

## PROLOGUE

*late night. 11:00ish. an underfunded episcopalian church serving a small, northern new hampshire town. it's dark, but the moon is bright through the windows. rural quiet.*

*then, MICHAEL and DYLAN crash through the side door. they immediately begin making out, perhaps a bit too frantically, with MICHAEL sitting his ass against the back of a pew.*

*DYLAN is a bit younger than MICHAEL—if the latter is 23 or 24 the former is 20 or 21. he is even more clearly a product of his hometown than MICHAEL, and that's saying a lot. he's wearing work boots and a flannel under stained overalls.*

*DYLAN makes a sudden movement and it knocks MICHAEL's glasses askew, or his hat, or knees him in the thigh, something of the sort.*

Ow.  
MICHAEL

Sorry. Sorry. I can't fucking see.  
DYLAN

Well, I'm not going to light a candle.  
MICHAEL

You have a candle?  
DYLAN

It's a church.  
MICHAEL

*DYLAN seems to realize for the first time where he is.*

Oh yeah.  
DYLAN

*DYLAN goes back to kissing MICHAEL, still a bit too aggressively, before:*

Wait. Does that make it weird for you?  
DYLAN

No.  
MICHAEL

Okay. I don't want to be. Disrespectful.  
DYLAN

You'd do better to worry about drawing blood with how hard you're biting me than disrespecting my pure immortal soul. Or whatever it is you were imagining.  
MICHAEL

Sorry.  
DYLAN

Don't be sorry.  
MICHAEL

*MICHAEL starts kissing him again. he maneuvers so he can sit down in a pew and pulls DYLAN on top of him. a Book of Common Prayer falls to the ground with a loud thunk, making DYLAN jump.*

Jesus, sorry. Sorry!  
DYLAN

You don't have to say sorry to Jesus either.  
MICHAEL

I didn't even hit it, I don't know how that fell.  
DYLAN

You made the Holy Spirit mad.  
MICHAEL

Ha. Okay.  
DYLAN

*DYLAN takes a moment to really study MICHAEL. after a moment or so, the latter returns to kissing him somewhere besides his mouth.*

Can't believe I picked you up by talking about *baseball* .  
MICHAEL

Me neither. I don't even like baseball. My family follows the Habs.  
DYLAN

*C'est de valeur. Les uniforms ne sont pas aussi agréable.*  
MICHAEL

My parents never taught me French.  
DYLAN

Please. That was *Québécois*. My real French is much better.  
MICHAEL

Oh, *Québécois* isn't "real French."  
DYLAN

Well, it's certainly not *la langue d'amour*.  
MICHAEL

It's not fair that your family's so WASP-y and yet you speak better French than me.  
DYLAN

Not my family. Just my dad.  
MICHAEL

Right.  
DYLAN

Unfortunately you speaking English won't impress me.  
MICHAEL

You were impressing me?  
DYLAN

Wasn't I?  
MICHAEL

*MICHAEL starts kissing him again, but anxiety is making DYLAN talkative for some reason. knocking that book over kinda freaked him out for real. he pulls back after a few moments.*

Can I ask you a question?  
DYLAN

*MICHAEL just looks at him.*

How'd you know.  
DYLAN  
(cont.)

Oh. I mean. You'd be surprised what can give it away.  
MICHAEL

Such as?  
DYLAN

Well. In high school, you were best friends with Anna Greene.  
MICHAEL

I was.  
DYLAN

You played clarinet.  
MICHAEL

That's not...  
DYLAN

Well maybe not by itself. But in the grand puzzle, certain pieces sometimes.. slot together.  
MICHAEL

Is that some sort of innuendo?  
DYLAN

What do *you* think?  
MICHAEL  
(smiling, genuine)

I don't think it's obvious, if that's what you're worried about. I've always had a sort of knack for reading people. And people like confessing to me. Probably something about me assimilating their sins through my father. Either way, it means I know a lot of people's secrets.

Either I guess or they end up telling me anyway.

*MICHAEL combs his fingers through DYLAN's hair. weirdly intimate for people who barely know each other.*

DYLAN

You're different from most gay guys I've met.

MICHAEL

How many gay guys in Shelburne do you know?

DYLAN

Only you. But I've been to Vermont a lot.

*that makes MICHAEL laugh.*

MICHAEL

What, you've never met one with the personal connection to the Lord that I have? I know, most guys, when they realize they're fags, they run from places like this as quickly as they can. Either that or they convert to Catholicism.

DYLAN

Well, that's not exactly what I meant. I don't know, you're... I don't know.

MICHAEL

Mysterious?

DYLAN

No.

MICHAEL

*(slightly offended)*

No?

DYLAN

I don't know, I guess I'm just surprised how flippant you are about everything. Y'know, considering.

MICHAEL

You're surprised I'm not more like someone like.. fucking Tim Bailey.

DYLAN

Tim's not/?

MICHAEL

Oh yes.

DYLAN

He's not gay.

MICHAEL

Well he was roughly uhh.. two weeks ago? in the empty lot behind the Aubuchon.

DYLAN

*(after a beat, pointedly ignoring this revelation)*

Why were *you* at a hardware store?

MICHAEL

I can play butch. Anyways, I'm not like Tim. I got over the self-hatred and hand-wringing shit pretty fast. I was trying to avoid going down the Catholic route. The only thing worse than being gay.

DYLAN

Well. I don't know what it is exactly. About you.

MICHAEL

*(growing bored, trying to get things going again)*

So I *am* mysterious.

DYLAN

You're annoying.

MICHAEL

Obviously. Listen, do you want me to suck you off in my dad's church or what?

*that gets DYLAN's attention. he nods and MICHAEL promptly swaps their places.*

DYLAN

Fucking... overalls. Hold on.

MICHAEL

*(smiling, sincere)*

I've got all night

*shuffling of clothes, some more kissing.*

*a sharp, high note, like one that might shatter a window, rings out. neither of them seem to hear it.*

SCENE II

*that afternoon. 7:00ish, right before the sun starts to set. the playground. MICHAEL swings on the swingset. sitting next to him, not swinging, is a young woman, wearing the small-town approximation of 90's punk fashion, in the middle of telling a very animated story.*

MARIAH

So she makes me send it back for the second time. This is after I've explained at length how french fries are fucking made and that if she wants them completely grease-free she can eat raw potato wedges instead.

MICHAEL

You didn't say that.

MARIAH

I basically did. I said 'ma'am I'm very sorry but there *is* a frying aspect to the making of french *fries*.' And she said, I'm not kidding, 'can't you use a nonstick with no oil' and I said. Well I *thought*, I can not believe I am spending my one precious life having this conversation. But I *said*, very patiently I believe, 'I'm sorry to tell you this, but french fries are not fried in a pan like eggs.' I didn't even bother trying to explain that we don't use pans at all, it didn't seem worth it. But so then anyway she said just take them back and take it off my bill. Well the sandwich comes with fucking fries so there's nothing to take off the bill anyway you're just gonna leave hungry with a little less carbs and sodium.

MICHAEL

What a bitch/

MARIAH

*(in response to "bitch")*

Aht—

MICHAEL

I'm allowed to say it.

MARIAH

I don't think that's how /that works

MICHAEL

Anyway. That *unkind woman*. God, It's gonna be hard not to laugh shaking her hand Sunday morning.

MARIAH

You know what you should do, you should pull her aside, make it seem really urgent. Tell her you switched out the communion wafers with french fries.

*MICHAEL laughs.*

'I'm so sorry, ma'am, but *budget cuts*. You know how these *Democrats* in the state legislature are.'

MICHAEL

Those liberals are trying to take the Christ out of our Country, Mrs. Richards.

MARIAH

Yup.  
UGH.  
sorry I just remembered I'm opening tomorrow. Kill me.

MICHAEL

Why do we both work a job that doesn't have weekends off.

MARIAH

Just be grateful it's not twenty-four hour.

MICHAEL

I'd kill myself.

MARIAH

I would've never started working there in the first place.

MICHAEL

I don't know if I've ever had someone be quite that stupid. I don't know, for how long I've worked there I feel like I have an astonishing lack of stories. You get all the crazies. Why do you think that is?

MARIAH

You're too nice to people. That's why. They're endeared by your boyish charm. I think I look too dyke-y and it freaks people out.

MICHAEL

And you're not even a dyke.

MARIAH

And you know I've tried.

MICHAEL

Do I?

MARIAH

Psychologically willing myself to want to fuck Monica Geller counts as trying when that's really all I have to work with.

MICHAEL

Your life is hard enough as it is you don't need to be trying to catch all the possible axes of oppression like Pokemon.

MARIAH

I could always be poorer.

MICHAEL

I actually don't think that's possible.

MARIAH

Right. Well thank god for my my Robin Hood BFF who's gonna save me from all this.

MICHAEL

Don't—

*he looks over his shoulder, but it's silly. they're completely alone.*  
It's not going to you anyway.

MARIAH

Not even a tiny bit?  
...Not even hush money to keep me from blabbing all over town?

MICHAEL

Nice try.

MARIAH

My dad's a cop.

MICHAEL

I remember.

MARIAH

5% cut or I secretly record all our conversations from here on out and mail them to the Berlin paper. No, the *Manchester Union Leader*.

MICHAEL

It's not a secret if you're telling me all about it right now is it?

MARIAH

Damn.

MICHAEL

Your reward is knowing you're on the right side of history.

MARIAH

Yeah whatever 'good deeds railing against the imperial machine subverting the American capitalist theocracy' whatever. But wouldn't it feel a lot better to just go and throw like a fucking shoe at that guy's fucking head or something. And give me \$5,000 so I can replace my car.

MICHAEL

Yeah it would. But unfortunately you're gonna have to hold onto that car for a little longer.

MARIAH

When you get the Nobel Peace Prize you can get me a new car.

MICHAEL

Sure. When that happens I'll get you a car.

MARIAH

Yayyyyyyy.

*she starts swinging.*

MICHAEL

I have to get up early tomorrow to let in the new guy my dad hired.

MARIAH

Who?

MICHAEL

He just moved here. Like he moved here on purpose. And he just got hired as secretary because he's like ridiculously overqualified and he applied. Which means I'm gonna have to do some shuffling with the offering paperwork, by the way. Just another thing on the to-do list. But yeah dad has some shit tomorrow morning and can't let him in to the building so I have to do it.

MARIAH

That's annoying.

MICHAEL

It's fine, I can do it. I just felt like complaining because you got to complain earlier and I felt left out.

*he smiles at MARIAH. she laughs. he starts swinging with her.*

MARIAH

Will you come visit me at work tomorrow?

MICHAEL

Of course.

MARIAH

Good because if Laura Richards shows up again I'll need you to be there to prevent me from landing an assault charge.

*MICHAEL rattles the chain of her swing and she yelps and almost falls. she smacks him. they keep swinging.*

SCENE VII

*that night. 9:00ish. the playground of the local elementary school. the only school technically in their town, in fact. MICHAEL sits on the swings, flask or bottle or something containing alcohol in his hand.*

*he swings and looks up at the sky. he's drinking to get drunk, to have something to do. he sings a song quietly to himself. it's the first time we've seen him all by himself for this long. if you want suggestions, he could be singing "the patron saint of liars and fakes" by fall out boy, or "good riddance (time of your life)" by green day, or, of course, "oops!... i did it again" by britney spears. he sings and swings for a while. it's peaceful.*

*slowly, across the field separating the playground from the main street in town, ALEX approaches on his way home. he doesn't notice MICHAEL, but the latter sure notices him.*

MICHAEL  
*(aggressively, because he thinks it's funny)*

ALEX!

ALEXANDER  
*(having a cardiac event)*

JESUS CHRIST.

*MICHAEL thinks this is hilarious and bursts into laughter*

MICHAEL  
Sorry! I thought you saw me.

ALEXANDER  
If I had don't you think I might have said "Hello?" You know, *calmly* made my presence known?

MICHAEL  
I don't know. You might have a myriad of ways of introducing yourself to strangers in the dark.

ALEXANDER  
You're not a stranger anymore.

MICHAEL  
Aww, you recognized me from that far away? Those glasses are going to good use.

ALEXANDER  
I didn't, which is why I *screamed* and woke up half the town. I don't usually swear, either, so thanks for that.

MICHAEL  
All part of my evil plan.

ALEXANDER  
*(indicating the alcohol)*

What's that?

MICHAEL

Want some?

ALEXANDER

No thanks.

MICHAEL

Wanna swing?

ALEXANDER

No thanks.

MICHAEL

Now I know that's a lie. Why were you walking over here if not to swing your little heart out on our charming small-town playground?

ALEXANDER

It's a shortcut home.

MICHAEL

And where is "home"?

ALEXANDER

I'm renting the room that was posted out on Pine Ridge Road

MICHAEL

Oh, Sammy's place? No shit. Kinda far, isn't it? Why didn't you drive?

ALEXANDER

I like walking. Especially at night. I drove my first day but figured I'd try walking this time. It helps me clear my head, or whatever.

MICHAEL

You're so strange. You're not worried about The Beast leaping out of the trees to get ya?

ALEXANDER

I can't say it's crossed my mind, no. I know there's nothing really dangerous in the Northeast. Except maybe snakes, but I'm pretty sure I can manage not to step on one.

MICHAEL

You must've not seen Blair Witch.

ALEXANDER

If a witch comes and takes me, then I give you permission to say I told you so.

MICHAEL

C'monnn Alex swing with me. I know you want tooooo.

*he rattles the chain of the swing next to him.*

ALEXANDER

Only because I know you'll heckle me halfway home if I don't.

*he sits, but doesn't actually move to swing. MICHAEL does. he's a little bit drunk. just a little.*

ALEXANDER

(cont.)

Oh. Actually.

*he rifles in his bag and produces the carefully folded hat and flannel.*

You left these yesterday.

MICHAEL

(dragging his foot in the dirt to stop)

Oh, shit. Thanks..

*pause.*

You could've just sent them home with my dad.

ALEXANDER

Yeah. I guess. I forgot.. I had them.

MICHAEL

Uh huh.

*MICHAEL hides a tiny little smile as he takes the bundle from ALEXANDER. then, he takes ALEXANDER's hand and holds it by the pinkie and ring finger.*

MICHAEL

(cont.)

Thank you for keeping my clothes safe.

ALEXANDER

Of course.

*pause. he takes his hand back.*

No problem.

MICHAEL

(swinging again, looking at the sky)

Do you know the names of any constellations?

ALEXANDER

Um. Ursa major and minor.

MICHAEL

Okay archaeologist.

ALEXANDER

Astronomer. It's not that impressive, it's just the fancy names for "big and little dipper."

MICHAEL

Ok then why didn't you just say that? Ohhh, I get it. You're trying to *impress* me.

*this is a very funny callback to MICHAEL. ALEX, of course, doesn't get it, but he's used to not being in on the joke at this point. he also recognizes that MICHAEL's a bit drunk.*

ALEXANDER

Your turn. What's that one?

*he points.*

MICHAEL

Where?

ALEXANDER  
*(leaning over)*

There.

MICHAEL

Oh. The one that looks like an M? That's Cassiopeia.

ALEXANDER  
*(genuinely kinda pissed off)*

How do you know that but not Ursa Major.

MICHAEL

I'm just full of surprises.

ALEXANDER

Yeah. I'll give you that.

MICHAEL

Alex.

ALEXANDER

Michael.

MICHAEL

Tell me a secret.

ALEXANDER

Excuse me?

MICHAEL

If we're not strangers anymore like you say, that means we're basically friends. But I barely know anything about you or your life or anything. Tell me something I wouldn't expect.

ALEXANDER  
Okay. But you better tell me one back.

MICHAEL  
Promise.

*ALEX is quiet for a moment.*

ALEXANDER  
My mom told me that when I was really little I could talk to angels.

MICHAEL  
Cute.

ALEXANDER  
She was serious.

*they look at each other.*

MICHAEL  
Could you?

ALEXANDER  
Yeah. I think so.  
Sometimes they talked back.

*MICHAEL studies him for a moment, tries to figure out if he's crazy.*

MICHAEL  
Well that didn't make you a *less* complicated figure in my mind.

ALEXANDER  
You said something you wouldn't expect.

MICHAEL  
I did.

*MICHAEL takes a drink. ALEX motions for it.*

MICHAEL  
*(cont.) (handing it over)*  
For real?

*ALEX rolls his eyes and takes a drink.*

MICHAEL  
*(cont.)*  
You rebel.

ALEXANDER  
*(handing it back)*  
Whatever.

MICHAEL

His aloof demeanor and dispassionate affect have charmed me body and soul.

ALEXANDER

It's your turn.

MICHAEL

Right.

*he takes a pointed swig from the bottle. very hayes code. at least he thinks so.*

ALEXANDER

Not.

*MICHAEL looks at him.*

Your secret.

MICHAEL

Ah. That.

*he swings for a few beats.*

I love my mom more than my dad.  
But she's dead now so it feels like a waste.

ALEXANDER

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

It's fine. I'm not.

ALEXANDER

No, that she's dead.

MICHAEL

Oh. Yeah. Thank you.

*MICHAEL shrugs.*

ALEXANDER

When?

MICHAEL

Um. Middle school. I was thirteen. She went back to Lebanon to visit her mom and I said goodbye at the airport. And she uh. Never came back.

Dad says car accident. He didn't want to fly us over for the funeral. It was insanely fucking selfish. I. Yeah.

ALEXANDER

That's where she's from?

MICHAEL

Yup.

ALEXANDER

So that's why...

MICHAEL

Why I tan really easily? Yeah that's it. And let me tell you, the last two years have been a real hoot in this fucking place. Everyone's got something to say about it.

Being The Minister's Son is the only thing saving me. And it feels like people try their hardest to forget who my mom is. Or was. What it means I am.

ALEXANDER

I'm sorry. That isn't fair.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

I was gonna make a joke about what an astute and nuanced political commentator you are. But that's a lot better than what anyone else I know is saying.

ALEXANDER

Wow. A look behind the curtain.

MICHAEL

Yeah, well. You snuck up on me while I'm tipsy.

ALEXANDER

*(quoting MICHAEL from earlier)*

All part of my evil plan.

MICHAEL

You're good with the callbacks. You're quick with the callbacks.

ALEXANDER

Must be because. I. Hmm.

*he tries and fails to produce another callback to an earlier conversation.*

I don't know. I lost it.

*MICHAEL laughs. it's genuine, not mocking.*

*he holds out the bottle. ALEX takes the bait with barely any prompting. MICHAEL begins swinging with renewed vigor.*

MICHAEL

Alex. Swing all the way to the moon with me.

ALEXANDER

You think we can do that?

MICHAEL

Yeah. We can do anything. I can take you anywhere on this thing.

*they're not really drunk, they're both full grown men, but the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere with a wide open sky can make you feel like you're not really yourself, like you can do anything.*

ALEXANDER

*(putting down the bottle)*

I really do feel like a little kid on the playground now.

MICHAEL

It's great. Where would you want to go in the whole world. The universe. If you could go anywhere.

ALEXANDER

*(with little hesitation)*

Heaven.

MICHAEL

Right. Yeah.

*ALEX isn't laughing. of course he isn't.*

For real?

*MICHAEL slows to a stop. ALEX does too.*

ALEXANDER

Yeah. Wouldn't you?

MICHAEL

I'm more interested in a heaven-on-earth type scenario. I think so much focus on some far off reward achieved by accepting suffering in the present is a fallacy concocted by people like my father.

But sure. I can take you there.

*MICHAEL grabs ALEX's hand without warning.*

Be careful what you wish for.

*MICHAEL yanks them backward and then pushes off in an aggressive swing forward. ALEX nearly falls backwards off his swing and grabs onto MICHAEL's wrist with his free hand. Some sort of maneuvering to attempt to save himself and a lot of flailing. MICHAEL however is completely in control and utterly focused on his mission of swinging all the way to heaven.*

ALEXANDER

Slow down!

MICHAEL

But we're almost there!

*ALEX gets with the program a little. But he doesn't let go of his vice grip.*

MICHAEL

Alright. Got it?

Yeah.  
ALEXANDER

Good. Because now we have to jump.  
MICHAEL

What?  
ALEXANDER

*JUMP!*  
MICHAEL

*and MICHAEL does. pulling ALEX with him, the two launch off the swings, becoming briefly airborne, then landing completely ungracefully and falling onto the woodchips. ALEX yelps.*

Ow.  
ALEXANDER

How's that for heaven?  
MICHAEL

A little different than I pictured.  
ALEXANDER

But isn't that how it has to be?  
MICHAEL  
*(rolling on his side to face ALEX)*

Bloodier than I imagined.  
ALEXANDER

*ALEX swipes at his knee or elbow and produces a streak of blood. the cut is pretty deep.*

Oh, shit. Are you okay?  
MICHAEL

*MICHAEL licks his thumb and swipes at the cut before ALEX can protest. then, he wipes his slightly bloody thumb on ALEX's shirt. The cut stops bleeding immediately.*

All better.  
MICHAEL  
*(cont.)*

How'd you do that?  
ALEXANDER  
*(utterly serious, a little scared)*

Saliva clots blood.  
MICHAEL

ALEXANDER  
But that was a *lot* of blood.

MICHAEL  
My saliva is special.

*ALEX looks at MICHAEL. studies him in a way he hasn't in a bit.  
MICHAEL lets himself be looked at, and then opens his mouth, sticking  
out his tongue, as if giving evidence to his claim.*

*or like an invitation, maybe.*

ALEXANDER  
You're crazy.

*MICHAEL closes his mouth.*

MICHAEL  
Thank you.

ALEXANDER  
Like actually insane.

MICHAEL  
It's been said.

ALEXANDER  
Thanks for taking me to heaven. It looks a lot like a public school playground.

MICHAEL  
You're so poetic.

ALEXANDER  
I can be. Sometimes.  
You are.

MICHAEL  
You're drunk.

ALEXANDER  
I definitely am not.

MICHAEL  
You're crazy. Like actually insane.

ALEXANDER  
Nice callback.

MICHAEL  
Thanks.

ALEXANDER  
So, yet again, *you* haven't answered the question.

MICHAEL  
What was it again?

ALEXANDER  
Where would you go if you could go anywhere. I think we've used up the swing-machine for tonight, so purely hypothetically.

MICHAEL  
Hypothetically?

ALEXANDER  
Yeah.

*MICHAEL pretends to think.*

MICHAEL  
Hypothetically, I think I would stay right here. In this spot, on this night, June, whatever, 12th? 2003.

With you.

*ALEX doesn't say anything. he pokes at his healed cut.*

MICHAEL  
(cont.)  
Does that scare you?

ALEXANDER  
(very quiet)  
Yeah. A little.

MICHAEL  
It's the truth. Try not to be scared of it, Alex.

Goodnight.

*MICHAEL stands, retrieves his bottle, and exits the playground.*

*ALEX puts his mouth to his cut. after a long time, he exits.*