

BRINGING DAYLIGHT

Drama, Stage play

by
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Bringing Daylight - Kristine A. Hurst

| CHARACTER NAME | BRIEF DESCRIPTION | AGE | GENDER |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-----|-------------------|
| Anna Carter | Co-dependent, wife, mother | 40s | Female |
| Ted Carter | Abusive, alcoholic cop, father | 40s | Male |
| Dee Williams | Social worker, mom, wife | 40s | Female |
| Jasmine Carter | Happy kid who is now rebelling | 11 | Female |
| Russell Carter | Boy who loves his family & jokes | 8 | Male |
| Bullhorn Voice | Voice off stage | | Male or Female |
| Judge | Voice off stage | | Female |

Sets can be minimal. Necessary pieces are a couch, coffee table, small dinner table or similar table, four chairs, small props: laptop, beer cans, soccer ball, flute, dice and cup, board game, food serving plater, plates, drinking glasses, paper napkins, school books, school backpacks, miscellaneous mail. Lighting used to differentiate areas and accent people.

PRELUDE

[Lights are low, we barely make out shadowy figures of a woman and two children moving around frantically past a couch and small coffee table; gathering things; a soccer ball, a teddy bear, a flute, books; packing items into pillow cases and bags. A suitcase stands near the door.

The woman motions to the children to hurry. They all move to the door dragging the belongings, exit and close the door quietly.

Suddenly, the girl bursts back inside. A soft pin light clicks on, illuminating a music box with a unicorn standing erect at its center on the coffee table. The girl grabs it, pauses, the box plays a few notes, then she turns, runs with it to join her mother and brother, SLAMS the door behind her.]

SCENE 1

[A pin spot illuminates ANNA, early 40s, her husband TED, 40s, daughter JASMINE, 11, son RUSSELL, 8, social worker and friend DEE, 40s as each person on stage begins to speak. All five face front addressing an unseen questioner. They are being interviewed individually and are unaware of each other's comments.]

TED

Am I?

ANNA

He does.

...

Lose his temper, I mean.

TED

I'm a cop. Forceful
Have to be.

ANNA

Uh.
...Pretty often.... actually.

RUSSELL

I don't know what that means.

JASMINE

I think so.
...
Yeah.

RUSSELL

Does yelling count?

ANNA

Gradually...
Over...
over time.

JASMINE

Nice?
...
Sometimes.

DEE

43% of domestic violence victims experience another beating within a years time.

RUSSELL

What about spanking?

JASMINE

He makes my Mom cry.

TED

No.
It's...
She pisses me off.
A lot.

ANNA
I..
...love
...him.

DEE
...like a drug ...

ANNA
...I can't give up.

RUSSELL
Then, yes.

TED
Explosive!
What do you mean by that?

JASMINE
I never know when.
...
It's scary.
...I think he tries to scare me.

RUSSELL
Yeah. My Mom and sister.
Mostly

DEE
Yes. The vast majority. In fact, 85% of domestic violence victims are women and girls.

ANNA
He's nice
... Some of the time.

JASMINE
I.
...
I don't trust him.
(spot out on JASMINE)

ANNA

Then... the rest of the time...
he's
...angry...
...awful.

DEE

For every woman killed in the United States because of domestic violence, nearly nine are almost killed.

RUSSELL

Really, really mean.
(spot out on RUSSELL)

TED

I would say good. Yeah...I'm a good dad.

DEE

Actually, on average, 137 women are killed around the world by a partner or spouse.
Every single day!
(spot out on DEE)

ANNA

Uhh...
Definitely...
Uh...
Getting worse, not better.

TED

No!
Not at all...
Not my fault.
(spot out on TED)

ANNA

You know...I
uh...
...
Can we just change the subject?
(spot out on ANNA)

SCENE 2

[Lights up on a living room scene. There is a resale-shop couch and a coffee table that has more than a few scratches and mars. Nothing superfluous on stage.

Lights are low but we can see character expressions.

Crowded on the couch, ANNA, daughter JASMINE, and son RUSSELL sit stoically, looking up at Ted who is standing in front of them pointing a Glock handgun at them.]

ANNA

(she raises her hands toward TED as if to push him away, but from a distance)

Whoa!! What are you doing?

RUSSELL

Dad! You told me never to point a gun at someone. That's not nice.

TED

(still aiming at ANNA)

I'm glad you remember that, son. This is different.

[TED steps closer to them; makes it a point to aim directly at JASMINE. She shrugs, unimpressed.

ANNA makes a move to go to a nearby chair, sits on it. TED detects her movement out of the corner of his eye.]

TED

(to ANNA)

Don't move. Stay where you are. All of you.

ANNA

(speaks in a soothing voice)

Ted. C'mon.

...Settle down. ...

...Let's talk about what's bothering you.

TED

Don't talk to me in that god damn, calming teacher voice. You know I hate that.

ANNA

Just put the gun down
...so we can talk.

TED

No.

ANNA

Then at least
...let the kids go to their rooms.
...You and I can figure this out.

TED

Nobody is going anywhere.

ANNA

Please
...tell me what's wrong.

[TED slowly, silently slides his aim around the room, pointing the Glock at each of them, pausing a moment at each, then pulls back the 'cocking' slide atop the gun before moving to the next person.]

ANNA, JASMINE and RUSSELL sit completely motionless as he does this. They try their best not to betray the fear they feel right now. They've had a lot of practice at masking their emotions.]

TED

Everything is wrong. You're wrong. They're wrong. I get no respect here. In my own home.

ANNA

Of course we respect you.
...You're my husband.
...I
...love you.

(no reaction from TED)

And, you're Jasmine and Russell's Dad.

...They love you.

You ...

you don't have to do this. Okay...

...Put down the gun.

TED

Shut up!

[His hand trembles. He puts both hands on the hilt of the gun to steady it, points it at ANNA again.]

You're cheating on me. I know it.

ANNA

(calmly)

Why do you keep saying that?

No.

No, I'm not cheating on you.

...

I wouldn't do that.

TED

I'm tired of your lies! Tired of you. Tired of all of you!

[There is a KNOCK at the door.

TED swivels, points the gun toward the door then back to ANNA.]

(lights fade)

TWO WEEKS EARLIER

SCENE 3

[The living room of ANNA CARTER, and TED CARTER's home. It's early evening.

ANNA sits on the floor near the coffee table, a board game beside her. Her daughter, JASMINE, kneeling, is furiously shaking dice in a cup;

her son RUSSELL, sits cross-legged on the floor with his hands atop his head, anxiously awaiting the result of JASMINE'S shake.

When JASMINE finally deposits the dice on top of the game board, RUSSELL leaps to his feet for a victory dance.]

(LAUGHTER.)

RUSSELL

(Pointing at JASMINE)

Ha. Ha. You have to go to jail!! You lose \$200.

JASMINE

So what?!? I'm still gonna win.

RUSSELL

Are not!

JASMINE

Am, too!

RUSSELL

Are not!

ANNA

You're both crazy. I'm going to win!!

[ANNA grabs the dice and the cup; RUSSELL wrestles her for it.

Everyone LAUGHS

TED enters wearing his cop uniform.]

TED

Sounds like fun. Who's winning?

[ANSWERING TOGETHER]

ANNA

...I am!...

JASMINE

...I am!...

RUSSELL

...I am!...

[Loud LAUGHTER]

RUSSELL

Dad! Be on my team. We'll beat them.

JASMINE

That's not fair.

I'm ahead. That's like cheating.

ANNA

Dad can join us. It'll be fun.

(to TED)

C'mon.

Play.

...You can take my spot.

[Without responding, TED removes the gun and holster from his belt. Sets both on the coffee table. He joins the family circle; sits cross-legged next to JASMINE.

He leans to ANNA, they kiss.]

ANNA

(tenderly)

Hello, you.

How was your shift?

TED

Mmm. You know....

Uneventful..

ANNA

That's good. Right?

TED

At the jail, boring is very good.

ANNA

Are you hungry? I can heat up something.

TED

Nah. I grabbed a bite on the way home.

(turning his attention back to the kids; he
rubs his hands together)

Let's do this.

JASMINE

Do we have to start over?

...Just when I was winning.

TED

Don't worry, Jazz. You can keep your lead. I'll catch up.

[TED scoops up the dice and with great flourish,
deposits them on the game board.]

JASMINE

Oooh. Fancy.

TED

I'll show you how.

(coaching JASMINE)

Stretch your arm up high. Balance with your left arm.

Out farther. ..

Okay, now keep your eyes on where you want them to land.

Big sweep with your right arm...

Then, WHAM, throw 'em down!

[The dice CLATTER.]

RUSSELL

Whooh!

ANNA

Good job, Jazz.

JASMINE

Ten!! Dad you're my good luck.
For sure, I'm going to win.

[TED and JASMINE share a wink and a smile. Still smiling, TED leans toward ANNA, gives her another kiss, this time on the cheek.]

RUSSELL

Dad, can you teach me a special shake? You know...for good luck?

TED

Absolutely, buddy. For yours, you have to stand up.
Now...grab the dice.
Cup 'em in your hand. Gently, gently... blow on them.
All right. Spin around. Twice.
Big arm...WHAM!

(Everyone LAUGHS and WHOOPS)

RUSSELL

I love it. I'm going to do it that way every time.

[RUSSELL goes through the gyrations again, a little more wildly and bumps the coffee table.

The jolt makes Jasmine's water glass wobble. She reaches for it but, too late. Water spills across the coffee table.]

TED

(to JASMINE)

You're so clumsy. Clean it up.

[JASMINE looks surprised]

ANNA

It's only water.
Jazzy, go get a cloth to wipe it up.

TED

She's careless.

ANNA

C'mon, Ted...

really...

...It's not a big deal. It wasn't her fault.

TED

You coddle her. This is your doing.

JASMINE

(returning with a cloth.)

Geez, now you're mad at each other!

[TED gets up, takes his gun and holster, leaves the room.
RUSSELL sits quietly, trying to be invisible.]

ANNA

(To JASMINE)

Don't aggravate your Dad.

[JASMINE gestures like, "What?"]

ANNA follows TED out of the room. JASMINE flops
onto the couch.]

JASMINE

It wasn't even my fault!

ANNA

(O.S.)

....It was an accident. Jazz didn't do it.

TED

(O.S.)

Don't talk to me.

ANNA

Please...Just...Try to ..
calm down.

TED

Get away!

ANNA

(O.S.)
I'll tell her to be more careful.

RUSSELL

I hate it when they fight.

[ANNA re-enters.]

ANNA

Jasmine! What are you doing?
Please wipe up the water.

...

You don't want your Dad to come back in and see it.

JASMINE

I don't care if he sees it.

[JASMINE throws down the cloth and runs out of the room.]

Silently, without any eye contact, ANNA sits on the floor; she and RUSSELL gather up the game pieces and parts.]

(lights fade)

SCENE 4

[Later that same evening, as lights come up on a round dining table; nothing fancy, utilitarian. Four straight backed chairs near or around it. A smaller table to the side holds an electric tea kettle.]

Wearing 'civilian' clothes, TED sits at the table with a beer; ear buds planted firmly in his ears; in his own world. Two empty beer cans sit nearby. Anna's laptop is on the table.

Without acknowledging each other, ANNA joins him at the table; dumps down an armful of mail; sorts through it as neither of them speak.

Then ANNA breaks the silence, speaks more to herself than anyone in particular.]

ANNA

Geez...

There are a lot of bills here.

[She opens her laptop, fires it up.

ANNA squints at the screen.]

ANNA

It's going to be a tight month...

[No reaction from TED. ANNA motions to him to remove his ear buds.

He does; then stares at ANNA.]

ANNA

I said,

...It's going to be a tight month.

TED

Okay. Not my fault.

ANNA

(not reacting to his comment)

I can try to move a few things around.

...

Buy a little time...

TED

Meant to tell ya. Cap' said there won't be any overtime for at least another three weeks.

ANNA

Darn.

TED

I'm glad. OT was wearing me down.

ANNA

But we needed that extra.

...My union is still negotiating our contract. There's talk we might go on strike .

...Strike pay isn't much.

(typing on her laptop)

Our budget is stretched so thin...

TED

Yeah, well, teachers and jailors don't make much.

ANNA

Maybe I can pick up more after-school tutoring.

...It won't come close to being what we need, though.

TED

More tutoring. I don't like it.

You should be home after school.

In fact, I don't like it that you work at all.

ANNA

I'd go crazy...I mean...

...And, if I didn't work

...then we'd really have no money.

[Getting up to turn on the tea kettle.

While it's heating, ANNA pauses behind TED, tenderly rests her hands on his shoulders. TED doesn't react to her touch.]

ANNA (CONT'D)

What about the promotion?

TED

I like working in the jail. Look, it's a state-of-the-art facility. Who wouldn't want to work there? It's new. And, clean.

ANNA

You're the best candidate. For the new job.....
...Did you put in your paperwork?

(SILENCE)

ANNA

Ted?

TED

I'm not so sure I'm going to.

[Bringing two full mugs to the table, she puts one in front of TED; ANNA sits down again.]

TED ignores the tea; takes another gulp of beer.

ANNA

When did you decide this?

TED

Being in a squad might look 'glamorous', but it's a real bitch on the streets.

ANNA

We were counting on the promotion.
...its a full pay grade higher.

TED

Yeah, well, the deadline's past.

ANNA

Awww.
...When were you going to tell me?

TED

I'm telling you now.

[ANNA slumps back in her chair.]

TED

Don't be so dramatic.

ANNA

...I'm disappointed.

TED

Ha. You have no right.

ANNA

I have a right...

Your decision affects me, too.

...Our whole family.

TED

It's my ass on the line.

ANNA

Are you saying it's dangerous?

...

I thought you mostly watch monitors.

TED

You want to do my job?

ANNA

Please don't change the subject...

TED

You brought up the promotion, not me...

ANNA

...I'm juggling finances

... still trying to pay off the big credit card bills from last Christmas.

TED

Putting me on an allowance, now.

ANNA

No.

...

But we have to slow down our spending.

TED

We still need to buy stuff.

ANNA

...How much do you spend on beer

...

and weed?

TED

None of your business...

[TED takes a hit of his vape pen. Blows the vapor cloud towards ANNA. She fans it away.]

ANNA

Ugh...

...How about...

For the rest of the month ...
we stick to essentials.

...

Like the mortgage
...and food,
but that's about it.

TED

Gas for the cars.

ANNA

Of course....

Agree?

TED

(shrugs, drains his beer)

Fine.

[TED puts his earbuds back in place.]

ANNA opens a letter, reads it, then again motions to TED to remove the earbuds. He removes them with great drama.

Stares at ANNA.]

ANNA

Jasmine has been acting out at school.

...This is from her teacher.

Addressed to both of us...

(Reading from the letter.)

Jasmine has been displaying aggressive behavior towards her classmates. This is uncharacteristic...

...Perhaps there has been a change of circumstances at home or increased stress...

...I have sent home two notes requesting a phone conference with you but have received no response...

(to TED)

Have you seen any notes from her teacher?

TED

That's your area.

ANNA

We'll have to set up a meeting with him ..

TED

You do. Not me.

ANNA

If Jazz is upset by something, we both should be trying to help her.

TED

You spoil her.

ANNA

It can't be helpful that we argue as much as we do.

TED

You start it. That's not my fault.

ANNA

It's on both of us.

TED

I come home and just want to relax. But, no.
You're all over me.

ANNA

...I'm just trying to...

TED

You're just like my mother. Knock it off.

ANNA

We have to do what's best for..

TED

Figure it out. I'm not talking to any teacher.

[TED leaves. ANNA puts her head in her hands for a long moment then gathers her laptop and papers, clears the table.]

(lights dim slightly)

[DEE enters with two glasses; they could be wine glasses or small water glasses being used for adult beverages. ANNA approaches the table with an unmarked bottle in her hand; probably wine. She pours something into each glass; joins DEE at the table.]

ANNA

I do...
I remember.

DEE

Get out!
It was, like
What?
Six years ago.

ANNA

Exactly.
Alex was clinging to your leg.
You had that look in your eyes, like
“Please let me get to work!”

[both LAUGH.]

ANNA (CONT'D)

I was such a bad mom.
I told Russell something like, “This little boy looks just as nervous as you are.” and I
dragged him over to meet Alex.

[more LAUGHTER. DEE leaks out a SNORT.]

DEE

If our kids hadn't been terrified.../

ANNA

...we would never have met.

DEE

Right?

ANNA

That toddler school was soooo frightening.

[raises her glass]

To the scary first day of school.

(they clink glasses, drink)

DEE

...
the boys are already eight.

ANNA

Lucky they get along.

DEE

It's sweet that even Amy and Jasmine are besties.

ANNA

Mmm.

Yeah

DEE

Speaking of besties...

We all missed you.

ANNA

Me!

When?

DEE

The other night.

The party...

ANNA

Oh, ...yeah...

DEE

Why did you and Ted bail?

...

The whole neighborhood was there.

ANNA

...

Ted got busy and...

(they continue to sip and refill their glasses
as the conversation slows)

DEE

Hmmm

...

Seems like a lot lately.

ANNA

...
 Busy time
 ...

DEE

...
 Would've been fun...

ANNA

Last minute change,
 ...
 you know.

DEE

Yeah. Dave gets busy, too.
 He works late sometimes...

ANNA

With Ted...
 Stuff happens at the jail and...
 Ted...
 They ask him to stay late.

DEE

Sure...
 Things happen.
 ...
 You should've come.

ANNA

That's not really me.

DEE

What!?
 It used to be.
 You'd never turn down an invitation.
 ...
 With Ted or without him...
 In fact, you were a total party animal.
 Hanging out with you at parties is what kept me sane.

ANNA

Well...
He comes home...
Has a few beers.
Vapes...
then...
He's not in the mood.

DEE

He vapes?
I didn't figure a cop would get high.
...
They let him?

ANNA

I doubt they know.

DEE

Do you?
Vape
or smoke?.

ANNA

(grins)
Hey, I went to college, too, ya know.
Smoked.
Not now.
But then.

DEE

Of course.
Everyone did.
Then.

ANNA

I stopped before I got pregnant with Jasmine.

DEE

But, not Ted...

ANNA

He never stopped.

...

Does Dave?

DEE

No.

Neither of us anymore.

...

All these years I've known you and Ted...

Just never realized. Wouldn't have guessed.

ANNA

I keep it quiet...

Ted hides it pretty well.

It's been a lot more lately, though.

And he's so...

angry...

DEE

About what?

ANNA

Everything.

He explodes.

At me. At the kids.

...

When he gets like that...

I...

...not sure I want him in charge of the kids.

...and, he doesn't like it when I go out, anyway...

So,

I stay home...

[DEE flinches and cocks her head in reaction. She keeps her eyes on ANNA; slowly takes a drink from her glass.]

(lights dim slightly)

[Dee departs. The lights are low, ANNA puts on a bathrobe as she sits at the corner of the couch, folds her legs beneath her, picks up a book.

TED enters slowly and quietly. He's surprised to find ANNA still awake. She looks up at him as she closes her book. She stretches and looks at her watch.]

ANNA

Wow! It's almost midnight.
...I lost track of the time.

TED

Were you waiting up for me?

ANNA

No.
...No, just reading.
...Where've you been?

TED

You know; here, there.

ANNA

...Huh...

TED

What do you mean by that?

ANNA

...Nothing.

[TED moves quickly to where ANNA is sitting, shoves her down into a lying position on the couch. He straddles her, holding her shoulders down.]

ANNA

Ow!
...What are you doing?

TED

You don't get to ask me where I was!

ANNA
 It hurts...
 ...Get off!

[ANNA puts her hand on TED's arm, trying to dislodge his grip. She flails a bit.]

TED
 Ohh! Go ahead. Hit me.

ANNA
 Stop...

TED
 Yeah, this is good.
 C'mon. C'mon. Hit me. I'll call 911. They'll arrest you.

ANNA
 (struggling)
 ...just
 ...let me up.

TED
 I'll make sure that they do a cavity search on you.
 Strip and search, girl!

[TED bounces her shoulders hard into the couch, hauls back, slaps ANNA across the face before getting off of her. He leaves the room.]

ANNA stifles a CRY.]

(lights fade)

SCENE 5

[The next morning, lights up on seven grocery-filled bags lining the counter of ANNA's small kitchen. ANNA is unpacking them as her friend, DEE enters without knocking.]

DEE

(gesturing to the lineup of bags)

Whoa! Did you get up at dawn?

[Continuing to unpack, ANNA tosses a grape to DEE who pops it into her mouth.]

ANNA

Just about. I didn't actually sleep much last night.

Wanted to get this shopping done before work. I LOVE the days you drive carpool.

DEE

(sarcastically)

Yeah, me, too!

(they laugh)

[JASMINE and RUSSELL bound into the kitchen wearing their backpacks. JASMINE holds out a paper to ANNA.]

JASMINE

Sign, please.

(to Dee)

Hi, Mrs. Williams.

ANNA

What is ...

JASMINE

Field trip tomorrow. Bye!

RUSSELL

(sing-song)

Gooooood morning, Missusss Williams. Good-bye, Mooooom.

DEE

Hi, kids! Amy and Alex are waiting in the car. I'll be out in a minute.

[JASMINE and RUSSELL dart through the door, elbowing each other, trying to be the first. TED lumbers in, without even a nod to DEE, he pours himself a cup of coffee.

DEE mimes to ANNA, "I'm going. Bye!" and she dashes out.

TED scowls, looks at the unpacked groceries.]

TED

So where the hell were you?

ANNA

Uh, grocery shopping.

TED

For over an hour?

(beat)

Who're you fucking?

ANNA

(stops putting groceries into the cupboard to look at Ted incredulously)

Come on!! Stop saying that.

TED

It's a long time to be at the grocery store.

ANNA

How do you think I could shop for all of this any faster?

TED

I'm sure you could work it out with your lover.

ANNA

I don't have a lover!!!

TED

Well, what about your precious spending freeze? You spent a lot today.

ANNA

I'm the queen of coupons. I've been keeping our budget afloat for a long time by shopping carefully.

TED

I still think you're fucking someone else.

[TED shoulder checks ANNA as he walks past her and he leaves the room. The jolt staggers ANNA.]

(lights fade)

SCENE 6

[Later that same day, lights come up on ANNA as she sorts through mail at the kitchen table while holding an ice pack against her bruised arm. The kids are at the table, books and papers spread across the top.]

JASMINE

What do you think about a flute?

(pause)

Mom?

ANNA

(sets aside the mail and the ice pack)

Sorry, honey. What did you say?

JASMINE

A flute. What if I take flute lessons? I have to be in either regular music class or band. I kind of want to be in the band.

ANNA

That sounds like a great idea.
...You'll have to practice though.

(pause)

I'll have to see about renting a flute for you.
 ...Can you maybe wait until next month?

JASMINE

(crinkles her nose)

I guess, if I have to.

RUSSELL

She wants to be in band because Tommy Gray is. He plays drums.

[RUSSELL drums the table top.]

JASMINE

That's not why. Anyway, he likes Maisey.
 ...Amy's in band.

[a KNOCK at the door..ANNA rises to answer it.]

ANNA

Hey. Come on in.

DEE

Hi kiddos! Jazz, you left your math book in my car this afternoon.

(DEE holds up the book, JASMINE
 GROANS)

Not intentionally, right??

(JASMINE feigns surprise. The both laugh.)

ANNA

Why don't you two finish your homework in your rooms?
 ...Jasmine, I'll help you with math later
 ...if you want.

[Both kids gather their books and head to the other room.
 DEE sits at the table, notices ANNA's bruised arm and
 holds up the ice pack.]

DEE

What's with the ice pack?

ANNA

If I had a dollar for every time I bang into the doorframe...

DEE

Hmm.... You know that when you drive carpool, you get to listen to the kids' conversations.

ANNA

Yeah, it's like magic.

Without having to ask a single question,
...you get to overhear all of their secrets.
Like who's the cutest boy in 5th grade?

(both answer)

DEE

...Tommy Gray!...

ANNA

...Tommy Gray!...

(then)

And which Marvel super hero is better,
Iron Man or Spider Man?

(Again, they answer together, now raising
their arms into the air in victory)

DEE

...Iron Man!...

ANNA

...Iron Man!...

[They share a good laugh, then calm down to the
seriousness of DEE's initial question.]

DEE

Yeah, but beyond that, they talk about their concerns.

ANNA

...Like ...what?

DEE

Jazz and Russ worry about you. About the 'bruising'. About Ted's temper.

(waits for a reaction; nothing)

What's going on, girl? You okay?

[ANNA stares down at her hands on the table. DEE reaches across and takes ANNA's hand.]

DEE

You can trust me. C'mon. Maybe I can help.

ANNA

(cries softly)

It's getting bad. I thought it was just normal 'guy' anger. But lately...

[The door SQUEAKS open. TED is home. ANNA hurriedly wipes her eyes and lets go of DEE's hand.]

TED

What's going on?

(to Dee)

What are you doing here?

DEE

We're talking about that new movie. You know, the one with Scarlett Johansson. It's a such tearjerker...

TED

Don't you have a family you should go take care of, or some poor child you could counsel, Miss Social Worker?

DEE

Catch you tomorrow, A.

[As quickly as she can, DEE leaves. ANNA gets up from the table intending to go to JASMINE's room. TED grabs her by the arm before she can get out, spins her around.]

ANNA

Ow! What are you doing?

TED

Were you two talking about me?

ANNA

Why would we talk about you?

TED

You better be telling me the truth.

[ANNA squirms out of his grip and leaves.]

(lights fade)

SCENE 7

[It's dinner time as lights come up, JASMINE and RUSSELL set the table, jostling each other as they cross paths, giggling along the way. JASMINE begins to fold the napkins into elaborate shapes.]

ANNA enters with a serving bowl in hand. Sets it on the table.]

ANNA

Honey, you don't have to make them so fancy. One fold is plenty.

JASMINE

Dad likes it when I make them into shapes. He said it's artistic!

[RUSSELL follows JASMINE, crushing the napkins.]

JASMINE (CONT'D)

Stop doing that! Mom!

RUSSELL

I'm making shapes, too. See, now they're balls!

ANNA

(without looking up)

Don't tease your sister.

[RUSSELL jumps around like a monkey, gesturing as though he's scratching his sides as TED enters with a beer in hand, sits at the table, drinks down the beer.]

RUSSELL

(grunting)

Uungh, Uungh, Uungh.

TED

Okay, monkey. Sit down.

(picks up a napkin ball)

What happened to the napkins?

JASMINE

I tried to make them nice for you but a stupid monkey came around.

ANNA

Don't call your brother stupid.

[When neither ANNA nor TED are looking, JASMINE shoves RUSSELL, hard. He looks at her confused, then sits at the table.]

TED

Anna! Grab me a beer.

...

Make it two.

[No reaction from ANNA.]

TED

Anna!

ANNA glares at TED.]

TED

Don't give me that look.

[TED gets two beers for himself, returns to the table.

ANNA places a second serving bowl of food on the table close to TED.

Taking their seats, ANNA, JASMINE, and RUSSELL bow their heads in prayer while TED serves himself; he hunches over his plate and starts to eat.]

ANNA

(to TED)

Well...

You're hungry.

(No reply. They sit silently for several beats,
then to the kids)

Anything fun happen at school today?

JASMINE

We started pre-algebra. Ugh!

RUSSELL

(making a fish face, he flaps his hands
pretending to have gills)

We're studying the ocean.

[TED pushes his half eaten plate of food away, glares at ANNA.]

ANNA

What's wrong?

TED

Too salty.

ANNA

It's the same recipe I always make.

...You love it.

TED

Well, you did something wrong. It tastes bad.

ANNA

(under her breath)

You think the beer affects..

TED

I heard you...

Your cooking is terrible.

(chugs one of the beers, burps loudly)

I drink to make the food taste better.

JASMINE

Please don't argue.

ANNA

Honey, we're not arguing.

TED

Yes, we are. Your mother won't admit that she's wrong.

JASMINE

I think the food tastes good.

TED

Don't sass me.

(to Anna)

See what you've done.

TED leaves the table.]

ANNA

Don't upset your Dad.

[JASMINE clenches her fists and STIFLES a SCREAM.]

(lights dim)

[JASMINE and RUSSELL leave the room. DEE enters.

As lights come up, we see ANNA and DEE sitting alone at the table. ANNA, looks forlorn.]

DEE

You're not the only one. Believe me, the statistics are frightening. Twenty women in the U.S. are assaulted every minute by their partners. Domestic violence affects a lot of people...

ANNA

Oh, god. Domestic violence.

(pausing)

Even just saying those words

...makes me cringe.

Never, ever thought it would be me.

...I don't want to be a statistic.

DEE

Look, talking about it is a very important first step. You're admitting that it's a problem.

ANNA

You're the first person who I've ever even mentioned this to.

...I worked for years

to keep this quiet.

DEE

No one knew?

ANNA

No one.

Not my sister, not my mother.

...No one.

DEE

By not talking about abuse, it emboldens the abuser. Gives him more control.

ANNA

I was ashamed...
...In fact,
...I'm still ashamed.

DEE

Don't be. You can't change the past. We can only move forward. Besides, most women endure more than 50 episodes of abuse before asking for help.

[ANNA stares down at the table. Slowly shakes her head.
Finally, looks up at DEE.]

ANNA

I don't remember the first time he hit me.
...I can't even recall what set him off.
But, at the time
...I was sure it was a one-time thing.

DEE

Of course, you did. You love him. It's shocking when someone you love hurts you like that.

ANNA

And then when it happened again... He apologized the next day.
...He said I made him angry,
...pushed him too far.
...Everything I did was wrong.

DEE

That's a typical excuse that abusers use, "You made me do it."

ANNA

....You know, he never actually...
...told me he loved me.

DEE

He shouldn't treat you like that.

ANNA

He had a really rough childhood. Both of his parents were alcoholics. I think there was some abuse there.

DEE

That's not yours to fix. A lot of people have alcoholism in their family. Not all of them become domestic abusers.

ANNA

...I felt like if I would love him more,
be more kind,
...more thoughtful,
I was sure it would make him stop.

DEE

It's not your fault.

(pause)

You're the victim, not him.

ANNA

I'm trying to wrap my head around that...
...that I'm an abuse victim.

DEE

(taking Anna's hand)

How long?

ANNA

I'm embarrassed to say.

DEE

Don't be. Really, really, it's not your fault.

ANNA

Years.
Since before the kids were born.

DEE

Oh, sweetie...

ANNA

It's not like it was an everyday thing.
Not even every week.
...We'd go for months and things would be fine.

He could be so kind,..and funny
 ...but
 ..I was always afraid of what might piss him off.
 and, then he'd hit me again.

(pause)

I thought, "Who was I to be choosy?"
 ...Maybe it was my fault.

DEE

You did NOT deserve to be hit.
 ...Or, verbally abused.

ANNA

And...
 After all this time...
 I've been taking out my frustration about Ted on Jasmine.
 ...He yells at me. I yell at her.
 Did you know that she's been misbehaving at school?

DEE

Amy mentioned that Jazz has been having a really hard time. Sometimes she cries in class. Especially in math. She's been floundering.

ANNA

(sniffing)

Her self-esteem has dropped.
 ...What have I done?
 I've been in such denial.
 ...
 I don't think I can go on like this.

DEE

And, you shouldn't have to.
 ...Have you thought about what you want to do?

ANNA

If I talk to Ted about this...
 ...

He'll just blow up...
and ...

DEE

Yeah, that's ...
That's definitely a concern.

ANNA

We've been married for fifteen years.
I feel like we should try to fix this.

...

The kids deserve a happy family.
(pause)

So, I guess,
...counseling?

DEE

That's a good start.
I can help you set up an appointment.

ANNA

Could you?

(lights dim slightly)

[DEE leaves. The kids enter. Lights come up. ANNA
busies herself tidying things.

We hear a loud CRASH. JASMINE has pushed
RUSSELL's books out of his arms onto the floor.

She stands over the pile of books, hands on her hips,
glaring at RUSSELL.]

RUSSELL

You're mean!

JASMINE

You're stupid!

[JASMINE takes a step towards RUSSELL with her
arms extended as if to shove him.]

RUSSELL

Mom!!

[ANNA turns to see the commotion; TED rushes in.]

ANNA

(looking at the pile of books, then to RUSS)

Pick those up.

RUSSELL

Jasmine did it. She should pick 'em up.

TED

(to JASMINE)

Why did you do that?

ANNA

Pick up the books.

...Then, to your rooms.

...Both of you.

[The kids pick up the books, glare at each other and stomp out.

TED sits at the table.]

ANNA

I talked with Jasmine's teacher today. Her math teacher.

...He's worried about her.

And, he thinks we should see a therapist.

...As a family.

TED

What does he know.

ANNA

I agree with him.

...We need help.

...Jasmine needs help. She's been crying at school.

She spends time in the counselors office, afraid to go back to class.

And now, she's taking out her frustrations on Russ.

TED

Just how kids are.

ANNA

I don't think so. She's always been nice to Russ.

I'm really worried about her.

...Anyway, we have an appointment for all of us to meet with a therapist.

TED

Do we?

ANNA

Next Tuesday. After work.

(lights fade)

SCENE 8

[The next afternoon, lights come up on JASMINE and RUSSELL sitting at opposite ends of the couch. JASMINE is swiping through texts on her phone. RUSS is playing with a couple of Star Wars action figures battling an imaginary war.]

TED bounds through the door in high spirits, his arms filled with wrapped gifts and sits between the kids. He ignores JASMINE, puts a box on RUSSELL's lap.]

TED

Hey buddy! Check this out.

RUSSELL

What is it?

JASMINE

Yeah, what is it?

RUSSELL

(tearing open the box.)

Whoa!!! A gun!!

JASMINE

A gun?! Mom's going to be mad.

RUSSELL

Is it real?

TED

A real pellet gun.

JASMINE

Mom's still going to be mad.

TED

This is none of your mother's business.

[ANNA enters.]

ANNA

What's all this?

JASMINE

Dad bought Russ a gun.

ANNA

No...

JASMINE

A pellet gun.

ANNA

But, why?

TED

A kid can have a gun.

ANNA

He doesn't need a gun. Even a pellet gun.

...Plus, it looks exactly like your Glock.

...

The case is the same color, too.

He could mistake it for yours.

...

And, ...

...what do you expect him to do with it?

TED

Shoot birds. Squirrels, maybe.

JASMINE

Creepy...

ANNA

I don't want him shooting squirrels or birds or anything.

TED

Fine. I'll set up a target behind the garage. I want my son to know how to use a gun.

ANNA

...The only way I'll let this happen is if you make him wear safety glasses.

...and

...and, he learns the rules of owning a pellet gun...how to handle it.

TED

You'll LET it happen! Ha!

He doesn't need safety glasses.

...

I'm not gonna to turn my son into a wimp.

JASMINE

What's in the other boxes?

TED

You'll see.

(handing out boxes)

Jasmine...

Russell...

This special one for Mom.

Don't open them yet!

RUSSELL

I get two! Yay!

ANNA

Why are we getting gifts?

TED

Okay. Okay. I know I've been a bit grumpy lately. I want to make it up to you. All of you.

RUSSELL

Can we open now?!?!

TED

Go for it!

[The kids tear into the packages. ANNA looks at TED for a sign of what he's up to.

JASMINE holds up a unicorn music box. She looks disappointed. RUSSELL reveals a tackle box.]

JASMINE

Unicorns are for babies.

TED

I thought you loved them.

RUSSELL

Wow! I never had my own tackle box before. This is so cool.

TED

Look inside.

RUSSELL

Sweet! Lures and everything. When can I use 'em?

TED

We're going fishing on Saturday. Just you and me.

[RUSSELL jumps into his fathers lap. ANNA is opening her box slowly, trying to figure out if she should believe what she's seeing around her.

JASMINE winds the music box ; glares at it as it plays a wispy song. Pushes it aside.

ANNA finally gets her gift open, revealing an emerald necklace. She looks pleasantly surprised. TED gets up, walks to her.]

TED

Let me help you.

(he takes the necklace, gingerly places it around ANNA's neck. Steps back.)

Perfect!

ANNA

(stunned)

Thank you. Ted,

...

It's sweet of you.

TED

But wait, there's more!

RUSSELL

More presents?

TED

Better than presents. I'm taking everybody to the carnival on Sunday.

JASMINE

Can I bring a friend?

TED

Just family.

[JASMINE folds her arms and pouts. Both kids exit.]

ANNA

I thought you had to work.

TED

Nope. Took the day off. We're going as a family.

[TED sits on the couch, his fingers woven together, hands behind his head. He's looking very satisfied with himself.]

ANNA runs her fingers across the emerald necklace around her neck.]

ANNA

Ted, thank you.
It's a pretty necklace.
...
It looks expensive.

TED

It is! It looks great on you.

ANNA

Did you get a bonus or something?
...
How can we afford all of this?

TED

No worries.

ANNA

But, we said no more spending

TED

I charged everything. It'll be fine.
Don't ruin the good vibe.

(lights dim slightly. TED exits. DEE enters)

[Lights up to reveal ANNA and DEE sitting, facing each other at the table, talking quietly.]

ANNA

... if you had seen him...

DEE

(raising her hand)

Tell it to the hand.

ANNA

He was sincere.

Really... sorry.

DEE

Anna, you're not being logical.

ANNA

He took the time to shop. And, he...

(beat)

He even apologized...

DEE

That's good. Still, you really should keep that counseling appointment.

ANNA

I'm not sure we need to anymore.

DEE

Has this happened before; he gets violent and then remorseful?

ANNA

Yes.

DEE

It's a typical pattern of abusers. Obviously, it's Ted's pattern, too. Don't lose sight of that.

It's worked for him in the past. He'll react that way again.

ANNA

Yeah, but he was...

really...sorry This time...

It might be different.

DEE

That pretty necklace is cutting off the circulation to your brain, girl.

ANNA

Ha. Ha.

DEE

I don't mean to take away your hope but odds are he'll be violent again. Abusers don't just stop.

ANNA

(SIGHS)

You're probably right.

DEE

Aside from the abuse, you know all relationships hit rough spots. Going to counseling might give you some strategies going forward. It won't hurt.

ANNA

Honestly, bringing up the subject of ...

...counseling...

He wasn't happy that I made an appointment.

...It could set him off if I push it.

DEE

You can't live your life like that - cowering and not talking about certain things for fear that he'll get angry and lash out. That's no way to live!

ANNA

(throws up her hands)

You're right. You're right. ..

...You're right.

(seeing DEE's glare)

I'll keep the counseling appointment.

DEE

Thank you. It's the right thing to do.

(lights dim slightly)

[DEE leaves the room.]

Lights rise to show, surrounded by math homework and books, ANNA and JASMINE navigate the world of pre-Algebra. JAZZ looks worn out from the effort.]

ANNA

You did that one perfectly! Great job. Let's try the next one.

JASMINE

Do we have to?

ANNA

You're on a roll. Let's not lose momentum.

(JASMINE nods)

Okay, good. Here's a quick review of fractions. Seven tenths minus three fifths. Take your time.

JASMINE

(scribbling on a paper, then triumphantly)

One tenth!

[They high fiving each other.]

ANNA

Excellent! You're good at this.

JASMINE

No, I'm not. I get nervous that I won't know how to do the equations. And, if we have a quiz, I totally freeze up. It's terrible.

ANNA

Jazz, you are good at math.

...Take your time, learn the homework

...and that'll build your confidence.

(pause)

I hope you don't mind

but I spoke to your math teacher.

He said that you can come in after school

and he'll give you some extra help.

...Is that okay?

JASMINE

I've been too afraid to ask him. I thought it would make me look dumb.

ANNA

Sweetie, you're definitely not dumb. You're an intelligent, kind, and creative girl.

(hugs JASMINE)

Being able to ask for help is an important skill.

...Believe me, I've had to learn that myself.

[RUSSELL enters, carefully guiding his soccer ball forward with his feet. He dabs with his arms, then imitates the sound of a cheering crowd.]

RUSSELL

Guess who scored a goal today!!

[They share high fives, low fives, raise the roof!!

JASMINE and ANNA respond together.]

ANNA

...Wooooo!!...

JASMINE

...Wooooo!!...

ANNA

The one, the only, Russell Carter!!

I have two super star children.

...Have I told you guys lately that I love you?

JASMINE

Every minute.

RUSSELL

Of every day.

(all laugh)

JASMINE

Good job. Russ.

(pause)

I'm going to work on the next math problems by myself.

[ANNA gives JASMINE a 'thumbs up', then motions RUSSELL to sit beside her on the couch. He plops down, snuggles up to ANNA.]

ANNA

I'm proud of you, pal.

Not just because of scoring, which is great by the way,
but because you were kind to Nick at practice last week.

RUSSELL

Yeah.

ANNA

Coach told me you've been helping him.
...Nick has a hard time.

RUSSELL

I know. Some kids tease him. But, you told me he can't help it that he doesn't run fast.
So, now when we run sprints, I stay next to him so he won't be last.

ANNA

(pulls him close)

You are going to be a wonderful man when you grow up.

RUSSELL

I want to be a police officer, like Dad.

(pause)

Now though, my favorite thing is to sit with you. We get to talk about good stuff.
...Can we read like we used to; you know, where you read a page and then I read a page?

ANNA

(picks up a book from the table, opens it)

That's my favorite thing to do.

(reads from the book)

David and the Phoenix, Chapter One.

“David walked slowly to the backyard with his eyes fixed on the ground...”

(lights fade)

SCENE 9

[Next evening, lights are low, the house is quiet.
JASMINE and RUSSELL have gone to bed.]

TED is restless; paces around the room.

ANNA, exhausted, enters and slouches down on the couch.

TED finally stops pacing; stands directly in front of ANNA.]

TED

How could you do that?

[No reaction from ANNA as she stares straight ahead.]

TED

The counseling session...
How dare you pull me into that.

ANNA

This shouldn't be a big deal. It was for our family.

TED

Look, I figured out what you were trying to do.

ANNA

I was trying to help us. Help the kids, for gods sake!

TED

You and that counselor were going to gang up on me.

ANNA

We were there to help Jasmine....and Russ.

TED

This wasn't a meeting to help the kids. Jasmine doesn't need counseling.

ANNA

Yes, she does. We all do. The kids see us argue and it upsets them.

...

We aren't getting along.

TED

Aren't getting along! What are you talking about? We get along just fine.

ANNA

That's outrageous for you to say.

TED

I took you and the kids to the carnival last weekend. That's getting along..

ANNA

And, it was fun until you went into one of your moods.

TED

That's not true.

ANNA

Suddenly, nothing was right. You shouted at Jasmine.
Criticized her for not liking the stuffed animal you won.

TED

She didn't even want it.

ANNA

She's getting too old for stuffed animals.
She likes make-up and boys.
Walking around the mall with her friends...

TED

I don't give a damn about her liking makeup or boys or all that shit. She has to appreciate whatever I decide to give her. You've made her ungrateful.

ANNA

She doesn't deserve to be criticized by you.
And, certainly not the way you target her.

TED

I do not target her.

ANNA

It's your temper. It scares her.

TED

(raising his voice)

My temper!! The only reason I get angry is because of you! Every single thing you do pisses me off.

ANNA

You not being able to control your temper is not my fault.

TED

Control! That's it...

You're the control freak. You control everything. Me. Our budget. The kids.

ANNA

Someone has to take charge.

TED

(ranting, jumps to his feet)

This is stupid! It's always got to be 'your way'. I'm sick of it.

[While they were arguing, JASMINE quietly came downstairs.

She cowers in the shadows, unable to get into the kitchen or get back upstairs without being seen. She's terrified.]

ANNA

Please stop.

TED

NO! I won't stop.

[ANNA moves closer to TED, trying to quiet him. She reaches for his arm.]

ANNA

Calm down.

TED
I will not calm down!!

[He raises his arm to strike ANNA.

JASMINE bumps into something with a loud THUD from the shadow, steps forward into the light. TED turns and goes towards her. Grabs JASMINE's shoulders, shakes her violently. JASMINE WHIMPERS.]

TED
(shouting, shaking her)
Were you spying on us?

[ANNA lunges for TED, pulls his arms.]

ANNA
Don't touch her!!
(pulls at his arms)
Get your hands off my daughter!!!

[TED loosens his grip on JASMINE, she breaks free, runs out. He turns his rage to ANNA.

TED and ANNA scuffle, he shoves ANNA to the floor, stands over her for a moment with clenched fists. He pauses for a long moment then he goes out the door, SLAMS it and is gone.

Both JASMINE and a sleepy RUSSELL join ANNA on the couch.

The lights are low. ANNA consoles JASMINE, who is still rattled from the incident. RUSSELL, fighting off sleep, huddles close to his sister and mother, clutching his soccer ball.]

ANNA
None of this is your fault. Your father's anger is his, not yours.

JASMINE

Dad hurt me. Am I gonna get a bruise...
...like your arms do?

ANNA

(stunned by the question)

We'll go to the doctor tomorrow to make sure everything is okay.
(smooths JASMINE's hair)

I had no idea that you knew.

RUSSELL

We know that he hurts you. I don't like it.
(pause)

He gets so mad.

ANNA

I wish I knew why. If I did, then maybe we could help him to stop.

JASMINE

I don't want to help him. He's too mean.

RUSSELL

He's mean to you and Mom.

JASMINE

(crying again)

Why doesn't Daddy love me?

ANNA

Oh, sweet girl. It's not you.

Your dad doesn't love anybody. Not even himself.

His mom and dad were mean to him. He doesn't know how to be any better.

...

Just so you know, I love you. Both of you. So much. I'm going to protect you. We are going to be fine.

[ANNA pulls them close to her. The three huddle in a long hug, crying. After a long moment.]

ANNA

Okay, back to bed. Both of you. Together we are going to be fine.

[JASMINE and RUSSELL head to bed. ANNA moves to sit at the table.]

(lights fade slightly)

[DEE enters as lights come up, the house is quiet. DEE sits beside ANNA at the table. It's clear that ANNA has been crying, she dries her eyes.]

ANNA

All I could think of was to call you.

DEE

I'm glad that you did.

ANNA

It was...very upsetting to the kids...
...and ...to me.
I loved him...
...um, love him..
I'm torn between who he is now and
...the man he was when we fell in love.
...
I guess we all change...

DEE

Changes -- maturing, growing are normal. Becoming an abuser isn't normal.
...You can't keep doing this.

ANNA

No,... I can't.
I have to have a plan.

DEE

Yes, of course, you do. First, you have to decide what you ultimately want to do.

ANNA

Do you think he can calm down and deal with his anger issues?

DEE

We can hope for that, but he may never deal with his anger. In the mean time, you have to get yourselves ready.

(DEE gives ANNA a moment to let that sink
in.)

What do you want to do?

ANNA

Leave.

DEE

Do you think that you're in danger now?

ANNA

No, I don't. When he explodes like he did tonight, he usually calms down for a while...until the next blow up.

DEE

We have a lot to get done before the next explosion.

ANNA

A lot?

DEE

Yes.

Get your paperwork together; birth certificates, mortgage documents, bank account info, the kids' vaccination records, school records. Pack a 'go-bag' for each of you. Hide them at the back of the closet or keep them hidden in your car.

ANNA

Let me write this down.

DEE

No. Commit it to memory. You don't want Ted to find your notes.

ANNA

I wouldn't have thought of that. Thank you! Really, Dee. Thank you.

DEE

There's more. Put the phone number of the women's shelter in your phone under a different name. If you have to leave in a hurry, you'll need to let them know you're coming there.

ANNA

Okay. Got it.

DEE

Now this one is going to be hard.

(pausing for emphasis)

Don't let on to the kids that you're doing any of this.

ANNA

Why not?

DEE

They're just kids. They could inadvertently say something to Ted or one of their friends. It could get back to him.

ANNA

They'll suspect something.

DEE

They might. Have an answer ready. Make up an excuse.

ANNA

I have to lie to them?

DEE

Yep.

ANNA

(buries her face in her hands)

Oh, God!

DEE

One more thing. When Ted comes back home, be cheerful, act like nothing happened.

...Make plans to do something together in the next few days.

If he thinks you're looking to the future with him, he won't suspect that you're getting ready to leave.

ANNA

Jasmine will think that I'm betraying her.

DEE

She probably will think that. She'll have to trust you and follow your lead. You can explain it all to her at some point. Russell will be confused, too. They saw how angry and upset you were last night.

ANNA

I don't know...

DEE

Anna! Look at me! You are strong. You told me that protecting your children is the most important thing to you. You can do this.

ANNA

(lowers her head; takes a breath)

Yes! I can do this.

(lights fade)

SCENE 10

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

[TED arrives home. He hadn't been to work, he's still wearing the clothes he had on the night before. He's sullen.

Without speaking to ANNA, he pokes around in the kitchen looking for something to eat. ANNA pours on the charm.]

ANNA

Are you hungry? I made a casserole. The one you like. With tuna and noodles.

TED

Hmm. I do like that one.

ANNA

Easy enough to give you a serving now. I'll heat it up for the kids and myself later.

TED

(tentatively)

Okay.

ANNA

Sit down. I'll get it for you.

TED

Thanks.

ANNA

(hands him a magazine)

Your Outdoor Life came today.

[The kids come in thinking that it's dinner time and are surprised to see TED at the table. They're even more surprised that ANNA is being solicitous towards him.]

JASMINE

(looks warily at TED)

Is it dinnertime?

ANNA

Your Dad was hungry so I served him now. We'll sit down for a family dinner later.

RUSSELL

I'm hungry, too.

ANNA

You and Jasmine can eat in a little while. Right now, give your Dad some time to relax.

TED

You don't have to manage everything. They can eat now.

[RUSSELL jumps into his chair, grins up at ANNA.]

JASMINE

I don't want to eat now.

TED

(to JASMINE)

C'mon. Sit here. Next to me.

JASMINE

No.

TED

Don't sass me! Get over here.

JASMINE

No.

TED

(to ANNA)

This is your doing. She's disrespectful.

ANNA

Everybody calm down.

TED

I don't need to calm down. Your daughter is disrespecting me..

ANNA

Our daughter.

(pause)

Ted, please, leave her alone, she's not hungry now.

TED

This is ridiculous. You need to discipline her. This is why we argue.

(pushes his plate away)

I've had enough of this and enough of all of you.

[He leaves the room, ANNA, RUSSELL, and JASMINE look relieved.

ANNA relents and serves dinner to JASMINE and RUSSELL. They all sit quietly eating at the table, without any conversation.

TED returns, keeps his right hand behind his back.]

TED

Ah, so now you're all hungry.

(only ANNA looks up at him)

Come into the living room. All of you.

ANNA

What's up?

TED

Just come to the living room. Can't you?!

ANNA

Let us finish first. What's so important?

TED

(SHOUTS)

Get the fuck into the living room.

[All three slowly get up from the table, file into the living room. ANNA has that, "Oh, oh, this is going to be bad" look on her face.]

TED

Sit down.

[Without a word, ANNA, JASMINE and RUSSELL find a place to sit; they all settle onto the couch.

JASMINE looks at TED defiantly. He turns to look directly at her.]

TED

Get rid of that attitude!

ANNA

Take it easy.

...So, what's on your mind?

[TED takes a moment to look at each of them in turn. Finally, he reveals that he's holding his service gun. He levels the Glock and takes aim directly at ANNA.]

ANNA

(she raises her hands toward TED as if to
push him away, but from a distance)

Whoa!! Whoa!! What are you doing?

RUSSELL

Dad! You told me never to point a gun at someone. That's not nice.

TED

(still aiming at ANNA)

I'm glad you remember that, son. This is different.

[TED steps closer to them; makes it a point to aim
directly at JASMINE. She shrugs, unimpressed.

ANNA makes a move to go the nearby chair, sits on it.
TED detects her movement out of the corner of his eye.]

TED

(to ANNA)

Don't move. Stay where you are. All of you.

ANNA

(speaks in a soothing voice)

Ted. C'mon.

...Settle down...

Let's talk about what's bothering you.

TED

Don't talk to me in that god damn, calming teacher voice. You know I hate that.

ANNA

Just put... the gun ..down

... so we can talk.

TED

No.

ANNA

Then at least
...let the kids go to their rooms.
...You and I can figure this out.

TED

Nobody is going anywhere.

ANNA

Please
...tell us what's wrong.

[TED slowly, silently slides his aim around the room, pointing the Glock at each of them, pausing a moment at each, then pulls back the 'cocking' slide atop the gun before moving to the next person.

ANNA, JASMINE and RUSSELL sit completely motionless as he does this. They try their best not to betray the fear they feel right now. They've had a lot of practice at masking their emotions.]

TED

Everything is wrong. You're wrong. They're wrong. I get no respect here. In my own home.

ANNA

Of course we respect you.
...You're my husband.
...I
...I love you.

(no reaction from Ted)

You're Jasmine and Russell's Dad.
...They love you.
...You
...You don't have to do this.
...Put down the gun.

TED

Shut up!

(His hand trembles.

He puts both hands on the hilt of the gun to steady it; points it at ANNA again.)

You're cheating on me. I know it.

ANNA

(calmly)

Why do you keep saying that?

No.

No, I'm not cheating on you.

...

I wouldn't do that to you.

TED

I'm tired of your lies. Tired of you. Tired of all of you.

[There is a KNOCK at the door. TED swivels, points the gun toward the door then back to ANNA.]

TED

(whispers)

Who is that?

ANNA

(speaks in her normal voice)

I don't know.

[KNOCKING again, more insistent now.]

DEE

(O.S.)

Hey, Anna. It's me.

TED

(quietly)

Don't make a sound!

ANNA

(normal voice)

She knows I'm here. I talked to her earlier and asked her to come by.

TED

Make a sound and I'll shoot you all.

[RUSSELL and JASMINE MURMER to each other.
ANNA motions to them to keep quiet. TED moves to the door.]

ANNA uses the moment when his back is turned to quickly punch in 911 on her phone.]

ANNA

(whispers into the phone)

Help. Help.

[ANNA quickly tosses her phone under the chair as TED suddenly turns back to look at ANNA.]

TED

I said, don't move!

[ANNA raises her hands as if to say - "Not moving!"

TED opens the door a crack as he keeps the gun trained on ANNA, addresses DEE.]

DEE

Hey, Ted! Is Anna home?

TED

(sweetly)

Hi. You caught us right in the middle of dinner. Can I have Anna call you later?

DEE

(skeptically)

Sure. Thanks.

[ANNA stands, moves one step toward TED.]

He closes the door, turns around, rushes to her and shoves her to the floor. Holds her down.]

ANNA

Unhh. Ow! Stop. You're hurting me! Ted, put the gun down.

(beat)

Kids, go! Run! Get out!

TED

I told you to shut up! Sit down!! Don't move. Both of you, DOWN!

(pause)

I'll kill all of you. And, nobody will catch me.

[JASMINE and RUSSELL freeze in place. ANNA speaks loudly so that the 911 Dispatcher will hear her.]

TED continues to hold ANNA down with one hand while he points the gun at the kids.]

ANNA

Ted. Please
...don't shoot us.
...We'll work this out.

TED

Now you're really asking for it!

[TED rears back, punches ANNA hard in the face.]

JASMINE

NO!!!

RUSSELL

DAD!!

[TED stands up and stares at the kids.]

A LOUD VOICE over a bullhorn, startles TED.

He goes to the window to look out. ANNA uses the opportunity to grab the children. They take advantage of TED's confusion, run to the kitchen and hide.]

BULLHORN VOICE

(O.S.)

Police!

Ted Carter! Drop your gun. Come out now, with your hands up.

(pause)

You have 'til the count of five. Give yourself up! One, ..two...

[TED turns to see that ANNA and the kids have escaped. He hangs his head, removes the ammo clip from the gun, drops it to the floor.

BULLHORN VOICE

(O.S.)

Three, four...

[He places the gun on the coffee table, goes to the door, opens it, stands for a long moment then raises his hands above his head and goes through the door.]

BULLHORN VOICE

(O.S.)

Put your hands on your head. ..Turn around.

(pause)

Walk backwards toward s me.....Lie down on the ground.

(lights fade)

SCENE 11

[The room is bathed in the pulsing red light of a parked squad car.

Lights come up. There is no movement at all in the room. DEE enters.]

DEE

Anna! Jasmine! Russell! Are you okay? Where are you?

(pause)

Oh, god! Are you hurt? Anna!

(pause)

He's gone. Ted has been arrested. It's okay to come out.

[Slowly, cautiously, ANNA steps out of the shadows followed by JASMINE and RUSSELL.

DEE runs to them, engulfs them all in a group hug. They dissolve into tears.]

ANNA

It was terrible.

JASMINE

We were so scared.

DEE

Of course, it's terrifying. ...

You all should try to get some rest. ..If you can.

ANNA

Let's go to bed. We're safe now.

RUSSELL

I'm still afraid.

JASMINE

Me, too. I'm too afraid to sleep...

ANNA

We'll all snuggle in my bed.

DEE

I'll check on you in the morning.

(lights fade)

SCENE 12

[Lights are low. It's midnight.

Loud BANGING on the front door. A drowsy ANNA stumbles to the door. As she opens it, DEE lurches inside. She's frantic.]

DEE

Hurry. You have to leave.

ANNA

(In a haze)

What are you talking about?

DEE

Ted. He's out of jail. You have to leave. He's coming back here.

ANNA

No. He can't be out of jail.

...I thought we had time.

They said he couldn't come home for 72 hours.

DEE

The Chief and the DA aren't going to charge him. They let him go.

ANNA

(incredulously)

He held us at gunpoint. Threatened to kill us.

DEE

Chief said Ted's just over-worked. Made a poor decision.

ANNA

We have to leave.

DEE

Exactly what I've been saying! Get your things.

ANNA

I can hardly think....I'll call the kids...

...We have to put some stuff together.

...How did you find out?

DEE

Keep packing! A cop I work with a lot wanted me to warn you.

ANNA

(calls to JASMINE and RUSSELL)

Kids! Come in here. Hurry!

[Punch-drunk, JASMINE and RUSSELL come to the living room in their pajamas.]

DEE

You don't have much time. Help your Mom.

ANNA

Grab any toys or books you want to take along.

[Both kids look confused. DEE scurries around gathering things for them.]

JASMINE

Take along... Where?

ANNA

We're going to a women's shelter. I'll explain more when we're in the car. Your Dad is on his way home. We have to leave right away.

[DEE helps RUSSELL put his soccer ball and gear into a pillow case. JASMINE collects her books and pushes them into her backpack.]

DEE

Call the shelter! You have to get the address.

[ANNA grabs her phone and calls]

ANNA

(TO PHONE)

Hello. My children and I need to come to your shelter. We're in danger.

(pause)

Anna Carter. Jasmine and Russell Carter.

(pause)

It's my husband. He threatened us. He's violent.

DEE

Tell them exactly what he did.

ANNA

(TO PHONE)

He threatened to kill us. With a gun.

(pause)

Ted Carter.

(pause)

Yes.

(listening)

Why are you sorry? I don't understand.

(pause)

You must be kidding.

If we can't come to the shelter,

...where can we go?

(now frantic.)

You've got to help us.

(pause)

Stop saying that you're sorry.

Please help us!

[The call ends. ANNA collapses into a chair..]

DEE

Come on, we have to get out of here.

ANNA

We can't use the shelter because Ted is a cop.

The police know the address.

If we go there, Ted'd find us.

...It'd be dangerous for the other women and kids there.

DEE

Damn it!

ANNA

Where can we go?

DEE

I'll hide you at my house for now.

ANNA

That's the first place he'll look for us.

DEE

We'll figure something out. I have a friend who can help.

ANNA

(gesturing to the kids to hurry)

We have to leave. Now. Come on!

[They grab all of the bags and the suitcase standing near the door. Dragging things out of the door, ANNA pauses, looks back to make sure they have everything. She turns off the lights, then closes the door behind them.

Suddenly, JASMINE bursts back inside. A soft pin light clicks on, illuminating her music box on the coffee table. The unicorn is standing erect at its center. JASMINE grabs it, pauses, the box plays a few notes. She turns, runs with it to join her mother and brother. SLAMS the door behind her.

(lights fade)

SCENE 13

[Lights come up. The house is quiet. The room looks disheveled, magazines that were on the table have been swept off to the floor, couch pillows are in a pile.

TED strides in, looks around.]

TED

Anybody home?

(pause)

Anna? Hello!

[Checking around, still no response.]

TED

The fuck. Where are they?

[He kicks the magazines that are on the floor. Smashes a glass ashtray that was left behind.]

SCENE 14

[Two weeks later, as lights come up, DEE sits at ANNA's kitchen table. The mess we saw after Ted's standoff has been cleared away. The house is back to normal.]

DEE

What Ted put you through;
the gun, threatening to kill you ...
...that's more than what kids can handle.

ANNA

Absolutely.
...But... the therapist says that both Jasmine and Russ are getting better,
... all things considered.
Thanks for getting us in to see her again so quickly.

DEE

(smiling)

Oh, sweetie. You don't have to thank me. You're my best friend. Whatever I can do...

ANNA

It was a huge help. Jazz is already more relaxed. Ted was so cruel to her.
I just...
...I kick myself for not seeing the effect it had on her.
I... I should have protected her.
(pause)
I'll regret that the rest of my life.

DEE

Don't berate yourself. Yeah, you could have stepped up sooner.
...You can't change that.
But, what you're doing now is the right thing. You stopped the abuse.

ANNA

(puts her head in her hands, then looks up)

When Ted grabbed Jasmine...

That was it...my breaking point. I thought I could handle what he did to me, but when he had Jazz by the shoulders...

(pause)

People always say, "Stay together for the kids."

DEE

Straight up bullshit!

ANNA

And, cruel.

DEE

Staying in a bad relationship doesn't help kids one bit.

What about you? How did the appointment go?

...with your attorney

ANNA

Went very well. Yeah.

The court said we could come back home.

...Ted had to find a new place to live.

(pause)

She got the paperwork ready. Now, I have to tell him I want a divorce.

...That'll piss him off.

DEE

Don't tell him in person. Should be a phone call.

ANNA

That seems kind of harsh.

Doesn't he deserve to hear it face to face.

DEE

Nope. Way too dangerous.

ANNA

It's not going to be easy.

(lights down slightly)

[DEE departs. JASMINE and RUSSELL enter]

ANNA

Hey, guys. How about a snack?

[ANNA retrieves a tray of food, both kids dig in.]

JASMINE

It's nice to be home.

ANNA

Yeah, it is.

RUSSELL

Weird that Dad isn't here.

JASMINE

I like it.

ANNA

You'll get to see him sometimes. The Family Court judge is setting up a visitation schedule.

JASMINE

No.... NO!

ANNA

I'm sorry, sweetie. You have to see him.

...I asked the judge to waive that requirement but your father's attorney insisted.

JASMINE

So I have to go?

ANNA

You do.

...Only every other weekend.

JASMINE

No! I don't want to.

ANNA

The judge ruled. My attorney, Audrey, is working on it.

(lights fade)

SCENE 15

[Lights reveal, several days later, ANNA enters to find JASMINE on the couch, sobbing inconsolably. She goes to JASMINE.]

ANNA

Jazz! You're supposed to be at your Dad's. It's his day.

JASMINE

I'm never going back there.

ANNA

(angry)

What did he do?

JASMINE

He said things about you. Mean and crazy stuff. Like, you're having an affair.

...That you don't care about us. That you're lying about him.

...but you haven't said anything about him.

(wipes her tears)

He said I'm just like you.

(pause)

Are you having an affair?

ANNA

No. Not ever.

...He shouldn't say that to you.

Your father is angry with me and he's taking out that anger on you. You don't deserve this.

Why don't you rest in your room for a while. I'll check on you in a little bit. We'll do something together.

[JASMINE leaves, ANNA makes a phone call to her attorney.]

ANNA
(TO PHONE)

Audrey? ...Anna.

(pause)

I'm about to defy a court order and I need your support.

[Loud KNOCKING. ANNA sets down her phone, opens the door.]

ANNA
You shouldn't be here.

TED
(O.S.)
This is still my house. Let me in.

ANNA
No.

TED
You're saying I can't come inside.

ANNA
That's right.

TED
(O.S.)
You bitch.

ANNA

(Slams the door, holds it shut, speaks to him through the closed door)
Leave or I'll call 911.

TED
(Shouting, O.S.)
Go ahead! I'm going to take the kids... you'll never see them again. And you... you better be looking over your shoulder. I'm coming for you.

[He BANGS on the door, and finally leaves.]

ANNA goes to her phone.]

ANNA

(TO PHONE)

Still there?

(pause, listening)

You heard?

(pause, listening)

Yeah, it was... I need your help.

(lights fade)

SCENE 16

[Next day, lights come up. ANNA and DEE sit on the couch.]

ANNA

What happened at school today? The kids are freaked out.

DEE

I walked up to the school and I saw them. Ted was looming over them.

ANNA

Damn. Glad you were there.

DEE

Principal James was standing between Ted and the kids.

Ted gave some story...you were delayed....that you gave him permission.

ANNA

The principal knows we have restraining orders now.

DEE

I reminded him. He used his walkie to ask his secretary to check the file. Then, Jasmine asked Ted if he knew the secret word.

ANNA

Of course he wouldn't know it.

(pause)

I'm proud of Jazz...that she asked him.

DEE

It was brilliant to set that up with the kids.

(pause)

Anyway, Ted. Got pissed.

Whatever the principal said to the secretary was a code to get help. She called the police.

A squad car pulled up just as Ted shoved the principal and tried to grab the kids.

ANNA

Thank god Audrey helped me get the Restraining Orders.

DEE

Ted'll never back down without a fight.

ANNA

Of course, he won't.

At the hearing, the judge looked at me and said, "Ma'am, these papers aren't going to protect you." ...What the hell.

DEE

She's right. You have to be very careful. The R.O.s will only help you in court. If Ted does something and you didn't have the R.O.s, his attorney would say that you aren't actually afraid of him. That he's not a danger.

...Crazy but they'd use it against you.

ANNA

Is this what our lives are going to be now? Always on edge, watching out for Ted?!

(pause)

You know, he filed a complaint against me. Saying I can't take the kids out of town for a long weekend.

DEE

He's just going to keep trying to block you.

ANNA

It's ridiculous. He can't see the kids anyway.

But, since he filed it, I had to pay my attorney to respond. He does it to aggravate me.

Costs me money I don't have.

DEE

Damn DA. If he had charged Ted with lethal force domestic violence in the first place. At least he'd be in jail now...

ANNA

...instead of being on the street terrorizing us. His buddies on the force are sticking by him. I a squad car follows me...every time I go out.
Last week, a cop followed me to the county line, then turned off.

DEE

That's weird.

ANNA

I thought I was being paranoid...then the dispatcher told me Ted asked the guys to keep track of me.

DEE

Where did you run into her?

ANNA

She's in my yoga class. Apparently, Ted's been telling nasty stories about me at work. She doesn't like it.

DEE

Good for her. He's relentless.

ANNA

Even weirder. Yesterday, I went out after work with a couple of teacher friends. We were sitting near the window of that new cafe downtown. The waitress came over and told us that some guy was across the street with binoculars ...watching us.

DEE

Ted?

ANNA

Yep. It's really scary. I don't know what he'll pull next.

[RUSSELL bounds into the kitchen, very excited.]

RUSSELL

Mom!! Did you see it? On TV?

ANNA

No. What? I'm not watching TV.

RUSSELL

Prisoners escaped! From Dad's jail.

DEE

I'm heading home to check on my kids.

[DEE exits.]

ANNA

(to Russ)

Did they get caught?

RUSSELL

No. There's a manhunt. A real manhunt! Hurry, turn on the TV. I wonder if Dad knows about it.

ANNA

I bet he does.

RUSSELL

I wish I could call him and ask him. This is so exciting.

ANNA

And, scary. Did the news say anything else?

[JASMINE joins them. She's not nearly as excited as RUSSELL.]

JASMINE

We have to stay inside. Lock our doors.

ANNA

I'm sure we'll be okay here.

[ANNA brings plates to the table.]

ANNA, JASMINE and RUSSELL settle in to eat dinner.]

ANNA

(to JASMINE)

I ironed your skirt today. You're all set for Friday's concert. It's so cool that you like the flute. Practice, practice, practice. It pays off.

JASMINE

Can I wear my new blouse, too?

ANNA

Yeah, that'll look nice.

JASMINE

My teacher asked if I needed three tickets. I told her only two.

RUSSELL

Too bad Dad can't come.

JASMINE

I don't want him there.

RUSSELL

Yeah, well, anyway, he's probably leaving soon for his new job.

ANNA

He has a new job?

RUSSELL

He told me last month when I was at his apartment, you know, before he wasn't allowed to see us.

ANNA

What's the new job?

RUSSELL

He's moving to Venezuela! Help the president take things back and forth across the border. It'll be dangerous. The last guy who had the job got killed. Shot!

(pause)

It sounds like a movie.

JASMINE

Why do you believe stuff that Dad tells you? He's such a liar.

ANNA

It can't be true, Russ.

JASMINE

It's stupid talk. He was telling Russ about it.

ANNA

(to JASMINE)

You heard him say it, too?

JASMINE

I didn't believe him .

Then Dad yelled at me.

That's when I left his apartment.

(pause)

You know, one of the escaped guys is from Venezuela.

ANNA

Oh, yeah. That's right.

RUSSELL

Well, Dad helped somebody and they got him this job. To thank him.

JASMINE

Lies.

RUSSELL

It's true!

ANNA

Finish your dinner. I have to make a quick call to Audrey.

[ANNA punches in her attorney's phone number. She speaks quietly so the kids can't hear.

The kids finish eating and leave the room, ANNA now speaks in a louder voice; we hear her side of the conversation.]

ANNA

(TO PHONE)

I know, it sounds crazy.

(pause, listening)

And, Ted left me an odd voicemail yesterday. Said he had paid off the car loan... now I don't have to worry.

(pause)

No. Can't imagine where he'd get the money. And, in a lump sum like that.

(pause)

Just as strange...he was calm, ..almost kind. Sort of saying good-bye. Like he really might be leaving.

(pause)

Uh-huh. When I heard that one of the guys is Venezuelan, I figured I should let you know...

... Could Ted've been involved in the jail break?

(pause)

Maybe a payoff.

(pause, listening)

Those guys haven't been caught, though.

(pause)

Oh, yeah. We're being careful. But, feeling on edge just like everybody else.

(lights fade)

SCENE 17

[A day later, lights up on ANNA, JASMINE and RUSSELL sitting quietly on the couch together. The mood is subdued. DEE enters, a bit frazzled from her encounter with the reporters outside. She embraces ANNA, then each of the kids.]

DEE

How you doing?

ANNA

Struggling... Feeling like prisoners ourselves.

DEE

It's insane out there. There are so many...I couldn't even count the number of reporters on your lawn.

This is a big deal.

ANNA

I wish they'd leave us alone. We didn't let those guys out of jail. Lucky we got back before the reporters showed up.

DEE

How did you manage that?

ANNA

I got a call at work from the duty sergeant. He told me.

DEE

That was a stand-up thing to do.

ANNA

Yeah, he wanted me to know before it hit the Noon news.

(She pauses to put an arm around each kid)

It gave me a chance to pick up the kids and explain what was happening.
...My head is still spinning.

DEE

It's a lot to take in.

...Do you know how they arrested him?

ANNA

After I told my attorney Ted's crazy story, she reported it.

Turns out the cops had started to suspect Ted. My info helped them focus on him.

(Anna's phone rings, she checks the screen
and ignores the call.)

A reporter.

Cops set up a sting. A Federal Marshall pretending to be a friend of the Venezuelan guy called Ted, offered him more money. He fell for it...

[There is a KNOCK at the door. DEE gets up to answer.
It's another reporter.]

DEE

No, the family has no comment.

(returns, sits down again.)

Sorry. Go on.

ANNA

Thanks for doing that.

(regroups her thoughts)

So ...Ted, shows up at a meeting place...

...thinking he's gonna get more cash for helping the escape. Feds arrested him. He confessed on the spot.

(pause)

He had given hacksaw blades to the prisoners. They sawed through the bolts, pushed out the window bars and got out. Apparently, they'd all been planning this for awhile.

DEE

He's such a fool.

ANNA

Here's the kicker. When he was arrested, he claimed he helped them escape because he was so upset that I'm divorcing him.

...Somehow this is all my fault.

DEE

Bizarre.

ANNA

Jailors went through security footage. Ted passed the blade rolled up in a newspaper.

(catching her breath)

That looney story about working in Venezuela is what they told Ted to convince him to help. Promised a high pay, high risk job. He took the bait.

DEE

Thought Ted was smarter than that.

ANNA

Obviously, not.

DEE

You're safe though, right?

...I mean those guys haven't been caught yet.

ANNA

Feds think they're long gone. But, this has been devastating for the kids.

DEE

(to the kids)

How are you doing?

JASMINE

I think what my Dad did is so dumb. I hate him even more now.

ANNA

Oh, sweetie.

RUSSELL

I liked it that my Dad was a cop.

...Now I'm embarrassed.

(crying softly)

I hope I never see him again.

JASMINE

Me, too. I never, ever want to see him again.

ANNA

We're going to be fine together.

...But right now, feel like I'm in quicksand up to my neck.

DEE

There is a silver lining to this weird and awful tale.

ANNA

What's that?

DEE

You got your wish.

...Ted is in prison.

ANNA

I thought about that. In fact,

I feel safer than I have in years knowing that he can't hurt us.

...Can't stalk us anymore.

DEE

He should have been in jail for domestic violence.

ANNA

I'll take this. At least he's gone.

(ANNA's phone RINGS. She answers it.)

(TO PHONE)

That's ridiculous...
...Can't be true.

(listening)

Thanks for letting me know, I think!

(ANNA ends the call.)

DEE

What is it?

ANNA

I can hardly believe it.

DEE

Tell me!

ANNA

Ted requested a bail hearing. This is terrible.
Do we have to go back into hiding? ...He'll find us...Ahhhhh.
How can he get out on bail?

DEE

He has the right to ask.

ANNA

The DA wouldn't stick him in jail before ...
...he held us at gunpoint for Christ's sake

DEE

That's not part of this now.

ANNA

Makes me mad. Somebody's got to bring daylight to this to ...
...to domestic violence. ...the way the system treats us.

...

...I thought this stupid crime would keep him in jail.

DEE

You have some power here.

ANNA

He belongs in jail!

...What kind of power?

DEE

It's not guaranteed that he'll get bail. Speak up, girl!

...Give a deposition.

ANNA

I'm calling Audrey back. She can make it happen; get word to the Feds.

SCENE 18

[Several days later; a faint pin light comes on to reveal an almost ghostly image of TED, wearing the ubiquitous orange jumpsuit. His hands are clasped at his waist, his wrists secured with hand cuffs and a body chain. Ankle irons and chains limit his stride to a shuffle. He takes only a step or two then stands stiffly. The pin light on TED becomes brighter.]

We hear but don't see the JUDGE.]

JUDGE

(O.S.)

Mr. Carter, the court has heard the deposition provided by your wife, Anna Carter. It's been read into the record. Based on that information, your request to live with your former brother-in-law if you were granted bail is impossible. He's a convicted felon, so are you. Law forbids you from associating with other felons.

[TED shifts his gaze to the floor]

JUDGE (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

You said you have a job waiting for you if you are granted bail.

That's false, based on your wife's deposition and statements from local authorities.

(pauses)

Your history of domestic violence has also influenced the court. Sir, the court finds your conduct of violence and abuse to be reprehensible.

[TED jerks his head up and fixes his eyes forward.]

JUDGE (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

Based on all of these facts, your request for bail is hereby denied.

(pause)

You are remanded into the custody of Federal Marshalls to continue to serve your sentence of five years for the crime of aiding and abetting in the escape of two violent federal prisoners.

[TED vehemently shakes his head from side to side.]

JUDGE (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

Mr. Carter, the court urges you to use that time to reflect on your life and discover how you can become a positive, contributing member of society. Court is adjourned.

[Gavel BANGS]

(lights fade)

SCENE 19

[Lights up, a day later, as ANNA and DEE sit amidst a sea of boxes. Anna's life packed into neat piles. JASMINE and RUSSELL bring more belongings to add to the growing stacks.]

DEE

Won't be the same without you. Amy and Alex already miss the kids.
...And I'm going to miss you terribly.

ANNA

Leaving's not my first choice, you know that. I'm free of him.
...for the first time in what seems like forever.

...Ted's five year sentence'll fly by.
There's no way we can be here when he gets out. I don't trust him.

DEE

My mind understands; my heart doesn't.

(they embrace)

ANNA

When the Family Court judge said we could move out of state, she limited Ted's contact with the kids.

...He can write letters but they have to go through my attorney. If they're at all dicey, we can have a psychologist read them before the kids do. Pretty strict.

DEE

Strict but necessary. She set a strong precedent. I'm sure other women can use the model.

ANNA

Course, Ted can't know our address, or even what city we settle in.

...If Jasmine or Russell want to write letters to HIM, the letters go through the same process. I can read them, send them to my attorney and then forwarded to Ted.

DEE

It's all good.

ANNA

Right now, neither of them wants anything to do with him. It's kind of sad to lose their Dad like this.

DEE

He brought that on himself.

ANNA

Don't feel sorry for him at all. It's the kids who are hurt.

DEE

They're good kids. He doesn't deserve them.

ANNA

No, he doesn't. They deserve a Dad who loves them. Ted is not that man.

SCENE 20

[Three years later, lights come up on a new apartment. ANNA hums as she moves around a bright, airy kitchen. She's wearing shorts, tank top and sandals. She sets the table for dinner.

RUSSELL bounds in wearing his soccer gear. He's in a great mood.

We hear FLUTE MUSIC off stage. The playing ends and JASMINE enters carrying her flute. She is in an equally great mood.

This is a happy family, at last. ANNA puts the meal on the table. Everyone assembles.]

ANNA

There. Dinner's officially ready.

JASMINE

Yum. Tacos are my fav.

RUSSELL

Can I start with three, please? I want to eat really fast.

ANNA

What's the rush?

RUSSELL

Tim and I are going to run sprints for awhile. I want Coach to make me a forward. I need to be stronger.

[RUSSELL raises his arms into a muscle flexing pose.]

JASMINE

I'm not going to hang around too long either.

ANNA

My busy children. Have I told you guys lately that I love you?

RUSSELL

Yes.

JASMINE.

More like, always.

ANNA

I can't help myself.
I love you.

JASMINE

Blah, blah, blah. Moving on...
(they all laugh)
High school is totally sweet. I love it!

ANNA

(copies JASMINE's intonation)
I'm 'totally' happy for you! Why the big change?

JASMINE

I have friends...and...mostly...I feel safe.
(pauses, smiles)
Tameka and I are going to the practice field. We're gonna watch the band go through the formations for Saturday's game.

ANNA

(smiles)
Are you going to watch the formations or the boys in the band?

JASMINE

(giggles)
Maybe both...
(pauses to take a bite of taco)
Tryouts are tomorrow. It's like way exciting. Meka and I are going to play a duet. So maybe, we both get in. Fingers and toes crossed!

ANNA

Hmmm, no mention of homework?

JASMINE

Done!

RUSSELL

And, done!

JASMINE

Does that mean we can go?

ANNA

Yes, you can both go to your events. Not too late.

RUSSELL

We know. School night.

JASMINE

What're you gonna do, Mom?

ANNA

I've got my DV Support Group meeting tonight. It's nice. Made a lot of good friends there.

RUSSELL

DV?

ANNA

Domestic violence.

[Both RUSSELL and JASMINE nod.]

JASMINE

Are you going to be home late?

ANNA

Shouldn't be.

...Are you worrying about me now?

JASMINE

Haha. No.

...Well, maybe a little.

ANNA

That's sweet. Appreciate it. The meeting might go a little long, Mayra and I are presenting.

JASMINE

Cool.

ANNA

Trying to pay it forward. I wish I'd had the group when I was dealing with your Dad.

JASMINE

Was Mayra's husband an abuser, too.

ANNA

Yeah. Mayra and her kids got away and started over. Like we did.

RUSSELL

I'm happy we're safe now.

JASMINE

It seems like eons ago when we were living with Dad.

RUSSELL

What's an eon?

JASMINE

A long time. I learned it in History class.

ANNA

So proud of you both. Our little family has come a long way.

RUSSELL

It's weird to think that stuff with Dad happened.

[There is a KNOCK at the door. ANNA is startled and jumps a little

RUSSELL looks up, sees his friend, gulps down his milk.]

RUSSELL

It's Tim. Gotta go. See ya.

(he bolts)

ANNA

(Calls after him)

Slow down!

JASMINE

I have to go too, Mom. Good luck with your presentation!

[And, they're gone.

ANNA sits at the table for a moment, looking toward the door, reflecting on their happy family life. She clears the table with a smile on her face.]

(lights fade)

SCENE 21

[Pin-light up reveals ANNA standing at a podium, shuffles her notes for a moment, then resumes speaking. She's addressing the Domestic Violence Survivors Support Group members. We see only ANNA.]

ANNA

We all know the signs. We lived with them every day. Jealousy. Control. Rage. Verbal abuse. What we didn't know was that we weren't alone. One in twelve women report being the victim of domestic abuse. The key word here is "report". There are many more who don't report it.

(beat)

I didn't. I was too embarrassed. Completely ashamed. My husband convinced me that it was my fault. He shattered my self-esteem during years of scorching criticism.

(pauses and looks down, takes a breath)

No one in my world knew that my husband was hitting me. At least that's what I thought. I tried to hide the bruises. And, if someone did see them, I lied. I never went to the doctor to have my broken ribs treated. I wore long-sleeved blouses to cover my bruised arms. I cancelled lunch dates with friends.

(beat)

But my children knew. As young as they were, they knew. My best friend figured it out. And, honestly, it was her encouragement and support that finally propelled me to leave.

(a few murmurs from the room, ANNA
gestures)

But, look at us! We all left, all of us. We're here. We made it.

(applause)

Now we live with the stigma. And, we dread "the questions". You know which ones I'm talking about.

(smattering of "oh, yeah" and "amen")

"Why didn't you leave?" Or, "Why didn't you leave sooner?" People ask with that look in their eyes that says, "You must be weak". We are NOT weak. We're determined to keep ourselves and our children safe. We understand that staying, even though it doesn't seem logical, can protect us,... for a while. We know that leaving can be more dangerous.

(more applause)

We plan. We pack go-bags. We squirrel away money. We keep our children safe. We take the blows so the kids don't have to. We wait for the right moment to run. We're patient. We're fierce! We are survivors!!

(lights fade)

SCENE 22

[Lights up on ANNA arriving home before the kids do. She turns on the lights, sits down. It's been a long night. As she takes her phone out of her purse, ANNA notices that she has three voice mails. She puts them on speaker and listens as she removes her shoes, rubs her feet.]

RUSSELL

(ON SPEAKER)

Hey, Mom. It's your wonderful son, Russ. I'm using Tim's mom's phone. She took us for ice cream. Hope that's okay. Won't eat too much. I know, I know, no chocolate. Byeeeeeee!

ANNA

Huh. So he was listening when I told him not so much sugar and no caffeine at night.

[ANNA clicks the next message.]

JASMINE

(ON SPEAKER)

Hi Mom. Tameka and I are going to get pizza with the band kids. I'll stick with Meka.

...Yes, some boys going, too. Don't worry, we won't take a ride home with them. Love you! Bye.

ANNA

Boys and cars. Here we go...

[ANNA clicks the last message. Walks to the kitchen as she listens. The message stops her in her tracks.]

DEE

(ON SPEAKER)

Anna! It's me, Dee. Call me as soon as you hear this message. Ted is out of jail!! Please! Call me!

ANNA

Well that's a bad joke.

[ANNA frowns, checks her watch.]

ANNA turns on the outside light, then a couple more lights inside as she waits for the kids to get home. She walks into the kitchen and back to the living room, twice. ANNA realizes that she's pacing and sits down on the edge of the chair, taps her foot. One more glance at her watch. Reaches for her phone.

ANNA punches-in DEE's number, waits while the phone rings. It goes to voice mail.]

ANNA

(TO PHONE)

Hey. It's Anna. Too late to call. Should have waited. Um, let's talk tomorrow..
...Oh, yeah, and that joke about Ted being out of prison is NOT AT ALL funny.

[While ANNA waits for the kids to come home, she keeps busy by putting things away, neatens up the living room. She has a lot of nervous energy without knowing why. She goes to the kitchen and runs the water to wash dishes.

Her phone rings. As she answers, she hears the front door open. Calls out.]

ANNA

Hey, kids. I'm in the kitchen. Hope you had fun!

(no response from either Jasmine or Russell)

(TO PHONE)

Hello!

(pause)

Dee! Sorry. Did my message wake you?

(pause)

Come, on...that can't... that can't be true.

[Another sound from the living room, as though someone
bumped into the table.]

ANNA

Kids, get ready for bed, please. I'm on the phone.

[ANNA cradles the mobile phone with her shoulder.]

(TO PHONE)

Gonna put you on speaker. Hold on.

DEE

(ON SPEAKER)

It is true! Ted is out of jail.

ANNA

No... It's too soon. He has two more years...

DEE

(ON SPEAKER)

Listen to me! They cut his sentence short.

ANNA

Damn it. He's really out?

DEE

(ON SPEAKER)

LISTEN!!

No one knows where he is. You could be in danger.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

ANNA

[ANNA paces in the kitchen.

Suddenly, she feels a searing pain at the back of her head, like something exploded in her brain. She crumples to the floor.

Her phone lands with a THUD.]

DEE

(ON SPEAKER)

Anna! Are you there?

(pause)

Did you hang up? Anna!

[TED stands over ANNA, holding one of Russell's soccer trophies. He nudges her with his boot. She's out cold.

He reaches to Anna's phone and ends the call.

TED drags ANNA to the living room. Let's her fall hard to the floor.]

(a moment passes)

[A groggy ANNA MOANS. She tries to sit up. Her hand goes to the back of her head. She pulls it down covered in blood.

ANNA GROANS loudly. TED reappears from the kitchen, slaps her hard across the face. She slumps down.

TED stands to leave; stops at the doorway; looks back, then disappears into the night.]

(lights dim)

[ANNA slowly rises, she takes a position; JASMINE, RUSSELL, DEE, and TED join her.

A pin spot illuminates each one on stage as they begin to speak. All five face front addressing an unseen questioner. They are unaware of each other's comments.]

ANNA

No.
...Never my intention...
...didn't want to keep the kids away from their father...
...I
...wanted Ted to stop abusing me, us.

TED

All I wanted was her to be sweet..
...have dinner ready, you know,
...clean the house...put the kids to bed.

DEE

Women often don't know their level of danger...
...they assume everyone is being subjected to domestic violence and abuse to a certain extent.

JASMINE

...I'm afraid
... of sounds in the night...
...like if someone ...is in the house..

ANNA

I guess I got used to it...
He whittled away at me... Every day. I felt...

TED

I would just push her a little...or a slap...
she'd overreact...

RUSSELL

I get nervous...
...and afraid.
...if I see...
any cops now...

ANNA

...like I was losing myself...

TED

I did...

try...

...but I didn't know how...

to stop...

DEE

A woman stays in an abusive relationship for many reasons - for pride, love, fear, money, for reasons beyond her control...

ANNA

Don't tell a victim of domestic abuse, "Just leave." Instead, ask "How can I help protect you?"

(lights up on stage)

DEE

Call the National Domestic Violence Helpline

TED

Call for yourself, your friend, your neighbor, your sister...

ALL

(slowly)

1 - 800 - 799 - 7233

(fade to black)

(CURTAIN)