**CHANGELINGS** 

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A Play in Two Acts

# Cast of Characters

JONAH: Male. 14 years old. Meek and introverted. Very impressionable.

From a lower middle-class Filipino family.

TIMOTHY: Male. 17 years old. Confident, well-educated, and wealthy.

Hopelessly impatient. Uses humor to hide his insecurities.

FATHER ERNESTO: Male. 40-50 years old. Head priest and founder of Evergreen Youth

Ministry. A charismatic speaker.

DR. CANTOS: Female. 35-45 years old. Jonah's therapist. Determined to make her

mark in the ministry.

PERRY: Male. 15-17 years old. Very protective of his friends. Sensitive.

MARK: Male. 35-50 years old. Counselor. His usually peppy attitude masks

an aggressive side. Played by the actor playing Father Ernesto.

BENJAMIN: Male. 13 years old. Young and childlike in most aspects, down to his

curiosity.

ANDREW: Male. 15-17 years old. Numb to the world. Therapy has not been

kind to him these past few months. Played by the actor playing

Benjamin.

LILIBETH: Female. 35-45 years old. Admin officer. Interviews the new Seekers.

Can't keep her mouth shut. Played by the actor playing Dr. Cantos.

FERNANDO: Male. 20-25 years old. Guide. Would rather be doing anything else.

Still, this job has its perks.

DR. ESGUERRA: Male. 30-35 years old. Head of the ECT division in Evergreen.

Easily angered and flustered. Played by the actor playing Fernando.

# Setting / Time

Evergreen Youth Ministry, a gay conversion ministry in Cebu City, Philippines. The play is set during the height of the worldwide AIDS epidemic and the tail-end of President Ferdinand Marcos's term in the Philippines.

NOTE: A forward slash "/" indicates a point of overlapping dialogue.

# <u>ACT I</u>

#### SCENE 1

SETTING: The in-house chapel of Evergreen
Youth Ministry, Cebu City. January 19, 1986.
AT RISE: A priest, FATHER ERNESTO, dressed
in red and gold vestments, stands in the middle of

a spotlight to give a sermon.

# **FATHER ERNESTO**

How do we learn to accept change? In these turbulent times, we bear witness to a country in the midst of change. We pray for God to give us the strength to face the uncertain — whatever it may bring. But what of those who resist it? What of those who are lost to the past and are unable to adapt? Do we allow change to yield us or reinforce us?

In these turbulent times, God has sent a plague. Death is dampening its scythe with the contaminated blood of gay men. We can offer only the smallest whisper of prayers for them to change. Change their beliefs and see the destruction that lies at their wake. Change the way they love. We seek God's strength to cope with change. But what happens when we hear silence on the other end? Our whispers turn into cries of frustration. When our doubt becomes deafening and our faith becomes fractured, we lose hope. We fear a future forever in flux, our wits awaiting rest, unable to understand the universe and its underpinnings.

Then we remember. "The sluggard gets nothing. It is the desires of the diligent that are satisfied". He asks us to be the change we want to be in the world. He gives us the will to create this change. Let us use it to direct change towards others. Towards those whose whispers are unheard. This is the forest we all live in. Let us prune its weeds together.

(He exits the stage.)

# SCENE 2

	SCLINE 2
	Room 317. 7:00AM.
	The lights cross-fade to a sleeping JONAH. A
	loud scream is heard offstage. Running, panicked
	voices, and footsteps follow. BENJAMIN attempts
	to shake Jonah awake — much to his displeasure.
	BENJAMIN
Excuse me! HEY!	
	JONAH
I can hear just fine, okay? You don	n't have to yell.
	BENJAMIN
Really? 'Coz there's someone screa	aming outside and you don't—
	JONAH
I couldn't sleep. So just leave me a	lone.
	BENJAMIN
Shouldn't we?	
	JONAH
You're new here, right?	
	BENJAMIN
Got in last night.	
	JONAH
Yeah, the screaming? It'll be nothi	ng.

B	$\mathbf{E}$	N	Ί	А	Ν	Л	Г	N	

Seryoso? I'm going anyway.

# **JONAH**

Just don't wake me up again tomorrow, Greenie.

(BENJAMIN exits.)

He won't last the week.

(Lights shift to a waiting room. LILIBETH, the admin head, sits behind a desk. JONAH moves to the front of a line of terrified boys, carrying a large backpack.)

#### LILIBETH

Next!

(JONAH sits down. A spotlight shines on him — an interrogation.)

# LILIBETH

Good afternoon, Seeker. Please state your name, address, and reason for stay.

# JONAH

"Seeker"?

# LILIBETH

It's for our records. This doctor from California's doing a big study about our practices here at Evergreen. Top secret. Don't repeat that.

# **JONAH**

Ah. Okay then.

# LILIBETH

We'd like to give him as much data as we can. Names, ages, addresses, that sort of thing. It helps to make a good impression, you see. Name and address please.

JONAH

Jonah Mark R. Segundo. Mandaue City.

LILIBETH

And reason for stay?

**JONAH** 

Well, uhm...

LILIBETH

I need a straight answer, Seeker.

JONAH

I think it's because — I mean, I guess we're all here for the same reason, aren't we?

LILIBETH

Don't worry. Your record is confidential. Reason for stay.

JONAH

It's a little embarrassing. Do I have to?

LILIBETH

I must insist. Reason for stay.

**JONAH** 

Well, uhm, my mom found a few magazines under my bed. I st— I took them from my friend's sister's room when I stayed over one time.

LILIBETH

(couldn't care less)

Uh-huh. And then?

**JONAH** 

*Kuya* Jere was coming home for the Sinulog Festival. And my mom decided to clean the whole house before he arrived.

LILIBETH

I see. Did she confront you about them?

**JONAH** 

I tried to lie and tell her they were Gab's, but that only made things worse. "Why did he give them to you? Do you want me to call his mother and ask her about them?". She wouldn't fall for it. "Don't lie, *anak*. Don't you know lying is a sin?"

LILIBETH

What happened next?

**JONAH** 

Dad came home and she told him everything. They said I was ungrateful. They said they've been working so hard at the church. They had to help in the *Traslación* and everything and they were — and they said their hard work and money were being used to buy dirty magazines. And that I was sinful and they — that I was too young to even think about that stuff. And that I'll be the death of them.

LILIBETH

And then?

#### JONAH

They went into my room. I thought they were looking for more magazines. I was thinking what I could do. Run away? Would *Tita* Odette lend me money if I asked? Then, they came back with a bag of my clothes.

#### LILIBETH

What did you do?

#### **JONAH**

Nothing. They gave me my clothes and 70 pesos. They told me they called the Ministry and that you — that they entered me into your program. I was — and I'm gonna be staying here for a few months. They told me someone was gonna pick me up, they gave me some leftover bibingka from Christmas to eat on the way, and they said I should wash my face.

#### LILIBETH

(scribbling)

"Came out to family. Dinnertime". Here's your schedule.

# **JONAH**

There's a schedule?

# LILIBETH

We here at Evergreen adhere to a strict itinerary of activities. The program is designed to accommodate your stay for six months. After that, we have an exit interview with your counselor and your parents. They will decide whether to extend the treatment or pull you out.

# **JONAH**

What if they decide to continue?

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LILIBETH
We will be glad to accommodate your extension.
JONAH
What about me?
LILIBETH
As long as they're paying, they can do what they want.
JONAH
Do you — how are they paying for it? 'Coz I don't think—
LILIBETH
They made a small downpayment by bank deposit, but it says here in this promissory
note that they'll try to ask money from one of their friends by the end of the week.
JONAH
Oh.
LILIBETH
I'm not really allowed to say any more than that.
JONAH
Yeah. I see.
LILIBETH
You will stay in the dorm rooms here in the 4th floor of the left wing. It's four to a room

You will stay in the dorm rooms here in the 4th floor of the left wing. It's four to a room. Hope that's fine.

# JONAH

I guess so. Never had to stay in  $\slash\hspace{-0.4em}$  dorm rooms before.

#### LILIBETH

/ Wake-up time is at 7:30am. Please be ready for breakfast by 8:00 at the Mess Hall. One-on-one psych sessions start at 9:00 sharp. Your assigned counselor is Dra. Cantos. You are not allowed to change counselors.

# **JONAH**

Why would I want—?

# LILIBETH

Psych sessions are an hour long. Mid-morning prayers begin at 10:00. They're in the chapel. Attendance to all prayer sessions is mandatory. Prayers end at 12:00 noon. Lunch will be in the mess hall until 1:00. From 1:00 to 4:00, you will have your conversion therapy sessions—

#### **JONAH**

Oh my God. Another one? / Seriously? Oh. Sorry.

# LILIBETH

/ Please don't say the Lord's name in vain, Seeker. You will have conversion therapy with your counselor. From 4:00 to 6:00, you will join your fellow Seekers for group healing exercises. Then, an hour of evening prayers at the chapel. Dinner is at 7:00. Lights out at 9:00pm sharp. Questions?

# **JONAH**

No, but—

#### LILIBETH

You are in Room 427. You will find your roommates have already settled in. Here is your room key. Do not lose it. You will find your uniforms in your designated closet.

7	ТІМОТНҮ
ANDREW.)	
with a practiced	d swagger, followed by PERRY and
hallway. Lights	s shift to find TIMOTHY entering
(The spotlight	fades and returns. JONAH is in a
Next!	
I	LILIBETH
Uh, thank you.	
J	JONAH
Welcome to Evergreen Youth. We he	ope you have a lovely stay here. God bless you!
1	LILIBETH
How big is this place? 'Coz I'm not i	really good with—
	JONAH
Orientation's in the chapel. It starts in	n ten minutes. Here's a map.
	LILIBETH
_	
I think—	
J	JONAH
Any further questions?	
Father Ernesto says uniforms instill a	a sense of unity without the unnecessary intimacy.
I	LILIBETH
Uniforms?	
J	JONAH

Greenie?

JONAH
Huh?
PERRY
He's asking if you're new here. Legend has it that Timothy Alvendia would self-destruct
if he ever tried to speak in full-length sentences.
JONAH
I just had the orientation in the office. I just came out.
TIMOTHY
Didn't we all?
(TIMOTHY laughs. JONAH follows suit nervously.)
JONAH
Yeah. Gay joke. I get it.
(extending his hand)
Jonah.
PERRY
(taking it)
Perry. That's Andrew. Nothing personal, but he doesn't like touching people / that much.
ANDREW
/ I don't like touching people.
TIMOTHY

# **PERRY**

Not anymore. This place can really do a number on you.

Andrew and I have been here since October. Our parents caught us — let's just call it

"bonding over our adolescence" together. And what better way to punish your sons for fooling around than by locking them together for months on end? Doing touch exercises everyday.

#### TIMOTHY

Andrew can't do the exercises / anymore.

**ANDREW** 

/ I can't do the exercises anymore.

**JONAH** 

Right.

**ANDREW** 

That wasn't orientation.

JONAH

It wasn't?

#### **ANDREW**

That wasn't orientation. Not really. Orientation is after. In the chapel. After. Wasn't orientation. Not really. No.

### JONAH

That reminds me. Can you guys tell me where the chapel is?

# **TIMOTHY**

It's down this hall and to the left. You won't miss it. It's right next to the bathroom.

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1	( )	N	А	н

(checking	the	mai	<b>1</b> )
(Chiccining	uic	min	"

(cne	cking the map)
Right. Next to the bathroom.	
	PERRY
Talk about intelligent design.	
	TIMOTHY
It's where all the demons go after the	he exorcisms.
	PERRY
At least that's what it sounds like a	fter lunchtime.
	JONAH
Thanks, guys.	
(The three bo	ys start to leave.)
	JONAH
Wait! You haven't told me your sto	ory yet.
	TIMOTHY
You first.	
	JONAH
Oh. Well, uhm I had this friend.	
	TIMOTHY
What was his name?	
	JONAH
Gab. And he—	

	TIMOTHY
Bored.	
	JONAH
Thanks. What about you?	
	TIMOTHY
Been here six months on Friday. Tr	reatment almost over. Can't wait to get the hell out of
here. Oops, I meant "heck".	
(shak	ring JONAH's hand)
You know, you don't have to drag a	all that to the chapel.
	JONAH
I don't?	
	TIMOTHY
Others might but that's 'coz they did	ln't bump into us first.
	JONAH
I see.	
	TIMOTHY
Why don't I take it up to your room	? Orientation's just about to start and you need to find
a good pew.	
	PERRY
I usually go for the ones at the back	a. Next to the side door. In case you ever need to run
out and vomit after the Communion	1.
	ANDREW
Perry	

JONAH
I don't know.
TIMOTHY
It's a bag. Don't worry so much. What room are you in?
JONAH
427. But won't you be late for your uh, therapy session?
TIMOTHY
Not really. I got Doc Rivera. Total pushover.
JONAH
(handing it over)
Well, thanks.
TIMOTHY
I'm at 423. If you wanna hang out before dinner
JONAH
Don't you have evening prayers before dinner?
TIMOTHY
See, that — you'll never make it here with that attitude. Make friends with the right
people and the Guides won't even notice you're gone half the time. Trust me.
JONAH
Guides?
PERRY
The guys who help the counselors during sessions. They'll cover all of this at orientation.

Oh. Okay.	JONAH
on only.	TIMOTHY
See you later.	THWOTITI
	PERRY
Bye. Good luck.	
	ANDREW
Yes. Hm	
	(Everyone exits. Lights fade.)

#### SCENE 3

Evergreen Youth Ministry chapel. Same day.

FATHER ERNESTO, adorned in a white alb

under a gold-lace chasuble and green stole,

stands under a spotlight, preparing to orient a

room full of teenage boys. A small group of

Guides in white shirts form a semi-circle around
him.

# **FATHER ERNESTO**

Good morning! Hope all of you are having a good day today!

(murmurs of agreement)

Well, we can do better than that, can't we? Are you having a good day today?

(slightly louder murmurs of agreement)

Close enough. Welcome to the Evergreen Youth Ministry. My name is Father Ernesto Vicente. I'm the head priest here at Evergreen. It's nice to see such young, fresh faces looking up at me. Any questions you have about the Church — what we do here — just pop in my office for a few minutes and I assure you that you'll come out perfectly satisfied.

We established this ministry two years ago as a center for young males to understand their homosexuality and, after learning God's word and teachings, change for the better.

These are hard times for many gay men. We are here to teach you that homosexuality is a sin. And that it is in your best interest to follow the path guiding you to the Holy Spirit's gentle embrace and not the one leading you to the Devil's flaming tongue.

The Lord has spoken His Word. 1 Corinthians 6:9. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit my kingdom? Neither fornicators nor the effeminate. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, by the Spirit of God".

Normally, this is where I play a tape about the short but proud history of this ministry. Unfortunately, one of our Guides, through a misjudgment on his part, broke the VHS player when he chose to use the TV to watch a few... contraband videos.

(The Guides covertly glance towards a young man in their group who is nursing a prominent black eye.

He hands FATHER ERNESTO a white, but stained, cincture and returns to his spot. The back of his shirt is slightly tinged with red...

Father Ernesto takes the cincture wordlessly, ties it around his alb, and continues.)

Here at Evergreen, you will meet a staff of highly qualified doctors and counselors, young Guides who will help you on your journey, and your fellow Seekers. Seekers of enlightenment and salvation. Learn the schedule by heart, follow your Guides, and don't step out of the walls of the ministry without permission, and your stay will be the best six months of your lives.

Good day to you. And may God bless you, my children.

(They all exit. Lights fade.)

# SCENE 4

Room 317. 8:00PM the same day.

JONAH stands over his bed, already in his
uniform — a white shirt and white shorts. His
bag rests at the end of the bed. TIMOTHY enters
wearing a long-sleeved hoodie.

# TIMOTHY

You rang?

# **JONAH**

Yes. Okay, I...

# TIMOTHY

You know, when Marco told me you were looking for me, he made it seem so urgent.

And I gotta get back to—

#### **JONAH**

I just — did you try to open my bag?

# TIMOTHY

Your bag?

#### **JONAH**

It's just that the lock is broken and I didn't break it. I take care of my stuff and I think — I mean I didn't pack it myself, but I have important things in there that I — well, my parents packed it, really — that I don't want other people to see. You know how expensive three-number-combination locks are? And if you tried to open it... and why would do that anyway, unless you just snoop into people's things on purpose? But who

does that and why me, unless, of course, you thought I might be... but that's assuming I'm interesting enough or I have interesting stuff or... ah, but maybe I just never noticed the lock was broken and my parents... I mean it was a long ride and it was dark and — in that case, I'm sorry I even accused you of anything, maybe you're as offended as I was when I saw — ugh, sorry, and you might have been busy, or you might have said you were and I wasn't even listening 'coz I was being selfish and thinking you were a thief. Or at least an attempted thief. Is that even a thing, an "attempted thief"? I mean you're either one or you're not... but in any case, I'm sorry if you — I'm sorry I said anything. And I'm sorry for rambling...

#### **TIMOTHY**

(beat)

You're weird.

**JONAH** 

I know.

# **TIMOTHY**

Sorry. It's just that — maybe it's your parents. You know, to stop you from hiding stuff.

# **JONAH**

Yeah, I guess you're right. I can't tell you the number of times they've yelled at me when I lock my bedroom door.

#### **TIMOTHY**

They're just looking out for you. And hey, someone needs to fix your horrible fashion sense one way or another.

# **JONAH**

What? I thought we're supposed to wear these.

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	TIMOTHY
I don't wear straitjackets.	
	JONAH
They <u>are</u> a bit tight	
	TIMOTHY
Wear 'em during the sessions if you	a want. It gives them the illusion they're in power.
	JONAH
Won't the Guides report you? That	s what they said. And then you won't pass the exit
interview.	
	TIMOTHY
The beaution in a section and the	
	up to every Guide, therapist, and member of staff here.
Everyone loves me. Stick with me	and you'll be fine.
	JONAH
I don't know	
	TIMOTHY
	TIMOTITI
Come on. Take it off.	
	JONAH
What?	
	TIMOTHY
Go ahead. You'll feel better, I prom	nise.
	JONAH
I	

# TIMOTHY

(opening his bag)

I'll even help you pick out something to wear.

(JONAH grabs the bag, pauses, then tosses a few

shirts on his bed.)

That's the spirit. Now, take that off.

(JONAH takes off his shirt, showing the brown

necklace he's wearing.)

What's that?

# **JONAH**

I think it's called a scapular. They give it free to the volunteers at the church—

# TIMOTHY

Yeah, that's gotta go. Go on. Take it off.

(JONAH removes his scapular. TIMOTHY tosses

him a green shirt)

Now, I think this one. Yes. Green for 'Greenie'.

JONAH

(putting it on)

Stop calling me that.

**TIMOTHY** 

Better than 'Jonah'. Too Biblical for me.

**JONAH** 

Says the guy called 'Timothy'.

	TIMOTHY
Call me Timmy. Much more pagan	. So what's your story?
	JONAH
You already know it.	
	TIMOTHY
	TIMOTHY
I want details. Why are you here?	
	JONAH
T	V 01.1.11
I'm not sure I want to—	
	TIMOTHY
I promise I'll tell you mine.	
	JONAH
I what do you want to know? It w	as nothing special. My parents found some dirty
magazines under my bed, confronte	ed me at dinner, blah blah
	TIMOTHY
Dirty magazines, huh?	
	JONAH
I shouldn't have taken them.	

**JONAH** 

TIMOTHY

Where'd you get them? No offense, but you don't seem like someone who steals things. I

don't think you even cross the street without mommy's say-so. How old are you anyway?

Fourteen.

# TIMOTHY

Damn.	When 1	was fourteen,	I had to make	do with a dusty	y Betamax	of An	Officer	and a
Gentle	man. Ri	chard Gere in	that tight navy	outfit				

Gentieman. Richard Gere in that tight havy outfit
JONAH
(beat)
I stole it from a friend's sister.
TIMOTHY
What was his name again? Your friend?
JONAH
Gab.
TIMOTHY
That's right.
JONAH
Your turn.
TIMOTHY
Well, when Lolo Tinong died, Dad got most of his estate in Talisay. My brothers and I
studied in expensive schools abroad. I went to Brazil last year for one semester. Trust me,
summer's not a good time to go to Brazil. Anyway, that's where — his name was — well,
is Julio.
JONAH
Ah. I see.

#### TIMOTHY

We were best friends for three months. We promised we'd write to each other every week when I get home. And we did.

**JONAH** 

Well, that's nice.

#### TIMOTHY

A month passed, and I realized I started to have feelings for him.

**JONAH** 

I'm sorry.

#### **TIMOTHY**

Reading his letters, running my fingers across every line... and then, I thought — I decided — well, when it was my turn to write back, I did the worst thing anyone could have done. You don't know how hard it is to recover from pouring your heart out to someone. Your hand cramping up when it can't keep up with the words in your head. And your writing becomes sloppy, but then you pause for a bit just before you write down his name so that it'll look perfect. I wrote pages and pages about how much I missed him.

Not just him, but the thought of being with him. About how my brothers were morons with their idiot girlfriends from the province. About how my parents would understand — that they're educated and cultured and refined enough to see what true love looks like. About how my dad will give a teary speech at dinner when he comes over to visit and how my mom will hug him when he goes back home. About how society is going to get past the hatred and the ignorance. That if we wait a little longer, we can overcome the weird glances and the whispering as we walked past the scared parents, who were holding their kids tight like they're afraid we're gonna corrupt them just by walking near them. About how our love will be stronger than death staring us in the face every day.

JONAH

What did he say?

TIMOTHY

Nothing.

**JONAH** 

Nothing? After all that? *I* would've — uhm, why?

# TIMOTHY

Because that was the day I learned about my parents screening my letters. Once they read what I was going to send, they tore it up. They called me a disappointment and yelled at me.

**JONAH** 

What did you do?

# TIMOTHY

I yelled back, of course. I don't think I've ever yelled at my parents before. The hypocrites. They had my brothers carry me kicking and screaming into the car. I made sure every single one of our neighbors knew what was happening. Then, they drove me here themselves. I wasn't allowed to yell at them in the car because they were on the phone, they said. Probably wiring money to pay for this place. The car ride was so long that I fell asleep. I'm thinking they drove me around in circles until I did. I woke up in my bed the next day, with a suitcase full of my clothes and a note telling me to go down to the office to get interviewed. That was six months ago.

# **JONAH**

I can't believe you would yell at your parents. I could never imagine doing anything like that.

#### TIMOTHY

You have to learn to take control of your life. We're taught at a young age to be grateful for what we have and never question our blessings. Bullshit.

# **JONAH**

I don't know.

#### TIMOTHY

It's a skill you need to learn. And learn fast. You grow up in this place. Quicker than you need to. I guess it's the only good thing about it.

# **JONAH**

And did Julio ever write back?

# TIMOTHY

He got mad that I stopped writing. He sent one final angry letter and that was it. My parents sent it to me a month after I got here.

# **JONAH**

I'm so sorry. But did you really think they would be okay with all this?

# TIMOTHY

I thought they would understand. That they were different — smarter than the other parents. But in the end, they were just like everyone else. Honestly, they were the ones who disappointed me.

# **JONAH**

I still think you shouldn't have yelled at them. Maybe that's why they put you here. Did you ever think about that?

### TIMOTHY

What should I have done? Lie down and accept it? Lot of good that did to you.

# **JONAH**

I'm not — maybe this place would be the best thing for me. Who knows? I mean, you've been here six months and you seem fine. Maybe it's for the best.

#### TIMOTHY

This is a God-less place, Jonah. I don't know if He exists, but six months here hasn't shown me proof that he does.

# **JONAH**

That — you can't say that.

# TIMOTHY

It's just how I feel.

# **JONAH**

Maybe — maybe you should pray more. It'll help you grow stronger. Maybe give you the strength to open up more. Or you could write to your friend again. If you really want to.

# TIMOTHY

Opening up to others is overrated. It's much easier to be the funny guy making all the jokes and sidestepping all the awkward questions. This way, nobody gets hurt.

#### **JONAH**

So you're happy just lying to everyone?

# **TIMOTHY**

Why not? It's not like I'm gonna see these people again.

(Lights slowly fade until the pair are illuminated by a single spotlight.)

That'll be lights out. I must be off. I've got nightmares to sit through, you know. Maybe there'll be some new ones. But knowing my luck, it'll be the same vision of burning fire and brimstone. I'll say hello to Lucifer for you.

**JONAH** 

Wait. I have one last question.

TIMOTHY

What?

JONAH

Why are you telling me all this?

**TIMOTHY** 

Huh?

JONAH

You said you think opening up is overrated. So why...?

# TIMOTHY

I don't — I guess everybody needs an outlet, I suppose. And you just had the misfortune of asking me to talk to you in private near the end of my stay. You should thank me for the privilege.

JONAH

Gee, what an honor. I'm so thrilled.

T	T /	$\sim$	T T	₹7
TI	IVI	w	п	Y

As you should be. Plus, you look so lonely here. I felt sorry for you.

# JONAH

I — I'm not lonely! I've got roommates!

# TIMOTHY

Right. Your 'roommates'. We've been talking for about 20 minutes now. Not once did these guys even acknowledge you exist. I barely even noticed they were in the same room.

# **JONAH**

How could you not notice my roommates?

# TIMOTHY

Okay, what are their names?

# JONAH

Well, there's... they're... uhm... you see, they never—

# TIMOTHY

Thought so.

### JONAH

Uhm... how does it feel then? Opening up?

# **TIMOTHY**

What kind of question is that?

### JONAH

It's just — I don't — no one's ever really opened up like that to me. I just — and you said you didn't want to talk that way to anyone. I just wanted to — just in case I ever — I mean, I do have therapy tomorrow. I've never done it before.

# **TIMOTHY**

I feel good. Better. I guess if it's the right person...

# JONAH

Oh.

# **TIMOTHY**

Actually, you know what? I kinda feel sick. Yeah, I think I got acid reflux. You got any discount coupons for antacids I could cut out from the porno mags stashed in your bag?

#### **JONAH**

Discount coupons? I thought you were supposed to be rich. And funny.

# **TIMOTHY**

And I thought you were supposed to be a self-flagellating Jesus freak raised to kiss God's ass to eternal kingdom come. You know, you better get some sleep. You've got therapy tomorrow, remember? Who do you have?

JONAH

Dra. Cantos.

TIMOTHY

Never heard of her.

**JONAH** 

I hope she's nice.

TIM	ОТНҮ
Probably not. Meet up at the Mess Hall a	after therapy?
JON	TAH
Uhm	
TIM	ОТНҮ
1 HVI	OIIII
Come on. The food'll be g—well, there's	ll be food, that's for sure.
JON	AH
I guess. We'll see.	
TIM	ОТНҮ
Oh, and by the way, if you hear any scre	aming tonight—
JON	АН
Screaming?	
TIM	ОТНҮ
11171	
Yeah, don't mind that. Most of the boys	here get night terrors by their 2nd month. You'll
learn to ignore it.	
JON	AH

Jesus Christ.

# TIMOTHY

Jonah! Has no one ever told you not to use the Lord's name in vain? You're going to Hell with that mouth!

# **JONAH**

Trust me, if I'm going to Hell, it's not because of my language.

# TIMOTHY

Well, we don't have time to go through all the reasons right now. Maybe tomorrow. Good night, Greenie.

(TIMOTHY exits.

JONAH places the clothes back into his bag. He considers his scapular for a second... and puts it on again.

The spotlight turns off.)

# SCENE 5

DR. CANTOS's office. 9:00AM the next day.

Lights shift outside the therapist's office, where

DR. CANTOS is sitting down. A picture of a trio
of sheepdogs sits prominently on her desk. A
nervous JONAH knocks and enters.

Uh, Doc?	JONAH
Jonah? Please take a seat.	DR. CANTOS
Thank you.	JONAH
Now, have you ever had therapy be	DR. CANTOS fore?
No.	JONAH

DR. CANTOS

Well, my job is to make sure you're well-equipped mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to progress in this program. Doesn't that sound encouraging?

**JONAH** 

I guess so.

# DR. CANTOS

Don't worry, Jonah. Evergreen will help you be closer to God and become a better
person. Everything we talk about here will be in strict confidence. Do you know what
that means?

**JONAH** 

Yes.

# DR. CANTOS

That means you can say anything in this room and no one else will know. So, how do you find the ministry so far?

**JONAH** 

Everyone's been really nice.

DR. CANTOS

Good, good. Have you made any new friends?

**JONAH** 

I guess.

DR. CANTOS

That's good to know. Do you normally make friends easily?

JONAH

Not really. A lot of kids think I'm kinda weird.

DR. CANTOS

I see. Well, you're young. You'll grow out of that soon enough. Do the other kids in your school bully you?

No, not really. I mean — what I meant is — I have some friends back home.		
DR. CANTOS		
A Mr. Gab. Is that correct?		
JONAH		
(taken aback)		
Yes.		
DR. CANTOS		
It's all here in your file.		
JONAH		
Sorry, it's just — I thought she wasn't paying attention.		
DR. CANTOS		
Now, would you consider your family a loving one?		
JONAH		
I guess.		
DR. CANTOS		
Well, what would you say holds your family together?		
JONAH		
I don't know.		
DR. CANTOS		
Well, what do your parents do for a living?		

They work at my high school. My mom works as an admin officer and my dad's one of the security guards.

#### DR. CANTOS

And your brother?

#### **JONAH**

He works in Manila. Sometimes, he sends money home to us to help pay for bills but—

#### DR. CANTOS

That's nice. What do your parents do on their free time?

#### JONAH

They volunteer at the church.

#### DR. CANTOS

(bulls-eye)

That's good. A God-fearing family will go far in this world. Now, has that ever been a problem for you? Your parents being close to God?

#### JONAH

Some of my friends would tease me a little about them. But I think it's more 'coz they work at my school. But we all just laugh about it after.

#### DR. CANTOS

And how long have you felt persecuted for being religious?

#### **JONAH**

What? I don't feel that way! They're just kidding and we all laugh—

#### DR. CANTOS

Seeker, there are times when a person says something in jest but it's meant to be insulting. And sometimes, you don't even know it, but deep inside, you're hurting.

#### JONAH

But does it matter if what they say is meant to be an insult if I don't / feel insulted?

#### DR. CANTOS

/ Tell me about your father.

#### **JONAH**

My father?

#### DR. CANTOS

You said he works as a security guard at your school. That must mean he isn't home much.

### JONAH

Well, he works the night-shift sometimes. He's there most days, though. Most days, we eat dinner / together but—

#### DR. CANTOS

/ Sometimes? Where does he go when he's not at the school or at home? Does he go to the bar?

#### JONAH

He goes to visit my *Tita* Odette sometimes. Takes care of her. He said she's sick. She lives with her friend *Tita* Doreen. I'm not allowed to visit them, though. I think my dad just feels ashamed because *Tita* might give me money and he would feel really bad about it. I don't understand it, really.

DD	$\sim$ $^{\prime}$	N Tr	$\Gamma \cap C$
DR.	CA	NI.	ΓOS

Do your mother and father fight at home?

#### JONAH

Well, sure. I mean / most parents—

#### DR. CANTOS

/ And when they fight, do they fight in front of you and your brother?

#### **JONAH**

Well, *Kuya* Jere works in Manila and doesn't really come home unless it's the holidays or something and since it's the Sinulog Festival—

#### DR. CANTOS

Please answer the question, Seeker.

#### **JONAH**

(slightly annoyed)

I was trying to. Anyway, they don't really fight more than most parents do. We're a happy family. And they don't really fight in front of me, if that's what you're asking.

#### DR. CANTOS

What do they normally fight about? Do they fight about you?

#### **JONAH**

Not really. The usual stuff. Finances, bills, and stuff.

#### DR. CANTOS

And when they fight, do they take it out on you?

	JONAH
No! No one hits me, okay?	
	DR. CANTOS
I see.	
	JONAH
And they don't hit each other! No	
And they don't intedem other. No	one's inting anyone.
	DR. CANTOS
I see.	
	JONAH
So did you rescue all three of you	ur dogs?
	DR. CANTOS
Let's stick to me asking questions	
	·
	JONAH
Of course.	
	DR. CANTOS
So, you spend most of your time w	vith your mother, then?
	JONAH
I — what?	
T What:	
	DR. CANTOS
Well, you say your father is off son	me days and your older brother works in Manila. And

you don't have any friends who / are good influences on you.

JONAH
/ Gab's my friend and he's a good / influence!
DR. CANTOS
/ Please let me finish. You should respect your elders, you know.
7 Tease let the fillish. Tou should respect your claers, you know.
JONAH
(fuming)
Fine.
DR. CANTOS
Now, as I was saying. You don't have good friends, so you stay home with your mother?
Thom, as I was saying. I ou don't have good intends, so you stay nome with your mount.
JONAH
(sickeningly saccharine)
Yes, po.
DR. CANTOS
And she was the one who discovered you were a homosexual?
That she was the one who discovered you were a homosexuar.
JONAH
She found the magazines under my bed.
DR. CANTOS
Is it normal for her to invade your privacy like that?
is it normal for her to invade your privacy like that:
JONAH
Well, she didn't really. She was just cleaning and, I guess accidentally
DR. CANTOS
DR. CANTOS

Would you call her an overbearing mother?

JONAH
She only wants the best for me.
DR. CANTOS
Do you ever think that being as close as you are with your mother could be damaging?
JONAH
We're really not that close.
DR. CANTOS
So you intentionally distance yourself from your mother, or other family members?
When they're around, I mean?
JONAH
No, not really. I mean we're just a normal family. Normal in every sense of the word.
DR. CANTOS
Except your father isn't around as often as you like.
JONAH
I guess I would like him to spend more time with me sometimes. But it can't be helped
DR. CANTOS
Jonah, I think we're making excellent progress here.
JONAH
Are we?

DR. CANTOS

Of course we are. Now, I'd like to get back to your mother.

	JONAH
Oh, goodie.	
	DR. CANTOS
Are you taking this seriously, Seeke	r?
	JONAH
I — yes, of course, ma'am.	
	DR. CANTOS
I should hope so. Hard-working peo	pple have set up this institution hoping to do some
good in the world. To help young m	en like you. To help save your souls. To help save

at night. If people knew you were gay, you'll have no hope. There are already

Yes, ma'am.

DR. CANTOS

your lives. Your parents want you to make this place a safe zone, where you can avoid

persecution for what you are. You know what happens to kids your age when you go out

repercussions of your past behavior on your immortal soul. Let's not add fat to the fire.

Do you know what that means? Adding fat to the—?

JONAH

Yes.

DR. CANTOS

Please understand that I'm here to help you. To help you change for the better. Unless it's your wish to grow up, have sex, and waste your life away from AIDS.

J	O	N	A	Н
J	v.	T 4.	4 A	

Have sex? I'm not really thinking about — I mean, I'm—

#### DR. CANTOS

AIDS is a brutal disease. It's God's punishment for the wicked.

#### **JONAH**

But I thought that He lov—

#### DR. CANTOS

Don't worry about the future. That's what I'm here to fix. It may not be your fault you have chosen to be gay, but it would be your fault to deny yourself the chance to change.

#### **JONAH**

It's not my fault?

#### DR. CANTOS

I see here a mother who smothers her son with female affection, with feminine energy. Because of this, you see all female forms as maternal and aromatic. I also see a father spending time away from his son. Studies show that young boys need a strong, authoritative, non-sexual male relationship to counterbalance the maternal energies. Without a father figure, you view men as exotic and mysterious and start to associate the male form with romantic and sexually arousing thoughts. Your body can't tell the difference. But your brain can. That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to help you understand what's wrong so we could cure you of this disease.

#### **JONAH**

Disease?

#### DR. CANTOS

Any abnormal condition of the body is a "disease". It is our duty as doctors to treat those diseases. The problem is that unlike other diseases, homosexuality also affects your soul. This is why we established Evergreen — so both faith and science can work together towards a common goal.

(She checks her watch.)

And we're out of time. After each session, I am obligated to ask you how you are feeling. How are you feeling?

JONAH

Er—

DR. CANTOS

Good. See you after lunch.

(JONAH exits. Lights off.)

CC		N T	$\mathbf{T}$	
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Mess Hall. Lunchtime. TIMOTHY absent-mindedly reassures a tense JONAH while serving himself seconds. JONAH How can anyone even keep anything down after that? TIMOTHY You get used to it. **JONAH** Then why is the mess hall always empty? TIMOTHY I prefer to think of it as a plate half-full situation. The less everyone's eating, the more full my plate is. JONAH And the more people starving themselves? TIMOTHY Well, maybe the plate's a little less than half-full, then. JONAH I bet the Guides get good food. TIMOTHY

A lot of them are worse off, actually.

Really?

#### TIMOTHY

Imagine being 21. In the prime of your life. You can do anything you want. Instead, you're being forced by your parents to work in a ministry you have no business being in, looking after hormonal teenage boys 24/7.

#### JONAH

So they're not all gay?

#### **TIMOTHY**

I'd guesstimate based on my personal calculations — by that, I mean counting those who haven't thrown themselves on me — that it's a good half-and-half split.

#### **JONAH**

And did they let you in on their working conditions while they were on top of you?

#### **TIMOTHY**

I was talking to Father Ernesto earlier. And I may have casually mentioned thinking the Guides look more like prisoners than prison guards. And then he said a lot of stuff — it's not a prison, how could I say that, blah blah — I eventually got to the kernel but I had to weed out a lot of his nonsense from the waffle. Mmm. Corn waffles.

#### **JONAH**

Why were you talking to Father Ernesto?

#### **TIMOTHY**

Doc Rivera said he wanted me for something.

J	ONA	Н
J	O1 11.	

Why would she want you to talk to the priest alone?

#### TIMOTHY

Maybe she thought the old Father needed some action. More than he already got, anyway.

#### JONAH

Really? This is the level now?

#### **TIMOTHY**

Yes. This is the level we're at now. Making jokes about an old priest having sex with underage boys. Get used to it. It happens.

#### **JONAH**

No, it doesn't. I should know. My parents work in a Catholic school and they would have told me this stuff.

#### **TIMOTHY**

You're so naïve. Trust me. It happens.

#### **JONAH**

And I suppose the Guides don't do anything for him, then? The bar's not really set that high if you're the best he could get.

#### TIMOTHY

They probably don't. They're too tired after working for him all the time and being paid in lodging.

#### **JONAH**

Isn't that slavery?

# TIMOTHY

Call it anything you want. The Church is. They're calling it work. No one in this floundering government would ever dream of investigating an institution built on God's love. There are bigger things to worry about. It's the perfect scheme.

	JONAH
So we're suffering. They're sufferin	g—
	TIMOTHY
But the staff are loaded.	
	JONAH
Of course they are.	
	TIMOTHY
Hey, how was Cantos? She cool?	
	JONAH
She was uhm	
	TIMOTHY
That bad, huh?	
	JONAH
I could never look at my family the	
	TIMOTHY
Let me guess. You have an emotion	nally distant father and an overprotective mother?
	JONAH
Pretty much, yeah.	JOIN11
-	

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 4	$\mathbf{v}$		

TIMOTHY
Textbook Freudian baloney. I'm not impressed, Cantos.
JONAH
You're not impressed? In one hour, she made me hate my family for turning me gay.
TIMOTHY
She made you <i>think</i> you hate your family.
JONAH
I know they're not bad people. Not really. 'Hate' is a strong word. But now that someone
else says it — they may really have had a negative effect on me and I never noticed.
TIMOTHY
You're backpedaling, Jonah.
JONAH
Well, maybe not a <i>negative</i> effect.
TIMOTHY
Did they or didn't they beat you?
JONAH
No!
TIMOTHY
Then you're fine. Eat. You'll feel better.
JONAH

I'm not hungry.

#### TIMOTHY

Just remember that whatever it was you felt back there, whatever you said, it's on Cantos, not on you. If there's anyone you can trust in this world, it's yourself.

#### **JONAH**

So, what should I do?

#### TIMOTHY

Stoke the fire. She asks you if your father was never around, do her one better. Tell her he was a drug addict. Tell her he hit you. You'll be here a couple of months. Might as well have a bit of fun while you're at it. Makes the doctor's job a little easier, too.

#### **JONAH**

I don't know how that—

#### TIMOTHY

It's easy to look like you're improving if your problems are big enough. Best of all, you're telling her your deepest, darkest secrets, and they're not even true, so they can't hurt you.

#### **JONAH**

You want me to lie? I can't do that.

#### TIMOTHY

Think of it this way: You're playing a game of limbo. On the other side is your freedom. With a loving family, no issues at home, you're basically burying that bar, and your chances of getting released, six feet underground. But if you pretend mommy and daddy run a *shabu* den, and you say you're getting better every session, Cantos is happy, you're happy, and you might as well cartwheel across to the other side. You'll seem like you're improving more if you set yourself back more.

Drug squads?

You don't know. They might exist.

# TIMOTHY

They wouldn't risk an investigation that might backfire on them. No way.				
JONAH				
But what if—?				
TIMOTHY				
Just trust me, okay? This is solid, grade-A advice right here. This is you taking control of				
your life.				
(beat)				
Eat.				
(He slides his plate of food over.)				
What do you have next?				
JONAH				
Another round of therapy with Cantos.				
TIMOTHY				
Uh-huh. Okay.				
JONAH				
Something called aversion therapy. Or conversion therapy or something.				
TIMOTHY				
(takes plate back)				
Uhm you know what? Never mind. Maybe you shouldn't be eating.				
JONAH				
Hey!				

	TIMOTHY			
Just listen to me, okay?				
	JONAH			
That's all I've been doing so far.				
	TIMOTHY			
Cantos sounds like a psychopath. I	don't know what she's planning, but it can't be good.			
	JONAH			
What is aversion therapy?				
	TIMOTHY			
Can't say for sure. It's different for	everyone.			
	JONAH			
How refreshing.				
	TIMOTHY			
Basically, the goal is for you to reje	ect any previous urges you might have had before.			
How she's gonna do that, I'm not sure. Like I said, it's different for everyone.				
	JONAH			
Well, what do you do in yours?				
	TIMOTHY			
I haven't gone in months. I'm a pure	e soul now.			
	JONAH			
But didn't you say Doc Rivera—?				

#### TIMOTHY

Oh, and don't forget, we have PT later. Can't miss that. It's at the Recreation Room at 4. They're trying something new and they want all the Seekers to come. It could be fun.

#### **JONAH**

I'm starting to think everything here sounds fun for you.

#### **TIMOTHY**

Perry's gonna be there. And we'll all have a good laugh about everything after. In the meantime, just ride it out. You'll be out of here in no time. Well, I gotta go.

#### **JONAH**

'Gotta' go?

#### TIMOTHY

Yeah, and you'd better get back to therapy. And don't touch my food.

(They both exit. Lights off.)

#### SCENE 7

DR. CANTOS's office. 1:00PM.

JONAH enters. Heavy blackout curtains cover the windows. Bracing himself, he sits down in his usual chair.

#### JONAH

Doc?

(DR. CANTOS enters wearing gloves and a deep red lab coat. She is holding a thick photo album.)

#### DR. CANTOS

Good afternoon, Jonah. We'll start the session in a moment. I've instructed Fernando to fetch something from the storage room first. Just take this time to relax.

# **JONAH**

How would the therapy work?

#### DR. CANTOS

I'll show you. Ah.

(A tall, pallid young man enters holding a length of copper coils and a remote control. He hands them over to DR. CANTOS, gives JONAH an apologetic look, and hurriedly exits the room.)

#### **JONAH**

What's that?

#### DR. CANTOS

Before we get to that, I am obliged to inform you the nature of your therapy today.

(As DR. CANTOS talks, she ties JONAH's arms to

the chair's arms with the coils. He is trapped.)

This part of the program is called reparative conversion therapy. It's a form of aversion therapy designed specifically to deal with male homosexual patients. It's divided into three levels.

**JONAH** 

Levels?

#### DR. CANTOS

Don't worry. You don't need to progress to the next level if I succeed in absolving you of your homosexual thoughts.

**JONAH** 

Is it safe?

#### DR. CANTOS

Perfectly. It's been approved in countless hospitals. Results are instantaneous and it has a low relapse rate. At least when I administer it.

JONAH

(staring at the coils)

What are these for?

DR. CANTOS

This will just take a second, Seeker.

Stop calling me that. My name is Jonah.

(DR. CANTOS pulls out some photos from the album. She fiddles with the remote in her other hand.)

#### DR. CANTOS

This remote controls a temperature-regulating sensor in the metal coils. They will heat up when I press one button, and turn off when I press another. It will create a harmless, but slightly uncomfortable sensation.

#### JONAH

How is this therapy?

#### DR. CANTOS

The purpose of reparative therapy is to rid you of all preconceived homosexual emotions you may have. Psychotherapy is just one solution that tries to solve the same problem. I didn't think we went anywhere with our session earlier, so I've decided to try a more — fast-acting course of action. This will help you direct your energy into thinking heterosexual thoughts instead.

#### **JONAH**

Will it hurt?

#### DR. CANTOS

As I said, doctors have been doing it for years. Now, relax.

#### JONAH

I'm relaxed. Let's just get this over with.

#### DR. CANTOS

I admire your determination, Seeker. Now, I'm going to show you a set of photos. What I
want you to do is to relax, breathe in, and breathe out. Let your mind react how it would
naturally.

**JONAH** 

Okay.

# DR. CANTOS

We will spend one minute on each photo. That will allow your brain to absorb and retain the stimulus longer. Do you understand?

**JONAH** 

Yes?

# DR. CANTOS

All right, then. Let's begin.

(Image: Two men holding hands. DR. CANTOS

presses a button. The coils heat up.)

Breathe in. Breathe out.

**JONAH** 

(breathes quickly)

Ahh! Ahh!

DR. CANTOS

30 seconds left, Seeker.

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Oh my God! It hurts / so much! Ahh!

#### DR. CANTOS

/ The Lord's name, Seeker! Keep breathing! And we're done!

(JONAH relaxes as the coils cool down.)

Good job. One photo down. Here we go.

(Image: A topless man stretching. Button.)

**JONAH** 

AHH! It's — ah, it's getting worse!

DR. CANTOS

Just relax and it'll be over in a second.

**JONAH** 

Relax? AHH!!

#### DR. CANTOS

Think of it as motivation to try harder. You wouldn't want to feel that on your entire body, for all of eternity, would you? And... stop!

#### JONAH

(ragged breathing)

That's enough. Please stop it!

(Image: A man and woman kissing on their wedding

day. Button.)

Oh. Huh.

#### DR. CANTOS

I've	removed	the hea	t. This	is the	"conversion"	part of the	therapy	session.	Making	sure
you	associate	straigh	t relati	onship	s with relief					

#### **JONAH**

Why can't it be like this all the way?

(JONAH rubs the raw skin on his arms. It's a vivid

red, but otherwise unblemished.)

#### DR. CANTOS

I'm sorry. That's not how therapy works. Next.

(Image: Two topless men hugging. Button.)

**JONAH** 

Ow! Shit!

#### DR. CANTOS

Language. And next.

(Image: A male underwear advert. Button.)

#### JONAH

It's getting worse! It's getting worse!

(Image: Two naked male models. Button.)

Fuck! / I don't care!

DR. CANTOS

/ Seeker, your tongue!

**JONAH** 

No!

(Image: A man and woman hugging. Button.)

# DR. CANTOS

Control your language, Seeker. We want you to come out of this an improved person.

	JONAH
Please stop talking. Jus	st hit me with the next one.
(	Image: Two male models locked in a torrid kiss.
I	Button.)
(	(JONAH screams.)
(	Image: A close-up of an athlete's chest. Button.)
(	(JONAH screams again.)
(	(Button)
(	(Scream)
(	(Button)
	Lights dim painfully slowly. JONAH's screams of agony continue in the darkness until they erupt in a
	final sustained crescendo.)

#### SCENE 8

Recreation Room. 4:10PM.

A single row of Seekers, including PERRY, thread across the room.

The exercise leader, MARK, is wearing a whistle around his neck and gym shorts. FERNANDO is also there to assist.

JONAH enters, pale and sweaty, wearing his uniform and a rubber band on his arm, and approaches TIMOTHY, who is wearing a long-sleeved shirt.

#### **TIMOTHY**

Jesus H. Christ. Where have you been?

**JONAH** 

(matter-of-factly)

Therapy.

TIMOTHY

Ah.

(JONAH shows him his arm.)

JONAH

She burned me half to death.

**TIMOTHY** 

Strange. Rivera gave me the ice treatment.

And what's with the outfi	40 T 41 1 4	' 1 4 41	· C 1	
And what's with the outti	t'/ I thought you	i said to wear the	initorme o	lliming sessions

#### TIMOTHY

Ringworm. Comes out when I'm horny. I never trust myself, so I just keep the shirts on. What's with the rubber band?

#### **JONAH**

I'm supposed to snap the elastic on my arm if I ever get "sinful thoughts". She said the pain would remind me of the coils and the thoughts would go away.

TIMOTHY

Oh, that's clever.

MARK

You two are late.

JONAH (to TIMOTHY)

Wait, you're late, too?

TIMOTHY (to MARK)

Sorry. Therapy.

MARK

I know for a fact that you skipped therapy today, Seeker.

**TIMOTHY** 

I was helping a friend out?

**MARK** 

Non-sexually?

# TIMOTHY As per dictated by Your Holiness. MARK (deaf to the sarcasm) Good. And where is your uniform? TIMOTHY I have a note from Father Ernesto. (He produces a note.) I think you'll find everything is in order. MARK Ringworm, eh? TIMOTHY Only on Tuesdays, sir. **MARK** Well, fall in line, then. Quickly now. (JONAH and TIMOTHY line up with the others.) **JONAH** Did you really skip therapy?

TIMOTHY

Where have you been?

Never mind.

PERRY (to TIMOTHY)

Good day, Seekers. As I was saying, we're still working out the kinks of this session. But take it as your formal journey into manhood.

(TIMOTHY snickers.)

Today, we will have exercises that would help us discover ourselves. Move around our core energies and experiment with our auras. Do you have any questions?

#### **TIMOTHY**

When lightning strikes the ocean, why don't all the fish die?

#### **MARK**

No one? Okay then. Now, sit down on the floor and stretch your legs. Stretch until your legs are touching the Seekers' on your sides.

(The entire room complies.)

Fernando, assist these two here.

#### **FERNANDO**

Don't make my life harder than it already is, Seeker. Just stretch your legs.

**TIMOTHY** 

A familiar line.

**FERNANDO** 

(whispering)

Please, Timmy. Not now.

**JONAH** 

Perry?

PERRY
Yeah?
JONAH
Nothing. I just need to pretend to talk to you and drown these two out.
PERRY
He's in his element. Lots of people. Impressionable new Seekers. You'll get used to him
eventually.
JONAH
It's been a day and I don't think I'll ever, to be honest.
(TIMOTHY's voice carries over.)
TIMOTHY
and you could barely walk the next day!
MARK
Okay, everybody up.
(Everybody stands.)
I need you to pair up for this next exercise. Jonah, you're with Fernando here.
Theed you to pair up for this next exercise. Johan, you're with Perhando here.
PERRY
Finally. Breaking up the dream team. Don't look so sad Timmy, you're with me.
JONAH
Hello.
FERNANDO
Seeker.

JONAH				
Great.				
MARK				
Now, one of you will act as the Giver in this exercise. The other will be the Receiver.				
JONAH				
Should I?				
FERNANDO				
You could be the Receiver. For this round, I mean. Don't worry. You don't have to do				
anything, trust me.				
TIMOTHY (to PERRY)				
I think we both know who ought to be "giving" anything here.				
PERRY				
Shh. I'm trying to listen.				
MARK				
So, everybody take a seat. Givers, move behind your Receivers. You'd want to make a				
protective space for your Receivers with your legs. Receivers, sit between the legs of				
your Giver and lean your back up against his chest.				
(Everyone assumes the position.)				
Now, for the next exercise, I'm going to ask everyone to keep an open mind.				

PERRY

That can't be good.

#### MARK

We call this the "motorcycle position". A prime position to impart your masculine energies onto each other. Stretch your arms over the ground and let them touch. Giver to Receiver. Receiver to Giver. Brother to brother.

#### **TIMOTHY**

Sir, what are we doing?

#### **MARK**

(seemingly to no one)

You are the Divine. Let your bodies move and morph as one.

#### **PERRY**

And he's gone.

#### MARK

You put walls up to protect yourselves all your lives, but now, let those walls down. Let your brothers heal you. Remember your father and how you longed for his energy. For his stability. For his bond. Imagine being with him again. Let your heart speak. What does it say?

(Whispers suddenly emerge: "I love you", "I miss

you", "Why didn't you love me?")

Unlock your Giver's soul. Share his energy be yours. The past, gone. The future, yours. You are one with your Giver.

FERNANDO (to JONAH)

You are special. You are loved.

**JONAH** 

What did you—?

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(JONAH gasps. He feels something on the small of his back.)

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You are special. You are loved.

**MARK** 

Okay. Let's move on to the last exercise of the day. Maintain your positions, people. Now that we've shared our bodies, we will share our stories. Are there any volunteers?

PERRY (to JONAH)

You should volunteer.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, you should.

JONAH

No, I shouldn't.

**PERRY** 

Come on. Do it for the brownie points.

JONAH

Then you do it then.

**PERRY** 

I don't have anything to share.

MARK (to PERRY and JONAH)

Yes? Would one of you like to volunteer?

Well fine, I guess.
(to JONAH)
But you owe me big time.
MARK
Now, Seeker, do you have anything to share to the group?
PERRY
Like what? Stuff about my dad?
MARK
Yes. That's excellent. I mean, that'll do.
PERRY
He's in the military. So it's just me and my mom mostly.
MARK
Anything else? Anything he does that makes you angry?
PERRY
He does this thing where he shouts as he coughs. Really annoying sometimes. Woke up
the dog once. It got scared and pooped on the carpet and I had to—
MARK
What else?
PERRY
That's it.

PERRY

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Seeker, I can't work with that. What happens when he does go home? Does he get angry?
PERRY
Not really.
MARK
Does he get drunk?
PERRY
No.
MARK
Okay, then. Are there any other volunteers?
PERRY
I'm sorry, sir. But we're pretty normal. My dad goes home. He doesn't get angry or drunk
or anything. He doesn't hit us. He just sits in front of the television all day, minding his
own business.
MARK
TV all day?
PERRY
Sometimes.
MARK
That must really take a toll on his time. A father's place is providing for his family.
Loving his family. Not spending all day in front of the TV.

PERRY
We're just happy that he's home.
MARK
But is he <i>really</i> home?
TIMOTHY (to JONAH)
Watch out. This could go full-on cult like that.
MARK
Tell me. Was there ever a time when you wanted to spend some time with him? Maybe
help you with your homework? Maybe play games? But he was too busy watching TV?
PERRY
It's happened once or twice.
MARK
I'll need someone to assist me in the next exercise. Mr. Alvendia?
TIMOTHY
(standing up)
Delighted to.
MARK
You'll play the part of Perry's father.
TIMOTHY
What?
(MARK takes TIMOTHY aside. They return with
dark, stoic expressions.)

PERRY
What's happening?
TIMOTHY
Don't worry.
(MARK brings out a stool and a large box.)
MARK
We're going to help you heal.
PERRY
Heal?
MARK
Dad, please sit down on this chair. You're going to be watching basketball.
PERRY
What do I have to do?
MARK
Try talking to him.
(The scene materializes: PERRY tries to get his
father's attention. MARK and the others watch.)
PERRY
Dad?
DAD / TIMOTHY
What do you want?

	MARK
Remember that day. What did you	want from him?
	PERRY
Levent could you halo with may l	
I want — could you help with my h	ioniework?
	DAD / TIMOTHY
Can't you see I'm busy?	
	MARK
Beg him.	
	PERRY
Please help me, Dad.	
	DAD / TIMOTHY
I'm watching basketball. Go away.	
	PERRY
Okay.	
	MARK
	1 X 1 1 1 1 D' 1 - 1 1

Is that all it takes? He's your father! You deserve better than that! Didn't you want his help? His attention?

PERRY

Please, Dad. And maybe after you help me with homework, we can play basketball outside.

TIMOTHY

I...

MA	ARK
Do it, Seeker.	
DA	AD / TIMOTHY
(beat)	
Can't you see I'm watching the playoff	s? Go away!
MA	ARK
What little boy doesn't want his father's	s love and affection? It's sad. All you wanted was
to bond with him. And what do you get	in return? He yells at you. You're called
worthless. He doesn't need you anymor	re, he says.
DA	AD / TIMOTHY
You're worthless! I don't need you. I do	on't love you! Go bother someone else!
(PERRY is instan	tly transported. This is no longer
just a simple exer	cise for him.)
PE	RRY
Dad, please!	
DA	AD / TIMOTHY
What part of "I'm watching TV" do you	not understand? Are you deaf, boy?
PE	RRY
N-no. Dad, it's just	
TIN	МОТНҮ
Sir, I can't	
MA	ARK
Seeker, I'm warning you.	

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### DAD / TIMOTHY

I — I don't know why I ever go home. What's your problem? Can't you see I don't have time for you? Go away, boy! I'm busy.

#### **PERRY**

Dad, that's not fair!

#### DAD / TIMOTHY

You know what's not fair? Having to work day and night everyday and having just one month to relax at home, while an ungrateful, brat pesters me about stupid things like playing basketball with him! Don't you have any friends you can play with? Go play with them!

#### **MARK**

Thank you, Seeker. That will do for now. Please get the other materials.

### **TIMOTHY**

Perry? Perry, I'm sor—

#### MARK

Thank you, Seeker. Now, let's move on.

(The Seekers clap. PERRY is shaking.)

### **PERRY**

I — I'm — am I healed now?

# **MARK**

Not yet, Seeker. Now that you have recognized the problem, you need to take control.

# **PERRY**

What?

(TIMOTHY pulls a large knife and a sack of cement from the box. He turns to rejoin JONAH.)

#### MARK

Dad, come back. Now, Seeker — we return to your story. A father who has no time for his son. What can you do to change the situation?

(TIMOTHY reluctantly returns to his spot, holding the sack on his lap.)

#### **PERRY**

I guess I could ask him again.

#### MARK

Do you think he'll respond differently? Do you think after all of that, he still cares about you? After what he said, do you think you still matter to him?

### **PERRY**

I d-don't — please, I — can't someone else tell a story?

#### **MARK**

No. You have to take control now.

(He hands PERRY the knife.)

You need a new father.

**PERRY** 

What?

MARK

Go ahead. Move closer to him.

(He moves toward TIMOTHY.)

PERRY
Dad?
DAD / TIMOTHY
What do you want now, boy?
PERRY
Maybe — you're done watching TV and I thought I — I wondered if you would play
games with me now.
DAD / TIMOTHY
I told you to go away. I don't have time for you anymore.
(PERRY starts crying.)
PERRY
I can't
TIMOTHY
(whispering)
I'm sorry, Perry. Just do it. I promise it'll be over soon.
JONAH
Perry, are you okay?
FERNANDO
Just let him heal on his own, Seeker.
(JONAH feels it again. His arms start to burn.)
JONAH
Ahh

### MARK

This old father is standing in the way and you need a new one. Someone who loves you and has time for you. This one just watches TV all day. He needs to go.

#### **PERRY**

J-just one.

(PERRY limply plunges the knife into the sack. A small amount of red liquid emerges from the entry wound.)

No!

### **TIMOTHY**

It's fake, Perry! It's just corn syrup! I promise. You're not hurting anyone.

### MARK

More! He deserves it! Stab him again!

**PERRY** 

Please — please don't make me...

MARK

Now!

(He plunges the knife again. Once!)

Again! More!

(Twice!)

Harder!

(Three times! The other Seekers cheer him on.)

JONAH

What's happening?

<b>N</b> /	٨	D	T/
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Yell louder! Let your pain out! Again! Again	!
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(With each stab, PERRY yells louder and louder and his screams become primal.)

Yes! More! More!

(PERRY slashes the air back and forth, cutting the sack to ribbons. His hand is soaked in red liquid.)

FINISH HIM!

**PERRY** 

AHHH!

(He drops the knife and proceeds to punch the sack instead. The effigy is torn apart. PERRY is left squatting over a large red puddle on the floor.)

**MARK** 

Okay, stop, stop! Seeker, good job!

**TIMOTHY** 

Perry? Are you okay? I'm sor—

**MARK** 

And your reward: a new father.

**PERRY** 

(breathless)

Dad?

TA /	ГΛ	D	T/
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I think he needs a hug, don't you, Dad?
(PERRY and TIMOTHY hug tightly. The room
applauds loudly.)
JONAH
This is insane.
(JONAH squirms, feels it a third time, and lets out a
loud gasp. He feels his arms burning again.)
TIMOTHY
Perry
MARK
You're excused for the rest of the session, Seeker. Let's proceed.
(Lights shift. Hours have passed.
JONAH is standing over the bathroom sink, running
cold water down his arms. TIMOTHY enters.)
TIMOTHY
What are you doing?
JONAH
My arms are burning up. I can't — I don't know why.
TIMOTHY
Amazing.
JONAH
What?

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Say what you want about Cantos's methods, but the proof is in the burning. What
triggered it?
TONAL TA
JONAH
Violence and yelling really turns Fernando on.
TIMOTHY
Yeah, I found that out the hard way. No pun intended.
JONAH
(an annin a)
(snapping)
What is wrong with you? I'm in pain here. And all you could do is joke around?
TIMOTHY
I was just saying there's always a silver lining to everything. At least you know the
therapy works.
JONAH
And what was the matter with you back there?
TIMOTHY
TIMOTHY
What?
JONAH
How could you do that to Perry?
TIMOTHY
Perry's gonna be fine. He'll bounce back.
2 211 2 20 11110 1110 11 00 01100 011011

#### **JONAH**

I can't even imagine being an emotional mess in front of everyone like that.

### TIMOTHY

He'll come around sooner or later. And then we're all gonna laugh about it.

#### JONAH

I'm sure you would.

### TIMOTHY

What do you want me to do? Fine. I'll apologize later if you want, but I don't understand why you're the one—

#### **JONAH**

You don't have to ask my permission to apologize. I can't believe — are you serious? That was your fault, you know?

# TIMOTHY

I'm sorry but Mark was — he told me if I didn't, he'd — I couldn't refuse. I didn't know what would happen or that Perry would—

### **JONAH**

Of course. You couldn't refuse 'coz you have to be the likable Seeker. The fun Seeker. The Seeker who wants to please everybody.

### **TIMOTHY**

Now, wait — I didn't mean / it like that.

### **JONAH**

/ As long as it's the right people. The people who can get you out of here. Everyone else gets thrown to the sharks.

### TIMOTHY

What do you want? I'm sorry, okay? I don't even know what I'm apologizing to you for. It's really Perry I should be / apologizing to.

#### **JONAH**

/ Yeah, you should. Is that how you treat your friends? What if I was the one who — is that why you wanted me to volunteer?

#### TIMOTHY

No, no. Oh, God. This wasn't how this was supposed to go.

### **JONAH**

"Supposed" to go? What are you — did you plan this? / What is wrong with you?

# **TIMOTHY**

/ No, not "plan", really. Not that.

### **JONAH**

I'm just something to keep you entertained? I get it now. Pretend to be Greenie's friend, hear him tell stories about how he gets tortured, and laugh about it with your rich friends abroad once you get out. Your stupid, real friends. You deserve each other.

### TIMOTHY

You're upset and you don't mean all this. I get it. I'm sorry.

#### **JONAH**

'Sorry'? Do me a favor, Timmy, and stop using big words you don't understand. Since you don't seem to care about Perry, I guess you shouldn't care about me, too, right? I thought you were gonna be different. I thought you were gonna try and help me. But it turns out you're just like everyone else.

TIMOTHY	7
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If you could just let me explain. There's a reason—

### **JONAH**

I'm not gonna get fooled by someone pretending to be my friend. Not again. I'm sure Mr. Perfect thinks he can do anything he wants and everyone will just lie down so he can—and he'll just step on anyone he wants. Well, not me. I just—I think it's best if you leave me alone.

**TIMOTHY** 

Leave you alone? I don't...

JONAH

I'm used to it. I'm sure I can handle it.

TIMOTHY

But I...

JONAH

Go. Please.

(An awkward silence.)

# TIMOTHY

You're angry. I get it. I want to explain everything to you. But not like this. Let's talk about this, about everything, tomorrow. I'll tell you — everything. I hope you'll come. I'll be on the swing set in the back garden. Midnight.

JONAH

Midnight?

### TIMOTHY

Don't worry. We won't be caught. I promise. I've taken the necessary precautions for this.

### JONAH

Of course, you've really thought of everything from the start. And tell me — why should I take that risk after curfew?

#### TIMOTHY

I don't know. Just know that whatever happens, I'll be waiting for you tomorrow.

(TIMOTHY exits. After an eternity, JONAH exits.

Lights shift to a spotlight. FATHER ERNESTO

enters, wearing a thin, white chasu-alb.)

#### **FATHER ERNESTO**

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm 34:17-19.

(He exits.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT)

# **ACT II**

# SCENE 1

SETTING: DR. CANTOS's office. 1:00PM.

AT RISE: Silence. Blackness stretching infinitely. Suddenly, the darkness is punctuated by groaning and the unmistakable sound of fresh vomit hitting a metal bucket.

Lights find JONAH in a hospital gown, sitting in a chair holding a bucket in his lap. He is attached to an IV drip.

An intimidating DR. CANTOS in her red lab gown and surgical mask is flipping through images of naked men with an overhead projector.

(A man lying supine on a bed)

(Two shirtless men on a bench)

# **JONAH**

Stop.

(He retches violently into the bucket.)

DR. CANTOS

Should I move on to the next one?

**JONAH** 

I just — I need a moment to rest. Just five minutes.

DR. CANTOS
You can have two.
(She shuts off the IV.)
JONAH
What's that?
DR. CANTOS
Apomorphine. Perfectly safe.
JONAH
(sotto voce)
I'll bet.
DR. CANTOS
Doctors in Harvard and Cornell use it all the time for alcoholics. We're training your
body to reject homosexual thoughts. This helps reduce your sexual drive towards men.
You'll learn to associate the naked male form with certain — discomforts — much faster
than just the coils.
JONAH
Strange. I don't feel any better.
DR. CANTOS
It takes a bit of time to work, I'm afraid.

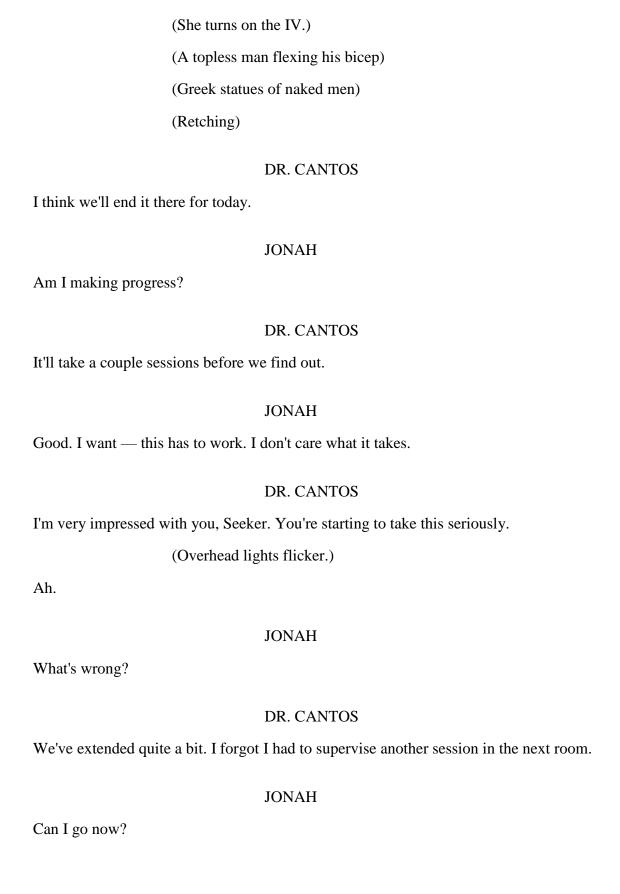
JONAH

When does the conversion part of the therapy start? I'm kind of looking forward to that.

DR. CANTOS

Be patient. Your conversion will come after. Let's continue.

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# DR. CANTOS

(handing him pills)

Here. Take these.

JONAH

What is it?

# DR. CANTOS

Domperidone. It'll counteract the effects of apomorphine. Take two orally. It may take a few hours for the drug to work, though. And get some rest.

**JONAH** 

Thank you, Doc.

(JONAH exits.)

# SCENE 2

The next room.

Lights shift next door, where DR. ESGUERRA monitors an unseen patient lying in bed, hooked up to an EEG monitor, an IV drip, and a bilateral electroshock device.

DR. CANTOS enters to supervise the procedure.

SPLIT SCENE: FATHER ERNESTO stands on
the other side, adorned in a white chasu-alb
under a violet stole, illuminated by a single
spotlight.

### DR. CANTOS

What's happening?

### DR. ESGUERRA

The muscle relaxant isn't working. He's still seizing up. Help me adjust his ankle cuff.

### DR. CANTOS

I want to talk to him.

(DR. ESGUERRA removes the mouth guard.)

Can you hear me?

(no response)

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

En ego, o bone et dulcissime Iesu, ante conspectum tuum genibus me provolvo...

### DR. CANTOS

How are his vitals?

# DR. ESGUERRA

Stable *naman*. Should we adjust the voltage?

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

...ac maximo animi ardore te oro atque obtestor, ut meum in cor vividos fidei, spei et caritatis sensus...

### DR. CANTOS

He's still conscious. Are you sure you adjusted the dosage for methohexital? He's lost a lot of weight, you know.

# DR. ESGUERRA

Putang ina. Ano ako, bobo? It's not the first time I've done this!

# **FATHER ERNESTO**

...atque veram peccatorum meorum paenitentiam, eaque emendandi firmissimam voluntatem velis imprimere...

### DR. CANTOS

Fine. Let's adjust further. What was the previous run?

### DR. ESGUERRA

0.9 amps, 130 volts for 0.5 seconds.

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

...dum magno animi affectu et dolore tua quinque vulnera mecum ipse considero ac mente contemplor...

DR.	CANTOS	

Ramp it to 250 for 3 seconds.

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

...illud prae oculis habens, quod iam in ore ponebat tuo David propheta de te, o bone Iesu...

### DR. ESGUERRA

Ready in three, two, one.

(The patient's body convulses as electricity passes through him. Overhead lights flicker.)

# DR. CANTOS

He's convulsing. I'll run more succinylcholine down the line.

### DR. ESGUERRA

No! We won't know if the treatment's working.

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

...Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos...

# DR. CANTOS

The reading says the seizure lasted 60 seconds.

### DR. ESGUERRA

Clonic? That's normal.

## **FATHER ERNESTO**

...dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea...

### DR. CANTOS

	Un	the	voltage	to 450.	Three	seconds
--	----	-----	---------	---------	-------	---------

### DR. ESGUERRA

Four-fifty? I wouldn't do that. His mother didn't give us his history. Just said we should do what we need to do.

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

...Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi...

# DR. CANTOS

What a vote of confidence. Probably doesn't want to deal with him herself.

# DR. ESGUERRA

He's not too bad. What about the one with the bruises?

# DR. CANTOS

He got those from that Latin guy.

### **FATHER ERNESTO**

...miserere nobis...

### DR. ESGUERRA

I think he was Italian.

### DR. CANTOS

Where do you think Latin people come from? *Puñeta*. Prime the drip chamber, *na nga*.

# DR. ESGUERRA

450. In three, two, one.

# FATHER ERNESTO

Amen.

(Lights flicker. The faint chirping of a chick can be heard in the background.)

(BLACKOUT)

# SCENE 3

Recreation Room. 4:00PM.

Lights find PERRY and TIMOTHY already stretching. MARK appears wearing his usual gym shorts and whistle around his neck. A surgical mask covers his nose and mouth. **PERRY** What's with the mask? He must be sick. TIMOTHY Spreading some shit around, are you, Mark? **PERRY** I don't smell anything. TIMOTHY It's an expression. PERRY Meaning what? **TIMOTHY** I wonder where Jonah is. **PERRY** He'll be here. You guys okay? I kinda heard some yelling coming from the bathroom yesterday.

	TIMOTHY
Oh no. Did anyone else?	
	PERRY
Not really.	
	TIMOTHY
Good It was nothing	TIMOTHT
Good. It was nothing.	
	PERRY
You sure? That might explain why	he's not here.
	TIMOTHY
He's in therapy. Maybe he's still in	therapy.
	PERRY
I still don't understand that mask.	
	ТІМОТНҮ
Maybe Cantos did something to him	n.
	PERRY
I'm worried about Jonah, too, you k	
	C
	TIMOTHY
What do you mean?	
	PERRY
You're obsessed.	
100100000000000000000000000000000000000	
	TIMOTHY

### **PERRY**

I'd tell you to bring it up in your sessions, but I know for a fact you've been skipping therapy for two days now. We both know you've had problems in this area. I'm just concerned for you. And for him.

### **TIMOTHY**

It's nothing like that. I swear.

### **PERRY**

(annoyed)

Well, then what is going on with you?

### **TIMOTHY**

Oh no. Please. I can't have you angry with me, too.

### **PERRY**

So you were fighting. What about?

### TIMOTHY

Look, I'm sorry I haven't been paying much attention to you and Andrew. Especially given what... happened yesterday.

(An uncomfortable silence.)

I'm so sorry about — I didn't know.

**PERRY** 

It wasn't your fault.

TIMOTHY

Do you want to talk about it?

PERRY
I'm okay now.
TIMOTHY
Good. I'm glad. You know how Mark can get sometimes. And I'm so proud you're brave
enough to come back to PT again.
PERRY
Really? You are?
TIMOTHY
Of course I am.
(PERRY's stunned by the new Timmy.)
PERRY
Wow. I — uh thanks, Timmy. I appreciate that.
TIMOTHY
I promise I'll make it up to you guys soon.
PERRY
I guess I should thank Jonah then. He's had more of an effect on you that you realize.
(At that point, DR. CANTOS enters in her lab gown.)
MARK
What's this?

DR. CANTOS

Mark, come with us.

I'm in the middle of an exercise!
DR. CANTOS
(in hushed tones)
There's been an accident.
MARK
An accident?
DR. CANTOS
Shh! They'll be fine. Come on.
(to Seekers)
Session is canceled. Please return to your rooms at once.
(They hurry off.)
TIMOTHY
What was that all about? Good timing, though.
PERRY
I sense something. Something bad. The air. It's changing.
TIMOTHY
Really? I feel fine.
(BLACKOUT)

MARK

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The back garden outside the ministry. Midnight.
TIMOTHY waits by the swing-set. A tall, wrought
iron gate faces him. JONAH enters.

TIMOTHY waits by the swing-set. A tall, wroug
iron gate faces him. JONAH enters.
TIMOTHY
vh.
JONAH
eah
TIMOTHY
(beat)
Vell, uhm, thanks for coming.
JONAH
ou didn't really give me much of a choice, did you? My new roommate woke me up a
ove me very note. Nevy what's all this shout?

nd gave me your note. Now, what's all this about?

(TIMOTHY smiles wistfully but remains silent.)

Why am I here? Hello? Ugh, I should have never gotten up. This is—

**TIMOTHY** 

What do you see when you go to sleep, Jonah?

**JONAH** 

What?

# TIMOTHY

Sometimes — at night — I like to stare out into the garden from my window into the
fields just outside this stupid gate. You know they've never even opened this gate?
JONAH
It looks like it's rusted shut.
TIMOTHY
Nope. It's not even locked.
JONAH
Really?
TID AOTH NA
TIMOTHY
We can go out anytime, you know. But we're not allowed outside. Just one good kick
JONAH
Father Ernesto said NPA rebels were hiding in those mountains. My dad told me about
this massacre in Balamban a few months ago. That's two hours away. And that we could
be salvaged like what they do to those kids in Manila
(beat)
Are you sure we won't get in trouble if we're down here?
TIMOTHY
We'll be fine.
JONAH

Why did you want to meet here?

#### TIMOTHY

I wanted you to see this place like I do. I've been here six months. Six months of therapy and prayers. And everything in between.

**JONAH** 

You just stare out your window every night?

TIMOTHY

Can't sleep. It's been that way ever since I got here.

**JONAH** 

Bad dreams?

**TIMOTHY** 

Just one. The same one every night.

JONAH

What is it?

#### TIMOTHY

I'm standing in this orchard full of trees. The trees just go on and on but I keep walking forward. Eyes front. Suddenly, it gets really dark. And there's this — dead tree in front of me. No leaves or anything. Not a single bird perching on its branches. Just death. Then, this black liquid starts oozing out from the trunk. And that's when I wake up.

**JONAH** 

Weird.

### TIMOTHY

It feels like something's pulling me toward it. Wherever I go, wherever I turn — that's where I always end up.

JONAH
What do you think it means?
TIMOTHY
I don't know. I'm not scared or anything. I just wake up — always when I see the tree.
JONAH
Is that all?
TIMOTHY
(pensively starts swinging)
I'm leaving in the morning, you know.
JONAH
Oh. Really? That's — hey, that's great. Good job. Good for you.
TIMOTHY
Yeah, I guess. It's just
JONAH
Is something wrong? Aren't you happy you're leaving?
TIMOTHY
I don't — no, not really, actually. It's not that I want to stay here. I don't. It's just that I
don't want to leave.

**JONAH** 

You can't not want both things.

#### **TIMOTHY**

But I do. I — see, what's really waiting for me out there? What does my future look like? I can go to school, sure, get a job somewhere, but my parents will still be around, and I'll still be — like this. What does my world look like beyond that gate? Is it really any different to my world here? I'm not in control of my life anymore. I can't sit around and wait for the rest of the universe to catch up to whatever I want to do. I'm so tired of trying to put on a smile on my face, or trying to make someone else laugh when I don't even know what I — I can't trade my days for a bit of freedom that doesn't really exist. I'll be free as a bird perching on dead trees for the rest of its life.

#### **JONAH**

You think you won't be free when you leave?

### TIMOTHY

My time here and my time outside has shown me that the world's just one big conversion ministry. I've always tried to be different, to be special, to change who I am. But no one is willing to change for me.

#### **JONAH**

If this is about what I said earlier, I'm sorry, all right? I mean, of course you didn't mean it and it was stupid of me to say that. And if I had volunteered in the first place...

**TIMOTHY** 

No. It's not that.

**JONAH** 

Then what is it?

# TIMOTHY

Something's changed. My perspective is — I don't know.

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JONAH
Is that bad?
TIMOTHY
I'm not quite sure yet. Does it matter? Does what I think even matter?
JONAH
I don't know if this is some big joke you're trying to pull but—
Table into Will this to some engineer you're arying to pain out
TIMOTHY
The universe is this big ocean. Seagulls flying above and coral reefs below. You know
where we are in all this?
JONAH
Okay. I'll bite. Where?
TIMOTHY
In a tiny rowboat in the middle of a gigantic whirlpool, surrounded by sharks or
something. Trying to get out. And just when we row a little bit above the water, we get
shoved back down again. We can try rowing up. Waste all our time and energy. Or we
can stop moving. Stop trying. And just sink down to the bottom — where we belong.
JONAH
Well you're wrong.
TIMOTHY

JONAH

This is not you. What happened to taking control of your life?

What?

What's the point? We take control, we get shot down. We try to follow the herd, we lose our self-respect.

#### **JONAH**

My entire life is me lying on the floor waiting for someone to jump on me. It's not something I enjoy. But it's my life and I accept that. It's happened with my parents. It's happening with my therapist. Eventually, I'll end up like Perry. An emotional wreck hiding inside a stone wall that could crumble at any moment. But I don't think I'm that person anymore. And I think — well, I know it's because of you.

# **TIMOTHY**

Me? But I—

#### **JONAH**

You've been a big help to me. I've never been really close to my brother. He's seven years older than me. He's off in Manila. But you've been the best older brother I've never had.

# **TIMOTHY**

But we barely know each other.

# JONAH

Do we? You know everything there is to know about me.

# **TIMOTHY**

Have I really helped you?

Who else do I have? My roommates? I don't even know their names. You tried to help me when I was feeling hopeless.

#### TIMOTHY

And look at what's happened to you since. Face it. I'm the anti-Midas. Everything I touch turns to shit.

#### **JONAH**

Real friends try to help each other. Even if they don't know what to say to do it.

# **TIMOTHY**

Therapy's been a bitch to you and that's all on me. If it weren't for me, you could've—

# **JONAH**

I'm scared, too. Everyone is. Life's short and we all want to go rushing into whatever comes up because we don't know how long we've got. But we can't do that. Sometimes, we have quiet moments. Small moments that don't last. And though it may not seem that way from where you stand, they matter, too. I've spent most of my life saying yes to everything because it means I don't have to make a big decision that could change my life and risk things getting worse. But there are times when I wish I could just do what you do. Go against everything and everyone but myself. And take it one day at a time.

#### TIMOTHY

It's just so hard to pretend to be happy again. I have so many questions. What if I'd never gone abroad? What if I'd been closer with my parents? What if I'd been a better friend to Perry and Andrew and then—

(He cuts himself off.)

JONAH
What's wrong?
TIMOTHY
You haven't heard?
JONAH
Heard what? I've been puking in my room all day. Pretty sure all Cantos gave me were
Tic Tacs.
TIMOTHY
Andrew.
JONAH
What about him?
TIMOTHY
He was just supposed to have an ECT session
JONAH
What's that?
TIMOTHY
Electroconvulsive therapy. It's the last resort here. When you don't respond to drugs,
normal therapy, or prayers. They basically shock you 'til you get seizures.
JONAH
(beat)
What the hell is wrong with this place?

No, it works, actually. But the thing is they didn't know he had a heart condition. So they kept increasing the voltage...

# **JONAH**

Jesus Christ.

#### TIMOTHY

I'm s-sorry you had to find that out from me.

# **JONAH**

But how did you find that out? It doesn't sound like something they'd want spread around.

# TIMOTHY

Cantos interrupted PT to get Mark. They needed his car to get to the hospital. A real one, anyway. Word just spread.

# **JONAH**

Cantos? What does she have to do with it?

# TIMOTHY

I heard she helped supervise the procedure.

### JONAH

I bet that's why she let me go early. I could've stopped her — said I wanted more therapy or something.

# **TIMOTHY**

It's not your fault. Don't beat yourself up about it.

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I could've done something. Anything.

# TIMOTHY

There's nothing you could have done. You didn't know.

# JONAH

How's Perry?

# TIMOTHY

Devastated. He's locked himself in his room. Won't come out.

# **JONAH**

I'll check on him tomorrow. Andrew was — they weren't supposed to go there.

# **TIMOTHY**

See what I mean? It's hopeless. We're all gonna end up like him one way or another. If it's not therapy, it's getting beat up by your parents. Or getting salvaged in the streets. Or dying from AIDS. Limited. Our futures are limited.

# **JONAH**

Can't we do something?

### TIMOTHY

We try to bend to what they want. When we can't, they say we're unwilling to change. No one likes changing who they are.

# **JONAH**

But why? Why would they want us to change?

Because we're the unwanted babies they leave in the forest.

#### **JONAH**

What?

#### TIMOTHY

There's an old folk tale about fairies in the forest swapping human children for demons that look like diseased babies. They would cry all day. You had to toss the demon baby into the fire or leave it in the forest to die. Force the fairies to make the switch back. And if you prayed hard enough, your baby would come back. Pure, unblemished, and most of all, compliant. Just the way they like it. It's kind of ironic if you think about it. They focus so much of their energies on telling us we should change. "We're doing this for your own good". Like they're doing us a favor. But the second they see the world changing around them for the better, they isolate themselves. They build institutions to shut the world out. No one likes changing who they are — least of all them. And nothing we can do will get them to see differently.

#### **JONAH**

That's where you're wrong.

(TIMOTHY snorts in derision.)

A regime change is coming, Timmy. In more ways than one. I don't know what'll happen in a few months. But people are talking. You can't hear it — you've been abroad the past few months.

#### TIMOTHY

I'm not out of touch.

I know you're not. You're — look, I don't know what's changed with you, but you were right before. We just need to wait. Ride the waves out. The tides are turning here. And the sooner people realize that, the faster they can row away.

# TIMOTHY

I want more life. I want to live. I want — I want to love.

# JONAH

We have our whole lives ahead of us. We may be going nowhere in your version of the universe. But eventually — the ocean calms down, you'll see. You just need to wait.

#### TIMOTHY

I'm so tired of waiting. Nothing's changed in six months even though I like to pretend otherwise.

# **JONAH**

Don't give this place the satisfaction of seeing you in pain.

#### TIMOTHY

I feel like Father Ernesto's sermons have started to drill a hole in my brain.

# JONAH

I get what you mean.

# **TIMOTHY**

I wonder how he feels about all of this. Like, really feels.

# JONAH

What do you mean?

Don't tell me you haven't noticed.

# **JONAH**

Are you telling me Father Ernesto — he's gay?

# TIMOTHY

Oh please. In a few years, someone'll catch him playing tummy-swords with little Kevin the altar boy in the parish broom closet. He comes in here on his high horse, spreading the word of God. Telling us that God is almighty. God is love. While he's getting his rocks off to a room full of teenage boys who look up to him as a father figure, something he knows they desperately need, while pretending he's there to save their souls.

#### JONAH

And the others are probably worse.

### TIMOTHY

Sure. Mark with that faux-witch doctor nonsense? Come on.

#### **JONAH**

Imagine having to hear that for six months.

# TIMOTHY

You are men. You are one with each other. Let your auras merge.

# **JONAH**

Let your bodies take you soaring toward the skies.

You are phoenixes. Rising from the ashes. Bursting into flames. You are entwined with the clouds. Under the rain showers and hailstorms, you dance an erotic dance of fire and water. And ice. And wind. And yes, I <u>have</u> lost my train of thought. Now, to your auras...

**JONAH** 

Killed it.

**TIMOTHY** 

Thanks.

**JONAH** 

Hey, sense of humor's coming back, I see. Look, I know things were bad. But now, they're kinda — okay, right?

(A pronounced silence.)

What's wrong? Is this still about Andrew?

**TIMOTHY** 

A little. But, it's not just that. I — I can't—

**JONAH** 

Let me remind you that you're leaving in the morning and — in your own words — "you're never gonna see me again" anyways.

#### TIMOTHY

I guess it doesn't matter in the end. Father Ernesto knows. Mark knows. And we've had a good run, haven't we?

**JONAH** 

What are you trying to tell me?

TIMOTHY
Julio.
JONAH
Your pen pal from Brazil. The one you had a crush on. Your parents found out when they
read your letter. Yes, I know all this.
TIMOTHY
Yes. But you didn't know that he was 35.
JONAH
Well, no. But I thought you were classmates.
TIMOTHY
I never said we were classmates. I said we were friends. He was my teacher.
JONAH
Oh but you're 17. Is that even allowed?
TIMOTHY
What he did certainly wasn't. I mean, not that I let him or led him on or anything. He
just decided to go for what he wanted to do — even if I didn't want the same thing.
JONAH
(realizing)

# rry.

TIMOTHY

I can't believe I told you that. I'm sorry.

Oh my God.

It wasn't your fault.

# TIMOTHY

You don't understand. You're too young.

#### JONAH

These things — they happen sometimes. It's not your fault. It's never your fault, okay? He's an asshole. You were — you're 17 and... when did it happen?

# **TIMOTHY**

It was the night before I came home to Cebu. He asked me to stay over at his place and...

# **JONAH**

Did you tell your parents?

# TIMOTHY

And then what? You know how they reacted when I said I was gay. I don't know what they'd say. You know what's worse? I loved him even after all that. I kept on thinking that was what love was. Or rather that was how love is gonna be for me from now on.

# JONAH

That wasn't love. What he did was wrong.

# **TIMOTHY**

I was desperate to keep him in my life. I couldn't lose him. So I kept writing to him.

Regardless of — those kinds of thoughts don't leave you. Not even after six months of therapy. The feeling that no one would ever really love you. The feeling that what he did — that I deserved it.

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I shouldn't have said all those things I said. I was angry. I didn't know. I was stupid.

# TIMOTHY

It's fine. Really. I just needed to talk to somebody. I don't know why I turned to you.

Maybe you were there at the right time. Maybe I saw myself in you.

#### JONAH

We all have problems. Some people learn to keep themselves in their own heads so they won't get hurt.

# **TIMOTHY**

And others push people away before they get to know them.

# **JONAH**

But I guess — hey, silver lining. You're feeling much better now, right?

(TIMOTHY shrugs.)

Don't worry. You'll feel better tomorrow. I promise.

#### **TIMOTHY**

I guess we should go to bed. I'm sorry I took up your time.

# **JONAH**

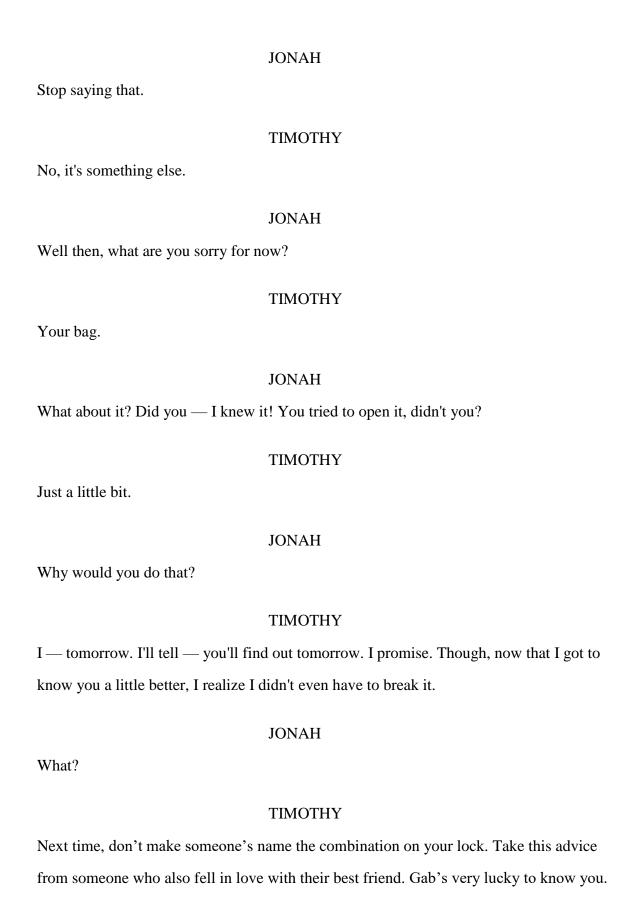
Stop that. We helped each other. That's what friends are supposed to do, right?

# TIMOTHY

Sure.

(They arise.)

Oh, by the way, I'm sorry.



J	ONA	Н
J	O1 11.	

Why would you — what did you do?

# TIMOTHY

I may have put a little something for you to remember me by. You'll see it tomorrow.

# **JONAH**

Why can't you just tell me now?

# **TIMOTHY**

Tomorrow. Just promise me you'll wait until tomorrow.

# **JONAH**

I promise — but I'm still kinda angry at you.

(TIMOTHY leans over and kisses JONAH's

forehead.)

# **TIMOTHY**

See you later, Jonah. And for God's sake, take that stupid rubber band off.

# **JONAH**

Are we just not gonna discuss — what was that?

# **TIMOTHY**

Go to bed... Greenie.

(TIMOTHY exits.)

(JONAH pauses for a second, rubs the spot where

TIMOTHY kissed him, and slowly smiles. He exits.)

(BLACKOUT)

# SCENE 5

Room 317. 7:00AM the next day.

Chaotic footsteps and panicked voices barrage
BENJAMIN and JONAH in their bedroom. A loud
scream is heard offstage. Lights shift on the
arguing pair.

JONAH

I'm telling you. It's nothing.

**BENJAMIN** 

I'm going anyway.

JONAH

Fine. Good luck, Greenie.

(BENJAMIN exits. The chaos outside continues.)

SEEKER #1 (off)

What's going on?

SEEKER #2 (off)

The Guides found him like this. Call Father Ernesto.

(JONAH sits up at the words. He opens his bag to reveal a letter resting neatly on top.)

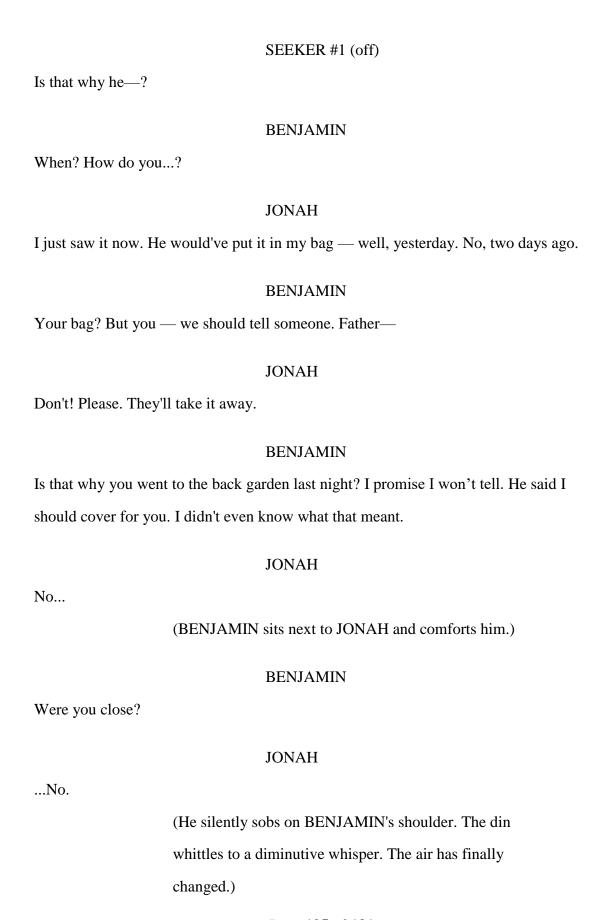
**JONAH** 

Timmy... what did you do?

(JONAH reads the letter quietly. The noises outside vanish. His face falls. BENJAMIN enters.)

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	BENJAMIN
Kuya?	
	JONAH
Y-Yeah?	
	BENJAMIN
You have to see this.	
	JONAH
I don't	
	BENJAMIN
It's not just nothing	
	JONAH
I know, but	
	BENJAMIN
Kuya?	
	SEEKER #3 (off)
Doc Rivera said not to touch him. I	Look at his arms.
	SEEKER #2 (off)
Since when has he been sick?	` ,
(BENJAMIN	moves closer.)
	JONAH
He wrote	



#### **BENJAMIN**

What did he say?

(JONAH starts reading the letter.)

# **JONAH**

Dear Jonah, I'm sorry. I...

(JONAH stops. BENJAMIN takes the letter and continues reading.)

#### **BENJAMIN**

Dear Jonah, I'm sorry. I don't know what to say. If you're reading this the morning I'm supposed to leave, I'm sorry. I'm sorry it had to end like this.

It turns out Julio gave me something more than a broken heart.

I thought it was just a big bruise on my arm, but more of them started appearing. I showed them to Doc Rivera. She assumed the worst and she was right.

#### **JONAH**

I knew that ringworm story was bullshit.

# **BENJAMIN**

I'm too scared to get out. Father Ernesto gave me an ultimatum. He contacted this hospital in Manila — in Sta. Cruz. He said they're gonna take a look at me. That I'll be fine. And that he'll call my parents.

Doc Rivera said some drug in the US has been developed and is up for approval by the FDA next year. AZ-something. I don't know whether it's false hope or not — it doesn't matter. It's not gonna work. It's not gonna work next year and it's not gonna work five years from now. I'm through waiting. I'm so tired.

I can't wait to change the world, Jonah. So I need you to do it for me. I know it sounds scary. But trust me, it'll be worth it.

Whatever you decide to do with your life, do it with your head held high. With pride. With full control of it. Riding it out probably isn't enough for something this big.

I'm sorry I couldn't be a better friend to you in the short time we spent together. I hope, someday, you could forgive me for what I'll be doing. And everything I did.

Take care of Perry and Andrew for me. They need you more than they think.

Sincerely, Timmy.

JONAH

Thank you.

**BENJAMIN** 

Who's Andrew?

**JONAH** 

He probably wrote this before Andrew — that's why he was late to therapy. And his talk with Father Ernesto — but he looked so calm at lunchtime...

**BENJAMIN** 

What does this mean?

**JONAH** 

(beat)

It means I need to be ready to pack in 20 minutes.

	BENJAMIN
What?	
	JONAH
I figure it'll take that long to assemb	ble everyone for an unscheduled early-morning prayer.
That way, everyone's distracted and	I no one will be watching the gates.
	BENJAMIN
Are you insane?	
	JONAH
I can't stay here any longer. They're	e gonna parade around his body. Say things — God is
punishing him for his sins, and now	that he's done this — how he'll never go to — and
how he — I just couldn't take it.	
	BENJAMIN
You're not leaving.	
	JONAH
You're right. We are.	
	BENJAMIN
What? But I just got here!	
	JONAH
I don't know why you're here. But I	do know you don't belong here. And you're so young.

**BENJAMIN** 

I'm thirteen.

Exactly.

(JONAH removes his uniform and scapular and

changes into a dark red shirt.)

**BENJAMIN** 

But what about — how will I get home?

**JONAH** 

I think I've got enough pocket money. We can take a bus to Mandaue. I have an aunt. I have a feeling she'll let us stay with her. My dad will be too busy organizing the festival and he won't have time to visit her. She can help us contact your family. If nobody wants to take us in... well, we'll cross that bridge when we get there. Now, change your clothes. The uniform will make you stand out once we get outside. Everyone will be at the chapel.

**BENJAMIN** 

I-I can't do this. My parents would be so angry.

JONAH

You can explain what happened — and what could happen if you stay. Hopefully, they'll understand. Now, do it.

**BENJAMIN** 

But I can't just disappear with a stranger.

JONAH

Hi, I'm Jonah.

**BENJAMIN** 

B-Benjamin.

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J	u	IN	Α	Н

There.

(BENJAMIN starts changing his shirt.)

#### **BENJAMIN**

I can't do this. I can't disobey my parents and lie to them.

#### **JONAH**

Believe me, I've seen what could happen if we stay here. Our freedom is more important than you think. Now pack. Quickly.

(FATHER ERNESTO's booming voice suddenly

rings offstage.)

#### **FATHER ERNESTO**

Staff, Guides, and Seekers. Please meet at the chapel for an emergency early-morning prayer. Thank you.

#### **JONAH**

Hurry up! Our 20 minutes just became 15.

#### **BENJAMIN**

I'm coming! Wait. Won't the gates be locked?

# **JONAH**

They're just rusted shut. One good kick and we're home free. Now, I don't know what's out there. It might be dangerous. But you'll have to trust me. Okay?

# **BENJAMIN**

O-okay.

Do you know Perry Cervantes?

# BENJAMIN

The creepy dude who was staring out the window during dinner?

# JONAH

Get him, too. Tell him to pack. Yell at him if you must. I owe him that. Wait, no — I'll come with you. We'll go through the back garden. Near the swings. We have ten minutes.

# **BENJAMIN**

Ten minutes?

(JONAH takes the scapular, pauses, then places it around his neck.

He removes the rubber band on his arm, throws it on the ground, and steps on it.)

# JONAH

Hurry up! The real world awaits!

(JONAH and BENJAMIN exit, and sprint headfirst into the unknown.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)