



IF ONLY; LAST WORDS

An expressionist inspired drama

INFO

This piece was first produced at the Black Box Art Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia by Red Hill Theatre Group on 2nd January 2020 starring Cole Snyder, Cody James, Kelly Parr, Amanda Thomas, Jacob Reese and Madeleine Davis in the roles, respective as listed in Cast of Characters, with Makaley Swam originally rehearsing the role of Stranger. Sarah Usary stage managed the piece. Special thanks to Laura Richards Bakin and Brigid Bakin for help managing production night.

Written by

Cody James

A Note on Scene Structure:

The play is broken into two distinct sorts of scene. The main action occurs in Snapshots; short looks into the lives of the main characters of the play. These comprise the main storyline of the play. Complimentary action occurs in Headlines; excerpts from a local newscast. These provide context and allegorical commentary to the main action of the play. The former is played live, while can be played either live or through video/projection with bias toward the latter.

A Note on Scene Gender:

While gender is not the main focus of the play, specific attention has been paid to gender in an effort to broaden the playability of the text, as well as contrast different groups of characters within the play. It doesn't work out to be a significant notion in the script, but could, in staging, be used to some advantage.

The three young adults of the play are intentionally written as gender neutral. While this means they could be played as any specific gender, it was most truthfully written this way because gender has absolutely no impact on the story told between them. Singular they/them pronouns are used where necessary as, in the writing, I wanted to avoid conforming to expectations about the characters based on binary gender labels. Thus, it made the most sense to write them as non-binary. The news cast was written in a similar fashion. In contrast, the older cast were written, in terms of pronouns, as men. This is, in no insignificant part, due to a wish to highlight generational differences. Conforming the two elder characters of the play to binary gender assignments adds a contrast to the younger cast, for which gender is significantly less important. I don't think the characters act specifically as men, but that is how I envisioned them as I wrote it. That being said, any and all characters' genders (and thus pronouns), may be changed to address individual productions' needs and intentions. All names were used for specific reasons and should stay as they are.

The initial production of the piece will see the younger cast as all female, the newscast as male, and the elder cast as male. However, the only character with any attention paid to their gender will be Parker.

Setting:

Where: The town of Dusk Hill

When: The kickoff weekend of the town's Founders' Festival, in not-so-distant memory

Cast of Characters

ANCHOR: A News Anchor at a local news station

SIDNEY: An older resident of Dusk Hill

ACE: A young adult, resident of Dusk Hill

RIAN: Another young adult, resident of Dusk Hill; best friend of Ace

PARKER: A town Councilman; uncle to Rian

STRANGER: A young adult; unknown to the other characters

WEATHERMAN: A weatherman at the local news station

Headline I:

In the darkness, TV static, and broken bits of random TV broadcasts. Unease, chaos, and then, in an instant, a test signal followed directly by an intro from the local TV news station. As titles finish...

ANCHOR: Good evening; This is your news at 5; I'm Charlie Woodson. An exciting weekend ahead for the town of Dusk Hill as residents prepare for the annual Founders Festival. Starting 10 years ago as a small celebration of the town's heritage, the Festival has grown to be the largest cultural event of its kind in the tri-county area. Councilman Reggie Parker, one of the organizing members of the town's first Founders Festival, has been chair of the Festival Committee every year since. Parker is often credited for the success of the Festival, as well as the success the Festival brings to the town. Over the last decade, dozens of new businesses have cropped up in town: along Main Street, at Town Square and nearby around Dusk Hill Park. A good number of the business' owners found their home in Dusk Hill after visiting the town's Founders Festival; while nearly all of them reported better business during the week the Festival spans, as thousands of visitors from around the state come to town for a week of food, music and fun. The Festival kicks off early this evening with the Dusk Hill band playing a Medley of Marches! Expect coverage of that and more right here on channel (*static*) news a- (*longer static*) Coming up next, your weather forecast, follo- (*another sustained static*) and sports! But first, a word from our spons- (*quick cut to more static; louder, a few uneasy hiccups in the static*)

Snapshot I: Someone Else's Problem

In the darkness, through the static, a beat. Like a heartbeat.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Three times. Then, a clear and present note from a trumpet joins. It starts at a distance, but gets closer and closer as the static fades. It is a simple tune, as though the trumpeter is just practicing. As one last note is held, the static fades and lights fade onto the scene. An individual of quite some age sits on a bench in some public place with but one other occupant. The note is held as the lights come up; a brisk high E flat. It holds for a good few subsequent seconds. It rings somewhat weaker than it did in the darkness. This is Sidney. The note ends and Sidney looks wistfully at the trumpet.

SIDNEY: Sixty some-odd years I been playin' this thing. What do ya think, kid? Still got it, eh?

Sidney is addressing a young adult, around 20 years of age, standing at a short distance away, watching Sidney play like an audience. The young adult is, for lack of better words, colorful. This is Ace. Ace radiates all the joy and happiness of the world, though with an altogether calm demeanor.

ACE: Of course, Sid! You rock!

SIDNEY: Heh heh, ya know, I been playin' since I was your age! Start now, ya might well be good as me one day.

ACE: Oh, no! There's no way, I have no sense of music. I just like listening.

SIDNEY: Well, that's lovely of ya dear! You'll be comin' down to listen to the band play then?

ACE: Oh, yeah! Definitely; I'm just waiting for my friend. We have some shopping to do, then we'll be down!

SIDNEY: Shoppin'? Well, you best be hurryin', we start in just under an hour now!

ACE: We'll make it, I promise! Rian's just running a little late...well...Rian's a l w a y s running a little late....

SIDNEY: Oh, right right, o' course...well, why don't I play ya a song while ya wait for your date!

ACE: OH, no! Rian's not-

It's too late, Sidney has already taken a deep, loud breath, ready to belt out...well...something, when another young person, around the same age as Ace, runs in, tripping over something and knocking the bench that Sidney is sitting on. This startles Sidney, who takes a moment to recover. This is Rian. In contrast to Ace, Rian is earthy, disheveled and just a bit of a mess. Completely out of breath, Rian had obviously been running to get here. Ace can't help but laugh.

RIAN: Oh my gosh, I am so, so sorry Ace; I was reading and I thought I was keeping track of time and...

SIDNEY: Goodness gracious, ya scared the livin' hell outta me!

RIAN: Oh, I'm so sorry Sidney! I didn't even see you there-

SIDNEY: You're fine kid, just watch yourself! Don't want ya gettin' hurt and missin' the band concert, ya hear?

RIAN: Of course, I'll be there.

SIDNEY: Damn right ya will be! (*Sidney Stands*) Now I'm off to practice; you all enjoy your date now! Don't be late to the show!

ACE: Oh, it's not a--(*Before Ace can finish, Sidney is gone. Ace is just getting over the laughter*) So persistent! Well...I'm glad to see you finally woke up!

RIAN: Ahhh no no no, I got up on time, I was just reading and—

ACE: Right, right r e a d i n g, of course. That's some pretty gnarly bedhead for someone who got up on time.

RIAN: I did though!

ACE: Oh, shush. I believe you. Just pokin' fun.

RIAN: Yeah, like we don't have enough of that....

ACE: Oh, you know Sid was just kidding!

RIAN: Yeah, I know, e v e r y o n e is just kidding! Every time we go a n y w h e r e!!!

ACE: I know.

RIAN: And it's so dumb!! We're not dating!!

ACE: I know...

RIAN: I just don't get why they have to be so dumb about it!

ACE: Who knows...

RIAN: It's just so...so...

ACE: Dumb?

RIAN: Yeah.

ACE: You done now?

RIAN: Yeah...

ACE: Listen, don't worry about it. They're jealous of our awesome friendship and that's their problem, not yours.

RIAN: But it a f f e c t s me.

ACE: Only because you let it, dork. Now hurry up, we still gotta go get supplies for the Festival!

RIAN: Do we have time for that still? The concert starts in—

ACE: I know, I know; we have time. (*As Ace is talking, a well-dressed person of middle age, or thereabouts, enters just out of Ace's eyesight. This is Reggie Parker. Parker is on the town's Council and looks it. Particularly, Parker's hair has gone a bit grey, possibly moreso than it should be at Parker's age, and looks tired, both in face and in posture. However, Parker still walks with a large amount of confidence. Ace does not notice Parker at first*) Listen, We gotta get this done by Sunday! If our booth isn't finished by the time everyone gets to the park for fireworks, old Parker will (*turning and seeing Parker*)...OH! Councilman Parker! Hey! Hi! How are ya??

PARKER: (*With a kind yet suspicious smile*) Hello Ace, Rian. Out here working hard, I imagine?

ACE: You know it boss! Just on our way down to the concert! Gotta watch the old folks play! Support the arts!

RIAN: I thought we were going to get sup-

ACE: SUPPLIES! Yeah! We have just a few more things to get to top off decorations for the food stall for Sunday...we were just gonna run down before the concert and—

PARKER: You've not even started, have you?

ACE:

RIAN:

PARKER: (*a kind smile*) Oh, to be young again. Well, I'm quite sure you'll manage to get it all together in time. Just try not to wait too much longer.

ACE/RIAN: Sorry...

PARKER: Now, now; don't apologize. Just, the longer you wait, the more pressure you will put on yourselves. I know the two of you care enough to get the job done either way, but you're far too young to have that much stress.

ACE: Yeah...you're right, boss. We'll get to work right after the concert!

PARKER: I have complete faith in you. (*Parker goes to leave; but then, turns back to address the pair*) Oh, I'd nearly forgotten: I have favor to ask, Rian. I know you both have quite a lot of work to do, but the Carters' eldest is a bit under the weather. He was supposed to string some lights around the gazebo in Town Square. We wanted it to look a bit more festive for the formal kickoff on Sunday. Would you find someone to do the job for me?

ACE: (*trying to interject on behalf of their friend*) Wel—

RIAN: I'd be glad to, uncle!

ACE: You would?

RIAN: I would.

PARKER: AH! You would! Excellent! All you need to do is to find someone. The lights are in the same shed I told you to use for the rest of the decorations, so whoever you get, just point them there. Like I said, I know you have enough to do so don't go trying to do this yourself. *(a trumpet is heard off in the distance, perhaps a couple other instruments)* Ah, it sounds as though the band is warming up. I must be off then; I have to introduce them. Best go and be friendly. Good luck the two of you, and thank you again. I truly appreciate it. *(Parker leaves as the band warm ups continue, faint in the distance)*

ACE: Hey Rian...

RIAN: Yeah?

ACE: Who, exactly, are ya planning on asking to do the lights?

RIAN: I don't know what you mean.

ACE: You. Don't. Know. Anyone. Everyone you do know? They already have jobs for the Festival. Because it's me. And your family. And my family. And you're too scared to talk to anyone else!

RIAN: Says who?

ACE: Says your entire life! I know you. There's no one you know who isn't already working on this Festival, and you don't have the guts to talk to some stranger, let alone ask them to do something like this! You're planning on doing this yourself. You shouldn't have even agreed!

RIAN: It'll be fine, I can handle it.

ACE: Handle it! You already have too much on your plate!

RIAN: Well it's not like I'll find anyone!

ACE: You would if you tried!

RIAN: Ughhhhh but everyone in this town is so g a r b á g e.

ACE: Oh my gosh, not this again...

RIAN: Seriously! No one cares! We have this cool festival, with a bunch of cool talented artist and musicians and all kinds of things...

ACE: Ugggghhhhhhhhhh

RIAN: ...and everyone in the town l o v e s to come out and see it all, but no one in the town wants to help!!

ACE: Stooooooooopppppppp

RIAN: It could be a really great town if people just ca—

ACE: I know. Really. I agree with you, Rian. But that's not an excuse.

RIAN: It's not an excuse!

ACE: It is! I know you just want to help. Me too. But Parker said to find someone, so you're gonna find someone.

RIAN: But I don't kn-

ACE: Don't care! Its gonna happen. And I won't leave you alone 'til it does.

RIAN: But Aaaaaaaace...

ACE: Nope! No whining. You, my dear Rian, are going to make a friend!

RIAN: Noooooo....

ACE: Sorry, you gotta. I love you, but you're pathetic. You need more than just me.

RIAN: But you don't have any other friends!

ACE: Oh, but I do! I work down at the ice rink!

RIAN: That's work! That doesn't count!

ACE: Um, yes it absolutely does! I work three days a week and I know everyone there!

RIAN: Everyone? That's like...four people!

ACE: And that's four more people than you. Stop trying to get out of this. You're making a friend and you're gonna like it.

RIAN: (*Grumbles something unintelligible*)

ACE: There will be 1 o a d s of people around tomorrow, so I'm sure we can find someone while we work on decorations, ok?

RIAN: (*After a deep breath in*) Yeah...I guess so...

ACE: That's the spirit! Now, I'm gonna go grab something to drink. I need some caffeine if I'm gonna stay awake through "A Medley of Marches." What do you want?

RIAN: Nothing...

ACE: Come on, don't be a sourpuss; I'm buying, what do you want?

RIAN: Just a coke, please...

ACE: Great, I'll be just over at the corner store. You gonna be ok here?

RIAN: Yeah.

ACE: Ok. Just chill here then and I'll be back. You can meet me over there if you're up to it, ok?

RIAN: Ok...thanks...

ACE: Always. (*As Ace begins to exit, half snarkily*) Love you!

RIAN: Yeah, yeah (*Ace is gone, following a sigh*) Love you too...

Rian takes a deep breath in, falls back to a laying position on the ground, and lets out a much louder sigh. Just as the sigh is finishing, from behind, Parker returns, much to Rian's surprise.

PARKER: Ah, good, Rian, you're here still...

RIAN: AH! Uncle! (*Spinning around and standing up to face Parker*) What's up?

PARKER: I can hardly seem to remember anything today. I forgot, you'll need the combination to get into the shed.

RIAN: ... shed?

PARKER: Yes, the storage shed? Where you'll put your decorations?

RIAN: OH! Right! Sorry...I guess I'm a bit out of it...

PARKER: No apology necessary; now, the combination is 27-11-24. That should make the job a bit easier.

RIAN: Thank you.

PARKER: Now (*sitting down on the bench*), what was that sigh about just then?

RIAN: (*playing dumb*) Sigh?

PARKER: Oh, Rian, I've known you for far too long. What is it that's bothering you?

RIAN: (*Sitting down as well*) Oh...Ace was just teasing me...

PARKER: About meeting new people?

RIAN:

PARKER: You should listen to your friend. It's no coincidence I gave you a job searching for help. It's the two things you're worst at.

RIAN: (*still playing dumb*) What's that?

PARKER: Talking to new people and asking for help. I know you want to do the most you can, but you can't do everything yourself. (*Before Rian can start*) And don't feed me that spiel about how lazy the town is. Trust me, I know more than anyone. But I also know how much you love this town and the lengths you would go to for it. And I know it's not healthy to take on that much work yourself. There are plenty people that would be more than willing to help if you would asked. That aside, you need to make some new friends anyway. (*Pause*) Your parents worry about you, and I can't say I blame them. I understand talking to people can be hard for you; trust me, I know, I grew up the same way. I also know how easy it is to isolate yourself. But growing up to be that kind of person? That independent? It's not healthy.

RIAN: Yeah...I know you're right...

PARKER: Good. I think it would make you a lot happier. Now...I have something else for you here (*searching pockets*) AH! Here. (*Parker produces an unusual...stone? Maybe a gemstone? Maybe it's just a very pretty rock. Either way, it's very unusual*)

RIAN: What is it?

PARKER: My aunt gave it to me, years ago (*long pause*) She said, well...she said it was very special. Good things started to happen once she found it.

RIAN: Found it?

PARKER: Oh, I'm not sure I know the details (*Parker obviously does*). She was...a bit of a strange one. She gave me the stone on my fifth birthday. My parents didn't really like having her around...they were afraid she would make us strange. Like her. But she was sick. They knew she didn't have long. When she gave me the stone, she told me how lucky it had made her, and that I should hold on to it for as long as I can. The way she talked about it, you'd think it was...well...you'd think it was the most important thing in the world. Her whole life, wrapped up in this little stone. (*Parker holds the stone up to the light. It shines. A light wind, just enough to be audible, blows. Parker closes his eyes, as if taking it all in, Silence. Then...*) Anyhow...Its yours now (*he puts the stone in Rian's hands and closes them around it*)...I won't take no for an answer.

RIAN: (*As Parker stands to leave, Rian is deep in thought, then...*) But did it bring you luck?

PARKER: (*Turning back*) Sorry?

RIAN: You said it brought your aunt luck...what about for you?

PARKER: Oh, Rian (*chuckling, walking off*)...it's just a stone. But I want you to keep it. Remember this conversation, and try to expand your horizons a bit. (*Parker motions for Rian to stand and come over*) Now, I won't force you to do anything, (*he puts his hands on Rian's shoulders*) but I encourage you to try. I know it'll be hard, but Ace will be there to support you. And so will I. My door is always open (*Rian smiles, though somewhat half-heartedly. At this moment, a new young adult enters slowly from where Ace left, listening to music with headphones. This is a Stranger. Neither Rian nor Parker notices them*) Now, I have things to get back to.

RIAN: Yeah, I guess I should go catch up with Ace. (*With a true smile*) Thanks Uncle.

PARKER: Good luck, Kid.

As Parker exits, Rian turns to follow where Ace went, still not noticing the Stranger. Both oblivious to the other's existence, they collide at center. Rian spins and falls to one side, while the Stranger spins but remains standing to the other side, as if to continue walking. In the instant of the collision, an accent of a tense sort of light comes from behind them, as though freezing them in place. The STONE Rian has been holding falls in an earie, isolated light, directly between the two. Then, an instant later, the scene fades while the tense light remains, with Rian and the Stranger frozen in it, through Headline II....

Headline II

As the scene fades, static fades back in. A few minor hiccups at first, followed by some major hiccups accompanied by flashes of a news intro; a welcome back from an ad break. After, cut back to the News Anchor, initially through static...

ANCHOR: -elcome back!- (*static*) -urrent time i- (*more static*) -et's go over to Drew Conner with the weather; Drew?

WEATHERMAN: Thanks Charlie; to start things off, a quick look at the surface ma- (*static again, this time more aggressive*) -nd in the local area, todays looking to start of a bit chilly but warm up as the day goes on and the skies looking to stay clear through the evening. Now, looking at the next week, today's nice weather should last us through tomorrow afternoon; plenty of time to get out and enjoy the Sun. A front will be moving in from the west later tomorrow evening, bringing some possible precipitation; but fear not, the weather should clear up in the early morning hours and we should be looking at partly cloudy skies and high temperatures for the rest of the wee- (*VERY angry static, then quickly cuts to-*) Taking a closer look at the weekend, in addition to precipitation, the National Weather Service has put out a warning for strong winds and possible electrical storms later overnight, increasing the risk of property damage and driving accidents. For those of you working on Dusk Hill's Founders Festival, the Town Council's office is advising to hold off setting up until Sunday to avoid damage to any personal property and Festival materials. No major Festival events have been canceled. Back to y- (*more angry static*)

ANCHOR: Thanks Drew! Sounds like a- (*even more angry static*) -njoy the weather and spend some time out in the Sun! But stay safe folks, we've got storms on the horizon!

Hard cut to just slightly angrier static. The tense light at center fades and leaves the image of glitchy TV static in the darkness.

Snapshot II: What About You

The static slowly fades out as the scene fades in to another public space, though more natural, and a bit more covered. It is much later the same day; the sun has started to set, and continues to do so through the scene. Ace stands, rather relaxed, looking up through the STONE Rian received through what remains of the sunlight. Rian lays on the ground at Ace's feet, obviously distraught. The area is quiet, bar their conversation...

RIAN: ...I don't know...I told you: I went to catch up with you, and I ran into some random person and dropped the stone and fell and ugggghhh...

ACE: And you didn't see this person's face?

RIAN: I don't know! Maybe! As soon as I realized what happened, I panicked and grabbed the stone and ran....

ACE: Huh...well, good news, the stone looks fine. Not a crack or nick on it!

RIAN: Really??

ACE: Take a look for yourself (*tossing the STONE back to Rian, who fumbles with it but ultimately catches it*)

RIAN: Oh my gosh, thank goodness! (*visibly relieved, the distress melts away*)

ACE: Seriously?

RIAN: What?

ACE: Some rando runs into y o u and you were just worried about your new pet rock?

RIAN: Parker j u s t gave it to me! It seemed really important too!

ACE: Ok, fine, but I think Park would be more worried about some jerk pushing you down for no reason!

RIAN: I didn't get pushed, I just...

ACE: Rian. Listen. I was there...

RIAN: You weren't

ACE: ...and I know you...

RIAN: Ugggghhh

ACE: ...and pushing or not, you let someone knock you over without so much as apologizing??
A n d they made you drop your new stone!

RIAN: I thought you didn't care about the stone...

ACE: Rian. If the stone is important to you, of course I care about it. But I care about you more.
And I...(Ace cuts off, having noticed that someone unfamiliar has walked by and has sat down at some distance from them to read a book. Then, much quieter) ...who is that?

RIAN: Who is what?

ACE: Over there...behind you...reading the book. I've never seen them around here before...

RIAN: (*Upon turning to see who Ace is talking about, Rian freezes and turns back, stunned. It is the Stranger from before*) Uhhhh...

ACE: What?

RIAN: Uhhhh.....

ACE: Wait, have you?

RIAN:

ACE: Wait...is that the person that knocked you over??

RIAN: (*nods head in confirmation*)

ACE: Oh my GOSH!!

RIAN: (*Standing, trying to silence Ace as quickly as possible*) SHHHHHH

ACE: RIAN! Oh my gosh, this is FATE!

RIAN: ...fate?

ACE: Yes! Listen. You have to go over there and demand an apology.

RIAN: What?? Why??

ACE: That person. Over there. Knocked. You. Over. And didn't even take the second to say 'sorry'!!!

RIAN: What?? Ok. No. Sorry, no.

ACE: Come onnnnn! This is your chance to be assertive for once!!

RIAN: I don't need to be though!

ACE: You do!!

RIAN: I don't!! Getting knocked over was just as much my fault! I wasn't looking where I was going either! I'm not going to go yell at someone I don't even know over something that was clearly an accident for both of us!

ACE: But y o u fell! Y o u are the one that got hurt!

RIAN: I'm not hurt...

ACE: But you could've been ! It's a slippery slope, Rian, you let people take advantage of you and push you around and you just can't keep doing that!

RIAN: I'm not just going to start a fight over something this small!

ACE: Of course you're not! You're always so quick not to start a fight! And that's just what that person wants! To push you around because everyone knows that you'll never do anything about it!

RIAN: How could someone I've never met, let alone seen outside of today, possibly know that much about me???

STRANGER: *AHEM (through what has turned into the closest Rian and Ace ever get to an actual fight with each other, the Stranger has gotten progressively more annoyed and has finally gotten up to approach them and shut them up. Rian and Ace hadn't noticed, and the Stranger's abrupt throat clearing makes them jump. Then, in a level but fully annoyed tone...) I'm trying to read over there and everyone on this side of the continent can hear you jabbering on about nothing. So, could you, kindly, shut the hell up???*

Silence

STRANGER: *THANKS. (The Stranger goes back to reading at some distance away. Rian and Ace are petrified)*

More silence; then...

ACE: Rian, I can't believe you did that...

RIAN: Oh my gosh.

ACE: Rian, you can't just yell about people when they're right there!

RIAN: Oh my g o s h.

ACE: I can't believe that just happened...

RIAN: Ahhhh that was so embarrassing....

ACE: Embarrassing?? You just got yelled at by someone who pushed you down, on the ground, and kept walking; and you clammed up!!

RIAN: What??

ACE: You didn't even r e s p o n d!!!

RIAN: Neither did you!!

ACE: That's not the point. Y o u are the victim here! You need to go stand up for yourself!! You need to...wait...no wait...I just had a brilliant idea!

RIAN: Oh no...

ACE: Oh yes! The best idea! You're gonna go introduce yourself!

RIAN: What.

ACE: That person? Over there? They're gonna be your new friend!

RIAN: WHAT.

ACE: You'll go over, talk about their book or whatever nerd stuff comes to mind...

RIAN: HEY.

ACE: ...and you're gonna make friends; then, not only will you have someone to talk to that isn't me, but you'll have someone to work on the Festival lights!!

RIAN: Ok...slow down...this is too much. I can't just go make friends with them! What if the book they're reading is garbage?? What if we just don't get along?? They already probably think I'm the worst!

ACE: *(sigh)* Rian...listen...you'll never know if you don't try. You just gotta go up and start a conversation! This is fate!! Its d e s t i n y!!!

RIAN: *(Rian looks at the stone and ponders this...Ace isn't completely wrong. But is it worth the risk? Then...slightly more subdued...)* I don't know, Ace...you know how awkward I am...I don't even know how to start.

ACE: Hmm...yeah, good point *(Ace backs off, considering)*...ok then...new plan....HEY!!!

Ace calls out to the Stranger. Rian grips the STONE and looks up, eyes wide in shock, at Ace, who has turned and fled the scene. In Ace's absence, Rian spins around to look at the Stranger, who has looked up in confusion at the ruckus. They lock eyes. Tension, but not necessarily bad. They are the only two people in this moment. Nothing else matters enough to exist.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

STRANGER: Hey...?

Beat; a barely audible whimper from a trumpet as time begins to crawl back to normal speed. Everything exists again.

RIAN: Hey...

STRANGER: Hey...

Beat.

RIAN: Ummm...

Beat.

STRANGER: *(Somewhere between confused, annoyed and concerned)* ...you ok friend?

RIAN: Uhh...yeah...oh my gosh, yeah, sorry, you said you were reading, I didn't mean to bother you....*(Rian is so awkward...)*

STRANGER: *(In the same tone as before)* Oh, no, don't worry about it dude. You seemed a little intense there trying to get my attention. You all good?

RIAN: Yeah...uh...actually...I was just wondering, what you were reading? *(Rian is SO awkward...)*

STRANGER: Oh, uh...yeah, this is just some crappy book I'm supposed to read for class.

RIAN: ...class?

STRANGER: Yeah, English class? *(Pause, but Rian doesn't get it)* Like, over at the community college?

RIAN: OH.

STRANGER: Yeah...I'm supposed to have read it for tomorrow; only just started though. Don't even know why I'm bothering at this point.

RIAN: (*Obviously confused by all this, looking for how to respond...*) Yeah...right...reading is so...lame...

STRANGER: (*Smiling, for the first time*) You're pretty damn awkward, huh?

RIAN: (*Embarrassment*) OH...Yeah, um...sorry about that....

STRANGER: (*This is very amusing, but with some concern...*) Don't worry about it, dude. Some people are just that way, you know?

RIAN: (*This is a very kind way to look at it*) Yeah...

STRANGER: Where'd your friend go?

RIAN: ...friend?

STRANGER: Yeah. The one that was just with you a minute ago?

RIAN: A minute ago...OH! You mean Ace! I'm not sure...

STRANGER: Huh...well aren't you a weird couple o-...

RIAN: We're n o t a couple!

STRANGER: Calm down! I meant, a weird couple of people!

RIAN: Oh...oh yeah, well...yeah I guess we are...

Beat.

RIAN: (*Shifting to a smile*) Yeah...yeah really awkward.

STRANGER: (*Now a bit curious*) Hey, um, what's that you've got there?

RIAN: What?

STRANGER: In your hand. What're you holding?

RIAN: OH right, this (*remembering the STONE*). It's a sort of stone...maybe like a gem? Or crystal or something? I'm not sure.

STRANGER: Not sure?

RIAN: Well...I just got it today...I mean, someone I know gave it to me. A family member. As a gift. They said it was lucky....

STRANGER: Lucky, huh?

RIAN: Yeah...I mean...I'm not sure if I really believe in luck...

STRANGER: I don't know, I'd say it's probably pretty lucky.

RIAN: ...yeah?

STRANGER: Yeah, I mean, if you got it today; and after that we met...

Beat.

The Stranger is a bit embarrassed. It was a bit of a blunt thing to say. The two make eye contact.

Beat.

The Stranger holds back a laugh...for a second...but can't for long. The Stranger is full on laughing. Rian, a bit bashful at first, can't help but laugh at the whole situation too. For the first time, the Stranger seems actually approachable.

STRANGER: Oh goodness...wow...sorry, I didn't mean to sound so awkward. That was just...boy, what an awkward situation...

RIAN: *(Through a smile)* Yeah...yeah really awkward.

STRANGER: *(Shuts book and stands still, laughing a bit)* Anyway, it's getting a bit late. It was nice meeting you, awkward friend. Hope I see you around some time. *(going to leave)*

RIAN: Oh yeah...OH! Uh, wait! *(the Stranger stops; Rian approaches closer than before)* Listen...um...I just wanted to apologize...

STRANGER: ...apologize?

RIAN: Yeah...um...see, earlier...well, we ran into each other...well, I wasn't looking where I was going and I ran into you at th-

STRANGER: OHHHH! That was you?? Nah, dude, don't worry about it! I was so out of it. That kinda thing happens!

RIAN: Oh! I just...well, I felt bad...

STRANGER: Dude. Don't. Legit, if you weren't paying attention, I may as well have been having an out of body experience or something. I completely zone out whenever I'm out walking. This town suuuuuuucks so I need s o m e way to drown it out.

RIAN: Oh my gosh, yeah, I feel that. I was just trying to tell Ace that earlier...

STRANGER: Ughhh yeah, everyone's just so apathetic. Until something changes! Then we all suddenly love the town! Can't let someone come in and change it, for goodness' sake.

RIAN: Right?? If people just c a r e d.

STRANGER: SERIOUSLY. Goodness...I was just starting to think no one in this town made any sense...

RIAN: Yeah...it definitely feels like that sometimes...*(At this point, Ace has snuck back in, peaking around a corner, watching and reacting to the rest of the conversation)* Oh, hey...uh...listen...I have this project I have to work on...

STRANGER: Project? What, like, for class?

RIAN: Yeah...I mean...no. Not quite. Just...I have a lot going on right now...I was wondering if, you know, you weren't busy or anything...well, I'm working on it tomorrow, and...

STRANGER: Ohhhh, you want help? (*Thinks about it for a second*) You know what? No problem awkward friend, I gotcha. What're we working on? WAIT. Don't tell me, I might not wanna help then. But I owe you one, for the whole running into each other. Where are you working on it? And when? I'll just show up.

RIAN: Oh! Ok...so, uh...tomorrow, probably around 6pm? I was gonna work down at the park...

STRANGER: PERFECT! I'll be there. You can count on me!

RIAN: Really??

STRANGER: Yeah! Totally! (*A bell rings in the distance. It's late*) Hey, I gotta run now, but I'll see you tomorrow?

RIAN: Great, yeah! See you tomorrow!

The Stranger exits and Rian looks after, then, looks at the STONE and smiles. While Rian is distracted, Ace sneaks up, quiet as can be, then...

ACE: SO (*Full volume, spooking Rian*) That went pretty well, huh?

RIAN: I hate you.

ACE: Oh, come on! I think it went pretty well.

RIAN: You are the actual worst!

ACE: You flatter me.

RIAN: How long were you watching?

ACE: Long enough to know you have a nice little play date tomorrow!

RIAN: You are the w o r s t!

ACE: Oh, calm down! It all turned out for the best!

RIAN: Yeah...I guess...

ACE: Oh, come on, it did! I mean, they seemed a bit negative about...well...everything. They didn't even apologize for running into you?? You didn't even tell them how your new stone almost broke!

RIAN: Oh yeah, and sounded like a first grader, that would've been real great....

ACE: Not much more awkward than you actually were. Anyway, doesn't matter too much. You got a friend! Someone to help you work on the lights! Looks like that stone is a bit lucky after all!

RIAN: (*Holds up the stone to what remains of the light, which is quite a good deal less than before; smiling...*) Yeah...maybe a bit, yeah.

ACE: I'm so proud of you!!

Ace hugs Rian as Rian smiles and holds up the stone. They are both very happy. A happy light highlights them as everything freezes, with the stone again in some eerie light. Time stops and the scene fades out, leaving the pair accented in the happy light.

Headline III

As the scene fades, static fades back in; angry, but not so much as when we last left it. The reports in this Headline all involve local news. The broadcast is weak, but still comes through mostly coherently up until the last report...

ANCHOR: -ocal news, the Carter family, known for being a significant contributor to catering for the Founders Festival as well as many other local events throughout the year, had a successful launch of their newly opened family restaurant on Main Street yesterday- *(static)* -lines down the street, excited to try Mrs. Carter's famous homema- *(longer static)* -oard of commerce denied another chain from opening a location within town limits, citing preservation of local busi- *(angrier static)* -undred thirty four applications over the last year, with todays taking that number up to- *(more angry static)* -dog named- *(angrier static)* -adopted fro- *(more static, intercut with imagery of war and strife; tanks firing, buildings collapsing, people cowering)* -inally found a good home! The Humane S- *(static, similar imagery)* -ver three hundred animals yet to find homes, all ready to be adopted today! *(the angriest static yet, now with imagery of fire, smoke and storms; sounds of chains, heavy machinery and something that may be screaming; then back to a more calm, consistent newscast)* -r main story comes from town square, where the plan for a new traffic light has caused some concern amongst longtime residents of the town, saying it will only further exacerbate the town's growing traffic issues. In a public meeting earlier today, the mayor, council and planning committee sat with residents and heard their concerns over a two hour stretch, which concluded in the town government suspending the plan to install a traffic light until all other options have been explored. In a statement following the meeting, Councilman Parker stated that the livability of the town was the council's prime concern. According to Parker, many residents accepted that some change to the town's traffic patterns was inevitable, but that such a rapid change was too much for downtown to handle. After the closing of the meeting, the council issued a statement saying that they will continue to work on the town's traffic plan and will see it finished by the end of the next fiscal year. Townspeople are looking to the government to solve the growing traffic issues as quickly as possible; we can only hope the council can steer the town in the right direction. *(a corny grin, followed by static so angry it is more corruption than static. It swells and cuts hard to the next scene)*

Snapshot III: I Can't Handle This

After the static cuts, Rian enters to a dark stage. Light follows Rian, who is bashfully looking around. Rian is the only person in existence. No one else is around. Rian is carrying a rather large cardboard box filled to the brim with Christmas lights, unlit. Rian finds a place to sit, sits the box down and buries their face in their hands.

RIAN: Uuuggghhhhhh why did I show up so EARLY???

The word 'early' echoes ever so slightly. Rian uncovers their face and lets out a loud sigh. Then, alone and isolated, Rian begins to pull Christmas lights from the box, plugging in a strand at a time, testing them, then leaving them in a sort of mess on the floor. The light from this testing is the only other occurrence in the space. A harsh wind blows. It is clear Rian is under some cover. This all lasts for a short time before Rian reaches in the box for another strand of Christmas lights, when...

RIAN: OUCH! *(having pricked their hand on something sharp in the box, perhaps a broken light)*

PARKER: *(From off on the side opposite to where Rian came from) Hello? Who's there? (Parker's footsteps are faint, but they are accompanied by a cane tapping. Parker enters, the only other soul in existence in that moment, lit by themselves. Rian had earlier left a strand of lights plugged in, creating some ambience)*

RIAN: *(Having had their finger in their mouth after hurting it, removes it) Oh! Reg!*

Beat.

The Lights left plugged in are the twinkling type. The colors fade on and off in the pause.

PARKER: Oh, it's you Rian. *(The rest of the scene begins to fade in. They are in some sort of a pavilion. The lighting is from a high angle and very warm. It has a strange quality about it)* What are you doing out here? The storm is coming through in a few hours, I wouldn't think you'd want to be caught in it. *(Parker approaches, looking far more gaunt and exhausted than before)*

RIAN: Storm?? I thought that was supposed to be later?

PARKER: Oh, you know the weather forecasts...never can rely on them.... *(Parker sounds truly exhausted)*

RIAN: Hey, Reg, you ok? You're not sounding so great.

PARKER: Oh, I'm fine. Just a busy time of year is all. This festival does a number on you. And it gets bigger every year. I think we'll need to hire on some extra hands next year... *(Parker sits and removes a hat he had previously been wearing)* Keep your schedule open!

RIAN: You need to rest, Reg! You look exhausted. You shouldn't overwork yourself. *(Rian pulls the strand of lights that's been plugged in. The life the lights once gave the scene leaves)*

PARKER: Me? Overwork? Never. (*Standing*) Anyhow, I should be the one lecturing you. I thought I'd told you to find someone for this job?

RIAN: I know, I know! And before you say anything else, I did. Ace made...well...I met someone yesterday. They said they'd meet me here to help.

PARKER: Ah...good.

Beat.

PARKER: Don't take this the wrong way...you are alone though.

RIAN: I know!!! I panicked and couldn't sleep and I got here and they weren't here and so I got the lights and I was just making sure they worked and I guess I got here a lot earlier than I thought because they're still not here....

PARKER: Ah, slow down. (*Approaches Rian*) You're nervous, I understand. (*Puts a hand on Rian's shoulder*) Don't worry. It will work, I'm sure.

RIAN: (*Face once again buried in hands*) Well I'm glad one of us is....

PARKER: Rian (*Sitting next to Rian*) I need you to trust me. You can do this. I am sure. I know it is easy to work yourself up and get overwhelmed; but when it comes down to it, it isn't hard. Its just talking to another human.

RIAN: (*Face still covered*) I guess...

PARKER: (*Standing*) So, when will your friend get here?

RIAN: I don't know...soon, I think...I hope....

PARKER: Good. (*Picking cane back up from where he'd previously sat it down*) Now, I want you to remember Rian. We're only in this world for a short time. Everything is fleeting. Life, relationships, friends, family, all of it.

RIAN: (*Chuckling, Rian thinks Parker is making a joke*) Way to be cliché, Uncle.

PARKER: (*Smiling*) Just...hold on to it while you can. Keep it close. These things are fragile. Ok?

RIAN: Of course.

PARKER: Do you still have the stone I gave you?

RIAN: Oh yeah, it's right here...(retrieving it from a pocket)

PARKER: (*Laughing*) No need to pull it out. I believe you. I'm glad. Keep it on you when you're with your friend. You can never have too much good luck. Even if it may be fake (*he winks at Rian*) Now, I have to get home. Stay safe in the storm.

RIAN: Wait! (*Standing, running to him*) Are you sure you're good? You really don't look well, and you're walking with a cane! I don't want you to get hurt.

PARKER: Oh, don't worry about me. I hurt my knee earlier. Getting old. I'll be fine; I can handle myself. You enjoy your time with your friend. Bring them by some time.

RIAN: Yeah...

PARKER: Goodbye, Kid. (*Parker exits*)

RIAN: Bye, Uncle!

Rian is alone. The rest of the scene has faded from existence, leaving Rian with nothing but worry.

Beat.

Rian, now alone holding the STONE with two hands, sighs. The Stranger walks up silently from the non-existence behind Rian as Rian looks worriedly after Parker.

Beat.

STRANGER: (*Scaring Rian, probably purposefully*) Who was that?

RIAN: (*Turning around, almost dropping the STONE in fright*) Ahhhh!

STRANGER: (*With a mischievous smile*) Hey, skittish friend.

RIAN: (*Gathering composure*) Hey...when did you get there?

STRANGER: Oh, just a second ago...so that's your 'family member' huh?

RIAN: ...what?

STRANGER: The one you said gave you your stone?

RIAN: (*After a pause*) OH, right, yeah. My uncle...

STRANGER: He seems nice... (*The Stranger trails off, attention switching from Rian to the mess of Christmas lights on the ground*)

RIAN: Yeah...he's always been there for me so...you know...I can't complain...

STRANGER: Right, right...hey (*picking up a strand of lights, looking more than a bit confused*)...what's with all the lights?

RIAN: Oh...those are...well, they're for the, um, project...you know, the one I said about...yesterday...

STRANGER: Why are there so many of them??

RIAN: Ok...so, you know the gazebo in Town Square? So, they're doing the ceremonial start or whatever to the Festival tomorrow and I'm supposed to get it decorated with these lights for, like, ambience?

STRANGER: (*Looking somewhat concerned at Rian, then at the lights in a mess on the ground*)
Hmmm....

RIAN: And I'm already supposed to be working on this food stall with Ace and it's just...a lot to handle on my own...I think....

STRANGER: (*Looking quite concerned; then, coming to terms with it, lets out a big breath and...*) Ok. I'll still help you.

RIAN: ...still?

STRANGER: Yeah. The festival is kind of the worst, but you look overwhelmed and I guess I still owe you.

RIAN: I...

STRANGER: Listen, just hand me a set of lights and I'll start untangling them.

RIAN: Ok...

The Stranger's sudden shift in tone disheartens Rian a bit. Rian sits back down, sitting the stone close by, to continue testing strands of lights as The Stranger lays them out, seemingly randomly, about the space.

Silence.

The wind picks up a bit.

The lights dim a bit, like there's a tree somewhere hanging on the power lines.

The space is a bit dimmer than before. The testing of the Christmas lights shines a bit brighter on the pair. Everything feels a bit less real.

But they continue.

A much lower, calmer gust of wind blows somewhere near.

Then...

STRANGER: *(Breaking the moment, the tension)*...so...you've lived here your whole life?

RIAN: *(Caught off guard)* What?

STRANGER: In this town? Like were you born here or what?

RIAN: Oh...umm...I was born somewhere else...a few towns over, I think. I'm not sure. We moved here when I was pretty young. I barely remember it now.

STRANGER: Oh...huh....

RIAN: What about you?

STRANGER: Me?

RIAN: Yeah, are you from here?

STRANGER: Here? No... *(with a sort of giggle to their voice)* I'm from, well...pretty far away. My dad moved us out here after a falling out with his family. *(Impersonating their father)* To hell with 'em!! Who needs 'em anyways!!! *(This elicits a laugh from Rian. The Stranger continues, happy to get a smile)* So he drove us out here, to the middle of God-forsaken nowhere. Been here ever since....

RIAN: Ever since...wait, but I never saw you when we were in high school?

STRANGER: Oh, high school...my dad insisted on home schooling me. Can't trust the government! At least that's what he always said...I'm not so sure....

RIAN: Why not?

STRANGER: I'm not sure I liked being home schooled...honestly, I really don't think I completely trust the government either. But it would have been nice to go to public school. It feels a little more...free, you know?

RIAN: I guess....

STRANGER: What, did you have some terrible experience at public school?

RIAN: I mean...not terrible...just sort of...typical....

STRANGER: Hmmm...

RIAN: What?

STRANGER: It's just...that's a strange word choice, don't you think? It's like you're saying having a typical education is a bad thing.

RIAN: I mean, it wasn't great...

STRANGER: Yeah, but at least it was normal. I'd rather typical than a complete mess like mine was....

RIAN: I'm sorry.

STRANGER: For what?

RIAN: I don't know...you're like...situation? (*Rian is obviously confused*)

STRANGER: If you don't know what you're sorry for, then don't apologize! (*laughing a bit*)

RIAN: (*Smiles*) Ok.

Time slows down a bit. At least, it probably does outside of where Rian and the Stranger are. The lights of the room are weak, with just enough light, between them and the most recent strand Rian has plugged in, to see the Stranger laying out Christmas lights about on the floor. Rian is glowing. Strange how it feels to be making a new friend. The wind has grown, almost like static, drowning out the world. The Stranger is only lit by the ambience of the Christmas lights and Rian's glow. Then...

STRANGER: (*Starting completely inaudible, muffled; then, turning into yells as Rian fails to notice*) Hey...heeeeeey...helloooooooooo...(then, the ambient noise cuts out, and...) HEY!!!!

RIAN: (*Snapping out of it*) Huh? What's up?

STRANGER: Hello? You were staring, nerd.

RIAN: Staring?

STRANGER: (*Laughing*) Yeah, dude, you zoned out staring at me.

RIAN: I...wait what? Seriously?? I'm sorry, I didn't....

STRANGER: Its ok! (*still laughing*) It happens, dude. Don't worry about it.

They go back to working, though both a bit more jovial than before. After a moment...

STRANGER: *(Making small talk)* So, your uncle...?

RIAN: My uncle?

STRANGER: Yeah, the one who was here before?

RIAN: *(Confused)* What about him?

STRANGER: He gave you that stone?

RIAN: Wha-...oh, yeah. Yeah, just yesterday, actually.

STRANGER: *(Humoured)* Yeah...that's what you said yesterday.

RIAN: Oh...right....

STRANGER: Its really pretty.

RIAN: Yeah...yeah it is.

STRANGER: *(Stopping what they're doing; then, curiously)* Can I see it?

RIAN: *(Suspiciously)*...see it?

STRANGER: Yeah, like, can I hold it for a minute? And look at it?

RIAN: OH; right, yeah. *(Picking up the STONE and bringing it over to the Stranger)* Just be careful. I'm not sure how fragile it is....

STRANGER: *(Taking the STONE)* Oh...oh wow! This is so cool!

RIAN: *(Suddenly distracted, realizing the mess of lights the Stranger has made on the ground)* Hey...um...quick question....

STRANGER: *(Still enamoured with the STONE)* What's up?

RIAN: Um...what...exactly...are you doing with these lights?

STRANGER: *(Still mesmerized)* Lights...*(snapping out of it)* OH!! Right! Here, come here come here come here!! *(The Stranger moves Rian to stand in one of two human sized circles they have made on the ground)* Ok! So! I've put the lights out in a specific pattern in order to...are you ready? Wait for it...have a ritual!

RIAN: *(Confused. Not quite annoyed, but the seed of annoyance is there)* A...ritual? For what?

STRANGER: Ah, well...so, you stand there...right, perfect. Then, I stand here in this one *(the Stranger stands in the other circle)* Then we both put our hands on the stone-

RIAN: What? Why?

STRANGER: *(Cutting Rian off)* PUT YOUR HANDS ON THE STONE.

RIAN: *(Putting their hands on the STONE)* Hmph....

STRANGER: Now, repeat after me....

RIAN: *(Responding with nothing but a stale expression)*

STRANGER: Repeat. After. Me: I totally, completely, and unequivocally swear...

RIAN: *(Only after being egged on by a look from the Stranger)* I totally, completely and unequivocally swear...

STRANGER: ...to be your friend, and remain so for as long as humanly possible...

RIAN: ...to be your...*(getting frustrated and giving up, Rian lets go of the STONE)* Can we stop?

STRANGER: *(Annoyed, almost offended)* What? Why?

RIAN: Well...just...*(going to pick up some of the lights on the exterior of the Stranger's design)*
We're supposed to get this done...and the lights are just everywhere now...

STRANGER: Hey, chill out. It's just the festival. It's a waste of time, anyway/

RIAN: It's not a waste of time!

STRANGER: It is!

RIAN: It's not!!! My uncle puts a lot of work into it and-

STRANGER: *(Quieter, half in thought)*...uncle?

RIAN: Well, like, my uncle and a lot of other people work really hard to-

STRANGER: No, no, no; I get it now.

RIAN: Get what?

STRANGER: Your uncle! He asked you to do this, didn't he? *(Cutting Rian off before they can answer)* Actually, don't answer that. He did. I knew I recognized him somewhere. He's the moron of a councilman that started this waste of money festival.

RIAN: Hey-!

STRANGER: No, I totally get it. You look up to him and want to waste your time and effort stringing lights to make this crap hole of a town look passable for all the trashy tourists that come through to look at us like farm animals when the festival goes up.

RIAN: Oh...well...maybe you should just go home then....

Beat.

STRANGER: *(Regretting their previous words)* No...no, sorry...that was kind of out of line.
I'll stay. *(Starting to pick up some other peripheral lights)*

Beat.

RIAN: Listen...I'm sorry too...its just, this festival means a lot to me.

STRANGER: Don't worry about it, dude. We don't have to agree. I said I'd help and you're pretty chill. *(Turning so their back is to Rian)* And, it's not your fault your uncle's an incompetent ass-

RIAN: Wha- *(All other sound stops. Just the Stranger shuffling lights around, all else is quiet)*

STRANGER: Anyway, I think my dad's been thinking about moving again, so we should probably hang out again soon. Maybe we can get together next wee- *(The Stranger turns around to see Rian, still in the same position as before, now somewhere between angry and upset. A single tear streamed down from each eye, hands clenched, staring straight down) ...wha-?*

RIAN: *(Trying to breathe, more single tears falling down the single streams on their face)*

STRANGER: *(Sitting the STONE down in the center of the lights, approaching RIAN)*
Hey...what...I didn't...

RIAN: Go to hell.

STRANGER: Wha-?

RIAN: *(Looking up; in a tone full of life for the first time, fully crying for the first time)* If your dad wants to move then just go! You don't even care about this town anyway, so just go to hell!

Beat.

STRANGER: Oh....

Beat.

The Stranger looks like they want to say something, but they don't. They go to walk out then turn back.

STRANGER: Seeya.

The Stranger exits, leaving Rian alone in space and time. The Christmas lights slowly light up on their own. Rian falls to their knees, then to a sitting position near the STONE. They look out where the Stranger left. This wasn't how it was supposed to go. Rian covers their face with their hands; then, noticing the STONE, picks it up. Ace walks in, illuminated only by the ambient glow of the Christmas lights.

Beat.

Rian grips the STONE tight. Closes their eyes. Then, looking at it one last time, lost in anger and frustration in themself, throws the stone into the ground.

A million pieces.

It is gone.

The STONE ceases to exist.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

ACE: Rian....

Time and space crawl sneakily back into existence. A trumpet whimpers. Rian, in tears, turns around to see Ace. Ace doesn't need Rian to explain what happened. They know. They approach and sit down next to Rian, to comfort them.

ACE: Hey...I'm really sorry Rian. I know this sucks...maybe it'll be fine, though? Everyone goes through arguments and just...maybe...it'll be good to have got it out of the way now? *(Silence. Rian doesn't respond. Just cries)* Hey...*(holding Rian close)* I know, I'm sorry...it'll be ok though! This doesn't have to be the end! Just give it a bit. You can go talk and tell them you're sorry! I'm sure they'll understand. I know they'll understand. Everyone has their moments. You just...you can't give up. You've still made a friend, just like Parker said! It's progress! *(Rian still doesn't really respond. Ace doesn't know what else to say.)* Listen, how about I go get Parker? He'll know what to do. You gonna be ok here? *(Rian nods)* Ok. I'll be right back.

Ace gets up and leaves. Rian is left alone again. Space and time dissolve again. Rian realizes what they've done to the STONE, running their hand through the remnants.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

A raw note from a trumpet, for the first time since yesterday. Jarring.

Sidney enters, looking at his trumpet. He jumps when he sees Rian, bringing space and time back to a crawl with him.

SIDNEY: Oh! Rian! What'd I tell ya about scarin' me! I'm comin' down here ta practice and yer just sittin' here in the dar- *(Noticing the mess and Rian's state)* What on earth happened here, then?

RIAN: *(Getting up)* Nothing...just a little argument....

SIDNEY: What, with Ace?

RIAN: No...just...it's nothing....

SIDNEY: What, with that new friend then? The one you been hangin' round with last night? Yeah, I seen y'all. Tryin' to make new friends, eh? It can be hard. What'd they say somethin' stupid or somethin'?

RIAN: No...I mean...we both said dumb things...I shouldn't have-

SIDNEY: Nah! Y o u spoke up fer once? Good. If it were somethin' stupid, who the hell cares! Listen, we all say some dumb nonsense once in a while. Ya gotta stand up for yerself. Go and find that kid you been tryin' to be friends with and tell 'em how you feel! That they said somethin' to annoy ya! And ya want an apology. Sure, ya did the same, but ya gotta be assertive for once in yer life! They'll respect ya more for it! Now come on. We'll go and find the kid. I'll look off toward the school, you can go over toward town square and that lot where y'all hang out all the time. How's about it?

Rian gets up. Sidney exits. Time and space fade, leaving just Rian, alone with the glow of the Christmas lights. Rian goes to follow where Sidney left, turns and looks back at the mess, where the stone used to be, takes a deep breath, then walks out with purpose. Nothing is left but the glow.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Ace runs in opposite where the other two left. Ace looks disheveled. The light and joy that previously filled their person is...weak. Something is wrong. Everything is slow. Looking around, realizing Rian has gone, Ace runs their fingers through their hair. They sit down at the center of the Christmas lights, completely drained, trying hard to prop themselves up, looking around at what used to be the STONE.

ACE: Oh, Rian...

Tears well up in Ace's eyes. All light fades bar the Christmas lights. The scene is engulfed in static.

Headline IV

The static is angrier than it's been before. The broadcast is weaker than it's been before. The Headline is choppy, intercut with images of the news story and aggressive static. The result is off-putting, as this effect grows through the course of the Headline, crescendo-ing at the end.

ANCHOR: -eaking news tonight as- *(static)* -n explosion at a US milit- *(static)* -orth time this month. The building collap- *(angry static; footage of explosions, rubble with more static and...)* -leaving no survivors. Officials have issued a travel warning *(intercut static, more imagery of war and destruction)* asking potential visitors to stay away from- *(very aggressive static, similar imagery as before, but now just flashes)* -avoid more civilian casualty. This comes amidst rising tension- *(more angry static, more flashes)* -ausing more trouble in the region, with more than thr- *(again, static, imagery, etc.)* -otal casualties since fighting began. The Pre- *(static; then, over more imagery of rubble, destruction, abandonment)* -plan for ending the conflict, heading off what has become the most violent clash in recent memory. *(Then, through poor reception)* -odies will be sent back t- *(static)* -emorial services in their respective home towns. *(static)* -e offer our most sincere th- *(static)* -nd prayers in this most trying time *(angriest static yet, then cut back to...)* -And next up, sports! *(an insincere smile; cut to the same angry static growing angrier and angrier)*

Snapshot IV: If Only; Last Words

A church bell tolls eight times, somewhere in the distance. By the eighth toll, the static is gone. A single spot lights the Stranger, sitting where they'd sat reading just a day before, a new book by their side, face down, open to a page near the middle. They look distraught, head in hands.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Rian runs in from opposite. Out of breath. They've been running for quite a while. They don't pause to catch their breath. They just run in, see the Stranger, and freeze. Everything exists again, but weirdly.

Beat.

RIAN: Hey....

STRANGER: Hey....

Pause, as Rian catches their breath.

RIAN: Do you mind if I sit?

STRANGER: No....

Rian sits at some distance from the Stranger.

RIAN: Listen....

STRANGER: I'm listening.

RIAN: I think...you know...we got along well enough...just...maybe we can still try to be friends?

STRANGER: *(Looks at Rian with a critical uncertainty)*

RIAN: I just think...maybe, I don't know...maybe we can just, like, talk?

STRANGER: *(After a brief pause, continuing the look of critical uncertainty; a deep breath, then...)* Ok. Talk, then.

Beat.

Beat.

An off-tune trumpet note sounds somewhere far in the distance.

Beat.

RIAN: I think...so...I think I might have just been...you know...a little...well...I'm sorry....

STRANGER: For what?

RIAN: Just, like...what I said...I shouldn't have said it....

STRANGER: Yeah, you think....

RIAN: I just...I was being to...like...reactionary.....

STRANGER: Reactionary?

RIAN: Yeah, like...I got too caught up and just acted on being mad and stuff....

STRANGER: I know what reactionary means.

RIAN: Right...yeah....

Awkward silence.

RIAN: I'm sorry I was so reactionary...

More awkward silence.

STRANGER: It's fine.

RIAN: ...Really?

STRANGER: (*Getting up*) Yeah...it's whatever.

RIAN: Are you sure?

STRANGER: Yeah. Just...yeah, its fine. Just chill about it. Ok?

RIAN: Oh...yeah...ok....

Even more awkward silence. Stranger is looking away from Rian.

STRANGER: You gonna be ok?

RIAN: Yeah...just....

STRANGER: (*Turning back to Rian*) Just what?

Awkward silence again; but, for the first time since Rian got there, they lock eyes.

RIAN: (*Getting up*) I just...feel like such an idiot. I just...I didn't mean it. I was just mad and stupid and irrational an-

STRANGER: Ok, ok; enough, enough, enough! Listen, dude. It's. Fine.

RIAN: I just-

STRANGER: It's ok! We both said some things we shouldn't have said and it's fine. It's whatever. It happened.

Less, but still somewhat, awkward silence.

RIAN: You're not mad?

STRANGER: Only a little...but...it's fine.

An almost completely un-awkward silence.

RIAN: You're sure?

STRANGER: *(After a deep sigh)* Yeah....

A normal silence.

RIAN: Are...um...are we still friends?

STRANGER: *(Another sigh)* Yeah...yeah, sure. It's fine.

RIAN: Oh...um...cool...yeah, ok.

Not quite awkward, not quite silence; but certainly a slightly uncomfortable pause.

STRANGER: Maybe...I guess...we can hang out...sometime.

RIAN: Yeah?

STRANGER: Yeah...like...maybe next week or something....

RIAN: Yeah...um...yeah, that'd be cool. I guess.

STRANGER: Ok.

RIAN: Ok...

STRANGER: I think I'm just gonna...*(motioning toward the book)*

RIAN: Oh...um...OH right, right. Ok, yeah.

STRANGER: *(With a very slight smile at Rian's awkwardness)* Yeah. So...I'll see you around?

RIAN: Yeah....

STRANGER: Don't you have some decorations to finish?

RIAN: OH! Right, yeah. I guess...I'm gonna go do that....

STRANGER: *(Sitting back down where they started, picking up the book. A church bell begins tolling somewhere in the distance. It tolls 8 times)* Ok. Seeya, dude.

RIAN: Yeah, ok, seeya.

Rian exits opposite where they entered. The Stranger takes a look at their book, a bit. Smiling at first; then, as though reading a particularly sad chapter, looks grimmer and grimmer. They massage their eyes, stressed. They sit the book face down to their side, open to a page somewhere in the middle. The Stranger is left alone. Distraught. Head in hands.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Rian runs in from opposite. Out of breath. They've been running for quite a while. They don't pause to catch their breath. They just run in, see the Stranger, and freeze. Everything exists again, but weirdly.

Beat.

RIAN: Hey....

STRANGER: Hey....

Pause, as Rian catches their breath.

RIAN: Do you mind if I sit?

STRANGER: No....

Rian sits at some distance from the Stranger.

RIAN: Listen....

STRANGER: I'm listening.

RIAN: I think...you know...we got along well enough...just...maybe we can still try to be friends?

STRANGER: *(Looks at Rian with a critical uncertainty)*

RIAN: I just think...maybe, I don't know...maybe we can just, like, talk?

STRANGER: *(After a brief pause, continuing the look of critical uncertainty; a deep breath, then...)* Ok. Talk, then.

Beat.

Beat.

An off-tune trumpet note sounds somewhere far in the distance.

Beat.

RIAN: I think...listen...I just...I just think...well-

STRANGER: Come on, dude; get on with it.

RIAN: You kind of pissed me off!

An awkward silence.

RIAN: *(Standing)* Listen, sorry, just, you were really mean! You were mean about my uncle even though you've never met him. Then, you acted like it was nothing and kept going about it even though it was obviously bothering me! Like, I didn't even do anything and I just wanted to be friends and I don't understand why you couldn't just. You know. Be nice!

Rian turns to the Stranger, who is staring wide eyed back. This is the first time their eyes have met since Rian arrived. After a short pause...

STRANGER: Wow.

RIAN: *(Realizing maybe they've gone a bit too far)* Oh...oh my gosh, I'm so sorry!

STRANGER: WOW.

RIAN: I didn't...oh...I just-

STRANGER: (*Standing*) No...no, don't apologize! Just...I didn't think you could be so assertive....

RIAN: I...well...you kind of really annoyed me before....

STRANGER: Yeah...I kinda got that.

RIAN: I just. I don't know. I just wanted to speak my mind. Sorry.

STRANGER: I said don't apologize! Geez...who got you all riled up?

RIAN: Nobody...I just...I want to stay friends. I really like you. I just...I'd really appreciate an apology.

STRANGER: An apology?

RIAN: Yeah...like...you were really mean to me and I think it'd be nice if yo-

STRANGER: Yeah, I get that. (*A momentary pause as they make significant eye contact*) I'm not going to apologize though.

RIAN: Wh-what?

STRANGER: I mean, don't get me wrong, I was way out of line...but so were you.

RIAN: M...me?

STRANGER: Yeah. You. And we both said things that were...well...a bit intense. I think it's best if we just drop it.

RIAN: Oh....

An awkward pause.

RIAN: Can...um...can we still be friends?

STRANGER: Yeah. Yeah, I guess that's fine.

Another awkward pause.

RIAN: Ok....

One more awkward paused, this time sustained.

RIAN: Listen....

STRANGER: What?

RIAN: I just...I'm really sorry.

STRANGER: No.

RIAN: What?

STRANGER: No. Don't apologize.

RIAN: Why?

STRANGER: If you apologize, then I have to apologize, and I don't think I should.

RIAN: But, you should though!

STRANGER: Yeah? Why's that?

RIAN: I told you! You were mean!

STRANGER: So were you! You said I didn't belong! You told me to go to hell!!

RIAN: You...I....

STRANGER: Right?? You have nothing to say! You're just as bad!

RIAN: But I just think we should both apologize!

STRANGER: No!

RIAN: Why not??

STRANGER: Because I didn't say anything wrong!

RIAN: What??

STRANGER: This town is crap and your uncle is making it worse! It's not my fault you can't accept the truth!

Another sustained, very awkward pause.

RIAN: Well...if you won't take it back...I won't either. I hope you and your dad move as far away as humanly possible.

STRANGER: *(A church bell begins tolling somewhere in the distance. It tolls 8 times. The Stranger senses they went farther than intended)* Dude....

RIAN: Go to hell.

Rian exits, storming off, mad. The Stranger looks on, extremely upset. They go back to where they were reading before. They pick up their book and try to read, but they're too distraught. They slam the book back down next to the, open to a page somewhere around the middle. The Stranger is left alone. Head now in hands. Distraught.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Rian runs in from opposite. Out of breath. They've been running for quite a while. They don't pause to catch their breath. They just run in, see the Stranger, and freeze. Only the two of them exist, but a strange deep blue light permeates the space.

Beat.

RIAN: Hey....

STRANGER: Hey....

Pause, as Rian catches their breath.

RIAN: Do you mind if I sit?

STRANGER: No....

Rian sits at some distance from the Stranger.

RIAN: Listen....

STRANGER: I'm listening.

RIAN: I think...you know...we got along well enough...just...maybe we can still try to be friends?

STRANGER: *(Looks at Rian with a critical uncertainty)*

RIAN: I just think...maybe, I don't know...maybe we can just, like, talk?

STRANGER: *(After a brief pause, continuing the look of critical uncertainty; a deep breath, then...)* Ok. Talk, then.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

RIAN: I don't know how to fix this.

Silence.

STRANGER: Me neither.

Silence.

RIAN: I really care about you, but...

STRANGER: But?

RIAN: But...I just *(starting to tear up)*...I don't know how people do this! I don't know how other people manage all of this! I can't even talk to someone I actually like without making an ass of myself!

STRANGER: Yeah....

RIAN: *(Hiding their face in their arms, crying)* I'm sorry...I'm so sorry....

STRANGER: Dude...just...don't worry about it.

RIAN: No, I really, really messed up and-

STRANGER: DUDE. *(Starting to tear up as well)* Don't worry about it. We both messed up.

RIAN: But-

STRANGER: But nothing. We. Both. Messed Up.

The Stranger closes their book, gets up, and walks to center. Existence follows.

STRANGER: I really like you. I've had more fun than I've had in ages. Really. And I know this is gonna suck but....

Rian stands and walks to center, where the Stranger has their back turned.

RIAN: Suck? What are you t-?

STRANGER: (*Turning*) Listen. I like you. A lot. But. I went home to grab my book...our place was just covered in boxes. Turns out my dad really does want to move.

RIAN: Wha...why...but what about our argument? Weren't we talking about-

STRANGER: That's just it. I really like you, but I think...maybe...it's like, a sign, you know?

RIAN: A sign?

STRANGER: (*Almost crying at this point*) Yeah, like...just...bad timing. Like with the argument, and moving, just....I don't want t-

RIAN: You don't want to hear from me....

STRANGER: I didn't say that.

RIAN: But it's what you meant. Right?

STRANGER: (*So close to crying*) I just....

RIAN: Right.

Another awkward pause.

STRANGER: Listen...I...I have to go...we're leaving Monday and...I just...I have a lot to pack...

RIAN: Right....

STRANGER: Listen, I'm sorry for all this.

RIAN: Yeah...me too....

STRANGER: I know this is hard, but...maybe...we'll meet each other again?

RIAN: (*Smiling through tears*) Yeah...one day.

STRANGER: (*Also smiling through tears*) Under different circumstances.

RIAN: Better circumstances.

They both laugh through the tears at the cliché.

Beat.

Beat.

They share a moment.

Beat.

STRANGER: Seeya later, dude.

RIAN: Yeah. Later, nerd.

The Stranger turns to leave when...

RIAN: Wait...hey...hey! What the heck, I never asked your name!

STRANGER: Too late now!

RIAN: Wha...but...what if...I'll never be able to find you again!

STRANGER: *(Halfway out)* Shoulda asked sooner, dude!

RIAN: Wha...wait!

STRANGER: *(Now off, yelling back)* It's Whit!

RIAN: *(To themselves)* Whit...?

STRANGER: Short for Whitney!

(The Stranger is now gone. For good)

RIAN: Whitney...*(yelling after)* BYE WHITNEY!!!

Rian's emotions are mixed. This moment, as happy as it has turned out, is the hardest any moment has possibly ever been. It has also distracted Rian from Ace, who had entered from the opposite side. Ace looks on, worried. Rian is fragile. Grown, yes. But fragile. This won't be fun.

ACE: Rian....

RIAN: *(Turning)* Ace...? ACE! Ace *(In Tears)*...I don't know...I just...

ACE: *(Walking to Rian)* Rian...hey....

RIAN: Whitney! I made a friend! Whitney is my friend!

ACE: Rian, listen....

RIAN: But Whitney is leaving...moving on Monday and it's so much...I don't know what to think!!

ACE: Rian.

RIAN: We argued...we had a disagreement...but just...the time wasn't right...but I think it's fine?? I feel like I've grown.

ACE: RIAN.

RIAN: I have to tell Parker! I need to know what to do...

ACE: Hey...

RIAN: Should I write a letter to Whit??

ACE: Listen...

RIAN: Should I visit??

ACE: Ri-

RIAN: How do I find them???

ACE: DUDE.

RIAN: I don't even know where they're moving

ACE: RIAN.

RIAN: I have to go see Parker, now.

Rian turns to leave, but Ace grabs them.

ACE: R I A N.

RIAN: *(Noticing Ace for the first time)* Ace...woah...hey...what's wrong.

ACE: *(At this point, completely in tears)* Rian, listen. I know a lot just happened, and this is gonna be really tough to hear.

RIAN: *(Starting to look worried)* Ace...hey, what's wrong?

ACE: *(Slowly, carefully and hesitantly)* Listen...Rian...something happened....

Through this last line, static engulfs the scene, drowning out Ace.

They're left there alone but together.

In the darkness.

The only two in existence.

The Final Headline

As the scene fades, static fades back in, This time calm. Solemn. Rian reacts to Ace telling them the same news in time with the newscast that follows. As the static cuts, the News Anchor is caught, unprepared. Clearly still absorbing the news they are about to report. They shuffles their papers, looks down, then back up. Clears their throat then...

ANCHOR: Some...um...truly saddening news tonight. It is with great distress that I tell you...tragedy has struck the town of Dusk Hill. Councilman Reggie Parker, founder and long-time leader of the Dusk Hill Founders' Festival, has died. *(Pause. They collect their thoughts)* The Councilman was found in his home by his only sister late this evening. Parker was well known in the tri-county area as a hard worker, an honest leader, and above all, a good friend to many. Parker was unmarried and had no children, but is survived by his sister and her family, with whom he had a close relationship. Paramedics on the scene refuse to discuss the cause of death, but those close to him noted Parker looked more and more tired in the days leading up to the Festival this year. Whatever the case, Reggie Parker was loved by many, and always kind to those that disagreed with him. He was a model citizen and will be greatly missed.

Pause. The Anchor looks to their papers to continue, but quickly abandons them half way through a breath. Then, as Ace comforts a now stable Rian in the foreground...

ANCHOR: I know this will be a hard day for our community...but Reggie would want us to keep working to make it better, even without him. He was a great man, but...it takes more than just a great man to make a great town. I know a lot of our viewers will be upset...Reggie was an aspiration to a great many of you and worked harder than near anyone I've ever met...but, in his memory, I just think...maybe...don't forget to tell people you love them. Everyone has their own experiences...their own ups and downs...sometimes we argue or we fight...people come into our lives and people leave...and whether you see them every day for the rest of time, or...if you're never going to see them again...just...appreciate them. Love them while you can. And, if they're already gone, love the people who are still there. You never know what might happen, and love is the only thing we have.

Another pause. The Anchor is deep in contemplation. Tearing up. Almost crying. They pick up their papers and continue, as Ace and Rian grow still, supporting each other...

ANCHOR: The Councilman's family would like to thank everyone in advance for their love and support in this trying time. A public service will be announced in the coming days and all Festival activities have been indefinitely suspended, out of respect. I sincerely wish all of our viewers the best of rest this weekend. Get some rest, and stay safe. Goodnight, Dusk Hill.

From "Get some rest" the newscast fades to static, leaving just Rian and Ace, still silhouettes, barely existent. After a few seconds, the static fades as well.

Beat.

Beat.

A trumpet sounds somewhere in the distance.

Beat.

The beats turn into a rhythm. The trumpet turns into a melody.

Rian and Ace fade from existence. Nothing exists but a solemn, distant melody. END.