

SCRIPT TITLE

Written by

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Based on, If Any

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INT. CAR - MORNING

Junior drives, Senior next to him holding a map.

SENIOR  
She didn't say goodbye or anything?

JUNIOR  
She wasn't even up.

They sit in silence, highway rolling out before them.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

The GRINELL campus lies on a verdant stretch of land, brick buildings that look untouched since their creation.

The car pulls off of a main strip into a small parking lot.

SENIOR  
I brought something.

JUNIOR  
Oh?

SENIOR  
You got anything else to do before  
your show?

JUNIOR  
Ummm, I don't think so.

SENIOR  
You know where all the buildings  
are? Nobody you need to get in  
touch with?

JUNIOR  
Nope. I think I'm good. What'd you  
bring me?

Senior walks to the back of the car, rifles through quickly.

He pulls a BOX, hands it to Junior.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)  
What's in this?

Senior reaches back in, removes Imposter Syndrome.

SENIOR  
It's for handling *this*.

JUNIOR  
Oh shit, you took it with us?

SENIOR  
Andre gave me specific  
instructions. You suppose there's a  
dumpster back there?

JUNIOR  
I hope so.

EXT. DUMPSTER - MOMENTS LATER

Junior carries the box, Senior the Puppet. They round the  
corner, watching for witnesses.

SENIOR  
Open it.

Junior squats over the box, digs in like sociopath christmas.  
Rags, long matches, decanter of gasoline.

JUNIOR  
Oh. Damn.

SENIOR  
You gotta let go.

JUNIOR  
Yeah. Yeah...

Junior looks manically over his shoulder.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)  
It's just, people I love made this.

Senior's gaze remains uninterested in releasing Junior.

SENIOR  
All of it.

JUNIOR  
Yeah, but this is a *school*, ya  
know? They're *paying* me. Do I  
really wanna set 'em on fire?

Senior lays hands on the gasoline.

SENIOR  
Gimme.

They struggle over the can, barely holding off splashes.

JUNIOR  
No, just-- I'll do it. Gimme--

A laugh emerges from the other side of the dumpster. Senior and Junior's heads swing toward it.

ELI, 19, dark skin, androgynous, stares from the main drag.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)  
Oh, hey. We were just about to--

SENIOR  
Set fire to a puppet. Want in?

Eli smiles, points to Junior.

ELI  
Emmett March?

Junior freezes as though busted.

JUNIOR  
Um, yeah...?

ELI  
You're our feature tonight, right?

Junior attempts to hide the rags and matches.

JUNIOR  
I mean, I'm reading on the queer  
open mic...

ELI  
What are you doing right now? After  
your puppet burning.

Eli waves to Senior.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Oh, hey. Sorry to ignore you.

Senior moves toward Eli.

SENIOR  
No worries, Sir. Emmett Senior.

ELI  
Oh, I don't do *Sir* or *Ma'am*...

Senior looks legit confused. Junior swoops in.

JUNIOR  
You okay with *Friend*?

ELI  
*Friend is good. Love too.*

JUNIOR  
 Ooh, I *LURV* using *Love* as a  
 pronoun. Love.

Junior and Eli laugh. Senior's still head scratching, though.

ELI  
 Emmetts Junior and Senior, what are  
 you doing right now? Or after your  
 Imposter Effigy.

JUNIOR  
 Wide open. Why?

ELI  
 The same artist who was supposed to  
 do the feature you're doing was  
 also supposed to facilitate a  
 workshop this afternoon. It can any  
 topic, any activities...

JUNIOR  
 I'm sorry, did you say *feature*?

ELI  
 Yeah. Didn't Student Life tell you?  
 Wait, what am I saying? Of course  
 they didn't. It's more pay, if  
 you're interested.

Junior holds back low-key panic.

JUNIOR  
 A *feature*? How long a set? And what  
 do I need to do for the workshop?

Eli meditates for a moment, smile forming on their face.

ELI  
 You willing to hold off on all this  
 for a half hour?

Junior looks to Senior, confused. Senior smiles, nods. Boom.

EXT. CAMPUS - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Walking backward, Eli leads a gaggle of about A DOZEN  
 STUDENTS, almost all White, a few with bongos, guitars,  
 djembes, etc.

ELI

Okay, Writers! Thank you so much for your patience. And your willingness to take the scenic route through the *whole* school.

Crowd laughter. They semi-circle around the dumpster. Eli takes the center.

ELI (CONT'D)

For those of you who weren't around at the commons, we have a special treat from the poet who'll be featuring at our open mic right after this.

Scattered cheers and applause. A too loud *Whoo!* from Senior. Junior awkwardly smiles and waves.

ELI (CONT'D)

As I alluded earlier, Emmett Marches came of age in Omaha's youth slam poetry scene, including leading two Louder Than a Bomb slam teams to Nebraska's state championship and being Omaha's youngest ever finalist for the National Poetry Slam team.

Eli turns to Junior, faux whispering.

ELI (CONT'D)

How'm I doin' so far?

JUNIOR

For real, my own mama doesn't know this much about me.

Awkward laughter. Eye roll from Senior. Junior shrugs.

ELI

Emmett was willing to lead a workshop on something I'm calling *release writing*.

Eli snaps their fingers for Junior to grab the puppet.

ELI (CONT'D)

We all familiar with *imposter syndrome*?

Crowd response, mostly *yup*.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Cool! Well, not *cool*. You know what I mean. Emmett's not just a master poet, but a puppeteer as well.

Junior brandishes *Imposter Syndrome* to *oohs and ahhs*.

ELI (CONT'D)  
I was thinking that we all write down the thing we're hell bent on letting go of. Then maybe we'll help lay waste to *The Syndrome* and write some obits for our baggage?

JUNIOR  
You are fucking magical.

Laughter.

ELI  
Then let's bring the fucking Magic!

Cheers. Junior sprawls the Puppet over the small chute in the front of the dumpster.

He grabs the gasoline, pours a few drops on the Puppet.

JUNIOR  
Confession, Y'all: Until this morning, I considered this gig a *maybe*. Like, I was gonna just cancel instead of embarrass myself in front of strangers.

A guitar starts to gently play.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)  
FUCK THAT!

The crowd repeats in emphatic unison. Junior adds more gas.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)  
Who's next?

Several students move toward the dumpster. Multiple drums sound. As Junior and Eli talk, several students add gasoline to the puppet, some indicating what they're letting go of.

ELI  
So, I was thinking...

JUNIOR  
I do like it when you think...

ELI

I'll work on keeping it up. Our open mic is scheduled in an hour. How would you feel if we changed the location to right here and just continued the workshop right into the open mic?

JUNIOR

Works for me.

ELI

Great. Lemme go put up signs in the theater that we're performing out here.

Eli turns to run off.

JUNIOR

You sure nobody'll mind sitting in an alley by a dumpster?

ELI

Please. This is a liberal arts school. We'll be fine.

JUNIOR

Hey, Eli.

Eli turns back to Junior.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Are there any *conservative* arts?

Eli thinks for a second, dead ass serious.

ELI

Lacrosse?

JUNIOR

Yeah. Yeah.

Eli walks off.

Music continues, playing over several scenes.

EXT. DUMPSTER THEATER - LATER

Students lay out on the quad and alleyway, writing in journals as the puppet ashes smolder behind them.

EXT. DUMPSTER THEATER - LATER

A STUDENT POET performs from a journal, the other students horse shoed around her. The drum circle eclipses her words.

EXT. DUMPSTER THEATER - LATER

Junior performs before a CROWD of 30-40 students. After a few seconds, the drum circle fades, Junior's poem in progress.

JUNIOR

Gimme a set of stretchmarks to  
follow like a road map to your  
soul/or at least your belly button/  
flanks on the side to strum like a  
marimba/and moobs/OH MY GOD, MOOBS/  
not breasts or tatas, but their own  
separate entity-MOOBS...

Rather than talking over the roaring crowd, Junior breaks, intimates motor boating, and awkwardly locks eyes with HECTOR, 20, tubby Latino, adorbs.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Okay, okay, enough of that. You get  
the idea. I likes 'em big.

Applause. Junior looks to Senior, asks him *we good?* with his eyes. Senior nods.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

I've alluded to the fact that I'm  
not traveling alone, but I haven't  
really sung the praises of my  
traveling companion...

Senior waves. Audience hoots.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

And he happens to have written  
something during the workshop, so  
let me just give you the gift of my  
great-grandfather, you totally  
heard right *great* grandfather...

Audience cheers.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Emmett Senior!!!

Senior comes center to bestial applause.

SENIOR

Thank you, it's so nice to see there are still real live hippies around. I was older than you all when they were first invented.

Laughter.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

I'm lucky, you know? Most people don't live to be my age, and they certainly don't get to travel the country with their hero.

Awww.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

I hope I'm not overstepping, but I've gotten to hear the poets in Nebraska and all of you, and if your families aren't supportive of every part of your life and what you do, it's not your fault.

Applause.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Seriously. You all are important. I'm honored that you include me and are willing to teach.

Applause continues. Senior waves it off, opens his journal.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

I think I've done enough losing-- two brothers, a wife a daughter-- you never get to lose the things you want to-- a haven't lost a liver spot or a night terror, or that feeling my great grandson calls imposter syndrome.

*Fuck that shit!*

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Indeed. I'd rather get good at finding things. I already found true love. Twice. I find community every time somebody shares their truth. I'd like to find a new country that doesn't push its children all the way to its borders.

(MORE)

SENIOR (CONT'D)

I'd like to find a new body that  
doesn't tell this old country that  
I'm just like it. I'd like to find  
a new body that says *safe* and *home*.

Senior closes the journal.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Thank you. All of you. I'm just--  
proud of and humbled by all of you.

Applause. Senior regards Junior with his arms. Junior returns  
to the dumpster stage, they hug.

JUNIOR

Thank you all! Let's make music and  
burn shit!

Symphonic pandemonium.

Junior pulls a waist-high marionette shaped like an  
existentially conflicted bird, dances it to the drumbeats.

After some dancing and low-key chanting, Eli hands a paper  
bag to Hector, all sneaky like, whispers to him.

Meanwhile, Senior claps to the 1's and 3's in a cypher.

Eli walks to Junior, circled by new fans.

ELI

I don't wanna dethrone the prom  
king, but I should show you two  
were you're staying before it gets  
too late.

JUNIOR

I'll pry him away. Is he...?

Junior points to Senior, mouth agape, in front of a STUDENT  
with a SQUIRT GUN and a bottle of vodka.

ELI

Yup. They call it squirt gunning.

JUNIOR

If there were *liberal sports*,  
squirt gunning would be in the  
Olympics.

Eli halfheartedly laughs, distracted by Hector, near the  
quad, passing something plush around a group of Students.

ELI

Yeah. Nice. Listen, you guys meet me by the big tree. That path that come off of it, that take you right to the *Executive Quarters*.

JUNIOR

Ooh. Fancy. On it.

He darts to Senior, legit acting out a version of *The Boy is Mine* sung by the Show Choir featuring a male student and the Bird Puppet.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Yeah, it's time.

The dance continues. Junior intervenes.

EXT. QUAD - MOMENTS LATER

Eli escorts Junior and a wobbly Senior toward an ornately appointed Victorian looking building.

JUNIOR

What do you all usually do after these things?

ELI

Well, the Commons is already closed, so some of might end up doing Netflix and Uber Eats in somebody's room.

JUNIOR

Oh. That's cool. Isn't there a diner real close to here? I have a car, if that's an issue.

Eli looks down, visibly uncomfortable.

ELI

Oh, yeah... We, uh-- we're here. This is you.

Eli points to the building. Junior looks confused, but is distracted by Senior, teetering in his direction.

ELI (CONT'D)

Let's figure that out after we get the King settled.

Junior nods. They flank Senior, pry him up the front steps.

INT. SENIOR'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Senior lays halfway off the bed, eyelids half mast.

JUNIOR  
It's too bad. He wanted to hang.

ELI  
He hung better than most twenty  
year olds I know.

Junior pulls Senior's shoes off, tosses legs onto the bed and under a blanket.

SENIOR  
Thank you.

JUNIOR  
Yup.

Senior points to Eli.

SENIOR  
I was talking to him.

Eli hides a shudder.

JUNIOR  
*Them.*

SENIOR  
Huh? Oh. Shit. *Them.* I was talking  
to *them.* I'm sorry.

Eli smiles, nods.

EXT. QUAD - MOMENTS LATER

Eli and Junior walk back toward the dorms.

ELI  
So...

JUNIOR  
So...?

ELI  
How much of the town did you see on  
your way in?

JUNIOR  
About as far as the Wal-Mart.

ELI

Did you get out of your car?

JUNIOR

No. Why?

ELI

You can feel the bubble burst.

Junior stops walking. Eli takes a step, stops.

JUNIOR

Oh. *Oh*. Shit. That makes sense.  
Shitty, awful sense.

ELI

You learn pretty quick where you  
can get away with being... other.

JUNIOR

In parts of Omaha, I can't walk to  
my car without getting called a  
faggot. Even if I'm alone. Even if  
I don't even talk. I've got an  
Asian friend who got called the n-  
word by a jeep full of douche  
muppets walking downtown.

ELI

It's a weeknight, so the diner  
might not be too busy... We'll see  
who's still around.

JUNIOR

Yo, I'm fine with whatever. Movie  
and delivery is totally cool.

They come up on a car, a half dozen students from the  
reading, all White except for Hector.

ELI

Guess we've decided.

JUNIOR

You sure you're cool--

ELI

Have Hector ride with you. He  
nearly died when you did the moobs  
poem.

JUNIOR

*Hector*. He has a name. Noted.

They walk to the car.

INT. DINER - LATER

Junior, Eli, Hector and five other Students from the parking lot sit around a table far too small for them in the farthest corner of the nearly otherwise empty restaurant. All water glasses are empty, coffee mugs clearly haven't been refilled.

The table passes a felt HAND PUPPET drawn on to look like Emmett Junior, signing it until it gets to him.

Near the door, an EMPLOYEE texts, occasionally scrutinizing the table. The only other CUSTOMERS whisper, leave.

The Server and Employee whisper, laugh, turning away when Hector stares them down.

TWO DUDES, 30's, enter, hug the Server, mutter amongst the two staff members, aim their gaze at the table. One Dude whispers in an intentionally audible voice.

DUDE

I don't know what the fuck the Black one's supposed to be.

The Staff Members giggle.

ELI

We should get the check.

JUNIOR

Our food hasn't even come yet.

Hector's eyes correct Junior from across the table.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

I'll go settle up.

At the register, the Dudes still talk and laugh.

Junior approaches the Register. Everyone looks, no one moves.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

'Scuse me?

SERVER

We ain't no bathroom for you all.  
Don't even ask.

One of the Dudes snorts at Junior's voice.

SERVER (CONT'D)  
You don't want your food?

JUNIOR  
Have you started it yet?

SERVER  
No.

Junior sighs, pulls a twenty from his pocket, waves it.  
He looks to his table, standing, scooting in chairs.

JUNIOR  
This is for the coffee. Good night,  
y'all.

The group walks from the table, heads down, past the counter,  
out the door. Junior follows, looks over his shoulder.

The Staff and Dudes still laugh, edging toward the door.

EXT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

Junior and his crew walk quickly, silently, to their cars.

A rustling behind them as they cross the street. Junior looks  
over his shoulder. Several of the Students visibly shudder.  
No one.

They get to their cars, turn to the diner. The Dudes stand in  
front, watching them get into the car and pull off.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Junior drives, Hector next to him, Students in the backseat.  
No one speaks. No music.

EXT. QUAD - MOMENTS LATER

Near the dorms, the two carloads of Students disband. Eli  
nods to Junior, hugs Hector.

Hector and Junior remain, approaching the dorms together.

Hector points to his building.

Junior looks to the building, sighs, looks to Hector, nods.

Hector smiles, opens the door.

No sound.

INT. HECTOR'S DORM ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Hector leads, Junior manically looks over his shoulder and around the room.

Hector shuts the door behind them.

Closed door. No sound.

Hector motions for Junior to sit on the bed. Junior sits, rigid, facing away from Hector.

Hector sits. Junior crinkles his face, sniffs in an indeterminate direction, confused.

Hector puts his hands on Junior's chest and shoulder, leans in to kiss.

Junior turns, falls backward onto the bed. Hector lays his body halfway on top of Junior, his other half on the bed.

Hector looks in Junior's panicked face, his mouth moving to ask a question. His voice is inaudible.

The only sound is a throaty, aged, SMOKER'S COUGH increases in volume from no discernible source.

Junior shoots up, Hector jumping out of his way. Hector calls out. No voice, instead the sound of a young boy laughing.

Junior darts for the door, a confused Hector in his wake. Junior opens the door, exits.

INT. DORM - CONTINUOUS

Junior slams the door behind him, its sound resonates through the hall. Sound returns. Junior bolts.

INT. SENIOR'S ROOM - LATER

Senior snores in bed.

The door knob turns, Junior enters, panting, distraught.

Junior leans against the wall, closes his eyes, begins heaving, nearly hyperventilating.

Junior walks to his bag, pulls a notebook, sits against the wall, writes.

INT. SENIOR'S ROOM - MORNING

Junior awake in bed, Dr. Zoe on his phone screen. Water runs from the bathroom.

ZOE

And you said it's happened before?

JUNIOR

Yeah, once when Dre and I tried to hook up, and once with another guy.

ZOE

Other than the cough, did you hear anything else that wasn't there?

JUNIOR

I heard the cough when he started putting his hands on me. Didn't stop 'til I got out of his room. Then I heard, I dunno-- kid laughs?

The water in the bathroom stops.

ZOE

And did he-- remind me his name?

JUNIOR

Hector.

ZOE

Hector didn't do anything to you, though? He didn't force himself?

JUNIOR

Not really. It didn't feel specific to him. There was something else, though. I could smell something. Cigars. Philly Titans.

ZOE

That's so specific.

JUNIOR

I think my grandad used to smoke 'em. My mom's dad.

A knock at the door. Junior looks to the bathroom.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Hey Doc, can we check in later?

ZOE

Absolutely. Text around two?

JUNIOR  
You got it. Thank, Doc.

ZOE  
Yup.

Call ends. Junior hops up, answers. Eli stands with a bag in their hands.

JUNIOR  
Oh hey. You doin' okay?

ELI  
Yeah. Sucks, but it's not the worst I've experienced even since I've been here.

JUNIOR  
Yeah, I get it, I--

ELI  
No, you *don't* get it, Emmett. Way before those guys started coming for you, that server misgendered me on purpose three times, seated us away from everyone and everything, and barely waited on us. I didn't have to move my hands or say a single word. Emmett, you're splitting this country in half like it's your birth rite. And that's amazing. And you're doing great things with that privilege. But it *is* privilege. The idea of your road trip sends my entire body into an anxiety attack.

JUNIOR  
Oh, no. I didn't mean--

ELI  
It's okay to not get it. It's *not* okay not to listen.

JUNIOR  
I'm sorry. I really am.

ELI  
Okay.

Eli hands Junior an envelope.

ELI (CONT'D)

There's enough in our budget for us to give you your money back from the diner.

Junior motions to resist. Countered.

ELI (CONT'D)

Just take it. It's gas money.

They stare face to face in silence.

JUNIOR

Eli, I really regret not listening to you about going out. I erased everything that's different between your experiences and mine. I, uh-- I just wanted us to have solidarity, you know?

ELI

I know. And we do. You're cis and you're White, Emmett, but it's still not as easy for you as a lot of people. Just remember we're not exactly the same. And we don't have to be.

Junior smiles with sucked-in lips, nods.

Senior exits the bathroom, unnoticed by Junior.

ELI (CONT'D)

Now that I've hazed you up, can I be nosy?

JUNIOR

That was *not* hazing me up. And yeah, but there's not much to report.

ELI

You didn't hang out with Hector afterward?

JUNIOR

Eh... not really. Literally the second he starting touching me, I started freaking the fuck out.

ELI

We had been through a lot.

JUNIOR  
Yeah... It's happened before,  
though.

Senior clears his throat.

ELI  
Mornin'. How ya feelin', Champ?

SENIOR  
Doin' alright. What'd you kids get  
into last night?

Junior and Eli look at one another awkwardly.

ELI  
Not much. I was just bringing Eli  
the thank you gift we made him.

Eli holds up the Hand Puppet, hands it to Junior.

ELI (CONT'D)  
We grabbed it when you were...  
handling things.

Eli looks to Senior.

ELI (CONT'D)  
And to tell you how much I enjoyed  
what you read last night.

SENIOR  
Thanks. That was a blast. You got  
any good recommendations for our  
way out of Iowa?

ELI  
Go as fast as you can.

Senior laughs. Eli and Junior don't. Silence.

INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Junior drives, Senior next to him. No talk. No music.

EXT. I-80 - CONTINUOUS

They pass a patch of road signs: *Make America Great Again.*

No sound.

EXT. REST STOP - AFTERNOON

Senior eats a sandwich alone at an outdoor table. Junior approaches him from the parking lot, putting away his phone.

SENIOR  
Good session?

JUNIOR  
Yeah. It was fine.

Junior idly checks his phone.

SENIOR  
You skipped her yesterday.

JUNIOR  
Oh. Yeah. We had to get to Grinnell on time.

SENIOR  
Did you talk about Hector... or anything?

JUNIOR  
Not really. You ready to go?

SENIOR  
Gimme three minutes.

JUNIOR  
Cool. I'm hitting the head.

Junior walks off, fast, no eye contact.

EXT. BACKROAD - CONTINUOUS

Junior drives, radio on. No talking.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Senior gulps, moves lips as if to speak. Junior catches this peripherally, ignores it.

They are silent.

Then...

SENIOR  
Your grandfather smoked Philly Titans.

Maybe twenty feet in front of the car, a queue of about a dozen TURTLES trudges single file across the road.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Oh wow. A whole... pack? What is a group of 'em called?

JUNIOR

Slow as balls, that's what. Poor little guys are *not* safe.

He swings the car around, parallel with the turtle queue.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

You stay in here.

SENIOR

Junior. What if they snap?

Junior turns to Senior, says nothing, exits the car.