEN

I ain't no good at shit else either. I was just... I just don't know what to do.

Beat.

SAM

What with?

JEN

Anything! I hate farming because it takes too much time. I hate teaching because I hate young people-

SAM

You are a young people.

JEN

I know! And I hate it! I don't want to work on the railroad wait tables or drive a truck, so what else is there for me here? College right? To figure out what I like? But there's no way in hell my parents would let me go just to figure it out, but... I don't fucking like anything! It's a vicious cycle.

SAM

You got kin here?

JEN

My friend, Katie. She's the only one I'd miss. But I'd come back and visit. What I'm saying is, I have to get out of here, but I can think of only one thing that can help me. It's dumb, it's irresponsible, but like I said, I can't think of anything else. Sam, can you teach me how to... do crimes?

SAM

You wanna do crimes is it?

JEN

I do! I mean. I like planning parties, the logistics and preparation of everything. Planning a crime is basically the same principle.

SAM

Ms. Jen, that is absolutely true.

JEN

It is?

SAM

Hell yeah! Ya gotta pick a venue fit for what you're plannin', a guest list that'll all get along with each other, and an aggressive clean-up plan. Just like a party.

JEN

Well, where should I start? Who should I crime? Someone I hate?

SAM

No, not someone you hate, never involve your emotions, it muddies your mind. If you go in on a vengeance deal, go in with someone else to keep ya grounded. I wish I got around to a vengeance gig, sounds fuckin' intense don't it?

JEN

How about the saloon? I have the keys!

SAM

You mean MY saloon? Never bite the hand that feeds ya, buttercup. You're thinkin' at it all wrong.

JEN

Trains? People don't really rob trains anymore.

SAM

The hell they don't. Train robbin' is alive and well all over the world. But trains nowadays, Ms. Jen, they don't run on no tracks. Gold isn't in a rickety box chuggin' across the prairie.

JEN

It's in the market. The stocks are the trains!

SAM

They're havin' one hell of a party, buttercup! Ain't no reason you can't plan a little somethin' too.

JEN

I gotta know math though.

SAM

That's the beauty of it! When you get to where you wanna be, you ain't gotta know shit! But you gotta know how to find the people who do, the guest list. Ya hear me? But this ain't no easy thing. You gotta move away from here, Ms. Jen Gartner. You gotta start from damn near the bottom, and there ain't no comin' back. You ready to hit the bottom?

JEN

Where's the bottom?

SAM

The biggest thieving gig of them all: College. Math college. You're gonna get taken from for quite a bit before you start findin' somethin' more than crumbs in your own pocket. That somethin' you want?

JEN

Are you kidding me? Look at my origin story! Girl from small town, Nebraska becomes greatest market mogul of all time after being visited by the ghost of Sam Bass! You're saving me!

SAM

I already told ya, kid, I ain't no messiah. Ya have it in ya already! But you gotta pull yer own triggers.

JEN

Before I'm 27.

SAM

That would be best.

JEN

Thank you so much!

SAM

Well, thank you for bringin' me back to reminisce.

JEN

Sure. Uh. Are you going to... you know... haunt me?

SAM

If you're lucky.

SAM sings a country rendition of Nirvana's Lithium as he tips his hat and exits.

SAM

"I'm so happy. 'Cause today I found my friends. They're in my head. I'm so ugly. That's okay 'cause so are you. We broke our mirrors. Sunday morning is every day, for all I care. And I ain't scared. Light my candles. In a daze 'cause I found God! Yeahyeeeeeehaw!"

SCENE 4- HOTEL ROOM

PHIL weeps continuously as he sets up the HOTEL ROOM for SCENE 4. Once the room is set up with a small desk and a bed, PHIL collapses down onto the bed and wails into the comforter.

JOSH almost enters the room. He backs up and looks at the room number to reassure himself. He looks at his matching key. JOSH enters. He clears his throat in trepidation. He attempts a louder cough, but PHIL matches volume with his sobs. JOSH nudges the bed with his foot. PHIL bolts up, strings of spit and snot dangle from his face to the comforter.

PHIL

Dear Christ! Holy! Wow. Hello! Welcome to... your room, this is your room! This is your room? The room with no TV?

JOSH

Yeah, this is the room they gave me, should I move?

PHIL

No, no, this is fine. We're pretty full up, I just, I usually use this room to...

JOSH

How long?

PHIL

How long is what?

JOSH

No, how long has it been since she broke up with you?

PHIL

Nine days. And change.

JOSH

What was your name?

PHIL

Phil. You're Josh right?

JOSH

Right. Impressive.

PHIL

I got a thing with names. I'll get out of your way, sorry about uh-

JOSH

When was the last time you talked to her?

PHIL

About an hour ago? Megan calls me now and again to comfort me.

JOSH

She shouldn't do that.

PHIL

But I like it.

JOSH

It's not helping you. You need to get a little mad at her if you're ever going to get over her. How are you going to get mad at her if she's always comforting you? Her role right now is to eat your bad vibes, not cuddle them.

PHIL

Um... I don't know.

JOSH

Be mad at her. Be mad at her for trying to comfort you when she's the reason you feel this way. Let yourself be mad at her, Phil.

PHIL

I guess that makes some sense.

JOSH

That's step one. You gotta let yourself be angry, then get it out.

PHIL

How do you know that?

JOSH

Believe me, I know how to be dumped.

PHIL's phone rings.

PHIL

It's Megan.

JOSH

Hang up!

PHIL

I'll just let it go to voice mail.

JOSH

You'll hang up.

PHIL

Nnnn you do it.

JOSH

You have to do it, Phil. Red button. Press it now. Now!

PHIL

I'm doing it... I'm doing it!

PHIL presses the red button. The phone goes silent.

JOSH

She's going to call again. You need to answer, then hang up right away. Let her know you don't need to hear her right now.

PHIL

What?

PHIL's phone starts ringing again.

PHIL

Are you like the ghost of break-up's present?

JOSH

If she really wants you to feel better, she'll want to know that you don't need to hear her right now, so do it.

PHIL presses the green button.
He's trembling, silent. PHIL hangs up and breathes.

PHIL

I did it! I hung up on her!

JOSH

Good, Phil. That's good. Now, call her a bitch.

PHIL

A what? Excuse me, Sir!

JOSH

Just say bitch. Right now. Think of her in your mind. Think of her dumping you. Feel your broken heart and call her a bitch.

PHIL

...Biiiiitch. Bitch.

JOSH

Awesome.

PHIL

BITCH!

JOSH

That's good, that's enough, we don't wanna... you know.

The guests!

PHIL

Yeah.

JOSH

Right. (Whispering) Bitch! Bitch! Bitch!

PHIL

Phil, you've passed step one, buddy.

JOSH

PHIL breathes and looks around the room like he's never seen it before. A rebirth of sorts.

PHIL

It hurts. But I can feel it getting better kind of. Like getting a boil drained.

JOSH

...Exactly.

PHIL

What's step two?

JOSH

Why don't you just enjoy step one for a couple weeks. Then...

PHIL

Josh! It hurts! I want to know, what is step two!?

JOSH

Step two is you take your baggage and start looking again. Just looking.

PHIL

Looking? Looking where? At what?

JOSH

Wherever. You know, at women. Or dudes.

PHIL

I'll look at women, thank you, kindly.

JOSH

Cool. We'll get there.

PHIL

But, I'm busy and cowardly, so how will that work?

JOSH

Well, we'll start out easy. We'll set up an online profile, but like I said, first, just drain your boils. Get your anger out.

PHIL

Setup a profile, like on a website? Like a dating website?

JOSH

Yeah, it's just what people do now. Busy people.

PHIL

They couldn't see me, could they?

JOSH

Um. Well, yeah, but only what you want them to see.

PHIL

I can do that. I can do that right now.

JOSH

No. You got a little taste of success with the bitch thing, but I think you're getting a little progress-drunk on your very small accomplishment. Step one is very easy, step two is much more complicated and emotionally...

PHIL

I'll comp your room. For however long you want, just show me.

JOSH

I'll get my laptop.

JOSH gets out his laptop. He opens it and types in a web address.

JOSH

Okay, I'll help you set one up, but I strongly advise you...

PHIL

Josh, I'm not a child, just press the clickity-clacks!

JOSH

Fine, you're right. Fine. Username, what do you want your code name to be?

PHIL

Ah, Phil.

JOSH

It's taken.

PHIL

You didn't even click it in.

JOSH types in "Phil" and presses enter.

JOSH

It's taken.

PHIL

"Taken!" Can you say it like the intense Irish guy?

JOSH

Liam Neeson. Really?

PHIL

I'm comping your room, dude.

JOSH

(Liam Neeson voice) Your username will be *taken*.

PHIL laughs until he's breathless.

PHIL

Okay, how about Phil One?

JOSH

How about something that describes you, like an adjective, then Phil.

PHIL

Taken Phil!

JOSH

That's going to send the wrong message.

PHIL

Hospitable Phil.

JOSH types it in.

JOSH
Hospitable Phil it is. Password?

PHIL
Yay! Uh, Big Springs.

JOSH
Okay and we're off. You are a man looking for a...

PHIL
Woman! Come on.

JOSH
What's the zip code here?

PHIL
69122. When can I look at the women?

JOSH
Easy, Hospitable Phil, they gotta know who's looking for whom, you give and take. How many miles within 69122 do you want to be looking?

PHIL
Let's go 150. That'll cover Julesburg and Ogallala, if I'm feeling adventurous.

JOSH
Good. Your hair color?

PHIL
Summer Cinnamon.

JOSH
Not an option, so, light brown. Eye color.

PHIL
My eyes actually change colors depending on my mood and what color I'm wearing. It's the weirdest-

JOSH
Blue. Height and body type.

PHIL
Oo! 6'5, athletic god!

JOSH
I recommend honesty.

PHIL
Ehh, how about compromise?

JOSH
That's also a popular option.

PHIL
6 foot athletic.

JOSH
5'9 slim.

PHIL
5'9 athletic.

JOSH
Sure. Okay, here's the heavy stuff. Current relationship status: Never married, separated, divorced, widower... Phil?

PHIL's choking back tears.

PHIL
We never married.

JOSH
Okay.

PHIL
I proposed, but...

JOSH
We can save our progress and pick it up later.

PHIL
She said no. So asked again. And again. No. No. No... I smothered her with my love!

KATIE enters with clean towels.
JOSH and PHIL do not see her.

JOSH

What do we say, Phil? What do we say about her?

PHIL

Bitch! I smothered that bitch with my love!

JOSH

There we go. It's a complicated feeling.

PHIL

Am I attractive?

KATIE

Phil! We don't say that to our guests.

JOSH

Oh, hi Katie. It's okay, Phil and I are friends now.

PHIL

Hi Katie.

JOSH

You're a good looking man, Phil. Okay? We'll pick up where we left off later.

PHIL

Thanks, I'd like that.

KATIE

Am I interrupting something?

JOSH

No, I think we reached a stopping point. Phil, we should get something to drink next time, when we pick it back up.

PHIL

Yeah maybe.

JOSH

Okay. Hey, Katie could you take this comforter with you?

KATIE

Uh... sure.

PHIL

Oh, I'll get it. It's my mess.

JOSH

Thanks. Let me know when you're ready to go again.

PHIL hugs JOSH, holding the comforter.

PHIL

Thank you, Josh.

PHIL exits.

KATIE

You two made fast friends.

JOSH

Yeah, we have something in common.

KATIE

Mm, I'll bet.

JOSH

We're both dumped.

KATIE

Ah. Sure. Yeah, it's been kind of a mess around here since Megan cut him loose.

JOSH

I guess he proposed to her and it was too fast for her or something.

KATIE

Well, yeah.

JOSH

What do you mean well yeah? Had they not been going out very long?

KATIE

Sure, there's that.

JOSH

And what?

KATIE

... Megan's nineteen. It was Phil's first relationship. It was her... not first.

JOSH

...Oh. Well, Phil is kind of...

KATIE

Young for his age.

JOSH

Yup.

KATIE

People made a big ass deal of it. Megan moved to Julesburg, last time I checked, and she'll be going back to school next fall, so at least there will be distance. But I see you've got him calling her a bitch?

JOSH

I have. Yes, I have.

KATIE

Neat. Well, the sooner you get him back together, the sooner he'll start working again, so keep it up, would you?

JOSH

I got nothing better to do.

KATIE

No, you don't. Hey, have you seen Jen today?

JOSH

No, does she work here too or does she just hang out?

KATIE

Well, she's on the payroll, but...

JOSH

So it's just you right now? Doing the rooms and the desk and everything?

KATIE

For now, yeah. We carry each other, you know. Small town thing. You probably wouldn't get it.

JOSH

Right. Well, I'm off to do some laundry.

JOSH rises to leave with a garbage bag of clothes.

KATIE
So you were dumped huh?

JOSH
Yeah.

KATIE
Did you smother her with her love?

JOSH reaches for a pillow on the
bed.

JOSH
Something like that..

KATIE
Oh God..

JOSH
Haha, just kidding, I was just an asshole.

KATIE
Hilarious.

JOSH
I did love her though. I was just bad at it. Where did you
say the laundry room was?

KATIE
The washer and drier are broken, we weren't kidding.

JOSH
I know, I just..

KATIE
Whatever. Between the bathrooms around the corner from the
lobby.

JOSH
Okay. Cool.

KATIE
Oh, hey, Josh. Um..

JOSH
What?

KATIE

I was going to apologize for being kind of a bitch last night, but I'll just do it later.

JOSH exits. KATIE resumes cleaning the room.

SCENE 5- SAM BASS SALOON

FOSSIL rolls the bar onto the stage and stands behind it, addressing the audience.

FOSSIL

I thought you'd be back. Sure, Grandma Max's food is great, but there's something about this place, isn't there? The whatayacallit? Ambiance we might call it. Speaking of ambiance, I got another story for ya'. Since you're back.

Have you ever heard of a place called Farragut, Iowa? Little hatch mark of a town right smack in between Riverton and Shenandoah. Now that place had an ambiance. Imagine. You're cruising down an asphalt belt that's pulled tight across cornfields, bean crops, and prairie lands as far as the eye can see. Then you stumble onto the main street of a strange Iowan town, adorned cobblestone to steeple in nautical themed paraphernalia. Landlocked, as it is, barnacles, anchors, and blue paint on every square inch of surface. Hell, the high school mascot? The Farragut High Admirals.

Now there was farm house on the outskirts of that town. A big house, you know the kind. It's what I think of when I think about love. Ain't no secret that love can be the stuff of monsters, and what happened there in that big, blue house was nothing short of monstrous. The house was home to a man and a woman. High school sweethearts they was. After trying and trying, one June day, that man and that woman had a little baby together. A little daughter. They held onto her so tight. Wouldn't hardly let her go nowhere. The man was a soybean farmer, but he had a salsa garden around the house, I mean around the whole house, biggest salsa garden you'd ever see. He'd be working out there in that garden, and he'd look up at his woman and daughter inside and they'd look down at him. He'd smile and tip his hat.

Well, that little girl of theirs got sick one day, and she never got better. She never saw the age of five. After she died, the woman began collecting things. She'd drive the car into town and return with the trunk full. Then the back and front seats were full too. Soon enough, she'd haul the trailer into town and come home riding as low as the wheels would go. The house became full. Stacked from floor to ceiling with damned near anything you'd imagine. Lamps, baby clothes, oatmeal in bulk, but the man paid no never mind. He'd even help her stack it. It was how he loved her.

Then one day the woman got sick too. Diabetes is what she had. Soon enough, she couldn't move her legs to walk around. So the man would bring her his homemade garden salsa, fresh squeezed lemonade, even bacon on occasion. And when he was working in that garden, he would look up at his wife inside the big, full house, and she look down at him from her easy chair. And he'd tip his hat.

The woman had a sister. The medaling kind. The kind who thought she knew what did a person good, better than the person themselves. She thought the woman needed help, so she called the state. The state came a knockin'. "No, sir, no thank ya!" the man yelled from behind the door, "Doin' just fine in here! Ya'll go on and get!" But they refused, calling it a matter of public safety, and the woman had started to thief her collections. "Don't let them in," the woman begged him, "Don't let them get my things," she said. But they busted the door down, which knocked over a tower of this, which toppled a stack of that, and an anchor got knocked over onto the woman. She got hurt, bad. She lied there trapped and screaming in pain. And the man got mad. He tried to get the others out of the house so he could get to saving his hurt wife, but they wouldn't leave. Two of them held him back while one of them started to lift the anchor. The man went to the truck and got his gun, and when he got back in the house, his wife wasn't screamin' anymore. She wasn't movin' neither. The three men from the state that barged themselves into that house, died in that house, one after the other, mowed down by buckshot.

Then after he couldn't get his wife to wake up, the man wheeled his propane tanks up to the outside wall of the house, he got in his tractor, and he drove right over them. The baby clothes, the salsa garden, the kitchen where his wife and daughter made scotcheroos, and the whole acreage

burned to the goddamned ground just as the sheriff was pulling up. Nothing's there these days. Not even the crop. But I cut through Farragut, when I go to visit my nieces in Shenandoah, when I feel like a drive. I stand where the salsa garden used to be and look up to where I think the woman might've sat in her chair. I think of love. And I tip my hat.

FOSSIL is wiping down the bar. JEN enters sweeping. SAM BASS is nursing a glass of whiskey at the bar. PHIL is working on his fourth hard cider, he's in rough shape.

FOSSIL

Hm. That Henderson boy's gettin' big, ain't he?

JEN

I remember when his mom could hold him in one arm. Now you don't see her anywhere without a stroller. Not a regular stroller either, like one of those off-roader types with the tires.

FOSSIL

He'd better get to walkin' or they'll have to upgrade to a wheelbarrow.

JEN

Right?

PHIL

How many have I had?

JEN

That's four. How you doing, Phil?

PHIL

Almost there.

FOSSIL

First time I saw you tie one on was when your lady cut you loose. This counts the second time, and it hasn't been two weeks. You okay, partner?

PHIL

Oh. Ha, it's not like that, Fossil. Not this time. I'm gearing up for something later.

FOSSIL

Oh? You goin' for dip in the lake or something?

PHIL

Haha! You remember when you caught us doing that?

FOSSIL

Likely never to forget it, Phil.

PHIL

Me neither. You know that night, you were so nice to me and the boys. You gave us blankets and coffee- that's the first time I had coffee!

FOSSIL

Set the bar pretty low then.

PHIL

It was awful!

FOSSIL

Instant mud.

PHIL

I felt so taken care of then. It's when I first started to think about taking care of people for a living. I was only nine or ten, but I knew there was something there. Something in me that wanted to do that. And I wasn't smart enough to be a doctor, so...

FOSSIL

Yep, your path was set right then, I'd say.

PHIL

There's something magical about this town like that.

SAM

Hell yeah.

JEN

You got that right.

PHIL

You feel it too, Jen, don't you? About Big Springs?

JEN

I more than feel it.

PHIL

You should stay here, then! Stay in Big Springs, I'll teach you about the hotel business if you want!

FOSSIL

No dice, there, Phil. She's taking over the bar for me when I'm dead and gone. Ain't that right, Jen?

SAM

How about it, Jen? You makin' beds or cleanin' vomit?

JEN

No thanks, gents. I got some other plans.

FOSSIL

Darn shame, girl sharp as you. But I suppose the family farm is the family farm.

JEN

I don't think I'm doing that either. And I'm not that sharp.

PHIL

Then what? You leaving?

JEN

Yeah. I'm thinking of going to college. Seriously.

PHIL

Ha! Me too.

JEN

I'm said I'm serious.

PHIL

What about the magic?

SAM

Can't buy shit with magic.

JEN

I just need something different I think.

FOSSIL

I wouldn't worry, Phil. It always happens. They leave town for college or adventures, a vision quest is what I've been callin' it. Not realizing how gol-darn good they got it.

But she'll be back. They all come back, if they know what's good for them.

PHIL

Hear that, Jen? You'll come back if you know what's good for you!

JEN

What if I don't want what's good for me?

SAM

Damn.

PHIL

Why, why, why wouldn't you... want... why? What?

SAM

I think you broke his brain.

FOSSIL

I swear, Jen, I think kids your age just say shit to say it.

JEN

I ain't just saying it. I mean I'm not. You don't know what's good for me, neither of you do. I'm moving away come fall, and I won't be back.

FOSSIL

You tell your parents about this decision, young lady?

JEN

No. But I've been thinking about it for a while. I'll tell them soon. I want it to come from me though, okay Fossil?

FOSSIL

I think that'd be best. Good luck, kid.

PHIL

What about me?

JEN

Sorry?

PHIL

I mean, we need your help at the hotel. What am I supposed to do?

JEN

I don't know. Pull yourself together and start actually working again. That should help.

FOSSIL

Jen!

PHIL

I am working on it! One more hard cider please!

JEN

Put that new guy to work. It looks like he's sticking around.

PHIL

Josh?

JEN gets PHIL a fifth hard cider.

JEN

Sure. Josh. That should get you by until you hire someone else. And Katie will be there, but like I said though, I'm not leaving until fall.

PHIL

I guess. What about Katie, what will she think?

KATIE

I have to tell her too, but seriously Phil, let me do it okay? Don't stick your nose into this, you have your own shit to deal with.

SAM

Whew, you set him straight. You're a born leader, buttercup.

JEN

No, he's just a pansy.

PHIL

What?

JEN

I said adjust your... pants seat. It means... you know, get yourself together and relax, like your pants are wrong and it's making you grouchy, so you adjust your pants seat and uhh everything's better. All the kids are saying it.

FOSSIL

Adjust your pants seat?

JEN

Mhmm. Anything else you need me to do tonight, Fossil?

FOSSIL

No, you're free to go for the night.

JEN

Cool. Mind if I sit for a second actually?

FOSSIL

Be my guest.

JEN sits with her back to the bar
next to SAM BASS.

FOSSIL

What'll it be?

JEN

Ginger Ale please, with some grenadine and cherries?

FOSSIL

You bet.

PHIL

What you going to college for? I mean, do you have a major
in mind?

SAM

Kickin' ass and robbin' trains!

JEN

Math.

PHIL

Math?

JEN

Yup.

PHIL

You like math?

JEN

I think so. I think it's worth learning to like anyway.

PHIL

Are you sure you're not... running away from something? You can talk to me-

JEN

It's not about running away, Phil.

SAM

Nothin' wrong with runnin' away, so long as you're runnin' to somethin' worthwhile.

JEN

I just don't feel like there's anything for me here.

FOSSIL

You mean nothin' you want.

JEN

No, it's just what I said. There's nothing for me here.

PHIL

You wanna help me with budget stuff sometime? Or bills or something? That's math.

JEN

Sure. Thanks, Phil.

SAM

Did you know there's an item on this menu that's just called "Fried Stuff"? What does the stuff entail in "Fried Stuff"?

FOSSIL

You know there's that nursing home up North. They're always looking for people.

SAM

Fried Scorpions? Fried Tarantulas? Bullets?

JEN

Vegetables mostly.

PHIL

Hey, my mother's one of those vegetables!

FOSSIL

Jen, that's inappropriate! There are plenty of mindful, functioning residents-

JEN

No! I'm sorry! I wasn't calling the people there vegetables, I was thinking of something else. Phil, I wasn't calling your mom a vegetable.

PHIL

You're a vegetable.

JEN

Look, I've actually been thinking about this since before I graduated, about going away somewhere, and recently... I...

SAM

You gonna tell them about your little séance?

JEN

Have you guys ever seen something weird, and it kind of told you what you were supposed to do. Like you were talking about the magic earlier, like that?

PHIL

Oh, the magic? This is about the magic? What happened, what did you see?

SAM

Go ahead, they already think you're insane.

JEN

Just something. You guys ever see something weird around here?

FOSSIL

Nope.

JEN

Really?

PHIL

Yeah, Fossil, you had to have seen something like that! All those messed up stories you tell, none of them got weird stuff in them? No crazy happen stances, no ghosts in them or angels or nothing?

FOSSIL

Naw, nothin' like that. Supernatural fortune don't make for good storytellin'.

PHIL

Okay, but you gotta have seen someone come into the bar one night like... a guy in a cape and a hood right? Or like a fancy hat, one of those fancy hats. A Pannnnerrrrra.

JEN

Fedora.

PHIL

Ya-hmm! And he says, uh, uh, uh, "Don't take the normal way hommmme! Use a different roaaaad." Like he's got scars on his face and one of them eyes without the black part, and he says that. So you take another way home. Then the next day, you find out there was a crash on your normal road on your normal way home. And the guy from the bar died!

*That ghost story can be
improvised or different every
show.

FOSSIL

Nope, nothin' like that.

PHIL

Come on! How is that possible?

FOSSIL

I'm a practical man.

PHIL

Well. I'm a practical and so is Jen, but we still experience the magic.

SAM

You experience the magic with this fella, Ms. Jen.

JEN

We sure do.

PHIL

Anyway, I gotsta get. I got step two to tend to. Two to tend to. Two to tend to. Two to where the hell are my keys?

JEN AND FOSSIL

You walked.

PHIL

Ah! Good thinkin'. Maybe I'm a practical man after all.

PHIL attempts to lean on a chair
and falls.

PHIL

I'm good! I'm good! Have a super night, everyone.

PHIL exits.

JEN

You ever worry about him?

FOSSIL

Never have before, these days though, seems everyone's crazier than a monkey in a cement mixer. More worried about you and what your folks are gonna do to you when you tell them your plan.

JEN

Yeah well, if I don't do something crazy now, who knows when I'll get to it?

SAM

Couldn't have said it better myself!

FOSSIL

You're young, though, Jen. You have plenty of time.

JEN

Then I'll have a head start.

SAM

Where the hell you learn to sharp shoot like that?

FOSSIL

You been saving your tips? It ain't cheap.

JEN

Every penny. I have a savings account.

FOSSIL

So you're not a total bonehead.

FOSSIL smiles at JEN. JEN smiles
back and sips her drink.

FOSSIL

You want a refill?

JEN

No, I'm still working on this one.

FOSSIL

I'm talking to Sam.

SAM

Yes, please.

JEN jumps out of her chair.

JEN

You can see him!?

FOSSIL

He stops by every now and again. Seems like he's taken a
liking to you, for better or worse.

JEN

Can Phil see him?

FOSSIL

Phil? Heh.

SAM

Phil would shit himself empty if he saw somethin' like me.

JEN

Wait, so you heard him ask about the fried stuff, but you
jumped down my throat about the vegetable comment.

FOSSIL

Just screwin' with ya.

SAM

That was funny as hell.

JEN

Well shit! How come I've never seen you here before?

SAM

You never wanted to.

JEN

(To FOSSIL) Did you do the blood on the hundred dollar bill?

FOSSIL

The what now?

SAM

AhhhhHAHAHA!

JEN

I wasted \$100 on you, you jerk!

SAM

The face you're making right now, buttercup, is worth every penny!

FOSSIL laughs.

FOSSIL

Adjust your pants seat, Jen!

JEN playfully attacks FOSSIL and SAM as they laugh at her.

SCENE 6- HOTEL ROOM

JOSH sits on his bed, staring at the closed notebook in front of him as he folds his laundry.

KNOCK, KNOCK

PHIL

Oh Josh! Hospitable Phil's here to set up his stalker page! I wanna look at the women! Open up!

JOSH opens the door.

JOSH

So that's horrifying to hear in the middle of the night, for anyone.

PHIL

I'm just kidding you, dude, adjust your pants seat.

JOSH

What?

PHIL

Let's finish my profile before my buzz wears off, come on, open your computer!

JOSH

Your buzz isn't going to wear off until sometime tomorrow. You're not too drunk for this are you?

PHIL

No! I'm phoning most of this in.

PHIL opens the night stand and pulls out a bible.

PHIL

SweardaGod.

PHIL attempts to drop the bible back in the drawer, it misses and falls to the floor. PHIL pushes the drawer shut, and sits on the bed.

JOSH opens his laptop.

JOSH

How much did you have?

PHIL

Almost a whole six pack of hard apple ciders.

JOSH

Damn, Phil.

PHIL

Hey, I can hold my cider, man, believe mew me.

JOSH

Okay, so you remember where we left off?

PHIL

I do. As in I didn't. As in we didn't get married. So never married. Put it.

JOSH

Okay, cool. Do you want kids?

PHIL

Yeah someday maybe a little pack of lil' Phil's runnin' around my legs, yippin' at me for treats.

JOSH

I said kids, not puppies, we're clear on that?

PHIL

Clystal crear. Hehhehheh, clystal crear. I almost said clitoris (gasp!)

JOSH

How many?

PHIL

They just have one don't they?

JOSH

Kids.

PHIL

Pssh, don't matter, just some. Or one, don't care.

JOSH

What are your religious beliefs? No answer, Agnostic, Atheist-

PHIL

Taoist.

JOSH

What?

PHIL

Taoist, I'm Taoist. It's an Eastern Asian reverence of the spirits in nature.

JOSH

How are you Taoist?

PHIL

Megan was Taoist, she learned it in Community College.

JOSH

Okay, but you're not with her anymore, so you don't have to be-

PHIL

JOSH! I'M! TAOIST! This is America, where we have something called relichis freedom! Deal with it!

JOSH

Swell. This is going to be a great night. Political views.

PHIL

Is there any option that's less than conservative, but definitely not liberal?

JOSH

There's ultra conservative, conservative, and middle of the road.

PHIL

Conservative'll have to do.

JOSH

Education level.

PHIL

I graduated from hotel school.

JOSH

I don't know if you're kidding, so I'll just put college associates. Where did you grow up?

PHIL

BIG SPRINGS BITCHES!

JOSH

Got it. What's your occupation?

PHIL

They got hospitality?

JOSH

God helps us if they don't, and they do. You wanna put your salary range on there? You don't have to.

PHIL

I don't mind, if you think it'll help.

JOSH

That just depends.

PHIL

What are the options?

JOSH

Less than 25,000, 25,001 to 35, 35,001 to 50, 50,001 to 75-

PHIL

That one.

JOSH

Okay, Phil, do you remember when we talked about honesty and compromise?

PHIL

I net 72,000 a year. I run a hotel in the middle of nowhere by the interstate. My competition is a truck stop. We're always full, and I got nothing to spend it on. I mean I eat at Sam Bass like every night. The rest I just keep in the combination safe. Wanna know the combination? Psych! But yeah, put it.

JOSH

Wow. Okay, I think that could help. Do you smoke?

PHIL

Depends on who's underwear! 'M I right!?

JOSH

How often do you exercise?

PHIL

Sometimes during the day.

JOSH

...Alright. What sports and exercise do you like? So think of things you might want to do with someone else, that's basically what it's asking.

PHIL

Nnnnothing Oh! Pool, they got pool on there?

JOSH

Billiards.

PHIL

Billiards! Bully! Capital Gov'na! Let's put anotha shrimp on the Barbie!

JOSH

Languages? Accents don't count.

PHIL

Depends on who's underwear!

JOSH

Only works for that one question. You're also saying it wrong.

PHIL

Can you say depends on who's underwear as Leem Neesom?

JOSH

(Liam Neeson voice) Depending on whose underwear this is, we are already dead.

PHIL shoves his head under the bed
to laugh louder than any human
person should ever laugh at
anything. He breathes and emerges.

PHIL

Okay, languages. English is good. English is good.

JOSH

Ethnicity.

PHIL

I'm Germam-American.

JOSH

Ehhh, they have white.

PHIL

RACIIIIIST! This is America! Where we have something called ethnic freedom! I can be African-Native American-eesee if I want to! These coloreds will NOT run!

JOSH

No. To all of that. I'll just put white. Favorite local hot spots.

PHIL

Sam Bass, Deerwood Grill, Grandma Max's, and my crotch!

JOSH

(Laughs) Actually, that's really funny, can I put that?

PHIL

No! God no, don't do that. I'm drunk. Jesus. Did you put it!?

JOSH

No, I didn't put it.

PHIL

You'd better not've.

JOSH

Do you have pets?

PHIL

Pet-pet-pet peeves! Racisism!

JOSH

Are there pets you'd like, but don't own.

PHIL

Dolphin.

JOSH

I'm putting that. That's gold.

PHIL

Josh, no! Use your discretion, I'm drunk on hard ciders, I don't mean a lot of what I say.

JOSH

Dolphin's perfect! It show's you're funny and sensitive.

PHIL

Oh. I *am* funny and sensitive.

JOSH

Exactly. Okay, business time. We're onto the open ended stuff. What are some of your favorite movies, music, and TV shows.

PHIL

Okay, Movies: White Fang, Fievel Goes West, Mission Impossible Three-

JOSH

Is that the Philip Seymour Hoffman one?

PHIL

Oh yeah! He's incredible in it! It's like I don't know if he doesn't care or he's just insane, but he's so scary.

JOSH

Yeah. I miss him.

PHIL

Why?

JOSH

Because he's dead.

PHIL

What?

JOSH

Philip Seymour Hoffman is dead, 2014, heroine.

PHIL

Are you serious right now??? (Tearing up).

JOSH

I need you to cry about that later. We need to focus on music now.

PHIL

Okay, okay, I can do this. Music. AHHH! Okay. Umm, I like musicals a lot so, like I don't know. Best Little Whore House in Texas, Nightmare Before Christmas, Johnny Cash is good, Jimmy Buffett...

JOSH

Eh, I'm not going to put Jimmy Buffett.

PHIL

Okay, thank you. You're a true friend.

JOSH

TV.

PHIL

Home Improvement, Step By Step, Family Matters-

JOSH

Full House?

PHIL

EVERY WHERE YOU LOOK EVERY WHERE THERE'S A FACE! A HAND TO HOLD ONTO! No, fuck Full House.

JOSH

Wow.

PHIL

Deadliest Catch, aaaaand Adventure Time.

JOSH

Okay, good. Foods.

PHIL

Depends on who's underwear!

JOSH

Still only really works for the one.

PHIL

Runts, Nerds, Gobstoppers, Nerd Rope...

JOSH

Anything not Willy Wonka?

PHIL

Lemonheads--

JOSH

Dinner foods, meats, vegetables.

PHIL

My mom!

JOSH

What? I'm losing you.

PHIL

Oh, that's right you weren't there. Jen was like your mom's a vegetable and I was all what the fuuuuuck. STEAK. FRIES. CHICKEN FINGERS. CHEESE POPCORN. SWEET CORN. SWEET POTATOES. SHOCK TARTS. SWEET TARTS...

JOSH

That's good. Hobbies?

PHIL

Ugh, now I can't stop thinking of candy.

JOSH

Pull it together, Phil, we're almost in the clear.

PHIL

Okay, adjusting my pants seat. Hobbies: Fishing, cleaning, microwave cooking, pool.

JOSH

Billiards.

PHIL

Wot! Wot! Right-O! Twat! Oo! Can you go back and add Taken to my movies list?

JOSH

No. What's something you recently read?

PHIL

Life of Pi and it was the shiiiiiiii-

JOSH

We're going to talk about who you want to meet now. Who you want to see. Are you with me?

PHIL

I'm good. I'm here.

JOSH

So think of your ideal woman. Okay? Don't--

PHIL

I'm thinking of Megan.

JOSH

No. No, that's exactly what you cannot do. Think of what you wish Megan would look like.

PHIL

She's ideal though, she's what I want. She took my virginity. She looked at me after and was like (Liam Neeson voice) *Your virginity has been taken!*

JOSH

I assumed so. Okay, here. When you look up porn, what do you type in for your tags?

PHIL

Animated.

JOSH

Cartoon porn? People actually watch that stuff?

PHIL

Yeah, no one gets objectified, no one gets hurt or violated.

JOSH

That doesn't help anybody here though. I can't type in ideal woman must be a cartoon.

PHIL

What if she was though?

JOSH

Write the screenplay later, Phil, I need some characteristics. After you type in animated, what else, who do you want to see, and don't say lesbian.

PHIL

I was into tentacle porn for a bit.

JOSH

...You ...Japanese! Right? You like that Japanese shit! The anime porn, Taoism, Japanese, yeah?

PHIL

Yeah, that would be cool. I like how young they look.

JOSH

Good God, I'm just going to go as fast as I can so I can get on to repressing this entire experience. Hair color, black?

PHIL

Dark brown or black, yeah.

JOSH

Eye color, no preference.

PHIL

Uh, sure-

JOSH

Body type, slender?

PHIL

Heavysset if you could please.

JOSH

I'm going to put curvy.

PHIL

Why?

JOSH

Because no girl is going to put heavysset on her own profile. How tall is she?

PHIL

Eh. Mouth height.

JOSH

I... What is her education?

PHIL

Is middle school an option? (Laughs hysterically).

JOSH

Do you understand why that's not funny to me?

PHIL

It's not. It's not, I'm sorry, uhhh, some college. So we could converse on an intellectual level.

JOSH

Is that a deal breaker? That's the site asking, I know it's not.

PHIL

I don't think sooo. Oh JOSH! I'm getting sleeeepy.

JOSH

Almost done, buddy, languages? English?

PHIL

No, Portuguese dumbass.

JOSH

Ethnicity?

PHIL

Not albino, those are scary as shit.

JOSH

Her religious beliefs?

PHIL

Not Muslim, same reason. Fuckin' pink eyes.

JOSH

I'm going to put no preference hoping that you do get a Muslim, so she can educate your ignorant ass. Her relationship status? ...PHIL! Wake up! Relationship status!

PHIL

Just, you know. Looking around, like me or whatever.

JOSH

Can she have kids? What's her salary range? Does she drink or smoke?

PHIL

Depends on who's underwear for all three.

JOSH

Phil!

PHIL

Don't care about kids or money, doesn't smoke, drinks socially.

JOSH

We're on a tear, dude! Last thing! Your headline, what do you want it to say at the top of your page? Do you have a life motto, something you always say? You seem like a dude who would.

PHIL

Taste the rainbow!

JOSH

Less horrifying.

PHIL

Live comfortably.

JOSH

That's it! We're done! Look! This is step two, Phil! These are all the available fish in your pond, dude. All the ladies who are looking, just like you.

PHIL

Huh... aw... aw man!

JOSH

What?

PHIL

I know all these women already! That's Hilary, she works at the library and is boring. That's Amanda, she's a schoolteacher and she's crazy. That's Tammy, she's mean. Rhonda. Tara. Stephanie. Megan...

JOSH

...Oh shit.

PHIL

Megan? Why would... she said she was going back to college, she said she wanted to be alone, why would...

JOSH shuts the laptop.

JOSH

Phil. This is okay. You're both on step two, fishing in the same pond-

PHIL

Bitch.

PHIL stands, tearing up.

PHIL

Bitch!

JOSH

Phil?

PHIL

(Exiting) BIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIITCH!!! NO ONE
IS EVER LEAVING ME EVER AGAIN! EVER! BITCH!

PHIL bundles up the comforter and
crawls under the bed to scream
into it.

JOSH looks over at his closed
notebook. The lights fade.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT 2

SCENE 1- HOTEL LOBBY

KATIE is doing a Sudoku behind the desk. JOSH enters with a something inside a plastic grocery sack.

KATIE

So you fixed the washer and drier and didn't tell anybody?

JOSH

Oh, I thought I told you.

KATIE

Liar. Enjoying your private laundry room?

JOSH

The hoses were calcified. How do you do this for a living and not know to replace hoses on a washer?

KATIE

I was never taught, ass. What about the drier.

JOSH

Is it new?

KATIE

Yeah.

JOSH

Thought so. It has these bolts in the back they use to steady it while shipping. You gotta take them out before you use it. It's in the directions.

KATIE

You seem heightened today, Josh, something on your mind?

JOSH

You know why your pool was broken?

KATIE

Ugh.

JOSH flings the sack down onto the counter.

KATIE

Probably gross.

JOSH

Yup. You had a coyote stuck in the filter, Katie. A coyote.

KATIE

Haha! Are you serious? Welcome to the prairie lands.

JOSH

I don't know of any other reason why a coyote would wander into a hotel full of people and want to go for a fatal dip in a chlorinated pool, unless it was rabid.

KATIE

Doesn't chlorine kill rabies?

JOSH

I don't... Didn't Phil teach you any of this shit?

KATIE

No, he usually just did it. Can you throw this away please?

JOSH

I'm going to put it somewhere where you'll remember to clean the pool once in a while, as a reminder.

KATIE

I'll remember. There's a dumpster on the side.

JOSH

Sure. There's also your car. The break room fridge... your pillowcase.

KATIE

I'll remember! Stop being a dick, please. Phil usually... weren't you going to fix him? You guys were on a roll, and then what?

JOSH

What do you mean then what? He's got a lot to get through.

KATIE

It seems like you broke him more.

JOSH

We had a setback.

KATIE

Couldn't take *Step Two*?

JOSH

Step two went off the rails a bit at the end. We were setting up-- don't tell him you know this, you'll spook him, but we were setting up a dating profile for him, just so he could see--

KATIE

See what? He knows everybody around here.

JOSH

Yeah, that had a lot to do with the derailment. I'm an idiot.

KATIE

You tried.

JOSH

If anything, we beat the shit out of step one.

KATIE

The anger one?

JOSH

Yeah. God, I hope I didn't... has Phil had, like, anger issues ever before?

KATIE

It was an issue in that he never exhibited any anger. Phil's version of anger is binge eating a bag of cheese popcorn or nerds.

KATIE Picks up the service phone and dials.

JOSH takes the coyote in a bag and starts toward the exit.

KATIE

Hey Josh. Seriously, keep trying with Phil. It's a cool thing you're- hello? Hi Audrey, I just have a question.

JOSH exits.

KATIE

Can chlorine kill rabies? Jesus, I said rabies with an "R"! A coyote. No, like if it was stuck in the filter of a pool. Why does it matter what pool it is? Audrey, do you know or not? Are you sure? Well, how does it work then?

JEN enters.

JEN

I told my parents.

KATIE

Hold on, Audrey's telling me how rabies works. Ugh, really?

JEN

They didn't take it well. Ask her if there are such things as rabid sharks. I had this nightmare once.

KATIE

Oh my God!

JEN

They said that if I didn't take over the farm, they'd rather burn it down than sell it. They said I'd never be welcome back.

KATIE

Is there an antidote?

JEN

Ask about the sharks!

KATIE

Can we have some just in case? Okay, thanks. You too, Audrey. Bye.

JEN

You didn't ask about the sharks.

KATIE

Audrey says sharks can't be rabid because it's a mammal born virus. It would delude in the ocean anyway or even in the pool, thank God.

JEN

Was there rabies in our pool?

KATIE

Maybe, but it should be fine. Rabid animals are repellent to water anyway.

JEN

What?

KATIE

Yeah! So the virus gets into the bloodstream through direct contact with infected saliva. It creeps its way up the nerves from the bite point, infecting every inch along the way. So if you get bitten on the foot, your foot will start spazzing out little by little weeks before it even reaches your brain. Then, when the virus gets to your brain, it totally rewires it so you can't stand water. You won't be able to drink anything, which causes your mouth to foam up with rabies loaded gobs of spit, right? The last stage is when the virus attacks the part of your brain that controls your aggression. I don't know how it finds that little pocket, but it does. It's just what it does. And that's when you go psycho crazy. You don't even know what's happening, but you can't not be pissed off. You try to tear apart everyone around you. You try and bite them. So the virus can spread.

JEN

Dude, that is so evil.

KATIE

I know.

They share a beat in reverent
fear.

KATIE

So Audrey's apparently got loads of the antidote in her office. She said she'd bring some by. I'm thinking we should mix it in with the chlorine just in case.

JEN

Good thinking.

KATIE

So you told your parents? That's brave of you.

JEN

Had to be done. They hate me.

KATIE

They don't hate you.

JEN

They hate me for my hopes and for my dreams.

KATIE

They're probably just disappointed in your hopes and dreams.

JEN

Can you love something even though you're disappointed in it?

KATIE

Not as well, I don't think.

JEN

Thanks, friend.

KATIE

Sorry, of course you can, Jen, of course they still love you. I'm sorry, I'm just still stuck on this rabies stuff.

JEN

That's okay.

KATIE begins thoroughly sanitizing the counter where the coyote bag had been.

JEN

What do you think about all this?

KATIE

What? The uh...

JEN

Should I come back later?

KATIE

Jen, no. I... I think it's... super great.

JEN

Yeah? Me going to college is super great?

KATIE

Mhmm. Yup. Just going away for God knows what for God knows how long, but hey you're totally smart enough for it.

JEN

Well, Katie, that wasn't really my concern, but...

KATIE

It wasn't?

JEN

No. You know, I'll just come back.

JEN turns to exit.

KATIE

Jen, wait, I'm sorry. Jen!

JEN exits.

KATIE

Dammit.

KATIE examines her fingers and cuticles, scrubbing any point of rabies penetration.

PHIL wanders in zombie-like, in a hate trance, finishing off a sandwich bag of cheese popcorn. He stops center stage and stares hatefully into space as he finishes the bag. Upon finishing the last piece, PHIL looks over at KATIE who's preoccupied with scrubbing her hands. PHIL turns the sandwich bag inside out. He looks at KATIE one more time, still distracted.

PHIL licks the inside of the bag.

KATIE

Phil, can you not do that in the lobby?

PHIL turns the bag right side in,
zips it, and puts it in his
pocket.

KATIE

Josh fixed the washer and drier.

PHIL

That washer is a useless piece of garbage. What kind of machine has hoses that calcify that quickly? A piece of garbage, that's what. And by fix, do you mean he took the shipping bolts out of the back of the drier? So he's good for something. Whoopie.

KATIE

He also pulled a dead coyote out of the pool's filtration system?

PHIL

Ew.

KATIE

You have no idea.

PHIL

I'm going to go fire him.

KATIE

Phil, don't, he's actually helpful, and we need help right now. Unless you plan on actually cleaning rooms and fixing things again.

PHIL

What's that supposed to mean? Katie, I'm damaged!

KATIE

Your hotel is showing it!

PHIL

You said you could handle it! I'm really hurting here!

KATIE

Your pain is hurting your hotel and it's hurting me. I can handle some slack, Phil, sure, but...

PHIL

It's been two weeks!

KATIE

Fine. It's been two weeks, but this what I'm saying. I'm tired, my body hurts, my head hurts, and I don't know what my breaking point is, but if it wasn't for Josh, I would be there.

PHIL

You know, if Jen would-

KATIE

I'll talk to her, but she's leaving. And Josh has no obligation here either. How entertained can a guy be in a town like this before he heads onto Colorado?

PHIL

Pshh, what does Colorado have that Nebraska doesn't?

KATIE

Mountains, a football team, a baseball team, legal weed-

PHIL

Enough! So what? I'm doing the best that I can, okay?

KATIE

Me too, and it's not enough.

PHIL

Now I'm not enough for you either?

JOSH enters.

PHIL

Josh, am I enough for you?

JOSH

You're almost too much for me, Phil.

KATIE

I want to kill you both.

JOSH

Did you tell him about the pool?

KATIE

Yeah.

JOSH

You gotta keep a better eye on that pool, Phil. And the hotel in general. Those coyotes smell blood and they come prowling. Your hotel is bleeding.

PHIL

Yeah right.

JOSH

Phil?

PHIL

What?

JOSH

Are we okay?

PHIL

You're just trying to help.

KATIE

He is helping.

JOSH

It's the only way I can think to repay your hospitality.

PHIL

Yeah. Because I'm hospitable.

JOSH

You are. You're the most hospitable man I know.

PHIL

Thank you. But I suck at being dumped.

JOSH

So do I.

PHIL

I'll say! (To KATIE) He thought making me an online stalker profile would help!

JOSH

I never called it that.

PHIL

Is that what you did, Josh? You make a stalker profile when you got dumped?

JOSH

No.

KATIE

Then what did you do?

JOSH

I drove to Big Springs to fish a coyote out a pool filter. Like I said, I'm bad at this too. Katie, have you ever been dumped?

KATIE

Never got the privilege.

PHIL

Yeah, you strike me as more of a dumper.

KATIE

I've never dumped anybody either.

JOSH

You've never gone out with anyone?

KATIE

Please.

JOSH

You, please, what happened?

KATIE

There's not nearly enough alcohol in me to tell you that right now.

JOSH

You keep sanitizing yourself like that and in a minute there will be.

KATIE

You don't know about rabies like I do.

PHIL

Ha! That sounds like something crazy I'd say! We've been hanging out too much, Katie.

KATIE

Sure. I think we need some space.

PHIL

That's a good idea. Before you get too needy. You're kind of high maintenance sometimes.

KATIE

Excuse me? Phil, you need someone to assure you like every five minutes.

PHIL

That's not even true! Josh, do I need someone to assure me every five minutes?

JOSH

Your confidence is a little shaken.

PHIL

Am I high maintenance? Josh! Am I high maintenance???

JOSH

Look Phil, sometimes your hoses calcify, that's all.

PHIL

My hoses calcify?

JOSH

All our hoses calcify.

KATIE

Sometimes we get rabid coyotes dumped in our filters.

JOSH

I want to know about your rabid coyote, Katie. Not right now, but sometime.

KATIE

So you can write about it?

JOSH

Just so I can know about it.

KATIE

Why do you want to know about it?

JOSH

Because I want to know about everything.

KATIE

You want to know about rabies?

JOSH

Yeah, but... also later.

PHIL

Rabies gives me the hibbidy jibbidies. Enough of this stuff, you're both a couple of sad sacks. Come on, Josh, I'll show you where we keep the chlorine! It's in a shed!

JOSH

Lucky day.

PHIL and JOSH exit.

KATIE holds her hand out in front of her, waiting for it to shake. It doesn't. She picks up her bottle of water and drinks it. She swallows suspiciously and studies the bottle.

KATIE

Ha. Rabies. Oh, you bored, delusional little girl.

Beat.

KATIE dials.

KATIE

Hey Audrey? I'll just come and get those antidotes now.

Click. KATIE exits.

SCENE 2- SAM BASS SALOON

FOSSIL enters onto the hotel lobby set and addresses the audience as he sets up for the Sam Bass Saloon.

FOSSIL

Yep, I had to sneak up on ya. Thought you might run out the door if ya saw that bar roll out here one more time on account of the grimness of those last two tales. No need to get ruffled. I just wanted to thank ya'll for the visit. That's right, this is fare thee well. There's some show yet to unravel, sure, but I ain't comin' out at the end to say, well there ya have it. You'll know the end when you see it. You don't me coming out and tellin' you what you saw and what you learned. That's somethin' I'm damn sure of, hell, this is draft one! See what I did just now? I shoved the entire show up its own rear end. It ain't fun. It ain't cute. It ain't clever. And yet, people walk around that way all day long, restless, flippin' over cow pies, searching for... *cohesion*. Okay fine. Here. I'll give you one that's short and sweet, since the last two were so grim, and I ain't one to leave a bad taste in your mouth.

There was a little photographer man who came through the town of Ewing, Nebraska about two, three decades ago. The man did church directories ya see. He'd go to these towns, take pictures of the congregation, member by member for two days, pack up, and head to the next town. He'd sell the pictures to the people too, family portraits and whatnot.

So he was staying in Ewing, they let him use the rectory for place to sleep and cook. The pastor was a nice fella, stern though, as they can often come, out that way. He got halfway through the sessions of the first day, when a girl walked into the church basement, where he'd setup. She was about his same age, wearin' a sun dress, hair the color of a sunrise over a harvested field, eyes that bright too. The photographer looked at her name on the sheet, and she had the pastor's last name. The pastor's daughter.

He told her to sit on the crate he'd put on the canvas backdrop. He tested his lights, adjusted his focus- he needed these shots to be the best of the bunch. Pastors pay handsomely for good shots of their beautiful daughters, you know. He told her one-two-clickety-doo! She had a smile that would stop the world. But right when the photographer clicked the button, she turned her smile into monstrous expression, all tooth and tongue. To screw with him right? The photographer laughed at the picture and lined everything up again. He walked over and adjusted her chin by hand, looking into her eyes.

One-two-clickety-doo! And she made an even uglier face! After the third time, the young photographer said, "Cut it out, now! There's a line formin' and I gotta get all these folks shot by dinnertime!" This time after the clickety-doo, this young lady, this preacher's daughter pulled the bottom of her shirt down right when he clicked the button, giving him a shot of her exposed bust and brazier! "Now stop that!" said the photographer. He was losing his temper at this point, but the pastor's daughter just got more bemused with each bad snapshot. She'd blink on purpose, yawn, sneeze, blow a spit bubble. People in the line started to leave, the sun started to set. Fish lips, a leg up, buckteeth, she wouldn't quit! But the photographer was determined. If he could get just one good shot of her, it would pay for the whole trip, and if he didn't, the pastor would kick his ass right out of town.

Finally, the sun was all the way down, and he'd burned through all his bulbs, the photographer dropped to his knees and yelled, "Why? Why would you do this to me? What have I ever done to you? All I needed was one shot, Ms. Fuller! Why didn't you give it to me? The church is going to be so riled at you!" Then the girl kissed the little photographer man on the cheek and said, "Mister, that ain't my name, and I don't go to this church."

Now, I believe you'll find that story charmin', complete, appropriate, and yet, it ain't got jack to do with cohesion. No more than anything else anyway.

At his point, SAM BASS SALOON
should be all the way set up.

SAM BASS enters.

SAM

Hey Fossil, you tell em that story about the photographer
up in Ewing?

FOSSIL

Yup, got them all soft for ya.

SAM

Oh, it ain't like that! Don't even put those bad thoughts
in their heads! I'm sure everything will work out fine for
everyone. Just fine.

FOSSIL

Like they did for you?

SAM

They ain't me.

FOSSIL

Some say everyone is everyone, Mr. Bass!

SAM

Some bullshit that is.

FOSSIL

I was talkin' about cohesion earlier.

SAM

Cohesion my ass, it's there, it ain't there, everything means something, nothin' means nothin', who gives a shit? You see it or you lose your mind tryin' and then what? Nothin' is what! So you might as well skip all that nonsense and do what you want in the first place.

FOSSIL

Well, that's the thing with folks these days, Sam, they don't know what they want and count on cohesion to lead the way.

JOSH enters with his notebook,
still closed.

FOSSIL

There's trouble. How goes the vision quest, Chief?

JOSH

Hard to say at this point, but it's definitely going.

FOSSIL

You got anything in there yet?

JOSH

No. I haven't opened it. I'm trying to feel when the right time would be to start getting it all down.

SAM

Do him a favor and set that damned thing on fire.

FOSSIL

Couldn't hurt.

JOSH

To wait? Yeah, that's what I'm thinking.

SAM

Poor bastard.

JEN Enters.

FOSSIL

Working today?

JEN

My future just went to hell! My whole life! My parents want me to be a farmer. Like what kind of cliché Nebraskan bullshit is that? Hi Fossil.

FOSSIL

Howdy.

JEN

New bolero?

FOSSIL

Nah, I just spit shined up an old one.

JEN

Oh. It's nice.

FOSSIL

I don't care if they ain't comin' back.

JEN

They'll come back. As ties get skinnier, it's the natural progression. Keep it up.

FOSSIL

I will, but like I say. I don't care. You were sayin' about your parents?

JEN

They drained my savings account. All of it, gone! Everything I've worked for... They're my parents, aren't they supposed to support me?

FOSSIL

They're supposed to do what's best for you.

JEN

That was when they are raising me. I'm eighteen now, which means they have been demoted to consultants at their most powerful. And Katie...

JOSH

She supports you doesn't she?

JEN

I don't even know I wanted to talk to her, but like, she just wanted to talk about rabies.

JOSH

She seemed to want to steer our conversation toward rabies too. What's her deal?

SAM

Was she bit?

JEN

No, some just got in our pool. It should be fine.

JOSH

I know.

JEN

I don't know what her deal is though. I'm so fucking pissed off, and I have fucking no one to turn to!

FOSSIL

She's just not ready for you to go, like your parents.

JEN

Ugh, why can't anyone just be happy for me?

SAM

I am!

JEN

Thanks.

JOSH

For what?

FOSSIL

The best thing you can learn out there is how to let yourself be happy.

SAM

And how to manipulate people.

FOSSIL

You can shut it.

JOSH

Who?

JEN

I need more than just to let myself be happy. I never understood the people who could do that.

SAM AND JOSH

Me neither.

FOSSIL

And I've never understood the boneheads who can't.

SAM

You calling me a bonehead?

FOSSIL

What if I am?

JOSH

What if you're what? What the hell is going on? You guys are being weird.

SAM

You realize I can piss in your coffeemaker when you're asleep right? Hell I might just do it right now.

FOSSIL

Fine, I like the taste of ghost piss.

JOSH

No! What? Is that a cocktail?

SAM

So to speak. Couldn't have said it better myself!

FOSSIL

Take a shot and relax, son.

JOSH shakes his head and gets out
a pen.

FOSSIL

Don't. Don't do it.

SAM

I'm doing it.

SAM rises to the coffeemaker.

SAM

Jen, can you put this on the floor for me? Moving shit
tuckers me out like you just wouldn't believe.

JEN

Sure.

JOSH

Dammit! Sure what?

JEN puts the coffeemaker on the
floor in front of SAM.

JOSH

What are you doing?

FOSSIL

Alright, that's enough, pick it up.

SAM

Say we're smart folks, take back calling us boneheads!

JOSH puts his hand on the notebook
cover. FOSSIL swats it away.

FOSSIL

I ain't tellin' you again, son.

JEN

Do it!

JOSH

But he told me not to.

JEN

Not you. Piss in the coffeemaker!

JOSH

Am I on drugs, or is everybody else on drugs?

FOSSIL

You're bad people. Both of ya! Not smart folks! You're BAD FOLKS!

SAM

Jen, sing it with me!

SAM starts pissing in the
coffeemaker while he and SAM sing
Nirvana's cover of Lake of Fire.

SAM AND JEN

"Where to bad folks go when they die? They don't go to
heaven where the angels fly. Go to a lake of fire and fry.
Won't see um again till the Fourth of Julyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!"

FOSSIL

Dammit, now I gotta go dig out my spare grinder. The loud
one!

FOSSIL throws his rag down and
exits.

JEN

Oh, Phil told me he was going to teach me how to do the
hotel budget, since I guess that's going to be my life now.
I gotta run. See you guys.

SAM

Adios, Darlin'. Thanks for the tune.

SAM zips up and turns to face
JOSH.

JOSH is gripping his notebook with
both hands, shaking in confusion
and in fierce determination NOT to
open it.

JOSH

Don't write it down... stay in the moment... don't recognize
the moment or it will leave like a dream you don't
remember... stay in the moment. Oh my God that was so fucking
weird... No...

JOSH clicks his pen.

JOSH

Don't...

JOSH begins to open the notebook.

JOSH

NOOOO!!!!

JOSH rips a handful of pages out of the notebook, throws it down, and pours his shot on it. He stares at the mess, panting. Relieved. JOSH looks up and makes eye contact with SAM BASS.

SAM

You know that story about the photographer?

JOSH

...No.

SAM

If he would've just put the camera down, he would have realized that the love of his life was standing right in front of him. He wouldn't have had to waste the whole damned day taking shit pictures. Cohesion. ...If you're into that shit.

JOSH

I'm sorry. Are you the love of my life?

SAM

Am I?

JOSH faints into his tattered notebook. SAM laughs as the lights fade.

SCENE 3- HOTEL ROOM

JOSH is asleep in his bed. PHIL is sitting on the bed with his hair combed and shirt tucked in. He's staring at JOSH, waiting for him

to wake up. JOSH slowly wakes up
and sees PHIL.

PHIL

Am I old?

JOSH

Jesus. I was dreaming?

PHIL

I don't know, were you? Fossil brought you back here just a
few minutes ago. Looks like you passed out.

JOSH

No, I didn't drink anything. So I wasn't dreaming. Wow. Why
are you sitting on my bed?

PHIL

I was just thinking about time and how little of it there
is. And I was just wondering if you thought I was old?

JOSH

I don't know. No. Was there another guy with Fossil? A
cowboy looking guy?

PHIL

No. Why? You make a friend?

JOSH

I don't... No, Phil, you're not old. You have plenty of time
to do whatever the hell it is you want to do before you
die. Is that what you're asking?

PHIL

Yeah. Thank you. Okay, well...

PHIL stands.

JOSH

Why do you look like that?

PHIL

I just wanted to look nice?

JOSH

For what?

PHIL

Because people like it when you look nice, duh!

JOSH

Who? Where are you going?

PHIL

Actually, since we're full, I reserved your room. Sorry.

JOSH

What?

PHIL

Would you mind?

JOSH

Mind what?

PHIL

Could you leave please?

JOSH

Are you serious?

JEN enters wiping her face, she's been crying, but she's trying to hide it.

JEN

I told you this was Josh's room. Why did you want to meet in here? Hi, Josh.

JOSH

Hi. Phil, what are you doing?

PHIL

I told you, we're completely booked up for rooms, so I told Jen to meet me in your room, so we could borrow it from you. I told Jen I would show her how to do the budget and stuff, since she's going to math college in the fall.

JOSH

Uh. Okay. Phil?

PHIL

Jen, what's wrong have you been crying?

JEN

No, no, I'm fine, it's fine.

PHIL gets a folder from the night stand.

PHIL

If you say so. Pop a squat! Josh would you mind?

JOSH

Sssssure. Jen?

JEN

What? Yeah, it's fine.

JEN sits on the bed next to PHIL and looks at the contents of the folder. JOSH slowly moves to the exit.

JOSH

When should I come back?

PHIL

Shouldn't be long. Thirty minutes? Bye!

JOSH

Why aren't you meeting in your office?

PHIL

It's getting cleaned. Could you go help out with that? The carpet shampoo is in the lobby closet. Bye!

JEN

Josh, don't be weird, it's cool.

JOSH exits, but stands outside the door out.

PHIL

Ugh! Finally! Am I right? Okay, so! These here are all expenses. There are a lot of them obviously. Here is the tally for net income in a year, based on stuff in this column, mainly just room fees, occasional lobby rentals, that stuff. Here is my net worth, based on this average deposit for twelve months.

JEN

Is this your balance?

PHIL

Yes ma'am!

JEN

What does liquid assets mean?

PHIL

Okay, so that would be like my car, the physical hotel, maintenance equipment, anything I could sell basically.

JEN

And those add up to this number down here?

PHIL

Exactly!

JEN

So if I take your balance and add your liquid assets, it should total your net worth, right?

PHIL

Quick learner! College is just going to be a snap for you, Jen! You'll just eat it up! So for the budget-

JEN

It doesn't work out.

PHIL

Hm?

JEN

It doesn't equal your net worth, it's like two hundred thousand short. Do you have another account?

PHIL

Oh, that's right! No, the rest is in the safe, where we put our tax stuff.

JEN

In all those envelopes?

PHIL

Correct-o-mundo! It's good to have a little rainy day fund.

JEN bows her head trying to hold back a burst of tears.

PHIL

Sweetie, what's wrong? What did I say?

JEN

It's not you. I just can't focus... my parents...

PHIL

Oh, are they being sticks in the mud about you going to-

JEN

Not just that. They drained my bank account. I had everything saved. Everything I've ever made because there's nothing to spend money on in this goddamned town! And they transferred it over to their account and closed mine! Now I have nothing! None of it! They said they'll start paying me back when I decide to do something worthwhile.

PHIL

Yeah well, at least now we can focus on your long term career here huh? No more distractions?

JEN

Distractions? Phil, this is the distraction! Anything other than what I want to do is the fucking distraction!

PHIL

Jen, you don't have to react this way. You work some here, you work some at the farm, and we start paying back the money, then before you know it-

JEN

Why the holy fuck did you just say "we"?

PHIL

Me and your parents, goofball. We need you here.

JEN

You and my parents? You fucking arranged this?

PHIL

It's the best way, Jen, it's mutually beneficial. I'll support you, just stick with me.

JEN

You'll support me?

PHIL

You betcha. Trust me, I'm reliable. I'll be perfect to you, financially or... whatever you need. Whatever you want.

PHIL leans in too closely. JEN puts her hand on his chest holding PHIL back.

JEN

No. Phil! What the fuck are you doing?

PHIL

I thought... I mean... you can stay, Jen. You have everything you need right here. I took care of everything.

JEN

No.

PHIL

Please? Just hold still please, let me talk to you? Just talk?

JEN

No! Jesus, Phil!

JEN jumps up and backs toward the door. She grabs a pen from the dresser and holds in front of herself for defense.

PHIL

You don't have a choice.

JEN

Don't fucking touch me.

PHIL

Okay, fine, we can take a break so you can deal with your emotions, but I want you back here in ten, understand?

JEN

You need some help, Phil. This isn't okay.

PHIL

Okay, let's not blow this out of proportion. I didn't do anything, I thought you'd be interested in earning your money back.

JEN

I'm not.

PHIL

Fine. Okay. Sorry. So ten minutes?

JEN exits, running into JOSH.

PHIL

Jen!

JEN takes JOSH's hand and writes something on it. JEN exits. JOSH lingers in his doorway.

PHIL throws the folder down and punches the bed and screams into the pillow. PHIL paces, sits back on the bed, and opens the night stand. He picks up the bible from the drawer, flips through and points at a verse at random. He reads it aloud. It's not helpful. He tries again.

PHIL tosses the bible back into the night stand and buries his head in his hands. He punches himself in the face.

PHIL gets out his phone and dials.

PHIL

What... what are you doing? Hi... I've just been busy. It's so good to hear your voice. Um, that's not why I called. I kissed another girl... Did you hear me? ...Are you mad? ...Why? I know, but... you are? ...Who? Tell me who! Well that's just fine, you... you b... AAAHHHH! BYE!

PHIL screams into his hands. JOSH knocks.

PHIL

Oh, crap. What did she tell you?

JOSH

Nothing, so it's going to have to come from you.

PHIL

She's just. Ugh. It'll work out, it just takes time.

JOSH

I shouldn't have left. I knew what you were doing.

PHIL

I wasn't doing anything!

JOSH

You shut yourself in a hotel room with an eighteen year old and tried to seduce her. That's some predatory shit there, Phil.

PHIL

That's not... Whatever. I'm sorry, okay? Let's everyone make a big deal about something that never even- I didn't even do anything! I should have just killed myself. Who cares?

JOSH

There was a guy in Pennsylvania one time. A construction worker. He accidentally cut his hand off with a table saw on the job site. So in his pain and delirium, he tried to off himself with a nail gun. Eleven nails in the head later, he goes to the emergency room, and he lives.

PHIL

Uh... good?

JOSH

The thing is, they were able to reattach the hand, but they couldn't remove all the nails.

PHIL

Is that true?

JOSH

Fairly certain.

PHIL

You're saying I shouldn't work so hard at trying to fix things?

JOSH

Not really. It's just a crazy story.

PHIL

You're so weird all the time.

JOSH

You need real help. I'm full of shit.

PHIL

Before I put another nail in my head?

JOSH

I guess. Like I said, it was just a story, not necessarily a metaphor-

PHIL

Or, you know, get a real gun.

JOSH

No, you definitely shouldn't do that.

PHIL

I called Megan.

JOSH

Yeah?

PHIL

Just now.

JOSH

Why?

PHIL

To tell her that I kissed another girl. It's a lie though.

JOSH

How'd that go for you?

PHIL

Bad. She's kissing other boys. BoySSS, with a-a-a plural "S".

JOSH

Yeah. She's a nineteen year old in college, it's what they do.

PHIL

I can't handle it, Josh. My brain can't handle it. Why does everyone I love leave me?

JOSH

Because you're immature, needy, controlling, desperate-

PHIL

OKAY!

JOSH

Old.

PHIL

You said I wasn't!

JOSH

Compared to teenagers, you're old.

PHIL

No. It's not me. I'm hospitable. She was such a nice girl before she went to college. That's what it does to people I guess. That's what happened. Well, at least Jen will stay a little nice for a while longer. Her parents cut her off. I offered for her to stay with me, but no, no, no. She'd rather be a poor farm girl, still living with her parents, working at the saloon. I told her parents this might happen.

JOSH

So wait, you arranged for Jen's parents to..

JOSH looks down at his hand, where
JEN had written.

PHIL

Yup. *Taken.*

JOSH

Does she work tonight?

PHIL

Yup. She's got the late shift, and I'm going to man the desk for a night. Giving Katie the night off.

JOSH

Good. That's a good apology for Katie, for working her so hard. A few nights off would be better.

PHIL

We have an arrangement, don't worry. I think the nights will be good for me anyway. I'll clear my head.

JOSH

And you need to apologize to Jen.

PHIL

She's a bitch.

JOSH

That's not going to work here, Phil. You have to apologize for advancing upon her in her moment of weakness.

PHIL

I did not!

JOSH

You totally did. You made her cry. More.

PHIL

Fine, I'll say I'm sorry.

JOSH

And you'll get some counseling.

PHIL

What? Counseling?

JOSH

Yeah. Yeah dude.

PHIL

Come on!

JOSH

Phil, you are messed up, man. You have some weird issues that I can't really help you with.

PHIL

What? I thought you said..

JOSH

I was wrong. Look, you just tried to seduce a teenager. Call it what you want, but that's what happened. You're brokenhearted, you're angry, confused, depressed--

PHIL

Yeah, but I'll get better. Right? I mean, counseling is for crazy people.

JOSH

It's for people who are tired of feeling crazy. You need to change the way you process things. The way you apologize is you acknowledge what you've done, express remorse, then vow to make a change, detailing how.

PHIL

Professor Apology over here. How'd you get to be an expert?

JOSH

Practice. Phil, I was in counseling for a few years before I came out here. It's helpful, I think you'd like it.

PHIL

Would you go with me?

JOSH

You'd get more out of it if you went alone, trust me.

PHIL

Right. Well, I'll think about it, but I really think I just need a bit more time.

JOSH stares at PHIL for a beat.

JOSH

Baloney.

PHIL restrains the reflex to cry.
JOSH exits.

Scene 4- SAM BASS SALOON

KATIE is drinking a beer at a table, reading a book. JEN is

sweeping around her. SAM BASS sits
at the bar, nursing a whiskey.

JEN

So you get your rabies cure?

KATIE

I don't know what that was about, Jen. I'm so sorry. But
yeah, I picked some up.

JEN

Good.

KATIE

I'm just freaked out that you're leaving, and I took the
first distraction I could find.

JEN

No need to freak out. My parents drained my account under
Phil's instruction. Everything I saved is gone. So I have
to stay.

KATIE

Oh my God. Phil, that scummy bastard. Come here.

KATIE hugs JEN. JEN drops the
broom for the embrace.

KATIE

It'll be okay, it's just a setback. Don't let those
assholes stop you from getting out of here.

JEN

Then he tried to tell me to stay so he could support me. I
almost stabbed him with a pen.

KATIE

Ugh. UGH! How are you not still showering?

JEN

He's such a creeper.

KATIE

Yeah, I mean, we know he has issues, but that shit is not
okay, Jen.

JEN

I don't know if I should call the cops or what, but I sure as hell ain't working there anymore. Do I have to tender a resignation or something?

KATIE

You don't have to tender shit. I'm going to tender my foot up Phil's ass, that psycho. Did he like, try to seduce you? Did he touch you?

JEN

No, nothing like that, he just surprised me.

KATIE

I'd call the sheriff anyway. He probably won't get into trouble, but a friendly visit from a cop could scare the shit out of him, hopefully it will scare him into some therapy.

JEN

Yeah.

KATIE

Are you okay?

JEN

Aside from the nausea and betrayal, I'm dandy. Katie, Everything is such bullcrap.

KATIE

I know it is, but there is truth out there, and you'll find it. As a matter of fact, I might have some with me right here, if you're up for it?

KATIE pulls out a stack of reviews
from her messenger bag.

JEN

Oo! Me first!

JEN sorts through the stack and
finds a good one.

JEN

MC_McTavish, one star. "What a suck hole! There was lettuce in my sink! I get that you should wash lettuce before you eat it, but who brings a head of lettuce to a hotel? What's next? Cabbage in my shower?"

KATIE

Lettuce is the perfect shower snack because you can eat it wet and it tastes the same.

JEN

You have a ranking list of best and worst shower snacks?

KATIE

I'm a busy lady, if I can compress two needs into one activity, I go for it.

JEN

And yet you have the time to comprise a list of shower snacks. What's the worst shower snack?

KATIE

Tie between nachos and cotton candy.

JEN

I love that I don't even think you're kidding. Does your home shower have a garbage disposal in the drain?

KATIE

Everybody will have one in like a year. Okay, I'm up. Game_of_Scones, A thousand stars. Customer service blew my mind through all the holes in my head. Hospitality expert Jen is basically too hot for her own good. She's hilarious, thoughtful, tough, and makes for perfect company in having to deal with long nights at the desk. She's everything anyone could want in a best friend. The way she gives energy to anyone just by being around her makes her impossible to not love. I want to keep her forever in my life, and keep smaller versions of her in my glove compartment and pillowcase. I hope that wherever she goes, people see her like I do, and fall ridiculously in love with her.

JEN

Please tell me you're Game_of_Scones.

KATIE

How terrifying would that review be if I wasn't?

JEN

You're amazing.

KATIE

But now that you're not leaving, this is really awkward.

JEN

At least we'll be able to keep hanging out.

KATIE

Yeah, for sure. And like I said, you'll make it out of here eventually, if you still want to. I'll do whatever I can to help you, whatever you need. I know you know that, but I just felt like I needed to say it.

JOSH enters with a backpack and his duffle bag.

JOSH

Jen, I'm so sorry. I was an idiot to leave you in there with him.

JEN

Oh my God, it was nightmarish. He even told me to hold still at one point.

KATIE

Jesus.

JOSH

That's gross. Well, I hope I convinced him to get some help.

FOSSIL enters and begins putting glasses away.

FOSSIL

You're all packed up. Heading out, Chief?

JOSH

I'm thinking so.

FOSSIL

Leaving older and wiser and all that?

JOSH

Something like that. You know what I did learn about wisdom though? Wisdom can be quantified by how full of shit you realize you are at any given point.

FOSSIL

Yup, that's the size of it.

SAM

Fuckin' Ay.

KATIE

Where are you going?

JOSH

I think I'd like mountains.

JEN

Mountains are good.

JOSH

They've got a pretty solid reputation. Katie, I wanted to ask, who put the dead coyote in your filter?

KATIE

Trucker guy. I fell in love with him. He bought a trailer in town and lived here for four months. Then one day he was gone, and his wife came looking for him a week later. How about you?

JOSH

Yeah. Something like that. Well, adios.

JOSH turns to leave without the duffle bag. He turns back.

JOSH

Oh, Katie, you still owe me an apology for calling me detestable.

KATIE

I sure do. Come back for it someday.

JOSH

I might.

JOSH nods at SAM. JEN notices, it makes her smile. SAM salutes and starts whistling "Lithium" by Nirvana.

JOSH exits, leaving the duffle
bag.

FOSSIL

Oh, he left his bag.

JEN

Actually, I think that's mine.

Lights fade over SAM whistling.

END.