

6 Feet Apart
By Harrison M. Starrett

Harrison M. Starrett
641 ½ College Street
Shreveport, LA 71104
(318) 317-6517
hmacstarrett@gmail.com

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

JOHNATHON FRANK: White, freshman in college, “Johnny”

DESHAWN SMITH: Black, sophomore in college

ELIZABETH FRANK: White, late 40s

ALLEN FRANK: White, mid-50s

MARY FRANK: White, junior in high school

SETTING

The play takes place in the dining room of the Franks’ house on a night in the middle of November. It is a house in the suburbs.

SET DESCRIPTION

A dining table is set horizontally across the stage. The table is divided into four sections by five walls. At each section of the table is a chair. For a majority of the play, there will be plates of food, silverware, and beverages at each section of the table for each of the actors to interact with. The choice to have the actors actually eat and drink or mime eating and drinking is up to the director. These props will be taken on and off the stage by the actors at specific moments of the play. Besides what has been previously stated, the set designer is free to do whatever else they wish... as if they weren’t already.

THE TEXT

A slash (/) indicates where the following line begins.

Lights fade up. The dining table, divided into four sections by five walls, is bare. Four chairs are tucked into each of their respective sections of the dining table. JOHNATHON enters carrying a dinner plate and some silverware. He places these items at one of the sections of the dining table.

JOHNATHON

Look bro, I've got it handled. I'm gonna ask them tonight while we're eating, while you're here, and they won't be able to say no.

DESHAWN

Enters carrying a dinner plate and some silverware. He places these items at one of the sections.

You told me you were gonna ask after I left, when I wasn't here so that it wouldn't be awkward.

JOHNATHON

No I didn't.

DESHAWN

Yeah, you did.

JOHNATHON

Well, I changed my mind.

Moves to exit, then stops.

Whatcha want to drink?

DESHAWN

You can't surprise me like this, man.

JOHNATHON

I know, Deshawn – whatcha want to drink?

DESHAWN

You know how much money it'd cost me to live on campus? Fuckin' one thousand dollars. I did the math.

JOHNATHON

We got water, coke, diet coke, I think some Perrier /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

Are you listening to me?

JOHNATHON

I get it, bro. I really do. It'd really fucking suck if you had to live on campus during the break. But I'm gonna hook you up!

DESHAWN

It's not about living on campus, Johnny, it's the fucking money.

JOHNATHON

I know.

DESHAWN

My mom can't afford it.

JOHNATHON

I know.

DESHAWN

No, you don't.

Beat.

She hasn't even gotten a call back yet.

JOHNATHON

No one's called her back?

DESHAWN

She don't have a college degree, man. That bank was the only place that didn't require it. She's fucked.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

I still can't believe that they burnt it down. I mean... it's a bank. Everyone needs that. Even them.

DESHAWN

I don't know, man. It is what it is.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

Look, I'm gonna help you out. They won't be able to say no if you're right there in front of them, and you'll get to help your mom out. I promise.

DESHAWN

Beat.

Alright... still, if things get awkward, I'm gonna kill myself with one of those fucking Cutco knives you got in the kitchen.

JOHNATHON

I promise, it won't. But if you do kill yourself bro, don't use those knives. It's the only set I ever sold.

DESHAWN

I don't think selling it to your parents counts.

JOHNATHON

My bank account would disagree.

DESHAWN

And stop calling me "bro." I'm not in the mood.

JOHNATHON

How about "hon?"

DESHAWN

Don't think we're there yet.

JOHNATHON

Laughs.

Now can you please tell me what the fuck you want to drink?

DESHAWN

Laughs.

I don't know, man. What the hell is "paryeeyay?"

JOHNATHON

Laughs.

No, "PERRIER." It's seltzer water.

DESHAWN

I'll just have water.

JOHNATHON

My mom likes it.

Exits.

DESHAWN

Course she does.

Groans and puts his head in his hands.

Fucking kill me.

ELIZABETH enters carrying a wine glass and goes to one of the unattended sections. She drinks throughout.

ELIZABETH
You alright, honey?

DESHAWN
Oh, uh, yes ma'am. I'm okay.

ELIZABETH
Got a headache or something? We've got ibuprofen if you need it.

DESHAWN
No ma'am, I'm fine right now.
Aside.
Maybe later.

ELIZABETH
Alright hon, and you don't need to say "ma'am," makes me feel old.
Laughs.

DESHAWN
Laughs a little forcefully.
Okay...

ELIZABETH
Much better. Johnathon get off his butt and get you something to drink?

DESHAWN
Laughs awkwardly.
Uh, yeah, he's getting me some water.

ELIZABETH
We have Perrier, too, if you want some?

DESHAWN
Yeah, Johnny told me. I'm good, though. Thanks, though.

ELIZABETH
Are you a freshman, too?

DESHAWN
No, actually, I'm a sophomore.

ELIZABETH
Oh, so you're halfway done?

DESHAWN
Yeah...

ELIZABETH
Time flies, huh?

DESHAWN
I guess it does.

ELIZABETH
Oh, believe me, you don't even know. Just wait ten more years. You'll see.

Laughs.

JONATHON enters carrying a glass. He sits at his section.

Still, time is time, nothin' you can do about it. Johnathon, where's your friend's glass?

JOHNATHON
Oh, shit, sorry, / I left it on the counter.

ELIZABETH
Overlapping.
Hey, language.

JOHNATHON
You curse.

ELIZABETH
Yeah, well, live a little longer, work a little harder, and you'll earn the right, okay? Now go fetch his drink.

DESHAWN
No, it's fine, I'll go get it ma'am – oh sorry /

ELIZABETH
Interrupting.
Don't worry about it, hon.
DESHAWN exits.
He's cute.

JOHNATHON
Mom.

ELIZABETH
What? I'm just saying. You into guys like him?

JOHNATHON
“Like him?” Seriously?

ELIZABETH
Oh stop it.

JOHNATHON

I like him cuz I like him. That's all.

ELIZABETH

Alright, alright, whatever you say.

Stands.

I'm gonna make myself a plate. Your dad should be home soon, so make sure you save some for him. I don't want to hear it tonight.

JOHNATHON

I know.

ELIZABETH exits carrying her glass.

JOHNATHON begins to eat.

DESHAWN enters carrying a glass. He sits at his section.

DESHAWN

Your mom seems nice.

JOHNATHON

And she'll get nicer and nicer with each glass.

DESHAWN

So are you gonna ask her now or later?

JOHNATHON

Oh will you relax, dude?

DESHAWN

After everything you've told me?

JOHNATHON

I'm gonna ask when my dad gets home. There's no point in asking her now, she'll just say we gotta ask Dad as well. Just *try* to relax.

DESHAWN

Don't tell me to relax. My mom was dead-serious about me not coming back.

JOHNATHON

I know.

DESHAWN

She fucking "forbade" me, man.

JOHNATHON

I know. Have a little faith in me, alright?

Beat.

DESHAWN

I shouldn't even be here.

JOHNATHON

Maybe she's right though.

Beat.

I don't know, it's like, obviously dangerous. She is your mom.

DESHAWN

I'm 20 years old, Johnny. I can take care of myself.

JOHNATHON

I know.

DESHAWN

I should be able to stand up for what I believe in, especially something as basic as "fairness."
You'd think she'd get that.

JOHNATHON

Yeah. But she's right to be worried about you.

DESHAWN

She should be proud of me. Not scared for me and fuckin' punishing me before I even get the chance.

JOHNATHON

I know. I'm just saying... I can see her point.

Beat.

Look, it's all gonna be okay. What you're doing... it's a good thing. You're being really selfless for your mom.

DESHAWN

You can say that again.

JOHNATHON

It's really admirable.

Beat.

DESHAWN

Thanks.

Beat.

I'm sorry if I'm up your ass about this. I don't mean to.

JOHNATHON

It's okay.

DESHAWN

I really do appreciate it.

JOHNATHON

Of course. I got you.

ELIZABETH enters carrying a dinner plate and her wine glass, which has been refilled or is understood to be refilled.

ELIZABETH

I am starving. How's it taste boys? I do good?

JOHNATHON

It's really good, Mom. Definitely better than what we get on campus.

ELIZABETH

Not so good there, huh?

JOHNATHON

It really could be a lot better, I'll put it that way.

ELIZABETH

Well, you're only a short drive away from home, so if you want something else just tell me and you can come pick some food up. You too, Shawn.

DESHAWN

Beat.

Thanks... it's DeShawn actually.

ELIZABETH

Oh! I'm sorry, I thought it was Shawn. Didn't you tell me it was Shawn, Johnathon?

JOHNATHON

Uh... yeah. But usually you go by Shawn, right?

Beat.

DESHAWN

Uh, yeah, right, sorry, I must have forgot.

ELIZABETH

Wait, so Shawn or DeShawn?

Beat.

DESHAWN

Both are fine.

ELIZABETH

Alright, well, you can come over with Johnathon any time to get some food. I'm sure you've had it harder than Johnathon being there a year longer than him.

DESHAWN

You get used to it.

ELIZABETH

By the way, what's your major, Shawn? I think Johnathon told me, but I forget.

DESHAWN

English.

ELIZABETH

I knew it was something like that. I love to read.

DESHAWN

So do I.

ELIZABETH

What's your favorite?

DESHAWN

What?

ELIZABETH

Your favorite book?

DESHAWN

Um... *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

ELIZABETH

Oh I *love* that one. It's been years since I read it. I hate the ending, though.

Beat.

DESHAWN

I like it.

ELIZABETH

Really? Even with him saying "I love Big Brother" and all?

DESHAWN

It didn't feel fake. The state won, like it always does.

ELIZABETH

The state?

DESHAWN

The state, the system, the uh, the way the society works. Foucault, this critical theorist I've been reading in my classes, he /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

Oh my god you are *obsessed* with this Foucault guy.

DESHAWN

Yeah. Because he's right. You should, too, being the sociology major.

ELIZABETH

What does Foucault say about *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?

DESHAWN

He doesn't really say anything about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – he argues that the state is built around the prison, that everything is built around the prison.

ELIZABETH

Everything?

DESHAWN

Everything. Schools, businesses, the military, everything.

JOHNATHON

Everything?

DESHAWN

Yeah, everything.

JOHNATHON

Just making sure.

ELIZABETH

Don't be a smartass.

JOHNATHON

You mean a "smart-aleck"?

ELIZABETH

It's not attractive.

Beat.

DESHAWN

So, uh, yeah, I think Foucault probably liked the ending of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Several beats.

ELIZABETH

How's your sociology class going, Johnathon?

JOHNATHON

It's been good.

Beat.

It's been really good actually. I really like the main concepts and themes we talk about like "situations are powerful." Like there was this one experiment where a scientist had a participant and other actors that the participant thought was, I mean were, other participants, but they weren't. And the experimenter showed a line to all of them and then some other lines and asked which line was equal to the first line. And it was super obvious what the answer was, but the participants /

ELIZABETH

Spills wine on her shirt.

Interrupting.

Oh shit, goddammit. Sorry boys, I made a mess of myself. I'll be right back.

Exits.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

So uh, basically the actor participants, they all chose one of the answers that was definitely wrong, and /

DESHAWN

Interrupting

Stop talking Johnny.

Beat.

Or should I say Johnathon? Or J-Boy? Which do you prefer again? I forget.

JOHNATHON

DeShawn I /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

Actually, I prefer Shawn now.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

I was just trying to help you.

DESHAWN

Bullshit.

JOHNATHON

Statistically White names are better responded to than Black names for everything like jobs and /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

I know the fucking statistics Johnny, okay, don't act like I'm a child who hasn't seen the world just because I haven't taken your sociology classes. Trust me, I get it.

Beat.

And don't use what you learn in the fucking classroom to *improve* my situation. They were gonna find out I was Black eventually.

JOHNATHON

Well they didn't need to know right away.

Several beats.

I'm trying to help you, DeShawn.

DESHAWN

Yeah.

JOHNATHON

I know this feels fucked.

DESHAWN

That's an understatement.

JOHNATHON

But just bear with me. We can make it work.

DESHAWN

It has to work, Johnny.

JOHNATHON

I know, I know it does. That's why I did it.

Beat.

I'm just trying to help.

Several beats.

My dad should be home soon.

DESHAWN

He's coming from work?

JOHNATHON

Yeah.

DESHAWN

He makes, uh...

JOHNATHON

Buttons.

DESHAWN

Right.

JOHNATHON

He's the owner of the business. It was founded by my great-grandfather. *He* actually made the buttons. Then my granddad took over, and he really got the company going and expanded it, and then after him my dad took ownership.

DESHAWN

Oh.

JOHNATHON

My dad doesn't actually make the buttons. He doesn't do work with his hands like that.

DESHAWN

Gotcha.

JOHNATHON

He just leads and delegates – that's more his *forte*.

ELIZABETH enters. She is wearing a new shirt and is carrying her wine glass.

Right, Mom?

ELIZABETH

What, honey?

JOHNATHON

Dad's forte is leading and delegating.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, he sure thinks it. You know what you get when you are an only child, getting all the attention as a kid? You get asshole syndrome. My husband's diagnosed with it.

JOHNATHON

If only he could get a prescription for it.

ELIZABETH and JOHNATHON laugh. DESHAWN laughs awkwardly.

DESHAWN

Don't you have a sister, Johnny?

JOHNATHON

Yeah, Mary, she's uh, at one of her friend's houses, right, Mom?

ELIZABETH

Yep, she's sleeping over there tonight.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

Did she or her friends know the kid that got killed last week?

ELIZABETH

No, I don't think so.

JOHNATHON

There's a vigil happening at their high school tonight, right?

ELIZABETH

Yes, I believe so.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

Gunned down by a fucking cop for nothing.

ELIZABETH

First off, language, again, and second off, you don't know that.

JOHNATHON

It was for nothing, Mom.

ELIZABETH

Robbing a store sounds a little like something to me.

JOHNATHON

Getting shot five times in the back for stealing something from a CVS /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

I thought it was a Walgreens?

JOHNATHON

No it was a CVS. He did not /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

I could have sworn it was a Walgreens.

JOHNATHON

Walgreens, CVS, who gives a /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

Johnathon.

JOHNATHON

Fine. Who cares which store it was? It doesn't matter. The point is he got shot five times in the back for stealing one bottle of who knows what from a store. He did not need to die.

ELIZABETH

He didn't need to be stealing either.

JOHNATHON

He was just a kid! Kids do dumb shit, I mean things! And of course it didn't help that he was Black.

ELIZABETH

He should have known better then.

JOHNATHON

What's that supposed to mean?

ELIZABETH

If he was smart, he would have realized that he'd be in even more danger when stealing because he's Black, right?

Beat.

Then, he should've had even more reason to not do what he did.

JOHNATHON

That's...

ELIZABETH

Am I wrong?

JOHNATHON

No, you're not wrong /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

Then there you go.

JOHNATHON

But that's not good enough.

ELIZABETH

Not good enough?

JOHNATHON

It's not fair. Black / people should not have to avoid things or situations just because they are Black.

ELIZABETH

Overlapping.

Wake up honey, nothing about this world is fair. Absolutely nothing.

JOHNATHON

So what about Shawn, huh?

DESHAWN

Uh...

ELIZABETH

What about Shawn?

JOHNATHON

Should he also have to think about what situations he puts himself in because he's Black? Should he always have that in his mind, day in and day out, because the world is not fair? What about Shawn, Mom?

ELIZABETH

Well does he rob stores?

Beat.

Do you, Shawn?

DESHAWN

Uh... no.

ELIZABETH

And Shawn, do you run from the cops when they ask you questions?

DESHAWN

No.

ELIZABETH

And do you do anything that could put you in danger?

DESHAWN

No.

ELIZABETH

Then there's your answer. Your friend Shawn is a smart Black man. He doesn't put himself in bad situations because he knows better. That kid *obviously* did not need to get shot and killed, but he was because he wasn't a smart Black man like Shawn. In this world, you have to know better. You have to outsmart the world.

JOHNATHON

Try telling that to the kid's parents.

ELIZABETH

You know what, Johnathon, if you *care* so much, why aren't you at the vigil tonight?

Beat.

JOHNATHON

Cuz I'm having dinner with you guys.

ELIZABETH

We could have had dinner a different night. You still could have made it to the vigil. So why aren't you there? You do care, don't you?

JOHNATHON

Yes, Mom, I do /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

Then what are you doing here arguing with me?

Sound of door opening and closing.

Your dad's home. Don't start with him tonight.

ELIZABETH exits, bringing her wine glass with her.

DESHAWN

Johnny. What the fuck /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

I know.

ALLEN

ALLEN enters carrying a briefcase. He goes to the section of the dinner table that has not been used yet.

He takes off his jacket and puts it on the back of the chair and places his briefcase by the chair while speaking.

22,697 steps.

Beat.

DESHAWN

Uh...

ALLEN

22,697 steps today. That's ten miles.

JOHNATHON

Wow.

ALLEN

Shut up. What time you wake up today, noon?

Exits.

JOHNATHON

Jesus Christ.

DESHAWN

Nice to meet you, too.

JOHNATHON

Tell me about it.

Several beats.

When they both sit down I'll ask them.

DESHAWN

Good.

Beat.

Thanks for this.

JOHNATHON

Of course.

DESHAWN

Seriously. Thank you.

JOHNATHON

I told you, I got your back. Always.

Beat.

After tonight, you uh, wanna go to The Cup or something? I know I'll want to be out of this house after dinner.

DESHAWN

Sure, Johnny. That'd be good.

JOHNATHON

Sweet.

ELIZABETH

Enters.

How many steps this time?

JOHNATHON

Twenty-two thousand something.

ELIZABETH
Wow. Good for him.

ALLEN
From offstage.
Can the person who takes the last of the paper towels *please* put in a new roll? Please?

ELIZABETH
Sorry, honey!

ALLEN
From offstage.
Just *think*, you know?
Enters carrying a dinner plate, some silverware, and a beer glass.

ELIZABETH
I said sorry.

ALLEN
I know you did, just, proactiveness eliminates apologies. And Johnny, if you see it's empty, which I know you did, do something about it. Awareness – you can do it.

JOHNATHON
Thanks, Dad.
Beat.

ALLEN
You must be Shawn, right?

DESHAWN
Yes, sir.

ALLEN
Johnny's been talking our ears off about you. You a freshman, too?

DESHAWN
No, sir. I'm in my second year.

ALLEN
What's your major?

DESHAWN
English, sir.

ALLEN
And what do you plan on doing with that?

JOHNATHON
Dad.

ALLEN
What?

JOHNATHON
Don't attack him.

ALLEN
Oh don't be so gay. I'm just getting to know him.
Beat.

DESHAWN
I'm looking to go to graduate school to do research in a critical theory, which I'll figure out later, and then hopefully teach on the college level.

ALLEN
Good for you! You got a plan. The concept of a plan is something that Johnny boy is still struggling to figure out.

JOHNATHON
Seriously?

ALLEN
Stop it stop it I'm just busting your balls. He this sensitive on campus? This looks really good by the way, Liz.

ELIZABETH
Thanks.

ALLEN
I swear, Liz can cook better than any restaurant in this town. Thank the gods for all these steps or I'd be fifty pounds heavier.

ELIZABETH
I have to do something well to earn my keep here.
ALLEN laughs.

ALLEN
Oh, I almost forgot. That Honda parked on the street, is that yours, Shawn?

DESHAWN
Yes, sir, it is.

ALLEN

Would you mind moving it behind the tree on the side of our driveway? We got some complaints from the fucking HOA about not having cars parked on the street and I don't feel like dealing with them anymore about it.

DESHAWN

Of course. One sec.

DESHAWN exits.

ALLEN

Seems like a good kid.

JOHNATHON

Yeah. He's one of my best friends.

ALLEN

Yeah... you didn't say he was Black.

JOHNAHTON

Does it matter?

ALLEN

No, of course not. Just surprised that's all.

ELIZABETH

His actual name is *DeShawn*.

ALLEN

Oh, well, that definitely would have been a uh, signifier.

Laughs.

ELIZABETH

How was your day?

ALLEN

Frustrating. These fucking BLMers in the front have been calling out exponentially, meaning I have to work the front way more than usual, which I should not be doing in the first place. And of course HR makes it a pain to get them fired in a way that doesn't get my ass burned with "wrongful termination under account of racial discrimination."

ELIZABETH

That's so ridiculous.

ALLEN

How many days did you call out in all the time you worked up front, Liz? / Once? Twice?

ELIZABETH

Overlapping.

I couldn't afford to call out. Not back then.

ALLEN

Exactly, exactly. But they call out five times in two months. Fucking typical. And I know what you're going to say Johnny, okay, I get it, but you try dealing with them for twenty-five years and then tell me there isn't something wrong with the culture.

JOHNATHON

I don't even know what to say.

ALLEN

Good – maybe you're learning to listen then.

DESHAWN enters. He returns to his section of the dining table.

DESHAWN

It's moved.

ELIZABETH

Thanks, dear.

ALL eat dinner for several beats.

DESHAWN

Thank you again for dinner. Johnny's right – it's a nice break from what we normally get.

ELIZABETH

Of course, of course! You two can come over anytime for dinner. We're only, what, twenty minutes away?

JOHNATHON

Yeah it's nothing.

DESHAWN

Must be nice living so close.

JOHNATHON

It definitely helps with storing clothes and other stuff.

ALLEN

Be careful, I might start charging you for storage.

JOHNATHON

Thanks, Dad.

ALLEN

You're welcome, son.

ELIZABETH

Actually, you could pay for your storage by mowing the lawn tomorrow morning.

JOHNATHON

Sighs.

Why don't you just pay that company that does everyone else's lawn to do it?

ELIZABETH

Sure! You got seventy-five dollars I could borrow to give the Mexicans every Tuesday?

JOHNATHON

Mom /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

I didn't think so. So cut the grass. / I shouldn't have to ask twice.

ALLEN

Overlapping.

Come on, contribute.

JOHNATHON

Look, I'm sorry, I'll cut the grass, okay, I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

Unless Shawny here wants to earn a few bucks tomorrow?

JOHNATHON

You're not gonna have Shawn cut the grass for you.

ELIZABETH

Why not? You don't seem to want to do it. Want to make a few bucks, Shawn?

DESHAWN

I've actually never used a lawn mower before.

ALLEN

Get out.

DESHAWN

Nope. My mom and I live in the city. Not much grass to keep control of there.

ELIZABETH

Well that would / make sense.

ALLEN

Overlapping.

What does your mother do?

DESHAWN

Beat.

She works at a bank.

ALLEN

And your father?

DESHAWN

He's not with us. May I go get seconds, Mrs. Frank?

Stands to exit.

ELIZABETH

Of course! I always get carried away and cook too much anyway.

DESHAWN exits carrying his plate.

Beat.

ALLEN

That's not the only thing you get carried away with.

ELIZABETH

Don't.

ALLEN

How many glasses have you had?

ELIZABETH

Clearly not enough.

JOHNATHON

Please, / not right now guys.

ALLEN

Overlapping.

I'm just worried, that's all.

ELIZABETH

You're worried?

ALLEN
Yes.

ELIZABETH
About me?

ALLEN
Yes.

ELIZABETH
Wow. Look at you go. Worried about someone besides yourself.

ALLEN
Liz, can you please /

ELIZABETH
Standing up to exit.
No, you deserve a gold star for this. Really.

ALLEN
It's getting worse, Liz.
ELIZABETH begins to exit.
Just like your father.
ELIZABETH stops.
Beat.
ELIZABETH returns and stands at her section.

ELIZABETH
You done?

ALLEN
Liz, I just /

ELIZABETH
Interrupting.
Are you done?
Beat.
Good. Then do me a favor and choose your words fucking carefully for the rest of the night.
Downs the remaining wine in her glass.
I'm going to go refill my glass. Johnathon, want some more water?

JOHNATHON
No thank you.
ELIZABETH exits carrying her wine glass.
Several beats.

ALLEN

She's just stubborn.

Several beats.

I do worry about her.

DESHAWN enters carrying his plate.

Several beats.

ELIZABETH enters carrying her wine glass.

JOHNATHON

So, uh, there's actually something I wanted to talk to you both about.

Beat.

Winter break is coming up soon, and Shawn needs a place to stay. Can he stay here?

Beat.

ALLEN

The whole break?

JOHNATHON

Yeah.

ALLEN

Isn't that a whole month?

JOHNATHON

Around that yeah.

Beat.

ALLEN

I don't know.

JOHNATHON

Why?

ALLEN

That's a long time, Johnny.

JOHNATHON

It's not that long.

ALLEN

Johnny...

JOHNATHON

What?

Beat.

ELIZABETH

Why can't you stay with your mom?

Beat.

DESHAWN

She doesn't think it would be safe for me there.

ELIZABETH

Safe?

DESHAWN

There's a lot of protesting and riots happening near where we live. It started alright, but um, it's gotten pretty bad, and she doesn't want me to get hurt.

Beat.

ALLEN

That's really unfortunate.

JOHNATHON

"Unfortunate"?

ALLEN

Yeah, unfortunate, you heard me.

ELIZABETH

What about the campus? Doesn't the college provide housing for the winter break?

JOHNATHON

It's really expensive.

ALLEN

How expensive is it?

DESHAWN

After everything, like the room, and food, and my car, and other logistics /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

Over one thousand dollars.

ELIZABETH

Jeez Louise.

JOHNATHON

Yeah. It's a lot.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON (continued)
So?

ALLEN
You don't have any money saved up, Shawn?

JOHNATHON
Dad.

DESHAWN
All my money goes to tuition.

ALLEN
And your mother can't pay for it?

DESHAWN
She can.

ALLEN
Then there's your solution.

DESHAWN
But barely. My mom can't really pay that kind of money right now. That's why I've been talking to Johnny about /

ALLEN
Interrupting.
What about your father?

DESHAWN
I'm sorry?

ALLEN
Can your father help?

DESHAWN
He can't. He's not with /

ALLEN
Interrupting.
Yeah, he's not with you guys, I remember.
Beat.

That's something I wish was better about your culture. I know too many Black people, many of them my employees, that grew up without their father. It's not good for the family dynamic, so many fathers missing. I mean it has just decimated the ability for so many young Black men and women to grow up in good households and live better lives, you know?

ALLEN (continued)

Beat.

I'm sorry that it's affected you, too.

Several beats.

DESHAWN

My dad was killed by a drunk driver when I was three.

Several beats.

But yeah, I'm sorry, too.

Beat.

Excuse me.

DESHAWN exits carrying his glass.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

I told you to choose your words carefully.

ALLEN

I didn't know.

ELIZABETH

I know you didn't know. That's the point.

ALLEN

I was being sympathetic and trying to, to connect, / okay. I didn't know.

ELIZABETH

Overlapping.

No. You assumed. Don't sugarcoat it.

ALLEN

I don't see you being sympathetic.

ELIZABETH

I am sympathetic. I feel very sorry for that boy, and his mother, especially her. To raise a kid by yourself – I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

So he can stay?

Several beats.

DESHAWN enters carrying his glass and sits at his section.

Well?

Beat.

ALLEN

Sure. You can stay, Shawn.

DESHAWN

Really?

ALLEN

Of course.

DESHAWN

Thank you so much, sir, you don't know how much this helps me and my mom.

ALLEN

Well I have a pretty good idea. I've been providing for / two humans for nearly twenty years now. It's not cheap.

ELIZABETH

Overlapping and aside.

"I've been providing."

JOHNATHON

I'm so sorry for the inconvenience.

ALLEN

We'll talk about payment plans in a few years.

JOHNATHON

I didn't realize that I was living in a bed and breakfast.

ALLEN

Just show me a little respect, alright. You could be much worse off right now.

JOHNATHON

I just don't understand why you have to guilt-trip me for costing you / money every chance you get. You decided to have me. You decided to have a kid.

ELIZABETH

Overlapping.

Johnathon, please not tonight.

ALLEN

Cut me a break. I'm not guilt-tripping you, I'm simply alluding to the fact that people are expensive. It is expensive to have Shawn stay with us for an entire month. No disrespect, Shawn.

DESHAWN
No, I understand.

JOHNATHON
There's no way that money is a problem.

ALLEN
How would you know? You ever feed and provide shelter for another human being before?

JOHNATHON
Obviously / not.

ALLEN
Overlapping.
Then you *obviously* don't know what you're talking about. And it's my money, so don't tell me how I can and cannot use it.

ELIZABETH
Our money.

ALLEN
Our money.
Beat.
It's just not cheap, alright. Just be a little more aware.
Several beats.

ELIZABETH
We could have Shawn earn it.

JOHNATHON
What?

ALLEN
Liz, we don't need to /

ELIZABETH
Interrupting.
We can have him do work around the house. You have a car, right?

DESHAWN
Yeah.

ELIZABETH
He can run errands for us. Hell, he can mow the lawn for starters tomorrow morning. I know you'd be happy about that, Johnathon.

ALLEN
I don't / know.

ELIZABETH
Overlapping
I could really use the help. What do you think, Shawn?

DESHAWN
Uh... I mean /

JOHNATHON
Interrupting.
Wait a second, are you really thinking of hiring him as the fucking help?

ALLEN
/ Johnathon, seriously.

ELIZABETH
Overlapping.
No one said that I'm hiring Shawn here as the help, alright.

ALLEN
Don't be so dramatic.

ELIZABETH
I'm just saying that Shawn could legitimately / earn his stay here instead of us giving him a space for free. Your father has a point – people aren't cheap.
Beat.

JOHNATHON
Overlapping.
Jesus Christ.

ELIZABETH
I really could use the help. And if you'd be willing, Shawn, then I'd think it'd make things fair.

DESHAWN
You're right, it would be fair of me to, uh, earn it.

ELIZABETH
Well great!
ELIZABETH exits carrying her plate and utensils.
Several beats.

ALLEN
You have any brothers or sisters, Shawn?

DESHAWN

No, sir. It's just me and my mom.

ALLEN

I was an only child, too. It's a weird thing, isn't? Growing up by yourself? I think we have it harder than others that grew up with a sibling. There's almost too much isolation and not enough, well, people, know what I mean?

DESHAWN

Yeah, I think I do.

ELIZABETH enters carrying her wine glass.

ALLEN

That's why I wanted Johnny to have a brother, or a sister. To have someone to grow up with. I didn't want him to experience what we went through.

DESHAWN

Of course not.

ALLEN

Where is your sister, Johnny?

JOHNATHON

She's at her friend's house having a sleepover.

ALLEN

Which one?

ELIZABETH

Grace.

ALLEN

Good. As long as it's not with that other girl.

JOHNATHON

Other girl?

ELIZABETH

She has this one friend that just, well, we don't think / is the best influence on her.

ALLEN

Overlapping.

Whenever she's here all they talk about is politics and Black Lives Matter and everything else in between and it just is not what I feel like listening to in my own house when I come back from work.

JOHNATHON

Cuz you think it's all bullshit.

ALLEN

/ Not all of it is bullshit, obviously. But I think we can at least all agree, even Shawn here, that all lives matter. Right, Shawn?

ELIZABETH

Overlapping.

Aside.

I give up. Curse as much as you want to. I don't care.

DESHAWN

Uh, yeah...

ALLEN

Good.

Beat.

And that was something I was honestly worried about with Shawn staying here all break. I didn't want to not be able to come home and decompress and not have to deal with anything as remotely ridiculous as what Mary and that friend of hers is always talking about. But Shawn, you seem to be intelligent. I guess that's what a college education is primarily for: eliminating ignorance.

Beat.

DESHAWN

Is Mary's friend Black, too?

ALLEN

Yep.

DESHAWN

And you think she's ignorant?

ALLEN

Don't you?

JOHNATHON

Wait, that's why you didn't want to let Shawn stay? Cuz you didn't want to share a space with him?

ALLEN

Don't try to put words into my mouth, boy.

JOHNATHON

Don't call me boy.

ALLEN

I'll call you what I want, alright, I made you.

ELIZABETH

You're both acting like boys.

Beat.

ALLEN

This is our space. I didn't want to have to feel the need to pretend in my own house. I do enough pretending at work every day.

JOHNATHON

So basically you didn't want to have Shawn here because he's Black, right?

The following lines are spoken nearly at the same time.

ALLEN

Jesus Christ.

DESHAWN

Johnny.

ELIZABETH

Oh here we go.

JOHNATHON

It's the truth, right?

ALLEN

Stop it. / Stop it.

JOHNATHON

Overlapping.

You're so full of shit.

DESHAWN

Johnny, please.

ALLEN

I am not racist. I work with Black people every day, I speak with Black people every day, I understand their struggles.

JOHNATHON

Sure, Dad.

ALLEN

You're making a fool of yourself.

JOHNATHON

No, Dad, you're the / fool.

DESHAWN

Overlapping.

Johnny.

JOHNATHON

What?

DESHAWN

Please stop.

ALLEN

Listen to your friend. You don't see him calling me a racist. And he's the one who's Black.

ALLEN exits carrying his plate and silverware.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

Remember when I said not to start anything with your dad tonight? Imagine what it'd be like if you had, I don't know, listened to me and done what I said.

JOHNATHON

Okay, Mom.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you should listen to me more often. That way nice dinners like this wouldn't happen.

JOHNATHON

Okay, Mom.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

He provides for you, for me, for your sister. You gotta respect that.

JOHNATHON

That's not good enough for me.

ELIZABETH

Then you don't know what a problem is.

JOHNATHON

What?

ELIZABETH

You don't know what a problem is.

JOHNATHON

Educate me then, Mom. What is a problem?

ELIZABETH
A problem is, uh /

JOHNATHON
Interrupting.
Yeah?

ALLEN enters carrying a tumbler glass. He sits at his section.

ELIZABETH
It's a /

JOHNATHON
Interrupting.
Go on.

ELIZABETH
I will if you let me finish.
Beat.

Look, you'll know what a problem is when it hits you right in the face. And it will, one day. But right now, you don't have problems, so you don't know what a problem is. You don't know because of me. Because of your dad. You should be thankful. The best answer to a problem is not having a fucking problem in the first place.

ALLEN
Liz /

ELIZABETH
Interrupting.
What?

JOHNATHON
That doesn't mean you get to qualify my own, Mom.

ELIZABETH
Oh please.

JOHNATHON
I shouldn't have to reach a fucking age limit to be able to say that "I know what a problem is."

ELIZABETH
It's not about age.

JOHNATHON
Seems like it is.

ELIZABETH

No, what I'm saying is that you haven't earned it yet.

JOHNATHON

What the fuck does that even mean?

ELIZABETH

It means that you haven't lived hard enough to earn the right.

JOHNATHON

The right?

ELIZABETH

You don't have the right to be sad or complain, or even be depressed about life yet. Because you don't know what hard life is. You don't know what a problem is, Johnathon. Period.

JOHNATHON

My bad, I didn't realize that you have lived the hardest life ever in the history of the world.

ELIZABETH

Johnathon.

JOHNATHON

No one. Ever. Has lived a life harder than my Mother. Period.

ELIZABETH

Johnathon.

JOHNATHON

I think you deserve a medal.

ALLEN

Will both of you knock it off? For fuck sake.

JOHNATHON

If you are as all knowing about problems as you say you are, I've got a question for you.

ALLEN

Johnathon.

JOHNATHON

It's just a question. I promise.

Beat.

Does Shawn know what a problem is?

ELIZABETH
Shawn?

JOHNATHON
You seem to think I don't have problems, or even know what a problem is. So what about Shawn?

DESHAWN
Johnny, I don't /

JOHNATHON
Interrupting.
Let her answer. It's just a question.
Beat.

ELIZABETH
He probably knows a little more than you.

JOHNATHON
Why?

ELIZABETH
Because he lives with just his mom.

JOHNATHON
That's fair.
Beat.
But what about because he's Black?

ELIZABETH
No. Just because he's Black doesn't mean he knows what a problem is.

JOHNATHON
Thought you'd say that.
Stands up to exit.

ELIZABETH
It's ridiculous to believe that. You can't /

JOHNATHON
Interrupting.
You're so fucking blind it's scary. Both of you are.

ALLEN
Christ, Johnny, stop being so fucking gay and /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

No, Dad. I won't stop being gay. I can't. So stop fucking saying that.

Beat.

You know, I thought that Shawn being here would maybe make you think before you talk and realize that the things you say are insulting, and ignorant, and just completely wrong. But here you are saying the same shit again and again without even a fucking clue. And I'm the one who is unaware. The amount of bullshit both of you are capable of is insane. I mean it fucking smells in here.

Exits.

ALLEN

Excuse me.

Exits.

Several beats.

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry that my son is the dramatic piece of work he is.

Beat.

I didn't say anything remotely like he said, right?

DESHAWN

No, you're fine.

ELIZABETH

Okay, good, he just exaggerates beyond reason sometimes. Just like his father.

DESHAWN

Right.

ELIZABETH

And the whole thing about Black people having more problems just because they're Black just drives me up the wall.

Beat.

I mean... it is just ridiculous. Like, let me get this straight, your life is inherently harder than mine?

Beat.

Ridiculous.

Beat.

It's skin. Fucking skin. What am I missing?

Beat.

DESHAWN

I...

ELIZABETH

What?

DESHAWN

Nothing.

ELIZABETH

No, what'd you say?

DESHAWN

I didn't say anything, ma'am.

ELIZABETH

Don't call me "ma'am." Tell me what you said.

Beat.

DESHAWN

I was saying that... I don't think it's that simple.

ELIZABETH

What's not that simple?

DESHAWN

You said it's just skin. But it's not. There's... a lot more going on than that.

ELIZABETH

Like what?

DESHAWN

I, Black people, experience problems that go way deeper than people not liking us because of the color of our skin. It's institutional and integrated into /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

Shawn, that's just what the one percent and their media is feeding you. They want you to think you have it harder. They want you to complain because then they get you to lose focus of the *real* problem. The problem that has always been the problem and always will be the problem. *Money*. It's the one percent against everyone else. They fucking laugh at us having these conversations about race and political correctness and this and that and all this other bullshit that really just doesn't matter. It's all about money. They have it, and we don't.

ALLEN and JOHNATHON enter.

Beat.

Money, money, money, money, money /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

You okay, Mom?

ELIZABETH

I'm fine.

Beat.

And don't assume I've always had it easy. Cuz I haven't. Not by a long shot.

Beat.

You know... I, I grew up in a house that had gray water. Gray. Water. I'd come back home from school as a kid and ask, "Why's the water at school see-through, Mommy?" Can you believe that?

Beat.

And then I had to drop out of school to work so that I didn't starve. You wanna, you wanna know what's a problem, Johnathon? Starving. That's when your body literally hurts because you don't have enough food. *No one in this house gets that.* And you wanna talk and talk about fairness and equality and all these big words and shit.

ALLEN

Liz, do you want to maybe /

ELIZABETH

Interrupting.

Come talk to me when you have to drop out of school to work. Come talk to me when, when your own father steals the money that you make so that he can stay drunk twenty-four seven. Come talk to me when you have to lock yourself in the bathroom so that your father can't take you from your own mother who is on the ground in the other room with blood coming out of her face. Come talk to me when there are nights, days, weeks, you can't remember because you have spent years forcing them so far away that you can't even find them anymore.

Beat.

Come talk to me... when you have to marry a rich man, a member of the same group of people that has fucked you since birth... to make sure that your kids don't have to go through anything like I had to.

Beat.

Then we'll talk.

Beat.

ELIZABETH finishes her wine.

Hope you all liked dinner.

ELIZABETH exits carrying her glass.

Several beats.

ALLEN

Shawn, could you excuse us for a minute? I just need to talk to Johnny about something.

DESHAWN

Uh, yes sir. Where do I...

ALLEN

You can just go to the guest room.

DESHAWN

Alright.

ALLEN

Thanks. And if you could drop your plate and stuff off in the kitchen that'd be great.

DESHAWN

Okay.

DESHAWN exits carrying his glass, plate, and utensils.

Beat.

ALLEN

That is exactly what I'm talking about.

JOHNATHON

She's drunk.

ALLEN

It's still an outburst, Johnny. Besides, having a little too much to drink isn't exactly uncommon for her.

JOHNATHON

So what, just because Mom can't hold her wine he can't stay?

ALLEN

No, you're missing the point entirely.

JOHNATHON

It's hard when there isn't a point to begin with.

ALLEN

Having him stay here for a whole month is going to be uncomfortable.

JOHNATHON laughs.

He seems like a good kid, really, but he's going to fuel conversations and outbursts and it's going to be uncomfortable for me, for your mother, and even for you and your sister. There's nothing he could do about it – it will happen. It just did.

JOHNATHON

I just can't believe you actually admitted that Black people make you uncomfortable.

ALLEN

Christ Johnny, he doesn't make me uncomfortable. The conversations he is going to cause do. And the outbursts from your mother and you and your sister are going to make our home feel

ALLEN (continued)

unsafe. It will turn hostile no matter / what Shawn does. Him being Black will do just enough by itself. It's out of his control.

JOHNATHON

Overlapping.

You and Mom are the ones being hostile!

ALLEN

Don't you understand that?

JOHNATHON

All I'm hearing is you don't want to have Shawn stay here because he's Black.

ALLEN

It's what's best for everyone. Even for Shawn. If you think we will be uncomfortable, he is going to want to kill himself or everyone in this house by the end of the month. I know I would. He'll be much happier by himself in his own space than in here. Believe me, it'll benefit everyone.

JOHNATHON

His mom can't afford it.

ALLEN

He said she could barely afford it. That still means she has the money.

JOHNATHON

She doesn't even have a job right now, Dad!

ALLEN

He said she works at a bank?

JOHNATHON

Well, he lied, so before you fucking bankrupt Shawn's family you might wanna know that.

ALLEN

How was I supposed to know?

JOHNATHON

What you're supposed to do is fucking let him stay here, Dad.

ALLEN

Johnny, it's not happening. I will not make our home uncomfortable just to help out some friend of yours. It isn't right.

Beat.

I'm sorry, Johnny, but it's not our problem.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON
Help him pay for it.

ALLEN
No.

JOHNATHON
You already told him yes. You really just gonna bring him back here and tell him that you changed your mind and not give him anything else in return? Just “thanks for coming over for dinner and go fuck yourself?”

ALLEN
He’s a big boy – he can handle it.

JOHNATHON
His family’s bank account sure can’t.

ALLEN
Johnny / it is not our problem.

JOHNATHON
Overlapping.
They’re broke, Dad. They need help.
Beat.
It’s the least you can do.
Beat.

ALLEN
Johnny. I can’t just give some friend of yours money because they’re not doing well. They’re not family.

JOHNATHON
Then do it for me.
Beat.
Don’t help them. Help me.
Beat.
Please.
Several beats.

ALLEN
Fine. I’ll help you.

JOHNATHON
Thank you.

ALLEN

But I'm not paying for all of it, alright. I'll pay half. That's what, five hundred dollars?

JOHNATHON

That's right.

ALLEN

That's still five hundred dollars, Johnny. That's not just some gas money.

JOHNATHON

I know. If you want... I'll mow the grass for you during the break.

ALLEN

Every week.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

Every week.

ALLEN

Good. I'll write the check for him tonight.

JOHNATHON

Cool. I'll go get him.

Stands to exit.

ALLEN

Don't go yet, I still want to talk to you.

JOHNATHON

Dad /

ALLEN

Interrupting.

Just a few more minutes, okay, come on, you're my son, I don't have as many minutes left with you as I wish I did.

JOHNATHON sits back down.

Beat.

I'm still glad you came by. I really am. Even if you did bring your BLM friend.

JOHNATHON

Jesus Christ.

ALLEN

Chill out, alright, you know I'm just busting your balls. It keeps me young.

Beat.

ALLEN (continued)

But seriously... I missed you. I feel like I haven't seen you all year, and Mary's been in and out of the house like it's a fucking motel... I miss spending time as a unit, you know?

Beat.

I hope that we can do that more during the break. I think it'll be good for all of us. Especially your mom. Her nest is starting to get a little empty.

Several beats.

I love that you challenge me. I know it doesn't seem like it sometimes, but I do. Of course, I'll tell you that you're wrong when you're wrong, and I may even tell you that you're wrong when you may be right, but I'm in love with your passion. I'm so proud of it. I can see me in it. And I know that's my pride talking but hey, you're my son, I can't help it. It's my job to see me in you.

Beat.

I don't think many families are talking like we do. Not many parents let their kids come back and even speak for themselves. Your mother is right – you should be grateful for that.

JOHNATHON

I know.

ALLEN

I know you know, but... be. Do. Don't fake it.

Beat.

What I'm trying to say, though, is that I'm rooting for you, Johnny. I'm rooting for you every step of the way. Even when you call me old or racist or ignorant, I still love you. I still respect you. One hundred percent.

Several beats.

I love this family because we have the respect for each other to be honest with each other, and we shout our views to each other. That's respect. It's not dysfunction. Not at all. It's fucking respect, and I'm proud of it. I'm proud of this family. And I'm so proud of you. I always will be. You can do whatever the fuck you want with the rest of your life, and I'll always be proud of you. Even if sometimes you find it hard to be proud of me.

Beat.

I don't mean to guilt-trip you by saying that. I just know... you're further away from me than you used to be. And I get that's because of college and everything, you're learning to be independent, but I still see you as my boy.

Beat.

You are my boy.

Beat.

Just, remember that it's the moments that count. It's these moments when we are together, really talking, really being with each other, that count. Cherish these moments, son. Live in these moments. They're all we got.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON

Dad.

ALLEN

Yes, son?

Beat.

JOHNATHON

I'm grateful for what you do, and what I've been given.

Beat.

And I love you... and I'm proud of you.

Beat.

But you make it so hard... all the time and...

Beat.

I just need some help.

Beat.

I'm gonna go get Shawn.

JOHNATHON exits.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON and DESHAWN enter.

ALLEN

Shawn, me and Johnny were talking, and uh, I'm sorry to tell you but I'm afraid we can't have you stay here anymore during the break.

DESHAWN

Oh.

ALLEN

It's nothing personal, it's just too last minute. You'd like it better on campus anyway, having your own space. It'd feel crowded here and I know no one wants that.

DESHAWN

Yeah.

ALLEN

And since I know that it would be really difficult for your mother to pay for all of your expenses, I'm willing to offer you half of what's needed.

DESHAWN

Really?

ALLEN

It's the least I can do.

DESHAWN

That's very nice of you, sir.

Beat.

Let me think about it overnight, if you don't mind.

ALLEN

Of course. I'll write the check out anyway in case I don't see you tomorrow morning. You said it was about one thousand dollars total, right?

DESHAWN

Uh, yeah.

ALLEN

Okay.

Takes out a check and begins to write on it.

What's your last name?

DESHAWN

Smith.

ALLEN

Finishes writing on the check.

Well there you are, Mr. Shawn Smith. A check for five hundred dollars. It's yours if you want it.

Places check on his section of the dining table.

Stands.

DESHAWN

Um, thanks, sir. I really appreciate it.

ALLEN

Like I said, it's the least I can do. Johnny, if you could do all the dishes, that'd be really helpful. I know your mother would appreciate it to not see a mess in the kitchen tomorrow morning.

Exits carrying his glass, plate, and utensils.

JOHNATHON

This'll take forever.

Exits carrying his glass, plate, and utensils.

Beat.

DESHAWN

Take your time.

DESHAWN looks at the check from his section.

Several beats.

He sits and pulls a cell phone out of his pocket. He dials on it to make a call. He puts the phone to his ear.

Several beats.

Hey Mom, it's me again. I really need you to call me back. I just had dinner with Johnny's family and um... it was... well they just talked and talked and talked...

MARY enters. She carries with her a poster that reads "AWARENESS IS EASY.

IGNORANCE TAKES EFFORT." She goes to ALLEN's section.

The dad, he offered me, um, I just really need to talk to you.

DESHAWN puts his phone back in his pocket.

MARY

They talked a lot, huh?

DESHAWN

Surprised.

Jesus!

MARY

Laughs.

Sorry that I scared you.

DESHAWN

It's okay, I just didn't see you.

MARY

Yeah I just didn't want to be loud.

Beat.

Are you Shawn?

DESHAWN

DeShawn, actually.

MARY

Oh shit, I'm sorry.

DESHAWN

It's okay. I'm guessing you're Mary?

MARY

Yeah. Johnny's talked a lot about you.

DESHAWN

That's what I've heard.

MARY

You don't want him to?

Beat.

Sorry, you don't have to answer that. I'm just being nosy.

DESHAWN

It's okay.

Beat.

What's with the poster?

MARY

Oh, um, it was my poster for the vigil.

DESHAWN

The vigil?

MARY

Yeah, there was a vigil tonight at the school for the kid who got killed by that police officer. I didn't know him too well but he was in my Pre-Calc class. A lot of us brought posters to carry since the news were there taking pictures and uh, this is the one I made.

DESHAWN

"Awareness is easy. Ignorance takes effort."

MARY

I know it might sound wrong or backwards at first but /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

No. I love it. I might steal it.

MARY

Thanks.

DESHAWN

I could have sworn that your family said that you were sleeping over with a friend.

MARY

Yeah that's what I told them.

DESHAWN

Oh.

MARY

I'd rather not have that conversation. Makes things easier.

DESHAWN

Yeah, that makes sense.

MARY

It seems that you got sucked into it, though. They talked and they talked, huh?

DESHAWN

Yeah.

MARY
How bad was it?

DESHAWN
It wasn't pleasant.

MARY
I'm sorry for your loss.

DESHAWN
Yeah. My loss of time.
Beat.

MARY
MARY picks up the check from the table.
Is this your name?

DESHAWN
Uh, yeah. It's mine.

MARY
Why do you have a check?

DESHAWN
Your dad gave it to me.

MARY
My dad wrote you a check... for five hundred dollars?

DESHAWN
Yep.

MARY
You must have made one nice fucking impression.

DESHAWN
I guess I did.

MARY
What's it for?
Beat.

DESHAWN
I can't go back home for winter break, so I need a place to stay. I was hoping to stay here, but that doesn't seem to be an option anymore.

MARY

I'm so sorry.

DESHAWN

Your dad actually said yes at first, but he changed his mind later. Now he's offering to pay half of what it'd cost me to live on campus during the break. Thus, the check.

MARY

So he won't let you stay here, but he'll give you five hundred dollars to stay somewhere else.

DESHAWN

Yep.

MARY

Sounds about right.

Beat.

Why can't you go home?

DESHAWN

My mom says I can't.

MARY

Why?

DESHAWN

She's afraid I'll join the protests.

MARY

Oh.

DESHAWN

Most of them are peaceful and fine, but others have gotten pretty bad. The bank down the street from us, where she worked, it got burnt down a week ago.

MARY

Jesus.

DESHAWN

And now people are getting taken off the street in vans and shit and it's... it's getting scary and she's, well, she's scared that I'll get hurt. So now she's not letting me come back home at all.

Beat.

MARY

Shit.

DESHAWN

It's just frustrating, you know?

Beat.

I'm just so tired of waiting for this generation of racist fucks born in the 50s and 60s to die out. They aren't dying fast enough.

Beat.

But she said I'm all she's got left, so...

Beat.

I'm sorry if I'm, I'm uh /

MARY

Interrupting.

No, no it's okay. I asked you, you know.

DESHAWN

True.

Several beats.

Are you uh, are you a senior?

MARY

Yep. One more year.

DESHAWN

You thinking of possibly going to the same college or /

MARY

Interrupting.

Oh there's no way in hell I'm staying here.

DESHAWN

I feel that.

MARY

I've been ready to get out of here for a long time.

DESHAWN

Where you wanna go?

MARY

Somewhere out of state. I want to keep visits back home to the bare minimum if you know what I mean.

DESHAWN

I can tell.

Beat.

DESHAWN (continued)

Still, it's a pretty good school. I don't know what you're interested in of course but there is a lot to offer there.

MARY

You an ambassador or something? I feel like you're about to hand me a pamphlet.

DESHAWN

Laughs.

No, no, it's just... you seem cool.

Beat.

MARY

Cooler than Johnny?

Several beats.

DESHAWN

I didn't mean it like that.

MARY

You didn't?

DESHAWN

I'm sorry if it seemed like /

MARY

Interrupting.

It's, it's okay.

Beat.

DESHAWN

Okay.

Several beats.

MARY

Does Johnny know?

Beat.

DESHAWN

No.

MARY

You should probably tell him. I think he thinks otherwise.

Beat.

DESHAWN

Never thought I'd have to come out as straight.

MARY

I guess you have to when you put yourself in the closet in the first place.

Beat.

Don't worry about it, he'll get over it.

Beat.

JOHNATHON enters and goes to his section.

JOHNATHON

Oh, hey Mary.

MARY

Hey Johnny.

MARY stands and picks up her poster.

It was nice meeting you, DeShawn.

DESHAWN

You, too.

MARY exits.

JOHNATHON

So I guess you've met the whole family now.

DESHAWN

Yeah. Your sister's good people.

JOHNATHON

Yeah she's alright.

Beat.

Well, I guess there's one good thing that came out of tonight.

Beat.

DESHAWN

What?

JOHNATHON

The check.

DESHAWN

Oh.

Beat.

I don't know, Johnny.

JOHNATHON

What?

DESHAWN

I don't know if I'm taking it.

JOHNATHON

What do you mean you don't know?

DESHAWN

I mean what I say, okay, I don't know if I want to take the money.

JOHNATHON

But, I... but you have to. Like, you don't have a choice, right? I mean, you said it yourself your mother *forbade* you from coming home.

DESHAWN

Who gives a fuck?

JOHNATHON

Uh, your mom?

DESHAWN

I shouldn't be kicked out of my own house just because I have respect for myself.

JOHNATHON

She's just trying to protect you.

DESHAWN

I don't want her protection.

JOHNATHON

It's really bad up there. Your mom literally lost her job.

DESHAWN

She hated that job. Besides, I felt more in danger here than I have anywhere else.

JOHNATHON

And I'm sorry about that, I really am, but you really have to think about this logically man. My dad is literally giving you money. I mean it's right there for the taking. You know how hard it was to convince him to do that for you?

DESHAWN

What?

JOHNATHON

DESHAWN begins to laugh at some point as JOHNATHON speaks.

He wasn't gonna give you shit! He told me he changed his mind and that he wasn't gonna let you stay for the break, so I told him to give you the money. I told him it was the least he could do.

DESHAWN's laughter builds and builds until it is quite loud.

JOHNATHON awkwardly laughs as well.

Why's, why's that funny?

DESHAWN

It's just –

Laughs a little more.

I can't believe that I actually convinced myself that this was a good idea.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

I can.

Beat.

Just let me talk to my parents tomorrow morning. After you leave. I'll talk to them and ask them to reconsider and, and I'll get them to let you stay. Okay? I'll change their minds – I can do that.

DESHAWN

No.

JOHNATHON

I can do it, DeShawn, just let me have tomorrow morning and /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

No, Johnny. I don't want to stay here.

JOHNATHON

But /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

I'm not staying here or on campus. I won't do it.

JOHNATHON

What about me?

DESHAWN

It's not about you, Johnny. I can't stay here. It's literally more dangerous for me to stay here than home.

JOHNATHON

They're not gonna hurt you, man.

DESHAWN

I'm not talking about physically, okay, I'm talking about my, my fucking mental health. I could barely stand tonight. The whole time I was biting my tongue and taking it, and man I fucking took it, too. I'm willing to do a lot for my mom, but there's only so much I can handle.

Beat.

No, I can't stay here, and I'm not taking the money. I'm going home.

JOHNATHON

What?

DESHAWN

I'm going home, Johnny.

JOHNATHON

But you can't.

DESHAWN

Your dad's money doesn't get to save me. I'm going home, and I'm going to those rallies, and my mom is just gonna have to accept that. I'm not going to waste my time on campus and protest from the fucking dorm room like she wants me to. Fuck that.

JOHNATHON

Then what happened to all that shit about "spending the break together" and "getting close and really getting to know each other." I mean was all that bullshit?

Beat.

DeShawn?

Beat.

DESHAWN

I'm not into you.

JOHNATHON

What?

Beat.

DESHAWN

I'm not gay.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON

But...

DESHAWN

I was trying to help my mom.

Beat.

JOHNATHON

What kind of a douchebag are you?

DESHAWN

Johnny /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

No fuck you. I fucking stuck my neck out for you and you were just toying with me the whole time? So what, so that your mom didn't have / to spend some money to live on campus?

DESHAWN

Overlapping.

Don't act like you were sacrificing yourself for me.

JOHNATHON

You have no idea how much I was willing to do for you.

DESHAWN

You spent more time pissing your parents off than you did actually helping me. All I needed was for you to *help* me, Johnny, not use me as a prop in some fucked up game of racist show and tell.

JOHNATHON

Well if you needed help you fucking *ask* me to help you. Don't manipulate me to help you. Fucking *ask* me.

Beat.

I mean that's what friends are for, right?

Beat.

Fuck.

Beat.

DESHAWN

I made a mistake.

JOHNATHON

No shit.

DESHAWN

I led you on, and, that wasn't right of me.

JOHNATHON

Wow. "Check out the big brain on Brad."

DESHAWN

I'm trying to apologize, man.

JOHNATHON
I don't want your apology.

DESHAWN
Well I want it.

JOHNATHON
Ohhhh, *you* want it.

DESHAWN
I fucked up and I need to apologize, even if you don't forgive me.

JOHNATHON
I'm not giving you shit.

DESHAWN
Alright, Johnny.

JOHNATHON
Just because you feel sorry doesn't mean you're entitled / to my forgiveness, okay, or even a fucking apology.

DESHAWN
Overlapping.
Goddammit Johnny can you just shut the fuck up and let me talk?
Beat.

JOHNATHON
Go on.
Several beats.

DESHAWN
I try to be a good person. I try really hard.

JOHNATHON
Not hard enough.
Beat.
Sorry.
Beat.

DESHAWN
I'm sorry that I hurt you. What I did, I tried to justify with helping my mom, you know... I tried to be respectful of her, and I got desperate. And that's not right. I shouldn't have to fuck over one person to do good by someone else. I was selfish.
Beat.

DESHAWN (continued)

And you're right. I'm not entitled to your forgiveness. Or even maybe this apology. But I have to try. Maybe not for you then for myself. And maybe that's selfish of me in a fucked-up way but, I wouldn't feel right not doing it. I have to try.

Beat.

I should've been a better friend to you. I just should've been better.

Beat.

I'm sorry.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON

Goddammit.

Beat.

DESHAWN

What?

Beat.

JOHNATHON

I'm sorry, too. About everything. I just, I got caught up in it. I used you... without any idea of how you might have felt. My parents, they start me up and I... I lost focus and... you're right. I used you. And that... I fucked up... I fucked up.

Beat.

I should have been a better friend to you, too.

Beat.

The walls slowly slide upstage and disappear into darkness.

DESHAWN and JOHNATHON look at each other for the first time.

Several beats.

So you're definitely going home for the break?

DESHAWN

Whether my mom wants me to or not, yeah.

JOHNATHON

How do you think she's going to react?

DESHAWN

Probably with a slap to the face followed by a hug. Or vice versa.

Several beats.

JOHNATHON

I don't know if I can be friends with you after this.

Beat.

DESHAWN nods.

But maybe after the break we can, I don't know, catch up.

DESHAWN

Maybe.

Beat.

I'm not gonna stay here tonight, either.

JOHNATHON

You're going back to campus?

DESHAWN nods.

Okay.

Several beats.

I guess I'll see you, uh, /

DESHAWN

Interrupting.

After the break.

JOHNATHON

Yeah. After the break.

Beat.

You should still take the money.

DESHAWN

But I'm not /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

I know you're not staying on campus. You should still take the money.

Beat.

It was fucked up of me to put you through tonight, and... you should get something out of it. Your mom needs the help, right?

DESHAWN

What if your dad finds out?

JOHNATHON

He won't. I'll just tell him you're on campus. He'll never know.

DESHAWN

I don't know /

JOHNATHON

Interrupting.

Just think about it, okay.

Beat.

DESHAWN nods.

Beat.

JOHNATHON (continued)
Well... goodnight.

DESHAWN

Goodnight, Johnny.

JOHNATHON exits.

DESHAWN stays standing.

Beat.

He moves to the table that has the check sitting on it.

He picks up the check, looks at it, and then looks up.

Beat.

Lights fade to black.

End of play.