

WHERE THE FIREWORKS COME FROM

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CHARACTERS

Tony, 17, M

Wears his heart on his sleeve.

Gabe, 17, M

Prefers to cover it up.

SETTING

A backyard in a small, suburban neighborhood south of Boston.

TIME

The Fourth of July. Late evening.

“ / ” indicates that the next character’s line should begin

AT RISE: The stage is black. We hear the sounds of suburbia – dogs barking, cars driving by, etc. – then, the click of a lighter. The flame illuminates the set. We see GABE sitting in a cheap lawn chair, a sparkler in one hand and a lighter in the other with an empty chair next to him. He is wearing a sweatshirt and some shorts. Detritus from a Fourth of July celebration is scattered across the lawn. He tries to light the sparkler, but it does not catch. After a few increasingly frustrated attempts, GABE tosses the sparkler into the grass, looks to the sky and checks his phone. It's late. TONY enters holding two beers.

TONY

Sorry, sorry. My mom had me singin' *God Bless the USA* on the karaoke machine.

(TONY hands GABE a beer and sits.)

GABE

I swear, I've never met someone so excited about their kid joinin' the army. *(Beat)*
You're sure she's okay with this? *(re: the beer)*

TONY *(with a drunken Boston accent)*

'Boys just graduated high school. They deserve their first drink.'

GABE

Fuckin' Cheryl.

TONY

She just thinks you're an angel. 'Oh, Gabe, he's so responsible' ...musta forgotten what ya looked like after Shelby's grad party. *(Beat. Looking up to the sky.)* Nothin', huh?

GABE

Maybe they're skippin' out this year.

TONY

Nah, it's comin'...I can feel it.

GABE

...well I still got more to pack, so they better hurry up.

TONY

When's your flight?

GABE

8 A.M...just glad I get to spend the next four years in California and not here.

A long beat. TONY stands up.)

GABE (cont.)

...what?

TONY

Come on. Stand up.

(GABE reluctantly joins him.)

TONY (cont.)

I, Anthony Francis Mason the Third, propose a toast.

(Beat. TONY raises GABE's beer for him.)

TONY (cont.)

To good neighbors, cheap alcohol, and twelve years of carpooling to school in our parents' minivans.

GABE

May we never have to drive another Honda fuckin' Odyssey as long as we live.

TONY

Here, here.

(The boys clink their bottles and take a sip. They laugh. A moment. They are close - close enough to smell each other's breath...)

TONY *(as if he were revealing a secret)*

You know it uh...it wasn't a mistake...at Shelby's when we...

(A loud 'whoosh' breaks the trance. The boys look to the sky, waiting for a firework. Nothing.)

GABE

Musta been a dud.

(TONY smiles, biting his lip. GABE catches himself and sits back down. TONY remains standing for a moment, feeling the sting of rejection. He sits. GABE takes a sip of his beer, wincing at the taste. An uncomfortably long beat.)

TONY
Hey, can we just...

GABE
God this shit is so...

GABE
...I was just sayin' the smell of this stuff is like...I don't know.

TONY
Yeah, it uh...kinda reminds of me of last week...I mean like...

GABE
Shit, when Jay Palmieri threw up in the hot tub! God...you know, I think it actually left a ring around the inside. *(Beat)* Didn't he graduate like three years ago? What's he even doing?

TONY
Pretty sure he's still takin' classes at Mass Bay.

GABE
I'm tellin' ya, that kid's gonna be gettin' wasted at high school grad parties 'til they fuckin' bury him over at St. Mary's. *(Beat)* Your dad still goin' on about your qualifying scores?

TONY
Yeah, the numbers go up every time he mentions it.

GABE
...hey the army clearly wants ya for a reason? I mean, that's what they say, right? *'I want you!'* ...no, it's nice bein' wanted.

(THEY take another sip. Beat)

TONY
Shelby's was fun though.

GABE
Hm? Oh, yeah.

TONY
(Beat) You were uh...you were havin' a *really* good time. *(Beat)* Still don't know how we managed to fall asleep in her basement. *(Beat)* Or how we both fit on that tiny-ass couch. *(Beat)* I mean I'm just glad you were okay bein' the little spoon 'cause uh...'cause/I don't

GABE
So, where'd you say you were goin' for basic training? Fort Jackson?

TONY

Oh, yeah, um...no, they uh...haven't decided yet...probably though. (*Beat*) What about you? You find out who your roommate is or...?

GABE

Some kid from India or...Bangladesh I think. I just know we're both doin' summer research. (*A long beat.*) It's weird, I feel like we've been watchin' these fireworks forever, and we still have no idea where they're comin' from.

(*Silence. GABE takes a sip.*)

TONY

I think I love you.

GABE

...fuck.

TONY

I'm sorry, I just...I had to say it.

GABE

Did ya?

TONY

I'm not gonna pretend that whole thing didn't happen.

GABE

I don't know what you *thought* happened in Shelby's basement/but whatever

TONY

You know what happened.

GABE

I know that we were both drunk off our asses and could barely complete a sentence.

TONY

You're gonna blame *all* that on two jaeger-bombs and a Sam Adams?

GABE (*going to leave*)

It's not...whatever, Tony, I don't know.

TONY

(*Beat*) You know, you owe me.

GABE

Well what do you want, a fuckin' wedding ring?

TONY

I want you to admit it.

GABE

Admit what?

TONY

That you wanted it!

GABE

Listen. What we have is...is special...but this is not the time to be takin' on any more emotional baggage...aright? I just wanna have one good, last memory of this place...but now with you and the... (*Looking to the sky.*) Look, I'm...gonna go. Clearly no one's shootin' anythin' off tonight.

(*GABE goes to exit when TONY stands up.*)

TONY

You're a bullshitter.

GABE

What?

TONY

You act like that was the first time anythin' happened.

GABE

Well yeah.

TONY

How 'bout eighth grade? (*Beat*) How 'bout when fuckin' Francesca invited us all over after the eighth grade formal to go night-swimming, and they thought it'd be fun if we all took our bathing suits off, but then when everyone else went inside, you said that I should stay in the pool with you and that it "wasn't gay cause you couldn't see anything"? (*Beat*) Or how 'bout...how 'bout over the summer when we used to get subs at Rondo's and ride our bikes to the Charles to have fuckin' picnics by the river? Then we'd just fall asleep next to each other. (*Beat*) Or...I don't know...how about when we used to just talk on the phone at night for hours about nothin' even though you lived like ten feet away? I mean, your phone number was the first one I ever memorized 'cause I didn't call anyone else. (*Beat*) You don't hate the smell of that beer 'cause it reminds you of Jay vomiting in the hot tub. You hate it 'cause that's what was on my breath when you kissed me. You hate that you liked it. (*Beat*) Listen, I know how your family feels about this kinda stuff...I get it. The first time my dad heard someone say LGBT, he thought it was a dyslexic guy tryin' to order a sandwich...but...Jesus, how do you just ignore this shit? Even if it *was* the first time...so what? (*Beat*) I love you.

GABE

Stop sayin' that.

I do. TONY

Stop. GABE

I love you, Gabe. TONY

No, you don't. GABE

I. Love. You! TONY

GABE
 WELL I DON'T LOVE YOU! *(Beat)* You know I was tryna figure out what made me want to leave so bad, why I wanted to just get on a plane and fly across the country...and I think it's you. You're part of what makes this place so goddamn suffocating. *(Beat)* I don't know what you *think* you are, but I am not that.

(As GABE turns to leave, TONY grabs him by the shoulders, and in a last-ditch effort, kisses him. GABE leans into it...just for a second...then quickly recoils and pushes TONY, spilling his beer all over his shirt.)

The fuck's the matter with you? GABE (cont.)

(GABE is about to exit when TONY cuts in.)

I dropped out. TONY

What? GABE

I dropped out. TONY

What do you mean you dropped out? GABE

TONY
 ...I mean I'm *not* shipping out to Fort Jackson in September...I'm *not* completing my basic training...and I am not joining the army.

GABE

(Beat) I thought it was too late for you/to

TONY

It was the delayed entry program...submitted my discharge paperwork over the weekend.

GABE

(A long beat. Now genuinely trying to comfort TONY.) I mean...at least you'll get to see more fireworks...you know 'cause of the whole...thing with loud noises and stuff...like, shellshock...not that you'd get shellshock, that's...you know.

TONY *(On the verge of tears)*

I'm just gonna die here.

GABE

Jesus, Tony, you're/not

TONY

I was born here, and I'm gonna die here, and they're gonna take my body, and they're gonna bury it at St. Mary's next to Jay fuckin' Palmieri, and I'm never gonna leave/and

GABE

I didn't/mean

TONY

And, and *you*...*this* was supposed to make sense. All this was supposed to make sense, but it didn't, and it doesn't, and I'm sorry.

(GABE sits down with TONY.)

GABE

Tony, it's okay Hey. Hey, Tony!
It's...Jesus, it's...I'm sorry, okay?

TONY

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm
sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

(GABE holds TONY, now sobbing.)

GABE

I'm sorry.

(The two boys sit, holding one another. After a while, TONY pulls himself together.)

GABE

You know *you could* be goin' to California too if you actually tried. You're smart.

TONY

Not that kinda smart. *(Beat)* Besides, if I wanted to hang out with a bunch of hipster assholes and eat avocado toast for breakfast, I could just go to fuckin' Cambridge. *(A long beat.)* You were right...about bein' wanted.

(GABE can't find it in him to respond. Beat)

GABE

Well you look like shit, so I'm gonna get you a towel.

(TONY laughs as GABE stands up and goes to leave, but at the last minute turns around to see TONY sitting by himself. He hesitates, realizing that in this moment, TONY needs him more than he needs a towel. GABE goes back to sit down. He helps TONY remove the beer-soaked shirt and hands him his own sweatshirt. He tries to help him put it on...it's clumsy, but cute. A long, very full beat. All of a sudden, we hear a 'whoosh'. Then...a firework. It explodes in the air, painting the night sky with a kaleidoscopic array of colors. Then another. And another. And another. TONY rests his head on GABE's shoulder. GABE looks down at TONY, then back up. They sit in the grass, staring at the sky, their faces lit by the glow of the fireworks. Then, one final boom.)

End of play.