

*Escaping Reality* is a moving and entertaining screenplay that explores identity, complex family dynamics, and the consequences of outrunning your past. Josh's passion for film and close attention to detail has given him a firm grasp on visual language and, in his skillful hands, the reader is whisked across the globe, thrust into an ensemble of exciting characters, and placed directly in the experience of a young man trying to find his place in the world.

-Brandon Garegnani, SAY Teaching Artist

Every time you think you know where this movie is going, Josh Dunford finds a way to surprise you and touch your heart. Thrilling, relatable, emotional and intelligent, *Escaping Reality* is beautifully told and visually described with skill and finesse. Anyone who reads this story will find themselves reflected in this extraordinary screenplay about leaving home and returning to who you are.

-Aidan Sank, SAY Artistic Director of Confident Voices

Josh Dunford's *Escaping Reality* is a tale both bold and tender. It is at once a testament to the power of self-identification, and an exposition on how our identities are articulated through family - the ones you're born with and the ones you choose. A love letter to New York City, *Escaping Reality* is a hopeful story about one young man who takes his future into his own hands, learns to make a mean steak, and ultimately discovers - perhaps for the first time - his piercing belief in the bonds of family and the beauty of forgiveness. Josh Dunford expertly navigates the nuance of coming-of-age, of boldly adventuring into the world, and finally, of returning home to your deepest truth.

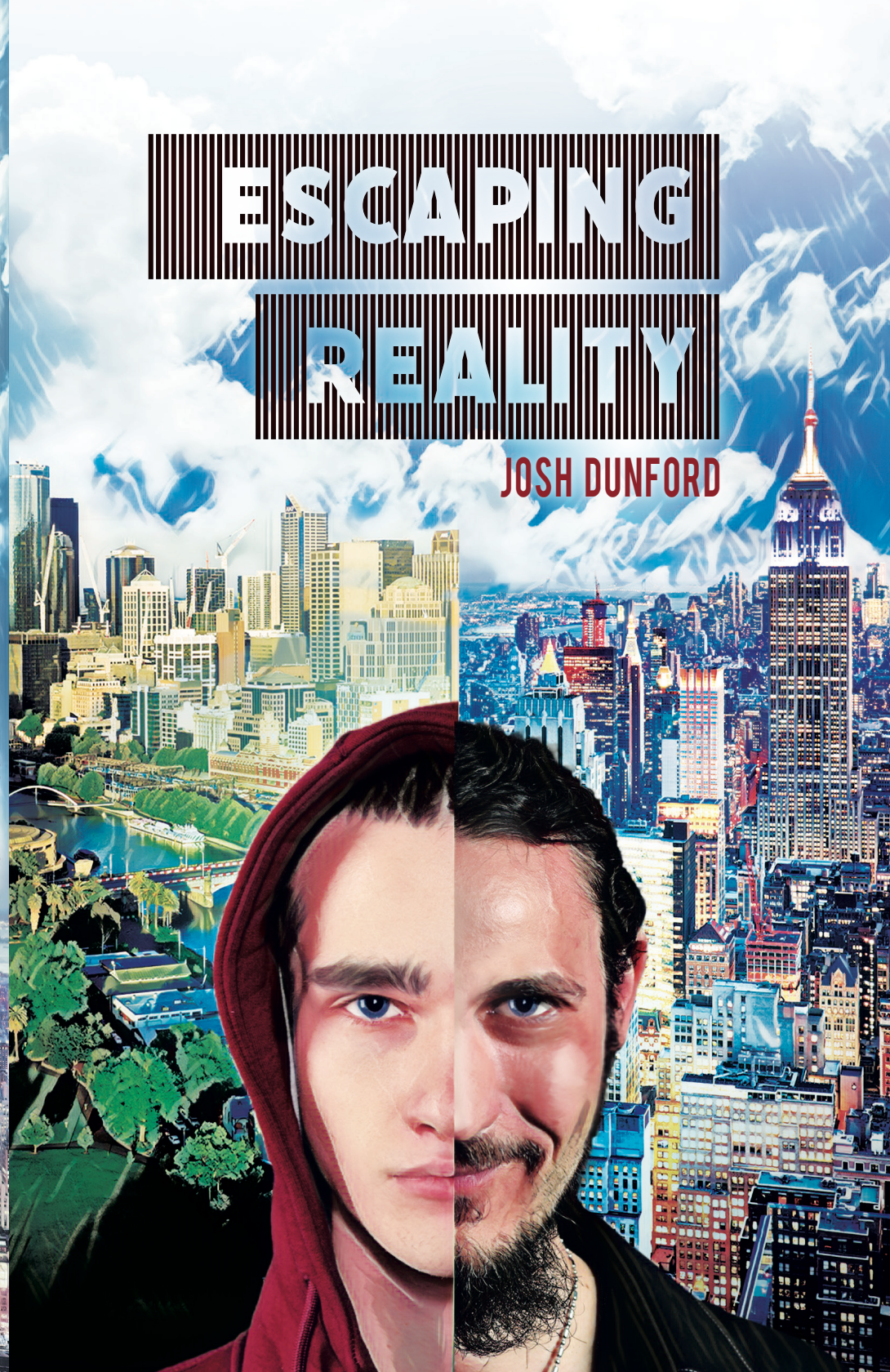
-Kate Detrick, SAY Director of Confident Voices

ESCAPING REALITY

JOSH DUNFORD

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**Josh Dunford**

**Escaping Reality**

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## **Dedication**

**I want to thank my parents, SAY, and Brandon for helping  
me write this book. I also want to thank my sisters.**

**“Do not let the shadows of your past darken the  
doorstep of your future. Forgive and forget.”**

RecoveryExperts.com





## **Screenwriting glossary**

ECU-extreme close up (camera is very close to character's face)

CU-close up (camera is close to character's face)

MS-medium shot (camera is it too close or too far)

LS-long shot (camera is far away)

ELS-extreme long shot (camera is very far away)

VO-voiceover (we hear actor's voice off screen)

BEV-birds eye view (view of something from above)

INT-interior

EXT-exterior

CONTINUOUS-camera follows person without stopping





# *Escaping Reality*

*Written by Josh Dunford*





## ***EXT -MELBOURNE -NIGHT***

We see the close up of a sign saying  
"WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA" with a picture of Melbourne.

There is a winding road. On one side of the road is an ocean and on the other side there are some woods. There is a city in the far distance, and the lights from the city are reflected off of the water.

We hear crickets chirping.

We see an empty road. After about 30 seconds a car suddenly passes. We see a man, Phoenix, in the car looking out of the window with a very nervous face.

## ***INT - CAR - CONTINUOUS***

We see the road from Phoenix's perspective. We cut between his face and the houses. As he starts recognizing the houses, he breathes heavier and heavier. He eventually sounds like he's just ran a marathon, in which point the driver takes notice and looks at him.

**Driver**

You seem very nervous.

**Phoenix**

You can tell?

**Driver**

Yeah dude, it's pretty obvious... You here to visit somebody?

**Phoenix**

Family.



**Driver**

That's nice. Do you like your family?

**Phoenix**

They tried their best.

**Driver**

Sorry to hear that. I understand you want to keep some things to yourself. I must say though I know how you feel.

**Phoenix (looking at driver)**

You do?

**Driver**

Yeah. Everyone has family issues, including me. If your family messes up, and you can't forgive them, you may screw up your relationship even more. I heard a few years back that there was a kid who ran away from his parents in this town. Have you heard of that story?

**Phoenix looks at him at a red light and they share eye contact for a few seconds.**

***EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS***

**The car eventually arrives in the neighborhood, then the street.**

**INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS**

**Driver**

You one of these houses?

**Phoenix**

This one right here.

**Phoenix gets out of the car and waves at the driver. The taxi then pulls out.**

**CUT TO-EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

*Phoenix walks to the door. He stares at it for a few minutes. He notices a sign on the door saying "knock and I'll be right with you." He looks at it for a few minutes. He is breathing very heavily. He looks back and thinks about leaving, but he decides to get up the guts to finally do it. He knocks on the door. We wait 2 more minutes before the door finally opens. We see a woman in a nightgown.*

**Mom**

It's the middle of the night. I don't usually let any guests in this late.

*She doesn't recognize that it's her long lost son in front of her. Phoenix doesn't want her to know yet it's him so he lies to her. He changes his voice so she won't know it's him.*

**Phoenix** (in quiet slow voice)

I'm traveling here for a business trip and my car just ran out of gas. I need a place to crash for one night. I saw the sign on your door. Mind if I crash here?

**Mom**

Yeah, sure. Come on in, I'll make you a room and some tea.

**INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

*We enter a dimly lit kitchen. There's pictures on the wall. They sit at the kitchen table. The mom gets up to go make some tea. While she's making the tea, she talks to Phoenix.*

**Mom**

Sorry about your car. It sucks to be stuck in the suburbs in the middle of the night. You said you are here for a business trip. What do you do?

*Phoenix stares at the floor. Mom finishes the tea and goes back over to the table. She sees Phoenix looking down and the expression on his face.*

**Mom**

Is everything all right?

*Phoenix stares at the floor for a few more minutes but eventually looks up into her eyes. She looks into his face and eventually realizes who it is. She drops her tea and the cup shatters. She looks blank for 30 seconds and then starts to cry.*

**Mom (in shaky voice)**

What are you doing here?

*Cut to-Black. TITLE CARD: "18 YEARS AGO" in white letters.*

**CUT TO-EXT-HOSPITAL - DAY**

**MS-We see a room with a man and a woman who both look fairly young. We see them talking.**

**Mom**

I can't believe we are finally here.

**Dad**

Yeah it's crazy. I am glad we are starting this family. I want to wait until our first kid is five to think about having a second one.

**Mom**

I couldn't agree more.

**They hear a knock and a nurse walks in to give the mom an ultrasound. She sets up the machine and puts it on the mom's belly.**

**Nurse**

It's a big day for the two of you.

**Mom**

It sure is. I've been waiting for months for this day.

**Mom looks at the screen. The parents stare at it for a few minutes and then look at each other and then the nurse.**

**Mom**

Am I going crazy or is there more than one person in there?

**Dad (looking at screen)**

Yeah, I see two. You definitely aren't losing it.

**Nurse (in positive tone)**

You guys are so lucky. You just got twins.

**Mom (in concerned voice)**

Oh my god.

**Dad**

I don't know how to process two babies. I guess now we'll be parenting experts.

**The babies are taken out and the parents hold them and take them out of the hospital. We see them go into the car and go back to the house.**

**CUT TO-Black. TITLE CARD screen with words 5 years later**

**CUT TO-EXT-PARKING LOT-MORNING**

**We see a parking lot with a bunch of cars. There is a school in the background. The mom and the two brothers drive into the lot.**

**Mom**

You guys ready? This is such a big day for both of you.

**Apollo (in positive tone)**

I'm so excited. This is going to be so much fun. I love trying new things.

**Mom**

That's the spirit. Your enthusiasm will get you far. Are you excited Phoenix?

**Phoenix**

Whatever.

**The mom looks at Phoenix and then walks the boys into the building.**

**INT. GYM - MOMENTS LATER**

**We go into a gym with a bunch of bleachers. There are many kids, parents, and teachers all around. Apollo goes straight to the other kids while Phoenix stays with his mom.**

**Mom**

Go hang out with the other kids.

**Phoenix**

But mommy, I have never met any of these people before.

**Mom**

Then go introduce yourself. Look over at your brother. He's already in a group. You

guys are twins, if he can do it you can do it.

**Phoenix**

All right, mommy. See you later.

Phoenix goes to walk around the gym, but he can't find a group to stay in. He eventually sees a kid a few rows up in the seats, and decides to go to him. They start talking and become good friends.

**MONTAGE**

These two boys are always hanging out together. They walk to class together, hang out after school, and eat lunch together all the time. One day we see the friend going into a moving van, closing the door, and waving at Phoenix.

Phoenix spends the rest of elementary school alone. He is always seen staring at his brother in awe. The boys finish elementary school and go off to middle school.

Phoenix is always seen alone again, but we also see him get severely bullied by many of his classmates. We see his classmates stare at him and laugh when he passes them, steal his lunch money, and pass around notes about him behind his back. We see his brother with multiple groups of friends. Everyone treats him like he is a god.

The boys graduate from middle school.

**INT. HOUSE - NIGHT**

On the night before the first day of high school, the boys overhear their parents talking. They can't make out what they are saying at first but they eventually hear the specific words.



**Mom**

Why did this happen?

**Dad**

I have no idea. I just came to work today and my boss looked at me with a very stern face and told me to pack my things. He never told me why.

**Mom (more assertive)**

You can't just get fired out of nowhere. Did you do something you shouldn't have done?

**Dad (in angry voice)**

I hate my job. I know I never told you, but I can't hide it anymore. I had dreams that I was going to pursue, but we ended up with two kids which means I had to take a job that I hated. We all have secrets, and I'm no different.

**That is the last thing they hear from that conversation. That night, after the fight, Phoenix is walking around his room and stops at his closet. He finds a journal that he starts to write in. He is first seen writing in it that day, but he continues writing in it throughout the rest of high school.**

**The next morning the boys go down to eat breakfast, and the dad isn't there.**

**Phoenix**

What happened to dad?

**Mom**

We had a bit of a fight last night. Now I can't find his wallet or keys.

**The boys are pretty freaked out by this. They look each other in the eyes and then go back to their room. They shut the door.**

#### **CUT TO-MONTAGE**

The boys start high school. We cut between Phoenix and Apollo. Phoenix is always seen alone again with his hoodie on, writing in his journal. His brother is a very social kid with a ton of different friend groups. Apollo is class president and gets an A on every test. Phoenix is always seen at school events by himself, writing in his journal. The teachers and students all look up to Apollo, and they always brush off Phoenix like he doesn't exist.

#### **INT. RESTAURANT-NIGHT**

One day when the boys are seniors, Apollo gets into his top college. The mom is very happy for him. She takes the brothers out for dinner.

#### **Mom (to Apollo)**

I always knew you would get into your top school. You have always been so good at everything you did.

#### **Apollo**

Thank you so much. I've always felt so happy being in this town. I feel like it's shaped me into the person I am...I need to go to the bathroom.

#### **Mom**

All right, champ.

Apollo goes into the bathroom and the mom starts talking to Phoenix. Phoenix is seen writing in his journal while the mom talks to him. He isn't really paying much attention to her.

#### **Mom**

Aren't you so proud of Apollo?

**Phoenix**

Yeah, whatever.

**Mom**

Are you serious? That is all you have to say? Your twin brother, one of the best students in his class, just got into his dream school, and you just say "Yeah, whatever"? You would never get into a college like the one your brother got into. You are the polar opposite of him. I don't know how you guys are related. All I ever see you do is write in that stupid book of yours. Why can't you do all the good things that your brother does? You guys are twins but your brains couldn't be more different.

**Phoenix looks at his mom with a blank expression. He looks around and sees some people staring at him. He gets up and goes into the bathroom.**

**CUT TO-INT-BATHROOM**

**Phoenix locks the door and starts sobbing. He decides to write in his journal again. We hear for the first time what he is writing.**

**Phoenix (VO)**

*Dear diary,  
I am so goddamn angry at my mom and brother and everyone in this stupid town. I really don't belong here. I've tried my hardest for 18 years to fit in, but nobody has ever been good to me. There is no place for me here anymore. There never has been. I am going to leave tonight. I can't keep staying here.*

**INT. RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER**

**Phoenix leaves the bathroom. He stares at his mom and Apollo for a few seconds, and they leave. People are still staring at him as he leaves.**

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

They arrive at the house at 9:00. Phoenix goes up to his room and locks the door. He goes under the cover and starts crying again.

CUT TO-

Phoenix eventually gets up and looks at the clock. It says 11:30.

He gets his wallet and credit card. He writes down the credit card number in his diary just to remember it. He finds a map of his town and picks it up. He then goes into his drawer and packs two pairs of pants, and three shirts. He gets his toiletries. He puts all of this in a bag and goes out of the bathroom window.

CUT TO EXT-HOUSE

LS - We see Phoenix on the roof. He eventually goes down a ladder onto the ground. We hear a dog bark as he passes his neighbor's house. He walks off of his street, turns a corner and goes onto a big road. He follows the road for the rest of the night and hides when cars pass. He walks for the rest of the night, and then stops. He looks up and sees his new location.

EXT-MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY  
SUN'S COMING UP.

LS-We see Phoenix go through the doors and go to the bank. He takes out his life savings and looks at a list of cities in the United States he could go to. He hasn't figured out where to go. His eyes go down. As he goes down, his face goes from uninterested to more interested until he arrives at the end, in which he looks very excited.

Cut to-BEV-list of cities. They are written in large black letters and have pictures of them directly below.

- Philadelphia
- Dallas
- Seattle
- Chicago
- LA
- New York

He thinks about it for a few minutes and realizes that the place he's heard the most about is NYC. He buys a one way ticket there. He sits in the waiting area. Everyone around him has a group of people they are with. Phoenix decides to wear noise cancelling headphones so he doesn't have to overhear their conversations.

INT-PLANE - DAY

MS-Phoenix sits down in a window seat. He puts his bag down and then we hear the flight attendant.

#### Flight attendant

Welcome to flight 1644 to the Big Apple. Put on your seatbelt and don't unlock it unless you need the loo. We will arrive in about 13 hours. We have complimentary food and drinks for our flight.

Phoenix looks out the window of the plane as it takes off. He sees the skyline of his home city and then closes the window. A couple sits next to him and are very friendly. Out of nowhere, Phoenix strikes up a conversation with the man.

#### Phoenix

So mate, tell me why you're going to New York.

**Man on flight**

Are you talking to me?

**Phoenix**

Yeah mate, who else would I be talking to?  
You are literally right next to me.

**Man on flight**

Ok, mate chill. My wife and I are going on vacation.

**Phoenix**

That's cool, mate. Do you have friends in New York?

**Man**

Yeah, my wife and I are going to visit some friends in the city.

**Phoenix**

That's cool mate. That is actually the same reason I'm going to New York too. Need some new people to be around...

**Man**

Ok mate. I've had enough chit chatting.  
It's a long flight ahead of us. Let's stop talking.

**Phoenix then starts to write in his diary.**

**Phoenix (VO)**

*Dear diary,  
I can't believe I've gotten here. I was just out all night getting to the airport on foot. I don't really feel bad for leaving my family behind. I can't wait to get to the city. I don't know what will happen when I land, and I don't know if I made the right decision, but we will see.*

**He then falls asleep for a majority of the flight.**



CUT TO-ECU-PHOENIX'S FACE

We see Phoenix sleeping. He eventually wakes up. He opens the window and looks out. It is dark and he has a blank expression on his face. He yawns and then we see some specks of lights reflected off Phoenix's wet eyes. His face then turns to shock.

CUT TO-PHOENIX POV-NYC SKYLINE-NIGHT

Phoenix sees Manhattan and a bunch of buildings. They are way taller than the ones in Melbourne so he is pretty shocked.

EXT- JFK AIRPORT -- NIGHT

LS of the plane landing on the tarmac.  
Phoenix gets off the flight.

INT - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

MS-Phoenix walks out and thinks NYC is just like Australia. He sits down on a bench and starts talking to a guy.

Phoenix

G'day mate, tell me where I can find the loo?

Man

Huh?

Phoenix (very slowly)

I said, g'day mate, tell me where I can find the loo?

Man

Who is loo?

Phoenix

What do you mean who is loo?

**Man**

I don't know who it is.

**Phoenix**

The loo is not a person. It is the place you go when you eat too much.

**Man**

Ok man. I really have no idea what you are talking about. Go over there to that cop and ask him where the "loo" is or go find a map somewhere.

**The man gets up and walks away. Phoenix starts walking to the cop but passes a door he recognizes as the bathroom before he gets there. He opens his bag and takes out his diary. He puts the bag on a bench and goes into the bathroom.**

**INT-BATHROOM-CONTINUOUS**

**We see Phoenix go into a stall. We see his feet.**

**INT - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

**We see Phoenix walk out. He gets outside, goes to the bench, and is horrified to find his bag missing. He starts looking around frantically. He looks around for a few minutes. He tries asking people for help but they just ignore him.**

**Phoenix**

Hey mate, I need help.

**Man**

I'm on the phone.

**Phoenix**

Hey, can you help me?

**Lady**

No. I'm rushing to my flight.

**Phoenix**

Hey, can you please help me?

**Man**

I don't have any change.

**Phoenix feels like everyone is ignoring him. He keeps standing and starts looking angry. He gets madder and madder and suddenly screams at the top of his lungs. Everyone stops for a second and a cop comes over.**

**Cop**

What the hell was that for?

**Phoenix**

Look I'm sorry mate. It's just that I came here from Melbourne with one backpack of belongings, pretty much everything I needed for this trip. I just used the loo, and now my backpack is missing.

**Cop**

Look man, you have a lot to learn. This is not Australia. You can't leave your open belongings in public in this city. It is common sense.

If you want to file a complaint, I'll take you to my office.

**Phoenix**

I just told you that I lost all of my belongings, which also means I have no money. I don't have anyone I know here and I have no idea what I'm supposed to do next. Filing a complaint is the last thing I want to do.

**Cop**

Look man, I'm not a cop. I'm not a therapist either. I just got this security job two weeks ago. Trying to pay off student debt. I'm still in training. What I do know is that there are taxis over there outside of those doors. Go out, find one, and you'll figure stuff out.

**EXT-JFK AIRPORT CURB PICKUP - MOMENTS LATER**  
Phoenix walks out and starts to look for a taxi. He sees a bunch of cars and buses and some trains but can't find a cab. He walks around the parking lot and finally sees a rundown, dusty, decrepit car that is making a weird sound. He looks inside and sees a bunch of fog. Out of nowhere a voice talks to him. It is very deep and raspy.

**Taxi driver**

Need a ride?

The smoke then clears and Phoenix sees a very large man in a tank top. He goes into the taxi.

**INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS**

Phoenix stares at the man for a few minutes. The driver moves his head and makes some hand gestures for Phoenix. He eventually says something.

**Taxi driver**

If we're just going to sit here all day, you can get out of my cab. I'd prefer sitting here alone.

**Phoenix**

Sorry mate. I need to go to the nearest downtown area.

**Taxi driver**

Ok man. Which one?

**Phoenix**

There isn't only one?

**Taxi driver**

Have you lost it? You need to tell me which borough you're going to.

**Phoenix**

What is a borough?

**Taxi driver shakes his head and looks down. He mumbles some things to himself. Phoenix sees a brochure on the floor with a picture of the Empire State Building. He picks it up.**

**Phoenix**

Take me here.

**Taxi driver**

Please?

**Phoenix**

Yeah, whatever you say.

**Taxi driver**

We use manners here.

**Phoenix**

Ok mate. We use manners too. Let's listen to some music and not squabble anymore.

**Taxi driver**

Yeah, that's probably a good idea.

**The taxi driver goes from 0 to 90 MPH. Phoenix is thrown back against the seat and screams.**

**Phoenix**

Can you slow down mate? You are clearly going way too fast.

**Taxi driver**

I didn't let you in here to critique my driving. I've been driving cabs for the past 50 years. I can do it how I want.

**EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

Phoenix looks out of the window and sees some people smoking on the side of the road. They stare at him as he passes. He sees some rats and raccoons and skunks on the side. He looks pretty freaked out but it eventually gets nicer. When they arrive in Manhattan Phoenix looks like he's about to throw up. The driver looks at him.

**Driver**

You good? You don't look so well.

**Phoenix**

I feel kind of sick. You're going insanely fast and it smells horrible in here.

**Driver**

I thought you said earlier you used manners. People get sick in my cab a lot. Doesn't mean I need to change anything about my vehicle or lifestyle. Open the window.

**EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - NIGHT**

They pull into the Empire State Building.

**INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS**

**Driver**

40 dollars.

**Phoenix**

Look mate, I know you'll probably kill me for this, but I don't have any money.



**Driver**

What the hell did you just say?

**Phoenix**

I lost all my money at the airport.

**Driver**

I just rode you all the way from JFK to the Empire State Building. I need to be paid. If you don't pay me, I may call the cops. If the cops bust you, they may send you back to where you came from.

**Phoenix (Nervous)**

No...no...NO!!! That can not happen to me. I really CAN'T go back. Only forwards. I swear to you that if you allow me, I will get out of this car right now, go to the bank and get you your money. You can watch me if you want.

**Taxi driver**

All right. If you trick me, things will not end up good for you. Go up to that bank right there. I'll be watching you.

**EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS**

Phoenix gets out and walks to the end of the block. The driver nods at him, and Phoenix gives him a thumbs up. He goes to the corner and starts sprinting. He then hears the taxi driver yelling behind him.

**Taxi driver (VO)**

YOU COME BACK HERE YOU LITTLE...

He bumps into a few people and they yell at him. He ignores them and eventually arrives at a park.

INT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Phoenix runs until he knows the cab driver can't see him. He goes deep within the park and finds a bench. He sees a man eating a sandwich and talking on the phone. He gets off the phone and looks at Phoenix. He sees he looks scared and is breathing very heavily.

**Man**

Hey, you don't look so good. You want to tell me what's wrong?

**Phoenix**

I would tell you but I don't think I can trust you.

**Man**

Who do you think I am? Do I look like a bad guy?

**Phoenix**

No mate. It's just that I am so used to people brushing me off or being rude to me. It's been going on my whole life and even more so when I got here to NYC.

**Man**

You're new here, huh? Where are you originally from?

**Phoenix**

Just arrived from Melbourne.

**Man**

I heard Melbourne's nice. What brought you here?

**Phoenix**

Family.

**Man**

Are you coming to visit family? Sounds like a good time.

**Phoenix**

No, mate. It is the exact opposite of that. I came here to get away from my family.

**Man**

What happened with your family?

**Phoenix**

They suck. That is as simple as it gets. Everyone in Melbourne sucks. People aren't nice. They've never been nice.

**Man**

I work at a lodge that my friend owns. If you want to come stay, I would be happy to take you.

**Phoenix**

Really? You are actually helping me?

**Man**

Yeah. I am actually a trained therapist and I work with all kinds of people with similar problems to you. Follow me.

**EXT-MANHATTAN-CONTINUOUS**

**Phoenix follows the man all around the city. He takes him to a building and walks him in.**

**INT - THE LODGE - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS**

**The lady at the counter recognizes the guy.**

**Lady**

Hey, I haven't seen you in so long. How are you doing?

**Man**

I'm pretty good. I made a new friend here.

**Lady (looking at Phoenix)**

Hey, are you new here?

**Phoenix doesn't respond at first but the man tugs him on the shoulder. He looks at him and then the lady and clears his throat.**

**Phoenix**

Yes, I am.

**Lady**

And where are you from?

**Phoenix**

I just came here from Melbourne.

**Lady**

That's cool. I've been to Melbourne a few times. Welcome to the lodge.

**Phoenix**

Thank you. Can you take me where the people are?

**Lady**

Yeah, follow me.

**INT. -ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER**

**The three share a ride on the elevator.**

**INT. - SECOND FLOOR - CONTINUOUS**

**We see the outside of the elevator and then hear a ding. We see the man and the lady come out. The lady talks to Phoenix again.**

**Lady**

There's the other guys. I know you're nervous, but these guys are very accepting. Go introduce yourself to them.

We see a lounge with pool tables, TVs, and a bunch of benches and bean bags. There is a table with a bunch of free food and drinks. There are a bunch of people in groups sitting around and playing games. Phoenix sits on a bench and looks out the window. A guy comes over to him.

**Xavier**

Hey, new guy.

**Phoenix**

Hey.

**Xavier**

What's your name?

**Phoenix**

Phoenix.

**Xavier**

Nice to meet you. My name is Xavier. Kind of the leader here. When did you get here and where are you from?

**Phoenix**

Originally from Melbourne. Just arrived.

**Xavier**

How did you end up here?

**Phoenix**

It is very personal and a very long story. You probably don't care. You may be like everyone back in Melbourne.

**Xavier**

Dude, I would love to listen to your story. I wouldn't brush you off. You have my eyes, ears, and attention.

**Phoenix**

Ok thank you. I have a twin brother in Melbourne. He was the total opposite of me. He was very popular and good at everything. I had almost no friends and nobody liked me or talked to me. My dad disappeared and I was bullied. I escaped and came here to New York. Just lost all my luggage, my life savings, and I also just got threatened by a taxi driver who told me he would get me in trouble for not having money for him. Sucks, doesn't it?

**Xavier**

That's awful. I never had much family myself. Once I moved here I formed this group and we've become brothers. If you'd like to join us, come right ahead.

**Phoenix**

Yeah definitely.

**The man takes Phoenix to a group of five guys. He points to each member as he introduces them.**

**Xavier**

Here are their names. Elliot, Cody, Jeremiah, Steven, and Vincent. Guys, this here is our new friend Phoenix from Melbourne.

**Phoenix goes to each of them and says hello. He shakes their hand as he does it.**

**CUT TO-MONTAGE**

**After that day, Phoenix is always seen with them. They do everything together. Two years pass. We see the guys going to restaurants, walking around the city, and always staying together.**



One day Phoenix is walking around the city with his group of friends and he sees a sign saying help wanted at a Michelin star Steakhouse. He stops at it and reads the information.

**CUT TO-INT-STEAKHOUSE-DAY**

The next day, Phoenix walks in and sees a guy sitting at a table. He has glasses on and is looking down at the menu.

**Owner**

Hey, can I help you?

**Phoenix**

I saw the sign on your wall saying help wanted. Can I get an interview?

**Owner**

Yes sir. Can you tell me a little more about yourself?

**Phoenix**

Yes sir. I just got here from Melbourne two years ago. I wanted a new place to live. I'm not sure how stressful this job is or what kinds of customers you have, but I can handle anything. I can withstand bad situations and bad people.

**Owner**

That's great. We don't have many bad customers at a Michelin star restaurant. Only the best people dine here. Do you have any emergency contacts?

**Phoenix**

Yes. Here's the numbers of my group of friends.

He gives the owner a sheet of paper with numbers on them. The owner looks at it and nods.

**Owner**

What about family members?

**Phoenix**

I don't have much family.

**Owner**

Sorry to hear that.

**Phoenix**

What positions do you offer?

**Owner**

You can be a busboy or dishwasher.

**Phoenix**

Sounds good. Can I start tomorrow?

**CUT TO-MONTAGE**

Phoenix starts working at the steakhouse. We see him as a busboy, then as a dishwasher, and finally as a waiter. One day he stays late after work. He is cleaning one of the tables. He sees the executive chef making a steak. He goes up to him and asks how he's making the steak. The chef gives him a tutorial.

**Phoenix**

I've been working here a while, but I've never actually found out how you make steak here. How do you make that one?

**Executive chef**

Watch this.

The executive chef gives Phoenix a long lesson. Phoenix then becomes a chef and a few years later becomes executive chef. The restaurant becomes way more popular and busy due to his cooking. He changes his appearance. He changes his name sticker to Phoenix. He grows his hair out, grows a goatee, and gains a good amount of weight. He eventually gets his own apartment. Phoenix becomes well known in the city. He is always seen smiling and happy.

CUT TO-BLACK-TITLE CARD-FOUR YEARS LATER

INT-RESTAURANT-NIGHT

We see Phoenix in the kitchen. He is cooking a steak. There is a window above the stoves and grills with a view of the restaurant. There are a bunch of tables that are stretched out and near the end we see some windows with the Manhattan skyline in the back. Phoenix looks up and sees a man sitting at the farthest table.

Phoenix gets the man's order and makes it. He looks out and sees the man eating and looking very surprised at how good it is. Later on he gets up to go to the bathroom. He walks past the kitchen and Phoenix sees who it is. It is Apollo.

Phoenix looks out the window for thirty seconds. We see his face in a stage of utter shock. He doesn't know how to react or what to do. A few minutes later, one of the waiters calls him.

Waiter

Phoenix, the man at the far table wants to talk to you. He said he needed to personally thank the chef.

**Phoenix (in nervous voice)**

All right.

**Phoenix walks out and goes to the far table. He sees Apollo for the first time since he left Melbourne. He doesn't know what to do or say when he reaches the table.**

**Apollo**

Are you the head chef?

**Phoenix nods his head.**

**Apollo**

That was the best steak I've ever had. How did you make it?

**Phoenix looks like he's about to throw up. He doesn't answer but stares at the ground.**

**Apollo**

You ok?

**Phoenix**

Long day. Being executive chef gets tiring.

**Apollo**

I see. I'm very tired too. I just got off a plane from Melbourne. I'm here for a job interview.

(Looks at Phoenix)

You look kind of familiar.

**Phoenix**

Really? From where?

**Apollo**

I was just in a taxi and the guy had a brochure. There was an ad for your restaurant in the brochure. I think I may have seen you in the ad. I feel like I know you more personally than that.

**Phoenix**

I'm not sure if that's true.

**Apollo**

Do you have any family?

**Phoenix doesn't answer. He just stares at Apollo for a couple of minutes. They make eye contact for a few seconds and suddenly the brother realizes who it is. He looks kind of dazed, like he's meeting a celebrity.**

**Phoenix**

We are both equally shocked. Why don't you come by my apartment later? I'll try to explain.

**INT-PHOENIX'S APARTMENT-NIGHT**

**Phoenix and Apollo sit in the apartment on the couch. They are both silent and looking at the floor. They briefly make eye contact but then look back at the floor.**

**Apollo**

It's been four years.

**Phoenix**

Sure has.

**Apollo**

Dude, it's been FOUR YEARS and we've heard nothing from you. Four whole years. You have no idea what it's been like for us. You remember how we felt when dad abandoned us? It was like that, times 10. It hurt way more losing two family members than one.

**Phoenix**

I've spent the last four years running from the past. I never thought you would show up.

**Apollo**

I never thought I would run into you. You need to tell me why you left.

**Phoenix**

I'm not sure I want to.

**Apollo**

You need to tell me why you left.

**Phoenix**

Do I have to?

**Apollo**

It's just the two of us. I won't tell anyone. Just tell me.

**Phoenix**

Fine. I can't keep hiding the truth. I never felt like I was able to tell you or mom this, but we are all alone now.

**Phoenix takes out his diary and shows the brother his journal. The brother finds out how Phoenix has felt his entire life. He doesn't look angry anymore but looks upset. He looks at Phoenix.**

**Apollo**

Am I the reason you left?

**Phoenix**

No, mom is.

**Apollo**

Dude, our mom was great. She raised the both of us by herself. She had to deal with dad leaving us and then raising two kids alone.

**Phoenix**

You say that because she prefers you.  
She's always treated you great and never  
once listened to any of my problems. What  
happened to her when I left?

**Apollo**

If you want to know, you need to call her or  
go see her.

**CUT TO-MONTAGE**

The next day the brothers walk all around  
the city. Phoenix takes Apollo to the lodge  
and the park he first went to when he arrived  
in the city. He then goes back to the  
steakhouse and calls up his group. He tells  
them that he is having a special party for  
them, and they come to the party that night.

**CUT TO-INT-BAR-NIGHT**

Phoenix and Apollo are sitting at a table.  
His friends walk in and go to the table.

**Phoenix**

Great to see you guys. I brought someone  
with me. It's my brother.

**Elliot**

It's you're what?

**Phoenix**

My brother.

**Apollo (to Phoenix)**

They didn't know about me?

**Phoenix**

Only one did. This is Xavier. I told him  
about you on the first night I arrived here.

**Xavier**

Yeah, he told me about you. He said that he hated his family.

**Apollo**

That's very nice of him to say.

**The guys laugh.**

**Xavier**

He's become our lead member. He's brought us together. He may have drifted away from his real family, but he made us way closer.

**Phoenix**

I never thought my biological brother would meet my new brothers.

**The guys get their food and have a good time. They are all seen smiling and having fun. After two hours, the tone dials down a lot. Phoenix looks around the restaurant. He sees a woman that kind of looks like his mom. She turns around and he sees her face and he thinks she is his mom.**

**Mom**

What happened to you?

**Phoenix closes his eyes. He opens his eyes and looks at the same woman but realizes that she looks nothing like his mom.**

**Apollo**

You good? You look pretty weirded out.

**Phoenix**

I thought I just saw...I don't know why... I guess I was just imagining stuff.

**Apollo**

You thought you saw who?



**Phoenix**

Never mind. It was just my imagination.

**Phoenix talks to his brother and looks at the lady again. He again sees his mom. He doesn't understand why he can't stop seeing his mom's face.**

**Mom**

You shouldn't have left.

**Phoenix looks at her. He hears her muffled voice which eventually turns into Apollo's voice.**

**Lady**

Phoenix... Phoenix... Phoenix... Phoenix...

**Apollo**

PHOENIX!!!!

(Pause)

Dude, you good?

**Phoenix**

Yeah I'm fine.

**Apollo**

Ok man you just looked like you were dozing off.

**Phoenix**

I was. I'd say we should go now before it happens again.

**The group eventually leaves and they go out of the bar.**

**INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT**

**Phoenix brushes his teeth and goes to bed. We see him close his eyes.**

**CUT TO-BLACK SCREEN - DREAM**

We see a still image of his mom. She is looking in a mirror with a blank face and eventually gets a phone call. She is surrounded by black.

**Mom**

I don't know what happened to him. I can't find him anywhere. I don't know what's wrong with me. It seems like everyone in my family besides Apollo would rather live anywhere else besides from under my roof. Why would they do this to me?

Phoenix then sees his own reflection in the mirror. He turns around and sees his mom. She then multiplies and multiplies until there are at least 30. She repeats the same lines. Her voices get louder each minute. Phoenix screams and then someone whispers in his ear.

**Mom (VO)**

You can't hide from me forever.

**CUT TO INT-BEDROOM-NIGHT**

BEV-Phoenix wakes up with a scream and is very sweaty. He walks out of his room to get water and then goes back to bed.

**INT. HOUSE - DREAM**

He has another dream about his mom, but one that is totally different from the one before.

We see the mom on the couch. She is holding a phone book and has the phone in her hand. She is crying while she is talking.

**Mom**

I'd like to place a missing person's report.

**Police (VO)**

How long have they been missing mam?

**Mom**

A few hours.

**Police (VO)**

And what do they look like mam?

**Mom**

He looks exactly like his brother. You can come here and look at a picture of the brother and you'll know what he looks like.

**Police (VO)**

We'll be there soon mam.

Phoenix sees Apollo alone in his room looking sad for the first time. He's never seen him like that before. He then sees his room and sees all of his belongings. He goes back to the living room and sees a big pile of papers with a missing person report on them.

**EXT. HOUSE - DREAM**

He goes outside and walks around the block. He sees missing posters everywhere. He goes downtown and goes to the police station. He hears everyone talking about him as a missing person's case. He eventually hears a voice.

**Voice**

Look what you've done.

**CUT TO**

**INT-APARTMENT-MORNING**

Apollo shakes Phoenix awake. Phoenix has a depressed look in his eyes.

**Apollo**

You don't look so good.

**Phoenix**

I don't feel good. I just had two of the worst dreams I've ever had. The dreams were about mom. I think seeing you and reconciling with you makes me want to do the same with the rest of my family.

**Apollo**

You know what to do.

**Phoenix looks the brother in his eyes and nods his head.**

**INT. APARTMENT - MORNING**

**We see Phoenix in his room zipping up his bag. He shakes hands and hugs his brother.**

**INT. MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

**Phoenix goes out and sees his friends standing there. He shakes each of their hands and they each send him off.**

**Xavier**

Good luck man.

**Vincent**

Yeah, you have some guts going back to your actual family.

**Elliot**

We will miss you.

**Phoenix**

I will miss all of you so much. Thank you guys for doing all this stuff for me. You guys are like my new family and you gave me a new home.

**EXT. APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER**

Phoenix gets out of the apartment and he's carrying his suitcase. He stands on the corner of his block and waits for a taxi. He sees one and waves for him to come and he pulls over. Phoenix sees the same guy as the first time he came to NYC.

**INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS**  
He goes in.

**Phoenix**

Can you please take me to JFK airport? I know it's in a different borough so I would be very happy if you would take me there. I have money.

**Taxi driver**

I'm happy you know how this city works. Also thank you for using manners. Many people don't use manners. I always say "please?" because many people don't say it.

**They drive to the airport.**

**EXT. JFK - DAY**

Phoenix looks at the price at the front of the taxi.

**Taxi driver**

40 dollars man.

Phoenix goes into his wallet and gets 400 dollars out. He gives it to the driver who stares at it with a weird face. He then looks up at Phoenix.

**Phoenix**

See ya, mate.

**Phoenix winks at him and walks out.**

INT. JFK AIRPORT - MOMENTS LATER

Phoenix walks out and goes to the airport. He goes into the bathroom but this time takes his luggage in with him. He then goes to his boarding station and gets on the plane.

INT. AIRPLANE - MOMENTS LATER

He sees the skyline of NYC again. He thinks about the first time he ever went and now and how much he's changed. He makes eye contact with his own reflection. The reflection then dissolves into his mom's face back in Australia.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

We see the mom again and the broken teacup on the floor. We hear mom crying again.

Mom (in shaky voice)

What are you doing here?

Phoenix looks at the floor with a blank face. He looks at his mom again and looks at the pictures on the wall. He sees a picture of himself and his brother when they were small and both parents were there. He picks it up and takes it to the table.

Mom

Do you have something you want to say to me?

Phoenix takes out his diary and reads his old journal entries again.

Phoenix

You want to know? Look inside this "stupid book" and you will find out everything.

Phoenix gives the mom the diary and she reads through it. It is silent and she scrolls through the pages. She then puts it down and stares blankly at the floor. She then talks to Phoenix again.

**Mom**

You went all the way to New York?

**Phoenix**

That's the only reaction you have?

**Mom**

You have been gone for four years. You just walk into my house without any announcement in the middle of the night. You bombard me with all of this information. What do you expect me to say?

**Phoenix**

I just flew halfway around the world, abandoned my new home and family, and got up the courage to finally come back here. I want you to apologize.

**Phoenix looks at his mom with a very mad look. She looks at him with the same neutral face. Five minutes pass and Phoenix gets up.**

**Phoenix**

There was no point in me coming here. I'm going back to my family.

**Phoenix leaves the diary, takes his backpack, and walks over to the door. He looks back at his mom.**

**Phoenix**

I can't believe I came back here just for this.

Phoenix walks out.

We don't see Phoenix anymore. We stay at the kitchen table and see mom. She looks at the table with the same blank face. She eventually picks up the diary and starts reading it again. She starts breathing heavier and heavier and then starts sobbing.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The mom goes outside and sees Phoenix sitting on the lawn.

Mom

Hey Phoenix. I want you to know how happy I am for you that you found a new family in New York. I've been sitting with the fact that you left for four years. I needed to digest the fact that you just returned. Can you come back inside and I'll make it right?

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Phoenix goes back into the kitchen.

The mom and Phoenix talk to each other for a good couple of hours. We don't hear what they are saying but we see Phoenix's facial expressions change from mad to concerned to neutral to happy. At the end of the conversation, everyone is happy and smiling. Phoenix shows the mom pictures of his new group and the steakhouse and him as executive chef. He then makes them some of his food and they are seen laughing and having a good time.

THE END





## *Acknowledgements*

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helping me out in the last few years:*

*SAY for helping me out throughout the  
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at writing and helped me get out of my shell at school.*

*Brandon for helping me write this.*

*My guidance counselor and school social worker for  
being there to help me out throughout high school.*



**ALSO BY AUTHOR**

**Making Hope**

**King of the Light**

**Stereotypes**



## **Making Hope**

By Josh Dunford, Evan, & Dane

Mentor: David Lehmkuhl

Teaching Artist: Ryan Pater

Spring Mentor Project 2019

### List of Characters:

Dane/Ryan

Josh

Evan

David

### **Scene 1**

Time: Noon

Place: Josh's kitchen

At Rise: Josh is having a party.

### **JOSH**

I'm trying to make hope. Can't find the ingredients.

### **SOUND CUE: Doorbell Ring**

(EVAN enters)

### **EVAN**

Hi Josh!

### **JOSH**

Hi there! Come to the kitchen! What did you bring?

### **EVAN**

I brought an H for hard work. Something I learned throughout the year by not making the basketball team. I learned if you want to make something happen you have to work for it. Here's an H.

**JOSH**

Thank you. I was looking for this.

**SOUND CUE: Doorbell Ring**

(DAVID enters.)

**DAVID**

Hi Josh!

**JOSH**

What did you bring?

**DAVID**

I brought an O. A big bowl of optimism and it's been a hard year but I've gotten through and it's gonna get better. Here's an O.

**JOSH**

Thank you. They were out of this at the store.

**SOUND CUE: Doorbell Ring**

(DANE enters.)

**DANE**

Hi Josh.

**JOSH**

What'd you bring?

**DANE**

I brought a P for Practice. I've been working hard trying to achieve a goal so I practice and practice hoping for the best and I'm still hoping for it. Here's a P.

**JOSH**

Thank you. I looked around a lot for the P but I couldn't find it. Now I can't find the E for excellence? Does anybody have it?

**ALL**

Check your pockets!

(Josh finds the E. They put their ingredients in the pot, one by one)

**EVAN**

H is for Hardwork

**DAVID**

O is for Optimism

**DANE**

P is for Practice

**JOSH**

E is for Excellence

(David and Dane reach in the pot and pulls out a strand of letters connected spelling HOPE)

**ALL:**

Oh we have hope now

Let's say it loudly

Oh yes I stutter

I sing it proudly

**DAVID:**

And when I stutter

It's not a crime

I'll get the words out

Just give me time



**JOSH:**

I do talk very fast  
Been like this since the past  
I have some speaking tics  
I'm learning voice tricks

One day my voice will  
be so clear  
Once people hear me  
They will cheer

**EVAN:**

Oh when I stutter  
That makes me sad  
But I have learned  
I should be glad

It gives me time  
to get my thoughts out  
Because my stutter  
Removes the doubt

**ALL:**

Repeating words  
It's just not fun  
Have some patience  
Wait till I'm done

It's just as good as  
Regular speech  
It's who we all are  
And it's really really really really really ok

## **King of the Light**

By Josh Dunford, Harry, & Sam C.  
Teaching Artist: Brandon Garegnani  
Music Mentor: Ryan Pater  
Fall Songwriting Project 2019-2020

Dark stuff may come back  
It might be in front of you like  
A sneak attack.  
The light will soon come to you  
You just need to try to stay happy  
All the way through

You may need help getting to it  
But once you find it, it'll be lit  
Never let life get you down  
You're a king and life is your crown

The bad stuff makes you frown  
But you must turn it upside down  
To find the light  
Soon it will be in your sight  
Shining so bright  
The path to the light is like a fight

Work your way up  
You're going to make it  
It's clear that there's something between you and finding  
The light will surround you  
Wherever you look  
It'll always be shining around you

You knew it would come  
for your rescue  
And now after all of this time  
It's upon you  
You finally know life is good

I'm so tired!

Brick by brick  
Tock by tick  
It's not even worth a kick  
No matter how hard you try  
You never believe that you will fly  
Wait till you see what you got inside  
Eventually you will abide

Stick to the rhythm and hold on tight  
Cause in the end you'll be alright

If life ever gets you down  
It may be hard to turn around  
You'll want it to stop  
But life isn't a candy shop  
Bad luck will always be there  
But good luck will always be square  
Life may be like a storm  
But good stuff is also in the norm  
Clouds are always  
Followed by the sun  
When you think you lost  
You'll realize you won

Someday, I hope I'll wake up fine  
With nothing but good,  
no bad things in mind  
Everything will work out  
just as planned  
Because nothing worse  
could ever happen to me, right man?

Y'all always knew I'd write these words  
But I bet you didn't know I'd start spitting them out in all sorts.  
I know that burning light  
will surround me  
Everyone believes in me  
So can you let me in please?

I'm so tired!

Brick by brick  
Tock by tick  
It's not even worth a kick  
No matter how hard you try  
You never believe that you will fly  
Wait till you see what you got inside  
Eventually you will abide

Stick to the rhythm and hold on tight  
Cause in the end you'll be alright

You worked so hard  
And the cost was so great  
Path wasn't clear  
through the atmosphere

Now you must  
Work your way up  
and you'll suffer no more  
Moment's upon you it's time to  
Rejoice in the light.

## **Stereotypes**

By Josh Dunford & Michael

Teaching Artist: Laura Bozzone

Fall Storytelling Project 2020-2021

### **MICHAEL**

Stereotypes, it's something we all know we're guilty of. A stereotype can be defined as a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

We as individuals can hold these views about a person or group of people that we personally can not relate to, so we may make a baseless assumption. We all know we're guilty of them, no matter how minuscule or great it may have been.

The problem with these is that they can make the person feel "smaller" than they realize, especially if the popular thought is negative.

Our story starts off with Johnny. He is a high school senior and rising Ipage star.

**(MICHAEL CAMERA OFF. JOSH CAMERA ON)**

**JOHNNY** (*pool background, wearing sunglasses and hat backwards*)  
(*read as the cool Johnny*)

Sup everybody, I am Johnny and I am a senior in high school and I am very popular in school because of my Ipage Account. In this post behind me on Ipage, I am surrounded by 100 people and they are all hanging out with me and they want to take pictures with me and post them on their social media accounts because they all think I am the coolest because I am the popular kid in school and their popularity level will go up... However, my life is the exact opposite of the way it looks on this post. (*he takes off glasses and hat*)

**(JOSH TAKES DOWN POOL BACKGROUND AND PUTS UP CIRCLE PICTURE)**

This is how my post would really look if I showed my true self. I feel alone when I am with all these people...like a circle in the middle of nothing. On the inside I am just feeling like I don't belong here at all with all these random people who I don't really even know. All these people post on social media all the time but none of them know who I actually am. I feel like I am standing in the middle of nowhere. I have so many interests that pretty much no one knows about. I spend a lot of my free time cooking and I watch movies and no one actually knows any of this. I've never actually really spoken to any of these people in school. They have this idea of who I am from social media. The idea of who I am has been in their heads since the beginning of high school. That's 4 years. They all "know me so well." I am not sure who my true self is so I honestly don't know that much about who I am and so that's why I want to get out of high school and go off social media and never come back again and discover myself.

***(JOSH CAMERA OFF. SHARE SCREEN.  
WOODS PICTURE AS LAURA NARRATES)***

**LAURA/NARRATOR**

Johnny graduates from high school and moves to the woods. He eventually finds a support group and reaches out to a guy named Derrick, who runs the group. Derrick writes him a letter.

***(STOP SHARE/ MICHAEL CAMERA ON  
WITH MOUNTAIN BACKGROUND)***

## **DERRICK**

Dear Johnny,

I'm glad you wrote this letter to me. As uncomfortable as it may still be, I'll admit that I can understand your struggle. Everyone thinks that there is someone else who is better or more perfect than them. But that is not how life works. It is simply just our imagination or stubbornness that assists in hiding the flaws that we don't see in our idols and mentors. With these failed views from other people, we begin to think that we are what others think we are. We give into what others may think and then believe it to be true. To me, this is like a cannonball and chain that is slowing you down to your path of self discovery. We have to remember that life is an evolution and only you have control over the actions that you do. I'll admit I've been both on the receiving and providing end of the backlash. Not being able to relate can irrationally stress us out in addition to the clouded thought process. Though not everyone may agree, the best way to move on from something is to accept it. Think back to why it bothers you and once you do, you will find the source. Sure it may take a few tries but you will find the answer because it may just be the tip of the iceberg of something else you never knew you had! I quote Rafiki from The Lion King, "The past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it or learn from it."

**(MICHAEL TURNS CAMERA OFF.  
SHARE SCREEN. WOODS PIC-  
TURE AS LAURA NARRATES)**

## **NARRATOR/LAURA**

Johnny and Derrick become very good friends and Johnny looks to Derrick as a mentor. Johnny discovers himself and eventually writes a letter to his past self.

**(STOP SHARE. JOSH TURNS CAMERA ON)**



**JOHNNY** (*cabin vibes. He has a blanket and  
has different background of woods*)

Dear past self,

I want to reach out to you to let you know what the future holds for you. I am you 5 years after graduation and I am doing better now than I have ever been. Getting rid of Ipage was the best thing I have ever done. I learned that I never had any true friends in high school. In order to be a true friend, people look at your actual life and not just at your virtual life. I've been going to a weekly hangout group and I feel like they have become my closest friends. Derrick taught me to let people know the actual version of myself and not to create stereotypes of myself. The first time I shared who I really was, I was nervous, but afterwards it felt so good. I needed to heal myself because of social media and now that I have real connections, I am best self.

Hang in there.

**(SHARE SCREEN COFFEE SHOP IMAGE)**

**NARRATOR/LAURA**

Johnny and Derrick keep in touch for years and meet up in a coffee shop to thank each other.

**(STOP SCREEN SHARE AND JOSH  
AND MICHAEL VIDEO ON)**

**JOHNNY**

Hey- Thank you for everything you have done for me in the past years. I have realized now that what people think is one of the best things is actually one of the worst things. Now that I am off social media, I have real connections with people and I am the best that I have ever been.

**DERRICK**

Sure I am glad I was able to help you out. Life can be really hard especially as a young adult, but if you have the right support system, you can get through anything and I am glad I was able to be a part of your support system.

**JOHNNY**

We should continue this support system for people who are dealing with the same things I was.

**DERRICK**

Sounds like a plan! (they fist bump the screen)



## Praise for the Author

“Josh Dunford is a person whom you feel before you see: in himself he carries a presence of energy - a warm kindness - that precedes him and envelopes his interactions inside of a warm glow. He is an incredible conversationalist. Interacting with Josh is not only a journey characterized by being on the receiving end of a confident and kind person, but ultimately is a path that brings us closer to ourselves - we see ourselves through his generous eyes. He is worldly, inquisitive, intelligent, and playful. He moves through the world seeing its beauty, and we bow to him for his.”

– KATE DETRICK, SAY Director of Confident Voices

“Josh is an absolutely remarkable writer, and an even more remarkable human being. Not only does he have a fantastic imagination and natural skill as a storyteller, he also puts his full heart into absolutely everything that he does. In even just a short conversation with Josh, it immediately becomes evident how smart, kind and incredibly genuine he is. A fantastic listener, a leader in the SAY community and a true expert on all things ramen, Josh Dunford is a true joy to be around.

This incredible screenplay, *Escaping Reality*, is the work of a true cinephile and an artist who deeply understands the power of vulnerability.”

– AIDAN SANK, SAY Artistic Director of Confident Voices

“Josh is an incredible storyteller, dedicated cinephile, phenomenal cook, and all-around good-hearted human being. Leading with curiosity and compassion, Josh is always willing to say yes. He takes big risks, which requires an incredible amount of bravery. Josh has wonderfully open energy and is unafraid to explore choices and ideas outside of his comfort zone. He nurtures his ideas and brings such grace to his work as an artist. Josh is an observer of the world and one who spreads joy, sincerity, and understanding everywhere he goes. This brilliant screenplay is just a taste of the many rich offerings Josh has to share with the world.”

– BRANDON GAREGNANI, SAY Mentor & Teaching Artist

“Josh Dunford has the incredible ability to switch between a dedicated playfulness and seriousness that leads to profound conversations and artistic expression. He shares of himself and sets such a generous example for everyone around him that the energy of a room changes when he enters; it fills with peace. He is an incredible listener, storyteller, and artist who will let nothing stop him from achieving.”

– RYAN PATER, SAY Teaching Artist

### **About the Author**

**My name is Josh Dunford and I've been involved with SAY since I was in 10th grade. I love cooking, eating, watching movies, and writing. This is the first screenplay I've ever written.**