

A LITTLE GIRL AT WAR  
By: C.E. Turnage

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Scott Weston	A returned war vet and husband	34	Male
Charlotte Weston	The wife Scott left behind	32	Female
Dannie Sothers	The babysitter	16	Female
Michael Athen	Dannie's boyfriend	18	Male

**Synopsis:**

A play about the ability to believe the worst...everytime. When a returned war vet and his wife decide to go on a couple's therapy retreat they call in their old kid neighbor from back home, little do they know that she's been harboring a secret that could destroy them for years. The family is closer to falling apart then they think.

ACT I

Scene 1

A living space with a kitchen and dining area. It's the nice kitchen of a man who had a real affinity for hunting. There's a stone fire place with a sawed off shot gun mantled on the wall. There's mounted heads of deer, and stuffed bobcats, all in all the kitchen/dining and living area looks like the lobby of a Mississippi welcome center. To one side there's a plaid couch that at least all the women who've seen it have asked to re-upholster. There's a yellow pine dining table with a lace doily kitchen runner. Everything looks dated except for the high tech kitchen that's been completely revamped with a new oven and granite counter tops.

A grizzly bear of a man limps in the back door leading out to a half seen backyard. A trampoline is visible out back through a big bay window on the wall. The man has a newly permanent scowl and a bow slung over one arm. On the other arm hangs a dead baby deer with an arrow sticking out of its neck mercilessly. Blood that is not the man's own dribbles to the kitchen tiled floor. He grunts and slams the little deer onto the nice pine dining room table. He rests the bow next to it carefully. He goes to the wall with the mantled shotgun and pulls it down. He just holds it looking at it, wistfully. It's like the girl he wishes he could ask out in middle school. After loving it a while he puts the gun back on its mantle and calls upstairs to his wife.

SCOTT

Charles! Look! Charles! CHARLES! Come down!

Charlotte descends stairs that lead into the kitchen area. She's rubbing her head, a permanent mom headache. Scott sees her and smiles.

CHARLOTTE  
 (Yelling down the stairs)  
 What. What do you want?

SCOTT  
 Close your eyes.

CHARLOTTE  
 Scott...

Scott laughs.

SCOTT  
 Quick close your eyes!

CHARLOTTE  
 I'm not walking down stairs with my eyes closed.

SCOTT  
 Well--then you're just gonna miss out.

CHARLOTTE  
 On what?

SCOTT  
 Prepare the drum-roll! Blare the trumpets! You're not gonna believe this!

She sighs exasperated.

SCOTT  
 I'm a provider, Charles. I'm like God in all his defining glory.

CHARLOTTE  
 What are you high on?

SCOTT  
 Life! Look what I got! Myself! By myself, Charles!

CHARLOTTE  
 What are you even--

Charlotte rounds the corner of the stairs into the dining area. She stops. Her eyes go wide. She squeaks.

SCOTT  
 TA-DA!

She looks from him to the deer-- incredulous.

Scott? CHARLOTTE

Yeah. SCOTT

Why? CHARLOTTE

Why what? SCOTT

Why what?! CHARLOTTE

Um? SCOTT

WHY? CHARLOTTE

I'm confused. SCOTT

Why?! CHARLOTTE

She points to the deer. He thinks she's pointing to the bow.

SCOTT  
Because I went to provide and I did! By myself!

CHARLOTTE  
By yourself? You--You? By yourself?!

SCOTT  
It's one of those days, Charles. You just gotta get up and do--and I did, I actually did. I'm like a real jungle man.

Charlotte just stares.  
Why aren't you saying anything?

Charlotte walks as opposite of the dead deer as she can and pulls a wine glass from one cabinet and a bottle of wine from another. She pours herself a glass. She takes a long gulp and drains the wine.

SCOTT  
Should you really be drinking already?

Charlotte casually shrugs, pretending to be nonchalant before chucking the wine glass at Scott from across the kitchen. He catches it before it can break--his reflexes are amazing.

CHARLOTTE

You brought a deer into the house?

SCOTT

It's only a fawn.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. You're right. YOU BROUGHT A DEAD BABY DEER INTO MY GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE?!

SCOTT

I killed it though! Myself!

CHARLOTTE

(Sarcastic in thought, genuine in tone.)

Oh. Well, that's different.

SCOTT

I knew you'd be/proud.

CHARLOTTE

It's not fucking different, Scott.

Scott's eyes go wide.

SCOTT

Watch the mouth. They got ears.

CHARLOTTE

Don't you dare give me advice on those kids. They're just planning on doing everything to make me tear my hair out because you and your dead deer are clearly not enough.

SCOTT

You're mad?

CHARLOTTE

Really?

SCOTT

I didn't use Pappie's gun. I was just gonna go shoot at trees, Charles, I swear! With that old bow and arrow set. I was just sitting there, fiddling with the thing when I hear this kind of snorting behind me. The kind of hot air that gets your neck to spine out a little straighter. Scared me half to death up here in the woods like this. So I thought "great. This is how I die. I'm gonna turn around, it's gonna be a bear.

We're never gonna make it to the goddamn couples retreat that you want to go to so bad, and I'm gonna be bear-lunch." But was it a bear?

She's glaring at him. He waits for her to respond.

CHARLOTTE  
(Deadpan)

Was it a bear?

SCOTT

NO! It wasn't. It was a deer. A little fluffy white tailed snorting baby deer looking over my shoulder. So I waited.

Scott gets real quiet and then he hits the table loud making Charlotte jump. And I shot it. And boom. Deer keeled over on its side dead. And I whooped, and I jumped over twigs and--picked up the carcass and here he is, a sacrifice for you.

CHARLOTTE

It's little.

SCOTT

Not that/ little.

CHARLOTTE

It's little, Scott.

A pause of disbelief. Charlotte rubs her forehead.

CHARLOTTE

You whooped?

Scott howls and Charlotte puts her hand over his mouth, annoyed.

CHARLOTTE

And you still thought on top of that, that it was okay to bring this saggy dead deer into Pappie's house and slam him down on my dining room table?

SCOTT

Pappie's table.

Charlotte scrubs at her face

CHARLOTTE

Did you even do all the steps?

SCOTT

The steps?

CHARLOTTE

Yes. The steps. The steps you do when you kill things. There are steps!

SCOTT

Really?

CHARLOTTE

Like--to maintain the deers integrity. That's a thing.

SCOTT

Meat has integrity?

CHARLOTTE

Meat?

SCOTT

That's what you shoot deer for, right?

A Pause.

CHARLOTTE

Wait. You thought we were gonna eat this thing?

SCOTT

Well, I killed a good deer Charles.

CHARLOTTE

(A horrified new thought)

Do you even have a permit?

SCOTT

No.

CHARLOTTE

So I have an illegal dead deer on my table.

SCOTT

Yes?

CHARLOTTE

You're telling me that at any possible second the police could show up at my door and arrest my crazy husband for illegally murdering a baby deer.

SCOTT

Murder seems harsh.

CHARLOTTE

Scott!

SCOTT

I thought it would be nice. Like when Dannie and Michael get in, we can all have deer for supper and I can tell them how I went out and shot it myself and--it's a conversation starter.

CHARLOTTE

A conversation starter?

SCOTT

Yeah.

Charlotte nods and smiles at Scott through gritted teeth. She walks over to the cabinet and pulls out another glass.

CHARLOTTE

A conversation starter.

She shrugs. She pours herself some wine.

CHARLOTTE

*A conversation starter.*

Charlotte throws another glass at Scott and he catches it.

CHARLOTTE

Stop catching the glasses! I'm trying to hurt you!

SCOTT

So I should just let myself get hit?

CHARLOTTE

(Pointing at the deer)

This. This is what I'm talking about Scott! You're reckless, you don't think right anymore! Why can't you just go to therapy like every other returning vet.

SCOTT

I don't need therapy.

CHARLOTTE

You murdered something!

SCOTT

Well I don't want therapy.

CHARLOTTE

All your troupe, tribe, whatever you had over there got help. Why can't you?

SCOTT

'Cause unlike you, sweetheart, I'm not a basket case! Now could you stop chucking things at me?

Charlotte seems defeated.

CHARLOTTE

This was supposed to be a nice weekend, Scott. A good "getting to know you" weekend.

SCOTT

Well, that's weird since I've known you for years--in fact if I remember right we've been married for *years* so why the hell are we getting to know each other. Who's changed?

CHARLOTTE

You know what I'm talking about.

SCOTT

Do I? How 'bout you yell it at me?

CHARLOTTE

That's not fair.

SCOTT

You yell a lot, Charles.

CHARLOTTE

I think it was called for. You just cat-dragged a dead animal in here!

A pause.

SCOTT

I was antsy.

CHARLOTTE

*Antsy?*

SCOTT

Yeah. I wanted to let off some steam.

CHARLOTTE

Through murder?!

SCOTT

Yes. No. I don't know. I just wanted to get out.

CHARLOTTE

Then take a walk.

SCOTT

It was antsy-er then just a walk.

CHARLOTTE

We *just* got here. Dannie isn't even here yet.

SCOTT

I just--had a lot of--steam, to blow off.

CHARLOTTE

You keep saying that but I still don't understand how it equates to violence.

SCOTT

I just needed to do something because...

CHARLOTTE

Because of me. Because being in the same room for so long makes you...antsy?

Charlotte scoffs.

SCOTT

You just--well, everything becomes a fight. We can't just talk the problems out. Like...what if instead of pointing fingers and being all accusatory and exploding you had just been like "Hey hon, why is there a deer on the table?" It could be like that kid affirming thing. How instead of saying no you say "I understand--eating vegetables is hard." So they don't associate you with negativity.

CHARLOTTE

Are you saying you're like a toddler?

SCOTT

I'm saying I associate you with negativity!

CHARLOTTE

Well. That's ridiculous.

SCOTT

Is it?

CHARLOTTE

It is.

SCOTT

It's really not.

CHARLOTTE

It is too!  
And did you think that maybe you draw it out? I'm gonna yell at you if you fuck up Scott. That's how life works. People yell when you don't meet their expectations of you.

SCOTT

People make mistakes.

CHARLOTTE

Oh so all the things that make me yell at you are just "mistakes". Just little teeny tiny border line microcosmic mistakes?

SCOTT

Yeah.

A beat.

CHARLOTTE

Mistakes like being a little late to get your kids from school? Funny how you can let yourself off so easy, but the blame you place is still there!

SCOTT

God, you always hold on to shit!

CHARLOTTE

I hold onto the things you still blame me for! Yeah.

SCOTT

Because that was just spiteful, leaving them--see--you're--negative.

CHARLOTTE

No I'm not.

SCOTT

You made the girls wait on the curb of their school for thirty minutes in the rain because you were--

There's a noise. The two still. They look up towards the stairs.

CHARLOTTE

Girls?

No one answers. The couple wait a beat longer before--

SCOTT

Because you were--*pissed*--I wouldn't hook your bra.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, so my vanity is the only problem? What about/ you?

SCOTT

What about me?

CHARLOTTE

You were batting your long eyelashes at the principal, trying to get our kid out of time-out. Who does that?

What kind of egotistic parent has to persuade and, and--flirt their seven year old son out of time-out.

SCOTT

You know it was unfair, kid just has a lot of energy. He's a boy. He's a runner and a player and a--

CHARLOTTE

Lot like his father.

SCOTT

Oh, and that's a bad thing?

CHARLOTTE

Yes. Scott. Sometimes it's a very bad thing.

SCOTT

Oh it's a very bad thing now.

CHARLOTTE

Well, you did murder a baby deer in cold blood.

SCOTT

FORGET ABOUT THE FUCKING DEER!

He hits the table hard. They both still--  
-immediately looking towards the  
stairs. They break and scowl at each  
other.

CHARLOTTE

See?

SCOTT

See what?

CHARLOTTE

You're taking a very aggressive tone with me.

SCOTT

I am not.

CHARLOTTE

It's angry.

SCOTT

No, it's not.

CHARLOTTE

You didn't used to do that.

SCOTT

Used to? I didn't used to do that?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah. Used to.

SCOTT

Well when did I apparently "change"? Last week? Last month?

CHARLOTTE

Scott...

A pause.

CHARLOTTE

You know when.

SCOTT

Maybe I do. Maybe I don't.

CHARLOTTE

Don't pull that shit with me. I know you know--

SCOTT

When I was at work?

CHARLOTTE

(Scoffing)

Work.

SCOTT

Oh, so that's funny to you now is it? Of course what I was doing wouldn't be considered work. Your life is too squeaky white for *that* to be work.

CHARLOTTE

Your tone is aggressive and unnecessary and hurtful, Scott. And it wasn't like that before you decided to up and out.

SCOTT

So what? So I picked up an "aggressive tone" in Bagram?

CHARLOTTE

Maybe.

A pause.

SCOTT

Wow.

CHARLOTTE

Well, Scott. I don't know. You just came home and you seem--

She searches desperately for a word, and finally settles on the deer.

CHARLOTTE

Unnecessarily violent.

SCOTT

That's a pretty damn dark accusation, Charles.

CHARLOTTE

This is just--a weird and awful/thing for you to do right before we leave for the couples retreat.

SCOTT

Oh awful?

CHARLOTTE

And yes--it is kind of--awful. And badly timed.

SCOTT

It has nothing to do with/ the couples retreat.

CHARLOTTE

Everything about us right now has everything to do with the couples retreat. It's like--it's like...I don't know.

SCOTT

Spit it out. Why not.

CHARLOTTE

It's like you're intentionally trying to sabotage us, okay? Like you're intentionally trying to ruin our marriage because you got--sad, or something. Or--

SCOTT

Fucked up.

CHARLOTTE

No. Yes? Maybe?

SCOTT

Hm.

There's silence between them.

SCOTT

The kids are playing?

CHARLOTTE

The girls are. Jackson's--quiet.

SCOTT

He's always quiet.

CHARLOTTE

He wasn't always.

SCOTT

Oh--he had a used to too?--

A pause

SCOTT

Things change. You've gotta be adaptable to that.

Charlotte snorts. Holding back a laugh.

SCOTT

What now?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know. Maybe I'm at the limit of how adaptable you have the right to ask me to be.

She pointedly looks at Scott.

SCOTT

Maybe you picked up a hurtful tone too.

CHARLOTTE

If I didn't, you'd leave me behind.

There's more silence. Scott starts rummaging through the drawers in the kitchen. He pulls out a long butchers knife and presses his finger into the tip. It draws blood. He sucks on his thumb to get it off and goes to a closet. He opens it up and pulls out a plastic kids play mat complete with alphabet pictures and numbers on it.

CHARLOTTE

You better not be--

He goes to the deer and hauls it onto his shoulders. He lays the mat out on the table--

CHARLOTTE

I will kill you, Scott. I will literally actually kill you.

--and places the deer back on top with a thud.

CHARLOTTE

You ass hat. Are you--

He takes the knife and holds it dramatically up like he's about to perform ritualistic sacrifice.

There's a knock on the door. Charlotte sighs and rubs her face.

CHARLOTTE

Don't you fucking dare.

SCOTT

Know how to gut a deer?

Charlotte growls and storms off to the front door. Scott sets the knife on the table. He takes the deer head in his hands. Charlotte answers the door opening it up. Dannie enters, a young fresh faced girl complete with freckles. She wears a crop top tee and little jean shorts. Everything about her is girl next door sexual.

CHARLOTTE

Dannie!

Charlotte hugs Dannie and spins her around as motherly as possible. But she's pissed, and it comes off awkward.

Nice to see you.

DANNIE

Really.

CHARLOTTE

Wow. You look like you haven't been a kid in some years.

DANNIE

(Bitter as fuck)

I haven't. Funny how...distance does that. Pappie said hi. You know--a year ago. Before he died. Good to see you 'gain Scott.

She sheepishly smiles.

Mr. Weston.

Charlotte gapes. Dropping her arms from Dannie like a punch in the gut. Dannie looks past Charlotte at Scott, who's dumbstruck by Dannie's appearance. He whistles at her. Charlotte looks pissed.

SCOTT

Hey, kiddo.

Charlotte whacks his stomach and it snaps Scott out of it, he hides his uncomfortabitlity with jokes. He makes the deer head talk by moving it's mouth.

SCOTT

"Hi there Dannie, I'm the young buck you'll be baby sitting."

CHARLOTTE

That's gross.

DANNIE

Um what's with the--?

CHARLOTTE

Don't ask. Where's Michael? He comin'? Or did you manage to--

DANNIE

There was a snake. Think he was chasing after it with his shoe.

SCOTT

Ew. Really?

CHARLOTTE

You're groping a bloody fawn and you say ew?

SCOTT

I just didn't know Pappie had snakes.

DANNIE

Michael got him a dog once. To try and kill 'em.

SCOTT

What happened to the dog?

DANNIE

Got bit by a cotton mouth.

SCOTT

Jesus.

DANNIE

Life's a bitch, right?

CHARLOTTE

Come in. Don't just stand in the door way *like you don't belong*.

Insincere.

Thank you so much. For coming. Scott really wanted you here. Remembered all those good days we spent taken' care of you.

Charlotte tries to pat Dannie's head but she pushes her away. Dannie shrugs causing her shirt to ride higher. Scott looks at her stomach.

DANNIE

I need the money. College is sooner than I'd like to think it is.

SCOTT

You going?

CHARLOTTE

Scott!

SCOTT

(To Charlotte)

Well--it's hard getting out of here. You know that better than anyone.

DANNIE

I'm going. I think. I hope. I'm broke.

SCOTT

Well, count this as your first twenty dollars for school, then.

CHARLOTTE

Scott!

SCOTT

What?

CHARLOTTE

We're giving you more than twenty dollars. I know you *need* it. With your mom and all.

DANNIE

Whatever's *fine*. 'm happy to see y'all again.

CHARLOTTE

It's nice how it worked out. A little time to visit before we have to go.

DANNIE

Yeah.

SCOTT

Yeah. I haven't seen you since you were.

He motions at his knee.

SCOTT

'Bout this tall.

I 'member.

DANNIE  
(Uncomfortable)

She was 13.

CHARLOTTE

But short.

SCOTT

Would you stop.

CHARLOTTE

It's fine.

DANNIE

There's an awkward and uncomfortable  
silence.

So--are we having--

DANNIE

She points at the carcass.

--for supper?

DANNIE

Charlotte buries her head in her hands.

Oh, sweet lord.

CHARLOTTE

That was the plan.

SCOTT

You didn't gut it in the field?

DANNIE

Was I supposed to?

SCOTT

Yeah.

DANNIE

*Steps.*

CHARLOTTE

Scott grimaces.

SCOTT

Would you take your high and mighty self elsewhere please?

Charlotte grimaces.

CHARLOTTE

I'll let the girls know you're here.

Charlotte exits upstairs. In the silence that follows her leaving, Dannie inspects the deer. She pokes at it for a while shifting its legs.

DANNIE

You didn't tag it?

SCOTT

Was I supposed to?

DANNIE

Is that what you're gonna ask every time I ask you a question?

SCOTT

(A joke)

Am I supposed to?

DANNIE

Ha. Ha. Very funny. You don't have a license?

SCOTT

It was an impulse sort of decision.

DANNIE

You shot it with an arrow out of--impulse? That seems a little--neandrathal?

SCOTT

(Grunting)

I am man.

He Tarzan beats his chest. Dannie blushes and looks away.

SCOTT

Maybe it was a dumb idea.

He looks embarrassed.

DANNIE

I think it's kind of--cool? I mean, everybody does it, so it's not really all that weird--I mean it's kind of weird you shot a baby. That seems. Aggressive. But you should maybe have looked up how to gut it and stuff? Cause like now the blood's gonna curdle and it gets weirder tasting/ I don't really like the gamey taste.

SCOTT

The blood curdles?

DANNIE

All blood curdles right? Like it needs oxygen to not curdle, and you don't get any oxygen when you're dead.

SCOTT

Guess not.

DANNIE

Yeah--nope.

There's an awkward silence. Dannie pokes at the deer, a bit morbid.

SCOTT

Wow...

The look at each other. Really look.

SCOTT

So--how've you been, kid.

DANNIE

I'm not a kid. I don't feel like one. So can you just not say it.

SCOTT

Well--I haven't seen you since you were one.

DANNIE

I told you--I remember.

SCOTT

Right.

A pause. Dannie hops up on the counter of the kitchen kicking her feet back and forth. Scott watches her legs.

SCOTT

You grew up nice--you look, well some just don't grow into their faces but you--It's weird how people grow up.

DANNIE

It's fairly normal actually.

Scott laughs.

SCOTT

Still a brat though I guess. Didn't outgrow that. So--how are you? Got so used to you being here looking out for Pappie--sittin out on the porch.

DANNIE

Yeah. I liked that.

SCOTT

Yeah, me too.

They look at each other.

DANNIE

I've been good. Missing people--you know the people who've left here. Like you.

An awkward pause.

SCOTT

Funny--everyone who leaves always comes back for something right? No one stays away. Not even me--and I never fit here at all.

DANNIE

It's just a big truck stop. The same customers every day, the same customers every month, the same customers once a year, but they're always the same customers. And they always come back to be fixed in some way. Get used to it.

SCOTT

What do you mean?

DANNIE

Nobody comes back to anything unless they're looking for some kind of salvation or something. Like they got a mistake to heal. Something to fix 'em. Mamma's pastor said that last Sunday too. People only come back to Jesus asking to be fixed. Means we owe him a lot of shit.

SCOTT

Well--that's...Hm.

DANNIE

You here to be fixed?

He laughs nervously.

SCOTT

I'm here cause I missed seeing your pretty face at church on Sunday's.

He winks at her.

DANNIE

That lie is thicker than heat.

SCOTT

You've gotten smart on me, kid.

DANNIE

*Don't* call me kid.

There's a tense pause.

DANNIE

Were you mad?

SCOTT

Huh?

DANNIE

I mean, killing a deer. It's usually cause a certain level of southern boredom gets you angry. We've got a lot of angry men down here. And since you're visiting and all--well it's your first day so the boredom shouldn't get to you yet. So were you just like--mad?

SCOTT

Guess so--a little bit.

DANNIE

At her?

He doesn't answer. She smiles.

That sucks.

SCOTT

Yeah. Responsibility's / hard.

DANNIE

I know a lot of mad people. So you don't have to feel too bad.

SCOTT

What kind of mad people?

DANNIE

I like to play this game...

SCOTT

Yeah?

DANNIE

When I go shopping for my mom...

SCOTT

She worse?

DANNIE

Ask her liquor cabinet--because of her there's nothing dry about this county.

SCOTT

I'm sorry.

DANNIE

Shut up. That's such bullshit.

SCOTT

No really I--

DANNIE

We already talked about this--before. Before you decided to go. There's not a sorry bone in your body. You condemn her just like I do. Fucked me over.

A pause. Scott looks stunned by her.  
She lightens it up.

So I have this game--when I go out for her. The people pushing the carts in stores-- all those mad people--I give 'em stories. Walking through with their half jaded faces. Woman with a scowl--must hit her kids cause she's mad. Girlfriend with a bruise, must have cuts to even out the mad. Me judging people hard--must be 'cause I'm mad. God--with all the frowns and day old grudges going on in the Wal-mart just out of town there's enough mad to kill off the entire deer population. Bad circumstance--it can make a lot of people mad. And there's a lot of it down here--"Mr. I Can Leave And Go Whenever I Want".

SCOTT

Hey now.

A pause.

DANNIE

So you shouldn't feel bad--if you killed cause you were mad. We like playing God to the people who treat us like shit or the people who are just--smaller. Victims. That make me fucked up?

He's bewildered by her, this sad little kid. She ignores him and picks up the knife. She begins to plunge it into the deer.

DANNIE

Do you have a bucket or something?

Scott nods and goes to a utility closet. He pulls out a bucket. Dannie starts to plunge the knife into the deer but before it punctures Scott grabs her wrist. Dannie yanks her hand away.

DANNIE  
(Wildly.)

Don't do that.

SCOTT

You okay?

She can't look away from him.

DANNIE

Yeah--I--sorry.

SCOTT

What's up with--are you--?

DANNIE

Nothing.

SCOTT

It's not/Michael is it?

DANNIE

No it's--just--missed you so I'm--jumpy.

A pause. He looks at the deer. Then back at her.

SCOTT

Outside?

DANNIE

Probably smarter.

Scott slings the deer onto his shoulders. Him and Dannie take it outside where they're visible and audible through the bay window. Scott lays the deer down and goes back into the kitchen opening and searching through drawers.

SCOTT

Charles! Charles? CHARLES!!!

Charlotte peeks her head down from the top of the stairs. She has glittery kids clips in her hair and a tea cup in her hand.

CHARLOTTE

What? What?

SCOTT

Did your Pappie have any butcher's twine?

CHARLOTTE

Um--I don't know? Check the fork drawer.

SCOTT

I did!

CHARLOTTE

I don't know Scott. I'm busy. Taking care of the girls. Like always.

SCOTT

Well I'm trying to prep this deer.

CHARLOTTE

Nobody wants your fucking deer, Scott!

She leaves. He calls out to her.

SCOTT

Great--but where would the twine be?

There's no answer. He rummages through a few more drawers until he finds some wrapping ribbon. The kind that would tie bows on birthday presents. He grabs a pair of scissors and takes it out to Dannie who's waiting.

SCOTT

This work?

DANNIE

Not really.

SCOTT

Well there's nothing ceremoniously correct about this deer anyway so--

He cuts off a long strand of the pink ribbon. He lifts the legs of the deer and ties them together, bound tight. He then takes down a wind chime that was hanging and hangs the deer's legs from the hook that was holding it. So now the dead deer is suspended in the air outside of the nice bay window.

SCOTT

You know, with that little bow it almost looks sweet.

DANNIE

Gussied up, dead carcass--yeah, beautiful.

Scott takes the knife and is about to rip into the deer under Dannie's instructions when there's a knock on the front door and Michael enters peeking his head into the living room.

MICHAEL

Hey? Dannie?

Charlotte descends the stairs looking like a princess tea party mess.

CHARLOTTE

Michael!

She goes and hugs him close to her.

CHARLOTTE

Come on in.

When she turns she sees the deer hanging like a piñata.

CHARLOTTE

Sweet Jesus Christ, are you kidding me, Scott?!

He comes back into the house with Dannie in tow. He leaves the deer, knife, and bucket outside.

MICHAEL

Cool! You shot it?

Scott beams.

SCOTT

With an arrow.

DANNIE

What'd you do? Just chase a snake?

MICHAEL

I lost it.

DANNIE

Well aren't you / a hunter--

MICHAEL

But I scared it off.

SCOTT

Thanks. I wouldn't want the kids playing outside when a snake could get 'em.

CHARLOTTE

But a dead deer hanging outside their kitchen is just *fine*.

SCOTT

Charlotte. Please. Shut up.

There's a tense silence.

MICHAEL

Well, thanks for inviting me. Too, I mean.

SCOTT

Heard I couldn't get Dannie here without you.

Charlotte gives Scott a sharp look.

CHARLOTTE

You're welcome.

SCOTT

How else we gonna know if you've been treating the kid right, anyways. I gotta see it you know, for her own good.

DANNIE

No you don't. He could treat me like shit. It's my choice.

MICHAEL

Um/ excuse me?

SCOTT

You know I'm just lookin' out for you.

He pseudo noogies Dannie who looks pissed.

DANNIE

Not a *kid*.

Scott grimaces.

SCOTT

Right, sorry, my bad.

DANNIE

(Muttered)

Keep your hands to yourself.

An awkward pause.

CHARLOTTE

I miss it--being young. Being here. You forget how sweet the air is.

Dannie snorts.

MICHAEL  
(Reprimanding)  
Dannie...really?

CHARLOTTE  
It smells like home again.

DANNIE  
(muttered)  
Bullshit.

MICHAEL  
(Trying to change the subject)  
Is this just like vacation?

SCOTT  
Kind of.

CHARLOTTE  
Yes.

Dannie scoff-laughes.

CHARLOTTE  
What?

DANNIE  
Funny.

CHARLOTTE  
Hm?

DANNIE  
You didn't visit much. Didn't even know you missed it.

CHARLOTTE  
Of course I do.

DANNIE  
What'd you miss about it?

CHARLOTTE  
You know. Here. I missed the smell of here.

DANNIE  
Oh the smell of here?

CHARLOTTE  
Um. Yes?

DANNIE  
Wow, I didn't know this place had a smell.

CHARLOTTE

Well--yeah. Of course/ it does.

DANNIE

What is that exactly? The honeysuckle? The azaleas? Freshly mowed grass out back every Sunday because Pappie needed air-- or maybe it's the smell of the *crap* you're spewing talking about missing the smell of here.

CHARLOTTE

Excuse me?

DANNIE

You heard me.

Dannie plops down on the plaid couch.

CHARLOTTE

Shouldn't you *ask* to sit on the couch?

DANNIE

Well...since Pappie said I could stay in this place *whenever*...and since I was the only advocate to keep the couch...hmmmmmm....no. My house too. It's what pappie *wanted*. He also said--

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to talk to you about / Pappie.

DANNIE

I sat out on the back porch every day. You know that post, that Pappie told all his visitors to carve their names in-- yours isn't there Charlotte, the person living with him, and your name wasn't even there. I thought that was weird. Mine's there. Right next to Scott's.

CHARLOTTE

I just didn't want to etch it.

DANNIE

Why?

CHARLOTTE

Just never thought about it.

DANNIE

Pappie thought about it. Every day.

CHARLOTTE

I just didn't, okay.

A pause.

DANNIE

Right.  
Maybe you'll etch it now, because you missed the smell of it  
so much.

CHARLOTTE

Sure.

DANNIE

Pappie didn't think you would. We had a bet. Too bad he can't  
win it anymore.

MICHAEL

Um, you're being morbid.

DANNIE

He used to dig little faces into that post with his nail,  
caused it to crack and bleed. He said blood tied him to the  
strangers who walked in and out his door frame. He said the  
one thing the door frame couldn't do / was tie him to his  
real blood.

CHARLOTTE

You really need to cool it.

DANNIE

I just--It's funny the things you can remember clear as day.  
Like they're pictures in your head and well--Pappie  
remembered a lot--speculated a lot--was thinking a lot about  
you. You missed this place--he missed you.

CHARLOTTE

Well. That's fine/ but I--

DANNIE

Your ears not falling off to hear it? The Charlotte stories  
he told me.

CHARLOTTE

Pappie said he was fine. And whatever he told you--we were  
fine.

DANNIE

From what he said you said things too.

CHARLOTTE

Pappie didn't really give a shit if I came or went.

DANNIE

I don't think that's true.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I do.

DANNIE

Do you?

CHARLOTTE

He practically begged me to leave, Dan. Okay? Move on.

DANNIE

Begged? He was heart-broken.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I don't know why cause I never gave him anything to be heart-broken over.

DANNIE

Funny, it's just--Well it's just, he thought--pretty distinctly--that he heard you yell "Get me the fuck outta here" when you got in your get away car with Scott--I mean. Mr. Weston. And it hurt his feelings.

MICHAEL

Um...

CHARLOTTE

We don't talk about/that.

SCOTT

We don't talk about anything bad. You don't let us.

CHARLOTTE

Shut up.

Dannie looks over at Scott and smiles. Then she turns back to Charlotte maliciously.

DANNIE

What--it's just what he said. Right there--on that god awful couch. Breathing tube/taped to his face and all.

CHARLOTTE

Really though, can you just quit it.

DANNIE

Thought you should know. All that he heard.

A pause.

CHARLOTTE

None of us are going anywhere tonight at all so--who wants some wine? We can all be adults here for the night, right, Dannie?

SCOTT

Well she says she is an adult so--

Charlotte rolls her eyes at him and goes to her cabinet pulling out four wine glasses and her bottle. She pours three to the half mark a bit to high, and pours hers to the brim. She drinks half of it before serving her guests and her husband. Dannie smiles and takes a small sip of wine. She makes a face and shoves the glass away.

SCOTT

Cute.

DANNIE

Thanks.

SCOTT

Your first taste?

MICHAEL  
(To Dannie)

Really?  
You're such a /goodie goodie.

CHARLOTTE  
I remember my first taste as a *kid*.

DANNIE  
I am not a goodie goodie. Or a kid.

MICHAEL  
Sure you are, you're the kind of girl who prays before eating and comes to every game.

Dannie ignores him, looking at Scott and taking a long swig of the wine. It makes her make another face. He laughs and takes it from her.

MICHAEL  
Goodie goodie.

DANNIE  
Would you shut up. If anyone's the goodie here it's you.

CHARLOTTE  
Are you gonna start in on "I'm rubber, you're glue."?  
Imitation's a cheap playground comeback.

DANNIE  
Excuse me?

CHARLOTTE  
*Ma' am*. You say *ma' am*.

Michael frowns at Dannie, Scott clears his throat.

MICHAEL  
How've ya'll been up in Clinton?

DANNIE  
Really, Michael?

SCOTT  
Alright.

A pause.

MICHAEL  
Are you...adjusted?

SCOTT  
I don't think I know what you mean?

Awkward silence and Michael tries to recover.

MICHAEL  
I saw a recruitment booth, the other day.

SCOTT  
Yeah?

MICHAEL  
I was thinking maybe I--

DANNIE  
Shut up. No you weren't. You're too much of a wimp for that.

MICHAEL  
Am not. They said I'd be good. Anyways I--

SCOTT  
She's right don't do it.

CHARLOTTE  
Really? Are you serious?

DANNIE  
I can show you the letters he sent me. When he was over there. Sounded like a whiny teenager, he was so miserable.

She turns to Charlotte.  
Did you get some too?

Scott looks at Dannie with a frown.

No. SCOTT

Dannie smiles.

What? Letters? CHARLOTTE

DANNIE  
Saying how much he hated it. Tuesdays were the only good days because--wait...why were Tuesdays good again?

Dannie. SCOTT

All your post came on Tuesday, right? DANNIE

You wrote her/ letters? CHARLOTTE

DANNIE  
So you'd hate it. You couldn't hold your breath long enough in the trials to survive. They pepper spray your face, you know. Cool, right?

I called you and you were writing other people/ letters? CHARLOTTE

Oh, so you did have a phone? Weird it was like it was getting hung up on every time I called--or just, screened? DANNIE

Really, Dannie/this is-- CHARLOTTE

I called you--at least a thousand times. DANNIE

God, let it go--you don't have to pry at people. They're not clams. MICHAEL

I'm sure you did. CHARLOTTE

DANNIE  
I hated having to lie to him. To Pappie. He told me about you--jumping out on the trampoline--Scott and you having picnics there. I took him out there sometimes if he was actually being nice. I'd let him lay on it and I'd jump up and down and then he hit his head on a spring and it bled and freaked me out so we stopped that.

CHARLOTTE

Look, Dannie, I don't really want to talk/ about him.

DANNIE

I just think you should know.

A pause of half defeat.

CHARLOTTE

I got married. Moved. You'll do it too. And your neighbor will take care of your mom.

DANNIE

No. She'll probably die on the toilet. People do that.

MICHAEL

That's gross.

DANNIE

Goodie.

CHARLOTTE

People leave all the/ time.

DANNIE

I know--and they heart-break the nicer and better people they leave behind.

A pause.

SCOTT

So how'd your season end, Michael?

Dannie scoffs and rolls her eyes.

DANNIE

Nice.

MICHAEL

Eh. You win some you lose some.

DANNIE

Y'all lost 'em all.

MICHAEL

Would you quit trying to pick a fight with everyone who breathes in this room.

CHARLOTTE

I know exactly what that feels like.

SCOTT

Well, I think you're a fine linebacker. You being scouted?

MICHAEL

Sent some tapes to 'Bama and Louisiana Tech, Mississippi State's been over a few times.

DANNIE

To look at every other player on the field.

MICHAEL

What bit your ass?

CHARLOTTE

More wine anyone?

Everyone looks over at her--her glass is drained.

SCOTT

You still Cheerlead?

Dannie blushes.

DANNIE

Yes sir.

CHARLOTTE

(Hell of a fake gritted smile)

Bet the boys are all over you.

SCOTT

Why would you say that?

CHARLOTTE

Well it's probably true.

DANNIE

It's not. I promise.

CHARLOTTE

Well, maybe just Michael then.

SCOTT

Charlotte.

Michael blushes now.

DANNIE

I wouldn't know--I'm a goodie.

MICHAEL

Would you--

A bump is heard upstairs.

/stop it.

MICHAEL

CHARLOTTE  
 (Calling out)

Girls?

SCOTT

Why do you never call out to Jackson?

He exits up the stairs. Charlotte pours herself more wine.

CHARLOTTE

Strange places make everyone a little--on edge I think. It's easy to pick *meaningless* fights.

DANNIE

Yeah. Right. Strange places.

MICHAEL

So are we gonna eat that deer for/ dinner?

CHARLOTTE

I ordered pizza.

MICHAEL

Bummer.

DANNIE

Charlotte's real good at breaking people's expectations.

CHARLOTTE

Enough.  
 Don't call me Charlotte.

DANNIE

You weren't gone that long. I know who you are. I can call you Charlotte if I want.

CHARLOTTE

You can't.

DANNIE

And why not?

CHARLOTTE  
 (Smiling like cyanide)

Simple. I'm an adult. You're not.

Scott appears at the top of the stairs with rainbow wand.

SCOTT

They're trying to coerce me into princess tea party, please get up here. I'm dad. Dad's don't say no.

Charlotte rolls her eyes and goes upstairs. Dannie tries to follow but Charlotte stops her.

CHARLOTTE

Don't. My husband. My house. My kids. Back off.

She runs up the stairs. Her and Scott exit.

MICHAEL

I don't like this.

DANNIE

What, Michael, the plaid couch, the dead deer, the granite counter tops can you please be fucking specific about something?

MICHAEL

You're acting like a bitch.

DANNIE

Excuse me?

MICHAEL

You're attacking Charlotte.

DANNIE

She left.

MICHAEL

That's not a reason to jump on her, Jesus. You don't have to rub salt in everyone's wounds, okay?

Dannie doesn't answer.

I don't like that you just got here and are already acting like a tantrum throwing kid because you don't get to--I don't know talk to him without her hovering in a room.

DANNIE

Him?

MICHAEL

Well shit, Dan. Do you want me to say it? You're attacking a married guys wife, because--well it's like your puppy guarding him.

DANNIE

Go chase another snake.

MICHAEL

Well, I might.

DANNIE

Good, bite me.

MICHAEL

Can you not be such a brat today?

DANNIE

It's hard not to when I'm in a place that only makes me sad, with people who piss me off, and a boyfriend who acted more like a diva than a guy last night.

MICHAEL

It was weird--don't be a jerk.

DANNIE

Well I get cranky when I don't get what I want, excuse me.

MICHAEL

I didn't say "no" forever.

DANNIE

But you said no, Michael. And that's embarrassing.

MICHAEL

Don't make this a thing here. Could you be a little more professional? We're here for a job. Taking care of little kids, for Christ sake. Right? So act a little more mature.

DANNIE

Like you--Cause you're a fucking solemn monk.

MICHAEL

I'm already uncomfortable. I didn't want to have sex with you when you were all--

DANNIE

All what?

MICHAEL

Riled up about whatever has you upset. This place--agitates you. It's like you hate these people.

DANNIE

I don't hate them.

MICHAEL

Seems like it.

DANNIE

They're family friends. Clearly you don't have any of those. They're fun to see. I don't hate 'em.

MICHAEL

You hate anyone who leaves because they have too--and they had too. People don't just stay forever. Can't you just be happy with the way things are? Do you have to force everyone's hand? You can't chain people to home.

She sulks.

DANNIE

I don't force everyone's hand.

MICHAEL

You do.

DANNIE

I do not.

MICHAEL

You do.

Dannie sticks her tongue out at Michael who rolls his eyes.

MICHAEL

I just want you to be happy. Even when things change.

DANNIE

Well, I can't be.

MICHAEL

Awesome, Debbie downer.

Dannie laughs.

DANNIE

And you call me the goodie goodie.

MICHAEL

Well you are.

DANNIE

You said no. I was fucking shirtless. And you said no!

MICHAEL

Ridiculous. You're worse than a broken record.

DANNIE

Asshole.

MICHAEL

There are innocent ears upstairs.

DANNIE

Are you a fucking grandma?

MICHAEL

I give up.

DANNIE

Great, do you want a sticker for that?

MICHAEL

Dannie! Just shut up.

Dannie does. Shocked. Michael sighs exhausted. The fight goes out of him. He takes a long sip of his wine. He rummages around in the kitchen awkwardly, wanting to find a new topic. A pause.

MICHAEL

Did Scott always come over to Pappie's? You seem--y'all seem like friends. Close.

DANNIE

He didn't really have a place to go, and when Charlotte got pregnant the first time 'round with Jackson--well what else was he supposed to do. Moved in here for four years. Then they got married--she was pregnant with the twins. Nobody says that...but he married her out of necessity. I know it.

MICHAEL

Well...they had kids, so I don't think it was just necessity.

DANNIE

It was.

MICHAEL

You're kind of small-minded, you know that?

DANNIE

Stubborn. You're--you're thinking stubborn.

MICHAEL

Either way. He was loving her enough to sleep with her.

DANNIE

Shut up, Michael.

MICHAEL

What, he was!

DANNIE

People who care don't just leave a pregnant wife with a four year old and some babies on the way. He didn't want kids. He told me that. He didn't like kids all that much.

MICHAEL

Why would he tell you that?

DANNIE

Never mind.

MICHAEL

Y'all are that familiar?

DANNIE

He lived with Pappie. Of course we are. He was here. He was living where I ran off too. Did the yard work and stuff. We sat outside every night and did the whole lightning bug, star gazing, Mississippi made bullshit thing. I was over with Pappie a lot before I could go over to your place.

MICHAEL

Hm.

DANNIE

He doesn't deserve someone who's so quick to leave.

MICHAEL

This place makes two kinds of people, leavers and stayers. Some people gotta go. Don't judge her too much.

DANNIE

I will.

MICHAEL

Why?

A pause.

MICHAEL

He looked at you funny.

DANNIE

What?

MICHAEL

When you said you weren't a kid. He looked at you funny.

DANNIE

Because adults don't like when kids point out that they're not anymore. It means they're--losing something, I guess...

MICHAEL

What?

DANNIE

You're so fucking stupid.

A pause.

DANNIE

Why couldn't you just have said yes? I wanted you to say yes. Girls never want the guys to say yes. You were like--on a victory lap and said no to a gold medal.

MICHAEL

I just didn't want to.

DANNIE

That's not an answer.

MICHAEL

Well it's mine.

DANNIE

But why?

MICHAEL

Because.

DANNIE

Really?

MICHAEL

Because you're just not ready for that.

DANNIE

Holy shit--really?!

MICHAEL

What? You're not!

DANNIE

Because I'm a--

MICHAEL

(Under breath)

Fuck me.

DANNIE

Say it, Michael. Say it.

MICHAEL

No--you're like a breathing mine field. And you hide new ones every day.

DANNIE

Say it!

MICHAEL

It's just gonna make you mad.

DANNIE

Do you think I'm not mad right now?!

MICHAEL

You're just not ready 'cause you're a kid.

DANNIE

Then what. The fuck. Are you?!

MICHAEL

I'm legal.  
You're making yourself mad for no good reason.

DANNIE

Yeah. None.

Michael exasperated sighs and gets up.

MICHAEL

Do you want to go upstairs?

DANNIE

No.

MICHAEL

We should prove we can take care of their kids.

DANNIE

Well apparently I can't because I am one.

MICHAEL

There are worse things to be than young.

DANNIE

Not when apparently everyone looks at you that way.

MICHAEL

You are so whiny.

DANNIE

Like a fucking baby.

Michael growls and goes upstairs.  
Dannie frustrated goes outside and punches at the deer. Then she goes to the trampoline and starts to jump on it, just little jumps until she gets angry enough to jump hard. We watch her jump for minutes. Scott pokes his head out from upstairs.

SCOTT

Dannie?

There's no response, she still jumps.  
He walks down the stairs looking around but doesn't see her.

Finally his attention turns to the big bay window and he sees her, bouncing up and down. He watches her. His nose pressing the glass as he hides half behind a wall and watches her. He looks over at the gun on the wall and takes it down. Holding it to him. He strokes it lovingly and goes back to watching her for what seems like an eternity. He doesn't take his eyes off of her. After long silence of watching her jump up and down he goes to the door and stands in the frame watching her.

Hey!

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

Come back inside!

SCOTT

Why?

DANNIE

Just--because.

SCOTT

Because?

DANNIE

Just--

SCOTT

Come join me?

DANNIE

No.

SCOTT

Do it.

DANNIE

I shouldn't.

SCOTT

For me?

DANNIE

There's absolute stillness as he watches Dannie continue to bounce. Finally he goes outside and joins her.

Charlotte appears at the top of the stairs and sees Scott holding the gun jumping with Dannie. She looks frightened and doesn't say anything. Instead she shakes her head and massages her temples.

SCOTT

This is ridiculous.

DANNIE

You're smiling.

SCOTT

Am I?

DANNIE

You always smile on trampolines.

SCOTT

Nah.

DANNIE

Yep--I notice. You look like an idiot every time you jump on one. Your kid's probably gonna get less use of this than you are.

Scott crosses his heart. and holds out a pinky to her. She links pinkies with him and he kisses the thumb, looking up at her. She joins him kissing her thumb.

SCOTT

I will dutifully share this trampoline with my kids.

Dannie stares at him blankly. It makes him nervous.

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

I just didn't know if you were expecting me to hand you a world's best dad mug because I'm pretty sure that's a flat out lie.

Scott mock laughs.

SCOTT

Very funny.

Dannie stares at him again.

DANNIE  
Is it weird...having kids?

Scott shifts uncomfortably.

SCOTT  
I'm just getting to know them.

DANNIE  
Why'd you leave, then?

A pause. She stares.

DANNIE  
You get uncomfortable when I look at you.

SCOTT  
I get uncomfortable when anyone stares, you weirdo.

DANNIE  
Right.

They continue to jump. Dannie playfully and flirtatiously shoves at Scott's chest.

DANNIE  
You're a trampoline hog.

SCOTT  
You're totally jumping closer to me!

Dannie snorts like a pig.

DANNIE  
Hog.

SCOTT  
Well--I cross my heart. On my honor as a trampoline hog. You can spend the whole week we're gone jumping right here.

DANNIE  
Why go? Jump with me?

Scott laughs.

SCOTT  
I shouldn't.

DANNIE  
You should. Do what you want to do. You're such a "no-man".

Dannie stretches her arms up, exposing skin. An awkward pause.

SCOTT

What is it? You would call this thing--it's God's big cradle. The fabric makes you sway as the sky gets closer. You had a real knack for making something stupid feel like a real--moment.

DANNIE

Then I'd make you think we were seeing UFO's.

SCOTT

Shut up. I didn't believe you.

DANNIE

Yeah you did. You do. Everyone believes me.

SCOTT

You're very convincing--especially when you're trying to be.

DANNIE

Like Charlotte?

SCOTT

Do you really want to pick a fight with me?

DANNIE

No, I want to jump with you.

Dannie giggles and grabs his hands.  
They bounce in a circle.

DANNIE

And I want to know how she convinced you she wasn't a flake. She flaked out on Pappie. You don't think she's gonna flake out on you when things get hard?

SCOTT

You don't know what you're talking about.

DANNIE

I do. She took you away. You just got here. And then you left. Didn't you like it? Didn't you like me?

SCOTT

Dannie--

DANNIE

Don't just shut me up--okay?

SCOTT

You're great, kid.

DANNIE

Fuck off.

Dannie shoves him a little making him bounce back on the trampoline.

DANNIE

Just--she suckered you didn't she? She's convincing too. Pappie said her tears were more crocodile than his wife's old purse.

SCOTT

Yeah, Pappie said too much.

Charlotte pokes her head outside to them.

CHARLOTTE

Scott?

Scott jumps off the trampoline like he's been caught doing something wrong.

SCOTT

Yep?

CHARLOTTE

Jackson has a headache.

SCOTT

Okay?

CHARLOTTE

Right. Of course. My job. I--what were you--why do you--

She looks at the gun in his hands.

CHARLOTTE

Should you really be holding that.

Dannie laughs.

CHARLOTTE

It's none of my business.

SCOTT

Shit. I forgot I was--

CHARLOTTE

None of my business Scott. You can handle that gun all you want just--be careful?

SCOTT

I will.

CHARLOTTE

Just--if you get angry...I mean--is the safety on?

Dannie snorts. Charlotte glares.  
Scott's face darkens.

SCOTT

The safety?

CHARLOTTE

I just...was worried.

SCOTT

*Just* worried. *Just* a lot of things...Right.

She shakes her head and goes back to the kids. Dannie and Scott enter into the living area. Scott is looking up the stairs after Charlotte. Dannie smiles and sneaks up behind him goosing his waist. He jumps.

DANNIE

What are you lookin' at? She's gone.

He doesn't answer.

DANNIE

Let the adults run away, and the kids can stay out and play.

She pokes at him.

DANNIE

Remember that night we fell asleep on that thing? That was fun.

SCOTT

(Distracted)

Yeah. Looked like you were having fun.

DANNIE

You were having fun. Your smile was at least fifty miles long and years wide.

SCOTT

It's a waste of time.

A pause. Dannie peeks up at Scott from under little girl lashes.

DANNIE

I'm a waste of time?

SCOTT

No of course I/ don't--

DANNIE

It's fine. I get it. It's the big bad wife. She'll huff and she'll puff and she'll blow your common sense down.

A pause.

I really love trampolines. I used to have one--mom broke it one day.

SCOTT

How do you break a trampoline?

DANNIE

Intentionally taking a knife to it when you're drunk.

SCOTT

Oh.

DANNIE

Yeah. Oh.

A pause.

DANNIE

Did you like what you saw--'fore you came out to jump with me?

Scott's attention snaps to Dannie. She knows he was watching her.

SCOTT

I--  
You--  
Yes.  
It's a pretty day.

DANNIE

Yeah, guess it is. Beautiful.

She takes a deep breath of air. She tilts her head back, sucking deep. Scott watches her throat. Mesmerized.

DANNIE

It's the kind of day that smells just like real sunshine. Those days are a hell scape. All sticky sweat and hair sticking to your neck.

She nods at the gun.

DANNIE

She's right you know. It's weird that you have it. Would've said something, but who am I to judge.

Some men read on the toilet, some men sleep in socks, and some men hold guns while they jump with their girl neighbors. Gonna go shoot something else?

Scott shakes his head.

SCOTT

No I just--holdin' it. I guess.

DANNIE

Sometimes we do stupid things just to feel-- human.

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

Like maybe you're holding the gun cause you remember what it felt like to pull the trigger. I wasn't judging you. Out there...in Bagram--did you pull the trigger a lot?

SCOTT

I don't know what you mean.

DANNIE

Yes you do. It's a morbid curiosity thing. Like you stand on a cliff because...what if you fell? It's the part of you just waiting for the bad, cause it's coming no matter what.

A pause.

SCOTT

Yeah, people keep telling me that.

DANNIE

Tellin' you what? That you're bound to fuck up?

SCOTT

That I shouldn't handle guns. I think--I think they just assume as a soldier my fingers gonna twitch on that trigger.

DANNIE

But are they right?

SCOTT

I guess if they'd tell me enough--it wouldn't matter anymore would it. They'd just--become right.

DANNIE

Funny how that works.

SCOTT

It's just a nice gun. Nothing more than that.

A pause.

DANNIE

Charlotte sure doesn't seem to think so.

SCOTT

You can't just pick on her you know?

DANNIE

I loved Pappie.

SCOTT

She did too, in her own right.

DANNIE

No one with blood ever loves enough--it's a watered down kind of "have to" it's not choosing. It's empty.

A pause.

What we have isn't blood. That makes it strong.

SCOTT

You've got a real fucked up perspective, know that?

DANNIE

I do.

SCOTT

What kind of person owns up to that?

DANNIE

I do, I guess.

SCOTT

You guess?

DANNIE

I mean--like I said, circumstance. I'm the bad seed the world made me.

SCOTT

So you think circumstance made you this cynical before you were even an adult?

DANNIE

Why do people think kids can't be--mean.

SCOTT

Cause they don't like to believe that there's not a before. A before bad. If kids can be bad then--poof--there goes before.

DANNIE

Like in Bagram? Like kid terrorists--I thought about that. You know kids really are the best at destruction. Blameless even while pushing the button, pulling the trigger.

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

I thought about you a lot. Being there. There's not control. Not when you get to a moment like that. Where some bright eyed five year old walks up and says "Mr. Do you want a" and then Boom.

A long pause.

DANNIE

I thought about you seeing them--you've always been so happy. So--trusting, I guess. When you were here those few years before taking off. And so I thought about you with your eyes open and in a new place and away from this and--did you see any of them?

SCOTT

I'm not gonna talk about this with/you. That's too much for you to hear.

DANNIE

I imagined them. Little tan kids, with dark hair and round eyes like fucking moon saucers. All bushy tailed with religious bullshit and none of the weight of responsibility. Their moms just whispering in their ears. "Okay. Go inside. You'll see men. Men with guns. Say hi to them for me. Say hi." And they smile and goo and ga and they do. They walk. Little marching order baby soldiers. I imagined the smile you would get on your face if you saw one because of course you love kids. Of course you love little girls who smile at you--like if you give them entire cities they won't buy into the idea of devastating them. They're the kind of precious love that's been coddled and taught to tear up pieces of grass subconsciously--uprooting the good from its foundation. And I imagined your ears ringing. As the smile turned to flat pain. Turned to third-degree, skin-charring, gilded fire instead of white teeth. And I imagined your adult eyes--reverting-- to fucking moon saucers. As you exploded. And I was scared for you. And I wondered what it would feel like to see a kid control the fate of a man's situation. Without him being able to say. "No. Don't."  
So, did you see any of them, being sent into buildings by their mothers to look innocent--ask for a lollipop and then BOOM! They explode taking out a whole building with them? Bombs strapped to their ankles and wrists and torso until their just pink mist? Scott, did you see them? I'm an adult. I can take it. I just--that's--I thought of you.

A pause.

SCOTT

That's...that's just a fake perception. That's a kid's perception of war.

DANNIE

I guess that's a no.

SCOTT

You must think this place is horrific.

DANNIE

I do. It's what my generation's been bred to think. We're creatures of war.

Scott can't take this kind of sad. He nicks her chin up with his finger and pokes her nose.

SCOTT

Guess so. Or you're just Wednesday Addams on a bad day.

DANNIE

Yep. I just--

A pause.

If I think the very worst of a situation--I can nullify my own.

SCOTT

You hurt that much?

Dannie smiles up at him.

DANNIE

You really think I'm gonna answer that?

Scott extends the gun.

SCOTT

Here. Touch the gun. It'll make you feel better.

DANNIE

Does it make you feel better?

SCOTT

Sometimes. Yeah.

DANNIE

Then sure. I'll touch it.

She puts her finger on the trigger.

DANNIE

Do you ever have to remind yourself that there's no shells inside?

She stares right down the barrel.

SCOTT

Um. No?

DANNIE

Really? I would. Like what if it just went off?

SCOTT

Guns don't just go off.

DANNIE

Don't they though? Aren't there more accidents in the world then--things that are hurt out of purpose?

A pause.

SCOTT

That seems--wrong.

DANNIE

Fingers itch and love to tear things apart--you know when you have a church program and you start tearing corners absentmindedly and then before you know it you have a whole mess of white shredded flurries--it's our destructive tendencies. So like--when you have a gun--what if you just--?

She makes a finger pulling motion as if with a trigger.

DANNIE

Without even thinking twice.

She strokes it lovingly as Scott was doing just a little while before.

SCOTT

Nobody ever teach you gun etiquette?

DANNIE

I think humans are made out of blood and chaos. We like to fuck things up. We like to make people into monsters.

She looks him up and down. He sighs.

SCOTT

Give it back. If you can't be an/ adult about it.

DANNIE

Like calling a stranger a child abuser at a wal-mart because she looked at you with eyes that were more hurt than happy and so you wanted to exploit that. Because there's a part of you in here--

She taps her brain with the gun.

DANNIE

That says--

Scott freaks out and takes the gun away from her.

SCOTT

Enough.

Dannie laughs maniacally.

DANNIE

God, see people will believe the worst--every. Time.

SCOTT

That's a lot of assuming.

DANNIE

You're doing it. When I tapped the gun to my head.

SCOTT

You like to put words in people's mouths don't you.

DANNIE

You bought it, that I could be some whacked out little sad shit ready to smear her brains on a wall--looked scared for me--and now maybe I'm thinking I'm a little crazier. So if they hear you--so if you're aggressive or violent or whatever bullshit it is they think you brought home from Bagram--they'll buy it--but then the scary part is--you'll think it too. And then you'll act on it.

A pause.

SCOTT

You used to be so sweet.

DANNIE

Used to is longer than an eternity.

SCOTT

A trampoline jumper.

DANNIE

Anyone who's sad can jump on trampolines--you do.

You've changed. SCOTT

But am I right? DANNIE

Yeah. Maybe. SCOTT

Maybe. DANNIE

A pause.

SCOTT  
Why'd you think of me? Out of all the people to think of--why me?

Dannie blushes.

DANNIE  
Shut up. It's only cause you left.

SCOTT  
I wasn't leaving you.

DANNIE  
No-one ever leaves anything specific, they just go.

SCOTT  
You're hard to win-over you know that.

Scott nervously laughs. Dannie nervously laughs with him.

DANNIE  
Right.

A pause.

SCOTT  
What'd you think about?

DANNIE  
Mostly how hot it was.

SCOTT  
It was hot.

DANNIE  
I bet.

SCOTT  
For the first time in my life I needed a canteen.

DANNIE

Does she ever just talk about this shit with you?

SCOTT

We have kids.

DANNIE

Kids like to hear stories about their dads.

SCOTT

Not about camel eating spiders.

DANNIE

What the fuck are those?

SCOTT

They're spiders. The size of dogs. And they will eat you.  
I've seen it.

DANNIE

And those exist?

SCOTT

They do. And when they bite the limb basically just--  
disintegrates. Cool, right?

DANNIE

(Smiling)

Shit. That's fucked up.

A pause.

SCOTT

I should tell you not to cuss.

DANNIE

Right.

SCOTT

But for some reason it fits in your mouth.

His hands squirm like he's gonna reach  
for her.

SCOTT

You changed your hair.

DANNIE

You just realized?

SCOTT

Yeah.--I mean. No. Didn't it used to be brown?

DANNIE

Yeah.

SCOTT

I like blonde.

DANNIE

Even the straight out of the bottle kind?

SCOTT

You know me, I'm not the kid of guy who ever minded anything straight out of the bottle.

He winks at her and laughs.

DANNIE

Don't do that.

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

Be you--before you left. You should be--

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

Traumatized, or something I guess.

SCOTT

Traumatized--shit--that's dark.

DANNIE

It's just what I expected. It's what we all expected. It's what she expected, because how could a person who went shoulder to shoulder with war come out--okay. And so she tells you you're messed up in the head. And it's why it's weird when you joke and goof around with a dead deer.

SCOTT

Sorry, I'll try to act more--sad.

DANNIE

I just--missed you, missed having you around.

SCOTT

Dannie--

DANNIE

No. It's cool. I met Michael. I'm doing good in school. Everything was here. Just you weren't.

SCOTT

This shouldn't be a thing. That you linger on.

DANNIE

What do you want me to do?

SCOTT

Babysit.

Dannie laughs hard.

DANNIE

Wow, so sweet.

She stands and goes over to the kitchen and pulls out a bottle of Jack from the cabinet. He gives her a face.

SCOTT

I thought you--

DANNIE

I drink just fine. Wine's for *shitty* people. So I stay away from it. Pappie got me used to hard liquor, you mind?

SCOTT

Pappie shouldn't have been sharing alcohol with his kid neighbor.

DANNIE

Lots of people share *lots* of things with their *kid* neighbor.

SCOTT

You don't have to act like a person made out of concrete. It doesn't suit you. Don't drink.

DANNIE

He felt for me. Alcoholic mom/ and all.

SCOTT

So he wanted to make an alcoholic daughter?

DANNIE

He just wanted me to feel home.

SCOTT

I don't like you drunk.

DANNIE

You've never had the chance to see it. Want to?

SCOTT

Charlotte won't like it if she catches us.

Us?

DANNIE

Dannie smiles wickedly

DANNIE

Funny thing about Jack. You can mix it with Coke--and it looks just like Coke.

SCOTT

You know they're my kids too, and I don't really want a trashed teenager/ watching 'em.

DANNIE

Are they?

A pause. And then a challenge.

DANNIE

Why did you agree to come? Why didn't ya'll stay in your perfect city home, with your perfect traffic--she didn't want to come back. And you hated everything about here didn't you, Scott. We talked about it. Every night. We sat with our noses almost touching and whispered about everything you hated here. I remember. So why'd you come?

He doesn't respond.

DANNIE

To vacation?

Nothing.

DANNIE

To get away?

Nothing.

DANNIE

To save your marriage?

Scott strokes the gun, a nervous tick. Dannie watches him, predatory.

DANNIE

That?

A pause. Scott remounts the gun.

SCOTT

Maybe to see if she's right. If someone else says I'm--

Another pause. Dannie goes nose to nose with him.

DANNIE

See, you're thinking it now. Does that mean I should be afraid of you like she is?

She takes her cup and pours some jack into the glass. Then she opens the fridge and searches for a Coke. Scott comes up quietly behind her. His entire front is pressed up against her back--the closeness of sex--not a neighbor. He reaches around her and pulls out a big liter Coke. He sets it on the counter and puts his hands on her shoulders. She shivers and leans back to him.

DANNIE

Are you happy?

SCOTT

Sure.

DANNIE

Do you love her?

SCOTT

Sure.

DANNIE

Did you shoot that deer on accident or on purpose.

SCOTT

Sure.

DANNIE

Are you angry?

SCOTT

Sure.

DANNIE

Do you remember?

SCOTT

What?

A silence. Michael enters at the top of the stairs and sees them. He clears his throat.

MICHAEL

Helpin' her find the Coke?

Dannie smiles up at him not breaking from Scott. She holds up the big Coke bottle.

DANNIE

Nope. Got it right here. Just gotta pour it.

MICHAEL

What's in the glass then?

Dannie leans further into Scott and turns to look at him.

DANNIE

Dr. Pepper. Making a suicide.

She winks at Scott.

MICHAEL

Cool. Can I have one?

DANNIE

No.

SCOTT

Sure.

DANNIE

No. We're out of Dr. Pepper.

MICHAEL

Took the last? You do that.

DANNIE

What's that supposed to mean?

MICHAEL

Nothing just--you didn't ask.

DANNIE

Do I always have to ask if someone wants what I want before taking it?

MICHAEL

Well you should. Or else things get awkward.

DANNIE

Oh, they do?

MICHAEL

Like what if you wanted the Dr. Pepper but I didn't want the Dr. Pepper but we had already agreed to share drinks. And then you're just forcing things on someone.

DANNIE

Like you?

MICHAEL

Yeah, like me.

DANNIE

You're being dumb.

MICHAEL

Well what would you say? If I wanted Coke and you got Dr. Pepper? Do you know how different those are? What would you say? What would you tell me?

DANNIE

You're being too picky.

MICHAEL

No. You *should* compromise. But, you never do.

DANNIE

You just like to get worked up.

Scott nods and takes a sip of Dannie's drink before handing it to Dannie. She takes a gulp of it.

MICHAEL

What? Not afraid of swapping spit?

DANNIE

Fuckin' goodie goodie.

Charlotte peeps her head out.

CHARLOTTE

Can you not?

Dannie downs her drink.

DANNIE

*Sure.*

Michael and Charlotte descend down the stairs.

SCOTT

Are they asleep?

CHARLOTTE

No--they're watching a movie.

SCOTT

A movie? Shouldn't they be--out playing or something?

CHARLOTTE

No--because a movie means at least two hours of quiet and that is good enough for me. So if you want to deal with them be my guest but I don't want to have to-

DANNIE

You know you're really lucky--

Everyone looks at Dannie.

CHARLOTTE

Who? Me?

DANNIE

Yeah--even though you fight a lot--you're really lucky.

CHARLOTTE

Um. Okay?

DANNIE

To have a husband who came back. Who went away, to war, and actually came back. I feel like most women/can't say that.

SCOTT

What are you doing?

CHARLOTTE

Guess I am.

DANNIE

And he's even fine. He looks just--well peachy I guess. Same ol' Scott he always was. Right? Except maybe I think one pupils wider than the other.

SCOTT

No, it's not.

MICHAEL

How would you know?

DANNIE

That's what happens when you're scared of something, right? Maybe it's what happens when you lie.

CHARLOTTE

We don't really like to talk about/ this.

DANNIE

He was telling me stories.

A pause.

CHARLOTTE

Scott?

Dannie coyly blushes.

DANNIE

I used to love your stories. When we'd sit outside and you'd let me sip out of your beer can and I'd get half tipsy enough to put my head on your lap. I did that after the two of you left. Pappie snored on his couch and the room was a fucking cavern of it and so I'd sit out there and I would think if I could go anywhere. If I could blink my eyes and vanish would I want to disappear to the hot white desert you holed away to and sip your beer and put my head down there? I bet'd be full of all the sticky promise of feeling important--and yeah--I just love your stories.

CHARLOTTE

What kind/ of stories?

DANNIE

He'd probably have lots to tell you if you didn't yell over him all the time.

MICHAEL

Dannie!

SCOTT

What are you doing?

DANNIE

Starting a conversation, aren't those just nice Charles, real conversations?

MICHAEL

You're crossing lines/ here Dan.

DANNIE

Camel eating spider stories--talking bout those too. Have you seen them? Scott said they take a whole chunk out of your leg--like the flesh just--melts. Said it was--what word did you use? "Cool."

CHARLOTTE

I've seen the pictures. Let's talk about something/ better.

DANNIE

Do you know the anatomy of how a person explodes?

MICHAEL

Jesus Christ Dan, you're being really rude.

DANNIE

(To Scott)

I just want to know. It's been--years. I feel like you've been kept at arms distance. You're close now. I want to reach out and know what it was like. People share things.

So share what it felt like with us. With me. What was "away from here" like?

SCOTT  
(To Dannie)

Boring.

CHARLOTTE  
(To Scott)

Really?

SCOTT  
(To Charlotte)

No.

A look of respect between Charlotte and Scott.

Thank you.

CHARLOTTE

You're welcome.

SCOTT

DANNIE

So that's it, that's what you do now? The two of you? You just sit around and talk about nothing all day? Or all the nothings you pretend not to know about?

CHARLOTTE  
What are you talking about?

Dan, forget it.

MICHAEL

DANNIE

I just don't understand how you can pretend to forget about the fact that he left! I would be mad! And I don't understand how you can forget about the fact that she left! Why is no one mad?

SCOTT  
Seems like you are.

DANNIE

I'm not, but your wife should be. And she's not, so does that mean, what?--She just didn't care enough?

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. Did I do something? Besides choose to go my way and leave Pappie here? I thought you were over being bitter, that we were adults. When I called your mom I thought that--

DANNIE

No. It's fine. I'm dumb. I'm sorry. I just--it's weird. It's like relearning people you knew so well and--the last time we were here Pappie was too. And now he's not so I feel like I have to speak for him to you--I have years of his missing you and It's gotta come out some way.

SCOTT

People die.

DANNIE

I know that.

CHARLOTTE

When things change. It's hard.

DANNIE

I know that.

A pause.

DANNIE

What did you do? When he was gone? When Scott left. Pappie was the man in my life--so how do you--how do you not have--a person--anymore.

CHARLOTTE

I raised the girls.

SCOTT

--and Jackson.

CHARLOTTE

Right. And I talked to friends. And I--

DANNIE

Didn't come home. You could've couldn't you?

CHARLOTTE

I was working.

DANNIE

Right.

CHARLOTTE

I wrote to him a lot. I guess, like Scott apparently wrote you.

SCOTT

Did you?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah I wrote you letters. I didn't send them.

SCOTT

What'd you do with them?

CHARLOTTE

Burned them after I wrote them.

DANNIE

Burned them?

MICHAEL

This isn't your fight, okay?

He grabs her arm gently trying to pull her back.

DANNIE

Why would you--why? He wanted them.

To Scott.

Didn't you? Wouldn't you? You're the kind of man who would wait for them right? For that kind of commitment? So why would you just--get rid of them?

MICHAEL

Let's...just calm down. Please?

CHARLOTTE

Cause they were nothing.

SCOTT

Nothing?

DANNIE

They were nothing? He was gone and the letters you wrote to him were nothing?

MICHAEL

Dannie.

DANNIE

No, do you know how many people in my life have walked out doors? I have an actual fear of door hinges, and door frames, and the squeaking noise they make because so many of the people I love have turned around and said--well I could cross this threshold or I could fight to stay put. And guess what, no one ever fights to stay put. So when you have someone who may return? Well, why the fuck would the letters that might have gotten him back meant nothing?

SCOTT

I don't understand it. Charles I--how could you--

There's a pause.

CHARLOTTE

There's nothing to understand it was my choice.

SCOTT

What'd you write that I couldn't read?

CHARLOTTE

Nothing.

SCOTT

Must've been something.

CHARLOTTE

Well it wasn't, okay? So don't worry about it.

Dannie laughs.

DANNIE

Oh. No ones worried. Not anymore. You've lost that opportunity.

An awkward pause.

MICHAEL

Dannie...let's just...come on.

She doesn't answer.

MICHAEL

Please?

She doesn't answer. He sighs and scrubs his face.

MICHAEL

Do you want anything?

He tries to pull her up and away. When she doesn't budge he goes to the kitchen. He clatters around like he's looking for something.

SCOTT

Did you save any of them?

CHARLOTTE

Maybe?

SCOTT

Can I read them?

CHARLOTTE

No.

SCOTT

What'd you write?

DANNIE

How scared she was that you were gonna love something more than this, like she loved something more than Pappie. The people who get left behind resent the ones who go.

MICHAEL

Would you stop it? You are really exhausting do you know that? Can you just leave her alone?

DANNIE

I won't.

CHARLOTTE

It's really not your place to ask me about these things. You're part of my history but I cut that part out so let me--

DANNIE

Also cut out the man who went and sacrificed everything because getting shot at was better than you ostracizing him from here? From me. From us.

SCOTT

Dannie--enough.

DANNIE

But you and I both--

SCOTT

Dannie.

A pause.

SCOTT

You're acting like the kid I used to know.

DANNIE

But you did *used* to know.

Dannie smiles like saccharin cyanide,  
stands and goes to the back door.

MICHAEL

Where are you going?

DANNIE

To *play*.

She exits and goes back to jumping on  
the trampoline.

We see her through the bay window-- almost as if she's trying to take off and fly. Scott can't help but watch her.

MICHAEL

She's been having a hard time.

CHARLOTTE

I know.

MICHAEL

She doesn't understand why everyone leaves this place--

He looks at Scott.

MICHAEL

She feels like an idiot for being here, and she feels like an idiot every time someone says "see you later".

SCOTT

It's childish.

MICHAEL

Well, yeah.

SCOTT

And stupid.  
Because things don't go the way she wants them.

MICHAEL

Yeah--losing people, the come and go of it....it's shit. I get it. She feels left here, and stuck here, and rooted to a thing doomed to be left behind when the world explodes.

Scott scoffs.

SCOTT

But you're still gonna leave her? Right?

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

SCOTT

This was never long term before--I know boys. I know what a senior is looking at and it's not a girlfriend to marry. You sleep around. You fuck her/ but it's not for the long term. And it never was.

CHARLOTTE

Scott!

MICHAEL

I love her.

You love her? SCOTT

Sure. MICHAEL

How much? SCOTT

Enough. MICHAEL

You going to college next year? SCOTT

Um. Yeah. Probably. MICHAEL

Is it in town? SCOTT

No. MICHAEL

Then would you leave her? If something came up? If you got those scouts and scholarships. SCOTT

Bull/ shit. MICHAEL

No, If someone tells you you're worth a college tuition. Would you go? SCOTT

Yeah, maybe. MICHAEL

A pause.

Probably. MICHAEL

Well--congratulations. I guess that makes you an actual adult. And it's why she's still the petulant little kid who was so mad when I'd tell her to go home instead of letting her sleep over at pappie's. She's not someone who knows how to turn around and leave. SCOTT

I don't want to be--I won't just go. I'll be the better man. I'll say goodbye. MICHAEL

SCOTT

That's the duct tape that rips off the skin.

Michael nods and exits the kitchen to go to Dannie. He sits on the edge of the trampoline watching her jump.

A silence.

SCOTT

She's right.

CHARLOTTE

What.

SCOTT

Too many people don't come home, for you to have not sent those letters.

CHARLOTTE

We talked.

SCOTT

We lied.

CHARLOTTE

What was I supposed to even say to you? It was day to day. I think we talked more about your diet than anything. I didn't know how to say--oh your daughters are fighting all the time. They're getting older, saying no to me. Your son has become an inch long turtle whose shell is so deep that sometimes I have to hide in it myself to find him. He's seven. He's seven and the only times he would talk to me were when I was crying about you being away.

SCOTT

Because he hurt too! So you didn't think to cheer him up? You didn't think a letter from his father would make him smile? Especially if they were to his mom?

CHARLOTTE

No. I didn't. Because most of my letters just said "Don't come home." So what would you have responded?

SCOTT

Well, I'd probably be pretty fucking pissed off.

CHARLOTTE

So I didn't send them!

SCOTT

I missed you.

CHARLOTTE

You left me. You don't get to miss me too. I was too busy being mad at you to hear shallow man "you miss me's". To think about you. When I said stay--and you just--You didn't miss me. How could you when you've been back and every turn you make is to hurt me.

SCOTT

It's really not.

CHARLOTTE

It sure feels that way.

She touches his cheek.

You're taking your anger out for something. I just don't know what. You won't let me in.

SCOTT

I let you in as much as you let me in--before you decided to burn what you were feeling when I left. She's right Charles. We don't talk about it. Why don't we talk about it? What if I want to talk about it? Bagram, Bagram, BAGRAM, bagram! BAGRAM, BAGRAM! THERE! I want to talk about it! Say it. BAGRAM, BAGRAM, BAGRAM!

CHARLOTTE

You're too angry to talk about it.

SCOTT

I'm not.

CHARLOTTE

You are!

SCOTT

I'm not!

CHARLOTTE

You scare me sometimes. You just stare. And look mad, you yell. And you wake up yelling. If you're not angry about it why do you yell in your sleep all the time?

SCOTT

That's a fucking reflex. You can't control that.

CHARLOTTE

And if you can't control that? Can you control the rest of you? You hit things.

SCOTT

Like walls.

CHARLOTTE

Walls come first.

SCOTT

So what? You're saying you come next?

CHARLOTTE

No--actually that deer came next.

A pause.

SCOTT

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah.

SCOTT

So you think that--that the deer was an act of--

CHARLOTTE

I think. That you're angrier than you think you are. And I think if we talk about it--it's not gonna get better it's gonna get worse. And I'm afraid that one day you won't just yell in your sleep--but you'll sleep walk. And what happens when you sleep walk on the same floor as our three kids--and one of them is someone totally different in your head--because you aren't here with me. Not really. You're in Bagram.

SCOTT

Stop making me feel guilty for doing nothing. Charles. I can't not live--

CHARLOTTE

But can't you just--let's be quiet. Go to the couples retreat. Start over. Pretend we just got married.

SCOTT

The kids/ know.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, well you left--those are your bridges to un-burn not mine.

SCOTT

Wow.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't mean it like that.

SCOTT

Like what? Like you think I destroyed the life we had.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I sure as hell am not the one who fled the country.

SCOTT

I just--I needed to--

CHARLOTTE

Why didn't you stay when I asked.

SCOTT

Because.

CHARLOTTE

Not good enough.

A pause. He doesn't answer her.

But somehow I'm still here, aren't I?

Scott laughs, burying his face in his hands.

SCOTT

You don't have a lot of faith in me do you?

CHARLOTTE

Are you serious?

SCOTT

Dead.

CHARLOTTE

Faith? Faith is everything I've given you, the fact that I'm still here when you said you would be, for me, through all that bullshit when we got married. Then a few months later ranting and screaming signing military forms that you never okayed with me, saying "I'm out" when I was pregnant. And so I cried. And I waited, because you gave me one choice: to believe in you.

And when you took off I'd find pieces of clothes you left in our apartment it was like looking at the fucking Shroud of Turin, Scott. I had nothing but faith. I have nothing but incessant ridiculously large amounts of faith that we can start completely over and wipe the unease and...what was it--the antsy feeling you have out of your system. If anyone has been the fucking doubting Thomas of the two of us it's you when you went over seas because you were more concerned with us having money, and not being able to support each other than you were with the love that might have fucking gotten at least me through--but it wasn't enough for you. The nail is in my fucking finger, where the ring you put on it is, and it's all of my faith. You're the one who's fallen out. I've been here the whole time. Where have you been? Shooting deer with arrows, yelling at walls, hitting tables, jumping on trampolines with sixteen year old girls who are fire hot to crucify me--being a different man then the one that I was baptized in faith for. You're the one who changed--you're the fucking Judas.

She stands and grabs a glass of wine she drains the contents before throwing it at him. This one he doesn't catch. This one shatters.

SCOTT

Charlotte!

Scott punches the table in front of him. Dannie enters with Michael following behind her. Scott pokes Dannie's chest making her take a step back.

SCOTT

You can't just cross lines like that.

He goes out the door slamming it behind him and takes the knife to the deer. Finally gutting it he tears at it viciously. Dannie starts to follow but Michael grabs her arm stopping her.

MICHAEL

We should go.

DANNIE

No. Hell no. This is my home more than it's theirs. This was my haven.

MICHAEL

Everyone's--mad.

DANNIE

That doesn't change. Everyone's always mad.

MICHAEL

You're fighting at battles that haven't been there for three years. You can let it go.

DANNIE

And what happens if I can't. You just let *me* go. You just walk away? Would you do what they did to me?

MICHAEL

Of course/ not.

DANNIE

Because I think you would.

MICHAEL

What happened? Why are you like a stray? It's like you've been kicked in the ribs and you're just waiting to bite anyone and everyone who walks in front of you with pity in their face.

Dannie doesn't respond.

MICHAEL

I'm not going. I'm not leaving. I'm here for you.

DANNIE

The membrane on your promise is so paper thin, that I think at this point it's see through. You're see through. I could stick my hand right through you if I wanted.

MICHAEL

Keep biting, but I came. I'm still in this room. Even if you have been pushing me away. I'm listening just--why? Why are you so--

DANNIE

What?

MICHAEL

Aggressive.

Dannie laughs.

DANNIE

I don't think you'd believe me. If I told you...

MICHAEL

Maybe not.

DANNIE

Excuse me?

MICHAEL

Well...

DANNIE

Wait, really?!

MICHAEL

It's just--

DANNIE

You told me to tell you why I feel, how I feel, but you're not even going to pretend to believe me? Why cause I'm a kid?

MICHAEL

I just--I know what you spin about Charlotte and she's...she's just not necessarily as awful as you've made her/ become.

DANNIE

This has nothing to do with Charlotte.

MICHAEL

You might want to tell her that, because the way you've been/ attacking--

DANNIE

I--I mean it--

A pause.

DANNIE

It does. Kind of.

MICHAEL

You are so...*frustrating*.

Michael rubs his face in his hands, trying to scrub away his anger.

MICHAEL

Dan. I'm not going. I'm right here. And even though your dad goes, your mom goes, your next door neighbors go--I've been here this whole time.

DANNIE

Cause you have to be.

MICHAEL

So let me make the choice to stick around for you.

She doesn't answer him.

MICHAEL

(Exhausted, exasperated)

Fine. Be mad. Bite people.

DANNIE

I don't want to--I'm not--I'm not doing it on purpose.

A pause.

DANNIE

I used to hide in closets a lot. I don't like--crowds. I feel swallowed by them. And bathrooms smell, and people knock--but in a closet, well nobody thinks to look in the closet. And so I'd sit underneath the rack and let coats hide me and it was like a cocoon.

That's where I was when they got married, Charlotte and Scott. I hid in the church closet. I didn't like the--there were bells, and people applauding, and Pappie kept coughing and there were so many sounds that I just really had to get out of there.

You know how when you put a pillow over your head and scream, it sounds twice as loud--but to everyone else you're muffled? Well that's how--my thoughts are just really loud so I thought the hiding would make them stop. Because my thoughts were secret and bad. And mad. And I couldn't stop them.

"Charlotte shouldn't be happy. Pappie's a better father than my own. I'd rather have a dead mother than a drunk one. Scott is mine."

Scott is *mine*.

And yeah. So that last one was really bad. So I tucked it in one of the coats and said I was gonna let it go, but then-- When a door handle to a kid's closet turns you expect two things. The first is a monster. The second is the person you most desperately want to see.

And when the door handle to my hiding spot turned. It was both.

MICHAEL

Both? Who--who was it?

He nervously looks out to where Scott's gutting the deer.

DANNIE

I won't say it.

MICHAEL

What? Why not?

DANNIE

I just won't.

MICHAEL

You can't tell me something like this and then--

DANNIE

It was both, okay. Michael. And that's all you need to know. It was both of the options. And then I wasn't hidden anymore and he--

A pause.

MICHAEL

Dannie?

She stares outside at Scott.

MICHAEL

Are you saying that--what are you even--what are you saying?

She doesn't respond.

MICHAEL

Dannie?!

He shakes her and she snaps.

DANNIE

Don't do that!

MICHAEL

What did he do?

DANNIE

Nothing.

MICHAEL

What did he--

Dannie shushes him and puts a finger over his lips. She kisses the very corner of his mouth, half cheek, almost a real kiss. She heads for the door to Scott.

MICHAEL

You're really not gonna talk to me?

She opens the door. He growls frustrated.

MICHAEL

You're so fucked up.

He heads up the stairs to the kids rooms. Dannie goes over to where Scott is. He rips at the deer. He's got blood all over his hands. He's furious, tired, with tears in his eyes. Dannie touches his shoulders stopping him. He looks at her.

SCOTT

You crossed a line. With Charlotte. We don't talk about that. We don't talk about Bagram--we don't talk about dust and dirt--we don't talk about blood--and we sure as hell don't talk about the fact that I'm the one who left her.

DANNIE

We used to talk about everything.

SCOTT

We used to talk about wishes. There's a lot more to this place than empty wishes.

DANNIE

But they were ours--together.

SCOTT

No they weren't. They were yours. Little kid fantasies. That I said okay to.

Dannie looks crest fallen.

SCOTT

I'm sorry I didn't mean that.

He puts his hand underneath her chin and lifts her face to his.

SCOTT

How can I be angry when you look like you're about to cry.

A pause. He sizes her up.

SCOTT

I missed you, kid. I can't stay mad at you.

She takes his bloody hands, and holds them, now both of their hands are bloody with the gutted deer. A macabre sight. She takes Scott's hands and kisses them. He pulls away from her, but not far enough to be actually trying to get away.

SCOTT

What are you doing?

DANNIE

Do you remember? I told you I did. But do you? I've been holding my breath praying--hoping--do you remember?

SCOTT

What?

DANNIE

It's been three years. A lot changes, but even after crossing seas, and hating a marriage you still seem like the man I knew. You still seem like a broken person. And I'm a broken person too. Fucked up. So do you remember?

A pause.

DANNIE

Come on, Scott!

SCOTT

What? Do I remember what?

DANNIE

What I looked like waiting for you--waiting for you in a church closet like you were Jesus himself.

Scott doesn't respond, but his head is slowly unintentionally inclining towards Dannie's.

DANNIE

I told him. I told Michael.

She leans her head to his. They are barely a breath away from a kiss.

DANNIE

I told him how you opened that door to the closet--  
I told him how you kissed me.

Scott looks like he's been slapped in the face. He grabs Dannie quickly, fiercely, and abruptly with bloody hands getting it all over her small shirt. Black out on the two of them outside.

END ACT 1

## ACT II

Charlotte sits on the top step of the stairs with her head buried in her hands. Michael comes and sits next to her.

MICHAEL

Um--Mrs. Weston?

CHARLOTTE

At this point...just call me Charlotte, Michael. It's fine. Our dirty laundry is out.

MICHAEL

I feel bad, I didn't mean to--

CHARLOTTE

Witness that? A thing that happens every damn minute of every damn day. Don't worry about it. There was no escaping it. There's no escaping anything that ever happens here. It's all shoved in your face with a healthy dose of guilt and anger.

MICHAEL

I still--I just--I wanted to apologize. For--

CHARLOTTE

Do you apologize for her a lot?

MICHAEL

I mean...I guess so. But it's my job.

CHARLOTTE

No. Michael. It's really not. Make your own mistakes before you let her dictate them.

Charlotte laughs and growls simultaneously burying her face in her hands again.

CHARLOTTE

Am I an idiot?

MICHAEL

What?

CHARLOTTE

For trying. For trying with Scott, for trying to be nice. I spent years of my life trying to get away from what made me unhappy, and now I'm spending years of my life fighting to keep them? Does that make me an idiot?

MICHAEL

I keep Dannie around, and she gives insults out like paper cuts.

Charlotte scoffs. Michael pauses.

MICHAEL

So if you're an idiot. I guess I'm one too.

Charlotte cackle laughs.

Charlotte

What is this prison we're stuck in? We're sure as hell not sticking around 'cause they're nice.

Charlotte tries to stifle the laugh.

Charlotte

I'm sorry. You just--no one deserves to handle the kind of hate the two of them have managed to hold on to. It's draining. Aren't you tired? I'm tired.

Michael

Yeah. I am.

CHARLOTTE

Hell, I'm exhausted.

A pause.

But you don't have to be.

MICHAEL

Mrs. Weston...I--

CHARLOTTE

You seem like a good boy--you seem like someone with a good head. So get out. Get out while you still can.

MICHAEL

With Dannie or with here?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know, both. It's jaded cynical advice. I know her mother--I know what she can become and she's headed straight to that way, and I know how this place is relentless in making you stay and I wouldn't wish that amount of being stuck on my worst enemy. Let alone a sweet little boy who has the chance to actually try and be young and full of something other than Southern bullshit.

MICHAEL

I think you might be biased.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah maybe.

MICHAEL

I also think you may be right.

There's a long pause.

MICHAEL

It's hard--loving an unhappy person.

Charlotte smiles, the kind of smile that comes from someone who knows they're losing.

Charlotte

I'm always surprised. By kids...you know? Not once was I aware of my--*sadness*, especially not when I was that little. But y'all are all so in tune with your problems and I'm always surprised...by how aware kids seem, when I'm still lost trying to figure out how the adults in the room are feeling.

A pause.

MICHAEL

How are you feeling?

CHARLOTTE

Like no one ever asks me that anymore. And like I don't even know.

She sighs, long and deep.

It's always quieter after the fight.

MICHAEL

Yeah--I guess. I'm used to the kind of people who continuously scream everything. Scream to win, otherwise there's no victory waiting on the other side.

CHARLOTTE

That's sad.

MICHAEL

So is quiet.

CHARLOTTE

Not talking about things--avoiding things--it can get lonely.

A pause.

The way Scott looks at everyone but me--it can get lonely.

MICHAEL

He's not looking at everyone.

Charlotte  
(Barely smiling, she knows what she's asking)  
Then who do you think he's looking at?

MICHAEL  
I'm not saying that--

He can't finish his sentence. Charlotte  
pats his hand tenderly.

CHARLOTTE  
Michael--relax. I get it.

A pause as Michael considers telling.

MICHAEL  
How do you--how do you try and separate what you know as good  
Scott, from bad Scott?

CHARLOTTE  
What are you saying?

MICHAEL  
Well...you said. Part of him is different. That's bad Scott,  
new Scott, strange Scott. So on days when he has those  
moments, and then kisses you to make up for it...how can you  
differentiate between the good and the bad.

CHARLOTTE  
It's hard to...or you don't.

MICHAEL  
Dannie does that. She says things sometimes and I...well,  
it's a really weird feeling being scared of a person you  
love.

CHARLOTTE  
That's not okay.

MICHAEL  
You're right it's not. But you feel it too, right?

A pause.  
I need to--Dannie said/ something...

CHARLOTTE  
Dannie has always been one who says a lot of things. She's  
the kind of girl who gets raised out of the earth here.  
Little girls so bored with kicking dust up that they kick  
shit up instead.

MICHAEL  
I don't know that she's kicking up anything that wasn't  
already there.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

I mean that what if she's not just trying to...hurt you? People who're hurt bite more often than the ones who're healed.

CHARLOTTE

Well, forgive me if I say I don't really care.

MICHAEL

Well you don't have to but--

CHARLOTTE

But what?

MICHAEL

Nothing I just...what Dannie told me. You might want/ to know.

CHARLOTTE

I want, to know why I feel attacked. I want to know why my husband sides with everyone but me, and I want to know why he's so--aggressive. But what's funny is--I think I already know why.

MICHAEL

Really?

Charlotte growls and rubs her face.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know. I'm frustrated. I want him to be--him again. So yeah...I think I know why...but if I think I know that then there's not a lot of love left is there?

MICHAEL

I can't tell you this.

CHARLOTTE

But you still need to tell me Michael--only because if you don't... Aren't we always better at trusting the bad than we are at hoping for the good?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

CHARLOTTE

Okay.

MICHAEL

Okay?

She sighs.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah. Okay. Tell me.

MICHAEL

Really? But I--I don't want to--it's not my thing to tell.

CHARLOTTE

We spend so much time avoiding saying real things, and then when we have real things to say--we feel like they're not ours.

MICHAEL

It's gonna make the silence worse.

CHARLOTTE

I know that.

Michael hesitates.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry if this hurts.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, it will--  
Just--tell me. Please Michael. If you don't--I'll make something up. And it'll be horrific in comparison.

MICHAEL

It might not be.

Charlotte looks up sharply at Michael. She takes his hand and squeezes it reassuringly.

CHARLOTTE

Okay.

Lights up on Dannie and Scott. The moment picks up right where it left off--only now there is space between Dannie and Scott and they're not touching. Not even a little. Dannie's smiling, superior.

DANNIE

You're surprised face looks like a fish. You could at least try and look put together. What did you think was gonna happen?

SCOTT

I need you to be clear. What did you tell him? What are you talking about?

DANNIE

You're so good at pretending. I always loved that. You could play with me. Keep up. Imagine the things that I wanted and feed them to me in spoonfuls, you were like a best friend, you are that. Because you can pretend like me that you're okay, when you're not.

SCOTT

Dannie, not a game. What did you tell, Michael. What is he telling Charlotte.

Dannie giggles. She tries to take Scott's hand.

SCOTT

Dannie--really stop it.

DANNIE

There was one time I touched your hand--just barely touched it and, you blushed. You actually blushed and I never really thought I could feel--sympathy for people--like feel the weird anxieties they were feeling--but when you blushed I blushed too, and I felt hot, and warm, and I knew that you got it. You understood me. And I understood you--and I never seem to understand people.

SCOTT

That's sociopath territory.

Dannie laughs.

DANNIE

But I felt you--I felt you. That makes me, normal.

SCOTT

Dannie, I don't know what you're--

DANNIE

I'm not a fucking idiot, Scott. You kissed me and then told me not to tell anyone.

SCOTT

We're friends.

DANNIE

Is that how you shut up all the little girls you kiss?

SCOTT

Is this part of your game? Are you trying to make me the monster to keep yourself entertained.

DANNIE

Oh, fuck you!

SCOTT

You told me. You told me how you tick, Dannie. So don't try and lie to me. Don't try and make me a game. We're friends.

DANNIE

I waited for you. All your letters, everything you said asking me about my days, asking me about my family--you were there for me. And I've been here for you. Everybody leaves this fucking truck stop but I am the only person who doesn't. I am the only person who has wanted to stay until you could come back home for me.

SCOTT

This isn't my home.

DANNIE

But *I'm* here.

SCOTT

I came back for Charlotte. I came back for my wife. You've gotten some kind of make-believe in your head and it's--it's just a lie.

DANNIE

No it's not! It's true! It's our true! Everything I ever thought of you was as real as real gets, Scott. I swear. And that's okay.

She pauses. Seductively grabbing the front of his shirt.

DANNIE

It really is okay--I promise.

She is moments from his lips.

DANNIE

Kiss me again. It's okay, cause I want you to this time. I'm ready for you this time.

Dannie leans into Scott trying to kiss him. He grabs at her with his hands tussling with her, in the process blood gets all over her shirt, in platonic and intimate places.

SCOTT

I trusted you and you do this?

Scott shoves past Dannie and into the house just as a furious Charlotte and Michael are charging down the stairs.

SCOTT

Charlotte! CHARLOTTE!

DANNIE

Why do you sound so mad? Don't be mad at me, please?

CHARLOTTE

You what? Scott--you WHAT?

SCOTT

I don't know what the fuck she's talking about.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, really? Because that sounds like complete bullshit.

A pause like a slap to the face.

SCOTT

You believe her?

DANNIE

Of course she would.

SCOTT

Shut up you do not get to talk/ here.

CHARLOTTE

Neither do you, Scott!

SCOTT

This is so obviously a little girl's lie.

MICHAEL

Dannie did he/ do anything?

SCOTT

Oh my god. What are you insinuating, what are you. Dannie you actually would say I--

A pause. Dannie looks down. Hiding her face.

DANNIE

(A barely perceptible smile)

But you did.

Dannie fake cry sniffles.

CHARLOTTE

That blood on your shirt...

They all look at Dannie's shirt.  
There's blood splatters from the deer  
around her breast. On her waist.

There's blood in new places. Charlotte looks at Scott, betrayed.

CHARLOTTE

Did you--did you--the blood. That's on your hands. Scott that's from your hands.

SCOTT

Well yeah, but Charles I--

CHARLOTTE

--so what? You touched her? You--TOUCHED her?

SCOTT

It's just the deer blood.

Scott holds up his bloody hands in defense.

SCOTT

It's on her hands too. Dannie, tell her. Tell her you're lying.

DANNIE

I'm not though. You kissed me.

Charlotte sits.

CHARLOTTE

I'm gonna throw up--I'm--and this has happened before?

DANNIE

Yes.

SCOTT

No.

MICHAEL

She told me it had. She told me about the--

Dannie cringes.

DANNIE

You won't even say it? You won't come to my defense?

MICHAEL

I just. It's not mine to tell.

DANNIE

Fucking coward. You can't even stand up for me. You won't fuck me, and now you won't even--help me?

MICHAEL

Excuse me?

DANNIE

You heard me! You're a coward. I've told you, you can have all of me if you want and you just say no and walk away every time cause you're too afraid to touch me. You won't even defend your fucking girlfriend.

MICHAEL

Do you need to be stood up for? It seems like you're good at taking it on the chin.

DANNIE

What's that supposed to mean?

MICHAEL

Just--I don't want to talk/ about it.

Dannie laughs.

DANNIE

No one wants to talk about anything! Charlotte won't talk about her betrayal, Scott won't talk about his, and when I try and bring it up you shut it down--still won't talk about it, huh?

She waits. Michael doesn't respond.  
Scott looks to Charlotte.

DANNIE

(To Charlotte)

You were too busy planning how to use him to escape to notice that he was happy here. To notice how he smiled when he would play outside--with me. You were too busy using him as a strategy to avoid facing the death of your grandfather to notice that he spent that time with me--talking to me--caring about me. And on the day you got married, he found me, alone, and he kissed me. Right there--before he helped you escape.

Charlotte turns on Scott and lunges at him.

CHARLOTTE

You--I don't know you!

Michael stops her and holds her back from Scott. She struggles against him.

CHARLOTTE

Let go of me! Let go of--

MICHAEL

How'd he kiss you, Dan?

DANNIE

What?

CHARLOTTE

Please. I don't want to know.

SCOTT

You don't even believe/ me for a second?

CHARLOTTE

A lot's hard to believe--you going to war was hard to believe--you leaving me with children is hard to believe--maybe I'm getting a little bit better at believing the kind of man I'm looking at.

MICHAEL

No. Dan...

To Dannie.

How'd he kiss you?

DANNIE

He just did.

SCOTT

I wouldn't have--you were--fuck, you were a thirteen year old.

Charlotte holds back a gag.

MICHAEL

Was it on the/ mouth?

CHARLOTTE

Stop. Just stop!

MICHAEL

Was it on the hand?

DANNIE

It was/ on the mouth.

SCOTT

The cheek. I've kissed your cheek before. I told you I'd miss you. I kissed your cheek. Because that's what you do. That's what you do when you care about someone, a kid. That's what you do when you tuck them in, and tell them stories, and protect them, and yeah--love them. Dannie I loved you like a friend, like my own little sister. So the day I got married and saw you looking dejected and sad and put off by me--and scared--I kissed your cheek. And you were so sweet, and my heart broke. How do you not kiss the cheek of someone who looks like their hearts have been totally defeated--but it was innocent/ I swear.

CHARLOTTE

You have asked a lot of things of me in our marriage. But I think the very last thing you have the right to do now, is force me to listen. I will not--listen to you.

SCOTT

Please. Charles, it's me. You know me.

CHARLOTTE

I know that my 16 year old kid neighbor has blood on her shirt in places that someone must have grabbed her. I know my husband was watching that neighbor outside on the trampoline. And I know that my husband is a different man then he was when he left for Bagram. I know that maybe he's been different since the day we got married. I think I've always known that. And now I think I know/ why.

SCOTT

Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Enough. This is all...enough.

Charlotte stands and goes into the kitchen. She runs her hands under the faucet. The sound of the barely running water is heard. She looks catatonic as she perpetually washes her hands.

Dannie gets up on the trampoline and starts to bounce. Her face is emotionless. She bounces for eons. Scott stares a solemn man into the house, while Michael looks at Dannie horrified.

DANNIE

Come here, Scott.

Scott doesn't answer. She pouts.

DANNIE

Please? For me?

He still doesn't respond. Dannie looks at Michael. She rolls her eyes at him and jumps even higher.

MICHAEL

What do you think you're doing?

DANNIE

Jumping.

MICHAEL  
You can't--you can't just jump.

DANNIE  
Why not?

MICHAEL  
You just--you admitted--aren't you--don't you want to leave?

DANNIE  
No.

MICHAEL  
No?! He's--He's right--

DANNIE  
My house too. Pappie said I could come here when I wanted.  
And--I want to.

MICHAEL  
I just told Charlotte that/ you said--

DANNIE  
What I told you?

Michael looks at Dannie in utter disbelief.

MICHAEL  
You're--you're--

He rubs his face exasperated.

MICHAEL  
I can't---I really can't believe...

He grabs her arm fiercely.

MICHAEL  
Get down from there.

DANNIE  
No.

MICHAEL  
Get the fuck down from there.

DANNIE  
I don't really want too.

Michael pulls her off of the trampoline hard. She stumbles into him. She shirks away his touch. It bothers her.

MICHAEL

No, you don't get to respond like that--you don't get to shy away from me, because of..because of...

A pause.

Are you lying?

DANNIE

What?

MICHAEL

You heard me, are you lying?

DANNIE

Why would you think so?

MICHAEL

I don't know Dannie, you're fucking jumping around on a trampoline like it's time for recess!

DANNIE

It helps me think.

MICHAEL

Really?! You're fucking lying about this?!

DANNIE

That's a little harsh, Michael.

A pause. Michael's face is getting redder and redder. He squeezes her arm painfully.

DANNIE

(Emotionless)

Ouch, You're hurting me.

MICHAEL

You talked about him.

DANNIE

I talk about a lot of people, Michael.

MICHAEL

I'm such a hopeless idiot. You talked about him. Often. Incessantly. Always. Rambling on and on about the man who went away to war and how fucking...good he was.

DANNIE

I talk about a lot of people. Not just Scott.

MICHAEL

But you never hold them in your mouth like you held him. I felt gross, when you asked to sleep with me.

Because somehow it felt like it had this in it. It felt like you wanted to forget something--like you couldn't stand yourself.

DANNIE

Yeah sure, you just couldn't handle/ it.

Scott finally stops pining after Charlotte. His fury pulls him sharply to Dannie.

SCOTT

Is this what it's all about/ that Michael wouldn't sleep with you? You feel rejected?

MICHAEL

So are you lying? Are you so fucked up--are you so bored here--so broken here--so left behind here that you would do something like this?

A pause.

MICHAEL

Even if you're not. You wanted it to be him. You wanted him to open that door. So if he did--if he kissed you--if he wants you does that really make it any better?

Dannie doesn't respond.

MICHAEL

This whole time, you're not mad because she left Pappie. You're mad because he left you, because you're stuck here and he followed her. He didn't stick around for you--and you see the crack. You're like a roach. Bending and contorting your body-- breaking your back, exploiting the only crack in their marriage that your antennae can feel out. And you've got it. Damn, do you have it, and so you're nesting there, spreading your roots out in this little sliver of Bagram, of morbidity and sadness hoping you can fucking tear him apart so that he'll come back to you. That was it the first time right? You were the sad little abused girl with a shitty family life, and he was the sad little boy coming back to a life he could've almost had nothing to do with and you, what? You bonded? The two of you found each other. And so you loved him because he was like you. And you've spent three years hoping. And now that he's returned it's stronger than ever, your eyes are so wide being mothlike to the light of the--I don't know, almost indescribable joy you feel going to him.--that you can't see yourself careening to your own blind destruction. You're desperately hoping that he'll see the same kind of fucked up that's living in you and he'll live there too. And so you've found the crack--and now it's a matter of tearing down the brick.

DANNIE

Why'd you tell his wife if you don't believe me?

MICHAEL

Because I want to. I want to believe you. Don't you get that! I am so eager to believe you. All of my body knows it's bullshit but I'm still over here clinging to the hope that my girlfriend couldn't be a coddled little monster.

A pause. Michael hesitates before he touches Dannie, the touch becomes a grab. Before long he's shaking her.

MICHAEL

You couldn't...could you? You couldn't be like this.

She doesn't respond.

MICHAEL

You just can't--because how do you begin to love someone who--you're not like this. I can't let you be like this.

DANNIE

Be what, manipulative--pry at people till they break--you've said that's in me before.

Dannie looks at Scott.

DANNIE

But then again they've told you, you have it in you to do awful things. So...

She yanks her arm away from Michael.

DANNIE

Whose perception of monster outweighs whose?

Dannie goes over to the trampoline and jumps on it. Scott and Michael are left analyzing each other.

SCOTT

I swear I didn't--

MICHAEL

(To Dannie)

Perception? Or what's really there?

Dannie starts to respond. Michael holds up a hand. He goes into the house. Scott takes the knife he was using to gut the deer and gouges it into the carcass. He growls in frustration.

DANNIE

It sucks, doesn't it? When people shut you up--because your innocence, your youth, your juvenility prevents you from having anything valid to say. Like you're just raising your hand in the corner and hoping they'll pick on you--but by the time they do--you've lost your voice anyway so you're just stuck in the room without a single argument to prove your worth jack-shit to the one person you want to please most.

She jumps up and down, She runs her hand seductively from her stomach to just under her crop top.

DANNIE

It sucks, when you don't get looked at twice, because your freckles make cute instead of ugly, because your hair deserves pigtails and softens your face, because your breasts are flat and worthless to men. You're a joke of a body stretched out for everyone to speculate at--to discuss--if you've grown the right way. And if you haven't--well it sucks to be thrown out with the trash.

She reaches under her shirt, her hand half buried.

DANNIE

It sucks when people's expectations, projections, of you are enough to ruin your honesty. I guess Charlotte thinks my victimized little girl, is more honest than your good man. Or maybe it's the other way around, her expectation of your fucked up violent war vet outweighs her memory of the Scott that I keep with me every day.

No one speaks. Just the sound of her bouncing up and down.

DANNIE

You underestimated me. When you kissed me--you underestimated how far I could go to get you back. And it's so easy when people are ready to believe the worst.

Scott starts to move towards her, but instead of attacking he sags in defeat on the side of the trampoline. He buries his head in his hands. Dannie laughs at him.

DANNIE

Bullshit--you're really gonna let them ostrich you into a corner, bury your head while they whisper what they think you are behind your back without consulting you?

SCOTT

Dannie, stop.

DANNIE

People tell me what I am to my face, Scott. Because I want it that way. Fucked up, left behind, messed up alcoholic little loser who has zero friends and a bad attitude to prove it. They say it to my face, because I can fucking stand there and take it, I won't wilt, I won't sag, and I won't fucking run away when things get hard!

SCOTT

SHUT UP!

With Scott's head buried in his hands he starts to laugh. Slow and methodically, and like a man who's been on fire and is just now realizing he's burning.

SCOTT

You're so sorry.

DANNIE

Why are you laughing?

SCOTT

And you don't even realize--

Scott laughs harder.

SCOTT

Oh man, you're the kind of kid who puts themselves in time-out to make the parents feel worse.

Scott is howling with laughter.

DANNIE

I don't get it. Stop laughing. Stop--

SCOTT

You're so contrite. So--shamefaced.

Scott laughs so hard she can't get words out. Dannie flips out and slaps him across the face hard. Scorned lover.

DANNIE

Don't you dare fucking laugh at me.

Scott stops laughing.

SCOTT

You're so sorry and you don't even realize it. You're so young and so apologetic for everything you do.

You're so desperate and full of the need for someone to tell you it's okay you're messed up and I'm a great excuse for that person. I've been there. I've seen what that looks like. To be apologetic for existing wrongly. When I got there--when you get to base camp--do you know within the first month if they sense weakness on you they tell you to kill yourself, to shoot your brains out, to go ahead and take one for the team because if you do--well the boys get a whole three days of paid vacation if a company member dies. And they smelled it on me. I had strangers who I'd never even seen before coming up to me in bed threatening to stage my own letter if I didn't do it soon because they were so tired of routine patrols and the constant itching fear that comes with being thrown into a day where your life may or may not end. I was sick with being apologetic for existing. Sorry that I cried at night for being a coward and running from my wife because I couldn't think about her right anymore, sorry that I left my kids because I didn't think I could wake up every single morning thinking I loved them. Or even cared about them once. I was heavy with how much I hated being me--and it's something they smelled--sniffed out--like I produced different pheromones than them that labeled me the odd weak man ready to do something that he'd never get the chance to even think of regretting, but that makes me able to smell it on you. You are so thick with feeling sorry for how much of a mess you are that you can't even pick yourself up, or hold yourself out for people who could care about you anymore.

Scott grabs at her, half caress half plea.

SCOTT

You think you're damned. And so you damn everyone else you touch.

He pokes her.

Poking and prodding with bloodied hands you can't wash your own self-guilt off of.

By the end of his monologue he's breathing heavily, sexually. His hands are all over her. She pulls away from him.

DANNIE

Don't you reprimand me. Don't talk to me like I need a fucking lesson. I'm not young enough that you can shamelessly adult-moral at me!

Scott touches her face. She leans into it barely, but seething.

SCOTT

But you crave it, right Dannie? The person who's ready to tell you you're wrong. You want adult morals and lessons in your life--around you. You just...ignorantly decided they don't apply to you. Responsibility is a thing you've chosen not to have.

DANNIE

That's not true.

SCOTT

It is. Own up to it. Maybe if you own up to it I can stop seeing you as a little *sorry* kid.

DANNIE

I don't want to!

SCOTT

Because you're afraid of the consequences? Come on, Dannie. This is not the playground--are you really ready to ruin my entire life for your pleasure?

A pause. Dannie looks like she's been slapped.

DANNIE

Pleasure?  
Mine? It was for us. Everything I--Everything I did it was for us. Because I love you.

SCOTT

Bullshit. You were poised to attack all along, weren't you?

DANNIE

I wasn't.

SCOTT

Liar!

A longer pause. Dannie tears up. Scott looks horrified.

SCOTT

Are you crying?

DANNIE

I...I...I really didn't mean to.

She stands catatonic.

DANNIE

(Like a broken kid)

I hate it. I hate hurting you.

Scott sighs and rubs his face in his hands.

DANNIE

Please don't stay mad at me. I didn't mean to.

SCOTT

You're impossible.

DANNIE

(Whispered and hiccupped)

I didn't. You're--I can't stand it. When you're mad.

SCOTT

I can't hate you when you're crying, kid. Come on. No more tears.

He wipes under her face.

DANNIE

Please don't call me kid.

Scott laughs.

DANNIE

I would never actively hurt you.

SCOTT

I know.

DANNIE

You're right. I'm --

SCOTT

I *know*.

DANNIE

But I didn't lie.

Scott holds her away from him at arms length both hands on her shoulder. A lecture.

SCOTT

You need to understand. I didn't kiss/ you.

DANNIE

You did. On the corner of my mouth. You meant it to be the cheek I think. But I--I wanted you to actually kiss me. I wanted to know what it felt like--to actually be kissed by someone who cared. My mom doesn't kiss me. So--I wanted you too. I wanted an adult to--acknowledge me. And you got so close that I thought---well I thought there must be some part of you that wanted to go further.

A pause.

SCOTT

Okay.

Scott hugs her. Dannie tries to back away confused.

DANNIE

Okay?

SCOTT

I'm acknowledging you. I see you. I get you. I know how hurt you are.

DANNIE

Wait no.

SCOTT

I'm here for you.

DANNIE

Stop it. It's fake.

SCOTT

I know you better than I know the back of my hand. I get you. I see you now. I'm sorry I didn't before.

DANNIE

Stop it. Fight me.

SCOTT

No, this is a thing you do for children.

DANNIE

You asshole.

She tries to pull away.

SCOTT

You don't tell them they're wrong--even when what they're doing is destructive.

Dannie hits at his chest.

DANNIE

Fuck off.

SCOTT

I feel that way too. Like my opinions are ignored, like it doesn't matter/ what I think.

DANNIE

Stop it, please.

SCOTT

What I say goes unheard.

DANNIE

Fucking stop it.

SCOTT

I won't. I won't ever. So stop struggling and squirming like a toddler and listen to me. You got to scream. It's my turn now.

A pause. She stops fighting. He whispers in her ear almost sexually.

SCOTT

Are you listening to me? Are you hearing me. I understand your kind of fucked up. It's our kind of fucked up.

DANNIE

I'm listening.

SCOTT

What I've learned in Bagram goes un-responded too. Like your caring for Pappie went un-responded too. No one thanked you did they? They just called you clingy, called you lonely. They just called me violent even when I said I wasn't.

Dannie grabs at Scott, needing to feel connected to him.

SCOTT

When I was screaming into a megaphone it was jut pointing at a void of a wife who said sweetly "Let's change the subject" or "let's change you."

A pause.

SCOTT

And you know what, Dan. I don't want to be changed. Not when I see you as an uninhibited little kid. I want to do what I want.

A pause.

DANNIE

You should do what you want.

SCOTT

You're giving me permission?

Dannie nods.

DANNIE

I like that you like guns. I wouldn't change you.

Scott laughs.

SCOTT

Really?

DANNIE

I like that you own up to it. I like that you can handle other people's judgement.

SCOTT

You're such a baby.

DANNIE

I'm smart.

SCOTT

Sure.

DANNIE

I like that your sad.

SCOTT

Why?

DANNIE

Because I am too.

SCOTT

That's messed up.

DANNIE

So am I.

I thought about them a lot. Kid terrorists. Child terrorists. Because. I am one.

I'm a child terrorist. I'm the kind of kid who has bombs strapped to every part of me. But unlike them--I'm choosing when to detonate. I control every part of the destinies surrounding me. I just click a button on the world and it goes--boom. And it makes me happy. That I get to be destructive.

A long silent pause.

SCOTT

(A Threat)

It's cute that you think you're in charge. And it's cute that you think you have the right to be fucked up.

A pause. Shocked, Dannie takes a step back from Scott, but he doesn't let her.

DANNIE

What?

SCOTT

You don't know the first thing of what it means to feel hurt.

DANNIE

Scott?

SCOTT

I'm a violent man. Didn't she tell me that, didn't you ask if you should be scared--of me? Of all things, scared of me?

DANNIE

What are you--?

SCOTT

You want to be fucked up--then let's be fucked up. A violent man can't be trusted.

DANNIE

But you're not a--

He smiles. Pure wicked. A wasp who's been provoked.

SCOTT

People will believe the worst, kid--every time. Even me. You wanted to see me traumatized?

I went to war, and it wasn't worse than you.

He kisses her fiercely, aggressively, hurtfully, and violently. He paws at her, gropes at her, the blood on his hands covering her and he squeezes her neck.

DANNIE

Get off--

SCOTT

This is what you pretended happened? This is what you said you could live through, so live through it. Be as broken as you want to be.

He pushes her back on the trampoline and she bounces. She screams. The lights go back up on Charlotte and Michael. Michael runs out the door to the back. Charlotte, very deliberately and slowly follows. She pauses, looking at the gun on the mantle, and at her scrubbed clean hands. She reaches for the gun. And switches off the safety.

Michael sees Dannie bouncing on her back on the trampoline, and Scott dominantly standing over her. Michael freezes, and doesn't move.

MICHAEL

What are you--

DANNIE

Get him away.

MICHAEL

But what's going--

SCOTT

She fell. She was jumping and she fell. Kids do that all the time. Lose control of their limbs.

Charlotte points the gun at Scott.  
Scott holds his hands up.

CHARLOTTE

Back up, Scott. Get away from her.

SCOTT

You can't honestly think--

CHARLOTTE

What--that you're crazy? Scary--even. Scott, you're--scary?

SCOTT

You're the one pointing a gun at someone.

CHARLOTTE

She screamed. I trust screams. Now back off.

SCOTT

She fell.

CHARLOTTE

Bull shit.

SCOTT

What do you think happened?

CHARLOTTE

I will shoot you.

SCOTT

I'm your husband.

CHARLOTTE

You've changed.

SCOTT

How? When?

CHARLOTTE

You know when. Whatever you saw, whatever you did there, whatever you left for--it's made you--

SCOTT

Say it.

A pause.

SCOTT

You don't want to believe it. Still. Please...please Charles, don't believe it. Because if you do--

CHARLOTTE

Dangerous. Scott. It's made you dangerous.

SCOTT

Because I cared about her? Because I was a good friend?

MICHAEL

Why is there blood on her neck?

DANNIE

He--

Scott jostles the trampoline and it bounces Dannie shutting her up. Charlotte cocks the gun.

SCOTT

You're so ready to shoot that thing, aren't you. So afraid of it before, and now it's in your hands.

Scott holds up his hands.

SCOTT

Mine are clean, Charles. Mine are pure scrubbed clean. Do you want it spelled out. Do you want to hear what you expect or the truth of it. Are you ready to listen now? I did kiss her. She obsessed about it for three years, enough to make me a thirteen year old fantasy, and when she finally saw me again--felt like she was brave enough to act on it... my own wife believed it. Because I don't tuck my kids in at night. Because I look at her distantly. Because I left. Because I shot a baby deer in the neck until it died and carried it back home with my own two "white as snow" hands. BECAUSE I CAME BACK UNNECESSARILY VIOLENT. I must have molested this girl. So did I?

Charlotte gags on the word "Molested".

Shoot him. He--

DANNIE

Scott actively jumps on the trampoline, near Dannie's head. Jostling her further.

Charlotte shoots, but instead of shooting at Scott, she shoots at the deer carcass hanging from the wind-chime hook. She shoots quickly, crazily, an act of pure and unadulterated aggression, many times. The blood of the deer sprays onto her. Covering her--she now matches Dannie and Scott. They all freeze and the silence of the ringing gunshots is perpetual. Charlotte crumples on the floor, breathing heavily. She holds the gun, and strokes it lovingly much like Scott was doing at the beginning. Dannie stands on the trampoline.

DANNIE

Well, I didn't think she'd actually shoot.

Charlotte scream wails and buries her face in her lap towards the gun.

Michael horrified and like a zombie after what he's witnessed speaks. His voice almost cracks from fear.

MICHAEL

Dannie...you should apologize.

Dannie snaps her attention.

DANNIE

I should apologize? No amount of loving a person...is okay to provoke that. No amount of a crush allows him to do what he did.

Michael stares at her. He hangs his head.

DANNIE

Well...am I right?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

Dannie smiles.

DANNIE  
(Bitterly Sarcastic)

Okay. But you still think I should apologize?

Michael looks back up at her. She goes over to him and pats his cheek.

DANNIE

Who's aggressive now?

She grabs Scott's hand and kisses the back of it. He looks at her horrified.

DANNIE

(A little kid absolutely unapologetic on the playground)  
I'm sorry.

SCOTT

Get out.

A pause. She looks at Michael fake confused and then back at Scott.

DANNIE

But--I'm sorry. I said I was sorry. Right? I'm sorry.

SCOTT

Get. Out.

Scott drops Dannie's hand. He goes over to Charlotte and sits in front of her. He stares at her. Charlotte stares at the gun.

SCOTT

Charles. It's okay. It's just a deer. It's just a gun.

Charlotte looks up at Scott pleadingly she has tears in her eyes. She tries to speak and she can't.

SCOTT

(Mantra)

It's just a deer. It's just a gun. It's just a deer. It's just a gun.

Michael goes over to Dannie and takes her hand pulling her away from them.

MICHAEL

We're going now.

DANNIE

What? But I--Michael I said I was sorry. Didn't you say that would solve my problems? Didn't you say that would fix the fact that he attacked me?! But somehow it still doesn't feel fixed. It feels insulting! It feels broken!

MICHAEL

Come on.

DANNIE

I said I was sorry! Michael...seriously stop.

MICHAEL

We're leaving.

DANNIE

No we're not Michael, this is--no I'm staying. This is home. Everyone leaves but--I...I can't. Scott! Scott...

Scott doesn't respond.

MICHAEL

Come on, Dan.

DANNIE

He shouldn't get to stay! He shouldn't get to be here.

He pushes her aggressively towards the entrance to the house.

DANNIE

No! Michael! NO! Let go of me!

He pushes at her.

MICHAEL

Move!

DANNIE

Don't do that! Don't touch me!

She stumbles forward. Michael looks at her like he's afraid of her.

She reaches for him. He takes a step away from her. Dannie laughs like she's broken.

DANNIE

You're...you're afraid of me now?

Dannie let's out a sob. She calls out to Scott.

DANNIE

See Scott, See? I told you. Everybody believes the worst.  
Even of the *victims*.

MICHAEL

Let's go. Come on. Let's just...go.

DANNIE

He really did kiss me, though. Michael, he did. He kissed me.  
He kissed me. He--it was really a kiss.

Scott looks up at her. They don't break  
eye contact.

DANNIE

You kissed me.

Michael pushes Dannie inside the house  
and she struggles against him trying to  
get back to Scott. She screams.

DANNIE

HE KISSED ME!

Michael leads her to the front door.  
Scott holds Charlotte. They rock back  
and forth covered in blood. Dannie  
looks to them and then up at Michael,  
pleadingly, searching. He kisses  
Dannie's forehead, tenderly. A real and  
final Judas Kiss.

MICHAEL

I know.

Michael pushes Dannie out the front  
door. He looks back at the empty room  
full of heads and shuts the door. The  
empty house echoes only with  
Charlotte's tears as she cradles the  
gun with Scott hovering over her. The  
lights fade to black.

End play.

