

## LABOR DAY

a play in one act

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### CHARACTERS

PATRICK, 17

JASON, his brother, 22

### TIME

The present; late afternoon. It is Patrick's seventeenth birthday, Labor Day, the final day of summer vacation.

### PLACE

A small clearing in the middle of a forest somewhere in suburbia.

The clearing is bordered on all sides by tall trees, the leaves still clinging to greenness, though it will not be long until they change color and fall to the ground. Numerous half-beaten paths branch out of the clearing and into the forest in every direction. Stones and several old tree stumps are scattered about.

(Lights come up to reveal PATRICK sitting on a tree stump, writing feverishly in a well-worn journal. He is dressed in dark, drab clothing and looks pitifully small for his age. At his feet lies a backpack stuffed nearly to the bursting point.

From offstage comes the sound of a male baritone, tunelessly—if enthusiastically—singing “Happy Birthday.” PATRICK immediately stiffens, slams the notebook shut, and shoves it into his backpack. He pulls out a granola bar and feigns nonchalance as JASON strolls into the clearing, still singing.

In sharp contrast to PATRICK, JASON is an attractive, athletic young man who seems older than his 22 years, yet still possesses a certain youthful exuberance. He wears a faded high-school football jersey on which the number “1” is stitched in gold material. He claps PATRICK on the back and finishes his song)

PATRICK

How could it possibly take you thirteen minutes to pee?

JASON

How could you possibly know that?

PATRICK

I have a watch.

JASON

Congrats, me too. I don’t feel the compulsive need to look at it every five seconds.

PATRICK

Jesus, Jason, you were gone a long time. I just wanted to know why.

(Not hungry, he flings what is left of the granola bar, including the wrapper, onto the ground)

JASON

Hey Patrick, when did you start littering?

PATRICK

Oh yeah, sorry, wasn’t thinking.

JASON

Well, pick it up.

PATRICK

Give me a break, Jason. It’s a little garbage, big deal.

JASON

Just pick it up, all right?

(PATRICK sighs. He picks up the granola bar and stuffs it into his backpack. JASON smiles and sits down on a nearby stump)

PATRICK

Let me guess—you accidentally took a piss on a beehive ... Pissed off bees who’d had it up to here with man trespassing in their forest ...

JASON

Up to where?

PATRICK

(gesturing)

Here.

JASON

(laughing)

Right. So these p.o.’d bees came swarming at me, oozing venom—

PATRICK

—You barely had enough time to zip up your fly and protect your shrinking manhood—

JASON

—Hey, leave my manhood out of this—

PATRICK

—As all around you the air grew thick with bees.

JASON

I screamed in terror.

PATRICK

No, you stood firm and took every sting, secure in the knowledge that a juster fate awaits you in the next life.

JASON

And then I realized I couldn’t leave my baby brother alone in the woods, so I came back.

(He laughs)

Now, what really kept me ... how long?

PATRICK

Thirteen minutes.

JASON

Thirteen minutes—thank you ...

(suddenly serious)

Tomorrow you go back to school. And pretty soon you'll graduate, and move away ... go to college ... never look back. Well, I was thinking—this'll probably be the last time we go exploring together, right? I started looking around at the trees like they'd changed, somehow, when I turned my back. Wanted to memorize each leaf just like it is right now, and I started singing all these songs from when we used to camp out here—helped me remember, I guess—and then I came back. Just in time to keep you from turning into a serial litterbug.

PATRICK

You're serious? About the trees, I mean?

JASON

I know what you mean. Why the hell not?

PATRICK

I'm impressed.

JASON

Yeah, pretty poetic for an ex-jock. It's a warm-up for tonight, when I serenade you under the stars.

PATRICK

I don't think the neighbors will appreciate that.

JASON

Mr. Schmidt may be old, but a little sax in the moonlight won't kill him.

PATRICK

You're going to play for me?

JASON

Well, I'll probably be inside at the time. But yeah, of course I am.

PATRICK

What are you going to play?

JASON

Just something I wrote.

PATRICK

You shouldn't have gone to all that trouble.

JASON

Hey, it's your birthday. No trouble at all.

PATRICK

Mom shouldn't have either.

JASON

Yeah, yeah, you didn't want a party—

PATRICK

—And I was serious! It's my birthday. It should have been my choice.

JASON

If Mom and Dad want to celebrate, they're going to celebrate.

PATRICK

If Mom wants to celebrate, she still shouldn't force it on me.

(JASON begins to say something, but decides against it. He sighs and stands up)

JASON

You don't want a birthday party? Fine. Pretend it's a Labor Day barbeque or something. Just don't show up with an attitude, all right?

(checking his watch)

What say we head back?

(PATRICK picks at the ground with a stick but says nothing)

JASON (Cont'd)

You can take that stick home, if you want.

PATRICK

I'm not going home, Jason.

JASON

Right. I'll have Mom Fed-Ex you your presents. Just don't expect any cake.

PATRICK

You never take me seriously. I'm saying goodbye, I might never see you again—

JASON

—Look, Pat, you said you didn't want to hang around the house all day. So I said I'd

take you out here, for old time’s sake, or whatever. But I swore I’d have you back by six, or else Mom is going to be pissed, and I will not be the one responsible for that.

PATRICK

Let me know if Dad notices, will you?

JASON

Christ, do we have to go through this every day? Actually, Dad pulled me aside this morning and slipped twenty dollars in my pocket if I would lose you in the woods. Just hold still a minute, okay, because I have to bring him back your heart in a little silver box.

(PATRICK glares at JASON, then marches over and plants himself in front of an extremely large rock. Pushing with all his might, he tips the rock onto its side. Underneath is a freshly dug hole. He reaches in and pulls out a large, rectangular object wrapped in plastic bags. He rips off the bags to reveal a suitcase.)

JASON stares at PATRICK, confused. PATRICK flops the suitcase onto a tree stump and gestures for him to look inside. After a moment, JASON crosses to the stump and opens the suitcase)

JASON (Cont’d)

It’s full of clothes.

PATRICK

Look inside the pocket.

(JASON reaches into the suitcase and pulls out a bundle of papers)

PATRICK (Cont’d)

They’re maps. Now open up the envelope.

(JASON searches through the maps. He locates a thick envelope and removes its contents)

JASON

A bus ticket?

PATRICK

To the airport. There’s another ticket, next to my passport ...

JASON

(finding it, uncomprehending)

Australia?

PATRICK

Count the traveler’s checks.

(JASON pulls a wad of bills out of the envelope and does a quick tally)

PATRICK (Cont’d)

Two-thousand, right?

(JASON nods. PATRICK suddenly rushes forward and snatches his belongings out of JASON’s hands. JASON grabs him by the arm)

JASON

I can’t let you do this.

PATRICK

This is not a joke!

(He wrenches out of JASON’s grasp and begins stuffing everything back into the suitcase)

PATRICK (Cont’d)

What do you think, I woke up this morning and just got it into my head to run away? I spun the globe in Mom’s study and my finger landed on Australia?

(slamming the suitcase shut)

If you can’t play the part of the good brother and wish me well, just leave. Tell Mom I’ll write. Tell Dad whatever you want.

JASON

Dammit Patrick, no one’s going anywhere.

(PATRICK grabs the suitcase and begins to walk away; JASON steps in front of him)

JASON (Cont’d)

What happened today?

PATRICK

Nothing happened.

JASON

People don’t just run away.

PATRICK

You’re right, they don’t.

JASON

Then what happened?

PATRICK

Get out of my way!

JASON

Patrick, what happened?

(PATRICK smolders but says nothing. He sits down on a tree stump, clutching his suitcase)

JASON (Cont'd)

Don't bullshit me. You brought me out here for a reason. You got something to say, say it.

PATRICK

I brought you out here to say goodbye.

JASON

Well, the plan has changed.

(PATRICK slumps over, refusing to look up. JASON glances around the forest, as though searching for the right thing to say)

JASON (Cont'd)

I don't know what you want me to do here, Patrick. Help me out some, hey, give me a clue.

(staring at the hole)

I believe you're serious. Is that a start?

(sitting down)

Pat? ... How did you get two-thousand dollars? Did you sell something? ... Did you steal something? ...

(He looks at the hole again)

Hey, isn't that the rock?

(PATRICK can't help but look up)

JASON (Cont'd)

It is! Were the arrowheads still there? Maybe you didn't dig deep enough ...

PATRICK

I didn't see them.

JASON

Well, I guess you weren't looking. Probably crumbled to dirt years ago.



PATRICK

Especially since they were dirt.

JASON

What? No, we never—

PATRICK

—I guess some rock too. But mostly hard, dried mud.

JASON

We were never sure of that. They could have been arrowheads.

PATRICK

I was always sure. Come on, Jason, have you really believed all these years we discovered ancient Indian arrowheads?

JASON

Yes! It's so much cooler that way. We didn't need to spend five hours digging up the forest for dirt and rocks.

PATRICK

I would never have let you throw them back if they were genuine.

JASON

Don't give me that. You were as scared as I was—

PATRICK

—You were pretty scared.

JASON

Well, neither of us wanted ancient Indian warrior ghosts haunting us from beyond the grave. Come on, we stayed up all night talking about it. Don't pretend you could get to sleep.

PATRICK

I stayed up all night because with every word I spoke about dead Indians your eyes got just a little bit wider.

JASON

Your eyes got pretty wide too!

PATRICK

You try holding in your laughter for hours on end, see how wide your eyes get.

(They are both laughing by now. PATRICK looks at JASON and smiles)