

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

by Jonathan J. Samarro

NAME: Jonathan J. Samarro

WHERE YOU ARE FROM: Hackensack, NJ

BIO: Jonathan Samarro is a member of the Dramatists Guild. His plays *The Lost Episode* (co-authored by Michael Quixote Fellmeth) and *Grandma Serafina's Famous Tiramisu* were given workshop productions at The Schapiro Studio Theatre in Columbia University's Oscar Hammerstein II Center for Theatre Studies, where he earned his M.F.A. in playwriting. After a long hiatus, *Grandma Serafina* has been published by Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. and given an Equity Showcase production as part of the Thespis Festival in Manhattan. At present, Jonathan is a resident of New Jersey, where he very happily works as an educator and an early-morning playwright.

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What's keeping you positive? Writing and reading.

Yes, you can publish this!

CHARACTERS

MYRNA, a middle-aged woman
LACEY, her slightly older neighbor
JASON, an African-American man in his twenties
TIMMY, MYRNA's late-in-life surprise child
LARRY, MYRNA's husband
DANIEL, MYRNA's eldest son
STEPH, MYRNA's middle child

TIME

The present

PLACE

The backyard and porch of a working-class home in a sleepy town near the river in the Hudson River Valley.

SCENE ONE

Lights come up on the backyard of a small working-class house in a small, sleepy town in the Hudson River Valley. We see the back of the house, which is a bit run down; it features a porch with a picnic table and benches as well as a barbecue that's long overdue for replacement. A screen door leads inside. In the yard is a large tree, encircled at its base by a row of large stones—big enough to sit on.

From inside the house is heard a persistent beginner practicing on the trumpet. There are good licks here and there—mixed in with a lot of bad ones.

After a moment, MYRNA comes around the side of the house carrying a few too many grocery bags. She's heading for the screen door when LACEY steps into her path from the backyard of the house next door. MYRNA is startled a bit and during the following grows increasingly stressed about being unable to set down her heavy bags. LACEY remains oblivious to this fact.

LACEY

Myrna, all afternoon it's been like this. I don't mind it so much, of course, but you know, Frank is a real crank pot.

MYRNA

What's this now?

LACEY

From inside my house, that horn sounds like a construction site. Frank, he's a lunatic in there. I can't live with him when he's like this. 'S why I'm out here. He's inside catching up on the TiVo. "All I want is one day. One day a week to be left alone in peace. Is that too much to ask?" I'm sure Larry is the same way. You think you could ask Timmy to take a little break before I have to end my marriage.

MYRNA

Sorry, Lace. He's on a kick right now with that thing. It's all he talks about.

LACEY

Oh, I know how kids get. Believe me. I got a house full of mitts and masks and shin guards all over the place. Skeletons of all their old, silly dreams. Never went in for music, thank god.

MYRNA

Well, Timmy thinks if he can get good enough by the time his brother comes home, he can convince him to take him on tour. It's cute, actually.

LACEY

Oh, sure, sure. He's excited. Who wouldn't be?

MYRNA

I told him he's got a long way to go. And now he won't stop till he proves me wrong. It's my fault. But I'll go on up and tell him to take a break.—

LACEY

Good, good. But don't make him feel bad, Myrn. I mean, I'm out here watering my azaleas, and from out here, it doesn't sound so bad. I can hear him more clearly. There's a few good moments here and there. Though mostly ones that are not-so-good. A person's gonna take up an instrument they're gonna have to squeak and squeal for a while, I suppose, before what's coming out is even recognizable as music. So I don't mind. I understand. But Frank, he's in there out of his mind.

MYRNA

Well, I'll get Timmy off that thing. Soon as I can get in the house.

LACEY

What is all this? So many bags. And your trunk. It looks like it's exploding. Is it finally happening? The river's gonna swallow up the town. You going down in the bunker for the end of the world?

MYRNA

You sound like Larry. No. Daniel's coming home tonight, and we're having a little barbecue tomorrow afternoon.

LACEY

Daniel! Barbecue? For a big star like that? He won't eat no barbecue. You better head on back for something fancy.

(MYRNA finally manages to step around LACEY and set the bags down on the picnic table.)

MYRNA

He's still Daniel. He'll still eat a hot dog. Right?

LACEY

You gonna ask him what I asked you?

MYRNA

I'm not so sure I remember what that is.

LACEY

To come on over and sign my CD. I know people don't buy CDs any more and all, but I ordered it special so he could sign it. It'd mean a lot.

MYRNA

Of course he'd do that. He's just Daniel. You've talked to him a million times. He used to mow your lawn. Bring it on over tomorrow. Have a hot dog. And he'll sign your CD.

LACEY

How exciting it must be. Going out on tour. Girls screaming. Do you remember screaming at singers? Who did you used to scream at, Myrn?

You all right?

MYRNA

Just a lot on my mind.

(From off in the direction of LACEY'S house, we hear a voice screaming "Lacey! Lace!")

LACEY

Shoot. I better go. You'll get Timmy to take a break?

MYRNA

I'll do my darnedest.

(LACEY heads off. MYRNA takes some of the groceries into the house, and leaves the rest on the table. The stage is empty for a moment. The trumpet sounds stop.)

(After a moment, JASON, a very dark-skinned black man in his early twenties tenuously steps into the back yard. He looks around, smiles wistfully, like he's visiting somewhere he hasn't seen in a long time. He heads on over to the picnic table and conscientiously picks up the grocery bag and steps toward the screen door.)

(At this very moment, TIMMY, MYRNA'S young son, flies out of the door with a string of dance moves. When he notices JASON, he freezes. JASON'S grocery bag rips and various items go crashing to the floor of the porch.)

JASON

Hey, Bug.

(JASON squats down to pick up the groceries. He places them one by one back onto the picnic table.)

You remember me, Bug? You just gonna stare at me?

TIMMY

No one's called me Bug in three years.

JASON

That's how I remember you. I don't even remember your real name. What do people call you these days?

TIMMY

Just regular Timmy, I guess.

JASON

Well, I'm happy to call you by whatever name you want to be called.

TIMMY

You're my brother's friend.

JASON

You do remember me. Jason. In case you forgot my real name. Is your brother home?

TIMMY

Uh-uh.

JASON

Oh. I didn't really think he would be. I didn't think he'd remember, but I thought maybe I would give it a shot. I don't even know how to get in touch with him any more.

TIMMY

I play the trumpet now.

JASON

Well, that's my favorite instrument.

TIMMY

Do you still play the guitar?

JASON

You remember that?

TIMMY

You guys used to lock the door, so I couldn't get in.

JASON

Yeah, I guess we did. We were trying to write songs.

TIMMY

Do you want to hear me play the trumpet?

JASON

Well, of course I do. I'd be a fool not to.

TIMMY

Where have you been?

JASON

I still live here—in town. I go to college part time, and I work. I see your sister sometimes. She works in the coffee shop near my job.

TIMMY

Did my sister tell you to come here?

JASON

Your sister? No, not quite.

(MYRNA comes out from the screen door;
she is startled to see JASON.)

MYRNA

Oh, my god. You're like a big handsome man now.

JASON

Mrs. G!

MYRNA

(to TIMMY)

What happened to my groceries? Chop chop.

(TIMMY groans, then dances off to the
side of the house. Through the
following, he makes a few trips back
and forth bringing in the grocery bags
from the car to the inside of the
kitchen. He carries only one bag per
trip. His gait is a string of dance
moves.)

JASON

I was trying to help and the bag ripped.

(MYRNA waves her hand in dismissal.)

MYRNA

Now, give me a hug.

(They embrace.)

What can I get you? Something to drink?

JASON

Nothing, nothing. I'm fine.

MYRNA

No, have something. I hate having a guest that doesn't leave
here plumper than when they arrived.

JASON

I'll have some water, I guess.

(Through the following, MYRNA goes in and out of the house. They will occasionally talk through the screen door. She brings out two glasses of iced tea and a plate of cookies.)

MYRNA

How's your mom?

JASON

She's all right, I guess. I'm still living with her. But I'm either working or at one of my classes, so we don't get that much time together.

MYRNA

But she's okay?

JASON

She's all right.

MYRNA

You tell her I said hello, and if she ever wants to talk, I'd love to get together with her.

JASON

Sure, sure. How's everybody here?

MYRNA

We're just fine. You know, it's exciting everything that's happened with Daniel but my job is just to keep everyone sane. No big rock star egos allowed.

JASON

It's not really rock music, technically. It's what would be classified as indietronica. But it's kind of second wave indietronica to be precise.—

We could just say he's a rock star, if you want.

Your famous cookies.

MYRNA

I'm basically a Mom from the fifties, serving a plate of cookies to her son's friends.

JASON

You didn't have to do all this. Water would've been fine.

MYRNA

Stop. Enjoy. He's gonna be so happy to see you. Now I don't know what time his plane is coming in. It got delayed twice. You, of course, are welcome to stay and wait for him, but—warning—it might be a couple hours. And when Larry gets home and sees you, he'll chew your ear off.

JASON

Daniel's coming here tonight?

TIMMY

(passing by)

Awww, cookies.

MYRNA

Yes, cookies. You can come sit with us when all those bags are in the kitchen. And put my milk right in the refrigerator.

So wait a minute, you didn't know he's coming here tonight? I just assumed that's why you're here. I thought maybe he called you.

JASON

I haven't talked to Daniel in more than two years.

MYRNA

That makes me sad to hear.

But you just randomly came by on the one day in months that he's coming home? That's an extraordinary coincidence.

JASON

It might be. Or not. I don't know. It's hard to explain. It's sort of a secret.

MYRNA

That's not too mysterious.

JASON

It's not, really, but I don't know if I'm allowed to talk about it.

(little pause)

MYRNA

Well, I'm glad you're here anyway. I want to ask you something.

JASON

(tentatively)

Okay.

MYRNA

Well. No, no. It's not really something I should be asking you. Never mind.

JASON

Okay.

(little pause)

MYRNA

But it's just gnawing at me, and I have no one else I can ask. Larry, he's got his opinions about this, but I think he's got some blind spots about some things that make him unreliable.— I'm sorry. I shouldn't be asking you this. Never mind.

JASON

Okay.

MYRNA

I guess you're an adult now. It's been three years. And you knew Daniel back then. You're the perfect person to ask.

JASON

If I can help you, I will.

MYRNA

(near tears)

I've been listening to Daniel's album. He's my son. Of course I'm gonna listen to his album. His voice. There's so much pain in it. And the lyrics. It's all so full of, I don't know, so much sadness.

JASON

Most of the best music comes out of some pretty dark places.

MYRNA

Did I do something wrong? Did I cause him that pain? I don't mean it like an egomaniac. Like I think those songs are about me. But did I teach him to feel the world like that, to experience his life that way? Did he ever talk about me to you?

(awkward pause)

(TIMMY with a flourish sits down at the table next to JASON. He loops his arm through JASON'S and with the other hand grabs a cookie. Tacitly, MYRNA and JASON agree to postpone their conversation.)

TIMMY

I'm gonna play my trumpet for Jason. He asked me to.

MYRNA

Listen, Bug—

TIMMY

How did I become Bug again?

MYRNA

I need you to take a little break from the trumpet.

TIMMY

Why?

MYRNA

It's just for the rest of the day. Tomorrow, I'm gonna have you play for everyone at the barbecue. Jason will be there. Your brother will be there.

TIMMY

But I'm not ready yet. I want Daniel to hear how good I am, so he'll take me with him.

MYRNA

Well, you're going to have to take a little break for the rest of the night.

TIMMY

I have to practice.

MYRNA

Tomorrow morning. The Clotts will be at church. Then they'll go to breakfast in town. You'll have two whole hours.

TIMMY

Fine.

MYRNA

Did you put my milk in the refrigerator?

(TIMMY gets up guiltily, grabs one more cookie, and dances into the kitchen.)

(calling after him)

And start putting those groceries away for me!

(A groan.)

(She turns back to JASON anxiously.)

I shouldn't have asked you that. It's not appropriate. You're my son's friend.

JASON

Sounds like that's a conversation you oughta have with Daniel.

(From the screen door, LARRY enters.)

LARRY

He-ey! I remember this guy! What a nice surprise!

MYRNA

You remember Jason, Larry. Come say "hi."

LARRY

That's what I just said. I walked in and I said, "I remember this guy!" Sheesh.

How are you doing, Jason?

JASON

I'm all right.

LARRY

And your folks?

JASON

They're all right.

LARRY

How's your dad?

JASON

He's all right.

LARRY

Well. Well.

(awkward pause)

MYRNA

Riveting, Lar. You're staying for dinner, of course.

LARRY

Of course he is. It's my night. You know what that means:
Peanut butter and jelly tacos.

(LARRY dances back into the house.)

MYRNA

He's kidding about the tacos. His cooking's the only reason I
keep him around.

JASON

I don't think I can stay. I should be getting home.

MYRNA

You know, I've thought so much about calling your mother. And I
just haven't. I feel terrible.

JASON

I'm sure she would like that very much. She could use a friend.
Who couldn't?

MYRNA

I haven't seen her since the funeral. And I meant to get in
touch with her after, but I wanted to give her some time. And
then time passed, and I worried I waited too long. And then it
all just slipped through my guilty fingers. She's all right?

JASON

She has her days. But she keeps going. That's all that we can do here. That's how we have to live.

MYRNA

At least, she still has you.

(awkward pause)

JASON

At least.

(awkward pause)

MYRNA

I'm sorry. That was maybe not the right thing to say. I'm not very good at talking about these type of things. I never really had to. I was born, and they handed me a map, and all I had to do was follow that map. Then Daniel wrote that song, and I listened to that song over and over, and my whole polished little life cracked right open. Like an egg. I never had to feel much of anything—maybe a little frustration or stress or worry. But that song. It's like I can feel my life now. And that map lead me nowhere. I'm lost in some sleepy woods somewhere I never belonged in the first place.

JASON

That song had a real impact on you, hunh?

MYRNA

I'm sorry. I don't know why I keep doing this. I'm a little out of sorts. It's not your job to fix me. I have no one to talk to.

(JASON holds her hands across the top of the table.)

You are very welcome to stay for dinner if you'd like. I won't keep crying on you. No more break downs.

JASON

It's all right. But I can't stay.

MYRNA

You'll come tomorrow afternoon for our barbecue? Daniel would hate to've missed you.

JASON

I'll do that. Thanks for the cookies.

(They hug. JASON starts off, stops,
and turns back to MYRNA.)

Mrs. G, will you not mention to Daniel that I was here? I was hoping to surprise him.

MYRNA

I like that plan. I'll tell Mr. G and Timmy not to spill the beans.

JASON

Thanks, Mrs. G.

MYRNA

We'll see you tomorrow.

(JASON heads off around the side of the house. MYRNA takes a few breaths. LARRY pops his head out of the screen door.)

LARRY

What time is the boy coming home?

MYRNA

Probably late. His plane has been delayed twice now.

LARRY

Jason's gone?

MYRNA

That was a nice surprise, wasn't it?

LARRY

I'm glad Lacey didn't call the cops on him like that one time. That was awful.

(little pause)

(After a moment, MYRNA tears up. LARRY steps out onto the porch and comforts her.)

LARRY (Cont'd)

Hey. Hey. What's this about?

MYRNA

Can you imagine that poor woman losing her son?

LARRY

It's terrible. I know, I know.

MYRNA

Can you imagine?

LARRY

Just seeing Jason brought all this up again?

MYRNA

When that happened, you know how I comforted myself? I thought: it has nothing to do with me. I'm all right. My family is all right. We're all safe. I don't have to deal with all the worries of that woman.

LARRY

That's normal to think that. You sense danger, you take care of your own.

MYRNA

That's what wild animals think. That's not the world we live in. We're less safe in a world where it's everyone for themselves. We can't get to spend our lives all boxed in and safe. People need each other, Larry. Not just tight little families fending for themselves, but people.

LARRY

Are you running for office?

MYRNA

When Daniel came out to us, you were worried that someone might try to hurt him. Weren't you?

LARRY

Still am.

MYRNA

And now he's in the public eye, and it all feels so much more dangerous.

LARRY

What are you getting at?

MYRNA

(frustrated with herself)

I'm not saying what I mean to say. I don't know how to.

It's that song of his. Every kid in the country's going around humming it, singing it, making their little video things on their phones—whatever they call it. But that song: those lyrics, the sound of his voice. That's the sound of someone who could do what that boy did.

LARRY

This again?

MYRNA

Yes, this again. There's more to it that I didn't say.

I can't sleep more'n a few hours a night. I have dreams about that kid under water. Can you imagine that first moment when he surrendered every natural instinct to that river? When he took in that first big breath and rendered his life over? What could make someone do that? Plan it all out, and then go off in the middle of the night and do it.

LARRY

It's not healthy to be thinking all that. Terrible things happen. That was a terrible thing.

MYRNA

You are all sealed up in there. I can't even talk to you. I don't know who I'm living with.

LARRY

It's a sad song. I've listened to it. I don't know what it is that you're hearing in there that I don't hear. I think you're over thinking it. It's a little heartbreak song. He probably wrote it about Jason. Your son got his heart broken. You're young, you get your heart broken. You have your feelings. You move on. The kid's fine.

You want to talk to him about it, talk to him about it.

MYRNA

We took care of our own. But we didn't think about the world we can't protect them from. We forgot these kids are going out there. They're not suited for it.

LARRY

You're upset that you didn't make the world free of heartbreak?

MYRNA

No, no. I'm not saying it right. I don't know how to say what I'm trying to say.

LARRY

I want to understand you. Instead of just being told I'm all sealed up.

MYRNA

I sculpted his entire existence. He didn't have to learn to make friends. Whatever other mothers seemed nice, I set up playdates with their sons. I chose his friends.

I signed him up for t-ball. If the coach didn't send him in, I got in that coach's face. Next game, he was out there, staring off into space, not catching a single ball. He hated t-ball.

I signed him up for Boy Scouts—all the things boys were supposed to do. If he didn't get a badge. I'd call that den mother up and straighten her out. He hated it. He would pretend to be sick, so he wouldn't have to go.

He showed some interest in music and performing. Finally found a good fit for him. I got him to audition for the school plays. He didn't get a big part, that director got an earful from me. Next year, he was the lead. Poor woman didn't want to deal with me again.

Same thing with school. Every grade south of an A. Phone calls, emails, meetings. I'm sure the teachers in that school cringed every time our son's name showed up on their roster. Not cause of him. But because of me.

LARRY

I think you're exaggerating.

MYRNA

Go ask those teachers.

MYRNA (Cont'd)

I just did the opposite of what my mother did with me. I didn't want him to grow up feeling like he didn't matter. Like he wasn't important.

And now, all these amazing things have happened for him. And he's in no way prepared. I talk to him on the phone, and he sounds miserable.

LARRY

I think he's overwhelmed. He never had much discipline.

MYRNA

I listen to that song, and he sounds miserable.

LARRY

That's the genre. You remember The Smiths?

MYRNA

I should have made friends with women my own age. I should have worked, had set backs, recovered, got involved in my community. I should have lived my life, and let him watch me do it. Then give him the space to build his own life. Whatever kind of life he wanted.

That's not at all what I did.

I gave up my own life and stole his life from him. That's what I did.

I didn't love him like he deserved to be loved. I used him to show everyone what a good parent I was. That I was better than my mother. I didn't raise a child. I had a slow motion temper tantrum. He never had any space to exist the whole time he was growing up. I filled up every moment of his life with my retribution. There was no room left for him to exist. I did that to him. I did.

That's what I hear in that song.

(LARRY comforts her. The sky has grown slightly darker.)

LARRY

What happened to this day?

(LACEY crosses on over from her yard to their patio.)

LACEY

I brought over a little Mary Jane. Thought you all might want some.

MYRNA

Oh, no, no, no, can't do it. Timmy's upstairs. And Steph'll be home any minute.

LACEY

I'm sure the kids wouldn't mind a little puff.

(cackles)

LARRY

Come on back later tonight after Timmy's in bed. Honey? To take the edge off?

(MYRNA concedes.)

I'll start dinner.

(He exits.)

LACEY

So what time's the rock star coming?

SCENE TWO

It is late at night. The porch is lit up by a few outdoor lights. The yard is largely in darkness.

LACEY, MYRNA, and LARRY are sitting around the table. They are basking in the afterglow of having partaken in smoking some weed.

LARRY

And by the time we're seventy, this whole block will be under water. Some three-eyed, radioactive sea bass is gonna swim right through that window of yours like it's a goldfish-bowl castle.

LACEY

Well, what are we still doing here? We gotta move inland.

LARRY

(nodding)

We gotta move inland.

LACEY

Frank, he thinks the whole thing's a hoax.

LARRY

Well, he's a horse's ass.

LACEY

He is a horse's ass. I'm married to a horse's ass. I'm gonna tell him to put the house on the market.

LARRY

Me, too. Honey, put the house on the market.

MYRNA

It's 11:39. I don't think the real estate office is open right this second.

LARRY

It's past my bed time. When's this kid coming?

MYRNA

He's on his way from the airport now.

LACEY

Where should we move?

LARRY

You're gonna wanna move to the highest spot in the whole country.

LACEY

Well, where is that?

LARRY

It's not New Orleans. I'll tell you that much.

LACEY

Colorado!

MYRNA

Sh! Not so loud.

LARRY

Colorado is the spot.

Welp! I've got to go to bed. I'm old now. He's gonna have to see me in the morning.

Thanks for the

LACEY

You bet.

MYRNA

I'll be up in a bit.

LARRY

Goodnight, everyone!

(LARRY exits into the house.)

LACEY

Myrna, you want another quick . . .

MYRNA

No, no. I'm gonna head on in soon as I clean up.

LACEY

Can I give you some help?

MYRNA

No, no. You've got enough to deal with. Frank's probably in there sleeping on the couch without his C-PAP.

LACEY

Maybe I should poison him. Ashley's moving out. I'll have the whole place to myself.

MYRNA

That sounds like a plan.

Night, Lace.

LACEY

You sure I can't help you?

MYRNA

I'm fine.

LACEY

All right. Here I go. Good night.

MYRNA

Be careful. Watch where you're walking. Good night.

(LACEY is gone, into the darkness. MYRNA breathes for a moment and then takes a few dishes from the table inside. DANIEL emerges from the side of the house. He pulls a rolling suitcase and wears a backpack. He heads to the porch and inspects the remaining dishes and glasses on the table. MYRNA emerges from the house. She sees him. They silently embrace for an extended time. She senses that he is crying. She breaks the embrace to look at his face.)

Hey. Hey. What's this? It's okay, it's okay. I got you.

Tell me, now. Tell, Mommy. What are these tears?

DANIEL

(stifling the waterworks)

I'm just tired. I just need to rest.

MYRNA

Was it the delays? Being stuck all day?

DANIEL

That didn't help. I was supposed to be here this morning.

MYRNA

Let me give you some real dinner, something to drink.

DANIEL

There's so much happening.

MYRNA

Well, of course there's so much happening.

DANIEL

And I don't want any of it. I just want to be invisible.

MYRNA

What happened?

DANIEL

That stupid song.

MYRNA

It's a beautiful song. It's a beautiful album.

DANIEL

I can't even listen to it. We're rehearsing for the tour, and I can't stand that song. I can't stand any one of those songs. They're all terrible. I'm terrible. The idea of singing them in front of big crowds for a year every night in a different city: I can't even envision this. The whole idea of it sounds so intolerable.

MYRNA

Isn't this what you wanted?

DANIEL

I wanna stay here. I wanna hide. I wanna not let anyone know where I am.

MYRNA

That doesn't sound like a realistic plan.

DANIEL

I wish I got here earlier.

(little pause)

MYRNA

Do you really not like the songs? Are you afraid you're not going to perform them well? We've all heard you sing live, and Daniel, it's chilling. You're captivating.

DANIEL

You're my mom.

MYRNA

You can ask anybody. Everyone stops me in town. Lacey—from next door, she was just here. She wants you to sign her CD.

You think these people are in the business of just handing out recording contracts to anyone? Why do you think they signed you in the first place? Those videos that you put up on the computer. They saw you. They came and found you. They plucked you out of your dorm room because you're talented.

DANIEL

I feel empty. I want to disappear.

MYRNA

Don't say that.

DANIEL

It's true.

MYRNA

I'm not going to lie to you. It's going to be hard. You go up there, and you give so much of yourself. It's going to be exhausting. But it's gonna feel so rewarding when you hear all those people. All those faces.

DANIEL

Not helping.

MYRNA

And that song. That river song.—

DANIEL

Can we not talk about that song?

MYRNA

All right, all right. . . . Do you want anything to eat?

DANIEL

No.

MYRNA

A drink?

DANIEL

No. I just want everything to go back to the way it was.

MYRNA

I know, I know.

DANIEL

But I can't make it go back.

MYRNA

It's all right. You're home now. You're safe. I'll take care of you..

(long pause as she strokes his hair)

DANIEL

I want to go up to bed. I don't want to talk any more.

MYRNA

You don't have to talk if you don't want to.

(He picks up his suitcase and puts on his back pack.)

DANIEL

I'm glad I'm home. I need some quiet time to sort myself out. I don't want to talk about it. I've done something so terrible. Something that can't be forgiven.

(He exits.)

SCENE THREE

The next day. It is the afternoon.
LACEY, LARRY, MYRNA, STEPH, and DANIEL
sit together in a bunch on the porch.
Before them stands TIMMY with his
trumpet.

A long pause.

TIMMY

I can't do it.

MYRNA

Of course you can.

TIMMY

You didn't let me practice.

STEPH

Just play whatever you can.

DANIEL

Come on, Bug.

(TIMMY readies himself. He blows into
the trumpet. It makes no sound at
first before turning into a horrible
squawk.)

You got it.

TIMMY

That was terrible.

MYRNA

Keep it going. You gotta get warmed up.

(Hesitantly, he blows again. A little
better. He's hit one solid note. He
checks in with his audience.)

That's my special guy. Now keep it going. Give us a couple of
different notes.

(TIMMY plays a musical phrase from no particular song. Some notes work out, some don't.)

DANIEL

All right. Sounding good. Keep it going.

(TIMMY plays another phrase. MYRNA claps along in a standard 4/4 beat. TIMMY keeps going with other phrases. Some of the others clap along in encouragement. DANIEL pulls STEPH up from her chair, and they start dancing as best they can to this steady beat adorned with this profusion of atonal squeaks and squawks. One little phrase has an accidental resemblance to something familiar and LARRY chimes in.)

LARRY

(singing)

OH, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN,
OH, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN,
OH, LORD, I WANT TO BE IN THAT NUMBER
WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN.

(Others join in singing as this repeats. DANIEL, especially, works himself into a frenzy for his young brother's amusement and encouragement. As it goes on, he lets out all of the pent up anxiety he's been holding onto these past few months. There is an apparent uncontrolled wildness observable and concerning to a few of those participating.)

(JASON rounds the corner of the house. He cautiously walks up to the porch and slips into the clapping audience and chorus. When DANIEL suddenly sees him, he is startled and stumbles, falling on the ground and knocking over a chair in the process. The performance comes to a grinding halt.)

SCENE FOUR

Downstage, TIMMY and JASON sit on the rocks around the tree. They each hold paper plates. JASON'S got a little bit of food. TIMMY'S plate is overflowing. LACEY, LARRY, and STEPH are up on the porch eating.

JASON

You think he's gonna be all right?

TIMMY

My mom'll fix 'im. He'll be all right. Nothing bad ever happens to Daniel.

JASON

I suppose not.

TIMMY

You heard me play?

JASON

I did. I did. You got some real promise, my friend.

TIMMY

You think so?

JASON

You saw how excited you got everybody. Dancing and singing. Gospel music, no less. Not everyone can do that, you know.

TIMMY

You think Daniel's gonna take me with him?

JASON

Daniel?

TIMMY

You think he'll take me with him on his tour?

JASON

That's a question you gotta ask Daniel.

TIMMY

I suppose.

JASON

Why you wanna go on tour with Daniel?

TIMMY

I dunno. I just wanna go.

JASON

People say they wanna be a musician, but it's a lot of work. Being away from home. Away from your Mom. Performing every night in some new place. For a whole bunch of strangers.

TIMMY

I'd get to leave.

JASON

You wanna leave this place?

TIMMY

Uh-huh.

JASON

Why you wanna leave this place so bad?

TIMMY

It'll all be under water soon. My house. This whole block. This whole town. The whole valley.

JASON

Who told you that?

TIMMY

My dad.

JASON

That so?

TIMMY

(smacking the ground)

This right here'll be the floor of the river. Fish swimming all over. Through those trees. In and out of my bedroom. Up and down my chimney. All over.

JASON

I guess we all better leave this place.

TIMMY

'Less you wanna drown. 'Less you want that river to swallow you up.

JASON

Well, isn't that something.

TIMMY

It's true.

(DANIEL and MYRNA step out onto the porch. DANIEL has an ace bandage wrapped around his ankle. He can walk on it, but he has to limp a bit. Through the following, MYRNA fixes a plate for DANIEL before fixing one for herself and joining her husband at the table.)

JASON

Now why would that river wanna go ahead and do something like that? Is it just mean?

TIMMY

I dunno. I never thought about it like that. Maybe cause the people are bad.

JASON

You think all these people around here are bad?

TIMMY

Some of 'em are.

JASON

Some of 'em are, sure.

TIMMY

But I guess not all of 'em.

JASON

I think most of 'em are all right; they're just careless. They just can't see themselves.

(little pause)

I know somebody who went down in that river and never came back.

TIMMY

You do? Was this person bad?

JASON

Not that I know of.

(little pause)

TIMMY

Maybe some people are real, real sad, and that river isn't mean at all. They go down there, and they never have to be sad again.

JASON

Why would someone be sad like that?

TIMMY

If nobody was nice to them. If the world went and took something away from them.

JASON

The world?

TIMMY

Or if they feel real, real bad about something they did. Or if the person they love went away from them.

JASON

These all seem like some good answers. You're a smart little man.

TIMMY

Can you make sure you never call me Bug?

JASON

I haven't called you Bug since you told me your name was Timmy. That's who you are. You get to decide that for yourself. So that's what I call you. Real simple. It's just polite.

(DANIEL approaches them.)

DANIEL

What are we talking about out here?

JASON

Just some basic kindness between two fellas that live on the edge of the river.

DANIEL

You mind me getting in on some of that kindness?

JASON

Pull up a rock. How's that ankle?

(DANIEL lowers himself onto one of the rocks.)

DANIEL

It'll be all right. It's not even a sprain. Probably pulled something that shouldn't've been pulled. It's always been my weak spot. That's all.

JASON

Your mamma dipped you in that river when you was born?

DANIEL

I suppose so.

JASON

I didn't mean to startle you like that. Surprise you, yes. But not like that.

DANIEL

Not your fault. I was dancing like a lunatic.

JASON

I never seen anything like it. Those moves. You were a wild animal.

DANIEL

That's cause this little man can play that trumpet like nobody's business.

TIMMY

You really think so?

DANIEL

Of course, I think so.

TIMMY

You gonna take me away with you on tour?

DANIEL

Take you with me on tour? Now why would you wanna do a thing like that?

JASON

That's what I asked him.

TIMMY

I just want to.

DANIEL

Well, I'm gonna have to give that some thought. I don't get to decide all those things by myself, you know. There's people who run this whole thing. There's a whole team. Me, I'm just a sail boat without a rudder. I just do what they tell me. And first you'd have to get permission from Mom. She'd have to come too just to take care of you. I'll be busy all the time. There's so many things, Bug.

(little pause)

TIMMY

Can you not call me Bug any more?

DANIEL

It's a good name. Suits you well. Bug.

(DANIEL lovingly taps his brother on the nose.)

TIMMY

I don't like that name.

JASON

He doesn't.

DANIEL

Well, I'll try to remember.

(little pause)

I guess you and I have some things to talk about.

JASON

I guess we do.

DANIEL

You didn't show up for our date. Yesterday on these rocks, under this tree. Five o'clock.

JASON

You didn't show up for our date. I was here.

DANIEL

You were here?

JASON

Timmy, was I here yesterday?

TIMMY

Am I supposed to say yes or no. Mommy told me not to tell Daniel you were here so I don't ruin the surprise.

DANIEL

You were here?

JASON

I was here.

DANIEL

I tried to be here. I did. My plane.

JASON

I know. Was that really why you came?

DANIEL

Of course. The timing just happened to line up with my first nervous breakdown.

JASON

I didn't expect you to remember.

DANIEL

Of course I remembered. It's our secret.

JASON

What I couldn't remember was why today. Cause we were just weird? We were in high school, and we didn't do anything that made sense?

DANIEL
(smiling)

You don't remember why it was supposed to be yesterday?

JASON

Why not the day after we both should have graduated? That would make sense.

DANIEL

It was five years to the day since right here under this tree we first did this:

(DANIEL kisses JASON.)

TIMMY

Aww, you guys are cute.

DANIEL

Do you mind if I kiss you like that?

JASON

You gonna ask me afterward? We got things to talk about, and no, I don't want you kissing me like that.

DANIEL

I'm sorry.

JASON

What is it? What is it you're sorry for? I want to hear you say it.

DANIEL

I know, I know. Listen, let's not do this here in front of my family. In front of Bug. Meet me here tonight.

JASON

You don't want your family to hear?

DANIEL

Please, please, not now. Meet me tonight. Midnight. Right here, where we both should have been yesterday.

JASON

I was here yesterday. And I'm here right now.

DANIEL

I gotta be with them right now. I'm gone tomorrow. I can't ask my family to meet me under a tree in the backyard at midnight.

JASON

Don't be stupid.

DANIEL

I want to talk to you. I need to explain myself. And I want to make everything right.

JASON

(dubiously)

You're gonna make everything right.

DANIEL

I'm gonna make everything right.

JASON

I'm gonna leave now.

DANIEL

Are you gonna be here tonight?

JASON

. . . I haven't decided yet.

DANIEL

Please. I still love you.

JASON

Timmy, you're a good man and a promising musician. Keep at it.

(He extends a hand to TIMMY. They shake. JASON heads up to the porch to say goodbye to the others. He then exits around the side of the house. MYRNA walks down to the tree to sit by her boys.)

MYRNA

Help your Mom. I don't know how you do that: Just sit right down on these rocks like it's nothing. I got old lady knees.

Speaking of, how's that ankle feel?

DANIEL

It's all right.

MYRNA

You didn't bring the bag of ice with you. Timmy, run up to the kitchen and get that bag of ice. It's probably somewhere on one of the counters.

(TIMMY runs off into the house.)

You gotta keep that ice on it.

DANIEL

Mom?

MYRNA

My boy?

DANIEL

When I came here last night, I was real upset. I want you to forget all about it. I know what I'm gonna do. About the thing I did. I'm gonna make it right.

MYRNA

I wish you would tell me what happened.

DANIEL

I wish I could too. But it's all gonna be fixed. So don't worry.

MYRNA

You know you can tell me anything. Did you murder someone?

DANIEL

Mom, I didn't murder someone.

MYRNA

Did you force yourself on someone?

DANIEL

I would never do that.

MYRNA

Are you seeing someone and you cheated on them?

DANIEL

I don't want to talk about it. And after tonight it'll all be over.

MYRNA

What do you mean after tonight?

DANIEL

It'll all be worked out.

(little pause)

MYRNA

Was I a good mom to you?

DANIEL

What?

MYRNA

Was I?

DANIEL

Where is this coming from?

MYRNA

Here you are, and your dreams are coming true, and you're a mess of emotions, and I don't understand what's happening. Did I do something wrong?

DANIEL

No, Mom, no.

MYRNA

And it's not just last night. It's been months. I hear it in your voice whenever I talk to you.

DANIEL

You were the best mother. You were the best mother you could be.

MYRNA

I feel so much like I didn't do right by you.

DANIEL

Of course you did.

MYRNA

There's such a sadness in you. That song. I hear it in your voice. Those lyrics.

DANIEL

Is that where all this is coming from?

MYRNA

Ever since I heard that song I been wanting to have this conversation with you. And then last week when out of the blue you tell me you're coming home. It's all I can think about. If I hurt you in some way. If I took something from you by trying too hard.

DANIEL

I didn't write that song. Jason wrote that song about his brother. I stole it from him.

SCENE FIVE

The tree. Midnight. DANIEL stands alone. His backpack is on the ground beside him. Many of the rocks that were encircling the tree have been removed.

After a few moments, JASON emerges from the darkness and approaches DANIEL.

JASON

I don't know what I'm doing here. I should have just gone to a lawyer.

DANIEL

Why didn't you?

JASON

I knew we had a plan. Our secret meeting. I wanted to see if you'd show. I wanted to hear what you'd have to say for yourself. Now I'm not so sure I want to.

DANIEL

I have something for you.

(He hands JASON an envelope.)

JASON

An excuse note from your Mommy?

DANIEL

It's a check. I talked to Herb.

JASON

Herb?

DANIEL

At the record company. I came clean. They all know now. This check is everything that I made off the song. All past, present, and future royalties of the song are yours. Plus, half the money from the whole album. Even though it's only one of ten songs, most people bought the album because of your song. You get half and Timmy gets the other half. Past, present, and future. You can take care of your family. You can go away to college. You could buy a house. You could buy a few houses.

JASON

I will say I didn't expect this.

DANIEL

And in the next few months those sales are gonna have a boost like you won't believe.

Come sit next to me. We were supposed to have a date yesterday. A reunion.

JASON

What'd you do? Take out the rocks so I'd have to sit closer?

DANIEL

I want to kiss you.

(He sits beside DANIEL.)

JASON

How's your ankle?

(DANIEL kisses him.)

You're trembling. You're all goosebumps.

DANIEL

(singing—softly)

OH, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN,
OH, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN,
OH, LORD, I WANT TO BE IN THAT NUMBER

JASON

My God. People are gonna know I wrote the song. I can't believe it.

DANIEL

Well.

(little pause)

JASON

What?

DANIEL

That's the one thing. If we did that, all those future sales'd disappear. Nobody would buy the song anymore. If you trust me and you stay quiet, you're probably set for life.

JASON

That song is my brother. That song is me. That's the sound of my heart. You're just gonna take that from me.

DANIEL

I know that. I know. You're one-hundred percent right. But think about it. Nobody will buy that song from some disgraced fake musician. This way you get everything. It's still my voice. It's still me playing on that track. But I'm giving up all proceeds from my contribution to the song—my interpretation. You're giving up credit.

JASON

You make that sound like me wanting credit for my own song is petty.

DANIEL

Listen, take this. Keep it. Think about it. Hell, spend it. I don't care. If in a couple weeks you're not happy, go to your lawyer.

JASON

You stole my heart. You stole my life. You looked at me yesterday like I was the devil showing up to collect your soul. I ain't the devil. You got it all backwards. You are the devil. You stole my soul. And I didn't even get anything in return.

DANIEL

I know all that. I know all that's true. I am dead inside. I am nothing. And you should hate me. Please take this check. You're gonna see that this is better. At least you get something out of it.

(JASON crumples up the envelope and throws it on the ground. He leaves.)

(After a moment, DANIEL kneels down, unzips his backpack, it is full of the rocks from around the tree. He adds the remaining ones and zips it back up.)

He struggles to put a strap around one of his shoulders. He slowly walks off into the darkness toward the sound of the river.)

THE END