“BANG BANG YOU’RE DEAD”

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TIME: Now.

SET: Bare stage. A wooden box that serves as a jail bed, a coffin, a judge’s bench, a truck seat, a table, etc.

PLACE: The play begins in a jail cell, then moves to various places—a court room, a woods, a school, a home—and back to the jail cell again.

CHARACTERS in order of appearance:

Josh
The deceased—Michael, Katie, Matt, Jessie, Emily
Grandpa
Judge (male or female)
Prosecutor (male or female)
Public defender (male or female)
Jury foreman (male or female)
Shadow (male)
Mom
Dad
School principal (male or female)
Voices 1, 2, 3, and 4 (male or female)

The play is continuous without intermission.
“BANG BANG YOU’RE DEAD”

(DARKNESS. A flashlight cuts through the darkness finding Josh asleep on the jail bed).

JOSH
Who’s there?

(Another flashlight from another direction finds Josh).

JOSH
Who is it? Who’s there?

(Michael holds the flashlight under his chin illuminating only his face. The others do the same when they speak).

MICHAEL
Why me?

KATIE
Why me?

MATT
Why me?

JESSIE
Why me?

EMILY
Why’d you kill us, Josh?

JOSH
Cry me a river—I feel like a swim.

(The “Deceased” continue to light themselves and Josh alternately, making sure that the audience sees faces and action when necessary and appropriate.)

MICHAEL
I need an answer, Josh. Why me?

JOSH
For the pleasure of seeing you drop. Okay?

KATIE
Why me?

JOSH
You sat next to him. That’s the way the cookie crumbles.

MATT
Why me? I don’t even know you.

JOSH
Wrong place, wrong time. Loser.

JESSIE
Why me?

JOSH
Why not you? World’s overpopulated. I wanted to do my part.

EMILY
Why’d you smile when you killed me?

JOSH
You know me. I’m just a friendly guy.

EMILY
You liked me once.

JOSH
In your dreams.

(Josh lays back on the bed).

EMILY
We live on the same street. We used to make mud pies when we were little kids.

(Josh mimes an imaginary keyboard, presses keys)

JOSH
ESCAPE.

EMILY
I taught you how to blow bubbles with chewing gum.

JOSH
DELETE.

EMILY
I came to your birthdays, you came to mine.

JOSH
CONTROL ALT DELETE
EMILY
When we were eleven you let me play war with you and the other boys because you liked how I died. Remember?

(The deceased improvise pre-teen kids playing war, using their fingers for guns and making shooting sounds. They run around in the dark, their flashlights sweeping the floor, looking for the enemy, the lights criss-crossing. Let them shout "bam," "pow" etc. Eventually Emily "kills" Katie and Matt who drop dead. Michael shoots Jessie who falls dead. Michael and Emily shoot each other at the same time. Michael drops dead at once. Emily dies very dramatically with all the appropriate sounds).

EMILY
Hope I didn't disappoint when you killed me in the cafeteria this morning, Josh. Hope I died just right for you.

JOSH
Perfect. Wish I could do it again.

EMILY
Go on then. Shoot me again. C'mon.

(Josh pretends to shoot her. She dies again very dramatically).

MICHAEL
Why her?

KATIE
Why him?

MATT
Why them?

JESSIE
Why me?

EMILY
Why anybody, Josh?

JOSH
Simple math. My rifle holds five bullets. Five bullets, five people.

MICHAEL
The bullet that killed me pierced my parents' hearts, too.

KATIE
Pierced my brothers' and sisters' hearts.

MATT
Pierced my friends’ hearts.

JESSIE
Pierced the hearts of parents who send their kids to school.

EMILY
Your five bullets wounded hundreds.

MICHAEL
Maybe thousands.

KATIE
Wounds that will bleed forever.

MATT
Wounds that will weep forever.

JESSIE
Wounds that never heal.

EMILY
Wounds unseen but no less real.

DECEASED
Thousands! Why?

JOSH
It was more fun than droppin’ dudes in a video game.

(Josh lies down to sleep again. Emily pulls off his blanket).

EMILY
All my life I’ve been taught to forgive. I was taught that forgiveness is for the forgiver. But I just can’t. Not until I know what’s really in your heart, Josh.

JOSH
I don’t need your forgiveness. I don’t need anything from anybody. I got all I need in here. Three hots and a cot. The whole thing will be off my record when I’m eighteen anyway. Maybe I’ll be out of here when I’m twenty-one. After that, when I walk down the street, people will look at me and whisper, “Don’t mess with that dude.”

MICHAEL
That’s not fair.

DECEASED
Not fair.

KATIE
Our bodies lie in coffins.

DECEASED
Not fair.

MATT
And you don’t even care.

DECEASED
Not fair.

JESSIE
Our bodies will lie under the earth.

DECEASED
Not fair.

EMILY
While you still breathe the air.

DECEASED
Not fair.

JOSH
But you got yourselves a cozy little place—and you can’t beat the rent.

(JOSH lies down to sleep).

EMILY
This is your last chance for an honest answer, Josh.

JOSH
You can’t hurt me. You’re dead.

MICHAEL
We're gonna open you up.

JOSH
Good luck.

KATIE
Dissect you like a frog in bio lab.

MATT
Pry open your heart.

JESSIE
For a start.

EMILY
Put you through the ringer.

MICHAEL
We’ll find your rhyme.

KATIE
Your reason.

MATT
Not a fun time.

JESSIE
We’ll go up one side.

EMILY
Down the other.

MICHAEL
In your face.

KATIE
Under your skin.

MATT
Crawling through your brain.

JESSIE
Like a worm in an apple.

EMILY
Last chance, Josh. Why?

JOSH
You’re all just a bad dream.

EMILY
Sometimes bad dreams come true.

(The deceased wrap Josh in the blanket, pick him up, making the box a coffin. They drop him in, close the lid. Josh kicks and screams inside).

MICHAEL
That’s how it is in our world now.

KATIE
Alone.

MATT
In the dark.

JESSIE
In silence.

JOSH
Open this thing!

EMILY
We really need some answers, Josh.

JOSH
Let me out!

MICHAEL
What were you thinking?

JOSH
Open up!

KATIE
When you open up.

JOSH
I'm claustrophobic!

MICHAEL
But you got yourself a cozy little place

KATIE
And you can't beat the rent.

JOSH
Please!

MATT
Did he say please?

JESSIE
I think he said please.

JOSH
PLEASE!

EMILY
He definitely said please.

(The deceased turn the box on its side, open the lid. Josh tumbles out with a primal yell. He lies on the floor exhausted).

MICHAEL
That will be your life.

KATIE
Every hour.

MATT
Every minute.

JESSIE
In a word...hell.

EMILY
Without love.

MICHAEL
Without decency.

KATIE
Without comfort.

MATT
A kid in a cage.

JESSIE
A cage that eats you alive each day.

EMILY
And vomits you out so it can eat you again.

MICHAEL
And one day your cage will vomit you out in the street--

(JOSH makes nonsense sounds like a child to drown out what they are saying).

MICHAEL
Stooped.

KATIE
Broken.

MATT
Bitter.

JESSIE
Friendless.

EMILY
Hopeless.

MICHAEL
Mindless.

KATIE
Soul-less.

JOSH
Some lawyer will get me off.

MATT
And how will you get a lawyer?

JOSH
My parents will--

JESSIE
Your parents will what, Josh?

EMILY
Do you remember them?

MICHAEL
A little?

KATIE
A lot?

MATT
Not at all?

JESSIE
Say something, Josh.

EMILY
Your parents can’t do anything for you, Josh, because your parents--

JOSH
I don’t need my parents. The state will appoint a lawyer and I will be out.
MICHAEL
If you survive the big house.

JOSH
Piece o’ cake.

CON VOICE (OFFSTAGE)
Yo, bad boy.

JOSH
Are you talking to me?

CON VOICE
You the bad boy offed seven people?

JOSH
Ah, one, two and then three, four, five, six, seven. Yes, seven. Did you see me on the news?

CON VOICE
We all had our day on the news, bad boy. Tomorr’ we gonna see just how bad Bad Boy is.

JOSH
What do you mean?

CON VOICE
You’ll see, bad boy. We’ll see how bad Bad Boy is without his rifle.

JOSH
Whoa. Guard! Guard! Somebody just made a threat! Guard! Guard!

MICHAEL
Nobody hears you, Josh.

KATIE
You might as well call for your mommy.

JOSH
Shut up.

MATT
The mommy you have no more.

JOSH
SHUT UP!

JESSIE
Nobody hears you but the dead, Josh.
EMILY
You will love your bars.

MICHAEL
Bars protect you from them.

KATIE
The walls close in.

MATT
Narrow your thoughts.

JESSIE
Squeeze your brain.

EMILY
Drive you insane.

MICHAEL
As you remember the big wide world.

KATIE
That you traded for a concrete coffin.

MATT
Six by eight.

JESSIE
Only the truth will set you free.

EMILY
The whole truth and nothing but the truth.

(JUDGE bangs the gavel)

JUDGE
Court is now in session.

FOREMAN
Your honor, the jury has reached a verdict.

JOSH
A verdict already? The trial didn’t even begin!

JUDGE
How do you plead?
JOSH
I have the right to remain silent. Anything I say can be held against me.

PUBLIC DEFENDER
My client pleads guilty your honor.

JOSH
I didn’t say that. Why can’t anyone hear me?

JUDGE
The court will hear the prosecutor's opening statement.

PROSECUTOR
Ladies and gentlemen of the jury: Seven corpses, scores of witnesses. What’s to think about?

FOREMAN
The jury has reached a verdict, Your Honor.

JOSH
Hey, Bozo, you have to wait till the end. Why’s nobody hear me?

JUDGE
The court will now hear from the public defender.

PUBLIC DEFENDER
Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I agree with the Prosecutor.

JOSH
What kind of defense is that?

JUDGE
Let us call witnesses for the prosecution

PROSECUTOR
I call the deceased.

JOSH
How can they testify? They’re dead.

PROSECUTOR
State your name and what you saw.

MICHAEL
I’m Michael. I hardly knew Josh. He was friends with my girl for like forever. That day I got a letter in the mail. My football scholarship was denied from the college I wanted to get in to. There was no way I could pay for college without a scholarship. I wanted to be alone with Emily and tell her because we were applying to the same college. But Josh was there.
We had words. Things got hot. I don’t remember if I pushed him or he pushed me but I thought it was over and forgotten...till I saw he come towards my table in the cafeteria.

KATIE
I’m Katie. I wasn’t even hungry. I wanted to spend my lunch in the library because I was a little shaky for the biology test. But Matt was shakier than me and when he asked for my help I couldn’t say no because he’s like a lost puppy when he asks for anything and it’s impossible to say no. I was explaining mitochondria when I saw Josh dressed in camou walking like he was late for a dentist appointment. It was like when the rollercoaster suddenly drops and you feel weightless and sick and helpless. Then I saw he had a rifle.

MATT
I’m Matt. I didn’t even know Josh. I saw kids mock and tease him. I thought, Poor guy. He never really answered them back. You know how that is. Once they get on your case, there’s not much you can do about it but suffer until they pick on somebody else. Truthfully, I thought it was a joke when he came in the cafeteria. I thought those theatre people are at it again, advertising some dumb play. And I thought, Whoa, they are gonna be in trouble with the principal because that rifle looks so real, I can’t believe they would allow that on school grounds. And then he aimed the rifle at Michael, and when fire came out the barrel...

JESSIE
I’m Jessie. Emily told me that Michael and Josh had a pushing contest. She was so upset because she loved them both and didn’t know how to make peace between them. So when I saw josh come into the cafeteria with a rifle, smiling a smile that was not really a smile, but I don’t know, a taunt, a threat, a mask, a weapon...I don’t know what I’m trying to say but I knew I should run but my legs turned to stone and I had to sit there and I knew I should pray but I couldn’t even remember the words and all I could see was his smile and I waited for the bullet to rip through my body.

EMILY
I’m Emily. He pointed the rifle at me and called my name. He wanted to make eye contact with me because it was so personal. I don’t know why but I thought of 5th grade when I found a tiny box of chocolates in my desk with a Valentine from Anonymous, and I knew it was Josh because he had borrowed the money from me for the exact amount two days before but he’s denied it ever since, I guess because we’re more like brother and sister, we finish each other’s sentences. I felt a sadness that poured over me like cement. The giver of chocolates was now pointing a rifle at me and said, What happened? How did we get to this place? I didn’t want to believe it. But it wasn’t Josh behind his eyes. Something else took him over. And after I fell, and before I closed my eyes forever, I saw the oddest look on his face.

PROSECUTOR
What kind of look?

EMILY
The same face he had when he killed the deer.
PROSECUTOR
What deer?

EMILY
His first buck.

JOSH
You weren’t there. How could you know the face I made?

MICHAEL
We know everything about you.

EMILY
All your thoughts.

MICHAEL
Your feelings.

KATIE
Your memories.

MATT
Your dreams.

JESSIE
Your deep, dark secrets.

JOSH
How? How could you know all that?

EMILY
We're all in your head, Josh.

JOSH
Psych! Tell me one fact about that day. One fact. One.

MICHAEL
Just you and grandpa drove up to the mountain in his old red dented truck with the cracked windshield and the uncomfortable seat with a spring coming out of the upholstery. Enough facts, Josh?

(GRANDPA sits next to Josh on the box that becomes a truck.)

JOSH
Okay, you saw the truck somewhere. Now tell me one thing grandpa said. Ah. You can’t. You can’t. You can’t tell me one thing grandpa said.

GRANDPA
Respect the animals. Don't take a shot unless you know it's sure. Do it quick and clean. You don't want the animal to suffer. You keep that safety on till you are ready to shoot.

JOSH
Okay, anybody could guess that.

KATIE
That old logging road is full of ruts.

JESSIE
You both bounce on the seat. You can't wait to shoot your new rifle.

GRANDPA
Let's go, Josh.

MATT
You both get out of the truck.

JESSIE
The cold stings your face.

EMILY
You can see your breath.

MICHAEL
You wish you dressed warmer.

KATIE
Grandpa watches you load the rifle's magazine.

MATT
Five shiny bullets.

JESSIE
You show him the safety is on.

GRANDPA
Atta boy.

EMILY
You love this man.

MICHAEL
He teaches you so many things about life.

KATIE
You split up.

MICHAEL
You walk for miles.

(JOSH sits on the floor.)

KATIE
Your nose goes numb.

MATT
Your fingers go numb.

JESSIE
Toes go numb.

EMILY
You wish you were still in your warm bed.

MICHAEL
You wish you ate the oatmeal your mother begged you to eat.

KATIE
And in the midst of your numbness, you have a profound philosophical thought:

JOSH
Hunting sucks.

MATT
You lie on dry leaves.

JESSIE
You curl up and doze off.

EMILY
You dream of venison on the grill.

MICHAEL
Something wakes you up.

KATIE
Something moving on dry leaves.

MATT
You don't move.

JESSIE
You feel its presence.

EMILY
And then you see it.

JOSH
A buck!

MICHAEL
Beautiful.

KATIE
Magnificent.

MATT
Strong.

JESSIE
Proud.

EMILY
Keen.

JOSH
Like a dream.

MICHAEL
You're taken by its beauty.

KATIE
Utterly taken by its feral beauty.

MATT
Its hot breath condenses cold.

JESSIE
Makes you forget you're hunting.

EMILY
And then you notice the rifle in your hand.

MICHAEL
But deep inside you don't know if you can really pull the trigger.

KATIE
The buck poses like a sublime statue.

MATT
Your pulse quickens.

JESSIE
You raise your rifle.

(JOSH mimes a rifle)

EMILY
Your hands shake.

MICHAEL
You can't find the buck in the scope

KATIE
You hold your breath.

MATT
You put the crosshairs under the buck's shoulder.

JESSIE
The moment of truth has come.

EMILY
But this buck's beauty weakens you.

MICHAEL
You don't see venison in a stew.

KATIE
You don't see steaks and chops on the grill.

MATT
You don't see a trophy mounted on the wall.

JESSIE
You see a beauty beyond words.

EMILY
You want to shoot but you don't want to shoot.

MICHAEL
So you make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

MICHAEL
You pull the trigger! Nothing happens!

KATIE
The safety's still on!

MATT
You panic!

JESSIE
You click the safety off.

EMILY
The buck turns and runs like the wind.

MICHAEL
You take aim.

DECEASED
Bam!

KATIE
First shot misses!

DECEASED
Bam!

MATT
Second shot misses.

DECEASED
Bam!

JESSIE
Third shot misses!

DECEASED
Bam!

EMILY
Fourth shot misses!

JOSH
Damn!

JISH
DAMMIT!

MICHAEL
Down on one knee!

KATIE
Find the buck in the crosshairs.

MATT
The buck stops.

JESSIE
Looks back as bucks do.

EMILY
Makes a perfect target of itself.

MICHAEL
You think...So beautiful.

KATIE
So magnificent.

MATT
So proud.

JESSIE
So strong.

EMILY
All you want to be.

MATT
But you want to shoot.

JESSIE
And you don’t want to shoot.

EMILY
You have to shoot.

MICHAEL
But you don’t have to shoot.

KATIE
The war inside you has to end.

DECEASED
Bam!

MATT
Buck goes down!

JESSIE
You tear across the field.

EMILY
You stand over your dying buck.

MICHAEL
Its legs kick as if running on the air.

KATIE
Its chest heaves

MATT
Its blood spurts out

JESSIE
Its life runs out

EMILY
Like a wind-up toy

MICHAEL
Battery dying.

KATIE
Slowing.

MATT
Slowing.

JESSIE
Still.

EMILY
Dead.

JOSH
Awww, man.

MICHAEL
You hurt inside

MATT
You wish it was all a DVD.

JESSIE
You wish you could just hit STOP BUTTON.

EMILY
Just hit the BACK BUTTON.

MICHAEL
To make the buck come alive again.

KATIE
That was the look on your face.

MATT
The look that loved the hunt.

JESSIE
But wished the buck could live again.

EMILY
But you can’t unshoot the bullet.

MICHAEL
You can’t unkill it!

KATIE
The beautiful--

MATT
Magnificent--

JESSIE
Proud--

EMILY
Keen buck dying on the ground.

MICHAEL
You watch its life run out.

JOSH
I didn’t know it would be like this. CONTROL ALT DELETE.

DECEASED
That was the look on your face.

KATIE
Your buck takes its last breath.

JOSH
Awww, man.

MATT
You almost let yourself weep.

JESSIE
But you hear a voice.

GRANDPA
Josh. Why 5 shots?

EMILY
Grandpa comes out of breath.

MICHAEL
He sees your dying buck.

KATIE
He looks at you like no one's ever looked at you before.

EMILY
Like a man.

MICHAEL
Somebody you always wanted to be

KATIE
12 feet tall.

MATT
Big.

JESSIE
Bigger than big.

EMILY
Immense.

MICHAEL
Gigantic.

KATIE
Colossal.

MATT
Measureless.

JESSIE
Other hunters come out of the forest.

EMILY
They ask you to tell the story.

MICHAEL
All the details

KATIE
And you feel as tall as the pines.

MATT
But as small as the moles deep underground.

JESSIE
Both at once.

EMILY
Pine tree tall and mole small.

(Grandpa takes out a Polaroid camera).

GRANDPA
C’mon, Josh, let’s have a picture. Say “moment of glory.”

MICHAEL
You make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

(Grandpa takes a polaroid photograph, hands it to Josh.)
DECEASED
That was the look on your face.

JUDGE
Where is this photo?

EMILY
I have it, Your Honor.

(EMILY hands two halves of the photo to the JUDGE)

PROSECUTOR
Why is the photo ripped in half?

EMILY
Tell the court what happened that day in the cafeteria that day, Josh.

JOSH
If you know everything about me, why don't you know that?

EMILY
We want to hear you say it to yourself.

FOREMAN
We have reached a verdict, Your Honor.

JOSH
You can't have a verdict! You didn't hear the whole story! (to PUBLIC DEFENDER) Why don't you object?

PUBLIC DEFENDER (stage whisper)
Laryngitis.

PROSECUTOR
What's the whole story, Josh.

(LIGHTS BLINK. FLASHBACK. EMILY sits with a notebook and pencil. VOICES 1, 2, 3, 4 are conversing on another part of the stage, close enough to eavesdrop. ENTER JOSH with a whole photo).

EMILY
Where have you been all weekend?

JOSH
Wait till you see this.

(JOSH shows a whole photo)
EMILY
I left messages. You never answered.

JOSH
Okay, don’t pull a muscle, I’m here. My first buck.

EMILY
What about your half of our baby diary?

JOSH
I’m not quite done with it. So my grandpa drives up this old logging road.

EMILY
Josh, the baby diary’s due this afternoon.

JOSH
I’ll finish it at lunch. You didn’t even look at the picture. My first buck.

EMILY
I don’t care about your first buck. I care about our grade in Health Class. Where’s Chloe?

JOSH
Safe and sound.

(JOSH takes the sugar baby out of his backpack. It looks “tampered with.”)

(DIRECTOR’S NOTE: VOICES 1-4 LAUGH on a 3 point scale: #1 is bemused laughter, #2 is mocking laughter, #3 vicious mocking laughter. At this moment VOICES 1-4 LAUGH #1).

EMILY
You are so... Josh, when you have a kid, are you gonna keep it in a backpack?

JOSH
A kid? I can’t even get a date.

EMILY
Why’s it so light?

JOSH
I emptied the sugar out.

EMILY
Josh, why?

JOSH
I needed some for my cornflakes.
(VOICES LAUGH # 1)

EMILY
Oh, Josh!

JOSH
Filled it with cotton balls. Easier to carry.

(VOICES, LAUGH #1)

EMILY
We both are gonna fail if the teacher ever does a spot-check.

JOSH
With all my books I can’t be lugging around 10 pounds of sugar all day long.

EMILY
How else can you develop patience and care with a child?

JOSH
It’s not real, Emmer.

EMILY
Lucky for you because it would be child abuse and you’d be arrested. Let me see what you wrote.

JOSH
I’m not quite finished.

EMILY
Let me see what you have.

JOSH
Well, ah, it’s kinda all in my head, Ems. I just have to sit down now and write it out from memory.

EMILY
What’d you have for lunch yesterday?

JOSH
Lunch? I don’t remember.

EMILY
But you can remember all the details about our baby care for the last two weeks.

JOSH
I was waiting for a big burst of inspiration but it never came. Is that my fault?
EMILY
You had a big burst of selfishness.

JOSH
CONTROL ALT DELETE.

EMILY
Wish I could shut down and restart my conscience like that. I knew it was a mistake to have a baby with you.

(VOICES LAUGH #1)

JOSH
Chill, Emmer, everybody’s looking.

EMILY
Josh, you obviously don’t care about your grade, but I care about mine.

(Enter MICHAEL)

MICHAEL
Hey, Josh.

JOSH
Hey.

MICHAEL
Let’s rock ‘n roll.

EMILY
I’m sorta stuck here for a while.

MICHAEL
This is my only time off.

EMILY
I know but...

MICHAEL
But what? What happened?

EMILY
We don’t have all of the Health Class assignment.

MICHAEL
But last night you told me you finished it.

EMILY
My half.

MICHAEL
Oh.

EMILY
Josh doesn’t quite have his half.

MICHAEL
Well, why don’t you turn your half in and let him fail.

EMILY
We’re graded together because we have a, you know, baby together. We really need to come up with 14 diary pages.

MICHAEL
Well how long will that take?

EMILY
Maybe two hours.

JOSH
More like a half hour.

MICHAEL
This stinks.

EMILY
I know, Michael, I’m sorry.

MICHAEL
Don’t apologize for him. He should be the one the say he’s sorry.

(MICHAEL takes the photo out of EMILY’s hand).

MICHAEL
What’s this?

EMILY
Josh got a buck on the weekend. His first.

JOSH
My picture please.

MICHAEL
Josh the big bad game hunter had time to hunt but not enough time to do the assignment.

JOSH
CONTROL ALT DELETE.

MICHAEL
What’s that mean?

JOSH
My picture.

(JOSH grabs the photograph but MICHAEL’S grip is so tight, JOSH accidentally rips the photo in half).

(VOICES LAUGH #2)

MICHAEL
Oops. (Flips the other half of the photograph to Josh) You ripped it, not me.

(JOSH holds up the torn photograph).

JOSH
I wanted to get this enlarged and framed. But now it’s ruined.

(JOSH throws the pieces of the photo down. EMILY picks up the pieces).

MICHAEL
It was an accident.

JOSH
No it wasn’t. You wouldn’t let go.

MICHAEL
You pulled it too hard, loser.

(VOICES LAUGH, #3. JOSH throws himself at MICHAEL, pushes MICHAEL back, and then MICHAEL pushes JOSH to the floor. VOICES continue LAUGH, #3. JOSH throws himself at MICHAEL again. EMILY holds JOSH back.).

EMILY
C’mon, you guys, you’ll both get in trouble.

JOSH
Let me go!

EMILY
C’mon, Josh, we really need to get this diary written.

MICHAEL
Let him go. What can a puny little loser do to me?
(VOICES LAUGH # 3)

JOSH
That’s what the buck thought.

(VOICES go “WHOA!”)

MICHAEL
What’s that supposed to mean?

JOSH
You better hope you never find out.

MICHAEL
You know, Josh, you’re a joke in this school. Josh the joke.

(VOICES LAUGH # 3)

EMILY
Michael, Josh is my friend and you can’t talk to my friend like that.

MICHAEL
You two spend a little too much time together.

(EXIT MICHAEL)

JOSH
What do you see in him?

EMILY
Let’s just get this done.

JOSH
I knew you first.

EMILY
What?

JOSH
CONTROL ALT DELETE.

EMILY
No, what’d you mean?

JOSH
It doesn’t matter.

EMILY
It does to me. Tell me.

JOSH
I’m too ticked. I can’t think straight right now.

EMILY
Okay. But what you said was sweet.

JOSH
Can I put that on my cornflakes? Can’t believe he pushed me in front of the whole school.

EMILY
I think he’s a little jealous.

(VOICES LAUGH, #3)

JOSH
Every kid in the school’s laughing at me.

EMILY
They’re not laughing at you.

JOSH
Why are they looking at me?

EMILY
Let’s work.

JOSH
I’ll do it on my own.

(Josh moves to another place).

MICHAEL
You make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.
(VOICES LAUGH, # 3)

JOSH
Somebody's gonna laugh once too many times.

VOICE 1
You hear about Josh the joke? He got his ass kicked.

(VOICES LAUGH # 3. Josh writes in his notebook. He tries to ignore the sporadic peals of laughter. ENTER SHADOW in a black hooded sweatshirt hiding his face standing behind Josh).

SHADOW
You gonna let them just flick your switch?

JOSH
Who said that?

SHADOW
You do nothing, you’re gonna be their daily entertainment.

JOSH
Who are you?

SHADOW
You’ve known who I am ever since the day you shot the buck.

JOSH
What about it?

SHADOW
You cast a long shadow across the snow that day.

JOSH
How do you know that?

SHADOW
You felt twelve feet tall.

JOSH
How do you know that?

SHADOW
I know what you know.

JOSH
How can you know what I know? Who are you?
SHADOW
I am you and you are me.

JOSH
I don’t get it.

SHADOW
I am the long shadow you cast on the snow that day in the woods but that long shadow is the shadow of a different you deep inside.

JOSH
How different?

SHADOW
I am you when the remote is in your hand and your nimble fingers dance over the remote switching from Glock to AK-47 to flamethrower, wiping out multitudes of enemies. That feeling of big.

JOSH
Bigger than big.

SHADOW
Immense.

JOSH
Gigantic.

SHADOW
Colossal.

JOSH
Measureless.

SHADOW
Exactly.

JOSH
Whoa.

SHADOW
At your service.

JOSH
What do you mean?

SHADOW
Whatever you want it to mean.
JOSH
Okay.

SHADOW
How much longer can you take this abuse?

JOSH
Like a negative second.

SHADOW
You have to do something.

JOSH
I’m hoping they’ll get tired of me and find somebody else to harass.

SHADOW
Never happen. They’re vampires. They want your blood. Everyday.

JOSH
I don’t know what else to do.

SHADOW
I know how to stop it.

JOSH
How?

SHADOW
Let’s give ‘em something to think about.

JOSH
Like what?

SHADOW
Something big.

JOSH
For example.

SHADOW
Something that blows their minds.

JOSH
Be specific.

SHADOW
I see an empty classroom. I see a blackboard crying out for a dire message that shuts them up.

(Josh uses the fourth wall as a blackboard, mimes writing on it with a piece of chalk. SHADOW speaks the words as JOSH writes them)

SHADOW
"Everybody...in...this...class...is...dead...meat."

(A CROWD assembles and reacts to the words on the blackboard. Improvise. The crowd is comprised of the Voices, the Deceased and perhaps others. The Principal ENTERS to have a look. S/He takes a snapshot of the words on the blackboard).

PRINCIPAL
Okay, people, Health Class is cancelled for today. This room is now a crime scene. If anyone knows anything about the blackboard phantom, it will be kept strictly confidential. Go to the library and study quietly. Move those feet. Let’s go!

(The crowd fragments into different directions and suddenly we are back in the courtroom.)

PROSECUTOR
And who did you suspect to be the blackboard phantom?

PUBLIC DEFENDER
Objection, Your Honor. It’s pure speculation.

JOSH
Wow, you spoke up. I thought you died with your eyes open.

JUDGE
Overruled. Emily knew him best. While her feelings are not factual, they may be relevant. I want to allow this.

EMILY
I thought it was Josh.

PROSECUTOR
Why did you think Josh was the blackboard phantom?

EMILY
He practically confessed to me.

(Suddenly we are back in the past again. JOSH sits writing in a notebook. ENTER EMILY. JOSH rips a few pages out of his notebook).

JOSH
Here’s my diary pages.

EMILY
Josh, when did you do all this?

JOSH
Since the school went into lockdown.

EMILY
Guess the blackboard phantom did you a favor.

JOSH
Blackboard phantom. Love that.

EMILY
Who do you think it is?

(SHADOW ENTERS, sits between JOSH and EMILY and blows up a balloon).

JOSH
No idea. But he must be somebody whose switch got flicked once too often.

EMILY
What do you mean, Josh?

JOSH
Just what I said. People flick your switch, you gotta stop it.

EMILY
But Josh, this blackboard phantom has to realize how frightened we all feel now. Education stops. That’s not right.

JOSH
Well, those frightened people need to realize how frightening it is to be pushed around like the school joke. Life stops. I feel empty. Like a balloon. All puffed up. Big enough for everyone to see. But empty. So empty. A balloon in a world where everybody else is pointed, sharp, jagged. Just a word is a needle. A look is broken glass. A laugh—oh, especially a laugh—is a razor. I go pop.

(SHADOW pops the balloon with a sharp object and then holds the limp and ragged remnant of the balloon in the air).

MICHAEL
So you make your face a mask.

KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

(ENTER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL)

PRINCIPAL
Hi Emily. Hi Josh.

EMILY and JOSH
Hi.

PRINCIPAL
May I speak with you in my office, Josh?

JOSH
Sure. See ya, Emily.

(JOSH and PRINCIPAL go to another part of the stage)

PRINCIPAL
Have a seat.

JOSH
Thanks.

PRINCIPAL
 Anything you want to say to me, Josh?

JOSH
Didn’t you want to talk to me?

PRINCIPAL
I was hoping you’d come to your senses and have something to say to me.

JOSH
Oh, yeah. Great hair.

PRINCIPAL
I admire a good poker-face, Josh, but to your credit, you’re not a very good liar.

JOSH
I never claimed to be an expert.
PRINCIPAL
What do you know about the words on the blackboard?

JOSH
Nothing.

PRINCIPAL
We know for a fact that you're the blackboard phantom, Josh.

JOSH
You can’t know that because I’m not.

PRINCIPAL
We have a snitch.

JOSH
Who?

PRINCIPAL
You.

JOSH
What do you mean?

PRINCIPAL
We compared the writing on the blackboard to your last English class essay. It’s a perfect match. Do you have anything to say now?

JOSH
What a remarkable coincidence.

PRINCIPAL
Violence or even the threat of violence triggers our zero tolerance policy. I have no choice but to expel you for the rest of the year. I will inform your parents that you will have to repeat the grade unless you repeat all your courses in summer school.

(VOICES LAUGH #3. EXIT PRINCIPAL. ENTER JOSH'S PARENTS).

JOSH
I won't go! I won't go!

MOM
It won’t be so bad, Josh.

JOSH
Sit in hot class all day while other kids can do what they want? And study on summer nights?
(VOICES LAUGH # 3)

DAD
Maybe you should've thought about that before you wrote on the blackboard.

(ENTER SHADOW blowing up a balloon).

JOSH
Know what they call me at school? Josh the joke.

(VOICES LAUGH # 3).

Somebody calls you a name, it’s superglued to your forehead. Forever. I had to shut them up. Why can’t you see that?

DAD
You can’t threaten people.

JOSH
It wasn’t for real, Dad. It was just SHUT UP AND LEAVE ME ALONE.

DAD
If you wrote SHUT UP AND LEAVE ME ALONE on the blackboard you wouldn’t be in trouble now, would you? The school can’t take a chance. You did something wrong so take your punishment like a man.

(VOICES LAUGH # 3)

JOSH
Why should I be punished when they’re laughing at me right now?

DAD
So what. That’s life.

MOM
What your father means is you can’t help what others think of you.

DAD
And what your mother means is—you care too much about what others think of you. You are in school to get an education, not to make friends. And you threw away an education for what? To blow off a little steam. So grow up. Bite the bullet. Be a man.

MOM
Well, I wouldn’t have said it exactly like that.

JOSH
My life is over.
SHADOW

JOSH
I’d rather be dead.

MOM
Oh, Josh, you don’t really mean that.

SHADOW
Don’t overdo it.

MOM
Josh, we will help you through this. Step by step we will be there for you. The first step is an appointment with a psychotherapist tomorrow morning.

JOSH
I don’t need that.

DAD
It’s a requirement to get back into school.

MOM
Neither one of us can take off from work. So here’s the address. This will be one step closer to getting you back on track, Josh.

(SHADOW bursts the balloon with a pin.

JOSH
I hate you both.

(EXIT JOSH’S PARENTS. VOICES LAUGH # 3. JOSH and the VOICES have a contest, his words against their laughter).

JOSH (repeat)
CONTROL ALT DELETE!

(VOICES LAUGH #3. They win. Josh mimes a rifle and shoots at VOICES. They drop dead only to jump up and LAUGH again. He shoots them again with more ferocity. They all fall and lie dead. JOSH relaxes and lies on his bed. VOICES jump up again and circle JOSH, pointing and laughing).

VOICE 1
Hear about Josh the joke?

VOICE 2
No, what now?
VOICE 3
He’s gotta see a shrink to get back in school!

(VOICES LAUGH # 3 waddle in a circle like ducks going “Quack, quack, quack,” like ducks in a shooting gallery. Once again JOSH drops them all one by one. Momentarily).

JOSH
Friend? Where are you, friend?

SHADOW
Right behind you.

JOSH
The voices are driving me crazy.

SHADOW
Gotta shut ‘em up, Josh.

JOSH
But how? The voices are in my head now. How can I shut them up?

SHADOW
Only one way, Josh.

JOSH
How?

SHADOW
Boom.

JOSH
What do you mean?

SHADOW
You know what I mean. Boom. No more pain.

JOSH
That’s dumb.

SHADOW
You said it before, Josh. Your life is over.

JOSH
Awww, man.

SHADOW
Punish them. Do it in the living room. Leave your brains on the wall for your parents to see. Boom. No more pain.

JOSH
That's really dumb.

SHADOW
Know what's dumb? Going back to that school. You know what they’re saying about you?

VOICE 1
Hear about Josh the joke?

VOICE 2
While everybody's having fun in the sun, Josh is reading gobbledygook in a book!

(THE VOICES JUMP UP LAUGHING # 3)

JOSH
I'll always be the laughingstock.

SHADOW
Always Josh the joke. Imagine you do summer school. Imagine the day you go back. Imagine riding the bus. Imagine the looks. Imagine you walk the halls. Imagine the words.

VOICE 1
Loser!

VOICE 2
Josh the joke!

SHADOW
They will whittle you down to dust.

JOSH
It will never end.

SHADOW
Never. Stop the voices, Josh. Boom.

JOSH
Awww, man.

SHADOW
Stop the pain, Josh. Kill the voices.

JOSH
Does it hurt?
SHADOW
You don’t feel a thing.

JOSH
Sometimes it hurts too much to be alive, but I’m afraid to be dead. I don’t want to be thinking this.

SHADOW
You wanna be Josh the joke forever?

(VOICE LAUGH # 3. SHADOW blows up a balloon).

VOICE 1
Hear about Josh the joke?

VOICE 2
No, what’d he do now?

VOICE 3
Blew out his brains.

VOICE 4
What a loser.

JOSH
Not even that? Not even that? They won’t even let me have that in peace?

SHADOW
The deck is stacked against you, Josh.

JOSH
Not even that.

SHADOW
You will never be anything but a fool in their eyes

JOSH
They’ll still mock me even when I’m dead. (SHADOW bursts the balloon with a pin)
WILL SOMEBODY JUST PUT ME OUT OF MY MISERY?

SHADOW
You gotta take ‘em down with you.

DECEASED
Fort Gibson, St. Charles, Fayetteville.

JOSH
Whoa.

DECEASED
Pomona, Edinboro, Pearl, Moses Lake.

SHADOW
Show 'em who you are.

DECEASED
Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield.

SHADOW
The whole school would stand in awe of you.

DECEASED
Columbine, Bethel. Virginia Tech.

SHADOW
You’d be a legend for years to come.

DECEASED
Erfurt, Virginia Tech.

SHADOW
They’ll write books about you. They’ll make movies about you.

DECEASED
Kauhajoki.

SHADOW
It's almost lunchtime. They will all be in the cafeteria soon. Scene of the crime.

JOSH
I can see them sitting there.

SHADOW
Imagine their faces when you walk in.

JOSH
Totally surprised.

SHADOW
Heart attack time.

JOSH
Big.

SHADOW
Bigger than big.

JOSH
Immense.

SHADOW
Gigantic.

JOSH
Colossal.

SHADOW
Measureless.

JOSH
Imagine their faces.

SHADOW
A rifle in your hand—instant respect.

JOSH
Love that feeling.

SHADOW
Love it.

JOSH
Crave it.

SHADOW
Need it.

JOSH
Gotta have it ever since I could hold a—

SHADOW
Cap gun.

JOSH
Water gun.

SHADOW
Air gun.

JOSH
Pop gun.

SHADOW
B.B. gun

JOSH
Twelve gauge.

SHADOW
22.

JOSH
38.

SHADOW
45.

JOSH
A gun makes you feel alive.

SHADOW
Watch out!

JOSH
Move aside!

SHADOW
Nobody can touch you.

JOSH
When you have a gun-

SHADOW
Nobody mocks you.

JOSH
When you have a gun. When you have a gun,

SHADOW
People talk nice.

JOSH
When you have a gun-

SHADOW
People look at you like a V.I.P.

JOSH
Somebody bumps you, they say, Excuse me.
You walk different-

JOSH
When you have a gun.

SHADOW
You talk different-

JOSH
When you have a gun.

JOSH
You think different-

SHADOW
When you have a gun.

JOSH
It's an A-plus.

SHADOW
Slam dunk.

JOSH
Touchdown.

SHADOW
Perfect put down.

JOSH
All in one.

SHADOW
You can be whatever you wanna be.

JOSH
A gun in your hand is a Ph.D.

SHADOW
Take 'em all with you and put this town on the map.

JOSH
That's a wrap.

SHADOW
Hey, Josh, hear that?

JOSH
I don’t hear anything.

SHADOW
The voices in your head, they’re not laughing anymore.

(JOSH and SHADOW share a primal primal yell of joy, rebellion, and freedom. SHADOW helps JOSH on with a camou t-shirt and hat, and they dance and yell until--)

DAD (offstage)
Josh?

MOM (offstage)
Josh, are you home?

SHADOW
Home early because you didn’t keep the appointment.

JOSH
The psychotherapist!

SHADOW
They will stop you.

JOSH
No.

SHADOW
Back to school.

JOSH
No.

SHADOW
Josh the joke.

JOSH
No.

(ENTER MOM AND DAD)

DAD
 Josh, what are you doing home? The therapist called and said you never showed.

JOSH
NO!

MICHAEL
Make your face a mask.
KATIE
A mask that hides your face.

MATT
A face that hides the pain.

JESSIE
A pain that eats your heart.

EMILY
A heart nobody knows.

SHADOW
BAM!

(DAD drops).

MOM
Josh, what are you doing?

JOSH
I love you, mom.

MOM
Josh! Think!

SHADOW
BAM!

(MOM drops)

JOSH
Who did this?

SHADOW
You.

JOSH
No.

SHADOW
Don’t think about it. Move, move, move or you will chicken out.

(The DECEASED and VOICES gather together in the cafeteria. Ad lib small talk. ENTER JOSH. Dead quiet. JOSH aims at MICHAEL).

JOSH
Anybody here think I’m Josh the joke?

SHADOW
Bam!

(Michael pulls a red scarf through a pin hole in this clothing representing blood and drops).

JOSH
Anybody here think I’m a loser?

SHADOW
Bam!

(KATIE pulls a red scarf through a pin hole and drops).

JOSH
Why’s nobody laughing now?

SHADOW
Bam!

(JESSIE pulls a red scarf through a pin hole and drops).

JOSH
Why’s nobody laughing at Josh the joke?

SHADOW
Bam!

(MATT pulls a red scarf through a pin hole and drops).

JOSH
Emily...

EMILY
What happened?

(JOSH shoots EMILY who pulls a red scarf through a pinhole and drops).

SHADOW
Reload!

(As Josh reloads, VOICES tackle him and bring him down).

JUDGE
Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?
(VOICES release JOSH)

FOREMAN
We have Your Honor.

(The jury assembles: the FOREMAN, the DECEASED, VOICES, MOM and DAD, =12).

JOSH
That’s my jury?

(MOM sings "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" under the monologue).

JOSH
Mom, do you have to sing that stupid song? Message received, okay? Yes, I remember you used to sing me that when I couldn’t sleep? Thank you for the pain?

(DAD puts on a baseball glove and slams a baseball into the pocket repeatedly).

JOSH
Do you have to do that, Dad? Message received, okay? Yes, I remember you taught me the outfielders glove and I caught a high-fly in the Little League championship game and you carried me off the field? You carried me! How did that stop? What happened? Why can't it be like that all the time? You didn't understand I was a joke at school and a joke at home. I wanted to kill you but I didn't want you dead. How else could I tell you what's on my mind without you interrupting? Why's it so easy to talk to you now?

JUDGE
The foreman will read the jury’s verdict.

JOSH
Big surprise this is gonna be.

FOREMAN
Your Honor, we the jury find the defendant guilty—

JOSH
I have reached a verdict too, Your Honor! There are put-down artists who will trash you just to be noticed by other kids. There are kids who hurt so bad inside they need to make somebody else hurt. There are kids who would do anything to see somebody trip, fall, cry, fail, just for laughs. And the teachers don't see. Nobody sees. Will there be a trial for them too? Answer me that! Will there be a trial for them too?

JUDGE
The foreman will now read the sentence.

FOREMAN
Your Honor, we the jury sentence the defendant to life imprisonment without possibility.

JOSH
Possibility of what?

FOREMAN
Without possibility.

JOSH
Without possibility of what?

FOREMAN
Without possibility.

JOSH
I don’t know what that means.

MICHAEL
You'll never achieve your dreams.

KATIE
Never skydive.

MATT
Never scuba off Australia.

JESSIE
Never explore the caldera of a volcano.

EMILY
Never fly a helicopter.

MICHAEL
Never be a sportscaster.

KATIE
Never ski again.

MATT
Never body surf.

JESSIE
Never meet people on the internet.

EMILY
Never know what you could've been—

MICHAEL
Done—

KATIE
Seen—
MATT
Had—
JESSIE
Known--
EMILY
Loved—in your lifetime.

MICHAEL
Now you'll never know all the happiness that might have been yours.

KATIE
Through the bars of your cell you'll see the Josh you might have been.

MATT
And wondering will be your pain.

JESSIE
The pain will eat the blossom of your youth.

EMILY
You will be as dead as we are.

(The DECEASED pull away from Josh momentarily. They address the audience at this point.)

KATIE
Know what I hate about being dead? You can't call up and order a pizza.

MICHAEL
Pepperoni.

JESSIE
Extra cheese.

EMILY
Garlic.

MATT
Hold the anchovies!

MICHAEL
Cheeseburgers.

KATIE
With bacon.

MATT
And fries.

JESSIE
Drenched in ranch dressing.

EMILY
Triple chocolate milkshakes.

MATT
Chocolate chip cookies.

KATIE
With milk.

MATT
Cold milk.

JESSIE
So many things to miss.

EMILY
You could never name them all.

ALL
Never.

(With background music. The tone is bittersweet--sad that it's gone, joyful in remembrance. Sometimes they are oblivious of Josh, other times they direct the lines at him. At the director's discretion, cut one or two of the following sections (5 or 10 lines) and let the Actors personalize things they now have that they miss. Let each line begin with, "I miss--". Let none of the personalization court controversy or interfere with plot, character, or tone).

MICHAEL
I miss cruising, windows down, radio up.

KATIE
I miss lying on my bed in the dark falling asleep to my iPod.

MATT
I miss dancing to NSync.

JESSIE
I miss when a guy gets that look in his eye! And you know he's gonna ask you out!
EMILY
And then he says, Can I borrow your math book?

MICHAEL
I miss when she answers before you even finish asking-

KATIE
I’d love to!

MATT
I miss when you go in for the kiss and then it happens and it's much, much better than you dreamed it would be.

JESSIE
I miss bowling.

EMILY
I miss seeing Jody when she has that look on her face that she’s got another stupid joke to tell me.

MICHAEL
I miss mom's rock-hard brownies.

KATIE
I miss my dog when I come home from school.

MATT
I miss how my dog jumps all over me and barks for a treat.

JESSIE
I miss text messages saying, “Sweet dreams.”

EMILY
I miss when you take a new pair of jeans in the dressing room and put them on and they fit perfect.

MICHAEL
I miss cheese puffs.

KATIE
I miss soda fizz tickling my nose.

MATT
I miss loving someone.

JESSIE
I miss fixing my hair in the morning.
EMILY
I miss going to the mailbox and getting a letter that I didn't expect.

MICHAEL
A hand written letter.

KATIE
I miss jumping into a cool pool on a hot day.

MATT
I miss sneezing.

JESSIE
I miss sleeping.

EMILY
I miss good times in Louisiana.

MICHAEL
I miss rollerblading.

KATIE
I miss when you start the school year and you open a book for the first time and the spine cracks.

MATT
I miss going into the cafeteria and deciding who I want to sit with.

JESSIE
I miss laughing so hard I start to cry.

EMILY
I miss waterskiing in Georgia.

MICHAEL
I miss being home alone with a bag of microwave popcorn and the remote in my hand channel surfing.

KATIE
I miss giving my dog a bath and she shakes and gives me a shower.

MATT
I miss cooking for my mom.

JESSIE
I miss mom's cooking wafting through the house and trying to guess what it is.

EMILY
I miss picking a college.

MICHAEL
I miss talking with friends on the phone after midnight.

KATIE
I miss going in a grocery store and being able to buy anything I want.

MATT
I miss hanging out.

JESSIE
I miss the end of a race when I’m out of breath and I feel so good about myself.
EMILY
I miss screaming at the football games.

MICHAEL
I miss the end of the day school bell, the feeling in the air when you can go home.

KATIE
I miss my bed.

MATT
I miss singing in the shower.

JESSIE
I miss getting into a fight with my sister and acting like nothing happened five minutes later.

EMILY
I miss making mom laugh so hard she can't hardly breathe.

MICHAEL
I miss watching the sky go from light to dark.

KATIE
And dark to light.

MATT
I miss, even at my age, not being able to sleep on Christmas Eve.

JESSIE
I miss learning new songs on the piano.

EMILY (TO DECEASED)
I miss singing to the radio in front of the mirror.

MICHAEL
And pretending I'm in concert.

**MATT**
Standing room only! I miss Sunday brunch.

**JESSIE**
I miss Krispy Kreme donuts.

**EMILY**
I miss opening a door on a winter's day and feeling the cool rush of cold air on my face.

**MICHAEL**
I miss hitting on girls.

**KATIE**
I miss jumping on the trampoline with six people at a time.

**MATT**
I miss swimming in the fountain at midnight.

**JESSIE**
I miss people watching.

**EMILY**
I miss the look in my brother's eye just before he pulls his newest wrestling move on me.

(Music fades out. **JOSH** interrupts.)

**JOSH**
I never thought I was taking away all that. I killed all my possibilities too. I'll never have anything to look forward to. Never.

**MICHAEL**
Never? What do you know about never? I'll never do all I wanted to do.

**DECEASED**
Never.

**KATIE**
I'll never achieve my dreams.

**DECEASED**
Never.

**MATT**
I'll never see all I wanted to see.
Never.

JESSIE
I'll never know all I wanted to know.

DECEASED
Never.

EMILY
Not ever.

(At the director's discretion, cut one or two of the following sections (5 or 10 lines) and let the actors improvise. Let the actors personalize those things they never had. Let each line begin with, "I'll never--". Let none of it court controversy or interfere with plot, character, or tone).

KATIE
I'll never be the cool aunt.

(Music continues)

MICHAEL
I'll never know what it is to live on my own and be independent.

MATT
I'll never have the chance to be a better person.

JESSIE
I'll never go to college and have a double major.

EMILY
I'll never find the right person to spend my life with.

MICHAEL
And make a marriage work.

(Josh, on the outside, moves in, hoping for an invitation. They ignore him.)

JOSH
I'll never--

(They drown him out.)

KATIE
And give love.

MATT
And get love.
JESSIE
I'll never meet a beautiful, intelligent, caring fraternity boy who will look at me and see perfection.

EMILY
I'll never be married in a white dress and have a huge wedding.

MICHAEL
I'll never make new friends.

KATIE
I'll never have the chance to apologize to my mother.

MATT
I'll never play catch with my son.

JESSIE
I'll never have long talks at a candle lit table in the corner of a little restaurant.

EMILY
I'll never get to decorate my baby's room.

MICHAEL
I'll never know what it is to come home from work and open the door and all my kids run to me and pull me down on the floor and smother me with hugs and kisses.

KATIE
I'll never find out if the psychic was right--will I get what I want or sell used cars?

MATT
I'll never know what it is to own my own car.

JESSIE
I'll never have my beautiful frat boy hold my hand in the delivery room of the maternity ward telling me to push, push, push while I tell him to SHUT UP.

EMILY
I'll never own a red convertible.

MICHAEL
I'll never fly a plane.

KATIE
Or ride another rollercoaster.

MATT
Or see the Dead Sea.

JESSIE
I'll never have three children who look just like my frat boy so that when I kiss them I'm kissing him.

EMILY
I'll never see my limits.

MICHAEL
Or really know myself.

KATIE
I'll never get to play with my little brother again.

MATT
I'll never have a chance to make dad proud of me.

JESSIE
I'll never cry at my children's graduation.

EMILY
I'll never see Paris.

MICHAEL
Or Tokyo.

KATIE
Or be handed a high school diploma.

MATT
Or get washboard abs.

JESSIE (Right to Josh)
I'll never have an epitaph that reads "Beloved mother, grandmother, and wife. Because I died at 17."

JOSH
It was just a fantasy. Like a horror movie. A DVD. In my mind I thought I could just hit the BACK BUTTON and bring you back to life! The movie's over. There's nothing I can do. It's over. Okay? It's over.

MICHAEL
Over for us, Josh.

KATIE
But BACK BUTTON and PLAY BUTTON for you.
MATT
Every day of your life.

JESSIE
You'll see us on the big screen in your head.

EMILY
And you'll see us over-

MICHAEL
And over-

KATIE
And over-

MATT
Again-

JESSIE
And Again-

EMILY
As you saw us yesterday in the school cafeteria.

DECEASED
DEAD!
(Katie drops dead)
DEAD!
(Michael drops)
DEAD!
(Jessie drops)
DEAD!
(Matt drops)
DEAD!
(Emily throws her arms around Josh and drops bringing him to the floor).

JOSH
I didn’t know it would be forever.
   (JOSH goes to his knees)
Is this the rest of my life? Oh God.

(ENTER SHADOW IN HIS HOODED SWEATSHIRT. SHADOW sits near JOSH back to audience as LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS)

END