

"The Beautiful Dark"

A Full-Length Play by  
Erik Gernand

"Affecting, thought-provoking... Mr. Gernand has created complicated, recognizable people who are, like most of us, victims of their own flaws."

- **The New York Times**

"An untenable situation, spiraling out of control. This is what it looks like from the inside, when a family is coming apart at the seams."

- **Chicago Tribune**

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**Characters:**

Nancy - 40s, female, a high school principal

Tom - 40s, male, Nancy's ex-husband, a cop

Jacob - 18, male, Nancy's eldest son

Charlie - 13, male, Nancy's youngest son

Sydney - 18, female, a college student

Mr. Marsh - 60s, male, a teacher at Nancy's school

**Setting:**

The play takes place in spring, the present, in a mid-sized town in the Midwest.

The bulk of the play takes place in Nancy's home, in an open living room/dining room/kitchen area. To one side there is an exterior door. To the other side there is a hallway leading to bedrooms.

There are several scenes in Nancy's office at the high school.

ACT I - SCENE 1

JACOB

Imagine when a hurricane comes. The people all run around in panic. Like she is this horrible thing. This monster who has invaded them from above. They board up their windows. They buy supplies to save themselves. They turn on the news and listen for the winds to arrive.

But what they do not know...what their feeble minds cannot comprehend...is that the hurricane is good. Natural. A thing of beauty.

When she hits, she takes away all the disease and the death that the people have created themselves, and washes it out to sea. The houses with their perfectly manicured lawns. The offices where the drones do their mindless buying and selling. The schools where they feed the children lies.

And then...and this can only happen because the hurricane has finally done her work...can the sun come out and the people who are left behind wake up for the first time in their wasted, miserable lives and see the truth:

"Perhaps we should not have built our homes so close to the fucking sea."

"I guess we really are just assholes and pricks."

"Nature was right to destroy us."

And she was.

End of scene.

SCENE 2

*Friday. A chilly April day in the Midwest. An aging home in a mid-sized city.*

*Nancy, in her forties, prepares dinner. Her son Charlie, 13, argues with her.*

CHARLIE

She doesn't want to.

NANCY

Dogs take time and patience.

CHARLIE

That's what I'm doing.

NANCY

Do it more.

CHARLIE

But, I'm tired.

NANCY

So is she. So am I. We all are. We don't just give up though.

CHARLIE

She tried to bite me.

NANCY

Bite her back.

CHARLIE

That's stupid.

NANCY

Says the boy wasting twenty minutes in a futile argument.

CHARLIE

Why does she have to do stupid tricks anyway?

NANCY

They're not tricks. I don't need Lady to jump through a burning hula hoop. I need her to sit. And stay. And be obedient. It's for her own good.

CHARLIE

What about my good?

NANCY

I'll worry about that.

CHARLIE

Kevin's mom didn't make him train their dog.

NANCY

And Kevin's house smells like someone tried to microwave a poodle.

CHARLIE

So?

NANCY

So you're going to have to be a grown up and take care of Lady. Your brother will be here any minute.

CHARLIE

But she hates it.

NANCY

She might.

CHARLIE

And I hate it.

NANCY

Too bad.

CHARLIE

And if I keep making her she's going to hate me!

Beat.

NANCY

She's not going to hate you. You're protecting her.

CHARLIE

She doesn't know that.

NANCY

Lady is a dog; you are her boy. She loves you.

CHARLIE

Not if I keep bossing her around.

NANCY

You love me, don't you?

(silence)

Fine. Don't answer.

CHARLIE

Can't we take the night off? I want to hang out with Jacob.

NANCY

One lesson. Every night. Twenty minutes.

CHARLIE

But, he hasn't been home in forever.

NANCY

You do realize that in the time you've spent whining you could be finished.

CHARLIE

So?

NANCY

So, you could be *hanging out* with Jacob. But instead you're crying about your dog. *Your* dog, who *you* picked out. And *you* pleaded - "Mother, I must have her. I'll die if I don't get a dog." Does any of that sound familiar?

CHARLIE

What did Grandma do that you made you so mean?

NANCY

Now.

Beat. He starts to leave, but feels bad.

CHARLIE

I do.

NANCY

You do, what?

CHARLIE

What you asked before.

NANCY

(taunting him)

I don't recall what I asked before.

CHARLIE

Yes, you do.

NANCY

You'll have to remind me.

CHARLIE

Whatever.

Charlie exits.

NANCY

I love you, too.

Nancy continues preparing dinner.

After several moments, her 18-year-old son  
Jacob enters.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Oh. Hey there.

Jacob storms through the room without even  
a look at Nancy. He carries multiple bags  
and quickly exits to his bedroom.

NANCY (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

It's good to see you, too. I'm fine, thanks so much for  
asking. We'll catch up soon. Chit-chat.

Jacob slams his bedroom door off stage.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Welcome home.

Tom, also in his forties, enters.

TOM

He's all yours.

NANCY

Thanks for picking him up.

TOM

(it's not)

My pleasure.

NANCY

How was the drive?

TOM

Exactly like you imagine.

NANCY

That good?

TOM

Hmmmm.

NANCY

Sorry.

TOM

Not your fault.

NANCY

So, what did you find out?

TOM

Nothing.

NANCY

At all?

TOM

He didn't say a damn thing.

NANCY

For three hours.



TOM

No, wait. I think he said, "I have to piss." But he mumbled it while staring out the window and listening to his music. Does that count?

NANCY

Sounds lovely.

TOM

It wasn't.

(Beat.)

Smells good.

NANCY

If you want you can stay for dinner. It would mean a lot to Charlie.

TOM

I should get home. Janice ordered food.

Slight beat. Nancy is annoyed but is masterful at controlling her emotions.

NANCY

OK.

TOM

Don't be mad.

NANCY

I'm not mad. Why would I be mad?

TOM

Sorry.

NANCY

I was asking for Charlie.

TOM

I'll have him all next weekend.

Music suddenly blares from Jacob's bedroom.

NANCY

(yells over music)

Can you take your tools out at least?

TOM  
(yells)

Can it wait?

NANCY  
(yells)

Sure. I guess. I just need the space. It would be nice to have the garage back.

TOM  
(yells)

I don't have room in the truck. Next time. I promise.

NANCY  
(yells)

Fine.

Nancy flips a switch on the breaker box in the kitchen. Jacob's bedroom power and music go off.

Jacob screams in anger from his bedroom.

TOM  
He needs reality to kick him in the ass.

NANCY  
Call me reality.

TOM  
This is the good life.

NANCY  
How quickly you forget what it's like to live with me.

TOM  
He shouldn't get to move home and have his old bedroom back.

NANCY  
It won't be the same.

TOM  
You can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped.

NANCY

And you can't help someone if you don't try.

TOM

He's an adult.

NANCY

What would you do, Tom?

TOM

Kick him out.

NANCY

And where would he go?

TOM

Anywhere he wants. He's eighteen. Maybe he'd learn to make good choices. Not keep fucking things up.

NANCY

Maybe he should go to work with you.

TOM

That's funny.

NANCY

I'm serious.

TOM

I can't do that.

NANCY

You're the police chief.

TOM

Should I get him a sidearm, too?

NANCY

Just be his father.

TOM

I tried that. It didn't go so hot.

NANCY

Then as much as I appreciate your suggestion to do nothing, I'll move forward with my own plan.

TOM

You always do.

NANCY

I think I'm man enough to whip him into shape.

TOM

What's that supposed to mean?

Slight beat.

NANCY

Nothing. I'm sorry. I didn't...I shouldn't have said that.

TOM

Sometimes I have it coming.

NANCY

Sometimes you don't.

In the backyard, Jacob walks by the kitchen window. He waves at his parents and exits.

NANCY (CONT'D)

(calling to him)

Your bedroom window is not a door, Jacob!

TOM

Good luck. With everything.

End of scene.

SCENE 3

*Nancy's home. Afternoon the next day.*

*Nancy plates up lunch. Charlie plays a video game.*

NANCY

(to another room)

Jacob! Lunch.

CHARLIE

He's sleeping.

NANCY

It's almost one o'clock.

CHARLIE

So? He's still sleeping.

NANCY

Tell him lunch is ready.

CHARLIE

I don't want him to yell at me.

NANCY

You're the one person in the world he won't yell at.

(Beat.)

Jacob!

CHARLIE

I'm not hungry.

Beat.

Nancy goes to the breaker box and flips a switch. With the power back on, Jacob's music blasts from his bedroom. She's pleased with herself.

NANCY

(to Charlie - yells over the music)

Put that away and come eat.

CHARLIE

(yells)

I don't want any cooked carrots.

NANCY

(yells)

They're good for you.

CHARLIE

(yells)

They taste like butt.

NANCY

(yells)

I don't appreciate that language.

The music goes off. Charlie goes to the table.

CHARLIE

Kevin doesn't have to eat anything he doesn't want to.

NANCY

Then, sweetheart, go live at Kevin's house.

CHARLIE

Maybe I will.

NANCY

And you can finally live the dream of Froot Loops and Ding-Dongs for lunch, while feral dogs circle the dining room table.

Jacob enters wearing boxer shorts.

JACOB

What the hell?

NANCY

(friendly, she's really trying)

Good morning, sunshine.

JACOB

I think it's afternoon.

NANCY

It is.

JACOB

Then your salutation is erroneous.

NANCY

And I was aiming for facetious. Good *afternoon*, sunshine.

JACOB

But is it good?

CHARLIE

Hey, Jacob.

JACOB

Hey, kiddo. Sorry I didn't get to talk to you last night.

CHARLIE

It's OK.

JACOB

We'll hang out though, I swear.

CHARLIE

Good.

NANCY

It's nice to finally see you. Your hair looks different. I like it.

JACOB

It's different every day. Always growing.

CHARLIE

Even after you die it still grows.

JACOB

Who told you that?

CHARLIE

My teacher.

JACOB

Then she lied or is misinformed. Both are sadly plausible.

NANCY

You must be starving.

JACOB

I'm certainly not starving.

NANCY

Your dad said you didn't get dinner.

JACOB

That is correct.

NANCY

Then you have to eat something.

JACOB

Coffee.

NANCY

You'll need actual food with your pills.

JACOB

Thanks, doc.

Beat. She knows not to push too far - pick your battles. Jacob pours himself a mug of coffee.

CHARLIE

Some girl named Cindy called this morning. I wrote her number down.

JACOB

Lovely.

CHARLIE

Is she like your girlfriend or something?

JACOB

Or something.

NANCY

Someone left a voicemail last night, too. You should call her back.



Jacob picks up the phone number, crumples it and throws it away.

Beat.

NANCY

(still trying)

Will you please join us?

JACOB

(re: his coffee)

I'm good.

NANCY

You can still sit at the table.

JACOB

Can't I just sit?

NANCY

I cooked.

JACOB

I didn't ask you to.

CHARLIE

She's getting better.

JACOB

That's not at issue.

NANCY

I made your favorite.

JACOB

I don't want lunch. I just want to visit with Charlie. From afar.

CHARLIE

OK.

NANCY

Then could you please at least put on some clothes while Charlie and I eat?

JACOB

I'm wearing clothes: boxer shorts.

NANCY

Maybe some pants?

JACOB

Everything is dirty.

NANCY

Everything you brought home from school is dirty?

JACOB

Affirmative.

Slight beat.

NANCY

Fine. Just take your medicine.

He doesn't.

CHARLIE

(changing the subject)

I like boxer briefs.

JACOB

Huh?

CHARLIE

You know, they're like if boxer shorts and regular underwear had a baby. That's what mom bought me when I outgrew my old stuff. Except sometimes I still wear boxers. I guess it just depends what kind of mood I'm in when I wake up.

JACOB

I'm all boxers all the time. Except when I don't wear underwear.

NANCY

(annoyed)

Jacob.

CHARLIE

Why wouldn't you wear underwear?

JACOB

It frees you up. You're not so confined. So trapped.

CHARLIE

Really?

NANCY

Underwear is not optional, Charlie.

JACOB

Word to the wise: only take manhood advice from someone with first-hand experience.

NANCY

I've successfully bought underwear for three different men over two decades. Four counting your grandfather. I think I'm more than qualified.

JACOB

But you don't your own set of balls.

Slight beat.

NANCY

(she can play his game)

How do you know?

CHARLIE

Mom, that's disgusting.

JACOB

It's a valid question.

NANCY

I'm just saying.

JACOB

She's right. We have no clue about this one.

CHARLIE

Now I'm definitely not hungry.

NANCY

I was speaking figuratively! And this isn't appropriate family conversation.

JACOB  
(a jab)  
We're not an appropriate family.

Slight beat.

CHARLIE  
(changing the subject)  
I already bought your birthday present.

JACOB  
You don't have to buy me anything, kiddo.

CHARLIE  
I know.

JACOB  
I'm sure it's awesome.

CHARLIE  
Will you still be here on your birthday?

JACOB  
Afraid not.

NANCY  
(dubious)  
Oh. Are you getting your own place?

JACOB  
Something like that.

NANCY  
That's very soon. Less than a month away.

CHARLIE  
I can help you move out. You know, carry boxes and stuff.  
Just like I did for Dad.

JACOB  
Except I'm *choosing* to move out.

Beat.

NANCY

(choosing to ignore him)

We should plan something fun for your birthday.

JACOB

(scoffs)

Why?

CHARLIE

Yeah! We totally should.

NANCY

It would be nice. I'm sure your dad would like to celebrate, too.

JACOB

We don't need to do anything.

CHARLIE

We should have a party!

NANCY

That's a good idea.

JACOB

How about we each celebrate my birthday privately in secret.

CHARLIE

That sucks.

NANCY

(disapproving)

Charlie.

JACOB

I'll be otherwise engaged.

NANCY

Doing what? It can be low key.

JACOB

No.

NANCY

Don't be a party pooper.

CHARLIE

Please.

NANCY

I'll get a cake and we'll do dinner. We'll have the grandparents over; they'd love to see you. Who knows, you might even have fun.

CHARLIE

(continues chanting)

Party. Party. Party. Party...

JACOB

(over Charlie)

Am I supposed to succumb to peer pressure now?

NANCY

(over Charlie)

It's good pressure.

CHARLIE

Oh, and we can get ice cream from this new place, they have a flavor called Fat Elvis and it has like bananas and peanut butter in it.

JACOB

I prefer Skinny Elvis: a waffle cone with amphetamines and vodka.

NANCY

Please, Jacob? Don't make us beg.

JACOB

(groans, then relents)

Fine.

NANCY

Good. I'll let everybody know.

JACOB

Is this how you'll distract me from killing myself?

Beat.

NANCY

(hurt - finally too much)

That's not funny.

JACOB

(laughs)

It kind of is.

NANCY

It's not.

JACOB

Very clever. Because last time I tried was on my birthday, too.

NANCY

Stop it, Jacob.

JACOB

So I think it's pretty fucking hilarious.

NANCY

Charlie, go eat in the den.

JACOB

Let him stay.

CHARLIE

I won't say F.

JACOB

It was a long time ago.

NANCY

Four years is only a long time when you're young.

CHARLIE

Kids at school say F all the time.

NANCY

It's pedestrian.

JACOB

And this conversation is pedantic.

CHARLIE

I want to eat with Jacob. He hasn't been home since Christmas.

NANCY

(to Jacob)

Can you please try to be respectful?

JACOB

I don't know how much more fucking respectful I can be.

NANCY

That's it. You're having lunch now.

JACOB

I don't want your shitty lunch.

NANCY

Charlie, go.

JACOB

Stay.

CHARLIE

Mom.

NANCY

You cannot wait all day to take your pills. That is not how it works and you know it.

JACOB

Jesus fucking Christ, how did Dad spend twenty years in this goddamn house with you?!

NANCY

Now, Charlie!

Charlie takes his plate and exits to the den.

Jacob follows him.

NANCY (CONT'D)

We're not finished.



JACOB

I am.

NANCY

He soaks up every word you say.

JACOB

They're just words.

NANCY

You will sit down and you will talk to me.

JACOB

(exits)

Screw that.

NANCY

(calling after)

If I cannot trust you, I will send Charlie to live with your dad and you'll have me all to yourself.

Beat.

Jacob returns.

NANCY (CONT'D)

How could you fail out?

JACOB

Stupid, I guess.

NANCY

You have so much potential.

JACOB

This is my potential.

NANCY

For the record, you don't get to sit around my house all day in your underwear.

JACOB

Boxer shorts.

NANCY

You're going to do something with your life. Get a job. Go back to school.

JACOB

Join the circus?

NANCY

Something. Anything.

JACOB

My school doesn't want me back.

NANCY

I don't care where you go. Take a class at State.

JACOB

I love how you think school...some over-priced education...is the fix-all, end-all, be-all to life.

NANCY

I don't. I think it's a good start. It's why I have my job. It's why we have this house. You can't do anything in life if you don't finish college.

JACOB

The bearded lady didn't have a degree; though she does look like this Philosophy major I know.

NANCY

(not amused)

You're very funny.

JACOB

Looks aren't everything.

Beat.

NANCY

(a new tactic)

You're going to pay rent and utilities.

JACOB

I wouldn't expect anything less.

NANCY

I'm serious.

JACOB

I'll be here a month tops. Will you take a check?

NANCY

You get one week to find a job. After that, no more games.

JACOB

Fine.

NANCY

Your father and I worked too hard to give you a good life for you to throw it away.

Jacob laughs.

NANCY (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you?

JACOB

A good life?

NANCY

I think so.

JACOB

Is that why you drank so much? Because life is so fucking good?

NANCY

I'm trying to help you, Jacob.

JACOB

A cheating ex. A job at the high school you graduated from. And me for a son. I would've gotten wasted, too.

NANCY

Go away.

JACOB

I thought you'd never ask.

He exits toward his bedroom.

NANCY

What am I supposed to do with you?

JACOB

(shrugs)

It's up to you. But just *for the record*, I stopped taking my medication.

Jacob exits. His door slams off stage; he loudly plays music. Nancy does nothing about it.

End of scene.

SCENE 4

*Nancy's office at the high school. The following Monday.*

*Nancy is busy at her desk. It's precisely organized but piled high with work.*

*Mr. Marsh, 60s, enters. He thinks he's funny. They've known each other for years.*

MR. MARSH  
(playful)

Howdy, *Principal* Weller. I was summonsed.

NANCY

Jim. Hi. Yes. Come in.

MR. MARSH

How goes it up here in the big office, far, far from the loons down in the asylum?

NANCY

It's fine.

MR. MARSH

The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and Charlie back over for dinner. She's in a hosting mood.

NANCY

Thank you.

MR. MARSH

How's Charlie hanging in?

NANCY

He's fine. He's busy with scouts and getting out of middle school.

MR. MARSH

They're the hardest years. Just get him through that.

NANCY

Listen, Jim...I just got a call from American Express about a problem with my school card.

MR. MARSH

At twenty percent interest they should send someone in person. With flowers. Did you have a good weekend?

NANCY

Uh...Jacob is home visiting from college.

MR. MARSH

Holy geesh. I still can't believe he's in college.

NANCY

It goes fast.

MR. MARSH

How's he like it?

NANCY

He's...he's doing well.

MR. MARSH

Best in my class. Smart boy. Could write circles around every other kid in there.

Slight beat.

NANCY

Jim, you were the last person to use my credit card. For the refreshments at the faculty meeting.

MR. MARSH

Good meeting. I thought we got a lot accomplished, for public workers.

NANCY

Sure.

MR. MARSH

And I'll follow up with Jane to order breakfast for the honors convo. I thought we'd get the cheese biscuits this time. I know they cost a little more, but the kids have earned it, right?

(MORE)

MR. MARSH (cont'd)

And have you been in there when they're baking? Geez. If God farts, and I'm not saying she does, that's how it smells.

NANCY

Jim, you still have my credit card.

Slight beat.

MR. MARSH

No, I gave it back after the meeting.

NANCY

There was a charge on Saturday. At Fantasy Express Emporium.

MR. MARSH

I don't know what that is.

NANCY

Express is spelled with three Xs.

MR. MARSH

Must be some kind of mistake. Computers or something.

NANCY

Look, I know this is embarrassing.

MR. MARSH

I haven't done anything.

NANCY

You probably grabbed the wrong card. I just need to know what happened so I can tell central office. You can imagine this won't look good during an audit; we just need to rectify it with financials.

MR. MARSH

You have no business accusing me.

NANCY

I'm asking for your assistance.

MR. MARSH

I'm not that kind of person.

NANCY

I just need the card back.

MR. MARSH

I'll talk to Bill.

NANCY

Bill has nothing to do with this. That's my credit card. I'm sure it was a mistake. I almost grab the wrong card all the time. But, I have to answer for that. And you have to answer to me. Not Bill.

MR. MARSH

Am I in trouble?

NANCY

We need to fix this. Please check your wallet.

MR. MARSH

I have to get back to class.

NANCY

You have to resolve this.

MR. MARSH

I don't know what you want from me.

NANCY

My card.

MR. MARSH

I don't have your damn card!

NANCY

Jim, I don't want to write you up, but if you refuse to cooperate you'll leave me no other choice. I need you to check your wallet.

He doesn't.

Beat.

MR. MARSH

Do you know what they say about you around here? Behind your back? In the halls? They say you can't do your job. That you're not cut out to be a leader. They talk.

(MORE)



MR. MARSH (cont'd)

But do you know who sticks up for you? I do. I hope I don't regret that.

Mr. Marsh exits.

NANCY

(calls out after him)

Jim?

Jim.

End of scene.

SCENE 5

*Nancy's home. Late that night.*

*Jacob looks through cabinets. After a moment, he notices his mom's purse. He goes through it and takes out some money.*

*Charlie enters from his bedroom.*

Hi.

CHARLIE

Fuck.

JACOB

I just want some water.

CHARLIE

Do you ever knock?

JACOB

What?

CHARLIE

Do. You. Ever. Knock.

JACOB

Not at home.

CHARLIE

You should make a sound or something. Not just sneak around.

JACOB

I wasn't sneaking.

CHARLIE

I'm messing with you.

JACOB

Beat.

CHARLIE

(awkwardly trying to connect)

How's it going?

JACOB

(playful)

*Wunderbar.* And you?

CHARLIE

OK, I guess. I couldn't sleep.

JACOB

Me neither.

CHARLIE

I keep having this bad dream.

JACOB

About what?

CHARLIE

I always forget when I wake up.

JACOB

Then maybe it wasn't really bad.

Jacob gives him a glass of water.

Beat.

JACOB (CONT'D)

(re: the purse)

It was ten dollars. That's all.

CHARLIE

OK.

JACOB

She's not going to miss it.

CHARLIE

I didn't say anything.

JACOB

Just don't tell her.

CHARLIE

I'm not like that.

JACOB

I know.

Jacob puts on his jacket.

CHARLIE

Where are you going?

Pause.

JACOB

The store. (sarcastic) Why? You need something?

CHARLIE

Are they open?

JACOB

Twenty-four/seven. For whatever capitalistic, douche bag reason someone might need flip-flops or yoghurt or nails at three o'clock in the morning.

CHARLIE

I don't need anything.

Beat.

JACOB

You must think I'm some asshole loser.

CHARLIE

What?

JACOB

This guy who blows into town and screws life up. Makes all the locals miserable.

CHARLIE

No.

JACOB

It's true.

CHARLIE

I don't think that.

JACOB

(genuine)

What would you know? You haven't screwed up once in the last thirteen years.

CHARLIE

Yes, I have.

JACOB

It's not a bad thing, kiddo.

Jacob heads out the front door.

Beat.

CHARLIE

(very hard to admit)

After Dad left...I was really mad at Mom. So on her birthday, when I got up and went to school, I acted like I didn't remember. And then when she got home that night, she said we could go out to eat together. But I lied. I told her I had to work on a science project at Kevin's, even though I could tell it hurt her feelings.

When I got back, she was already in bed. And I felt really bad about everything. So I went in to see her. And she was sleeping. But I thought I could smell something, on her breath. It's because I was so mean.

I don't know why I did that.

Beat.

JACOB

Don't you have school in the morning?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

JACOB

Then you should go to bed. You don't want to screw up, like me.

Jacob exits out the front door. Charlie watches him leave.

Charlie goes to his backpack and digs through it. He takes out a \$10 bill and places it in his mom's purse.

He exits to his bedroom.

End of scene.

SCENE 6

*Nancy's home. Late afternoon.  
Several days later.*

*Tools are being used off  
stage. Nancy sits at the  
dining room table working on  
her laptop.*

*After a few moments, Jacob  
enters from the hall.*

NANCY

You emerge.

JACOB

What's he doing?

NANCY

A favor.

JACOB

What the hell?

NANCY

I asked for his assistance and he was kind enough to oblige.

JACOB

That's my private space. That's where I write.

NANCY

You stay in that room all day, and go out every night and do God knows what.

JACOB

That's none of your business.

NANCY

Have you even washed your clothes?

JACOB

Who gives a shit?

NANCY

You're not going to find a job looking like that. You have to be awake during the day, and go out during the day and search.

JACOB

Is that what this is about? Some stupid job?

NANCY

In part.

JACOB

You said I had a week.

NANCY

A week to *find* a job. But you have to actually start looking to find one.

JACOB

Jesus! This whole place is fucked.

NANCY

My thoughts exactly.

Tom enters from the hallway carrying a door.

TOM

Where do you want it?

NANCY

Anywhere's fine.

JACOB

This is seriously happening?

TOM

Looks that way doesn't it, kid?

JACOB

Un-fucking-believable.

TOM

I'd watch my mouth if I were you.



JACOB

Good advice.

NANCY

Thank you, kind sir.

TOM

My pleasure.

JACOB

Do you always do what she says?

TOM

No.

NANCY

Clearly he does not.

(to Tom)

Don't forget your tools.

TOM

They're in the truck.

NANCY

Good.

TOM

I'm still missing a few: pliers, a couple hammers.

NANCY

I think Charlie was using them for this scout-project-thing he was working on.

TOM

Just have him box them up and I'll get them later.

NANCY

Will do.

JACOB

Hello? What about my door?

NANCY

(taunting)

It's a lovely door. What do you think, Tom?

TOM

(playing along)

Maybe I'll get one for my kitchen.

JACOB

You people want me to be better but you treat me like a child.

NANCY

I was worried you might hurt your fingers slamming it.

JACOB

Such a fucking cunt.

Tom hits Jacob hard in the face.

Jacob falls. He's bleeding.

NANCY

Do not hit him! You will not hit him!

TOM

That was for you.

NANCY

I don't need that kind of help.

TOM

Is that so?

NANCY

Get out!

TOM

He won't respect you on his own. That's pretty damn clear.

NANCY

Tom. Now!

Tom grabs his things and exits.

Nancy tries to examine Jacob's lip.

JACOB

Leave me alone.

NANCY

I'm sorry.

JACOB

Don't act surprised. You know how he is.

NANCY

Why do you push his buttons?

JACOB

It's my fault?

NANCY

No. It's just...everything we're doing is to try and help you. You coming back home. The door. Getting a job.

JACOB

Getting assaulted.

NANCY

I'm sorry.

Nancy hands Jacob an ice pack.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Hold this.

Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

I'm finished with Lady. What's for dinner?

NANCY

I don't know. I'll order something.

CHARLIE

Is Dad staying?

NANCY

He had to leave.

CHARLIE

What happened to Jacob?

NANCY

Nothing.

JACOB

Dad whacked me upside the head because I called Mom a fucking cunt.

NANCY

Is that necessary?

CHARLIE

Why would you call her that?

JACOB

Because she was being one.

Pause.

CHARLIE

(hard to defy Jacob)

That hurts her feelings. You shouldn't call her that.

Beat.

JACOB

(to Charlie)

I'm sorry.

NANCY

(to Jacob)

Thank you.

Slight beat.

CHARLIE

Can we have pizza?

NANCY

That's junk food.

CHARLIE

I did my chores like you asked.

NANCY

Fine. I guess.

CHARLIE

No vegetables. Sausage.

NANCY

One vegetable.

CHARLIE

It already has tomato sauce.

NANCY

That's not a vegetable.

(slight beat)

Fine. Just let me talk to Jacob in private.

CHARLIE

Why can't I stay? I'm part of this family, too.

NANCY

Please, Charlie.

Charlie is frustrated but exits.

Beat.

JACOB

I need my door.

NANCY

You can have it back when you make changes.

JACOB

Fine.

NANCY

Fine, what?

JACOB

I'll take a summer class at State.

NANCY

Really?

JACOB

Yes.

NANCY

Good. Start with one class. Whatever you want.

JACOB

Can I have my door back?

NANCY

When I see your registration.

JACOB

Done.

Beat.

NANCY

(hesitant - one last try)

Will you...would you consider going back to a counselor?

JACOB

I'm not going to another fucking therapist!

NANCY

I was just asking.

JACOB

I wasted three years of my life doing that. For you. It doesn't help and you know it.

NANCY

Maybe it will this time.

JACOB

You said when I turned eighteen I could decide for myself.

NANCY

I know.

JACOB

Then why do you harass me?

NANCY

I just want you to be OK.

JACOB

I don't need a therapist to be OK. I'm an adult. I need a door.

End of scene.

SCENE 7

*Nancy's home. Later that week.  
Early evening on a school day.*

*Nancy returns from work. She  
places her bags on the table  
and looks through the mail.*

NANCY

(calls out)

Charlie? Jacob? Can someone give me a hand unloading the car?

No answer.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Charlie? I could use some help.

Still no response.

Charlie enters from outside. He's covered in dirt and blood.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Oh my God!

CHARLIE

I'm fine.

NANCY

Where are you hurt?

CHARLIE

I'm not.

NANCY

What happened?

CHARLIE

It's not my blood.

NANCY

Whose is it?

CHARLIE

Lady's.

Slight beat. She's relieved about Charlie,  
but devastated about Lady.

NANCY

Oh God.

CHARLIE

I was giving her a lesson. I took off her leash and she ran  
out in the street. She got run over by a truck.

NANCY

Where is she?

CHARLIE

In the backyard.

NANCY

(heading to the back yard)

OK.

CHARLIE

She's dead.

NANCY

I need to check.

CHARLIE

I know what dead is!

Slight beat. Nancy stops.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

She got tore up really bad.

NANCY

Are you OK?

CHARLIE

I guess.

Nancy fights to keep it together for  
Charlie.



Beat.

NANCY

OK. Your dad can come over and help us.

CHARLIE  
(emphatic)

No.

NANCY

Why?

CHARLIE

I don't need anybody's help. This is my fault. It's my problem.

NANCY

Charlie, it's not your fault.

CHARLIE

I didn't protect her.

NANCY

That's not true.

CHARLIE

She was my responsibility. That's what you always say. She was my job and I didn't do it.

NANCY

Sweetheart, she's a dog. Dogs do things they shouldn't do. You couldn't help it.

CHARLIE

She was bleeding. A whole lot.

NANCY

Did you see it happen?

CHARLIE

Yes.

NANCY

I'm so sorry.

CHARLIE

Me, too.

Slight beat.

NANCY

OK...go clean up, sweetheart. I'll call your dad and we'll take care of Lady.

CHARLIE

I already took care of it.

NANCY

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

She's buried. Back by the fence.

NANCY

But, how did you...

CHARLIE

Jacob helped me.

NANCY

Why didn't you call me? Or your dad? We could've taken care of it. You didn't have to do that.

CHARLIE

She's my dog.

NANCY

But, sweetheart...

CHARLIE

She was my responsibility! I let her get killed so I buried her. That's all. I don't want to talk about it!

He walks away.

Beat.

NANCY

It's not your fault, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Just because you keep saying that doesn't make it true.

NANCY

It's not.

CHARLIE

This is stupid.

NANCY

I know how bad it hurts.

CHARLIE

What do you know?

NANCY

I know what it's like to lose someone you love.

CHARLIE

That's not the same.

NANCY

Lady was also my dog. I loved her, too.

CHARLIE

But you weren't here.

End of scene.

SCENE 8

*Nancy's home. A couple of days later. It's Sunday evening, a full week after Jacob's arrival.*

*Tom digs through a box. It's friendly banter. Maybe even occasionally flirtatious.*

NANCY

That should be the rest of your things.

TOM

Close enough.

(picks something up)

This key for me?

NANCY

Oh. I found that by your tools. It's not yours?

TOM

Never seen it.

NANCY

(she takes it)

All right. Going once. Going twice. Junk drawer it is.

(slight pause)

I guess that's everything.

TOM

Now you've got the whole house back.

NANCY

(bittersweet)

Yes.

Slight beat. There's still a longing.  
Something between them.

TOM

I should probably get going.

NANCY

Sure.

Beat. He doesn't want to leave.

TOM

You holding up OK with Mr. Sunshine back in the house?

NANCY

He's not so bad.

TOM

Compared to what?

NANCY

He's making an effort.

TOM

That's very generous.

NANCY

He's a kid.

TOM

He would've pushed me over the edge.

NANCY

(making a joke)

Well, I haven't opened a bottle of anything. Yet.

TOM

(embarrassed)

That wasn't what I meant.

NANCY

It's OK. I haven't. And you can ask.

TOM

Good.

Beat.

NANCY

Before you go, can I get your opinion on something?

TOM

Sure.

NANCY

Just if you have a few minutes.

TOM

I have time.

NANCY

You know that place out by the highway, um, Fantasy Express Emporium?

TOM

Why? Did Charlie buy something?

NANCY

No. What? No. He's thirteen.

TOM

Yeah. He's thirteen.

NANCY

No. He doesn't even think about that stuff -

TOM

He's thirteen.

NANCY

Charlie didn't buy anything.

TOM

Did you?

NANCY

I need you to watch something.

TOM

Like a porno?

NANCY

Yes.

TOM

OK.

NANCY

A teacher accidentally used my school credit card there. When I confronted him, he acted very strange. Nervous.

(MORE)

NANCY (cont'd)

Creepy even. I needed to know why, so I looked up the receipt and rented this.

TOM

That's awesome.

NANCY

I'm serious.

TOM

So am I. Let's watch this puppy.

She puts a DVD in a laptop.

TOM (CONT'D)

You should know that a lot of people watch porn. Regular people. Couples. It's how they get their rocks off. It's completely normal.

NANCY

I don't care who watches porn. I care about this.

TOM

Suddenly this feels weird. We never did this when we were married.

NANCY

We're not *doing* anything. Just watch.

They watch several moments.

TOM

(changes to disgust)

Jesus.

NANCY

That's the whole movie. It's at some, I guess, reform school for girls. And that guy in the mask apparently teaches there. And he also hides in the locker room. Or the back seat of some girl's car. Or waits in an alley behind the school. And he rapes the girls.

TOM

Why are you showing me this?

NANCY

Can I fire my teacher?

TOM

Because of what he watches at home?

NANCY

Because he used my school credit card.

TOM

Look, I think it's weird, twisted shit. I really do. But that's kind of his business. And those are clearly women, not girls. The credit card was an accident.

NANCY

It's a violation.

TOM

It's porn. It's not illegal. Don't you have a lawyer at school you can ask?

NANCY

I can't talk to anyone. I feel sick. He's one of my best teachers. But I can't look at him and not see this.

TOM

Then stop watching.

NANCY

What if he does something? To someone's kid?

TOM

It's a sexual fantasy. Fantasies are legal. Even awful ones. Those women were paid, they weren't raped.

NANCY

I don't care about those women. I care what this man is thinking about when he stands in front of a classroom of fourteen-year-old kids who naively think he hung the moon.

TOM

You can't fire somebody for their sexual fucked-up-ness.

NANCY

But, I know what he's thinking.



TOM

If you really knew people...if you could see inside everybody's head, you wouldn't like anybody.

NANCY

I don't want to see inside anybody's head. But I can see my credit card statement, and it says my creative writing teacher bought rape porn.

TOM

Everybody has secrets.

NANCY

Maybe.

TOM

No. They definitely do. Sick. Dark. Twisted. Fucked up secrets. Things you don't want to know.

NANCY

So, what do I do when I'm lying awake at night worried about this? About what he might do? What he might have already done?

TOM

You close your eyes and you go to sleep.

End of scene.

SCENE 9

*Nancy's office at school. The next day - a Monday. Nancy tackles the overwhelming workload at her desk.*

*Sydney, an 18-year-old woman, enters. Nancy is distracted.*

SYDNEY

Hello? Dr. Weller?

NANCY

What can I do for you?

SYDNEY

You look busy.

NANCY

It's all right.

SYDNEY

Is there a better time?

NANCY

Unfortunately, not. What's this about?

SYDNEY

I need to talk to you.

NANCY

Go ahead.

SYDNEY

About Jacob.

Beat. Nancy finally gives her full attention.

NANCY

What happened?

SYDNEY

I'm Sydney.

NANCY

How do you know Jacob?

SYDNEY

(disappointed)

Oh. I am...I was Jacob's girlfriend at college. Since last fall.

NANCY

Hi.

SYDNEY

We met at freshman orientation. We were in the same group together. For the tours. And I guess we just clicked. You know?

NANCY

OK.

SYDNEY

And then before too long we became more than friends. You know. (slight pause) He never mentioned me?

NANCY

What can I do for you, Sydney?

SYDNEY

He's all I talk about at home. Even after he broke up with me. My parents are sick of hearing about Jacob. I just thought he would have said something. To you. Maybe.

NANCY

Jacob doesn't tell me much of anything. You're in good company.

SYDNEY

Is he OK?

NANCY

I guess.

SYDNEY

What does that mean?

NANCY

I suppose it depends how you define OK.

SYDNEY

How do you define it?

Pause.

NANCY

He needs time. He's making positive changes. He's going to work through this.

SYDNEY

How do you know?

NANCY

I'm his mother.

SYDNEY

This is all my fault.

NANCY

Jacob is responsible for his own actions. Not you. Not me. Not anybody else.

SYDNEY

I wanted to help. I swear, I did.

NANCY

You can only offer someone your help; not make them take it.

SYDNEY

I didn't know they would ask him to leave school.

NANCY

His grades are his own doing.

Slight beat.

SYDNEY

What are you talking about?

NANCY

If he's not going to do the work, of course they're going to fail him. That's how it goes.

SYDNEY

Jacob had good grades. He's probably the smartest person I know.

NANCY

Then why did he fail out of college?

SYDNEY

He didn't.

Beat.

NANCY

What do you mean?

SYDNEY

The school didn't tell you?

NANCY

They didn't tell me anything. There are privacy laws. Jacob called.

SYDNEY

Oh.

NANCY

So now I need you to tell me.

SYDNEY

I just wanted to check on him.

NANCY

What happened?

Long beat.

SYDNEY

It was his play.

NANCY

What play?

(silence)

Sydney.

SYDNEY

He was writing it on his own, like instead of doing homework and stuff. And for like the whole semester it was all he worked on. But he wouldn't let me read it, or even talk about it. He was obsessed with this play and I wanted to know why. To see in his head. Sometimes he just gets so quiet, you know? So we were in his room one time and he went to take a shower. And I knew I had like fifteen minutes at least, so I got on his computer...and I know I shouldn't, it wasn't my business...but I emailed it to myself. So that night I read his play.

And it scared me.

NANCY

Why?

SYDNEY

You know Jacob. I mean he gets angry...you know, moody, pissy sometimes.

NANCY

He's a teenager.

SYDNEY

But this play...his play. It was just different.

NANCY

How?

SYDNEY

Violent. Really violent. About school. And it just seemed so personal. I mean, I think everything people write is personal, but this seemed like it was more than that.

NANCY

He's very creative. He's always written stories.

SYDNEY

Jacob's birthday is coming up. And the kid in his play...that's when the guy does it.

NANCY

It's fiction.

SYDNEY

I know. That's what I kept telling myself. But I had this feeling...you know? You hear stories. On the news. When bad things happen. And everybody says they didn't know. I mean, maybe they thought the guy was acting kind of strange, but they didn't really know. Not what the guy would do at least. Like with that Congresswoman in Arizona. Or Virginia Tech.

But what if they did? What if they knew but they just didn't want to know?

NANCY

That's a big accusation.

SYDNEY

I'm probably totally wrong. I didn't know what to do though. So I told my adviser. I gave her the play. I didn't know they were going to kick him out though. I swear. I wanted them to help him. Why didn't they help him?

Beat.

NANCY

I need to read it.

SYDNEY

It's his personal property.

NANCY

That's why you came here.

SYDNEY

I just wanted to check on Jacob. Please tell him I'm sorry. He won't talk to me.

NANCY

It's in your bag, isn't it?

Slight beat.

SYDNEY

Yes, ma'am.

NANCY

Then give it to me.

SYDNEY

I just don't want you to freak out. Last time I showed it to someone they went ballistic and that's why he's in trouble now. You have to promise me you won't go like all ballistic or anything.

Sydney hesitates, then takes the play out of her bag and hands it to Nancy.

NANCY

Thank you.

Sydney starts to leave.

Beat.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Do you know Jacob well?

SYDNEY

Yes. I think so.

NANCY

So do I. And you're right...he can be angry. Moody. *Pissy* sometimes. A lot lately. But inside, he's a good person.

SYDNEY

I know.

NANCY

Then why would you think he could do something violent?

SYDNEY

I don't know.

NANCY

But you turned him in.

SYDNEY

I shouldn't have.

NANCY

But you did.

SYDNEY

I don't know.



NANCY

Was it just that feeling you had?

SYDNEY

Yes.

NANCY

You're lying.

SYDNEY

I have to go.

NANCY

You can't come into my office and bring up Virginia Tech in the same breath you talk about my son and not tell me everything that's going on.

SYDNEY

I'm sorry.

NANCY

You care about Jacob. It's obvious. That's why you're here. It's why you drove all this way. That's why you turned over his play. You love him even. But you can't love someone and turn your back on them.

SYDNEY

I'm not.

NANCY

But, you are.

SYDNEY

I'm trying to help him.

NANCY

Then I need you to tell me everything you know.

SYDNEY

But, Dr. Weller...

NANCY

Why would you think Jacob could do something violent?

Long pause.

SYDNEY

(decides to tell)

Because he told me he would.

End of Act I.

SCENE 10

*Nancy's home. Jacob has been home for a little over a week.*

JACOB

It's just a play.

NANCY

I know that.

JACOB

Then why do you keep yelling?

NANCY

We're not yelling.

TOM

No one is yelling.

JACOB

THEN WHY DO YOU KEEP TALKING IN LOUD VOICES?

NANCY

Please just answer us.

JACOB

I need a more cogent question.

NANCY

Why did you write it?

JACOB

Why does anyone write anything?

TOM

This isn't about anyone else.

NANCY

We need you to talk to us.

JACOB

It was in my head and it came out; planted there by the magic idea fairy. I wanted to write it, so I did.

Slight beat.

NANCY

Is that how you feel?

JACOB

No. Mostly with my fingers.

TOM

Goddamnit, Jacob.

NANCY

Is that what you think? About your school?

JACOB

I don't know.

TOM

Yes, you do.

NANCY

Let him explain.

JACOB

There's nothing to explain. They're just words. On a page.

TOM

Extremely violent words.

JACOB

Can't I have a dissenting opinion?

TOM

Wishing everyone dead isn't a dissenting opinion.

JACOB

Then please tell us what you would call it.

TOM

A crime.

NANCY

It's not a crime.

JACOB

Under what system of jurisprudence is wishing a crime?

TOM

Don't get smart with me.

JACOB

It's not that hard.

NANCY

You should have told us that's why they kicked you out.

JACOB

Clearly that would have gone over swimmingly.

NANCY

We could have helped you.

JACOB

Is that so?

NANCY

We would have tried to understand.

JACOB

What do you understand so far?

TOM

You don't make it easy.

JACOB

Because you already think I'm some kind of psychopath.

TOM

What else do I think?

NANCY

He's trying, Jacob. We're all trying. You have to help us though if you want this to end.

Beat.

JACOB

(a pity tactic)

I knew they would tell you. They lie. That's all they know how to do. For them it's endemic.

NANCY

Who lied to you?

JACOB

Every one of them. The school. The administrators. Dean Stanton.

NANCY

How did they lie?

JACOB

They told you. They said that if I agreed to drop out of school and never set foot back on campus, they wouldn't do anything. No permanent record. No police file. Nothing. Which is all pointless anyway because all I did was write a play. How can you file a police report on a play?

Beat.

TOM

You did more than write a play.

JACOB

What's he talking about?

TOM

Your school didn't tell us anything. We know what you said.

JACOB

What do you know? There's nothing to know.

NANCY

I was told you made an actual threat.

JACOB

By whom?

NANCY

That you told someone you wanted to do those things.

JACOB

Who told you that?

NANCY

It doesn't matter.

JACOB

It matters to me. Who said it?

Pause.

NANCY

Sydney.

Jacob laughs.

TOM

This isn't a game, Jacob.

JACOB

Is that seriously what this whole tribunal is about?

NANCY

She gave me your play.

JACOB

Of course, she did. What, did she call you guys or something?

NANCY

She came to my office.

JACOB

Oh my God. Even better. And you just believed whatever she said. At face value.

NANCY

She wants to help you.

JACOB

So just to make sure I understand correctly...some girl who you've never seen before in your entire life, shows up and tells you something completely egregious, about your own son, and you believe every word.

NANCY

We want to understand.

JACOB

And this whole time, I thought this was something important.

TOM

Goddamnit, Jacob. This isn't a joke.

JACOB  
But you talked to her.

NANCY  
Yes.

JACOB  
In person.

NANCY  
Yes.

JACOB  
Didn't she strike you as, I don't know...off?

NANCY  
No.

JACOB  
Needy? Clingy? Wacko? The mayor of crazy town?

NANCY  
She cares about you.

JACOB  
She cares about revenge. She's pissed off and she lied.

TOM  
So you break up with this girl and her next logical move is to get you kicked out of college.

JACOB  
Correct.

TOM  
What makes you such hot shit?

JACOB  
I popped her cherry.

NANCY  
Have some respect, Jacob. We're trying to help you.

JACOB  
Forgive me if I'm not wild about your idea of help.



TOM

It can get a lot worse.

JACOB

So, what? You think I'm the hurricane? And that I wrote down everything I was planning to do in some stupid play?

TOM

People have done crazier shit.

NANCY

We're not accusing you of anything. But we have to ask.

JACOB

So you had two choices: A) I'm planning mass murder based on the histrionics of a jilted girl. Or B) I authored a fictional play.

(slight pause)

And, of course, you made the right choice.

NANCY

We chose you.

JACOB

I'm no expert, but I'm pretty sure the fact that we're all here right now means I lost.

TOM

This is pointless. I'm calling the girl. The two of you can come into the station and figure out what the hell you really said. If I have to, I'll arrest you.

JACOB

(laughs)

Over a fucking play?

TOM

Over a fucking threat!!

Beat.

NANCY

Maybe Jacob's right. I don't know. Sydney was kind of...she was...I don't know...she was a little off.

TOM

What does that even mean?

NANCY

She was definitely strange.

JACOB

Coo-coo for Cocoa Puffs?

TOM

Jesus.

NANCY

Maybe she was crazy. I don't know.

TOM

Are you serious?

NANCY

This is our son, not some criminal who you drag into a police station. All of this sounds crazy.

JACOB

This whole thing is crazy. Everyone over-reacted. The school. You. Sydney. It's how the world works though. I naively assumed I had a right to free speech. I don't. Zero tolerance.

(slight pause)

I wrote a play. The school didn't like it. They kicked me out. End of story.

Beat.

NANCY

OK.

JACOB

Are we done then?

NANCY

Yes.

Jacob looks to Tom for approval. Tom doesn't even look at him.

JACOB

Good.

Jacob exits to his bedroom.

His music starts up, though not as loudly  
as before - a respectful level.

Pause.

NANCY

If we're going to help him, we have to start trusting him.

Tom, fed up with it all, exits without a  
word.

End of scene.

SCENE 11

*Nancy works in her office. Mr. Marsh enters. He's still perturbed with Nancy.*

MR. MARSH

Nancy?

NANCY

Jim. Hi. Thank you for coming. Have a seat.

MR. MARSH

Will this take very long?

NANCY

Please.

He hesitates, then sits.

NANCY (CONT'D)

I want to clear the air between us. Perhaps I should have approached the situation with the credit card differently. Whatever happened, I don't need to know. Central Office will have a form for us both to sign, but we can move on.

MR. MARSH

Apology accepted.

NANCY

That wasn't...

(slight beat)

Good. Are we fine then?

MR. MARSH

Is that why you called me down here?

NANCY

Yes.

MR. MARSH

I'm fine if you are.

Beat.

NANCY

I actually need to ask you something else. About Jacob's writing.

MR. MARSH

I haven't seen Jacob since he graduated.

NANCY

This is important.

MR. MARSH

I don't know what I can tell you.

NANCY

You read his writing. He was in your class after he tried to kill himself.

Slight beat.

MR. MARSH

(finally sympathetic)

Yes.

NANCY

Did any of his writing...when you were reading his stories or his essays...was there ever anything troubling?

MR. MARSH

Like what?

NANCY

No red flags? Nothing that you thought a student shouldn't be writing about?

MR. MARSH

I'm not sure what you're getting at.

NANCY

Did you ever read anything that made you think Jacob might be disturbed?

Beat.

MR. MARSH

Jacob is gifted.

NANCY

Yes.

MR. MARSH

Sometimes the gifted are misunderstood.

NANCY

I know that.

MR. MARSH

Then I don't know what you're asking me.

NANCY

I just want to know if what he wrote about was normal. Like the other students.

MR. MARSH

I wouldn't say Jacob was normal at all. He was much better than normal.

NANCY

How?

MR. MARSH

That was a long time ago.

NANCY

Please.

Slight pause.

MR. MARSH

He wrote one story I can recall. It was about a bird, I think, who sat on a rooftop, looking down at all the other birds.

Jacob enters the stage and recites the story. He's not in Nancy's office.

JACOB

He was a blackbird. His feathers dark as coal; his eyes the color of mud. Nothing pretty or special, not compared to the red robins or the blue jays or the yellow finches who flitted about from tree to tree.

(MORE)

JACOB (cont'd)

So one spring day the black bird sat perched on the highest spot in town and watched while beautiful bird after beautiful bird flew straight into a picture window below. Bam. A mist of crimson sprayed from their brightly colored bodies into the air. The blackbird turned to a cat nearby and laughed, "What fools. Can none of them see the glass?"

"No," replied the cat. "They're stupid birds. Like you."

The blackbird was aghast. That was not him. He had nothing in common with those idiotic creatures.

But the next day the blackbird flew over a pond. And he looked below and saw his reflection: the wings, the beak, the feathers. He didn't share the other birds' color. Or sing their moronic songs. But everything else was exactly the same. Perhaps the cat was right, he was just a bird.

That night, he kept thinking about what the cat had said. And how much happier he had been before he knew, when he could still blissfully reside in that beautiful dark.

The blackbird knew he could never go back. So instead, he got an idea: if he could fly right through that window, he would prove to them all that he was better. Smarter. More than a bird.

The next day, he worked up all the nerve he could muster. He went back to that rooftop, set his aim, and took off for the window. Faster, and faster, and faster, he flew straight for the glass.

Bam. A mist of crimson sprayed out from his darkly feathered body. The blackbird fell twisted to the ground. His final thought was of regret: not that he was dying, but that he was just another stupid bird.

Jacob exits.

MR. MARSH

I thought it was pretty good. I offered to submit it to a short story contest, but he turned me down.

NANCY

I'm glad he had your class; writing helped him move on after the overdose.

MR. MARSH

He wrote that before.

Beat.

NANCY

What?

MR. MARSH

I taught Jacob for two years. I also had him in freshman honors writing; Marcie was on maternity leave.

NANCY

But you never said anything.

MR. MARSH

What was there to say?

NANCY

He wrote a story about killing himself.

MR. MARSH

Nancy, it's a story about a bird.

NANCY

Who kills himself.

MR. MARSH

Or is just trying to make sense of a world where it feels like an outsider.

NANCY

You had an obligation.

MR. MARSH

Didn't you read any of his stories yourself?

NANCY

He was very protective over his writing. I respected his privacy.

MR. MARSH

Then perhaps you respected him too much. You should really be talking to your son about this. Not me.

End of scene.



SCENE 12

*Nancy's home. The middle of the night. A few days later.*

*Nancy sits beside an open window and smokes.*

*Jacob enters from his bedroom on his way out the front door. He stops when he sees her.*

JACOB

Since when do you smoke?

NANCY

Since I stopped drinking.

JACOB

What else do you do?

NANCY

Can't I have a few secrets?

JACOB

Touche.

NANCY

Do you want one?

(pause - he resists)

I know you smoke. I can smell it every time you come home.

She holds out the pack.

JACOB

Does it come with a free lecture?

NANCY

No.

He hesitates, then takes a cigarette and lights it. He inhales.

JACOB

These are shit.

NANCY

I work in a high school. I'm a single mother. Buy your own cigarettes.

JACOB

I do.

Beat.

NANCY

I came across that essay you wrote, the one about the giant spider. You were in sixth grade, I think.

JACOB

How does one *come across* a writing assignment from seven years ago?

NANCY

I keep all of those things from you and Charlie: drawings, cards, notes.

JACOB

That's called hoarding. You should watch more TV.

NANCY

I couldn't throw any of those things out from you guys. They're very special to me. Some day you'll understand what that's like. To feel like some horrible drawing of a purple cat is the most special thing in the world just because it was given to you by a sweet, tiny person.

JACOB

Like a Hobbit?

NANCY

You don't have to always be a smart ass.

JACOB

I think it's genetic.

Beat.

NANCY

What do you want for your birthday?

JACOB  
(laughs)

Are you serious?

NANCY  
I'd like to get you something. What do you need?

JACOB  
I don't need anything.

NANCY  
Says the man with no clean pants.

JACOB  
There's this thing called a washing machine.

NANCY  
Oh, so you've heard of it?

JACOB  
In theory.

Slight beat.

NANCY  
(as casual as she can muster)  
Where are you off to?

JACOB  
(re: cigarettes)  
I thought these were lecture-free.

NANCY  
Just a question. Conversation. You don't have to tell me anything.

JACOB  
Out. Fresh air. Why? Were you waiting up for me?

NANCY  
No. I was working. Thinking.

JACOB  
At two in the morning?

NANCY

I'm having trouble with one of my teachers.

JACOB

Which one?

NANCY

Doesn't matter.

JACOB

So, I know the perp?

NANCY

I didn't say that.

JACOB

Let me guess. Connor. Pugsley. Helms. Pickering. It's totally Pickering. Wait. Mr. or Mrs. They're both total douche bags. He's the bigger douche though. Right? I'm right.

NANCY

I can't say.

(slight pause)

But side by side, I'm pretty sure he'd come out on top in douche baggery.

JACOB

Very classy.

NANCY

I'm a classy lady.

Slight beat.

He heads for the door.

JACOB

Thanks for the smoke.

NANCY

Don't make a habit of it.

JACOB

That definitely sounded like a lecture.

NANCY

Good night.

Beat.

He walks to the door. He almost leaves, but stops.

JACOB

I could probably use a good shirt. Nothing too fancy. Something you might wear on a job interview. A date. You know, one of those all-purpose, grown-up type shirts.

NANCY

I'll see what I can do.

Slight beat.

JACOB

And your cigarette...you're holding it kind of funny. I just mean, for someone who's a closet smoker and all. But you get an "A" for effort.

He exits.

She watches him through the window.

End of scene.

SCENE 13

*Nancy's house. Late afternoon  
a few days later.*

*There's a knock at the door.  
Another knock.*

*A key is inserted in the door.  
Tom enters in uniform.*

*Jacob enters from the hallway.*

JACOB  
Jesus. You scared me.

TOM  
No one answered.

JACOB  
She's not here.

TOM  
I'm not here for her.

JACOB  
What do you want?

TOM  
Can't we just talk?

JACOB  
I guess.

Beat.

TOM  
(awkwardly)  
How's it going?

JACOB  
(sarcastic)  
Good.

TOM  
Your mom told me you signed up for a class.

JACOB

That's correct.

TOM

What's the class?

JACOB

Why does it matter?

TOM

I'd just like to know.

JACOB

Are you in the market for higher education?

TOM

Can't you just answer a question?

Slight pause.

JACOB

"Political Discourse in the Developing World." Or at least the version of it offered at State. It sounded quaint.

Beat.

TOM

I know you think we're completely different. You and me. I think that, too, sometimes. But we're not. We're also exactly alike.

JACOB

OK.

TOM

I'm serious. You think I'm fucking with you, but I'm not. It might not be in the best way, but we have something in common.

JACOB

If you say so.

TOM

I know what it's like. To be angry. I feel that. Like you. That rage. All inside. Bottled up. And then some day. Something. It just bursts. It comes out.

(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)

I wish to God it didn't. But it does. Your mother's not like us. She thinks everything through. She weighs her options. She makes a calculated decision. I've fucked a lot of things up in my life. I don't want to see you do that, too.

JACOB

Thanks for the tip.

Beat.

TOM

Why do you have an AB-10?

JACOB

A what?

TOM

You heard me.

JACOB

I don't have one.

TOM

Bullshit. Why do you have a fucking gun?

JACOB

I told you, I don't.

TOM

No more games, kid.

JACOB

I'm not playing games, sir.

TOM

I ran your name through our database.

JACOB

Why?

TOM

Because I can. Because it's my job to know what you're doing.



JACOB

Why can't you just leave us alone? Go screw another one of your subordinates.

TOM

You bought a gun in November. Where is it?

JACOB

You tell me? You've been in my room. All your shit was in our garage. Where is it?

TOM

Don't fuck with me.

JACOB

I wouldn't. I don't want to get beat up.

TOM

I have your name. I have your social. It's all there. It's your gun.

JACOB

You don't have anything.

TOM

Then tell me. Make up some fabulous story to explain this away. You're so good at that. Any time something doesn't seem right, you have a perfect solution. What is it this time?

JACOB

Why bother? You already don't believe me before I open my mouth.

TOM

That's because everything out of your mouth is bullshit. You can fool your mom every time, but not me. I know who you are.

JACOB

A smarter, thinner version of you.

TOM

I swear to God, Jacob, you're not leaving this house until you tell me everything. And you know I can do it. Tell me. Now.

Beat.

JACOB

I bought it at a store. Perfectly legal. You said so yourself. They did a background check. I cleared.

TOM

Where is it?

JACOB

I got rid of it.

TOM

I don't believe you.

JACOB

That's not surprising, but I can't help that.

TOM

What is your problem, Jacob?

JACOB

You.

Nancy and Charlie enter through the front door.

NANCY

Oh. Hi. What are you doing here?

JACOB

You should change your locks.

NANCY

What's going on?

TOM

Jacob has a gun.

JACOB

Goddamnit. I don't have a fucking gun.

NANCY

Charlie, go to your room.

CHARLIE

No.

NANCY

Charlie.

JACOB

Good for you, kiddo.

NANCY

Now.

TOM

Let him stay. He should know the truth about his idol.

JACOB

What do you know about truth?

NANCY

(to Jacob)

What's he talking about?

TOM

He bought a gun last year.

NANCY

I'm not talking to you, Tom.

(to Jacob)

Do you have a gun?

JACOB

I do not have a gun.

NANCY

Then why does your father think you do?

JACOB

Because I bought one so I could blow my brains out.  
Do it right this time. OK? Obviously, I didn't. I got rid  
of the gun. My brains are still here.

TOM

That's not the kind of gun someone buys to kill themselves.

NANCY

Shut up, Tom.

CHARLIE

Everyone stop.

TOM

I could arrest you.

NANCY

No one's getting arrested.

CHARLIE

Leave him alone.

JACOB

Take me to jail. With all your crack evidence it should be a slam dunk.

NANCY

Let's talk about this.

TOM

You can talk. I'm doing something.

CHARLIE

Dad.

JACOB

And why don't you hit me again before you do? Hit us all, while you're at it. Like a real man.

TOM

I should hit you!

CHARLIE

Everybody fucking shut up! Fuck, fuck, fuck!

Charlie runs out.

Beat.

JACOB

A responsible party should go check on your son. (pause) I guess that would be me.

Jacob follows after Charlie.

Slight beat.

TOM

I'll call the school this time. They can't keep hiding behind some asinine privacy statute.

NANCY

I want you out.

Beat.

TOM

What?

NANCY

I want your key. Don't come into my home unless you're invited.

TOM

What are you talking about?

NANCY

You make it worse.

TOM

I make it worse?

NANCY

It's already bad, but every time you show up you make it so much worse.

TOM

It can't get any worse.

NANCY

How can you not see what you're doing?

TOM

Me?

NANCY

He needs distance from you.

TOM

So you can coddle him?

NANCY

So I can help him.

TOM

I'm the only one left with any sense in this family.

NANCY

We're not a family.

TOM

You're fucking serious?

NANCY

You hit him. You made him bleed. How will that look if we go back to court? How will that look for your job?

TOM

You're making a big mistake.

NANCY

Don't make me call the police, Tom, because I will!

Beat.

Tom removes Nancy's house keys from his set.

TOM

This is your problem now. Whatever shit he does, whatever he pulls, it's on you. All of it. Don't call me. Don't tell me what he's doing. Or what he's done. It's on you. I hope you're ready to live with that.

He throws the keys down and exits.

End of scene.

SCENE 14

*Nancy's home. A couple of days later. Afternoon. Charlie sits on the couch and folds laundry.*

*Jacob enters from outside. He's in a good mood.*

JACOB

That's my T-shirt.

CHARLIE  
(busted)

Oh. Yeah.

JACOB

What are you doing?

CHARLIE

Nothing.

JACOB

I don't need someone to do my laundry.

CHARLIE

I don't mind. I'm good at it.

JACOB

Then you need a new hobby.

CHARLIE

You hadn't done it since you came home from school. I thought you needed some help.

Beat.

JACOB

Thanks.

CHARLIE

I washed everything on cold. I hope that's OK.

JACOB

Sure.

CHARLIE

That's what mom says to do. It saves energy and plus it keeps the colors bright.

JACOB

Thanks, Hazel.

CHARLIE

Who's Hazel?

JACOB

You.

CHARLIE

Oh.

JACOB

I'm messing with you.

CHARLIE

I know.

Beat.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

This is a lot of clothes.

JACOB

Kids in college don't do laundry.

CHARLIE

How do they get clean stuff to wear?

JACOB

They don't.

CHARLIE

Really?

JACOB

You ever smell a dorm room?

CHARLIE

No.



JACOB

It's enough to make a guy want to get kicked out and move back home with his overbearing mother.

CHARLIE

Oh.

JACOB

Still messing with you.

CHARLIE

I know.

Beat.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Sometimes Mom can be kind of annoying.

JACOB

You think?

CHARLIE

I mean, it's not like she means to be or anything. That's just how she is.

JACOB

I guess.

CHARLIE

It's like, she just wants to help us.

JACOB

I don't want to talk about Mom.

Beat.

CHARLIE

Did you like it at school?

JACOB

And I don't want to talk about school.

Beat.

CHARLIE

My friend Kevin, his sister's in college, she's at State, and she comes home like every weekend to do her laundry.

JACOB

Good for her.

CHARLIE

Do you know her? Her name's Kylie.

JACOB

Kind of.

CHARLIE

She said you guys had some classes together in high school. She said you were quiet, but that you seemed really nice.

JACOB

What does she know?

Beat.

CHARLIE

(extremely difficult to say)

I know you wouldn't do anything bad.

JACOB

Jesus.

CHARLIE

I think sometimes people say things or do things but that doesn't mean they're like that.

JACOB

Let's not talk about this. It's all I fucking hear any more.

CHARLIE

It's just, I know that's not who you are.

JACOB

What is your fucking problem?!

CHARLIE

Nothing.

JACOB

Then why are you turning in to her?

CHARLIE

I'm not.

JACOB

You are.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry.

JACOB

What's wrong with you? Just leave my shit alone!

Jacob walks away.

He thinks again then storms back to  
Charlie.

JACOB (CONT'D)

What kind of mama's boy sits at home and does laundry for fun? Huh? That's messed up. Don't do things for me. Or hang out with me. Or talk to me. I don't want you following me around all the time. I don't even like looking at you. Just leave me the fuck alone!!

Charlie exits.

After a moment alone, Jacob angrily picks  
up his folded clothes and hurls them.

End of scene.

SCENE 15

*Nancy's home. Evening. Later.*

*It's dark when Nancy and Charlie enter through the front door and turn on the lights.*

*The place is turned upside down: cabinets are open, drawers pulled out, things turned over.*

NANCY

Stay back.

CHARLIE

What happened?

NANCY

Don't come in.

CHARLIE

Were we robbed?

NANCY

Just stay back.

CHARLIE

We should call the police.

NANCY

No.

CHARLIE

Why?

Nancy enters further into the house.

NANCY

(calls out)

Jacob? Are you here? Are you hurt?

CHARLIE

Don't go in. Please!

NANCY

I have to check.

CHARLIE

But, Mom -

NANCY

Stay there!

She walks toward the hallway to the bedrooms. She hesitates, then enters.

She's gone for several moments.

Suddenly a loud CRASH comes from one of the back bedrooms.

CHARLIE

Mom!

After an uncertain moment, Nancy re-enters.

A figure runs by a window outside of the house. Nancy closes the front door and locks it.

CHARLIE

Are you OK?

NANCY

Yes.

CHARLIE

Who was it?

NANCY

I couldn't see. I don't know.

CHARLIE

Yes, you do.

NANCY

(she hesitates)

I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

Is the whole house like this?

NANCY

Yes.

CHARLIE

What are we going to do?

NANCY

Clean it up.

Beat.

CHARLIE

Why is he doing this?

NANCY

He's not well.

CHARLIE

Then what are you going to do?

NANCY

Keep trying.

CHARLIE

It's not working.

NANCY

It will.

CHARLIE

But what if it's too late?

NANCY

Don't say that! We can't think like that. We have to try harder.

Beat.

CHARLIE

I lied.

NANCY

About what?

CHARLIE

I lied to you.

NANCY

What did you lie about?

CHARLIE

I'm really sorry.

NANCY

Charlie.

CHARLIE

I know something about Jacob.

NANCY

Then you have to tell me.

CHARLIE

I didn't want you to be mad at him.

NANCY

It's OK.

CHARLIE

I should have told you.

NANCY

I won't be mad. Just tell me.

CHARLIE

Lady didn't get hit by a car.

Beat.

NANCY

OK.

CHARLIE

I was in my room getting ready for Scouts, and she was tied up by the picnic table, barking really loud. And I heard her make this noise, like a scream or something. So I looked out my window and Jacob was there. Kicking her. Really mad. But nobody was home and I didn't know what to do. I got scared. So I left. I thought he'd stop, you know.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (cont'd)

But when I got home, Lady was under a blanket. All bloody.

Jacob said she accidentally got loose and got hit by a car. He was really sorry. He said he didn't want you to know, that you'd just blame him for it.

NANCY

Maybe that's what happened.

CHARLIE

It's not. You know it's not.

NANCY

We don't know.

CHARLIE

He killed her.

NANCY

You didn't see everything, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(interrupts her)

He killed my dog!

Beat. She knows, too.

NANCY

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

CHARLIE

What if he does something to you? Or me?

NANCY

Sweetheart, he would never do anything to hurt you. Jacob loves you.

CHARLIE

You didn't see him.

NANCY

I won't let that happen.

CHARLIE

You can't stop him.



NANCY

We're going to help him.

CHARLIE

He's going to hurt us.

NANCY

He won't. Jacob is sick. He needs us.

CHARLIE

He shouldn't be in our house.

NANCY

What if I were sick? What if I had some bad disease? What if I had cancer? You wouldn't kick me out.

CHARLIE

That's not the same.

NANCY

It is the same.

CHARLIE

I'm scared of him.

NANCY

Then you have to trust me.

CHARLIE

There's something wrong with Jacob.

NANCY

Do you trust me, Charlie?

CHARLIE

I don't know.

NANCY

(getting him on board)

Do you trust me?!

Long beat.

CHARLIE  
(decides)

Yes.

NANCY

I promise we can get through this together, but I need you with me. We have to help Jacob.

There isn't anybody else.

End of scene.

SCENE 16

*Nancy's office. The next day.*

MR. MARSH

You can't keep pulling me out of class. This is highly unprofessional.

NANCY

I just got off the phone with central office. You never signed the financial discrepancy form.

MR. MARSH

I never said I would.

NANCY

Then the credit card matter is still open.

MR. MARSH

It's been taken care of.

NANCY

That's not possible.

MR. MARSH

I went to Bill.

Beat.

NANCY

You went above me?

MR. MARSH

He's the superintendent. He said he would take care of it.

NANCY

He didn't.

MR. MARSH

Then that's between you and him now.

NANCY

I don't think so.

MR. MARSH

If you want to pick a fight, choose something worth fighting for: dismal test scores, pregnant kids, no funding to make anything better.

NANCY

Those problems aren't in my office right now.

MR. MARSH

I have a job to do, Nancy. If you want to chat about this further, talk to Bill or my union rep.

He starts to exit.

NANCY

I watched the DVD. I even got your receipt. You signed your name.

MR. MARSH

Why are you doing this?

NANCY

Apparently it's the only way I can get you to listen.

MR. MARSH

I'm listening.

Nancy gives him a contract.

NANCY

I refuse to work with someone who lies to me. You're up for retirement this year. You'll take it.

MR. MARSH

That's not who I am. I'm a good teacher.

NANCY

You were one of the best.

MR. MARSH

I've put in a lifetime of service. More than anyone else here. Much more than you.

NANCY

That's why I'm letting you retire. But this is a one-time offer. You sign now or I take action.

MR. MARSH

What if I don't?

NANCY

That's certainly your call. But I can't promise that details of your taste in pornography won't get out.

MR. MARSH

I have given everything to this school. People know me. They love me.

NANCY

And that could all change. Everything they thought they knew gets called into question: a glance that lasted longer than it should; a touch on a shoulder that perhaps had other intentions; an after class meeting alone with a young girl. It's your choice, Jim. But this ends right now. I'm done with you.

Beat.

He signs.

End of scene.

SCENE 17

*Jacob is on stage.*

JACOB

"The Peculiar Spider"  
By Jacob Weller  
Sixth Grade Honors English

My family was in the car on our way to the beach, when up my mom's leg crawled the biggest, blackest, furriest spider I'd ever seen--it looked like a hamster that had grown four extra legs. My mom screamed so loud it sounded like someone was being murdered.

My dad swerved the car. "Just kill it," he proclaimed.

"It's too big," she cried while doing the Macarena beneath her seatbelt. But the spider wasn't going anywhere. My little brother started laughing uncontrollably.

"Stop the car, stop the car," my mom yelled over and over and over.

The large spider sauntered up her leg, traversed her shorts, and was now sojourning across her blouse. Next stop: her head. With one hand on the wheel, my dad tried to swat the hairy beast, but he was no match for the spider's eight speedy legs.

It looked like the end was near. I could see the headlines flash before my eyes: Arachnid Ends Area Educator; Family Holiday Becomes Family Horror Day; Little Brother Laughs Self to Death--"Details at eleven."

But just in the nick of time, from the back seat I reached my arm around my mom's neck, and right before he could get to her face, the spider hopped on me.

Silence.

The screaming and laughing and swerving ceased, as this enormous, magnificent spider froze on my hand. He looked up at me as if to say: "I don't want to vacation with this family. They're all nuts." I couldn't say I blamed him.

(MORE)

JACOB (cont'd)

So I rolled down my window, placed my hand outside, and set the spider free into the salty air.

When we finally got to the beach, I couldn't stop thinking about that spider. I hoped he was OK, that he'd landed safely, that he'd found new spider friends. Sure he was gigantic, and furry, and had eight scary legs.

But maybe he wasn't so bad after all.

End of scene.

SCENE 18

*Nancy's home. The middle of the night.*

*Nancy anxiously waits.*

*A key is inserted in the front door. Jacob enters. He goes to the back bedrooms.*

NANCY

(calls after him)

Jacob.

After several moments, Jacob returns.

JACOB

Where is he?

NANCY

Will you please sit down?

JACOB

Where is Charlie?

NANCY

Just stop.

JACOB

Tell me.

NANCY

He's not here.

JACOB

He said you were drinking again. That you wrecked the car.

NANCY

Let me explain.

JACOB

There's nothing to explain. I don't give a shit about you.

NANCY

Sit down and I will tell you everything.



JACOB

He was crying. The kid was a fucking mess.

NANCY

I'm sure he was.

JACOB

Can't you control yourself?

NANCY

If you sit down -

JACOB

I'm not staying.

NANCY

Then I'm not talking.

JACOB

Where is he?

NANCY

No one knows you're here. You are completely safe. If you care at all about Charlie you will sit down and you will talk to me.

Beat.

Jacob finally sits.

JACOB

Where is he?

NANCY

Charlie lied to you.

JACOB

He wouldn't.

NANCY

You haven't been home for days. You won't answer your phone.

JACOB

Charlie wouldn't lie to me.

NANCY

He's afraid of you.

JACOB

You're a liar.

NANCY

He told me what you did to Lady.

JACOB

Fuck you.

NANCY

You need to talk to me.

JACOB

I don't owe you shit. I would never hurt Charlie.

NANCY

But you are.

JACOB

Screw this, I'm out of here.

He walks away.

NANCY

Why do you have a storage unit?

JACOB

I don't.

NANCY

Do not lie to me! You will not lie to me! I found your key!!

Beat. He stops.

JACOB

That's my personal property.

NANCY

I followed you. What does an eighteen-year-old kid who doesn't own anything in the world need to store?

JACOB

Where's my key?

NANCY

Somewhere safe. Somewhere you can't get to it.

JACOB

Give it back.

NANCY

I saw everything.

JACOB

It's all legal. Things I bought. Things I rightfully own.

NANCY

That's why you ransacked our house.

JACOB

You have no right to invade my privacy.

NANCY

Are you planning to do those things in your play?

JACOB

It's a story. You know that. I wrote things down. Whatever was in my head. Like I used to do in therapy.

NANCY

But this is different. I think you want to.

Beat.

JACOB

(a tactic - pity)

It's pathetic what you think of me.

NANCY

Clearly you have no idea what I think of you. That you are all I think about.

JACOB

That I'm some monster.

NANCY

I think you are in a dark place. And I think you've been there a very long time. I think you're sick.

JACOB

Says the alcoholic.

NANCY

I got help. You can, too.

JACOB

It doesn't work. You know it.

NANCY

We have to try.

JACOB

I need my key.

NANCY

It's over Jacob.

JACOB

But I haven't done anything.

NANCY

It's all gone.

Beat.

JACOB

What?

NANCY

I got rid of everything.

JACOB

Those are my things.

NANCY

You were going to use them.

JACOB

You don't know that.

NANCY

Just like in your play.

JACOB

Nobody knows what they're going to do. Not until they do it.

NANCY

I threw it all away.

JACOB

Those are my fucking things!

NANCY

Not any more.

JACOB

I could kill you. I should fucking kill you!!

NANCY

You'd still be my son.

JACOB

That play wasn't about my school. It was about your school.

Long beat.

Jacob walks to the door.

NANCY

Your father is outside.

JACOB

What did you do?

NANCY

We're helping you.

JACOB

No.

NANCY

You're going to a hospital.

JACOB

You can't make me.

NANCY

I have enough.

JACOB

They're just words. Words are not actions. Don't you know that? You know that.

NANCY

Charlie will testify.

JACOB

You can only keep me for 72 hours. I'll leave.

NANCY

Then you'll go to jail. It's your choice.

JACOB

You'll never see me again.

NANCY

I'll look for you.

JACOB

I'll kill myself.

NANCY

You can't get away, Jacob. I will go with you. I'll do whatever it takes, anything, but you're getting help and it's starting tonight.

Beat. He's trapped.

JACOB

Before you judge me, before you throw me out to the wolves, you should ask yourself why you found that key so easily. Why I wrote a play and then left it out for some half-witted teenage girl to find. Why I bought a gun that could be traced back to me. If I was really going to do all those things...does that sound like something I would do?

NANCY

I don't know.

JACOB

Yet you would destroy me. Because I wrote a play. Because of things I bought legally.

(MORE)

JACOB (cont'd)

They're going to call me a killer. But I haven't killed anyone. I won't get to finish college. Get married. Have kids. It's all over if you do this. If you have me branded. Don't you care?

NANCY

Yes.

JACOB

Then help me.

Long beat.

NANCY

Use your bedroom window.

JACOB

It was just a play. Thoughts. Ideas. I wasn't going to do it. You know that's true. You know me.

NANCY

I love you, Jacob.

Jacob exits to the hallway.

Nancy goes to the front door and opens it.

NANCY (CONT'D)

(calls off Tom)

He's in the backyard. Don't hurt him, Tom. Do not hurt him.

Beat.

Nancy closes and locks the front door.

There's a scuffle outside the house between Tom and Jacob.

End of scene.

SCENE 19

*Nancy's home. Two weeks later.  
A warm day in May.*

*Charlie makes Nancy breakfast  
for the first time. Nancy  
enters, unsure what to make of  
this.*

CHARLIE

I think we should get a cat.

NANCY

I don't know.

CHARLIE

Since we're almost on summer break, we could train it to live inside.

NANCY

They smell so bad.

CHARLIE

Cats don't smell bad. Just their pee.

NANCY

They all pee.

CHARLIE

One of Kevin's cats is pregnant. I bet his mom would give us one of the kittens.

NANCY

I bet she would. They need to keep their cats spayed.

CHARLIE

But then they couldn't have babies. What fun is that?

NANCY

I didn't know you were a cat person.

CHARLIE

I don't know. Maybe I am. Maybe you would be, too. Kevin's mom says they're good company. The cat could stay with you when I spend the weekend at Dad's.



Slight beat.

NANCY

We'll see.

CHARLIE

Is that a yes?

NANCY

It's not a no. Just a, "We'll see."

Beat.

CHARLIE

Today's his birthday.

NANCY

Yes.

CHARLIE

(with guilt)

I don't have his present any more.

NANCY

That's OK.

CHARLIE

How is he?

NANCY

Better.

CHARLIE

But how do you know?

NANCY

Because I know.

CHARLIE

How?

NANCY

Because he is choosing to get better.

CHARLIE

Can I see him?

NANCY

I don't think that's a good idea.

CHARLIE

Why?

NANCY

Soon. I promise.

CHARLIE

Did he say anything about me?

NANCY

He's not mad at you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I bet he is.

NANCY

I can't talk about this right now.

Beat.

CHARLIE

When are you going to stop treating me like a kid?

NANCY

I don't treat you like a kid.

CHARLIE

I'm going to be in high school next year.

NANCY

And you'll be fine.

CHARLIE

That's how old he was when tried to kill himself.

NANCY

Some day I'll tell you whatever you want to know.

CHARLIE

I need to know now.

NANCY

No, you don't.

CHARLIE

It's my life. I want to read his play.

NANCY

He wouldn't want you to.

CHARLIE

I won't tell him.

NANCY

I don't want you to.

CHARLIE

You always say I'm mature.

NANCY

You are.

CHARLIE

Then let me read it.

NANCY

You're not ready.

CHARLIE

Because I'm a kid?

NANCY

Because I don't think you really want to know what he wrote.

CHARLIE

Kids at school already talk about him. About us. They say all kinds of things. That he tried to kill himself. That he got locked up in some mental hospital. And even worse stuff. A lot worse. But you won't tell me anything. What am I supposed to think? How can I go to high school like that?

Long beat.

NANCY

(reluctantly)

OK. You're right.

Nancy goes to retrieve her copy of the play. She returns.

Beat.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

NANCY

Are you sure you want to read it?

CHARLIE

Yes.

NANCY

You don't have to. That won't make it better.

CHARLIE

I want to.

NANCY

Then we can talk about it. About everything.

She places the play in front of him.

Beat.

CHARLIE

He's going to be better now. Because of what we did.  
Because he's getting help.

Very long beat. She desperately wants to  
say "yes."

NANCY

I don't know.

Charlie picks up the play. He hesitates  
with great uncertainty.

Lights slowly fade.

End of play.