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THE PORTAGE OF LUKE RUSCHMEYER TO A.H

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Please note that this is a FOUR actor play.

The actor playing BERKOFF should also be playing the LOCKSMITH, the INTERVIEWER, and AH.

The play can also be done as a two act with the break occurring after Act Two Scene Five.

David Blackman

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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Tony Ruschmeyer..... A part time writer and lecturer, 40-55 years old
 Laura Ruschmeyer.....A psychologist, 35-45 years old
 Luke Ruschmeyer.....A high school student, 16 years old
 A.H.....Adolph Hitler, indeterminate age
 Berkoff.....A school teacher 30-40 years old
 Locksmith.....40 to 50 years old
 The Interviewer..... ..40 to 50 years old

TIME: The not too distant future

PLACE: A semi affluent suburb in a major city in the US.

SETTING: The set needs to incorporate two main areas; the kitchen of the RUSCHMEYER household and LUKE's bedroom. LUKE'S bedroom should be spare, with his bed, a small desk and chair. Similarly, the kitchen could be represented simply with a stand alone sink and fridge, a table and four chairs, one of which could be used by the TEACHER for his scene with TONY. These should be front of stage and require little to no change as far as props or furniture. (Alternatively, Luke's bedroom could be on another level above the kitchen). The set can be abstract and minimal to allow for quick changes between scenes and a more economical use of space if required.

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

LIGHTS on TONY RUSCHMEYER seated. He is dressed in a suit and tie.

TONY

Martin Flanagan's last known occupation was that of a social worker. There are some rumours that he started out as a priest but was quietly asked to leave. Highly intelligent. From all accounts he could do anything. But he could also manipulate people to do all sorts of things on his behalf. Perverse sort of stuff really. Coerced some boys to harass a female friend to the point where she committed suicide. Always pushing the boundaries at work or in his personal life. It is believed he held one captive in his house for a few days, but nothing could be proven since the boy was too frightened to say exactly what happened or where he was. But once the police got involved Flanagan disappeared. A few years later he emerges in another city or town, different identity, his past history virtually erased. Another teenager goes missing only to re-appear. This time showing signs of torture. Flanagan, now John Silvester, is questioned but there is nothing to tie him directly to the crime. No one's willing to speak, no charges are laid and once again he is gone.

LIGHTS on the INTERVIEWER sitting across from TONY. (He does not have to be on stage during TONY'S monologue).

INTERVIEWER

So there is actually no proof that your latest subject has committed a crime?

TONY

No. But sources of mine within the police in several states believe he is a serial killer in the making. His victims described his home as full of books on Richard Ramirez, Ted Bundy, Dahmer, Ian Brady and he often talked about actions that were "beyond good and evil," including the torture of his victims.

INTERVIEWER

If he hasn't killed anyone up to this point when he has clearly had the opportunity, what makes you think he will in the future?

TONY

Brad Johnson tried to murder his whole family after 20 years of marriage. Almost succeeded. Raped his daughter and shot his wife three times but she survived. The thing was she had a premonition about him on one of their dates.

She was convinced he was going to kill her after taking her to a quiet secluded spot. Instead he pulls out an engagement ring. Johnson managed to keep that evil hidden for that long. Never put a hand on her in 20 years. Flanagan just hasn't found the perfect environment for him to work in.

INTERVIEWER

And if he does re-appear?

TONY

I'll have the best subject that I've written about in years.

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

SOUND of music. "This is the Day" by The The.

As the song plays, the RUSCHMEYER family is introduced. LIGHTS on TONY RUSCHMEYER standing alone under a star filled sky. LIGHTS. On another part of the stage, LUKE RUSCHMEYER, sixteen years old, lies disconsolately on his bed. The room is a shambles with clothes and other personal items tossed all over the place. Restless, he gets up, turns on his computer and becomes consumed by it. LIGHTS on another part of the stage reveals LAURA RUSCHMEYER sitting on a chair taking notes. She is a picture of stoic professionalism.

LIGHTS. The RUSCHMEYER kitchen. TONY walks towards the kitchen table which has four chairs. He sits down. SOUND as if from a computer game coming from another part of the stage. LAURA enters. Pause.

LAURA

How did it go?

TONY

Same questions, lucky to get this one since I don't actually have anything new to offer.

LAURA

Well one of my clients read your last one. Quite enjoyed it.

TONY

I thought you didn't tell them what I did for a living?

LAURA

I don't but this one's a little bit more switched on than the rest.

TONY

I'm not famous Laura.

LAURA

Your subjects are, albeit for all the wrong reasons.

TONY

No guarantee anything I write will get published.

LAURA

Maybe you should try different subject matter.

TONY

This is what I'm good at.

Pause.

LAURA

Sometimes Tony...never mind.

TONY

No you've got something to say, say it.

LAURA

With your last book particularly, but this is something I've noticed creeping up with some of your other work, you create this air of mystery about them when it's pretty clear what went wrong or alternatively reduce their life to one or two key events and presto, they're on the road to a life of crime.

TONY

What's wrong with that? It's what the readers are looking for.

LAURA

You're not a forensic psychologist Tony.

TONY

So I'm not allowed to entertain an opinion? You know many of those guys I've interviewed...?

LAURA

No one's doubting the quality of your writing but ..

TONY

Would you prefer I put it down to the mystery of good or evil?

LAURA

I never said that. It all comes down to recognisable human behaviour no matter how despicable. Nothing is really fathomless and this evil business is like some abyss you can never truly comprehend. It has no place in my professional life.

TONY

And if it did that would put you out of business.

LAURA

I'll be the first to say there are some people that can't be helped Tony but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to understand what made them that way .

TONY

What did your patient think?

LAURA

Oh c'mon Tony. Please.

TONY

You mentioned him.

LAURA

I said he loved it. Because of the very thing I'm talking about...your reducing everything to a few factors.

TONY

And of course being a patient of yours, the alarm bells started ringing immediately...

LAURA

We won't talk about this anymore OK? This is your field of...

TONY

Apparently not.

SOUND of computer games coming out of LUKE'S bedroom along with his voice uttering shrieks of elation or groans of disappointment.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

How long has he been in there?

LAURA

Three hours.

TONY

Since he got home from school?

LAURA

He didn't go to school.

TONY

Why not?

LAURA

He's not feeling well.

TONY

You believe him?

LAURA shakes her head.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Then why didn't you just tell him to go?

LAURA

We've tried that remember?

TONY

Not with conviction.

LAURA

You're not your father Tony. Thank God.

Uncomfortable pause between them.

TONY

Luke's slipping through our fingers.

LAURA

I haven't given up on him and neither should you.

TONY

No, I'm just saying...

LAURA

I've tried to get him to speak...let me know if there's any underlying reason for his behaviour but he just shuts down.

TONY

There's things he's just got to figure out for himself, like getting of his bed in the morning.

LAURA

This isn't normal behaviour Tony. Even for a 16 year old.

TONY

Is he depressed?

LAURA

His therapist doesn't think so.

TONY

You recommended him.

LAURA

He thinks there's a lot of resentment and anger which he doesn't know how to deal with...

TONY

Resentment and anger over what? He's a privileged kid, like most of his generation.

LAURA

Something's bothering him.

TONY

Then why can't he help him? That's what he's getting paid for.

LAURA

He suspects it has something to do with you.

TONY

I've never hurt that kid..

LAURA

Neither do you spend a lot of quality time with him. At least not the last few years.

TONY

He has no interest.

LAURA

He's a teenager. You have to show more interest in him and know when to back off but still be present in his life.

TONY

Jesus Christ...alright.

Pause.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

His co-ordinator called again.

LAURA

I asked him too.

TONY

What does he want?

LAURA

Luke's "at risk" of failing.

TONY

Which subjects?

LAURA

All of them.

TONY

And this is the first time we hear about it?

LAURA

The letter was on the table. You should try opening mail that's not just from your publisher.

TONY

I do Laura.

LAURA

There's been several meetings with his teachers and they're doing their best to stop him from failing.

TONY

Nobody fails at that school. It's one of the reasons we sent him there.

LAURA

It's a school which accepted Luke when our options weren't that open.

TONY

This place has done nothing for him, pushed him through every grade not matter how poorly he does.

LAURA

The value of repeating has been shown to be minimal at best.

TONY

(Sarcastic)

Yes that's right and of course the social stigma of repeating could damage his self esteem.

LAURA

Are you done?

Pause.

TONY (CONT'D)

What about that girl he was seeing? Alyssa..?

LAURA

Alexandra. She broke it off.

TONY

Why?

LAURA

He won't talk about it. Obviously it hasn't helped matters.

TONY

He's been like this for months.

LAURA

Tony, boys are often less prepared for this sort of thing.

TONY

He just needs to be more resilient.

LAURA

Yes. We could all do with that.

TONY

What?

LAURA

Nothing. Just try put your focus on what we can do to help him.

TONY

That's what we're doing now isn't it?

LAURA

Please Tony. Our, your son is not measuring up. He's defeating all our expectations.

TONY

I'm glad they're not just mine.

LAURA

These are critical years. We need to get it right in how we approach it.

TONY

I want to speak with him.

LAURA

Man to man?

TONY

I'll wear one of your dresses if it'll help but I think it's time we talk.

LAURA

Try not to be judgemental Tony. Luke's never been that confident in himself.

TONY

I love him too you know.

LAURA

Then listen to him.

LUKE enters.

LAURA (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Here's your chance.

TONY

Now?

LAURA

No time like the present.

LUKE

(Ignoring this comment)

Is there anything to eat?

LAURA

I'll fix you something.

TONY

No. If Luke couldn't bother to eat with us at-

LUKE

You didn't have supper with the family...

TONY

How do you know?

LUKE

I heard you outside.

TONY

Don't be a smart ass Luke.

LAURA

He's not.

TONY is slightly taken aback by LAURA'S defence of LUKE before he has even gotten started.

TONY

Didn't you have some clients you had to call...

LAURA

Right. I'll leave you to it.

LUKE

(pleading)

Don't go Mom...

LAURA

You're on your own Luke...can't say you don't deserve it.

LAURA exits. Pause.

LUKE

(surly)

Well?

TONY

What's this I hear about you not going to school?

LUKE

I've been going...just not in the morning.

TONY

Why not?

LUKE

I can't get up.

Pause.

TONY

Why can't you get up...

LUKE

Cos I'm too tired Dad...what do you think?

Son... TONY

Oh no here it comes. LUKE

Don't be a smart ass... TONY

Already called me that Dad. LUKE

Pause. TONY takes a deep breath before he continues.

Why is it that you are so tired you can't get up in the morning? TONY

I dunno...look I hate school Dad...why do I have to go? LUKE

What do you think you are going to do if you're not at school? TONY

I could get a job... LUKE

Doing what? You've never shown any inclination to do part time work, even over the holidays. TONY

I don't want to work at MacDonald's. LUKE

Any part time work. TONY

Rub it in. LUKE

Shape up Luke. Life will rub it into you like sand paper to a baby's bottom with no parents there to make it all better. TONY

LUKE

I don't know why you're making such a big deal.

TONY

The big deal is you're our son. We...your mother and I love you very much. And we want the absolute best for you which is not going to happen if you can't even front up to school of a morning...

LUKE

Why does it have to start so early?

TONY

Nine o'clock is not early Luke. For heaven's sake most jobs start well before that.

LUKE

I could get an apprenticeship.

TONY

Doing what?

LUKE

Haven't thought about it..

TONY

Is there anything you'd like to do with your life?

Pause.

LUKE

I'll work nights.

TONY

What as?

LUKE

I was thinking of security...

TONY

Luke...you're scared of your own shadow.

LUKE

(Unconvincingly)

I can handle myself...

TONY

It wasn't that long ago you still wanted me to check if there was something under your bed before you'd go to sleep.

LUKE

(With great conviction)

Someone...someone under my bed. I never believed in monsters.

TONY

Oh Luke...you're sixteen. There's not going to be any night job. You're going to start getting to school on time.

LUKE

I can't handle it...

TONY

Why not?

LUKE

It's boring.

TONY

You're not so bored to spend half your waking life on that computer of yours.

A mobile phone goes off. TONY looks around for a second. It is LUKE'S. He answers it.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

What are you doing?

LUKE

Answering my phone.

TONY snatches it off him. LUKE gets up from his seat lunging for his phone.

LUKE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

What are you fucking doing!?

Sit down.

TONY

LUKE reluctantly sits down. TONY checks the phone.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Tariq...your prize winning buddy...

LUKE
Don't make fun of him.

TONY
I'm not. But when your son's best friend is a...

LUKE
What Dad?

TONY
An intellectually disturbed boy with a tendency towards aggression...

LUKE
From Iraq...

TONY
I didn't say that.

LUKE
You didn't have to.

TONY
I'm not having that discussion. Your friend has got a lot of baggage.

LUKE
It's not his fault Dad. He's got PS...

TONY
PTSD. Post traumatic stress disorder.

LUKE
Yeah whatever. He's been exposed to a lot of violence. His family was there during the invasion and then spent two years in detention when they arrived here. The things he saw...

TONY

That's no excuse.

LUKE

How would you know?

TONY

We've all got stuff to deal with. You can't just take it out on others.

LUKE

How do you know about that anyway?

Pause.

TONY

We got a call from the school. Apparently you egged him on.

LUKE

Some of the names they were calling him...

TONY

So he hits a girl in the class.

Pause.

LUKE

Does Mom know?

TONY

No thank God. I took the call.

LUKE

And you haven't told her?

TONY

Not yet.

LUKE

If you haven't done it right away you're not going to do it at all.

TONY

Don't be so confident about what I'll do.

LUKE

What's he ever done that was so bad...

TONY

How about that time you and him were shooting birds with my AR-15...

LUKE

Mom told you she didn't want it in the house.

TONY

It wasn't.

LUKE

That was a recreational pastime of his in Iraq...bodies were everywhere Dad...a few dead birds. Really.

TONY

Your mother doesn't know about that either.

LUKE

(Accusatory)

You just don't think he's good enough to be my friend...

TONY

No. He's not. There. Alright. I said it. You...you can do better. I feel for what he's gone through but he's been given opportunities.

LUKE

What? The shrink at school? She doesn't even understand his condition.

TONY

It's better than nothing.

LUKE

He's my friend! We get along. Anyway he's smarter than half the kids at school!

TONY

That's really not saying much Luke.

LUKE

I don't want to fucking hear it! Leave me alone.

LUKE covers his hands over his ears like a little boy. He's almost in tears. TONY looks helplessly at LUKE.

TONY

Tariq shouldn't be at your school. It's not the right environment for him. And you should be mixing with friends more like yourself.

LUKE

You mean more like you.

TONY

Luke, I've seen the light in your room at three or four in the morning most nights, playing games, doing whatever on the internet.

LUKE

What are you doing up then?

TONY

When you learn to spell prostate you'll understand. Anyway, it's got to stop, otherwise...there'll be a curfew.

LUKE

Curfew? I'm in my room by 6.00pm. What's the difference?

TONY

The curfew will be on when you can use the computer...and this mobile phone.

LUKE

What about homework?

TONY

If you decide to do any?

LUKE

This won't help.

TONY

Time spent for homework will be carefully monitored and supervised.

LUKE

(Surly)

How you gonna enforce that?

TONY

I'm going to enforce that by taking them off you. Unplugging that computer putting it in my study, taking your cell and putting it in a place where you can't find it or access it.

LUKE

You...you can't. Mom won't let you...

LAURA walks in on them.

LAURA

Sorry...couldn't help overhearing.

LUKE

(Pitiful)

Mom...he wants to take the phone and computer off me.

LAURA

One more morning missed at school or any classes,...

TONY

One more morning? I just said-

LAURA

...they'll both be confiscated.

LUKE

You...you can't...I'll call the cops!

LAURA

You'll have to use the land line.

LUKE

This is abuse...you're abusing me. You can't do it...

LAURA

We can. And we will.

LUKE

FUCK YOU BOTH!

LUKE screams and runs into his bedroom.

LAURA

That went well.

LIGHTS. TONY enters LUKE'S room. LUKE is lying on his stomach with his head buried underneath the pillow. TONY removes the computer and takes it to his study offstage. He returns and holds out his hand in front of LUKE. LUKE reluctantly sticks his hand in his pocket, still with his head under the pillow and hands his mobile phone to TONY who exits. LUKE pulls the pillow tightly around his head. His body starts to shake with sobs.

ACT ONE SCENE THREE

Two weeks later. LIGHTS on LAURA and TONY in the kitchen. They are both agitated.

LAURA

Have you called the school...

TONY

They're closed by now.

LAURA

Where could he be...he hasn't run away..?

TONY

Where to? Anyway, nothing's missing in his room. I already checked.

LAURA

(With a sense of dread)

Maybe he's...

TONY

(Firmly)

Don't go there Laura.

LAURA

How can I not? After your little episode he was a basket case for months.

TONY

He had shingles.

LAURA

From all the stress!

Pause.

LAURA (cont'd)

He ran away to find you. I was beside myself...

TONY

You didn't tell me about that...

LAURA

Don't underestimate the toll your actions took dear husband.

TONY

I hope you're not this quick to jump to conclusions with your patients...

LAURA

He's my son. Stop expecting me to be clinical about him.

TONY

It's only 7.00pm.

LAURA

He hasn't talked to us in...

TONY

Two weeks. Maybe he's out with some friends.

LAURA

He doesn't have any.

TONY looks at her. This is a painful truth for both of them.

LAURA (cont'd)

Well he doesn't. Not real ones.

TONY

(Pointed)

I guess Tariq's emotional state precludes him from any real feelings of friendship.

LAURA

Oh God...please, you can't stand the kid.

TONY

Not true. We've had this discussion...you agreed with me. Luke doesn't have the capacity to deal with his own problems, let alone other people's.

LIGHTS. LUKE enters.

LAURA

There you are...Jesus.

LAURA goes up to LUKE and gives him a hug. He gives her a perfunctory kiss on the cheek. She lets him go.

TONY

Have you heard of calling Luke..?

LUKE

You took my phone remember.

TONY

What about the school office...

LUKE

They were closed when I finished.

LAURA

Finished what?

TONY

What were you doing Luke. Out with it.

Pause.

LUKE

Rehearsing. I was rehearsing.

LUKE takes a script out of his backpack and throws it on the table.

LUKE (cont'd)

I'm playing the lead.

TONY

But I thought you weren't doing drama this year...?

LUKE

Ran into this new teacher, Mr. Berkoff. Just arrived. He's really good.

TONY and LAURA are speechless.

LUKE (cont'd)

Don't worry about tea. I'm really tired. Think I'll do a bit of reading before going to bed.

LUKE exits.

LAURA tentatively goes to the table and picks up the script.

TONY

Luke's playing the lead.

LAURA

Is A.H who I think it is?

LIGHTS on LUKE in his room curled up on his bed with the script in hand.

LUKE

"He created on the night side of language a speech for hell, whose words mean hatred and vomit of life. Few men can learn that speech or speak it for long. It burns their mouths..."

ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

In DARKNESS.

TONY

"But there shall come a man whose mouth shall be as a furnace and whose tongue as a sword laying waste. He will know the grammar of hell and teach it to others. He will know the sounds of madness and loathing and make them see music..."

LIGHTS. TONY is at the kitchen table. LAURA enters.

LAURA

What are you reading?

TONY

Luke's play. I found a copy upstairs. Haven't read it in years.

LAURA

Who or what is that quote of yours describing?

TONY

Hitler. Who else...

LAURA

Bit melodramatic don't you think..."grammar of hell"?

TONY

One of the Israeli agents is warning those sent on the mission to not to talk to Hitler after they had captured him deep in the Amazon jungle. He felt that if they started to see him as a human being they would not be able to complete their mission.

LAURA

Hitler was just a man Tony. And of course its other men who can't help themselves from either deifying him or enshrining the bastard as some kind of evil incarnate. And all the explanations for what triggered his fathomless hatred...being born with one testicle, his penis half bitten off by a billy goat...

TONY

Ouch.

LAURA

Didn't know about that one? Not to mention his sexual perversions or his Jewish grandfather that drove him to feelings of genocide towards a whole race. As if he was the only man who ever suffered some unique trauma. It's all tripe.

TONY

He may have been only a man but he wasn't like anybody else.

LAURA

Look the guy's some screwed up little corporal with a death fetish like most of his soldier mates who'd seen one too many corpses in the Great War...wants to be an artist but can't paint to save his life and gets caught up in the politics of the period. Things were obviously so bad a neurotic freak like Hitler could rise to power with a little help from his thuggish mates.

TONY

They took over a country and almost conquered the world. Not bad for a bunch of neurotic thugs.

LAURA

They were as fallible as anyone else Tony and made so many mistakes its a wonder the war lasted as long as it did.

TONY

Now that's a novel interpretation of history.

LAURA

Women aren't as overawed by him.

TONY

Bullshit. Women loved him. They'd get hot between their legs just at the sight of him. Even with his one testicle.

LAURA

Mass hysteria. Like a contagion.

TONY

He was one in a billion. That's the point the author's making. His purpose on this earth was to destroy everything he came into contact with.

LAURA

Just like those you devote your life too...

TONY

Each one of them has a unique quality about them, just like AH, but simply wanting to kill didn't get him to where he was.

LAURA

I don't understand why any school would want to do a play like this...unless it's a Jewish one looking for some kind of catharsis.

TONY

Bit harsh.

LAURA

They're always on about it. He's their poltergeist.

TONY

If your father could hear you now.

LAURA

Mum never converted. He didn't go to temple.

TONY

Maybe A.H shouldn't be forgotten. For all the right reasons.

LAURA

In my experience Tony, forgetting can be a useful balm on the road to recovery.

Pause.

TONY

Irrespective, I think it's a pretty daring choice by the school. I've waited enough for Godot.

LAURA

And let me guess...Hitler is apologetic for his crimes as he is led to the gallows...Jews of the world rejoice.

TONY

Far from it. They try him right there in the jungle before they either die or the Americans and Russians snatch him from the Israelis if they were to reach San Cristobel. Then he gives the speech of his life...for his life no less.

LAURA takes the copy of the play in her hands.

LAURA

And we're letting our son play this lunatic..?

TONY

The director was obviously impressed by his ability.

LAURA

I recall Luke was very good at acting.

An uncomfortable silence. TONY turns his head and stares at her incredulously.

TONY

You've got to be joking...

LAURA

What?

TONY

You decided to discourage him back in junior high...not show up to school performances, not even ask him how his rehearsals were going...and he was keen as could be.

LAURA

(Bothered)

It was the right decision. Once you go down the artistic path...it's hard to change direction even if you want to. I've treated enough patients to know.

TONY

Well I think this is the right decision. Even if it is a dead end it'll be good for him.

LAURA

Or your perception of him.

TONY turns on her.

LAURA (cont'd)

(Sarcastic)

Bit harsh?

TONY is silent.

LAURA (cont'd)

Just don't judge him by his performance that's all.

TONY

I'll be happy if he gets up on time.

LAURA

Well he hasn't been on time for anything in his life. Nothing's about to change.

LIGHTS. LUKE enters. An awkward moment.

TONY

What's this? You don't have to be up for another-

LUKE

45 minutes. I know Dad. Got to be at school early. Mr. Berkoff wants to run lines...there's this big speech at the end of the play. I have to be word perfect.

LAURA

What about breakfast?

LUKE

I made something last night and put it in the fridge. Mom, if you don't mind running me to school it'll save me 15-20 minutes rather than taking the bus.

TONY

(Smiling)

Don't worry I'll do it.

LAURA

What about your room...I want the bed made.

LUKE

Done.

LAURA

Now Luke no more of this, how many times you've said it's done-

LUKE

I've done it Mom. Clothes in the washing.

LAURA is rooted to her spot, unsure whether to believe him.

TONY

Just like he said he's done it Laura. Relax.

LUKE

Meet you outside Dad.

TONY

Right. I'll be a minute.

LUKE exits.

LAURA

“Just like he said...” Luke hasn’t listened to a word I’ve said since he was fourteen...

TONY

Twelve.

LAURA

Let’s see how long it lasts.

TONY

I’ve always felt this Laura. He just needed something to believe in.

LAURA

Well you better get moving then. He needs to run lines.

TONY is beaming. He grabs his keys and exits with a spring in his step.

ACT ONE SCENE FIVE

A few days later. LIGHTS. TONY is at the kitchen table sifting through LUKE’S copy of the play. LUKE enters.

TONY

So Luke, this play of yours has a vague history. A season in London decades ago and then...pretty much nothing.

LUKE

Because it’s too confronting for audiences Dad.

TONY

Why’s that?

LUKE

Hearing the voice of A.H on the stage is too much for them.

TONY

It’s the writer’s voice coming through an actor’s mouth. George Steiner, with a little help from Christopher Hampton, is imagining what Adolph Hitler would have said under the circumstances.

LUKE

That's where I think you're wrong Dad. Steiner, with a little help from Hampton hit on something dark and mysterious in this play. He tried to find a voice of hate and rage but instead unearthed something more profound.

TONY

Such as?

LUKE

(with great fervour)

How his presence transcended history and the Second World War. He lives on and haunts any attempt to categorise him as some kind of madman. He was a political genius and spiritual leader of a country...at least for a while.

TONY

Is this the director's take on things or what you have discovered through eminent scholarship and research?

LUKE

(Sheepishly)

He's given notes. But the rest he wants me to find out for myself.

TONY

And thus far you have discovered his genius and spirituality...

LUKE

I understand he was a flesh and blood character Dad, but I can't play him if I'm judging him and his actions all the time...coming into the role with a set of prejudices that aren't my own.

TONY

So what's this director of yours like?

LUKE

He's really smart Dad. Maybe even smarter than you.

TONY

I'm not biting.

LUKE

All the other teachers are envious of him. Or intimidated.

TONY

That's encouraging.

LUKE

He knows so much more than they do like he's at a whole other level. He's read everything.

Pause.

TONY

I have a library of books you're most welcome to use...could make a few recommendations if you like...

LUKE

I've already taken a look. Didn't think you'd mind.

TONY

Of course not.

LUKE

Mr. Berkoff's given me a list.

TONY

Has he?

LUKE

Some pretty obscure stuff but I said I'd do it.

TONY

Truth be told I'm quite impressed. Who was to know history might really be your thing.

LUKE

I'm in a play Dad.

TONY

Theatre then! This is the kind of passion you need for the theatre...to captivate audiences.

LUKE

Honestly Dad...I don't even know if it's about that.

TONY

Luke...your mother and I never actually showed a real interest...that was our fault but theatre is a wonderful calling, a truly great art form.

LUKE

You used to say there's no future in it.

TONY

I was talking about the entertainment business in general. Theatre is completely different.

LUKE

Mum said theatre was the worst.

TONY

She's a clinical psychologist! What do you expect her to say? With all respect to your mother, she doesn't know anything about theatre. I used to go many times by myself when you were younger...before...

LUKE

Yeah I remember. You don't have to convince me Dad. Getting this role has been the best thing that's happened to me in a long while. Half the time I feel like I'm walking on air.

TONY

(Moved)

That's wonderful son, it really is.

LUKE

Is there anything else you wanted to discuss?

TONY

No. Just thought we could talk...

LUKE

It's just that I've got a ton of work to do. Mr Berkoff gave me some research to do on AH, what made him different, unique. Help me get into character.

TONY

The actor prepares...

LUKE

Yeah. I guess.

TONY

Luke...

LUKE

Yep...

TONY

Just...keep in mind one thing. No matter how wrapped up you get in the role and that's what you have to do I understand that...just remember it's only a play.

LUKE gets up to leave.

LUKE

Don't worry Dad, I'm not about to start putting on a whole lot of weight.

LUKE exits. TONY is alone.

TONY

It wasn't Hitler's diet that I was thinking about.

ACT ONE SCENE SIX

LIGHTS. The kitchen. It is evening. TONY is sitting at the table. He holds an envelope in both hands. LAURA stands above him.

TONY

I feel this is the end of the line for him Laura. No more reports saying he's on target or ahead on some criteria like "working with groups"...but only a little bit behind in reading and writing...a little dot on a scale that barely makes sense. For a while you feel like he's swimming along with all the other fishes. When the reality is he's probably behind in everything. I know teachers, candor is not their forte. Then all of a sudden he's in his junior year and he can fail. A grade is a grade and all this stuff about attaining personal goals is utter bullshit. You get into nothing and the only door open for you is the one leaving the school grounds to the nearest community college. Or worse.

LAURA

Tony...we've been expecting it for months...maybe longer. He's barely shown up for school for most of the year. Anyway I've arranged another session with his shrink.

TONY

(Still clinging to some hope)

But he's changed hasn't he...

LAURA
Give it here.

In resignation, TONY hands it over. LAURA opens it and quickly scans it.

LAURA (cont'd)
Oh my God...Tony, he's passed.

TONY grabs it off her and does the same.

TONY
Passed? He's excelled...

LAURA
I don't believe it.

LAURA has her face absorbed in the report, analysing every detail.

TONY
In less than two months Laura...he's turned it around, all these teachers calling to say he wouldn't pass this test or that test...all of them trying to sound understanding and conciliatory while they tell us our son's a fuck up. Well, screw them! What do they know!

LAURA
What's 28 out of 30?

TONY
What do you mean what is it? It's terrific!

LAURA
It's an A isn't it?

TONY
Yes my love...it's a A. A big beautiful A. Luke's scored himself an A in English!

LAURA
Ha ha!

TONY
An A in all his subjects. God I'm proud of that kid!

LAURA

History 26...Psychology 27...27 for Psychology!

TONY

Yes yes!

LAURA

Oh Tony I don't know what to say. Where is he?

TONY checks his watch.

TONY

Rehearsals I think. Should be home by now or at least called...

LAURA

If he keeps getting marks like this he can live there for all I care. Oh this is wonderful.

TONY

Isn't it...

LAURA

We've got to reward him Tony. This is special.

TONY

What do you have in mind?

LAURA

I don't know.

TONY

I'll tell you the first thing we can do...

LAURA

What?

TONY

Give him back his computer and phone.

LAURA is unsure.

LAURA

Isn't that what got him into trouble in the first place?

TONY

The kid hasn't complained about it since he started with this play. No nagging or whining.

LAURA

Would it have made a difference if he had?

TONY

If it's a mistake we'll take it off him again.

LAURA

I see that working out well.

TONY

It's not a mistake Laura. I have this feeling Luke has turned a corner. For good.

LAURA

And if he trips up what then?

TONY

We help him back onto his feet like we always have.

LAURA

That's what we've been doing is it...the two of us hand in hand..?

TONY

(Ignoring this)

With grades like these...it's not likely there's going to be any problems. We have to trust him.

Pause. LAURA thinks about it. They hug each other in a burst of spontaneity.

LAURA

(With great emotion)

I knew he had it in him Tony I just knew it!

LIGHTS. They dance around happily together in total bliss. MUSIC. They continue dancing as if in a dream. LUKE, carrying his computer, saunters past them into his room. LIGHTS. He plugs it in, sits at his desk and turns on the computer.

LUKE taps away at his computer keys.

LUKE

Hi, my name is Luke Ruschmeyer and I'd like to know more...

MUSIC. "Searching with my Good Eye Closed" by
Soundgarden blasts across the stage.

End of Act One

Act Two

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

LIGHTS. TONY and LAURA are sitting at the kitchen table for breakfast. LUKE is busy in his room, carefully putting on his school jacket then combing his hair which has been dyed black. He grabs his school bag and enter the kitchen. LUKE takes his lunch out of the fridge, gives LAURA a kiss goodbye, a quick wave to TONY then exits.

LIGHTS. SOUND of an electric drill. LIGHTS. LAURA is still seated at the kitchen table. She is reading the newspaper. TONY is pacing up and down. A LOCKSMITH is fitting something to LUKE'S door.

TONY

Why would you agree to it without discussing it with me first?

LAURA

Because I knew what you'd say.

TONY rather dramatically raises his hand towards the LOCKSMITH.

TONY

STOP!

The LOCKSMITH stops. He looks towards LAURA.

LAURA

(Wearily)

Just...finish what you're doing. I'm paying you. Tony...look how good he's been...

TONY

Don't you think giving him back his privileges was enough?

LAURA

You read the whole report, his teachers are bowled over by the change in class. The other day I was in his room and there's copies of Crime and Punishment, Justine...

TONY

Not to mention Mein Kampf.

LAURA

Given the role what do you expect? Anyway, he's tearing through all of this stuff with no dent in his regular studies. It's amazing.

TONY

So for finally measuring up, he gets to create his own fortress in our house.

LAURA

More like a sanctuary. Is that really so strange?

TONY

For a someone who just got his computer back after years of obsessive compulsive behaviour, yes, it is.

LAURA

That was your idea.

TONY

Under conditions of strict parental control.

LAURA

Need I remind you there was a time that control just wasn't there from you...it was all left up to me..?

TONY

(Exasperated)

I didn't run away Laura...

LAURA

Luke assures me he won't abuse the privilege. And leave the diagnosis to the expert.

TONY

You're damn right he won't. I'll be checking on him regularly.

LAURA

(Hesitant)

He can...lock it from the inside.

TONY

What?! You mean he can keep us out of there even when he's at home?!

LAURA

Think of it as a safe room Tony. If any of your subjects don't like their literary treatment, we've got somewhere to hide.

TONY

You're sounding like one of your patients.

LAURA

Don't push it Tony...

TONY

No. You've gone too far. Who lets their children have complete control over who can come into their bedroom?

LAURA

Times have changed Tony. Kids demand more autonomy, more privacy.

TONY

So why do we have to give it to them? Adults demand more respect but we don't seem to be getting that!

LAURA

Stop showing your age.

TONY

Start acting yours.

Pause.

LAURA

What are you worried about? That he's back with his girlfriend?

TONY

No. I must say that was a nice surprise...

LAURA

Her idea apparently.

TONY

I don't want his room becoming a love nest.

LAURA

Luke's promised that if she comes over, it won't be locked.

TONY

(Backtracking)

He just shouldn't have this degree of privacy.

LAURA

Look, I'm willing to take the chance. It's unorthodox but he's our only child. We're not setting a precedent for any younger sibling. In a year he can do what he likes, move out, refuse to see us if he chooses...

TONY

Is that what this is about?

LAURA

We almost lost him and we've got a few years to make up. When he's out of this place it might be too late. He's got to know we've stood by him. It's a leap of faith but it's better he has that sense of autonomy while still under our roof.

TONY

And if he falls back into his old ways...

LAURA

I'll confiscate the computer myself, no more chances. How's that?

TONY

(Sarcastic)

What if he doesn't let you in?

LAURA

I'll kick the freakin door down.

LOCKSMITH

If you change your mind within sixty days I'll remove the lock free of charge.

LAURA

See? All fixed.

LOCKSMITH

Done.

The LOCKSMITH grabs his tools and exits.

TONY

I was looking around his room the other day.

LAURA

Why did you do that..?

TONY

We've been down this path before, you said it yourself.

LAURA

You don't trust him.

TONY

Do you...

LAURA

(Anxious)

What did you find?

TONY

His room, if anything is immaculate, like ...an army barracks.

LAURA

Is that something you can't handle? Give the kid a break...

TONY

It just...doesn't feel right Laura. Books everywhere and old records from the Nazi period...authentic stuff. Amazing really, speeches of Hitler and Goebbells on vinyl. He's got my old stereo and turntable from the garage. And the new look, the hair, the uniform like he's on parade all the time.

LAURA

He's taking pride in his appearance.

TONY

And I've done some research on this teacher of his...

LAURA

Tell me you're not serious.

TONY

He's moved around quite a bit. Never put down roots in one place. In fact there's really very little to find.

LAURA

And this is a problem?

TONY

And the name...it just doesn't feel right. Can't put my finger on it.

LAURA

(Sardonic)

Well known English actor...

TONY

(Annoyed)

Not that.

LAURA

He's not a criminal. He's a teacher and the director of a play our son is going to perform in. It doesn't get much safer than that.

TONY

Yeah I know but it doesn't hurt to be careful either.

LAURA

Tony, you've found nothing. Now I need you to be consistent with Luke. You already forced one child out...

TONY

I encouraged our daughter to live near uni so she could be more independent...

LAURA

Now we hardly ever see her!

TONY

That's part of being independent!

LAURA

Maybe I didn't want her to leave.

TONY

She was ready.

LAURA

Your daughter was sick of the deafening silence in this place once you returned from the dead.

TONY

Back off...

LAURA

No you back off. Luke's on a path of his own, and for once not expecting us to hold his hand. Let's keep it that way. Maybe at long last he's discovering who he is and how to look after himself.

SOUND of a lawnmower. TONY turns upstage towards the backyard.

TONY

What the...

LAURA

Yes Tony?

TONY

(Sheepishly)

I couldn't find the jerrycan...

LAURA

It's the red thing next to the mower, little smudge of oil near the cap, same distinctive grease marks on the side. Luke went and filled it up. First thing he did when he came home.

Pause.

TONY

How much does he want for the job?

LAURA

Nothing.

TONY

C'mon...

LAURA

He realised it simply needed to be done.

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

A few weeks later. LIGHTS. LUKE enters the kitchen which is in darkness. LIGHTS are switched on to reveal TONY and LAURA. A cake is sitting on the table.

LAURA AND TONY

Happy Birthday son!

LAURA

I got your favourite...chocolate ice cream cake...

LUKE

Thanks Mom.

TONY is about to pour a glass of wine for LUKE

TONY

I don't think a glass of wine for your seventeenth birthday would be out of order.

LUKE

Soda's fine Dad. I've stopped drinking.

TONY

When did you start?

LAURA

Leave it Tony.

TONY pours him a glass of soft drink. LUKE takes the glass and raises it. LAURA and TONY follow with their glasses.

LUKE

To A.H...

A very awkward moment. TONY and LAURA are momentarily speechless.

LUKE (cont'd)

We share the same birthday Dad.

LAURA

Isn't that amazing...who would have guessed.

TONY

That doesn't mean we have to toast him.

LAURA

Yes. He's not a member of this family last time I checked.

LUKE

Yeah but he's pretty important to me.

TONY

Why is that Luke?

LUKE

His message has inspired me to change negative things in my life.

LAURA

What kind of things?

LUKE

I've taken care of the drug problem at the school.

Pause. TONY and LAURA exchange glances.

LAURA

What drug problem?

LUKE

The one at school.

TONY

The one you never told us about.

LUKE

Well I couldn't could I..?

LAURA

Why not...

LUKE

Cos I bought drugs from the drug problem didn't I..?

TONY
When did all this fucking-

LAURA
Tony...

TONY
(Pained)
When did all this...happen heh?

LUKE
Chill out Dad.

TONY
You chill out.

LAURA
Tony just...listen. He hasn't finished the story.

TONY
(Getting the message)
No. He hasn't.

LUKE
Do you want to hear it?

TONY
Continue.

LUKE
Anyway...these kids at school have been selling drugs for a while now...

TONY
What kind...

LUKE
Ecstasy, pot...what does it matter?

LAURA
It matters.

TONY
What kind did...you purchase Luke?

LUKE

If you must know I bought pot. Alright...

LAURA

No wonder you couldn't get up in the morning.

TONY

Jesus...

LUKE

He's got nothing to do with it Dad. I've made it my mission to take care of those who won't change their ways.

TONY

What have you done Luke?

LUKE

I simply alerted the school to who was dealing and when and where the deals were taking place.

LAURA

Like a sting.

LUKE

Yeah, whatever that is. The boys were confronted by Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Rajasingam...should have seen the look on the boys faces.

TONY

I'll bet.

LAURA

Then what happened?

LUKE

I knew they'd taken all their stash out of their lockers and had it in their bags as they were leaving school. Mr. Murdoch asked them to open their bags just as they were closing their lockers. The boys refused. It was a real moment of truth.

TONY

Just like now.

LUKE

The teachers were going to back down. Boyle was about to cave in first, I could tell. Then, just like we planned, he looks over and sees my in my pre-arranged position and I give him the signal.

LUKE demonstrates the signal; a pronounced nod of the head.

TONY

Very distinctive.

LUKE

Well that was it. They got some fire in their bellies and stared the boys down. I've never seen the teachers so focused, at least not in class. The boys dropped their bags like they were ready to piss themselves on the spot. Mr. Boyle opens up the first boys bag and it's full of tablets. Then he opens the next one and there's this huge bag of pot. It was massive...

TONY

So what happens now? A week's detention. No mid year excursion?

LUKE

They're out Dad. Gone. Police called, charges laid. It was amazing.

LAURA

What made you take such...concerted action against them Luke?

LUKE

(Accusatory)

Would you prefer I kept buying from them instead?

LAURA

We would have preferred you came and talked about it with us first...your parents, rather than just going half cocked to the assistant principal.

TONY

Did you tell them you had bought drugs from these boys?

LUKE

They already knew.

TONY AND LAURA

What!

LUKE

Wait. I made a deal.

Silence.

LUKE (cont'd)

I told the school I'd let them know who is involved, when and where the deals occur, give them an exact time when they could catch them red handed...as long as they kept me out of it. My name never gets mentioned.

TONY

And they agreed to it?

LAURA

How naive you are son...

LUKE

(Coldly)

Nothing naive about it at all Mom.

TONY

What about the police? They'll want to know how the teachers found out. Why should they protect you? Your track record certainly isn't going to help...

LUKE

Because I told the assistant principal and the co-ordinator there are teachers who have also been buying.

TONY

(To LAURA)

He's not staying at that school.

LAURA

Just hold on a minute. Is it true Luke?

Pause.

LUKE

Does it really matter? They won't investigate it. That would open a real Pandora's Box. As long as the source disappears, the teachers won't be able to buy any. Problem gone.

LAURA

So you don't know any who are...

LUKE

That's not the point. I thought you'd be pleased.

TONY

Only son turns snitch on drug dealers he used to buy illicit drugs from while using coercion and fear to silence teachers and protect his own name. I'm thrilled.

LAURA

Why did you do it Luke?

LUKE

The school's a dump. And I realised I could be a force for change.

TONY

Making yourself a potential target of the school and police is your idea of change..?

LUKE

Of course not. The same day I also signed up to run the principal's new pet project, some environmental clean up program. Sort of makes me bullet proof.

TONY

For the time being.

LUKE

This is about me Dad. What I'm prepared to stand up to, how far I'm willing to go.

Silence.

LUKE (cont'd)

You'll realise I did the right thing. Anyway got work to do. Thanks for the cake.

LAURA

You haven't eaten any...

LUKE

It's melted already.

LUKE exits.

TONY and LAURA sit there in a stunned silence.
LAURA picks up the cake and throws it in the bin.

ACT TWO SCENE THREE

LIGHTS. LUKE is sitting at his computer. TONY is walking around checking on the new state of his room which is immaculate. He picks up and peruses books that LUKE is reading.

TONY

Sometimes its the little things Luke. The single acts of good or evil that can tell you so much about someone.

LUKE

Is this going to be another heartwarming father son moment...

TONY

Just listen. A reporter by the name of Gerlich, he was investigating Hitler in 1933. This Gerlich was getting close to exposing some pretty damning secrets about your new mate.

LUKE

What kind?

TONY

Oh stuff about him arranging the murder of his own niece whom he had an affair with. Geli Rabaul. Apparently she knew all the secrets when it came to his deviant sexual ways and the adoring German public couldn't find out how big a degenerate their new leader was. So the SS shows up one day and this reporter just disappears. Not a trace. Weeks later his wife receives an envelope in the mail containing her husband's spectacles all smashed and covered in his blood. No official notification of what happened to him. Guess it wasn't really necessary. Later, when he became Chancellor, all records in his hometown were destroyed, his past history virtually erased.

LUKE

That's pretty sick. In the original sense of the word.

TONY

Yeah.

An uncomfortable pause.

TONY (cont'd)

Still playing the odd video game?

LUKE

Worried I might slip back into my old ways?

TONY

Possibly.

LUKE

I don't have time for video games Dad. Thought you might have realised that.

TONY

Finding a lot of information on the Internet..?

LUKE

Why don't you have a look. I haven't erased my history.

TONY

Are you...don't worry about it.

LUKE

I'm not scared of what you'd find. You shouldn't be either.

TONY

No need. If it helps with your role, not to mention your schoolwork then there's no need for me to check on you.

Pause.

LUKE

So why do you write about criminals Dad? What's the attraction?

TONY

You're playing one you tell me.

LUKE

It's not the same.

TONY

I don't know...there's some consolation in witnessing what is the worst in human nature. Much like what AH represents. You think no one could be worse than this person. There is actually a limit to how bad someone can be.

LUKE

But is there?

TONY pulls out a small box that is giftwrapped.

TONY

(Changing the subject)

Here take this...

LUKE

What is it..?

LUKE begins to unwrap it.

TONY

Something Pop gave me when I was in my senior year...

LUKE opens the box.

LUKE

Apen...

TONY

It's a Parker. Stainless steel. Thought you could use it for your preparation. Taking notes that sort of thing.

LUKE

Most of it I do on my computer or the phone.

TONY

Emergencies...you never know when you might need it, a moment of inspiration.

LUKE

Why didn't you give it to me earlier...

TONY

Something just between me and you...for your birthday. Never actually got around to using it so it's brand new.

LUKE

Thanks Dad. I'll put it to good use.

TONY

Leave you to it then.

TONY exits.

ACT TWO SCENE FOUR

A few days later. LIGHTS on TONY and LAURA in the kitchen. LUKE is seated between them.

LUKE

I don't see why this would get everyone so worked up.

LAURA

You were defending him. One of the vilest pieces of human excrement to ever walk the earth. Defended him in public!

TONY

Why would you do that Luke?

LAURA

It didn't end there Tony. He didn't just defend him.

TONY

Pray tell.

LAURA

He got into a fight outside of class. Go on...tell him.

LUKE

One of the kids called me a Nazi lover so...we got into a scuffle.

TONY

Are you alright?

LAURA

Of course he is! He belted this kid in the face as hard as he could!

TONY

Calm down.

LAURA

Don't tell me to calm down. You know how I feel about any sort of violence. It's what I have to deal with day in and day out with so many of my patients...

TONY

It's part of your job to listen to their problems.

LAURA

That's right! And I'm sick of listening to it so when it suddenly involves my son who has never been involved in violence in the past I get worried. Understand!?

LUKE

I'm sorry Mom.

TONY

Did the kid hit you back?

LAURA

What are you talking about? No he didn't. The boy apparently was too stunned by all the blood gushing out of his nose which Luke broke.

TONY

Does this kid have a name.

LAURA

Tell him Luke.

LUKE

Farai Musungwa.

TONY

The African kid. You belted a black kid for calling you a Nazi lover...

LUKE

I was provoked. Race had nuthin to do with it.

LAURA

I hope it didn't. That's not how we brought you up.

TONY

Sometimes Laura...you have to stand up for yourself.

LAURA

Maybe you've gotten a little too close to your subjects Tony. Violence is never justified.

TONY

Did he put a hand on you?

LUKE

He grabbed me by the shirt collar.

TONY

This Farai kid did act first.

LAURA

The school didn't mention that.

LUKE

Of course they didn't. He denied it. Blamed it all on me.

LAURA

Farai is the injured party. He's also a top student at the school.

LUKE

Anyway there were two of them. Brodie Smith was backing him up.

TONY

What did he do?

LUKE

After I hit Farai he ran away.

TONY

Is there anyone who can verify your story?

LUKE

Tariq...

TONY

Someone credible Luke.

LUKE

Mr. Berkoff saw the whole thing.

TONY

Oh?

LUKE

It was just after his class. Farai grabbed me outside.

LAURA

Why am I hearing this now? The school was unequivocal...

LUKE

He's going to speak to the principal tomorrow.

TONY

We'll sort it out Laura. I'll have a chat with the school.

LAURA

What? Put on your published writer's voice and this will all go away...

TONY

Better than a shrieking mother's...

LAURA

Don't you-

LUKE'S phone rings. He doesn't move.

LUKE

I need to take it...it might be the school about rehearsals.

LAURA and TONY say nothing. LUKE takes that as permission. He answers the phone.

LUKE (cont'd)

I'll try and make it but I might be grounded. (Pause).I know we open in a couple of weeks...OK.

LUKE hangs up. He looks pleadingly at both parents.

TONY

Go.

LAURA

I'm not finished!

TONY

We can talk later.

LUKE prepares to leave.

LUKE

I get it Mom...it won't happen again.

LUKE exits.

TONY

It's a one off Laura. Even his director was there, says it wasn't Luke's fault.

LAURA

So he's a white knight all of a sudden?

TONY

No but I'm trying to take your advice and see more of the positive in people.

LAURA

That doesn't mean you excuse actions that could have been avoided.

TONY

We haven't brought him up that way and you said it yourself...he's never demonstrated any capacity for violence in the past.

LAURA

So nature and nurture are both on our side huh?

Pause.

TONY

Got to be lucky in something.

LAURA

And how have you nurtured him?

TONY

What are you talking about?

LAURA

You're his father...you're supposed to provide an example for how a boy should behave...

TONY

I haven't taught Luke to be violent. Anyway, not all violence is evil. If it means stopping-

LAURA

What? What did Luke stop?

TONY

He defended himself. Sometimes words aren't enough.

LAURA

Words are all most of have Tony. Particularly women.

Pause.

TONY

I'll speak with Luke. He won't get into this kind of trouble again.

ACT TWO SCENE FIVE

LIGHTS. SOUND of A.H'S voice from one of his speeches. LIGHTS on LUKE'S bedroom. It is a twilight world. DARKNESS. For a moment nothing stirs. Out of the blackness a creature can be sensed slithering across the stage, a primeval figure from another world. LUKE stands riveted to the floor. He then realises there is someone or something in his room. He turns on a torchlight. A.H is sitting next to the turntable staring out at the audience as if trying to hypnotise them. He is dressed like a middle aged school teacher. At the same time, the presence of a dangerous figure who poses a real threat to LUKE should be without question.

SOUND of HITLER'S voice coming from the turntable. All the dialogue is performed by LUKE, as if he is "channelling" AH.

LUKE/A.H

February 10th 1933...my first speech as Chancellor of Germany...

LUKE

It's one of my favourites...

LUKE/A.H

Mine too.

LUKE goes to the turntable and takes the record off.

LUKE

My parents will hear us.

LUKE/A.H

Luke, where you are now, no one could possibly hear. Do you know who I am?

LUKE

Of course...but it couldn't be...

LUKE/A.H

Why not? I am ever present in your thoughts, stalking your unconscious moments.

LUKE

But...you are dead...

LUKE/A.H

Do you think someone like me, after forty attempts on my life, all of them unsuccessful, vanishes completely from this world?

LUKE

So you are a spirit...

LUKE/A.H

Yes. A malevolent spirit to be sure, but undoubtedly a spirit.

LUKE

Why have you come here?

LUKE/A.H

You summoned me from the darker recesses of your soul...

LUKE

How do I play you...

LUKE/A.H

You don't. It is impossible to play me. You must become A.H.

LUKE

How do I do that?

LUKE/A.H

Something inside you must let go. There is such a thing called an abyss. It exists within every man if he is brave enough to look. First you must stare into it.

LUKE

Then?

LUKE/A.H

It will stare back into you.

LUKE

I've heard that before.

LUKE/A.H

Nietztche. I have borrowed from him in the past. He still complains.

LUKE

I don't understand...

LUKE/A.H

I am the abyss. Do not resist the pull inside of you towards the darkness. It is a place...like any other.

LUKE

(Frightened)

Are we in hell?

LUKE/A.H

I created Hell...gave it a grid reference on a map. No one, nothing could send me there. It is my natural domain, like asking Saint Peter to stand by the gates of Heaven.

LUKE

But you're not religious are you..?

LUKE/A.H

War is my religion Luke but there are still many who believe in man's innate sense of reason. What is innate lurks beyond reason or comprehension. It is the link between man as a beast and man reaching for the gods.

LUKE

(Eagerly)

I want to reach for the gods...

LUKE/A.H

Then you must answer to your savage beast. He will guide you.

LUKE
To where?

LUKE/A.H
You have a friend?

LUKE
One.

LUKE/A.H
Is this friend stronger or weaker than you?

LUKE
Weaker. Definitely weaker.

LUKE/A.H
How so?

LUKE
Mentally...abnormal.

LUKE/A.H
Abnormal?

LUKE
He's seen too much violence.

LUKE/A.H
There is no such thing! This is not a friend but a liability.

LUKE
He couldn't hurt a fly.

LUKE/A.H
We are not interested in the well being of flies.

LUKE
It's your politics I believe in.

LUKE/A.H
My boy...this is my politics! The strong devours the weak. His vulnerability is your strength. Devour him and all philosophy will be rendered meaningless. All religion for that matter.

LUKE

How so?

LUKE/A.H

You will have proven yourself a god, able to act without mercy for the greater good.

LUKE

I'm not sure...

LUKE/A.H

Sometimes it's the little things Luke...the single acts of good or evil that tell you so much about someone.

LUKE

I don't want to kill him.

LUKE/A.H

Then frighten him, terrify his feeble mind even more. Is this friend capable of fighting back?

LUKE

Tariq? I doubt it.

LUKE/A.H

Good. You must pick your enemies so that with one blow they are on their knees. Mine were always in this position.

LUKE

So how did you...

LUKE/A.H

Lose?

LUKE

I wasn't going to say that...

LUKE/A.H

In '42 with victory against the Russians no longer in sight, I made the one decision closest to my heart, the one that really mattered above all else...

LUKE

The final solution to the Jewish problem..?

LUKE/A.H

Exactly. The Wannsee Conference took only 90 minutes to decide their fate...and with so much war no country would be interested in their extermination.

LUKE

But you didn't kill all the Jews...

Pause.

LUKE/A.H

(Malicious)

I changed the course of history, theirs and the rest of the world's. I became the avenging god they needed rescuing from and in the process destroyed their faith in mankind.

LUKE

(Awe)

So you weren't human after all...

A.H is bemused by this comment.

LUKE/A.H

It is time for me to go. The longer I stay in one place the easier it is for my enemies to track me down...

LUKE

Don't go...please. Show me what's in your head...teach me how to get in there...

LUKE/A.H

Alright. Come. Follow me.

LIGHTS. The space takes on the characteristics of AH'S abyss. MUSIC. Ozzie Osbourne's "No More Tears" blares across the stage. Behind him, images of Hitler's destruction during World War Two repeat as if watched through a viewfinder. LUKE is slowly hypnotised. These images are juxtaposed with those of HITLER relaxing with his inner circle.

LUKE/A.H (cont'd)

For me Luke, these are like home movies!

He circles around LUKE who has become overwhelmed by the continuous stream of atrocity images. These are interjected with the faces of known serial killers, Bundy, Ramirez, Dahmer and Ian Brady. LUKE crawls into a ball on the stage with his eyes closed and hands over his ears.

LUKE

PLEASE...I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN TAKE ANY MORE! SWITCH IT OFF!

As the MUSIC fades, A.H looks at LUKE lying on the floor. He gives him a kiss on the forehead. This line is completed by AH.

A.H

No more tears Luke Ruschmeyer.

The final image: a Jewish synagogue with Nazi swastika spraypainted on it. A.H gets on his stomach and crawls underneath the bed. SPOTLIGHT on LUKE. SILENCE. LUKE wakes up from his dream/nightmare a changed person. He looks around with the look of a stunned rabbit, then realises he is alone. A feeling of calm settles on him.

ACT TWO SCENE SIX

LIGHTS. A few days later. LUKE and TONY sit at the kitchen table. LUKE is reading the newspaper.

TONY

You know we're always here for you Luke. Any problem you can come to us...

LUKE

I took care of this problem myself.

TONY

Fair enough. But it's not the way to do things.

LUKE

I got it Dad.

TONY

I hope so. Your mother's not good with this sort of response.

LUKE

What exactly does that mean...

TONY

She doesn't think there's any justification for...defending yourself.

LUKE

What about you?

Pause.

TONY

(Uncomfortable)

It depends on the circumstances. The people I've researched, their victims, that's one of things they were incapable of doing.

LUKE

Enough said.

TONY notices the article LUKE has been reading.

TONY

Anything interesting?

Pause.

LUKE

The nearby synagogue was vandalised last night. Didn't know there was one around here.

TONY

What happened?

LUKE

Graffiti was spray painted on the walls, some pretty vile stuff.

TONY

Such as?

LUKE

Neo-Nazi slogans that sort of thing.

TONY

Sounds like we've got a few white supremacists in the neighbourhood.

LUKE

Could have been a bunch of kids just fooling around...no real harm done.

TONY

Yes God bless'em.

LUKE

I'm serious Dad. People get all worked up because of a stupid swastika on a door.

TONY

Of a Jewish synagogue.

LUKE

Could have happened to a Catholic church.

TONY

But it didn't.

LUKE

Well I'm sure the police will be right onto it. Can't let a synagogue go unavenged.

TONY

It was a crime Luke.

LUKE

The city's covered in graffiti Dad. Must be a lot of criminals running around,,,or maybe its the same people.

TONY

Very funny. Obviously playing A.H brings out your comedic side.

LUKE

All I'm saying is we've got bigger problems in this country than worrying about whether the feelings of certain groups are trampled upon. Our borders are open to anyone...the whole town's bursting at the seams and every leader we've got is either spineless or hasn't got a clue. Not to mention the real crime out there...Black and Hispanic drug dealers, Asian gangs, Middle Eastern terrorists, the mafia, you name it.

TONY

(sardonically)

You forgot African refugees. Surely they've got a place on your hit list.

LUKE

Not enough of them. Yet.

TONY

What about Tariq? Does he qualify as one of your terrorists...

LUKE

Tariq and I...we're parting ways.

TONY

Why is that?

LUKE

We're too...culturally different.

TONY

I never had anything against his culture Luke.

LUKE

Only his mind.

TONY

Tariq needs help.

LUKE

He sure did last time I saw him.

TONY

What do you mean by that?

LUKE

Nothing.

Pause.

TONY

It's probably for the best you two don't see each other but there's no need to be cruel.

LUKE

Sometimes there is no other option or alternative.

TONY

When did you become so absolute about everything, so cut and dry...

LUKE

You read more you start to ask a lot of questions.

TONY

That's supposed to make you more open minded.

LUKE

Depends on what you read.

Pause.

TONY

Luke I understand you are getting involved in this part...you're seeing the world through the eyes of the character, but don't confuse his twisted view of the world with whatever issues we have today. There is no Shangri La and a tolerant society is largely an imperfect one.

LUKE

So a perfect society doesn't tolerate this sort of crap.

TONY

Including people who vandalise Jewish synagogues. You think whites don't form gangs?

LUKE

Yeah I know Dad you grew up in a tough neighborhood.

TONY

Thugs of various shapes and colours who would beat the living crap out of anybody...all home grown.

LUKE

At least they weren't into drugs.

TONY

Not out of any moral choice. More of a case of couldn't be bothered. Mindless violence was much more fun for them.

LUKE

You sound like you grew up scared all the time. Grandpa was never like that.

TONY

Yeah? I'll tell you a little story. Driving home from church one Sunday, I was 12. We're at the end of the street and Pop almost squashes this motorcyclist against a parked car. Eyesight was going thanks to his glaucoma.. Pop's fault but there was no contact. He stopped the car as the rider swings around to his side. Pop lowers to window to apologise as the rider repeatedly punches him in the face through the open window.

LUKE

What did Pop do?

TONY

Bleed. While frozen to his seat.

LUKE

What happened after that?

TONY

We didn't talk about it.

LUKE

You're obviously tainted by personal experience.

TONY

I guess.

LUKE

I've got to go. Early rehearsals...

TONY

This director, he's working you hard...

LUKE

It's a big play Dad...a tough role.

TONY

I'd like to come and watch one day...see how it's all going.

LUKE

It's a closed rehearsal.

Shame.

TONY

As LUKE is about to exit.

TONY (cont'd)
How did you know it was a swastika on a door?

LUKE

What?

TONY
How did you know it was a swastika painted on a door?

LUKE

It's in the newspaper.

TONY
No it isn't. I read the paper already before you got up.

LUKE
You must have mentioned it yourself.

TONY
No I didn't.

LUKE
The words came right out of your mouth. Anyway, what else would a Neo-Nazi paint on a Jewish synagogue?

LUKE exits. TONY is left standing with more questions. He walks up to LUKE'S door and grabs the lock. He holds it in his hand pensively. After a moment, TONY exits.

LIGHTS on LAURA as she enters the kitchen with the washing basket and places it on the table. She notices something strange about one of the shirts and takes it out. She examines it closely becoming more and more concerned.

LAURA
Luke...what have you done..?

LIGHTS.

End of Act Two

Act Three

ACT THREE SCENE ONE

LIGHTS on TONY in the kitchen. LAURA appears holding LUKE'S shirt in her hands. She is clearly not herself.

TONY

How bad could it be...

LAURA thrusts the shirt into TONY'S face.

LAURA

LOOK FOR YOURSELF!

TONY grabs it.

TONY

It's covered in blood...Luke didn't kill him..?

LAURA

He's alright.

TONY

How do you know that...

LAURA

Because he's not dead! He's still walking and talking...at least according to Luke.

TONY

I just spoke with him yesterday...he said nothing.

LAURA

He confessed to me Tony and I can assure you he's distraught over it.

TONY

I don't buy it.

LAURA

You've seen the size of him ...and he attacked our son.

TONY

You believe that...

LAURA

Luke was defending himself.

TONY

I thought you abhorred violence...

LAURA

Maybe he didn't have a choice...

TONY

What are you talking about..?

LAURA

It's not like he tried to hide anything..the shirt was in full view...he could have disposed of it...

TONY

I want to speak to him.

LAURA

Please Tony, we've got to handle this one right. He's come so far...

LUKE enters.

LUKE

I heard all the screaming...

TONY

You're here. Good. So what's this...you've attacked your best friend...

LUKE

He's not my best friend.

TONY

That makes all the fucking difference!

LAURA

Calm down Tony.

LUKE

If you keep raising your voice I won't listen.

TONY grabs him and throws him into a seat.

LAURA

TONY!

TONY takes a second to calm himself down.

TONY

Tell us exactly what happened.

LUKE

You gonna give me the third degree...

TONY

Cut the cute remarks and answer my fucking question...

LAURA

Explain what happened Luke.

LUKE

But I already told you everything that happened...why do I have to...

LAURA

He deserves an explanation.

LUKE

No he doesn't.

TONY

NOW.

LUKE

We were over at his place...just hangin out. No one else was home. He get's all upset about something and starts shoving me hard up against the wall.

LAURA

You see he had no choice.

TONY

Be quiet Laura. Go on.

LUKE

So I grabbed a stainless steel pen from my pocket...it was the only thing I could find.

TONY

A pen...

LUKE turns directly to TONY.

LUKE

(Pointedly)

It was an emergency.

LUKE and TONY stare at each other with barely concealed hostility.

LUKE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I did like you said. It finally came in handy.

TONY

Then what..?

LUKE

I shoved it into his chest.

TONY

Once twice?

LUKE

Four times. The last one caught him in the eye. I didn't mean it.

TONY

What? You've blinded the kid!

LUKE

He can still see through it.

TONY

You've got to be joking...

LUKE

Tariq was trying to hurt me and I wasn't going to let that happen.

TONY

Why didn't you calm him down...for Christ's sake that kid adores you...

LUKE

Since the play Dad, since I've taken on this part...he's been really different. I got Tariq a small role as one of the Indians who helps capture A.H...as a favour...

TONY

That's enough. C'mon...let's go.

LUKE

Let's go...go where?

TONY

The police.

LAURA

Have you lost your mind.

TONY

Did you hear me?

LUKE

I don't believe you...

TONY

I've never been more fucking serious. You can tell the cops what happened. Press charges against Tariq for assaulting you...like you said he did...

LAURA

What..?

TONY

His injuries are a result of our son defending himself...

LAURA

You know they won't believe that!

TONY

Then why the hell should we?!

Pause.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

MOVE!

LUKE

Mom...

TONY

First...you can go into that room of yours and get rid of all that crap...

LUKE

Crap..?

TONY

The records, the books, the Neo fucking Nazi paraphenalia that you've been collecting...all those tell tale signs that you're not the victim in all of this...

LAURA

Tony. No. We are not going to the police...do you understand.

TONY is for the moment, spent. He sits down.

TONY

Fuck it then. What's it all mean if we are going to let our son get away with this..?

LUKE

Why don't you believe me...I'm still your blood.

LAURA

Luke...just go. Out of the house. Your father and I need to talk.

LUKE quickly exits.

TONY

You might want to nip this one in the bud before things really get out of hand.

LAURA

What are you talking about?

TONY

There's something I think you ought to know...the rifle...

LAURA

What rifle?

TONY

The AR -15.

LAURA

You agreed to get rid of it. Sell it, break it up into scrap metal but not keep it in this house.

TONY

Well...I didn't.

LAURA

What?

TONY

I caught Luke and Tariq shooting birds in the backyard with it, took it off them and locked it in the garage. A few months later I check and it's not there.

LAURA

Why didn't you ever mention this.

TONY

I didn't want to worry you...

LAURA

Well now I'm fucking worried. You're saying Luke took it.

TONY

I don't know. We haven't discussed it. But the lock on the cabinet was broken. Nothing else was taken.

LAURA

You leave the garage door open at all hours...maybe somebody else took it.

TONY

But after this -

LAURA

What? A fight with a friend and now he's ready to kill? I know the signs Tony...homicidal rage, suicidal anguish...a desire for fame, fragile personality...Luke is not on the radar. He's not some future criminal.

TONY

He's got the capacity for violence. Maybe there's no conscience to go with it.

LAURA

The expert strikes again. Our son has turned his life around. By himself. He's not some depressed loner about to kill anyone that crosses his path.

TONY

Only his friends.

LAURA

This will be sorted out between them. The police will not be involved. They don't need to be.

TONY

He nearly blinded the kid!

LAURA

I can't believe our son would have purposely done that.

TONY

What if Tariq's parents go to the police..?

LAURA

They won't.

TONY

How do you know.

LAURA

Luke's assured me. Tariq's too loyal.

TONY

What about his injuries.

LAURA

Tariq...Tariq told them he was attacked outside of school. He didn't recognise who they were.

TONY

And they believed him...

LAURA

His parents don't know what happened and Tariq won't tell them anything different. The whole family just got out of a detention facility...they won't want any police involvement.

TONY

So we protect Luke from any form of justice. That's a great lesson to teach him. Commit a crime and have your parents help you get away with it. What if he does something like this again? Where we can't cover it up? Heh?

LAURA

I'll take whatever measures necessary to ensure his safety and anyone else's for that matter...

TONY

You're not thinking...

LAURA

You just can't got to the police Tony. Our son is not going to a jail. He has no one else.

TONY

What about his girlfriend?

LAURA

Luke's broken it off. All of a sudden she's just disappeared from his life.

TONY

You're sure it wasn't the other way round?

LAURA

He wasn't lying. Our son's isolating himself from everyone.

TONY gets up to leave.

TONY

Not quite.

LIGHTS.

ACT THREE SCENE TWO

LIGHTS. The rehearsal room. TONY and BERKOFF are sitting across the table from one another. A phone sits between them.

BERKOFF

Luke wanted to audition for the play. He came to me.

TONY

And you haven't noticed any change in his personality that might give you cause for concern...

Pause.

BERKOFF

None. Should I?

TONY

(Bewildered)

His behaviour, his dress the way he thinks, he's a cross between a thug and a politician. I can't believe you haven't noticed any of this. My wife and I are really quite...troubled by it all.

BERKOFF

Your wife hasn't said anything. Apparently she's the one who usually advocates on his behalf.

TONY

I'm...here for the whole family.

BERKOFF

Mr. Ruschmeyer, your son has researched his character meticulously. He's going to make a great Adolph Hitler.

TONY

No father could ask for more.

Pause.

TONY (cont'd)

Why this play? It hasn't been done for years.

BERKOFF

Exactly why it should be done now. Everyone seems to have forgotten the play tells a great story. By today's standards no-one is likely to be offended. Bigger problems out there than a play with some notoriety.

TONY

They're just teenagers...

BERKOFF

Who understand the politics and the history of it. In some ways they're far more sophisticated and less troubled by it all than previous generations...

TONY

My generation.

BERKOFF

(Ignoring this)

I can assure you Mr. Ruschmeyer there won't be anyone protesting your son's performance.

TONY

That's not my concern. It's his well being that has brought me here.

BERKOFF

No one's going to get hurt.

TONY

You're aware there's been incidents at the school...

BERKOFF

Only one...nothing to be too alarmed about. Anyway your son was provoked.

TONY

Only one...

BERKOFF

Yes. You know of others?

Pause.

TONY

No.

BERKOFF

Good. We are also aware that Luke has turned into an outstanding student with no little help from the work he has put into this play.

TONY

He acts differently, dresses differently, thinks...differently...ever since taking on this role.

BERKOFF

Mr. Ruschmeyer we don't want to push him in any particular direction. Many of us had given up on your son. All of his teachers had difficulty understanding how a student with parents like you and your wife, could fall by the wayside.

TONY

(Almost choking with emotion)

Try understanding it in our shoes for even a day...

BERKOFF

This role, however disturbing you might find it, has had a... calming effect on your son. He reads voraciously.

TONY

De Sade, Mein Kampf..?

BERKOFF

Dostoyesvsky. All relevant to the psychology of his character and at this stage, given your son's past record, I would call it something of a miracle.

TONY

It's become obsessive...

BERKOFF

Luke doesn't understand half measures. It's why he's been able to make such a remarkable turnaround. You just have to understand the kind of boy he is.

TONY

My son is becoming something I hate and detest with every fibre of my being and I want it to stop.

TONY is taken aback by what he has just revealed to BERKOFF. He gets up from his seat and turns his back with a sense of embarrassment. He turns on BERKOFF with a sudden vehemence.

TONY (cont'd)

Take him off the part...give him another role in the play.

BERKOFF

Part of this process has been gaining Luke's trust, believing that he is capable of pulling it off. To renege on that, however justifiable the reason, would have a terrible effect on his emotional and psychological state.

TONY

Then I'll stop him. I'm his father he'll have to listen to what I say...

BERKOFF

You should have thought about that a few years ago...

TONY

What?

BERKOFF

You weren't there for him when he needed you most.

TONY

I can't believe you're talking to me this way...

BERKOFF

Truthfully?

TONY

You can find someone else...you do it. This is your project, leave my son out of it.

BERKOFF

If you really want him removed, I won't stand in your way. But if you do this, there may not be much of a relationship between you and your son at the end of it either.

Pause.

TONY

"The Portage to San Cristobel of A.H". Whose idea was it to put on a play that its own author didn't want produced...

BERKOFF

That's not quite true.

TONY

No? Steiner was shell shocked after a performance in London when Hitler was given a standing ovation...

BERKOFF

The actor was given a standing ovation...

TONY

Bullshit. The audience was mesmerised by Hitler's words as protesters were screaming outside because they understood the danger of doing a play which gave a mass murderer the final word.

BERKOFF

(Terse)

The play courted controversy. That doesn't mean it shouldn't be performed.

TONY

Steiner knew only too late that he had lost control of his own creation...it scared the hell out of him...his own words!

BERKOFF

His Frankenstein..?

TONY

Why not. Either way, it troubled him ever since. Even before that performance, he made sure the play wasn't published in Hebrew or German. He was uneasy about what he'd done, knowing that giving Hitler the power of language once more was playing with fire...

BERKOFF

Steiner was simply trying to recreate a man not so unlike those you make a living writing about.

TONY

You think Hitler was a serial killer..?

BERKOFF

Ramirez proclaimed that he was beyond good and evil. Ian Brady said exactly the same thing. AH would have readily agreed with this statement.

TONY

Ramirez raped and murdered a dozen people between the ages of 8 and 80 and Brady-

BERKOFF

Raped a murdered several children. I was simply making a point.

TONY

These books you lent my son, Justine, Mein Kampf, Crime and Punishment were the favourites of...

BERKOFF

I have no idea.

TONY

I bet you do.

BERKOFF

You should go.

TONY

Ian Brady.

BERKOFF

So there.

TONY

Is Berkoff your real name?

BERKOFF

What business is that of yours...

TONY

Well, it's also the name of one of the characters in the play, albeit one that doesn't appear.

BERKOFF

How coincidental.

Pause.

TONY

Does the name Patrick Hamblin mean anything to you?

BERKOFF

Do I need to call the police?

TONY

How about Luke Belvedere? He still has nightmares after what you did to him.

BERKOFF

Who are these people? You are making false accusations that could land you in serious trouble. In fact I'm going to call the police.

BERKOFF reaches for the phone. TONY lunges forward and takes it off him.

BERKOFF (cont'd)

What are you doing?!

TONY picks up BERKOFF by his shirt collar with both hands and deftly throws him onto his back on the table. TONY holds the phone receiver over BERKOFF'S face.

BERKOFF (cont'd)

LET ME GO!

TONY presses his elbow against the BERKOFF'S throat and holds the phone over his face.

TONY

I press a little harder and there goes your esophagus...or maybe just pummel your fucking face with this...that's a call you'll never forget!

For a moment it looks as if TONY will stop but then he suddenly smashes the receiver several times into the BERKOFF'S face with great force. He falls to the ground holding his face and obviously in great pain. TONY is shocked by his own actions. He stands there frozen.

TONY (cont'd)

I'm...I'm sorry.

BERKOFF is on his knees holding his face in his hands. He is in great pain, breathing heavily.

BERKOFF

You have no proof I've done whatever you think it is.

TONY

If you go to the police it would destroy my family.

BERKOFF

Yes. It would.

TONY

Will you tell Luke?

BERKOFF

He, your wife maybe should know what kind of person you really are.

TONY

You're...

BERKOFF

Who? Who am I? A fucking name and some books your son has read?

TONY

(Defeated)

I...have no idea who you are...

BERKOFF

Leave your son alone and I'll try forget this ever happened. Now get out of here before I change my mind.

TONY exits.

ACT THREE SCENE THREE

The SOUND of a door being kicked in. A FLASHLIGHT moving carefully insider of LUKE'S room.

TONY turns the flashlight on different parts of the room, books stacked on his desk. The LIGHT shows a neatly pressed school uniform covered with plastic hanging from the door knob of his wardrobe. TONY feels something underneath the bed with his feet. It falls to the ground making a clanking sound. TONY looks under the bed and pulls out some spray paint cans. He looks at them in horror. SOUND of footsteps.

TONY throws them onto his bed. The door opens.
LIGHTS. LUKE stands at the entrance to his room.

LUKE

What are you doing?

TONY

I found these under your bed.

LUKE

I don't fucking believe this...what the fuck are you doing in my room!?

TONY

Swear or raise your voice at me again and I'll...

LUKE

Yes..?

TONY

(Pointing to the cans on the bed)

What are you doing with these?

LUKE

Oh, I don't know. One can never tell when that moment of inspiration arrives.

TONY

Is that why the gun is missing?

LUKE

You confiscated it remember.

TONY

Well it's gone.

LUKE

No idea Dad.

TONY

If you have it you better tell me now.

LUKE

Can't help you.

Pause.

LUKE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Are you going to tell Mom?

TONY

Only if I decide to go to the police.

LUKE

Go ahead. Mom will never forgive you and I'll deny everything.

TONY

And Tariq? I know he didn't attack you.

LUKE

He still wants to be friends. Can you believe it? It's like having a pet.

TONY

The kid's not...

LUKE

What?

TONY

Dangerous.

LUKE

And what would you know about that?

Pause.

TONY

You're fond of secrets...

LUKE

Only what's behind them.

TONY

Do you want to know mine?

LUKE

What secrets could you have Dad?

Pause.

TONY

Nothing.

LUKE

Alright then. So why don't you just get out of my room.

TONY moves towards the door.

LUKE (cont'd)

Just what I thought.

TONY spins around, stung by this comment.

TONY

You can't repeat any of this.

LUKE

Any of what?

TONY

I mean it Luke. No one can know.

LUKE

Christ what could you have done? Not paid your bills on time?

TONY

I...I almost killed someone.

Pause.

LUKE

Rubbish.

TONY

Fine then. It's rubbish. Let's leave it at that.

LUKE

No. What happened?

TONY

Like I just said...

LUKE
What did you do.

TONY
That's not important.

LUKE
That's all that fucking matters right now!

TONY
Don't raise your voice.

Pause. LUKE lowers his voice.

LUKE
By accident?

TONY
No it wasn't a fucking accident.

LUKE
A fight?

TONY
You could say that.

LUKE
When?

TONY
Before you were born...your mother and I were just getting serious.

LUKE
What then...how did it happen?

TONY
It doesn't matter.

LUKE
Did you attack him or were you defending yourself?

TONY
Just know a man was almost killed and no...it wasn't self defence.

LUKE

I should ask Mom see what she-

TONY

NO! You can never bring this up with her. I'm telling you this...in the strictest confidence.

LUKE

She doesn't know. Wow. That would upset your little applecart huh?

TONY

Don't.

LUKE

Tell me what happened. I will go to Mom and see what she-

TONY

Jesus fucking Christ I attacked someone alright..he was going to beat up a friend of mine so I...intervened.

LUKE

How.

TONY

What difference does it make?

LUKE

Tell me. Did you use a weapon or your fist or what?

TONY

I beat him to the ground...beat him senseless. We were at this bar up at the mountains. Celebrating.

LUKE

What?

TONY

He had just enlisted. Marines. Inspired by Operation Desert Shield. He was getting very pissed, shouting his mouth off, some guys didn't like what he was saying...

LUKE

It must have been pretty strong stuff for you to almost kill someone over it...

TONY

These Middle Eastern guys took offence and one of them was going to do something about it.

LUKE

What did your friend say?

TONY

That doesn't matter. I was protecting a buddy.

LUKE

How bad could you have hurt him...

Pause.

LUKE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You can't stop now Dad. What did you do to him.

TONY

This guy was like...he could have really done some damage so, I hit him with a ski boot over my fist.

LUKE

Creative. The what?

TONY

I didn't stop alright? I kept fucking hitting him in the side of the head. Is that enough information for you?

LUKE

Then how come you aren't in jail? Judge let you off for being such a good citizen?

TONY

If I was caught Luke, no judge would have been lenient. We got out of there. There was no phone cameras around, no CCTV's. No one had any idea who we were. All forgotten.

LUKE

But not really huh?

TONY

No.

LUKE

If he survived you couldn't have hit him that hard.

TONY

Years later I went to visit him. Don't ask me why. Atonement maybe. He ended up in some long term rehab facility. Permanent brain damage. When he saw me he wet himself, started crying. I raced out of there.

LUKE

Raced out of our lives.

TONY

I couldn't face your mother, you.

LUKE

What was his name?

Pause.

TONY

I don't remember.

LUKE

Sure.

LUKE becomes more animated with this revelation, pacing around his room.

LUKE (cont'd)

So, like, you're a criminal...hiding in plain sight.

TONY

Don't say that.

LUKE

With the perfect alibi...he writes about criminals. That's brilliant Dad.

TONY

I didn't mean it. It just...

LUKE

...happened? Yeah. I know the feeling.

LUKE and TONY look at each other in a moment of recognition.

LUKE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Did you feel any guilt.

Pause.

TONY

Of course.

LUKE

But not enough to turn yourself in huh? Tell Mum the truth so she would know what exactly you are...

TONY

Then she would have had to live with the lie or I would have to turn myself in.

LUKE

Not to mention you would have gone to jail.

TONY

Is that what you would have preferred to happen? You were twelve.

LUKE

So what are you thinking...that I'm the same as you? I didn't want to kill Tariq. If I wanted that I'd have used a knife.

TONY

Jesus do you listen to yourself.

LUKE

Violence has a purpose for me Dad. For you, it's like an ocean you can barely stay afloat in. All the effort for respectability...you'd have been better off going to jail and telling the bastard you'd do it to him again when you got out. Now that would have been a sign of purpose! Instead you've lived this lie, pretending to be something you're not.

TONY

(With great sincerity)

We all have different parts to our personality...no one's one thing Luke. I've tried to erase...make amends for what I'd done...worked hard to be what I am, to know who I am.

LUKE

(Venomous)

Then you've failed haven't you.

TONY

How dare you talk to me like that!

TONY grabs LUKE by the throat in a barely controllable rage. TONY stares hard at LUKE then pulls him close and hugs him forcefully.

TONY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Oh Luke...I love you son. Please...don't be like this...

For a moment it looks like LUKE might reciprocate this gesture. His arms move tentatively away from his side. He stops abruptly.

LUKE

GET AWAY FROM ME!

LUKE pushes TONY away and hits his father in the face. For a moment, LUKE is frozen with fear. TONY checks his impulse to retaliate. LIGHTS. LAURA enters.

TONY

How much did you hear..?

LAURA

More than I would expect in two lifetimes.

TONY

Luke...go.

LAURA

No. He can stay.

TONY

Laura...

LAURA

All these years...

TONY

I've wanted to tell you...

LAURA

Shut up! One big fucking lie of yours has helped rip this family apart. Why couldn't you have just lived with your guilt instead you have to try and make amends like the goddamned fool that you are!? You don't have the capacity to deal with the consequences of your own actions and we've been paying the price ever since.

TONY

I wanted to do the right thing...

LAURA

That's impossible. You stole that man's life...he would have been better off dead...God you're a bastard...

TONY

All these years...I've felt nothing but remorse.

LAURA

(Reeling)

You've felt nothing for this family! And here we've all been thinking life's just gotten too much for Tony Ruschmeyer...the nature and pressure of work, meeting deadlines, living in a world...what a bloody performance, instead it turns out you're not a fucking human being...I think I'm going to be sick...

LAURA rushes over to the sink and retches. TONY and LUKE take tentative steps towards her.

LAURA (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Tell your son where you were when you disappeared from our lives without any explanation...go on...

TONY

Please Laura don't...

LAURA

Tell him!

TONY shakes his head.

LAURA (cont'd)

Alright. Your father was admitted to a psychiatric facility. He had a breakdown. Supposedly. Was away for months. Baffled his doctors because he wouldn't offer any reason for his sudden spiral. Then after months of not knowing what the future was going to hold for any of us, he's back like nothing ever happened. Won't discuss any of it.

TONY

How could I for Christ's sake?!

LAURA

You've passed onto our son all that he needs to destroy himself with! Instead of blaming the living and the dead, look at your legacy..."we drank ourselves senseless..." that sums up your fucking life. What a fool I've been...

TONY

I love you both and would do anything for this family...

LAURA

Then leave.

TONY

What?

LAURA

(Choking with emotion)

I can't live with you Tony. Not anymore...not after this.

TONY

What are you talking about...I'm not the same person-

LAURA

I want you to leave. Tonight.

TONY

You're choosing between me and-

LAURA

YES! I AM! Whatever it is that Luke is going through has been made worse by your presence...

TONY

He's old enough to live by-

LAURA

Luke is not leaving this house. Do you understand?

TONY

I've got nowhere to go...

LAURA

You're a grown man Tony. Start acting like one.

LAURA starts to leave. LUKE hasn't moved a muscle.

LAURA (CONT'D) (cont'd)

(To LUKE)

Are you coming?!

LUKE

My room...

LAURA

Fuck your room! After tonight you'll never have to worry about your father coming into this place ever again.

LAURA exits. LUKE hurriedly follows. TONY stands there in stunned silence.

ACT THREE SCENE FOUR

LIGHTS on the abyss. The trappings of the RUSCHMEYER household have disappeared. A basement somewhere. It is dark and uninviting. There is a small table with two chairs, dingy and worn. Strange SOUNDS emanate from the background, possibly human. Enter BERKOFF and LUKE. BERKOFF is carrying a duffel bag in one hand and a red jerry can in the other. He places both on the table.

LUKE

Why do we have to stay here?

BERKOFF

You can't go home. Not after tonight.

Pause. The SOUNDS become mor audible, like that of someone is pain or distress.

BERKOFF (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You had everyone fooled, your family, the school. Quite impressive.

LUKE

What if they find us?

BERKOFF

Who?

LUKE

The police of course...

BERKOFF

With all the mayhem, all those bodies, our disappearance is not likely to be noticed. At least not soon enough for anything to be done about it.

LUKE

How can you be sure?

BERKOFF

No one knows this address. We may as well not exist.

LUKE

What about Tariq?

BERKOFF

He won't be a problem.

LUKE takes this information in.

LUKE

I'd like to have seen it...

BERKOFF

Sometimes it's best not to witness your own handiwork.

LUKE

How many do you think we killed?

BERKOFF

Why should any have got out...

LUKE

I really don't feel anything...

BERKOFF

That's what drew me to you in the first place.

LUKE

Where will you take me?

BERKOFF

All in good time. Where we go is unimportant.

The SOUND becomes louder, that of someone whimpering in pain and abject fear. LUKE notices it.

LUKE

I thought...

BERKOFF

What?

LUKE

That you'd, you know, made her disappear.

BERKOFF

You brought her here..

LUKE

When...when did you first know?

BERKOFF

I was seven. Dreams.

Pause.

BERKOFF

You can take one last look...I don't mind.

LUKE stands and heads towards the SOUND.

BERKOFF (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I've given her some drugs so she probably won't recognise you anyway...

LUKE moves tentatively closer. As he does so, BERKOFF removes an AR-15 rifle from the duffel bag.

BERKOFF (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Don't worry. Her parents are away on vacation. No one has raised the alarm. By the time they return...we'll be long gone.

BERKOFF aims it at LUKE who does not notice. LUKE'S face registers what he is seeing.

LUKE

What have you done to her...

BERKOFF fires. SOUND of a gunshot. LUKE disappears from the stage. BERKOFF methodically takes the magazine off the weapon and places both parts back into the duffel bag. LIGHTS on LUKE'S bed in another part of the stage, in BERKOFF'S or LUKE'S imagination. TONY crawls out from under it. He is a spectral figure animated by what he has just witnessed. BERKOFF turns to face him. BLACKOUT.

LIGHTS on LAURA seated. She is clearly agitated. Her phone rings. She answers it.

LAURA

Tony? Is that you? Please don't hang up. Your son's almost been killed but you probably already know that from what's been on the news. (Pause). Oh my God Tony...all those people. I need you at home. A lot of questions are being asked. The police want to know about the gun. Say something...I know you haven't visited the hospital. Luke's still...Tony...don't...no...

The line has been disconnected. LAURA begins to gently sob. LIGHTS.

Fade to blackout.

The End