

"West End Blues"
Dramatic Writing Sample

Excerpt from the full-length play, "West End Blues"

By Justin Pierce

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ACT ONE: JAZZ

SCENE ONE: MEMORIES OF YOU

Lights up on an apartment in Wilder Falls, Indiana. October 1998.

Though the apartment is dark, the open windows in the back let a bit of light in and paint the picture of a sun setting on a small mid-western town. The sound of passing cars can be heard from the street below.

HARPER enters, comfortably dressed and looking like she has just woken up from a nap. She takes a moment to re-orient herself with this room before crossing to the lamp and, after a bit of reaching around, turning it on.

As the lamp turns on, low lights up on a bus seat, elsewhere. DONNA sits with her purse by her side and a luggage bag at her feet. The odd passing car lights up her face as it goes by.

DONNA

The way my mother talked about me as a child, you'd believe that I never caused a fuss. She'd say that you couldn't find a happier, more complacent child. For a time, I even took that as a compliment- felt pride at the mention.

As DONNA speaks, HARPER goes to the record player. She goes through the available records before picking her selection from the milk crate at her feet. She places the record into the player and drops the needle down.

Pops are heard for a moment before a jazz song begins.

DONNA (CONT.)

I guess things do tend to change, don't they?

HARPER heads to the back window. She produces a cloth bag she has hidden away and takes out a small baggy. She opens it up and rolls a joint as...

DONNA (CONT.)

Only they don't all change at once. It starts small and keeps it up, little by little. It's like looking at yourself in the mirror- looking back you see the change but you're watching it happen so it doesn't seem like...

HARPER lights the joint and takes a drag, blowing it out the window.

DONNA (CONT.)

And then suddenly you're this new... thing and people don't know what to do with you and that word "complacent" starts to feel a whole lot more like a box that you're sittin' in. And you might be growing, you might be gettin' bigger and bigger all the time, but that box... it ain't growin' with you. Starts to feel like escaping that box is all that matters. And boy does escaping that box cause a fuss.

The apartment phone begins to ring as lights go down on DONNA. HARPER crosses to the phone and picks it up.

HARPER

Denton Residence.

Hello?

Hello?

She hangs up the phone, shaking her head, and goes back to the window.

She picks up the joint and takes another drag before...

The apartment phone begins to ring again. She stares at it for a second, almost disbelieving, before walking back towards the phone hesitantly.

It continues to ring until she picks it up and listens. Eventually...

HARPER (CONT.)

Hello?
Is anyone there?

She hears something on the other end of the line.

HARPER (CONT.)

Don't call here again.

She hangs up and storms over to the window, sitting back down. She attempts to relax for a moment, before...

The apartment phone begins to ring.

She starts to get up again but she stops herself. What's the use?

She stares at it, letting it continue, as she takes a drag.

The buzzes begin to get louder, eventually overtaking the music until...

HARPER (CONT.)

I got all fucking day!

The apartment phone continues to ring.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TWO: CHICAGO

Moonlight on an apartment in Chicago, Illinois.
October 1998. Movement is heard from the
hallway outside, before...

PEYTON (O.S.)

Which one?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

On the right.

PEYTON (O.S.)

Beautiful.

CHARLIE and PEYTON enter the front door.
For a moment, they are silhouettes until
CHARLIE flips the light switch on. PEYTON
regards the room.

PEYTON (CONT.)

Wow, man...

CHARLIE

Thoughts? Concerns?

PEYTON

No, no concerns- I like your place. It's got a nice feel.

CHARLIE

You look surprised.

PEYTON

Well, I gotta be honest with you, Charlie. Just knowing you from work, I'd say you seem
nowhere near this put together.

CHARLIE laughs.

CHARLIE

Maybe you're right.

PEYTON

I'm used to it.

CHARLIE

This stuff- it's all my roommates'.

PEYTON

Roommate...

CHARLIE

Oh, he's- uh- he's out of town.

PEYTON

That's convenient.

CHARLIE

His brother's getting married, so.

They flew him out to Vegas and everything so he's- he texted me a few hours ago- said he was riding in a limo down the strip or something- maybe it was to the strip- uh, you can take your coat off if you want. Just throw it anywhere. You want water or something?

PEYTON puts her coat on the coffee table.

PEYTON

What's "or something?"

CHARLIE

I think there might be- almond milk...?

PEYTON

Let me guess, -

CHARLIE

The roommate.

PEYTON (CONT.)

- the roommate.

The two enjoy the moment.

PEYTON

Water sounds great.

CHARLIE

Cool.

CHARLIE exits as PEYTON looks around the room. After a moment...

PEYTON
(calling off)

So, how long you been here?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

The apartment or the city?

PEYTON

Eh, whatever breaks the silence.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Moved to Chicago about five years ago. Moved in here a couple months back.

CHARLIE re-enters with two glasses of water.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

This is the kind of- Jake's helping me out right now, but it's- you know, it's a temporary thing.

He hands her a glass.

PEYTON

Hey, I've seen a lot of temporary situations and this is definitely on the nicer side. So bravo. Where you from originally?

CHARLIE

Wilder Falls, Indiana.

PEYTON

Never heard of it.

CHARLIE

And I have actually never not heard that response.

PEYTON

Glad I can prove the rule.

CHARLIE

What about you?

PEYTON

Chicago, born and raised.

CHARLIE

Wow.

PEYTON

What?

CHARLIE

Seems like every one I meet here came because their hometown sucked and New York was too far away.

PEYTON

Not my story, exactly. Is that what brought you here?

CHARLIE

Nah. I came here for school.

PEYTON

Ooh. Let me guess. You're a business major with a minor in... basket weaving.

CHARLIE motions over to a trumpet case
sitting against the wall near PEYTON.

CHARLIE

I've got a little sheet of paper saying I can play the trumpet real good.

PEYTON

No kidding.

CHARLIE

My student loans are the proof. There can be no doubt.

PEYTON

You know they're always looking for new talent at the club, right? You should ask Jordan about getting an audition or something- I'm sure he'd be up for it. You could show him your sheet of paper- he might even be impressed.

CHARLIE

Yeah, it's- I've thought about it. I definitely have, but- at least for now... I'm kinda good.

PEYTON sizes CHARLIE up for a moment.

PEYTON

Well. If you're good, you're good. Can't argue with that.

Beat.

CHARLIE

I don't usually see you at the club on nights you aren't working.

PEYTON

And I tend to see you there every night, regardless. But yeah, I was kind of dragged there. Today's my birthday.

CHARLIE

It is not.

PEYTON

(not sure if she's regretting the confession)

It *is*, actually.

Beat.

CHARLIE

Happy birthday...!

PEYTON

Thank you but if you sing, I kill you. The heels I wore tonight are very sharp.

CHARLIE

You don't have to worry about that.

PEYTON

I'm thirty now, by the way. Just to- get it out there. It happened, I'm here- and I'm living with it.

CHARLIE

(teasing)

And how's that going for you?

PEYTON

Really well, can't you tell?

The two enjoy the moment.

PEYTON (CONT.)

I don't know, man. Today feels big. The end of something.

CHARLIE

I get that.

PEYTON gives CHARLIE a look.

PEYTON

What're you, 24?

CHARLIE

I'm 26.

PEYTON

OK, not so bad.

CHARLIE

What would've been the cutoff?

PEYTON

I mean, I'm here. I'd say something like, "I never do this," but how many mid-twenties creative types you gotta blow before it's your thing?

End joke.

The two enjoy the moment.

CHARLIE

You want some music?

PEYTON

Sure.

CHARLIE goes over to the record player and begins to look through the milk crate of records sitting beneath it.

CHARLIE

Why go to work on your big night?

PEYTON

Honestly? I couldn't even tell you. I couldn't think of anything else to do- anywhere else to go- I think I'm there so much that it has *actually* taken over a section of my brain. Plus Kate's got a crush on one of the guys in the band, so- decision was just kind of made.

CHARLIE

Kate was the blonde you said goodbye to.

PEYTON

Oh, you noticed her.

CHARLIE

(attempting to recover)

Yeah, I mean, she's- I guess I've probably seen her around-

PEYTON

(with a smile)

She's noticeable, I get it. We made plans that we were gonna go out and celebrate, right? Dinner was great, then we get to the club and an hour in- she gets a call. Then a few minutes later- a text. And at first, she's like, "oh no, it's fine- I'm in this for the long haul, sister. This is your night." Then before you know it, she's tired, she's got all this work in the morning and, "it's just gonna be easier if I go home." Abandoned on my birthday, Charlie. Do you feel bad for me?

CHARLIE has lost himself in the records.

PEYTON clears her throat. CHARLIE looks back to her.

CHARLIE

Who was- uh- who had called?

PEYTON

It was her fiancé. In just a few years, everyone around you is gonna have a fiancé or a career or a kid on the way or any number of horrible things. And it doesn't matter who it is or what they've got- they're not gonna be able to spend an hour away from it.

CHARLIE pulls out a record and loads it into the player, placing the needle precisely on the track that he wants, a memorized action. He flips a switch and a Blues song begins to play.

PEYTON (CONT.)

You are full in on this jazzy shit, aren't you?

CHARLIE

I can put something else on, I just figured-

PEYTON

No, no, it's nice.
Come here.

CHARLIE does. The two kiss for a moment before PEYTON pulls away.

PEYTON (CONT.)

So, what's the deal?

CHARLIE

Deal?

PEYTON

With tonight.
Am I staying?

CHARLIE

Do you want to stay?

PEYTON says nothing, daring him.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

Yeah, you're staying.

PEYTON

And you're not gonna be fucking weird about this tomorrow, right?

CHARLIE

No more than usual.

PEYTON

Good boy.

The two kiss again.

PEYTON (CONT.)

Where's your-?

CHARLIE gestures into the hall.

CHARLIE

In here.

The two make their way into the hall, still managing to kiss the entire way.

A door is heard opening. Giggles, various noises, before...

The apartment phone begins to ring.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Shit- sorry- let me... just be a second.

CHARLIE enters a moment later, putting on a shirt. He goes to the phone and checks the caller ID.

CHARLIE (CONT.)

(calling off)

Hey- it's uh- my aunt. I should take it.

PEYTON (CONT.)

Do your thing. I'll be here.

CHARLIE

Thanks.

CHARLIE answers the phone.

CHARLIE

Hello?

Yeah, sorry. I couldn't- uh- I just got in. You OK? What's up?

(long beat)

No, I'm still here.

PEYTON enters.

PEYTON

(joking)

Alright, who died?

Beat before she realizes...

BLACKOUT.

SCENE THREE: OUTRO

Mid-day lights up on a room in Chicago, Illinois.

At lights, JUSTIN sits at a desk typing on the keyboard of his laptop. After a moment, he stops, stands up, and addresses the reader.

JUSTIN

Hey there! This is the end of the writing sample! If you enjoy my work and want to enquire about any creative or business projects, I encourage you to reach out! My email is **justinpierceplaywright@gmail.com** and I am open to any jobs, opportunities, or collaborations! Thank you so much for your consideration.

BLACKOUT.