

Red Light, Green Light

Part Two of:

An American Family Trilogy

by

Erik Patterson

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“He sees alien people
and begins to understand
how alike they are to him.

He sees courage
and aspiration
and agony
and begins to understand himself.

He begins to feel himself a brother
in a race that is led by many dreams.”

—Vachel Lindsay, poet, 1915

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ELLIOT, thirty, a high school teacher.

LITTLE B, his sister, fifteen. Thinks she's Bjork: the Icelandic pop singer.

BECKY, their older sister, thirty-one. A stripper.

MOM, in her fifties, the mother of Elliot, Little B, and Becky. Named Rose Silverstein.

ROSE, Becky's daughter, fifteen. Pregnant. Goth.

KRISTEN, Becky's girlfriend, in her thirties. A stripper.

AVI, twenty-five, Israeli. A student of Philosophy.

CALEB, thirties. A professional clown.

DAMIEN, Rose's ex-boyfriend, sixteen. Also a Goth.

KENNY, a man in his forties.

RUTH, mother of Caleb, in her sixties. A housewife.

BARRY, a hustler, in his thirties.

FRANK, a man in his forties.

EXCERPT:

Scene Eight.

Caleb and his mom, Ruth, sit at The French Market, a restaurant on Santa Monica Blvd. They look at their menus.

CALEB: So, how are things?

RUTH: They're fine.

CALEB: But how's dad?

RUTH: Oh, you know—

CALEB: Not really.

RUTH: *(looking at the menu)* They have goulash. You love goulash.

CALEB: How's dad?

RUTH: The drugs seem to be helping.

CALEB: Yeah?

RUTH: His state of mind. It doesn't look like they'll do chemo.

CALEB: That's good, right?

RUTH: They don't think it'll help. More pain than it's worth.

Beat, as that sinks in.

CALEB: And you...?

RUTH: What about me?

CALEB: How are you?

RUTH: My knee's acting up again. And I think I might be going deaf. You could get a hamburger and fries. Not much they can do wrong to a hamburger and fries.

CALEB: What do you mean you think you're going deaf?

RUTH: Unless there's Mad Cow again.

CALEB: Mom?

RUTH: It's probably wax, but we'll see. I have an appointment with Dr. Stearn. What about fettuccini Alfredo? Do you like Alfredo? Or do you still have lactose problems?

CALEB: Mom.

RUTH: What?

CALEB: I can read the menu.

RUTH: I know you can.

CALEB: You don't need to—*(he stops himself.)*

RUTH: What?

CALEB: No, never mind.

RUTH: What?

CALEB: I'm thirty-three-years-old and I don't need you to—

RUTH: I'm sorry.

CALEB: —read the menu for me.

RUTH: It's a hard habit—

CALEB: I know.

RUTH: —to break.

CALEB: I know. But just worry about yourself, okay?

Beat.

RUTH: But what are you having?

CALEB: I don't know, I haven't decided.

Beat, as they continue to look at their menus.

RUTH: So, are you dating anyone?

CALEB: What?

RUTH: Are you dating anyone?

Caleb considers whether or not he should tell her about Elliot.

CALEB: Not really.

RUTH: What's "not really"?

CALEB: I don't know.

RUTH: How can you not know?

CALEB: I don't know if I am.

RUTH: How is that possible?

Caleb shakes his head, he doesn't have an answer.

RUTH: Did you call Kathryn Hoover?

CALEB: Mom.

RUTH: Did you?

CALEB: No.

RUTH: I gave you her number a month ago.

CALEB: I'm sorry.

RUTH: It makes me look bad.

CALEB: I'll call her.

RUTH: You say that—

CALEB: I will.

RUTH: —but then you don't.

CALEB: Mom.

RUTH: If you say you're going to do something, just do it.

CALEB: I told you I—

RUTH: I mean, how many times do I have to—

CALEB: Stop it.

RUTH: —ask you before you’ll finally—

CALEB: Please stop.

RUTH: —do it? How many?

CALEB: I’m gonna go.

RUTH: No, stay.

CALEB: No, it’s okay, you don’t listen to me so I’m just gonna leave.

RUTH: Why, why?

CALEB: I sleep with *men*, mom. I’ve told you, like, a dozen fucking times. How many more times do I have to say it before you stop trying to fix me up with your friends’ daughters?

RUTH: Calling Kathryn Hoover wouldn’t kill you.

Beat.

CALEB: Bye.

He starts to go.

RUTH: Caleb? Please. Don’t.

CALEB: What?

RUTH: Why do we have to do this all the time? I just don’t understand why we have to talk about it all of the time.

She looks to Caleb for an answer, but he still doesn’t say anything.

RUTH: Why? Why? Because I heard you. The first time you told me, I heard you.

CALEB: You did?

RUTH: Yes, and I wish. You would stop. Talking about it. Why do gay people have to talk about it all the time?

CALEB: Why does it bother you so much?

RUTH: Because it bothers me.

(Beat.)

Because I've read up.

Believe me, I've done my research.

I've read the books.

I've read the magazines.

I've rented the films.

I've watched the news programs.

I've even searched the web.

I've culled my data.

You know, the thing that's...*difficult*...about being a parent,

is that you never know what your kid knows,

what your kid's not telling you,

what your kid's doing when you're not there.

So you have to fill in the blanks,

connect the dots.

And while I might not know what you,

my son,

specifically have done,

I do know what people say—

about you,

about you people,

your people,

about you and your people.

I know what you do, as a group.

I know about, about, about—

I know all about the anonymous sex.

I know about

sex with strangers,

in clubs—sex clubs—with towels around your waists.

About sex in places like public parks behind trees,

or urinals, public restrooms like George Michael,

or alleys, dark alleys, orgies in alleys,

multiple partners in one night, countless strangers.

I know about glory holes,

which I have to admit have a kind of spectacular name:

Glory Hole.

It paints a vivid picture:

Glory Hole.

I found this website that lists all of the glory holes in the world,

at least that's what the website purports,

and I'm inclined to believe it

because there are just so many bathrooms listed, it's...

dizzying.

And the website has all of this...*data*, I guess you'd call it. About where to find the best glory holes in your area, and what time to go, you know...when each hole hits heavy traffic. If you wanted to get your penis sucked by a stranger during your lunch hour, believe me, I could point you in the right direction.

I know about,
about,
about—

I know about leather bars, about bear bars.
About size queens, muscle queens, queen queens.

About Cock rings.

Anal Beads.

Lube.

Poppers.

I know there are other drugs, but poppers are so scary because they could damage your brain, just like that, so you have to be real careful.

And overdosing on Viagra, and things like that.

Because, you know,

the gay population is using a lot of Viagra these days.

And I know about, um,

um,

tops and bottoms, also known as “pitchers” and “catchers,”

and then there are versatile guys but I haven't read of a baseball term that describes them.

I was thinking “he plays for both teams” might work

but then I found out that already means something else entirely.

And I know about, um,

two-headed dildos,

and things like that.

I don't really want to get into all of the sex toys

because they're kind of disgusting to me—

I can't even figure out what some of them are even used for,

I just know that they're disgusting.

(Beat.)

But what I'm trying to say is that there are all of

these,

these,

these images in my head.

And you have to understand that these

images

sometimes make you a very difficult person to talk to.

But that's not all.

Because I know it's not just difficult for me.

I'm not that self-absorbed.

I'm not that—

I know how you...

I know, I know—

I mean, I don't *know*, but I can imagine,
how difficult it must have been for you,
must *be* for you,
to—
oh, God, to, to—
To come out.
To have that conversation.
To keep having that conversation.
To keep having to have that—
It must have been so hard.
When you said it the first time.
The fear of rejection.
The fear of other things.
The fear of—
I tried not to reject you when you told me.
Because I suspected.
Your son reaches his twenties without ever bringing a girl home and you start to suspect.
And I saw the way you looked at your, you know,
male friends
and the way you weren't looking at your, you know,
female friends.
So I prepared myself,
just in case,
so as not to have the reaction I didn't want to have, which was one of rejecting you.
But, Caleb, honey...
You have to understand
that if *I'm* having these thoughts—
I, your mother—
if these thoughts are in *my* head,
then just think about what other people must be thinking.
I can't help it.
And what I've read,
what I've seen—
which hasn't all been bad.
I don't want to give you that impression...
(*Beat.*)
But people are backwards,
people don't understand,
people have a long way to go, you know?
And when they see you,
what some of them are thinking,
what I know some of them are thinking—
I mean, when they see you, I know they're not: Seeing. You.
They're seeing—
They're—
(*Beat. She's begun to run out of steam.*)

And I know about Matt Shepard.
Everyone calls him Matthew, but I read somewhere that his friends called him Matt.
I know what happened to him.
And my first thought is that plenty of straight people die worse deaths than he did without getting put on a pedestal. Without getting idealized. Without becoming heroes.
But I understand why he haunts us.
Because it's just terrible what they did to him.
And you could say it was just a moment of passion,
but that defense doesn't stick because they just spent too much time with him.
They lured him into their truck.
And then they started beating him.
And then they continued to beat him as they drove him out to the fence.
The fence where they were going to leave him.
I know all about Matt Shepard.
And things like what happened to him—they could happen to the rest of us too,
but when you factor in a thing like sexuality,
the chances of something like that happening to my son,
they triple, or something terrible like that.
And that scares me, Caleb. It really, really scares me.

(Beat.)

And I know about AIDS.
And I know you don't want me to say it,
but I'm a mother,
so I'm going to say it:
You need to be wearing a condom,
and your partner needs to be wearing a condom—
because things were better for awhile,
but lately people have become lackadaisical,
and the figures are rising.
So just wear a condom.
Just do it.
For me.
Because the thought of you getting AIDS
scares the shit out of me.
I'm sorry.
I'm sorry that I'm like this.
I don't mean to sound like a Public Service Announcement.
But I'm a mother,
I'm your mother,
and I just—
I don't want you to get hurt.
That's all.

(Beat.)

That's all.

So.

What are you having for lunch?

CALEB: The fettuccini.

Lights shift.

THIS IS NOT THE COMPLETE PLAY!

Email erik@erikpatterson.org to request a full draft.