

MENTORS

By
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September 2023
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MENTORS

CHARACTERS

JENNA - 30s, arts administrator, state arts commission. Pregnant, slightly showing.

BRIAN - 30s, aspiring TV writer - on a long edge of success. P/T Teacher at university.

DAVID - early 60s, Professor/Theater Director.

SETTING

Jenna & Brian's home in suburban Hartford, CT.

present.

1.

JENNA, four months pregnant, enters with bags of groceries. She hauls them in, puts them down and has to take a moment to catch her breath.

BRIAN is on the phone.

BRIAN gestures to help.

JENNA waves him away.

BRIAN

No - no that's not what I said. Of course I'm interested — I mean, anything is possible - but people write and teach all the time, I'll figure it out! I love working with the students, I'd love the opportunity to contribute -

JENNA mimes are they offering it?

BRIAN shakes his head.

JENNA exits to get more groceries.

BRIAN

Sure, but - Ah, right. Well. Not that. No - I can't help that. But you know my syllabi - I do have a culturally inclusive viewpoint - I am clearly adept at implementing EDI proactively across the department and I already take an active role in supporting the community - -Wait really? Who?

JENNA enters with heavy bags. Puts them on the counter. Catches her breath.

BRIAN

Well Sure. Sure, no she's great - but - will she be a good fit? With our students?

JENNA mimes who?

BRIAN mimes something with boobs & hair.

JENNA mimes Got It.

BRIAN

Would she want to live up here? I mean - sure - who does - but you know. Jenna's got her job -oh yeah, she likes it -

JENNA makes a face to the contrary.

-- the hours are better than when she was at that theater - and the pay. We have a nice place. We're - - Well, sure if that happens I'd need to be where that writer's room is but -

JENNA
Maybe you'd be remote?

BRIAN waves that away.

BRIAN
Look. Are you on the committee? No? So - I put in my application. That's all I can do right? Hey, I should go - we've got company coming. Yup. Yup. Sure. See you Tuesday.

JENNA
So?

BRIAN
Who knows. They'll probably cut the position before they fill it - or there will be a hiring freeze again.

JENNA
Ugh. What does he eat these days?

BRIAN
Everything.

JENNA
You sure? He might be watching his salt/ or his weight?

BRIAN
He didn't mention it.

JENNA
Why is he coming?

BRIAN
For a visit - he misses us.

JENNA
He never visited when we were in Brooklyn.

BRIAN

Too far from Manhattan.

JENNA

- and Hartford?

BRIAN

- is exotic?

JENNA

Uh huh. No really. Why?

BRIAN

He's meeting about that Artistic Director job in the Berkshires. We're a stop along the way.

JENNA

I saw that posting - its a good job. A lot of opportunity for someone.

BRIAN

Probably wants a change. I can't imagine teaching for what - twenty-five years? More? I've been teaching for two, barely part-time - and it's a lot.

JENNA

You just said you loved it!

BRIAN

Sometimes I do? It's just, hard to shift gears. It's not a do it and forget it kind of job. And to do it without benefits?

JENNA

I have the benefits.

BRIAN

I know I know but -

JENNA

And you like your students.

BRIAN

Some, yeah - but most are clueless. And weirdly adversarial - I don't know what I can and can't say -

JENNA

Shifting times.

BRIAN

I want to have things good for him - and for us.

He puts his hand on JENNA's belly.

JENNA

I know.

BRIAN

Little bean.

JENNA

More like a pear now.

BRIAN

How're you feeling?

JENNA

Eh - only threw up twice today - so better?

BRIAN

Doesn't it let up in the second trimester?

JENNA

It is better - just not great, it would help if I could sleep through the night - but the heart burn -

BRIAN

That new pillow?

JENNA

Sure. Helped. Thanks.

JENNA kisses BRIAN to end the conversation.

I got whisky and red wine. That's right, right? And he can't smoke inside okay? Out on on the deck.

BRIAN

Surely he's quit -

JENNA

If he hasn't.

BRIAN

of course.

JENNA

The smell kills me.

BRIAN

I know, he won't - he wouldn't. You got a lot of -

They survey a huge amount of groceries.

JENNA

I know. I didn't know what to make - so I got everything.

BRIAN

It's not a big deal. We could go out -

JENNA

But I got all this food.

BRIAN

But you don't really like to cook.

JENNA

But I want to like to cook.

BRIAN

That's not the same.

JENNA

I want us to have people here. I want a life where people come over. Where we have friends that will drop by. Where he'll have kids down the street who will be running in and out of each others houses.

BRIAN

Maybe we should start by meeting some of our neighbors?

JENNA

We will. We will - when I'm on maternity leave I'm going to meet everyone.

BRIAN

You might be busy with -

JENNA

What? The baby? Natural process. We'll nest, we'll build our community, it's going to be awesome. We'll have those crappy dinner parties.

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

Where you bring whatever, just share food and spend time with people.

BRIAN

What if we don't like these people?

JENNA

We will. We'll have to - we have to find someone - you've met people at the college.

BRIAN

Sure, they're okay.

JENNA

If you get the job then -

BRIAN

It's really a long shot. I don't think they can hire another white guy. It is all men, all white in the department. I'd love the job but - come on -

JENNA

Well. Anyway. You can stay part-time?

BRIAN

If I need to, but I talked to my agent again today -

JENNA

She read the script?

BRIAN

Might need to fly out.

JENNA

Really? That's great!

BRIAN

I know I know - but I don't want to leave you -

JENNA

Easier now before this guy pops out -

BRIAN

Sure.

JENNA

And even when he does - well. We'll figure it out.

BRIAN

I know.

JENNA

We never said this would be permanent.

BRIAN

I know.

JENNA

And its not like you want to be a professor -

BRIAN

No. NO. But -

JENNA

So - what?

BRIAN

Nothing.

JENNA

Don't worry - we'll figure it out when it happens.

BRIAN

If it happens.

JENNA

It will.

BRIAN

Maybe.

JENNA

You're ready - more than ready -

BRIAN

They don't really want -

JENNA

Stop it.

BRIAN

They're really interested in different stories now - I'm not -

JENNA

Brian. Don't overthink it - if there's a chance, go!

BRIAN

There's been chances before.

JENNA

I know.

BRIAN

It just hard to keep trying.

JENNA

I know.

—

What time did he say?

BRIAN

Seven.

JENNA

That late?

BRIAN

It's a dinner.

JENNA

I'm just so tired.

BRIAN

Okay.

JENNA

If I have to turn in just don't tease me about it.

BRIAN

Okay.

JENNA

Cause I have to listen to my body.

BRIAN

I know.

JENNA

And this kid's.

BRIAN

I know.

JENNA

What will we make?

BRIAN

Stew?

JENNA

Gross.

BRIAN

That's all I've got.

JENNA

I'll figure it out.

JENNA takes the bags of groceries to the kitchen.

BRIAN takes something to snack on out of one of the bags.

BRIAN

When did you see him last?

JENNA re-enters with water, takes the snacks from BRIAN and sits down. BRIAN finishes putting away the groceries.

JENNA

New York - probably five years ago just before we moved. He had an opening of a play, remember?

BRIAN

Didn't go.

JENNA

Oh right. You were against it.

BRIAN re-enters.

BRIAN

I wasn't against it. I just - it was when I wasn't seeing anything.

JENNA

Why was that again?

BRIAN

So I could clarify my voice.

JENNA

It worked.

BRIAN

That year. It worked.

JENNA

I don't remember the play at all. After I tried to congratulate him at the party and he was gracious, but polite.

BRIAN

How rude.

JENNA

You know what I mean. Like I was just another of the adoring fans and wannabes. He had a gaggle of interns following him around and a donor type pushing their niece in his face.

BRIAN
Sounds about right.

JENNA
Ugh.

BRIAN
You're doing great.

JENNA
I know

BRIAN
We're doing great.

JENNA
Yeah.

BRIAN
Great job.

JENNA
Mmmm. Great insurance.

BRIAN
Uh huh.

JENNA
And time off for this guy when he comes.

BRIAN
See, that's important.

JENNA
Yeah.

BRIAN
What?

JENNA
Nothing.

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

Why is he coming here?

BRIAN

To see us? His favorite students ever?

JENNA

We were not.

BRIAN

Sure we were - you were. I was a close second.

JENNA

But I quit. I don't make anything anymore.

BRIAN

You're working in the arts.

JENNA

Administrator. For the state. Managing grants. Not cool.

BRIAN

Necessary.

JENNA

Nope. A well-paid middle man.

BRIAN

Not the way you do it.

JENNA

I try. But really - the right way to do this job - the way it is set up is you show up at 9, leave at 5, maximize the state retirement fund, meticulously take every day off you can and leave after twenty years with a better title, not too much more responsibility, some pleasant acquaintances and a comfy retirement.

BRIAN

You're not that person. You can't be.

JENNA

Can't I? You know we distributed four million last year. Mostly to institutions so that they wouldn't go under, and those budgets are all facilities and salaries - maybe twenty percent to the artists? Maybe? There's no way to make anything work and it gets worse every year - that hiring freeze at your college? There are NOT fewer students attending. There are not fewer needs - there's just this screaming maw demanding sacrifices - but for what? It's not like the money is being spent on child welfare or health care or the environment? Oh god the environment - have you looked at our son's timeline? - we're looking at societal collapse basically when he is a teen-ager. So what? We'll have a raging hormonal, starving kid while the world burns? How are we going to handle that?

BRIAN

Honey.

JENNA

What?

BRIAN

We don't know what will happen.

JENNA

Right.

BRIAN

We don't.

JENNA

Okay.

BRIAN

You don't believe me.

JENNA

I believe you. How else can I go on?

BRIAN

Exactly.

JENNA

It's not a bad job.

BRIAN

It's not.

JENNA

He's such a shit.

BRIAN

Who?

JENNA

David. Mr. Fontaine.

BRIAN

I thought you were excited -

JENNA

That he called you? Of course he called you.

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

Just. Of course he called you. Doesn't matter that I went out of my way to see his shows all these years. That I helped him secure funding for the goddamned community project that probably saved his job. That I walked him home when he was too drunk. That I've listened to him tear his hair out about one protege or another - and got those ever so promising students of his jobs, gigs, internships when I could. And I could. Cause I've been working the whole time.

BRIAN

I think he just had my number handy.

JENNA

Uh huh.

BRIAN

You can't let it bother you.

JENNA

There is so much I can't let bother me.

BRIAN

Tell me.

JENNA

The dude they just hired is starting at what I make now.

BRIAN

Oof.

JENNA

I spend the day crafting an equity statement and then - I find that out?

BRIAN

I know.

JENNA

I want what I do to matter.

BRIAN

It does.

JENNA

Does it? Isn't it just adding to the bullshit?

BRIAN

It's paying our bills.

JENNA

I know.

BRIAN

Health insurance, retirement, paid time off.

JENNA

I know.

BRIAN

I don't have that.

JENNA

I know.

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

I know. You don't.

BRIAN

But I will if the school thing pans out.

JENNA

- or the show.

BRIAN

Or the show -

JENNA

Right?

BRIAN

Yeah. Yeah.

JENNA

It's a real thing right? Your agent has a plan?

BRIAN

She always does.

sound of a car pulling into driveway

BRIAN

Is that him?

JENNA

Early?

sound of a car pulling out of driveway.

BRIAN

They're leaving.

JENNA

Weird.

BRIAN

Just turning around.

JENNA

Okay. I'm going to get dressed.

JENNA exits.

BRIAN stays.

BRIAN looks out the window.

JENNA (*off stage*)

Could you take out the steaks? Just put them on the counter?

BRIAN

You want to do them on the grill?

JENNA (*off stage*)

Better than smoking up the house. Can you? And make sure the grill is clean?

BRIAN

Sure.

BRIAN exits to kitchen.

Returns with an apron. A newspaper. A spatula. Exits to the grill, outside.

Sound of a car. Headlights go out.

DAVID knocks. Pokes his head through the door.

DAVID

Hello! Hello! I'm here! Ready to be wrapped in Domestic Bliss!

DAVID enters. Wears an over-coat, that could be pretentious, but is convincing on him.

Brian?

Jenna?

BRIAN & JENNA enter from different sides of the house.

BRIAN

David!

JENNA

David!

BRIAN

Welcome! Come in.

JENNA

Oh my god it's been forever.

BRIAN

Let me get your coat.

DAVID

I brought wine.

BRIAN

Thank you!

JENNA

Are you eating beef? I'm planning on steaks but -

DAVID

Terrific. Terrific. Look at you! Getting pouffy in the middle aren't you -

BRIAN

It's a pregnant glow

DAVID

You're as beautiful as ever! - and now let me see you both here -you were so smart to leave when you did. The insanity of the city and the noise of everybody needing everything and grasping for their diminishing chances -

JENNA

You need a break?

DAVID

I need a transfusion. A new life. It's all too difficult now. I only want to talk to students via email. You're teaching Brian. You know - it's all too difficult -

JENNA

Come in - take off your coat. Have some wine. Brian?

BRIAN opens a bottle. Pours two glasses.

JENNA takes his coat. Hangs it up.

DAVID

Because I can't go on. It's not like when you were there - when you both were - a golden age.

BRIAN

We were lucky.

DAVID

How can you bring a child into this?

BRIAN

David -

JENNA

Madness.

DAVID

Indeed. But you always thrived in the madness - kept us crazies in line! Wine yes. Steak, yes. And then - we will solve this stubborn world's crisis together.

BRIAN

Welcome.

JENNA

Welcome.

DAVID

Yes. Oh. My students. My dearest, darling students. We hold on don't we? We carry on? It's all we can do. I believe that. I do. Look at you! Which way to your bathroom?

BRIAN

Right through here.

BRIAN guides him out. Returns.

JENNA

He hasn't changed.

BRIAN

No.

JENNA

Ass.

BRIAN
Poet.

JENNA
Wine?

Hands him a glass.

BRIAN
Yes.

LIGHTS OUT

2.

BRIAN and DAVID have glasses of wine. DAVID has less than BRIAN in his glass.

BRIAN
You never said what exactly happened -

DAVID
I never say what exactly happens because I rarely know. Surely you've noticed how baffling the working world is? So much better to just muddle through. Avoid conflict and keep your nose clean.

BRIAN
You're right.

DAVID
It's what Richard Hugo said - if you want time to create avoid politics and arguments. And accept that a man's religion is whatever he needs to hold onto - to not kill people - or himself.

BRIAN
The poet?

DAVID

He was my teacher. A lifetime ago. I was so young - he was so old.

BRIAN

Undergrad?

DAVID

University of Montana - a portal to my present. You know I was born in North Dakota?

BRIAN

I did.

DAVID

On a farm. Wind blown and miserable.

BRIAN

You came a long way from there.

DAVID

Nothing would have kept me there. Everyone's so - puritanical. So committed to their toil, their simplicity, their sobriety -

BRIAN

What they need to hold on?

DAVID

Hah. Hugo was generous. They're just small-minded and afraid.

BRIAN

Do you want -

DAVID

Yes.

BRIAN refills his glass.

DAVID

So. What do you have going?

BRIAN

Oh - you know -

DAVID

I don't. No one tells me anything anymore. You get old and they forget all about you. People stop calling. Don't just send a note every once in a while -

BRIAN

Do you? Send a note? Call?

DAVID

Hah! Never. So. Are you avoiding the question?

BRIAN

No. I'm writing. A couple projects. It's going well. I'm developing the pitch with my agent. I think it might -

DAVID

Go somewhere? Join the piles of content seeking our eyeballs? Good for you. Money's right isn't it? Better than theater.

BRIAN

Oh - you love it.

DAVID

Do I? It takes your time, your life, your heart, your soul. I give it. I gave it. And now. When the shit hits the fan. Then bang. Slam. Disaster.

BRIAN

What's happened?

DAVID

Nothing. Noise. Tell me about your project.

BRIAN

People living on the margins - a family and the people they take in. The compromises made. The life discovered underneath the compromises.

DAVID

Like compost.

BRIAN

The shit that feeds the crops. Exactly.

DAVID

Huh. Nice. Good luck. But it sounds painfully sincere. Don't you need a witch or a magical talisman? Time travel or some dystopia to sell things these days?

BRIAN

I'm banking on a shift.

DAVID

We live in hope.

BRIAN

We do.

DAVID

And - Jenna?

BRIAN

She's great. Great job in the state's arts office.

DAVID

Sounds like the Soviets.

BRIAN

Hah! More like selling the idea of the arts as an economic generator - an inciter of community renewal. Art-trepenuers.

DAVID

Stick an artist in whatever run down quandary of late-stage capitalism. What's the worst that could happen?

BRIAN

Exactly. Usually coffee shops and yoga studios aren't too far behind.

DAVID

Ugh.

BRIAN

You love coffee.

DAVID

I know. And yoga. I am complicit! I am a bourgeois asshole of the capitalist intelligentsia! Honestly, I just want a comfortable time while I'm skilled, and experienced and know how to do things - and still want to make something - but I don't want to have to talk about it. I don't want

to fight about it you know? I just - I want to make what I want to make and I want to work with who I want to work with. There was a time I could pursue an idea, chase what was alive to me - but now have to think about the ripples and implication of every choice -

BRIAN

So - what do you want to make?

DAVID

Hah! I have my list. You should set that show of yours on a farm where they're trying to be utterly sustainable and perfect - and they fail and fail and fail because we're all part of this sick culture - we're the shit that feeds the crops. Deny that at your peril.

BRIAN

It's set in a bus station.

DAVID

Nobody cares about bus stations.

BRIAN

I know.

DAVID

Do you?

BRIAN

What?

DAVID

Care about bus stations?

BRIAN

I -

DAVID

What?

BRIAN

I -

DAVID

Do you?

BRIAN

I - I - care about finding a way to tell the truth/

DAVID

The farm. The compost. The shit that we're in. That's the money.

BRIAN

Sure.

DAVID

It is. And look at you - family starting, home, rural -

BRIAN

Suburbs.

DAVID

It's dark out there.

BRIAN

Sure.

DAVID

So.

BRIAN

There's a town movement to combat light pollution.

DAVID

Real dark.

BRIAN

They've been really successful.

DAVID

Sometimes I don't know -

BRIAN

Sure.

DAVID

You know? I was so young when I started down this road and you don't know if you're going to feed yourself or not and you're in love with all these people. I just loved everyone I met. You know? I know you know.

BRIAN

Sure -

DAVID

When you're all young and just in love with words and image - with art - when you've spent your youth in whatever American backwater feeling misunderstood and out of place and you get to college or to the city and you start finding your people. It's like - stepping into the books that made you. It's a kind of magic.

BRIAN

It is.

DAVID

Maybe I just fell into a spell and it's gone now.

BRIAN

It's not gone -

DAVID

Teaching has done me in.

BRIAN

You've shaped so many -

DAVID

Hah! I've been there in my little office. I've managed to communicate to a few young people that they are not crazy for having feelings. That there is some worth to their impulses - that there's a field that they *might* make a life in.

BRIAN

Might.

DAVID

Better that they go fall in love. They don't even know how to do that anymore.

BRIAN

That's not -

DAVID

They're so concerned about internships and getting work and the debt they're in and how will they retain the approval of their over-involved parents - they barely even begin to step into their own depths. Maybe they don't have any depths -

BRIAN

They live in a different world than us.

DAVID

Than me - than I even recognize.

BRIAN

You probably felt that way about us back then.

DAVID

No.

BRIAN

Come on.

DAVID

I didn't. You were the future - and I had a great responsibility to offer you a ladder into the life you were reaching for against all odds -

BRIAN

I still don't know -

DAVID

You do. You did - hungry for everything - you set about re-making your world. Now - ugh.

BRIAN

Maybe it's just time to step back - or take a sabbatical. I'm sure you're due -

DAVID

I am. I'm overdue. Time to dive off the cliff of academia and do something real. This gig should be that. Will be that.

BRIAN

Great.

DAVID

I put you down as a reference. And Jenna.

BRIAN

You did?

DAVID

Well you're up here and you both are trusted so -

BRIAN

Sure. Absolutely of course.

DAVID

Good.

BRIAN

Anything specific?

DAVID

Oh - no. Just general support. There's an intern program there, so a lot of young people. So, just - from that perspective it will go a long way.

BRIAN

Absolutely. Anything.

DAVID

Good. Good.

BRIAN

Would you like another -

DAVID

Thank you.

BRIAN fills his glass.

BRIAN

Jenna's been awhile - I'll just go and check on her.

DAVID

Wonderful - let me read something! Your script -

BRIAN

Oh - gosh, no. It's not - ready. This. You can read this.

Pulls a play script off the shelf.

DAVID

Published?

BRIAN

Last year - it's had a few productions -

DAVID

I didn't hear -

BRIAN

Small things. Anyways. I won't be long.

DAVID sits down to read. Eyes drift around the room. Land on a picture of Jenna as NINA from Seagull. He picks it up.

JENNA enters.

JENNA

Brian won't let me hide it.

DAVID

Why would you -

JENNA

I need to remind you?

DAVID

You were terrific. What a joy - that whole project. Why doesn't anyone do Chekhov anymore?

JENNA

I think they do.

DAVID

Yours was the only year I could have cast it from - and not until you were ready.

JENNA

You really don't remember?

DAVID

What?

JENNA

My hands. You'd yell at me - 'What are you doing with your hands!' And I just wanted to cut them off. I couldn't stop -

DAVID

Oh - Jenna - No! That was Nina, Nina didn't know what to do with her hands - not you. You - you were too strong to play her, too full of confidence - I needed you to be broken, to be unsure -

JENNA

I - I thought I was terrible.

DAVID

Why would you think that? Everyone said you were wonderful - you were wonderful.

JENNA

I quit after. I mean. I didn't ever start actually.

DAVID

That's not why you quit.

JENNA

I'd freeze up there. Just hear your voice in my head - I never really got over it. I have to have a podium when I give presentations. Something to hold onto.

DAVID

Oh - God. Actors. It was just - it was what the part needed - and you got there beautifully. I told you that a thousand times.

JENNA

I didn't hear that.

DAVID

You always had such a presence. Always. Ran whatever room you walked into. You still do I'm sure.

JENNA

Sometimes.

DAVID

An actor's life is a misery anyway. You have the world in you and around you. What would you do stuck in the dark playing one miserable woman after another?

JENNA

Poor Nina. It's a lovely picture though.

DAVID

It is.

JENNA

It's got nothing to do with how I felt then.

DAVID

Ah. We're all mysteries to one another.

BRIAN calls from the kitchen.

BRIAN (*off*)

Jenna!

JENNA

I should -

BRIAN enters.

BRIAN

I think the meat is ready? Could you double check -

JENNA exits.

JENNA

On it.

BRIAN

I can never tell.

DAVID

I never even tried.

BRIAN

Hah. You must cook something.

DAVID

Cold things. Prepared things. Delivery.

BRIAN

Diet Cokes.

DAVID

Small vices.

BRIAN

We'd run to get you fresh ones from the vending machine.

DAVID

I had the best students.

BRIAN

None of my students do that.

DAVID

No?

BRIAN

Barely know my name. All they want to know is the assignment, the rubric and the grade scale, and then I swear they hunker down in their air conditioned dorm rooms and map out the exact minimum of work they need to do to pass respectably. There's no curiosity - no doing for the sake of it.

DAVID

I think it's permanent. For years I fought it - and now. Now I surrender. I'm done with the fights and the justifications, trying to explain to an increasing army of well-compensated administrators the need for an emotionally volatile space; the need for a bit of the unexpected, for the unnerving. For something besides the steady diet of pre-digested pabulum these children are weaned on. And they nod and take notes and then I'm delivered a memo about my teaching methods and student boundaries and building a safe space for academic development - and then it's not a memo, it's a report and it turns out they've been investigating me. Investigating? I could be flattered. I could imagine that at the end of it they would have a dossier on the annals of a tremendous teacher of theater who changed the lives and enriched the university for decade after decade.

BRIAN

An investigation? Like - for -

DAVID

I have made enemies.

BRIAN

But, that's -

DAVID

It's terrible. It's like the communist witch hunts. It's like the Malleus Maleficarum. It is crazy making.

BRIAN

I'm so sorry.

DAVID

It's the end. It's the end of everything. Really. I don't even know what to fight about anymore.

BRIAN

Do you have a lawyer?

DAVID

No. No. My union handles it through to the end - and then we'll see. But - I can't sit there any longer and just wait. Wait - for what? For vindication? There's no vindication. It's done. And the minute it began I was - I was ostracized. Exiled. Banished. It's an old idea, but most effective.

BRIAN

God - I'm - I'm sorry

DAVID

The shit of it is there is no one going to say a peep - no one left to explain that art is fraught and art students are vibrating bundles of nerves and if they're going to make a life they're going to have to learn to navigate that buzz of life in them and use it. How do I write a fucking learning objective for that?

BRIAN

Well you don't.

DAVID

Boundaries are for lecherous math teachers who haven't been alone with a girl and need Very Clear Guidance when faced with advising one in their dusty office.

BRIAN

I don't remember there being any issues from when -

DAVID

There weren't. Abuse implies a victim. It requires some kind of compulsion to hurt on the part of the perpetrator. That is not me.

BRIAN

Right.

DAVID

I only wanted to guide you students through the muck and the tumult of that buzzing need - to tune you into that drive, to pull you from one side of your youth to the launch of your lives with a spark intact - and if I did my job - with a pile of kindling that you could set fire to at will.

BRIAN

That's - fantastic.

DAVID

When will you set yours to burn?

BRIAN

Right -

DAVID

When?

BRIAN

It's not that simple. I have a stack of scripts that -

DAVID

Don't fritter it away. And don't fall into teaching, it's a trap - as much of a trap as Jenna's in-

BRIAN

I don't think Jenna's in a trap

DAVID

Of course you wouldn't. It's good for you. That she wants to do what she's doing.

BRIAN

She struggles with it - everyone struggles with things.

DAVID

That attitude is another one that is taking us all down with it.

BRIAN

Human condition.

DAVID

Hah! Excuses and lies. This wine is delicious.

BRIAN

Oh - good.

DAVID

I've been so tense. Haven't slept in weeks. I white knuckled it up here. Jenna? Jenna! I could eat your house!

DAVID disappears into the kitchen. Leaves BRIAN empty handed.

DAVID *(off)*

Oh this looks delicious! My God you genius! Food for the soul!

JENNA's laughter can be heard.

JENNA

David! Hah - stop - I need to get this out of the oven. Put on some music will you?

DAVID

What is this thing?

JENNA

Just press that button.

Music fills the room.

3.

BRIAN, DAVID & JENNA sit at the dinner table. A modest feast.

JENNA

I've been reading Mark Bittman watching the cooking shows - I'm getting better at it. I want to be able to cook for a crowd - have a welcoming table -

BRIAN

And my repertoire is limited.

JENNA

You'll figure it out.

BRIAN

I will.

JENNA

When this guy pops out - you'll be tethered to the crib and kitchen for the first few months.

BRIAN

Right.

JENNA

That's the plan. I'll have six weeks off from work and then - Brian will take over.

BRIAN

Till the fall semester.

JENNA

Sure.

BRIAN

Or if I sell this project -

JENNA

Of course. If that happens.

BRIAN

Then it's all different.

DAVID

How do you live in this constant state of speculation?

JENNA

What?

DAVID

This if this - if that -

BRIAN

It's the state of things.

JENNA

Debt, bills, keeping our heads and home together.

DAVID

There's no economy of dreams I think.

BRIAN

We do have to live - no one is offering us the deal you got straight out of grad school/

DAVID

That program was nothing when they hired me -

BRIAN

I know - you built something there just -

JENNA

It's doesn't look like what you remember.

DAVID

No. No. It doesn't. I know. It's constricted.

BRIAN

Debt.

JENNA

Rent.

DAVID

It's more than that -

JENNA

Is it?

BRIAN

You could get by on dreams.

JENNA

All that writing about it - Patti Smith? Just Kids?

DAVID

So good.

BRIAN

They had apartments, in Manhattan, for what they could make at a bookstore.

JENNA

Imagine.

DAVID

New York was different then.

BRIAN

Did you read M Train?

DAVID

Twice. Glorious.

JENNA

She quit.

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

When she got pregnant. You know. She stopped making music. Got married. Moved to Detroit. She was a mom. Full stop.

DAVID

So is this your Detroit?

JENNA

Hah! No. I have to work.

BRIAN

We're figuring it out -

JENNA

And I'm not the force of nature that is Patti Smith.

BRIAN

Eh - we'll see.

JENNA

I'm not.

BRIAN

You're going to raise this child - going to - who knows what?

JENNA

I know. I'm going to build this life that we have - going to make the best of what's left in the world. Try to turn the dial a little bit towards compassion and peace and recycling.

DAVID

Agh! Isn't that what we're all trying to do? That is not a goal. That's just what it means to be alive. To have a heartbeat. To exist. Even the evangelical, abortion hating - climate change deniers will claim that as their goal. You can't just say that. It's limp. Everyone wants that. You have to stake out your territory - and push past it, let what you desire push you to be loud, to cross lines, to destroy boundaries, to knock over their fucking walls and make them feel your WHY - teach their children to recognize that feeling deep in their gut as desire and that it is power and that power makes the world go round.

JENNA

And?

DAVID

And what?

JENNA

And - how does that translate? to what? revolution? change?

DAVID

I don't want a revolution.

JENNA

No?

DAVID

No! It's not Politics. Not Money. I want people to be able to feel their feelings. Live in the power of their talent, whatever that may be. I want people not to be afraid to wander into a dark room

and encounter something - something true, challenging, terrifying - beautiful and they can come out the other side - more alive, more human.

JENNA

Just that?

DAVID

Hah. Yes. Just that. Just - community. Just - connection.

BRIAN

Of course. Yes.

JENNA

For everyone?

DAVID

Yes!

JENNA

Who gets to decide?

DAVID

Who ever steps up. Whoever devotes themselves. Sacrifices. Keeps showing up.

JENNA

Right. Whoever can see themselves there.

DAVID

Yes.

JENNA

Whoever imagines they have a voice worth hearing - a vision worth sharing.

DAVID

And can draw people. Can lead - or do whatever it is they do to carve out their space -

BRIAN

I always felt that - with you - that you were teaching us to trust ourselves, to trust our work and it's value in the world - to lean into life's mysteries.

DAVID

Thank you.

JENNA

I didn't.

DAVID

Well -

JENNA

I was worried whether I was pretty enough to be on-stage - to be looked at.

BRIAN

You're gorgeous. Then and now.

JENNA

Huh.

DAVID

We're called based on talent as well - what we have to give -

JENNA

Sure. Though. You know I never had a woman teacher - there weren't any in the department when I was there. I never had a woman director either?

DAVID

I've worked with some terrific women -

JENNA

Sure. And if I'd stayed with it. Maybe.

DAVID

It's ultimately a human endeavor.

JENNA

I wish. I just wish - when I was younger - and shaping my thoughts - or my practice? 'Clarifying my compass' — that I'd had someone who wasn't finding me attractive or not, but was - was listening, to me.

DAVID

Just cause a director is a woman doesn't mean that she would bring some magic earth-mother thing.

JENNA

No.

DAVID

Plenty of women do plenty of damage everyday.

JENNA

Not like men.

BRIAN

This is not an argument.

DAVID

And there have been women in the department.

JENNA

Yeah?

DAVID

They don't stay. They tend to move on. Or have families. Or - something.

JENNA

Maybe they get sick of the fight. I know I'm sick of it. I've got x number of years to live. And here I am, everyday. So - the best life I can make and compassion and peace and maybe not kill every species in the mean-time. Seems like a decent goal.

BRIAN

Jenna -

JENNA

I loved how beautiful you thought I was.

BRIAN

You still are.

JENNA

I mean. I loved how you saw me. You too David. I felt chosen. When you'd cast me. And I felt seen when you'd pick out a choice I made or praise a scene -

DAVID

You were very good.

JENNA

I always tried to get your attention. Keep your attention. Keep your eyes on me.

BRIAN

You had my attention.

JENNA

Yeah.

DAVID

You were beautiful.

JENNA

So you'd say.

DAVID

Riveting. I remember the day you actually felt it - felt that shift - that eyes were on you and you had their attention. That you had our attention - and you were shaping the space around you -

JENNA

To what?

DAVID

To tell the story. To bring life to the darkened space -

JENNA

I didn't feel that.

BRIAN

Didn't you? I remember you glowing after a show - people were drawn to you - they still are.

JENNA

But - then? I felt needy. So needy. So - incomplete. So caught up in your opinion of me. First yours David - and then Brian's - I was - I don't know what - I did whatever I thought I needed to do to keep your attention.

JENNA puts her hand on her stomach.

JENNA

Ridiculous. It was easy to walk away from that.

DAVID

There's no rule that you have to stick to it - or anything for that matter. I'm the idiot. Continuing to fight for this - something. I don't really know anything else.

BRIAN

Mysteries.

DAVID

Hmm.

JENNA

There are people who would disagree with that. There are people who would claim that there's exactly what's in front of us and that we should deal with it. There are people that get very excited about tolls and taxes but don't bat an eye when kids are caged by our government or rapists have more rights than women.

DAVID

I don't think -

JENNA

What?

DAVID

That's what we're talking about - is that what we're talking about?

BRIAN

I just meant - our motivations, why we do what we do - it's - mysterious.

JENNA

And I'm pointing out that it is not felt as mysterious to most people and at the moment those people seem to be very successful at wielding power to achieve their aims and we - we who appreciate mystery and nuance seem to be failing. And maybe that is because there is no 'there' there. Maybe shrugging and attributing the power of art to mystery is denying that there is power in it and that we actually have the authority, the responsibility, to wield it.

DAVID

So? Will you? Wield it?

JENNA

It's why my cushy job isn't comfortable for me.

DAVID

That I understand.

JENNA

I know you do.

DAVID

The pull between what you can see as possible and what actually happens -

JENNA

Constantly. Exactly.

BRIAN

My project - this new one - I hope it speaks to that, how people wrestle with their ideals in a real way. I'm just waiting -

DAVID

- waiting for what?

BRIAN

For the 'yes' that will put it in motion -

JENNA

That's the thing though! You don't have authority there. You don't. You'll get paid. I hope you get paid. I do. I want you to get paid and get health insurance - and be able to support this kid along with me - but look. The money wins. It wins. It already won, you're writing the thing to sell. And if you sell it there's no author anymore - it's becomes a product . The producers will make it - and not that it can't be beautiful and meaningful and satisfying in the creative endeavor and the collaboration and all of those things - in fact - that's rich in so many ways - I know it is. But still. You don't own it. They can do what they want with it. Bin it. Hide it. Delete it. They own it.

BRIAN

Jeez. I know. I know. But I have to do something - I can't just cobble a living from these bits and pieces anymore -

DAVID

How do we go on? We go on.

JENNA

Hah.

BRIAN

We do.

JENNA

For how long? For how long do we go on? Really? I mean. We're here. We're fed. Trash goes out, electric on - baby growing in my belly - and yet... don't you get the feeling that any day now - a little breeze, a gust, a tremor and boom.

DAVID

I do. I feel that.

BRIAN

More wine?

DAVID

Indeed. It's too bad you can't join us.

JENNA

I could. If I wanted. In this state. Who knows though - a couple months and I could be prosecuted for drinking while pregnant. Like maybe this baby will turn out to be a murderous teen - couldn't they come after me then? Cite my slugging back a glass of wine on March 16th as the poison that caused the aberrant behavior and punish me accordingly?

BRIAN

I think you're going a bit far down a handmaid's tale rabbit hole.

JENNA

There's not really a point that feels too far to me at the moment. And yet. Here we are. More potatoes?

DAVID

Please.

BRIAN

They're delicious.

DAVID

God they're good.

JENNA

Oh good. Not overcooked? Too salty maybe?

DAVID

Oh no. Just perfect. Don't know how you do it.

JENNA

Well. We do go on. Might as well eat decent.

BRIAN

Cheers to that.

They toast.

DAVID

I barely eat anything palatable - between the college cafeteria and the deli, I may be alive because of the preservatives.

BRIAN

It's hard with a theater schedule.

DAVID

And teaching - which is daytime - then rehearsals are still in the evenings. Why they don't consider the main-stage productions at that school essential to the degree and create time during the daylight hours I will never understand.

JENNA

You were trying to get that changed when we were there.

DAVID

At this point I feel so stupidly grateful to have access to a theater - I barely argue. Pathetic.

BRIAN

And maybe time to go?

DAVID

Exactly. I can't live like this for much longer. And now the dogs are after me.

JENNA

The dogs?

BRIAN

He's under investigation.

JENNA

David?

DAVID

It's bull crap. They have nothing. Complaints of children. I cannot help it if NO ONE in their lives made them feel something between their legs until they walked into my acting class of all fucking places.

BRIAN

I'm sure they -

DAVID

They don't. They look at each other's junk on-line. They dress like strippers - the boys too - but it's all spectatorship. It's all for consumption. They get into my class. They lay on the floor and breath together. They connect to motivation and imagination. They maintain eye contact. Feel the humid air from their scene partners mouth on their exposed shoulder blade and they actually start burning. I watch them ignite - and I watch them get scared and I tell them to keep going, to ride that feeling - to trust that heat - that heat is life and nothing else fucking matters.

JENNA

I remember.

BRIAN

We weren't so cut off before -

JENNA

Speak for yourself.

DAVID

They have to learn. And they have to control it. And to do that they have to feel it - but now. Now there's one girl? One girl covered in fucking unicorns and rainbows, hiding her figure under the most boxy childish clothes and she won't go there and I won't let her hide from herself - and now. Now I'm under investigation. For what? What? Teaching these aspiring artists that they are human in an art form that - at bottom - is about creating a space where we can just stare at each other unashamed? Pah. Fuck that. I'm done. Or - I'm not done. But damn it if I'm going to end my career begging for access to my theater and tip toeing around the truth of things. No. No. No.

BRIAN

And you shouldn't. Just let us know what you'll need. Jenna's got pull with the festival - they are funded by her office

JENNA

Partially.

BRIAN

So we've got you. Sir - I remember your class. I remember what you affirmed for me - what I had spent my youth fearing. I grew up. I became a person who could love. A person who could live in this noisy, contradictory, maddening country with some semblance of a compass.

DAVID

Thank you. Thank you Brian. I don't know where I'd be without you, without my former students. I - I can't tell you how painful it has been reading these girls words - and think me? I made them feel like that?

JENNA

Girls?

DAVID

The one main one - but once they started the witch-hunt - more felt like they should get involved. What do the kids say? FOMO?

JENNA

That's probably not all/

BRIAN

It's sad. They're starved for feeling - they misplace their anger to the one person who revealed the possible depths they might hold instead of where that anger belongs - aimed at the society who stole our desire, packaged it up and sold it back to them via cold screens.

JENNA

How many?

DAVID

Brian you understand. You have to tread so carefully with your students. Be glad you're teaching writing and there's no need for them to - god forbid - make physical contact with one another.

JENNA

Like five? More than five?

DAVID

Does it matter? It's not true.

JENNA

I'm curious.

DAVID

My Dean says four.

JENNA

On the record?

DAVID

Four.

JENNA

Multiply that by five. Most won't say anything.

BRIAN

Because there's nothing to say!

JENNA

What is that - 20?

DAVID

Over the last five years. But it's not 20 - it's not 4. It's not any!

JENNA

Did they go back further?

DAVID

I don't know. There's no there there. My union is on my side on this one.

JENNA

You know going on record is a pretty high bar?

BRIAN

About what? About being pushed past their comfort zone? About stepping into their potential?

JENNA

About feeling invaded.

DAVID

I never touched any one of them.

JENNA

Really?

DAVID

Never.

JENNA

But there's been times -

DAVID

Yes. Yes - when I was younger. When I was new - getting used to the contours of the role - and back then students weren't infantilized - they were expected to live their lives however they wanted.

JENNA

And now?

DAVID

Now I'm older! I understand the power I hold. To appreciate the out-sized influence I may have on my students and to measure my involvement appropriately. Also I've sat through twenty plus hours of mind-heart and life-force killing trainings on the subject.

JENNA

All a waste of time?

DAVID

Most. Have you encountered any that weren't?

JENNA

It should - could be done better.

BRIAN

The ones I'm subjected to are invariably awful - everyone parroting the line they are supposed to walk and no one considering human nature or the fact that boundaries are imaginary - that we barely can agree on fundamental definitions of reality in this country - how are we going to agree on a code of conduct? When I don't even know what dictionary they've been raised with.

DAVID

And I have to teach desire. I have to teach them to feel needs and wants and desire and want often connects to sex. At some level. We're messy creatures.

JENNA

Still there are ways to approach that without - I don't know - crossing lines.

DAVID

No lines were crossed! I've told you that. I'm their teacher. They come to me, they want me to tell them they are amazing, wonderful, beautiful - and I do! They are! They deserve to feel their power in this world.

BRIAN

There's intimacy directors now.

DAVID

Exactly! Everyone's afraid of lawsuits. Hire someone else to be the responsible party. Take the blame, 'not my problem we hired an expert.'

JENNA

Back then, I just desired acceptance - I wanted to feel like I belonged.

BRIAN

You were always cool.

JENNA

I used to think it made me special, you told me I wasn't like the other girls.

DAVID

You weren't.

JENNA

I felt so - chosen - when you listened to me.

DAVID

You had worthwhile things to say.

JENNA

When you asked me to pick up materials from the library and photo-copy them for class.

DAVID

Everyone helps. That's what makes the world go round.

JENNA

When you had me join you at dinners, and would breezily introduce me as your star student and rely on me to get you home once you were too drunk to trust yourself.

DAVID

A wise man knows his limits.

JENNA

Whatever you asked.

BRIAN

You never asked me to do those things.

DAVID

Did I not?

JENNA

Then you started in with Renee. Then Chloe. Then Maureen. Then -

DAVID

Once you've been doing a job as long as I was doing that job you will learn that patterns emerge. That there are systems that you can rely on to make everything flow just a bit more smoothly. And it's not nothing that you've had impeccable reference letters from me for everything you've ever chosen to apply yourself towards.

JENNA

I've written every one of those letters.

DAVID

And I signed them. And mailed them or inter-folioed them or whatever damned system they're going to come up with next.

JENNA

I always wished you'd have written one yourself. Just so I could see how you saw me.

DAVID

Dangerous impulse. We can't live looking for validation outside ourselves. That's a trap.

BRIAN

Be right back.

BRIAN disappears into the house.

JENNA

I know. I know and I'd tell myself that as I sat down to write letters perfectly toned, channeling your voice as best as I could - for the powers that be -

DAVID

And you've done fine. Look at you - they'll have you running that department in five years or less. You'll be directing the state arts budget - poised to go national if that's what you choose.

JENNA

Maybe.

DAVID

What then? What?

JENNA

I just - I wish you saw me, back then. When I was young and your student, as a person, as someone who could go do something.

DAVID

I did. I always cast you. I always -

BRIAN re-enters with a letter.

BRIAN (*reading*)

To Whom It May Concern,

It is with the greatest enthusiasm that I recommend Brian McDowns for this opportunity. Brian has been my student and colleague since he stepped into my acting classroom.

This young man is a writer through and through. His deep compassion, sense of timing, connection to character and event all push his work beyond the good and into the compelling, the necessary. His is a voice you want to hear. Audiences want to hear and whatever direction he chooses to go over the coming years he will have people leaning in to catch what he has to say.

JENNA

Did you write that Brian?

BRIAN

No.

JENNA

Right. You always saw him as an artist.

DAVID

This is not fair. Brian came asking me to recommend him for some of the most competitive programs for young writers in the country. He came with specific requests. With a vision for what he wanted to do. With scripts. Plural. All of which he had shared with me over the years, sought my advice on, acknowledged my contribution on -

JENNA

I -

DAVID

You were applying for jobs at theaters, all sorts of positions I didn't know what you wanted but *YOU* did. You were your best advocate.

JENNA

I just wanted a job, to get a foot in the door somewhere.

DAVID

And you did!

JENNA

I was grateful for crumbs.

DAVID

The experiences you've had are not crumbs.

JENNA

I had to work.

DAVID

Don't we all.

BRIAN

You've supported me.

JENNA

Sometimes.

BRIAN

A lot.

JENNA

And I was glad to. And you're right - I didn't know what I wanted. I didn't see myself making a living as an artist. I didn't see myself with the same drive and clarity of desire as you or the people around me. So - if it's in-born talent then -

BRIAN

From the moment I shuffled into your office and mumbled something about writing scripts, your eyes lit up and you've supported me.

DAVID

I support my students. I do. I don't take that part of my job lightly. There's so little support for creative people in this country.

JENNA

I just wish -

DAVID

Don't be like this current crop of girls. Throwing their disappointments and angers at the feet of one father figure or another because they find the world they are growing up in disappointing. Of course it's disappointing. This country is disappointing. That's what we live in.

JENNA

It is.

DAVID

We find what joy we can amongst our friends.

BRIAN

I hear your words echoing in my ears.

DAVID

I try to pass on something.

BRIAN

From your letters. I - I know I haven't fulfilled what you saw back then. I don't know what you saw -

JENNA

He saw a young man who needed him.

DAVID

Maybe. Maybe I did - see myself.

BRIAN

I imagined that I was what you said I was - I believed it when you said I could - I would - do well - before I even figured out what 'to do well' might look like -

DAVID

You want me to apologize for supporting you?

BRIAN

No - no - I just - I was so

DAVID

You sound like you've given up.

JENNA

Have you?

BRIAN

Have I what?

JENNA

Given up?

BRIAN

Given up what?

DAVID

There's the question.

JENNA

Okay. And there we are. You're both far too drunk for this conversation.

DAVID

And you are right. You are so right. And I apologize - your wine, your company - I should lie down.

BRIAN

Oh - oh - of course. Let me get the room upstairs set up -

JENNA

There's a lot of junk to move -

BRIAN

I've got it.

JENNA

I can -

BRIAN

Let me. I don't want you moving heavy things anyways.

JENNA

I hauled it all there.

BRIAN

I've got it. I've got it.

BRIAN is gone.

JENNA and DAVID regard one another.

Pause.

JENNA

We should have had the room ready.

I should have known you'd stay -

Who wants to drive?

No trains to go home on.

I guess people Uber now.

But.

I don't.

I don't feel safe.

In a car with a stranger.

I know it's probably fine.

I'm just being paranoid.

But.

I'm just so relieved to get home safely.

So

It's not worth it.

So.

I don't go out much.

And now. Well.

I stay home.

Go to work.

Work is good.

It is.

Really good.

You're right. Partly.

I probably will be running the place in ten years.

If I stay.

They'll promote like six people. Then they'll settle on me. I'll have been doing the work anyway. And they'll offer me bottom of scale. I wonder if I'll take it.

I might. Retirement's good for the state. Now.

In ten years.

Who knows.

We may be eating bark by then.

The bees all dead.

The cities underwater.

The storms.

No crops.

Do you remember Olivia?

DAVID

I do.

JENNA

She lives on a farm now. Upstate NY.

DAVID

She had some problems.

JENNA

She drank a lot.

DAVID

I saw her in a play. She was - raw. Wonderful.

JENNA

She was.

DAVID

After the play I went to congratulate her - she - fell into my arms . And an older man steadied her and guided her home. He was very polite.

JENNA

Her boyfriend. Much older. Very sweet.

DAVID

Are they still together?

JENNA

He died.

DAVID

Oh.

JENNA

She lost touch for awhile, but now she works on a farm. And. There's no bees? On her farm, so they take little paintbrushes and transport the pollen from one plant to another. They hope it works.

DAVID

Is she -

JENNA

What?

DAVID

Okay?

JENNA

I think she imagined more for herself.

DAVID

If I get this appointment. I could reach out - because it wouldn't be the city and I would make a really wonderful space for actors. I think. I could - I'm sure she's not the only one, "up-state" you know? Even you could -

JENNA

I don't think you should.

DAVID

But there's so much talent just - languishing. You of all people know this.

JENNA

I know that I missed your voice in my head. For a while. I would listen for it - and for others. All those voices that I'd allowed to shape me - the ones I imagined watching me - I was depressed. Nothing mattered. I'd moved across country for a job - before Brian and I got back together. I was lying in a studio apartment on my futon staring at the ceiling and imagining the possibilities of gas -

DAVID

Oh Jenna. I didn't know. You never said -

JENNA

No. No I didn't. Barely acknowledged it to myself. And I didn't. You know that. Obviously. I'm here.

DAVID

We all go through things.

JENNA

Yes. And mine are - really small. Really.

DAVID

It's not a measurable thing.

JENNA

Maybe. Maybe not.

DAVID

Regardless.

JENNA

Regardless. I did. I finally let go of expecting some applause. I had a laugh. To know that when I sent you an email detailing my latest accomplishment or dishing about some mutual

acquaintance that I was waiting for some reply that I had already written in my head - so really if I could actually value my own response then I'd be free of something that had tied me down - and I might have a chance at something else.

DAVID

What?

JENNA

Making a life for us - doing some good somehow. I'm hopeful.

DAVID

You should be.

JENNA

You think?

DAVID

You've always had more than you thought you had - could deal with whatever came at you - really.

JENNA

Thanks.

DAVID

I don't want to say too much of course. I don't want to get in your head -

JENNA

No - no it's. It's not that.

DAVID

I just. I don't know what's the right thing to do anymore. Everything seems to piss someone off.

JENNA

People are pissed.

DAVID

Or damage them. I never set out to damage anyone.

JENNA

People are damaged.

DAVID

I remember my favorite teacher. He was a giant. Like almost really. Huge. Then he developed these growths on his head - like golfball size. And he didn't try to hide them - they just made him seem bigger - like his brain was pushing out of his skull every which way that there was no way to contain his mind.

I loved him.

I hung on his every word.

I imagined myself growing up to be him.

Inhabiting my comfortable office for decades. Drawing a group of devoted students into my orbit. Living into my life - which would carry me through to the end.

Not expel me.

As if someone turned off the gravity.

JENNA

What did you do?

DAVID

Nothing.

JENNA

It can't be nothing.

DAVID

It is - it is just being myself, trying to do my best for my students. And if that is now actionable. I am out. By force or choice - doesn't matter. They turned off the gravity and we're all just floating around.

Colliding or not. What matters now?

Set free from all that. What do you expect?

JENNA

I don't expect much.

DAVID

Good. 'Cause people do their best but - their best isn't much.

JENNA

Huh.

DAVID

You've got to say thank you to them though. Be infinitely grateful. Otherwise they'll be pissed.

BRIAN enters.

BRIAN

Room's ready. I got you a glass of water.

DAVID

Thank you. You're a savior. You and Jenna. Thank you. My hope was long gone - and now - well. And now it sails again.

JENNA

Good night.

BRIAN

Here, I'll get you situated.

DAVID

AH! There's ice cream in the car! Go - go get it! I brought it all the way from that place in Mott Hill where they milk the Central Park goats and mix in honey from The Bronx. It may be salvageable.

JENNA

I'll get it.

DAVID

Eat it all! It won't be re-frozen.

JENNA

Good night.

BRIAN

Here we go.

DAVID

Eat it. Even if you have to drink it like soup. Even if you have to lick it from the upholstery!

JENNA

Brian.

BRIAN

Got it.

JENNA gets her coat and exits outside.

BRIAN and DAVID start up the stairs.

DAVID

This is not giving up. You should know that I know that.

BRIAN

Okay.

DAVID

This life you have is something that matters. Something you can't just dismiss - something with gravity.

BRIAN

Careful.

DAVID

See - gravity. Pulls you right down.

LIGHTS OUT

4.

BRIAN and JENNA huddled over a soupy carton of ice cream. Both have spoons and are eating gluttonously.

BRIAN

This is amazing.

JENNA

I can't believe he left it in the car.

BRIAN

Nearly melted.

JENNA

You cannot get this up here.

BRIAN

I've never -

JENNA

Is it the honey?

BRIAN

Maybe -

JENNA

The goat milk?

BRIAN

That tanginess -

JENNA

And like grass?

BRIAN

And -

JENNA

Oh god.

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

A hint of - can you taste that?

BRIAN

What? What?

JENNA

- of like black sidewalk crust

BRIAN

Why would you know -

JENNA

Haven't you ever fallen in the city? And you get just - some of it in your mouth? And you spit it out - but it's there - it lingers.

BRIAN

I do.

JENNA

You don't want it but - you know it. You know it so particularly.

BRIAN

We shouldn't eat it all.

JENNA

It won't re-freeze right.

BRIAN

You go ahead.

JENNA

Hmmm. Maybe it's just because I'm pregnant but - I've never tasted anything like this.

BRIAN

No. It's legitimately amazing.

JENNA

Remember his first project with us?

BRIAN

mmm -

JENNA

Second year. He took over directing that main stage show? I was supposed to be playing one of the sons? It was in verse - Jacobean - Revenger's Tragedy - but all gender swapped. Brutal.

BRIAN

Kindof.

JENNA

We'd been drinking after rehearsal. You were there. It got late and everyone else left. We kept talking, he walked me to my room. I felt sorry for him somehow. Like he seemed lonely. And - I guess also, special? Like he wanted to spend time with me.

BRIAN

Sure.

JENNA

He went through my book shelves. He said he could know everything about a person from their bookshelves.

BRIAN

Huh

JENNA

My Rilke, and my 'Still Life with Woodpecker' my Kerouac and my Tao of Pooh.

BRIAN

I remember that shelf.

JENNA

He said 'Ah, a writer. A poet maybe. The men you meet must disappoint you constantly.' I laughed. And he pulled out a flask from his overcoat and plopped down on the bed and offered me a swig. Which I accepted. Plopping down right next to him with the same carelessness that he'd initiated. The same casual sense that we knew the world and we were in cahoots. This sense that he saw me and could imagine what it was to be me - and he wanted to step into that for a bit -

BRIAN

Did he -

JENNA

We drank. We laid there. On the bed together. He snuggled close to me and he - fell asleep. I couldn't move - I didn't want to disturb him - I didn't want to break this moment. I felt so - I didn't know what to do - I tried to stay awake. I wasn't that drunk - not like he was. I think he must of passed out. I just - I just stayed there - worrying about what would happen when he woke up - should I just leave the room? Should I sneak out and pretend like nothing had happened? Should I wake him up? Get coffees? Throw water on him? Surely he wasn't supposed to be here, in the dorms, with a student. I didn't want him to get in trouble. Hours passed. It felt like hours. I poked at him - I pushed him. He finally stirred and his eyes opened and he looked at me and smiled - and he sat up. 'Ah' he said, 'And here I am. I should go.' And he did. Out the door. Never to speak of it again.

BRIAN

Did you want him to -

JENNA

Men were disappointing to me.

BRIAN

He shouldn't have been in your room.

JENNA

Yup.

BRIAN

Telling you about your books.

JENNA

Yup.

BRIAN

Putting you in that - situation.

JENNA

He shouldn't have.

BRIAN

What did you do?

JENNA

Nothing.

BRIAN

Did he ever say anything?

JENNA

No. No. Never. I thought I was special somehow. Because there were others. Every year. Every show. One girl or another became the favorite. And I was jealous. But I held onto this idea that I was different, that he and I had an understanding. You know. We had this moment between us. And oh my god how stupid is that. What kind of stupid fucked up thinking is that to walk around with. To grow up with. To shape your fucking head with. I was such a bitch to those girls. Freezing them out of the department. Quietly passing judgement. Promoting the idea that David was such a genius. Such a gifted professor, such an inspired director that we were all so fucking lucky to have him in our lives. And I still kind of believe it. I still feel like

he's a lonely man seeking connection the only way he knows how. And I still feel special that he visits us. I'm still so pathetic.

BRIAN

No. No - No -

JENNA

But I do.

BRIAN

I don't know if I should keep teaching.

JENNA

Why?

BRIAN

I don't - I don't know how to navigate everything they want from me. The weight of my approval. I'm/

JENNA

Don't drink with them. Don't touch them.

BRIAN

So simple?

JENNA

End of the day. And for bonus? Don't imagine your interpretation of them is their only possibility.

BRIAN

He'd be good up there. He does good work.

JENNA

He does.

BRIAN

I should. Of course. Help him. He's helped me so much.

JENNA

Of course.

BRIAN

Though - you'd have the stronger influence.

JENNA

I may just sit this out.

BRIAN

He'll ask.

JENNA

Sure. But. I'm learning, I don't have to answer every time.

BRIAN

Right.

JENNA

So. I'm going to bed.

BRIAN

I'll be up in a minute.

JENNA

Okay.

BRIAN

Tomorrow -

JENNA

Would you deal with him? I don't - I don't want to.

BRIAN

Okay.

JENNA

And -

BRIAN

What?

JENNA

You don't have to understand everything about what I told you,

BRIAN

Okay.

JENNA

Just listen.

BRIAN

Of course.

JENNA

And this kid - I'm going to raise this kid the best I can in the world how it is.

BRIAN

I know you are. We are.

JENNA

Good. So -

yawns.

BRIAN

I'll clean up.

JENNA

Thanks.

BRIAN

You sleep in tomorrow. I'll get him up and out of here, and that will be that.

JENNA

But it won't.

BRIAN

It will for now.

JENNA

Good.

BRIAN

Good night.

JENNA

Night.

JENNA exits upstairs. BRIAN starts to clean. DAVID enters in his boxers.

DAVID

Ah! I thought I heard someone up -

BRIAN

Do you want a robe?

DAVID

Hah! I couldn't sleep - you found the ice cream?

BRIAN

Delicious.

DAVID

I thought Jenna would like it. Pregnant women like ice cream right?

BRIAN

Some.

DAVID

Sorry if I -

BRIAN

It's okay. Go on to bed, I'll get you up in the morning.

DAVID

I do appreciate the hospitality. I want you to know that. And I understand if you can't bring yourself to recommend me - I have others. It's fine.

BRIAN

Okay -

DAVID

I - I don't know if I deserve it. Hah - don't know much these days.

BRIAN

It's alright.

DAVID

You don't know that.

BRIAN

Get some sleep.

DAVID

They say that. Breathe. New start. One day at a time. Stay present. Investigate that feeling. I say that - all of that. And now - looking at the last good decade ahead of me - what will that be? What if all I know has turned to glass - ready to splinter apart into the hearts of anyone who ever received what I gave them?

BRIAN

I don't think -

DAVID

- you don't know. You can't. Everything in front of you. Just wait though. A couple decades - if you're lucky - you'll look around and wonder - how did I leave such a path behind me? Trampled. Broken. Piled with plastic and crap -

BRIAN

David - that's not -

DAVID

No. It's not everything. I know that. Anyways. I try not to look backwards too much.

BRIAN

Good. Do - do better. You know? For the people around you?

DAVID

I will. I will. I get this job and you're set up - Jenna too if she wants. I would love to have you with me. It's a sweet set up - just a bit north. Beautiful place for kids. It's what I want to do. Step into this position and create the best possible situation for the next generation. A way you can live and make the art and -

BRIAN

Okay.

DAVID

It'd be great to work with you both.

BRIAN

Careful on the steps -

DAVID moves to go - stumbles a bit.

BRIAN

Here - let me -

BRIAN goes to help him up the stairs.

DAVID

Thank you. See, I'm going to need you for this next thing

BRIAN & DAVID exit. BRIAN supporting DAVID up the stairs.

Lights fade.

END OF PLAY.

