

Sam is a force to be reckoned with. His artistic voice is specific, unique, and, frankly, hilarious. Sam seems to have lived many lives. He can do anything. He teaches everyone he meets by being unapologetically himself. He will rock the world with his infectious musicality and remarkable talent that he was born to share.

- Ryan Pater, SAY Teaching Artist

Sam is an incredibly talented artist with a deep well of knowledge.

As a musician and film enthusiast, Sam has cultivated masterful tools in storytelling. His intellectual curiosity guides him in making extremely thoughtful and precise choices. There is a purpose for every word, every element in his stories resulting in something truly special and one of a kind. With his profoundly unique sense of humor and wit, Sam sets a high bar of integrity for himself and always finds a way to make even the simplest things profound.

- Brandon Garegnani, SAY Teaching Artist

The first time I met Sam Carroll, I knew I was in the presence of a beautiful heart. I knew I was in the presence of a person who was alive with the truths of this world. Sam has a unique ability to channel what he sees in this world into art. He explores the well-spring of his own lived experience - the categories of sensations involved in being his exceptional self - to create art that pierces through the core of all who engage with it. Watching Sam grow into a man is watching a tree grow tall; intricate, alive, powerful, hopeful, magnificent.

- Kate Detrick, SAY Director of Confident Voices

Sam Carroll is a tremendous artist. As a musician he is extraordinarily gifted, and as a writer his intelligence and wit shine through. Sam is a marvelous conversationalist, a cinephile, and he translates his deep appreciation of art into his work seamlessly. This is a young man who sees the world clearly and is not afraid to share his feelings about it; he has an opinion about everything, and it's an opinion worth hearing! It has been a joy to get to know this beautiful soul over the past few years, and I feel confident that whatever goal he sets his sights on, he will ultimately achieve.

- Aidan Sank, SAY Artistic Director of Confident Voices

Crescendo & Other SAY Stories

By Sam Carroll

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Sam Carroll

Crescendo and Other SAY Stories

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*Dedicated to my family, friends, and everyone involved
with SAY who made it possible for me to do all of this as
well be comfortable with my own voice and stutter.*

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Preface

I've been a part of SAY for over 4 years. I went to Camp SAY three times, been through over 10 Confident Voices programs, and now I'm writing this. Out of everything I've done for SAY, this project has been the most creatively strenuous of all of them. Compiling everything in chronological order, choosing which stories to include, as well as finishing my new story, was a handful to begin with. However, I had to finish all of this while also preparing to graduate from high school, and getting ready for college, so it became even more of a task than it was. Anyway, this is my last goodbye to SAY and it's pretty bittersweet considering we've only been doing virtual programs for the last year. I would've loved to spend one last time in the normal space or the theater, but this is the best opportunity I have so I might as well cherish it. To the reader, I hope you enjoy all that I've done through my years at SAY, I've been honored to be a part of his amazing organization and I'm grateful for my time spent. Enjoy the stories.

Crescendo and Other SAY Stories

SAM CARROLL

I

The Road to Pot Pie Palace



SCENE 1

AT RISE: Inside Home Ec Class. Senior year of high school.

We see Jake and Cameron and Omar at their table with 2 bowls with the ingredients for pot pie filling in it and a recipe.

Teacher

Good morning class. Today we're going to learn how to prepare pot pie filling.

Omar and Jake

Yes, finally! I love pot pie!

Cameron

Oh my god, really? *(starts texting.. Not paying attention)*

Jake

You aren't going to learn a thing if you're on your phone for the entire period.

*(Jake and Omar start stirring, adding ingredients, mixing /
Cameron is still not paying attention)*

Teacher

All students have to participate *(she takes Cameron's cell
phone)*

Jake

Here put half of this in *(Jake passes ingredient)*

Cameron

Whatever *(dumps entire contents. everyone stops what they're
doing & looks at her)*

Omar and Jake

WHAT?!!

Omar

Cameron!

Jake

I said put HALF of it in-not the entire thing. We're gonna get
an F now!

Teacher

Be sure to taste your food!

Cameron

Not it!

Omar

You're the one who gave her the ingredient!

Jake

Ughh... fine *(tastes the food. pauses; takes another bite)*
Woah.. this is good.. we're actually gonna pass!

Cameron

I did something good (*tries it*) It's gucci fam

Omar

(*He tries it*) Wow you were right, it is good!
(*High five in a freeze frame - mannequin challenge song comes on; teacher walks by & looks at them*)

Teacher

Uhhhh...What are you doing? Get back to work.

Jake

Aw man you broke it!

SCENE 2

AT RISE: After school, the 3 students meet up at McDonald's sitting in the booth eating.

Jake

I don't even like McDonald's.. I wish we were having that thing we made in home ec class.

Cameron

But these fries are so good.

Omar

What we could make is bigger than fries!(*others look confused*) "POT PIE"

Cameron

What are you talking about?

Omar

MONEY!!

All

What?

Omar
CANADA!

Cameron
Full sentences!

Omar
We could use the filling that Cameron made in class to make
pot pies and sell them!

Jake
Excuse you, (Clears throat)....that WE made in class.

Cameron
(Rolls eyes) No one in New York City would buy that.

Omar
That's why we travel.. To CANADA!

Cameron
Like a food truck?

Omar
Exactly!.

Cameron
So what is your plan then?

Omar
I need a summer job so I can be a world traveller
photographer, and working at Starbucks isn't going to cut it
for me. Cameron, you need a summer job to pay for a dance
school. Jake, this could be your chance to play with other
bands. I'm thinking we will take a road trip, convert my
family's truck into a food truck and sell our amazing pot pie
recipe as a way to make our dreams come true!

Cameron

You know...That sounds like a great idea!

Jake

Sounds good to me!

Omar

Great, well then, we have some pot pies to make so let's go!

(Freeze frame high five; mannequin challenge song)

McDonald's Employee

What are you kids doing? Go home and do your work.

Jake

Broken again! Come on!

SCENE 3

AT RISE: 5am; At school parking lot;Cameron has pot pies in a bag, Jake has his bass guitar. Omar shows up with a van ready to go on a journey to Canada.

Cameron

Can we get going, I want to get out of this place. And these frozen pot pies are heavy..

Jake

He should've been here half an hour ago. He said meet here at 5 am! Hopefully I brought my bass for a good reason.

(Omar arrives - beep)

Cameron

Woahh, it's lit! I love the name,Pot Pie Palace, it looks poppin'!

Jake

Hey! What took you so long?

Omar

I had to convince my parents to give me the van.

Jake

So they gave it to you?

Omar

No

Cameron and Jake

What?

Cameron

How did you get it? I thought your parents were strict.

Omar

I asked and they told me no so I had to wake up super early,
sneak into their room and take the keys.

Cameron

Savage!

Jake

You stole the van?

Omar

I borrowed it...

Jake

We could get arrested!

Cameron

And I could be sleeping, but I'm not, so LET'S GO! (*she gets
in the truck*)

Omar

Let's roll out! (*gets in as well*)

Jake

Ugh, fine. (*hops in the truck*)

SCENE 4

AT RISE: Montage of events on the road

Day 1: Happy, Dancing

(They turn on "Don't Stop Believing" by Journey)

Jake

I love this song!

(*They sing and rock out to the chorus*)

Day 2: change configuration; Sleeping

Jake

Hey wake up you guys are supposed to be my co-pilot! I don't know if we're going the right way.... Guys, Guys!!

Day 3: (Cameron is driving the van; Omar is in the passenger seat)

Cameron

We need to stop for gas again?!

Jake

I paid for the last one..

Omar

I've been using all my Starbucks money..

Cameron

I have.. 2 bucks?

Jake

Two bucks?! That's all you have?! I knew this was a bad idea.

Cameron

Well what do you want me to do?

Omar

We used all the money to make the food.. I guess we didn't think about the gas.

Jake

This is your plan, you should've thought of it!

Omar

This was OUR plan! And it wasn't only me who was supposed to figure it out. I got the van & the food, you guys should've put in more.

Cameron

More?! All this work when I could be at home watching Netflix.. And you blame it on me?

Jake

How is your laziness going to get you to dance?

Cameron

(turns to face Jake)

How are you going to join a band if you're so afraid to expose yourself.

Omar:

Cameron, watch out there's a pothole!

(Cameron grabs steering wheel; Brakes screech, Tire pops; Car hits a pothole)

Omar

Is everybody ok?

Jake

Yeah, what happened? *(they get out of car)*

Omar

Oh my god... we definitely popped a tire on that pothole

Jake

Cameron, you should've been paying attention!

Cameron

You were the one who started the fight and I was just trying
to focus on where we are going.

(As they start arguing, a stranger walks over to them)

Stranger

Hey-is this your food truck? Can I buy a pot pie?

ALL

(Look at each other)

Um, yeah?

Cameron

(gets pot pie)

Here you go. That will be \$5

Stranger

This is the best pot pie ever..I'll be sure to tell all my friends.
(they leave)

Mannequin Challenge

Stranger

Ummm sorry...can I have another pot pie.

Jake

Oh right, sorry.

SCENE 5

(a few hours later people are lining up for pot pie)

Mayor:

We love what you guys are doing. We heard why you are doing all this and we will do our best to help you get to Canada. Why don't we repay you for bringing light into our community by fixing that van and getting you on your way.

Cameron

Wait a minute, We have everything we need right here so we might as well stay.

Jake

We got an audience, we got scenery and we can give you a show!

Mayor

Sounds great...it's showtime!

(The Show: Jake plays his bass, Cameron dances and Omar photographs them. Everyone applauds.)

Omar

Let's go home and we can tell everyone that Pot Pie Palace originated here in Washington State....also I'm sure my parents would like to get their van back.

Cameron

This was an amazing road trip!

Jake

I can't wait to find out what happens in the future!

II

The Quest Marked for Answering Dangers



SCENE 1

Larry's room in Penbrooke outside a big city.

6:00pm

Lights up. It's the day before school. Larry is anxious. We hear sounds of cars and trash cans rattling.

Larry

I can't believe tomorrow's already the first day of my new school. How will I fit in? How will I stand out? I want to help the school and this town anyway I can. I want to find an easy way to do this.

[beat]

What if I do find an opportunity to help and it turns into a complete disaster and goes out of control? There's litter on the street and violence. I just can't stand all this. Someone needs to do something about this to at least stop it for a little bit but I can't do it alone...

Mom

Larry! Come down for dinner! It's been ten minutes!

Larry
Coming!

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 2

Penbrooke High- Lunch Room

3:30pm

At rise Reginald is standing facing the audience giving a speech.

Reginald comes in and gives Donathan the "Answers to Question Marks" handshake.

Reginald

Welcome to "Answers to Question Marks"; the answers to requests if given upon us. Hi, I'm Reginald, and I'm the founder of "Answers to Question Marks". The reason I started "Answers to Question Marks" is so whoever is stuck in the dark and needs a light of help, we will be able to rush and give all of our streaks of might, just because the feelings of your cells were called upon us like a cellphone you just gotta talk to us.

"Answers to Question Marks" means that when someone needs a mannered person with manners they should have someone nearby, not be a bystander and go by to hear what right answer they need that will save the person's case that needs a resolution like an answer needs to answer a question statement that has marks. This is what makes you a role model, and "Answers to question marks", is how you can be that role model.

We knew you needed help because of your helpless pose. "X" out the helpless pose! If you take out the "X" from the helpless pose, you'll still be helpless I suppose. You gotta keep the "X" on the helpless pose because it never marks the spot.

Donathan
What? Sorry?

Reginald
I think you need an answer to your question mark.

Donathan
Oh, do I?

Reginald
Yes, because you just had a question mark that needed an answer.

Donathan
What if I want to keep my questions to myself?

Reginald
Well there will still be questions and they won't have an answer.

Donathan
What if I already found my answer?

Reginald
Well then that's the answer to your question mark.

[beat]

Donathan
We've known each other for some time now, but I've never been so sick of you as I am now.

[Larry Enters]

Larry
Hi. What's this club called?

Reginald

“Answers to Question Marks”. Come on in.
[to Donathan] I’ve never seen this kid before. I’m not sure
about him.

Donathan

Who is this misfit of a student?

Larry

I heard about this club and I’m interested. What do you guys
do?

Reginald

We help others who suffer in silence.

Larry

If I can help them, then I’d be glad to be a part of this.

Reginald

First I gotta know who you are.

Larry

Sure, don’t worry, I’m gonna help you out. My name is Larry
and I am new here, I kinda want to, you know, help others...
so this place seems like the best option.

Reginald

I appreciate your passion to help but before I can let you in,
you have to do the first activity and I’ll see how you do on
that.

Donathan

Are you seriously letting him in?

Reginald

Well yes, because first I gotta get to know him first so what
else is there to do than not let him in...

Larry

Hey-

[Donathan glares at Larry and Larry stops talking]

Donathan

Since you're so "caring" and "smart", can you relate to this?

[Reginald throws himself on the floor]

Reginald

My leg! My leg! My leg! My leg! My leg! My leg! My leg! My leg! My leg!

Donathan

[ironically]

Oh no! Someone's hurt, Larry! What should we do now?

Larry

Oh um, I-

Donathan

See? This kid's useless! He doesn't know what to do!

Larry

[firmly]

I think the most absolute "answer to this question mark" would be to get a cast from the nurse.

Reginald

That's the correct answer to the question mark requested upon me.

Donathan

Great...*[sighs]*

Larry

Thank you.

Reginald

No thank *you* for answering the question mark requested upon me.

[Reginald gives Larry the Answers to Question Marks handshake.]

Larry

That's a cool handshake actually.

Reginald

You know you should thank me right?

Larry

For what?

Reginald

Letting you become an answer to a question mark of course.

Larry

Um, okay? Thanks... for letting me join?

Reginald

You're welcome!

SCENE 3

Setting: School hallway

At Rise: It's the second day of school [Wednesday] and Larry is walking down the hallway to his math class.

[Donathan enters]

Donathan

Hey Larry, Reginald is sort of sick today so stay as far away from him as possible, so you don't get sick. You don't want to get sick, do you?

Larry

No, I don't want to get sick.

Donathan

Just stay away from him for a while...he needs his space.

Larry

Oh, ok...

[Reginald enters, clearly healthy]

Reginald

Hello "Answers to Question Marks"!

[Reginald gives Larry and Donathan the Answers to Question Marks handshake.]

Donathan

Oh, you're sick, right? *[winks at Reginald]*

Reginald

I have a request for what you asked of me. What could be the answer to that question mark?

Donathan

Uh excuse me?

Reginald

Why do you think I'm sick?

Donathan

Well because you have a cold... right?

Reginald

No, I don't have no cold. Ohhh, so I'm assuming that this is just to test Larry of our "Answers to Question Marks", isn't it?

Donathan

Oh yeah, yeah..of course we are going to test this guy, because he's in our group right? And well, of course, I mean... I'm supposed to test Larry because that's the whole reason why he's here, because we gotta get to know him.

Reginald

Ok, so be it. I mean it's "Answers to Question Marks", so let's be the graders of the test of Larry...

Larry

So, this is an actual test now?

Donathan

Uh yeah, of course.

Larry

Umm ok well the logical thing would be to ask the sick person what their symptoms are so I can find out what happened and help them get better.

Reginald

I don't really have a cold, but if I did, I would call it quits of the "Answers to Question Marks", because I might need a break if I had a cold or I would have just called in sick because I had a runny nose and I sneezed World War II.

Donathan

What?

Larry

So if you were sick you would definitely have a cold, so make sure to always have tissues nearby and sneeze into your elbow.

Donathan

No, that's wrong!! Right Reginald?

Reginald

Larry was right because that's what the whole thing is about!

We are supposed to get him to really have an answer to a question mark that has to get us to believe that he is willing to help us out.

Larry

I mean yeah, I was right, Donathan. I mean it seems like you don't want me around Reginald for some strange reason. Do you care enough to reveal the cause of your actions?

Donathan

Yes, I...uhhh...*[Donathan is at a loss for words]*

Larry

Ok, dude what's your problem?! I don't know if you hate me or just don't want me around at all. I mean you gotta say at least one honest sentence for me to have a resolution here.

Donathan

Alright, fine. I don't feel comfortable with you talking with Reginald all the time now. I feel like I'm losing him as a friend and honestly, he's all I have, really.

Larry

Well aren't clubs supposed to be about acceptance and community and befriending anyone? You're not gonna lose Reginald, but you will eventually if you keep shutting other people out of this club that's supposed to help others.

Reginald

Hey, "Answers to Question Marks". Since you two have answers to this problem mark, why don't we put a period to it?

Larry

I think that's needed.

Donathan

I think I need some time to think.

[Donathan walks away]

SCENE 4 *Setting: School hallway*

At Rise: It's the third day of school [Thursday] and Larry is at his locker. Donathan enters.

Donathan

Hey Larry.

Larry

Hey.

Donathan

I just wanted to say that I'm still not friends with you... but I'm sorry.

Larry

Well this is a surprise coming from you.

Donathan

[angrily] Well. I just wanted to say "sorry". How bad is that, Larry?!

Larry

I mean it's not bad at all, really. But hey man, you gotta loosen up a bit. But also, come to think of it, I have to apologize as well for some stuff.

Donathan

What do you have to say sorry for?

Larry

How about, sorry for stealing your thunder?

Donathan

Oh, it's fine. I mean, you didn't steal *all* my thunder.

Larry

I mean, I was super eager to join this brand new school and my mission was to help anyone the best I can and I know you had the same intentions. Maybe we could find a way to help others together.

Donathan

I think you're right. I think we need to work together. But just remember this: you mess with me, I mess with you.

Larry

I promise to never mess with you and I hope you don't mess with me.

[Larry and Donathan do the Answers to Question Marks handshake.]

[Reginald enters]

Reginald

Hey "Answers to Question Marks"! So I'm guessing from what I've seen from you two just now, you've answered the answers to the question marks.

Donathan

Ok, and...

Reginald

You have checked the answer to the question mark, which was making sure that you two have agreed to an agreement.

Larry

So what are we gonna do now?

Reginald

I want to ask the principal to let me announce something that isn't usually announced.

I want to create awareness by spreading it to the whole school and I think this is the only way to do it.

Larry
Do what?

Reginald
Well, before you, Larry, had joined “Answers to Question Marks”, I gave a speech about the meaning of the club. But that was just an introduction to it- I wanna make a conclusion to it. To me, I think that this will give a hundred percent awareness to “Answers to Question Marks”. People will want to study “Answers to Question Marks” after this. And whether they join, or do an activity similar to it, they will have the test that they will be geniuses in.

Larry
Ok, it’s actually a really good idea. It’s a good way to reach the entire school, so I’d say go for it!

Donathan
Yeah, this *might* work.

Larry
Ok, what he means is that “yes, it will work”!

SCENE 5
Setting: inside school office

Reginald
“Answers to Question Marks”. When answering the request marked for us we gotta trust our guts. But again, that’s only if we have the correct “because”. So, this is important because our guts have the chosen thoughts of what we could accomplish.

Ok so now, I have question marks to my answer. Like how would I convince people to be an answer to a request that people in dangers have marked upon them?

Donathan

Reginald, just remember the things that you say to yourself every day.

Larry

Talk like you always do to us.

[Reginald gives the following speech over a microphone in the school's office to the entire school]

Reginald

Attention, the "Answers to all Question Marks". Whether or not you are a stranger or not, you can still be famous with a thought. And that thought is: the answers to question marks.

If you see anyone that needs help from dangers, why not?

Step in and help and maintain hold of the conflict of the question marks that need answers because we're mostly the cost of our lives for continuums.

For the upcoming events that we have no idea about, we gotta prepare for them and study for the test of the answers to question marks.

[All three guys do the "Answers to Question Marks" handshake]
[We hear the sound of loud applause]

III

Friendship is Forever



SCENE 1

Time: 8pm

Place: Apartment

At Rise: A run-down apartment with minor damage in a poorer area of the city. Cracks in the walls.

Narrator

Hello there! I promise you my submission this time won't stink like my last seventeen submissions. Previously, I've told you about an alien dog who finds love and then I've told you about an ant who grows up to be a real boy but now I promise that my next submission will be totally realistic and in no way, shape, or form not realistic. This story involves Jim (*Jim shoots the audience a look*) who basically has the worst life ever and his friend Vincent (*Vincent pops in and waves at the audience before returning backstage*) who later reunites with him to help him put his life back together.

Jim

(Jim on the phone) Honey look I'm sorry okay? Drawing is my life. Someday we're gonna make a fortune from selling my pieces, just you wait. *(Pause)* I do have an actual job, it's just part-time because my passion is drawing. Why can't you understand that? *(Pause)* Okay wow, that just hits right there, thanks. Just wait a little bit more. I know I can pay for the rent, we won't get evicted and everything is gonna be okay. *(Pause. After a moment Jim puts the phone down in a huff.)*

Fine.

(Jim goes to put the phone back, opens up his book, and starts looking at his past drawings. In frustration he rips most of them out, crumples them up and tosses them on the floor. He leans forward with his head in his hands.)

Jim

What am I gonna do?

SCENE 2

Time: 11:30pm

Place: At a diner

At rise: Jim is cooking something in the kitchen of the diner.

Vincent sits at a table at the diner.

Narrator

Yes so as you can see Jim does actually have the worst luck in the world but soon it might change as the following scene I wrote takes place at his part-time job as a diner chef as he meets a person he hasn't seen in a long time. Also, I hope all of you don't mind that I wrote in small parts for me to play throughout the whole thing because well I'm not just gonna sit here.

(As the Narrator speaks he is changing into a WAITER'S costume. He approaches Vincent who is sitting at a table.)

Waiter

So what would you like to eat tonight considering you're the only one here?

Vincent

A steak. Medium-rare.

Waiter

Okay, I'll take this over to our cook Jim.

Vincent

Okay thank you. *(Pause.)*

(WAITER/Narrator returns to the podium.)

Narrator

Vincent then remembers his old friend Jim from high school and how he hasn't talked to him since graduation.

Vincent

Waiter? Excuse me? Did Jim over there graduate from Westfield High School?

Waiter

I'm pretty sure, yeah, why?

Vincent

Do you mind if I speak with him?

Waiter

I mean yeah it's almost midnight I don't really care at this point. Hey I think this guy may know you.

(Jim goes over to Vincent.)

Vincent

Vincent Ramos. Are you Jim Harper Westfield class of 91'?

Jim

I haven't seen you in so long. What's going on?

Vincent

I went to college, got a degree, got a job opportunity at a finance company and moved up to working at wall street.

Jim

Lucky. I mean wow good for you.

Vincent

How are things with you? Any big changes since high school?

Jim

So there's good news and bad news I guess. I got a girlfriend, I got a place, and I have a job but we are behind on our rent, and it's complicated with my girlfriend because she has to work longer hours to keep up financially.

Vincent

I don't really know what to say but I thought that ever since graduation day you would always be better than me like now
I see a stark contrast between our lives.

Jim

I just didn't have enough money to finish my degree and dropped out. I lived in a homeless shelter for a few weeks. At least I met my girlfriend while I was staying there.

Vincent

You know I think you did what you could at the time. It was the best choice for you then.

Jim

I get what you're saying.

Vincent

So what about these problems with your girlfriend?

Jim

She's annoyed at my reluctance to find a full-time job. I'd just rather draw.

Vincent

I can see you have a passion for drawing.

Jim

It's my escape from the problems of the real world. I want to inspire other people to love it as much as I do.

Vincent

Maybe someday you can show me your work.

Jim

Can you come over later? My shift ends in a few minutes and I can show you a few of my drawings.

Vincent

Sure. Sounds good!

(Vincent and Jim shake hands)

Narrator

This part just fills me with joy whenever I read it! What will become of their relationship now that they're finally reunited after several years of going on their own paths? Well I don't know why I'm asking this because I wrote the darn thing, moving on!

SCENE 3

Time: Same night

Place: Jim's Apartment

At Rise: Jim and Vincent are in Jim's Apartment covered in crumpled up paper.

Jim

It's not the prettiest but it's home.

Vincent

Anybody else home?

Jim

Well my girlfriend should be home by now but she's probably on a business trip and forgot to tell me.

Vincent

Why are there so many crumpled up pieces of paper?

Jim

I'm kind of a perfectionist. I can get irritated at small mistakes so I try to start them all over again.

(Jim shares one of his finished works)

Jim

This one is a copy of my most popular piece.

Vincent

What is your artwork about?

Jim

Honestly, nothing special yet. I just wrote down my thoughts in pictures I guess.

Vincent

And you work really hard to make these thoughts in your head perfect?

Jim

Yes, why?

Vincent

See what you could improve on in other areas such as your relationship instead of trying to make just one perfect.

(Jim thinks about it. Pauses for a few seconds.)

Jim

Vincent, you are right. Can you help me get my life back on track?

Vincent

Of course I'll help you. That's what friends are for.

Jim

Thanks Vincent! *(Pause)* So how exactly are we gonna do this anyway?

Vincent

You've gotta have more selflessness in your life and show your girlfriend that you don't want to lose her by doing something special for her. When is she not working?

Jim

Next Saturday night.

Vincent

Okay great. Since I know the owner of a really fancy restaurant I can help hook you up.

Jim

What's its name and how fancy is it?

Vincent

Mario's Fine Cuisine. It's in little Italy. It's somewhat formal. What are your nicest clothes?

Jim

These are the best I've got.

Vincent

We need to get you some new clothes.

Jim

Yeah I agree. I don't know what I would do without her.

Vincent

She will love the surprise.

Jim

What about my job?

Vincent

No problem. I have a friend who works in a department store and he needs someone to work the register full-time. I'll hook you up.

Jim

It's either take it or leave it. I'll have a better chance of keeping my apartment and my relationship; two very important things in my life.

Vincent

I'll let you know it's not going to be easy but I guarantee you will do well. Just don't forget about your art.

Jim

Thank you Vincent for all you have done.

Vincent

No problem, I'm happy to repay you.

SCENE 4

Place: Jim's Apartment

Time: Morning

At Rise: Jim walks in listening to a voicemail from his girlfriend.

Narrator

Now this is where the story takes on a serious tone, when the hero is at his lowest! When Jim gets a very surprising call from his beloved partner.

Jim's Girlfriend

Hi Jim. It's me. It's very sweet of you to try and give our relationship one last try but I regret to inform you that I've made the decision to finally move into my parents' house. It's been fun, we shared a lot of great memories, but I don't think I can do this anymore. I'm sorry Jim.

Narrator

Jim stands there, dumbfounded and heartbroken that he's lost the love of his life. He gets down and depressed about it, as you do. He starts to go through all the seven stages of grief. *(Pause as a person comes out from offstage and whispers in his ear)* He starts to go through all the five stages of grief. His past with her flashes before his eyes. He starts to get angry from his grief separating the five stages.

Jim

(On the phone with Vincent)

Call everything off. She broke up with me and I don't think I can see you anymore.

Vincent

Are you serious? After all we've been through? This is your thanks to me trying to return the favor? She's not the last person you're gonna meet in life.

Jim

I don't care about all that now. All I care about is that she's gone and that my life is over and so are you, goodbye!
(Jim hangs up the phone and curls up in a ball onstage.)

Narrator

This is the part of the story where the hero is at their lowest and they desperately need a guardian angel to help them cling onto life. My apologies if my brilliant emotional writing has left you crying uncontrollably on the floor, *(Jim cries loud)* but I'm just that profound. Anyway, we cut to Jim who has locked himself in his muddled apartment as Vincent tries to come in.

Jim

(Moaning in sorrow)

Vincent

Jim! Oh my god is that you?

Jim

Vincent?

Vincent

Alright Jim, I've come here to apologize and I want to make it up to you. Friends don't leave each other after just one fight. Come on, I'm taking you back to my place to clean you up.

SCENE 5

Time: Late night

Place: Vincent's apartment

At rise: Jim just shaved, bathed, and cleaned himself up.

Narrator

Vincent, being the savior that he is, helps Jim clean himself up and they begin to have a deep meaningful conversation about friendship.

Jim

I'm so grateful that you still care after everything that's happened .

Vincent

Please don't cry or else you'll make me cry too. Do you remember high school graduation?

Jim

Yeah why?

Vincent

Well do you remember what else happened there? I was so grateful that you helped me through high school that I started crying. You said the same thing that I just said.
"Please don't cry or else you'll make me cry too."

Jim

I almost threw away our friendship. Vincent, can you ever forgive me?

Vincent

Of course, because you helped me out so much throughout high school that I'm just happy that I was able to help you out and personally experience both sides.

Jim

So can we be friends again?

Vincent

Yeah man of course.

Narrator

Jim and Vincent became best friends again. Jim finds and later marries another girl. Jim becomes a very successful artist thanks to Vincent sponsoring his future exhibits. They stay friends for the rest of their lives and maybe for even longer. The End... There! You wanted realism, and I gave you loads of realism! How's that for a pitch?

Executive

(Says from off stage) *sigh* We really don't think your attitude can fit in with this channel. This is your eighteenth time pitching to us and I can't see why the security hasn't noticed you yet. Get out.

Narrator

Oh come on! Clearly someone has to like this! Just wait until I get to show this in front of an audience! Maybe at a theater! Some organization has to accept this!
(SAY logo flashes behind him)

Narrator
Yes!

IV

Another Day in New York



SCENE 1

CUE: Lights up

Mike is sitting on the train and he exits but drops his phone.

CUE: Stand clear the closing door SFX

The door closes and pulls him by the headphone forward then the headphones fly off and the train goes off into the tunnel leaving Mike with no phone and no headphones.

Mike

No!!!!!! My phone! MY EARBUDS!! NOO!!!

Brian hears Mike freaking out and walks up to Mike.

Brian

What's wrong? I'll help you find them, nothing gets between a man and his music.

Mike

Who are you?

Brian

When I was 7 my grandmother gave me a pair of earbuds. Not five seconds later, it was snatched out of my hand by a Boston Terrier. I haven't gotten earbuds since. That is your phone and earbuds, which is also my phone and earbuds from when I was seven and the subway is the Boston Terrier, robbing both of us of the objects of our desires.

Mike

Oh...ok. Why are you telling me about what happened when you were seven?

Brian

Worry not friend, I will help you find your phone

Mike

At this point I welcome any kind of help, so thank you.

Brian

Hurry! We've got no time to waste!

Mike

Why are you helping me now?

Brian

Well you see, about ten minutes ago I dropped a corn muffin and I'm still mad about it. You see, when I was seven my grandmother...

Mike

Ok, chill dude, let's just go get my phone and earbuds back

SCENE 2

Mike

Ok I recall my train was going south toward New Lots Ave.

Brian

Good thing I brought my emergency subway map.

Mike

I'm just not going to question you anymore.

Train Conductor v/o

Attention all subway users, the 3 Train has malfunctioned in it's journey and is currently stopped in front of 14th st station. We will take care of it as soon as possible, but for now no trains can go down this tunnel. Have a great day!

(hooded figure sits on stage hidden)

Brian

This is perfect! The train is immobilized so we can get to it faster. Into the tunnels we go!

Mike

We could just go upstairs and walk

Brian

Don't you have any adventurous spirit in you!

Mike

Ok fine, let's just get this over with.

*The two jump down onto the tracks (very dangerous).
MYSTERIOUS STRANGER stops the two as they descend.*

Mysterious Stranger

Hey! If you're going down there you'll need this.

He pulls a lit torch out of his pocket and hands it to them.

CUE: Tunnel Projection

SCENE 3

INT Subway Tunnel

Brian

I can almost hear the music coming from your earbuds. We're getting close

Mike

It's probably a good amount of yards away, how can you hear it?

Brian

I think the more important question is, why are you listening to In Rainbows when Kid A is clearly the superior Radiohead album?

Mike

Uhhh, anyway, hey what's that over there?

There is a mysterious Hooded Figure, just hanging out.

Brian

It seems like it's a mysterious Hooded Figure, just hanging out.

Mike walks up to the mysterious figure

Mike

Hey there dude, we're looking for my phone and earbuds, did you see them fall out of the train anywhere?

Hooded Figure

Well I might know where your phone and earbuds are, and I may know a shortcut to get you there, but in order to access said shortcut you must answer one question.

Mike

What is it?

Hooded Figure

What's the deal with shoes?

Brian

Wait what? I mean I guess I like shoes. Sometimes they're comfortable, sometimes they're not... yeah what is the deal with shoes?

Hooded Figure

I mean you put one on then you put the other one on, but you also need socks, I mean why can't we just wear socks?

Brian

Do shoes really matter? I mean you're already wearing something to protect your feet. Do we really need more protection...

Mike

Dude, we need to find my phone!

Brian

Oh yeah, where is it?

Hooded Figure

Ahh, ok answer this!

He shows them a phone with a hard calculus problem on the screen.

Mike

Is this just a calculus problem? This isn't really fair though, I dropped out of calculus...wait, is that my phone?

Hooded Figure removes hood to show that Mike's earbuds have been in his ears the whole time

Brian

(Gasps) You lying scoundrel!

Mike grabs his phone and earbuds from the Hooded Figure.

Hooded Figure

Well I wasn't technically lying. I said I could show you your phone and earbuds and here they are. Don't you see, the answer was right in front of you all along. Hey kid, I think you dropped this.

He reaches into his pocket and takes out a corn muffin and hands it to Brian

Brian

Oh my god you found it! Wait, I dropped that, I'm not going to eat that.

Hooded Figure

Welp, more for me.

Hooded Figure slinks back into the darkness eating the muffin. Brian and Mike stand there stunned.

Brian

I guess we all learned something.

Mike

Don't spend your whole life worrying about your earbuds.

Brian

No, don't lose your corn muffin!

Mike

Welp! I guess this is just another day in New York!

They both high five

CUE: Lights fade to black

V

The Mysterious Mystery
of Sauce & Co. Sauce



SCENE 1

Place: The conference room

At Rise: Joe Sauce is giving his orientation spiel.

Joe

Welcome to Sauce and Co. My name is Joe Sauce and I'll be your supervisor.

Sauce and Co is the biggest producer of all things sauce in Northern America. My great grandfather William Sauce established this company on the condition that all sauce must be created equal and because of that if your last name is not sauce you might as well be dead because we only hire people with the name of sauce. You may ask why? Well I couldn't tell you because my great grandfather buried that secret along with himself. Speaking of employment, you have to be passionate about the idea of sauce if you wanna be a part of our establishment, not just as a condiment but as a lifestyle. You need to sauce, sleep in sauce, and breathe sauce. If you make it past our meticulous interview process you can work in several

positions and areas, such as packaging, tasting, delivering and sales. Now is your first step in joining the Sauce and Co. family today. For further questions please come up to me during the tour.

SCENE 2

Place: Joe Sauce's office

At Rise: Joe is sitting at his desk, Ronald Papushka is sitting across from him.

Ronald

My name is Ronald Papushka. I love sauce. I eat, drink, and sleep in it. I'm a sauce person. It's been my dream to work in a sauce place. I just really really love sauce. I actually put it on everything. I put it on macaroni and cheese, chicken, gravy, everything! Don't ask about gravy. I actually invented my own sauce. Papushka sauce. Creamy but delicious.

(While Ronald is speaking, Joe is simultaneously listening and reading Ronald's resume.)

Joe

Wow! Well that's a pretty big achievement if I do say so myself. I'm very pleased to hear about your intense commitment to sauce as most of your lifestyle; however, I regret to inform you that we cannot hire you.

Ronald

What? I told you everything about my undying love for sauce, so why not hire me?

Joe

Well Mr. Papushka, you simply lack the natural given name of Sauce and it's strict company policy that we only hire people who are born with Sauce lineage. I didn't make the rules Ronald, I'm sorry.

(Ronald begins to respond, but the CEO walks in. Joe is surprised to see him, stands up and shakes his hand.)

CEO

Morning Joe, what are you up to?

Joe

Well, sir, I was just in the middle of an interview.

(CEO draws his attention to Ronald and shakes his hand.)

CEO

Christopher Sauce, and you?

Ronald

Ronald Carlos Papushka.

CEO

Papushka? You mean like the legendary tomato mutation?

(Ronald looks surprised that someone actually knows it.)

Ronald

In fact, you're very correct, sir. My family has always been a supporter of sauce.

CEO

Well, would you look at that, I bet Joe was about to hire you if all is logical.

Joe

Well actually I was just about to send him off because of the Sauce Company policy, the one that states we must only hire people with the natural birth name of Sauce.

CEO

I understand that's company policy but we can always make exceptions, right? We don't even know why my grandfather enforced that rule.

Joe

But sir, the company policy is sacred. It's been around since the inception of our brand.

CEO

Oh, you don't always have to follow the rules verbatim, Joe. You can always loosen up and make a couple of exceptions.
(to Ronald) You're hired.

Ronald

Oh my god, thank you sir. I won't let you two down!

(Ronald grabs the resume and walks out. Joe looks kind of annoyed.)

Joe

Are you sure that this is a good idea, dad?

CEO

Anything's a good idea if you make it work, son.

(CEO walks out. Joe sits at his desk, defeated.)

SCENE 3

Place: Main sauce production area

At rise: Joe is showing Ronald around

CEO

(Over the loudspeaker) This is the CEO telling all employees to welcome Ronald Papushka to Sauce and Co. A very saucy welcome!

Ronald

Wow! This is amazing! I get a special welcome? Man, I love this job!

Joe

Don't get too excited. It's hard. Over here. This is the packaging area. This is where we package all the tomato sauces. We pack them in a jar, then into the boxes, ready to go into the truck.

Ronald

Whoa this is so cool! WHOA! Is that my Papushka Sauce?!?

(Ronald runs off to grab a sauce bottle.)

Joe

Wait! This sauce doesn't belong here! Every sauce that comes through has to be approved by me. What the heck?

CEO

(offstage) It's a good sauce! It will probably make the company way better!

Joe

Make the company better? You got sauce on your brain?

CEO

(offstage) Joey, you have to try it out.

Ronald

Yeah try it out! Man, it's amazing. I made it with my own love!

Joe

I don't want to get sick from your love. It probably tastes like Ragu, aka Trash.

CEO

(offstage) Do you talk to your mom with that saucy mouth of yours?! *(enters)* Joe, son, just try it out for your old pops. *(Joe carefully inspects the sauce box carefully and looks at Ronald suspiciously.)*

Joe

Ronald, let me ask you something, besides your “famous” tomato mutation, what’s in this sauce, hm?

Ronald

I’m glad you asked: broccoli, ragu, cream sauce, eye drops, baby oil, olive oil, castor oil, oil, a tiny bit of gasoline, candle wax, shredded cashews, american cheese, italian cheese-

(Joe drops the box and looks shocked and confused.)

Joe

Cashews?!? I’m allergic! This could’ve given me an allergic reaction dude! *(looks annoyed, then takes a moment to compose himself)* Ronald, Mister CEO and I are going to have a little talk okay? Go out and find the other employees.

Ronald

Aye sir!

(Ronald exits.)

Joe

Everything’s been so weird since you hired that Babooshka guy and violated the code!

CEO

I have no idea what you’re talking about, son. These are simply unfortunate coincidences.

Joe

You knew the Papushka sauce had cashews right? Why didn’t you tell me?

CEO

Son, I didn’t know it had cashews!

Joe

You said you tried it! You're the CEO!

CEO

You know what son, you're right I apologize. I'm not gonna be in tomorrow. You're in charge.

Joe

Wait, what?

(Ronald looks baffled and confused, Ronald runs in.)

Ronald

Hey guys there's something wrong with the sauce machine.

Joe

It's probably just another unfortunate coincidence, right?

(Joe annoyingly looks at the CEO and runs off.)

Ronald

Ok it's time, I've prepared the machine..

CEO

Did you press the wrong button?

Ronald

Yes I did. Ok let's get him. See you on the other side.

CEO

See you on the other side.

SCENE 4

Place: Main sauce production area (downstairs)

At rise: Joe, Ronald and the CEO are trying to figure out what happened to the sauce machine.

CEO

What happened?

Ronald

I don't know what happened, I just pressed the button and it started malfunctioning.

CEO

Son, go fix it.

Joe

Dude, you pulled and broke off the shutdown button! How do you even do that?

Ronald

I don't know! I'm just trying to learn from the best...

(Ronald looks down sadly as the CEO pats his back comforting.)

CEO

Joe this is embarrassing, how can you not fix this small problem?

Joe

It's not small at all dad! He broke a part of the machine!

CEO

Well I guess it's impossible to fix now.

(Joe looks at the CEO confused.)

Joe

Dad, you forgot the secret sauce repair technique?

(Joe breaks glass and grabs the secret repair sauce and pours it onto the machine. Then he beats the machine with his fists and feet until it turns on.)

CEO

Oh um...

Joe

A dedicated Sauce employee never forgets the secret repair sauce technique.

CEO

You're absolutely correct, my son. In fact, throughout this whole day, I've been implementing a series of tests on you in order to see how dedicated you are to Sauce and Co. and our family.

Ronald

We wanted to see if you could really handle being the only sensible one at Sauce and Co. You have proven to be worthy.

Joe

Ronald? I knew there was something up with you but what exactly is your deal being a part of this? What are you then?
My long lost brother?

(The CEO and Ronald look at each other nervously and then look back at Joe. Eventually he crumbles to the floor.)

Joe

OH MY GOD WHY IS EVERYTHING SO CONFUSING??
IT'S JUST A SAUCE FACTORY!

Ronald

Well it's true Joe. I'm not Ronald Papushka, my name is Jack Sauce, your brother separated at birth. Dad's been preparing me to replace him and run the company once he retires.

(Joe looks at the CEO baffled.)

Joe

I thought you said I was going to replace you?

CEO

You both are gonna run it.

Joe

Holy sauce! Thank you so much dad, does this mean that you're retiring.

CEO

Yes soon you're both gonna be in charge.

(Joe looks at Ronald and smiles.)

Joe

Well whatever the case, we're gonna make this the sauciest place ever!

(Joe and Ronald high five while the CEO watches. A random guy walks in.)

Random Guy

Hi! I'm here for a job.

Ronald

Great, what's your name?

Random Guy

Johnny Casserole!

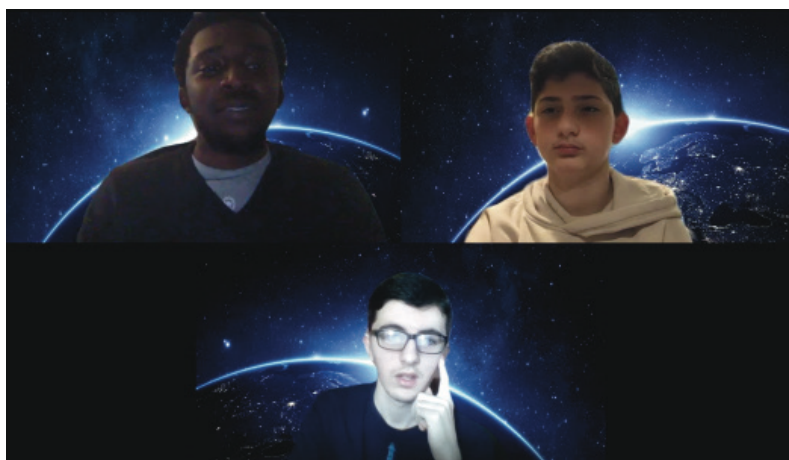
(There's a pause after he says his name.)

Joe, Ronald, CEO

(shouting) GET OUT!

VI

Steaks and Space



(A zoom call comes in from Sam, Nathan is watching TV)

Sam

Where would you rather be right now?

Nathan

Not in quarantine. Where have you been?

Sam

Where do you think I've been? At my house. Where else?

Nathan

I'm bored. Everything is online.

Sam

Yeah, I know. What's new?

Nathan

Me too. But I'm pretty content right now because I'm watching Space Force.

Sam

So you're not even listening? Okay fine, in the show, it's all a dream. He was asleep the whole time.

(Nathan turns off the TV)

Nathan

Alright fine, you have my attention. Now what?

Sam

Nathan, you're a fan of steaks aren't you?

Nathan

Why does that matter?

Sam

Earlier today, I mailed something to your door right?

(Nathan walks out of frame and then back with a box that he opens on camera)

Nathan

Is that a New York strip?

Sam

It is indeed. In fact, I have the same kind of steak right next to me. I also have a stopwatch. Here's my plan, we're gonna eat these New York strips as fast as we can.

Nathan

Oh boy, you challenged the wrong person, I'm going to win.

Sam

Alright, I'm turning my camera off, I'll see you on the other side, starting in 3, 2, 1!

(Cameras turn off, they soon come back on with a space background)

Space Guide

Hello! What brings you here?

(Sam and Nathan pop up into frame)

Nathan

No more steak...too much steak.

Space Guide

Steak? Did you guys bring steak? Tomahawk?

Sam

I am so confused right now

Space Guide

Well, this is my home. Welcome to space!

Nathan

Space? How did we even end up here?

Sam

All we did was eat steak as fast as we could, not sure how that relates to space.

Space Guide

Oh you did the famous New York Strip challenge? You see, whenever people attempt the challenge and do it faster than anyone else, they get to go to space!

(A pause as Sam and Nathan process)

Sam

Well those are some pretty random circumstances, but at least we're not in quarantine anymore.

Nathan

Can we stay?

Space Guide

Of course! I would love some company!

Nathan

How long have you been here?

Space Guide

I've been here since the pandemic started to spread.

Sam

Wow, I wish I spent more time up here.

Nathan

What? That sounds awful.

Space Guide

I mean, there's no internet, but I got some movies and a Playstation 5.

Sam

Oh my god actually a Playstation 5?

Nathan

Really? Let's see it.

Space Guide

Um, it's floating somewhere else right now.

Sam

Then let's go look for it!

Nathan

Sam, we should go back home.

Sam

What do you mean? This place is perfect!

Nathan

Dude, we don't have our phones, no internet, we can't even see our family or have any steaks!

Sam

Oh, huh, when you put it like that it sounds bad.

Space Guide

Wait till I get the PS5!

Sam

Okay yeah I wanna go home now

Space Guide

Alright fine, the steaks you ate weren't too big so you should be waking up any minute now.

Nathan

Wait, we're dreaming?

Space Guide

Yep! Food coma! Bye!

(Cameras shut off and switches back to normal background)

Nathan

Well um...we've been on this call for two hours so I'm gonna go.

Sam

That's fair, me too, talk to you later.

(Zoom call ends)

VII

Exposing Maderville High



At Rise: Aaron's zoom box appears. And they introduce their show...

Aaron AND Sam CAMERA ON

Aaron

Good morning ladies and gents, theys and them! Its your
host Aaron

Sam

And I'm Sam and this is...

Aaron

Exposing Maderville High.

Aaron

Today will be our last show. Don't be too sad though, we
won't be going away that easily.

Sam

I thought we had more of these to do...but I guess not.

Aaron

Well today for this show we have something special for you guys.

Sam

As you guys know last year we suffered a horrible loss to our rivals, the Townsville Jaguars. But this year, we made sure to train our athletes more vigorously and spared no expense to provide them with all the resources to succeed.

Aaron

Today for our show we have a special guest, the head cheerleader Chloe. We'll be interviewing her on the play of the game. Because of the pandemic right now this interview will take place over ZOOM. So let's get started with Chloe.

Chloe CAMERA ON

Sam

Hi Chloe!

Aaron

Welcome to Exposing Maderville High.

Chloe

Thank you. I'm happy to be here. It's so nice to meet you, Aaron.

Aaron

We have a bunch of classes together.

Chloe

Oh yeah, like math and science?

Aaron

No. History and English.
(*Awkward silence*)

Sam

Anyway, let's not waste anymore time and get straight to the interview.
Due to the outbreak of this unexpected pandemic, were there any changes of how you practiced for the game?

Chloe

We wore masks and at first we were socially distanced.

Aaron

Did you stop wearing masks? Did you stop social distancing?
And if so, do you think they made the right decision?

Chloe

The cheerleading team has to wear masks at all times. And the football team...well...they wear masks usually. And of course in a contact sport you can't keep being socially distant.
We have to play our sports.

Aaron

Do you really *have* to play this sport? Is it above your health and the health of others?

Sam

Well to rephrase what they were trying to say...Do you think these slight risks impact the necessity of the sport?

Chloe

Well of course everyone's health is more important but we take significant safety measures when we are in school and that's all we can really do.

Sam

Well I do think Chloe has a good point. There's only so much you can do when trying to make contact sports as safe as possible.

Aaron

Is that really all you can do? Like is wearing masks in school all you can do? What about outside of school? Like, what do you do then?

Chloe

What I do outside of school is none of your business.

Aaron

Well it is my business if it affects me. Do you really think that you are taking this seriously? Do you know how serious this is and how many people have died?

Chloe

Well I...

Aaron

One in three people in Maderville who have gotten the virus have died

Chloe

I don't think...

Sam

That is true. Chloe, do you know anyone who has gotten sick with the virus?

Chloe

A few...

Aaron

Are any of these people members of the football or cheer team?

Chloe

That's really not my place to say...

Aaron

Well it's not really your place to expose others to the virus...

Chloe

I have no idea what you're talking about...

Sam

As a matter of fact Aaron what exactly are you talking about?

Aaron

Quick question, what happened last week, on Friday? Do you know Chloe?

Chloe

We didn't mean for so many people to show up.

Sam

Wait, so you're telling me that you had a big party full of people?

Aaron

Yeah they did. And now the school is trying to cover it up by cancelling our show.

Chloe

I'm sorry, I didn't realize anyone would get sick. We were trying to...I'm sorry.

CHLOE CAMERA OFF

Aaron

Well that was an entertaining last show. Don't you agree, Sam?

Sam

Mmhmm. It was certainly quite a spectacle. Even though I wasn't expecting it.

Aaron

Well anyway, everyone, remember to be safe and wear your mask.

Sam

This was

Aaron

Exposing Maderville High.

VIII

Crescendo

“Band members have a special bond. A great band is more than just some people working together. It’s like a highly specialized army unit, or a winning sports team. A unique combination of elements that becomes stronger together than apart.”

**- Steven Van Zandt, guitarist of Bruce
Springsteen’s E Street Band**

“Will everyone show up?”

This is one of the many things running through my head.

“Will we have a show?”

“Will we actually perform?”

I had no idea why I still bothered with being the mediator. I could easily just leave and get a gig somewhere else; someone always needs a bassist. However, I knew they wouldn't last 10 minutes without me. That's not me being cocky about my skill, someone would easily get stabbed if I wasn't a constant presence.

Walking into the concert hall was always accompanied with the same looming sense of curiosity as to what could unfold next. I knew that this time was different, after what happened last night, I wasn't sure exactly what to look

forward to regarding tonight's events. Who knows, maybe I'll be a solo act, or maybe I just won't bother if no one else will, but that's not the mindset I like to go for. I decide to open the door with the slightest bit of optimism that everyone pulled through, and what do I see?

Nothing.

Until I spot the shadowy figure sitting cross-legged on the stage.

"Paul?"

"You look surprised."

Of course I was surprised, he's never on time, let alone this early.

Paul and I are childhood friends, at least I hope we still are, considering I'm pretty sure we haven't had a full conversation since the end of recording. The more recording we did, the less real he was. By the end, he was still playing as well as he had been, but he lacked any resemblance to the punky teen I met in middle school. We all knew he started using drugs when the sessions became yelling fests, but I didn't expect it to completely change his behavior.

He was wearing his usual black tank-top that he was definitely going to rip off around the halfway point of the show as usual, same baggy shorts, but he definitely seemed different today.

"Well, I just can't remember any time where you actually showed up early." I said, not really knowing what caused this sudden change. "Can't remember the last time you said a sentence to me either."

He started to speak after moving to start dangling his legs off the stage, "The truth is, I know you're always the first one here, and I needed a place to talk to you without the love-hate birds around to interrupt us with their mating

call.” He actually retained the same sense of humor, what is going on?

“Okay then, so what is it?” I said in a slightly annoyed tone, “You haven’t talked to me in months and I still don’t have a concrete answer after several guesses, what exactly made you normal again?”

He then took a deep breath, and began to say what I’ve been wanting to hear for a long time. “I was stubborn to say why for a long time, once something changes I can’t really be bothered to go back to the way it was. Can’t you agree that once they started arguing, they controlled the band?”

I started to listen more in-depth as he went on, “We just pledged our allegiance to the shouting matches and practically became session musicians. We never wrote anything after they started getting mad.”

“Look, I know I seem like a completely different person than who I was for the past few months, but I did this to myself.” Well of course he did it to himself, what other reason could there be? “I used drug trips to completely block myself out of the picture, it was better to be in the background at that point. After last night though, I felt as if it was getting too much. I felt like you needed me.”

It was true, I really did need him even if he wasn’t talking to me. I couldn’t stand to be a part of this for much longer if he stayed like this. I was glad to see he came back-

Then they walked in.

The door opened and I saw the two of them. I never expected to see them together again after last night, especially walking in together holding each other’s hand. You’d expect a loving couple from this image, but one look on their faces and you know something is up.

Their names are Liz and Johnny, aka our singer and

guitarist. They were the ones who have been accidentally ruining the band they wanted to be in since the start. However, I guess they wanted to change that because after Johnny went to sit by himself, Liz came up to us more focused than usual.

“Hey guys, long time no see right? So here’s the setlist for tonight, make sure everything sounds the way it should and we’re gonna be just fine. I’ll be over there if you need anything but let’s sound check in about 5 minutes alright?” She hands us the scribbled setlist, proceeds to flash a quick smile, then walks away to where Johnny went to sit.

Before I could register Liz’s odd upbeat behavior, I noticed that one of the songs on the paper was scribbled out. The song was “To Love is Death”, the heaviest one on the record. So, it didn’t make sense to me why it would be crossed out.

I walked to where she was sitting, “Why is ‘To Love is Death’ crossed out? Are we not doing it?” I said. “No we’re definitely not doing it,” she said quite definitively, “I’m sure you can adjust to one song change right?” “It’s the big crowd pleaser though, it’s when everyone starts to mosh like crazy,” I said, trying to persuade her otherwise, “it adds to an otherwise pretty speedy show, why not include it?”

She looked at me like I insulted her, “Well, I’m not too fond of it, so could you please stop asking me about one stupid song being cut?” She said very passive aggressively, as if her laidback nature was starting to break like a facade.

“If you say so.”

I walked back over to Paul, “Any idea why she doesn’t want to do it?”, he asked. I thought about it for a minute, before realizing how stupid I was for even questioning it, “She probably feels bad about writing it, I mean it’s basically about how much she hates Johnny.” Paul looked at me dumbfounded, “Oh, duh. I mean, it makes sense, but we

still need to have some sort of heavy hitter.”

Paul was right, but I was unsure of going back to talk to Liz since it seemed like she was done with talking to me. “Should I go ask her again?” I asked Paul. “I think you should, we’re gonna tire the crowd out if we remove the song.” So I went over to Liz again, “Hey so-”

“Alright let’s get this going! Sound check!”

Dammit sound guy, it was closer to showtime than I thought. I’ll hopefully be able to bring this up to her afterwards when we’re backstage, that is if I actually get to say anything. Things seem to be going differently than usual however, so I’ll try my best to stay optimistic.

So began the sound check, one of the most routine things you can do at a concert. Liz walked over to grab her mic like she didn’t notice I was saying something to her, as everyone else went to grab their respective instruments. So I grabbed my bass, and went to set up.

Sound check usually goes pretty smoothly. We normally just play our instrument, and wait until the sound guy says we sound good. This shouldn’t be too much of a big deal.

I don’t know what happened.

Paul tried to sound check, it wasn’t working, and then there was just yelling. I spaced out for so much of it, it’s an automatic thing for me to do based on what constantly happens at the studio, but here it was the worst option. It went from Liz yelling at Paul to stop screwing up, to Liz yelling at Johnny who looked like he was doing everything he could to not yell at her.

I don’t understand why I didn’t say anything for so long. Paul must’ve been looking at me with bewilderment wondering why I wasn’t doing anything, and he was, because I finally noticed my surroundings and saw him. I had to do

something, so I yelled back.

“Will you shut the hell up!?”

Liz, Johnny, and Paul all looked at me with wide eyes. I don’t think I’ve ever really yelled at them before. I quickly composed myself, unsure of how I actually managed to do that. I said, “Let’s just go backstage.” Not caring about finishing the sound check, and I don’t think the sound guy cared either considering he definitely didn’t wanna get involved in whatever was happening.

Everyone else grabbed their instruments and followed me backstage silently, perhaps they were still shellshocked at my shout, I was too.

Once we were all settled in our usual square of waiting, we heard the doors open. People were entering the venue, and I didn’t know what to do.

This is our last show, is what I kept thinking, this is the last thing we’re going to do together, as we all just sat there twiddling our thumbs.

“I’m sorry.” I said, “I just... I need this to stop.” I tried to be honest, and I felt like it was about time I was open instead of just not saying anything.

“I need this to stop too.”

Everyone looked up, it was Johnny. We all reacted differently, mostly surprised, but Liz looked more upset than anything.

He looked at Liz and said, “I hope you realize that. Everything you’ve done to me, and to everyone, has been making us suffer.”

Liz shot back, “I know this by now you know, I’ve been trying to fix it, but I guess it wasn’t good enough.”

Johnny shot right back, “So writing that ‘love’ song

was a form of trying to fix it? You stopped caring about me as soon as the first tour ended, nothing I said to you last night changed anything?”

Paul and I didn’t know what to say to either of them, but they kept arguing. Obviously not the first time, but we decided to actually communicate this time instead of isolating ourselves.

“I think this is it,” I told Paul, “I don’t think we can go further than this. They won’t get better, I thought last night would be a start but I think it’s never going to happen.”

Paul looked back at me, we both knew that what I was thinking meant the end of everything. Paul eventually responded after a few seconds of listening to the continuing argument, “Normally I’d try to be hopeful, but that part of me left a while ago.” He almost looked sad, “Let’s end it.”

We turned back to the two, and I yelled again, “Hey!”

They gradually stopped and looked at us, “We’re done.”

At that point, I didn’t even bother listening to what they had to say. They kept asking us various forms of why, and we answered in various forms of “because you’re ruining everything”.

After a few minutes of letting them absorb everything, Liz came forward, “So that’s it? It’s over? We still have a show to do.”

She was right, we did have a show to do.

I looked at Liz and Johnny, the ones who put all of us on a roller coaster of success, sorrow, hardships, and all of the above, and I said, “Then let’s do it.”