

REV SHAW

But if Walt Whitman were alive today,
what song would he hear America singing?
(begins walking through the congregation)

When I turn on the television, all I hear is the music of easy sexuality and
relaxed morals.

I hear rock and roll

and the endless chant of pornography.

And I ask myself, "Why does our Lord allow this?"

We know God has the power to turn all those records and books and videos
into one big fiery cinder like...

(clapping his hand behind a sleeping boy)

THAT! (boy jumps)

But he doesn't. And why? ... God is testing us.

He's watching to see whether we'll choose His path.

And that is why, every day, we must ask ourselves. "Have I done the
RIGHT thing?"

SHAW

It was frightening enough

when she was running around with Chuck Cranston.

Now, she is out in the middle of the night,

with that punk who's campaigning against me and the entire Town Council.

How long can you keep defending her?

SHAW

I'm standing before you this morning with a very troubled heart. You see, my
friends, as you minister, I should be helping you to find the joy in your lives;
last night I realized that I haven't been doing that. After all, we all remember
that terrible night five years ago when the lives of four young people ended
on the Potawney Bridge. Everyone in this community lost someone that night
- a child, a neighbor, a friend. I—Vi and I - we lost our son.

VI

Shaw, you did a good thing this morning.

SHAW

I'm still not sure it was the right thing.

VI

I think it comes close.

(Pause)

I've missed you. I've missed us.

SHAW

Where is she?

VI

She told me she was going to Wendy Jo's.

(As SHAW reaches for the phone) Don't bother calling. She's not there.

SHAW

Did you know this?

VI

No. I did not.

SHAW

So, how does it feel, Vi? Now that she's lying to you?

VI

I'm not saying anything until I hear an explanation from her.

SHAW

How long can you keep defending her?

VI

I'm not defending her. We're not on opposite sides here, are we?

Or are we?

VI

Shaw, she doesn't mean that.

SHAW

Stop taking her side! She has to start answering for herself.

SHAW

We're losing her, Vi. She has become willful and obstinate.

VI (Kindly)

Like her father.

SHAW

I am her spiritual guardian.

VI

You used to be her friend.

SHAW

I don't understand what's happening. I don't know what to do anymore.

VI

Yes, you do.

ETHEL

Ren, honey, if I don' say something now I'm gonna bust.

REN

What's there to say? I lost. The Council voted, and I lost.

ETHEL

Sweetie, you never had a prayer.

REN

That's not funny, Mom.

ETHEL

I promise you: Shaw Moore had those votes locked up
before he walked in here tonight.

REN (Startled.)

You think he told them how to vote?

ETHEL

You can still sound shocked. I love that about you.

REN

But he's a man of God!

ETHEL

He's a man. And you were railroaded. ... Now listen, Reverend Moore said he
would reconsider if someone convinced him there was no danger in your
"raucous plans." Make him reconsider.

REN

Me?

REN(Referring to SHAW)

And him?

REN

When?

REN

But...!

REN

Mom!

ETHEL

You!

ETHEL

Yup

ETHEL

Now.

ETHEL

Ren!

ETHEL

Stop!

REN

What can I say I haven't already said? I read my speech, I thumped my Bible

ETHEL

You did everything but speak from your heart. (That stops REN)

REN

Reverend Moore is a really smart man.

ETHEL

So are you.

REN

But he's stubborn.

ETHEL

And you're not?

ETHEL

Ren, don't start! I don't want to move any more than you do.

I, too, wish your father hadn't left.

I, too, wish that things could be the way they were.

And we both wish I could be one of those strong single mothers who
suddenly becomes self sufficient!

But I'm not. ... That only happens in the movies!

ELEANOR

Vi, Vi, I made some of my Toll House cookies.

Now Ethel, dear, you just ask Lulu,
one taste of my cookies and you'll burn every recipe in your kitchen.

ELEANOR

Thank you, Lulu. Now let's consider new business.
Before we begin, I want to remind all our young people who have joined us
this evening that this meeting is convened to consider official town business.
Disturbances will not be tolerated. The floor is now open.

WES

Do you know how hard it was for me to get you that job at Dillingham's
Hardware Store? It's not even a month and you get fired!

LULU

Every day it's more bad news with you. ... Every day.

Everything you do makes people suspicious.

WES

Are you on drugs?

REN

No! But why don't you frisk me?

I'm sure you've already poked through everything in my room!

LULU

Now Ren, you need to apologize to Uncle Wes!

WES

Look, young man, I know that I'm not your father...

REN

You can say that again!

(WES slaps REN. LULU gasps.)

LULU

Pumpkin, hush, Don't say anything else ... please!

WES

Lulu!!! (That stops her.)

Right now, don't anyone say anything!

REN
What are you doing?
ARIEL
I'm answering the train.
I'm saying, "I can't wait for the day when I get onboard and leave Bomont!"
Try it.
REN
No, thanks. I just ate. ... You are really something.
ARIEL
Whaddya mean?
REN
I mean the whole package: Minister's kid, Chuck Cranston's girlfriend.
ARIEL
Guilty.
REN
Just a church goin' gal with some kicking red cowboy boots.
ARIEL
My daddy hates me wearing these boots.
(REN sits on the ground; ARIEL eventually sits nearby)
REN
And you love that, don't you? Getting up in his face?
ARIEL
That way he'll notice when I'm gone.
REN
Where're you gonna go?
ARIEL
College, for starters.
I've applied to some places my daddy doesn't even know about.
I wanna speak five languages and see the world. He wants me to teach
English Lit in Baylor County.
(Beat.)
They don't even speak English in Baylor County.
REN
I can't picture you as a teacher.
ARIEL
Thank you. Neither can I. I'll leave that to my daddy.
REN
He's a preacher, not a teacher.
ARIEL
When you're good at it, it's the same thing. And he used to be real good.
REN
What changed?

ARIEL
His mind. He closed it.
REN
I noticed.
ARIEL
He used to be so open, so inspiring.
I've seen him give people hope when hope was gone.
I've watched him change lives!
REN
If you love him so much, why do you wanna tick him off?
ARIEL
I didn't say I love him.
REN
Boy do I know what you mean. ... My dad ... (He shakes his head)
ARIEL
What happened there?
REN
He walked out. One day he just walked out the door. No 'good-bye'. Nothing.
ARIEL
Whew. I bet you've got lots to say to him.
REN
Lots.
ARIEL
Like what?
REN
(Suddenly self-conscious)
No, I couldn't...
ARIEL
Tell it to the train.... That's what I do.
(REN considers her suggestion. Then, in imitation of ARIEL 'S earlier wail,
he throws his head back, chases after an imaginary train and screams)
REN
Aah-h-h-h-h-hh.,! How can you be so stupid to leave Mom and me?
I... hate.. you!
(Spent, he drops to the ground near her; neither speaks)
ARIEL
I can't believe you're checking up on me. ... How come when I'm at home, you're
never interested in what I'm thinking or how I feel?
But the minute I walk out that door - wham!
Suddenly, you're the concerned parent of the year!

REN

You okay? You seem jumpy.

WILLARD

That's why I'm having a beer. Mama says I can have one beer or one cigarette, but if I have both I should never come home again.

REN

Willard, c'mon. What's up? You finally go out on a date with Rusty...

WILLARD

Hold on, hold on! Is this a date? **You** asked me to go for a ride. **You** told Ariel to invite Rusty. It's more like I'm on a date with you.

REN

And you look so handsome tonight.

WILLARD

Thank you. But you stuck me in the back seat with a crazy woman who won't stop moving and talking.

REN

She's excited to be with you.

WILLARD

Oh, well. Sure. That. But the problem is...

REN

Yes?

WILLARD

Between you and me?

REN

Uh-huh?

WILLARD (With difficulty)

I can't do it

REN

Oh. "It?" (WILLARD nods) You can't do "it?"

WILLARD

No, sir.

REN

Well, that's okay, Willard. It's only the first date.

WILLARD

Right.

REN

You don't have to do "it" on the first date.

WILLARD

Really? ... Well, that makes me feel a lot better.

REN

(Starts back to the dance floor.) Great! Then let's dance!

WILLARD

Dance! Dance?! What the heck do you think I'm talking about?

REN

When you said you couldn't do "it," I thought you meant...

WILLARD

What? (It dawns on him) Oh, that?!

Heck, any idiot can do that!

(Pointing to the dance floor) I can't do this! I can't dance

WILLARD

Smart-aleck, huh?

Listen, fella, around here you push somebody... they push back.

Next thing you know, you got...(Gets confused; forges ahead.)

.two people pushing. Get it?

REN (Emphatic)

Sir, you already are alone!

(That stops SHAW in his tracks. Long pause. REN realizes that his words have stung, deeply. Now calmly, kindly.)

We both are. You and me. We've both lost somebody. And even though people say they understand, they don't really. I bet you stop a hundred times a day and wonder "why?"

I do, I wonder why'd my Dad leave? Was it something I did? Something I didn't do? Could I have made him stay? Maybe I could bring him back?

But I can't.

(SHAW looks up)

But I don't have to tell you. You know what that's like

RUSTY

There were these four kids we all grew up with. And they were driving back from a big dance over in Baylor County. Now, maybe it was the rain that night, maybe they were being a little wild, but somehow they lost control of the car. It skidded across the bridge, crashed through the railing, and fell thirty-five feet into the Potawney River.

REN

Whoa. Did anybody survive? (RUSTY shakes her head "no.") Oh, god.

RUSTY

Yeah. And when the sheriff's office published the autopsy report it claimed there was alcohol and marijuana in their blood. Well! everybody in town went nuts.

RUSTY

Argh!

ARIEL

Let me guess. Willard's acting weird.

RUSTY

So, its not just me?

ARIEL

Rusty, you and Willard have been weird since kindergarten.

RUSTY

But tonight is different. This is the first time we've ever left Bomont together.

(Gasps at a sudden realization) Maybe we don't travel well.

ARIEL

. Rusty, it's just a car ride!

RUSTY

But that makes it like a first date, doncha see? Oh, I should've seen the signs. The whole way up here I had to do all the talking. All he said was, "Uh-huh, mmm-hmmm, uh-huh, mmm-hmmm."

You know what that means, doncha? My baby's in a panic!

ARIEL

Now, don't make yourself crazy. Come on. I'll dance with you.

RUSTY

If I could only find a guy who'd make the first move.

URLEEN

If I could only find a guy who - when he went to kiss me goodnight — would take the toothpick out of his mouth.

WENDY JO

If I could only find a guy.

URLEEN

OUUU ooo oooo ! You are so cute. Wendy Jo, isn't he sooo cute?

I bet he knows he's cute though, doncha think, Wendy Jo?

Oh, there he goes. Look at that ...Ouch! Oh, baby...! You got that sweet stuff...!

ARIEL

Come on! I was only teasing him.

RUSTY

Teasing. huh? Ren is from out of town. Don't tell me that doesn't curl your toes.

WENDY JO

You want out of Bomont so bad

I bet you've memorized the bus schedules.

URLEEN

You told us that you read just to escape to other worlds.

ARIEL

Exactly! In books, I get to meet guys who amaze me.

WENDY JO

What about Ren?

ARIEL

What about him?

RUSTY

He's sorta smart.

WENDY JO

He's kinda tall.

URLEEN

And I think he's handsome.

ARIEL (Shrugs.)

Cute, maybe.

WENDY JO

But can he really compete with Chuck Cranston, the rugged, dangerous high school dropout slash-drug dealer who was recently evicted from a trailer park? I don't think so.

WENDY JO (Very ditzy)

I like the part where King Arthur and Lancelot fight over Guinevere.

It's right after Mordred shows up and says, "I'm the king! I'm the king!"

(She stops, realizing they are staring) What?

URLEEN

You read a book?!

WENDY JO

Cliffs Notes. ... It took me forever.

COWGIRL

Darlin', darlin', your boyfriend has two left feet and you had no idea?

Didn't he never take you in his arms and sweep you off your feet?

Didn't he never whisper sweet nothings in your ear?

BETTY

Cranston! Your pick-up truck is in the handicapped parking, which is a space we reserve for people with physical, not emotional, disabilities.

(CHUCK, humiliated, has no graceful way out.)

CHUCK

You haven't seen the last of me, McCormack.

(He bumps REN as he exits. WILLARD makes a fist to go after him.)

BETTY

Willard! ... What's that your mama says?

"Before you make a fist, make sure it's your fight."

(WILLARD nods his head)

Well, this is not your fight.

(looking at the others) Now, don't the rest of you have a curfew?

(They begin to leave) And McCormack?

(REN fearing the worst begins to turn in his skates)

Listen to me. I'll see you here after school tomorrow.

REN

Really? You mean I'm not fired?

BETTY

Not just yet. Now, gimme a push, honey. ... Thank you!

CHUCK

When I say "meet me at eight," what am I – talking to myself?

ARIEL

No. You're right. Calm down, honey.

CHUCK

Don't tell me to calm down! Don't – EVER – tell me what to do. (He looks over her friends.) I know what your friends think of me.

And that's BULL.

I'm the best party in this town, baby!

And those three dogs oughta be tied up under the porch. Let's go!

ARIEL

No.

CHUCK

Excuse me?

ARIEL

I said, "No." What part of that don't you understand?

CHUCK (Grabs her.)

Oh, when the preacher's daughter says "no," it just makes me hot.

Say it again, baby.

PRINCIPAL

That sort of remark may pass for wit in Chicago, but here we speak simply.

Let me make this as clear as I can:

there is absolutely no dancing of any kind allowed at any time anywhere within the town limits of Bomont.

COP

You're gonna have to learn that in Bomont, a stop sign means stop.

And that radio music of yours was blasting pretty loud.

And while you're at it ... you'd better learn to watch that attitude, boy.

COACH

Reverend, did you hear that new English teacher is planning to introduce some vulgar modern novel into our American Lit course?

"Slaughterhouse Five." ... She says it's a classic. What does she know?

"Tom Sawyer" now that's a classic.

COACH

(Blowing his whistle.) McCormack! You and your friends are late!

And don't waste your breath or my time with another lame excuse. McCormack, it seems that when you're not making trouble, it finds you anyway.

And Ariel, I would encourage you to stay away from this guy. I've been asked to keep my eye on you and...

... and if you cooperate, it will make all of our lives much easier.

REN

Gee, if my daddy makes a phone call, will you get offa my back?

COACH

That mouth of yours is probably what made your daddy walk out in the first place.

COWBOY BOB

Well bust my britches...you can do some serious tail-shaking! You are some good! (Looks her up and down) And you are fine!

WILLARD

Hey! She came with me, Cowboy. (He puts up fists to fight.)

COWBOY BOB

Yeah? Well, we all make mistakes. ...Bu look, sonny, it's much too early in the evening to get blood on that pretty little shirt of yours.