

Unfinished

BRIAN is alone. His casual clothes suggest autumn. He looks worn out. Setting-wise we're not really anywhere yet.

BRIAN Grand Central Station, New York City. (*lights, sound in: the Main Concourse, crowds in a vast space*) Everywhere and nowhere. I got off the subway here for no reason, just felt like it. This place excited me to no end when I was a kid. Maybe because I'm from a small town. Grand Central Station seemed like the center of the universe. Trains to everywhere. All these people – the place seemed full of possibilities – every stranger has a story. You hear snatches of someone else's conversation, a little window into their world. I used to love this.

(ELISE appears, on another part of stage. She wears summer clothes.)

ELISE (*laughs exhilarated*) Higher, baby, higher!

PHIL (*enters, away from Brian, into cellphone*) Laura?

(PHIL wears clean professional-looking clothes. The two men are unaware of each other.)

BRIAN Sometimes I don't know if the voices I'm hearing are real or memories...

(ELISE disappears as Brian's cellphone rings.)

BRIAN Yeah?

PHIL (*overlapping*) Laura, things are crazy. I wanted to call earlier, time slipped by.

(the following speeches can overlap to an extent)

BRIAN Hey. We have to make this fast. My phone needs to be charged. Plus I'm in the subway.

PHIL You're pissed off now but you would have been pissed off if I called you earlier too.

BRIAN It's your birthday; you pick the place.

PHIL I know, babe, but there's nothing I can do about it. We can't go through this every time I have to work late. It's just – the way it is right now.

BRIAN Andy, wherever you want. Anywhere.

PHIL I didn't ask Mickey for the guy's name because we can't afford to do the basement right now. You know that. We've talked about this.

BRIAN Not Le Plaisir. Don't you remember? The tables were squished so close together I knocked the candle on the next table over and got wax all over my favorite pants which I then had to get drycleaned? And they had attitude.

PHIL The reception's not that good. I said I'm in Grand Central Station.

(Brian at some point around here becomes aware of Phil, though without recognizing him)

BRIAN Trust me, Andy, I remember. Lots of attitude. They didn't even apologize. They're lucky I didn't sue.

PHIL Laura, I don't need to have a fight right now. I'll get home – when I get home.

BRIAN *(away from phone, annoyed to Phil)* Excuse me.

PHIL Brian?

BRIAN Oh my God... Andy, I'll call you back. Nothing – I just remembered something I have to do – I'll call you back.

BRIAN *(Cont'd)* Okay, yes, great, eight at La Riserva.

PHIL Brian? How are you doing, man?

BRIAN Oh my God.

PHIL How's it going?

BRIAN Here of all places.

PHIL Wild.

(THEY don't shake hands or embrace. There is a certain awkwardness, but they are genuinely glad to see each other. Long silence.)

BRIAN Did you get my letters? I sent them to your Bronx address, your old address I guess.

PHIL Old, yeah. My parents moved to Florida.

BRIAN They weren't forwarded?

PHIL I'm not the greatest letter-writer.

BRIAN Whatever. So how are you, Phil?

PHIL Great! You live in the city?

BRIAN 23rd St. West.

PHIL Cool.

BRIAN You?

PHIL Larchmont. Westchester.

BRIAN Never been there.

PHIL It's nice.

BRIAN Let's have a drink!

PHIL Love to but I'm late already. Laura. My wife. I'm married.

BRIAN "Wife" tipped me off. Call her.

PHIL I just called her.

BRIAN Call her again.

PHIL Hey, man, give me your email and –

BRIAN Phil, you ignored my letters. I know you got at least one of them. I haven't seen you in twelve years. Have a goddamn drink with me.

PHIL *(enjoying)* Brian...you're still – yourself.

BRIAN Actually, I'm not. I'm... *(pretends to take off "wig")* Rodney, the florist!

BOTH Dibble dibble dum. . *(They laugh.)*

PHIL "Nightfall"! Remember that?

BRIAN *(leading PHIL)* Brian remembers all. This way, there's a place in the terminal...

PHIL There is? *(to audience)* We got a table in the back of this little bar in the terminal.

BRIAN He looked tired.

PHIL He looked really tired.

BRIAN We got through the updates pretty quickly and painlessly.

(by now they're probably seated)

PHIL *(by route)* Laura's wonderful. No kids yet. We want 'em. My office is on 49th. I develop software.

BRIAN *(by route)* Still gay. Unattached, seeing a guy. Andy. Been in the city for five years. Love it.

PHIL So are you designing? You probably are Broadway's top set designer and I don't even know it.

BRIAN Of course I'm designing, yes, absolutely. I'm between projects right now. At this time.

PHIL Does that work out okay, I mean, money-wise?

BRIAN I temp. In an office.

PHIL That's cool.

BRIAN A few years ago I was mentioned in a Village Voice review, for an off-Broadway show. Well, off-off Broadway. "Brian Codoni's delicate, tremulous sets are almost another character in the drama."

PHIL Awesome, man!

BRIAN *(as if hitting him for the first time)* The Village Voice.

PHIL Congratulations.

(to audience) The letters came up again. I had a feeling they would. Brian was never one to let something like that go.

BRIAN Well?

PHIL *(to BRIAN)* I guess I didn't know how to respond. My life was – moving in a different direction.

BRIAN You could have written that: *(pretending to write)* "My life is moving in a different direction."

PHIL I should have. I'm sorry.

BRIAN I – used to miss you – a lot. It was like, something was left unfinished that summer.

PHIL Yeah... shit, the time. This is my last.

BRIAN That's it?! No, no, no. Next round's on me.

PHIL I can't.

BRIAN Give me your cell. I'll call Loretta. *(picks up phone)*

PHIL Laura.

BRIAN Laura. What's your number?

PHIL *(laughing)* You don't know her.

BRIAN *(into phone pretending)* Hello, Laura. Your husband's with me. He's going to be a little late this evening because I'm going to seduce him. Correct, I am a man. What you don't know, Laura, is that your husband and I used to be lovers.

PHIL *(laughing)* Jesus. We were never lovers, you psycho. Maybe we could keep this down a little?

BRIAN Do you have a minute, Laura? I want to tell you about some wild summer nights in Saunders.

PHIL You're an idiot. *(removing his jacket, and moves into the shelter of the old rail station in Saunders. The actual shelter would be enclosed on three sides with a window in rear, but only the scenic suggestion of such a structure is needed.)*

PHIL *(Cont'd)* Saunders. What a knockout. The Hudson river. The trails. The woods. The mountain...

(to BRIAN, who is still at table) What was it?

BRIAN Crook Mountain.

PHIL Crook Mountain.

(The lighting and feeling of this location – where PHIL is – are quite different from Grand Central. Here it is summer, 12 years prior. We are outside; we hear birds, dogs barking in the distance. There is a certain vitality to PHIL here that wasn't present in the previous scene. The same will be true for BRIAN when he joins PHIL.)

PHIL *(to audience)* Everything was hills and curves and trees, winding, mysterious – unknowable. Is that the word? The train tracks, but no train...

BRIAN *(removes sweater, joins PHIL)* There used to be a train from New York that stopped here. Like in the 1940s. You can see the track at some points in town.

PHIL What happened?

BRIAN There are no factories anymore. Saunders and all the other little towns aren't so important now. Plus everyone has a car.

PHIL If this train were still running, I could come straight up to your house practically. Since now I know your parents leave the porch door unlocked, I could slip in.

BRIAN And what? Take the silverware?

PHIL No. I'd come into your bedroom ... and smother you to death. *(mock-smothers BRIAN)*

BRIAN Hey!

(they laugh; then)

PHIL It's really nice up here.

BRIAN Been coming up here since I was little. To hang out, or hide, or wait out the rain. There's a whole world beyond New York City, you know.

PHIL I thought you wanted to move to the city?

BRIAN I do. I think I do. Everything is there. Everything except – this.

PHIL Do your parents mind me being here? Be honest.

BRIAN Are you kidding? They're relieved I have a friend.

PHIL You have tons of friends.

BRIAN At school. Not here.

PHIL What about from high school?

BRIAN High school was a nightmare. The people here are small. They think small, they live small. There's nobody here I can really talk to, besides Elise.

PHIL *(playful)* Who's Elise? Huh? Huh? You keeping secrets, man?

BRIAN I never mentioned Elise? She's kind of hard to pin down, but maybe you can meet her and we can hang out. While you're here.

PHIL She's hard to pin down, huh?

BRIAN She's my cousin. I told you to bring Amy – if you're so horny.

PHIL She couldn't have come anyway. Some family thing. She's got some family thing every time I turn around. It's only a weekend. I'll survive.

BRIAN A weekend's not a lot of time to really do Saunders. I mean if you want to stay longer you're welcome to.

PHIL I don't know. My parents are already breathing down my neck about getting a summer job.

BRIAN Job? This is our last summer of freedom!

PHIL Yeah... I don't know

BRIAN *(singing)* Summertime and the livin' is easy...

PHIL *(enjoying it)* Oh no. The singing is starting.

BRIAN Whatever. You don't have to decide now. It's fine by my parents.

PHIL They're very nice to me.

BRIAN They love you. You seem normal to them. They're hoping it'll rub off on me.

PHIL What's normal?

BRIAN You like sports.

PHIL Basketball and soccer. Not baseball so much. And I hate football.

BRIAN Okay, you like some sports. I hate all sports. You're majoring in engineering. You're planning on having a career that will make you a decent living.

PHIL No guarantee in any field.

BRIAN There's really no guarantee when you're a set designer.

PHIL But what you do is so cool.

BRIAN What I've done at school is nothing. Nothing compared to what I'm going to do. When I move into the city.

PHIL Seeing what you have here – I don't know. I don't think I'd want to leave. So what are we doing tonight?

BRIAN There's not much going on, in the way of local color. Shad Festival's over. The carnival's in July, I mean if you wanted to come up again.

PHIL July? Who's thinking about July? What's up tonight?

BRIAN Movie?

PHIL We've seen too many movies. I want local color.

BRIAN *(doesn't want to disappoint)* Elise is more up on what's going on in Grenville. Next town up. Has more of a nightlife.

PHIL So where's Elise?

BRIAN Who knows. She's here, she's not here. No one can keep track of her. What would you be doing tonight if you didn't come up?

PHIL I'd be doing Amy.

BRIAN Oh, right.

PHIL It's Friday so first she'd have to watch that idiotic mystery show.

BRIAN "Nightfall." My parents love it.

PHIL It's not that bad.

BRIAN It's that bad. Its intended audience is the brain-dead. (*worried*) I'm not saying Amy's brain-dead. I don't even know Amy.

PHIL I'm not offended, man. I said the show was crap. (*touches BRIAN's shoulder gently. Their eyes lock for longer than PHIL is comfortable with. He breaks it off*) Man, look at these houses! Imagine owning one of these houses on the mountain. Looking out at the river... Awesome. I'd have peace.

BRIAN You don't have peace?

PHIL I don't know. Doesn't your mind ever race, and question everything?

BRIAN You'll never stop questioning. You don't know it, but you have the soul of a poet.

PHIL Ha. You're the artist.

BRIAN You've got the artist's spirit. You see the interconnectedness of things. You're open to things that are new, that you don't know. Even if you can't express it.

PHIL Wow. You sure it's me you're talking about?

BRIAN I noticed you on campus. Before we actually met. You were – different. Sometimes with the engineers. Sometimes going to one of the recitals in the music building alone.

PHIL (*not looking at BRIAN*) I think I – might have noticed you too, before we actually met.

BRIAN In Macbeth? Making a fool of myself? Did you come to that?

PHIL No.

BRIAN Where?

PHIL Just around campus. (*silence*) Macbeth? You're an actor too?

BRIAN A bad actor. Part of a class.

PHIL You could be on "Nightfall."

BRIAN Oh yeah. They could cover me with latex and then at the end – (*miming*) –they rip it off! Surprise!

PHIL (*laughing*) That's it! That's like every episode!

BRIAN I know. They really overuse the disguise thing. After a while you start looking for wigs and fake noses right from the start.

PHIL Exactly!

BRIAN You know by the end of the episode, some lady's going to turn out to be a man in drag, who's the killer – or a hippie is really a bald doctor killer. Or the person you thought was Mr. Beeldergander is in reality –

PHIL Rodney the florist!

BRIAN *(gasp)* Oh my God. *(They laugh.)* And that cheesy music: dibble dibble dum.

PHIL That's it! dibble dibble dum! You do it better.

BRIAN dibble dibble dum! *(to audience)* He slept in my bedroom, on the floor. I said he could have my bed and I'd sleep on the floor but he insisted. Neither one of us suggested sharing the bed. But I think we both thought it. I know I did.

PHIL *(to audience)* I wasn't sure about undressing in front of him at first.

BRIAN He didn't think twice about changing his clothes in front of me.

PHIL I'd heard rumors about Brian at school. But there are things you can't really ask someone.

And then there I was about to undress. I felt strange. I thought: if I look at him, will he be looking at me? And then I thought: if he sees me looking, will he think that I'm looking to see if he's looking? And will it look like I'm looking because I want him to look or will it look like I'm looking because I don't want him to look? Or will just the fact that I'm looking at all seem odd? But then if I don't look, it might look like I'm deliberately not looking and that might seem odd too and finally ... Who cares!? Everyone checks everyone out anyway, maybe not obviously, maybe they wouldn't admit it. So what if his eyes fell on my shoulders, or slid down my back –

(to BRIAN, without a pause) Do the music again! Do it again!

BRIAN Dibble dibble dum.

(PHIL laughs wildly.)

PHIL On the money, man!

BRIAN *(to audience as PHIL moves back to table in Grand Central)* I guess it had been happening gradually at school. But now that he was here in the place I grew up, smiling that smile when there was no one but me around. Wow. I didn't say this to anyone yet. I didn't say this to myself yet. But I was in –

PHIL So. You moved into the city, and I moved out!

BRIAN Huh?

PHIL So what's the scoop? Are you happy, Brian?

BRIAN Am I happy? What? Twenty-four – seven?

PHIL What's Chelsea like?

BRIAN *(joining PHIL at table)* It's – okay.

PHIL You said you loved it.

BRIAN I do. I did. Now it's – okay.

PHIL You couldn't wait to move into the city!

BRIAN Yeah. I don't know. It's not just Chelsea. It's – I don't know – the gay scene. It's not what it was.

PHIL Oh?

BRIAN You're happy to hear that, aren't you?

PHIL No.

BRIAN I don't know. The guys are all so knowing and jaded. Everything's calculated, everything's for effect. From across the room of some club you notice a guy has these gorgeous green eyes and when you get a little closer you overhear he's trying out his new color contacts. That's the scene, in a nutshell.

 It just seems impossible to make a real connection. Something more than sex. You think you found someone special, you date for a few months, then they leave you a message saying they can't see you anymore it's not working sorry bye. Just like that. Like it's nothing. Like your feelings are nothing.

PHIL Rude.

BRIAN More than rude. I don't know. There's no – innocence. There's pretend innocence. But not the real thing.

PHIL Is Andy innocent?

BRIAN He's as innocent as I am, I guess.

PHIL What kind of work does he do?

BRIAN Not important. Tell me about life in the suburbs with the picket fence and the dog.

PHIL We don't have a dog.

BRIAN Picket fence?

PHIL Hedge.

BRIAN Well?

PHIL I like it...

BRIAN But?

PHIL But...

BRIAN Sometimes you wanna take out a shotgun and go on a killing spree?

PHIL You're an idiot.

BRIAN Bad joke. Talk to me. You and Laurie and Larchmont...

PHIL Laura's great. Larchmont's great. Lotsa trees but close enough to the city. Good schools. Safe community. Expensive as all hell.

BRIAN I figured.