



## FAIL BETTER

BY BAILA EVE

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes... Marijuana: the devil's lettuce, good kush, the choice chooch of Cheech and Chong. In Baila Eve's one-act Fail Better, a couple of "bros" named Elvis and Dakota are waiting around for a weed delivery from a dealer. Amidst the icy cold air, Dakota and Elvis reveal a long-standing friendship frozen cold after Dakota's acceptance into MIT. Upon being expelled in his junior year for cheating, Dakota returns home which is where our story begins. Over the course of their intimate conversation, much akin to the source material of Waiting for Godot, we find these two hooligans shooting the shit,*

*contemplating the meaning a life well lived, and getting more stoned while the hypothermia kicks in. Will their Godot ever arrive? I'm not sure that it matters. Maybe just being in the same time and place as someone is enough. (Spacing is playwright's own.)*

AT RISE:

The middle of a park, a big maple tree. Under the tree two camping chairs face out, a bright blue plastic cooler and a faded backpack beside them. A picnic table smothered in graffiti is in the background, and a trash can is near the base of the tree.

ELVIS (21) sits in one of the camper chairs. There's a soda in one of the cup holders that he occasionally sips (glugs). He hums a vague, indistinguishable tune to himself. DAKOTA (20) enters from behind him, backpack slung over his shoulder.

DAKOTA

Why would you think I would know what tree you were talking about? It's a park. There are literally dozens of trees.

ELVIS

(startling)

Woah—you scared me.

Dakota reads off his phone--

DAKOTA

You text me— "Meet me at the tree in Willow-shade Park." You didn't even tell me which parking lot to go to!

ELVIS

You're here, what's the big deal? Stop complaining.

DAKOTA

I'm not—okay, well what are we doing here?

ELVIS

Waiting for Alex; he's coming with the weed.

DAKOTA

It's cold. When's he going to get here?

ELVIS

He said he'd be here at five, but all drug dealers are late. They kind of know people will just sit around and wait for them.

DAKOTA

You've been here forty-five minutes?!

ELVIS

No, there's no way it was forty-five...

DAKOTA

No way he's going to show up. Dude forgot. Look, I have some weed, let's just go back to your place.

ELVIS

Nah, trust me, Alex has the really good stuff. And I don't want to smoke whatever cilantro MIT nerds are selling you.

DAKOTA

Alright. Fine.

Beat.

ELVIS

...But if you wanna pregame with your stuff, I'm okay with that. Do you want to sit down? Here—

He digs into the cooler and passes Dakota a soda.

DAKOTA

Thanks. It's good to see you by the way.

ELVIS

Yeah, you too.

DAKOTA

Not since last summer right? That one time.

ELVIS

Yeah...that was a busy summer.

DAKOTA

Mm.

They attempt an awkward hug. As Dakota sits, he reaches into his pocket and takes out a minuscule joint. He passes it to Elvis.

ELVIS

Man, what the hell is this??! I didn't have *high* expectations, but this is *really* exceeding my low expectations.

DAKOTA

It's enough to give you a little kick.

ELVIS

This thing is going to be dead in like, two minutes.

DAKOTA

Do you not want those two minutes?

Elvis lights the joint and takes a hit before passing it to Dakota. They pass it back and forth throughout the rest of the play.

ELVIS

So like...I heard you cheated on a test.

DAKOTA

Huh?

ELVIS

Or something. My mom mentioned—she and Pat had lunch a bit ago.

DAKOTA

Oh. Yeah. How is your mom?

ELVIS

Totalfuckingnightmare. So you don't want to talk about it?

DAKOTA

About what?

ELVIS

You can tell me, I'll drop it.

DAKOTA

No. I guess not.

ELVIS

...Okay...

DAKOTA

...It's so ludicrous, it was just—there was, it was for calc, some of the formulas just weren't sinking in...so I wrote them on a slip of paper on the inside cap of my water bottle. And the underside of my baseball cap.

ELVIS

Oh that's clever.

DAKOTA

Clearly not.

(after a pause)

Yeah, I thought that was clever too. I don't think the risk of the situation really hit until I was walking out of the building. And as I got more anxious I kept trying to calm myself down thinking "What's the worst thing that could happen?" And here it is. The worst thing.

ELVIS

How'd they catch you?

DAKOTA

You know, they didn't even find out about the baseball cap until after—that really did almost work. No, someone saw me examining the inside of the water bottle. They called me to the dean's office a week later. I thought they knew about the baseball cap though, so I blabbed on that and screwed myself over even more.

ELVIS

Would stuff be different if they didn't know about the baseball cap? Like—would it not have mattered as much if it was just the water bottle?

DAKOTA

I don't know. I don't want to think about it.

ELVIS

So is that it? MIT's over?

DAKOTA

Completely.

ELVIS

Wow... congratulations, man!

DAKOTA

Excuse me?

ELVIS

You got out! C'mon dude, you never wanted to be an engineer—now you don't have to tell your parents.

Dakota's not feeling it.

ELVIS

I mean—that sounds rough. I'm sorry.

DAKOTA

What, sorry I was an idiot?

ELVIS

I'm sorry it's such a big deal.

DAKOTA

I'm still wrapping my head around it all.

ELVIS

Makes sense. Do you think you'll go somewhere else or,...

DAKOTA

No clue. Literally, none. My parents aren't talking to me.

ELVIS

Oh. Like, not at all, or, like, minimal grunts?

DAKOTA

They both walk out of the room whenever I enter. The only interaction I've had with my dad was when he asked me to change his phone settings.

ELVIS

Damn. What about Sara? How'd she react?

DAKOTA

She said I was a fucking idiot. Which, no counterargument, but it's not like, it's not like *I* called her a fucking idiot when she got arrested for public urination.

ELVIS

I mean dude...that's pretty different.

DAKOTA

Well, yeah, I *know*, but —hers is a lot more embarrassing.

ELVIS

...sure, yeah.

DAKOTA

...She said I could come visit though, for a little. If I needed to get away from mom and dad. She's manager at a winter sports store now. Did you know that?

ELVIS

My mom told me. Think you'll visit her?

DAKOTA

I don't know. What would I do in Denver.

ELVIS

What are you going to do here?

DAKOTA

Rot, probably. Everything feels so weird right now. School, MIT, engineering—that's my entire life, that's everything I've been working for, and what, now it's just gone? It's just—gone. ...I can't believe that after everything, all of this work, two and a half years, I'm back to zero.

Beat.

DAKOTA

This must be hilarious to you.

ELVIS

What? Why would you say that?

DAKOTA

You were always so discouraging about school. Saying I was too invested in it, that, I didn't need to prove how smart I was—and now I'm back. No better than anyone else.

ELVIS

Um...

DAKOTA

—That came out poorly. I just mean; It's all my fault, and...my mind is just constantly kicking itself. I never thought I'd live here again.

(after a pause)

I'm sorry. I'm being...—What about you? How's your mom? Honestly.

ELVIS

You know, the same.

DAKOTA

Really though?

ELVIS

I don't see her as much now that I moved out.

DAKOTA

Yeah, but you're still talking, right? If she told you about Sara. And me.

ELVIS

Of course. I mean...

(he coughs)

Y'know my mom's boyfriend Eric?

(Dakota nods)

Yeah, like, okay, good guy and all, but he keeps—it's like he thinks he's this big hero, like, firefighter savior come to rescue the crappy little family—he doesn't know she's seeing other guys behind his back. And now Annalise is all excited, and he took her roller skating once I guess, and she was telling me—“Mom's not locking herself in the bathroom anymore!” And just, how can that be enough to get her so excited?

DAKOTA

Compared to your dad?

ELVIS

...Maybe I'm wrong. At least now there's someone who can take the door off it's hinges.

DAKOTA

Yikes.

ELVIS

Tuesdays.

DAKOTA

I don't think I really understood your situation growing up—you made it seem so normal like everyone's parents were—waking their kids up screaming, or leaving for days at a time. I just thought our family dynamics were different.

ELVIS

It's been so weird growing up—the difference between kids and adults—I honestly didn't know that they were supposed to be that different from each other.

DAKOTA

What do you mean?

ELVIS

Whenever my dad came home my mom instantly turned into a child; he would leave for a year then show up out of nowhere for my birthday with cake and all these presents and she would



watch and she was just...she never looked so happy. It was like watching a Christmas special of another family. Big happy smiles on their faces like that was enough to make us live inside the one moment forever. ...It's crappy, having the best memories of your parents feel like fever dreams. Those are the only memories where they actually seemed like the parents you see in the movies.

DAKOTA

I can't even imagine that. I mean, I think I can, but I know I can't possibly...I'm so sorry.

ELVIS

What, sorry that my parents are assholes?

DAKOTA

Sorry that you had to go through all that. Alone. I would've listened, you know.

ELVIS

Nah, it's fine, it's like, you know, whatever.

DAKOTA

Just because you're fine doesn't mean it's fine.

ELVIS

Eric's good for her. And she really is doing a lot better now, Annalise is right about that. But it still doesn't make her...a different person...maybe I'm just bitter that Eric wasn't there to protect me as a kid.

Elvis tries to blow a smoke ring.

ELVIS

Shit--there's wind.

DAKOTA

I could kinda see it.

ELVIS

I didn't see anything.

DAKOTA

Do you think your mom regrets having gotten pregnant again?

ELVIS

If she were in the right mind, I think she'd regret it the first time. But no. I think she wants to hold onto whatever scrap of my dad she can get her hands on. I regret it for her though. I mean

obviously I love Annalise, but—god it just feels so unfair. My mom didn't need another kid to worry about, and she was so burned out that I was pretty much raising Anna anyways.

DAKOTA

I mean, you did pretty well. She's great.

ELVIS

You can take some credit—you were always really nice to her. She asks about you, you know.

DAKOTA

Oh yeah?

ELVIS

Yeah. Drive her home from aftercare for a month, you've got a fan forever.

Elvis blows a perfect smoke ring.

DAKOTA

Nice one!

ELVIS

Never even took a class.

DAKOTA

Do you remember that philosophy class we had to take sophomore year?

ELVIS

No.

DAKOTA

Oh.

ELVIS

Why?

DAKOTA

Nothing.

ELVIS

Okay.

Beat.

ELVIS

Yes?

DAKOTA

The cab driver back from the airport had the radio on, this podcast came up talking about how humans always equate knowledge with happiness –since the world feels so inaccessible, we assume that happiness is derived from the understanding of our surroundings. And it was saying, what if –agh, what was it, –like, something about ants. What if ants are the smartest creatures in the world because they know enough to understand that knowledge isn't the secret to a virtuous life. They stick to a system that gives them a sense of purpose, they do their job, and that's it. Basic fulfillment. Not like people, always chasing something out of reach because it scares us that we don't understand.

ELVIS

...That's bullshit.

DAKOTA

(taken aback, hurt)

No it's not.

ELVIS

Yeah it is. You just think it's true because you can't figure out the answer. If every theory that made you question your life were true, you wouldn't be here. It's too much—not possible.

DAKOTA

You think knowledge is the equivalent of happiness? That seems...off-base for you.

ELVIS

I never said that. I think—I guess I don't really think knowledge is a thing. Like, ask me how a lightbulb works, and the best answer I can give you is “magic.” I could figure it out in less than two minutes—

DAKOTA

—We learned that in third grade.

ELVIS

Yeah, well I don't know why you think I'd remember that—but the point is, is that it still doesn't mean anything to me. And knowing it wouldn't and didn't and never will mean anything to me. And I'm not exactly happier than the average person, if you haven't noticed.

DAKOTA

I don't know, it's just been on my mind a lot since I got home.

ELVIS

It's not making you question anything I hope.

DAKOTA

No, I mean what could it—?—It's not—...no. I'm not fragile enough to let some podcast mess with my headspace.

ELVIS

Good.

DAKOTA

Mmhm.

(he taps his head)

All mental stability up in here.

ELVIS

Oh yeah. I can see.

Beat.

ELVIS

...Penny for your thoughts?

DAKOTA

Really?

ELVIS

Duh.

DAKOTA

It's gonna sound stupid.

ELVIS

So do I, all the time. Just say it.

DAKOTA

I'm sorry, I'm just, I'm still so stuck on school—I really did think engineering was going to make me happy. Like, since I got into MIT I had finally achieved something, and everything was going to be simple after that. But then it was about actually staying in school. And passing my classes. And using it all to go somewhere and do something. And thinking about it now, I'm not even really sure what I was working for that I thought was going to make me so happy.

ELVIS

Your parents' validation.

DAKOTA

Whatever. I'm home again, and I blew up my chances of achieving happiness the way I thought I was supposed to. So...so if some podcast is going to tell me I had it all wrong to begin with...it's just an easier reality to stomach.

ELVIS

Does it make that much of a difference? You're still here. You have to live with your choices either way. If true—what's that word? Euphoria?

DAKOTA

Enlightenment.

ELVIS

If true Enlightenment is knowing that a life without knowledge is bliss, then doesn't that prove the point by showing you what you're missing?

DAKOTA

...Kind of feels like a dead end on both sides.

ELVIS

One test can kill you.

DAKOTA

One test has killed me.

ELVIS

Only for now.

DAKOTA

I'm 20.

ELVIS

Exactly. You're young.

DAKOTA

Still doesn't feel like a great start.

ELVIS

We'll see.

They both sip their drinks.

DAKOTA

SO I thought you said over the summer you were going get better at texting, but you still never respond to me.

ELVIS

Yeah, I just figured, you're at school, you don't need the dead weight to—

At the oblivious look on Dakota's face, Elvis gives an awkward little laugh.

ELVIS

I—c'mon, you know what I'm talking about, just...

DAKOTA

Just *what*?

ELVIS

(waving his hand)

Never mind, we don't need to get into—I knew you were busy with school, I didn't want to distract you—

DAKOTA

Oh, because that's historically been a concern for you—

ELVIS

Seriously, forget about it.

DAKOTA

Okay. Fine.

ELVIS

Good.

DAKOTA

Fine.

ELVIS

Fine.

DAKOTA

Good.

ELVIS

He should be here by now.

DAKOTA

Elvis, I don't think he's—

ELVIS

He always gets here eventually. And the longer we wait, the more likely he is to be here at any minute.

DAKOTA

But doesn't every minute that he doesn't get here make it more likely that this will be the time he doesn't show up? It's a paradox kind of.

ELVIS

Um.

DAKOTA

Like—I had this professor who always talked about how he was going to give us a shit ton of pop quizzes. And then then there were no quizzes. So every day going to class was a question of whether it was more likely that we were going to have a quiz since there was only so much time left in the semester, or if by now he had forgotten about it altogether.

ELVIS

So? Were there any quizzes in the end?

DAKOTA

I don't know. I only made it half the semester.

ELVIS

Oh. Right.

DAKOTA

So Annalise is good then? She just turned eight in November, right?

ELVIS

Yeah—you remember that?

DAKOTA

Of course. Do you see her much now? Like, now that you're out of the house?

ELVIS

I drive her to after-school stuff.

DAKOTA

Nice.

ELVIS

Yeah, and, she's like—you know, normal. I still can't really believe how normal she is. I don't know, she likes cards and horses, and—ice cream—and the fairy obsession and fighting games are

a little weird, but it's still not like... I don't know how she did it. With our shitty parents,—I don't know how she turned out so great.

DAKOTA

...Elvis...

Dakota looks at him sadly; 'duh'. Elvis looks down at himself, embarrassed but comforted.

DAKOTA

...What was the fairy-fighting thing?

ELVIS

Oh—it's this game she read about in some book Eric gave her; the whole fairy thing was cute at first, but now even Eric wishes the book would fall into a black hole.

DAKOTA

Yeah, so what is it?

ELVIS

You need a game to play with your cousins?

DAKOTA

And I'm curious.

ELVIS

...Okay, yeah, it's—here, I'll show you—c'mon, get up.

Elvis rises.

DAKOTA

Dude, it's cold. I'm tired.

ELVIS

It will only take a minute. And moving will make you less cold. Stop being a baby.

Dakota reluctantly stands and rests the joint on the picnic table. It falls without him seeing.

ELVIS

Okay, it's really simple. You like, you take your leg and hold it behind your back—

Dakota does so—

ELVIS

No, your other hand—yeah, exactly.



DAKOTA

Alright. Now what?

On one leg, Elvis barrels towards Dakota. Dakota falters but manages to keep his balance.

DAKOTA

Dude, what the hell?

ELVIS

That's it, that's the game. Like bumper cars. You try and knock the other person down the fastest. On one leg. No hands.

DAKOTA

Huh. Lemme try again.

Dakota charges at Elvis on one foot, knocking him down strategically, almost instantaneously. On the ground, Elvis shakes his head in shock, stands up and readies himself. They hop around but soon enough Dakota knocks Elvis down again. Elvis sits up on the ground and Dakota drops down beside him.

DAKOTA

How many times have you played this with Anna?

ELVIS

I'm sore just thinking about that.

DAKOTA

Oof.

ELVIS

It's better than playing Candyland for the zillionth time. Have you ever played Candyland? It's a fucking nightmare.

DAKOTA

It's brutal. Still—that was pretty easy.

ELVIS

It's not like I've had a whole lot of practice—I'm letting her win. I'm a good brother.

DAKOTA

You've also always been pretty shit at fighting.

ELVIS

That's not a fight, it's a game. You can't use that as--what's that saying? Or, not saying, like, phrase? From that statistics class?

They both stand to return to their seats and mistakenly switch places. Elvis sips Dakota's drink.

DAKOTA

Oh. Conclusive data?

ELVIS

I--yeah. That. How'd you know that so fast?

DAKOTA

That's the only thing you understood about that class all year. You started using the word conclusive all the time. I figure it's more likely that you forgot the thing you used to most remember rather than you remember something you used to have forgotten but suddenly recalled.

ELVIS

...say that sentence again.

DAKOTA

Hold on, I'll try and rephrase it, give me a second to remember.

Dakota tries to grasp the words he wants to say, out of his reach.

DAKOTA

I would think it would be more likely...it's more likely for you to have remembered...the existence...of something that you used to know, but then forgot...than it is for you to...you to *remember* something that you *used* to have *forgotten*.

ELVIS

...Now say that ten times fast.

DAKOTA

You're hilarious. Do you get what I mean though?

ELVIS

Heh. Yeah. I think so. I mean, no. I can't really process what you just said but...but I feel like I understand the *idea* of it, you know? Like, I understand it on a deeper level, even though I don't really know what you just said.

DAKOTA

Eh. Good enough.

ELVIS

It's getting kinda cold.

DAKOTA

That's what I said before.

ELVIS

No, you said that *you* were kind of cold. But now I am. I—oh, you know what, I have some blankets in my bag.

Elvis digs into the backpack and pulls out two scratchy gray blankets. He hands one to Dakota.

DAKOTA

Is that your backpack from middle school?

ELVIS

Oh—yeah, I...I don't know, it's just a good bag.

DAKOTA

No, I wasn't judging.

DAKOTA

—I forgot, I brought us munchies—

ELVIS

So did your parents—

DAKOTA

—oh, sorry, I didn't mean to—

ELVIS

—no, no, it's okay—you go.

DAKOTA

I bought munchies on the way over here.

ELVIS

Munchies?

Dakota digs into his own bag.

DAKOTA

Yup—Here, —I got you some sour candies, and there's chips, and I found some old holiday cookies in the back of the freezer.

ELVIS

You got me high just so I would eat the old Christmas cookies your family forgot to throw away?  
I feel so flattered.

DAKOTA

Time stops in the freezer. Grow up.

ELVIS

Yeah, sure.

Elvis takes one of the cookies.

DAKOTA

Hey, so what did you mean earlier when you said I never wanted to be an engineer and now I don't have to tell my parents?

ELVIS

Oh, nothing. Seriously.

DAKOTA

No, I wanna know. The cookies reminded me. My family and I were making them right before I went back to school. See, I had a little theme—this one's a textbook.

ELVIS

Really? You suck at cookies man, it just looks like a J to me.

DAKOTA

That's yours—I meant mine. And that's a candy cane, not a J.

ELVIS

Oh. Yeah you're right that makes more sense. What I meant...it just never really seemed like you were that interested in engineering. Your parents were the ones always forcing you to do all those summer programs. You never seemed to particularly like them. You were always sneaking off early to do stuff with me and Josh—well, before junior year—then you got like, *really* into it,—and the SAT thing too, god.

DAKOTA

It's called hell year for a reason.

ELVIS

Oh believe me, you made us all aware.

DAKOTA

School really felt like the most important thing at the time, and that kind of commitment was what you had to do—

ELVIS

You preached that plenty then too—a bit sickening, really—

DAKOTA

Yeah, well—that's just how I was raised, you know. I didn't know I was allowed to think past it.

ELVIS

Well, plenty of time to hang around and figure it out now. Do you need a job? I might be able to hook you up with—

DAKOTA

I was kinda thinking maybe I'd move out of my parents'—like, move a few counties over or something. Maybe up or down a state.

ELVIS

Good for you, man.

DAKOTA

You should come with me. We can get a crappy apartment somewhere or something. I'm sure you're dying to get out of here.

ELVIS

What do you mean 'dying'?

DAKOTA

Like—just—do you really want to stay here your whole life? You must be ready for a change.

ELVIS

Oh. Right.

DAKOTA

Yeah—breaking free man, I think it could be really good for both of us.

ELVIS

I mean, it sounds good, but...I've kinda got my own situation going on, so I don't think it's the best idea...

DAKOTA

Oh. Yeah. You're probably right.

Dakota finishes his soda and throws the can at the trash. He misses.

DAKOTA

So are you still living with Mickey?

ELVIS

No. I moved in with Calvin actually.

DAKOTA

Really? Wow. That's great. When?

ELVIS

Uhh...two months ago?

DAKOTA

Damn. That's a while.

ELVIS

Yeah— in that apartment above the cheese shop in town—where Jesse used to live.

DAKOTA

Nice. How long have you two been together now?

ELVIS

Um...eight months now I guess.

DAKOTA

(smiling)

'I guess'.

ELVIS

Almost nine actually. Yeah. It's going—it's been really nice.

DAKOTA

Yeah?

ELVIS

(light involuntary smile)

Yeah.

DAKOTA

That's awesome.

ELVIS

Yeah. It kinda is.

Beat.

DAKOTA

Where did you say you were working?

ELVIS

I didn't—I'm working at the pet shop at the mall—I'm spending all day around puppies—

DAKOTA

Oh, that sounds—

ELVIS

—like, the ones in those tiny cages that can barely turn around.

DAKOTA

Oh.

ELVIS

We get to play with them sometimes though. So that the uglier ones get some exercise.

DAKOTA

Hey, ugly puppies are still puppies.

ELVIS

Yeah. There's this one schnauzer puppy, no one ever plays with him, but he's got the best expressions, he's always pawing at his face, it's really cute—I feel like he's going to die in that box, I want to take him home each night.

DAKOTA

How does Calvin feel about dogs?

ELVIS

He loves them.

DAKOTA

So...you can always return him.

ELVIS

Uh—

DAKOTA

The puppy.

ELVIS

Oh. Duh. Heh. I don't know. Can you really picture me walking down the street with a schnauzer?

DAKOTA

Vividly. Think of your Christmas cards.

ELVIS

Oh god. But like...people who have dogs are put together. I feel put together when I stand up in the morning.

DAKOTA

Well yeah, but—

ELVIS

—Hey, stop hogging the joint, have some manners.

DAKOTA

Huh?

ELVIS

Fork it over.

DAKOTA

I thought you had it.

ELVIS

Me?

DAKOTA

You.

ELVIS

*Me?* Did you drop it?

DAKOTA

I didn't think so. Did you?

ELVIS

Oh, trying to pin it on me now.

DAKOTA

Hm.

They both scan the ground. Elvis twists in his chair. Dakota gets down on all fours to search.

ELVIS

I think you can see the same amount from up here.



DAKOTA

Says the guy who hasn't spotted the joint yet.

Elvis sighs and joins Dakota on the ground. The two crawl around aimlessly.

ELVIS

...Was it ever even here to begin with.

(off Dakota's look)

That was a joke. Obviously.

DAKOTA

Obviously.

Dakota crawls around the picnic table.

ELVIS

Man, how would it even get that far—

DAKOTA

(picking up the joint)

Ah-hah!

ELVIS

What!

DAKOTA

Hah.

ELVIS

How did it get over there?

DAKOTA

No clue.

ELVIS

It's impossible.

DAKOTA

Sprouted legs and walked on its own.

ELVIS

Magic.

DAKOTA

You believe in magic?

ELVIS

I'd sure rather believe in magic than not.

Elvis sits in his chair again, knees dirty. Dakota dusts off his pants and hands the joint to Elvis, who drops it.

ELVIS

Ahh, fuckkk.

DAKOTA

No sweat, it's still burning.

ELVIS

Really?

DAKOTA

Look.

ELVIS

Oh. Sweet.

There's a rustle behind them. They both listen attentively before the noise disappears.

DAKOTA

Is that—

ELVIS

Nope.

DAKOTA

I thought Alex was gonna move to Cali with Josh.

ELVIS

They started driving cross country—didn't even make it to Texas before turning around. Ran out of money. Or weed. Both probably.

DAKOTA

Heh. Do you ever think about what would've happened if we had gone on the road trip after graduation?

ELVIS

I thought we were going on that trip.

DAKOTA

Ha. What? No. Really?

ELVIS

Yeah, man. We made all of those plans. I literally bought that blow-up mattress thing for the car. You *told* me to.

DAKOTA

Come on Elvis, in what world would I have actually done that?

ELVIS

I didn't think it made sense either, but then you told me you changed your mind about school, and, and screw your parents, we were breaking out or some shit.

DAKOTA

I thought we both knew that was just a pipe dream. You—

ELVIS

I never expected you to go. Not really. There was no way you were actually going to say “fuck you” to your parents or anything. You were just freaking out because you were getting rejected everywhere. But you never even mentioned it after you got into MIT. You never apologized for bailing on me. There was like, a week in between you and me roadtripping and you going off to MIT and leaving me here. I hadn't made any plans because of you! Just—stuck. Completely.

DAKOTA

If you knew I wouldn't go, why didn't you bother coming up with a plan B?

ELVIS

I—Plan B was probably exactly what Plan A would have been if you had been honest with me from the beginning. You should trust me enough to tell me the truth. And I know it's my fault I got my hopes up about the whole thing...but you're my best friend and you ditched me and you never said anything. Not once.

DAKOTA

...You're my best friend too.

(after a pause)

You could have told me. Or said something. You can't just hold a grudge for three years when you don't even tell me about it.

ELVIS

I shouldn't have had to tell you.

DAKOTA

Hey, if you don't tell me you have a problem, then you can't expect me to—

ELVIS

You can't say you just forgot about everything Dakota, you can't. If you do we both know you're lying.

DAKOTA

I couldn't just pick up and go, there was all this pressure from—

ELVIS

—From your parents, yeah, I know.

DAKOTA

I—yeah.

ELVIS

I'm just saying—

DAKOTA

—I get it. I could...could've handled it better. I'm sorry. Really. You're my best friend. I'm sorry I hurt your feelings.

ELVIS

...You probably figured I'd forget about it as soon as you didn't do anything...not like you had a whole lot of reason to think otherwise.

(he knocks on his head)

Nobody home most of the time.

DAKOTA

Don't be ridiculous. You know I think you're a misunderstood genius.

ELVIS

Misunderstood being the keyword there.

DAKOTA

Putting that cupcake on Maddy's seat in fourth grade? Brilliant.

ELVIS

I forgot about that.

DAKOTA

We got in so much trouble for that.

ELVIS

*We?* I got in so much trouble for that.

DAKOTA

Well yeah, it should have been just you, but then when Ms. Arks talked to you, you ratted me out and told her I was egging you on.

ELVIS

Oh, so you were really complimenting *your* idea. Like you got in so much trouble for that.

DAKOTA

My parents grounded me for two weeks.

ELVIS

Maddy didn't talk to me again until eighth grade.

DAKOTA

Well yeah, we spend the whole day making fun of her. I wouldn't have talked to us if we were her. We were dicks.

ELVIS

Ha. Yeah.

DAKOTA

Didn't make asking her to prom any easier.

ELVIS

She told me she didn't go out with you because you weren't on the football team.

DAKOTA

Yeah, then she went with fucking mathlete Justin. Elementary school grudges die hard.

ELVIS

They're married now, you know.

DAKOTA

Maddy and Justin? No way.

ELVIS

Yeah.

DAKOTA

No.

ELVIS

Yup.

DAKOTA

Wow.

ELVIS

I know.

DAKOTA

It's weird knowing that.

ELVIS

Being married at 20, that's what's weird.

DAKOTA

They'll probably have kids by 21.

ELVIS

I'd be surprised if she's not with child already.

DAKOTA

"With child"?

ELVIS

They've been married a year.

DAKOTA

"With child"? Since when do you talk like that?

ELVIS

It was just a joke.

DAKOTA

Oh.

ELVIS

You're not laughing.

DAKOTA

My bad.

(clears his throat)

HAhaHA.

ELVIS

Sorry I ratted you out to Mrs. Arks. I forgot that.

DAKOTA

Eh. It's okay.

Beat.

DAKOTA

Do you think Maddie and Justin are actually in love? Happy? It seems weird meeting your soulmate within five miles of where you grew up. There's a lot of people in the world.

ELVIS

Does love only count if it's soulmates? I didn't think you believed in those.

DAKOTA

Isn't that supposed to be the end goal?

ELVIS

Pfft. I'm not the person to ask. I'm just working on maintaining a goal at the moment.

(thinking about it)

But I think love has different shades, I guess. Like pink and red. It's the same color, just— light pink is when you have a crush on someone, and when it's dark red it's like—...

DAKOTA

...—Different intensities, yeah I get what you mean.

ELVIS

Right.

DAKOTA

That's a nice way of thinking of it.

ELVIS

I like most shades of red. And pink.

DAKOTA

I like the idea that it's all love—just because some instances of it are stronger than others doesn't make any experience less of the same feeling.

Beat.

ELVIS

I'm not shit at fighting.

DAKOTA

Huh?

ELVIS

What you said earlier. You said I was shit at fighting. I'm not shit at fighting.

DAKOTA

What about sophomore year? We were about to get into a whole thing with that skater group, and then you just backed out.

ELVIS

I told you from the beginning that I didn't want to mess with them. Didn't you hear how bad they fucked up Evan W. ? I *told* you about that. You should be thanking me for saving you the humiliation of losing.

DAKOTA

Yeah, backing out of that fight sure saved us from humiliation that day.

ELVIS

You could have fought them yourself if it was such a thing. You were going to the gym back then—you were like, kinda buff.

DAKOTA

We were in it together—I didn't want to make you look bad.

ELVIS

Wow, well thank you...Evan had to go to the hospital. He had a concussion. He missed like, two weeks of school.

DAKOTA

So how about Kenny?

ELVIS

You can't ask me to justify not getting into a fight in second grade.

DAKOTA

I think I can.

ELVIS

Maybe I was just a peaceful, forward-thinking child. Like how Gandhi was when he was a kid. Or Jesus.

DAKOTA

Holy smokes!

ELVIS

...What?

DAKOTA

Get it? 'Cause like, Jesus, and we're smoking? And 'holy smokes' is an expression. And Jesus was holy.



ELVIS

Well thank you for explaining it...there's a better joke in there somewhere. As is—I'd give it a two.

DAKOTA

I guess if you hadn't been such a wimp with Kenny we wouldn't have met. So maybe that's good. You remember?

ELVIS

Um...

DAKOTA

It's fine if you don't.

ELVIS

That was the first time we met?

DAKOTA

Yeah.

ELVIS

Huh. I remember pieces of that day—sort of. Like, I have a still image of the second before he punched me, I can't remember him saying it, but I know he was saying his dad said I was... well, you know. And I have a still image from after I opened my eyes and sat up; you were next to me crying and holding your hand, and there was some blood on my shirt and then I realized my nose hurt. You know, I don't remember anything about that being the first day we met.

DAKOTA

It feels unnecessary for you to remember me crying; you could have just stopped at “you were sitting next to me”.

ELVIS

I'll make a note to edit the memory in my head—Oh, you know what? I just remembered something else from that day—after Mr. T. called your parents to pick you up, your dad came and was bitching you out outside of the classroom and we were making funny faces through the window.

DAKOTA

Yeah I remember that.

ELVIS

Your parents must have been really pissed.

DAKOTA

Pretty much.

ELVIS

Heh.

DAKOTA

Do you have the time?

Elvis pulls his phone out of his pocket.

ELVIS

Crap, it's dead. I have no clue what time it is.

DAKOTA

Well I got here around 5:30. So it's probably been about...

Dakota and Elvis both concentrate on trying to do the mental math. Elvis looks down at the joint in his hand.

ELVIS

I'm impressed. This thing has been going a while.

(laughing)

Wouldn't it be funny if like, Alex already came and we just forgot about it? Like, this is a fresh joint, and we just don't even remember.

DAKOTA

I mean, I feel like we would have gone somewhere.

ELVIS

Where else is there to go?

DAKOTA

We couldn't forget an entire interaction with another person. We're not that high. He probably texted you and you just don't know cause your phone's dead.

ELVIS

Rut-roh.

Elvis starts to crack up. Dakota joins him.

DAKOTA

What's so funny? What are we laughing at?

ELVIS

I have no clue.

They both laugh for another minute.

ELVIS

New subject?

DAKOTA

New subject.

ELVIS

Have you seen the new Back to the Future?

DAKOTA

Oh god—I can't talk about that.

ELVIS

Well you throw some options out there.

DAKOTA

Um, okay, how about this: what do you think the worst moment of your life has been?

ELVIS

...Where the fuck did that come from? —Please tell me getting grounded in second grade isn't the worst moment of your life.

DAKOTA

Hah— no, I was just thinking.

ELVIS

Thinking about...?

DAKOTA

School and stuff. A little bit after everything went down.

ELVIS

*That's* the worst moment of your life? Seriously? Because—

Elvis sees the look on Dakota's face and cuts himself off.

ELVIS

Sorry. That came out wrong, what I mea—what were you going to say?

DAKOTA

No, you're right, it's dumb, it's—

ELVIS

—just fucking spit it out.

DAKOTA

(now unsure of himself)

...I know in the grand scheme of things it's not like anyone died, or anything deeply serious like that...but when I got on the phone with my mom...I was sitting outside the dean's office and she wasn't picking up, and then like, on the last ring she gets it and says "I'm at work can it wait?" And I, like, whimpered "Mom I really screwed up" and she said "What did you do?"...I don't know why that was...it, but I just cracked. I couldn't say anything, I was just breathing into the phone. And she said she needed to get back to work and she'd call me back later. She didn't need to—the dean called her and then she called me like seven times and I just let them all go to voicemail. That was really awful.

ELVIS

That sounds really awful.

DAKOTA

Really? Even to you? It just feels stupid telling you now. All of your problems are so much bigger. More physical.

ELVIS

We've been raised to have different things be hard for us.

DAKOTA

...It was really hard.

ELVIS

Is there a difference between the worst and hardest moment of your life?

DAKOTA

In terms of this event? Or in general?

ELVIS

Either.

DAKOTA

...The worst part was when she asked "What did you do." The hardest— —the hardest part Was listening to all those voicemails...it was like coming to every few minutes to remember all over again.

ELVIS

That sounds awful.

DAKOTA

It really does feel like such a dumb “hardest moment”—I wish it was breaking my leg, or when my grandma died or something, but when I was listening to those voicemails in the lobby...that was the first time in my life I actually felt...hopeless. Like I would never go anywhere again. It was honestly just really hard getting through that feeling.

(after a pause)

Like dementors, you know? I didn’t think I would ever smile again.

Beat.

DAKOTA

You know?

ELVIS

Yeah.

DAKOTA

...So...do you...

ELVIS

...When my dad was dying, like, in his last few hours or so,—

DAKOTA

That was in January, right?

ELVIS

Yeah, January 18,—

DAKOTA

Right, sorry,—

ELVIS

—Mom called me to get on the phone with him. She’d been begging me to go with her and Annalise to the hospital—but I wouldn’t. I didn’t think I could even look at him without wanting to tear his eyes out. But she said he was saying all of this shit about wanting to say goodbye, and she made me get on the phone. At first he was making me feel all guilty about not being there, but then he got real quiet and said ‘I love you.’ And I know that’s just a thing you’re supposed to say on your deathbed, but...that was the first time he had ever said that to me. That I can remember. And I know on that last phone call I was supposed to forgive him, or something like that, and it wasn’t right to tell him what I really wanted to say which was “I hope you burn in hell,” so I just hung up. I’m not even sure what was harder—not saying “go to hell,” or not just giving in and saying “I love you too,” to make myself feel like we had any kind of relationship or closure.

DAKOTA

You didn't owe him anything. You didn't owe him that. Closure. Or a relationship.

ELVIS

I know. I don't feel guilty about anything. I don't think I regret anything either...I had to go there to pick Annalise up. She texted me from our mom's phone, saying mom was bawling and she wanted to go home, so I got in the car and drove to the hospital, told her to meet me outside, I wasn't coming in. Waiting for her to come out, it was just...brutal. I was sitting there in the car feeling absolutely nothing. It's weird not caring about someone dying when our whole lives we are taught that life is more important than anything. That was the worst; the hardest was hanging up on him, but the worst: Just. Waiting. Knowing my dad had just died and I couldn't feel anything.

DAKOTA

I'm really glad you didn't go in.

ELVIS

It's nice to know someone is.

DAKOTA

I wish you'd have told me about that when it happened.

ELVIS

Ehh.

DAKOTA

I wanna know when you're having a hard time.

ELVIS

I don't man, I like to keep that to myself most of the time. Don't like bumming other people out.

DAKOTA

It's not bumming other people out—

ELVIS

Well it bums me out to talk about it. I'm talking about it now? Isn't that good enough?

DAKOTA

I'm glad you're talking about it now.

ELVIS

But it's not good enough huh.

DAKOTA

I just wish I could have done something at the moment to help. It's hard hearing about it now, knowing I could have helped and didn't.

ELVIS

Dude, you couldn't have done anything. It was a shitty situation, but I pulled it together. You didn't need to get involved.

DAKOTA

Maybe if you'd talked to me I could've helped you pull stuff together faster—or different—maybe you wouldn't still be here, you'd have a job that made you happy, or—taken some classes somewhere, or—just—something to keep you busy—so you weren't sitting around—

ELVIS

(stiffening)

I mean, it's not like I've just been *sitting around* since you've been gone.

DAKOTA

No, I didn't mean that, just—

ELVIS

God, this is the same as high school, you were such a dick—

DAKOTA

—Excuse me?

ELVIS

Yeah. Really. When you started studying like, seven hours a day. Talking all stuffy, all of these big words—it sounded all wrong when we were talking like you were just trying to prove a point that you were better than everyone, trip the rest of us up. And you only ever wanted to talk about school. You made all of this time for extracurriculars, but you ditched me and everyone else. You were a dick.

DAKOTA

Wow, really tell me how you feel.

ELVIS

That's why I stopped responding. I wanted to stop feeling bad when I couldn't keep up with you—I thought I'd save you from being awkward about it, set you free, or whatever.

DAKOTA

Okay. Okay, hold on, I need a minute.

Dakota stands and paces.

DAKOTA

Okay. Look, I'm sorry if I was a jerk in high school, and I get that the trip thing was shitty, but you can't say I ditched you because I went off to school. God! Do you not see the irony in that? Jesus fucking Christ Elvis, that's exactly what you did! You were worried about me ditching you for school, but you ditched me for school. And it wasn't even your school! At least I would have had a solid reason for not responding; I was actually doing something! You just decided to invent a personality for me so that you would have an excuse to feel sorry for yourself.

Elvis stands up too.

ELVIS

No, no, you don't get to say that kind of shit now! You may have failed yourself intentionally, but you still failed. So quit thinking you're so much better than everybody and take a reality check. Maybe you were better than me before, but you sure aren't now.

DAKOTA

I could have been. I got into MIT. I had a 4.0 For over two years.

ELVIS

See? You don't think I'm good enough to hang out with you. Ever since high school. You've made me feel like crap for not being as smart as you think you are.

DAKOTA

Oh, fuck you.

ELVIS

C'mon Dakota, really be honest. Didn't you expect yourself to have made some better, smarter friends by now? Aren't I just the best you got at the moment?

Dakota drops to his chair defeated.

DAKOTA

...I never said I didn't think you were smart. Like...Elvis...you can't pretend you're academically...oriented. And you can't get mad at me for saying that either. You're smart in other ways. Like the way you take care of Annalise. You have an interesting frame of reference. That's being smart too. I just, screw me but it was kind of exciting thinking I would find people who wanted to talk about academic stuff.

ELVIS

*Why? You don't even like it!* Your parents were just forcing it on you.

DAKOTA

You don't know that—it's complicated.



Elvis sits.

ELVIS

You're good at so many things, and you just choose to believe that your purpose is this whole tech-y world where you just stare at a computer screen all day long. You're like a stupid ant with a crumb, guarding it with your life, but there are thousands of other ants with crumbs so why do you think your crumb is any more important than theirs? You're the one who's keeping yourself from being an ant. Just let the fuck go already.

DAKOTA

I can't just let it go. Everything in my life has been built towards one future.

ELVIS

You know what they say about planning the future.

DAKOTA

What?

ELVIS

Oh. I don't know.

DAKOTA

Some saying?

ELVIS

I figured you'd know it.

DAKOTA

I don't.

ELVIS

You get what I mean though.

DAKOTA

No.

ELVIS

Or the idea of it.

DAKOTA

Fine. Sure.

ELVIS

You know what, Dakota, you need to get out of here.

DAKOTA

Excuse me.

ELVIS

Not–now–not like that, just–you’re going to go crazy here. Back home. You need something to be doing. Go stay with your sister or something.

DAKOTA

In Denver? What am I going to do in Denver?

ELVIS

What are you going to do here?? Better than here. Go somewhere where you don’t have to feel bad about yourself for a little while.

DAKOTA

Are you trying to get rid of me?

ELVIS

I’m being honest about what I think you need.

DAKOTA

What about what you need?

ELVIS

...I think I need to stop feeling like I’m missing something because of you.

DAKOTA

What?

ELVIS

I didn’t really think about it until...I’m doing really well right now. Like, I know not a whole lot has changed since high school and probably not much will, but...that’s okay. I’m okay with that. Stuff with my mom is probably always going to be...however it is, but I’ve moved out, and I still see Anna, and Calvin’s been really helping me figure out how to–stuff’s okay. I don’t need anything to change. Or–to get in my head about being here. If you’re always ready to leave.

DAKOTA

...I’m really happy for you. Really. I don’t want to make you feel like you’re missing out.

ELVIS

I know.

DAKOTA

Good.

ELVIS

Yeah.

DAKOTA

So like...Calvin—what would you say? Crimson?

ELVIS

Huh? Oh—um...more like...maroon?

DAKOTA

Yeah?

ELVIS

(embarrassed)

Yeah.

DAKOTA

(grinning)

That's deep. That's a deep red man.

ELVIS

I like that color red.

DAKOTA

You should get that puppy. The schnauzer.

ELVIS

I don't know...

DAKOTA

You said dogs are for people who have their lives together. Why don't you think your life is together? You're the one giving all this sage advice here.

ELVIS

Mm...*sage* advice.

DAKOTA

I think legal drinking age has made you very wise.

ELVIS

Calvin and I aren't—it's been eight months, what, we move in together and all of a sudden we're playing family—

DAKOTA

Why not?

ELVIS

I don't want to ruin stuff with him, and a dog, like, that's a crazy ton of commitment. I don't want stuff to fall apart.

DAKOTA

Yeah. Exactly. The only thing standing between you and commitment is your belief that you can't commit to anything. That's it. If stuff's good—why not build on it and begin good, instead of worrying about it staying that way?

ELVIS

I don't want to lose anything.

DAKOTA

Whatever you lose you have time to make up for. You're young.

ELVIS

I'm 21.

DAKOTA

Exactly. Plenty of time.

ELVIS

If I don't get run over first.

DAKOTA

Look both ways before you cross the street.

ELVIS

I guess so.

(after a pause)

Momo is kind of a cute name for a dog, don't you think?

DAKOTA

Uh...yeah...that's cute.

ELVIS

Like the winged lemur from The Last Airbender.

DAKOTA

Oh—*yeah*, I really like that then. Actually.

ELVIS

This is nice. We haven't gotten to sit and talk like this in a while.

DAKOTA

Not since summer.

ELVIS

Summer.

DAKOTA

It is. Nice. You know— I think this is the first time in a while I haven't felt guilty about just sitting around and enjoying conversation. I can just be here because this is where I am at the moment. I'm not slacking off from anything; not supposed to be anywhere or doing anything.

ELVIS

Mm. You know Heaven?

DAKOTA

...What, like—

ELVIS

The Talking Heads song. David Byrne. Heaven.

DAKOTA

“Is a place where nothing ever happens”?

(lightly sarcastic)

Yeah, I think I've heard of it.

ELVIS

That's a good song.

DAKOTA

Lemme put it on—

He pulls out his phone.

DAKOTA

Oh. Crap. Mine's dead too. Maybe it's the cold?

ELVIS

I thought it was only heat that brought battery life down.

DAKOTA

I'd look it up for you if I could.

ELVIS

I care more about knowing that than about lightbulbs.

DAKOTA

Why'd you bring up Heaven?

ELVIS

Well—

DAKOTA

You think we're dead.

ELVIS

No, I just—No, duh, I don't think we're *dead*, this is just—...like, a good way to waste time. If you have time to spare and you're going to waste it. Sitting here shooting the shit with you—if nothing happens, it's okay.

DAKOTA

I suppose if we were dead, at this point I shouldn't expect I would know any better.

(after a pause)

I agree. I really missed this. It's...refreshing, somehow.

ELVIS

What's that other R word? Regenerate—

DAKOTA

Rejuvenate?

ELVIS

That one, thanks. —Rejuvenating, even.

(after a pause)

I feel like we've had this conversation before.

DAKOTA

We've had a lot of conversations before. That's the thing about talking to you. It feels like one conversation that keeps picking up again and again, over and over.

ELVIS

I like that. It makes me feel better about when it ends.

They sip their drinks. The sound of crickets. Tiny blinking yellow lights are projected across the stage, appearing like fireflies in the dark lighting. They lean back, get comfortable.

DAKOTA

When was Alex supposed to show up again?

ELVIS

5:00.

DAKOTA

...he's probably not coming.

ELVIS

...yeah, I know.

They do not move.

BLACKOUT.

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *From my sophomore year of high school to my senior year of college, I have been assigned Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot in no less than seven different classes. While reading with friends, I was always struck most by the overall foolishness of the piece. As we age I feel we detach from the "silly" side of ourselves, and alcohol and drugs are used as an excuse to let go of our humor standards. I wanted to explore the relationship of two best friends, with no one around, given that permission to be non-sensical and enjoy one another's company without societal pressure.*

*Godot is commonly viewed as a representation of God; meeting God (for sober people) is generally an event that takes place after death. The more I read the play, the more I began to believe that there was a crucial misunderstanding in the play: Godot already came. The iconic duo of Vladimir and Estragon are dead in heaven—because what more would either of them want than an excuse to fool around with their best friend for all eternity?*

**AUTHOR NOTE:** Baila Eve 'Bay' Zisman was born and raised in the Hudson Valley, Upstate New York, and has known she wanted to be a writer before she was capable of the act. Baila

transferred from Bard College to NYU in her sophomore year of college to major in Dramatic Writing. In her spare time, she is a visual artist. As she approaches graduation, she is excited for what is to come \*and open to suggestions\*