

**CROOKED, BUT THEY STAND**

by Royce Wood

*for Kristin  
because she asked nicely*

*(All characters enter, holding envelopes. They stand spread out across the stage, each separate. They all open the envelopes, and then roughly simultaneously:)*

All right.

JAKE

Yes!

MELANIE

Sweet.

STEVE

... oh.

LEAH

*(They all run off, except LEAH, who exits more somberly.)  
(Enter STEVE from right, JAKE from left. They are calm, cool, and collected, in sharp contrast to the previous scene.)*

So ...

JAKE

So?

STEVE

Yeah.

JAKE

Have you ... you know?

STEVE

Maybe. Depends.

JAKE

On?

STEVE

What you meant.

JAKE

Any ... mail?

STEVE

Like letters? JAKE

Perhaps. STEVE

From ... JAKE

Certain ... STEVE

Places ... JAKE

Colleges? STEVE

*(they both sigh)*

Yes. JAKE

Letters from colleges? STEVE

Yes. A specific college? JAKE

Yes ... good letters? STEVE

... yes. JAKE

Me too! STEVE

Wow! Great! JAKE

*(They suddenly embrace in their excitement. Then, self-conscious, they break and face away from each other.)*

JAKE

Does it say the same as mine?

STEVE

Let's find out. *(he pulls a crumpled letter out of his pocket. reading:)* 'Dear Steven L. Harris: We are pleased to inform you that, upon reviewing your application' ... blah blah blah. They could have put a giant YES and it would have told me the same thing and saved a lot of time.

JAKE

Have you heard from Leah or Melanie?

STEVE

No, I haven't.

JAKE

I was sure you would have. From Leah, at least.

STEVE

No.

JAKE

Hmm.

STEVE

I'm sure things will work out.

*(enter MELANIE, from right. she is holding a letter.)*

MELANIE

Hey guys!

JAKE

Hey.

MELANIE

Guess what.

JAKE

I give up.

MELANIE

I got in Up North!

JAKE  
Wow! Congratulations!

STEVE  
Hey, that's great.

MELANIE  
What about you guys?

STEVE  
We both got in.

MELANIE  
You guys will be going to the same school next year? Oh,  
that's great!

JAKE  
Yeah, we're pretty excited.

STEVE  
We'll be playing Frisbee all the time.

JAKE  
For sure.

STEVE  
Have you heard from Leah?

MELANIE  
I was going to ask you.

STEVE  
I was sure she would have told you first.

MELANIE  
No, she hasn't called me.

STEVE  
Strange. That's not like her.

JAKE  
She applied Up North too, didn't she?

MELANIE  
As a backup, yes.

STEVE

So it's possible that you two will be going to the same school too?

MELANIE

I'm hoping that's how it will work out.

STEVE

She's pretty talented. There's a lot of places she could get in.

MELANIE

That's what I'm afraid of.

STEVE

I'm sure things will work out.

JAKE

Are you guys going to try to stay together?

STEVE

I don't know. We'll still be friends, I'm sure, but I don't a long-distance thing is going to work out.

MELANIE

Wow. Does she know?

STEVE

Not yet, but I'm sure it will come up soon enough.

*(enter LEAH from left, holding a letter, somber.)*

MELANIE

Leah!

STEVE

Hey ...

MELANIE

What's up?

*(silence.)*

LEAH

I got the scholarship.

MELANIE  
*(disbelief, wonder)*

What?

STEVE

Congratulations!

JAKE

What scholarship?

MELANIE  
*(to JAKE)*

The scholarship.

*(to LEAH)*

The scholarship?

LEAH

The scholarship.

STEVE

That's great! That means—

LEAH

I'll be going Out East.

JAKE

Hey, that's great.

STEVE

I told you. Didn't I tell you?

LEAH

You did.

STEVE

I told her.

LEAH  
*(to MELANIE)*

What about you guys?

JAKE

We both got in.

MELANIE

I got in Up North.

LEAH

That's so great.

MELANIE

Yeah, yeah it is. So you'll be going Out East for sure?

LEAH

This is what I've been dreaming of! Of course.

STEVE

Things always work out.

LEAH

This is so great for everyone. Aren't you excited?

MELANIE

Uh ... yeah. Listen, I have to go.

JAKE

See you at graduation rehearsal tomorrow?

MELANIE

Oh, right. Thanks.

LEAH

I'll call you later.

MELANIE

Bye.

*(She exits left. LEAH makes her way into STEVE's arms. They embrace tightly. After some time:)*

JAKE

Right ... well, I have to ... see you later.

*(He exits right.)*

LEAH

This is such an exciting time right now.

STEVE

What do you mean?

LEAH

Everyone's making their plans. We're all going off, growing up.

STEVE

Well, Me and Jake are going to the same school. We're not.

LEAH

I wanted to talk to you about that.

STEVE

Me too.

LEAH

I found out about this great new phone plan. If we're both on the same plan, we can call each other for as much as we want for no extra cost.

STEVE

Oh.

LEAH

And then, I was at the computer store the other day picking out my laptop for school and I saw these really cool things. They're like little cameras that you can put on your computer. You can use them with chat programs, so you can chat and see the other person at the same time.

STEVE

That's great, but-

LEAH

So I got this great idea. If we both get the cameras and the same phone plan, we can be on the phone and on the internet at the same time and it'll be like using a video phone! Isn't that great?

STEVE

Yeah. Sounds ... futuristic. But there's something you're not thinking about.

LEAH

Yeah?

STEVE

Well, we're going to different schools, right?

LEAH

Yeah.

STEVE

And these schools will have other people at them.

LEAH

Yes. Not so many at mine, but yes.

STEVE

And these other people might be ... nice.

LEAH

I hope so. Where are you going with this, Steve?

STEVE

You know ... there will be new people, and you might like them -

LEAH

Oh, Steve, I get it. Don't worry. I'll never find anyone to replace you.

*(she embraces him, tightly. Lights down.)*

*(On rise, all four are in a row, sitting in chairs. From right to left, the order is JAKE, STEVE, LEAH, and MELANIE.)*

JAKE

You know, I never really understood the point of rehearsing for ceremonies.

LEAH

Shh.

JAKE

Wedding rehearsals, graduation rehearsals. We're all already here. Why not get it over with now?

LEAH

Because no one's here to see us.

JAKE

So we won't waste their time. I'm sure everyone has better things to do than watch kids in robes move around for two hours.

LEAH

We need to practice so we know what to do tomorrow.

JAKE

Is it really that hard? I mean, all these people demonstrated that they can complete a high school curriculum. Shouldn't they all be smart enough to figure it out?

LEAH

Be quiet. We'll get in trouble.

JAKE

I'm just saying.

MELANIE

I thought you were making a good point.

LEAH

You would.

STEVE

Can you believe who they chose to give the speeches? I thought mine was much better.

LEAH

Of course it was.

MELANIE

Steve, that was a comedy routine, not a graduation speech.

STEVE

The administration doesn't appreciate complex humor.

JAKE

I don't think your impression of the principal qualifies as complex humor.

STEVE

It wasn't meant to be insulting. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

LEAH

Guys, I really think we should be quiet.

STEVE

If they want the speeches to be the same thing they have been at every other graduation, that's fine with me. I was trying to mix things up a little bit.

LEAH

Steve, you're going to get us in trouble.

STEVE

I reject the status quo! I reject entrenched traditionalism!

JAKE

I think she has a point, Steve.

STEVE

I reject boring graduation speeches!

JAKE + LEAH + MELANIE

Steve!

*(They all look to the same point off stage. They are being scolded by some unseen adult.)*

ALL

*(heads bowed)*

Sorry.

STEVE

*(Under his breath)*

Enjoy it while you can. Because after tomorrow, you have no power over me. None at all.

*(He laughs, amused with himself.)*

MELANIE

You're such a weirdo, Steve.

STEVE

I am so bored.

JAKE

It's almost over anyway.

STEVE  
(excited)

I know.

JAKE

I meant the rehearsal.

STEVE

Oh. That too.

JAKE

You can tell the people on stage are getting bored too.

MELANIE

How can you tell?

JAKE

They're getting tired of standing. They're moving from side to side, scratching the back of their ankle with the opposite foot. They're not straight, they're all crooked. That's what you get when people stand that long. Or anything for that matter. Crooked, but they stand.

LEAH

You guys are coming to Melanie and I's graduation party, right?

STEVE

Of course. It's the day after graduation, right?

MELANIE

Yep. At my house.

LEAH

It'll be great. Everybody's going to be there.

STEVE

You mean everybody who's not already at someone else's graduation party.

LEAH

Well, yeah.

MELANIE

You're coming too, right Jake?

JAKE

Oh, yeah. Of course.

MELANIE

Great. *(pause)* This is so weird.

LEAH

What?

MELANIE

We're graduating. Tomorrow.

STEVE

That's right.

LEAH

*(to STEVE)*

Be serious.

STEVE

What's weird about it?

MELANIE

All that time, we were going forward to this. And ... here we are.

JAKE

Yeah. I get what you're saying.

STEVE

You would.

MELANIE

All that time, all those things we did ... wow.

JAKE

Yeah.

MELANIE

You don't really appreciate it at the time, do you?

LEAH

Appreciate what?

MELANIE

I don't know. Things.

JAKE

People?

MELANIE

Yeah. You think you have all this time, and when it starts to run out, you think about all the things you didn't do.

STEVE

Like what?

MELANIE

Just ... things.

JAKE

Yeah.

STEVE

I don't know about you guys, but I did everything I wanted to.

JAKE

You're lucky. I didn't.

STEVE

*(looks at his watch)*

You still got time.

JAKE

How much? A few minutes?

STEVE

How much do you need?

JAKE

More than that.

STEVE

They better let us go soon.

LEAH

You should go talk to him.

MELANIE

About what?

LEAH

You know.

MELANIE

... no, no, it's silly.

LEAH

It's not silly.

MELANIE

There's so little time left.

LEAH

This could be your last chance.

MELANIE

I don't know.

LEAH

After this summer, you may never see him again.

MELANIE

And?

LEAH

You've got nothing to lose.

*(pause)*

LEAH

Go get him.

MELANIE

Jake, wait!

JAKE

What?

MELANIE

I was just wondering ... what you're doing over summer.

JAKE

I'll be working. Saving up. Why?

MELANIE

I thought, maybe, we could hang out some time. Just me and you.

JAKE

Just me and you?

MELANIE

Yeah. If you wanted to, I mean.

JAKE

Without Steve and Leah?

MELANIE

Yeah. I mean, I know we won't be going to school together

JAKE

Sure.

MELANIE

What?

JAKE

Sure. I'd like that.

MELANIE

Really?

JAKE

Yeah.

MELANIE

Great.

JAKE

So ... see you around.

MELANIE

Yeah.

*(JAKE stands alone center stage. The others, wearing graduation caps, walk across the stage behind her, in a cycle, to give the illusion of a graduation ceremony.)*

JAKE

Graduation. Unless you're lucky enough to have a quinceanera or a bar mitzveh, it's the closest thing most of us have to a coming of age ceremony. Which is scary. It tells you what kind of importance we put on education. Unless you wear that hat and that gown and get that piece of paper, you're not really an adult. You're not really a

JAKE (*con't*)

person. So until then, you're in this weird limbo stage, where technically, yes, you are an adult, but no one treats you like it. It's uncomfortable.

I remember being in the third grade and thinking, "What will it be like to be in twelfth grade?" I knew it would happen sometime - it was inevitable, the track I was on - not soon, but sometime. All I could comprehend at the time was some distant and vague future. And today I realized, here I am. This is what it's like. Part of me wants to go back and explain it to my third grade self, but I don't now what I would say. The fog of vagueness has lifted, so what do I see? Some things are clearer, some things are more confusing.

When you're a kid, you think adults have all the answers. Like there's this magic potion you get to drink that will tell you everything, that will make you wise. That will make you an adult. And when you get to the other side of that stage, you look for it. I've watched, I've seen people look for it. They had you the diploma, and then they hand you a bottle of the potion. Right?

But it's not there. And then - then it hits you. There are no answers. That may be the first real moment of empathy you have with your parents, from your side, anyway. They didn't actually know what they were doing. They were just making it up as they went along. It makes you wonder how anything gets done, how anything gets anywhere, with everybody just making stuff up.

Maybe that's not fair. I don't know. That's what it comes down to. I don't know.

*(lights down. on rise, LEAH and MELANIE are putting up decorations before the party, balloons perhaps. there is a box with streamers, ribbon, tape, scissors, etc.)*

LEAH

I don't know. What do you think?

MELANIE

Crooked, but they stand.

LEAH

They'll work.

Yeah.

MELANIE

(*Silence.*)

LEAH

What's up?

MELANIE

What?

LEAH

What's going on?

MELANIE

What do you mean?

LEAH

You've been quiet.

MELANIE

There's been ... a lot on my mind.

LEAH

Like?

MELANIE

This. After. You know.

LEAH

I'm not sure I do.

MELANIE

You ... and me—

LEAH

Are friends?

MELANIE

Yes, but ...

LEAH

But what?

MELANIE

Don't you get it?

LEAH

No!

MELANIE

After this?

LEAH

What's 'this'?

MELANIE

School. The party. Graduation.

LEAH

More schools. More parties. More graduations.

MELANIE

But we won't be together!

*(silence)*

LEAH

We'll keep in touch.

MELANIE

People say that, but really? Do they?

LEAH

I would hope so.

MELANIE

What if we don't?

LEAH

I don't want to talk about this right now.

MELANIE

How about in August? Do you want to talk about it then?  
When you're Out East?

LEAH

Mel, stop it.

MELANIE

What happened to all our plans?

LEAH

You know how much I wanted that scholarship!

MELANIE

Do you know how much I didn't?

*(silence)*

LEAH

Mel, I'm sorry.

MELANIE

For what? Being perfect?

LEAH

Mel!

MELANIE

They practically rolled out the red carpet for you. Me? A form letter. They misspelled my name.

LEAH

What do you want me to say?

MELANIE

That we'll stay together.

LEAH

You know we can't do that.

MELANIE

Why not?

LEAH

You know this is the school of my dreams.

MELANIE

I know. I just wish there were room for me in your dreams.

LEAH

You're making it sound like I'm abandoning you.

MELANIE

Are you going to go and make new friends without me?

LEAH

Of course not. I'm keeping in touch with everyone. Nothing will change.

MELANIE

What about Steve?

LEAH

What about Steve?

MELANIE

You mean ... he hasn't told you?

LEAH

Told me what?

MELANIE

Oh my god, I am so sorry. I thought you knew.

LEAH

What are you talking about?

*(Silence. Enter STEVE from right.)*

STEVE

Hey guys! Thought I'd show up a little early and give you a hand.

LEAH

*(maneuvering herself into his arms)*

Hi Steve.

MELANIE

Hey.

*(silence)*

STEVE

So ... anything I can help with? Or is it mostly done?

LEAH

*(breaking away)*

We're mostly done.

STEVE

Ah. Very ... minimal. I like it.

MELANIE

We got a little distracted.

STEVE  
I can help you finish up then?

LEAH  
Sure.

*(STEVE bends down to get something from the box. LEAH glances at MELANIE, who moves a little further away.)*

LEAH  
Steve?

STEVE  
Do you want me to do something with this ribbon?

LEAH  
Is there something you wanted to talk to me about?

STEVE  
About the ribbon ... ?

LEAH  
No, I don't know what about.

STEVE  
Then I really don't know either.

LEAH  
Melanie said-

STEVE  
Oh! That.

LEAH  
Yeah?

STEVE  
Jake said he'd be a little bit late.

LEAH  
I don't think that was it.

STEVE  
So you don't know what it is, but you don't think it's that.

LEAH  
(*laughs, awkwardly*)

Yeah, I guess.

STEVE  
I can't think of what it could - oh.

LEAH  
Did you remember?

STEVE  
Oh.

LEAH  
Yeah?

STEVE  
Um, yeah, this isn't really the, uh, best time.

LEAH  
Why not?

STEVE  
Trust me, it isn't.

LEAH  
Okay.

MELANIE  
When, Steve?

STEVE  
What?

MELANIE  
When? Are you going to leave the poor girl hanging? Doesn't she have a right to know?

STEVE  
Mel, please. This is between me and her.

MELANIE  
I'll just tell her.

LEAH  
If Steve doesn't think this is the right time, then-

MELANIE

He wants to end your relationship.

LEAH

What?

STEVE

God, Mel.

LEAH

Is that true?

STEVE

I was going to be a little more delicate, but basically, yes.

LEAH

Why?

STEVE

Leah, I still want to be friends. But—

LEAH

Was it something I did?

STEVE

No. God, no, just—

LEAH

What then?

STEVE

Let me talk!

LEAH

Sorry.

STEVE

I don't want you to feel ... tied down.

MELANIE

You don't want to feel tied down.

STEVE

Jeez, Mel, what is your problem?

MELANIE

It's just not fair to keep her hanging like that. She needed to know.

*(enter JAKE.)*

JAKE

We got out early, so I headed right over.

MELANIE

Hey Jake.

JAKE

What's up?

*(silence. LEAH runs out, left.)*

JAKE

Awkward.

STEVE

Thanks a lot, Mel.

MELANIE

She was going to find out eventually.

STEVE

Yes, but I didn't want her to find out at her graduation party.

JAKE

Find out what? Whoa, Steve, are you gay?

STEVE

No! Christ!

JAKE

Oh. Sorry. Oh! Did you tell her? I thought you were going to wait until summer.

STEVE

Apparently Mel wanted to move that up a little.

MELANIE

I've already spoken my piece.

STEVE

I'm going to go find Leah.

*(he exits left. silence. awkward glances. lights down. on rise, JAKE and MELANIE are sitting across from each other at a table, suggesting a restaurant. they are laughing.)*

JAKE

The funniest part was watching them avoid each other the entire time. It was like some crazy chess game. He would move, she would move. No one else knew what was going on except for us.

MELANIE

I didn't think it was very funny at the time. I thought they were going to be so upset.

JAKE

Eh, I knew things would work out eventually. They can't stay mad at each other for too long.

MELANIE

No. Can you believe the summer's almost over?

JAKE

Where did the time go?

MELANIE

Into the future.

*(they both laugh. this is an inside joke, perhaps?)*

JAKE

So, are you excited for school to start?

MELANIE

Yeah, I think so.

JAKE

I think so too.

MELANIE

Leah and I got these computer cameras so we can do video chat.

JAKE

Wow. That's ... amazing.

MELANIE

Yeah. She had already bought them and let me have one. I don't know what she was planning to do with them.

JAKE

Hmm. Odd.

MELANIE

Whatever. You and Steve go up ... this weekend?

JAKE

That's right.

MELANIE

Did you do everything you wanted to this summer?

JAKE

*(thinks)*

Hmm. Yeah. Yeah, I think I did. You?

MELANIE

You bet.

*(STEVE and LEAH enter from right.)*

JAKE

There they are. Hey guys.

LEAH

Hey.

MELANIE

I was wondering if you were ever going to show up.

STEVE

And miss this? Never.

*(They sit down, LEAH next to MELANIE, STEVE next to JAKE.)*

LEAH

So. This is the last lunch we'll have together for ... how long?

STEVE

Until we have another one.

LEAH

And when will that be?

JAKE

Winter break, probably.

MELANIE

I didn't even think about that. Somehow I thought you would all disappear off the face of the planet.

STEVE

Somehow ... I don't think that's going to happen.

LEAH

No, I don't think so either.

JAKE

Where did you guys come from?

STEVE

Actually, we met in the parking lot.

LEAH

We both showed up fifteen minutes late.

STEVE

Figures.

LEAH

We come separately, and we show up at the same time.

MELANIE

That's funny.

STEVE

Some things don't change.

MELANIE

And some things do.

STEVE

You're not going to get all philosophical on us, are you?

MELANIE

*(pleased)*

No.

JAKE

That's my job.

*(lights fade, JAKE comes center.)*

JAKE

You know that Greek myth about the universe being created out of chaos, out of nothingness? It's true, because it happens to thousands of graduates every year. You get tossed out, expecting someone to tell you who you are and what to do - and you get nothing. And in the chaos, you take the bits and pieces of what you know, and you build your own answers. They fall down sometimes, true, but you can always go back and fix them. And, after a while, they stand up on their own. Crooked, but they stand.

*(MELANIE comes up. they clasp hands, and exit as the lights go down.)*

END