

BREAK POINT

Andrada Angileri

CHARACTERS

Michael Warren/Young Randolph—49 years old, Charlene and Randolph's eldest son

Randolph Warren—71 years old, Michael and Beth's father

Charlene Warren—69 years old, Michael and Beth's mother

Beth Warren—48 years old, Charlene and Randolph's daughter

Audrey Reed-Warren—37 years old, Michael's ex-wife

Meghan Moore—29 years old, Michael's girlfriend

Jacob Warren/Eddie Warren—16 years old, Audrey and Michael's son

Maeve Warren—14 years old, Audrey and Michael's daughter

Erin Thompson—21 years old, Michael's student

Detective Miller—Late thirties

Young Michael—15 years old

Police Officers #1 and #2—Early thirties

SETTING

Northeast US, Autumn

TIME

Present Day

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

A '/' in the dialogue represents an overlap in the characters' lines.

The actor playing Michael Warren/Young Randolph must modify their voice and physical qualities accordingly, so the characters are discernible to the audience.

The actor playing Jacob Warren/Eddie Warren must modify their voice slightly to perform Eddie Warren's voiceovers in Act II, so the characters are discernible to the audience.

ACT I

Scene I

Early morning in AUDREY REED-WARREN's kitchen. Quaint and neatly organized, the kitchen table is surrounded by three chairs. The fridge is filled with photos, drawings, and awards. MICHAEL WARREN is seen on stage rummaging through the cabinets, clearly searching for something. He is wearing a button-up shirt, a suit jacket, and jeans. He missed a few loops on his belt.

After a beat, Audrey enters, but Michael doesn't see or hear her. She observes him for a moment.

AUDREY

Third cabinet from the fridge.

MICHAEL

(startled)

Jesus! You couldn't start with a "Hello" or "Good morning?"

AUDREY

(crossing to the table)

It doesn't look like you're having a good morning.

MICHAEL

I am. Well, once I get the coffee going.

AUDREY

You lived here for thirteen years, and you still can't remember where the coffee filters are.

MICHAEL

You moved them. That's why I couldn't find them.

AUDREY

They've always been in that cabinet.

Sitting down at the table, Audrey opens her journal, trying to distract herself from Michael's

presence. Michael takes out a coffee filter and begins to brew a pot of coffee. The small beeping noises irritate him.

AUDREY

How did you sleep last night?

MICHAEL

Fine.

Pause.

Between you and me... I'm not sure how I even made it to bed last night.

AUDREY

Meghan kept you up?

MICHAEL

What? No! No, she... she didn't, I—I just had a long night, that's all.

Michael continues making the coffee.

AUDREY

You forgot about today, didn't you?

MICHAEL

I'm here at the time you told me, aren't I?

AUDREY

You could have at least shown up looking a bit more... presentable. You think the kids want to see you like *this*?

Pause.

Is she even okay with the fact that you have kids?

Beat. Michael gives Audrey a look.

MICHAEL

I'm sure they'll be happy to see their dad. It was my weekend last week / and you know it.

AUDREY

No! I told you that they were coming with me to celebrate my mom's birthday. I called you, texted you. Would you like me to pull them up / for you?

MICHAEL

No! Just... fine. You were right. I was wrong... as usual.

AUDREY

Look, the kids will be down soon, and I want to get these details finalized. The less time I have to spend talking to you, the better.

MICHAEL

And the less time I have to spend listening to you, the better.

Pause.

I haven't seen them in months, Audrey.

AUDREY

(shifting in her seat uncomfortably)

Jacob's party isn't going to plan itself, you know. Sit down.

MICHAEL

(crossing over to sit at the table)

What theme are we working with this year?

AUDREY

No theme.

MICHAEL

No theme? Are you sure?

AUDREY

I am.

MICHAEL

He always wants a theme.

AUDREY

Not this time. He said he's "too old" for that.

MICHAEL

Oh, "too old," my ass! He's turning sixteen. What are sixteen year old boys into now, anyway? Video games? Superheroes?

Pause.

I mean, I'm sure he's been eyeing some girls at school. If he's so "old" now, maybe we should get him a stripper.

Michael chuckles at his own joke as Audrey gives him a look.

MICHAEL

Oh, come on! You know that was funny.

AUDREY

He said no theme. Just friends and family.

Silence.

MICHAEL

... I see. That's why you asked me to come here? To see if my family is available?

AUDREY

My parents are in my Vermont, and at their age, I don't want them driving that far.

MICHAEL

My parents are old too, you know.

AUDREY

Yes, but they live thirty minutes away.

MICHAEL

I thought you didn't want my parents around the kids.

AUDREY

I don't.

Pause.

He asked for them.

MICHAEL

Okay, I find that *very* hard to believe. A sixteen-year-old kid wants his grandparents to come and embarrass him in front of his friends? Please!

AUDREY

I wouldn't have asked you to come here if he hadn't asked me about them. Can we just get this over with? I don't have all day, and I'm sure your students would appreciate it if their professor sobered up before class.

MICHAEL

I am not hungover, Audrey.

AUDREY

I'm sure you aren't.

MICHAEL

What does it matter if I *was* drinking last night? It's too early to be having this conversation, anyway.

AUDREY

All I'm asking you to do is talk to your parents, that's it. End of discussion.

Audrey closes her journal and gets up to open the fridge, starting to make herself a drink.

MICHAEL

He really asked for them?

AUDREY

Yes.

MICHAEL

He barely talks to them.

AUDREY

I guess he's starting to understand what his priorities are.

Michael gives her a look.

Pause.

MICHAEL

I'll talk to them.

Michael groans and lays his head against the kitchen table. It's cold. It feels good.

JACOB and MAEVE WARREN enter from stage right. Jacob is a typical teenage boy, concerned with puberty, and maintaining his position on his tennis team for the new season. He is first singles, and that's a big deal to him. He is carrying his backpack and tennis bag. Despite his familial hardships, he has emerged as the most gracious Warren, having accepted kindness as his guiding principle.

The quieter of the two, Maeve, is more reserved. However, she isn't quiet because she's shy; her

gaze always holds a meaning. When she chooses to speak, she is blunt, yet she always speaks the truth.

The kids rush to the fridge and start gathering things to make breakfast and their lunches. Maeve is the first to notice Michael but says nothing to him.

AUDREY

You two have everything you need?

JACOB

Yeah.

AUDREY

Even for your match?

JACOB

Yeah! I got everything.

AUDREY

I don't want you calling me at work again telling me you forgot your socks.

Jacob walks over to Audrey, unzips his tennis bag, and shows her the contents.

JACOB

See? All there.

Jacob zips the bag back up and finally notices Michael.

What's wrong with Dad?

AUDREY

You know.

MICHAEL

Migraine! I've... I've got a migraine. That's all.

As Michael tries to rest his head again, Maeve begins to mix her drink, causing the spoon to hit the glass in such a way that it makes an insufferable sound, which only affects Michael.

Just as Michael is about to snap, Jacob crosses over to Maeve and nudges her arm.

JACOB

(light heartedly)
Come on. Stop that.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

MAEVE

What? I had to mix it so it all settles.

Pause.

Why is Dad here anyway?

MICHAEL

Dad would appreciate it if all questions regarding his presence were directed at him.

AUDREY

Finishing up the last minute things for your party, Jacob.

JACOB

... Oh.

MICHAEL

“Oh” is right. What’s this about wanting my mom and dad at your party?

JACOB

What? Is it so hard to believe that I might want them there?

MICHAEL

A little. A lot, actually. They’re horrible people, Jake.

JACOB

Maybe to you.

MAEVE

He’s just hoping they’ll give him some money.

I am not!

Pause. Shrugging.

It is a plus, though.

JACOB

MICHAEL

You seriously want them there?

JACOB

Yeah. I don't see them often.

MICHAEL

For good reason.

AUDREY

Michael, just call them! Okay?!

Silence.

MICHAEL

(crossing over to coffee maker)

I will.

JACOB

(appreciatively)

Great.

Maeve and Jacob move over to the kitchen table with their breakfasts and start eating. Michael pours the coffee into a mug and looks at the table. Audrey, Jacob, and Maeve are all sitting there peacefully. There is no seat for Michael. After a beat, he notices a chair off to the side and drags it to the table, forcibly squeezing himself in. The grating sound makes everyone stop what they are doing and stare at Michael. Once he is seated at the table, Michael surveys the group.

MICHAEL

(with a joking tone)

You all act like you don't know me.

Pause.

Look, I'll ask them if they can make it, but I can't guarantee anything.

JACOB

That's fine.

AUDREY

Here's hoping you follow through.

Looking at watch.

Alright, bus will be here soon. Finish up and get your things together.

Jacob and Maeve clean up their breakfasts and gather their belongings. As Jacob puts his shoes on, Maeve crosses over to one of the cabinets and pulls out a bottle of pills. She places it on the kitchen table before she exits the room, Jacob following after her.

JACOB

(exiting)

Bye, Dad!

Michael turns to speak, but they are already gone. He hesitates before taking the pill bottle in hand.

MICHAEL

(shaking out a few pills)

So...

Michael swallows the pills with his coffee.

AUDREY

I told you. Jacob wants them there. Why would you ever think he was lying?

MICHAEL

I never said he was—

Pause.

Look, I know how you feel about my parents.

AUDREY

Just because I have my own... *feelings* towards them doesn't mean you have the right to keep him from seeing them. If he wants them there, they'll be there.

MICHAEL

Like I said, I can't guarantee—

AUDREY

They'll be there, Michael. Don't let him down this time.

Silence.

Audrey reaches out hesitantly for Michael's hand. He notices out of the corner of his eye. As Michael stands up from his chair and crosses over to the sink, Audrey lets out a breath she didn't know she was holding. He places his mug in the sink and fixes his hair.

MICHAEL

I will talk to them.

AUDREY

Thank you.

Michael goes back to the table and picks up the chair in which he was sitting. He then places it back down where he found it and grips the back of it tightly.

Silence.

Michael takes a breath and exits the stage. The closing of the front door can be heard.

Audrey begins to write something in her journal, but her mind is racing. After a beat, she storms off stage. For a moment, the audience is left with the image of Audrey's kitchen. With no one around, it's peaceful.

Blackout.

SCENE II

Early afternoon on the same day, in Michael's office. The space appears neat, but if one were to open any drawer, the contents would flood the room. The office is dark, since the curtains are closed with a clip, and the colors of the room are so similar to Michael that he almost blends into his surroundings. He can be seen organizing one of his bookshelves. He stumbles and bumps into it after a moment, causing several books to fall. As Michael grumbles and bends down to the floor, a knock at the door startles him.

ERIN (O.S.)

Professor Warren? Are you there? It's Erin!

MICHAEL

(aside)

Shit!

Michael quickly fixes the bookshelf and adjusts his jacket before crossing over to his desk.
Come in!

ERIN THOMPSON enters the room. She is one of Michael's students and is taking several of his upper-level classes. Out of all the writing he reads, he enjoys Erin's the most. There is something about her writing that feels familiar to him.

Erin closes the door behind her and crosses over to Michael's desk. Michael flashes her a smile as he gestures to the seat in front of him.

How are you, Miss Thompson?

ERIN

I'm good. How are you?

MICHAEL

(sitting across from Erin)

Alright.

ERIN

... Did you forget about our meeting again?

MICHAEL

No. I'm ready to discuss with you your senior thesis.

ERIN

Okay.

MICHAEL

So... what is it that you'd like to tackle first?

ERIN

(rummaging through her bag)

Well, I spent the whole summer trying to come up with an idea to write about. I filled up so many journals, and I *definitely* contributed to deforestation somewhere, but I think I've got the gist of what I want to develop.

Erin hands Michael a small stack of papers stapled together. He gives her a prideful smirk before reading over a few pages. Erin adjusts herself in her seat, making sure her skirt hem moves up her thigh ever so slightly.

MICHAEL

Hmmm. A murder mystery?

ERIN

Yes. Also a thriller.

MICHAEL

I don't think you've ever dove into this genre before.

ERIN

I haven't, but I got a great idea for a novel. It's all in there.

MICHAEL

For a project of this magnitude, why don't you stick to what you're comfortable with?

ERIN

I... I like a challenge.

MICHAEL

Well, then... tell me, Moore.

ERIN

Sorry?

MICHAEL

(quickly)

More! Tell me more.

ERIN

The premise sounds a bit cliché.

MICHAEL

You're a creative writing major. Nothing's original.

ERIN

It's about your run-of-the-mill family. Squeaky clean, everyone appears normal, but they're hiding something sinister from everyone around them.

Pause.

I don't know. The more I talk about it, the more I think it won't work.

MICHAEL

So, choose another genre your style of writing is suited for.

ERIN

But I like the idea! I *want* to make it work.

MICHAEL

Alright. Tell me more about this idea.

ERIN

Well, it's not totally... *my* idea.

MICHAEL

Like I said, nothing's original anymore.

ERIN

Don't ask me why, but my grandparents like to collect newspaper clippings that are, like, big headlining news. I visited them over the summer, and they showed me some. This one caught my eye.

*Erin pulls a piece of paper out from her bag.
The news article is photocopied onto the paper.*

As she continues talking, she bubbles with excitement. Michael looks over the paper and is terrified.

ERIN

This family's youngest son dies in the backyard shed. Everyone's present on the property. Looks like a complete freak accident. He just trips and falls face first onto the concrete. Simple. But if it was just a trip, why does he have bruises on the *back* of his head, like the article says? Isn't that weird?

MICHAEL

(staring at the paper)

Uh-huh.

ERIN

So, I asked my grandpa about it to see what he remembered. Turns out, he was the detective on the case.

MICHAEL

(hesitant)

He... He was?

ERIN

He told me everything he could remember. The dad had said he'd found the body himself, but when the rest of the family was questioned, the eldest son said he was there too. Aside from that detail, the two of them had the exact same story, almost word for word. I mean... that's weird, right?

MICHAEL

I suppose.

ERIN

It's almost as if they were, like, trying to hide something. That's what my grandpa said. But if so... what was it? What would they've had to hide?

MICHAEL

(looking up at Erin)

Right.

ERIN

That's what I want to explore in the piece. What are they hiding? How does a simple fall turn that deadly? There's got to be more to it, you know?

MICHAEL

I see.

ERIN

So I thought about maybe trying multiple third person points of view? You know, that way I could expand upon the article. Or I could explore a “detective as the main character” angle.

MICHAEL

Erin...

ERIN

Or even write it in the first person so that the reader can really be immersed in the story. Of course, I'd have to come up with a plausible cause of death for the boy.

*The clip holding the curtains together pops off.
As the curtains separate, sunlight enters the
office.*

MICHAEL

Look, Erin—

ERIN

It just doesn't make any sense! But the idea is exciting, and I think that with the proper research and *your* guidance... this could be something really great!

MICHAEL

Miss Thompson!

ERIN

Um... yes, Professor?

MICHAEL

(standing up and moving to the window)
... As much as I... appreciate... your passion and excitement for this material... I don't think it would be a good topic for your senior thesis.

Michael tries to close the curtains.

ERIN

I know it's not something I'd usually write about, but I want my senior thesis to be amazing! I want to do something outside the box.

MICHAEL

I understand that. Just not on this.

ERIN

What?

MICHAEL

I'm sure you can find another article that will pique your interest when you visit your grandparents again.

ERIN

Oh... kay?

MICHAEL

Besides, you have a couple more months until your full proposal needs to be ready. Plenty of time to think about something else.

Michael returns to his desk after finally getting the curtains clipped back together.

ERIN

I don't want to do something else. I want to do *this*.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, but you have to give this up.

ERIN

Why? This idea is as good as any. Like you said, nothing's original.

MICHAEL

Erin, you are not to develop this idea any further. As your professor *and* your advisor, I am telling you that writing about this would not be in your best interests.

ERIN

(knowingly)

It's just a story.

MICHAEL

It's not...

Pause.

Having that kind of attitude towards a piece will not help you. Nothing is ever *just* a story.

ERIN

Are you sure you're alright?

MICHAEL

I'm fine. I know you need my approval on the subject, but I'm afraid I cannot give it to you.

ERIN

You're being ridiculous.

MICHAEL

Ridiculous?!

Pause.

Erin, do not take my liking for you as a student to mean you can say things like that to me. You have to find something else to do for your thesis, because I know *why* you're interested in writing this piece.

ERIN

(startled)

You do?

MICHAEL

Yes, just like the journalist who wrote that article and the rest of his ilk, you are going off nothing but speculation to make light of another family's pain. By rekindling the rumors your grandfather believes to be true, you're turning their story into something it's not.

ERIN

That was never my intention! Besides, this *had* to have been major news if it was on the front of a newspaper. It's the headline!

MICHAEL

You too are trying to sensationalize their story by inventing nonsense subplots and relationships that don't make sense, detracting from the reality of *their* tragedy.

Pause.

I strongly encourage you to find another idea. This meeting is over.

ERIN

What?!

MICHAEL

Yes. We're done with this discussion.

ERIN

You're not even going to help me come up with other ideas?

MICHAEL

No, you've shown me today that you're more than capable of doing so on your own. I have another meeting starting shortly.

Erin gathers her things defeatedly but leaves the photocopied paper on Michael's desk. He crosses over to the window.

ERIN

Um... can you please just think it over?

Michael turns to look at Erin. As he sees the expression on her face, he exhales. She takes a step forward and makes her way closer to Michael on each of her next lines.

MICHAEL

Look, I know that you're a good student, and you do good work. I know it's not your intention to cause any pain... but not this one.

ERIN

Please. Think about it. This is what I really want.

MICHAEL

Find another story to use.

ERIN

Just think it over. I promise you that I won't sensationalize anything. I'll do the proper research and take good care of the material.

Pause. Erin is now very close to Michael by the window.

And I know that having you as my advisor will help my writing process. You've been an incredible mentor over the past three years.

Michael looks at Erin, letting his gaze linger for a moment.

MICHAEL

Erin, I'll—

The office door opens, and the two turn quickly to face it. BETH WARREN enters. She sees how close in proximity Erin and Michael are to one another, and she gives him a look.

See. Just as I said, I have another meeting to attend to.

ERIN

But you'll think about what I said?

MICHAEL

Um, yes. I'll think about it. Get your stuff.

ERIN

Great! I can't wait to work on this with you.

Erin gathers her things and exits the office. Beth walks towards Michael's desk and spots his water bottle. Michael stays by the window.

BETH

(taking water bottle in hand)

Who's that?

MICHAEL

Student.

BETH

(smelling inside of the water bottle)

What did she ask about?

MICHAEL

Her senior thesis.

BETH

(placing water bottle back on the desk)

Ah! Was it anything worth getting excited over?

Michael spots the photocopy on his desk and stares at it for a moment.

Hey. You okay?

Michael snaps out of his trance, briefly looking at Beth before he crosses over to his desk. He takes the paper and stuffs it into the pocket of his suit jacket.

MICHAEL

Yes. I'm alright. Why is everyone asking how I am?

BETH

Because they care about you.

MICHAEL

Yeah, right.

BETH

Well, I do.

Pause.

Now, what did she propose?

MICHAEL

Just some murder mystery.

BETH

Oh, that *is* exciting.

MICHAEL

Like we need any more of those in the world.

BETH

Oh, come on! You might have the next best-selling author on your hands.

MICHAEL

I read the same bland stuff every year—believe me, I’ve seen it all. I guess that after all these years, I’m just not excited by it anymore.

BETH

You might need to get that checked out.

Michael gives Beth a look.

The opportunity was *right* there!

Pause.

Okay. Seriously. How are you?

MICHAEL

I’m fine.

BETH

I said seriously.

MICHAEL

I'm fine, Beth. Trust me.

BETH

That water bottle implies otherwise.

Michael lets out a laugh as he sits in his desk chair.

Drinking at work? You're above that, Michael... or at least I thought you were. What's wrong? Miss Moore not satisfying your needs, so you're drinking it away?

MICHAEL

What? No! Meghan and I are good, okay. Why does everyone think our relationship is the issue?

BETH

Seems like everyone's asking you questions you're uncomfortable with today.

Pause.

Alright, I'll ask about something else. How is the planning for Jacob's party going?

MICHAEL

Audrey's handling it.

BETH

Your baby boy's getting older. How do you feel?

MICHAEL

Horrible. Them getting older is just a reminder that I'm getting older. Soon, I'll grow old and croak, and they'll remember me as the father that was never there.

BETH

When was the last time she let you have them over?

MICHAEL

A... a few months ago? It's probably for the best. Besides, it gives me more time with Meghan. She's wanted to go on a vacation soon, so it all works out.

BETH

I'm sure they miss you. Don't you miss them?

MICHAEL

Of course, I do! But think about it realistically. What am I supposed to do with them when they come over? Last time Jacob was with me, he kept leaving to hang out with his friends and train for the tennis

season. Just used my apartment as a place to sleep. And Maeve... I don't think she's said a word to me in months.

BETH

Listen, I'm sure she's just going through a phase right now. Trust me, you've been with me through all of mine.

MICHAEL

I don't even know my own kids.

BETH

Oh, that's not... that's—that's ridiculous. Of course you do!

MICHAEL

I really don't. I don't know the things they like or the things they hate. They rarely call me. I try and be there for them at their events, but then they just reject me.

Pause.

I never wanted kids. When Audrey told me, she was... she was so happy. At the time, I wanted nothing more than to give her everything *she* wanted.

Pause.

I remember holding Jacob for the first time. Audrey couldn't stop smiling and gushing about him. She kept saying he was perfect. I just thought he looked like a flab of skin they cut out of her. I just felt this... this disconnect.

BETH

If you really want to connect with them... you've got to try harder.

MICHAEL

I am trying! I call them, text them, and I get nothing. Any time I ask Audrey about what they're doing, she barely tells me anything. I know she thinks I'm a joke.

BETH

Try something more... active. Like... playing a game with Jacob. Play some tennis. I'm sure he'll appreciate you making that effort.

MICHAEL

No, I... I swore I wouldn't play again.

BETH

You were really good, you know.

MICHAEL

I know.

BETH

Just try. When they see you're truly trying, they'll come around.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

BETH

Can we get going now? I'm starving.

MICHAEL

Sure.

BETH

Plus, I'm sure some food in your stomach will do you good.

MICHAEL

Please!

Beth laughs as she shrugs.

I have to talk to you about something.

BETH

About Mom and Dad being excited for Jacob's party?

MICHAEL

How would you know that?

BETH

I spoke with them.

MICHAEL

Now, *that* I don't believe, but that's / not it. Beth, my—

BETH

Maybe if you gave them a chance. It's been years, Michael! All you have to do is pick up your phone and call them. Or even go to their house!

Pause.

I'm allowed to change how I feel about people. They've changed. Trust me.

MICHAEL

Those two are incapable of change and you know it. Pretending is just another one of their tactics.

BETH

(rolling her eyes)

You're talking about this like it's some sort of conspiracy theory.

MICHAEL

They're just the same now as they were when we were kids. Mom was suffocating and didn't bother listening to us. Dad never even thought we were good enough—to hold up to his standards, anyway. Do you realize how fucked up that is?! Since I was born, I was never good enough for him!

BETH

You think I don't know that? Of course I do, Michael! I experienced it too. You think it was only you who went through that shit? See, this is...

Pause.

It's possible for people to change. All you have to do is give them a chance, and if you still feel this way... that's fine. The feelings you have about them are valid.

Silence.

Just call, Michael. What do you have to lose?

MICHAEL

... Audrey's making me call them to see if they can make it to the party.

BETH

You haven't invited them yet?

MICHAEL

I know what they would say. Dad will just pretend like he has something else going on, but really, he doesn't want to be in the same room as me, and Mom will say yes and then forget that she even said yes.

BETH

Well, you're right about one of them wanting to come.

MICHAEL

What does that mean?

BETH

They both said they'll come.

MICHAEL

What?

BETH

Audrey called me a few days ago. Told me she was certain you wouldn't call if she asked.

MICHAEL

(under his breath)

Fuuuuuuuuck.

Pause.

See! This is why I don't bother trying. No one gives me a chance!

BETH

You done?

MICHAEL

... Yes.

BETH

Great! I heard that the place we're going to has amazing flatbread.

Beth exits with a brooding Michael following behind her.

MICHAEL

(exiting)

I still have to talk to you about something.

The audience is left with the image of Michael's office. Suddenly, the clip pops off the curtains again, allowing sunlight to enter the room. Everything looks alive.

Blackout.

SCENE III

Late afternoon, same day, in RANDOLPH and CHARLENE WARREN's living room. The sound of drizzling rain can be heard in the background as Randolph leans back in his recliner, skimming through a book. Charlene is seated on the couch watching T.V. Since its occupants first moved in, the house's aesthetic has remained roughly the same. The living room is filled with memorabilia from the Warren family's successes; trophies and knick-knacks

line the bookshelf behind Randolph and Charlene. If they could, these memories of the past would seep out of their neat displays, revealing their secrets.

A particular scene on the T.V. causes Charlene to laugh. Her shrill laughter matches her regular speaking voice. It hadn't always been like that. Randolph grumbles to himself as he flips through another page of the book begrudgingly.

RANDOLPH

This book is shit.

CHARLENE

Shh! This is the good part.

RANDOLPH

Just read this paragraph.

Randolph shoves the book directly in Charlene's face. She pushes his arm back as she squints to read the page. She then reaches for her glasses and puts them on, finally able to read the paragraph. When she finishes, she taps Randolph's wrist, and he pulls the book back towards himself.

Told you. Shit.

CHARLENE

It's not... that bad. Maybe you just don't get it.

RANDOLPH

What's not to get? Do you get it?

CHARLENE

Not really.

RANDOLPH

He wrote a shitty book.

CHARLENE

He did not write a shitty book.

RANDOLPH

He made a mistake choosing this profession.

Pause.

I could write something better than this.

CHARLENE

Randy!

RANDOLPH

You don't think I could? Writing isn't that hard. I bet I could do it. He *thinks* he's a writer.

Pause.

How much do you think he's made selling this crap?

CHARLENE

Shh!

RANDOLPH

(to himself)

Not nearly enough if he can only afford that apartment he's shacking up in with that girl.

(to Charlene)

And this Robert character... a family drama, my ass. And the three siblings... they have no substance. All they do is whine throughout the whole book about Robert. Their poor father died, and all those kids can do is pick on every little one of his faults.

CHARLENE

Randy, please, I'm trying to watch the show. Put the book down if you hate it so much.

RANDOLPH

No... I think I'll keep reading.

Randolph continues reading as Charlene keeps her eyes glued to the T.V. screen. Her attention, however, cannot be kept for too long. She quickly turns to her phone, checking her emails and messages.

The doorbell goes off a few times, and the rings almost sound desperate. Knowing Charlene won't take her eyes off of her phone, Randolph slams the book down onto the coffee table and

groans as he gets up from his seat. He crosses over to the front door, just as the doorbell goes off again.

RANDOLPH

I'm coming, goddamnit!

Randolph opens the door, and Michael barges in, wet from the rain.

Oh, sure, come right on in.

Randolph slams the door as Michael takes off his coat. He shakes it off and Randolph groans again.

If you keep shaking that off like a dog, you'll flood this house.

MICHAEL

It's a few drops.

CHARLENE

(not looking up from her phone)

Is that Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes, Mom, it's me.

CHARLENE

You've got to come and watch this. I've been laughing at this show for the past hour now. It's—

Charlene looks up at the T.V. The show that was on previously is no longer playing, and a new show is on. Charlene furrows her brow and sighs.

CHARLENE

Well...

RANDOLPH

You're worse than that damn leak.

MICHAEL

Again? Dad, just call a plumber and get it fixed.

RANDOLPH

I am perfectly capable of fixing things myself. Age doesn't mean shit.

MICHAEL

I wasn't suggesting it because of your age. I—

Pinches the bridge of his nose.

It would just be easier for you.

CHARLENE

Wait... Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes, Mom. What?

CHARLENE

You're here?

MICHAEL

Yes.

CHARLENE

You're never over here.

MICHAEL

I know I don't visit often, but—

RANDOLPH

Often?! That's an understatement if I've ever heard one. You *never* visit us... unless...

MICHAEL

Unless what?

RANDOLPH

Nothing.

MICHAEL

Dad, just say it. Unless what?

RANDOLPH

Why are you here? What do you want?

Randolph takes Michael's coat and puts it on a coat hook by the door.

CHARLENE

Beth called us a few days ago. Have you spoken with her lately? She's doing good, you know.

MICHAEL

I saw her today. Our monthly lunch date, remember?

CHARLENE

Oh, yes! I always forget you two do that. I'm always forgetting things.

MICHAEL

That's actually why I'm here.

CHARLENE

Come and sit down, Michael. Don't just stand by the door.

RANDOLPH

(laughing)

You act like you don't know us, son.

Randolph slaps Michael on the back as he laughs. It's a bit too forceful, causing Michael to stumble forward.

MICHAEL

No, this won't take long. I'm just here to tell you that you are not coming to Jacob's party.

CHARLENE

What?! What do you mean? Beth called and invited us.

MICHAEL

Consider the invitation rescinded.

Silence.

Alright, have a good night.

Michael goes to grab his coat. Once in hand, he reaches for the door knob, but he stops as Randolph plants himself in front of the door.

RANDOLPH

Why can't we go?

MICHAEL

Audrey. You know how she's always felt about you two.

RANDOLPH

That's not it and you know it.

Pause.

Might want to take a seat, son.

Randolph rips Michael's coat out of his grasp and sets it back on the hook. Michael reluctantly walks over to the couch and sits next to Charlene. She doesn't bother with a greeting. Charlene begins to fix Michael's hair, and he politely pushes her hands away. Randolph remains standing by the door.

CHARLENE

We're looking forward to the party. Lord knows we haven't seen those babies in so long!

MICHAEL

They aren't babies anymore, Mom.

CHARLENE

Are you sad to see them growing up?

MICHAEL

Not really. Actually—

CHARLENE

It always felt surreal watching you and Beth grow up right before our eyes. Watching you become your own person was so special. I wished you two could have just lived here with us forever. To be honest, it gets a bit lonely here from time to time when your father's at the high school working. Why did you and Beth have to move so far away from us? / It was a big change for me, you know. I'd spent my days running this house, chasing after the two of you. I could barely keep up most of the time! I thought I'd enjoy the quiet side of life after you two moved out, but it's been so lonely.

MICHAEL

Can we not get into this?

Michael glances down at the coffee table and notices the book. He reaches forward as Charlene continues speaking. He flips through the pages in disbelief that he's actually holding the book.

CHARLENE

Are you listening to me, Michael?

MICHAEL

What? Uh, yes. Yes, I'm listening.

CHARLENE

You always were bad at listening, Michael, even as a kid.

MICHAEL

Why is my book here?

CHARLENE

Your father was reading it.

RANDOLPH

Char!

Charlene shrugs as Randolph crosses over to the recliner, standing beside it.

MICHAEL

You were reading my book?

RANDOLPH

Yes.

MICHAEL

Why?

RANDOLPH

It's the only one you got. Wanted to see what it was about.

MICHAEL

After ten years... you *finally* wanted to see what it was about?

RANDOLPH

Yes.

Michael scoffs as he places the book back down on the coffee table.

MICHAEL

Dare I even ask your thoughts?

RANDOLPH

It was shit.

MICHAEL

(standing up)

Okay, we're done. You two are not coming to the party. Goodbye.

As Michael attempts to leave, Randolph gets up to block his son's way. Michael takes the hint and sits back down on the couch.

RANDOLPH

You never should've turned down that scholarship. You could have been a tennis pro.

MICHAEL

This is not the conversation we're having.

RANDOLPH

Look at those trophies, son. You earned those with your talent and your drive. You were a killer on the court. No one stood a chance against you. You could have been competing with the best.

Pause. Slowly advancing to get in Michael's face.

Now, look at you. Divorced, two kids you barely see, a girlfriend who's young enough to be your daughter, and one shitty book. How long did it take you to write that piece of crap? Why was writing ever more important than your tennis career? So important to you, you chose it over something that could have truly made you somebody?

MICHAEL

It tells the truth!

Getting into Randolph's face.

Keep it up, Dad. You ever disrespect me or Meghan again, and I swear I'll...

RANDOLPH

Do what? I'm sure there's nothing you could do to me that's worse than what you've done to yourself.

CHARLENE

Stop it! Both of you sit down and stop fighting!

RANDOLPH

(pained whisper)

You could have been somebody.

Michael pulls himself away from Randolph and sits back down on the couch. Randolph sits back down in his recliner.

MICHAEL

Please, I'm asking the both of you not to come to Jacob's party.

RANDOLPH

The kid wants us there. We're going.

CHARLENE

We haven't seen them in so long! It's not right to keep a grandmother from her grandbabies, you know.

MICHAEL

Just make up an excuse. We don't need either of you there.

RANDOLPH

We've already gotten him a gift.

CHARLENE

He's going to love it!

MICHAEL

You can give it to me.

RANDOLPH

What isn't getting through that head of yours? We're going, Michael. The damn kid wants us there.

MICHAEL

Can't you just do this *one* thing for me?

RANDOLPH

What have I always said, Charlene? He only ever comes to see us when he wants us to do something for him.

MICHAEL

At least tell me what you got him.

CHARLENE

Oh, but that would ruin the surprise.

RANDOLPH

You're not going to make me change my mind, Michael. Now, get your stuff and leave. We'll see you at the party.

CHARLENE

Goodbye, baby.

Michael cringes as Charlene presses a kiss to his cheek. Randolph gets up from the recliner and walks to the front door. Charlene resumes looking at her phone. Michael stands up and spots the book on the coffee table. In one quick motion, he scoops up the book and crosses over to his father. Randolph throws Michael's coat at him before opening the door. Just as Michael is about to leave, Randolph stops him.

RANDOLPH

Is it possible for you to come by one day and fix the leak?

Michael shuts his eyes and tries forcing himself to say no.

MICHAEL

Sure.

CHARLENE

Don't be afraid to call us, sweetie. We miss you terribly.

Michael looks at Randolph. Randolph gives Michael a subtle nod before he puts on his coat and exits. Randolph closes the door and walks back to the recliner.

For a moment, all that can be heard is the noise of the T.V. Charlene is preoccupied with her

phone, while Randolph glances back at the trophies and then at the coffee table. He reaches for the book but is confused to see that it's not there.

RANDOLPH

Char?

CHARLENE

Mmm?

RANDOLPH

Where's Michael's book?

CHARLENE

(laughs at something on her phone)

...

Randolph sighs as he sits back in the recliner. For a moment, the audience is left with the image of Randolph watching the T.V., unamused by what's playing, and Charlene sitting on the couch, enticed by whatever is on her phone.

Blackout. The sound of the falling rain continues into the next scene.

SCENE IV

Night, same day, in Michael and MEGHAN MOORE's apartment. Both the kitchen and the living room can be seen on stage. The space is cramped and dark, enlivened by a few limp houseplants practically crying out for attention. On the living room wall, there are a few photos of Michael and Meghan together, along with photos of Jacob and Maeve.

Meghan is in the kitchen washing dishes. She always tries to keep the space clean, but it never seems to stay that way. Wearing lounge clothes a

few sizes too big for her frame, Meghan is listening to a show with her earbuds in, her phone resting on the counter. Just as Michael enters the apartment, she laughs at something on the screen. Michael freezes in place. It is the laugh of an excited child, and it sounds too familiar for his own liking.

Michael shuts the door, and Meghan jumps, letting out a startled shriek. When she sees Michael, she immediately calms herself and begins to laugh once more.

MEGHAN

(taking her earbuds out)

You've got to stop sneaking up on me all the time.

MICHAEL

(crossing over to Meghan)

Sorry. I don't mean to.

Michael and Meghan kiss. She wraps her arms around his neck and smiles up at him.

MEGHAN

You're late.

MICHAEL

Let me take my coat off. You're getting all wet.

MEGHAN

I don't care about that. They'll dry.

MICHAEL

Well, if that's the case...

Meghan shrieks giddily as Michael tightens his hold on her and starts rubbing himself against her, shaking his hair to get the rain out. Meghan manages to push herself away from him. The two of them laugh like children, though Michael's

laughter stops quickly, while Meghan's dies out more gradually.

MEGHAN

(crosses over to the kitchen sink)
You said you would be home hours ago.

MICHAEL

Right.

MEGHAN

(cleaning dishes)
...And?

MICHAEL

I went to see my parents. Audrey had me talk to them about inviting them to Jacob's party.

MEGHAN

You went to visit them?

MICHAEL

Yeah. And I deserve a fucking medal for my service.

Michael takes off his coat and walks into the kitchen. He grabs a dish towel and begins drying off his hair.

I went because I had to disinvite them from the party.

MEGHAN

How did they react?

MICHAEL

Exactly how I expected.

MEGHAN

That bad, huh?

MICHAEL

I've told you about how they are.

MEGHAN

I expect they're still going?

MICHAEL

You know, Audrey told me to call them to send the invite. I don't understand why she's always asking me to do these things for her, but then she can't trust me to actually do them. She asked Beth to invite them because she thought I wasn't going to, even if I agreed.

MEGHAN

I mean... you wouldn't have invited them either way so, in a way, she was right.

Michael gives Meghan a look before playfully throwing the dish towel over her face. Meghan chuckles as she places the towel on the counter. Michael crosses over to the couch and sinks down into it, enjoying the feeling. Meghan walks over and stands behind the couch.

MICHAEL

Why does he even want them there? He's barely seen them. Why would their presence be so important to him?

MEGHAN

I'm sure he has his reasons. Besides, they are his grandparents. He doesn't have the same issues with them that you do.

MICHAEL

It's so much more than *just* issues, Meg. It's everything.

MEGHAN

I know.

MICHAEL

I don't understand why no one can see what I see. I have a dad who never thought I was good enough, always pushing me. He doesn't even know I purposely lost that game. In front of my whole team, he took my racket and just...

Michael mimics hitting someone over the head. Meghan quickly grabs his hands and shushes him. She leans forward and places a kiss to his temple.

MEGHAN

I know, Michael. I *know*.

Michael gets up from the couch and crosses over to the front door. He pulls out the book from his coat and throws it onto the coffee table as he walks back to the couch.

MICHAEL

He was reading my book.

MEGHAN

Seriously? I thought you said that he—

MICHAEL

(perplexed)

He was reading... my book.

Using her hands, Meghan caresses Michael's body and stops at his shoulders, kneading the flesh. He lets out a soft moan as he closes his eyes and throws his head back.

My book...

Pause.

And now I have to fix the leak.

MEGHAN

Why didn't you just say no to him?

MICHAEL

I don't know. I felt I had to agree to it. At his age... who knows what might happen.

MEGHAN

(leading Michael to the couch to sit)

I'm sure it's a quick fix anyway.

MICHAEL

He always says he has it under control, but then it always comes back.

MEGHAN

Let's forget about the outside world tonight. Just you and me. The only thing worrying you should be what surface you're going to fuck me on.

Michael lets out a laugh as Meghan runs her fingers through his hair. While she stares

longingly at Michael, his eyes are fixed on the book. Michael slowly lifts his head to look up at Meghan. As their eyes meet, Michael finally feels some peace. The two share a kiss, which quickly becomes heated, and they are soon laying on the couch. Meghan sits on top of Michael, straddling his waist.

She runs her hands down his chest, heading for his belt. As they kiss, Meghan slips her hands down his pants. She caresses him... and caresses... but...

Meghan pulls back from the kiss and gives Michael a sympathetic smile.

MEGHAN

Again?

Michael sits up on the couch and begins fixing his pants. Meghan steps off the couch and stands there awkwardly.

(to herself)

But three times?

MICHAEL

What?

Pause.

I still have a lot on my mind. That's probably it.

MEGHAN

Probably.

Beat.

MICHAEL

(clearing throat)

So... how was work today?

MEGHAN

Some wannabe author threw a tantrum over a contract falling through. He dropped us, and my boss ripped me a new one. Even though it wasn't my fault.

MICHAEL

(absentmindedly, buckling belt)

Sorry, babe. Happens all the time in this industry. It'll blow over soon.

MEGHAN

Right...

Pause.

I'm going to take a bath to clear my mind. If you find a way to clear yours... you can join me.

Meghan exits the stage. Michael takes a moment to compose himself. The water from the tub can be heard in the background. Michael's eye catches the book on the table. For a moment, he just stares at it. The sound of the running water becomes louder as Michael slowly reaches for the book.

Once he has it in his grasp, Michael gets up from the couch and crosses over to the kitchen. The sound of the running water is now as loud as it can be. Michael takes one last look at the book before throwing it back on the coffee table. The sound of the running water stops once the book hits the table.

The audience can hear Meghan humming a small tune. Michael takes a breath before turning to face the direction from which Meghan exited the stage. He smiles lightly.

MICHAEL

(exiting the stage)

I think I'm ready to join you now.

For a moment, the audience is left with the image of Michael's apartment. The sound of Meghan's laughter and the sloshing of water can be heard in the background.

Blackout.

SCENE V

A few days later, mid afternoon, in Audrey's backyard. The sound of birds chirping and the excited chatter of guests can be heard in the background. On the stage, there is a large table covered by a colorful tablecloth. It is surrounded by lawn chairs that have balloons tied to their backs. Beth is seated at the table with Maeve. The two are quietly talking, and Maeve enjoys her company.

Jacob runs onstage with a tennis racket in hand. Beth gives him a look as he moves over to the table.

BETH

Seriously? On your birthday? You need to take a break.

JACOB

They just wanted to have a quick rally. Besides, Coach says I need to stay sharp.

MAEVE

This is the one day where you can slack off a bit.

JACOB

Fine, I'll take a quick break.

BETH

Tennis isn't everything. You're just a teenager. You should be worrying about... whatever it is teenagers worry about now.

MAEVE

She means making sure Mom doesn't find your porn.

JACOB

(immediately defensive)

I do not have porn!

MAEVE

I've seen your search history.

JACOB

How do you... You went through my stuff?!

MAEVE

You're always away, and you make it too easy. You need better passwords.

BETH

Porn or no porn, you should still be taking it easy. You're sixteen!

JACOB

I need to practice for a few hours every day. Coach has been helping me look for colleges that have good teams and offer some scholarships. And I know I've got a good shot.

BETH

Is that *all* you want to do with your life? Just hit a ball back and forth until someone misses?

JACOB

Yeah. I like it.

Pause.

When you're in the game, it's just this rush of, like, pure adrenaline. Just you and your opponent and the ball. It's... I don't know. I like it. I feel free when I play... you know?

BETH

Hmmm.

Pause.

And what about you, Maeve?

MAEVE

What about me?

BETH

How is it as a freshman?

MAEVE

It's alright.

BETH

That's it? Just alright? Any drama?

MAEVE

Not really. I don't get involved.

BETH

You ignore it?

MAEVE

I observe.

JACOB

(chuckling)

You're such a weirdo.

MAEVE

What? I like to know what's going on, I just don't want to be a part of it.

Maeve reaches into one of the snack bowls for a few chips. She eats them while walking away from the table to go watch Jacob's friends. Maeve exits the stage as Audrey enters. Audrey is carrying a few plates of food, and she sets them on the table. Audrey notices that Maeve has moved from the table and spots her offstage.

AUDREY

(to Maeve)

Sweetie, come help me bring out the cake!

Maeve neither answers from offstage nor comes back onstage. Audrey is visibly annoyed.

Maeve!

Pause.

Maeve!

Pause.

(to Beth)

I swear, that girl truly has a mind of her own.

Audrey shares a look with Jacob, and he is immediately on his feet.

JACOB

I can help!

BETH

Don't worry, Jakey, I got it. You take your break.

The two women move to exit the stage. Before they enter the house, Michael and Meghan enter the backyard. Meghan is carrying a gift. Audrey looks the couple up and down before putting a smile on her face.

AUDREY

Welcome! You've made it just in the nick of time. I'm about to get the cake.

MICHAEL

Sorry. Traffic was awful.

AUDREY

(exiting)
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Meghan gives Michael a look before crossing over to the table. She takes a seat next to Jacob and places her gift on the table. Michael stops Beth before she exits the stage.

MICHAEL

Look, I've got to talk to you.

BETH

I've got to help Audrey with the cake. We can talk after.

MICHAEL

Beth, it's about—

Michael cuts himself off as Beth exits. Maeve walks on stage and takes a seat at the table.

MEGHAN

Are you having a good time?

JACOB

Yeah, I'm having the best time.

MICHAEL

Happy birthday, Jake.

JACOB
Thanks!

MICHAEL
Sixteen, huh? Where did all that time go?

JACOB
When are Grandma and Grandpa coming?

MICHAEL
I, uh... I'm not sure.

MAEVE
(to Jacob)
That's cause he didn't call them.

MICHAEL
Maeve... I called them. Like I said, I can't guarantee them being here.

JACOB
Well, what did they say?

MEGHAN
They said they'll be coming.

MICHAEL
Mhmmm.

JACOB
I wanted to show Grandpa some of the new shots I've been practicing before it gets too dark.

MICHAEL
You know, you can show me. I used to play tennis when I was your age.

MAEVE
We know.

Despite these being her first words back to him, Michael wants to yell at her, hit her, do anything to show his true emotions, but he stops himself when he feels Meghan's hand wrap around his own.

MICHAEL

I'm sure there isn't anything he would say that I couldn't tell you.

JACOB

Well, Grandpa's been coaching me on the weekends, and he wants to—

Michael's expression drops, and Jacob realizes he's been caught in a lie.

Sorry. Um... Grandpa told me not to say anything.

MICHAEL

Coaching you?! He's coaching you?!

JACOB

He saw me during practice one day as he was leaving work, so he decided to give me some pointers. After that, he just kept coming to my practices and games, and he just became, like, my second coach.

MICHAEL

Are you kidding me?! Why didn't you tell me anything?!

JACOB

They didn't want you freaking out.

MICHAEL

Who's "*they*?!"

MEGHAN

Michael...

JACOB

Grandpa and Mom.

Pause.

He's been talking with my coach and coming up with a plan for me for next year. They think I have what it takes to go all the way. Besides, you hate Grandpa!

MICHAEL

I do not...

Pinches the bridge of his nose.

Regardless of my own reservations about him, he shouldn't be training you.

JACOB

Why not? He's *really* good. I'm sorry but... it's not like you've ever offered.

MICHAEL

I would've, but...

MAEVE

But what?

MICHAEL

Look, your grandfather has a lot of time on his hands. Plus, he works at your school, so it's convenient for him to help.

JACOB

Exactly. That's why we thought it would be best.

MICHAEL

Besides, how good can he be? He hasn't been training. All he does is watch high-schoolers run around a track all day.

JACOB

And what? You *don't* have the time?

MICHAEL

I do. It's just... limited.

JACOB

(*dejectedly*)
... I know.

After a beat, Audrey and Beth enter. Audrey is holding the cake, and Beth has a lighter. Michael spots Beth and crosses over to her.

BETH

What are you doing?

MICHAEL

(*reaching into pocket*)
I have to talk to you.

BETH

We're about to do the cake. Can't it wait until after?

MICHAEL

It's important.

AUDREY

Beth, we need the lighter.

BETH

(to Michael)

Tell me after.

Beth walks over to the table as Michael stands alone. Audrey lights the cake, and everyone begins to sing "Happy Birthday." In the middle of the song, Jacob stops them.

JACOB

We can't start until Grandma and Grandpa are here.

MICHAEL

I'm sure they're on their way.

Jacob gives Michael a look. With this slight reassurance, they all continue the song. Michael moves towards the table and stands behind Jacob by Audrey.

By the end of the song, as Jacob blows out his candles, Randolph and Charlene enter. Randolph is holding a large box. The two go unnoticed as Randolph sneaks his way towards the group, placing his hand on Jacob's shoulder.

Jacob turns to see who has made this gesture of affection, hoping it is Michael. Upon seeing Randolph, he jumps from his seat with a mixture of excitement and disappointment.

JACOB

You made it!

RANDOLPH

Are you kidding?

The two embrace. Michael feels physically ill seeing Randolph place a kiss to the top of Jacob's head.

RANDOLPH

Now, how about we start cutting into that cake, huh?

The group, except for Michael, seems pleased with Randolph and Charlene's presence. Audrey cuts into the cake and begins passing slices around. Before Beth can get her piece, Michael grabs her arm and pulls her to the side.

BETH

What the hell, Michael? I said we can talk after.

MICHAEL

We can't.

BETH

Why not?

MICHAEL

Because someone knows.

BETH

Knows what?

Michael gives her a look.

Who?

MICHAEL

One of my students.

BETH

How did... was this student the one in your office?

MICHAEL

Yes.

BETH

How did she find out?

MICHAEL

Apparently her fucking grandparents like to collect scandalous newspaper articles.

Pause.

She wanted to adapt it into a murder mystery for her senior thesis.

BETH

You told her no, right?

MICHAEL

Of course, I did!

BETH

Good.

Pause.

Does she still have the article?

MICHAEL

(pulling out the photocopy)

She made a copy of it.

Beth quickly takes the photocopy and crumples it up.

BETH

(hushed, glancing at Charlene and Randolph)

You fucking brought it here?! Are you insane?!

MICHAEL

Give it back.

BETH

Today is *your son's* birthday. What happened to Eddie was... terrible... but that's not why we're here. Just forget about it. Like you said, you told your student no, so we have nothing to worry about.

MICHAEL

I can't just *forget* about this. A student found out something about our family. Even if she can't use it for her thesis, she still knows.

BETH

Well, did she say she knows it was about us? About you?

MICHAEL

She gave me no indication either way.

BETH

So, she doesn't know it's about you, and she won't write about it. All's well with the world.

MICHAEL

How can you be so passive about this?

RANDOLPH

What are you two whispering about over there?

Michael and Beth turn to face the group as if they have been caught red-handed. Beth hides the crumpled photocopy behind her back.

BETH

Nothing.

Michael tries to take the paper from Beth, and the siblings get caught in a back and forth. Beth keeps her hold on the photocopy as the group watches on in unsettling intrigue.

RANDOLPH

Cough it up. What are you hiding there?

MICHAEL

Nothing.

RANDOLPH

Come on! We're trying to enjoy Jacob's birthday, and you two are spoiling all the fun. What is it?

AUDREY

I think it's time for presents!

MEGHAN

Yes. Presents!

Pause.

Open ours!

Meghan pushes her gift towards Jacob, a little too insistently. Randolph keeps his eye on Beth

and Michael for a moment before turning his attention back to Jacob. As Jacob opens the gift, Michael pinches Beth's neck. She swats at his hand as the two make their way to the rest of the group.

Jacob opens his gift to find a pair of sneakers. Meghan smiles triumphantly.

MICHAEL

You said you needed some new sneakers for the season, so... voilà!

JACOB

Um... thanks, Dad, but...

Jacob moves his legs to reveal the shoes he is wearing. They are the exact same pair as the gift.

AUDREY

Just a tad late.

Randolph chuckles, and Michael gives him a look.

You always pay such *close* attention, Michael.

JACOB

That's okay, Dad. When I wear these ones out, I'll have yours to show off.

CHARLENE

Now, open ours. I think you'll really like it.

Jacob opens the large gift box and pulls out a tennis racket. At the sight of it, Michael suddenly feels ill.

JACOB

This is so cool!

MICHAEL

How did you find that?

RANDOLPH

Just did some digging.

Pause.

That racket was actually your Dad's.

JACOB

(to Michael)

Really?!

MICHAEL

I thought I lost it.

Jacob sees the look on Michael's face and glances back at Randolph.

RANDOLPH

It was his good luck charm, so I thought I'd pass it on to you for your big season. Can never go wrong with a little luck.

Pause.

And you better take care of it better than your father did.

Jacob rushes to embrace Randolph again.

MICHAEL

(to Randolph)

You had it? All this time?

RANDOLPH

(to Jacob)

We can even start training with it.

MICHAEL

No.

Everyone turns to face Michael. Randolph pulls back from the embrace but keeps one arm around Jacob's shoulders.

RANDOLPH

And why is that?

MICHAEL

Because I said so.

MEGHAN

Michael...

MICHAEL

I'll train with him from now on.

JACOB

(shifting uncomfortably)

Dad, you don't have to...

MICHAEL

No, I... I want to. It's time I got back on the court.

JACOB

We've already planned it all out. It's good, Dad... really.

MICHAEL

(to Randolph)

Why didn't you tell me that you were training with him?

RANDOLPH

Didn't feel that I needed to. He appreciates my coaching... unlike you.

Pause.

Is that what you two were talking about so secretly?

Randolph grabs the crumpled photocopy from Beth's hands. Before Beth can even react, Randolph and Charlene have already started to read over its contents. Randolph looks devastated.

RANDOLPH

Why do you have this?

BETH

Dad, it's not what you—

RANDOLPH

Why do you have this?!

CHARLENE

Randy...

MICHAEL

I, uh... it's not... if you could just—

RANDOLPH

Stop stuttering like a fucking moron! You know I hate that.

Beat.

This why you don't want me training with your son? You were planning on some big reveal? How you think I'm bad for him? For Maeve, too?

MICHAEL

(seething)

I made it perfectly clear to you already that I want you *nowhere* near my children, and especially not alone with them!

Michael attempts to snatch the photocopy from Randolph's grasp, but he rips it in half instead.

I will train with him for the rest of the season. He's *my* son. You will leave him alone.

JACOB

Dad, just stop it! It's fine!

MICHAEL

No, it is not fine! You don't know what he's really like, Jake. Can't you see that I'm doing what's best for all of us?!

Pause.

RANDOLPH

(putting the ripped piece of the photocopy into his pocket)

... Alright. You train with him.

Pause.

As long as it's what the boy wants.

Jacob feels Randolph's grip on his shoulder tighten. Jacob glances between his father and grandfather, and then up at Audrey. He takes the racket in his hand, feeling its weight and playing around with it. As Jacob thinks about his decision, he realizes that this is his chance.

JACOB

I'll train with Dad.

Michael looks up at Randolph, beaming with pride. Jacob remains by Randolph's side. Michael paces towards the two and grabs Jacob, pulling him away from Randolph. Michael hugs Jacob tightly and ruffles his hair.

MICHAEL

I'll show you what it's like to *really* play.

JACOB

(*slightly elated*)
Okay.

In the distant background, a knock can be heard at the front door of the house. Audrey goes to answer it, but Charlene stops her.

CHARLENE

(*exiting*)
I'll get it. Enjoy yourself.

MEGHAN

(*trying to lighten the mood*)
You still have a lot more gifts to open, Jacob.

Jacob sits back down in his seat as the others watch him open the remaining gifts. Michael has his arm around Meghan and loves how she reacts to the gifts just as excitedly as Jacob. Michael glances at Audrey, and she is clearly suppressing her boredom. She knows that in a few years, most of these gifts will be thrown away or stored in the basement.

After a moment, Charlene re-enters the stage, pale and trembling. Maeve is the only one who notices her.

MAEVE

Grandma? What's wrong?

Everyone turns to look at Charlene.

AUDREY

Who was at the door? What happened?

CHARLENE

It was... um... they want to...

RANDOLPH

Char? Are you alright?

POLICE OFFICERS #1 and #2 enter and stand behind Charlene. All the guests are surprised. Maeve rushes to Audrey's side.

AUDREY

(to the Police Officers)

Has something happened?

POLICE OFFICER #1

Is Mr. Randolph Warren present?

RANDOLPH

That would be me. Is there something I can help you all with?

POLICE OFFICER #2

Mr. Warren, you are under arrest for three counts of simple assault and criminal battery.

Everyone, except for Randolph and Michael, adlibs lines of shock. Michael remains silent; however, he can't help the smallest twitch from appearing in the corner of his mouth.

CHARLENE

(to Randolph)

What are they talking about, Randy?

RANDOLPH

I'm sure it's all just a misunderstanding.

Police Officer #2 approaches Randolph.

POLICE OFFICER #2

(placing his hand on Randolph's shoulder)

We have a warrant. Mr. Warren, I repeat, we are placing you under arrest.

Charlene being closest to him, Police Officer #1 hands her the written warrant for observation. She quickly glances over it, and just as she fully reacts to the details therein, Police Officer #1 takes the warrant back and places it in his pocket.

BETH

Mom?

CHARLENE

(knowingly)

Randy... you hurt them?

BETH

Hurt who?

RANDOLPH

Nonsense!

CHARLENE

Officers, please! Surely this is all a mistake!

POLICE OFFICER #1

Ma'am, please—Mr. Warren, you'll need to come down to the station with us.

RANDOLPH

(to Charlene)

It'll be alright.

(to the Police Officers)

Just wish you boys picked a different day to do this. Can't even let me enjoy my grandson's birthday.

JACOB

What's going on?

RANDOLPH

It's alright. Don't worry about me. I'll be back in no time.

Police Officer #2 begins to place handcuffs on Randolph. Charlene lets out a cry while rushing over to Randolph, who shows no signs of resistance. With an outstretched arm, Police Officer #1 holds Charlene back a little too roughly. Michael steps forward.

POLICE OFFICER #2

You have the right to remain silent.
Anything you say can and will be used
against you in a court of law.

MICHAEL

(to Police Officer #1)

Get off of her! She's doing nothing wrong!

*Michael pushes Police Officer #1 back.
Police Officer #1 puts one hand on his gun
holster and holds the palm of his other hand
out to Michael.*

POLICE OFFICER #2

You have the right to an attorney. If you
cannot afford an attorney, one will be
provided for you. If you decide to answer
any questions now without an attorney
present, you have the right to stop
answering at any time until you talk to an
attorney. Do you understand these rights?
(Randolph nods)

POLICE OFFICER #1

Stand back, sir!

MICHAEL

You get your kicks out of hurting old ladies,
huh?

*Charlene rushes over to Michael and pushes
him back towards Beth and Meghan.*

AUDREY

Jacob! Maeve! Go inside! NOW! GET
INSIDE!

*Jacob and Maeve run offstage. Having
finished the Miranda warning, Police
Officer #2 grips Randolph by the shoulders
and motions for him to begin walking.
Police Officer #1 follows after them.*

MICHAEL

(to the Police Officers)
How did you even find him here?

BETH

(to the Police Officers)
You can't just take him! He's only been *suspected* of it... right?

POLICE OFFICER #1

We're taking him in for questioning, ma'am.

RANDOLPH

Don't worry. It'll be alright.

Police Officer #1, Police Officer #2, and Randolph exit the stage. Charlene breaks down crying as she rushes to Michael. He takes her in his arms and soothes her. Meghan, Beth, and Audrey are left in shock.

MICHAEL

It's okay, Mom. It's going to be alright.

CHARLENE

It's happening all over again!

MEGHAN

What is, Charlene?

There's a moment of silence before everyone turns to look at Meghan. She doesn't know.

For a moment, the audience is left with the image of Charlene weeping in Michael's arms as he comforts her. Meghan glances between everyone, waiting for some sort of answer. Beth sits down at the table, unable to stand any longer. Audrey, still in shock, stands up straight and clears her throat.

AUDREY

I'll go and take the cake inside.

Audrey picks up the cake and exits the stage.

MEGHAN

What am I missing?

Michael takes a moment before handing his half of the photocopy to Meghan hesitantly. She reads it over and is shocked by her newfound realization.

MEGHAN

This... this is about your family?

MICHAEL

Yes.

MEGHAN

I heard about this.

BETH

How? You weren't even born yet.

MEGHAN

My...

All eyes are on Meghan. Suddenly, she becomes violently aware of the age gap between her and the other adults.

MEGHAN

My parents had heard all about it.

BETH

Right.

MEGHAN

I didn't know that you were...

Meghan points to the photocopy before handing it back to Michael.

BETH

Quite the surprise, huh?

MEGHAN

(to Michael)
I think we should go.

Michael lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding.

MICHAEL

I'll get an Uber.

MEGHAN

We drove here.

MICHAEL

For you.

MEGHAN

What?

MICHAEL

I can't leave now. I'll get you an Uber, and I'll be back later.

MEGHAN

Oh. I'll take care of it. Don't worry.

Pause. Crosses to exit.

I'll see you later tonight.

Meghan exits.

BETH

You never told her?

MICHAEL

I didn't want her to know.

CHARLENE

Oh, God. I hope this isn't like last time.

MICHAEL

No one's going to blow this up. It's just an old guy who hit some kids or something. Happens all the time.

BETH

Not unless someone connects him back to Eddie.

Silence.

The audience is left with the still image of the group. Michael stands aside from the family. Beth is sitting slouched at the table, staring into space. Charlene begins to weep again.

We're *the* Warrens.

Blackout.

SCENE VI

1986. Late afternoon in the interrogation room of a Police Station. A table and three chairs are visible, and DETECTIVE MILLER is sitting in one. He has a pen and a legal pad in front of him, as well as an unopened manila file.

YOUNG MICHAEL sits across from him, fidgeting, clearly in distress.

DETECTIVE MILLER

No need to be fidgeting around like that. I only want to ask you a few questions.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Oh... okay.

DETECTIVE MILLER

You know, I've got a nephew who goes to your school.

Pause.

He was thinking of trying out for the tennis team.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Really?

DETECTIVE MILLER

Yeah. And I take it that you enjoy playing tennis?

YOUNG MICHAEL

I do.

DETECTIVE MILLER

I've even seen your photo pop up in the newspaper a couple of times. You're a real talent, you know that?

YOUNG MICHAEL

I wouldn't say so. I just enjoy playing the sport.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Who trained you?

YOUNG MICHAEL

My coach does during the season.

DETECTIVE MILLER

And do you train when the season's over?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yes.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Same coach from your school?

YOUNG MICHAEL

No, um...

Pause.

My dad.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Your dad?

Pause.

Hmmm. How does that go?

YOUNG MICHAEL

It's alright.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Is he hard on you? I mean, you play so well. No one plays that well without a little... *discipline.*

YOUNG MICHAEL

I... I guess. A little.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Your brother played tennis too?

Young Michael's eyes widen slightly. This is picked up by Detective Miller. Young Michael begins to fidget again.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yes.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Did you like playing with him? Being the older brother, you gave him a few tidbits of advice, right? You were a good older brother?

YOUNG MICHAEL

He was alright.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Your dad trained him too?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Sometimes.

Pause.

This is more than a few questions.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Why? You got somewhere to be?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Um... no, sir.

Pause.

DETECTIVE MILLER

What was your dad doing at the time of the incident?

YOUNG MICHAEL

He was painting the house. He had just finished and was sweeping the porch.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Where was Eddie?

YOUNG MICHAEL

In the house.

DETECTIVE MILLER

How did he get outside?

YOUNG MICHAEL

My dad noticed he missed a spot on the house and called for Eddie to go get the paint can he'd been using from the shed.

DETECTIVE MILLER

So... your dad had finished the house, found a spot he missed, and asked Eddie to go get the paint can from the shed. Do I have that right?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yes.

DETECTIVE MILLER

How do you know that happened?

YOUNG MICHAEL

My dad was telling my mom after he got off the phone with 9-1-1. I overheard it.

DETECTIVE MILLER

How did your dad seem after finding Eddie?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Um... he was a bit... I guess... frantic. We found him unconscious and—

DETECTIVE MILLER

We? Who's *we*?

Young Michael's eyes widen.

YOUNG MICHAEL

...

DETECTIVE MILLER

You were there? *You* were with your dad when he found Eddie?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yes.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Seems your dad forgot that part.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Um... he was frantic.

DETECTIVE MILLER

How did you find Eddie, then? What made you go outside? A scream? Did he call for anybody inside to come and help? Or were you outside too?

YOUNG MICHAEL

I... he, um... I...

DETECTIVE MILLER

It's alright, son. You can tell me the truth. That's what we're here for. The truth.

Pause.

You want to help your brother, don't you?

YOUNG MICHAEL

I was going outside... to practice. Hitting a few balls against the shed, like me and Eddie did all the time. I couldn't find my racket, so I went to check the shed. That's when I saw my dad, and I ran up to him.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Alright.

Pause.

You didn't see your father... *do* anything... did you?

YOUNG MICHAEL

No. He was just kneeling over Eddie's body, shaking him to try and wake him up.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Right. How long did it take your dad to call 9-1-1 after he couldn't wake Eddie up?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Uh... I don't remember exactly. A few minutes? We were in shock.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Really? Because the *dried* blood on the scene would indicate otherwise. Why did it take so long for the call to 9-1-1 to be made?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Like I said, my dad was frantic. Same as my mom.

Silence. Detective Miller leans forward towards Michael.

DETECTIVE MILLER

You telling the truth?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Um... yes, sir.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Do you know what the doctors said happened to him? What caused your brother's death?

YOUNG MICHAEL

My dad told me.

DETECTIVE MILLER

So, Eddie went to retrieve the paint can your father used, he ended up tripping on some hose, went to grab the shelf but managed to knock the paint can over, fell face-first onto the concrete breaking his nose, and *then* the paint can hit the back of his head and got paint all over him?

Pause.

Blunt force trauma. That what he told you?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yes.

DETECTIVE MILLER

On the scene, we didn't find a lot of paint on your brother's body. Do you know what that means?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Uh... no. I don't.

DETECTIVE MILLER

That the paint can wasn't really that heavy. Easy to knock over, but...

Pause.

Is that what you would say? Since you were also there when your dad discovered Eddie's body.

YOUNG MICHAEL

I... I didn't really notice.

DETECTIVE MILLER

You didn't notice?

YOUNG MICHAEL

I don't really remember a lot.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Well, you just *told* me a lot.

Silence.

Look, son, you and I both want the same thing. We want to understand what happened. We want to make sure nothing *bad* happened. Do you understand what I mean?

YOUNG MICHAEL

... Yes.

DETECTIVE MILLER

And I'm sure that Eddie would want you to be nothing but honest with us. For his sake... and his soul.

YOUNG MICHAEL

... Right. His soul.

DETECTIVE MILLER

So, tell me *exactly* what happened.

YOUNG MICHAEL

My dad was painting the house. He had just finished and was sweeping the porch. My dad noticed he'd missed a spot on the house and called for Eddie to go get the paint can he'd been using from the shed. I went outside to practice, and I, um... I couldn't find my racket so... I went to the shed and found my dad there with Eddie trying to wake him up.

DETECTIVE MILLER

That's what happened?

YOUNG MICHAEL

That's what happened, sir, yes.

Silence.

DETECTIVE MILLER

Alright. I think we've got what we need.

*Detective Miller gets up calmly from the table,
while Young Michael stands up erratically.*

I'm sure Eddie would be proud of you, son.

Detective Miller places a hand on Young Michael's shoulder and squeezes it a little too tightly. Upon hearing this, Young Michael's nervous expression and body language suddenly drops, being replaced by a strange bitterness.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Can I leave now?

DETECTIVE MILLER

Sure. I have everything I need.

Young Michael practically jumps at the approval and exits the interrogation room.

The audience is left with the image of Detective Miller standing in the middle of the room, staring in the direction from which Young Michael just exited. The detective crosses over the table and sits back down. He finally opens the manila file and begins looking through its contents: images of Eddie's injuries and other paperwork from the morgue.

After a beat, he shoves the papers off the table violently, his frustration on full display.

Blackout.

POLICE OFFICER #2 (V.O.)

Has your father ever physically abused anyone before? Is that something you think he's capable of doing?

Silence.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

... Yes.

End of Act I.