

INDEPENDENCE DAY

a play in one act

by Brent Englar

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CHARACTERS

PATRICK, 18

JASON, his brother, 24

TIME

July 4th, the present. Nearly two years have passed since the events of “Labor Day.”

PLACE

A hill in suburban Maryland, sloping gradually up from the audience and “continuing” offstage, where a party is in progress.

(In the darkness comes the sound of fireworks exploding high above the stage. Their colors are reflected in the grassy surface of the hill—bursts of red, white, and blue growing ever brighter and synchronized to the distant strains of “Stars and Stripes Forever.” As the dual effect reaches its climax, the lights come up onstage. It is a lovely summer evening. The grass is a deep, purplish green and the sky is full of stars. PATRICK stands alone on the hill, his back to the fireworks. He has grown since last we saw him, though somewhat more in weight than height, and he has taken some care to shave and to comb back his unruly hair. He wears jeans and a touristy, London-themed T-shirt.

As the last fireworks echo in the night, an unseen crowd at the top of the hill applauds and murmurs appreciation. JASON enters, slightly unsteady from the combination of drink and uncertain ground. If the past two years have wrought any change in him, it may be seen in the tightness that grabs at his face during moments of reflection; in happier moods, he still recalls the high school quarterback tracing the arc of a perfect pass.

JASON spots PATRICK first and stumbles to a halt. As the offstage applause gives way to silence, PATRICK breaks out of his reverie. He notices JASON and turns to face him. JASON gives an exaggerated bow. PATRICK grins)

PATRICK

It wasn't for you.

JASON

Wasn't for you.

PATRICK

Do you see me bowing like a fool?

JASON

When there's clapping, I bow. Old habits—years of adulation and all ... Can't help you if you're jealous, kid.

PATRICK

I do not envy age unattended by wisdom ...

JASON

That's 'cause you're an ass.

PATRICK

You’ll get there one day. Happy twenty-fourth, Jason.

JASON

What’s this? A birthday wish from baby brother?

PATRICK

Well, I didn’t get you anything ...

JASON

Well, you got a couple more days to think on it. The big two-four don’t come knockin’ ’til Sunday.

PATRICK

But I’m leaving tomorrow.

JASON

Don’t hold my breath for a present, is that what you’re saying?

(PATRICK shrugs. JASON wipes a feigned tear from his eye and pulls PATRICK into a tottering embrace)

JASON

I accept.

(He rubs PATRICK’s head and releases him, then flops on the ground, suddenly exhausted. A firecracker explodes offstage. PATRICK jumps)

JASON (Cont’d)

BOO!

PATRICK

(yelling at the sound)

Give it up already, goddammit!

JASON

It’s just a firecracker.

PATRICK

The fireworks are over. That was some asshole trying to impress his asshole friends.

JASON

Patrick! Those assholes are neighbors.

PATRICK

I hate our neighbors.

JASON

So why'd you come to their party?

PATRICK

They invited me. I didn't see you up there.

JASON

I was around.

PATRICK

Did you follow me down here?

JASON

Nope.

PATRICK

Oh yeah? Then what are you doing?

JASON

Just living my life, Pat.

PATRICK

Some crazy living. What are you doing tomorrow?

JASON

Going to work.

PATRICK

You work a lot.

(JASON shrugs)

PATRICK (Cont'd)

You want to get out of here?

JASON

Where to?

PATRICK

Let's go to the club.

JASON

What club?

PATRICK
The club. Your club.

JASON
I don't have a club.

PATRICK
You play there, dumbass.

JASON
You have been gone a while.

PATRICK
What do you mean?

JASON
I mean you missed a lot while you were at college.

PATRICK
I'm talking about your saxophone.
(when JASON is silent)
Jason. What happened to your saxophone?

JASON
Holy shit! I left it at the pawn shop.

PATRICK
You what?

JASON
Jesus, Pat, lighten up, huh? I've drank some beer and I've watched some fireworks and I've heard me some J. P. Sousa, so if all you've got for this Fourth of July is a wet blanket, you can just stuff it back in your bedroom ...

(He trails off. PATRICK kneels beside him)

PATRICK
What is it?

JASON
I need some barbecue.

PATRICK
Fuck!

JASON

It’s going fast, I know.

PATRICK

Jason, I don’t give a shit about barbecue. I want to talk to my older brother before I fly off to London for the summer. Before he goes back to a job that works him so hard, he can’t even drop by the house to say “Welcome home.”

JASON

First off, it’s not my house. It’s Mom and Pops’s house. And it’s in the opposite direction.

PATRICK

From what?

JASON

From everything! The grocery store.

PATRICK

What?

JASON

Groceries. They’re a very important part of my life. Without them, I’d have nothing to put in my microwave.

PATRICK

I don’t want to come between you and your microwave.

JASON

I’m glad to hear it. Welcome home.

PATRICK

I’ve been home a month.

JASON

Two-way street, Pat.

PATRICK

I know. And I’m going to call you more this year. You remember what it’s like to be a freshman—there’s no time to miss anyone. At least there wasn’t for me. Which was not how I’d imagined it ... which is a very good thing, when things turn out different than you’d imagined. At least when you imagine the worst.

JASON

You should stop imagining the worst.

PATRICK

But this year ... well, it won't be so new, anyway, and I'm going to call you ... once a week. I promise.

JASON

You don't have to call me once a week.

PATRICK

You don't want me to—

JASON

—I don't want to run out of things to say by October. You've done great at school, Pat, everybody says so—but it's not because of anything I said, and we're already running out of things to talk about. Another month of this and you'd throw your phone into the Chesapeake.

PATRICK

We haven't even caught up.

JASON

We can catch up. What did you do last semester?

PATRICK

I wrote a play.

JASON

What about?

PATRICK

It's hard to explain ... it's my first play, you know, so I was finding my way as I went, and it borrows pretty heavily from what I was reading at the time ... there's some Chekhov in the plot and the dialogue reminds me of Pinter ... It's kind of an exploration into whether Machiavelli still makes sense in a digital landscape ...

(when JASON laughs)

Anyway, it's a love story. And it got me accepted into this program this summer, so it must have done something right.

JASON

I'm very proud of you.

PATRICK

Yeah?

JASON

Fuck yeah. This is a pretty big deal, this program?

PATRICK

It's supposed to be. I don't know.

JASON

Hell, I've never been to London.

PATRICK

Why don't you go?

JASON

And you never even wrote a play before last semester. Maybe it should be you leading the program.

PATRICK

Knock it off.

JASON

It wasn't two years ago you couldn't even show me what you wrote.

PATRICK

I said knock it off. What do you know about it? These are real life professional playwrights, Jason. I'll probably be the only kid that's never read *Henry IV*.

JASON

So read it on the plane.

PATRICK

I don't have a copy.

JASON

What is that, like *Rocky*?

PATRICK

Let's change the subject.

JASON

You want to hear about my job?

PATRICK

No.

JASON

I'll rephrase. You want to hear about my job?

PATRICK

Did something happen?

JASON

Like what?

PATRICK

I don't know ... whatever happens in office buildings.

JASON

Like telling my boss to shove it and quitting?

PATRICK

Is Dad still your boss?

JASON

Not for months. Almost a year, in fact ... I'm one of the best salesmen in the company, Pat—that's not me talking, that's numbers. That's new accounts, that's money in the bank—

PATRICK

—At least you sound the part.

JASON

It's good to be good at something again. Something that doesn't require an anterior cruciate ligament.

PATRICK

Last I checked, neither does playing the saxophone.

JASON

Something that earns me a living.

PATRICK

Here's to a living.

JASON

What do you know about it? Talk to me when you write something that doubles as a rent check.

PATRICK

If I spent my weekends working instead of writing, I never would.

JASON

Right, right, because all it takes to land a record deal is some elbow grease.

PATRICK

Who's talking about record deals? I was looking forward to hearing you play.

JASON
We were talking about my job.

PATRICK
Not interested.

JASON
Then I guess we’re all caught up.

PATRICK
No. When do I meet Katie?

JASON
Katie?

PATRICK
Didn’t you bring her to the fireworks?

JASON
No.

PATRICK
Why not?

JASON
We broke up two months ago.

PATRICK
Two months? How long did you date?

JASON
Almost four.

PATRICK
Why didn’t you tell me?

JASON
You never even met her.

PATRICK
I was at college!

JASON
Well ...?

PATRICK
What?

JASON
When do I meet your girlfriends?

PATRICK
Should I have more than one?

JASON
You're the college man, Pat, you tell me.

PATRICK
Do women go for that?

JASON
If you're lucky they do.

PATRICK
Have you ...?

(JASON stares at PATRICK, his expression blank)

PATRICK (Cont'd)
Liar. You never asked to meet my girlfriends.

JASON
All right, I'm asking now. I would like to meet your girlfriends, Patrick.

PATRICK
I don't have any. What of it?

JASON
Can I give you some advice?

PATRICK
If you want.

JASON
The longer you wait, the harder it gets.

PATRICK
That's very funny.