

One Night in September

BY
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ONE NIGHT IN SEPTEMBER

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*"Speak your truth, even if your voice shakes."
-Robin Sharma*

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*One Night in September was honored as Lanford Wilson New American Play Festival Finalist.

One Night in September

Running Time: Approximately 90 minutes

PLACE

A College Campus.

PLAYWRIGHT NOTES

A Slash (/) in the dialogue indicates an interruption of speech. The intent is to create overlapping dialogue. If there are lines following this in parentheses (), this indicates what the actor would've said had there been no interruption. An actor may try to say the rest of the line until they are cut off.

An Ellipses (...) means the character actively searches for what to say next.

A Beat (Beat) is a breath or shift in thought/tactic.

Allow for the natural flow of young adult conversation. It is influenced by emotions and is fast-paced. All productions and readings must include contact information for a local Sexual Violence Resource Center or a national organization such as RAINN (800.656.Hope).

STAGING

We should flow between and amongst scenes. It is more important to establish relationships than places. Maya in her dorm room can be present throughout Act One as the action occurs outside her door. Self-expression and creativity are encouraged.

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CAST

When selecting actors, it is essential to be mindful of inclusivity and make thoughtful choices that embrace the richness of human diversity. Resources should be available for the cast to process their personal reactions, and all involved should be provided with a full copy of the script before auditioning.

CONTENT WARNING

This play contains talk of sexual violence and strong language.

WHY NOW?

National Institute for Justice-commissioned study of two universities found that more than 50 percent of all sexual assaults among undergraduate women happened between August and November. Subsequent research concluded first-year women were at particular risk, especially in their earliest weeks on campus. How can we be a part of the solution?

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CAST

(7) 4 female, 2 male, 1 non-binary

MAYA	F, 18, Student.
CAMILLE	F, 18, Student.
JADEN	Non-binary, 20s.
KIERA	F, 19, Student.
NIA	F, 19, Student.
ALEX	M, 20, Student.
BRENDAN	M, 21, Student.

Time: Sometime in the 2020s.

Place: A state university.

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ACT I
SCENE I

At Rise: A college dorm room. Midday. MAYA is in her robe, wrapped in a blue blanket. A blue light falls upon her as she speaks. She picks up a picture of her home.

MAYA. When I was little, a field of bluebells lay behind my house, delicate and sweet, shaped like tiny trumpets. I remember how they'd sway in a gentle breeze. When mid-April arrived, the sight of those bells filled me with joy. I'd rush outside, eager to pick them, gathering the biggest bouquet for my mom. She'd pull me onto her lap, a warm embrace, and weave tales of fairies living in the field. She'd tell me how they'd ring the bells, calling one another. Then they'd meet together to dance, serenaded by the little trumpets. *(She wraps herself tight in the blanket. There's a wrestling of keys at the door. Light shifts. It startles MAYA. Her roommate CAMILLE speaks as she enters. She is carrying a tray of food.)*

CAMILLE. Well, well. Look who's awake!

MAYA. Did you grab me anything?

CAMILLE. All this ain't for me! *(She studies her for a moment.)* Are you okay? You haven't moved since I left.

MAYA. *(Nods.)* I'm fine. *(Maya sees Camille's disbelief.)* I swear. *(Beat.)* Did you get the good stuff?

CAMILLE. If you mean greasy pepperoni pizza, then yes.

MAYA. Thanks. And the fries?

CAMILLE. Right here, next to my salad. It has arugula.

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MAYA. Which is?

CAMILLE. Uhhh-Green. I think. *(They eat for a moment. Then Maya begins spitting her food out.)* What? What is it? A hair? Geez, I thought they were supposed to wear hair nets.

MAYA. Green peppers.

CAMILLE. On your pizza?! *(Maya nods as she wipes her tongue.)* You know it wouldn't kill you to eat a vegetable, right?

MAYA. *(Teasing.)* If I wanted to pretend to be healthy, I would've gotten a salad. How's your bacon, Ms. Healthy Living?

CAMILLE. *(Playful.)* Hey, you could get food yourself, you know.

MAYA. *(Retreating.)* I'm not hungry.

CAMILLE. I-I didn't mean anything by that. Do you want me to go back? How about I get you some chicken fingers or something/

MAYA. I'm fine.

CAMILLE. Are you sure? I can put it on my card/

MAYA. I said I'm good. I want to rest, okay?

CAMILLE. Okay. *(Maya wraps herself back in the blanket and lays on her bed. Camille tries gently...)* *(Hesitant.)* So, do you think you'll feel up to class today? Dr. Braden says the review packet, "Is crucial for success on the midterm." I can help you with it if you're not up to going, but the TA will notice if I keep signing you in... so I-I/ *(probably shouldn't do it anymore.)*

MAYA. Then don't.

CAMILLE. What?

MAYA. Don't bother signing me in. I'll look at the packet tonight. Thanks.

CAMILLE. Like I said, I can help/

MAYA. Don't worry about it.

CAMILLE. It's like 40% of our grade/

MAYA. I need some rest.

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CAMILLE. Sure.

MAYA. *(Softening.)* Besides, I can't stand another one of his rants about, "What is knowledge?"

CAMILLE. I know, right!

MAYA. Pure torture.

CAMILLE. He says we'll have to know the answer from the perspective of Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes...

MAYA. "The only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing." *(Maya covers her head in the blanket.)*

CAMILLE. I see you've been reading up on Socrates, at least. *(Camille takes a bite of the pizza.)* Hey, this pizza isn't half bad.

MAYA. You can have it.

CAMILLE. Gee, thanks.

MAYA. *(Sarcastic.)* Put a little lettuce on it and call it a salad. *(They share a laugh, but it fades fast. Camille grabs a textbook and puts it in her bag.)*

CAMILLE. Hey, Uhh- I'll be back before dinner. Maybe then you'll feel up for a trip to the dining hall? *(Maya lets out a groan.)* Or not. It's totally up to you. Text me if you need anything, okay?

SCENE 2

Camille is walking to class. JADEN sees her walk by and tries to catch up.

JADEN. Hey. Hey, Camille. Are you just going to walk right by/

CAMILLE. Sorry I didn't see you.

JADEN. Where's your other half?

CAMILLE. Maya? Resting.

JADEN. Resting? It's 12:45 pm.

CAMILLE. So?

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JADEN. So, who says “resting?” That sounds like something my grandma would say. I mean, what does that even mean?

CAMILLE. I don’t know, not asleep, but not awake. Just there.

JADEN. Is she sick?

CAMILLE. What?

JADEN. There’s a wicked flu going around. It hit our dorms last week.

CAMILLE. Nah, it’s not like that.

JADEN. Good. Believe me, you don’t want any part of that! Where are you headed?

CAMILLE. Stats.

JADEN. Oh, I got Trig. Mind if I walk with you?

CAMILLE. Free country.

JADEN. What’s gotten into you?

CAMILLE. Sorry, it’s just...Maya. She hasn’t been herself lately. (*Camille takes Jaden by the hand to a more secluded area.*) She’s not gotten out of bed all week. I hear her cry at night when she thinks I’m asleep. I think something is really wrong.

JADEN. Maybe she’s homesick. It’s her first year away. I remember it hit me around this time last year, too. I went to my academic adviser, and she said, “Jaden, college is an adjustment.”

CAMILLE. You’re telling me.

JADEN. She told me to stop locking myself away and join some clubs/

CAMILLE. And?

JADEN. It helped.

CAMILLE. I don’t know if that’s it. We spent all summer together, and it was great. Sure, she missed home, but she seemed happy here. I don’t know...maybe it’s me/

JADEN. What? You two looked like you were having fun at the party last weekend.

CAMILLE. That’s the thing. She said she was feeling

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claustrophobic and went to get some air. Then she texted, saying she was going to walk home. I ended up crashing upstairs at the house.

JADEN. A little too much jungle juice for you?

CAMILLE. Last time I checked, vodka, rum, and fruit punch were not indigenous to the jungle.

JADEN. Serving it out of a garbage can was a classy touch.

CAMILLE. (*Gags.*) Don't remind me!

JADEN. Did something happen at the party?

CAMILLE. With me and Maya? Nah, I mean, I don't think so. She's an introvert- it's not unlike her to go home early. I got back, and she was sleeping. She was in her robe, so I guess she took a shower and went back to bed. Hasn't gotten out of it since.

JADEN. Homesick. I'm telling you.

CAMILLE. I appreciate all your sophomore wisdom. Oh, wise one. (*She bows to them.*)

JADEN. You laugh, but it sneaks up on you.

Summer was fun, but now it's fall, and midterms are around the corner. It's a lot of pressure. Just give her some time. If she feels like getting out, my poetry club is meeting to share some new works. It's open to everyone. It's in the small auditorium next week. I'll text you the details.

CAMILLE. I'll get my snaps ready. (*Camille snaps her fingers as if she is applauding Jaden's work. They start walking towards class again.*)

JADEN. Why, thank you. Oh, a few of us are meeting in the dining hall tonight to listen to each other's stuff. Nia, Kiera, and Alex will be there, you should come.

CAMILLE. Sure. Oh wait, I promised Maya I'd be back by dinner.

JADEN. Bring her with you. Might be good for her.

CAMILLE. Maybe.

JADEN. Come on.

CAMILLE. I'll ask her. Save a spot for us, just in case.

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JADEN. Will do. (*Jaden and Camille continue to class. They exit. Enter Nia and Kiera, drinking coffee.*)

NIA. Have you got a dress yet for Homecoming?

KIERA. I'm not buying a new dress when I have a perfectly good prom dress at home.

NIA. Good point, but we're in college now, don't you want something new?

KIERA. It's new to these people.

NIA. Can't argue with that. What's Alex wearing?

KIERA. He's refusing to dress up. So, his usual jeans and a flannel.

NIA. Maybe you'll get lucky, and he'll retire the one with the whole in the pocket.

KIERA. A girl can dream. (*Looks off.*) Oh, look what the cat dragged in! (*Nia looks in the same direction as Kiera.*)

NIA. Brendan Bradford. You can hear him running his mouth before you see him.

KIERA. The other day, I walked past him at the breakfast bar, and he said, "You're not pretty enough to date, but if you want to hook up, I'm down."

NIA. He didn't?

KIERA. Oh, he did.

NIA. Did you tell Alex?

KIERA. No. Brendan's all talk. He wants to get a rise out of someone.

NIA. Still. I hate that he walks around here like he's God's gift.

KIERA. He's 6'6 and looks like a giant gerbil. I guess he has to try to compensate.

NIA. I heard he's going to train to be an MMA fighter after football season.

KIERA. Unimpressive.

NIA. Very.

KIERA. And after next year, who cares what he does.

NIA. True. He'll graduate, and his little cronies will have to

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find another jock to worship.

KIERA. Come on. I can smell his cheap cologne from here.
(Nia and Keira exit from the opposite direction from where they saw Brendan.)

SCENE 3

Maya is in her room. She is still in her robe. She is trying to study. Her phone goes off. She checks it. She cancels the call. She returns to studying. The phone rings again. She doesn't answer the call but is too distracted to study. She grabs her blanket and covers herself. The phone rings and rings. Lights go down.

SCENE 4

Flashback to the party. Maya sits on the ground against a tree trunk with a red solo cup. She is dressed for a night out. The sounds of a party are in the background. After a moment, BRENDAN appears. He stands near her on his phone.

BRENDAN. Hey. Maya? Maya Parker?

MAYA. Yeah.

BRENDAN. I thought that was you. Mind if I...*(He gestures, sitting next to her.)*

MAYA. *(Matter of fact.)* Go ahead.

BRENDAN. *(Trying to be funny.)* You know there's a party-that way.

MAYA. Well aware.

BRENDAN. Oh, are you?

MAYA. I needed some fresh air.

BRENDAN. It's more crowded than usual, the last weekend before finals brings everyone out.

MAYA. These parties are too peopley for me.

BRENDAN. You get used to it. You're a freshman, right?

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(Maya nods.) Do you live over in Hanson Hall?

MAYA. Yeah, Maria's floor.

BRENDAN. I thought I remembered seeing you. We broke up. So, I'm not over there much/

MAYA. Sorry.

BRENDAN. Thanks.

MAYA. What happened? *(Beat.)* Sorry, that's personal.

Never mind. You don't have to answer/

BRENDAN. No. No, it's okay. I thought everyone knew. She got an ID, and now she's at the bars. Too good for house parties.

MAYA. Do people still do that?

BRENDAN. What, go to bars?

MAYA. No, get fake IDs.

BRENDAN. *(Laughs.)* I know I was teasing. Geez, loosen up, Freshie. *(Brendan indicates Maya should drink more from her cup.)* Turns out the fake ID business is alive and well. She got hers off this site from Mongolia. It took about a month and then came wrapped in socks.

MAYA. I don't have one. You?

BRENDAN. Don't need one.

MAYA. You're a junior?

BRENDAN. Yeah, and it's not my scene.

MAYA. Oh. I guess it's not for everyone.

BRENDAN. Bars are expensive. Why waste the money? *(Brendan finishes his drink. He takes out a bottle of hard liquor from his bag.)* I need a refill. How about you? *(He pours liquor into his cup.)* You're going to make me drink alone? Come on, it's on the house. *(She tips her cup, and he pours a few shots worth of alcohol into her cup. He indicates 'cheers.')*

MAYA. Cheers. *(Maya drinks and nearly chokes.)*

BRENDAN. Are you gonna be, okay?

MAYA. Yeah, it's strong. But it's better than whatever the guys made in that garbage can.

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BRENDAN. Ah, yes, the infamous jungle juice. It'll give you a terrible headache. I stick to this stuff. You know what they say. Beer before liquor, never been sicker; liquor before beer, you're in the clear.

MAYA. Where does jungle juice fit into that?

BRENDAN. I don't know and don't want to find out. So, Ms. Maya, are you planning on staying out here all night or...?

MAYA. I like the breeze. It's peaceful out here.

BRENDAN. You knew before you came here that college would be "people-y" right?

MAYA. Sure, I guess. It's also super random.

BRENDAN. Random?

MAYA. Like I never imagined I'd be sitting outside a party talking to Brendan Bradford.

BRENDAN. Why'd you say it like that?

MAYA. I don't know- because it's kind of unexpected.

BRENDAN. Oh, because jocks can't talk to pretty girls?

MAYA. I didn't say that/

BRENDAN. Do you think we're all Neanderthals? (*Brendan imitates a caveman.*)

MAYA. No-No not what I meant/

BRENDAN. Maybe I should leave you to your thoughts, Ms. Maya.

MAYA. It's just we've never talked before.

BRENDAN. Never had the chance- but I've seen you around. Look, I thought you might like some company holding up this tree.

MAYA. (*Skeptical.*) Sure.

BRENDAN. (*The sounds of the party are loud.*) Okay. You got me. Marie's new boyfriend walked in.

MAYA. Tough one.

BRENDAN. It's whatever. Besides...these parties get old fast.

MAYA. I can imagine that's true.

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BRENDAN. Listen, it's a nice night, and I wouldn't mind the walk if you want some company. I can make sure you get back to the dorms safely.

MAYA. Uh...yeah. Okay. I'll let my friends know. *(Maya sends a text message to Camille, letting her know she's heading home. She gets up.)* I never noticed how dark it is down Main Street.

BRENDAN. *(As a caveman.)* Me protect you!

MAYA. *(Laughs.)* Oh, stop. I didn't mean to offend you. *(She playfully pushes him.)*

BRENDAN. Whoa, careful. I don't want your boyfriend coming after me.

MAYA. No boyfriend. A girlfriend. Sorta.

BRENDAN. Interesting.

MAYA. I-uhh mean, she's my roommate. We're not official yet, but/

BRENDAN. Oh. Where is she? Back at the dorms or/

MAYA. No, back at the party. She'll probably stay over. One of her best friends rents a room at the house.

BRENDAN. Cool...uh...so did you know her before you got here?

MAYA. Yeah, she's my roommate.

BRENDAN. You're such a freshman. I meant before you got to college.

MAYA. Oh. No. We met here. Probably the best thing about coming here. Camille just gets me; it's easy with her...I can't believe I'm saying this out loud, but I was thinking of asking her tonight, but I chickened out, and well... here I am...

BRENDAN. She's a freshman, too?

MAYA. Yeah.

BRENDAN. Young love. I remember those days. Well, I hope for your sake she never gets an ID.

MAYA. Thanks.

BRENDAN. Here's to your first year. *(He pours more into her cup, and as she lifts it, he puts his hand under it to ensure*

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she finishes it.) Come on- there's a shortcut down by the streetlight next to the hot dog place.

MAYA. Looks like they're still open.

BRENDAN. Yeah, all night. They know their clientele. Hey, as much as the smell tells you it's a good idea, trust me, it's not. Come on. *(He reaches back for her arm.)* You've had a rough night. Let's get you back to the dorms, Ms. Maya. *(Maya and Brendan exit.)*

SCENE 5

Maya's dorm room. She is in her robe, wrapped in her blanket. She sits up. Her phone is going off again and again. It's a mix of texts and calls.

MAYA. Just stop! Stop! I can't do this. *(Maya throws the phone on the bed. Just then, Camille tries the door. It's locked.)*

CAMILLE. Hey. Hey Maya, open up! *(She knocks.)* I left my keys. Could you let me in? *(Maya stashes the phone under her pillow.)*

MAYA. Cam? Shit. *(Maya checks the alarm clock.) (To self.)* It's dinner already?! *(She calls.)* Yeah, uh, just a minute! Coming! *(Maya takes out her study materials and arranges them across her bed. She fixes her hair for a moment, then rushes to the door.)* Sorry! I was studying and didn't even hear the door. *(Camille enters.)*

CAMILLE. You were studying this whole time? *(Maya nods.)* Impressive! Maybe the next step is to put on clothes. You've been in this robe for days. Wouldn't it be nice to get dressed? You might feel better/

MAYA. I'm fine.

CAMILLE. Right. *(Beat.)* I ran into Jaden, and they're in this new poetry club, and some folks are getting together in the dining hall to/(do some readings).

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MAYA. No thanks.

CAMILLE. Jaden said it helped them adjust.

MAYA. Adjust to what?

CAMILLE. School. College. Being away from home. They barely left their room freshman year and/

MAYA. So?

CAMILLE. So what?

MAYA. So why are you telling me this? (*Camille gestures to the robe, the bed, the mess, and the picture of flowers from Maya's home.*) I'm not homesick!

CAMILLE. Then what's the matter?

MAYA. Nothing's the matter! Just because I don't want to go to some stupid poetry thing, doesn't mean there's gotta be something wrong with me?

CAMILLE. Whoa-

MAYA. I shouldn't have said that/

CAMILLE. What did I do?

MAYA. Huh?

CAMILLE. To make you so mad at me-

MAYA. What? Nothing.

CAMILLE. Come on/

MAYA. I'm not mad at you! (*Camille retreats.*)

CAMILLE. I get it.

MAYA. What is there to get?

CAMILLE. You don't want to be seen with me/

MAYA. That's not it.

CAMILLE. I know we're not...you know, "official" or whatever, so I get it if you want to just forget about it/

MAYA. Forget about us? Where are you getting this from?

CAMILLE. You said you wanted to take things slow/

MAYA. Because you're my first girlfriend/

CAMILLE. And you don't know if you want to be with me/

MAYA. What? No. That's not it.

CAMILLE. Then what is it?

MAYA. Nothing.

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CAMILLE. It's something/

MAYA. I've just been tired.

CAMILLE. Sure.

MAYA. I have/

CAMILLE. You don't have to make up excuses/

MAYA. Maybe I'm coming down with something, I don't know. *(Camille feels defeated.)*

CAMILLE. Yeah, me either.

MAYA. What's that supposed to mean?

CAMILLE. Nothing. *(Beat.)* I brought you some notes from class. I'm going to the dining hall. You're more than welcome to join us. *(Maya's phone goes off again.)*

MAYA. Damn it. *(Maya is searching the bed for the phone.)* I thought I put it on silent.

CAMILLE. Your phone has been going crazy lately.

MAYA. Scam calls. Uh, I try to block them, and then another one pops up.

CAMILLE. And the texts?

MAYA. Texts?

CAMILLE. Never mind.

MAYA. Never mind what? Just say it.

CAMILLE. I'm heading out. If you need something, text me. *(Beat.)* I wish you'd come. *(Camille looks at her for a moment. Maya doesn't move, almost as if she is in a trance. She makes no effort to follow.)* Fine. I get it. Good luck studying.

MAYA. Camille, please, don't be like this. *(Camille grabs her keys and exits. Maya sits on the bed.)* Damn it. *(She clutches the blanket, the blue light casting a glow on her face.)* If only I could tell her. I'd tell her how I returned to those fields that night, in my mind running to her. Careless. Free. When I could no longer fight. When escape seemed impossible. I returned to the field of bluebells, and instead of his stale cologne, I inhaled the sweet, soft petals dancing on a breeze through her hair. I held her hand. She was everything I

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wished for. It was her who transported my soul far, far away from here. She saved me. *(Her phone rings.)*
Leave me alone! *(She picks it up and sees who is calling.)*
Wait. Camille. *(She reads.)* “I’m sorry about what I said. I miss you.” *(She texts.)* Miss you too, see you soon. *(Maya takes off the robe. She gets dressed, takes a deep breath, grabs her keys, and exits.)*

SCENE 6

Jaden, Nia, Kiera, and Alex sit at a dining hall table. They are sitting with food in front of them. Jaden has been writing in their notebook.

JADEN. Okay. Okay. It’s my first attempt.

NIA. Before you start, do you want feedback or support?

JADEN. Supportive feedback?

NIA. Ok, I can do that.

KIERA. Go ahead, give us a few lines.

JADEN. I don’t know, I get so nervous. I read it in my room like a thousand times. Why is it so different in public?

KIERA. It’s not public, it’s just us.

NIA. Totally and don’t think about anything out there just focus on the page.

ALEX. I remember my first punt. I thought my leg was going to fall off. All those people staring. Depending on you. It was like everything was in slow motion. The coach was like, *(In slow motion.)* “Alex get on the field. Control. Control the ball. Laces out!” *(Alex stands up, demonstrates his staggered step, and mimics kicking a football.)* It gets better, though. You just think about the ball, nothing else.

JADEN. Real poetry in motion.

ALEX. Hey, it’s harder than it looks.

KIERA. I think it looks great. *(Alex puts his arm around Kiera.)*

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NIA. Can we get back to the poem, please?

ALEX. Sorry, yes. The floor is all yours, Jaden. Nia's right don't even think about the audience. Or how the only thing they're looking at is you.

JADEN. Thank you for...that. All of that-it was sort of helpful- I think. *(Camille enters with a tray of food.)*
(Calling) Camille! Over here.

CAMILLE. Hey- *(The group warmly greets her and makes room at the table.)*

JADEN. No Maya?

CAMILLE. No. But I'm ready for a little *(She snaps.)* poetry with my dinner.

NIA. Fancy us, dinner and a show. Jaden was just getting ready to entertain us/

JADEN. Don't build expectations!

NIA. Sorry, sorry. Remember, they're just words on a page. *(Jaden readies herself, and right before they begin, Alex shouts.)*

ALEX. Laces out! *(Kiera signals Alex to be quiet. Jaden takes a last look around the group.)*

JADEN. Ok. *(Takes a deep breath.)*

In places beyond the binary hold,

A journey of self, beautifully bold.

Unveiling truths, embracing the unknown,

Finding my chosen family, a symphony of souls, uniquely sown.

Beyond the borders of societal norms,

A spirit untamed, breaking free from forms.

For I am neither this nor solely that,

Instead, I exist in a vibrant spectrum where all identities can chat. *(Jaden looks up from the poem.)* It's not done/ *(Camille leads the group in applause.)*

KIERA. I love what you have.

ALEX. "A journey of self." Love that line. You nailed it right through the posts. *(Alex reaches over and pats Jaden on*

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the back.)

JADEN. Thanks, buddy.

NIA. I can't wait to hear how it ends!

JADEN. Me too. I hope to have it done in time for the readings next weekend. What'd you think Camille?

CAMILLE. Well, when you said poetry club, I thought about my high school AP English class. We would sit around trying to dissect the meaning of poems by people we could never relate to.

KIERA. I remember doing that, too!

CAMILLE. We'd guess at the meanings. But this is the first time I actually- 'got it.' I felt what you meant, if that makes sense.

JADEN. I appreciate that.

NIA. What are you going to call it?

JADEN. I usually wait until I'm done to name it. The name has to reveal itself to me.

KIERA. Oh, I love that.

JADEN. Is anyone else thinking of reading?

NIA. Maybe. I'm not sure yet.

KIERA. Come on! Give us a little taste. *(Alex starts a chant. "Nia, Nia." He soon sees this is not catching on and trails off.)*

NIA. Like Jaden, I wrote something personal. So don't judge. *(Nia pulls it up on her phone.)* I'll read a little bit of it, but no one looks at me while I read it. *(Everyone promises. Nia begins reading.)* Ode To the Shy One

In the crowded rooms, where laughter cascades,

There is a shy spirit that seeks solace in hidden shades.

She knows the observers' intricate dance,

Hiding in the shadows, dodging each fleeting glance...

That's what I have so far. I don't even know if I'll be able to read it/

JADEN. So, don't.

NIA. Didn't expect you to say that/

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JADEN. I mean - don't read it. Find your way to tell us.

KIERA. Ohhh! I love that idea.

NIA. I'd love to wallpaper the wall with it! Maybe create a little spot just for introverts. Ha! I never would have thought of that!

CAMILLE. It was really beautiful- It's giving 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' vibes and I love it even more now.

NIA. Thanks. I pretended to be an extrovert in high school because I thought people wanted that.

JADEN. Pretending is exhausting.

NIA. It is! And for what? To be included in things that made me uncomfortable anyway?

KIERA. Yes! I feel that! My sophomore year of high school, I was on a mission to be popular. I changed my hair, and my clothes, and it sort of worked. But then I got here and looked in the mirror and was like, "Oh no, girl, this is NOT you."

CAMILLE. It's like when you finally get some distance, you start questioning what you've been doing all along.

ALEX. I grew up playing sports. My dad played in college. He put me on the field as soon as I could walk. I didn't question it. Football's been good to me. Got a scholarship and all. But I wonder what I would've done if I didn't start so young.

JADEN. It's crazy to think that our whole path could be different with a couple of different choices.

KIERA. It's like the butterfly effect. If Alex hadn't sat behind me during Freshman orientation, I never would've yelled at him for kicking my chair.

ALEX. And I never would've seen how beautiful your eyes are.

NIA. And I never would've gagged myself with this spoon.
(They all laugh. Maya enters the dining hall.)

JADEN. Well, look who it is! *(Camille waves Maya over to the table.)*

CAMILLE. I didn't think she was feeling up for it.

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MAYA. Hey-

CAMILLE. Glad you made it.

ALEX. Oh, the popcorn chicken line is open. They have all these different seasonings/

MAYA. Thanks. I'm not hungry.

CAMILLE. You sure/

MAYA. So, what did I miss?

KIERA. Jaden and Nia shared some poems they're working on. Alex has eaten his weight in popcorn chicken/

ALEX. Soooo good.

CAMILLE. And I was just saying how small moments can change our lives-

JADEN. She got all deep- she went 'meta' on us.

CAMILLE. This year has been pretty good for me so far -
(*Camille is trying to allude to meeting Maya, but Maya isn't getting it. She puts her hand on hers, but Maya pulls away.*)

MAYA. Well, sorry I missed it. Sounds like the sort of conversation Professor Braden would love.

NIA. Speaking of, you weren't in class yesterday/

MAYA. Yeah, I skipped it. I had some stuff to catch up on/

CAMILLE. You did?

MAYA. Yeah.

CAMILLE. What stuff?

MAYA. Stuff.

CAMILLE. Ok/ (*Jaden sees the conversation going south.*)

JADEN. What matters is Ms. Maya is here now!

MAYA. What did you say?

JADEN. All that matters is that you got out of your bed, got dressed- sort of- and joined some friends. (*The friends carry on talking. Maya's world is different. She gets up from the table. She's in her head. He's in her head. Brendan enters the daydream sequence.*)

BRENDAN. Look who's here, Ms. Maya.

MAYA. Don't call me that. My friends call me that.

BRENDAN. We're *friendly*. Aren't we, Maya?

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MAYA. Why do you keep calling me? What do you even want/

BRENDAN. You know what I want/ (*Brendan puts his finger up to Maya's mouth.*)

MAYA. I didn't tell anyone. I swear.

BRENDAN. Tell anyone what?

MAYA. You know what?

BRENDAN. That a freshman came on to me?

MAYA. What?! I didn't/

BRENDAN. Says you. People saw us walking back that night. What do you think they thought?

MAYA. No one thinks that... (*Brendan laughs.*)

BRENDAN. Haven't seen you around campus much. (*Brendan goes to brush Maya's hair off her shoulder. She shutters and moves away.*) Acting all weird just makes people more suspicious. Lots of people have one-night stands Maya. You don't have to be embarrassed. It's natural.

MAYA. You're sick. You know that?

BRENDAN. You think you're the only girl that's thrown herself at me?

MAYA. That didn't happen.

BRENDAN. You haven't been to many football games, have you?

MAYA. That's not me. I have a girlfriend.

BRENDAN. You have a "roommate" remember? Do you think she'll put up with your promiscuous behavior? Go ahead, tell her- tell all of them while you're at it. I doubt they'll buy your story. (*Brendan makes a 'tsk, tsk' sound and waves his finger at her.*) You think you're the first freshman to sleep with someone, then regret it.

MAYA. That's not what happened, and Camille will believe me.

BRENDAN. You don't sound so sure. (*Brendan puts his hand on her shoulder. She feels paralyzed by it.*) Listen, you were drinking, I was drinking. We had a nice talk, you flirted

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with me, and one thing led to another. These things happen, kid/ (*Brendan touches her cheek, then starts to walk away. He's smiling, and cocky. He takes out his phone and starts dialing. He gestures to her to answer the phone.*)

MAYA. No! I said No! (*Maya is back at the table her phone has been ringing for some time now. She's staring at it. The table has been noticed.*)

CAMILLE. Maya.

JADEN. Maya. Earth to Ms. Maya!

MAYA. Don't call me that!

JADEN. Sorry. I-I didn't mean to offend/

MAYA. No- it's just. Whatever. I didn't mean to snap. (*Alex puts some of his food on her plate.*)

ALEX. You're probably hangry. Happens to me all the time. Eat up.

MAYA. Maybe I should head back to the room?

CAMILLE. Already?

NIA. I get it. Loud places take so much energy out of me too.

CAMILLE. I'll go with you. (*Maya nods.*) Sorry- it was really nice hearing your poems. Can't wait to hear the finished versions.

JADEN. Maya, you're welcome to join us next week for the readings. Think about it- okay? (*Maya nods. The group says goodbye. Camille gives Jaden a look of "See what I mean?" Maya and Camille exit.*) Camille told me she was struggling but I didn't think it was this bad.

KIERA. She barely said a word.

ALEX. I didn't want to say anything, but I think I might know why.

JADEN. Shut your mouth immediately and tell us everything!

ALEX. I heard some guys talking in the locker room.

KIERA. Great, locker room talk. This should be super reliable.

ALEX. Well, that's why I didn't want to say anything.

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JADEN. Spill it.

ALEX. Brendan's roommate Wally said he didn't come home the night of the house party. Said he was hooking up with some Freshman in Hanson Hall.

NIA. You don't think it was Maya, do you?

JADEN. Camille stayed over at the house that night and did mention Maya left early....

ALEX. Some of the guys saw them walking together towards the dorms/

KIERA. No? Maya? With Brendan. He's terrible. Like literally the worst.

ALEX. Hey, don't shoot the messenger.

NIA. What do we do?

KIERA. Nothing, right? It's not our place to tell her- is it?

JADEN. It doesn't sound like Maya. She's super into Camille.

ALEX. People make mistakes...have regrets...

KIERA. How would you know?

ALEX. I'm not talking about me!

KIERA. Better not be...

ALEX. The only thing I regret is that second helping of popcorn chicken/

NIA. Whatever is going on, I hope they talk about it soon. I know something about this... *(The group stops and listens intently to NIA read more of her poem.)* The heart yearns for connection's gentle touch, To share its secrets, to be seen as such. But fear takes hold, tightening its grip, Leaving words unspoken, a sinking ship. *(Lights down on the group.)*

SCENE 7

Camille and Maya are walking back to their dorm. They are just outside the cafeteria.

CAMILLE. Are we going to talk about what happened back

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there?

MAYA. What?

CAMILLE. You barely said a word, then stared at your phone.

MAYA. Oh-I-I/

CAMILLE. Whoever that is can't be more important than us. Right?

MAYA. It's no one.

CAMILLE. What's going on?

MAYA. (*Maya crafts a cover story.*) Uh, just my mom calling. You were right about the homesick stuff. Only it's my mom who's homesick for me.- I guess. She keeps calling. Checking in. You know? It's annoying. Guess it's some kind of empty nest syndrome or something.

CAMILLE. Should you answer it?

MAYA. Why?

CAMILLE. To let her know you're okay.

MAYA. What good will that do?

CAMILLE. I could answer it for you/

MAYA. NO! (*An awkward silence.*)

CAMILLE. I just thought that maybe if she hears everything is okay, she'll stop.

MAYA. It'll just become about something else.

CAMILLE. How do you know?

MAYA. Trust me, if I answer this time, then she'll call twice as often. It's got to be cold turkey. Cold turkey until the holidays.

CAMILLE. Are you sure that's healthy?

MAYA. Sure. I'll be home for Thanksgiving. Then we'll turkey... I-I mean we talk; we'll talk then. Over a nice turkey dinner- not now.

CAMILLE. Okay. If that's what you think you should do. I just want you to feel like you can talk to me. Why didn't you tell me? Didn't you think I'd understand about family stuff? You think you're the only one with obsessive parents?

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MAYA. I guess not/

CAMILLE. My dad keeps sending pictures of our dog, saying, 'Felix misses me, Felix is sad on his walks without me.'

MAYA. Felix sounds like my mom.

CAMILLE. I told my dad we could have a weekly call and he's chilled out a bit. Maybe you should try that.

MAYA. *(Warning.)* Cam.

CAMILLE. You're right. I'll let you handle it.

MAYA. Thanks. It's just a lot to deal with right now, you know?

CAMILLE. Are you sure that's all that's on your mind?

MAYA. Yeah...just distracted. I'll try harder not to be...

CAMILLE. *(Smiles.)* Good. *(Maya lets her guard down for a moment. Just then, Brendan enters. He walks right past them, heading to the dining hall. He turns and gives Maya a head nod of acknowledgment.)* I feel like we haven't got to spend any real time together lately, you know/

MAYA. *(Not listening.)* Uh-huh...uhhh well, we should get out of here.

CAMILLE. Hold on. I was just saying how we barely see each other anymore- everyone is still in the dining hall. Let's hang out for a while/

MAYA. No. I'm not hungry. I don't feel up to hanging out/

CAMILLE. Okay.

MAYA. I'm sorry- you go.

CAMILLE. No, it's okay, I'll stay with you. *(Maya's phone starts ringing again.)*

MAYA. *(To phone.)* Just leave me alone.

CAMILLE. Fine!

MAYA. Not you. *(Maya indicates her phone.)*

CAMILLE. This is crazy, Maya. She won't stop until you answer it.

MAYA. No.

CAMILLE. Just try what I said/

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MAYA. I can't/

CAMILLE. It might help/

MAYA. It won't/

CAMILLE. Just tell her you're at dinner. She'll stop calling if you answer it this one time/

MAYA. Fine. *(Maya, out of sheer frustration, answers the phone. It is Brendan on the other end.)* What could you possibly want from me? Leave me alone. Just go away. I don't want you calling me anymore. I don't want anything to do with you. *(Maya hangs up, and Camille is shocked by what she just saw.)*

CAMILLE. Hey, are you okay?

MAYA. Yeah. She just won't stop.

CAMILLE. That was not how I thought that would go.

MAYA. I need some fresh air. I'll meet you back in our room. *(Maya exits, and Camille stands there, taking it all in.)*

CAMILLE. Thanksgiving dinner at their house is going to be super awkward. *(Brendan enters. He looks Camille up and down.)*

BRENDAN. Hey. I saw you talking to Maya.

CAMILLE. Yeah.

BRENDAN. Where'd she go?

CAMILLE. Excuse me?

BRENDAN. Are you, her *roommate*?

CAMILLE. Yeah, why?

BRENDAN. Give her a message for me, tell her to answer her damn phone. *(Brendan exits towards the dining room again. Camille freezes, contemplating what she just heard. Lights down.)*

SCENE 8

Camille is packing a bag full of her clothing. Maya enters after taking a shower. She is back in her robe.

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MAYA. Whoa, whoa! What are you doing?

CAMILLE. What am I doing? She has the nerve to ask what am *I* doing.

MAYA. Excuse me?

CAMILLE. No excuse me, Maya.

MAYA. What's happening here? Are you going home?

Why? (*Maya is following Camille around the room.*) Talk!
Just fucking talk to me!

CAMILLE. Talking seems like the last thing you want to do lately... well, at least with me.

MAYA. What's that supposed to mean?

CAMILLE. Who was on the phone, Maya?

MAYA. When? Now? No one. I was in the shower.

CAMILLE. Not now! Outside the dining hall.

MAYA. My mother.

CAMILLE. Okay.

MAYA. Okay, what?

CAMILLE. I tried to give you a chance. The benefit of the doubt...stupid me. Just forget it. We're not official, so I shouldn't be feeling this way, but I am, so just let me go.

(*Maya reaches for Camille's bag- anything to try and keep her near.*) Let go. (*Maya releases.*)

MAYA. Where are you going?

CAMILLE. Away from here. I can't sit here and just watch you... you... be with someone else.

MAYA. Someone else?

CAMILLE. I can't have an open relationship Maya and if that's what you want...it's fine. It's just, well, if that's the case, then I'm not interested/

MAYA. I'm so not following any of this/

CAMILLE. Brendan.

MAYA. What?

CAMILLE. Brendan Bradford, the football player. (*Under her breath.*) Convenient time for a case of amnesia.

MAYA. You think I'm with him/

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CAMILLE. I know. So, stop pretending/

MAYA. Oh my god.

CAMILLE. Didn't think I'd find out?

MAYA. It's not what you think.

CAMILLE. He's been calling you all week, hasn't he?

MAYA. How'd you know?

CAMILLE. He gave me a message for you, he says you should answer your phone.

MAYA. Fuck.

CAMILLE. That little display in the hall about your mom was cute but really Maya/ (how could you lie right to my face).

MAYA. Stop. I'm not with Brendan.

CAMILLE. I thought we could be honest with each other. I thought that was our thing, "radical honesty."

MAYA. It was...is...just stay, please. I promise it's not what you think.

CAMILLE. I don't want to think about it. I know it hasn't been long, but I love you, Maya. Okay. I love you, and this hurts. I'll stay at Jaden's until we figure out the room stuff/

MAYA. I don't want anyone but you. Cam. Come on. Cam, I love you too/ (*Maya didn't know she was going to say it, and Camille doesn't know how to receive it.*)

CAMILLE. Yeah, well...love isn't supposed to be like this/

MAYA. Cam...(*She blurts this out.*) He hurt me.

CAMILLE. What-

MAYA. (*Bolder this time.*) He hurt me. (*Maya reaches for Camille to stop her from packing.*) He told me no one would believe me. He was right, who would believe it?

CAMILLE. You're not making sense.

MAYA. The party. I was drinking.

CAMILLE. So?

MAYA. So, I left willingly- with him. I was so stupid. Cam, you gotta believe me. I didn't want what happened. I didn't. I swear. I swear on everything. On us. Please believe me.

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(Maya is trembling. Camille holds her, she is confused.)

CAMILLE. Hold on, you said you were going to get some fresh air, then you texted me saying you were going home. But you left with him?/

MAYA. Yes, but not like that/

CAMILLE. Then like what?

MAYA. He offered to walk me back, it was late and dark. It seemed fine. I swear. When we got to the dorms, I thought he was going to walk away. I slid my card, and he caught the security door. He said he was coming up.

CAMILLE. Here? To our room?

MAYA. He grabbed me by my arm on the stairs. He squeezed really hard and told me to stay quiet and not make a scene. We got to our door, and I fumbled with the keys. He got mad. He pushed me in and threw me on the bed/

CAMILLE. That fucking monster. My god. *(Camille hugs Maya. Maya starts crying. Camille is holding her and comforting her.)* Shhh... it's okay. Shhh... I've got you.

MAYA. You gotta believe me.

CAMILLE. I believe you.

MAYA. I wanted to tell you. I- I couldn't. I barely believe it happened myself. Every time I close my eyes, I see flashes of it. His body on top of mine. The smell of his breath. His hand over my mouth. He- He/*(She can't bring herself to say the word.)*

CAMILLE. He...assaulted you?

MAYA. He raped me/

CAMILLE. I'll kill him. I swear I-I'll kill him. That loudmouth piece of trash. He'll get what's coming to him/*(Camille jumps up, and Maya pulls at her arms.)*

MAYA. No. Stop. Please. I don't want you anywhere around him. I just want it to go away. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I can't fucking think. I can't take any more of this/

CAMILLE. He's not going to get away with it/

MAYA. Don't do anything stupid/

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CAMILLE. We gotta call the police or the dean or...or... go to the hospital/

MAYA. Hospital? Wait, what? Why?

CAMILLE. For evidence. They can do a kit or something...

MAYA. Camille, it's been days.

CAMILLE. So?

MAYA. So what evidence is going to be left

CAMILLE. I don't know - something. What he did is a crime...We can go to the police!

MAYA. My body is the crime scene, Cam. I can't. I don't want to do all that. It'll be his word against mine.

CAMILLE. Who fucking cares about his word. He's a rapist bastard/

MAYA. He'll ruin my life. He threatened me, Cam. I'll have to leave school. I know how it sounds, but what else could he do if he could do this?

CAMILLE. That's why we go to the authorities. We get proof and we go to the authorities.

MAYA. He made me shower.

CAMILLE. What?

MAYA. Over and over.

CAMILLE. He's disgusting. But we can't let him get away with this. He gets to go on with his life and what do you get-to suffer? No- no that's not right. It's not fair.

MAYA. It's not.

CAMILLE. Then let's do something. There's got to be someone that can help/

MAYA. I need you to stop. Okay? I know you mean well, and I love you for it...but I can't handle all this right now. I don't know what end is up. I have all these gaps in my memory. I try to remember what happened, but there's these walls I can't get behind. Then something will trigger a memory, a flash, and then I'm right back there.

CAMILLE. I'm so sorry.

MAYA. *(Beat.)* I shouldn't have been drinking/

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CAMILLE. Are you fucking serious right now? This is not your fault.

MAYA. Cam- but I-I trusted him/

CAMILLE. None of it. Don't let that asshole make you doubt yourself.

MAYA. I know, I know. You're right.

CAMILLE. You didn't consent to any of that.

MAYA. I tried pushing him off me. I tried what I could, but he was too strong. I said, "no" Cam, but he didn't stop. At some point, I stopped fighting.

CAMILLE. Did you pass out?

MAYA. No, I sort of left my body. The next thing I knew, I was staring at that picture from home. I was imagining running in the fields behind the house. Cam, it felt so real. I could feel the sun on my skin, I saw the blue petals swaying in the breeze, and the leafy-green smell of the grass. It was like I was a little girl again. *(Beat.)* I went somewhere safe/

CAMILLE. You're safe now. You're not alone. I'm right here. *(They embrace.)*

MAYA. Please don't make me go back. Don't make me tell people. Please.

CAMILLE. We'll figure this out.

MAYA. Don't leave me.

CAMILLE. How could I ever? I love you, Maya. I'm not sure what to do, but we'll figure it out together. *(They fall into their embrace.) (Lights down.)*

END OF ACT I

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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