

Mortal: A Short Play

*Two brothers James (14) and David (12) are walking down railroad tracks in a secluded, wooded area at night. They stop once they arrive at the crossroads. There is one street light, and it is silent except for their conversation.*

JAMES: I told you not to follow me. Go home.

DAVID: Why've you got such a stick up your butt, James? If you don't want Mom and Dad to find out about you sneakin' out, I'm coming along.

JAMES: David, please. I'm not gonna fight you. Go back, and go to sleep. Mom ain't home yet from her night class, and Dad's outta town til Friday anyway, so you couldn't even tattle on me if you wanted.

DAVID: Look, can I stay for just a few minutes?

JAMES: Fine. Just be quiet.

*Silence.*

DAVID: James? What's the matter with you? You're like a different person.

*Silence.*

DAVID: Did I do somethin' to piss you off?

*Silence.*

DAVID: Well, you don't haveta talk my ear off there, brother. I um... I got a question. I've been thinkin' a lot about it a lot since the funeral. Do you think uh... we coulda talked him outta it?

JAMES: Jesus Christ, shut up.

DAVID: I mean, well, I just, what if we could've done something different? Like, looked for those warning signs or something. Like what they talk about in school. Those videos, like, do you think if we would've paid more attention—would he have still— er. ya know—

*JAMES stops and gives DAVID a terse look.*

JAMES: No. I don't know.

*DAVID looks away, wanders the stage.*

DAVID: D'ya remember when we all snuck out last summer to light off fire crackers in the park, and Matt got too close to one when he lit it and caught his pants on fire? And he ran around like a chicken with its head chopped off so we tackled him into that pond?

*DAVID chuckles. JAMES sits down in the middle of the crossing train tracks. He checks his watch repeatedly.*

JAMES: I remember.

DAVID: And remember when he told us about how at his fourteenth birthday party him and Sarah Williams snuck off to go make out and she grabbed his dick and was like "That's it?"

*DAVID smiles, playfully pushes JAMES or pokes him. JAMES doesn't respond.*

JAMES: Yeah.

DAVID: Or the time he climbed up that giant ass oak tree to get that dumb orange balloon that was stuck up there and he was so close to getting it but he gave up because he couldn't see how close he was and so we yelled at him to keep going but he just jumped down anyway and landed in that big pile of leaves and scared the shit outta us?

JAMES: Yeah.

*DAVID sits down next to JAMES. Silence.*

JAMES: Matt's mom got rid of Kip. I saw her in the lawn next door yesterday and asked where he was. She just said he reminded her too much of Matt, so she took him to the fucking pound. Just like that. Just took Matt's dog away to some pound like he never even mattered, like Matt's just a ghost to her.

DAVID: That's so dumb. Kip'll never be anyone else's dog but Matt's; they were like partners-in-crime. But, maybe it'll be good for Matt's mom. She could use some company though. I bet it's real quiet in their house—

JAMES: No David, first she abandons Matt, then she throws his dog away? No. Fuck her.

DAVID: I don't think she meant it like that.

*JAMES checks his watch. Silence.*

DAVID: Why do you keep checking your watch?

JAMES: To check the time, dipshit.

DAVID: But why do you need to check the time?

JAMES: Because I do. Look, David, you wouldn't understand if I told you, okay? So just go home already. It's been a few minutes.

*Silence.*

DAVID: Do you think Matt went to heaven? I mean he was such a good guy. He would always help me out with homework, and he'd give us money for snacks at lunch time, and he never cheated on any of his tests, and—

JAMES: Father George and Sister Mary Ann both said people who kill themselves go to hell.

DAVID: I mean, he was baptized though. Doesn't it say in the Bible that you can go to heaven if you get baptized?

JAMES: That's not what it says. Suicide is a mortal sin. That's what it says. So he went to hell.

DAVID: Yeah, but he was just a kid like us. God wouldn't send a kid to hell, would he?

*Silence.*

DAVID: Would he, James?

JAMES [aside]: I'll make sure to ask him.

DAVID: Huh? What did you say?

JAMES: Never mind.

DAVID: I don't think God would send a kid—especially a good kid—to hell. Maybe he'd just understand that Matt really was a good person, and that he just had a really hard time and got depressed. Maybe God would let him into heaven anyway.

*JAMES stands up.*

JAMES: You don't get it, David. God doesn't care about Matt because if he did, he wouldn't have let Matt die. So when Matt's soul got to heaven, God shut the door in his face and told him

good luck in hell. So just—just shut the *fuck* up and go home, David. You're a stupid kid in way over your head, and you don't know anything about God or Matt's mom or me or Matt. Just go the fuck home.

*JAMES walks down stage left, and sits down in the middle of the train tracks facing the audience and his back to DAVID. DAVID stands up slowly. Silence.*

DAVID: What're you doing out here, James?

*Silence.*

*JAMES checks his watch, then puts his head between his knees and holds himself in a ball, crying.*

DAVID: I know you don't wanna talk to me but I'm really scared, and I'm not leaving you until you tell me what you're doing out here.

*In the distance, a train horn sounds twice.*

DAVID: James, cmon, get up, let's get outta here.

*Silence.*

DAVID: Get up! Please there's a train coming, please, James, get up.

JAMES: No. I made up my mind.

*DAVID begins crying.*

DAVID: No!

JAMES: Go home, David.

*DAVID scrambles over to JAMES and grabs him by the shoulders to look him in the eyes.*

DAVID: Maybe Matt's mom abandoned him! Maybe God left him, too! Maybe everyone else left Matt but—but you and me? We didn't. We didn't leave him. He killed himself because he forgot that we were there. He killed himself because he just didn't know we were right there with him.

And goddamnit James I'm right here with you.

*The train horn sounds again, louder.*

JAMES: I'm a fuck-up, David. I'm a fuck-up.

*The bright red lights on the arms of the railroad crossings light up, illuminating the boys and the entire stage in bright red.*

JAMES: I'm a fuck-up! It's my fault, David, I left him after school that day because he said he wanted to be alone and I knew I shouldn't have let him go because he said nothing was worth it anymore but I didn't believe him so I let him go and now he's dead *all because of me*. He's *dead* because of me!

*The alarm bells ring, and the train horn sounds deafeningly loud. David screams "No!" as the lights cut to darkness.*