

VOICES FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL

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into all the other empty rooms upstairs. No one home in the kitchen or rest of the house. There were some dirty glasses in the kitchen sink and three plates with egg stains. I scrubbed them all clean and laid them in the dishrack. I tried to look out the window over the kitchen sink but there was too much light. I opened the cellar door before I opened the cellar door. I mean I could see myself doing it. I went down the stairs. It was like going down into darkness... water... fog... my mind had nothing to do with it any more. I could see the axe on the wall. The hammer. The saw. I found a piece of rope near the washing machine and got up on a box and tied it to a pipe. Then I tied it around my neck, I stood on the box and looked out the window but there was no one in the street. Couldn't see any legs passing by. I kept one leg on the box and lowered the other one into the free air. I don't remember kicking over the box but they tell me I did. My brother said something felt weird when he came into the house. If he hadn't found me when he did I'd have been a vegetable or dead. So I'm glad he cut me down. And though it's a little embarrassing to tell you all this... I'm real glad I can. (*Lights fade on "JIMMY" who rejoins group. Lights up on another GROUP MEMBER*)

GROUP MEMBER. Watch us. (*GROUP performs some of the acts this GROUP MEMBER describes*) We ride our bikes like we're going to live forever. We run on streets and highways, balance on rails of bridges and the edge of subway platforms. Dive from the highest rock into the lake below, swagger into unknown places singing and shouting.

(*Two members of the group move out and become:*
"PATTI and Bo." PATTI is sitting in her room doing nothing. Bo, an older teenage boy, comes into her room.)

START

Bo. Hi, Patti. (*She looks at him*) Your mother let me in.

PATTI. Uh huh.

Bo. You haven't been to school all week.

PATTI. Right.

Bo. Just thought I'd see you there.

PATTI. What's going on is that my mother called you, right.

Bo. I missed you at school.

PATTI. She called you, right.

Bo. I was coming over anyway.

PATTI. For what?

Bo. What do you think?

PATTI. I'm okay.

Bo. That's not what I hear.

PATTI. Well it's what I know. And I'm the one who ought to know, right. I don't care what my mother's been telling you.

Bo. She says you haven't eaten for too long a time.

PATTI. I'm not hungry. I don't want another person telling me I ought to eat. My mother's been in with that boring news. She's sent in my father who's not hungry either but who's chewing on automatic and now she's dragging you in.

Bo. I called up to see how you were. Your mother didn't tell me anything; the way she was talking did.

PATTI. I'm not hungry. And I'd like to be by myself if you don't mind.

Bo. For another week?

PATTI. For as long as I want.

Bo. In this room not going anywhere?

PATTI. Quit hassling me!

Bo. I'm not.

PATTI. Yes you are. (*Pause*) You are.

Bo. Can I sit down?

PATTI. Are you going to try to feed me?

the incomplete oxidation of carbon. It burns with a blue flame to form carbon dioxide, and is highly poisonous when inhaled, since it combines with the hemoglobin of the blood to the exclusion of oxygen."
(*Long pause*)

Bo. Burns with a blue flame, huh?

PATTI. That's what the book says.

Bo. Weird.

PATTI. Me?

Bo. No, no... that phrase. That phrase that's all. It's just weird.

PATTI. "Burns with a blue flame?"

Bo. Yeah.

PATTI. Why?

Bo. Forget it.

PATTI. Tell me.

Bo. It's sad. We've had enough sad ^{crap} Look at you. You can't even get out of your room.

PATTI. Tell me, Bo.

Bo. Why? So you can memorize it. Then go on starving yourself to death. What good is that going to do anybody?

PATTI. I'm not starving myself to death.

Bo. Sure you are.

PATTI. I am not! (*Silence for a while*)

PATTI. What does "burn with a blue flame" mean to you, Bo? Tell me so that definition in my head can explode.

Bo. One time... I don't know if you knew how hard Mary studied... she was always working on extra projects and studying those books... late at night. I'd kid her sometimes... you know... just kidding about... the fun she was missing and the goofing. But I mean she was having fun. She and Ken...

PATTI. Yeah.

Bo. No.
PATTI. Sit. (*Bo sits. They're quiet for a while*)

Bo. So.

PATTI. What?

Bo. What have you been thinking about?

PATTI. Bo, did you come here to be stupid?

Bo. No.

PATTI. I've been trying to think about anything.

Bo. Have you been successful?

PATTI. Bo.

Bo. So tell me.

PATTI. Tell you what?

Bo. What's got you in prison up here.

PATTI. I'd think that would be obvious to you.

Bo. It happened to the rest of us too, Patti.

PATTI. The rest of you are the rest of you. I'm me and I'm working it out my own way.

Bo. How are you working it out?

PATTI. I'm not just going to cry and moan and then wipe my nose and go on like it never happened.

Bo. You think that's what we're doing?

PATTI. I don't care what any of you are doing. I'm not thinking about any of you. I can't.

Bo. What are you thinking about?

PATTI. Carbon monoxide.

Bo. Yeah?

PATTI. Surprised?

Bo. Not a bit.

PATTI. I looked it up in a dictionary. Got the definition locked in my memory now.

Bo. Tell me.

PATTI. "Carbon monoxide. Chem..." That's an abbreviation for chemical.

Bo. Got it.

PATTI. "A colorless, odorless gas, CO, formed by

Bo. But one time... this one night... when she was up reading her brains out because she was so determined to get to college... I said... When you get into college, Mary, you're going to have to read even more. And she said... "That's okay by me, Bo, I burn with a blue flame."

PATTI. She said that?

Bo. Yeah. Weird, huh.

PATTI. They were just sitting in the car. Talking like we are now. Only about life. And that carbon monoxide was coming in without any warning. "Odorless gas." Odorless gas. It's such a stinking cheat. I know you loved your sister, Bo. I know how bad you feel. I could hardly bear to look at you at the funeral. But I miss Kenny so bad I can't even... They were just on a goddamned date. I keep playing it back and I roll their windows down so the air can get in. Pardon me, lovebirds, I say; but I'm just giving you some air. Some clean air so you won't have a death that makes no sense to anybody. Bo, we've gotten so used to crazy violent deaths but not the cheating of carbon monoxide. They didn't even know they were going down and I'll never hear him laugh again. Never. He never knew how much I loved him.

Bo. Course he did.

PATTI. I keep playing it back and I roll down the windows. I mean if the windows were just rolled down a crack Bo, they'd be okay wouldn't they, Bo? Even just one window rolled down a crack with clean air coming in. Bo, Christ, he's the only one who ever talked to me and now I'll never see my brother again. (PATTI is crying uncontrollably now, Bo has his arms around her and she cries against him as he comforts her)

Bo. We're all rolling down the windows, Patti.

PATTI. I loved him so much.

Bo. I know. I know. (*Lights fade on "Patti and Bo" They rejoin group. Lights up on another GROUP MEMBER*)

GROUP MEMBER. Some of us have died in worse ways. We're not strangers to guns or knives or cars going too fast and out of control. In a world of toys and tempets we've had out losses too. Even natural diseases take some of us away. But death is not really a part of us. We're still on the other side of plans. Our hopes are things that we'll make real. Life is all ahead of us. We got yeaks to go. We're ready to work.

(*A member of the group moves out and becomes: "TEEN SANTA"*)

TEEN SANTA. I got this job to make extra money for Christmas. Working in a big department store downtown. The shipping room. You know, all these boxes come in; shirts, sox, jewelry, perfume—tons of perfume and garbage like that. All coming in for the Christmas shopping crush. So I carry stuff to the different departments, run the ticket machine sometimes that makes the prices for all the junk. Some of the girls from school got jobs too. Selling crap upstairs. So we fool around. The two guys in the shipping room are career men. They tell me corny jokes between giving me advice on how to live. Anyway, the store manager comes in on Christmas Eve. She's about ten feet tall. Bigger than anybody else in the store. Looks and talks like John Wayne used to. She's okay. So she comes in and says. "I don't know how this happened but we don't have a Santa Claus today. Christmas Eve and the company hired the guy up to yesterday. Now there's a bunch of mother's and kids out there and an empty chair where Santa should be." Then she stands there, her head scraping the ceiling. Old John keeps