

Cast of Characters

Tracy: A vital 37 year old school teacher

Aaron: A charismatic 38 year old Union advocate.

Bradford: An athletic 16 year old high school student.

Scene

The 'rubber room' or 'holding pen' for teachers accused of various misdeeds that have caused them to be removed from the classroom - simply furnished. Left or right of the room is a teacher's desk with appropriate clutter and some evidence of a general science classroom. At one point - left or right - at least a suggestion of a bedroom. Other scenes play downstage and are defined by dialogue, lighting and circumstances.

Time

Current.

There are two acts and no discrete scenes as such. The three players remain onstage throughout the performance and move in and out of time as the story unfolds.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: The Rubber Room - midday

AT RISE: AARON sits at a small table. BRADFORD sits in the vicinity of the science room. TRACY stands considering BRADFORD.

AARON
Did you have sex with that sixteen year old boy?

TRACY
Always that. And why. And where. But never - ever how.

AARON
I *must* ask the question.

TRACY
And I must answer for it.

AARON
Your answer determines how we proceed from here.

TRACY
(Engages AARON.)
How we proceed! We? We suggests you and I, but we are on very different paths.

AARON
Of course, your career is in jeopardy.

TRACY
My god, man -.

AARON
Mr. Finn, in this case.

TRACY
My teaching career is over.

AARON
Not yet and maybe not according to the law.

TRACY
The law? The law of the jungle? The law of the land? The law of diminishing returns?

AARON
Do we have time for that?

TRACY
My fellow inmates take long lunches.

I'm on the clock. AARON

Tick-tock. BRADFORD

Another three hundred dollars. TRACY

As your Union's advocate, I'm worth every penny. AARON

Tell me you were recently engaged. TRACY

Recently moved back to the state, yes. AARON

Well, that's a comfort. But is there no one else? TRACY

Would you want anyone but the best for yourself?
(Shift.) AARON

Would I? TRACY

Questions after the fact. TRACY

The question now is, were you ever intimate with that child? AARON

Water and oil can be intimate. But you meant something more than that. TRACY

It's important to have the - particulars. AARON

The details. TRACY

Yes. AARON

I could draw you pictures. TRACY

Which suggests -. AARON

That we're a country of voyeurs. TRACY

AARON

Not very helpful.

TRACY

All right. In scientific terms. Leave out the eroticism.

AARON

You're facing time in prison.

TRACY

What's done is done.

(Shift.)

And the - trauma is better left alone.

AARON

But in your defense.

TRACY

Can I be defended? Is that possible?

AARON

You meant no harm. Correct? We can work from there.

TRACY

Yes. At least there's that. I - meant no harm.

AARON

At least. Perhaps - we should start with the - precipitating events. How you met. When. And go from there.

TRACY

Is Mr. Finn sure he wants to hear this?

AARON

I must hear it to manage your case effectively.

TRACY

Beware, solicitor, where we're weakest is where we are tested.

BRADFORD

Where we break.

AARON

I'll take that risk.

TRACY

There. See what maturity can do for a spine.

AARON

We'll work through it together.

TRACY

Like before? You mean like we worked through it before?

AARON

Start at the beginning, please.

TRACY

Remember how it was with us - our first time?

AARON

The topic at hand!

TRACY

(Work through this.)

Fine! Okay. All right. I suppose I should. From the beginning. Clear the air. Finally. Get some - closure. He deserves at least that much. Besides, the penalty's already been paid. Is being paid. Still, it may cost you and me more than we can bear.

AARON

It's the right thing to do. For everyone.

TRACY

But fair warning.

AARON

Fair enough.

TRACY

(Thinking back.)

One of the best things about teaching is the first day of school. Anything is possible - Mr. Finn.

(Enters the classroom.)

Any and everything.

BRADFORD

(Engages TRACY.)

Hey. Sorry I'm late.

TRACY

By fifteen minutes.

BRADFORD

Half-measures and all that.

TRACY

They're filling out class cards. Saved one for you.

(Hands BRADFORD a card.)

BRADFORD

Personal information?

TRACY

Contact information.

BRADFORD

Really? What's the difference?

TRACY
Besides the spellings?

BRADFORD
Yeah, besides them.

TRACY
Intent.

BRADFORD
So, no skeletons in the closet?

TRACY
The usual superficial details. But plenty of room on the back for expounding.

BRADFORD
I'll pass.

TRACY
Fine. Front row - only seat left open.

BRADFORD
Lucky me. Unobstructed view of the teacher.

TRACY
(To AARON.)
He projected cockiness. The way insecure people do. Especially teenagers. It's their armor against being eaten alive by their peers. And their fears.

AARON
And you know about teenagers.

TRACY
I've *taught* them for nearly fifteen years and don't pretend to know hardly anything at all.

AARON
Good. Self-effacement could be useful.

TRACY
Must you treat me like a stranger?

AARON
Like a client, absolutely.

TRACY
Is *this* a good idea?

AARON
I know my work. So, yes, it could be.

TRACY
The late bloomer. Congratulations.

AARON

Unlike the student involved. He was quite the opposite.

TRACY

Quite, no. But he should have been in physics not my general science class. Way too - clever for his age. The exception to the rule. Because of and in spite of his circumstances.

AARON

What were his circumstances?

TRACY

Don't patronize me, damn-it!

AARON

In your own words.

TRACY

Is that how this going to be - one question after another?! Prodding and probing like a clumsy doctor? Taking my vitals. Peering deep into my throat and every other orifice looking for evidence?

AARON

Ms. Arnett.

TRACY

What's my name, Mr. Finn?

AARON

Not today.

TRACY

You liked the taste of it.

AARON

This is business.

TRACY

The other social transaction.

AARON

The one I'm being paid for.

TRACY

Who's the tramp now?

AARON

You haven't lost all your dignity? Surely.

TRACY

Yes! I have. I've been stripped utterly bare and you've come to take a look! You're own private peep show. I should charge at the door. Lap dances are extra.

(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)

But hey, lawyers can afford them and more. Right?
(Shift.)

Damn -.

AARON

I *am* here to help.

TRACY

Of course. Something I can appreciate - intellectually, but this is an emotional mind-field for me. You'll need to be patient.

AARON

I can do that.

TRACY

Even though I'm sick. Depraved.

AARON

Let's leave that to others.

TRACY

The papers.

AARON

Yes.

TRACY

And letters to the editor?

AARON

A bit more - pointed.

TRACY

Creative writing.

AARON

There is the note he left.

TRACY

Too - allusionary to be definitive. Quote, unquote.

AARON

Referential enough to help put you here. Inspire those letters.

TRACY

But everyone's poking at a thing they'll never understand.

AARON

It's up to you to illuminate us.

TRACY

Things that - transpire in the - dark should stay there. It's their natural habitat.

Unnatural things?

AARON

TRACY

What the hell is unnatural, Mr. Finn? If it occurs in this world it must part of this world. Correct? Nature doesn't go around moralizing.

AARON

Save that for a judge and jury.

TRACY

I don't expect to be heard.

AARON

Today I'm your ear.

TRACY

Used to be hell of a lot more than that.

AARON

Years ago.

TRACY

Yesterday. Today. And tomorrow.

AARON

All right. And I should - what? Apologize? It seems - insufficient. Apparently. And - inappropriate - at the moment. Besides, I must remain unbiased.

TRACY

Remain? That implies that you were. Unbiased.

AARON

Can we refrain from word games?

TRACY

Give Mr. Finn a sporting chance? Spoon feed him.

AARON

Describe what took place. That will suffice.

TRACY

You've been there. Tell me.

AARON

With the student in question!

TRACY

He had a name, Mr. Finn.
(The class dismissal bell
RINGS.)

He had a name.

BRADFORD

(Engages.)

Your card.

TRACY

(Joins BRADFORD.)

Bradford Dillon Philip Whalen. Wow. That's a lot of vowels.

BRADFORD

No worries. My parents can afford them.

TRACY

I have - most of *your name* on the rolls. All the rest -.

BRADFORD

Is private.

TRACY

These are for my own files.

BRADFORD

Drew a blank. Crazy, huh?

TRACY

Your cell phone number?

BRADFORD

Can't have you harassing me.

TRACY

Okay. I get it. You're angry.

BRADFORD

I already have a psychologist. An expensive one. He wears a bow tie and gets paid for listening to my - non-verbal communication.

TRACY

So - if it asked for favorite pastime, you'd write being an irritant?

BRADFORD

Wouldn't the act be - contradictory?

(A moment where TRACY and
BRADFORD measure one
another.)

TRACY

Next time, bring your book.

BRADFORD

I've read it. Everyone dies in the end.

TRACY

(To AARON.)

He sauntered away and I watched him till he disappeared among the crowd of students. I watched him and he knew it.

AARON

You were - attracted.

TRACY

Repelled, but the effect is the same. Curiosity.

AARON

Scientific?

TRACY

Will that play? It was scientific inquiry that motivated me? Observing mammal young in extremis.

AARON

In this business, veracity plays.

TRACY

Right, people are more interested in those details than justice.

AARON

Can't one lead to the other?

TRACY

The trial is already taking place, Mr. Finn, in those newspapers and kitchens and lunchrooms throughout this community.

AARON

All the more urgency to get it right in court.

TRACY

How? So much was lost.

AARON

So let's salvage what we can.

TRACY

My reputation?

AARON

Your innocence.

TRACY

We lose our innocence way before we lose our virginity.

AARON

Now you're reciting.

TRACY

Yes. It's Bradford's. He always had something to say - something keen and - indecorous.

That impressive IQ. AARON

He dismissed it. TRACY

Being - adept is a curse. BRADFORD

Yet, he did well in your class. AARON

Like wearing glasses in a dark room. BRADFORD

After a rocky start, we were making some progress. Yes. TRACY

We can see - oblivion more clearly. BRADFORD

Making a connection. AARON

It's how we're God damned. Can I say that in school? BRADFORD

(To BRADFORD.) TRACY

Excuse me, we're discussing other animal behavior. BRADFORD

All animals rut and die. TRACY

So much for the entire curriculum. BRADFORD

In-between they hustle for something to eat. TRACY

And that's all that needs to be said? BRADFORD

Ms Arnett, sometimes you're the diner and sometimes you're the dinner. And sometimes you get lucky. TRACY

We should talk after class. BRADFORD

I have tennis practice. TRACY

After that.

BRADFORD
You stay late.

TRACY
I stay as long as it takes.

BRADFORD
Great. You're a dedicated teacher.

TRACY
I'm a teacher who has a cat unwilling to sit on her lap.

BRADFORD
So now I'm teacher's pet. Meow.

TRACY
Ah, you find yourself amusing.

BRADFORD
I appreciate my own company. Sure.

TRACY
That's fortunate.

BRADFORD
Nice return. I could take it at least two different ways.

TRACY
Oh. Please do.

(TRACY and BRADFORD check
one another and in the
moment something deeper
stirs.)

BRADFORD
All right. One for Teach.

TRACY
Are we keeping score?

BRADFORD
In and out of the classroom. But what game are we playing?

TRACY
No game.

BRADFORD
Everything's a game. I need to know the rules of this one.

TRACY
Why? So you can break them?

BRADFORD

Use them to my advantage. Protect myself from being taken -
advantaged of.

TRACY

How about we agree on being civil and go from there?

BRADFORD

Civil will be a stretch -.

TRACY

(On top of BRADFORD'S line.)

Will I see you?

BRADFORD

It'll be dark.

TRACY

I'll keep the light on.

BRADFORD

(Shift.)

All right. I'll look for it.

(Disengages.)

AARON

You do live by yourself?

TRACY

For the record?

(Joins AARON in the Rubber
Room.)

AARON

Of course.

TRACY

Yes. Separate and apart from other human beings. And immediately
your eyes light up. A clue. A reason. The poor thing lives on
her own. No wonder she - befriended a teenage boy.

AARON

I'm *here* for you.

TRACY

You weren't then!

AARON

But now -.

TRACY

Can you imagine my shame and humiliation? Mr. Finn. When the
news first broke? The pointing of fingers. The whispered asides.
The smarmy remarks. Open season.

(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)

Suppressed imaginations running amuck. Soon it was gospel that I screwed the entire football team.

AARON

That's enough.

TRACY

But it's not, is it?! Sanctimony requires its step-sister, its dark underbelly upon which it crawls. Now I'm hidden away in this Rubber Room with my fellow fuck-ups while the virtuous revel in their speculations.

AARON

Is that language helpful?

TRACY

I think I've earned the right to use all the words at my disposal.

AARON

They'll taint the court's opinion.

TRACY

And your opinion -?

AARON

I understand you're distraught.

TRACY

Then you understand nothing!

AARON

Suffering is universal, Ms. Arnett.

TRACY

But each person suffers uniquely. And some peoples' hells burn with a ferocity most folks never experience. Would you agree, Mr. Finn?

AARON

So it seems. Yes. Yes.

TRACY

Yeah. So - what's yours?

AARON

Another time.

TRACY

There won't be another time.

AARON

Why -?

How's the family?
TRACY

Avoidance -.
AARON

Of course, I'm avoiding! For both our sakes.
TRACY

My family -.
AARON

Does concern me. I've always imagined you as a father. Like my own Papa - this all encompassing presence.
TRACY

I'm married - Ms. Arnett, and have two children. Now, can we -?
AARON

Swell. Two children. One wife. A Rockwell painting.
TRACY

More like Jackson Pollock.
AARON

Still have trouble coloring between the lines?
TRACY

Shall we carry on?
AARON

Again?
TRACY

Let me do my job!
AARON

Best keep the little woman in the dark.
TRACY

Best leave it alone.
AARON

Right. Everyone has a past.
TRACY

It's your future we're concerned with here.
AARON

Because yours is all anniversaries and grandchildren.
TRACY

Enough about -.
AARON

TRACY
What's it like to be happily married?!

AARON
She's divorcing me! All right?!

TRACY
(Shift.)
Ouch.

AARON
Yes. Ouch.

TRACY
(Tenderness.)
So - your - motivations are suspect as well.

BRADFORD
(Knocks.)
Anyone home?

TRACY
But whose aren't?
(To BRADFORD.)
Practice ran long.

BRADFORD
I stopped for a soda.

TRACY
(Joins BRADFORD in the
classroom.)
Must have been exceptionally thirsty.

BRADFORD
Not really.

(The implication is weighed.)

TRACY
Okay. Let's move on.
(References an exam paper.)
One word answers to essay questions are unacceptable.

BRADFORD
Quality over quantity.

TRACY
The wise-guy routine affects your grades and our relationship.

BRADFORD
What relationship?

TRACY
Teacher student, Bradford. We're a team.

I play tennis.

BRADFORD

Doubles?

TRACY

Never.

BRADFORD

Of course. I believe you're on academic probation.

TRACY

Only because my parents and the superintendent share martinis and who the hell knows what else.

BRADFORD

Otherwise?

TRACY

I'd be hustling folks on country club tennis courts.

BRADFORD

Still, if you flunk this class -.

TRACY

That would be up to the administration.

BRADFORD

And the teacher.

TRACY

Less than you'd like to think.

BRADFORD

You're that good.

TRACY

State championship. Twice.

BRADFORD

So, a second reason for your lack of - enthusiasm.

TRACY

See what you're up against?

BRADFORD

I need an aide. For fifth period. Course credit.

TRACY

Give it to someone more deserving.

BRADFORD

You're flunking sincerity as well.

TRACY

BRADFORD
Are we done here?

TRACY
Is that what you want? To be done here before you've given this half a chance?

BRADFORD
(Shift.)
I don't play well with others.

TRACY
Something you're proud of. Apparently.

BRADFORD
A note from my 3rd grade teacher.

TRACY
Third grade was a long time ago, Bradford. Time to grow up.

BRADFORD
Why? Grown-ups are debauched.

TRACY
Debauched. Well, you've been waiting to use that one -.

BRADFORD
What - there's an age limit on vocabulary? I need a permit and adult supervision for words over one syllable? Damn.

TRACY
Words are one thing; actions another. Either way, you're - speaking volumes.

BRADFORD
Most adults are put-off by - children brighter than themselves.

TRACY
Is it the intelligence, or the intransigence?

BRADFORD
And if it's both?

TRACY
I'm not - put-off so easily. Well?

BRADFORD
I'll think about it.

TRACY
It's simple. Say yes and we'll get on with it.

BRADFORD
I have a complicated life.

TRACY

More the reason.

BRADFORD

What? Subtraction by addition?

TRACY

It happens.

BRADFORD

To numbers, Ms. Arnett. But I'm more than a digit. Right?
(BRADFORD disengages.)

TRACY

(To AARON.)

It was the - challenge that drew me. At first. The puzzle. He kept saying no, but meant yes. And I felt - impelled. Compelled by forces inexplicable then. Intractable now. Damn! If I had left not-so-well-enough alone!

AARON

Dedicated teachers do what they can. They're driven. And you had good results. Teacher of the year. Fulbright scholar. A file full of accolades.

TRACY

(Joins AARON.)

Do you know what drove that? Inspired such - success. Fear. Of course. Fear is genetic, counselor. It's a survival tool. Fear of strangers. Fear of shadows. Fear of loud noises. Fear of the dark. Fear of failure. How I worked to avoid that particular demon.

AARON

And effectively.

TRACY

But now that I've been unmasked, the state is at my throat. Poised to take away my life.

AARON

Your livelihood, maybe.

TRACY

My work was my life, and I've jeopardized the one and sullied the other.

AARON

How? That is the point here.

TRACY

Every time I cared I jeopardized it. Every time I laid a hand on a child, or hugged them or told her I love you and meant it I put my career on the chopping block.

AARON

Including the student in question?

TRACY

Whom the system failed, his parents failed, I failed!

AARON

By going beyond what is acceptable?

TRACY

Teaching is more than disseminating information, Mr. Finn. Computers do that. We humans yearn for something deeper. The profound expressions of our humanity. Especially the children!

AARON

Children, Tracy! Children!

TRACY

(Shift.)

Ah. You do remember my name.

AARON

(Shift.)

Your name - and the first time I heard it.

TRACY

Well. That's comforting.

AARON

More discomfoting than I thought, in fact.

TRACY

Yes, you're in a tender place right now.

AARON

Still, we have work to do.

TRACY

Though we are - compromised.

AARON

Compromised, yet professionals.

TRACY

(Shift.)

Afterwards - after you left, my father wondered where that young man I had been seeing got off to? He enjoyed being quaint. I told him I didn't know. 'Well, Tracy he said, 'he'll be remembering my gal all the way to his grave.'

AARON

It's true.

TRACY

The dear, dear man. He gave up the classroom after 35 years.

It's a noble profession. AARON

He ennobled it. His daughter -. TRACY

Did lots of good. AARON

'Sometimes, Tracy,' he told me, 'sometimes, every so often it clicks.' And he's right. It clicks. A student gets me. We're on the same wavelength and it's magic. Those bright eyes. The knowing look. The inside jokes. This flowering of a whole person. That's joy. I'll miss it. TRACY

Are you condemning yourself? AARON

That's been done. TRACY

By me. No. AARON

Selective memory. Another coping trait. TRACY
(Enters the classroom.)
One I won't be allowed.

Hey. BRADFORD
(Engages.)

Hey back. TRACY
(Quite busy.)

I'm here. BRADFORD

So you are. TRACY

Fifth period. BRADFORD

Finally. TRACY

I cleared it with the counselor. BRADFORD

In your own sweet time. Over week, in fact TRACY

Should have reminded me. BRADFORD

Do you need reminding? TRACY

Not really. BRADFORD

Right. TRACY

What's the job? BRADFORD

Hand out those cards. Twenty-eight this period. TRACY

Now the personal information. BRADFORD

I like to get to know my students. TRACY

Your favorite color? Seriously? BRADFORD

It's telling. We'll use it later. TRACY

Indigo. BRADFORD

I was thinking fire engine red. TRACY

Alarming. BRADFORD

Passionate. TRACY

I won the other day. BRADFORD

No doubt. TRACY

Doubles, too. BRADFORD

Change of heart? TRACY

Kevin got sick. BRADFORD

Ah. TRACY

All right! I get it. It is just a job!
(Tosses cards aside.) BRADFORD

(Engaged now.) TRACY

Whoa.

My mistake. Leave you to it. BRADFORD

Wait. Hold on, Bradford. I do need an aide. Obviously. TRACY

There are a hundred other willing serfs. BRADFORD

I asked Bradford Whalen vowels and all. TRACY

So there is an agenda. BRADFORD

Always. What's yours? TRACY

Screw that! BRADFORD

Seriously? You're like every other disaffected boy? TRACY

Disaffected? I'm supposed to know what that means? BRADFORD

I won't play games with you. TRACY

Nothing that involves balls. BRADFORD

Wow. Am I supposed to be shocked? TRACY

Shall I genuflect? BRADFORD

TRACY

Fine. Then distribute the cards and sort these lab reports.
(Slaps papers down.)

(And now a brief challenge
which evolves into a second
visceral connection TRACY
and BRADFORD realize but
don't comprehend.)

TRACY

By date.

BRADFORD

When do I get to use a red pen?

TRACY

How about - indigo?

BRADFORD

That was a lie.

(Takes the cards in hand.)

TRACY

The - truth will come. But these things take time. Have to begin
somewhere. Somehow.

BRADFORD

Rough start.

TRACY

The universe had a rough start.

BRADFORD

How much time do you have?

TRACY

We scientist think in terms of epochs. Finish with the cards,
then those reports.

BRADFORD

(Shift.)

I collect things.

TRACY

What sorts of things?

BRADFORD

Snakes. My other - interest.

TRACY

Poisonous?

BRADFORD

Especially.

Am I surprised?
TRACY

Probably no.
BRADFORD

Not very warm and fuzzy. Snakes.
TRACY

I don't do warm and fuzzy.
BRADFORD

You're alive. You're human. You do.
TRACY

(TRACY and BRADFORD consider
one another before -.)

The two of you worked in close proximity.
AARON

Yes.
TRACY

A - familiarity developed.
AARON

Well phrased.
TRACY
(Joins AARON in the Rubber
Room.)

That's it?
AARON

You want applause?
TRACY

Too much is at stake here, Tracy, to be keeping me at bay.
AARON

Yes. The education of our youth. But they're bent, broken,
beaten, neglected, abused -.
TRACY

Come on. This is about their teacher.
AARON

Their teacher is a fraud, all right? A phony. All that fear
driven by default!
TRACY

Default? What in god's name -?
AARON

TRACY

That's how I became an educator, Mr. Finn. Oh, yes. It's something else I've come to admit while stashed away in this room. It's a - discomfoting truth and another contributing factor - in retrospect.

AARON

How -?

TRACY

How much did we know about each other?

AARON

Enough - and then too little.

TRACY

When I entered college, I looked for the profession with the most time off and the least demanding course requirements.

AARON

It seemed pragmatic.

TRACY

Lack of intestinal fortitude. Turns out teaching took all the fortitude I could muster. Still, it was writing that drew me - at first.

AARON

I remember. The college literary magazine. Impressive work,

TRACY

Not impressive enough for this *writer* to pay her dues. I like eating too well, and the comforts of a thoroughly insulated home. I sacrificed my - avocation for a vocation. And overcompensated. Joined every committee. Arrived early and stayed later. Tried to justify myself. Tried to rescue every stray. Went above and - beyond.

AARON

The beyond is why we're in this room. It needs definition. Clarification.

TRACY

So my advocate can be convinced? Or convincing?

AARON

Facts will convince me - and others.

TRACY

Facts are one thing, interpretations another. But I'm preaching to the choir.

AARON

Can't facts stand by themselves?

TRACY
They're temporary truths.

AARON
In science. But in life?

TRACY
We can be talked into anything, Mr. Finn. Persuaded in the moment.
Make sense of the insensible.

AARON
Are you referencing Bradford?

TRACY
Why *did* you take my case?

AARON
It was the right thing to do.

TRACY
Like you did years ago?

AARON
Years ago, I didn't know what I was looking for.

TRACY
Can a person miss what they have in hand?

AARON
If they let go. Yes. If they - are let go. Yes.

TRACY
It hurts. Separation.

AARON
Very similar, I imagine, to having one's guts ripped out.

TRACY
My eventual husband left me as well. Right before school started.
Evan Matthews. It was quick and sudden. I had trouble breathing
for days after. Thought I was dying. But neither he nor death
wanted me.

AARON
Still, you did recover.

TRACY
Wholly. No. I went dormant. A sort of secular nun. And what
people took for a renewed - dedication was really quiet
desperation. A need to be needed. A compulsion to be busy.

AARON
Tough way to start a school year.

TRACY

He was a poet. Evan. Taught at the university. Gaunt. Grave. Perfect, right? If I was going to forsake my own writing, I could at least nurture others. And just so. His - passion went into his poems. And for - what - inspiration he went into me -.

AARON

Tracy -.

TRACY

It *is* the topic at hand.

AARON

Precisely, no -.

TRACY

Precisely, yes! That's exactly what we're about here. What we were about. Then. What we are all about. It's how cars and soap and women are sold. It's why and how we breathe and breed. Sex.

AARON

We're more complex than that.

TRACY

We'd like to think so. But I cross my legs and you snatch a quick look. I lean over and a hopeful glance. Out in public the eyes stray assessing the herd. Speculate about perspective prey. Appetites are momentarily satisfied. In the cities or on the savannas.

AARONB

You're under a great deal of stress.

TRACY

Stress is good. It's distress that disables us.

AARON

And you've been disabled.

TRACY

Yes! I'm out of resources to meet the demands. I've nothing left.

AARON

But you continue to function.

TRACY

Then and now, but to function is rudimentary. It's the labored breathing in and breathing out and little else. Right, Mr. Finn?

AARON

Yes. So it seems. How do you - manage?

TRACY

I keep the blinds shuttered.

AARON

Live in the dark.

TRACY

In half-light, counselor. In half-light everything is forgiven. That's where I take my comfort. Now more than ever. That's where I find consolation. Respite. In dawn and dusk especially. Hope and resolution exist there. The world is beautiful then.

AARON

Everything in-between is life.

TRACY

All sharp edges and hard angles. Bright and brittle. And sometimes - unbearable.

AARON

Sometimes.

TRACY

Even for Aaron Finn. Yes. I remember your name as well. And the - last time I heard it.

(A light change. Some MUSIC.)

BRADFORD

(Engages.)

I have a match this weekend.

(During the following,
BRADFORD practice various
tennis strokes.)

AARON

We should speak of Bradford.

BRADFORD

Our cross-town rivals.

TRACY

It's safer. The - damage done.

AARON

It's why we're here.

TRACY

Really?

BRADFORD

Liberty High. Scholastically challenged.

AARON
About your lack of - discernment.

TRACY
What?

AARON
The other cautionary tales.

TRACY
(Considering BRADFORD.)
Oh, make no mistake, I knew of them.

BRADFORD
They're undefeated.

AARON
But never sought counsel.

TRACY
I was the mentor.

BRADFORD
They're going down anyway.

AARON
Or befriended other staff members. Where were they in your life, Tracy?

TRACY
The men were blowzy or married or both and the women celebrating all those rites of passages I had - disdained.

BRADFORD
We'll trash them.

AARON
Nevertheless, some of their interviews are damaging.

TRACY
We existed on different planes! In different terms. They believed they were happy with their dissatisfactions. Turns out there was wisdom there.

BRADFORD
(Takes a vicious cut with his racquet.)
Game. Set. Match!

TRACY
(To BRADFORD.)
So. Another victory?

BRADFORD
Guaranteed.

TRACY
I expect all your fans will be on hand.
(Joins BRADFORD.)

BRADFORD
Father, if he's in town. Mother, if it fits in her schedule.

TRACY
I meant - other students.

BRADFORD
Tennis is a lousy draw.

TRACY
Even winning tennis?

BRADFORD
You could find out.

TRACY
Sorry. Sports and I clash.

BRADFORD
You don't have to play it. Damn!

TRACY
Is anger always your first response?

BRADFORD
Do you expect anything else from a - *disaffected* teenager?

TRACY
Right. Rebel with a cause.

BRADFORD
Yeah. And you're going to fix me. That's why this - charity work.

TRACY
We all need - fixing.

BRADFORD
Platitudes.

TRACY
Is that more impertinence?

BRADFORD
I'm forever crossing the line. Notice?

TRACY
In tennis or just elsewhere?

BRADFORD
Especially elsewhere.

TRACY

Behavior is about survival, Bradford, even if the results appear contradictory.

BRADFORD

Check me out, Ms. Arnett. I suck at life outside those concrete courts. Ask the overworked school counselor. I believe the word she used was incorrigible, but she meant misfit.

TRACY

Something else you learned in the cradle?

BRADFORD

Is that my cue? Time for my close-up. My David Copperfield moment. Go off on my parents. Show the scars where the hanger tore at my flesh.

TRACY

If you'd like -.

BRADFORD

Hey, they never laid a hand on me.

TRACY

Reason enough to -.

BRADFORD

I was kidding!

TRACY

Yourself? Again?

BRADFORD

Hello! You're giving me nothing back!

TRACY

What do you want? Back?

BRADFORD

No wonder you're a scientist.

TRACY

Because I won't fill in your blanks? That's for you to do. With my help.

BRADFORD

Water from a stone.

TRACY

It is possible.

BRADFORD

Are you ever not a teacher?!

TRACY
Bradford, it is what I do.

BRADFORD
So I'm work. Heartwarming.

TRACY
Developing a - friendship requires work, yes.

BRADFORD
I have friends. They're younger.

TRACY
Is age a criterion?

BRADFORD
You're old enough -.

TRACY
No need to finish that.

BRADFORD
Memo. Student's speech abridged.

TRACY
Respect is appropriate, Bradford.

BRADFORD
Is earned!

TRACY
Is demanded!

BRADFORD
Because you're an adult?!

TRACY
Because I've been there and done that, yes.

BRADFORD
Yeah. I get it. No teacher like experience.

TRACY
And no student like a humble one.

BRADFORD
Humility is for losers, Ms. Arnett. Losers.

TRACY
Humility is best served by winners, Bradford.

BRADFORD
Serve like that, it would ruin my game.

TRACY
Life is more than tennis.

BRADFORD
WOW! Carve that *banality* on a freakin' stone tablet!
(A long moment.)
Damn. I mean -. Damn.

TRACY
You grew up too fast. Know too much. Taken on - too much. It's
discomfiting. For both of us.

BRADFORD
Sure.

TRACY
The match?

BRADFORD
Is Saturday. At 10.

TRACY
AM?

BRADFORD
Yeah.

TRACY
I'm free then.

BRADFORD
Wear a hat. And sit close - where I can see -.

TRACY
All right.

(TRACY disengages. BRADFORD
practices.)

AARON
Quite the athlete - Bradford.

TRACY
Very fluid. Aggressive. Beautiful.

AARON
So you took an interest in sports.

TRACY
I took an interest in him.

AARON
At one point, you bought a racquet.

TRACY
I needed the exercise.

AARON
Must have pleased your father. Used to trip over shadows.

TRACY
So I took an instructor.

AARON
Bradford.

TRACY
It was a way of connecting. Bridging the gap.

AARON
It seems an invitation -.

TRACY
A trap, maybe? Aaron? A scheme to woo him? And why not? Every boy deserves his Mrs. Robinson. His tea and sympathy. God knows, Bradford did.

AARON
And you - served it to him.

TRACY
I tried to sweeten his life, yes.

AARON
That could mean anything.

TRACY
It means everything, Aaron. A man in your current position appreciates that.

AARON
But can a child?

TRACY
Can we ignore his chronological age? Can we do that?

AARON
You ignored the fragility of his developing ego.

TRACY
There were too many secrets! They wanted a voice. Beginning with his parents.

AARON
Did you consider them?

TRACY
Did *they* consider him? No. Bradford was an afterthought. Expectations fulfilled. The t's crossed, the i's dotted.

AARON

Still, he was their son and they have expressed their outrage.

TRACY

All right! I was stalking him. Luring the sweet - man-child into my lair. A spider seeking a mate and then devouring him even as he ejaculates!

AARON

I find that reprehensible!

TRACY

Most males would.

AARON

Bitterness such as that can convict you.

TRACY

So can the truth.

AARON

What the hell happened, Tracy?

TRACY

Whatever the hell is happening to you, Aaron.

AARON

You're evasive -.

TRACY

Heartbreak. Right? Heartache. Loss and depression. Alienation.

AARON

I'm sure Bradford enjoyed this sort of - volleying.

TRACY

Bradford enjoyed very little of anything.

AARON

Even the - attentions of his science teacher.

TRACY

Tell me what this *isn't* in regards to again.

AARON

All right, the young man was - confounded.

TRACY

Confounded? My god, counselor, that's too sterile. It lacks perspective.

AARON

Perspective is distorting my judgment!

(A moment.)

TRACY

Yeah. Ignorance, it turns out, is bliss.

AARON

For children. But we adults aren't allowed that grace. It seems. We're too heavily invested in the world. In one another. Or should be.

TRACY

Relationships are steeped in emotional compost. That's why they bear so much fruit. Good and bad. According to Papa.

AARON

Fifteen years -.

TRACY

Sixteen. And, yes, I have been counting.

AARON

A blink-of-an-eye to scientists, but an eternity - evidently in matters of the heart.

TRACY

Indelible. What you said.

AARON

It seems I meant it.

TRACY

It's a long way from there to here.

AARON

But finally - here we are.

TRACY

Antagonists.

AARON

You're fighting me.

TRACY

Shall I go down without a whimper, Aaron?

AARON

No, but you can save yourself. Here and now.

TRACY

My fate is in other peoples' hands.

AARON

My hands, Tracy.

TRACY

So this is what? Recompense? Another chance to get it right between us?

AARON
Again, I'm trying to do my job.

TRACY
So was I.

AARON
You taught general science not sex ed.

TRACY
The - dour advocate makes a funny. Be sure to enter it in the record.

AARON
How much time do we have left?

TRACY
Enough to draw, quarter and then hang me.

AARON
I can make certain you escape at least that. And maybe more.

TRACY
Based on a university - fling.

AARON
Based on my report.

TRACY
To hell with your report!

AARON
I will have to submit one.

TRACY
Write in there - even his sweat tasted good.

AARON
Damn-it, Tracy!

TRACY
I was referring to you, Aaron Finn. You.
(Crosses to BRADFORD at the
tennis courts.)

BRADFORD
(Engages.)
You showed.

TRACY
Of course. But you're surprised I did.

BRADFORD
Like it? The tennis?

You seemed very - efficient. TRACY

I skunked him. Damn. BRADFORD

And stiffed him afterwards. TRACY

I did what's required. BRADFORD

Why bother if it's insincere? TRACY

People are looking at me. BRADFORD
(Puts away his gear
throughout following.)

I noticed. TRACY

I mean recruiters. From major universities. BRADFORD

Ah, a scholarship. TRACY

That's the idea. BRADFORD

Aren't those based on - scholarship? TRACY

They have minimum standards, sure. BRADFORD

So minimal is satisfactory. TRACY

And sometimes less. BRADFORD

Won't your parents help pay -? TRACY

Why should they?! BRADFORD

(A brief moment.)

Okay. Did I see them? TRACY

BRADFORD

They had other business.

TRACY

Business. Strange way of referring to yourself.

BRADFORD

Can I expect them to show every match?

TRACY

Would you expect anything else?

BRADFORD

Forget it. Disappointment is a sucker's game. Right?

TRACY

But disappointed Bradford is.

BRADFORD

Is this part of the deal? To dissect your student?

TRACY

To have empathy, yes.

BRADFORD

My father's a pimp for drug companies and my mother prostitutes herself for every charity that will have her. Feel that.

TRACY

I can *hear* the hurt.

BRADFORD

I'm undefeated, Ms Arnett. And pain free.

TRACY

So all this hostility - it comes naturally?

BRADFORD

Yeah. It's called puberty.

TRACY

Do you believe anything you say? Anything at all?

BRADFORD

Do you know anyone who tells the truth? Anyone ever?

TRACY

Gosh. Such *low* expectations. Should be happy they're always met.

BRADFORD

Gotta keep the faith, Teach - or lose my grip on reality.

TRACY

Faith in what - besides yourself?

BRADFORD
How about Greek mythology?

TRACY
Surprise. You're a romantic.

BRADFORD
I've been accused of lots of things, but never that.
(Begins an exit.)
Oh, thanks for being here.
(Carries on.)

TRACY
Bradford -.

BRADFORD
Yeah?

TRACY
That's it?

BRADFORD
The match is over.

TRACY
What about lunch?

BRADFORD
Gotta shower.

TRACY
And after?

BRADFORD
I have other plans.

TRACY
So the invitation -?

BRADFORD
Maybe it was a mistake. Later.
(Disengages.)

TRACY
Mistake?
(To AARON.)
God, *I* felt utterly disappointed. Spurned. A school girl sent
on her way. It was incomprehensible - absurd, but the hurt
strikingly acute anyway. And I spent that afternoon grading papers
with a stridency that I regretted later.

AARON
No one likes to feel rejected.

TRACY
This was different.

AARON
Because of his age?

TRACY
It felt - pointed. Plotted. Somehow purposeful.

AARON
The hook set.

TRACY
By a child, Aaron. A child.

AARON
Right. My own - argument used against me. Lethal in a courtroom.

TRACY
In the classroom, I was losing control of my - domain. My professional - demeanor. Cracks in an already unstable pedestal appeared. And things started to fall apart. The next week, in fact.

BRADFORD
(Engages.)
Hey, Ms. Arnett?

TRACY
Right here.

BRADFORD
What's on today?

TRACY
How was your lunch?

BRADFORD
Greasy and queasy. Why?

TRACY
After the tournament.

BRADFORD
The tournament? Oh. Don't remember.

TRACY
Well, that makes me feel a whole lot better.

BRADFORD
Students don't do lunch with their teachers. Favoritism is - frowned upon by the administration. Of any sort.

TRACY
You're adamant about all sorts of things.

BRADFORD
I appreciate the social conventions. Sure.

TRACY
When it's convenient.

BRADFORD
Is there any work for me?

TRACY
And now conscientious.

BRADFORD
(Physically emphatic.)
Damn, I invite you to a game and now I'm on trial!

TRACY
Impressive. You strike the ball with the same sort of - ferocity.

BRADFORD
Yeah. It's subliminal. I'm really whacking the crap out of my parents.

TRACY
Affected honesty is still honesty, Bradford, despite the posturing.

BRADFORD
Will that be on the test tomorrow? Need to know what *not* to study.

TRACY
And there's the crux of why we're here.
(Referencing a paper Bradford completed.)
If you ever did study, you'd be a terrific student.

BRADFORD
I am a terrific student, Ms. Arnett. I don't need to roll over and play dead to prove it.

TRACY
You're already playing dead, but it isn't your strong suit. Continuing to squander a gift is self-destructive.

BRADFORD
I'll be slouching along, if there's nothing to be done.

TRACY
Fear cloaks itself in puffery and aggressive displays.

BRADFORD
I was here for that lesson, too.

TRACY
Then you understand how it applies? Correct?

BRADFORD

I'm not afraid of you, Ms. Arnett.

TRACY

Maybe afraid is the wrong word? What would you suggest?

BRADFORD

Maybe you're barking up the wrong tree. Hey? Maybe I'm untrainable. Maybe you should mind your own damned business!

(A moment.)

TRACY

Fine. Okay. Apparently, this entire arrangement *is* a mistake. So go ahead then. You're free to leave. And take your bad attitude elsewhere.

(Gets busy. BRADFORD remains.)

Good afternoon.

(BRADFORD stays.)

Either door.

(BRADFORD is rooted in place.
TRACY looks up.)

Well?

BRADFORD

I'm supposed to be here.

TRACY

You are excused.

BRADFORD

It's for credit.

TRACY

I'll sign off on it.

BRADFORD

And cheat the system?

TRACY

Shall I escort you, Mr. Whalen?

BRADFORD

It's your constant inquisition!

TRACY

Some of us call it communication.

BRADFORD

Others the third degree.

TRACY

Go on and - lick your wounds in private.

BRADFORD

Talking about me or you? Or the both of us together?

TRACY

Your insolence is rude and repugnant.

BRADFORD

Tough to live with.

TRACY

You're exceeding your own expectations, Bradford.

BRADFORD

And meeting yours.

TRACY

I can have you thrown out.

BRADFORD

Yeah. Come on! Have me tossed out on my ass. Give me the boot!
Come on! Do it!

TRACY

(Shift.)

Yes. Yes. Of course. There it is. I *kick* you out and all's
right with your world. Bad boy act justified.

BRADFORD

BULLSHIT, TRACY!

(A moment.)

TRACY

Ms. Arnett. Ms. Arnett, Bradford.

BRADFORD

(A moment.)

Shouldn't push me.

TRACY

How about - catch you?

BRADFORD

I've already fallen - those snakes and all.

TRACY

I thought the Iliad would be your point of reference.

BRADFORD

Does the mythology matter?

TRACY

It's too easy to be cynical. It means you've given up. Have
you?

BRADFORD

Easy? It's a damned hard thing to learn, Ms. Arnett. But I have good teachers. The best. They teach by example. I follow their lead.

TRACY

You're very - self-aware.

BRADFORD

I've had lots of time for reflection.

TRACY

What do you see - in that reflection?

BRADFORD

(Shift.)

Nothing.

(A moment.)

TRACY

(Touches BRADFORD.)

Open your eyes.

(A moment.)

AARON

He was a difficult boy.

TRACY

Too many boys are - difficult.

AARON

And men?

TRACY

Too few outgrow their boyhood.
(Joins AARON in the Rubber Room.)

AARON

It took time -. Several months before getting beyond -.

TRACY

There was a lot of time to undo.

AARON

And you kept - forcing the issue.

TRACY

He wanted rescue. We both wanted rescue. And the more he pushed back, the more I needed to pull him to me, the more he needed me to pull. We both understood that.

AARON

But did it have to lead to -.

TRACY

Touching? Fumbling around? Looking for something to hang on to?
And finding it - finding it soiled?

AARON

Where is the line?

TRACY

All - lines are drawn in the sand, Aaron. Just as easily washed
away by any storm as inscribed in it.

AARON

How many of them did you cross?

TRACY

Obviously one too many.

AARON

Do you have any straightforward answers?

TRACY

Do you, Aaron? Do you have one *single* answer?

AARON

Are we talking about Bradford? That is the point, damn-it.

TRACY

About Bradford especially. Yes. The enigmatic is part of his
puzzle. And mine. He was struggling to keep from being -
overwhelmed. Like his teacher. That was one more inescapable
bond. He'd looked through microscopes and seen the secrets of
cells. But no answer. A telescope and seen echoes of worlds
millions of miles away and came away with more 'whys' for his
trouble. He observed the Amaurobius spiders hatch, feed upon
their unhatched siblings then eat their mother - alive. What
sort of metaphor is that? What sort of answer is any of it?
Bradford played tennis to swat those sorts of questions away. To
keep his life at arm's length. Circumvent his parents'
complications. An ace was Bradford's way of saying to hell with
every truth, person and institution that let him down. And - we
all have, and we - I did. A tolerance for ambiguity alluded him.
And duplicity. And complicity.

AARON

Can a 16-year-old-boy be - complicit?

TRACY

At what age do we finally become responsible for our own actions?
At what age, Aaron? And what price should we have to pay?

AARON

The law determines that.

TRACY
The law or our conscience?

AARON
The law is our conscience written down, Tracy.

TRACY
Is that why it's so baffling?

AARON
In this it's painfully clear. Bradford was under age. Period.

TRACY
He was more than that.
(Picks up racket.)
Otherwise this would have never happened.
(Gathers tennis gear.)

BRADFORD
(Engages.)
We're still on for lessons?

TRACY
(To BRADFORD.)
I told you, despite evidence to the contrary, I'm not so easily put off.

BRADFORD
Good. I need the cash.

TRACY
Do you actually *have* a father and mother?

BRADFORD
According to my science teacher - yeah.

TRACY
There's nature and there's nurture.

BRADFORD
Then there's survival of the fittest.

TRACY
Which you've taken wholly to heart.

BRADFORD
So I've mastered your course content. Right?

TRACY
Right. Let's play tennis.

BRADFORD
Hope you brought something to wear -.

TRACY
This is it.

BRADFORD
It's - wrong.

TRACY
There's no one else within -.

BRADFORD
I count.

TRACY
Okay. I'll do better.

BRADFORD
Sure. We should warm up first. Don't want to hurt something.

TRACY
I won't break. Yoga every other day. Keeps me spry. But like I said - I need something more aerobic.

BRADFORD
Great. Forehand volley then. Grip your racket like so. Bend your knees. Swing through your torso, not just your shoulder. Watch me. And follow through. Like this. Go on.

(TRACY makes an especially awkward attempt.)

BRADFORD
Wow.

TRACY
What?

BRADFORD
I mean -.

TRACY
That bad, huh?

BRADFORD
Worse.

TRACY
Thanks.

BRADFORD
Ever play any sports at all?

TRACY
Much to my father's regret - none.

BRADFORD
All right. Here.
(Stands behind TRACY to help correct her swing.)
This way.

(An awkward swing followed by a brief moment where they register their - indelicate positions.)

TRACY
Now what?

BRADFORD
(Backs away.)
Practice that.

TRACY
By myself?

BRADFORD
I've got a call.

TRACY
On my time.

BRADFORD
The time is over.

TRACY
I paid in advance, Bradford.

BRADFORD
I'll reimburse you.

TRACY
Reimburse? Why? Am I so hopeless?

BRADFORD
What do you want from me?

TRACY
What I paid for. Tennis lessons. What else?

BRADFORD
It was a bad idea.

TRACY
But you're a good tennis player.

BRADFORD
For a biology teacher, you're damned naive.

TRACY
Ah. I see. It's making you nervous.

BRADFORD
I have girlfriends.

TRACY
Here, I'm the student.

BRADFORD
Why the perfume?

TRACY
Why the question?

BRADFORD
Tennis isn't what you want.

TRACY
Really? What do -?

BRADFORD
You're trying too hard!

TRACY
Bradford, your adolescent mind is on overdrive.

BRADFORD
Which is why you hired me.

TRACY
Good heavens, Bradford, this is about a teacher and her student building, yes, a working relationship - albeit awkwardly. Accept it for that.

BRADFORD
I'm not for sale.

TRACY
Lighten up!

BRADFORD
YOU CARE TOO MUCH!

(A moment.)

TRACY
Is that possible?
(Wait.)
Bradford?
(Wait.)
Is it possible to care too much?
(Tosses BRADFORD a ball.)
Hey. The ball's in your court.

BRADFORD

(Drops the ball.)

Serve yourself.

(Disengages.)

TRACY

(To AARON.)

Perhaps there's the problem - I had been - serving myself too long.

AARON

Demeaning and intemperate.

TRACY

All right! But it was for Bradford's sake! Despite what he - misconstrued. That rationalization held true. That's what I clung to as I tumbled down my own rabbit hole having no idea how it would end!

AARON

Tragically.

TRACY

But some things propel us - some things ages old and older, Aaron. One we've tried to legislate, regulate, defame, profane, cut out and sometimes obliterate! But here we are! Here we are. Like those ancient Greek heroes he so admired. Doomed.

AARON

So we're predestined?

TRACY

Pre-wired. Hard-driven. The maternal and the sexual. Finally. Finally, somehow they - converged. Forsook their separate identities. Corrupted one another.

(Tears now?)

And the walls came crashing down. Crashing, crashing down.

AARON

What does that mean? Tracy? What the hell does that mean?

TRACY

Something was there. Something bewildering. Inarticulate. Could it have been denied? Could it, Aaron?

AARON

Tracy-.

TRACY

Times like these - times like these, Papa held me. Wrapped me up in his arms and made it all right.

AARON

It's everything I want to do - but can't.

TRACY
Then tell me something. Say something sweet. Like before.

AARON
Tracy -.

TRACY
Anything!

AARON
Yoga - it agrees with you.

TRACY
That's it?

AARON
No - but anything else -.

TRACY
It's artless and lacks subtlety.

AARON
It's true.

TRACY
You'd think of me after leaving? Yes?

AARON
Of course.

TRACY
An afterthought.

AARON
My god, Tracy, I was consumed by you.

TRACY
Good word. Those public displays of affection. Got us thrown out of more than one restaurant for that.

AARON
Yes. I wanted you everywhere. Anywhere.

TRACY
And then?

AARON
We were on fire, Tracy. It frightened me. Confused me.

TRACY
That's too easy.

AARON
We were too young.

Irresponsible? TRACY

Yes. AARON

So you were proving the point. TRACY
(Shift.)

Who knew how much anger I had stored inside? At Aaron Finn and Evan and all the rest. Men with short-term memories and indulgent mores. With lies and callousness. It may help explain -. Well.

(Engages.) BRADFORD

It was wrong.

Boorish, certainly. TRACY

I can be an ass. I know that. BRADFORD

Some men are stuck on Neanderthal. For you I have hopes. TRACY

I can't say it won't happen again. BRADFORD

Oh, it will, but we'll learn to deal with it better. TRACY

(Heartfelt.) BRADFORD

But why? What is it about me -? Why am I the one?

Start with the fact you even ask the question. TRACY

Am I supposed to understand that? BRADFORD

The possibility that you don't is okay. Truly. TRACY

What happens next? BRADFORD

These tests. File them. TRACY

Alphabetically? BRADFORD

If it's not too much.

TRACY

BRADFORD
(Gets to work.)
Haven't seen my father in a week.

TRACY
Is that unusual?

BRADFORD
Or heard from him.

TRACY
Has your mother?

BRADFORD
She's at a convention with the mayor. In San Diego.

TRACY
You're on your own then?

BRADFORD
I think he's left. Permanently.

TRACY
Left your mother.

BRADFORD
And me!

TRACY
Of course. Emptied his closet?

BRADFORD
Doesn't need to. Can fill up another one.

TRACY
Have you tried contacting him?

BRADFORD
Every way possible.

TRACY
And your mom? What about her? Surely she's aware -?

BRADFORD
Phone's on vibrate.

TRACY
For the duration of her trip?

BRADFORD
She has a lot of stamina, Teach.

TRACY

Being crude seems inappropriate given these or any other circumstances.

BRADFORD

Being crude seems to be standard operating procedure amongst the species.

TRACY

How long is Mother gone?

BRADFORD

Two more days according to her note - unless she's made a better offer.

TRACY

And you have a place to stay.

BRADFORD

A six thousand square foot house, Ms. Arnett. In the foothills.

TRACY

Ah. But it's empty.

BRADFORD

Know what it takes to fill up that much space?

TRACY

No.

BRADFORD

Neither do I.

TRACY

So you're parents are going through a tough time. They're - distracted.

BRADFORD

Fucked-up!

TRACY

In transition.

BRADFORD

In transition! Shit. The noncommittal scientist! Wears her gloves and mask to protect herself from getting -.

TRACY

All right! Not everyone is your enemy or your target.

BRADFORD

Until proven differently, they are.

TRACY

Your mother will return home.

BRADFORD
Problem solved. Ta-da.

TRACY
Problem to be addressed, Bradford.

BRADFORD
That requires communication, Teach. Actual conversation. A dialogue between communal life forms.

TRACY
You're exceptionally verbal. When you make the effort.

BRADFORD
Some things won't be said.

TRACY
Still - you want - need to - say - something.

BRADFORD
And you're dying to hear it.

TRACY
Does finding fault with me help?

BRADFORD
Faults are all they're cracked up to be.

TRACY
All right, you're clever.

BRADFORD
To hell with that.

TRACY
Yet, we have to make allowances for it.

BRADFORD
How would you make allowances for what I saw?!

TRACY
Saw?

BRADFORD
Like an eyewitness account.

TRACY
Say what you can.

BRADFORD
Yeah. Then you will be gratified. Vicariously.

TRACY
All right, Bradford. Enough. If not me, then your coach. You must have some connection with him -.

BRADFORD

He's one of those Neanderthals.

TRACY

Then wait for your mother -.

BRADFORD

SCREW MY MOTHER! Everyone else does!

(A moment.)

TRACY

I'm listening.

BRADFORD

Yeah? Hear this: her - dress was - hiked up. My mother's. Her panties ripped and on the Italian tile. Floral pattern. The panties. I found that - disconcerting. This - other man was nailing her up against the door. Cedar from the Middle East. Hand-carved. Driving into her with such - urgency. And she clung to him like - like he was the air she needed to breathe. It was - brutal. Raw.

TRACY

Unconscionable.

BRADFORD

(Breaking down.)

In the kitchen. In *my* kitchen, Ms. Arnett. Where *I* should have been - nurtured. Mother *and* Father present. Stories been told. Laughter been shared. Where smells and - and sounds and - tastes of being a family is what I should remember, not -. Not -. Not - that.

TRACY

I'm sorry. So sorry.

(Holds BRADFORD.)

You're too young to witness such betrayal.

(Kisses BRADFORD'S head.)

BRADFORD

NO!

(Strikes TRACY. A reflex. TRACY hits him likewise back. And hold. Then TRACY begins another strike. BRADFORD catches her arm. Now a brief struggle ensues. The struggle draws them together. It evolves into a kiss. This kiss escalates. Becomes all consuming. The two of them trying to engulf the other. It's elemental, unrepentant and utterly guileless.)

(Abruptly they push apart.)

TRACY

I've got class.

BRADFORD

Me too.

TRACY

Nearly first bell.

BRADFORD

Right.

TRACY

Is there someone -.

BRADFORD

An aunt.

TRACY

Good.

BRADFORD

Should I come back?

TRACY

No. Yes. Maybe. Just go. Go, go, go, go. Go!

(BRADFORD disengages. TRACY works to gain some equilibrium.)

TRACY

My god, what the hell is happening? What the hell, Tracy.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

SETTING: The Rubber Room - midday

AT RISE: AARON sits at a small table. BRADFORD sits in the vicinity of the science room. TRACY stands considering BRADFORD.

AARON

Sometimes discovery can be difficult for the client and their attorney. In this case. Certainly. Difficult - like these photographs found in Bradford's book bag.

TRACY

Ah. The photographs. I wondered if they would be part of the record.

AARON

You're - stunning in them.

TRACY

It's the trick of light and lenses.

AARON

The photographs are one thing, but what's behind them is another.

TRACY

They're only two dimensional.

AARON

Being - wry seems inappropriate, Tracy.

TRACY

It was work from the heart, Aaron. Unprofaned by any guile.

AARON

Two hearts?

TRACY

I had a lot of heart left to give. Heart starved for affection.

AARON

Statements like those sound too much like a confession.

TRACY

Do I need one - given those photographs?

AARON

They will be used to - imply - things. Yes.

TRACY

And such implications become actualized. Correct? Wish fulfillment. People seeing what they want to see or longing to experience themselves.

AARON

People will see a - smoldering sensuality as suggested by the prosecuting attorneys.

TRACY

And the defense sees what? The same?

AARON

Yes.

TRACY

So. They brought back memories. Is that it? Those days we never bothered to get dressed. Our lips bruised.

AARON

You're toying with me again.

TRACY

Said the cat to the mouse.

AARON

Damn-it, Tracy, I'm offering a lifeline and you keep throwing it back!

TRACY

But it's all knotted up, Aaron! Uncertain if it wants a confession or a denial. Right? One would whet his appetite, the other would sanctify his memory. Which would be a door back into my life? You're curious. Freed now to act on that curiosity.

AARON

It's more than curiosity!

TRACY

More than child's play?!

AARON

Yes. We've grown up.

TRACY

We're older.

AARON

What were you thinking when he took those photos?

TRACY

I'm a 37 year old woman, Mr. Finn. A sexual being. With all my bodily functions intact. Men think they have a monopoly on the drive to copulate. But it comes and goes. We're steeped in it.

(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)

We women sow and reap it. Sex is who we are. And when we climax the earth doesn't move, we move it.

AARON

A speech the prosecutor would cherish.

TRACY

And the advocate?

AARON

You're a scientist, not a philosopher.

TRACY

Because I needed something that had the appearance of truth.

AARON

Appearances are what may do you in.

TRACY

Jealousy will do me in. And ignorance.

AARON

And arrogance?

TRACY

I'm the furthest thing from arrogant.

AARON

Are you sure?

TRACY

Don't preach to me!

AARON

SOMEBODY SHOULD HAVE!

TRACY

(Shift.)

All right. Pretentious, maybe. All that - striving. All that - success. Yeah. The Jesus complex. What my father called it. A teacher starts to believe she can raise even the dead. Well - so much for such - hubris.

(A moment.)

BRADFORD

(Engages.)

It's fifth period.

TRACY

I'm well aware of what period it is, thank you.

BRADFORD

I can set up the labs -.

It's no longer - appropriate. TRACY

We were both - venting. BRADFORD

It's over. We're over. TRACY

Sorry I hit -. BRADFORD

Likewise. TRACY

Mother -. BRADFORD

We won't psychoanalyze it. TRACY

You're strong for a - biology teacher. BRADFORD

The - weaker sex does the heavy lifting. TRACY

Maybe I could straighten out the closet. BRADFORD

Did your mother return yet? TRACY

Yes. BRADFORD

That's where you need to be mending fences. TRACY

My mother's needs to ask for my forgiveness. BRADFORD

It would be appropriate, yes. But that's between you two. TRACY

And between us? BRADFORD

You're confusing me with her and god knows what else. TRACY

And you're confusing me with whom? BRADFORD

TRACY
Bradford!

BRADFORD
It won't happen again! Again.

TRACY
Yes, you're right. So it's best that you leave.

BRADFORD
Not that way.

TRACY
Pardon?

BRADFORD
If the - authorities find out.

TRACY
There were only two people in the room.

BRADFORD
One of them was underage.

TRACY
What? Wait. Am I hearing - what I'm hearing?

BRADFORD
You - invited me in.

TRACY
Because you needed a place to be.

BRADFORD
Has that changed? I like you, Ms Arnett. I like the way you command the class, but don't bully it. I like your dumb jokes.
(Shift and tentative.)
And I do - like the way you smell.

TRACY
You're a -.

BRADFORD
Boy? I don't feel like a one.

TRACY
A child can have an erection.

BRADFORD
Is it all about sex in biology?

TRACY
What do you want?!

What were you offering me?
BRADFORD

I was reaching out to a young man who had lost his way. It's part of my job.
TRACY

Have you retired?
BRADFORD

Will I get that chance?
TRACY

There were only two people in the room.
BRADFORD

Well done. Both a promise and a threat.
TRACY

I know it's crazy -.
BRADFORD

Irresponsible. Dangerous. Foolish! All of the above and more.
TRACY

But it's all right to love me!
BRADFORD

Have you told your parents that?
TRACY

Should I have to?
BRADFORD

No.
TRACY

It doesn't need to be all at once.
BRADFORD

Or all together.
TRACY

Whatever it is -!
BRADFORD

What I can give you is no substitute -.
TRACY

Where shall I start?
BRADFORD

This has already gone too far!
TRACY

So what's to lose? BRADFORD

Faulty logic! TRACY

What's logic got to do with it, Ms. Arnett? What the hell does logic have to do with it? BRADFORD

Everything. TRACY

Is that why you're single? BRADFORD

Bradford -. TRACY

What other choice do you have? BRADFORD

Choices have unintended consequences which neither one of us are equipped to handle. Better get out before... TRACY

I'm staying. BRADFORD

Think of... TRACY

I *think* we're done negotiating. Please. BRADFORD

(BRADFORD and TRACY check one another.)

Those trays. They're filthy. TRACY

Sure. Drudge work. BRADFORD

It's what *aides* do. TRACY

And after that? BRADFORD

The rat wants feeding. TRACY

(BRADFORD disengages.)

AARON

It bought you time.

TRACY

Yes. But I felt trapped. Inert. Unable to move forward or back. A blunt panic throbbed in my mind. Reason became unreasonable. Either way was the wrong way.

AARON

Nevertheless, you chose one.

TRACY

What does it matter if the results would have been the same?

AARON

And you know that for certain?

TRACY

Isn't death a certainty?

AARON

Good god, these sorts of responses take us nowhere.

TRACY

I'm under a lot of pressure here, Aaron. Not the least of which because you've chosen to be my representative. Anxious for those *anticipated* details.

AARON

Anxious to help.

TRACY

Pick up the pieces?

AARON

Put them back together.

TRACY

They won't hold, Aaron. They can't be held!

AARON

Let me try!

TRACY

Yes. Of course. Who knows better than me that self-indulgence is a synonym for mercy.

AARON

All right! All right, Tracy. Full disclosure. Yes? When the news broke, it all came flooding back. All of it. Everything. And given my current circumstances, I did *indulge* myself. Oh yeah. And I understood that boy, Teach. Was envious of him. Absolutely. Believe it. Green as grass. Stupid with jealousy. It overwhelmed common sense. And these images! My god, that should have been me!

It was, Aaron!

TRACY

He was a boy!

AARON

And you were?

TRACY

I'm the man who loved you.

AARON

Who ducked and ran? Who was more the child?

TRACY

This is about the decisions you made.

AARON

You have no idea.

TRACY

Cause and effect, Tracy.

AARON

Yes, you're the cause, this is the effect.

TRACY

That's a reach.

AARON

I was the woman jilted.

TRACY

Wrong word.

AARON

I was the guest reader, Aaron, the morning after your *departure* who sat in front of those 1st grade children reading Dr. Seuss and weeping. I couldn't help it. That's okay one of them said, I don't like green eggs and ham either.

TRACY

I was getting out of our ways.

AARON

An iceberg is in the way. A lover -?

TRACY

Tell me how any of this has to do with Bradford.

AARON

Bradford rescued me!

TRACY

AARON

From what for god's sake?!

TRACY

From going over the edge when my father died!

AARON

(Shift.)

Charles? Charles died? When? How? Tracy?

TRACY

We were watching a Laurel and Hardy film. Way Out West.

(As Hardy.)

'A lot of weather we've been having.'

AARON

I know it.

TRACY

We were laughing, sharing something we had shared over and over - but never tired of sharing. 'Look at the timing, Tracy,' he said. 'It's all about timing.' Then he proved his case. I went into the kitchen for some more nuts. Pistachios, Aaron, and nothing remained when I returned. The room was empty. I mean, the form was there but the essence was gone. No angst. No long drawn out farewell. Neat and tidy. Thoughtful right?!

AARON

I'm sorry.

TRACY

He was the man in my life. The anchor. He made me laugh. Comforted me in every sort of storm. Especially after my mother's death. Chased the dark away. Cradled in his arms I was safe. The world couldn't harm me there. Yes, he could be irritating and sometimes too sharp and on more than one occasion too loud, but Papa loved me. That never failed. Ever.

AARON

I was fond of Charles.

TRACY

I ache for him.

AARON

One can only imagine.

TRACY

In this life, we don't have to.

BRADFORD

(Engages - photography gear
in hand.)

That's a first. A substitute. For two days.

Personal business. TRACY

Even dedicated teachers are allowed. BRADFORD

Gee, thanks. TRACY

I heard -. BRADFORD

It's old news. People die. Even the people we love. TRACY

I - missed you. BRADFORD

For all the right reasons, I hope. TRACY

I thought the proper response was, I missed you, too. BRADFORD

I'm unable to - banter today. TRACY

Yeah, it's gotta to be tough. BRADFORD

Impossible. Damn. I've got to get out of here. TRACY

Take me with you. I can be good company. It is possible. BRADFORD

(To AARON.) TRACY

And he was. Good company. Despite what had happened between us. Or because of it.

It seems - reckless. AARON

Reckless, it seems, is getting out of bed in the morning. TRACY
(Shift.)

We drove out of the city, past the suburbs, out into the hills. BRADFORD

Silent all the way. BRADFORD

Tracy -. AARON

TRACY

But Bradford there. Like a ballast. Keeping me from being swamped.

BRADFORD

The day - golden. Full of anticipation.

AARON

Beware.

(Joins the scene.)

TRACY

We came across a glade off the road and stopped. Climbed over the fence. Took shelter. The soft shadows a comfort. That's when Bradford - exposed yet another interest.

(BRADFORD prepares his camera.)

And those photographs, despite the implications, are not of a woman ripe for sex, but a woman in mourning. A woman in half-light. A woman with a half-life.

BRADFORD

(Referencing the camera.)

May I?

TRACY

Take what you need. Most males do.

(BRADFORD takes photographs during the following.)

AARON

I took what you offered.

BRADFORD

Is it all right if I say you're beautiful?

TRACY

This time of day, everything is beautiful. Consolation if we could hold on to it.

BRADFORD

These will.

AARON

They did.

TRACY

Did I ignore the ramifications? Foresee the repercussions? Yes and no. Only the moment mattered.

BRADFORD

Turn this way. Good. Try it here by this tree.

AARON
On the bed of russet-colored leaves.

TRACY
They're lovely.

BRADFORD
The light plays off your hair. Undo it.

TRACY
Like this?

BRADFORD
Perfect.

AARON
I remember getting lost in your hair.

BRADFORD
Bring it round across your shoulder.

TRACY
It feels so wanton.

AARON
It looks stunning.

TRACY
You're repeating yourself.

BRADFORD
Look right into the lens.

TRACY
Right through the lens.

BRADFORD
Yes.

AARON
Into me.

TRACY
And see what?

AARON
A man asea.

TRACY
So many are.

BRADFORD
I liked kissing you.

So many have.	TRACY
You lips like -.	AARON
Honey?	TRACY
Sweeter.	AARON
Can I -?	BRADFORD
What -?	TRACY
Once more.	BRADFORD
No.	AARON
	(A hesitation.)
Yes.	TRACY
	(BRADFORD a kiss - ever so gently.)
There.	BRADFORD
But now you're crying.	AARON
God-damn-it!	TRACY
It's all right.	BRADFORD
And yet you believe that.	TRACY
Believe in me.	AARON
Believe what I feel.	BRADFORD
One kiss that sears and salvages!	TRACY

Burns and destroys.
AARON

TRACY
(To AARON.)
But only we were present! Only each other to comfort. No one else was at hand. No one. And Aaron Finn was a long, long time ago.

(AARON withdraws.)
TRACY
And the moment lingered -. We were caught between hell and oblivion. Even the birds went quiet to consider it. Then the - decision deferred when -.

(BRADFORD'S cell phone RINGS.)
BRADFORD
Hey. I got busy. All right. I'll be there.
(To TRACY.)
We'd better go.

TRACY
Back.

BRADFORD
Yeah.

TRACY
Can we?

BRADFORD
You have work to do.

TRACY
Do I?

BRADFORD
It's good work, Ms. Arnett.

TRACY
Still.

BRADFORD
Oh yeah.

TRACY
One of those girlfriends? The phone call.

BRADFORD
My mother.

TRACY
How is she?

BRADFORD

Unfaithful. Unreliable. Unsympathetic. Unlike Teach.
(Disengages.)

AARON

(Engages.)
So you were the vulnerable one.

TRACY

I went home that night and wept. Why? For my missing father?
For everything taken away from me? For Bradford. Because I kissed
him. Because I dared contemplate - screwing him. Because I
hadn't. Because one way or the other I was screwed? Jesus, Aaron,
get it over with! Throw me in the water and see if I drown!

AARON

It's not a witch hunt!

TRACY

A whore hunt.

AARON

So you had sex with him?

TRACY

Can we be more precise?!

AARON

It means what it means.

TRACY

Are we speaking of penetration? But of what? How? And where?

AARON

Come on, Tracy!

TRACY

Come on, hell. You're the advocate. Advocates require the nitty-
gritty. Yes? So you can make your case. State your position.
Stand up for the truth.

AARON

This is your dilemma!

TRACY

And you're exacerbating it! One more - complication. One more -
man seeking solace - read sex. One way or another. Sorry, but
I'm all out of Band-Aids.

AARON

All right. Fine. Great. Enough dancing around. You got yourself
into this fix, Ms. Arnett, and you sure as hell can get yourself
out!

(Begins gathering his things
for an exit.)

TRACY

Wait. Aaron, wait. Damn-it-all-to-hell! What else did you expect? Aaron? What the hell else could you expect?!

AARON

Civility.

TRACY

From a woman on the verge of a mental breakdown? Telling this sort of story to a man she held in - in - regard. It's more difficult than I imagined.

AARON

You were right before. I am the wrong man -.

TRACY

Never were good at conviction.

AARON

Commitment is the word you're looking for.

TRACY

Is one the root for the other?

AARON

I clearly didn't know.

TRACY

So you're leaving. Again.

AARON

I was a fool then. I'm a fool now.

TRACY

Because you loved - love me?!

AARON

YES! Yes, damn-it!

(A moment where TRACY and
AARON regroup.)

TRACY

What happened, Aaron?

AARON

You were to tell me.

TRACY

To your marriage? What went wrong? I need to know.

AARON

(Work through this.)

Wrong? It went - wrong in little pieces. Incrementally.

(MORE)

AARON (CONT'D)

It seems I - no, no I *did* stop - paying attention. I became - inured to the facts of my life - this neat little equation that measured out the days in a reassuring - beat. But individual hearts have their own rhythms. Right? And I woke up one morning - and there's this - woman looking out the window at something visible only to herself. I - speak her name. A question. But - no answer. I want to reach out and touch her, but already she's too far away. Cry out, but say what? It's a mumbled 'morning' instead and cold cereal in return. The silence goes bone deep. And the children tread water in it.

TRACY

The children - I bet they're terrific.

AARON

Of course. They are. But they don't have a place in our conversation.

TRACY

They could have.

(A moment.)

I'm sure you're a terrific father.

AARON

Like your own.

TRACY

Some people get lucky.

AARON

But not Bradford.

TRACY

Not so much.

AARON

So you were - what? Some sort of surrogate?

TRACY

Some sort -. Yes.

AARON

I suppose all teachers are - one way or another.

TRACY

Certainly teachers who've had children and lost them.

BRADFORD

(Engages.)

It's the state championship.

TRACY

Like me.

BRADFORD
Here in town. I'll reserve a seat.

TRACY
(Crosses to BRADFORD.)
The usual sweating and grunting.

BRADFORD
Catnip for a biologist.

TRACY
I've got finals to prepare.

BRADFORD
Make them multiple choice.

TRACY
Too easy.

BRADFORD
It's all too easy.

TRACY
Should I remind you you're top of the class, or would that offend your sensibilities?

BRADFORD
What's my reward?

TRACY
A diploma. Earned. Fairly.

BRADFORD
Even though you keep on gaming me.

TRACY
It was a mistake, Bradford. Lousy circumstances and bad judgment.

BRADFORD
That deflates my self-esteem, Ms. Arnett.

TRACY
Perfect.

BRADFORD
Are you including our *date* in the woods?

TRACY
That was someone in the need of comfort.

BRADFORD
Does the need ever go away?

TRACY
You're so earnest.

BRADFORD
Damn-it, Ms. A!

TRACY
How long will this go on?! Can go on? Now even your presence is intimidation. And the stalking. Oh yes, I've seen you.

BRADFORD
I've kept our secret.

TRACY
And earned a place in heaven if I had anything to say about it.

BRADFORD
I'd rather be -

TRACY
Bradford!

BRADFORD
Yes! Just say yes!

TRACY
I've told you, Bradford, I'm not your mother.

BRADFORD
Fuck you, Tracy!

TRACY
(Shift.)
Well, that's rather the point, isn't it?

BRADFORD
For the lower animals, sure. Right, Teach. But we higher beings
aspire to something greater. Word for word.

TRACY
Everything *is* heard.

BRADFORD
Everything is felt.

TRACY
Did I hurt you already?

BRADFORD
Is that - obligatory?

TRACY
That would be the result, Bradford. Believe me.

BRADFORD
I know the songs and the literature.

TRACY
Have you any idea what you're doing? What you're saying?

BRADFORD
Making an offer you shouldn't refuse.

TRACY
Right. Because you'll ruin my career otherwise.

BRADFORD
Is that all I mean?

TRACY
And now emotional blackmail. Working all the angles. A plus.

BRADFORD
There is chemistry in biology, Teach.

TRACY
It's against the law and common sense, Bradford.

BRADFORD
What? Expressing affection?

TRACY
You're disingenuous and belligerent all at once. Remarkable.

BRADFORD
Too many people have told me that.

TRACY
Still, it's true.

BRADFORD
What I'm feeling -.

TRACY
I KNOW!
(Shift.)
I know. It's authentic as hell. I know.

BRADFORD
(Shift.)
Good. You'll sit front row - at the net. Then, afterwards -.

TRACY
And your parents?

BRADFORD
Forget them! They've double faulted.

TRACY
What -?

BRADFORD
Over dinner. Everything was carved up but the ham.

TRACY
Your father returned.

BRADFORD
For a trial run.

TRACY
Lots of drama.

BRADFORD
Lots of cutting remarks. Fists banging on tables. This - white hot rage breaking to the surface. It was ugly. Went out. Came back to Mother in bed. Father watching football. I ate leftovers. Alone.

(Begins an exit.)
Anyway, see you at the tournament.
(No response.)
Teach?

TRACY
No.

BRADFORD
What?

TRACY
No. You won't see me there.

BRADFORD
That would be - disappointing.

TRACY
I'm exhausted. I can't do it anymore. It's one more weight too many.

BRADFORD
Maybe I *should* go see an actual counselor. Tell *her* my - troubles.

TRACY
If you do feel anything for me, what would you say?
(No response.)
Bradford? What would you say?

(BRADFORD, terribly conflicted, backs away and finally disengages.)

TRACY
It was supposed to be the proper thing to do. Yet, that moment rocked me - and Bradford.

(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)

That - estrangement made the day and the one after stretch out like an endless road. Mocked my self-imposed isolation. My self-served mourning. The mystics got it wrong, Aaron. Solitude doesn't feed the soul. It feasts on the mind.

AARON

Tracy.

TRACY

What happens to our original impulse? Mr. Finn? The thing that brings us together?

AARON

(Insistent.)

Explain what you meant -.

TRACY

My father always wanted grandchildren. I have two good knees, he said, and can dandle like nobody's business.

AARON

Tracy! What you said.

TRACY

Anyone up to bat? On deck circle? Got to get in the game, sweetheart. He never knew.

AARON

About?!

TRACY

I was pregnant before you left!

AARON

(Shift.)

Pregnant?

TRACY

It happens, Mr. Finn, when passion trumps common-sense.

AARON

With our child?

TRACY

It was mine, Aaron. It was in me, of me, by me. Your small - paternal contribution was nothing compared to the union of those two gametes. The nurturing of that zygote.

AARON

The question -.

TRACY

Lacks discretion, but yes, monogamy suits my disposition.

AARON

If I had known -.

TRACY

My god, don't mock yourself.

AARON

Can I be sincere?

TRACY

Long enough to leave me knocked-up.

AARON

And that's discretion?

TRACY

It was my senior year, Aaron. Remember? A semester of practice teaching looming on the horizon. Bills to pay. The old Dodge needing repair or last rites. I had invested so much into my education - in you - now one of those wheels had come off that ride and left me balancing precariously - fighting to stay upright. What do you think took place when some disinterested intern informed me I was now 'living for two'? I toppled over. My life as I knew it broke apart. And I struggled to regain some equilibrium. Struggled to sort out the proper course of action. But Papa was right. There's no one correct response. There are only choices.

AARON

And you chose?

TRACY

(Shift to memory.)

When that - executor came to take - Raymond from me - the hurt in her own eyes mirrored the one in my soul. Oh, how tenderly she cradled that babe. And as the door shut behind her, there came this unchecked eddy, this voracious vortex spinning me to despair and a howling without a voice. And finally unconsciousness - the sedative working its magic, but still gripped in my hand a - scrap of his hair. I hung on. I still do.

AARON

A boy -.

TRACY

For a long time after, I used to hear him crying at night and waken to pitch black in a hole impossible to fill or climb out of. Or when a window was open, hear the whisper of his voice as he called to me. Felt his light touch on my shoulder, but turning see it's the curtain and a breeze riffling leaves.

AARON

Our boy -.

TRACY

On rainy days, it seemed the rain drops slipping down the pane were his tears and I tried to trace them, follow them to wherever he had gone. Find a way back.

AARON

I should have been notified.

TRACY

All the legal hoops were leapt through, Aaron. The father never responded. Where were you?

HAARON

At one point, I left the country.

TRACY

Foot-loose, fancy-free.

AARON

I would have wanted to see him.

TRACY

Oh, I can tell you what he looked like! I can sure as hell do that!

AARON

All right!

TRACY

(Shift.)
Beautiful.

AARON

Of course.

TRACY

How much can one heart sustain?

AARON

Quite a lot it seems.

TRACY

Until -.

AARON

I'm sorry. So sorry.

TRACY

Words.

AARON

Trust them.

TRACY

This time.

Raymond Charles? AARON

Yes. TRACY

It was a closed adoption -? AARON

Unfortunately. TRACY

Why -? AARON

Best let it go. TRACY

AARON
 Now that I know of him, I'll make that decision! About my son, I'll make my own choices. After. After all this. After I've - grasped it.

TRACY
 (Shift.)
 I woke up to the note on our refrigerator. In your spare scrawl. Be back it read and AF inside a heart. Not A. But AF. It was enough to know.

AARON
 I went out for coffee - and -.

TRACY
 To Piccadilly Square?

(BRADFORD hammering on TRACY'S door.)

BRADFORD
 Ms. Arnett!

TRACY
 That was prologue. Your leaving.

BRADFORD
 Ms. Arnett!

TRACY
 Now the ending.
 (Crosses to BRADFORD.)
 Okay. Okay.

BRADFORD
 (Bursts into TRACY'S house.)
 Good thing you *stayed away!*

From the championship -? TRACY

Where else? Damn. BRADFORD

Why? TRACY

That bastard could hardly strike the ball last summer. BRADFORD

And now? TRACY

Check the fucking results. BRADFORD

He had a better day. TRACY

He out hit me, Ms Arnett. Where the hell did that serve come from? BRADFORD

Practice? TRACY

I don't practice? BRADFORD

As hard? TRACY

Hard for ten years. Ten goddamned years. BRADFORD

You've won too much. TRACY

It's expected. BRADFORD

It's near impossible to remain undefeated. TRACY

I thought your expertise was biology. BRADFORD

Kings of jungles come and go, Bradford. TRACY

Losers are bottom feeders, Teach. Period. BRADFORD

TRACY

Tennis *is* just a game. You lost nothing important.

BRADFORD

There were people in the stands who would disagree!

TRACY

Does one - result make so much difference?

BRADFORD

It's one more kick in the gut. One more dose of reality.

TRACY

You should be engaging your parents -.

BRADFORD

To hell with my parents!

TRACY

You're overwrought.

BRADFORD

My life is going to shit!

TRACY

And overdramatizing!

BRADFORD

Drama?! Want to talk about drama? Real life headline-making drama? How about one that involves a knife, a hospital and a jail?

TRACY

That's too nuanced for me.

BRADFORD

The knife in my father, Teach. My father in the hospital. Mother in jail.

TRACY

What?

BRADFORD

Listen up! She stuck him in the back! Once before he broke her grip.

TRACY

Sweet Jesus. A fight.

BRADFORD

Brief and to the point.

TRACY

Why were you even playing the match?!

BRADFORD

Why?!

(Breaking down.)

Where else could I go?! Hey?! My aunt's in shock. You blew me off. Tennis used to make sense. It was my court and I ruled it! Damn. Damn! What's left for me, Ms Arnett? What the hell am I supposed to do now?

TRACY

Come here.

BRADFORD

Fuck it. All of it!

TRACY

Come here, Bradford!

BRADFORD

I have.

TRACY

(Takes BRADFORD in hand.)

Yes. Yes, you have. And we'll find a way through this.

BRADFORD

We? How?

TRACY

Minute by minute. Hour by hour. Day by day.

BRADFORD

But right now?

TRACY

Hold on tight.

BRADFORD

Can I?

TRACY

Yes. Hold on very tight indeed.

(Kisses BRADFORD'S forehead.)

And there we clung to each other. Both needing rescue.

AARON

Tracy -.

TRACY

This is where.

(Kisses away BRADFORD'S tears.)

Why. And how.

AARON

It's making me uncomfortable.

TRACY

Intimacy?

(And now BRADFORD kisses
TRACY on the lips and TRACY
reassures him.)

Yes. All right. All right.

AARON

You knew it was wrong!

TRACY

We were all out of sanctuaries! Suffering lifetimes of loss and neglect. It was the lancing of wounds. Elemental. Primordial. From life to life. An affirmation.

(Walks BRADFORD to the bed.)

And there at that time, in that place yes was the only answer that would do.

(TRACY slowly undressed
BRADFORD during.)

AARON

I should look away.

TRACY

But won't.

AARON

What will we call it?

TRACY

Inevitable.

AARON

I'm floundering in the dark here.

TRACY

Grappling with an unknowable universe.

AARON

So you did have intercourse with that child?!

TRACY

The Big Bang turns out to be a big bust, Aaron.

AARON

How does that help?

TRACY

The Marx Brothers are my explanation for everything.

AARON

Can you answer the question?!

TRACY

Bradford answered it for us. How can there be anymore questions after what happened to him? EXPLAIN THAT TO ME!

(Shift.)

You men are so fragile. All your lusty intentions. The phallic fallacy. It leads you astray. Imagining you're gods. In fact, you're only messengers. And they come to nothing.

AARON

It's all inference!

TRACY

(Puts BRADFORD to bed on -.)

Yes. You want to hear about his lean body stippled with quick muscles. My own urgent need. Our worlds careening out of control and finding there something to hang on to. Falling together, but falling nevertheless. Bradford ravenous. But neither one of us wanting to define it. We were what remained! Still, my mind took its own path, made it's own connections. And afterwards, while he nuzzled at my breasts I wept. My eyes shut tight. The mark on my son's shoulder familiar as dirt. And prayed this boy was unblemished. There is where madness begins.

AARON

Tracy. Impossible.

TRACY

Read your mythology! Bradford had. So when in that post-coital warmth where revelations take root and bloom Bradford told that last secret, we were both consigned to hell.

AARON

My god.

BRADFORD

I was two weeks old.

TRACY

And -?

BRADFORD

They took me home. My - adoptive parents. Changed my name. First and last.

TRACY

You're adopted?

BRADFORD

He told me - in the hospital. This morning.

TRACY

Your father told you that?

BRADFORD

A senior at the local university birthed me.

A senior -? TRACY

An - aspiring writer. I have - no I idea who I am anymore. BRADFORD

(To AARON.) TRACY
It was too much. Too pitiless. This - horror wrenched my gut.
(To BRADFORD.)
You have to leave.

What? BRADFORD

Go. Get up and get out. TRACY

Now? BRADFORD

Right now! TRACY

Why -? BRADFORD

Get dressed. In there. I can't see you anymore. TRACY

Can't -? BRADFORD

I don't want to see you anymore. TRACY

Tracy. BRADFORD

Put this on! TRACY

What the hell -? BRADFORD

Get out of here, Bradford! TRACY

Holy shit. BRADFORD

OUT! TRACY

No -.

BRADFORD

Yes. Hurry!

TRACY

This is insane.

BRADFORD

It's over, that's all.

TRACY

Who are you?

BRADFORD

A nightmare. Better forgotten.

TRACY

Hold on -.

BRADFORD

Bradford -.

TRACY

What are you saying?

BRADFORD

Your parents need you. Will miss you.

TRACY

To hell with that.

BRADFORD

To hell with this!

TRACY

This was sweet.

BRADFORD

Poison.

TRACY

Poison?

BRADFORD

The back door.

TRACY

Damn.

BRADFORD

Shove off!

TRACY

Wait -. BRADFORD

You got what you wanted. TRACY

You're telling me -. BRADFORD

I'm telling you nothing, Bradford. TRACY

Am I a moron? BRADFORD

Damn your persistence. TRACY

Damned if I'm wrong. BRADFORD

All wrong. TRACY

You've had a child. Right? BRADFORD

I'm no mother. TRACY

Gave it up -. BRADFORD

Romantic nonsense! TRACY

Why else -? BRADFORD

Leave it. TRACY

You don't believe -. BRADFORD

Exactly. TRACY

No way. BRADFORD

Run. TRACY

BRADFORD

No fucking way.

TRACY

(Throws a book at him.)

Get gone, you bastard! Leave!

BRADFORD

No - fucking - way.

TRACY

GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!

(BRADFORD backs out of the
room - as horrified as
TRACY.)

AARON

And he left.

TRACY

He stumbled away. Half-dressed.

BRADFORD

My mind on fire. And returned to that six thousand square foot
chrome and glass house and broke everything that could be broken.
That wasn't already broken. The snakes escaped. So did I.

AARON

Incredible.

BRADFORD

In the end, it felt like sleep, but it was something else and I
was glad. It was easy letting go of something I never had.

TRACY

Bradford -.

BRADFORD

I've filled out the card, Ms. Arnett. All my - particulars.
Favorite book. Favorite movie. Favorite quote. It's from a
teacher that. She said, 'Human beings require three things to
survive and one to thrive.' It explains everything.

(Exits.)

TRACY

Yes, it does.

(Perhaps in tears.)

I showered afterwards. Changed and washed the sheets. Kept busy.
Cleaned out the cupboards. Bathroom cabinets. Focused on the
tasks at hand. And when the phone rang, I let it ring and ring
and ring. The police were more insistent. A young man had died.
They needed someone to blame. Someone - to carry the weight.

(MORE)

TRACY (CONT'D)

(Shift.)

It wasn't supposed to end this way!

(Shift.)

But how else *could* it end?

(Shift.)

So. All right. I'll take it on. It's my - penance. The least - and most that I can do.

(Crosses back to the Rubber Room.)

And now you have what's needed.

AARON

But what shall I write?

TRACY

Does it matter? It will only be misunderstood.

AARON

Who was he?!

TRACY

I boy I had in hand and let go.

AARON

A son?

TRACY

A male of the species, Aaron. Son, lover, husband, father - I've had them all - one way or another.

AARON

We should find out.

TRACY

Isn't this much truth enough? Enough to temper any hopes for - reconciliation? With either of us?

AARON

But what will I do with it?

TRACY

It happened to me! Me, Aaron Finn.

AARON

And Bradford!

TRACY

And Bradford.

(Shift. Checks her watch.)

We're probably out of time.

AARON

Your - peers take long lunches.

We have a strong union. TRACY

Tracy -. AARON

Move on, Aaron. Please. TRACY

(Hold.)
Yes. You're right. I should.
(Begins to gather his
materials.)
But someone else will be in touch.

This was my day in court. TRACY

There are mitigating circumstances -. AARON

Do they mitigate it for you?
(Hold for no response.)
Me neither. TRACY

Being in prison is hard time. AARON

Here and now is hard time. TRACY

Of course. Of course.
(Secures his materials.)
Well. AARON

Good-bye, Aaron. TRACY

(AARON crosses to the door,
opens it and hesitates.
There are a thousand things
he does need to say; a
thousand things he left
unsaid, but it's all too
late and the eloquence of
his silence is the only
voice he's allowed. And
now he exits.)

TRACY

(Crosses to the window.)

An awful lot of weather we're having. Right, Papa? An awful lot of lousy weather.

(TRACY adjusts the blinds to partially closed, and so, draped in half-light, she begins her long dark descent into madness.)

(Black out.)

(The End.)