

OAK TREE

By Sean Patrick Smith

Drama Editor JANET COLSON writes... *Oak Tree is a starkly realistic brutally violent and personal piece of theatre. Sean Patrick Smith's debut play is a visceral mixture of dream, memory, alternating (and altered) consciousness, and the cultural and symbolic representation of manhood. Toxic male? You have no idea. Everyone is implicated in this wrenching tale of grappling with an unspeakable act that somehow demands the radical idea of compassion for those who have hurt us most.*

X: You're making this up. It can't be true. Shut up, there's no way! I just saw you. We were just...

Y: It was like I was there and not there. I wasn't me. Me wasn't I. I was mechanical. And, the weird part, when I took the knife out, it made no sound. No sound at all. I thought there'd be a sound. It felt like there was supposed to be a sound. (*shwlop's* with his mouth). You know something like that. But, no. Nothing. Just blood. Not much at first. But then the neck; yeah, that made a sound (*crack*).

X: You can't be—ugh; I think I'm going to vomit (*reaches*).

The writing is dizzying. You might throw up, too. But this isn't the desensitized made for TV kind of squeamishness; it's the unsettling feeling that in getting to know these people, you bear the responsibility for their horror and pain.

The title of Modern Greek no longer belongs to a Panera salad.

And the final speech from X is too good to excerpt. Just read it.

Five Stars. If you can take it.

Oak Tree

Scene I: The stage is bare save for a large structure resembling a tree back stage left, lights up and X (man, late 20s/early 30s) is standing, center stage, looking aimlessly at audience when Y (man, late 20s/early 30s) runs from stage left bumping into X who is startled by the contact. "/" indicate where two characters are speaking at the same time, or when one cuts another off.

X: What did you do?

Y: I can't explain it.

X: What is this? What happened?

Y: I can't explain it.

X: What do you mean? What'd you do?

Y: I can't explain it, but I can explain, I can explain...what snapped.

X: OK what is it? There's--what's all over you?

Y: I was with her again.

X: Who?

Y: In the car.

X: What are you talking about?

Y: She and I. We.

X: Tell me. Help me understand what is going on.

Y: We were sitting there. I absent-mindedly, yet calm, gazed over the cliff. I was avoiding the situation of two people in a car, at night, alone. Something was going to happen. Up by that overlook. It felt that between these two people, something was supposed to happen. Do you ever get that feeling? What she expected and what I

expected were worlds apart. She pulled over to show me her favorite view of the city.

And.

X: And? And...What?

Y: I don't know.

X: Who was with you? Where were you coming from?

Y: We were at Albie's. Had a drink. ...Okay, I had two—but that's it!

X: So you're drinking again?

Y: That's not the point.

X: How?

Y: It, they—the drinks—they had nothing to do with this.

X: With what?

Y: I'm telling you! We pulled over. Sat and watched the fading day turned rising night.

And then I had this urge. I suddenly was attracted to her, when I knew I shouldn't be, to this woman. But, I had never seen this view before. It was breathtaking. Have you been up to that spot? At night? On a clear, open lightless night? On a night where you can feel the outer reaches of the solar system? I image that when the air is so crisp, it's because we are tilted closer to space...62 miles, straight up then the abyss. We're given a glimpse of what it must feel like to be truly outside, devoid of the comforts of home, as if it were only 60, 50, 10 miles max.

X: Sounds terrifying. What spot?

Y: But assuring. I felt an overwhelming confidence in the face encroaching adrenaline and fear.

X: It sounds like the drink.

Y: We were up by the cliff overlooking the rundown quarry, back by I-24. Got off on our way. She wanted to show me this spot, and talk to me about...before taking me home.

What did she want to talk about?

X: And what happened?

Y: I snapped.

X: Snapped?

Y: Something inside of me.

X: So, what did you do?

Y: It was ethereal, otherworldly. I'm not even attracted to her, to women.

X: Right?

Y: Right. Especially her. But up there, up by that big old oak tree, the moon was rising. You know how it does that thing, just above the horizon—early in the night? Maybe she felt for me, felt bad, felt sorry; I felt nothing.

X: Perspective. Or something. It's big.

Y: It was huge! I've never seen it so big, and the tree—as if Van Gogh just packed up his brush and canvas, biking home with the next would-be masterpiece. And I was /

X: / Did you try to kiss her? Would you tell me who this goddamn woman is?

Y: No, I did not.

X: Who is it then?

Y: I felt nothing, toward her. It doesn't matter. *(To himself, under breath)* It was Traci.

X: What'd you say?

Y: She's a regular at Albie's. I think. You know her. You've seen her.

X: Do I? What does she look like?

Y: Dead. She looks dead now.

X: What!

Y: Listen, I'm telling you I don't know what happened. I have no idea what—I was someone else. Watching, me.

X: She's dead?

Y: I saw all this beauty, elegance and all of the sudden she, and the sky, glittered with tiny balls of light, and the moon, that colossal tree. This oak tree is godly. It must be hundreds of years old, statuesque.

X: Stay focused. What happened to her! Did you...?

Y: And they say the branches are just like the roots below, growing upward, growing downward, in unison. Tandem.

X: What did you do to her? Tell me what you did.

Y: I have never. I was. I lost it and grabbed my small umbrella. For some reason I thought it would rain tonight. I took the umbrella and shoved it at her throat. She coughed. Gaspd. Must have broken her windpipe. My face, I was in complete disillusion. And I couldn't stop.

X: I don't believe what your saying. Just. Shut the fuck up.

Y: I'm not. Then there she was, in the driver's. And just a moment before, we were looking at this moon. How does it look so big? So massive, celestial. More than when it's full and way up in the sky. Next to the oak tree. You know oak trees, they have these trunks, no other tree has a trunk like an oak tree. And its leaves, they were yellowing, I could see it from the moonlight. And turning red, this burnt orange quickly changing red, a deep red. Vincent would have had a field day with this scene.

X: It's because of perspective. The moon is the same size on the horizon as it is way up high in the sky. Same moon. It's just an illusion. Wait. Why? Why did you punch her with your umbrella? You killed her! What is going on?

Y: I couldn't stop myself. I grabbed my knife and stabbed her in the chest. Repeatedly. You know the one I carry. Dad gave it to me. Wanted me to be a boy scout, a real stand up man's man. I hate the thing, fucking hate. That. Fucking. Knife.

X: (*Hysterical*) The what? I'm familiar. It's sentimental. But stop! You didn't. Why are you telling me this?

Y: But then—god there was blood, so much blood. She didn't even scream. Obviously, I see now, it must have been because of the windpipe, crushed. I just kept forcing that silly little boy-scout knife into different parts of her. Her neck. It was so thin that I nearly missed. So sleek and pale, it was beauty I can't explain. Have you ever seen a neck so supple? And then I grabbed her head and I, I just broke it. I snapped it to the side, real hard. I've never seen a neck so white in comparison to the dark red drops that squirt from her chest and dripped from my knife. You know that one with the little Swiss army cross? I broke that too. Must have been from the—I guess I cracked it on...something. She went lifeless. Like that (*snaps his fingers*).

X: You're making this up. It can't be true. Shut up, there's no way! I just saw you. We were just...

Y: It was like I was there and not there. I wasn't me. Me wasn't I. I was mechanical. And, the weird part, when I took the knife out, it made no sound. No sound at all. I thought there'd be a sound. It felt like there was supposed to be a sound. (*shwlop's* with his

mouth). You know something like that. But, no. Nothing. Just blood. Not much at first. But then the neck; yeah, that made a sound (*crack*).

X: You can't be—ugh; I think I'm going to vomit (*reaches*).

Y: I need to tell you this. When I started moving her out of the car. Because right then I snapped, again, snapped into something out of body, and right then, I knew I had to do something. So I took this, this dead Traci, lifeless out of the car. I was calm. Unnaturally calm.

X: You buried her? You can't be serious?

Y: I had to get rid of the body! So I dug a hole, next to the oak tree. Dug it deep. Well, deep enough, so many roots. And rolled her in. The whole time, I barely broke a sweat. I was automatic. It felt like I wasn't in...control of me. But I was doing it, I was controlling everything, I knew exactly what to do. They'll be looking for me.

X: By the tree? Who will be looking for you?

Y: Who? Who do you think? Her cat! I mean, probably, eventually. But no, the police, you idiot, her employer when she doesn't show up to Albie's, the people who saw me leave with her. Her family, if she's got any.

X: She works at Albie's? I thought—wasn't she a regular?

Y: Regularly works there. You know this. You know her.

X: I've never been to Albie's.

Y: You were there yesterday. With me. You left. I think you left. I don't remember.

X: We were there together?

Y: Weren't we? We were. They kicked us out—86'ed. I don't remember much, but I remember that...and, burying her.

X: What are you going to do? What are *we* going to do?

Y: That's why I came to you!

X: So all of this...all of this is blood and dirt?

Y: Blood and dirt.

X: Blood and dirt. (*X looks down at his hands*). We buried her.

Y: We buried her. Here. Right there, under that tree. Look at it. Look at that tree and that moon.

X: What did I do?

Scene II: The scene takes place in a dream-like state, not exactly reality, not exactly a dream. Stage setting same as in Scene I. X & Y walk on stage from stage right, X clearly agitated and Y following lethargically behind. The action takes place in a dream-state not exactly a dream, but not exactly a reality, existing in a plain beyond the real.

X: DAD? Dad! Where the f-

Y: Why are you looking for Dad?

X: Dad? Where are you?

Y: He's not here. You know he's not here.

X: He's around here somewhere. DAD! (*To Y*) We did something. Right? You have your way of keeping him close, this is mine.

Y: This is pointless, what do you think you'll get from bringing *him* back?

X: God damn it let me deal with that. I need to figure out how to *deal* with *this*. And discuss it with the man. (*To nothingness*) Are you here?

Y: Discuss?

X: Need to address some past grievances.

Y: Hmm. Are you sure about that?

X: It's about time.

Pause.

Y: Fine. Let's bring him back, if you think it's time.

X: I'm sure he's here. He's supposed to be here. Dad! Where /

A man pulls a rolling grill onto the stage from stage right, stopping at mid stage right with his back to X & Y and a spatula in hand, grilling food.

Man: / What're you yelling about? I'm right here.

X & Y stop searching and turn to realize the man is there. X & Y tense up, demonstrating the significant new presence in the world.

X: Hello, sir.

/

Y: Hello, sir

Man: I've been here the whole time. Now keep it down. Gonna' upset your mother...and the neighbors. You know how they get. *(Doesn't look up from grill but motions with spatula at temple to signal crazy)*. We didn't invite them. Ornery types. So, what do you want?

Y: *(To X)* Yea, what do you want?

X: I need to talk to you. About what happened.

Man: Son, listen closely: something always happens. Now what you do want?

X: I think I made a mistake.

Man: Burger or dog?

Y: *(To X)* You know it's not the time to discuss that mistake. *(To Man)* What?

Man: I said, "What do you want?" I've been cooking burgers and dogs all day, for the cookout. Well not all day. People should be coming over soon, not the neighbors, but the guests we invited. See, first I did the lawn, the grass was practically coming out of my ears. Mowed it corner to corner. Then those goddamn weeds. First thing you should

know about being a true man, keep your grass cut, and green. You can tell everything you need to know about a man by the way he keeps his lawn. Very important.

X: No, Dad, listen I need to talk to you, now.

Man: (*Yelling*) Son! We *are* talking. So what'll it be, burger or dog?

Y: (*To X*) You can't just jump in on this like that.

X: (*To Man*) I don't/

Y: / I'll take a hot dog.

Man: Good choice. I'll grab the mustard.

X: I don't want mustard.

Man: Another thing you can tell about a man. (*Holds two fingers up mouthing the number, two*). Man's gotta' take mustard on a dog. It's down right blasphemous not to put mustard on your hotdog. Here, take it.

Y: (*Taking mustard, to X*) Bring him up to speed. He won't get it here if you don't.

X: (*To Y*) You want to "bring him up to speed"? If it wasn't for your pocketknife outburst, we might not have to be here; you're the reason we're here anyway.

Y: Before you go blaming the masses, let's get this straight—you're the reason we're here.

The mental gymnastics of talking to our dead father are the conjuring of your own doing.

I'm just here for moral support.

X: Can I proceed?

Man: "May..."

Y: You may proceed.

X: It's because of you.

Y: (*To X*) Stay focused through this part. It's time for this.

X: It was you; you realize that right?

Man: Me what?

X: The reason Mom isn't inside taking a nap, the reason she's gone.

Man: She's just inside, actually should probably go wake her up, guests are on the way.

X: No, they aren't. And she's not inside. She's not napping.

Man: Okay, that's enough.

Y: Is this the third thing to know about how to be a *real* man?

Man: Number three is to treat your lady with respect. So...we let her rest. Now, we should wake her up.

Y: Ha!

Man: But, you're learning. *(To himself)* It's about fucking time. *(To X&Y)* You know, as a kid—always thought you weren't getting it, bit...funny. But I knew, figured you'd come around sooner or later. Didn't fully expect you to, but...Hand me that beer, almost out.

Pause.

(Cont.) Let's not bring up such things. You know how your mother and I detest such hurtful conversation. Look around you, boy. Enjoy this barbeque. Fresh cut grass. I even did some prepping for the racking, well pre-racking. Since we'll have to deal with all those gargantuan oak leaves come fall. It'll come sooner than you think, always does. And our mighty tree never takes a year off. She always drops them big, brown, and in tremendous quantity. Hope you're up for it. Right now, the birds are out chirping their little lungs out. Sky's clear. You can see straight up to the spy planes. They're up there, watching. Not a cloud in sight. Not a one up there to taint that Keys' water blue ocean above us. This is what it's all about, my boy. Don't forget that.

X: Stop talking about her like she's here. None of that is real. It took me years to put it together. Mom's not inside, Dad.

Man: You used to love trying to climb that tree. (*Laughing*) I'd say, "Good luck! One day you'll reach those branches!" You'd need a fucking fire fighter's ladder to get up on those branches. Never quit though. Might have been the only admirable effort I ever saw in you. Not like trying to throw a baseball (*laughing*). Sorry, I mean (*mimicking an un-athletic toss*). I mean, what was that (*laughing*).

Y: Is he done?

X: Mom's not inside.

Y: She's gone. Years ago.

Man: (*Curtly*) Listen here, son, I won't say it again.

X: You took her (*stops abruptly*)...Do you even remember what it was like? When you first felt your mother's love? You must remember. Maybe you can't, not here anyway, not anymore. I can, or I think I can from a memory, or maybe a photo of a moment, a memory of a photo. There, in the bathtub, rolls of baby-fat up and down my plump arms and legs, laughing. She with a bar of soap the size of my forearm, scrubbing carefully. I'm not sure of the point of this ivory square. So I'm nervous, confused by the warm water and bubbles. But I'm happy, I have no idea of pain, or loss, just bubbles. Eventually the tear-no-more baby bubbles are nearly overflowing the claw foot tub. She blows them into my face. It makes me laugh harder. I still know no pain. She loves me in to way any other human can possibly love another person. She bathes me. I don't even know enough yet to know that I need to bathe myself, let alone have the capability to accomplish such a feat. She loves me unconditionally, wholly.

Man: I didn't love you?

X: That's all gone. You took that away.

Y: How long did you keep it secret?

Man: You already seem to know the answers to everything. Why are you asking me the questions?

X: *(To Y)* We were on our way to tee-ball when I found out. Of course, I didn't know what I found out, then. *(To Man)* Fucking tee-ball, Dad, in the back of that old champagne-colored 1980 Mercedes station wagon.

Y: *(To X)* Putting the pieces together now.

X: I tried to open up the back to put my water and glove in the back. You never wanted anything dirty in that car.

Y: *(Mimicking Man, pointing finger)* No eating in the car! Don't touch anything! Wipe off your pants! Knock your boots before you get in!

X: But you were so visibly nervous and angry that I tried to open the back. *(To himself)* I shouldn't be putting my dirty glove in the trunk? *(To Man)*. It was a contradiction to all normal behavior before that day. But there I stood with a feeling of split confusion, and in you I sensed embarrassment, shame, anger. And that's when I saw it, the first time. That painting of a, it was a...CLOWN!

Y: A clown in a tuxedo.

X: I was nine. The first time I saw that painting. The first time I saw you caught for something I didn't even know I was catching you doing.

X: Did Mom ever see it? How would you explain it to her?

Y: Did you have that same caught-with-your-pants-down look on your face when she saw it?

X: Is that the fourth thing to know about being a *man*, have a painting of a clown in a tuxedo. Or is this the exception to number three, treat your lady with respect unless you want something else, someone younger, someone...different?

Y: That must be it. (*Holds up four fingers*) A man needs what a man needs. (*Mouthing the number four*).

X: What was your plan; wait for Mom to find out, have her leave you? Coward. Would that make it easier?

Y: I guess it didn't work out. Because she (*makes a snapping neck motion with rope about head*).

X: (*Looks at Y as if too far*). I realized it all the other night. When we went to her gallery show, and I saw that tuxedo donning clown.

Y: I don't know why you even agreed to go.

X: As soon as I walked it, front and center. That clown, the reason Mom's gone.

Man: You saw Traci?

X: I left. Went to Albie's.

Y: And guess what?

X: I took something from you.

Pause.

Y: And now a woman is dead.

Man: (*To X*) How'd you do it?

X: I...

Man: Isn't this what you wanted, to talk? Well, boy, talk.

X: I can't explain what happened.

Y: (*To X*) But, you can explain how you snapped.

X: I lost control.

Man: Again?

X: What?

Man: This isn't novel, son. You are your mother's son. This will happen again as it happened before. So how did you? What did you do to her? Forget it. I may have left your mother for Traci, but she made me whole. One day you'll understand. (*Struggling*) And we were...I don't...you're mother had her issues, as do you. I can't—won't be responsible, for what she did. (*Switches quickly to anger again*) And you shouldn't hold me responsible! (*Upset again*). I only did my best. To be happy.

X: Like father, like son, right?

Man: Look around you. There are no blue skies, no late summer sun. There is darkness around you, boy. None of it matters anyhow, we've been here before and we'll be here together again.

Y: That's the fifth thing about being a man.

X: Like father, like son.

Scene III: *The stage is set the same as Scene I and II, the grill remains at mid stage right, but now there is a U-shaped bar jutting out into center stage with Chuck (bartender portly and evident of a "not so nice" bar flare) The bar is surrounded with a few small tables and chairs for patrons. Not all tables and chairs are occupied, the place is practically, but not, empty. An old red neon sign "Albie's Bar and Grille" hangs from stage right, flickering on with the loud sound of ionized electrons that fades the same time the sign's light becomes constant as Y storms in from stage right and sits down next to an*

old man, orders whiskey neat. X is trailing closely behind, head down carrying an umbrella at his side.

Y: Chuck, whiskey.

Chuck is drying glasses with a white towel. Looks at Y long and hard, then slowly pulls out the whiskey to pour two glasses, one of Y and one for X.

X: *(To Chuck)* Please and thank you. *(To Y)* The nerve. I can't believe it.

Y: It's been going on for that long.

X: That long. How didn't I realize it until now?

Y: Since the painting in the trunk?

X: How could I be so blind?

Y: All this time.

X & Y pick up their glasses, contemplating the decision to imbibe. Bartender stares at them, drying glasses again, curious if they will actually drink. X & Y eventually drink their whole glasses, in unison and one gulp. Chuck looks down, in disbelief but without judgment. Momentary pause.

Chuck: Another?

X & Y pausing in the guarded realization they are drinking, again.

X: Pour it.

Chuck pours two more.

Y: That bastard really is /

Old Man: / Excuse me, son.

X: Help you?

Old Man: Do you have the time?

Y: Huh?

Old Man: I'm sorry to interrupt. I was asking for the time.

X: It's 8...8:47. PM.

Old Man: Thanks.

Y: *(To X)* Please tell this man to mind the room.

X: *(To Y)* It's nothing. He just wants the time.

Old Man: What's that?

X: Nothing.

Old Man: I never *had* a watch my whole life.

X: What?

Y: *(To X)* What's he talking...?

Old Man: Well, that's not true.

X: Can I help you with something, sir? I'm kind of...having a...

Old Man: I have had a watch.

Y: *(To Chuck)* What's this guy talking about?

X: *(To Y)* Just, hold on a second.

Old Man: I've had watches, three to be exact. But, I've never worn a watch, in my life.

Y: And...?

X: I'm sorry. You see, I just found out some...troubling information. So, if you would.

Old Man: Ah, I see. Again, pardon me.

Y: Will you tell this guy to ([can it])? We need to do something about Dad. *(Y—he cannot see him)*.

Old Man: I'm going to be eighty, next month. *(Holds his hands far apart)*. Abundance.

X: *(To Y)* Lighten up. *(To Old Man)* At that point, who has the time?

Old Man: What?

X: For watches, who has the time for time anyway?

Old Man: Oh (*chuckles*) Well, I've just always been lucky enough to have friendly people like you so far, to give me the time. Let me tell you though /

Y: Oh Jesus...

Old Man: / I have actually had three watches, in my life. See, I used to play /

Y: Is this guy serious? (*To X*) Can we get back to (*X hushes Y before he can finish*).

Old Man: / baseball. College ball. Are you a baseball fan?

Y: Nope.

X: Eh, not particularly.

Old Man: Well. Okay. But, I was good. Won three league championships—sophomore, junior, AND senior.

X: Is that right?

Old Man: Gave me a watch each time.

X: And you didn't keep 'em, didn't want to keep the time.

Old Man: Who's got time for time, right? I gave the first one to my sister, the second to my older brother, kept the last one for myself.

Y: (*To X*) Thought he never had a watch?

Old Man: But I kept that last one upon my mantel. Like a time clock, a mantel piece, like a mantel clock. That is until...I'm going to be eighty, next month. How about that?

X: Abundance.

Old Man: YES!

Y: (*To X*) All right. Wrap this up—don't have time for this.

Old Man: The archangels and abundance are on my side. My son stole the last watch from me. But who needs it.

X: I guess he did?

Old Man: Maybe. I gave him what he needed though, everything a child needs. I fed him, I clothed him, supported him. Did he have to take that watch? I tried, *(to X)* son. Tried real hard to love him, treat him like he deserved. I can't put my finger on it, but there was just something about him, eternally...unsettling.

X: What do you mean?

Old Man: *(cont.)* It's not that I didn't love him. I was young. I didn't know what it meant to have to care for someone other than myself. We tried, god we tried. But we were, you know, the way I was, the way we were raised. No other option. I was 19, with a full-on chil who, truth be told, I didn't even know how to hold. The nurse had to show me, more than once. *(Emulating a nurse instructing how to hold a baby)* "It's like this, see. Hold his head. Yep, support his head. Cradle his back. Not so firm. Just, okay, just let him rest, like so. Right in your arms." I thought that most of it, or at least part of it would come, I guess naturally. *(Chuckles)*. It did not come easy, and we made ALL our mistakes on him. Did the best I could, but I learned from my father, and he his father before, and his father before him. All of these men, they were just trying to get by, make a better life for their sons. But that learned inability to care, it's passed down through our cells, the memories stored in DNA. All they knew was war, depression, and famine. All I knew was baseball. How was I to care for another living being when all I knew was, a game. She was pregnant. And like I said, no other options. Nine months go by much faster than you think when you don't know whether you're making the right choice. Before I knew it,

I was...a father, to this little boy. I was only a little boy myself. All of the sudden there was this little, tiny, child with small fingernails and big green eyes, no hair. He yawned, constantly, and I thought, "You and me both, buddy." I was tired of it before it even got started. I didn't know what to do, or how to do it. Who knows what's right and wrong, right? I just did my best. Maybe that wasn't good enough.

X: I, I can't say, sir. Maybe it wasn't?

Old Man: I'm sorry, I don't mean to consume your evening—what with my ramblings-on about a child I see no more, feel like I never knew. But, I like you, son. Good listener. Ya know most people, when I talk to them, they say: "Well, it was nice *listening* to you."

Never, "It was nice *talking* to you." I guess at this point I don't have time to listen to other people, too much to say. I used to be busy, trying to make up for what I lost. The time I lost having to start a life not my own. Distracting myself from what I had by seeking out lost potentials...with things that could have been, that weren't. People I could have loved, but who didn't love me. People who were in love with me, but whom I didn't even know.

X: I had a father once. I guess we all do, did.

Old Man: Was he good, a good man?

X: He was like, well like you, always in search of the next better thing. Without ever knowing what that better thing was. Left my mother, mid way through. Unfinished job. Someone else. Dead now. Physically. But after tonight, he's been dead to me for years.

Y has finished his drink, and orders another. Drinks it down fast. Orders another.

Old Man: I...tonight?

X: Years later, I tried to make it right with the only person left from his life. Myself aside. Stopped in to her show. Thought it was the right thing to do. Trying to forgive him

for leaving. Wanted to reconnect with him, through her. Maybe I wanted to see if she was better than, Mom. See what he left us for; she had to be better, right?

Old Man: Oh, well, I don't know. Can't say. I just, I'll let you do your own searching.

Y: *(Starts talking to himself, becoming noticeably intoxicated)* Sitting here, talking about time and watches, and children. *(Turns toward X and Old Man)* Are you done talking about time yet? *(Back to himself)*. Am I supposed to feel sorry for this old guy? Time. So you lost your time. You didn't shine when your light was bright? Maybe you turned on the wrong torch. I won't feel sorry for this. Time is what we make of it. And you squandered it, royally. Time is relative. It speeds up. It slows down, when you're moving fast enough. Sure, maybe you moved too fast by becoming a father. But you lost the chance in the matter, to make all of this time, work for you. You can debate that it's linear. Or that it's cyclical, repeating on endless loops for eternity. But above everything, time is constant, that's for sure. True. It's long. It stretches. Time is persistent. No matter how much time, things don't change. People stay the same, regardless of time. Whether or not you wanted to be present in that time is your own damn quarrel to fight. But you chose avoidance and disregard, as support and love. Ignoring the time you had.

X finishes his drink. Orders another. Drinks it fast. Orders another.

Y: *(Cont.)* Dad used to say life is like baseball. There's time, but not really. We move about this life, time passes, but do we ever actually recognize it. Or does it just move through us as a breeze does on a warm day in July. You can't feel it, but are comforted by it. Time moves too slowly for us to perceive it. If you call "time-out" in baseball, there's no clock to stop. Maybe he was right about one thing. Maybe I'll feel differently about

time when I'm eighty. But it's certain that by that time, it will have already passed me by, unable to get back the present moments I wished I could have been there to enjoy.

X: Maybe we're all doomed to repeat the past wrongs our predecessors committed, unable to recognize the fallibility of our actions until long after we've committed them.

Y: *(To X)* I can't take this self-indulgent attempt at releasing the misgivings of older men before us any more. Why should we let him off the hook? Because we're both here, getting drunk? It seems like a rash decision to just absolve him of his sins. While we're at it, should we just *(making the sign of the cross)* *In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti*, forgive Dad. Don't forget what he did/has been doing, all these years.

Traci walks into the bar—searching, eyes land on X & Y.

Traci: There you are. Why did you leave the show?

X: *(Drunkenly slurs)* There she is.

Y: Get out of here.

X: What do you want? Why are you here?

Y: *(To X)* Don't indulge.

Traci: I came looking for you, figured you might come back here.

X: What gave you that inclination?

Traci: Are you serious? It's the closest bar to the gallery, for miles. Hi, I'm Traci remember. *(To herself)* You Dad's ex-wife, I suppose. Widow? *(Ponders)*. Friend of yours, remember?

X: Okay. Yes, hi. Here I am. Thanks, and goodbye, you can leave now.

Traci: I just want to help. Why did you leave? Was it the wine? I know those art shows can be a bit...unwelcoming. But you didn't have to just run out. *(Pause)* God, I hate them

too: all of those (*using hyperbolic hand gestures*) socialites standing around, with their big glasses of chardonnay—calling it, vino—complimenting you with self-masturbation of their own similar yet highly superior work. Was it the wine? Did you leave 'cause of that?

Y: Not the wine.

Traci: Are you sure? Because now you're here, drinking again.

X: I'm fine. Thanks. Please leave.

Traci: I think I should call a cab.

Y: Best, not.

Traci: No, no I'm calling a cab, you should go home.

X: Don't! Please.

Traci: Then talk to me. Why'd you leave? You agreed to come, remember?

Y: I don't.

X: Yeah well, I just—had to do...this, instead. Have you met...(to *Old Man*) what's your name? He's got a fascinating story about how his shit son stole his watch.

Old Man: I'll give you some privacy.

Old Man turns away and gets up to move to a table away from the bar, recognizing the disrespect shown by X about their conversation and Old Man's opening up to X.

Y: (To X) I guess we're done talking about time.

X: And so what? I didn't agree to stay. I came, saw what I needed to see, and left. But, you staying here, checking in...it's tired, I'm only getting agitated the longer you stay.

Traci: Listen I know what it's like. I want to help. How can I help?

Y: What the fuck you know about what it's like?

Traci: You're father, he would talk to me and tell me about you, about your mother.

Y: That's enough, Chuck can you get her out of here?

Chuck looks up, decidedly continues to dry glasses.

Traci: He tried to tell him about how much he wanted you to be okay. He would tell me about you, and what it's like, what he thought it must be like for you.

X: Sounds like he had a lot to say. Did you get to the part where...never mind.

Traci: The part where you found your mother?

X: *(To himself)* This isn't worth it. *(To Traci)* Fine, you really want to go there?

Y: *(To X)* Don't tell her.

X: *(To Y)* Why not?

Y: *(To X)* She doesn't get it. She wouldn't understand. Don't let her in.

X: *(To Traci)* It wasn't the wine, not the people. Thing is, Traci, you don't get it. You won't understand. As much as you try to comfort me, and be the stand-up friend, widow to my father, it won't change what happened. You can keep inviting me to your shows, call to check in on me, follow me to Alfie's. I won't go to any more, I won't answer, I'm finished with him, and you. I wasn't ever your problem and I'm certainly not now.

Pause.

X: You won't be able to help.

Y: *(To X)* Not in the way she thinks anyway.

X: Because you didn't find out your father was cheating on your mother and left her alone to hang herself so her nine-year old kid could walk in looking for dinner only to find her with blue lips, eyes open, little red dots of petechial hemorrhage. Learned that little tid-bit term from the police reports, pretty young. And you didn't have to try to get her down from the railing. Try because she weighed more than I expected and even with the adrenaline I was too short to lift her up and stop the hanging all because your dad was

fucking, you. You won't, and it's even more unlikely that you would understand that I realized all of this when I saw...your painting tonight.

Traci: My painting?

X: The clown, in the tuxedo.

Traci: So you left because of my painting?

X: *(To Y)* Let's make a run for it. Let's get out of here and leave this all behind. Let's leave the drinking, the widow, the painting, watches, Dad and all this bull shit. Let's leave it and never come back. This is our chance. It's time.

Y turns to X, Old Man, and Traci to speak.

Y: I've got a better idea.

X pulls out the Swiss Army Pocket Knife, stabs it into the bar frightening all but Chuck.

Chuck: That's it—you're out! Get the fuck outta here.

Y: Fuck you, I don't want to stay here anyway.

Traci: Hey, hey, hey. Let's all just calm down.

Chuck: This piece of shit comes here, pulls out a damn knife. He's gone.

Traci: Will you all just calm down!

X: I'm done; I'm gone.

Y: I'm leaving. Ready.

Traci: *(To X&Y)* Let me take you home. Come on, I'll give you a ride.

Y: *(To X)* Fuck it, let's take the ride.

X: *(Looks at Traci, contemplates the offer, hesitates a long while)* Where are you parked?

X & Y and Traci walk out, X first, followed by Traci. Y finishes his drink and X's drink, grabs the knife from the bar, then the umbrella and follows them out of Albie's.

Scene IV: The stage is set as it appeared in Scene I. The only lighting is from headlights of a vehicle positioned at stage right pointed toward stage left, and at the tree, where X & Y are located. X is down on his hands and knees. Y stares blankly at the audience.

X: Help me dig.

X stops digging to look up at Y.

X: Help me dig. Why aren't you helping me dig?

Y comes to, notices X digging.

Y: We need to dig deeper.

They both dig, feverously. And keep digging. And digging. And digging. Until, finally, X stops, seemingly satisfied with the hole, followed by Y upon realizing X has stopped.

X: So.

Y: So what?

X: Have you come to terms with it yet?

Y: Come to terms? With...this?

X: With what you did.

Y: *(Glaring at X contemplatively)* Me? What I did? You mean what you did. You did this. You created this whole mess...*(gesturing at the digging)*, this hole, everything.

X: *(Brushing Y off)* Okay. I see. You're not going to take *any* responsibility in this. Got it.

Y: What responsibility should I take? What did I do here? I'm just a part, of you, of us. I may be real to you, but I am not *real*. You, my good man, are Creator and Destroyer. You are the Mis-placer of Blame. Killer Almighty! You are the one who holds on to past wrongs, which have nothing to do with you. You, who have passed judgment and who took a seat at the murderous table, the only player in this game...The Clown in a Tuxedo.

Pause.

Y: Have *you* come to terms with it?

X stares deeply at Y without breaking his gaze. He appears ready to be disagreeable. But then X shifts his attention away, appearing to accept and admit his actions are his own. Then turns directly to the audience. At this time the lights dim to black behind him, engulfing Y leaving the stage, as X walks toward front stage center under a spotlight.

X: I passed by the old house the other day. Where we used to live. It's set back no more than 200 feet from the street, just far enough for a small lawn. Before, we finally called it our "old house," pulling out of the driveway saying and waving, "Goodbye House!" onto another structure with a roof and walls, rooms for pissing and shitting and sleeping, and living as a family, with a father and his new—Traci. In the front lawn, that old Oak Tree, its outstretched leafy limbs gave shade and reprieve from the blistering summer days. I was now tall enough to climb that tree. And she was still standing, able to bear my weight upon its branches. I climbed as high as I could, just beyond the point of feeling safe from how much potential for a broken arm that would most certainly result if I fell. It was at this height that I could see a park down the block across the road I used to board the school bus every weekday morning at 6:17 AM. And at this height above the tree line of the neighbors' younger trees, I could see the park with its playground. The place I would escape to, and spend hours—losing track of time in jubilation. Swings, monkey-bars, slides, a merry-go-round. The old playground and metallic jungle gym pieces on which I used to play "pirates," "cowboys and Indians," and "cops and robbers," was torn up and made new with plastic green and tan slides. A soft rubber mat covered those hallowed grounds which now lacked the hard grit of wooden splintery mulch that stuck to the palms of your hand when trying to swing so high you might make it all the way around the top bar, only to jump off and see how far you could fly before tumbling harshly to your hands and knees. Where does the old equipment go? Where do the pieces end up, in

a graveyard for swings and slides, thrown sloppily into a heap? Do the builders dismantle those adventures I cherished along with the removal of our metal-framed playground? I have come to terms with this.

X removes the red pocket knife from his pocket, looks at it for a moment, looks back out into the audience, opens the knife and violently stabs himself in the stomach. At this time, the curtains fall.

THE END.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I have no resume or career history in theatre of which to speak. Reared by parents who's focal parenting discouraged creativity and passions stifled for profession, religion, and conservative success. I spent my formative years under the watchful eye and care of a grandmother while mom and dad worked tirelessly to support four boys. This wonderful woman sang, danced, instructed, and taught me to love life and chase creative outlets in secret. I wrote "Oak Tree" after a vivid dream about my brother committing something unspeakable. He was confused, surprised in his actions. "Oak Tree" is purposed with highlighting the pain and turmoil present in those mentally ill persons against whom we, as civilized others, issue death sentences for they are largely deemed unsuitable for society.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Sean Patrick Smith is a playwright living in Brooklyn, New York. He studied Business and Chinese at Villanova University School of Business, before entering law school at Widener University School of Law (now, The Delaware Law School). Sean Patrick has informally studied and wrote plays since 2018. OAK TREE is his first publication, but he is currently writing THE DOORMAKER, a two-person, one Act play about the struggles of indecision and the ramifications of doing, or not doing, sure to include trippy dreamscapes; as well as, HOLY LANDS, a play about the interfamilial struggles after the loss of a mother and potential gain of a plot of land by the sea. The first planned performance of OAK TREE was scheduled to appear in a DIY Play House in Bedford-Stuyvesant, prior to the wholly unanticipated halt of the world from the COVID-*

19 pandemic. The performance is hopefully expected after a vaccine arrives.