

**REV SHAW**

But if Walt Whitman were alive today,  
what song would he hear America singing?  
(begins walking through the congregation)

When I turn on the television, all I hear is the music of easy sexuality and  
relaxed morals.

I hear rock and roll

and the endless chant of pornography.

And I ask myself, "Why does our Lord allow this?"

We know God has the power to turn all those records and books and videos  
into one big fiery cinder like...

(clapping his hand behind a sleeping boy)

THAT! (boy jumps)

But he doesn't. And why? ... God is testing us.

He's watching to see whether we'll choose His path.

And that is why, every day, we must ask ourselves. "Have I done the  
RIGHT thing?"

**SHAW**

It was frightening enough

when she was running around with Chuck Cranston.

Now, she is out in the middle of the night,

with that punk who's campaigning against me and the entire Town Council.

How long can you keep defending her?

**SHAW**

I'm standing before you this morning with a very troubled heart. You see, my  
friends, as you minister, I should be helping you to find the joy in your lives;  
last night I realized that I haven't been doing that. After all, we all remember  
that terrible night five years ago when the lives of four young people ended  
on the Potawney Bridge. Everyone in this community lost someone that night  
- a child, a neighbor, a friend. I—Vi and I - we lost our son.

**VI**

Shaw, you did a good thing this morning.

**SHAW**

I'm still not sure it was the right thing.

**VI**

I think it comes close.

(Pause)

I've missed you. I've missed us.

**SHAW**

Where is she?

**VI**

She told me she was going to Wendy Jo's.

(As SHAW reaches for the phone) Don't bother calling. She's not there.

**SHAW**

Did you know this?

**VI**

No. I did not.

**SHAW**

So, how does it feel, Vi? Now that she's lying to you?

**VI**

I'm not saying anything until I hear an explanation from her.

**SHAW**

How long can you keep defending her?

**VI**

I'm not defending her. We're not on opposite sides here, are we?

Or are we?

**VI**

Shaw, she doesn't mean that.

**SHAW**

Stop taking her side! She has to start answering for herself.

**SHAW**

We're losing her, Vi. She has become willful and obstinate.

**VI** (Kindly)

Like her father.

**SHAW**

I am her spiritual guardian.

**VI**

You used to be her friend.

**SHAW**

I don't understand what's happening. I don't know what to do anymore.

**VI**

Yes, you do.

**ETHEL**

Ren, honey, if I don' say something now I'm gonna bust.

**REN**

What's there to say? I lost. The Council voted, and I lost.

**ETHEL**

Sweetie, you never had a prayer.

**REN**

That's not funny, Mom.

**ETHEL**

I promise you: Shaw Moore had those votes locked up  
before he walked in here tonight.

**REN** (Startled.)

You think he told them how to vote?

**ETHEL**

You can still sound shocked. I love that about you.

**REN**

But he's a man of God!

**ETHEL**

He's a man. And you were railroaded. ... Now listen, Reverend Moore said he  
would reconsider if someone convinced him there was no danger in your  
"raucous plans." Make him reconsider.

**REN**

Me?

**REN**(Referring to SHAW)

And him?

**REN**

When?

**REN**

But...!

**REN**

Mom!

**ETHEL**

You!

**ETHEL**

Yup

**ETHEL**

Now.

**ETHEL**

Ren!

**ETHEL**

Stop!

**REN**

What can I say I haven't already said? I read my speech, I thumped my Bible

**ETHEL**

You did everything but speak from your heart. (That stops REN)

**REN**

Reverend Moore is a really smart man.

**ETHEL**

So are you.

**REN**

But he's stubborn.

**ETHEL**

And you're not?

**ETHEL**

Ren, don't start! I don't want to move any more than you do.

I, too, wish your father hadn't left.

I, too, wish that things could be the way they were.

And we both wish I could be one of those strong single mothers who  
suddenly becomes self sufficient!

But I'm not. ... That only happens in the movies!

**ELEANOR**

Vi, Vi, I made some of my Toll House cookies.

Now Ethel, dear, you just ask Lulu,  
one taste of my cookies and you'll burn every recipe in your kitchen.

**ELEANOR**

Thank you, Lulu. Now let's consider new business.  
Before we begin, I want to remind all our young people who have joined us  
this evening that this meeting is convened to consider official town business.  
Disturbances will not be tolerated. The floor is now open.

**WES**

Do you know how hard it was for me to get you that job at Dillingham's  
Hardware Store? It's not even a month and you get fired!

**LULU**

Every day it's more bad news with you. ... Every day.

Everything you do makes people suspicious.

**WES**

Are you on drugs?

**REN**

No! But why don't you frisk me?

I'm sure you've already poked through everything in my room!

**LULU**

Now Ren, you need to apologize to Uncle Wes!

**WES**

Look, young man, I know that I'm not your father...

**REN**

You can say that again!

(WES slaps REN. LULU gasps.)

**LULU**

Pumpkin, hush, Don't say anything else ... please!

**WES**

Lulu!!! (That stops her.)

Right now, don't anyone say anything!

**REN**  
What are you doing?  
**ARIEL**  
I'm answering the train.  
I'm saying, "I can't wait for the day when I get onboard and leave Bomont!"  
Try it.  
**REN**  
No, thanks. I just ate. ... You are really something.  
**ARIEL**  
Whaddya mean?  
**REN**  
I mean the whole package: Minister's kid, Chuck Cranston's girlfriend.  
**ARIEL**  
Guilty.  
**REN**  
Just a church goin' gal with some kicking red cowboy boots.  
**ARIEL**  
My daddy hates me wearing these boots.  
(REN sits on the ground; ARIEL eventually sits nearby)  
**REN**  
And you love that, don't you? Getting up in his face?  
**ARIEL**  
That way he'll notice when I'm gone.  
**REN**  
Where're you gonna go?  
**ARIEL**  
College, for starters.  
I've applied to some places my daddy doesn't even know about.  
I wanna speak five languages and see the world. He wants me to teach  
English Lit in Baylor County.  
(Beat.)  
They don't even speak English in Baylor County.  
**REN**  
I can't picture you as a teacher.  
**ARIEL**  
Thank you. Neither can I. I'll leave that to my daddy.  
**REN**  
He's a preacher, not a teacher.  
**ARIEL**  
When you're good at it, it's the same thing. And he used to be real good.  
**REN**  
What changed?

**ARIEL**  
His mind. He closed it.  
**REN**  
I noticed.  
**ARIEL**  
He used to be so open, so inspiring.  
I've seen him give people hope when hope was gone.  
I've watched him change lives!  
**REN**  
If you love him so much, why do you wanna tick him off?  
**ARIEL**  
I didn't say I love him.  
**REN**  
Boy do I know what you mean. ... My dad ... (He shakes his head)  
**ARIEL**  
What happened there?  
**REN**  
He walked out. One day he just walked out the door. No 'good-bye'. Nothing.  
**ARIEL**  
Whew. I bet you've got lots to say to him.  
**REN**  
Lots.  
**ARIEL**  
Like what?  
**REN**  
(Suddenly self-conscious)  
No, I couldn't...  
**ARIEL**  
Tell it to the train.... That's what I do.  
(REN considers her suggestion. Then, in imitation of ARIEL 'S earlier wail,  
he throws his head back, chases after an imaginary train and screams)  
**REN**  
Aah-h-h-h-h-hh.,! How can you be so stupid to leave Mom and me?  
I... hate.. you!  
(Spent, he drops to the ground near her; neither speaks)  
**ARIEL**  
I can't believe you're checking up on me. ... How come when I'm at home, you're  
never interested in what I'm thinking or how I feel?  
But the minute I walk out that door - wham!  
Suddenly, you're the concerned parent of the year!

**REN**

You okay? You seem jumpy.

**WILLARD**

That's why I'm having a beer. Mama says I can have one beer or one cigarette, but if I have both I should never come home again.

**REN**

Willard, c'mon. What's up? You finally go out on a date with Rusty...

**WILLARD**

Hold on, hold on! Is this a date? **You** asked me to go for a ride. **You** told Ariel to invite Rusty. It's more like I'm on a date with you.

**REN**

And you look so handsome tonight.

**WILLARD**

Thank you. But you stuck me in the back seat with a crazy woman who won't stop moving and talking.

**REN**

She's excited to be with you.

**WILLARD**

Oh, well. Sure. That. But the problem is...

**REN**

Yes?

**WILLARD**

Between you and me?

**REN**

Uh-huh?

**WILLARD** (With difficulty)

I can't do it

**REN**

Oh. "It?" (WILLARD nods) You can't do "it?"

**WILLARD**

No, sir.

**REN**

Well, that's okay, Willard. It's only the first date.

**WILLARD**

Right.

**REN**

You don't have to do "it" on the first date.

**WILLARD**

Really? ... Well, that makes me feel a lot better.

**REN**

(Starts back to the dance floor.) Great! Then let's dance!

**WILLARD**

Dance! Dance?! What the heck do you think I'm talking about?

**REN**

When you said you couldn't do "it," I thought you meant...

**WILLARD**

What? (It dawns on him) Oh, that?!

Heck, any idiot can do that!

(Pointing to the dance floor) I can't do this! I can't dance

**WILLARD**

Smart-aleck, huh?

Listen, fella, around here you push somebody... they push back.

Next thing you know, you got...(Gets confused; forges ahead.)

.two people pushing. Get it?

**REN** (Emphatic)

Sir, you already are alone!

(That stops SHAW in his tracks. Long pause. REN realizes that his words have stung, deeply. Now calmly, kindly.)

We both are. You and me. We've both lost somebody. And even though people say they understand, they don't really. I bet you stop a hundred times a day and wonder "why?"

I do, I wonder why'd my Dad leave? Was it something I did? Something I didn't do? Could I have made him stay? Maybe I could bring him back?

But I can't.

(SHAW looks up)

But I don't have to tell you. You know what that's like

**RUSTY**

There were these four kids we all grew up with. And they were driving back from a big dance over in Baylor County. Now, maybe it was the rain that night, maybe they were being a little wild, but somehow they lost control of the car. It skidded across the bridge, crashed through the railing, and fell thirty-five feet into the Potawney River.

**REN**

Whoa. Did anybody survive? (RUSTY shakes her head "no.") Oh, god.

**RUSTY**

Yeah. And when the sheriff's office published the autopsy report it claimed there was alcohol and marijuana in their blood. Well! everybody in town went nuts.

**RUSTY**

Argh!

**ARIEL**

Let me guess. Willard's acting weird.

**RUSTY**

So, its not just me?

**ARIEL**

Rusty, you and Willard have been weird since kindergarten.

**RUSTY**

But tonight is different. This is the first time we've ever left Bomont together.

(Gasps at a sudden realization) Maybe we don't travel well.

**ARIEL**

. Rusty, it's just a car ride!

**RUSTY**

But that makes it like a first date, doncha see? Oh, I should've seen the signs. The whole way up here I had to do all the talking. All he said was, "Uh-huh, mmm-hmmm, uh-huh, mmm-hmmm."

You know what that means, doncha? My baby's in a panic!

**ARIEL**

Now, don't make yourself crazy. Come on. I'll dance with you.

**RUSTY**

If I could only find a guy who'd make the first move.

**URLEEN**

If I could only find a guy who - when he went to kiss me goodnight — would take the toothpick out of his mouth.

**WENDY JO**

If I could only find a guy.

**URLEEN**

OUUU ooo oooo ! You are so cute. Wendy Jo, isn't he sooo cute?

I bet he knows he's cute though, doncha think, Wendy Jo?

Oh, there he goes. Look at that ...Ouch! Oh, baby...! You got that sweet stuff...!

**ARIEL**

Come on! I was only teasing him.

**RUSTY**

Teasing. huh? Ren is from out of town. Don't tell me that doesn't curl your toes.

**WENDY JO**

You want out of Bomont so bad

I bet you've memorized the bus schedules.

**URLEEN**

You told us that you read just to escape to other worlds.

**ARIEL**

Exactly! In books, I get to meet guys who amaze me.

**WENDY JO**

What about Ren?

**ARIEL**

What about him?

**RUSTY**

He's sorta smart.

**WENDY JO**

He's kinda tall.

**URLEEN**

And I think he's handsome.

**ARIEL** (Shrugs.)

Cute, maybe.

**WENDY JO**

But can he really compete with Chuck Cranston, the rugged, dangerous high school dropout slash-drug dealer who was recently evicted from a trailer park? I don't think so.

**WENDY JO** (Very ditzzy)

I like the part where King Arthur and Lancelot fight over Guinevere.

It's right after Mordred shows up and says, "I'm the king! I'm the king!"

(She stops, realizing they are staring) What?

**URLEEN**

You read a book?!

**WENDY JO**

Cliffs Notes. ... It took me forever.

**COWGIRL**

Darlin', darlin', your boyfriend has two left feet and you had no idea?

Didn't he never take you in his arms and sweep you off your feet?

Didn't he never whisper sweet nothings in your ear?

**BETTY**

Cranston! Your pick-up truck is in the handicapped parking, which is a space we reserve for people with physical, not emotional, disabilities.

(CHUCK, humiliated, has no graceful way out.)

**CHUCK**

You haven't seen the last of me, McCormack.

(He bumps REN as he exits. WILLARD makes a fist to go after him.)

**BETTY**

Willard! ... What's that your mama says?

"Before you make a fist, make sure it's your fight."

(WILLARD nods his head)

Well, this is not your fight.

(looking at the others) Now, don't the rest of you have a curfew?

(They begin to leave) And McCormack?

(REN fearing the worst begins to turn in his skates)

Listen to me. I'll see you here after school tomorrow.

**REN**

Really? You mean I'm not fired?

**BETTY**

Not just yet. Now, gimme a push, honey. ... Thank you!

**CHUCK**

When I say "meet me at eight," what am I – talking to myself?

**ARIEL**

No. You're right. Calm down, honey.

**CHUCK**

Don't tell me to calm down! Don't – EVER – tell me what to do. (He looks over her friends.) I know what your friends think of me.

And that's BULL.

I'm the best party in this town, baby!

And those three dogs oughta be tied up under the porch. Let's go!

**ARIEL**

No.

**CHUCK**

Excuse me?

**ARIEL**

I said, "No." What part of that don't you understand?

**CHUCK** (Grabs her.)

Oh, when the preacher's daughter says "no," it just makes me hot.

Say it again, baby.

**PRINCIPAL**

That sort of remark may pass for wit in Chicago, but here we speak simply.

Let me make this as clear as I can:

there is absolutely no dancing of any kind allowed at any time anywhere within the town limits of Bomont.

**COP**

You're gonna have to learn that in Bomont, a stop sign means stop.

And that radio music of yours was blasting pretty loud.

And while you're at it ... you'd better learn to watch that attitude, boy.

**COACH**

Reverend, did you hear that new English teacher is planning to introduce some vulgar modern novel into our American Lit course?

"Slaughterhouse Five." ... She says it's a classic. What does she know?

"Tom Sawyer" now that's a classic.

**COACH**

(Blowing his whistle.) McCormack! You and your friends are late!

And don't waste your breath or my time with another lame excuse. McCormack, it seems that when you're not making trouble, it finds you anyway.

And Ariel, I would encourage you to stay away from this guy. I've been asked to keep my eye on you and...

... and if you cooperate, it will make all of our lives much easier.

**REN**

Gee, if my daddy makes a phone call, will you get offa my back?

**COACH**

That mouth of yours is probably what made your daddy walk out in the first place.

**COWBOY BOB**

Well bust my britches...you can do some serious tail-shaking! You are some good! (Looks her up and down) And you are fine!

**WILLARD**

Hey! She came with me, Cowboy. (He puts up fists to fight.)

**COWBOY BOB**

Yeah? Well, we all make mistakes. ...Bu look, sonny, it's much too early in the evening to get blood on that pretty little shirt of yours.