

(Lights up on STEVE and NATE's apartment. It's messy in that special "two guys in college" kind of way. Everything's been hastily cleared away, making room for a large table, surrounded by five chairs. Music is playing. Something jaunty and upbeat, but with very depressing lyrics. Possibly by Frank Turner. STEVE is busying himself around the table, setting the dice and books up for everyone.)

(After a few moments of STEVE's silent set-up, MERRILL bursts in.)

MERRILL

Steve you will not believe the day I've been having it's been absolutely miserable and I just want to curl up into a ball and die or watch Netflix until I pass out but I locked myself out of my apartment this morning and Sarah doesn't even get off work until like eleven so I guess I'm just- Oh dammit, it's Friday, isn't it?

STEVE

Yesterday was Thursday so unless some serious shit went down, yeah it is.

MERRILL

So you're gonna... Do whatever it is you do. Where is everybody?

STEVE

Eh. Gideon's around here somewhere. Nate made a snack run, and Joel and Cess said they'd be here in ten minutes... Twenty minutes ago.

MERRILL

Checks out.

(Shouting.)

GIDEON!

GIDEON

(Shouting back.)

OH! MERRILL! WHAT A PLEASANT SURPRISE!

MERRILL

Kitchen. Of course.

STEVE

Wait, didn't you have a date tonight-

MERRILL

Hey! Funny story about that. Asshole texted me after I'd been waiting at the bar for a fucking HOUR to cancel. And he said he hoped we could reschedule. Yeah. No.

STEVE

That wasn't a funny story.

MERRILL

I'm aware.

STEVE

On the plus side you could be killing dragons and casting spells and shit instead so that's pretty cool.

GIDEON

STEVE, WHERE ARE THE CHEETOS?

STEVE

IN THE CABINET TO THE LEFT OF THE FRIDGE!

MERRILL

No. No way I'm playing-

STEVE

Dude, long as you're here. Six is a good number of players.

MERRILL

It's not going to make me feel better.

STEVE

How could you know that if you don't try?

GIDEON

THEY'RE NOT THERE, STEVE!

STEVE

OTHER LEFT, DUDE!

GIDEON

OH! FOUND THEM! CAN I BRING THEM IN THERE?

STEVE

NO! YOU'LL GET THE DUST ALL OVER EVERYTHING!

GIDEON

WHAT ABOUT MOUNTAIN DEW? CAN I HAVE A MOUNTAIN DEW?

MERRILL

GIDEON WE'RE TRYING TO HAVE A SERIOUS CONVERSATION
HERE!

GIDEON

SO AM I! CAN I-!

MERRILL

YES, WHATEVER! Maybe I'll watch, but I'm not playing.

STEVE

Super fun, dude. You can trust me- I loved dinosaurs
when I was a kid.

MERRILL

Um... Non-sequitur much?

GIDEON

YOUR MOUNTAIN DEW IS FLAT! ALL YOU HAVE IS MOUNTAIN
DON'T!

STEVE

Wait, I haven't told you about my test?! Oh, oh shit-
I could've saved you from that guy-

MERRILL

What test?

GIDEON

DID SOMEONE THINK MERRILL WAS A LESBIAN AGAIN?

STEVE

NO, SHE GOT STOOD UP!

GIDEON

FUCK THAT GUY! AND IF THE LESBIAN THING HAPPENS AGAIN,
TELL THEM YOU'RE INTO CUNNING LINGUISTS, NOT
CUNNILINGUS!

STEVE

Ignore him.

MERRILL

Usually do.

STEVE

I've got this lie detector test-

GIDEON

GUYS THAT WAS ACTUALLY A GOOD PUN! I'M PROUD OF MYSELF!

STEVE

NO SUCH THING! Let me preface this a little bit- that's a good word. Preface. I should use it more often. I thought of this yesterday- haven't even told Nate yet- and it's the single most brilliant and original thought I've ever had.

MERRILL

Even better than your idea for a cartoon series where Mark Ruffalo voices a crime fighting bison?

STEVE

Yes! It's even better than Ruffalo the Buffalo! So without further ado, prepare to have your mind blown by the patent-pending Steve Everett method for telling if a guy's honest or not. It's real simple. And it always works. On dudes, that is. I haven't come up with one for chicks yet, and the dude method doesn't work both ways. It's a gendered test. I'm getting off topic. Picture this. You meet a new guy. He's funny, he's charming, and goddamn he's hot. But you don't know if he's cool or not because you don't know if you can trust him. We've all been there. This'll fix that really quick. And it's super easy. All you gotta do is look him right in his eyes- and I don't mean just like quickly, I mean you hold that eye contact the whole time and you just stare right into his soul, you try to burn a hole straight through that guy with your eyes- and you ask one question. That's it. One easy question. Don't preface it or anything, just spring it on him suddenly, just like- nonchalant as possible. So he's not prepared. "Hey man, when you were a kid, did you like dinosaurs?" See? Super easy. It's not even a weird question. Now, there are two ways he can answer. If he says yes, that's the end of that. Your new bro

liked dinosaurs when he was little. That's cool. You did too, so you can talk about it, maybe watch Jurassic Park together or something and BOOM! Dinosaurs just made you a friend. An honest friend. But if he says no- if this guys says no- if he looks right into your eyes while you're both making some serious eye contact, you are both looking deep in each others souls and it's like hella intimate but in a cool way, not in a weird way and he says no- then you can't trust a word that jackass says. Because he is clearly a liar. It doesn't matter if they grow up to be straight, gay, a woman, an avocado, or whatever else- at some point in their life, all little boys fucking. Love. Dinosaurs. And that's it. That's the end of that. If he says no, if that asshole says no, you can't trust him. Because, I guarantee 100% that motherfucker did like dinosaurs. He just won't admit it. Because he's a dirty little liar. Like I said, it's simple, easy, and effective.

MERRILL

I... I have no words.

STEVE

Oh ye of little faith. Exhibit A. YO, GID- WHEN YOU WERE A KID, DID YOU LIKE DINOSAURS?

GIDEON

DUDE, FUCK YEAH! STILL DO!

STEVE

Boom. Trustworthy. With everything other than Cheetos. I'd drop the mic if I had one but I don't so I'm gonna say it. Mic drop! Steve out.

(Enter GIDEON, with Cheetos.)

GIDEON

Still on about his lie detector test?

(MERRILL nods.)

STEVE

Dammit Gideon what'd I tell you about the Cheetos?

GIDEON

I'm not going to get the dust on your books, chill.

STEVE

You can't know that, dude, Cheeto dust is like cancer-

GIDEON

Except cancer's not contagious, asshole.

STEVE

It's like glitter. Vacuum up one molecule of mysterious processed powder that might possibly be cheese and ten more will take it's place!

GIDEON

Ah yes, cheetos and glitter. The hydras of our modern world.

MERRILL

(Looking through the books.)

What is this?

STEVE

The game you're going to play, man.

MERRILL

First, no I'm not. Second, I thought it was a board game. Like with pieces. And points.

STEVE

We don't need no pieces-!

GIDEON

Double negative.

MERRILL

/Pedants always gotta pedant, huh?

STEVE

/Whatever, Gideon. We don't need any pieces. You're going on an adventure, right in our living room.

GIDEON

...Pedants are going to be pedantic, you ignorant philistine.

MERRILL

Our last "adventure" was as much of a crushing disappointment as I am to my parents.

STEVE

Tell me, is there anything about you you wish you could change?

MERRILL

Steve. I'm a young woman in America. Do you really want to go down the rabbit hole that is my self-esteem?

GIDEON

/Dark.

STEVE

/Point taken. But here's the beauty of the game- you can be anything you want! A bear, even!

MERRILL

Why is "bear" the first thing you think of?

STEVE

I want to be a goddamn bear, duh. And in this game, I can be.

GIDEON

You'll love it.

MERRILL

That's what you said about acid.

GIDEON

Which was fun as shit.

MERRILL

We have very different ideas of fun.

GIDEON

You found some shit out on acid. Deep stuff, man.

MERRILL

I was convinced my spirit animal was a shag carpet.

GIDEON

It's what you feel like in your soul.

STEVE

Hey, Joel's an orange chair and he's never been happier.

MERRILL

Remind me why we're friends again?

GIDEON

It's a secret to everybody.

MERRILL

How about... I hang out and watch?

STEVE

Come on! One of us, one of us!

MERRILL

Yeah, one of the nerds.

GIDEON

You could be an elf.

MERRILL

We talking "bakes cookies in an oak tree" elf or "Santa's happy slave labor" elf?

STEVE

Dude, sounds like someone needs a bit of christmas spirit.

MERRILL

If you start singing christmas carols in the middle of [current month] I will deck you in the halls-

STEVE

They're not slave labor!

MERRILL

Oh yeah, they just work for a jolly old fat man who doesn't pay them out of the goodness of their hearts.

STEVE

DON'T TALK SHIT ABOUT SANTA!

GIDEON

Focus, Steve. We're talking Lord of the Rings kicks ass takes names and looks absolutely flawless doing it elf. You could Legolas harder than Legolas ever Legolas'd.

MERRILL

Legolas is a noun, not a verb.

GIDEON

Have you seen the Hobbit movies? Pretty sure it's a verb now. A badass verb.

MERRILL

Goddammit, Gid.

GIDEON

So? Will you join us on our mystic quest to save the kingdom?

MERRILL

This isn't like a board game or a video game I don't even know what this is.

STEVE

It's much more better! It's a roleplaying game.

MERRILL

Sorry, I don't roleplay.

GIDEON

Oho! Was that-?

MERRILL

Turn back while you still can.

GIDEON

Turning back.

STEVE

Merrill. I have shared my wisdom, my house, and my time. The least you can do is try it.

MERRILL

It seems... Really complicated.

STEVE

That would be because it is. But it's worth it.

MERRILL

Look, I'm just gonna go home.

STEVE

Aren't you locked out?

MERRILL

Oh yeah. Right.

STEVE

So...?

MERRILL

No, Steve. I'll play like- Cards against humanity, or Clue, or even that weird Cthulhu game. But roleplaying is beyond me.

GIDEON

Settlers of Catan?

STEVE

Don't let him start. Merrill, it's serious time.

MERRILL

You're capable of being serious?

STEVE

We're about to find out. Riddle me this. When you were a kid, what did you want to be?

MERRILL

An astronaut.

STEVE

Nah man, I'm talking about before you realized some things were impossible.

MERRILL

Pretty sure me being an astronaut is impossible.

GIDEON

Hell yeah.

MERRILL

Good to know I can count on your support, Gideon.

GIDEON

I was agreeing with you.

MERRILL

You know what I meant.

STEVE

You're not getting it, man. Gid, what did you want to grow up to be?

GIDEON

Dead.

STEVE

Ya'll suck. The point I'm trying to make is when I was a kid, I wanted to grow up to be a hero- but not like "we're all heroes in our own way" bullshit, like a hero hero.

MERRILL

So you said it twice and that changes... What, exactly?

STEVE

Hero of time. Hero of Hyrule. I wanted to be the guy who saved the princess, collected all 151 of those little fuckers, saved the world, the universe, everything!

MERRILL

You can't do that, Steve.

STEVE

Hell no! I'm just Steve Everett. I'm not space jesus, I'm not even Aquaman for crying out loud. I'm me. And that kinda sucks.

MERRILL

Could be worse. You could be me.

STEVE

And that's the beauty of the game! At this table, you don't have to be you.

GIDEON

I killed a god, once.

STEVE

Gid killed a god! That happened!

GIDEON

Nice change of pace from the ennui of working a nine to five office job.

STEVE

Life sucks, but we can escape, just for a few hours. Isn't that something?

MERRILL

I guess so.

STEVE

What's upsetting you right now?

MERRILL

I'm not upset, I just don't want to play because it sounds-

STEVE

Not about the game. In the abstract.

MERRILL

I'm still mad about my "date."

STEVE

Guess what? Stuff like that isn't going to happen in Westeros- nah, there it probably would- but like, not in Greyhawk or wherever Gideon decides we're going! You're the hero of your story!

MERRILL

That does sound nice.

STEVE

Doesn't it! Come on, man, all you gotta do is roll the dice.

MERRILL

This isn't going to make me spontaneously grow a neckbeard and move into my parent's basement, will it?

STEVE

That only happens if you let it happen.

GIDEON

And for the love of God don't let it happen.

MERRILL

Fine. Fine. I'm in.

STEVE

WOO!

(STEVE digs around in the papers.)

It's dangerous to go alone! Take this!

(Hands MERRILL a character sheet.)

MERRILL

My brain hates my eyes for looking at this. What is this devil language?

STEVE

It's your character! Well, it's going to be. You've got to make her first- or him, if you want. No judgement in DnD.

GIDEON

Tabula rasa, if you will.

MERRILL

What are these boxes for?

STEVE

Your stats.

MERRILL

Translation...? I'm not quite fluent in geek quite yet.

GIDEON

Think about it in terms of tomatoes. Strength? How powerfully you can crush a tomato. Dexterity? How well you can throw a tomato. Constitution? How many tomatoes you can survive being thrown at you. Intelligence? Knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom? Knowing that just because a tomato is a fruit doesn't mean it belongs in a fruit salad. Charisma? Being able to sell a tomato based fruit salad anyway.

STEVE

Tomato fruit salad is salsa.

GIDEON

He's a bard. High charisma.

MERRILL

Wow. For complete and utter nonsense, that was surprisingly helpful.

(GIDEON hands MERRILL the player's guide.)

GIDEON

So first you're going to want to pick your race and class- these are your options-

MERRILL

What're you?

STEVE

He's the dungeon master.

MERRILL

The what?

GIDEON

Think of me as the captain of our quickly sinking ship.

MERRILL

That's... Comforting.

NATE

(From outside.)

I HAVE LEARNED THE NAME OF GOD, AND IT IS TRADER JOE!

(NATE enters, laden down with snacks and experiencing a rare moment of religious epiphany.)