Guidance

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A Brief Summary of Events

Eighteen year old Tracey is in the midst of creating a new life for himself down South. Every plan he has attempted to set in motion has been an utter failure and it certainly doesn't help that Camaren, his little sister, snuck into his car to accompany him. Tracey decided to leave home after a violent fight with his father, which left him with two black eyes and a broken nose. His last chance is to go to Mr. Hebb, his old summer school teacher, to see if he will write him a recommendation for a job.

Scene IV

(Half past two. A high school classroom. HEBB, late thirties, Tracey's former summer school teacher, is grading papers, somewhat disgusted with the work in his hands. Tracey knocks on the doorframe.)

TRACEY

Hey. Mr. Hebb?

HEBB

Yes. Hey. Sorta in the middle of…

TRACEY

Hey.

HEBB
(Stares hard)

...Tracey?

TRACEY

Yeah.
(Smiles)

You remembered my name.

HEBB

Tracey... Hi.

TRACEY

Hi. The secretary said you'd be in here.

HEBB

I am. I am indeed. What's going on, pal? I thought you left the fair state of Georgia.

TRACEY

I did, I- I'm back. I'm okay. How are you?

HEBB

I'm sorry, I... I almost didn't recognize you.
(Points to Tracey's face)

That's--

TRACEY

Yeah.

HEBB

That's pretty intense.

TRACEY

Yeah.

HEBB

How'd you get that?

TRACEY

Car wreck.

HEBB

Oh jeez. These idiot drivers…

TRACEY

Yeah, my, uh, my friend was driving and, uh…

(Mimes this with his hands)

We were going straight and this guy from the other direction; he was making a left hand turn, and he didn't wait, and BAM. Right into us.

HEBB

Oh, jeez.

TRACEY

Jersey drivers. Yeah. I went forward. My friend went right into me. The airbags went off. It was... it was fun, really. It was a good time.

HEBB

Did you go to the hospital?

TRACEY

No.

HEBB

Well, that's idiotic.

TRACEY

I'm okay.

HEBB

You might have a concussion.

TRACEY

Believe me, I don't.

HEBB

Ah. Well, you should get it looked at.

TRACEY

Can't do anything for a broken nose.

HEBB

They can reset it.

TRACEY

Can they?

HEBB

Yes, Tracey, they can.

TRACEY

Eh, leave it crooked. Gives me more character.

HEBB

Well, I suppose you were lucky. Anyway.

TRACEY

Marking those?

HEBB

Oh yes. We're reading *Twelve Angry Men.* Simple enough stuff, right? Well, no. No, apparently not because…

(*Reads one of the papers)*

"Juror number three is angry with Juror number eight because his wife insulted him and she don't play like that…"? I don't remember the wives being in Twelve Angry Men, do you?

TRACEY

Hey, it's creative thinking.

HEBB

It's idiocy. Idiocy. You know, I really, I thought they'd like the play. You become a teacher to inspire, you know? I thought, eh, I'm young, they'll eat me up. They'll come in every day with their hands raised high in the air. Now I'm lucky if I can get these guys to hand in papers. Dare I even ask them to hand them in on time.

TRACEY

Freshman are shits, man.

HEBB

Right.

TRACEY

I like what you've done with the place.

HEBB

Thank you, Tracey, but it's basically the same as when you were here.

TRACEY

You added *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

HEBB

Yes, yes, I did. Glad you noticed. Well, you know, I have actual classes, actual students during the year. I have to keep it spicy.

TRACEY

Hey, I was the *most actual* student that you could have possibly had.

HEBB

Well, if you count sleeping and not handing in work.

TRACEY

No, I mean, like keeping it real. I kept it real, right? That's why you remember me.

HEBB

I remember you because you never did any work. You were asleep in class with your eyes open. Except of course when you flirted with Miss…?

TRACEY

Miss Bambino.

HEBB

Miss Bambino, yes.

TRACEY

Yeah, well, she was… I mean, come on, her and I. It was meant to be.

HEBB

It's a shame.

TRACEY

What is?

HEBB

That you didn't apply yourself. I know: summer school. Nobody cares, but...

TRACEY

Did you apply yourself in high school?

HEBB

Yes. I did.

TRACEY

Huh. That's funny.

HEBB

Why is that funny?

TRACEY

No, I just- I always felt like we were similar.

HEBB
(Stoic)

Really?

TRACEY

No, I mean… I always thought that.

HEBB

You think that, huh?

TRACEY

Just in the way that you… you're cool. I'm cool. You're definitely smart and… I just thought our attitudes were kinda the same, like, if we just keep at it then things will come through for us.

HEBB

Well, I think I appreciate English a little more than you do.

TRACEY

I appreciate English… I just… reading…. My mind… wanders, you know? I get shit, I do, but my mind wanders…

HEBB

Well, you have to learn how to focus. That takes a while. Takes a lot of patience with yourself. Of which you seemed to have none.

TRACEY

No, I do.

HEBB

You have to sit with the material and let it actually take you places. It's the one driving. Not you.

TRACEY

Yeah, no, I know.

HEBB

Like when we read *Great Expectations*, right? Now that's a really good example of what I'm talking about.

TRACEY

Yeah.

HEBB

The narrative is intricate. It's taking its time; he's not trying to hit you over the head with his mastery. He's trying to paint a picture. That takes time, patience. When you're painting a picture you paint it stroke by stroke, you weave together each bit, you don't just throw paint on a canvas.

HEBB

Nah, you… well, unless you're Pollock.

(A beat.)

HEBB

Dickens was no Pollock.

TRACEY

Sure, sure.

HEBB

Well. Look, I wish you the best of luck but I gotta pick up some stuff for dinner. My wife is currently obsessed with kabobs, so. It was nice seeing you.

TRACEY

Yeah, I, uh… maybe … if I could just ask you.

HEBB

Yes?

TRACEY

I really did get something out of your class.

HEBB

I'm glad.

TRACEY

I mean, is the only reason you remember me because I didn't do any work? Did I have any potential?

HEBB

In English?

TRACEY

Anything. Anything, really. I'm at a crossroads. I don't know what to do.

HEBB

About what?

TRACEY

Is it all right to be confused about where you want to go after you graduate?

HEBB

Sure.

TRACEY

Or if you want to graduate at all…?

HEBB

You're thinking of dropping out?

TRACEY

Yeah. I'm actually I'm… I'm trying to get work. I need a recommendation for a job. A job recommendation and. I know it may seem odd to ask you, but- It's not even a job for English or whatever but I think it just has to say that I have some motivation and social skills or that I'm not an idiot or-- look, I just remember that during the summer you seemed to *see* me. Or tolerate me. I mean, you let me come in here every morning and just…. I mean, you asked me to read those poems aloud and stuff and… you clearly trusted me enough to butcher those Bukowski poems…. But like, you just let me get the rhythm of it on my own and just listened while you got ready. You opened your door, you know.

HEBB

I'm glad I could do that.

TRACEY

Yeah, but, I mean… did I ever… was there a reason or…

HEBB

No, Tray. I mean, I'm glad I could do it, but it was sorta a whim. We both got here early.

(Beat. Tracey takes this in.)

TRACEY

Yeah, sure. A whim.

(Beat.)

TRACEY

Okay, fine, but let's say, you're a person who is ordinary and has no exceptional skills, but that something really bad was happening to you and you just didn't know *what* you were, like, if you were good or bad, and you wanted someone to tell you what to do to give your life… you needed someone to save your life.

HEBB

Tracey, no one is going to save your life.

TRACEY

Right, I know.

HEBB

I watched you day after day determined to flush yourself down the drain. It was waste. I hoped you'd wake up!

(Tracey starts to speak; Hebb cuts him off.)

HEBB

Is there something you want to tell me? Like something about things going on at home?

TRACEY

Like what? Yeah. How can I…?

(A very long beat. Hebb waits for Tracey.)

TRACEY

It's funny they give you the same room as summer.

(Beat. Tracey laughs.)

HEBB
(Sighs)

Tracey…

TRACEY

Mm?

HEBB

Did you ever think about the army?

TRACEY

The army?

HEBB

Maybe that might be a good thing for you, you know? They'd take care of you. It would certainly build you up.

TRACEY

Yeah.

(Tracey throws his hands over his face.)

HEBB

You might have a lot of potential in that area. You seem like a soldier type of guy.

(Tracey rubs his eyes to stop his tears.)

TRACEY

Yeah. Yeah, maybe. Guys bossing me around, might be… might be good.

HEBB

Wait here, all right?

TRACEY

Why?

HEBB

I'm gonna get you an ice pack.

TRACEY

I don't need one.

HEBB

Yes, you do. Sit there.

(Tracey sits. Hebb turns in the doorway. Beat.)

HEBB

Do you like… sports? Track?

TRACEY

No, not really.

HEBB

What about… tactile stuff? Shop? Cars? Or building maybe? Construction?

(Tracey falls silent.)

HEBB

What do you like? What felt so easy it felt like nothing at all?

(Tracey drops his hands. He shrugs. His face is bright red.)

HEBB

You'll figure it out.

(Tracey nods.)

HEBB

I'm sorry if I said something to upset you.

TRACEY

No…

HEBB

You're a great kid, Tracey, you are.

TRACEY

Thanks.

HEBB

Sit.

(Hebb exits.)

TRACEY

Yes, sir.

(Tracey wipes his eyes. Gets up. Walks to the door and leans in the frame. Tracey checks and sees if Hebb is there and sees nothing. Fast, he exits.)