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## **Something in the Way**

Dawn walks off stage as Shawn crumples the paper and tosses it to the ground.

**Man in Black**

Did you ever write back?

**Shawn**

I did. Told her I loved her, I missed her, I hoped she was okay. I told her I couldn't come visit, but that I'd send my next five paychecks to her.

**Man in Black**

You didn't visit your dying mother?

Shawn hesitates.

**Shawn**

No.

**Man in Black**

And you think you're not like your father.

**Shawn**

Why do you keep saying that?

**Man in Black**

Because you think you're special. You think you're the only person in the world who hates themselves, and you use that belief to walk over people who care about you. You hate yourself because you're everything your father was, so you shut yourself away from your sister and your mom when they need you most.

Shawn stares at the Man in Black

**Shawn**

I read the note. Now tell me why you're here.

**Man in Black**

I'm here to hate you.

**Shawn**

What?

**Man in Black**

I told you a hundred times that I'm you. Every time you have a negative thought, it's me. Every time you drink yourself to sleep, it's me. Every time you hate yourself, it's me. Every time you wanna grab that little metal piece in your closet and pull the trigger, it's me. It just so happens that tonight you're drunk beyond your mind, lacking meds,

and going through a bout of PTSD, so I seem a lot more real than usual.

**Shawn**

So none of this is happening?

**Man in Black**

Not in the real world. Right now it's been five minutes since that firework went off, and you're still crying on the floor.

**Shawn**

What?

**Man in Black**

Those fireworks. To you they sounded like artillery shells rounding off in the night, so that sent you spiraling into the situation we're in right now.

**Shawn**

So you're here to help me?

**Man in Black** (laughing)

Hah! You're not too bright are you? Do you remember the last time a PTSD trip *actually* helped anyone? No, I'm here to make your life hell, Shawn. I'm here to torment you and make the few minutes we have together abysmal and maybe even drive you to take that big jump off the deep end.

(walks to mirror, slicks back hair)

I never said I was good, Shawn, I only said that I was real and that I was fair.

**Shawn**

*Fair?* How is any of this fair? What's fair about my mind tormenting me because of something I was manipulated into doing years ago?!

**Man in Black**

Manipulated, Shawn? Really? You enjoyed the military. You enjoyed feeling a sense of belonging and a sense of having a purpose for once in your miserable life! You enjoyed seeing those little Afghan children dodge your stare and whisper in terrified little clumps. Because you had *control*. You had that little itch in the back of your head *yearning* for control finally scratched, and Jesus Christ in Heaven! How good it felt! And then you come back home, a useless, traumatized bum with no college degree, expecting people to treat you the same way those little Afghan children did! Your wife! Your sister! Admit it! The only difference between you and your father is that you have a tiny bit of talent in writing!

**Shawn**

How the *hell* am I like my father?!

**Man in Black**

Your father's the only other man you know who *hits his wife*.

**Shawn**

No...

**Man in Black**

Yes, Shawn, yes. I was there.

**Shawn**

No, I didn't- I mean, it was an-

**Man in Black**

Goddamnit Shawn! Stop lying to yourself! To me! To her!

Danny renters, wearing a different outfit, carrying a stack of envelopes. Shawn begins panicking, and looks at his ex

wife.

**Danny**

Oh my goodness, Shawn. Scholastic, Olympia, Viking. You got responses from all three! Shawn takes a step towards Danny, but stops, shaking. The Man in Black walks behind Shawn, and whispers closely in his ear.

**Man in Black**

Take your place, Shawn...

**Shawn**

No...

**Man in Black**

You know there's only one way out of this...

Tears begin streaming down Shawn's face as:

**Shawn** (clearly drunk)

Open 'em up. Let's see who the winner is.

Danny excitedly opens up the all three letters, and sets them on the table.

**Danny** (reading)

"Dear Mr. Robinson, thank your submitting your manuscript to Scholastic Publishing! Unfortunately..."  
Danny looks up at Shawn, worried. Shawn waves his hand.

**Shawn**

Read the next one

**Danny**

"Dear Mr. Robinson, we at Olympia Publishing thank you sincerely for your submission. Unfortunately--"

**Shawn**

Next one.

**Danny**

"Dear Shawn, after reading your manuscript, we are very interested in your work!"

(Danny looks up, excited)

"Unfortunately, due to the mass amount of submissions we receive each year, we at Viking must choose between only a few submissions, and, unfortunately, your novel needs a bit more work to be completely up to the Viking standard. We thank you for your submission, and encourage you to reach out again after a thorough revision of your novel!"

Shawn stands, and takes a swig from a bottle.

**Danny**

Well, that's good!

**Shawn**

How?

**Danny**

Viking was interested! You just need to work a little more, and then I'm sure you're-

**Shawn**

Give it up, Danny! They didn't like it then, they won't like it now!

**Danny**

Shawn, we both know that's not-

**Shawn**

When are you gonna realize that I suck! I'm a horrible author and an even worse songwriter! I can't believe I thought Interscope would *actually* be interested in me.

**Danny**

They will be. You are incredibly talented, Shawn. You just have to keep working at it.

**Shawn**

I'm done working at it! I'm twenty eight and I've done *nothing* with my life! I threw away my youth to kiss up to some assholes in the military, and then came back just to be told I'm not "mentally fit" enough to work!

**Danny**

Shawn...

**Shawn**

The rest of the world has already thrown me away, Danny. It's time you did, too.  
Danny walks over to Shawn.

**Danny**

I'm never gonna do that and you know it. I love-

As she puts a hand on his shoulder, Shawn spins and smacks Danny across the face. The stage lights turn red again, as Danny pulls away, face in hair. She looks at Shawn, stunned. Danny looks back, just as stunned.

**Shawn**

Danny, I-

**Danny**

I'm leaving.

Danny storms away, grabbing her purse. As she goes to leave:

**Shawn**

Danny, no! Please! I love you!

**Danny**

How can you love somebody else when you can't even look yourself in the mirror?  
Danny storms out, leaving Shawn standing alone.

**Man in Black**

That was the night we met, Shawn.

**Shawn**

Stop talking.

**Man in Black**

That was the night you drank yourself blind and passed out in your bathtub. You woke up and walked into me watching *MTV Unplugged: Nirvana Live in New York* on your TV. We watched that concert together until you passed out. I didn't speak once.

**Shawn**

Stop. Talking.

**Man in Black**

Do you remember me now, Shawn?

**Shawn**

No.

**Man in Black**

I thought we were done lying.

**Shawn**

Shut up.

**Man in Black**

I need you to accept that this isn't the first tim-

**Shawn**

WOULD YOU SHUT THE HELL UP?! All you do is talk! Do you do anything else besides make my life a living hell?!

The Man in Black stares at Shawn, then laughs bitterly.

**Man in Black**

Trust me, this isn't hell

**Shawn**

So show me hell. It couldn't be any worse than this.

The Man in Black walks over to the remote, and presses a button.

**Man in Black**

You're a writer, right? I've read your work. Not good, not bad. You've been thinking about getting into TV lately. So let's write a TV show.

(Presses button on remote)

First, we need a song.

"Where Did You Sleep Last Night?" Begins playing, as Kurt Cobain plays the song live on the TV, from the same episode of *MTV Unplugged* that the Man in Black had just mentioned. Kurt and his band project across Shawn and the Man in Black.

**Man in Black**

Next, we need a leading lady. A gorgeous, down to earth girl who's working a 9 to 5 just to get by.

Danny walks on stage, wearing a stereotypical waitresses outfit. She is stressed, clearly still thinking about her earlier fight with Shawn.

**Man in Black**

And what's a lady without her lad?

A **Handsome Man** walks in, and takes a seat near Danny.

**Man in Black**

A good-looking, good-natured, down to earth small town boy, just trying to make it by in this big world. Don't worry, Shawn, you won't have to stand by for this scene.

(Shawn looks down, ashamed)

What's the inciting line? Hmm. Let's see:

**Handsome Man**

Are the burgers any good here?

**Danny**

Yeah!

(Leans in)

Between you and me, these are the nastiest burgers I've ever had

**Handsome Man** (chuckling)

Noted. Thanks for the advice, um, what was your name?

**Danny**

Danny. Your humble waitress today.

**Handsome Man**

And does a humble waitress such as yourself have a boyfriend, by chance?

Danny hesitates for a moment. Shawn grows uneasy.

**Danny**

Nope. Just me, myself, and I.

**Handsome Man**

I find that hard to believe, a gorgeous girl being single in the city.

**Danny**

I guess I just have trouble finding the right person.

Shawn begins to shake again.

**Handsome Man**

So you're looking for someone who could be the right person?

**Danny**

Are you asking me out?

**Handsome Man**

Depends on the answer.

**Danny**

What if the answer was yes?

**Handsome Man**

Then I'd say yes.

Shawn begins talking over the two as they keep speaking.

**Shawn**

This isn't real.

**Man in Black**

How do you know?

**Shawn**

You can only show me memories you were there to see. You can't be watching this right now because you're here.

**Man in Black**

Was I there for your father beating you? When you knocked him out? Basic training? The letter? Don't tell me what does and does not make sense, Shawn.

**Danny**

Eight o'clock tomorrow night sounds good.

**Handsome Man**

That sounds great to me.

Shawn makes a low moaning noise.

**Man in Black**

What's the matter, Shawn?

**Shawn**

We were going to a poetry reading tomorrow night.

**Man in Black**

Looks like things change...

The Handsome Man stands to leave, as Kurt Cobain begins the final verse of his song. It is much louder, raspier, and more desperate than the first two verses. As the Handsome Man turns to leave, Danny grabs him and kisses him, just as Kurt Cobain reaches the point where he screams "I'll shiver". It is a painful sound. The audience can see Cobain's pained face from the projection. Shawn has a similar face. Danny and the Handsome Man leave the stage, hand in hand.

**Shawn**

Did this really happen?

**Man in Black**

Maybe it did. Maybe it didn't. But would Danny be wrong if it actually happened?

**Shawn** (hesitating)

No...

**Man in Black**

Did you really expect her to sit by and *wait* for you to make yourself better?

**Shawn**

Yes! She promised she would! She promised she'd stay by my side and come back home when I got healthy!

**Man in Black** (laughing)

You selfish prick.

**Shawn**

What?

**Man in Black**

She's out there trying to make a living for herself! Your ex-wife! She sends you money and drives you around and checks on you everyday even when you treat her like *trash*. You're a parasite!

**Shawn**

I'm not.

**Man in Black**

You *are*.

**Shawn**

I'm not!

**Man in Black**

You are and you know it! You're useless! You've done nothing with your life! You take your pension and drink it within two weeks, you get great ideas for books and forget them the next day, you go to brothels just to feel some semblance of the human connection that *you* pushed away! And here you stand, thinking it's fair to be mad at *Danny* for talking to another man. You're a leech! So tell me: why? Why do you do these horrible things? At what point did you stop being the dream-filled rebel and became the half-dead waste of life?

**Shawn**

I don't know! There's been something in the way since I came back! Something that stops me from doing good for myself. I've been raised my *whole life* being told I'm nothing, so excuse me if I began to believe it. I joined the Army and tried to do good, but I came home to *nothing*. I serve this country, and they abandoned me! No healthcare, no therapy, no job support! The minute I came home I was nothing to the U.S. government! So what's the endgame?! I'm useless! Fine! I'm a waste of space! Fine! I'm a parasite! Fine! Fine fine fine!

**Man in Black**

Look at you! Throwing a fit as soon as the kitchen gets hot! You can't take any bit of criticism without popping a vein! You're just like your father!

**Shawn**

YOU CALL ME MY FATHER ONE MORE TIME AND I'LL KILL YOU!

Shawn stops, realizing the whole point of this conversation, the whole point of this night. He steps back slowly, and looks at the Man in Black, as if he had just been betrayed.

**Shawn**

That's why you're here, isn't it?

The Man in Black smiles the smile of a shark.

**Man in Black**

I was wondering if you were ever gonna figure it out.

**Shawn**

Why? Why here? Why now?

**Man in Black**

We're at the end of our rope, Shawn. I am. You are. What's the point of going on?

**Shawn**

We have a life to live. We have Danny!

**Man in Black**

The same Danny that's scheduling a date with another man as we speak?

(Shawn softens)

Let's stop being a burden on people, Shawn.

Shawn is growing restless as it seems like he's arguing with himself- which he is.

**Shawn** (whispering)  
What about Dawn?

**Man in Black**

Imagine how much money will go to her after we're done. Danny took out life insurance for you a few years ago.

A final song begins playing, "Something in the Way". Kurt Cobain begins singing softly on the same episode of *MTV Unplugged*. The Man in Black nods towards the TV.

**Man in Black**

He's your hero, isn't he?

**Shawn**

He was dealt a losing hand and made something out of himself.

**Man in Black**

And in death he became more than he could have by living. He's a legend because he isn't here anymore.

(grabs Shawn's shoulders from behind)

Become a legend, Shawn.

Shawn begins to sob quietly, beginning to give in.

**Shawn**

And what if I did? Am I going to Heaven or Hell?

**Man in Black**

I don't know, Shawn. I know as much as you do.

**Shawn**

How would I do it?

**Man in Black** (laughing softly)

We've thought about that too much to still have that question. There's a rope in the garage. Pills in the cabinet. Knives in the drawer.

Kurt Cobain continues to sing as the Man in Black helps Shawn up off the floor. Shawn breaks down and collapses into the Man in Black, who comforts him.

**Man in Black**

Shh. It's gonna be over soon.

The Man in Black walks offstage, still holding Shawn. The lights on stage go out, leaving only a single spotlight on the TV as Kurt Cobain finishes his song.

After a few seconds of silence, Danny walks in, wearing the same overcoat she was wearing at first. She is holding a white box, and is in a much better mood.

**Danny**

Shawn, I'm back! I'm sorry I left like that. I've just been so stressed lately, and you know how this holiday makes me stressed out for you. I also lied. I wasn't going into work, I took the day off. I actually went to pick up something: a cake! For me and you and Dawn. It's nothing fancy, but I figured it would be a nice surprise.

Danny trips over a can as she sets the box on the table.

**Danny**

It would have been nice for you to actually clean u- You know what? Nevermind! Tonight's a celebration! We're gonna double down on your book, get some new equipment for your guitar!

(realizes something is wrong)

Shawn? Everything okay? I'm really sorry if I upset you. If you wanna talk, I'll talk.

(gets worried)

Shawn? Shawn?

Danny walks off stage, going the same route Shawn went. After a few moments of silence, a blood curdling scream is heard. Danny rushes back onstage, and collapses onto the floor, sobbing. She pulls out her phone, shaking and still crying.

**911 Operator**

911, what's your emergency?

**Danny**

I- my- oh god- my, my- my ex husband, he- he just... oh god...

**911 Operator**

Calm down, ma'am. Can you please repeat that for me.

**Danny**

My, my- my husband. He's dead...

Danny drops to the floor and begins sobbing again. The Man in Black enters from where he exited, and stops behind Danny. He begins rubbing her shoulders.

**911 Operator**

What's your address, ma'am? Are you sure he's dead?

**Man in Black and Danny**(at the same time)

Yes.

**911 Operator**

Do you know how he died?

**Man in Black** (sarcastically)

Of course. I did it.

**Danny** (repeating)

I did it...

The Man in Black smiles his shark's smile, and rubs Danny's shoulders.

**Man in Black**

It's a pleasure to meet you, Danny.

Lights out as:

**Anchor**

We'll be right back after these messages, folks. But before we leave, we just wanted to remind you, on this Fourth of July, take care of our veterans. Reach out to them. Thank them. Love them. We could never have any idea the struggles they are going through.

