

BAKER'S DOZEN

13 Gay Plays and Monologues

By
Donald E. Baker

DEDICATION

*This collection is dedicated, as always,
to my ever-supportive husband
Roy Hardison.*

INTRODUCTION

The pieces in this collection may be produced individually or performed together as one evening of theater. Individual actors can appear in multiple plays and/or monologues. The actors who perform *The Boys Across the Street* and *My Summer of Cypress Gardens* should be White. Otherwise race/ethnicity is irrelevant. Set requirements for the plays are very minimal, at most a table and a couple of chairs. None of the monologues require any furniture.

PRODUCTIONS AND PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

The Boys Across the Street

Online Production: Stage Left Theater, Spokane (March, 2022)

The First Time

Publication: *Monologues by LGBTQIA+ Scriptwriters for LGBTQIA+ Actors* (June, 2023)

For a Man Your Age

Zoom Reading: Literary and Discourse Society Facebook Group (May, 2023)

I Invited Your Mother for Thanksgiving

Production: Chapin Theatre Company, Chapin SC (November, 2022)

Intestate: A COVID-19 Monologue

Publication: *Monologues by LGBTQIA+ Scriptwriters for LGBTQIA+ Actors* (June, 2023)

Production: Magnolia Arts Center, Greenville NC (February, 2022). “Audience Favorite”

Online Publication: *some scripts literary magazine*, Issue 4: “Outbreak” (July, 2021)

Online Production: Talking Horse Productions, Columbia, Missouri (May, 2021)

What Happened This Time

Publication: *Fresh Words: An International Literary Magazine: Contemporary One-Minute Plays Volume III* (November, 2022)

CONTENTS

- Life Support*** (10-minute two-hander) The same-sex partner and the homophobic sister of a dying man meet for the first time in a hospital waiting room.
- After It Stopped*** (5-minute monologue) A man recalls the sexual abuse he suffered when he was thirteen.
- Feeling Devilish*** (6-minute two-hander) A man summons a demon on a dating app.
- The Boys Across the Street*** (5-minute monologue) An older White woman discovers a mixed-race same-sex couple is moving into her neighborhood.
- For a Man Your Age*** (10-minute two-hander) An older gay couple discuss aging, flirtatious baristas, and the National Geographic.
- The First Time*** (5-minute monologue) A man who always thought he was straight fearfully questions his sexuality after an encounter in a public restroom.
- What Happened This Time?*** (5-minute two-hander) A klutz's failed attempt to take a box to the trash means a trip to the ER and the pet cemetery.
- Dad & Uncle Mark*** (10-minute monologue) An older man remembers what he saw spying through a knothole when he was thirteen.
- Marvin and the Muses*** (5-minute three-hander) A playwright fires his muse, but will her replacement be more distraction than inspiration?
- Intestate*** (10-minute monologue) A 50-year-old gay man loses his partner and everything else to the COVID pandemic.
- I Invited Your Mother for Thanksgiving*** (8-minute two hander) One half of a gay couple is not pleased to find out his estranged mother is coming for Thanksgiving.
- My Summer of Cypress Gardens*** (10-minute monologue) A White man in his seventies recalls the childhood trip to Florida when for the first time he truly "saw" Black people and also experienced the beginnings of sexual awareness.
- Guilt by Association*** (20-minute two-hander) A pleasant father-son evening turns serious when the son mentions his best friend is considering suicide.

LIFE SUPPORT

CHARACTERS

JONATHAN. Age 30, Ben's partner, any race/ethnicity

SANDRA: Age 42, Ben's sister, any race/ethnicity

PLACE: A dreary institutional hospital waiting room, where they put people awaiting bad news.

TIME: The present.

Lights up on a private but dreary institutional hospital waiting room. Two chairs. Perhaps occasional hospital sounds are heard in the background. JONATHAN sits absent-mindedly toying with a cardboard coffee cup. When he finally realizes it's empty, he crushes it and throws it across the room. SANDRA enters.

SANDRA. I assume you're Johnny.

JONATHAN. And you must be Sandra. Even if I'd never seen a picture of Ben's family I'd know you were his sister. I'm sorry we have to finally meet under these circumstances.

SANDRA. (*Sitting.*) I'm sorry I have to meet you under *any* circumstances.

JONATHAN. And it's Jonathan. Nobody calls me Johnny except ...

SANDRA. I pictured you a lot younger. The last time I heard Ben's voice was the voicemail he left to say he was in love with a man. Johnny Harris he said. With a name like that I assumed you were just a kid.

JONATHAN. He spent the last five years hoping you'd call him back. Or answer any of the text messages he left.

SANDRA. Even if I'd wanted to, Mama forbade any contact. "That's not my son," she said. "I raised my son to be a good, normal, God-fearing man, not an abomination that lies with other men like unto a woman."

JONATHAN. Well, it sure didn't take us long to get around to the one verse anybody knows from the Book of Leviticus. Ben was no abomination. If anybody was made in God's image, he was.

SANDRA. I used to think that. Before the voicemail.

JONATHAN. Have you seen him? In there, I mean.

SANDRA. I hardly recognized him. Battered and bruised. All swollen up. Tubes everywhere. Some kind of machine buzzing and blinking. Awful.

JONATHAN. Life support. Life support they call it. What a joke. I was home when they called. I had a pot roast in the slow cooker and red wine breathing on the counter. Wondering why he was so late. Another driver crossed the center line and they crashed head on. Took them a long time just to cut Ben out of what was left of the car. The doctors say there's no coming back from his injuries. They want to stop the machines and let him die. It's what he would've wanted.

SANDRA. That can't be right. Our family believes in leaving it in God's hands. Deciding when somebody dies. After Daddy's heart attack, Mama insisted they do everything they could to keep him alive for as long God wanted us to.

JONATHAN. He saw what that did to you and her. He didn't want to put you through it again. I'm just his boyfriend. I can't give the order. It has to be a family member. Since your mother has Alzheimer's, it has to be you.

PLAY CONTINUES

AFTER IT STOPPED

A monologue adapted from the play, *Everyday Monsters*

CHARACTER

TIMOTHY: A 38-year-old man recalling the aftereffects of the sexual abuse he suffered when he was thirteen. Any race or ethnicity.

PLACE and TIME: Indeterminate

WARNING. References rape and childhood sexual abuse.

People say I could have stopped it if I wanted to. I could have just said “no.” I tried. God knows I tried. But I was just a skinny thirteen-year-old kid. He was a grown-ass man, a lot bigger and heavier and stronger than I was and he wasn’t about to take “no” for an answer. It’s been twenty-five years and I still get nightmares about being smothered under the weight of him. I’ve asked myself over and over. Why me? ... Why *me*? Was it my fault somehow? Was I sending out subconscious signals that made him think I *wanted* him to touch me? Did he think I was queer? I’ve spent my whole life trying like hell to make sure nobody ever thought that about me again.

MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

FEELING DEVILISH

CHARACTERS (1M, 1M/F)

ROGER: 30-ish. Male. Any race or ethnicity.

STEVIE: Roger's best friend. Any race, ethnicity, or gender expression.

PLACE: An apartment implied by a chair and a door to the outside

TIME: Whenever.

Lights up on ROGER sitting in his apartment playing/working on his phone. There is a loud knocking on his door.

STEVIE. (*Off.*) Roger! Are you in there? Roger!!

ROGER. Stevie? (*Roger opens the door. STEVIE enters.*) Stevie, what's the matter!

STEVIE. Roger! Thank God! Are you alright?

ROGER. Of course I'm alright. What's gotten into you?

STEVIE. This text you sent. Something about meeting a demon. I was scared to death. On my way here I actually left a message for Father O'Brien asking him if he knew a good exorcist. Dammit, Roger. I expected to come in here and find you lying dead in a mess of blood and pea soup with your head on backwards.

ROGER. Well, he had my head spinning for sure. Calm down. As you can see, I'm fine.

STEVIE. How in the world did you meet ... it?

ROGER. His pronouns are he, him, his.

STEVIE. Whatever. Did you do the whole bit? Draw a pentagram and light candles? Or did you just stand in front of your mirror and chant a forbidden name over and over until he appeared?

ROGER. I found him online.

STEVIE. Like on Tinder?

ROGER. No. I came across this brand-new dating app. It's called R-Triple G dot com.

STEVIE. Which means?

ROGER. Really Good-looking Gay Guys. Dot com.

STEVIE. Don't take this the wrong way, but to be on a site called Really Good-looking Gay Guys, don't you have to *be* a really good-looking gay guy?

PLAY CONTINUES

THE BOYS ACROSS THE STREET

CHARACTER

MABEL: An older White woman

PLACE: A small town somewhere in Middle America.

TIME: Now.

*Lights up on a comfortable, lived-in middle-class home in a small American town.
Or an implied space.*

Just wait till you hear what's goin' on right across the street from me. I looked out my window and there was a man and what I thought was his colored helper over to the old Thompson place. They was haulin' stuff outta the house and throwin' it into a big ol' dumpster. At the time, I couldn't have been more thrilled. Since the Thompson's both died it's just sat there all boarded up and bringin' down my property values. Well, I quick whipped up a batch of my famous chocolate marshmallow brownies and took 'em over to welcome the man to the neighborhood. I spotted his weddin' ring right off, so of course I said if he and his wife hadn't found a church home yet, they'd certainly be welcome at the Sturdy Rock Church and I'd be happy to take 'em to worship next Sunday if they'd like me to. That's when he called the colored man over and introduced him to me as his *husband*. There had never been any queers in this town and we surely never believed in race mixin' but here I was face to face with an interracial, same-sex, couple of all things! You can believe I skedaddled back home as quick as these old legs could get me here.

MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

FOR A MAN YOUR AGE

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL: Older gay male, any race/ethnicity, fighting the aging process

WILL: Even older gay male, any race/ethnicity, happy with who he is

PLACE: A condo in a high-rise building. A couch or a couple of chairs.

TIME: Saturday morning. The present.

NOTE: A slash mark indicates where the next speech breaks in.

WILL, an older gay man, perhaps a bit over 70, sits dressed in Saturday clothes, reading an intellectual magazine such as The Smithsonian or The Atlantic. His husband MICHAEL, aged somewhere in his low sixties but trying to look and act younger, enters from the bedroom and crosses toward the outside door.

MICHAEL. Morning, sunshine.

WILL. Morning. Where do you think you're going?

MICHAEL. Down to the Pump & Grind for coffee. Like I do every Saturday morning. You want to come?

WILL. Didn't you read last week's email from the homeowners' association?

MICHAEL. I value my sanity too much to read emails from the HOA. What're they griping about now? Dog poop on the sidewalk again?

WILL. They were warning everybody the elevator will be off in the whole building this morning. Time for the annual inspection.

MICHAEL. On a Saturday? For how long?

WILL. For however long it takes.

MICHAEL. How am I expected to function without my coffee?

WILL. You could always make it yourself. You just like to go to the Pump & Grind because Myron the barista's young and cute and he flirts outrageously for extra tips.

MICHAEL. Just because we're married doesn't mean I don't appreciate a nice smile and a little attention from a younger man. But that's sweet. After all this time you still get jealous.

WILL. After thirty years together, I'm pretty sure you're not really planning to dump me for a boy nearly young enough to be your grandson.

MICHAEL. He's not *that* young.

WILL. Yeah. He is. And despite all the mythology to the contrary, there are very few good-looking young guys who want to spend the best years of their lives playing nursemaid to an old man.

MICHAEL. Watch who you're calling old, buster. If the elevator's out I can just use the stairs. I haven't got much exercise lately.

WILL. You never get much exercise. If you attempt to go down and back up fourteen flights they'll find you dead from a heart attack somewhere long about the fifth floor, if you even make it that far.

MICHAEL. If I'd known this was going to happen, I'd have insisted on a condo on the first floor.

WILL. Oh, no. You were the one who insisted on a de-luxe apartment in the sky-yi-yi.

MICHAEL. Maybe the Pump and Grind would deliver.

WILL. In your dreams. And even if your college boy cutey pie *were* willing to schlep it up Mt. Everest for a huge tip, the coffee would be cold by the time it got here. Surely you can find a way to distract yourself. Maybe read something for a change.

MICHAEL. I read.

WILL. Menus don't count.

PLAY CONTINUES

THE FIRST TIME

A monologue adapted from the play, *Best Friends*

CHARACTER

EDDIE: A 25-year-old small-town blue-collar guy who always thought he was straight. He speaks with a country accent. Grammar anomalies in the script are intentional.

PLACE: Indeterminate

TIME: 1975

WARNING: References sex acts between adults and sexual exploration by adolescents.

They say you never forget your first sexual experience. 'Course, what my best friend Danny would say is, a couple of horny teenagers sharin' a hand job was not a "sexual experience." But 'til I married Michele that was all I had to go by. What I do know is, God didn't approve of what we were doin' down in Danny's basement when we were fifteen and I was supposed to be helpin' him with his algebra homework. But sometimes it just pops into my head, you know? How it felt with Danny. Sometimes even when I'm tryin' to get it on with Michele. Few years later here I am a married man with a two-year-old kid and one on the way. Got a decent job drivin' a truck out at the plant, mostly haulin' stuff to and from their other facility fifty miles away. Livin' the American dream, right? But then I was drivin' back couple weeks ago and comin' up to that little rest area off the highway. You know the one. No secret it's a place where the queers like to hang out. Ever' few months the state cops'll arrest somebody outta there for public indecency and their names'll be in the weekly paper for ever'body to see. I only stopped 'cause I had to piss real bad. Honest!

MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

WHAT HAPPENED THIS TIME?

CHARACTERS

SAM: The klutz of all klutzes

JACKIE: The long-suffering spouse

The performers can be any age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.

PLACE: An apartment living room, a chair and enough wreckage to suggest a room in shambles. Door to the outside.

TIME: The present.

From the darkness is heard a cacophony of crashing, banging, and breakage, a small dog barking, an angry cat meowing, and SAM yelling at both animals. Then silence.

SAM. *(Offstage.)* Fluffy! Come down from there! *(Cat meows angrily.)* Oww! Whoaaaa!

Sound of a large crash. SAM moans. Lights come up to reveal the suggestion of a living room in shambles. Amid the wreckage is a box large enough to be cumbersome and to hold...well, you'll see. Its contents are not visible. SAM sits on what's left of a sofa or easy chair, all banged up and either holding his arm or wearing an improvised sling. After a moment JACKIE enters from the street and scans the scene in horror.

JACKIE. Oh, Sam. What happened this time?

SAM. I was carrying that box to the trash and tripped on the cat.

JACKIE. You are the klutz of all klutzes! But if there's such a thing as a black belt in klutziness I think you've finally earned it. Looks like a tornado went through here.

SAM. Close enough. Fluffy got so scared she started running all around. The dog got excited and started chasing her so I started chasing both of them and, well, you can see the results for yourself.

PLAY CONTINUES

DAD & UNCLE MARK

CHARACTER

DOUG: A man perhaps in his seventies.

PLACE and **TIME:** Indeterminate

When a guy asks me about when I figured out I was gay—usually in the afterglow of fantastic sex—and yes, sex can still be fantastic after age seventy—I always say 1958, when I was thirteen and before I’d ever heard the word “gay.” That year my parents transformed the basement into what they called the “rec room.” You never saw so much knotty pine paneling in your life. And I’m not talking about those cheap sheets of fake wood an eighth of an inch thick. Dad used substantial individual tongue-and-groove boards. Uncle Mark helped him put them up. He wasn’t really my uncle, but that’s what you called your parents’ close male friends back then. Dad and Uncle Mark had been best buddies since grade school. They did everything together. As part of the remodeling, Mother let Dad section off the area closest to the furnace for a workshop. My Dad could build or fix anything. Pretty soon he and Uncle Mark started making fancy birdhouses together to sell at flea markets on the weekends. These were not your run-of-the-mill birdhouses from a kit. Oh, no. My Dad dreamed up birdhouse-size Victorian mansions. And French chateaus. Tara from *Gone with the Wind*. They even did an Empire State Building purple martin house one time. Uncle Mark was the artistic one. He’d paint those miniature masterpieces in all kinds of colors and put in every little detail. Mother hated the sounds of sawing and hammering—said it brought on her sick headaches—so Dad and Uncle Mark would have their work sessions on Wednesday nights when she went out to her weekly bridge game.

MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

MARVIN AND THE MUSES

CHARACTERS

MARVIN: A struggling playwright in his thirties or older. Any race or ethnicity.

YAKOV: An attractive young man in his twenties. Any race or ethnicity.

MELPOMENE: The Muse of Tragedy, ageless.

PLACE: Marvin's workspace.

TIME: Now.

NOTE: "Melpomene" is pronounced mel-paw-MEN-ee (except where it isn't).
"Thalia" is pronounced THAH-lee-yah.

Lights up on the workspace of a not-very-prosperous playwright. Chair, table, laptop. A door to the rest of the house. MELPOMENE, the ageless Greek Muse of Tragedy, paces impatiently. She wears ancient Greek garb. MARVIN, a struggling writer in his thirties or older, enters.

MELPOMENE. It's about time you showed up.

MARVIN. Who are you? Where's Thalia?

MELPOMENE. *(Produces a business card and hands it to him.)* Melpomene, Muse of Tragedy, at your service. Thalia passed your case file on to me.

MARVIN. Tragedy? But Thalia's the Muse of Comedy, and that's what I write—comedies.

MELPOMENE. Not according to her. She says your plays are definitely no laughing matter.

MARVIN. Everyone's a critic.

MELPOMENE. Comes with the territory.

MARVIN. Anyway, where have you been? I've been calling for weeks.

MELPOMENE. I was busy elsewhere. You aren't the only writer around, you know. There are over ten thousand playwrights in America alone, every one of them badgering me for inspiration day and night.

MARVIN. Well, you can go right back to Mt. Olympus or wherever you and your sisters hang out. I've found a new muse who makes my creative juices flow like a mountain stream. (*YAKOV enters, shirtless, toweling off from a shower.*)

YAKOV. (To Melpomene.) Mother? What are you doing here?

MELPOMENE. Kid, you have me mixed up with someone else entirely. I think you're looking for Necessity. She's the mother of invention and you would appear to be the invention of this so-called writer's sex-starved brain. A mere figment of his overheated imagination.

MARVIN. That's rich, coming from a mythological being. But he's solid flesh. I think after last night I can attest to that.

YAKOV. For the time being, anyhow.

PLAY CONTINUES

INTESTATE

A Pandemic Monologue

CHARACTER

RICHARD: A 50-year-old gay man, any race or ethnicity, who lost his partner (and everything else) to the COVID-19 virus

PLACE: A cemetery. Or an implied space.

TIME: April, 2020

RICHARD, a 50-year-old gay man, visits the grave of his deceased partner. Or he just directly addresses the audience.

God dammit, David. How could you be dead? You did everything right. Ate and drank in moderation, slept eight hours a night, went to the gym every day. Is that where you got it? Someone forget to wipe off the weight machine? ... I hope to God that's where you got it. It makes no *sense*. You *survived* the AIDS pandemic. Then you end up dying from a virus people kept saying was no worse than the flu? You would never have died from the flu. You got a flu shot every year. Of course you did. The hospital had those big white triage tents set up outside. Looked like there was some kind of festival going on. A couple of nurses took you in one and told me to go wait in the car. I don't know how long I sat there. Ten minutes? Half an hour? I had your wallet, so finally somebody came looking for your i.d. and insurance card and she started asking questions. Was I related to you? Were we married? Not officially, I told her, but we did have a commitment ceremony. Doesn't count, she said. Did I have your power of attorney? Did you have a living will? No. No because we never took the time to get the documents together. We never *took* the time because we thought we had *plenty* of time. We never had a "real" wedding because you didn't want to do it until your family of rock-ribbed Kentucky evangelicals were willing to attend. Somehow you convinced yourself they'd eventually welcome me into the fold. You just couldn't bear the thought they didn't love you enough, enough to be happy for you when you found somebody

who did love you—even if that somebody was another man. The nurse had one last question: “Who *is* the patient’s nearest relative?” “The patient” has a name, I said. “It’s David. He has a mother. I’ve never spoken to her.” Now would be a good time, she said.

MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

I INVITED YOUR MOTHER FOR THANKSGIVING

CHARACTERS

DALE: Gay male age around age 30, any race or ethnicity

WARREN: Gay male age around age 30, any race or ethnicity

PLACE: An implied kitchen table, chairs.

TIME: Sunday morning.

Lights up on DALE sitting at a kitchen table drinking coffee and reading a Sunday newspaper. WARREN enters sleepily and sits down.

DALE. Morning. You OK? You were tossing and turning most of the night.

WARREN. It was horrible. I kept having the same nightmare over and over. A monster was chasing me. Every time I hid in some room it'd bang on the door louder and louder.

DALE. What kind of monster?

WARREN. The same one it always is. My mother. What time is it anyway?

DALE. 11 o'clock.

WARREN. I haven't stayed in bed that long since college.

DALE. When I got up it looked like you were finally having a restful sleep. Since it's Sunday I didn't see any reason to haul you out of bed. Figured you could miss *Meet the Press* for once in your life.

WARREN. Guess I'll have to rely on coffee to raise my blood pressure then. Any left?

DALE. Just made a fresh pot when I heard you stirring around.

WARREN. Bless you. And what's that I smell?

DALE. Homemade cinnamon rolls.

WARREN. God I love you.

DALE. You may change your mind when I tell you what else I did this morning. Interesting you should mention your mother. ...

WARREN. Oh?

DALE. I called and invited her for Thanksgiving.

WARREN. If that's some kind of sick joke it isn't funny.

DALE. No, I did it. *Mea culpa.*

WARREN. Why would you intentionally ruin a holiday? You know how I feel about her.

DALE. Because she's your only mother and you're her only son and after five years of mutual silence it's time the two of you got over yourselves.

WARREN. These have been the most peaceful five years of my life since I came out to her and she finally realized Tommy wasn't just my roommate and exploded like Mt. Vesuvius.

PLAY CONTINUES

MY SUMMER OF CYPRESS GARDENS

CHARACTER

CHARLES: age 70+, white

PLACE: Indeterminate

TIME: Now

The summer of 1956 was my summer of Cypress Gardens. I was ten years old. It was my first trip South. And the first time my young mind became aware of racism. And beautiful men. My father loved to drive. When he got his two-weeks' vacation every year that's all he wanted to do. Pick a far-off destination that required a lot of time behind the wheel. Of course, we always left early—very early—he was itching so badly to get moving. On the road by 6 a.m. if possible. Of course, Mother insisted we have a good breakfast before we left, so that meant getting up at five or so. When we finally piled into the car—a Pontiac it would have been in those days. Dad was always a GM guy. He eventually graduated to Buicks but never all the way to Cadillacs. I'd be in the back seat with a pile of comic books. Dad in the driver's seat of course. Mother in the passenger seat in charge of all the maps. Remember those? Maps? Printed on paper? Folded in such a way that they could never be re-folded that way again? Mother acting as navigator always made the trips more interesting since she had no sense of direction. There were always unintended detours. This was before interstate highways carved up the country, so we saw a lot of towns and cities on two-lane highways. Some of which we intended to see. Some of which we didn't. That year the destination was Florida. No Disney World yet, but the itinerary included Cypress Gardens, Silver Springs, the Bok "Singing Tower," Monkey Jungle, a "sunken" tropical garden in Saint Petersburg. Mother and I picked the sights we were going to see. Dad didn't really care where we went as long as he was driving. He really hated to stop. If Mother or I had to go

to the bathroom, it took a lot of persuasion to convince him to stop at a gas station that looked to Mother's critical eye like it might have clean enough restrooms. Same thing with motels. Mother and I would be well past the point of exhaustion before he'd start looking for a nice motel that still had its vacancy light on. Occasionally that meant settling for a not-quite-so-nice motel. We never made reservations in advance. That would have required Dad to stick to a schedule and probably have to stop before he was ready to. As soon as we crossed the Ohio River I started to notice more Black people than I ever knew existed. Our little hometown surrounded by northern Indiana cornfields had less than two thousand people. One Black family. The wife did house cleaning and laundry, the husband did odd jobs. Except for the television version of "Amos and Andy," I never saw another Black person. Suddenly they were everywhere. In the towns doing the dirty work wherever there was dirty work to do. In the countryside tending the crops under the unforgiving sun. How excited we all were to see our first cotton fields. Black folks were dragging their sacks between the rows, just like in the Disney movie "Song of the South." We couldn't tell from a distance if they were singing "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" or not.

MONOLOGUE CONTINUES

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

CHARACTERS

JIM: Age 35, James's father

JAMES. Age 15 going on 16, Jim's son, can be performed by a youthful-looking adult

PLACE: Open back porch of a small house, early evening. Two outdoor chairs (or a glider or porch swing). Small table. Screen door into the house.

TIME: September, 1950.

NOTE: A slash mark indicates where the next speech breaks in. Brackets enclose words that are understood but not spoken. Words in quotation marks should not be underscored with "air quotes." They weren't a thing in the 1950's.

WARNING: A suicide is discussed but not enacted.

Lights up at a level to suggest outdoors on an early September evening, 1950. The back porch of a modest house. A screen door. Outdoor seating, with a low table to set drinks on. JIM and JAMES enter from having taken a walk around town.

JIM. Go ahead and sit down. I'll get us a couple of beers.

JAMES. *(Tired of the running joke.)* Dad!

JIM. Okay. Root beer for you, real beer for me. One of these days, though. When your mother isn't looking.

JAMES. I promised Topher I'd call him tonight.

JIM. That can wait, can't it? There's a couple of things I need to talk to you about.

JAMES. *(He anxiously looks at his watch.)* I guess.

JIM. Be right back. *(Jim exits into the house. James paces. He looks at his watch another time or two. He'll continue to do that as the play goes on. Jim returns*

carrying a beer and a root beer.) Here you go. (Jim hands James the root beer. They both sit. James's posture is not what his father might have called "manly." Perhaps his legs are crossed at the knees or one ankle is under the opposite knee.) Your call to Topher was gonna have to wait anyway. Your mother's on the phone with her sister and it sounded like they were just getting wound up.

JAMES. Damn.

JIM. Watch your language. I heard enough four-letter words in the army. I don't need to hear them in my own house. And I better never hear you say them in front of your mother. You understand me?

JAMES. Yes sir. Sorry.

JIM. Sure you don't wanna try my beer?

JAMES. You gave me sips before. Tastes like kerosene.

JIM. You'll get used to it. And who knows? It might put some hair on your chest.

JAMES. I have hair on my chest.

JIM. Really?

JAMES. Six last time I counted.

JIM. *(Exchanging his beer for James's root beer.)* Then here you go. Today my son Jimmy is a man.

JAMES. What is this? Some kind of initiation?

JIM. Passed down from father to son since time immemorial.

JAMES. Okay. If you insist, I'll try to drink it. On one condition.

JIM. Which is?

JAMES. Could you and Mom stop calling me Jimmy?

JIM. Wow. Would you prefer Jim Junior?

JAMES. Jim's what everybody calls you, and Junior makes me still sound like a kid. I was thinking "James."

JIM. That'll take some getting used to. But sure. We'll try. I will anyway. James.

JAMES. Thanks.

JIM. *(Points at the beer.)* We have a deal? *(James gingerly takes a sip. It's as bad as he remembers.)*

JAMES. Yep. Pure kerosene. *(He checks his watch.)* You think Mom's off the phone yet?

JIM. You've gotta be kidding. They'll be in there yacking for at least an hour.

JAMES. D--- Darn.

JIM. That's better. ... It was nice getting to spend some time with you tonight.

JAMES. Yeah.

JIM. My dad and I used to do the same thing. Every September when the new car models came out.

JAMES. (*Affectionately.*) Yeah. You told me. Just like you told me last year and the year before that.

JIM. After supper we'd walk around from dealership to dealership looking through the showroom windows. Comparing the new designs and the latest colors. Not that it made any difference. Didn't matter what the new Packards or Hudsons or anything else looked like. If Dad was gonna get a new car, it was always gonna be a Ford. When I got our first car in 1940, I almost got a Chevy just to irritate him. But of course I didn't. The Depression wasn't quite over yet but I managed to put enough money aside for a used 1937 Ford Deluxe. You remember it?

JAMES. I should. That was what Mom and I rode around in all through the war while you were off fighting Hitler. At least when she could get enough gas ration stamps.

JIM. Thank God her father was a good enough shirrtail mechanic to keep it going 'til they started making cars again. Traded what was left of it for a brand new 1946 Ford Super Deluxe Station Wagon.

JAMES. All they have to do is say a car's "deluxe" and you'll buy it.

JIM. It was a great family car. And speaking of new cars. The ones we saw tonight. Which was your favorite?

JAMES. I don't know. Why?

JIM. You'll be sixteen next month. Your mother and I talked about it and we thought instead of getting us a new car this year, we might hit for a car for you.

JAMES. Are you kidding me?!

JIM. You'll need to get a job after school to pay for the gas. At twenty-two cents a gallon I can't afford to be paying for you to cruise up and down Main Street every Saturday night. But yeah. We think you can handle the responsibility. So. Which was your favorite?

JAMES. Well, I kind of liked that new Studebaker Commander.

JIM. (*Aghast.*) A Studebaker!?

JAMES. It's totally aerodynamic. It looks like something out of those old space movies—Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century.

JIM. But it's so small. There's hardly any room. Especially in the back seat. And once you start dating, a roomy back seat will come in real handy. You'll see.

JAMES. (*Appalled.*) Dad! ... I haven't even thought about dating yet.

JIM. Yeah, well. Now if you were driving that snazzy red Ford Custom *DeLuxe* Convertible we saw in the showroom the girls'd be lining up. (*James is getting really uncomfortable.*) And you'll be wanting to haul your friends around. Yeah. That custom Ford's just what you want. A car the guys'll wanna ride in, and the girls'll wanna be *seen* riding in. And trust me. No girl wants to be seen in a Studebaker.

JAMES. You know I haven't got a bunch of friends to haul around. Just ...

JIM. Just Topher Wilson.

JAMES. Yeah.

JIM. (*Pause.*) About Topher.

JAMES. What?

JIM. Your mother and I think maybe ... maybe you shouldn't be seeing him so much.

JAMES. He's my best friend. ... He's my only friend.

JIM. We just think maybe he's not the best influence.

JAMES. Why?

JIM. Look. I understand what it means to be close to another guy. I do.

PLAY CONTINUES