

The Aliens

BY ANNIE BAKER

Original music & lyrics by
Michael Chernus, Patch Darragh
and Erin Gann

CHARACTERS

JASPER: 31.

KJ: 30.

EVAN: 17.

NOTE

At least a third of this play is silence. Pauses should be at least three seconds long. Silences should last from five to 10 seconds. Long pauses and long silences should, of course, be even longer.

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

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

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

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

A long silence.

Eventually KJ starts singing to himself.

KJ (singing):

I WON'T
WASTE AWAY
WONDERING WHY
I WON'T GO DOWN LIKE THAT IF I DIE
TIME MACHINES WERE MADE FOR ME
I BELIEVE
IMPOSSIBILITIES
ARE WHAT YOU PERCEIVE
TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR
TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR
TRIPLE DIMENSIONAL SUPERSTAR

Jasper smokes. A pause.

KJ (singing):

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

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

KJ: Remember Orion?

Jasper nods.

KJ: He started a wind farm.

Near Marshfield.

Jasper exhales.

JASPER: What does that mean he started a wind farm?

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

JASPER: Wind farm like the big /white—

KJ: The big white spinny things.

(pause)

With like the—on top of a mountain or something.

JASPER: Aren't those owned by the government?

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

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

KJ: Yeah.

Pause.

JASPER: So how does he live on one?

KJ: He just does.

JASPER: Who told you that?

KJ: ...Eli.

Jasper sighs and stubs out his cigarette. KJ watches him, worried.

Another long silence.

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

KJ trails off.

JASPER: Andrea?

KJ nods.

JASPER: Not really.

KJ nods again. A pause.

JASPER: She's crazy, man.

KJ nods again. A pause.

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

A pause.

JASPER: There's actually something wrong with her.

KJ: Like—

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

KJ nods.

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

KJ: Cool.

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

KJ: That's not good, man.

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

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

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

KJ: I'm sorry.

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

(pause)

I don't need to talk about it.

(pause)

I actually feel bad for her.

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

JASPER: What're you doing?

KJ (still squinting): ...Trying to sneeze.

JASPER: What is that /supposed to—

KJ: It helps you sneeze.

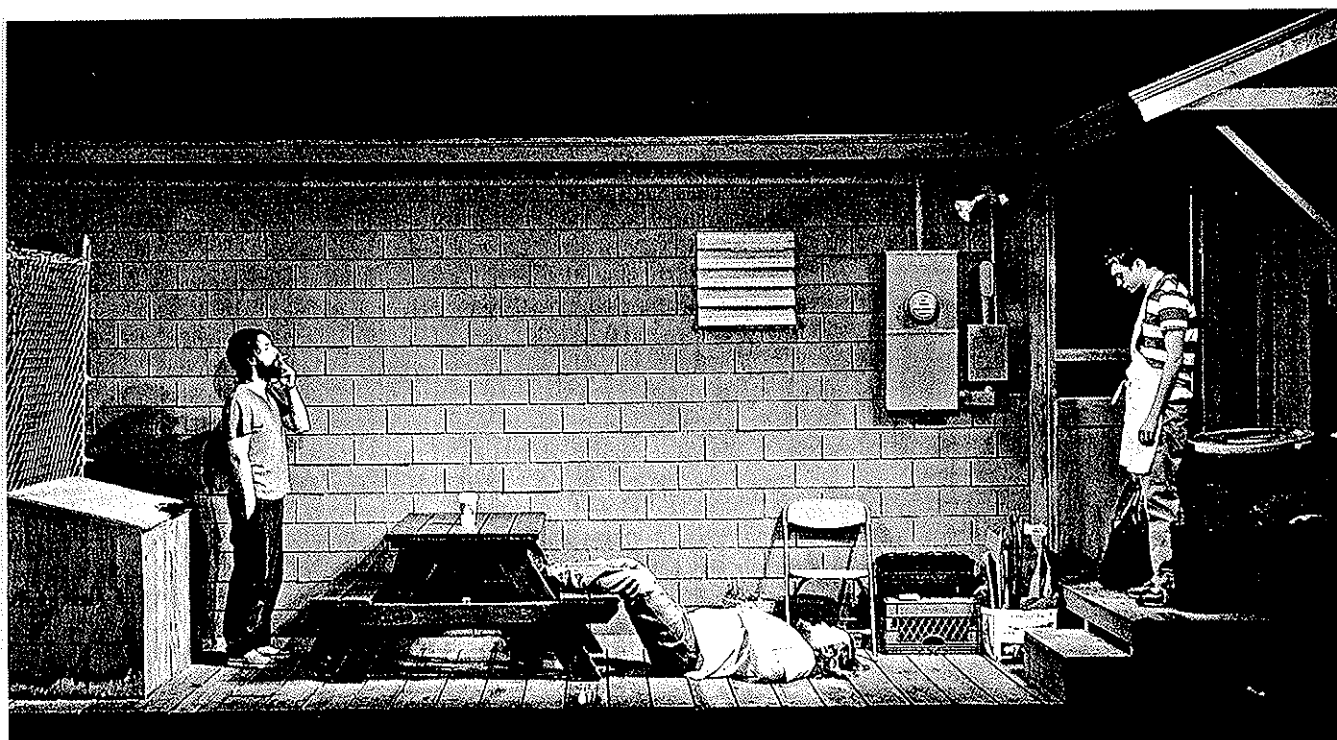
Looking at the sun helps you sneeze.

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

A long silence.

Jasper suddenly kicks a plastic chair over. It makes a loud noise.

KJ: Whoa.



Jasper (Erin Gann) smokes and KJ (Michael Chernus) lies on the ground, while coffee shop employee Evan (Dane DeHaan) looks on.

About five seconds later, the back door to the coffee shop opens. Evan peeks his head out, sees them, then steps outside, in his white apron. Evan is 17 and in a constant state of humiliation.

EVAN: Hey.

Um...

Jasper and KJ regard him coldly.

EVAN: Hey.

We're not allowed to, uh...

(pause)

Did you guys just kick that chair over?

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

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

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

JASPER: Who are you?

EVAN: Um. I'm Evan.

JASPER: You new here?

EVAN: Uh...yeah.

KJ: We know Rahna.

EVAN: ...Okay...

Pause.

KJ: Rahna lets us sit out here.

EVAN: Um. Okay. Uh.

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

JASPER: What's your last name?

EVAN: Shelmerdine.

KJ: Shelmerdine?

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

Evan doesn't know what to say.

JASPER: Emily.

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

JASPER: Her last name is Spencer.

Pause.

EVAN: Um...would it be okay with you guys to move out front?

'Cause it's my second day working here, and I really don't want to get in, um, trouble.

They both look at him and do not move. Evan stands there for a while. Like 10 seconds. Everyone is very still.

Finally Evan turns around and walks back inside. After a while:

KJ: Does it feel hot to you?

Like especially hot?

Jasper doesn't respond.

KJ: Is it supposed to be this hot in June?

JASPER: It's July.

KJ: Oh yeah?

JASPER: July 2nd.

Pause.

KJ: He was like 12. That kid.

Pause.

KJ: July 2nd. That makes sense.

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

(pause)

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

(pause)

Don't they just light it?

Jasper doesn't answer. He touches the pack of cigarettes in his pocket. He drums his fingers on the table.

After a while, he gets up, rights the plastic chair he kicked over and sits back down.

KJ basks in the sun.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO

The next day. Afternoon.

KJ is sitting by himself at the table. He has another to-go cup of tea. He removes his tea bag from his cup, opens it, pours out a little bit of the tea onto the plastic table, removes a tiny packet from his pocket and refills the tea bag with the contents of the tiny packet. Somewhere during this careful operation, Evan comes out the back door in his apron, beleaguered, dragging

a huge garbage bag behind him.

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

KJ turns around, sees him, waves cheerfully, then goes back to his tea bag surgery.

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

EVAN: Don't you mind the smell back here?

KJ (not looking up): Can't smell a thing, my brother.

Pause.

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

No response. KJ twists the new tea bag together and puts it back in his cup.

Then he takes a small wooden stirrer out of his pocket and starts stirring.

Evan looks at the mess on the table.

EVAN: What are you doing?

KJ: Concocting.

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

KJ: Taste it.

Evan looks dubious, then walks forward, takes the cup, then takes a tiny sip.

He nods and hands it back. A pause.

KJ: You go to SHS?

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

KJ: Is Mr. Rafaello still around?

EVAN (nervously glancing back toward the door): Yeah. Um. I had him for World Civ this past year. He's cool.

KJ: I hate that guy.

Evan doesn't know how to respond.

KJ: He's still there?!

Evan nods.

KJ: Oh fuck. Someone needs to fucking kill that guy.

That guy ruined my life.

Shit. Just thinking about him makes me wanna like—
Oh man!

That guy is such a bitch!

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

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

Then KJ takes out his cell phone and dials.

KJ (after a pause, into his phone): Where are you.

(pause)

Ah yes.

(pause)

You are on fire, my friend.

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

JASPER: ...and then I realized that he goes to California. And he drives up the coast. And he's got like five bucks to his name but back then that was like 50 bucks. And he drives, right, he drives up the coast and he sees the ocean for the first time in his life. And then he drives to Big Sur. Which is where...that's where Henry Miller lived.

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

JASPER: So Miller's gonna be a character.

KJ: No shit.

JASPER: Very minor. But he makes an appearance.

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

JASPER: Shroom tea?

KJ: Myfriendmyfriend.

Jasper sits down and takes out his cigarettes. He lights one. He seems wound up. They sit there.

Eventually KJ starts singing.

KJ (singing):

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

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

KJ: ...Back problems.

JASPER: Oh yeah?

KJ: I slept on it weird.

A long pause. Jasper smokes. Suddenly:

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

Pause.

KJ: Wait, what?!

JASPER: She's dating that guy. Sprocket.

She's dating a guy named Sprocket.

KJ: I had no idea.

JASPER: It's cool if you did, man.

KJ: I had No Fucking Idea. I swear to god.

Pause.

KJ: Who's Sprocket?!

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

Pause.

JASPER: He makes his own pants?

KJ: Oh god.

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

KJ: Oh man.

Pause.

KJ: Sprocket.

Jasper stubs out his cigarette.

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

KJ: Ha.

Yes.

JASPER: So you didn't know.

KJ: ...I did not know.

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

(short pause)

I'm telling you, it ended up being one of the best nights of my life.

I was just doing nothing, fucking staring out window, and then I get this phone call, and she has this like haughty tone, and she's like telling me that...

I hold on.

Jasper suddenly leans forward, rests his elbow on his knees and bows his head.

KJ, who is still lying on his back, lifts his head up a little and peers over.

KJ: Are you okay?

JASPER: Yeah. I just had to, like, breathe.

KJ: Whoa.

JASPER: I feel fantastic, though.

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

Jasper takes a deep breath and collects himself.

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

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

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

Worst five minutes of my life.

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

Bad, though.

KJ: What were the worst five minutes of your life?

JASPER (ignoring him): BUT THEN.

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

KJ: Sandy Jano?!

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

KJ: Oh yeah.

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

KJ: Oh man. Was she talking about her Gender stuff?

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

KJ is silent.

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

And then I sat down and I wrote like 20 pages.

KJ: In one night?

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

Pause.

KJ: Awesome.

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

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

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

JASPER: Shelmerdine!

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

JASPER: How are you today, Shelmerdine?

EVAN: Um. I'm good.

'Takin' off.

JASPER: You done already?

EVAN: Um. Yeah. Eight to three.

JASPER: ...You smoke?

EVAN: Um.

Occasionally.

I don't know.

JASPER: Want one?

EVAN (after glancing behind him at the door): Uh...sure.

Jasper offers him a cigarette. Evan takes it and holds it between two slightly trembling fingers. Jasper holds out a lighter. After a half-second of confusion, Evan remembers what to do, leans forward, inhales, lights it and then steps back. He smokes passably, taking tiny hits, still wearing his backpack.

Jasper smokes.

KJ is still lying on his back.

After a while:

KJ: Will someone please pass the psilocybin tea?

Jasper ignores him.

KJ: Will someone please pass the psilocybin tea?

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

EVAN: What's psilocybin?

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

KJ: Shroom karaoke.

KJ laughs. No one else does.

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

Jasper nods.

EVAN: He gave me some. He made me drink some!

JASPER: How much?

EVAN: Like a whole sip.

JASPER: You're fine.

EVAN: Shit!

JASPER: You're fine.

EVAN: Do I seem weird?

JASPER: Do you feel weird?

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

EVAN: No. I don't know.

JASPER: You're fine.

Pause.

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

(pause)

And then they melted off.

KJ (still on his back): Urban myth.

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

EVAN: Uh. I should probably head home.

(pause)

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

JASPER: I'm Jasper.

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

JASPER: And that's KJ.

EVAN: Cool.

Um.

Cool. Yeah.

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

JASPER: All right.

EVAN: Cool.

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

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

JASPER: Where you goin'?

EVAN: Uh...

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

JASPER: A what?

EVAN: Counselor-In-Training? It's just like a week-long-thing.

JASPER: At a camp?

EVAN: Uh...yeah.

JASPER: What kind of camp?

This is the question Evan has been dreading.

EVAN: Uh...it's a, uh...

It's a Jewish music camp?

Um—

JASPER: Jewish *music* camp?

EVAN: ...Yeah.

Um.

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

JASPER: Little Jewish kids.

EVAN: ...Yeah. Um. My mom is Jewish.

Jasper thinks about this, then nods.

EVAN: I went there when I was a little kid.

KJ: You play guitar?

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

KJ: Jasper plays guitar.

Jasper rolls his eyes.

EVAN: Oh yeah?

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

KJ: We had a band!

JASPER: KJ thinks we had a band.

I'm actually a novelist now. I'm writing a novel.

EVAN: Oh. Cool.

KJ: We had a band!

EVAN: What was the name of the band?

JASPER: Oh fuck. Don't get him started.

KJ finally sits up.

KJ: We had many names. Many phases. Many incarnations.

JASPER: We could never agree on a name. We had like 50 different band names.

KJ: The New Humans!

JASPER: Yeah. He really pushed for that one.

KJ: Hieronymous Blast.

JASPER: Oh god.

KJ: Pillowface.

Frog Men.

Electric Hookah.

The Limp Handshakes.

Joseph Yoseph.

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

KJ: The JK/KJ Experience.

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

KJ: The JK/KJ *Experiment*.

Jasper shakes his head.

KJ: Killer Jamball and the Jolly Kangaroo!

Dharma Machine!

Nefarious Hookah!

JASPER: I wanted us to be called The Aliens.

KJ: No. Boring.

JASPER: After the Bukowski poem. You like Bukowski?

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

JASPER: You ever write poetry?

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

JASPER: You gotta read Bukowski.

EVAN: Okay.

JASPER: He cuts away all the bullshit.

EVAN: Cool.

Evan nods and keeps nodding.

EVAN: ...Bukowski.

JASPER: What are you doin' tomorrow night, Shelmerdine?

EVAN: Ah—

JASPER: You goin' to the fireworks?

EVAN: Uh. I don't know. Maybe. I might just stay home.

(a short pause)

Sometimes the Fourth, like, depresses me.

JASPER: Oh yeah?

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

(pause)

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

A pause. Jasper nods thoughtfully.

EVAN: Not that there's like...not like it's a bad thing...or like...

Evan trails off.

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

KJ: A hootenanny.

JASPER: We might read shit out loud. Sing a few songs.

Although drumming circles are strictly forbidden.

KJ: Drumming of any kind.

EVAN: Oh. Cool.

JASPER: You could join us.

A pause.

EVAN: Um...

Yeah! Okay. Thanks.

Yeah.

Awesome.

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

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

JASPER: Here.

EVAN: Oh. Um.

We're really not supposed to...

You can't have a party back here.

Jasper stares at him.

EVAN: It's like a loitering thing.

JASPER: I thought you guys were closed tomorrow.

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

JASPER: Fine.

Don't come.

It's not a big deal.

A pause while Evan stands there, at a loss.

JASPER: No need to fret, little man.

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

JASPER: It's cool.

EVAN: Yeah. Um...

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

KJ (sincerely): Have fun at band camp!

EVAN: Uh.

...Thanks.

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

JASPER: KJ.

KJ: Yes.

Pause.

JASPER: Are you freaking out?

KJ: What?!

No!

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

KJ: No way.

A pause.

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

JASPER: What?

KJ: *Projecting*, man. You're projecting.

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

Blackout.

SCENE THREE

The next evening. The Fourth of July. Twilight.

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

JASPER: —and her bedroom smelled faintly of stale piss and those porcelain bowls of dried rose petals his mother used to put on the back of the toilet, before she died on his 15th birthday.

Candace walked over to the window, took a long white plastic rod between her fingers, and twisted it. Sunlight flooded the dusty little room. "What?" she said, grinning at him. "I got nothing to be ashamed of." He noticed for the first time that her front tooth was chipped, just a little. The right one. Something about that tooth stirred him, made his gut ache.

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

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

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

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

"I do," he said, "I do," and he moved toward her /and—

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

Jasper puts down the paper and sighs.

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

Please. Continue.

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

JASPER: "I do," he said, "I do," and he moved toward her and grasped her hair with his hand, pulling her head back so her mouth opened a little. She let /out a—

KJ: Oh wait. One thing.

Sorry.

Can I say one thing?

JASPER: Yes.

KJ: The thing about the 15th birthday?

I feel like... I feel like maybe it's like too much of a coincidence? That his mom died on his 15th birthday. It feels like... I'm supposed to be like: whoa: or something.

JASPER: My mom died on my 15th birthday.

Pause.

KJ: She did?

JASPER: Yes. You knew that.

KJ: Whoa. No.

I knew that you were... I knew that you were 15, man.

I didn't know it was on your birthday.

JASPER: It was on my birthday.

KJ: Jesus.

Oh man. That's horrible.

Wow.

Nevermind.

A weird pause.

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

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

KJ (*shaking his head*): Jesus. On your birthday.

JASPER: I would've kicked your ass.

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

JASPER: Okay. I'm gonna skip ahead.

KJ: No!

JASPER: Yes.

Jasper slips through the pages.

JASPER: This next part is what I wrote the other night.

After Andrea called.

(a short pause)

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

(another short pause)

Okay.

Jasper starts reading again.

JASPER: He was seeing America for the first time. In a way he'd been thinking about this drive since he was a kid, this drive across America. What did Arizona look like? he used to wonder. Utah? Wyoming? Oklahoma? Illinois? He had imagined, somehow, that each state had a different set of plants and animals, a slightly different color blue in the sky. But as he drove, as his little Hudson Hornet cranked and moaned across the long flat highways, and he flashed by farm after farm, cornfield after cornfield, desolate truck stop after desolate truck stop with the red flashing lights and the toothless man behind the counter and the occasional lonely woman with crinkled eyes desperately trying to catch his attention, as he crossed state line after state line, he realized that most of America looked like... most of America.

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

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

And so as he approached California, his dream of California started to fade. He thought of what Miller had told him about the jutting cliffs in Big Sur, the mystical fog, the amethyst waves. But what if it was a lie? Or worse, some kind of delusion? What if Miller was actually living in a cornfield, sleeping on a billboard, writing underneath the glow of another drive-through movie theater?

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

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

Genius.

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

And immediately he knew she was right, he'd known it since he was a boy, that word had lived in him before he even knew how to say it or spell it, but after Allison had confronted him with it, made it live

in the air, he started to feel a constant, pressing weight on his shoulders and his back.

The loneliness of it.

The loneliness of it could kill him.

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

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

When you gonna stop fucking around?

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

JASPER: Anyway.

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

Hello, Shelmerdine.

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

KJ: WHAT THE FUCK?!

Jasper tries not to beam.

KJ: Whatthefuckwhatthefuckwhatthefuck. Oh my god.

KJ does a little prayer jog around the recycling bin.

KJ: Ohmygodohmygodohmygodohmygod.

Ohmygodohmygodohmygodohmygod.

EVAN: ...That was really cool.

JASPER: Aw, come on, Shelmerdine.

EVAN: That was really really cool.

Pause.

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

JASPER: He doesn't have one.

EVAN: Oh. Cool.

Pause.

EVAN: And uh...what's the title?

JASPER: Little Tigers Everywhere.

EVAN: Little Tigers Everywhere. Cool.

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

Pause.

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

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

KJ: Yes!

Welcome to the Fourth of July!

JASPER: Lookit that. Shelmerdine showed up.

(to KJ)

Are you surprised?

KJ: Fuck no. Fuck no.

EVAN: Is anyone else coming?

KJ and Jasper suddenly look self-conscious.

JASPER: Uh...no.

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

KJ: What's Noah doing?

JASPER: ...Being an asshole.

Pause.

EVAN: Um. I brought some stuff.

Evan kneels down and unzips his backpack.

EVAN: Uh.

He removes some Tupperware.

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

Uh.

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

He takes a bottle out of his backpack.

EVAN: Peppermint Schnapps?

KJ: Ooh. Peppermint.

Jasper snatches the bottle out of Evan's hand, away from KJ.

JASPER: I'll take that.

Jasper shoves the bottle into his pocket.

KJ: Aw come on. Are you serious?

JASPER: Yes.

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

JASPER: No you can't.

Evan has no idea what's going on.

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

KJ (to Jasper): Are you kidding?

Jasper doesn't respond.

KJ: JESUS.

I'm...this is unbelievable.

You're treating me like a child.

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

KJ: FUCK!

(a short pause)

This is so fucking pointless. I could just march over to the liquor store and buy whatever the fuck I want.

I'm 30 fucking years old!

JASPER: Do it.

I'll just go home.

KJ: You wouldn't fucking *know*!

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

A pause.

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

He walks over to Evan.

KJ: Don't do it, you asshole.

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

JASPER: Zhoop. Zhoop. Zhoop. Zhoop.

KJ: ...Fuck you.

Jasper goes back over to one of the plastic chairs and sits down. He takes out his cigarettes and lights one.

JASPER: What else you got, Shelmerdine?

EVAN: Um.

Evan reaches into his backpack.

EVAN: This is kind of dumb. But I thought I'd just...

I brought sparklers?

Evan takes out a box of sparklers and puts them on the ground.

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

JASPER: SHPAHKLAHS!

Evan isn't sure how to respond to this.

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

"SHPAHKLAHS!"

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

EVAN: Um. Okay.

JASPER: KJ might be like one-eighth Jewish or something, right, KJ? *KJ, standing near the recycling bin, shakes his head sullenly.*

JASPER: Or was that just a Sandy Jano theory.

Mm.

(to Evan)

Sandy Jano is KJ's fantastic mother, with whom he still lives. She's a little, ah, how shall we say it, New-Agey? She's into the New Age? And she like became obsessed with tracing their ancestry back and proving they were Jewish or something.

It didn't really work, though, did it KJ?

No response.

JASPER: They're like Lutherans.

Pause.

JASPER: I'm one-sixteenth Cherokee.

EVAN: No way.

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

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

JASPER: Tell him.

KJ doesn't respond.

JASPER: Tell him about the dream.

KJ continues to give no response.

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

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

KJ: And I was really happy.

JASPER: ...And he was really happy.

Pause. KJ and Jasper giggle.

EVAN: Um. That's kinda weird.

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

EVAN (forgetting to be cool): Oh wow.

A pause.

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

Another pause. Jasper looks at his watch.

JASPER: They won't happen for at least another 10 minutes.

No one knows what to say.

KJ: Music!

JASPER: Already?

KJ: Frogmen.

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

JASPER: Lemme eat a brownie first.

Jasper grabs a brownie out of Evan's Tupperware, stuffs it into his mouth and swallows it within a matter of seconds.

JASPER: Okay.

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

JASPER (to KJ): Do you want to give some kind of introduction? Explanation?

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

JASPER (to Evan): This is a very old song. Actually our oldest song. Vintage Kevin Jano.

So.

When was this.

Shortly after we met.

KJ was a recent UVM dropout

and I never graduated from high school.

EVAN: Did you go to SHS, too?

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

Evan shakes his head.

JASPER: New Hampshire. It's a shithole.

There's nothing. There's a fucking war memorial and a soda fountain and that's it. Trailer trash.

I am a living piece of trailer trash.

Anyway

Moving on

KJ's a college dropout, I'm a street urchin, and: we meet.

in Vermont.

in this town.

and two weeks later

KJ writes this song

and comes to me

and says:

you make up the music.

you make up the chords.

(after a pause, to KJ)

you want to sing this alone?

KJ: Frogmen sing together.

Jasper nods, plays the opening chords a few more times, and then they sing. During the song the sun sets completely, and by the end they are in the dark, lit only by the moon and perhaps a nearby parking lot lamp.

JASPER AND KJ (singing):

FROM SAGAMORE TO OGDEN

COME THE SLIMY FROGMEN

THEY JIGGLE AND JANGLE THROUGH THE ANGLE

FROM THE BRIDGE TO THE RIDGE AND UNDER

THE FRIDGE

THE FROGMEN COME WITH BOTTLES OF RUM

KJ: (Mimic rum)

JASPER AND KJ (singing):

MACHO COMACHO THREW THE FIRST SHINDIG

WHERE THE FAT LADY ATE ALL THE RING DINGS

THE YOUNG ONES ATE LIKE RABBITS

AND DREAMT OF LAKE PLACID

(THE FROGMEN ATE FROG STICKS FROG CAKE AND FROG ACID)

FROM UNDER A LANDING CAME BUTCH AND HIS BANDMATES

THEY PLAYED MULTIPLE SETS OF

BENNY AND THE JETS

AND WE ALL PLACED BETS

YEAH

WITH PURPLE CIGARETTES

AND THE PARTY WAS FINE TILL QUARTER PAST NINE

FROM UP IN MAINE TO DOWN IN SPAIN

THE FROGMEN CREW BLEW THEIR BRAINS

FROM FRICK TO FRACK

I FLICK MY ASH

FROM DUST TO DUST

I EAT YOUR CRUST

FROGMEN, FROGMEN

NO MATTER WHERE THEY GO

THEY LEAVE TIME FOR THE WILDLIFE

FROGMEN, FROGMEN

THEY MARCH TO AND FRO TO THE DRUM AND

FIFE

YEAH

FROM SAGAMORE TO OGDEN—

The fireworks begin. The noise is powerful, despite the fact that it's coming from a distance. KJ and Jasper stop singing. They all sit and listen, in silence. The explosions build over the next minute or so the way that fireworks do, rising to some sort of climax, then fizzling out, then rising again, then working up to a series of short and manic bursts.

At some point, probably about 20 seconds in, KJ gets up and starts dancing. He dances in weird little circles around the patio.

Jasper and Evan watch him. The fireworks continue.

JASPER: You got any friends at SHS, Shelmerdine?

Evan shakes his head peacefully.

EVAN: No.

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

KJ (still dancing): I NEED A SPARKLER!

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

KJ dances with the sparkler.

They watch him.

After a little while, quietly:

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

EVAN: Um. It's not technically band camp.

The fireworks reach their finale.

KJ (referring to the sparkler): It's going out it's going out it's going out! *The sparkler goes out.*

Darkness.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

The same set.

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

He sits by himself, thinking.

He sits by himself for a long time.

This should be at least 20 seconds.

Finally he says:

KJ: If P then Q.

Then more silence. More sitting by himself. Then Evan enters from the side with his backpack, radiant.

EVAN: Hey!

KJ: ...Hey!

Pause.

KJ: Welcome back from band camp!

EVAN: Thanks.

Yeah.

Another pause that goes on a little too long.

KJ: Did you have a good time?

EVAN: Yeah. Actually.

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

(pause)

I met a girl, actually.

KJ: Excellent.

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

(pause)

Nicole.

KJ: Nicole.

EVAN: Yeah. She's like a violist.

I don't know.

She lives in Boston.

So if I wanted to visit her I'd have to like drive three hours. So I don't know.

It was cool, though.

(pause)

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

It's kind of humiliating.

KJ: No. That's beautiful, man.

(pause)

Did you finger her pussy?

Evan blanches a little.

KJ: Oh. Sorry. Is that inappropriate?

EVAN: No. Um. I mean. Yeah. I did.

Yeah.

KJ: ...Great!

EVAN: 17 is like kind of pathetic, though, right? I mean, that it's happening for the first time, like, now?

KJ: There are no rules, man.

EVAN: Yeah.

I mean.

When was your first...whatever? Kiss. /Or---

KJ: Ah...let's see. My first kiss I was, like, 14?

Evan nods.

KJ: It was with this like 16-year-old chick at an Allman Brothers show. And I was totally tweaked out just to like kiss her but then she tried to give me a blow job in a Porto Potty and my like little hairless dick like didn't respond and I was totally humiliated.

EVAN: Oh man.

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

(he makes a vague gesture and waits for the word to come)

...heap on the ground and she like cried and cried but she stayed with me and then I broke up with her anyway right before I went off to UVM. So yeah.

EVAN: Wow.

KJ: Bleak, man. It was bleak.

EVAN: When did you have your like first serious girlfriend?

KJ: Ah...

KJ sbrugs uncomfortably.

EVAN: At UVM?

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

A weird pause.

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

Another weird pause.

EVAN: Um. Cool. Well. I should probably go inside. I'm workin' the three to 10.

KJ: Awesome.

EVAN: Maybe I'll see you guys tomorrow.

KJ: Wanna hear a song?

Evan looks at his watch.

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

KJ starts singing.

KJ (singing):

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



From left, KJ (Michael Chernus) and Jasper (Erin Gann) in *The Aliens* at Rattlestick Playwrights Theater.

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

EVAN (*edging towards the door*): That's awesome.
KJ: It's not over.

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

A pause.

EVAN: Cool.

KJ: Thanks.

EVAN: Are you, like, a Buddhist?

KJ: You could say that.
You could say that.

Pause.

EVAN: Um. See ya later, KJ.

Evan exits into the coffee shop.

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

Blackout.

SCENE TWO

The next day.

KJ is standing next to the backdoor, leaning up against the brick wall. He

is humming quietly to himself. It looks a little like he's waiting to surprise someone.

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

EVAN: Oh. Wow!

KJ giggles.

EVAN: You scared me. Kind of.

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

EVAN: I have a five minute break.

KJ claps his hands.

KJ: Yay!!!

EVAN: Where's Jasper?

KJ: He's sick.

EVAN: Oh man. That sucks.

KJ: Yeah.

EVAN: Does he have like a cold? Or /like—

KJ: Yup.

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

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

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

KJ: Where?

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

KJ: Never heard of it.

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

Pause.

EVAN: You dropped out, right?

KJ nods.

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

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

A pause.

EVAN: Okay. Cool.

KJ: College is bullshit, though.

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

Evan nods.

KJ: Jasper didn't go to college.

EVAN: Yeah.

Pause.

EVAN: Did you have like a major?

KJ: Double Major. Math and Philosophy.

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

KJ: Ever heard of propositional calculus?

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

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

Evan nods, confused.

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

EVAN: What was it...what is it, /like—

KJ: You know about truth tables?

Evan shakes his head.

KJ: No? Okay. Well.

KJ scratches his beard thoughtfully.

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

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

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

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

A pause.

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

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

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

EVAN: Um—

KJ: Or:

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

EVAN: Okay.

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

EVAN: Okay.

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

Pause.

KJ: Or like: or: or:

J, right? Picture the letter J. As in Jasper.

EVAN: ...Okay.

KJ: And then picture another J. Sitting next to it.

Evan nods.

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

EVAN: Okay.

KJ: But how do you prove that?

A pause.

EVAN: Um.

(a short pause)

Because they look like each other?

KJ: EXACTLY!

That was my point.

That was the gist of my thesis.

Pause.

EVAN: Um. I should probably go back inside.

Evan starts to head back inside.

KJ: I love you, Shelmerdine.

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

EVAN: Um. I love you too.

KJ: Just kidding.

Another pause.

KJ: Just kidding!

EVAN: Yeah. Um. Me too.

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

SCENE THREE

The same day. Evening.

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

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

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

EVAN: Oh shit.

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

KJ: Was I snoring?

EVAN: No.

A pause.

EVAN: Is. Um. Is everything okay?

KJ: Do you like Jasper more than me?

EVAN: Um.

No.

No!

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

EVAN: That's because Jasper is usually /here.

KJ: He's sick!

EVAN: I know. I'm sorry.

Pause.

KJ: I wanna kill myself.

EVAN: Oh shit.

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

EVAN (into the phone): Mom.

I'm gonna be late for dinner.

(a short pause)

Um...this guy I work with is upset.

(a short pause)

He broke up with his girlfriend.

(pause)

Please don't ask me that. Please don't ask me that. Please don't ask me that.

(a short pause)

Please don't ask me that.

I don't care.

I don't care.

Okay.

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

EVAN: I hate her.

KJ: Whoa.

EVAN: She like—she does this thing? She does this thing where she like asks what kind of—like if I want cauliflower or carrots with dinner and then if I like tell her carrots she's like well your father doesn't—and it's just like whatever I say she like contradicts me and I'm just like—Nevermind. It's stupid.

KJ nods understandingly.

KJ: Yeah.

This one time...

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

I was a little kid. I was like five.

I would walk around all day saying:

(he whispers softly)

Ladder. Ladder. Ladder.

EVAN: Ladder? Like what you climb on?

KJ nods.

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

And I just went:

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

Ladder.

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

EVAN: What did he die of.

KJ: He died.

EVAN: *What* did he die of?!

(pause)

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

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

EVAN: He was *what*?

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

EVAN: Were you *there*?

KJ shakes his head.

EVAN: That doesn't make any sense!

Pause.

KJ: It's okay if you can't cry.

Evan begins to cry.

EVAN: Oh my god.

I have to go home.

I have to go home.

KJ: Okay.

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

I have to go home.

Evan puts his cookie down on the table and leaves.

KJ is alone.

Eventually he starts singing, softly and slowly.

KJ *(singing):*

ZANE

SIT'S

BY A BROOK

A LITTLE STREAM

IN A NOOK

IN A CRANNY WITH HIS KRAMMY

HE SIT'S BY A BROOK

AND HE LOOOOOKS

IN THE WATER

THAT FALLS DOWN THE ROCKS—

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

SCENE FOUR

The next day.

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

This is the first time in his life he has ever bought a pack of cigarettes and this is the first time in his life that he has ever smoked a cigarette by himself.

There is a certain bittersweet joy in it.

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

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

EVAN *(into the phone):* Hey.

It's Evan.

How are you.

Um.

I'm smoking a cigarette.

(pause)

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

I bet you were good. Either way.

Um.

(pause)

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

He was like one of my best friends.

I'm um...

I'd like to come visit you in Boston.

He's the only person I um...

My grandparents died when I was a baby.

Okay. Sorry this message is ramble-y.

Evan hangs up.

He stubs out his cigarette.

He waits for KJ, in vain.

A minute passes.

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

The set is empty.

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

KJ puts his guitar case down and sits in one of the plastic chairs. He is wearing shorts and sneakers and sunglasses. He sits there for a while, in the sunlight, and then he bends down and unlaces his shoe. He turns his shoe upside down. A pebble falls out onto the ground and makes a small noise.

KJ doesn't put his shoe back on.

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

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

Eventually:

EVAN: Hey.

KJ: Hey.

EVAN: I haven't seen you for a few days.

KJ: Yeah.

(pause)

I might be moving.

EVAN: Oh. Wow. Um. Really?

KJ: I might be. I'm thinking about it.

EVAN: Where?

KJ: I have a list of places.

I'm trying to decide.

(a short pause)

Wanna hear?

EVAN: Yeah.

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

KJ: These are just some ideas.

Okay.

(he reads)

Austin Texas.

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

KJ: It's high on the list.

Iowa City.

Olympia Washington.

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

Amherst Massachusetts.

Orion's wind farm.

Seattle.

EVAN: What's Orion's wind farm?

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

EVAN: What's a wind farm?

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

EVAN: Oh yeah.

KJ *(going back to the paper)*: Eureka California.

EVAN: How does he live there?

KJ *(ignoring him)*: Eureka California.

Asheville. Question mark.

Commune in Virginia where they make hammocks find out name.

...Can't read my own handwriting. Resnick? Redding?

This one's a stretch: Winnipeg?

EVAN: Where's that?

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

Pause.

KJ: That's it.

EVAN: Those all sound cool.

KJ: Yeah.

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

Evan stubs out his cigarette on the ground.

KJ: ...Smoker.

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

Pause.

EVAN: Um. I'm sorry I um. Ran away. Or whatever. On Wednesday. *KJ nods.*

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

KJ: It was last week.

Evan nods. A long pause.

EVAN: He was so. um. cool.

A self-conscious pause.

EVAN: I kind of feel like a completely different...

Evan shakes his head tearily and can't finish his sentence.

KJ looks at him for a little while.

KJ: Come here.

Evan walks over to him.

KJ: Kneel down.

Evan tentatively kneels down.

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

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

KJ *(quietly)*: Zhoop.

(a pause)

That's it.

You can stand up again.

Evan stands up again.

EVAN: Um. KJ? I should /tell you—

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

EVAN: Oh. Cool.

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

EVAN: Don't you like need an agent or something?

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

KJ: Did Bukowski have an agent?

EVAN: Yeah. I don't know.

(a short pause)

I'm reading some of his...I took out um...I'm reading Ham on Rye?
And um—yeah. Love Is a Dog From Hell.

KJ: You like it?

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

KJ: Yeah!

EVAN: ...Yeah.

Pause.

EVAN: Um.

KJ?

KJ: Yes.

EVAN: Rahna came back yesterday.

I guess she was on vacation?

KJ: Uh huh.

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

KJ slowly starts putting his shoe back on.

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

KJ nods.

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

He fades out. KJ nods.

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

KJ: It's cool.

EVAN: You can start coming inside if you want.

I can make you free tea.

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

EVAN: ...Yeah.

KJ: Uh.

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

(pause)

I should go probably go back inside in a minute.

KJ: Yeah.

A pause.

KJ: I have a present for you.

KJ points to the guitar case.

KJ: I don't know how to play, so.

It's his guitar.

EVAN: I can't take that.

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

EVAN: ...I don't know.

KJ: Do you already have one?

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

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

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

KJ: Try it.

EVAN: I'm not very good.

Evan plays a few halting chords.

KJ: Yeah!!

Yes.

Evan smiles a little.

EVAN: I feel weird taking it.

Pause.

EVAN: Okay. I mean. Thank you.

KJ: Thank Joseph Yoseph. Thank the Limp Handshakes.

EVAN: Okay.

KJ: Thank The Aliens.

EVAN: Okay.

KJ: Play something!

EVAN: I should go back inside.

KJ: Play something first!

EVAN: Um.

Evan thinks.

KJ: Don't think!

EVAN: Um.

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

EVAN *(singing softly)*: If I had a hammer, I'd hammer /in—

KJ: No covers!

Evan stops playing.

EVAN: Oh. Um. Sorry.

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

KJ: Why not?

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

KJ: How do you know?

Evan shrugs.

KJ: I'm a genius. Jasper was a genius.

EVAN: ...Yeah.

KJ: Maybe you're a genius too!

Pause.

EVAN: Yeah.

Pause.

EVAN: Um. I should probably go back inside.

KJ: Play The Hammer Song.

Pause.

KJ: Play The Hammer Song!

EVAN: Really?

KJ: Play it.

*Evan looks anxiously toward the back door, then starts playing "If I Had a
Hammer." The first verse is painful—Evan's voice is thin and slightly out
of tune, and he strums haltingly and botches a few of the chords. Then he
takes in a long, shaky breath and starts playing the second verse. He gets a
little bit better. His voice grows stronger and clearer. By the time he hits the
third verse ("If I had a song") Evan is kind of playing the shit out of "If I
Had a Hammer." The third verse ends.*

A pause.

Evan puts down the guitar, crimson-faced.

EVAN: Um. Yeah.

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

KJ: ...That was awesome.

EVAN: I kind of fucked it up.

KJ: You're gonna go far, man.

EVAN: Come on.

KJ: I'm not kidding.

You're gonna go far.

EVAN: ...Yeah?

KJ: Yeah.

Evan tries not to smile. But then he does.

They stand there.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY