

[Excerpt]

New Choice

by

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STUART  
Trans M || 26  
Smart and kind,  
Settles for less

DRAKE  
M || 27  
Charismatic Nerd,  
Feels like he deserves more

PARKER  
F || 23  
Wanna-Be-Manic-Pixie-Dream-Girl, but is just depressed  
Wants everything

Place  
A Residential Mental Health Treatment Center  
Oxnard, California

Time  
Now

Notes:

// indicates when the next line should start, overlapping

... indicates a brief silence

AT RISE:

A HIGHSCHOOL THEATRE

A 14-year old PARKER stands alone onstage

PARKER

Mrs. A told us to pick a monologue we related to. And I scoured all the plays I knew for some good ones. And all I could find were women getting divorces and old men sad about being old. But then I picked up *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*. And read Helena in this one part. And I was like... this girl gets me. Thanks Shakespeare. This is when Helena cannot believe that Lysander and Demetrius love her. She thinks they're pranking her. Because she cannot fathom that she is actually lovable. So, if anyone wants to do something from *Midsummer* for finals. Let me know. So, um. Here we go.

RESIDENTIAL ADMIN OFFICE - 10 YEARS LATER

An office room in a house. Two desks face each other with desktop computers on each.

DRAKE sits with his feet on the desk, while STUART is intensely hunched forward.

DRAKE

It's cool.

STUART

In what world is it cool?

DRAKE

The land of *Abrosia*.

STUART

Aren't you the cooler one out of the two of us?

DRAKE

Yes and this *is* cool. Picture it. You. Humble Stuart Little.

STUART

Not my last // name

DRAKE

Stuart Langston. Is no longer humble Stuart Langston. But rather a king. Or a knight. Or a wizard.

STUART

You are so not helping your case.

DRAKE

LARPing combines physical activity // with historic --

STUART

Hitting each other with foam sticks

DRAKE

With historic recreations // and

STUART

Weird

DRAKE

And improv!

STUART

I do enjoy improv.

DRAKE

There we go, Royal Vally's Improv Club... Treasurer?

STUART

Secretary. Two years in a row. I was very good at keeping notes.

DRAKE

LARPing is just like a big game of pretend. We're in improv club -- Play production. It's like a production of Peter Pan except there's no script and we don't have the budget for those pully rope things.

STUART

They have to strap it so tight...

DRAKE

(mocking)

Wha wha, "I was Peter Pan. And I got to fly and kiss // Parker"

STUART

I didn't kiss her.

DRAKE

Yes you did.

STUART  
Stage kiss.

DRAKE  
That's a kiss. That counts.

STUART  
Mrs. A told her to put her thumbs between our lips.

DRAKE  
Oh my god.

DRAKE starts laughing hysterically.

STUART  
It's not that funny.

DRAKE  
This whole time I was so jealous. You never fuckin' told me.

STUART  
I thought she did.

DRAKE  
She never said it wasn't.

STUART  
If she actually kissed me -- 17 year old me woulda...

DRAKE  
Woulda jizzed his pants.

STUART  
Stop being gross.

DRAKE  
Woulda jizzed his heart.

STUART  
Better.

DRAKE  
I still can't believe you didn't tell me, when you knew I really fucking --

DRAKE goes to wack STUART in the head. He can't reach.

He moves slightly. Still can't reach.

DRAKE gets up and wacks STUART in the head.

STUART

Ow.

DRAKE

Shit, did that hurt?

STUART

Dramatic Effect.

DRAKE

So, anyway, there's a LARP coming up in two months. The Jester's Fair. Just right over in Westlake. \$250 for the weekend.

STUART

Oh god, you're actually trying to rope me into this.

DRAKE

Think about it. Think about it. Think about it.

STUART

Maybe.

DRAKE

I'll be you're best friend -- swear to god.

STUART

What are you now?

DRAKE

That guy from that one sex dream you had.

STUART

It was once! In the 10th grade. We were all horny little bastards.

DRAKE

You still had it.

STUART

I swear, I've known you for too long.

DRAKE

That's why you love me.

STUART

And why I'm the only one that will.

DRAKE gasps and acts like an arrow plunged through his heart. He falls to the floor and acts as if blood is spewing out of his chest. He takes one final gasp and finally "dies".

After a beat.

DRAKE

And this is why we will both die alone.

STUART

For that, you get to go check on the patients.

DRAKE

It's 3 -- they're sleeping.

STUART

One could've tried to kill himself. Radley was a little on edge today.

DRAKE

Ugh. Fine.

DRAKE exits.

STUART watches him go. He starts to smile and then shakes it off.

He clicks around on his computer, until DRAKE comes back

DRAKE

All asleep. None dead.

STUART

Great. Email from Marcy.

DRAKE

At 3 in the morning?

STUART

Nah, she sent it earlier, I'm just checking now. Equine therapy is cancelled tomorrow.

DRAKE

Oh, Dameon's gonna be pissed.

STUART

Yeah, we'll just take them to Barns and Nobel for their outing again after DBT group. Can you call Shirley and let her know?

DRAKE

Shirley hates me, can you talk to Shirley?

STUART

It's just a voicemail. It goes to her work phone. Wait -- why does she hate you?

DRAKE

I dunno I get this vibe whenever she's around that she wants me to leave. Like she always looks at me, and then the door. Me and then the door. Me, door, me, door, me, door.

STUART

You want me to call?

DRAKE

Yes pwease.

STUART rolls his eyes, picks up the phone and calls.

While it rings, DRAKE makes a little origami frog.

STUART

Hey Shirley. This is Stuart over at the Green House. Just informing you that Equine was cancelled and we need approval for a switch to Barns and Nobel. Jack and Ava will be here in the morning and I'll pass along the message to them. Thanks so much. Have a nice night.

He hangs up.

DRAKE

You're such a strong speaker. The diction. The tone.



STUART

Alright, alright. Email. Uh... Ba ba ba... New admit.

DRAKE

When?

STUART

Tomorrow morning. Day shift.

DRAKE

Ah. Alright, new blood.

STUART

Ready for the form?

DRAKE nods, gives a “thumbs up” .

He types as STUART speaks.

STUART

Patient is P. Matthews. Female. 23 years old. Diagnosed with Bipolar II, Anxiety, and EDNOS. Height 5'7". Weight 193. From Newbury Park. Address 58 Peakrose Ave. All good?

DRAKE

Yep. Do we have a picture?

STUART

We do and it is loadingggg... and...

STUART's face goes blank.

DRAKE

What? ... What?

DRAKE gets up from his desk to look at STUART's computer screen.

DRAKE

Holy --

## PARKER'S RESIDENTIAL BEDROOM

A sparse, smallish bedroom. Handwritten posters hang on the wall with motivational sayings such as “There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn’t.” and “Keep Calm and Carry On”.

PARKER lays in her bed, clinging on to a stuffed sloth -- numb. After a moment her breathing speeds up, almost on the verge of hyperventilating. She then takes a long deep breath. Then another. Back to the stillness.

Another exhale as she stands up out of bed. She stands frozen for a moment. Then the hyperventilating starts again. Instead of calming down, she leans into it. Breathing harder and faster almost getting... angry.

Faster, harder -- some thought has entered her mind too consuming to handle internally and --

BAM. She punches a hole in the wall.

The instant she pulls back, the anger has faded and she regrets it. Shit.

PARKER tentatively approaches the hole. She tries to guide the pieces back together -- maybe it'll look fine?

Nope. No. Not gonna work. Time to think of a new plan of action.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Instant fear.

DRAKE (OFF)

Hey, just letting you know we're starting group in 5 minutes.

PARKER

Okay, got it! Thank you!

DRAKE (OFF)

... Actually can I come // in --

PARKER

I'm getting dressed! I'm naked!

DRAKE (OFF)

Oh, sorry! I can -- I'll wait.

PARKER

No need to do that. I'll be out in a minute.

PARKER starts searching the room for things she can cover the hole with.

DRAKE (OFF)

I just, um, need to... discuss things?

PARKER

You're weird this morning.

DRAKE (OFF)

Hm?

PARKER

Your voice sounds way deeper.

DRAKE (OFF)

It's not Jesse.

PARKER

Oh.

DRAKE (OFF)

We haven't met yet // or --

PARKER

Then who --

DRAKE (OFF)

I'm, uh, I've been off the past couple days.

PARKER tries moving one of the posters to cover the hole -- it's too skinny.

PARKER

Why?

DRAKE (OFF)

Because that's how schedules work. I get some days off.

PARKER

Usually they don't give you guys two days off in the middle of the week. That's what Jesse said.

DRAKE (OFF)

I had some... moral complications.

PARKER

Way to be weirdly vague.

DRAKE (OFF)

Can I just come in? It'll be // easier --

PARKER

I'm still naked!

DRAKE (OFF)

Alright! Staying out.

PARKER

Thank you. ... So, moral complications? You, like, run over a cat and don't know how to tell the owner or something

PARKER tries taping another poster next to the first one -- it won't stick. She tares down the other poster and starts fresh.

DRAKE (OFF)

Jesus -- no. No -- I -- That was very specific.

PARKER

I have a checkered past.

DRAKE (OFF)

It's, um, ethical interpersonal issues.

PARKER

Ooo, more fancy words.

PARKER eyes the dresser.

DRAKE (OFF)

I'm just trying to help people and not get fired at the same time.

PARKER

I worked over at Home Depot for a few years. Started just giving out discounts to people who looked like they were having shitty days.

PARKER starts scooting the dresser over to the hole in the wall. It's loud

PARKER

(over the dresser)

YOUR DOG DIED? 30% OFF. YOU'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH GENERAL DEPRESSION? 40% OFF. YOU HAVE A WEIRD LOOKING FACE? THAT MUST OF BEEN REALLY HARD GROWING UP. ON THE HOUSE!

DRAKE (OFF)

WHAT'S GOING// ON

PARKER

I'M PUTTING ON MY BRA

PARKER stops scooting the dresser. It doesn't cover the hole.

Shit.

DRAKE (OFF)

Are you okay? I just // want to --

PARKER

You know, they fired me. I mean, blessing in disguise -- the store closed like 3 months later. Probably because the customers knew they weren't getting any more discounts.

DRAKE (OFF)

You're funny.

PARKER spots her stack of books.

PARKER

Well, I need something to offset the mental illness. ... You mentally ill?

She starts stacking the books under the legs of the dresser.

DRAKE (OFF)

What?

PARKER

You got a diagnosis? An addiction you kicked? Or are you just one of those assholes who likes to prance around the crazies to make yourself feel better?

DRAKE (OFF)

No! I um... Depression?

PARKER

Depression -- question mark?

DRAKE (OFF)

I mean, never formally diagnosed but --

PARKER

Oh boy.

DRAKE (OFF)

I'd stay in bed for, you know, days sometimes. Couldn't shower.

PARKER

(blunt)

Ever tried to kill yourself?

DRAKE (OFF)

No. Cause my // brother

PARKER

(robot voice)

Wha wha. Access to the Suicide Squad Denied.

DRAKE (OFF)

Cause my brother killed himself.

A beat. PARKER stops stacking.

DRAKE (OFF)

And I've see what that does to people. And I just could never... um...

PARKER

Yeah. Shit. ... I'm sorry. ... A couple acquaintances of mine, you know. And then friend of mine. From high school. His brother. Like 3 years ago. Saw it on Facebook. I always meant to reach out to him but...

DRAKE (OFF)

But?

PARKER

I don't know. Depression. // Ironic, but --

DRAKE (OFF)

Oh.

PARKER

So it goes.

PARKER starts stacking books again.

DRAKE (OFF)

Group's now in like // a minute

PARKER

I'm still getting dressed!

DRAKE (OFF)

How can you still be getting dressed?

PARKER

It's elaborate!

Silence for a moment as PARKER keeps stacking.

DRAKE (OFF)

You doing okay in there?

PARKER

I'm doing great. It's my 3rd day in a residential mental health facility and I couldn't feel any fucking better. Stripped away from my job, my friends, my husband. ... Okay I don't have a husband, but I do have a dog and that's like 10 times worse. I've got no one here.

DRAKE (OFF)

I may, um, are you sure I can't come in?

PARKER

NAKED

Right.

DRAKE (OFF)

The books aren't enough.

Shit.

PARKER  
(re: books)

What?

DRAKE

PARKER  
(jokingly)

Nothing, just in here trying to kill myself.

DRAKE (OFF)

I have to come in the room.

PARKER

What? No -- no no no -- I was joking.

DRAKE

Even if you were it's policy // if someone makes a threat

PARKER

It was a joke, I joke like that all the time

DRAKE

I just need to physically see that you're not

PARKER

But I'm -- I'm naked. // That's a crime!

DRAKE

Okay, coming in, in 1, 2, 3

PARKER takes off her shirt and pants. And is about to take off her underwear when DRAKE comes through the door.

PARKER

This is illegal! I'm going to report you to --

PARKER stops -- she recognizes DRAKE.

A long beat.



They both stare at each other, taking the other one in.

PARKER runs to DRAKE and gives him a giant hug.

## DINING ROOM

PARKER and STUART sit on the same side of the table, an awkward amount of space from one another. They're both eating silently.

After a moment

PARKER

Hi.

STUART looks over, composes any sort of reaction he has and says

STUART

Hello.

He goes back to eating.

PARKER

Drake told me you're not suppose to // know

STUART

Mm! What good food this is.

PARKER

Oh c'mon, really?

STUART

Really. It is great food.

A pause.

PARKER's frustrated. She continues eating.

Then has an idea.

PARKER

Hi, I'm Parker. New patient here. I don't think we've met yet.

STUART can't quite refute this, he plays along.

STUART

It's nice to meet you, Parker.

He goes back to eating.

PARKER

How's it going.

STUART

Fine.

Back to the food.

PARKER

How long have you worked here, what was your name again?

STUART

Stuart.

PARKER

Stuart. I really like that name. How long ago did you start working here?

STUART

Two years.

PARKER

You like it here?

STUART

I have to go.

PARKER

What?

STUART

My shift in the admin office starts in like 5 minutes. It was nice to meet you. See you around.

STUART gets up to leave

PARKER

I NEED HELP.

STUART

What?

PARKER

I -- I am a person in a mental health crisis and I need to speak to a counselor.

STUART

I'll get a clinician.

PARKER

They're probably busy.

STUART

I'm gonna go check --

PARKER

Thomas is with Daemon, Angie's on break, and Chris's off today. So... if the nearest counselor was available to listen to my woes...

STUART huffs and sits down.

PARKER smiles.

STUART

Your woes?

PARKER

Right. Well, recently, I ran into an old friend. Well, a couple of old friends. Two really great people from high school.

STUART

Uh huh.

PARKER

And we were good friends. Like really good friends the three of us. Best friends.

STUART

Best friends?

PARKER

Well, maybe the two of them were a bit closer... A fair amount closer than I was with them.

STUART

Mmhmm.

PARKER

One was named... Jason. And Jason, well, he was kind. And funny. And pretty cocky. He was tall. And he was great. Is, great -- I assume.

STUART

Ah.

PARKER

And we, uh, well there was this other guy.

STUART

Mmmhmm

PARKER

And his name was... Um...

STUART

Maybe he doesn't need a --

PARKER

We'll call him Peter. He played Peter Pan in the school musical.

STUART

Must've been talented.

PARKER

Quite.

STUART

And you guys were... friends?

PARKER

Mmmhmm. He was a senior when I was a freshman, so he'd sneak me off campus to go get McDonalds at lunch. And he'd wait with me for my mom to come pick me up from rehearsal. And we'd sit on this bench right outside the school we called "The Sittin' Spot"

STUART

Stupid name.

PARKER

Well, he came up with it. So...

STUART cracks a smile, he might even chuckle the tiniest bit.

PARKER

But we'd sit in the sitting spot and talk for hours. About movies and philosophy. We'd sing sometimes.

STUART

Was he a good singer?

PARKER

Is it an important detail?

STUART

I think it would give a lot of insight.

PARKER

Pretty good. Sometimes a little pitchy.

STUART

I'm sure he's improved.

PARKER

I'm sure.

STUART

So, what happened?

PARKER

What?

STUART

You're telling me this story about you and your friend "Peter" and everything seems fine.

PARKER

It was fine.

STUART

So, are you still friends?

PARKER

Well --

STUART

Did you just drift apart?

PARKER

We don't // need to --

STUART

I'm here to help you, Parker. You asked for help. I can't help unless I know the whole story. So, what happened?

PARKER

... We... I um... You know when, um... When you're just like an idiot kid and you don't -- It's not the goal to hurt people. It was never the goal to hurt people. Especially those you care about. And you're just this freshman girl with a lot of attention and you're like fat and you think you're ugly and no one would ever --

STUART

Hey, hey -- it's // okay

PARKER

You feel like you are sinking and so you decide to plunge the ship into the water to get it over with rather than scooping the water out to salvage what you have, you know? And it's a trauma response. I know that. But that still doesn't make it okay, and I know // that --

STUART

It's okay. It's okay.

PARKER

I just wish I could explain to them that I'm sorry. That my life's gone down the shitter because of the shitty things I've done and I hope anything I did, didn't hurt them too bad.

STUART

I bet your two friends are okay. They are probably struggling as anyone in their 20s does, but they got on with their lives. I bet they think about you from time to time. And hope that you're alright.

PARKER

I just -- they are two people I really miss. Especially Peter. *Especially* Peter.

A pause

STUART

I missed you too.

A nice quiet moment.

They go back to eating their dinner.

GROUP ROOM

DRAKE, STUART, and PARKER stand in a triangle playing "Zip-Zap-Zop"

Zip DRAKE

Zap STUART

Zop PARKER

Zip DRAKE

Zap STUART

Zop PARKER

Zip DRAKE

Zap STUART

Zop PARKER

Zip STUART

Zap DRAKE

How does this help? PARKER

DRAKE  
It helps with focus, keeping on your feet, give and take --

PARKER  
With mental health.

Oh it doesn't. Zop. STUART

Zip DRAKE

Zap STUART

Then why are we doing this? PARKER

They let us run one group a week doing anything we want. Zop. DRAKE

And you pick improv? PARKER

It brings joy. Zip. STUART

Everyone else stayed in their rooms. PARKER

Well, Dameon's in session and Joey's not feeling well. STUART

And the rest. PARKER

Stayed in their rooms. Zap. DRAKE

Can we do something else? Shoot the shit? If it's just the three of us. PARKER

We can play a different improv game. DRAKE

This is our favorite part of the week. You're not taking this away from us. STUART

Okay okay. Different improv game then. PARKER



Finish it out.

DRAKE

... Zop.

PARKER