

THE BACKPACK PLAY

A 10-minute Play

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROB, 30s, male, Black

ANGELA, 30s, female, Black

MARCUS, seven years old, male, Black

SETTING

A lower-middle class suburban home in the United States of America.

The play can be set anywhere from 2013 - 2018 - present, if the material still applies.

THE BACKPACK PLAY

ROB sits on a couch, watching the news.

ANGELA and MARCUS enter the house. Marcus zooms in while Angela hobbles, arms full of Walmart shopping bags.

MARCUS

We're home!

(Rob clicks off the TV, picking up and hugging Marcus.)

ROB

Hey, welcome home, buddy!

(He kisses Marcus on the forehead, then goes to Angela and kisses her too.)

ROB

How was school shopping?

ANGELA

It was alright, I actually wanted to talk to you-

MARCUS

Mom bought me light up shoes!

ROB

Light up shoes?! Whoa!

MARCUS

Now I can run in the dark.

ROB

I don't know about that-

MARCUS

Mom, can I have the bag with the shoes?

ANGELA

I don't know which bag has the shoes.

ROB

Let's search together, huh? You can show me all your new stuff.

(Angela sets the bags on the dining table and Marcus begins tearing through them.)

MARCUS

I got these new crayons.

ROB

48 pack! Wow!

MARCUS

I wanted 64 but Mom said no.

ROB

48 is great!

MARCUS

Yeah but Tommy has the 48 and I want more than him.

ROB

That's not a reason to want things, Marcus.

ANGELA

That's what I tried to tell him.

MARCUS

And I got two glues. This one is normal, this one is glitter. And these folders! See, they have Spider-Man! And this cool backpack. It's for safety. And- here they are! My light up shoes!

ROB

Whoa, those are really nice!

MARCUS

I look so fast in them!

ROB

Why don't you go change into some play clothes, and you can show me your new shoes outside?

MARCUS

Okay!

(Marcus runs offstage to his bedroom. Rob grabs the backpack and stares at it silently.)

ROB

A bulletproof backpack?

ANGELA

That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

ROB

Are you serious, Angela?

ANGELA

Excuse me?

ROB

You bought him a bulletproof backpack? Are you trying to make him afraid of going to school?

ANGELA

First of all,

ROB

And you told him it was "for safety." Do you want him to believe his school isn't safe?

ANGELA

Of course I don't. But, to be fair: it might not be. We have no idea. Every school seems like it's safe until it isn't.

ROB

These products are sick. They fear monger on parents.

ANGELA

I'm not some hysterical mother-

ROB

So, what? Should we go ahead and arm the teachers too?

ANGELA

You're being ridiculous.

ROB

Not as ridiculous as dressing our child for war. I'm so tired, Angela! I'm tired of talks! We've already had so many talks with him. The "you just have to take these pills to help you focus" talk, the "you just have to be extra respectful to police" talk. He's seven years old and each talk seems to make him older. They're making *me* older! Now here you come with backpack and we have to explain-

ANGELA

He picked the backpack, Rob!

(The air is sucked from the room.)

ROB

What?

ANGELA

Marcus picked it out. I wanted to get him something cute, more Spider-Man to match his folders. He wanted that one.

ROB

Why would he-

ANGELA

You watch the news all the time. He hears.

ROB

I- You could have told him that's just the news. That those things won't happen at his school.

ANGELA

I tried. But his friends talk about that stuff too. He remembers doing active shooter drills last year.

Look, he's not... *actively* afraid, but he's afraid. And I can't blame him. I'm scared too. At work, at the movie theater, in the grocery store. If a bulletproof backpack makes him feel better, feel safe, he can have it. I wish it made me feel better too.

(They sit in silence for a moment.)

ROB

I'm sorry.

ANGELA

Thank you.

ROB

I shouldn't have assumed-

ANGELA

I get it.

ROB

I just wish...

(He cannot verbalize everything seeping through the cracks in his heart.)

ANGELA

I know.

(A beat.)

It was... so painful.

(Her throat catches and Rob goes to hold her.)

ANGELA

Everything was so normal. He was asking for normal things; videogames and trading cards and the fucking 64-pack of crayons and then we go to the backpacks and he just... latched on to it. I tried so hard to get him to pick a different one but he said he has to stay safe from the shooters and... I couldn't argue him.

I mean, of course, I lied: I told him I wasn't worried, I told him he didn't need to worry either but... I couldn't really *convince* him because... Everything he said was true. They *do* the drills, it's *on* the news, and now they're selling fucking backpacks right there, next to Hello Kitty and the Avengers... I wish. God, I wish I did a better job of talking him down or making something up but. It just caught me so off-guard.

ROB

No, no, you did the best you could. I'm sure you did better than I ever could.

(Rob kisses Angela's head.)

ANGELA

It was fucking expensive too.

ROB

How bad?

ANGELA

Let's just say I put the steaks back.

(He kisses her head again.)

ROB

I'm sorry you had to go through that. Especially alone. And I'm sorry I got so upset.

ANGELA

It's fucking upsetting.

ROB

It is. But I was unfair. I'll try to talk to him.

ANGELA

What are you gonna say?

ROB

I don't know yet. But I'll try to-

(Marcus comes running out in shorts, a t-shirt, and his new light up sneakers. Angela and Rob put on happy faces.)

ROB

Wow! Look at those!

ANGELA

You look so cool!

MARCUS

Do I look fast?

ROB

So fast!

(Marcus starts jumping.)

MARCUS

They make my jumps look higher too!

ANGELA

So high!

MARCUS

Look, I can spin and jump too!

(Marcus attempts to spin while jumping. He stumbles and almost knocks into a piece of furniture.)

ANGELA

Be careful!

ROB

Look out!

(Marcus narrowly misses. He steadies himself and recovers in that way only children can: completely unaware of how close he just called it.)

MARCUS

I'm okay!

(Rob and Angela exhale.)

ANGELA

Maybe no more jumping in the house tonight?

MARCUS

Okay, okay, I'm sorry.

ANGELA

It's okay.

ROB

How 'bout we go outside and see your cool shoes before the sun sets?

MARCUS

Okay!

(Rob and Marcus begin heading towards the front door.)

MARCUS

I bet they look extra cool *after* sunset.

ROB

Maybe, but we're not gonna find out.

MARCUS

(exiting)

Awh!

(Rob stops in the doorway and looks back at Angela. They hold each other's gaze. Rob exits.)

END OF PLAY