

PIPER

a mostly fabulous fable of puppets and parenthood
By Briandaniel Oglesby

PIPER

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PIPER

*For Rudy. And Robby. And Jim.
You're the tops!*

PIPER

PIPER was developed at Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, Texas, with dramaturgy by Megan Thornton and direction by Madge Darlington. Performers included David Allan Barrera, Chase Brewer, Sammy Jo Cienfuegos, Karina Dominguez, Rudy Ramirez, Blake Robbins, and Vincent Tomasino.

CAST

PIPER GEPPERSON	35. oh so gay.
ANDREW	a puppet made of underwear.
ESMERFELLA	a fairy godmother drag queen.
KATHY GEPPERSON	Piper's sister.
JAVIER	30s-ish, works in marketing. Dammit, why are all the cute guys in marketing?
AUSTIN	22, bruh. White.

Also: kid's voices and puppets.

Notes: Y'all, the Geppersons are mixed.

TIME: Now-ish.

PLACE: Austin, Texas.

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PIPER

PIPER

PROLOGUE

At rise, we see a miniature proscenium set for a puppet show. Let's put a chair next to it, and a sign: "Drag Queen Storytime." We hear a theme song in the key of a worn-out tape deck. A cat puppet appears, wearing a kingly crown. Applause. PUPPETCAT takes a bow and prepares - very Shakespearian thespian.

PUPPETCAT. Once upon a time, there was a —
KID's VOICES. KING!

PUPPETCAT. And this king —
ESMERFELLA's VOICE. WRONG!

PUPPETCAT. Hey! I'm doing art here.
I will begin again. Ahem! *(The Puppetcat restarts.)*

Once upon a time there was a —
ESMERFELLA's VOICE. Wrong.

PUPPETCAT. Once upon a time there was a —
ESMERFELLA's VOICE. Queen.

PUPPETCAT. No. That's not — Once upon a time there was a—
ESMERFELLA's VOICE. QUEEN, bitch.

KID's VOICES. Ooooooooooh.

PUPPETCAT. EXCUSE ME! YOU'RE DISRUPTING THE ART,
ASSHOLE! Once upon —

ESMERFELLA's VOICE. Wrong wrong wrong wrong WRONG. Once
upon a time there was a QUEEN. And when one HIRES a queen, it is she
who starts the story.

PUPPETCAT. YOU ARE NO QUEEN. Kids! This is a man.

KID's VOICES. Oooh.

PUPPETCAT. And men are dumb. Say it with me kids: men are —
KIDS. Dumb! —

PUPPETCAT. Go away dumb man, this is my story —

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ESMERFELLA's VOICE. DO NOT ANGER THE QUEEN! SHE
COMMANDS THE FORCES OF SPECTACLE.

PUPPETCAT. Security!

ESMERFELLA's VOICE. Thunder go. (*Thunder and lightning crack.
ESMERFELLA makes a hell of an entrance. The puppet cat yelps and
scurries away.*)

ESMERFELLA. Now where are we?

Esmerfella is the voice of God. And yet - 'tis not her story. Like all Gods, she is fictional. She is a catalyst as invented as that bit of talking felt, the idea of virginity, Ronald Reagan, America, marriage, gender, and everything else we hold near and dear. Fractals, we, glitter, rocks, paste. Like all Gods, she cannot die, she can only be forgot. (*Smoke, and the world is formed. As she speaks, our storytime setup disappears like magic, becoming Piper's tacky home.*) In the beginning, there was The Queen and the Word, and the queen was good, and the word was a list of commandments. Topping this list: **thou shalt tip your queen.**

PIPER

ACT 1

SCENE 1...

NO, LET'S CALL THIS "CHAPTER 1"

ESMERFELLA. Let's call this Chapter 1. This is a story of Piper Gepperson. (*Magic fairy 'ding.'* We see **PIPER**. He is sewing.) Piper Gepperson had given up on love and procreation.

PIPER. I'm an old maid.

ESMERFELLA. He was 35.

PIPER. Forever alone.

ESMERFELLA. He blamed biology.

PIPER. My family dies stupid young. We're like Great Danes.

ESMERFELLA. Rare was it for a Gepperson to make it past 60.

PIPER. Our hearts are three sizes too small.

ESMERFELLA. His Tia Clara hit 59 before her wheelchair got sucked into a jet engine, but causes au naturale usually slew la Casa de Gepperson; heart attack, cancer, consumption, gingivitis. Looming over every Gepperson cradle: calaveras with knives. Perhaps some ancient brujarita cursed them with short telomeres and epigenetic bad judgment.

PIPER. I suppose it's better that I'm too gay and too poor and too awkward to find someone.

ESMERFELLA. You know what they say: It gets better - and then stalls out around 30.

PIPER. I went on so many first dates. Ghosts, all. I am Piper Gepperson: Ghost Hunter. No partner, no progeny—

ESMERFELLA. Orphan-stealing is off the table.

PIPER. —just as well. The world is falling apart and I don't get along with babies. Anytime a coworker offers to let me hold their brand new moco, they get so offended when I say, oh fuck no, I'll break it.

ESMERFELLA. Fatherhood is to be looked at from afar, behind glass, like a zoo or an aquarium or Dillards.

PIPER. I adore aquariums, don't I Percival? (*Percival is a fish in a fishbowl.*) So. It's totally okay that I spent my twenties looking for love and failing at it. Where's the Disney limited on that cuentito? Where the

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happy ending is the wisdom that you die alone and unloved surrounded by your porcelain cat collection and pet goldfish?

ESMERFELLA. Seeing himself, at the age of 35, as in his twilight years, he doubled down on crafting.

PIPER. I'm really getting into this whole spinster thing.

ESMERFELLA. His place had become a mausoleum, ornamented with knick-knack reminders of still-born romances.

PIPER. I shall retire to *Grey Gardens*. Call me Miss Havisham, Percival—

ESMERFELLA. A beautiful tragedy, mon ami.

PIPER. — and she shall only wear big hats. Yes. Nestled inside this concave chest, the heart of an elderly shut-in whose mummified body is found by eager young house-flippers mottling away in a well-worn chair surrounded by stacks of TV Guides; her once young and serviceable face, eaten by the local strays. Here kitty kitty. (*He tosses some cat food out a window.*) Be kind to me, dear pussies. (*CATS: meow.*)

ESMERFELLA. Drama queen.

PIPER. Oh, how I love you all. Tragically, I'm allergic, so you must wait outside until I'm to be buried in the sandbox of time. Where's my knitting?

ESMERFELLA. At 35, Piper Gepperson had settled on his fate.

And then, one night — Phone call: go. (*Phone call. The ring is something like Memory from Cats. Piper picks up.*)

PIPER. Kathy!

KATHY. Cunt.

PIPER. Bitch.

KATHY. Wherefore the fuck art thou, brother dear?

PIPER. Waiting for the cats to eat me, sis.

KATHY. You are allergic to cats, sis.

PIPER. But are they allergic to me?

KATHY. Piper, I'm currently surrounded by patchouli hipsters from Dallas who consume medically inadvisable amounts of psychotropic substances but are under the impression that DEODORANT CAUSES ALZHEIMER'S AND SHOWERING WASHES AWAY PHEROMONES DUDE and I need my homosexual hermanito to rescue me or at least to stand next to me and say bitchy things.

PIPER

PIPER. Oh, that sounds terrible. *(To his goldfish.)* What do you think, Percival?

KATHY. CRYSTAL BALL, Pipe. It's the future, and Piper finds himself comatose, ventilator breathing for him, tubes sprouting from more holes than he has, and who who who has pledged to force the hospital to unplug him?

PIPER. You.

KATHY. Damn right. Now, you promised to wing for me tonight, and your sister needs to get it in.

PIPER. Eww.

ESMERFELLA. And so he went to a party. Kiki: go. *(Esmerfella waves her hand and Piper is instantly at a multicolored party. Everyone wears animal masks and bobs to EDM. Piper tries, but does not fit in.)* Cue: the meeting. *(And then Piper sees Javier. And Javier sees Piper. They are drawn to each other. It's magnetic. They begin to dance. Let this moment be ripped off from every version of Romeo & Juliet you've seen. Our glittery, flittery Esmerfella floats through like Queen Mab, if Queen Mab had cupid'ed RJ. Good Pilgrim...)* He was in town for South By.

JAVIER. I'm in town for South By. Javier. Javi.

ESMERFELLA. They'd found themselves at a weird party Kathy's coworker Jerome was throwing in a geodesic dome. Surrounded by oblivious straight people who were trying too hard, the moment they saw each other, every burner bro seemed to disappear. *(Piper removes his mask.)*

PIPER. Piper. The Pipe. Um.

JAVIER. "The Pipe," huh? A mask for masc? *(Javier pokes him. Piper giggles. He ain't masc. They hold each other.)*

ESMERFELLA. Piper usually hated South By.

PIPER. So many douchebags.

JAVIER. I work in marketing.

PIPER. Dammit! No! Tonight, I can't care.

ESMERFELLA. Tonight, South By seemed magical.

PIPER. You are so pretty I could vomit.

JAVIER. You also make me want to vomit.

PIPER

ESMERFELLA. It was chemical, primal, animalistic, awkward. (*Javier indicates, about the mask, Why a cat?*)

PIPER. They'll eat my face someday. Never mind.

JAVIER. Meow. (*Javier licks him.*) I came here looking for something. I didn't know it would be you.

PIPER. Kiss me right now. Be obnoxious about it. (*They kiss. It's pretty obnoxious.*)

ESMERFELLA. A thousand thoughts scurry through Piper's head. Javier Javi is only in town for South By. He'll soon vanish into a haze of mango vape smoke to photograph a muscle queen holding an energy drink in front of the Who Are You? Mural. Act now or forever wonder what could have been.

PIPER. I can't.

ESMERFELLA. His place is small and stupid messy, and when was the last time he washed his sheets?

PIPER. September. Shit -

ESMERFELLA. But there, in that geodesic dome, with a bit of champagne and PBR buzz, under a chandelier made of doll heads and dildos, he detects fragility in Javier. Something that matches his own.

PIPER. Hey, um, so... Hi.

JAVIER. Do you want to invite me home with you?

PIPER. Oh, thank God. (*Esmerfella claps. They are instantly at Piper's place.*)

PIPER. I wasn't expecting anyone.

JAVIER. Meow.

PIPER. It's not much, but —

ESMERFELLA. Oh for fuck's sake. Sexytimes: go. (*Sexytimes do, indeed, go. Music! Think of the Lady and the Tramp spaghetti scene.*) It was one of those rare magical nights that seem to go on forever. You get two or three of them in your life, four if you're lucky, five if you're bisexual. And yet... The sun rose, as it always does, breaking the spell, and with the dawn's early light, Javier Javi had vanished like morning mist.

PIPER. The world is as it was.

ESMERFELLA. And from great heights, there are only great falls.

PIPER

PIPER. It felt real. I thought it was real for once.

ESMERFELLA. As Flannery O once said, an emotionally available man is hard to find. Piper despairs.

PIPER. (*Wailing.*) Fuck-a-duck! Why why why?? This is why I renounced sex and everything adjacent to sex. I need to become a monk or a eunuch or a hermit. God, bring on the cats. (*Cats meow. Piper looks at his fish tank.*) Sorry, Percival.

ESMERFELLA. Even though Javier had disappeared into the void of hookups past, he'd left something behind. (*JAVI's underwear.*)

PIPER. "Andrew Christian."

ESMERFELLA. Having nothing better to do in the haze of hangover, Piper takes the sliver of tasteful fabric. (*Piper does so.*) And he holds it. (*Anyone who has wanted someone knows the ache.*) And turns to craft. (*Piper sews.*) This is what he does, our little Piper. For every fallen spark, he has —

PIPER. Something to remember him by. (*To the goldfish.*) What do you think, Percival? (*He raises the underwear project in the air. We hear the music from the geodesic rave.*) You'll be something —

ESMERFELLA. Different.

PIPER. It had been so, so long.

ESMERFELLA. And abstinence made the heart grow fonder. (*As Piper sews, let's say that Esmerfella sings:*)

When you wish upon a star
And your dick's no longer hard
You may find your heart's desire
... In your own backyard...

PIPER. (*Piper has finished a puppet.*) To remember him by. Hello... (*A dawning realization.*) I'm pathetic. Who does this? Weirdos and psychopaths, that's who. A Loser who couldn't get someone to love him or even stay long enough to go out for breakfast and make straight tourists from Lubbock uncomfortable. Percival, have you ever seen such lonely pathetic *twat*? (*Piper folds himself. Esmerfella flicks something from her drink. Fairy dust. Magic! The puppet begins to move.*)

PUPPET. Bah. Bah? (*The PUPPET looks around and sees Piper. The Puppet taps on Piper. Piper bats it away. The Puppet crawls back to him.*)

PIPER

PIPER. What the fuck? *(The Puppet hits him.)* Oh, you little shit. *(The Puppet hits him again.)* What the hell did I do?

ESMERFELLA. *(The VOICE of GOD.)* You did shit bitch.

PIPER. Who said that?

ESMERFELLA. She appears! Glitter smoke confetti! *(A poof of glitter, smoke, confetti. Esmerfella appears to Piper.)*

Piper. Who the fuck are you? You're in my house.

ESMERFELLA. House?

PIPER. You're in my shitty apartment. I must be high. I can't be high. I don't do drugs.

PUPPET. Baaah.

PIPER. Do I do drugs now? Am I a drug fiend? You, you're a spot of e I took in a weak moment, that dab of marijuana I smoked in my twenties, a line of coke, a snort of meth, is that how you do meth? Did I finally take Jim Shead's advice about poppers? Save me, Nancy Reagan, for I am a popper meth fiend.

ESMERFELLA. I AM FLESH AND MAGIC GLITTER, YOU WRETCH!

PUPPET. Baaah!

ESMERFELLA. And fuck Nancy Reagan.

PIPER. Mom was right, I am possessed by demons. Begone devil, and take your cursed underwear with you.

ESMERFELLA. I ain't the Devil.

PIPER. Am I dying? Is this a final hallucination? I see dead twink, there's no place like home. And you were there, and you were there. Are you a good witch or a bad witch?

ESMERFELLA. SHUT THE FUCK UP MORTAL! YOU DARE UPSTAGE ME!??? *(The world thunders and quakes, threatening to rip open.)*

PIPER. Sorry.

ESMEFELLA. The glorious glitter fish before you is Esmerfella, your Fairy God Mother-fucker, and she brings her blue fairy wish-granting magic unto your shitty apartment and self-pitying life.

PIPER. Oh my God, you work at OilCans.

PIPER

ESMERFELLA. Talentless mortal! Judge me not, for in the new millennium, we all need side hustles! Now, The Pipe, in spite of your dust, Esmerfella is here, and with sequined gloves, she reaches up through your puckered ass and finds your achy-breaky heart. There, she fingers your ache, your desire, your fear, and thus: abracadabraboom. A one night stand becomes a magic trick.

PIPER. I did not wish for a monster puppet thing.

ESMERFELLA. Every drag mother pines for a daughter. A legacy to leave. *(Thunder rumble.)* And Esmerfella grants you progeny.

PIPER. Progeny?

PUPPET. Bah bah bah!!!

PIPER. I wanted a partner who stays for breakfast first.

ESMERFELLA. In the new millennium, that is asking too much.

PUPPET. Bah! BAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

ESMERFELLA. Now that she has granted your heart's desire, Esmerfella needs some appreciation.

PIPER. Oh, um, thank you.

ESMERFELLA. A girl pays no bills on 'Thank you.'

PIPER. Oh. *(Piper gives Esmerfella a dollar.)*

ESMERFELLA. Bitch.

PIPER. Fine. *(Piper hands Esmerfella a tenner. Her hand lingers a beat.)*

ESMERFELLA. Someday, you'll need her again. Everyone does.

Esmerfella out. *(Poof. Esmerfella vanishes like the Wicked Witch of the West or a RuPaulian sashay-away.)*

PIPER. What the fuck is going on with my life?

PUPPET. What-fuck...

PIPER. What's that?

PUPPET. What-the-fuck-what-the-fuck

PIPER. I taught it to curse.

PUPPET. What-the-fuck-what-the-fuck

PIPER. Shut up! *(The Puppet begins to cry.)* Shhh. Shhh. Um. Rock-a-bye puppet, in the fabric shop, when the wind blows something something.

(The Puppet laughs.) Hello. Hi.

PUPPET. Hi-hello. What the fuck?

PIPER

PIPER. You can't say that. People will know that I'm a shit parent and - what am I saying? People will run screaming, monster abomination God is dead! I've killed God now.

PUPPET. Abom-

PIPER. Abomination.

PUPPET. Abomation!

PIPER. That's right, you're an abomination. Shit, I'm becoming my mother.

PUPPET. Abomation.

PIPER. Let's forget that word.

PUPPET. Fuck fuck.

PIPER. That one, too. I'm. Call me Piper.

PUPPET. Fuck fuck.

PIPER. Piper.

PUPPET. Papa.

PIPER. Piper.

PUPPET. Pa-pa!

PIPER. ... Papa. *(The Puppet awkwardly stands and tries to walk.)* This is happening, okay. *(The Puppet stumbles. Piper helps the puppet. The Puppet falls into his hands.)*

PUPPET. Papa.

PIPER. What did I get into Percival? *(The Puppet sighs and starts to fall asleep in Piper's hands.)*

PIPER. Okay. Okay. I'm going to call you.... Andrew.

CHAPTER 2

ESMERFELLA. Chapter 2. Piper took to parenthood with the passion and excitement of a new owner of a Roomba. Bonding montage: Go. *(Music plays. Piper teaches ANDREW how to walk. Andrew kicks Piper and runs away.¹ Piper scolds him. Andrew cries, and Piper comforts him with Peek-a-boo. They play Hide-and-Go-Seek. They do macaroni art.*

¹ The puppet design will dictate what this montage looks like. What's important is that we see that 1. Andrew is learning very quickly. 2. Piper is letting himself love Andrew. 3. There's some slapstick element and Andrew can be destructive.

PIPER

Piper shows his picture - it's a portrait of Javier. Andrew looks at it and then pushes over a plant that's near him. Piper goes to clean it up. Andrew knocks something else over. Smash! Laugh!)

ANDREW. Smash!

PIPER. NO! BAD!

ANDREW. Andrew bad?

PIPER. No, I mean, this is bad, but you're not, / behavior not identity—

ANDREW. What-the-fuck?

PIPER. One naughty thing at a time!

ANDREW. Andrew smash Andrew smash. SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMASH SMA — *(In desperation, Piper turns on the television, flipping it to Sesame Street. Andrew is instantly transfixed.)*

PIPER. Um. Andrew? Hello? Damnit. I wanted to be a No-Screen house. Well, Percival. What now? *(PERCIVAL is a fish and cannot talk, but Piper makes a voice for him.)* “Piper, dear, you should take him out.” It's not safe. “You can't keep him from the world. He'll grow up to be you.” Can't have that. “No you can't.” Shut up, Percival.

ANDREW. Move. *(Piper is blocking the television.)* Jackass. *(Transition! Thanks to theatre magic, they are instantly at The Public Library. Yay! We see a sign for Drag Queen Storytime next to the small proscenium puppet stage. You know, the one we saw at the start of the play? Piper is pushing a pram.)*

PIPER. The public library! I had no idea there was a branch here. Did you see that check-out boy? I could check him out. *(Ugh.)* Shoot me, I've become lame-dad lame. I wonder if he has a thing for daddies. *(Andrew pops out of the pram.)*

ANDREW. *(Sesame Street singing.)* Sunny-day! Sunny-day!

PIPER. I'm raising an addict.

ANDREW. A dick! A dick!

PIPER. Keep quiet, Andrew. *(Piper covers him up. Andrew pops out.)*

ANDREW. Why?

PIPER. Because

ANDREW. Dick dick dick! Why why why? Dick dick dick —

PIPER

PIPER. Because being who you are makes people uncomfortable.

ANDREW. (*Ow.*) Okay.

PIPER. I am becoming my mother. Um. Fine. (*Piper takes Andrew out.*) Just play pretend like we practiced. (*Andrew plays dead.*) Like that, yeah. (*AUSTIN, the check-out boy, who looks exactly like an Austin, comes up.*)

AUSTIN. Bruh.

PIPER. Huh-hello, hi. Checkout boy. Fuck. I mean. Hi.

AUSTIN. You look gay.

PIPER. Really?

AUSTIN. And you're late, bruh.

PIPER. Me?

AUSTIN. JK, bruh. Ain't your mom. Like, I know we were supposed to meet yesterday, but (I) scored some killer weed, so, priorities.

PIPER. Right. Yesterday?

AUSTIN. I'm an entrepreneur. Four jobs. I also teach fire dancing. It's really grounding for kids.

PIPER. Everyone's gotta side hustle.

AUSTIN. Nice puppet.

PIPER. He can be a dick.

AUSTIN. You're cute, kinda.

PIPER. No, I'm not.

AUSTIN. Follow me. (*Austin leads Piper to the Drag Queen Storytime chair, handing Piper a book.*)

AUSTIN. Hey guys and stuff!

KIDS. Hello Library Man!

AUSTIN. Heh, cool. So, like, I know you're here for some Storytime with Lady Glitters, but, like, these bizniches at a Million Facebook Mothers posted some shiitake about snatching drag queen wigs, boooo.

KIDS. Booo!

AUSTIN. Booooo assaulting people booooo. So this week, we got this homosexual with a puppet, who is a SECRET drag queen. We're putting on our IMAGINATION glasses, okay bruh?

KIDS. Okay bruh!

AUSTIN. I have - what's your name?

PIPER. Piper

PIPER

ANDREW. Andrew.

AUSTIN. ... Is that underwear?

PIPER. Um. No.

ANDREW. Excuse me. *(Austin leans in.)*

AUSTIN. Yeah bud?

ANDREW. POOP! *(Kid's laughter.)*

AUSTIN. Righteous. Do you want Andrew to help with the story?

PIPER. No.

ANDREW. Yes.

KIDS. YES!

AUSTIN. *(Hands Piper the book.)* Show us what you got, bruh.

PIPER. Uh. *(Piper fumbles with the book. Austin ducks away.)* Once upon a time, there was a —

KIDS. KING!

ANDREW. Why? *(The KIDS laugh. Andrew is delighted by them.)*

PIPER.

Andrew, keep it down. I'm reading.

Once upon a time, there was a fox king.

(The FOX puppet appears in a tiny story time proscenium. Andrew doesn't notice yet. He's doing his own little dance.)

Well isn't that clever?

(Andrew notices the puppet. He's in awe.)

Anyway, "this fox king, huh-

ruled with an iron paw -

He had everything at his beck and call.

With a flick of claw, he'd open his maw,
and command his kingdom all.

Shower me in gold, he'd say. Throw
me a party glamor and gay. I am the
fox king, and I always get my way."

The rhyme scheme is really inconsistent —

KIDS. KEEP GOING!

PIPER. "And then one day, in walked a
calico cat.

ANDREW.

Why?

Why why why why why

Why why why why why.

*(Andrew waves at the
puppet. He's nervous
to meet this new thing.)*

ANDREW. Hello. You are
like Andrew. Friends? *(The
FOX ignores Andrew. A
second Puppetcat joins.)*

ANDREW. Friends for
Sesame Street and TV and
smashing.

Be Andrew friend, okay?

PIPER

‘How did you get past my platoon of rats?’

“I have a gift no one’s given you,
And they let me pass right through.
You have respect and fear, my king,
but you are missing just one thing.”

“Is it diamonds, is it gold?”

“It’s not something you can hold.”

What do you think it is, kids? I bet it’s
love, it’s always shit like that, and let
me tell you, kids, if you’re looking for
puppet

fulfillment through love —

ANDREW. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaagh! What-the-fuck!! *(The kids scream. Andrew screams at the kids screaming. Austin appears. It was his hand.)*

AUSTIN. *(To Piper)* What the hell? *(To the kids who are screaming.)* My
dudes, chill. None of this is real. It’s like the Santa Claus or the moon
landing or Jesus. See— *(Austin pulls the head off of the puppet. More
screaming. Andrew is shocked.)* Fake like Jesus.

ANDREW. What-the-fuck-what-the-fuck- *(Screaming from the kids.
Piper grabs Andrew and flees.)*

AUSTIN. So, uh. Who here wants to learn how to fire dance? *(Austin
disappears. Then they are outside. Andrew is crying.)*

ANDREW. Mean mean mean mean!

PIPER. I told you they’d scream. *(Andrew is crying, crying)* Oh, stop.
STOP! Goddamn it. I’m not cut out for this. Uh. *Esmerfella?* Why did you
do this to me? I may have sucked at life before, but at least I wasn’t a bad
parent. Please stop, Andrew. Um. *(Starts singing.)* Sunny day.

Chasing the clouds away.

Something something

Can you tell me.

How to get to WHERE?

ANDREW. Sesame Street.

PIPER. Yeah. Sesame Street. Now, are we better?

ANDREW. No. Andrew friend. Fox king head went pop. No friend.

...Can you be Andrew
friend? Pretend, okay?

Okay???

Please?

PLEAAAAASE?

*(Andrew hugs the FOX.
PUPPETCAT gets into the
fray. There’s a bit of tug of
war. Andrew pulls the*

off a very naked hand.)

PIPER

PIPER. That was for a story. It wasn't real. We'll get you home and you can watch Sesame Street until your eyeballs fall out.

ANDREW. Andrew GO to Sesame Street. Please. Pleaaaaaase.

PIPER. You can't.

ANDREW. Pa come too. One minute.

PIPER. We can't go to Sesame Street.

ANDREW. But I

want to.

Take me.

Now. Now. NOW! *(Andrew holds his breath.)*

PIPER. That's not going to work. *(Andrew takes a big breath and tries again. Austin enters.)*

AUSTIN. Bruh, bruh. Yo.

PIPER. Nothing!

AUSTIN. What?

PIPER. What? It's you.

AUSTIN. It's a me. And a you. Andrew.

PIPER. Piper.

AUSTIN. Right, Piper. (Call me) Austin.

PIPER. Why are Texans named after Texas. You never meet someone named New Orleans or Bakersfield —

AUSTIN. So, you just got me fired, bruh.

PIPER. Sorry?

AUSTIN. Nah, it's cool. Fuck the man. Wanna buy some weed?

PIPER. I'm good.

AUSTIN. That puppet shit (was) wild man. (Keeping) It weird. (I) thought it was like doing shit itself. (I am) so fuckin high. So, you wanna go out sometime?

PIPER. Yes, no, what? You say, "bruh." You can't be gay.

AUSTIN. I'm cool with butt stuff, we're all human, man. And you kinda owe me.

Think about it, daddy. *(He writes his number in the library book, which Piper is still holding.)* Ninja vanish! *(Exit Austin.)*

PIPER. Well, that was - kids and puppies, huh? *(To Andrew.)* So, are you done? *(Andrew gasps for air.)*

PIPER

ANDREW. ... done. Sesame.... (*Esmerfella appears. Smoking a cigarette and watching.*)

PIPER. Look, Andrew. Sesame Street is... like the Fox. Not real.

ANDREW. Not. Real. But... like me. (*Realizing.*) Andrew is not real.

PIPER. No, to me, you're real. Andrew, you're special. There's no one like you.

ANDREW. There is no one like Andrew.

PIPER. No one on the whole earth planet. Andrew? Are you - Andrew?

ANDREW. Sunny day... Taking the clouds... away.

ESMERFELLA. A phone call. (*Ringtone is Memory from Cats. Piper answers.*)

PIPER. Hello, Kath.

KATHY. (*Voice.*) Piper, Aunt Susan died. (*As the scene ends, the lighting shifts to something more ominous. We're visiting the in-between.*

Esmerfella takes the head of the puppet-king and pulls a skull from it. She is magic, after all. This is her drag queen story time.)

ESMERFELLA. Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him, Oratio. So ends you, so end we all. Inside of you there was once life, a hand— Inside of that hand, bone. (*The skull begins to move, forming a puppet skeleton.*) Bone outlast flesh, which we paint

and putrefies to tease its past. The burlesque of the macabre. (*The puppet skeleton realizes it's a skeleton.*) We are paint. We are but dust waiting our turn to be dust again. It is the order of things. In the course of human development, every sparkle discovers they are far more alone than they imagined... (*The puppet skeleton realizes it's alone.*) And then, there comes resistance. (*The puppet skeleton falls apart.*) Now. Let's get ourselves the fuck to Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

They are in Piper's house. KATHY is there, lying on the couch, shoes off. She's dressed for a funeral. She holds a cookbook. There's a basket of cookies with a picture of Aunt Susan attached. Andrew is hidden, and Piper is looking for him.

PIPER

KATHY. —see, that's my problem, I never found The One because I'm too hygienic. I need a man who bathes. I told this to the burners, and oh that didn't deter them, oh no,

PIPER. Oh no.

KATHY. Oh yes, so I pretended to be a rabid coyote to fend them off. I did my yip yip yip thing. The tragedy is that they were *interesting*. No one interesting is datable and no one datable is interesting.

PIPER. Tragic.

KATHY. I swear, the trick is to meet someone when you are young before status has hardened, and then to rust into each other. I will never marry, never become one of those,

PIPER. Incubators

KATHY. INCUBATORS, like everyone else in our abundant family. Fuck them, all judging me.

PIPER. They weren't judging you.

KATHY. Yes they were. They do. Every Christmas, every funeral. You get a pass because they think you're demented because you're gay. You can mince in there *with a puppet* and they assume it's a fetish, you lucky deviant, but for me, I am single no kids, and it's chisme time. Some of them were grandmothers at my age. And I don't judge that.

PIPER. Yes you do.

KATHY. Well fuck them. Aunt Susan never had kids.

PIPER. And look how she died. Alone. In Pfluggerville. A SUBURB! Crushed by an avalanche of her cookbooks days shy of her 60th, a batch of cookies baking in the oven.

KATHY. What's this? (*A scrap of fabric.*)

PIPER. I don't know. A shirt from a festival. Gay Bi Gay Gay. Andrew's going through a phase, cutting apart things, I really don't —

KATHY. Ugh. "Andrew." I thought you shared my views on parenthood, then you turn this fuckboi's underwear into —

PIPER. Progeny.

KATHY. "Progeny." What happened to "Our bloodline dies with us?"

PIPER. He's not really blood.

KATHY. He could be a demon.

PIPER

PIPER. Can you be like less? And you know if you'd help, things would go faster.

KATHY. Who schedules a date for the day of his dear Auntie's funeral?

PIPER. *He* called me. There will always be another funeral, but how often will I get asked out? Now - help me please.

KATHY. Here, little demon, we're not going to destroy you.

PIPER. Cancel that. Eat some of Aunt Susan's funeral cookies.

KATHY. All parenting books say it helps if you tell babies you're not going to destroy them — These are good.

PIPER. Aha! (*It's a scrap of fabric.*) Nope.

KATHY. Meanwhile your little demon plunges a knife into your sternum while you sleep. This movie never ends well for gay man or slutty sister. We exit at the end of Act I pinned to the door with pinking sheers as a warning to attractive Caucasians.

PIPER. Will you shut the fuck up? Come on out, Andrew! Ready or not? Auntie Kathy is babysitting.

ANDREW. (*Voice.*) No! She sucks.

PIPER.

KATHY.

Fine, Andrew. Don't come out.
I said shut up.

Second dates only!

ANDREW. (*Voice.*) Good!

KATHY. Hah! Your 'progeny' gets it. This body is entirely without maternal instincts. It's a feminine husk surrounding burnt cigarette butts and Adderall -

PIPER. Instead of a uterus, you have a pile of thorns. Babysitting will be good for you.

KATHY. Babies are just the fear of death, you know. Babies are what you make because you're terrified of *the end*. And you know what? Everyone dies. It's the great equalizer. Every Gepperson should know that. Still, because we cannot stop death, we're all about popping out the kiddies.

PIPER. Sister dear, you're being shitty.

KATHY. I've had a bad week, Piper. Aunt Susan died, we spent the last four hours in Pfluggerville at a BIRTHDAY PARTY THEMED FUNERAL, the herpes are back, and I need a cocktail. Meanwhile, my dear brother has joined the cult of parenthood. Are you even working?

PIPER

PIPER. Family comes first.

KATHY. Piper.

PIPER. I telecommute.

KATHY. You work at HEB, how do you telecommute?

PIPER. I'm taking some time off. What? My boss is gay, and the one perk is 'mo's before hoes.

KATHY. Gay men make me vomit, Piper.

PIPER. You're homophobic.

KATHY. You're sexist.

PIPER. You're barren.

KATHY. That is the nicest thing you've ever said to me...Piper. The truth.

PIPER. Okay, so I have some money put aside. I started saving for my wedding when I was ten.

KATHY. Oh Piper.

PIPER. A-HA! *(Piper finds the hidden Andrew, who is squealing.)*

ANDREW. EEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!

KATHY. What's that in his hand? *(A scrap of fabric. Cut into pieces.)*

PIPER. My favorite pair of underwear.

ANDREW. Burglar did it.

PIPER. A burglar?

ANDREW. Yes. Smash window.

KATHY. Bullshit.

PIPER. Kathy. He smashed the window. How is the window not broken?

ANDREW. Burglar fixed it.

KATHY. Oh really?

PIPER. I got this, Herpe. Oh really?

ANDREW. No?

PIPER. No.

ANDREW. Andrew fixed it.

PIPER. That's a third lie. You know what happens to liars?

KATHY. They become Republican?

PIPER. Their noses grow.

KATHY. You know that's a lie.

PIPER. Andrew, you gotta tell me the truth. It's what decent people do.

PIPER

ANDREW. Andrew is not a person.

PIPER. You know who'd want you to tell the truth, Andrew? Big Bird. Cookie Monster.

KATHY. Not Elmo. Elmo's such a tweaker.

PIPER. Shut up.

KATHY. Have you watched the show?

ANDREW. Poppa. I have a truth to tell you okay? It was a bad puppet. Andrew is a bad puppet.

PIPER. Andrew isn't *bad*. Sometimes he can act naughty, but -

ANDREW. If Andrew is so bad, will Andrew go away?

PIPER..... It's just stuff, Andrew. I'll never let you go.

KATHY. There you go. You've done all the parenting. Now, go get your dick wet.

PIPER. Kathy.

KATHY. I forgot: bottom.

PIPER. KATHY!

KATHY. Go change. You're late. Go! *(A beat. Piper exits.)*

ANDREW. You suck.

KATHY. Hush. We must support your pa in his game.

ANDREW. Game?

KATHY. You want to know where gay babies come from? From that. Game.

ANDREW. Oh. Is Papa good at game?

KATHY. You're dad's like, if a fisherman had no pole but a pizza box to go fishing with, so the only fish he catches are when they jump directly into his boat. And those fish are usually pretty fucked up.

ANDREW. *(What the fuck is she talking about?)* Oh.

KATHY. Your father is a very lonely man. He has been for a long time. This is a chance for him to not end up like Aunt Susan. *(Piper reenters, still dressing.)*

PIPER. This shirt okay?

KATHY. It has a hole in it.

ANDREW. Dad. Why was Aunt Susan sleeping?

PIPER. Oh —

KATHY. I'll handle this one. Aunt Susan was dead.

PIPER

ANDREW. Dead?

KATHY. As a doornail.

ANDREW. What's a doornail?

KATHY. All that was left of her was embalming fluid and cookies.

PIPER. Let me handle this, sis. Everyone, all living beings, we eventually stop being. We become objects.

ANDREW. Oh... Someday you will die.

PIPER. Yes. I will get older. My body will change.

ANDREW. Will Andrew die?

PIPER. I don't know. You're special.

ANDREW. Andrew will always be Andrew.

PIPER. Possibly. I hope so.

ANDREW. Andrew is not real.

PIPER. We've talked about this.

ANDREW. Andrew will be here and no Piper.

PIPER. Maybe. But I'm not going anywhere for a long time. I promise.

Um. I should cancel. Let's watch a movie tonight. I got a VHS of The Muppets Take the Manhattan Project!

KATHY. No. Piper, the greatest sin committed by a new parent is when they lose themselves —

PIPER. There are worse things —

KATHY. As if the purpose in life is merely to propagate. I have lost so many friends to the purgatory of parenthood, and I refuse to let you join the ranks of the damned.

ANDREW. Go play game, Poppa.

KATHY. Go! There's this place on the East Side called the Gentrifire.

They serve organic cold roasted coffee in masonite jars and appetizers on reclaimed wood. Andrew and Aunt Kathy will be fine. Go.

ANDREW. Go!

KATHY. GO!

Blackout. Transition. We're outside, on a path near a lake. We hear music first. Let this be something mechanical, acid EDM. We see Austin.

Shirtless, with a scatter of cat tattoos across his chest. He's fire dancing.

PIPER

Piper is both stressed and impressed. If you can't use real fire, have Austin add the line "Next time, I do it with real fire."

AUSTIN. Your turn, bruh. It's fire. It's not going to bite. Go on, boyo. Take a chance. *(Piper takes the torch.)* Don't burn down Lady Bird Lake. *(Piper gives Austin a look.)* Gonna be fine. Fuck, a cop! JK JK. You ready for some fire? *(Austin captures Piper with a hoop. Austin puts his hand down Piper's pants.)* This wood could catch. Bruh. You're quiet.

PIPER. I'm good. *(About his tattoos.)* You must really like cats.

AUSTIN. Huh? I hadn't thought of it. When I get a tattoo, I get a tattoo. Egyptians worshipped cats, you know. Turned 'em into mummies and shit. Made them live forever. I want to be worshipped. Worship me, daddy.

PIPER. Can you not use that word?

AUSTIN. Daddy, fine. *(Unbuttoning.)*

PIPER. What are you doing?

AUSTIN. I like being naked.

PIPER. You are so 21.

AUSTIN. 22, and whatever. You're only 35.

PIPER. That's like 60 in Gepperson years.

AUSTIN. You've said that like six times. OMG STFU OK. Come on, bruh, (let's) get our skinny dip on. Don't be such a middle aged white lady.

PIPER. I have the soul of a middle aged white lady, and she's concerned because someone could see us, ATX.

AUSTIN. That would be hot.

PIPER. This isn't Hippie Hollow.

AUSTIN. Everywhere is Hippie Hollow if you don't get caught.

PIPER. Amoebas will crawl up my nose and eat my brain. It happens - my friend Johnathan is a nurse, and he told me it can happen, and you have to understand, my family, we die from shit like that.

AUSTIN. Okay. *(Piper reconsiders. Piper begins to take off his shirt. He stops.)* Austin is not someone who tells himself, 'no.' Austin sees something, he takes (it). He sees you, he gets (you). His heart, his brain, his dick - (it) wants, and he serves. What have you done in your life? Fuck shit up, Daddy. Live like you don't know consequences. *(Piper makes a choice.)*

PIPER

PIPER. Can we go to your place?

AUSTIN. I have like seven roommates.

PIPER. Oh. Can we go to my place?

AUSTIN. No shit.

We're back at Piper's with Kathy, who is watching television with Andrew. We hear an atomic bomb blast.

KATHY. Muppets are so CREEPY... You know, I could have kids. If I wanted.

I was twenty-two and Piper was eighteen when our parentals died - six months apart. We decided - I decided - when you got so little time, use it for fun. I guess this is fun, too. You ready for bed? *(Big old fake snoring.)* He's asleep. Um. *(Kathy takes him into Piper's room. A beat. Piper is at the door, letting Austin in.)*

PIPER. It's small.

AUSTIN. I'll be the judge of that.

PIPER. And full of clutter.

AUSTIN. Don't care.

KATHY. *(Kathy enters.)* Hey homo. Oh, good. You adopted the twink.

PIPER. Shut the fuck up.

AUSTIN. Bruh.

KATHY. Don't introduce me. I'm going. He's asleep.

AUSTIN. Who's asleep?

PIPER and KATHY. The fish.

AUSTIN. Nice.

KATHY. Don't wake him. *(Kathy leaves.)*

AUSTIN. Chick really cares about your fish.

PIPER. My sister. Uh. Let's just be quiet.

AUSTIN. I like it. Your bachelor pad, bruh. A little, like, you could be a serial killer. What's this? *(The macaroni Javier.)*

PIPER. Someone.

AUSTIN. Someone?

PIPER. Someone someone. Have a cookie.

AUSTIN. Death by chocolate. So. What are you looking for?

PIPER

PIPER... Companionship.

AUSTIN. I meant sexually, but okay.

PIPER. I want - I need - Someone who can help me move the couch. Couches need two people. We're not built to grow old alone, Austin. No one who romanticizes being alone has spent time alone, and has had to move a couch.

AUSTIN. Never thought of that. Yeah.

PIPER. I'm afraid of falling. Like down the stairs. And metaphorically. And no one finding me. I'm afraid of breaking. Of -- the harder parts of this world. I need someone to scare the cats away. And what do you want?

AUSTIN. I want kids. Like, I'm ready. Like emotionally. I bet I could be a dad right now.

PIPER. Really?

AUSTIN. My dad says I should go into commercial real estate like him. They make major buck. But he's a dick, and like, fuck that guy. I could also be, like, a fuckin baller corporate spy I think.

PIPER. You could be anything.

AUSTIN. So you. What do you want? And I think you know what I mean this time. *(They make out.)*

PIPER. I gotta pee.

AUSTIN. I have that effect on people. *(Piper exits. He's clearly looking for Andrew. Austin looks around a bit.)*

AUSTIN. It's like a thrift shop threw up. *(Austin gets comfortable. Does he smoke a bowl? A door opens and closes.)* Bruh? *(Nothing. Austin continues settling in. We see Andrew. Then he hides. We see him again. This time taking a pair of scissors. He hides. On the third time he pops up, Austin sees him.)* Yo little man.

ANDREW. Andrew.

AUSTIN. How's it hanging, bruh?

ANDREW. Andrew. Not 'bruh.'

AUSTIN. Can you tell me what Piperdude wants, bruh?

ANDREW. No. Andrew wants —

AUSTIN. Yeah?

ANDREW. Andrew wants your underwears.

AUSTIN. Kinky.

PIPER

ANDREW. No. No. Shh... (*Andrew indicates for Austin to lean in.*)

ANDREW. IT'S A SECRET!

AUSTIN. Got you, bro man. Secret. Well, Austin hates to disappoint, but he don't wear 'em.

ANDREW. No underwears?

AUSTIN. Freeballin.

ANDREW. GIVE ANDREW UNDERWEARS! (*Andrew pulls out the scissors.*)

AUSTIN. Whoa. WHOA! Piper, chill! (*Piper enters.*)

PIPER. Andrew put those down!

ANDREW. Nothing!

PIPER. Let me explain.

AUSTIN. There someone else here?

PIPER... Him.

ANDREW. Andrew.

AUSTIN. A threesome?

PIPER. Ew, no. It's just him. (*Austin looks at his pipe.*)

AUSTIN. Fuck, Logan told me this shit was good, —

PIPER. No, Austin, he moves on his own. Austin. Meet Andrew

AUSTIN. This shit is wild, man. Andrew - wild, man.

PIPER. This shit is magic. Um.

ANDREW. UNDERWEAR UNDERWEAR UNDERWEAR

PIPER. He's going through a phase.

AUSTIN. I DON'T GOT ANY!

PIPER. Oh, and now you two are fighting.

ANDREW. I HATE YOU! (*Andrew exits.*)

PIPER. Austin, I don't think this is going to work.

AUSTIN. Nah, bruh, I can deal -

PIPER. I had fun, Austin, and I hope to see you again. The most romantic thing in the world would be for us to wake up next to each other, and to cook breakfast, but there are responsibilities. I am raising... my puppet son made from the underwear of this guy (*the macaroni portrait*) that a drag queen fairy magically brought to life.

And this has to be my priority. And... I still hope you choose me. I hope you choose us...

PIPER

AUSTIN. You could totally sell it.

PIPER. Damn it.

AUSTIN. Get a ginormous Terrytown house and shit. This place looks like a thrift shop threw up.

PIPER. Austin. I think it is time for you to take your bike and go.

AUSTIN. Can you pay for a taxi? You're at the bottom of a hill and I'm riding a Fixie.

PIPER. Seriously?

AUSTIN. I'm good, I'm good. I've got amazing thighs. Something you missed... *(Austin leaves.)*

PIPER. Well. That sucked..... *(Piper makes a call.)* Kathy? I need you to bring something — *(Piper exits. Andrew enters. There's knocking on a window.)*

ANDREW. Knock knock knock. *(Then, we see in the window - the Puppetcat.)*

PUPPETCAT. Yoohoo! *(Andrew sees this and is a bit startled. The Puppetcat indicates: open the window. Andrew does so.)*

ANDREW. Who are you?

PUPPETCAT. Someone like you.

ANDREW. Someone not real.

PUPPETCAT. Like you, but not you. Andrew, do you want to be loved?

ANDREW. Yes.

PUPPETCAT. You should join us. We can do so many wondrous things.

ANDREW. But.

PUPPETCAT. Come with me. You'll dance for cheering crowds. And anything your heart desires... Or. You can stay here. And someday he will leave you. And it will hurt. *(Andrew thinks. Andrew nods. He clambers up on the window, knocking something over.)*

ANDREW. Smash. *(Piper enters - and sees Andrew trying to leave.)*

PIPER. Hey. HEY! Where are you going?

ANDREW. No! *(Andrew slaps at Piper.)*

PIPER. What's got into you?

ANDREW. But but -

PIPER. No buts, Andrew, no buts.

ANDREW. Yes, buts. Lots of buts. The cat is like me! —

PIPER

PIPER. The cat? (*Andrew points. But there's nothing.*)

ANDREW. You SCARED HIM, BAD MAN! I HATE YOU! (*Andrew slams out of the room. Knock. Piper answers. It's Kathy.*)

PIPER. That was quick.

KATHY. My car wouldn't start. I was waiting for AAA. What's up? Why do you need my —

PIPER. He needs a sister.

KATHY. Ah.

PIPER...

KATHY. This is weird.

PIPER. Weird runs in the family. (*Kathy takes a pair of panties from her purse.*)

KATHY. I always keep a spare. You sure this will work?

PIPER. No. (*Piper takes the underwear. Kathy leaves the scene, but narrates.*)

KATHY. Once upon a time, there was a puppet that could move and talk and love and want and hurt, and there was a Piper who loved him so. (*Piper is sewing.*)

He was the only puppet in the world that could move and talk and love and want and hurt. And he was so alone. And one night, his maker stays up sewing him a sister. He put all of the love he had into the second little doll, knowing that, yes, he could be asking for twice the pain and twice the destruction. How could he afford this? He wondered. But still. He worked until his fingers ached. He worked until he was finished. He fell asleep. (*Piper is asleep.*) And when he woke up. (*Piper awakes.*) He realized —

PIPER. It didn't work. (*Andrew is devastated.*) Sorry bubba. Andrew, you're loved, okay.

ANDREW. Poppa.

PIPER. I'm sorry.

ANDREW. Sorry.

PIPER. Hush, little puppet, don't say a word.

KATHY. They buried the puppet in a small grave near Lady Bird. (*We see PIPER and Andrew holding each other.*)

PIPER

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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